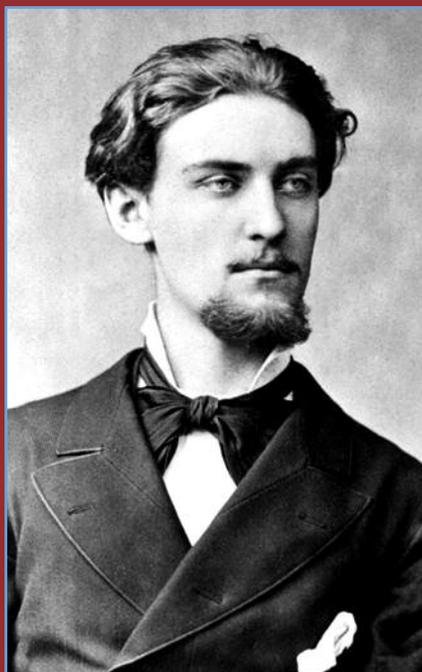




Kajanus conducts Sibelius • 2

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ADD



Jean
SIBELIUS

Symphony No. 2

**Belshazzar's Feast
Karelia Suite**

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
London Symphony Orchestra

Robert Kajanus

(1930 and 1932 studio recordings)

Kajanus conducts Sibelius • Volume 2 Symphony No. 2 • Karelia Suite (excerpts) • Belshazzar's Feast (Suite)

Robert Kajanus, the Finnish conductor and composer of Swedish descent, was born in Helsinki on 2nd December 1856 and died there on 6th July 1933. Although posterity recalls him first and foremost as a conductor, he was also a prolific composer. His catalogue embraces over two hundred works often inspired by the folklore and traditional melodies of his homeland. Kajanus was well-travelled in his student days, not least to Paris and Leipzig, his mentors including the conductor Hans Richter (who gave the premières of major works by Brahms, Bruckner, Elgar and Wagner) and the composer Johan Svendsen. Kajanus's postgraduate work was undertaken in Dresden before he returned to Helsinki to form the Philharmonic Society (today the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra). Kajanus's fifty-year tenure created an ensemble of a very high standard. In 1888 Kajanus conducted the Finnish première of Beethoven's *Choral Symphony*. Kajanus also played an important part in his country's music education. For nearly thirty years he was Director of Music at the University of Helsinki. His children, all carrying the family name, include two harpists and a violinist, all now deceased.

Robert Kajanus and Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) were close friends. Although Kajanus was an established composer before his younger compatriot started to climb this particular ladder of creativity, it is Sibelius who is now recognised as one of the supreme compositional creators. Nevertheless Kajanus was an exemplar as part of Sibelius's development: Kajanus wrote a symphonic poem called *Aino* and Sibelius responded with one of his own, the ambitious *Kullervo*. Kajanus commissioned Sibelius to compose what would turn out to be the orchestral *En Saga*, and so Sibelius reciprocated with a dedication to his benefactor. Kajanus's reputation as a conductor endures given his association as a trusted interpreter of Sibelius's music and through the recordings he made of it. Although they are now eighty years old they remain essential listening for aficionados of the composer owing to these versions carrying Sibelius's imprimatur.

Kajanus made the first recordings of Sibelius's *First*,

Second, *Third* and *Fifth Symphonies*, all set down in London in the early-1930s. The plan was that Kajanus would document all seven symphonies as well as numerous Sibelius orchestral pieces, but his death in 1933 prevented this. In 1930 the Finnish government and the Columbia record label joined in partnership in a wish to record Sibelius's first two symphonies, the works of a then-living and highly admired composer. (Sibelius's reputation somewhat diminished in the years following his death.) Kajanus was the conductor of choice, not least by the composer himself.

Although Sibelius's *Second Symphony*, probably his most popular work in this genre, is often associated with Finland's then struggle with independence away from the domination of Russia, and was thought so from the very first performance – the grandiose and triumphant close to the work no doubt suggesting Sibelius's music as nationalistic – its composition was in fact started in the winter of 1900 in Rapallo. Returning from Italy the composer completed the symphony in Finland in 1902. He conducted the first performance that year in Helsinki and then subjected the score to some alteration. The first performance of the revision was given in 1903 in Stockholm with Armas Järnefelt conducting.

For all that the *Second Symphony* is direct in its appeal and full of volatility, it is strictly organised and was thought severe and logical by its admiring creator. The music though has a passion, drama and beauty that rarely fail to impress and stir. In this, the work's first recording, made for Columbia, Robert Kajanus opens the work with a tempo much faster than we have become accustomed to (although in our own time Neeme Järvi opted for something approaching Kajanus's speed). Under the Finnish conductor's baton this first movement can seem unduly hasty, exciting though, with a nervous intensity that suggests it as a prelude to what is to come. In fact, the movement that follows – nominally the 'slow' one – also flows with emotion. There are moments of contrasting reverie, deeply felt and suggestive here, but there is always a sense of something waiting to burst through, which it does, numerous thrilling uprisings.

If Sibelius himself tended to discourse on the symphony's structure and motivic connections, there can be no doubt of the music's outgoingness and fervour, something caught by Kajanus and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with seeming spontaneity and sympathy. The rapacious *Scherzo* may not be the most wind-swept ever recorded, but Kajanus's handling of the oboe-led *Trio* is indicative of his overall approach to the work in that it is un sentimental and tempo-related to its surrounds. The finale, which emerges from the depths, is also treated with a welcome lack of pomposity but with no lack of eloquence on the journey to the unshakeable belief of the coda; whether achieved through musical inevitability, fervent patriotism, or both. Kajanus's broadening of the final bars might just tip the balance in favour of patriotism.

