



SIBELIUS

Swanwhite

Complete incidental music

The Lizard • A Lonely Ski Trail

The Countess' Portrait

Riko Eklundh, Narrator

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra

Leif Segerstam



Jean
SIBELIUS
(1865-1957)

	Svanevit (Swanwhite) – Complete Incidental Music, JS189 (1908)	29:29
❶	I. En hornsignal i fjärran (A horn signal in the distance) – Largo	0:18
❷	II. Tyst duvan, min prins kommer (Be silent, dove, my Prince is coming) – Comodo	2:51
❸	III. En svan flyger förbi (A swan flies past) – Adagio	0:19
❹	IV. Då börjar harpan spela (Now the harp begins to play) – Lento assai	3:36
❺	V. Då drager en vit svan förbi (A white swan flies past) – Adagio	0:20
❻	VI. Svanevits moder (Swanwhite's mother) – Lento – Comodo – Lento – Allegro	5:50
❼	VII. Harpan tystnar ett ögonblick och tar så upp en ny melodi (The harp falls briefly silent and strikes up a new melody) – Andantino	2:19
❽	VIII. Annorstädes! (Elsewhere!) – Andante	2:47
❾	IX. Styvmodern (Stepmother: Where is the bride?) – Lento	2:26
❿	X. Guldmolnen bli rosenröda (The golden clouds become rose red) – Moderato	2:53
⓫	XI. Svanevit (Swanwhite) – Allegretto	1:09
⓬	XII. Eld på borgen (Fire at the castle) – Largamente	1:34
⓭	XIII. Nu spelar harpan (Now the harp plays) – Adagio	1:37
⓮	XIV. Alla böja knä som om de tackade och lovade (All bend their knees as if in thanks and praise) – Largamente molto	1:30
	Ödlan (The Lizard) – Complete Incidental Music, Op. 8 (1909)	25:50
⓯	Scene 1: Adagio	3:43
⓰	Scene 2: Grave	22:07
⓱	Ett ensamt skidspår (A Lonely Ski Trail), JS77b (1948)	3:45
⓲	Grevinnans konterfej (The Countess' Portrait), JS88 (1905)	4:29

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Swanwhite • The Lizard • A Lonely Ski Trail • The Countess' Portrait

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' oeuvre, surrounded by tone poems often based on a Finnish folklore narrative, such as the famous epic, the *Kalevala* – the inspiration for his popular *Lemminkäinen Suite*. However, he was also prolific 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 *Tapio* in 1926, Sibelius produced no large-scale works for his remaining thirty-one years – a period often referred to as the 'Silence from Järvenpää'. 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.

In 1901 the Swedish author August Strindberg (1849-1912) wrote a symbolist fairy-tale called *Svanevit* (Swanwhite) for his fiancée, the Norwegian-born actress Harriet Bosse, who was to become his third wife. Five years later, Bosse assumed the role of Mélisande in Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas and Mélisande*, for which Sibelius had composed incidental music, at the Swedish Theatre in Helsinki. She later recalled how – even in character – she was moved to tears at every performance by Sibelius's music for *The Death of Mélisande*, played by the orchestra as she lay on her deathbed. Indeed, so great was the effect of the composer's music for Maeterlinck's play that Bosse suggested to Strindberg that Sibelius should also write the music for *Svanevit*, which had not yet been performed on stage. The author accepted, and the first performance was

initially planned for 1907 in Stockholm. However, when this proved to be impossible, the Swedish Theatre stepped in, and commissioned Sibelius to write the music. The premiere of both Strindberg's play and Sibelius' music eventually took place on 8th April 1908, with the composer conducting. It was well received by the critics, and was also a tremendous success with the public.

Svanevit represents Strindberg's response to Maeterlinck's symbolism, not only that of *Pelléas and Mélisande* but also *Princess Maleine*, which Strindberg had read in February 1901, just before he began work on *Svanevit*, and which also includes a wicked stepmother who thwarts the romance of a prince and princess. *Svanevit*'s eponymous central character is a fifteen-year-old princess who lives in a fairy-tale castle with her father, the Duke, and her wicked Stepmother, a witch, as well as the Stepmother's three daughters.

