

## Week 2: Klaus Mäkelä returns to The Cleveland Orchestra podium

by Mike Telin



After an illness forced Klaus Mäkelä to withdraw from three of the four scheduled performances last week, the Finnish conductor will return to The Cleveland Orchestra podium on Thursday, February 9 at 7:30 pm at Severance Music Center.

The program will include Unsuk Chin's *SPIRA – Concerto for Orchestra* and Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 5*, and it will be repeated on Saturday at 8:00 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

Last week I caught up with the friendly conductor by phone for a brief chat while he was backstage at Severance.

*Mike Telin: How did you come to pair the Unsuk Chin with the Mahler?*

Klaus Mäkelä: The Mahler is a tough piece to program with because it is a bipolar symphony. It's tragic and then dramatic and has some of the most beautiful music ever written. And it ends in contrapuntal joy. It's a symphony where everybody has an opportunity to shine.

And Unsuk Chin's piece is a beautiful concerto for orchestra. She was a student of Ligeti, and she has an extremely detailed and careful way of writing for the orchestra. In a way she reminds me of Mahler in that she is precise down to the very last detail.

Of course the piece is a showcase for the orchestra but in a virtuosic way. The strings play fast and very high and the horn has a big solo. But everything blends together. It takes a group mentality to play, which is something about The Cleveland Orchestra that is very special for me.

*MT: You are in your third season as Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic and second season as Music Director of the Orchestre de Paris — you were offered both of these positions after making your first guest appearances. And you certainly impressed Cleveland at your debut back in 2019. You seem to make a big impression on your first outing wherever you conduct. What is it about you that you think draws orchestras in?*

KM: You are very kind to say that. For me it is a chemistry thing. When I meet an orchestra like Cleveland for the very first time, I want to make sure everyone feels comfortable — in a good way. It's about creating a musical dialogue. I want to encourage people to express themselves more deeply than they have before. So I guide them. It's wonderful that I've been able to meet important orchestras at the right moment for me — and hopefully for them too — so that they will want me to come back.

There are a few orchestras that I like — Cleveland is one of them. The musicians are so special, and to be a guest is something that I really cherish. It's like being at home.

*MT: Speaking of home, do you still live in Helsinki?*

KM: [Laughs] Occasionally I live in Helsinki — I keep my scores and suits there. But seriously, my family is still there, so it is nice to spend time at home.

*MT: One last thing. You turned 27 on the 16th of January — happy belated birthday.*

KM: Thank you so much.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com February 8, 2023.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)