

**Outside the circus: psychology,
modernity and narrativity in
Sibelius's Fourth Symphony**

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Abstract

Written at a time when Sibelius himself was in crisis, the Fourth Symphony occupies a place not only as the numerical midpoint of seven symphonies, but also as a stylistic watershed, attracting strongly-worded reviews and speculation about its meaning from contemporaneous critics. This thesis considers the work's cultural, musical and personal context from such starting points as Sibelius's status as a national icon, his claim that this was his "psychological symphony", and conflicting criticisms of a Third Symphony that was "out of step with the times" but a Fourth that was "disconcertingly new". All three areas hint at possible reasons for its initial unpopularity: the piece is stripped of any anticipated patriotism, instead presenting a dark and personal face, with its so-called "cubist" sparseness, obsession with the tritone and economy of form making uncomfortable listening for many at the time.

Despite Sibelius's claim that it had no programme, the Fourth Symphony quite obviously has elements of the evocative stillness and cinematic changes found in his tone poems. The crux of this study is a narrative interpretation, one that marries the music's unspoken drama – to paraphrase Abbate – with its essentially abstract nature by examining the use of instrumental "voices" in the foreground. Such an avoidance of a direct conferment of "meaning" again broaches the symphony's unpopularity. Having "nothing of the circus" could ultimately count against it: if it had to be interpreted, let its subject be clear, and if not, let it thrill the audience. The phrase "profound logic" sheds light on the motivation behind the work, the very opposite of that "circus": it is not a series of entertaining acts, but the logical pursuit of the consequences of its earliest ideas. Later works are briefly examined in this light, returning to the concept of this as a watershed work.

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Preface

My special interest in the music of Jean Sibelius began with the discovery of his Violin Concerto, although it was to be another four years until, in the final year of my undergraduate degree, I undertook a dissertation on his Third Symphony. During this study I developed a particular fascination with the next symphony, whose style seemed to be so startlingly different. It was in 1999 that I first began an independent analysis of the Fourth Symphony to pass the time on a long-haul flight, and it lay dormant and unfinished until I began this degree in 2014.

The Fourth Symphony remained at the forefront of my mind during those fifteen years. It is a piece to which I have returned repeatedly when teaching more able composition students about sowing the early seeds of later harmonic language, or the power of a sparse texture, or the potential contained in a set of four notes. The aesthetic contrast it presents to the symphonies on either side led me to think that it was an anomaly in the series of seven symphonies, and, in fact, my premise for this study was an assumption that the Fourth Symphony stood alone stylistically. The first stages of my research dispelled that belief, with glimpses of its soundworld appearing in many preceding pieces – the improvisatory clarinet solo at the beginning of the First Symphony, the solo cellist in *Pohjola's Daughter*, the disruption of the raised 4th in the Third Symphony. Very quickly, the study shifted to being a search for aspects of the “middle” style of the Fourth Symphony that were apparent in the early works, and expanded to include examination of his formal thinking and his absorption of the harmonic language of the times.

A consideration of the context has shed a great deal of light on the work, and has meant that what began as an analysis of a symphony has become a study of it as a document of a man's mid-life crisis. The reception of his middle symphonies seemed to be inseparable from that episode in his life, and the consequence of this discovery was to split my research into three areas: Sibelius's status as a national hero during an interesting period of Finland's history, and his subsequent desire

to rid himself of the mantle and write more abstract or personal works; the possibility that this particular “abstract” work has something to say about the composer’s inner self, despite a necessary caution about autobiographical interpretations; the surrounding musical scene and Sibelius’s place amidst a proliferation of musical “modernism”.

In terms of specific study of the Fourth Symphony itself – a plain analysis of its musical content at first, without consideration of context or possible angles of interpretation – I needed to find a good explanation for the way in which the music progressed and shaped time, or a way to put into words the impression that there was more to it than just the well-proportioned distribution of material over the course of a movement. Whilst analysing the Violin Concerto early on in my studies, it had struck me that the soloist was less a showcase than a “voice”, with an expressive role that sometimes steered the direction taken by the music. What if the same could be said for the Fourth Symphony, in which soloists are often at the fore and the impression of barely connected chains of thought or spontaneous conversation is frequent? The similarities with Carolyn Abbate’s narrativity theory were clear, and I extended this into my own narrative interpretation of the Fourth Symphony. It proved possible to encompass various aspects of the form such as improvisation, discontinuity, developing variation and compression, whilst offering an explanation for the growth and spread of ideas from an original germ, the disintegration of order, or the sense of eternally becoming. Given the fact that many of those features relate to motivic unity, it allowed me to look at the “profound logic” of the symphony and to dovetail this with theories of landscape, journey, goal and horizon.

At the time of starting to plan the thesis, the word “watershed” was still in the title, and although this was abandoned, it has remained important to place the Fourth Symphony in the context of works written before and after it. If the Fourth Symphony truly is a watershed, it must be both the culmination of what has gone before and the gateway to a new stylistic episode in the composer’s life.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the following thesis is my own work and that I am the sole author of material within it. It has not been presented previously for any award or qualification at any institution. All sources have been acknowledged in footnotes and in the resource list.

Introduction. An inner journey

It is a matter of satisfying symmetry that the fourth of a series of seven symphonies should also sit at a central point in the composer's stylistic development and, perhaps, in his personal life. This study began from the perspective of an interested listener who perceived a great difference between the Fourth Symphony, op.63, and its predecessors, and has become an investigation into where the clues to the unfolding of this apparently new style lie in previous works. The clues do exist, and can be found in earlier works such as Symphonies Two and Three (respectively 1902 and 1907) and the Violin Concerto (1904, revised 1905) as well as the tone poems *The Swan of Tuonela* (1893), *Pohjola's Daughter* (1906), and *The Dryad* (1910), where one hears not only the orchestration pointing towards the Fourth Symphony and an approach to form entrenched in the classical spirit of balance, reprise and unity, but also the germs of an harmonic language that was to become the most discussed and analysed aspect of the Fourth Symphony for the next century.

In his chapter on Cultural Identity and Cosmopolitan Developments in Northern, Western and Southern Europe in *A History of Twentieth-Century Music in a Theoretic-Analytical Context*, Elliott Antokoletz identifies certain specifically "Finnish" traits in Sibelius's orchestration, namely

the modality of the melodies – often played by dark, nostalgic English horn or cello solo – sustained static chords in the brass, full sonorities in the low registers of the winds or strings, and the surging of crescendos to full dynamic climaxes, creating a sense of spaciousness.¹

One has the taste of this soundworld even in the opening bars of the First Symphony (1889, rev.1890), and again in the melancholy cello solo at letter F in the second movement. The solitary, almost improvisatory clarinet that opens the first movement has partners in other works: the opening of the Violin Concerto, where the soloist unfolds a long theme within the confines of D

¹ Antokoletz, E: *A History of Twentieth-Century Music in a Theoretic-Analytical Context* (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), pp.128-9

dorian; the cello solo which opens *Pohjola's Daughter*, again an exploration of G dorian, with a similar immediate homing in on Λ^5 and Λ^1 to that of the Violin Concerto; and, most famously of all, the cor anglais solo that haunts *The Swan of Tuonela*.

As interesting as what preceded the Fourth Symphony is what interrupted it, and what was never finished. *The Dryad* shares many of its characteristics – it is something of a drawing board for the Fourth Symphony – in part because its composition was an interruption to work on the latter. Despite its label of op.45, it was completed after op.52 (the Third Symphony) and just before op.63 (the Fourth Symphony), and, given its location in the timeline of Sibelius's symphonic output, it is perhaps unsurprising that it signposts the Fourth Symphony. It offers a precedent to the latter in terms of an increasingly economical treatment of classical forms such as sonata form, although clues were already present in the much earlier Second Symphony that his attitude towards reprise would become more reductive as his style developed, his treatment of the form more compressed.

Voces Intimae, completed in 1909, bears comparison to the Fourth Symphony in several respects: its date, its chamber genre, and what Guy Rickards refers to as “its expressive weight [which] falls unusually on the large slow central movement..., an intense Adagio which has drawn comparison with Beethoven's late quartets”.² One might also add “and with the third movement of the Fourth Symphony”, which is likewise laden with the “expressive weight” of that work. Its chamber genre does not immediately present it for comparison to a full symphony, but for the fact that the Fourth Symphony may well have started life in the form of sketches for another string quartet,³ and Andrew Barnett has noted that Sibelius uses the orchestra “in a very economical fashion that is often compared to chamber music”,⁴ going on to point out that the main themes of

² Rickards, G: *Sibelius* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997 and 2008), p.103

³ Layton, R: *Sibelius* (Master Musician Series, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1992), p.42

⁴ Barnett, A: *Sibelius* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2007) p.211

the third movement and the slow movement in *Voces Intimae* can both be seen on the same page of sketches, both arranged for string quartet.⁵

Guy Rickards refers to two unwritten “tone-pictures”, *The Mountain* and *The Wayfarer*, in which he claims the first thoughts for the Fourth Symphony found expression.⁶ This supports a widely shared view that the Fourth Symphony has something of the programmatic about it, even if only in the sense of evoking a landscape, one that is universally acknowledged to be bleak and, as Rickards puts it, “glacial”.⁷ Hence the notion that it was inspired by a visit to Mount Koli. More verifiable is another work which never came to fruition, a setting of Poe’s poem *The Raven*, whose sketches match material found in the Fourth Symphony. Alex Ross notes that the middle sections of the fourth movement are, according to Tawaststjerna, drawn from sketches for *The Raven*,⁸ and directly links the closing bars to a line of text: “A softly crying flute-and-oboe line in the coda exactly fits the words “Quoth the Raven, ‘Nevermore’””, while Michael Mäckelmann, quoted by Murtomäki, identifies the “pendular movement” of the oscillating E-F# that underpins the opening of the first movement as being from *The Raven*.⁹

The topic of this poem invites a return to the subject of the “inner journey” that led Sibelius to this symphony, its harmonic language, its fragile textures, and, in places, its overriding sense of despair. A glance at the above works in order reveals a composer inspired by Romantic giants Liszt and Wagner to write tone poems, galvanised by the emergence of Finnish literature, the rise of nationalist fervour, and the publishing of the *Kalevala* to base his music on the legends therein, compelled to write the Romantic and, at times, Tchaikovskian First and Second Symphonies, before

⁵ Ibid, p.212; also see Layton, p.79 and Tawaststjerna, E: *Sibelius. Volume II. 1904-1914* (trans. Robert Layton) (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) p.179

⁶ Rickards, p.107

⁷ Ibid, p.109

⁸ Ross, A: *The Rest is Noise. Listening to Twentieth-Century Music* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), p.180

⁹ Murtomäki, V: *Symphonic unity – The development of formal thinking in the symphonies of Sibelius* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1993), referencing Michael Mäckelmann, *Sibelius und die Programmmusik, Eine Studie zu seinen Tondichtungen und Symphonien. Programmmusik, Studien zu Begriff und Gesichte einer umstrittenen Gattung* (Hamburg Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft Band 6), ed. by Constantin Floros & Hans-Joachim Marx & Peter Petersen (Hamburg: Laaber-Verlag), pp.121-168.

significantly turning towards the more refined and overtly Classical sound of the Third Symphony, already foreshadowed by the Violin Concerto and *Pohjola's Daughter*. A string quartet (*Voces Intimae*) and further sketches for a second, which found their way into the Fourth Symphony, a fragile "tone picture" inspired by a mythological forest creature (*The Dryad*) and a discarded setting of a grim poem (*The Raven*) whose material also found its way into the Fourth Symphony – all of this corroborates the view that Sibelius may have found himself on more than just a musical journey towards his mature style over the years between *The Swan of Tuonela* and the Fourth Symphony, two works in which Tim Howell hears a strong similarity not only in their harmonic language (and choice of key) but also in their concern "with the environs of death".¹⁰

So could the Fourth Symphony be a reflection of Sibelius's inner journey and preoccupation with his own mortality, brought about by persistent throat cancer, as much as a testament to his maturing style or a depiction of the frosty landscapes of Finland? Is it the case that what Rickards describes as his "musical evolution" was indeed accelerated, as he puts it, by his brush with fatal illness?¹¹ In Layton's view, "It is hardly surprising that given the anxiety at the back of his mind concerning his health and ever increasing alarm at his mountainous debts, now in the region of 100,000 marks, 1909 should prompt dark thoughts."¹² In October of that year, he began working on what would become his darkest symphony yet.

As the twentieth century entered its second decade, music enjoyed one of its most interesting and diversely experimental periods to date; this symphony shared a window in music history with Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra* (1909), Scriabin's *Prometheus* (1910), Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913), Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), and Debussy's *Jeux* (1912). Murtomäki draws many of these works together

¹⁰ Howell, T: *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques in the Symphonies and Tone-Poems* (PhD Thesis. University of Southampton, 1985; New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), p.196

¹¹ Rickards, p.99

¹² Layton, p.42

when arguing for the Fourth Symphony's place amongst these most "modern" of works.¹³ In England, the Fourth Symphony was premiered in 1912, in the same programme as Elgar's *The Music Makers*, and was favourably compared by Ernest Newman to Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, op.16.¹⁴ Not all reviews were as positive; many dismissed it as "incomprehensible, nonsensical, cubist",¹⁵ while the critic Heikki Klemetti proclaimed that "The future will decide whether in the melodic structure of some of the themes the composer has crossed the boundary that healthy natural musicality instinctively sets for the play of intervals in a melody",¹⁶ also claiming that "Everything seems strange. Curious, transparent figures float here and there, speaking to us in a language whose meaning we cannot grasp."¹⁷ *The Times* in England somewhat more kindly declared it to be "music which stands apart from the common expression of the time ... the orchestration is almost disconcertingly new" while *The Musical Times* described "another world – one with which most of us are so unfamiliar that we stumbled in our endeavour to understand".¹⁸

Finland's Hero

In one sense, in England Sibelius had always been of "another world", and was celebrated for that. In Finland, he was celebrated for precisely the opposite; to the people, Sibelius was a national hero of *their* world, a boy who had grown up in Hämeenlinna, attended one of the first Finnish-speaking schools, absorbed the newly published *Kalevala*, a source of great national pride and focus of national identity, and based one of his most successful works – *Kullervo* – on this epic tale. The background is complicated: Russia's invasion of Finland in 1808 and establishment of Finland as a Grand Duchy of Russia in 1809 was the result of a desire to position a line of defence between itself

¹³ Murtomäki, *Symphonic unity*, p.141

¹⁴ Hepokoski, J: *Sibelius Symphony no.5* (Cambridge Music Handbooks Series, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.17

¹⁵ Murtomäki, *Symphonic unity*, p.85

¹⁶ from http://www.sibelius.fi/english/musiikki/ork_sinf_04.htm accessed on 27th July 2015 at midday

¹⁷ Barnett, p.210, quoting Klemetti in *Säveletär*

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.225

and Sweden and therefore the rest of Europe. Under Russian rule, however, Finland thrived; it was in Russia's interests for Finland to separate itself from Sweden, and Finnish identity flourished under their encouragement to form literary societies, establish Finnish-speaking schools, and create a culture of art and music that was distinctively Finnish.¹⁹ The influence of Russian style on this artistic output was inevitable, and no one could miss the flavour of Tchaikovsky in Sibelius's first two symphonies, just as the Russian quality of his early miniatures for violin and piano or piano solo is noted by Bullock as betraying "the influence of the Russian repertoire that would have been prevalent in the schools and salons of Hämeenlinna (and Helsinki too)".²⁰

The publishing of the *Kalevala* in 1835 by Elias Lönnrot was part of a wave of national fervour, dubbed by Matti Huttunen "the most important symbolic event in the development of Finnish national identity in the nineteenth century",²¹ so it was of great significance that it inspired Sibelius to write his first major composition, *Kullervo*, premiered in 1892. Only seven years later, however, another of his most famous works received its premiere, under a cloud of oppression that lasted from 1899 to 1905 and became known as the first of two periods of "Russification" in which the autonomy of Finland as a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire was threatened. Young Sibelius composed a set of eight tableaux, the last of which was entitled *Suomi herää* (Finland Awakens) but is better known now simply as *Finlandia*, and depicts the awakening of Finland despite "the powers of darkness menacing Finland" depicted in earlier tableaux,²² and indeed in the looming threat of the opening bars of this tableau in itself. The triumph befits a nation on the brink of a new century "equipped with its own history, with its own poetry and legitimised language, with modern

¹⁹ For a more comprehensive coverage of relevant Finnish history, see Glenda Dawn Goss's *Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009)

²⁰ Bullock, P: "Sibelius and the Russian Tradition" (in *Jean Sibelius and His World*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p.18

²¹ Huttunen, Matti: "The national composer and the idea of Finnishness: Sibelius and the formation of Finnish musical style" (in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.9

²² Hepokoski, J: "Finlandia Awakens" (in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.89

resources (education) and with modern technology”.²³ In short, its political meaning was as evident as the *Kalevala* legends were in *Kullervo*.

A second period of Russian oppression, or Russification, is identified by Philip Bullock as 1908-17,²⁴ and Sibelius did not respond to the famous cry of “Finis Finlandiae?” heard in 1909. There was no equivalent artistic gesture of protest or depiction of oppression turning to triumph. Although future compositions return to the theme of Finnish patriotism and politics, with works such as the *March of the Finnish Jäger Battalion* (1917), *March for the Civil Guards* (1925) and *Karelia’s Fate* (1925), at the time of writing the Fourth Symphony Sibelius appeared uninterested in politics and in making political statements. Sibelius was a personification of the complex nature of “Finnish national identity” anyway, being from Swedish-speaking stock and having benefitted greatly from Russian support of the arts, and he even articulated his own path away from his younger self’s inspiration, saying in 1910, “Picked up the *Kalevala* and it struck me how I’ve grown away from this naïve poetry”.²⁵ It turned out to be a temporary estrangement – he returned to that source for *Luonnotar* (1913), *The Oceanides* (1914), *Tapiola* (1926) and *Väinämöinen’s Song* (1926) – but in 1910 he was already on his own inner journey,²⁶ having moved away from Helsinki’s bustle and distractions in 1904 and having been diagnosed with throat cancer in 1908. Goss notes that “the composer seemed to draw more and more into himself”,²⁷ into this “other world” that at best bemused and at worst alienated the first audiences for his Fourth Symphony.

²³ Ibid, p.90

²⁴ Bullock, p.13

²⁵ Note from diary, in Tawaststjerna, E: *Sibelius. Volume II, 1904-1914* (translated by Robert Layton, London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p.161

²⁶ Ibid, p.145: “Nor did Sibelius feel any urge to compose another *Song of the Athenians* or *Finlandia*... His thoughts were now centred on his inner journey”

²⁷ Goss, G.D.: *Sibelius: A Composer’s Life and the Awakening of Finland* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p.343

The Fame and the Shadow

Sibelius found himself in the dichotomous situation that his status as a national idol, following the massive event of the premiere of *Kullervo*, was both a blessing and a problem. The event earned the sobriquet of the birth of “truly Finnish music”,²⁸ and elevated Sibelius to heroic status. Following this, he tried to complete *The Building of the Boat*, the overture for which eventually became *The Swan of Tuonela* as part of the *Lemminkäinen Suite*, also inspired by the *Kalevala*, and composed the *Karelia Tableaux* in 1893, whose premiere was another patriotic event, albeit on a smaller scale than *Kullervo*. The Finnish people felt that Sibelius’s music *belonged* to them; he compounded this with his 1899 *Song of the Athenians (Atenarnes sång)*, written in the context of the February Manifesto to make Finland a Russian province rather than an autonomous duchy.²⁹ Some people, notably among them Robert Kajanus, even claimed to hear a patriotic voice in his first two symphonies, although Ilkka Oramo is quick to point out that, while one might identify “heroic *topoi*” in listening, there is no obvious link to a political programme,³⁰ and Bullock describes Sibelius’s “explicit rejection of Robert Kajanus’s interpretation of the Second Symphony as an anti-Russian narrative of Finnish self-realisation”.³¹

So there is a framework of nationalism, and a foundation in Russian (and European) Romantic music, behind Sibelius’s musical journey. The “heroic figure of the young master-composer” is a common image, his role as “hero-idol” being “the legitimising of his home-country”.³² Ranta expands on the notion of a journey, or what he calls the “narrative scheme” of the composer-hero’s life, suggesting that a composer such as Sibelius adopts a common language

²⁸ Huttunen, p.13

²⁹ Oramo, I: “Sub umbra Sibelii: Sibelius and his successors” (in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.160

³⁰ Ibid, p.160

³¹ Bullock, p.17

³² Tarasti, E: “Sibelius as an icon of the Finns and others” (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Timothy Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.7-8, quoting respectively Similä, *Sibeliana* (Helsinki, 1945), p.36 and Ranta “Jean Sibelius eurooppalaisena ja yleismaailmallisena eilmiönä” (Porvoo, 1946), p.11

or style at first (the *langue*), and within that finds his own voice (his *parole*, literally “words”); finally, he develops his own style or *langue*, and at that point can be released from the burden of being a national standard-bearer and can “sink his thoughts inward”.³³ Ranta’s narrative scheme corroborates the idea that there might have been an “inner journey” that carried Sibelius towards the musical language of the Fourth Symphony, and away from the patriotic spirit of the people.

Being unable to map a nationalistic or even *Kalevala*-inspired programme onto many of Sibelius’s works, including the Fourth Symphony, Finnish and other audiences alike have instead attributed their qualities to the landscape of Finland, and there has been much writing on the subject, from evocative images of “icy wastes, somnolent lakes, endless spruce forests and untouched wilderness”,³⁴ to more specific interpretations, amounting to an almost programmatic review of the Fourth Symphony by the critic known as Bis:

The motif of the symphony is a journey to the famous mountain Koli, which rises 252 metres above the level of Lake Pielisjärvi³⁵

which Sibelius uncharacteristically publicly refuted. Interestingly, Bis went on to say

the magnificent connection which Sibelius has previously made with our people and its national epic and which has made him so strong and great, this hand is lacking in the Fourth Symphony

thus summing up the general response to the symphony, more succinctly expressed by Guy Rickards: “The music’s glacial tone dumbfounded the first audiences in Finland and Scandinavia”.³⁶

The context of the Fourth Symphony can hardly be clearer: a national hero lets down the expectations of his public. His public nicknamed it the *Barkbröd* Symphony, with reference to a

³³ Ibid, quoting Ranta, p.13

³⁴ Grimley, D: “Sibelius, Finland, and the idea of Landscape” (foreword to *Jean Sibelius and His World*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2011), p.ix

³⁵ Bis (Karl Fredrik Wasenius) in *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 1911

³⁶ Rickards, p.109

collective memory of such hardship that people were forced to eat bark. Hardly a complimentary image! This went on as it was performed around Europe: Sibelius noted that, following the Copenhagen performance, he was “abused in a scurrilous fashion”,³⁷ while in Gothenburg, 1913, it was reputedly hissed.³⁸ In England, 1912, audiences were likewise not ready for this music. Sibelius had conducted *Finlandia* and *En saga* to great acclaim in England in 1909, and audiences still loved that music and were simply not prepared for this only three years later. Incidentally, it was not the first work to be viewed unfavourably; the Third Symphony had been met with some cool response – the “largely uncomprehending response from both public and critics” that Richard Powell describes in his thesis on that work³⁹ and Hepokoski likewise in his book on the Fifth Symphony⁴⁰ – and even the *Lemminkäinen Suite* received a poor review from Flodin in 1897.⁴¹ However, this was the first universal response of incomprehension, and as such it asks the question of whether it is the reception, as much as anything to do with the style, that places this work at the centre of the composer’s symphonic oeuvre and at a point of “watershed”.

Ilkka Oramo explores the notion of the “shadow” of Sibelius over his successors, a term that has proved hard to attribute to one name or date, but which was used by Ernest Pingould in the 1920s.⁴² I would like to suggest that Sibelius was in fact in his own shadow, the shadow of his younger self, whose music satisfied the needs of the nation. His later, more inward-looking music was too austere and too personal to belong to the Finnish people, and, although Goss has suggested that the very fact that it came from “within” Sibelius is enough to make it “quintessentially Finnish”,⁴³ he had cut his ties to the masses, who, as Goss aptly states, were “not ready for a work

³⁷ Layton, p.46

³⁸ Ibid, p.44

³⁹ Powell, R: *From Chaos to Crystallisation - Perception and Perspective in Sibelius's Third Symphony* (MA dissertation, University of York, September 2012), p.19

⁴⁰ Hepokoski, J: *Sibelius, Symphony no.5* (Cambridge Music Handbook Series, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.13: “The Third Symphony failed to impress its Berlin audience in February 1910.”

⁴¹ Huttunen, p.15: “Flodin described the work in *Nya Pressen* on 2 November 1897 as being excessively ‘sombre’ and difficult to understand”

⁴² Oramo, “Sub umbra Sibelii”, p.157

⁴³ Goss, p.348

so stringent, so psychologically exposed, so infinitely lonely.”⁴⁴ There is great joy to be found in communal fervour, and great discomfort in the exposure of one man’s personal inner journey, and it is this that I would argue makes the Fourth Symphony a centrepiece in the composer’s symphonic and wider orchestral output.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.351

Chapter One. Enshrining the essential Sibelius: the Fourth Symphony in context

“It is the Fourth Symphony which, by general consent, enshrines the essential Sibelius.”¹

Whether there is a genuine consensus or not, the Fourth Symphony is a culmination of sorts, a landmark on a road along which the composer was journeying with the Seventh Symphony, *Tapiola* and *The Tempest* in the distance. Its special traits include its concision and its exploration of a single opening motif not only melodically but also in harmonic language – perhaps both summed up by Frank Reinsisch as “the work’s archaic rigour and harmonic audacities”.²

One can look at this extraordinary work’s place in a number of contexts, or as a benchmark on a number of continua, as discussed in the introduction above. It is the central work in a series of seven symphonies; it has a place in the timeline that saw Sibelius at first take inspiration from his national folklore and later lose interest in it; it is one of a number of notable fin-de-siècle “modern” works, part of a fertile and experimental period in music history; it therefore represents not only a certain stage in the composer’s own development but also something of his response to or absorption of twentieth-century innovations. Taken in isolation, the symphonies as a set do not form obvious partnerships with each other in terms of their style; each is unique, so choosing one as the anomaly is not particularly easy. The Fourth Symphony, however, stands out from the rest because it is short, at times very sparsely orchestrated, and, for some, disconcertingly dissonant. Where did this harmonic language come from? Where are the clues that such a reductive approach to form and, in particular, reprise, was developing? I have already touched on a few key works

¹ Layton, p.77

² Reinsisch, F: postface to the Breitkopf & Härtel edition of the symphony (Wiesbaden, 1991)

above; I will now look in detail at four significant signposts: the Third Symphony, *Pohjola's Daughter*, the Violin Concerto, and *The Dryad*, beginning with a brief background to each piece.

The Violin Concerto: a place in the symphonic timeline

The Violin Concerto is unique in Sibelius's output; there exist no concerti for other instruments. Instead, the composer's early works are dominated by the tone poems of the 1890s – *En Saga* (Op.9, 1892 rev. 1902), *Skogsrådet* (Op.15, 1895), *Vårsång* (Op.16, 1902), the *Lemminkäinen Suite* (Op.22, 1896 rev. 1897) and *Finlandia* (Op.25, 1899 rev. 1900) – which sit alongside the First Symphony (1899, rev.1900), with a number of chamber works – songs, piano solos, etc – in amongst them. It is perhaps surprising that this once ambitious violinist should not have written a Violin Concerto earlier than 1904, having created for his instrument only an early string quartet, Op.4 (1890) and, slightly before that, two pieces for violin and piano, Op.2 (1888). Although, according to Jukka Tiilikainen, he had had it in mind to compose a Violin Concerto for some years, even claiming to have made early sketches as far back as 1890, the earliest signs of the themes we now know as those in his Violin Concerto only appear in folios dating from 1902, probably following a meeting with the virtuoso Willy Burmester, whom Tiilikainen views as an important catalyst.³

Tiilikainen makes another thought-provoking observation. In his article he writes, 'In the revision the subjective violinist-composer was replaced by the objective symphonist',⁴ concluding his account of how the Violin Concerto took shape and came to be significantly revised with a statement that places it in the timeline of development of Sibelius's symphonic style. It is

³ Tiilikainen, J: "The Genesis of the Violin Concerto" (in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.67, p.80

⁴ Ibid, p.80

interesting that, insofar as it does not have a title or acknowledged inspiration, the Violin Concerto is abstract, but it sits in amongst works which at the very least could be described as evocative, if not downright programmatic. Perhaps it was an indicator of a composer moving towards a more “absolute” music, in the sense that this work did not need a professed inspiration or imposed association with a literary or nationalistic idea, as in the *Lemminkäinen Suite* or *Finlandia*. Lacking an obvious programme and being a rather more Classical genre than his tone poems, more abstract in that respect, the Violin Concerto is an indicator of a future move towards the Classical in the subsequent symphonies, especially when compared to the Romantic proportions and harmonic language of the first two. Given that the revision of the concerto involved considerable reduction of the solo part, one could make a case for that in itself being part of a classicising process.

Nonetheless, the concerto also has a strong solo character, an instrument which is a presence connecting all movements and which has a voice throughout, thus almost creating its own “narrative” without words. This in itself was nothing new, and Charles Rosen points out that the concerto has had a “strong... relationship to the operatic aria” from the age of Mozart and earlier, with an inherent drama in the relationship between the orchestra and the solo voice, not only heard but also “seen to be different”.⁵ It is a poignant voice when one considers Sibelius’s former ambition to be a solo violinist, and indeed the connection between the concerto and opera is also significant for this composer whose ambitions to create the latter were never fulfilled beyond a one-act work, *The Maid in the Tower* (1896).⁶ Layton calls this concerto “the peak of... his first period”⁷ and, although I might question that claim on the grounds of its foreshadowing later works, perhaps it

⁵ Rosen, C: *The Classical Style* (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1971, new edition 1997) p.196. The italics are mine.

