

Jean Sibelius and his “monument” by Eila Hiltunen

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Finland regarded the composer Jean Sibelius as a national hero from his youth until the end of his long life, although he composed nothing during his last thirty years. Outside Finland his reputation as a composer has been erratic. His life and work are here examined against the background of the hero-worship he was favoured with in his native country. This survey also serves as background information for the analysis of the monument, designed and executed by Eila Hiltunen, which the Finnish state erected for Sibelius. When subject to analysis the sculptural composition which comprises the “monument” that consists of a cluster of some 600 hollow steel tubes welded together with a separate realistic head of the composer reveals various anomalies that do not seem to relate to Sibelius’s life and work.

Key words: Jean Sibelius, Sibelius Monument, Eila Hiltunen

Jean Sibelius en sy “monument” deur Eila Hiltunen

Finland het die komponis Jean Sibelius sedert sy jong dae tot aan die einde van sy lang lewe as ’n nasionale held beskou, al het hy gedurende sy laaste dertig jaar niks gekomponeer nie. Buite Finland was en is sy reputasie as ’n komponis wisselvallig. Sy lewe en werk word hier ondersoek teen die agtergrond van die heldeverering wat hom in sy vaderland te beurt geval het. Hierdie oorsig dien ook as agtergrondinligting vir die ontleding van die monument wat Eila Hiltunen ontwerp en uitgevoer het en deur die Finse staat vir Sibelius opgerig is. ’n Ontleding van die beeldhoukundige komposisie van die “monument” wat bestaan uit ’n saamgroepering van ongeveer 600 aanmekaar gesweisde hol staalbuisse en ’n afsonderlike realistiese kop van die komponis, dui op verskeie anomalieë en hou nie met Sibelius se lewe en werk verband nie.

Sleutelwoorde: Jean Sibelius, Sibelius-monument, Eila Hiltunen

The sculpture by Eila Hiltunen (1922-2003) in a public park in Helsinki, Finland, named in memory of the country’s national composer, Jean Sibelius, has the distinction that it does not represent the composer on a pedestal like the nineteenth-century monuments of great musicians, especially in Germany (see Steyn: 2004). It is modern in the sense that it is more like a public sculpture in a park setting in Töölö, some distance away from the centre of the capital city. Indeed, the website states:

One of Helsinki’s landmarks, the monument to honour national composer Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) was the result of a public fundraising campaign and a two-stage competition in 1961-62. At all stages, the project stirred an unprecedented public debate, as the entire Finnish population seemed to be divided into two camps, the conformists urging for a figurative solution, and the modernists accepting an abstraction as well.¹

The winning sculpture can briefly be described as consisting of two parts, an elevated monumental composition of a cluster of some 600 acid-proof stainless steel tubes of various diameters welded together, elevated on three support legs, measuring 10,5 metres in length, by 6,5 in depth and 8,5 in height, weighing some 30 tons, that are clearly reminiscent of organ pipes (figure 1), and some fifteen metres away (not to be dwarfed by the monumental tubular cluster) the finely realistic head of the composer on a level rocky outcrop in front of an undulating steel form serving as a kind of irregular protective niche (figure 2). The addition of the figurative element was an afterthought, requested by the Monument Committee to satisfy the public. The over life-sized portrait, *ca.* a metre high, meticulously resembles the composer in his full manhood (*circa* 1910) in a concentrated, pensive mood. According to the website the sculptor “chose to depict him in his creative age, not as the familiar elderly man, the national

icon”. Since the two parts of the monument are in contrast with each other, being so differently stylised, an evaluation of the artistic value of the total sculptural composition consequently becomes problematic.



Figure 1

Eila Hiltunen, the Sibelius Monument, showing the cluster of 600 acid-proof stainless steel tubes of various diameters welded together, 1961-67, Töölö, Helsinki. (Photograph: courtesy of George King).



Figure 2

Eila Hiltunen, the Sibelius Monument, showing the head of Jean Sibelius, cast in stainless steel, adjacent to the Sibelius Monument (Photograph: courtesy of George King).

Presumably visitors to the Sibelius Park seeing the monument for the first time will know that it was designed in honour of the composer whose life and work are critiqued in the next section of this article. Visitors may, however, be of two types: those ignorant of the composer's music and those acquainted with his music. Obviously, the viewers of the monument in the first category will not become any the wiser about the kind of music Sibelius wrote. They may be forgiven if they guess that he wrote organ music. Viewers acquainted with his music might wonder what the "organ pipes" signify, since there is a dearth of organ parts in the composer's oeuvre. It is acknowledged in the webpage (see note 1) that the competition organisers, the Sibelius Society, established after the composer's death in 1957 that Hiltunen, one of the 50 participating sculptors who submitted an abstract entry which she named *Passio Musicae*, consisting of hundreds of tubes that superficially resembles organ pipes, stated in brackets that "Sibelius never composed organ music".

The pipes of *Passio Musicae* seem symbolic of music in general, but apparently that is not all that it is meant to symbolise. On the website it is stated: "The relatively dense cluster of pipes had transformed into an airy, free shape suggestive of a birch forest or the Northern Lights. The nature feeling was enhanced by openings and rich texture on many of the tubes." So probably, the pipes do not refer to music after all and Sibelius's realistic presence is meant to symbolise the Finnish people's passion for their woodland landscapes.

What effect is the Sibelius Monument designed to produce in the viewers who will obviously be of a great variety, from totally uninformed about his music and life and those acquainted with it in great detail? What the monument will signify for the casual visitor to Sibelius Park is somehow less interesting than the value judgement of the informed viewer. Interpretive conclusions about the life and work of the composer will have consequences for a value judgement of the sculptural composition. An appreciation of Sibelius's life and music in Finnish society, positive or negative, should support an understanding of the way in which his memory was honoured by means of a monument.

