



Sibelius

1957 Memorial Concert - 14 Song Recital



Jean Sibelius died on 20 September 1957, at the age of 91. Easily the best-known Finnish composer, his symphonies and tone poems remain in the mainstream of concert repertoire and extremely popular with audiences.

A few weeks after his death a memorial concert was organised at Carnegie Hall in New York, featuring members of the New York Philharmonic under the baton of Finnish conductor Martti Similä. The date chosen, 8 December, would have been Sibelius's 92nd birthday. Naturally the programme consisted entirely of works by Sibelius: his fourth symphony, tone poems *En Saga* and *Finlandia*, and five songs sung by Swedish tenor Jussi Björling.

Symphony no.4 was premiered in 1911 and has often been interpreted as being full of foreboding for a Europe on the cusp of war. Sibelius himself stated that the work was a 'protest against present-day music' in particular the atonal works of composers such as Schoenberg.

En Saga (A fairy tale) was written in 1892, and is not meant to portray a particular story. Sibelius believed that "*En Saga* is psychologically one of my most profound works. I could almost say that the whole of my youth is contained within it. It is an expression of a state of mind. When I was writing *En Saga* I went through many things that were upsetting to me. In no other work have I revealed myself as completely as in *En Saga*."

Finlandia was written in 1899 and meant to symbolise key moments in Finland's history, encapsulated in the phrase 'Finland Awakens.' Reflecting on the immediate popularity of the piece Sibelius recorded in his diary "What is so attractive about this symphonic poem? Surely it is its 'plein air' style. Really, it is based entirely on themes 'given from above'. Pure inspiration."

Jussi Björling sings the five Sibelius songs in his native Swedish: Säv, säv, susa [Reed, reed, rustle]. Flickan kom ifrån sin älsklings mote [The girl returned from meeting her lover]. Var det en dröm? [Was it a dream?] Svarta rosor [Black Roses]. Demanten på marssnön [The Diamond in the March snow]. Songs 1, 4 and 5 are from Op. 26, songs 2 and 3 from Op.37. Björling regularly performed these Sibelius songs in his concerts, and made commercial recordings of nos.1, 4 and 5. His affinity with the music is absolute, and his extremely beautiful tone captures the essence of these songs perfectly.

Martti Similä was a close friend of Sibelius and was chief conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic (1945-51) and then the Lahti Symphony (1951-57). After conducting a concert in honour of Sibelius's 80th birthday Sibelius informed him 'You have understood my psyche as very few others have.' He died at the age of 59 shortly after conducting this performance on 9 January 1958.

We have Decca producer John Culshaw to thank for enticing Kirsten Flagstad out of retirement in the late 1950s. After being an RCA Victor artist since 1935, her recording career seemed over when she parted ways with the company in 1954, partly over the leak of information about the 'assistance' provided for some high notes in the complete recording of *Tristan und Isolde*. Culshaw assiduously courted Flagstad, and eventually she agreed to record first lieder and then more substantial pieces, including acts 1 and 3 of *Die Walküre*. Much of the lieder she recorded was from Scandinavia and the Sibelius album was recorded in stereo in 1958. Despite being over 60 years old, Flagstad's vocal technique remained absolutely rock solid and her seamless voice was capable of great nobility and tenderness while still being fully capable of soaring over every orchestral climax.

sibelius

new york memorial concert, 1957



symphony no. 4

five songs

en saga

finlandia

anthems:

**the star spangled banner
porilaisten marssi**

jussi björling tenor

new york philharmonic orchestra

martti similä conductor

live at carnegie hall, 8 december, 1957

plus

fourteen songs

kirsten flagstad soprano

london symphony orchestra

øivin fjeldstad conductor

stereo decca studio recording, 1958



- CD 1
- 1 STAFFORD SMITH The Star Spangled Banner (1:34)
 - 2 ANON Porilaisten marssi (1:28)

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

- 3 1st mvmt. - Tempo molto moderato, quasi adagio (12:04)
- 4 2nd mvmt. - Allegro molto vivace (5:22)
- 5 3rd mvmt. - Il tempo largo (12:35)
- 6 4th mvmt. - Allegro (10:07)

SIBELIUS Five Songs

- 7 Säv, säv, susa, Op. 36, No. 4 (3:10)
- 8 Flickan Kom, Op. 37, No. 5 (4:17)
- 9 Var det en dröm?, Op. 37, No. 4 (2:58)
- 10 Svarta rosor, Op. 36, No. 1 (3:13)
- 11 Demanten på Marssnön, Op. 36, No. 6 (4:34)

Jussi Björling *tenor*

- CD 2
- 1 SIBELIUS En Saga, Op. 9 (18:19)
 - 2 SIBELIUS Finlandia, Op. 26, No. 7 (9:34)

90 members of New York Philharmonic Orchestra *Martti Similä*

SIBELIUS Fourteen Songs

- 3 Om, kvällen, (Illalle) (orch. Jalas), Op. 17, No. 6 (1:36)
- 4 Var det en dröm? (orch. Jalas), Op. 37, No. 4 (2:20)
- 5 Höstkväll, Op. 38, No. 1 (5:28)
- 6 Demanten på marssnön, Op. 36, No. 6 (2:20)
- 7 Flickan kom ifrån sin älsklings möte (orch. Pingoud), Op. 37, No. 5 (3:09)
- 8 Arioso, Op. 3 (4:05)
- 9 Våren flyktar hastigt, Op. 13, No. 4 (1:39)
- 10 Se'n har jag ej frågat mera, Op. 17, No. 1 (2:24)
- 11 Men min fågel märks dock icke, op. 36, No. 2 (2:46)
- 12 På verandan vid havet, Op. 38, No. 2 (3:09)
- 13 Den första kyssen (orch. Pingoud), Op. 37, No. 1 (2:05)
- 14 Svarta rosor (orch. Pingoud), Op. 36, No. 1 (2:01)
- 15 Säv, säv, susa (orch. Hellmann), Op. 36, No. 4 (2:40)
- 16 Kom nu hit, Död (orch. Boruttau), Op. 60 No. 1 (3:39)

Kirsten Flagstad *soprano*

London Symphony Orchestra *Øivin Fjeldstad*

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based
on a photograph of Sibelius

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8 December 1957
An in-house recording

Sibelius Song Recital
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