

**TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

# Debussy & Sibelius

**Paavo Järvi**, conductor  
**Ksenija Sidorova**, accordion

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**Claude Debussy**  
*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*  
(*Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*)

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**Tõnu Kõrvits**  
*Dances: Concerto for Accordion and Orchestra*  
(North American Première/TSO Co-commission)  
I. Darkness (cadenza) – Under the Cajun Moon  
II. Passacaglia  
III. Siciliana  
IV. Sarabande

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**Pēteris Vasks/arr. George Morton**  
*The Fruit of Silence*  
(North American Première)

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## Intermission

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**Jean Sibelius**  
*Symphony No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 82*  
I. Tempo molto moderato  
II. Andante mosso, quasi allegretto  
III. Allegro molto

*Program 1*

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Thursday,  
October 30, 2025  
7:30pm

Saturday,  
November 1, 2025  
7:30pm

Sunday,  
November 2, 2025  
3:00pm

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*The North American  
Premières of Dances:  
Concerto for Accordion  
and Orchestra and The Fruit  
of Silence are generously  
supported by Margie and  
Peter Kelk.*

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

## ***Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*** **(Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun)**

Composed 1892–1894

10 min

**PREMIÈRE IN PARIS** on December 22, 1894, with Gustave Doret conducting, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (*Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*), a masterpiece of musical atmosphere, heralded the emergence of Debussy's mature style. Poet Stéphane Mallarmé had written "L'après-midi d'un faune" in 1876. When Debussy encountered it some ten years later, he recognized in it a style similar to his view of music.

The words of the poem are those of a faun or satyr—a lazy, pleasure-loving half-man, half-goat creature from classical mythology. Debussy described his musical reflection as "a very free rendering of Mallarmé's beautiful poem. It does not purport to contain everything that is in the poem. It is rather a succession of scenes in which the desires and dreams of the faun pass through in the heat of the afternoon. Then, tired of chasing the frightened nymphs and naiads, he gives in to intoxicating sleep."

Music as free and sensuous as this had never been heard before. Its improvisational quality would become a Debussy trademark. Conjured out of silence by the unaccompanied call of the faun's flute, it evokes Mallarmé's hazy, dream-like ideas with effortless tonal magic. Short phrases melt one into the other; solo winds take the spotlight in turn; coolness alternates with passion.

Recalling the première, Doret wrote, "There was a vast silence in the hall as I ascended the podium with some emotion,

but full of confidence. I waited a long moment, after imposing silence on the audience, then our marvellous flutist Barrère unrolled his opening theme. Suddenly I felt behind my back a completely captivated public! The triumph was complete, so much so that I did not hesitate to break the rule forbidding encores. The orchestra was delighted to repeat this work, which it had come to love and which, thanks to them, the audience had now accepted."

The grateful Mallarmé gave Debussy a copy of the poem, inscribed with a verse that may be translated as follows:

“  
*Oh forest god of breath primeval*  
*If your flute be true,*  
*Listen now to all the light*  
*Debussy will breathe through you.*

—Program note by Don Anderson



↑  
Édouard Manet's frontispiece for the poem "L'après-midi d'un faune" by Stéphane Mallarmé, which was the inspiration behind Debussy's composition.

Tõnu Kõrvits (b. 1969)

## Dances: Concerto for Accordion and Orchestra

North American Première/TSO Co-commission  
Composed 2024

20 min

**WHILE ACCORDION CONCERTOS** are in no way as commonplace as those for the violin, piano, or even, say, clarinet, they have a surprisingly ample history. The first one was written in 1937 by Russian composer Feodosiy Rubtsov, and some 200 more have been created in the years since, including examples by noted composers ranging from Roy Harris to Per Nørgård to Sofia Gubaidulina.

Tõnu Kõrvits added his alluring take on this musical form with this 2024 concerto, which is featured here in its North American Première. He is part of Estonia's younger generation of composers who have followed Arvo Pärt, a nonagenarian who has long dominated the Baltic country's musical scene. Although especially well known for his choral works like *Kreek's Notebook* (2007), the prolific Kõrvits has written music in a wide range of forms, including film scores.

When approaching this concerto, be ready to set aside stereotypical notions of the accordion that might come from polka bands or other folk ensembles. Kõrvits stretches the tonal and expressive range of this versatile instrument in beguiling and hypnotic ways. The first movement opens with a completely unexpected and strikingly dramatic slow cadenza, with Kõrvits drawing on the accordion's lowest, almost guttural register. As the work progresses, the composer incorporates elements of the minimalism and mysticism that have come to characterize Estonian music while simultaneously conjuring his own rich, intoxicating sound world with sweeping lines, seductive runs, wave-like effects, and enveloping harmonies.

