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# SIBELIUS, A TOWERING NATIONAL COMPOSER:

## An Outsider's Perceptions

By Glenda Dawn Goss

Great men come to prominence in every time and place, but when the greats are composers who represent their countries to the world – rather than political leaders or military men, for example – there is a special need to acknowledge their importance and further, to understand how such men came to symbolize their respective nations. The composers Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius offer particularly intriguing cases in point, not least because of their contemporaneousness and their relative geographical closeness. Seldom has history given us two such parallel examples. By examining the one, in this case Sibelius, we may begin to gain fresh insights about the other, Carl Nielsen. At the very least, we obtain a deeper appreciation of the time and the place in which both composers came of age and came to represent their native lands.

There is furthermore a special feature of writing about national composers such as these. More often than not, 'great national composers' are interpreted to the scholarly community by their own countrymen. However, when such composers can also be viewed closely and their works elucidated by scholars from 'the outside,' so to speak, a new dimension is brought to the understanding of their positions and their music, thereby enriching the wider picture for us all. It is to that end that this essay was written.

The conspicuous similarities between Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius began at birth, for both came into the world in the year 1865. Both left the Northland to study in Germany, specifically in Berlin, where they met for the first time in 1890.<sup>1</sup> In their compositions, both gave attention to the art song and chamber music, as well as, unusually for the time, the symphony. And, as we shall see, their lives intersected again and again in musical ways. Yet even with all of those parallels, undoubtedly the most

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1 According to Erik Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius, Volume I 1865–1905*, trans. Robert Layton, London 1976. Nielsen and Sibelius apparently met for the first time at a dinner party, only 'Sibelius was not in good form on this occasion and struck his companions as far too earnest to be good company!', 72.

striking is the role each composer played in the musical self-understanding of his respective country. In Sibelius's case this role extended to the very essence of what it means to be Finnish. That legacy continues right down to the present. There is no better example than the Finns' celebration of their World Hockey Championship in May 2011, when the jubilating thousands who surged onto the streets of Helsinki joined in a deeply felt, widely televised rendition of Sibelius's *Finlandia*. Whether any of the revellers had ever listened to an entire Sibelius symphony is not known. Nevertheless, for most Finns, these included, Sibelius and his music have given them a sense of identity as Finns.

This identity was consciously and deliberately constructed, and not just by Sibelius or even mainly by Sibelius.<sup>2</sup> In the course of the nineteenth century an entire swath of educated Finnish society – composers, artists, and writers, as well as doctors, lawyers, teachers, businessmen, university professors, and journalists – joined in creating what it meant to be Finnish. They were motivated by the need to preserve Finland's 'autonomy' at a time when their land had been wrested from Sweden and turned into an Autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. The goal of these patriots – whose rallying cry was 'We are not Swedes, we cannot become Russians, let us be Finns!' – was to awaken the wider population to their true Finnishness. 'Awakening' or, in Finnish, *herääminen* became the euphemism for the national project.

One result of that awakening was a spectacular golden age of the arts. We see it still today – in beautiful editions of music; in treasured, symbolistic landscapes; in photographs celebrating Finnish architecture and technology; in portraits of exotic others, such as Helene Schjerfbeck's *The Spaniard* (Fig. 1); and in portraits of characters from the Finnish *Kalevala*,<sup>3</sup> such as the god Väinämöinen, the bringer of music to Finland (Fig. 2).

Sibelius made his mark on this scene for the first time in 1892. He was just twenty-six. By 1915, when at the age of fifty he premiered his fifth numbered symphony, he had become a national celebrity. Unfortunately, the vaunted position of national idol carries its risks. It may be one of the things that interfered with Sibelius developing the kind of close relationship with Carl Nielsen that the Finn enjoyed with other musicians from abroad, including the Italian Ferruccio Busoni and the Swede Adolf Paul.

There are very few documents in Finland's National Archives connected with Carl Nielsen, but those few give an especially warm impression of the Danish com-

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2 Portions of this article are drawn from my *Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland*, Chicago 2009, in which the composer's life and works are explored in the context of Finland's national awakening.

