

JEAN SIBELIUS

4 LEGENDS

FROM "THE KALEVALA" Op. 22

LEMMINKÄINEN AND THE MAIDENS OF SAARI

THE SWAN OF TUONELA

LEMMINKÄINEN IN TUONELA

LEMMINKÄINEN'S HOMEWARD JOURNEY

THE BUFFALO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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The third Legend is based on an episode in Runes XIV and XV of the *Kalevala*. A herdsman from Pohjola kills Lemminkäinen to save the black Swan. Cast into the River of Death, the hero's body is borne upon its icy waters to Tuonela.

In the fourth Legend (from Rune XXX of the epic), Lemminkäinen is rescued from the land of the dead by his mother's magic powers: the remains of his body are sewn together by her spells. He mounts his horse, and through the wild, frozen landscape of the North he gallops headlong towards his homeland.

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Recorded at Kleinhans Music Hall, March 1968, during the
2nd Buffalo Festival of the Arts Today

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(1865-1957)

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2. The Swan of Tuonela (8:41)
(Florence Myers, English horn)

SIDE TWO (20:20)

3. Lemminkäinen in Tuonela (14:18)
4. Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey (5:57)



Photo: Keith Holzman

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Sibelius is thought of as a symphonist. That is one categorization that would be agreed by both parties: those who therefore admire him for preserving classical ideas of musical growth and development in an age when revolutionary methods were tearing traditional fabrics apart; and those who espouse the slogan "The symphony is dead", consequently regarding Sibelius as just one among several studies in a dying culture.

Whether or not we favor the view that, from 1898 till 1924, the symphony was alive and well in Finland, there is no doubt of the enthusiasm with which the Finns accepted the proposition. When Sibelius was still in his early thirties, he was given a government pension which enabled him to devote the rest of his active life to composition without distraction by any of the usual material worries. Certainly there was a strong element of nationalism in this public support. Sibelius was the first claimant in Finnish history to the title of great composer, and he was widely regarded as a symbol of national emancipation at a time when the country was finally emerging from more than 700 years of domination by Sweden and Russia.

But though he wrote a handful of nationalistic pieces—among which the first set of *Scènes historiques* is well known and *Finlandia* almost notorious—Sibelius was not a nationalist composer in any profound sense. The archetypical characteristic of nationalistic music—frequent recourse to the musical materials of the nation's folklore—is almost entirely absent from his work. Only one trait of Finnish folk music left much of a mark on Sibelius: that is the interval of a descending fifth, usually with the accent on the first note, which is prominent in the first two pieces on the present record and in many other works. To that extent Sibelius writes like a Finn. In other respects he merely writes like Sibelius. And the picture he has given us of Finland as a dark, brooding, lugubrious land is in truth a picture of one man rather than of his country or his compatriots.

Nevertheless the somber, epic quality does have one palpable national source. It is not a musical but a literary one. For a large part of his composing life, and especially early on, Sibelius derived recurrent inspiration from the folk epic known as the *Kalevala*. The big choral and orchestral work *Kullervo* (1892), the *Four Legends* recorded here, the *Origin of Fire* cantata (1902), the symphonic poem *Pohjola's Daughter* (1906), the big soprano piece *Luonnotar* of 1913, and the 1926 *Song of Vaino* all stem from this great stock of national lore.

In outward aspect the *Four Legends* are fairly typical symphonic poems. All four bear descriptive titles; one is further provided with a few lines of atmospheric preface; and they form one set among a larger series of such works in the composer's output. But unlike *Pohjola's Daughter* (another strong and unjustly neglected piece) they do not concern themselves with depicting a program of any detailed nature. They are symphonic before they are poems. In this respect they contrast sharply with the symphonic poems of Strauss, who was much more concerned with dramatic, psychological, and picturesque illustration than with matters of formal construction. Thus the judgment that Sibelius is above all a symphonist does not depend purely on his seven symphonies.

In the symposium on the composer edited by Gerald Abraham, Ralph W. Wood pointed out Sibelius's capacity—evidenced in the *Four Legends*—of "remarkably anticipating his own development". As far as sheer musical quality is concerned, this comment applies especially to the second and fourth Legends, the celebrated *Swan of Tuonela* (which originally stood in third place) and *Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey*. These two pieces are typical of Sibelius at his best. Respectively, they demonstrate the strong characterization of his poetic and exuberant moods.

But Wood's comment has a more specific stylistic reference. All four pieces are full of pointers to the formal methods that Sibelius was to use in his symphonies. Indeed, the first Legend, *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari*, though less popular than the second and fourth, looks forward with especial vividness to both the methods and the language of one of his last and greatest works: Symphony No. 7. The tossing about of little melodic scraps, often in thirds in the woodwinds, here has a mosaic effect remarkably like that of the later piece. The purpose, too, is the same. For this Legend is essentially a one-movement symphonic structure. In the finale of the Third Symphony, in the first movement of the Fifth, and in the increasingly pervasive inter-movement relationships of the Fourth and Sixth, Sibelius's symphonic output shows a constantly deepening preoccupation with structures of this kind. They reached their highest point in the Seventh Symphony and, in reality if not in name, in the last major work he wrote, the symphonic

And while the first of the Legends looks forward to the last of the symphonies, it also bears a strong thematic resemblance in places to the Second Symphony. Compare some of the woodwind figures a few minutes into *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari* with the Second Symphony's first movement (also in 6/4 time), then observe the parallel I have noted with the Seventh Symphony, and the constant, unswerving nature of Sibelius's development will become evident.

