



Jean Sibelius: Symphony No. 6 in D minor, Opus 104 (1923)

The first performance of the Symphony No. 6 took place in Helsinki, Finland, on February 19, 1923, with the composer conducting the Helsinki City Orchestra. The Symphony No. 6 is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, harp, and strings.

In the summer of 1914, Jean Sibelius began to sketch a series of symphonic themes. Sibelius used most of these themes in his Symphony No. 5 in E-flat Major, Opus 82 (1915, rev. 1916, 1919). But some of the sketches also marked the beginning of his Symphony No. 6.

In December of 1914, Sibelius turned his attention to the Symphony No. 6. He continued to work on the piece through June of the following year. Notations by Sibelius in the spring of 1915 indicate that at the time, he was contemplating the music would take the form of a second violin concerto. The next mention of the Symphony No. 6 occurs in a July 18, 1917 diary entry by the composer: "I have the symphonies VI and VII in my head."

Sibelius returned to work on the Symphony No. 6 in 1918. But various other commitments, as well as a crisis of self-doubt, further delayed progress. It was not until the fall of 1922 that Sibelius was able to devote his full energies to the piece. Sibelius completed the Symphony No. 6 in February of 1923. On February 19 Sibelius conducted the world premiere, in Helsinki.

In a May 20, 1918 letter to his friend Axel Carpelan, Sibelius



Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865 - 1931)





described his overall concept of the Symphony: “As far as its character goes, the VI Symphony is weighty and passionate. Somber with pastoral contrasts. Probably in four movements. A flood of gloomy orchestral activity develops at the end of the work—and drowns the main theme.” But in its final form, the Symphony No. 6 bears little resemblance to Sibelius’s characterization, save the work’s four-movement structure.

Although the Symphony No. 6 is typically referred to as being in “D minor,” that key is not specified in the original score. In truth, the Symphony is based upon the Dorian mode (D-E-F-G-A-B-C-D). The Sixth Symphony’s modal harmonic foundation, introspective lyricism, and transparent, often chamber-like orchestral textures, create a mystical beauty and atmosphere unique among Sibelius’s Symphonies, perhaps among all symphonies of the early 20th century. As Jean Sibelius observed: “You may analyze it and explain it theoretically. You may find that there are several interesting things going on. But most people forget that it is, after all, a poem.”

I. *Allegro molto moderato*—The Symphony opens with an extended introductory passage. Despite its relatively quick tempo marking (*Allegro molto moderato*), the extended note values and seraphic writing for violins (divided) and violas create a sense of repose, even timelessness. The cellos soon enter, followed by the winds and timpani, and then the brass. A crescendo leads to a brief pause, resolving to the lively, central portion of the movement, as the flutes play a sprightly phrase, echoed by the oboes. The sense of perpetual motion is finally halted by the coda (*Poco allargando*), as the opening movement reaches its enigmatic conclusion.

II. *Allegretto moderato*—The second movement begins with another expansive introduction. Following the briefest of statements by the timpani, the flutes and bassoons pay an extended passage. The first and second violins introduce, in tandem,





a tripping *espressivo* melody, capped by an ascending passage. This music forms the basis for the central portion of the movement. The second movement concludes with a sprightly sixteenth-note episode (*Poco con moto*), capped by a brief reminiscence of the ascending passage (*Tempo I*).

III. *Poco vivace*—The third movement—the briefest of the four—assumes the role of the Symphony's scherzo. A relentless “galloping” figure, introduced at the outset by the violins, predominates. The fleet, energetic atmosphere established at the outset continues to the emphatic final bars.

IV. *Allegro molto*—The finale's introduction, related to its counterpart in the opening movement, is a repeated dialogue between higher and lower voices. The introductory music develops into the finale's energetic central episode. The final coda (*Doppio più lento*) becomes ever more serene, capped by the violins' *diminuendo* on a sustained “D.”

