



Nordic Chamber Music

FINLAND

Sisu in Seattle

Saturday, October 10 at 1 pm
St. Luke's Memorial Episcopal Church, Tacoma

Sunday, October 11 at 2 pm
University Presbyterian Church, Seattle



Featuring:

James D. Hicks, organ

Sisu in Seattle

PROGRAM

For the continuity of the program, please hold your applause until the end of each half.

I. Finnish Romanticism

<i>Prelude</i> (2024)*	Olli Saari (b. 1991)
<i>Eijaa! Jo Laulaa Sielu Kiitostansa</i> * ° (2025) (Oh No! Now the Soul Already Sings Its Gratitude)	Hannu Ala (b. 1977)
<i>Kansanlaulu</i> * °	Toivo Kuula (1883-1918) Organ Arrangement Jimi Järvinen (b. 1996) (2025)
<i>Passacaglia</i> °	Juhani Pohjanmies (1893-1959)
From <i>Kaksi ostinatoa</i> (Two Ostinati) Uni (Dream)	Väinö Haapalainen (1893-1945)
<i>Intermezzo</i>	Väinö Raitio (1891-1945)
From <i>Sonaatti 2, G-molli</i> Introductione/Allegro	Arvi Karvonen (1888-1969)
<i>Pohjalainen sarja</i> (The Ostrobothian Series)* ° Preludi Adagio Kriuhnaasu	Jimi Järvinen (b. 1996)

INTERMISSION

II. Finnish Neoclassicism

<i>Partita över en andlig Finsk Folkmelodile</i> (Partita on an old Finnish Folk Melody)	John Sundberg (1891-1963)
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III. In the Åland Islands

<i>There Will Be A Spring Again</i> *	Jack Mattsson (1954-2007) Organ Arrangement Lars Karlsson (2023) (b. 1953)
<i>Who Can Sail Without A Wind</i> *	Lars Karlsson (b. 1953)

IV. Finnish Modern Life

<i>Gigue-fuuga urlee Jäälöauton</i> (1999) (The Gigue Fugue Ice Cream Truck Theme)	Harri Viitanen (1954-2025)
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V. Finnish Influence in the World

From <i>Der Schwan</i> (The Swan)* <i>Orgelsinfonie Nr. 17</i> The Secrets of Tuonela	Enjott Schneider (b. 1950)
<i>Three Pieces in Jazz Style</i> Folk Song The Place of my Childhood Hymn to Freedom (after Oscar Peterson/1925-2007)	Mons Leidvin Takle (b. 1941)

* denotes commissioned work by James D. Hicks

° denotes world premiere performance

PROGRAM NOTES

Written by James D. Hicks

Today's concert presents a fascinating, yet little-known corner of the organ repertoire: the Finnish Tradition. Although Finland arrived relatively late into the production of original works for the pipe organ (the first known original work for organ dates from the middle of the nineteenth-century), by the early twentieth-century a widely contrasting body of works firmly rooted in the late-romantic tradition came into existence. Numerous installations of new instruments gradually appeared after Finland gained its independence in 1917 with the most notable and nationalistic in orientation being built by the Kangasalan Urkurakentamo. These instruments tended to be dark in color with a plethora of components that emphasized the fundamental. To balance this foundational tonal approach, the Kangasalan firm was adept at fashioning a wide array of reed stops, both for solo and ensemble purposes, as well as providing some limited treble oriented pipe work that could top off a tutti.

The first section of this concert begins with music rooted in the "Golden Age" of Finnish music history, the era of Jean Sibelius and his compatriots as well as contemporary enthusiasts of this tradition.

Prelude

Olli Saari (b. 1991)

Erupting out of the silence with brutal, expressionistic harmonies, Olli Saari's *Prelude* is a three-part essay that was intentionally set in a late-romantic *zeitgeist*. Saari is a Helsinki-based artist who is a highly regarded composer, improviser, conductor and concert artist. One of the goals of his original compositions is to bridge the gap between new music and the audience. As a result, some of his works are quite orchestral and French-influenced, while others such as *Prelude*, stem from a more mainstream tradition from the past. He is also interested in creating new works that can be most successfully realized on historic seventeenth and eighteenth-century instruments. *Prelude* switches gears after its massive introduction into a perpetual motion piece before concluding in the manner in which it began. I premiered this commissioned work on August 28, 2024, at *Vor Frelzers Kirke*, Copenhagen, and have presented this exciting opener on numerous occasions including my November 9, 2025, concert, at Westminster Abbey.

