

Chandos

CHAN 8388



*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 4 & 5*



*Scottish National Orchestra*  
*Sir Alexander Gibson*

General  
Accident

This recording is sponsored by General Accident

**General  
Accident**

In association with Chandos Records Limited, General Accident is pleased to bring to music lovers this production of Sibelius's Third and Sixth Symphonies by the Scottish National Orchestra. This is the fourth 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 1983  
Cover design: General Accident Design Unit*

**W**HILE IT CANNOT be said that any of Sibelius's seven symphonies are neglected, some receive less attention than others. Probably the least performed is the Sixth, which is understandable in view of its restrained and elusive character. The Third, too, crops up only occasionally. In this case the reasons are more difficult to fathom, but a possible one is that its central movement suffers a little by comparison with the corresponding and similar one of the Fifth. Another possible reason—one that has not been put before—is that the Third is very difficult to play really well. Unlike its two predecessors, which owe much to the nineteenth century romantic tradition, this work is thoroughly classical in spirit. Although the feeling of inevitability imparted by the Third Symphony might suggest it was written both easily and quickly, Sibelius laboured over the work for almost three years, eventually finishing it in 1907. Apart from the Fifth no other symphony caused him so much trouble. A possible cause of this is that the work represents a decided break with the past. Indeed, it may be said that the Third is the first symphony, although not the first work, of Sibelius's full maturity.

If the opening movement is classical in spirit, it is no less so as regards form, the only departure from the usual sonata structure being that new, or almost new, material appears in the coda. However this is no classical pastiche but a movement with an exceptionally high degree of organic unity. Although lengthy, the first subject, begun by the cellos and basses in octaves without harmonic support, impinges itself on the memory because of the rhythmic repetition it contains. There follows a short appendage for the violins and violas, and another in which the woodwind are heard in dialogue with a bustling passage for the strings. Next the horns introduce a new idea that, after a short climax during which the heavy brass make their first appearance, turns out to have been a foretaste of the second subject, which is delivered in full by the cellos. Thus a relationship between first and second subject material is established, and it grows throughout the rest of the exposition and the development section.

Towards the end of the latter the opening subject's rhythm becomes more and more insistent until it launches the recapitulation before the development has ended—a masterly piece of dovetailing.

The straightforward second movement has the function of an intermezzo, although some have regarded it as a slowish scherzo. Apart from two short episodes, the first of which returns to form the coda, the movement is concerned wholly with a single, rather march-like theme; much of its charm derives from the interplay of duple and triple time. Such development as there is stems from the long delayed closing phrase added to the theme by a clarinet.

From the formal point of view by far the most original movement is the last. Falling into two parts of roughly equal length, the first in 6/8 and the second in 4/4 time, it serves as a fast scherzo followed by a finale—which is not to say two independent movements have been linked together. Appropriately the scherzo section is largely made up of fragmentary ideas, one of them taken from the previous movement, while the formal layout approximates to the first two-thirds of a sonata form. In other words the exposition and development sections are not followed by a recapitulation. In place of this last we have the second part of the movement, corresponding to the finale. It is based on a single theme but one that, from a beginning of only two notes, has evolved gradually during the later stages of the scherzo.

While working on the third and final version of the Fifth Symphony in 1918, Sibelius planned two more. One of these eventually saw the light of day early in 1923 as No. 6, while the other may well have been the long-awaited, ill-fated No. 8, all traces of which have disappeared; certainly it did not become the one-movement Seventh Symphony. The Sixth is rightly looked upon as a work for connoisseurs. Although the score includes parts for a bass clarinet and a harp—the first does not appear in any other symphony by Sibelius and the second only in No. 1—these additions are not the result of a return to the more luxuriant textures of the early symphonies.

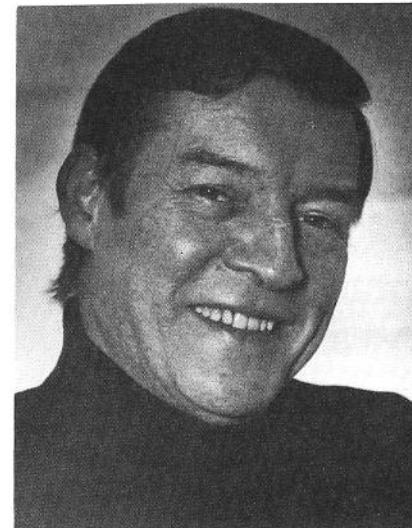
The Sixth is usually described as being in D minor, but the composer did not specify this or any other key on his manuscript. In point of fact the only time one flat appears as the key signature during the opening movement, it denotes F major and not D minor. Elsewhere B natural (as opposed to B flat) persists, as does C natural in place of the leading note C sharp. Consequently the Symphony would be more accurately described as being in the Dorian mode on D.