The history of monuments to composers offers no guidance in respect of the qualities a monument to a composer should have because no other monument to great composers such as Beethoven and Bach (see Steyn 2004) includes a reference to music. However, the Monument Committee requested the addition of a figurative element to satisfy the public. In shaping Sibelius's face the sculptor chose to depict him in his creative age, not as the familiar elderly man, the national icon. Since Hiltunen included a mere portrait reference and did not put the composer on a pedestal, it is advisable to first review the life and music of Sibelius in the Finnish context of his times before attempting a value judgement of the monument that has become "a must for tourists". Also "Heads of State and VIP visitors are regularly taken there", the webpage states.

One needs to understand the background of the country and the musician to judge the Sibelius Park sculptural composition.

Sibelius and Finland

Jean Sibelius, born on 8 December 1865 at Hämeenlinna, a small provincial city in the south of Finland, died at Järvenpää, near Helsinki, on 20 September 1957, was the central figure in creating a Finnish voice in music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Throughout the twentieth century Finland regarded him as a national hero and its most renowned artist. Outside Finland, however, Sibelius's reputation has been volatile, with passionate claims made both by advocates and detractors. The various reactions to his music have provided some of the

most ideologically charged moments of twentieth-century reception history (Hepokoski 2001: 319).

In the year of Sibelius's birth Finland was a backwater, a smallish province on the north-western perimeter of Tsarist Russia, a country that had abolished serfdom only four years earlier (Layton 1978: 1). Sibelius was born into a Swedish-speaking home. Swedish was the language of the educated classes, while Finnish, spoken by the larger majority of the people, enjoyed a subservient status (Layton 1978: 2). He studied in Berlin for two years, but it was in Vienna in 1890, at the age of 35, that Sibelius began to steep himself in Finnish-language culture. This must have been occasioned by his engagement to the pro-Finnish Aino Järnevelt the previous summer (Hepokoski 2001: 319).

In his native land Sibelius had a place allowed to few other men. He was the voice of Finland in the world, and this voice was of great significance for his people. When his first significant work, *Kullervo*, was first performed in April 1892, it was an enormous success, both with the public and with the critics. Sibelius himself conducted, and from that moment onwards his position in Finnish musical life was never seriously challenged. For the first time a composer with a strong personal style and at the same time Finnish characteristics had appeared. It was regarded as a landmark in Finnish music at the time, and reflected the increasing national self-consciousness that was a feature of the period. The Finnish Sibelius cult began with this performance (Tarasti:1987: 5; Layton 1978: 9, 19, 24, 25; Levas 1972: xv). In 1892 Finland was an autonomous state under Russian rule. But the autonomy of Finland was a thorn in the flesh of the Czar. Laws and injunctions were promulgated in contradiction of Finnish autonomy, while Finnish laws were violated or abrogated without scruple (Levas 1972: 1).

In November 1897 the Finnish Senate voted to support Sibelius, then thirty-two, as a national artist with a pension of 3000 Finnmarks for each of the next ten years, after that time it was renewed to extend to the rest of his life (Hepokoski 2001: 323). He still did a certain amount of teaching to supplement his income, for he had a family as well as expensive tastes, but at least he was able to devote most of his time to composition (Layton 1970: 31).

He was honoured enthusiastically in his own land when on 8 December 1915 he celebrated his fiftieth birthday. In the Scandinavian countries the celebrations surrounding the fiftieth birthday are both extensive and exhausting: they tend to exceed those of any other day, even one's wedding day, in lavishness. Sibelius's birthday, which was celebrated as a national holiday, culminated in the première of the Fifth Symphony under the composer's own baton. At the Festival concert, in which the tone poem *The Oceanides* was given its first performance in Finland, it was welcomed with fanfares and massive applause. The composer's first biographer, Erik Furuhjelm, had prepared his biography almost as a kind of one-man *Festschrift* for the occasion (Layton 1978: 71, Levas 1972: xix).

In 1925 when Sibelius celebrated his sixtieth birthday, tributes, telegrams, flowers and other gifts were showered upon him in even greater profusion than had been possible on his fiftieth, held in the middle of the First World War. The Finnish government increased his pension, there was a nation-wide fund in his honour that reached a total of 150,000 Finnish marks, and his publisher, Hansen, gave him a handsome sum in addition (Layton 1978: 76).

The outbreak of the Second World War in the autumn of 1939, and the Soviet Union's attack on Finland in November, marked the start of a period of great privation for Finland. Sibelius's name was invoked in appeals to the American people for help (a stamp with his head and the words, "I need your help" was issued to raise funds for the Finnish cause), and his music once again served patriotic ends (Layton 1978: 90). There were pictures of him

everywhere. An energetic mouth and a much-wrinkled forehead suggested a powerful and somewhat unemotional man (Levas 1972: 3).

Every time there was a special occasion the Finnish Government and Parliament sent greetings to the nation's greatest son. During the war, when tobacco was strictly rationed, Sibelius had special permission from the authorities to have his needs supplied directly from the factory. His birthdays were national events, and on his eighty-fifth, in 1950, the President of Finland motored out to Järvenpää to pay the nation's respects. On his ninetieth he received more than twelve hundred telegrams, cigars from Sir Winston Churchill, tapes from Toscanini, and an enormous number of other presents and letters. Arrangements were made for him to hear his ninetieth-birthday concert, given by Sir Thomas Beecham in London and beamed on a specially powerful signal so that he could receive it at Järvenpää (Levas 1972: 116,117; Layton 1978: 91, 92).

