

Sibelius and Mahler

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We know that Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) and Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) met only once: in 1907 in Helsinki, where Mahler conducted Kajanus's orchestra on Friday November 1 in a concert with works by Beethoven and Wagner, his favorite composers. In his book on Sibelius, published almost thirty years later (1935), Karl Ekman Jr (1895–1961) conveys a conversation between the two composers reproduced innumerable times since then, putting into Sibelius's mouth words, the authenticity of which is far from guaranteed: "Mahler and I spent much time in each other's company. Mahler's grave heart-trouble forced him to lead an ascetic life and he was not fond of dinners and banquets. Contact was established between us in some walks, during which we discussed all the great questions of music thoroughly. When our conversation touched the essence of symphony, I said that I admired its severity and style and the profound logic that created an inner connection between all the motifs. This was the experience I had come to in composing. Mahler's opinion was just the reverse. 'Nein, die Symphonie muss sein wie die Welt, Sie muss alles umfassen.' ['No, symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything.'] Personally, Mahler was very modest. [...] A very interesting person. I respected him as a personality, his ethically exalted qualities as a man and an artist, in spite of his ideas on art being different than mine. I did not wish him to think that I had only looked him up in order to get him interested in my compositions. When he asked me in his abrupt way: 'Was wollen Sie dass ich von Ihnen dirigiere?' (What would you like me to conduct of yours?) I therefore only answered: 'Nichts' (Nothing)."^[1]

We would probably know more of it, if Sibelius already had begun keeping a diary in 1907. In fact, his meeting with Mahler is not mentioned anywhere in his correspondence. In Mahler's correspondence the meeting does not go without comment, but no great importance is attached to it. Coming from St. Petersburg by night train (eight hours travel time) Mahler arrived in Helsinki on Monday morning, October 29, and attended the same night a 'popular concert' conducted by Kajanus. The painter Akseli Gallén-Kallela (1865–1931), whose acquaintance he had made three years before in Vienna at an exposition of the Secession, and who had just officially 'Finnicized' his family name Axel Gallén, joined him during and after the concert. On Wednesday, October 30, Mahler wrote to his wife Alma (1879–1964): "Gallén was in very good spirits and made a great impression on me [...] On Saturday, after the concert, he intends to take me out with his boat. [...] At the concert, I also heard some pieces by Sibelius, the Finnish national composer about whom they make a great fuss, not only here but also elsewhere in the musical world. One of these pieces was just ordinary 'Kitsch', spiced with certain 'Nordic' orchestral touches like a kind of national sauce. *Pui Kaiki* ['For shame!']. They are the same everywhere, these national geniuses. [...] Axel is made of an altogether different stuff with his twelve schnapps before the soup, and one feels that there is something genuine and robust about him and his kind." According to Alma, *Pui Kaiki* was Mahler's allusion to an expression used by their younger daughter Anna, called Gucki (1904–1988), instead of *Pfui Teufel* (Bloody Hell) that she was yet unable to pronounce. Two other letters by Mahler to Alma followed during his stay in Finland. "Helsinki owes her splendor to the sea. It penetrates everything and one sees it everywhere" (October 31). "Yesterday, then, the concert. People came from all over Finland. Sibelius came to see me in the morning. He was also very friendly as all the Finns" (November 2). Mahler's letters to Alma show that during his five days in Finland he visited more with Gallén-Kallela, or even with Kajanus, than with Sibelius. He left the country on Saturday, November 2, in the evening (or on Sunday, November 3, in the morning) after having been taken on a daytime boat trip to Hvitträsk by Gallén-Kallela (whose signature also appears in the letter to Alma dated November 2). In Hvitträsk, a living and working estate built in 1902–03 by three famous architects in the midst of a thick conifer forest, Gallén-Kallela painted a remarkable portrait of Mahler with a thoughtful expression, "entirely à la Rembrandt, in the light of only a fireplace" (Mahler to Alma, St Petersburg on November 4). The Hvitträsk community was a sort of Finnish equivalent to the Viennese Secession, and Mahler certainly found it extremely interesting.

Before his only stay in Finland, Mahler had not—as far as we know—heard Sibelius, except at the first festival of Alsace-Lorraine in Strasbourg in May 1902—without being particularly impressed. At the inaugural concert on May 20, Maikki Järnefelt was indeed singing (La Grange 1983, 667) some Sibelius ("The Ferryman's Bride," Op. 33), Hugo Wolf (1860–1903) and Armas Järnefelt (1869–1958). On May 21, Mahler conducted his Fifth Symphony and Richard Strauss his *Sinfonia Domestica*. On May 22, Mahler conducted a Beethoven program comprising notably the Fourth Concerto, with Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) at the piano, and the Ninth Symphony. Two months earlier, March 28, 1905, a work by Sibelius had been programmed in Vienna for the first time (Krones 2003, 28–29): "The Swan of Tuonela" at the Vienna *Konzert-Verein* under the direction of Ferdinand Löwe (1865–1925). Mahler, who did not attend the concert, was at the time plunged in the preparations of the Viennese premiere of Hans Pfitzner's (1869–1949) *Die Rose vom Liebesgarten*: it took place on April 6. At the concert of Kajanus on October 29, 1907, Mahler heard *Vårsång* ("Spring Song") Op. 16 (1894/1902) and *Valse triste* (1903): this explains his more than reserved reaction that doubtless would have been different if Kajanus had had the good idea of programming "The Swan of Tuonela" and "Lemminkäinen's Return". One must say that, for Mahler as well as for a number of his compatriots, 'national music' in

the derogatory sense only existed outside the German-speaking countries, and also that, in 1907, nothing of his own music had been heard in Finland. His work was performed there for the first time only in January 1909 in Viipuri (Viborg): the second movement (*Andante moderato*) of the Second Symphony under the direction of the composer Erkki Melartin (1875–1937), who had discovered Mahler when studying in Vienna in 1899–1901 and whose six symphonies, composed between 1902 and 1924, bear traces of his enthusiasm.

Announcing the arrival of Mahler, the journal *Helsingin Sanomat* notwithstanding, had presented him as “one of the most eminent composers of our time” adding that, “As proof of the worldwide esteem in which Mr. Mahler is held, let us mention that, after his dismissal from the Imperial and Royal Opera of Vienna became known, he received from Heinrich Conried, director of the Metropolitan Opera in New York, an extremely generous offer promising him the equivalent of 225,000 Finnish marks yearly for three months of work.” So, Sibelius was not unaware that Mahler was soon to become a Chief Conductor in the United States, but the question whether Mahler really had an interest in his music and whether his own *‘Nichts’* reflected his pride or his modesty is inopportune here. Although, in all likelihood, not articulated in exactly this way, the words attributed to each by Ekman—our sole source regarding their conversation in 1907—reflect faithfully enough the ideas of the Austrian and of the Finn without necessarily delineating them precisely. “The term symphony means to me: to build a world with all the technical means at my disposition,” Mahler had declared to his friend the violinist Natalie Bauer-Lechner (1858–1921) since summer 1895 when working on his Third Symphony. In 1907, his most recent (but not yet performed) symphony, the Eighth Symphony, well illustrates this conception with its imposing instrumental and vocal forces, its “whole universe about to resound” and its “suns and planets in full rotation” (Mahler to conductor Willem Mengelberg, August 18, 1906). But he, too, was master of the “profound logic creating internal unity”: his Sixth Symphony (1904), first of all, had already proven it. Sibelius, whose Third Symphony had been premiered some weeks earlier (September 25, 1907), was no less than Mahler a “builder of worlds,” although in a more abstract manner and not in need of the same temporal and sonorous dimensions. To finish with the meeting of 1907: we learned in 1999 that on January 8, 1943, in a conversation with his son-in-law, the conductor Jussi Jalas (1908–1985), Sibelius told a different story: “My Third Symphony more or less deceived the audience, since everybody expected something in the style of the Second Symphony. I mentioned it to Mahler when he visited us, and he immediately understood, observing that with every symphony you lose the partisans you gained with the previous.” Sibelius only repeated a phrase he had spoken twenty years earlier, in February 1923, at an interview in Stockholm (“With every new symphony [...] I have gained new partisans and lost old ones.”)?