Sibelius's score – which often evokes the style of Grieg, not least in its melodic lines and ornamentation – comprises a horn call and thirteen musical episodes for an orchestra of thirteen. After the initial horn comes a pantomime scene ❷, in which Swanwhite meets the Prince, who has been summoned to teach her in regal etiquette. She has been promised to the Young King of a neighbouring country since she was a child, but falls in love with the Prince as soon as she sees him. The very short third number, consisting of just a single chord that swells up and fades away, portrays the flight of Swanwhite's Swan-mother, while the following movement finds the Swan-mother lamenting as she finds her daughter dirty and unkempt – the result of the evil Stepmother. The single chord of ❸ returns for ❹ to once again mark the flight of the Swan-mother, and in the sixth episode, the pizzicato arpeggio figures on muted strings describe the instrument associated with her: a magic harp ❹. This is the second of the two musical instruments with magical qualities that assist Swanwhite throughout the drama (the other being a horn, heard at the very opening). Each of these is associated with her parents: she blows her horn to call for help from her father, while the harp belongs to

her Swan-mother. As the harp plays by itself, it makes the lamps of the girls who are watching over Swanwhite extinguish and the chamber doors close. During this scene, the Swan-mother washes her daughter's feet, combs her hair and dresses her in a white gown. (It is here that the shadow of Grieg is perhaps most explicit, both in the string writing and in the solo flute and clarinet parts).

In the seventh number Swanwhite dreams of the Prince, but such blissful reveries soon give way to brooding timpani and a dark clarinet melody, describing the Prince in a troubled mood after the lovers have been quarrelling [8]. It is the wedding day of the Young King and Swanwhite, but the tone is bleak, and during the sombre, syncopated wedding waltz [9] dominated by muted strings, the Stepmother encourages the Prince to marry Magdalena instead. Still angry with Swanwhite after their argument, he rashly agrees. Magdalena is presented under a thick veil, but when he lifts this he discovers his bride-to-be is in fact Swanwhite. The bridal couple are taken to the bed, and the Prince places a sword between them as a sign of their chastity [10].

The Young King (to whom Swanwhite was originally betrothed) meets her and declares that he is not attracted to her, setting her free. During the music that follows [11], with a shifting tonality between A minor and C major, she is reunited with the Prince. The magic harp plays itself once again, and Sibelius also includes material – staccato flute rhythms – which he would later develop in the central movement of his *Fifth Symphony* (1915). This happiness is short-lived, however, and Swanwhite is compelled to blow her magic horn to request help from her father [12], after the Prince is caught in a storm on his ship. The father sets out to put matters right, but the Prince drowns. He is brought back to Swanwhite [13] and in the final episode she revives him [14]. The music adopts a religious atmosphere here, not least through the addition of an organ in the final two movements, and the characters fall on their knees, praising God for the Prince's miraculous resurrection.

As was his custom, in 1909 Sibelius extracted an orchestral suite from *Svanevit* soon after he had completed the incidental music. In the same year he began work on

music for another play, *Ödlan* (The Lizard), by Mikael Lybeck, which premiered on 6th April 1910. Lybeck's play inspired Sibelius with its dreamlike atmosphere and its principal character, Count Alban. He is engaged to Elisiv, who represents everything that is pure, and the lovers linger in the "pure" world of music. Adla, on the other hand, in her lizard dress symbolises evil, and arouses both fear and passion in Alban. Elisiv and Adla both struggle to keep Alban's soul on their side, and Elisiv perishes in the struggle. In revenge, Alban kills the evil that exists within himself – Adla. Sibelius was especially interested in Elisiv's dream visions, writing: "In the dream sequence I can give my musical inventiveness free hand". Scored for string orchestra, the music is organised into just two parts, scenes 1 and 2, and is seldom performed, possibly because it seems too closely connected with the stage action to be suitable for a concert performance (as with the incidental music for *Jedermann*, written several years later).

While Sibelius' composed music for many plays to great effect, with the brief melodramas *Ett ensamt skidspår* (A Lonely Ski Trail) and *Grevinnans konterfej* (The Countess' Portrait) he also demonstrated his skill in writing for drama on a miniature scale. Although *Ett ensamt skidspår* dates from 1925, it did not receive its first performance until 19th December 1948. Originally scored for narrator and piano, the version heard on this recording is arranged for narrator, harp and strings. The spoken text is by Bertel Gripenberg, charting the progress of a ski ride through a forest, drawing parallels between the trail in the snow that fades from sight and the waning of human thought, never finding the answers for which it is constantly striving. The narrator concludes, somewhat dejectedly, that his erratic wandering is nothing more than a ski trail that disappears with the freshly fallen snow. By contrast, *Grevinnans konterfej* (1906) for string orchestra features a text by Zachris Topelius dominated by references to eternal youth and springtime. Here, the ephemeral nature of the solitary ski trail is turned on its head, and instead of mourning over faded memories, the piece is pregnant with the anticipation of new life.

