Sibelius's Josephson Songs, Op. 57 – The Composer's Voice

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Introduction

The main aim in this article is to establish the Josephson songs, Op. 57, as one of Jean Sibelius's major works.[A] Sibelius wrote the Josephson songs in April-May 1909 in Berlin,[1] immediately after completing his D minor string quartet *Voces intimae*, to fulfill his commitments to his publisher, Lienau.[2] Tiilikainen notes Sibelius's attempts to reorder the songs, before sending them to the publisher, in order to make them suitable for performance as a complete song cycle.[3] On 18th May 1909, the songs were reported to be complete. Three days later, the composer sent a letter to his wife, Aino, which included the famous phrase 'a change of style?'[4] This comment may establish the songs' position either as the end of an era, or as the beginning of a new experimental period.[5] Stylistically, the songs continue the expressionistic tendencies so far revealed mainly in Sibelius's Op. 35 songs, written in 1907. Both song collections bridge the seemingly wide stylistic gap between the Fourth Symphony, whose ideas were already germinating in the composer's mind, and the major instrumental works that preceded it.

General Assessments of Sibelius's Songs

Jean Sibelius's song corpus is apparently his most important non-symphonic genre of creation, his achievement in this genre guaranteeing him a place among the greatest composers of the art-song of his generation. His *Seven Runeberg Songs* (later known as Op. 13), composed in 1891–92 at the same time as his first orchestral works, can be regarded as his first truly mature masterpiece. From that time on, Sibelius's songs retained their presence and prominence throughout most of his creative career. All of his songs exhibit excellent vocal writing, in their setting of language to music and, contrary to some prevailing assessments, they display a unique feeling for the piano, both technically and emotionally. Although never quoted directly in his symphonic music, or vice versa, the songs maintain a significant communication with his orchestral writing. Interesting similarities between the two genres can be found in terms of sonority, texture and coloring, as well as the writing method of germ motifs and development techniques.

Structure and form are crucial to Sibelius's songs in the same way that they are indispensable to all of his creative endeavors. We can compare Sibelius's method of composing songs to his approach to his orchestral tone poems, where formal principles prevail over tone painting and the depiction of verbal plots. Both songs and tone poems tend to develop their own musical narratives, communicating with the given subjects on evocative or intuitive levels. Yet, without contradicting the above,

the words in Sibelius's songs are crucial to establishing their melodic and structural concepts. They are also strongly bound to the musical development.[6] This duality, of being confined to words yet displaying total musical narrative freedom, is due mainly to the highly symbolistic quality of the texts chosen by the composer, which allows words and music to act on the same signifying level.

The "Other" Sibelius

The significance of the songs, mostly set to Swedish texts, challenges widely accepted conventions concerning the nature of Sibelius's nationalistic ideology and identity. While he was identified as the Hegelian 'great man' of Finnish music, his songs clearly imply that he never abandoned his Swedish cultural origins. 'The reception of Sibelius's music in Finland was essentially national in character up to the Second World War.'[7] It is generally accepted that Sibelius 'found his voice' as a composer in Vienna, in around 1891, inspired by the Finnish epic, *Kalevala*. The triumph of *Kullervo*(1892) and the *Kalevala* compositions that followed established Sibelius not only as a Fennoman, but also as a musical spokesman of the nation's contemporary spirit, strongly connected to the political events of his time.

On the other hand, Sibelius was no exception among the other nineteenth-century Swedish-speaking Fennomans, who, in the wake of Turku Romanticism, always strived 'to promote the common destiny of Finland and Sweden as a pan-nationalist ideal'.[8] Accordingly, major musical works based on the *Kalevala* prior to Sibelius (including Robert Kajanus's powerful *Aino*, 1885) presented an ideal of absorbing Finnish mythology into the pan-Scandinavian Romantic concept and style.[9] Sibelius was influenced by Runeberg's romantic poetry; the poet was idealistically attracted to 'the dual culture of Finland' and 'his Swedish-language poetry reflects the influence of Finnish folk poetry'.[10] Sibelius's "Seven Runeberg Songs" reflect this dual-culture principal, not only by means of the much-quoted *Kalevela*-like tune at the beginning of *Drömmen* (Op. 13 No. 5),[11] but also by merging the principles of the Scandinavian ballad. This is particularly notable in *Under strandensgranar* ("Under the Fir Trees"), Op. 13 No. 1,[12] with its declamatory, almost savage vocal writing and daring pianistic contrasts of symphonic quality, so typical of his *Kullervo* and early *Kalevala*-based works.

In light of his biography and early works, Sibelius's songs call for an alternative survey of his cultural development, centering on his Fenno-Swedish origins.[13] From childhood, Sibelius absorbed Swedish-language poetry and literature, as well as popular songs. During his studies in Helsinki under Wegelius (1885–89), he was encouraged to compose songs and melodramas after Swedish texts by Finnish and Swedish authors such as Runeberg,[14] Stagnelius[15] and Wennerberg.[16] During the 1890s, Sibelius continued to develop the Nordic Ballad genre especially (but not

exclusively) through his early orchestral tone poems. Murtomäki defines a 'ballad period' in Sibelius's creative history (c. 1890–1900), which exists alongside the composer's development as a Finnish National Romantic composer.[17] This gives unexpected prominence to Scandinavian elements during Sibelius's most crucial period as an up-and-coming composer. [18] The Josephson songs, Op. 57, also manifest substantial influences of the Scandinavian folk song and ballad tradition. From 1902, Sibelius became involved with a group of intellectual Swedish speakers called the Euterpists.[19] In many respects, his affiliations to this group can be considered a counterbalance to his earlier affiliation with political and cultural movements such as the Young Finns and Karelianism. As opposed to, or alongside the growing Finnish nationalist movement, the Euterpists strived, by means of Swedish poetry, theatre and architecture, to open Finland up to international cultural events of their time, especially French symbolism and *fin-de-siècle* art.[20] Some of the poetry published in the group's periodical, *Euterpe*, was later set to music by Sibelius. This body of poetry included the decadent *Teodora* (Op. 35 No.2, 1907), written by the poet Bertel Gripenberg, who also translated Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande* into Swedish, to be performed at the Swedish Theatre with music commissioned from Sibelius.[21] The distinguished Swedish author and playwright August Strindberg (1849–1912), who was an antithesis of the Runebergian nationalist Romantic spirit, can be regarded as the person who most influenced the Euterpists. Strindberg drew his inspiration from Schopenhauer, and was influenced by Darwin's scientific discoveries of natural selection, and also by Scandinavian mysticism and theology. Sibelius, who had thought highly of Strindberg since his youth,[22] composed incidental music to Strindberg's allegorical play *Svanevit* ("Swanwhite" 1908). It should be noted that most of the composer's theatrical activity during the first decade of the twentieth century (as in previous and later decades) was for the Swedish Theatre. The exception was Järnefelt's *Kuolema* (1903),[23] which was nevertheless close in its subject and sinister atmosphere to the Symbolist movement and the international Scandinavian spirit. This is also the spiritual backdrop to Sibelius's selection of eight Josephson poems as the basis for his Op. 57 songs.