On some other occasions, Mahler and Sibelius missed each other by a small margin. In 1900, both composers stayed in Paris in connection with the World’s Fair: Mahler at the helm of the Vienna Philharmonic (three concerts on June 18, 20 and 21), Sibelius shortly later (two concerts of the Helsinki Philharmonic conducted by Kajanus on July 30 and August 3). Sibelius’s stay in Vienna in April 1901, on the way back from Rapallo, could have proved interesting in this respect. On April 25, he attended, at the Imperial and Royal Opera, a performance of Tchaikovsky’s *Yolanta* conducted not by Mahler but by Franz Schalk (1863–1931). In the Austrian capital, he met not Mahler but Pietro Mascagni (1863–1945), who, on April 25, was also conducting in the great hall of the Musikverein, veiled in black, Mahler possibly being there, the first of two performances of Verdi’s *Requiem* in commemoration of its author, deceased in Milan on January 27 the same year. At Mahler’s invitation, Mascagni also conducted *Cavalleria rusticana* at the Imperial and Royal Opera on May 1. In St. Petersburg, just after the meeting in Helsinki, Mahler conducted, on November 9, 1907, his Fifth Symphony in the presence of Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), who was horrified, and of Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), who was very impressed. A few days later, Sibelius conducted his Third Symphony in a Siloti concert in the presence of young Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953) and doubtless of Rimsky-Korsakov as well. Mahler and Sibelius stayed one after the other in Hôtel d’Angleterre. This time one really can speak of a near miss. Reviewing the Mahler concert, the journal *Novoyé Vremya* (“Modern Times”) asked whether “this nonsense”, “this pretentious din” should be taken seriously, adding that Jews seldom are “eminent composers” and that the enthusiasm of the hall after the works of Beethoven and Wagner, in contrast to the icy reception of the *Fifth*, must have “vividly hurt the composer’s self-esteem” (La Grange 1984, 151). The same journal was some days later one of the few favorable to Sibelius’s Third Symphony, not without making the most of the opportunity to dwell upon anti-Semitism: “As to thematic clarity, Sibelius is closer to Mendelssohn and his school than to Wagner and his disciples. The orchestration is modern without, however, seeking originality at all costs. [...] In this respect, Sibelius is very different from a composer like Mahler, whose only objective is to surprise us with everything that comes to hand. Mr. Sibelius is a serious and sincere artist, without the insulting circus acts concocted by the most recent of Jewish composers, nor the pretentiousness of Strauss and Mahler.”

Several personalities knew both Sibelius and Mahler; some of them were even interested in both, but it seems that no one served as an intermediary between them. Robert Fuchs (1847–1927) counted Mahler and Sibelius as his students with an interval of fifteen years (1875 and 1890). Author of five serenades for strings (the fourth with additionally two French horns), and nicknamed “Serenaden-Fuchs”, he taught Mahler harmony. In 1912, during the search for a new professor of composition at the Vienna Conservatory (Sibelius was for a while one of the candidates), Fuchs saw

himself blamed for not considering the “modernists”—Mahler, Skryabin and others—except as “names” and staying “deep-rooted in an idyllic past.” From Fuchs, as well as from Karl Goldmark (1830–1915), Sibelius took only private lessons in Vienna in 1890–1891. In 1881, Goldmark had been member of the jury that rejected Mahler’s *Das klagende Lied*. Sibelius doubtless had heard him conduct his recent overture *Der gefesselte Prometheus* (“Prometheus Bound”) in Berlin in November 1889. Among Sibelius’s companions in Berlin in 1889–1890 was the American violinist and future conductor Theodore Spiering (1871–1925), at that time studying with Joseph Joachim, and from 1909 leader of the New York Philharmonic under Mahler (and chosen by him personally for this position). Mahler never conducted a single note of Sibelius, but his Violin Concerto was included in the program of his New York concert on March 13, 1911, dedicated to “national schools.” Incapable of mounting the podium (he was to die two months later), Mahler was replaced by Spiering, who wrote to Sibelius on April 24 from the steamer *Bremen*, on his way back to Europe: “My second season in New York ended on the 2nd. And Mahler’s illness gave me the opportunity to conduct the season’s last seventeen concerts. In one of them, Maud Powell played your Violin Concerto. To accompany her was for me a great pleasure and satisfaction” (Vignal 2004, 452). Maud Powell (1868–1920) had given the American premiere of Sibelius’s Concerto in New York in 1906 and had played it again, with success, next year in Chicago. In Berlin, at the beginning of 1914, Sibelius skimmed through the score of his Fourth Symphony with Spiering. In 1911, Spiering was not chosen to succeed Mahler at the helm of New York Philharmonic: the position went to Joseph Stransky (1872–1936), a native of Bohemia, preferred for his European background, who was to occupy the position until 1922. In February 1910, Stransky had conducted the Berlin premiere of Sibelius’s Third Symphony: “Sheer butchery,” if Adolf Paul (1863–1943) is to be believed.^[2] In New York, he conducted *The Oceanides* in December 1915 and the Fifth Symphony in November 1921.

Conductor Sir Henry Wood (1869–1944) is rightly considered as someone who did much to promote Sibelius. He was, notably, the first one to program him in England (“King Christian II Suite” on October 30, 1901), and to conduct there the First Symphony (October 13, 1903), *Tuonelan joutsen* (“The Swan of Tuonela” 1905), *Finlandia*, *En saga* and *Karelia* (1906), the Violin Concerto (1907), the Sixth Symphony (November 20, 1926), the Seventh Symphony (December 8, 1927) and *Tapiola* (September 1, 1928), and finally, in 1937, “Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island” and “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela”, as well as to program, at the Promenade Concerts, the seven symphonies and several other works. He saw and assisted the composer greatly during his stays in England, and with his orchestra Sibelius conducted the English premieres of the Third (February 28, 1908) and the Fifth Symphonies (February 12, 1921). Henry Wood—to whom we owe the world premiere of Schoenberg’s “Five Pieces for Orchestra”, Op. 16 (September 3, 1912)—also conducted Mahler. He gave the English premieres of the First Symphony (1903), “the first notes of his music ever played in England” (Wood 1938, 173), of the Fourth *Symphony* (1905), of the Adagietto of the Fifth Symphony (1909), of the Seventh Symphony (1913) and of *Das Lied von der Erde* (January 31, 1914), and still further the Eighth Symphony (1930): “I admire this great work” (Wood, 1938, 257). Wood’s performances aroused in Rosa Newmarch (1857–1940), in her letters to Sibelius, typical reactions (Vignal 2004, 936): “What a strange mixture of things heard before, of genuinely noble moments and of others displaying the vulgarity of Viennese coffee house music! With all its faults, it is sometimes very interesting, if only it would not last so long” (Spring 1913 after Mahler’s Seventh Symphony). And: “There is something *absolutely* new in your music. [...] Thank you once more for a healthy, strong, and short work” (November 1926, after the general rehearsal of the Sixth Symphony).

