

Reconciling Opposites: On the Compositional Genesis of Sibelius's *Scènes historiques II* and *The Oceanides*

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Sibelius's *Scènes historiques II*, Op. 66, were conceived as a sequel to *Scènes historiques I*, Op. 25, which had been completed in September 1911 as a revision of Nos. 2, 5 and 4 (or Tableaux 1, 4 and 3) from the earlier *Press Celebrations Music* of 1899. Furthermore, *Scènes historiques II* also echo certain aspects of Sibelius's *Karelia Suite*, Op. 11, notably the E flat major fanfares of the well-known *Intermezzo* (composed in 1893). Significantly, Sibelius had written to Breitkopf & Härtel at the end of 1909 – in response to his publisher's entreaties – that 'it would be easy to make a suite in the Carelia style' ('eine Suite in Style Carelia sich gut machen lässt'[\[1\]](#)).

The actual music of Sibelius's *Scènes historiques II* was composed between 28th May 1909 (the day he mentioned in his diary that the first movement [*Die Jagd*] was being planned) and March/April 1912.[\[2\]](#) On 1st July 1911 he refers to both an overture (likely the future *Die Jagd* with its subtitle, *Ouverture*) and a suite – two works that are again listed in his entries for 9th and 11th January 1912 (there worded *Suite symphonique*). Not until 20th January 1912 does *Die Jagd* become synonymous with the above-mentioned overture ('for a limited characteristic orchestra' with bass clarinet and horns). Sibelius worked especially hard on *Die Jagd* between 16th December 1911 and 19th February 1912. From his entries on 4th and 15th February we learn that he extensively revised the hunting fanfares in *Die Jagd* – which are frequently related to sketches for Sibelius's *Cassazione*, Op. 6 (1904)[\[3\]](#) and Third Symphony, Op. 52 (1907)[\[4\]](#) – and also devoted special care to the first movement's development section (possibly the future bars 88–169).

On 4th February 1912 Sibelius again visualized *Die Jagd* as a member of a larger series or suite, listing the order of movements as 1) *An der Zugbrücke*, 2) *Die Falkonière* and 3) *Die Jagd*. However, on the next day he reversed this sequence of movements, so that *Die Jagd* now comes first and *An der Zugbrücke* last, *Die Falkonière* being renamed *Ritterliebe*. Here (5th February 1912) Sibelius's overall title for the entire work still vacillates between *Suite caractéristique* and *Scènes historiques II*.

In a musical sense, *Die Jagd* prefigures much of the intervallic content of the entire *Scènes historiques II*, notably its opening triadic fanfares on a–f–c' (first horn, bars 1–4), e flat–g–c' (first flute, bars 13–14) and e flat–g–b flat (first clarinet, bars 14–16). These were possibly inspired by parallel tertial figurations in Mozart's Symphony No. 39, first movement (1788) and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, first movement (1803), with whom they also share repeated coloristic excursions to the submediant realm of C major. Similar melodic third contours are observable in the subsequent second movement of *Scènes historiques II*, the *Minnelied*. Here the viola's opening, broadly flowing *cantilena* in bars 1–8 outlines an ever-expanding intervallic matrix on b flat–d flat, b flat–e flat, b flat–f' and d flat–a flat, d flat–c flat–b flat that was originally sketched for the final episode of the symphonic fantasia *Pohjola's Daughter*, Op. 49 (c. 1905–06)[\[5\]](#). Like the *Minnelied*, this dramatic scene sought to depict the minstrel Väinämöinen courting Pohjola's icy daughter.

Two subsequent self-quotations from the *Press Celebrations Music* are smoothly worked into *Minnelied*'s heterogeneous melodic fabric. Thus flute I's prominent fourth-fifth intervals in bars 11–14 appear to echo the above-mentioned *Press Celebrations Music* of 1899, No. 6 (the fifth tableau): compare bars 20–22 with the trombones' striking fanfare an e–a–g–f sharp–e. Significantly, this dramatic tableau depicts the Russian capture of the Finnish city of Viipuri in 1710. (See Example 1.)

