
Finlandia, Op. 26

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

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 works 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*.

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Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

Just as the symphonies and the tone poems may strike the listener as containing great canvases of Finland's landscape and heroic past, the *Violin Concerto* seems to be tinged by a mood of communion with nature. Remarks about this work from music analysts and commentators include such ones as: "bardic songs heard against a background of pagan fires in some wild Northern night;" "the settled melancholy of a Finland of Northern darkness;" and "the violin expresses...the labor and the love of a sensitive, almost morbidly modern, personality among the crude and prehistoric conditions of an unprotected land and ancient myths."

Sibelius wrote the Violin Concerto at Lojo, Finland, in 1903, it was premiered on February 8, 1904, under the composer's direction, with Victor Novacek as the soloist. Sibelius then revised the work during the summer of 1905 and in this new, definitive version it was first performed in Berlin on October 19, 1905, with Karl Halir playing the violin under the direction of Richard Strauss.

By virtue of its thematic material and the way in which it is developed, Sibelius' only concerto stands alongside his symphonies and tone poems as testament to the composer's right of inclusion in the list of the great European composers of the twentieth century. Music writer Louis Biancoli best summarizes the make-up of this work in the following words: "Despite its strongly modern character and modified sonata form, Sibelius' score belongs to the romantic tradition of the nineteenth century concerto. The so-called 'bardic' moods and

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