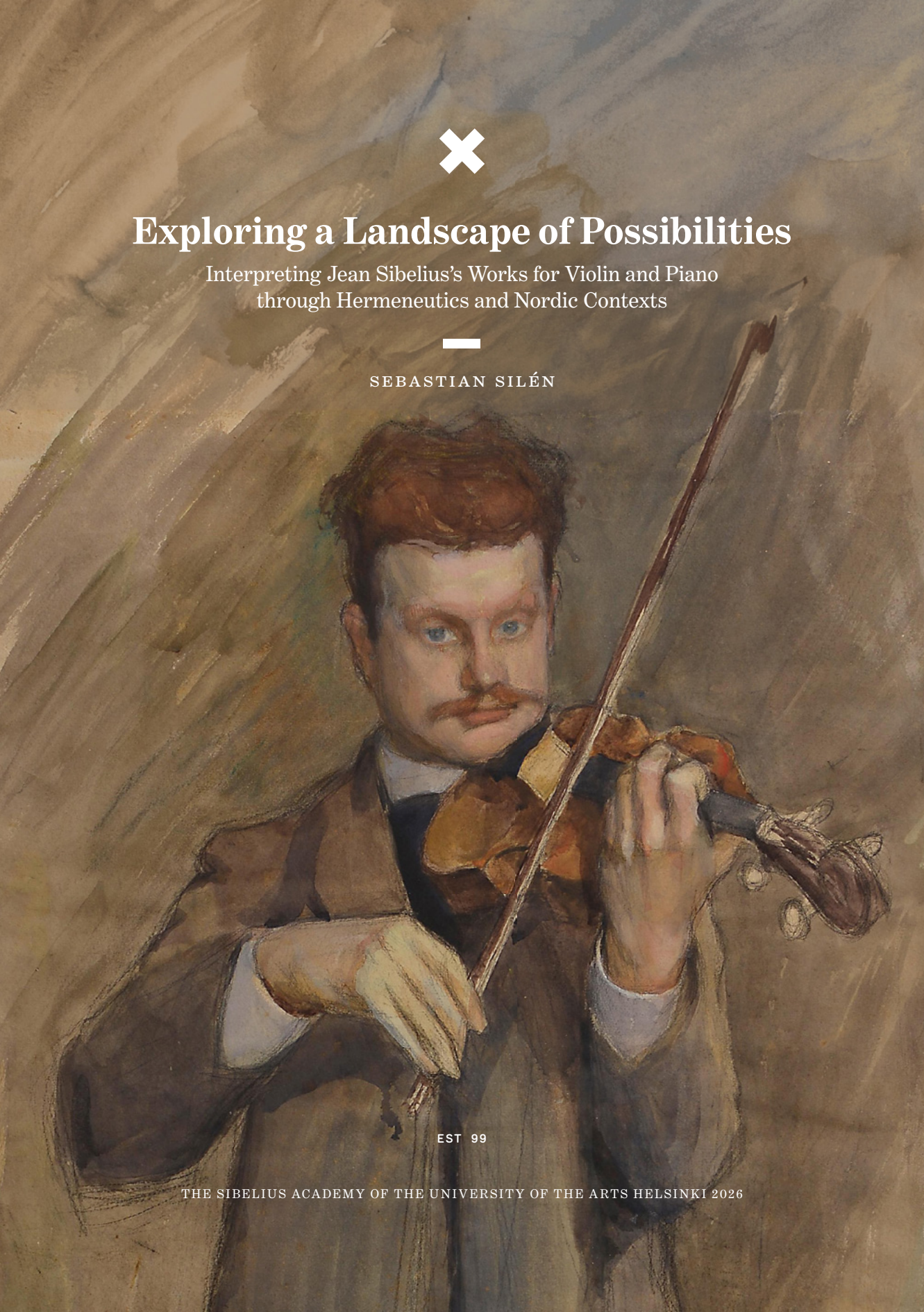


Exploring a Landscape of Possibilities

Interpreting Jean Sibelius's Works for Violin and Piano through Hermeneutics and Nordic Contexts

SEBASTIAN SILÉN

EST 99

THE SIBELIUS ACADEMY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS HELSINKI 2026

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Sibelius Academy Doctoral Programme

Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, 2026

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Cover image: Watercolour depicting Jean Sibelius playing the violin, by Eero Järnefelt. *Sibelius soittaa viulua*, ajoittamaton, vesiväri, Järvenpään taidemuseo. Kuva: Järvenpään taidemuseo, Matias Uusikylä. The cover image has been digitally edited, expanded, and cropped. The original painting is reproduced in Figure 49.

Printing: Grano, 2026
ISBN 978-952-329-440-0 (printed)
ISSN 1237-4229 (printed)
ISBN 978-952-329-441-7 (pdf)
ISSN 2489-7981 (pdf)

The publication is available in the University of the Arts publication archive Taju.
https://taju.uniarts.fi/







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Abstract

This thesis, part of a larger artistic doctoral project, explores how a Nordic perspective can shape our understanding of Sibelius and his music, with particular emphasis on his works for violin and piano. Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics, it examines Sibelius's music in relation to its historical and cultural Nordic contexts.

The thesis consists of three major sections: (1) an overview of how Sibelius interacted with Nordic individuals, cultural influences, and contemporary trends; (2) an analysis of characteristic musical features in Nordic music and their presence in Sibelius's works for violin and piano; and (3) a synthesis that brings these perspectives together to develop interpretative approaches that remain responsive to historical contexts. Taken together, the findings demonstrate how historical and musical knowledge can support several well-reasoned interpretations of Sibelius's music.

Keywords: Nordic music, hermeneutics, Jean Sibelius, musical interpretation, artistic research.

Tiivistelmä

Tämä monografia on osa laajempaa taiteellista tohtorintutkintoa, joka tarkastelee, miten pohjoismainen näkökulma voi muovata ymmärrystämme Sibeliuksesta ja hänen musiikistaan. Erityisesti tarkastellaan hänen viululle ja pianolle säveltämiään teoksia. Filosofiseen hermeneutiikkaan nojaten tutkimus käsittelee Sibeliuksen musiikkia suhteessa sen historiallisiin ja kulttuurisiin pohjoismaisiin yhteyksiin.

Työ koostuu kolmesta pääjaksosta: (1) katsauksesta siihen, miten Sibelius oli vuorovaikutuksessa pohjoismaisten henkilöiden, kulttuuristen vaikutteiden ja aikansa suuntausten kanssa; (2) analyysistä, jossa tarkastellaan pohjoismaiselle musiikille ominaisia piirteitä ja niiden ilmenemistä Sibeliuksen viululle ja pianolle säveltämissä teoksissa; sekä (3) synteesistä, jossa nämä näkökulmat yhdistetään historialliset yhteydet huomioon ottavien tulkintatapojen kehittämiseksi. Yhdessä tarkasteltuina tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, miten historiallinen ja musiikillinen tieto voi mahdollistaa useita perusteltuja tulkintoja Sibeliuksen musiikista.

Avainsanat: pohjoismainen musiikki, hermeneutiikka, Jean Sibelius, musiikin tulkinta, taiteellinen tutkimus.

Sammanfattning

Denna monografi är en del av ett större konstnärligt doktorsarbete som utforskar hur ett nordiskt perspektiv kan forma vår förståelse av Sibelius och hans musik, med särskilt fokus på hans verk för violin och piano. Med utgångspunkt i filosofisk hermeneutik undersöker studien Sibelius musik i relation till dess historiska och kulturella nordiska sammanhang.

Monografin består av tre huvudsakliga delar: (1) en översikt över Sibelius kontakter med nordiska personer samt de kulturella influenser och samtida strömningar som han mötte; (2) en analys av karakteristiska musikaliska drag i nordisk musik och hur dessa kommer till uttryck i Sibelius verk för violin och piano; samt (3) en syntes där dessa perspektiv förs samman för att utveckla tolkningssätt grundade i musikens historiska sammanhang. Sammantaget visar resultaten hur historisk och musikalisk kunskap kan möjliggöra flera välgrundade tolkningar av Sibelius musik.

Nyckelord: nordisk musik, hermeneutik, Jean Sibelius, musikalisk tolkning, konstnärlig forskning.

Acknowledgements

I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has supported this doctoral work, including friends, colleagues, teachers, supervisors, board members, foundations, and my family, each of whom contributed in their own unique way.

I especially thank my two supervisors, Professor Mieko Kanno and Professor Markus Mantere, for their invaluable insights, guidance, and patience throughout the many years it took to complete this work. I also owe my deepest gratitude to pianists Satu Elijärvi and Martin Malmgren, whose exceptional musicianship and passionate, open-minded approach to music have taught me so much. I also want to thank all the other musicians I have worked with over these years.

I also thank the artistic board, DMus Anu Lampela, DMus Folke Gräsbeck, Professor Neil Heyde, Professor Réka Szilvay, and Antti Tikkanen for their valuable feedback on the artistic components of this work. I am especially grateful to Folke Gräsbeck, whose extensive expertise on Sibelius inspired me to pursue this research. His gentle advice at the start of this doctoral project had a major impact on the direction of the work.

Many colleagues and friends have crossed my path over the years, but a few have had an especially strong impact on my thinking. I thank DMus Markus Sarantola for his openness in discussing and sharing his deep knowledge of style and performance practice, Jacob Sundström for his insights on folk music, and Sampsa Konttinen, PhD, for sharing his research on language prosody in songs by Finnish composers.

I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Emeritus Eero Tarasti for our shared moments of music-making, for taking an interest in my work, and for providing opportunities to present it at several conferences.

I would also like to thank the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland and the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation for supporting my research through working grants. Additionally, I am grateful to the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (Fredrik Pacius Memorial Fund), the Arts Promotion Centre Finland, and the Sibelius Academy Foundation for supporting artistic work associated with this doctoral project.

Most of all, I thank those closest to me, my family, for making this journey possible. I am especially grateful to my mother, Beatrice, for her valuable advice and help proofreading this thesis, and to my father, Lars, whose encouragement has been a steady support. I also thank my sisters, Daniela, whose perspectives, remarks, and observations have shaped my own thinking substantially, and Josefin, for her support and for

providing an excellent reason to explore Nordic mythology in greater depth. The biggest thanks, however, go to my wife, Iryna, and our children, Nicole and Edward, who have given me the energy and support to see this work to completion.

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1. Introduction to the research topic

This artistic doctoral thesis explores what knowledge and insight can be gained by approaching Jean Sibelius's (1865–1957) works for violin and piano from a Nordic perspective, drawing on philosophical hermeneutics as the primary framework for the inquiry. The thesis can be divided into three broad sections. The first is concerned with Sibelius's cultural context and historic situatedness, the second is an exploration of Nordic characteristics in music and how they manifest in Sibelius's works for violin and piano, and the third explores how the knowledge gained in the previous sections can be turned into practice through performance. Part of the inquiry is therefore focused on how this part of Sibelius's repertoire fits within the larger landscape of Nordic classical music, but, due to the work's artistic orientation, the primary aim is to explore what such a framing can contribute to interpreting this repertoire in combination with the application of hermeneutic thinking.

The subject of this thesis has been chosen for both personal and scholarly reasons. Sibelius and his music have been explored and researched from many different perspectives, but his cultural and personal connections to the wider Nordic region have received limited direct attention. As Sibelius was a member of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, the relative lack of previous research suggests an opportunity to deepen our understanding of Finland's most influential composer and his place within broader Nordic musical culture.

The decision to focus this research on Sibelius's works for violin and piano is grounded in three primary motivations. Firstly, these works have historically received modest attention compared to his compositions in other genres, such as symphonies, tone poems, choral works, songs, and piano works. While literature exists on these other genres, Sibelius's compositions for violin and piano have primarily been discussed within the context of biographical studies, rather than as the specific focus of dedicated scholarly research. This limited attention provides the starting point for the present inquiry, which seeks to deepen our understanding of this underexplored part of Sibelius's output.

Secondly, focusing on this particular repertoire allows for a more manageable scope while maintaining scholarly depth. Although the same research questions could be

explored in relation to Sibelius's larger works, his compositions for violin and piano offer a focused and fruitful angle of approach. This narrower focus not only facilitates a detailed analysis, but also opens the possibility for future research to apply the Nordic perspective to other parts of Sibelius's—or other composers'—repertoire.

Thirdly, Sibelius's works for violin and piano have derisively been associated with the Swedish half of Sibelius's character (Gray 1934, 56, 184–185; Adams 2011, 135). The British musicologist Cecil Gray (1885–1951) identified a duality in Sibelius's personality, distinguishing between the "amiable social attributes" associated with his Swedish heritage and a "deeper and more fundamental […] substratum of Finnish granite" (Gray 1934, 56). This duality, according to the American musicologist Byron Adams (2011, 135), accounted for Gray's perceived contrast between Sibelius's "ephemeral salon music and the profound symphonies". Rather than rejecting this perceived Swedishness as insignificant, this research seeks to explore the implications of embracing this aspect of Sibelius's character and music.

The 'Swedishness' found in Sibelius's smaller works offers a perspective essential to a complete understanding of the composer. While Sibelius's "ephemeral salon music" may not appeal to all listeners, it should not diminish his stature or legacy. On the contrary, the existence of these smaller works—which resist a narrative of Sibelius as a solely serious and monolithic figure—suggests that there are multiple ways of engaging with both the composer and his music. These works, with their strongly varied character, echo the literary concept of the 'character paradox', where traits that defy stereotypes bring characters to life. Similarly, these works can enrich our understanding of Sibelius by revealing the multifaceted nature of his musical identity.

By using Nordic musical culture as a hermeneutic perspective to examine Sibelius's works for violin and piano, this research aims to enrich, rather than overturn, our understanding of the composer. Thus, the purpose of this doctoral work is not to determine whether Sibelius was a 'Nordic' composer, as the answer to such a question inevitably depends on the criteria which have been chosen for considering a composer Nordic. Instead, I aim to explore the implications of interpreting Sibelius's work from a Nordic perspective.

It is also interesting to ponder why Sibelius's works for violin and piano have received limited attention. Obviously, one may shrug off these works as mediocre or lacklustre,

but such an outright rejection of a substantial part of Sibelius's production is unhelpful if the goal is to advance our understanding of the composer and his music. Even if one feels that they do not live up to the expectations of Sibelius's symphonies, they nonetheless represent a substantial body of works by Finland's most influential composer. This raises the question of whether Sibelius's symphonies provide the ideal comparison for his works for violin and piano, or if these smaller works were composed for a different audience and for a different purpose.

In addition to the arguments for my research perspective outlined above, my interest in the topic also stems from my personal experience as a performer. As a violinist I have performed works by Sibelius across Europe and the United States, and have gotten the impression that the compositions generally have been well received by the audience. My personal experience stands in contrast to the works' relative obscurity within the violin repertoire. While the works are by no means unknown, they have never entered the standard repertoire that most violinists should be aware of, if not perform. So, part of my doctoral work attempts to answer the question of why my own perception of these works' effectiveness on stage differs from the commonly held belief about their quality.

1.1 Research perspective and methodology

As this thesis is part of a larger artistic doctoral work, it is relevant to explain my approach and reflect on my own position as a researcher. My doctoral work as a whole consists of a CD recording, three doctoral recitals, and this written thesis.

The CD explored how music for violin and piano by the central figures in Finnish music, Fredrik Pacius (1809–1891) and Robert Kajanus (1856–1933), compared to Jean Sibelius's early works for violin. The works by Pacius and Kajanus had not been previously recorded, nor had the music been published. Due to my familiarity with the manuscripts of these works, I served as editor for Urtext editions of several works by both composers. These include Pacius's Duo for Violin and Piano and two different versions of *Variations on the theme "Studenter äro muntra bröder",* as well as Kajanus's *Nocturne, Menuet ancien, Spiccato* (and its earlier version *Ronde Courante*), along with my arrangements of his *Air élégiaque,* and *Berceuse (the Pauper Girl's Lullaby)* (Kajanus 2021). The sheet music editions were produced in collaboration with Fennica Gehrman.[1]

I also published two peer-reviewed articles as a result of my focus on the music by Pacius and Kajanus. The first article dealt with the reconstruction of the violin part to Pacius's Duo for violin and piano (Silén 2020a). The other article explored the history and the evolution of Kajanus's three last works for violin, from the first manuscripts to the final version for violin and orchestra (Silén 2020b).

The concerts approached the research topic from three different perspectives. In the first concert, *Nordic Connections,* I performed Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, and *Sonatina in E major*, op. 80, as part of a recital program that also included Christian Sinding's (1856–1941) *Sonate im alten Stil*, op. 99, and Wilhelm Stenhammar's (1871–1927) Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19. The purpose of the juxtaposition of these works was to see if any similarities or differences could be identified in these composers' treatment of non-programmatic music. This repertoire later served as the foundation for

[1] At the time of writing, the works by Pacius were still pending publication.

my article "Nordic Influences in Violin Sonatas by Edvard Grieg, Wilhelm Stenhammar, Jean Sibelius, and Christian Sinding" (Silén, 2024).

The second concert focused on Nordic dances, by placing Sibelius's dances for violin and piano alongside dances inspired by Nordic themes by Niels Gade (1817–1890), Fini Henriques (1867–1940), Tor Aulin (1866–1914), Julius and Amanda Röntgen (1855–1932, 1853–1894), Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), and Johan Halvorsen (1864–1935). A central topic for this concert was the use of folk dances as a source of inspiration for these classical composers.

The last concert, *From Dawn to Dusk,* explored character pieces by Jean Sibelius, Fini Henriques, Ole Bull (1810–1880), Johan Halvorsen, Wilhelm Stenhammar, Johan Svendsen (1840–1911), and Christian Sinding. The concert program was shaped into a loose narrative of a day, while also exploring the ideas of landscape and atmosphere in relation to Nordic music.

The program notes for the concerts and the CD booklet are found in the appendix to this thesis. These texts include observations and discussions of individual works that complement the present discussion and reflect the development of my understanding through the artistic components of the research.

This means that I have approached the subject first and foremost as a violinist. While I have done my utmost to make the research for this thesis as rigorous as possible, my primary expertise arguably lies in performing the music. As such, my perspective on the subject is strongly affected by my starting point as a performer. Throughout my work on this topic, I have noticed that my personal interests appear to differ from the interests of many other—perhaps more conventional—researchers and musicologists. While most, if not all, of the topics explored within this thesis could equally well have been pursued within musicology, my background as a performer has shaped the questions I have found worth exploring. The inquiry has been motivated by an interest in performing the music, and the research has been directed towards developing an understanding that can inform musical interpretation. The findings, in turn, feed back into artistic practice, opening up new interpretive possibilities and giving rise to further questions. This reciprocal relationship has strongly shaped the resulting text.

As such, my relationship to the interaction between practice and research is probably best described as "practice-led research" (Wilson and van Ruiten 2013, 164). However, for my own research process the artistic and the research components are so intrinsically linked that I would argue that the process can equally well be considered "artistic research", where the two elements cannot be separated (ibid.).[2] The artistic work guides my research interests, which in turn informs my artistic work, which creates new questions, in a continuous *hermeneutic circle*.[3]

My research methods can best be described as eclectic, which I believe aligns with the needs of artistic work. For that reason, my research methods have varied significantly depending on my perceived artistic needs. I believe this variability has its roots in the interpretive aspects of music making. As my research informs my music making, I am interested in broadly exploring questions which may present interpretive possibilities. For that reason, different works have suggested different approaches. The result of this artistically guided process is found in this thesis.

Within the artistic research community, the discussion is ongoing whether artistic work in itself can or should be seen as research.[4] As a performer it feels obvious that knowledge is gained whenever a new work of music is studied, since without any gained knowledge no learning could take place. However, communicating this artistic knowledge is often challenging, as the knowledge does not need to be intellectual, but

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[2] The exact vocabulary for discussing how to classify this thesis is complicated by the fact that the use of the Finnish term *taiteellinen tutkimus* (artistic research) encompasses practice-based research, practice-led research, art-based research, artistic research, and research creation (Elo 2023, 2). Elo (ibid.) sees this dynamic partly as a consequence of the difficulty to satisfactorily translate the word 'practice' into Finnish. The Sibelius Academy similarly describes artistic research as an approach in which art may "offer a premise and an aim for research: a motive, a terrain, a context and a whole range of methods" (University of the Arts Helsinki, Sibelius Academy 2020). It also emphasises that artistic research is not a counter-concept to scientific research, but seeks to establish a framework for research that does not reduce art merely to the subject matter of a study (ibid.). These formulations reflect the diversity of relationships between artistic practice and research, rather than a single, universally established methodology.

[3] See below, for a broader discussion of hermeneutics and the hermeneutic circle as it applies to this thesis.

[4] See for instance Borgdorff (2012, 140–173) or Nelson (2013, 3–22).

can instead be embodied, phenomenological, intuitive, practical, etc. The artistic work therefore adds to the body of knowledge, which also includes other forms of research.

The theoretical framework for this thesis draws on several established approaches, though they are applied with flexibility, serving as conceptual tools rather than rigid methodologies. Their purpose is to inform the artistic inquiry, rather than prescribe how the music should be interpreted.

At the centre of this approach is hermeneutics, understood here as a philosophical tradition of understanding and interpretation rather than a strict research method. In this thesis, hermeneutics provides a way to engage with Sibelius's works for violin and piano through a Nordic perspective, allowing new meanings to emerge through the interplay between historical context, interpretation, and artistic practice.

Hermeneutics was originally developed in theology, law, and philology as a method for interpreting sacred, legal, and historical texts. The German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), while still primarily focused on biblical studies, expanded hermeneutics into a general theory of interpretation that could be applied to any text, secular or sacred. Later, the German philosophers Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) played a central role in the development of philosophical hermeneutics, emphasising the role of historical context, preconceptions, and the dynamic process of understanding (Heidegger, 1962; Gadamer, 2004 [1975]).

Gadamer (2004 [1975], 305, 390) sees understanding as emerging from the "fusion of horizons" between the interpreter and the work.[5] In essence this can be understood as a dialogical process between two horizons. One horizon surrounds the work and encompasses everything that can shape our understanding of it, such as history, context, traditions, legacy, analysis, etc. This horizon is, however, always understood through a horizon of our own, which includes our experiences, knowledge, thoughts, ideas, and

[5] In applying this framework to music, I prefer to describe the fusion as occurring between the interpreter and the interpreted, as the word *work* carries specific associations in classical music. Not all music is regarded as a 'work' within the tradition of classical music, but engaging with the music nonetheless requires a level of interpretation.

everything else that shape our understanding. Gadamer (ibid., 294, 398) argues that one's own fore-understanding is one of the preconditions for creating meaning: "To try to escape from one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak for us." Gadamer (2004 [1975], 299–301) also reminds us that understanding is always historically effected.[6] That means that we are always interpreting from our own place in history, even when taking into consideration the historical context.

While the interpreter's hermeneutic horizon can be affected by anything that is visible from a given vantage point, Gadamer recognises that any hermeneutic inquiry is shaped by its motivation (ibid., 301, 285). A conscious framing and the explicit recognition of the motivation behind it can allow aspects of a work to become visible that may otherwise remain hidden. By applying a Nordic lens to Sibelius's works for violin and piano, this thesis does not aim to produce a definitive interpretation but allow these works to reveal new insights.

A second key hermeneutic principle for this thesis is the idea of the *hermeneutic circle*, which describes how understanding develops through a dynamic movement of attention between the parts and the whole. The concept was derived from Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), although the general idea actually predates Schleiermacher's writings (Wallace 1972, 98, 100). Gadamer (2004 [1975], 293–294) argues that the circle is not formal in structure, expanding the general idea from a methodological oscillation of attention towards an ontological and dialogical process that takes into account the interpreter's situatedness and historical horizon. This rethinking of the hermeneutic circle reflects Gadamer's broader concern that method alone cannot account for the forms of understanding through which meaning becomes accessible.

In this thesis, the *hermeneutic circle* operates on several levels. First, in the traditional sense, it involves the interplay between individual works (or specific musical passages) and the larger body of Nordic music, where each informs the understanding of the other in a

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[6] The English translation of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* provides the original German term "wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein" for clarity.

continuous process. Gadamer's expanded view of the process also involves the interplay between the works and their broader context. However, beyond this, I argue that a similar hermeneutic relationship exists between the artistic and academic components of this research. Here, artistic practice generates research questions, while scholarly inquiry in turn informs artistic interpretation, creating a dynamic and iterative process of understanding.

Gadamer (2004 [1975], 305) argues that interpretation is not "an occasional post-facto supplement to understanding", but that understanding always is tied to interpretation. This understanding, however, only becomes truly meaningful through its application (ibid., 305–309). For that reason, this thesis also explores questions of relevant performance styles, as the application of knowledge for a performing musician generally happens practically through a combination of taste, style, historical awareness, and technique. While these aspects of performance are not unique to the Nordic countries, nor to Sibelius, they are essential for applying the understanding developed in this thesis to artistic practice.

Hermeneutics has been used extensively within musicology, especially in the works of the American musicologist Lawrence Kramer, but my approach aligns more closely with the literary and philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer. My difficulty engaging more fully with the musicological tradition of musical hermeneutics seems to stem from my own background and research goals. Kramer's (1993, 1) approach to applying hermeneutic thinking to music is often primarily concerned with finding discursive meanings in music and articulating them through critical interpretations comparable to those of literary texts. While this can be both musically and intellectually interesting, many of Kramer's analyses result in insights which at least I find difficult to meaningfully turn into musical practice. For example, Kramer (ibid., 114–115) links Liszt's *Faust Symphony* to the "phallicized gaze" and "narcissistic self-reflection", but how could a musician make this interpretation audible in performance? While such interpretations may provide useful starting points for a performer's imagination, they do not, in themselves, explain how the interpretation might inform choices concerning timing, phrasing, articulation, vibrato, or other aspects of musical performance.

The difference seems to stem from the stated goal of the hermeneutic process. Kramer appears concerned with understanding the music as an object that has a discursive

meaning, whereas my work aims to create the conditions for a hermeneutically informed, embodied musical interpretation, which in most cases may take place in a concert setting. The difference therefore concerns both the intended outcome and the medium: is the interpretation produced in text or enacted through musical action? I would even argue that if one of Kramer's interpretations is to be used as a model for a musical performance, it requires another level of interpretation through which its ideas are translated into practice. And whether the resulting interpretation conveys the intended understanding is a question of yet another level of interpretation. This does not mean, however, that my own approach entirely escapes this problem. The contextual and analytical understandings developed through my research also require further interpretation when translated into musical action.

While Kramer's (2011, 258–277) later work engages with performance, he primarily considers performance in relation to how it can affect our understanding of a work and therefore our interpretation of it. He nevertheless attributes considerable interpretive agency to performance, arguing that it can modify, highlight, obscure, and expand the meanings available through the work. At the same time he states: "But as soon as we ask about real meaning and want a real answer, matters change–and the change matters. […] the hermeneutic limitation of performance asserts itself; the need to refer to the work and its meanings intervenes" (ibid., 276). Such statements are understandable, given Kramer's perspective, but as a musician my interests lie elsewhere. An interpretation of, for example, Sibelius's Violin Concerto, op. 47, can exist as a sounding event or recording that becomes meaningful as a lived musical encounter for a listener without requiring prior knowledge of the work's historical context or subsequent discursive explanation. The performance itself can constitute an act of interpretation. Hermeneutic thinking nonetheless seems to hold potential for exploring this type of interpretation as well.

A consequence of this approach is that I feel uncomfortable closing down the interpretive space prematurely within this written thesis, by proposing specific interpretations based on my current horizon of understanding. A musical performance is in my opinion not merely an attempted reproduction of a pre-conceived plan, but an ongoing encounter between the musical text, performer, the environment, and the potential audience. Since I cannot assume to know under what circumstances others may

perform the music, I aim to show that the music holds greater interpretive richness than what is often appreciated, and leave the final performance decisions to the performers.

Other theoretical frameworks have also influenced my thinking, but their impact on this thesis have been more sporadic. The interactions between musical works could be approached through either Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895–1975) and Julia Kristeva's theory on intertextuality, or Harold Bloom's (1930–2019) theories on the anxiety of influence.[7] Both approaches have successfully been adapted to music, offering insights into how composers engage with past works. An example of the former is Michael Klein's (2005) book *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*. However, my reading of Klein's adaptation of intertextuality to music did not sufficiently resonate with my approach to make it a core part of my methodology.

Kevin Korsyn's (1991) seminal article "Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence" is an adaptation of the literary theories laid out in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). According to this theory, influence happens through a process of 'misreading' previous works (Korsyn 1991, 6, 10). Importantly, 'misreading' is not a pejorative term in this context, but an inescapable necessity (ibid.). This approach has, among other things, been used to explore the "shadow" of Sibelius (Oramo 2006; Jurkowski 2003).

Korsyn's theory of musical influence is especially attractive with regards to works to which we can find a clear point of reference or comparison. With regards to this thesis, the broader adoption of Korsyn's theory is hindered by the lack of a clear point of reference to which individual works for violin and piano by Sibelius should be compared. The only clear case in Sibelius's production for violin and piano is, in my opinion, his early Sonata in F major, JS 178, where Grieg's sonata in the same key appears to have served as a model for Sibelius's work.

Applying this theory to Sibelius also raises the question of whether his use of Finnish folk music could be seen through this lens. Sibelius adamantly claimed that he never used Finnish folk music in his compositions, but the stylistic importance of this idiom is

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[7] Editorial note: years of birth and death are provided only for individuals who are deceased. For living persons, the years of birth have been omitted to respect privacy.

inescapable. When Sibelius's *Kullervo* was premiered, the reviewer Oskar Merikanto wrote that "we recognize [the melodies] as our own, even though we had never heard them before" (Goss 2009, 131). [8] This simultaneous adoption of a national style in combination with the rejection of any literal reference to Finnish folk music could be interpreted as a 'misreading'.

Despite not adopting either theory as a central framework for this thesis, both intertextuality and the theories on the anxiety of influence have nonetheless informed my thinking and have shaped how I consider relationships between works. As such, they inform my own interpretive horizon. I will highlight moments where these theories have proven useful for my Nordic perspective on Sibelius.

In addition to these well-established methodological approaches, my work has also drawn inspiration from the Swedish philosopher Tore Nordenstam's (2005) book *Exemplets makt* (The Power of Examples). He argues that there is always a connection between rules and examples, and that examples always suggest a rule of sorts (Nordenstam 2005, 88). Without this connection, examples would not be illustrative or useful.

This suggests that complex subjects often can be more readily understood by using a series of examples than by using convoluted language, which generally requires considerable prior knowledge. For example, many expressions commonly used in language, such as "as strong as Pippi Longstocking", are only understandable within a cultural context where examples of the literary character Pippi's strength are known (ibid., 89).

This line of thinking has proven useful in my exploration of Nordic characteristics in the works of Nordic composers. Instead of trying to explain these concepts in an abstract manner, I have sought to investigate what historically has been understood as representative of *Nordicness*, and then illustrate how these musical characteristics appear

[8] "[…] hän siwelee korwiamme suomalaisilla säweleillä, jotka tunnemme omiksemme, waikkemme niitä sellaisina ole koskaan kuulleet" (*Päiwälehti* 28th of April 1892).

in music using specific examples. Taken together, these examples begin to form a picture of what can be considered representative of Nordic music.

While my writing draws inspiration from numerous sources, such as hermeneutics, music history, intertextuality, music analysis, topic theory, cultural studies, and others, I feel that the research subject is better served by not narrowing down my approach too strongly, but instead letting the music and the context guide the research process. One consequence of this approach is that my understanding of the subject feels more like a landscape of interconnected facts, ideas, and observations than a straight research path that aims for a specific goal. For that reason, settling on a structure for this thesis has been challenging, as this landscape of knowledge could be traversed in many different ways. Perhaps the core of this issue is best described by the Danish composer Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) when he writes: "The essence of music cannot be explained with the help of words, but why is it that one still cannot help circling around the problem?" (Nielsen 1963 [1925], 9).[9] Perhaps this thesis is best understood as my own circling around the topic of Sibelius in relation to Nordic music.

1.2 The researcher's horizon

Considering the hermeneutic orientation of this thesis, I believe it is necessary to also reveal something about my own horizon, which undoubtedly colours my understanding of the research topic. While I would rather write about Sibelius and Nordic music than about myself, I see the potential relevance of making at least parts of my horizon visible to the reader.

I think there are three aspects of my life and experiences which substantially shape my view of this subject. The first circumstance to affect my horizon arose simply from being born into a Swedish-speaking family in Finland. While I can make no claim to know to what degree my own experiences align with those of Sibelius over a century earlier, there

[9] The English translation, based on the Swedish edition of Nielsen's book, is mine.

are aspects of my experience which at least make me cautious about some overly simplistic narratives concerning Sibelius's linguistic and cultural identity.

For starters, the language question is often presented within a framework which makes the situation look unnecessarily black and white. While it may be obvious to those familiar with the language politics of Finland, it is still worth clarifying that a Swedish-speaking Finn is a Finn, not a Swede. Also, being Swedish-speaking does not necessitate having parents of Swedish nationality (although that obviously is a possibility). While some Swedish-speaking Finns during the nineteenth century advocated for reunification with Sweden, others Finnicised their names and became leading figures within the Finnish movement, while yet others seem to have been relatively oblivious to the whole question. The language an individual spoke, and especially their mother tongue, did not necessarily determine their cultural or political affiliation.

Personally, despite being Swedish-speaking and having only learned Finnish as a foreign language at school, I would never call myself a Swede. Whether this makes me less Finnish is a question of interpretation. The two years I studied violin playing in Gothenburg, Sweden, only served to reinforce that understanding. While we spoke the same language and there was a strong sense of kinship with my Swedish colleagues, I felt more Finnish than I ever had in Finland. Interestingly, my closest group of friends ended up consisting of colleagues who spoke Finnish.

My experience has therefore made me wary of any overly deterministic relationship between language and identity. At the same time, it has not led me to regard language as culturally insignificant simply because it does not determine identity. Language is part of the world in which a person lives, communicates, reads, thinks, and forms relationships.

This has subtly influenced the way I understand Sibelius. There often seems to be a tendency to quickly move from acknowledging that he was Swedish-speaking to downplaying any potential consequences of this fact. I do not claim that Sibelius's Swedish-speaking background necessarily had a significant impact on his music or his cultural contribution. Nor do I claim to be able to demonstrate that it absolutely did. Rather, I am reluctant to prematurely assume that it did not. It was part of who he was, and whether or to what extent this aspect of his life shaped the music he composed is a question we may never fully be able to answer. But perhaps the more relevant question is what becomes possible when we leave this question open. Might considering Sibelius's

Swedish-speaking background offer perspectives from which aspects of his music and cultural position can be understood differently?

The second aspect of my horizon which I consider particularly relevant to this research is my experience as a violinist. After studying in Gothenburg for two years, I continued my violin studies in Zürich in Switzerland for five years. In fact, before embarking on my doctoral studies in artistic research, I had never studied anything other than violin playing in any formal sense. My professional life has consequently been almost entirely centred on performing music.

This also means that I have encountered a considerable part of Sibelius's output through performance. I have played all his symphonies, with one exception, almost all his symphonic poems, his Violin Concerto, and a large part of his chamber music involving violin. I have also studied all his published works for violin and piano, and performed almost all of them, in addition to many early works which remain unpublished to this day. My understanding of the works examined in this thesis has therefore developed within a much broader practical engagement with Sibelius's music.

More fundamentally, my experience as a violinist has shaped what I understand it to mean to know and interpret music. For me, interpreting music is not something that can be entirely separated from making music. It is something I do through music. A score can be analysed, discussed, and interpreted in words, but for a performing musician, interpretation ultimately has to become something that can be heard. Being able to take a piece of music onto the stage is, in my experience, not merely a sign of knowing it, but also part of how you get to know it more deeply.

In this sense, the starting point of this research was quite straightforward. I had always found playing Sibelius's music enjoyable and, as a Finnish violinist, it seemed natural to me to engage more deeply with his works. I wanted to understand this music better, largely because I wanted to play it better. This practical motivation has remained an underlying aspect of the project, even as the research has developed into questions concerning interpretation, hermeneutics, and the relationship between performer, work, and context. Recordings of my playing are available online, should the reader wish to hear something of the practical background from which this research has developed.

A third aspect of my horizon concerns the particular way in which my development as a violinist took place. Although I have played the violin since early childhood, I only began to approach it with serious professional ambitions in my mid-teens. By that point, I had the distinct feeling—reinforced by my teacher at the time—that I had a great deal of catching up to do. Whether or not this perception was objectively justified, it became part of the horizon that shaped my learning. A potentially positive consequence of these circumstances was that becoming a musician was never a given, nor an obvious choice for my future. My decision to pursue a career in music was therefore almost entirely based on my own interests and motivations. In trying to catch up with my peers, I sought out as much information as I could: I read books by musicians, followed online discussions, listened to recordings, and watched videos and documentaries of great violinists whenever I could find them.

Historical recordings in particular fascinated me because they seemed to reveal approaches to music that differed substantially from what I was accustomed to hearing yet seemed to follow a coherent logic of their own. At the time, however, I saw little reason to believe that some of the qualities I found most compelling in these recordings could still be part of contemporary performance, given how completely they had disappeared. I tended to understand what I heard as a combination of the limitations of early recording technology, the individual idiosyncrasies of particular performers, and perhaps technical practices that had simply disappeared or modern musicians had transcended. I nevertheless found much of this playing deeply moving. There was something in the sound, phrasing, timing, and expressive directness of violinists such as Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962), Yehudi Menuhin (1916–1999), and Jascha Heifetz (1901–1987) that appealed to me in a way I found difficult to explain. I therefore found myself in a curious position: I was strongly attracted to a way of playing which I assumed was, to a large extent, no longer possible.

This assumption began to change during my years in Switzerland, particularly through the five years I studied with Professor Rudolf Koelman, one of Heifetz's last students. I would not describe Koelman as a teacher of an old-fashioned style of violin playing. His playing was firmly contemporary, and he approached Baroque and Classical repertoire with an awareness of present-day performance conventions. What affected me, however, was that he seemed to possess an expressive vocabulary that I had not realised was still available to a contemporary violinist. His use of *portamenti*, his personal vibrato, his

unique approach to fingerings, his timing, sound, and other expressive means were always readily available to him whenever the music seemed to call for them. They did not feel like the application of historical mannerisms. They were simply part of what he could do.

This was particularly striking because these qualities were not always easily reducible to instructions. With many teachers, I had become accustomed to understanding musical problems in terms of identifiable things that could be improved: a shift could be made cleaner, a passage could be made more secure, intonation could be improved, a string crossing could be coordinated better, or a phrase could be directed more clearly towards a particular point. Such advice can be extremely useful. Yet Koelman often demonstrated things which left me with the feeling that I did not even know what I was missing. I remember him sometimes playing individual notes with such a quality of expression that I could not easily explain it in terms of more or less vibrato, more or less bow speed, or some other clearly identifiable parameter. There seemed to be a practical and embodied knowledge behind the sound which exceeded the vocabulary I had previously used to understand musical interpretation.

The use of *portamento* became one particularly revealing example. While it is easy to describe *portamento* as an expressive device added between two notes—a slide from one pitch to another—attempting to reproduce it convincingly made me realise how little such a description actually captures. The same applied to vibrato. Its rate and width are relatively easy to describe, but these parameters do not fully capture the quality of someone's vibrato, nor do they exhaust what can happen in the interplay between vibrato, sound quality, phrasing, and other expressive techniques.

Koelman did not primarily teach me new techniques to add to my playing. More fundamentally, he made me aware of options I had not previously considered. I also began to realise that some expressive possibilities could disappear from a performer's horizon not necessarily because they were intrinsically undesirable, but because the skills required to realise them convincingly were no longer commonplace. If an expressive technique is encountered only in an awkward or unconvincing form, it is perhaps unsurprising that it may come to be regarded as aesthetically undesirable. In my experience, the absence of a *portamento* is almost always preferable to a poorly executed one. However, encountering a performer who could use such devices with extraordinary

subtlety suggested another possibility: that what had appeared to be a simple or outdated expressive manner could contain a much larger world of artistic possibilities.

In retrospect, I think this was one of the most valuable aspects of these encounters. They made visible musical possibilities that I did not yet possess the practical means to realise. Sometimes those means could subsequently be developed through experimentation and practice; in other cases, the underlying quality remains partly mysterious to me to this day. What mattered was that I had encountered these possibilities at all.

A later, much briefer encounter with Ida Haendel (1928–2020), whom I had the opportunity to hear and play for during a few masterclasses, reinforced this impression in a different way. Like Koelman, she embodied qualities that I had associated with historical recordings. Yet there was an important difference in their respective relationships to the musical traditions I encountered through them. Koelman had received aspects of this tradition through his studies with Heifetz, whereas Haendel had herself developed as a musician within the musical culture from which many of these recordings emerged. Hearing her therefore offered a different kind of encounter with that tradition. What struck me most, however, was how utterly personal her playing seemed. It did not sound like the adoption or recreation of an earlier style, but like an expression of her own distinctive way of making music.

These encounters did not lead me to conclude that contemporary violinists should return to an earlier style of playing, nor do I regard the practices I encountered as self-evidently preferable to those more familiar to me today. Their significance for my own development was different. They showed me that a musical world which I had previously regarded, at least in part, as belonging to the past remained accessible to contemporary performers. Realising these expressive possibilities convincingly, however, required particular skills and artistic sensibilities. This experience also left me with a broader question: if possibilities that seemed to belong to the past can become present again through renewed engagement, what other possibilities might remain outside the boundaries of what we currently imagine?

1.3 Framing the research

Before delving into the Nordic context and musical landscape that surrounds Sibelius's works for violin and piano, it is important to address several key issues that should be kept in mind throughout this thesis. A major challenge has been to keep the scope of the research within reasonable bounds. The topic easily extends into related fields, many of which could contribute relevant information and context to my research question.

I have therefore attempted to narrow the scope of this thesis in two ways: first, by focusing on Sibelius's works for violin and piano, rather than his production as a whole; and second, by using music by Sibelius's Nordic friends and acquaintances as the primary point of comparison. Despite these efforts to narrow the research, the nature of the subject necessitates a broad rather than narrowly focused approach. I, however, find this breadth necessary for highlighting relevant connections between Sibelius and both Nordic music and culture. While I have chosen to narrow my focus, the observations made in this thesis could mostly be applied to works in larger formats as well. Additionally, many of the subtopics of this thesis could warrant considerable additional research.

The decision to focus on Sibelius's friends and acquaintances means that this thesis only focuses on Nordic composers from Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. The selected composers are Fredrik Pacius (1809–1891), Robert Kajanus (1856–1933), Christian Sinding (1856–1941), Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927), Amanda Röntgen-Maier (1853–1894), Tor Aulin (1866–1914), Niels Gade (1817–1890), Fini Henriques (1867–1940), Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), Johan Halvorsen (1864–1935), Johan Svendsen (1840–1911), and Ole Bull (1810–1880). Of these Kajanus, Sinding, Stenhammar, Henriques, Halvorsen, and Aulin can be counted among Sibelius's personal friends, while Pacius, Gade, Svendsen, Grieg, and Bull are so central to either Finnish or Nordic music that they could not be ignored.[10]

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[10] This focus has resulted in limited attention to Nordic female composers, despite their growing presence in scholarly discourse. During my years as a doctoral student, I have performed (or at least familiarized myself with) works by numerous Nordic female composers in addition to the aforementioned Amanda Röntgen-Maier, such as Laura Netzel (1839–1927), Helena Munktell (1852–1919), and Helvi Leiviskä (1902–1982), and have recorded a minor work by Lilly Kajanus-

The focus on Sibelius's friends and acquaintances means that music from Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands has unfortunately been left out. This leads to a question of terminology. I have opted to use the word Nordic to describe the geographical area in focus throughout this work, but the word is arguably not ideal, as the research only focuses on a subsection of the Nordic countries.

The available names for this geographical area are a source of some confusion. The Nordic countries are a collection of states in the north of Europe which consist of Finland (including the autonomous Åland islands), Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands. These countries have an intertwined history, cultural similarities, and have a long history of close cooperation, but all the countries are unique, with their own culture and identity.

There is a difference between the Nordic countries and the Scandinavian countries, which consist only of countries on the Scandinavian peninsula, i.e., Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (although northwestern Finland arguably can be considered part of the peninsula). Despite this distinction, the Nordic countries are often conflated with Scandinavia. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines 'Nordic' as "Of or relating to Scandinavia, the Scandinavian people, or their languages."

A possible alternative could have been to use the term Fennoscandia. However, as Fennoscandia generally is considered to include parts of Russia, I wanted to make it clear that my interests lie in the countries to the west of Finland, rather than to the east. Also, the term Fennoscandia is less well known than the Nordic countries.

I have also decided to use the term "Nordic music" as a super-category for music from the Nordic countries. However, one can question whether all musical works by Nordic composers comfortably fit under this umbrella. This question will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter about Nordic music.

Blenner (1885–1963) for the Finnish broadcasting company Yle. Nonetheless, these works have not taken on any major role within this project.

1.4 Previous research on the subject

Sibelius's Works for Violin and Piano have received surprisingly little research that focuses specifically on these works, but they have been analysed and discussed as part of biographies about Jean Sibelius. These include, but are not limited to Karl Ekman (1895–1962) (1938), Erik Furuhjelm (1883–1964) (1916), Erik Tawaststjerna (1916–1993) (1965), Glenda Goss (2003), Andrew Barnett (2007), Tomi Mäkelä (2007), Cecil Gray (1934), and Daniel Grimley (2025 [2021]) among many others, where the works for violin and piano receive varied amounts of attention but are not the main focus of the biographies.

A work that specifically focuses on Sibelius's works for violin and piano is Kaija Saarikettu's (2008) doctoral dissertation *Tanssiva ja laulava viulu: Jean Sibeliuksen opusnumeroidut teokset viululle ja pianolle* (The dancing and singing violin: Jean Sibelius's works for violin and piano with opus numbers), which describes the history, characters, and challenges of performing all of Sibelius's works for violin and piano with opus numbers.

Furthermore, a paper that directly deals with Sibelius's works for violin and piano is Rebekah Brown's "Sibelius Unstrung: His Works for Violin and Piano Contrasted to the More Popular Pieces by Contemporary Violinist-Composers" (2003). It is notable that she makes the comparison to violinist-composers, considering that Sibelius generally would not be categorised as such, despite his early training as a violinist. Additionally, Melinda Scott's (1998) article "Performance and Contextual Issues Within Selected Sibelius Violin and Piano 'Salon' Pieces" focuses on a few selected works. On a related topic, the Finnish musicologist Veijo Murtomäki (2004, 137–156) has written an article about Sibelius's miniatures that suggests that these pieces deserve re-evaluation.

Given the shared geography, linguistic ties, and cultural similarities among the Nordic countries, it is surprising that Sibelius's connections to the broader Nordic region have not been extensively explored. Using the aforementioned biographies one can begin to assemble a picture of the importance of Sibelius's Nordic connections, but within these works the Nordic angle is mostly found in Sibelius's friendships and personal connections with individuals from the Nordic countries.

