

SIBELIUS

Symphonies

2&7

THOMAS SØNDERGÅRD
BBC National Orchestra of Wales



BBC
RADIO



Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 43

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Allegretto | 9:29 |
| 2. Tempo andante, ma rubato | 13:51 |
| 3. Vivacissimo | 5:55 |
| 4. Finale: Allegro moderato | 12:38 |

Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105

- | | |
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| 5. Adagio – Vivacissimo – Allegro moderato | 20:33 |
|--|-------|

Total Running Time: 62 minutes

RECORDED AT

BBC Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff, UK
26–28 March 2014

PRODUCED AND RECORDED BY

Philip Hobbs

ASSISTANT ENGINEERING BY

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BY THE END of the old (nineteenth) century, Jean Sibelius was basking in the recent successes of his big-hearted, opulent First Symphony and stirring *Finlandia*. More, he was slowly beginning to make a name for himself in musical circles on the European mainland. Both 'The Swan of Tuonela' and 'Lemminkäinen's Return' (the second and last of the *Four Legends*) had been given in Berlin by Felix Weingartner; while in England, Henry Wood had programmed the delectable *King Christian II* suite in one of his promenade concerts. Across the Atlantic too, the concert halls of New York, Chicago and Cincinnati were beginning to resound to Sibelius's music. Nonetheless, the composer himself remained sunk in despondency: marriage- and money-worries were exacerbated by frequent alcoholic binges in Helsinki; and the death in February 1900 of his 'radiant' 15-month-old daughter Kirsti (victim of an outbreak of typhus in southern Finland) had been a devastating blow.

Then, in June 1900, a letter arrived from an anonymous admirer: 'It is time you travelled. You will spend the late autumn and winter in Italy, a land where one can learn about cantabile, proportion and harmony, the plastic arts and the symmetry of lines, where everything is beautiful – even that which is ugly. After all, recall what Italy meant to the development of Tchaikovsky and to Richard Strauss.' It was not long before the author identified himself as Baron Axel Carpelan. A far from wealthy yet extraordinarily persuasive patron of the arts, Carpelan (who was to become a trusted friend and influential mentor) had gathered together

sufficient funds to free the composer from his teaching commitments and to enable him to take his family to Italy. During the late winter and spring of 1901, Sibelius rented a villa in Rapallo on the Bay of Genoa, and it was there that the seeds were sown for what was to become the Second Symphony.

Initially unsure of his next step, however, Sibelius flirted with various projects, among them works inspired by Pushkin's drama *The Stone Guest* (based on the Spanish legend of Don Juan) and the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, as well as a tone poem in four movements labelled *Festivals*. Worse still, history repeated itself: his six-year-old daughter Ruth also contracted typhus. Overcome by the strain, the composer promptly took himself off for a fortnight in Rome, where he visited art galleries and listened to Palestrina masses: he had effectively abandoned his long-suffering but loyal wife, Aino, and left her alone to nurse the stricken child back to health.

In early May, the family returned to Finland via Florence, Vienna and finally Prague (where Sibelius met Dvořák and Suk). The bulk of the symphony was written that autumn, and Sibelius's correspondence with Carpelan from this period confirms the work's birth pangs: 'I have been in the throes of a bitter struggle with this symphony. Now the picture is clearer, and I am proceeding under full sail. Soon I hope to have something to dedicate to you. That is if you are pleased with the work.'

The first performance was originally scheduled for January 1902, but numerous revisions (as well as a mild attack of influenza) meant it had to be postponed. Sibelius himself eventually directed the world premiere, on 8 March 1902; the Helsinki public greeted the new work rapturously (a further three, sold-out performances took place that same month), and to this day the work remains the most popular of the composer's seven symphonies. Given that Finland was still under the oppressive rule of the Russian Empire and Sibelius's music had already played a vital role in the nation's quest for greater self-determination and the ultimate goal of independence, it is perhaps not surprising that many critics were quick to ascribe to the symphony various programmes of a strongly nationalistic flavour. Here, for instance, is the reaction (from a newspaper article) of one of Sibelius's doughtiest and most eloquent champions, the conductor and composer Robert Kajanus:

The *Andante* [slow movement] strikes one as the most broken-hearted protest against all the injustices that threaten at the present time to deprive the sun of its light and our flowers of their scent...The scherzo gives a picture of frenetic preparation. Everyone does his bit, every fibre vibrates...the finale develops towards a triumphant conclusion intended to arouse in the listener a picture of lighter and confident prospects for the future.