3 The *Kalevala* is a collection of orally transmitted folk poetry, collected and edited by Elias Lönnrot (1802-84).

poser.<sup>4</sup> In February 1909, on first hearing Sibelius's Symphony no. 2 (completed in 1902), which had been conducted by Wilhelm Stenhammar in Copenhagen, Nielsen took the time to write to Sibelius and describe the tremendous impression the music had made on him:

I am an enormous admirer of the strange and unique power that radiates from your symphony, and I am thankful for the great impression that is still with me – several days after the concert – and from which I cannot get free

In general your symphony is all embracing – at one moment it is powerful in temperament, wild as in a violent conflict, and, at the next, tender and gentle in its melancholy stillness. But your music must be judged as something apart: it is not to be weighed on a set of pharmacist's scales but on a highway along which one can drive a coach and horses, with man and beast under the open skies in sun and wind, where there are people moving around and where nature unfolds itself in its grandeur and peace.

Such is the impression I have of it at present and I once again beg you to accept my warmest thanks and greetings.<sup>5</sup>

Nielsen's next letter to Sibelius preserved in the National Archives was written more than a decade later. On 27 February 1920, he wrote to say that he had conducted *En saga* and would soon perform *Finlandia* in Amsterdam with Mengelberg's orchestra.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Most of the Carl Nielsen documents are preserved in Filebox 24 of the Sibelius Family Archives (hereafter SFA), the National Archives of Finland, Helsinki. They consist of two letters to Sibelius, a photograph with a short message to Aino Sibelius, and a calling card. See notes 4, 5, and 7 below.

5 ... jeg er en stor Beundrer af den strømmende, ejendommeligt-uensartede Magt der hersker i Deres Symfoni og jeg er Dem taknemmelig for det stærke Indtryk, jeg endnu bestandig – flere Dage efter Concerten – har, og ikke kan blive kvit.

I det hele taget virker Deres Musik som et bredt Favntag, der snart bliver voldsomt i sin temperamentsfulde Knugen, snart vildt som blodige Bid og atter ømt og stort og fint i sin melankolske Ro. – Men Deres Musik skal bedømmes for sig; ikke vejes paa en Kemikers fine Vægtskaal, men paa en Vægt hvor man kan kjøre op med Hest og Vogn og Folk og Fæ, under aaben Himmel i Sol og Blæst, hvor folket rører sig og Naturen ligger stor og stille udenom det Hele.

Saaledes er mit foreløbige Indtryk og jeg beder Dem endnu engang modtage min bedste Hilsen og Tak. Carl Nielsen to Jean Sibelius, 7 February 1909, SFA, Filebox 24 (also published in John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen. Brevudgaven*, vol. 3, Copenhagen 2007, 393-94). The translation is cited from Erik Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius, Volume II 1904–1914*, trans. Robert Layton, London 1986, 235. This volume also contains a portion of the letter in facsimile together with a photograph of Carl Nielsen in 1911, following 240.

6 Kære Sibelius! Jeg har lige spillet Din herlige 'En Saga' og sender Dig i Hast min hjerteligste Hilsen. Den 3die og 4de Marts spiller jeg 'Finlandia' i Amsterdam med det fortræffelige Mengelberg'ske Orkester. Hilsen fra min Hustru til Dig og Din søde



Fig. 1. Helene Schjerfbeck, *Espanjalainen (The Spaniard)*, 1881. Oil on canvas. Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki.

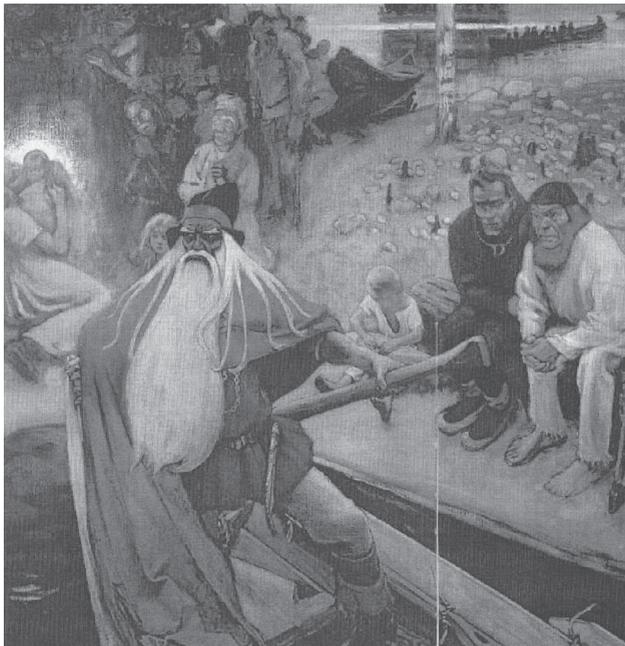


Fig. 2. Axel Gallén, *Väinämöinen's Departure*, 1896–1906, tempera on canvas. Hämeenlinna Art Museum, Hämeenlinna, Finland.



