


437 828-2 

JEAN SIBELIUS

(1865–1957)

1 **Finlandia op. 26** [8'34]  
Symphonische Dichtung · Symphonic poem  
Poème symphonique · Poema sinfonico  
Andante sostenuto – Allegro moderato – Allegro

2 **Valse triste** [6'36]  
aus der Bühnenmusik op. 44 zu Arvid Järnefelts Drama »Kuolema«  
from the incidental music op. 44 to the play "Kuolema" by/  
extraite de la musique de scène op. 44 pour le drame «Kuolema» de/  
dalla musica di scena op. 44 per il dramma "Kuolema" di: Arvid Järnefelt  
Lento


**Symphonie Nr. 2 D-dur op. 43**  
Symphony no. 2 in D major · Symphonie n° 2 en ré majeur  
Sinfonia n. 2 in re maggiore

3 1. Allegretto [9'08]  
4 2. Tempo Andante, ma rubato [12'43]  
5 3. Vivacissimo – (attacca:) [5'52]  
6 4. Finale. Allegro moderato [12'32]


Konzertmitschnitt · Live recording · Enregistrement public · Registrazione dal vivo

Berliner Philharmoniker

JAMES LEVINE

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STEREO 437 828-2 

**SIBELIUS · SYMPHONIE NO. 2**  
**FINLANDIA · VALSE TRISTE**  
**Berliner Philharmoniker · James Levine**

NUMERIQUE

DIGITAL  
RECORDING



JAMES LEVINE

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## SIBELIUS: SYMPHONY NO. 2

### FINLANDIA · VALSE TRISTE

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By 1900, at the age of 34, Sibelius had already established himself in Finland as a local "patriotic" composer of considerable promise. In the years that followed he sought to secure a foothold in Europe at large. The three works on the present recording, all central to this process, were among the pieces that formed musical Europe's first, strongest and most lasting impressions of the composer. So indelible were these impressions — those of the modern primitive, the politicized folk-symphonist, the exotic artist from the icy North — that in future years many of his listeners would simplistically collapse his later, more abstract works into the nationalistic categories established here.

Sibelius sketched the initial ideas for what would become the Second Symphony while on a privately sponsored visit to Italy from February to May 1901. Back in Finland for the second half of the year, he decided to incorporate some of the ideas spawned in Italy into a new symphony. The bulk of this work — including much rethinking and revision — was done between late August 1901 and February 1902, and Sibelius conducted the première with the Helsinki Philharmonic Society on 8 March 1902. But the most important moments in the Second's history were to come three years later: the important German première in January 1905, with the composer conducting the Berlin Philharmonic as part of Busoni's series of "modern" concerts; and the equally crucial English première in Manchester

by Hans Richter later in the same year. With these performances the Second Symphony — and Sibelius's name — were now "in play" in European culture.

In its earliest social contexts, the Second Symphony clearly invited a nationalistic-political interpretation, despite Sibelius's desire not to confine the work to this meaning alone. From the beginning it was widely heard as a four-movement image of Finland's struggle for freedom from an oppressive Russia, especially since the tensions of the first three movements usher in the motivically related cry of liberation released in the Finale. In the standard political reading — perhaps still the most reasonable one — the Finale seeks to project a utopian vision of a future that, for a harshly governed Finland, was still a long way off. In a broader sense, though, Sibelius's adoption of the pattern of multi-movement "redemption through struggle", one of the standard plots of symphonic practice from Beethoven onward, need not be associated with any single program that would restrict the scope of its potential meanings.

The first movement is an essentially positive statement, though its musical landscape is deeply shaded, swirling together a wide range of elemental moods in contrasting segments of bold orchestral sound: the naive folk-pastoral, the swelling, powerful waves of sonority that suddenly discharge with a single decisive accent, the purposefully crude, the

tenacious. Much has been made of Sibelius's subtle treatment of sonata form here and of the symphonic intensity and motivic coherence that binds together these seemingly fragmentary and discontinuous blocks.

In the slow movement we encounter the intrusion of the negative. The pizzicato "steps" in the low strings at the opening instantly chill the previous D major into a dark D minor and bring us to a mournful theme in the bassoons. (This was apparently the earliest theme of the symphony to be sketched; in Italy Sibelius had associated it with the fateful steps of the statue in the Don Juan legend.) Concluding with an anguished swell of despair in the brass — punctuated by gaps of silence — this first section leads to a contrasting block of consolation or hope in F sharp major. (This, too, had been sketched in Italy and labeled as "Christus".) The crux of the movement's narrative lies in the immediate, varied repetition of the two sections, in which the second, formerly major-mode theme returns at the end, largely under the rule of the harsh D minor — the crushing of hope.

