

435 351-2 GH

JEAN SIBELIUS
(1865–1957)

Symphonie Nr. 1 e-moll op. 39

Symphony no. 1 in E minor, op. 39 · Symphonie n° 1 en mi mineur, op. 39
Sinfonia n. 1 in mi minore, op. 39

1. Andante, ma non troppo – Allegro energico –
Tranquillo – Tempo I [Allegro energico] –
Tranquillo – a tempo [11'56]
2. Andante (ma non troppo lento) – [11'05]
Molto tranquillo – Tempo I
3. Scherzo. Allegro – Lento (ma non troppo) – [5'31]
Tempo I
4. Finale (Quasi una Fantasia). Andante – [12'47]
Allegro molto – Andante assai – Allegro molto
come prima – Andante (ma non troppo) –
Più largamente poco a poco

Wiener Philharmoniker
LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Konzertmitschnitt / Live recording / Enregistrement public / Registrazione dal vivo

A *Leonard Bernstein*™ RECORDING

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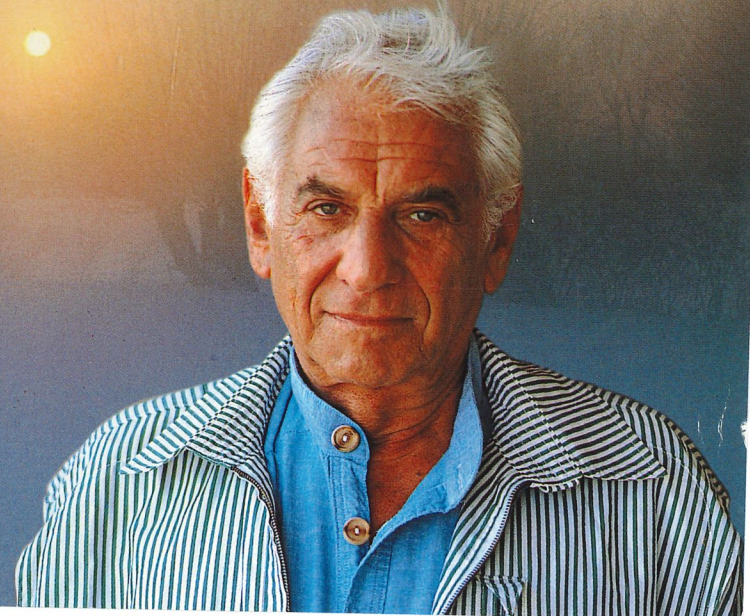
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SIBELIUS · SYMPHONIE NO. 1
WIENER PHILHARMONIKER · LEONARD BERNSTEIN

NUMERIQUE





JEAN SIBELIUS

SIBELIUS: SYMPHONY NO. 1

I have never listened to any music that took me away so completely from our usual Western life, and transported me into a quite new civilization. Every page of [the First Symphony] breathes of another manner of thought, another way of living, even another landscape and seascape than ours." Ernest Newman's response in 1905 to this symphony, which Sibelius had composed some six years earlier, reminds us of how daringly "primitive" it could sound to its first listeners.

Much of the First Symphony's exotic effect relies on the radicalism of its orchestration. Among the sources for this is Tchaikovsky, whose spirit and tone loom behind the work, for all of its rugged individuality. To a later generation of Northern "modernists" Tchaikovsky's nakedly direct, heartfelt intensity, his coloristic orchestral outbursts, and his unleashing of eruptive emotion — the very aspects that some Western European critics interpreted as recklessness or "barbaric" transgressions of cultivated taste — represented a revolution of sonority. The young Sibelius eagerly adopted this liberated orchestral style and pushed it in even bolder directions.

Sibelius's "post-Tchaikovskian" First Symphony may be heard as a succession of contrasting, static timbre-tableaux or "sound-sheets". Here we encounter bold patches of color, laid onto the sonic canvas with the broad strokes of the palette knife,

not the fine brush. Transitional material is minimized to permit rich chunks of primal "sound" to butt up against one another. Consider, for example, the harsh brass closes of the first and last movements; the "cold" reprise of the first movement's subordinate theme, whose phrases are passed back and forth among the clarinet, trumpet, horn and flute; the hammered timpani that ignite the Scherzo's main theme; the *non sequitur* intercutting of the horns at the beginning of the Scherzo's trio; the interrelated, resonant string themes throughout the work.

When this full-color orchestration is coupled with the clipped syntax of several of the symphony's themes (for instance, that of the principal themes of the first, third, and fourth movements), as well as with the somber returns to "oppressive" minor tonalities and the occasional modal harmonic turns, the result is an extraordinarily individualized utterance. That the whole conception is simultaneously concerned with problems of motivic development, thematic interconnection and symphonic structure on the highest level makes the achievement all the more remarkable.

Sibelius began sketching the First Symphony in Berlin in late April 1898, but most of it was composed in Finland in later 1898 and early 1899. Its first performance took place on 26 April 1899 with Sibelius himself conducting the Helsinki Philharmonic. The

composer revised the orchestration in March 1900. Although the First Symphony is not explicitly programmatic, it is worth noting that he and his Finnish backers initially used the work for unabashedly political purposes. The new symphony was the centerpiece of the Helsinki Philharmonic's European tour in the summer of 1900, which aimed, in part, to marshal sympathy for a Finland suffering under the Bobrikov governorship and its policy of Russification, made most explicit in the notorious "February Manifesto" of 1899 (this deprived Finland of its political autonomy and severely limited the freedom of speech and assembly). The month-long tour, which included concerts in Lübeck, Hamburg, Berlin, Amsterdam and Paris, was a volatile mixture of the new aesthetic of "elemental" Northern sound and subtle politics, and it was a pivotal moment in Sibelius's career.