⁶ Tim Howell has also considered “the possibility of tone-poems conceived as substitute opera”, with specific reference to *The Swan of Tuonela* (Howell, *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*), p.197

⁷ Layton, p.41

does offer closure to the period in which Sibelius wanted to emulate the giants of epic opera and tone poem, Wagner and Liszt; maybe it is the end of an era in that sense, and an opening of new possibilities in its more Classical perspective.

Out of step with the times: the radical new classicism of the Third Symphony⁸

Despite the commonly held view that it is the Fourth Symphony that forms the most significant departure in Sibelius's output from his previous style, the Third Symphony was also an important movement in a new direction for the composer. Botstein relates this to the zeitgeist in Europe during the years around World War I, when people felt that they were "spiritually and philosophically... at a historical moment of decay, decline, and confusion", and Sibelius – along with Strauss – "sought refuge in an idiosyncratic reassertion of classicist ideals".⁹ To listen to the Third Symphony is to experience something radically different from the First and Second Symphonies, and much has been written about its overtly Classical-sounding opening bars in C major, as well as its whirlwind scherzo and affirming chorale finale. Especially given its reduction to three rather than the more typical four movements, this symphony in itself represented an intention on Sibelius's part to leave behind the "national romantic style that had preceded it",¹⁰ to abandon his erstwhile "reliance on programmatic inspiration, whether explicit or implied",¹¹ and to embark on

⁸ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, pp.66-67

⁹ Botstein, L: "Old masters: Jean Sibelius and Richard Strauss in the Twentieth Century" (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p.259

¹⁰ Powell, p.14

¹¹ Botstein, p.266

a “self-conscious search for self-evidently “simpler” elements”.¹² Tawaststjerna cites the Third Symphony as the point at which Sibelius “turned his back on his ‘nationalist’ past”.¹³

Botstein makes a further observation about the new “simpler” elements and links them to the image of Finland as uncorrupted nature, left untouched by man,¹⁴ although he is not asserting any kind of landscape interpretation or Finnish flavour of the kind that Tawaststjerna declares to be missing from this symphony.¹⁵ Powell sees the classicism in the Third Symphony as a possible consequence of influential conversations with Busoni in 1905,¹⁶ and Antokoletz attributes what he calls “significant changes” to Sibelius’s style to his European travels and the influence of Beethoven, which he hears in “a greater economy of means, more classical handling of orchestration, and increasing concern for the pervasive development of thematically derived motifs within classically balanced formal structures”.¹⁷ The real question in the context of this study is how the Third Symphony’s classical traits might point towards the Fourth Symphony. Self-evident simplicity and compression might be apparent in the first movement of the Third Symphony, in the circularity of its second movement, or the chorale themes that appear in all three movements, and the Third Symphony might embody the concept of *junge Klassizität* “(a move away from the programmatic tendencies of the nineteenth century in favour of the melody and absolute music of Bach and Mozart), advocated by Busoni”.¹⁸ The question of its prefiguring the Fourth Symphony in any of the above respects will be considered below.

¹² Ibid, p.268

¹³ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.67

¹⁴ Botstein, p.268

¹⁵ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.67

¹⁶ Powell, p.13

¹⁷ Antokoletz, *A History of Twentieth-Century Music*, p.125

¹⁸ Barnett, p.182

Two tone poems: narration, evocation and their impact on form

Pohjola's Daughter, Op.49, was completed in 1906, and falls between the Violin Concerto, Op.47 (1904 and 1905), and the Third Symphony, Op.52 (1907). It was fourteen years since he had written *En Saga* and *Kullervo* (1892), albeit not yet in revised form, thirteen since the *Karelia Suite* (1893), twelve since *Skogsrådet* and the first version of *Vårsång* (1894). Suites and tone poems became a successful medium for this composer, with the *Lemminkäinen Suite* written in 1895-97 and *Finlandia* in 1900, the same year as the First Symphony (1899-1900), followed two years later by the Second.

The tone poem, with its overtly programmatic inspiration, seems to have been a favourite genre for Sibelius, and even crept into his First Symphony, with the fourth movement bearing the subtitle "Quasi una fantasia". Again, the connection with opera is more than fleeting; Sibelius's first attempt in this genre was abandoned, the surviving material becoming *The Swan of Tuonela*, one of four tone poems in the *Lemminkäinen Suite*. His enchantment with Wagner had allegedly waned and been superseded by an identification with the music of Liszt and, by extension, the tone poem. In 1894, having been briefly "transported" by *Parsifal*, which he had heard in Bayreuth, Sibelius wrote to Aino: "Really I am a tone painter and poet. Liszt's view of music is the one to which I am closest. Hence my interest in the symphonic poem".¹⁹

The use of the word "painter" is interesting here, as it implies more general evocation or depiction than story-telling, or a visual as well as literary influence. Perhaps a preoccupation with overall form rather than programmatic dictations was emerging, and in fact it seems to have been the case that Sibelius completed the first draft of *Pohjola's Daughter* without having attached it to

¹⁹ Tawaststjerna, E: *Sibelius. Volume I, 1865-1905* (translated by Robert Layton, London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p.158

that particular episode in the *Kalevala*. It has what Virtanen calls “multidimensional” sources, using material originally planned for two other works, the abandoned *Marjatta* oratorio and what became *Luonnotar*,²⁰ and it is referred to as a symphonic fantasy rather than a tone poem. Although the eventual choice of subject matter and title affected the order of material and therefore the structure of the piece, it has been possible for analysts to map the structure of sonata form onto the narrative of the poem about Väinämöinen’s encounter with Pohjola’s daughter, among them Tawaststjerna and Virtanen, the latter giving a side-by-side account of how the music and the text can be matched.²¹ In other words, *Pohjola’s Daughter*, while being a one-movement programmatic piece, does seem to be intrinsic to the symphonic timeline, having not been composed to match an exact narrative and having a connection to a rather traditional, Classical form.

The Dryad (Op.45) is one of Sibelius’s less well-known orchestral works, paired with *Dance Intermezzo* but written some six years later. Sibelius’s opus numbers do not match their chronology, having been revised by the composer himself, and *The Dryad* was completed after Op.52, the Third Symphony (1907) and just before Op.63, the Fourth Symphony (1911). The scale of a 5-minute, one-movement piece is naturally dwarfed by the Symphonies, but it is precisely this compression and new approach to the manipulation of time within a particularly small framework that defines this tone poem, and gives it something in common with the Fourth Symphony. Unsurprisingly, given when it was written, there are also other ways in which *The Dryad* signposts the Fourth Symphony, and it is an important piece in what David Burnett-James calls “a clutch of

²⁰ Virtanen, T: “Pohjola’s Daughter - “L’aventure d’un héros” ” (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Jackson and Murtomaki, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.158

²¹ *Ibid*, p.166

smaller works surrounding the Fourth Symphony which throw additional light on his methods of composition".²²

Temporal experience, pace and drama

If it seems odd to compare short and ostensibly programmatic works to an abstract symphony of considerably greater proportions, one need only listen to the opening of both of those named above and compare the first bars of the Fourth Symphony to get a sense of the immediate similarity of these works. Quite unlike the Second, Third and Fifth Symphonies, the Fourth begins with an air of dramatic mystery, an unfolding tale in the hands of a soloist and limited other forces. Marion Guck's "Analytical Fictions" examines our tendency to confer character or imagined representation on music when analysing it, or what she calls "our inclination to model music in terms of human thought and emotion",²³ and it can be hard to convey a personal response or to describe the effectiveness of a piece of music in words that do not reveal an imagined scene or strong emotional state. The opening bars of *Pohjola's Daughter*, *The Dryad*, the Fourth Symphony and the Violin Concerto seem to occupy the same anticipatory soundworld: harmonic suspense in their static backdrop to improvisatory – or, in the case of *The Dryad*, halting and fragmented – melodic lines, reduced forces or dynamics, and a sense of slow-motion that has less to do with real time passing or even actual rhythmic activity than it has to do with the pace of harmonic progression. As can be seen in the examples below, a lack of clear metric pulse at first is also a factor.

²² Burnett-James, D: *Sibelius* (The Illustrated Lives of the Great Composers, London: Omnibus Press, 1989), p.71

²³ Guck, Marion A.: "Analytical Fictions" (in *Music Theory Spectrum*, 16:2, 1994), p.229

Example 1

Opening of the Violin Concerto

con sord.
pp *mf* Violin Solo

Opening of Pohjola's Daughter

Largo con sord. Vc. solo
p *poco f*

Opening of The Dryad

Lento Vln I *mp* *mf* Vln II *mp* *poco f*

Opening of the Fourth Symphony, mvt.1

con sord.
ff *dim.* *p* (Vc2) *dim.*

6 Vc solo *p* (col 8va)

There is, of course, the question of the intention behind these similar openings; the impression one might get as a listener may be rather simplistic, after all. In the case of the Violin Concerto, this is as long a melody as one might hear at the beginning of any work by Sibelius, and

Layton even goes so far as to suggest that “Sibelius recognized it for what it was – a heaven-sent idea.”²⁴ However erroneous this may be as a view of a theme whose component motifs appear separately in several sketches²⁵ and which therefore probably did *not* arrive in the composer’s brain as a divine gift, it does convey the essence of its long, almost effortless quality. Perhaps it is a reflection of the deep connection Sibelius had with the violin, having abandoned his dream of becoming a concert violinist, the opening being a rhapsodic tribute to this most revered instrument. In another corner of his composer’s mind was the latent admiration of Wagner and a desire to explore the rich possibilities offered by his native land’s literary heritage to the medium of opera, another ambition never fulfilled; perhaps this ostensibly abstract genre was in fact more of a song without words for the violin, and not abstract at all.

Pohjola’s Daughter might be a candidate for genuine scene-setting, were it not for the fact that the “programme” of this symphonic poem was appended to the work after it was written. This leaves that atmospheric opening functioning less as a scene-setter and more as a kind of slow introduction out of which grows the accompaniment figure for the main theme (shown below).

Example 2

Pohjola’s Daughter: accompaniment figure at letter B growing out of opening melodic material

The musical score for Example 2 is in G minor (one flat) and 4/4 time. It begins with a tempo marking of "poco a poco meno largo al" and a dynamic of *mp*. The melodic line starts with a crescendo from *mf* to *f*, followed by a decrescendo to *p*. The tempo then changes to "Moderato". The accompaniment figure at letter B is shown in two staves: the top staff is for Oboe (Ob.) with a dynamic of *mp*, and the bottom staff is for piano accompaniment.

²⁴ Layton, p.139

²⁵ Tiilikainen, p.67, p.80

The Dryad, named as a “tone picture for orchestra” rather than a tone poem, could be open to visual interpretation, especially as its title is evocative of a creature from Greek mythology rather than taken from a folk tale. Its opening is a string of disconnected ideas, like a series of snapshots, first tentative, then erratic, offering no real tonal or metric stability and no textural consistency. It has a strong connection to the Fourth Symphony, owing to its first few bars: a quavering semitone underpinned by a tritone, a new motif with that very interval embedded in it, and avoidance of $\wedge 1$ and any assertion of the tonic, despite a “dominant” pedal from bar 5³.

Example 3

Opening of *The Dryad*

The musical score for the opening of *The Dryad* is presented in two systems. The first system shows the initial bars for Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), and Viola (Vla). The tempo is marked *Lento*. The Vln I part begins with a *mp* dynamic, followed by a *mf* dynamic. The Vln II part starts with a *mp* dynamic. The Vla part enters with a *mp* dynamic and a fifth finger (5) fingering. The dynamic for the Vla part later changes to *poco f*. The second system shows a continuation of the Vln I part, starting at bar 12 with a *rfz* dynamic, and a piano accompaniment starting with a *fp cresc.* dynamic.

The Fourth Symphony, of course, is not “depicting” anything, as its composer famously pointed out. What it shares with these other works, all of which had quite different motivations behind their composition, is the impression of vast slow-motion in the first few bars, the passage of time seeming to be all but suspended as the initially decreasing pendulum on F# and E stabilises and becomes a static and sometimes dissonant backdrop to the gradually unfolding triadic melody. It is a matter of drama and perceived pace. The “magnificent kaleidoscope of colours” that Mäkelä

hears from the outset²⁶ is nonetheless without real direction; in terms of pitch, dynamics and texture, the music builds towards the *fortissimo* C major chord in *tremolo* strings at bars 25-27, while the harmony really hampers progress, and the melody has been no more than a triadic ebb and flow.

Here at bar 27 appears a method Sibelius employs again elsewhere, the use of one disruptive pitch – a c# to replace the anticipated c in the bassline, shockingly dissonant in context – to galvanise motion and force things in a new direction. It happens again during the passage at letter D, where the music has stagnated on an F# pedal note, alternating the chords of F# and G#7/F#, and it takes a rogue E in the lower strings and clarinet (boxed at the end of example 4 below) to push the music into its subsequent, harmonically shifting passage at letter E.

Example 4

1st movement b.25 C major chord (thwarted by c# in violas)

24 Upper str
 Cb
 f
 ff
 Vla
 ff
 Vc
 ff

²⁶ Mäkelä, T: “The Wings of a Butterfly: Sibelius and the Problems of Musical Modernity” (in *Jean Sibelius and his World*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2011), p.102

1st movement letter D, b.45

45 **D**

G#7/F# F# G#7/F# F#

pizz. *p*

Ob. *p dolce*

Cl. *p dolce*

Timp. *ppp*

50

Vc (div)

F#

Ob. *pp*

Cl. *pp*

Timp. *pppp*

mf

Back at letter B, in the wake of the bb.25-27 *tremolo* chord, the new direction was a more sudden change, an abrupt step into three bars of rising brass chorale, heavy with what Mäkelä hears as an “easily recognisable quotation from Wagner's *Parsifal* ... preceded by no significant preparation.”²⁷ (One might add that it is laden with Wagnerian *Tristan* chords.) The alternation of strings and brass continues for a few bars, without a really clear linear progression from one to the next.

²⁷ Ibid, p.102

Example 5

1st movement letter B, b.29

29 **B** Adagio
 F#7 D7/F G#7 E7/G
 brass str.
 mf ff pp
 C# pedal in timpani and Cb
 F# major p
 F# pedal in timpani and horns

34 **C**
 ff mf cresc.

40 **Tempo I**
 brass E Bb Db Vla Vc
 ff p dolce

It is a technique of “apparent discontinuity” described by Edward Cone as “stratification... the separation in musical space of ideas – or better, of musical areas – juxtaposed in time”,²⁸ a technique also suited to the tone poems, whose depictive qualities can extend to an imagined series of changing scenes. In *Pohjola’s Daughter*, as Howell points out, the perceived narrative²⁹ process often arises from the changes of tempo³⁰, and this in itself is one of the hallmarks of Sibelius’s mature style, with or without an intended programme. It is relatively easy to ignore the story of Väinämöinen and still acknowledge the drama within the music, if its natural ebb and flow becomes the focus instead. Sudden changes have a cinematic (or narrative) quality, such as the abrupt cut-off of the semiquaver figure just before the first *Tranquillo molto*, shown below.

²⁸ Cone, E: “Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method” (in *Perspectives of New Music*, 1:1, 1962), pp.27-38

²⁹ “narrative” being used here in the sense of mapping onto a storyline, rather than in the sense explored at length in Chapter 4

³⁰ Howell, *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*, p.232

Example 6

Pohjola's Daughter 4 bars after letter C

Tranquillo molto

Ob.
p

Hp.

Str. *pp*

The Dryad has this almost from the outset, beginning as a collage of motifs, described by Layton as “a kaleidoscope of images”.³¹ True to the collage analogy, the music reveals itself as the fragments collect, and the whole becomes a coherent picture as the piece gradually takes shape, rather like pieces of mosaic coming into focus from a distance. The fragmentary aspect is not the consequence of the melodic material, which is closely knit, as shown below.

Example 7

Comparison of motifs in *The Dryad*

1 semitone mordent figure
tritone E# - B

5
tritone B - E#

12 **Meno lento**
3 mordent figure (b.1)
descending triad
fp cresc. *f*

19 **Poco stretto**
descending triad
semitone (b.1)

31
tritone span
b.5 (ph. dim.)
3 3

83
descending triad
semitone (b.1)

³¹ Layton, p.120

The impression of fragments – or collage – comes from the frequent tempo changes which seem to define each motif and, far from causing a halting effect, actually enhance the sense of narrative flow. The opening is presented as an exploration; a jubilant moment leads nowhere at bar 12; uncertainty follows with the *meno lento* at bar 13, which gradually gains surer footing and gathers pace at the *poco stretto* at bar 19, and more so when directed *un pochettino con moto* at bar 27. The motif at bar 31 (see above) seems purposeful in its descending sequence, but it leads to a dead-end, blocked by the return of the b.14 motif and its hesitancy (*allargando*) at bar 35; the tempo is reinstated but chugs to a halt and a general pause at bar 40. The form and the pace of events are dictated by disconnected segments. This suits the “picture” aspect of this piece, but it is a method in its own right and not confined to depiction, and as such is present in the Fourth Symphony as well. One can hear a similar thing in the 2nd movement; in the example below, following a series of motifs that comprise the opening melody, a sequence of falling tritones lingers while it hesitates over where to go next, and is suddenly abandoned in favour of a new idea.

Example 8

2nd movement, Fourth Symphony: opening motifs forming the melody

The image displays three staves of musical notation. The first staff shows a single melodic line with a long slur over it. The second staff is labeled '13 Vlns v' and 'mp', showing a sequence of notes with a slur. The third staff is labeled '21 Vln' and 'espressivo', with a box containing the letter 'A' above it, showing a sequence of notes with a slur.

2nd movement, Fourth Symphony: hesitating over the b.29 tritone sequence and abandoning it for a new idea

29 Ob.
Vln. 1

35 poco ritard. a tempo

40 p

The Dryad, bb.31-40, showing a similar manipulation of tempo as the progress of motifs becomes uncertain

31 ob. + fl. allarg. p str. p < f

horns pp

str. p D# G#m

36 ob. + fl. solo fl. a tempo

poco f mezzo p

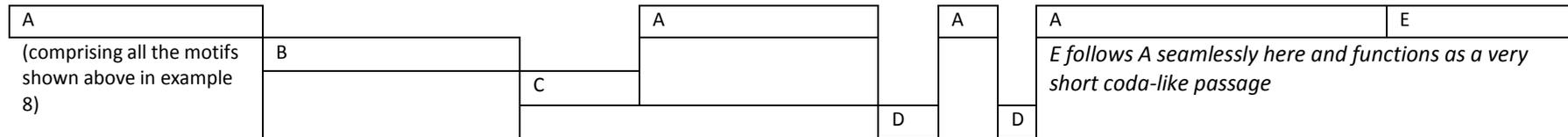
mf p mf saltato

Both pieces gain much of their momentum from the changes in material, and much of their narrative progress from the accompanying changes in tempo.

To continue with Cone's idea of stratification – a more abstract interpretation of the continual interchange of ideas – the 2nd movement of the Fourth Symphony up to the *Doppio più lento* can be represented as stratified, as shown below. The slightly erratic character it gains from this is part of its role as the Scherzo of the symphony. In this way, it is possible to visualise a movement whose component parts interrupt each other, not developing or logically following previous material. In part, this is due to changes in pace that occur, with the B material being essentially the same tempo but feeling slower because it is duple time, while the D material is at a much slower pace, marked *Tranquillo* for only 6 bars at a time.

Figure 1

	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	250	260
--	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----



Ob.

pp

50 Vln.

p

98 Tr, Trb.

fp

104 WW

p

Timp.

f

Tranquillo

163 Fl.

mp

240

p dolce

One can hear the same process in a completely different context, the stirring and circular 2nd movement of the Third Symphony. In this movement, the concept is presented very simply: there is the main theme, introduced in stages, and there is an opposing theme, first heard as a tiny woodwind interjection at Figure 1, bars 11-12 and in exactly the same form at bars 49-50. It is apparently inconsequential, a bar and a half of material that is dislocated from the surrounding theme and seems to have no impact on it. It only becomes apparent later that this prefigured a more complete passage and a more significant woodwind chorale at bar 84.

Example 9

Opening of 2nd mvt, Third Symphony

The image shows the opening of the 2nd movement of the Third Symphony. The first system (bars 1-5) features a flute (Fl.) playing a melodic line with a *p dolce* dynamic. The bass line includes horn and timpani (horn, timp) with a *p* dynamic, and pizzicato strings (pizz. Ch, Vc) with a *pp* dynamic. The second system (bars 6-11) shows a clarinet (Cl.) playing a melodic line with a *mf* dynamic. The bass line includes a figure bass (Fig.) with a *pp* dynamic and pizzicato strings (pizz. Ch, Vc) with a *mf* dynamic. A first ending bracket (I) covers bars 11-12, where the flute (Fl.) plays a melodic line with a *mp* dynamic and a *marcato* marking.

Third Symphony, 2nd mvt: bar 84 woodwind chorale passage

The image shows the woodwind chorale passage at bar 84 and the beginning of the 'Tranquillo' section at bar 88. The first system (bar 84) features flutes (flutes) playing a melodic line with a *f* dynamic, followed by a *p* dynamic and then a *f* dynamic. The second system (bar 88) is marked 'Tranquillo (♩ = ♩.)' and features a melodic line with a *f* dynamic.

This presents another link with the Fourth Symphony, and brings to attention a matter which almost sits in opposition to the stratified or discontinuous form described above, that of continual growth through repetition. As another aspect of musical evolution, this is an important factor particularly in the Third and Fourth symphonies, and in the Violin Concerto.

Development, circularity, reprise and transformation

In the Third Symphony, the 2nd movement begins with a short and tentative motif, three notes rising by step, that emerge as the first three notes of the full melody, each phrase beginning in this way. The initial 3-note motif is a fragment of something longer, a periodically phrased main theme whose two consequent phrases appear first, in an introductory passage that precedes the first full statement of the theme.

Example 10

Third Symphony, 2nd mvt, opening 3-note motif (boxed)



Third Symphony, 2nd mvt, main theme



This theme returns frequently throughout the movement, always texturally altered, not quite *developed*, as such, but never the same as it was. It is what Hepokoski terms “rotation”, a “cyclical procedure” that sees the first (“referential”) statement repeatedly return, with the theme “reworked” or “elastically treated”, often with “new material... added or generated”.³² Each rendition of the theme in the Third Symphony’s middle movement has a different texture, gradually acquiring more quavers and duplets in order to give the impression of increased energy. The closing phrase then prompts new woodwind countermelody figures from bar 40, and so on, until even the new material from the A_b major passage makes its way into the woodwind at bar 175.

Example 11

Third Symphony, 2nd movement, b.40 new woodwind countermelody



Third Symphony, 2nd movement, example of increasingly complex rhythm and texture

66 Cl.

strings

³² Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.25

Powell calls this “the eye of the storm”,³³ repetitive and, ultimately, hypnotic, adopting a moderate pace but nonetheless seeming to hang back in time, its obsession with its own tonic key creating the illusion of something that moves more slowly than it really does. Each “rotation” is in G# minor, with the exception of one that starts in G# major but quickly slips back into the minor, and one that starts in G# minor and suddenly restarts in B minor. This one leads to a developmental passage at bar 119 (Figure 9), quickly ending up in A \flat major at bar 126, and finding itself pinned to that key by pedal notes from bar 128, so that a return to the original theme in the original key is inevitable. The 3rd movement of the Fourth Symphony is similar in this respect; C# minor seems to be part of its identity (although it is not pinned to this key at all times).

As in the Third Symphony’s 2nd movement, each appearance of the theme, in its various stages of completeness, has a different texture in the Fourth Symphony’s 3rd movement. The main theme – the C# minor theme mentioned above in connection with the 2nd movement – gradually emerges from the web around it, starting with very sparsely accompanied celli at bar 23 (letter B), one inconclusive phrase of something that is loosely linked, melodically, to the horns’ interruption at letter A. Each time, new instruments take it forward, as if providing a commentary on its possible direction. In some cases, it is almost a dialogue; the violas suggest it as an idea to revisit at letter B, and the cellos take it on; later, at letter C, the woodwind invert it and the violins consider it in the new light, and create from this a new accompaniment figure. After the many perspectives, it seems that the only voice that can bring it to its full potential is that of the full orchestra.

³³ Powell, p.35

The role of individual instruments here allows for comparison with the Violin Concerto. An inevitable feature of the genre is that, as themes return, they are altered in some way by the soloist part itself, perhaps in order to show off some aspect of technique. We have already seen how the focus at the outset was on the soloist, and this does more than hold attention or give a platform for the performer; it suspends the music while this individual voice is allowed to be heard, a focal point within the texture as is heard at the beginning of *Pohjola's Daughter* and many times in the Fourth Symphony itself. Momentum is out of the question until the orchestra begins to come to the fore, 12 bars after Figure 1, where a crotchet beat is decisively given by the lower strings:

Example 13

The musical score for Example 13 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Violin solo (Vln solo), featuring a melodic line with a long slur and a fermata over the final note. The middle staff is for the Viola and Violin (Vla, Vc.), playing a triplet of eighth notes with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The bottom staff is for the Cello (Cb.), playing a triplet of eighth notes with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a pizzicato (*pizz.*) instruction.

The impression is that the soloist is rather in control of the pace, and the moment at which it relinquishes the main melodic role is the moment at which things can move forward decisively. It likewise impacts on reprises of themes, so that, for example, the coda material – in fact a reprise of the Figure 4 theme, now with prevalent quaver figures from the soloist that eventually become *spiccato* semiquavers – becomes a piece of showmanship to upstage any balance of form taking place.

Example 14

Violin Concerto, 1st movement, figure 4 theme

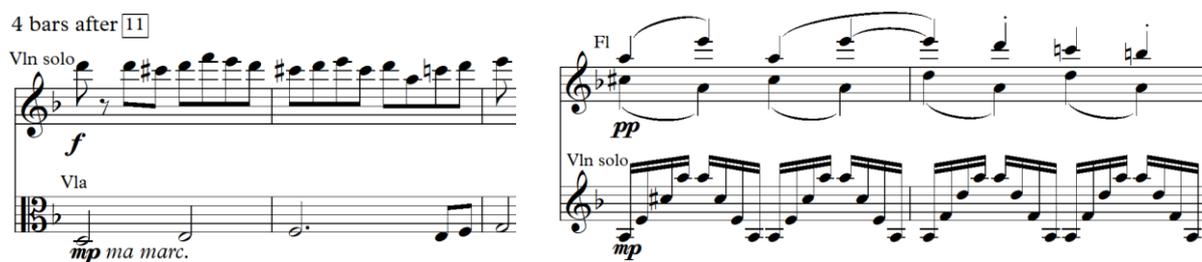
4 **Allegro molto**



f marc. ritiss.

Return of the theme with solo violin countermelody and *spiccato* semiquavers 20 bars later

4 bars after 11



Vln solo *f*

Vla *mp ma marc.*

Vln solo *pp*

In the Violin Concerto, the soloist supersedes the formal balance, using reprise as a forum for variation or prolonged countermelody, as seen above and in the example below from the second movement, where the return of the violin's long opening melody, now played by the viola, horn, oboe and clarinet at Figure 3, is somewhat dominated by the soloist's countermelody.

Example 15

Violin Concerto, 2nd movement, opening melody and its reprise at figure 3

6 Vln solo



mf

poco f

3 3 3 3

3 Vln solo

If we continue with the notion of soloist as an influential force rather than a technical display – in other words, having a bearing on the development of material and therefore the form – it is almost possible to personify the violin and to interpret the variations it presents as the commentary of the solo voice on original ideas. (This idea of an instrumental voice as a sort of “agent” will be pursued in Chapter 4.) In a similar manner to the eternally changing rotations in the 2nd movement of the Third Symphony, there is a constant development upon reprise, as seen in the following example from the finale of the Violin Concerto.

Example 16

Violin Concerto, 3rd movement: reappearances of the theme from 4 bars after figure 2

The image shows a musical score for Example 16. It consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Vln solo' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Cl. + bsn'. The Vln solo part starts with a measure marked '4 after [2] Str.' and then continues with a measure marked '8 after [3] Vln solo'. The Vln solo part includes trills and dynamic markings like 'f' and 'dim.'. The string part includes dynamic markings like 'f' and 'dim.'.

In this case, it goes beyond mere elaboration, and approaches a kind of developing variation, as shown above by the soloist’s dominating variations on or countermelodies to reprises of themes.³⁴ The meaning of “reprise” for Sibelius was apparently not a mere restatement or

³⁴ “Developing variation” is used here in the sense of Schoenberg’s description of “repetition [as] the initial stage in music’s formal technique, and variation and development its higher developmental stages” – Schoenberg, A: *For a Treatise on Composition* (1931) as quoted by Walter Frisch in *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* (California: University of California Press, 1984), p.2

reappearance, and Hepokoski goes so far as to describe it as “suspicion of the redundancy of non-altered, or even modestly altered, themes”.³⁵

With such a strong grip on the architecture of the work and, in the case of the 1st movement, its pace, the soloist is thus far more than just a maestro accompanied by the orchestra; it is a driving force and a dramatic presence.³⁶ None of this transformation of melodic ideas is unexpected in a concerto, but the result is that it distracts from the formal event of reprise, giving the same sense of constant progression as in the gradual transformation of the theme in the 2nd movement of the Third Symphony and the increasing revelation and maturing in the 3rd movement of the Fourth Symphony.

