

THE VERY BEST OF  
SIBELIUS



2 CDs

# JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

## HIS LIFE

Sibelius grew to maturity at a time of fervent Finnish nationalism, as the country broke away from its earlier Swedish and later Russian overlords. Brought up in a Swedish-speaking family, Sibelius acquired a knowledge of the Finnish language and traditional literature at school and the early Finnish sagas proved a strong influence on his subsequent work as a composer. After early training in Helsinki and later in Berlin, Sibelius made his career in Finland, where he was awarded a state pension. Although he lived until 1957, he wrote little after 1926, feeling out of sympathy with current trends in music.

## HIS MUSIC

### Stage Works

Sibelius wrote incidental music for Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* and for *Belshazzar's Feast*, a play by Procopé, as well for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, from which he drew an orchestral *Prelude* and two *Suites*. His well-known *Karelia Suite* was derived from incidental music for a pageant. The popular *Valse triste* was originally written for Järnefelt's play *Death*, and in fact accompanies a death-bed scene.

### Orchestral Music

Sibelius completed seven symphonies, with an eighth that was apparently destroyed after completion. The first two of his symphonies enjoy particular popularity. His symphonic poems usually taking their inspiration from ancient Finnish legends, include *En Saga*, the *Lemminkäinen Suite* (of which the *Swan of Tuonela* and *Lemminkäinen's Return* form a part), *Pohjola's Daughter*, and *Tapiola*. *Finlandia* was adapted from music provided for Press Pension celebrations in 1899.

### Chamber Music

Chamber music by Sibelius includes a string quartet, *Voces intimae*, a *Sonatina* for violin, and a number of short pieces for violin and piano.

### Keyboard Music

Although trained originally as a violinist, Sibelius wrote for the piano throughout his career, showing an understanding of the instrument and its possibilities in contrast to those of the orchestra, with which he always seemed more at home. There was a ready market for piano pieces, a matter of some importance to an often-impecunious composer. His piano music includes the essentially Finnish *Kyllikki* of 1904 and a lyrical set of flower pieces, Op. 85, written in 1916.

## Vocal Music

The songs of Sibelius, some hundred in number and mainly setting Swedish texts, have been neglected internationally, perhaps for linguistic reasons. The *Six Songs, Op. 36*, written in 1899, are probably his most popular collection, and the fourth of the set, 'Säv, säv, susa' (Reed, reed, rustle), is among the best known.

## MUSIC NOTES

### **Pelléas et Mélisande, Op. 46: Prelude to Act I Scene 1, 'At the Castle Gate' (CD 1, track 1)**

Sinfonia Finlandia • Patrick Gallois

The play *Pelléas et Mélisande*, by the Belgian symbolist poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, had been written in 1892 and first staged in Paris. It attracted the attention of various composers, notably Debussy, whose opera was first staged in 1902. It was in 1905 that Sibelius wrote his incidental music for a Swedish version of Maeterlinck's work, staged at the Swedish Theatre in Helsinki. The incidental music starts with an introduction to the opening of the play, where maidservants wash the entrance to the castle of Arkel, preparing for the day.

### **Kyllikki – 3 Lyric Pieces for piano, Op. 41: No. 3. Comodo (CD 1, track 2)**

Håvard Gimse, piano

Sibelius wrote one of his most important and profound piano works, *Kyllikki, Kolme lyryistä kappaletta pianolle* (Kyllikki – 3 Lyrical Pieces for piano), Op. 41, in 1904, during the construction of his new home, Ainola. This sonata-form work is firmly rooted in Finnish soil, and tells the story of Kyllikki, who is abducted and taken as wife by the wanton Lemminkäinen, who later deserts her to go to war. The first two pieces are ominous and melancholy, with elements of drama. The third piece, *Comodo*, is lighter in mood, darkened by a contrasting central section.

### **The Oceanides (CD 1, track 3)**

Iceland Symphony Orchestra • Petri Sakari

Sibelius wrote *The Oceanides* in 1914 for a tour of America and it is based on a Homeric epic. Oceanus, the river that encircles the earth, is personified as a Titan, responsible with Tethys for the origin of the gods, father of the Oceanides, the ocean nymphs. The sea-picture opens with muted strings, over drum rolls, soon joined by bird-calls from the flutes and an emerging melody, against the misty background, suggesting the French impressionist composers. The tone poem leads to a great climax, quickly subsiding to end on a chord that swells in volume, before diminishing to a whisper.