One explanation may be that the Nordic perspective on Sibelius has not fitted the prevailing narratives on his music, which have historically emphasised either his role in establishing a Finnish musical identity or his significance as a composer whose work transcended national boundaries to achieve something universal. From either a national or a broadly international perspective, the Nordic view sits uncomfortably. Recognising Sibelius's Nordic connections complicates the image of him as a purely Finnish national composer, while also situating some of his so-called universal qualities within a more specific geographic and cultural framework. With regards to Sibelius's connections to particular countries or regions, it can be noted that while I have been unable to find research explicitly addressing his Nordic connections, I have found articles that explore different aspects of Sibelius's connections to Germany, Vienna, the USA, Great Britain, Russia, Europe, and Japan (Jäntti, Vogt and Holtkamp 2000; Mäkelä 2004; Krones 2003; Franklin 2004; L. Gray 1996; Bullock 2011; Goss 2011; Tarasti 1995, Lehtonen 2026).

The research that focuses on Nordic classical music from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a distinct group can be divided into a few categories: first, a Nordic perspective, which deals with the Nordic cultural heritage and its relation to and interaction with the surrounding cultures, focusing primarily on the dominant Germanic tradition of classical music; second, a perspective that has its roots in the German tradition and looks towards the Nordic countries as a form of exotic, pre-Germanic borderland; and, third, a broader international perspective that looks to the Nordic countries with intrigue, but without the same historic connections as Germany (Ling 1992, 56). For this doctoral work, attention is primarily given to the first of these categories, i.e., the Nordic perspective.

For a general overview of Nordic music, the British musicologist John Horton (1905–1989) gives a good introduction in his book *Scandinavian Music: A Short History* (1963). The book includes chapters on both Sibelius and more broadly on Finnish music, despite Finland not technically being part of Scandinavia. A more recent book on the subject is Frederick Key Smith's *Nordic Art Music: From the Middle Ages to the Third Millennium* (Smith 2002). A third book that provides a general overview is *The Nordic Sound, Explorations into the Music of Denmark, Norway, Sweden* by John Yoell (1974), even though the author made the decision to limit the content to the three Scandinavian countries and leave out Finland. The bulk of the book consists of an extensive composer gallery. These three

books all provide an outside view of Nordic music, where the view of the Nordic countries can sometimes feel quite foreign to me as a Finn.[11]

For an inside view, it is necessary to turn to Nordic material. The most important Nordic book on the subject is *Musik i Norden* (1997), edited by Greger Andersson (1952–2012). It contains articles on many relevant subjects by leading Nordic musicologists. As a note of caution, Tarasti (2016, 55) has argued that the book has a Swedish bias.

For exploring the Nordic context that surrounds Sibelius, we are also faced with a large body of knowledge about the individual Nordic countries, all of which it has not been possible to review for this doctoral work. I can, for example, mention the major music history book series *Suomen musiikin historia* (Finnish Music History) (Dahlström, Salmenhaara and Heiniö, et al. 1995–2006), *Musiken i Sverige* (The Music in Sweden) (Jonsson, Nilsson, et al. 1992–1994), *Norges musikkhistorie* (Norwegian Music History) (Vollsnes 1999–2001), and *Musikkens historie i Danmark* (The History of Music in Denmark) (Schiørring, Kongsted and Traustedt 1977–1978).

In these major works of music history, we are therefore dealing with a problem similar to the biographies, where observations relevant to a Nordic perspective on Sibelius are interspersed within the research on the individual nations and their composers. For this reason, the research for this doctoral work has narrowed the focus to primarily concentrate on aspects related to Sibelius's friends and acquaintances in the Nordic countries.

1.5 Sibelius's works for violin and piano

Sibelius's works for violin and piano hold a unique place within the late nineteenth and early twentieth century violin repertoire. It is difficult to find any other serious composer

[11] For example, in the preface to *The Nordic Sound, Explorations into the Music of Denmark, Norway, Sweden*, Yoell describes the Nordic countries with the following words: "Thanks to mass media, the world's stock image of Scandinavia is of a sub-Arctic socialist utopia populated by luscious blondes and pornographers, where sex, sauna and suicide reign supreme in that order. The very idea that the northland enjoys a lively creative and performing musical tradition of its own strikes too many people as esoterica of peripheral importance" (Yoell 1974, vi).

from the period whose music has both retained its popularity in the concert halls and who also composed so many works for violin. Even more surprisingly, Sibelius's works for violin and piano are often not held in particularly high regard, despite Sibelius having composed one of the twentieth century's most popular violin concertos. Some, such as the British musicologist Guy Rickards (1997, 12) have dismissed them outright, calling them "light music pot-boilers of embarrassing vacuity".

There are a few external factors that undermine the popularity of these works. The first factor is that serious composers of Sibelius's era were not expected to write minor works. Murtomäki (2004, 139) argues that the activity of writing miniatures during the early twentieth century, especially when using techniques from the previous century, was viewed with suspicion. The decline of music making at home also led to a decrease in the popularity of music of this kind in favour of larger works. Gräsbeck (2003, 106) has called this phenomenon "a kind of aesthetic 'elephantiasis'", where the value of musical works are intrinsically linked to their duration. Gräsbeck (ibid.) argues that Sibelius would have found such valuation incomprehensible. For example, on the 16th of May 1910 Sibelius wrote in his diary "I should be able to combine things large and small. Symphonies and songs" (Dahlström 2005, 44).

No matter Sibelius's own thoughts on the matter, such widespread cultural assumptions may nonetheless have affected the reception and interest in his miniatures. If works of this type are assumed less valuable, they risk being overlooked in favour of works perceived as more substantial. This may result in their musical potential not being presented in the best possible light, which in turn may reinforce the perception that they are of lesser significance. The lack of recordings of this repertoire by most of the twentieth century's most celebrated violinists seems to attest to this fact.

However, there appears to be a more nuanced dynamic at play, as miniatures by other composers were popular in both concerts and on recordings, especially during the first half of the twentieth century. This suggests that the valuation of the miniature genre as a whole does not provide a sufficient explanation for these works' relative neglect. While the relative status of small-scale works may contribute to the overall picture, there is certainly more to explore.

There are numerous contradictions about these works, ranging from the type of music they represent to the reception they received. This even includes Sibelius's own

comments about them. A large portion of them were composed during the First World War, while Sibelius was struggling financially, but it is valid to question if this is sufficient reason to reject them as works of low quality or little importance. These works have often been referred to as "bread and butter pieces", and there is no denying that there often were financial incentives for composing these works, but would we be equally quick to reject work of other authors, painters, or performers if we learned that there were economic incentives driving their production (Tawaststjerna 1992, 177; Rickards 1997, 205)? If composing for money is unacceptable, we should reject a large part of the greatest masterworks in the canon of classical music, including all the cantatas by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) (Heinonen 2000, 3 quoted in Murtomäki 2004, 139).

Even if we accept this criticism, there are nonetheless many arguments for highlighting these works' relative importance. Let us for the sake of argument assume that these works were composed hastily for financial reasons. In that case, do they not show us a more spontaneous side of Sibelius than what is found in his orchestral works, and as such can they reveal something about Sibelius's musical intuition? While it could be argued that a rapid composition process would result in easy solutions, anyone familiar with Sibelius's works for violin and piano knows that this generally does not seem to be the case. In my own experience, Sibelius's works for violin and piano do not show signs of being uninteresting and hasty composition, but instead present a fascinating world of music, which otherwise would have remained hidden to us.

Sibelius's own attitude towards these works appears to have been contradictory, sometimes praising and sometimes dismissing them. For example, on the 15th of August 1915 Sibelius wrote in his diary: "Now I shall be fifty. Poor — so poor that I must compose miniatures."[12] At other times Sibelius comments suggested the opposite opinion. He told his secretary Santeri Levas: "I know that they have some future

[12] "Jag blir nu femtio år. Fattig—så fattig att jag måste komponera småstycken" (Dahlström 2005, 236). Such statements should be interpreted with caution. While Sibelius's diary provides an invaluable source, the intentions behind individual entries cannot be established with certainty. Moreover, the remarks attributed to Sibelius by others are mediated through recollections and secondary sources. His comment about having to compose miniatures for financial reasons does not necessarily imply that he considered them artistically inferior; rather, it may reflect their greater marketability.

although today they are almost entirely forgotten" (Barnett, Sibelius 2007, 244). The pianist Kosti Vehanen (1887–1957) also quoted Sibelius saying that some of the later miniatures "contain more of my thoughts and impulses than many of my larger works" (quoted in Grimley 2025 [2021], 194).

This ambivalence may be related to the turbulent nature of that period of history, as well as to Sibelius's own personal struggles. His diary suggests that his opinions about his work fluctuated considerably. For example, on the 23rd of February 1915, Sibelius wrote about his work on his *Sonatina*, op. 80: "Worked on the third movement. I have high hopes for this sonatina."[13] The optimism was, however, short-lived. The next day the only entry in the diary reads: "Worked on and wrote the Sonatina, but it is not good."[14] Similarly, on the 9th of February 1915, Sibelius's short diary entry includes the comment "Been forging the 'Sonatina prima' [op. 80]. – The day is wonderful."[15] The next day the tone of the diary entry is again different. It reads: "A strong depression. Lay in my bed until 2! […] – The Sonatina is on my mind and I have been forging it […] – In these dark moments, everything I do seems to happen 'as if asleep'. It is as if my life would be at the end."[16] The Finnish musicologist Tomi Mäkelä (2011, 98) has noted that Sibelius was known to adjust his opinions to the people he interacted with. This may partly explain some of his contradictory public comments, but it does not explain the ambivalence found in the diary.

The violin nonetheless appears to have held a special place in Sibelius's life. He composed a total of 34 pieces for violin and piano with opus numbers which he published during his lifetime. In addition to these works for violin and piano, Sibelius's production for the violin also includes the Violin Concerto, op. 47, *Six Humoresques*

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[13] "Arbetat på tredje satsen. Jag hoppas bra af denne sonatina" (Dahlström 2005, 219).

[14] "Arbetade och skref Sonatinen men – den är ej bra" (ibid.).

[15] "Smider på "Sonatina prima" [op. 80]. – Dagen härlig" (ibid., 216). The comment in brackets is by Dahlström.

[16] "En stark depression! Låg i min säng till 2! […] – Sonatinen [op. 80] I hågen och smidit därpå […] – I dessa mörka stunder förfaller allt mitt görande och låtande som 'i sömnen'. Äfven är det som vore mitt lif slut" (ibid., 217).

(divided into op. 87 and op. 89), Two Serenades, op. 69, a *Suite*, JS 185 (sometimes called op. 117), the solo piece *En glad musikant*, a *Lullaby* for Violin and Kantele, JS 222, and chamber music. The *Two Pieces*, op. 77, *Cantique (Laetare anima mea)* and *Devotion (Ab imo pectore)* were originally written for violin and orchestra but were later also published in a version for violin and piano. Additional unpublished or unfinished works were left in manuscript form.[17] The violin was present in both his very first compositions, such as *Vattendroppar* (Water Droplets), JS 216, and *Luftslott* (Castles in the Air), JS 65, as well as in the last works he published during his lifetime: *Four Pieces*, op. 115, and *Three Pieces*, op. 116.

For a complete picture of everything Sibelius composed that is available for violin and piano, we can add arrangements for violin and piano of the Violin Concerto, op. 47; *Six Humoresques*, op. 87 and op. 89; the *Two Serenades*, op. 69; the *Suite,* JS 185; *Valse triste*, *Valse romantique* from *Kuolema,* op. 44 and op. 62; and *Nocturne* from *Belshazzar's Feast*, op. 51, *Melisande* and *Melisande at the Spinning-Wheel* from *Pelleas and Melisande,* op. 46, *Musette* from the *King Kristian II Suite,* op. 27, to the list, but except for the piano part to the violin concerto these were not arranged by Sibelius himself.[18]

It is also worth remembering that Sibelius had a childhood dream of becoming a violin soloist. Sibelius's biographer Ekman quotes Sibelius saying: "The violin carried me away entirely; the wish to become a great violinist was to be my greatest desire, my proudest ambition, for the next ten years" (Ekman 1938, 27). Later Sibelius adds:

> Everyone has his life's tragedy, [...] [m]ine was that I wanted to be a celebrated violinist at any price. From the time I was fifteen I played my violin for ten years practically from morning till night. I hated pen and ink and infinitely preferred an elegant violin bow. My preference for the violin lasted quite long, and it was a very painful awakening when I had to admit that I had begun my training for the exacting career of an eminent performer too late. I was at the age when we

[17] For more complete information, refer to Dahlström (2003).

[18] The list of arrangements should be assumed to be incomplete.

chase chimeras and put off as long as possible looking at reality as it is" (ibid., 38–39).[19]

By exploring Sibelius's smaller and less known works we can enrich our understanding of the composer. Sibelius has been described as a stern, granite-like figure, who represented the very essence of Finnishness.[20] While these characteristics were present both in Sibelius's physique during his later years, as well as in some of his most famous musical works, there is another side to explore, and another story to tell, about both Sibelius's music and his personality.

In much that has been written about Sibelius over the years it is possible to notice a kind of tension between different impulses and different simultaneous realities. One can mention his mother tongue, Swedish, and his initially less than perfect command of the Finnish language, which he worked on with his wife Aino, who came from the strongly Fennoman[21] Järnefelt family. One can also sense that Sibelius had a need to be perceived as an upper-class citizen, even while actually struggling financially. The ambivalence about whether he belonged in a busy city or in the untouched wilderness presents another juxtaposition. Also, his early interest in the music of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) and Edward Grieg stood in conflict with the ideals of his composition teacher Martin Wegelius (1846–1906), who wanted him to study within the German tradition. Additionally, Sibelius created a highly appreciated Finnish national Romantic style of music, which he spent most of his professional life moving away from. Similarly,

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[19] "Varje människa har sin livstragedi, […] och min tragedi hade sin upprinnelse i mitt beslut att till varje pris utbilda mig till violinvirtuos. Sedan mitt femtonde år spelade jag tio år i följd violin nära nog från morgon till kväll, och passionen för detta instrument satt i. Jag hatade penna och bläck, föredrog avgjort en elegant violinstråke. Min förkärlek för violinen hade starka rötter, och det blev ett smärtsamt uppvaknande då jag nödgades konstatera, att jag verkligen alldeles för sent satt i gång med min utbildning för den prövande virtuosbanan. Jag befann mig i en ålder, då man jagar efter chimärer och i det längsta söker blunda för verkligheten och dess bistra lärdomar" (Ekman 1956, 48).

[20] For references equating Sibelius's image to granite, see for example *The Observer* (December 2nd, 1945), or the *Los Angeles Times* (September 30th, 2007).

[21] The Fennoman movement was a Finnish nationalist movement that strongly supported the Finnish language and Finnish culture.

he was strongly rooted in the tonal tradition, while attempting to make his music relevant in a modernizing musical society. The Finnish composer Joonas Kokkonen (1921–1996) (1990) has also drawn attention to Sibelius's balancing act between the cultivated and the primitive. As a performer I sense a similar juxtaposition between Sibelius's large orchestral works and his smaller miniatures.

What makes these works so difficult to categorise, is that it is not immediately obvious what they are meant to be. The length and the style of these miniatures are often suggestive of them being salon-style pieces, but Rebekah Ann Brown (2003, 139) has noted that when compared to many other miniatures from the time by Edward Elgar (1857–1934), Fritz Kreisler, or Pablo de Sarasate (1844–1908), Sibelius's works for violin and piano show greater stylistic variety. Sibelius's piano parts are usually richer and thicker than those of Elgar, Kreisler, or Sarasate, and feature tonal ambiguities and nonfunctional chord progressions (ibid., 140). The technical challenges that Sibelius's pieces present vary greatly, ranging from relatively easy to challenging.

Another peculiarity of Sibelius's works for violin and piano is that, taken as a whole, they resemble the output of nineteenth-century violinist-composers who typically performed their own music. While there are good reasons to assume that Sibelius was a skilled violinist, he did not bring these works to the stage himself (except for the early works he composed during his youth). A challenge for the reception of these works may well be that Sibelius lacked a champion of international renown who could bring them to wider attention (R. A. Brown 2003, 143). It is, for example, striking that it is not clear who premiered the *Danses champêtres*, op. 106 (Dahlström 2003, 440–443). Sibelius's works for violin and piano also show similarity in style and duration to pieces by the Norwegian Christian Sinding, who was Sibelius's friend, most importantly during his studies in Berlin in 1889–1890. Sinding's main instrument was also the violin (Vollestad 2005, 21).

Sibelius's works for violin and piano can be categorised in several ways, three of which are considered here: by period, publisher, and format. If we explore the period when the works were composed, we notice that Sibelius composed a substantial number of works during the 1880s and early 1890s. Of these pieces, only the *Two Pieces* included in op. 2 were published during Sibelius's lifetime. During the following two decades Sibelius did not compose for the violin and piano, but both the Violin Concerto, op. 47 (1904/1905), and the *Two Serenades*, op. 69 (1913), are from this period. The largest part of Sibelius's

works for violin and piano was composed during 1914–1918 and was published in the 1920s. These include *Two Pieces*, op. 77, *Four Pieces*, op. 78, *Six Morceaux*, op. 79, *Sonatina in E major*, op. 80, and *Five pieces*, op. 81. During the 1920s Sibelius still composed *Novellette*, op. 102, *Five Danses champêtres*, op. 106, *Four Pieces*, op. 115, and *Three Pieces*, op. 116. He also arranged a scene from his pantomime *Scaramouche,* op. 71, for violin and piano in 1925, under the title *Scène d'amour de la Pantomime Scaramouche*. Sibelius considered the arrangement essentially a new piece (Dahlström 2003, 315). The *Three Pieces*, op. 116, was the last opus Sibelius published during his lifetime.

By looking at the composition date, we can roughly categorize the works into early (1884–1891), mature (1914–1918), and late works (1922–1929). This categorisation broadly agrees with the Finnish musicologist Nils-Eric Ringbom's (1907–1988) (1954) view of there being three distinct periods in his work. The Finnish musicologist Fabian Dahlström (1997, 44) argues that Sibelius's early chamber music should be seen as a distinct period. It bears mentioning that the composition dates of the mature and late works are close together. The British musicologist Andrew Barnett (2007, 310) nonetheless considers the *Five Danses champêtres,* op. 106, as a turning point, and the beginning of Sibelius's last stylistic period with regards to his works for violin and piano.

If we instead attempt to categorize the works by publisher, we notice that the early works were either left unpublished or were initially published in collections not specifically intended for music. Most of the works from 1914–1918 were published by Wilhelm Hansen in Copenhagen (after many delays and complications),[22] except for the *Five Pieces*, op. 81, which were published by Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig. The late works op. 106, op. 115, and op. 116 were published by Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig or Carl Fischer in New York. This begs the question of whether the publishers were chosen by convenience or if Sibelius was intentionally looking for different audiences. His publishing decisions must also be considered in the context of the economic

[22] The rights were initially offered to the local publisher Axel Lindgren, who failed to publish the scores. The rights passed to R. E. Westerlund, and later to Wilhelm Hansen in Copenhagen, who finally published the music in the early 1920s (Maxwell and Barnett n.d.).

circumstances, as severe inflation in Germany drastically reduced his income from his German publishers (Barnett 2007, 303).

We can also categorize the works based on format. Sibelius composed two early violin sonatas, one in A minor, JS 177, in 1884 and one in F major, JS 178, in 1889. During the same decade he also composed two suites in multiple movements, the *Suite in D minor*, JS 187, in 1887/1888, and the *Suite in E major*, JS 188, in 1888. The only other work that is clearly in multiple movements is the *Sonatina in E major*, op. 80, from 1914–1915. The rest of the works can be broadly divided into dances or character pieces.

1.6 The structure of this thesis

In addition to this introductory section, which outlines the reasoning behind and the goals for this doctoral work, this thesis consists of three interconnected sections that highlight different aspects of my inquiry, followed by case studies that explore their interpretive consequences, and finally by conclusions, reflections, and afterthoughts. These sections did not emerge from a fixed conceptual framework or from the application of a specific method, but from a dialogical process with the material itself, which has led my understanding in different directions. In hindsight, I have realised that this structure mirrors the very hermeneutic approach I have come to embrace in my work.

Initially, my curiosity centred on external influences that may have shaped Sibelius's compositional language, particularly from a Nordic perspective. This led me to investigate the cultural landscape and historical context that surrounded the works that lie at the heart of this thesis. This initial exploration is presented in chapter 2. *Approaching the historic and contextual horizon*. The chapter served two primary functions: to explore the cultural influences that may have left traces in Sibelius's work, and to justify the focus on a Nordic perspective by demonstrating its relevance for a fuller understanding of Sibelius's life and work. While hermeneutics had not yet taken on an active role in shaping my thinking, this opening chapter already operated within a situated horizon of understanding, by asking what connections become apparent when this particular cultural frame is applied.

As the research progressed, I came to realise that I did not merely need to identify potential Nordic connections within Sibelius's works, but also needed a way to evaluate, or at least highlight, these instances in meaningful ways. Chapter 3. *Constructing an interpretive horizon* therefore delves into the question of what historically has been understood as representing Nordicness, and how such elements might be recognized. The natural next step was to investigate whether and how these elements appear in Sibelius's works for violin and piano. The aim was to create an interpretive framework for locating and describing what may be understood as Nordic in Sibelius's musical idiom. As I was unable to find an existing framework that could satisfactorily be applied to this repertoire, I set out to create one myself.

However, as the project neared its final stages, I became increasingly aware that the initial sections were insufficient for communicating the aspects of the work I myself had come to understand as the most meaningful. Due to some rather dismissive feedback, I also realised that I had not sufficiently managed to communicate what I was trying to accomplish through this combined artistic and scholarly process. While I still view the initial sections of this thesis as essential for a Nordic perspective of Sibelius, they risk becoming a static collection of observations, disconnected from the questions of meaning-making I was myself grappling with throughout my work, unless integrated into a broader interpretive context.

This realisation led me to recognise the value that hermeneutics could bring to my work, not merely as a theoretical supplement but as an active dialogical process for exploring questions of understanding, meaning, and interpretation. The final section, therefore, draws more explicitly on hermeneutic concepts in order to explore how the cultural context in combination with an understanding of Nordic characteristics in music can come together to enable an applicable and musically meaningful engagement with the material. The focus shifted from *what* Nordic elements are present to *how* they can be used to produce meaning or shape interpretation.

The thesis does not, therefore, reflect a linear argument, but a layered one, where the engagement with the topic shaped my approach to it. The second chapter, with its contextual approach, effectively explores the horizon of the works themselves. It seeks to understand these works' cultural situatedness and the surrounding historical currents that may have come to shape them. As I needed a way to engage with the material in a

more systematic manner, the third chapter seeks to establish such a framework. While the chapter continues the contextual exploration initiated by the previous chapter, it also helped shape my own interpretative horizon, providing a framework through which to engage with the music. The final chapters enact what Gadamer famously called a fusion of horizons. They bring the insights of the previous chapters into a productive dialogue, in which meaning arises not from the imposition of a fixed interpretation, but from the meeting between the material and my own historically situated understanding. What became obvious in this process was that my own knowledge, understanding, experiences, and opinions were not examples of unwanted subjectivism, but a necessary part of the hermeneutic process.

Viewed from this hermeneutic perspective, the structure of this thesis has itself become a reflection of a process of evolving understanding. What might initially appear as a pragmatic division of subjects—context, framework, interpretation—can instead be read as an unfolding of my understanding. The structure reflects an evolving understanding that moves dialogically between the two horizons, and between inherited meaning and its consequences for newly formed insights. This thesis reflects this interpretive journey.

2. Approaching the historic and contextual horizon

The following chapter aims to establish relevant context and background information for applying a Nordic perspective to Sibelius's works for violin and piano. It explores the historical and cultural circumstances relevant to this inquiry. Rather than offering a strict methodological model, this section builds the foundation for the interpretive perspective applied later in the thesis.

2.1 Sibelius's connections to Nordic culture and musicians

Sibelius had a vast web of connections within the Nordic countries. These connections extend across several domains, including personal networks, language, culture (encompassing music, literature, theatre, and visual art), history, mythology, and identity. Rather than attempting an exhaustive cultural analysis, this thesis approaches the Nordic milieu surrounding Sibelius as a means to explore the horizon that surrounds this body of works. This allows for an active hermeneutic engagement with the material, where interpretation is informed by historical and cultural context. As an added benefit, the exploration of this cultural context makes the thought processes that have shaped my thinking more transparent.

Personal networks

Historically, Jean Sibelius's Finnish friends and networks have received more attention in the scholarly literature than his Nordic networks. These Finnish networks include, but are not limited to: the Leskovites—Jean Sibelius, the Italian pianist and composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), the author and pianist Adolf Paul (1863–1943), the composer and conductor Armas Järnefelt (1869–1958) and his brother, the painter Eero Järnefelt (1863–1937), and Busoni's dog Lesko; the Symposium—Jean Sibelius, the painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931) (originally Axel Gallén), the composer Oskar Merikanto (1868–1924), and the composer and conductor Robert Kajanus; and the more loosely defined Euterpe—Jean Sibelius, the linguist Werner Söderhjelm (1859–1931), the literary historian Gunnar Castrén (1878–1959), the literary historian Olaf Holmén (1879–1949), the poet, author, and literary scholar Emil Zilliacus (1878–1961), the physician and professor Axel Cedercreutz (1873–1946), the literary scholar and politician Alexis

von Kræmer (1871–1927), the architect Sigurd Frosterus (1876–1956), the poet, novelist, and playwright Mikael Lybeck (1864–1925), the literary critic Emil Hasselblatt (1874–1954), the philosopher and literary scholar Alvar Törnudd (1866–1943), the poet Bertel Gripenberg (1878–1947), the poet Hjalmar Procopé (1889–1954), and sometimes the painter Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905) and the poet Eino Leino (1878–1926).

Alongside these Finnish networks, Sibelius also cultivated friendships across Scandinavia during his studies abroad. In Berlin (1889–1890), he spent much of his time with a group of friends consisting primarily of Scandinavians. His closest friend was the Danish violinist Fini Henriques, who studied violin with Joseph Joachim (1831–1907) and later became a popular violinist, composer, and conductor in his home country and abroad (Tawaststjerna 1965, 166). Another Danish member of this group of friends was the violinist Fredrik Schnedler-Petersen (1867–1938). The Norwegian members included author Gabriel Finne (1866–1899), the pianist Alf Klingenberg (1867–1944), and the composer Christian Sinding, who at the time lived in Leipzig but frequently visited Sibelius and his friends (Barnett 2007, 52; Vollestad 2005, 64). Sinding, who was almost a decade older than Sibelius, has been described as something of a leader of this group of friends (Tawaststjerna 1992, 130).

Another Nordic friend of Sibelius was the Swedish-born author and pianist Adolf Paul. The friendship between Sibelius and Paul was turbulent, marked by both periods of closeness and conflict (Dahlström 2016, 9–15). Paul had been a friend of Sibelius already in Helsinki, but also became part of Sibelius's group of friends in Berlin after moving there from Weimar, where he had been studying piano playing with Busoni (Barnett 2007, 53). In Berlin, Sibelius also met Carl Nielsen, but Nielsen appears to have been a closer friend of Sinding than Sibelius (Tawaststjerna 1992, 150; Vollestad 2005, 64).

It bears mentioning that while many of Sibelius's friends in Berlin were from the Nordic countries, his group of friends also included the Americans Theodore Spiering (1871–1925), and the siblings Paul[23] and Geraldine Morgan (1868–1918); the German painter Josef Sattler (1867–1931); the Italian pianist Ferruccio Busoni; and the Czech violinist Ottokar Nováček (1866–1900) (Tawaststjerna 1965, 166; Barnett 2007, 53). It can be

[23] I have sadly not been able to find Paul Morgan´s years of birth and death.

noted that Ottokar Nováček was the brother of Victor Nováček (1872–1914)[24], who would later become a violin teacher at the Music Institute in Helsinki and would eventually premiere Sibelius's Violin Concerto. Sibelius also stayed in touch with Werner Söderhjelm and his wife, Sigrid Wilhelmina Söderhjelm (1863–1945) (born Lönnblad), whom he had met on the steamboat *Storfursten* on the way to Berlin (Tawaststjerna 1965, 156, 168). Werner Söderhjelm would later become a close friend as part of the Euterpe.

Sibelius's group of friends became infamous in Berlin, and on the way to their favourite pub the people on the street would call out: "The Swedes are coming" (Tawaststjerna 1965, 167). It is noteworthy that except for Adolf Paul, who was born in Sweden but who had lived in Finland from the age of nine, there were no Swedes in the group.

A few anecdotes paint a picture of the life the bohemian group of friends lived. An inability to manage their finances seems to have been a common problem. Tawaststjerna (1992, 131) describes how Schnedler-Petersen became an informal treasurer, who did not agree to hand out more than 10 marks at the time. Once this system was put in place, Sibelius immediately asked for 100 marks, and when he was denied, managed to borrow 200 marks from some music-loving countryman (ibid.).

A less-known anecdote, which was told in *Nya Pressen* (26th of February 1912), reinforces the picture of Sibelius's fun-loving lifestyle in Berlin. *Nya Pressen* describes how Sibelius and Henriques—who were once again low on money—had come up with an ingenious plan to solve their problem. They showed up at a local variety show and presented themselves as Professor Meyer and his accompanist Dr. Müller, and offered to perform as a duo. While I question some of the details provided by *Nya Pressen*, which among other things suggest that Sibelius presented himself as a violinist playing a Stradivarius and Henriques as the accompanist (while Henriques in reality undoubtedly was the superior violinist), the two of them managed to earn 45 marks by performing between a ventriloquist and a trapeze-artist.[25]

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[24] Nováček's year of birth is uncertain; the secondary literature gives conflicting dates.

[25] There is some doubt about the fee Sibelius and Henriques were paid. Ekman (1938, 88) briefly retells the story and mentions that the musicians "received twenty marks (less than five dollars)".

Another relevant Nordic figure from the same period was the Norwegian violinist, composer, and conductor Johan Halvorsen, who was the violin teacher at the Helsinki Music institute from 1889–1892 (Dahlström 1982, 54). There is an interesting link between Johan Halvorsen and Finnish music history. Halvorsen had studied with Johan Lindberg (1837–1914) in Stockholm, who in turn had been one of Pacius's students in Helsinki (Dahlström 1982, 54; Lappalainen 2009, 57).

While it is unclear how much Halvorsen and Sibelius interacted, it is notable that Halvorsen premiered Sibelius's Piano Quintet, JS 159, and String Quartet in B-flat major, op. 4, in 1890 (Dahlström 2003, 14, 598). Halvorsen may have been the first violinist to inquire about a violin concerto by Sibelius. He did so already in 1890 after the premiere of Sibelius's Piano Quintet (Tawaststjerna 1992, 137).

In December 1891 Sibelius and Halvorsen both took part in a concert, when Wegelius and Kajanus temporarily managed to set aside their differences and arranged a shared concert that included musicians from both Wegelius's Music Institute and Kajanus's Orchestral School (Vainio 2002, 175). Later in life, Sibelius and Halvorsen met during the Nordic Music Days in 1919 (Tawaststjerna 1996).[26]

Halvorsen is a fascinating figure within the history of Nordic music, not only for his prominence as a violinist, composer, and conductor in his home country, but also due to his contribution to the study of Norwegian folk melodies. On Grieg's request, Halvorsen set out to transcribe tunes originally played by Knut Dahle (1834–1921) on the Hardanger fiddle (Grimley 2006, 147). These transcriptions served as the starting point for Grieg's work *Slåtter*, op. 72. Halvorsen's collection of folk tunes can be compared to Sibelius's trips to Karelia, where he collected folk melodies. However, Halvorsen's use of folk melodies in his own compositions differed markedly from Sibelius's approach. Halvorsen integrated folk music directly into his compositions, whereas Sibelius took on the style and character of folk music but insisted that he did not use actual folk tunes in his mature compositions (Barnett 2007, 302).

[26] See photographs between pages 256 and 257 in Tawaststjerna (1996).

Later in life, the Swedish pianist and composer Wilhelm Stenhammar became one of Sibelius's close friends and supporters. Sibelius visited Stenhammar in Gothenburg in 1911, 1915, and 1923, where he attended concerts dedicated to Sibelius's music. While these two men never lived permanently in the same location, their mail correspondence was extensive. Stenhammar dedicated his Fourth String Quartet, op. 25, to Sibelius, who in turn dedicated his Sixth Symphony, op 104, to Stenhammar.

Sibelius's compositions made a strong impression on Stenhammar. After the premiere of Sibelius's Second Symphony, op. 43, in Stockholm, Stenhammar wrote to Sibelius: "[…] you are in my thoughts every day since I heard the symphony. You wonderful person, you have brought forth great wonders from the deepest depths of the unconscious and the ineffable. What I suspected has been confirmed: at this moment, you stand for me as the foremost, the only one, the unfathomable. […] You have shaken me so that I will not forget it."[27] Later, Sibelius's influence can be heard in some of Stenhammar's own works (Haglund 2019, 115, 156).

Stenhammar was also one of several conductors who helped bring Sibelius's music out of Finland and into Europe. Other conductors who helped establish Sibelius as one of his time's most important composers were the Finns Robert Kajanus, Georg Schnéevoigt (1872–1947), and Armas Järnefelt, who regularly conducted Sibelius's music in Finland and abroad. For the sake of completeness, it needs to be mentioned that Ferruccio Busoni, Thomas Beecham (1879–1961), Herbert von Karajan (1908–1989), and Serge Koussevitzky (1874–1951) also played important roles in bringing Sibelius's music to broader attention. Additionally, numerous biographers also added to Sibelius's reputation.

These personal connections and influences were not just a cultural backdrop to Sibelius's life, but also had a noticeable impact on his music. Particularly in many of his early formative works, it is possible to find interesting connections to Nordic culture. These

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[27] The original Swedish letter reads: "[…] du är i mina tankar dagligen alltsedan jag hörde symfonien. Du härliga människa, det är ju helt stora fång af under du hämtat upp ur det omedvetnas och outsägligas djupaste djup. Det som jag anade har besannats: du står i denna stund för mig som den främste, den ende, den outgrundlige. […] Du har ruskat i mig så att jag inte glömmer det" (Tawaststjerna 1994, 232–233). The translation is my own.

include Grieg's strong influence on Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, which will be discussed in the dedicated case study below. Similarly, the premiere performance of Sinding's Piano quintet, which Sibelius heard in Leipzig in 1890, encouraged Sibelius to compose a piano quintet of his own (Barnett 2007, 55–56). The quintet stands at a stylistic crossroads between the simple charm of his early works and his later mature style. It can nonetheless be seen as a significant step in his compositional development.[28]

The following major composition, *Kullervo*, op. 7, which definitely established Sibelius as Finland's leading composer, is not as clearly linked to a broader Nordic culture due to its strongly Finnish theme. However, if we approach the work hermeneutically from a Nordic perspective, some interesting observations can be made. Sibelius told Ekman that the performance of Kajanus's *Aino*, op. 5, in Berlin opened his eyes to the possibilities of using the *Kalevala* as a source of inspiration:

> Acquaintance with this work was of thrilling importance to me. It opened my eyes to the wonderful opportunities the Kalevala offered for musical expression. Earlier attempts to interpret the national epos in music had not encouraged imitation. And the environment in which I had grown up was as far removed from the Kalevala as possible. My mother and my Swedish grandmother had loved poetry of a very different kind and had aroused my liking for it. In my youth the Kalevala was not the educational equipment of every home in Finland as it became later. Nevertheless, I remember that the Kullervo myth occupied my imagination at school. After hearing Kajanus's *Aino* symphony the thought of creating a work myself with a subject chosen from our national epos began to occupy my fancy more and more (Ekman 1938, 88–89).

Kajanus's role in getting Sibelius interested in the *Kalevala* can hardly be disputed, but for a clearer understanding of the events that led Kajanus to compose *Aino,* we briefly need to explore his background. Kajanus studied in Helsinki with Richard Faltin (1835–1918), who had given him a solid German foundation in music theory and composition.

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[28] The first and the third movement of Sibelius's piano quintet were premiered on the 5th of May 1890 by Ferruccio Busoni, Johan Halvorsen, Karl Fredrik Wasenius, Josef Schwartz, and Otto Hutschenreuter (Dahlström 2003, 598).

However, when he continued his studies in Leipzig the strongest influence on his thinking does not appear to have come from his formal teachers, Salomon Jadassohn (1831–1902), Ernst Richter (1808–1879), and Carl Reinecke (1824–1910), but from a group of Nordic friends (Vainio 2002, 70, 75–76). This social group included Edvard Grieg, but it was Johan Svendsen who came to be the biggest influence. Svendsen encouraged Kajanus to look into Finnish folklorism and folk music for inspiration and argued that a national style should be based on local musical characteristics, in line with what Svendsen himself and Grieg had done in Norway. Shortly after, Kajanus composed several works with Finnish themes. Kajanus seemed to have increasingly adopted Svendsen's opinion that classical music should find its roots in folk melodies (ibid., 106). While Sibelius's connection to Svendsen is indirect, it is interesting to speculate if Sibelius would have composed *Kullervo,* op. 7, without the influence of Svendsen on Kajanus.

This suggests that there is a secondary level of influence, which is hard to evaluate and even harder to prove. So, while Sibelius did not, for example, meet Edward Grieg, Kajanus met Grieg during his studies in Leipzig (ibid., 75). Svendsen was arguably even more important. While we can only speculate about the topics that were discussed among Sibelius and his friends during their many long evenings together, it would be surprising if Svendsen's advice to Kajanus never reached Sibelius's ears. It is, for example, striking how closely the trial lecture Sibelius (2011 [1896]) gave when he applied for the job as music teacher at the Imperial Alexander University (nowadays the University of Helsinki) heeded the advice that Svendsen had given to Kajanus.

Language

Historically, the Swedish language in Finland played a significant role in tying Finland both to the Nordic cultural sphere and more broadly to Europe. This was a consequence of Finland being part of Sweden for more than 650 years, from approximately 1150 to 1809. People in official positions had to speak Swedish, which led to a sizable Swedish minority in Finland. The Swedish minority in Finland came to play a major role in Finnish culture, education, and politics. It should be noted that Swedish and Finnish belong to entirely different language groups, with Swedish being a north-Germanic language within the Indo-European family, while Finnish belongs to the Uralic language family.

In 1809 Sweden lost the Finnish War to Russia, resulting in Finland becoming a partially autonomous Grand Duchy under the rule of the Russian Emperor. Although this marked a major political and social change, many of the administrative, legal, and ecclesiastical institutions from the Swedish period were retained. This helped maintain continuity in certain societal structures, even as Finland entered a new political era.

Interestingly, the threat of reunification with Sweden seems to have been considered a greater threat to Russia than Finnish nationalism. Traces of this political balancing act have even left their mark on Finnish violin music from the nineteenth century. When Fredrik Pacius (1809–1891), often referred to as the 'Father of Finnish music', composed the song "Studentvisa", he changed the original text by Carl Wilhelm Böttiger (1807–1878) to refer to Finland rather than Sweden.[29] The song's melody later served as the theme for Pacius's virtuosic violin work *Variations on the theme "Studenter äro muntra bröder"* from 1842. The Finnish musicologist Matti Vainio (2009, 134–135) has argued that the change was made in order to appease the Russian authorities.

As Finnish nationalism grew during the nineteenth century, the importance of the Finnish language rose considerably. Many originally Swedish-speaking figures translated their names into Finnish to support the national cause. The language question came to play an important role in Finnish history.

It was within the emerging Finnish national culture that Sibelius grew up, and where he initially made his biggest mark. It is well known that Sibelius was born into a Swedish-speaking family in Hämeenlinna (Swedish: Tavastehus) in 1865. He initially attended Swedish school, but switched to a newly founded Finnish one in third grade. This suggests that Sibelius had already at an early age acquired a good grasp of the two official languages in Finland.

Sibelius's Swedish-speaking roots have historically been something that has not been discussed in great detail. While the fact that Swedish was Sibelius's first language is not

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[29] The Finnish music critic and author Karl Flodin used the informal title 'The Father of Finnish Music' in relation to Pacius in 1902 (Dahlström and Salmenhaara 1995, 389). In the song "Studentvisa", the original text, "helst på Sveas gamla jord" (preferably on Sweden's old soil) was changed to "helst på Suomis gamla jord" (preferably on Finland's old soil).

controversial, his early education in Finnish has been used to argue that Sibelius was in essence completely bilingual (Murtomäki 1997). Similarly, Aleksi Haukka (2017) has questioned the characterization of Sibelius as a Swedish-speaking Finn (*suomenruotsalainen*), describing it as an erroneous conception.[30]

However, there are a few observations that cast doubt on the idea that Sibelius had an equally strong grasp of both languages. His diaries, which exist from 1909–1944, are written in Swedish throughout. The same preference for Swedish can be seen in Sibelius's letters to his wife Aino. 1100 letters exist between these two from 1890–1931 (Hartikainen n.d.). Initially, Jean Sibelius wrote in Swedish while Aino answered in Finnish. From 1893 Jean began using Finnish as well, but a majority of the letters are nonetheless written in Swedish.

Of Sibelius's 116 solo-songs, only eleven are in Finnish, whereas a majority, 85 songs, were composed to Swedish texts (Dahlström 2003, 671–672).[31] The same observation can be made for Sibelius's incidental music and melodramas, where a majority of the music he composed for the theatre was for Swedish plays or plays translated into Swedish. With regards to his choral works, which were often composed on commission, Finnish and Swedish were used more equally, with a majority being in Finnish.

While these observations are not intended to detract from Sibelius's command of the Finnish language, they do suggest that the use of the two languages was not identical. Obviously, Sibelius also used Finnish texts, topics, and themes in his music, and the *Kalevala* served as an important source of inspiration for many of Sibelius's most important orchestral works. However, a letter from Sibelius to Aino from Vienna suggests that Sibelius at least initially found the old Finnish language used in the Kalevala

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[30] Haukka's original Finnish words are: "Joskus voi nähdä Sibeliusta sanottavan suomenruotsalaiseksi. Tämä on kuitenkin erheellinen käsitys, mikäli tuolle sanalle halutaan antaa mielekäs merkitys" (Haukka, 2017).

[31] The exact number of songs is somewhat controversial. Dahlström (2003, 671) lists 116 songs under "Sololieder mit Klavier". This list includes lost and unpublished songs. According to the Finnish musicologist Jukka Tiilikainen, Sibelius's production for voice and piano consists of 109 songs (Tiilikainen n.d.).

quite challenging (Talas 2001, 117). Broadly, it can be observed that Sibelius's large works from the 1890s and early 1900 often took on Finnish themes.

There are multiple reasons why the question of language is of interest. As was discussed above, the commonalities between the Nordic languages made it easy for Sibelius to form connections with other Nordic musicians and acquaintances. This obviously does not mean that people speaking different languages cannot form strong friendships, but a strong sense of camaraderie can often be found between individuals from the Nordic countries. One can, for example, compare Sibelius's experiences during his studies with those of Robert Kajanus about a decade earlier (Vainio 2002, 75–76). Kajanus primarily spent his time with Norwegian colleagues, and quite bluntly dismissed the Germans (Suomalainen 1952, 48–49).

Sibelius's mother tongue, Swedish, was also embedded in a broader cultural context that arguably influenced his work. Moreover, language may have left traces in Sibelius's music beyond the choice of texts. Research has suggested that the music of a culture is often linked to the culture's language (Patel, Iversen and Rosenberg 2006, 3045). Given Sibelius's command of both Swedish and Finnish, the question arises whether either language, or both, left identifiable traces in his music. The implications of these potential links will be discussed in greater detail in the subsection Prosody (p. 126).

Music

The previous subchapters have already touched upon many of Sibelius's cultural connections to the Nordic countries. However, the breadth of these connections merits attention. In the case of music, it needs to be noted that Finland's musical culture was first and foremost rooted in the German tradition.

This was true for two primary reasons. The first two individuals to hold the influential role as music teacher at the Imperial Alexander University, Pacius and Faltin, were both born and educated in Germany. The role of music teacher was not a traditional teaching position, but instead included an assumption that whoever held the position should take a leading role in musical activities in Helsinki (Vainio 2009, 85). Taken together, the two men held the key position for 59 years.

A second reason was that, up until the Helsinki Music Institute was founded in 1882, aspiring Finnish musicians had to seek education abroad, most often in Germany. Martin Wegelius (one of the founders of the Helsinki Music Institute), Robert Kajanus (the founder of *Helsingfors orkesterförening*, nowadays the Helsinki Philharmonic orchestra), Carl Johan Lindberg (1837–1914) (concert master of the Theatre Orchestra in Helsinki), and Filip von Schantz (1835–1865) (violinist, conductor, and composer) all studied in Leipzig. The trend continued even after the foundation of the Music Institute. This meant that many of the most influential musicians in Finland received their professional training in German institutions. Moreover, Finnish orchestras during the nineteenth century were largely staffed by musicians who were either German by origin or had been educated in German conservatories (Marvia and Vainio 1993, 15–16, 49–57). Even though the German influence played an important role in Finland's musical life, it was not the only one that can be observed. The Nordic cultural connections also played a role in shaping Finland's musical life.

To give a concrete example, it can be mentioned that during the first five years of *Helsingfors orkesterförening's* existence—the orchestra founded by Robert Kajanus in 1882—Nordic music played a central role in the repertoire.[32] The most performed Nordic composer was Johan Svendsen, whose name featured on the program a whopping sixty times.[33] Svendsen was also the first guest conductor to visit the orchestra (Vainio 2009, 205). Other frequently performed Nordic composers include Niels Gade (7 times), Ole Bull (5 times),[34] and Edvard Grieg (6 times). Music by Pacius was performed 18 times. Other Finnish and Nordic names include Robert Kajanus, Georg

[32] The source for these figures is the *Concerts of Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra 1882-*, provided by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra (2013) through Helsingin kulttuurin ja vapaa-ajan toimiala.

[33] The number reflects the number of times Svendsen's music was performed in Helsinki by *Helsingfors orkesterförening*. Many works are repeated multiple times, and concerts that featured more than one work by Svendsen are counted as separate instances. In other words, Svendsen's name appears as composer or arranger in the orchestra's database 60 times between the 3rd of October 1882 and the 3rd of October 1887.

[34] Each time the piece on the programme was the short and charming violin piece, *Sæterjentens Søndag* (the Herdgirl's Sunday).

Schnéevoigt,[35] August Söderman (1832–1876), Emil Hartmann (1836–1898), Betzy Holmberg (1860–1900), Carl Theodor Sörensen (1846–1914), and Hans Christian Lumbye (1810–1874). This list should not be assumed to be complete. The concerts even included the Swedish National Anthem, "Du gamla du fria" in Svendsen's arrangement.

While many of the works were short, this simplistic overview of the first five years of Kajanus's orchestra shows a strong Nordic influence.

Literature

Literature by authors who wrote in Swedish was a strong influence on the young Sibelius. Ekman (1938, 19) specifically mentions Anna Maria Lenngren (1754–1817), Esaias Tegnér (1782–1846), Per Atterbom (1790–1855), Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804–1877), Zacharias Topelius (1818–1898), and Viktor Rydberg (1828–1895) as important influences. Sibelius also held Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) in high regard (Tawaststjerna 1992, 171). Sibelius's reading habits have also been discussed by Glenda Goss (2009, 81–82) and Frederick Smith (2000).

