

Recorded at Wyastone Concert Hall
Symphony No. 6, Tapiola: 1-2 March, 2022
Symphony No. 7: 2 May, 2021

English Symphony Orchestra
Kenneth Woods - Artistic Director
Seb Lovell-Huckle - CEO
Zoë Beyers - Leader and Principal Artist

Assistant Conductor
Michael Young

Producer
Phil Rowlands

Engineer/Videographer
Tim Burton

JEAN SIBELIUS

THE SYMPHONIES VOL. I

Symphony no. 6
Symphony no. 7
Tapiola

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English Symphony Orchestra
Kenneth Woods *conductor*



JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN D MINOR, OP. 104 (1918-23) (27' 03")

1. I. Allegro molto moderato 8' 03"
2. II. Allegro moderato 5' 42"
3. III. Poco vivace 3' 23"
4. IV. Allegro molto 9' 55"

SYMPHONY NO. 7 IN C MAJOR, OP. 105 (1923-4) 22' 56"

5. Adagio—Un pochett. meno adagio—poco affrett.—Poco a poco affrettando il Tempo—Vivacissimo—Adagio—Allegro molto moderato—Allegro moderato—Vivace—Presto—Adagio—Largamente molto—Affettuoso—Tempo I

TAPIOLA, TONE POEM, OP. 12 17'17"

6. Largamente - Alegro moderato - Allegro - Allegro moderato - Allegro - Allegro moderato

English Symphony Orchestra
Kenneth Woods - *Conductor*

Although completed in quick succession in the early 1920s, the origins of Sibelius' last two completed symphonies lie in ideas jotted down in notebooks from 1914 onwards, from which *The Oceanides* and Fifth Symphony amongst other works also stem. The Fifth, written originally in *four* movements for his 50th birthday concert in December 1915, needed two rewrites before achieving its final form in the now familiar three movements in 1919. By this time, the seeds of both the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies had taken; indeed, by late Spring 1918, after the brief post-Independence civil war—which at one tense point spilled into Sibelius' house, Ainola—he was planning three symphonies, while simultaneously contemplating discarding No 5's final two movements to release the composite first movement alone as a *Fantasia sinfonica*, a form that would influence the structure of No 7 six years later.

The very public tribulations Sibelius experienced getting the Fifth Symphony correct, coming after the bafflement he observed in friends and colleagues (many avoiding his eyes) after the premiere of No 4 in 1911, certainly affected his approach to the Sixth. While its gestation was longer than the Fifth, over six years, Sibelius kept the score under wraps until he was ready to release. The composer's almost constant need for funds led him to focus on smaller works, songs and instrumental works, cantatas, minor occasional pieces and lighter suites for small orchestra. He composed the *Valse chevaleresque*, for example, to repeat the enormous commercial success of the earlier *Valse triste* (1903-4) from which Sibelius had derived relatively

small royalties. The attempt was vain, the *Valse*—premiered at the same concert as the Sixth Symphony would be—failing to impress. The composer's long-suffering wife, Aino, was unsurprised, declaring it the product of someone whose senses were sodden with champagne! Other minor pieces fared little better: for example, while Chappell's accepted the charming if musically slight *Suite mignonne*, for publication in 1921, they refused its companion, *Suite champêtre*, much to the composer's dismay.

The Danish firm Hansen published it and *Suite caractéristique* hoping to secure the Sixth Symphony but were disappointed when that went to their Swedish rivals, Hirsch.

The Sixth Symphony is often regarded as the 'Cinderella' of the cycle and, along with the Third (1903-7), the least often performed. It stands apart from Sibelius' other symphonies in its avoidance of grand, rhetorical statements that are such a part of Nos 1, 2 and 5, for example; its climaxes tend to be briefer, more confined in scale, as if episodes in an ongoing musical fabric rather than the culmination. The whole work ultimately derives serenity from the serene opening of the first movement, *Allegro molto moderato* [1], and sets the seemingly undemonstrative tone for the entire work with airy string chords and limpid woodwind writing. There are more excitable moments as the movement progresses (without, incidentally, a hint of sonata form) and the closing climax, with the brass more prominent (though, as in the concentrated tone poem *The Bard*, hardly let off the leash) and calm close, is a model of understatement: here, as throughout, less is most definitely more.