Other conductors, before Sir John Barbirolli (1899–1970), Herbert von Karajan (1908–1989) or Leonard Bernstein (1914–1992), performed both Sibelius and Mahler: Felix Weingartner (1863–1942), Walter Damrosch (1862–1950), who conducted, in New York, the American premiere of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony (November 6, 1904) and the world premiere of Sibelius’s *Tapiola* (December 26, 1926), and additionally Oskar Fried (1871–1941). In the company of the latter, in St. Petersburg, Sibelius visited the *Hermitage* and its museum in November 1907. In January 1916, Fried conducted in Berlin, without a big success, the German premiere of Sibelius’s Fourth Symphony, and in September–October 1920, for the first time in Vienna, all the symphonies of Mahler. In Berlin, in 1924, he made the first-ever recording of a Mahler work: the *Second*. Armas Järnefelt (1869–1958), Sibelius’s brother-in-law, conducted Mahler’s Eighth Symphony in Stockholm on March 11, 1923. In Finland, Kajanus conducted, on November 20, 1911, for the first time in this country and in tribute to the recently deceased composer, an entire Mahler symphony: the First Symphony. George Schnévoigt (1872–1947) gave the Fourth Symphony in February 1913 and the Fifth Symphony in the following October. Schnévoigt appreciated Mahler more than his colleague and rival Kajanus. The Finnish press was divided at this point as well. On March 2, 1916, Kajanus conducted an all-Sibelius program, with the Fourth Symphony as the *pièce de résistance*. The work was much more favorably acclaimed than at its first hearing in April 1911, but certain critics remained reticent. In *Hufvudstadsbladet*, on March 3, Bis (= pseudonym of Karl Fredrik Wasenius) declared that he did not like any of the first two movements: “This contemplative language, this ‘profound’ prose poem, will it become the currency of future music, or will the warm, divine inspiration by which Sibelius has gratified us in “The Swan of Tuonela” [...] and *En saga* maintain its supremacy over the contemplative?” In *Uusi Suometar* of the 4th, on the contrary, Evert Katila gave free rein to his enthusiasm. Or, when a week before, on February 23, 1916, Schnévoigt had conducted, in Helsinki, with the participation of Aino Ackté (1876–1944), the

Finnish premiere of *Das Lied von der Erde*, Bis and Katila had already stuck to their opposite positions, but the other way round. Bis had spoken highly of the “profundity, imposing formal mastery, harmonic richness and supreme orchestration” of Mahler’s score, whereas Katila had found it “interminable, annoying and banal” and envied those who had had the “moral courage” to leave the hall before the end of this “sonorous desert.” From 1904, Sibelius had been able to read in *Länsimaisen musiikin historia pääpiirteissään*, Finnish edition of the original Swedish *Hufvuddragen af den västerländska musiken historia* (“Main Traits of the History of Occidental Music,” 1891–93) by his former teacher Martin Wegelius (1846–1906) praise of Mahler at his own expense, or nearly so. In a new chapter, entitled “Uudempia musikalisia ilmiöitä” (“Newer musical phenomena”), Wegelius had indeed greeted in Mahler—whose Second Symphony had for him the same force and the same elevation as Beethoven’s best works—the successor of Bruckner, and in Richard Strauss (1864–1949) an artist more skillful than Liszt, asserting that “if here and there some composers have allegedly shown a more genuine spirituality and a more fresh originality, no living composer, at any rate, has reached such a general, overwhelming mastery than they have.” These two composers were entitled to two pages each, Debussy, for his part, was dispatched in four lines, Grieg in nine and Tchaikovsky in eight. What is more, Wegelius mentioned his own country only by saying that “...young Finnish music can already show at least *one* name well-known in Europe: Jean Sibelius”, and by repeating one sentence from his original Swedish: “In Finland, music history must first be *made* before it can be *written*.”^[3]

When it comes to Mahler, Wegelius proved more perceptive than many of his Austro-German colleagues, but Sibelius, when reading his lines, unsuspectingly got a foretaste of future preemptory statements and controversies. There is no need to dwell on it here, from Cecil Gray (1895–1951) and Bengt von Törne (1891–1967) to Adorno (1903–1969) and to Ernst Křenek (1900–1991) by way of the wild imaginings of the *Courier musical* of June 1, 1920 after the performance of the Third Symphony under Kajanus in Paris: “A strong and solid work, somewhat related to Saint-Saëns and Vincent d’Indy, but with an orchestration of a Richard Strauss and of a Mahler.” Or, by way of a Henri Prunières (1886–1942) in Volume XVII of the *Encyclopédie française* (January 10, 1936): “Jean Sibelius, after having attained glory with his symphonic poems on Finnish themes, has written immense [sic!] symphonies, whose religious and humanitarian aspirations recall those of Gustav Mahler” (Vignal 2004, 1003). It is important to remember, on the other hand, that some conductors, known for their engagement under the banner of Mahler and of the Viennese School and its followers, also acknowledged the greatness of Sibelius, as well. Hermann Scherchen (1891–1966)—whose conducting Adorno (1984, 455) assessed as “being rooted in the recognition of actualities, since it does not come from Schoenberg in vain”^[4]—gave the Fourth Symphony in Leipzig in 1921. He took it up again in Winterthur on November 4, 1934, after having written in a letter the day before: “Sibelius’s symphony is formidable, an extraordinary mastery of the orchestra, impregnated with national spirit and landscapes to be sure, but whose purely musical invention constantly leads up to the magnificent and the sublime. Wagner and Debussy are the two great opposing figures who have made possible the hatching of this work, nevertheless born in the most complete autonomy. [...] Everything in it is magistral.” Having premiered, six months earlier, the *Marteau sans maître* of Pierre Boulez, Hans Rosbaud (1895–1962) told Sibelius, in conveying good wishes for his 90th birthday in December 1955, that he had recently conducted the Fourth and the Fifth Symphonies in Baden Baden adding, “The universe of your music opened for me in all its profundity, filling me with joy. With conviction and internally enriched I will be committed to your art” (Vignal 2004, 1090). In March 1957, Rosbaud was to record a magnificent *Tapiola* with the Berlin Philharmonic and, in June 1959, to conduct a memorable Fourth Symphony in Helsinki. For others, like Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) or Alban Berg (1885–1935), one would like to know more. On September 21, 1912, Berg attached to a letter to Schoenberg, then in Berlin, a clipping from the *Neue Freie Presse* of the same day announcing the program of the Vienna Philharmonic for the next season, in particular the novelties, among them the Fourth Symphony of Sibelius, scheduled for December 15 under the direction of Felix Weingartner (who had succeeded Mahler at the helm of the Imperial and Royal Opera from 1908 to 1911). Yet, two days before that date, the work was removed from the poster, “disappearing as into a trap on an unspeakable pretext,” as the critic Richard Specht (1870–1932) noted in an article entitled *Anklagen* (*Accusations*) in his magazine *Der Merker* (IV.1). This incident possibly prevented an interesting comment from Berg on Sibelius, in which Mahler’s name could have been mentioned.

