

# Sibelius

Symphonies Nos 2 & 5

**Scottish National Orchestra**  
**Sir Alexander Gibson**

collect

**Jean Sibelius** (1865–1957)

**Symphony No. 2, Op. 43**

in D major • in D-Dur • en ré majeur

1	I	Allegretto	9:59
2	II	Tempo andante ma rubato	12:33
3	III	Vivacissimo – Lento a suave	5:42
4	IV	Finale. Allegro moderato	12:50

**41:16**

**Symphony No. 5, Op. 82**

in E flat major • in Es-Dur • en mi bémol majeur

5	I	Tempo molto moderato – Allegro moderato	12:36
6	II	Andante mosso, quasi allegretto	7:39
7	III	Allegro molto	8:55

**TT 70:42**

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**Sibelius: Symphonies Nos 2 & 5**

**Symphony No. 2**

The Second Symphony was begun in 1901 and completed either in the last days of that year or early in the following one. The fact that the work was written in Italy has led some to detect in it the effect of the warm Italian climate, but it is easy to be wise after the event. It should also be pointed out that the Italian winter, the season in which the work was written, can be very cold. Of Sibelius's seven symphonies, the Second has almost certainly had the most performances, its nearest rival in this respect being the Fifth. In one sense it is easy to see the reason for this popularity: the overall effect of No. 2 (like No. 5) is optimistic, despite the fiercely dramatic and even tragic passages that occur in the slow movement, and the stormy outburst of the scherzo. In another sense the Second Symphony's popularity is less easy to explain, for its concise opening movement demands intense concentration and does not give up its secrets easily. Unlike the First Symphony there is no introduction and the exposition with which it begins is decidedly, and of course deliberately, disjointed. Themes and motives follow each other in an apparently haphazard manner, usually without

any connecting link. Admittedly the structure is based on normal classical procedures, but this has not prevented the analysts from disagreeing among themselves about what constitutes the first and second subject groups. From the listener's point of view this is something that hardly matters, if at all. What is important is to remember the copious amount of material presented, and so to be able to follow its adventures later. During the development section Sibelius proceeds to show relationships between these apparently unrelated fragments, gradually building them up to a unified climax at the point where the development merges into the recapitulation. Finally the music is broken down once more into its elements, their order being slightly rearranged. The effect, however, is quite different from that of the exposition. Now that the relationships have been meaningfully displayed, the result appears far less fragmentary than before.

In their design, the remaining three movements are far more straightforward, and because of this some have regarded them as inferior, but surely some relaxation of this particular aspect is necessary after the concentration of the opening movement. On

the other hand, there is little relaxation of tension in the second, D minor movement, which begins with a roll on the timpani followed by a long succession of *pizzicato* quavers shared between the double-basses and cellos. Against this a lugubrious theme eventually appears on the bassoons in octaves, followed by a variant of it on the clarinets and an oboe. It is only when the upper strings enter for the first time that the *pizzicato* quavers cease. The strings soon build up to an angry outburst, the ending of which duplicates that of one of the most important pieces of material in the first movement. Following another outburst, this time from the brass, there is a complete change of mood, and it is here that the Italian sunshine, if it is present at all, comes through. Yet the new theme is not as new as it appears to be, for it derives directly from the angry outburst of the strings. The remainder of the movement, the longest of the four, is mainly concerned with alternating and contrasting the two moods. To this end, the warm, romantic second theme is built up into a big climax.

The outer sections of the stormy scherzo consist almost entirely of triplet quavers on the strings and a slower-moving idea for the woodwind, the one being superimposed upon the other. The rush ceases abruptly and the fifteen bars that follow contain nothing more than five drum taps – the first quiet and those

that follow quieter still – to prepare the way for the calm central section. This is based on a theme introduced by an oboe and beginning with nine repetitions of the same note. Here, again, there is a relationship with the first movement. The respite from the storm is brief, but the oboe later returns with its theme, this time unpreceded by drum taps. New elements gradually appear, the most important of them anticipating the first theme of the finale, which follows without a break. Its entry is majestic, even though, for the moment, the theme itself is restricted to its first seven notes. No fewer than nine bars separate this initial, incomplete statement from its continuation, and during that time a fanfare-like motive, a variant of which is to prove of major importance, is heard on the trumpets. Following a complete statement of the first subject a transition leads to the second, which is introduced tentatively before it gets underway. During the development this theme is built up to a great climax by the full orchestra, after which the fanfare leads to a coda in slower tempo which crowns the whole work.

