

## Pietari Inkinen to make Cleveland Orchestra debut

by Mike Telin



“I am thrilled to be making my debut with this wonderful orchestra,” Pietari Inkinen said. “The Cleveland Orchestra is one of the greatest in the world and for any conductor it is an honor to be invited to conduct in Cleveland.”

On Friday, November 24 at 7:30 pm at Severance Music Center, the Finnish conductor will lead The Cleveland Orchestra in Dvořák’s *Othello Overture* and *Symphony No. 8*, as well as Tchaikovsky’s *Violin Concerto* with Augustin Hadelich as soloist. The program will be repeated on Saturday at 8:00 and Sunday at 3:00. Tickets are available [online](#).

Born in Kouvola, Finland, Inkinen began studying the violin and piano at the age of four. He attended the Sibelius Academy, where he graduated with diplomas in violin in 2003 and conducting in 2005, and also studied violin at the Hochschule für Musik Köln. As a violinist, he has appeared as soloist with many orchestras including the Finnish Radio Symphony and Helsinki Philharmonic, and as a chamber musician he has appeared with the Inkinen Trio at the Wigmore Hall and St. John’s Smith Square.

On the podium, Inkinen has served as Chief Conductor of the Prague Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of the Ludwigsburg Schlossfestspiele, and his association with the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra dates back to 2009. He has also served as Music Director of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and is currently Chief Conductor of the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie and Music Director of the KBS Symphony Orchestra in

Seoul. This past summer he led a production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the Bayreuth Festival.

Inkinen graciously answered questions by email.

*Mike Telin: You're bringing a great program. Please share your thoughts about each of the pieces.*

Pietari Inkinen: We open the program with Dvořák's *Othello Overture*, which is part of a trilogy of overtures called "Nature, Life and Love." It's a very dramatic, exciting piece about love and jealousy. It's inspired by Shakespeare's drama and is rarely performed, so I'm excited to be conducting it in Cleveland.

Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto* is a piece that is very close to my heart — I've played it a lot during my career as a violinist. Even though it didn't have instant popularity, it is now one of the most beloved violin concertos. Tchaikovsky wrote it with Leopold Auer in mind to give the world premiere, and even dedicated it to him, but Auer wanted changes to be made in the solo part and finally refused. It was Adolph Brodsky who played the premiere in 1881, but it wasn't a big success — it was Czech violinist Karel Halíř who made the work popular.

Dvořák's Eighth Symphony was a big hit right from the beginning. It is one of the most performed and loved symphonies. I have conducted it quite often, especially when I was the Chief Conductor of the Prague Symphony Orchestra. Spending so much time there brought me closer to Czech culture, nature, and spirit — it really became my second musical home. Now Czech music feels as close to my heart as Sibelius does to us Finns.



*MT: Have you worked with Augustin Hadelich before?*

PI: Augustin is a fantastic violinist and I hear only praise about his appearances from colleagues around the globe. We already have some plans after Cleveland, but these will be our first concerts together and I can't wait to work with him.

*MT: You're also an accomplished violinist — what made you decide to become a conductor?*

PI: I started violin and piano when I was four years old, and began my conducting studies at fourteen. Our famous professor Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy feels it is important to expose young, talented musicians to conducting as early as possible, and I am very lucky to be part of that very fruitful and successful system. In the earlier years of my career, I was playing more, and slowly the balance shifted more to conducting. But I never stopped playing the violin and never will.

*MT: How does being a violinist inform your conducting?*

PI: As a conductor you should know as much about everything as possible, including having first-hand expertise with as many orchestral instruments as possible. Of course, the strings are an important part of an orchestra, and the more expertise you have with those instruments, the better.

As a violinist, you have an ideal sound in mind, and you achieve that sound with your own hands. As a conductor, you invite and motivate musicians to produce your ideal sound. And being a violinist certainly increases your chances of drawing out that sound.

*MT: How did you mentally and physically prepare to conduct the Ring Cycle?*

PI: It is a long process. My preparations for these pieces began a long time ago, when I first got the scores of these monumental masterworks. The work itself is like climbing Mount Everest four times — you need to know inside and out every twist and turn on the way to the top.

The first opera of the Ring that I conducted was *Die Walküre* in New Zealand in 2012. That was followed by *Rheingold* and *Walküre* in Palermo, and my first complete Ring Cycle was with Opera Australia the following year. Then there were more cycles in 2016 in Australia. And finally this year I led the whole Ring in Bayreuth. When doing the Ring it is important to eat healthy, while still taking in enough calories to get through a *Götterdämmerung*. So it is not dissimilar to preparing for a Grand Slam tennis tournament.

*MT: What advice do you have for someone who wants to be a conductor?*

PI: Take it slowly. Play a lot of chamber music, play as a soloist, and work, play, and perform with singers. Work with young people who don't have the experience to put

together things on their own. This is also a way to learn how to invent ways to help them improve. And hopefully take the right steps at the right time. This also means being able to say no, which especially in these days can be difficult.

*MT: Is it true that you once played in a rock band?*

PI: It is true, I did it during my elementary school years. Our band used to perform for school dances and also regularly in the music classes — we played and the class would sing. My instrument was the electric guitar and I remember very vividly playing for a school dance when I was twelve years old. There was a full house and everybody was screaming — I felt like a real rock star at the mature age of twelve!

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