

ORDINE

LUDVIG NORMAN

Symphony No. 3  
Overtures

Oulu Symphony Orchestra  
Johannes Gustavsson





## **LUDVIG NORMAN** (1831–1885)

- |   |   |              |
|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | <b>Concert Overture in E-flat major, Op. 21</b> (1856)                      | <b>8:30</b>  |
| 2 | <b>Funeral March, ‘To the Memory of August Söderman’,<br/>Op. 46</b> (1876) | <b>6:45</b>  |
| 3 | <b>Overture to Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra,<br/>Op. 57</b> (1881)    | <b>10:25</b> |
|   | <b>Symphony No. 3 in D minor, Op. 58</b> (1881)                             | <b>30:05</b> |
| 4 | I. Allegro appassionato ma non troppo presto                                | 12:09        |
| 5 | II. Andante cantabile   | 7:52         |
| 6 | III. Allegro molto commodo  | 4:27         |
| 7 | IV. Allegro molto   | 5:21         |

**Oulu Symphony Orchestra**

**Johannes Gustavsson**, conductor

**B**orn in Stockholm, Sweden, Ludvig Norman (1831–1885) grew up in humble circumstances due to his father's premature death but showed an exceptional musical talent from a young age. With financial assistance from several influential persons, among them the celebrated soprano Jenny Lind, at the age of 16 he went to study at the famous Leipzig Conservatory, where his teachers included Ignaz Moscheles (piano) and Julius Rietz (composition).

Having returned to Stockholm as a professional musician and composer, and deeply inspired by his impressions of musical life in Leipzig, he began a lifelong pursuit of raising the artistic level of musical life in Sweden's capital. Over the years, he worked as a composer, a pianist, a chamber musician, an educator, a concert organiser, a music critic and a writer, but he was principally appreciated for his role as a conductor. He was not yet 30 years old when he was appointed Chief Conductor at the Royal Opera in Stockholm in 1861. His artistic work over the 18 years of his tenure was unanimously praised, and his opera performances were well on a par with the finest that the rest of Europe had to offer.

As a composer, Norman did not enjoy a similar immediate success, even if his works were always received with respect. At the time, folk music and simple melodies were preferred as ideals by many music lovers, and opera and operetta were highly popular genres. Neither of these appealed to Norman as a composer, though, as he was focused on 'absolute music': chamber music, piano works and orchestral works. This was where his musical invention found its principal inspiration and where his creative skills were to their best advantage.

Indeed, Norman is considered to be among Sweden's premier symphonists after Adolf Fredrik Lindblad (1801–1878) and Franz Berwald (1796–1868). His contribution to the Swedish orchestral repertoire comprises three symphonies, three overtures and a Funeral March in memory of composer August Söderman (1832–

1876). Norman wrote his Symphony No. 1 in F major Op. 22 in 1858–1859, but it was not performed in its entirety until 1875. His Symphony No. 2 in E flat major Op. 40, completed in 1871, was first performed two years later and turned out to be an enormous success. The critic writing for the daily *Aftonbladet* enthusiastically declared the symphony to be the work of a master at the height of contemporary musical culture. Even the usually quite stern critic Adolf Lindgren claimed that it represented “a not insignificant feat in the style that seeks to reconcile Classical form with Romantic content”.

In 1864, Norman married the well-known violin virtuoso Wilhelmina (Wilma) Neruda, who hailed from Brünn (now Brno) in Moravia. Their first years together were happy, and their two sons were born at this time. However, gradually their relationship soured, and apparently Wilma cheated on Norman. Eventually Wilma resumed her concert tours around Europe, and by 1868 or 1869 a permanent breakup was inevitable. Being a Catholic, Wilma could not get a divorce, so on her initiative they simply separated. This was an emotional disaster for Norman. His enormous grief had a radical impact on the remaining 15 years of his life, a period of constant illnesses and depression. One might imagine that such a devastating blow would have affected his creative faculties as well, but quite the opposite is true: Norman wrote many of his most important and most expressive works in this period, including three of the works on the present album.

**Symphony No. 3 in D minor, Op. 58** was written in 1881 but not performed until 1885, after Norman’s death. Here the tonal language is concentrated and the technique is refined. Adolf Lindgren regarded this as Norman’s finest symphony, since it “combined the clear shape and refreshing humour of the F major Symphony with the deep and powerful musical content of the E flat major Symphony”. A short introduction is followed by the dark and dramatic main subject of the first movement

(Allegro appassionato ma non troppo presto). It is vigorous and succinct, while the second subject is delicate and slightly hesitant. These musical ideas are developed effortlessly and organically throughout the movement. The following movement (Andante cantabile) opens with a solemn melody, almost like a hymn. However, quite soon this elevated mood becomes more mobile and temperamental. In the intertwining of these musical ideas, the strings on the one hand and the woodwind and brass on the other fuel further development in the movement. The movement that follows (Allegro molto comodo) is characterised by subtle motifs, pronounced rhythms and an elegant treatment of orchestral sounds. It has a kind of benevolent humour that, while obviously stemming from the composer's personality, rarely explicitly manifests itself in his works. In the finale (Allegro molto), the main subject is energetic and joyful, and even the second subject, though soft and melodious, retains a similar energy. In all, Norman's orchestral writing in this Symphony is quite impressive, particularly as regards his skill in articulating and developing his musical material in multi-layered textures. This Symphony was deeply admired by one of Sweden's foremost composers, Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927): in a letter dated in 1902, he described it as “full of beauty” and even claimed that he valued it more than “any of Brahms's symphonies”.

The **Overture in E flat major, Op. 21** was written in 1856 and first performed at the Royal Opera in 1857. It is cast in a traditional structure, with a slow, clearly delineated introduction followed by an Allegro in sonata form. Here Norman combines formal elegance with contagious joy. The main subject, despite its melodious character, has driving and captivating qualities, and the sighing, seemingly limping second subject may be considered typical of the composer.

