

Longwood Symphony Orchestra-December 5, 2009
Program Notes
by Steven Ledbetter

JEAN SIBELIUS

***Tapiola*, Opus 112**

Jean (Johan Julius Christian) Sibelius was born at Tavastehusmeenlinna, Finland, on December 8, 1865, and died at Järvenpää, at his country home near Helsingfors (Helsinki), on September 20, 1957. He composed Tapiola while on a visit to Rome in the spring of 1925 on a commission from Walter Damrosch for the New York Philharmonic Society. He completed the score in late August. Damrosch conducted the premiere in New York on December 26, 1926. The score calls for three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings. Duration is about 18 minutes.

This is the last orchestral work by Sibelius, who, at the time he composed it, was widely regarded (especially in England and the United States) as the greatest living composer. Yet during those same years, most composers and critics in the mainstream European musical centers condescended to him and often regarded his music as kitsch—pretentious junk. Like many composers whose work was predicated on the folk traditions of one of the small countries that had spent most of the preceding century finding a musical voice against the overwhelming domination of German music (in the realm of symphonic work) or French and Italian traditions in the opera, Sibelius apparently was wracked by doubts as to the long-term value of his work.

Sibelius had shown clearly in his First Symphony that he knew as well as anyone how to write a mainstream “European” symphony. But in the quarter century that followed, he essentially recreated the symphonic form in his own way. With the Seventh he produced a large work which—though it had subsections in various tempos—was an entirely original one-movement form that takes its shape from the constant development and unification of the ideas that fill it.

Tapiola came soon after, and it too had a single movement that grows symphonically from thematic ideas introduced at the beginning. There were some who thought of it as an Eighth Symphony. But Sibelius gave it the poetic title that marked it as a tone-poem, a final, highly original achievement linked across the extent of his career to the youthful Four Legends from the *Kalevala*, Op. 22.

The title *Tapiola* refers to the forest god of the *Kalevala*, Tapio; the addition of “-la” to the name turns it into an identification of the god’s home, the primeval northern forest. Sibelius prefaced the score with this quatrain, which was designed to establish a context for the piece.

Widespread they stand, the Northland’s dusky forests,
Ancient, mysterious, brooding savage dreams;
Within them dwells the Forest’s mighty god,
And wood-sprites in the gloom weave magic secrets.

Here, as in much of his work, the music starts with sustained pedal points and small motivic ideas repeated, changing color and generating new elements in a flexible way, all of them somehow elemental, as if a new world is coalescing out of the primordial soup. In earlier music, a sustained pedal point is always on a single pitch; but Sibelius generates a weird background to the unfolding by having a pedal on two pitches, a major second apart (E and F-sharp) repeated five octaves deep in the orchestra. The themes appear, grow in intensity, lead ultimately to a powerful crescendo to a kind of musical storm. During much of this, there are few hints as to any kind of conventional musical form, but a recapitulation of the themes that appeared against the deep double-pedal is clearly a point of

recapitulation. The storm still builds to a massive climax, then falls away in intensity quite quickly, so that the closing chords supply a bright, major-mode blessing of the natural world.

Sibelius was only in his mid-50s when he completed *Tapiola*, and he soon made a start on an Eighth Symphony. On a number of occasions he hinted that it was almost ready for performance and even negotiated to dates and orchestras. But it was never to see the light of day. Apparently the new musical world of the Twentieth Century and the demands for novelty above all for new compositions spooked him. He had long been too devoted to the bottle, and he increasingly used drink as a way of hiding himself from the demands he was putting on himself. Finally—or so we must assume from a description that his wife left of a “bonfire” in the dining-room fireplace of their home in the 1940s—he destroyed the Eighth and perhaps other things, and retreated into a more serene shell for until his death in 1957. So *Tapiola* turned out to be his final artistic statement.