Sibelius and Josephson

Ernst Josephson (1851–1906) is mainly known as a realist and later a symbolist and expressionist painter. Born in Sweden to a Jewish family, he spent some of his creative years in Rome, Paris and Holland, returning to Sweden in 1888, following a severe mental breakdown. Many of his paintings were created during schizophrenic illness, probably caused by syphilis that he had contracted in his youth. Josephson is considered nowadays as one of the foremost representatives of the *Nordic*

Breakthrough of his time. [24] His most famous painting is *Strömkarlen* ("The Water Sprite," 1884), which is linked to his early poem *Näcken* (1872), set by Sibelius as the eighths and final song of his op. 57. Josephson's first collection of poems, *Svarta rosor* ("Black Roses," 1888), is possibly a tribute to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*.[25] His topics are most frequently taken from Nordic nature, Swedish history, as well as Scandinavian mythology and folklore. Accordingly, his poems are characterized by love of nature, rendering of old Nordic myths, depictions of loneliness, seduction, and love contradicted by suffering, stagnation and death.
It may also be that Sibelius found similarity between the biography and poetry of the deceased poet and his own life and creativity. As Hepokoski writes: '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.'[26] Sibelius's main concern was the tumor in his throat that was surgically removed in May 1907, which led to his constant fear that it might develop into cancer. It was also an exceptionally difficult time of financial and personal crisis for him and his family. [27]

The Songs

Op. 57 No. 2 – *En blomma stod vid vägen* ("A Flower Grew by the Wayside")[28] excels in its formal concentration, and its melodic and sonic economy of means. The song does not apply any direct word-painting; Even so, the gentleness of the melody, its transparent texture and its clear formal structure, suggest the tenderness and fragility of the flower, the butterfly, the bird and, above all, the girl. The perpetual tremolo at the middle section of the song may suggest love, femininity, the white color or the butterfly's fluttering wings. The piano part is mostly written in two-part and three-part textures with utmost transparency. Transparency and counterpoint also characterize Sibelius's constant striving to a pure and carefully designed orchestral sound as manifested in his third and fourth symphonies. Thus, representation of Sibelius's orchestral sounding by the piano is achieved mainly by means of transparency as opposed to thickness and density of texture, as one might have expect. Sibelius will further explore the possibilities of transparent pianistic texture and its representation of his symphonic sonic designs, notably through his three Sonatinas, Op. 67 (written in 1912).
The poem is written in Nordic folk song form (*visa*): four stanzas, each consisting of four rhyming lines and a brief 'refrain' ('Ty alla mina vänneräroedra' ['For all my friends are yours']), which is added as a fifth line. The *visa* genre can be described as a short ballad form that traditionally deals with such themes as tragic love and bereft lovers.[29] The refrain adds a touch of moral irony to the tale, and questions the

identity of the unhappy protagonist. It seems that the poet interprets the fate of the betrayed girl through a fable about a flower, a butterfly and a bird.

Sibelius maintains the musical characteristics of the *visa* through his modal vocal writing as well as his modal harmony, which do not differ in essence from the modality of his themes from *Kalevala*-inspired works (compare the Aeolian modality of bars 14–42 in Op. 57 No. 2 with that of "Pohjola's Daughter" . Although the song should be considered as *durchkomponiert*, Sibelius maintains the feeling of the separate stanzas and emphasizes the poetic role of the refrain by making it a source of melodic development.

Sibelius's contrapuntal organization is most obvious at the middle part of the song (stanzas 2 and 3), which is constructed like a canon. On an æsthetic level, this canon has more to do with folk music than with a learned Renaissance technique. On the other hand the canon, evolving against a background of perpetual broken octaves on a dominant pedal point, initiates a *sonic phrase*, which is in essence a typical structural feature of Sibelius's orchestral works.[30]

Figure 1: Graphic description of the sonic phrase in op. 57 no. 2 mm. 14–42. The vertical axis shows the register (C4 signifies "middle C"), while the horizontal axis is the timeline marked with measure numbers. The green curve marks the vocal line (melodically identical in second and third stanzas). The blue curve marks the canonic melody in the left hand, while the red curve marks the same melody in the right hand of the piano. The orange strip marks the organ point of B3–B4 and later B4–B5.

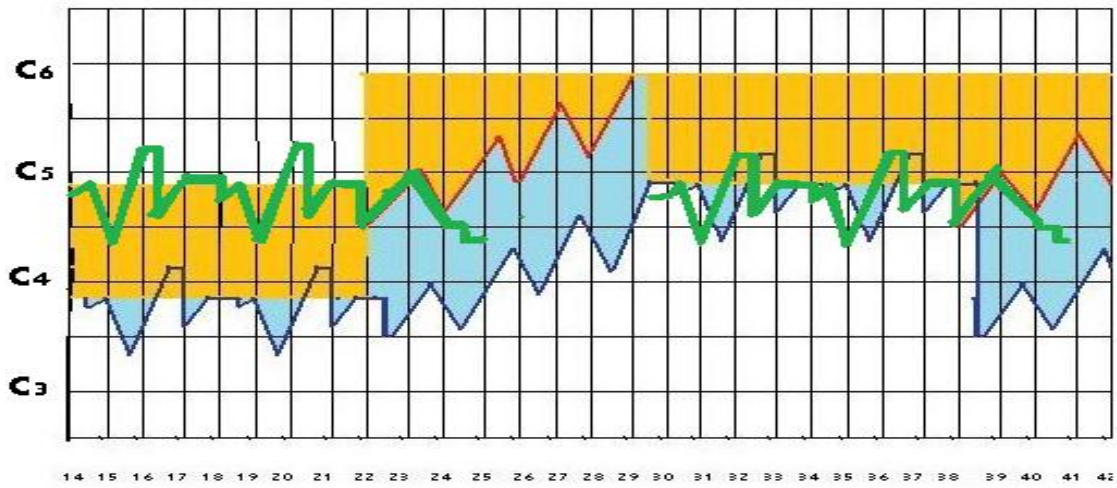
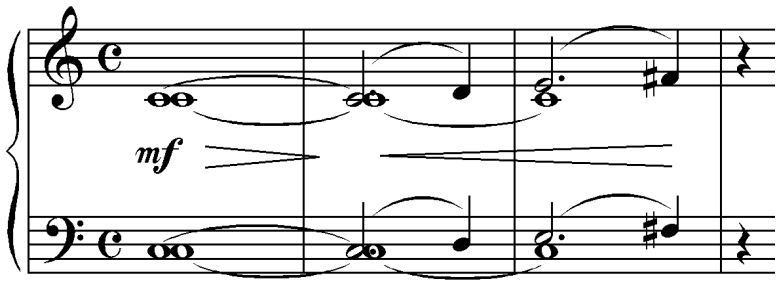


Figure 1 helps to identify the song's remarkable sonic development: the vocal melody is first accompanied by a lower organ point and, in the next stanza, by an upper organ point. An instrumental canon (mm. 24–29) is based on the same melodic material as the vocal line (the 'refrain') and gradually serves as a bridge between the two registers of the organ point. Note also the dynamic markings (*poco a poco cresc*, that breaks into *pianissimo subito*) at m. 29,as part of the overall sonic development. Toward the end of the phrase, there is a repetition of the same instrumental bridge, that connects

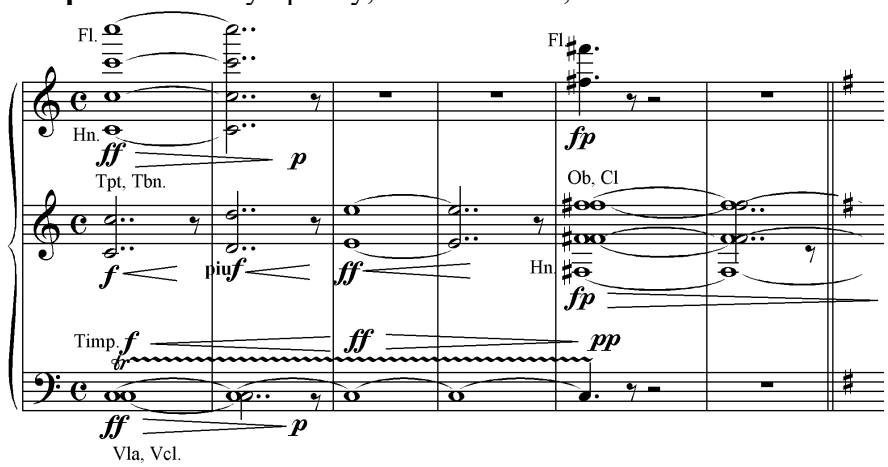
to the next stanza, to be discussed below. This delicate sonic phrase can be compared, for example, with the strings passage, mm. 351–368, in *En saga* (1902 version). Contrapuntal structure, though not imitative, also dominates the melodically identical first and last stanzas of the song (stanzas 1 and 4). Both stanzas open with a C Lydian melody that modulates into the concluding line in the main tonic, E minor [31]. The three opening measurs of the song are reminiscent of an orchestral transcription of, say, four horns, or any other combination of instruments that produces the typical Sibelius sonic 'pedal group',[32] extensively used in his orchestral music. It is true that the piano is incapable to realize the doublings in unison as suggested by Sibelius, nor the dynamic gradual changes in all four voices. Yet it is a fascinating task for the pianist to approach as closely as possible the desired orchestral sonority and expression (Example 1):

Example 1: Op. 57 no. 2, mm. 1–3, piano part.