***Eijaa! Jo Laulaa Sielu Kiitostansa** (2025) (Oh No! Now the Soul Already Sings Its Gratitude)**

Hannu Ala (b. 1977)

Hannu Ala is a contemporary Finnish pianist who performs on an international basis in a wide variety of venues and festivals, often collaborating with orchestras and chamber ensembles. He is a versatile artist experienced in his interpretations of new music as well as the standard classical repertoire. In addition to performing, he is involved in music education and mentoring young musicians.

The commissioned work heard in a premiere today began its life as a piano improvisation employing an old Finnish folk song. I was moved by a YouTube video by Mr. Ala from over ten years ago and eventually requested a version that could be interpreted on the organ. The result is a sort of "lead sheet" in which the performer is given the basic melody, pedal line and chords, thus providing numerous opportunities for a quasi-improvised rendition and free choice of programmed musical sounds. The musical language remains rooted in Finnish Nationalism

Kansanlaulu (Folk Song)*

Toivo Kuula (1883-1918), Organ Arrangement Jimi Järvinen (b. 1996) (2025)

Despite the relative brevity of his career, Toivo Kuula was one of the most prominent Finnish composers emerging in the late-Romantic period. He was one of the early students of Jean Sibelius and eventually created a number of highly esteemed orchestral, chamber, vocal and chorale works. Kuula died tragically at the age of thirty-five of gun wounds received during the Finnish Civil War.

Kuula composed two orchestral suites entitled *South Ostrobothian Suites* that are colorful movements closely related to the spirit and language of the folk culture of western Finland. There is a rustic nature to much of this music and the melancholy essence of the area finds expression in these suites.

Kansanlaulu appears in *South Ostrobothian Suite No. 1*, and Kuula scored it for strings only. It is a simple folk song arrangement that captures Finnish melancholy within an idiom that perhaps distills some influence from the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg.

The Finnish organist Jimi Järvinen belongs to the rising generation of brilliant Finnish artists and hails from Vaasa where he pursues a varied career in organ performance, composing and arranging as well as involvement in numerous folk music presentations. I met Mr. Järvinen at the 2023 Korsholm Festival where we found we possessed a mutual enthusiasm for the regional musical culture. The short arrangement premiered today is the result of that experience.

Passacaglia

Juhani Pohjanmies (1893-1959)

It is not often that a performer has the opportunity to present the world premiere of music that is a century old, but that is such the case today with the introduction of an intriguing Finnish work probably dating from the first quarter of the twentieth-century. Juhani Pohjanmies is a somewhat obscure figure who nevertheless pursued a varied career as an organist, organ builder, and composer of a number of works for mixed choir, and isolated works for piano and organ. In an abrupt career change of pace, he later switched gears completely and wrote and published three science fiction novels! His primary work for organ is a monumental *Sonata in F-sharp minor*, a heroic composition that treats the foot pedals in a highly personal, virtuosic manner. This composition may be accessed on my *Nordic Journey Volume VII*, recorded on the Steinmeyer organ at Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim, Norway.

Evidently there are still unknown manuscripts of music by this composer residing within the following generations of the family Pohjanmies. I obtained several of these unpublished works during the course of a fortuitous turn of events and was immediately drawn to the *Passacaglia*. It seems to me to be a most unusual work, not least in that it is written in common time as opposed to the three-quarter meter usually employed in compositions of this nature. My interpretation of the score (there are no dynamic, phrasing or interpretative indications of any kind) is to begin and end the composition in a subdued way, allowing the music to reach its apogee in the swirling figurations found in the central core of the music.

This unexpected musical treasure hunt concludes today with a hitherto unplanned premiere, and I eagerly anticipate including the piece on its first recording with the previously mentioned program for Bodø Cathedral next year.

Kaksi ostinatoa (Two Ostinati), Uni (Dream)
Väinö Haapalainen (1893-1945)

This Finnish composer worked as an organist, teacher, and military band conductor in Helsinki. He was a pupil of the German impressionist Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877-1933), and this brief work retains some aspects of the Karg-Elert tonal language. Haapalainen originally conceived his *Two Ostinati* in 1925 for string orchestra but realized afterwards that the enigmatic nature of the miniatures would make a successful transition to arrangements for both organ and piano. In *Uni*, there is a dreamy melody in the right hand supported by a measure-long ostinato (repeating pattern) moving in parallel thirds in the left hand. The overall effect is utterly hypnotic.