Musical Example 1:

a) No. 6 from *Press Pension ... Music* (1899),
bars 20–22, (3) Trombones' solo (Grave)



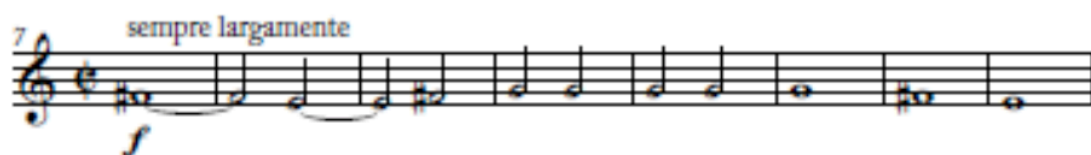
b) *Minnelied* from *Scènes historiques II* (1912),
bars 11–13, Flute I solo (Largo)



In musical terms Sibelius now freely inverts the fifth-fourth melodic sequences of *Minnelied*'s bars 5–9 in the flutes' soaring *cantilena* of bars 11–14. Much the same can be said of the second appropriation of *Press Celebrations Music*, namely the cello solo in bars 25–34, which adapts another expressive string motif from the *Press Celebrations Music*, No. 3, bars 7–14. (See Ex. 2.)

Musical Example 2:

a) No. 3 from *Press Pension ... Music* (1899),
bars 7–14, Violin I (Andante ma non troppo)



b) *Minnelied*, bars 25–27, Violoncello solo (Largo)



Here Sibelius effects a poetic and flowing continuation of the closing, ecstatically hued *Minnelied* climax in bars 19–24. One should also note the clearer focus on D major in *Minnelied*, bars 25–32, whereas the earlier *Press Celebrations Music* model had much stronger D-dorian (and even D minor!) overtones, depicting Bishop Henry baptizing the Finns as Christians in the twelfth century. Significantly, while the latter composition later introduces elaborate Phrygian-style modulations to D flat- and E flat major, *Minnelied*'s smooth transition back to the G flat major tonic in bars 34–35 utilizes a coloristic sixth chord on D/D flat–F sharp–G sharp–B that is eventually reinterpreted as a G flat:V sonority, F sharp being resolved down to the more neutral F. This masterly synthesis of seemingly disparate elements is already adumbrated in two earlier Sibelius sketches in HUL 0190, p. [1] (see Example 3) and also HUL 0191, p. [1], whose line 16 features a cadential figure on c–b flat–c–d flat–e flat–c–b flat–c: a variation of Ex. 2 and *Press Celebrations*

Music, No. 7: *Finland Awakes*, which eventually became the well-known *Finlandia*, Op. 26 (1900).

Musical Example 3:

Early sketch for *Pohjola's Daughter* (ca. 1905–6) fusing beginning of *Minnelied*, bars 3–4 and 25–27 (cf. again Ex. 2 and HUL 0190, p [1])



The third and final movement of Sibelius's *Scènes historiques II – An der Zugbrücke* – was begun on 8th and 20th October 1911, yet Sibelius did not complete its final orchestration until late March and mid-April 1912 (at a time he was also finishing *Minnelied*). In cyclical terms, *An der Zugbrücke* may be said to revert to the tertial matrices of *Die Jagd* and *Minnelied* (see Ex. 4).

Musical Example 4: Cyclical connections between *Die Jagd* and *An der Zugbrücke* (*Scènes historiques II: i+iii*)
 a) *An der Zugbrücke*, bars 5–8, Flutes (Allegro moderato)



b) *Die Jagd, Ouverture*, bars 13–16, Flutes and Clarinets (Allegro con brio)



Thus *An der Zugbrücke*'s opening flute duet in bars 5–6 outlines the same progression, E flat–C, E flat–G–B flat that figured so prominently in *Die Jagd*'s third fanfares, bars 13–16[6]. These tertial sequences eventually reach a peak climax during the E flat major reprise in bars 78–80, 86–88 and 112–114, at which point Sibelius smoothly incorporates another self-quotation from the earlier *Press Celebrations Music*, (1899), No. 1 (*Preludium*), bars 36–40 (see Ex. 5).

