

# SIBELIUS

## Pelléas et Mélisande

Musik zu einer Szene • Valse lyrique

Valse chevaleresque • Morceau romantique

Pia Pajala, Soprano • Sari Nordqvist, Mezzo-soprano

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra

Leif Segerstam

## Jean Sibelius (1865-1957): Pelléas et Mélisande • Musik zu einer Szene • Valse lyrique Valse chevaleresque • Morceau romantique sur un motif de Monsieur Jakob von Julin

Jean Sibelius was the most significant figure in the formation of national identity in Finnish music, to the extent that since 2011 Finland has celebrated a Flag Day on 8th December (the composer's birthday), also known as the 'Day of Finnish Music'. The seven symphonies and *Violin Concerto* lie at the centre of Sibelius' œuvre, surrounded by tone poems often concerning a Finnish folklore narrative, such as the famous epic, the *Kalevala* – the inspiration for his popular *Lemminkäinen Suite*. He was also prolific, however, in other genres, not least in songs for voice and piano (which number over a hundred), incidental music (for thirteen plays), chamber and choral works, and even an opera. Despite this significant body of work, after the composition of *Tapiola* in 1926, Sibelius produced no large-scale works for his remaining thirty-one years – a period often referred to as the 'Silence from Järvenpää'.<sup>1</sup> Supporters say that this dearth was the result of over-stringent self-criticism, which shut down his creative faculties; critics blame a comfortable lifestyle supported by a state pension and refer to the composer's notorious consumption of alcohol, which he once described as "my truest friend". Sibelius did not stop composing altogether during this time, but focused on writing smaller-scale compositions and revising and adding to some of his earlier works.

The move to Järvenpää (in 1904) was actually beneficial in two ways: it halted the composer's love of big-city luxuries, which he could not always afford, and simultaneously renewed his contact with nature, which he had found so inspiring in his youth. No sooner had he settled into his new home than he was invited to England, but had to decline in order to complete the incidental music for Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which had been commissioned by the Swedish Theatre. Given that Schoenberg's large-scale symphonic tone poem *Pelléas und Mélisande* had been completed just one year previously, it is tempting to draw comparisons between the two works, though such studies reveal no significant similarities: Maeterlinck was widely fashionable by 1904,

and Sibelius' setting demonstrates his awareness of literary trends rather than his reception of Schoenberg. Indeed, Schoenberg's *Pelléas und Mélisande* was not given its première until January 1905, only two months before the première of Sibelius' own setting on 17th March, conducted by the composer. The subject matter also (inevitably) invited comparisons with Debussy's eponymous opera of 1898, though the critic Karl Flodin used such a comparison to paint Sibelius' setting in a positive light: "Without degenerating into the pianissimo mannerisms of the Frenchman Debussy's illustrative music to the same play, Sibelius has been able to clothe his own tone pictures in a subdued, gentle and restrained atmosphere."

This was by far Sibelius' most ambitious undertaking in the genre of incidental music, and was the highlight of the Helsinki theatre season. Written to accompany a Swedish translation by Bertel Gripenberg, the original incidental music included ten pieces, and so effective is the score that Sibelius omitted just one of these when adapting it as a concert suite. The narrative concerns a love triangle set at the court of the aging King Arkel. The sombre tone of the overture [1] suggests both the grandeur and mysteriousness of the king's castle, whose gate opens at the end, as the sun rises. This is followed by a dark, pensive movement, where Mélisande is introduced by a wistful cor anglais solo [2]. During this music, Golaud finds her in the woods, weeping beside a spring, and persuades her to marry him. The subsequent movement accompanies the three principal characters (Mélisande, Golaud and his brother Pelléas, who falls in love with Mélisande) standing on the seashore [3], watching a boat sail away – the same boat on which Mélisande had arrived in Arkel's kingdom.

The intensity of the drama heightens at the beginning of Act II, when Pelléas and Mélisande visit a fountain in a park, and she fatefully drops the ring Golaud has given her into the water. This carelessness is reflected musically by a playful, lopsided waltz [4], whose main theme comprises

a phrase of nine bars, rather than the expected eight. The narrative then shifts to Act III, where we find Mélisande alone at her spinning-wheel [5], with a constant, sinister semitone motif in the violas depicting the relentless, mechanical character of the machine. Mélisande sings a ballad to Pelléas, *The Three Blind Sisters* [6], whose vocal part is doubled by the clarinets and was therefore excluded from the (purely orchestral) concert suite.

