

Chandos

CHAN 8344



The Scottish National Orchestra photographed in the concert hall of their fine Glasgow headquarters.

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Chandos

DIGITAL

Jean Julius Christian Sibelius
Symphonies 1 & 7



Scottish National Orchestra
Sir Alexander Gibson

**General
Accident**

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DDD = digital tape recorder used during session recording, mixing and/or editing, and mastering (transcription).

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General Accident

In association with Chandos Records Limited, General Accident is pleased to bring to music lovers this production of Sibelius's First and Seventh Symphonies by the Scottish National Orchestra. This is the third of a series of digital recordings of the seven Sibelius Symphonies by Sir Alexander Gibson and the Orchestra.

General Accident hopes that it will provide many hours of pleasure, and, at the same time, further enhance the SNO's reputation and distinctive contribution to the world of recorded music.

Recording producer: Brian Couzens

Sound engineer: Ralph Couzens

Recorded in the SNO Centre, Glasgow 1982

Cover design: General Accident Design Unit

LEAVING ASIDE THE *Kullervo* Symphony of 1892 (a work for soloists, male chorus and orchestra that may be described aptly as a series of symphonic poems), Sibelius's symphonies cover the years 1899-1924, a comparatively short time considering the composer lived to the age of ninety-one. This was, however, a period that saw enormous changes in music. For instance, 1899 was the year that Schoenberg wrote *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*), a thoroughly Wagnerian piece of music. By 1924 the same composer had formulated his 12-note method of composing. In the meantime Bartok had evolved his own harmonic idiom; Stravinsky had composed *The Rite of Spring* and turned to neo-classicism; Webern had produced his briefest miniatures; Scriabin had delved into mysticism; and Prokofiev had shocked audiences from Moscow to Chicago. The list could be continued with ease. One composer who remained aloof from all the experimentation and innovation that was going on during the first quarter of this century was Sibelius. He himself once remarked that, while others were mixing musical cocktails of every conceivable hue, he continued to give his audiences pure cold water. This is not to say he necessarily disdained new techniques, for on occasion he made sparing use of bitonality. Also it would be totally wrong to brand Sibelius as a conservative composer. In his own way he made enormous strides, the extent of which could not be better illustrated than by placing the First and Seventh Symphonies side by side.

Sibelius was thirty-four when he completed his First Symphony in 1899. It is a romantic work containing much that is in the spirit of the nineteenth century, to which, after all, it belongs. If the influence of Russian nationalist composers is easy to detect, it should be remembered that Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony predates Sibelius's work by only six years. At the same time there is much in the Finnish composer's Symphony that is thoroughly typical of

him, and could just have easily appeared in one of his later products. Indeed his individuality had been forcibly expressed in several compositions of a still earlier vintage, among them *The Swan of Tuonela*, *Lemminkäinen's Homecoming* and *En Saga*.

In the opening movement of the First Symphony sonata form is handled with exceptional mastery. The whole structure gives a very strong feeling of unity, the reasons for which do not necessarily leap to the eye when examining the score. The long clarinet solo, accompanied during the first part of its course by a timpani roll, may appear to be merely introductory and unrelated to the main body of the movement, but it contains elements that are to reappear, albeit in a contrasting mood and tempo. With its opening held note and abrupt ending the first main theme is absolutely typical of Sibelius, as is the important prefix of two notes it acquires on repetition. The fact that the corresponding theme in Borodin's First Symphony opens with exactly the same sequence of pitches has often been noted, although both the rhythms and the mood are very different. A complete contrast comes with the next section, during which the woodwind, beginning with the flutes, predominate. It takes its point of departure from the clarinet's introduction and at first appears to be transitional. However it finds its way into the second subject group, part of which clearly relates back to the first. Following the development that intensifies the feeling of unity, there is a masterly stroke when this section is dovetailed into the recapitulation. Nothing in the movement, or indeed the whole work, is more prophetic than Sibelius's mature symphonic thinking.

