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Edited by Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki

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This book presents a new view of Jean Sibelius as composer and man, a figure of national and international significance, patriot, husband and father. Three introductory articles explore Sibelius reception in Finland, performance practice and recording history, and Sibelius's aesthetic position with regard to modernity. The second group of essays examines issues of ideology, sexuality, and mythology, and their relationship to musical structure and compositional genesis. Studies of the Second, Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Symphonies are presented in the concluding section. Collectively, these articles address historical, theoretical and analytical issues in Sibelius's most important works. The analyses are supported by new investigations of Sibelius's compositional process as documented by the manuscripts and sketches primarily in the Sibelius Collection of the Helsinki University Library. Exploring Sibelius's innovative approach to tonality, form, and texture, the book delineates his unique brand of modernism, which has proven highly influential in the late twentieth century.

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Sibelius Studies

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Preface

In a 1996 *New York Times* review of the world première recording of Sibelius's incidental music to Hofmannsthal's *Everyman*, Alex Ross called attention to the controversy surrounding the music of the Finnish composer:

The collective scorn heaped on the music of Sibelius over the years could fill a companion volume to Nicolas Slonimsky's famous *Lexicon of Musical Invective*. What is unusual about anti-Sibelius bile is that it has often stemmed from fellow composers. Virgil Thomson called the Second Symphony "vulgar, self-indulgent, and provincial beyond all description." Benjamin Britten looked at the Fourth Symphony and said that its composer must have been drunk. René Leibowitz, a disciple of Schoenberg, called the Fifth "the worst symphony ever written." Theodor Adorno, typically venturing farther than most, accused Sibelius of fascistic nature worship.¹

On the other hand, as Ross observes, Sibelius has not lacked defenders among other important twentieth-century composers:

Alban Berg, breaking from the Schoenberg party line, found things to like in several Sibelius pieces. Morton Feldman loved the opening of the Fourth Symphony, its long and obsessive scrutiny of four ambiguous notes. Contemporary figures from John Adams to Wolfgang Rihm to Magnus Lindberg . . . have admired Sibelius not as a painter of pictures but as an original thinker, one who evolved radical methods of interweaving orchestral sonorities and mobilized harmonies at the edge of conventional tonality.²

This book attempts to present a new, more accurate picture of Jean Sibelius, the composer and man, a figure of national and international significance, patriot, husband, and father. Three introductory chapters explore Sibelius reception in Finland (Eero Tarasti), performance practice and recording history (Robert Layton), and Sibelius's aesthetic position with regard to modernity (Timothy Howell). The second group of essays (by Peter Franklin, Eija Kurki, Veijo Murtomäki, Timo Virtanen and Timothy Jackson) examines issues of ideology, sexuality, and

¹ Alex Ross, "A Serious Image Made Up of Bold Even Weird Strokes," *New York Times*, Arts Section, 23 June, 1996, p. 30.

² *Ibid.* And the list of Sibelius's avant-garde admirers continues: to it we may add Sorabji, the young Estonian composer Erkki-Sven Tüür, and the French, Tristan Murail.

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mythology, and their relationship to musical structure and compositional genesis. Analytical studies of the Second, Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Symphonies (by Tapio Kallio, Elliott Antokoletz, James Hepokoski, and Edward Laufer) are presented in the book's concluding section.

Adorno's attack on Sibelius is multi-pronged. Equating modernism with both novelty and quality, he argues that only by achieving the most advanced "state of the musical material" ("den Stand des musikalischen Materials") can music be simultaneously "modern" and "good." For Adorno, Mahler and the Second Viennese School participate in a continuous evolution towards post-tonality; therefore, these composers represent the one "true" modernism and pinnacle of quality. Because Sibelius remains tonal and outside "mainstream" modernism, he cannot be a modernist, nor can his music be any good.

Interestingly – the "Schoenberg party line" notwithstanding – Schoenberg himself was careful to dispute Adorno's overly simplistic equation of post-tonal modernism with innovation and quality. Asserting that "great music is still to be written in the key of C major," Schoenberg, in his late essay "Criteria for the Evaluation of Music" (1949), reaffirmed his admiration for both Sibelius and Shostakovich, writing that "[earlier in my career] I said something which did not require the knowledge of an expert. Every amateur, every music lover could have said: 'I feel they have the breath of symphonists.'"³ Schoenberg clearly acknowledged the quality – and the validity – of Sibelius's own brand of modernism.

