

Sea and Sky

January 18, 2025

Sponsored by Capital City Bank and
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Wesley Schulz, Conductor
Tessa Lark, Violin

Carl NIELSEN (1865–1931)

Helios Overture, Op. 17

Michael TORKE (b. 1961)

Sky, Concerto for Violin

Lively

Wistful

Spirited

INTERMISSION

Jean SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 43

Allegretto

Tempo andante, ma rubato

Vivacissimo

Finale: Allegro moderato



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MEET THE MAESTRO Wesley Schulz

Wesley Schulz is widely recognized for his superb programming and spirited yet heartfelt music making with orchestras. At home with masterworks, contemporary music as well as pops, the *Cultural Voice of North Carolina* deems Schulz's conducting "spectacular." Schulz is Music Director and Conductor of the Auburn Symphony Orchestra (WA) and recently completed four successful seasons as the Associate Conductor of the North Carolina Symphony. Prior to this, Schulz was a Conducting Fellow at the Seattle Symphony, Assistant Conductor of the Britt Festival Orchestra and Education and Family Conductor for the Austin Symphony Orchestra.

At the core of Schulz's artistry is the desire to unite people through thought-provoking performances. In 2010 Schulz won the American Prize for a singular performance of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* that gathered together orchestral musicians, pianists, dancers, and academics. Programs conducted by Schulz frequently include voices of our time. He has commissioned composers such as Tania León, Jennifer Higdon, Alan Lee Silva and Christopher Theofanidis as well as featured the works of composers such as Adam Schoenberg, Caroline Shaw, Anna Clyne, John Adams, Mason Quinn, Huang Ruo, Florence Price and Chris Rogerson. As a community builder, Schulz frequently brings together artists, philanthropists, business entities and political leaders in support of the Arts.

Across four seasons as Associate Conductor of the North Carolina Symphony, Schulz conducted over 200 performances in all genres including Masterworks, Pops, Friday Favorites, Holiday, Family and Education concerts. Schulz made his Masterworks debut, with hours' notice, conducting Bernstein's *Serenade*, with superstar violinist Philippe Quint, as well as Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*. One reviewer wrote, "The North Carolina Symphony and Schulz definitely drew the utmost life out of Schubert." Schulz has collaborated with Leslie Odom Jr., Pink Martini, Cirque de la Symphonie, Blind Boys of Alabama, Broadway By Request, Michael Cavanaugh and much more. Every season Schulz conducted the orchestra's Opening State Tour as well as Opening Night at SummerFest, the orchestra's summer home at Koka Booth Amphitheater in Cary, North Carolina.

As Music Director of the Auburn Symphony Orchestra, one of the Pacific Northwest's finest regional orchestras, Schulz is committed to deepening the relationship between the symphony and the community. Recent projects include visual art projects with local elementary schools, collaborations with visual artist Adrian Wyard, multiple commissioning projects and the presentation of Sphinx Competition winner, Randall Goosby. The orchestra has recently expanded its offerings to include more diverse concert presentations at various local parks, breweries and community spaces.

From 2014-2015 Schulz served as Conducting Fellow of the Seattle Symphony. He made his Benaroya Hall debut with the orchestra in a sold-out performance with singer and songwriter Gregory Allan Isakov. Schulz has received multiple invitations to return to the podium of the Seattle Symphony conducting a collaborative concert with singer and songwriter Amos Lee and to prepare the orchestra for the Oscar winning conductor and composer, John Williams. Additionally, Schulz has been a regular guest conductor of the Austin Symphony Orchestra developing and conducting family and educational performances that reach over 15,000 young people annually. Schulz is the former Music Director of Bainbridge Symphony Orchestra and Seattle Festival Orchestra.

Schulz graduated magna cum laude with Bachelor degrees in Percussion Performance and Music Education from Ball State University and Doctorate and Master's degrees in Orchestral Conducting from the University of Texas at Austin. When not on the podium, Schulz can be seen running the streets of your city or playing endless fetch with his two dogs, Chewbacca and Han Solo.

Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) is Denmark’s most well-known classical composer. He attended and later taught at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. His output includes six symphonies, three concertos (violin, flute, clarinet), and a wind quintet. An opera, *Maskarade*, is popular in his native land, which has also embraced his nearly 300 songs, many of which are nationalistic with roots in Danish folk music. The composer’s acclaim outside of Denmark grew in the 1960s when Leonard Bernstein championed some of his work, and his reputation has continued to grow in the 21st century. In a 2008 article in the *New Yorker*, musicologist Alex Ross favorably compared Nielsen’s symphonies to Beethoven’s Fifth and Eroica, recognizing that the Danish composer was only gradually earning a following in the U.S. Hopefully tonight’s taste of his music will encourage many of you to explore his other compositions. **Helios Overture** was composed in the winter of 1903 in Athens, Greece, where Nielsen’s wife, the sculptor Anne-Marie Brodersen, was residing courtesy of a study grant. While she was spending hours in the ancient ruins, he was finding inspiration in the differences between Athens’ winter climate and that of his native Denmark. The overture suggests the movement of the sun throughout the day, an unusual example of “program music” (inspired by an extra-musical idea) by a composer who generally preferred “absolute music” (inspired solely by musical sounds). Nielsen explained to a friend “Helios burns all day and I am writing away at my new solar system: a long introduction with sunrise and morning song is finished and I have begun work on the Allegro.” Low basses set the scene (I am reminded of the account of creation in Genesis, “darkness was over the surface of the deep”). Wonderful sonorities result from four horns repeating and overlapping specific intervals.

There is a midday blaze of brass and heat and later a respite in the form of a hymn, played by strings and winds. Nielsen’s interest in polyphony is evident in the fugue which leads to the slowly darkening conclusion by the basses. Inscribed in the Helios score is the composer’s program: “Silence and darkness/the sun rises with a joyous song of praise. It wanders its golden way and sings quietly into the sea.”

DID YOU KNOW?
Carl Nielsen was honored by the Danish National Bank when it imprinted his image on the 100-kroner notes issued between 1997 and 2010.

Born in 1961 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, **Michael Torke** is a composer whose music reflects his interest in jazz and in minimalism. He studied at Yale and at the Eastman School where he trained as a pianist. Torke’s oeuvre includes orchestral works, ballet, oratorio, vocal works comprised of nonsense words, and opera, including *Pop’pea*, a rock opera inspired by Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea*. Several of his titles, such as *Ecstatic Orange*, *Rust*, and *Bright Blue Music*, are indicative of the composer’s synesthesia, the ability to see colors when he hears music. His best-known work is *Javelin*, which was commissioned for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta and for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra’s 50th anniversary. A review in the *New York Times* praised Torke for being “a master orchestrator whose shimmering timbral palette makes him the Ravel of his generation.” **Sky** was a finalist for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Music and earned a Grammy nomination for classical solo. Torke’s personal website describes the composition as “a bluegrass concerto” that was writ-

ten for violinist Tessa Lark, embracing her Kentucky musical roots. At times the violin plucks the strings to simulate a banjo; at other points there are “stomps” in 5/4 time. An extended fiddling riff launches the first movement, marked **Lively**. Rapid finger passages, repetitive motives, and non-stop forward motion inform the movement. Its energy is truly contagious. The fast tempo and driving energy relent briefly for a sweetly lyrical secondary theme before the fiddling returns. Copland’s “Hoedown” comes to mind. The second movement borrows from Irish fiddle music, which has much in common with bluegrass thanks to the Irish immigrants who settled in Kentucky and areas near the Appalachians. Torke said he simply took an Irish reel and slowed it down in his mind. The mood and tempo change regularly, and rhythmic sections alternate with simple folk-like tunes to produce a mercurial movement that lives up to its name, **Wistful**. More rhythmic jigs and “bent” pitches energize the **Spirited** last movement. The orchestra has a few colorful offerings but is mostly relegated to an accompaniment role in this *tour de force* for the violin.

Finland’s best-known composer, **Jean Sibelius** (1865–1957), grew up speaking Swedish at home and did not learn Finnish until he was older. He is most famous for his tone poem *Finlandia*, which was introduced at a nationalistic event in 1899. The hymn portion of this work is still a popular national song in Finland, and it is also well known in the U.S. as a Christian hymn, “Be Still My Soul.” Sketches for Sibelius’s **Second Symphony** appear in notebooks from his 1901 visit to Italy, and the work was completed the following year, premiering in March 1902 in Helsinki with Sibelius conducting. Some interpreters see the work as a statement against