Sibelius died of a cerebral haemorrhage and was buried at his home at Ainola. The funeral was huge – 17 000 men and women passed by the coffin. On the altar seven tall candles with white lilies around them symbolized his seven symphonies (Hepokoski 2001: 340). The president of Finland said: "...generations yet to come will draw strength from his massive achievement" (Levas 1972: 128). The popularity and prestige Sibelius enjoyed in Finland at that time were apparent in numerous ways: commemorative stamps were issued, his picture graced the 100 mark bill, and more than fifty streets, parks, prizes, even one of Finnair's airplanes were named after him. In 1965 a prestigious international violin competition carrying his name was founded and in 1996 a conductors' competition was named after Sibelius, and several museums as well as the conservatoire at which he had studied were named with reference to him. Erik Tawastjerna began publishing his five-volume biography of Sibelius in 1965 and completed it only in 1988. There was wide-spread doubt in Finland about whether there is anything to add after Tawastjerna. For a long period of time music scholars in Finland respectfully chose other themes, allowing Tawastjerna to complete his work (Hepokoski 2001: 340). However, in 1997 Finnish society's great respect for Sibelius along with financial support from the state and cultural organizations contributed to making the publication of a complete critical edition of Sibelius's work possible. This will be a publication of 45 volumes consisting of some 8,000 pages of notes and 2,000 pages of comments. The project should be completed in 25 years (Dahlström 1997: 42-4).

There is another side to the coin, however. In his personal life everything was not always well. Sibelius was for a long time his own worst enemy. "His was a tormented personality, the forbidding image and fierce, bald, head masking the raw emotions of an intense, passionate soul" (Hepokoski 2001: 329). His most serious problem was alcoholism. Drink may have been a way of battling performance stress – he noted that he could feel incapacitated by nerves before conducting, but that if he had swallowed half a bottle of champagne first, he could do anything – and with excessive drinking went excessive spending, frequently landing him in debt. While he and his family lived in Helsinki, he would sometimes disappear on binges lasting several days. After the death of his third daughter, Kirsti, from typhoid fever in 1900, his habit headed toward dangerous levels. At the turn of the century Sibelius's family and several of his associates became gravely concerned about the effect of his continued heavy drinking. In 1903 his wife, Aino, and his close friend, Axel Carpelan, devised a plan to save him from self-destruction: the family was to move permanently out of Helsinki, away from city life and its temptations. A rustic, beautiful villa, Ainola ("Aino's house"), was designed and constructed for them in the midst of the Finnish forest at Järvenpää, close to Lake Tuusula – near enough to Helsinki to provide professional access, but far enough to discourage casual visits. Sibelius and his family

moved into Ainola in September 1904, but, four years later, in 1908, he was hospitalised to dry out. Ainola was his home for the rest of his life (Hepokoski 2001: 329).

The years 1907 – 12 brought alternating periods of buoyant confidence and corrosive despair. By 1908 he was awash in debts, he was experiencing the negative aspects of prolonged alcoholism – in his own mind intoxication had been a necessary spur to his artistry – and he had developed a menacing throat tumour. Fearing cancer, he consulted specialists in Helsinki and Berlin and suffered through several operations. After thirteen operations the doctors were finally able to remove the tumour. But the risk of cancer remained for many years. On doctor's orders he was forced to renounce drinking and smoking. Although such abstinence had previously been unthinkable, this resolution lasted until 1915. For several years after 1908 Sibelius was haunted by the shadow of death, and much in his music and thought at this time turned towards the darker and the more introspective. He changed his lifestyle for seven years, his compositions benefited, as did his public persona; he travelled widely, visiting the US (Levas 1972: xix; Duchon 2007: 13; Hepokoski 2001: 332).

In Ainola, Sibelius sat out the First World War and the upheavals following the Russian Revolution, half-heartedly battling his renewed addiction, working slowly at his sixth and seventh symphonies. With time, he grew increasingly reclusive, affected by nervousness, a tremor in his hands and cataracts. Ainola and his close family provided a crucial safety net and continued to protect him, and his reputation, up to and even after his death (Duchon 2007: 13).

After he turned sixty until his death Sibelius was silent. The musical world waited for thirty years in vain for a new work. After the last creative period, which produced two symphonies and the tone-poem *Tapiola*, there was nothing except for a few small unimportant pieces for violin and piano (Levas 1972: 91). The silence from Järvenpää was total (Hepokoski 2001: 339).

Santeri Levas, who was Sibelius's personal secretary for many years, wrote:

He kept silent in seven languages on the subject of his work, but always assured me that he still went on with it. At no time did I see a manuscript. The Eighth Symphony was the cause of his constant struggle. He seemed to have two movements complete in his dreams. Whenever he was asked to compose something he made me reply that he was attached to the idea of a bigger work. He often said that he would complete a major work before his death. In the early years he seemed to be sanguine that he would succeed in doing so and even later on he would not admit anything to the contrary. In the autumn of 1949 he said to me: 'I'm certain that I shall write a work before I die. When that will be, I don't know, but I know that I shall write it'. Even as late as the summer of 1953 he told me in the course of a wide-ranging discussion that he was still in fact working on the new symphony. He always liked to talk about the fact that he was composing, not only with me but also with his many visitors. It was a matter of psychological complex. He worried that he was no longer able to compose. Other great composers were fortunate in that they died at the height of their powers; but Sibelius had thirty years of inner strife, the hopelessness of which he must have recognized early on. But not for anything would he suggest that his life's work had reached its end – that, so to speak, he was a living corpse. But he also tried to deceive himself, and that was the worst thing of all. If he could have come to terms with his circumstances his old age would have been far more harmonious (1972: 93-4).

According to Sibelius's wife, Aino, however, in the mid-1940s he destroyed a laundry basket of manuscripts – including what must have been the entire set of materials for the Eighth Symphony – by throwing them into the fire of the dining room stove at Ainola (Hepokoski 2001: 338).

Many inquiries came about the Eighth Symphony. The Royal Philharmonic Society in London secured the right to a world premiere, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra for the first

performance in Germany. In July 1939 Sibelius reported to Leipzig that the symphony was not yet “ready for the printer”. A month later he said that not enough progress had been made for a first performance to be considered for January 1940, as the committee had proposed. At the beginning of February 1940, in the gloomiest days of the “Winter War”, the Royal Philharmonic asked from London if the symphony could be played in a concert in aid of the Finnish Red Cross. It must have been bitter for the master to have to answer that he had nothing to offer (Levas 1972: 96).

