

Brahms & Sibelius

Sunday, October 16, 2011 • 3:00 PM
First Free Methodist Church

Orchestra Seattle
Seattle Chamber Singers
Jayce Ogren, conductor



JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Nänie, Op. 82

JOHANNES BRAHMS
Gesang der Parzen, Op. 89

JOHANNES BRAHMS
Schicksalslied, Op. 54

—Intermission—

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)
Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

Allegretto—Poco allegro—Tranquillo—Poco largamente—Tempo I—Poco allegro
Tempo andante, ma rubato—Andante sostenuto—Andante con moto ed energico
Vivacissimo—Lento e suave—Tempo I—Lento e suave—
Finale: Allegro moderato—Meno moderato—Tempo I—Molto largamente

Please disable cell phones and other electronics. The use of cameras and recording devices is not permitted during the performance.

Orchestra Seattle • Seattle Chamber Singers • George Shangrow, founder
PO Box 15825, Seattle WA 98115 • 206-682-5208 • www.ossacs.org

Guest Artist

Jayce Ogren is rapidly developing a reputation as one of the finest young conductors to emerge from the United States equally at home in both symphonic and operatic repertoire. In recent seasons he has conducted the Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, New World Symphony and the Grand Rapids Symphony. Mr. Ogren also made his New York debut in two programs with the International Contemporary Ensemble under the auspices of the Miller Theater, resulting in an immediate re-invitation. In addition, he stepped into a last-minute cancellation for James Levine, conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra in a challenging program that included the world premiere of Peter Lieberon's song cycle *Songs of Love and Sorrow* (with Gerard Finley). European guest engagements have included the Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Aarhus Symphony and the Asturias Symphony.

On the opera stage, Mr. Ogren made his Canadian Opera Company debut with Stravinsky's *The Nightingale & Other Short Fables*. Following an invitation from New York City Opera to conduct a staged production of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, he was subsequently re-invited last season for a critically acclaimed new production of Bernstein's *A Quiet Place*, which was a resounding success.

This season, Mr. Ogren will make his debuts with the Copenhagen Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, Napa Valley Symphony, Berkeley Symphony and—following a highly successful debut with the Asturias Symphony—he will return to that orchestra during two separate periods (with pianist Joaquín Achúcarro and baritone Gerald Finley). Mr. Ogren's critically acclaimed performances with New York City Opera have led to another re-invitation and he will return there to conduct the world premiere of Rufus Wainwright's opera *Prima Donna*.

A native of Hoquiam, Mr. Ogren concluded his tenure in 2009 as assistant conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra and as music director of the Cleveland Youth Orchestra, having been appointed by Franz Welser-Möst. In May 2009,

Mr. Ogren made his subscription debut with the Cleveland Orchestra and, in August of that year, made his debut at the Blossom Festival.

Mr. Ogren previously served as a conducting apprentice with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, working with chief conductor Alan Gilbert. As a result, he conducted the orchestras of Gävle, Helsingborg and Norrköping, the SAMI Sinfonietta, Swedish National Orchestra Academy and Stockholm's Opera Vox. He has also conducted Finland's Vaasa City Orchestra. In the U.S. he has appeared with the New World Symphony, Boston's Calhumpian Consort, the Harvard Group for New Music and the New England Conservatory Opera Theater.

Jayce Ogren received a bachelor's degree in composition from St. Olaf College in 2001 and a master's degree in conducting from the New England Conservatory in 2003. Aided by a U.S. Fulbright Grant, he completed a postgraduate diploma in orchestral conducting at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden. He has been invited to participate in conducting courses and master classes in both the U.S. and Europe, including two summers at the American Academy of Conducting at Aspen. His principal teachers have been Steven Amundson, Jorma Panula, Charles Peltz and David Zinman.

Mr. Ogren is also a published composer whose music has been premiered at venues including the Royal Danish Conservatory of Music, the Brevard Music Center, the Midwest Clinic in Chicago, the American Choral Directors Association Conference and the World Saxophone Congress. His *Symphonies of Gaia* has been performed by ensembles on three continents and serves as the title track on a DVD featuring the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra.