Musical Example 5: Parallel third sequences leading up to E \flat -major climaxes
 a) No. 1 (*Preludium*) from *Press Pension ... Music* (1899), bars 36–40, Flutes (Andante ma non troppo)



b) *An der Zugbrücke*, bars 78–80 + 86–88 + 112–114, Violins I+II (Allegro moderato)



It is noteworthy that the *Press Celebrations Music*, excerpt begins in E minor/B major and terminates abruptly on a climactic E flat major tutti chord, similar to the modulations from B major[7] to D minor and E flat major in *An der Zugbrücke*, bars 28–56 (B major), 57–59 (D minor) and 74–118 (E flat major reprise). To top off this buoyant recapitulation, Sibelius also injects yet another self-quotation from an isolated draft dating from c. 1899[8] in the violins at bars 80–95 (see Ex. 6).

Musical Example 6: Additional thirds quotation in *An der Zugbrücke*
 a) Isolated draft in HUL 0957/2, lines 17–20 (ca. 1899)



b) *An der Zugbrücke*, bars 88–94, Violin I (Allegro moderato)



The latter's tertial outlines (particularly in bars 88–89 and 91) enable our composer to freely substitute Exx. 5 and 6 in place of each other, notably during bars 78–96. Moreover, the music's witty interplay between interrelated tertial matrices – replete with some subliminal echoes of Bottom's ass-music from Mendelssohn's overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1826)[9] – progressively brightens the already comical mood of *An der Zugbrücke*, thus preparing the way for the jovial 3/4 coda in bars 121–190.

The last-named coda-epilogue of *An der Zugbrücke* is based[10] on an even earlier Sibelius composition, the third movement of the *Promotional Cantata* of 1894[11]. (See Ex. 7.) Like the two earliest sketches (in HUL 0957/2, lines 13–15 and 1528/1, line 13) for the 1899 draft of Ex. 6a, Ex. 7a was penned in F major and thus transposed down a major second to *An der Zugbrücke*'s tonic of E flat major. A comparison of the *Promotional Cantata*'s flute I part and *Die Zugbrücke* also reveals that Sibelius has omitted the former's modulatory middle section in bars 25–53 and rendered the final fanfarish motive on f–g–a more heroic (compare the triumphant horns in bars 178–183 of *An der Zugbrücke*). Moreover, *An der Zugbrücke*'s bars 175–176 now stress a strong harmonic pedal on e flat–b flat (or E

flat:I+V) in place of the Cantata's supertonic sonorities on g² and d² at this cadential point.

Musical Example 7: Reworking of *Promotion Cantata* (1894) in *An der Zugbrücke*
 a) *Promotion Cantata*, 3rd movement, Flute I, bars 1–10, and Piccolo, bars 54–70 + 94–110

b) *An der Zugbrücke*, Coda-epilogue, bars 121–130 + 171–183

The ethereal light touches in *An der Zugbrücke*'s coda-epilogue call for special comment. Here Sibelius evokes a historical déjà vu atmosphere of neo-classical understatement. This compositional tendency is in keeping with Sibelius's own pattern of self-quotations in *Scènes historiques II*, which follow a sequence of reverse chronology: c. 1907/1904 for the earliest *Die Jagd* sketches (overlapping with drafts for the Third Symphony and *Cassazione*), 1905–06 for the initial *Minnelied* drafts (written concurrently with *Pohjola's Daughter*, 1905–06), 1899 for the *Press Celebrations Music* excerpts in the middle of *Minnelied* and *An der Zugbrücke* (cf. also the separate 1899 draft in Ex. 6a) and finally 1894 for the *Promotional Cantata* evoked at the close of *An der Zugbrücke*. Significantly, this theme of looking back, of reinvoking one's youth and distant past, is also mirrored in the choral lyrics employed in the Trio of *Promotional Cantata*'s third movement:

Riemumaistereille

Trio:

Jo elon päiväs painuu maillehen
 Ja taivas, ehtootaivas ruskottaa,
 Nyt vaihees kaukaisetkin, varhemmat
 Taas muiston hohtehessa heijastaa;
 Sun rintas nousee, silmäs kirkastuu,
 Kun eessä kevään muistot uudistuu.

