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SIBELIUS

Piano Miniatures

Romance • Evening Song

The Storm • Song in the Forest

Håvard Gimse, Piano



Jean Sibelius (1865 – 1957)

Piano Music Volume 5

The Finnish composer Jean Sibelius was born in 1865, the son of a doctor, in a small town in the south of Finland. The language and culture of his family, as with others of their class and background at the time, was Swedish. It was at school that Sibelius was to learn Finnish and acquire his first real interest in the early legends of his own country. In this society, linguistically, socially and historically divided, Sibelius was deeply influenced by his association with the family of the Finnish nationalist General Järnefelt, whose daughter Aino became his wife. Nevertheless Swedish remained his mother tongue, in which he expressed himself with greater fluency than in Finnish.

The musical abilities of Sibelius were soon realised, although he had entered university in Helsinki as a law student. His first ambition had been to be a violinist, but his abilities here were far outweighed by his gifts as a composer, developed first by study in Helsinki, then in Berlin and finally with Goldmark and with Robert Fuchs in Vienna.

In Finland once more, Sibelius won almost immediate success in 1892 with a symphonic poem, *Kullervo*, based on an episode from the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*. There followed compositions of particular national appeal that further enhanced his reputation in Helsinki, including the incidental music to the patriotic pageant *Karelia*, *En Saga* and the *Lemminkäinen Suite*. During this period Sibelius supported himself and his wife by teaching, as well as by composition and the performance of his works, but it proved difficult for him to earn enough, given, as he was, to bouts of extravagance, continuing the practice of his days as a student. As consolation for his disappointment when his appointment as professor in Helsinki was rejected, Sibelius was awarded in 1897 a government stipend for ten years, later changed into a pension for life. The sum involved was never enough to meet his inherited gift for improvidence and his seeming dependence on alcohol.

Sibelius continued his active career as a composer until 1926, his fame increasing at home and abroad. The

successful *First Symphony* of 1898 was followed by the still more successful *Finlandia*. The acclaimed *Second Symphony*, in 1902, was followed by the *Violin Concerto*, a *Third Symphony* and, after an illness that put an end for the moment to any indulgence in alcohol and tobacco, a *Fourth*, with travel to the major musical centres of Europe and international honour. The *Fifth Symphony* was written during the war, after which Sibelius wrote only four more works of any substance, the *Sixth* and *Seventh Symphonies*, incidental music for Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and, in 1926, the symphonic poem *Tapiola*. An *Eighth Symphony* was completed in 1929, but destroyed. The rest was silence. For the last 25 years of his life he wrote nothing until his death in 1957 at the age of 91.

In common with other composers of the period, Sibelius found a commercial market for his piano music, particularly for sets of short pieces suitable for domestic performance. Although his writing for the piano is seldom idiomatic, he composed a number of works for the instrument, the first from the 1880s unpublished, as was the last set of pieces, written in 1929. The outbreak of war in 1914 found Finland, a Russian Grand Duchy, on the side of the Allies against the Central Powers. For Sibelius this brought two particular difficulties. Although means were found for him to receive royalties from his German publishers, Breitkopf and Härtel, his concert tours abroad came to an end, and he was, in any case, seriously in debt. The shortage of money compelled him to turn his attention to a series of short piano pieces for the amateur market, interrupting his work on his *Fifth Symphony*. The period after the war brought further disturbance in Finland, when the Communists seized power, as they had in Russia, to be defeated eventually under General Mannerheim. With the *Fifth Symphony* completed in 1919, Sibelius now had a sixth in mind, but, as always, there were problems of money. The result, in part, was more short piano pieces.

1920 brought an invitation to serve as Professor of

Composition at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, an offer Sibelius felt obliged to refuse, in part because of his position as a pensioner of the state at home. Variations in the value of both Finnish and German currency brought increasing difficulties, and the disproportion between the rewards for major works and those for relatively insignificant piano pieces for the amateur market remained, as always, considerable. In October he completed a set of six such pieces, the first three new, to add to an earlier three for Breitkopf. The *Six Bagatelles*, *Op. 97*, published by the latter in 1921, start with a *Humoresque*, derived from an unaccompanied melody, to which a syncopated accompaniment is added. The attractive *Song*, marked *Andantino*, keeps its gentle melody in the upper part, and the *Little Waltz* introduces a livelier mood, shared by the capricious *Humorous March*. The fifth piece, *Impromptu*, mounts to a brief dynamic climax, before subsiding into melancholy serenity once more, and the final *Humoresque* offers contrast between its *Poco lento* opening section and the *Vivace* that follows.

Two years later problems continued. The *Fifth Symphony* had proved a success with audiences in London and America, but Sibelius was short of money and not encouraged by the rejection of works he had offered to London publishers. The *Eight Little Pieces*, *Op. 99*, of 1922 were published by his usual Finnish publisher, Fazer. The opening *Pièce humoristique* is very much of its period, followed by a lively *C major Esquisse* and a nostalgic *Souvenir*. *Impromptu* has the not entirely appropriate direction *Quasi Marcia*, while *Couplet*, marked *Commodo*, is gently effective. *Animoso*, with its dotted 6/8 rhythm, has echoes of Schumann's *Florestan*, leading to a C major *Moment de valse* and a final *Petite marche*.

In 1923 Sibelius conducted the first performance of his *Sixth Symphony* and was able to conduct concerts of his music in Rome, the city where he had once worked on his *Second Symphony*. The *Five Romantic Pieces*,

Op. 101, published, after some initial disagreement, by Hansen in Denmark, are more ambitious in scope. The first of the set, *Romance*, is orchestral in conception, and *Chant du soir* again uses a relatively wide range of the keyboard and something of the palette of Debussy. *Scène lyrique* offers an expressive melody, at first in the middle register, leading to a more energetic second section, and *Humoresque*, opening with Lisztian sweep, is marked by sudden shifts of tonality. The set ends with *Scène romantique*, with further suggestions of France in its harmonies.

