THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF
SIBELIUS

AKEO WATANABE
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC
THE
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SYMPHONIES
OF
SIBELIUS
THE JAPAN
PHILHARMONIC
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AKEO
WATANABE,
Conductor
Indeed, although Sibelius is regarded as a symphonist above all, the plain fact is that he addressed himself to this form for only twenty-five of his nearly ninety-two years. He was thirty-four when he completed his First in 1899, and fifty-nine when he completed his Seventh in 1924. There may have been more to come (the English conductor Basil Cameron insists that he saw the score of the Eighth), but all the evidence indicates that ‘Sibelians’ have only themselves to blame for the silence that came instead. Book after book by such scholarly sycophants as Cecil Gray had placed the composer among the Great Men of music. Small wonder that he was reluctant to send down anything less than an indubitable masterpiece from his Olympian height. With friends like that, Sibelius hardly needed any enemies.

At the expense of some specifics, it might be profitable next to consider the sticky matter of extramusical connotations in all seven of the Sibelius Symphonies. Friend and foe alike have heard the whistle of Arctic winds in this music, and in the perorations, envisioned the majesty of snow-capped ranges off in space. Such fanciful “programs” offer the sanctuary of obfuscation, but they are at odds with the truth. In the first place, there is the word of the composer himself. He has been quoted by the reliable Walter Legge as follows: “My symphonies are music conceived and worked out in terms of music, and with no literary basis.” In the second place, Finland is not a wilderness, nor was it so in the twilight of the nineteenth century. The composer’s mother and father (a physician) were musically literate, and his native Tavastehus was host to all the celebrated concert artists of the period; the cultural atmosphere seems to have been quite as it might have been in any European community of like size. In the third place, Sibelius was a professional musician in every way, much more at home in the conservatory or the concert hall than in the lonely countryside with which he is almost invariably associated.

Moreover, in his early and middle years, Sibelius was nothing if not peripatetic. (Most of the Second Symphony, for example, was composed in sunny Italy!) And those who fall back on his statement that “I love the mysterious sounds of the fields and forests,” etc., are reminded that Sibelius said this many years after he had withdrawn to his retreat at Järvenpää and, it turned out, to his retirement.

In deference to convention, some succinct descriptive remarks would not be untoward. The following might be helpful to the listener approaching the Sibelius Symphonies consecutively in this INTEGRAL edition:

I. The orthodox First Symphony is not seamless, but its construction is nevertheless exceedingly skillful. There is an individuality of profile throughout, although the slow movement admits a certain debt to the Russian Romantics—remember that the PATHÉTIQUE was only six seasons old!

II. Experts are still arguing about the ingenious layout of the Second Symphony. Harold E. Johnson feels that the opening movement is made up of extremely short themes. Gray, in a famous essay, held that, instead of introducing his theme and then dismantling it developmentally, Sibelius chose to let out a fragment here and there, integrating them later into an organic whole. The conductor Georg Schnéevoigt heard all manner of political implications in the music: the glories of the pastoral life, the tremble of nationalist fervor, a prophecy of deliverance from oppression—and Finns agree—the composer’s disclaimer notwithstanding; for them, this is his “Patriotic” Symphony.

III. Sir Donald Francis Tovey, who should have known better, reported without disapproval that some passages in the development section of the classically compact three-movement Third Symphony “are said to represent the composer’s impression of fog banks drifting along the English coast.” Sibelius had the work in progress from 1904 to 1907, during which years he did visit England (among other countries). On the other hand, this was also the first music he wrote in the stillness of his lodge at Järvenpää.

IV. When it was new, in 1911, the sublimely severe Fourth Symphony baffled even ardent Sibelians. Decades later, Downes confessed that he could only “try vainly to communicate in words” its grandly solitary mood and somber, intense beauty; “it remains ahead of us,” he concluded. Yes.

V. Born of travail (the dangers of privation of World War I; a long series of operations for suspected cancer), the Fifth Symphony was twice totally rewritten; the final version dates from 1919. In a letter to a friend, Sibelius provided the perfect thumbnail sketch of this work: “The whole, if I may say so, a vital climax to the end. Triumphant.”