He had practically everything else that a man could wish for. His beautiful home was full of works of art and souvenirs of a life rich in renown. He had a large library and numerous gramophone records. Through every window he could see the wide spread of the Finnish landscape that he loved so greatly. He had a wife who dedicated herself entirely to him and sought to fulfill his every wish. He had no more financial cares; he was prosperous and recognized throughout the world. Now was the time when he had so much opportunity to move about freely, to visit foreign countries and to acquaint himself with new trends in the field of culture. Yet he withdrew (Levas 1972: 105).

Sibelius’s music

At the head of the score of *Tapiola*, Sibelius’s last large orchestral work, he wrote his own short poetic explanation of its content:

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.

What Sibelius has to say is intimately related to the atmosphere and sensibility of northern Europe. In that lies his strength. He captures the soul of the North as no composer before him had done (Layton 1978: 155). The Sibelius-Finnish quality in his music was the expression of a strong spiritual experience and this lasted throughout his life. The connection with the natural beauty of his country was rooted deep in Sibelius’s feelings and became almost like a religion. Very few men have such an intimate relationship with nature as he had, and all his life it was an inspiration and joy (Levas: 47, 134).

Hepokoski (2001: 334)states:

At least within the sphere of musical practice, the composer appears to have held the quasi-animist conviction that long-dormant spiritual realities – roughly analogous to ancient, pagan gods – inhabit nature, waiting to be reawakened through meditative reflection. Supplementing what may be regarded as Sibelius’s aesthetic pantheism was his growing belief in the potential reuniting of music with nature. He sought to bring the palpable, grainy textures of musical sound and the processes of musical elaboration into alignment with the magisterial spontaneity of nature’s cries, rustles, splashes, storms, cyclical course and the like. Thus the act of composition became a neo-pantheist spiritual exercise. The resultant work of art was intended to invite a complementarily mystical, reverential or poetic listening – not to be captured by rational analysis or chalkboard explanation.

Analysis of and confrontation with the hostile forces of nature is central to Sibelius’s compositions. The sound of his orchestra is hard, dense, unyielding, the sonic equivalent of the texture of granite. Even at its most congenial, it tends to be ominous; the threat ever present (James 1983: 144, 145).

In the history of music Sibelius was an independent figure, “a lone wolf, who trod his own paths in the broad woodlands” (Levas 1972: 134, 135). For foreigners Sibelius for many years

was a typical nationalist composer. The symphonic poem, *Finlandia* (1899), his most popular short work, in which he characterizes the Finnish people in the most direct way possible (it begins with a hymn of an oppressed people, then a heroic series of fanfares, and finally a chorale of hope and triumph) had a lot to do with this. In June 1900 the Czar signed a decree making Russian the official language of Finland. In face of the accelerated effort towards the Russification of the country, it is natural that the Finns found spiritual consolation in the piece (De Gorog, 1989: 64). People from other countries were impressed by the strange, Finnish character of his musical language and very early it was spread around that he had made use of Finnish folk-songs in his works. In old age Sibelius fought a hopeless battle against this fallacy (Levas 1972: 84). His special sound says “nature”, not folk-song. This involves using individual members of the woodwind family (flutes, oboes, clarinets, or bassoons) in pairs, playing gurgling, rolling arabesques at the fixed interval of a third. As with his use of chugging string accompaniments, this sound is so characteristic that it has become one of Sibelius’s instantly recognizable orchestral fingerprints, irrespective of what other composers may have done with it before or since. The ubiquity of this “babbling brook” music accounts for the commonly held view that Sibelius’s symphonies are as much about nature as they are about anything else. Nature serves as a primary source of inspiration and expression in his music (Hurwitz 2007: 19, 25, 137). His art is intensely northern. It is based principally on the life, the past and the landscape of his country (De Törne: 96).

Sibelius’s life work began in earnest in the spring of 1891 when he began to plan the massive *Kullervo*, a five-movement “symphonic poem for soloists, chorus and orchestra” (Hepokoski 2001: 319). He threw himself into the project, continuing to construct his new “Finnish-culture” self-image in ways that were to inform the rest of his life. He ruled out the direct citation of folksong, however, and sought instead to capture the essential feeling that animated such music (Hepokoski 2001: 319). The *Kullervo* symphony is a vast fresco on Mahlerian scale that takes some seventy-five to eighty minutes in performance and calls for two soloists and male chorus (Layton 1978: 24, 25).

An unrelenting, mythic tale of hardship, incest and tragedy, *Kullervo* combines features of the standard programmatic symphony with cantata-like epic recitation and quasi-operatic soliloquies and brief dialogues (Hepokoski 2001: 322). It tells of the fate of a tragic hero in the *Kalevala* from which Sibelius was later to draw inspiration for further important works (Levas 1972: xv). The Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*, was published in its definitive form in 1849 by Elias Lönnrot (1802-84). It is not a faithful transcription of the Finnish oral tradition, but rather a literary epic in verse, in which the author amalgamated many different versions of the same stories, combined characters, and otherwise adjusted his source material in order to put together a cohesive and highly selective narrative containing, among other things, a creation myth, the exploits of several colorful characters down through the ages, and ending with the coming of Christianity to Finland. The importance of the *Kalevala* to Finnish culture, dominated throughout the nineteenth century first by Sweden and then Russia, cannot be overestimated. It established the language as a literary medium for the very first time, and so provided the aesthetic foundation of the nationalist movement. The Finnish mythology as enshrined in the *Kalevala*, was, with nature, to be a vital force in his Sibelius’s musical personality (Hurwitz 2007: 28).