#### Symphony No. 5

The Fifth Symphony was completed in 1915 and had its first performance that year at a concert celebrating Sibelius's fiftieth birthday. The composer was far from satisfied with the work and immediately set about re-writing it.

The resulting score was performed the following year, but it still left Sibelius dissatisfied, and not until 1919 did he produce the work we know today. There are, therefore, three versions of the symphony; the second remains unknown, as, until recently, did the first. This first version consists of four separate movements, the first two of which apparently became linked together in the second version. Interesting though a comparison between the initial and final versions of the work may be, there can be no question of regarding them as alternatives, as in the case of Prokofiev's Fourth Symphony, which exists in two forms under different opus numbers. In Sibelius's case the final version is so superior that the initial one has no place in the concert hall. The differences between them are marked indeed, the only section substantially the same being the first part of the finale. Even the opening horn theme is missing in the first version, while the silences that separate the unpredictably spaced chords at the end are filled in.

As it stands today the only indication of the work having once been in four movements is to be found in the first movement's reference lettering. Having proceeded from A to N it then begins again at A, this time reaching S. The second A appears shortly after the change from *Tempo molto moderato* to *Allegro moderato*, but in fact the basic pulse is

barely affected. It is merely the notation that is different, four bars in 3/4 time now equalling one bar of the previous 12/8. Structurally this is one of Sibelius's most original movements, although it opens with a fairly normal exposition containing two groups of subject material. The dividing line between them is easily recognisable, the beginning of the second group coinciding with the first entry of the accompanying strings. Having stated all his material Sibelius then repeats it, but not literally or according to classical procedures. The development starts by seizing on a fragment that had been omitted from the second exposition, and gradually builds up to a climax, seemingly paving the way for the recapitulation. What in fact occurs is a combination of scherzo and recapitulation, the old material returning, somewhat transformed yet easily recognisable, and new material being added. In the latter is a trumpet tune that cuts right across the 3/4 metre – a passage that did not appear in the original 1915 version. Other additions are the passages in still faster tempo that conclude the movement.

In marked contrast to the structural complexity of the first movement is the simplicity of the second. This is virtually a set of variations on a single theme – one might almost say a single rhythm of five equal notes, the second and fourth falling on the beat. All



the same, the movement is not lacking in dramatic quality. Listeners concentrating on the melodic aspects can easily fail to notice the bass part which in one variation anticipates, and in another duplicates, the principal theme of the last movement.

Leaving the question of key sequences and contrasts aside, the finale may be said to parallel sonata form. If this format is used for analytical description, the first subject consists of a kind of atmospheric, but themeless, *perpetuum mobile*, while the second, which enters in the same key, is the heaving tune, initially stated by the horns, that has its origin in the already-mentioned bass

progression of the previous movement. Against this theme is soon set an important, flowing counter-melody. This is the entire material of the movement. The *perpetuum mobile* returns during the development section, that also hints at the horn theme, and the former counter-melody reappears in its own right. The horn theme, now taken over by the brass section, dominates the recapitulation (or the part of the movement that substitutes for it), but only during the expansive coda, which forms the climax of the whole work, is the home key of E flat major re-established.

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In 1978 Sir Alexander Gibson became one of the few recipients of the Sibelius Medal 'for his outstanding contribution to the appreciation of Sibelius's music throughout the world'.

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SIBELIUS: SYMPHONIES NOS 2 & 5 - SNO/Gibson

**Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)**

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in D major • in D-Dur • en ré majeur

**41:16**

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in E flat major • in Es-Dur • en mi bémol majeur

**29:19**

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