

Sibelius

Symphony No.2
Symphony No.5

Charles Mackerras

Ole Schmidt

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

alto

Jean Sibelius

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Allegretto | 9:34 |
| 2 | II. Tempo andante, ma rubato | 13:44 |
| 3 | III. Vivacissimo | 6:02 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro moderato | 13:46 |

Symphony No. 5 in E-Flat Major, Op. 82

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I. Tempo molto moderato | 12:12 |
| 6 | II. Andante mosso | 8:37 |
| 7 | III. Allegro molto | 8:17 |

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Sir Charles Mackerras, conductor (1-4)

Ole Schmidt, conductor (5-7)

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

As with Elgar and Mahler the public have fluctuated in their affection for **Jean Sibelius'** music despite Columbia's pioneering six volume set of records by Kajanus and others. By the end of the 1940s the public had grown to admire, if not love, the Sibelius symphonies, and early LP recordings by Karajan (Columbia) and Anthony Collins (Decca) attracted listeners who had no liking for 'modern' composers. However, followers of the 'moderns', and of the Second Viennese School in particular, often treated Sibelius with undisguised disdain: one of them, the respected composer and eclectic conductor René Leibowitz, even wrote a 1955 essay entitled *Sibelius, le plus mauvais compositeur du monde*. Six years later Leibowitz retracted this negative supposition, saying that his opinion had been formed by hearing just two works !

By the end of the 19th century Finland had been under the thumb of first Sweden and then Russia for over 800 years. During the 19th century however a nationalist movement had developed in Finland which centred as much around the artists, writers and musicians as amongst the young politicians. This desire to rediscover a national identity was due in no small part to the publication in 1835 of the Finnish saga *Kalevala* by Elias Lönnrot (1802-84), who ironically was a Swede. The success of this publication prompted a second volume in 1849.

Sibelius's music is evocative of the vastness of Finland's landscape. This was apparent to all in one of his first works to gain international recognition: *En saga*. Although the work's title translated from Swedish (which for much of Sibelius' youth was his first language) suggests that Sibelius was inspired by a specific tale *En saga* in the words of its composer is a work that contained 'all of my youth...the expression of a state of mind'. The first truly Finnish nationalist composer was Axel Gabriel Ingelius (1822-68) whose symphony contains a movement in which the rhythm follows an old Runic chant. Ingelius (who himself died young in a snowstorm accident) foresaw a glorious future for Finnish music, writing 'We are now as in a restless, painful dream, but there will be a wonderful awakening.'

Robert Kajanus (1856-1933) appeared at first to be the very man to lead Finnish musicians out of the 'restless, painful dream'. He had begun composing whilst a student and his first major orchestral work *Kullervo's Funeral March* (1880) attracted a good deal of attention. Kajanus founded the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 1882 and three years later his choral symphony *Aino* based upon the *Kalevala* was

greeted as a masterpiece. However not long afterwards Kajanus became aware of the music of **Sibelius** and decided not to pursue a career in composition but instead to devote himself to promoting Sibelius' music. During a tour of Europe (including triumphant performances of Sibelius' *First Symphony* in Berlin and at the World's Fair in Paris in 1900) Kajanus succeeded in bringing his friend's music to a new audience and consequently brought about the 'wonderful awakening'. It later seemed only natural that when the Sibelius Society commissioned recordings of Sibelius' music in 1930, that the composer requested that Kajanus have the honour of recording his major symphonic works. Sadly this project was incomplete at the time of Kajanus' death and he had only recorded *Symphonies 1,2,3 and 5*, *Tapiola*, *Pohjola's Daughter*, the *Karelia Suite* and *Belshazzar's Feast*.

Sibelius' inspiration for his own *Kullervo Symphony* came from a performance of *Aino* in Berlin (where he was studying) conducted by Kajanus in February 1890. Following a short period of study with Goldmark in Vienna, he began to show increasing interest in composing a large-scale orchestral work. Critics were warmly enthusiastic about the *Kullervo Symphony*, although it seems that technically the premiere in 1892 left much to be desired. In 1893, Sibelius declared that he wished for no further performances of it to be played during his lifetime.

