

Jean SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

Symphony No.1 in E minor, Op.39 (1898-99, rev. 1900)

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|---|------|---|-------|
| 1 | I. | Andante, ma non troppo – Allegro energico | 10:40 |
| 2 | II. | Andante (ma non troppo tanto) | 9:28 |
| 3 | III. | Allegro | 5:10 |
| 4 | IV. | Finale (Quasi una fantasia) | 11:52 |

BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Kingsway Hall, London, 27 August 1956 MONO

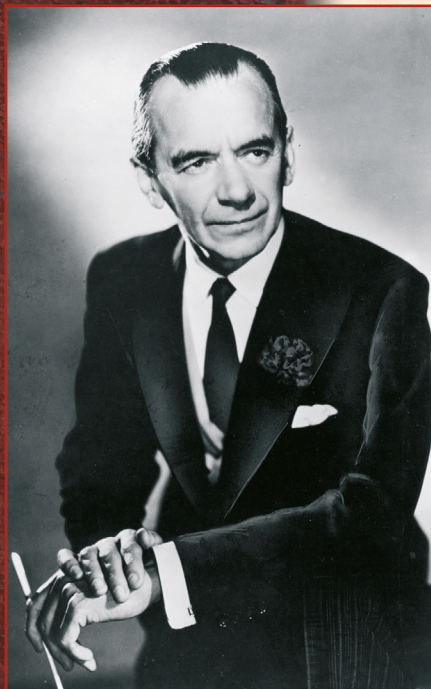
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|---|---|--------|-------|
| 5 | Pohjola's Daughter, (<i>Pohjolan tytär</i>) Symphonic Fantasy, Op.49 | (1906) | 12:27 |
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Symphony No.5 in E flat, Op.83 (1915, rev. 1916 & 1919)

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| 6 | I. | Tempo molto moderato – Allegro moderato | 12:16 |
| 7 | II. | Andante mosso, quasi allegretto | 8:31 |
| 8 | III. | Allegro molto – Un pocchettino largamente | 8:25 |

BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Recorded: Kingsway Hall, London, 25-26 August 1958 STEREO