Intermezzo
Väinö Raitio (1891-1945)

Raitio began his career writing intimate works rooted in the Finnish National Style before moving onward to the scoring of colorfully extroverted tone poems for orchestra which betray the influence of the Russian composer Alexander Scriabin. He later fell under the spell of Claude Debussy whose impressionistic impulses colored Raitio's middle period. This Finnish composer finally concluded his career with the creation of mostly conservative, small-scale works. *Intermezzo* dates from 1913 and was his first attempt at writing for the organ. This charming, harmonically rich music exists in three sections, beginning in a wistful A minor before moving to a more animated section in E major that builds to a climax. Raitio subsequently concludes *Intermezzo* with the ideas presented at the outset of the work.

From Sonaatti 2, G-molli, Introductione/Allegro
Arvi Karvonen (1888-1969)

Arvi Karvonen was a teacher of composition at the Helsinki Conservatory (later renamed as the Sibelius Academy) and also served as organist at Pasila Church. His *Sonata No. 2 in G minor* dates from 1920 and remained unpublished until I located the manuscript in a Helsinki archive several years ago. I subsequently had it published for the first time in my *The Nordic Journey Series*, an ongoing collaboration with the Norwegian *Norsk Musikforlag* firm. This composition begins with a striking maestoso introduction, leading to a long and exciting Allegro.

Jimi Järvinen is a Finnish organist. He has studied with, among others, Kalevi Kiviniemi and Vincent Dubois. Järvinen has performed throughout Europe both as a soloist and in collaboration with a wide range of instrumentalists, ensembles, orchestras, and vocalists. In 2025, he performed at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.

The composer has described his newest composition as follows:

“Pohjalainen sarja is based on three traditional Finnish folk songs from Ostrobothnia. The first movement draws on the folk song *Paappani maja on matala ja pieni* (*My grandfather's house is low and small*), the second on *Tuuli se taivutti koivun larvan* (*The wind bent the top of the birch tree*), and the third on *Niin kauan minä tramppaan* (*For so long I will tramp*).

The suite reflects the character, temperament, and history of the Ostrobothnian people. As a native Ostrobothnian himself, Järvinen seeks to bring the musical heritage of his home region into the tradition of organ music, transforming these folk melodies into a contemporary work for the instrument.”

Partita över en andlig Finsk Folkmelodile (Partita on an old Finnish Folk Melody)

John Sundberg (1891-1963)

John Sundberg served as organist at the Northern Swedish church congregation of Helsinki from 1922-1962. He made a notable contribution to church music, editing two Swedish language hymnals. Active as an organist and conductor, he began his performing career interpreting some of the standard works from the French symphonic school before increasingly coming under the influence of J.S. Bach and the early German masters. Sundberg was cognizant of current trends in Finnish life as well, performing the premiere of *Intrada*, one of the few solo organ works by Jean Sibelius in 1925. Sundberg's hitherto unpublished *Partita* now appears for the first time in the previously mentioned *The Nordic Journey Series* with Norsk Musikkforlag. *Partita* employs many of the characteristics found in the works of the seventeenth-century German master Johann Pachelbel, demonstrating his passion for historical procedures. The timing of the work also coincides with the emerging *Orgelbewegung*, movement of the time, a so-called return to the aesthetics of the Baroque Era.

Gigue-fuuga urlee Jäälöauton (1999) (The Gigue Fugue Ice Cream Truck Theme)

Harri Viitanen (1954-2025)

Harri Viitanen was organist at Helsinki Cathedral for many years and taught at the Sibelius Academy. During an unusually active career, he produced a wide-ranging body of works for varied media. The lighthearted work from his pen heard today offers a window into contemporary Finnish society. As the composer stated, "I was given permission by the Finnish Ice Cream Company *Home Ice Cream LTD* to use the theme of its ice cream trucks for the Bach-influenced *Gigue Fugue*. When an ice cream truck is moving on its route, then the ice cream theme will be heard from its loudspeakers on the truck. This is the signal for people to come and buy ice cream. My idea has been to compose a joyful piece especially for children and young people."