Fig. 3. Carl Nielsen's greeting to Aino Sibelius, [7 October?] 1924. The National Archives of Finland, the Sibelius Family Archives, Filebox 24.

The last communication in the Nielsen file is dated October 1924, when Sibelius was himself in Denmark to conduct his Seventh Symphony (at that point entitled *Fantasia sinfonica*).<sup>7</sup> It is a photograph of the Niensens' summer house sent to Aino Sibelius, the composer's wife, who had stayed behind in Finland (Fig. 3).<sup>8</sup>

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*Fru. Din hengivne Carl Nielsen.* (Dear Sibelius, I just played your glorious 'En saga' and in haste send you my heartiest greetings. On March 3rd and 4<sup>th</sup>, I will play 'Finlandia' in Amsterdam with the excellent Mengelberg's orchestra. Greetings from my wife to you and your sweet Mrs. Your devoted Carl Nielsen), SFA, Filebox 24 (also published in John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen. Brevudgaven*, vol.6, Copenhagen 2010, 389).

7 The Copenhagen concert on 1 October 1924, when Sibelius conducted his first and last numbered symphonies together with *Finlandia* and *Valse triste*, was apparently the first time his music was broadcast, thanks to Radio Ryvang. Erik Tawaststjerna describes the events surrounding the occasion, which was attended by the King and Queen of Denmark, and includes some of the Danish critical reactions; see his *Sibelius, Volume III 1914–1957*, ed. and trans. Robert Layton, London 1997, 249–55, as well as his *Jean Sibelius. Åren 1920–1957*, 175–82.

8 The message on the photograph reads, 'Our summer house in Skagen [the most northern part of Jutland]. Welcome there next summer.' (*Vort Sommerhus I Skagen. Velkommen til næste Sommer!*) On the reverse, the day was wrongly written as 6, then changed to 7; the month was also wrongly written as 9 (that is, September), but in fact the card dates from October of 1924, as its message reveals: 'Kære Fru Sibelius! Vi savner Dem her i Jeans store Succes. Det gaar gimrende, og det er stolt at hans sidste Symfoni er saa betydelig!! Blot De var her hos

The National Archives also preserve a statement given by Sibelius for publication in the Carl Nielsen Festival program in 1953 (see Fig. 4). ‘Carl Nielsen, Denmark’s great son, was a born symphonist,’ Sibelius begins,

though he produced music in all genres. Through his strong intelligence he developed his genius for achieving his objectives, which, it seemed to me, were clear to him from the beginning. Through his strong personality as a composer he established a school and strongly influenced composers in many countries. One speaks of the head and the heart: Carl Nielsen had both in the highest degree. The principles he followed, including a striving away from romanticism, are now current. His music thus arouses great interest in our time.

Then we come to lines that have been crossed through: ‘I had the pleasure to be his friend and the chance to follow his development from the beginning. As a friend, he was incomparable and with gratitude I remember the hours we spent together. Jean Sibelius.’

We do not know who crossed out these lines, but perhaps Sibelius or someone else decided that for a public statement about such a distinguished figure as Carl Nielsen, these remarks were too personal. Put another way, we witness here someone creating a certain conception, a pre-conceived idea of the formality appropriate to a national celebration. We humans do this all the time. Having conceptions is a condition of being human, an essential means of negotiating our daily lives. The problem with conceptions is that they can harden. They can engender myths and even interfere with genuine insights.

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*os! God Bedring med Benet! Mange kærlige Hilsner fra min Hustru og Deres gamle Ven Carl Nielsen*’ (also published in John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen. Brevudgaven*, vol.8, Copenhagen 2011, 227) (‘Dear Mrs. Sibelius, We miss having you here for Jean’s great success. It is going brilliantly, and you would be proud that his last symphony is so significant!! If only you were here with us! Good luck with the leg! Many warm greetings from my wife and your old friend Carl Nielsen’). The fourth item in Filebox 24 is Carl Nielsen’s calling card with an undated message scrawled on the reverse (tentatively assigned the date 1919 by the archivist, the year Sibelius attended the Nordic Music Festival in Copenhagen): ‘Kære Venner! De hjerteligste Hilsen. Jeg har varet paa Landet et par Dage og længes efter at se Der endnu engang’ (‘Dear Friends, Warmest greetings. I have been in the country and have days [free] and long to see you again’). After Carl Nielsen’s death, Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen wrote to Sibelius on at least two occasions: a letter dated 3 November 1939 and a picture postcard post-marked 8 December 1940 (Sibelius’s birthday). Her missives are preserved with the Sibelius letters in the National Library of Finland, Coll. 206.27.