When another Finnish conductor, Georg Schnéevoigt, introduced the symphony in similar terms before its Boston premiere, Sibelius wrote to him to deny any such political or patriotic links, and that was the view he continued to stick to in his later years: 'My symphonies consist of music thought up and set down purely as a musical expression, without any literary basis. As far as I am concerned, music begins where the word ends.' We know, too, that Sibelius was especially gratified by some glowing comments from the Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar, who corresponded with him not long after the work's Stockholm premiere in October 1902: 'You have reached into the deepest depths of the unconscious and the ineffable, and brought forth something of a miracle. What I suspected has been proved true: for me you emerge as the foremost, indeed the only major figure at this moment.'

So familiar is the Second Symphony and so easily intoxicating is its 'combination of Italianate warmth and Nordic intensity' (to quote the eminent Sibelian Robert Layton), we should not be blinded to its considerable strengths; and it has a pivotal position in the composer's development, standing as it does at the crossroads between those descriptive offerings (some of them inspired by the Finnish epic poem the *Kalevala*) from the previous decade (*Kullervo*, *En saga*, *Karelia* and the *Four Legends*) and the ever more radically questing symphonic statements to come. As in the case of its E minor predecessor, it is the Second Symphony's opening movement which has received the greatest

scrutiny and praise; understandably so, for Sibelius's ingenious treatment of his material in what is essentially a basic sonata-form design remains a continuing source of admiration and wonder. Indeed, it is unhelpful to talk in terms of traditional first and second subjects (what exactly constitutes the latter has been the topic of much heated debate over the years), so subtle are the organic processes at work. As Sibelius's foremost biographer, Erik Tawaststjerna, so eloquently puts it, Sibelius is 'no longer content to pour new material into predetermined moulds but like the Viennese masters themselves thinks in creative terms of the very form itself.' Repeated string chords followed by a chirruping woodwind idea introduce an exposition of formidable thematic fertility. An ensuing development section rises to a majestic climax (listen out for some powerful brass sonorities) and then promptly merges into the recapitulation, at the start of which the opening woodwind figure combines with other material from the exposition to breathtaking effect. What a marvellously concentrated essay this is, its inner workings consistently illuminated by symphonic thinking of an altogether exalted order!

The brooding slow movement commences arrestingly with a timpani roll followed by a long pizzicato passage for cellos and double basses, over which a pair of bassoons eventually voice a lugubrious lament. A contrasting idea for strings in a radiant F sharp major offers enchantment to the ear and on its second appearance is endowed with memorable romantic intensity. The movement's linking dialogue,

punctuated by angry brass outbursts, increases in desperation as we reach a grim coda that ends with two defiant pizzicato string chords. String writing of furious bustle typifies the scurrying outer portions of the Vivacissimo scherzo, whereas the trio section (marked 'lento e soave') is a memorably tranquil affair in which the solo oboe tenderly caresses a melody of rare loveliness and daring originality (the opening phrase repeats the same B flat crotchet no fewer than nine times). A surging transition plunges us straight into an unashamedly heroic finale dominated by two ideas: the strings' universal, stirring big tune; and a more mysterious theme in the wind heard against a hypnotically repeated background of running quavers in the lower strings. On its second (and final) appearance, the latter idea builds up enormous tension before toppling over into one last mighty climax, after which the symphony concludes with a brass-topped coda of blazing affirmation.

When Sibelius directed the premiere of his seventh (and last) symphony in March 1924, it bore the title *Fantasia sinfonica*. The composer had long been pondering the true nature of the medium, and in a diary entry dated 18 October 1914 he had written: 'I wonder whether this name "symphony" has done more harm than good to my symphonies. I'm really planning to let my inner being – my fantasy – speak. One needs to broaden the concept.' Within a couple of months he was jotting down ideas for sketches which he labelled 'Fantasia I' and 'Fantasia II', and which in time would form the nucleus of the last three symphonies

and of *Tapiola* (1926). The first real clue to the character of the Seventh probably comes in a letter to Carpelan from 20 May 1919, when Sibelius was still agonizing over the second (and final) revision of his Fifth Symphony: 'The Vllth Symphony: joy of life and vitality, with appassionato passages. In three movements – the last a "Hellenic rondo". All this with due reservation... the plans may possibly be altered according to the development of the musical ideas. As usual, I am a slave to my themes and submit to their demands.' The three movements referred to are most likely the sections of the symphony marked Adagio, Vivacissimo and Allegro moderato. But in the final, indivisible entity, Sibelius's astonishingly subtle mastery of organic growth and seamless tempo relations (to say nothing of his command of formal innovation) means that is pretty much impossible for the listener to perceive exactly where one section might begin and another one end.