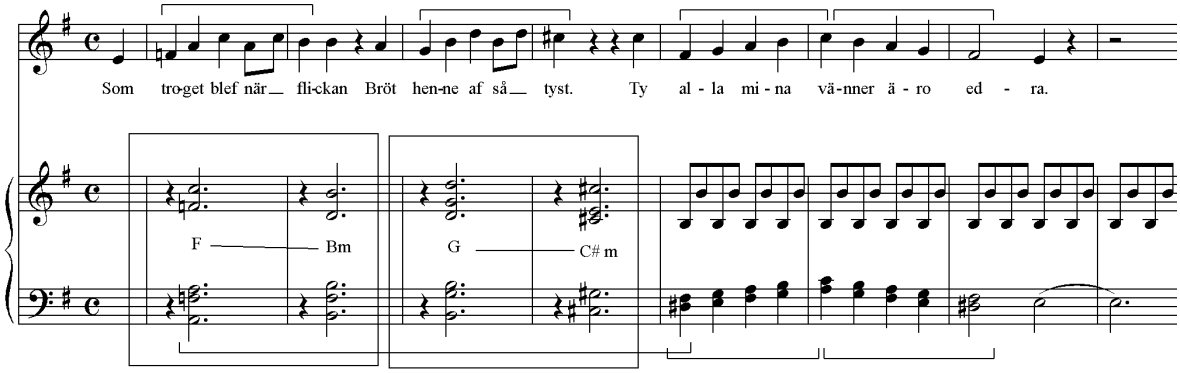
This rising motif of three major scale notes, usually followed by a fourth Lydian mode note, is a frequent occurrence in various genres of Sibelius's works. For example, the bridge that connects the two main subject groups in the first movement of the Third Symphony (1907) may be cited (Example 2). In fact, Example 2 can be regarded as an orchestral realization of the musical idea in Example 1. These examples, as well as the following, demonstrate to what extent the Fourth Symphony's famous motto, based on the same Lydian motif, is related to similar motives in previous works, such as the Third Symphony and the Op. 57 songs.

Example 2: Third Symphony, 1st movement, mm. 34–39.



To return to *En blomma*: the modal chord progression of bars 6–9 comprises two triton progressions as shown in Example 3. Tritons are also found in the sequential vocal line, as well as the bass line, where the first note of bar 10 (D sharp) appears as an augmented fourth in the progression that begins with A (in bar 6). The triton is highlighted also at the 'refrain' melody in bars 9–11, including the accompanying parallel thirds. Example 3 demonstrates Sibelius's various treatments of the triton, which become typical of his orchestral works of the 'experimental period'.

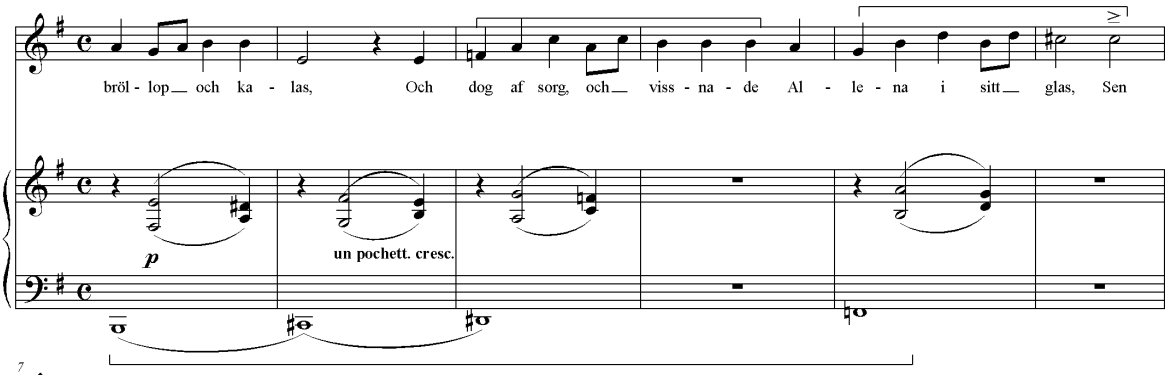
Example 3: Op. 57 no. 2, mm. 6–12, with all harmonic and melodic triton relations indicated with brackets.



The idea of the triton is brought to a culmination toward the end of the song (bars 44–49), in a wonderful harmonic strata that condenses the harmonic progressions heard before in bars 3–5 and 6–9, by means of a clearly articulated bass, outlining rather harshly the Lydian scale.

The triton-related pitches (B in bar 47 and C sharp in bar 49) at the vocal line remain exposed without harmonic support, which makes them even tenser than before (Example 4). Exposing the singer to triton progressions against a silent or idle background is a sonic feature, shared by all Op. 57 songs[33] – and characteristic to Sibelius's treatment of the vocal line in general.

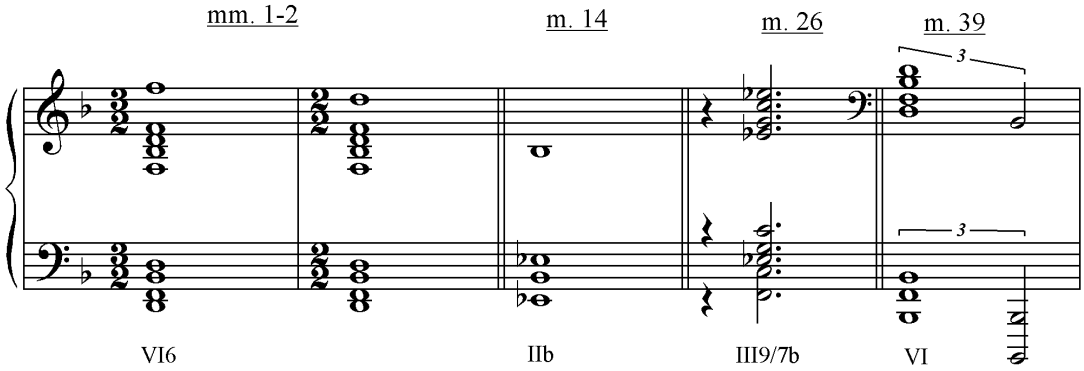
Example 4: Op. 57 no. 2, mm. 44–49, with triton structures indicated with brackets.



Op. 57 No. 5 – *Jag äretträd* ("I am a Tree") is an impressive threnody: a bare tree wishing either for a happier life, or for the coming of death, or for the coming of winter – the only season during which it can tolerate its own existence. The poem was written in Firenze, during young Josephson's sojourn in Italy [B] The poet's suffering, symbolized by the tree, may have found resonance in Sibelius's own state of mind, as explained above. The Poem's harsh pessimism, its perpetual yearning for winter as well as the setting's extreme concentration of musical ideas and its sonic construction, all are undeniably connected to she same atmosphere of the Fourth Symphony.
The song is devided into three distinct stanzas. However it is essentially a through-composed composition, considering its harmonic structure and its sonic design. A quick look at the Josephson poem, as printed in the original edition [C], reveals a structure of three stanzas, each containing two long lines (not in regular four lines, as usually printed in program notes nowadays). This might explain Sibelius's musical outline of each stanza as a single long descending line, as further presented below.
The constructive sonic principles of the song may reminiscent us those found in *En blomma stod vid vägen*; However this song, signifies a higher level of mythical heroic suffering, thus it needs much heavier and more dramatic means of expression. The opening sonorous arpeggios of VI^6 chords are no mere ornaments, but constitute the main motivic core of the entire song. Melodically, they are transformed in the vocal line into a $IV^6{}_4$ arpeggio-like melody (m. 6) carrying the simple existential words: 'I am a tree'. More important, however, is the harmonic impact of these opening chords, which overshadows the entire song, leading into a kind of hidden chord progression that strongly opposes the tonic centre of D minor. Among these chords are (1) the sudden Neapolitan lowered II in m. 14 (actually a neighboring chord to the tonic D minor), (2) the crucial III^9 chord in bar 26, which is in fact a chord-*strata* of a lowered VII^7 chord, and a bass on the III degree that acts as a dominant to the deceptive 'final' VI chord in bar 39 (3), itself a deviation from the main organ point of D. This organ point, although always prominent, constantly weakens its dynamics and its impact, as if to symbolize the tree's tragic ironic and

non-heroic victory over death. Note also how the chords of the 'hidden' progression are outlined here. They are almost equally spaced from one another (about 12–13 bars apart). Amazingly, this 'hidden' chord progression is the only actual chord progression throughout the entire song! The song does not contain any functional progression in D minor. It mainly manifests an obstinate organ-point of the tonic D. It may be concluded (with a measure of over-simplification) that the hidden progression symbolizes an uncompromised desire for death, while the state of existence is symbolized by the perpetual organ point, in constant semibreve triplets, and the empty resonance of the perfect octaves.