Modern audiences, more aware of the *Kullervo Symphony* through performances and recordings, generally agree that the inexperienced Sibelius more than did justice to his epic theme and in his imaginative handling of a large orchestra produced many striking and original features. In his *First Symphony* of 1899, although indebted to Tchaikovsky, one can find Sibelius already developing a style which then remained constant to the end of his composing career: that of developing short, apparently unimportant phrases into something meaningful.

Symphony No. 2 was begun when Sibelius was on holiday in Italy in early 1901 and unusually in his music, Sibelius has passages of almost Mediterranean warmth in this work. By the turn of the 20th century Sibelius had become known not only in Europe but his music had also been performed in the USA. It was due to the generosity of his friend and patron Baron Axel Carpelan that Sibelius was able to take that holiday in Italy and before travelling to Rapallo, he had visited Berlin and Prague and met Nikisch, Suk and Dvořák. The *Second Symphony* received its first performance in Helsinki under the composer's baton on 8 March 1902.

The first movement, in sonata form, is generally sunny. However the unconventional second movement is closer in form to a symphonic

poem. This rhapsodic movement, with passages resembling a recitative melding into alternating moments of lyrical warmth and high drama, must have seemed discomforting to a conventional audience and in all likelihood accounted for the audience's ambivalent reception at the premiere. Leopold Stokowski in the sleeve note to his own recording admirably summed up the mood of this extraordinary music when he wrote 'Typical of Sibelius is contrast of the savage with the tender, of the dark timbres with the brilliant, of the combining of a theme expressing both Fate and Hope, sounding in relief above a melancholy and monotonous background'. Inevitably there have been fanciful searches for Sibelius' inspiration behind this slow movement and amongst the most colourful interpretation is that it represents Don Juan's confrontation with both Christ and Death.

The quicksilver outer sections of the third movement are split by a slow trio whose melody is thought to emanate from a tune heard by the composer during his visit to Prague. This trio section returns, as in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, as a bridge to the finale. The final movement is a favourite with audiences, its memorable 'big tune' guaranteed to send them humming out into the night. (Stokowski): 'Typical also the vast vistas of the final growth where all the themes combined lead triumphantly to the ultimate statement, which culminates the whole symphony with eloquent expression of human warmth, strength, compassion, love'.

Each of Sibelius's seven numbered symphonies possesses a quite different character, a fact that has led his followers to assert that he is the finest symphonist since Beethoven. In 1915, in time for his 50th birthday celebrations, came the *Fifth Symphony*, long regarded as one of Sibelius' most accessible works, and yet incredibly it was once seen as box-office death; when Barbirolli, who had recorded the first two symphonies during his stint in New York, was beginning his period with the Hallé in the 1940s, this is precisely how it was perceived by the public. It took an inspirational performance by Barbirolli at the 1948 Edinburgh Festival (and a glowing review by Ernest Newman) to return Sibelius to favour.

Sibelius conducted the first performance of his ***Symphony No.5*** on 8 December 1915 but revised it twice, conducting his first revision in Turku exactly one year later, one of the changes being the reduction from four movements to three (what is now the first movement essentially formed the material for the first two movements, the original first one ending shortly after the letter M). Sibelius made further changes before being content with the end result and conducted the premiere of the

final version in Helsinki on 24 November 1919. As hinted above the first movement is in two clear sections, the first part being somewhat heroic in character before a triumphant passage (rather like the sun appearing from behind clouds). The second half of the movement is lighter in mood and perhaps forms the scherzo part of the symphony, although a sense of heroic strife is never far from the surface. The second movement, a set of variations upon a rhythm, forms a quiet interlude between the two heroic movements. Sibelius was however capable of darkening the mood at a stroke, and this Sibelian characteristic is evident momentarily here. The third and final movement opens in bustling fashion and leads into the famous horn tune, which was interpreted by Tovey as Thor's hammer. After the main climax (the return of the horn tune) six crashes close the work. This ending would reinforce the connection with Thor.

