



Jean Sibelius

Tomi Mäkelä

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This acclaimed study, available in English for the first time, looks at the music of Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) in its biographical context. The enigmatic composer is revealed in several chapters examining the background to Sibelius's creativity and the influences upon him. Other chapters show how he influenced others, discuss aspects of genre, as well as the relationship of the artist with nature and homeland. For more than 100 years myths have surrounded Sibelius and his work, often diverting attention away from his creative output. Drawing on many unpublished sources, Mäkelä's study focuses again the attention on Sibelius as a musician and a 'poet' of universal validity. Those who knew the composer at an early age tell a story of a youthful bohemian in the midst of European decadence. This 'age of Carmen', as Eduard Munch called it, marked Sibelius's formative years. Sibelius's most important works, dating from a time between his third symphony and *Tapiola*, reflect the modernistic mainstream. The composer's last three decades, known as the 'Silence of Ainola', have inspired the masculine clichés that this book deconstructs. Contemporaries tend to remember a detached gentleman mostly accompanied by his wife Aino. She was instrumental in creating the image of her husband as a Nordic icon. This book closely scrutinizes this popular image. Sibelius was one of the least political artists of his time who nevertheless became heavily politicized. The first supreme musical talent in the region, he gave his nation a genuine sound. Europeans of the late nineteenth century showed increasing affinity with Nordic culture, beside the still heavy Mediterranean influence. For English and American artists his mix of regionalism and modernity remained attractive even as these characteristics went out of fashion in continental Europe. National Socialism and Sibelius is a story of its own which is carefully analyzed here. Ideas of Finland and the North vastly influenced the interpretation of meaning in Sibelius's music, a music that until this day remains enigmatic.

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