This scale consisting of the 'white' notes, its constituents are identical with those of C major, and indeed this key plays such an important role that C rivals D as the Symphony's tonal centre. This question of key is doubly important because of the effect it has on analysis. It also explains why annotators have arrived at conflicting views. Some, for instance, deny that the first movement is in sonata form, while others, who agree this to be the basis, differ over what constitutes the first and second subjects. That the arguments they use to back up their analyses are convincing shows the formal structure to be open to more than one valid interpretation. Although to some extent still acknowledging classical forms Sibelius has left them far behind, creating his own logic deriving from the content, which here is unified by what the Finnish conductor Simon Parmet, a close friend of the composer, called the 'kernel-motif'. This consists merely of a downward stepwise progression, initially of only three notes, but soon extended to four and five. It can, of course, be inverted, so moving upwards, and in these two forms it casts its influence over the whole work. We hear it repeatedly in the opening passage for the upper strings only. The inversion appears when the oboes enter with what in the opinion of many is the first subject. Parmet, however, regarded everything up to the apparent change of tempo as introductory. In fact no increase of tempo is specified by the composer; it is the introduction of shorter note values that gives the illusion that the tempo doubles at the point where the harp enters. To some analysts what follows on the woodwind is the second subject, but Parmet regarded it as the first, stating that the second does not appear until the recapitulation. Listeners can

take their choice.

The pointlessness of attempting to attach labels to themes or of trying to force the music into established moulds is equally well illustrated by the remaining movements. In the case of the second the tempo indication *Allegretto moderato* is rather misleading; on occasion it has led to speeds that are too fast. Sibelius is said to have wanted this indication removed and *Andantino* put in its place. If one accepts that the last part of the main theme, given to the violins, grows into a second subject, then there is a resemblance to sonata form during the first two-thirds and the movement. As for the last third, throughout most of which the strings maintain a perpetual mobile succession of semiquavers, it might be described as a middle section, were it not for the fact that only the briefest reference is made to the first part afterwards. The short third movement is the Symphony's scherzo, and here at least, the overall, if not the detailed, plan is plain enough. It consists of A-B-A-B-Coda, preceded by a short introduction that recurs and also provides the rhythmic basis of the B sections. The finale opens in an antiphonal manner with various sections answering each other, and virtually everything that follows derives from this material. As in the first movement there is an apparent, as opposed to real, change of tempo, after which an extended theme, derived largely from the opening bars, is given three very different treatments. Following the third of these the opening antiphonal music returns in shortened and varied form, the initial phrase, complemented later by its consequent, being afterwards taken up in lively manner (*Allegro assai*). Finally the tempo is halved for the coda during which the 'kernel-motif', that all important unifying idea, sings out in the upper register of the violins prior to having the last word.

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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 Henschel, 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, including the Grand Prix International de l'Académie Charles Cros and, in 1978, he became one of the few recipients of the Sibelius Medal. He was the first 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.

In 1984 Sir Alexander Gibson relinquishes the Musical Directorship of the SNO, on the completion of 25 years' service in that capacity.

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*Jean Julius Christian Sibelius*  
*Symphonies 4 & 5*

**Symphony No. 4 in A minor, Op. 63**

- 1 First movement : Tempo molto moderato, quasi adagio (8:00)
- 2 Second movement : Allegro molto vivace (4:51)
- 3 Third movement : Il tempo largo (7:39)
- 4 Fourth movement : Allegro (9:14)

**Symphony No. 5 in E flat major, Op. 82**

- 5 First movement : Tempo molto moderato—Allegro moderato (12:36)
- 6 Second movement : Andante mosso, quasi allegretto (7:39)
- 7 Third movement : Allegro molto (8:52)

*Scottish National Orchestra*  
(leader: Edwin Paling)

conducted by  
*Sir Alexander Gibson*

Recorded in association with General Accident

**General  
Accident**

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Britain's largest insurance groups, operating in over 50 countries worldwide.  
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