Another key aspect of the unique nature of this work is, indeed, its tonality. It is usually listed as being 'in D minor', although Sibelius did not specify this. Rather, the Sixth is a symphony 'in the Dorian mode', deliberately evoking the medieval scale (playable on the piano by using only the white notes between D and D an octave above). All the movements are rooted on D bar the second, *Allegro moderato* [2] which gravitates to the tonal sub-dominant, G. After its luminous opening paragraph, the pace does pick up for a quicksilver, ethereal central section, but the return to the opening section is acutely truncated, mere suggestion only.

The use of the Dorian mode has led to speculation that Sibelius may have been influenced by the music of Palestrina or even William Byrd, composers he admired. However, there is nothing medieval-sounding in Sibelius' work, as the bucolic scherzo, *Poco vivace* [3] with its repeated-note subject and prevailing ta-dum rhythm, and dynamic *Allegro molto* finale [4] prove. With the hindsight provided by many symphonies composed in the century *after* No 6, it now sounds very modern but never discordant. Sibelius made a number of statements about the Sixth Symphony, declaring to friends early on in its composition that it would be "wild and passionate" in nature—it hardly attains that, even in the finale, the most dramatic movement—and in 1943 that it "always reminds me of the scent of the first snow". Perhaps his most famous pronouncement, however, was more defensive: "Whereas most other modern composers are engaged in manufacturing cocktails of every hue and description, I offer the public pure spring water." This may

indicate that No 6 had a special resonance for him personally; during its creation his younger brother Christian (1869-1922), a doctor and leading professor of psychiatry who published several treatises on mental health, fell seriously ill and died. Christian had been a talented chamber musician who in his youth had performed duos and trios with his siblings, so the symphony may partly be a memorial to him. Certainly, the closing pages, with the move into the Aeolian mode (again based on D) is markedly spiritual in atmosphere, as the music ascends into the heavens.

The Sixth Symphony was premiered in Helsinki on 19th February 1923 in an all-Sibelius concert that also included the first performances of *Valse chevaleresque*, *Suite champêtre*, and *Suite caractéristique*, setting in stark contrast the almost schizophrenic separation of high-art and lighter music in his output from 1914 onwards.

If the Sixth was positively unconventional in form, atmosphere and expression (not dissimilar in atmosphere with that of Vaughan Williams' contemporaneous *Pastoral Symphony*, completed in 1922), the single-movement Seventh Symphony [5] was revolutionary in its design. Symphonies that played continuously were rare, but not unknown, as with Schumann's Fourth (1840-1) and Nielsen's *Inextinguishable* (1914-6), while Schoenberg Schreker—in their Chamber Symphonies (1905-6 and 1916 respectively)—and Kurt Weill (No 1, 1921) had all integrated the constituent sections more fully. How much these models influenced Sibelius is unclear as his original plan was for a three-movement work concluding with an

'Hellenic rondo', but—as with the tone poem *The Oceanides* (1914) which also began as a multi-movement work—the single-span structure only emerged late on. The rondo element survived in part, however, through the noble 'Aino' theme on tenor trombone which punctuates the work three times (at roughly five-minute intervals) and seems to dominate and encapsulate the entire symphony; even the coda's progression from D to C—as Peter Fraklin commented, "the grandest celebration of C major there ever was"—incorporates the theme's first two notes. No 7 is the culmination of a trend audible in his orchestral output including the Third Symphony's fused scherzo-finale (1907), the tone poem *Night-ride and Sunrise* (1908), and No 5's opening span (1919). At its premiere in Gothenburg, the ever-sensitive composer (who was also conducting) programmed the work as *Fantasia sinfonica*, only settling on 'Symphony No 7' for publication after making some minor revisions.