Jayce Ogren is the founder of Young Kreisler, a band performing Ogren's own work, as well as music ranging from Mahler to Piazzolla to Kurt Cobain. Devoted to education, Mr. Ogren has worked with student musicians throughout the United States, appearing as a guest composer/conductor at the 2004 Washington All-State Music Festival. In 2001, the Minnesota Music Educators Association named Jayce Ogren their Composer of the Year.

OSSCS 2011–2012 Season

Pulcinella

Sunday, November 13, 2011 • 3:00 PM

Joseph Pollard White, conductor

Nick Masters, double bass

Handel Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 1

Vanhal Double Bass Concerto in D Major

Vaughan Williams Mass in G Minor

Whitacre Five Hebrew Songs

Beyer *Short Stories* WORLD PREMIERE

Stravinsky Suite from *Pulcinella*

Christmas Oratorio

Sunday, December 18, 2011 • 3:00 PM

Hans-Jürgen Schnoor, conductor

J.S. Bach *Christmas Oratorio*

Russian Masters

Sunday, February 5, 2012 • 3:00 PM

Meany Hall • University of Washington

Eric Garcia, conductor

Shostakovich *Festive Overture*

Prokofiev Suite from *Lt. Kijé*

Borodin Polovtsian Dances from *Prince Igor*

Stravinsky Suite from *The Firebird*

English Masters

Sunday, March 11, 2012 • 3:00 PM

Alastair Willis, conductor

Handel *Zadok the Priest*

Vaughan Williams Five Variants of
"Dives and Lazarus"

Britten Four Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes*

Walton *Belshazzar's Feast*

Easter Oratorio

Palm Sunday, April 1, 2012 • 3:00 PM

Darko Butorac, conductor

J.S. Bach *Easter Oratorio*

Sibelius *Valse Triste*

R. Strauss Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*

Bruckner & Beethoven

Sunday, May 13, 2012 • 3:00 PM

Jonathan Pasternack, conductor

Mozart *Kyrie* in D Minor

Bruckner *Te Deum*

Beethoven Symphony No. 3 in Eb ("Eroica")

All concerts (except February 5, 2012) take place at First Free Methodist Church. Advance tickets available online at www.ossccs.org or by calling Brown Paper Tickets at 1-800-838-3006.

Orchestra Seattle

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Morgan Shannon
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Jo Hansen*
Ericka Kendall
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Kevin McCarthy
Steven Messick

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David Brewer

Timpani

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* *principal*

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Victor Royer

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Doug Durasoff
Stephen Keeler
Dennis Moore
Stephen Tachell
Slosson Viau
Richard Wyckoff

Vocal Texts and Translations

Nänie

Auch das Schöne muß sterben!

Das Menschen und Götter bezwinget,
Nicht die eherne Brust rührt es des stygischen Zeus.
Einmal nur erweichte die Liebe den Schattenbeherrscher,
Und an der Schwelle noch, streng,
rief er zurück sein Geschenk.
Nicht stillt Aphrodite dem schöne Knaben die Wunde,
die in den zierlichen Leib grausam der Eber geritzt.
Nicht errettet den göttlichen Held die unsterbliche Mutter,
Wann er, am skäischen Tor fallend, sein Schicksal erfüllt.
Aber sie steigt aus dem Meer mit allen Töchtern des Nereus,
Und die Klage hebt an um den verherrlichten Sohn.
Siehe, da weinen die Götter, es weinen die Göttinnen alle,
Daß das Schöne vergeht, daß das Vollkommene stirbt.
Auch ein Klaglied zu sein im Mund der Geliebten,
ist Herrlich,
Denn das Gemeine geht klanglos zum Orkus hinab.

The beautiful, too, must die!

That which subjugates men and gods
does not stir the brazen heart of the Stygian Zeus.
Only once did love melt the Lord of Shadows,
and just at the threshold,
he strictly yanked back his gift.
Aphrodite does not heal the beautiful boy's wound,
which the boar ripped cruelly in that delicate body.
Neither does the immortal mother save the divine hero
when, falling at the Scaean Gate, he fulfills his fate.
She ascends from the sea with all the daughters of Nereus,
and lifts up a lament for her glorious son.
Behold! the gods weep; all the goddesses weep,
that the beautiful perish, that perfection dies.
But to be a dirge on the lips of loved ones
can be a marvelous thing;
for that which is common goes down to Orcus in silence.

