



FROM ORIGINAL DSD RECORDING

SIBELIUS
Works for Violin and Orchestra

PEKKA KUUSISTO
violin and conductor

Tapiola Sinfonietta

ONDINE

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Works for violin and orchestra

Jean Sibelius, Pekka Kuusisto and myself all played the violin in our youth, but only Pekka turned out to be a violinist. Janne and I spent time developing theories as to why we never made it into the big time on the violin, even though it was such a beloved and important part of our growing up. An accident is always a convenient excuse. In the summer of 1879, Sibelius hurt his right arm seriously enough to fracture the ulna. As a result, the arm was left stiff and even a bit shorter than his left one, it is said. Oh yes, and I dislocated my right shoulder a couple of times.

When Sibelius had his first violin lesson, he was 15 years old – 12 years older than when Pekka had his. Sibelius had owned a violin for some time, but in the absence of a proper teacher he used it for his own fantasies, sawing away wildly in places like a rock in Kalalahti which commanded an impressive view of Vanajavesi lake. He also liked to play in the bow of a sailboat, the self-taught violin artist playing for the sea with no regard to his own safety (or that of his violin), oblivious to how a sudden change of tack might impact the performance.

For ten years, the violin was a grand passion for Sibelius, and he is on record saying that his noblest aim in those days was to become a great violin virtuoso. Considering how late he began to study the instrument in earnest, he achieved an astounding level of proficiency. Though we have no way of hearing how well he played, we do know that at the music institute he performed works such as the Mendelssohn concerto.

A realistic explanation for why Jean Sibelius never became a concert violinist may be found in his nervous disposition. He was not a born performer. He experienced exceptionally severe stage fright and sometimes even turned his back to the audience in order to keep himself from going to pieces.



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Even at the age of 25, while studying composition in Vienna, Sibelius still believed that he could cut it as a violinist, and suffering from a chronic shortage of cash boldly entered the auditions for the Vienna Philharmonic. The audition board listened for a while to the composer struggling with his instrument, until finally they interrupted him. The chairman observed briefly: "Mr. Sibelius, please go and compose." We owe a great deal to this unknown Viennese civil servant, who was more astute than Sibelius himself in perceiving where his real talent lay.



Jean Sibelius in the late 1880s

Sibelius never lost his love for the violin, though. Its greatest manifestation is of course the world's most frequently performed Violin Concerto. Its excruciating difficulty has made many a violinist come to the conclusion that it represents the revenge of a failed virtuoso on every damned Pekka Kuusisto in this world who could succeed where Sibelius himself failed. In my view, this is rubbish.

Sibelius never wrote easy music for the violin. Even those of his miniatures that fall firmly within the domain of salon music are anything but a piece of cake. The difficulties encountered are not conventional ones, because Sibelius would not touch the traditional 19th-century virtuoso bag of tricks with a barge pole. Instead of having the violinist splash out on left-hand pizzicatos or flamboyant arpeggios, Sibelius creates a world of his own where an artistically satisfying performance requires a perfect technique. In many cases, the form, character and nuances of the piece are so subtle and layered that only a person fully familiar with and passionately in love with the violin could possibly have created them. So much, then, for a black avenger frustrated in his ambition.



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The earliest violin work on the present disc is **Serenade No. 1** in D major (1912). It was paired with **Serenade No. 2** in G minor, completed a year later, and both were premiered at Sibelius's 50th birthday concert on December 8, 1915. The soloist was Richard Burgin, and the Helsinki Philharmonic was conducted by the composer himself. The 50th birthday of the great Finnish composer was such a monumental occasion that these two lovely serenades were very much upstaged by greater things. After all, on the same occasion the composer conducted the premiere of his Fifth Symphony, which completely captivated the audience and critics.

The **Six Humoresques** for violin and piano or orchestra were written in 1917. Sibelius adapted the first of these two years later, prior to the premiere of the entire set. Again, the orchestra was the Helsinki Philharmonic with the composer conducting, but the soloist was Paul Cherkassky. The Six Humoresques are divided into two opus numbers, perhaps because of the publisher's mendacity. However, Sibelius intended the six pieces to form a single cycle, and usually they are performed as such.

