



# Celebrating a musical hero: Neeme Järvi at 85

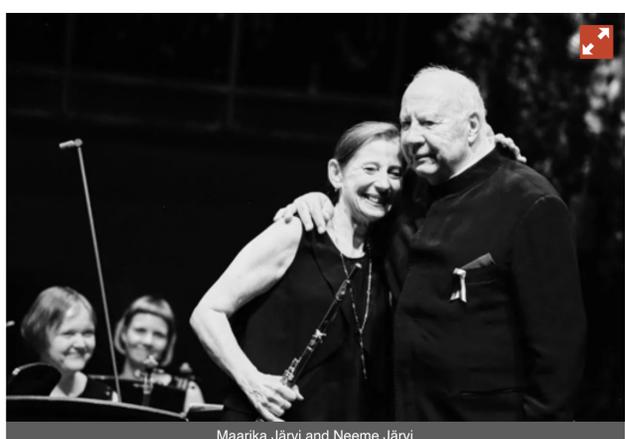
By *Alexander Hall*, 14 July 2022

When there is cause for celebration and jubilation, everybody likes to join in. This was clearly evident from the reaction in the Pärnu Concert Hall to the appearance of one of the musical *grands seigneurs*, **Neeme Järvi**, back in front of a home audience. At 85 he can look back on a lifetime of achievement, conducting orchestras all over the world and earning a distinguished place in musical history for his extensive discography alone. Yet it was with the 20 string players of the **Tallinn Chamber Orchestra** that he chose to mark his own personal anniversary. It might be odd to begin a review with reference to the three orchestral encores, but they were testament to Järvi's wide-ranging musical sympathies: Tubin's *Prelude*, Leo Weiner's *Divertimento no. 1* and Sibelius' *Andante festivo*, as well as being delivered with infectious enthusiasm by Järvi's players.



Neeme Järvi and the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra  
© Kaupo Kikkas | Pärnu Music Festival

Do some works play themselves? It might be thought so in the case of Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, given its over-exposure and apparent simplicity. Yet it takes a musical genius to construct the essence of grace and elegance in the first place. Nor is a heavy hand on the tiller required to bring the three movements of this particular serenade to life. All Järvi needed was a succession of nods and nudges, a series of gentle tweaks, experience distilled and then discharged with a minimum of fuss. In the second movement *Romanze* the calibrated dynamics were one example of the fine detailing, with gentle rippling effects from the upper strings in the *Menuetto* and a spirit of effervescence in the concluding *Rondo*.



Maarika Järvi and Neeme Järvi  
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One of the charms of the Pärnu Festival is its homely atmosphere, the feeling that comes from one family extending its musical embrace to the wider world. Järvi's daughter **Maarika** was the soloist in Gluck's *Dance of the blessed spirits*. One of the stalwarts of the Estonian Festival Orchestra, the bright bell-like clarity of her tone and evenness of her playing were perfectly embedded in the overall ensemble, those dying moments sounding like the fluttering of an angel's wings. An ideal ensemble player, her encore, Fauré's *Morceau de Concours*, was nevertheless a much better vehicle for her range of colour and individual personality.

Dvořák's *Serenade for Strings* was composed over a period of just twelve days in May 1875. Quite apart from the invigorating rhythms of Czech folk music, it is tinged with moments of wistful nostalgia. It was thus something of a surprise to find Järvi and his players emphasising the strong sense of flow in the opening *Moderato*, the mood brighter and more cheerful than usual. But the old master had a trick up his sleeve. There was plenty of elegant sway in the *Tempo di Valse*, the upper strings summoning up glints of radiant sunshine, with two emphatic chords at the close mirroring the dramatic chords, with pauses held, at the end of the *Romanze* in the earlier Mozart serenade. The Scherzo had buzzing energy without any compression of textures, as did the Finale too.



Neeme Järvi and Maarika Järvi  
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It was in the *Larghetto*, however, where Järvi's guiding hand was most keenly felt. Taking the tempo instruction quite literally, he still managed to convey a sensation of momentum in subterranean depths, the soulful quality of the interpretation emerging quite organically from the precision and refinement of the playing. Above all, Järvi's magical way with melodic threads that faded into mere wisps of sound, a constant merging and coalescing of individual voices, appearing on the distant horizon, then registering a fleeting presence, only to disappear imperceptibly, which left a lasting impression on me.

*Alexander's press trip was funded by the Pärnu Music Festival and Visit Estonia*

★★★★☆



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“nods and nudges, a series of gentle tweaks, experience distilled, discharged with a minimum of fuss”

Reviewed at Pärnu Concert Hall, Pärnu on 13 July 2022

PROGRAMME

- Gluck, Orphée et Eurydice: Dance of the blessed spirits
- Fauré, Morceau de Concours
- Mozart, Serenade no. 13 in G major, "Eine kleine Nachtmusik", K525
- Dvořák, Serenade for Strings in E major, Op.22
- Tubin, Prelude Solennel (arr. Charles Coleman)
- Weiner, Divertimento no. 1 for strings, Op.20
- Sibelius, Andante festivo

PERFORMERS

- Neeme Järvi, Conductor
- Tallinn Chamber Orchestra
- Maarika Järvi, Flute



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*Mark Pullinger, 16th July*  
While Kalle Randalu proves an amiable soloist in the First Piano Concerto, it is Beethoven the firebrand who startles in Paavo Järvi's account of the First Symphony with the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra.  
★★★★☆

Into silence: Arvo Pärt's distinctive soundworld casts a spell  
*Matthew Fye, 4th February*  
A portrait concert of music by Arvo Pärt, while single-mindedly contemplative in tone, proves surprisingly absorbing in the hands of his most authoritative interpreters.  
★★★★☆

Atonal explorations “through the forest” in Tallinn  
*Timmy Fisher, 7th May*  
The Tallinn Chamber Orchestra deliver a bold but challenging programme of atonal works.  
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A high-flying Creation in Estonia  
*Simon Rees, 14th September*  
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- Orphée et Eurydice: Dance of the blessed spirits
- Morceau de Concours, for flute and piano
- Andante festivo
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**Alexander Hall**  
Alexander Hall divides his time between London and Hamburg, having spent a lifetime writing in some form or other: fiction, academic research, educational materials and professional translations. He has been an avid concert-goer from his teenage years with fond memories of many of the giants of the past, including Klemperer, Karajan, Böhm, Bernstein and Carlos Kleiber. For him the symphony orchestra is one of the greatest artistic creations of all time.

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