Alluded to by Ross, another prong of Adorno's attack in his 1938 article "Glosse über Sibelius" associates Sibelius – as *the* paragon of musical conservatism – with Nazi ideology: "The song [of Sibelius's supporters] hinges on the refrain 'everything is Nature, everything is Nature.' The great Pan, yearning for 'blood and soil' (*Blut und Boden*) quickly installs itself. The trivial passes for the elemental, the unarticulated for the noise of unconscious creation."⁴ Adorno's contemporaries would have immediately recognized the phrase "Blut und Boden" as the slogan

³ Arnold Schoenberg, "Criteria for the Evaluation of Music" (1949), in *Style and Idea. Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (London: Faber, 1975), p. 136.

⁴ "Ihr Lied hört auf den Refrain 's ist alles Natur, 's ist alles Natur'. Der grosse Pan, je nach Bedarf auch Blut und Boden, stellt prompt sich ein. Das Triviale gilt fürs Ursprüngliche, das Unartikulierte für den Laut der bewussten Schöpfung." (This and

the following original text is taken from Theodor Adorno's book review "Törne, B. de, Sibelius; A Close Up" published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 7 [1938], pp. 460–63, and reprinted with the title "Glosse über Sibelius" first in Adorno, *Impromptus* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968], pp. 88–92, and thereafter in his *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. XVII [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982], pp. 247–32.)

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of Goebbels' propaganda campaign to return culture to "its native soil." Indeed, Adorno correctly interprets the "spin" the Nazis had put on Sibelius: for them, he becomes the paragon of the "Nordic" composer: virile, manly, nature-oriented, and nationalistic.

After 1918, Finland became generally hostile towards Soviet Bolshevism and, like many Finnish intellectuals, Sibelius remained German-oriented, especially because of his early training under German-speaking musicians. For all of these reasons, in 1934, Sibelius accepted Goebbels' invitation to serve as vice-president of the Council of Composers' International Cooperation (of which Richard Strauss was then president). In 1935, on his seventieth birthday, at Hitler's personal recommendation, Sibelius received the Goethe prize, the highest honor for artistic achievement in the Third Reich. Goebbels went on, in 1941, to found the first German Sibelius Society, the only such society dedicated to a foreign composer. But despite such seemingly close relationships, whereby Sibelius's eminence was exploited by politicians to cement Finnish–German "brotherhood-in-arms," the composer himself remained aloof; his diary entries from the 1940s unequivocally disclose his aversion to Nazi ideology.⁵ After the war, Sibelius's popularity declined somewhat in Central Europe, probably as a result of his prominence in the Third Reich, where, along with Respighi, he had been the most-played foreign composer.⁶

In retrospect, Adorno's critique of Sibelius's compositional technique has proven the most damaging – more harmful even than his allusion to the Nazi connection. Composers' unsavory political affiliations – real or imagined – may be excused as long as they are *good composers* (Richard Strauss especially comes to mind); but if they are *bad composers*, they will be forgiven nothing. Adorno sets out to prove that Sibelius's music is "amateurish," characterized by "the asceticism of impotence." Sibelius's "asceticism," as constructed by Adorno, is "the originality of incapacity" (*die Originalität der Hilflosigkeit*), as "it was denied to him to write either a chorale or a proper counterpoint [against it]" (*ihm weder einen Choral auszusetzen, noch einen ordentlichen Kontrapunkt zu schreiben vergönnt war*). Furthermore, in its representation of Nature, Sibelius's music reveals – contrary to French Impressionism as epitomized by Debussy – no sense of color, but only "dull, rigid, and accidental orchestral color" (*das stumpfe, steife und zufällige Orchesterkolorit*), in which there is "no palette: everything is only tints." Seventeen years later, in 1955, Adorno's influential apprentice and "representative" of the New Vienna School in

⁵ See Eero Tarasti's discussion of Ilmari Krohn, pp. 9–10 below.

