



SIBELIUS

ETHEREAL

APRIL 22 & 23, 2023

SUNSET CENTER, CARMEL

Ethereal is sponsored by Beverly and Lyman Hamilton

Jayce Ogren, Music Director and Conductor

Tessa Lark, violin

Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

[running time 31']

Jean Sibelius

(1865-1957)

- I: Allegro moderato
- II: Adagio di molto
- III: Allegro, ma non tanto

INTERMISSION [20']

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43 [43']

Jean Sibelius

(1865-1957)

- I: Allegro
- II: Tempo andante, ma rubato
- III: Vivacissimo
- IV: Finale

The April concert will be rebroadcast on KAZU's HD2 Classical station
on May 6, 2023, and May 7, 2023, both at 4PM.

PROGRAM NOTES

By Dr. Alicia Mastromonaco

APRIL 22-23, 2023

Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)



Sibelius was known, perhaps sometimes to his own frustration, as one of the most famous Finnish composers of the late nineteenth to early- twentieth centuries. His compositions have become inextricably linked to Finnish nationalism, and a "Finnish sound." Thankfully, in recent decades, Sibelius has been given more credit for his original compositional style as well as his musical nationalism. Fabian Dahlström and James Hepokoski note that his work is distinguished by

"unorthodox treatments of triadic harmony, orchestral colour and musical process and structure."

Sibelius, himself a violinist (although not nearly the virtuoso needed for this concerto), wrote the first version in 1903 and 1904. Sibelius was encouraged to write a violin concerto by Willy Burmester, to whom the composer announced he would dedicate the work. However, Sibelius did not follow through on his promise to Burmester, which ultimately may have been detrimental to the work itself. Nonetheless, Sibelius set to work on the concerto. His wife Aino wrote in a letter to Axel Carpelan (to whom Sibelius dedicated his second symphony), "Janne has been on fire all the time (and so have I!) and this time there has once again been an 'embarras de richesse'. He has such a multitude of themes in his head that he has been literally quite dizzy. He stays awake all night, plays incredibly beautifully, cannot tear himself away from the delightful melodies - he has so many ideas that it is hard to believe it. And all the themes are so capable of development, full of life." Sibelius found himself composing the concerto in a flurry of activity.

The work was premiered in Helsinki in February 1904, with Sibelius conducting and Viktor Nováček on the violin. The work was criticized as ostentatious to the point of being almost frivolous, far outside Sibelius's reputation as a "deep and sober thinker." Sibelius was disappointed in the work at first, partially due to the criticism of the respected Helsinki music critic Karl Flodin, and he withheld the first version of the work from publication. It was not until 1990 that this first version was recovered. Criticism for the piece stemmed from the overt virtuosity, but also perhaps from the sub-par interpretation by Nováček, who was known as a teacher, not as an accomplished soloist. If Burmester had been given the opportunity to premiere the work, perhaps the outcome would have been different. As it was, Sibelius revised the work dramatically (particularly the first and third movements), which is the version played today. Burmester again offered to perform the new work in October 1904 but was passed over again for the premiere of the new version; he never played the concerto for the rest of his career. The new version of the work was premiered in October 1905 in Berlin with Karel Halíř on the violin and Richard Strauss on the podium.

The concerto evokes the frigid, "brooding Nordic atmosphere" of Finland, and is very Sibelian in its style. There is sometimes tension between the piece as a virtuoso concerto, designed to show off a soloist's skills, and a more "serious" symphonic work, worthy of Sibelius's reputation. Sibelius tried to mitigate this tension this by using the violin as not only a vessel for virtuosity, but as an integral part of the musical architecture, right down to the cadenza, which is an important part of the structure of the piece. The work gradually garnered more and more attention until the 1930s, when it was recorded by Jascha Heifetz and catapulted to fame. Today, it is perhaps the most popular violin concerto written in the twentieth century.

"The concerto evokes the frigid, "brooding Nordic atmosphere" of Finland..."