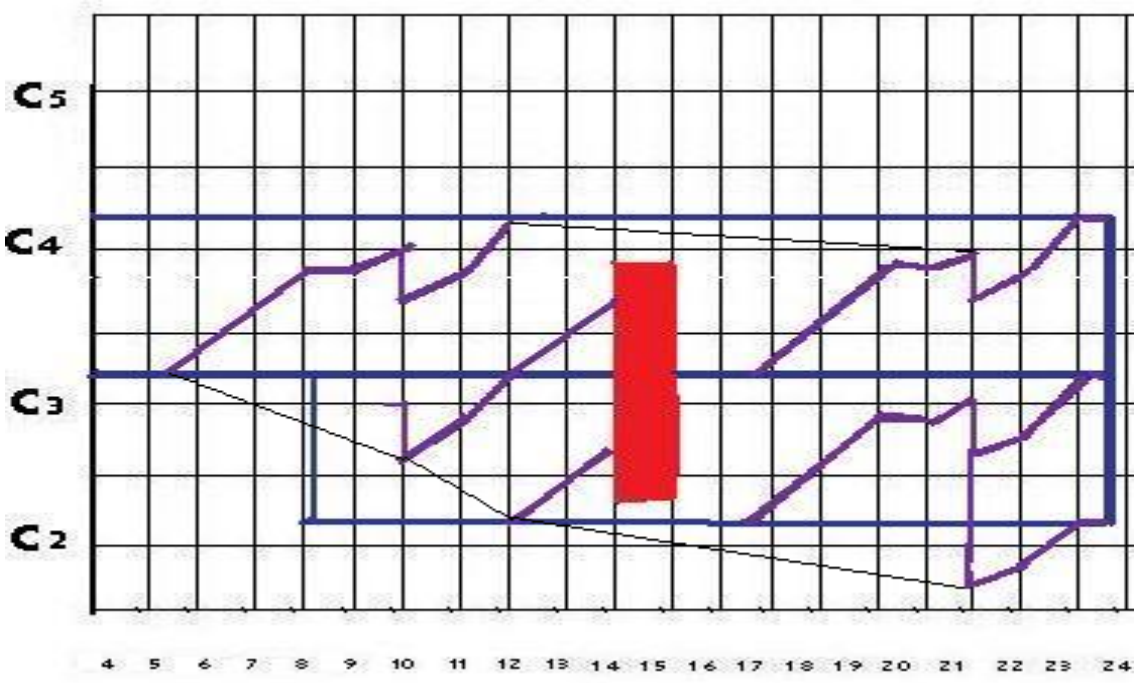
Example 5: The hidden progression as manifested in op. 57 no. 5.



At the first measure of the song, the piano introduces, in addition to the arpeggio-motif, a brief unison melody that anticipates the formation of the following vocal line and its harmonic implications. The briefness and bareness of this unison melody may also suggest the basic state of mind: coldness, bitterness and concentration on the essential question of being. Both melodies are constructed of a turn-like motif, followed by a gradual descent of a tenth (from F5 to D4) in natural minor mode. While the descent of the vocal line is long and unbroken (encompasses mm. 7-14), the descent of the introductory piano melody is somewhat abrupt, melodically and rhythmically: the melody rests on B flat (third crotchet of bar 3), and then quickly descends a sixth (by means of a semiquaver quintuplet) down to the bare octaves in the tonic D (m.4). This gesture also anticipates the final shift from the VI chord with B flat1 as the bass, to the bare sudden octaves on the tonic D in the final bar (bar 42). The song also displays Sibelius's unique conjunction procedures – later to be employed on a much larger scale in his tone-poems and symphonies, culminated in the Seventh Symphony. This can be noted in the piano interlude between the second and the third stanzas (bars 24–28). The vocal line ends with the words '*härligsyn*' ('gorgeous view') and the 'turn motif' C sharp, D, E, D, which is transformed by the piano into a rising motif: C sharp, D, E, F (bars 23–24), which the piano interlude takes as its initial statement (bars 24–25). However, in bar 26 the listener is surprised to realize that the actual recapitulation of the piano introduction has already begun.

The registration of the piano part in bars 4–23 does not exceed D4 (D of the 'first octave'), and the entire sonic development can be described as rising 'waves of sound', the overall shape of which is demonstrated in Figure 2. Between the two first stanzas (mm. 14-16), the rising line in the piano reaches its harsh dissonant climax on the above-mentioned Neapolitan E flat chord, simultaneously with the organ point D (the absence of the third in this chord makes the clash even tenser). Soon after, the dissonant chord quickly vanishes, leaving just the bare octaves for the beginning of a second sonic build-up. The phrase as a whole descends gradually (as can be seen in Figure 2), in contrast to the constant inner undulating movements upwards.

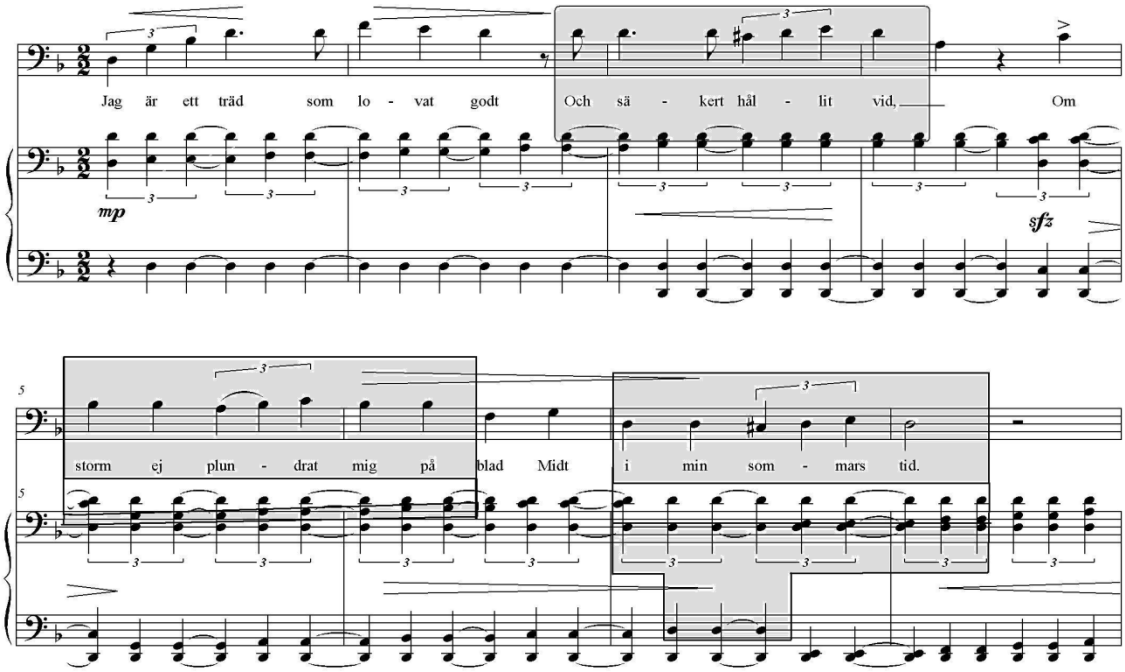
Figure 2: Sonic phrase of op. 57 no. 5, mm. 4–24. The red rectangle marks the dissonant "neighboring" E flat chord. The horizontal blue lines mark the organ-points (D in three registers), while the diagonal purple lines mark the slow scale-like movement heard within the range of these organ-points. The thin black lines emphasize the overall descent of the sonic phrase as a whole.



When sung by a male voice, such as a baritone (which actually sounds an octave lower than notated), the vocal line merges into the register of the piano sonority, while recurrences of the turn-like motif constantly intervene with the pianistic organ points and rising lines (seen in Figure 2) in all registers, creating almost a heterophony. Figure 3 visually demonstrates the combination of a baritone vocal line, the organ points and the rising piano lines. This is also demonstrated in regular notation in Example 6 below:

Figure 3: Sonic phrase of op. 57 no. 5, mm. 4–24, with the vocal line contour (in green) added.