—Program note by Kyle MacMillan

**COMPOSER BIO:** Tõnu Kõrvits graduated from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT) composition department under Raimo Kangro in 1994, and pursued his master's degree with Jaan Rääts. Since 2001, he has been a professor of composition and instrumentation at EAMT.

Kõrvits's oeuvre includes all traditional genres—from orchestral music, instrumental ensembles, and works for solo instruments to choral music, solo songs, and operas. He has written for important Estonian orchestras and artists including the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, and Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir. His music has also been performed by many foreign artists and collectives, such as the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Britten Sinfonia, Swedish Radio Choir, and others.

Kõrvits has been recognized by Estonian state and cultural institutions numerous times: He was awarded the Annual Music Prize of the Estonian Music Council (2007) and the Cultural Prize of the Republic of Estonia (2011, 2016), and named Choir Composer of the Year by the Estonian Choral Association (2014, 2021) and Musician of the Year by Estonian Public Broadcasting (2015). Kõrvits's recording *Moorland Elegies* won the Estonian Music Award for Classical Album of the Year (2017) and was ranked as the third-best classical album of 2017 by National Public Radio (US). His albums are released on the ECM, Hyperion, and Ondine labels.



Pēteris Vasks (b. 1946)/  
arr. George Morton (b. 1990)

## *The Fruit of Silence*

North American Première  
Composed 2013; arranged 2024

5 min

**THE FRUIT OF SILENCE** is a short prayer for peace by Mother Teresa set to music in 2013 by the prolific Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks. The original version, for voices and piano, has been performed extensively by choirs around the world, and has been arranged for various instrumental forces by the composer.

In 2024 Paavo Järvi and Ksenija Sidorova commissioned British arranger and conductor George Morton to create a new version of the piece for accordion, vibraphone, and string orchestra. The accordion is almost unique in its versatility, especially in the hands of today's virtuosic soloist. Long misunderstood as solely a folk instrument, it possesses an adaptability that allows composers and arrangers to explore a vast range of timbral colours and expressive possibilities. It is this that makes the accordion the perfect instrument, alongside vibraphone and strings, to realize the sustained sonorities and nuance in Vasks's writing, shifting seamlessly between soloist and accompanist.

Although this arrangement is entirely instrumental, it's easy to imagine Mother Teresa's poetic text resonating within the music to which it was originally set.

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*The fruit of silence is prayer.*

*The fruit of prayer is faith.*

*The fruit of faith is love.*

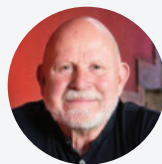
*The fruit of love is service.*

*The fruit of service is peace.*

—Program note by George Morton

**COMPOSER BIO:** Born in Latvia in 1946, Pēteris Vasks studied double bass and composition before embarking on an orchestral career. As a composer during the Soviet period, he suffered under the repressions of Russian cultural doctrine; however, his works have since achieved widespread international recognition. His violin concerto *Distant Light*, premièred in 1997 by Gidon Kremer, has been performed widely. He has won the Latvian Great Music Award on three occasions—for *Litene* in 1993, *Distant Light* in 1998, and his Second Symphony in 2000. His *Viatore* and *Cantabile* for string orchestra have entered the repertoire and enjoyed performances by the Berlin Philharmonic, the Norwegian National Opera Orchestra, and the BBC Philharmonic, among many others.

Vasks's compositions incorporate archaic, folklore elements from Latvian music and place them within a dynamic and challenging relationship. The works are frequently given programmatic titles based on natural processes. However, Vasks does not intend for these to be merely poetic praise of nature or showy tone-painting, but rather to highlight complex themes such as the interaction between man and nature, the beauty of life, and the imminent ecological and moral destruction of the world, which he expresses in musical language. Frequent reference is made to his personal biography and the recent history of suffering on the part of the Latvian people.



Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

## Symphony No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 82

Composed 1914–1919

31 min

**THE FIFTH SYMPHONY** was a pivotal work in Sibelius's career. He had come to realize that he could not keep pace with the revolutionary experiments of composers like Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, who rejected traditional melody, harmony, and form. The Fifth, the first important product of this aesthetic crisis, was Sibelius's reply to musical modernism, and he knew that such an overtly Romantic and accessible work would damage his reputation among champions of "progressive" music. Sure enough, it was viewed as a throwback, as a retreat from the forward-looking tendencies of his leaner, more dissonant Fourth Symphony of 1911.