Goss (2009, 81–82) argues that "Sibelius's debt to the literature of Scandinavia runs deep." She highlights this influence by showing that a majority of Sibelius's songs were either composed to texts by Swedish authors, such as Viktor Rydberg and Ernst Josephson (1851–1906), or to texts by Swedish-speaking Finns, such as Johan Ludvig Runeberg or Karl August Tavaststjerna (1860–1898). Additionally, Sibelius composed incidental music to libretti by the Swedes Adolf Paul and August Strindberg (1849–1912), also including the Swedish-speaking Finn Bertel Gripenberg's translation of Maurice Maeterlinck's (1862–1949) *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The Danish Edvard Lembcke (1815–1897) provided the Danish translation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* to which Sibelius

[35] The appearance of Georg Schnéevoigt's name is very likely a misattribution, even though the piece "Finlands unga tärnor" is attributed to him in the database, as he was only ten years old on the 28th of November 1882 when the performance took place. The piece, which appears to have been a polka, was performed even earlier on the 16th of January 1881 in Turku, which suggests that the piece may have been composed by Georg's father Ernst Schnéevoigt (1835–1905) (Tuomisalo).

composed incidental music. Additional Danish influences include the Danish Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), whose *The Little Mermaid* provided the story for a melodrama for narrator and string quartet (JS 59), which Sibelius composed as a student in Helsinki. Later, Sibelius read the works of the Danish author Georg Brandes (1842–1927) with great interest, finding within them "much of pure genius" (ibid.). Goss (ibid.) notes that many of Sibelius's works were influenced by the reading of great literature.

For more detailed information on Sibelius's reading habits, refer to Smith's (2000) article "The Influence of Literature on Sibelius". Smith argues that Sibelius's literary interests largely lay with his Nordic colleagues, and his orchestral works, songs, and incidental music all attest to this fact. The article finishes with the words: "[…] it was in Nordic literature that Sibelius found his greatest comfort and inspiration" (Smith 2000, 346).

Theatre

By the time Sibelius moved to Helsinki in 1885, theatre performances were given in both Swedish and Finnish. Theatre performances had been given in Swedish in Helsinki at the *Engels teater* since its founding in 1827. The theatre moved to new premises, called the *Nya teatern,* in 1860. The first years of the new theatre's history were dramatic, since the building was almost completely destroyed in a fire in 1863 and was rebuilt in 1866. The first permanent Finnish theatre was founded in 1872, but Finnish plays had been performed by *Suomalainen seura* since 1869.

More importantly for the topic of this thesis are the plays that Sibelius composed incidental music for. These include his friend Adolf Paul's *Kung Kristian II,* op. 27 (1898), *Belsazars gästabud*, JS 48 (1906), by Hjalmar Procopé; Mikael Lybeck's *Ödlan,* op. 8 (1909), a Finnish-language production of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's (1874–1929) play *Jokamies,* op. 83 (1916), his brother-in-law Arvid Järnefelt's *Kuolema,* JS 113 (1903), Bertel Gripenberg's translation of Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas et Mélisande*, JS 147 (1905), the Danish playwright Poul Knudsen's (1889–1974) pantomime *Scaramouche*, op. 71 (1912–1913), August Strindberg's *Svanevit*, JS 189 (1908), and William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) *The Tempest*, op. 109 (1925–1926). Sibelius also composed a single movement, a *Wedding March*, JS 62 (1911), to Adolf Paul's play *Die Sprache der Vögel.*

The list shows that Sibelius primarily worked with playwrights whom he knew personally. Adolf Paul, Hjalmar Procopé, Mikael Lybeck, Arvid Järnefelt, and Bertel Gripenberg were all personal friends and members of Sibelius's informal social groups. Of this incidental music, five works were performed in Swedish, two in Finnish, two in Danish (with *Scaramouche* included here because the pantomime contained spoken dialogue) (Kurki 2020, 30), a single movement was composed for a play in German. It is notable that Paul's *Kung Kristian II* was based on the history of the Danish king and was thus directly tied to Nordic history. Most of Sibelius's incidental music is written for symbolist plays, which suggests that Sibelius was keenly aware of literary trends (Kallberg 2011, 75).

Visual art

Sibelius was closely connected to a group of leading Finnish visual artists, including his brother-in-law Eero Järnefelt, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Pekka Halonen (1865–1933), and to a lesser degree Albert Edelfelt. These artists played a central role in defining the visual language of Finnish national art. Both Gallen-Kallela and Edelfelt studied in Stockholm, but, more importantly, all four spent significant time in Paris during the 1870s, 1880s, and early 1890s. Similarly to the groups of Finnish musicians in Germany at the same time, these visual artists often interacted with Nordic communities, maintaining a distinct cultural perspective.

Despite being in Paris, they gravitated toward realism, symbolism, and a Nordic approach to naturalism rather than the more experimental styles that already were gaining prominence in France. These stylistic movements, which were pan-Nordic, served a nationalistic purpose by depicting rural life, landscapes, and historical themes that reinforced a sense of national identity. Interestingly, the stylistic trends in Nordic culture extended beyond the individual artforms. Realism, symbolism, and naturalism were important movements across the visual arts, literature, and theatre.

It is noteworthy that while realism is not commonly seen as a distinct style of classical music, from the earliest biographies Sibelius's works have been described using such terms. The Finnish composer and musicologist Erik Furuhjelm (1916, 11) described Sibelius's style as "soulful realism" already in 1916. Similarly, he (ibid., 52) describes Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, as containing realism. Ekman (1938, 30–31)

saw the realism in Sibelius's music as influenced by Grieg, but simultaneously showing strong originality. Later in the biography Ekman (ibid., 237) summarises Sibelius's style as a blend of realism and romanticism.

Similar interpretations have appeared in later scholarship. Goss (2009, 266), for instance, argues that Sibelius by 1900 already had a decade of experience with realism, which had burst forth in the love scene in *Kullervo*. In her article "A Backdrop for Young Sibelius: The Intellectual Genesis of the Kullervo Symphony", Goss (2003, 55–57) discusses the topic of realism with regards to Sibelius in greater detail, arguing that "realism's strongest currents flowed into Finland from Scandinavia." She furthermore interprets Sibelius's letter to Aino dated December 24, 1890, as an allusion to realism, translating the relevant passage as follows: "I'm thinking of doing the thing much more 'realistically' than before. In realism there is also much music" (Goss 2004, 29).[36]

While the reception of Sibelius's music—and the language used to describe it—was likely affected by the surrounding cultural trends, the use of realism as a descriptive category is nonetheless noteworthy. Although realism was a prominent movement in Nordic literature, theatre, and visual arts, it is not commonly treated as a distinct stylistic category in classical music. Its recurring use in descriptions of Sibelius's music therefore raises the question of how far the language used to characterise his music reflects broader cultural currents.

History and mythology

The Nordic countries have long been connected through trade and cultural exchange, beginning sporadically well over a millennium ago. While modern nation-states did not yet exist, Viking seafarers travelled across and beyond the Nordic region, establishing contact routes that linked present-day Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and parts of Finland. Their influence in Finland was relatively limited, but this shared historical

[36] 'Jag tänker taga saken mycket mera "verkligt" än förut. I verkligheten är äfven mycket musik' (the original Swedish text is quoted from Goss 2004, 245). The translation of "i verkligheten" as "in realism" is interpretive; the Swedish expression more literally means "in reality."

backdrop nevertheless contributed to the international perception of the Nordic countries.

While much of this broader history is not directly relevant for understanding Sibelius, the history of the Nordic region came to influence Sibelius's image and reputation abroad. Rosa Newmarch (1857–1940) described Sibelius as "a Viking type", Donald Tovey (1875–1940) spoke about "Sibelius the Viking composer", and similar statements can be found by for example Ernest Newman (1868–1959), Constant Lambert, and Cecil Gray (Adams 2011, 131–132, 151). Here we see how distant Nordic history came to affect Sibelius's image abroad.

The Viking era also left behind a wealth of folklore and myths that played an important role in the Nordic countries' culture and identity. The old folktales are filled with gods, mythological creatures, magic, and heroes. The primary sources of ancient Nordic mythology are the Eddas, most importantly the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda* (sometimes called *Snorre's Edda*) in the Scandinavian countries, and the *Kalevala* in Finland.

These two mythological traditions have served as inspiration for many works of classical music. The Viking era *Eddas* have inspired works such as Johann Ernst Hartmann's (1726–1793) *Balders død*, Franz Berwald's (1796–1868) *Nordiska fantasibilder,* Jón Leifs's (1899–1968) *Edda*, *Baldr,* and *Helga kviða Hundingsbana, Grógaldr,* Geirr Tveitt's (1908–1981) *Baldurs draumar,* and many more. Works such as Grieg's *Peer Gynt* also exist within the Nordic mythological context, although it is not directly based on the ancient *Eddas*.

These examples indicate that the use of ancient mythology as a source of musical material was already an established practice in Nordic music long before Sibelius began composing his *Kalevala*-inspired works. While there is no need to assume that Sibelius was directly familiar with these earlier compositions, their existence places his engagement with mythology within a broader Nordic artistic tradition. The use of mythological subject matter was therefore not in itself novel in the late nineteenth century. Rather, Sibelius's engagement with the *Kalevala* can be understood as part of a

wider tradition of drawing on older mythological and literary traditions as sources for new artistic expression.[37]

Sibelius was familiar with both the *Eddas* and the *Kalevala* and perceived differences in their character and atmosphere. For example, in response to correspondence concerning his work *En Saga,* op. 9, Sibelius remarked that if a mythological basis necessarily is sought, the mood of the music is closer to the *Eddas* than the *Kalevala* (Levas 1986, 115).

In Finland, the *Kalevala* became the central work for both visual artists and composers, upon which many core aspects of the Finnish culture were built. While Sibelius is by far the most famous composer to use themes from the *Kalevala*, the tradition of writing music inspired by the *Kalevala* began earlier during the nineteenth century. Filip von Schantz's *Kullervo Overture* from 1860 was the first major work that used the *Kalevala* as inspiration. Later, Robert Kajanus composed *Kullervo's Funeral March* in 1880, and more importantly the symphonic poem *Aino* in 1885.

Sibelius's big breakthrough came after the premiere of his *Kullervo,* op. 7, in 1892. It was the first of many *Kalevala*-inspired works, which include the *Lemminkäinen Suite,* op. 22*; Tulen synty*, op. 32; *Kyllikki,* op. 41*; Pohjola's Daughter,* op. 49; *Luonnotar,* op. 70; *Tapiola*, op. 112; and others. Other composers also used the *Kalevala* for inspiration: Uuno Klami in his *Kalevala Suite* from 1933, Oskar Merikanto in the opera *Pohjolan neiti* (1898), Armas Launis (1884–1959) in *Kullervo*, and Erkki Melartin (1875–1937) in *Aino*. It can be noted that Pacius's second opera, *Prinsessan av Cypern*[38] from 1860, is loosely based on the *Kalevala,* although the setting has been changed from Finland to Cyprus (Elmgren-Heinonen 1959, 356). Interestingly, the Swedish composer Lars-Erik Larsson (1908–1986) used the same libretto for an opera with the same name which was premiered in 1937 (Herberts and Seppälä 2022).

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[37] The use of mythological subject matter was by no means unique to Nordic music, but was widespread in European art music more generally. The examples discussed here are therefore intended to illustrate a Nordic context rather than to suggest that engagement with ancient mythology was specific to the Nordic countries.

[38] The work is sometimes referred to as a fairy tale or a singspiel (Vainio 2009, 348).

While the Norse myths and the *Kalevala* have generally been seen as relatively separate mythologies, they both provided impetus for Nordic composers to explore the possibilities of Nordic music. Also, despite superficial differences, the *Eddas* and the *Kalevala* share many similarities.

To illustrate the parallels between the two mythologies, we can use the myths surrounding the death of Baldr in the Norse sagas and the death of Lemminkäinen in the *Kalevala.* Both Baldr and Lemminkäinen are gods who are murdered, and the deaths of both are predicted in advance; the murder weapon is a plant in both cases; in both cases the weapon is a projectile, and is the only thing the heroes are not protected against; both are killed by someone who is blind; both deaths are associated with water (Baldr's funeral at sea and Lemminkäinen ending up in the river of the dead); both myths involve a recovery attempt that is arranged by the victims' mother, which involves a journey to the land of the dead (although Baldr's mother sends Hermóðr in her place); and both myths involve a dialogue with the figure in charge of the halls of the dead (Frog 2010, 13, 30).

Comparisons like the one above suggests that there was in the past some cultural exchange between the Nordic countries, or that both mythologies have grown out of a common source. It is worth mentioning that many of the Nordic myths also bear a resemblance to other European traditions. For example, the stories of Baldr and Lemminkäinen also share thematic material with sections of the Old English poem *Beowulf* (Frog 2010, 55). One can also find similarities to the old Greek legends, which may suggest a shared European mythological heritage.

Identity

The following attempt to discuss aspects of identity is inevitably limited in scope. The topic could warrant extensive research, and would be greatly dependent on how the many sources are presented and interpreted. After reading extensively about Sibelius, I think it is reasonable to argue that Sibelius was simultaneously part of several different realities or contexts. One can highlight his Swedish-speaking upbringing and his acquaintances (as I do in this thesis); or, one can underline his understanding of the Finnish heritage and the essence of Finnishness, and what Finnish music could be; or,

one could decide to emphasise the universal or international qualities. All of these different characteristics seem to present themselves in different situations.

My aim here is to highlight that while Sibelius came to be hailed as a proponent of Finnish culture, he never (at least entirely) lost the identity of his Swedish upbringing. One such example can be found in Sibelius's diary entry from the 30th of July 1914, where Sibelius despairs of the quality of the Finnish leadership just as the First World War has broken out. The entry mentions that he has a greater trust in the Swedish element in society.[39] Two decades later, on the 4th of May 1934, Sibelius decried the rawness that, in his opinion, has arisen after all the Swedish has been discarded.[40]

Sibelius's relationship with the Kalevala is also interesting. His enthusiasm for the work is palpable in his letters to Aino from Vienna. Sibelius's letter to Aino reads: "I'm reading the Kalevala diligently and already understand Finnish much better. [...] In my opinion the Kalevala is completely modern. I think it is nothing but music, a theme with variations" (Goss 2009, 125). However, a few decades later his tone has changed. On the 3rd of December 1910 Sibelius's diary entry includes: "Looked at the Kalevala and it struck me—how I have grown away from this naïve poetry."[41]

It is also noteworthy that the Finnish ethnomusicologist Timo Leisiö has argued that Sibelius's portrayal of *Tapiola* in his last orchestral work (op. 112) was more Scandinavian than Finnish in perspective. He argues that Sibelius's world was always, even in his old age, the world of "the little Swedish speaking Finnish boy Janne" (quoted in Dahlström 1997, 39–40). These quotes are not meant to detract from other perspectives, which are equally valid. Instead, the observation that Sibelius did not lose his identity as a Swedish-

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[39] The diary entry reads: "[…] Skola vi bli brackor i brist på ledning. Effeminerade som vi äro. Det svenska elementet tror jag mera på. Men våra finnar?" (Dahlström 2005, 192).

[40] The diary entry reads: "[…] Men – huru litet begriper man här detta. Vår råhet – som tilltagit i oroväckande grad efter det man slopade allt svenskt" (Dahlström 2005, 334).

[41] "Grep i Kalevala och det slog mig – huru jag vuxit ifrån denna naiva poesi" (Dahlström 2005, 62).

speaking Finn simply provides yet another pointer towards the importance of his Swedish-speaking background.

In short, these subchapters have aimed to show that Nordic influences played a significant role in the culture within which Sibelius lived and worked. The perspective here does not give a complete picture of all the cultural forces at play at the time Sibelius was active. Instead, it aims to show how readily we can find connections to Nordic, and most often Swedish, culture. Disregarding the Nordic perspective would mean overlooking an important aspect of Sibelius's cultural background. The Nordic cultural backdrop remains important even when taking into consideration other cultural forces.

2.2 The dynamics of cultural exchange

As the sections above illustrate, the interactions between Sibelius and Nordic culture were many. These interactions by themselves have limited explanatory power, as influences can be rejected, diffused into one's own practice, or used to replace existing models. The Swedish musicologist Magnus Gustafsson (2016, 30–36), in his book *Polskans historia,* provides a good summary of relevant theories about the spread of cultural traits and cultural interactions.

A few leading theories are acculturation, transculturation, and diffusionism (ibid., 30–31). Acculturation and transculturation concern cultural encounters and the changes that result from them. The difference between the former and the latter can be summarized as the adoption of foreign traits versus mutual influence between cultures, including the loss or displacement of existing elements and the emergence of new cultural forms. Diffusionism, by contrast, focuses on the spread of cultural traits (ibid., 30–32). It argues that the similarities between cultural elements in geographically distinct locations can be explained through the spread and distribution of cultural materials, a broad category encompassing any transmissible cultural trait from tools and customs to language and music. Diffusion may involve processes of acculturation or transculturation, as the adoption and spread of cultural elements can also entail their adaptation or transformation. This theory provides an alternative to anthropological evolutionism, which argued that cultural progress arose independently along predetermined steps of development (ibid., 31). Within Nordic ethnology and Nordic folk music research, diffusionism has historically gained more prominence (ibid.).

A core idea within diffusionism is that the diffusion of new ideas includes three steps: the presentation of a new cultural element, the acceptance or rejection of the element, and, in the case of acceptance, the integration and/or adaptation of the element into the preexisting culture (ibid.). While these theories work on a societal scale, they are nonetheless useful for thinking about how an individual deals with external influences. The reaction to such influences can be closed (negative), selective, or open (positive) (ibid., 31–35). This brief framework suggests that the numerous connections Sibelius had to either Swedish or Nordic influences may have been welcomed, selectively adopted, or rejected. As such, mere proximity to an external influence does not necessitate its adoption.

2.3 Early influences on Sibelius, his early works for violin and piano

Before delving into the question of Nordic influences in Sibelius's works for violin and piano, it is worthwhile to briefly explore Sibelius's early works and the Finnish context that surrounded his formative years. These provide valuable insights into the many external influences that Sibelius was exposed to. At the beginning of this practice-led research project, I was curious to find out whether Finnish violin music by composers older than Sibelius could shed any light on Sibelius's compositional style or approach. I decided to make a sub-project focusing on three central figures of Finnish musical culture: Fredrik Pacius, Robert Kajanus, and Jean Sibelius.

The German violinist and composer Fredrik Pacius played a key role in creating a foundation for subsequent musical developments. He held the central position of music teacher of the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki from 1835–1869, arranged concerts, conducted choirs and orchestras, composed numerous works—including both the Finnish national anthem "Maamme" (originally "Vårt land" which means "Our country") and the first Finnish opera *Kung Karls jagt* (The Hunt of King Charles). He also trained a number of influential musicians. Pacius had studied with Louis Spohr (1784–1859) in Kassel, and his repertoire included virtuosic works by composers such as Spohr, Mayseder, and Kalliwoda in addition to more well-known German composers. His small number of works for violin show that he was both a virtuoso violinist and a skilled composer who followed in the tradition of German violinist-composers, whose music soon would fall out of fashion. His humorous variations on his own song "Studenter äro

muntra bröder" is a good example of both his virtuosity, his well-known humour, and his thorough German training.[42]

While Pacius's music for violin is historically interesting, it does not—in my opinion—provide any major insights into Sibelius's early style. One observation is that Pacius's aforementioned virtuosic variations, which he composed for his own use, seem to represent a middle ground between art and entertainment. This style of music seems well suited for smaller venues and less formal concert settings. The tradition of composing music for domestic use was strong in Finland. From that perspective, Sibelius's early works can be seen to fit neatly into this tradition.

Robert Kajanus largely took up the mantle after Pacius from the early 1880s, although it was Richard Faltin who formally held Pacius's previous position. During the 1880s Kajanus effectively earned a reputation as Finland's most promising young composer. Despite his early success, he found himself without work upon returning to Finland in 1882 after his studies in Leipzig, Dresden, and Paris. Additionally, the only orchestra capable of performing his music had just been disbanded. Kajanus quickly set out to found an orchestra of his own, which he called the Helsinki Orchestral Society.[43]

Although Sibelius by the early 1890s overtook Kajanus as Finland's leading composer, Kajanus held the reins over Helsinki's musical life. He conducted his orchestra in Helsinki for 50 seasons, served as music teacher from 1897 to 1928 at the University of Helsinki (the position which Pacius had held during the nineteenth century), and he was in many ways the gatekeeper to Finland's musical life (Vainio 2002, 337, 346). He was also Sibelius's close friend and supporter, although their friendship was not without challenges. Similarly to both Pacius and Sibelius, Kajanus was also initially trained as a violinist, and moved to Leipzig in 1877 to study with the famous concertmaster of the Gewandhaus orchestra Henry Schradieck (1846–1918). Kajanus's left-handedness was, however, seen as an insurmountable obstacle to his progress, so he quickly changed his

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[42] For more information about Pacius's violin playing, see Silén (2020a).

[43] Originally *Helsingfors orkesterförening* in Swedish.

plans and focused on music theory, composing, and conducting instead (Vainio 2002, 69–70).

Whereas I hoped to find clues to Sibelius's early compositional style in Kajanus's works for violin, the similarities can plausibly be attributed to the similarity of their early music training, which was strongly rooted in the German tradition. I would even argue that one can find more of a Sibelian influence on Kajanus in works such as *The Pauper Girl's Lullaby,* than a Kajanusian influence on Sibelius. While Sibelius's early compositions in no way feel out of style for the local Finnish musical landscape, the *Suite in E major,* JS 188, shows a level of ambition and creativity that surpasses the example set by the older composers.

In addition to the repertoire performed on the CD, I have also had the privilege of performing several of Sibelius's early works for violin that remained unpublished during his lifetime.[44] While I will not discuss all these pieces in detail, they provide relevant information for understanding Sibelius's later works for violin and piano. All but one of these works can be assumed to have been composed for Sibelius's own use. The exception is *Andante cantabile,* which Sibelius wrote for the sixteen-year-old Ruth Ringbom (1870–1949), the niece of Fredrik Wilenius (1825–1908) and his wife Ina (1829–1922), who at the time were renting accommodation at the Korpo manor in the archipelago near the Finnish city of Turku (Barnett 2007, 26). Ina Wilenius was a capable pianist with whom Sibelius and his brother Christian (1869–1922) regularly played chamber music during the summer of 1887.

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[44] These include *Luftslott* for two violins, JS 65 (1881?); Piano Trio for two violins and piano in G major, JS 205 (1883); *Vattendroppar* for Violin and Cello, JS 216 (1881?); *Havträsk Trio* (Piano Trio in A minor), JS 207 (1886); [*Largamente*] for Violin and Piano in e minor, fragment NB 0676 (1889–1891); [*Andante elegiaco*] for Violin and Piano in f-sharp minor, fragment NB 0672; *Andante cantabile* for Violin and Piano in G major, JS 33 (1887); [*Menuett*] in d minor for Piano Trio (1882–1885), [*Andantino*] in A major for Piano Trio (1886), *Andantino* in g minor (1887); *Allegro con brio* in D major, NB 0541a/4 (1885); [*Menuetto*] in d minor NB 0670/1 (1886); [*Menuetto*] in e minor, JS 67 (1886–1887); [*Andantino*] in A minor, JS 8; [*Étude*] in D major, JS 55; *Suite in d minor*, JS 187; *Suite in E major*, JS 188; Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178; parts of the *Korpo Trio* (Trio in D major), JS 209; and the *Serenata*, JS 169. I want to thank pianist and researcher Folke Gräsbeck for the opportunity to get to know and perform these early works.

Another key aspect of Sibelius's early compositions is their seasonal nature. They were often written during the summer months when he had more time for his own music. The music was composed for immediate consumption. While Ina Wilenius had brought copies of Ludwig van Beethoven's (1770–1827) piano trios as well as music by Franz Schubert (1797–1828), Fesca (presumably Alexander Fesca) (1820–1849), and Karl Reissiger (1798–1859), the music evenings were enriched by an almost never-ending stream of new compositions by Sibelius (Barnett 2007, 26). These compositions provide a glimpse into the type of music Sibelius could compose when he was unbound by Wegelius's thorough tutorship.

In Sibelius's early works we can find a wealth of different influences. The education Sibelius received from Martin Wegelius was strongly rooted in the German tradition, with Classical masters such as Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), Ludwig van Beethoven, and Franz Schubert as paragons. These influences can be seen, for example, in *Allegro con brio* in D major NB 0541a/4 (1885), which Sibelius composed right after hearing that he had passed his matriculation exam. The *Allegro* shows Classical clarity and features elements such as Alberti bass and a modest development section. Perhaps the most striking feature of the *Allegro* is the joyousness of the music, which is unlike pretty much everything we find in Sibelius's later works.

Broadly speaking, many of the smallest pieces and fragments listed above show similarities in both style and scope with the violin pieces that Kajanus composed during his youth. An explanation for this is that during their early composition studies both Sibelius and Kajanus received guidance influenced by the German tradition, Sibelius by Martin Wegelius and Kajanus by Richard Faltin. Many of the works are simple song forms with a clear melody and harmony. However, there are a few notable differences. Whereas almost all of Kajanus's early works for violin and piano are within this style, Sibelius's early works show far greater variety.

Sibelius's violin studies with Mitrofan Wasiljeff (fl. 1880s) seems to have opened Sibelius's eyes to a different, more brilliant type of violin playing.[45] The letters from

[45] Sadly, not much is known about Mitrofan Vasiljeff. It is unknown when he was born, or what happened to him after he left Helsinki after only one year of teaching. He was enrolled at the Moscow Conservatory from 1879–1884 (Moscow State Conservatory – Students n.d.), and these dates suggests that he likely was a student of Jan Hřímalý (1844–1915). This is consistent with

Sibelius to his family, collected in Goss's *The Hämeenlinna Letters* (1996), paint a picture of just how important the violin was to Sibelius. In the numerous letters to his uncle Pehr, the only things that rivals Sibelius's mentions of his violin playing are his frequent requests for money (often in order to buy strings or scores), or his common worries about his own or loved ones' health. A letter from Janne (Jean) to Pehr on the 28th of October 1885 is suggestive of the impact that Wasiljeff had on Sibelius. He writes:

> My playing is developing rapidly. In this one month I have learned as much as I previously learned in a year. My teacher, Wasilieff, is very pleased with me […] He is very talented, plays with fire and life, and possesses a colossal technique (Goss 1996, 79–80).[46]

The letter also mentions that Wasiljeff plays on a real Stradivarius, which he got from a Polish Baron. Another letter dated 7th of November 1886 begins to shed some light on the difference between Wasiljeff's teaching and the teaching Sibelius had received earlier. He writes:

> Yesterday I appeared in Bériot's Seventh Concerto before a large audience, and was awarded with applause. I had practiced a lot for it, because it has to be played in an entirely different manner than I have played before. You see, I played it too much in the classical way, *heavily* and correctly. Instead, it should sound brilliant and free, almost like an improvisation (Goss 1996, 86).[47]

This suggests that Wasiljeff introduced Sibelius to a style of violin playing that was unlike what Sibelius had experienced before. The repertoire Sibelius worked on during his

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Sibelius's own recollection that Wasiljeff may have been appointed as a violin teacher in Helsinki on Hřímalý's recommendation (Dahlström 1998, 75).

[46] "Med spelningen går det ganska raskt. Jag har på denna ena månad tagit till så mycket som annars på ett år. Min lärare, Wasilief, är mycket nöjd med mig […] Han är mycket begåfvad, spelar med eld och lif och besitter en kolossal teknik" (Goss 1996, 162).

[47] "I går upträdde jag med Beriot's 7de Consert inför stor publik, och belönades med aplauder. Jag har öfvat mycket på den, ty den måste spelas i en helt annan genre än jag förut spelade. Jag spelade nämligen den mycket för klassiskt, *tungt* och korrekt. Den skall deremot låta brillant och fri, nästan som en improvisation" (Goss 1996, 167).

violin studies also shows that he was introduced to the French virtuoso repertoire. These include works by Rudolf Kreutzer (1766–1831), Jacques-Pierre Rode (1774–1830), Charles-Auguste Bériot (1802–1870), Alexandre Artôt (1815–1845), and Jacques-Féréol Mazas (1782–1849) (Goss 1996, 22). Sibelius also performed Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Sérénade mélancolique*, Henri Vieuxtemps's (1820–1881) *Fantasia appassionata*, Giovanni Battista Viotti's (1755–1824) Violin Concerto in G major, Mendelssohn's (1809–1847) Violin Concerto in E minor, an unaccompanied Sonata by Bach, as well as one of Spohr's violin concertos and a duo for two violins (ibid., 81, 89, 97, 99–100, 104).

The following year, Sibelius changed his violin teacher to Hermann Csillag (1852–1922), who according to Sibelius was a "first-rate violinist and excellent teacher" (ibid., 89). Busoni, however, was not impressed. Csillag had been educated in Vienna by Joseph Böhm (1795–1876), and his students Jakob Grün (1837–1916) and Joseph Hellmesberger (1828–1893) senior and clearly represented a different tradition of music making than Wasiljeff.[48] Busoni saw Csillag's style as outdated, and decried:

> "[...] he subscribes to an outmoded, mannered (Viennese) school. He scoops all the time and is unable to play as much as a third without slithering through it in microtones. He also plays in a way that, when a triplet crops up, he drags it out really slowly. Da-da-da-doo—that's how it sounds" (Beaumont 1987, 37).

Sibelius's violin studies appear to have influenced his early compositions significantly. Some of the pieces, such as the *Étude*, JS 55, [*Largamente*] for violin and piano in e minor (fragment NB 0676), and the two *Suites* in d minor, JS 187, and E major, JS 188, show Sibelius's early interest in virtuosity. The *Étude* includes rapid scales in combination with chords, harmonics, and broken octaves. The [*Largamente*] is a slow melody written entirely in octaves. The two Suites are among his most ambitious early works, and are written in a virtuosic style. They were likely influenced by the virtuoso repertoire Sibelius had studied, heard, and performed. The two suites include everything from left-hand pizzicatos, octaves, double stops, chords, rapid spiccato passages, artificial harmonics, and staccatos. They therefore show a deep understanding of the violin and its technical

[48] For the exploration of performance practice, it is noteworthy that Joseph Böhm was the teacher of both Hermann Csillag and Csillag's teachers, as well as the world-famous Joseph Joachim.

possibilities. These pieces were composed for Sibelius's own use, and are therefore suggestive of Sibelius's technical proficiency on the violin (or at least his ambition). Sibelius approached the violin with a propensity for a virtuosic playing style.

Another important source of inspiration was Edvard Grieg. In the Finnish translation of Tawaststjerna's (1965, 77–78) biography, the author mentions that Sibelius's first contact with Grieg's music, either the Violin Sonata in F or G major, came during a concert given by the Finnish violinist Axel Emanuel Westerlind (1844–1919) in the 1880s in Hämeenlinna. In the later English translation of the same book, only the F major sonata is mentioned (Tawaststjerna 1976, 22). Furuhjelm (1916, 36) gives more information about the year of the concert, and mentions that a sonata by Grieg was performed in Hämeenlinna in May of 1883. Furuhjelm (1916, 37) also mentions that Sibelius had a particular interest in chamber music by Beethoven and Grieg during the 1880s.

Grieg's Sonata in F major had been performed at the opening of the Helsinki Music Institute on the 10th of October 1882, and again on the 1st of April 1885, but considering that Sibelius only began studying in the fall of 1885 it is unlikely that he heard either performance (Dahlström 1982, 356). It is, however, very likely that Sibelius heard a performance of Grieg's third sonata on the 4th of October 1888, as the performance was given by Sibelius's violin teacher Mitrofan Wasiljeff and the institute's new piano professor Ferruccio Busoni.

The reason these composers are interesting for our understanding of Sibelius's pieces for violin and piano is that much of this music represented a style that Sibelius's composition teacher Wegelius was sceptical of. Neither Grieg nor Tchaikovsky enjoyed Wegelius's favour. For example, Wegelius dismissed Tchaikovsky's *Sérénade mélancholique*

as "For the violin, rubbish!" (Ekman 1938, 50).[49] Sibelius thought of Wegelius as something of an opponent of the style that Grieg represented (Furuhjelm 1916, 78–79).[50]

Sibelius was, nonetheless, excited about Wegelius's teaching, calling him "an extraordinarily interesting teacher", but one can also sense the liberation Sibelius felt when he got to compose without supervision (1938, 50). Ekman (ibid., 51) quotes Sibelius as saying: "I guarded my double life jealously, so that exceedingly few got to know of the works in which I expressed my innermost strivings."

Stylistically these early works show a wide range of influences. These range from Classical masters such as Haydn, Schubert, and Beethoven to Nordic music, without forgetting either the French violin tradition, Slavic music, or folk music. Sibelius's openness to new ideas and his willingness to try them out in his own pieces is striking. I would argue that Sibelius's capability of integrating musical ideas into his own style is a key feature of his production for violin and piano. The stylistic diversity evident in these early works is also suggestive of the variety of performance traditions that Sibelius encountered as a violinist. Later chapters will consider how these traditions inform the interpretative possibilities of his music.

With regard to Sibelius's development as a composer, the most important early work for violin and piano is arguably his Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. This sonata has received more attention from scholars than most of his other early works, largely due to Sibelius's attempt to convey a distinctly Finnish musical character in the second movement.

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[49] The original Swedish quote "Violinistiskt strunt!" is in my opinion more expressive (Ekman 1956, 56). While it is challenging to provide an exact translation, something like "violinistic nonsense!" is more suggestive of the tone.

[50] Wegelius's opposition to Grieg's composition style is a surprise, considering that the first person to be asked to serve as director for the Helsinki Music Institute was Edvard Grieg (Bonsdorff 2017, 281). Wegelius was appointed director only after Grieg declined the offer.

3. Constructing an interpretive horizon

In order to use Nordic music as a hermeneutic perspective through which Sibelius's music can be explored, we first need an understanding of what is meant by the term. Nordic music can be defined in different ways, all of which have their advantages and disadvantages. On the surface level, "Nordic" is simply a super-category (or umbrella category) for music from the Nordic countries, i.e. Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands. This definition provides a relatively clear delineation between Nordic and non-Nordic music, although it is debatable if foreign-born composers who made their careers in the Nordic countries, such as Pacius or Friedrich Kuhlau (1786–1832), should be considered Nordic by this definition. This way of approaching Nordic music is not particularly interesting with regards to the topic of this thesis, as Sibelius was a composer from a Nordic country and his whole production therefore falls within the Nordic super-category. This definition also does not tell us anything about the music itself.

While the geographical definition provides a simple framework for categorising music as Nordic, we need a different approach if we want to understand the content of the music itself. As we begin exploring music from the Nordic countries, we are immediately faced with the challenge of being confronted with not one coherent music tradition but many, which are loosely collected under the umbrella of Nordic music. Each Nordic country appears to have its own view and relationship to Nordic music.

The terms Nordic, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, or Danish are used in order to differentiate music from a specific region or tradition from other traditions, such as German, French, Italian, or Slavic. This differentiation does not provide a clear demarcation, since cultural influences, ideas, and trends were rarely stopped by national borders. Dahlhaus (1989a, 95) has noted that musical elements associated with "national" music were commonly either more regional or more international than the terms may indicate. Often the folkloristic elements—despite their reputation of possessing the "spirit of the people" or "spirit of the nation"—were not common to a whole nation, but rather to a specific region within the nation (ibid.). Simultaneously, many of the compositional tools used to express nationalism in music were used far across the borders of the individual nations. Dahlhaus (ibid., 90) has also pointed out

that the tradition of differentiating a nation or a region from its surrounding countries was in itself a pan-European phenomenon during the nineteenth century.

Despite the diffuseness of the cultural boundaries, we can make an important observation: In order for Nordic music to be identifiable as distinct from surrounding traditions, it needs to differ from music from other areas in some meaningful way. These differences can be either additive or subtractive, meaning that they can either add something unexpected or remove something expected. These additions and subtractions will be discussed in greater detail below with regard to specific musical features.

The scholarship on Nordic music also overlaps with the use of "The North" as either an ideal or as a hermeneutic perspective (Torvinen 2010; Mantere 2010). The North can be approached both philosophically as well as geographically. Mantere (2010, 42) explores three aspects of the musical north:

1. The association of music and counterpoint, and the latter's further association with metaphysics.
2. The North as an excluding strategy of valorising "our music".
3. The "mystical North" as a mimesis of Nature.

It is noteworthy that Hanslick—who Mantere (ibid.) discusses in detail in his article—saw the North as a way of distinguishing between Italians and Northerners (Hanslick 1891, 136). Hanslick (ibid.) also associated the Italian School with "mental insolence" and "the monopoly of the soprano", and instead associated the "Northern races" with "all the intricacies of harmony and counterpoint". The geographical borders of "the North" are therefore relative and not clearly defined.

This suggests that the *Nordic* and *The North* are related but operate on different conceptual levels. Whereas the *Nordic* refers to geography, culture, and tradition, *The North* functions as an abstract and idealistic category—an imagined space of contrapuntal clarity and intellectual purity, often detached from specific cultural contexts. The idea of the North as an aesthetic or hermeneutic construct has also inspired broader discussions beyond Europe, for instance in the Canadian context, where landscape, climate, and remoteness have been seen as having symbolic value (Mantere 2006, 175–206).

3.1 The Nordic Tone

In the musicological literature, the unique quality of Nordic music is often described as the "Nordic Tone". The Nordic Tone describes something about the essence of the music, which differentiates it from music from other areas. The phenomenon is not so simple that the mere inclusion of typically Nordic musical features, such as quotation of folk music, automatically creates an association with the Nordic tone. Instead, numerous features come together to form a kind of 'intonation' that carries national character (Dahlhaus 1989b, 38).

From a historic perspective, the "Nordic Tone" began garnering attention in 1842 after a performance of the Danish composer Gade's *Efterklange af Ossian,* op. 1, in Leipzig.[51] It is notable that the work had been premiered in Copenhagen a year earlier, where the reviewers had not drawn attention to anything uniquely Nordic about the work (Fjeldsøe 2019, 5; quoting Sørensen 2002, 43). Gade's "Nordic Tone" garnered further attention the following year, after the premiere of his First Symphony, op. 5, in Leipzig (Fjeldsøe 2019, 5). It was therefore the German critics—Robert Schumann (1810–1856) among them—who identified Nordic music as something that differed from the German norm (ibid.).

Interestingly, the folklore that Gade used for inspiration was neither Nordic (in the word's modern meaning) nor necessarily ancient. The Scottish writer and poet James MacPherson (1736–1796) had published a "translation" of Ossian's *Fingal* in 1762, but the authenticity of this Gaelic poetry was immediately placed in doubt (Dahlhaus 1989b, 21). These mythical tales became known as the "Nordic Homer", and by 1800 Europe was going through something of an Ossian craze. Operas on the subject were composed in Denmark, England, France, Germany, and Italy (ibid.).

There were many reasons for the sudden interest in Nordic music in Germany. "The North" had received considerable attention in German literature and philosophy

[51] The title of the work is commonly translated as *Echoes of Ossian*, but Fjeldsøe and Groth (2019, 5) call it *Reminiscences of Ossian*. Neither translation fully captures the meaning of the Danish word *Efterklange*, which denotes not merely an echo but a lingering reverberation or resonance that suggests a more lasting influence.

(Fjeldsøe and Groth 2019, 5). Additionally, the growing nationalistic undercurrents in society meant that there was much interest in national music (ibid.). The northerners were seen to possess some of the ancient Germanic spirit. The phenomenon was strengthened by the fact that Germanic mythology has a great overlap with Scandinavian myth (Dahlhaus 1989b, 72).

The time was therefore ripe for someone like Gade to come along. It is no coincidence that it was Gade who was the first composer to bring the "Nordic Tone" to Germany. Gade had studied under Andreas Peter Berggreen (1801–1880), who in addition to being a composer was also a well-known folklorist who collected (and later published) a large collection of Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, German, English, French, Italian, and Slavic folk songs in eleven volumes. Berggreen has been credited with getting Gade interested in Danish folk music and literature (Andersen 2021).

The Nordic environment was also central to Gade finding his own musical style. After a concert tour in Norway and Sweden, Gade wrote a letter to Berggreen on the 24th of September 1838, stating: "I feel now, for the first time, my own self. [...] Many great, glorious conditions of nature that my corporal eyes have had the pleasure to view have spiritually awakened new emotions and thoughts and given my intellectual activities inspiration and nourishment for a long time" (quoted in Wasserloos 2007, 43). Gade's work would come to influence many other Nordic composers during the nineteenth century, among them Grieg and Nielsen. For those interested in a deeper dive into Gade and the "Nordic Tone", refer to Michael Matte's (2012) doctoral dissertation *Niels W. Gade und der 'Nordische Ton', Ein Musikgeschichtlicher Präzedenzfall.*

Despite Gade's huge influence on the central European perception of Nordic music, his compositions were not the first time that Nordic music had been perceived to contain unique characteristics. For example, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* wrote about old Nordic folk songs already in 1816 in two consecutive issues (35–36). In 1818, Johann Christian Fredrich Hæffner described what he called the *den gamla nordiska skalan* (the old Nordic scale), which according to him included the notes d-e-f-g-a-h-c-d' (Hæffner 1818, 78, quoted in Schwab 1982, 143).[52] The pitch collection of the old Nordic scale is

[52] The pitch h equals B♮ in English notation.

equivalent to that of the Dorian mode. I find it noteworthy that Sibelius (2011 [1896], 322) discussed the exact same scale in his trial lecture when he applied for the position of music teacher of the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki in 1896. Sibelius associated its first five notes with the oldest type of Finnish folk songs while the pitches B♮ and C joined the scale in moments "when the melody assumes an intensified character" (ibid.).

Later, the Norwegian composer and organist Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (1812–1887)—who collected Norwegian folk music that he published in the work *Ældre og nyere norske Fjeldmelodier*—identified what he called the *Langeleika* scale (Schwab 1982, 143). The scale includes the notes c-d-e-f#-g-a-h-c' and therefore features the raised fourth, making the pitch collection equivalent to the Lydian scale. Lindeman's work was invaluable to Norwegian composers such as Grieg and Halvorsen in their exploration of the local music.

As previously discussed, a challenge when it comes to dealing with Nordic music is that the essence of its character depends on how the topic is approached. Schwab (1982, 142) and Ling (1992, 56) both note that there have historically been two primary perspectives on Nordic music, one rooted in the central European tradition, which saw the Nordic countries as an exotic borderland, and a second perspective based in the Nordic countries, which was concerned with how the Nordic and central European impulses should be balanced. In other words, a central question for the Nordic perspective was to what degree the German tradition should be accepted or rejected. Additionally, previous research can also be divided into different categories, including focus on reception-history, musical analysis, or dialectic-sociological aspects, which emphasizes the interplay of different types of music (Ling 1992, 57). I would argue that, in addition to the German and the Nordic perspective, the Anglosphere has also provided a significant perspective on Nordic music (Horton 1963; Yoell 1974; Smith 2002; Grimley 2004, Howell 2020).

Despite these differing perspectives, they all share a common core: Nordic music is primarily defined by the elements that deviate from the norm of western art music. These features were often perceived as ancient, yet their distinction from the expected simultaneously allowed the music to be perceived as modern (Schwab 1982, 142). Dahlhaus (1989a, 97) has argued that the integration of ancient folk music—especially

monodic melodies—was a driving force behind harmonic innovation in classical music during the nineteenth century. The melodies often resisted easy assimilation into simple tonalities, which forced composers to look for more innovative solutions. The use of folk music could therefore serve both as a source of inspiration associated with the past and as a starting point for musical innovation and modernism (Grimley 2006, 101).

3.2 Musical characteristics associated with Nordic music

The following chapters will include an overview of musical characteristics that have been associated with Nordic music. In addition to the scales discussed in the previous section, the Aeolian, Mixolydian, and Phrygian modes are also common in Nordic music. These scales were, however, by no means the only ones associated with Nordic music. The Swedish music director Carl Erik Södling (1819–1884) collected folk music, which he organised according to ten different scale categories: pentatonic major, pentatonic minor, ancient Nordic major (mixolydian), traditional Dorian (which lacks the sixth note), Dorian, Phrygian, ancient Nordic minor, traditional minor, modern minor, and modern major (Gustafsson 2016, 234–236). Södling's categories reflect musicological concepts of his time and do not correspond directly to modern approaches to musical scales and modality.[53]

There has been some resistance to describing the scales found in Nordic music as church modes. The German-born composer Hæffner considered the old Nordic scale qualitatively different from the church modes, partly due to the commonly raised intonation of the 6th and 7th notes of the scale (Geijer, et al. 1880, XXXI). Similarly, Grieg appears to have considered the raised fourth in Norwegian folk music as a remnant of some ancient scale that he could not identify (Utne-Reitan 2021, 78). It seems unlikely that Grieg would not have been aware of the Lydian scale, which suggests that he saw

[53] The terminology suggests a developmental understanding of music, in which terms such as "traditional," "ancient," and "modern" indicate presumed differences in historical origin or developmental stage. Such evolutionary conceptions of musical history were influential in nineteenth-century music scholarship, but the categories should not be understood as an objective classification of historically distinct scales.

the raised fourth in Norwegian folk music as qualitatively different from the church mode (ibid.).

Another musical feature that early on came to be associated with Nordic music was the alteration between major and minor modes (*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, January 27, 1836). An even earlier article highlights that this transition between major and minor often happens between verse and refrain (*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 1816, 36). However, the relationships between keys can be more complicated, and can include different combinations of modes.

In 1842, German critics described Gade's music as having a "dark, misty tone […] [which] vividly recalls Nordic sagas and ballads" (*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik,* February *25,* 1842).[54] They also mention the style of Nordic folk song, which they found especially in moments where the brass scoring combined with arpeggio figures reminded the critics of bards striking their harps before battle (Fjeldsøe and Groth 2019, 5).

Berggreen (who was the teacher of Gade) treated the music of each Nordic country as a subcategory of Nordic music (ibid., 6). Berggreen also provided general guidelines for how to compose a "Nordic" melody. His instructions are non-specific, but include mentions of seriousness, the common use of minor modes, melodic movement from the third to the first degree of the scale, and a steady, even flow in the melodic lines, most often in 6/8 time (ibid.). Fjeldsøe and Groth (2019, 6–7) also make the important observation that the central characteristics of Nordic and national music existed in the culture before the classical compositions that came to represent these ideals.

In a review of Adolf Fredrik Lindblad's (1801–1878) collection of Swedish folk songs, the reviewer notes the inventiveness that is necessary when harmonising ancient melodies (*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, February 14, 1840). This observation resonates with Dahlhaus's opinion outlined above, that the harmonisation of ancient melodies was a driver of harmonic innovation during the nineteenth century. The review of Lindblad's collection also draws attention to a specific harmonic solution: "a frequently used

[54] "Der düstere, nebelhafte Ton in dem Werke erinnert lebhaft an die nordischen Sagen und Balladen [...]"

harmonic cadence through the *Sextaccord* (first inversion) on the fourth (subdominant) of the key, especially in the minor mode, instead of the dominant chord, which seems to combine the effect of both a plagal and an authentic cadence"[55] (ibid.). Interestingly, the use of the minor subdominant in place of the dominant in this context resembles what modern theorists might describe as a 'negative harmony' inversion of the dominant chord. While the concept of negative harmony was developed much later, the harmonic relationship between these two chords reveals an intriguing symmetry.[56]

Nordic music has traditionally been associated with simple musical forms, such as the song form. The Swedish poet, composer, and cultural figure Gunnar Wennerberg (1817–1901) spoke highly of the Nordic folk music's simple and naive character, which he associated with song-form (Tegen and Jonsson 1992, 48). Similarly, the Swedish composer and music critic Wilhelm Peterson-Berger (1867–1942) expressed the opinion that Nordic music was intrinsically song-like in nature, and as such was ill suited for musical development (*Dagens Nyheter,* February 23, 1898). The Swedish musicologists Martin Tegen (1919–2019) and Leif Jonsson (1992, 49) even go so far as to claim that Peterson-Berger thought Nordic music was incompatible with higher musical forms.[57]

The common root of all of the musical features outlined above is that they have a connection to the local folk music of the Nordic countries. Much of Nordic folk music can trace its lineage back to central European melodies and dances that were introduced to Scandinavia starting around the fifteenth century. For example, the oldest *polskas* in Folkmusikkommissionen's (FMK) collections often bear Polish or German names, suggesting that the early impulses were from these areas (Gustafsson 2016, 263).