The same applies in different ways to the third and fourth Legends. *Lemminkäinen in Tuonela* is the most sombre and brooding of the four. It would appeal particularly to a lover of Bruckner and somewhat resembles Sibelius's *Quasi una fantasia* finale of No. 1. *Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey*, on the other hand, is a brilliant and exhilarating sample of the way Sibelius develops big symphonic structures out of one or two tiny germinal fragments. The first movement of the Second Symphony, again, is one of the most famous instances of this procedure, but *Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey* points with even greater clarity toward the finale of Symphony No. 4, where there are much stronger resemblances of material, mood, and even orchestration.

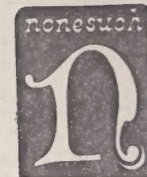
Being essentially a concentrated and fairly static piece of lyricism, the second Legend, *The Swan of Tuonela*, is naturally less close than the other three to the composer's symphonic methods. Yet it, too, has its counterparts in some of the symphony slow movements, and especially with that paradoxical slow-movement-within-a-scherzo, the trio section of the Second Symphony. Not only is there an affinity of expression, but the featured instruments are of the same family—English horn here, oboe in the Symphony—and *The Swan's* interweaving of solo woodwind phrases with solo cello and viola lines is matched more or less closely by the instrumental juxtapositions in the Symphony.

The Swan of Tuonela was actually the first of the four Legends to be composed. It originated in 1893 from an operatic project which Sibelius never finished. In collaboration with a writer named J.H. Erkkö, he planned a stage work entitled *The Building of the Boat*, based on one of the *Kalevala* legends. Having done a certain amount of work on both libretto and music, Sibelius abandoned the plan. But the prelude was too good to lose, and it was this section that became what is now the second of the Four Legends. It was revised in 1896 and again in 1900.

The Swan is probably the most popular of all Sibelius's shorter works. The solo English horn was a wonderfully evocative choice of instrument to represent the legendary bird. The rest of the orchestration is oboe, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trombones, timpani, bass drum, harp, and strings. This instrumentation shows the composer's concern to match in sound the somber quality of the mythical scene, and the sonority is assisted by the subdivision of the strings into more than a dozen parts.

The other three Legends were originally composed in 1895. Like *The Swan of Tuonela*, they were revised in 1896, and *Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey* was revised again in 1900. *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari* is scored for 2 piccolos (an unusual touch, and particularly effective in retrospect when the dark colors of *The Swan* take over), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion (triangle, bass drum, cymbals), and strings. *Lemminkäinen in Tuonela* uses 2 flutes, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, percussion (triangle, side drum, cymbals, bass drum), and strings. An unusual feature here is the omission of timpani, and the decision to leave them out, taken together with the inclusion of the percussion instruments listed, points to a certain deliberate starkness and primitivism in the atmosphere of this piece. *Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey* again calls for 2 piccolos; the rest of the orchestra consists of 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (triangle, tambourine, bells, bass drum, cymbals), and strings.

I have pointed out symphonic characteristics in the formal structure of the separate Legends. As a whole, the set shows much less tendency toward overall unification in any symphonic sense. It's true that the first and fourth Legends are in the same key—E flat major—with intervening contrast provided by the A minor of *The Swan* and the F-sharp minor of *Lemminkäinen in Tuonela*. Thematically, however, apart from a figure of descending thirds alternating with rising seconds shared by Nos. 1 and 3, each of the *Four Legends* is an independent work. What gives unity to the set is its epic style and manner. And these are the qualities, along with stringent symphonic logic and an unquestionable seriousness of purpose, that underlie all of Sibelius's important work.



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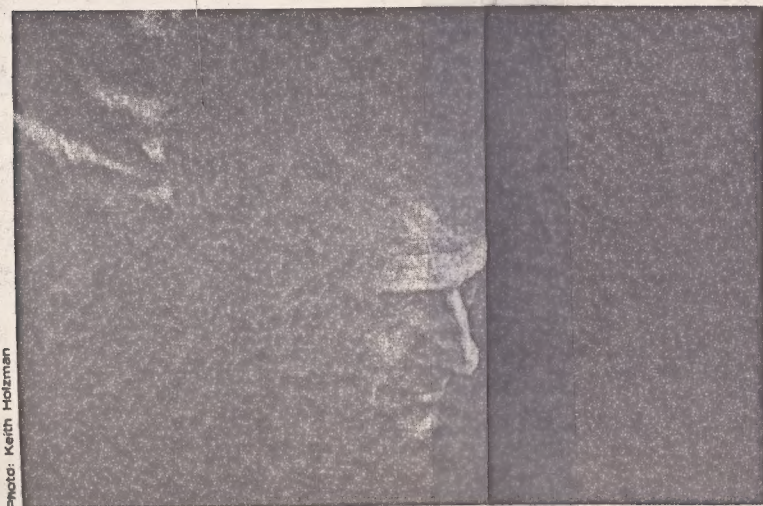


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STEREO

STEREO

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STEREO

H-71203-B
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