

Camerata Nordica Octet

Sat	May 1, 2027	Leshner Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek	2:30pm
Sun	May 2, 2027	Herbst Theatre, San Francisco	3:00pm
Mon	May 3, 2027	Oshman Family JCC, Palo Alto	7:30pm

Program

Traditional Swedish works (arr. Camerata Nordica)

Låt till far (Song to my father)

Polska efter Karl Lindblad (Polska after Karl Lindblad)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Two Pieces for String Octet, Op. 11

Prelude

Scherzo

Hanna Hellegren (b.1981)

The Nordic Seasons (2024) (selections)

Commissioned by and written for Camerata Nordica

Intermission

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Octet in E-flat major, Op.20

Allegro moderato ma con fuoco

Andante

Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo

Presto

The Camerata Nordica Octet appears by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists,
www.chambermuse.com

Program Notes

TRAD.

"Låt till Far" (Song to my Father) was written by the Swedish fiddler Pers Erik Olsson (1912-1983) to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of his father, the well-known fiddler Pers Olof Olsson. Folk fiddling is a generational avocation for this family; the composer is in turn the father of another renowned folk fiddler, Pers Hans Olsson.

The *polska* is a Scandinavian folk dance in 3/4 time, likely influenced by Polish courtly dances such as the polonaise. It is a partner dance in which couples hold each other and turn with smooth, coordinated steps. It is similar to a waltz but with a different rhythmic emphasis, often highlighting both the first and third beats. Karl Lindblad (1853-1911), was a famous Swedish fiddler.

SHOSTAKOVICH:

Shostakovich began his Two Pieces for String Octet, Op. 11, while composing his First Symphony in December, 1924, but had to hold off completing it until after the symphony was completed, orchestrated, and copied. By the time he returned to the chamber piece in July 1925, Shostakovich had changed his mind about the makeup of the piece. He had originally envisioned it as a suite for double string quartet in five movements and had sketched a prelude and fugue seven months earlier. When he returned to the work, however, he found that he could no longer summon up the enthusiasm for so large a chamber work; his mind was teeming with ideas for what were to become the First Piano Sonata and the Second Symphony. As a result, Shostakovich scrapped the fugue and wrote a scherzo as a counterweight to the prelude instead. He thought the scherzo "the very best thing I have written" (Laurel Faye, *Shostakovich, A Life*).

Both movements are examples of Shostakovich as a young modernist: edgy, piquantly dissonant, highly rhythmic, lightly lyrical, and forcefully driven.

HELLEGREN:

Camerata Nordica is excited that their performances in North America of "The Nordic Seasons" in October 2025 will be the first public performances of the piece anywhere in the world!

Hanna Hellegren began playing the violin at the age of four, and decided early on that she wanted to become a professional violinist. At 17, she began her studies at the Gothenburg School of Music in Sweden, and graduated from the University of the Arts in Berlin in 2004. She says, "I travelled the world with symphony orchestras as well as pop artists. After many years in big cities like Stockholm and Los Angeles, I've ended up living in a house next to the forest in the south of Sweden. Somewhere along the path, I happened to discover that I have a strong passion for gardening . . . "

In addition to her work as a violinist, Hanna is also a composer and arranger. Her music is inspired by the wide array of music she has performed throughout her career, from classical and jazz to folk music and pop. Navigating effortlessly through different musical genres, she finds that experiences and knowledge gained in one genre often prove to be highly valuable in another. She feels an equal fascination with the melancholy of Swedish folk music and the dramatic gestures found in the works of composers such as Richard Strauss.

Hanna's website is www.hannahelgegren.com.

The composer writes about *The Nordic Seasons*:

"When Camerata Nordica asked me to compose a piece in the style of Nordic folk music, the first melody that came to mind was 'Länge leve livet' (Long Live Life), which I once sang in a choir long ago, and which has always touched me in a special way. The melody, of unknown origin, has a distinct folk character, and evokes images of nature both wild and pristine. The lyrics tell of love overcoming violence, swords forged into plowshares, and seeds taking root and flourishing. This song was the inspiration for *The Nordic Seasons*. The melody can be heard in its entirety in the introduction to 'Winter.'