Compression

There is one more important aspect to Sibelius’s approach to reprise, one that is fundamental to the Fourth Symphony: his compression of form and the consequently truncated reprise of whole themes or passages. It is not particularly apparent in the 3rd movement, which unveils its main theme as described above, but it forms a crucial part of any examination of the 1st movement and, in a different way, the 2nd. The 2nd movement’s overall structure can be represented as shown above in figure 1, and one can add to this the almost equivalently long *Doppio più lento* section starting at letter K and spanning bars 260-344. This forms such a huge contrast to the previous scherzo-like material from bars 1 to 259 that many view it as functioning as the “trio”, foreshadowed, of course, in the duple-time theme at letter B (see example 17 below). I happen to

³⁵ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.20

³⁶ This is perhaps corroborated by the reduction in certain virtuosic features in the solo part in the revised version of the concerto – and in the sheer amount the soloist had to play – as well as the considerable structural change to the 1st movement. See Tiilikainen, pp.75-78

hear the *Tranquillo* passages at bars 163 and 177 as having a “trio” function as well, on account of their total contrast to everything around them, and, if that is taken as a valid interpretation, it provides a good example of how the principles of an existing form can, in Sibelius’s hands, be distorted in time whilst not in effect. In other words, the purpose of a trio would be to provide contrast to the scherzo, and proportional equivalence is not necessarily needed in order to fulfil that purpose. Even if the *Doppio più lento* passage is given the status of “trio” within the movement, the expectation would be to return to the scherzo material afterwards, and this Sibelius does... for five bars, understated and sudden, almost a joke in the brevity of its gesture towards reprise.³⁷

Example 17

2nd movement, *Doppio più lento* theme at letter K and letter B duple-time melody for comparison

The image shows two musical staves. The first staff is for Violin (Vln), bars 65-75, marked 'p' (piano). The second staff is for Oboe and Clarinet (Ob & Cl), bars 263-273, marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte), and Violin and Viola (Vln & vla), bars 273-283, marked 'rfz' (ritardando).

2nd movement, *Tranquillo*

The image shows a musical staff for Flute (Fl.) starting at bar 163, marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The section is titled 'Tranquillo' and includes a section marked 'A tempo'.

³⁷ Howell, in *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*, also refers to the parodic aspects of this movement (pp.39, 40, 139, 152)

2nd movement, last 5 bars

344 Vln. *ff p mf pp*

Timp. *marc.*

Cb *ppp mp*

The 1st movement as a whole is a paradigm of Sibelian formal compression. The movement can be depicted as shown below, where the obvious reprise of material in its previous state can clearly be seen to be either missing or greatly shortened.

Figure 2

bb. 1-6	establishing the pendulum
bb. 7-28	introducing the triadic theme and allowing it to grow
bb.29-40	brass chorale interrupts and alternates with strings
bb. 41-53	triadic theme resumes in F# major
bb.54-88 ²	development of this and the opening motif
bb.88 ³ -96	reprise of brass chorale and strings, starting with b.32 material
bb.97-109	triadic theme resumes in A major
bb.110-114	glimpse of opening motif grounded by tonic pedal

The entire opening passage, in which the first solo cello's triadic theme unfolds and spreads through the whole string section, simply never returns. The notion of traditional recapitulation of the opening bars is completely ignored, and when material does return in its original state (and, incidentally, in the tonic key, oddly in keeping with the sonata-form tradition that is simultaneously challenged by the distribution of material) it is greatly truncated, 25 bars being pared down to 16½.

Again, this calls into question the purpose of reprise, and whether it has an aesthetic or proportional function. Given that it has been seen as a sketch for the Fourth Symphony, it is not a surprise that *The Dryad* displays the same much-reduced reprise. The opening was a mesh of hesitant and sometimes disconnected motifs, almost inviting a flexible approach to their return, and, indeed, their reprise at the *Largamente* (bar 161) is vastly contracted. All the opening ideas return in their original keys and, despite continuing chromaticism, a tonic key – D major – is finally established, albeit only in the last 5 bars.

Figure 3

bb.1-18	Introducing motifs; many tempo changes.	18 bars
	b.13 melody often returns later	
bb.19-30	<i>Poco stretto</i> ; features Tristan chords	Central contrasting section
bb.31-40	Letter B: regularly phrased melody alternating with triadic motif. Section ends with G.P.	
bb.41-72	switches between hesitant oboe solo, letter B melody and b.14 motif	
bb.73-80	accomp figure established, with castanets	
bb.81-108	regular rise-and-fall of new melody, alternating with the letter B theme and some dissonant repeating chords at letter G	
bb.109-160	new periodically phrased melody, interspersed with repeating dissonant chords from letter G	
bb.161-165	return of b.13 melody	16 bars
bb.166-176	letter B melody returns and is then augmented at b.170	
bb.177-181	D major chord	

Material from the opening section that is reprised is shown in grey, with length in bar numbers.

This is without question a rehearsal for the Fourth Symphony: the long-overdue arrival at a tonic, the proportionally tiny recapitulation, the bare minimum of resolution because that is all it needs, all paving the way for the conclusion of the 1st movement's minimal return to the opening

texture, the theme altered to imply a clear tonic against a fragile pedal note. It brings into question the aptness of the term recapitulation, both here and in the context of the Fourth Symphony.

It is clear that amongst the preceding orchestral works, whose genres include other symphonies, a concerto, a symphonic fantasy and a tone picture, there are several indicators of the style that was to emerge in the Fourth Symphony. While this work occupies a quite discomforting soundworld at times, especially in comparison to pieces like the Third Symphony, the Violin Concerto and *Pohjola's Daughter*, it does seem to share characteristics with them – in fact, many of those aspects of the style which in part define the Fourth Symphony's austerity and severity are to be heard in a less concentrated form elsewhere and earlier.

One significant aspect of the Fourth Symphony's style remains to be explored in its forerunners: the stark tritone span in the opening four notes, which Sibelius declared "should sound 'as harsh as fate'".³⁸ Exposed though it may be in those first moments of the piece, the tritone was not a new sonority in Sibelius's music, and Tawaststjerna notes that it is present as early as *Kullervo*, an interval with "deep roots in his musical thinking".³⁹ While a main culprit in making the Fourth Symphony sound strange and discomforting was the harmonic language, that most dissonant of intervals was something that had been present and influential in his harmonic language for some time.

³⁸ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.180

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.175

The prevalence of the tritone

There had been other notable instances of this dissonant interval; to explore it in the Fourth Symphony was not a new phenomenon for Sibelius. *Pohjola's Daughter*, for example, returns to its 2nd subject idea at letter E (and, later, letter H) with a rather violent, completely transformed version of what had been a delicate and troika-like passage 4 bars after letter C. The tritone is now a part of the harmony, and the timbral differences here also contribute to the violence of the music.

Example 18

Pohjola's Daughter, 4 bars after letter C

Tranquillo molto

Ob. *p*

Hp.

Str. *pp*

Pohjola's Daughter, letter E (transformation of the above material)

Ww. *f*

A^{o7}

Vc, Cb. *p* *f*

Fg.

The 1st movement of the Third Symphony includes F# as a highly disruptive pitch at bar 38, at the end of a rather triumphant closure to the 1st subject. Here, the constant semiquaver energy has ceased, giving the impression of being suspended in time before dropping onto the 2nd subject's B minor. In the development section, there are three moments of pause, one at bar 97, one at bar 120 (the latter being slightly compromised by the continuation of semiquavers in the background) and one at bar 124. All accentuate the tritone relationship set up back in bar 38. The semiquaver motif from the 1st subject is altered during the same passage, now spanning a tritone (D-A_b) bb.111-112, and the same pitches are heard in the 3rd movement, for example in b.114. The keys of A_b and Dm are even juxtaposed in bars 77 and 88 during the same movement.

Example 19

Third Symphony 1st movement, F# pitch at b.38

strings (ctd throughout until b.34)

29 *f* Brass and woodwind *sf* *sf* *sf* *sf* *sf*

33 *sf* *f* *p* *ff* *fp* *p marcato* *mp*

Third Symphony, 1st movement, tritone exposed at b.97 (and later at bb. 120 and 124)

95 *pp* vln

97 *mp* horn *p* *pp* ww

Third Symphony, 1st movement, bar 1 motif altered to span a tritone

The image shows two musical staves. The first staff is for Violin and Cello (Vc, Cb) in a bass clef, showing a motif of eighth notes with a dynamic marking of *f*. The second staff is for Cello (Cb) in a bass clef, showing a similar motif with a dynamic marking of *p*.

Third Symphony, 3rd movement, bar 112

The image shows a musical score for bar 112. The top staff is for Violins (vlins) and Violas (vlas) in a treble clef, playing a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *pp sempre*. The bottom staff is for Cello and Double Bass (Vc, Cb) in a bass clef, playing a supporting line with a dynamic marking of *mp*.

As one might expect, there is harmonic similarity between the Fourth Symphony and *The Dryad*, immediately obvious in their emphasis on the tritone from the outset. One consequence of this, apart from avoiding a clear tonic, is in the later harmonic language: half-diminished chords, lack of resolution, and so on. This can clearly be heard in the progression $A\sharp^{\circ 7} - E - C\sharp m$ at bars 19-20, repeated at pitch twice more, changing texture every time but never really resolving. Less reminiscent of the old Sibelius is the chord at bar 13, B^{9dim5} , which bears more resemblance to Skryabin's mystic chord, sitting neatly on top of the D pedal that is presumably intended to resolve the double bass and cello A in bars 5³-12² and preventing it from fulfilling that purpose until bar 15.

Example 20

The Dryad, Prometheus and Tristan chords

The musical score for Example 20 is in 3/4 time and consists of three staves. The top staff features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes and dynamic markings *p* and *f*. The middle staff contains a melodic line with a *fp cresc.* marking and a *f* dynamic. The bottom staff shows a bass line with a *fp cresc.* marking and a *f* dynamic. A box labeled 'Prometheus chord (Mystic chord)' is shown below the bass line, containing the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F. A 'Tristan chord' is also indicated, with notes A#7, E, and C#m shown below the bass line.

Tristan chords have been part of Sibelius's music since his earliest works, but in *The Dryad* they are placed in a new context, one which set up harmonic unease from its outset, and uses more advanced dissonance, not only in the Prometheus-like chord in bar 14, shown above, but also in some cluster chords in the dance-like passage later on. At letter G, there is a chord which seems to be a combination of both $B^{\dim 7}$ and $B^{\text{halfdim} 7}$, shown below.

Example 21

The Dryad, breakdown of dissonant chord at letter G

The musical score for Example 21 is in 3/4 time and consists of a single staff. It begins with a box labeled 'G' and the instruction 'Poco a poco string.' followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The staff then shows a series of chords: a *f* dynamic marking, a $B^{\circ 7}$ chord, a B^{o7} chord, and a $[G^{\#o7}]$ chord.

Of course, the Fourth Symphony explores the harmonic potential of the tritone even further, not only in the types of chord that can be built on its dissonant foundations, like those shown in the two examples above, but also in the alternative tonalities that it could yield. In terms

of its being a work that divides his output, or stands apart from it, there is this to consider: that, while other works had used diminished chords, dissonant harmony, exposed tritones and disruptive pitches, they had always been in the context of tonally much tamer music, part of Sibelius's appeal as well as a reason to pigeon-hole and separate him from his mainstream contemporaries. Now there was a symphony offering audiences nothing but a diet of the harmonic consequences of the opening tritone pitch, and it was an experience for which they were unprepared. Exactly why this should be when, at that richly experimental and diverse time in twentieth-century European music, they were also hearing the first performances of frankly much more dissonant and disturbing works such as *Erwartung*, *Elektra* and *Pierrot Lunaire*, is, I think, linked closely to the expectations of the public and their unwillingness to hear this composer's inner self laid bare.

Chapter Two. The Psychological Symphony?

“The point of an analysis is not to *describe* what people consciously perceive: it is to *explain* their experiences in terms of the totality of their perceptions, conscious and unconscious.”¹

Despite the inherent dismissal of the mere *description* in this statement, Nicholas Cook presents two valid and complementary types of musical analysis here: an account of the features to be perceived by looking or listening, and an account of the way the sound affects the audience in real time. Actually, both are fascinating. In searching for the developing style in the works immediately preceding the Fourth Symphony, a suitable starting point is to list features and compare them in terms of purely musical content; in this way, one can come up with a list of things such as the consequences of one chromatic pitch, improvisatory solo melodies, tonal opposition, compressed reprise, and so on. As well as revealing a connection between a variety of works, analysed in chapter 1, this also shows an approach developing over those diverse works and elucidates the details that make a composer’s style unique.

A useful next step is to account for the listener’s experience, not only in the sense of temporal perception and manipulation, as in, for example, the changes in pace in *The Dryad* and the second movement of the Fourth Symphony, or the circularity of the slow movement in the Third Symphony, but also in the sense of a more spontaneous reaction to the emotional cues in the music. Whilst a good analysis will always surpass a basic *description* of what is on the page, the real appreciation of a musical work rests in part on exploring the listener’s reception, or, as Roger Scruton puts it, “[building] a bridge from the sound structure to the aesthetic experience”.²

In one sense, analysing a piece of music is about trying to uncover the secret of its success, and expressing Scruton’s “aesthetic experience” often involves the use of emotive and characterful language, so that it becomes impossible to restrict an analysis or a comparison between two works

¹ Cook, N: *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.221

² Scruton, R: *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.396

to the bare musical facts. Any powerful and expressive music invites such visual or “humanised” words, especially if it employs the kind of cinematic shifts, contrasts of light and shade (what Tarasti refers to as “*chiaroscuro* – or the play of light and darkness”³), spotlight soloists, fragile or majestic textures, continual development and variation, and disintegration, that the Fourth Symphony does. There has to be some kind of extra-musical subtext for the effect of all of this to be explained; hence, one might speak of the urgency of the third movement of the Violin Concerto, the stillness of the second movement of the Third Symphony, the brutalisation of the second subject accompaniment figures in both *Pohjola’s Daughter* and the first movement of the Third Symphony, or resolution of conflict when describing the reprise of material in a tonic key.

Elliott Antokoletz offers one of the most objective and non-emotive analyses of the Fourth Symphony that I have read, but even he prefaces it with a comment on “the more intense personal mood of the work”,⁴ following that with references to other interpretations, including Layton’s comparison with the Third Symphony, whose “confident, optimistic temper... is laid aside; here the mood is despondent”⁵ and David Burnett-James’s description of the Fourth Symphony’s “utmost severity and austerity”.⁶ We seem to need to give this symphony a character that can represent our own response to it as listeners, to build the bridge and to explain our experience, in the words of Scruton and Cook (above).

Sibelius himself called the Fourth Symphony a “psychological symphony”,⁷ and it has certainly invited speculation about his mental state and personal circumstances (more on that below). Tawaststjerna goes so far as to call the work “one of the most remarkable musical documents of the Freudian era”⁸, a reminder of its context in the age of psychoanalysis. Even without either of these statements, there has always been a great temptation to impose

³ Tarasti, p.13

⁴ Antokoletz, *A History of Twentieth-Century Music*, p.125

⁵ Layton, pp.42-43

⁶ Burnett-James, p.69

⁷ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.175

⁸ *Ibid*, p.175

programmatic interpretations on Sibelius's works in particular. This is not only for reasons outlined in the introduction, above – in short, he was “one of the nation's spiritual leaders”⁹ and the association of Sibelius with the Finnish spirit was one that proved hard to break – but also because, in the rest of Europe and beyond, our fascination with all that made him Finnish raised him almost to exotic levels. Anything from explicit folklore references to vaguely conjured images of forests would do as a “programme”.

There is more to it, of course; with all music, there is an unspoken assumption that it has to “mean” something, and indeed it often is an expression of human emotion, human experience and the human condition. Dahlhaus describes the symphony as occupying a “middle ground, stylistically, between the large canvas of music drama and the intimate discourse of chamber music”,¹⁰ implying that there is an element of both the programmatic and the abstract in such a work. This sits neatly with the nature of a work like the Fourth Symphony, which is loaded with unspoken and unspecified “meaning” while its composer consciously chose to style it a symphony, not a symphonic poem or a “music drama”. In the same book, Dahlhaus draws a distinction between two aesthetic tenets: one can adopt what he sees as a nineteenth-century perspective of composition as “fragments of autobiography”, and on the other hand, one can view music as “needing no extra-musical ‘formal motive’ to be meaningful”, as became the twentieth-century aesthetic theory in the age of art music.¹¹ It feels more purist and more easily substantiated to respond to a symphony in the latter sense, but Dahlhaus is right about the drama – and the intimacy, which does not preclude a programmatic interpretation. The danger of over-interpreting or speculating should not allow us to overlook the (admittedly lesser) danger of letting an intended or obvious association between sound and emotion go unacknowledged.

⁹ Oramo, “Sub umbra Sibelii”, p.160

¹⁰ Dahlhaus, C: *Between Romanticism and modernism. Four Studies in the Music of the later Nineteenth Century* (trans. Mary Whittall, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.51

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.3, p.37

Impossible though it might be to read a composer's mind and reveal his intentions, this is a symphony whose creator himself said that "a symphony is not just a composition in the ordinary sense of the word; it is more of an inner confession at a given stage of one's life".¹² So would an interpretation that begins from the perspective of this being a "psychological symphony" be an appropriate one in this case? It might be less unpopular with the composer himself; after all, his response to the immediate programmatic interpretation of the Fourth Symphony was one of vehement denial, perhaps in part because this somehow recategorised it as a multi-movement symphonic poem. The origins of that interpretation seem to lie in a trip he made to Mount Koli in 1909, and the subsequent sketches for pieces called "The Mountain" and "Thoughts of a Wayfarer" that he played on the piano for Axel Carpelan a month later.¹³ The critic, Wasenius (alias "Bis"), claimed to have obtained the programme from Sibelius's close friend, Eero Järnefelt, and would not retract it, and Tawaststjerna wonders if there might have been some foundation in fact that led the composer to protest so strongly.¹⁴ He later distinguishes between an "outer programme" or "background" – which could well have been the experience of climbing Mount Koli – and what he calls "inner essence", which he hears as the composer's anxiety about his health and mortality in the wake of his throat tumour.¹⁵ This is a very useful distinction, in particular for its acknowledgement of the constant presence of the Finnish landscape in Sibelius's consciousness. The diary entry in which he defined a symphony as an "inner confession" sits beside a comment on the weather and scenery on the same day: "Wonderful day with snow interlacing the trees and their branches – typically Finnish."¹⁶ Perhaps the outer background and the inner essence were a constant partnership in Sibelius's creative process, with the Finnish aspect being all too significant.

¹² Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.159 (diary entry, November 5th 1910)

¹³ *Ibid*, p.197

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.171

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp.198-200

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.159

If anyone should be hyper-aware of his heritage and nationality, it should be an artist in turn-of-the-century Finland.

Carolyn Abbate writes about the “absent text” of instrumental music, which a critic might impose on a whole piece in order to explain it, in much the way Wasenius did with the Fourth Symphony. From the starting point of a listener’s response to explicit musical gestures in opera, where the words and a character’s psychological state are accompanied or represented by the music, she explains that an equivalent is often sought in order to understand instrumental music, and the substitute for the libretto and actions is what one imagines the composer was envisaging. Some music helps by having an explicit narrative (she cites Berlioz and Mahler as examples), while some requires the musical events to assume drama and character, whether it is in the perception of themes as characters or tonal events as dramatically significant. Any of these responses, she clarifies, constitute not a narrative interpretation in the real sense, which she later explains and which I will return to in chapter 4, but in a programmatic sense, albeit detailed.

The idea of some kind of absent text does not seem to sit well with the Fourth Symphony, suggesting as it does a sort of plot, although the concept of assigning a wordless dramatic significance to certain musical events is useful. Of particular pertinence in the context of this chapter is her last description of something more akin to evocation than programmatic narrative.¹⁷ Here, she writes about a less prescriptive way of interpreting works as “sharing certain formal or structural characteristics with verbal narrative, or expressing some vague, transverbal drama”.¹⁸ So the music can “speak” to the listener, but what it says is not disclosed and we need not try to voice it.

This leaves us free to respond to the Fourth Symphony as a work that both evokes a mood and a certain type of landscape (each one rather bleak but nonetheless occasionally overwhelming

¹⁷ Abbate, C: *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp 20-23

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.24

in their enormity) and unfolds in time, a kind of process or a narrative without explicit words or events. It is very tempting to give in to the call of the composer's moniker "a psychological symphony" and simply attribute musical events to his mental state, but perhaps Abbate presents a caution and an escape from that, inviting instead another kind of narrative response. Rather than psychological – or programmatic, linked to landscape or anything else – perhaps just a personal interpretation is appropriate. The symphony does have powerfully evocative moments, and it does move through myriad sonorities and their associations, such as the desolation of the violins' unaccompanied 2-part texture in the first movement at letter F, matched by the loneliness of the solo flute and clarinet at the beginning of the third movement, and these moments do invite introspection and stillness, in the case of the latter example. It opposes the majesty of letter G in the third movement with the fragility of the same theme when played by a solo cellist at bar 51. It offers light-heartedness and exuberance at the opening of the fourth movement, and in the same movement there is terrifying dissonance at letter P and absolute emptiness in the closing bars from letter W, which Whittall hears as hinting at "Webern's stifled expressionism".¹⁹ To recall something said earlier, there is a danger in not appreciating all of this, as much as there is a danger in psychoanalysing the symphony. As Busoni put it, music may express human sentiment but not human affairs; i.e., it may be personal, but does not therefore have to be programmatic.²⁰

¹⁹ Whittall: "The Later Symphonies" (in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.53

²⁰ Busoni, F: letter to Herr Paul Bekker, Zürich January 1920 (in *The Essence of Music and other papers*, trans. Rosamund Ley, London: Rockliffe, 1957), p.22

Personal Expression

Stravinsky famously said that music was powerless to express “anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, *etc*”, and that if a listener perceived in music the expression of something that could be put into words it was only imagined.²¹ It brings to mind the discussion above about our *need* to confer meaning on this symphony. Of course, he was not suggesting that music was expressionless, but that a programmatic match of musical events to images, words or ideas was inappropriate, and he later qualified the statement by saying that it was absurd to imagine “exact sets of correlatives must exist between a composer’s feelings and his notation”,²² in much the same vein as the caveat, also above, not to be too literal in our interpretation. This should not encourage the notion that a composer is in some way detached from his art, however; while it is important to avoid attributing every aspect of the symphony to the psychological state of its composer in an attempt to form Scruton’s bridge between aesthetics and experience, this should not deter us from taking into account the composer’s personal circumstances. We cannot ignore them any more than we can ignore the aesthetics themselves.

There were three significant causes for worry in Sibelius’s life at the time of composing the Fourth Symphony. One was his health; another was his financial situation; the third was the tightening control over Finland and Finnish affairs of the Russian empire. Franklin’s description of Finland as “a smaller country in thrall to another great empire [i.e. Russia]”²³ conjures the picture of a nation whose sense of identity had been allowed to flourish but had all along been at the will of a much greater power, and 1910 saw a downturn in the autonomy of Finland with the removal of decision-making powers to the Duma. The destination of dissenting Finns was prison or Siberia;

²¹ Stravinsky, I: *An Autobiography* (New York: Norton, 1962), p.63

²² Stravinsky, I and Craft, R: *Expositions and Developments* (New York: Doubleday, 1962, reprint Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p.101

²³ Franklin, P: “Kullervo’s Problem: Kullervo’s Story” (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Jackson and Murtomäki, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.62

the nation was trapped between surrender to imperialism on the one hand and socialist revolt on the other, and unrest towards each other grew amongst the Finns.²⁴

As stated briefly in the introduction, this “spiritual leader of the nation”, to use Oramo’s words,²⁵ did not respond to the political upheaval with another *Atenarnes Sång*; as Tawaststjerna says, he was already concentrating on his own inner journey.²⁶ This journey was marked permanently by two burdens of worry: money and illness. His ongoing struggle with money and mounting bills saw debts of up to 100,000 Finnish marks in December 1909.²⁷ Ironically, help amounting to enough to eradicate this debt came partly because this was a national icon whose creative energy was being diverted by economic worries, and an appeal by Axel Carpelan and his cousin Tor capitalised on people’s concern for “serving the interests of their own country, and at the same time [fulfilling] their duty to the cultural life of the international community.”²⁸ Despite his apparent disinterest in politics, it seemed that Sibelius’s name was still strongly tied to every Finn’s sense of national identity, especially in the context of increasingly tense relations with Russia.

And so to the greatest daily burden of all: Sibelius’s health. Layton poetically describes the lengthening shadows that 1908 brought with it, in the form of heavy drinking, frequent ill health and ongoing money worries.²⁹ That same year, Sibelius was diagnosed with throat cancer, and he underwent operations in both Helsinki and Berlin which were ultimately successful but left in their wake a fear of what Layton calls “the bleak possibilities that the illness opened up”. No wonder he eschewed the politics of the day when pressing on his mind were thoughts of his own mortality, and no wonder Layton hears in the Fourth Symphony “austerity, depth and concentration... the closeness of death and an overwhelming feeling of isolation.”³⁰ It is well known that progress on

²⁴ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, pp.144-5

²⁵ Oramo, “Sub umbra Sibelii”, p.160

²⁶ Ibid, p.145

²⁷ Ibid, p.131

²⁸ Ibid, p.137, quoting a petition passed amongst wealthy businessmen by such influential figures as Yrjö Hirn, Werner Söderhjelm and Sigurd Prosterus

²⁹ Layton, p.41

³⁰ Ibid, p.42

the Fourth Symphony was not smooth, largely because of interruptions by other works, and Tawaststjerna links the fear of death, “that the illness might still claim him”, with a desire to complete or revise works ready for publication, as well as the more obvious motivation of raising much-needed funds.³¹

In a way, this in itself is a kind of “outer programme”, being an accumulation of blights on the future’s horizon, and leading to a general disposition in the composer. Goss’s term “introspective neo-classicism” encapsulates the inception and the result; a composer looking inward and a creation much refined in comparison to earlier works.³² This would concur with Howell’s belief that the style, the “extreme experimental nature” of the Fourth Symphony, is a direct consequence of the composer’s “preoccupation with the overriding threat of death”.³³ For confirmation of his mood over several months, there are diary entries from 1910 that reveal an emotional seesaw, their recording almost alternating moods revealing a desperate lack of equilibrium:

- April 21st “again in the deepest depression”
- April 27th “light, expectant, hopeful thoughts”
- May 11th “in the grip of a depression these days”
- August 1st-7th “all these days I spent ... in good spirits”
- August 8th “Torn up what I believed in on the island”
- August 30th “inspired”
- September 22nd “these dark shadows”³⁴

So if we can understand the symphony as an expression of a composer’s disposition, we can avoid a literal narrative that takes into account every *sforzando* chord or naked tritone, whilst acknowledging the psychological “background” or context of the music. This marries with

³¹ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.137

³² Goss, p.343

³³ Howell, *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*, p.199

³⁴ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, pp.139-143

Ballantine's notion of music as "an art of personal expression";³⁵ it can be motivated by very inner thoughts – or by an inner journey – but we need not create a biographical map or, for that matter, a mountain-trek narrative. Ballantine goes on, much later in his book, to name the Fourth Symphony as "Sibelius's first great symphonic masterpiece", presumably therefore deeming it his first great vehicle of personal expression.³⁶ "Autobiographical fragment" sits much more comfortably if understood as "personal expression", not a solid snapshot but a fleeting glimpse.

This means two things. The first is that we are free to speak of the expressive qualities of the Fourth Symphony in language that suggests something of the composer's inner thoughts and our own without fear of being speculative or presumptuous, so that Layton can call it "profoundly and deeply felt"³⁷ and Ballantine can label it as a "supreme tragic statement"³⁸ and we can agree. The second is that we can partly explain the bewildered or even hostile response to the symphony when it was premiered if we consider it as personal expression. "Psychologically exposed" and "infinitely lonely",³⁹ it speaks of suffering and makes uncomfortable listening, not because of the aesthetic effect of moments such as the hollow freefall of the violins in the development of the first movement or the bitonal chaos in the latter part of the fourth (see example 22 below), but because of the glimpse of an individual's mind and the invitation to look inward on oneself (one is reminded of Tawaststjerna's placing it in the context of the Freudian era). It is not expressionist, but this only serves to magnify the discomfort; it lacks the detachment that comes from the surreal quality and aesthetic rawness, even ugliness, that a genuinely expressionist work such as *Erwartung* or *Pierrot Lunaire* has.