⁶ Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (London etc: Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. 217–18.

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France, René Leibowitz, published a pamphlet entitled “Sibelius, le plus mauvais compositeur du monde,” which, essentially, recapitulates Adorno’s allegations in French.⁷

Tarasti argues that Adorno could not forgive Sibelius his distinctly Finnish voice in the teeth of German hegemony in music. To be sure, this feat of originality has granted Sibelius “cult” status in Finnish society – with its concomitant excesses – but Tarasti still considers Sibelius a hero in Finland’s struggle to throw off the stigma of colonialism, both political and cultural. Perhaps in no small measure because Sibelius’s music played such an important role in Finland’s ultimately successful bid for independence, to this day his work remains central to Finland’s cultural life. A small nation of only five million inhabitants, Finland nevertheless boasts today a significant number of composers, conductors, theorists, and musicologists of international stature, almost twenty symphony orchestras (many world class), and more than one hundred music schools or conservatories – all thanks, in no small measure, to Sibelius’s enduring influence.

In fact, numerous exercises in harmony and counterpoint worked for Martin Wegelius, Albert Becker, and Robert Fuchs during Sibelius’s school and student years in Hämeenlinna, Helsinki, Berlin, and Vienna (c. 1881–91) disclose that the young Finn acquired solid technical grounding in harmony and counterpoint, which reinforced his extensive early compositional efforts. These exercises and early compositions document his thorough grounding in Viennese classical and romantic compositional technique. The young Sibelius was also a capable practical musician: as a violinist, he performed chamber music and served as the concertmaster in one of the two orchestras in Helsinki, in which he also played the viola. That Sibelius was offered the chair in composition at the Vienna Music Academy in 1912, and a similar position at the Eastman School of Music in 1921, shows that he was widely considered an accomplished composer with impressive technical equipment. Although Sibelius would reject these later offers, he did accept a number of composition students; for example, Leevi Madetoja and Toivo Kuula, two prominent Finnish composers, numbered among his composition students in the early years of the twentieth century.

Ironically, Sibelius’s radical works composed at the turn of the century fulfill Adorno’s central criterion for modernism by achieving the most advanced “state of the musical materials.” His harmonic language in *En saga*, *Skogsrådet* and the *Lemminkäinen Suite* may be judged “modern” by

⁷ Ilkka Oramo’s article “Sibelius, le plus mauvais compositeur du monde” discusses the relationships between Adorno’s and

Leibowitz’s pamphlets; see BOREALES, Colloque international Jean Sibelius, 1993 (54/55), pp. 51–58.

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any criterion of the 1890s, containing inversions of ninth chords before Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*. Sibelius's *Kullervo* is an amazing achievement, comparable only to Mahler's *Das klagende Lied*, but still more innovative in its overall concept. The dynamic "minimalism" of the dwarves' music in *Skogsrået*, which prolongs a half-diminished (*Tristan*) chord built on A for over two hundred measures, adumbrates the minimalism of the 1960s. Carl Dahlhaus in his *Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft (Band 6)* groups Sibelius with Zemlinsky, Schreker, Busoni, Mahler, Reger, Strauss, and the young Schoenberg among the representatives of "die Moderne." Furthermore, one could argue that Sibelius's late music is equally innovative in its formal, rhythmic, and tonal organization, albeit in less obvious ways.

To be sure, Sibelius's oeuvre as a whole includes pieces employing "old-fashioned" musical languages and genres of the nineteenth century, sometimes recalling salon-like entertainment and domestic music. But, in its combination of progressive and conservative aspects, his music becomes as Janus-faced as that of Schoenberg, where conservatism in rhythmic or formal dimensions sometimes counterbalances radicalism in the post-tonal harmonic language. As Howell observes, Sibelius's formal thinking and orchestral technique, superimposition of different textures and temporal processes, and extensions of modal language are distinctly progressive features, recognized and further developed by present-day composers. If the melodic and harmonic idioms of his *Gebrauchsmusik* seem to be regressive, they do not deny it the charm of *autrefois*, a quality shared with comparable music by Rakhmaninov or Richard Strauss.

