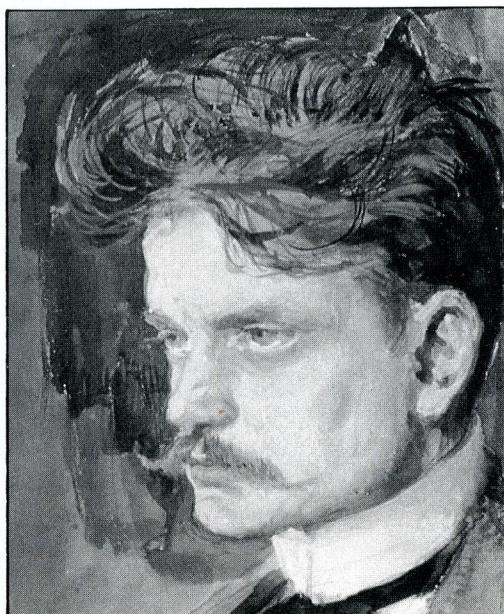


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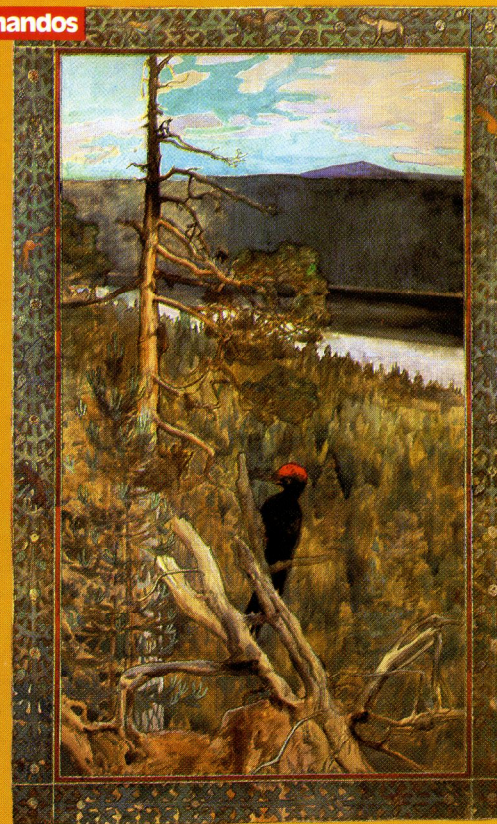
SIBELIUS

**Scenes
Historiques**
Suites 1 and 2

Rakastava

Valse Lyrique

Scottish National
Orchestra
**Sir Alexander
Gibson**



**DIGITALLY
REMASTERED**

Sibelius was in the forefront of artists who dedicated their efforts to the growing sense of national identity within Finland during the long years of Russian domination. After the success of his *Kullervo* Symphony in 1893 Sibelius was happy to provide music for a series of historical tableaux to emphasise the cultural ties between Karelia and the rest of Finland, from which came his *Karelia Suite*, and six years later he was the obvious composer to provide similar introductory music for six tableaux whose subjects were concerned with Finland's own history. Only a year earlier, as the Russian grip grew tighter around the Finns, he had written a *Song of the Athenians*, on the face of it a setting of a text concerned with the Greeks of Athens and their love for freedom, which was accepted by young Finns and performed all over the country at every opportunity, including sports meetings and in schools. With his new tableaux music Sibelius was to give them virtually a new national anthem, for the last part, *Finland Awakes!*, soon became *Finlandia*.

Ostensibly the three-day event was to raise money for the pension funds of newspapermen, but the real reason was to give positive moral and practical support to sustain and maintain a free press, constantly pitted against the Tsarist Establishment.

For the climax of the activities Kaarlo Bergbom staged six Historical Tableaux with texts by Eino Leino and Jalmari Finne and music by Jean Sibelius. These were given on 4 November 1899 in the Swedish Theatre with proceeds to go direct to the 'Press Pension Celebrations.' Russia's Governor-General of Finland, Bobrikov, ironically suggested that the tickets in the Imperial Box should be auctioned "in the interests of so good a cause." Sibelius' music had the dual purpose of both quieting the audience and preparing them for each scene.

Preceding the tableaux Sibelius wrote a short Prelude, scored for wind instruments. Then came his music for the First Tableaux and the six scenes flowed without interruption. They were titled: 1. Väinämöinen's Song. 2. The Finns are baptized. 3. Duke Johan at Åbo Castle. 4. The Finns in the 30-year War. 5. The Great Unrest. 6. Finland Awakes!

A month after the 'Press Pension Celebrations' Robert Kajanus included five of the seven movements, including the Prelude, at one of his regular symphony

concerts in Helsinki, omitting the second and fifth tableaux. These two movements, together with the Prelude, remained in manuscript while the final movement became *Finlandia*, leaving the first, third and fourth movements. These three were revised by the composer and published as **Scenes historiques No 1** in 1911. However, he removed their tableaux titles and reversed the order of Nos 3 and 4, which made a better finale and was now titled *Festivo*.