³⁵ Ballantine, C: *Music and its Social Meanings* (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1984) pp.1-2

³⁶ Ibid, p.160

³⁷ Layton, p.80

³⁸ Ballantine, p.150

³⁹ Goss, p.351

Example 22

1st movement, bar 63

63 Vln 1 con sord. *mf* *dim.* *p* *mf* Vln2

66 *cresc.* *ff* Vln 1+2

4th movement, bars 340 and 377: showing motifs in A major over an accompaniment in E_b major

340 *p*

377 Ob. Fl. *f*

I have mentioned its reception again, as being a symptom of people’s discomfort at hearing something so personal. Eero Tarasti asks, “What kind of body, then, speaks in Sibelius’s music?”⁴⁰ and it is a pertinent question for this symphony, with the answer: a personal one, more humble and introverted than people expected from their national icon. It is also far removed from the “surface sparkle” of his youth⁴¹ and the hero figures with whom he identified in early works.⁴² In *Kullervo*

⁴⁰ Tarasti, p.12

⁴¹ Goss, p.4: “it’s the surface sparkle people fall for” letter to Christian Sibelius, undated (probably 1903)

⁴² Murtoämäki, V: “Sibelius’s symphonic ballad *Skogsrået*: biographical and programmatic aspects of his early orchestral music” (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Jackson and Murtoämäki, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.130

could be found an exact fit for a national hero, says Franklin, “his story implicitly an allegorical version of Sibelius’s own”⁴³ – remember that this was the work that first rocketed Sibelius to the status of artistic representative of his nation’s spirit – and the Finnish people saw something of themselves as well in this character, and this music belonged to them, so that Sibelius was inextricable from the self-image that they had woven.⁴⁴ The connection between composer and hero goes further in *Pohjola’s Daughter*, with Virtanen claiming that the focus is never really on the daughter, but on the hero of the work, Väinämöinen, with whom Virtanen says Sibelius possibly identified, given that “[his] view of his artistic vocation seems altogether to have been strongly influenced by heroic images”. Whether or not he identified with the hero of the story, he was compared to Väinämöinen by the Finnish people, to whom Sibelius was “the messianic ‘inventor of the Finnish tone’”.⁴⁵ Given that it is widely recognised that the text for *Pohjola’s Daughter* was added after the music had been written, at the suggestion of his publisher, Robert Lienau, the incentive for completing the work was probably not to write an orchestral work depicting an heroic figure with whom Sibelius identified and with whom his audience would connect him. In fact, he seems to have been moving away from Finnish folklore and literary influences before this point, and things “Finnish” were becoming more of an “outer programme” anyway. Certainly the idea of what Grimley calls the “tragic male-heroic subject matter of the *Kalevala*”⁴⁶ is in absolute opposition to the voice that speaks in the Fourth Symphony.

⁴³ Franklin, p.69

⁴⁴ Oramo, “Sub umbra Sibelii”, p.160

⁴⁵ Virtanen, “Pohjola’s Daughter”, pp.163-4

⁴⁶ Grimley, D: “The tone poems: genre, landscape and structural perspective” (in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.103

Forests, Barkbread and the “Finnish”

Did anything remain, then, of the Finnish voice that had been Sibelius’s for so many decades, or was it superseded by his personal expression and inner voice? There was a way to preserve the connection, even conflating the inner and the Finnish voices, and that was the landscape. Sibelius himself felt that one’s natural surroundings had a profound impact on one’s creative style or disposition, saying

“I think that nature and landscape play a far greater part than national origins. Let us take the case of Grieg, whose music it is impossible to conceive in any other than a Norwegian landscape.”⁴⁷

Many might say the same of Sibelius’s own music, in a Finnish landscape, and this has been the topic of much analytical and contextual writing. Even in the context of tone poems such as the *Four Legends*, Howell writes of their “not following an exact literary programme, but ... evoking something of the general atmosphere of the poem”,⁴⁸ and the notion of a general atmosphere can be transferred to his later, more abstract, orchestral works such as the Fourth Symphony. Perhaps without realising it, the first audiences *were* hearing something “truly Finnish”, to use Huttunen’s words about *Kullervo*,⁴⁹ but the heroic figure had been replaced by a reflective one, at a time when his own countrymen might have anticipated or needed an artistic affirmation of resistance to Russian domination. On the subject of the *Lemminkäinen Legends*, Ilkka Oramo notes that Sibelius’s music thus offered his compatriots an object of self-identification, and in this symphony they did not readily hear the same.⁵⁰ It is possible, then, that it was their search for something to replace the refuted mountain narrative and their quest to find the Finnish voice in this symphony that led some of Sibelius’s compatriots to dub the Fourth Symphony the “*Barkbröd*” symphony, as if to

⁴⁷ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.145

⁴⁸ Howell, *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*, p.214

⁴⁹ Huttunen, p.13

⁵⁰ Oramo, “Sub umbra Sibelii”, p.159

replace interpretation with association. This neatly straddles the realms of psychological and national, by associating the music's emptiness and famous austerity with a time of such hardship that people were forced to eat bark, a shared memory of heritage that allowed people to claim the music as their own.

This still imposes extra-musical meaning on the symphony, however, and the notion of "general atmosphere" is somewhat more appealing in that it concurs with Sibelius's own belief in the powerful effect of nature and landscape as well as allowing a symphony to remain more abstract than a tone-poem. As has been shown extensively by Tim Howell (and corroborated in the selected analyses above in chapter 1), the tone poems and symphonic poems are closely linked to the symphonies in style, tonality and the development of Sibelius's unique approach to structure,⁵¹ but ultimately their inception is different, and a symphony does not bear the burden of extra-musical significance (even if not narrative as such) in the way that a tone poem or symphonic poem is more likely to do. Taking up Sibelius's idea of nature and landscape as a stronger influence than national origins, one can arrive at a notion of a kind of "Finnish psyche" that fits both the claim that this is a psychological symphony and the underlying aesthetic impression of something essentially Finnish. Goss even connects the landscape and the mindset, saying that the remoteness of Finland caused its inhabitants "unavoidably [to] experience its psychological and practical effects."⁵² Finland is not just geographically remote; it is also culturally removed, even isolated from the rest of Europe due to its language, and its climate represents a challenge.

Daniel Grimley takes the notion of music being programmatic in the sense of evocation rather than literal depiction right back to the early tone poem, *En Saga* (1892, rev.1902), which he says is not really based on any literary narrative, and, despite its being part of a "wider tragic-hero tradition" and bearing a stylistic resemblance to *Kullervo*, it is more evocative than programmatic.⁵³

⁵¹ Howell, *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*

⁵² Goss, p.13

⁵³ Grimley, "The Tone Poems", p.97

What is really fascinating is that in the 1940s Sibelius spoke of *En Saga* as “the expression of a state of mind”.⁵⁴ If this was true at the time of composition, it means that he had already been connecting the psyche and the music some twenty years before calling the Fourth Symphony a “psychological symphony”. Grimley also asserts that *Skogsrådet* (1894-5) was appealing to Sibelius precisely because the poetic style of its Swedish author, Viktor Rydberg, presented a “fin-de-siècle mixture of nature mysticism, inner psychological drama and Nordic myth”.⁵⁵

So it seems that Sibelius was aware of the role of the psychological early on, even during the period that could be perceived as his nationalist phase, when he produced works inspired by Finnish literature, such as *Kullervo* and the *Lemminkäinen Legends*, and national fervour, such as *Suomi herää* and *Atenarnes Sång*. Meanwhile, his preoccupation with nature is well known, even comparing the composition of a symphony to the progress of a river that gets its water from smaller sources, with motives gaining shape and finding their way,⁵⁶ and Leah Broad has noted his nature-centric annotations on the score for his incidental music for the play *Swanwhite*, along with a general observation about “his propensity for weaving his response to nature into the fabric of his compositions”.⁵⁷ The central tenet of her paper is symbolism in Sibelius’s music, with emphasis on orchestration, and others have also sought to associate instrumentation with specific landscape imagery, including Osma Vänskä in his powerful description from the perspective of a conductor:

“...the forest is certainly an underlying presence in his music ...it changes dramatically when the timpanist is not there. Everything seems so dry, the music loses its feeling of echo. ... if

⁵⁴ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. I*, p.130

⁵⁵ Grimley, “The Tone Poems”, p.99

⁵⁶ Mäkelä, p.100

⁵⁷ Broad, L: “Swanwhite: Sibelius, Symbolism and Modernism” (*Nordic Breakthrough Conference*, University of Oxford, 31 August-2 September 2015), p.5

you take it away, everything is changed. And I think Sibelius deliberately wrote this kind of ‘pedal noise’ that you hear in the forest.”⁵⁸

Grimley’s article on *The tone poems: genre, landscape and structural perspective* links “the folkloristic style” of *En Saga* and *Kullervo* to “mythic representations of the Finnish forest”⁵⁹ and, while he writes about a wider “pan-European forest mythos”, it certainly seems to be an almost foreboding presence specifically in the concept of Finland for foreigners. “Musical depictions of the natural world” in Sibelius’s tone poems and other orchestral works, for him, span the “gradual unfolding of a bleak musical backdrop” in *En Saga* and *The Swan of Tuonela*, the “bleak, fateful presence” of the landscape at the beginning of *Pohjola’s Daughter*, and the “bare landscape” that Tarasti describes in the opening of the Violin Concerto.⁶⁰ He includes observations by Mitchell and Scharma that “landscape” is as much about culture, values and heritage as it is about surrounding nature,⁶¹ and shares with Tim Howell the notion that musical events in time can map onto visual spacing of objects in a landscape.⁶² This I find very interesting, as it taps into one of Sibelius’s great accomplishments as a mature composer, his control of pace and temporal experience, and, in Howell’s hands, this becomes closely linked with his Finnish origins and the inevitable consequence of living with the intense periods of light and dark offered by extreme northern latitudes, thus concurring with Sibelius’s own belief in the effect of one’s physical surroundings on one’s mental disposition and, consequently, artistic output.⁶³

⁵⁸ From “Performing Sibelius: Sir Colin Davis and Osmo Vänskä in Conversation with Daniel M. Grimley” (in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.237

⁵⁹ Grimley, “The Tone Poems”, p.97

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp.105-6

⁶¹ Ibid, p.106

⁶² Ibid, p.107

⁶³ Howell, T: *Sibelius the Progressive* (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Timothy Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki, Cambridge University Press, New York 2001), p.57

Can a “psychological” interpretation be valid?

This chapter has progressed through the concepts of the psychological symphony, a psychoanalytical document, personal expression and a Finnish psyche, encompassing various interpretations of a programmatic, narrative and evocative nature. Ultimately, any interpretation of this essentially abstract work needs to be objective and to avoid literal interpretation, since it has not been identified by its composer. In the light of Cook and Scruton’s views on the purpose of musical analysis, it then becomes necessary to embed a little of the listener’s response in the analysis (or a range of listener’s responses), to find a link between aesthetics and musical fact, as a way of explaining the experience of hearing this music. What seems to have disappointed his Finnish audiences is the lack of overt reference to matters Finnish, whether heroic, political or folkloric; what many musicologists have uncovered is a way of explaining the overriding Finnishness that is nonetheless present, by invoking imagery of Finnish landscape, incorporating culture and individual disposition in response to that. Tomi Mäkelä expresses this most eloquently as “Sibelius’s ... landscapes of the mind”, noting that, while literal (“realist”) depictions of the visual in his music are hard to find, “Sibelius’s major works... are documents of the effect of nature upon the mind of the artist”.⁶⁴ To be absolutely clear, I would separate the appreciation of a musical work into purely musical analysis and aesthetic understanding, and I would say that an understanding of Sibelius’s Fourth Symphony does indeed rest on an acknowledgement of its composer’s psyche (as opposed to his mental state, although, as I have made clear above, personal circumstances are a necessary consideration).

As a final thought, in addition to being the quintessentially Finnish aspect of Sibelius’s style, the tendency to connect the natural and the human is something that Daniel Grimley hears as playing out in “an attempt to resolve the tension between ... dynamic, temporal unfolding and static, contemplative circularity” and lending Sibelius’s tone poems “a peculiarly modernist

⁶⁴ Mäkelä, p.111

poignancy”.⁶⁵ He could mean the landscape is the former, and the contemplative latter is the human; the opposite could be true, where the circularity refers to the fixed nature of the landscape, whereas the changing factor is the human. Perhaps the same qualities can be heard in the Fourth Symphony, and perhaps the very fact that there is something of the psychological (or the Finnish psyche) in this work contributes to its modernity, a topic for further discussion in relation to its specific musical features in the following chapter.

⁶⁵ Grimley, “The Tone Poems”, p.116

Chapter Three. The Issue of Modernity

The Fourth Symphony has a rich context to explore. Not only does it sit as the central opus in a series of seven symphonies, as I have already mentioned, but it also shares a period in the composer's life with acute anxieties of both a medical and a financial nature, a period in history with developing unrest in Finland, and a period in music with such ground-breaking works as *Pierrot Lunaire*, *Petrushka*, *Jeux* and *The Planets*. Such a context would inevitably inform contemporary reactions to the Fourth Symphony, from native Finns, perhaps anticipating an artistic affirmation of their patriotic fervour, and from international audiences, accustomed to the experimentation of Schoenberg and Stravinsky and the vast orchestral palettes of Strauss and Mahler, and perhaps slightly sceptical of the provincial Nordic composer's place alongside these giants of musical innovation.

In amongst the reactions to the Fourth Symphony by the Finnish people and the European critics was the composer's own view of himself, summed up in a diary entry from May 1910:

“As a personality and ‘*eine Erscheinung aus den Wäldern*’ [an apparition from the woods] you will have your modest place. Here at home you are a past number in the eyes of the general public”¹

a complicated picture of one who had developed his style and his reputation as a nationalist but who threatened himself with alienation as his music became more personal, while his place amongst the great names of Europe was always compromised by the geographical location and cultural separation of Finland from the mainstream. Tawaststjerna acknowledges and refutes the easy assumption that he was “an isolated figure without real contact with the European tradition”,² but nonetheless there was what Richard Powell identifies as “a period of introverted

¹ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.140

² *Ibid*, p.17

stylistic doubt and questioning” in the composer that began around 1909 – the year of Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*, Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* and Webern’s *Five Movements for String Quartet* – and culminated in 1911, the year of the Fourth Symphony.³ This concurs with Grimley’s description of this as “a period when Sibelius was beginning to feel increasingly alienated from, as well as simultaneously attracted by, avant-garde developments in music on the continent”⁴ and with Hepokoski’s view that it was around 1909 that Sibelius began to feel “eclipsed as a modernist”, following the completion in 1907 of the Third Symphony, with its “leaner, condensed ‘classicism’”.⁵ While Hepokoski hears in this no actual rejection of modernism, and in fact Whittall sees the classicism as an aspect of modernity (“modern classicism”) when compared to late Romanticism,⁶ it is indisputable that Sibelius’s style was far removed from that of his European contemporaries. To put it bluntly, Sibelius was a northern curiosity, and he was justified in perceiving that others saw him as an outsider, to use Hepokoski’s term.⁷

Who populated this “mainstream”, then? There were three broad strands of musical progress:

1. The Austro-German tradition, continuing to dominate the European symphonic scene with the huge masterpieces of Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler, while the pioneering Arnold Schoenberg and his student Anton Webern explored the extremes of chromaticism and timbre in chamber music, the aesthetic result being expressionism and eventually the move into atonality and, later on, serialism;
2. Paris and *Les Ballets Russes*, a catalyst for groundbreaking French and Russian works by composers such as Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky;

³ Powell, p.18

⁴ Grimley, “The Tone Poems”, p. 110

⁵ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.11

⁶ Whittall, “The Later Symphonies”, p.49

⁷ *Ibid*, p.4

3. England, enjoying its first real boom of musical proliferation since the Renaissance, with Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan-Williams and Gustav Holst leading the way (albeit in quite a different and less challenging direction from that of their French, Russian and Austrian counterparts – and, in fact, a considerably less “modern” one than that of Sibelius!).

Exploring extremes, breaking new ground – these were the remit of the modernists, the very label suggesting a conscious effort to “be modern”, to break away. The Tate Gallery defines modernism as “characterised by a deliberate rejection of the styles of the past”, going on to detail traits such as “innovation and experimentation with form (the shapes, colours and lines that make up the work) with a tendency to abstraction; and an emphasis on materials, techniques and processes.”⁸ If we translate this into music-speak, the experimentation with form can become anything from the global structure of the piece to its component features, including melodic motifs, recurring timbral sonorities, or distinctive harmonic fingerprints that unify the piece. “Materials, techniques and processes” become the exploration of things like pitch series, isorhythms, unusual timbres (sprechgesang, fluttertongue) and modes of limited transposition. Above all, the definition captures the notion that it is more an active reaction than a passive development.

If we therefore think of *modernism* as a reactionary movement and the modernists as the conscious protagonists, whilst *modernity* is merely the state of being modern and making use of new techniques or processes without the requirement to be the forerunner or the torch-bearer, we can start to place Sibelius not as a composer eclipsed, peripheral or isolated, but as an absorber of modernist trends and developments. That is not to say that he possessed no powers of innovation himself – he forged his own path, and in fact made it clear that he did not *want* to

⁸ <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/m/modernism>, accessed on 24/04/16 at 08:50am

emulate the musical style of his contemporaries – but here the emphasis is on his rightful place in the company of accepted “modern” composers as listed above, particularly Strauss, Debussy, Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Mahler. To that end, a brief snapshot of Europe’s music surrounding the Fourth Symphony seems appropriate, to put into context those aspects of this piece that provoked such a response at the time: its sparse orchestration and, above all, its harmonic language.

This window in music history: a brief listener’s perspective

One tends to think of “modernism” as not only a rejection of the old but also a conscious movement to push aesthetic boundaries, and this was certainly the case with many works in this closing chapter of *La Belle Époque*. Interestingly, it was not the case, however, with Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*, a work for tenor, alto and orchestra, which pushes no boundaries of tonality or timbre, instead exploring the richness of the orchestral palette and the potential of the voice to express human emotion. It has a grand opening, prominently featuring the horn, glockenspiel and high-pitched woodwind in accompaniment to a *fortissimo* tenor delivery of the first poem, *Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde* (The Drinking Song of Earth’s Sorrow), whose refrain is “Dark is life, dark is death!”. It is heavily chromatic but never approaches the ambiguity or outright dissolution of tonal hierarchy championed by Mahler’s contemporaries. Conversely, the orchestration has lighter moments, such as in the settings of the third and fourth poems, *Von der Jugend* (Youth) and *Von der Schönheit* (Beauty), with overt word-painting evident in the use of flutes and upper-register strings to depict the optimism of these texts.

In the same year of 1909, Richard Strauss and Arnold Schoenberg produced music at the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum, genuinely challenging works of a nature not so much expressive as expressionist. Strauss’s *Elektra* is a disturbing opera exploiting the female voice with

disjunct and extreme vocal lines, employing a large orchestra. Its harmonic language is famous for the bitonality inherent in the dissonant “Elektra” chord, shown below, and the use of harmonic parallelism.



The Elektra chord

Erwartung, composed in 1909 but not premiered until 1924, likewise focusses on the female voice, this time with a soloist whose progressing insanity is depicted through a kind of soundscape orchestration, fragmentary motifs, and a tendency to disintegrate in dynamics and texture where it might be expected to build. Disintegration and fragmentation themselves are the crux of one view of modernism, significantly the opposite process to the “crystallisation of ideas out of chaos” that Sibelius cultivated in, for example, the Third Symphony.⁹ The nightmarish topic of a woman discovering the body of her lover and slowly realising that she killed him is a monument to the era of psychoanalysis that produced the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* (various versions ranging from 1893 to 1910) and Egon Schiele’s *Self Portrait* (1910). Interestingly, Herbert Read’s description of Munch as “the most isolated, the most introspective... geographically and psychologically he was an ‘outsider’”¹⁰ resonates with Goss’s picture of Sibelius as a man who “turned inward in a manner so extreme that his music almost seemed to come from another world”,¹¹ and Hepokoski’s portrayal of a composer who “saw himself viewed as an outsider... [whose] symphonies were merely 'northern’”.¹² Read portrays the Danish artist Emil Nolde, another pioneer of the expressionist movement in art, in a similar way: “another

⁹ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.66

¹⁰ Read, H: *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1974), p.59

¹¹ Goss, p.343

¹² Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.4

‘outsider’ ... lonely, inhibited, morbidly religious.”¹³ In all three artworks shown below, there is the same focus on the emotion rather than the exterior appearance or event that pervades expressionist music – and, incidentally, that underpins Sibelius’s Fourth Symphony.

Expressionist artwork

Item not displayed for copyright reasons.

Can be viewed at

https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset/eQFdRTFKDtVQ1A?utm_source=google&utm_medium=kp&hl=en-GB

Edvard Munch

The Scream, 1893
(reproductions in other media in 1895 and 1910)

Item not displayed for copyright reasons.

Can be viewed at

https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset/nude-self-portrait-grimacing/UAFiGZvm_vatHA

Egon Schiele

Self portrait grimacing,
1910

Item not displayed for copyright reasons.

Can be viewed at

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/62151>

Emil Nolde

The Prophet, 1912

The following year in music saw the composition of Scriabin’s *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*, an extraordinary synaesthetic work for large orchestra, optional choir and “colour organ”, which has been performed with lighting associated with the keys through which the music passes. It is constantly dissonant, although usually in an ethereal rather than ungainly fashion, sounding almost Impressionistic in places. It is famous for its use of the mystic or “Prometheus” chord, shown below, a product of Scriabin’s fascination with 4ths and alternative harmonic modes.

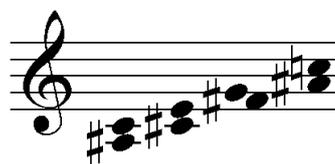


The Prometheus chord

¹³ Read, p.60

1910 was the year of *l'Oiseau de Feu* by Stravinsky, a *Ballets Russes* production significant in that it made Stravinsky's name. It is scored for a large orchestra, famously using harmonics glissandi in the opening scene and noted for its opposition of diatonic and chromatic harmony to signify, respectively, mortal and magical characters.¹⁴ Moments of predatory bass-chord figurations, *sul ponticello tremolo*, and switching between unrelated materials prefigure his later work, *Le Sacre du Printemps*. The use of almost stereotypically magical devices such as glissandi and the whole-tone scale, with entire passages repeated in excitable rising sequence, make this work a fantastic piece of musical narrative (in the literal, theatrical sense), although Stravinsky himself dubbed it "bouillabaisse" (fish soup), deriding it as a "thick and over-spiced dish",¹⁵ perhaps on account of its opulent orchestration and harmonic language.

The following year, this prolific young composer began work on *Petrushka*, vastly different in style, with the stratified structure and repetitive, non-periodic melodic phrasing that went on to characterise *Le Sacre du Printemps*. *Petrushka*, like *Elektra* and *Prometheus*, has its associated chord, a bitonal arpeggio whose appearance on two clarinets, shown below, is one of the ballet's most famous fragments and accompanies the eponymous puppet's movements and curses, directed at the magician who controls him.



The Petrushka chord

¹⁴ Marnat, M: *Stravinsky* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), p.17

¹⁵ Ibid, p.18 – "l'avare Stravinsky de la maturité... ironisa sur cette cuisine épaisse et trop épicée, parlant volontiers de sa 'bouillabaisse'"

This particular combination of C major and F# major triads gives rise to the octatonic set which is also apparent in the 1st movement of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony:

C-C#-[D#]-E-F#-G-[A]-A#.

Petrushka was completed and premiered in 1911, the same year as *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss's next opera after *Elektra*. Lacking the harshness of the latter, *Der Rosenkavalier* is richly post-Romantic, and presents a retreat from the edges of tonality that its composer reached in *Elektra*.

Whilst Stravinsky was at the cutting edge of composition in Paris, another, equally innovative path was being carved by the composer of *Erwartung*, the Austrian Arnold Schoenberg. Schoenberg's maturing style, predating his development of the twelve-tone system, led him to explore the limits of chromaticism, as heard in the atonal monodrama *Erwartung*, and he continued in this vein in his much smaller chamber work of 1912, *Pierrot Lunaire*. While the harmonic language was not the first of its kind in Schoenberg's output, the timbral explorations of the piece are its defining feature, with a range of techniques deployed by its five instrumentalists and one female vocalist, including fluttertongue on the flute and *sprechgesang* throughout the vocal part. Once again, this is a product of the expressionist period, a grotesque exploration of obsession and madness, and the music is sometimes sparse and brittle, other times brutal and intense, always at the edge of aesthetic comfort.

Although this takes us beyond the year of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony (1911), the picture of this period in music history is only completed when viewed up to the outbreak of the First World War. Debussy's *Jeux*, written for the *Ballets Russes* and premiered just before *Le Sacre du Printemps* in 1913, is a fascinating and ephemeral experience, filled with harmonic tension and flashes of whole-tone and pentatonic harmony. Short motifs, repeated and then discarded, give the piece a fragmentary quality, with memorable melodies hard to pick out, almost as if the intention were to create a soundscape. Again, the fragmentation and disconnection here seems

to be a significant contributor to this work's acknowledged modernism, and *Jeux*, along with others of Debussy's later compositions, was a source of interest decades later to the avant-garde Darmstadt composers, among them Boulez and Stockhausen. The latter's concept of "moment form" offers a useful method of interpreting or hearing *Jeux*: each segment or "moment" can exist in its own right, with no sense of any hierarchy of themes or linear development.¹⁶ Parallels can be drawn with Sibelius's formal thinking and the discontinuity apparent in all four movements of his Fourth Symphony.

Holst's *Mars, the Bringer of War*, *Venus, the Bringer of Peace* and *Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity* were composed in 1914, numbers 1, 2 and 4 of his suite, *The Planets*. The first piece is cataclysmically dissonant, notably in the climactic chords at the end, themselves an irregular augmentation of the opening ostinato in 5/4 which represents the intimidating advance of war. Dissonance is explored in a less violent context in *Venus*, with sustained and regular oscillating accompanying figures, bassless textures and ethereal harmony. *Jupiter* employs some quartal harmony in its opening passages, with excitable ostinato figures passed around the orchestra and sudden bursts of hearty trombones and horns. The stately theme which was adapted in 1921 as a setting for the poem "I vow to thee my country" provides, even without the associated text, a picture of understated patriotism that was particularly poignant in 1914, whether or not it was Holst's intention that it be heard as such.

¹⁶ For more on this subject, see Marianne Wheeldon: "Interpreting Discontinuity in the Late Works of Debussy" (in *Current Musicology*, Vol.77, Spring 2004, pp.97-115)

In the company of the modernists: Sibelius's place

In discussing modernity in and around 1911 – the state of being modern, as opposed to the conscious movement towards innovation and the challenge of tradition that is *modernism* – one encounters an almost overwhelming context of some of the greatest trailblazers of the Western Classical oeuvre. In this astonishing period of new musical *langues*, to return to Ranta's term, Sibelius might have very understandably felt himself to be on the periphery. Tawaststjerna even describes him as “handicapped by his own provincial background with its lack of musical traditions”,¹⁷ and pointedly claims that “the Third Symphony [1907] was totally out of step with the times”.¹⁸ It certainly met with mixed reviews, including one lamenting the loss of his fascinating interpretations of his country's legends, another suggesting he had burnt out, and another regretting that Sibelius was not in command of “all the complexities of symphonic form”.¹⁹ The first goes on to imply – somewhat bizarrely, given the Third Symphony's almost anti-Romantic refinement – that Sibelius has been “infected by the decadence of Debussy, Elgar and Strauss”, those composers who were at the forefront of their fields in their respective countries, while another, more complimentary review in *Novoye Vremya* praises him for the opposite, saying that his “orchestration is modern without striving for originality at all costs”, making him unlike Mahler, “whose whole aim is to astonish us with everything he can think of”.²⁰ Mixed and contradictory reactions indeed; opinion seems to have been divided on the matter of whether Sibelius was original or not, whether he was the equal of his French, German, Russian and English counterparts, and whether either was a good thing.

In this climate, Sibelius worked on the Fourth Symphony as his contemporaries were working on the likes of *Erwartung*, *Elektra*, and *Petrushka*. Layton observes that, having been a

¹⁷ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.77

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.67

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp.80-82

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.80

rising star up to this point, Sibelius's fortunes changed with the Third Symphony, which "puzzled" his audiences. "Alongside the more lavish orchestral canvas and vivid colourings of such contemporary works as Skryabin's *Le Poème de l'extase*, Debussy's *La mer*, Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*, Dukas's *La Péri* or even the young Stravinsky's *Feu d'artifice*, his palette was almost monochrome."²¹ Others have noted the same: Howell offers the opinion that "Sibelius's music appears to have suffered from its very accessibility which became unfashionable",²² while Goss observes that he had "struck out on a very different path from these contemporaries [Strauss and Mahler], and the ramifications on the international stage would be profound".²³ If Sibelius truly did feel that his music was being superseded by "works of such ultra-modernity that his own looked painfully dated",²⁴ why not join in and experiment with new techniques and huge orchestras, rather than turning to careful crafting, introspection and economy in an era that celebrated flair, experimentation and opulence? Why be frugal? It raises questions in relation to his intentions as a composer and his desires as a musician who had the ear of Europe: were there conflicting interests at heart? Did he want international acclaim? Did he want to forge his own, more personal style? Were those two desires mutually exclusive?

There is the suggestion, by Sibelius himself, that in fact he did not find much in the music of his contemporaries that he wished to emulate. He famously said of the Fourth Symphony that it stood as a "protest against present-day music" and that there was "nothing, absolutely nothing of the circus about it", seeming to imply that there was something of that in some of the works of his contemporaries.²⁵ According to Layton, he spoke of his Fourth Symphony as "a reaction against 'modern trends'" and, in Layton's words, "there seems little doubt that he had in mind the large canvases and opulent colours of Mahler and Strauss."²⁶ But having received the Third

²¹ Layton, p.41

²² Howell, T: *Sibelius Studies and Notions of Expertise* (Music Analysis 14:2-3, 1995), p.316

²³ Goss, p.347

²⁴ Ibid, p.345

²⁵ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.172 (quoting a letter from Sibelius to Rosa Newmarch)

²⁶ Layton, p.77

Symphony with the lukewarm response of a disappointed public, critics then received the Fourth Symphony, not as “out of step with the times” or “monochrome”, but “disconcertingly new” (The Times), “the most modern of the modern” (Evert Katila). Murtomäki places it “at the peak of modernism... among the key works of the era of modern music”,²⁷ alongside *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Jeux*, *Prometheus* and *Pierrot Lunaire*. From one symphony to the next, he is labelled as behind the times and then incomprehensibly new. Sibelius himself seems to have had conflicting views of where he fitted in: did he truly see himself at the time, as Goss claims,²⁸ being overtaken by younger and more radical composers, or was he reacting against modern lavishness when he purposely stripped down his orchestral forces and compressed his structures?