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NOTES ON THE ARTISTS

Sir Charles Mackerras (1925-2010) began his career as an oboist with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra but subsequently achieved fame both as conductor and as musical scholar. Following his arrival in Europe in 1946 he studied conducting in Prague and then worked on the staff of Sadler's Wells Opera for whom he conducted the first British performance of Janáček's *Káta Kabanová* in 1951. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he not only made numerous recordings with British orchestras, continuing his fine work at Sadler's Wells (later English National Opera), but also between 1966 - 70 he was closely involved with the Hamburg State Opera. In 1987 he was appointed Musical Director of Welsh National Opera and it was during his period with this company that he made his long-awaited Glyndebourne debut in 1990.

Mackerras's repertoire was wide and varied but of especial note are his performing editions of operas of the baroque and classical periods, his championing of Czech music and of the works of Sullivan (many feared that once copyright expired on Sullivan's music expired in 1950, that it would open the floodgates to all sorts of perversions: they were agreeably surprised by Mackerras' superb ballet score *Pineapple Poll* – a true labour of love). Mackerras was awarded the Janáček medal in 1978 and for services to music was knighted in 1979.

Ole Schmidt (1928-2011) was a composer, conductor, pianist, teacher, and provocateur. During a career of more than 40 years he has cut a versatile figure on the Danish music scene. Schmidt was born in

Copenhagen and started out after the war as a self-taught jazz pianist, earning money by playing in restaurants and at gymnastics classes. In 1948 he began to study piano at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, and after that he studied conducting at the same time as enrolling in a new programme for composition study there. His teachers of composition and theory included outstanding names like Vagn Holmboe, and Finn Høffding.

Schmidt made his official debut as a composer in 1955, but he had a reputation before in Denmark with A Piano Concerto from 1954, and in the same year he was asked to write music for the Royal Danish Ballet; this led to the score *Bag Tæppet* (Behind the Curtain). After completing his studies, he took private lessons in conducting with Albert Wolff, Rafael Kubelik, and Sergiu Celibidache. Immediately after graduating he worked at the Royal Danish Opera, where he conducted ballet from 1958-65.

Ole Schmidt is best known internationally as a conductor. He has appeared as a freelancer all over Scandinavia, Europe, and in the USA but has also held permanent posts at the Hamburg Symphony, the Danish Radio Sinfonietta, and the Århus Symphony. From 1984 he appeared as a guest conductor with numerous orchestras all over the world, and an advantage of this freelance lifestyle was the extra time available for composing. Most recently he was permanent guest conductor at both the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester (since 1986), and of the Toledo SO in Ohio, USA.

Ole Schmidt achieved world renown in 1974, when he recorded the symphonies of Carl Nielsen with the London Symphony Orchestra in the wintry surroundings of St Giles Church in London. As the first complete set of Nielsen symphonies, this recording is a milestone in the reception of the Danish master's music, and it is still recognized as one of the best sets ever made. Recent releases of Ole's compositions include his complete String Quartets (on 2 discs), one of his Double concerto for trumpet & trombone, and in autumn 2005 (with Danish Radio Symphony) of his concertos for Flute, for Tuba, and for Horn, plus later, his Suite for Flute and Chamber orchestra. In all, he wrote 145 works.

Alto ALC1189

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Symphony No. 2 recorded in 1994 at CTS, London

Executive producer: **Alan Peters**

Producer: **John H. West**

Engineer: **John Timperley**

Symphony No. 5 recorded in 1996 at CTS, London

Executive Producer: **Alan Peters**

Producer: **Oliver Davis**

Engineer: **Dick Lewzey**

Mastered for alto by **Paul Arden-Taylor**

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