Mahler and Sibelius were born at five-and-a-half year’s interval, both in small garrison towns. This particularity in their backgrounds left more concrete, more numerous and more diverse traces in Mahler than in any other composer who matured in such an environment. However, there is, from Sibelius’s childhood, a drawing representing a Russian military parade in Hämeenlinna and bearing the title: “Janne saw a parade today and now that it’s drawn, he sends it to his grandmother and aunt for them to see what it looked like” (Goss 2009, 43).^[5] Sibelius’s childhood, marked by the death of his father, took place without a series of family and psychological dramas, which, at the same time, marked that of Mahler. Both of them impressed their family circles with an “exuberant imagination.” At the age of fifteen, Mahler was already a student of the Vienna Conservatory, whereas Sibelius, at the same age, was only taking his first steps in music. At the age of twenty, Sibelius had just settled down in Helsinki and entered the Music Institute of Wegelius with violin as his major, whereas Mahler was already chief conductor in Bad Hall and working on *Das klagende Lied*. When Sibelius came to Vienna in the fall of 1890, Mahler was not there; for two years, he had been

conductor at the Royal Opera in Budapest, after having occupied posts in Olmütz, Kassel, Prague and Leipzig. As to his professional training in the traditional sense, Mahler enjoyed early on a more favorable environment. None of the two studied with Bruckner (1824–1896), but both were inspired by him, and both attended the first performance of a version of his *Third*, Mahler on December 16, 1877 (second version), Sibelius on December 21, 1890 (third version). On February 10, 1892, Sibelius wrote his fiancée a letter specifying his conception of marriage. Mahler did the same, in a still more egocentric manner and very passionately, on December 19, 1901. Apropos the impresario Emil Gutman (1877–1920), who organized, on September 12, 1910, the world premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony, a European cultural event, and who played a very important role in Mahler's last years, both of our composers expressed themselves in fairly similar terms. At the end of March 1910, in a letter from New York to Bruno Walter (1876–1962), Mahler compared Gutman's business to a famous American circus: "Until today, I have struggled internally and externally against the fatal Barnum and Bailey carrying out my VIII in Munich." And to Gutman himself: "I implore you, now and in the future, to renounce [...] publicity that is totally superfluous." The same summer Aino Ackté, whose impresario was Gutman, suggested to Sibelius, who was in the midst of working on his Fourth Symphony, a common concert tour in Germany, in Vienna and in Prague at the beginning of 1911. Sibelius began, for this purpose, to compose music to *The Raven* (1845) of Edgar Allan Poe, but ended up, for different reasons, writing in his diary: "I have burnt my vessels again. Broke with Gutman-publicity and Aino Ackté" (11 December 1910). And the following day to his mentor Axel Carpelan (1858–1919), "Leaving the diva Ackté to her commercially tuned-up destiny [...] Symphony IV is breaking out in sunshine and power."^[6] Did Mahler realize that both Sibelius and Alma had composed the poem *Die stille Stadt* by Richard Dehmel (1863–1920), she around 1900 under the supervision of Alexander von Zemlinsky (1871–1942), and he in 1906 (Op. 50 No. 5)? Alma's lied is part of the five songs published in 1910 with the aid of Gustav himself. On 6 February 1907, Mahler wrote to Richard Strauss after having heard in Vienna, the day before, Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 1, Op. 7, played by the Rosé Quartet: "It made such a strong impression on me, even so imposed upon me that I cannot but recommend it to you [when performed in Dresden]." In Berlin in 1914, Sibelius heard the Quartet No. 2, Op. 10: "It gave me much to think about. [...] He interests me tremendously" (Diary, February 9).^[7] Both were conductors, but if Mahler made out of it his second profession, to the point that he owed a great deal of his fame to it and thus was able to put his authority in service of his ideal, Sibelius did not conduct but his own works, without however refraining from dreaming and becoming excited: "Question of life and death! To stand before an orchestra and an audience like a real artist and to offer them the most truthful performance as possible. Mahler, Berlioz, and others!" (Diary, September 6, 1910). On September 11, 1912, again in his diary, he noted: "Funtek [the Slovenian born violinist, pedagogue and conductor Leo Funtek, 1885–1965] at my house. Interesting reflections on Mahler."

Sibelius was not indifferent to Mahler's music. In February 1914, he heard in Berlin *Das klagende Lied* (he described it as "wonderful and very poetic" music), the Fifth Symphony (he had studied the work in the same city in January 1905) and the *Kindertotenlieder* (that he had failed to hear in Paris in November 1911)^[8]. In Leevi Madetoja's (1887–1947) interview from August 1916, Sibelius expressed doubts, though: "Mahler's symphonies, of which I thought some years ago that they had marked their era, have gradually lost their ability to surprise. For my part, I only find sentimental and outmoded thoughts in them." But he hastened to put this into perspective: "Note, all the same, that what I say today [...] may very well take another form tomorrow, if, by chance, I should evoke the same questions." Since they had taken a different path, Mahler (and Schoenberg) aroused in Sibelius "a strange mixture of fascination, admiration and skepticism." These "contradictions" must not offend: had not Mahler, for his part, expressly reserved the right to inconsequence? About Mahler, he is alleged to have said in Rome in 1923: "He was a genius of the kind there will be no more, there was in him nothing of a Herr Doktor" (oral communication to the author around 1975). One finally wonders, whom the "circus" in the famous letter to Rosa Newmarch from May 2, 1911 refers to: to Mahler or to third order composers still more responsible for "tendencies prevailing at this time [...] especially in Germany, the seat of the genre [symphony], where instrumental music has become a purely technical operation, a public works type of thing, trying hard to conceal its empty interior behind an enormous mechanical equipment" (Interview of Axel Carpelan – possibly inspired by Sibelius – in *Helsingin Sanomat* on March 26, 1911).

