









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JEAN SIBELIUS  
(1865–1957)

**Symphonie Nr. 4 a-moll** op. 63 [37'20]  
in A minor · en la mineur · in la minore

- |   |                                       |         |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------|
|  | 1. Tempo molto moderato, quasi adagio | [11'23] |
|  | 2. Allegro molto vivace               | [4'57]  |
|  | 3. Il tempo largo                     | [11'30] |
|  | 4. Allegro                            | [9'30]  |

**Symphonie Nr. 5 Es-dur** op. 82 [29'21]  
in E flat major · en mi bémol majeur · in mi bemolle maggiore

- |   |  |        |
|---|--|--------|
|  | (1.) Tempo molto moderato – Largamente –   | [7'40] |
|  | Allegro moderato – Presto  | [4'52] |
|  | (2.) Andante mosso, quasi allegretto   | [8'11] |
|  | (3.) Allegro molto – Misterioso – Un pochettino largamente –<br>Largamente assai | [8'38] |

Berliner Philharmoniker  
JAMES LEVINE



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JAMES LEVINE

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## SIBELIUS: SYMPHONIES NOS. 4 & 5

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With the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies we encounter a Sibelius at the height of his powers and in the process of distilling a highly personal musical language. Although these two works differ markedly – as A minor darkness from E flat major light – both arise from the composer's stern reaction to an ever more solidly entrenched musical "modernism" in Europe, a set of styles that he increasingly disparaged either as overinflated and self-indulgent at the expense of formal control (Mahler, Strauss) or as infatuated with sensationalistic dissonances at the expense of spiritual depth or general comprehensibility (Debussy, Schoenberg). From the Fourth onward, a discouraged Sibelius began the process of withdrawing from the frenzied marketplace of modernism in order to embrace a more private, contemplative world, one that linked fundamental problems of musical structure to a belief in the mystical splendor of Nature, particularly as experienced in the towering, resinous pines and clean, cold Finnish lakes surrounding his forest-retreat at Järvenpää.

The most extreme of the seven symphonies, the Fourth (1911) was intended as an antidote to official modernism – a bleak reduction to the barest essentials. Shortly after the Helsinki première, writers close to Sibelius explained that it was "a protest against the prevalent musical style ... above all in Germany", and the composer added that the work "has nothing, absolutely nothing of the circus about it." Indeed, as the

quintessential statement of his "middle-period" modern-classical style, it was the most aphoristic, astringent orchestral work that he would ever compose. Yet in its very strangeness – and in its stark exploration of strained intervals and dissonances, particularly the tritone – subsequent commentators have found much to praise.

Opening with an eruptive groundswell in the lowest instruments, the first movement explores the soberest regions of minor-mode solitude. The movement's compact sonata-form variant is built not so much from themes as from "primitive" sonic gestures: spare, isolated strands of forlorn melody are juxtaposed with slowly oscillating pedal-points, rhapsodic string fragments, echoing horn calls and powerful intrusions of brass. This first movement, in A minor, seems not so much to end as to dissolve away into silence, only to be reawakened in the second movement, an F major scherzo. Here the main theme, led by a falling idea sounded by the oboe over viola tremolos, eventually gives way to a contrasting trio, studded with anguished, *rinforzando* tritone cries. One effect of this unsettled trio is to extinguish the scherzo-reprise: at the point of its expected arrival the candle is blown out, and the movement ends without its final, balancing portion. What follows is one of Sibelius's most celebrated movements: the purposeful knitting-together of a grand, quasi-Brucknerian theme that, after several partial attempts, receives its fullest, *forte*

sounding only near the end. The finale, at first seeming to promise an A major conclusion, is charged with wintry bustle and special orchestral effects, but whatever potential for major-mode cheer might initially exist here unravels at the minor-mode end to produce one of the loneliest final pages in the symphonic literature.

By the period of the more affirmative Fifth Symphony – which was performed in two preliminary versions (1915, 1916) before the definitive reading was decided upon (1919) – Sibelius had withdrawn even more deeply into a meditative world of “Northern” musical thought. (This psychological withdrawal was reinforced by political events: the isolating conditions of World War I, which brought with it Finnish independence in 1917 and the Finnish civil war immediately afterwards.) Now, even more than in the Fourth Symphony, the “late-period” Sibelius was seized with the idea of extracting the essence of the natural world in a contemplative music of mysticism and intuition. “From everything”, he wrote in May 1918, “I notice how my inner being has changed since the period of the Fourth Symphony. And these [new] symphonies of mine are more confessions of faith than are my other works.”