GIYA KANCHELI

***Styx*, for viola, mixed chorus, and orchestra**

Giya Kancheli was born in Tbilisi on August 10, 1935; he currently resides in Belgium. He composed Styx in 1999 on a commission from the Eduard van Beinum Foundation for the violist Yuri Bashmet, who gave the first performance in Amsterdam on November 7, 1999, with the Dutch Radio Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by T. Kaljuste. The work received its American premiere on April 4, 2008 with the Colorado Symphony, which gave an encore performance at the League of American Orchestras conference in June 2008. This performance is its New England Premiere. In addition to solo viola, the score calls for mixed chorus, two flutes plus alto flute and piccolo, three oboes (third doubling English horn, three clarinets (third doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, and strings. Duration is about 34 minutes.

Born in what was then Soviet Georgia, Giya Kancheli played popular music there while studying at the conservatory in Tbilisi. Later he taught at the conservatory and from 1971 to 1990 was musical director of the Rustaveli Theater there. Already in the late 1970s his music began to reach the United States. The Philadelphia Orchestra performed his Fourth Symphony and the publishing firm of G.Schirmer/Associated Music Publishers commissioned the Fifth (1977).

In the spring of 1988 Kancheli visited the United States for a month as part of an extraordinary exchange of Soviet and American musicians arranged by the conductor Sarah Caldwell in Boston, under the title “Making Music Together.” He was one of a dozen composers who were part of the visit—along with an entire opera company and many leading singers and instrumentalists from the Soviet Union. The composers included Alfred Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Rodion Shchedrin, all of whom were getting some of their first major exposure in the United States.

Of the dozen composers, Kancheli was one of those scarcely known even by reputation except for the handful of symphonic performances that had preceded his arrival. Yet his music made an immediate striking impact for its individuality. He clearly retained strong roots in the musical traditions of his native Georgia and yet he found ways to treat it in idioms of the late twentieth century, fused with the spirit of Orthodox Christianity in a special kind of approach that has been described as “dynamic stasis.”

References to Kancheli's inspiration from both Georgian folk music and the chants of Orthodox Christianity often lead commentators to emphasize his tendency to build his works gradually, in slow tempos, with long-phrased melodies. This may suggest a monotony of sound that is not actually the case when one listens to the music. Though its approach in works like *Styx* is undeniably temperate in its pacing, there is a range of color and texture that captivates the ear and draws the listener into a contemplative mood, particularly in this score, which commemorates some of the composer's departed colleagues with the imagery of the river Styx from classical mythology.

Yet despite this obvious reference to ancient mythology, the work is not simply an archeological recollection of stories many thousands of years old (one might recall the visits to the Underworld of

Orpheus, Odysseus, and Aeneas in classical literature), but rather merely a symbol of that transition point between life and death. The text that Kancheli created for *Styx* is not so much a poem or a libretto but rather a free-floating series of thoughts that combine traditional Christian religious imagery; evocations of nature (traditionally used either as a symbol of “earth abiding” while humanity passes on or the opposite notion of constantly changing seasons); passing references to two composer friends who had died recently (the Russian Alfred Schnittke and the Georgian Avet Terterian); pleas for forgiveness (using a whole string of typical first names for Georgian men); an evocation of Time (an implied character, as in Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale*), and finally a massive expression of joy.

Read purely as a text, these words seem disorganized and disconcerting, drawing upon too many different images and world views to achieve any sort of coherence. But that is the purpose of the music, and especially of the solo viola part, which Kancheli conceived particularly for the masterful Russian player Yuri Bashmet, to whom the score is dedicated. The viola is the “voice” of the score—far more than the real human voices of the chorus, whose part is more often treated as sonority rather than rational discourse. Kancheli declared that Bashmet’s “viola has a voice that has the ability to unite the two worlds of the dead and the living, two worlds divided by the waters of the Styx.” Throughout the score the viola’s role is predominantly songful; this is not a concerto filled with virtuosic moments for the soloist but a wonderful expressive meditation.

