

Nine premieres at the Finnish National Opera in 2014–2015

In the 2014–2015 season, the Finnish National Opera and Ballet will be offering nine premieres. The 150th anniversary of the birth of Jean Sibelius will be celebrated with two productions: Tero Saarinen's ballet *Kullervo* and a Roald Dahl fairy-tale concert. The season begins in August.

New productions: classics, an operetta and a monologue opera by Kaija Saariaho

The first opera premiere of the season will be *Le nozze di Figaro* by W. A. Mozart on 29 August. This classic depicts the twists and turns of relationships between aristocrats and their servants in the course of one day. Finnish director **Anna Kelo** considers it the world's best opera: "The libretto and music work seamlessly together, everything is just perfect." The new production in period style will have sets by **Jani Uljas**, costumes by **Erika Turunen** and lighting by **Mikki Kunttu**. Performances will be conducted by **Susanna Mälkki** and **Marco Ozbič**.

Friends of operetta will enjoy the return of *Die Fledermaus* by **Johann Strauss** on 28 November after an absence of almost 20 years. In the new production by director **Marco Arturo Marelli**, the action will be set in the early years of the 20th century, with plenty of colour, movement, bubbly joy and Viennese elegance. The work will be performed in the original German. Marelli, known for his visually dazzling productions, is designing the sets and lighting himself, while the costumes are by **Dagmar Niefind**. Performances will be conducted by **Alfred Eschwé** and **Kurt Kopecky**. Operetta is a rare treat at the FNO; since the previous production of *Die Fledermaus*, the only other production in this genre has been Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*.

The Cunning Little Vixen is a late work by **Leoš Janáček** that transports us to an enchanting fairy-tale world conjured up on stage by internationally distinguished Finnish designer **Klaus Haapaniemi**. **Immo Karaman** will be directing this encounter between wild nature and human society, and **Fabian Posca** will provide the choreography that brings the colourful animal figures to life. The opera will be performed in Finnish and will appeal to audiences of all ages with its beauty and lightness of touch. The conductor will be **Dalia Stasevská**, and the premiere will take place on 23 January.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg by **Richard Wagner** will be premiered on 13 March. This buoyant comic grand opera is directed by the legendary **Harry Kupfer**. The production has sets by **Hans Schavernoch**, costumes by **Yan Tax** and lighting by **Jürgen Hoffmann**, and it sets the tale of Medieval singing competitions and young love in desolate post-war Germany. The production was previously staged at the Zurich Opera. Performances will be conducted by FNO Chief Conductor **Michael Güttler**.

The April premiere will be the monologue opera *Émilie* by **Kaija Saariaho**, with **Camilla Nylund** in the title role. Émilie de Châtelet was an exceptional woman, one of the most accomplished physicists of the 18th century and a powerful personality. In the opera, we see her in a situation where she is pregnant with her lover's child, a woman torn by conflicting expectations. Directed by **Marianne Weems**, this production has previously been staged at the Spoleto Festival in the USA. Performances will be conducted by **André de Ridder**, who has conducted a lot of Saariaho's music. The sets are by **Neal Wilkinson**, the costumes by **Claudia Stephens** and the lighting by **Allen Hahn**.

Returning to the opera repertoire are **Mussorgsky's** *Boris Godunov*, **Puccini's** *La Bohème*, **Debussy's** *Pelléas et Mélisande*, **Verdi's** *Aida*, and – in a new double bill – **Puccini's** *Il tabarro* and **Leoncavallo's** *I pagliacci*. The other miniature-opera double bill, *La voix humaine* & *The Bear*, will be touring Finland in August and September in a joint production with the Oulu Sinfonia and the Lapland Chamber Orchestra.

The Chorus of the FNO was established in its current form in 1945. The Chorus will be celebrating its 70th anniversary with a *Grand Choral Gala* in the main auditorium in April 2015. This staged and choreographed concert will feature some of the greatest choral scenes in the opera repertoire, conducted by Chief Conductor **Michael Güttler**.

Dance season culminates in Tero Saarinen's *Kullervo* and Jorma Elo's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The triple bill *Horečná–Godani–Robbins* premiered on 19 September will feature the first performances in Finland of all three works. **Natália Horečná**, a hot name in dance theatre today, brings powerful emotions and dark humour together in a work created for the Finnish National Ballet. The intense and explosively energetic *Spazio-Tempo* by world-famous Italian choreographer **Jacopo Godani** was premiered by the Semperoper Ballet in Dresden in 2010. *Glass Pieces* to music by **Philip Glass**, was created by one of the aristocrats of the dance world, **Jerome Robbins**. He is known for his work on Broadway musicals and his more than 60 ballets. *Glass Pieces* was premiered by the New York City Ballet in 1983. Filled with urban energy, it combines post-modern dance with the movement language of classical ballet.