Järvenpää, den 2 juli 1953.

Till Generalsekretariatet för  
Carl Nielsen-Festival,  
Adr. Wilhelm Hansen, Musik-Forlag,  
Gothersgade N<sup>o</sup> 9/11,  
K ö b e n h a v n K.

Hänvisande till Eder skrivelse av den 9 juni ber jag Eder vänligen i festprogrammet för Carl Nielsen Festival införa följande utlåtande:

"Carl Nielsen, Danmarks store son, var en boren symfoniker, ehuru han producerat sig i musikens alla former. Genom sin starka intelligens utvecklade han sitt geni för att uppnå de mål, vilka, såsom det syntes mig, voro klara för honom från början. Genom sin starka personlighet som komponist har han bildat skola och inverkat starkt på tonsättare i många länder. Man talar om huvud och hjärta; Carl Nielsen had bägge två i högsta grad. De principer han följde bl. a. en strävan bort från romantiken, äro aktuella just nu. Därför väcker hans musik stort intresse i våra dagar. Jag hade glädjen vara hans vän och hade möjlighet att följa med hans utveckling från början. Som vän var han oförliknelig och med tacksamhet minns jag de stunder vi voro tillsammans.

Jean Sibelius"

Fig. 4. Draft of Sibelius's encomium for publication in the Carl Nielsen Festival program in 1953. National Archives of Finland, the Sibelius Family Archives, Filebox 35.

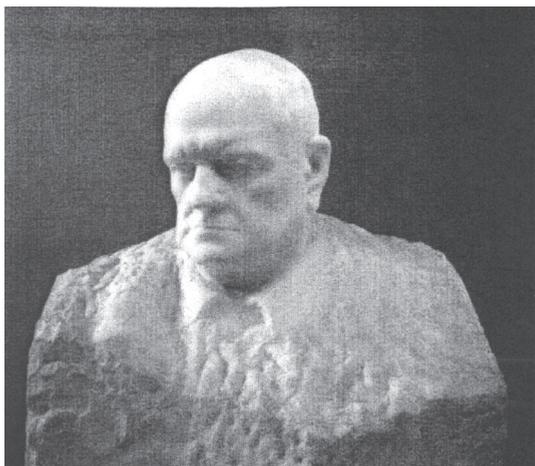


Fig. 5. Waino Aaltonen, *Sibelius*, ca. 1935. Marble bust. Ateneum Art Museum.



Fig. 6. Jean Sibelius in Berlin, 1889. Hämeenlinna Historical Museum, Hämeenlinna, Finland.

One conception widely shared today about Sibelius is how he looked. His public image is embodied in Waino Aaltonen's sculpture made in the 1930s, a monumental, implacable national figure (Fig. 5).

Even though Sibelius had just as many youthful years as any one of us (see Fig. 6), he has been relentlessly portrayed as eternally ancient, a kind of modern Väinämöinen.

When I began my Sibelius research in the 1980s, my starting point was American conceptions of Sibelius. I have to admit that Americans have some rather weird ideas about Sibelius and Finland. Long before I came anywhere near Finland, it was clear that many writings in English – whether American or British, for that matter – supplied notions that sounded more sensational than sensible. The music critic Olin Downes (1886–1955) was a master at conceptualizing the Finn for American audiences. In 1914, Downes was proclaiming: 'Out of the north has come a new prophet: Jean Sibelius.'<sup>9</sup> He described the composer's works as being about as welcome in Boston's Back Bay parlors as an unwashed Viking dressed in skins smelling of cod-liver oil. As for Sibelius's Second Symphony, no coach and horses under open skies here, but a symphony 'gloriously rude.'

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<sup>9</sup> These and other remarks by and about Olin Downes are taken from my *Jean Sibelius and Olin Downes: Music, Friendship, Criticism*, Boston 1995; see especially 28–37.

Rather desperately feeling the need for some balance to counter these extravagant conceptions, I found that extravagant measures were required: spending an entire year in Finland. Now twenty years later, having lived and worked in Finland almost fifteen of those years, I have learned many things, including that Finns have some rather strange conceptions about Americans. To put the matter more philosophically: living in Finland I became acutely aware of how seriously conceptions – mine as well as other people’s – interfered with my perceptions.

