



# SIBELIUS

## *Finlandia*, Op. 26/7

**Jean Sibelius** (8 December 1865 – 20 September 1957) was a Finnish composer of the later Romantic period. His music played an important role in the formation of the Finnish national identity. His mastery of the orchestra has been described as "prodigious." The core of Sibelius's oeuvre is his set of seven symphonies. Like Beethoven, Sibelius used each successive work to further develop his own personal compositional style. His works continue to be performed frequently in the concert hall and are often recorded. In addition to the symphonies, Sibelius's best-known compositions include *Finlandia*, the *Karelia Suite*, *Valse triste*, the Violin Concerto in D minor and *The Swan of Tuonela* (one of the four movements of the *Lemminkäinen Suite*). Other works include pieces inspired by the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala; over 100 songs for voice and piano; incidental music for 13 plays; the opera *Jungfrun i tornet* (*The Maiden in the Tower*); chamber music; piano music; Masonic ritual music;<sup>1</sup> and 21 separate publications of choral music. Sibelius composed prolifically until the mid-1920s. However, after completing his Seventh Symphony (1924), the incidental music to *The Tempest* (1926), and the tone poem *Tapiola* (1926), he produced no large scale works for the remaining thirty years of his life. Although he is reputed to have stopped composing, he in fact attempted to continue writing, including abortive efforts to compose an eighth symphony. He wrote some Masonic music and re-edited some earlier works during this last period of his life, and retained an active interest in new developments in music, although he did not always view modern music favorably. Sibelius has fallen in and out of fashion, but remains one of the most popular 20th century symphonists, both in the concert hall and on record. Sibelius had spent much time producing profitable chamber music for home use, salon music, occasional works for the stage and other incidental music, all of which has now been systematically recorded on BIS Records' complete Sibelius Edition. This major editorial project to record every note Sibelius left us also encompasses surviving sketches and early versions of the major works.

*Finlandia*, Op. 26 is a symphonic poem by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. The first version was written in 1899, and it was revised in 1900. The piece was composed for the Press Celebrations of 1899, a covert protest against increasing censorship from the Russian Empire, as the last of seven pieces, each performed as an accompaniment to a tableau depicting episodes from Finnish history. The premiere was on 2 July 1900 in Helsinki with the Helsinki Philharmonic Society conducted by Robert Kajanus. A typical performance takes anywhere from 7½ to 9 minutes. A recurrent joke within Finland at this time was the renaming of *Finlandia* at various musical concerts so as to avoid Russian censorship. Titles under which the piece masqueraded were numerous, a famously flippant example being *Happy Feelings at the awakening of Finnish Spring*. Most of the piece is taken up with rousing and turbulent music, evoking the national struggle of the Finnish people. But towards the end, a calm comes over the orchestra, and the serenely melodic *Finlandia Hymn* is heard. Often incorrectly cited as a traditional folk melody, the Hymn section is of Sibelius's own creation. Although initially composed for orchestra, in 1900 Sibelius arranged the entire work for solo piano. Sibelius later reworked the *Finlandia Hymn* into a stand-alone piece. This hymn, with words written in 1941 by Veikko Antero Koskenniemi, is one of the most important national songs of Finland (though *Maamme* is the national anthem). With different words, it is also sung as a Christian hymn (*Be Still, My Soul*; also *Hail, Festal Day*), and was the national anthem of the short-lived African state of Biafra (*Land of the Rising Sun*).