

Notes

JEAN SIBELIUS

Finlandia, Op. 26

Early in his life Sibelius manifested an interest in music; he actually began composing before having received any instruction in music theory. After studying piano and violin, he made a definite decision in his twentieth year to become a composer. He studied in Helsinki and later in Berlin, returning to Finland in 1899. It was at this time that he received a monetary grant from the Finnish state that enabled him to devote his entire creative endeavors to composition.

Having styled himself "a dreamer and poet of nature," Sibelius came to carve for himself a special place in the development of Scandinavian music, with his native Finland dominating the genre. His works reveal a close identity with Finnish nationalism and his inspiration often came from Norse mythology and the Scandinavian naturalist poets. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find one of his work that is not characterized by the typical "Sibelius sound," where scenery and deed alternate in shifting blends of tone, often combining the qualities of picture and story.

Shortly after his return to Finland in 1899, Sibelius began work on composing music for a series of tableaux that illustrated great episodes of Finland's past. The series was presented as part of the Press Celebrations in November of that year in an effort to support the resistance of Russian efforts to subjugate the country. The final movement, *Finland awakes* proved to be a stirring patriotic finale. Thus inspired, Sibelius expanded on the movement and worked it into a tone poem originally *Impromptu*, but eventually called *Finlandia*. It was premiered by the Helsinki Philharmonic on July 2, 1900. The work became such a rallying cry to Finnish nationalists that it was banned by the Czarist government in 1917.

The work opens with angry, growling chords in the brass, followed by a hymn-like section for the woodwinds. As the work progresses, it builds feelings of hope and jubilation culminating in a fiercely nationalistic hymn that brings tears to the eyes of the people of Finland. This final melody has often been compared to the rousing melody of Holst's *Jupiter* from *The Planets*. © 2004 Columbia Artists Management LLC

- Elizabeth Ely Torres

JOHANNES BRAHMS Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77

In 1853, Brahms embarked on a concert tour with the Hungarian violinist Eduard Hoffmann (a.k.a. Reményi). It was during their stop at Göttinger, near Hanover, that Brahms came to meet Joseph Joachim, the virtuoso violinist - also a composer and conductor - with whom he established an immediate rapport, flourishing into their long friendship. Joachim proved to be enormously influential in Brahms' career, as well as in the younger man's development as a composer. When Brahms wrote his masterful Violin Concerto in 1878, he asked his friend for technical advice regarding the solo part. Joachim - for whom the work was composed and to whom it is dedicated - provided some invaluable guidance in the form of fingerings and bowings, but ultimately, Brahms adhered to his original ideas. Joachim did also write the cadenza for the first movement, although since then, many other violinists have provided their own cadenzas.

Joachim introduced Brahms' Violin Concerto on New Years Day, 1879, at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, with the composer at the podium. The premiere of the work was not entirely well

received, and the infamous critic Hans von Bülow called it "clumsy and devoid of flexibility," further describing the work as being "written not for but against the violin." However, through the dedicated advocacy of Joachim, the concerto soon gained its deserved recognition and a very secure place in the repertoire. A later advocate of the work, Bronislaw Huberman would answer Bülow's criticism with the words: "Brahms' concerto is neither against the violin nor for violin with orchestra but...for violin against orchestra - and the violin wins."

The main theme of the first movement (*Allegro non troppo*) is announced by violas, cellos, bassoons and horns. This subject, and three contrasting song-like themes, together with an energetic dotted figure, *marcato*, furnish the thematic material of the movement. The solo violin is introduced, after almost a hundred measures for the orchestra alone, in an extended section, chiefly of passagework, as a preamble to the exposition of the chief theme. With great skill, Brahms unleashes his two essentially unequal forces: the tender, lyric violin and the robust orchestra. In the expansive and emotional development, the caressing and delicate weaving of the solo instrument about the melodic outlines of the song themes in the orchestra is most unforgettable. A particular high point is provided when the long solo cadenza merges with the serene return of the main theme in the coda that concludes the movement.

This feature is even more pronounced in the second movement (*Adagio*), where a dreamy oboe introduces the main theme against the background provided by the rest of the woodwinds. The solo violin makes its compliments to the main theme, and announces an ornamental second theme. Adding the warmth of its tone, the soloist proceeds to embroider its arabesques and filigrees upon the thematic material with captivating and tender beauty.

The Finale (*Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace*) is a virtuoso's tour de force, built upon a compact rondo structure, containing three distinct themes. The jovial main theme, in thirds, is stated at once by the solo violin. The thematic material and its eventual elaboration provide many hazards for the soloist: precarious passagework, double-stopping and arpeggiated figurations. But the music, inhabiting the carefree world of Hungarian gypsies, is quite spirited and fascinating - music of incisive rhythmic charm and great zest, which in turn pays tribute to the composer's friend and colleague, Joachim. After the proceedings accelerate to a quick march tempo based on the main theme, the brilliant coda finally slows down to bring the concerto to its elegant conclusion. © 1994 Columbia Artists Management Inc.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 7 in D major, Op. 92

"I am Bacchus incarnate, to give humanity wine to drown its sorrow...He who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world." - Beethoven

While Beethoven's Seventh Symphony has no subtitle or program, many musicians, musicologists and critics have attempted to find an appellative or running story to this work. Composers Robert Schumann and Hector Berlioz both said that its music evoked "the spirit of a rustic wedding." Richard Wagner went so far as to call it "The Apotheosis of the Dance." This last view is the most popular one among those who have attempted to define the emotional content of this work. Evidently the great Isadora Duncan agreed with this perception; she danced to all