

Eugene Ormandy Grieg Sibelius

Pristine's release of this collection, on the heels of its CD featuring Ormandy's 1954 recordings of Sibelius's Fourth and Fifth symphonies (reviewed in the March/April issue), is a most felicitous event. Ormandy recorded these four tone poems in 1955, the year of Sibelius's 90th birthday; for some reason, however, they were not released until early 1958, when Columbia issued them on a single LP, ML 5249. The record quickly became a casualty of the changeover to stereo, and was out of print by the end of 1963; it has never been one of the easiest to find of Ormandy's LPs. This is doubly unfortunate: first, Ormandy remade only one of the four works in stereo for Columbia, En Saga, 1963, and by the time he revisited them all in the 1970s for RCA, he was quite a different conductor, second, in three out of four instances at least, these are vital, compelling performances in their own right. I believe this is their first reissue.

The chief characteristics of these Sibelius performances, like many of Ormandy's finest recordings, are an ideal sense of pacing and an impression of natural unfolding of the music, free of mannerism or talicization. The early En Saga, which can sometimes sound repetitious and overlong, never loses momentum here; Pohjola's Daughter features some lovely woodwind solos and powerful brass chorales. Ormandy's 1955 Tapiola may not be as monumental as some later versions, including his own RCA remake, but it is still spellbinding, with a terrifically force storm episode. Only The Oceanides is less than satisfactory; everything here sounds just a bit too fast for comfort, undercutting the tranquility of the opening section's nature portrait and undermining the force of the climax. Interestingly, one of the finest versions of The Oceanides on disc, that of Sir Thomas Beecham, was taped precisely five days earlier than this one; its duration is 10:23, almost exactly two minutes longer than Ormandy's 8:24.

Hugo Alfvén's Swedish Rhapsody No. 1, recorded in 1953, became an Ormandy specialty; folksy and colorful, it's an ideal showpiece for virtuosos orchestras. It makes a delightful filler for this CD, but it does sound a bit disconcerting coming as it does directly following the gripping experience that is Tapiola...

The best news may be that Orbert-Thorn plans to issue Ormandy's riveting 1951 reading of the complete Lemminkäinen Suite—its first recording, I believe, and possibly still the most exciting. Meanwhile, this present collection warrants the highest recommendation.

From a review of PASC 203, "Ormandy conducts Sibelius & Alfvén", by Richard A. Kaplan in FANFARE, May/June 2010

Product's Note

Ormandy's recording of Grieg's Peer Gynt Suite was originally made on wide frequency range lacquer masters, from which the original issue of Sibelius' 8 rpm discs was dubbed in somewhat degraded sound. The original lacquers were later transferred to tape for LP issue, and it is from this superior source that the present remastering was made. The sound is a testament to what Columbia's engineers were able to accomplish years before magnetic tape was available.

The recording of the Sibelius suite has an interesting history. In 1950, The Swan of Tuonela was recorded and released on a 10-inch LP (ML 2158), coupled with Finlandia (both previous issues on Pristine PASC 177). Some twenty months later, Columbia taped the other movements and re-packaged the existing recording of Swan into the new LP issue. The resulting hybrid release remains one of Ormandy's greatest and most exciting recordings; more intense even than his critically-acclaimed stereo remake for EMI from 27 years later, with almost superhuman playing by the Philadelphia Orchestra in the final movement.

Mark Orbert-Thorn

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Eugene

Ormandy

conducts

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Grieg

Peer Gynt Suite No. 1

Sibelius

Lemminkäinen Suite

Studio recordings 1947-1951

 **Orbert-Thorn**

Ormandy Grieg & Sibelius

GRIEG *Peer Gynt* Suite No. 1, Op. 46

1. Morning Mood (3:38)
2. The Death of Ase (4:07)
3. Anitra's Dance (2:12)
4. In the Hall of the Mountain King (2:44)

SIBELIUS *Lemminkäinen Suite* (The Four Legends), Op. 22

1. Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari (14:29)
2. The Swan of Tuonela (9:38) (John Minsker, *cor anglais*)
3. Lemminkäinen in Tuonela (14:31)
4. Lemminkäinen's Homecoming (5:33)

The Philadelphia Orchestra Eugene Ormandy

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

PASC 299

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer
Mark Obert-Thorn

Additional processing for Ambient
Stereo issue by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on
photographs of **Eugene Ormandy**

Grieg

Recorded 22nd November, 1947 in the
Academy of Music, Philadelphia
Matrix nos.: XCO 39405 through 39408
First issued on Columbia 12744
and 12745 in album X-291
Transferred from Columbia LP ML-5181

Sibelius

Recorded 2nd April, 1950 (Swan)
and 16th December, 1951
in the Academy of Music, Philadelphia
First issued on Columbia ML-4672

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Total duration: 56:52

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