Sibelius had a good time writing the Humoresques, even though his personal life at the time was anything but humorous. He was short of cash, drank too much and had domestic problems, and the outbreak of the First World War did nothing to ease the atmosphere. His principal worry, however, was the Fifth Symphony. After the premiere in 1915, he refashioned it in 1916, but even then he was not satisfied. The final version was completed in 1919, after a long and arduous process. Whenever work on the symphony came to a halt, Sibelius amused himself by writing small, humorous violin pieces.

Small, indeed. While they are brief in duration, they were conceived in "a large format," as Sibelius himself said. And what about the humour? We know that on May Day 1917 it was snowing (!), and things were not well in Ainola. Not even the Humoresques could cheer up the melancholy composer, who wrote in his diary: "My nerves are troubling



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me. Terrible depression. Different title for the Humoresques. Lyrical Dances?”

It is a good thing that Sibelius did not, in the end, change the title. All six of them are much rather humoresques than lyrical dances. The playfulness is there for the performer who knows how to bring it out. Sibelius himself said: “They contain the anguish of life and a glimpse of sun- shine.” When Pekka Kuusisto plays them, the glimpse of sunshine is more than evident.

The **Suite** for violin and orchestra was the last work of Sibelius’s to receive an opus number – Op. 117. Completed in 1929, it also remained his last completed orchestral work, though he later wrote a number of pieces without opus number. Sibelius sent the Suite to the publisher, but when a satisfactory agreement could not be reached, he wrote a damning indictment on the cover sheet: “Not to be published.”

Morals today not being what they used to be, the Suite was blithely performed at a concert of the Sinfonia Lahti on Sibelius’s birthday in 1990, with John Storgårds as soloist and Osmo Vänskä conducting. Since then, violinists have had a field day with the piece, with numerous performances and a number of recordings too. The piece was originally written for the American market, which is perhaps why the music is so airy and carefree, and why the movements have titles in English.

The bonus on this disc is the suite from Sibelius’s **incidental music to the play Joutsikki (Swanwhite / Svanevit)** by August Strindberg (1908). Pekka Kuusisto declared that he is not conducting the performance, simply playing the violin along with everyone else in front of the orchestra. He does not (yet) have ambitions of a conducting career.

Sibelius had long been an admirer of Strindberg when the author’s wife, an actress, contacted him and requested him to write music for **Joutsikki**. As in many other cases, the theatre inspired Sibelius to write exceptionally compelling and charming music.

The play was premiered in Helsinki in 1908 and never became a success. Strindberg’s play is described as Symbolist, which is a convenient catch-all for confusing fairy tales



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written by grown-ups for grown-ups. *Joutsikki* has all the elements of a traditional fairy tale: the princess, the evil stepmother, the wrong husband chosen by the father and the right prince whom the princess eventually marries despite all odds. There are also evil stepsisters and magical items, principally a miraculous horn and a self-sounding harp.

Joutsikki contains a wealth of music with a practical application, from single-chord flashes to extensive mimed scenes. Sibelius later worked the material into an orchestral suite, whose seven movements bear no relation whatever to the original narrative: the music dictated the drama-turgy of the suite, not the play.

The suite opens with *Riikinkukko* (Peacock), where the stepmother's pet bird flutters its wings and tail, snaps its beak (castanets) and caws on the pitch of E (clarinet, oboe). The harp takes centre stage in the second movement; its grand solo towards the end of the movement is followed by a flute motif that ended up in the Fifth Symphony. The strings represent the harp at the beginning of the movement. In the play, this music was associated with Joutsikki's dead mother, who visits her daughter in the night.

The slow and melancholy third movement, *Tytöt ja ruusu* (The Maiden with the Roses) is a lamenting waltz where the stepmother entices the prince to marry one of her ugly daughters. *Kuule, punarinta laulaa* (Listen, the Robin Sings) is a gossip aria for the dead mothers of the prince and the princess, who have turned into swans: the mothers decry the king selected as husband for Joutsikki, until they realize that dawn is breaking and the birds are singing.