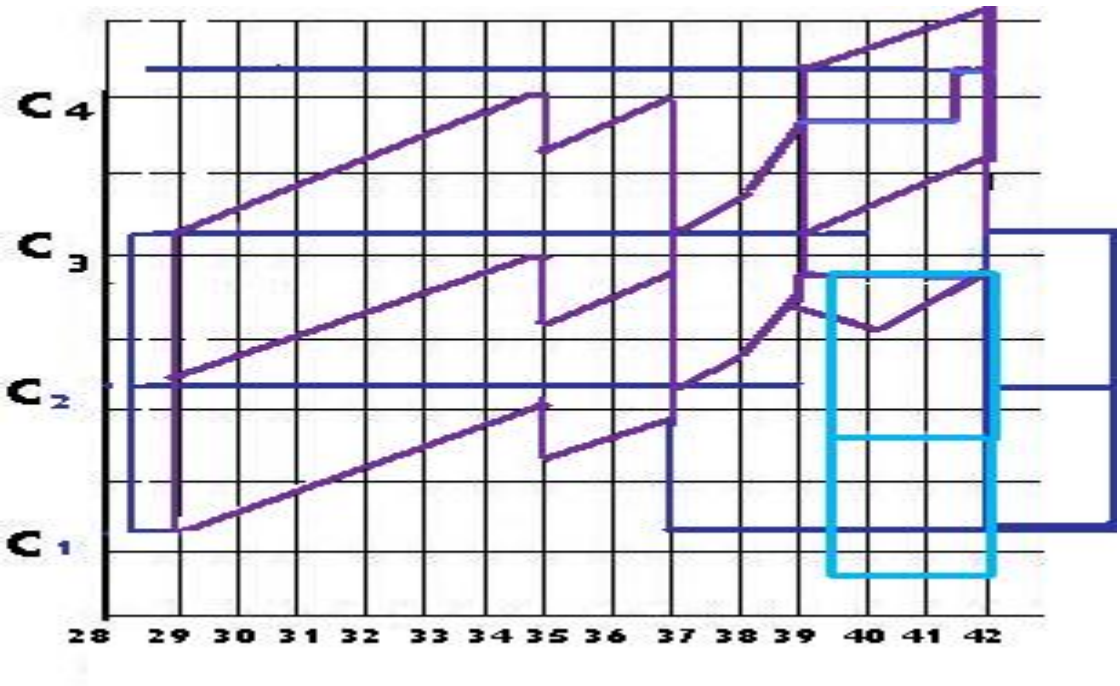
Example 6: Opening stanza of op. 57 no. 5, as transcribed for a baritone voice, marked with three occurrences of the "turn-motif," its sonic parallelism to the organ-points and the rising line in the piano accompaniment.



The third and final stanza displays, even more precisely, the sonic counterpoint of the rising lines in the piano part, against the overall descending direction of the sonic phrase as a whole. In this final stanza, the rhythmic movement of thirds freezes, yet the rising melodic lines keep steady even beyond the end of the stanza itself, thus forming a short postlude. The conflict is clearly shown at the penultimate measure,

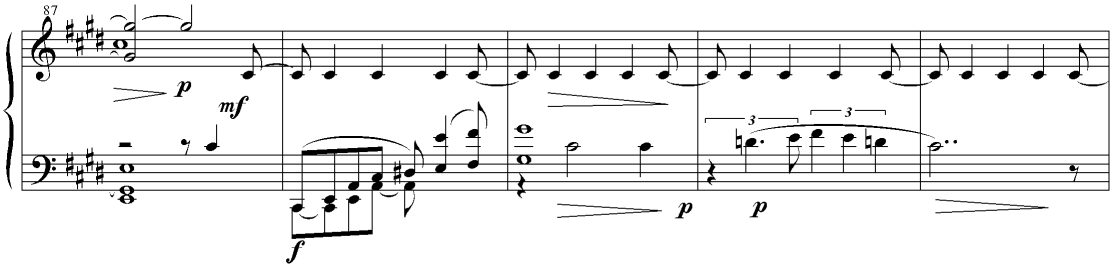
when the ascending line reaches its peak – up to G4, then falling down into a low, persistent and hollow octave on the tonic D, which sounds as if it emerges out of a vacuum. These simultaneous developments are clearly shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4: The sonic phrase of op. 57 no. 5, mm. 28–42 (end of the song). The horizontal blue lines mark the organ-points on D while the azure lines mark the lower reinforcement of the organ point – on the lower B flat. The diagonal purple lines mark the slow, scale-like ascending movements to the highest peak (G4) in the penultimate measure.



To conclude: Sibelius *Jag är ett träd* reflects a strong affiliation with the forthcoming Fourth Symphony, by means of harmony, sound and texture construction. One striking example of this affiliation is found at the concluding bars of the third movement of the Fourth Symphony (Example 7). The arpeggio and turn motifs, as in the song, are both clearly identified, juxtaposed rhythmically and harmonically with a perpetual syncopated organ point on the tonic as a symbol of hopeless eternity.

Example 7: Fourth Symphony, third movement, mm. 88–91.



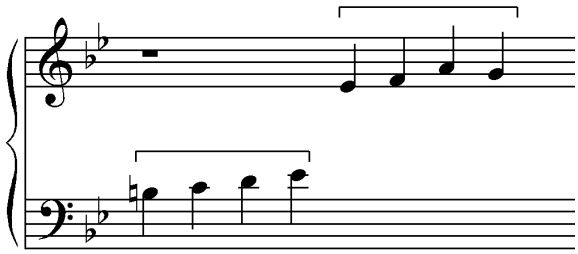
Op. 57 No. 8 – *Näcken* ("The Water Sprite"). This song is highly expressionistic and is considered the most advanced of the set, both melodically and harmonically. In

fact, it is one of the most daring of all Sibelius's works. The water sprite is a legendary creature in Nordic folklore. It appears as a beautiful young man who lives in river rapids, plays the violin beautifully, and induces women and children to follow him into the river – where they drown. Sibelius had already addressed this subject in 1888 in a song for Wennerberg's 'dramatic runic sorcery' *Näcken*, portraying a traditional water sprite and a priest who is trying to silence his seductive and sacrilegious singing. Sibelius's song *Under strandens granar* ("Under the Fir-Trees," Op. 13 No. 1, composed in 1891) after Runeberg, is also a ballad about a water sprite.[34] The present song is substantially different, however, to those works mentioned above, since it is based on Josephson's Symbolist poem, directed to the innermost parts of the artist's soul.

The poem was written as early as 1871, while Josephson was still a student in Stockholm. Later, Josephson painted the water sprite a number of times, and, from 1878 on, made several studies on the theme. In 1882-3, he painted two versions of *Näcken*("The Water Sprite"), depicted as a dark-haired creature surrounded by hostile and sombre nature. The violin is hardly visible in these versions. In 1884, he painted a different picture on the same theme, entitled ‚*Strömkarlen,*this time portraying a handsome, naked blond boy, sitting on a rock under a waterfall in the sunshine, playing a golden violin. In 1888–91, during his first mental breakdown, Josephson painted highly expressionistic versions of Näcken, picture, which are seemingly spiritual self-portraits as a water sprite.[35] The poem is vague about the identities of the water sprite and the poet himself. It follows a tale of a fiddler who ventures into the rapids in search of the water sprite, in order to hear his superb violin playing, and to learn how to play as beautifully. In fact, this is a kind of contract between the artist and the devil. They play together, the fiddler loses his mind and death eventually comes, symbolized in Josephson's poem by the appearance of the *älvkung* (elf king), whoever sees him must die). As Tawaststjerna hints, Josephson probably identifies with the young fiddler, and so might Sibelius himself.[37] .This horrible, yet delightful nightmare is soon resolved by the poet's awakening.

