The Sibelius of Myths, Lore and Legends

Saturday, March 9 – 8 pm

Alexander Prior, conductor

Symphony Prelude, 7 pm on Third Level (Upper Circle) Lobby with Alexander Prior & D.T. Baker

all music by **Jean SIBELIUS**

The Tempest, Op.109 (28')*

- Suite No. 1: I – The Oak Tree
- Suite No. 1: III – Caliban's Song
- Suite No. 1: IV – The Harvesters
- Suite No. 1: V – Canon
- Suite No. 1: VI – Scene
- Suite No. 1: VIII – Entr'acte – Ariel's Song
- Suite No. 1: IX – The Storm
- Suite No. 2: II – Intermezzo
- Suite No. 2: III – Dance of the Nymphs
- Suite No. 2: VII – Miranda
- Suite No. 1: VII – Intrada - Berceuse

Tapiola, Op.112 (21')*

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op.43 (45')*

- Allegretto
- Andante ma rubato
- Vivacissimo
- Allegro moderato

program subject to change
*indicates approximate performance duration

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The last orchestral works – ***Tapiola*** and **Suite from *The Tempest***

With the completion of his remarkable cycle of symphonies, culminating in the miraculously concise and proportional *Seventh*, Jean Sibelius would not write another symphony. Most experts feel that to have tried to do so would be to "begin again," as it were, as it would have been nearly impossible to follow what he had accomplished from the *First* to the *Seventh*. But what is remarkable is that Sibelius spent the final decades of his life writing virtually nothing more. "The Silence of Järvenpää," it was called, named after the location in Finland of the home Sibelius had built for his family. Only two major orchestral works followed the *Seventh Symphony*, and tonight's concert features them both.

The merits of each are often discussed. Even the official Sibelius website, sibelius.fi (and a wonderful resource it is) says of the two last works: "Jean Sibelius's orchestral poems culminate in *Tapiola* in 1926. This was Sibelius's last masterpiece for orchestra. In August 1927 he would send to his publisher the suites which he had prepared from the incidental music for *The Tempest*, but the suites do not meet the expectations aroused by the original incidental music. In contrast, *Tapiola* is one of Sibelius's most original and ingenious masterpieces, and one of the most remarkable compositions of the 20th century."

The Tempest, Op.109

First performance of the play with Sibelius' music: March 16, 1926
This is the ESO premiere of any of the music from *The Tempest*

Many an artist has seen in the character of Prospero a version of themselves. Prospero is the magician who sets in motion the events of Shakespeare's final play, *The Tempest*. Shakespeare himself saw in Prospero a mirror image: an ageing man, weary of bringing his particular magic to the world, and making his farewell with a last bit of sorcery. Jean Sibelius, 59 years old in 1924, saw parallels as well. Nearly 25 years earlier, his friend and supporter Axel Carpelan had suggested Sibelius write incidental music for the play, but it took a commission from the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen for it to come about.

Sibelius composed 35 sections for the first performance, which was actually a Danish translation of Shakespeare's play. For another production given the year after, in Finnish this time at the Finnish National Theatre, Sibelius added an epilogue. Soon after, Sibelius fashioned two suites from the complete score, though not without some controversy, as the quote above would indicate. In creating music for the concert hall, Sibelius re-ordered much of the music – the opening storm which gives the work its title, for example, is the final movement of the first suite.

But performances of *The Tempest* with Sibelius' music are rare indeed, and of the 11 works Sibelius wrote for the theatre, his incidental music for *The Tempest*, even in the revised, rearranged, and in some case shortened forms that the suites take on, offer a chance to hear the mature Sibelius in a unique way.

Tonight's performance marks the first time the Edmonton Symphony has presented any of the music for The Tempest. We will hear movements from both suites, and while they are not the complete suites, the order will follow the order in which Sibelius arranged them.

Tapiola, Op.112

First performed: December 26, 1926 in New York
This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Around the same time as the composition of *The Tempest* incidental music, Sibelius received a commission from the New York Philharmonic's conductor, Walter Damrosch. The tone poem Sibelius composed was his final major work, and for it, he turned once again to the *Kalevala*.

