Irina Ala-Opas (formerly Vavilova) began her musical journey as a pianist, but as a sixteen-year-old music theory student in St. Petersburg, she chose the organ as her minor—or, perhaps, the organ chose her.

Her passion for the instrument led her to the Sibelius Academy, where she studied under renowned organists Markku Hietaharju and Ville Urponen, completing her master’s degree in 2019. In addition to her focus on organ performance, Irina’s studies included church music, pedagogy, and harpsichord.

She has also enriched her expertise by participating in numerous masterclasses in Finland and abroad, including an exchange semester in 2018 at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, studying with Nathan Laube and William Porter.

Irina has received recognition in international competitions, notably achieving a shared second prize at the Stavanger Nordic Organ Competition in 2021. That same year, she began her role as a church music lecturer at the Sibelius Academy’s Kuopio unit and has since also taught organ at the Kuopio Conservatory and privately.

In addition to her teaching, Irina has performed extensively as a soloist and chamber musician and is a sought-after accompanist. A dedicated choral collaborator, she has worked with ensembles including Candomini, Ensemble Vida, Somnium Ensemble, EMO Ensemble, Tampere Cappella, and Cantio Laudis.

Her recent highlights include performing in the closing concert of the inaugural week for the new organ at Helsinki Music Centre alongside Ilpo Laspas and the Cantores Minores Choir in 2024. She has also performed at major Finnish cathedrals in Turku, Tampere, Helsinki, and Kuopio, and represented Finland at the Nordic Church Music Symposium in Copenhagen.