Of course, in his tireless quest for symphonic unity Sibelius had employed such procedures before: one immediately thinks of the remarkable concluding 'scherzo-cum-finale' of the Third and (above all, perhaps) the tremendous opening movement of the Fifth Symphony. But in the case of the Seventh, the composer's own analogy, wherein he likens the process of symphonic form to the formation of a river bed, strikes home with acute resonance: '[A river] is composed of innumerable tributaries, brooks and streams, and eventually broadens majestically into the sea, but it is the movement of the water that determines the shape of

the river bed.' Just so are the Seventh's structural foundations fashioned by the flow of the musical ideas, entirely liberated from any notion of stale convention or perceived symphonic 'tradition'.

Strings solemnly intone an ascending scale, a strikingly simple device that ushers in a powerful opening Adagio section. This contains elements that form the nucleus of all that is to follow, most notably of the noble trombone theme that will reappear twice more, and form the symphony's structural backbone. Soon, the pace begins to quicken imperceptibly, and suddenly we find ourselves propelled into a dancing, wonderfully airy Vivacissimo scherzo. Then, after the first, crisis-ridden appearance of the trombone motif (vividly accompanied by chromatic strings boiling like an angry sea), the key of C major reasserts itself as we pass through an enchanting landscape of vernal freshness (Allegro molto moderato is the marking for this pastoral rondo). Eventually, though, fragments from the Vivacissimo section briefly re-emerge, before the final – and most majestic – entry of the motto theme. The music now steadily gains intensity to attain a quite overwhelming climax, at the height of which the strings passionately recall a descending figure from the opening Adagio. After a further, poignant reminiscence from hesitant flute and bassoon, the work ends with a hard-won C major crescendo: a terse gesture, utterly characteristic of the symphony's spellbinding and entire cogency.



Photograph by Bjarke Johansen

THOMAS SØNDERGÅRD

Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård is Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. He was Principal Conductor and Musical Advisor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra from 2009-2012.

In recent years he has conducted four contrasting programmes at the BBC Proms (with BBC NOW) and made successful debuts with the Gothenburg, Atlanta, Brussels and Oslo Philharmonics, the Seattle, Houston, Philharmonia and BBC Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg and the Konzerthaus Berlin.

Søndergård collaborates regularly with such internationally acclaimed soloists as Janine Jansen, Vilde Frang, Nina Stemme, Truls Mørk, James Ehnes, Julia Fischer and Ingrid Fliter. He is also an experienced opera conductor and has appeared at both the Royal Danish (*Cunning Little Vixen*) and Royal Swedish Operas (*Turandot* with Nina Stemme, following his success there with *Tosca* in 2011), as well as performances at Royal Stockholm Opera (*Dialogues des Carmelites*) in 2014. In 2008 he had made a highly successful Stuttgart Staatsoper debut in *Tosca* (he returned in 2010 for *Luisa Miller*), and he had been described as a 'sensation' at his Royal Danish Opera debut with Ruders's opera *Kafka's Trial*: 'one of

the best things that has happened to the art of opera for many years'. Søndergård has conducted the Royal Danish Opera both in Copenhagen and on tour in Denmark, in repertoire from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Le nozze di Figaro* and *La Bohème* to *The Rite of Spring* and *Pulcinella* for the Royal Danish Ballet.

Admired for his interpretations of Scandinavian contemporary repertoire, Søndergård has recorded several symphonic scores, notably violin concertos by Sibelius and Prokofiev for EMI with Vilde Frang. His Bridge Records disc of Ruders's Second Piano Concerto was released to critical acclaim and received a *Gramophone* Award nomination in the contemporary category in 2011. In the same year, he was awarded the prestigious Queen Ingrid Foundation Prize for services to music in Denmark.