Gesang der Parzen

Es fürchte die Götter
Das Menschengeschlecht!
Sie halten die Herrschaft
In ewigen Händen,
Und können sie brauchen,
Wie's ihnen gefällt.

Der fürchte sie doppelt
Den je sie erheben!
Auf Klippen und Wolken
Sind Stühle bereitet
Um goldene Tische.

Erhebet ein Zwist sich,
So stürzen die Gäste,
Geschmäht und geschändet
In nächtliche Tiefen,
Und harren vergebens,
Im Finstern gebunden,
Gerechten Gerichtes.

Sie aber, sie bleiben
In ewigen Festen
An goldenen Tischen.
Sie schreiten vom Berge
Zu Bergen hinüber:
Aus Schlünden der Tiefe
Dampft ihnen der Atem
Erstickter Titanen,
Gleich Opfergerüchen,
Ein leichtes Gewölke.

Es wenden die Herrscher
Ihr segnendes Auge
Von ganzen Geschlechtern
Und meiden, im Enkel
Die ehemals geliebten,
Still redenden Züge
Des Ahnherrn zu sehn.

So sangen die Parzen;
Es horcht der Verbannte,
In nächtlichen Höhlen
Der Alte die Lieder,
Denkt Kinder und Enkel
Und schüttelt das Haupt.

Schicksalslied

Ihr wandelt droben im Licht
Auf weichem Boden, selige Genien!
Glänzende Götterlüfte
Rühren Euch leicht,
Wie die Finger der Künstlerin
Heilige Saiten.

Let the race of mankind
fear the gods!
For they hold dominion
over them in their eternal hands,
and can demand
what they please of us.

Doubly so should those fear them
who have been exalted by them!
On cliffs and clouds
stools stand ready
around golden tables.

If a dispute arises,
the guests are pitched down,
abused and shamed,
into the deep dark of night;
and they wait futilely,
bound in the dark,
for justice to be served.

But they [the gods] remain
at their eternal feast
at the golden tables.
They step from mountain
to mountain, up above:
from the abysses of the deep
steams the breath
of suffocating Titans,
like a burnt offering,
a light mist.

The rulers turn away
their blessed eyes
from entire races of people,
shunning the sight in their descendants
of those formerly beloved and
silently speaking features
of our ancestors.

So sang the Fates;
the banished one listens
in his night-dark lair
to the songs of the ancient ones,
thinks of his children and grandchildren
and shakes his head.

You wander above in the light
on soft ground, blessed genies!
Blazing, divine breezes
brush by you as lightly
as the fingers of the player
on her holy strings.

Schicksallos, wie der schlafende
Säugling, atmen die Himmlischen;
Keusch bewahrt in bescheidener Knospe,
Blühet ewig
Ihnen der Geist,
Und die seligen Augen
Blicken in stiller
Ewiger Klarheit.

Doch uns ist gegeben,
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn;
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie Wasser von Klippe
Zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahrlang ins Ungewisse hinab.

Program Notes

Johannes Brahms *Nänie*, Op. 82

Brahms was born in Hamburg on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. He made sketches for this "Lament" during the summer of 1880, but composed most of the work the following summer, completing it by August 22 and conducting the premiere with the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra on December 6 of that year. In addition to SATB chorus, Brahms calls for pairs of woodwinds, 2 horns, 3 trombones, timpani, harp and strings.

The Latin word "nenia" ("Nänie" in German) refers to a funeral song, usually performed in praise of a deceased individual by professional female mourners or by the recently departed's female relatives, to the accompaniment of one or more instruments. In 1799, the celebrated German author, dramatist and poet Friedrich Schiller (on whose "Ode to Joy" Beethoven based the final movement of his Ninth Symphony) composed the poem "Nänie," in which he employs allusions to Greek myths to lament the transitory nature of even the most perfect beauty that conquers both gods and humans. The poem's first section refers to the death of the handsome hero Adonis, adored by Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice describes how Zeus, ruler of the Greek pantheon and hence lord of the "Stygian" realm—the Underworld across the River Styx—had once permitted a loved one to leave the world of the dead. But Orpheus, in his anxiety about his wife Eurydice, glanced behind him to see if she was following him to the Upper World, and so lost her forever. Aphrodite, however, is not allowed to heal the wounds of Adonis. The last section of the poem references the inability of the sea nymph Thetis to rescue her god-like son Achilles, who is slain in battle at Troy's Scaean Gate. The grief-stricken Thetis rises from the Mediterranean Sea with the other daughters of Nereus, one of the Titans, to mourn in song the death of her son.