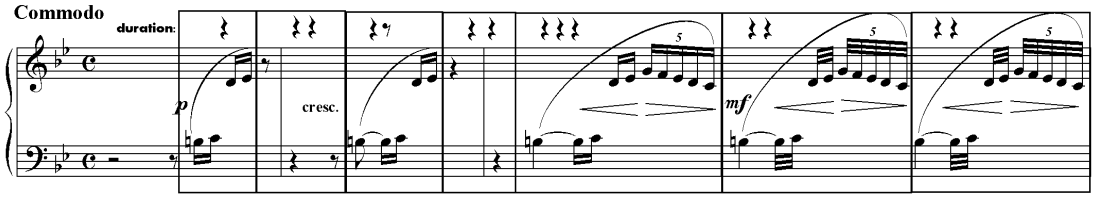
The poem contains a number of dualities: rock and fir, silver and gold, the fiddler and the water sprite, the violin and the harp – they all merge as symbols of the artist's soul in turmoil. The fir tree (also a religious symbol) symbolizes the waterfall, and later the elf king with his silver beard. The poet portrays a rich scale of colours, resembling the dark-haired water sprite version of Josephson's *Näcken*: the fir tree is dark, probably dark green as in the picture, shadowing the bright silver and gold of the waterfall and the rock. The boy fiddler is dark-haired and pale. The water sprite's harp is golden, like the foam of the rapids. When they start to play together, the boy loses his mind in ecstasy and confronts death. However, it all ends in a 'sobering' anticlimax. The artist

admits that the boy was nothing but his fantasy. Dream and reality still coexist as the waterfall splashes drops of water on the poet's cheek. For Sibelius, this is certainly a pessimistic conclusion. Accordingly, the last stanza laments the loss of fantasy, the denial of creative power, and the undesired return to the materialized world.
The tonality of the song is sometimes defined as B flat major.[38] Apart from the key signature, however, there is no audible evidence of such a tonal centre throughout the song. The piano introduces a 'modified Locrian' tetra-chord (B natural, C, D, E flat),while the vocal line joins in bar 5, expressing a Lydian tetrachord (E flat, F, G, A). Both modes highlight the interval of the triton. As Tawaststjerna remarks, the upper tetrachord is identical with the motto of the Fourth Symphony.[39]
Example 8: The opening 'modified Locrian' tetra-chord (left-hand staff) against the vocal Lydian tetra-chord (right-hand staff).



Neither of the tetra-chords employ traditional development procedures (such as sequences, mirroring, etc.); they appear to remain static. But the motifs constantly develop by means of rhythm (not confined to time-signature and bar-lines) and sonority. The four introductory bars, for example, display rhythmic and sonic development. The opening pattern gradually becomes longer, faster and denser, until – in bar 4 – a steady pattern of "modified Locrian" hexachords is being established

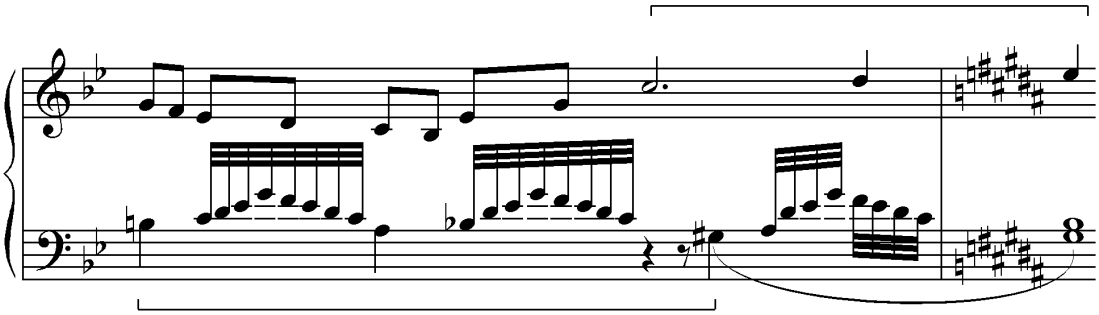
Example 9: Op. 57 no. 8, mm 1–4: gradual change in durations of the initial tetra-chord. In this example, each frame represents an event of the repeating Locrian tetrachord motif or a silence in between its occurrences. The duration of each frame is indicated by the silence symbols, appearing on top.



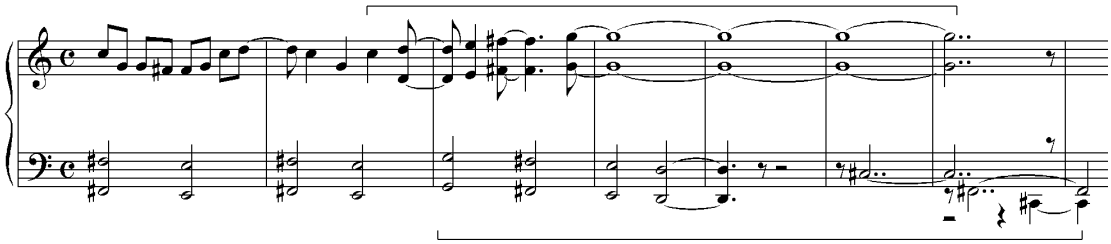
The tonal uncertainty of these opening measures clears up in bar 7, when a tonal centre – E flat major – is perceived for the first time. At bar 8, when the final line of the first stanza begins, the newly perceived tonality modulates abruptly to E major by means of a melodic progression at the vocal line: C–D–E (see Example 10, below).

This may remind the opening motif of *En blomma stod vid vägen* (No. 2), analyzed above, which was evidently very similar to a transition passage of the first movement of the Third Symphony. The modulatory process in *Näcken* would, however, be better compared to the transitory passage of the first movement of the Fourth Symphony. Both excerpts feature a chromatically descending bass line:

Example 10: The transition passage at the end of the first stanza (mm. 8–9) of *Näcken* modulates from E flat major to E major. Brackets highlight the ascending scale-like motif in the vocal line in contrast to the chromatic descending line of the bass.



Example 11: A transition passage from the first movement of the Fourth Symphony (mm. 22–28), to be compared with Example 10 above.



It is also interesting to compare the anticipatory G sharp in the bass line of bar 8 in Example 9 with the surprising C sharp in bar 27 of Example 10. They both sound somewhat harshly 'ahead of their time', announcing the target key while the home key zone is is still prevailing. Thus, *Näcken* anticipates one of the most daring and advanced moments of sonic conjunctions in the Fourth Symphony.

It may be a surprise that the song follows Sibelius's unique pattern of sonata form, initially found at the main part of the finale of the Third Symphony (1907) [40] According to this method, the reprise (or recapitulation) immediately follows the exposition. The lack of a development section is compensated for by an extended coda section, coming after the recapitulation, which is usually stretched in duration up to a third of the entire movement. In spite of the melodic repetition, the sonic structure of the recapitulation does not repeat itself, but develops rather constantly, toward a climactic sonic event in the coda. As a result, the listener has the impression of a continuously linear musical narrative.[41]

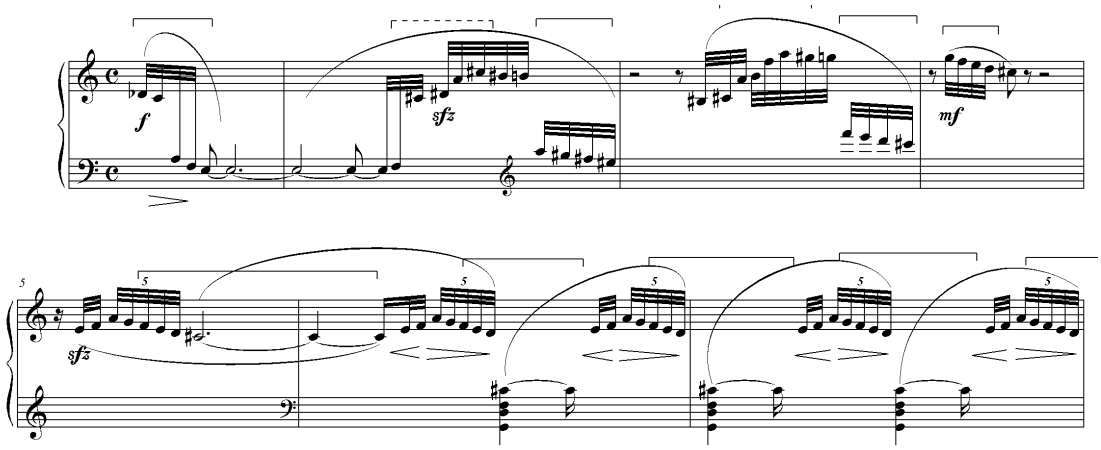
These three sections of such a sonata form are apparently suggested in *Näcken*, as follows: 'exposition' (bars 1–10), 'recapitulation' (bars 10–18), and 'coda' (bars 18–

33) which in fact contains a 'second recapitulation'. If the four final bars of the song, which present entirely different musical materials, are not counted, the coda's length (10 bars) equals the exposition's (10 bars) and the recapitulation's (9 bars). Yet there is a concurrency between this suggested formal scheme and the song's strophic structure. Moreover, each stanza opens half a tone higher than the stanza that precedes it, thus constantly 'elevating' the feeling of fantasy and ecstasy.