VI. Lacking either epic or heroic qualities, the Sixth Symphony of 1923 has not achieved more than a modicum of “popular” success. But its unhurried, profoundly tranquil simplicity of expression contains the subtest of symphonic syntheses. Ralph Wood correctly describes it as “a dazzling display of a technique so personal and so assured that its very achievements [are] hidden in its mastery…”

VII. One must agree with Robert Layton that the Seventh Symphony of 1924 is a “metamorphosis so far-reaching…that it would be impossible to do justice to it without countless music examples.” This glorious summation of the Sibelian aesthetic is in one long movement (the composer originally thought of entitling it PANTASIA SINFONICA). Students cannot but marvel at the inevitability of its unfolding, at the incredible logic and rightness with which bar follows bar to the end. The technically untrained listener is not less impressed, nor less moved, for this is music of immense power. It is also, I think, almost uniquely ineffable; when it is done, we are left with an alternative: cliché or silence. That, and an unanswered, unanswerable question: where could Sibelius have gone from here?
### RECORD I
#### Side I
**SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN E MINOR, Op. 39**
Beginning

Public Domain

1. **I—Andante ma non troppo; Allegro energico** .................. 11:12
2. **II—Andante** .................................................. 9:10

#### Side II
**SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN E MINOR, Op. 39**
Conclusion

3. **III—Scherzo: Allegro** .................................. 5:00
4. **IV—Finale: Quasi una Fantasia** ....................... 12:12

### RECORD II
#### Side I
**SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN D MAJOR, Op. 43**
Beginning

Public Domain

5. **I—Allegretto** ............................................. 9:36
6. **II—Tempo andante ma rubato** ...................... 13:12

#### Side II
**SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN D MAJOR, Op. 43**
Conclusion

7. **III—Vivacissimo; Lento e suave** ............ 19:20
8. **IV—Finale: Allegro moderato** .................... 19:20

### RECORD III
#### Side I
**SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN C MAJOR, Op. 52**

Public Domain

9. **I—Allegro moderato** .................................. 11:28
10. **II—Andantino con moto, quasi allegretto** .......... 9:37
11. **III—Moderato; Allegro (ma non tanto)** ............ 9:47

#### Side II
**SYMPHONY NO. 7, Op. 105**

12. **BIEM** .................................................. 20:48

### RECORD IV
#### Side I
**SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN A MINOR, Op. 63**
Beginning

Free in USA

13. **I—Tempo molto moderato, quasi adagio** .......... 9:55
14. **II—Allegro molto vivace** .......................... 4:44

#### Side II
**SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN A MINOR, Op. 63**
Conclusion

15. **III—Il tempo largo** ................................. 10:48
16. **IV—Allegro** ............................................ 9:28

### RECORD V
#### Side I
**SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, Op. 82**

BIEM

17. **I—Tempo molto moderato; Allegro moderato** .... 13:10
18. **II—Andante mosso, quasi allegretto** ............ 8:44
19. **III—Allegro molto** ................................... 8:07

#### Side II
**SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN D MINOR, Op. 104**

BIEM

20. **I—Allegro molto moderato** ......................... 8:15
21. **II—Allegretto moderato** ............................ 5:27
22. **III—Poco vivace** ..................................... 3:57
23. **IV—Allegro molto** .................................... 9:18

*Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.*
By JAMES LYONS
Editor, The American Record Guide

In aesthetic matters especially, the notion that “quality will out” is an article of faith; to believe otherwise would not be consonant with artistic sensibilities. Of course, there is no gainsaying the maxim that music does not even exist until it is heard, but on the other hand, it is improbable in the extreme that any score of minimal consequence has lacked for a hearing sooner or later. The assumption is that those deserving to survive will survive.

This is not to say that masterworks are always recognized for their true worth; indeed, some have waited long years for appreciation. But so have others suffered from a surfeit of exposure, which can distort auditory perceptions and bring about unwarranted consignment to obscurity. In the latter instance, there are remedies by way of those occasions ordained for revival and reappraisal, e.g. centenaries. In any case, such is the armamentarium of scholarship today that we need no more fear that music—however unworthy—will be irretrievably lost to posterity.

The foregoing generalizations may be subsumed under the “long view” of music history. Taken on its own terms, the rubric invites little argument; few among us would not claim to have 20/20 hindsight. With respect to the sounds of our own epoch, however, there are any number of factors conspiring to cloud so lofty a perspective. Not least among them—and its effects can be devastating, if not ultimately controlling—is the reality that our cultural market place is particularly, pervasively susceptible to folly, not because it would entail seven separate analyses but because each work in turn should, ideally, be shown to demonstrate the composer’s capacity for continuous growth. This cannot be done adequately in a few hundred words, however, nor even in a few thousand. (The interested listener is commended, in particular, to Simon Parmet’s really detailed study of this corpus, accomplished in collaboration with the composer and published in London by Cassell; the book is distributed in America by Dufour Editions of Chester Springs, Pennsylvania.) For our purposes an overview will suffice, with asides as are appropriate.