Although the second movement, cast in a kind of rondo form, is looser in construction, here again thematic relationships appear, while the theme of the central section relates to one in the previous movement. A unifying factor here is the rhythm of the opening bar, which later becomes the point of departure for two more themes, one an inversion of the other. The outer sections of the Scherzo are

somewhat in the manner of Bruckner, except that the second, far from being a literal repeat of the first, is condensed and has a coda added. With its pastoral-like central section the strongest possible contrast is provided. It is in the Finale, the free form of which is summed up by the subtitle *Quasi una Fantasia*, that Tchaikovsky's influence becomes most apparent. To begin with there is a substantial introduction using the same material as the one that opened the Symphony, but now the tune is begun by the strings in octaves against punctuating chords on the horns and trombones. For the rest this Finale is concerned almost exclusively with two themes, the second of them a lengthy and flowing melody initially stated by all the violins on the G strings. In a work by Tchaikovsky this would have probably become known as the 'love' theme, but Sibelius had no programme in mind, even if misguided well-wishers have attempted to attach one to the work.

What dependence Sibelius had on the Russian nationalist school of composers during the earlier part of his career quickly disappeared, although Borodin's methods have been traced in the Second Symphony of 1901. In both the Third (1907) and the Fifth (1919) compression led to one movement serving the purposes of two. It was not a case of merely linking a pair of movements together, but of welding them into an indivisible and related whole. This process was carried to its logical conclusion in 1924 with the Seventh Symphony, the last Sibelius was to give to the world, even though it was not the last he was to compose. Reliable and detailed information concerning the Eighth Symphony is still lacking, and liable to remain so for ever, since no trace of it has been found. Although normally reluctant to speak about his own music Sibelius, after completing the third and final version of his Fifth Symphony, mentioned plans he had for two more. The first of these became his Sixth (1923), while the second was to have been in three movements, ending with an 'Hellenic' rondo. It has been assumed this work eventually became the one-

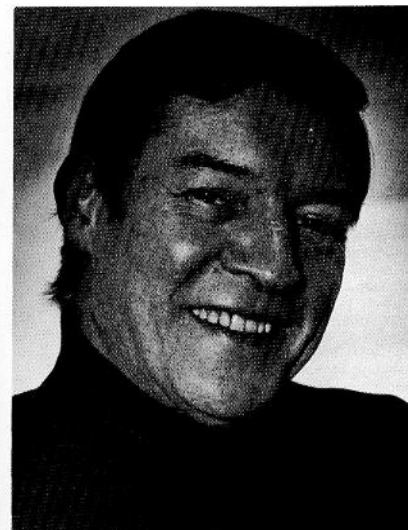
movement Seventh Symphony. Such an assumption is dubious to say the least, the more so since the work we know as the Seventh was not conceived as a symphony but as a symphonic fantasia, under which title it was first performed. The Symphony that was to have ended with the Hellenic rondo could, therefore, well have been the projected Eighth. The fact that Sibelius initially thought of the Seventh as a fantasia, and only afterwards changed its title, has apparently caused some people to have doubts about it being a genuine symphony. True, the work does not respond to formal analysis of the type applied to a classical or romantic symphony, but a single hearing should be sufficient to convince that it contains all the essential ingredients of such a work.

To analyse the form of the Seventh Symphony using conventional terminology is impossible, since such expressions as first and second subjects, transition themes and development sections do not apply. Development is continuous from the outset, and it is not often possible to say precisely where one section ends and a new one begins. No wonder those who have attempted a formal analysis have produced conflicting results. This is not to say one is right and another wrong, for the form is open to various interpretations, all of which are valid. For instance, the slow opening section has been labelled both an introduction and an exposition. Both definitions are correct, for the music is introductory in feeling yet almost everything that follows springs from it. Whether this section should include the first of the three trombone solos is a debatable point. Some have regarded this passage as the equivalent of a second subject (in which case it is in a wrong key), and others as the main piece of thematic material in an entirely new section that is recapitulated during the Symphony's closing stage. What listeners cannot fail to miss is that this trombone solo, in different but easily recognisable shapes and set in complex textures, occurs three times during the course of the work, punctuating it like three great pillars. Its final appearance is

preceded by a substantial section that comes closer to anything else in the work to a sonata-form structure. Even though its material appears to be new, it relates back to the opening pages. The Seventh Symphony must be counted among the most individual and successful examples of organic growth in all music.

Its formal aspect, however one chooses to approach it, is unique and can never be duplicated, since it arises as the inevitable result of the content. Largely because of this, structural complexity is no hindrance to appreciation.