Sibelius’s most significant output was orchestral: seven symphonies, one violin concerto, several sets of incidental music and numerous tone poems, often based on incidents taken from the *Kalevala* (Hepokoski 2001: 319). According to James the essential Sibelius is to be found in the seven symphonies. Everything else is to a greater or lesser extent a by-product of that central achievement. Whatever may be said about the symphonic tone poems, and there is much to be

said for they represent an important side of his creative faculty, the guiding principles are to be found in the symphonies (James 1983: 48). The symphonies provide no clue to any nonmusical purpose, but by the imaginative (and Romantic-minded) listener, they are invariably said to evoke fjords and snow fields (Peris 1985: 38).

The first performance of the First Symphony took place in Helsinki early in 1899 and was a tremendous success. No longer was there any doubt: Finland had a composer of international stature (Levas 1972: xv).

The most self-evidently Finnish of all his symphonies, Symphony no. 2 (1902), was largely composed in Rapallo, Italy where Sibelius, his wife and two small daughters were staying (Hurwitz 2007: 81). Like Ibsen, Sibelius had a lifelong love for Italy; not only the Second Symphony and other smaller works were written there, but also that most uncompromisingly arctic of all his symphonic masterpieces, *Tapiola* (Layton 1978: 46).

The Third Symphony is the only symphony to employ *Kalevala* melodies exclusively in all of its movements. Although the Second Symphony is often viewed as his most comprehensive nationalistic musical statement, according to Hurwitz, that honour really belongs to the Third (Hurwitz 2007: 94, 97).

Its severity and bleakness earned the Fourth the title of the “Barkbröd” Symphony, a reference to times of hardship in the nineteenth century, when the peasants were forced to use the bark of trees for making bread. At its first performances in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe, it bewildered and puzzled the public; at its première in Gothenburg it was hissed and booed by the audience, while in America it evoked all sorts of hostile criticism. It also acquired some staunch supporters. Among them was Toscanini, who, characteristically, reacted to its hostile reception by immediately billing it for repeat (Layton 1978: 58, 60, 67).

The Fifth Symphony is a true festival symphony, full of life and brilliance. Sibelius never forgot a phenomenon of nature he experienced just when he had put his pen to this score for the last time. Twelve white swans settled down on the lake, and then circled his home three times before flying away (Levas 1972: xxi, xxii).

The Seventh Symphony is widely regarded as Sibelius’s greatest achievement. Its music is a concentration of the essence of the other symphonies’ best qualities (Jackson and Murtomäki 1996: 352). Many commentators take its pastoral character as another example of nature music (Hurwitz 2007: 128).

Ideas that were first sketched for one piece sometimes wound up in another. The Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies and *Tapiola* are interrelated works, four tableaux of a comprehensive vision of the spiritual presences animating the Northern forest-world (Hepokoski 2001: 334, 335).

The last important work of Sibelius was, as Hepokoski (2001: 338) called it, “the disturbingly primeval forest-evocation, *Tapiola*”. The tone poem was commissioned in 1926 on behalf of the New York Philharmonic Society.

What impresses is the work’s unparalleled atmosphere, unique in the symphonic literature: its brooding stasis, gestational patience and long pedal points: its dark, hypnotic oscillations, registering an underlying, vital sway in the forest; its cold shadows and impersonal, elemental natural processes before which mere humankind fades into insignificance; its slow transformations of chordal colour; the terrifying ferocity of its wind-lashed storms; the self-disclosure of the animating forest-god.

It is easy to hear the “savage dreams” (see Sibelius’s poem) in the obsessive music of *Tapiola*, or to imagine the wood-sprites in one of its more playful episodes. But that disguises

what is really going on in this work. The genius of *Tapiola* is that it turns music itself into a force of nature. The climactic storm sounds unlike anything else that had been written up to then: made up of weird shimmerings and clusters that grow from barely audible string sounds into a gigantic explosion for the whole orchestra. *Tapiola* prefigures some of the orchestral experiments of Gyorgy Ligeti or Iannis Xenakis in the 1950s and 1960s. The whole structure of the music, its repetition of just one short theme, makes it a “terrifying, nihilistic vision, a blasted landscape whose beauty is stark, brutal and depopulated; as far removed as possible from a picturesque depiction of Finnish flora and fauna” (Service 2007: 25). The word *Tapiola* roughly translates as “dwelling place of the forest god”. It is the apotheosis of Sibelius’s *Kalevala* style and a masterpiece of mood, sonority, and atmosphere. *Tapiola* is often described as pure landscape painting, a scene devoid of any human presence. The music, however, says otherwise. It consists entirely of *Kalevala* melodies, or more properly, variations and developments of a single theme presented right at the beginning. Like all of Sibelius’s *Kalevala* melodies, this theme has a distinctly songlike quality, and the music’s disturbing, oppressive, and terrifying expressive power arises from the tension between this vocal idea and its often alien surroundings (Hurwitz 2007: 150, 151).

The development section, based mostly on the first subject, marks a startling break with the previous mood of darkness. It is fairy music, a representation of those wood-sprites weaving magic secrets in the gloom that Sibelius mentions, the tone is one of gossamer lightness, as woodwinds and timpani chatter rapidly above the most delicate tracery in the strings, but it quickly becomes more ominous and leads to a highly varied but nonetheless easily recognizable recapitulation. The coda contains the work’s principal climax, in this case a storm rather than a wave, but one achieved by remarkably similar means – chromatic string ostinatos beneath alarming crescendos in brass and timpani (Hurwitz 2007: 152). Of all Sibelius’s work it is *Tapiola* which shows the most profound originality in its handling of the orchestra. The sounds that he draws from what is merely a normal large orchestra without extra percussion or even harp are completely new (Layton 1978: 79).

The tone poem begins resolutely in a dark minor key, but closes in a softly positive major one. This is unusual for Sibelius, who more often ends in the same mode in which he began, but it is justified as a natural reaction to the climactic storm, which has the effect of “clearing the air” musically speaking. It’s also a conclusion that, with the benefit of historical hindsight, seems particularly fitting as a way of bringing Sibelius’s career as a composer of orchestral music largely to its close: a deep sigh of contentment for a job well done (Hurwitz 2007: 152). It is hard to know where Sibelius could have gone after the end of *Tapiola*. Silence, perhaps, is the only logical choice (Service 2007: 25).