Program Notes, *cont'd.*

the injustices suffered in Finland under Tsar Nikolai II, and they suggest a program that results in “liberation” at the end of the composition. Sibelius himself said he did not have a formal program in mind while he was composing. The symphony does not begin with a rousing theme as one might expect but instead offers a sweet pastoral melody that is more common in a second movement. Take note of the ascending three-note pulsing motif that Sibelius manipulates throughout the movement and reconceives as a triumphant message in the finale. What captures my attention most in the **Andante** are the fluctuating emotions and moods, influenced by the changing tempos and instrumentation. An opening timpani roll announces the pizzicato “walking bass” that stealthily leads to a lugubrious bassoon melody. It is the unpredictability of the movement

that I find most intriguing. Who would have expected the bassoons’ theme to return as a melancholic dialogue between trumpet and flute? How does that fit with the foreboding and the horror of a subsequent section for brass and timpani? Darkness, romanticism, lush string themes, bombastic brass, and insistent timpani all vie for supremacy in this lengthy second movement. The **Scherzo**, traditionally light-hearted and humorous, is instead introduced by frenetic **Vivacissimo** strings. Except for glimpses of earlier lyrical themes, this section intensifies into . . . Surprise! —a bucolic scene for solo oboe and other winds. These two sections alternate one more time before this ambiguous movement leads directly into the **Finale**, a crowd pleaser with its soaring string melodies, noble brass fanfares, and jubilant conclusion, whether the ending represents po-

litical emancipation or, as Sibelius himself ventured, “a struggle between death and salvation.”

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Dr. Akers has a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in Historical Musicology from Florida State University



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Violinist **Tessa Lark** is one of the most captivating artistic voices of our time, consistently praised by critics and audiences for her astounding range of sounds, technical agility, and musical elegance. In 2020 she was nominated for a Grammy in the Best Classical Instrumental Solo category, and she is also a highly acclaimed fiddler in the tradition of her native Kentucky.

Highlights of Lark’s 2023–24 season include the world premiere of Carlos Izcaray’s Violin Concerto – written for her – under the composer’s baton; and concerts with the Stuttgarter Philharmoniker that mark her European orchestral debut. She reprises Michael Torke’s violin concerto, *Sky* – also

written for her, and the 2020 recording of which earned her a Grammy nomination – with Oklahoma’s Signature Symphony and the Sarasota Orchestra; returns to South Carolina’s Greenville Symphony, the Virginia Symphony, the Buffalo Philharmonic and England’s City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra; and performs as a chamber musician in duos with double bassist Michael Thurber and jazz guitarist Frank Vignola.

Lark’s newest album, *The Stradgrass Sessions*, features a mix of original compositions by the violinist and her collaborators – double bassist Edgar Meyer, pianist Jon Batiste, mandolinist Sierra Hull and fiddler Michael Cleveland – with a sonata by Eugène Ysaÿe, Bartók violin duets arranged for violin and mandolin and the world premiere recording of John Corigliano’s *STOMP*. Her debut commercial recording was the Grammy-nominated *SKY*, and her discography also includes *Fantasy* on First Hand Records; *Invention*, marking the debut album for the violin-bass duo made up of Lark and her fiancé, Michael Thurber; and a live performance recording of Astor Piazzolla’s *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* with the Buffalo Philharmonic.

The violinist has performed with orchestras, recital venues and festivals around the world. She is a recipient of the Hunt Family Award, one of Lincoln Center’s prestigious Emerging Artist Awards, as well as a 2018 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship and a 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant.

In addition to her performance schedule, Lark champions young aspiring artists and supports the next generation of musicians through her work as Co-host/Creative of NPR’s *From the Top*. She also serves as Mentor and board member of the Irving M. Klein International Strings Competition.

Lark is a graduate of New England Conservatory and completed her Artist Diploma at The Juilliard School. She plays a ca. 1600 G.P. Maggini violin on loan from an anonymous donor through the Stradivari Society of Chicago.

Lunch with the Maestro

Join us at the Governors Club at 12:00 pm for an elegant lunch-and-learn with each conductor candidate. Meals are \$30 each (additional \$15/car valet) and are available for purchase at tallahasseesymphony.org.

Conner Gray Covington

Thursday, September 12, 2024

Wesley Schulz

Thursday, January 16, 2025

Daniel Black

Thursday, October 17, 2024

Kellen Gray

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Yaniv Dinur

Thursday, May 1, 2025