Jubilee of Master's Degree Recipients from the Year
 1844

Trio:

The days of your life set down,
 And the evening sky glows,
 Now the events of your life
 Are mirrored in the gleam of memory;
 Your chest rises, the eye becomes clear,
 When in front of you the memories
 of spring are renewed.

* * *

After finishing *Scènes historiques II* in 1912, Sibelius considered writing a third set of comparable historical scenes (or *Scènes historiques III*). His letter to Breitkopf & Härtel of 23rd April 1913 outlines a cycle of three movements: 1. *The Bard* (eventually published as a separate symphonic work, Op. 64), 2. *The Knight and the Elf* (*Der Ritter und die Elfe*) and 3. *Rondeau: A Round-Dance*. Even as late as 9th June 1913, we still find him (in a later letter to Breitkopf) labeling *The Bard* as part of a *Triptych for Orchestra*. The last two parts of this projected trilogy appear to have survived in HUL 0329, the last movement now bearing the title of *Rondo der Wellen*^[12]. Sibelius later appended a title-page to HUL 0329, *Fragment ur en Suite för Orkester 1914: Föregångere till Okeaniderna 1914* (*Fragment of an Orchestral Suite 1914: Predecessor of The Oceanides*).

Indeed, *Rondo der Wellen* may be considered the fountainhead of both the future *Aallottaret* (likely composed during January-March, 1914; score and parts in Yale University Music Library Deposit 23/Mn 13 Silx op. 73) and the final published score of *The Oceanides*, Op. 73 (Breitkopf & Härtel Part. B. 2352, issued in May 1915). All three versions are based on four principal themes given here in Exx. 8b, 9, 10 and 11. Yet their respective structural functions and temporal sequence vary considerably between the three different compositions, which again recalls the free, almost kaleidoscopic succession of quotation techniques that was observed in *Scènes historiques II*. Thus Ex. 8b presents the flutes' oscillating main theme (*Allegro*) from *Rondo der Wellen* in E flat major: a clear stylistic descendant of Ex. 8a's main rondo theme from *An der Zugbrücke*. The two themes share similar undulating tertial patterns, the same flute colours and analogous closing triplet flourishes superimposed on their fundamental C metre. While both finales are Classical rondo designs, *Rondo der Wellen* is even more traditionally conceived, in that its tonic refrains in bars 2–5, 50–57 (with an appended motivic fourth twist on f–b flat–e flat) and 112–117 frame an intermediate dominant (or B flat/A flat) statement in bars 96–105. The latter seventh chord in its third inversion will come to govern long stretches of the second Yale version, or *Aallottaret*.

Musical Example 8: Related rondo themes in *An der Zugbrücke* and *Rondo der Wellen*
 a) *An der Zugbrücke*, bars 5–8, Flutes (Allegro moderato)



b) *Rondo der Wellen* bars 2–5, Flutes (Allegro)



Musical Example 9: *Rondo der Wellen*: Mensural imitations in static midsection, bars 6–8 (–27); repeated with new strings-harp countersubject (f–e♭–d–e♭–c) in bars 59–71



Musical Example 10: *Rondo der Wellen*: Ostinato-like string transition back to E♭-refrain in bars 43–49 + 93–111 (B♭ over A♭ basis)



Musical Example 11: *Rondo der Wellen*: Valedictory closing theme in bars 118–123, Flutes and strings, E♭-major



Exx. 9 and 10 from *Rondo der Wellen* respectively present a static episode or midsection in the relative minor key of C (Ex. 9) followed up by a more dynamic transition (Ex. 10) back to the opening rondo refrain, both of which employ the identical B flat/A flat harmonies before returning to the E flat tonic in bar 112. The final, rather valedictory closing theme 4 in bars 118–123 of *Rondo der Wellen* provides for a poignant ending with contrasting modal colours, which stress D flat, C flat/B, G flat and F flat, or E flat: bVII , bVI , bIII and bII , again recalling *Rondo der Wellen*'s original first movement, *The Bard* (see Ex. 11).