Two single-movement works that received titles identifying them as myth- or nature-based tone poems are, *Luonnotar* (literally [feminine] nature-spirit), 1913, a reshaping of the *Kalevala* creation story and the most uncompromisingly Finnish of Sibelius’s major works, and a masterwork of the late style, *The Oceanides*, 1913-14 (Hepokoski 2001: 335).

Luonnotar translates roughly as “Daughter of the Air”, an elemental *Kalevala* nature-spirit who, tired of hanging out in the empty void, descends into the primal waters of the pre-creation cosmos. There she becomes pregnant, but is unable to give birth. As she swims around, cold and miserable, a giant duck flies in looking for a place to build its nest. *Luonnotar* take pity on the creature, and raises her knee to give the bird a platform. More time passes, and as the eggs hatch, they cause a throbbing, painful heat that makes the Daughter of the Air twitch violently, upsetting the nest and shattering an egg. Its shell and white are then transformed, becoming variously the land, sky, moon, and stars. The story itself is so weird and musically indescribable that Sibelius doesn’t bother much with pictorial details, save for some billowing

wind and waves in the harps. Even the great climax, which one might at first think represents the shattering of the egg, is an independent musical event unrelated to the narrative at that point. Sibelius concentrates on creating a visionary aural panorama that evokes the ancient time of creation, a study in mood rather than a sequence of specific episodes. The ending is particularly unforgettable: the voice glitters against the high, sustained violins, even as the speckled bits of eggshell becomes the stars in the heavens. *Luonnotar* has always been recognized as one of Sibelius's most original creations (Hurwitz 2007: 146, 147).

In *The Oceanides*, which takes its inspiration from Greek mythology rather than anything particularly Finnish, Sibelius produced a commendable work. Any symphonic portrait of the ocean is bound to rely more on texture and colour than on vocal melody, for the simple reason that the ocean is not a person and does not sing, nor does it lend itself to anthropomorphic approach. In the score, harps and rhythmic patterns in the strings naturally play a major role in conjuring up the necessary watery imagery. Not only is the entire work based on rising and falling motives having a distinctly wave-like shape, but the big climax at the end is the most graphically thrilling evocation of a huge ocean swell ever written. It is achieved by thoroughly Sibelian means: his trademark rapid, cross-hatched string ostinatos supporting long swelling chords (Hurwitz 2007: 148).

Reception and criticism

(1) *Reasons for idealisation*

Sibelius was a national figure, perhaps to a greater extent than any earlier composer, not excluding Chopin or Dvořák. Through the medium of his work people first became aware of Finland (Layton 1987: 91, 92). Already in his youth Sibelius gained a wholly extraordinary popularity in his native land. His compositions were widely interpreted more or less as battle songs and as representing the general mood of the Finnish people. This was so especially in respect of the tone poem *Finlandia*, which was very quickly recognized both at home and abroad as a second national anthem. Sibelius was honoured as Finland's most famous son. He held this place his whole life, and the more his fame grew in the world the more affection and esteem there were for him in his own country. In independent Finland Sibelius was practically a legendary figure, one of the elect, and approached with reverence (Levas 1972: 2). When a small nation of four million people produces an artist whose acclaim is truly universal it is easy to understand that in his own country his importance is unreasonably exaggerated. This is particularly the case when admirers have only a slender idea of musical history. It is therefore significant that foreign critics and scholars, important ones among them, have often compared Sibelius with Beethoven (Levas 1972: 131).

Sibelius made his appearance at a time when the people of Finland craved national symbols. He was himself permeated with the spirit of nationalism and carried along by the flow of patriotism, which afforded him a point of departure available to few young artists. The Finns could have wished for nothing more at that point in time than an artist who had something vital to say, and who spoke an international language (Dahlström 1997: 34; Levas 1972: 1).

(2) *Reasons for detraction*

Outside Finland the reception of Sibelius was not one of complete adulation. Alex Ross (1996: 30) remarked that "the collective scorn heaped on the music of Sibelius over the years could fill a companion volume to Nicholas Slonimsky's *Lexicon of Musical Invective*". What is unusual about anti-Sibelius bile is that it has often stemmed from fellow composers. Virgil Thomson called the Second Symphony "vulgar, self-indulgent, and provincial beyond all description"

(1945: 4). Benjamin Britten looked at the Fourth Symphony and said that its composer must have been drunk. René Leibowitz, a disciple of Schoenberg, called the Fifth “the worst symphony ever written”. Certain critics had used Sibelius to berate composers such as Schoenberg and Stravinsky. The German philosopher, sociologist and musical theorist Theodor Adorno, typically venturing farther than most, accused Sibelius of fascistic nature worship (Ross 1996: 30). He bore Sibelius a grudge for his very popularity, so was keen to associate him with Nazi ideology (Duchen 2007: 13).

It was unfortunate for Sibelius that in the 1930s leading Nazis took a liking to his music. By the time Hitler came to power, Sibelius was firmly established as the world’s most popular living composer. Given the stirring emotions and nationalistic edge of his early works, it is no wonder that German fascists tried to appropriate his music. His accessibility, idealism and evocations of nature made him certain for approval when compared to the 12-tone “wailings” of Schoenberg, Webern and Berg (Duchen 2007: 13). Hitler awarded Sibelius the Goethe medal in 1935, on the occasion of the composer’s 70th birthday, and in 1942 Goebbels founded a German Sibelius society. Sibelius did not do much to help his own cause as a radical in the 1930s and 40s: not only did he accept the Goethe medal, the highest honour for artistic achievement in the Third Reich, he also approved the formation of the German Sibelius Society, the only such society dedicated to a foreign composer. He was not noted for refusing honours (Service 2007: 25).

