

**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
DANZMAYR CONDUCTS SIBELIUS
A Jacobs Masterworks Concert
David Danzmayr, conductor**

April 27 and 28, 2019

JEAN SIBELIUS

Finlandia, Op. 26

JOHN WILLIAMS

Concerto for Horn and Orchestra

Angelus

Battle of the Trees

Pastorale

The Hunt

Nocturne

Benjamin Jaber, horn

INTERMISSION

JEAN SIBELIUS

Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39

Andante, ma non troppo; Allegro energico

Andante (ma non troppo lento)

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale (Quasi una Fantasia)

Finlandia, Op. 26

JEAN SIBELIUS

Born December 8, 1865, Tavastehus, Finland

Died September 20, 1957, Järvenpää, Finland

Finlandia has become a virtual symbol of Finland and its national aspirations, but this music achieved that status almost by accident. Sibelius originally composed it in 1899 for what seems like an innocuous occasion – a celebration to help raise money for newspaper pension funds – but this fiery music quickly caught the heart of the Finnish people and became a symbol of their national pride.

Finland had been under Russian control throughout the nineteenth century, and the movement for Finnish independence had always been strong. When Czar Nicholas II cracked down in 1899 and began an intense Russification campaign, the country nearly exploded with opposition, and it was at that precise moment that Sibelius wrote this music, which was first titled *Finland Awake!* So obvious was that meaning that Russian authorities banned its performance, and Sibelius retitled the piece *Finlandia* when he revised it the following year. The Finns would finally gain their independence from Russia after World War I, but *Finlandia* has remained a sort of unofficial national hymn ever since.

Yet this music tells no story, nor does it incorporate any Finnish folk material. Many assumed that music that sounds so “Finnish” must be based on native tunes, but Sibelius was adamant that all of it was original: “There is a mistaken impression among the press abroad that my themes are often folk melodies. So far, I have never used a theme that was not of my own invention. The thematic material of *Finlandia* ...is entirely my own.”

Finlandia is extremely dramatic music, well-suited to the striving and heroic mood of the times. Its ominous introduction opens with snarling two-note figures in the brass, and they are answered by quiet chorale-like material from woodwinds and strings. At the *Allegro moderato* the music rips ahead on stuttering brass figures and drives to a climax. Sibelius relaxes tensions with a poised hymn for woodwind choir that is repeated by the strings. (Surely this was the spot most observers identified as “authentic” Finnish material.) The music takes on some of its earlier power, the stuttering brass attacks return, and Sibelius drives matters to a knock-out close.

Small wonder that music so dramatic – and composed at so important a moment in Finnish history – should have come to symbolize that nation’s pride and desire for independence.

Concerto for Horn and Orchestra

JOHN WILLIAMS

Born February 8, 1932, Long Island, NY

John Williams is famous around the world for his scores for *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the Indiana Jones films and *Schindler's List*, among many others. And rightly so – he has won five Oscars® and sixteen Grammys® for his film scores. Williams has also composed a large amount of concert music: works for solo instruments, chamber music and a distinguished series of concertos that includes solo works for violin, cello, trumpet, flute, clarinet, bassoon and tuba.

Williams composed his Concerto for Horn and Orchestra specifically for Dale Clevenger, who was principal horn of the Chicago Symphony from 1966 to 2013. Clevenger gave the first performance of the Horn Concerto on November 29, 2003, with the composer conducting the Chicago Symphony. In the published score, Williams provided an introduction to this music:

When I received an invitation to compose a horn concerto for Dale Clevenger, the legendary principal horn of the Chicago Symphony, I was delighted. The commission, granted by the Edward F. Schmidt Family of Chicago, also offered the opportunity to conduct the premiere performance with Mr. Clevenger and the Chicago Symphony in November of 2003.

The project has been a labor of love for me as I have had a life-long infatuation with the French horn. I think this is because of the horn's very special capacity to stir memories of antiquity in the collective psyche. It is indeed an instrument which seems to invite us to "dream backward to the ancient time."

With these thoughts in mind I've set the piece in five separate movements, each casting the horn in one of the many, diverse and dramatic roles of which it is uniquely capable.

I will continue to be indebted to Dale Clevenger for his inspiration, not only to me, but to lovers and students of the French horn the world over.

On another occasion, Williams discussed the inspiration for each of the concerto's five movements:

In the first movement or section of my concerto, I begin with the distant pealing

of the Angelus Bell, while the horn joins in, sending calls and signals to complete the picture. This is followed by *The Battle of the Trees*, suggested by the famous Celtic poem of that name, which describes groves of trees transforming themselves into warriors and led in battle by the brave oak. The horn enters the fray, as the percussion section creates sounds of trunks, branches and twigs all colliding in the struggle.

Nostalgia has been described as “laundered memory” but our modern horn and oboe possess the power to produce it truly. They conjoin to “dream backward” of a pristine glen in the third movement, *Pastorale*.

In *The Hunt*, the horn plays its traditional role, getting the blood up, exhilarating the spirit and animating the chase.