There Will Be A Spring Again*

Jack Mattsson (1954-2007)

Organ Arrangement Lars Karlsson (2023)

Who Can Sail Without A Wind*

Lars Karlsson (b. 1953)

Åland is an autonomous region of Finland consisting of an archipelago of over 6,000 islands in the Baltic Sea. Largely self-governing, the Finnish government remains responsible for its defense. While it is a primarily Swedish-speaking region, Åland still manages to juxtapose aspects of both Swedish and Finnish societies. The province is an enchanting potpourri of seemingly endless forests, hundreds of scenic waterways and islands as well as an impressive array of picturesque medieval churches.

The two commissioned works in this section from Åland composers pay homage to this delightful location. Jack Mattsson was a versatile artist equally at home in liturgical, classical and pop styles. He was a gifted flutist, cantor-organist, and primarily worked as conductor of the Swedish Theater in Helsinki for over twenty years. On top of that, he played electric guitar and sang in a Beatles cover band! Mattsson composed most often for the stage, film, and the various broadcasts with which he was associated. Mattsson wrote a few fine organ works and I have commissioned his colleague, Lars Karlsson, to write several arrangements that Mattsson originally conceived in other media for solo organ. All of these works may be found in *The Nordic Journey Series* with Norsk Musikkforlag. *There Will Be A Spring Again* is an arrangement of one of the most beautiful melodies from Mattsson's music theater production *Katrina*. It is one of the signature themes from this play, and its deeply felt contours and melodic range are typical of Mattsson's thematic gifts. I premiered this work at the Bergen International Organ Festival on July 2, 2023, at St. Mary's Cathedral.

Lars Karlsson is a mainstream contemporary composer whose most acclaimed works include his *Violin Concerto*, *Symphonies 1 and 2*, the oratorio *Ludus Latrunculorum*, and the opera, *Rödhamn*. Karlsson served on the faculty of the Sibelius Academy for several decades.

As the basis of this commission, Karlsson chose what probably is the most loved folksong from the Åland tradition, *Who Can Sail Without The Wind*, to be used in a fantasy for solo organ. Karlsson here works within a lyrical, neo-Romantic style that meshes perfectly with the theme, producing music that is often wistful and introspective. Beginning with the softest tones of the organ, this music works its way to two powerful climaxes before subsiding to its initial mood.

I premiered *Who Can Sail Without A Wind* on September 28, 2018, at *Halgrímskirkja*, Reykjavík, Iceland.

From *Der Schwan (The Swan)* Orgelsinfonie Nr. 17 ; The Secrets of Tuonela* Enjott Schneider (b. 1950)

The final portion of today's concert examines how the legacy of Finnish music has extensively influenced other countries. I have chosen two contrasting examples of this phenomenon.

German artist Enjott Schneider is an award-winning composer whose legendary film scores are internationally acclaimed. He has also composed hundreds of scores for myriad instrumental and vocal combinations and remains as one of the most thoughtful and provoking voices of his generation. I was thrilled that he might be willing to write a major new work for solo organ in support of one of my projects, and in 2025, knowing of my passion for Nordic culture, he produced a superb work, *The Swan*. Inspired by the nineteenth-century epic poem *The Kalevala*, Schneider produced a four-movement symphony based on themes of Jean Sibelius, primarily his orchestral tone poem *The Swan of Tuonela*. Schneider actually provides extensive quotes from Sibelius in the movement entitled *The Secrets of Tuonela*, and he captures the mystic essence of the Finnish master, but here in a new work for our time. Although I am only sharing the first movement of the symphony today, the following works are entitled *Elegy: The Dying Swan*, *The Black Swan* and *Passacaglia – The Swan Goddess*. This symphony stands as a modern manifestation of the Sibelius legacy. I had the honor of premiering this composition at St. Martin's Church, Memmingen, Germany with the composer in attendance on May 30, 2026, and the composition will be included in the slated 2027 release *Rhine Journey Volume II*.

Three Pieces in Jazz Style

Folk Song, The Place of my Childhood, Hymn to Freedom (after Oscar Peterson/1925-2007) Mons Leidvin Takle (b. 1941)

Jazz music plays a prominent role in contemporary Finnish musical life. Some of the largest festivals devoted to jazz include Pori Jazz, April Jazz in Espoo and the more experimental gathering We Jazz in Helsinki. The Norwegian organist Mons Leidvin Takle studied in the United States with many of the great masters of this art, and during his career often preferred to travel to Finland to hear some of the great acts that often appeared at these festivals. This Finnish pilgrimage exerted a profound influence on his work and numerous pieces written in a highly personal jazz style made their way into his original creations for organ. The three works that conclude this concert are indicative of this activity. Each composition contrasts itself from the other with the first taking a folk song and setting it underneath with every possible "dirty chord", the second being an elegiac blues, and the final existing as an exciting homage to the legendary Oscar Peterson.