### **Andante Festivo (CD 1, track 4)**

Capella Istropolitana • Adrian Leaper

The *Andante Festivo* was written in 1922 and was designed originally for string quartet, but re-arranged in

1930 for string orchestra with optional timpani. Sibelius came out of retirement to conduct a performance on New Year's Day 1939, an event of patriotic significance at the time and the only recorded example of his conducting.

**6 Songs, Op. 36: No. 4. *Säv, säv, susa* (Reed, reed, rustle) (CD 1, track 5)**

Hannu Jurmu, tenor • Jouni Somero, piano

Sibelius's *Six Songs*, Op. 36, occupy a niche between Romantic song and Nordic ballad, and like many of his songs written at this time, have a deeply melancholic or chilling aspect. 'Säv, säv, susa' (Reeds, reeds, rustle) tells of a drowned girl, Ingallil, killed by jealous rivals, and lamented by the whispering reeds and lapping waves.

**Valse triste, Op. 44 No. 1 (CD 1, track 6)**

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra • Jorma Panula

*Valse Triste* has enjoyed an overwhelming reputation. The piece was written as part of the incidental music for Arvid Jaernefelt's play *Kuolema* (Death). The son dreams by the bedside of his sick mother: the room is suffused with light and the sounds of a waltz can gradually be heard. His mother rises from her bed and starts to dance to the music, summoning guests to join her. Dying, she tries to see the faces of the mysterious dancers, but none will look at her. As she sinks down on the bed, the music pauses, but, with renewed energy, she rejoins the dance, now in wilder rhythms than before. At the height of the dance there is a knock at the door and Death stands waiting.

**Symphony No. 5 in E flat, Op. 82: III. *Allegro molto* (CD 1, track 7)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Adrian Leaper

Sibelius finished the final version of his *Fifth Symphony* in 1919. The massive finale starts with the busy swelling activity of the strings, after which the well-known theme that dominates the movement emerges in all its strength, with an accompanying theme from the woodwind.

**Romance, Op. 42 (CD 1, track 8)**

Capella Istropolitana • Adrian Leaper

Sibelius wrote his famous *Romance*, Op. 42, written in 1904, at a time when he was occupied with the composition of his *Violin Concerto*. His early training as a violinist is demonstrated in his feeling for melody and his idiomatic handling of the string orchestra, in a piece that explores the same musical territory as Grieg.

**Pohjola's Daughter, Op. 49 (CD 1, track 9)**

Iceland Symphony Orchestra • Petri Sakari

The symphonic fantasia *Pohjola's Daughter* was written in 1906 and is based on the *Kalevala*. While Kalevala is the Fatherland of Heroes, Pohja or Pohjola is the back country, Lapland and the North. The heroes of Kalevala seek wives from among the daughters of Pohjola, with varying degrees of success. The

hero Väinämöinen woos Pohjola's daughter, inviting her to join him as he makes his way home on his sledge. She sets him Herculean tasks, to split a horsehair with a dull knife or to tie an egg into a knot, until, in a last impossible task, he is injured, and rides away on his sledge.

### **Finlandia (CD 1, track 10)**

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra • Jorma Panula

One of Sibelius's best-known works is *Finlandia*, as one of the movements for incidental music to an anti-Russian entertainment in 1899. The three connected movements of the tone-poem express the spirit of Finland. The work attracted much attention from the very first hearing because of its patriotic nationalism, becoming a symbol of the country's struggle for independence.

### **Karelia Suite: I. Intermezzo; III. Alla marcia (CD 2, track 1 and track 2)**

Iceland Symphony Orchestra • Petri Sakari

The *Karelia Suite* was originally a suite of seven pieces written for a student production depicting the history of Karelia. Sibelius later made various cuts, eventually leaving three movements: *Intermezzo*, *Ballade* and *Alla marcia*. The first movement, *Intermezzo*, originally accompanied a tableau in which Karelian woodsmen are on their way to pay taxes to a Lithuanian prince. *Alla marcia*, a call to arms, is the most popular of the three movements. The tableau it accompanied depicts a battle around Käkisalme Castle. The *Karelia Suite* was enthusiastically received, and it has since been performed at a wide range of popular events.