By 1924 Sibelius had turned his thoughts towards his *Seventh Symphony*, completed in March. The *Five Characteristic Impressions*, *Op. 103*, of that year open with *The Village Church*, suggested at first by a chorale-like chordal opening that mounts to a climax and rippling arpeggios before the chords return. *The Fiddler*, whimsical in character, is followed by *The Oarsman*, its 6/8 metre suggesting the rocking motion of the boat. *The Storm* lives up to its title, as does the funereal *In Mournful Mood* with which the set ends.

The *Cinq Esquisses* (Five Sketches), *Op. 114*, are the last piano pieces that Sibelius wrote, to be followed in the same year, 1929, by two sets of pieces for violin and piano, the last of his numbered works to be published in his lifetime. *Maisema* (Landscape) is thoroughly pianistic in style in its contrast between chordal passages and rapider sections. *Talvikuva* (Winter Scene) reflects a snow-covered and hushed winter landscape, to be followed by the livelier *Metsälampi* (Forest Lake). *Metsälaulu* (Song in the Forest) leads to a singing melody, *mezza voce*, set in the midst of characteristic harmonies. The pieces end with *Ketvätinäky* (Spring Vision), breathing an air of brighter optimism.

Keith Anderson

Håvard Gimse

Håvard Gimse was born in 1966 at Kongsvinger and has established himself as one of Scandinavia's leading international pianists. After gaining his Diploma at the Berlin Hochschule der Künste in 1995, he continued his studies with Jiri Hlinka in Norway. Gimse's New York Lincoln Center début in 1994 with the Riverside Symphony was acclaimed by critics and excellent reviews also greeted his appearances as a soloist with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra on tour in Great Britain, with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra on tour to Austria, and with the Janáček Philharmonic in Tokyo. Håvard Gimse has appeared as a soloist with other leading orchestras in Scandinavia and throughout Europe, as well as in Latin America, collaborating with conductors of great distinction. He has appeared at international festivals in many musical centres in Europe and as far afield as Mexico, while continuing an active career in chamber music that has taken him to major recital venues in London, Amsterdam, Prague and Berlin. Since 1997 he has served as an assistant programme manager for the Oslo Chamber Music Festival. Håvard Gimse was awarded the prestigious Grieg Prize in 1996, while earlier awards include first prize in the 1987 Jugend Musiziert and the 1995 Steinway Prize. For Naxos he has recorded the complete piano music of Sibelius and he has also recorded for a number of other major companies.

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Piano Music • 5

	Six Bagatelles, Op. 97	10:31
1	Humoreske I	1:55
2	Lied (Song)	2:38
3	Kleiner Walzer (Little Waltz)	1:15
4	Humoristischer Marsch (Humorous March)	1:07
5	Impromptu	1:59
6	Humoreske II	1:38
	Huit Petits Morceaux (Eight Little Pieces), Op. 99	10:45
7	Pièce humoristique	1:18
8	Esquisse	0:45
9	Souvenir	1:53
10	Impromptu	1:10
11	Couplet	1:40
12	Animoso	1:27
13	Moment de valse	1:07
14	Petite marche	1:25
	Cinq Morceaux Romantiques (Five Romantic Pieces), Op. 101	14:09
15	Romance	3:08
16	Chant du soir (Evening Song)	2:06
17	Scène lyrique	2:33
18	Humoresque	2:18
19	Scène romantique	4:03
	Five Characteristic Impressions, Op. 103	12:02
20	The Village Church	3:40
21	The Fiddler	2:08
22	The Oarsman	2:05
23	The Storm	1:37
24	In Mournful Mood	2:32
	Cinq Esquisses, Op. 114	10:44
25	Maisema (Landscape)	2:21
26	Talvikuva (Winter Scene)	2:58
27	Metsälampi (Forest Lake)	1:23
28	Metsälaulu (Song in the Forest)	2:16
29	Kevätinäky (Spring Vision)	1:44

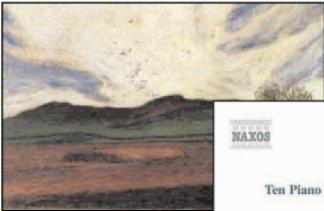
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Piano Music Vol. 2

Six Finnish Folk-Songs • Ten Bagatelles, Op. 34
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Håvard Gimse



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Ten Piano Pieces, Op. 58 • Three Sonatas, Op. 67

Håvard Gimse



 **SIBELIUS** 
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Piano Miniatures

Aquilegia • Twinflower of the North
The Lonely Fir • When the Rowan Blossoms

Håvard Gimse, Piano





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Playing Time
59:11

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Sibelius often took time away from his larger scores to compose piano pieces intended for amateur performance. The collections of short pieces in this recording all originated in this way, and, although he was not instinctively a composer for the piano, the craft of the greatest of Finnish composers is evident in these very attractive miniatures.

Jean
SIBELIUS
(1865-1957)

Piano Music Volume 5

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|-------|---|--------------|
| 1-6 | Six Bagatelles, Op. 97 | 10:31 |
| 7-14 | Eight Little Pieces, Op. 99 | 10:45 |
| 15-19 | Five Romantic Pieces, Op. 101 | 14:09 |
| 20-24 | Five Characteristic Impressions, Op. 103 | 12:02 |
| 25-29 | Cinq Esquisses (Five Sketches), Op. 114 | 10:44 |

Håvard Gimse, Piano

A complete tracklist can be found in the booklet.

Publishers: Breitkopf (Tracks 1-6), Fazer (Tracks 7-14 and 25-29), Fischer (Tracks 15-24)
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