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[55] "[…] eine öfters angewandte harmonische Schlußweise durch den Sextaccord auf der Vierten (Unterdominant) der Tonart, namentlich der weichen, statt des Dominantaccordes, was die Wirkung eines plagalischen und authentischen Schlusses zu vereinigen scheint."

[56] Negative harmony is a transformation of melodic or harmonic material by reflecting all pitches around a central axis located between the tonic and the dominant (i.e. between the major and minor third of a scale). This inversion creates harmonic progressions that mirror the original ones, offering a sense of symmetry while changing the character.

[57] I would argue that Tegen and Jonsson go somewhat beyond Peterson-Berger's original statements in their interpretation.

Gustafsson (ibid.) also notes that Polish, German, Slovakian, and Hungarian collections from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be strikingly similar to Swedish manuscripts from the same period. As a point of curiosity, it can be mentioned that the spelling of *polska*—which is one of the most popular dances in Swedish folk music—is identical to the feminine form of the Swedish word for Polish: "polska".

Despite the importance of these central European influences, it does not mean that there was no music in the Nordic countries before the introduction of central European songs and dances. One of the oldest notated Nordic pieces of music is the secular song "Drømde mik en drøm i nat", which is found on the *Codex runicus* from the late thirteenth century (Horton 1963, 28). There are examples of even earlier religious hymns (Herresthal 1997, 56–57). Musical instruments, such as bone flutes, "lurar", and bowed lyra, indicate that the history of music in the Nordic countries is far older, with the oldest bronze horns being from around 1800 BCE (Lund 1997, 34). This indicates that the influx of new music that began around the fifteenth century encountered an already existing, ancient Nordic musical landscape. This means that some aspects of the Nordic musical tradition may have truly ancient roots, despite being affected by different influences over the centuries.

An interesting association between folk music and compositional technique concerns the development of short motives as "seeds" or "buds", which gradually send out new "shoots" as the music develops. This technique is obviously not exclusive to Nordic music, nor does its presence in a composition necessarily indicate an influence from folk music. Nevertheless, the musicologists and Grieg-scholars Finn Benestad (1929–2012) and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe (1926–2013) (1988, 67) specifically associated this technique with music played on the Hardanger fiddle. Interestingly, Sibelius (2011 [1896], 323) also described Finnish rune melodies as "theme with variations" in his trial lecture when he applied for the position of music teacher of the Imperial Alexander University. The development of short motives rather than larger themes was one of the strongest commonalities I could find in my own article that focused on four Nordic violin sonatas (Silén 2024, 168).

In addition to the observations outlined above, numerous other aesthetic tendencies exist that are common in Nordic music. Among the most significant is the use of nature, and specifically Nordic nature, as a source of inspiration. The allusion to nature can

either be imitational, such as the use of musical gestures reminiscent of bird song, or evocative, creating a mood associated with nature.

Dahlhaus (1989b, 307) argues that the evocation of nature is usually accomplished negatively, by subverting the expectations that lie at the core of most Western classical music. This is often accomplished through the use of static textures—musical moments that, for example, can appear harmonically static while remaining rhythmically or melodically active. The technique has been described as *Klangfläche* that are "outwardly static but inwardly in constant motion" (ibid.). Dahlhaus (ibid.) further argues that *Klangfläche* conveys a landscape, because it is exempted both from the principle of teleological progression and from the rule of musical texture that nineteenth-century musical theorists referred to as 'thematic-motivic manipulation'. He (ibid.) elaborates on this idea by describing these moments as "being excluded from the imperative of organic development which, at least in the mainstream of compositional history, dominated the thematic and motivic structure of nineteenth-century music as well as its harmonic schemes."

Building on this idea, Juha Torvinen and Susanna Välimäki (2020, 173) have introduced the concept of "The Nordic Drone", which describes sustained musical textures that use barren pedal points, drones, stable chords, clusters or sound masses, and other long-lasting or repetitive gestures, combined with hushed, muted, and often dark timbres. They argue that these static moments "seem to suggest a mode of subjectivity beyond individuality or agency, and hence a depersonalized affect" (ibid.). They show that this technique appears in the work of composers ranging from Sibelius and Leevi Madetoja (1887–1947) to Erik Bergman (1911–2006), Kaija Saariaho (1952–2023), and Anna Thorvaldsdottir.

A related perspective is offered by Torvinen (2019, 99), who has argued that the 'northern tone' is "connected to the temporal process of eluding fixed musical subjects or, better, musical singularities—idiosyncratic musical themes, motifs, melodies, rhythms, timbres, topics and tropes etc." This means that music that appears driven by organic development may instead be interpreted as the avoidance of excessive individualisation (ibid.). Torvinen thus compares the northern tone to an atmosphere, in which the music unfolds through relations rather than through clearly individuated musical elements with fixed meanings (ibid.).

Partly related to the previous examples, the British musicologist Daniel Grimley has written extensively about the idea of landscape in nineteenth- and twentieth-century music. He argues that landscape can express itself on many different levels, including structurally (Grimley 2006, 145). Grimley mentions the following musical gestures that he associates with landscape: "diatonically dissonant sonorities, linear chromatic voice-leading progressions and various categories of nature sounds" (ibid.).

While musical landscapes and depictions of nature form an important piece of the puzzle in understanding Nordic music, there is another, less-explored aspect that may be equally significant. As mentioned previously, there often appears to be a connection between language and music. Research into songs by Finnish composers that were composed to Finnish, Swedish, and German texts support the notion that the language used seems to affect the melodic material (Konttinen 2013, 245–248). Although this study focuses on vocal music, it nonetheless suggests the possibility that linguistic prosody may leave traces in instrumental music as well. With this in mind, it could be argued that one ingredient of Nordic music is that it has been influenced by the prosody of one of the Nordic languages.

In addition to the observations mentioned above, I have drawn inspiration from an article by the Finnish musicologist Mikko Heiniö (1991). His article "Suomalaisen musiikin suomalaisuus" (The Finnishness of Finnish music) explores the question of which music can, or should, be considered Finnish. One of the strengths of his article is that it highlights the difficulty—if not futility—of coming up with unambiguous categories. It therefore makes the reader think, rather than providing an overly simplistic answer. For that reason, the same thought process is valuable when it comes to Nordic music as well. Heiniö's (ibid.) article presents the following categories, which I have adapted to Nordic instead of Finnish music:

1. It is composed by a composer who was born or is living in the Nordic countries.
2. It relates to Nordic history.
3. Its name or words refer to the Nordic countries.
4. It contains Nordic folk music.
5. It is "Sibelian", "Griegian", or "Nielsenian" in character.
6. It is stylistically traditional, underdeveloped or limited, or not international.
7. It is Nordic in character; for example, dark, melancholic, or sluggish.

These categories do not provide unequivocal rules for defining Nordic music, but instead offer a framework for thinking about the question of what makes music Nordic. The musical characteristics discussed in these chapters are also not unique to Nordic music, but they occur in different combinations and interactions across Nordic musical contexts. This understanding can be further enriched by Dahlhaus's (1989b, 38) observation that "musical character resides not in a single feature but in a configuration of features." Similarly, Torvinen (2019) has argued the 'northern tone'—as far as it exists in music—is usually attributed to the compositional whole rather than to smaller musical units.

My general attitude towards the attempt to provide an understandable and practically applicable approach to the elusive question of Nordic music draws on the idea that classifications within art need to be learned through encounters with relevant examples (Nordenstam 2005, 90). If we accept the necessity for a conceptual link between examples illustrating a concept or idea, and the concept or idea itself, we can often gain more clarity by encountering well-chosen examples than by trying to understand the concept in the abstract (ibid., 88–89). Nordenstam (ibid., 96–97) gives the example of the art style called Neoplasticism, which has been defined by a set of 'laws'. However, these 'laws' only become truly meaningful once grounded in actual examples. More generally, he argues that creative fields consist of 'open concepts' that resist essential definitions (ibid., 87). My aim is therefore not to define what Nordic music is or is not, but to present a series of contextualized examples that offer a sense of Nordic music rather than a rigid boundary.

The following subchapters have much in common with the study of musical topics, or topic theory. Both approaches are concerned with how musical characteristics acquire significance in relation to their surrounding cultural and historical contexts. Both can therefore bring contextual knowledge to bear on the interpretation of particular musical passages. The difference lies less in the musical characteristics under consideration than in the question that their identification is intended to address.

Topic theory is a diverse field of research concerned with the ways in which culturally and historically situated musical characteristics can contribute to the interpretation and understanding of music. One influential early formulation is found in Leonard Ratner's (1916–2011) seminal book *Classic Music* (1985, 1), where musical characteristics or topics

are discussed in relation to the moods, attitudes, and images with which they could be associated among composers, performers, and listeners. Raymond Monelle (1937–2010) subsequently developed a more explicitly semiotic account of musical topics in *The Musical Topic* (2006), focusing particularly on the hunt, military, and pastoral. More broadly, topic theory provides ways of relating recognisable musical characteristics to culturally and historically situated conventions and associations, thereby allowing such knowledge to contribute to the interpretation of musical passages.

The present exploration of Nordic characteristics begins from a different question: what becomes visible when Sibelius's music is approached from a Nordic perspective? Having established the numerous connections between Sibelius and the wider Nordic cultural sphere in the preceding chapters, the question is whether these connections have an audible counterpart in his music. To approach this question, it is first necessary to develop some understanding of what has historically been considered characteristic, significant, or otherwise relevant to Nordic music. The following chapters therefore examine musical characteristics that have been highlighted, discussed, or otherwise given significance within this musical context, and use this material to establish a horizon from which Sibelius's music can subsequently be approached.

This means that the identification of a common musical characteristic in Nordic music does not in itself imply any particular interpretation or establish it as a topic. It merely highlights it as something that has historically been associated with Nordic music. Many of the characteristics discussed below, such as modality, open fifths, or static textures, can be found in numerous other musical traditions as well. Their relevance here derives from the fact that they have acquired historical significance and therefore can become points of attention when approaching Sibelius from a Nordic perspective. A modal passage, for example, does not become Nordic simply because modal scales are used in Nordic folk music. Rather, awareness of that history makes the modal passage available for consideration within this contextual horizon. Its significance for an individual work remains open to interpretation.

To illustrate this dynamic, we can consider the appearance of the Grieg formula in the opening of Sibelius's *Ballade*, op. 115, no. 2. Here the formula consists of a falling minor second followed by a falling major third, a motive strongly associated with Grieg. This invites consideration of its relationship to Grieg and to the broader Nordic musical

context. Was Sibelius consciously referring to Grieg, or does the formula arise as a consequence of Sibelius's own melodic and harmonic writing? Does the formula acquire significance from its surrounding musical context, or is the resemblance ultimately coincidental? Depending on how such details are understood, a performer may choose to highlight, ignore, or even attempt to hide such tonal relationships.

The identification of characteristics which became associated with Nordic music was itself situated within particular horizons. When authors highlight particular musical features, their observations reflect historically shaped perspectives. These accounts are therefore not treated here as definitive statements about what Nordic music essentially is. Rather, they provide evidence of what particular listeners, musicians, or scholars considered noteworthy within particular historical contexts. Bringing such observations into the present inquiry makes this knowledge available within the interpreter's horizon. The purpose is not to establish that a particular feature makes Sibelius's music Nordic, but to allow familiar musical phenomena to be encountered from a Nordic contextual perspective. What follows from that encounter is left open to interpretation.

The subsequent chapters will explore to what extent these categories and musical elements outlined above can be found in music for violin and piano by Sibelius and his Nordic contemporaries. I have chosen the following subcategories to discuss and explore: geographical considerations; folk music influences; allusions to nature; Nordic musical character; influence of prosody; a question of causality, is Sibelius's music Nordic or Nordic music "Sibelian". The exploration of folk music influences is the largest category and includes the following subcategories: folk music imitations; folk music quotations; the assimilation of classical music into the folk tradition; motivic elements from folk music; modal scales; motivic rather than thematic development.

Geographical considerations

As we can observe, Heiniö's first three categories—which concern nationality, history, or the name of the works—are easily understandable but do not tell us much about the content of the music. They provide us with relatively clear categories for discussing Nordic music, but even these raise some questions. We could question if all music from the Nordic countries is equally Nordic?

Could it be argued that the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Denmark and Norway) have more in common given their linguistic affinity and their interconnected cultural histories? For example, after the Nordic Music Days in 1932 the Danish writer and critic Richard Hove (1892–1965) (1932) argued that "the 'actual Finnish' has nothing to do with Scandinavia". The question about Nordic kinship was brought up again after the Nordic Music days in 1956, when the composers Per Nørgård (1932–2025) and Karl-Birger Blomdahl (1916–1968) had a somewhat heated exchange (Fjeldsøe and Groth 2019, 12–13).

Regarding the second point, which regards works related to Nordic history, I have not come across any obvious examples of works for violin and piano which relate to Nordic history. One might argue that the most famous musical works became influential enough to have at least a minor influence on the history of Nordic music, but this does not in my opinion suffice for fulfilling the requirement of this category. One borderline example of a violin work that did carry historic significance was Bull's *Sæterjentens Søndag* (the Herdgirl's Sunday), which became popular in many different versions and the melody of which was sung to many different texts. This included a version to a nationalistic text by Tønnes Rolfsen (1815–1882) called "Norsk Frihedsmarsch" (Norwegian Freedom March), which was sung on the Constitution Day of Norway on the 17th of May 1850 (Haugen 1992, 248). One could argue about whether this constitutes an example of a work that "relates to Nordic history".

Regarding the third category, which addresses if a work's name refers to the Nordic countries, there are some examples of pieces for violin and piano that fit this category. However, most works that potentially fall under the Nordic super-category refer to the individual nations rather than to the Nordic countries as a whole. There are a few examples of orchestral music that fit this category, such as Edvard Grieg's *Two Nordic Melodies*, op. 63, and the Faroese composer Sunleif Rasmussen's work *Nordika*. Another interesting example is *Sangen i Norden* (the Song in the North) in ten movements from 1929, to which Sigfús Einarsson (1877–1939), Leevi Madetoja, Johan Halvorsen, Kurt Atterberg (1887–1974), and Fini Henriques all composed movements.

For violin, there are also a few examples of works that clearly reference the Nordic countries. Henriques composed a *Nordic Dance*, Aulin's *Midsommardans* (Midsummer

dance) was published under the name *Nordische Tanz* in Germany, and Gade published a work called *Volkstänze im nordischen Character*, op. 62. Gade's work includes four dances.

Other minor works include Grieg's op. 17, which is usually described as *Norwegian Dances and Folk Songs*, but Edition Peters published them under the name *Nordische Tänze und Volksweisen* in ca. 1895. Also, Jacob Adolf Hägg (1850–1928) composed *Kleine nordische Lieder ohne Worte und Präludien* in 1898.

However, even this category can in some cases get complicated. Can all national works from the Nordic countries automatically be considered Nordic music? For example, are the individual nations' national anthems Nordic, or are they so strongly linked to the respective nations that they avoid categorisation within a larger context?

The Finnish national anthem has some additional controversy. While Pacius's song "Vårt land" (Finnish: "Maamme", English: "Our country"), which uses a text by the Swedish-speaking Finnish poet Runeberg, has had a huge importance within Finnish culture, the song was controversial for a long time. Part of it had to do with claims that the song's melody was borrowed from a German drinking song (Suomalainen 1952, 53–54). Mäkelä (2009, 129–137) has explored German songs that may have served as a model for "Vårt land" without finding a clear candidate. As a point of curiosity, it can be mentioned that a song that used the same words by Runeberg but a melody by Jacob Axel Josephson (1818–1880), was so popular that it served as the Swedish national anthem during the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in choral settings (Jonsson 1997, 252).

Songs in general provide an additional challenge to categorisation, as the words and the music may suggest different answers. One striking example is a song published under the name "Suomen laulu" (Finland's Song). Using Heiniö's third category, this song, with its openly patriotic message, should obviously be considered Finnish and therefore fit within the Nordic super-category. There is, however, a slight problem. The song borrows the melody from Joseph Haydn's (1797) "Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser", which is better known as the German national anthem (quoted in Tarasti 2016, 62). This suggests that a mere reference to either the Nordic countries as a group or to one of the individual nations does not automatically make the music Nordic. Somewhat similarly, we can question whether the German composer Max Bruch's (1838–1920) *Swedish Dances*, op. 63, for violin and piano, should be considered Nordic.

Folk music influences

In terms of clearly identifiable characteristics of Nordic classical music, references to folk music—whether through quotation or imitation—are arguably the most important. Compared to other musical elements, folklorism in music has the advantage of having a relatively clear link to Nordic culture, whereas other musical features, such as droning or allusions to nature, only become Nordic through interpretation or association.

During the eighteenth century, folk melodies gradually began finding their way into performances of different kinds. Carl Michael Bellman's (1740–1795) singspiel *Fiskarne* (The Fishermen) from 1773 is an early example of borrowing folk music and placing it in a different context (Horton 1963, 84). Bellman—an eighteenth-century troubadour—was not a classical composer by today's standards, but his work had a considerable impact on culture, especially in Sweden (ibid., 85). In the beginning of the nineteenth century the author Anders Fryxell (1795–1881) used the folk song *Värmlandsvisan* (Song of Värmland) in his play *Värmlandsflickan* (The Girl of Värmland) in 1814 (ibid., 82). Similarly, the Norwegian musician Waldemar Thrane (1790–1828) introduced a traditional Norwegian melody into a concert performance of the Norwegian author Henrik Anker Bjerregaard's (1792–1842) *Fjaeldeventyret* (The Mountain Story) in 1824. One of the first major works of classical music to include Nordic folk music was Kuhlau's (1786–1832) *Elverhøj* in 1828 (ibid. 80–81).

A few decades later, Finnish folk music began appearing in classical compositions. For example, Pacius used a Karelian melody in his opera *Prinsessan af Cypern* in 1860 (Vainio 2009, 342). Another example is Kajanus's *Finnish Rhapsody* from 1881, which contains a few folk melodies (Vainio 2002, 108). These examples predate Sibelius's compositions that show a folkloristic influence by a few decades.

The increasing importance of folk-influences in Nordic classical music was strengthened by a growing interest in regional folk culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The perceived value of cultural roots led to numerous efforts to collect melodies, stories, dances, and other culturally important traditions for prosperity. For the topic of this thesis, some of the most important collections include Andreas Berggreen's eleven books of *Folkesange og Melodier faedrelandske og fremmede* (1842–1870), Ludvig Lindeman's *Norske Fjeldmelodier* from 1841 and the three volumes of *Ældre og nyere*

Fjeldmelodier (1853–1867), Emil Sivori's (1864–1929) *Kansanlauluja Mäntyharjulta* (1887), and Erik Geijer's (1783–1847) and Arvid Afzelius's (1785–1871) *Svenska Folkvisor från forntiden* (1814–1816) and *Svenska fornsånger* (1834–1842). Sivori's collection is of particular interest, because it is known that Sibelius had access to it when he worked on *Kullervo,* op. 7 (Goss 2009, 130).[58]

As an indication of the breadth of the Nordic folk music tradition, it can be mentioned that in 1919 the Finnish musicologist Otto Andersson (1878–1969) was tasked with collecting and publishing folk music that was used by the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland (O. Andersson 1934, XIII). The material was collected exclusively from Swedish-speaking areas along the Finnish coast. Despite limiting the material to only a specific minority and additionally limiting the search to a small geographical area in Finland, the resulting collection filled six large volumes that contains over 4000 songs and dances.[59]

Folk music quotations

The folk music tradition can be approached in many different ways by composers and musicians. The Norwegian violinist Ole Bull was of the opinion that Norwegian music already stood ready and waiting on the mountain tops, and the only thing that had to be done was to bring it down (Herresthal 1993, 150). Many other composers—such as Grieg and Halvorsen—considered the folk tradition an invaluable resource, but one which nonetheless had to be reworked or adapted for a classical setting (Grimley 2006, 38). A third option was to imitate rather than quote folk melodies. The third option was Sibelius's primary *modus operandi*. In some cases the flow of influences was reversed,

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[58] Sibelius also had access to a second collection of folk songs while working on *Kullervo*. The exact collection remains unknown, but research suggests that it was a Russian collection (Goss 2009, 130). In addition to published collections, Sibelius encountered Finnish rune singing firsthand while composing *Kullervo*. In December 1891, he met the rune singer Larin Paraske in Porvoo, listened to her singing, and made notes on melodic contours and rhythms (Tawaststjerna 1992, 196). The following year he travelled to Karelia during his honeymoon to collect rune songs, further deepening his understanding of the tradition (ibid., 198).

[59] The total number is most likely substantially larger, as I have been unable to locate the second part of the series *Folkvisor*.

meaning that classical compositions took on a status similar to folk melodies in cases where they gained strong popularity.

Bull actively performed Norwegian music, and even used the Norwegian folk instrument the Hardanger fiddle for concerts abroad (Herresthal 1993, 40). He created his own potpourris, which suggests that he adapted the music for his own needs despite his idealism towards Norwegian folk music. Bull's interests were, however, not exclusively Norwegian; he also included folk tunes from other countries in his performances (ibid.).

Bull's *Et Sæterbesøg* (A Mountain Vision) gives a glimpse into how he used folk tunes in his work. All but one of the melodies can be traced to folk melodies. The work opens with a Norwegian *gangar*, a folk dance with roots in the Hardanger fiddle tradition (Haugen 1992, 246). The work also includes the folk melodies "Er ser deg ut' for gluggen", "Den bakvendte visa", and the *halling* "Aa so sudla ho mor paa rokkjen sin" (ibid.). Only one melody, which became known as *Sæterjentens Søndag* (The Herdgirl's Sunday), was originally composed by Bull himself.

From a performance perspective, it is noteworthy that Norwegian folk music also affected Bull's approach to violin technique. He was fascinated by the way Hardanger fiddlers commonly played on multiple strings at once. Bull began using a flattened bridge to incorporate this technique into his playing (Schweitzer and Deneke 1933, 794). The result of this experimentation can be seen in works such as his *Quartet for Solo Violin, IOB 21* from 1834, and *Polacca Guerriera,* which ends with a coda where repeated sixteenth notes should be played on all four strings simultaneously. Bull also experimented with different bows, apparently using both a unique curved bow as well as a bow that was two inches longer than a regular bow (ibid. 793; Bull 1882, 361).

The following generations of Norwegian composers took after Bull in their interest in Norwegian folk music, although they approached it in a somewhat different manner. Even Lindeman—whose collections played such a central role in inspiring Norwegian composers—thought the folk tunes needed artistic reworking in order to serve as the foundation for a national art (Herresthal 1993, 150). This was also the approach taken by Grieg, Halvorsen, and Svendsen.

To highlight how openly Grieg used folk music, we can use the example of his *4 Norwegian Dances*, op. 35, which were originally composed for piano four hands, but were

later arranged for solo piano, orchestra, violin and piano, and many other instruments.[60] These dances became popular and were included in a performance of the play *Peer Gynt* in 1886 (Heinemann and Steen-Nøkleberg 2017, IV). But when Max Abraham (1831–1900)—who was the head of the publishing house C. F. Peters—suggested that the dances should become part of the *Peer Gynt* Suite, op. 55, Grieg rejected the idea. He said: "Using no. 2 of the Norwegian Dances will not work, because the theme is not by me, but borrowed from a folk dance. Everything in Peer Gynt must be original" (letter to Max Abraham, 12 February 1892, quoted in Heinemann and Steen-Nøkleberg 2017, IV).

Grieg's *Norwegian Dances* also have an identifiable link to Halvorsen's *Norwegian Dances* for violin and piano. They both used Lindeman's folk music collection as a source of inspiration. The second dances in both collections are particularly similar, as both are based on a jumping dance called *halling* from Eastern Norway (Dybsand 2010, 8). Halvorsen additionally used two separate folk tunes in his first *Norwegian Dance*, a *springar* from Østerdalen, and a melody that later became popular as a children's song (ibid. 7–8). Halvorsen's work also showcases how folk melodies can be adapted for classical music, as the folk song is not played in its original form, but is instead used as a starting point for the violin's figurations (ibid.).

Halvorsen also used folk melodies in *Air norvégien*, op. 7. The work follows in the footsteps of Bull's *Et Sæterbesøg,* which Halvorsen himself regularly performed in concerts (ibid., 8). An interesting detail is that all the folk tunes Halvorsen quotes in his work have a connection to Christian mysticism or Norse folklore (ibid.). These include "St. Thomas-klukkelåten", "Huldrelokk" which includes the song of a forest spirit called a *hulder*, the troll song "Åsmund Frægdegjæva", and the *halling* "Underjordisk musikk" (ibid.).

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[60] As a point of curiosity, it can be mentioned that the arrangements for both orchestra, and for violin and piano, were made by the Czech violinist Hans Sitt (1850–1922), who was the brother of the violinist Anton Sitt (1847–1929), who was the very first violin teacher at the Helsinki Music Institute from 1882 to 1885 (Dahlström 1982, 54). When Anton Sitt left the music institute, he instead joined the Helsinki Orchestral Society, and also taught at the orchestra's music academy (Vainio 2002, 172). Anton Sitt also arranged and published Finnish folk dances (Arvola and Sipilä 1987, 21).

In a similar way, Julius and Amanda Röntgen-Maier's *Swedish Songs and Dances,* op. 6, include direct quotations of Swedish folk music. For example, the fourth dance includes the folk song *Näckens polska,* which can be traced back to Afzelius's collection of Swedish folk melodies.

In an interview with Alberto Gasco of *La Tribuna* in 1923, Sibelius firmly stated that he never used folk music in his compositions, but only applied their style and character (Barnett 2007, 302). This is likely true for Sibelius's mature production, but some of his early works use folk music. Goss (2009, 120) has noted that Sibelius included two folk melodies, both taken directly from Sivori's collection, in his *Allegro* for brass septet and triangle from 1889. The opening to the song *Dansen i Rosenlund* is also similar to the folk song *Kopparslagarevisan* (The Coppersmith's Chantey), which Sibelius knew from his youth (Goss 2009, 154–155; Goss 1996, 91–93).[61]

Folk music imitations

In many cases the search for a clear source for a folk melody is inconclusive. Melodies existed in countless different variations, so the lack of an exact quotation may not always be indicative of a lack of a source.[62] However, in many cases the style of folk dances and songs can be imitated without quoting them directly. Many of the works I have performed during my doctoral studies have sections that fall into this category.

Some of the most obvious examples can be found in Fini Henriques's *Nordic Dance* and Julius and Amanda Röntgen-Maier's *Swedish Songs and Dances No. 6,* both of which contain melodies that intuitively feel very folk-like in style. Similarly, Tor Aulin's *Midsommardans,* op. 18 (Midsummer dance)[63]—despite its many virtuosic passages that feel more akin to music by Henryk Wieniawski (1838–1880) than folk music—contains themes that have

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[61] Tawaststjerna (1992, 213) also mentions that Sibelius's *Impromptu*, op. 5, no. 2, is claimed to include a Karelian Trepak, but that he was unable to locate the original dance.

[62] The amount of folk music in the numerous collections has also made a full review of their contents impossible during my work on this thesis.

[63] In German, the piece was known as *Nordischer Tanz*. For the sake of completeness, it can be mentioned that Aulin also published a collection of *Swedish Dances*, op. 30.

clearly been inspired by (if not borrowed from) folk music. Aulin's *Midsommardans* also includes a detail that raises interesting questions about how classical musicians approached folk music during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: he marks the tempo as *Tempo di polska (quasi Mazurka).* While there are many connections between Polish and Nordic folk music, my understanding is that the polska and the mazurka are nowadays considered relatively separate traditions. I find it interesting that Aulin made the decision to mention both dances in the tempo marking.

Broader European influences can also be found in Gade's *Volkstänze im nordischen Charakter* (Folk Dances in Nordic Character) (1887). The four dances were dedicated to the violinist Joseph Joachim, and can be seen as following in the footsteps of Johannes Brahms's (1833–1897) *Hungarian Dances* (1869, 1880), which Joachim arranged for violin and piano. Except for Gade's fourth dance, which begins with a *Menuetto* and ends with a *Reel,* none of the other dances has any indication of what specific dance was used as inspiration. The inclusion of a reel—which is strongly linked to Scotland and Ireland—suggests that Gade used the German word "nordisch" to mean northern rather than Nordic. The northern cultural sphere has historically been seen to include Celtic, Scottish, and Irish culture.

Gade's third dance, which I included in my concert series, does not include any direct reference to any particular dance. However, the style of the dance shares many characteristics with virtuosic Polish dances for violin. For example, the quick dotted rhythms bring to mind Wieniawski's *Polonaise brilliante No. 2,* op. 21 (1852). The phrase structure, which emphasises the second eight note, is also reminiscent of the polonaise found in Vieuxtemps's *Ballade et polonaise*, op. 38 (see Figure 1).[64]

[64] Although Gade emphasises the second eight note of bars 2 and 4 of the phrase, whereas Vieuxtemps places the similarly placed accents in bars 1 and 3.



Figure 1. The opening theme of Niels Gade's Third Nordic Dance and the opening theme of the Polonaise from Vieuxtemps's Ballade et polonaise, op. 38.

It should be mentioned that polonaises were an integral part of Nordic folk music. The Swedish musicologist Adolf Lindgren (1846–1905) noted already in 1893 that there was no clear delineation between polonaises and polskas (Gustafsson 2016, 41). He stated that "the peasantry alternately used the terms polska and polonaise" (Lindgren 1893, 1 quoted in Gustafsson 2016, 41).[65] This also highlights the difficulty of categorising music according to reductionist principles. While Gade clearly associated this musical style with the north, Nordic music (as I understand it) was not my primary association when I worked on the dance.

Sibelius's relationship with folk music in his works for violin and piano is interesting. It is not as obvious as in many other works by Nordic composers, but the folk music influence nonetheless makes itself felt in many instances. The clearest example is arguably in his early Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, where the second movement has the character of a folk song. Sibelius himself described the theme of the second movement as "an authentic Finnish girl who sings on the A string" (Goss 1996, 28).[66]

In Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, it is often difficult to evaluate whether the folk-like themes and melodies are imitations of actual folk music or reimaginations of Grieg's national style. The connection between Sibelius's Sonata and Grieg's Sonata in the same key has been highlighted from the very first biographies. The connection is strong

[65] "[…] allmogen använde om vartannat benämningarna polska och pollonessa."

[66] "Det är en äkta finsk flicka som sjunger på a strängen" (Goss 1996, 181).

enough that Furuhjelm (1916, 62) provocatively posed the question of whether Grieg should be seen as the true father of Finnish music.[67]

The first theme of the second movement undoubtedly has a strong Finnish character, which is supported by chords on the piano that Tawaststjerna (1976, 34) associated with the Finnish folk instrument *kantele*. Other sections of the sonata are harder to pin down. In a letter to his uncle Pehr, dated the 6th of July 1889, Sibelius described the middle section of the second movement in the following way: "Then some peasant lads perform a Finnish dance and try to entice her to smile, but it doesn't work."[68] While Sibelius describes the dance as Finnish, the melodic material is similar to themes found in both Grieg's Violin Sonata in G major, op. 13, and Violin Sonata in C minor, op. 45 (Lünenbürger 2007, 10–11).

When looking for folklorism in Sibelius's music, there is a risk of associating Sibelius only with the ancient Finnish traditions found in the region of Karelia. While this tradition arguably played a huge role in shaping Sibelius's tonal language, he was not oblivious to other forms of folk music. For example, on the 3rd of February 1889 he wrote to his uncle Pehr about a masquerade he had attended. Sibelius himself dressed up as a Finnish kantele player and entertained the other guests with some folk songs he had learned for the occasion (Goss 1996, 102). The evening ended with local fiddlers performing mazurkas, polonaises, minuets, and folk dances (ibid., 103).

This begs the question of whether the dance in the middle section of the second movement of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major was modelled after Grieg, folk dances Sibelius had heard in Finland, or perhaps a combination of influences. Be that as it may, I would argue that if the dance has folkloristic roots, it was likely from a different tradition of folk music than the *Karelian* one.

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[67] This statement served as the starting point for Jorma Lünenbürger's (2007) conference paper "Grieg as the 'father of Finnish music'?", which compared the two sonatas in greater depth.

[68] "[…] sedermera upträda några bondpojkar med en finsk dans och försöka locka henne att le, men det lyckas icke […]" (Goss 1996, 181).

Another example of a folkloristic melody in Sibelius's works for violin and piano can be found in his *Sonatina*, op. 80. As I have pointed out in my article exploring selected Nordic violin sonatas, the *Sonatina* evolves out of a dense motivic core that provides the melodic material for all three movements of the work (Silén 2024, 155–156). In the last movement, which arguably is the most folk-like in character, the motive is developed into a theme that is similar to the folk song "Lintuselle" (ibid., 159). In fact, the first bar of the two melodies is identical. However, the harmonic landscape that Sibelius's theme moves within differs significantly from a folk song.

Other pieces that suggest a folk influence include Sibelius's *Rigaudon*, op. 78, no. 4, and *Rondino*, op. 81, no. 2. The *5 Danses champêtres,* op. 106, which all refer to rural or rustic dances in their titles, also all include elements that suggest folk music influences. Interestingly, these influences are not limited to Finnish or Nordic folk music, but also bring to mind Hungarian and Polish influences. Regarding specifically Nordic influences, there are some melodies that show a rudimentary similarity to folk dances. One example is found in *Danse champêtre*, op. 106, no. 4, where the theme of the middle section shares a rhythmic similarity with a *Menuett* from Dragsfjärd in Finland that is found in Andersson's (1963, 120) collection.[69] *Danse champêtre*, op. 106, no. 5, also gives a strong folk-like impression in both of its main themes, but I have been unable to pinpoint any specific reference.

[69] The same minuet also bears a resemblance to the opening theme of Julius and Amanda Maier's sixth *Swedish Dance.*



Figure 2. Sibelius's Danse champêtre, op. 106, no. 4, compared to a Menuett from Dragsfjärd in Finland.

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The opening to *Danse champêtre*, op. 106, no. 3, is interesting because, in my experience, the dramatic dance gives an international, primarily Hungarian impression. However, the opening seven notes to this dance are identical to a transposed version of the opening to the Rune-song that opens the *Kalevala* (Berggreen 1869, 23). This similarity may be coincidental, but it nonetheless illustrates how Sibelius's tonal language resonates with characteristics of Finnish folk music.



Figure 3. The opening to Sibelius's Danse champêtre, op. 106, no. 3, compared to a transposed version of the opening of the Kalevala as quoted in Berggreen (1869, 23).

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The assimilation of classical music into the folk tradition

Interestingly, it is also possible to find cases where melodies by classical composers have taken on a folk-like status. For example, the aforementioned *Sæterjentens Søndag,* which Ole Bull composed for *Et Sæterbesøg,* is often sung using a text by Jørgen Moe (Haugen 1992, 103). The song, thanks to its many folk-like characteristics such as the inclusion of

inversions of the Grieg-motive and feminine cadences, fits almost perfectly within the folk-idiom.[70]

Carl Nielsen also composed several *folkelige* songs that came to be closely linked to Danish identity. While the intention of these songs appears to have been primarily educational rather than nationalistic, these songs became strongly associated with Danish identity (Vestergård and Vorre 2008, 89). Thirty-three of these songs were published in a collection called *Folkehøjskolens Melodi bog* (The Melody Book of the Folk High Schools) in 1922 that was edited by Nielsen, Thomas Laub (1852–1927), Oluf Ring (1884–1946), and Thorvald Aagaard (1877–1937). Of the 600 melodies included in the book, more than a third were new compositions (ibid., 84). This illustrates how composers could contribute to a living song tradition that had its roots in folklore.

These examples highlight an important aspect of the Nordic folk music tradition. Folk music is not simply a repository of ancient songs, melodies, and dances, but a living tradition that evolves and adapts to the surrounding culture. While the historic sources provide a fascinating glimpse into the past, new folk music is composed to this day. From this perspective the distinction between classical works and folk music can seem unnecessarily reductionistic.

Motivic elements from folk music

Folk music has not only been used as a source of complete melodies; relatively minor motivic or rhythmic elements have also become important building blocks for Nordic composers when developing a national style. These include the Grieg formula, folk-inspired phrase-endings, different uses of open fourths and fifths, and the melodic

[70] The term 'feminine' cadence is somewhat outdated in current musicology. I have nonetheless opted to use it for two reasons. First, it is the term used in the source material I am referring to, and the use of an alternative term risks complicating any comparison with that material. Second, the term 'feminine' cadence, even with its problematic connotations, forms part of this musical feature's historical horizon. Within this thesis the term is not intended to carry any implications of femininity being associated with weakness.

motion from the third to the first scale degree that Berggreen mentioned as part of his formula for composing a Nordic melody.

These short motivic gestures are arguably best understood not as absolute signifiers of Nordicness, but as common gestures within the Nordic musical language. The gestures are not exclusive to Nordic music as the same intervallic relationship can be found in music from other geographical and cultural contexts as well. Their occurrence alone therefore tells us little about the cultural significance of a particular instance of one of these motives. Nevertheless, these musical details are commonplace enough, and have received sufficient scholarly attention, that the identification and recognition of them in this context is relevant. By recognizing them, we may ask whether any particular instance may carry musical, historical, cultural, or interpretive significance, regardless of whether the gesture was consciously employed to evoke such an association or arose spontaneously in the process of melodic writing. Their significance in a particular instance cannot be assumed in advance but must be evaluated in each instance. In combination, however, such gestures may contribute to an atmosphere or intonation that can be associated with the Nordic countries.

The Grieg formula

One of the best-known examples of a typically Nordic motive is the combination of a second followed by a third, which is often referred to as the Grieg formula (Stein 1921, 185; Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1988, 49). The most iconic version of this formula uses a descending minor second followed by a descending major third, but it can also appear in a modal form (which consists of a major second followed by a minor third), reversed, inverted, or in combinations of the aforementioned alternatives (see Figure 4) (Silén 2024, 142–143). Additionally, Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe (1993, 43) have observed that the formula can sometimes appear with a fourth note inserted into the formula.

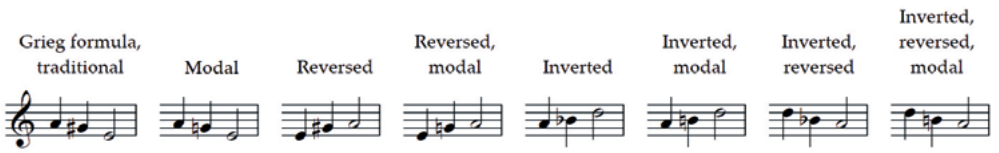


Figure 4. Versions of the Grieg formula: Traditional; modal; reversed; reversed, modal; inverted; inverted, modal; inverted, reversed; inverted, reversed, modal.

Haugen (1992, 246) identifies the formula as a typical folk-inspired trait in his discussion of *Sæterjentens Søndag*, which appears in Bull's *Et Sæterbesøg* from 1848–1849. Notably, the version of the formula in Bull's work is not the most typical one; instead, it first appears in bar 127 in a modal, reversed, and inverted version, where a descending minor third is followed by a major second (see Figure 5). In bar 128, two versions of the formula overlap. It first appears in a reversed version (an ascending major third followed by an ascending minor second), which overlaps with an inverted version (an ascending minor second followed by an ascending major third). The following bar includes a modal version of the motive (a major second followed by a minor third). This use of the motive continues throughout the melody, and also appear in the many quotations of folk music in other sections of the work.[71]



Figure 5. The use of different versions of the Grieg formula in Ole Bull's Et Sæterbesøg (A Mountain Vision). Also note the ending gesture in bar 130 with its characteristic ascending fourth.

Other early uses of the Grieg formula include works by Halfdan Kjerulf. In his work *Norges fjelde*, HK 93 from 1854 for male choir, the motive appears in the second bar in its most iconic form, which features the characteristic descending motion from the leading note to the dominant (see Figure 6).

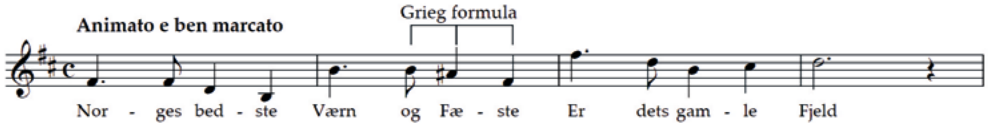


Figure 6. Halfdan Kjerulf's early use of the Grieg formula, a decade before Grieg's first use of the motive.

[71] The simplicity of the three-note formula means that it is commonly found in all kinds of music, not merely in Nordic music, especially when all versions of the formula are observed. However, since the motive is commonly found in Nordic music, it is of interest especially when it is combined with other characteristics that are typical of Nordic music.

Grieg used the formula extensively; hence, the motive is commonly associated with him. One of the most famous appearances of the motive is found in the opening to Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 16, but it is also a central building block in, for example, his Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major, op. 13, from 1865 (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1988, 116; Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1993, 43–50). Bull and Grieg knew each other and even played music together in 1864, so it is interesting to speculate whether Bull had any influence on Grieg's increasing interest in national topics (Haugen 1992, 146). Grieg himself discusses the motive in a letter to the American music critic and author Henry Finck (1854–1926), dated July 17, 1900, where he acknowledges the motive's folk-roots. Grieg writes: "There is one characteristic of our folk music that I have always liked: the treatment of the leading tone, especially when the note following the leading tone is the dominant" (quoted in Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1988, 49). Grieg's observation that the motive is particularly effective when it includes the leading tone calls into question whether other instances of the motive are musically significant.

The three-note Grieg formula is also found in Sibelius's compositions. My impression is that the motive is more commonly seen in its modal form in Sibelius's music than in the traditional form. There are, however, several instances in which a descending second followed by a descending third occurs in an Aeolian (natural minor) or Dorian context, with the motive ending on the lowered seventh scale degree. One such example is found in the opening of the *Allegro energico* of the first movement from Sibelius's Symphony No. 1, op. 39, where the melody consists of the Grieg formula followed by a falling perfect fourth (see Figure 7).[72] The use of open intervals, such as fourths and fifths, has also been associated with Nordic music, and will be discussed in greater detail in the section "Open fourths and fifths" on page 102.

[72] The interpretation that the motive ends on the lowered seventh degree of the Aeolian mode (natural minor) is based on the interpretation that the music is in E minor (which arguably is true, given the big picture). The motive therefore consists of scale degrees 3, 2, and 7. However, at the very beginning of the *Allegro energico*, before the harmonic context has been properly established, the passage could also be heard as beginning in G major. In this more localised harmonic context, the same notes correspond to scale degrees 1, 7, and 5 (or 8, 7, and 5), with the second note functioning as the leading note and the final note as the dominant. This alternative interpretation becomes less convincing as the music unfolds and the E-minor context becomes apparent.

Interestingly, the theme of the third movement of Sibelius's First Symphony also includes a Grieg formula. In this instance the formula is used in its modal version, with an additional note inserted between the second and the third notes—similarly to how Grieg treats the motive in his Violin Sonata No. 2 in G minor (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1993, 43).

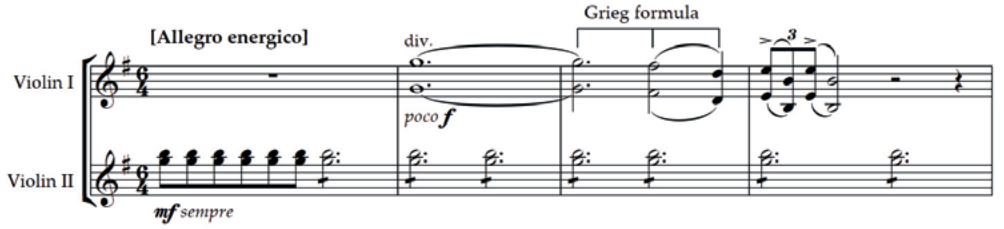


Figure 7. The main theme of the Allegro energico section from the first movement of Sibelius's First Symphony, op. 39.

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The Grieg formula is also found in Sibelius's works for violin and piano. The following discussion does not mention instances where the motive is inverted or in retrograde, recapitulations, or cases where the motive is used in the same context numerous times. Due to my perspective as a violinist, most examples highlight passages in the violin parts to Sibelius's works for violin and piano. The discussion should be understood as illustrative, not as a complete list of every instance of the motive.

In Sibelius's works, the Grieg formula often appears without the characteristic leading-note-to-dominant relationship, instead occurring in other scale-degree contexts. Although this raises the question of whether these instances are coincidental resemblances rather than genuine instances of the formula, I include them here because looser variants have also been discussed in relation to folk influences on Nordic music, as illustrated by Bull's use of the formula above.

For an example of the appearance of the Grieg formula in Sibelius's music, we can highlight bars 109–114 in Sibelius's *Suite in E major*, JS 188, which includes several different representations of the motive. The motive first appears in a modal form in bars

109–110, followed by a modal and reversed variation in bar 111, and finally concluding with the most famous version of the Grieg formula in bars 113–114 (see Figure 8).[73]

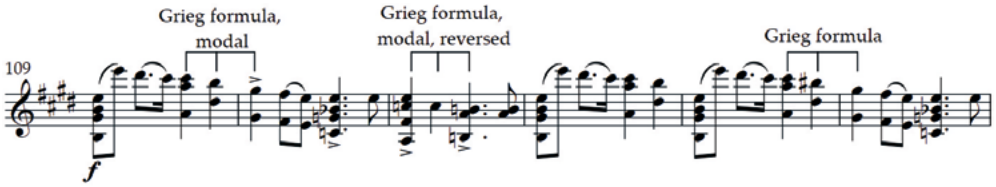


Figure 8. Grieg formulas in bars 109–114 of Suite in E major, JS 188.

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The Grieg formula also appears in several places in the Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. These include the first movement bars 43–46 (see Figure 51 on page 160), bars 73–74 (with an inserted note), and bar 96; second movement, bar 2 (see Figure 34 on page 117); and third movement bar 316.

A later example of the Grieg formula in Sibelius's works for violin and piano is found in the *Ballade*, op. 115, no. 2, in bars 2–3 (see Figure 9). The motive appears first in reversed and then in its most traditional form.

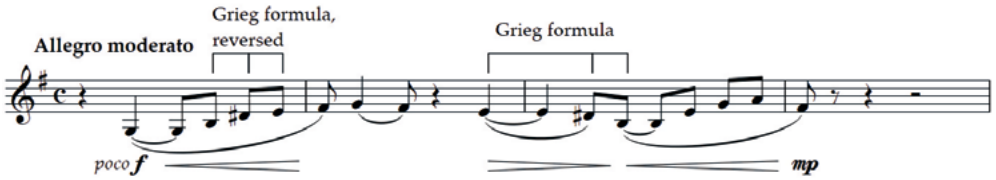


Figure 9. Grieg formulas in the opening bars of Ballade, op. 115, no. 2, bars 1–4.