Until the time of the Fourth Symphony, first performed on April 3, 1911, six weeks before Mahler's death, Sibelius wanted to compete with composers of Central Europe, among them Mahler, on their own soil. Later this question became less important for him. In Mahler's lifetime, the two composers had experienced both success and setback, not always at the same places. In 1907, when they met, they had little to envy in each other as regards success and fame. Although they did not feel like being Late Romantics—a term that came to be attached to them, with its pejorative connotations, only by future generations—but rather "Modern," they had tried, in an era of crises, to integrate themselves into existing musical institutions and had more or less succeeded. Perceived however, for different reasons, to be iconoclasts as symphonic composers, they had already been harshly criticized: for many commentators, the symphony had become one of the most prestigious assets of the tradition, and thus one of the most untouchable. Both Mahler's and Sibelius's symphonies were criticized for being "shapeless". Mahler's symphonies, often perceived as small lieder swollen into symphonies, were additionally accused for their abuse of all genres, heterogeneity of material,

plebeian perfume, and offensiveness: “Music for Alhambras or Moulin-Rouges, not for symphonic concert halls,” affirmed Vincent d’Indy (1851–1931) after a Parisian performance of the Fourth Symphony on January 18, 1914 (Vignal 1995, 6). Those of Sibelius were reproached notably for “exoticism” and a certain provincialism responsible, according to Walter Niemann (1876–1953), for inevitable failures despite undeniable qualities, according to Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969), for an irreparable technical incompetence and for a complete submissiveness to the conventions of traditional bourgeois art: this, while in reality, Sibelius was “more cosmopolitan than the majority of his detractors” (Vestdijk 1962, 41), indeed more than Mahler himself, and his manner as subversive as Mahler’s. That’s how, on January 18, 1905, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* hesitated to rank the “Nordic” Second Symphony, which Sibelius conducted in Berlin on January 12, “in the lineage of the grand symphonies of Haydn and Bruckner” — definitely not from Haydn to Mahler! Our two composers ranged Beethoven above everything, but only Sibelius could use a theme that “simple” and made of so few notes as the “swan hymn” of the finale of his Fifth Symphony. Both of them assumed only with great prudence the tradition of Wagner, since *Tristan*, with regard to one of its essential aspects — chromaticism — is seen as a “degradation of the material” (Adorno 1986, 167), the result of which in their music were the rather extended diatonic passages with rare modulations. If Mahler, nevertheless, very early decided to call his works with autobiographical content “symphonies and nothing else,” as opposed to the appellation symphonic poem, “repeated too often without saying anything precise” (summer 1893 to Natalie Bauer-Lechner), this was not always the case with Sibelius: “The symphonic fantasy is my domain! With or preferably without a program” (Diary, April 23, 1912). Or, yet more significantly: “I wonder whether this name of ‘symphony’ has not harmed my symphonies more than served?” (Diary, October 18, 1914).[\[9\]](#)

Mahler counted upon the recognition of the future rather than that of his contemporaries, considering himself a “martyr”, without nevertheless ceding to discouragement. Indeed, he never doubted - a messianic artist as he was - the extent of his genius and the importance of his message: “Could my Second Symphony cease to exist without an irreparable loss for art and humanity?” (to his friend the Czech composer Joseph Bohuslav Foerster, 1859–1951). “My Sixth [Eighth?] Symphony is ready. I think that I have managed” (1904 [1906?] to Bruno Walter). Or again, in 1906, to Richard Specht: “This symphony [the Eighth Symphony] is a gift to the nation. All the previous were only preludes to this one” (Specht 1913, 304). But also: “You’ll see, I shall not experience in my lifetime the victory of my cause! What I am writing is too strange and new for the audience, who don’t find any access to me” (April 1886 to Natalie Bauer-Lechner). Sibelius was more often in the grip of doubt and worried more about his present and future position in the century, as his diary testifies: “In a bad mood these days as nothing of mine is displayed in the windows of B:H [Breitkopf & Härtel]. Instead Busoni, Palmgren, Mahler, etc. But so what?” (Berlin, February 11, 1914). “Don’t let all these new things, triads without third etc. keep you from work. All [composers] cannot be “path-breaking geniuses”. As a personality and as “eine Erscheinung aus den Wäldern” (“an apparition from the woods”), you will have your small, modest place. Here at home you are surely “outflanked” according to public opinion!” (May 13, 1910). Nobody speaks of me — nobody. I’m thus out of the game!” (July 20, 1910). But also: “Necessity knows no law. Behold the grand lines” (May 16, 1910). “Don’t let the youth impose you to no purpose and make you unproductive. One doesn’t strike dead your art” (June 18, 1910). “Remember once and for all: you, ego, are a genius!! You know it. [...] ‘Man lebt nur einmal’ [You only live once]. What are you waiting for?!” (August 13, 1910). And finally: “What I want and what I do in the realm of the symphony, very few in the world know. Most people have no idea what it is all about” (September 13, 1943).[\[10\]](#)

Must one, can one compare Sibelius and Mahler musically? All the experts are not convinced. There are books and studies on Mahler, in which Sibelius’s name does not figure anywhere, whereas the opposite is less true. It was between Sibelius and Schoenberg, not between Sibelius and Mahler, that Ernst Newman (1868–1959), in 1912, 1914 and 1916, draws interesting parallels, insisting on their common quickness of thought and their common “reduction of ideas and expressions strictly to the necessary” (Vignal 2004, 591–593). Neither Sibelius nor Mahler wrote an opera, in spite of *Jungfrun i tornet* (“Maiden in the Tower”) and several unrealized projects, but both were attracted by the waltz. Mahler composed *Das klagende Lied*, his “first work,” at the age of twenty, and Sibelius *Kullervo*—a symphony in five movements—at the age of twenty-six. The female solo parts of both works emit sometimes almost identical accents. At the last words of the sister in *Kullervo and his sister*, the strings get the upper hand, accompanying the narrative by chords that are at the same time insistent and restrained—*Wie ein schwerer Kondukt* (“Like a funeral cortege”), as Mahler would have said. It is extraordinary how, in the course of the narrative, the young girl not only finds refuge in the realm of nature, but is absorbed by it, like the protagonist of the *Abschied (Adieu)* at the end of *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Measures 30ff. of *En saga* (1892–1893/1902), on the one hand, and the E major climax of the Poco adagio of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony, on the other, display the same kind of checkered string writing: *pp* in one case, *fff* in the other. It is easy to discern the extent to which the beginning of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony (1902) is reflected in Sibelius’s *In memoriam*: this score is from 1909–1910, but Sibelius wrote its first sketches, according to his own testimony, in 1905, the year when he was in Berlin to study the symphony “at the moment” (letter to Aino on January 16).[\[11\]](#) It is

interesting to note, here, that during this stay in Berlin, Sibelius's attention was drawn, thanks to Busoni, to Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*, which explains the quotation of a theme from this work in his incidental music op. 46 (no. 3 of the orchestral suite), on which Sibelius worked at this time (Vignal 2004, 381 and 385–386). But that is another story! Two of the five movements of Mahler's Fifth Symphony and of *Voces intimae* (1909) are united by similar relations: each time the second movement returns, in another context and giving it a new appearance, to a material stemming from the first movement. The approach is, however, far from identical in the symphony and in the quartet, and a comparison reveals more differences than similarities. In the original version of his own Fifth Symphony (1915), Sibelius moved into this direction before combining, or rather soldering, the two movements into one in the two subsequent versions (1916 and 1919). From this resulted one of the most magnificent and personal specimens of what Adorno, in the case of Mahler, called a *Durchbruch* (breakthrough): an eruption that, decisively and irreversibly, even brutally, changes the course of the process, such as the D major chord in the middle of the finale of Mahler's First Symphony that sounds "as if it had fallen from heaven, as if it came from another world" (summer 1893 to Natalie Bauer-Lechner). In Sibelius's *Fifth*, the effect is the sudden acceleration of tempo reviving a nature struck by inertia, the sudden apparition of a rapidly moving layer of events in the foreground, like a more or less abstract landscape that one sees passing through from a train coming out of a tunnel. There is a phenomenon analogous to the *Durchbruch* in the fugitive E major light at the heart of the Seventh Symphony. In Mahler, the *Durchbruch* often emerges from immobility, from an episode where time stands still (Adorno's *suspension*), indeed from the "heavenly seventh" in the *Stürmisch bewegt* ("second first movement") of the Fifth Symphony on top of a choral of the brass instruments, until then silent. The hammer blows in the finale of the Sixth Symphony are a kind of negative *Durchbruch* that annihilates the tentative clear up.