In *The Nordic Seasons* I sought to capture the essence of Nordic melancholy, where thoughts can darken as deeply as winter itself. Yet, after a long winter, light inevitably returns, bringing with it hope, playfulness, and joy. Nature has been an immense source of inspiration. Leaning against a tree and watching the mist rise over a bog, or lying on a beach listening to the rhythmic waves, somehow makes it easier to connect with the mystery of existence. In such moments, there is space both for contemplation of life's transience and for awe at the miraculous nature of creation. The movements mirror nature's cycles throughout the year, as well as how we, as humans, are shaped by these shifts in mood and emotion. The piece is performed alongside a film which depicts the seasons through landscape imagery.

The Nordic Seasons is a tribute to life in all its forms, an ode to the mystery that surrounds the very essence of our existence. It is also a reminder of how nature invites us to recharge, as well as reconnect with our origins—after all, we are an inseparable part of the natural world."

About the video:

"The Nordic Seasons" has been a long-term artistic project of Camerata Nordica. The idea behind this commission was to create a piece with a visual component connecting sound and imagery in order to deepen the storytelling and artistic impact. As Camerata frequently performs abroad, this would serve as a unique way to bring a piece of Sweden with us wherever we go.

The video director for the project is Jack Walton, a British filmmaker based in Sweden who has made documentaries for the BBC. Passionate about the arts, Jack has collaborated regularly with Camerata Nordica over the past five years, bringing a deep understanding of their musical identity to the project.

The director's goal "The Nordic Seasons" is to offer audiences a visual experience that will enhance the music's origins, connecting sight and sound in a way that deepens the storytelling and artistic impact.

MENDELSSOHN:

Mendelssohn composed his glorious Octet for strings in 1825 when he was merely 16 years old. Today, it is regarded as a first-rate masterwork on par with those of the finest mature composers of any age granting Mendelssohn the reputation of the greatest prodigy in Western musical history. What is more, Mendelssohn had no specific models from distinguished predecessors as a basis: his Octet is the first of its kind and has arguably never been surpassed. Conrad Wilson summarizes, "Its youthful verve, brilliance and perfection make it one of the miracles of

nineteenth-century music." Recent research by Nicolas Kitchen of the Borromeo Quartet reveals that a more mature Mendelssohn somewhat substantially edited the score before its final publication in 1832. Mendelssohn dedicated the Octet to his violin teacher Eduard Rietz, and the first violin part is virtuosic throughout.

The Octet is a full-scale four-movement work in the classical style. The opening movement is a sprawling sonata complete with contrasting themes, development, recapitulation and coda, over twice as long as any of the subsequent movements. The second movement Andante is a poignant, melancholy slow movement exploiting a myriad of suave and ever changing textural possibilities. The third movement offers a stunning first example of Mendelssohn's distinctive scherzi featuring quicksilver agility with a soft dynamic evoking the time-honored suggestion of woodland fairies. As his sister Fanny would write, "The whole piece is to be played staccato and pianissimo with shivering tremolos and lightening flashes of trills. All is new, strange and yet so familiar and pleasing—one feels close to the world of spirits lightly carried up into the air." The finale launches into swift perpetual motion with an eight-part fugue working through the entire ensemble from bottom to top followed by a theme that reminds many listeners of Handel's Messiah. The entire Octet is a miracle of scoring using just about every imaginable permutation of voices provided by the eight string players. Such mastery derives from the numerous string symphonies Mendelssohn wrote between the ages of 12 and 14 with one particularly vivid precursor in the String Symphony No. 8 in D major.

—Kai Christiansen

CAMERATA NORDICA OCTET

Short bio:

Established in 1974, Camerata Nordica has garnered a reputation for its distinctive performance style, captivating audiences by performing standing up, often from memory. Their dynamic energy and shared musical purpose form the core of the ensemble's identity. Three of their recordings have been nominated for the Swedish Grammis Awards.