### **Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47: II. Adagio di molto (CD 2, track 3)**

Dong-Suk Kang, violin • Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Adrian Leaper

Sibelius completed the first version of his *Violin Concerto* in 1903 and it was revised in 1905. The later version became the definitive version of the work and has become a standard part of the solo repertoire. The lyrical slow movement brings a deeply romantic melody, the soloist proceeding to weave his own fantasies above the orchestra.

### **En Saga, Op. 9 (CD 2, track 4)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Adrian Leaper

Sibelius wrote his tone poem *En Saga* in 1892 and revised it ten years later. Rich in thematic material, varied by its shifts of key, the work offers a general picture of the world of the ancient Norse sagas, rather than following any detailed narrative programme. The first theme is heard in the introduction of what is essentially a symphonic movement in which three further themes appear.

### **6 Songs, Op. 17: No. 6. Illalle (To Evening) (CD 2, track 5)**

Hannu Jurmu, tenor • Jouni Somero, piano

'Illalle' (To Evening) is based on a single melodic idea, and is delivered in the style of the ancient Finnish runic singers, declaimed within a limited melodic range. The poem is by A. V. Forsman-Koskimies and he

weaves a particular tenderness into the words, celebrating both the coming nightfall and his wife, Ilta, whose name also means evening.

**The Tempest – Suite No. 2, Op. 109: No. 3. Dance of the Nymphs (CD 2, track 6)**

Iceland Symphony Orchestra • Petri Sakari

Sibelius wrote his incidental music to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in 1925 for a production of the play by the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen. From it Sibelius derived two suites, the first for full orchestra and the second for a smaller ensemble. The *Dance of the Nymphs*, a minuet, forms part of the masque conjured up by Prospero for Miranda and Ferdinand.

**Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39: III. Scherzo (Allegro) (CD 2, track 7)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Adrian Leaper

Sibelius completed his *First Symphony* in 1899. The first performance of the symphony was given in Helsinki in April 1899 under the direction of the composer. The third-movement *Scherzo* bursts upon us, its opening rhythm repeated with vehemence by the timpani. To this the central trio offers a tranquil contrast.

**Lemminkäinen Suite, Op. 22: III. The Swan of Tuonela (CD 2, track 8)**

Iceland Symphony Orchestra • Petri Sakari

Originally the second of the *Four Legends*, *Op. 22*, on which Sibelius worked during the last decade of the 19th century, *The Swan of Tuonela*, is dominated by the melody of the cor anglais. On the black waters of Tuonela, the Dead Land, the swan glides, singing, the bird that Lemminkäinen planned to shoot with his crossbow. The order of the four works was altered in a later revision, while the generally used title of the whole work is the *Lemminkäinen Suite*.

**5 Pieces, Op. 85, 'Flowers': No. 2. Oeillet (The Carnation) (CD 2, track 9)**

Risto Lauriala, piano

In struggling with the creation of his *Fifth Symphony* in 1916, Sibelius wrote the *Flowers* suite for piano, each piece bearing the name of a flower. These are attractive short pieces with lyrical qualities that betray the characteristic hand of Sibelius.

**Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 43: IV. Finale (CD 2, track 10)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Adrian Leaper

Sibelius completed his second symphony in 1902 and conducted it at a series of concerts in Helsinki in March of that year. Audiences in Finland, where feelings of nationalism now ran high, were eager to find a patriotic statement of protest in the work, a programme that later writers have sometimes chosen to impose on the music. The heroic *Finale* is built around a grandiose principal theme, darkened by the Finnish second theme and its sinister accompanying figure.

**To explore the Nordic world of Sibelius, we recommend:**

### **Orchestral Works**

Symphonies Nos. 1 and 6 .....	8.550197
Symphonies Nos. 2 and 7 .....	8.550198
Music for Strings .....	8.550330
Finlandia / Karelia Suite / Lemminkäinen Suite .....	8.554265
'The Tempest', Suite No. 2 .....	8.554387
Symphony No. 5 .....	8.555200
Tapiola / En Saga / Oceanides / Pohjola's Daughter .....	8.555299
Finnish Orchestral Favourites .....	8.555773
Pelléas et Mélisande .....	8.557985
Violin Concerto .....	8.553233