But Sibelius himself must have thought the Fifth a watershed, for he worked long and hard at it —"struggled with God," as he put it. He produced two versions of it, in 1915 and 1916, and at one point all but recomposed it, before he completed it, in 1919.

Today, the Fifth seems less "reactionary" and more like a unique and highly idiosyncratic rethinking of symphonic form. It owes so little to formulas drawn from Classical or Romantic models that Sibelius considered replacing the "symphony" in the title with "fantasia", and yet the music still has the generous proportions, structural solidity, and seriousness of purpose that we associate with the symphony genre. With its three movements forming a continuous, coherent drama, the Fifth was a way station en route to the Seventh, which is in a single, long movement.

The first movement is a powerful and organic conception. The opening is tentative: the tempo is slow, the main key of E-flat major is weakly established, and

the "theme" consists of fragmentary motifs. Yet, these motifs are clearly related and, as the movement unfolds, they are recast and developed in such a way that the music seems to gradually cohere. At the height of this process, the music suddenly begins to dance, shifting into the tempo and metre of a scherzo, in which all the tension of the first part gradually dissipates. Motifs are further developed, the tempo progressively quickens, and, in its blazing, breathless final bars, the movement achieves that unequivocal assertion of the home key so noticeably wanting at the beginning.

The second movement is naive and pastoral in character, and its genial theme (pizzicato strings and staccato woodwinds) is varied and transformed throughout. This seemingly innocent intermezzo is in fact a crucial pivot between the more dramatic outer movements, and by the end it has generated all of the musical material out of which the finale will be forged.

Like the first movement, the finale is a goal-directed conception, in which the second half functions as an intensification of the first. The bustling opening theme, "piled up" through most of the orchestra, opens onto a broad, swinging new idea in the horns—it was inspired by the image of swans flying over the lake that adjoined Sibelius's property, and he came to think of it as the "Swan Hymn". After a brief, dark interlude, the whole process is repeated, this time at greater length, and laced with new dissonance, tension, and ambiguity, so that the final statements of the horn theme, in an unsullied E-flat major, are all the more triumphant. At the end of it all is one of the strangest and most awesome final pages in all music—six stark chords, torn apart by long pauses, whose only function is to make a grand, definitive cadence.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana



## **Paavo Järvi, conductor**

Paavo Järvi made his TSO début in December 1997.

Estonian GRAMMY® Award–winning conductor Paavo Järvi is widely recognized as one of today’s most eminent conductors, enjoying close partnerships with the finest orchestras around the world. He serves as Music Director of the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Artistic Director of The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and both the founder and Artistic Director of the Estonian Festival Orchestra.

Highlights of Järvi’s seventh season with the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich include the continuation of their Mahler symphony cycle; a tribute to Swiss-French composer Arthur Honegger on the 70th anniversary of his death; performances with this season’s Focus Artists, cellist Sol Gabetta and pianist Kirill Gerstein; and a year-long exploration of the music of Thomas Adès, this year’s Creative Chair. Alpha Classics releases *Mahler Symphony No. 1* in autumn 2025, coinciding with the start of a three-year guest residency at the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden and a Mahler tour, which takes them to the Vienna Musikverein, and the Cologne and Paris Philharmonies. Additional touring includes appearances at the Gstaad Menuhin Festival and the George Enescu Festival in Bucharest, a guest performance at La Scala, Milan, and an extensive tour to Japan and South Korea in May 2026.

Now in his third decade with The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Järvi has performed and recorded benchmark performances of the complete orchestral works of Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms on the RCA Red Seal label. Highlights in the 2025/26 season include the final release of Haydn’s London symphonies as well as recordings and performances of Schubert’s symphonies in Bremen and across Europe.

Each season concludes with two weeks of performances and conducting master classes at the Pärnu Music Festival in Estonia, which Järvi founded in 2011. The success of both the festival and its resident ensemble—the Estonian Festival Orchestra—has led to high-profile recordings and tours throughout Europe and Asia. In September 2025, Alpha Classics released the orchestra’s sixth album, *Credo*, which pays tribute to Arvo Pärt on his 90th birthday. Järvi then leads the orchestra in performances of Pärt’s iconic music on a tour culminating with the orchestra’s US début at New York’s Carnegie Hall.

