



JEAN SIBELIUS

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

Jean Sibelius (8 December 1865 – 20 September 1957) was a Finnish violinist and composer of the late Romantic period. His music contributed to the development of a feeling of national identity in Finland where he is now celebrated as the country's greatest composer. The core of his oeuvre is his set of seven symphonies, which continue to be performed and recorded in his home country and internationally. Sibelius composed prolifically until the mid-1920s but did not produce any large-scale works in his last thirty years. Although he is reputed to have stopped composing, he attempted to continue writing, including abortive efforts on an eighth symphony. In later life, he wrote Masonic music and re-edited some earlier works while retaining an active but not always favourable interest in new developments in music. Like many of his contemporaries, Sibelius was initially enamored by the music of Wagner. However, his appreciation for Wagner waned, turning to more lasting influences such as Ferruccio Busoni, Anton Bruckner and Tchaikovsky. Similarities to Bruckner are most strongly felt in the 'unmixed' timbral palette and sombre brass chorales of Sibelius' orchestration, a fondness for pedal points, and in the underlying slow pace of the music. Sibelius progressively stripped away formal markers of sonata form in his work and, instead of contrasting multiple themes, focused on the idea of continuously evolving cells and fragments culminating in a grand statement. The completeness and organic feel of this synthesis has prompted some to suggest that Sibelius began his works with a finished statement and worked backwards, although analyses effectively prove the opposite. Underlining his symphonic style, Sibelius said that he "admired [the symphony's] severity of style and the profound logic that created an inner connection between all the motifs."

Sibelius was commissioned to write the **Symphony No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 82** by the Finnish government in honor of his 50th birthday, which had been declared a national holiday. The symphony was originally composed in 1915. It was revised first in 1916 and then again in 1919. Reflecting on various changes since the beginning of the 20th century – Schoenberg's more dissonant language, Stravinsky's innovations in rhythm, and the work of the French Impressionists – Sibelius felt forced to choose between changing his style to fill the more modern desires of audiences or continue composing as he felt best fit. The first version of this symphony kept his orchestral style (consonant sonorities, woodwind lines in parallel thirds, rich melodic development, etc.) while further developing his structural style. The first version of the Fifth Symphony still has much in common with the more modernist Fourth Symphony as it features some bitonal passages; the version from 1919 seems to be more straightforward and classicistic. Sibelius commented on his revision: "I wished to give my symphony another – more human – form. More down-to-earth, more vivid." With only three movements, Sibelius' Fifth Symphony is different from the four-movement structure that was the norm since Haydn.