

## MUSIC OF SIBELIUS IN AMERICA

Works of the Great Finn Have Obtained Firm Standing in This Country—Altschuler and Damrosch His Prophets—Contrast Between His Earlier and Later Compositions—His Own Story of His Career—A True Poet of Nature

By IVAN NARODNY

FROM the ranks of the more prominent living composers whose works have gained an entrée in New York concert halls, Jean Sibelius occupies almost the foremost place, though he is not by any means a creator of sweet and popular melodies, but rather of music that sounds somewhat sombre and heavy. Modest Altschuler and Walter Damrosch, who have introduced him to this country, should feel well repaid for their efforts, for not only the music critics, but all the intelligent concert habitués have paid particular attention to the novelties of this unique northern composer. It seems rather strange in an age when the public taste is turned to ragtime tunes, dance themes, etc., that the works of such an individualist as Sibelius should attract such wide attention.

New York audiences are familiar with a number of Sibelius's best orchestral works, but his Second Symphony in D Major, which was performed Friday afternoon, January 29, by the New York Symphony Orchestra at Aeolian Hall, gave a new impression of the composer's peculiar genius. One could discern in this piece a very different composer from the Sibelius of the present, especially of the Fourth Symphony, which has aroused so many controversies here and abroad.

There is a marked difference between Sibelius thirteen years ago and Sibelius now. Then the young composer was typically Finnish, a patriotic poet of his nation; to-day he is the broad cosmopolitan, the world composer. One may call him "impressionistic" or "futuristic," but he remains a true poet of his time. The greatest conductors and musicians have compared him with Wagner and Beethoven, Tchaikowsky and Verdi in his creative potentiality.

The Second Symphony, which I had never heard before, proved exceedingly melodious, the least heavy of his larger orchestral works, and contained a distinct national element in its basis of familiar Finnish folk themes. The picture that Sibelius paints in this symphony is a true phonetic landscape of Finland and reminds me vividly of the paintings of Münsterhjelm, the celebrated Finnish landscape painter of the last century, whose masterpieces in the Museum of Abo still haunt me with their semi-arctic glamour. Just as much *stimmung* as there was in the paintings of Münsterhjelm, there is in the Second Symphony of Sibelius.

### Lover of Nature

"It is true," Sibelius writes to me, "I am a dreamer and poet of nature. I love the mysterious sounds of the fields and forests, water and mountains."

Since there have been published so many contradictory stories about Sibelius and his life, I asked him to give me the true facts of it and the other day I received his reply. He writes:

"My father was a surgeon of the rank of major in the Finnish army and died when I was very young. I was educated by my grandmother, who insisted upon my studying particularly Greek and Latin. I was graduated from the University of Helsingfors and studied law, but I did not care to be a lawyer or judge. I determined to become a musician and began to take lessons in the violin. I had already studied music systematically from my fourteenth year and even composed simple pieces of chamber music. The fact is, I had made attempts at composition from my very childhood on.

"My first composition to be performed was Variations for String Quartet, which was played in Helsingfors in 1887. It attracted considerable attention, which was a great encouragement for a beginner. In 1889 I left Finland to study in Berlin. Prof. Albert Recker instructed me there in composition and it was there that I started my bigger orchestral works. In 1891 I went to Vienna and



Jean Sibelius—Photographed Especially for "Musical America"

continued my studies with Karl Goldmark. I also studied a while with Albert Fuchs. These are in brief the principal facts of my musical career.

"It pleases me greatly to be called an artist of nature, for nature has been truly the book of books for me. The voices of nature are the voices of God, and if an artist can give a mere echo of them in his creations, he is fully rewarded for all his efforts."

### His Latest Works

Sibelius's latest works are more fascinating than those that have been performed here. Nothing of his has been heard in America after his Fourth Symphony, though the fact is that he has written eight huge works since that. The very latest of his creations are his "Luonnotar," op. 70, a symphonic poem for the soprano and orchestra from "Kalevala," "Scaramouche," op. 71, a pantomime in two acts. They have not been produced yet.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Sibelius is a lover of solitude and hard work, and for that reason spends most of his time at Jaerventie, a small Summer resort near Helsingfors. His long com-

munings with nature and dread of public lionizing have made him a real hermit of the Arctic. He is considering making a trip to this country but his fear of society and the long journey may prevent it.