Fateless, like sleeping
infants, the divine beings breathe,
chastely protected in modest buds,
blooming eternally
their spirits,
and their blissful eyes
gazing in mute,
eternal clarity.

Yet there is granted us
no place to rest;
we vanish, we fall—
the suffering humans—
blind from one
hour to another,
like water thrown from cliff
to cliff,
for years into the unknown depths.

—translations ©1995 Emily Ezust

As the poem concludes, the gods and goddesses bewail the inevitable fading of Beauty and the death of Perfection, but Schiller observes that a threnody in the mouth of a loved one is a lordly thing, for common people descend to the Underworld without a lament being sung for them.

Brahms found in Schiller's "Nänie" the perfect text for a musical memorial to the neo-Classical painter Anselm Feuerbach, a friend of his who often painted scenes from Greek mythology. Brahms might have heard Hermann Goetz' setting of the poem at a performance in Vienna during February 1880, within a month of Feuerbach's death. In July of that year, Brahms wrote to his friend Elisabet von Herzogenberg that Biblical texts did not fire his imagination because they failed to be "heathenish enough" for him, but he did recall Schiller's poem with its references to the myths of ancient Greece. When Brahms completed his choral-orchestral setting of the poem a year later, he dedicated the work to Henriette Feuerbach, the artist's stepmother.

A sweetly singing oboe introduces a tranquil, undulating melody in D major and $\frac{6}{4}$ meter as the work begins. This melody, so beautiful that its death is almost unthinkable, is sung first by the sopranos and then by other voices, weaving a rich contrapuntal tapestry that decorates the path of Orpheus and his beloved Eurydice as they make their way toward the light, before Zeus snatches back Orpheus' bride. Tenors and basses—imitated by sopranos and altos—describe Aphrodite's attempt to heal Adonis' wounds. The voices join together to anoint his injured body, but cannot save the youth, and neither can a shield of somewhat martial music protect Achilles as he falls, with the musical line, at the gate of Troy. In the composition's central section—as Achilles' mother, Thetis, and her sisters rise from the sea to join their voices with those of the gods in chromatic lamentation that features emotional octave leaps from sopranos—the musical texture becomes homophonic, and the meter shifts to $\frac{4}{4}$ and the key to a consoling F# major. With an

initial crescendo of protest that soon diminishes into hushed resignation, the chorus reiterates that beauty fades and the perfect die, before Brahms rounds out the work in A–B–A form by a return to the original key, meter and thematic material. As the work concludes, Brahms affirms that—although ordinary mortals descend silently to the grave—an elegy in the mouth of a loved one is “a marvelous thing.”

Gesang der Parzen, Op. 89

Brahms composed his “Song of the Fates” during the summer of 1882, completing it by the end of July. He conducted the premiere in Basel, Switzerland, on December 10 of that year. In addition to six-part (SAATBB) chorus, Brahms calls for pairs of woodwinds (with one flute doubling piccolo) plus contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.

For this compact, thick-textured, darkly chromatic work—his last piece for chorus and orchestra—Brahms chose a seven-stanza text describing the helplessness of humanity in the face of the gods’ implacable power. It comes from a monologue in Act 4 of the 1779 drama *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, a reworking by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of Germany’s most illustrious literary figures, of Euripides’ tragedy. Brahms dedicated the work to Duke Georg von Sachsen-Meiningen, in gratitude for his hospitality when Hans von Bülow, conductor of the famous Meinigen Court Orchestra, made the ensemble available to Brahms for rehearsals.