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A modal variant of the motive can be found in works such as *Andante cantabile*, JS 33, bars 8 (see Figure 20 on page 103), 11–12, 19, 20–21, 22, etc.; *Suite in E major*, JS 188, bars 19, 109–110, 198–199, 202–203; Violin Sonata in F major, 1st movement, bar 3, 64,

[73] The Grieg formula also appears in versions with an additional note inserted into the motive in bars 137 and 139.

65–66, 72; Violin Sonata in F major, 2nd movement, bar 120, 130; and Violin Sonata in F major, 3rd movement, bar 1 (and every other repetition of the theme), 360, 361, 370.[74]

Repeated phrase endings

Another common musical element in Nordic music is the repetition of the final note of a phrase. In the literature on Sibelius this treatment of phrase endings is often associated with influence from Finnish folk music.[75] This is inarguably a common musical feature of Finnish folk music. For example, in Sivori's (1887) collection of Finnish folk songs from Mäntyharju—which Sibelius had access to—12 of the 30 songs end with a repeated final note (4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 21, 23, 29, 30) (see Figure 10). Additionally, song 15 ends with a rhythmically identical gesture, but where the penultimate note is a different pitch than the final note.

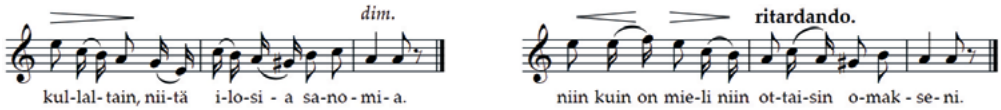


Figure 10. Repeated final notes in the Finnish folk songs "Järven rannalla" (song 4) and "Neitoselle" (song 7) in Sivori's collection of folk songs from Mäntyharju.

While this musical element is commonly associated with Finnish folk music, it is noteworthy that the re-emphasis of the final note was also common in Nordic folk music more broadly. For example, in the first volume of Berggreen's (1842) folk songs and melodies, which focuses on Danish folk tunes, four of the ten first songs end by repeating the final note (songs 1, 2, 3, 7a, 7b, 7c). An additional four tunes end with the same rhythmic gesture, but with the penultimate note being another pitch than the final

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[74] If we use Haugen's looser definition, where the motive merely consists of a second followed by a third that moves in the same direction, we can obviously find even more instances of the motive in Sibelius's music. For example, the Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, includes a version where both the second and the third of the formula are major intervals. In this case the motive uses the raised Dorian sixth and appears in the 2nd movement in bars 11 and 15, and in bars 180–181 and 192–193 of the third movement. The same intervals can also be found in Sibelius's *Andante Cantabile*, JS 33, from 1887 in bar 8 (see Figure 20 on page 103).

[75] See for instance Tawaststjerna (1992, 81, 177, 213).

one (songs 4, 6, 9, 10). In only two of the melodies is a single final note reached on the first beat of the bar (songs 5, 8).

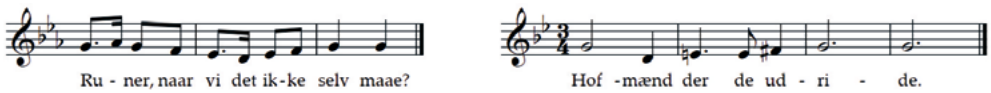


Figure 11. Repeated final notes in the Danish folk songs "Kæmperne paa Dovrefjeld" (song 1) and "Turneringen" (song 2) in Berggreen's collection of folk songs and melodies.

Similar observations can be made regarding Norwegian folk music (Lindeman 1840: Dances nos. 2, 5, 9; Songs nos. 15, 16, etc.), Swedish Dances (Geijer et al 1880: Dances nos. 2:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, etc.), and folk dances collected among the Swedish minority in Finland (Andersson 1963, 1934: *Äldre danser*: nos. 3, 4, 26, 27, etc.; *Äldre folkvisor*: nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, etc).[76] My brief exploration of these sources suggests that the rhythmic gesture seems more common in folk songs than folk dances. The need for the repeated phrase ending is often related to the lyrics. In the material I reviewed, it is also more common to have the penultimate and last note be different pitches than the same, although both variants can be found. In cases where the penultimate note differs from the final note, the gesture often involves a cadence in which the tonic is reached on a weak beat. Such cadences, traditionally termed *feminine cadences* (a gendered term often avoided in contemporary scholarship), have also been associated with Nordic music (Haugen 1992, 246).

These types of endings are also found in Nordic violin music. The rhythmic gestures are often combined with a chord on the final beat, adding additional emphasis. The addition of the chord also means that the penultimate note often differs in octave from the highest pitch of the final chord.

A Nordic example is found in the end of the *Andante* section of Bull's *Et Sæterbesøg* (A Mountain Vision), which features the folk song "Den bakvendte visa" (see Figure 12). In this case, the final note is relatively long compared to the penultimate note, calling into question if this is the same or a different gesture. Additional Norwegian examples

[76] These lists include both cases where the final note is the same pitch as the penultimate note, as well as cases where the rhythmic gesture is the same but the pitch is different.

are found in Halvorsen's *Norwegian Dance No. 1*, at the end of both the main section as well as in the contrasting slow section. The Danish Henriques's *Nordic Dance* includes two different versions of the repeated end note: one where the penultimate note is different from the last note, and one where the pitch is the same, but the octave is different.



Figure 12. Examples of repeated final notes of phrases in Bull's Et Sæterbesøg, Halvorsen's Norwegian Dance No. 1 (two examples) and Henriques's Nordic Dance.

These types of endings are also found in Sibelius's music for violin and piano. They feature most prominently in his Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, where phrases frequently end with repeated notes at the same pitch and octave. See the case study below for additional information.[77]

Sibelius also regularly uses endings that are similar to Halvorsen's *Norwegian Dance No. 1,* where the final note is repeated but the very last note features an accentuated chord. These endings can be found in, for example, Sibelius's *Mazurka*, op. 81, no. 1, *Danse champêtre*, op. 106, no. 2, and *Scène de danse*, op. 116, no. 1 (see Figure 13).

[77] Such phrase or movement endings appear in the first movement in bars 91–92 and at the very end of the movement; in bars 9, 13, 31, and at the very end of the second movement, and in bars 98–99 and at the very end of the last movement.

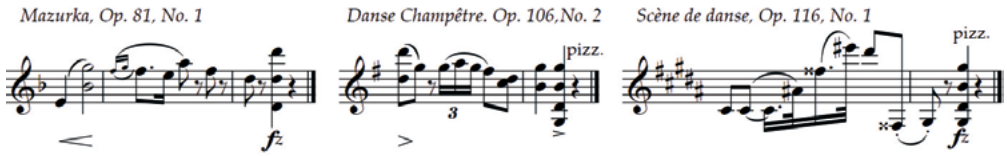


Figure 13. The final bars of Sibelius's Mazurka, op. 81, no. 1, Danse champêtre, op. 106, no. 2, and Scène de danse, op. 116, no. 1, which all feature endings with repeated final notes and an accented chord on the second beat of the bar.

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Endings featuring a descending line from the third to the first scale degree

In addition to the repeated phrase endings, I have noticed another ending gesture that is very common in Sibelius's works for violin and piano and is also found in music by other Nordic composers. That is the use of a stepwise descending motion from the third to the first scale degree. As we recall, Berggreen provided a loose guideline for how to compose a "Nordic" melody, which included this melodic motion, but the context for where in the phrase he would expect this gesture was sadly unclear.[78] This melodic motion is arguably too generic to suggest that it is a specifically Nordic musical trait, but its prevalence in this repertoire warrants attention. From a hermeneutic perspective, recognising such recurring patterns may inform our interpretive horizon even when the patterns themselves offer no definitive explanation of the music.

The gesture is also too prevalent to discuss each instance in detail, but the sheer number of pieces that feature this ending in the repertoire I have included in my doctoral concert series is striking. These include: Svendsen's *Romance*, op. 26, both at the end of the opening section in G major, as well as at the end of the contrasting section in G minor; Bull's *Et Sæterbesøg* at the end of the first short *Allegro* section; Halvorsen's *Air norvégien*, op. 7, both at the end of the first *Andante* section as well as at the end of the *Andante*

[78] The available description does not clarify whether Berggreen envisaged a direct melodic motion from the third to the first scale degree or whether the intervening second degree could also be included.

sostenuto section; Henriques's *Nordic Dance* at the end of the section in D minor; Stenhammar's *Sentimental Romance, No. 2* at the end of most sections; Sinding's *Abendstimmung* at the very end as well as in *Sonate im alten Stil,* op. 99, in movements one, three, and four.

In the case of Sibelius's works for violin and piano, the gesture seems to be even more important. It appears in Sibelius's *Six Pieces*, op. 79, at the very end of the *Souvenir, Tempo di menuetto, Danse caractéristique, Sérénade,* and *Berceuse* (see Figure 14). Only the *Tanz-Idylle* does not feature this gesture at the end. Similarly, in op. 81, the *Rondino, Waltzer, Aubade,* and *Menuetto* all end with the same gesture, with the only exception being the *Mazurka.* It also appears at the end of *Danse champêtre,* op. 106, no. 1, *Humoreske*, op. 115, no. 3, somewhat less obviously in *Danse caractéristique,* op. 116, no. 2, and in *Rondeau romantique*, op. 116, no. 3. It also appears in early works, such as his *Vattendroppar*, JS 216, *Suite in D minor*, JS 187 (bar 101), and *Suite in E major*, JS 188 (bar 56).



Figure 14. The final bars of Souvenir, Tempo di Menuetto, Danse caractéristique, Sérénade, and Berceuse from Sibelius's Six Pieces, op. 79. Five of the six pieces in the opus end with a 3-2-1 gesture.

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Rhythmic motives

In addition to melodic motives, it is also possible to identify rhythmical elements that are common within Nordic music. For example, Tawaststjerna (1965, 106) points out the use of dactylic rhythms (long, short, short) as a common feature of both Finnish folk

music as well as folk music more broadly.[79] A few examples from folk music collections include the polskas 319, 322, 333, 335 and 339 from Andersson's (1963, 142–143, 147–148) collection.



Figure 15. The beginnings to dances 319 and 333 from Andersson's collection of Older Dance Melodies, showing examples of dactylic rhythms in polskas played in the Swedish-speaking regions of Finland.

This simple rhythmic gesture also appears in many Nordic works by classical composers in many different contexts. These include the lyrical and melancholic "Solveig's Song" from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, op. 23 (or the *Peer Gynt Orchestral Suite II*, op. 55), the energetic opening of Grieg's own arrangement of his *Holberg Suite,* op. 40, and also the more playful character of the last movement of Stenhammar's Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19 (see Figure 16). The frequent use of the dactylic rhythm also appears in Sibelius's works for violin and piano, for example in the second movement of his Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, or the last movement of his *Sonatina*, op. 80.

[79] For some reason, the later revision of the Swedish version of the same book have left out this particular detail (Tawaststjerna 1992, 81). The English translation calls it "the Shadow of a Grieg-like folk melody" (Tawaststjerna 1976, 34).



Figure 16. Dactylic rhythms in Grieg's "Solveig synger i hytten", op. 23, no. 23; Grieg's Aus Holberg's Zeit, op. 40; Stenhammar's Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19; and Sibelius's Sonatina in E major, op. 80.

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Another common rhythmic element that I have come to associate with influence from folk music is the use of dotted rhythms. For a few illustrative examples, see for instance dances 578 or 617 from Andersson's (1963, 258, 277) collection (see Figure 17). In the repertoire I have performed for my doctoral concerts, the use of repeated dotted rhythms often coincides with particularly folk-like moments in the music, such as in Röntgen-Maier's *Dance No. 6* from *Schwedische Weisen und Tänze,* or Henriques's *Nordic dance*. In Sibelius's compositions, an example is found in the opening to his Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178 (see Figure 47 on page 144).



Figure 17. Dotted rhythms in folk dance 578 and dance 617 from Andersson's collection, Julius and Amanda Röntgen-Maier's Schwedische Weisen und Tänze, no. 6, and Henriques's Nordic Dance.

It is important to keep in mind that both dactyls and dotted rhythms do not occur only in classical music and folk music from northern Europe; their use extends far beyond these traditions. This means that we should not assume that either rhythmic element necessarily signifies a folk-influence, nor that these elements carry any specific geographical associations. Although these rhythmic gestures are not exclusive to Nordic folk music, their frequent presence within it, and their later use by Nordic composers, suggests that they may have contributed to shaping a shared stylistic vocabulary.

While rhythmic features such as the dactyl and dotted rhythm were shared between classical and folk music, other rhythmic characteristics of Nordic folk music—particularly asymmetrical beat patterns and micro-timing irregularities—remained largely unassimilated. Perhaps these features were deemed too foreign to classical music, or simply could not be satisfactorily notated. For example, within ethnomusicology there has been some debate about to what degree the unevenness of beats was a truly acoustic phenomenon, and to what extent it was psychoacoustic (Johansson 2017). For example, the Norwegian folk fiddler, composer, and researcher Eivind Groven (1901–1977) measured the rhythmic variability of the Norwegian dance, *Tele-springar Markensmondagen,* by tapping a Morse-receiver (ibid., 61–62). Across three different Hardanger fiddlers, his results were highly consistent: the first beat took up 39% of the bar, the second 33%, and the last the remaining 28% (with a variation of only a single percent between the three different musicians). However, later digital analysis showed only a small variation between the beats (ibid.). The question of to what extent such tempo irregularities are an integral part of Nordic folk music remains open to debate, as is the question of whether the phenomenon is top-down—i.e. groove influencing note durations—or bottom-up—the result of the physical execution of the musical details (ibid. 85). These types of irregular tempos have not become part of the performance practice of classical works that take inspiration from folk music.

In addition to the irregularities of beat duration, there are also folk-dances that differ quite substantially from the common treatment of time. Two examples of such uneven dances are "Bergmanpolskan från Orsa" and "Polska efter Omas Per", both of which are from Dalarna in Sweden (see Figure 18). While the notation of these dances varies, they are often notated in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, but where a large triplet takes up the first two beats, effectively giving the dance four beats that are uneven in duration. I have found no examples of these types of rhythms in the classical music of Sibelius or his Nordic

contemporaries. This illustrates how, despite the influence of folk music, not all of its elements found their way into classical compositions.



Figure 18. "Bergmanspolskan från Orsa" and "Polska efter Omas Per" from Dalarna in Sweden, highlighting dances with an uneven treatment of the rhythm.

Open fourths and fifths

Another musical detail often associated with Nordic music is the use of open fourths and fifths, which can serve several different musical functions. Fourths and fifths are, of course, common in all tonal music, but what makes them interesting in this repertoire is not their presence per se, but rather their prevalence in specific musical contexts and expressive functions. My focus within this section is primarily on these intervals as melodic elements, often appearing as upwards-reaching expansive leaps or as closing gestures. The use of open fifths as a drone-like element will be discussed in greater detail in the subchapter on *Klangfläche* or Nordic Drones.

Grimley (2001, 128–129) has discussed these intervals in relation to ancient horn calls in Nielsen's music. He sees them as evoking an idealised idyllic past that can be semiotically interpreted as a symbol of Danish style (ibid., 134). An example of a gesture in Sibelius's works for violin and piano that can be associated with a horn call can be found in his Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, where the folk-like opening phrase of the first movement ends with a firmly placed fanfare-like ascending fourth (see Figure 47 on page 144).

One of the most well-known Nordic examples of the use of a fifth that reaches above the rest of the melodic line is found in the violin's opening melody in Svendsen's *Romance*, op. 26 (see Figure 19). The first half of the melody features a prominent ascending fifth in the second bar of the phrase (bar 22), whereas the second half of the phrase includes a similar gesture using an ascending fourth. The second movement of Stenhammar's

Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19, features a similar gesture in the very first phrase, where the phrase-peak is reached through an ascending fifth (bar 5–6).[80]



Figure 19. The melodic use of the ascending fifths in Nordic music for violin and piano. The first example illustrates bars 20–24 of Johan Svendsen's Romance, op. 26, whereas the second example shows bars 5–8 in Stenhammar's Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19.

A similar melodic gesture, where the peak of the phrase is reached by an open fourth or an open fifth, is found in Sibelius's *Andante cantabile*, JS 33, where both the section in G major and the section in E-flat major include phrases that reach their peak through leaps of either interval (see Figure 20). The piece also features descending fourths as closing gestures, which will be discussed in greater detail below.



Figure 20. Expressive fourths and fifths in the two contrasting sections of Sibelius's Andante cantabile, JS 33 (bars 3–10 and 19–26), that reach above the surrounding melody. Also note the ending gestures, consisting of a descending fourth in the fourth bar of the upper line and in bars 3 and 7 in the lower line.

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Two other examples that show a possible intertextual connection are bars 65–68 in Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, and the D major section from Sibelius's *Menuetto*, op. 81, no. 5, both of which include melodically expressive ascending fifths and sevenths, however in opposite order. The melodic peak of the full phrase is not reached

[80] Similar melodic gestures are also found in Sinding's *Sonate im alten Stil*, op. 99, and Julius and Amanda Röntgen-Maier's *Swedishe Täntze und Weise*.

through the ascending fifth in either case, but the gesture nonetheless shares some of the expressive quality of the previous examples. Yet another interesting example is Sibelius's *Sonatina*, op. 80, where fourths and fifths (and sixths) constitute the core building blocks out of which the rest of the material evolves.[81]



Figure 21. Expressive fifths (and sevenths) in Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178 and Menuetto, op. 81, no. 5.

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Fourths and fifths are also common as closing gestures, as was briefly mentioned in relation to Sibelius's *Andante cantabile*, JS 33. In such cases, the first note often falls on a strong beat, suggesting a rhetorical emphasis, and the gesture is found as both descending and ascending versions. An interesting detail of this gesture is that it is rarely (if ever) used at the very end of a movement, but often seems to serve a role akin to punctuation between two halves of a larger phrase.

The use of fourths and fifths as closing gestures is particularly interesting from an intertextual perspective, as they often appear in similar contexts. The commonalities between the use of these intervals, especially in Sibelius's music, imbue these seemingly generic gestures with broader meaning, shaped by a dialogical understanding of their use across works in the Nordic repertoire. It is the intertextual connections that make them hermeneutically meaningful. One example of this use can be found in Svendsen's *Romance*, op. 26, where the gesture is found in similar functions in bars 64 and 72 (see Figure 22).[82]

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[81] For a broader discussion of Sibelius's *Sonatina*, see Silén (2024, 153–161).

[82] Similar incomplete closing gestures are found in the second movement, *Andantino*, in Stenhammar's Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19, in bars 4 and 10, and in the third movement of Sinding's *Sonate im alten Stil*, op. 99, in bars 23 and 31.



Figure 22. Bars 69–73 in Svendsen's Romance, op. 26, showing the falling fifth as a closing gesture on the dominant chord.

The number of times this gesture appears in Sibelius's works for violin and piano is too great to illustrate with individual examples. Instead, a few examples will need to suffice to highlight its use. In Sibelius's works for violin and piano, this closing motive appears in a few guises: with the upper note on a strong beat, with the upper note as a grace note, with the upper note as an upbeat to a strong beat, and as a less rhythmically active gesture (see Figure 23). The rhetorically strongest version, which has the upper note on a strong beat, is found in *Romance* op. 78, no. 2 (bars 15, 33, 34), *Souvenir,* op. 79 (bar 9, 51), *Sonatina*, op. 80, Movement 3, *Lento* (bar 8, 9), *Mazurka*, op. 81, no. 1 (bar 44), and *Aubade*, op. 81, no. 4 (bars 21, 25, etc.). The first movement of the Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, includes the same gesture with the upper note as a grace note (in bar 260). Examples of gestures where the upper note is an upbeat to a strong beat are found in *Souvenir*, op. 79, no. 1 (bars 21–22, 39–40).[83]

[83] Less rhetorically strong closing gestures that feature a descending fifth can also be found in the Sibelius *Suite in D minor*, JS 187 (bars 97, 114), *Suite in E major*, JS 188 (275–276), and Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, Movement 2 (bar 75) and Movement 3 (bars 174–175).



Figure 23. Examples of different uses of the descending fifth as closing gestures. The examples are from Sibelius's Aubade, op. 81, no. 4 (bars 19–22), Sonatina, op. 80, third movement, Lento (bars 5–8), Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, first movement (bars 257–262), and Souvenir, op. 79, no. 1 (bars 19–22).

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Similar closing gestures also appear where the descending fifth is replaced by a descending fourth. These can be found for example in Sibelius's *Andante cantabile*, JS 33 (bars 6, 14, 21, 25, 38, 46) (see Figure 20). Related gestures can also be found in his *Sonatina*, op. 80 (bar 139), and in the opening of his *Rondeau romantique*, op. 116, no. 3 (bar 11) (see Figure 24). An interesting detail with regards to the example found in the *Sonatina* is that the surrounding music is dominated by a relatively static harmonic landscape where the chords are sustained for several bars. For example, the bars highlighted in Figure 24 are found within a harmonically static field where an E major chord is held for twelve consecutive bars, with only a minor textural change providing variation. Within this static field, the music is characterized by playful scales in the violin that are punctured by closing gestures that feature fourths and fifths. These larger intervals can be seen as interruptions to the otherwise stepwise motion of the violin part.



Figure 24. Descending fourths as motivic closing gestures in the Allegro of Sibelius's Sonatina, op. 80, and the opening Largamente from Rondeau romantique, op. 116, no. 3.

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Similar closing gestures also appear in Stenhammar's Violin Sonata, op. 19, in several places. For example, in the sentence structure of the opening phrase of the second movement, *Andantino,* a descending fourth marks the end of the presentation of the main material in bar 4 before the continuation in bars 5–8 (see Figure 25). In the third

movement the closing fifth appears several times. An illustrative example appears in bars 233–235 where the gesture confirms that the recapitulation has begun.



Figure 25. Descending fourths and fifths as closing gestures in Stenhammar's Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19. The upper line shows bars 1–8 in the second movement, Andantino, whereas the lower line shows bars 227–235 in the third movement, Allegro.

In addition to descending fourths and fifths, we also commonly find ascending versions of the same intervals in similar contexts. A noteworthy example is found in Bull's *Sæterjentens Søndag* (the Herdgirl's Sunday), where every single phrase ends with an ascending fourth (see Figure 5 on page 90).

Ascending fourths and fifths also appear in Sibelius's music as closing gestures. See for instance the major theme of the second movement in Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178 (see Figure 60 on page 176). Another interesting example is found in Sibelius's *Sonatina*, op 80, where the descending fourth and ascending fifth are used in subsequent gestures (see Figure 26).



Figure 26. Bars 137–143 in the first movement of Sibelius's Sonatina, op. 80. These bars feature two closing gestures, first as a descending fourth and four bars later as an ascending fifth.

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Modal scales

As was discussed above, scale systems that differ from the traditional major and minor modes were another feature commonly associated with Nordic music. As mentioned previously, Södling (1819–1884) organised melodies according to ten different scale systems: pentatonic major, pentatonic minor, ancient Nordic major (Mixolydian), traditional Dorian (which lacks the sixth note), Dorian, Phrygian, ancient Nordic minor, traditional minor, modern minor, and modern major. Of these I find that the Dorian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Phrygian, and different types of modal mixtures are the most interesting with regards to this repertoire.

The Dorian mode is arguably the most prevalent in Sibelius's music. He also highlighted its importance during his trial lecture when applying for the position of music teacher at the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki. Interestingly, Sibelius (2011 [1896], 322) mentioned that this scale can be understood as two stacked pentachords, an upper one containing the notes D, E, F, G, and A, and a similar lower one that begins from the pitch G.

The use of modality presents an intriguing challenge when it comes to analysis. Nordic music often contains traces of modality without adhering strictly to it. This raises the question of when a section can be considered truly modal, and when the modal characteristics arise from brief borrowing of tones from closely related scales. This technique is sometimes referred to as modal mixing.

Another challenge arises from the interplay between melody and harmony. Some pieces, such as Svendsen's *Romance*, op. 26, include melodies which, when viewed in isolation, suggest a modal character (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1995, 196). However, in the case of Svendsen's *Romance,* the harmony is centred a fifth below the melody and is firmly rooted in the traditional major and minor scales. This calls into question if the interpretation of the melody being modal is warranted in this case.

The use of modality was a common feature of Sibelius's style. An early example appears in the second movement of his Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, where the main theme has a clear Dorian character. In many other cases Sibelius's use of modality is more varied.

For example, the harmonically static *Impromptu*, op. 78, no. 1 begins in a stable C major (Ionian), but soon begins to shift between the Ionian and Lydian modes (major with a raised fourth), which creates interest and a sense of development despite the harmony remaining static throughout the piece (see Figure 27).



Figure 27. Bars 5–10 (with upbeat) from the violin part of Sibelius's Impromptu, op. 78, no. 1. The music shifts from the Ionian mode to the Lydian mode in the ninth bar with the introduction of the pitch F-sharp.

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Rigaudon, op. 78, no. 4 changes mode for three of the four repeats of the main theme. The first presentation is Ionian (D major), but subsequent repetitions of the theme shift it first to Aeolian (D natural minor) and later adapt to an underlying D major seventh chord, suggesting a transition to G minor (see Figure 28). It could be argued that these variations are not the result of actual modal shifts, but merely the melody's adaptation to the varied harmonies. Nonetheless, these differences highlight how Sibelius transforms his melodies through slight tonal changes.



Figure 28. Bars 1, 17, and 25 from Sibelius's Rigaudon, op. 78, no. 4, showing three slightly altered versions of the same theme, first outlining a D major, then D minor, and lastly D major seventh chord.

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A related example is found in the *Allegro* section of Sibelius's *Ballade*, op. 115, no. 2, where the dance-like melody begins in E major in bar 35 but shifts to A minor in bar 37 (see Figure 29). When the same theme returns in bar 47 the same E major seventh chord resolves into A major instead. This modal mixture does not adhere strictly to any of the church modes, but moves more freely between them, as no specific mode includes all the notes found in these bars. Bars 35–37 could be understood as harmonies derived

from the notes of the melodic A minor scale, but bars 47–49 resists any obvious singular reading.



Figure 29. A comparison of bars 35–37 and 47–49 in Sibelius's Ballade, op. 115, no. 2. The bars are an example of modal mixture, as no singular mode includes all the featured notes.

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In other cases, the use of modality is more nuanced. The first *Danse champêtre*, op. 106, no. 1, treats modality in an interesting way. Both the melodic and harmonic material mostly suggests D Dorian, with B-natural replacing the B-flat of D minor. However, as the slow Largamente section draws to a close, the momentary optimism of the raised sixth is lost as the music at the end of a phrase lands on a G minor chord, which lowers the sixth back to B flat.

Sibelius's op. 116 will be discussed in greater detail in a dedicated case study below, but all three pieces in the opus raise questions about their suggestive use of modality. If we interpret the beginning of the *Scene de danse,* op. 116, no. 1 as a dominant seventh chord, the violin's opening melody suggests a Phrygian mode. However, the specific pitches used in the opening bars all belong to a whole-tone scale, suggesting an alternative

explanation. The opening of the second piece, *Danse caractéristique,* op. 116, no. 2, is tonally ambiguous. The opening chord again initially suggests a dominant function, but as the chord refuses to resolve in the expected manner, the chord gradually begin to give the impression of being a seventh chord on the tonic of a mixolydian scale. The last piece, *Rondeau romantique*, op. 116, no. 3, shifts between the Ionian and the Lydian mode, injecting the music with a unique brightness.

Motivic rather than thematic development

The development of short musical motives as "seeds" or "buds" that gradually generate new material has been associated with Nordic folk music traditions. Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe (1988, 67), for example, connected this approach with Norwegian performance traditions on the Hardanger fiddle. Similarly, Sibelius (2011 [1896], 323) understood Finnish rune melodies as theme with variations. Although motivic development has a long history in classical music, and its presence in a composition does not in itself indicate a folkloristic influence, these associations are nevertheless relevant to the present inquiry.

In my previous article that explored Nordic violin sonatas by Grieg, Stenhammar, Sibelius, and Sinding, I argued that the strongest commonality between the sonatas was a strong reliance on motivic rather than broader thematic development (Silén 2024, 168). More broadly, Sibelius's style of organically evolving musical germs is considered a hallmark of his style (Newman 1983 [1972], 141). Whether this characteristic has folkloristic roots is not determinable, but awareness of such musical germs can bring a sense of coherence to interpretations.

In Sibelius's works for violin and piano, I find the most striking example of this motivic thinking in his *Sonatina*, op. 80. The work begins with an unassuming nine-bar introduction that contains the seed out of which the rest of the work grows. This is all the more remarkable because these bars feel highly ambiguous and almost hesitant. The same opening motive is repeated three complete times, as it is passed between the piano and the violin, with the only difference being registral (see Figure 30). The opening motive's arrival on the long third (C-sharp, E), introduces a harmonic ambiguity, as what initially seemed like a motive in E major now takes on characteristics of C-sharp minor.



Figure 30. Bars 1–7 of Sibelius's Sonatina, op, 80. These opening bars contain the germ out of which the rest of the work evolves.

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This simple introduction introduces at least the following motivic ideas: the rising fourth, and the rising fifth; the dotted rhythm; and, more indirectly, the ascending sixth that is found between the lower third of the first note and upper note of the second note. All these ideas feature heavily in all three movements of the *Sonatina*. Most importantly, the opening interval—the ascending fourth—shows the ambitus of the opening gesture of the main theme of all three movements: in the first and third movements the interval is filled out by an ascending scale, and in the second movement the scale-wise motion is descending (see Figure 31). The first time the fourth is filled by a scalewise gesture is in bar 7 (see Figure 30).



Figure 31. The violin's opening gestures in each of the three movements of Sibelius's Sonatina, op. 80. Notice how the work's very first interval outlines the ambitus that shapes the main themes of all three movements.

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Additionally, as can be seen in Figure 36 on page 119, the motivic ideas outlined above permeate the *Allegro* section of the first movement. It begins with the scalewise motion, spanning a fourth, and continues with pairs of fourths and fifths, which is an inversion of the *Sonatina's* opening bar. These intervals even shape the harmonically static accompaniment, which is built out of an open fifth and an open fourth.

While the technique of developing small musical seeds or germs into larger wholes is definitely a central feature of Sibelius's mature compositional style, in my opinion, it cannot be determined whether this is suggestive of any particular cultural influence (C. Gray 1934, 135, 142, 158). Nonetheless, awareness of such techniques can be used to draw attention to the underlying logic of his music.

Traditional, underdeveloped, or not international?

Nordic music has sometimes been described as traditional, underdeveloped or limited, or as insufficiently international, which raises the question of how such evaluations should be made.[84] Dahlhaus (1989b, 306) argues that exoticism and folklorism usually make use of the same technical devices: "pentatonicism, the Dorian [raised] sixth and Mixolydian [flattened] seventh, the raised second, and finally bass drones, ostinatos, and pedal points as central axes." According to this view, the specific details are less important than their deviation from the central European norm, which gives rise to a sense of otherness. Whether this otherness should be seen as traditional or underdeveloped is arguably up for debate. Heiniö (1991, 29–30) has also addressed the question of how traditional, underdeveloped, limited, or insufficiently international qualities in Finnish music are evaluated, noting that such judgements may differ depending on whether national or international expectations are prioritised.

The term *primitivism*, sometimes associated with such evaluations, requires particular caution because of its historical entanglement with hierarchical conceptions of cultural development (Campbell 2022, 194–195). In this discussion, however, the central concern is not to determine whether Nordic music is underdeveloped, but to explore how musical characteristics associated with tradition, otherness, or an imagined past might inform interpretation. Such associations can be approached as potential sources of interpretive insight without endorsing the evaluative hierarchies with which they have historically been connected.

[84] See for instance Heiniö (1991, 13), although his discussion specifically concerns Finnish music.

Grimley (2006, 101) has made the observation that the traditional view of the interaction between the peripheral and the mainstream appears inverted in the case of some of Grieg's work. He writes:

> According to Dahlhaus, Grieg's treatment of harmony is 'advanced' because it resembles mainstream Austro-German practice; hence, those techniques 'such as bitonality and chord streams, that anticipate the modern music of our own century' point to the fundamentally assimilationist nature of Grieg's music. Grieg, however, seems to suggest precisely the opposite, that it is the sense of distance or remoteness from the mainstream that is responsible for the more radical or advanced aspects of his musical style.

Musical characteristics that may be perceived as traditional or insufficiently international can take many forms, including folk-inspired melodies and musical gestures, modality, and unusual treatments of harmony. For a Nordic example of how the same melody can be harmonised differently, we can compare how Svendsen and Halvorsen integrate the troll song "Åsmund Frægdegjæva" from Telemark into their music (see Figure 32). Svendsen uses the song in his *Norwegian Rhapsody No. 3*, op. 21, harmonising the melody in a more classical manner, where the harmonic language is relatively varied. Halvorsen uses the same song in his virtuosic violin work *Air norvégien*, op. 7, but he opts for a slower harmonic rhythm that results in dissonances against the melodic line (Dybsand 2010, 8). What is interesting is that Svendsen, through his more active harmonic progression, makes the music more in line with conventions of Romantic music, whereas Halvorsen's harmonisation, which actively uses pedal points and suspensions, feels more ancient. Halvorsen also regularly uses the pitch D-sharp in the accompaniment as a leading note into the dominant E-major, which gives the music which is in A minor a slight Lydian character. So, by opting for a type of expression that can be seen as more traditional, Halvorsen creates an interaction between melody and harmony that is more dissonant. This illustrates how such means were used to create music that could feel both ancient and modern at the same time.

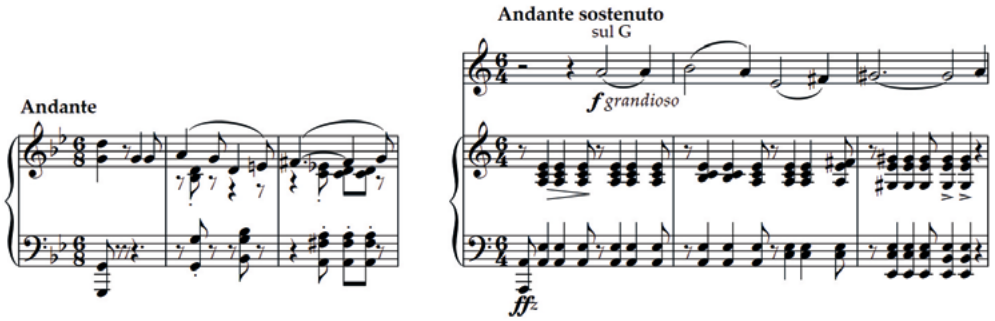


Figure 32. A comparison of how Johan Svendsen and Johan Halvorsen harmonised the folk song "Åsmund Frægdegjæva". Note how Halvorsen uses pedal points. The pitch E is held for three bars, C is part of the harmony for two and a half bars, whereas A is held for two bars. The piano arrangement of Svendsen's Norwegian Rhapsody No. 3, op. 21, is made by G. H. Witte.

This raises the question whether some musical features found in Sibelius's works for violin and piano can be interpreted in this way, particularly when judged by central European evaluative criteria such as those used by Dahlhaus. Such evaluations can have an impact on interpretation. However, from a performer's perspective, traditionalism, folklorism, or archaism does not need to be understood pejoratively, but can instead invite a broadening of the interpretive possibilities through associations with, for example, the ancient or the rustic.

A potential example is found in the *Mazurka*, op. 81, no. 1. The piece begins with a short and virtuosic two-bar introduction before the dance begins. The music is characterised by large chords, such as a G minor chord that includes both the seventh and ninth, which is followed by a C major ninth chord. However, despite these lush chords, the irregular three-bar motives—which result in a six-bar phrase structure—simultaneously introduce a "non-classical" feel (see Figure 33).[85]

[85] Johannes Brahms used similar three bar phrases in the last movement of *Rondo all Zingarese* to his Piano Quartet in G minor, op. 25.



Figure 33. Bars 3–11 of Sibelius's Mazurka, op. 81, no. 1. The music moves in three-bar periods, rather than in the more common two- or four-bar phrases.

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From a performance perspective, such deviations from the expected four or eight bar phrases invites the consideration of at least two different approaches. One alternative is to view the unexpected phrase length as a purely structural detail that does not have deeper implications for the character of the music. Another approach could be to understand this unexpected detail as indicative of some kind of traditional or "non-classical" quality, which may have implications for aspects such as sound, attack, and vibrato. While these features offer no definitive answers, the associations they evoke can guide expressive choices in performance. The question of how particular musical characteristics might be perceived in relation to tradition, archaism, or otherness is therefore not merely theoretical; it can inform the exploration of the music's expressive potential.

Klangfläche or Nordic drones

The general characteristics of *Klangfläche* or Nordic Drones were briefly discussed above. In short, a sufficiently static harmonic field challenges many of the expectations of harmonic directionality commonly found in western classical music. My own impression of the technique is that it suggests a mood, atmosphere, or environment, within which a melody may sometimes move with relative independence. This resonates with the experience of being surrounded by nature, which is always alive but seemingly unchanged from one moment to the next.

This suggests a framework for thinking about what constitutes *Klangfläche* or a Nordic drone. I would argue that one defining feature of this technique is that these harmonic fields do not adapt to the melodic movement that happens within them. These static moments may be related to some aspects of archaism, traditionalism or non-internationalism which were discussed above, where a moving melody and an unresponsive harmony can create interesting tensions, but Nordic drones push the concept much further. It should be emphasized that these techniques are not unique to Nordic music, nor do they function as indicators of geographical origin. Rather, their relevance within this context lies in their relative prevalence and in the cultural or stylistic associations these techniques may suggest.

Sibelius hints at this technique already in the opening of the second movement of his Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, where the kantele-like accompaniment remains essentially static for the opening four bars, and nearly static for the first nine (see Figure 34). It is interesting to compare these opening bars to the return of the main theme in bar 131, where the chords adapt more actively to the violin's melody. According to Sibelius's narrative of the sonata, the repeat of the theme depicts a Finnish girl singing with ever greater sadness (Goss 1996, 105).



Figure 34. The opening to the second movement of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. Note the static harmonic landscape.

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Another interesting example is the *Impromptu*, op. 78, no. 1, where the whole piece is anchored by an ostinato that remains mostly unchanged from the first to the last bar. The ostinato's primary elements are two open fifths, built first on C and then on A, resulting in a typical and tonally ambiguous Sibelian sixth chord. This basic element features in every single bar of the piece, with the only exception occurring when the

upper note of the second open fifth overlaps with other musical material. This musical element is briefly lowered by an octave, but the general character remains steady. A rhythmic element, which gives the music a casual skipping gait, is present whenever the music is not otherwise occupied with other material (see Figure 35).



Figure 35. The opening of Sibelius's Impromptu, op. 78, no. 1. Note how the open fifths are passed between the right and left hands of the piano.

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The most striking use of the Nordic drone in Sibelius's works for violin and piano, however, appears in the *Sonatina*, op. 80, where all three movements feature semi-static harmonic textures. After a nine-bar introduction, the first movement moves into a spirited, almost child-like *Allegro* that is accompanied by a Sibelian sixth chord, built of an open fifth and an open fourth (see Figure 36). Notably, these two intervals feature prominently immediately in the first bar of the *Sonatina* (Silén 2024, 145–146). This harmonic texture remains completely static for fourteen bars.

Interestingly, Sibelius's own statement about the *Sonatina*, as well as his diary entry on the 14th of February 1915, provide some hints to the environment this music seeks to convey. His diary reads: "[Worked on] the first movement of the Sonatina. Dreamed that I was 12 years old and a virtuoso. Childhood sky and stars—many stars."[86] He also told Erik Furuhjelm in an interview "that the Sonatina actually should be performed by

[86] "På sonatinens 1sta sats. Drömt mig vara 12 år och virtuos. Barndomshimmel och stjärnor—mycket stjärnor" (Dahlström 2005, 218).

a sixteen-year-old girl."[87] Taken together, these two quotations suggest that the static texture could be understood as a starry sky, while the simplicity of the violin's melody could be a reference to either a lived or imagined youth.



Figure 36. Bars 14–19 in the first movement of Sibelius's Sonatina, op. 80. Notice the static texture in the piano part, which creates an E major chord with an added sixth that remains unchanged for 14 bars.

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The second movement is also characterised by moments of relative harmonic calm. The most interesting of these is, in my opinion, the last eight bars of the movement, where the harmony remains statically on a B-major seventh chord in its second inversion until the movement's last beat, when the music finally shift to the tonic, B major (see Figure 37). The section is also modally interesting, because it seems to combine elements of both the B major and B natural minor in a modal mixture. The first pentachord (B, C-sharp, D-sharp, E, F-sharp) suggests B major, whereas the second overlapping pentachord (E, F-sharp, G, A, B) suggests B minor. The combination of the static texture and the modal mixture gives the closing of the movement a unique character.

[87] "Min violinsonat borde egentligen spelas af en sextonårig flicka" (*Dagens Press*, 7th of December 1915).



Figure 37. The last three bars of the second movement, Andantino, from Sibelius's Sonatina, op. 80.

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Static textures again feature prominently in the last movement's *Allegretto* section. The piano introduces a figuration built out of pairs of fourths that stretches over three beats, which creates an interesting rhythmic juxtaposition between the piano's pattern and the time signature $\frac{2}{4}$ (see Figure 38). The piano's figurations remain unchanged for eighteen bars, creating a static harmonic landscape for the violin's folk-like melody. The piano's pitches can be understood to outline a C-sharp minor chord that includes both the seventh and the ninth. These static moments create an interesting tension between the static harmony and the rhythmically driving figurations.



Figure 38. The first theme of the Allegretto section of the third movement of Sibelius's Sonatina, op. 80. The piano's figuration remains static for eighteen bars.

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Other methods for evoking impressions of nature

In addition to static textures, Nordic music also includes other elements suggestive of nature. One such technique is pictorialism, where music imitates sounds in nature, most often birdsong. Early attempts at notating birdsong can be traced all the way back to the later Middle Ages (Leach 2007, 3). The technique is therefore not unique to the Nordic countries, but in combination with other elements can situate the music within a certain environment.

In the Nordic repertoire for violin and piano, direct imitations are relatively rare. However, Bull's *Et Sæterbesøg* (A Mountain Vision) provides one such example. According to Bull's own description of the piece, it opens with the sound of bells and a cuckoo in the mountains (Haugen 1992, 246). Birds also appear to be singing in parts of the popular *Sæterjentens Søndag* (the Herdgirl's Sunday), which serves as the work's emotional culmination (see Figure 39).



Figure 39. Imitations of birds in Ole Bull's Et Sæterbesøg. The cuckoo sings in the opening bars of the work. Later, birds appear to be singing in the Sæterjentens Søndag (the Herdgirl's Sunday).

Sibelius associated the calls of both the crane and the swan with woodwind instruments (Dahlström 2005, 225). Birdcalls are rare in Sibelius's writing for strings, but some sections are at least suggestive of such allusions. In the middle section of the second movement of the Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, the violin plays a long and relatively high trill that lasts for six whole bars (see Figure 61 on page 178). The section—which according to a narrative by Sibelius depicts some farm boys who are dancing a Finnish dance—has a strong pastoral atmosphere, making it easy to associate the trill with birdsong (Goss 1996, 181). In *Auf der Heide*, op. 115, no. 1, Barnett (2007, 330) considers the violin's melody suggestive of the cries of migratory birds (see Figure 40).



Figure 40. Bars 32–35 in Auf der Heide, op. 115, no. 1, which can be understood to represent the cries of migratory birds.

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Auf der Heide also includes another element that I have come to associate with nature, or more specifically, with movement through nature. The way the accompaniment moves between the pianist's left and the right hands suggests a steady movement back and forth that is akin to walking (see Figure 41).



Figure 41. The "walking" motive as presented in the opening to Auf der Heide, op. 115, no. 1.

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The association is strengthened by both the work's title, which refers to a heath, and by intertextual connections to other works by Sibelius. For example, Sibelius's *Florestan*, JS 82, which he composed for his friend Adolf Paul, includes a simple narrative: "Florestan goes to the forest. He is depressed and unhappy. There is a scent of wild moss and wet

bark."[88] The scene is represented by a simple melody and an accompaniment that shifts back and forth (see Figure 42). This example raises the question of whether such textures—which are common in Sibelius's writing for piano—can be associated with walking more generally. Even though this observation remains at the level of speculation, hermeneutically such associations can be interpretively meaningful, even when based on conjecture.



Figure 42. The opening bars to Sibelius's Florestan, JS 82. The music is accompanied by the text: "Florestan goes to the forest. He is depressed and unhappy. There is a scent of wild moss and wet bark."

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It is also interesting that the text mentions the scent of wild moss and wet bark. Translating such experiences of smell into music is anything but easy, but Sibelius's way of thinking about music appears to have had a strong multisensory dimension. A story from Sibelius's youth describes how he had been walking on the ice of lake Vanajavesi with his friend Walter von Konow (1866–1943). The walk, and especially the feeling of the approaching spring, symbolised by the experience of meltwater seeping into his shoes, produced such a vivid experience that Sibelius rushed home to celebrate the coming spring with an improvisation (Ekman 1938, 33; Tawaststjerna 1992, 53). This habit of translating lived experiences into music lends credence to the idea that certain musical elements or gestures may have held special significance for Sibelius.

Related textures reappear in many of Sibelius's works for violin and piano. In the *Humoreske*, op. 115, no. 3, which is part of the same opus as *Auf der heide*, the movement is calm and idyllic, and contrasts with the piece's more energetic folk-like sections (see

[88] The original Swedish text reads: "Florestan går ut i skogen. Han är nedstämd och olycklig. Det doftar av vildmossa och våt bark."

Figure 43). In this case the harmony remains static for the opening five bars, with the pitches of the left hand being passed to the right hand and vice versa. The harmonic landscape is once again characterised by a Sibelian sixth chord, blurring the line between major and minor. Due to the explicit connection to nature in the first piece of the opus, it is easy to read a similar meaning into the *Humoreske*.



Figure 43. The opening bars to Sibelius's Humoreske, op. 115, no. 3. Note the harmonic texture, which is both static and constantly in calm motion.

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The *Rondino,* op. 81, no. 2, features a similar texture, but here the movement is quicker, perhaps more suggestive of a playful run. The *Sérénade*, op. 79, no. 4, includes a similar texture, but, again, at a tempo too quick for walking (see Figure 44). My own imagination in this case goes towards a horse's trot. I am unsure how this relates to the conventional understanding of serenades as songs sung outdoors to loved ones. In my opinion the whole piece resists the general trope.[89] The *Impromptu*, op. 78, no. 1, includes a related motion that includes a secondary rhythmic element, perhaps more suggestive of a skipping gait than a walk (see Figure 35 on page 118). A related texture appears in *Scène de danse*, op. 116, but here the mood of the music comes across as somewhat threatening (see Figure 66 on page 187).

[89] The *Souvenir*, op. 79, no. 1, momentarily includes similar textures, but featuring full arpeggiated chords. I am not convinced that these chords are related to the walking motive.



Figure 44. Sibelius's Sérénade, op. 79, no. 4, includes a related texture, but in a faster tempo than the examples above.