The above-cited debate among composers is symptomatic of a troubled – almost schizophrenic – Sibelius reception history. With the general public, Sibelius has enjoyed the kind of international success – even adulation – of which most composers can only dream. Charting the vicissitudes of Sibelius's popularity and its consequences for recordings and performance practice, Layton's survey of "Sibelius on record" offers an overview of the enormous Sibelius discography. Paradoxically, in spite of this enthusiastic promotion by musicians and the recording industry, academics outside of Finland have taken Sibelius seriously only recently. Perhaps the public's favor has proven to be Sibelius's undoing, since in the eyes of many arbiters of taste, what remains popular cannot, by definition, be good. Even Bruckner, still a "controversial" figure in academe, has been accorded the dignity of a scholarly edition of the first versions of his symphonies. But not Sibelius; a scholarly edition of the first versions of his major works is still years away. However, publication of this book, *The Sibelius Companion* in 1996, *Jean Sibelius. A Guide to Research*, and the *Proceedings* of the 1990 and 1995 International

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Symposia in Helsinki shows that Sibelius research is increasingly recognized as a legitimate field of inquiry.⁸

The present, improved, situation is due, in part, to access to new sources of information. The Sibelius Collection, donated in 1982 by the Sibelius Family to the Helsinki University Library and containing over 10,000 manuscript pages, is fueling new research. Providing the basis for the new Complete Works, begun in 1996 with the first volume published in 1999, it also includes some 120 early compositions (1881–91), the majority of which will be published for the first time. Drawn from this collection, Sibelius’s music for solo piano, and solo violin with piano accompaniment, dating from the 1880s, is now being performed, possibly for the first time. Performance, publication, and scholarly evaluation of Sibelius’s early music – suppressed by the composer himself – will encourage a more accurate assessment of his total oeuvre and its comparison with that of his contemporaries, most notably Strauss and Mahler. Sorely needed, this new edition will not only correct misprints and errors in the old printed scores, it will make many scores available for the first time.

The Collection has enabled musicologists and music theorists to trace the evolution of Sibelius’s compositional ideas from their initial manifestation in preliminary sketches through to their final form. The sketches reveal Sibelius to be a “constructivist,” a conscious manipulator of musical material who may forge and elaborate his themes and sections of pieces in his numerous sketchbooks years before the actual compositions come to fruition.⁹ He referred to motives and themes as “mosaic pieces,” which could be rearranged within a work, and even migrate from one piece to another. As Virtanen and Jackson suggest with regard to *Pohjola’s Daughter* and the Third and Seventh Symphonies, this “migration” may have a deeper programmatic significance connected with Sibelius’s relationship with his wife Aino and daughter Ruth. When working on his Fifth Symphony, Sibelius remarked in his diary: “The arrangement, make-up and grouping of the themes: with all its mystery and fascination, this is the important thing. It is as if God the Father had thrown down mosaic pieces from the floor of the heavens and asked me to put them back as they were. Perhaps that is a good definition of composition – perhaps not?”

Sibelius biography is also making significant strides with the discovery

⁸ *The Sibelius Companion*, ed. Glenda Dawn Goss (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996); Glenda Dawn Goss, *Jean Sibelius. A Guide to Research* (New York and London: Garland, 1998); *Proceedings from the First International Jean Sibelius Conference*, Helsinki, August 1990, ed. Eero Tarasti (Helsinki: Sibelius

Academy, 1995); *Proceedings from the Second International Jean Sibelius Conference*, Helsinki November 25–29, 1995, ed. by Veijo Murtomäki, Kari Kilpeläinen, and Risto Väisänen (Helsinki: Sibelius Academy, 1998).

⁹ In this way of composing, Sibelius has much in common with Beethoven.

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of new documents and access to sources that have remained “off limits.” The Hämeenlinna letters, recently published by Glenda Dawn Goss, portray the composer in his formative years, intimating his future development.¹⁰ A catalogue of Sibelius’s complete correspondence now in preparation will shed new light on his contacts with the leading cultural personalities of his time. Perhaps most importantly, Sibelius’s diaries will probably be opened – at least to scholars – in 2000, and, it is to be hoped, later published. This wealth of primary source material will supplement and correct Tawaststjerna’s five-volume biography. Furthermore, Fabian Dahlström’s *Thematisch-bibliographisches Verzeichnis*, slated to be published by Breitkopf und Härtel in late 2000, will serve as “the Sibelius Köchel,” providing a complete accounting of all of Sibelius’s music.