This neat structural balance between classical opposites is still encountered to some extent in *Aallottaret*'s frequent echoes of sonata form. Here bars 1–26 and 27–42 suggest a clear double exposition, replete with a plagal-style (or ${}^biv-i$) transition in bars 16–24 and a two-fold secondary theme in B flat's relative major, D flat in bars 10–15+27–36. As in many classical symphonies, the turbulent transition in bars 16–24 serves as a springboard for an elaborate, tripartite development section in bars 42–66 (with closing reference to theme 3 in 58–66) + 66–93 + 93–113. Here bars 109–113 function as a lower-level plagal recall of 16–26.

This structural consolidation process is also buttressed by the periodic returns to B flat minor's relative major key of D flat at the end of the development's initial two sections in bars 57+88–93 (featuring theme no. 1, with the fourth variant as in *Rondo der Wellen*). The recapitulation-coda in bars 120–128 blends themes 1 and the modal 4 in a kind of D flat-phrygian/mixolydian synthesis, one thoroughly in keeping with *Aallottaret's* pronounced stress on D^b. One is reminded of the first movement (entitled, *De l'aube à midi sur la mer*) from Debussy's *La Mer* (1905), with its equally static emphasis on D^b in bars 35–40. Like Debussy, Sibelius in *Aallottaret* extensively utilizes pentatonic patterns on D^b–E^b–G^b–A^b–B^b/C^b–D^b and treats the modal subdominant of F sharp (G flat in Sibelius, first main theme in bars 80–83) as a secondary key area.^[13] Furthermore, Debussy's inexorable linear bass progressions from C to B^b–A^b–G^b–F^b–E^b–tonic D^b in bars 95–120 + 122–135 clearly point to Sibelius's downward movement in bars 76–109 + 114–120, which likewise prepares for the final tonic apotheosis in D flat major.

If *Aallottaret* increasingly blends themes 1 and 4, it also treats theme 2 from *Rondo der Wellen* quite differently. Instead of articulating a static midsection (as in *Rondo der Wellen*, bars 6–27 + 58–72, there with harp countersubject), *Aallottaret* employs this evocative figuration as a softly murmuring introduction to the ensuing, expository-like theme 1. This kind of organic growth process becomes even more important in the final *Oceanides* premiered by Sibelius in America on 4th June 1914 and published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1915. Here, too, themes 1 and 4 are interwoven, since theme one appears not merely in the tonic key of D major (bars 5–10, 52–53 and 132–133), but also in the modal realms of C/B flat (measures 48–51: D: ^bVII–^bVI), F (54: D: ^bIII) and e^b-minor (98–100: D: ^bii): degrees that also figure prominently in the oboe's theme 4, bars 135–141. In this connection one should also stress the B flat minor reprise of the second, statically conceived theme group from bars 28–36 in 82–83 (D: ^bvi).

In similar fashion, themes 2 and 3 are increasingly fused during the turbulent and dynamic bars 46–81 ff., where they initiate significant linear momentum that will ultimately lead to a tumultuous climax in bars 101–132. As is typical for the final version of *The Oceanides*, this impressive thematic synthesis is already forecast during the opening bars 1–17 (with its notable fusion of themes 2 + 1) and especially 18–28 (neat synthesis of themes 2, 3 and the cadential tail of 1).

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In surveying the compositional genesis of *Scènes historiques II* (1912) and *The Oceanides* (1914) we have encountered an impressive gamut of quotation techniques. While some thematic gestures owe substantially to earlier compositional stimuli (such as Mozartean or Beethovenian tertial models in *Scènes historiques II:i*, or Debussyian impressionistic concepts in Yale's *Aallottaret*), we are especially impressed by Sibelius's extraordinary range of self-quotation procedures. In *Scènes historiques II* these are loosely arranged in reverse chronological fashion, so that the coda-epilogue of *An der Zugbrücke* finally seems to re-enter a lost world of pristine childhood. A similar approach is witnessed in the three different versions of *The Oceanides*, which allot new structural functions to the four principal thematic groups in each subsequent revision. In his flexible amalgamation of disparate gestures and temporal reinterpretation of structural pillars Sibelius shows himself to be one of the most progressive twentieth-century composers.