Mahler's Sixth Symphony (1904) and Sibelius's Fourth Symphony (1911) are in A minor, an exceptional tonality in early 20-century symphonies. For Herbert von Karajan, these two symphonies were among the few, if not the only ones, to end "in perfect disaster", to come to an end "in a totally negative vein." In both of them, however, the fatal fall only takes place at the last moment, at the conclusion of a finale that alternates between "positive and negative situations" (Ratz 1955), between zones of light and shade. On other levels, they differ completely. The Sixth Symphony is tonally and formally the most "classic" of Mahler's symphonies and the only one to end "badly," in a psychological defeat. These features are connected: the defeat results from the "traditional" internal and external structure of the work and the closed circle of a principal tonality frankly exposed at the beginning and then impossible to flee from. The Sixth Symphony has, nevertheless, nothing of a song of despair: the "hero" dies standing. Above all, it is one of Mahler's greatest symphonies. Furious battles are carried out, in the vast and splendid finale in particular, but it is neither anarchic nor chaotic, contrary to the feelings of its first listeners and many others later incapable of following its implacable course. The reached tonalities are unambiguous, even if they follow each other and transform quickly. In the outer movements, "sonata form" and "thematic work" are used in a normal manner, without the slightest ambiguity, but masterly. Nothing like it in the Fourth Symphony of Sibelius, the symphony accepted by audiences only with great difficulty, and by its author as well. The beginning is not in A minor. In many places, tradition collapses in whole sectors, various parameters of the writing contributing mutually to the fall. The tonal foundations, as soon as they weaken, carry along a metric fuzziness, a tattered instrumentation, unheard of forms, while Sibelius takes care of coordinating all the dimensions of the language, without maintaining this or that in good condition, in a futile attempt to save some pieces of furniture. No more than Mahler's Sixth Symphony, Sibelius's Fourth Symphony feels sorry for itself: after the strident seventh fall interrupting the chaotic ultimate summit of intensity causing the edifice to collapse, one should definitely not slow down the tempo but to carry on resolutely, "without tears" (Sibelius to Walter Legge in 1935), towards nothingness.

In 1932, Adorno (1984, 216) considered Mahler's Seventh Symphony (1905) as his "most difficult" score and its first movement his "most daring, most extensive, most forward-looking" piece^[12]. Later, Mahler's "chef-d'œuvre" was for him the *Andante comodo* beginning of the Ninth Symphony (1909), since it is here, he wrote in his 1960 book on the composer, "the liquidation of the sonata by the new music prepares itself" (1986, 299). Interviewed in Stockholm on February 23, 1923, Sibelius, from his part, said about his Sixth Symphony: "... like most symphonies, it has four movements, which are formally completely free and do not follow the ordinary sonata scheme."^[13] There are traces of the "sonata", very thin it is true, in the first movements of both Mahler's Ninth and Sibelius's Sixth Symphonies, and even, still more fragile, in the first movement of Sibelius's Fifth Symphony. This music joins, in such a subversive, although very flagrant manner, when regarded at close range, the glorious tradition of Haydn and Beethoven, completely scandalizing and disorientating people like Adorno, who practically swore allegiance to this tradition only, without being able to look elsewhere than to Vienna. For them Mahler, on the contrary, had the merit of having taken the 19th-century symphony to its ultimate limits. The thematic signposts, for instance, are in his music more important than they are in Sibelius, which made the German composer Wilhelm Killmeyer (born 1927) say that if Mahler "transfigured" the type of symphony stemming from Beethoven, Sibelius "disintegrated" it (Luyken 1995, 67). Adorno recognized Mahler's subversive qualities, but took those of Sibelius, his reinterpretations of traditional elements, as lack of know-how. The strident nine-tone chord in the *Adagio* of Mahler's Tenth Symphony (1910) is naturally in line with

the Germano-Viennese process of the “emancipation of the dissonance”, whereas it is, from a very different perspective, also that of Sibelius who, on January 26, 1914, his Fourth Symphony behind him, entrusted to his diary a sort of manifesto in view of his forthcoming Sixth Symphony: “Closer to them [to the church modes] owing to my ‘nascence and uninhibited habit,’ I am as if to the manner born.”^[14] Here we have some reasons for which the 19th and the 20th century intermingle so closely in Mahler. To distinguish between the two is less difficult in him than in Sibelius, who passed from the 19th to the 20th century with his Third Symphony and ended up to completely transcend, with his novel treatment of the timbre, of form and of time, the late Romanticism of his origins. One understands, however, Adorno deploring, in 1930, that “one refutes Mahler today as romantic, programmatic and decorative, without taking into account that the meaning of his dynamic and aggressive monumentality is radically different from the rigid façade art of the nineteenth century; that here the conjuration of the impossible takes place by a force that, paradoxically, makes it possible” (1984, 176).^[15] Treating the period, then topical, of the first post-war years, Adorno had recommended, two years before (1928), to “play Mahler’s symphonic art against the pseudo-objective, stabilized neoclassicism and this way indirectly tackle this art movement” (1984, 603).^[16] One notices, in this connection, that after 1945, Sibelius was attacked and despised less by the serialists, who ignored him, than by supporters of the neoclassicism, whom he frightened. “To allow Sibelius to take his place, the exhaustion of serialism and above all the extinction of the mannerism of the interwar period was necessary,” declared the French composer Hugues Dufourt in the 1970s (born 1943). Dufourt later maintained that he had found in Sibelius “techniques of long-term organization” not drawn from in the symphonic tradition, to which Mahler had put an end and that had had no continuation in the avant-garde of the early twentieth century.