After 1918, Finland became generally hostile towards Soviet Bolshevism and, like many Finnish intellectuals, Sibelius remained German-oriented especially because of his early training under German-speaking musicians. For these reasons, already in 1934 Sibelius accepted Goebbels’ invitation to serve as vice-president of the Council of Composers’ International Cooperation (of which Richard Strauss was then president). But despite such seemingly close relationships, whereby Sibelius’s eminence was exploited by politicians to cement Finnish-German “brotherhood- in-arms”, the composer himself remained aloof; his diary entries from the 1940s unequivocally disclose his aversion to Nazi ideology. After the war, Sibelius’s popularity declined in Central Europe, probably as a result of his prominence in the Third Reich, where, along with Respighi, he had been the most played foreign composer (Jackson and Murtomäki 1996: xii).

Adorno’s attack in his influential 1938 article “Glosse über Sibelius” in which he associates Sibelius – as *the* paragon of musical conservatism – with Nazi ideology points out: “the song [of Sibelius’s supporters] hinges on the refrain ‘ everything is nature, everything is nature’. The great Pan, yearning for ‘blood and soil’ (*Blut und Boden*) quickly installs itself. The trivial passes for the elemental, the unarticulated for the noise of unconscious creation” (461). Adorno’s contemporaries would immediately have recognized the phrase “Blut und Boden” as the slogan of Goebbels’s propaganda campaign to return culture to “its native soil”. Sibelius’s world-view could be interpreted as uncomfortably assimilable into the “blood-and-soil” ideologies promoted by the Third Reich. Such criticism looked warily on Sibelius’s lifelong attraction to the “truth” supposedly embedded in ethnic identity, on his deadly serious aesthetic invocations of archaic folk gods, on his manifest discomfort with modern urbanism and on his anti-technological retreat back to “nature”. Adorno correctly interprets the “spin” the Nazis had put on Sibelius: for them, he becomes the paragon of the “Nordic” composer: virile, manly, nature-oriented, and nationalistic (Jackson and Murtomäki 1996: xii, xiii). The criticism was strengthened by Sibelius’s well-known anti-socialist politics and the historical fact of Finland’s “continuation-war” alliance of convenience with Nazi Germany in 1941-4 against the much-hated Soviets – for which the composer made an Associated Press appeal for understanding on 12 July 1941.

Adorno was an influential thinker, and contributed greatly to the prevailing post-war

aesthetic in which critics condemned new music that seemed “conservative” and failed to toe the line of the 12-tone system. In his article he derided the veneration for Sibelius as a shabbily deluded, market-driven false consciousness and denounced the composer’s musical technique as reactionary and inept, the “originality of helplessness”. If Sibelius is good, then the musical criteria that have been applied from Bach to Schoenberg are invalid, he wrote (1938: 463). Nearly two decades later René Leibowitz issued a pamphlet (1955) labelling Sibelius, on essentially the same grounds, “le plus mauvais compositeur du monde” (Hepokoski 2001: 339). In 1990, Kokkonen pointed out that paradoxically Leibowitz’s title reveals Sibelius’s real international importance. After all, who in their right mind would set to writing about the worst composer in the world? (Kokkonen 1990: 17).

In retrospect, Adorno’s critique of Sibelius’s compositional technique has proven the most damaging – more harmful even than his allusion to the Nazi connection. Composers’ unsavoury political affiliations – real or imagined – may be excused as long as they are good composers (Richard Strauss especially comes to mind); but if they are bad composers, they will be forgiven nothing. Adorno set out to prove that Sibelius’s music is “amateurish”, characterized by “the asceticism of impotence”. Sibelius’s “asceticism” as constructed by Adorno, is “the originality of incapacity” as “it was denied to him to write either a chorale or a proper counterpoint”. Furthermore, in its representation of nature, Sibelius’s music reveals – contrary to French Impressionism as epitomized by Debussy – no sense of colour, but only “dull, rigid and accidental orchestral colour”, in which there is “no palette: everything is only tints” (Jackson and Murtomäki 1996: xii).

All these things doubtless had their roles to play as underlying, often tacit factors in mid-century Sibelius reception. Opinions about his work polarized along ideological lines, with disastrous results for his subsequent reputation in the critical and academic world in the second half of the century. However, Sibelius’s traditionalist supporters claimed him as the last true successor to Beethoven and adduced the composer’s works in their own campaigns against the dissonant new music (Hepokoski 2001: 339).

By the 1950s, the decade of the flowering of the post-war avant-garde, Sibelius’s reputation had plummeted among élite modernists, and it seemed to slump among concert audiences as well, notwithstanding the entrenched persistence of the Second Symphony and the Violin Concerto, the devoted support of several eminent conductors and a modest, ever-renewing faction of admirers. For the rest of the century, historians writing official accounts of what came to be called “modern music” or “twentieth-century music” would routinely blank him out of their histories or mention him briefly and patronizingly as a mere nationalist or faded holdover from the nineteenth century. Within the late twentieth-century academy, itself conservatively wedded to one-sided conceptions of “modernism”, this inadequate picture has proved difficult to move beyond (Hepokoski 2001: 339). By 1960 Sibelius’s fall from grace was complete (Lebrecht 2007: 1).

(3) Sibelius at the beginning of the twenty-first century

On the fiftieth anniversary of his death last year, opinions differed. “Whatever became of Jean Sibelius?” Lebrecht (2007: 2) asked.

For the first half of the 20th century, the square-headed Finn was the totemic symbol of a heroic nation and the most admired living symphonist. His second symphony was performed more often than all of Gustav Mahler’s put together. The world’s top conductors trekked to Helsinki to bend their knees and inquire after his long-awaited eighth symphony. The British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams said that all modern music should be ‘like Sibelius’. Today, half a century after his death, the commemoration is being marked by virtual silence. Few Sibelius retrospectives have been announced beyond the Baltic.