“Modern” as an intention

The connotations of “modern” are interesting, quite apart from the distinction between *modernity* and *modernism*, as discussed above. Huttunen uses the word “trailblazer” about the nationalist Sibelius, composer of *Kullervo*, his point being that, both aesthetically and conceptually, this work was modern and “nationalism was essentially a modern phenomenon”.²⁹ Howell discusses the issue of “what is ‘progressive’” and how this word is tied to the notion of originality, not only in challenging tradition but also in reinterpreting it. One of the problems with reactions to Sibelius’s works, he says, is that no one really offered a proper appreciation of what was progressive in the music. This “ultra-modern” style was lambasted as “cubist” and “futurist”, all three terms used in uncomplimentary fashion.³⁰ A number of terms used to describe modern

²⁷ Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity*, p.141

²⁸ Goss, p.345

²⁹ Huttunen, p.15

³⁰ Howell, “Sibelius the Progressive” (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Jackson and Murtomäki, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.35-37

art and music are somewhat derogatory; we can observe a few used in the following summary of the aims of a modernist, by James Hepokoski:

“The 1889-1914 modernists sought to shape the earlier stages of their careers as individualistic seekers after the musically 'new', the bold, the controversial, and the idiosyncratic in structure and colour. ... Within the de facto institution one strove to flourish as provocatively or enticingly as possible – to create an identifiable, personalised style that, while unmistakably emanating the aura, traditions, and high seriousness of 'art', also produced readily marketable commodities marked with an appropriately challenging, up-to-the-minute spice, boldness, or 'philosophical tone'. In short, one was encouraged to push the system to its socio-aesthetic limits, but not beyond them, as would be the case with the younger radicals.”³¹

Controversial, provocative, pushing the system to its limits... none of this is especially positive language. Even in “challenging” there lurks the suggestion of being difficult or inaccessible. Perhaps it would be preferable to use terms that focus on the skill and innovation of the composers themselves rather than the possible intended effect on the listener: progressive, original, even simply “mature”. Given the diverse canvas of musical output in that brief period in history, “modern” can imply “experimental”, and has aesthetic connotations. If one heard the Fourth Symphony described as “cubist”, “futurist” and “ultra-modern” before hearing it, one would anticipate a work that pushes the boundaries of tonality or timbre; the former happens only in a tightly controlled manner, and the latter not really at all, although Sibelius’s harmonic language and orchestration are both “mature” and “original” – and profoundly expressive – even where they do not apparently push aesthetic boundaries.

³¹ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.3

I have already explored the idea that, while Sibelius was not a modernist in that he did not actively seek to react against or reject the styles of the past, his output reached a point at which it could be called modern, and therefore modernity is an apt term to use in relation to his works. Exactly what, in the Fourth Symphony, can be termed modernist, and what it shares with some of those contemporary works viewed briefly above, is explored further below. As will be seen, it is a rather complicated picture of a symphony that combines practices of the day such as octatonicism and stratification with rather more archaic or even Romantic hallmarks such as Tristan chords and a traditional four-movement layout. As Howell has observed, “much that is original – progressive – about Sibelius’s composition comes not from a rejection of earlier practice but from its reinterpretation”,³² and there is plenty to support that view in the Fourth Symphony.

The opening contour: the original pitch collection and the harmonic repositioning of the motif

A great deal of what *is* aesthetically challenging or progressive about the Fourth Symphony arises from the first four notes, a perfect model of the potential of a few pitches to have a permanent effect on the symphony that follows. What Tomi Mäkelä refers to as a “shapeless gestalt”³³ is a collection of four pitches whose ambiguity is enough to imply several possible tonalities whilst giving no definite tonal centre. There is almost a deliberate avoidance of hierarchy, although the C pedal does seem to function as the focus to begin with.

Example 23

Fourth Symphony, bar 1



³² Howell, “Sibelius the Progressive”, p.37

³³ Mäkelä, p.101

While part of its “shapelessness” maybe have something to do with its expanding rhythm, a pendulum losing momentum and only coming to settle on the minims that reveal a definite pulse after four bars, it is the collection of notes that form the springboard for all that follows. The pitches map onto a number of scales, as shown below, each one a tonal region or area explored during the symphony.

Example 24

The image displays three musical staves in bass clef, each illustrating a different scale collection. The first staff, labeled "Whole-tone collection", shows a sequence of notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The second staff, labeled "Lydian collection", shows: C, D, E, F#, G, A, B, C. The third staff, labeled "Octatonic collection", shows: C, D, E, F#, G, A, Bb, C.

The shape itself is not developed immediately; it is simply reduced to as an oscillating ostinato, F#-E, and does not assume the role of a main theme. Nonetheless, its implications are vast. That is not to say that it never returns in recognisable form; on the contrary, it reappears as a woodwind motif at bar 48 and in a similar fashion at bar 104, now minimally altered to move by semitones rather than whole tones, and clearly harmonised as shown in example 25 below. In the closing bars it even threatens to return in its original state at bar 110, but is cut short and repositioned a bar later, coming to rest on A as the tonic whilst retaining the span of a tritone – now E-B \flat – that was the source of its initial ambiguity.

Example 25

Bar 48

Bar 104 (equivalent use of motif)

Bar 110 (closing passage)

It is interesting to note how the motif in its recognisable form adapts itself to new harmonic contexts, almost as if to attach itself to a little catalogue of twentieth-century tonal possibilities. It later appears in less harmonically stable contexts than the clear A minor at the end of the 1st movement, such as at bar 56, where, inverted and melodically augmented, the motif takes on much more of a whole-tone sonority than it has previously had, outlining a descending augmented triad before resolving the augmented pitch – the D# in the example below – upwards to the real root of the chord (in this case, E). This, of course, is the beginning of a much longer passage based on this version of the motif, dominated by the augmented triad, perhaps the inspiration for Klemetti’s description of “curious, transparent figures ... speaking to us in a language whose meaning we cannot grasp”.³⁴ As each one resolves and reveals a minor triad, it

³⁴ Klemetti, review in *Säveletär*, quoted in Barnett, p.210

is juxtaposed with another minor triad a tritone away, and so the dominance of the tritone continues on another level (see example 26 below, b.61). The tritone itself becomes an exposed interval in the ensuing monophonic unfolding of this idea, before the arrival of tremolo lower strings brings yet another tonally unsettled passage based on this opening shape.

Example 26

Bar 56 motif based on descending augmented triad, resolving upwards to root of minor triad

Bar 61 showing continuation of this motif into a longer passage

Bar 69, showing part of the violins' monophonic passage clearly derived from the opening contour, with exposed tritones embedded in the melody (and the beginnings of a rising whole-tone scale in the tremolo lower strings)

Bar 72, showing tremolo strings continuing, now based on an extension of the opening four-note motif

The image shows a musical score for Bar 72. The top staff is for Flute and Clarinet (Fl., Cl.), marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. It features a series of eighth-note triplets, with a slur over the first four notes and a fermata over the entire phrase. The bottom staff is for the strings, marked "sulla tastiera" (on the keyboard), and also features eighth-note triplets. A bracket above the string staff indicates a "clear derivation from bar 1". Both staves end with "etc" to indicate continuation.

What all of the above examples have in common is a lack of central pitch, revealing the harmonic no-man's-land that was one possible outcome of the opening shape. If eschewing a tonal centre is one barometer of modernity, passages like this are the model.

The 3rd movement adopts the same contour of those opening four pitches and places them within shorter glimpses of harmonic possibilities. Thus the first few bars are an extension of the shape, not bordering on atonality but exploring the chromaticism made available by one sharp pitch, the raised 4th (D \sharp). Strongly whole-tone at bar 5, the 3rd movement places the familiar shape in this context, with the lower strings presenting a fully whole-tone version of it here. Each tonality, each key visited, is ephemeral, and, over the course of five bars – 16-20 – the rise-and-fall of this familiar shape carries the music through C major, implies G \flat major, arrives at A \flat major and returns, via D major, to its opening flute motif – now in the depths of the bassoon's lowest register – in C \sharp minor. In a different way from that of the violins' stratospheric atonality in the 1st movement, this movement also finds it hard to settle in one key.

Example 27

Opening of 3rd movement

The score shows the opening of the 3rd movement. The tempo is marked **Il tempo largo**. The Flute (Fl) part begins with a **p** dynamic, playing a melodic line with a trill. The Violoncello (Vc) part is marked **div. con sord.** and **p**, playing a sustained, low-frequency accompaniment.

Bar 5, showing whole-tone cello variant of the contour in counterpoint with flute's whole-tone melodic line

Bar 5 features a counterpoint between the Flute (Fl) and Cello. The Flute part is marked **p** and contains a whole-tone melodic line, indicated by a bracket labeled "whole-tone". The Cello part is marked **pp** and contains a whole-tone variant of the contour, also indicated by a bracket labeled "whole-tone".

Bar 16, showing the harmonic progression detailed above

Bar 16 shows a complex harmonic progression. The top staff is for Strings, marked with a **3** (triple). The bottom staff is for Brass and Timpani (Timp.). The harmonic progression is detailed as follows: **G⁹(#5)** and **C** (Brass, **p**); **G^b major implied (and abandoned)** and **Fg** (Brass, **p**); **E^b9(#5)** and **A^b** (Brass, **p**); **D major implied** and **return to C[#]m and flute motif** (Brass, **fp**); and **D⁹7** (Brass, **pp**). The dynamics range from **p** to **pp**.

The melodic similarity between the 1st and 3rd movements really reveals itself in two places, bars 57³-63 and bars 90-100 (the closing bars of the movement), respectively anchored by pedals on G[#] and C[#] whilst impotently defying them with a starting-note a tritone away. It resonates with the closing bars of the 1st movement and is a reminder of how the opening motif was repositioned with its own tritone span of E-B^b, over a tonic pedal.

Example 28

Bars 57 and 97 of the 3rd movement, showing the connection to the closing abrs of the 1st movement

57 Cl. *mp espress.* 3

Fig. *p* 3
tritone span, D⁵ - G⁵

3rd mvt, 8 bars before the end

97 Vln 1 *mf* 3 3 Vln 2 (then Vc 15vb and Cb 8vb) *mp* 3 3

1st mvt, last 4 bars *p* Vln 1 *p* Vln 2 *p* Vc *p*

Elsewhere in the symphony, the obvious contour of its opening four notes, or the familiar sonority of its circling of a pitch or pricking at the edges of dissonance over a tonic pedal may not be so easy to detect, but this was never meant to be the symphony's "main theme", and was not immediately pursued as such. Instead, the individual pitches (or the relative scale degrees) themselves assume significance and the shape becomes less of a focus, and, on levels other than melodic contour, each movement explores the avenues presented by those pitches that are rich with harmonic possibility and charged with conflict.

Four perspectives, one idea³⁵

It is a distinctly Classical gesture to have four separate movements in a symphony, and, listening to how each one creeps to its conclusion and the next emerges from the same context, it occurs that they might not have been intended to be heard as entirely separate. They could be linked convincingly in pairs; the 2nd movement simply repositions the A left hanging by the 1st violins at the end of the 1st movement in a new F major chord, and the 3rd movement actually foreshadows the 4th 14 bars before its end, with the strings all ending on the same C# with which they begin the next movement, again simply altering the context from C# minor to A major. That relationship was also to appear in the Fifth Symphony, whose 1st movement's E \flat major ending cedes to a new beginning in B major in the original version, with the link so strong that this eventually became one continuous movement (or two joined by a bridge) in the 1916 revision.³⁶ Its tonal areas are E \flat -G-E \flat -B-E \flat , significantly similar to the tonal scheme – Am-F-C#m-A – that links the movements of the whole of the Fourth Symphony in a major-3rd cycle. This could also be understood as a gesture towards whole-tone organisation, and one could add to that two important pitches in the 2nd and 4th movements, respectively B \sharp and E \flat , which also form part of the same whole-tone collection. The point is that, rather than being contrasting in the traditional sense – although there *is* a definite journey through slow-motion emergence, exuberant scherzo, searching adagio and jubilant finale followed by chaos and wasteland – this is four explorations of the same thing, namely the opening pitch set and its marked opposition of C and F#.

Continuing with the thread of modernity, or whether or not this work has “modern” traits, there is one in the 1st movement's adoption of these opposing pitches as a replacement for the traditional ^1 and ^5 which are normally strongly presented in the opening theme of a Classical

³⁵ A paraphrasing of Tim Howell's term: “four views of the same fundamental ideas” in Howell, *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*, p.129

³⁶ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.52

symphony. Having $\wedge 1$ and $\wedge \#4$ instead has the immediate consequence of allowing – or inciting – the following passage to flit between triads on A minor, C major and $G\flat$ major ($F\sharp$'s enharmonic), juxtaposing C and $G\flat$, with a resulting octatonic sonority as shown below, and $F\sharp$ major soon becomes a tonal centre, almost supplanting the traditional dominant key, first at bar 32 (3 bars after letter B) and again at the Tempo I at bar 42 (4 bars before D). This is not to suggest that this movement is in sonata form, but rather to show that there is a comparison to be made here, perhaps along neo-classical lines, one which reveals an alternative to traditional (and outdated) harmonic practice that has a very modern-sounding origin in the bar-1 tritone.

Example 29

Bar 17, 1st movement, showing triadic passage. Juxtaposition of C and $G\flat$ major results in a set of notes with an octatonic flavour

Bars 32 and 41, showing $F\sharp$ major becoming the tonal centre

So F# itself is an important pitch, spawning a significant tonal centre, and in fact it also reappears as a recurrent pedal note in the 2nd movement, despite being in the context of F major.

As shown in the example above, that initial pairing of C major and G \flat major results in the suggestion, or hue, of an octatonic pitch set – one of the possibilities outlined by the opening four notes – and this particular tonality recurs several times in the symphony, often with hints of others. It is evident again at letter E, when whole-tone gestures again also become an underlying presence. Antokoletz notes that the 2nd movement’s distinctly Lydian flavour is “reinterpreted as part of a longer octatonic line”³⁷ with the addition of E \flat and G \flat at letter A, and at letter K, the *Doppio più lento*, the bassline rises through a complete octatonic scale. There is again a mixture of tonalities here, the bassline being in counterpoint with the “whole-tone coloured modal theme” above, which is derived from the letter B duple-time theme.³⁸

Example 30

1st movement, bar 58 (4 bars after letter E)

Antokoletz identifies this augmented triad as interlocking with the subsequent ascending 7-note octatonic segment (itches labelled)

F G B \flat
fleetingly allude to whole-tone scale

2nd movement, bar 21

A

F F# G# A B C D E \flat

espressivo

³⁷ Antokoletz, *A History of Twentieth-Century Music*, p.129

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.129

2nd movement, bar 263 (*Doppio più lento*) with b.65 for comparison

The 3rd movement presents another cauldron of tonal hints and flavours, exploring chromaticism and whole-tone, as described above. There is even a chord at bar 16 that is a stack of whole-tone pitches, F-G-A-B-[C#]-D#, repeated two bars later a 3rd lower:

Example 31

3rd movement, bar 16

While it is not as easy as in other movements to find a near-complete octatonic collection in the 3rd movement, the harmonic legacy of the frequent semitones inherent in an octatonic scale can be heard in the chord changes, sometimes plainly with roots a semitone apart as in bars 7-8, A minor morphing into A#^{halfdim7}, and sometimes with the semitone elsewhere in the chord, as in bar 3, G# minor to E minor.

Example 32

3rd movement, bar 3

3

Cl

G#m Em

Vc & Cb *p*

The half-diminished 7th, possessing the Tristan sonority that Sibelius had always favoured, is a common chord, not only here but also in other movements, as at letter B in the 1st movement, where sequential half-diminished 7^{ths} dominate, or at letter C in the 2nd movement, a sustained G^{#halfdim7} in the trumpets and trombones, later repeated a tone higher. If there is a palette of twentieth-century harmony in this symphony, a spectrum encompassing octatonic, modal, whole-tone and chromatic colours, there is also a Romantic legacy in this Tristan chord that has pervaded Sibelius's music since his earliest works. It has a particular significance in this symphony as a chord spaced with the tritone as the lower two notes.

Example 33

1st movement, bar 29 (letter B)

2nd movement, bar 98 (letter C)

Adagio

29 **B** F[#]7 D^b/F G[#]7 E^b/G

brass

fp < *ffz* *mp* < *ffz*

Vc

tr tr

C# pedal in timpani and Cb

98 **C**

Tr, Trb. *fp*

G[#]7

108 Tr, Trb.

p

A[#]7

An interesting feature of the 4th movement's harmony that seems to derive from the opening tritone opposition in the first bar of the symphony is the opposition of keys, in daringly close proximity, a tritone apart. As with the 2nd movement, the 4th introduces a "rogue" pitch, the same E^b that the 2nd movement introduced into an otherwise clear Lydian melodic line at letter A (see example 30 above). It first appears simply as an unsubtle dissonant \wedge_5 sustained by the upper woodwind at letter C, but has no real impact on the steadfast A major that underpins it. Where it does steer the key away from A major, 2 bars before letter E, the whole string section takes a sudden flatwards turn, intoning a recurring motif alternately in E^b and A major, while the flutes rush up an E^b major scale to an A major motif. Two key signatures are applied simultaneously, in true bitonal fashion, and these two keys eventually give way to antiphonal E^b and A major chords at letter F, with the common note of D^b (C[#]) holding them together.

Example 34

4th movement, Bar 79 (letter C)

Bar 119, strings take a flatwards turn (E_b, boxed) and other motifs are played in the new key of E_b major

Bar 138 (letter F), antiphonal E_b⁷ and A major chords

Again, if our search is for evidence of “modern” harmonic language, then this superimposition of one key upon another is just that, but the choice of keys is also significant for other reasons. E_b, of course, is inevitable, being the harmonic consequence of the $\wedge\#4$ that was D \sharp in the A major opening key of this movement. A collage of motifs comprises this opening

melodic material, and many of them include this raised note, which Antokoletz perceives to have a leading tone function here,³⁹ replicated on other scale degrees as in bar 9.

Example 35

Motifs at the opening of the 4th movement, presented on four staves to show four phrases and the motifs within them

Allegro

The musical score consists of four staves. The first staff (measures 1-8) is for Vln 1, starting with a forte piano (*fp*) dynamic. It contains motif (a) and motif (b). The second staff (measures 9-15) is for Vln 1, starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. It contains motif (c) and is followed by a section labeled 'Reminder of 3rd mvt C# minor' with a box 'A' at the end. The third staff (measures 16-19) is for Vln 1 and Vla, starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. It contains motif (d) and motif (e). The fourth staff (measures 21-22) is for Vln 1, starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. It contains motif (f) and motif (g).

An easy comparison here is between the raised 4th here and in the 2nd movement, and indeed both do seem to explore the melodic presence of the tritone as much as its harmonic consequences. In the 2nd movement, the tritone becomes a naked presence in a sequence that loses direction and momentum temporarily (and also happens to comprise a full whole-tone set),⁴⁰ and it returns at letter D to generate a less bright, more furtive passage of uncertainty,

³⁹ Antokoletz, *A History of Twentieth-Century Music*, p.131

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.130

where horns and timpani play simultaneous pedal notes a tritone apart. There are several points at which E and B \flat are simultaneous pedal notes, until the *Doppio più lento* at letter K, whereafter simultaneous pedals on F \sharp and B \flat take on this dissonant role.

Example 36

2nd movement, bar 29 (sequence based on the tritone)

whole-tone set encompassed by ensuing tritone sequence

2nd movement, bar 135, showing tritone-based melodic material and simultaneous pedal notes on B \flat and E

pp

horns (pedal on B \flat)

Vc + timp (pedal on E)

It is during this curiously static, slow-motion latter stage that, all brightness of the Scherzo being lost, the falling tritone becomes a lingering savage gesture, recalling the similar isolation of this interval in the central tremolo passage in the 1st movement, bars 71-77, or the repeated emergence, in the rather chaotic passage in bars 399-440 of the 4th movement, of what I have called motif (e) above, its prolonged $\wedge\sharp 4$ giving the same prominence to a harsh tritone interval.

Example 37

1st movement, tritone interval during bars 71-77

Fl., Cl.
p
 72
 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 etc
sfz
 exposed rising tritone

2nd movement, tritone interval prominent during the *Doppio più lento* passage

Ob & Cl, b.263
 Vln & vla
mf
sfz
 exposed falling tritone

4th movement, motif (e) during bars 399-440, shown here in bar 401

motif (e)
 Trb *mp marc.*
 prominent tritone

Recalling the critics' responses to the first performances of this symphony, there was bewilderment and displeasure; not only was it not anticipated that Sibelius should produce a work of such introverted bleakness, but also there was an aesthetic harshness to moments such as those shown above that maybe did not sit well with audiences. Where melodic material is based on this most disorientating of intervals, and the harmonic underlay is a rumbling dissonance produced by simultaneous tritone pedal notes or the insecure shifting sands of chords linked only by their semitone voice-leading, it is unsurprising that some audiences struggled to enjoy this music. It is rather interesting that the very aesthetic and harmonic factors which mark the symphony as "modern", as explored above, are treated in ways which have their roots in much more traditional norms.

A debt to conventional practice⁴¹

What could be more traditional than taking the first four pitches of a symphony and allowing the harmonic scheme to unfold from that premise? After all, Classical composers did it all the time: many a sonata-form 1st subject is drenched in the tonic and dominant, in the pitches it uses, in its balanced cadences, in its use of primary chords. It is logical that a modulation should then be made to the dominant key. We have already seen how Sibelius owes a debt to this practice, in his similar exploration of the harmonic possibilities presented by two opposing pitches in his opening motif. F# becomes a tonal centre in the 1st movement, in opposition to C major in an almost Classical way, and in fact the *resolution* of this conflict is just as interesting as its establishment.

C major was never the key of the symphony, and is not the tonic key of any of the four movements, so setting up F# in opposition to it is perhaps simply a large-scale follow-up of the opening pitches, and does not require F# major material to be reprised in C major. C major itself does return, incidentally, in a surreally static passage in the 4th movement (bb.218-236), like an arrival in the manner of a mock reprise, and F# is an immediate disruptive presence as ^#4.

Example 38

4th movement, bar 218, arrival at C major

218

motif (e)

⁴¹ Howell, "Notions of Expertise", p.319

It does not reappear in the 1st movement, however. In the opening movement of this symphony purporting to be in A minor, material that was in the opposing key is reprised in the tonic major, so F# becomes A major, starting with the falling triad from bar 32 – no longer F# major at bar 88, this is now a sudden step into A major, and the point at which Antokoletz identifies a recapitulation.⁴² Things then proceed a minor 3rd higher, with significant moments recaptured in their new keys, and all of this much truncated reprise underpinned by tonic pedals (Laufer’s “culmination of an “auxiliary cadence” that is spread out over the entire movement”⁴³).

Example 39

1st movement, bar 32, bar 40, bar 41

32 *ff* *pp* *ff* *mf cresc.*
 F# major B^o7 F# C^o7
fff *p*
 F# pedal in timpani and horns

40 *ff* *p dolce*
 brass E B^b D^b
 Vln Vc
 A pedal

Material reprised a minor 3rd higher at bar 88, bar 96 and bar 97

88 *allarg.* *Adagio* (♩ = ♩)
 strings brass
ff *p* *cresc. molto* *ff* *mf* *ff*
 A major D^o7 A E^o7 B
f
 pedal on A (Cb, taken over by timpani)

96 *ff* *strings*
 brass G D^b E F# + hn
 A pedal

This is not really “resolution” in the sense that conflict is eradicated; it is more a reprise in a tonic key. The disruptive pitch is still present in the form of \hat{A}_5 , now E \flat in bar 97 (incidentally the opposing pitch in the 4th movement) and A \flat in the next bar. It is a masterful hybrid of acknowledgement and defiance of tradition, the epitome of that aspect of Sibelius’s style which

⁴² Antokoletz, *A History of Twentieth-Century Music*, p.127

⁴³ Laufer, E: “On the first movement of Sibelius’s Fourth Symphony” (in *Schenker Studies 2*, ed. Carl Schachter and Hedi Schiegel, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.131-2

4th movement, b.330 reprise of same melody, arriving in E_b major and b.369 A major motif over E_b chord

The image displays a musical score for the 4th movement of Sibelius's Symphony No. 5. It is divided into two systems. The first system, starting at measure 330, is marked 'M', 'Str. affettuoso', 'poco f', and 'cresc.'. It shows a melodic line in the treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The second system, starting at measure 337, shows a continuation of the melodic line. The third system, starting at measure 369, features a 'motif (b) in A over E_b chord' for Flute and Oboe (Fl., Ob.) in the treble clef, marked 'p'. Below it, the string accompaniment (Str.) is shown in the bass clef, also marked 'p'.

The music does continue to explore chromaticism for a while, but E_b has been expunged by this point, and a rather subdued passage in A minor brings the symphony to a close. This is not “resolution”, though; what has happened here is best understood in terms of tonal symmetry and the subsequent annihilation of the disruptive pitch. If it is a neo-classical gesture to have a tonic reprise as we heard in the 1st movement, this balanced reversal of that process in the 4th movement must be a kind of anti-classical gesture in Sibelius’s hands.

Junge Klassizität or approaching neo-classical parody?

Junge Klassizität is defined as “the mastery, examination, and exploitation of all the gains of previous experiments and their inclusion in solid and beautiful forms... This art will be old and new at the same time at first.”⁴⁵ There is certainly much to suggest that Sibelius’s inspiration or aspiration lies in this ideal, in his assimilation of old practices into a new and daring context. We have already seen how the principles of conflict and resolution governing Classical forms such as

⁴⁵ Busoni, Letter to Paul Bekker, January 1920

sonata form are taken on in the 1st movement, and how they are reinterpreted in the 4th; we have also seen how the notion of reprise can be distorted and can present more threat than resolution.

There are other gestures towards older practices that bear some scrutiny, and not only in the realms of tonality. The 2nd movement seems very much modelled on ritornello form, in that its opening melody can be easily segmented and does not always return in full. Looking at the first half of the movement and excluding the crisis point of letter K onwards (the *Doppio più lento*), the scheme shown in figure 4 on the next page is apparent.

As can be seen, the pattern of return of the original melodic material resembles that of a ritornello-form movement. Unlike true ritornello, however, and perhaps closer to Rondo in this respect, the material always returns in the home key of F major, with the exception of one deviation at bar 183, where it appears in G \flat major and is quickly “corrected”. Whereas the same strong connection between material and key is apparent in the 3rd movement – the C \sharp minor material emerges gradually at various stages during the movement and is always tied to that key – the sense of archaic parody is not apparent as it is in the 2nd movement. This is partly because the 2nd movement also has a character role to play in this symphony, that of the playful scherzo. It makes sense, then, that there should be an abrupt change of key, tempo and texture at some point, to mimic the Classical trio section, first at the *Tranquillo* passages at bars 163 and 177 and then at the *Doppio più lento* at letter K, itself foreshadowed by the duple-time theme at letter B and not all that dissimilar to the *Tranquillo* theme.

Figure 4

2nd movement, scheme of the first part (before the *Doppio più lento*)

10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	250	260
				b.50 B					b.98 C					b.124 D	Tranquillo b.163 A tempo b.169		Tranquillo b.177 A tempo b.183						b.240 E		
A				B				C				A				A				E					
Section A can be divided into 4 themes, as shown																									



Ob.
pp

13 Vlns. V
mp

29 Ob.
Vln. I

29 strings
a tempo
p

If anything, the harmony at both letter B and the *Tranquillo* phrases supports the notion that some kind of parodic reference to the Classical is taking place in this movement. Far from the modern harmonic palette employed elsewhere, these favour cycles of 5ths, admittedly somewhat sparse and a little distorted at letter B.

Example 41

2nd movement, implied cycle of 5ths

85

implied chords: G^b7 C^b E⁷ A D⁷ G

2nd movement, cycle of 5ths in the *Tranquillo* theme

Tranquillo

163

Fl. *mp*

pizz lower str.

arco

A *tem*

Db/F G⁷ C^m F/Ab B^b E

More parodic still is an unusual passage in the 4th movement, in which the timpani assume the clear role of intoning ^1 and ^5, sometimes perfectly misplaced, as shown below in bars 107⁴-108.

Example 42

4th movement, misplaced $\wedge 5$ and $\wedge 1$ in the timpani

The image shows a musical score for Example 42, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a woodwind part (labeled 'Ob.') with a triplet of eighth notes and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a timpani part (labeled 'timp.') with a triplet of eighth notes and a dynamic marking of *p*. A bracket labeled 'motif (g)' spans across both staves, indicating a shared rhythmic motif. The score is marked with '106' at the beginning and 'dim. assai' at the end of the woodwind part. The timpani part ends with a trill-like flourish.

Amidst the very modern harmonic language that pervades the Fourth Symphony, and going some way towards explaining reactions to it, is a drawing board of antiquated practices that show more than just the leftovers of composition lessons taken in youth. There is a conscious move here towards the usage and the reinterpretation of tradition which is partly concerned with logic and unity and partly indebted to Busoni's new ideas of Young Classicism, and sometimes simply so far removed from the original inspiration that it has the air of parody. Sometimes the harmonic language borders on atonal; sometimes it is a nebula of chromaticism and whole-tone scales around a fleeting tonal centre; sometimes there is a gesture, like a cycle of 5ths, rooted in the harmony of centuries ago. Often this sense of old mixing with new also spills into the form, and allows a concept such as reprise to be realigned in the light of the harmonic language that has been unfolding.

Harmonic language as the conduit of Sibelius's modernity.