Through considerable stretches of the score, the conventional view of commentators regarding Kancheli’s long-breathed chantlike themes is certainly appropriate, but the very opening of the work, a brief explosion of orchestral power, warns us that this is by no means the whole of its musical world. The chorus sings its opening hymn with hushed tones, brightened by the sweet, soaring line of the solo viola, yet before long the remainder of the large orchestra demands its own role, sometimes in yearning solo passages and increasingly in powerful reminders of that abrupt opening. As the work unfolds in its half-hour (plus a bit) length, the lyrical line evokes many emotions, and the constantly changing spectrum of colors and sonorities (great and small) draws the listener along to the final hymnic celebratory dance.

Galoba angelozebis, galoba
Velebi da bibini,
Vaio veli, Vaio suli
Da galoba, suli

Hymn, angelic hymn, hymn
Valleys and the rustling (of the grass)
Valley of Vaio,¹ the soul of Vaio
And hymn, soul

[¹ Historic region in Georgia]

Dideba upalsa, ugalobet Mariams, Mariam

Glory to the Supreme God, sing a hymn to Mary,
Mary,
Sublime soul, Alaverdi,² Sioni,³ Ateni,³ Betania,²
Gremi³

[² Georgian monastery]

[³ Georgian cathedral]

Didebuli suli, Alaverdi, Sioni, Ateni,
Betania, Gremi

Kari cris, sada har mimaluli, lilianshi, dakarguli

The wind is raging, where are you hiding? Lost in the thicket.

Galobid davlie suli

The soul is exhausted by praying

Deda, mama, tsoli, shvili, shvilishvili
Kera budea, dideda,
Tu danama

Mama, papa, wife, child, grandson
My hearth is my nest, grandmother
If it be dewed

Oboli doli, oboli suli
Bindia, tendeba, gatenda, sinatle, Sioni

Lonesome tambourine, lonesome soul
Twilight, the day is dawning, the day has dawned,
light, Sioni

Tu aisi

Galoba upalsa, Alleluia

Tu daria

Schnittke, Alfred Schnittke

Dio odio lileo-lile

Shemindet Givi, Tito, Ira, Rezo,
Gogi, Vazha, Sulkhani, Muriko
Dareka zarma, Temiko, Temo, sheminde Temo

Givi, Tito, Ira, Rezo, Temo

Tu daria tu tu tu
Oodio odoia naduri nana odoia naduri

Oodio odoia!

Oodio naduri zari nana

Chu chu

Daria tu avdaria
Kriala tsa, shoria gza, bibini, shori

Karia, bibini, suli, bibini, veli
Eria, eri

Suli nateli, Avet, Alfred

Dibeda upalsa, ugalobet Mariams
Uplis gamchens
Dauntet santeli suli nateli
Amen, Alleluia

Time! merciless time!
Time! Merciful time!
Gone with the time!
Time! Merciful time!
Time! Merciless time!
Gone with the time!
Time that tries all
Despair and hope.

Time of joy, time of terror,

If dawn

Hymn to the Supreme God, Alleluia

If fair weather

Schnittke, Alfred Schnittke ⁴
[⁴Composer, 1934-1998]

Dio⁵ odio⁶ lileo-lile⁷
[⁵ Georgian folk-song refrain]
[⁶ Georgian folk-song]
[⁷ Ritual song of the Svanes (a
people in
north Georgia)]

Forgive Givi,⁸ Tito, Ira, Rezo,
Gogi, Vazha, Sulkani, Muriko,
A bell resounds, Temiko, Temo, forgive Temo
[⁸This and the following are Georgian first
names]Givi, Tito, Ira, Rezo, Temo

If fair weather if if if
Oodio odoia naduri nana odoia naduri

Oodio odoia!

Oodio naduri zari nana

Chu chu⁹
[⁹ Sound used to lull a child to sleep]

Fair weather or bad weather
Clear sky, distant way, swaying, distant

Wind, swaying, soul, swaying, field
Such is the people

Bright soul, Avet,¹⁰ Alfred
[¹⁰ Armenian composer Avet Terterian (1929-
1994)]

Glory to the Supreme God, sing a hymn to Mary,
The Mother of God
Light a candle, bright soul
Amen, Alleluia

Time! merciless time!
Time! Merciful time!
Gone with the time!
Time! Merciful time!
Time! Merciless time!
Gone with the time!
Time that tries all
Despair and hope.