Finally in *Nocturne*, the day’s end grants repose and a simple song is offered.

Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39 JEAN SIBELIUS

Writing a first symphony has proven a welcome challenge to some composers, and they have rushed to meet it: Mozart wrote his first at 8, Mendelssohn at 15, Schubert at 16, Shostakovich at 19. Others, all too aware of the intimidating achievement of earlier masters, have put off writing their first until they felt ready to face so daunting a prospect: Brahms did not complete his first until he was 43, Elgar waited until age 51, and Franck finished his first (and only symphony) at 66. Sibelius belonged to the latter camp. As a young man he had established himself as Finland’s leading composer with such symphonic works as *Kullervo*, *En Saga* and the *Lemminkäinen Legends*, and in recognition of these achievements the Finnish government awarded him a state pension at age 27. Yet Sibelius put off writing his First Symphony for some years: he began work in the spring on 1898 and completed the score early in 1899, when he was 34. The composer himself led the Helsinki Philharmonic in the first performance – a very successful one – at Helsingfors on April 26, 1899, and that orchestra included the symphony on its programs the following year at the Paris World Exposition, where it was again a success.

Those who identify Sibelius with the lean, sometimes austere, sound of his later symphonies will find his First Symphony a surprise. It is built on an unusually rich orchestral sonority – Sibelius assigns a prominent part to the harp (an instrument he rarely used), and he sometimes paints in primary colors here, with soaring melodies for unison string sections and

blazing eruptions for brass. To be sure, there are hints of the Sibelius to come in the imaginative evolution of brief motives, unusual key relations, and the sound of lonely woodwinds, but in general this is music that looks back to the grand manner of the late-nineteenth-century symphony. Many have heard echoes of other composers in Sibelius' First Symphony, and these are precisely the influences one might expect on a young composer in 1899: Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Wagner and Bruckner. Yet the Symphony No. 1 in E minor is unmistakably the work of Sibelius: in the sound-world it creates, in its techniques, and in its emotional atmosphere.

That atmosphere is evident from the first instant of this symphony. Sibelius opens with a long introduction scored for only two instruments: above a quiet timpani roll, the solo clarinet sings a long, almost bleak song of uncertain tonality and rhythmic pulse. The music leaps ahead at the *Allegro energico* on the bright sound of rustling violins and the slashing main idea, with its characteristic triplet at the end. This first theme is complex (there are several subordinate ideas here, some of them quite dramatic) before the "second" subject arrives in a pair of flutes over murmuring strings; the grace notes that encrust the flute duet will figure prominently throughout this group. The development is powerful, the conclusion striking: a climactic explosion in the brass drives to an enigmatic close on two quiet pizzicato strokes.

The *Andante* seems to inhabit a different world altogether, as muted strings sing the subdued opening melody. This ternary-form movement is scored with great delicacy, which makes the violent climax – at very high speed – all the more surprising in this "slow" movement. This energy subsides suddenly, and the movement concludes on a restatement of the violins' opening idea.

Over strummed pizzicato chords, solo timpani smashes out the main idea (more rhythm than theme) of the *Scherzo*, which is quickly taken up by other sections. Though this movement bristles with a spiky energy (the opening figure is treated as a fugato at one point), the trio section brings a mellow episode for horn quartet before Sibelius makes a precipitous return to the scherzo.

The structure of the *Finale* is somewhat free, and Sibelius takes care to specify that it is *Quasi una Fantasia*. It opens with a surging string recitative derived from the solo clarinet tune from the symphony's very beginning, and then the movement proceeds along the alternation of two quite different ideas: a brief, epigrammatic idea almost spit out by the woodwinds and what can only be called a Big Tune for strings. As these ideas alternate, the string tune takes on a

glowing fervor, and at the climax of the movement Sibelius lets it soar in all its glory. The unsettling ending arrives quickly: Sibelius comes out of that climactic statement of the tune with fierce gestures for full orchestra, and suddenly the music falls away to conclude on the same two pizzicato strokes that closed the opening movement.

-Program notes by Eric Bromberger

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

by Dr. Melvin G. Goldzband, San Diego Symphony Archivist

The Horn Concerto by John Williams is being performed for the first time by the San Diego Symphony, with its principal horn player, Benjamin Jaber, as soloist. *Finlandia*, Sibelius' great anthem to his native land, was first played at these concerts when Margaret Harris conducted it with the San Diego Symphony in the summer of 1972. It has been done here five times, most recently when Murry Sidlin led a performance during the 1988-89 season. Michael Zearott conducted the orchestra when the San Diego Symphony played Sibelius' First Symphony for its initial outing here, during the season 1972-73, but before that, the San Diego Philharmonic, a part-time body of San Diego Symphony and other musicians hoping to establish a winter season, played the piece under the direction of Leslie Hodge. That group disbanded after three years. Jahja Ling has led the Sibelius First Symphony with the orchestra twice, in his 2004-05 inaugural season, and ten years later in the 2014-15 season. Those were the fifth and sixth performances of the work at these concerts.