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JAZZ, CLASSICAL MUSIC AND THE ARTS IN NEW YORK CITY

The New York Scandia Symphony Sell Out Symphony Space

Many years – maybe decades – before Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic were thrilling audiences with the sweep and majesty and blustery fun of Carl Nielsen's symphony cycle, maestro Dorrit Matson was doing the same thing and more with the [New York Scandia Symphony](#). She and the orchestra specialize in both classical repertoire and new music from the Nordic countries. Much of what they play is rare and relatively obscure, at least south of where the aurora borealis is flickering. Which makes them a unique and important part of this city's cultural fabric.

And they're not such a secret anymore: from the looks of it (a few empty seats in the balconies), their Thursday night concert at Symphony Space was sold out. The orchestra rewarded the crowd with rousing, dynamic versions of material that for the most part is not typical for them. This time out, the program wasn't about discovery as much as it was revisiting some of Scandinavia's greatest global classical hits via a joint 150th birthday salute to both Nielsen and Jean Sibelius.

The one lesser-known piece on the bill was Nielsen's quirky, strikingly modernist Flute Concerto, quite a departure from the late Romantic material he's best known for, but characteristically flush with subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) good humor. Soloist Lisa Hansen held the center with minute command of dynamics while jaunty motives made their way through a characteristically labyrinthine arrangement that was closer to a series of funhouse mirrors than the often stormy intensity of Nielsen's earlier works. One of those on the program, the Overture from the opera Maskarade, balanced stiletto precision from the strings against the goodnatured rambunctiousness of the brass section (this orchestra's brass has a visible camaraderie and chemistry, and will sometimes perform as a separate ensemble).

Drama, suspense and foreshadowing permeated the lushness of Sibelius' At the Castle Gate (from his Peleuse et Melisande suite). Matson brought the drama up several notches further with a roller-coaster ride through his Karelia suite, unleashing the triumph of the first movement, dipping to a long, enveloping sweep upward and then a graceful balletesque pulse that alternated with mighty stadium bombast. The orchestra closed with a similarly triumphant yet warily colorful take of Finlandia, leaving no doubt that this was written not as a piece of nationalistic pageantry but as a slap upside the head of Russian Tsarist aggression.

In addition to performing in concert halls, The New York Scandia Symphony puts on an annual free summer series at Fort Tryon Park, typically on Sunday afternoons in June: check back at [their site](#) for details.

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