Of the other music on this release, we hear some of the music that Sibelius composed for the play of *Belshazzar's Feast* by his fellow-Finn Hjalmar Procopé (1868-1927) staged in 1906 and 1907 with Sibelius conducting for all performances. From the original ten numbers, some with singers, Sibelius made a four-movement *Suite* for small orchestra – strings with flute and pairs of clarinets and horns – and with some suitably exotic percussion, which is heard immediately in the opening *Oriental Procession*. Sibelius's vignettes for *Belshazzar's*

Feast also remind us that, like all great composers, even when not firing on all cylinders they remain inimitable. The final, gentle *Khadra's Dance* exudes a certain hypnotism, but the middle movements are particularly exquisite – be it the small band of strings required for *Solitude* with solos for viola and cello embedded into the starlit textures, and the twinkling aura of *Night Music* that features a lovely flute solo. The *Suite* was first heard in 1907 in a Helsinki Philharmonic concert which Sibelius conducted and which included the world première of his *Third Symphony*. Kajanus and the London players bring much sensitivity to this often enticing music.

In 1893 Sibelius wrote music for a patriotic historical pageant presented in Viipuri, Karelia (south-east Finland) by students of the University of Helsinki. From the incidental music Sibelius published an *Overture* as *Opus 10* and a three-movement *Suite* as the subsequent opus number. From the latter, Kajanus recorded the outer movements (leaving out the central *Ballade*). First is a festive *Intermezzo* (for many years the signature-tune of ITV's current affairs programme, *This Week*) and now-coming-second is a jaunty *Alla marcia* – quality light music.

Colin Anderson

Producer's Note

In 1930, the Finnish government arranged for the English Columbia label to make recordings of the first two symphonies of Jean Sibelius, contributing fifty thousand marks toward the project. The goal was to broaden interest in Finnish music throughout the world; and while Sibelius was already well known due to shorter works such as *Finlandia*, *The Swan of Tuonela* and *Valse triste*, his symphonies had never previously been recorded. Sibelius was invited to select a native-born interpreter to conduct the works, and had no hesitation in recommending composer/conductor Robert Kajanus (1856-1933). "Very many are the men who have conducted these symphonies during the last thirty years," Sibelius wrote, "but there are none who have gone deeper and given them more feeling and beauty than Robert Kajanus." The orchestra of London's Royal Philharmonic Society (the pre-Beecham "old RPO") was engaged to record the first two symphonies and two movements from the *Karelia Suite* as fillers.

Two years later, after the merger of Columbia and HMV into EMI, the latter label took up the cause with a series of "Sibelius Society" albums, the first of which featured Kajanus conducting the London Symphony Orchestra in the *Fifth Symphony*, *Pohjola's Daughter* and *Tapiola*. The *Third Symphony* and incidental music for *Belshazzar's Feast*

were also recorded during those sessions; but Kajanus's death the following year put an end to his participation in the series.

The present is the second in a series of three volumes which will contain the complete Sibelius recordings of Robert Kajanus. For the transfers, I had the luxury of drawing upon four sets of the *Second Symphony*. This and the *Karelia Suite* were taken from a combination of laminated Australian and American Columbia "Viva-Tonal" pressings. *Belshazzar's Feast* came from the best portions of two American Victor "Gold" label pressings which, like the ones used for the remaining items, were their quietest form of issue.

Mark Obert-Thorn

KAJANUS conducts SIBELIUS • 2

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957):			
Belshazzar's Feast – Concert Suite from incidental music, Op. 51		14:40	
1	Oriental Procession	2:40	
2	Solitude	3:46	
3	Night Music	4:38	
4	Khadra's Dance	3:36	
Recorded in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, 24th and 29th June 1932 • Matrix nos.: 2B 2943-1, 2944-2, 2945-1B and 2960-1			
First issued on HMV DB 3937 and 3938			
Karelia Suite, Op. 11		7:52	
5	No. 1 Intermezzo	3:43	
6	No. 3 Alla marcia	4:09	
Recorded in the Central Hall, Westminster, 28th May 1930 • Matrix nos.: WYX 19-1 and 20-1			
First issued on Columbia LX 54 and 69			
Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 43		39:20	
7	I. Allegretto	8:25	
8	II. Tempo andante, ma rubato	12:59	
9	III. Vivacissimo	5:26	
10	IV. Finale: Allegro moderato	12:30	
Recorded in the Central Hall, Westminster, 27th-28th May 1930 • Matrix nos.: WYX 10-2, 11-2, 12-2, 13-1, 14-1, 15-2, 16-1, 17-1 and 18-1			
First issued on Columbia LX 50 through 54			

London Symphony Orchestra (tracks 1-4) • Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (tracks 5-10)
Robert Kajanus

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

8.111394

Kajanus conducts Sibelius • 2

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Symphony No. 2 Belshazzar's Feast • Karelia Suite

Playing
Time
61:52

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957):

Belshazzar's Feast – Concert Suite from incidental music, Op. 51 14:40

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London Symphony Orchestra (tracks 1-4)

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (tracks 5-10)

Robert Kajanus

Offered a grant in 1930 to broaden international interest in Finnish music through recordings made in London, Jean Sibelius did not hesitate in his choice of a conductor, writing that "there are none who have gone deeper and given [my symphonies] more feeling and beauty than Robert Kajanus". These thrilling recordings remain a critical reference today, with Kajanus seen as "Sibelius's most eloquent and perceptive champion... listening to the *Second Symphony* one senses the extraordinary feeling Kajanus had for the organic nature of Sibelius's symphonic thought" (*The Gramophone*). Including the exotic and enticing *Belshazzar's Feast* and patriotic *Karelia* suites, this is the second of three volumes containing Robert Kajanus's complete Sibelius recordings.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover image: Robert Kajanus, ca. 1897 (Private Collection)

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