

# The Seattle Times

## 7th heaven: 3 Sibelius masterpieces at Seattle Symphony

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Thomas Dausgaard, Seattle Symphony principal guest conductor, with the SSO. (Brandon Patoc/www.brandonpatoc.com)

When a symphony audience is already on its feet after the first number on the program, cheering and shouting, you know something rather special is happening.

That was the case Thursday evening, when conductor Thomas Dausgaard and the Seattle Symphony played the last of three all-Sibelius programs that have traversed the seven symphonies and the lone violin concerto of the Finnish master. (The current program is repeated only once, on Saturday.) The triumphant Fifth Symphony, the shimmering Sixth with its quicksilver directional changes, and the glorious one-movement Seventh: how often do you get to hear these masterpieces? Hardly ever, especially not in the same concert.

After some brief and well-chosen remarks about the “new kind of synergy” these three final Sibelius symphonies create, Dausgaard and his players launched into a concert to remember. An extraordinarily expressive conductor, the Danish-born maestro commanded and cajoled the orchestra to explore every facet of these complex scores. No dramatic possibilities were ignored: the performances featured huge dynamic contrasts, delicately soft-focus woodwind flutterings, and bold brass statements. Most of all, however, the conductor and the orchestra clarified the musical architecture of each symphonic movement, and each finale gave the clear sense of that traversal and the arrival at a destination.

Dausgaard said earlier that he would decide on the spur of the moment whether to use a score in the performances; this time, he did so only for the Sixth Symphony, conducting the Fifth and the Seventh from what is evidently a prodigious memory. Dausgaard also has a great sense of timing: how to hold on to the memory of a phrase with a commanding gesture, and how to take a little extra pause to extend the mood of a final chord before starting the next movement of a symphony.

The performances had their share of tiny mishaps; none of that mattered. What did matter was the marvelous artistic energy, and the sense of the musical journey the musicians and the audience were making together.

This was a real festival. Many audience members attended all three programs, and there were impassioned discussions of the merits of the individual symphonies. On one subject there was unanimous accord: We’re lucky to have the chance to hear these “magnificent seven,” and even luckier to have Dausgaard conducting them.