© Malcolm Rayment



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

The Scottish National Orchestra

Founded in 1950, the Scottish National Orchestra grew out of the old Scottish Orchestra—a seasonal body of players which existed in Glasgow from 1891, performing under such conductors as Herschel, Sullivan, Barbirolli and Szell. During Walter Susskind's conductorship, from 1946 until 1952, the orchestra became a permanent organisation. Susskind's successors were Karl Rankl, Hans Swarowsky and, since 1959, Sir Alexander Gibson—the first Scot to hold the post of musical director.

Today the orchestra makes over one hundred and fifty appearances annually throughout Scotland and appears frequently at most of the major festivals as well as fulfilling an ever-increasing number of recording

engagements and London appearances. Three major European tours have been undertaken and, in 1975, the Scottish National Orchestra made its highly successful North American debut. In 1981, it made a twenty-city United Kingdom tour and in 1982 accepted a long-standing invitation to return to the United States and Canada for a sixteen-concert tour.

As well as playing a large part in the success of Scottish Opera, the Scottish National Orchestra has given many important world and British premières and, now acknowledged to be an orchestra of the highest international calibre, it was honoured, in 1978, with the grant of patronage by Her Majesty the Queen.

Sir Alexander Gibson C.B.E.

Sir Alexander Gibson was born in Motherwell. He was educated at Dalziel High School, Glasgow University, the Royal College of Music, the Mozarteum in Salzburg and the Academia Chigiano in Siena. He spent two years as Assistant Conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra before going to Sadler's Wells in 1954 as a Staff Conductor. He was appointed Musical Director and Principal Conductor of the Scottish National Orchestra in 1959. Three years later he founded Scottish Opera and became its Artistic Director.

In establishing Musica Viva in 1960 and, more recently, Musica Nova, he demonstrated his commitment to the performance of contemporary music and

has conducted an impressive number of both world and British premières of works by many of today's major composers.

His recordings have won him two Prix de Disque awards and in 1978 he became one of the few recipients of the Sibelius Medal for his outstanding contribution to the appreciation of Sibelius's music throughout the world. He is the first and only musician to be appointed an Honorary Member of the Royal Scottish Academy and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He was created CBE in 1967 and was made a Knight Bachelor in the Queen's Jubilee Honours List in 1977.

CHANDOS DIGITAL RECORDING

This recording was mastered and edited on Chandos Complete PCM Digital System. This system is superior to conventional analog (tape recorder) recording in dynamic range, signal to noise and distortion.

Equipment used:

- Schoeps & Neumann microphones
- New classical mixing console—State of the Art specification designed and built by Chandos
- Sony PCM 1610 Digital processor
- DAE-1100 Digital electronic editor
- Digital information stored in BVU 200A recorders

Although analog tape recorders have been remarkably improved today, they are still limited by a number of drawbacks resulting in distortion and dynamic range limitations. These limits are inherent in the tape, heads, and other mechanical factors, and it is virtually impossible to eliminate them completely.

Digital recording, including PCM (Pulse Code Modulation) is a revolutionary technique to leave these limitations of present analog recorders behind. With digital systems, the sound signal is recorded and transmitted in the form of digital codes and this provides a whole host of features.

Outstanding among them are:

- Wide dynamic range ● Flat frequency response regardless of input level
- Extremely low distortion ● Superior transient characteristics
- No deterioration when repeatedly duplicated

Chandos

CHAN 8344

Jean Julius Christian Sibelius
Symphonies 1 & 7

Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39

- 1 First movement : Andante ma non troppo — Allegro energico (11:11)
- 2 Second movement : Andante (ma non troppo lento) (9:01)
- 3 Third movement : Scherzo — Allegro ma non troppo (5:02)
- 4 Fourth movement : Finale (Quasi una Fantasia)
Andante — Allegro molto (11:54)

5 Symphony No. 7 in C, Op. 105

In one movement (20:55)

DDD

Scottish National Orchestra
(leader: Edwin Paling)

conducted by
Sir Alexander Gibson

Recorded in association with General Accident

**General
Accident**

Formed in Perth, Scotland in 1885, General Accident is now one of
Britain's largest insurance groups, operating in over 50 countries worldwide.
The Corporation is very conscious of the importance of sponsorship
of the Arts in the United Kingdom.

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