### **Piano Music**

6 Impromptus, Op. 5 / 5 Characteristic Impressions, Op. 103 / Others .....	8.553661
6 Finnish Folk Songs / 10 Bagatelles / Pensées lyriques, Op. 40 / Kyllikki, Op. 40 .....	8.554808

### **Vocal / Choral Music**

Songs .....	8.570019-20
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## CD1

<b>1</b>	<b>Pelléas et Mélisande, Op. 46</b> Prelude to Act I Scene 1, 'At the Castle Gate' .....	2:42
<b>2</b>	<b>Kyllikki – 3 Lyric Pieces for piano, Op. 41</b> Comodo .....	3:18
<b>3</b>	<b>The Oceanides</b> .....	10:18
<b>4</b>	<b>Andante Festivo</b> .....	4:27
<b>5</b>	<b>6 Songs, Op. 36</b> No.4 Reed, reed, rustle .....	2:29
<b>6</b>	<b>Valse triste, Op. 44, No. 1</b> .....	4:41
<b>7</b>	<b>Symphony No. 5 in E flat, Op. 82</b> III. Allegro molto .....	9:27
<b>8</b>	<b>Romance for strings, Op. 42</b> .....	4:50
<b>9</b>	<b>Pohjola's Daughter, Op. 49</b> .....	13:58
<b>10</b>	<b>Finlandia</b> .....	8:12
	<b>Total Timing</b> .....	<b>64:45</b>

## CD2

<b>1</b>	<b>Karelia Suite</b> I. Intermezzo .....	3:51
<b>2</b>	<b>Karelia Suite</b> III. Alla marcia .....	4:30
<b>3</b>	<b>Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47</b> II. Adagio di molto .....	7:53
<b>4</b>	<b>En Saga, Op. 9</b> .....	17:28
<b>5</b>	<b>6 Songs, Op. 17</b> No. 6 To Evening .....	1:33
<b>6</b>	<b>The Tempest – Suite No. 2, Op. 109</b> No. 3 Dance of the Nymphs .....	1:56
<b>7</b>	<b>Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39</b> III. Scherzo (Allegro) .....	5:09
<b>8</b>	<b>Lemminkäinen Suite, Op. 22</b> The Swan of Tuonela .....	9:11
<b>9</b>	<b>5 Pieces – piano, Op. 85</b> No. 2 Carnation .....	1:35
<b>10</b>	<b>Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 43</b> IV. Finale .....	13:30
	<b>Total Timing</b> .....	<b>67:06</b>

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# THE VERY BEST OF SIBELIUS

*"I am a slave to my themes and submit to  
their demands."*

(Jean Sibelius)

Jean Sibelius is considered the greatest Finnish composer and from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, defined Finnish music, becoming the nationalist voice of his country. This 2-CD survey includes favourite works from his symphonic, vocal, and instrumental music, such as the *Violin Concerto*, *The Swan of Tuonela*, and the *Valse triste*.

## Compact Disc 1

- 1** *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Op. 46 Prelude to Act I, Scene 1, 'At the Castle Gate' **2** *Kyllikki* – 3 Lyric Pieces for piano, Op. 41 Comodo **3** *The Oceanides* **4** *Andante Festivo* **5** *6 Songs*, Op. 36 No. 4: Reed, reed, rustle  
**6** *Valse triste*, Op. 44 No. 1 **7** *Symphony No. 5 in E flat*, Op. 82 III. Allegro molto **8** *Romance for strings*, Op. 42  
**9** *Pohjola's Daughter*, Op. 49 **10** *Finlandia*

## Compact Disc 2

- 1–2** *Karelia Suite* I. Intermezzo • III. Alla marcia **3** *Violin Concerto in D minor*, Op. 47 II. Adagio di molto  
**4** *En Saga*, Op. 9 **5** *6 Songs*, Op. 17 No. 1: To Evening **6** *The Tempest – Suite No. 2*, Op. 109  
No. 3: Dance of the Nymphs **7** *Symphony No. 1 in E minor*, Op. 39 III. Scherzo (Allegro)  
**8** *Lemminkäinen Suite*, Op. 22 *The Swan of Tuonela*  
**9** *5 Pieces – piano*, Op. 85 No. 2: Carnation **10** *Symphony No. 2 in D*, Op. 43 IV. Finale



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