Jessica Duchon (2007: 13) wrote:

Jean Sibelius, Finland's finest export, died in 1957 at the age of 91. In 1935 he was identified as the most popular classical composer of all, ahead of Beethoven, in a poll by the New York Philharmonic society. But on the 50th anniversary of his death he is receiving scant attention in British concert halls, even though he was as fine a composer as the more popular likes of Shostakovich and Mahler.

Hurwitz (2007: 4) however, states that at the beginning of the twenty-first century Sibelius is making a major comeback. New recordings are issued frequently, Paavo Berglund has already recorded the complete symphonies three times since 2000, while conductors who have recorded the complete cycle once include Simon Rattle and Vladimir Ashkenazy.

Against this background of Sibelius's life and music, the attention is shifted to his monument erected by the Finnish state.

An evaluation of the Sibelius Park sculptures

If the Sibelius Monument is to be considered as a work of art, albeit public art, there is need for evaluative criteria since it is not an autonomous work of art in the sense that it exists for its own sake as a self-referential aesthetic object, but with reference to "a genius [sic] composer, a grateful nation" – according to the website.

The first point to consider is what Rosalind Krauss (1979: 33) calls "the logic of sculpture" that "would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of this logic a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolic tongue about the meaning or use of that place". In this sense the situation of Hiltunen's sculpture in the park setting in Töölö is traditional in that it creates a place of remembrance, a necessary prerequisite for the "logic of the monument".

In attempting an aesthetic evaluation of Hiltunen's sculptures, I follow Donald Kuspit's (1985: 319) insight: "Successful art mediates the basic image by 'clarifying' its constituents, its relationship to the world, its relations with other images – or all three." Clearly, the Sibelius Monument, consisting of two parts, is not purely abstract and conceptual, but also partly imagistic. According to Kuspit's (321) definition the former (the abstract) "necessarily must oppose imagistic art, which denies autonomy by acknowledging the fundamental presence in art of a difficult-to-integrate extra-artistic reality". It therefore turns out that the "monument" to Sibelius is an unprecedented hybrid in various respects:

- The sculptural composition in the Sibelius Park is here interpreted as two separate entities: the massive, elevated cluster of pipes that is superbly suspended in space as a dynamic abstraction and the static portrait-head of the composer, implanted on rock at the eye level of viewers. Both are focal centres which do not enhance each other to achieve a wholeness of composition.² The former clearly aspires to be a symbol, not a representative image, but a "monument" to music as a universal art – not specifically to the music composed by Sibelius. Viewed in this way, the title *Passio Musicae* is more apt than the designation "Sibelius Monument".
- The total composition is neither a monument nor a memorial (even though these terms are often used synonymously).³ In the case of the abstract welded tubes no ideology is apparent visually, as is the case with most monuments. Furthermore, the welded tubes as "organ pipes" cannot possibly be interpreted as a memorial to Sibelius's oeuvre because he did not compose organ music and he was never personally associated with the place where he is honoured. Even with a leap of the imagination the pipes cannot be interpreted as an image of

Finland's woodlands. The sound occasionally produced by the wind in the hollow, flute-like pipes may be interpreted as musical or natural, depending on the mood of the visitor.

- Rikki Ashar (2004: 169), in an article discussing abstract sculpture, states: "The adjective abstract usually describes artworks – known as abstractions – without recognizable subjects. Synonyms for abstract include nonobjective and nonrepresentational." There is no need to question this definition, but it surely raises the question about the abstractness of Hiltunen's *Passio Musicae*. Why does a nonrepresentational work remind viewers of organ pipes, or even of a forest?
- As a public sculpture and tourist attraction, "It is considered as one of the most remarkable memorials in Finland, and its position in Finnish sculpture art (sic) is nearly iconic".⁴ Clearly, the "monument" is also meant to be judged as a work of art – abstract in its being-in-itself and avant garde in the Finnish context, even though at the time of its creation the nation was not unanimously happy with only a modern non-figurative composition to represent their national composer.
- The portrait of the composer seems strangely disembodied, even decapitated, but nevertheless vital as an idealised reminder of a composer as a national hero – not the real man with an erratic legacy.

In conclusion one may recall Adorno's (1977: 347) aesthetic judgement:

Artworks are understood only when their experience is brought to the level of distinguishing between true and not true or, as a preliminary stage, between correct and incorrect [...]. The comprehension of an artwork as a complex of truth brings the work into relation with its untruth, for there is no artwork that does not participate in the untruth external to it, that of the historical moment. Aesthetics that does not move within the perspective of truth fails its task [...].

Hiltunen's *Passio Musicae* sculpture and the Sibelius head invites a separate aesthetic assessment, but both need to be assessed within the "perspective of truth", that is the historical truth external to it – that is, the reference to the man it celebrates. Since hitherto only laudatory comments have been written about the homage that Hiltunen sought to bring Sibelius as an uncritically celebrated national hero, the present authors hope that we have unravelled some of the untruths external to the man and his "monument" as a Finnish icon.

Notes

1. Referred to as "the website", as cited below.
2. I borrow the references to "centres" and "wholeness" from Christopher Alexander (2002).
3. See Maré (2002) for the proposed difference between a monument and a memorial.
4. See <http://filahome.com/e/data/0205sibeliusmonument.htm> (created 2003/07/24)..

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The cult of monuments for German composers in the nineteenth century, *SAJAH* (19): 143-54; The fountain in honour of Richard Strauss: an assessment of its artistic value and meaning as a commemorative work, *SAJAH* 20(1): 147-58; The ideological influence of Richard Wagner on the visual culture of the Nazi era, *SAJAH* 20(1): 159-75; Auguste Rodin's marble portrait bust of Gustav Mahler: a study of the beneficiality of a dialectical synthesis of opposites in life and art, *SAJAH* 22(3): 83-99.