A largely homophonic work, *Gesang der Parzen* takes the form of a five-part rondo (A–B–A’–C–A’’) introduced by a menacing, harmonically unstable orchestral prelude that warns mortals to fear the ruthless gods, whose will must not be contravened. In the A section, chorus sings the first three verses of the text—initially by the men with women answering, and then by all the voices together—in an unhurried, relentless marching rhythm that emphasizes the gods’ power and cruelty. The B section (verse four of the text) moves from a somber D minor tonality to a lighter F major as the gods continue to feast at their golden tables, to the accompaniment of dance-like motives tossed from the lower voices to the upper and back again. A chromatic gloom descends, however, at the mention in the fifth verse of the deep abysses from which steams the Titans’ acrid breath; the minor mode of the work’s A section then returns with the text of the poem’s first verse. A sudden shift from $\frac{4}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ meter and a brighter D major tonality occurs as section C begins, as if Brahms could not bear to present the painful words of the sixth verse of the poem without clothing them in a comforting musical garb reminiscent of a gentle waltz, thus mitigating the melancholy mood of the text. The stark concluding section echoes the D minor tonality and the funeral-march-like rhythms of the A section. The opening melodic figures appear in the violins, while the voices of the chorus chant the phrases of the poem’s grim final stanza through an unusual harmonic cycle of major thirds (D–F#–Bb–D). The exile, banished by the Fates, shakes his head in despair, and the music sinks into a mysterious silence.

Schicksalslied, Op. 54

Brahms began sketching his “Song of Destiny” in 1868, completing a preliminary version by May 1870. He conducted the work’s premiere in Karlsruhe on October 18, 1871. In addition to SATB chorus, Brahms employs pairs of woodwinds, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings.

This powerfully dramatic work for four-part chorus and an orchestra has as its text German lyric poet Friedrich Hölderlin’s 1798 poem “Hyperions Schicksalslied,” originally part of the novel *Hyperion, or The Hermit in Greece*. While visiting some friends at Wilhelmshaven in 1868, Brahms discovered Hölderlin’s poem in a book of verse and was “stirred to his depths.” The poem has three verses that form two parts, the first (verses one and two) describing the blissful immortality of the gods, and the second (verse three) contrasting this serenity with the tumultuous sufferings of human beings. Brahms struggled over the course of three years to arrive at a satisfactory manner in which to conclude his setting of this text, finding that the despair in which the poet ends his work clashed with the composer’s desire to glimpse dawn’s hopeful glow beyond the poem’s desolate darkness. Moreover, the text’s bipartite intellectual architecture was at odds with his inclination to shape the music into a balanced ternary form that pleased him structurally.

The solution to this conundrum was Brahms’ recapitulation, in the orchestral coda, of music from the work’s warmly radiant instrumental introduction, with its gently pulsating timpani triplet figures. The altos first meet the blissful gods in the realm of eternal light, but the other voices soon join them in softly glowing harmonies. As the two-verse initial section ends, an ominously unsettling woodwind chord shakes the Eb major tonality of the first section into the tempestuous C minor of the second part, in which the entire chorus cries out in agonized defiance against the blindness, suffering and rootlessness that characterize the human condition. Its chords crash against our ears like a cataract hurtling from one cliff to another while the strings seethe and swirl and the triple meter’s shifting accents further unsettle those who can find no resting place. The chorus finally staggers into the silence of the unknown depths, but the music of the orchestra’s opening returns, this time in C major, to provide a measure of solace—will the gods have mercy upon tormented mortals after all?

—Lorelette Knowles

Jean Sibelius

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

Sibelius was born in Tavestehus, Finland, on December 8, 1865, and died at Järvenpää on September 20, 1957. He began work on this symphony in early 1901, completing it a year later. Sibelius conducted the Helsinki Philharmonic in the first performance on March 8, 1902. The score calls for pairs of woodwinds, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.

In March 1900, Jean Sibelius received an anonymous letter from an admirer of his music. The writer suggested that the composer title one of his recent compositions *Fin-*

landia and—after some revisions to the work—Sibelius did so. That summer, when the Helsinki Philharmonic (accompanied by Sibelius) set sail on a tour to the Paris World’s Fair, the mysterious correspondent showed himself at the pier. *Finlandia* proved a rousing success and, after returning home, Sibelius finally discovered the identity of his anonymous admirer: Baron Axel Carpelan. A Swedish-speaking Finn (as was Sibelius), Carpelan had a title but no money. His parents had thwarted his plans to become a violinist, so in protest he smashed his instrument, refused to attend university and took up a habit of writing letters of advice and praise to artists in whom he identified the potential for greatness.

