



Jean Sibelius
1865-1943

SIBELIUS – Finlandia

Finlandia, Op. 26 is a symphonic poem by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. The first version was written in 1899, and it was revised in 1900. The piece was composed for the Press Celebrations of 1899, a covert protest against increasing censorship from the Russian Empire, as the last of seven pieces, each performed as an accompaniment to a tableau depicting episodes from Finnish history.

A recurrent joke within Finland at this time was the renaming of Finlandia at various musical concerts so as to avoid Russian censorship. Titles under which the piece masqueraded were numerous, a famously flippant example being Happy Feelings at the awakening of Finnish Spring.

Most of the piece is taken up with rousing and turbulent music, evoking the national struggle of the Finnish people. But towards the end, a calm comes over the orchestra, and the serenely melodic Finlandia Hymn is heard. Often incorrectly cited as a traditional folk melody, the Hymn section is of Sibelius' own creation.

Sibelius later reworked the Finlandia Hymn into a stand-alone piece. This hymn, with words written in 1941 by Veikko Antero Koskenniemi, is one of the most important national songs of Finland (though Maamme is the national anthem). With different words, it is also sung as a Christian hymn (Be Still, My Soul), and was the national anthem of the short-lived African state of Biafra (Land of the Rising Sun).

Notices:

Please remember that the AGM will take place on 7th November during the coffee break. All current committee members are happy to continue so there is no need to worry that your attendance will result in your election!

Please try to commit yourself to a greater than usual involvement for the SMO weekend 27/28th February - venue not entirely finalised as yet but may well be a last chance to experience the character of Ufton Court.

The orchestra needs more violin players - do you know any that would be of an appropriate standard that would enjoy the repertoire and ambience of the SMO?

Please remember any changes to addresses, email details and telephone numbers are eagerly sought by your membership secretary Mike Cooney.

THE Saturday Morning ORCHESTRA

Bulletin No 17 – September 2009

Chairman's Report

By bringing along film scores, from some of the more delicate themes from Harry Potter to the swashbuckling Pirates of the Caribbean, Tom introduced us to music which we've not played a great deal in SMO. I suspect that many of you, like me, thought that this kind of music should be relatively straightforward to play but in reality it turned out to be nowhere near as straightforward as we might think. I hope everyone enjoyed the challenges that it set us.

And then the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with soloist Rowan Bell. What a pleasure it was to have such a talented soloist playing with us. Because I was playing timpani and there wasn't much to play I had the pleasure of listening to the way in which the orchestra learnt how to work with the soloist, and allowing the solo violin to sing above the orchestra, even in the quiet passages. And then, of course, there was the speed of the final movement where I remember the rehearsal in which Rowan asked everybody to play faster and how there seemed to be a collective sigh which sounded like 'Faster? I'm already playing as fast as I can'. But on the day the speed was up to what Rowan wanted and it sounded wonderful. Well done everyone.

I'd like to thank Antony and Sue for hosting our summer garden party. We were pleased to have good weather this year and it was wonderful to be out in the garden and see so many members and friends chatting away together.

By now most of you will know that Don has been in hospital and then on to a recovery unit in Thatcham after suffering a minor stroke. I'm pleased to be able to report that he is now home again and itching to recover sufficiently to come back on Saturdays. Unfortunately he had a fall whilst in Thatcham and that has slowed his recovery slightly so it may be a while before we see him back.

Our congratulations go to Lorraine who I am reliably informed (by Don) recently became engaged to Ian.

There are a couple of administrative points I would like to bring to everyone's attention.

The first is a further reminder that it is very helpful for Tom to know when members cannot manage to get to rehearsal. Please let Tom (or me) know if you cannot get there. Also, if you know in advance that you will not get to a rehearsal, please leave your music, even if you know there are multiple copies. We had an instance one morning where there were only two violins and no violin music.

The second concerns music. Sometimes the librarian has major problems in sorting the music at the end of a term. Unfortunately last term Nick has real problems and had to purchase at least one replacement copy and because of the time involved in getting the music sorted we were nearly fined for late return. Please make sure that all music is returned by the final rehearsal unless you are told otherwise.

Dates for your diary

Autumn Term:

Sept 12, 19, 26
Oct 3, 10, 17 Note: no rehearsal Oct 24 and 31
Nov 7 (AGM), 14, 21, 28
Dec 5, 12 FALO

Spring Term:

Jan 9, 16, 23, 30
Feb 6, 27 Note: no rehearsal Feb 13 and 20
Mar 6, 13, 20, 27 FALO

Summer Term:

Apr 17, 24,
May 8, 15, 22 Note: no rehearsal May 1 and 29
Jun 5, 12, 19 FALO

Programme notes for Autumn Term

DVORAK – 9th Symphony

The Symphony No. 9 in E Minor "From the New World" (Op. 95), popularly known as the New World Symphony, was composed by Antonin Dvorak in 1893 during his visit to the United States from 1892 to 1895. It is by far his most popular symphony, and one of the most popular in the modern repertory. Dvorak was interested in the Native American music and African-American spirituals he heard in America. Upon his arrival in America, he stated:



Antonín Dvořák
1841-1904

"I am convinced that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called Negro melodies. These can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition, to be developed in the United States. These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them."

The symphony was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, and premiered on December 16, 1893 at Carnegie Hall. A day earlier, in an article published in the New York Herald on December 15, 1893, Dvorak further explained how Native American music had been an influence on this symphony:

"I have not actually used any of the Native American melodies. I have simply written original themes embodying the peculiarities of the Indian music, and, using these themes as subjects, have developed them with all the resources of modern rhythms, counterpoint and orchestral colour."

Curiously enough, passages which modern ears perceive as the musical idiom of African-American spirituals may have been intended by Dvorak to evoke a Native American atmosphere. In 1893, a newspaper interview quoted Dvorak as saying "I found that the music of the negroes and of the Indians was practically identical", and that "the music of the two races bore a remarkable similarity to the music of Scotland". Most historians agree that Dvorak is referring to the pentatonic scale, which is typical of each of these musical traditions.

In a 2008 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, prominent musicologist Joseph Horowitz asserts that African-American spirituals were a major influence on the 9th symphony, quoting Dvorak from an 1893 interview in the New York Herald as saying, "In the negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music."

Despite all this, it is generally considered that, like other Dvorak pieces, the work has more in common with folk music of his native Bohemia than with that of the United States.