The essays by Franklin, Virtanen, Murtomäki, and Jackson initiate a new chapter in the Sibelius literature by exploring the connection between personal – especially sexual – issues and structure in Sibelius’s music. In his daily life, Sibelius chafed against bourgeois values as he struggled with alcoholism and Don Juanism. The striking appearance of his wife’s name – “Aino” – in the sketches for a number of major works (especially *Pohjola’s Daughter* and the Seventh Symphony) discloses that his relationship with her – albeit often strained – remained of central importance, not only for his personal life but also his music. Although Sibelius’s symphonies are much lauded as “absolute music,” essays in “symphonic logic,” these personal graffiti in the sketches intimate that he conceived his work as “confessional.” Kurki further proposes that Sibelius cites passages from his theatrical music in his symphonies to transfer their semantic from the dramatic to the putatively “absolute” musical context.

The colloquy on the Second, Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Symphonies presents contrasting yet complementary views of a cross-section of Sibelius’s symphonic oeuvre. Kallio focuses on the opening of the Second Symphony, observing that the notation seems to be strangely at odds with the way the music actually sounds: in particular, the placement of the bar-lines appears to contradict the perceived meter. An earlier draft of the symphony reveals that the notated and heard meters correspond much more closely with each other; in the final version, some – but not all – of the musical elements have been metrically shifted. Kallio proposes that, by moving originally separate events closer together, Sibelius creates a more intensified and dramatic continuation. In his study of the Fourth Symphony, Antokoletz posits that Sibelius’s innovative tonal language is

¹⁰ Jean Sibelius, *The Hämeenlinna Letters*.
Jean Sibelius ungdomsbrev, ed. Glenda Dawn
 Goss (Helsinki: Schildts Förlag, 1997).

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“hybrid” – more specifically, that the harmony is “semi-functional,” pitch formations being conditioned by *both* traditional voice-leading and non-traditional pitch collections, modal, whole-tone, and octatonic. Employing two analytical constructs developed in prior work on Sibelius – “rotational form” and “teleological genesis” – Hepokoski offers a new view of the formally innovative finale of the Sixth Symphony. From different perspectives, Kallio, Antokoletz, and Hepokoski all refute Adorno’s claim that Sibelius fails to achieve the “state of the musical material.”

Perhaps Adorno’s most damaging technical critique of Sibelius concerns lack of organic unity: “‘themes,’ some completely unplastic and trivial successions of pitches, are put forth, most of the time never once harmonized, instead *unisono* with organ points, stationary harmonies and whatever else the five-line staff will produce in order to avoid logical harmonic progression.”¹¹ Instead of musical coherence, Sibelius’s scores are ruled by “the configuration of the banal and the absurd”:

Each detail sounds hackneyed and familial. The motives are common linking elements from the common language of tonality. One has heard them so often that one believes one has understood them. But they are brought into a senseless juxtaposition: as when one hears the words gas station, lunch, death, Greta, plowshare cobbled together with verbs and particles in a senseless way. An incomprehensible whole built from the most trivial details produces the deceptive picture of the unfathomable.¹²

“If Sibelius is good,” Adorno concludes, “this invalidates the standards of musical quality that have persisted from Bach to Schoenberg: the richness of inter-connectedness, articulation, unity in diversity, the ‘multi-faceted’ in ‘the one.’”¹³

It is, perhaps, then, *the* crowning irony of Sibelius reception history that – *pace* Adorno – Schenkerians have lionized Sibelius as their own, precisely on account of his “organic unity” and “symphonic logic.” Laufer’s detailed analysis of *continuity* in the design of the Seventh Symphony demonstrates that the motivic material evolves logically, one

¹¹ Das sieht so aus: es werden, als “Themen,” irgendwelche völlig unplastischen und trivialen Tonfolgen aufgestellt, meistens nicht einmal harmonisiert, sondern *unisono* mit Orgelpunkten, liegenden Harmonien und was sonst nur die fünf Notenlinien hergeben, um logischen akkordischen Fortgang zu vermeiden.