Working with the Sibelius collected edition (the *Jean Sibelius Works*) was an essential part of my journey to conceptual awareness. One of my tasks was to edit *Kullervo*, Sibelius’s first symphony and his only choral one. He took the texts directly from the *Kalevala*, the Finns’ epic collection of oral poetry. At that time the Sibelius edition was still young, and we were in the process of developing its guidelines. One problem that had not been addressed was what to do if changes occurred in the received *Kalevala* texts when they were set to music. Sibelius had changed one word in all of the hundreds in the *Kullervo* story. Only later did I come to appreciate that this tiny change flew in the face of not one, but two, deeply entrenched conceptions in Finland: the *Kalevala* as a sacred text and the sanctity of an unsullied national composer.

The problem with ‘unsullied’ is *Kullervo* himself: this *Kalevalan* hero was deeply, tragically flawed. Not only was he lethally violent, but he also unwittingly seduced his own sister, causing her death and precipitating his own. Sibelius’s word change occurs at the moment when *Kullervo* is pulling out his silver shirts, his furs, and other evidence of his wealth and prosperity in an effort to entice the unrecognized maiden into his sledge. Although at first she scorns him, eventually, the *Kalevala* says, *Raha muutti morsiamen*, or ‘money changed [the girl’s] mind.’<sup>10</sup> For the word money, *raha*, Sibelius substituted desire, *halu*, which in the context implies desire for *Kullervo*.

The day I placed this question on the editorial table in Helsinki, there was a long and awkward silence. It was in fact some months before it was possible to take up the discussion of this word change in full. Now the conception that most Americans (and many others) have about Scandinavia, including Finland, is that it is the most gender-liberal place on earth. It never occurred to me that the small word *halu* would generate much discussion at all, and certainly not in the context of Sibelius’s music, much less that it would prove to be a delicate and embarrassing subject to broach in mixed company.

Today, I am happy to be able to tell you that *halu*, not *raha* – or in modern terms, love, not money – stands in the *Kullervo* critical edition, happy because I think

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<sup>10</sup> The change takes place in the third movement, b. 267. The literal translation of ‘*Raha muutti morsiamen*’ is ‘Money changed the bride’s mind,’ the explanation being that the maiden is about to become the ‘bride’ of *Kullervo*.

that *halu* both reflects the composer's desires and also makes musical sense.<sup>11</sup> But initially considerable outrage was expressed that anyone would dare to change the *Kalevala*'s poetry – never mind that the change was the composer's; never mind that Sibelius created an evocative love duet to accompany these very words; and never mind that the *Kalevala* verses themselves, transmitted orally, were rarely the same from one rendition to the next. The Finnish conception of the *Kalevala* is well-nigh biblical, and the conception of its creator is that he embodies the pure essence of the nation, a status no other Finnish composer has ever attained.

This little example illustrates the challenge we all face, whether we are studying Nielsen's music, Sibelius's music, or something else altogether: getting the reigning conceptions out of the way in order to engage with a work on its own terms. The challenge may be especially difficult with composers as close to us in time as Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius. There is a temptation to feel that they are 'just like us' and to approach their works in ways that make perfect sense to us today.

In many cases it is not difficult to see how certain conceptions arose – once we recognize them. The Finns' deeply Lutheran background probably has something to do with the squeamish reactions to an artistic display of desire, particularly when the desire involves a brother and sister. Finland's history has contributed significantly to the need for a pure Finnish Sibelius. As a young nation, created only at the end of 1917, Finland desperately needed heroes and public figures to embody its values and ideals. The heritage of over 600 years of Swedish rule and more than a century of Russian was quietly forgotten or played down.

*Kullervo* is particularly valuable for illustrating these points, because it has been considered a cornerstone of Finnish music. The work shows not only how reigning conceptions can clash with an outsider's perceptions, but also how composers themselves may foster misconceptions. More than a decade after completing *Kullervo*, Sibelius was emphatically denying ever having used folksongs in his music.<sup>12</sup> For most of the twentieth century this belief permeated the literature on the composer. I was thus not prepared to find indisputable evidence that Sibelius had in hand at least two folksong collections as he composed the symphony. One of these, Eemil Sivori's

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11 For discussion of this editorial problem and the various resonances suggested by Sibelius's word change, see the Introduction to my edition of the *Kullervo* symphony, *Jean Sibelius Works* (hereafter JSW) 1/1.1, Wiesbaden 2005, xii–xiii, and 'A Backdrop for Young Sibelius: The Intellectual Genesis of the *Kullervo* Symphony,' in *19<sup>th</sup> Century Music* 27 (2003), 70–72, where *Kullervo* is placed within a more broadly European context.