To start with, it is best to dispel the impression that any of this music is contemporary, as we ordinarily use that pejoratively loaded term. Downes once wrote of Sibelius: “In one sense he is a singular anachronism; in another, he is as modern as tomorrow.” That remains true, but the actual distance in time ought to be made clear—and it is perhaps instructive to note that even the last of the Sibelius Symphonies has been with us now for well over forty years!

Now to the music itself. To attempt a précis of the seven Sibelius Symphonies in this limited space would be the wildest folly, not because it would entail seven separate analyses but because each work in turn should, ideally, be shown to demonstrate the composer’s capacity for continuous growth. This cannot be done adequately in a few hundred words, however, nor even in a few thousand. (The interested listener is commended, in particular, to Simon Parmet’s really detailed study of this corpus, accomplished in collaboration with the composer and published in London by Cassell; the book is distributed in America by Dufour Editions of Chester Springs, Pennsylvania.) For our purposes an overview will suffice, with asides as are appropriate.

The inevitable reaction was set in motion during the autumn of 1940, when the ever-readable and refractory Virgil Thomson made his debut appearance as critic of the New York Herald Tribune and at once became the most influential arbiter of taste on the musical scene. Thomson’s initial assignment was a concert that included the Second Symphony of Sibelius. He described it as “vulgar, self-indulgent and provincial beyond all description.” (Nor did he miss many subsequent opportunities to have at the composer.) From that day forward, the music of Sibelius became officially unfashionable, and within a few seasons, his name was infrequently encountered on concert programs. With the passing of Koussevitzky, and then Downes, the Sibelian vogue reached its absolute nadir.

When the composer fulfilled his formal requirement for immortality two years later, there was no place for his popularity to go except up. But this time it had to be without special pleading. Save for Leonard Bernstein, who had been Koussevitzky’s protégé, the younger conductors were not predisposed to the granitic Sibelian style. Neither they nor the new generation of listeners had been wowed with panegyric about Sibelius as the successor to Beethoven, etc., and healthy skepticism was their attitude. The results are now in, more or less conclusively. What they suggest is that either despite or because of this objective climate of opinion, the music of Sibelius is today more firmly ensconced in the world’s affections. In short, quality will out.

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THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
AKEO WATANABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN E MINOR, Op. 39
(Ending)

1. I - Andante ma non troppo; Allegro energico
2. II - Andante

Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.
THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF SIBELIUS
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AKIO WATANABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN E MINOR, Op. 39
(Conclusions)
1. III - Scherzo: Allegro
2. IV - Finale: Quasi una Fantasia

Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.
THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF SIBELIUS
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
AKEO WATANABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN D MAJOR, Op. 43
(Beginning)

1. I - Allegretto
2. II - Tempo andante ma rubato

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Company Ltd.
THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF SJÖBLIJUS
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AKIO WATANABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN D MAJOR, Op. 43
(Conclusions)

III - Vivace assai: Lento e quasi
IV - Finale: Allegro moderato

Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.

EPIC STEREO
BSC 157
BC 1327
NONBREAKABLE
SIDE 2
XSB 113574
THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF SIBELIUS
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AKEO WATARABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN C MAJOR, Op. 52

1. I - Allegro moderato
2. II - Andante con moto, quasi allegretto
3. III - Moderate; Allegro (ma non tanto)

Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.
THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF SIBELIUS
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AKIO WATANABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN A MINOR, Op. 63
(Beginning)
1. I - Tempo molto moderato, quasi adagio
2. II - Allegro molto vivace

Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.
THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF SIBELIUS
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AKIO WATANABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN A MINOR, Op. 63
(Conclusion)

1. III - "Tempo lento"
2. IV - Allegro

Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.
THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF SIBELIUS
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AKEO WATANABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, Op. 82

1. I - Tempo molto moderato; Allegro moderato
2. II - Andante molto, quasi allegretto
3. III - Allegro molto

Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.
THE SEVEN SYMPHONIES OF SIBELIUS
THE JAPAN PHILHARMONIC SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
AKEO WATANABE, Conductor

SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN D MINOR, Op. 104

1. I - Allegro molto moderato
2. II - Allegretto moderato
3. III - Poco vivace
4. IV - Allegro molto

Recorded by Nippon Columbia Company Ltd.