The FNB and FNO will be contributing to the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Jean Sibelius with the world premiere of the expansive *Kullervo* by **Tero Saarinen** on 13 February. Known for his powerful movement language and impressive visual conceptions, Saarinen will be presenting his interpretation of Sibelius's music to the tragic tale of Kullervo from the *Kalevala*. The dancers of the FNB and the Tero Saarinen Company will be joined on stage by the Chorus of the FNO and the men of the Helsinki Philharmonic Choir, with vocal soloists from the FNO. The production will have sets and lighting by **Mikki Kunttu** and costumes by **Erika Turunen**, and it will be conducted by **Jukka-Pekka Saraste**.

Another superstar of Finnish dance, **Jorma Elo**, will be featured with his enchanting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to be premiered on 24 April. Based on the play by Shakespeare, it is a light-hearted adventure involving fairies as well as ordinary people. Elo's choreography was inspired both by the play and by the music written to it by **Felix Mendelssohn**. Elo received the Benois de la danse award, the 'Oscar of the dance world', for this choreography, which was premiered by the Vienna State Opera Ballet in 2010. The sets and costumes are by **Sandra Woodall**, and the lighting is by **Linus Fellbom**.

On 6 March, the ballet *Moomin and the Comet* for young audiences will be premiered in Almi Hall, with choreography by **Anandah Kononen** and music by **Panu Aaltio**. Returning to the repertoire are **John Cranko's** *Oregon*, Kenneth Greve's *The Snow Queen*, **Wayne Eagling** and **Toer van Schayk's** *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* and **Patrice Bart's** *Don Quixote*.

In August, the FNO and the Helsinki Festival will be bringing the world premiere of *Morphed*, by Tero Saarinen to music by **Esa-Pekka Salonen**, to the main auditorium. It will be performed by eight male dancers from the Tero Saarinen Company and accompanied by the Orchestra of the FNO, conducted by the composer.

The FNB Youth Company will be performing [R&J](#) by **Marilena Fontoura** in Almi Hall in October. This modern re-telling of the tale of Romeo and Juliet was previously performed by the FNB in 2002. The Youth Company, established by Kenneth Greve, is formed of 10 young dancers. The *FNB Visits* performances will continue around Finland, offering young dancers opportunities to train and perform with professional dancers.

The FNB and Pieni Suomalainen Balettiseurue are launching a new workshop project called *So You Think You Can Move*, intended to inspire 6th-graders to move and dance. The workshops will combine classical ballet with street dancing, and the concluding performances will be recorded on video and uploaded to YouTube. There will be a total of 40 workshops at schools in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

Concerts celebrating Strauss and continuing the Requiem series

This autumn marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of **Richard Strauss**. He was a master of tone poems, opera and solo songs, and all of these genres will be featured at [the anniversary concert](#) to be conducted by Michael Güttler on 24 October. Soprano **Anna Gabler** will appear as soloist.

On All Saints' Day, Verdi's dramatic [Requiem](#) will be performed at St John's Church in Helsinki. Soloists will include **Claire Rutter**, Lilli Paasikivi and **Mika Pohjonen**, and the performance will be conducted by Michael Güttler. With this concert, the FNO continues its series of Requiem performances on All Saints' Day.

In September, young musicians from music institutes in the Helsinki metropolitan area will be able to make music with professionals at the [Making Music with the Masters](#) concert. The year will conclude with Christmas concerts given by the FNO at various churches in southern Finland.

Sibelius meets author Roald Dahl in a fairy-tale concert

Beloved children's author **Roald Dahl** and music written for the stage by Jean Sibelius come together in a fairy-tale concert for the whole family. The *Sibelius as Storyteller* concert in May 2015 features the story (told in Finnish) of a boy, who meets a dangerous creature in the forest and ends up visiting tiny people who live in the treetops, the Minpins. Underpinning this tale of childhood, conquering fear and communing with nature are the magnificent *Tapiola*, the imaginative *Tempest* music and extracts from symphonies and other works by Sibelius. The Orchestra of the FNO will be conducted by **Anu Tali**.

The school opera *Hölmöläiset* (The Dummies) by **Jukka Linkola** will be performed by 5th and 6th graders with professional singers at 10 schools around Finland in the autumn. Among continuing projects there is *Hear This, I'm a Composer!* where kids and teens create their own music under the guidance of professionals.

Performers from the FNO will continue to visit care institutions to perform for the elderly and the chronically ill. Services for special needs groups also include sign-language interpreting of opera performances.

12,500 tickets booked for *Phantom*

Tickets for *The Phantom of the Opera* by **Andrew Lloyd Webber**, to be premiered at the FNO in September 2015, went on sale at the end of March. The FNO is the third theatre in the world to have been given permission to create a completely new production of one of the most successful works in the history of musical theatre. There will be 30 performances of the production to be directed by **Tiina Puumalainen** in autumn 2015, and at the moment 12,500 tickets have already been booked.

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The Finnish National Opera is an international-calibre opera and ballet company with a broad and varied repertoire. As a national arts institution, it serves the entire country: the FNO is the only professional opera company in Finland, and the Finnish National Ballet is the only professional ballet company.

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