In addition to his permanent positions, Järvi is much in demand as a guest conductor, regularly appearing with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Philharmonic, and New York Philharmonic. This season, Järvi also conducts the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Toronto Symphony, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, Philharmonia Orchestra, Luxembourg Philharmonic, and Verbier Festival Orchestra. He also continues to enjoy close relationships with many of the orchestras of which he was previously music director.

Recent accolades include Germany’s 2025 OPUS KLASSIK Composer of the Year award for the Estonian Festival Orchestra’s recording of Jüri Reinvere’s *Ship of Fools*, and an International Classical Music Award for the recording of *Bruckner Symphony No. 8* with Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, both on Alpha Classics. Other prizes and honours include a GRAMMY® for his recording of *Sibelius Cantatas* with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, and Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres awarded by the French Ministry of Culture. In 2015, Järvi was presented with the Sibelius Medal, and in 2012, he received the Hindemith Prize of the City of Hanau. As a dedicated supporter of Estonian culture, Järvi was awarded the Order of the White Star by the President of Estonia in 2013.



## Ksenija Sidorova, accordion

These performances mark Ksenija Sidorova's TSO début.

Described as "revelatory" (*The Telegraph*) and "one of the most magnetic soloists you will ever see" (*Seen and Heard International*), Ksenija Sidorova is widely recognized as the leading ambassador of the classical accordion. Celebrated for her "verve, style, attitude and impeccable virtuosity" (*ZEALnyc*), she brings a compelling blend of technical brilliance and expressive musicality to every performance.

Her repertoire spans three centuries, encompassing works by J.S. Bach, Astor Piazzolla, Erkki-Sven Tüür, and Václav Trojan, alongside a growing body of contemporary works written specifically for her. A passionate advocate for new music, Sidorova continues to expand the accordion repertoire through new commissions and collaborations. Fazıl Say is currently composing a new concerto for Sidorova, which will be premiered in July 2026 at the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival.

Recent highlights include the world première of Dobrinka Tabakova's *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines* with Stuttgarter Philharmoniker at the Bodensee Festival, where she was Artist in Residence. Highlights of the 2025/26 season include the North American Première of Tõnu Kõrvits's *Dances* with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Tüür's *Prophecy* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and a return to Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, all three under Paavo Järvi. She also gives solo recitals at Carnegie Hall, Club musical de Québec, and Prager Family Center for the Arts (curated by Gabriela Montero).

Sidorova has previously appeared with the Philharmonia Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra including at the Last Night of the Proms, Münchner Philharmoniker, Orchestre National de France, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, Cincinnati Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, and many others. She collaborates with conductors such as Paavo Järvi, Marin Alsop, Thomas Hengelbrock, Vasily Petrenko, and Nil Venditti.

Following a successful tour with Thomas Hampson in 2025, including performances at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn, she reunites with him in 2026 for performances of Schubert's *Winterreise* and songs by Kurt Weill in Switzerland, England, Norway, and Germany. She also continues touring with SIGNUM saxophone quartet and their *ANIMA* project, with appearances in Germany, Latvia, and Austria.

A dedicated chamber musician, Sidorova also performs regularly with Avi Avital, Benjamin Appl, Goldmund Quartet, Miloš, Nemanja Radulović, Andreas Ottensamer, Tine Thing Helseth, Juan Diego Flórez, and Nicola Benedetti. A regular guest at major festivals, she has appeared at the Verbier, Rheingau, Ravinia, Cheltenham, Mostly Mozart, MITO, Gstaad Menuhin, and Shanghai MISA Festivals.

Her upcoming album on Alpha Classics (spring 2026) features Kõrvits's *Dances* and Tüür's *Prophecy*, recorded with the Estonian Festival Orchestra and Paavo Järvi. Her previous release *Crossroads* (Alpha, 2024) was praised by *Gramophone* as "another notable demonstration of Sidorova's artistry." It followed *Piazzolla Reflections* (Alpha, 2021), named Album of the Month by BR Klassik and one of the year's best classical albums by *The Classic Review*.

Born in Riga, Latvia, Sidorova began playing the accordion at age 6, inspired by her grandmother. She studied with Marija Gasele before continuing with Owen Murray at London's Royal Academy of Music, where she received numerous accolades. She was named an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2016 and a Fellow in 2021.