The Seventh would prove to be Sibelius' final symphony as the long-awaited Eighth, begun in the 1920s and probably substantively complete by the mid-1930s, was withheld and destroyed in the 1940s. Sibelius had suppressed works before (the early *Kullervo Symphony* and first two *Lemminkäinen* tone poems), and had destroyed the first version of *In memoriam* (1909) at proof stage. A similar fate nearly befell his final tone poem *Tapiola* (1926) [6] when, again at proof stage, Sibelius tried to withdraw the work. This time, the publisher—Breitkopf und Härtel, the same as had set *In memoriam*—demurred, and Sibelius backed down, making a few small

revisions. Whatever the cause of his doubts, *Tapiola* is as different from his earlier tone poems as was the Seventh Symphony from its predecessors. Unusually, Sibelius supplied, at Breitkopf's request, a brief description of the programme which Breitkopf adapted poetically as an epigraph:

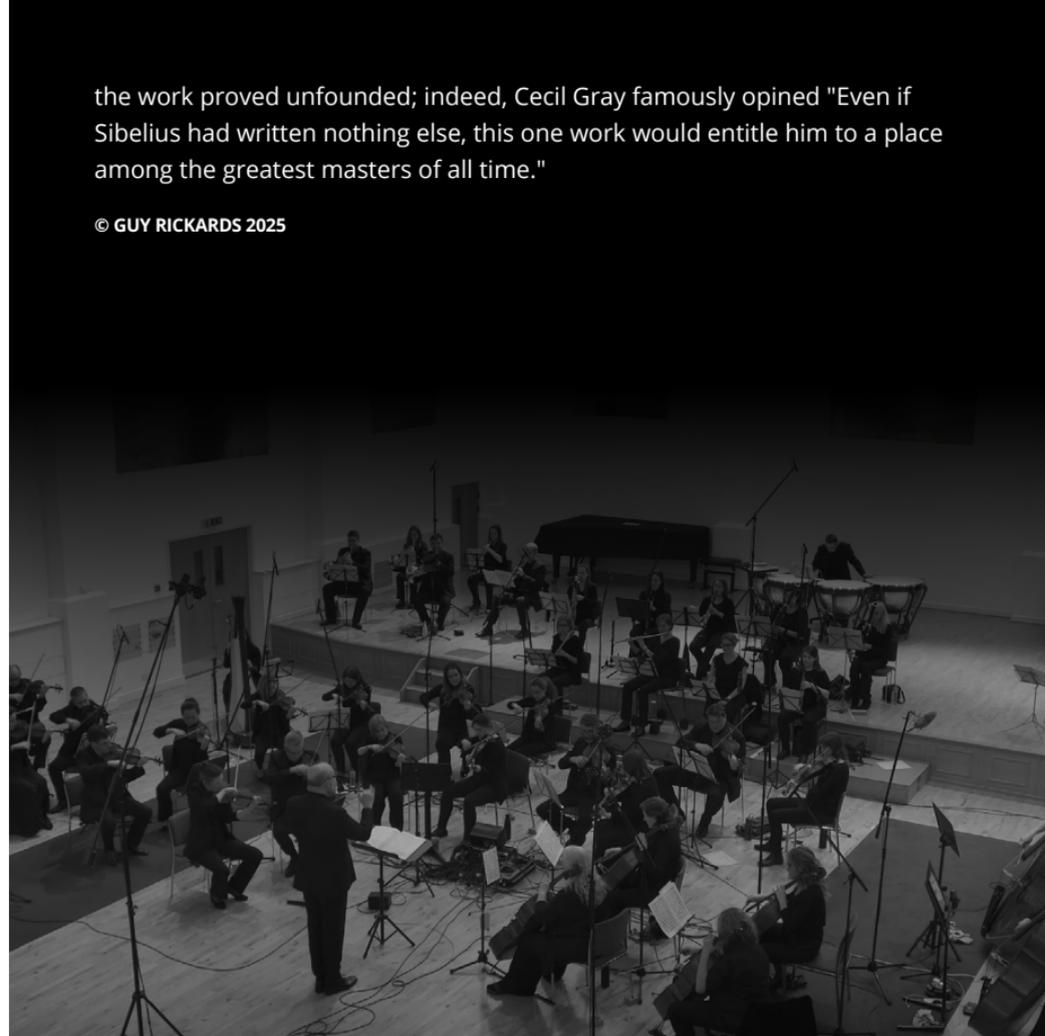
*Wide-spread they stand, the Northland's dusky forests,
Ancient, mysterious, brooding savage dreams;
Within them dwells the Forest's mighty God,
And wood-sprites in the gloom weave magic secrets.*

Opinions vary as to whether *Tapiola* is monothematic, as the main elements of the piece do not function as a coherent whole in the conventional sense. Rather, they form a pool of motifs that are used and combined by Sibelius in an intricate patchwork, developed colouristically as well as thematically. Indeed, the music's progress is often felt primarily through developments of texture, the clearest example being the brief climactic statement (a triumph of the power of suggestion, once again) of the core motifs just before 14'00", where the tone darkens into music of terrifying power (here, perhaps, we finally glimpse "the Forest's mighty God" Tapio himself), before the calm, exhausted close.