The *Kalevala* is a collection of Finnish mythology and folklore, assembled in the 19th century largely by Elias Lönnrot. The timing of its publication in 1835 was to prove a key factor, as the Finnish people struggled to win their independence from Russia – which they did, in 1917. The *Kalevala* became one of the most important cultural icons in the establishment of a separate Finnish identity and nationalism – a source of inspiration and pride. Not surprisingly, it inspired many important works in a wide range of artistic expression. Sibelius had turned to it for several of his important works, and surely its spirit and ethos permeated many others.

One of its legends was that of Tapio, god of the forests. Tapiola was his domain. Sibelius appended some words he wrote himself to one of the first editions of the published score, which his publisher – with the permission of the composer – turned into a quatrain which appears on the opening page:

Widespread 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 their magic secrets.

Those of us privileged enough to live in a northern land rich in woodland of its own can certainly easily hear the landscape so articulately brought to life in *Tapiola*. Despite it being one of Sibelius' longest tone poems, *Tapiola* is a remarkably economic and concise work. Nearly every theme in the work is derived from a deceptively simple opening motif. The pacing is deceptive: after only a few bars marked Largamente, the rest of the work alternates Allegro tempos. Nearly the entire work is in B minor; only the very last measures end the work in a warmer B Major. Tapio himself reveals his power in two storms of considerable ferocity. Sibelius' *Tapiola* may not be a picture postcard interpretation of the Finnish woods, but it is a remarkable painting of its mystery, magic, and the creatures who live in its legends. As a final masterpiece, even for a composer who lived almost 31 years more, it is a worthy farewell.

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op.43

First performed: March 8, 1902 in Helsinki
Last ESO performance: May 2013

It was while on vacation with his family in Italy in 1901 that Jean Sibelius sketched out the following scenario for a musical composition: “Don Juan. Sit in the twilight in my palace, a guest (the Stone Guest) comes in. I ask more than once who he is – no answer. I try to amuse him. He remains silent. Finally the stranger starts to sing. Then Don Juan recognizes who he is – Death.”

But what was originally conceived as part of an intended work based on the Don Juan legend instead became the main theme for the second movement of Sibelius’ *Second Symphony*. His *First Symphony* had been reasonably well received, if compared a little too often to Tchaikovsky for his liking. “I know that I have much in common with that man,” Sibelius wrote home to his wife, Aino, “but nothing can be done about that.” And yet, with each symphony, Sibelius moved significantly forward in crafting his own symphonic voice, and the *Second* begins that process.

The plan was to have it ready for a concert at the end of 1901. That proved a little optimistic, and its triumphant premiere took place the following March. The symphony has become, along with the *Fifth*, Sibelius’ most often-performed symphony. Serenity and majesty dominate the opening moments, with a pulsing figure contrasted against a noble horn melody. Fragments like this seem to come and go, confounding a clearly discernible Sonata form. But Sibelius constructs something marvellously integral from these pieces, and he once remarked of this movement, “It is as if the Almighty had thrown down the pieces of a mosaic for heaven’s floor and asked me to put them together.”

Pizzicato basses and cellos usher in the second movement, until bassoons in octaves first present the Don Juan “death” theme that first inspired him. The Andante pacing gradually increases to Poco allegro, nudged along by an insistent timpani, until the violins present what sounds like a cold, brief motif. The music swirls up to a climax, followed by the violin motif, now unveiled as the heart of a beautiful secondary theme – another idea from Sibelius’ days in Italy.

The third movement is in a Scherzo and Trio design. It scurries in, quietly but energetically, until its frantic pacing is halted by five sharp beats on the timpani, yielding to the Lento Trio section introduced in a pastoral passage for winds. Both the Scherzo and Trio sections repeat, and without a pause, an extended bridge welds the third movement to the finale, returning us to D Major from the previous movement’s B-flat.

The finale is in Sonata form, its principal theme announced at the outset – majestic, grand, sweeping – strings answered by warm, rich brass. There is certainly still something of Tchaikovsky’s overt romanticism here, but the way the theme is used throughout the Development is certainly Sibelius’ own. The quiet beginning of the Development is finally overwhelmed by the resoundingly powerful final moments – Sibelius revealing his vision of heaven, perhaps, after all.