

The 'Other' Petrenko To Stay At The Oslo Philharmonic Until 2020



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CONTRIBUTOR

I write about the culture, especially classical music.

Vasily Petrenko (*1976) – not related to his more elusive, slightly older, somewhat more famous Austro-Russian conductor-colleague [Kirill Petrenko](#) – has renewed his contract as Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic until 2020. The contract, signed in 2011 and which started with the 2013 season, was initially slated to last until 2017/18. It seems that in Petrenko the orchestra has – finally – found the conductor that can lead the orchestra back to the proud days it experienced with fellow St. Petersburg conductor Mariss Jansons who, between 1979 and 2002, lifted the [Oslo Philharmonic](#) from provincial obscurity to world-class and something approaching world fame.



The Oslo Philharmonic was founded in 1919.

[Like many orchestras](#) thus lugged into the limelight by the virtues of a great conductor-orchestra relationship, they were more concerned, upon the departure of Jansons (over lack of support for a new concert hall) of matching the new conductor's name recognition to their newly won fame... rather than finding a new vigorous fighter to push the orchestra further. The result was a considerable step back with the by then notably aging [André Previn at the helm](#). The [subsequent appointment](#) of Finnish conductor Jukka-Pekka

Saraste was a good one on paper: Now chief in Cologne and Lahti, Saraste had been with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and in Toronto before going to Norway, he knew how to make orchestras of lesser fame more competitive, and he offered a broad repertoire that was firmly, suitably anchored in the nordic sound world. Alas, even if he had been the absolute right man, with too many members of the orchestra still around from Jansons' time, unwilling to move on and likely comparing everything to the state back then, this relationship, too, yielded less than I – and presumably those involved, too – had hoped for. The Oslo Philharmonic had fallen back to become a solid but uninspiring, slightly anodyne and boring orchestra in a town that seemingly didn't care about them much. In appointing Vasily Petrenko, the orchestra made the right step towards youth and risk. Apart from an early blooper when, right around the time of his inaugural concert, Petrenko made a potentially sexist comment regarding the efficiency of women-conductors (something that doesn't fly in aggressively gender-progressive Norway), this seems to have paid off nicely. The orchestra is busy recording and reviews of its concerts are full of praise. Tours and gigs abroad (the Edinburgh Festival, the BBC Proms et al.) help greatly. [Gramophone Magazine](#) quotes Petrenko as saying: "After two seasons with me at the reins, I think we have freshened up the orchestra and introduced some great music that hasn't been heard in Oslo for many years." That sounds about right.



Vasily Petrenko. Picture courtesy Oslo Filharmonien

What readied Vasily Petrenko for the job and what made the Oslo Philharmonic take notice was his tenure with the undernourished Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, a collaboration that started in 2006 and which has since merged into an open-ended agreement between chief conductor and the Orchestra-upon-Mersey. Specifically a very successful [cycle of Shostakovich's Symphonies](#) recorded for the Naxos label helped to greatly improve the visibility – or audibility – of this conductor-orchestra pair. Something of the sort would do the Oslo Philharmonic, which has a proud, considerable, but also very spotty and Jansons-biased discography, a world of good... and the signs point into the right direction. A [cycle of Scriabin Symphonies](#), which I am eager to hear, is beginning this year on the LAWO label. Shostakovich's Cello Concertos with Norwegian cellist Truls Mørk on Ondine sound great, and the Szymanowski Violin Concertos Petrenko conducted with Baiba Skride as soloist went on to win a 2015 BBC Music

Magazine Award Nomination. With Petrenko locked in for at least another five seasons, things are looking up, up there in Oslo.

I have put together a select discography of the Oslo Philharmonic [here](#). Vasily Petrenko is also the new chief conductor of the [European Union Youth Orchestra](#).

Oslo Philharmonic [season highlights](#) for 15/16 include:

[Thomas Søndergård](#) conducting the seldom-played Sibelius *King Christian II Suite*, Esa-Pekka Salonen's Violin Concerto with [Julia Fischer](#) as the soloist, and Carl Nielsen's Fifth Symphony.

(December 3)

[Vasily Petrenko](#) conducting bits of Grieg's *Lyric Suite*, Sibelius' Violin Concerto with [Henning Kraggerud](#), and Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. (February 4 and 5)

[Herbert Blomstedt](#) conducting Mahler's First Symphony and [Maria João Pires](#) performing the Third of Beethoven's Piano Concertos.

(April 14 and 15)

Vasily Petrenko conducting Scriabin's Second Symphony and [Paul Lewis](#) performing Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto. (May 26 and 27)