PROGRAM NOTES continued

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

At the end of the nineteenth century, Finland began to resist its Russian occupiers with a turn toward traditional culture, music, and folk tales as a means of cultural rebellion. *Karelianism*, an artistic movement that came out of the nineteenth century, looked to Karelian folklore as an example of true “Finnishness,” and inspired Sibelius to compose orchestral works such as *The Swan of Tuonela*, *Lemminkäinen’s Return*, and *Finlandia*, among others. This nationalism also found its way into his symphonies.

Sibelius’s reputation as a composer whose music had nationalist overtones worked both for and against him at different points in his life. As was the case with the violin concerto, the immense popularity of *Finlandia* after its premiere, exploded Sibelius’s popularity and gave him an international reputation. By the 1950s, his reputation plummeted because he was pigeon-holed into being a composer of uniquely Finnish nationalist music. The two pieces that seemed to have escaped this criticism were the Second Symphony and Violin Concerto, the two exact works on this program.

Much of the thematic material for the second symphony was composed on a trip to Italy in April 1901. This compositional trip was organized by Axel Carpelan, a Finnish man of noble birth with no money but a love of Sibelius’s music, who convinced a donor to underwrite the trip. Sibelius found Rapallo and Florence fruitful, coming home with a decent amount of material. At first, he wanted to write a tone poem on Don Juan, but scrapped that in favor of writing a tone poem based on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Eventually eventually these tone poems were eschewed in favor of writing a second symphony. Sibelius realized that the material he had been working on was best suited to a larger symphonic work. The composer spent the summer and fall working on the symphony, and then completed a large revision on the work in January 1902 before its premiere in March of 1902.

Robert Kajanus conducted the first performances of the Second Symphony with the Helsinki Philharmonic and praised the work effusively. He interpreted the symphony as an overt political expression of the conflict between Finland and Russia at the time. Sibelius resisted this interpretation, denying that there was ever a cause associated with the work. Perhaps the composer felt that if another work of his were to be associated with the politics of Finland’s

oppression by the Russians (as was *Finlandia*), the work would not find favorable reception beyond Finland's borders. He wanted his music to be more widely received by a humanist audience, in Europe and beyond. Sibelius's denial of a political cause is also backed up by his sketches that date back to 1899 and eventually became the finale for the symphony.

Whether or not there was ever an extra-musical agenda associated with the symphony, the sense of triumph at the end of the work is undeniable. The piece opens pastorally, with a forward-moving ascending three-note motif. The movements of the symphony are related to each other by thematic material, but the structure does not follow what had been standard formalistic procedure up to that point. The result is a symphony that sounds organic and, as Sibelius wrote in his diary, a deeply personal "inner confession" at that point in his life.

"Whether or not there was ever an extra musical agenda associated with the symphony, the sense of triumph at the end of the work is undeniable."

DR. ALICIA MASTROMONACO

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL HORN
EDUCATION COORDINATOR



Alicia has played with the Monterey Symphony since 2007. She is also a member of the Carmel Bach Festival and Marin Symphony and plays in orchestras across the Bay Area. A San Francisco native, she began her music studies at age seven on the piano, sang in the San Francisco Girls Chorus, and took up the horn in middle school when she was given her uncle's old single B-flat Conn to try out (and fell in love with the instrument). Alicia earned Bachelor of Music degrees in

Horn Performance and Musicology from Boston University, then did graduate work at the Universität der Künste Berlin before returning to California to continue her studies. She earned a Master of Music degree at University of California, Los Angeles in Horn performance, and a Master of Arts and PhD in Musicology from University of California, Santa Barbara. Her dissertation, "Breakdown on the Freeway Philharmonic: Understanding the Causes and Effects of Regional Orchestra Bankruptcies in the San Francisco Bay Area," traces the history of the Oakland and San José Symphonies from their inception through their bankruptcies in 1988 and 2002, respectively, and provides sociocultural analysis of the many factors facing the groups that led to their demise. She lives with her husband and two cats in El Cerrito and enjoys the many beautiful hiking trails just outside their door.