“Once upon a time there was tonality” sings the *Andante comodo* of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony (1909) — as do, in their own manner, the Fourth and the Sixth Symphonies of Sibelius. The D major of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, as ultimately the C major of Sibelius’s Seventh Symphony (1924), is there above all as a color. Additionally, the two scores are formally *sui generis*. Measures 376–390 of Mahler’s *Andante comodo* function as a sort of cadence, superimposing flutes, French horns, cellos and double basses in an extraordinary linear polyphony of three voices apparently indifferent to each other, as if void of harmonic support and giving the impression of simultaneous improvisations. One finds the same approach, with more rhythmic flexibility, in measures 4–6 of the *Il tempo largo* of Sibelius’s Fourth Symphony: on one side the flute in its highest register, on the other the cellos and double basses, with nothing between the two, if not a formidable feeling of empty space. Our two composers participate in something that is commonly called the avant-garde, with Sibelius appearing as still more “removed from the world.” Especially, as the two first thirds of the *Andante comodo* of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony might be, after the *Adieu* at the end of *Das lied von der Erde*, a “return towards the world”, until the dislocated terrifying fanfares of measures 314–346, an episode that Alban Berg – in a letter to his wife probably from the summer of 1912 – perceived as “Death in person”, emphasized by Mahler’s performance direction “mit höchster Gewalt” (all the forces deployed) in a surrealist funeral march (*Wie ein schwerer Kondukt*). After this follows, hardly perceptible, a call of the violas *piano* in D major, which becomes a signal of retreat, a new “goodbye to the world.” Later on, the three-voice “cadence,” where the most “earthly” elements of the discourse dissolve, concretize this retreat, and one takes, this time for good, possession of the hereafter undeniably calmed, D major becoming a place of refuge. It is, however, the omission of the following movements, which, at the first posthumous performance in 1912, led a critic to qualify the Ninth Symphony as “the only finished unfinished.” But Mahler did not write a one-movement symphony! In this case, a comparison with Sibelius’s *Tapiola* (1926) is imperative. This work of a minimal raw material takes up, in an equally radical way as the *Andante comodo*, “the paradox of time and timelessness” (Whittall 1999, 64). On the other hand, however, injury does not occur in a world that is found to be, in reality, full of pitfalls (as in Mahler), but at the end of a process of exploration of *terra incognita*, in measures 353–358, with the hammering of the timpani and the brass instruments *crescendo possibile* and then *fff*. Equally terrifying as the aforementioned Mahler climax, this encounter seems first to give life to amorphous nature (as in the first movement of Sibelius’s Fifth Symphony), but in a completely different context. It gives, in fact, free rein to unexpected forces transforming all of a sudden *Tapiola*—despite a temporary withdrawal caused by a vague desire of recapitulation (measures 465–512)—into a succession of cataclysms. *Tapiola*, not an atonal but a “non-tonal” score (Howell 1998, 237–238), reveals constantly new horizons. The eleven final measures (624–634) of the strings in B major are not a sanctuary, in contradistinction to the concluding D major of the *Andante comodo* of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, but they cover the scene like a shroud, void of resolution, in an almost lunar silence. As in *The Oceanides* (1914), after the tempest, triggered by a powerful sonic object thrown across the space with an unstoppable force, only the Ocean itself subsisted, in its immobility and immovability.

The limitless landscape of *Tapiola* is a landscape without humans. In Mahler, landscapes are sometimes void of humans, but, in the end, the composer stands there always alone. “It is useless to admire the landscape, I have borrowed everything in order to put it into my Third Symphony,” Mahler declared to Bruno Walter, in 1896, when receiving him in Steinbach-am-Attersee. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine Sibelius expressing such naïve and concrete sentiments or inserting into his symphonies post horn solos, as in the “animal” movement of this Third Symphony, a passage where “all nature seems to make a face and to stick out one’s tongue” (Mahler to Natalie Bauer-Lechner in June-July 1899).

The major works of Sibelius neither despise the most suggestive scenes of nature nor the most intense personal emotions, but depicts them with a microscopic precision and an extraordinary objectivity, without reducing their identity in placing them into the perspective of a vaster reality. Robert Simpson (1921–1997) saw in Sibelius's Seventh Symphony "a grand planet on its orbit, moving in a large scale, inexorably, but for the inhabitants moving on its surface, imperceptibly or almost" (1965, 34).^[17] In all these respects, Sibelius seems to be, once more, less a "child of the Nineteenth Century" than Mahler. Nature, in his music, is not felt, contemplated and adored as in the Haydn of "The Creation" and "The Seasons" and in so many of the Romantics, as still so often in Mahler, but is shown as it is, not idealized, splendid but also devastating, indifferent of what is expected from it, and of the works and destinies of human beings. The music of Mahler can be devastating, but then the forces coming into play are not those of nature. The music of Sibelius and Varèse (1883–1965) share the hatred of the campaign and the glorification of nature, Varèse for the noise of the urban civilization created by men ("I would not like to live in a country town"), Sibelius for the interplay of elementary forces, even destructive, from which man is absent. Sibelius appreciated "the pavements of a big city," where his anonymity was protected, and the solitude of Ainola. In June 1914, after having visited the Niagara Falls, he bought some photos, but criticized most of them "because there were human figures in them or buildings. He said that such a great natural object should be taken entirely by itself, free from every contamination of any semblance of humanity." (Stoeckel 1971, 77.)^[18] When Mahler visited the Falls on December 9, 1910,—after having just conducted Beethoven's *Pastoral*—he said that, as for him, according to Alma (1949, 230), "articulated art is so much bigger than unarticulated nature." This profession of faith takes us back to art's borrowings from the nature—one of the conditions of its articulation?—of which Mahler spoke to Bruno Walter. About this Third Symphony, the symphony with which he identified the most, Mahler gave a long explication to Natalie Bauer-Lechner on June 22, 1896, initially close to that (dated to the same summer) he gave to Bruno Walter, then announcing his view on the Falls: "It is already almost no music, it is so to speak only noises of nature. [...] The unarticulated noises have reached a very high level of articulation."

One of the great strengths of Sibelius—for whom Germany, with some reservations, was "the country of music"—is that there are so few "visible" traces in his music of the German academic tradition, for example of the fugue (there are samples of it in the finale of Mahler's Fifth Symphony or in the *Veni Creator* of his Eighth Symphony). The third movement (*Poco vivace*) of the Sixth Symphony of the Finn contains canons, but they testify (Luyken 1995, 203–204) to an "abstract" compositional thinking characteristic of the era and relating Sibelius to Webern (1883–1945). The imitative episodes (in woodwinds) of the *Allegro moderato* first movement of his Fifth Symphony have an effect of not consolidating but fragmenting the discourse, of releasing it—still in a very abstract manner—into the space, and not of displaying any contrapuntal technique. In Natalie Bauer-Lechner, there are notes concerning spatial counterpoint in Mahler's music, "Now, when we were going along the same way next Sunday together with Mahler, and there was, on the Kreuzberg, a still more serious Witches' Sabbath going on – since in addition to innumerable carousels, seesaws, shooting galleries and Punch and Judy shows, even a military band and a male voice choir company had established themselves there, and everybody was carrying on, in the same glade, an incredible hurly-burly of music making without any respect for each other – Mahler then shouted: 'Do you hear? That's polyphony, and from here I have it! – Already in my earliest childhood, in the forest of Iglau, it moved me so innerly and stuck in my mind. [...] Just like this, from all different directions, must the themes come and be so completely distinct from each other in rhythm and melody (everything else is just polyphony and disguised homophony): the artist's job is only to arrange and to combine them into a balanced and harmonious whole.'" (August 1900).^[19] Bauer-Lechner described this noisy party as a very painful *Hexensabbath* (Witches' Sabbath). This is very real, and Mahler had already shown what he is capable of doing with the march (or rather marches) of the gigantic and "chaotic" first movement of his *Third*, a passage where he took the maximum of risks: the ideas follow each other in space, as if issued from orchestras placed—à la Charles Ives (1874–1954)—in all directions. The realist Richard Strauss saw regiments of workers marching on the Prater in Vienna once on May 1. Can we imagine the reaction of an aristocratic symphonist such as Sibelius?