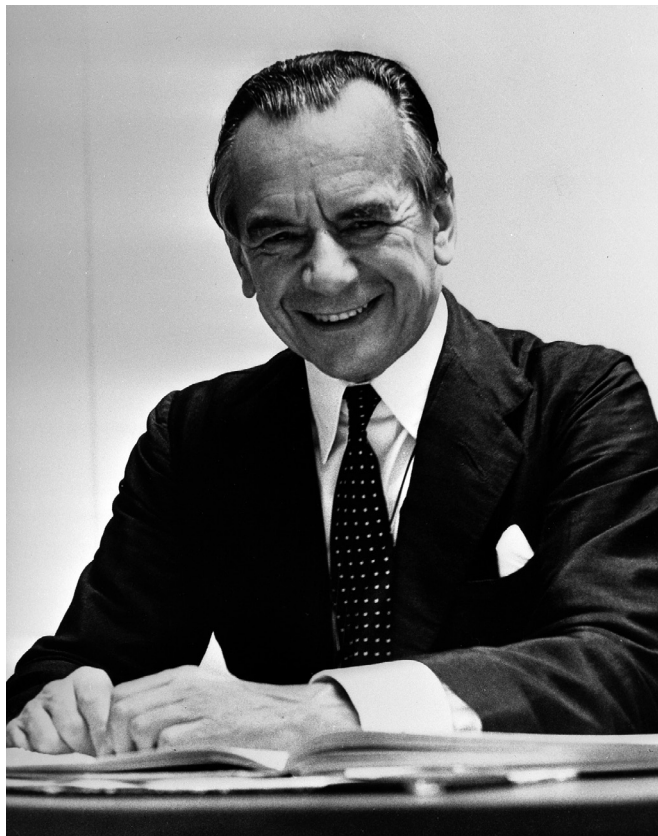


**SIR
MALCOLM
SARGENT**

SIBELIUS
Symphony No.1
Symphony No.5
Pohjola's Daughter

**BBC Symphony
Orchestra**

Recorded 1956 & 1958



A GUILD HISTORICAL RELEASE

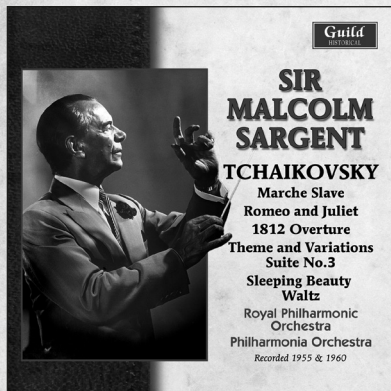
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The reception of Sibelius in Great Britain was in some ways exceptional. At the beginning of the 20th century Rosa Newmarch, Hans Richter (who on 2 March 1905 conducted the first British performance of a Sibelius symphony, No. 2), Henry J. Wood (who had conducted first English performances of Strauss, Reger, Schoenberg and Debussy) and Granville Bantock, promoted Sibelius's music through performances and the organization of visits of the composer to England. Performances of his works took place regularly, and he caused quite a sensation: Churchill gave him cigars and books were published on him, the earliest ones by Rosa Newmarch (as early as 1906) and Cecil Gray. Symphonies Nos. 1–3 were premiered on gramophone records by the London Symphony Orchestra, Symphony No. 3 being dedicated to composer and conductor Granville Bantock. Sibelius's reception was, at least temporarily, far more positive than that given to, for example, Mahler, Beethoven or Brahms. His popularity may in part have been due to his non-Germanic nationality – after the First World War, German composers fell somewhat out of favour. In a letter to his wife, Delius wrote of the 1912 British first performance of the 1911 Fourth Symphony in Birmingham: 'Sibelius interested me much more [than Elgar's *The Music Makers*] – He is trying to do something new & has a fine feeling for nature & he is also unconventional – Sometimes a bit sketchy and ragged'. And in the same year: 'the English like vogues for this and that. Now it's Sibelius, and when they're tired of him they'll boost up Bruckner and Mahler.' Numerous British composers, including Kaikhosru Sorabji, John Ireland and Constant Lambert, were ardent Sibelius supporters, and one can hardly imagine the symphonies of Arnold Bax, and some of Edmund Rubbra and Ralph Vaughan Williams, without the Finn's influence. Even the very earliest of symphonies by Michael Tippett and Robert Simpson (most of them long discarded or destroyed) reflected Sibelius's influence. Constant Lambert summed up: 'Whereas most modern music is concerned mainly with vocabulary, Sibelius is concerned with content; he has not, like so many contemporary composers, been forced to adopt an *outré* manner in a vain attempt to disguise the commonplace character of his thought. [...] Sibelius's symphonies rarely contain any chords which, examined by themselves, cannot be found in the works of Grieg or Tchaikovsky. Yet through the manner of their presentation these chords are made to take on an entirely new meaning. Their importance is due, not to their momentary sound in space, but to their placing in time.' It was

not only the sonorities that attracted British musicians, 'lines rather than masses of sound' (Percy Young), it was also the new technique of treatment of motivic material and the experiments with musical form that offered new perspectives into tonal music of the early 20th century; as Lambert put it: 'not only is Sibelius the most important symphonic writer since Beethoven, but he may even be described as the only writer since Beethoven who has definitely advanced what, after all, is the most complete formal expression of the musical spirit.'

This was the musical setting into which the first generation of 'stereo conductors' grew up. Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir John Barbiroli, Sir Adrian Boult and Sir Malcolm Sargent all fell under Sibelius's spell, and all of them met the composer personally. Whenever Sargent conducted in Finland, he would receive a friendly telegram from the composer the following day acknowledging the performance. There is an extensive correspondence between Sargent and the composer, otherwise largely living the life of a recluse, discussing questions of interpretation of his music. In 1956 Sargent toured with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Scandinavia, giving concerts in Helsinki and performing amongst other works Sibelius's First, Third and Seventh Symphonies. Whilst there he, together with some members of the orchestra, paid a visit to the composer's home in Järvenpää, and discussed with him musical matters, with Sibelius showing a remarkable knowledge of modern music. The orchestra members had taken with them a book of signatures from the whole orchestra and were photographed with the 90-year-old composer. Sargent received a signed photograph that bore the inscription 'To Sir Malcolm Sargent, with gratitude and admiration from Jean Sibelius'. It later stood proudly on the piano in Sargent's flat at Albert Hall Mansions. Sir Malcolm again visited Helsinki in September 1957, but although affectionate notes were exchanged, Sibelius died before the conductor could see him. At the exact moment of his death Sargent was conducting the Fifth Symphony in Helsinki University. He was also present at the funeral service in the Cathedral, laying wreaths upon the coffin as a representative of British musicians and music lovers.

Sargent's first recording of a Sibelius work however goes back much further, to an HMV 78 recording of *Finlandia* recorded in December 1929, after he began conducting the Finn's music several years previously. The *Valse triste* followed in 1947, again for HMV, this time with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra of which Sargent had become chief conductor in 1942. In May

1952 another recording of *Finlandia* followed, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra of which Sargent had become chief conductor in 1950. It is sad that, shortly after the composer's death, Sargent's impressive series of Sibelius symphonies for HMV was abandoned after three discs. 'As so often happens when a great composer dies, there is now a slump, probably temporarily, in interest and not much business to be done,' explained David Bicknell in a letter to Lady Jessie Wood, Sir Henry's widow. But Sargent's services on behalf of Sibelius were far from over. More recordings were planned, not least with the Vienna Philharmonic. Other performances were scheduled regularly, and then in October 1965 Sir Malcolm became a Knight Commander of the White Rose of Finland for his services to Sibelius's music. Having conducted many premiere performances of works by British composers, Sargent believed that Sibelius had been the most important composer he had known personally.

In his 1956/1958 recordings (both LPs are here issued on one CD for the first time) we hear Sargent as a Sibelius conductor in his prime, one of the most vivacious and passionate of Sibelius conductors, but without forgetting elegance, warmth and, if required, sensuousness. The combination of such qualities has remained rare to this very day, and the benchmark qualities of these recordings, close on 60 years old, outclass many more recent renderings quite easily.

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