The Fifth’s much-discussed first movement, in E flat major, is structurally innovative, a result of Sibelius’s rethinking of basic formal issues in these years. Actually a fusion of “first movement” and “scherzo” (which had been two separate pieces in the first version), it is most easily grasped as a gradually phased *accelerando*. Thus it begins with stillness and near non-motion – the opening “natural” horn call presented as an object for meditation – and is drawn by

degrees into the whirlwind of its final bars, whose intense inner motion implodes into silence at the end. The generally placid middle movement, in G major, is a set of multiple, varied rotations through a theme first presented by flutes and pizzicato strings. Although the movement is disarmingly simple on the surface, one of its concealed points is patiently to beget the thematic materials for the finale.

This is built from two contrasting themes: it is the task of the perpetual-motion first theme to generate the second – the back-and-forth idea with which this symphony is most commonly identified. Tovey’s famous metaphor of “Thor ... swinging his hammer” in the second theme is picturesque but inaccurate. Recent research has established that this theme was inspired instead by the majestic migrating swans that Sibelius saw every year with the thawing of winter into springtime – an image of the reanimation of the natural cycle. This “swan hymn” (as Sibelius’s friend Axel Carpelan called it) is the musical and “nature-mystical” idea into which the entire symphony grows. It appears in one of the 1915 sketches under the following observation: “16 swans. One of my greatest experiences! Lord God, that beauty! They circled over me for a long time. Disappeared into the solar haze like a gleaming, silver ribbon ... Nature’s mysticism and life’s Angst!” The version of the theme that first occurred to Sibelius was that of its third (and final) appearance in the finale – the climactic version, with its tremblingly stretched intervals, as if the theme were breaking apart, perhaps straining to reveal something even deeper within.

James Hepokoski

## SIBELIUS: SYMPHONIEN NR. 4 & 5

Finnland – geographisch, wirtschaftlich und kulturell ein Randgebiet; überdies erreichte es erst 1917 eigenstaatliche politische Identität (bis 1809 war Finnland ein Teil Schwedens, dann russisches Großfürstentum). Das sind keine günstigen Bedingungen für die Entfaltung eines reichen Musiklebens. Aber ausgerechnet dieses Finnland hat den bekanntesten und bedeutendsten Symphoniker aller nordischen Länder hervorgebracht. Jean Sibelius studierte in Helsinki am gerade erst gegründeten Musikinstitut; er wurde bald ein hervorragender Geiger und begann früh zu komponieren; 1889 ging er nach Berlin, dann nach Wien, kehrte 1891 in die Heimat zurück und unterrichtete ein Jahrzehnt lang am Musikinstitut Helsinki. Zu seinen frühen Kompositionen gehören Streichquartette, wohlklingend, gediegen gearbeitet und an Dvořáks Ton erinnernd; aber gleich nach seiner Studienzeit tritt er mit einem großdimensionierten symphonischen Werk hervor – *Kullervo* für Soli, Chor und Orchester –, das Sibelius’ ganze musikalische Individualität und Kühnheit zum ersten Mal rückhaltlos präsentiert und schon damals als Beginn einer eigenständigen finnischen Musik erkannt wurde.

Sibelius war Symphoniker wie sein Generationsgenosse Gustav Mahler; die sieben Symphonien, die *Kullervo*-Symphonie und die Symphonischen Dichtungen bilden Sibelius’ eigentliches Lebenswerk. Als Mahler 1907 in Helsingfors dirigierte, kam Sibe-

lius mehrmals mit dem Gast zusammen. »Der Kontakt zwischen uns«, berichtete er, »wurde auf einigen Spaziergängen geschlossen, als wir alle großen Fragen der Musik auf Leben und Tod diskutierten. Als unser Gespräch auf das Wesen der Symphonie kam, warf ich ein, daß ich deren Strenge und Stil und die tiefe Logik bewundere, die einen inneren Zusammenhang zwischen allen Motiven schaffe. Das entsprach den Erfahrungen, die ich bei meinem Schaffen gemacht hatte; Mahler aber war ganz entgegengesetzter Meinung: »Nein, die Symphonie muß wie die Welt sein. Sie muß alles umfassen.« Als Komponist von Symphonien sah Sibelius sich, wie zahlreiche Zeugnisse überliefern, nicht als Ideenmusiker oder Weltenbauer wie Mahler, sondern als absoluten Musiker, der Beethoven rückhaltlos bewunderte, der jede Art von Programm ablehnte und der, ähnlich verschlossen wie Brahms, Einblicke in sein Inneres verwehrte.

Seine Vierte Symphonie komponierte Sibelius 1910/11, teils auch auf Konzertreisen; die Uraufführung, 1911 in Helsinki, brachte keinen einhelligen Erfolg – kein Wunder angesichts der Schroffheit und Unzugänglichkeit dieses Werkes. Schon die ersten Takte stören den Hörer auf: ein lautes, sich jedoch gleich ins Pianissimo verlaufendes Grummeln in tiefen Streichern und Fagotten, einige wenige, scheinbar zusammenhanglose Töne, Ausschnitt aus einer Ganztonleiter, die sich der tonalen