What I have described above as a cauldron of harmonic languages and as the consequences of the opening motif is also a carefully crafted assimilation of the age-old principles of unity, conflict and resolution and the innovations that were the musical canvas of the early 1900s. Sibelius himself declared that he would not change a note of it, and how could he, without disrupting the logical progression across the whole symphony and unravelling its fabric?

It may be that this craft of consequences, dialectic, logic and woven unity was not apparent to its first audiences, the order in the dissonance and disintegration not obvious; it may be that the fingerprints and links to the opening pitch collection did not appear as recurrent and familiar sonorities. Whatever the reasons for this symphony being misunderstood, overlooked or even dismissed at the time, two things are true:

1. In a time of “modernism”, whether that is defined as experimentation, challenge of tradition, pushing of aesthetic boundaries or something else besides, this piece had much in common with contemporary works acknowledged to be cutting-edge. Its harmonic language is its biggest connection with contemporary music and the most significant indicator that Sibelius had a place amongst his modernist peers;

2. It is the work of a craftsman who not only wished to challenge tradition but also recognised the value of working with its legacy – a sort of “debt to conventional practice”.⁴⁶ In fact, this itself was a mark of the times, an embracing of his contemporary and teacher Busoni’s notion of *junge Klassizität*, defined by Busoni in terms which almost seem to encapsulate the Fourth Symphony:

“I mean *perfection* (as suggested by rightness and a bringing to conclusion)”

⁴⁶ Howell, “Notions of Expertise”, p.319

“a definite departure from the thematic and a return to melody ... as a ruler of all voices, all motions, all bearers of idea and as the generator of harmony – in short, the most highly developed polyphony.”⁴⁷

Beyond its harmonic language, the Fourth Symphony has another significantly “modern” or progressive factor, one which is perhaps more unique to the composer: the issues of timescale as raised by its approach to form, and the “masterly economy”⁴⁸ which has fascinated scholars for decades. This four-movement symphony, with its roots in the Classical, challenges and reshapes traditions of form in ways that affirm this symphony’s position as equal among the modernist works of the day and as a watershed in the composer’s own output.

⁴⁷ Busoni, letter to Paul Bekker, January 1920

⁴⁸ Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity*, p.141

Chapter Four. Form, Time and Narrativity.

In his letter to Paul Bekker on the subject of “Young Classicism”, Ferruccio Busoni places in opposition to his ideals – combining the old and the new, renouncing subjectivity and removing extra-musical associations – the efforts of artists wishing to escape tradition or explore its alternatives. He offers a rather damning account of “the appearance of isolated experiments which flow together into caricature... bizarre, ape-like leaping gestures of those who stand for something – either defiance or rebellion, satire or foolishness.” He opines that the end of this era is in sight, signalled by “the spread of exaggeration”, and that it will be necessary to follow it with “a move toward a new classicality”.¹

I mention this here not only to offer a contemporary perspective on the output of fin-de-siècle modernists, but also to draw attention to an important aspect of the style of *junge Klassizität*, that “music is in itself music and nothing more”. Busoni calls it “the *oneness* in music”.² The Fourth Symphony seems, in this respect, to fit Busoni’s bill: not a bit of exaggeration is in evidence, or, as the composer himself said, “nothing of the circus”.³ Nonetheless, it *does* contain the following:

A dramatic ebb and flow

Voices in the foreground, dislocated from the backdrop or surroundings

Progress through time that is more than simply the spatial distribution of material

In the last, Sibelius seems to contravene the rules of Young Classicism by releasing his music from the constraints of Classical reprise and balance, but in fact, as will be shown below, there remain allusions to the benchmarks of that architecture – tonal resolution, the return of ideas – that allow it to retain its ‘classical’ elements.

¹ Busoni, letter to Paul Bekker, January 1920

² Ibid

³ Letter to Rosa Newmarch, May 1911, quoted in Tawaststjerna, 1986, p.172

Without wishing to detract at all from its Young Classicism by implying that there was some attempt at depiction or a move beyond music “in itself”, I do feel it necessary to examine these aspects of the Fourth Symphony, not least because they offer an alternative interpretation which transcends labels of form, namely narrativity. Narrative in contexts other than the literary is a topic of ongoing interest, and it is necessary at this stage to state what I mean by the term. My concept of narrativity is largely based on Carolyn Abbate’s ideas that there can be sounds or “voices” that come to the fore, with musical “characters” and “events” allowing the piece to map onto our experience of dialogue⁴ (see below for further explanation). This study will not engage in any of the following:

- suggesting that there is a narrator figure in the symphony;
- referring to a specific storyline entailing scenes, emotions or mental states;
- using the word “drama” in the sense of mimesis, i.e. mimicking action or plot;
- claiming that there is “a narrative” that reflects programmatic intentions;
- implying that any of the soloists is creating a unique narrative by the act of performing.

My intention is to focus on individual sounds and moments rather than the progress of music through time, and even the carefully phrased expression of “narrative as the representation of a temporal development” as outlined in Vincent Meelberg’s excellent account of narrativity in contemporary music⁵ treads rather too close to the line beyond which lies a programmatic analysis. While my interpretation of the Fourth Symphony does not deny the importance of experiencing the music in time – and indeed the crucial element of “the sense that a narrative moves towards certain goals, or ENDS”⁶ is very much a part of my understanding of the piece, particularly as I embark on

⁴ Abbate, pp.23-24

⁵ Meelberg, V: *New Sounds, New Stories. Narrativity in Contemporary Music* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2006), p.1

⁶ *Ibid*, p.11

a discussion of its inherent logic in Chapter 5 – I have found it more fitting to this unique work’s use of instruments and sometimes disjointed or dislocated progress to model my interpretation on Carolyn Abbate’s understanding of narrativity.

In her words, narrativity may be defined as “nothing more than speaking of tonal “events” or themes as “characters” in a (purely musical) drama... [music] tends to be seen ... as sharing certain formal or structural characteristics with verbal narrative, or as expressing some vague, transverbal drama.”⁷ Examples she uses include two vocal performances in which the function of the aria in the actual drama of the opera becomes secondary to the awareness of the solo vocalist as a sonority in the foreground.⁸ In this chapter, I have extended that to include instrumentalists, and I have applied it to fragments of time as well as longer passages. Abbate writes of an “audible flight”⁹ from the backdrop, which I have found to be a useful image when describing the sudden focus on isolated soloists such as the cellist or various woodwinds, whether it is a prolonged solo phrase or something as short as the glockenspiel’s recurring four-note motif in the 4th movement. Leah Broad has conferred a similar “character” upon certain instruments in *Swanwhite*, observing that “texture ... proves crucial in Sibelius’s conception of the dramatic, with the wind instruments taking the role of differentiated character types, and the strings creating the atmosphere in which the drama of these lyric personae play out.”¹⁰ In other words, the specific timbre of these instruments allows them to stand out, or take flight, from the background and become like characters intoning events in a musical drama. I have also taken the notion of “audible flight” to mean a kind of “departure” in the sense of an interruption or a sudden new direction, and have found that there is often a correlation between sonic and tonal “events” in this respect.

⁷ Abbate, pp.23-24

⁸ The two arias in question are the Bell Song from Delibes’s *Lakmè* and the Queen of the Night’s Revenge Aria from *The Magic Flute*

⁹ Abbate, p.29

¹⁰ Broad, p.6

To observe a similarity between *Swanwhite* and the Fourth Symphony, and to compare the experiences of hearing the latter and listening to an aria, is to draw parallels with works that have very definite extra-musical elements – an opera, of course, having the most explicit of plots even if the vocalisation becomes wordless at certain points. This is not to say that the Fourth Symphony invites associations with precise images or stories, but to acknowledge that the music might still convey something unspoken or evoke something unspecified. Busoni’s own definition of *junge Klassizität* allows for “human sentiments, but not human concerns”,¹¹ which I have taken to mean that Young Classical music can be personal and emotional but, if it is to distance itself from extra-musical elements, it should not be programmatic. Given that the Fourth Symphony so brilliantly meets the requirement to reposition older practices in a new context (see Chapter 3) whilst lending itself to a narrative interpretation, I have to conclude that the notion of music being “itself... and nothing more” does not preclude its having a wordless voice.

This being a rather longer piece than a single aria, the “narrative” applies not only to such events and instrumental “characters” in the moment, but also to the whole symphony, in which the spread of ideas, their growth and development, and also their opposition and interchange, becomes a series of conversations, a narrative not in the sense that there is any kind of progressing story to map onto the symphony or any one of its movements, but in the sense of Abbate’s “transverbal drama”, with human speech or thought being the closest analogy to it.

A matter of time

At the VI international Jean Sibelius Conference in Helsinki, December 2015, Tim Howell referred to Sibelius’s shaping of music and time as part of his modernism, or of his challenge of tradition.¹² Howell’s understanding of Sibelius’s unique manipulation of the perception and experience of time

¹¹ Busoni, letter to Paul Bekker, January 1920

¹² Howell, “Progressive or Modernist?”

development and reinvention of a basic material set [creating] a potent sense of onward ‘motion’¹⁵. Conversely, there *is* precisely that buzzing surface activity in the 4th movement at bar 32, where the melodic energy is unmatched by a backdrop that remains static, almost suspended in time, both texturally and harmonically:

Example 44

4th movement, bar 32: top stave shows dynamic and energetic cello solo above a layer of inactivity, shown on the lower stave

The musical score for Example 44 consists of two systems of staves. The first system, starting at bar 31, shows a cello solo (Vc solo) in the upper staff and a cello accompaniment in the lower staff. The upper staff begins with a whole note chord, followed by a melodic line starting in bar 32 with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a tenuto mark. The lower staff features a sustained Tristan chord (C#07) in bar 31, which continues through bar 32. The second system, starting at bar 35, shows a violin solo (Vln solo) in the upper staff and a violin accompaniment in the lower staff. The upper staff begins with a melodic line in bar 35, followed by a whole note chord in bar 36, and then a melodic line in bar 37. The lower staff features a sustained E#07 chord (with Bb spelt as A#) in bar 35, which continues through bar 36, and then a sustained A#07 chord in bar 37. The score also includes a dynamic marking of *mf* and a tenuto mark in bar 35, and a dynamic marking of *ten.* in bar 37. A note in bar 37 indicates '+ timpani roll on E'.

The tension in the familiar Tristan chord (C#^{halfdim7}) sustained below the cello solo is left unresolved, followed by an E^{halfdim7} chord and then A#^{dim7}. In other words, harmonic goal is not the driving force in this passage, nor was it in the much more languid opening passage of the 1st movement.

Nonetheless, in the 4th movement (bar 32) and the 1st (bar 7), there is some sense of propulsion – “onward motion” – thanks to the direction of the melodic material and its continued expansion or development. Each time, the two temporal states are divided between accompanying parts in a state of timelessness – sustained chords as in the example shown above or a repetitive two-note figure in the case of the opening of the symphony – and the solo melodic line moving

¹⁵ Ibid, p.26

against that backdrop. The sense of “motion” arises from the extending and reshaping of the motif, whereas there is no harmonic direction towards a point of arrival, but the surface dynamism holds at bay real stasis and loss of temporal perspective – awareness of time passing in real terms – such as that which overcomes the latter part of the 2nd movement, from the *Doppio più lento*, and the dissonant vortex in the 4th a few bars after letter O until around letter S. In each of these, despite a continuation of rhythmic activity, the lack of harmonic goal and lack of significant motivic development or expansion causes the music to stagnate, its circular state becoming one of hypnotic repetition as it becomes apparent that there is only the *impression* of motion, and no direction.

In both the 2nd and 4th movements, this passage stands in contrast to their opening material, where tempo is not the only factor in the impression of much faster-paced music; the rate of change and rapid introduction of successive motifs detracts from any lack of harmonic progression, with, in Howell’s words, a “surface articulation of events [that] may suggest greater energy, speed and motion”.¹⁶ It has an interesting effect on the listener’s perception of time passing: in the 2nd movement, as has been stated above, the circular passage lasts for nearly the same amount of time as the whole of bars 1-250, but the first part’s propulsion through a combination of surface energy and “articulation of events” gives the impression that it is the faster-moving and shorter section, while the *Doppio più lento* passage feels much longer-lasting. The lack of any real goal is made plain in the sudden abandonment of this music in favour of a throwaway gesture towards a reprise of the opening Scherzo phrase.

Example 45

2nd movement, closing glimpse of the opening phrase

The musical score for Example 45 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Violin (Vln.), starting at measure 344. It begins with a dynamic of *ff*, followed by *p*, *mf*, and *pp*. The middle staff is for Timpani (Timp.), featuring a trill (*tr*) and a *marc.* section. The bottom staff is for Contrabass (Cb), with dynamics of *ppp* and *mp*. The music is in G major and 3/4 time.

¹⁶ Howell, “Sibelius the Progressive”, p.41

So what does any of this have to do with narrativity? Abbate writes about events and characters in a wordless musical drama, a comparison with the process of verbal narrative.¹⁷ In the light of this, one can understand, for example, the transformation of a formerly livelier theme into a slow-motion whirlpool as a prolonged dramatic “event”, and the fleeting reappearance of the opening scherzo theme as another, like a sudden reminder of the oboe’s opening idea that puts a stop to the circular *lento*.

Example 46

2nd movement: Transformation of duple-time theme at b.65 into the circular and repetitive theme of the *Doppio più lento* passage at b.263

The musical score for Example 46 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Violins (Vln, b.65) in 2/4 time, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a melodic line. The middle staff is for Oboe and Clarinet (Ob & Cl, b.263) in 3/4 time, starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a melodic line, followed by a forte (*rf*) dynamic. The bottom staff is for Bass, providing a harmonic accompaniment with chords.

The perception of the passing of time becomes part of the drama – the dramatic ebb and flow mentioned above – and a sense of progress, whether dependent on surface activity or actual development of melodic material towards a goal, supersedes the need for formal balance. The 1st violins who call a halt to the repetitious material at the end of the 2nd movement with their reintroduction of the opening theme can be heard as a wordless “voice” wielding immediate influence over the music – a voice dislocated from its surroundings. In a similarly influential way, the solo cellist provides the first idea for the string section to adopt and develop from bar 7 in the 1st movement, also taking the spotlight in the 4th movement at bar 32 and, incidentally, at bar 51 in

¹⁷ Abbate, pp.23-24

the 3rd movement, and becomes, in each case, a voice in the foreground, one of Abbate's "voices from elsewhere".¹⁸ The horizontal levels moving at different paces – as described above as the slow-moving ostinato beneath the unfolding and expanding triadic motif in the 1st movement, or sustained chords below the rather more urgently propelled cello solo in the 4th – are central to this effect, with the almost frozen background being the very thing that allows the voice to be heard as something apart from that.

Harmonic events as part of the narrative

Crucially, there is no need to complete this interpretation of the "event" of the violins' last-minute entry or the solo cellist's isolated voice with a suggested plot; this is not, after all, programme music. Their sonority gives them the status of a character interrupting, concluding, suggesting a new idea or offering a new perspective, and there is no need to confer exact meaning on a specific phrase; indeed it would be inappropriate to try to do so.

Sonority is not the only thing that articulates a different layer – a foreground character – or a point of reference in the passing of time. Harmonic events are equally important, especially in a symphony where tension can remain unresolved for many bars, or a sense of direction can be lost. Heard in this way, the sudden appearance, 32 bars into the 1st movement, of a brass chorale laden with Tristan-chord tension and bearing no relation to any motivic material on either side of it becomes a harmonic event articulating the narrative, as well as a dislocated sonority. Here, it offers a complete departure from the previous passage, which was dominated by strings, and allows the music to continue from the impasse it reached with the catastrophic c# that diverted arrival at C major in bar 26.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.29

Example 47

1st movement, bar 24: showing the C_# at bar 26 and the brass chorale at letter B

It is interesting that the chorale returns, in the shortened or compressed reprise at bar 89, with the rather similar function of departing from what had been a prolonged developmental passage with plenty of harmonic movement but no resolution or moments of arrival. It is a point in the symphony which neatly demonstrates three things:

1. That a harmonic event and a sonority can stand out from the surroundings and impact on the overall form, in both ways assuming a narrative function either in the moment or in the larger scheme, where it might achieve tonal significance;
2. That such a harmonic event can serve to articulate time where the sense of time's passing had been slipping away during a passage lacking in resolution or arrival, and in this sense can be a kind of substitute for resolution as found in functional harmony;
3. That in using tonality in this way rather than in the traditional way of shaping the architecture of a piece, Sibelius both challenged and reinterpreted that tradition.¹⁹

There is an equivalent point in the 4th movement: a passage that began at letter F (bar 138) with alternating E_b⁷ and A chords leads to a theme, which I have called motif (h), based on exactly that alternation (bar 143, shown below, now D_# and A⁷); after a short-lived cadence in E_b major at bar 167, it proceeds with sliding chromaticism and contrastingly static sustained chords – in other words, a passage charged with harmonic uncertainty – and, at bar 218, suddenly gives way to clear C major.

¹⁹ Howell, "Progressive or Modernist?"

Example 48

4th movement, bar 143: showing the alternating D and A⁷ chords, with the ensuing passage shown below

143 WW A⁷ D[#] A⁷ Fm
poco f

165 perfect cadence in Eb major Hrns
170 Str
p
C^{#7} F⁷ B^{b7} E^{b7} (F[#] = G^b) A^{b7} A^{#maj7}

178 motif (h)
B/D[#] throughout

187 motif (i), answering phrase to (h)
A^{#maj7}(#5)
C^{#/E[#]} throughout (A[#] in melody hints at aug chord)

197 chord now unequivocally B^{maj7}(#5)
207 B^{maj7}(#5) G^{#07}
motif (i)

211 A^{#maj7}(#5) F^{#07} G^{#maj7}(#5) H
motif (j) in descending sequence
G⁷/F C/E motif (j) suddenly leads to ^#4 of C major

218 motif (e)

Again, it is like a point in a narrative, a stand-out moment that audibly departs from its surroundings. As it happens, this marks the beginning of another rather static and timeless portion of the 4th movement, and it is the glockenspiel's penetrating voice that stands out in this.

Example 49

4th movement, bar 230: glockenspiel motif



It is often the case that the harmonic event and the sonority go hand-in-hand, with one of the best examples being the *Tranquillo* phrases in the 2nd movement. New key is matched by new texture of flutes in 3rds and pizzicato accompaniment, before the previous idea is resumed.

Example 50

2nd movement, *Tranquillo* theme

Tranquillo

An understanding of the form of this movement has already been a point of discussion above, and I suggested that, aesthetically, this phrase could be heard to function as a mock trio, or a gesture towards that, with its much reduced texture and its complete contrast to the scherzo material. It also, of course, represents the discontinuity that Cone named “stratification” with

reference to Stravinsky's works,²⁰ and fits neatly into the model (if there is one) provided by a narrative interpretation.

Audible flight from a continuum

As distinct from the effect of a departure or interruption, Abbate's concept of a musical "voice" taking "audible flight from the continuum that embeds it"²¹ also suggests that voice's growing out of its background or being a logical continuation of it. It is in this guise that the solo cello in bar 7 of the 1st movement may be heard, growing out of the background that has been established, introducing a new idea perhaps, or, as has been suggested above in Chapter 3 in the context of harmonic language, offering one possible context for the opening pitch collection. It audibly stands apart from the rest of the orchestra, but it also shapes the direction of the ensuing 20 bars, spreading its triadic idea amongst the string section and enabling them to develop it. During this, it remains a separate voice for a little longer, until the upper strings enter from bar 17³.

The solo cello becomes a recurring sonority in the symphony, an interesting choice when considered in the light of Daniel Grimley's observation that the solo cellist at the beginning of *Pohjola's Daughter* is placed in the "musical foreground" and represents the composer himself as the hero figure in what Grimley calls an attempt "to humanise the music".²² There is also a possible deeper significance in that Sibelius's brother was a cellist. Perhaps his connection with this particular instrument was transferred to the Fourth Symphony, where the solo cello is the initiator of new ideas more than once, also, for example, forming the catalyst for the developmental passage following letter E, taking the lower strings' ominous motif (a loose inversion of the bar-1 shape) and continuing it where they had left it hanging.

²⁰ See Chapter 3 above with reference to Cone, 1962, pp.156-7

²¹ Abbate, p.29

²² Grimley, "The Tone Poems", pp.105-6

Example 51

1st movement, bar 56

1st movement, bar 58, solo cello continuation of motif

The solo is prolonged and exposed, and, perhaps partly because it is the second time this instrument has been the focus, it is also a case in point of the *performer* being forced into the foreground.²³

Arguably, following the cello solo at bar 58, there is nothing *but* flight and a rather unsettling lack of any continuum in which it might be embedded, for this leads, of course, to the famous meandering violin passage that floats unsupported until a nebulous tremolo whole-tone scale emerges in the lower strings halfway through bar 70.

Example 52

1st mvt bar 61

Leading to...

²³ Abbate, p.10, with reference to Poizat

While the cello seems to take on or introduce ideas that are then passed on and become the substance of longer stretches of music, the opposite happens just after letter D, when other prominent voices – the oboe and clarinet – revisit the opening motif. Rather than taking flight from the continuum, these two halt the flow, if that is the right word for what has been a rather abortive switching between two chords while the bar-7 triadic motif is explored in its new key of F# major.

Example 53

They draw everything back to the opening shape, and do the same at the end of the movement, thus creating a natural sense of closure as they pass this motif back to the strings for the final phrase.

It is similar in this respect to the end of the 3rd movement, where, again, woodwind take the lead in drawing things to a close, taking flight from the tutti theme just bars before and providing a real moment of focus on their voices as the background freezes on a tonic pedal note.

Example 54

3rd movement, letter G onwards

Leading to...

The image shows a musical score snippet with three staves. The top staff is for Vln 1, starting at bar 97 with a dynamic marking of *mf*. It features a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note, then another triplet of eighth notes. The middle staff is for Vln 2 (then Vc 15vb and Cb 8vb) with a dynamic marking of *mp*, mirroring the rhythmic pattern of the first staff. The bottom staff is for Vc with a dynamic marking of *p*. It shows a long note with a fermata, with a '7' below it indicating a seven-measure rest. Labels include '3rd mvt, 8 bars before the end' in a box above the first staff, '1st mvt, last 4 bars' in a box above the third staff, and 'Vln 1', 'Vln 2 (then Vc 15vb and Cb 8vb)', and 'Vc' identifying the instruments. Dynamic markings *mf*, *mp*, and *p* are placed near their respective staves.

Perhaps it is significant that they also foreshadow the 4th movement with this motif, in the same way that the strings then capture the same shape as starts and ends the 1st movement. What also seems to be of particular importance is the sonic connection between the two movements, both of them responding to the same call from the same voices to draw things to a close. Incidentally, both of these closing bars passages are also foreshadowed much earlier, in the 1st movement at letter D, as shown above, and in the 3rd movement at bar 57, in the dominant key.

Further connection between them is found in the flight of that solo cellist, a point of focus in the 1st movement and in the 3rd, where it assumes the role of moving on the main theme. So halting is the progress in the 3rd movement, however, that there is never really a “continuum” as such, so, although the comparison holds up between solo voices that are crucial to the direction of things, the context is slightly different. The 4th movement, however, does present a continuum, and the different temporal layers that this entails, not only with the solo cello at bar 32 (see page 5 above) but also in two other places, where individuals genuinely detach themselves from the background. It is partly a feature of the opening material that the different motifs have an associated timbre – for example the flutes and the glockenspiel – but from letter C, when a static backdrop is established out of an unchanging chord and the motivic basis of the cello solo from bar 32, various voices erupt from this in exactly the way that something taking “audible flight” would do.

Example 55

4th movement, bar 57, ostinato-like backdrop established

57 Upper strings (doubled 15vb by Cb)

Vc

First flight: flute and oboe with motif (b), the rising 3rd from bar 7

79 Fl, Ob

Second flight: solo clarinet with an extension of motif (d) from bar 18

91 Cl

Third flight: glockenspiel with its original motif from bar 21, motif (f)

97 Fl + Fg 15vb 100

So the distinctive timbres, isolated individual voices and unique sonorities used in the 1st, 3rd and 4th movements not only provide a sense of narrating presences or characters, but also forge connections between the movements below their surface. The 2nd movement is missing from this, not because it does not share this employment of soloists, but because it seems to use them in a different way.

Stratification and development: two conversational analogies

Any description of something in terms of “voices” inevitably conjures images of dialogue and conversation, whether presented as interchange of ideas or argument and interruption, and indeed many musicologists use an exploration of “analogies between instrumental music and discourses normally understood as narrative” as the main thrust of their narrative interpretation.²⁴ The opening of the 2nd movement is a swift exchange of phrases between the oboe and the violins, the oboe beginning the process by picking up the violins’ A from the end of the previous movement and repositioning it in the new chord of F major. Of course, it was the oboe that presented that closing motif in the first place, so it is logical to pursue that pairing of voices. It also lends a sense of continuity even while moving in a new direction.

At the beginning of the 2nd movement, rather than either instrument standing apart from the accompaniment (which is, nonetheless, little more than a frozen oscillation, rather reminiscent of the opening of the Violin Concerto in this respect), the oboe and violins participate in a dialogue, animated and almost rhetorical in the decreasing intervals between their entries. In their overlapping, they do not seem to disagree, but to jostle in their enthusiasm. The alternating tritones which gradually bring things to a halt before the violins suggest a different course are accompanied by harmonic tension, unlike the calm of the opening, as if the two foreground voices are steering the other players by their melodic actions.

²⁴ Maus, F.E.: *Classical Instrumental Music and Narrative* (in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p.466

Example 56

Showing the interchange between violin 1 section and solo oboe at the beginning of the 2nd movement

The musical score for Example 56 consists of five staves. The first staff (measures 5-12) is for the Oboe (Ob.), featuring a melodic line with a triplet in measure 12. The second staff (measures 13-20) is for Violin 1 (Vln.1), starting with a *mp* dynamic and a *pp* dynamic, and includes a solo oboe entry marked *rfz* in measure 17. The third staff (measures 21-31) is for Violin 1, marked *espressivo*, with a section labeled 'A' in a box. The fourth staff (measures 32-38) is for Violin 1, with tempo markings *poco ritard.* and *a tempo*. The fifth staff (measures 39-46) is for Violin 1, with a *p* dynamic and a *etc.* marking at the end.

The dupe-time monophony that sets off at letter B at first simply spotlights the violins again, gradually spreading the idea to the lower strings and entering more ominous harmonic territory with the timpani pedal on F# at bar 75. There is a loss of direction here, harmonically, an increasing tendency towards spiralling descent, so that the only response is a halt called by the trumpets and trombones at letter C.

Example 57

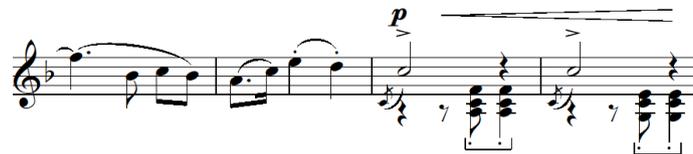
2nd movement, bar 98, brass chords

The musical score for Example 57 shows brass chords and timpani. The top staff (measures 98-116) is for Trumpets and Trombones (Tr, Trb.), with dynamics *fp*, *p*, *cresc.*, and *p*. The bottom staff (measures 98-116) is for Timpani (Timp.) and Figure Bass (Fig.), with dynamics *f* and *p*. The chords are labeled: G#^{o7}, Gm/F#, E^{o7}, A#^{o7}, and Am/E. There are also markings for 'WW' (Woodwind) and 'Fig.'.

There is an obvious shared sonority with the similar point in the 1st movement, in which the “event” of their entry takes on both sonic and harmonic significance, and represents a real departure from the previous material. This, more than anything else in the 2nd movement, is a moment of surreal pause, a change of focus and pace that possibly foreshadows the eerie and dissonant *Doppio più lento*, and a temporal change influencing the dramatic flow in much the same way as one might hear in a more overtly evocative work such as a tone poem or picture. The Fourth Symphony is the work of a self-confessed “painter”, after all.²⁵ The brass chords, alternating with woodwind, seem to send the strings into a confusion of tritones, from which they eventually emerge as before, with the same cheerful F major phrase.

Example 58

2nd movement, bar 152, 4 before letter E



From another analytical perspective, the interchange of ideas, enhanced by changes in timbre, is a case of stratification or discontinuity, as has been discussed above. It maps successfully onto the kind of narrative interpretation that confers a sort of conversational role upon the instrumental voices, who are heard as “sharing certain formal or structural characteristics with verbal narrative”.²⁶ Similarly, but without the fast-paced switching of the 2nd movement, the 1st movement offers another conversational type in the slow spread of the cello’s triadic motif through the rest of the string section. Once it has taken its “audible flight”, it passes the phrase to other members of its group, until the motif almost becomes a subject for discussion, presented with very

²⁵ Letter to Aino, 1894: “really I am a tone painter”

²⁶ Abbate, p.24

slight musical adjustments – parallel 3rds, shifting pitch collections, a climb into higher registers, etc. In this way the continuous development of that motif is another narrative process.

As we have seen, the “discussion” reaches no real conclusion, and the brass interrupt at this point (letter B). The strings do, in fact, try to reassert their idea at bar 32 and again at letter C, and a real conversation or exchange (or argument) follows briefly, until a more authoritative “horn-call” at bar 40 puts the strings back at their original starting-point with the triadic motif, now in the new key initiated by the interruption of the brass at letter B.

Example 59

1st movement, strings at bar 32 and brass chorale resuming

“horn-call” figure at bar 40

Improvised dialogue

One gets the sense of a similar conversational process in the 3rd movement, again following a somewhat incongruous horn call at letter A. While the horns present the most solid idea so far in amongst various trailing threads left by other instruments, if for no other reason than its being the first clearly consonant and homophonic phrase, they do not offer a particularly conclusive phrase or a new direction; the lower strings resume their sparse monophony, still feeling their way with this.

