

# Sibelius Symphonies Nos 2 & 5

**Colin Davis**  
**London Symphony**  
**Orchestra**

*alto*





# Jean Sibelius

## *Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43*

- |   |                          |       |
|---|--------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Allegretto               | 9:39  |
| 2 | Tempo andante, ma rubato | 14:49 |
| 3 | Vivacissimo              | 6:06  |
| 4 | Allegro moderato         | 14:00 |

## *Symphony No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 82*

- |   |                      |       |
|---|----------------------|-------|
| 5 | Tempo molto moderato | 13:36 |
| 6 | Andante mosso        | 8:07  |
| 7 | Allegro molto        | 9:13  |

**London Symphony Orchestra**  
**Sir Colin Davis, *conductor***

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### NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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As with Elgar and Mahler the public have fluctuated in their affection for **Jean Sibelius's** music, despite Columbia (UK)'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.

Leopold Stokowski in the sleevenote 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 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

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Throughout his career, Sir Colin Davis was a strong advocate for the music of Sibelius, recording the complete cycle of symphonies three times – once with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and twice with the LSO. His friend and fellow musician, David Cairns, once quoted Davis as saying '*conducting Sibelius is like looking at oneself in the mirror. I look in the mirror and see the pitilessness of life, yet I find the strength to go on. Sibelius was happy when he was in company, depressed when he was alone. I am the same*'.

Born in the Surrey town of Weybridge in 1927, Davis was a pupil at Christ's Hospital in Sussex before moving on to the Royal College of Music where he studied the clarinet with Frederick Thurston. In 1949, following National Service, he launched into a career as a freelance musician. This included founding and conducting the Kalmar Orchestra and working with David Cairns and the Chelsea Opera Group. In 1957 he became assistant conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra and, after standing in for Otto Klemperer at the concert at the Royal Festival Hall, his professional career took off. This included work at Glyndebourne and the Proms and then, from 1960, with Sadler's Wells Opera. Subsequently he became Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Musical Director at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

From 1983 until 1993, he was Chief Conductor of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and during that time became Honorary Conductor of the Dresden Staatskapelle. In 1995 he was offered the post of Principal Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, an orchestra with which he had been associated for much of his musical career. Having been appointed CBE in 1965 and knighted in 1980, he was made a Companion of Honour in 2001. His last concert with the LSO was in 2012 conducting the Berlioz *Requiem* (ALC1607). He died on 14 April 2013.



**Alto ALC1713**

**5055354417139**

*Symphony No. 2* recorded at the Barbican, September 2006, originally issued as LSO Live 0605

*Symphony No. 5* recorded at the Barbican, December 2003, originally issued as LSO Live 0537

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