In addition to frequent tours across Sweden, Camerata Nordica has graced numerous stages in the United States (in its full formation as a chamber orchestra), Canada, South America, and other international locations, earning high praise from audiences and critics alike. Their UK début at the prestigious BBC Proms in 2013 further solidified their acclaim and reputation.

The Camerata Nordica Octet's first North American tours, including a New York début in Carnegie Hall / Weill Hall, will take place in the 2025-26 season.

Long bio:

Established in 1974, Camerata Nordica has become the country's leading chamber orchestra. The ensemble has garnered a reputation for its distinctive performance style, captivating audiences by performing standing up, without a conductor, and occasionally by heart. This dynamic energy and shared musical purpose form the core of the ensemble's identity, complemented by its innovative and creative programming.

Comprised of both permanent and international members, Camerata Nordica draws exceptional talent from chamber music ensembles and orchestras across Sweden and Europe. This amalgamation of skilled musicians allows the ensemble to deliver a distinct and intimate chamber music experience to its audiences, leaving a lasting impact.

In addition to frequent tours across Sweden, Camerata Nordica has graced numerous stages throughout Europe and beyond, earning high praise from audiences and critics alike during performances in South America, the United States, Canada, and other international locations. The orchestra's debut at the BBC Proms in 2013 further solidified its acclaim and reputation.

Locally, the ensemble nurtures a strong bond with its audience, acting as a pillar within the vibrant musical community. Camerata Nordica places great importance on engaging and inspiring young audiences, actively developing projects tailored to their needs. Furthermore, the orchestra frequently commissions new works from Swedish contemporary composers, fostering the flourishing of modern musical expression.

Camerata Nordica has enjoyed a fruitful collaboration with the esteemed label BIS, resulting in numerous acclaimed recordings. Notably, three of these recordings have received nominations for the prestigious Swedish Grammis Awards. The orchestra's performances are regularly featured on radio and television, extending its reach and impact even further.

As Camerata Nordica continues its artistic journey, it remains committed to pushing boundaries, inspiring audiences, and shaping the cultural landscape through music-making and an unwavering dedication to the highest artistic standards.

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Reviews:

“Camerata Nordica may hail from Sweden, but [their concert at the Kennedy Center] pointed toward more cosmopolitan affiliations. While it did wonders in works of Scandinavian composers, the group brought an idiomatic sound to music from Britain, Germany and beyond ... a warm, sweeping and well-appointed reading.”

— WASHINGTON POST

”The group's intonation was impeccable, their articulation was stylish and convincing ... Impressive contrasts in dynamics, tone, and sound added to its triumph.”

— SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE

”Camerata Nordica are Swedish. They are also outstandingly good, practised and magnetic in performance ... the empathy between the players is unique. [They] rely entirely upon mutual sensitivity, deeply felt mutual intentions and good old fashioned eye contact and body language.”

— MUSICAL OPINION, *UK*

”Intelligence and clarity ... a very beautiful chamber music sound ... energy and spontaneity.”

— LA NACIÓN, *Buenos Aires, Argentina*

”Outstanding musicians ... one of the best music ensembles today ... Camerata rises above other chamber groups by sinking deeper into our soul.”

—GUIA, *São Paulo, Brazil*

”Superb quality ... played with lightness, well-balanced and stylistically convincing.”

—GÖTEBORGS-POSTEN, *Sweden*

”The Camerata was absolutely phenomenal—what a pleasure to hear them. They are intense, extraordinary musicians. We would love to get their great sound onto the air as soon as possible.”

— Cathy Fuller, Classical Producer, WGBH RADIO, *Boston*

”SWEDES SHINE WITH FRESHNESS, FLAIR [Headline] The players of this travelling band plainly have chemistry. They respond to each other. They stand while they perform, and ... sway like members of a rowdy crowd, each angling for a view of something unforgettable ... ”

— THE NEWS TRIBUNE, *Tacoma*

The Players:

Violin:

Shuichi Okada

Hanna Helgegren

Daina Mateikaitė

Katarzyna Szydłowska

Viola:

Kimi Makino

Sebastian Steinhilber

Cello:

Zéphyrin Rey-Bellet

Filip Graden