Mahler experienced his decisive breakthrough to universal acclaim in the 1960s, at the same time as Sibelius's reputation was experiencing a low point. This is understandable, historically. It was the era of the last repercussions of pure, hard serialism, for which Sibelius did not exist, and of new visions of Vienna and Jewishness. The *quotations* – twisted or not, imagined or not – found in Mahler do not exist in Sibelius. The *evocations* of *Parsifal* in the first and third movements of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony, of *La Mer* and Debussy in *Tapiola* or even "Brünnhilde's Awakening" in "Nighth Ride and Sunrise" are of a quite different order: less significant, and showing that, for Sibelius, knowing and appreciating an important work—for instance by Schoenberg—did not mean—especially after the Fourth Symphony—to be influenced by it, but, on the contrary, to turn his back to it. Mahler, who died in 1911 and who did not have to assert himself in the same way as Sibelius, i.e., as an artist from the "periphery", largely ignored this kind of problem. If Mahler was, in his music, as selective as Sibelius, his borrowings are easier to detect, without however compromising his originality. Then, for a long time, it was relatively easy, although risky, to draw from Mahler himself more or less openly. Certain passages of Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975), today considered as his "natural", if not downright "official heir", shed light on this. But Sibelius still does not have a "natural" heir, despite his spectacular

renaissance in the last thirty years; for Adorno, the “natural” heirs of Mahler were Schoenberg and, in the first place, Alban Berg. Today, the filiation Mahler-Berg strikes only very few, and Mahler has lost in people’s consciousness part of his corrosiveness: he generates less resistance, or rather a different kind of resistance than that from which he was suffering from until around 1960. It is inseparable from the fact that the dazzling vogue, which projected Mahler to the summit, making him—not without ambiguities—a new Beethoven by the number of performances, did go hand in hand with the rise of post-modernism and the rediscovery of a good part of the “anti-modern” repertoire of the years 1890–1960 (Botstein 2002, 3–12). Sibelius is in no way comparable to this repertoire, as is shown by the discussions he continues to provoke and the personalities of those who actually claim that he is. It happens today that traces of Mahler clearly manifest themselves in a work otherwise than on the surface, otherwise than through its dimensions and above all its accents - traces that only can be perceived through careful listening. When it comes to Sibelius, this kind of deeper-structural influence is almost always the case. Once, the beautiful Symphony in G minor of the British composer Ernest Moeran (1894–1950), first performed in January 1938, was considered as “influenced” by Sibelius. This obvious indebtedness, however, is not of the same type as that much more profound and generally less immediately perceptible “influence” that one may detect in composers of different nationalities at the end of the twentieth century, for example in *La Maison du sourd* for flute and orchestra by Hugues Dufourt (2001).^[20] Going against Adorno, Dufourt rightly said, in an interview with Helena Tyrväinen in 1996, that “in shaping the particular Finnish sensibility, Sibelius did not marginalize his music, but, on the contrary, introduced it in the European concert.” What remains is that composers of the twenty-first century would take interest in Sibelius not for his “Nordic atmosphere” but for such eminently actual features as his synthesis of the static and the dynamic, his dialectic of contraction and expansion, his sense of untemporality, his “putting things together” (Brian Ferneyhough) or his “strange blend of sonic colors” (Tristan Murail). One has not hesitated to compare *Tapiola* to Ligeti’s post-serial *Lontano* (1967) or to speak of Sibelius’s “micro-polyphony.” Sibelius “The Patient” and Mahler “The Impatient” (Vestdijk 1962, 115–117) are and will remain two opposite poles, both unshakable and fostering. For both of them holds true this phrase of Mahler: “A work, whose limits can be seen, breathes odor of death, something that I cannot bear in the arts.” And that of Sibelius: “The notion [of symphony] must be widened. [I] have at least made a contribution.” (Diary, 21 November 1914).^[21]

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- [1] Quotation directly from the English edition of Ekman's book, pp. 190–192.
- [2] Cf. Tawaststjerna 1986, p. 138.
- [3] Quotations translated (more accurately) directly from the Finnish edition of Wegelius's book, p. 584.
- [4] "Sein Dirigieren ist fundiert in Erkenntnis der Aktualität; nicht umsonst kommt er von Schönberg her."
- [5] Quotation from Goss 2009, 43.
- [6] Translated from the original source.
- [7] Translated from the original source.
- [8] "qu'il avait ratés à Paris en novembre 1911."
- [9] Diary entries translated from original Swedish.

[10] Diary notes translated from original Swedish.

[11] "Jag studerar här som bäst Mahlers 5te sinfoni [...]."

[12] "Der erste Satz ist der kühnste, ausgreifendste, zukunfts vollste Stück aus Mahlers Hand."

[13] Quotation Tawaststjerna 1997, p. 227

[14] Translated from the Swedish original.

[15] Translated from the German original.

[16] Translated from the German original.

[17] I have not been able to check Simpson's original wording.

[18] Original wording from Stoeckel 1971, 77.

[19] "Als wir nun Sonntags darauf mit Mahler denselben Weg gingen und bei dem Feste auf dem Kreuzberg ein noch ärgerer Hexensabbath los war, da sich mit unzähligen Werkeln von Ringelspielen und Schaukeln, Schießbuden und Kasperltheatern auch Militärmusik und ein Männergesangverein dort etabliert hatten, die alle auf derselben Waldwiese ohne Rücksicht aufeinander ein unglaubliches Musizieren vollführten, da rief Mahler: „Hört ihr's? Das ist Polyphonie und da hab' ich sie her! — Schon in der ersten Kindheit im Iglauer Wald hat mich das so eigen bewegt und sich mir eingepägt. [...] Gerade so, von ganz verschiedenen Seiten her, müssen die Themen kommen und so völlig unterschieden sein in Rhythmik und Melodik (alles andere ist bloß Vielstimmigkeit und verkappte Homophonie): nur daß sie der Künstler zu einem zusammenstimmenden und -klingenden Ganzen ordnet und vereint."

[20] <http://www.henry-lemoine.com/en/compositeurs/fiche/hugues-dufour>

[21] Translated from Sibelius's diary.

Marc Vignal

Marc Vignal was born 21 December 1933, in [Nogent-sur-Marne](#) (Val de Marne), France. He is a noted French musicologist, writer and radio producer for [France Musique](#) and program manager at [Radio France](#) (1975–1999), Journalist in *Harmony* (1964–1984), *The World of Music* (1985–2009) and *Classica* (2009–). Vignal is the author of numerous lectures, articles and books on music and musicians. Selected works include: *Joseph Haydn* - Seghers 1964, *Jean Sibelius* - Seghers 1965, *Mahler - The Threshold* 1966, repr. 1995, *Dictionary of music* under the direction of Marc Vignal 1982, *Dictionary of musicians* under the direction of Marc Vignal - Larousse 1985, *Joseph Haydn, the man and his work* - Fayard 1988, *Bach's son* - Fayard 1997, *Joseph Haydn - First & Autobiography Biography*, Translated and introduced by Marc Vignal Aubier-Flammarion 1997, *Haydn and Mozart* - Fayard 2001, *Muzio Clementi* - Fayard Mirare 2003, *Jean Sibelius* - Fayard 2004, *Beethoven and Vienna* - Fayard Mirare 2004, *Michael Haydn* - Bleu Nuit 2009, *Antonio Salieri* - Bleu Nuit 2014. He collaborated in the writing *Fayard Guides: symphonic, sacred, chamber and piano* under the direction of François-René Tranchefort, including French and translated *The Classical Style* (The classic) by Charles Rosen (Gallimard, 1978, repr. 2000) and *Bach Interpretation* by Paul Badura-Skoda (Buchen-Chastel 1999).

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