¹² Es ist die Konfiguration des Banalen und des Absurden. Alles Einzelne klingt alltäglich und vertraut. Die Motive sind Bruchstücke aus dem kurrenten Material der Tonalität. Man hat sie so oft gehört, daß man sie zu

verstehen meint. Aber sie sind in einen sinnlosen Zusammenhang gebracht: wie wenn man die Worte Tankstelle, Lunch, Tod, Greta, Pflugschar mit Verben und Partikeln wahllos zusammenkoppelt. Ein unverständliches Ganzes aus den trivialsten Details produziert das Trugbild des Abgründigen.

¹³ Wenn Sibelius gut ist, dann sind die Maßstäbe der musikalischen Qualität als des Beziehungsreichtums, der Artikulation, der Einheit in der Mannigfaltigkeit, der Vielfalt im Einen hinfällig, die von Bach bis Schönberg perennieren.

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theme being wonderfully transformed into another, thereby providing both unity and contrast, complexity within simplicity. Laufer's graphs lay bare the underlying middleground connections – the line of continuity – that Sibelius creates through concealed motivic transformations, enlargements, and recomposed restatements. From a technical point of view, Laufer's analysis confirms Sibelius's own perception of "that wonderful artistic logic that I seldom notice as I compose but can recognize afterwards."

The essays by the Finnish analysts (Murtomäki, Virtanen, and Kallio) bespeak an important development in music theory, namely the "internationalization" of the Schenkerian approach through its return to Europe. Originally developed in Vienna before the Second World War, in the second half of the twentieth century Schenkerian analysis metamorphosed in the American Academy, an experience eloquently described by William Rothstein in his article "The Americanization of Heinrich Schenker."¹⁴ Thanks to the efforts of Eero Hämeenniemi, Veijo Murtomäki, and Matti Saarinen, who invited leading Schenkerians to teach at the Sibelius Academy in the eighties and nineties (most notably David Beach, Carl Schachter, Edward Laufer, and Timothy L. Jackson), Schenkerian analysis has taken firm root in Finland; today, Lauri Suurpää, the most important representative of the Finnish Schenkerian school, currently offers courses in Schenkerian analysis at the Sibelius Academy. This successful transplantation was facilitated by the music of Sibelius. For, while Adorno's *aperçu* concerning the "commonness" and "disparateness" of Sibelius's "foreground" thematic materials may contain a kernel of truth, his music attains synthesis precisely by attenuating a compensating coherence in the middle- and background. Since Schenkerian analysis offers the best explanation of this kind of deeper-level synthesis, it has been recruited by the defenders of Sibelius – both Finnish and North American – to provide a potent weapon against the gainsayers (like Adorno). This book testifies to the coming of age of a new generation of Finnish Schenkerians, who take their place with distinction alongside the North Americans. But comparison of graphs of the same pieces (e.g. *Skogsrået*, *Pohjola's Daughter*, the Seventh Symphony) reveals that all of these analysts speak different personal and national "dialects"; contrasting – even diametrically opposed – analyses of the same pieces are placed in apposition, and the reader is left to glean the more compelling insights from each.

Many of the essays in this book suggest that Sibelius speaks to us with the troubled voice of the twentieth century. If the *per aspera ad astra* narrative was central to nineteenth-century discourse with its belief in

¹⁴ William Rothstein, "The Americanization of Heinrich Schenker," in *Schenker Studies*, ed. Hedi Siegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 193–203.

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“infinite progress,” this essential optimism dissipates in Sibelius’s twentieth-century equivocation. In his analysis of the finale of the Sixth Symphony, for example, Hepokoski speaks of “the thematizing of absence and loss.” The Sibelian discourse “mourns” the passing of faith and in its ineffable grief resides its irreducible modernism: in the end, it must withdraw into silence.

The cover reproduction is from the Sibelius Collection in the Helsinki University Library, HUL 0354, pp. 101–02, showing an earlier ink draft of the conclusion of the Seventh Symphony (revised in the final version).

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