A sunny *Andantino pastorale* [7] immediately follows a scene in which Golaud and Pelléas discuss Mélisande's pregnancy, and Golaud warns Pelléas to stay away. After an elegant and vivacious *Prelude* [8] – the brightest music in the score, where Pelléas and Mélisande arrange a secret tryst in the park – King Arkel converses with Mélisande [9], represented by cello and cor anglais respectively, over a syncopated string accompaniment. (This is the only movement not included in the concert suite.) No music was written for the dramatic events that follow in the play: Golaud's accusation of Mélisande's infidelity, or the lovers meeting in the park, where Golaud strikes Mélisande and kills Pelléas. Instead, the musical and emotional climax of the work is reserved for the very end of the story in a movement dominated by the strings: the exquisitely tragic *Andante* [10], accompanying Mélisande as she lies dying on her sickbed.

Dating from the year prior to *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Sibelius' *Musik zu einer Szene* was given its première in the spring of 1904. The music was originally intended to accompany a tableau, and presents a conflict between two highly contrasting sections: after its dark, stormy introduction, the mood yields to a much cheerier disposition as a dance-like idea emerges, replete with tambourines. The stern, opening section makes a brief return and is again overruled by the joyfulness of the dance, though it has the last say, returning for the final time to draw the piece to a somewhat unsettled conclusion. As with so many of his other works, Sibelius soon made a piano version of this piece (*Dance-Intermezzo, Op. 45, No. 2*, later orchestrated), though in this instance the arrangement included significant

differences, omitting most of the brooding introduction and concluding with the dance-like section, resulting in a work far lighter in tone than its orchestral original.

*Valse lyrique, Op. 96a* and *Valse chevaleresque, Op. 96c*, were both written in 1921 and are transcriptions of piano pieces. In fact, Sibelius originally intended to fuse together two piano pieces to form the *Valse lyrique*, using *Granen* and *Syringa* from his horticulturally-themed suite of 1914 (which was eventually published as *Five Piano Pieces, Op. 75*, where each piece depicts a different type of tree). Unhappy with the result, however, he decided to rework *Granen* (Spruce) into a separate piece, and developed *Syringa* (Lilac) into *Valse lyrique*, adding that it should be called *Les Lilas, valse pour piano*. It is a sunny, carefree piece, as is *Valse chevaleresque*, and in both pieces the influence of Tchaikovsky's waltz-writing is clearly evident. Sandwiched in between this pair of waltzes is *Autrefois, Op. 96b*. Unlike its companions, this was conceived as an orchestral piece (and later transcribed for piano). It is perhaps the most memorable of the three, exuding a sense of charm tinged with nostalgia.

Sibelius's penchant for waltzes is also apparent in the *Morceau romantique sur un motif de Monsieur Jakob von Julin*, which was completed in 1925 and received its first performance under the direction of the composer on 9th March that year. It was composed for a festive occasion connected with the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare. Sibelius conducted some of his shorter works, and at the end of the evening produced a surprise, a short romantic piece based on a waltz theme by the industrialist Jakob von Julin, who was a friend of General Mannerheim. The manuscript of the work, which included dedications by Sibelius and Mannerheim, was sold for a large sum, while the piano version (which dates from the same year) also raised a considerable amount of money, with the proceeds of both benefitting a project to build a children's hospital.

Dominic Wells

<sup>1</sup> Järvenpää was the town where Sibelius lived.

## Pia Pajala



Photo: Eija Hartemaa-Kallinen

A graduate of the opera programme at the Sibelius Academy, Finland, Pia Pajala is a versatile performer known for her wide vocal range, powerful expression and extensive repertoire. In recent years she has perfected her vocal technique with Finnish opera singer Kai Valtonen and Stockholm-based Dorothy Irving. Pia Pajala has appeared in many operatic rôles especially in contemporary works. She has also worked with some of Finland's most respected conductors, including Sakari Oramo, Leif Segerstam and Santtu-Matias Rouvali, having performed as a soloist with such orchestras as the Turku Philharmonic Orchestra and the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra. She has also appeared with the Tallinn Baroque Orchestra and the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra. A renowned interpreter of Sibelius and Finnish classical music, she regularly performs with chamber ensembles. Further engagements include sacred works and appearances on concert stages at the Naantali and Turku Music Festivals, among others. She has also featured on radio broadcasts and recordings of the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle.

## Sari Nordqvist



Photo: Heikki Tuuli

The Finnish mezzo-soprano Sari Nordqvist studied at the Sibelius Academy. Operatic rôles she has undertaken since 1994 include her début at the Finnish National Opera in 1999 in the rôle of Vera Boronel (*The Consul*). Awards include the Finnish Opera Union prize, *Operasinger 1998*, for her performance as Ulrica (*Un ballo in maschera*), and her recordings include rôles in Erkki Melartin's *Aino* (BIS), Mikko Heiniö's *The Knight and the Dragon* (BIS), and *The Hunt of King Charles* by Fredrik Pacius (Naxos 8.660122-23), as well as the rôle of Brigitte in Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*, a DVD for Opus Arte. She also has a busy schedule in the concert hall.

