

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Sibelius Fest Honors Tradition, Celebrates Excellence**

*HANCOCK* – Given the Finnish and Finnish-American roots of Finlandia University, it is apt that the university hosts an annual music festival featuring some of the most talented young musicians in Finland.

The tradition of music at Finlandia University began early. Throughout much of the institution's history, the Suomi College Choir was an important component of student life. For decades, the men's and women's a cappella chorus traveled throughout the Upper Peninsula and to many other locations in the Midwest, the United States, and Europe.

Finlandia University will present the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Sibelius Academy Music Festival the week of July 30 to August 1, 2008, in Hancock and Eagle Harbor. The series of three concerts features the excellence of musicians from the Sibelius Academy of Helsinki, Finland.

The festival begins Wednesday, July 30, at 7:30 p.m., with a concert by mezzosoprano Melis Jaatinen and pianist, Maija Väisänen, at the Finnish American Heritage Center, Hancock, preceded at 6:45 p.m. by a free performance of the children's traditional dance troupe, the Kivajat Dancers.

In their program notes, Melis and Maija write that for their Sibelius Festival concert they wanted to perform song cycles in their entirety to understand the music on a deeper level and create a well-balanced program.

"We also wanted to include Nordic, French, and German songs in our program because Melis lived in Norway for four years and Maija lived in Germany, both while studying music. From the Finnish repertoire we chose songs which are not often performed outside Finland," Melis and Maija add. They'll perform selections by composers Robert Schumann, Leevi Madetoja, Maurice Ravel, and Edvard Grieg.

On Thursday, July 31, also at the Finnish American Heritage Center, pianist Joonas Ahonen will perform at 7:30 p.m., preceded at 6:45 p.m. by a free performance by the Noteworthy Chorus, a women's a cappella vocal ensemble.

Joonas writes that the compositions included in his Sibelius Festival performance are by the most famous composers of Finland and the United States: Jean Sibelius and Charles Ives.

"Both represent something very special for me, each in a different way," Joonas noted. "Sibelius is such a central figure in Finnish music that, as a Finn, it is complicated – even impossible – for me to see him and his music apart from nationalism and glory. With Ives it is, of course, a different matter, although he too is often seen as the father of American music."

Joonas believes that the main work of his Sibelius Festival program, Sibelius's *Sonata for Piano, No. 2, The Concord*, is one of the greatest pieces of music ever written.

"It is endless. I don't mean its duration, but rather the almost incomprehensibility of its beauty of harmonies; the way it proceeds; its entirety," Joonas explains. "Sibelius and Ives are both unique composers and they lived at the same time; anything else that connects these two, I leave for the listener to find or feel. I hope that you enjoy listening to this music as much I enjoy playing it!"

The third and final Sibelius Festival concert takes place Friday, August 1, at 7:30 p.m. at St. Peter's by the Sea Church in Eagle Harbor, Mich., featuring Kaisa Koivula, clarinet, and Jukka Ojala, accordion.

Although it may seem as though the clarinet and accordion are entirely different instruments, they actually have one very important thing in common, Kaisa and Jukka write. They are both aerophones, musical instruments that produce sound primarily by causing a body of air to vibrate. In classical music this duo is not very common, but for folk-musicians it is a quite natural combination.

"The accordion is played by compressing and expanding the bellows while pressing buttons or keys to allow air to flow across multiple reeds," the musicians explain. "A clarinet has only one reed. The clarinetist makes the reed vibrate by blowing air through the instrument. This is why the sounds of the accordion and clarinet can be very similar and blend together well."

Kaisa's and Jukka's program includes pieces by traditional composers Tchaikovsky and Schumann, and contemporary composers Hakola, Martinu, Lutoslawski, Françaix, Tiensuu, and Piazzolla.

To conclude this year's festival, a public reception takes place Saturday, August 2, from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. at the Vertin Gallery, Calumet, Mich. During the reception, Kaisa and Jukka will perform several selections.

For ticket information, please visit [www.finlandia.edu](http://www.finlandia.edu) or contact Karen Johnson at 906-487-7348.