Example 60

3rd movement, bar 9 horn theme and following material

The musical score for Example 60 is presented in two systems. The first system, starting at bar 9, features the Horns playing a melodic line marked *p dolce*. The bassoon (Cb) and timpani (Timp.) provide accompaniment. The second system, starting at bar 16, shows the strings playing a triplet figure. The brass and timpani continue with various rhythmic patterns and dynamics, including *p*, *f*, and *fp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Now the strings and brass alternate with the bassoon, shown above at bars 16 and 17, and then the double basses, not as an energised exchange in the way that the 2nd movement was, but rather as a series of undefined “statements”, voices considering possibilities. It is a kind of collective improvisation, established from the outset by the unfinished phrases by flute and clarinet soloists. As ever, the isolation of these players serves to make the listener aware of the performers per se,²⁷ and Murtomäki has noted the rhapsodic nature of this opening, which, here and at each subsequent reappearance, is always the initiator of new ideas.²⁸ The idea of rhapsody actually fits extremely well with narrativity in that it not only offers a clear analogy to spontaneous verbal communication, but it also captures the heightened awareness of the instrumental sounds themselves, and therefore the performers.

²⁷ Ibid, p.10

²⁸ Murtomäki, *Symphonic Unity*, p.108

The notion of improvisation as a formal concept is taken from Tawaststjerna, who hears the 3rd movement as “an improvisation in three phases”.²⁹ It can encompass not only the rhapsodic woodwind solos, but also the horns themselves, seemingly assured but nonetheless harmonically inconclusive, as if offering a suggestion without knowing where it might lead. Of course, we find out where it could lead as many instrumental voices investigate where they might take it, as seen above; it is a continual process of invention, a kind of dislocated development of that idea at letter A, interspersed with the return of the opening phrases. This interpretation of the 3rd movement’s progress accounts for its apparent hesitancy, whilst also explaining why there is not the stratified effect of the 2nd movement. It also means that reprise is continuous and never literal, and that the main theme – as the letter A motif becomes – is constantly in a state of “becoming”, not only because it is always being altered, but also because it is never finished. The constant change and “becoming” is something that I noted in my study of the Third Symphony with regard to its 2nd movement,³⁰ and the similarity between the two symphonies’ slow movements has already been pointed out, although it is a far more apt term to apply to the Fourth Symphony’s 3rd movement because its theme is never completed. Tim Howell draws a useful parallel between the developmental, linear and progressive versus the static, circular and repetitive and Jonathan Kramer’s notions of “becoming” and “being”,³¹ and it is of particular relevance to this movement, where the many reappearances of the same theme in the same key nonetheless do not detract from its progress and development; in other words, it is not a static portion of the symphony simply because of its constant return to the same idea.

²⁹ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.187

³⁰ Narracott, J: *Contradiction and Unity: the dialectical processes in Sibelius’s Third Symphony* (University of Cambridge, part II dissertation, 1997), p. 30

³¹ Howell, “Sibelius the Progressive”, p.40

The function of reprise in a narrative

This does raise the question of how reprise might work in what is essentially a continuous process, an improvised dialogue, or a developing narrative. Whereas the concept of reprise might seem to be in opposition to the idea of narrative as a formal process, the continual development and eternal incompleteness of the theme in the 3rd movement shows one way in which it can sit comfortably in that context. It is really the only place in which this applies, although that is not to say that reprise in the other movements is out of place, or contradicts a narrative understanding, simply because it does not involve some degree of ongoing development.³² It can become a musical “event” in itself, even if performing the same function as it did previously. There may also be an aspect which significantly alters its role despite its similarities to an earlier passage; thus in the 1st movement’s almost literal reprise of material from bars 32-53 at the end, the melodic and textural content is secondary to the importance of what is happening tonally: the journey towards the real tonic key of the symphony, A minor. If it is true that Sibelius harboured a “growing suspicion of the redundancy of non-altered, or even modestly altered, reprises”³³ then this is one way to explain the fact of exactly that sort of reprise forming the ending of the 1st movement.

The 2nd movement contains a great deal of literal repetition of the opening material, albeit sometimes fleeting, and, in that constantly changing first half, where all new ideas seem to be a complete departure from previous material (letter B, the *Tranquillo* phrases), the re-emergence of the original ideas seems to represent the inevitable return to some kind of “norm”. They have a settling presence, usually following a period of tonal uncertainty, and they do aim towards a conclusion, a coda-like passage at letter I.

³² By “narrative” I do not mean to imply a literal subtext or story, referring instead to the transverbal drama in Abbate’s explanation of narrativity

³³ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.20

Example 61



The 4th movement has a similar attitude to reprise, in that it is often an attempt at restoration after a period of uncertainty or harmonic stasis. The trouble is that tonality is part of this process, and simply restating earlier ideas is not enough to settle things; reprise in such a fundamentally opposed key to A major as E \flat major (bar 339) cannot be a resolution, and in the end, there has to be that increasingly chaotic *mêlée* between letters O and S that resolves the battle.

Interestingly, it is individual groups of voices that draw the 4th movement to a close, islands of timbre that present a strangely sparse ending for a symphony, but which make absolute sense if the whole work is understood as a narrative: of course it should be miniature glimpses of all of those voices which helped to shape the piece that conclude the process. Timbre in itself seems to have a part to play in articulating form in the following ways:

1. New ideas or directions suggested by individual voices, as discussed above;
2. Definition of recurring ideas in the narrative thread;
3. Clear sonic connections between movements.

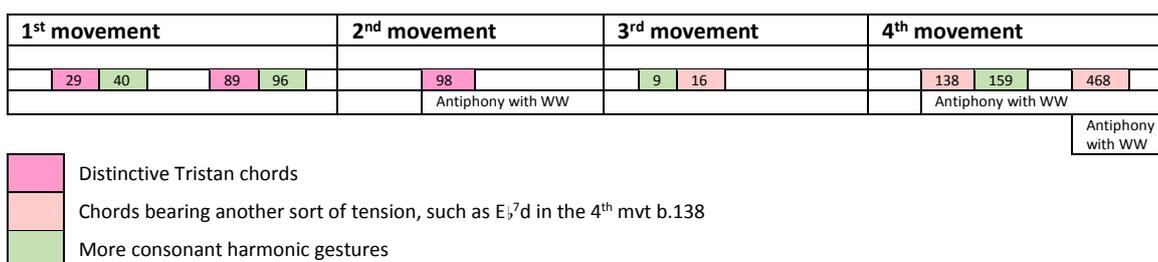
Points 2 and 3 are relevant to the discussion of reprise, and are linked in that what recurs in one movement might also be recognisable in another context. The very act of repetition (by which I do not mean immediate or persistent repetition, nor recurrent motifs such as those catalogued in a typical semiotic analysis,³⁴ but significant and instantly notable reappearance of previously heard material) enhances the listener's awareness of an idea and elevates its importance; it gains identity by virtue of its distinctive characteristics and its familiarity on return. By this logic, recurrent

³⁴ There are several good examples of semiotic analyses in Nicholas Cook's *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter 4: p.116 ff.

show a kind of recapitulation in the Classical sense, we can nonetheless see a representation of the extent to which both reprise and “sonic recall” can shape the music. The Classical legacy lurks, however, especially when the aforementioned *tonal* shaping of the movement is considered in the context of the above diagram.

Sonic recall does not rely on actual reprise in order to be strongly reminiscent of an earlier passage, although an instrument or body of sound is often associated with certain motifs or chords. In both senses – i.e., with or without the melodic or harmonic content – it spans the whole symphony, so that, as already discussed above, the solo cello becomes a recurrent voice, as does the oboe. Figure 6 below shows the powerful link provided by another, collective, voice, the brass section in various guises, sometimes reminiscent of previous material in more than just their timbre and sometimes simply familiar as a separate body of sound in brief isolation from its surroundings.

Figure 6



This kind of diagrammatic reduction of the symphony tends to encourage a more spatial image of the symphony as a whole than the linear nature of a narrative, and is a reminder of Sibelius’s description of himself as a “painter”. Perhaps the narrative is not just a matter of unfolding dialogue, a succession of ideas analogous to speech, with an intrinsic ongoing developmental aspect; perhaps it also entails a distribution of pockets of sound across the canvas of the Fourth Symphony, more like a collage than a dialogue.

An attempt to show the distribution of ideas or sonorities in time by means of visual representation also has the inevitable side-effect of demonstrating one of the pervading unifying

factors. It actually seems to make *more* sense of reprise in the context of this analytical method: a piece can revisit the same ideas without it being some kind of “anti-narrative” gesture, and there is a logic in binding together diverse material by doing so. Reprise and sonic recall are more than just factors to be accommodated in a narrative interpretation; they appear to be an essential part of it.

Human interpretations

In this chapter, I have taken as a starting point the definition of narrative provided by Carolyn Abbate, and have expanded it to include all kinds of “event”, including harmonic and timbral moments or aspects of tonal scheme and reprise. There has been a consideration of other kinds of “audible flight” than a growing awareness of a sonority in isolation or in the foreground. I believe that her comparison of the “formal or structural characteristics with verbal narrative”³⁵ makes sense of the symphony as a whole, and offers an explanation for the sequence of events we hear, with the result that what appears on the page to be somewhat disjointed and fragmentary becomes an absolutely logical process if heard as a narrative one. Narrative becomes a kind of “temporal form”,³⁶ closely linked to the appreciation of Sibelius’s manipulation of time and employment of different temporal levels as one aspect of his dramatic control.

It is important to note that, in adopting a narrative interpretation of this symphony, we can reject a programmatic one. We can also get as far away as possible from our tendency to describe music using analogies of human emotion or events³⁷ by removing references to personal responses and direct analogies, although I am not convinced that this is something to avoid if it allows analysis to explain our perceptions.³⁸ What a narrative interpretation can offer is a meeting point, or focus,

³⁵ Abbate, p.24

³⁶ Berger, K: “Narrative and Lyric: Fundamental Poetic Forms of Composition” (in *Musical Humanism and its Legacy: Essays in Honour of Claude V. Palisca*, Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1992), p.458. The term, while apt in this context, is used by Berger to describe a more programmatic understanding of narrative, with more explicit links to human “thoughts, emotions and situations” than the unspoken narrative advocated in this chapter.

³⁷ See Chapter 1 above, with reference to Marion Guck, 1994, p.229

³⁸ See Chapter 2 above, with reference to Nicholas Cook, 1994, p.221

for other analytical approaches, being able to map onto formal models such as stratification and continual development whilst accommodating the ideas of compressed reprise and multiple temporal states, and accounting, subtly, for the evocative and atmospheric nature of the symphony.

The mastery of the Fourth Symphony is that, while it remains an essentially abstract genre, it abandons traditional approaches to abstract form and spacing of material, and allows an intuitive, narrative approach to take over. All this is accomplished in parallel with the glimpses offered of archaic practices and old structural gestures such as sonata form, tonal resolution, ritornello and rondo, scherzo and trio, thus making it a true model of *junge Klassizität*. Meanwhile, its use of the orchestra as a collection of “voices” that can have their own impact on the form places it beyond the composer’s former works in maturity and in modernity.

Chapter 5. "The profound logic that creates an inner connection between all motives."¹

As has been discussed at length in Chapter 3, placing Sibelius's music alongside that of his contemporaries reveals his absorption and unique deployment of modern harmonic language as well as his refusal to engage in the "circus" of melodrama, flamboyance and extremes. What we know of the Fourth Symphony makes perfect sense of the above quotation: the four separate movements all linked by their exploration of the raised ^4 that first appeared in bar 1, with melodic shape, harmonic language, and even tonal architecture being a product of that obsession. His turn of phrase, though, suggests that Sibelius was really describing not logic but unity, or the unifying principles underlying a composition and accounting for its favouring of certain kinds of chords, certain melodic contours, and so on. It was something which Sibelius was apparently not aware of while he was composing, as he told Carpelan in the summer of 1909: "You mention interconnections between themes and other such matters, all of which are quite subconscious on my part. Only afterwards can one discern this or that relationship but for the most part one is merely a vessel".²

The definitions of "logic" and "unity" need to be precise in the context of musical analysis. While some aspects of this particular symphony might represent both, they are, to my mind, different qualities functioning on different levels. "Unity" is to be discovered in the finished product, in the form of similarity, recurrence and shared derivation. "Logic" may encompass unifying factors in the sense that relationships between the movements – for example, in the form of similar harmonic language – might be termed "logical", but it also relates to the process of composition, whether subconscious or not, and the manner in which the music progresses in time.

¹ Virtanen, T: "From Heaven's Floor to Composer's Desk: Sibelius's Musical Manuscripts and Composition Process" (in *Jean Sibelius and His World*, ed. Daniel Grimley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p.70. First documented in Karl Ekman's biography, *Jean Sibelius: En konstnärs liv och personlighet* (Helsinki: Holger Schidts, 1935).

² Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.129

In short, the unity in a piece of music is what holds it together; the logic is what makes sense of the whole.

Unity can be thought of as multi-layered. Some aspects of it are obvious and immediately discernible, while others need many hearings or even a score to uncover the connection. I have divided unity into three layers:

- Sonic unity

As discussed and illustrated at the end of Chapter 4, this is the recurrence of sonorities – whether purely timbral, such as the repeated choice of the cello and oboe as soloists, or associated with harmony, such as the brass chords recurring in the 1st movement and resurfacing in the 2nd, shown below:

Example 62

1st movement:

29 **B** Adagio

brass F#7 Db/F G#7 Eb/G

fp *ffz* *mp* *ffz*

Vc

trumpon

C# pedal in timpani and Cb

2nd movement:

98 **C**

Tr, Trb.

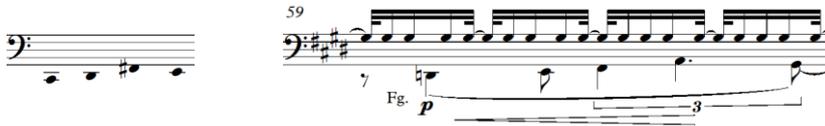
fp

G#7

- Motivic unity

On the whole, this is also on the surface, and includes such obvious similarities as

- the return of the 1st-movement contour in the 3rd



- the link between duple-time melody and *Doppio più lento* melody in the 2nd movement

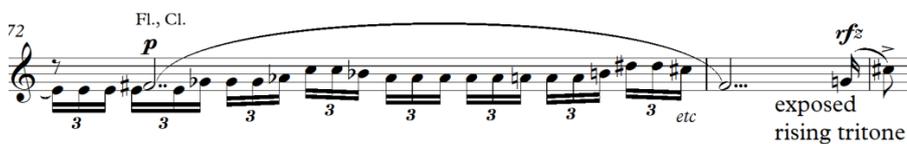


- the foreshadowing of the 4th movement's opening theme at the end of the 3rd



- the many instances of highlighting the tritone, such as

- i. in the opening contour, the accented tritones after letter F in the 1st movement



- ii. the sequence of tritones after letter A in the second movement and the savage falling figures, marked *rfz*, after letter K

29

Ob.
Vln. 1

Ob & Cl, b.263

Vln & vla

mf *rfz*

iii. the emphasis on A-D# in the flute's opening melody in the 3rd movement

Il tempo largo

Fl *p*

iv. the penetrating motif (e) in the 4th movement

19

Vla *rfz* motif (e)

v. and the commonality of the raised $\wedge 4$ in this motif and some others in the 4th movement

Allegro

Vln 1 *fp* motif (a)

16

mf *rfz* motif (d)

- Derivation

Derivation, or the sharing of a common source, takes place at a slightly deeper level and is not always immediately apparent. It includes aspects of the harmony, such as

- the 1st movement's exploration of C major and G \flat major
- the arrival at F \sharp major as a suitable secondary tonal area
- the use of Tristan chords, with their inherent diminished 5th
- the juxtaposition of chords E and B \flat at bar 40
- the pedal on F \sharp in the 2nd movement, followed by simultaneous pedals a tritone apart
- the establishment of the keys of A and E \flat as opposing tonal areas in the 4th movement
- the choice of keys: A(m), F, C \sharp m, their respective tonic pitches forming an augmented triad in keeping with the whole-tone harmony explored elsewhere in the symphony
- the keys explored in the 1st movement: C, F \sharp , Em, three of the pitches of the opening collection
- the reappearance of C major, heard in the first two minutes of the symphony, at bar 218 (2 bars after letter H) in the 4th movement
- the exploration of the many possible contexts for that opening pitch collection, as discussed at length above in Chapter 3.

Owing to the fact that many of these are about exploring the *consequences* of an opening pitch collection, the issue of the notion of derivation at this level invites the use of the word "logic" as well as "unity".

Most of these unifying aspects run the course of the symphony, forming an important part of the kind of narrative interpretation I have presented in Chapter 4: the sonorities become stand-out voices, and the ongoing development of motifs in the hands of different instruments and at different stages becomes part of the wordless drama, as does the exploration of a number of

possible avenues or contexts (the last point in the list above). In Chapter 4, there were analogies with monologue, dialogue and discussion, improvised half-statements, bold interruptions, timely reminders of previous thoughts, and so on. The important point here is that, whether one idea grows out of another or bears no relation to what surrounds it, there is a strong sense that the symphony “runs its logical course”.

Speaking of the music in terms of voices and conversations recollects the notion, posited in Chapter 2, of there being an unspecified but clear presence of a “psyche”, a quality within the composer that may be an amalgam of autobiographical, psychological and national traits, now conferred upon the music and the “voices” within it. It was suggested that this in itself made the symphony Finnish, where a more obvious form of nationalism was missing, and the concept of a Finnish psyche was closely linked to the landscape: nature and landscape, said Sibelius, are a stronger influence than national origins, with “landscape” subsequently being extended by some to mean cultural surroundings as well as natural.³ It is not my wish here to return to the psychological aspect of the Fourth Symphony, but to examine in more detail the nature images that have been connected with Sibelius’s music and form a link between these and the composer’s own concept of profound logic.

Natural logic: rivers and lakes

Tomi Mäkelä writes of Sibelius’s view that “the ‘natural’ symphony should be ... like a river that gets its water from smaller brooks”, going on to describe how “motifs should gain their shape organically and be able to find their own way”.⁴ This seems to be a bipartite image; on the one hand, there are the “smaller brooks”, presumably being the initial motifs or underlying principles, and on the other

³ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.145: “I think that nature and landscape play a far greater part than national origins.”

⁴ Mäkelä, p.100

there is the organic growth of material. If we were to pursue these separate ideas in the context of the Fourth Symphony, we might view the “source” as the opening pitch collection and the “smaller brooks” as the four movements, each flowing towards a moment of reconciliation with the symphony’s home key. Or, given the nature of each movement’s exploration of the tritone conflict inherent in the first four notes, perhaps the river’s tributaries are the different harmonic contexts in which each movement places the tritone.

The image of motifs organically taking shape and finding their own way suggests not so much that everything is flowing towards the same conclusion or goal, but that everything grows out of what went before it, and therefore nothing is random or an act of chance. Of course, Sibelius famously said that he would not change a note of the symphony,⁵ so it makes sense that this should be a work of art in which what happens is inevitable, or *logical*, and, given that it must therefore all be linked, *unified*. There is also something to be learnt about the compositional process. Tawaststjerna regards the “fascination of the Fourth Symphony [as residing] largely in the way in which the composer allows its form to be shaped by the motives”.⁶ It is almost as if the composer himself is not a creator, but the “vessel” that Sibelius chose to call himself.⁷ While Sibelius went on to attribute “this wonderful logic” to God – not the only time he mentioned some kind of heavenly intervention⁸ – we might simply call it intuitive composition. Virtanen phrases it as follows:

“the compositional process thus constructs larger formal units from smaller fragments of ideas, ideally following the principles of “motivic development” (or “organic variation”) to ensure the ultimate cohesion (or “unity”) of the final composition.”⁹

⁵ Mäkelä, p.97

⁶ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.179

⁷ *Ibid*, p.129

⁸ Virtanen, “From Heaven's Floor”, p.70: “For me, music is a fascinating mosaic which God has assembled, he takes all the pieces in his hand, throws them down in the world, and we have to reconstruct the picture.”

⁹ *Ibid*, p.69

Again, that link between unity and logic; what we have previously seen to be close connections between motifs or continual development and expansion is exactly what Virtanen has outlined, and is the ultimate blend of logical process and unifying factors. For Sibelius, it was more than that; it was as if the music itself took hold of him and found its own path: “I plan to allow the musical thoughts and their development in my spirit determine the form of my music”,¹⁰ which James Hepokoski interprets as the drive towards producing “unique structures – freely logical, intuitive, or *ad hoc* shapes”,¹¹ a rather similar interpretation to Tawaststjerna’s “improvisation in three phases”.¹²

Edward Laufer remains in watery realms but replaces the image of rivulets and river, together with the ongoing “flow” of ideas that this could imply, with “tiny ripples on a lake which expand into rolling waves”, specifically imposing this metaphor on the 3rd movement of the Fourth Symphony.¹³ In doing so, he allows for what he calls a “dynamic, or cumulative [design]” but does not subscribe to the onward motion of a river analogy; in other words, there is motion, but it may simply be expanding on an idea and not progressing to new ones. This, of course, is the perfect fit for the 3rd movement, whose main theme reveals itself by degrees, haltingly trying out half-phrases until the “rolling wave” of the complete theme is reached, majestically *forte*, at letter G.

¹⁰ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.187

¹¹ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.21

¹² Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.187

¹³ Laufer, E: “On the Fourth Symphony (Third Movement)” (in *Sibelius in the Old and New World. Aspects of his Music, its Interpretation, and Reception*, ed. T. Jackson, V. Murtoimaki, C. Davies, T. Virtanen, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main: Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2010), p.185

Example 63

85 **G** all upper strings

Vc (melody)

f Cb and brass

etc, as in Vlns brass

ff *tr* *tr*

Timp. *f* > *p* *f* > *p*

fz *mf* *fff*

Lauer calls this a “point of arrival”, an important aspect of his ripple analogy evidently being some kind of goal or destination. In a much smaller timeframe and without the intervening passages that separate the cumulative statements of the main theme in the 3rd movement, the image also fits bars 7-27 of the 1st, the triadic cello theme being the centre of the circles and the widening rings encompassing the whole string section and leading to the *fortissimo* C major that tries (and fails, thanks to the disruption from the viola’s c# and the cello’s subsequent F#) to assert itself, *tremolo*, at bar 25.

Example 64

22 Upper str

cresc.

ff

f

ff *p* *mp*

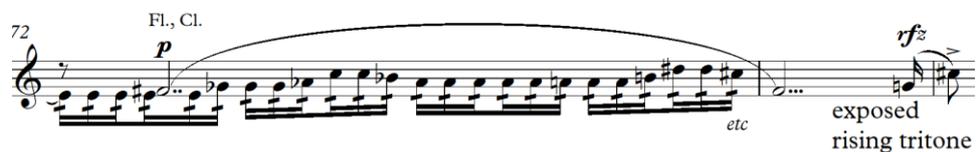
Cb *cresc.* Vla

It is a point of interest that, as a figure of speech, “the ripple effect” does not usually apply to a series of homogeneous events. We tend to use it as a catch-all metaphor for far-reaching and sometimes unforeseen or apparently unconnected consequences, and I wonder if it can be applied,

in this sense, to music. It would concur with Botstein’s consideration of the kind of gradually apparent complete picture that can encompass contrast and change as well as uniformity, what he calls the “reconciliation of diversity and unity in nature” being “translated into music”.¹⁴ It could be the perfect model for the repercussions of the first four notes that are palpable in every part of the symphony; what begins in the 1st movement as some fairly benign explorations of the chromatic colouring of G_b major and the tonal area of F_♯ major at bar 32 quickly adopts a more insistent tone with the *rinforzando* tritones during the developmental passage beginning 4 bars after letter F (at bar 71³), matched in their rather vicious character by those in the 2nd movement from bar 263 and by motif (e)’s obtrusive sharpened 4th in the finale.

Example 65

1st movement, development section, b.72



2nd movement, *Doppio più lento*



4th movement, opening passage (motif (e))



This last motif plays itself out between bars 400 and 435 (letter P to 6 bars before letter S), a swirling chaos of motifs and chromaticism, as if the only way to escape the building “waves” originating in bar 1 is to perform a kind of frenzied exorcism. It could be pointed out that this is not a new process in itself: the same might happen in any Classical piece, where a new key challenges the original one, a tonal battle-ground is established, and the original key emerges unscathed. In

¹⁴ Botstein, p.269

this case, however, resolution cannot entail simply erasing an extra accidental and having a common pitch repositioned as $\wedge 5$ or $\wedge 3$; the rogue pitch – E \flat in this movement, F \sharp in the 1st – does not fit, and has to be completely thrown out. A major, glowingly emerging at bar 435, is anything but unscathed, giving way immediately to the chromatic sliding that has been part of this movement since bar 170 (see below).

Example 66



It does raise the question of what the symphony's endgame is. Is it this expunction of the conflicting chromatic pitches? Is it the final establishment of A (major or minor) as the tonic key? And is there, in amongst all this – not just the chaotic throes of the 4th movement, but every movement's perspective on that opening idea – an ongoing journey, perhaps channelled by Sibelius or perhaps discovered *en route* by the musical ideas themselves, as he preferred to claim?

Horizons and goals

Inherent in the image of expanding waves is the prospect of reaching something larger, some kind of goal which may become apparent over time. If we combine Laufer's analogy with the notion of a mosaic-like construction of a phrase or longer passage – whether gradually revealing complete themes as in the 3rd movement or reconciling initially disparate ideas to form an increasingly unified whole, as in the 2nd – we can arrive at the concept of a gradually revealed destination, not as in a metaphorical *place* but rather like a kind of “state of being” – perhaps the goal of the process of “becoming”, as discussed in Chapter 4. This, too, can be imposed on the notion of “landscape” in

Sibelius's music – as we have seen in Chapter 2, “landscape” can be a rather broad term including culture, heritage, physical surroundings and, now, the sense of some kind of distant and conclusive “point of arrival”.¹⁵

For Daniel Grimley, “landscape” in the sense of this ever-expanding view shapes the music fundamentally, by “the way in which such cumulative cycles create a strong sense of directed motion towards a musical horizon”.¹⁶ While the context is the tone poems, and the metaphor has connotations of music that is more circular than the Fourth Symphony, there are aspects of it that lend themselves to this piece, especially given its connection with the evocative style of the tone poems and its suitability for narrative interpretation. These are the concept of accumulation (rather than specifically cumulative cycles), the suggestion of a journey towards a final destination, and the notion that all things point towards that goal, either gradually revealing it or forming the path towards it.

It seems to have as much to do with what is *not* revealed at the outset as what can eventually be made out on the “horizon”, and what is only established in the closing moments. While Grimley writes about this in the context of *Tapiola*, where “harmonic stability is only achieved in the final bars”,¹⁷ it can be useful in understanding the Fourth Symphony, albeit with the consideration that this is a work in four separate parts rather than a single-movement tone poem. Notwithstanding the sense of open-endedness that allows the first three movements to lead into the next in what is essentially a four-stage journey, each one nevertheless has to reach some kind of “close”, if not a traditionally conclusive finish, and this I have chosen to describe below in terms of “goals” and “aims”, with the final attainment of the pure tonic key on the “horizon” of the whole symphony. Only in the last 14 bars of the entire piece is A minor, the professed tonic, actually heard in an unadulterated diatonic context.

¹⁵ Laufer, “On the Fourth Symphony (Third Movement)”, p.185 (see above)

¹⁶ Grimley, “The Tone Poems”, p.115

¹⁷ Ibid, p.115

Example 67

Closing bars of the Fourth Symphony

A minor is not *absent* from the 1st movement, of course, nor is A major; it is established fairly early on by the solo cello in bar 7, albeit quickly superseded by the octatonic collection that leads to an alternation of C and G \flat majors in bars 17-20. Later on, as in the finale, A major emerges from the unsettled harmony of bars 71-87, first as a fleeting descending triad in bar 88³ (perhaps significantly replacing a chord of F \sharp ⁷ and therefore diverting a possible return to the erstwhile “rival” key), and then properly at the *Tempo I* in bar 97. Major seems to slip into minor by accident after a clarinet g \sharp and lower strings C \sharp in bars 109 and 110 respectively, and in each instance of the tonic key in either mode it is diluted by the presence of chromatic pitches.

Example 68

1st movement, A major at bars 88³ and 97

1st movement, bar 109

109 Cl.
p p
strings
mf > p < p

If the arrival at a tonic key is the horizon towards which the symphony is travelling, then the F major centre of the 2nd movement might appear to be something of a detour, but how else to eradicate the disruptive pitch of F# which led to the presence of other conflicting notes such as the b \flat , in the example above? Even in the 2nd movement, whose repeated return to the original key contributes to the restorative function of reprise (see Chapter 4 on this), F# is a lingering presence, like a narrative entity in itself: an F# pedal in the timpani and double basses at bar 75, and again at bar 101; a temporary rogue reprise in G \flat major in the clarinet at bar 187. Again, what seems to assume the traditionally tonally conclusive role of a coda at letter I is infused with chromatic notes which eventually lead to an oscillation on b \flat in the 2nd violins in bar 248. B \flat is in absolute opposition to the affirmation of F major as a tonic key, and this seems to be the catalyst for the impasse that is the *Doppio più lento* at letter K, throughout which there are simultaneous pedals on F and B \flat .