## Turku Philharmonic Orchestra



Photo: Seilo Ristimäki

The Turku Musical Society, which later formed the Turku Philharmonic Orchestra, was founded in 1790. As the oldest orchestra in Finland, the ensemble continues to develop and flourish under the baton of renowned conductors. Since 2012, the orchestra's 74 musicians have been under the artistic leadership of Leif Segerstam. The orchestra's resident composer is Mikko Heiniö. Several of the Turku Philharmonic's recordings have won platinum and other awards. In 2009 the orchestra was awarded the EMMA Classical Album of the Year for the recording *Transient Moods* by Pehr Henrik Nordgren. The orchestra gives weekly concerts, often streamed live throughout the world, while its chamber music ensembles perform in the historical venues of Turku and the archipelago. The orchestra also organizes family concerts and performs in opera productions. The Turku Philharmonic is a pioneer in audience accessibility, providing access to concerts online in hospitals, residential care homes and schools.

## Leif Segerstam

Photo: Seilo Ristimäki



Leif Segerstam is a conductor, composer, violinist and pianist with a prominent international career. He received diplomas from the Sibelius Academy in violin and conducting, won the Maj Lind Piano Competition in 1962 and gave his first violin recital in 1963. He rounded off his studies at The Juilliard School in New York, where he was awarded a conducting diploma in 1964. Segerstam was Chief Conductor and Music Director of the Royal Opera in Stockholm from 1970-72 and Director of the Finnish National Opera in 1973-74. Since then he has conducted in most of the world's leading opera houses, including the Metropolitan

Opera, Covent Garden and La Scala. He was Chief Conductor of the Austrian Radio Symphony Orchestra from 1975 to 1982 and of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra from 1977 to 1987, served as Music Director of the Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz from 1983 to 1989 and was appointed Chief Conductor of the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 1988. In autumn 1995 he was reappointed Chief Conductor of the Royal Opera in Stockholm (until 2001) and became Chief Conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. In autumn 2007 he stepped down to become the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra's Emeritus Chief Conductor. Since 2012 he has been Chief Conductor of Turku Philharmonic Orchestra. From autumn 1997 to spring 2013 Leif Segerstam was Professor of Orchestra Conducting at the Sibelius Academy. He was awarded the 1999 Nordic Council Music Prize for his work "as a tireless champion of Scandinavian music" and the Swedish Cultural Foundation's Prize for Music in 2003. In 2004 Leif Segerstam was awarded the annual Finnish State Prize for Music and in 2005 the highly esteemed Sibelius Medal. He has gained wide acclaim for his many recordings with different orchestras. While pursuing his conducting career, Segerstam has also produced an extensive oeuvre as a composer.

## De trenne blinda systrar

*Original text: Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949)*  
*Swedish translation: Bertel Gripenberg (1878-1947)*

De trenne blinda systrar  
(Låt oss hoppas få)  
De trenne blinda systrar  
med gyllne lampor gå.

Så gå de upp i tornet  
(De, jag och du)  
Så gå de upp i tornet  
De bida dagar sju.

Ack, säger första system  
(Aldrig hoppet dör)  
Ack, säger första system  
Jag ljusen brinna hör.

Ack, säger andra system  
(De, jag och du)  
Ack, säger andra system  
Vår konung kommer nu.

Nej! säger helga system  
(Låt hoppet ej förgå)  
Nej! säger helga system  
släckta ljusen stå.

## The Three Blind Sisters

The three sisters are blind  
(Let us yet hope),  
The three sisters are blind  
And hold their golden lamps.

They climb the tower  
(They, I and you),  
They climb the tower.  
They wait there for seven days.

Ah, says the first sister  
(Hope never dies),  
Ah, says the first sister,  
I hear our lights burning.

Ah, says the second sister  
(They, I and you),  
Ah, says the second sister,  
Our king is coming now.

No! the most saintly says  
(Let hope remain alive),  
No! the most saintly says,  
Our lights have gone out.

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### 📖 Autrefois, Op. 96b

*Text: Hjalmar Procopé (1868-1927)*

Ej av jaktens lekar i dungarna bland björk och tall  
det ekar, ej höres hundars skall.  
Pilen mot sin vana i kogret glömmer sig en stund,  
Diana nu tager sig en blund.  
Se armen sömnigt under kinden sträckt.  
Hör dess jämna andedräkt  
ur barmen blandas med fåltets vind.  
De skygga djuren få en timmes ro.  
Nu i skogens gröna bo  
gå trygga hare och hjort och hind.