The scherzo, in B flat major, is a whirlwind of orchestral virtuosity, which Sibelius's colleague Robert Kajanus was convinced represented "frenetic preparation". It is twice brought to a halt by the pleas of a G flat major trio, which, instead of closing as a self-contained block after its second appearance, gains mass, energy and speed, and surges directly into the joyously climactic Finale in D major. The simplicity of the Finale's sonata-like design and basic materials — the elaboration of static pedal points and ostinatos in rough-hewn blocks of sound — is central to its effect: the liberation of a self-justifying ethnic spirit. We may particularly notice the obsessive reiteration of its folklike, minor-mode

second theme — sounded three times in the exposition, multiplied to eight in the recapitulation — working in a determined crescendo of resistance to break through into the major. The whole structure is capped with a grand coda: a sonorous victory-stretch topped off with a concluding "Amen".

The politics of Sibelius's earlier tone-poem *Finlandia*, composed in 1899 and revised the following year, are even more overt. He originally wrote it to accompany a set of staged "protest" tableaux depicting Finland's history. In this tableau, "the powers of darkness menacing Finland have not succeeded in their terrible threats. Finland awakes." Some of Sibelius's conceptual models for *Finlandia* seem clear enough — *Egmont*, the "1812" Overture; and, following the "powers-of-darkness" introduction, the fusillade of heavy, C-minor brass reports launching the *Allegro moderato* seems especially indebted to the extraordinary conclusion of the first movement of Tchaikovsky's "Manfred" Symphony.

If the two-stanza hymn in A flat, introduced in the center of *Finlandia* (and regressed triumphantly at its end), is Sibelius's most widely recognized melody, a close second would surely be that of the *Valse triste*, which was composed in 1903 as part of the incidental music to Arvid Järnefelt's play, *Kuolema* ("Death"). In this spectral scene, a mother, near death, imagines in her delirium a ball she had attended as a young woman. Unsettlingly chromatic, the opening melodic line seems to hover uncertainly about the tonic G major, and is immediately repeated a semitone higher, similarly "haunting" a ghostly A flat major. Throughout, the tonic is presented ironically, as a faded memory no longer attainable "in reality".

James Hepokoski

## SIBELIUS: SYMPHONIE NR. 2 FINLANDIA · VALSE TRISTE

Bis 1900 hatte sich Sibelius, damals 34 Jahre alt, in Finnland als vielversprechender »lokalpatriotischer« Komponist bereits einen Namen gemacht. In den folgenden Jahren versuchte er, in ganz Europa Fuß zu fassen. Die drei hier eingespielten Werke, die eine wesentliche Rolle in diesem Prozeß spielten, gehörten zu denen, die das Sibelius-Bild der europäischen Musikwelt am stärksten und nachhaltigsten prägten. Dieses Bild vom modernen Primitiven, vom politisierenden Volks-Symphoniker, vom Exoten aus dem eisigen Norden erwies sich als derart unauslöschlich, daß Sibelius' spätere, abstraktere Werke simplifizierend in die gleiche national-patriotische Schublade gesteckt wurden.

Erste Ideen für die spätere Zweite Symphonie skizzierte Sibelius auf einer von privater Seite geförderten Italienreise von Februar bis Mai 1901. Im zweiten Halbjahr wieder in Finnland, beschloß er, einige dieser italienisch inspirierten Einfälle in seiner neuen Symphonie zu verarbeiten. Den größten Teil der Komposition, in deren Verlauf vieles neu konzipiert und revidiert wurde, bewältigte Sibelius zwischen Ende August 1901 und Februar 1902; die Uraufführung dirigierte er mit der Philharmonischen Gesellschaft Helsinki am 8. März 1902. Die Höhepunkte in der Geschichte der Zweiten ließen aber noch drei Jahre auf sich warten: die wichtige deutsche Erstaufführung durch den Komponisten mit den Berliner Philharmonikern im Januar 1905 im Rahmen von Busonis »modernen« Konzerten

und die ebenso entscheidende englische Erstaufführung im selben Jahr unter Hans Richter in Manchester. Mit diesen Aufführungen hatte die Zweite Symphonie — und mit ihr Sibelius — den europaweiten Durchbruch geschafft.

Angesichts der damaligen geschichtlichen Situation forderte die Zweite eine nationalistisch-politische Interpretation geradezu heraus, auch wenn Sibelius das Werk nicht ausschließlich so verstanden wissen wollte. Von Anfang an hörte man das Stück in erster Linie als viersätzigige Schilderung des finnischen Freiheitskampfes gegen den Unterdrücker Rußland; vor allem, wenn die Spannung der ersten drei Sätze in den (motivisch verwandten) Schrei nach Befreiung mündet, der sich im Finale entlädt. In der gängigen politischen — und vielleicht plausibelsten — Lesart beschwört das Finale eine Zukunftsvision, die für das geknechtete Finnland noch lange Utopie bleiben sollte. Diese Verknüpfung nur einer einzigen programmatischen Idee bei dieser Sibeliuschen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Muster eines mehrsätzigen »per aspera ad astra«, eines Standardsymphonischer Komposition seit Beethoven, beschneidet die potentielle Bedeutungsvielfalt des Werks jedoch stark.

Der erste Satz gibt sich im Grunde positiv, wenn gleich tief überschattet, und faßt eine breite Skala elementarer Stimmungen in kontrastierenden Blöcken kühnen Orchesterklangs zusammen: das naive, ländlich Pastorale; aufbrandende, mächtige Klang-