The *All'Overture* is music which took the Swedish Theatre audience back to Finland's pre-Christian past. After the staged performance the tableaux were described for readers of the *Hufvudstadsbladet*, which convey the idea behind each movement: "Väinämöinen is discovered seated at a rock playing the kantele. Not only do the peoples of Kalevala and Pohjola listen entranced but also the powers of nature". A kantele, by the way, is Finland's most popular folk instrument, of the psaltery type.

The *Scena* was played before the tableaux for The Finns in the 30-year War. This occupied the period 1618–1648. "From a height young Finnish peasants hurry to the struggle. The arbiter of battle hands them the key to the war, the banner of freedom". During the pensive introduction the music is interrupted by fanfares. During the battle music the strings are instructed to play *sul ponticello*, when they play near the bridge to produce a strange nasal sound; this, together with the muted horns, creates a strong atmosphere of the horrors of war.

Sibelius obviously relished the chance to show his cosmopolitan qualities in the third tableaux: Duke Johan at Åbo Castle, which became *Festivo* in the revised version. The Duke was a Swedish ruler of Finland during the 16th century and his court was near the then capital of Turku. There he lived with his beautiful Spanish-born wife, Katarina Jagellonica, both much in love with Finland and anxious to help the country. She is surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting, pages and, of course, cavaliers. There is a suitably Spanish flavour to the music, in honour of the Duchess.

Having published the *Scenes historiques No 1* Sibelius set to to produce a second suite, which was published in 1912 and first performed in March of that year under the composer's baton.

However, despite the title, the **Scenes historiques No 2** does not use material

from the original tableaux. It is also scored for a smaller orchestra, although some commentators find a slight reminder of *Festivo* in the final movement. *The Chase* opens with a slow introduction which anticipates the main allegro, itself catching the uneasy excitement of the title, culminating in a majestic coda where the tempi is cut to half speed.

Both the solo cello and the harp are evocatively exploited in the short but extremely expressive *Love Song*. This sets the mood for the flutes to set the scene for *At the Drawbridge* which begins in glowing good humour and gently subsides into a quiet conclusion. For the Sibelius of 1912 had developed subtle musicianship to a high degree, as evidenced by the Fourth Symphony, completed in 1911.

During 1911, too, Sibelius had been revising **Rakastava**, the three movements of which were published in 1913. The original version of this also belonged to the year of the Kalevala tableaux, 1893, and was composed for entry to a choral competition, apparently winning the second prize. The following year Sibelius rescored the piece for choir with a string orchestra and, in 1898, a further version for unaccompanied mixed chorus. He then left the work alone until 1911, in Paris, when he recomposed it for string orchestra, triangle and timpani, completing this final version after his return to Finland. With the Fourth Symphony exerting its intensely serious character on the composer it is not surprising that some of this quality infects *Rakastava*.

The first movement is a musical portrait of the *Beloved* of the title, opening with a simple statement of an uncomplicated theme, marked *andante con moto*. As this is repeated it grows in character until divided strings precede a quiet drum roll before the full warmth of the string orchestra recalls the theme for the last time.

The Way of the Lover moves along with the quicksilver pulse provided by ceaseless triplets out of which the cellos and basses pluck out a theme which is never allowed to take over, because the pulse is inexorable. It is the triangle, in six persistent dings, which calls a halt to a movement which could well continue into infinity.

The last movement is cast in three sections, following the title: *Good Night*,

My Beloved . . . Farewell! A solo violin enhances the first, giving way to a faster section, full of expressive anticipation; then a beautiful *Lento assai*, at the close of which a solo cello sings poignantly and with love over the other strings.

Valse Lyrique was composed in 1920, the first of a set of three orchestral pieces, the others being a pastoral scene called *Autrefois* and a *Valse chevaleresque*. It is a charming example of the popular music which occupied Sibelius between the completion of the Fifth Symphony in 1915 and the writing of the Sixth Symphony in 1923.

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JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

SCENES HISTORIQUES

Suite No. 1 Opus 25 (TT = 18:48)

- 1 I – *All' Overtura* 4:49
- 2 II – *Scena* 6:25
- 3 III – *Festivo* 7:24

SUITE: RAKASTAVA (The Beloved) Opus 14 (TT = 12:16)

- 4 I – *Rakastava: Andante con moto* 3:59
- 5 II – *The Way of the Lover* 2:14
- 6 III – *Finale: Good Night my Beloved . . .
Farewell* 5:55

SCENES HISTORIQUES

Suite No. 2 Opus 66 (TT = 18:03)

- 7 I – *The Chase* 7:18
- 8 II – *The Love Song* 4:12
- 9 III – *At the Drawbridge* 6:25

10 *VALSE LYRIQUE Opus 96* (4:19)

Scottish National Orchestra

Leader, Edwin Paling

conducted by

Sir Alexander Gibson

ADD

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