The dramatic **Overture to Antony and Cleopatra, Op. 57** was written for the first performance of the eponymous drama by Shakespeare in Stockholm on 28 March 1881. There is no explicit programme in this piece, but several characters and scenes

in Shakespeare's tragedy can be identified. The main characters are Roman military commander Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. Their love affair had political consequences, mainly because of the antagonism between the western part of the Roman Empire ruled by Octavian (later Caesar Augustus) and the eastern part ruled by Antony and Cleopatra. In the naval battle of Actium in 31 BCE, Antony lost his fleet to Octavian and was forced to flee. Many of Antony's soldiers deserted to join the victorious Octavian, and Antony was finally defeated in a battle outside the Egyptian capital eleven months later. When he received a message that Cleopatra had killed herself, he followed her example in despair – but reportedly before he died he was informed that the message was false. Five days after the death of Antony, Cleopatra deliberately let a venomous snake bite her and followed her lover in death.

Norman wrote the **Funeral March in B flat minor, Op. 46** in 1876 in memory of recently deceased composer August Söderman, his colleague at the Royal Opera. Söderman was born in Stockholm in 1832, and like Norman he studied at the Leipzig Conservatory. On 1 July 1860, he was appointed Chorus Master and Assistant Conductor at the Royal Opera, where his duties included conducting the orchestra in Norman's absence. Söderman and Norman were thus in close professional contact, and they had a deep respect for each other's artistic capabilities. Söderman, plagued by cirrhosis and other illnesses, died in 1875 aged only 43. This tripartite work by Norman is gesturally expressive, sophisticated in sonority and harmonically evocative, besides being infused with a sincere, heartfelt grief.

*Prof. Tomas Löndahl*

**Oulu Symphony Orchestra** is Finland's northernmost symphony orchestra, originally founded in 1937 and municipalized in 1961. The present name, Oulu Sinfonia (Oulu Symphony Orchestra), was adopted in 2005. The orchestra has 61 professional musicians.

The repertoire of the Oulu Symphony Orchestra is based on classical subscription concerts and completed with diverse contents such as opera, cinematic concerts, world music and jazz concerts as well as concerts for families and children. The orchestra also steps out of its home base in various formations taking its music to various locations around the town.

The orchestra's Chief Conductor since January 2022 has been Rumon Gamba who took up the post after a long tenure by Johannes Gustavsson (2013–2021). During the past decades, the post of Artistic Director was held by Urpo Pesonen, Paavo Rautio, Onni Kelo, Rauno Rännäli, Ari Angervo, Peeter Lilje, Arvo Volmer, Dmitri Slobodeniouk and Anna-Maria Helsing. Principal Guest Conductors have been John Storgårds, Susanna Mälkki and Jaakko Kuusisto.

Oulu Symphony Orchestra has made several recordings, including the opera *Messenius and Lucia* by Olli Kortekangas (the orchestra's composer-in-residence from 1997 to 2009) as well as the complete orchestral works by Leevi Madetoja, an album of violin concertos by Uuno Klami and Einar Englund, opera arias by Mozart, guitar concertos by Kimmo Hakola and Toshio Hosokawa, rock artist Ismo Alanko's pieces arranged for symphony orchestra, and 'Sininen Pallo' album for children, among others.

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**Johannes Gustavsson** is noted for his energy, charisma, poise and sensitivity – qualities that have put him in serious demand as a symphonic and operatic conductor across the Nordic region and beyond. He works regularly with all the major orchestras in his native Sweden as well as in Finland and Norway.

He has held senior conducting posts at the Oulu Symphony Orchestra, Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra, the Västerås Sinfonietta, the Nordic Chamber Orchestra and at Wermland Opera. Since 2017 Johannes has been Artistic Leader of the Norwegian National Youth Orchestra.

Johannes has a string of significant recordings to his name including the first taping of Anders Eliasson's Double Concerto and Sinfonia per Archi with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, released on the CPO label. The Swedish Radio Choir joined Johannes and the orchestra for the same label's subsequent release of Eliasson's Quo Vadis. He has recorded with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra (music by CFE Horneman for Dacapo), the Gävle Symphony Orchestra (music by Tobias Broström for Swedish Society), the Iceland Symphony Orchestra (music by Jón Nordal for Ondine), the Oulu Symphony Orchestra (music by Uuno Klami and Einar Englund, also for Ondine) and for the Västerås Sinfonietta (music by Britta Byström, Ylva Skog and Andrea Tarrodi for DB Productions). As a noted exponent of contemporary music, Johannes has premiered more than 50 orchestral works written by Nordic composers.

Johannes was born in 1975 in Vänersborg and studied viola with Lars Anders Tomter, subsequently pursuing conducting studies at the Norwegian Academy of Music with Ole Kristian Ruud and Olav Anton Thommessen. He took additional lessons from Simon Streatfeild and the great Finnish conducting instructor Jorma Panula. Johannes was the first artist to be awarded both the Swedish Conductor's Prize and the Herbert Blomstedt Award. He was a prizewinner at both the Solti Conducting Competition in Frankfurt and the Toscanini Competition in Parma.

Publisher: Levande Musikarv

Recordings: Madetoja Hall, Oulu Music Centre, Oulu, Finland, 27–31 May, 2021

Executive Producer: Reijo Kiilunen

Recording Producer: Ingo Petry (Take5 Music Production)

Recording Engineer: Fabian Frank (Arcantus)

Editing, Mixing & Mastering: Ingo Petry

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Booklet Editor: Joel Valkila

Cover: August Malmström (1829–1901): Children playing by the stream | Alamy

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