Thus concludes our Finnish Journey, *Sisu in Seattle!*

About the Artist



James D. Hicks is a concert organist living and working out of Califon, NJ, USA. A graduate of the Peabody Conservatory of Music, Yale University, and the University of Cincinnati, Hicks has also studied at the Royal School of Church Music in the UK. James held liturgical positions throughout the USA over the course of thirty-five years and now devotes himself to concert, publishing, and recording projects.

Over the past fifteen years, James has researched the music of the Nordic lands and the result is an ongoing venture entitled *Nordic Journey*. The endeavor places emphasis on new music, he has commissioned over seventy-five compositions from Nordic composers and other musicians in northern Europe, as well as researching repertoire from the past that has hitherto never been recorded or published. With the Autumn 2025 release of *Nordic Journey Volume XIX/Nordic Organ Book By Fredrik Sixten*, the series now comprises thirty-one discs, all produced for the American label *Pro Organo* as well as being distributed by *Naxos In America*, the German firm *JPC* and the usual digital streaming platforms.

A parallel aspect of the *Nordic Journey* project is the production of hardbound editions that include premiere publications of many of the works James has commissioned as well as a number of previously unavailable compositions from earlier eras. The Norwegian firm *Norsk Musikkforlag* released the *Nordic Journey Series Volumes I, II, and III* from 2018-2022, and the fourth volume of the series appeared in September 2025.

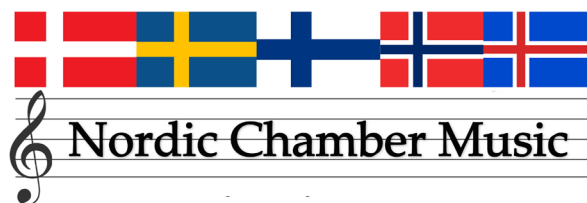
During the COVID-19 pandemic, James wrote the first full-length book devoted to the complete works for organ by Norwegian composer Kjell Mørk Karlsen on the occasion of the artist's seventy-fifth birthday.

In addition to his endeavors concerning the organ and its literature, James is an enthusiastic exponent of traditional music from the British Isles, performing on a number of instruments associated with these traditions. James is an avid hiker and has walked the historic Hadrian's Wall trail in Northern England as well as traversing numerous sections of the Appalachian Trail in the USA.

To learn more about James D. Hicks, you are invited to visit his website at www.jamesdhicks.com.

Selected CDs are available to be purchased at intermission and after the concert.

Join us for our upcoming concerts!



Norway

Northern Winds & Waves

November 7 & 8

Sweden

Swedish Songbirds

January 16 & 17

Nordic Neighbor:

Estonia

Estonian Elegance

March 6 & 7

Iceland

Sonorous Sagas

April 3 & 4

Saturdays at 1 pm

First Lutheran Church, Tacoma

Sundays at 2 pm

Ballard First Lutheran Church

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Grieg Piano Concerto

Monday, December 7, 7:30 pm
Meydenbauer Center Theater, Bellevue

Oda Voltersvik, piano
Issaquah Philharmonic
Jonathan Spatola-Knoll, conductor

ISSAQUAH
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THE SAINT MARK'S
MUSIC
SERIES

Trio Mediæval

Sunday, February 21, 3:00 pm
Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral
Trio Mediæval, vocal trio

Requiem ad Memoriam

A New Swedish Work by Joachim Olsson

Friday, May 21, 7:00 pm

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Port Angeles

Saturday, May 22, 7:00 pm

Trinity United Methodist Church, Sequim

Sunday, May 23, 3:00 pm

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Seattle

Laura Loge, soprano

Port Angeles Symphony

Jonathan Pasternack, Artistic Director



Port Angeles
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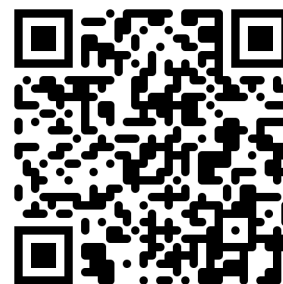
Sunday's reception is generously provided by the Finnish Choral Society of Seattle. We are grateful for their collaboration and delicious treats and aromas.

Donations are welcome to support their costs for today as well as for their organization.



Donations are welcome
& always appreciated.

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