There is no doubt that this gifted composer of the north has been greatly inspired by his contemplation of nature but probably he has received the greatest impetus of all in the appreciative encouragement of his countrymen, for in no country is a composer, singer or other musician held in such high esteem by the masses as in Finland. Music is the religion of the Finnish people, therefore Sibelius is their high-priest.

The example of Sibelius has been far-reaching in and outside Finland upon the younger composers. Though there is much of Mongolian weirdness in his melodic form, yet he is not too exotic, too Oriental. He confesses to being a descendant of the Teutons and the Tartars.

### Interpreting His Songs

Sibelius's songs have been sung frequently during the present season in New York, not only by Finnish singers, but also by Americans. Like his orchestral creations they require a very exact interpretation in order to make the true impression upon an audience. Sibelius is very difficult in his piano accompaniments, mathematically exact in his

rhythm and harmonies. His "Tulen syntö" ("Origin of Fire") is a magnificent ballad for orchestra, chorus and solo. It has a broad melodic structure and a sombre grandeur especially when the chorus and the orchestra melt into one majestic mass of sound. Most of his songs for solo voice require a too wide range or they are too monotonous to be effective with a large audience.

Taneli Hurri, a noted Finnish baritone, who made a tour of this country, did not include in his repertoire a single song by Sibelius, simply because he did not find them appealing enough to the Finns, who were his hearers. "Sibelius is too heavy even in Finland in his songs," explained Mr. Hurri. Mme. Mieler-Narodny has been so far the only successful interpreter of Sibelius in the vocal field, and the "Spring Song" and "But My Bird," etc., are the gems of her Finnish repertoire. The songs of Sibelius as well as of all other Finnish composers, do not require large volume of voice but very delicate shadings and nuances of tone.

The secret of the success of Sibelius in this country is the fact that he is a man with an individual message who stands close to the ideal of a high-minded American. He is distinctly modern and has plenty of power, tenderness and breadth, besides a touch of sentimentality, as was here and there so distinctly revealed in his Second Symphony.

## NEW EXEMPLAR OF AMERICAN TRAINING

Mabel Garrison Metropolitan's  
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To be the first wholly American-trained, American-born coloratura soprano engaged for leading rôles at the Metropolitan Opera House is of itself a distinction, but to be at once signed up for a three years' contract, without even so much as a try-out in the big auditorium of the Metropolitan, or without a big European reputation is quite unusual. However, when an interviewer from MUSICAL AMERICA approached the door leading to Mrs. George Siemmon's apartment (for that is Mabel Garrison's name in private life), an inkling of the reason for this rapid advancement was given the visitor, for the strains of the Johann Strauss's "Voce di Primavera" waltz, sung with a beautiful soprano, were wafted through the door, and later the owner of this voice was found to be a young woman of decidedly charming personality.

"Do you know," said Miss Garrison, "I was extremely lucky in picking a musician for a husband, for most singers have to employ an accompanist, and have to limit their practice hours to the time when the accompanist can be present, but whenever I want to sing, my husband is always at my disposal to accompany me."

"We have the distinction of being the only two diploma graduates of Peabody Institute in Baltimore who are married to each other, although the courtship did not begin while we were there. Ours was a church choir romance—Mr. Siemmon was organist, and I sang in the choir."

As to the details of her career, Miss Garrison related: "My first teacher was Lucien O'dend'hal, an old graduate of the Paris Conservatory, and the one to whom I attribute the good preliminary training I received. I then continued my studies at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, remaining there until I received my diploma. Then I thought I was ready for a public career, so I came to New York, but soon became disillusioned. I began my studies with Oscar Saenger and within a few months he obtained for me an engagement with



Mabel Garrison, American Coloratura, Engaged for Metropolitan Opera Company

the Aborn Opera Company, with whom I toured for two seasons, always continuing my studies with Mr. Saenger whenever I was near enough to New York to do so.

"Finally, one day at Mr. Saenger's studio I was heard by Andres de Segura, and he liked my singing so well that he introduced me to Signor Gatti-Casazza, who granted me a private hearing and immediately gave me a contract. Only yesterday I signed a two and one-half years' contract with R. E. Johnston, the manager, for concert work before and after my seasons at the Metropolitan. I am now hard at work learning the twenty-four parts assigned in my contract with the Metropolitan."

"It might interest you to know that Mr. Siemmon and I are enthusiastic farmers in the Summertime. We have a little farm up-state, and every year we lead the simple life up there, doing all our own farm work alone. This puts one in condition for the hard musical work of the Winter." W. J. Z.

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