

Sibelius's Third Symphony has been regarded as more classical than his previous works. The scholar Gerald Abraham has argued that the first movement bears strong comparison with the first movements of Haydn's and Mozart's symphonies. Against this background, it seems all the more remarkable that the history of its composition has turned out to be quite complicated.

Influences from Finnish folk music are discernible in the very first chords of the symphony. There were also some programmatic notions behind it. In Paris in January 1906, after a period of lively celebrations, Sibelius played three themes to the painter Oscar Parviainen. These were: *Funeral March*, *A Prayer to God* and *A Great Feast*. The scholar Markku Hartikainen has shown that these themes were probably connected with Jalmari Finne's libretto for the oratorio *Marjatta*, which Sibelius did not manage to compose despite several attempts. However, the *Prayer to God* theme ended up as a hymn theme within the finale of the third symphony – and it also appeared on the wall at Ainola, for the theme inspired Oscar Parviainen to produce a painting for Sibelius.

In 1906 Sibelius completed the orchestral poem *Pohjola's Daughter*. The sketches for the work contain material which ended up in the third symphony. Thus, it seems that the symphony, which in itself was heard as a non-programmatic work, received – as is often the case with Sibelius – its initial stimulus from various programmatic ideas; these lost their programmatic meaning during the process of composition as the material was reworked in purely musical terms. Sibelius conducted the first public performance on 25th September 1907.

The Fourth Symphony was once considered to be the strangest of Sibelius's symphonies, but today it is regarded as one of the peaks of his output. It has a density of expression, a chamber music-like transparency and a mastery of counterpoint that make it one of the most impressive manifestations of modernity from the period when it was written.

Sibelius had thoughts of a change of style while he was in Berlin in 1909. These ideas were still in his mind when he joined the artist Eero Järnefelt for a trip to Koli, the emblematic "Finnish mountain" in Karelia, close to Joensuu. The landscape of Koli was for Järnefelt an endless source of inspiration, and Sibelius said that he was going to listen to the "sighing of the winds and the roar of the storms". Indeed, the composer regarded his visit to Koli as one of the greatest experiences of his life. "Plans. La Montagne," he wrote in his diary on 27th September 1909.

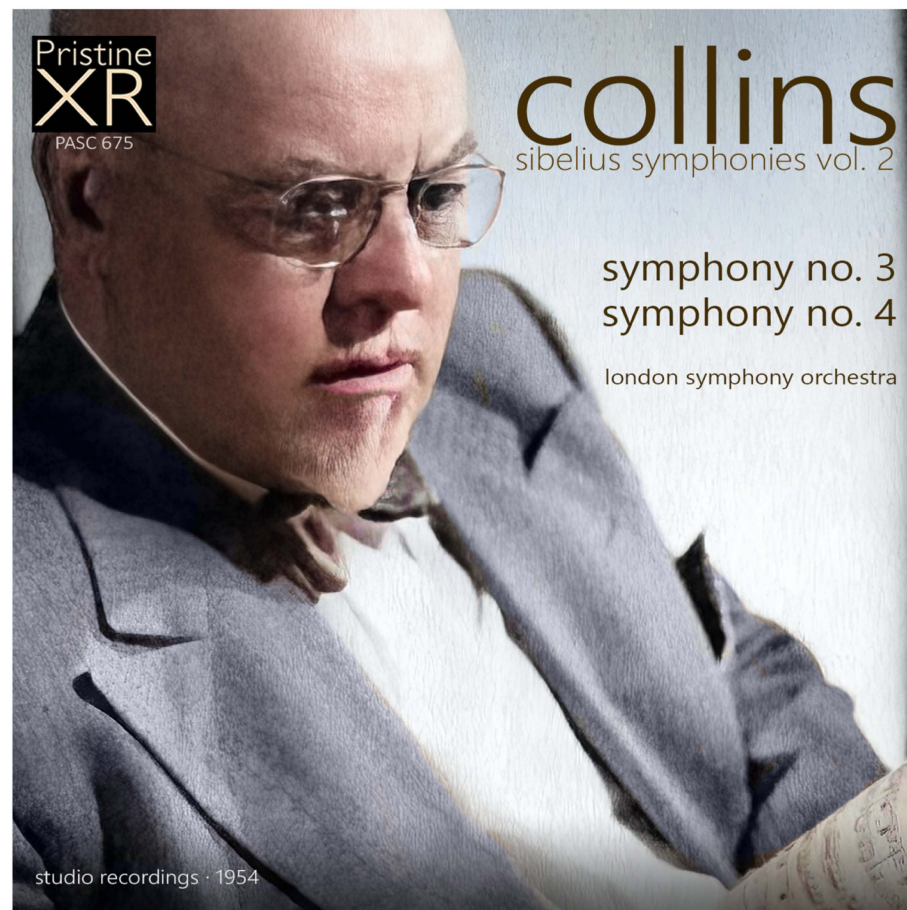
The following year Sibelius was again travelling in Karelia, in Vyborg and Imatra, now acting as a guide to his friend and sponsor Rosa Newmarch. Newmarch later recollected how Sibelius eagerly strained his ears to hear the pedal points in the roar of Imatra's famous rapids and in other natural sounds.

The trip also had other objectives. On his return Sibelius wanted to develop his skills in counterpoint, since, as he put it, "the harmony is largely dependent on the purely musical patterning, its polyphony." His observations contained many ideas on the need for harmonic continuity. Since the orchestra lacked the pedal of the piano, Sibelius wanted to compensate for this with even more skilful orchestration.

Yet one more natural phenomenon – a storm in the south-eastern archipelago – was needed to get the symphonic work started. In addition, in November 1910 he was preparing the symphony at the same time as he was working on music for Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, which he had promised to Aino Ackté. *The Raven* was never finished, but its atmosphere and sketches had an effect on the fourth symphony.

The symphony was performed for the first time on 3rd April 1911, in Helsinki. Its tone was both modern and introspective, and it confused the audience so much that the applause was subdued. "Evasive glances, shakes of the head, embarrassed or secretly ironic smiles. Not many came to the dressing room to deliver their congratulations," Aino Sibelius recollected later. The critics, too, were at a loss. "Everything was so strange," was how Heikki Klemetti described the atmosphere. In the years that followed audiences in many parts of the world reacted the same way...

Notes from *Sibelius – The Website*: <http://www.sibelius.fi>



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Sym. 3 producer: Peter Andry
Sym. 4 producer: Victor Olof

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Total duration: 57:05

SIBELIUS Symphony No. 3 in C major, Op. 52

1. 1st mvt. - Allegro moderato (9:28)
2. 2nd mvt. - Andantino con moto, quasi allegretto (7:30)
3. 3rd mvt. - Moderato - Allegro ma non tanto (7:59)

Recorded Kingsway Hall, London, 5-6 May 1954
First issued as Decca LXT 2960

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

4. 1st mvt. - Tempo molto moderato, quasi adagio (8:50)
5. 2nd mvt. - Allegro molto vivace (4:05)
6. 3rd mvt. - Il tempo largo (8:56)
7. 4th mvt. - Allegro (10:17)

Recorded Kingsway Hall, London, 22-25 February 1954
First issued as Decca LXT 2962

London Symphony Orchestra
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