Symphony No. 7 in C Major, Opus 105, “In One Movement” (1924)

The first performance of the Symphony No. 7 took place in Stockholm, Sweden, on March 24, 1924, with the composer conducting. The Symphony No. 7 is scored for two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

As in the case of the Symphony No. 6, Jean Sibelius's Seventh (and final) Symphony was the product of an extended and sometimes difficult process. The first mention of the work occurs in a diary entry by the composer, dated July 18, 1917: “I have the symphonies VI and VII in my head.”

In the May 20, 1918 letter to Axel Carpelan (quoted above), Sibelius offers this





description of his Seventh Symphony:

The VII. Symphony. Joy of life and vitality, turned appassionato. Three movements — the last of them “a Hellenic Rondo”...As far as the VI. and VII. symphonies are concerned, the plans may well change, depending upon the development of the musical ideas. As always I am a slave to my themes and subject myself to their demands.

It was not until March 2, 1924, that Sibelius completed his Symphony No. 7. By that time, the Symphony embodied a far different structure than described in the 1918 letter to Carpelan. As Sibelius told his biographer, Karl Ekman: “At night, as I entered in my diary, I completed *Fantasia sinfonica* — that is what I first thought of calling my seventh symphony in one movement.”

Sibelius conducted the world premiere of his Symphony No. 7 in Stockholm on March 24, 1924. At the time, the title of the piece was indeed *Fantasia sinfonica*. But when the work was published in 1925, it was finally given the title of the composer’s Symphony No. 7.

The Symphony No. 7 is an extraordinary work on many levels. It is designated as being “In One Movement,” and in that sense, is unique among the composer’s Seven Symphonies. But it is also possible to discern a series of symphonic movements within the structure. During the brief course of the Seventh Symphony, Jean Sibelius presents the constant metamorphosis of themes, couched in ever-shifting tempos and orchestral colors. The Sibelius Seventh manages to fly by in an instant, while maintaining an atmosphere of eternal timelessness. In every respect, the Sibelius Seventh represents the fitting culmination of a master composer’s unique achievements in this genre.





The Symphony opens with a brief, hushed statement by the timpani (*Adagio*). The cellos inaugurate an ascending scale in C Major, capped in mysterious fashion by an A-flat minor chord. The flutes, bassoons, and clarinets play an undulating sixteenth-note theme, followed by a descending passage in the oboes (the ascending scale and subsequent themes all play central roles throughout the Symphony). Divided strings inaugurate a sublime lyrical episode, culminating with a solo trombone proclaiming a noble *sonore* theme.

A further development of the principal themes (*Un pochettino meno adagio*) gathers momentum, resolving to a quicksilver scherzo (*Vivacissimo*) episode, featuring lightning-quick exchanges between the strings and winds. The tempo slows, and an undulating string figure serves as accompaniment for a reprise of the trombone theme (*Adagio*). An extended, quick-tempo episode (*Allegro molto moderato*) focuses upon a buoyant theme, first played by the winds.

A second scherzo episode (*Vivace*) jaunts to a *Presto* conclusion. The trombone melody returns heralding the Symphony's expansive concluding measures (*Adagio*). Echoes of the central themes (including the trombone melody, now played by solo flute and bassoon), resolve to the majestic closing bars.

Tapiola, Opus 112 (1926)

The first performance of Tapiola took place in New York on December 26, 1926, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony Society. Tapiola is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.





The title of *Tapiola* refers to the dwelling of Tapio, the forest god of Finland. Sibelius provided publisher Breitkopf and Härtel the following explanatory verse for his orchestral tone poem:

Widespread they stand, the Northland's dusky forests,

Ancient, mysterious, brooding savage dreams;

Within them dwells the Forest's mighty god,

And wood-sprites in the gloom weave magic secrets.

Early in 1926, conductor Walter Damrosch requested Sibelius to compose a new orchestral tone poem for performance by the New York Symphony Society. Sibelius composed this decidedly Finnish work while traveling in Italy.

