

Posted on Fri, Aug. 25, 2006

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**St. Paul Pioneer Press**  
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## **Orchestra sparkles at Concertgebouw**

**MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA PLAYS EUROPE**

**AUG 23 1:45 A.M., FOLLOWING 8:15 P.M. CONCERT AT AMSTERDAM CONCERTGEBOUW**

**Orchestra sparkles at Concertgebouw**

**BY PAMELA HILL NETTLETON**

AMSTERDAM — The Concertgebouw seats 2,000 and tonight it is very nearly sold out. It is a festival crowd, dressed informally but buzzing excitedly. Minnesota, after all, no doubt sounds exotic to these Amsterdam folk.

After concertmaster Jorja Fleezanis enters to applause and tunes the orchestra, down from above, entering from the staircase that descends from the highest reaches of the centerstage pipe organ, come violin soloist Viktoria Mullova and Minnesota Orchestra music director Osmo Vanska. It is a long walk down, which may be why Mullova eschews the traditional gown and heels and instead wears black trousers and a black camisole under a duster-length, yellow-and-black-net sleeveless vest. Osmo wears tails and takes the podium.

It is an attentive, appreciative audience. Osmo has conducted at the Concertgebouw before, but this is the first time the Minnesota Orchestra has played here. Mullova plays the Violin Concerto by Sibelius, a composer for whom Osmo, a fellow Finn, has a special affinity. The concerto is sinewy, tender, sometimes lyrical, sometimes quite rhythmic and virtuosic. It is a hit. The crowd is on its feet after one curtain call, not uncommon in Amsterdam, according to the natives sitting around me. Standing ovations are not uncommon in Minnesota, either, I tell them.

But this performance was deserving, and memorable.

The second half of the concert is the Mahler Symphony No. 5, a 70-minute long monster, both in difficulty and length. At intermission, I meet Erik Voermans, a music reviewer for the large Amsterdam paper *Het Parool*. He tells me that American orchestras, in general, tend to play too loudly, but he did not feel that way about the Sibelius — though it is not a piece meant to be played loudly. He is eager to hear what the orchestra and Osmo do with the Mahler. Amsterdam and Mahler have a special relationship. Although Mahler was not Dutch by birth, he conducted here regularly at the Concertgebouw, and some of his own compositions were premiered here. A conductor stepping onto this podium is literally standing in the footsteps of many of history's greatest maestros. It is a rather cheeky business to come to Amsterdam to perform Mahler.

The cheekiness pays off. The audience is still, focused and silent. The *adagietto* demands intense concentration and long periods of meditative silence; the audience honors this with only a rare cough —

noticeably less turmoil than back home in Orchestra Hall. Osmo handles this movement tenderly and with insight, and shapes the sum of the symphony with intelligence and restraint. This Mahler does not overwhelm with overblown brass, and because it does not, the colors and the many moods of the piece reveal themselves. It is a triumph, and the audience is on its feet before Osmo takes his first bow.

Curtain calls are an aerobic exercise here, since Osmo must mount the long stairs to exit, descend when called back, mount the stairs again to exit, and so on. Yet he does this several times. Osmo gives particular curtain calls to principal trumpet Manny Laureano, who opened the symphony with a prolonged and exposed solo, and to principal horn Michael Gast, who dominated the third movement scherzo, possibly the most challenging symphonic movement for a first horn, with faultless, floating playing.

Backstage the mood is ebullient, and the orchestra goes to a party. ING, the financial company, is a large presence here and hosts a sit-down gourmet dinner for the orchestra and some 40 board members traveling concert-to-concert. Important donors are thanked and honored, after which elegantly served sushi, smoked salmon and something called "sea-devil," which turned out to be an extraordinarily tender chunk of some kind of swanky fish, were served.

Tomorrow morning we leave for London. The Proms concert was broadcast live on MPR at Thursday and will be rebroadcast Sept. 4, at 8 p.m. It will be televised, a rarity for this orchestra, on TPT2, Sept. 6 at 8 p.m.

*Pamela Hill Nettleton is traveling with the Minnesota Orchestra on its European music festival tour and reporting on its travels, travails and performances. Her husband is acting associate principal bass and has been with the orchestra for 30 seasons. Her previous reports from the tour can be found at [www.twincities.com/entertainment](http://www.twincities.com/entertainment).*