[1] See Frank Reinisch, preface to Breitkopf & Härtel's pocket score of *Scènes historiques II*, Op. 66 (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1995 [B&H PB 5197]).

[2] My kind thanks to Professor Fabian Dahlström for providing me with excerpts from Sibelius's diary for the time-periods 1911–12 and 1914. At this point one should also mention Sibelius's letter to Breitkopf & Härtel of 18th April 1912. Here the composer offers *Scènes historiques II* to his publisher for 4,000 Reichsmark and also describes the three-movement sequence of the just-completed work. (My cordial thanks to Dr Sopart of the Breitkopf & Härtel Archives, Wiesbaden for permitting me to examine copies of the extant correspondence between Sibelius and Breitkopf & Härtel.)

[3] See Timo Virtanen's paper delivered at the Fifth International Jean Sibelius Conference, Oxford, England, 2010 entitled 'At a Crossing of Compositions: Sibelius's Manuscripts for *Cassazione*'.

[4] See Timo Virtanen, 'The Third Symphony: A Sketch Study', in *Sibelius Forum II: Proceedings from the Third International Jean Sibelius Conference Helsinki*, 7th–10th December 2000, pp. 59–68. My cordial thanks go to Dr Virtanen for pointing out additional drafts of *Die Jagd's* fanfares to me.

[5] See Virtanen's comprehensive essay '*Pohjola's Daughter* - L'aventure d'un héros', in *Sibelius Studies* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 139–174, in particular 147–151. Several of Sibelius's score-drafts for this final part of *Pohjola's Daughter* –

including Helsinki University Library [HUL] Mss. 0163–0165, 0231 and 0238 – already adumbrate *Minnelied*'s ethereal orchestration with its closing harp figurations, sonorous horn quartet and delicate woodwind *fioriture*.

[6] That E^b-, G- and C-major were closely interlinked in Sibelius's compositional mind during the writing of *Scènes historiques II* may also be observed in the fact that bars 1-24 of *Die Jagd* and 1-10 of the ensuing *Minnelied* are often sketched in G- and C-major in the numerous HUL drafts for the *Third Symphony* and *Pohjola's Daughter*.

[7] *An der Zugbrücke*'s modulatory progression from the E^b-major tonic to B-major in bars 28-56 recalls *Minnelied*'s G[♯]-D relationship.

[8] Two preliminary sketches for Ex. 6a occur in HUL 0957/2, lines 13-15 (in F-major) and 1528/1, line 13 (again in F-major); these only extend up to Ex. 6a's tenth bar. A slightly more developed version (now in the key of B^b-major, like Ex. 6a) up to bar 11 is encountered in HUL 1531, p. [1], line 18.

[9] On Sibelius's admiration for Mendelssohn's music, see Peter Frankland, 'Jean Sibelius, Deutschland and the Third Reich', in: *United Kingdom Sibelius Society Newsletter* 67 (2010), pp. 29–36, in particular p. 34.

[10] As pointed out to me by Andrew Barnett.

[11] My thanks to Timo Virtanen for obtaining a copy of the Flute I part of the *Promotion Cantata*, third movement from the Sibelius Museum in Turku, Finland. The English translation of the choral lyrics from this movement is also by Dr Virtanen and is here used with his kind permission.

[12] That the first surviving movement in HUL 0329 (beginning on score page 26) is likely the above-mentioned *The Knight and the Elf* is also seen in its many stylistic resemblances to *The Bard*. Both share the same closing E flat major tonic, many impressionistic chord streams and an analogous series of clarinet solos on g–b flat with falling cadential fifths.

[13] Two earlier and highly analogous C sharp compositions with flatted seventh B and subdominant emphasis on F sharp are Chopin's Nocturne, Op. 27 No. 1 (1836) and Mussorgsky's statically impressionistic song *On the river* from *Sunless* (1874). Both works were undoubtedly familiar to both Debussy and Sibelius.

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