Tapiola was premiered on Boxing Day 1926 in New York by the New York Symphony Society conducted by Walter Damrosch as the final item in a concert that included Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Gershwin's Piano Concerto. The Finnish premiere followed in April 1927. Sibelius' fears about

the work proved unfounded; indeed, Cecil Gray famously opined "Even if Sibelius had written nothing else, this one work would entitle him to a place among the greatest masters of all time."

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KENNETH WOODS

Hailed by Gramophone Magazine as “a symphonic conductor of stature”, **Kenneth Woods** was appointed Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the English Symphony Orchestra in 2013, and has quickly built up an impressive and acclaimed body of work and recordings with them. Woods also serves as Artistic Director of both the Colorado MahlerFest – the only US organisation other than the New York Philharmonic to receive the International Gustav Mahler Society’s Gold Medal – and (since 2017) the founding Artistic Director of The Elgar Festival in Worcester. Woods has conducted the National Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia and the English Chamber Orchestra, and has made numerous broadcasts for BBC Radio 3, National Public Radio and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He has appeared on the stages of some of the world’s leading music festivals, such as Aspen, Scotia and Lucerne.

Under Kenneth Woods’ leadership, the English Symphony Orchestra has gained widespread recognition as one of the most innovative and influential orchestras in the UK. The first of Woods’ many acclaimed ESO discs was volume one in the Complete Piano Concertos of Ernst Krenek, selected by The Times as one of their “Best Recordings of 2016.” His recording of Fraser’s Elgar orchestrations for Avie was a Classic FM Disc of the Month. The ESO’s Nimbus Alliance recording of Kenneth’s orchestration of Brahms’

Piano Quartet in A Major was chosen as one of the 10 Best Classical CDs of 2018 by The Arts Desk. In 2016 Woods and the ESO launched their 21st Century Symphony Project, an ambitious multi-year effort to commission, premiere and record nine new symphonies by leading composers, with the triumphant premiere of Philip Sawyers’ Third Symphony at St John’s Smith Square. In 2018, the Project continued with the premiere of David Matthews’ Ninth Symphony, selected by The Spectator as one of the Top Ten Classical Events of the year, followed in 2019 by Matthew Taylor’s Fifth Symphony, hailed by ClassicalSource as “a masterpiece” at its premiere. The most recent offerings in the 21st Century Symphony Project include Robert Saxton’s *Scenes from the Epic of Gilgamesh* and Adrian Williams’s First.

www.kennethwoods.net



ENGLISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The **English Symphony Orchestra** is an ensemble which in recent years has become synonymous with artistic excellence, innovative and visionary programming, distinctive commissioning and ground-breaking recordings. In the last decade, ESO has established itself as a major force in British musical life under its Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Kenneth Woods, presenting and recording the orchestra's first full length opera (the world premiere of John Joubert's *Jane Eyre*) to overwhelming critical acclaim, presenting the 2015 Classical Music Magazine "Premiere of the Year," (Donald Fraser's orchestration of the Elgar Piano Quintet) and releasing a triumphant series of recordings, including the Complete Piano Concertos of Ernst Krenek (Sunday Times Best Recordings of 24 NI6408 2016) and John Joubert's opera *Jane Eyre* (2017 MusicWeb Opera Recording of the Year).

Founded by William Boughton in 1980, the ESO have a long and distinguished history of collaboration with legendary figures of British music making. As the professional orchestra of Elgar's home city, and orchestra-in-residence of The Elgar Festival, the music of Elgar has long been a central part of the ESO's repertoire. Past ESO collaborators include some of the leading Elgar interpreters of the last 50 years, including conductors Yehudi Menuhin (Principal Guest Conductor 1990-2000) and Vernon Handley (Principal Conductor 2007—8) and soloists Nigel Kennedy, Nicola Benedetti, Steven Isserlis and Alexander Sitkovetsky.