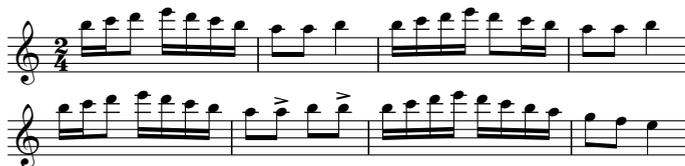
12 In a letter to the British critic Rosa Newmarch, 8 February 1906, SFA, Filebox 121, a claim Newmarch published in her *Jean Sibelius: A Short Story of a Long Friendship*, Boston 1939. For Philip Ross Bullock's recent edition of these letters, see *The Correspondence of Jean Sibelius and Rosa Newmarch, 1906–1939*, Woodbridge 2011.

*Mäntyharjun kansanlauluja koonnut sekä kvartetille ja sekaääniselle koorille*,<sup>13</sup> was a quintessentially Finnish product of the awakening, the kind of folksong anthology being produced elsewhere in European national movements. But the other collection was anything but quintessentially Finnish.

It had been noted before that this sprightly theme in *Kullervo*'s fourth movement (see Ex. 1) sounds oddly familiar, strongly resembling a far better-known theme composed some eighteen years later, namely, the familiar *Danse russe* in Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (Ex. 2).



Ex. 1. Jean Sibelius, *Kullervo*, Op. 7, Movement IV, bb. 142–147.<sup>14</sup>



Ex. 2. Igor Stravinsky, *Danse russe* from *Petrushka*, Part I, rehearsal 64.<sup>15</sup>

The tune to which both Stravinsky in *Petrushka* and Sibelius in *Kullervo* allude was published in the celebrated anthology of Russian folksongs by Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach, a resource mined by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Rossini, Beethoven (for those Razumovsky Quartets), and many others.<sup>16</sup> So is another tune heard in *Kullervo*'s third movement.<sup>17</sup> The allusion to more than one melody from a single collection strongly

13 The title translates as *Folksongs of Mäntyharju collected for quartets as well as choruses* (Porvoo: Werner Söderström, 1887). See the Introduction to *Kullervo*, *Jean Sibelius Works* I/1.1., ix–xix, which deals with the importance of Sivori's collection to the symphony and includes facsimiles of folksongs used in Sibelius's earlier brass *Allegro*.

14 From *Jean Sibelius Works* I/1.3, ed. by Glenda Dawn Goss, Wiesbaden 2005.

15 Copyright 1912 by Hawkes & Son (London) Ltd. Revised version Copyright 1948 by Hawkes & Son (London) Ltd. U.S. Copyright renewed.

16 Richard Taruskin identifies the source for *Petrushka*'s *Danse russe* as 'Ai, vo polye lipin'ka' (a tune also used by Rimsky-Korsakov in his *Snow Maiden*, Act III, bars 1–8); see the discussion in Taruskin's *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through 'Mavra'*, Oxford 1996, vol. 1, 695–717. This issue was first dealt with vis-à-vis Sibelius in my article 'Jean Sibelius's Choral Symphony *Kullervo*,' *Choral Journal* (February 2007), 17–26. As for 'Lvov-Prach,' the anthology was first published in Saint Petersburg in 1790 and went through further editions in 1806 and 1815. For a facsimile of the 1806 edition, see *A Collection of Russian Folksongs* [compiled and arranged by Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach], edited by Malcolm Hamrick Brown, with an introduction and appendixes by Margarita Mazo, Ann Arbor, MI 1987.

suggests that Sibelius had access either to Lvov-Prach or to Rimsky-Korsakov's *100 Russian Folk Songs*, which incorporated a substantial portion of the Lvov-Prach repertory, including both of these tunes.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of 1890s Finland, it would in fact have been strange had Sibelius not drawn on folksong. National songs were on the agenda of the Finnish awakening, and what better way to create a national symphony than to draw on national resources? Lvov-Prach and Rimsky-Korsakov were fair game, particularly as many of their melodies had been gathered in Karelia, the home of the *Kalevala* itself. But later, when *Kullervo* began to be singled out as marking the birth of Finnish music and Sibelius was being promoted as 'so original' and 'purely Finnish,' the stigma of anything borrowed or remotely Russian became insupportable.

What I find important about these and other borrowings in *Kullervo* is not the Easter-egg hunt of collecting Sibelius's musical debts, but rather what the composer considered legitimate resources for creating a Finnish musical identity in 1892. Even though the conception of the 'purity of the Finns' reigned during most of the twentieth century, the truth is that artistic Finns in the 1890s drew things in rather than keeping things out. That wide-open embrace was an essential part of their creativity.

