

Sibelius

Lemminkäinen Suite • Luonnotar • The Bard

Scottish National Orchestra
Sir Alexander Gibson

collect

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Lemminkäinen Suite, Op. 22

Four Legends

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| | 44:51 |
| 1 Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari | 15:35 |
| 2 The Swan of Tuonela
Susan Tyte cor anglais
Adrian Shepherd cello | 8:18 |
| 3 Lemminkäinen in Tuonela | 14:38 |
| 4 Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey | 6:02 |

- | | |
|---|------|
| 5 Luonnotar, Op. 70
Tone Poem
Phyllis Bryn-Julson soprano | 9:12 |
|---|------|

- | | |
|---|------|
| 6 The Bard, Op. 64
Tone Poem | 7:47 |
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TT 62:04

Scottish National Orchestra

Edwin Paling leader

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Sibelius: Lemminkäinen Suite/Luonnotar/The Bard

Sibelius grew up into a Finland becoming increasingly aware of its separate national identity, wanting to free itself from both the cultural influence of Sweden on one side and political control by Tsarist Russia on the other. Pride in its native heritage was given a literary focus by an epic poem in Finnish, the *Kalevala*, not a work of antiquity but a compilation by Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884) of narrative poems from an oral tradition of myths and legends. Its definitive edition was published in 1849; the fifty 'Runos' or chapters were to become a fruitful stimulus to musical imagination in the young Sibelius.

Among the several works he derived from it are the four 'Legends', first performed at Helsinki on 13 April 1896 and collectively known as the **Lemminkäinen Suite, Op. 22**. Lemminkäinen is a less-than-respectable heroic adventurer somewhat akin to Wagner's Siegfried, and the first of these legends, 'Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari', concerns his escape, from vengeful pursuit for killing a king, to an island where he spends three summers consoling the women whose menfolk are busy fighting elsewhere. 'Saari' is both place name and a Finnish word for 'island', and the amorous exploits relate to the

latter. They are musically evoked amid dance-like passages, a storm, and a sorrowful final parting, in a large-scale tone poem in sonata form.

'The Swan of Tuonela' was originally the prelude to an opera that Sibelius never finished, *The Building of the Boat*. It is a haunting tone-picture, long popular on its own, suggesting the dark waters of Tuonela, the land of death, on divided strings while a solo cor anglais represents the melancholy song of the swan gliding smoothly over the surface. It is a creature Lemminkäinen has been ordered to kill as one of the tasks fitting him to marry 'Pohjola's daughter' (the subject of a later work by the composer). This and the last legend were revised and published in 1900. The other two, after further revision, did not appear in print until 1954. That event brought wider hearing for 'Lemminkäinen in Tuonela' in which, instead of killing the swan, the hero is himself killed and cut in pieces, which are raked from the waters by his loving mother and magically sewn back together to bring him to life again. The listener's imagination can find some diversion in relating this splendidly macabre subject to music of shuddering strings, sinister harmonic tension

in minor keys, threatening brass, a woodwind lament, lyrically expressive first violins and cellos, more lamentation and solemn brass, and a final cello solo to signify – what? Lemminkäinen's resurrection?

In the last legend, 'Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey', the hero and his comrade Tiera have failed in their attack on Pohjola and, on horses which Lemminkäinen has summoned by magic, ride frantically for home, sighting familiar lands and lakes on the way. Here is an early example of Sibelius's building small motifs like pieces of mosaic into symphonic developments of increasing tension (a technique characteristic of his symphonies, in particular). The homeward journey begins in C minor and, accelerating furiously, changes tonality as if to suggest the changing scenes on the way; it reaches E flat major for the arrival, the same key as that in which the first legend began.

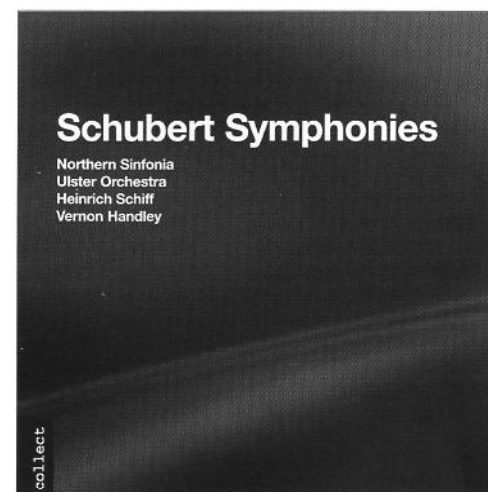
Sibelius went to the very beginning of the *Kalevala* for *Luonnotar*, Op. 70, adding to the orchestra a dramatic soprano to narrate how the world, according to the poem, was created. 'There was a Maiden, daughter of the heavens, the beautiful Luonnotar', it tells. Heavy with a child she cannot deliver, she cries to Ukko, the God of All, who amid

swirling storms sends a bird which lays its egg in her lap. This generates a great fire in her body, in shimmering anticipation; as the egg shatters, its upper shell forms the arch of the sky, the yolk the sun's light, the white the moon, and the mottled remainder the stars. The demanding solo writing is both epic and expressive, complementing the subtle instrumental colours. Although composed perhaps as early as 1910, *Luonnotar* was first performed at the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival in 1913.

Also in 1913 Sibelius composed *The Bard*, Op. 64. He acknowledged no literary source for this work but it is thought likely to relate to a poem of that name by Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804–1877) about the life and death of a wandering minstrel. A solo harp is given a prominent obbligato role in a study in musical impressionism of otherwise austere character and fragmentary subject matter, elegiac in mood and almost chamber-like in texture. The key of E flat minor colours a depth of restrained feeling that only gradually acquires melodic substance, reaches a single radiant climax in the major and reverts quickly to the subdued and sombre tones of the beginning.

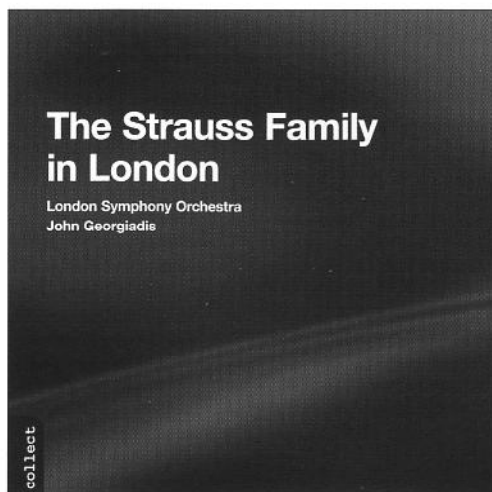
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