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An interesting detail when it comes to the association between Sibelius and nature is that both Sibelius's proponents and detractors refer to it, but find vastly different meaning within this connection. Sibelius's use of nature as imagery and inspiration is discussed extensively already in Furuhjelm's (1916, 10–13, 62, 64) and Ekman's (1938, viii, 31) early Finnish biographies, and the topic remained relevant in biographies by international authors as well.[90] Even Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), in his harsh criticism of Sibelius, discusses the connection to nature, though critical of the perceived connection between profundity and the unconscious nature (Adorno 2011 [1938], 334–335). Adorno's criticism is best understood in relation to his time, when Sibelius during the 1930s and 1940s was promoted by Nazi propaganda as embodying a "Nordic" spirit, a connection that Adorno strongly opposed (Mäkelä 2004, 171–175).

The importance of nature to Sibelius is so strong that we hermeneutically should keep in mind the possibility of such associations even when they are not accompanied by specific musical gestures. The examples given above, including the previous subsection on Nordic drones, merely seek to illustrate specific musical features that can encourage such considerations, and should not be viewed with any form of exclusivity. Nature, either in form of environments, landscapes, atmospheres, or pictorial representations,

[90] See for instance Gray (1934, 43, 89, 123), Rickards (1997, 12).

can often serve as inspiration when thinking about options for interpreting Sibelius's music.

Prosody

As has been previously mentioned, the prosody—i.e. the speech melody and rhythm—of the Nordic languages likely has a nontrivial impact on Nordic music. However, it is difficult to analytically prove any specific cases in instrumental music where the prosody definitely influenced the shape of the music. For that reason, this section should be understood to be speculative. Konttinen's (2013) dissertation, which explores how Finnish composers adapted their style when composing songs to Swedish, Finnish, and German texts, nonetheless provides several significant insights that can be used as inspiration when forming an interpretation.

In Sibelius's songs, Finnish texts are correlated with a narrower use of intervals, a near absence of dotted rhythms, and peak notes are always reached through stepwise motion or by beginning the phrase on the topmost note of the phrase (ibid., 245–246). The phrase structure in Sibelius's Finnish songs is often descending, and the variety of intervals is limited. Seconds and thirds account for 53% of all intervals, while primes make up 40%, meaning that these three intervals total over 90%. The largest interval upward within a phrase is a fourth, while octaves only appear in the songs "Souda, souda, sinisorsa", JS 180, between the verses, and once in the beginning of a phrase in "Illalle", op. 17, no. 6. Konttinen (ibid., 221) sees the latter case akin to an inversion of the unison, but the interval of an octave is nonetheless present.

In Sibelius's songs set to Swedish texts, the melody's use of seconds and thirds is even greater, at 71%, but the use of primes decreases to 15% (ibid., 245–246). The songs set to Swedish texts also feature greater intervallic variety, a more varied rhythm including punctuated rhythms that, although rare, nonetheless feature four times more often than in Finnish songs, and the peaks of phrases are reached both through stepwise motion and leaps (ibid.). The shape of melodies in Sibelius's songs set to Swedish texts often feature a wave-like shape and an ascending line. These general patterns are generally consistent in songs by Oskar Merikanto, Erkki Melartin, and Yrjö Kilpinen (1892–1959) as well, though each composer brings subtle variations to their handling of text in different languages (ibid., 380–381).

Another interesting detail is the rarity of upbeats in Finnish songs. Indeed, Konttinen (ibid., 391) argues that Sibelius's songs do not feature a single one. However, "Illalle", op. 17, no. 6, includes material that can be interpreted as long upbeats that includes five notes. The Finnish conductor and composer Simon Parmet (1897–1969) saw the lack of upbeats in Sibelius's music as intrinsically linked to the Finnish language (Dahlström 1997, 40). Upbeats are, however, found in songs by Merikanto, Melartin, and Kilpinen, and also Sivori's (1887, 9–10, 12–13, 23–25, 30–31) collection of folk songs. This indicates that the inclusion of upbeats does not preclude the music from having been shaped to fit the Finnish language.

While the question of prosody is analytically inconclusive when applied to Nordic music, from a hermeneutic perspective it can nonetheless serve as an invitation to consider interpretive options based on speech patterns and rhetorical shaping. For example, Sibelius's *Romance*, op. 78, no. 2, is characterised by two contrasting ideas, one initially introduced on the upper strings and a second one that is initially kept on the violin's G string.

The first of these opens with an ascending sixth, an interval that is not found in a single one of Sibelius's solo songs set to Finnish texts.[91] Instead, the interval features prominently in Stenhammar's works for violin and piano, where the ascending sixth serves central thematic functions in both his Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19, and *Sentimental Romance*, op. 28, no. 2. This begs the question of whether the opening theme of Sibelius's *Romance* can be understood to show an indirect link to either Sweden or to the Swedish language. Additionally, the opening melody includes four two-bar motives that all melodically show a wave-like motion with two melodic peaks (see Figure 45). While the link is speculative, this wave-like shape with two melodic peaks shows a surprising similarity to Swedish prosody, which is characterised by a dual accent pattern.[92]

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[91] Finnish songs that feature sixths obviously exist by other composers, but the lack of such intervals in Sibelius's songs can still invite us to think about its implications more broadly.

[92] Swedish prosody is characterized by a lexical pitch accent system with two tonal patterns (accent 1, acute; and accent 2, grave), which shape the rhythmic and melodic structure of the language (Bruce 1977, 5–9). These accents are typically realized through pitch contours associated



Figure 45. Melodic peaks in the opening phrase of Sibelius's Romance, op. 78, no. 2 (bars 3–10). Each pair bars includes two melodic peaks, with the first being higher than the second one in each case.

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The individual motives of the following phrase, which begins on the G string, is constructed largely out of stepwise motion, with the larger intervals mostly appearing between the melodic gestures. This phrase ends with a typically Sibelian descending fifth (which was discussed on page 102), before returning back to the motive that opened the *Romance*, op. 78, no. 2. The narrow ambitus of the second motive brings to mind some traditions of Finnish folk-singing. Hermeneutically, this suggests the possibility that the two first phrases of the *Romance* not only present a contrast between major and minor, high and low registers, perhaps two different characters, but also a contrast between the prosody of two languages: Swedish and Finnish. However, the general shape of the second phrase, with its ascending melodic line, does not align neatly with the speech intonation of the Finnish language, which is usually characterised by a falling melodic contour (see Figure 46).

If we instead choose to interpret the second phrase through a Swedish lens, it is tempting to see the descending fifth that closes the phrase as related to the idea of a terminal juncture in Swedish prosody. A terminal juncture is a closing melodic drop that only appears at the end of phrases (Bruce 1977, 38–41).

with stressed syllables. A sentence level prosodic accent provides an additional level of nuance to the shaping of Swedish phrases. The distribution and realization of the accents vary significantly across Swedish dialects (ibid., 32).



Figure 46. Bars 11–16 of Sibelius's Romance, op. 78, no. 2, showing a contrasting expression. Note, however, that the second phrase is based on bar 5 in the opening phrase.

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While these ideas of a linguistic influence cannot be empirically proven, they may serve an interpretive role if the speculation can be turned into an actionable difference in performance. If we assume that the common nineteenth century notion of a link between rhetorics and music still held true at the very end of the long nineteenth century, the specific language we associate a musical piece with may shape our understanding of the music.[93]

For example, German grammar results in sentence structures where the full understanding is often only intelligible at the end, due to the placement of verbs at the end of subordinate clauses. It is tempting to see a link between this sentence structure and certain historically influential assumptions about music form, most notably the assumption that musical phrases are governed by a teleological harmonic progression. While this analytical framework emerged within German music theory, particularly from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it subsequently shaped broader international conceptions of musical structure. This raises questions about the assumption of the directionality of musical phrases, perhaps shifting the attention from a goal-oriented approach to one more comfortable with simply *being* within the music. Such a perspective may be particularly relevant in repertoires whose stylistic or linguistic backgrounds do not strongly align with German theoretical norms.

The hermeneutic openness that invites the consideration of other types of prosody does not suggest that German (or other international) models are wrong or incompatible with Nordic music, but invites a broader engagement with the question about links between

[93] The long nineteenth century is a term used to describe the historical period spanning from the French revolution in 1789 to the outbreak of the First Word War in 1914.

music, language, and rhetorics. Assuming that the opening of Sibelius's *Romance*, op. 78, no. 2, is Swedish in style, rather than Finnish or German, is not a positivistic claim, but an exploration of how the adoption or rejection of such an idea may shape our approach to phrasing and structure.

While the exploration of the connections between music and language is both fascinating and possibly interpretively meaningful, it must be approached with an awareness of its limitations. For example, the prosodic accentual pattern found in the Swedish language primarily operates on the level of individual words, not complete sentences. And while prosodic speech melody is also found on the level of complete sentences, the patterns are less straight forward. That raises the question of whether such patterns can be meaningfully applied to musical phrases. This suggests that any mapping of speech patterns directly onto musical melodies is necessarily approximate.

This topic will be revisited in the case study on Sibelius's Sonata in F major, where prosodic tendencies may offer insight into phrasing and expressive possibilities. While the observations outlined in this section cannot be used as absolute indicators of prosodic influence, they can enrich our understanding of certain pieces within Sibelius's repertoire. Understanding how language can influence musical forms and melodic contours provides a potential interpretive lens for musical meaning.

The direction of causality

As a final point on Nordic musical characteristics, we need to note that a few figures tower above the rest, at least when it comes to fame and influence. These are arguably Jean Sibelius, Edvard Grieg, and Carl Nielsen. These men have been sufficiently influential that the musical style and musical language they brought to prominence has become intimately linked to the Nordic countries' musical traditions. For that reason, music that sounds "Sibelian", "Griegian", or "Nielsenian" brings associations with the Nordic countries. It is, however, difficult to say with certainty whether these composers discovered some deep truth about their respective countries' nature, culture, history, or mentality that allowed their music to give a voice to their nation, or if these composers were so influential that their music has become associated with their respective countries.

The answer may be either one or both, depending on one's point of view. This dilemma of causality has been discussed with regard to Nielsen's songs. The Danishness of Nielsen's *Folkelige Songs* became a self-reinforcing process where the songs' popularity and their use in communal singing made them a core aspect of Danish musical identity (Vestergård and Vorre 2008, 99–100). The strong national association of many of the leading Nordic composers, such as Sibelius, Nielsen or Grieg, also raises the question of whether their music is so strongly nationally bound that it resists absorption into a larger Nordic cultural context, or if they have provided us with some of the strongest examples of Nordic music.

The relationship between national identity and musical modernism further complicates this question. As Grimley (2010, 77) discusses in relation to Nielsen, an appeal to the Nordic could serve as a means of challenging prevailing aesthetic ideals. Nielsen advocated for vigour and physical health in opposition to what he perceived as the decadent and excessively sensual tendencies of post-Wagnerian aesthetics (ibid.). National and regional identities could thus provide not only sources of musical material but also points of departure for alternative conceptions of musical modernity. As mentioned previously, Grimley (2006, 101) also argues that, in the case of Grieg, it is the sense of distance or remoteness from the mainstream that gives rise to the more radical aspects of his tonal language.

4. A fusion of horizons: Towards actionable understanding

The previous chapters of this thesis have aimed at highlighting two important aspects of my central research questions. The discussion of Sibelius's many connections to Nordic culture, musicians, and composers has shown that these influences were considerable and arguably played a meaningful role, especially during his formative early years. Sibelius's personal networks were also invaluable later in his life. From this thesis's hermeneutic perspective, this can be understood as an engagement with the historical horizon that surrounds this subject.

The subsequent discussion showed that essentially all the Nordic musical characteristics examined in this thesis can be found in Sibelius's works for violin and piano. The section continued the exploration of the historical horizon while establishing an interpretative framework for engaging with the specific question of Nordic musical characteristics in Sibelius's music.

This third and final major section seeks a fusion of the previous sections by exploring the practical implications of this understanding for musical interpretation. On an overarching level, it explores how the understanding developed in the previous sections can open up possibilities for musical action. The term "actionable understanding" emphasises the practical dimension of a musician's hermeneutic understanding, while acknowledging that musical action is not simply the application of previously acquired knowledge. Rather, understanding and action are intertwined, as the act of interpreting music can itself contribute to understanding. This aligns with Gadamer's (2004 [1975], 305–306) observation "that understanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation." Furthermore, he (ibid., XXIX) argues that application is an element of understanding itself.

As a musician, one of the most exciting aspects of this artistic research project has been to notice how this type of knowledge and inquiry can actively shape one's approach to interpreting the music. For a musician on stage, the value of this type of knowledge lies partly in how it can shape musical action. Therefore, while this third section will first take a step back and approach the big picture with our newfound understanding of the parts, it will also attempt to put this awareness of the parts and the whole into practice

in two case studies. These case studies attempt to show how this research can open up a landscape of interpretive possibilities that can be considered when deciding how to perform music by Sibelius and other Nordic composers.

4.1 Exploring interpretive choices

The music I have researched as part of this thesis was composed within a specific historical and cultural context, which encourages the evaluation of many different interpretive approaches. While each work holds a unique place within this context, a shared cultural landscape can nonetheless be understood to serve as a backdrop for many of these works. This context does not dictate a singular answer, but can broadly shape our understanding of our interpretive choices.

An interesting aspect of the Nordic repertoire from this era is that many of its identifiable features are linked to folklore. This suggests an interesting interpretive dilemma. Should we prioritize the folkloristic influence, and imagine how a folk musician might have performed a piece of music? Or, should we approach this music through the works' historic horizon by attempting to perform them in line with the style of the time? Or, should we lean into our modern personal horizon, which in any case is always a prerequisite for any interpretation?

There are strong arguments for all three approaches, and they can obviously be combined in different ways and as such present a continuum rather than fixed categories. However, they are simultaneously sufficiently different that they tend to suggest incompatible solutions for individual musical moments. Resolving these moments of interpretive tension requires engagement with the music's expressive potential.

The folk-inspired approach is especially useful in moments where the music has a clear folk-like character. The style of folk music is best understood by listening to good folk musicians, but a few guidelines can help assimilate some of its characteristics. Folk dances are often based around a strong sense of rhythm and groove, to the point that I would argue that these elements become more important than polish, or even conventional tonal beauty. This suggests an approach where beat hierarchy and clarity of articulation become essential. The use of vibrato is generally sparing or absent.

Experimenting with imitating folk musicians can be a good way of exploring interpretive possibilities. I would even go as far as to argue that the connection between technical approach and musical expression often is underestimated. Obviously, a good technique should allow for a wide range of expression, but in my experience the technical means of reaching a desired goal will inevitably affect the result. For example, playing dances or folk-inspired melodies with the chin off the instrument will suggest technical and musical solutions, such as fingerings or articulations, which may differ from a traditional classical approach. The purpose is not necessarily to fully imitate folk musicians, but to explore the interpretive possibilities such an approach may suggest. This approach draws inspiration from the Finnish ethnomusicologist Heikki Laitinen's (2003, 333–338) notion of 'imaginary field trips'.

There is also a question about whether folk singing and fiddling should be approached in the same way. As a violinist, it usually feels easier to imitate folk fiddlers than singers, but many folkloristic melodies come across as songs rather than instrumental music. This begs the question: how should folk songs be approached within a classical setting? Folk singing varies widely, but often has an appealing simplicity and purity of expression. In many traditions, folk singing is strongly linked to storytelling. This suggests the possibility that folk-inspired melodies could be shaped as if guided by unwritten words. Subtle rhythmic liberties or declamatory emphasis on important notes can help bring out the speech-like qualities of such melodies.

When it comes to both instrumentalists and singers, the folk music landscape is more pluralistic than the current mainstream of classical music. For that reason, suggesting a specific approach is counterproductive. Listening to folk musicians and exploring how their approaches might inform the interpretation of classical pieces may nonetheless offer rich possibilities.[94]

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[94] There is also a fascinating, although speculative, link between folk music and earlier forms of western classical music. Current scholarship indicates that many Nordic folk dances can trace their roots to renaissance or Baroque dances from central Europe (Gustafsson 2016, 263). While these dances undoubtedly interacted with local musical traditions through diffusion, there is a striking overlap between early performance descriptions from the Baroque era and the living tradition of folk musicians in their treatment of rhythms, expressive techniques, improvisation, etc. These perceived similarities between folk music and early performance practice served as inspiration for the Finnish violinist Kreeta-Maria Kentala's albums *Side by Side* (2016) and *Polska*

While the folk music perspective provides a fascinating lens through which Nordic music can be explored, it is by no means the only relevant one. Another interesting approach is suggested by the time and the cultural landscape that existed at the time the Nordic repertoire discussed in this thesis was composed. It is curious that while at least a rudimentary understanding of performance style is expected when it comes to performing music from the Baroque or the Classical era, this historically informed approach is less often applied to works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is all the more striking as the advent of recording technology during the late nineteenth century means we know far more about how musicians played during the end of the Romantic era than during earlier times. Despite the availability of strong evidence, my experience is that the performance practice of this period in history is largely ignored. There is also a relatively widespread assumption that from the early nineteenth century onwards the use of a generally modern approach to interpretation is entirely appropriate, despite a wealth of scholarship suggesting the contrary (C. Brown 1999, 5).

While a discussion of performance practice may feel unrelated to the central topic of this thesis, the performance style of the era provides one of the most important contextual puzzle pieces when attempting to make the Nordic perspective actionable. Most of these works were composed during a time when a late Romantic performance style was in vogue. Ignoring the sounding legacy of this era would leave out an integral part of the works' historical horizon. While this stylistic context was not unique to the Nordic countries, it was nonetheless present in their musical cultures.

In order to explore this stylistic context, it is worth briefly considering the type of violin playing Sibelius may have been exposed to, both as a violin student and as a listener. Sibelius studied the violin seriously until approximately 1890. We can therefore safely assume that his education was grounded in the Romantic tradition of the nineteenth century, rather than in the modern approach that began to replace the old style around the First World War. In order to get an impression of how violinists from this era played,

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Pandolfi (2021) (Särkiö-Pitkänen 2024). This suggests that the living Nordic folk music tradition may be a distant remnant of a performance style which was more widespread centuries ago.

the limited legacy of historical recordings can provide a glimpse of the expressive qualities and musical approach of these musicians.[95]

We know that Joachim had made a considerable impact on Sibelius when he performed quartets in Berlin in 1890. In a letter to Wegelius, Sibelius wrote:

> When the Adagio was performed, I felt as though I were in a colonnade. It was moonlight. On the west side there was a solid wall, on the other a glorious garden with birds of paradise, seashells, palm trees, and more. Everything was dead and still; the shadows were long and sharp, and it smelled like an old library. Nothing could be heard except sighs. It was Beethoven who was sighing. When the theme in F minor returned for the second time, he sighed immensely deeply. — After a while, everything transformed into great lakes of red water, and above them, God played the violin. Gradually I noticed that it was Joachim who was actually drawing the bow, de Ahna [the second violinist] and the others also emerged, and finally I myself was J. Sibelius.[96]

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[95] Those interested in hearing what this old style actually sounded like can listen to the few recordings by Joseph Joachim (1831–1907), Pablo de Sarasate (1844–1908), Arnold Rosé (1863–1946), Marie Soldat-Roeger (1863–1955), Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931), August Wilhelmj (1845–1908), Jenő Hubay (1858–1937), and Fini Henriques, which all suggest a stylistic approach that differs significantly from modern ideals. Wilhelmj's recording (although of very poor quality since it was recorded in 1900) may be particularly informative for our understanding of the type of violin playing Sibelius heard during his early transformative years, as he in his youth strived to become the next Wilhelmj (Tawaststjerna 1992, 79). The recordings by Joachim, Rosé, and Soldat-Roeger may be equally important, both considering the strong German influence on Sibelius's music education and for the unique insight they provide into the German violin school from the nineteenth century.

[96] Då Adagiot föredrogs tyckte jag mig vara i en pelargång. Det var månsken. På vestra sidan var en fast vägg, på den andra en härlig trädgård med paradisfåglar, snäckor, palmer m.m. Allt var dött och stilla, skuggorna voro långa och skarpa och det luktade som i ett gammalt bibliotek. Ingenting annat hördes än suckar. Det var Beethoven som suckade. Då temat i F-moll för andra gången återkommer suckade han ofantligt djupt. — Efter en stund förvandlades allt till stora sjöar med rött vatten och ofvan dem spelade Gud violin. Småningom märkte jag att Joachim dock förde stråken, de Ahna [andre violinisten] och de andra kommo också fram, och slutligen var jag sjelf J. Sibelius (quoted in Tawaststjerna 1992, 129).

The vividness of the description is striking, as it includes both the general atmosphere, lots of specific details, and even smells, suggesting that music was a very multi-sensory experience for Sibelius. If nothing else, the letter at least shows that Sibelius was responsive to Joachim's style of playing.[97]

The way Sibelius described Joachim's playing to his biographer Ekman (1938, 79) also reveals a markedly different approach to interpretation than we are used to today. He remarks how the "the old man was very impulsive, and he seldom played the same thing twice in the same way." Listening to recordings from the beginning of the recorded era suggests that musicians allowed themselves greater individuality, and greater use of expressive techniques such as *portamenti* and *rubato* (both when it comes to shaping of phrases and the placement of individual notes) than what we are used to today. The style comes across as less calculated and more idiosyncratic. Also, the requirement for synchronicity between musicians—or even the two hands of pianists—was not expected to the degree that we are used to today. The awareness of the performance style of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can suggest interpretive possibilities that might otherwise remain hidden.

A third general framework for approaching Sibelius's works for violin and piano is a score-centric approach, where the score is viewed through a modern lens. If we listen to how Sibelius's works for violin and piano are performed in, for example, the Sibelius Competition we generally find a strong literal adherence to the score, a strong emphasis on perfection, clarity, and brilliance, and a generally modern aesthetic. In this approach the use of vibrato is generally assumed, whereas the use of *rubato* or expressive *portamenti* is limited.

Interestingly, the modern approach—especially outside of competitions—has begun to welcome a wider range of interpretations. For example, whereas historical recordings generally do not show indications of imitating folk musicians, such elements have

[97] It is possible that Sibelius's taste changed later in life. Ekman (1938, 79–80) remarks that when faced with this description later in life, Sibelius said that he would not have believed that he had written it himself without the physical evidence of the letter.

become part of the expressive vocabulary of some modern performances.[98] During the feedback sessions for my doctoral concerts, I was consistently encouraged to explore this aspect of the music. On the other hand, while my own attempts to explore a more historically aware performance style were met with enthusiasm from audiences, they also drew relatively sharp criticism from some members of my artistic board. The practical implications of these interpretive perspectives will be discussed in greater detail in the case studies below.

4.2 A hermeneutic perspective on interpreting music

My understanding of the subject has evolved considerably throughout my work on this thesis, from an initially more contextual analysis towards a more flexible hermeneutic one. Towards the end of this multi-year process, I noticed that the hermeneutic perspective that I had applied to the central topic of this thesis had begun to influence my approach to interpreting music more broadly. For that reason, I find it meaningful to expand on the implications of this approach before delving into specific case studies.

At the core of Gadamerian hermeneutics is the idea that meaning arises through a fusion of horizons between the interpreter and the interpreted, i.e. the work. This means that while interpretations should involve serious engagement with the work's historical and cultural context, the arising meaning is not fixed, but is a consequence of the interpreter's openness, fore-meanings, and prejudices (Gadamer 2004 [1975], 271–272). The identification of biases is thus important, so that the otherness of the interpreted work can assert itself against the interpreter's fore-meaning.

Through my engagement with hermeneutics, I have noticed my approach to interpretation evolve from a concern for fidelity to a presumed "correct" reading, towards a more multifaceted approach in which alternative interpretive possibilities can coexist within a continually developing personal understanding. From this perspective,

[98] While I think this opinion generally holds true, there are some examples to the contrary. For example, the recording of Béla Bartók's (1881–1945) *Rhapsody No. 1*, Sz. 87 for violin and piano by Joseph Szigeti (1892–1973) on the violin and the composer on the piano, shows a strong awareness of folk music. For an example of a modern musician who has integrated such awareness into his playing, listen to Pekka Kuusisto's interpretations of Sibelius.

interpretation can be seen as an exploration of a landscape of possibilities that converges into a single interpretation during a performance. This approach does not suggest that every interpretation is equally valid, or that anything goes. Rather, the interpretation should emerge from a serious interaction with the work's cultural context and history in relation to the interpreter's own understanding. This process can be seen as dialogical in nature. The interpreter's present horizon engages with the historical and cultural conditions of the work, and through this interaction new meaning is negotiated rather than merely extracted. A unique aspect of applying hermeneutics to music, rather than to written texts, is that the process of performing results in a singular realized interpretation rather than a space for multiple possible interpretations.

Another consequence of a hermeneutic perspective is that the artist who creates something—be it an author, composer, or performer—is not the appointed interpreter of it (ibid., 192). Similarly, Gadamer (ibid., 184) quotes the German philosopher and theologian Johann Martin Chladenius's (1710–1759) opinion that "since men cannot be aware of everything, their words, speech and writing can mean something that they themselves did not intend to say or write", which means that "when trying to understand their writings, one can rightly think of things that had not occurred to the writers." Applying this mode of thinking to music challenges conventional assumptions, as there is a strong tradition within classical music of seeking to understand the composer's original intentions—a task which in most cases is arguably impossible. Personally, approaching interpretation as an active engagement with a work's interpretive possibilities, rather than merely an attempt to fulfil contemporary expectations, has proven both artistically rewarding and intellectually engaging.

Hermeneutics also suggests an interesting perspective on collaborations between musicians. In this case the fusion of horizons is not limited to a single interaction; rather, all the musicians bring an interpretive perspective of their own that interacts with both the work as well as with the other musicians. I have had the enjoyment of performing some of the works discussed in this thesis with several different pianists, and I have always found it fascinating how the collaboration shapes the music. Exploring this interaction raises several interesting questions.

While one goal of rehearsing is to prepare a work for a coherent, well-executed, and engaging performance, it is fascinating to deliberate if this necessarily always needs to

arise from a maximal fusion of the performers' interpretative horizons. For example, the Finnish-born Swedish composer and music critic Moses Pergament (1893–1977), in a review of the Koppel-quartet, wrote that the musicians' individuality appears to have been sacrificed on the altar of the collective, leading to a performance where it feels like something is missing (*Stockholms-Tidningen*, 10 June 1960). This raises the question of whether hermeneutics could provide an interpretative lens that could encourage a broader range of interpretative possibilities than is commonly explored, especially considering that art often thrives on ambiguity and contradiction.

Viewed from a hermeneutic perspective, a musical performance involves yet another fusion of horizons. No matter what the composer's or performers' original intentions were, the audience interprets the performance through an interpretative horizon of their own. This highlights the multiplicity of interpretations that take place during a performance. Rather than undermining the coherence of the experience, it invites both the musicians and the audience to interact with music as a dynamic, living art form that invites, rather than dictates, meaning. A hermeneutic approach can therefore encourage not just deeper understanding and a wider engagement with plausible interpretive possibilities, but a form of interpretative generosity and a willingness to encounter contradiction, ambiguity, and otherness as constitutive of musical experience.

This perspective does not imply a dismissal of musical standards, or the importance of deep engagement with the score and its context. Rather, it suggests that rigor in interpretation can coexist with, and even be enhanced by, a recognition of interpretive multiplicity. A hermeneutic approach invites us to explore the richness of these possibilities with care and responsiveness, not arbitrariness. By embracing this complexity, I hope to approach the ensuing case studies not as exercises in analysis alone, but as interpretative dialogues with the material.

5. Case studies

In order to explore how the musical elements or characteristics described above manifest in Sibelius's music, I will use the early Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, and his last published work, *Three Pieces for Violin and Piano,* op. 116, as case studies. These two works present a strong stylistic contrast, but despite obvious differences both works feature Nordic characteristics prominently. These two case studies will follow the flow of the music, highlighting relevant elements in order of appearance.

5.1 Jean Sibelius's Sonata for Violin and Piano in F major, JS 178

Jean Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, is often seen as a turning point in Sibelius's stylistic development. In the sonata, Sibelius took a large step towards a more personal, Finnish-inspired tonal language. Furuhjelm (1916, 45–65) wrote extensively about Sibelius's Violin Sonata, and noted the many similarities to Grieg's Violin Sonata in F major, op. 8. These include using the same key signatures in all three movements, including in major subsections (Furuhjelm 1916, 51). The similarities run even deeper, and also include the "prolonged upbeat" before the introduction of the first theme, and parallels in how the development section moves to the recapitulation (Lünenbürger 2007, 6–8). Furthermore, the shapes of the motives, the general feeling, and certain harmonies of the piece bring to mind Grieg's sonata (Furuhjelm 1916, 51; Tawaststjerna 1965, 107).

There is, however, a crucial difference. The folkloristic elements, which are most noticeable in the second movement of both sonatas, have not been imitated, but rather reapplied to the Finnish folk tradition. Whereas Grieg's sonata brings to mind the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle, Sibelius's sonata seems to evoke a folk song accompanied by a Finnish kantele (Benestad & Schjelderup-Ebbe 1993, 29; Tawaststjerna 1965, 106).

Despite the many similarities, the two works are nonetheless distinct. The two works use different time signatures, which creates a noticeably different flow of the music. The movements in Sibelius's sonata are in $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{8}$, while Grieg's is in $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, and $\frac{2}{4}$. Also, the difference in expression and style is noticeable even though they share similarities. For this reason, I believe that the two works are often grouped together too strongly, considering that the experience of hearing and performing them are different.

In addition to the clear link to Grieg, there is a second aspect that is of particular interest for this thesis. Sibelius's own programmatic description of the sonata, which is found in a letter to his uncle Pehr from the 6th of July 1889, provides rare insight into his intent to blend personal expression, Finnish themes, and narrative imagery within a formally classical framework. Sibelius wrote:

> The first movement, 2/4 in F major, is fresh and daring as well as gloomy with some brilliant episodes; the second movement, A minor, is Finnish and melancholy; it is an authentic Finnish girl who sings on the A string; then some peasant lads perform a Finnish dance and try to entice her to smile, but it doesn't work; she only sings with greater sadness and melancholy than before. The third movement, 3/8, F major, is fresh and spirited as well as romantic. There are people in a meadow singing and playing on Midsummer Night. Meanwhile, a meteor falls down among them. They are amazed, but even continue playing, but not as readily as before, because everyone is more serious. At the end the mood becomes splendid but gloomy [the meteor!], and also playful and happy (Goss 1996, 105).[99]

While the narrative is simple, it nonetheless provides us with a rare description by Sibelius himself of the content of one of his musical works. The mention of the midsummer night (or summer nights more generally) is also relevant, because it is a common topic in Nordic music and art.[100] The white nights, together with the low-lying

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[99] "1*sta* satsen 2/4 f dur är frisk och djerf, samt äfven dyster med några brillanta episoder; 2*dra* satsen a moll är finsk och vemodig; det är en äkta finsk flicka som sjunger på a strängen; sedermera upträda nagra bondpojkar med en finsk dans och försöka locka henne att le, men det lyckas icke utan hon sjunger djupare och vemodsfullare än förut. 3*dje* satsen 3/8, f dur, är frisk och spirituelle samt svärmisk. Det är folk om midsommar afton ute på ängen, de sjunga och leka. Under detta slår en meteor ned ibland dem. De blifva häpna, men fortsätta med lekandet, som icke mera vill gå så ledigt som förut ty alla äro alvarsammare. Till slut blifver stämningen dystert praktfull [meteoren!] och äfven lekande glad" (Goss 1996, 181).

[100] Consider for instance paintings by Anders Zorn (1860–1920), Nikolai Astrup (1880–1928), Karl Nordström (1855–1923), Peder Krøyer (1851–1909), and Harald Slott-Møller (1864–1937); literature and drama by Johan Ludvig Runeberg, August Strindberg, Albert Engström (1869–1940) and Emil Norlander (1865–1935); and musical works by Hugo Alfvén (1872–1960), Wilhelm Stenhammar, and Tor Aulin.

sun, contributes to a unique atmosphere (Torvinen 2019, 106). The narrative in the last movement also highlights Sibelius's and Pehr's shared interest in astronomy (Goss 2009, 54–55).

The existence of a narrative is interesting when viewed in relation to another letter, written by Sibelius to the Finnish poet Juhana Heikki Erkko (1849–1906) in 1893:

> I believe that music by itself, that is, absolute music, cannot satisfy us. It certainly arouses feelings and emotions, but something is always left unsatisfied in our souls; we always ask "For what reason." […] Tones attain their real power only when guided by poetic meaning. In other words, when text and tone unite (quoted in Goss 2009, 180–181).

While narratives in instrumental sonatas are not unheard of, the sonata—alongside the symphony—remains one of the key genres associated with absolute music. This suggests that the formal aspects that are expected of a sonata were not the only thing in focus for Sibelius. Instead, Sibelius combined the formal characteristics of the sonata with a Grieg-inspired folk-like tonal language and a partial narrative. This combination of influences inspired Sibelius to compose one of his largest and most important works before his studies abroad.

The First Movement: [*Allegro*]

The first movement is lively and spirited and contains an interesting combination of elements that can suggest Nordic influences. The first theme has a general shape—the way the music rises and falls in pitch—that shows some similarities to the opening of Grieg's Violin Sonata in F major, op. 8. However, the two sonatas treat the harmonic landscape in different ways. While both sonatas are in F major, Grieg avoids a clear F-major chord until the very end of the primary-theme zone, after which the music immediately modulates. Sibelius, in turn, builds a driving accompaniment to the melody by outlining an F-pentatonic scale in brisk sextuplets using the pitches F, G, A, C, and D (see Figure 47). As was outlined above, Södling considered the pentatonic scale common in Nordic folk music. Already in the third bar the pitch E is introduced, to form an expanded pentatonic scale that allows for greater harmonic possibilities.



Figure 47. The opening to Sibelius's Sonata for Violin and Piano in F major, JS 178 (bars 1–11).

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There may be a secondary level of importance to the notes that are found in the opening of the sonata. Tawaststjerna (1992, 53) mentions Sibelius's ability to convert experiences, and even smells, into music. He was also a synesthete, which means that he saw music as colours. While Sibelius's synaesthesia is most commonly linked to specific key signatures, the possibility that it also applied to individual pitches suggests an interesting interpretation of the opening to Sibelius's sonata. Following this tentative assumption, it becomes apparent that the specific relationships between keys and colours—A-blue, C-red, F-green, and D-yellow—are exactly the pitches that feature most prominently in the beginning of the Violin Sonata in F major (ibid., 47).[101] If this assumption holds true, the opening of the sonata may have been almost like a kaleidoscope of colours to Sibelius.

[101] I want to extend my gratitude to Folke Gräsbeck, who drew my attention to this interesting observation.

Rather than suggesting a specific interpretation, such observations can serve as a suggestive mental image when shaping the music.

The first theme also shows an interesting modal ambiguity. Whereas the piano clearly is rooted in F major, the violin enters on the pitch D and goes on to outline a complete D minor chord. This creates a typical Sibelian sixth chord where F major and D minor coexist, all part of the pentatonic scale. It can be debated whether this relates to the typical Nordic characteristic of shifting between major and minor.

The theme also includes grace notes, which could be considered folk-like gestures. Grace notes in themselves are insufficient for suggesting folklorism, but in combination with other elements they add to the character. In many of Sibelius's later works for violin and piano, I have intuitively come to associate grace notes with agogic inflections, but it is unclear to me if this observation holds true in this case. The use of grace notes will be discussed in greater detail in the case study about Sibelius's *Three Pieces*, op. 116.

The fourth bar of the sonata repeats the second bar, but embellishes it with dotted rhythms. Such dotted rhythms are common in Nordic folk music.[102] Similar dotted rhythms appear in bar 9, leading to a phrase ending which features a rising fourth, emphasized by a *forzando* on the upbeat. Grimley (2001, 128–129) has associated such gestures with horn calls in Nordic music.

The combination of these elements, many of which can be associated with folklorism, begs the question of how they can be used to shape our interpretation of the music. The use of folk music—either as quotation or imitation—raises the question of whether such musical moments should be performed in a folk-like manner. The answer to this question depends on one's individual understanding of the three performance perspectives described above. The folk-like melodies, gestures, and allusions to dances offer the possibility of approaching the music with a sense of ruggedness, a folk-like rhythmic drive, and a soundscape that differs from the classical norm.

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[102] For examples of similar rhythmical features in Finnish folk music collected from Swedish-speaking areas, see for instance Andersson (1963, 331, 345, 347).

The folkloristic perspective has several implications on the interpretation. The following observations are largely based on a discussion I had with the folk fiddler and ethnomusicologist Jacob Sundström (2025). The associations should therefore be assumed to be subjective, but rooted in a strong awareness of Nordic, and in particular Finnish, folk music.

A first topic we discussed concerned the general style of the opening theme. While Sundström (ibid.) agreed that the music clearly appears to be influenced by folk music, he did not immediately associate the music with any particular tradition. Something about the music reminded him of the folk dance *Schottis*, particularly the dotted rhythms in the second half of the first phrase. According to this interpretation, the music should ideally be felt in four beats to the bar (despite an initial emphasis on the downbeat), as a schottis is characterised by three brisk steps on the first three beats, followed by a light hop on the fourth beat. This aligns rather well with the rhythmic shape of bars 2 and 4, where the fourth eight note features two slurred sixteenth-notes.

Sundström (ibid.) also remarked that among experienced folk musicians the rhythmic shaping is considered of prime importance, as their performances often had a utilitarian function as actual dance music. Depending on the experience of the dancers, the music could be shaped in slightly different ways, either by giving additional time to gestures where the dancers might require it, or by subtly prolonging or shortening beats to enhance the dance's character. For dancers, the rhythmic shaping of the music is generally more important than questions of tonal purity, intonation, or even the specific pitches. While these elements arguably should not be sacrificed in a classical performance of Sibelius's sonata, they should also not be the only qualities to be prioritised.

Sundström (ibid.) demonstrated how folk musicians sometimes use bowing styles where accents are added not at the beginning of bows, but in the middle. The purpose of these accents is to reinforce the character of the music. This observation may be especially relevant for the dotted rhythms in the fourth bar, where classical performance styles may suggest emphasising the first note of a slur, whereas a folk fiddler may add accents to the main beats on the second note of the slur.

I asked Sundström (ibid.) about how folk musicians might treat the "prolonged upbeat" in the first bar. He made the interesting point that, in situations where people actually are dancing, the music would rarely begin in this manner. Instead, a suitable section from

the end of the dance would be performed as an introduction, so that the dancers could get ready. However, during jam sessions among musicians, such "prolonged upbeats" can be utilised. The gesture carries the meaning "you know this, let's play", where the note is held until everyone is ready to start. In such cases, such prolonged upbeats are often realised with a crescendo towards the end.

As the main theme begins, the grace notes on the first beats of the second and third bars suggest a folk-like groove where emphasis is placed on the first beat. This opening phrase is a prime example of how adopting a technical approach inspired by folk musicians can suggest interpretative options. As suggested above, lifting the chin off the instrument (or letting it slide down on the left arm) suggests a considerably different approach to technique and expression. Experimenting with this approach in practice suggests performing the whole theme—except for bars 8 and 9—in the first position. It even raises the possibility of performing the grace note in the third bar using an open string. The general approach also encourages a flowing tempo combined with a limited or near-non-existent use of vibrato.

While a folk-inspired approach provides more than enough ideas for interpreting the music, it is by no means the only well-reasoned alternative. If we instead approach the question of interpretation from a perspective informed by awareness of performance styles of the late nineteenth century and the historic attitude towards folk music, we are faced with wholly different choices.

Folk music was an important source of inspiration, and even musical material, for many Nordic composers throughout the nineteenth century. Despite widespread interest in folk music during the 19th century, there was often a colonial dimension to the way classical composers appropriated folk materials into their compositions. Instead of engaging with these musical traditions on their own terms, composers frequently reshaped them to fit the conventions of the Western classical canon.

I would argue that a similar mindset seems to have been present among performers from the period. Even Ole Bull, who placed a strong emphasis on the intrinsic value of the existing Norwegian folk music, performed the music using his own arrangements and

transcriptions.[103] Sadly, since Bull died in 1880, we have no recordings of his playing, and therefore no direct way to evaluate his approach. Broadly speaking, I am unaware of any recording of leading violinists from the late nineteenth century performing Nordic folk music, so we have no direct auditory evidence of how this generation of musicians may have approached folklorism.

In order to get an idea of how musicians of this era approached interpretation more generally, we can turn to historical recordings. The end of the nineteenth century saw the first recordings of classical music, which provide a glimpse into the performance style of the period. The few recordings from the last decade of the nineteenth and first century of the twentieth century, most importantly by Brahms, Joachim, Sarasate, or the singers Adelina Patti (1843–1919), Nellie Melba (1861–1931), Fernando de Lucia (1860–1925), or Enrico Caruso (1873–1921), suggest a style that is quite different from what we are accustomed to today.

To name a few examples, I can mention the frequent use of *portamenti*—i.e. the sliding between notes—a far greater flexibility when it comes to tempo and *rubato*, and a different approach to vibrato that often sounds fast and fluttering rather than slow and broad. Sadly, the recording quality is in many cases so poor that it is often difficult to form a complete picture of how these musicians who made a career during the end of the nineteenth century actually sounded. Additionally, some of these musicians were past their prime when they made their recordings. We should therefore be cautious about drawing too far-reaching conclusions based on these historical recordings.

If we allow ourselves to broaden our exploration of historical recordings to encompass the years when the majority of Sibelius's works for violin and piano were composed (1914–1918), we notice a surprisingly significant shift in style. The leading violinists of that time were arguably Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931), Fritz Kreisler, and Mischa Elman (1891–1967). Each of them left recordings that show their highly personalised styles,

[103] One could, however, argue that Bull's approach may not have been that different from skilled folk musicians, who also adapted folk tunes to fit their individual style and technique.

with no clear evidence of deliberate imitation of folk musicians. This highlights a surprising change in taste and performance style during Sibelius's lifetime.

From this approximate era, I was able to find the example of Mikhail Press (1871–1938) (ca. 1924), a classical violinist, performing a "Swedish Song".[104] Interestingly, Press was a student of Hřímalý, who presumably also had also taught Sibelius's violin teacher Wasiljeff. If we assume that Sibelius's view of interpretation and violin playing in general was in line with the prevailing performance culture of the time, he most likely did not expect his compositions to be performed in a style that strongly imitated folk musicians.[105] If our intention is to perform the music as the composer intended it—which from a hermeneutic perspective may not be necessary or even desirable—we should be cautious about applying modern artistic ideals, which may not be in line with the music's place in history.

Following this line of reasoning, it is meaningful to also explore a historically aware approach to interpretation. An approach based in knowledge of performance practice immediately faces an apparent paradox. The very act of applying historical knowledge in a prescriptive manner to recommend specific performance suggestions contradicts the historical record of how musicians from the Romantic era approached interpretation. For example, Julius Levin (1862–1935) (1926, 746) recalled that one of Joachim's chamber music partners had warned him: "To play with the 'Old Man' is damned difficult. Always a different tempo and different accents."[106] This suggests a performance style deeply rooted in interpreting the music in the moment rather than executing a pre-planned script. For that reason, all of the suggestions provided in this exploration of a

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[104] Press plays August Wilhelmj's arrangement of the well-known folk tune "Ack Värmeland, du sköna".

[105] There is of course no way of knowing this with certainty. This argument is merely based on my understanding of the cultural landscape of the early twentieth century. As such, this observation merely provides a perspective that informs our interpretive horizon, which can be either accepted or rejected.

[106] "Mit dem 'Alten' zu spielen, ist verflucht schwer. Immer anderes Tempo und andere Akzente [...]"

historic performance style should be seen as historically informed interpretive possibilities, not rules for an "authentic" performance.

A historic perspective provides a wealth of different possibilities, some of which may feel quite foreign to a modern performer. If we begin with the question of phrasing, we find that the nineteenth century saw a gradual transition from a beat-hierarchical tradition built around the idea of metric accentuation towards a directional approach where phrases were expected to move dynamically and agogically towards a high-point. The latter approach was codified by Hugo Riemann (1849–1919) (1884) and gained considerable popularity, but it is likely that he was describing a style of phrasing that was already in relatively common use among musicians (C. Brown 1999, 9). However, Riemann's ideas were not universally supported. Joachim opposed his ideas so fervently that he blocked Riemann's appointment to the faculty of the University of Berlin (Arntz 1999, 104).

This suggests at least two approaches to shaping the first phrase of Sibelius's F major Sonata. Considering that Sibelius lived in Finland at the time, relatively far from the large European musical centres, it is reasonable to presume that the local culture did not represent the very newest trends in classical music. However, Wegelius's acquaintance with Riemann simultaneously provides a counterargument that makes the consideration of both perspectives worthwhile.[107] Whichever perspective we deem more plausible, it is important to keep in mind that playing styles were in practice fluid. Styles could evolve, change, or adapt to changing circumstances. This serves as an important reminder that there is not one historically correct approach but a multitude of possibilities, informed by historical sources.

The older, more classical approach to phrasing was still rooted in the tradition of beats having a hierarchy of importance. In a $\frac{2}{4}$ bar, as is the case in the first movement of Sibelius's Sonata in F major, the first beat was seen as stronger and more important than the second beat. On top of this general framework, a second layer was added that encouraged an emphasis on notes that required special attention. These could include

[107] Wegelius had gotten the recommendation to hire Busoni as the Helsinki Music Institute's piano teacher from Riemann (Bonsdorff 2017, 310).

notes that were longer or higher than the preceding and following notes, raised or lowered pitches foreign to the prevailing key, free clashing dissonances, preparations of dissonances, or syncopations (C. Brown 1999, 26). Older methods, such as ones by Daniel Gottlob Türk (1750–1813) and August Ludwig Crelle (1780–1855), argue that musical units (such as phrases) begin powerfully and importantly and gradually relax in intensity (ibid., 21–22). This suggests that the first bar of the phrase would be assumed to receive more emphasis than the second one. The German violin school recognised the relationship between "rhythmical accent" and "melodie accent" (Joachim and Moser 1905a, 57). Joachim and Moser (ibid., 57–58) clearly state that "the claim of the rhythmical accent would outweigh that of the melodic, unless [...] the composer had given special directions to the contrary."

Fundamentally, the classical approach viewed music as having a rhetorical dimension, with phrases being shaped akin to sentences in speech. In the third part of Joachim's and Moser's Violin School (1905c, 7) the authors advise that the best way of assuring a natural treatment of simple melodies is to fit a suitable text to it. They illustrate this by adding a German text to the opening of Joachim's *Romanze*, op. 2 for violin and piano (see Figure 48).

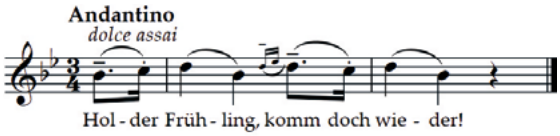


Figure 48. The opening to Joachim's Romanze, op. 2, with a German text applied to it. The text is meant to facilitate natural phrasing.

Riemann (1884, 50), however, argued that the metrical approach was rooted in a direct application of poetic metre to music; a tradition which he saw as "not completely correct". Instead, he argued that motives and groups should be phrased using a combination of dynamic and agogic direction (ibid., 10). Interestingly, Riemann's ideas are not identical to modern notions of phrasing, which are often driven by harmonic direction. Rather, Riemann emphasises the shaping of individual motives and passages in a way that increases their structural clarity. Phrases can therefore be seen as behaving like upbeats, leading to specific highpoints.[108] This inherent upbeat-like

[108] Riemann (1884, XI) uses the term "Obligatorische Auftaktigkeit aller Figuration".

quality of phrasing stood in clear contrast to earlier methods and subsequently served as the foundation for later views on phrasing.