Appropriately for an orchestra based in the city of his birth, the ESO has made many acclaimed recordings of Elgar's music as well as that of major 20th century British composers including Vaughan Williams, Britten, Butterworth and Bridge. The ESO discography also highlights a commitment to the music of our time; in addition to the notable recordings which grew out of the orchestra's affiliation with Sir Michael Tippett, there are recordings of music by John Metcalfe, John Joubert, Nicholas Maw, and Michael and Lennox Berkeley. John McCabe served as the orchestra's Composer-in-Association from 2013 until his death in 2015. Following McCabe's death in 2015, the ESO appointed Philip Sawyers as "John McCabe Composer-in-Association" who was succeeded by David Matthews in 2018 and Adrian Williams from 2020-2021. The ESO's current John McCabe Composer-in-Association is Steve Elcock.

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MUSICIANS OF THE ENGLISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

SYMPHONY NO. 6/TAPIOLA

Violin 1

Zoë Beyers
Kate Suthers
Richard Laing
Noriko Tsuzaki
Carl Darby
Zhivko Georgiev
Shulah Oliver
Paul Mann

Violin 2

Suzanne Casey
Esther King Smith
Emily Adams
Olivia Jago
Elizabeth Goble
Lucia D'Avanzo-Lewis

Viola

Carl Hill
Rebecca Hopkin
Mark Coates-Smith
Lowri Thomas

Cello

Corinne Frost
Anna Joubert
Alice McVeigh
Beatrice Newman

Double Bass

Stephen Warner
Caroline Harding

Flute

Laura Jellicoe
Catherine Handley
Elizabeth May *dbl Piccolo (2 Mar only)*

Oboe

Rebecca Wood
Odette Cotton

Cor Anglais

Lydia Griffiths *(2 Mar only)*

Clarinet

Alison Lambert *(Pr Sibelius)*
Sara Temple *(Pr Sawyers)*
Jill Allan

Bass Clarinet

Katie Hole *(1 & 2 Mar only)*

Bassoon

Rosemary Cow
Joanna Shewan
Alexandra Davidson *(2 Mar only)*

French Horn

James Topp
Matthew Jackson
Vikki Scanlon *(1 & 2 Mar only)*
Rebecca Holman *(1 & 2 Mar only)*
Jose Lluna *(1 & 2 Mar only)*

Trumpet

Stuart Essenhig Stephen
Peneycad
Sam Lewis *(1 & 2 Mar only)*

Trombone

Jake Durham *(1 & 2 Mar only)*
Dafydd Thomas *(1 & 2 Mar only)*

Bass Trombone

Christopher Gill *(1 & 2 Mar only)*

Timpani

Cliff Pick

Harp

Bethan Semmens

SYMPHONY NO. 7

Violin 1

Kate Suthers *Guest Leader*
Carl Darby
Jacqueline Allen
Noriko Tsuzaki
Charlotte Moseley
Robert Bilson
Zhivko Georgiev
Shulah Oliver

Violin 2

Amelia Conway-Jones
Richard Laing
Emily Adams
Esther King Smith
Amanda Woods
Zoë Davies

Viola

Helen Roberts
Emma Sheppard
Helen Sanders-Hewett
Lowri Thomas

Cello

Joely Koos
Corinne Frost
Alice McVeigh
Kathryn Graham

Double Bass

Stephen Warner
Christopher Wescott

Flute/Piccolo

Laura Jellicoe
Catherine Handley

Oboe

Rebecca Wood
Louise Braithwaite

Clarinet

Alison Lambert
Sara Temple

Bassoon

Rosemary Cow
Joanna Shewan

French Horn

James Topp
Craig MacDonald
Michael Gibbs
Tom Taffinder

Trumpet

Stuart Essenhig
Stephen Peneycad
Corey Morris

Trombone

Julian Turner
Chris Hickman

Bass Trombone

Andy Clennell

Timpani

Cliff Pick

Orchestra management/fixing

Andy Farquarson/
The Music Agency UK