BBC NATIONAL ORCHESTRA OF WALES

THE BBC NATIONAL ORCHESTRA OF WALES is one of the UK's most versatile orchestras, with a varied range of work as both a broadcast orchestra and the national symphony orchestra of Wales. It performs live to tens of thousands of people across Wales and the UK each year; and can regularly be heard in the UK on BBC radio and television.

Generously supported by the Arts Council of Wales, BBC NOW is the orchestra in residence at St David's Hall, Cardiff, and presents a season in Swansea. The orchestra performs a busy schedule of live concerts, touring the length and breadth of Wales as well as appearing at venues around the rest of the UK. Almost all its performances can be heard on the BBC, not least through regular broadcasts on BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio Wales and BBC Radio Cymru.

Under its Principal Conductor Thomas Søndergård and Conductor Laureate Tadaaki Otaka, the orchestra has won considerable acclaim over the years. With an outstanding ability to refresh the core repertoire, it is proud of its adventurous programming and continuously demonstrates artistic excellence in new and rarely performed works. As part of its commitment to contemporary music, the orchestra appointed B Tommy Andersson as composer in association for the 2014–15 season, alongside

Mark Bowden, who has been resident composer since June 2011. The orchestra is invited to perform at festivals throughout Wales and the UK each year, and appears biennially at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World. It also gives several concerts annually as part of the BBC Proms, where it is proud to represent Wales.

Learning is at the heart of the orchestra's work, and in recent years this has included the development of an innovative concert format designed for audiences of adults and children who are deaf or hearing impaired; a unique music resource-pack has been distributed to every primary and special school in Wales. The orchestra was seen on cinema screens across the UK in October 2014 as part of the BBC's landmark *Ten Pieces* project to inspire children to creativity in classical music.

The orchestra's home is BBC Hoddinott Hall, a world-class concert hall and recording studio in the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay. There the orchestra continues its work as the UK's foremost soundtrack orchestra, recording for programmes including *Doctor Who* (BBC Cymru Wales), *Hidden Kingdoms* (BBC Natural History Unit) and *The Crimson Field* (BBC One).



Photograph by Betina Skovbro



1ST VIOLIN

Lesley Hatfield (leader)
Nick Whiting (associate leader)
Carl Darby (assistant principal)
Gwenllian Hâf Richards
Terry Porteus
Suzanne Casey
Anna Cleworth
Emilie Godden
Paul Mann
Richard Newington
Kerry Gordon-Smith
Gary George-Veale
Georgina Leo
Eluned Pritchard

2ND VIOLIN

Naomi Thomas (section principal)
Jane Sinclair (assistant principal)
Ros Butler
Sheila Smith
Katherine Miller
Beverley Wescott
Margot Leadbeater
Debbie Frost
Vickie Ringguth
Nicolas White
Joseph Williams
Sellena Leony

VIOLA

Göran Fröst (section principal)
Peter Taylor
Sarah Chapman
James Drummond
Ania Leadbeater
Robert Gibbons
Catherine Palmer
Laura Sinnerton
Carl Hill
Benjamin Kaminski

CELLO

Rosie Biss (guest principal)
Keith Hewitt (assistant principal)
Jessica Feaver
Sandy Bartai
Kathryn Harris
Carolyn Hewitt
Rachel Ford
Margaret Downie

DOUBLE BASS

David Stark (section principal)
Mark O'Leary
Christopher Wescott
William Graham-White
Tim Older
Jan Zahourek

FLUTE

Matthew Featherstone
(section principal)
Eva Stewart

PICCOLO

Eva Stewart (principal)
Matthew Featherstone

OBOE

David Cowley (section principal)
Amy McKean

CLARINET

Robert Plane (section principal)
John Cooper

BASSOON

Jarosław Augustyniak

(section principal)

Martin Bowen

HORN

Tim Thorpe (section principal)

William Haskins

Neil Shewan

Oliver Fitzgerald-Lombard

Edward Hodgson

TRUMPET

Philippe Scharz (section principal)

Robert Samuel

Andy Everton (principal)

TROMBONE

Donal Bannister (section principal)

Phil Goodwin

BASS TROMBONE

Darren Smith (principal)

TUBA

Michael Levis

TIMPANI

Steve Barnard (section principal)



Photograph by Paul Groom

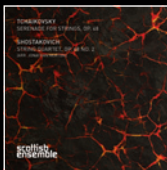


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