The first stanza of *Näcken* can represent a highly condensed exposition, in which the duality of the Lydian tetra-chord and the 'modified Locrian' tetra-chord functions as a first subject, while the E major arpeggios in the piano, as well as the arpeggio-like vocal line (bar 9) closing the exposition, can be regarded as the second subject. The second stanza is identical to the proposed recapitulation, opening with a new sonic element – the chromatic descent at a low register of the piano, as if something were drowning. Built of triplets, it is also metrically independent from the main key signature and the rhythm of the vocal line. While the chromatic scale goes back upward, it acts like a 'diagonal organ point', namely a long, mostly chromatic ascending or descending pattern, placed simultaneously against melodic line, a typical of Sibelius orchestral writing. Being half a tone higher than the first stanza, the reprise highlights the tonal centers of E major and F major.

Moving toward the third stanza, which is the beginning of the coda section, there is an interesting piano interlude, where Sibelius examines further possibilities in developing his two tetra-chords (similar explorations of the Lydian tetra-chord occur in the development section of the first movement of his Fourth Symphony). In the following musical example (bars 17–23), brackets have been placed above all the derivations of the opening Locrian tetrachord, while dashed brackets are placed above all the derivations of the Lydian tetrachord. The 11th+ chord first introduced at bar 22 can itself be regarded as a vertical derivation of the opening tetrachord (rather Schoenbergian serial thinking), but its immediate interpretation as a dominant chord shifts the tonal connotation from F major to C major, where the 11th+ chords express the dominant.

Example 12: Op. 57 no. 8, mm. 17–23 – the beginning of the coda. Regular brackets mark the places derived from the initial tetrachord, while dashed brackets mark the places derived from the whole-tone scale – the vocal line tetrachord.



The modulatory progression that ends the third stanza is interpreted this time as a 'triton progression' from C major to F sharp major. This is the very moment in the poem when the elf-king is seen. However, this note – F sharp – announces not only the 'death' of the boy (and, accordingly, of the poet), but also an awakening into the gloomy reality, while the F sharp major chord serves as a long dominant organ-point, leading to the epilogue (bars 30-33). This epilogue, surprisingly static, somber and seemingly so different from what has been heard up to this point, is also the only traditionally tonal section in the song (in B minor). The vague, imaginative Locrian and Lydian tetra-chords (based on the same initial note B!) are transformed into a vocal line that contains the three initial notes of the minor scale (B, C sharp, D). The piano part is essentially in parallel thirds, with the resonating sounds of the organ point on F sharp in the background (symbolizing the only hint of fantasy left, much like the drops of water mentioned in the poem), and its registration encompasses the whole lower half of the piano (registers 1 to 4). Harmonically, it is a tonic-dominant section. Musically, this ending is enigmatic, mainly because of the composer's exceptionally strong evocation of resignation. The ending, which also concludes the Op. 57 songs as a complete set, suggests the final A minor chords of the Fourth Symphony – apparently unconnected too with the extraordinary set of roving harmonies that precede it. EeroTarasti identifies at least two simultaneous and contradictory narratives in the Fourth Symphony; the first leads from order to chaos (for example, in the fourth movement), and the second leads from chaos to order (for example, in the third movement).[42] Nobody claims that the Fourth Symphony resolves into complete order. On the contrary, the seemingly tonal ending only increases the horror of the chaotic process of destruction that precedes it. It is left to the reader to decide how far the ideas of order versus disorder in *Näcken* are related to the Fourth Symphony.

All other remaining songs of Op. 57 deserve no less our attention. **No. 6, *Hertig Magnus*** ("Duke Magnus") and **No. 1,*Älvenochsnigeln*** ("The River and the Snail") are constructed as Nordic ballads. While *Hertig Magnus* exhibits elements of a typical

Nordic ballad, based on historic roots and endowed with all the characteristics of the genre, *Älven och snigeln* is a symbolic ballad, in which he traditional narratives of seduction, love, and death are embedded as though beneath the surface of the fairy-tale like plot. **No. 3, *Kvarnhjulet*** ("The Mill Wheel") is an outstanding lyrical miniature about new and old mill wheels, in which the abundance of musical ideas tremendously elevates its dramatic impact. This poem, like **No. 5, *Jag är ett träd***, reflects the poet's suffering and both are in fact autobiographical. Between these two powerfully dramatic songs, **No. 4, *Maj*** ("May") can be conceived as a pastoral idyll. However, the poem establishes the subjective suffering mind at the centre, making Spring a desired symbol of reawakening and revival. Finally, **No. 7,*Vänskapens blomma*** ("The Flower of Friendship") connects again to the flower motif,[43] so central to Josephson's poetry as well as to Sibelius's entire song repertoire. Friendship, like a flower, accompanies the poet's life during the bitterest moments of rejection, sickness and death.

Summary and Conclusion

'It is easy to overlook the important place that vocal music occupies in his [Sibelius's] creative output.'[44] This subjective feeling of the editor of the first scholarly edition of Sibelius songs seems to be true, since the songs have not yet gained the international reputation and publicity they deserve – neither in the framework of Sibelius's œuvre nor as part of the general art song repertoire. Various explanations for this situation fail to take into account the fact that the songs, mostly reflecting Fenno-Swedish cultural roots, contradict Sibelius's widely accepted role in the history of Finnish nationalism, as well as the generally accepted narrative of his personal development as a great Finnish composer [D] see also Mäkelä, p.111. Mainstream researchers tend to emphasize Sibelius's absorbance in the *Kalevala* and Karelianism, most of whose principles were integrated into his original symphonic music. Comments about the composer being 'in search of his own voice [45] became common assessments. In this respect, it is easy to understand the undervaluation of Sibelius's 'Swedish' works as 'marginal'.[46] Some facts about the history of Finnish national awareness, and its implications on language and the arts, as well as Sibelius's own personal cultural milestones, may shed light on this seemingly confusing contradiction – mainly to the non-Finnish eye and ear – between languages, cultures, and social and political affiliations.[47]

In this respect, the eight Josephson songs of 1909, Op. 57, represent an important test case. They are small-scale compositions, written in haste after completing such large-scale projects as the Third Symphony, "Pohjola's Daughter" and the *Voces intimae* Quartet, and just before writing the Fourth Symphony. They set to music the work of Josephson, a mainland Swedish poet, who embodies in this life-story and his creative

process the spirit of the great Nordic Breakthrough in its most utmost extreme. He found a true echo in Sibelius's creative mind mainly as a result of the composer's affiliation with the new pan-Nordic movement, as manifested evidently in a good number of theatrical projects he was involved at the same period.

A close analysis of the songs reveals their strong communication with Sibelius's symphonic music of the same period: their formal and harmonic concentration, their logical construction, and, above all, their cultivation of the sonic design principle, including layering sonic groups (notably the 'pedal group') and the development of 'sonic phrases'. Composed on the threshold of the Fourth Symphony, it is impossible to overestimate their immense significance as generators of Sibelius's most radical and experimental creative period. Songs like *Jag är ett träd* and *Näcken* may even be regarded as immediate models for some of the most radical moments of the Fourth Symphony and the following tone poems.
Above all, the importance of Sibelius's Josephson songs lies mainly in their artistic merits, being a superb manifestation of the Nordic art song. They excel in vocal writing, in pianistic accompaniment, in concentration of ideas and form, and in their portrayal of the text Enriched by such complex cultural circumstances, their position at such a critical stage in Sibelius's own development only increases their intrinsic value as genuine lyrical and dramatic masterpieces. The setting to music of poems by the same poet, displaying close interrelations in their states of mind, and sharing musical motifs and ideas, justify the Op. 57 songs being referred to as a genuine song cycle.

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Appendix I: Josephson's Water Sprite Paintings

Figure 5: Ernst Josephson, *Strömkarlen* (1882), Göteborg Art Museum.

