

# Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

- 1 **En Saga, Op.9** 17'26
- 2 **The Swan of Tuonela, Op.22/2** 8'17
- 3 **Finlandia, Op.26** 7'41
- 4 **The Oceanides, Op.73** 8'57
- 5 **Tapiola, Op.112** 18'47

Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra  
Sir Andrew Davis

0927 40620 2

DDD Digital recording

(LC)1169

Total timing 61'57

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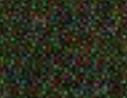
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Series concept: Matthew Cosgrove

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# Sibelius

*En Saga / The Swan of Tuonela  
Finlandia / The Oceanides / Tapiola*

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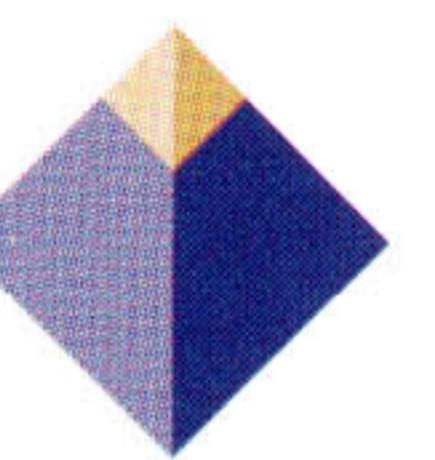
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# Sibelius

Tapiola / En Saga

Finlandia / The Oceanides

The Swan of Tuonela

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Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra  
Sir Andrew Davis



Sibelius is one of the most singular symphonists known to the history of music; he continued working with the programmatic symphonic poem genre throughout his career, in parallel with his 'pure' symphonies. In his late works Sibelius bridged the gap between symphony and symphonic poem with his new concept, 'symphonic fantasy' (first movement of the Fifth Symphony, the Seventh Symphony and perhaps *Tapiola*), where an arc of symphonic development is spanned within a single movement. Sibelius' approach to programme music was also largely determined by his use of the *Kalevala* as his principal source of inspiration. In contrast with the dramatic action of Germanic mythology, the world of the *Kalevala* is lyrical and epic. Sibelius himself said that in the *Kalevala* 'the action is always subordinate to the atmosphere'. Thus, of all his symphonic poems only *Skogsrået*, *Lemminkäinen's Return* and *Pohjola's Daughter* contain a detailed programme. *The Swan of Tuonela* (in its first edition) and *Tapiola* provide a short textual introduction with no specific description of the action or the plot of the work. Works such as *En Saga*, *The Bard*, *The Dryad*, *The Oceanides*, *Night Ride and Sunrise* and even *Finlandia* to a certain extent remain mysteries as to their content. In deliberately obscuring the content of his symphonic poems through the use of 'vague' titles, Sibelius was unique among contemporary composers. Sibelius never went the way of illustrating events as in film music; he adhered to the older poetic characterisation tradition. Programme music was to Sibelius more a conveying of emotional content than telling or illustrating a story. He continued from where words failed him; for him music was an extension of poetry – the fundamental substance underlying all the arts, according to Romantic aesthetics – with other means.

*En Saga* was written after Sibelius had completed *Kullervo* and premiered on 16 February 1893. It was Sibelius' most extensive symphonic poem apart from *Skogsrået*, which was rediscovered in 1996. The composer said of the work that it was in character more akin to the *Edda* than to the *Kalevala*. Its music is brooding and dramatic, and the *Songs of Ossian* have also been mentioned in connection with it. Much later, in 1940, Sibelius confessed: '*En Saga* is a portrait of a state of mind. At the time I was writing it, I experienced a great many shocks'. Thus, it appears there is no programme as such underlying the work. Sibelius refashioned *En Saga* in 1902, and this is the form in which the work is performed today. In the *Lemminkäinen Suite Op.22* (1896), Sibelius attained full mastery over the orchestra. Although the suite as a whole had a rough journey – only *The Swan of Tuonela* and *Lemminkäinen's Return* were printed in 1900, it was not until 1935 that all movements were performed again, and the entire work was not printed until 1954 – the refined orchestral colour and sensual atmosphere of *The Swan of Tuonela* spelled instant worldwide

fame for Sibelius. *The Swan of Tuonela* is the most significant manifestation of Symbolism in Finnish music. It owes something to Wagner's overture to *Lohengrin*, and it is a parallel to Rachmaninov's *The Isle of the Dead*. The famous cor anglais solo scintillates against an ethereal shimmering string background, with occasional replies from the solo cello. The work was originally supplied with the following programme note, written by Sibelius on the basis on Runo 14 of the *Kalevala*: '*Tuonela, the realm of Death, is surrounded by a broad, black and swift river where the Swan of Tuonela swims majestically, singing.*'

From the moment of its emergence, *Finlandia* has been considered the musical embodiment of Finland's struggle for freedom. It was originally the concluding number, entitled 'Finland awakens', in the incidental music to a series of tableaux depicting Finnish history, performed at a festival to support the freedom of the press in 1899. In the following year, Sibelius fashioned this music into an independent tone poem called *Finlandia* to be played at the Paris World Fair as a contrast to Anton Rubinstein's *Rossiya* overture performed at the previous world fair in 1889. *Finlandia* has become perhaps Sibelius' best known work, although the composer himself perhaps would have liked to see his reputation rest on something other than this '*work which in comparison with others is rather slight.*'

*The Oceanides* is perhaps Sibelius' most Impressionistic work, although it contains traditional Romantic elements too. The work, which was premiered at the Norfolk Music Festival in 1914, was partly inspired by the orchestral and piano music of Debussy, and partly no doubt by the composer's crossing of the Atlantic, as the title seems to suggest. The glittering playful cluster of motifs on the flutes in the opening depicts naiads or mermaids; only the woodwinds have solos in this piece, with a carpet of string sound underlying them. The opening theme alternates with a broader 'ocean' theme – an extensive melody on clarinet and oboe against string tremolos – alluding to the original title of the work, 'Rondo of the Waves'. The breakers grow, and at its climax the work erupts with the 'breaking of a great wave', a synthesis of elements from under which the naiads make one last appearance before fading away.

*Tapiola*, Op.112, Sibelius' last major independent orchestral work, was written in 1926 to a commission from conductor Walter Damrosch, to whom the work is also dedicated. For foreign listeners, Sibelius provided the work with a rhymed motto: '*The Northern woods are deep and dense and dark, / There slumber ancient secrets, wildest dreams. / This is the realm of Tapi the god, / Where spirits shimmer and the twilight gleams.*'

Recorded at Stockholm Concert Hall, Sweden, in February and March 1996  
Recording producer: Mats Engström  
Recording engineer: Matti Heinonen