Example 69

2nd movement, bar 248, showing the coda-like melody in F major being increasingly undermined by chromatic pitches until a B \flat at bar 248 provides the ultimate opposition

240 p dolce tr
248 p tr

Keeping in mind that the topic of this discussion is the journey towards a “horizon”, which I am proposing is the arrival at undiluted A minor, the 3rd movement is something of a diversion

again, with its own goal of a “complete” theme, emerging in stages, in C# minor. Laufer confers a kind of human intention on the two contrasting sets of material: the first, feeling tonally exploratory, texturally sparse and melodically improvisatory, he claims to “express seeking, searching” and the pieces of the C# minor theme “express an assertive aspect – the object of the search”.¹⁸ There is a strong link to the harmonic aspect in his metaphor of seeking and being found: in describing bars 5-11 and 11-20, he uses the same term of “composing out” C# minor, by which he seems to mean a thorough – if temporary – riddance of accidentals in the key, with C# minor being “in the process of becoming” at this point.¹⁹ He later refers to the “broad, massive, granite-like quality” that this movement obtains from its “insistence on the tonic C# minor”.²⁰

The key itself is not the goal; this movement is not a microcosm of the symphony. The goal is the theme in its most complete form, at bar 82. The tonal centre, however, must have a role to play in the overall journey from the beginning to the end of the piece, and again I think it is a narrative one: C# minor is like a “false tonic”, akin to a false recapitulation in Classical sonata form in that it can fool listeners into feeling a sense of arrival or even resolution. It is also, as I have mentioned before, one link in a chain of major 3rds connecting all four movements – A-F-C#-A – and thus provides not so much a detour as a vital piece in the large-scale journey (as does F major, of course). It acquires a purpose and becomes a player in the drama, in which the 3rd movement is an episode juxtaposing “granite-like” (and misplaced) certainty in a home key with quite disconcerting harmonic unrest, heard each time the opening material returns to drift between barely connected chords, as shown below.

¹⁸ Laufer, “On the Fourth Symphony (Third Movement)”, p.185

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.188-9

²⁰ Ibid, p.189

Example 70

3rd movement, bb.28-29 as an example of chromatic chord changes

C# minor is representative of stability, although even at the two points where it is most rooted by the dominant pedal in bars 56³-65 (leading into a rendition of the main theme at letter E) and the tonic pedal from bar 87³ to the end (following the majestic sweep of the “complete” theme at bar 82, letter G), the flattened 2nd and, more significantly, flattened 5th play a part in undermining this security.

Example 71

3rd movement, b.57, showing flattened 2nd and 5th conflicting with the dominant pedal

There is a hint of the real tonal destination in the momentary glimpse of the 4th movement’s opening motif at bar 88, because it colours that bar with A major, effectively transferring responsibility for reaching the “horizon” to the next movement, which assumes the mantle and begins with a bright A major tonality. Keeping in the mind the cumulative model that accompanies the notion of a “horizon”, we should consider the question of *what* is accumulating, or what presence is gradually becoming more pronounced during this last section of the journey, and the answer can only be one thing: the threat to the tonic key posed by E_b.

It is present from the outset as a $d\sharp^2$ that rather tamely leads to \wedge^5 , with A major not seriously undermined by this or any other chromatic pitches that surface. Half-diminished chords between bars 32 and 40 give way to A major again at letter B (b.48). The $d\sharp^2$, however, was the manifestation of the 1st movement's F \sharp , and at letter C (b.79) it begins to weigh more heavily on A major, a sustained $E\flat$ over the hypnotically repeating A^{maj7} chord in bars 57-88 (see below). In the shift from a single pitch with a slightly Lydian flavour in bar 1 to a more penetrating \wedge^5 at bar 79, the $D\sharp/E\flat$ presence instils enough instability to overthrow A major in a smooth slide from E^7 into $E\flat$ major in the space of 2½ bars. In something of a tonal coup, $E\flat$ takes over as \wedge^1 and $a\sharp^2$ is now the raised 4th, the original disruptive pitch (shown in example 72 below, bar 121).

Example 72

4th movement, b.79

4th movement, b.117, where the slide into $E\flat$ major begins

The cumulative effects of $E\flat$ continue to be felt as the two key signatures co-exist for 12 bars (bb.124-135) with the motif shown below (I have called this motif (f)) alternating between $E\flat$ and A major before this is distilled to antiphonal $E\flat^7$ and A major chords at letter F, held together

by the D \flat pedal note. As this gives way to motif (h), more harmonic conflict ensues, this time by the chordal melody, which settles and, 5 bars later, resumes in F minor, and the C 9 chord in the strings. A perfect cadence in E \flat major in bars 165-167 affirms this key's takeover.

Example 73

4th movement, b.123, showing two key signatures and alternating E \flat and A major motifs

4th movement, letter F – antiphonal E \flat 7 and A major chords

F
Str, br, WW
timp.

138
Eb 7 A Eb 7 A
Vc, Cb

4th movement, motif (h) at bar 143³ and the two implied keys following this motif (h)

143
poco *f*
A 7 D \sharp A 7 Fm
C 9

4th movement, cadence at bars 165-7

165
perfect cadence in E \flat major
Hrn

Interestingly, the key signature does not change to E \flat major, despite its very tonal assertion at this point, and there are another 171 bars to go between the cadence and this more permanent triumphant gesture by the “rival” key. It is worth noting that 19 bars of the intervening time were spent sitting on a swirling C major chord (see example 74 below, b.218ff.), with agreeing key signature, if only because, when E \flat major is later challenged, it is by two keys: A major and C major. (Again, there seems to be a larger scheme here: all three keys stand a minor 3rd apart.) In a genuinely bitonal passage, beginning with the sustained \wedge :4 posed by A \natural at bar 369, the strings maintain an E \flat ^{maj7} chord beneath various motifs from the opening, all in A major, and there is even a tritone pedal to cement the conflict, played by the trumpet on e \flat ¹ and the timpani on A in bars 381-4 (the trumpet’s sustained note morphs into motif (e), which has been characterised throughout by the prolonged raised 4th/flattened 5th – in this case, e \flat ¹ in the context of A major again). As the strings spin off into chromatic contrary motion, C major motifs start surfacing, and as soon as E \flat major attempts to make a comeback (trombone, motif (e) in bars 397-8) a tonal confusion ensues, with motifs in several consecutive keys – what Laufer might term a “composing out” of E \flat , the rival key.

Example 74

4th movement, C major at b.218ff.

4th movement, showing motifs appearing in A major over an E \flat major accompaniment from b.369

369 Fl. Ob. motif (b) in A over E \flat chord
p
 Str.

377 Ob. motif (d) in A major over E \flat chord
 Fl. motif (d) extended
f

4th movement, b.392, showing motifs now appearing in C major

392 Vlns. motif (e)
 Hn. motif (fg)
poco f
 Cl. + Fl. 15va motif (fg)

4th movement, b.397, showing the trombone attempting to reestablish E \flat major through motif (e)

397 Trb *mf marc.*
 motif (e) in E \flat

So E \flat has been a raised 4th (d \sharp^2 , b.2), a more persistent flattened 5th sustained over an A^{major7} chord (b.79, letter C); it has suddenly effected a role-swap with A major and made A its own \wedge 4 (b.121, letter E), and imposed its key signature on a continuing A major one (bb.124-135) whilst motifs alternated keys; it has affirmed its place as the new tonal centre with a perfect cadence (bb.165-7) and finally taken over, complete with key signature, at bar 340. In terms of cumulative effect, this has been exponential, but the takeover is not the endgame; rather, this seems to have been a necessary part of the “composing out” that is needed to clear the path to what is on the “horizon”, namely the home key of the symphony, A minor.

Before this can be reached, there is more chromaticism to be expunged. A grand transformation has taken place during this movement, not only harmonically but also aesthetically, from a rather carefree opening to rising tension, then outright conflict, resulting in cataclysmic disarray. There are bound to be reverberations, and although these do not overturn A major, they do strip it of its major-key brightness (and, incidentally, its key signature), and A *minor* is reached in an understated and exhausted manner at bar 482.

Example 75



Of course, it is not just a question of accumulating tension and eventual resolution; the increasingly disruptive presence of E \flat major in this movement has been playing out the consequences of the very first few notes of the symphony. In the 1st movement, the tension lay in F \sharp 's challenge to C; in the finale, with the tonic major now attained, E \flat must take on that role in opposition to A. Given that the reprise of 1st-movement material originally in F \sharp major takes place in A major rather than C, the fact that things should resume in A major in the last movement after the diversions of F major and C \sharp minor is not only satisfying but also possessed of a deeper logic.

The 'nature' analogies satisfy several camps: those in search of a Finnish quality or inspiration apparent in the music; those who assign special significance to Sibelius's own fascination with his natural surroundings; those who seek a model for explaining his unique approach to form; those wishing to identify how something which at times seems to be feeling its way or changing

direction – whose “musical thoughts and their development determine their own form”²¹ – can possess a logic borne of its fixation on a final point of arrival.

The other side of the watershed

If the Fourth Symphony is to be considered a turning point in Sibelius’s output, we can examine future works in the light of its most innovative qualities, among which are the increasing emphasis on all-pervasive unity, a gradual coalescing of ideas, the slow revelation of the complete picture by stages, and the emergence of a logical endpoint. And while the harmonic language in Op. 63 did not prove to be a gateway to atonality, the lingering effects of its tonal explorations are heard clearly in subsequent works.

Between the premiers of the Fourth Symphony in April 1911 and the Fifth in December 1915, four and a half years passed. They were not idle years – several chamber works and songs and two tone poems, *The Bard* and *The Oceanides*, were completed – but the next piece of a truly symphonic scale was not hard on the heels of the Fourth. It is hardly surprising, then, that the two should be so different in character and in spirit, even if the Fifth is clearly the successor to the Fourth in some respects. Among these are its obvious reference to the finale in the previous movement, a momentary flight by the clarinets in the Fourth Symphony’s 3rd movement but a rather longer preparation in the Fifth Symphony.

²¹ Hepokoski, J: “Rotations, sketches, and the Sixth Symphony” (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Murtomäki and Jackson, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.327 – diary entry, 8th May 1912

Example 76

Fifth Symphony, 2nd mvt, letter A: emergence of the finale theme

fl. *p marc.*

ob. *pp*

Fifth Symphony, 2nd mvt, 6 bars after letter C: more prominent presence of the theme in the lower strings

Vlins *mf* *dim.*

Cb. *dim.*

Fifth Symphony, 3rd mvt, 1 bar after letter D: horn theme ("Swan Hymn"²²)

Horns *poco f e deciso*

The opening and scherzo of the Fifth Symphony were famously fused in acknowledgement of their motivic connection, the scherzo (*Allegro moderato*, 4 bars after letter N) being like a variation of the 1st movement material, or development thereof, as well as becoming a giant gesture of resolution.²³ It is a genuine example of two movements in one, as opposed to one movement with built-in contrast, albeit two movements without distinct melodic material. It also highlights the necessity for such a contrast in tempo and character in a symphonic work, whilst demonstrating that the traditional positioning of material in proportionate and separate sections is not crucial to the fulfilment of that requirement.

The massive implications of this liberation from a formal template did not manifest themselves in the Sixth Symphony, which seems to follow a different path from those on either side

²² Hepokoski, in *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, refers to the theme as the Swan Hymn, also calling it the "Swinging Theme", p.37 ff.

²³ Howell, "Sibelius the Progressive", p.44

of it, being a refined and expressive masterpiece of textural and harmonic manipulation presented in four movements, the first three of which Whittall describes as having “flexibly adapted sonata-form schemes”.²⁴ For the fully mature conversion of form into fluid process, we have to wait until the Seventh Symphony, in which nothing is separated by silence and everything is a logical outcome of what has gone before. In this, too, the presence of temporal contrast is essential, not only for simple aesthetic reasons but also for making this a symphony in essence rather than just in name. While its structure is unique and is therefore insufficient as an argument for its being a symphony rather than a symphonic poem (or *Fantasia Sinfonica*, as it was originally titled), Whittall identifies two things as lending it symphonic weight: “the presence of thematic statements and restatements” and “strong contrasts of mood and tempo”.²⁵ Laufer succinctly sums it up as “redistributing the symphonic contrasts”,²⁶ and both seem to acknowledge that the exact architecture of the piece is very much secondary to the process of moving from one idea to the next. While the Fourth Symphony has as one of its central features the sense of a freely-evolving form, this one-movement Symphony completely replaces the notion of formal architecture with that of logical progression.

Hepokoski refers a lot to what he calls *telos*, and, in the context of the Fifth Symphony, “the idea of long-range discovery”,²⁷ which is in keeping with metaphors connected with goals, horizons and points of arrival as detailed above. Both this and the Fourth Symphony have one “goal”, but it is the difference between them that led me earlier to claim that the two works are entirely different in spirit. In the Fourth Symphony, the continual exploration and eventual exorcism of the tritone governs the direction of each movement, and the goal is to wring the music dry of any remnants of that interval, with the prospect of pure A minor on the horizon. In the Fifth, whose comparative

²⁴ Whittall, A: *Music since the First World War* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1997 (1988)), p.19

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.21

²⁶ Laufer, E: “Continuity and Design in the Seventh Symphony” (in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Murtomäki and Jackson, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.355

²⁷ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.60

grandeur and optimism would be evident to any casual listener, everything *grows* towards the finale, and the “long-range discovery” is of a majestic theme, the so-called “Swan Hymn” that dominates the finale, foreshadowed not only in the previous movement, as shown above in example 76, but also through timbre and intervals in the very opening bars of the symphony.

Example 77

Fifth Symphony, 1st mvt: opening horn statement

The musical score for Example 77 shows the opening horn statement of the Fifth Symphony, 1st movement. It is written in 12/8 time and B-flat major. The top staff is for horns, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and moving to mezzo-forte (*mf*). The bottom staff is for the bass line, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and marked *sempre*.

In the Seventh Symphony, the “long-range” aspect of the discovery is presented differently, with the equivalent arrival at a main theme – in this case the trombone theme – coming early on in the piece. The journey here, however, is one of the *recovery* – rather than discovery – of C major, not only the key but also its original slow and expansive grandeur, after much intervening material of a faster nature. Edward Laufer’s theory of material being redistributed is useful here, as it helps to comprehend the arrival now as a multiple event, serving not only as a goal but also as an articulation of the form of the piece. As Whittall points out, the trombone theme’s later transformation at letter L into a much more ominous, minor-key version of itself, represents “an important stage in the emotional progress of the symphony”²⁸ as well as presenting what is the kind of sonic and motivic unity that is familiar from the Fourth Symphony. This theme and its associated harmony and grandeur are confirmed as being the main point of arrival, or goal, by the fact that the closing four bars are in fact a soundbite from that very theme.

²⁸ Whittall, *Music since the First World War*, p.22

Example 78

Seventh Symphony, 7 bars after letter C: first appearance of trombone theme

upper str, ww
f dim.

Trombone solo
sonore

lower str
f dim.

Detailed description: This musical score is for the first appearance of the trombone theme in the Seventh Symphony, 7 bars after letter C. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for upper strings and woodwinds (upper str, ww), marked with a forte dynamic (*f*) and a decrescendo (*dim.*). The middle staff is for the Trombone solo, marked with a *sonore* dynamic. The bottom staff is for lower strings (lower str), marked with a forte dynamic (*f*) and a decrescendo (*dim.*). The music is in 3/2 time and features a melodic line in the trombone solo and a rhythmic accompaniment in the strings.

Seventh Symphony, letter L: second appearance of trombone theme (minor key)

L
Adagio

Str.
f dim. mf cresc. f dim.

Trb. solo
marcato

Trb. 2 & 3

Detailed description: This musical score is for the second appearance of the trombone theme in the Seventh Symphony, letter L, in a minor key. It is marked Adagio. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes three staves: the top staff for strings (Str.) with dynamics *f*, *dim.*, *mf*, *cresc.*, *f*, and *dim.*; the middle staff for Trombone solo (Trb. solo) with a *marcato* dynamic; and the bottom staff for Trombones 2 and 3 (Trb. 2 & 3). The second system includes three staves: the top staff for strings (Str.) with dynamics *mf*, *cresc.*, *f*, and *dim.*; the middle staff for Trombone solo (Trb. solo); and the bottom staff for Trombones 2 and 3 (Trb. 2 & 3). The music is in 3/2 time and features a melodic line in the strings and a rhythmic accompaniment in the trombones.

Seventh Symphony, 3 bars after letter X: third appearance of trombone theme

The musical score for the third appearance of the trombone theme in the Seventh Symphony is presented in two systems. The first system features three staves: the top staff for strings (Str.), the middle staff for trombone (Trb. solo), and the bottom staff for cello (Cb.). The strings play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The trombone plays a melodic line with dynamic markings of *f* and *mf*. The cello plays a bass line with dynamic markings of *poco f* and *mf*. The second system continues the same parts, with dynamic markings of *cresc.*, *poco*, *a*, and *poco* indicating changes in volume and tempo.

Seventh Symphony, last 4 bars, showing the familiar $\Lambda^2-\Lambda^1$ over a strong tonic chord

The musical score for the last 4 bars of the Seventh Symphony is presented in three staves. The top staff shows the melodic line with dynamic markings of *f* and *ff*. The middle staff shows the harmonic accompaniment with dynamic markings of *mf*, *cresc.*, *ff*, and *mf*. The bottom staff shows the bass line with dynamic markings of *ff*. The tempo is marked **Tempo I**.

By way of comparison to the Fourth Symphony, one can imagine these moments of sonic connection on a timeline, similar to my illustrations above in Chapter 4. This can also illustrate Laufer’s redistribution of material, and, by taking into account the fact that each of these moments is the “main theme”, provide a clear comparison with the Fourth Symphony’s 3rd movement in that the “sense of continuous growth, cumulation and completion of sections”²⁹ is ongoing rather than

²⁹ Laufer, “Continuity and Design”, p.355

a finite point in the piece. It need hardly be pointed out that the trombone assumes a narrative role in the Seventh Symphony, much as the soloists in the Fourth did.

Harmony is very much part of the narrative “event” that is the trombone theme, not only being associated with the sound of that soloist but also being integral to the journey and the “arrival”. The same is true of other works; as has already been described in detail, the colossal harmonic tension in the 4th movement of Op.63 is part of the process of throwing out the tritone and achieving stability, and the Fifth Symphony shows the same remarkable control of increasingly heightened dissonance that marks the crisis point in both finales. Rather than being a struggle to escape the rival tonal centre of E \flat major and regain A, however, the latter accumulates “extreme harmonic tension against the firmly established bedrock of the tonic key”.³⁰ It serves, in this case, to enhance the magnificence of the theme when it emerges from the dissonance in a glow of tonic consonance at the *Un pochettino stretto*, shown below.

Example 79

Fifth Symphony, 3rd mvt, showing the build-up of harmonic tension towards the end of the movement

The musical score for Example 79 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the upper strings (upper str.), the middle staff is for the trombone (Tr.), and the bottom staff is for the lower strings (lower str.). The key signature is E-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The upper strings play a series of chords, starting with a *poco f* dynamic and building to *mf* and *cresc.* The trombone plays a melodic line starting with a *f* dynamic and ending with *dim.* The lower strings play a rhythmic pattern starting with *f poco dim.* and building to *mf* and *cresc.*

³⁰ Ibid, p.19

ff f

R

cresc. ff

Un pochettino stretto

52

f cresc. molto fff

When discussing the “logic” of the Fourth Symphony earlier in this chapter in terms of its growth from one initial germ and its direction towards a goal, the concept of a tonal journey was clearly as important as the notion of motivic unity and derivation. Accounts of the harmonic events in Sibelius’s later symphonies also suggest some kind of continuous process with an aim in view, such as Whittall’s description of the Seventh Symphony’s C major in terms of a “search” and the attainment of “stability”,³¹ so it is interesting that the final work of anything approaching symphonic

³¹ Whittall, *Music since the First World War*, p.23

scale that Sibelius produced should all but abandon harmonic adventure and capitalise on tightly connected motivic content. *Tapiola* is a fantastically focussed work, which Tim Howell describes as “the ultimate stage in symphonic compression, reducing the role of contrast and resolution within the Seventh Symphony to that obsessive concentration on different aspects of one idea”.³² Indeed, it is possible to compare every seemingly new melodic idea to the opening motif and find it to be in some way derived from the same source, what Mäkelä refers to in Harold Johnson’s terms as “maximalism” – composing a lot out of nothing.³³ It is interesting that the apparently opposite style of minimalism should also bear comparison to this piece, in that there are local areas of “repetition of small, redundant musical blocks”.³⁴ No wonder this should be heard as the depiction of a frozen landscape,³⁵ despite the slightly more dynamic implications of its forest title.

We should be careful not to make too much of the repetition and lack of harmonic progress in *Tapiola*, as there is a danger that, in doing so, we should inadvertently imply that it is “static” and thus overlook the continual transformation of the initial melodic idea throughout the piece, and therefore the sense of never-ending development (or “becoming”, to return to a previous term). It would also be misleading to suggest that this “depiction of a frozen landscape” maintains the stillness one might associate with such a place; on the contrary, there are moments of drama brought about by dynamic contrast, and levels of activity that maintain momentum. One example of a place with three distinct layers comes early on in the piece, from around 10 bars before letter B, with the surface dynamism of the upper strings’ motif (taken from bar 1) held in check by the slow-moving oscillating semibreves – all highly reminiscent of the opening of the Fourth Symphony – and an unmoving pedal note, beginning as a deathly repeated note and expanding later to a more continuous, sustained sound.

³² Howell, *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*, p.192

³³ Mäkelä, p.116

³⁴ Ibid p.115

³⁵ Whittall, *Music since the First World War*, p.24

Example 80

Tapiola, letter B (bar 59), showing three layers of activity: energised motif in violas, slow-moving celli and bassoons, and static double basses.

B

The musical score for Example 80, letter B (bar 59) from Sibelius's *Tapiola*, consists of three staves. The top staff is for Viola (Vla) in treble clef, showing a melodic line with dynamics *mf*, *f*, and *dolce*. The middle staff is for Violins and Cellos (Vc, Fg) in bass clef, showing a slow-moving line with a dynamic of *p*. The bottom staff is for Double Basses (Cb) in bass clef, showing a static line with a dynamic of *p*. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8.

Tapiola is not only the “last word”³⁶ in symphonic compression, but also the culmination of a lifetime’s work in allowing the musical ideas to determine the form³⁷ – what Laufer describes as “the compositional intent being that of cumulation and transformation”,³⁸ and the complete mastery of temporal manipulation. As Whittall has pointed out, the last three symphonies are not an attempt to *retreat* from the austerity and concentration of the Fourth, but “to pursue the implications” of its ingenious control of form and unification of content.³⁹ It makes absolute sense that the subsequent works should exhibit connections between movements until the concept of such segmentation becomes irrelevant, as much as it seems inevitable that traditional architecture should be abolished in favour of the organic growth of ideas that feed into the main “stream” of the music, or shape its “riverbed”. Thus the statements of the main theme in the Seventh Symphony come not at the beginning of an exposition nor at the end of a development, but as a triple event, acting both as the culmination of what has gone before and as a milepost in the journey of the piece. Being able to break free from the constraints of formal templates meant that Sibelius could allow a more intuitive course to unfold – inherently logical – at the same time as binding a whole symphony tightly by its recurrent and unifying moments.

³⁶ Howell, *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques*, p.266

³⁷ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony no.5*, p.21

³⁸ Laufer, “Continuity and Design”, p.358

³⁹ Whittall, *Music since the First World War*, p.18

Conclusion. “A decisive step into the unknown”¹

“If one looks at Sibelius’s creative development, one can see that he was at a watershed.”² My own starting point for this thesis was a fascination with the apparently anomalous style of the Fourth Symphony in the context of Sibelius’s other orchestral works. I would switch the word “anomalous” now for “groundbreaking”, having heard its stylistic features signposted in earlier pieces and continued in those composed in subsequent years, but I would not remove the special significance that this symphony has in Sibelius’s output. It represents a watershed in his style and a landmark in his personal life, a synthesis of the old and the new in purely musical terms as well as being what he himself named his psychological symphony and a “spiritualised” one.³ It is the point from which he did not look back, the point at which his own “langue”⁴ is exhibited in its maturity.

Finnishness and psychology

The question of this piece’s being abstract has provided fertile grounds for discussion. On the one hand, to comply with the parameters of Busoni’s *junge Klassizität*, the music has to be “nothing more” than just music, and cannot intend to convey image or plot. On the other hand, this is a composer who described himself as a painter and whose earliest compositions were inspired by the *Kalevala* and fuelled by Finnish national pride; it is very hard to separate the style of one piece, however abstract it might purport to be, from predecessors laden with textual associations. In fact, this has been a source of direct comparison when accounting for the evocative and atmospheric “musical backdrop” in some parts of the Fourth

¹ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.199

² *Ibid*, p.199

³ *Ibid*, p.197

⁴ See the Introduction above, with reference to Ranta’s terms “langue” and “parole”.

Symphony, the most obvious being the solo cellists at the beginning of this and *Pohjola's Daughter*.

Mention has been made of Marion Guck's comment on our tendency to analyse music in terms of "human thought and emotion",⁵ and I find this impossible and perhaps inadvisable to avoid. I agree with Tarasti when he says that "gestures in music are always to some extent corporeal";⁶ given that music is created by a human, there must be a personal imprint left. Whether literary, pictorial or personal, there may be inspiration or a catalyst for an artwork that is not necessarily its eventual *subject*, but is nonetheless something which an analyst should acknowledge. While I have taken care in Chapter 2 to steer clear of any interpretation based on either an autobiographical or a psychoanalytical programme, I have treated this expression of the inner self as being an important consideration in understanding the music. In terms of the Fourth Symphony's having a place in an exciting period in history, the psychological aspect is highly relevant. Antokoletz goes so far as to connect this side of the piece to its inherent modernity, with "the new musical language contributing to the more intense personal mood of the work",⁷ and Tawaststjerna likewise writes of it as "one of the most remarkable musical documents of the Freudian era",⁸ having earlier quoted Sibelius himself as noting in his diary: "A symphony is not just a composition in the ordinary sense of the word; it is more of an inner confession at a given stage of one's life".⁹

⁵ Guck, p.229

⁶ Tarasti, p.12

⁷ Antokoletz, *A History of Twentieth-Century Music*, p.125

⁸ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius. Vol. II*, p.175

⁹ *Ibid*, p.159

Time and narrativity

All of this is important if we remember that the purpose of musical analysis, in the words of Nicholas Cook, is “to tell us something about the way we experience music”.¹⁰ Another crucial acknowledgement is of music’s temporal nature, and the fact that we experience it as a sequence of events in time, something that has dynamism and motion. Therefore, I have found the narrative interpretation to be the most useful of all, as it makes sense of the shifting focus from background to foreground, the apparent discontinuity when considered in the larger context, the improvisatory nature of some themes, and the overwhelming sense of logic and inevitability as the music progresses. It can also be individual, so that, for example, the solo cello in bar 7 does not have to convey a specific mood, heard and felt by every listener; it can be enough that the cello has an “unsung voice”. It also allows us to connect the listening experience to the compositional process, which Virtanen has described as being “seemingly unforeseeable or improvisatory”, with Sibelius’s sketches showing that a larger work was not always planned when he began it, but took shape as he worked.¹¹

Narrativity can offer one explanation for how the music’s progress in time can appear logical despite sudden changes of direction, improvisatory expansion on half-finished ideas, and the wide spacing of connections that become apparent only as things pan out. Analogies with the human voice, or human thoughts, far from contradicting an abstract interpretation, seem essential to it. To this we can add the nature metaphors explored in Chapter 5: in their representation of processes such as forming a river-like passage from smaller feeders or expanding ideas from one central droplet, they provide analogies for musical form that, whilst not intended to be programmatic, simultaneously confer some kind of “intention” on the piece in question, whether it be a sense of searching or a distant goal

¹⁰ Cook, *Musical Analysis*, p.219

¹¹ Virtanen, “From Heaven's Floor”, p.69

or point on the horizon. It is interesting that many people writing about the motifs tend to personify them in some way, especially when they are credited with determining the form of the music. In returning to the natural surroundings of the composer, we also return to the concept of inherent Finnishness, and Mitchell's concept of landscape as being something more than just what we see, but what we experience of both physical surroundings and cultural heritage through all of our senses.¹²

Reception and modernity

As a composer who did not wish to emulate his modernist contemporaries, Sibelius nonetheless did subscribe to an artistic ideal of the times, Busoni's *junge Klassizität*. It is worth noting again at this point the importance of the distinction between an artwork inspired or suggested by something but not attempting to *depict* that thing, and, by extension, between an analysis or interpretation which rests on analogy but does not impose an extra-musical programme. The Fourth Symphony is a masterpiece of Young Classicism. Its *modernity* is never really in question, thanks to its harmonic language, but it is more subtle than many contemporary expressionist works and retains a refined orchestral medium where many composers sought to push the boundaries of timbre.

The reception of the Fourth Symphony continues to be a source of fascination to me; on the one hand, the Third Symphony was not modern enough, and on the other, the Fourth was incomprehensibly new. Perhaps different audiences were lukewarm for different reasons: maybe disappointed, if they were seeking affirmation of Finnish national pride; maybe anticipating something grander, if they were accustomed to such modernist works as *Elektra* and *Petruschka*; maybe already subconsciously prejudiced against this Nordic

¹² Mitchell, W (ed): *Landscape and Power* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2002 (2nd edition)) p.14

curiosity of a composer; maybe simply, as I have suggested above, discomforted by the exposure in the sparse textures, dislocated soloists, and uncomfortable harmonic territory. What is a testament to its remarkable quality, however, is that it left a legacy for Sibelius's future works, which, far from rejecting its severity and austerity, capitalise on the very concentration and unity that lent it the "profound logic" of a symphonic masterpiece.

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