

St. Paul Pioneer Press  
Posted on Thu, Aug. 24, 2006

## Minnesota Orchestra plays Europe

BY PAMELA HILL NETTLETON  
Special to the Pioneer Press

The stage entrance is around the side of this wedding cake wonder of a building. Musicians drag in suitcases because trucks leave with the luggage right after the concert tonight. They are eager to get inside the building and be reconnected with the instruments they have been separated from for days.

Bassist William Schrickel, to whom I am wed, unlocks his bass trunk, grabs a bow, and noodles a few notes. He's grinning. 'As in tune as the day I left it in the hall.'

Outside bassist Bob Anderson's enormous wooden bass trunk lie two stacks of disposable baby diapers. With luggage restrictions, orchestra players who are also mothers of infants in tow find it hard to pack enough diapers. By virtue of having the biggest trunks, the bass players often tuck in nappies in odd nooks and crannies to help out.

Instruments are carried up the narrow back steps to the stage, and suddenly, we are all inside the red velvet and white-and-gilt performance space of the famous Concertgebouw. Cello cases lean against the plush seats. Woodwinds struggle to fit into the tiny space allotted them. Everyone struggles to fit into the tiny space allotted them. The orchestra is crowded into a space designed for smaller orchestras. But they are still thrilled to be on this stage. Out in the house, a few musicians stretch, bend and loosen up.

Violist David Brubaker stands between two rows of seats warming up his violin; it's easier to hear yourself play out in the house rather than up on the stage with everyone else. Like most European concert halls, the centerpiece of this one is an enormous pipe organ. It is flanked by audience seats (in Europe, you can also sit behind the orchestra and really see what that conductor is doing), and the front rows here are smack up against the basses on the left and the horns on the right. And in the center of it all, artistic director Osmo Vanska.

The musicians gather on the stage, and only a handful of people are left in the hall: associate conductor Mischa Santora; e-tour producer Mele Willis; the mother of violist Sam Bergman, who listens to the music in clear enjoyment with her eyes closed, and Harris Kleyman, the young son of associate principal cellist Janet Horvath, who wears headphones and is playing a video game.

Soloist Viktoria Mullova walks onstage and the musicians shuffle their feet in approval; on little notice, she has replaced soprano Dawn Upshaw, who had to cancel. Mullova is very slender and tall, built like a runner, in low-cut white jeans and long-sleeved tissue tee, and lifts her violin almost shyly. But then she plays the Sibelius, absolutely not shyly.

A few bars in, Osmo stops the orchestra and Mullova bends over the podium to speak to him. They consult the score. Principal second violin Vali Phillips stands in a half-crouch asking Osmo a question. When he sits back down, violinist Julie Ayer, who sits behind Phillips, leans forward to ask him what Osmo said.

Mullova plays again, the orchestra with her. The Sibelius, a specialty of Vanska's, is warm and soaring, and just as we few in the audience are carried along (except Harris in his headphones) and Osmo stops and asks for stage manager Tim Eickholt. He pops up from his seat. 'Is this the only place to put the winds?' asks Osmo. Tim says it's too crowded to move them anywhere else. The percussion is pushed to the very edge of the pipes.

Another pause. Osmo turns to the house. 'Mischa, can you hear the timpani there?' he asks. 'Barely,' says Santora. Osmo turns back to the orchestra. They rehearse for 90 minutes, moving from section to section at a steady clip.

Osmo beats the air, he yells out where not to rush, he reads the score, he counts beats on the score, he hums entrances, he picks phrases. Pages rustle as musicians all turn to the same place in their music. '163!' says Osmo. 'Ya pum pah pha—' And they tuck in.