Lätta molngardiner för solen fladdra då och då,  
som skiner på himmel, middagsblå.  
Djupt i bäckens bölja, som går bland vass sin krökta stig,  
fördölja de snälla fiskar sig.  
År stunden, herde, icke kommen än,  
då din flöjt ditt hjärtas vän  
ur lunden lockar från får och lamm?  
Herdinna, där du snörd och sirlig går,  
låt ej dina unga år  
förrinna – Dámon dig ber, träd fram!

### 📖 In Olden Times, Op. 96b

*English translation: Andrew Barnett*

Not a sound of hunters' sport in woods 'mongst birch and fir  
Is ringing, nor any bark of dogs.  
The arrow, 'gainst its wont, in its quiver rests awhile,  
Diana now slumbers for an hour.  
See her arm, a lazy pillow for her cheek.  
Hear the even breathing  
Of her bosom mingle with the breeze.  
The timorous beasts have now a moment's calm.  
In their forest-green abode  
At peace walk hare and deer and doe.

Wisps of thinnest cloud veil at times the sun  
Shining in a sky of noontime-blue.  
Deep in flowing stream, which winds its way 'mongst reeds,  
Gentle fish are hiding.  
Oh, shepherd, has 'the moment not yet come  
To lure your sweetheart with your flute  
Out of the grove, leaving sheep and lambs?  
Shepherdess, beribbon'd and with light step  
Let not thy youth  
Be spilt – Dámon thee bids to come forth!

*By kind permission of BIS Records.*

No sooner had Sibelius moved to the town of Järvenpää in 1904 than he was commissioned by the Swedish Theatre to write incidental music for Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. At the time it was his most ambitious undertaking in the genre of incidental music and his setting included ten scenes, only one of which was cut when he adapted the piece as a concert suite. Dating from the same year, *Musik zu einer Szene* was originally intended to accompany a tableau and is full of striking contrasts. The two waltzes of 1921 are transcriptions of piano pieces, and reveal the potent influence of Tchaikovsky.

Jean  
**SIBELIUS**  
(1865-1957)

**Pelléas et Mélisande – Complete incidental music, JS 147 (1905) 33:34**

**Act I**

- |   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | No. 1. Grave e largamente (Prelude, Scene 1) | 3:45 |
| 2 | No. 2. Andantino con moto (Scene 2)          | 4:35 |
| 3 | No. 3. Adagio (Scene 4)                      |      |

**Act II**

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|---|----------------------------------|------|
| 4 | No. 4. Comodo (Prelude, Scene 1) | 2:27 |
|---|----------------------------------|------|

**Act III**

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|---|---|------|
| 5 | No. 5. Con moto (ma non tanto) (Prelude, Scene 1)   | 2:04 |
| 6 | No. 6. Tranquillo (Mélisande's Song, Scene 2) 'De trenne blinda systrar' [The Three Blind Sisters]* | 2:29 |
| 7 | No. 7. Andantino pastorale (Scene 4)  | 2:23 |

**Act IV**

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|---|--------------------------------------|------|
| 8 | No. 8. Allegretto (Prelude, Scene 1) | 2:08 |
| 9 | No. 9. [no tempo marking] (Scene 2)  | 3:10 |

**Act V**

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|----|------------------------------------|------|
| 10 | No. 10. Andante (Prelude, Scene 2) | 3:17 |
|----|------------------------------------|------|

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|----|------------------------------------|------|
| 11 | <b>Musik zu einer Szene (1904)</b> | 7:16 |
|----|------------------------------------|------|

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|----|--------------------------------------|------|
| 12 | <b>Valse lyrique, Op. 96a (1921)</b> | 6:29 |
|----|--------------------------------------|------|

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|----|--|------|
| 13 | <b>Autrefois – Scène pastorale, Op. 96b (1919)*†</b> | 4:47 |
|----|--|------|

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|----|--|------|
| 14 | <b>Valse chevaleresque, Op. 96c (1921)</b> | 5:36 |
|----|--|------|

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|----|---|------|
| 15 | <b>Morceau romantique sur un motif de Monsieur Jakob von Julin, JS 135/a (1925)</b> | 4:47 |
|----|---|------|

**Pia Pajala, Soprano\* • Sari Nordqvist, Mezzo-soprano†**

**Turku Philharmonic Orchestra • Leif Segerstam**

The sung texts and translations can be found inside the booklet,  
and can also be accessed at [www.naxos.com/libretti/573301.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/573301.htm)

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