We hear it in *Kullervo*, with its echoes of Russian-Karelian folksong, Beethovenian choral symphony, Freudian scenarios, and Verdiesque unison choruses. We see it in the magnificent fresco *Kullervo Riding Off to War* by Sibelius's contemporary, Axel Gallén, another child of 1865 (see Fig. 7).

The fresco is a monument of the Finnish awakening, yet the knight on horseback, the horse's handsome caparison, the direction of horse and rider, even the startling blue of the background sky as well as the fresco techniques themselves harken back to the Italian Renaissance artist Simone Martini (1284–1344), whose fresco *Guidoriccio da Fogliano* graces the Palazzo Publica in Siena, a work Gallén had studied. We find this wide-open attitude in Finnish literature as well, much of which was written in Swedish: Bertel Gripenberg's *Teodora*, for instance, a poem to which Sibelius improvised at the piano while Norwegian actress Johanne Dybwad declaimed verses brimming with opulent images of the Byzantine Empress.

The fascination with the Orient and Orientalism arrived in Helsinki via St.

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17 'Vo poly beryozyn'ka stoyal.' Leoš Janáček used the same well-known tune in the Prelude to his opera *From the House of the Dead*, based on a novel by Dostoyevsky about life in a Siberian prison. Janáček had his own copy of Lvov-Prach, which, according to John Tyrrell, was a valuable resource for his operatic inspiration; see Tyrrell's *Janáček: Years of a Life, Vol. 1, 1854–1914*, London 2006, 352–53. Prach, incidentally, was probably Czech.

18 *100 Chants nationaux russes, recueillis et harmonisés par N. Rimsky-Korsakov*, édition complète, 3 vols. Paris [n.d.].



Fig. 7. Axel Gallén, *Kullervon sotaanlähtö* (*Kullervo Departs for War*), 1901. Tempera on canvas. Fresco in the University Student House, Helsinki. Ateneum Art Museum/Central Art Archives.

Petersburg and also by way of Paris. In 1908, when Sibelius turned *Teodora* into an art song, he was keeping company with the Euterpists, a group of Swedish-Finnish writers who were keenly attuned to French ideas, such as Orientalism, then in the air and who were appreciative of the clear, classical orientation of the French spirit; hence the group's name, Euterpe. Sibelius, who after all had chosen the French 'Jean' as his musical name, reflected similar attitudes, not only in art songs, but also in major works such as the Third Symphony (completed in 1907).

The first movement's second theme, a startlingly sensuous, undulating melody supported by underlying drones, together with the symphony's key of C major – out of sync with the avant-garde in the first decade of the twentieth century as measured by Germanic standards, but, significantly, the very key that Rimsky-Korsakov chose for his Third Symphony – together with the use of ostinato variations in the closing movement rather than conventional developmental techniques (which Mussorgsky dismissed as 'Germanizing'<sup>19</sup>) led the great Sibelius scholar Erik Tawaststjerna to observe that Sibelius's Third Symphony was 'totally out of step with the times. Its Vi-

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19 Mussorgsky's observation appears in translation in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, selected and annotated by Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, New York 1984, 395–96.

ennese classical orchestration could hardly be at greater variance with the ethos of Mahler and Strauss.<sup>20</sup> While the comment is perfectly true, what Prof. Tawaststjerna could not very well add in the 1970s – given the prevailing conceptions about Sibelius in Finland, as well as the conceptions in musicology where German hegemony has so long held sway – was that Sibelius’s Third Symphony was quite in tune with tastes along the Paris–Saint Petersburg axis.

One last example I would like to mention is *Tapiola*. It seems ironic that while so many of Sibelius’s works for which he drew on multiple resources have been cast by later writers as ‘pure Finnish’ music, *Tapiola* – whose Finnish title means ‘where the Forest god dwells’ and which might well be described as quintessentially Finnish – has stubbornly persisted in being couched in Germanic terms. The reason mainly has to do with the motto printed in the score by Sibelius’s German publishers, Breitkopf & Härtel (in German, French, and English):

Wide-spread they stand, the Northland’s dusky forests,  
Ancient, mysterious, brooding savage dreams;  
Within them dwells the Forest’s mighty God,  
And wood-sprites in the gloom weave magic secrets.<sup>21</sup>