If we attempt to apply Riemann's ideas to the opening of Sibelius's sonata, we discover a different way of shaping the music. Rather than emphasising the first beat, the music could follow the music's rising and falling shape, moving dynamically and agogically towards the second beats of bars two and four. Alternatively, the music could be shaped in a similar manner, but using the second bar as an upbeat to the third and the fourth bar as an upbeat to the fifth. This suggests an approach that emphasises the opposite accentual goals to what was recommended by Türk and Crelle. In addition to the shaping of individual motives, whole phrases can be approached in a similar manner, seeing the beginning of a phrase as an upbeat to a specific highpoint, followed by a gradual relaxation.

The 1880s also had two traditions when it came to the use of vibrato. The more conservative German approach still viewed it as an ornament to be used sparingly, whereas musicians educated in France—such as Wieniawski, Vieuxtemps, Ysaÿe, and, towards the end of the century, Fritz Kreisler, began using it more frequently (C. Brown 1999, 534). The British musicologist Daniel Leech-Wilkinson (2009), who has explored the changing performance styles among violinists, has noted that the strongest proponents of the German school, such as Joachim and Arnold Rosé (1863–1946), use a vibrato that is very narrow, and in the case of Joachim, simultaneously rare, fast, and uneven compared to modern standards. The older approach, which quickly went out of style in the beginning of the twentieth century, can be heard on some early recordings by Joachim, Marie Soldat-Roeger (1863–1955), and to some extent Rosé.

Another important stylistic feature was the use of agogics, which in the classical German style was often applied in an accentual manner in the form of "emphatic lingering" on important notes (C. Brown 1999, 50). In contrast, the tradition of using agogics as a means to show phrasing and structure was not uncommon, but more aligned with a more late-Romantic style. Rhythmic modifications were also common, and the first note of a slurred group was almost always lengthened, especially in Classical repertoire (ibid.,

31).[109] Among violinists there was also a relatively wide-spread tradition of keeping phrases on an individual string, when possible, in order to keep the "voice" of the melody consistent. This was generally combined with a prioritisation of odd-numbered positions (such as 1, 3, 5, etc) over even-numbered ones (2, 4, 6, etc).

Although the extent to which these stylistic features apply to Sibelius's sonata is debatable, there are several reasons why at least a rudimentary awareness of both a more classical German approach to violin playing as well as its later developments may be important for understanding the style prevalent in Finland during the late 1880s. Spohr's teachings continued to carry considerable authority in German violin playing during the end of the nineteenth century, and the second part of Joachim's and Moser's *Violin School* (1905b, 93–94) still quotes him substantially. Considering that the leading figure in Finland's musical life during most of the nineteenth century, Fredrik Pacius was a dedicated student of Spohr, there is good reason to assume that Spohr's teachings had not been forgotten. It is noteworthy that Pacius was still alive when Sibelius composed the F major Sonata.

While there are good arguments for considering the German violin school from the nineteenth century when exploring interpretive possibilities in Sibelius's early works, there are simultaneously several arguments to the contrary. Leech-Wilkinson (2011, 22) has noted that most recorded performers develop a personal style by their late twenties, which they retain relatively unchanged for the rest of their careers. With that in mind, it can be argued that although Joachim (born 1831) was still arguably the most influential German violinists during the 1880s, his style may be more indicative of a style that was fashionable around 1860. By contrast, the recordings by Paul Viardot (1857–1941), Rosé (1863–1946), and Maud Powell (1867–1920) may tell us more about the tastes of the 1880s and 1890s (ibid.).

Considering that Sibelius ambitiously studied violin in the 1880s, it can be argued that his style was most likely influenced by more Late-Romantic tendencies. As was discussed earlier, Sibelius's violin teachers, Levander and Csillag, represented a more old-fashioned

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[109] This tradition can be heard in Soldat-Roeger's recording of Mozart's Violin Concerto in A major, KV219, from 1928 (Soldat and Schulhof 2024 [1928]).

approach, whereas the year Sibelius studied with Wasiljeff introduced him to what was likely a Franco-Belgian style. Not much is known about Levander's violin playing, but considering his position in Finland one would not expect him to represent the newest stylistic trends.

A painting by Eero Järnefelt of Sibelius playing the violin, from around 1890, aligns well with the German violin school's approach to technique, characterised by a low elbow and a bow grip in which the fingers contact the stick close to their tips (see Figure 49).



Figure 49. Jean Sibelius playing the violin, painted by Eero Järnefelt around 1890. Sibelius's low elbow, in combination with the bow grip where the fingers contact the stick close to their tips, aligns well with the German tradition of violin playing.

Source: Järvenpää Art Museum, CC0 1.0 Universal.

In addition to the folkloristic and historically informed performance-practice approaches outlined above, a third option is to view folkloristic elements in music through a modern lens. This is arguably the most common approach to music making today. The modern perspective is at first glance the most straight-forward, but reveals considerable nuance once given more thought. A simplistic view of the modern approach merely applies our current playing style, technique, and ideals to the notes in the score, often with the intention of performing the notated music as closely to the markings in the score as possible. This approach is related to the idea of *Werktreue* and the widespread use of *Urtext* editions, which aims to understand exactly what the composer wrote.

Viewed through this lens, important musical works are treated almost like sacred documents to be reproduced rather than living texts that invite active interaction with musicians across decades or even centuries. There is obvious merit to a literal approach, as it aims for objectivity, clarity, structure, and respect for the source material. I also want to emphasize that modern performance

traditions are not monolithic, as they still leave room for individuality. Nonetheless, many of the core ideas of contemporary performance traditions have become homogenised across countries.

Any summation of the modern style is inevitably going to be an oversimplification, but I believe it can be argued that tonal evenness and clarity, rhythmic precision and a general avoidance of expressive techniques that may be deemed excessive or self-indulgent are generally considered virtues. Rhythmic precision is expected both in an individual musician's realisation of the written score and in the interplay between musicians in an ensemble.

Paradoxically, however, any performance given today is inevitably modern, even if it draws on styles that fall outside the prevailing conventions of classical music performance. This is not only because it takes place in the present, but also because it is shaped by contemporary cultural contexts and performance conditions. As I described above, the incorporation of folkloristic playing techniques into performances of Nordic classical music is a relatively recent trend. This creates a fascinating tension in which the performance places contemporary taste in relation to (or in contrast to) a playing style that has its roots outside of the classical tradition. The full picture is even more nuanced, as this interpretative dialogue between styles also communicates through time, since the playing style of folk musicians has its roots in music from the past. It means that the synthesis of these differing styles produces an interpretation that strives for freshness and modernity by incorporating something ancient. A similar dynamic is at play in performances that incorporate awareness of historical performance styles. Therefore, incorporating stylistic elements that contrast with the expectations of "typical" modern performances is a valid possibility, but nonetheless results in a "modern" performance (Taruskin 1995, 164; Haynes 2007, 123).

There is another interesting tension at the centre of modern performance. On the one hand, there is no obvious reason why a modern interpretation needs to adhere to any specific tradition. Why can a modern interpretation not explore any solution that

resonates with the interpreter's understanding, experience, and interpretive horizon?[110] Whereas past performances and recordings are fixed in time, there is no clear limit to the interpretive possibilities of future ones. But, while this freedom undoubtedly exists, the reality is that musicians are often expected—implicitly or explicitly—to conform to established institutional, pedagogical, and social norms of taste and style, including the expectations of listeners, many of whom want to hear what they already know.

This means that a modern approach to the opening of Sibelius's sonata could in theory be approached by almost unbound interpretive freedom, but this landscape of possibilities is in practice shrunk by cultural expectations and traditions. The folk-inspired melody and its musical gestures can equally well be seen merely as melodic material that is no different from any other music, or fully embraced with the adoption of a significantly different playing style and stylistic choices. Both approaches are modern and equally valid, although their suitability may vary depending on the context.

This brief exploration of playing styles in relation to the opening phrase of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major has attempted to show that there are several well-reasoned but simultaneously often incompatible interpretive possibilities. From a hermeneutic perspective, the interpretive multiplicity is not a problem, but what Gadamer (2004 [1975], 271, 335, 499) has called "open indeterminacy", "productive ambiguity", or a "fluid multiplicity of possibilities". All of these interpretive perspectives become part of our "historically effected consciousness", where history, context, prior experiences, and prejudices contribute to the fusion of horizons between the interpreter and the interpreted (ibid., 301, 336).

The flexibility of the hermeneutic approach suggests that there is no singular, definitely correct interpretation. The past does not dictate the present, nor does the present override the past. All this knowledge can coexist within the interpretive horizon, enriching our understanding of the work's place in history and its interpretive possibilities. I have preferred to think of this multiplicity as a landscape of possibilities,

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[110] For an extensive discussion of the constraints imposed by conventional performance ideals and the possibilities for greater interpretive freedom, see Leech-Wilkinson's *Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them* (2020).

wherein several well-reasoned but sometimes mutually exclusive readings can be found. The acceptance that hermeneutics allows for several different readings of the same material provides a level of artistic freedom, as the interpretation can arise from our personal convictions, understandings, and artistic evaluation of the possibilities within this interpretive space.

What this comparison between different approaches—be they folkloristic, performance-practice-based, or modern—has attempted to highlight is that the space for well-reasoned interpretive possibilities is far wider than what is generally observed in practice. I also want to emphasize that some of the stylistic possibilities I have mentioned, such as performing the opening theme of Sibelius's sonata on a single string using predominantly odd-numbered positions, which would result in frequent *portamenti*, intuitively feels wrong for my understanding of the character of the piece. Similarly, the idea of playing slurred notes unevenly by lengthening the first note feels equally instinctually foreign, and does not align with my understanding of music from the 1880s. However, while my personal experiences and prejudices discourage bringing such a reading to the stage, these possibilities definitely exist within the range of well-founded alternatives. I believe that approaching interpretation through a deep engagement with the full range of stylistic options has the potential to broaden the range of expressive possibilities.

The hermeneutic perspective also reminds us that interpretive assumptions that are today almost taken for granted—such as assuming that a close adherence to the score is virtually always preferable to a less literal reading, or that synchronicity between musicians (or the two hands of a pianist) is nearly always a virtue—are based in our current performance culture, and did not always hold true in the past. Indeed, many modern ideals align with what Spohr (1832 [1843], 181–182) described as a *correct style* in his *Violin School*. But, according to Spohr, a *correct* style is only the starting for a successful interpretation. In order to elevate *correct style* to *fine style,* the performer needs to discern the character of the piece and transfuse the character into the performance (ibid., 181). This is done by imbuing the music with the spirit of the composer by applying different shades of tone, the correct accentuation and separation of musical phrases, choosing fingerings for expression rather than convenience, using *portamenti*, using four shades of

vibrato,[111] and the occasional acceleration or slackening of tempo that reinforce the musical character (ibid.). While we do not know the auditory consequences that the application of these expressive tools had in the nineteenth century, it is noteworthy that the means to elevate a performance to a *fine style* involves musical elements not communicated directly in the score.

If we return to the exploration of Nordic musical characteristics within Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, we have already found several musical elements that can be associated with Nordic music in the opening bars. To recap, these included an initial suggestion of pentatonicism, a kind of modal ambiguity caused by the active use of the Sibelian sixth-chord, which simultaneously gives the music features of both F major and D minor, the folk-like dotted rhythms in bar 4, which is used to embellish the opening gesture in bar 2, and the use of grace notes for emphasis, which can also be tied to folklorism (see Figure 47 on page 144). Nordic characteristics also appear in the continuation of the sentence structure of the first phrase. An inversion of the folk-like rhythmic embellishment found in bar 4 appears in bar 9, leading to a phrase ending where the melody suggests cadential closure but the harmony avoids a perfect authentic cadence. The phrase's concluding gesture, a rising fourth emphasised by a *forzando,* can be interpreted as akin to a horn-call. This horn call ends the primary theme zone.

The following bridge passage immediately introduces further characteristics that have been associated with Nordic music. The music changes mode from F major to F minor by pivoting to a minor subdominant over a pedal point on the pitch F (see Figure 50). The pedal point, another feature commonly associated with folklorism, is held from bar 11 until the end of bar 18. The harmony shifts between the minor mode of the subdominant (to which the melody adds a sixth) and the minor tonic, which gives the bars a plagal character. The repetition of the subdominant to tonic relationship also gives the section a static feel, not driven by clear harmonic development.

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[111] Spohr calls the technique tremolo rather than vibrato.



Figure 50. Bars 12–15, highlighting the bridging motive and the shift from F major to F minor.

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On top of this harmony, the melody also contains details of interest. The motive includes dotted rhythms, in line with the ones introduced in the fourth and ninth bar of the movement. Additionally, the melody of the passage reaches its peak through a leap of a fifth. While not a strong indicator of Nordicness, the upwards leap of a fifth mirrors melodies found in Svendsen's *Romance* and the second movement of Stenhammar's Violin Sonata in A minor, op. 19. As we recall, such arrivals to the peak note of a phrase are nowhere to be found in Sibelius's songs set to Finnish texts, whereas similar gestures can be found in his songs set to Swedish and German texts (Konttinen 2013, 245–246). I need to stress that this is not a universal characteristic of Finnish songs, but merely an observation of the melodic content of Sibelius's songs set to Finnish texts.[112]

Next, the movement briefly returns to the material introduced in the opening of the sonata, however the harmony rests over a pedal tone on the pitch D instead of F as in the beginning. What is striking is how casually Sibelius shifts back from minor to major in bar twenty, with the right hand outlining an F minor chord on the first beat and an F major chord on the second. This can be contrasted with Sibelius's experience in Berlin a year later, where his composition teacher Albert Becker (1834–1899) got a shock when Sibelius showed him his string quartet, where he had used the same key's major and minor modes in succession (Tawaststjerna 1992, 124).

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[112] A few examples of Finnish songs that leap to the peak note of the phrase includes the song "Tuomen juurella" (Sivori 1887, 19). The song likely served as inspiration for the first movement of Sibelius's *Kullervo*, op. 7, both of which reach their first melodic peak by ascending an open fourth. Another, more famous example is the Finnish folk song "Taivas on sininen ja valkoinen", which reaches its melodic peak by ascending an open fifth.

The following phrases also include features that can be associated with Nordic music, but these are either the continued use of elements that have already been discussed or relatively weak connections. An interesting detail that can nonetheless be highlighted is that Sibelius's frequent use of modality in combination with non-chordal passing tones (tones not included in the main harmony) in the section from bar 43–52 leads to figures that fulfil at least the looser definitions of the Grieg-formula (see Figure 51). The Grieg-formula, which most famously consists of a falling minor second followed by a falling major third, in this case appears in modal, inverted, and reversed variations. It is debatable whether the link to Grieg is meaningful in such figurations or if the Grieg formula is only relevant in melodic contexts, but the awareness of such elements presents the possibility of bringing out such details if desired. My impression is that the appearance of the Grieg formula in this case likely is coincidental, but it is interesting that the music's style spontaneously gives rise to these combinations of intervals.[113]



Figure 51. Versions of the Grieg formula in bars 43–46 of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178.

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As we enter the second theme zone in bar 53, the melody can be understood as either starting on the subdominant of A minor, or as a melody in the D Dorian mode, which is characterised by its raised sixth. The melody is strongly centred around the pitch A, whereas the harmonies never resolve unequivocally to A minor. Instead, the harmony keeps returning to D minor or inversions of D major for the beginning of each iteration of the theme. Whichever interpretation feels more correct, the harmonies underlying the melody are not limited to notes from the A minor or D Dorian scale.

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[113] Although I personally find the importance of these versions of the Grieg formula to be limited, the appearance of different versions of the formula has previously been highlighted in the works of Grieg (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1993, 44–46).



Figure 52. The beginning of the secondary theme zone of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, bars 53–60.

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The melody has a strong intertextual connection to the melody of the *più vivo* section of the second movement, as well as bars 90–92 and 123–125 of the last movement (see Figure 53). From a Nordic hermeneutic perspective, it is even more noteworthy how similar the melodic gesture is to both bars 46–49 of the second movement of Grieg's Violin Sonata in G major, op. 13, as well as to the main theme of the second movement from Grieg's Violin Sonata in C minor, op. 45.



Figure 53. Similar melodic gestures in Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, in bars 53–55 of the first movement, bars 33–35 in the second movement, and bars 123–125 in the third movement. The second line shows similar melodic gestures in Grieg's Violin Sonata in G major, op. 13, in bars 46–48, and Violin Sonata in C minor, op. 45, in the opening to the second movement.

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The end of the melody in the secondary theme zone also includes another musically significant detail. Up until this point in the movement, triplets have primarily served an

accompanying role, but at the end of the four-bar melody the triplet takes on a rhetoric or declamatory significance on the downbeat of bar 56 (see Figure 52). I highlight this detail due to its importance in the rest of the sonata. The triplet briefly reappears a few bars later, in bar 70, and later becomes an important motive in the development section in bars 132–136 (see Figure 54). A transposed version of the triplet motive appears as part of the accompaniment in the second movement in bars 10–13, and rhythmically similar motives also appear in bars 37–39, 68–70, and 107–109. The last movement is a dance where a similar triplet on the first beat on many bars sets the character (see for instance bars 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, etc.) (see Figure 62 on page 180). The last movement in particular shows great similarity to motives used by Grieg in his Violin Sonata in G major, op. 13, in the *Allegro vivace* section of the first movement as well as the main theme of the last movement.



Figure 54. The triplet figure that is first introduced in the secondary theme zone of the first movement in bar 56 takes on several roles throughout the sonata, serving accompanimental, developmental, and thematic functions.

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When the violin enters in bar 57 the harmony briefly shifts from minor to major (see Figure 52). The continuation of the melody is also changed from a generally falling melodic shape to one dominated by an expressive leap of a rising fifth; both details can

be suggestive of a Nordic influence. Following the leap of a fifth, the melody returns to its starting note A, using a modal version of the Grieg formula. Lünenbürger (2007, 5) argues that the treatment of the leading tone in bars 59–60 evocate associations to the Grieg formula, even though the motive is incomplete.

The violin's entrance in bar 57 also includes an interesting grace note for both instruments, a fifth above the first regular note of the phrase, which was not included when the theme first was introduced. It is difficult to assess an exact reason for the added grace note, but it shows the range of the subsequent leap into bar 58. The grace note could be suggestive of slight rhythmic freedom or localised agogic shaping. This observation is based on a combination of practical considerations and how such grace notes interact with surrounding harmonies in other works by Sibelius. It is not obvious to me if this observation holds true in this case, but the interpretive possibility exists.

The following bars 65–68 introduce a lush, syncopated motive that feels more salon-like than the movement's main character. The change of character is suggested by the combination of the syncopated rhythms, expressive leaps of a seventh, fifth, and octave, and broad harmonies. Bar 65 opens with the first inversion, a D minor seventh chord that then expands to an F major chord with a major seventh (see Figure 55). In practical terms, due to pedalling, the chord will sound like an inversion of a D minor seventh chord with an added ninth. This chord brings to mind the large ninth or major seventh chords in the opening of Sibelius's *Mazurka,* op. 81, no. 1, in bars 3–10 (see Figure 33 on page 116).



Figure 55. Bars 65–74 in the first movement of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. These bars illustrate the expansive ascending leaps, the broad harmonies, as well as the perfect authentic cadence in bar 73.

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The more openly Romantic section ends with a falling gesture that ends on a perfect authentic cadence in bar 73, which resolves to C major in the following bar. Lünenbürger (2007, 5) has again associated the gesture with the Grieg formula. In this case a note is added between the second and the third note of the motive. Similar added notes are often used in Grieg's own music, although in his case the added notes usually appear between the first two notes rather than the two latter ones (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1993, 43). In this case, the scalar motion caused by the added note in bar 73 substantially weakens the impact of the motive.

The section ends with a sparkling passage that begins in bar 83 and brings the exposition to its conclusion. Any potential Nordic elements are relatively allusive; however, the frequent use of chords with added sixths result in arpeggiated figures that include versions of the Grieg formula. Additionally, while the section is in C major, the few brief shifts to the subdominant alternates between F minor and F major.



Figure 56. Bars 83–85 of the first movement of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, which lead to the end of the exposition in bar 94. The section features modal versions of the Grieg formula as well as brief borrowings of the minor subdominant harmony.

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In the rest of the movement, Sibelius goes on to develop and repeat many of the elements highlighted in my discussion of the exposition of the sonata. As this analysis is concerned with Nordic elements, I will not repeat each iteration of the same motives, and will therefore leave the development and recapitulation undiscussed. Instead, the following section will discuss what the awareness of these Nordic elements can mean for interpreting the music.

This is where the hermeneutic perspective becomes useful, both as a method for bringing together artistic and academic insights and as a means of navigating the multiplicity of different interpretive possibilities. At the core of this inquiry is the hermeneutic circle, the continual shifting of attention between the parts and the whole. As we have been preoccupied with exploring specific Nordic musical details, we are now in a position to consider how these elements inform our broader understanding of the character of the movement as a whole.

I want to begin by stating that not every detail that has been highlighted necessarily carries deep meaning, value, or explanatory power. Nonetheless, the awareness of such musical elements, even when their true meaning is elusive, provides space for contemplation that allows us to consciously choose which details to foreground and which to background. From a hermeneutic perspective, it is relevant to note that the decision to not draw attention to a specific musical element can be as interpretively impactful as the decision to highlight it. Both positive and negative interpretive choices affect the end result.

Hermeneutics also suggests that there is no singular, correct reading, but a wealth of different readings that arise from the fusion of the horizons of the interpreter and the work. This does not suggest a relativistic framing where anything goes, but rather that a deep engagement with the work, its cultural and historic context, and other surrounding factors can inform our understanding of different possibilities. This means that every serious hermeneutic interpretation should be deeply rooted in verifiable knowledge, but how this knowledge shapes the meaning is inevitably linked to the individual's personal understanding, background, experiences, and prejudices. The awareness that one's personal understanding serves an indispensable function in the formation of any interpretation can serve as a liberating reminder that our own beliefs and understanding are both valid and valuable.

If we apply this hermeneutic approach to the performance perspectives outlined above, it becomes immediately obvious that every single musical decision exists in a landscape of possibilities shaped by our understanding, our convictions, knowledge, and the music itself. These decisions are not arbitrary, but are based on a personal assessment of several possible well-reasoned alternatives. This means that we have the option to approach

each and every one of the Nordic musical elements with a broadened sense of their expressive possibilities.

If we choose to highlight a specific musical element, we have a range of options when it comes to how attention can be drawn to it. In order to avoid talking purely in the abstract, we can use the ascending fifth in the bridging-section in bar 17 as an illustration.[114] From a modern performance perspective, the most obvious option is to highlight the importance of the leap either through dynamic shaping, perhaps by making a crescendo to the peak note, or by a shift in the dynamics. Both a stepwise increase and decrease in volume will differentiate the large interval from its surroundings. The interval could also be highlighted by a change of speed, width, or style of the vibrato; a change in tone-colour; or articulation.

While the modern perspective provides sufficient tools for bringing out the musical detail, the landscape of well-reasoned possibilities is far wider. If we use our knowledge of late-nineteenth-century performance practice, we find several expressive tools at our disposal that are rarely utilised in modern performances. These can include agogic shaping, either through phrase-level agogic direction, motivic shaping, or agogic accents. An interesting option could be to employ a slight agogic lingering to bring out the importance of the interval. Such rhythmical liberties can be realised through a slight lengthening of the relevant note or notes, a slight rhythmic alteration, or rhythmic displacement. While my goal is not to suggest specific meanings of such expressive techniques, playing the upper note slightly early may suggest urgency, eagerness, or excitement, whereas playing it slightly late could suggest calmness, relaxation, or contentment. Such rhythmic liberties can be coordinated among the musicians, but historically there was a far greater acceptance of slight rhythmic deviations than what we are used to today.

Such timing decisions are also intimately linked to another expressive tool, the use of *portamento* or sliding between notes. While the technique may feel outdated from a modern perspective, it was widely employed during the end of the nineteenth century.

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[114] The violin's melody in bars 16–19 is equivalent to the piano's melody in bars 12–15, but shifted up an octave. See Figure 50 on page 159 for the piano's introduction of the bridging section.

A fascinating, often overlooked feature of *portamento* is its interaction with agogic inflections. A musician can signal the other musicians when the next note will land by the rate and shape of a slide (Potter 2006, 541, 544). This mirrors my own experience of experimenting with such techniques. Additionally, an exploration of historically aware performance styles invites the consideration of rhetorical and declamatory devices, which use timing, emphasis, or punctuation to bring out speech-like qualities in the music.

Similarly, while the specific musical detail in question does not have a strong folkloristic character, the exploration of what a folk-inspired approach could entail is nonetheless valid due to the work's style. A folkloristic approach can suggest tonal characteristics or rhythmic emphasis that differ from a traditional classical approach. As such, this provides yet another space for exploration that lies outside of normal conventions.

Instead of suggesting a specific "correct" reading, the hermeneutic approach to cultural and historic awareness opens up a landscape of potential options and possibilities. None of these options are obligatory, but they can broaden our sense of what is possible. These possibilities are reined in by our personal taste, musical convictions, and technical abilities, by the extent we allow them to influence our choices, and by contemporary cultural expectations, traditions, and norms. However, the interpretive landscape is nonetheless far wider than a literal reading of the score would suggest. If we choose to highlight a specific musical detail, there is a wealth of well-reasoned ways to do so.

The Second Movement: *Andante*

As we move on to the second movement of the sonata, we are immediately faced with a new set of interpretive choices. As was discussed above, Sibelius described the movement as "Finnish and melancholy; it is an authentic Finnish girl who sings on the A string; then some peasant lads perform a Finnish dance and try to entice her to smile, but it doesn't work; she only sings with greater sadness and melancholy than before." A philosophical question concerns whether or not the main theme's Finnish character resists a broader Nordic association. While the music is arguably more regional than transnational, it nonetheless becomes part of the broader Nordic musical landscape merely due to its geographical and historical position.

Lünenbürger (2007) has noted that the style of the opening melody of the second movement shows similarities to some Finnish folk songs, such as "Maantien poikki ne riijarit loikki ja lakit oli kallellansa", due to its dactyl rhythms and cadences with repeated closing notes (see Figure 57). The melody of the second movement also bears similarities to the Finnish folk song "Tuuli se taivutti" in its general character, rhythmic features, and harmonic language. Particularly striking is the appearance of a Dorian sixth at a corresponding point in the phrase.[115] Despite stylistic commonalities, Sibelius's melody does not appear to be a direct quotation.



Figure 57. A comparison of the opening theme of the second movement to Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, and the Finnish folk songs "Maantien poikki ne riijarit loikki ja lakit oli kallellansa" and "Tuuli se taivutti" (transposed).

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The melody is filled with musical details that can be associated with Nordic influence. Starting from the beginning, the piano's accompaniment presents a static texture in A minor, which Tawaststjerna (1976, 34) has described as "stylized writing for kantele" (see Figure 34 on page 117). The static downwards arpeggiated chords form a Nordic drone upon which the "authentic Finnish girl" can sing. The initial A minor chord

[115] Interestingly, Toivo Kuula's arrangement of the folk song, which was published as op. 17/9 in 1909 features a piano accompaniment whose character resembles that of the first movement from Sibelius's sonata.

remains unchanged for four bars. The static quality of the harmonic landscape can be compared to the return of the theme in bar 131, where the same melody is accompanied by a harmonic progression in which each beat supports the melody's pitches. The fact that the opening remains static, leading to clashes between the harmony and the melody, creates a juxtaposition between foreground and background while effectively conveying a mood and an archaic quality.

An immediate question facing any performer is the question of tempo. The time signature is marked *alla breve,* which traditionally would suggest feeling the music in two beats to the bar, but Clive Brown (1999, 313) has noted the inconclusive evidence of historical sources. Different sources suggest that *alla breve* could mean anything from the same tempo as common time, twice as fast, considerably faster but not twice as fast, or somewhat faster (ibid., 314). The accentuation of each beat of the piano's first bar suggests that each quarter should get an emphasis. The choice of tempo is therefore inconclusive, and leaves room for a wide range of choices.

When it comes to Nordic musical characteristics—in addition to the dactyl rhythms and the repeated ending notes—it can be noted that the second bar includes the Grieg-formula in its traditional form. However, in this case the intervallic relationship does not arise from the treatment of a leading tone that descends to the dominant, but rather from the use of the Dorian mode with its minor seventh. The motive is therefore not as prominent as in cases where the expectations of the leading tone's resolution to the tonic is subverted. The strict use of the Dorian mode also results in a minor dominant chord in bar 5. Also noteworthy is that, except for bar 5, the left hand of the piano includes an open fifth on the pitches A and E from the first to the end of the ninth bar.

In my opinion, one of the most interesting aspects of this melody is that a hermeneutic reading suggests the possibility of a layered approach to phrasing. Finnish prosody is generally characterised by an initial emphasis followed by a generally falling intonation. This intonation is generally produced through a combination of a falling melodic shape in combination with a gradual decrease in volume. The initial emphasis is tied to the Finnish language's rhythmic features, which are generally trochaic in nature. The trochaic metre is composed of pairs of syllables where the first syllable is stressed and the second one is unstressed. While trochaic rhythms and dactylic rhythms are metrically distinct—stress-release for the former, long-short-short for the latter—both share a prosodic

gesture: an initial stress followed by release. This allows the rhythmic emphasis of trochaic rhythms to map onto dactylic rhythms as well, even when their metrical structure differ.

If we observe the melody's general shape, we note that while individual bars may rise and fall, the general shape of the opening nine bars consists of two falling gestures. This aligns well with a melody inspired by Finnish prosody. Interestingly, this speech-like approach to phrasing—which suggests an initial emphasis followed by a relaxation—aligns with earlier approaches to phrasing, as was suggested by Türk and Crelle above.

While this approach can suggest a general shaping of the phrase, it also invites the possibility that the dynamic emphasis and the general musical direction do not necessarily need to align. In the Finnish language, the semantic emphasis of a sentence rarely aligns with its prosodic shape.[116] In other words, the most important words of a sentence spoken in Finnish do not necessarily lean on prosodic emphasis to convey meaning.

Applying this idea to musical performance suggests the possibility of using rhetoric shaping when it comes to dynamics, but nonetheless shaping the phrase through agogic direction towards a later point of importance. In my reading of the opening bars, I would suggest that this type of approach could aim towards the raised Dorian sixth in the fourth bar and carry the emphasis into the following bar. The second half of the phrase could be shaped either towards the eight or ninth bar. My understanding is that the semantic emphasis in music generally aligns with harmonic tension, but in this case the modal harmony, which shifts between the minor tonic and the modally inflected minor dominant, lessens the sense of harmonic directionality. The harmonic direction is even weaker in the consequent—i.e. the second half of the phrase—as an open fifth double pedal point built on the tonic further reduces the harmonic pull of the minor dominant chord. Therefore, harmonic tension is not a clear indicator of phrase structure in this case.

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[116] I use the term "semantic emphasis" here in a broad, colloquial sense, referring to the part of a phrase or sentence that carries the most meaning or expressive weight. This is distinct from the more technical use of "semantic" in linguistics.

Yet a third layer can be suggested by the melodic contour of the phrase, which peaks on the third beat of both the antecedent and consequent of the phrase's period structure. The early placement of these melodic peaks differs both from the prosodic shape as well as from my understanding of the semantic emphasis. This adds yet another layer to our hermeneutic landscape of possible interpretations. Rather than seeing these options as distinct or incompatible, this framing suggests the possibility of a layered approach to musical phrases.

In addition to interpreting the phrase-level structure, there are many other details that can be evaluated. Sibelius's description of a singing Finnish girl raises the question of how this idea can be conveyed most effectively. This comment suggests that while folklorism definitely provides a valuable interpretative lens, performance decisions may be more fruitfully inspired by models of folk singing rather than fiddling traditions.

The particular mention of the "A string" in Sibelius's description is also puzzling. Whereas the melody obviously is possible to perform entirely on the A string, the relatively high register makes it hard to combine with the performance instruction *semplice*. On the other hand, using fingerings that I found idiomatic in my doctoral concert, two and a half of the first eight bars ended up on the E string. This raises the question of whether Sibelius would have mentioned the A string in the description if around 30% of the theme ends up on the E string. While there is no definite answer to this question, the contrast between practical convenience and Sibelius's own description of the theme provides a wide interpretive space to explore.

A decision to remain on one string would (at least according to a late-Romantic performance style) almost inevitably lead to noticeable *portamenti*. While I personally found it difficult to find suitable moments for expressive slides in my own performances of the movement, intellectually I now recognise that there are good reasons to consider such expressive devices. Among singers, *portamento* provides the potential to introduce "para-linguistic tropes such as sighing, sobbing or other effects designed to manage the rhetorical communication of emotions" (Potter 2006, 549). Such gestures align well with Sibelius's description of the movement's character. The different performance perspectives that we explored in relation to the first movement are generally relevant here as well, but the discussion does not need repeating.

In my discussion with the ethnomusicologist Sundström (2025), he mentioned that the melancholic singing of women within the folk music tradition often involved the use of the high *falsetto* register. If we imagine that Sibelius wished to evoke this kind of singing, the A string could be used as a means to imitate this singing style. Rather than going for a clear and brilliant sound, the A string could imitate an airier, less focused falsetto.

Attempting to investigate this suggestion led me to accounts of the use of falsetto in Karelian lament (Tolbert 1990, 90). An interesting parallel can be found in the indigenous Finnic Seto people's funeral laments (Pärtlas 2025, 97). While such vocal features are relatively rare in recordings made outside ritual contexts, a recording made during an actual funeral exists, in which the lamenter's "falsetto, sobs between lines and occasional breaks in the crying" express sincere grief (ibid.). This suggests that the relationship between vocal technique and emotional expression may depend not only on the conventions of the musical tradition but also on the circumstances surrounding the sung laments.

The following phrase has several points of interest. The melody, which feels like a continuation of the opening theme, reappears in Sibelius's later orchestral song *Koskenlaskijan morsiamet*, op. 33 (The Rapids-Rider's Brides) (Barnett 2007, 50).[117] Considering our previous discussion of prosodic shaping, it is noteworthy that the motive is sung using the words "Oi kuinka kirkas on illan kuu, [...]", with the melodically interesting Dorian sixth appearing on the second syllable of the word "illan" (see Figure 58). Due to the Finnish language's trochaic structure, this means that the Dorian sixth would not be emphasised when the melody is sung using these words. This presents the possibility that my previous suggestion to draw attention to such folkloristic elements using dynamics, agogics, or expressive devices, may betray an outside perspective that sees such elements as inherently exotic. Sibelius's combination of text and melody suggests an approach where the Dorian sixth is not an exotic difference to be highlighted, but an intrinsic part of the style that is just as natural as any other note in the modal scale.

[117] The motive appears in *Koskenlaskijan morsiamet*, op. 33, in the fifth bar after rehearsal mark D, and in the subsequent phrase. The opening two bars of the same melody in Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, can be seen in Figure 54 on page 162.



Figure 58. The motive that Sibelius uses in bars 10–11 of the second movement of the Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178, also appears in Sibelius's Koskenlaskijan morsiamet, op. 33. In the orchestral song the motive is sung with text, which can shape our understanding of how to interpret the motive in the sonata.

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In addition to the orchestral song, the melodic gesture also appears in Sibelius's tone poem *En Saga,* op. 9 (Tawaststjerna 1992, 81–82). The melody is part of the closing section of the tone poem, and appears in the clarinet seventeen bars into the final *Moderato e tranquillo* section. These intertextual connections can be used to further explore additional layers of potential meaning.

The theme is also accompanied by a similar triplet figure to the one that was introduced in bar 56 of the first movement of the sonata (see Figure 54 on page 162). Both the melody and the harmony stay strictly within a minor pentachord. The lack of harmonic direction contributes to an archaic monotony that reinforces the seriousness of the character (ibid.).

Next, the piano takes over the melody in a repetition of the same motive an octave and a fifth above the original statement, in a seven-bar phrase that ends on a firm repeated folk-like end note. The violin returns to the opening melody, now played an octave below the original statement of the theme. The melody is accompanied by sparse but heavy, downward-arpeggiated chords. An interesting detail is found in bar 27, where the harmony initially consists of a major subdominant that uses the Dorian sixth, but which transform into a minor subdominant as F-sharp descends to F-natural (see Figure 59). This move away from the Dorian mode at the end of a section is akin to a similar harmonic transformation in the *Danse champêtre,* op. 106, no. 1.[118] Interestingly, the phrase does not end conclusively in A minor, despite the melody's firm arrival on the

[118] The shift from a predominantly Dorian harmonic landscape to a natural minor happens four times in the dance, in bars 14, 22, 50, and 58.

pitch A. Instead, the piano reaches an F major chord in bar 28, and only resolves into A minor on the short, repeated end note.



Figure 59. Bars 26–32 of the second movement from Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. Note the shift from D Dorian to D Aeolian in bar 27, and the unexpected transition into the next section in bar 32.

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The transition to the B-section of the movement is brief and unexpected. The violin plays an eighteen-note rapid ascending scale in A minor in bar 32, landing on E natural. The scale is framed by *fermatas* on both sides. Knowing the narrative that Sibelius had imagined for this movement, the rapid run of notes feels more like a theatrical scene change where the focus shifts from the sad Finnish girl to the dancing peasant lads than a traditional transition.

We recall that Sibelius described the following section as a Finnish dance where some boys try to entice the girl to smile, without success. An interesting detail is that whereas the vast majority of traditional Nordic folk dances are in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, this stylized folk dance continues in *alla breve* with four quarter notes to the bar.[119] As was noted above, the melody of this rustic dance section shows a strong similarity to the theme found in the

[119] There are exceptions, such as dances in duple meter or in mixed meter. For some examples of dances in mixed meter, see Dance No. 100 "Åtta stegs menuett", Dance No. 106, or Dance No. 116 in Andersson's (1963, 36, 39. 44). Dances in duple metre includes Dances 1039–1043 (ibid., 498–501).

secondary theme zone in the first movement of this sonata (see Figure 53 on page 161). It also shows similarities to themes found in Grieg's Violin Sonatas in G major and C minor. The triplet on the first beat, which is first introduced in bar 37, is also gesturally similar to both the main theme of the *Allegro vivace* section as well as the main theme of the last movement of Grieg's Violin Sonata in G major, op. 13 (see Figure 54 on page 162). Notably, both of these dance-like themes in Grieg's music are, however, in triple meter.

From an interpretive perspective, there are several musical elements to consider. The general shape of the phrase is formed by a four-bar ascending line that stays firmly in the tonic harmony for the three first bars (see Figure 60). The following bars serve a dominant function, with the bass line remaining on a pedal tone on the pitch E for the first three bars. This wave-like shape contrasts significantly with the first theme's falling melodic shape. It is significant that Konttinen (2013, 246) has noted that, while such wave-like melodic shapes are common in Sibelius's songs set to Swedish texts, they are mostly absent from his songs set to Finnish texts. While the importance of this observation is inconclusive in this case, as the section clearly represents a dance rather than a song, it is nonetheless noteworthy how the two sections of the movement contrast in style (song/dance), modality (A Dorian—minor with a raised sixth/Ionian—A major), melodic shape (falling/wave-like), and arguably expression (introverted/exuberant and pictorial).



Figure 60. The contrasting theme in bars 33–40 in the second movement to Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178.

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From an interpretive perspective, several aspects invite consideration. The eight-bar phrase, with its naturally ascending and descending line, provides a clear overall structure yet still leaves room for interpretative flexibility. Dances, however, often depend on rhythmic drive and a clearly articulated beat hierarchy. Sibelius's writing supports this through the strong bass notes and wide chords spanning a tenth on the first beat of each bar, which naturally emphasises the downbeat and establishes a rhythmic hierarchy within the measure. This creates a secondary level of shaping in addition to the larger phrase structure.

While the beat hierarchy is clear, the relative importance of the individual bars is less so. Many dances begin with a strong first downbeat, which also corresponds with descriptions of classical phrase structure, in which phrase openings were often highlighted. Such an approach would give greater weight to the first and third bars than to the second and fourth. Yet, melodically, the opposite interpretation could also be convincing—treating the first bar as an upbeat to the second, and the third as an upbeat to the fourth—an approach more consistent with Riemann's conception of phrase structure.

Yet another interpretive option is suggested by historical performance practice. Still during the nineteenth century, highly regarded musicians such as Carl Czerny (1791–1857), Johann Hummel (1778–1837), and Mathis Lussy (1828–1910) argued that long notes should generally be strongly accentuated, especially if they follow shorter notes (C. Brown 1999, 38). This suggests the possibility of emphasising the second beat of the melody, whereas the accompaniment is grounded on the first beat. This type of rhythmic displacement can bring energy to the phrase, as both the first and second beats carry the

music forwards. It also prepares the ear for the following movement's mazurka, with its rhythmic playfulness.

All of these beat-level options simultaneously interact with the larger phrase that melodically leads into the fifth bar, but which structurally could also be seen as leading towards the seventh bar. As we can see, the folklorism of this dance-like section once again produces a kind of productive ambiguity wherein several simultaneous but often incompatible interpretations can interact.

In the subsequent bars of this folk-like dance we find a feature that is rarely found in Sibelius's music. Whereas Sibelius's depictions of nature are usually atmospheric, internalised, or produced through static sonic landscapes, this section contains elements that can be interpreted as depictions of birdsong. These begin as playful grace notes by the violin above the piano's melody in bars 42 and 44, but soon grow into a trill that continues from bar 49 to 54 (see Figure 61). This type of pictorialism brings to mind the opening of Ole Bull's *Et Sæterbesøg* (A Mountain Vision), which begins with the imitation of distant bells and cuckoos. In the section that brings the first statement of the boys' folk dance to a close, Furuhjelm (1916, 59) has drawn attention to the delicate quality of the music, typical of Sibelius's idyllic style. In the middle of the dance-section we return to a dramatic restatement of the Finnish girl's sad melody, now accompanied by triplets that are passed between the piano's left hand and the violin. After an energetic repetition of the dance-theme, Sibelius gradually brings this middle section to a close.

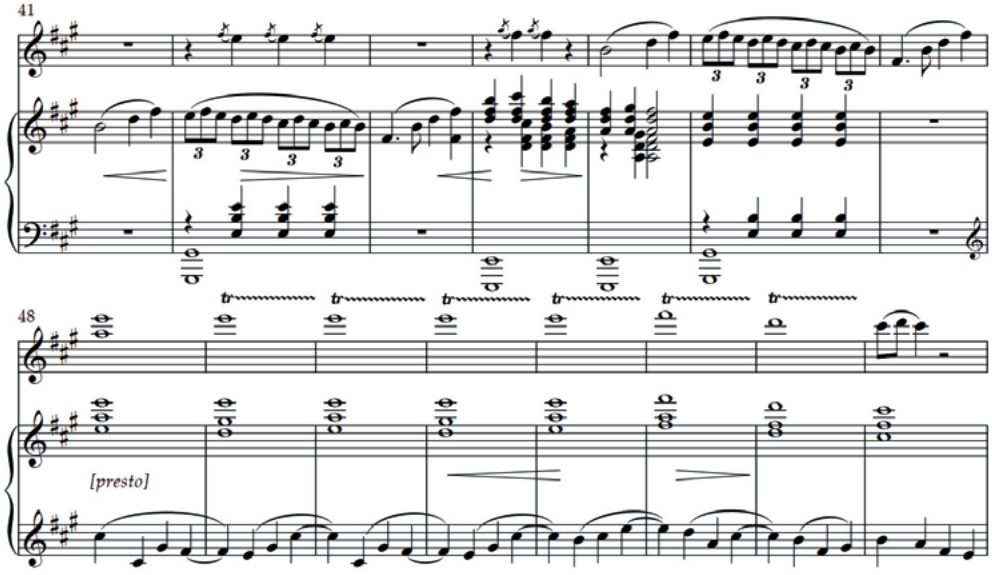


Figure 61. The section from bars 41–55 in the second movement of Sibelius's Violin Sonata, JS 178, includes musical elements that can be associated with pictorialism or imitations of birdsong.

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After a short and dramatic interlude in bars 125–130, the melancholic Finnish folk melody returns. As we recall from Sibelius's narrative, this instance in the music represents the moment where the girl sings with even greater sadness and melancholy than before. From an interpretive perspective, it is worth considering how this greater melancholy can be achieved. The dynamic is *pianissimo* for both instruments, whereas the opening of the movement was in *mezzopiano*. This begs the question of how the expressive sadness and melancholy can be strengthened even as the music becomes ever more introspective. Based on performance practice from the end of the nineteenth century, my impression is that it was unlikely that such a heightening of expressive intensity was produced merely through the use of dynamics and vibrato. Instead, a larger toolkit of expressive techniques, including rhetorical devices, agogics, and *portamento*, likely contributed to the heightened expression, as has been discussed above. This awareness provides a broad range of possibilities that can contribute to our interpretive options.

The Third Movement: *Vivace*

The last movement, which has the tempo marking *Vivace*, takes the form of a spirited mazurka in $\frac{3}{8}$ time.[120] According to Sibelius's narrative, the movement begins by a depiction of "people in a meadow singing and playing on Midsummer Night". As discussed previously, the reference to Midsummer carries significant cultural, historical, and symbolic weight in the Nordic countries.

The opening theme uses a triplet on the first quaver, similar to the triplets in both the major section of the second movement, as well as dances in Grieg's Violin Sonata in G major, op. 13 (see Figure 62). It is notable that while mazurkas originated from Poland, they had by Sibelius's time become a common dance form in Nordic and Finnish folk music as well. In the collections of folk dances from the Swedish-speaking areas in Finland, we can find several mazurkas with similar characteristic triplets.[121] While these mazurkas are invariably notated in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, rather than $\frac{3}{8}$, they nonetheless show a stylistic similarity. As we recall, Sibelius had attended a masquerade in the beginning of 1889 that ended with local fiddlers performing mazurkas, polonaises, minuets, and folk dances (Goss 1996, 103). That means that Sibelius's exposure to mazurkas was not limited to classical music, but also included local folk music.

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[120] A broader discussion of Nordic folk dances can be found as part of the Appendix which features the program notes to my doctoral concert "Jean Sibelius and Nordic Dances".

[121] See for instance Dances No. 1191, 1217, 1279, 1288, 1308, 1309, and 1354 in Otto Andersson's and Greta Dahlström's (1887–1978) (1975) collection of "Younger Dance Melodies". Dances No. 1288 and 1308 show particular gestural similarity to the theme of the last movement of Sibelius's F major Violin Sonata. While triplets on the first beats are not uncommon, the majority of the mazurkas use a characteristic dotted rhythm rather than a triplet on the first beat.



Figure 62. The opening to the third movement of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178.

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Tawaststjerna (1992, 82) has noted how the opening harmonies immediately bring Grieg's music to mind. The harmony uses a rustic-sounding open fifth on the tonic in the bass as a pedal point for the four opening bars, whereas the harmonies shift above it. In the English translation of Tawaststjerna's (1976, 34) biography, the author particularly draws attention to "the seventh on the supertonic over the bass fifths" that gives the music its Griegian flavour.

All the interpretive perspectives that have been discussed in relation to the previous movements are still relevant, but the mazurka-like style introduces another layer of nuance. Mazurkas often derive their distinctive character from a firm initial downbeat followed by a rhythmically displaced accent, typically falling on the second or third beat of the measure. This subtle off-balance lilt distinguishes the mazurka from other triple-time dances like the waltz. The dance steps to mazurkas are highly regionally varied and, depending on the tradition, to some extent improvisatory. They are, however, often characterised by a movement towards the second beat, initiated on the first. That means that the first beat is structurally important, but the rhythmic emphasis often lays elsewhere in the bar. This rhythmic irregularity provides a wealth of interpretive choices for the shaping of the opening phrase of the last movement.