The fifth movement depicts the sorrow of the prince after his quarrel with Joutsikki, and the sixth is set at the wedding of the prince and the stepmother's daughter – but it is Joutsikki who is revealed when the bridal veil is lifted. The music here actually consists of music from several scenes, beginning with the miraculous horn, followed by a dance of the themes of the prince and the princesses. The suite concludes with an almost religious song of praise once good has triumphed over evil. In the original version, an



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organ was included, and in the performance everyone – even the evil characters – knelt to thank God.

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Pekka Kuusisto

Born in Finland in 1976, Pekka Kuusisto began to study the violin with Géza Szilvay at the age of three. In 1985, he went on to study with Tuomas Haapanen at the Sibelius Academy. He also studied with Miriam Fried and Paul Biss at Indiana University in Bloomington from 1992 to 1996. He embarked on an international career after winning the Jean Sibelius Violin Competition in 1995. He has since performed with many of the world's major orchestras, such as the Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Czech Philharmonic, the Stockholm Royal Philharmonic, the Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Conductor champions include Valery Gergiev, Yuri Temirkanov, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Osmo Vänskä, Paavo Berglund, Thomas Dausgaard, and Leif Segerstam. Apart from his appearances as a soloist, Pekka Kuusisto also performs chamber music, jazz, folk music and electronic music. Together with his brother Jaakko Kuusisto he is Artistic co-Director of the Lake Tuusula Chamber Music Festival.

Pekka Kuusisto has an exclusive recording contract with Ondine. His acclaimed first disc, Jean Sibelius's Violin Concerto with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra under Leif Segerstam, was released in 1996 (ODE 878-2). He has also recorded Vivaldi's The Four Seasons with the Virtuosi di Kuhmo (ODE 939-2), the complete Violin Concertos of J.S. Bach with the Tapiola Sinfonietta and Jaakko Kuusisto (ODE 980-2), a disc containing works by Olli Mustonen conducted by the composer (ODE 974-2), Mozart's Violin Concertos nos. 3, 4 and 5 with the Tapiola Sinfonietta under Olli Mustonen (ODE 1025-2), as well as works for violin and piano by Sibelius accompanied by Heini Kärkkäinen (ODE 1046-2). Pekka Kuusisto plays a Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin (1752) kindly lent by the Finnish Cultural Foundation.



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Tapiola Sinfonietta

Based in Espoo, the Tapiola Sinfonietta is one of the top professional orchestras in Finland; its popularity has been swiftly on the rise ever since it was founded in 1987. The Tapiola Sinfonietta is structured as a typical Viennese Classical orchestra, with 41 musicians. The orchestra's distinct sound and its interesting choice of repertoire are its long-established trump cards. The nucleus of the orchestra's repertoire consists of music composed by Mozart and his contemporaries. Alongside the classics, the orchestra performs lesser-known works. Its repertoire includes both older music and works by contemporary composers, which the orchestra is keen to premiere. The Tapiola Sinfonietta also actively promotes Finnish music at home and abroad.

The orchestra enjoys performing at festivals and in various arts productions, and performs popular music with equal enthusiasm. Interaction with children and young people is an important part of the Sinfonietta's activity in Espoo, and its cooperation with schools is constantly being diversified. The Tapiola Sinfonietta has a busy recording schedule, adding on average three new discs a year to its discography, which currently comprises more than forty titles.

In 1993, French violinist and conductor Jean-Jacques Kantorow was appointed conductor of the Tapiola Sinfonietta. During Kantorow's tenure, Tuomas Ollila, John Storgårds and, from autumn 2003, Olli Mustonen have also appeared as conductors. They were preceded by Jorma Panula, Juhani Lamminmäki and Osmo Vänskä as artistic directors of the orchestra; today, the orchestra itself manages its artistic profile.



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THE 2xHD MASTERING PROCESS



This album was mastered using our 2xHD proprietary system. In order to achieve the most accurate reproduction of the original recording we tailor our process specifically for each project, using a selection from our pool of state-of-the-art audiophile components and connectors. The process begins with a transfer to analog from the original DSD master, using cutting edge D/A converters. The analog signal is then sent through a hi-end tube pre-amplifier before being recorded directly in DXD using the dCS905 A/D and the dCS Vivaldi Clock. All connections used in the process are made of OCC silver cable.

DSD and 192kHz/24Bit versions are separately generated, directly from the analog signal.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audiophile sound engineer René Laflamme.

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