The first movement opens with the famous "lonely" clarinet solo: the obvious model here is Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, whose E minor key this work shares. In late 19th-century nationalist symphonies such introductions characteristically represented either the "national spirit" that would increasingly pervade the rest of the work or the narrative voice that would present the epic tale to follow. The ensuing Allegro energico, in sonata form, is built from the interplay of three thematic blocks. The first is an explosive principal theme that, although it seems to aspire to G major, is continually pulled back to a fateful E minor. The second is a quieter, staccato transition theme for a pair of flutes, sounded over a modally swaying background of strings and harp. And the third, marked Tranquillo, is the subordinate theme proper (first heard in a "chilly" B minor), consisting of long, echoing woodwind glides — clearly derived from the introduction — over a per-

sistent, throbbing dominant pedal in the strings, into which elements of the second, staccato block menacingly insinuate themselves.

The dreamlike slow movement is most easily heard as a three-part form, ABA, whose expansive outer sections reflect coloristically on a persistent, gently rocking theme. In the opening section the shifts between the E flat tonic and its "colder" relative, C minor, are so flexibly managed that at times it is difficult to determine which of the two keys is actually prevailing. The central section, a "Forest Murmurs"-like nature-scene led by the horns (and related to the first movement's subordinate theme), plunges warmly into A flat major. It leads to one of the work's most remarkable pieces of scoring: the icy, windswept return of the main theme itself — its "minor-mode" color now emphasized — in the substantially altered reprise.

The C major Scherzo is dominated by its rough-hewn, "Brucknerian" outer sections. In the center, though, the seemingly unstoppable triple-pulsations are abruptly interrupted by the horns and the slower E major trio, which also, of course, recalls the characteristic sonorities of the previous movement's central section.

The Finale begins with a desperate, *forte* return to the first movement's introduction: the sealing of the "E minor fate" is at hand. The main body of the movement is a sonata based on two starkly juxtaposed thematic blocks. The principal theme's determined folk-rhythms lead to bitter battle-clashes. The broad, contrasting theme, Andante assai, is something of an apotheosis of the preceding movements' lyrical themes. A prolonged "sound-sheet", it is grounded throughout in the bass by a rock-solid, unflinching tonic pedal. Above it Sibelius expertly transforms the harmonic and orchestral colors from

a sumptuously warm major into a cold, stern minor — doubtless representing the inexorable extinguishing of hope itself. The symphony concludes by con-

firmed, in the coarsest, most direct terms possible, the final control of the fateful E minor.

James Hepokoski

SIBELIUS: SYMPHONIE NR. 1

Viele große Musiker haben auch im politischen Leben ihres Landes eine bedeutende Rolle gespielt. Es sei nur an den Pianisten Ignacy Paderewski erinnert, der 1919 zum polnischen Ministerpräsidenten ernannt wurde, oder an Giuseppe Verdi als Symbolfigur für die italienische Einigungsbewegung im 19. Jahrhundert. Im Falle des Finnen Jean Sibelius ging die Verehrung seines Volkes noch weiter: er wurde nicht nur zur allseits verehrten Persönlichkeit, sondern geradezu zur nationalen Integrations- und Identifikationsfigur, denn er hatte wie niemand sonst seinem Volk in der Zeit der russischen Herrschaft das Bewußtsein eigener geschichtlicher Größe gegeben — kein Staatsmann oder Freiheitsheld, sondern eben ein Musiker. Und das nicht etwa, indem er vor allem folkloristische Musik geschrieben hätte, sondern weil er — wie wenige andere Komponisten — Naturstimmungen tonmalersisch einzufangen wußte und dabei auf ganz spezifische Weise das Idiom seines Heimatlandes traf. Er machte die nordischen Sagen ebenso wie bestimmte historische und geographische Themen zum Inhalt

seiner Kompositionen (z.B. in Symphonischen Dichtungen wie *Der Schwan von Tuonela*, *Tapiola* und *Finlandia*). So wurde er von seinen Landsleuten als ihr bedeutendster Künstler gefeiert und gilt in aller Welt als Verkörperung der finnischen Kultur schlechthin.

Freilich blieb solcher Ruhm bei Zeitgenossen und musikalischer Nachwelt nicht unangefochten. Gerade was für die eine Seite höchste Qualität bedeutete — der ganz eigene, unverwechselbar nationale Ton —, erschien der anderen als Mangel: ein starker Ausdruckswille, der vielfach auf Kosten struktureller Qualitäten geht — so sah man es zumindest im deutschsprachigen Raum. Besonders das scharfe Verdikt durch Theodor W. Adorno, der unter Berufung auf die deutsch-österreichische Tradition dem Finnen (mit Sätzen wie »Symphonien sind keine tausend Seen: auch wenn sie tausend Löcher haben«) schlichtweg jede kompositionsästhetische Qualität absprach, zog eine weitgehend negative Bewertung nach sich. Dagegen zeigte man in anderen Ländern mehr Sinn für die Eigenart seiner Musik.