Those lines embody a German conception of the forest, which we all know from fairy tales – dark, threatening, terrifying places. There, monsters lurk, wolves gobble up unsuspecting children, and witches lure the lost into dank dens from which they never escape. The Finns, however, conceptualize the forest very differently. For them, it is a nurturing place, a realm of safety, a haven of peace. In testing this conception as I was writing Sibelius’s biography, I found among his papers another version of *Tapiola*’s motto; although written in English, it comes far closer to the Finnish spirit: ‘*Tapiola*’: A deep and dreamy northern forest, where the god of forests and his wood-nymphs live.’<sup>22</sup>

‘Deep and dreamy’ rather than ‘brooding and savage’; ‘nymphs’ – enchanting, inspirational – rather than ‘sprites’ with their overtones of mischief-making; the differences are significant. The winds of social unrest dividing Finland might sweep through *Tapiola*’s pages, but in the sheltering forests around his home called Ainola,

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20 Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius, Volume II 1904–1914*, 67. The Third Symphony’s connections with the St. Petersburg musical milieu are discussed in more detail in *Sibelius: A Composer’s Life*, 336–41.

21 Quoted from Jean Sibelius, *Tapiola*, Studienpartitur PB3348, ed. by Carl Etzler, Wiesbaden 1926.

22 The discussion and findings on *Tapiola* are drawn from *Sibelius: A Composer’s Life*, 424–25.

the composer found a haven of safety. There, in 1926 he sculpted the leanest, most minimal symphonic piece he ever wrote. Like Giacometti, who ultimately chiseled his art out of existence, Sibelius too reduced his music until, in the end, there was none.

There is something deeply disturbing about the end of this story, about Sibelius's fateful lapse into silence, something that is not satisfied by the conventional explanations of too much self criticism, too much alcohol, too much money. Indeed, there is too much at stake to accept such glibly imparted anodynes. If we can step outside of our conceptions – the unquestioned, endlessly recycled beliefs – and allow for perception – the awareness of things unseen – we might perceive, for instance, that the great national awakening, which brought about the democratic republic of Finland, also fatally carried the seeds of creative destruction for the artistic men and women who were its agents. Their illusions were cruelly shattered, their creative juices sucked dry, on realizing what they had wrought: not a wide open, continuous-golden-age Finland, but a closed-in, 'pure Finnish' and deeply divided Finland, rent by Reds versus Whites, hatred of all things Russian, a vicious civil war, and bitter disputes over language, which pitted the country's Finnish speakers against its Swedish speakers. By stepping outside of our conceptions, we might recognize in the figure sculpted by Waino Aaltonen (shown in Fig. 5) less of Sibelius as a mythic Väinämöinen, a bringer of music to Finland, and more of the man, a human being helplessly imprisoned in the granitic mold of his iconic status, the composer as silent as the artist who sculpted him was deaf.

To deny our perceptions is to miss the extraordinary depth and richness of Sibelius's music and all the possibilities these suggest for interpretation. To cling to our conceptions is to ignore the dynamic context in which he lived and composed – and to avert our eyes from his great tragedy. Another contemporary of Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), captured this elusive perception in one of his last works, *Sonnets to Orpheus*:

A god can do it. But how shall a man, say,  
get to him through the narrow lyre and follow?  
His mind's dichotomy. Where two heartways  
cross there stands no temple for Apollo.<sup>23</sup>

Two heartways crossed for Sibelius: his creative life and the new, radically changed, independent Finland, which he had helped to create and where he was sorely needed as a heroic, patriotic symbol. Did Sibelius, like the *Kalevala*'s Väinämöinen, lose his

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23 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, with English translations and notes by C. F. MacIntyre, Berkeley 1965, repr. 1997, 7; quoted by permission.

power through hubris – clinging to his godlike status? Or did he consciously make a true hero's heartbreaking exchange: his creative soul for service as an empty icon for the greater good of his nation? The answer has been left suitably, and for Sibelius characteristically, ambiguous.

Whatever the answer, for those of us gathered here today, the deeper significance of Sibelius's story may be its message for the role of scholars – that ultimately a scholarly calling may be to strive for the perceptions of the outsider while working diligently to master the knowledge base of those on the inside.

#### A B S T R A C T

Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius offer particularly intriguing examples of “national” composers who symbolize their countries to the world. Their lives and works are striking not only because of their contemporaneousness and relative geographical closeness, but also because they represent startlingly parallel examples in musical ways, including their cultivation of the symphony, chamber music, and song. In a departure from the rule, namely, the interpretation of a “great national composer” by a fellow national, this essay is a close examination of one of the pair, namely, Sibelius, by an outsider. This approach, together with the use of comparison and contrast, enables us to gain fresh insights also into Carl Nielsen.