Figure 6: Ernst Josephson, *Strömkarlen* (1884), Stockholm, PrinsEugensWaldemarsudde.

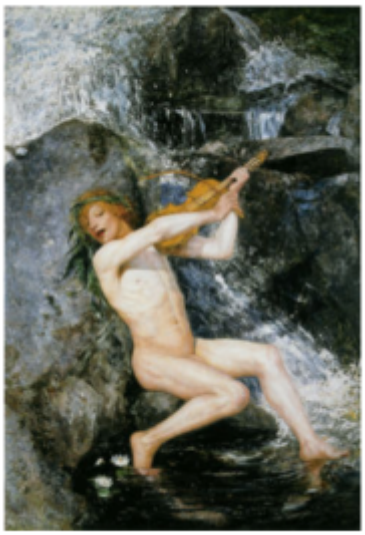

Figure 7: Ernst Josephson: *Näcken* (or "Spiritual Self-Portrait") (or *Narcissus*), 1888–91.

[A] The first commentary that makes justice to the op. 57 songs appears in Mäkelä, pp.322-327

[1] Tawaststjerna, Vol. 2, p. 124.

[2] Ibid., p. 114.

[3] The Jean Sibelius website: http://www.sibelius.fi/english/musiikki/laulut.htm .

[4] Tawaststjerna, Vol. 2, pp. 128 and 116.

[5] C. 1910–15, vaguely from the creation of the Fourth Symphony (1910-11) to the première of the 1915 version of the Fifth Symphony.

[6] Jeffrey Kallberg justifiably notes that Sibelius only infrequently adds pianistic postludes to his settings (in Grimley, p. 121). In fact, long introductions and extensive interludes are also very quite rare in his songs.

[7] Huttunen, in Grimley, p. 19. He notes prominent twentieth century writers, beginning with Flodin and Furuhjelm, and highlights ToivoHaapanen's works, such as *Suomensäveltaide* ("The Music of Finland"), published in 1940, as the most influential publications, representing 'the culmination of nationalistic Finnish music historiography'.

[8] Ibid, p. 9.

[9] Ibid., p. 12; also in Goss (2003), p. 48. The topic of *Kullervo* attracted important Swedish-speaking writers from the mid-nineteenth century on, including Alexis Kivi, whose first (lost) version of *Kullervo* was written under his former Swedish name (Goss, p. 51). Huttunen reminds us that Sibelius's own *Kullervo* (1892) was

anticipated and received no less enthusiastically by the Swedish-language press than by the Finnish, a clear sign of unity.

[10] De Gorog, p. 37.

[11] Highlighted in Goss (Cambridge, 2003), p. 28, Murtomäki (2010), and others.

[12] Composed in Monola, Karelia, June 1892 after sketches made in Vienna, 1891 (Barnett, p. 75).

[13] The present attempt is compiled mainly from existing writings (De Gorog, Murtomäki and others).

[14] *Serenade* (1887).

[15] *Trånaden* (*Suckarnasmystär*) (*"*Yearning [The Mystery of the Sights"]), JS 203 (1887), after the important early Romantic Swedish poet Erik Johan Stagnelius (1793–1823), melodrama for narrator and piano, composed while the composer was on vacation with his family in Korpo. See also Gräsbeck, p. 107.

[16] A song and monodrama (JS 138, for singing voice, narrator and piano trio), as part of *Näcken*, a play by Gunnar Wennerberg (1817–1901).

[17] Murtomäki, 1999, p. 15.

[18] Murtomäki's extensive research on the Nordic ballad and its influence on Sibelius is presented in *Finnish Music Quarterly* and Jackson &Murtomäki. He highlights mainly *Skogsrået* (1894), based on Viktor Rydberg's poem, but also broadens the ballad concept into many of Sibelius's orchestral compositions of the period, including *Kalevala*-based movements and patriotic music of the turn of the century.

[19] Named after *Euterpe*, Karl Flodin's music periodical (1901), which beginning 1902 published essays on literature, theater, art, poetry, philosophy and music.

[20] To be more precise, the essentially liberal Young Finn movement was also open to foreign cultural influences, particularly to French Realism, while advocating the prominence of the Finnish language in Finland's public life.

[21] Kurki, pp. 11–12.

[22] See also in Smith, pp. 344–345.

[23] First performed on 2nd December 1904 at the (Finnish) National Theatre, Helsinki (Barnett, p. 159).

[24] Weinstein, Introduction, pp. 1-9.

[25] His second and last collection of poems, "Yellow Roses" (1896), was associated with the first in a 1901 publcation, entitled *Svarta rosor och gula* (Black and Yellow Roses).

[26] Hepokoski, 'Sibelius, Jean', *Grove Music Online*.

[27] Tawaststjerna, Vol. 2, p. 94.

[28] Translated Jeremy Parsons(1984). All English translations of the Josephson poems are taken from the booklet of Sibelius's complete songs recorded by Tom Krause and Elisabeth Söderström on Decca CDs (recorded 1978–1981), 476 1725 (no translator's name mentioned). The Theodor Rehbaum German translation, appearing in Lienau's edition, deviates substantially from the original Swedish, as does the Herbert Harper English translation, apparently mostly based on the German. The editor rejected Adolf Paul's translation of the poems into German, and preferred Rehbaum's: 'They should not be translations, but rather totally new poems', he wrote to Sibelius (Barnett, p. 197).
[29] Grandell, pp. 30–31.
[30] Term explained in Weidberg, p. 217.
[31] Analyzing the entire song in E Aeolian (minor) region is equally acceptable, thus the harmonic progression of the opening phrase would be VI–$V_{13/7}$–I; In this case one should speak of a 'Lydian motive/segment' of the piano part.
[32] Weidberg, p.217. Pedal Groups in the mature Sibelius's orchestral music usually involve all the brass instruments, as well as bassoons and bass clarinet (when included in the score). It is not identical to functional bass, even when scored at the lowest register.
[33] Look for similar treatment of the vocal line in the songs Op. 57 Nos 1 and 6.
[34] See above.
[B] Josephson, P. 132
[C] Ibid.
[35] See Appendix 1.
[36] The character, which originates in Danish folk literature, was mistakenly translated into German as 'the king of trees'. Elves have become very popular nowadays through modern fantasy fiction (Tolkien) and computer games.
[37] Tawaststjerna, Vol. 2, p. 127.
[38] As written in the Lienau version for high voice (published by the Masters Music Publication, Inc.), transposed a minor third above the original. Prominent scholars often offer C minor as the initial tonal centre of the song, which in the light of this the prolonged B in the left hand (established at bar 3) should be regarded as a leading tone rather then the initial tone of the 'Locrian' tetrachord B–C–D–E flat.
[39] Tawaststjerna, Vol. 2, p. 127.
[40] This unique method of writing sonata form is also present in *The Oceanides* (1914) and in the first movement of the 1915 version of the Fifth Symphony, as well as in the corresponding part of the first movement of the final version of the Fifth (1919). It should be stressed though that this formal procedure can be attributed to *Näcken* only partially, and mainly on the suggestive level.

[41] Compare, for example, the first theme section in the exposition of the 1919 version of the Fifth Symphony (bars 1–17) with the corresponding first theme section in the recapitulation of the same movement (bars 36–52).
[42] Tarasti, p. 179.
[43] Flowers of friendship are traditionally yellow roses (as Josephson entitled his last collection of poems in 1896 – see note 24 above).
[44] Tiilikainen, *Finnish Music Quarterly*, p. viii.
[45] De Gorog, pp. 71–101.
[46] 'The fact that this part of Sibelius's output shows the least amount of development in the man and the composer justifies the belief that without the influence of Hämeenlinna and the Finnish nationalistic movement, Sibelius might never have been able to rise to the front rank of composers' (de Gorog, p. 41).
[47] Hepokoski's assessment is interesting in this respect: 'At the risk of oversimplification, one might also suggest that these differences intersected in vital ways with the ever-present dialectic of language and world-view in Sibelius's (and Finland's) life: the "Finnish-language" (or Kalevalaic) and "Swedish-Finnish" tendencies. The two styles were not mutually exclusive: there was much overlap between them, but certain compositions tilted towards one or the other' (Hepokoski, accessed 12th December 2007).

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http://www.openu.ac.il/Personal_sites/ron-weidberg.html