Of good and evil!
Gone with the time,
Merciless time,
Time of terror, joy.
Terror and joy!
Devouring time!
With terror and joy!
With terror and joyful

Joy!

Time of joy, time of terror,
Of good and evil!
Gone with the time,
Merciless time,
Time of terror, joy.
Terror and joy!
Devouring time!
With terror and joy!
With terror and joyful

Joy!

HOWARD SHORE

Suite from *Lord of the Rings*

Howard Shore was born in Toronto, Canada, on October 18, 1946. He composed the film scores for the three parts of the extended narrative Lord of the Rings, beginning late in the year 2000 and completing the last part of the last score on March 20, 2004. The scores for all of the films call for an expanded orchestra of standard instruments plus a large number of ethnic and exotic instruments. The full score naturally runs some 10 hours. The suite to be performed, arranged by Lopez, is one of many versions of the score designed to make it available in smaller units. Duration is about 15 minutes.

For his massive score to the film version of J.R.R. Tolkien's great novel of the imagination *Lord of the Rings*, Howard Shore knew that he was in a sense following in the footsteps of Richard Wagner, who created, over a quarter century in the Romantic era, the largest, most extraordinary musical-dramatic narrative in history, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, consisting of four music dramas that brought about the end of the world and the birth of a new order.

The fact that Wagner's and Tolkien's works both revolved around rings of power, fabled objects which many individuals would commit any crime to get, was an obvious link (derived in both cases from ancient legends) that both men would expand and work to their own artistic purpose. No doubt it was that conceptual relationship that encouraged Shore to follow Wagner's own technique of creating special identifying themes, *leitmotifs*, for every individual character or group, object, or idea in the work. Wagner had already demonstrated the way of using these themes as the basis of a continuous symphonic web of music that could carry the emotional freight of the story, empower the characters with individuality and strength, remind the audience of previous events and even foreshadow things that had not yet happened.

So powerful was Wagner's technique in a dramatic setting that it had often been the preferred method of scoring dramatic films, in particular—especially by highly trained composers who knew their Wagner well, composers like Erich Wolfgang Korngold or Miklos Rozsa or Max Steiner. This technique was very common in Hollywood in the 1930s and '40s, but it went out of favor in the 1950s and beyond, partly because the studio heads became more interested in pop songs—which could be marketed to a wide audience for greater income—regardless of whether they suited the film at all. It wasn't really until John Williams wrote the very influential score for *Star Wars* (inspired by many of those older Hollywood composers) that the big, thematically intricate score returned for films to which it was especially suited.

Howard Shore's own background is very diverse. He studied at the Berklee College of Music in Boston and worked especially in television (he was the musical director of *Saturday Night Live* from 1975 to 1980), and increasingly in films. He had already written more than two dozen film scores—ranging

from dramatic projects like *The Fly*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Philadelphia*, and *Gangs of New York* to comedies like *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *That Thing You Do*—before undertaking the Tolkien films.

For this program, Jonathan McPhee has selected (and adapted) a suite of themes mostly connected with the last half of the trilogy. While it is by no means necessary to analyze all the themes in order to enjoy the music, you might like to have an indication of which main themes will be heard here, as a way to refresh your memory, in case you haven't seen the films for a few years:

- Rohan - Eowyn's Theme
- Rohan - The King of the Golden Hall
- Evenstar
- Gollum's Song
- The End of All Things
- Into the West
- The Steward of Gondor
- The March of the Ents
- Isengard Unleashed

So, as they used to say in the old-time movie theaters, after encouraging you to buy a lot of sugary, fatty, or salty products at the snack bar, "Sit back and enjoy the show!"

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