Dominic Wells

Riko Eklundh



Riko Eklundh was born in Helsinki in 1965 and graduated from the Helsinki Theatre Academy in 1989. He started his professional career at Åbo Svenska Teater and has varied his career between permanent and freelance engagements, particularly working at the Swedish Theatre in Helsinki. He has also worked at the Theatre Viirus, Lilla Teatern, Espoo City Theatre and at the Wasa Theatre. Relevant musical rôles include the part of Seymour in *Little Shop of Horrors*, Motel in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Albin/Zaza in *La Cage aux Folles* and the Master of Ceremonies in *Cabaret*. Important stage rôles include leading characters in *Amadeus*, *Topelius*, *Peer Gynt*, *Den dansande prästen* and *Kontrakt med Gud*. In addition he has contributed to many TV series and movies. He has also worked with radio, documentaries and as a solo artist and as narrator with different choirs and orchestras.

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.

📖 Grevinnans konterfej

Text: Zachris Topelius (1818-1898)

Jag är den makt, som allt förmår,
jag är den evigt unga vår,
som genom tid och åldrar går,
föryngrar och förklarar.
Och till de gamla kommer jag,
jag andas på de vissna drag,
och nya rosor, nytt behag
jag än åt dem bevarar.

I kojan eller slottet född,
i vadmal klädd, på siden stödd,
med blommor eller puder strödd,
jag evigt är densamma.
Jag evigt kallar rosor opp,
ur de förgångna dagars lopp
och skapar nya vårens hopp
i höstens aftonflamma.

Och minnet är mitt glada namn,
och mänskohjärtat är min hamn.
Århundraden uti min famn
stå upp igen i blomma.
Och lycklig den, vars flydda dag
står skriven i mitt anletsdrag
med oförvissneligt behag,
när kvällarna bli skumma.

📖 The Countess' Portrait

*English translation reproduced
courtesy of BIS Records, Sweden*

I am the power that knows no bounds,
I am Spring, the ever-young,
Who, passing through time and ages,
Refreshes and illuminates.
And to the elderly I come,
Blowing air on faded features,
And new roses, new grace
I keep in store for them.

Born in cabin or castle,
Coarsely clothed, or resting on silk,
Sprinkled with flowers or powder,
I forever am the same.
Forever I summon up roses
From past days, long gone by,
Creating hopes of springs to come
In autumn's evening glow.

And memory is my joyous name,
In the hearts of men is my haven.
Centuries past in my embrace
Burst once more into flowers.
And lucky the one whose long-gone day
Is written on my features,
With a grace that cannot wither,
When evenings begin to darken.

So great was the effect of Sibelius's incidental music for Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas et Mélisande* that August Strindberg, whose wife had performed the role of Mélisande, agreed that he should write the music for his as-yet unperformed play *Svanevit* (Swanwhite). Composing for an orchestra of thirteen he wrote in a style reminiscent of Grieg, and both play and music were very well received by critics and audiences alike. The play *Ödlan* (The Lizard) inspired Sibelius with its dreamlike atmosphere, while *Ett ensamt skidspår* (A Lonely Ski Trail) and *Grevinnans konterfej* (The Countess' Portrait) show his skill in writing for drama on a miniature scale.

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|--------------|---|--------------|
| 1-14 | Svanevit (Swanwhite) –
Complete Incidental Music, JS189 (1908) | 29:29 |
| 15-16 | Ödlan (The Lizard) –
Complete Incidental Music, Op. 8 (1909) | 25:50 |
| 17 | Ett ensamt skidspår
(A Lonely Ski Trail), JS77b (1948) | 3:45 |
| 18 | Grevinnans konterfej
(The Countess' Portrait), JS88 (1905) | 4:29 |

Riho Eklundh, Narrator **17 18**

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra • Leif Segerstam

A detailed track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet.

The Swedish sung text and an English translation of *Grevinnans konterfej* can be found inside the booklet and may also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/573341.htm

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