Carpelan managed to function as something of a patron for Sibelius by recruiting wealthy individuals to the cause. Even before their first face-to-face meeting in October 1900, Carpelan wrote in one of his many letters that Sibelius should travel to Italy, as the country had provided great inspiration for Tchaikovsky and Richard Strauss. “Everything there is beautiful—even the ugly,” Carpelan insisted, in spite of the fact that he himself had never traveled outside Scandinavia.

Sibelius arrived in Rapallo, near Genoa, in February 1901, remaining there until May. The Italian scenery proved beneficial both to his spirit and to his compositional output. He began sketches for what he initially envisioned as a suite of four tone poems on the subject of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and also worked for a time on a project related to *Don Juan*. But after his return to Finland these disparate elements evolved into a four-movement symphony devoid of overt programmatic associations. On November 9, Sibelius reported to Carpelan that the symphony was nearing completion, and he delivered the score to a copyist in early 1902. The premiere of the work, which Sibelius dedicated to Carpelan, resulted in immediate and resounding acclaim, with one reviewer describing it as “a definitive masterpiece, one of the few symphonic creations of our time that points in the same direction as Beethoven’s symphonies.”

While the symphony does bear some hallmarks of Beethoven’s approach to symphonic form, it differs in important—often miraculous—ways. Beethoven typically began a work with fully laid-out themes that then undergo deconstruction in an extended development section. Sibelius, by contrast, introduces building blocks—sequences of chords or short musical motives—that he later combines and extends into longer-lined thematic statements. “It is as

though the Almighty had thrown the pieces of a mosaic down from the floor of heaven and told me to put them together,” the composer once wrote. The symphony opens with the first of these pieces, a sequence of three chords spread across 11 notes in the strings. Woodwinds answer with a dance-like melody, interrupted by horns with a duple-meter phrase that questions the prevailing $\frac{6}{4}$ time signature. These elements repeat and intermingle before a bassoon fanfare leads to an impassioned violin phrase. Pizzicato strings soon drive the tempo faster (to *poco allegro*) and the music surges forth in earnest. The initial musical ideas return again and again, but always modified or developed to some extent, from the full brass section taking up the bassoon fanfare at the movement’s climax, to the quiet coda, in which the strings recall the symphony’s opening gesture.

The second movement—beginning in D minor to contrast with the cheerier D major of the symphony’s opening—originated with Sibelius’ *Don Juan* sketches. A timpani roll leads to an extended pizzicato passage in $\frac{3}{8}$ time for double basses, which yield to cellos. Bassoons, playing in octaves, challenge the established meter with a theme in $\frac{4}{4}$ over the pizzicato triplets. The music builds in urgency, then subsides for a magical passage of hushed strings that introduces a key change to F \sharp major. Much of the rest of the music develops the string theme, shedding a tragic light on the initially hopeful melody.

Strings launch the frenetic scherzo—in $\frac{6}{8}$ time but with one beat to each bar—over which woodwinds chime in with duple-meter phrases that struggle to form a theme. Solo timpani provides a bridge from G minor to the trio’s exotic key of G \flat major. Solo oboe, answered by clarinets, intones a relaxed melody in $\frac{12}{4}$ time over sustained chords in horns and bassoons. Strings attempt to join in, but the oboe melody returns briefly until trumpets shatter the calm by announcing a return to the scherzo. The fragmentary woodwind motive finally resolves into a complete theme as the strings generate ever more frenzy. A return of the trio and its oboe theme is short-lived, but this time the music remains in $\frac{12}{4}$, building inevitably and powerfully to the opening bar of the fourth movement.

The symphony’s finale begins triumphantly and ends even more so. Not long after the work’s premiere, some listeners set forth an interpretation of the symphony as a musical evocation of the battle for Finnish independence, with the D major finale representing a victorious conclusion to the struggle. The composer himself discounted such notions, preferring to think of his most famous and enduring symphony in purely absolute terms. Program or not, the work’s conclusion remains among the most beloved passages in all of Sibelius’ music.

The contrast of this composition with Sibelius’ fairly traditional Symphony No. 1, premiered three years earlier, is striking. The composer would further refine his “mosaic” approach in his next five symphonies, the last of which debuted in 1924.

—Jeff Eldridge



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