The pangs of self-doubt that plagued Sibelius during his later years were evident during the creation of *Tapiola*. In his diary, Sibelius complained: "Have suffered because of *Tapiola*...it was unfortunate that I accepted this commission...Was I really cut out for this sort of thing? Going downhill. Can't be alone. Drinking whisky. Physically not strong enough for all this."

In August, Sibelius forwarded the score to his publisher. The following month, Sibelius asked for the return of the work in order to make "extensive deletions." By the time of this request, however, Breitkopf and Härtel had already engraved the score. Sibelius made only minor revisions. The premiere of *Tapiola* took place in New York on December 26, 1926, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony Society.

Despite Sibelius's lack of confidence in himself and *Tapiola*, the work is widely recognized as one of the composer's finest achievements. British composer and writer Cecil Gray





contended: “Even if Sibelius had written nothing else, this one work would be sufficient to entitle him to a place among the great masters of all time.” Sibelius biographer Robert Layton adds: “Although it is as perfect an evocation of the forest as is (Claude Debussy’s) *La mer* of the sea, its greatness lies in its impact in terms of pure music. In its homogeneity, concentration of utterance and intensity of vision it is a masterpiece of the first order.”

After a brief roll of the timpani, the strings introduce a motif that serves as the basis for the entire tone poem. The varying characteristics of the great forests are portrayed by the constant manipulation of rhythms, harmonies, and instrumental colors. A fearsome climactic storm finally yields to the welcome serenity of *Tapiola*’s closing measures.

—Ken Meltzer

Robert Spano, conductor

Recognized as one of the most imaginative conductors of his generation, Robert Spano is currently in his 13th season as Music Director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO) where he has created a sense of inclusion, warmth, and community unique among American orchestras.

Under Mr. Spano’s guidance, the ASO and its audiences explore a creative programming mix. The Atlanta School of Composers reflects his commitment to American contemporary music, thus defining a new generation of American composers. He has led ASO performances at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and at the Ravinia, Ojai, and Savannah Music Festivals.

As Music Director of the Aspen Music Festival and School, he oversees the programming of more than 300 events and educational programs for 630 students, including Aspen’s





American Academy of Conducting. Guest engagements include the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, San Francisco, Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, and Philadelphia Symphony Orchestras, as well as Orchestra Filarmonica della Scala, BBC Symphony, and Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. He has conducted for Covent Garden, Welsh National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, and the 2005 and 2009 Seattle Opera Ring cycles.

With an extensive discography of 21 recordings for Telarc, Deutsche Grammophon and ASO Media, Mr. Spano has garnered six Grammy Awards. Dedicated to pedagogy and multi-disciplinary studies, he has lectured on "Community" for TEDx and recently completed a three-year residency at Emory University. He was inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in 2012.

Mr. Spano is on the faculty of Oberlin Conservatory, and has received honorary doctorates from Bowling Green State University, the Curtis Institute of Music, Emory University, and Oberlin. Spano served as director of the Festival of Contemporary Music at the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Music Center in 2003 and 2004, and from 1996 to 2004 was Music Director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic. He headed the Conducting Fellowship Program at the Tanglewood Music Center from 1998 to 2002. In May 2009, Spano was awarded Columbia University's Ditson Conductor's Award for the advancement of American music.



Derek Blanks





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* Added Musicians
for this recording
Players in string
sections are listed
alphabetically





Technical Information

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CD-1004

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Symphony No. 6 in D minor, Opus 104 (1923)

[28:06]

1 | I. Allegro molto moderato

[8:34]

2 | II. Allegretto moderato

[5:22]

3 | III. Poco vivace

[4:08]

4 | IV. Allegro molto

[9:32]

5 | **Symphony No. 7 in C Major, Opus 105, "In One Movement" (1924)** [22:17]

Adagio

Un pochettino meno adagio; Vivacissimo; Adagio

Allegro molto moderato

Vivace; Presto; Adagio

6 | **Tapiola, Opus 112 (1926)**

[19:45]

Total playing time:

[70:26]

ASO MEDIA  TM

Robert Spano, conductor
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

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