The first two bars could be phrased as an impulse and release, or, alternatively, shaped towards the second bar, but neither solution brings out the mazurka's typical lilt. An interesting option is to bring out the second quaver of the second bar, as it creates a rhythmic displacement similar to what, for example, Niels Gade uses in both his first and third *Folkdance in Nordic Character*, op. 62. However, a too consistent application of

bringing out the second beat lessens the music's ability to surprise the listener. For example, in the fourth bar, the piano plays a gesture towards the second beat, marked by hairpins. However, the violin's large leap in the same bar, bridged by a grace note, suggests the possibility of emphasising the third beat instead. The grace note is once again suggestive of a slight agogic playfulness.

The hairpin adds an additional interpretive dimension, as there is significant scholarship suggesting that hairpins were not merely dynamic markings during the Romantic era, but indicators of expressive intent that were often realised through rhythmic inflection (Kim 2012, 46). For example, in recordings by musicians who personally knew Brahms, hairpins are realised through a variety of expressive techniques such as changing dynamics, chord-rolling, hand-displacement (for pianists), vibrato, *portamento*, and especially agogic inflections (ibid., 56). While such markings are neither uniquely Nordic nor Sibelian, an awareness of the historic attitude towards such markings provides important contextual information about our interpretative options. I have been unable to conclusively establish if this nineteenth-century approach to hairpins holds true in the case of Sibelius, but from a hermeneutic perspective an awareness of this possibility can inform our choices. If we interpret the piano's hairpin not merely as a dynamic marking but as an indicator of musical shaping in line with historical usage, the markings could suggest a slight agogic movement forward, followed by a relaxation that would give time for the violin to shape the grace note.

I have also noticed that many large registral leaps in Sibelius's violin music often use pitches that can be played using harmonics. While this does not suggest that leaps in Sibelius's music should always be performed in this manner whenever possible, it invites the possibility of considering such alternatives. The leap in the fourth bar of the violin part can effectively be performed using a harmonic, lending a sense of humour and light-heartedness to the music. Personally, I would likely not opt for such a performance solution on the first statement of the theme, but such minor variations to fingerings and rhythmic shaping can bring variation to the many repetitions of the theme.

The hermeneutic framework that has been introduced in the discussion of the previous movements naturally extends to the last movement's Grieg-inspired mazurka as well. For that reason, I will consciously leave the discussion of the last movement more concise. Moreover, despite its Griegian influence and folkdance-like flair, the last

movement does not present many new Nordic stylistic elements beyond those which have already been discussed. Taken together, I feel that a detailed discussion of the last movement would not sufficiently expand our interpretive horizon to warrant the length.

There are nonetheless a few things that can be briefly highlighted. The contrasting section of the movement depicts a meteor falling down among the people celebrating Midsummer. Goss (2009, 55) seems to suggest that the meteor can be seen to be arriving already in bar 31, but I see the subsequent return of the spirited mazurka-theme as suggesting that the arrival only happens later, in bar 76, when the character of the music shifts noticeably. Sibelius uses several techniques to create a contrast to the opening section of the movement, most noticeably through a rhythmic broadening by reframing the $\frac{3}{8}$ time signature by the near-constant use of duplets.



Figure 63. Two possible musical moments depicting the arrival of the meteor, in bars 31–35 (top) and 76–83 (bottom).

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The section also shifts from the initial F major to D Aeolian (natural minor). The Aeolian scale is also a common feature in Nordic music, and effectively reduces the tension between tonic and dominant by flattening the leading note found in the harmonic minor. Only towards the end of the second phrase in bars 90–93 does the piano introduce the

note c-sharp to create a traditional A major dominant seventh chord. These same bars also show a clear intertextual connection to both the second theme zone of the first movement as well as the rustic dance-section of the second movement, as well as connections to Grieg, as has previously been discussed. After the "meteor"-section ends, the music hesitantly returns to the opening mazurka.



Figure 64. Bars 90–93 of the third movement to Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. The music shifts from the Aeolian mode to the harmonic minor, allowing for a dominant seventh chord.

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The end of the sonata also includes elements that are relevant for a Nordic reading of the work. After a partial recapitulation of the opening material, where the "meteor"-theme is alluded to only briefly, a gradual buildup of energy commences, which carries the movement to its conclusion. The final increase in tension is accompanied by a long pedal point on the dominant that lasts from bar 358–369. Interestingly, a dominant chord is never reached during this pedal point. Instead, the final bars of the pedal point revolve around the tonic 6/4 chord, but with the pitch D as a constant feature of the harmonic landscape, again simultaneously suggesting elements of D minor and F major. When the pedal point finally resolves, it does not serve its expected cadential function, but instead resolves into the mediant A minor.

The concluding chords of the work bring together several elements that have featured prominently throughout the sonata. As we recall, the very opening of the first movement presented a harmonic foundation in a pentatonic F major, but where the violin's melody outlined a D minor chord, effectively juxtaposing the parallel major and minor modes. Similarly, the final chords reinforce this harmonic dualism with a final cadence that ends with a I–VI–I progression. These final chords also prominently feature the repeated and

accentuated end notes that were used in the previous movements. And, while it may be coincidental, the very last notes outline a reversed version of the modal Grieg formula.



Figure 65. The last bars of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. These bars feature a I–VI–I chord progression, repeated end notes, and a reversed and modal version of the Grieg formula.

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Thinking about the sonata as a whole, we can note an interesting aspect of Sibelius's use of folkloristic and, more generally, Nordic elements; it imbues the music with a stylistic directness that differs noticeably from much other music from the late nineteenth century. Realism was an important stylistic trend in visual art, literature, and drama in the Nordic countries during the nineteenth century, but it never became recognized as a major style within classical music, likely because music cannot convey information with sufficiently objective precision. For that reason, I find it noteworthy that several authors have described Sibelius's music as realistic, or coloured by Nordic realism.[122] This label certainly fits this sonata as well (Furuhjelm 1916, 52). It is as if Sibelius is describing the musical narrative without excessive Romanticism, leaning instead on a rustic immediacy. This alignment with broader Nordic cultural trends provides a relevant perspective for our hermeneutic horizon.

Another interesting aspect is that Nordic characteristics in music, and folklorism in particular, can often evoke extra-musical associations (Silén 2024). These elements place

[122] See for instance Ekman (1938, 31, 121, 147, 237), Tawaststjerna (1992, 84), or Goss (2009, 266).

the music in a particular historical and cultural context. While they do not communicate a specific meaning, these details can be used as a starting point for imagining a broader interpretation.

This ties into the way Kramer (1993) has applied hermeneutics to music. Kramer (1993, 9–10) argues that the identification of specific hermeneutic windows—such as textual inclusions ("texts set to music, titles, epigrams, programs, notes to the score, and sometimes even expression markings"), citational inclusions ("a less explicit version of the first"), and structural tropes ("a structural procedure, capable of various practical realizations, that also functions as a typical expressive act within a certain cultural/historical framework")—can be used to indicate meaning within musical works. These hermeneutic windows can then be used to interpret related expressive acts, expanding the meaning towards a complete reading of the work (ibid., 13). Kramer (ibid., 15) notes, in line with hermeneutic tradition, that while "bad interpretations may be manifestly false, good interpretations can never be manifestly true", as alternative readings always are possible.

Applying this perspective to Sibelius's sonata suggests the possibility of using a combination of the narrative provided by Sibelius, in combination with musical elements that can serve as hermeneutic windows, to expand the brief narrative into a more complete interpretation of the whole work. The process uses the hermeneutic circle. If we can find interpretations or meanings for specific moments in the music, we can zoom out and use these parts to expand our perspective on the work as a whole.

This case study has attempted to highlight the deep level of inquiry and interpretive possibilities that even a relatively modest work for violin and piano can accommodate. I have sought to show how a hermeneutic perspective can be used to expand rather than constrict our artistic choices. The process illustrates how thoughtful engagement in music does not converge towards a singular "truth", but that there are several well-reasoned interpretive options which can be evaluated for their artistic merits. So, rather than providing a specific map for how to interpret this work, the hermeneutic perspective helps us appreciate that there are no objectively correct readings, but rather a vast landscape of possibilities to explore.

5.2 Jean Sibelius's Three Pieces, Op. 116

The first case study, which focused on Sibelius's Sonata in F major, JS 178, from 1889, showed a major step towards a personal style. This new direction, which leaned on folklorism and cultural situatedness, set Sibelius on a path towards a unique new voice for Finnish music. Between the sonata and the *Three Pieces*, op. 116, from 1929—which we will explore next—we do not merely find the passage of four decades, but also the creation of every single one of Sibelius's seven symphonies, *Kullervo*, all his tone poems, and virtually all other works that Sibelius is best known for. These four decades also include the First World War, from 1914–1918, Finland's declaration of independence from Russia in 1917, and its civil war in 1918. The First World War, as well as the following inter-war years, are often tied to the crisis of historicism, as well as the so-called break with the past that shattered many of the assumptions of the late-Romantic world.

This context situates Sibelius's *Three Pieces*, op. 116, in a considerably different historical surrounding than the youthful Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. While many of the topics discussed in relation to the sonata can still inform our interpretive horizon, including the three performance perspectives described above, the musical culture had shifted considerably in those intervening decades. The German style represented by Joachim had largely gone out of fashion. Instead, highly personal performers such as Jascha Heifetz, Fritz Kreisler, Joseph Szigeti, and Mischa Elman stood at the pinnacle of the violin world. Yehudi Menuhin and Nathan Milstein (1904–1992) were both at the start of equally brilliant careers, both having made major debuts in 1929. The metal E-string had almost universally replaced the gut E, a development largely driven by the practicality of the more reliable metal string in combination with the difficulty of getting hold of quality gut strings during the war (Martens 1919, 64, 269–270). The other strings, however, were still generally made of gut—either plain or wound. Given Sibelius's musical education in the 1880s, remnants of the late-Romantic style likely remained relevant to him, but the performance style of the late 1920s had largely adapted to new ideals and expectations. These changes in musical language and performance context inarguably shaped Sibelius's late works for violin.

Scène de danse, Op. 116, No. 1

Sibelius's *Three Pieces*, op. 116, is an enigmatic set of short works that are a far cry from the realism of his Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178. The first piece, *Scène de danse,* opens with an ominous introduction that immediately presents considerable interpretive ambiguity (see Figure 66). While the piece as a whole can be understood to be in G-sharp minor, it begins on a first inversion of a D-sharp dominant seventh chord (where the fifth is missing), but where the structurally important tritone between F-double-sharp and C-Sharp is introduced first in the bass. The pitch D-sharp, which establishes the chord as a D-sharp seventh chord, only arrives as part of a syncopated rhythm. Viewed from this perspective, where the opening chord is seen as a dominant to G-sharp minor, the violin's opening melody, which begins on A-natural, suggests a Phrygian mode, characterized by the minor second between the first and second scale degrees.



Figure 66. The opening four bars of Sibelius's Scène de danse, op. 116, no. 1.

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This perspective suggests an ancient folkloristic influence. However, this reading does not satisfactorily explain the harmonic landscape. Already the opening chord, with its F-double-sharp, does not belong to the Phrygian mode. Also, since the root-note G-sharp has not yet been established, a listener is unlikely to hear the opening in this light.

An alternative interpretation is that the opening resists a clear tonal centre, and instead outlines a whole-tone scale. Indeed, looking at the tonal content of the three first bars, all six notes of the whole tone scale are present—F-double sharp (also later notated as G-natural), A-natural, B-natural, C-sharp, D-sharp, and F-natural. Only the E-natural in the violin on the last sixteenth-note of the third bar does not belong to this scale. A

whole tone scale also explains the peculiar chordal progression in the piano, enharmonically read as E-flat seventh, F seventh, and G seventh (all the chords are missing the fifth, which would not fit the whole-tone scale).

This strange opening resolves to a G-sharp minor chord on the second beat of the fourth bar. In the same moment the bind of the whole-tone scale is broken, and the piece seems to arrive in its primary key. This strange non-functional chord progression shows similarities to a composition technique often referred to as parallel harmony, or harmonic planing—a technique where all the pitches of a chord move in parallel motion. This technique was popularised in classical music by Claude Debussy (1862–1918), Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), and Erik Satie (1866–1925). However, while the harmonic content is suggestive of parallel harmony, the voice-leading is not, as common tones are retained, producing a hybrid effect.

The violin enters in the second bar, playing a brooding, gradually ascending motive that seems to move in double time rather than the triple time indicated by the time signature. Once the fourth bar is reached, the violin presents a folk-like gesture characterised by quick dotted rhythms. While this dotted figure is the culmination of the violin's opening line, it does not feel like the natural conclusion of the opening bars, but rather like an introduction of a new thematic element. The short, dotted gesture in the fourth bar gives the impression of a melodic fragment, taken out of its context. Subsequent musical material reinforces this interpretation.

A consequence of the use of the whole-tone scale is that the opening lacks a clear tonal centre, and the chords resist resolutions according to traditional functional harmony. In combination with the unchanging texture, this gives the opening a relentless, quasi-static feel. So, while I would not describe the opening as a clear example of the Nordic drone, it nonetheless presents some of its characteristics. It creates a mood or a landscape that is relatively independent from the violin's melody. Also, the piano's texture, which is passed between the two hands of the pianist, is similar to the texture of the opening of Sibelius's *Auf der Heide,* op. 115, no. 1, which refers to nature in its title.

In the fifth bar the music returns to the same ominous inversion of the D-sharp dominant chord as we heard at the very beginning. The violin introduces a motive that gives the impression of a folk-dance, but rather than hearing the whole melody, we again only get a single bar that resolves into a rapid figuration which is passed between the

violin and the piano. It is as if the music drifts away and briefly gets stuck on the short motive.



Figure 67. Bars 5–8 of Sibelius's Scène de danse, op. 116, which introduce a new folk-like gesture.

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A striking thing about this short piece is that the opening six bars contain the seeds to virtually all the musical material of the piece, however in fragmented form. An interesting example is how the opening ascending line, which was introduced in the violin, combines with the folk-like dotted rhythm to produce a new melodic element that is used in bars 7–8 (and later in 26–27), whereas the opening melody never returns in its original form. However, bars 20–23 include what feels like a development of the opening gesture, again ending in the familiar folk-like motive (see Figure 68).



Figure 68. Bars 20–23 recall the violin's opening gesture.

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Even more interesting are bars 11–17. They combine the two folk-like gestures that were introduced in bars 4 and 5 into a larger—though still fragmented—melody. The striking thing is that these two motives have now changed place, so that the motive from bar 5

begins the phrase and the motive from bar 4 serves as a continuation. This suggests that the initial introduction of these motives was a fragmented and disordered glimpse of a larger melody.



Figure 69. Bars 11–14 introduce a reorganisation of the opening material in combination with bitonality.

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A second level of interest arises from Sibelius's use of bitonality. The piano remains in G-sharp minor, but the violin's key signature has changed to D major. Both instruments, however, hover around their respective dominant key, with the piano returning to the characteristic inversion of a D-sharp dominant seventh chord, and the violin playing its folk-like melody around the dominant A major. The lack of a clear tonal grounding raises the question of whether the violin's tune is in D major and circles the dominant, or if the melody is better characterized as an A mixolydian mode, which is characterized by the flattened seventh scale degree. Whichever interpretation we choose, we note that the two chords D-sharp major and A major are a tritone apart—the very first interval that was introduced in the piece.

A unique aspect of dominant chords spaced a tritone apart is that the tension between the third and the seventh, which pulls the chord towards the tonic, is shared between these two otherwise distant chords. In this example, the D-sharp dominant seventh includes a tritone between the third, F-double-sharp (enharmonically understood as G-natural), and the seventh, C-sharp, whereas the A major seventh chord includes the third, C-sharp, and the seventh, G-natural. That means that both chords can, depending on how the tritone is resolved, lead into the same tonic. This is exactly what happens in bar 18, as the music returns to G-sharp minor.

A tempting interpretation of this piece's tonal instability, ambiguity, fragmentation, and suggestive folkloristic gestures is to explore it through the lens of Symbolism. Symbolism, which arose as a reaction against realism and naturalism, was often interested in dreams, ambiguity, and the inner rather than the external world. Instead of viewing the external world as it is, Symbolist plays and novels often focus on depicting the inner, subjective world.

As was previously discussed in the section on Sibelius's connections to Nordic drama and theatre, Sibelius was thoroughly familiar with Symbolism, especially through authors and playwrights like Strindberg, Ibsen, and members of the Euterpe. Most of Sibelius's incidental music was composed to plays with Symbolist undertones (Kallberg 2011, 75). Additionally, some of Sibelius's orchestral music has been described as having characteristics in line with Symbolism (Tawaststjerna 1992, 260; Goss 2009, 223; Barnett 2007, 98, 156–157).

This interpretive lens, in combination with the ambiguity of the tonal material, suggests that the dance scene that the piece's title refers to is not experienced directly. The piece does not seem to convey the feeling of dancing or watching a dance. Neither does it feel like a performance of dance music which invites expression through movement. Instead, a symbolist interpretation suggests that what the music depicts is not the dance scene itself but a filtered experience, memory, or even a dream of a dance that may have taken place long ago. If the piece is reflective of fleeting memories or dreams, it explains why musical motives appear out of order, such as the introduction of the two folk-inspired motives that later form a larger melody in inverted order. It also begins to explain the unsettling harmonic landscape and the brief repetitive gestures, which feel as if they become stuck. I have found this interpretive lens to be illuminating for some of Sibelius's other miniatures as well, as they sometimes convey a feeling of distance or detachment. This topic will be discussed further in the afterthoughts to this thesis.

The uniqueness of this short piece resists easy categorisation. Many of the musical details can be suggestive of Nordic influence, such as the folk-like gestures, the relatively static harmony in combination with the relentless "walking"-motive, as well as brief suggestions of modal influences. However, while the details suggest such a connection, the way these elements are combined sound unlike any other work I have performed as

part of this research project. The piece feels like a jigsaw-puzzle where many of the pieces look familiar, but once they are assembled they do not form the picture one might expect.

Danse caractéristique, Op. 116, No. 2

The second piece of op. 116 is just as allusive as the first one, but conveys a completely different mood. My initial reaction was that the Nordic perspective and the Nordic characteristics were not as informative for understanding this piece as in the other case studies. Upon closer inspection, however, several details emerged that can be interpreted as relating to Nordic musical features.

The piece immediately opens with a sense of being suspended in ambiguity. The opening three beats strongly suggest a waltz, but rather than being in a traditional $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature, the piece is written in $\frac{6}{4}$, where the waltz falters on the latter half of the bar (see Figure 70). This rhythmic pattern is repeated over and over in seven of the piece's first eight bars. It is as if the waltz tries to get going on beats one, two, and three, only to fade away on beats four, five, and six.



Figure 70. The opening five bars of Sibelius's Danse caractéristique, op. 116, no. 2.

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While I would not primarily associate waltzes with the Nordic countries, it is notable that they nonetheless were a central part of Nordic musical culture. During the nineteenth century, waltzes began replacing older dance forms in collections of folk

music (Gustafsson 2016, 323).[123] This suggests that the faltering waltz that opens the piece may be understood as either having a Nordic connection or being representative of more cosmopolitan influences.

An even stronger contributor to the peculiar mood of the opening bar is the result of an unresolved seventh, which lingers in the bass line for nineteen bars. The bass line is not entirely static, but briefly shifts from B-flat to G-natural on the last beat of the bar, in an almost hypnotic *ostinato*. This static element is the source of many analytical question marks.

While pedal points are a common feature of folkloristic music, the specific details of how this lingering B-flat behaves is anything but traditional. Pedal points often serve as tonal anchors. For example, if they are placed on the tonic they serve as a reinforcement of the home key and a stabilising feature that awaits the music's return to the tonic, whereas if the pedal point is on the dominant, it creates a tension that awaits a cadential resolution. In both cases the pedal point creates a harmonic tension that awaits resolution and effectively creates a grounding against which the rest of the music can interact. However, in this case the quasi-static pedal point on the flat seventh creates an impression where the very element we expect to serve as a tonal anchor is the source of instability. It feels as if the ground we hope to lend support is unstable or tilted. Additionally, the fact that the pedal point on the seventh never resolves from B-flat to A-natural, according to traditional voice leading expectations, gives the whole music an unresolved quality. This may again suggest using Symbolism as an interpretative lens, as was discussed in relation to the previous piece.

At first glance, the key signature of the piece seems to suggest that it is in F-major, which would make the opening chord a dominant seventh in its third inversion. However, the refusal of the seventh to resolve casts doubt on this seemingly obvious interpretation. Seen as a whole, the piece can instead be understood as shifting between C Mixolydian

[123] Gustafsson notes that dances known as waltzes during the eighteenth century likely referred to a dance nowadays known as "valstur". Actual waltzes only began gaining popularity in the nineteenth century.

(with its characteristic lowered seventh) and C minor, but the piece is ambiguous enough to resist a definite answer.

The harmonic landscape of the opening is also peculiar. The opening nineteen bars in essence only contain two chords, the previously discussed C major chord with the minor seventh, and a G minor chord in its first inversion, which sometimes includes the seventh and sometimes not. This means that the harmonic space is highly static. However, it is debatable if this is an example of a Nordic drone or not. I have argued that one of the characteristics of the Nordic drone is that it often creates a harmonic landscape that is mostly unresponsive to the melody's movements. In this case, the harmony does interact with the melody, conforming to the shape of the melody. This calls into question whether the opening section of the piece includes one. The harmonic landscape is highly static, but it does not behave like the static textures in many other works by Sibelius. Rather, it suggests that the harmony of this opening section is related to the Nordic drone, but not a perfect representation of it.

On top of this harmonic landscape, which feels simultaneously both familiar and peculiar, the violin introduces a simple lyrical melody. The violin's melody seems like an invitation to dance, even as the piano fails to keep the waltz going. The violin even halts the melodic motion twice, which can be interpreted as the violin stopping to check if the dance could finally get started.

This simple melody also contains a thematic seed which at first appearance seems unimportant. The brief quavers, which add a slight shape to the melodic line and guide the music in its gradually descending line, contain towards the end of the second, third, and fourth bar an inversion of the Grieg formula, first in its minor and then in its major form. This unassuming gesture will become an important thematic component in the piece's B-section, appearing both in its original as well as in reversed form.

As the piece gradually builds up energy, the attempt to keep the waltz going is forsaken. Instead, the music appears increasingly frustrated with the inability to resolve the dissonant note B-flat, which keeps being repeated in each and every bar. As the music grows ever more dramatic, the violin adamantly repeats the pitch G-natural, as if to drive home a point, perhaps that the music should finally settle into C-major.



Figure 71. Sibelius's Danse caractéristique, op. 116, no. 2, bars 12–19, showing the violin's insistent repetition of the pitch G.

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The attempt to resolve the dissonance fails, leading the music into a dissonant *Agitato* section. The tritone relationship, which had been so central in the first piece, *Scene de dance*, op. 116, no. 1, again makes an appearance, alternating in the bass line between C-natural and F-sharp. The destabilising B-flat loses some of its impact, but still retains a strong presence. On top of this dissonant foundation, the violin introduces a melody that is built out of fragments of the opening theme, which are manipulated and changed in different ways (see Figure 72). This section is played almost completely in double-, triple-, and quadruple-stops. The Grieg formula appears both in a form that is simultaneously inverted and reversed, and later in inverted form.



Figure 72. Bars 20–24 in Sibelius's Danse caractéristique, op. 116, no. 2.

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It is as if the music's inability to resolve the disturbing dissonance that unsettled the whole beginning of the work has pushed the piece from a general feeling of major into the minor mode. While it might be an over-reaching interpretation, it is notable that the violin's second chord in the *Agitato* section contains both the notes E-natural and E-flat simultaneously, as if the music does not know where it tonally belongs. As has been discussed previously, shifts between major and minor modes are a common feature of Nordic music, but the general ambiguity of the piece's tonality makes this shift less obvious than in most other cases.

The *Agitato* also introduces an intertextually interesting motive, found in the arpeggiated octaves in the piano.[124] This ascending motive becomes a relatively important building block in the rest of the piece, but its true importance only becomes clear in the third piece of this opus, *Rondeau romantique*, as a similar ascending line played in broken octaves brings the whole opus to its emotional high point.

The energetic *Agitato* resolves into another lyrical section, which now has shifted from the opening's major to minor. All the melodic motives are modally altered versions of previously introduced material. Particularly interesting is the return of the inverted Grieg formula in bar 34, effectively stating a lyrical variation of the *Agitato* section. This gentle moment is punctured by sudden C major chords, as if the music again tries to reassert the need to find a way back to the home key.

[124] These arpeggiated scales are first introduced in bars 21 and 23 (see Figure 73), but are expanded into a longer scale in bar 25.



Figure 73. Bars 34 –38 in Sibelius's Danse caractéristique, op. 116, no. 2. Note how the lyrical theme, which is marked dolce, is related to the material found in the Agitato section.

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As the music returns to the opening material in bar 39 (however, omitting the opening seven bars), the disruptive B-flat is reintroduced, again being a near-constant feature of the section. The end of the piece is a partial repeat of the A and B sections of the piece. A partial restatement of the *Agitato* section finally brings the piece to a clear, perfect cadence, ending the piece dramatically in C minor.

Viewed through a Nordic hermeneutic lens, the primary characteristic of the piece is a very strong sense of ambiguity. Is it trying to be a waltz, or what is the dance character the piece's title refers to? And, if it is a waltz, what kind of waltz is it in that case? Is it French, Russian, or perhaps Nordic, or is it merely a recollection or a dream of some imagined waltz? What is the piece's actual key signature? Is it in major or minor, or in some other mode? Is the pedal point suggestive of a Mixolydian mode, or is it an independent element, as Murtomäki suggests (2004, 153)? Are we hearing a static landscape, suggestive of a Nordic drone, or merely a strongly restricted harmonic space? Are the Nordic elements, such as the musically relevant Grieg formula, used intentionally, or are they merely a coincidental consequence of the tonal language?

Rather than seeing this ambiguity as a problem, it can serve as a strong driver of creativity. The unresolved questions do not need clear answers in order to be suggestive of meaning. Art has the capability of presenting multiple simultaneous contradictory feelings, emotions, and mental images, and it is exactly within this multiplicity of meanings that I believe the greatest interpretative depth can be found. Perhaps this piece is the perfect reminder that no matter how we choose to resolve its multiple creative

ambiguities, we can always be assured that other interpretations are possible. So, rather than trying to solve these "problems", we can enjoy the search for possible meanings by actively letting our interpretative horizon fuse with the polysemy of the music.

Rondeau romantique, Op. 116, No. 3

The two first pieces of Sibelius's op. 116 have presented strange worlds that have felt simultaneously both familiar and allusive. The third piece, *Rondeau romantique*, finishes the set in a completely different, lighter mood. Yet, its position within Sibelius's production suggests deep interpretive possibilities. The work is Sibelius's last piece of the last opus he published during his lifetime. Although it was not the very last piece he composed, *Rondeau romantique* nonetheless carries a sense of finality simply due to its position within Sibelius's catalogue of works, even as the music itself resists such associations.[125] The work was definitely not intended to be Sibelius's last composition, as he kept working on his Eight Symphony, which he never completed and eventually destroyed, but its historical context gives the work meaning even beyond what Sibelius could have intended.

The piece opens with a calm *Largamente,* which immediately sets a very different tone to the previous works in the opus (see Figure 74). The tone is warm and inviting, and includes none of the strange tonal ambiguity we have learned to expect in late works by Sibelius. Instead of the unstable pedal point on the seventh, the opening *Largamente* of the *Rondeau romantique* takes place on top of a grounding pedal point on the tonic in D major, strongly reinforcing the sense of tonality and assuredness. The chords above the pedal point provide a traditional and harmonic support for the melody.

[125] Sibelius composed his *Suite in E major* for violin and string orchestra, JS 185, at the same time as op. 116, but it remained unpublished during his lifetime. Additionally, he also composed a small number of other works. The most important of these is arguably the *Funeral music* (1931) that was written for the death of Akseli Gallen-Kallela and was added to op. 111.



Figure 74. The opening eight bars of Sibelius's Rondeau romantique, op. 116, no. 3.

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One detail that is worth drawing attention to is the way the music unfolds in pairs of two-bar motives, where each motive is repeated almost identically, differing only in dynamics and articulation. From a performance perspective, it is noteworthy that Sibelius has marked these repeated motives to be performed first *forte* and then *dolce*, rather than, for example, *forte* and *piano*. What this means in practice is unclear—as *dolce* is an expressive marking, not a dynamic—but it suggests a deeper interpretative layer. Are these repetitions echoes, a hesitant attempt to hold onto tonality for as long as possible, or a representation of time standing nearly still? From a hermeneutic perspective, all three possibilities, or any other understanding, can simultaneously add to our interpretative horizon.

After this opening phrase—which is never returned to again—a simple and beautifully flowing melody in $\frac{6}{8}$ emerges from the stillness of the opening's final chords (see Figure 75). After the darkness, strangeness, and ambiguity of the previous two pieces, I have come to hear this melody almost like a small stream in the spring that breaks through the previous darkness and turmoil. The music is unforced, unpretentious, and conveys an innocence that feels both refreshing and welcome. The tempo marking *Tempo commodo* reinforces the understanding that the music should feel natural and comfortable.



Figure 75. The opening eight bars of the Tempo commodo section of Sibelius's Rondeau romantique, op. 116, no. 3.

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As the violin enters, a new level of interest is added. The violin moves with three quarter to the bar against the piano's $\frac{6}{8}$, which is clearly shaped with two beats to the bar. The violin also introduces the pitch G-sharp, adding the feeling of brightness that the raised Lydian fourth can bring to music. Despite the piano playing a G-natural at the same time, the violin's G-sharp feels wholly unforced. After the introduction of the Lydian fourth, the music effortlessly shifts between the raised and regular fourth in both instruments. These two elements create two levels of contrast. On a rhythmical level the music simultaneously moves in both two and three beats to the bar, while the melodic material shifts between D Ionian (D major) and D Lydian (D major with a raised fourth). What is striking is how these elements seem to coexist in harmony without any perceived conflict.

The music keeps reaching upward, only to return back through a leap of either a pure fifth or octave. This return to a note that grounds the melody—most often the pitch A—gives the music a feeling of existing in the moment without being overly concerned with a teleological development or anticipating a specific structural goal. The *Allegro commodo* section effectively stays within the same mood, despite a brief section in the mediant key B-flat major.

The transition to the B-flat major section also highlights a minor detail that has implications for interpreting other works by Sibelius. The section begins with grace notes, both in the violin and the piano, as the previous bar's A major dominant seventh chord unexpectedly resolves into B-flat major (see Figure 76). I have in the previous case

studies mentioned that Sibelius's use of grace notes often invites the consideration of agogic shaping, where the grace notes do not fall clearly before or after the beat, but result in a slight broadening where the grace note encompasses a space "in between" the actual notes. In this transition, the grace notes cannot satisfactorily be played before the beat, as the pitches B-flat and F-natural clash with the piano's A major seventh chord on the last quaver of the previous bar. However, placing the grace notes on the beat and "stealing" the time they require from the following beat disturbs the natural triplet feel that the music conveys. For these reasons, neither a placement before nor on the beat is in my opinion musically satisfactory. Instead, I would propose that these grace notes can be understood as an invitation for a slight agogic broadening.



Figure 76. Bars 63–69 in Sibelius's Rondeau romantique, op. 116, no. 3. If the grace notes in bar 67 are played before the beat they easily clash with the piano's dominant seventh chord, while placing them on the beat disturbs the flow of the melody, which could suggest a slight agogic broadening.

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The music ebbs and flows naturally, gradually growing to a *crescendo* that leads to the dynamic high point of the piece (see Figure 77). This *crescendo* includes both the juxtaposition of two beats against three per bar, as well as the intertextually interesting arpeggiated octaves that I highlighted in the previous piece. The buildup leads into a repetition of the main theme in the piano, while the violin plays a technically challenging syncopated version of the accompanying gesture we heard at the beginning of the piece, which now is riddled with double stops. The use of numerous open strings gives the music a folk-like brightness without fully leaning into the idiom.



Figure 77. The grand return of the Tempo commodo theme is preceded by arpeggiated scales that show an intertextual connection to the Danse caractéristique, op. 116, no. 2.

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The piece ends with section marked *Un pochettino stretto*. A *stretto* is a term from the Baroque era describing musical entries that occur at increased rapidity, suggesting a sense of increased tension and momentum. *Strettos* are often associated with fugues, but are not exclusive to them. In this case, the *stretto* does not increase the harmonic rhythm, which remains at one chord per bar, but the music consists of two bar motives that drive the music forward. It is unclear whether or not the section should be understood as involving a slight increase in tempo, but it seems likely to be the case. Both alternatives are nonetheless worth consideration.

Harmonically the music consists of a sequence that ends with a slight twist. As the section begins, the music moves to the mediant F major and begins a descending circle of fifths: F major, B-flat major (later adding the seventh), E-flat major. But, whereas we would expect the E-flat major chord to resolve to A-flat major, Sibelius brings us back to D major by resolving the chord a tritone from where we had expected it. Considering how important the tritone was in the two previous pieces, this unexpected resolution may well carry intertextual meaning.

Nine bars before the end, the music reaches a six-bar pedal point on the pitch D, clearly indicating that the music has found its way back to the tonic. During these bars the music gradually ascends with each repetition of the two-bar motive, until finally ending with a series of five simple chords, which close Sibelius's last opus. These chords do not include a perfect authentic cadence, and end with such unassuming ease that it is hard to believe

that this gesture ends Sibelius's last work for violin and piano. From a Nordic perspective, it is notable that the very last musical gesture consists of a melodic motion from the third to the first scale degree, a gesture that Berggreen almost a century earlier had highlighted as typically Nordic (Fjeldsøe and Groth 2019, 6–7).



Figure 78. The final nine bars of Sibelius's Rondeau romantique, op. 116, no. 3. The piece ends with a simple melodic gesture that moves from the third to the first scale degree.

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This piece highlights a fascinating aspect of the consequences of applying hermeneutics to music. As meaning arises through a dialogical process between the horizons of the interpreter and the interpreted, our contemporary perspective adds a layer of meaning that almost assuredly was not intended, and which was even unknowable to Sibelius himself. Even though Sibelius kept working, *Rondeau romantique's* position as the last piece of Sibelius's last opus imbues it with a sense of finality and closing. Hermeneutics suggests that even if this reality was not intended when Sibelius composed the work, it is unquestionably part of the work's horizon when we view it with the knowledge of hindsight.

This tension between what the music itself expresses and what the work's context tells us is, in this case, one of the most fascinating things to explore. This juxtaposition of the backwards-looking positivism and contentedness, the sense of breaking through the darkness into a new expressive clarity, and the beauty and brightness clashes with the reality of the piece's finality. Whereas the music may be suggestive of a new creative spring, characterised by a new form of simplicity and purity, the following nearly three decades of silence make the beauty all the more sad. From this perspective, the piece can be understood as the promise of a new spring that never arrived.

From a performer's perspective, this creates a fascinating tension. The more beautifully and purely the piece is performed, and the more it is imbued with a sense of a new beginning, the sadder the following decades appear. This highlights several hermeneutically important insights. The meaning that the music presents to us is not limited to the music itself, but can also be shaped by the surrounding context, history, and culture. It also means that the oft-held assumption that the performer's goal should be to understand the composer's original intentions leaves out a huge part of what imbues music with meaning.[126] In the case of *Rondeau romantique*, many of the most interesting aspects of the work lie outside of the written score.

Even more striking is that Sibelius almost surely could not have understood the piece's full context when he composed it, as it is the following decades of his life that most strongly shape our understanding of it. This reinforces the hermeneutic observation that the author of a work is not its sole, or even necessarily its most insightful, interpreter. The dialogical process between the work's horizon and the horizon of the interpreter, which communicates across both time and space, can imbue the work with meaning that could not have been known to the author.

Another hermeneutic insight that is highlighted by this piece is that since interpretations are not singular, but can coexist within a landscape of possibilities, art can simultaneously communicate contradicting feelings and emotions. In my opinion, great art often arises from exactly this tension. An example of this duality of meaning is found in Albert Edelfelt's painting *Conveying the Child's Coffin (*A Child's Funeral*)* (1879), where the beauty and tranquillity of the scene creates a stark contrast to the sadness of the subject of the image, as it depicts the funeral of a child (see Figure 79).

The mention of Edelfelt's painting is not meant to suggest a direct connection with Sibelius's *Rondeau romantique*, but rather to illustrate a similar juxtaposition of contrasting emotions. The painting offers a serene, even idyllic vision of a Finnish summer, yet this environment is irrevocably recontextualized when one notices the coffin of the child in the boat. The beauty of the surrounding landscape remains, but the emotional landscape

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[126] Bruce Haynes (2007, 6) critically summarises this view in the introduction to his book *The End of Early Music.*

is altered. Similarly, our awareness of Sibelius's later experiences and the broader historical narrative around his last opus does not negate the character of the piece, but instead overlays it with an added dimension informed by our knowledge of the following decades.

This moment, when new understanding shifts perception without altering the object itself, might be described as the opening of a new hermeneutic window where the horizon of meaning expands, revealing interpretive layers that were not previously visible, but once noticed cannot be ignored. Such expressive tensions can often be used to bring meaning and depth to art. This suggests that such tensions do not need to be resolved, but can effectively be utilised as meaningful representations of the human condition, which can rarely be reduced to a singular, tidy, and coherent narrative.



Figure 79. Albert Edelfelt's painting Conveying the Child's Coffin (A Child's Funeral) from 1879.

Source: Finnish National Gallery Collection / Ateneum Art Museum, Antell collections, CC0 1.0 Universal.

This type of exploration of the surrounding context is not merely abstract speculation, where we force a narrative or a meaning upon a work, but can also serve as an actionable guide for musical interpretation. If we accept this reading of the *Rondeau romantique's* context and place in history, it invites us to understand the music in relation to its dual

meaning. To me, this suggests approaching the music with a calm contentedness and optimism that conveys the music's purity and simplicity. Yet, the music should not be overly joyous, knowing what followed. This immediately provides an interpretive framework for how the piece's melodies, phrases, and harmonies could be approached.

From a hermeneutic perspective, it is worth mentioning that this reading of the piece does not carry any universal truth, but is merely one way of interpreting the work's horizon. One could equally well interpret the music based on the score alone, or based on other narratives or associations. The interpretation presented here is one that has arisen from the fusion of my personal horizon in combination with the horizon of the work. Nonetheless, such a reading can be both meaningful and actionable, even when it cannot be proven to be objectively "true". It allows the music to speak anew, rooted in its past, yet responsive to the horizon of the present.

6. Conclusions and reflections

With an awareness of the topics discussed within this thesis, we may now return to the initial research questions. My primary aim was to explore how a Nordic hermeneutic perspective shapes our understanding of Sibelius's life and work, with particular focus on his works for violin and piano. This perspective does, in my opinion, bring many relevant aspects to the fore that can enrich our understanding. One such aspect, which has become very clear, was his deep engagement with and/or strong awareness of Nordic artists, composers, painters, authors, and cultural figures. It also highlights how his music contains many characteristics associated with Nordic music. Indeed, in my exploration of Nordic characteristics, virtually every trait I have identified appears in some form in Sibelius's works for violin and piano. Obviously, these Nordic musical characteristics are not absolute indicators of Nordicness, but they are indicative of a shared cultural tradition.

Furthermore, I would argue that the Nordic cultural landscape informs our understanding on three different scales: the macro scale, which explores the big picture and concerns the genre and type of works Sibelius composed for violin and piano; the micro scale, which focuses on musical details and highlights how Nordic characteristics present themselves in these works; and an intermediate scale, where the focus is on the individual pieces.

Starting from the big picture, the type of works that Sibelius composed for violin and piano fit naturally into the broader cultural landscape. Gade, Sinding, Halvorsen, Henriques, Röntgen-Maier, Ole Bull, Tor Aulin, Wilhelm Stenhammar, and many others all composed character pieces and/or dances for violin of similar size and duration. Viewed from this "zoomed-out" perspective, Sibelius's production for violin and piano has much in common with his Nordic contemporaries. In addition, both the associations as well as the reception of these works have historically been in line with broader Nordic cultural trends, for example through comparisons to realism, symbolism, or national Romanticism.

Many of these works can arguably be considered salon-style works, but my positive experience of performing them has made me strongly question the pejorative attitude towards smaller and more light-hearted pieces. Ironically, while Sibelius's works for

violin and piano have such a reputation, it is precisely the most salon-like pieces that have become the most popular among violinists and audiences. These include the virtuosic *Mazurka*, op. 81, no. 1, the light-hearted *Rondino,* op. 81, no. 2, and the ever-popular *Romance,* op. 78, no. 2. Many of the less frequently performed works are—while short in duration—significantly more demanding both technically and musically.

This Nordic preference for character pieces calls into question assumptions that equate artistic value with duration or complexity. It may reflect both aesthetic ideals, such as intimacy, lyricism, and a kind of naïveté, and cultural circumstances, including the domestic and social contexts in which much Nordic music was performed. While there obviously are long Nordic works for violin and piano—for example violin sonatas—there seems to be something uniquely Nordic about at least some of these miniatures. One could argue about whether these works are related to Nordic Romances, or if the partial resistance to larger forms can be caused by an incompatibility between such forms and the local musical idiom. Whatever the cause, Nordic miniatures often seem to possess a distinctive atmosphere. While Sibelius's music does express many of these characteristics, it arguably holds a special place within this historical context.

If we change our perspective and instead "zoom-in" and look at the specific details found in Sibelius's works for violin and piano, the Nordic perspective is again informative. As the previous sections have shown, Sibelius's works exhibit many features that are common to both historical and contemporary views on Nordic music. There are, however, several challenges to evaluating the importance of these details. First, many details are so small, consisting of only a few notes or specific intervals in certain contexts, that they arguably may be coincidental rather than signifiers of Nordic influence.

Second, since these details are contextual—meaning that their significance is not just tied to the musical details themselves, but also to the surrounding context, which also includes other musical and extramusical considerations—the evaluation of their Nordicness inevitably requires a level of interpretation. For example, is a drone fifth Nordic? Arguably, it depends. The degree to which such a musical feature appears Nordic relates both to the surrounding musical context—other musical elements in the same piece, as well as to the larger cultural context—and to the composer's nationality and historical situatedness. This means that the details only take on specific meanings

when we engage with both the work's horizon as well as our personal interpretative horizon.

Third, there remains an unresolved question about the direction of causality. For example, is a static texture in a musical work by Sibelius an example of Nordic influence, or is the correlation reversed, meaning that Sibelius's use of such textures created an association to what we nowadays consider Nordic? In the case of many of the folk-inspired musical characteristics, they arguably predate Sibelius's compositions, but their association with Nordic classical music may nonetheless be tied to specific composers who incorporated these elements into their music.

The importance of the musical details therefore leaves much room for interpretation. It is nonetheless undoubtedly true that if one searches for these characteristics in Sibelius's music, they can readily be found. What we do with these observations is, however, a different question. I would nonetheless argue that an awareness of these characteristics allows us to more effectively evaluate their musical significance. Not every open fifth or dotted rhythm needs to be musically important, but they can serve as an invitation to explore questions of character, expression, and cultural context more deeply.

While both the big picture and the close-up perspective provide insight into Sibelius's works for violin and piano, neither framing sufficiently explains Sibelius's compositional choices. Both perspectives are relevant in framing our understanding, but Sibelius's violin pieces do not sound like anything else I have performed during my doctoral concert series. I have consistently found that Sibelius's music stands apart from other Nordic compositions in style and expression. So, while the Nordic perspective has explanatory power, it falls short of satisfactorily accounting for the actual musical content of Sibelius's works for violin and piano. Nordic elements are definitely present in these pieces, but the way Sibelius combines them and infuses them into his own tonal language creates a result that primarily feels Sibelian rather than merely Nordic. I would therefore be hesitant to claim that a Nordic perspective explains Sibelius's works for violin and piano, even though it informs our understanding. The Nordic characteristics may add a colour or cultural nod towards a broader cultural context, but this influence is overshadowed by Sibelius's own presence. The Nordic perspective nonetheless provides a meaningful way of interacting with the music and its interpretation, adding a valuable layer to our understanding of Sibelius's music.

In my opening chapter I also pondered why these works are not performed more frequently. After spending years intimately working on this repertoire, I feel like I at least partly understand why, while simultaneously placing even greater value on these pieces than I previously did. I believe the issue lies in the unique quality of these works, which often defies expectations. If you approach them with the expectation of being simple miniatures in the style of Kreisler's *Liebesleid* or *Schön Rosmarin,* or Elgar's *Salut d'amour,* both the complexity of their musical expression as well as what they require of the ensemble may be surprising.[127] With a few exceptions, most of Sibelius's miniatures are not simple enough to be picked up casually and performed with almost no rehearsals. Many of them rival the technical difficulties of far more obviously virtuosic works by Bull, Halvorsen, and Henriques, despite not being technically as flashy in character. This creates something of a tension between the time that needs to be invested in producing an engaging performance and the generally perceived value of these works. Interestingly, my sense is that most performers who have put in the necessary work recognize their value, but I understand that many performers may choose to dedicate their time otherwise.

In reflecting on why these works are not more frequently performed, it also becomes clear that the issue is not unique to Sibelius, but affects much of the Nordic repertoire of this kind. Outside of Grieg's Violin Sonatas—and to some extent the rising profile of Nielsen's—relatively few Nordic works for violin and piano, particularly those in the miniature genre, have found a sustained place in the international concert repertoire. Many of the pieces I have explored in this project are rarely performed beyond their respective national borders, even when they exhibit considerable musical value and charm.

This raises a broader question about the programming culture of today's classical music world. Most concert programs are built around large-scale, canonical works that signal artistic seriousness and provide structural weight. Miniatures, by contrast, tend to be relegated to encores or pedagogical use. Yet, many of Sibelius's miniatures resist both of

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[127] I want to stress that I am not arguing that it is easy to give musically engaging performances of any of these works, but I believe musicians are generally more aware of the challenges presented by these works than of those found in Sibelius's miniatures.

those expectations. They are neither showpieces nor typical salon pieces. Their expressive language is often understated, enigmatic, or atmospherically charged, requiring a kind of interpretive investment that is rarely demanded by the genre.

This creates a practical paradox. In order to perform these works effectively, one must commit sufficient time, both individually and in collaborative rehearsal. However, that commitment is unlikely to be made unless these works are already perceived to be valuable. In that sense, their underperformance may reflect not a lack of musical substance but a lack of symbolic capital: they do not, in the current landscape, carry the status that invites the necessary investment of time.

Moreover, the question of how to perform Sibelius's works for violin and piano, whether as complete opuses or as individual selections, remains unresolved. I have experimented with both approaches, and found that both alternatives have their own strengths and weaknesses. Performed as a set, an opus can take on the shape of a larger work, and can to some extent serve a similar function in a concert program. Musically, the pieces also work well individually and allow for more flexible programming, but within our contemporary recital culture it is not immediately obvious how to position short individual works. This ambiguity of form and function may partly explain why they have struggled to find their place in the repertoire.

If these works are to gain a stronger foothold in concert life, a broader shift may be needed, one that recognizes their artistic value and treats them as more than peripheral curiosities. This may require re-engagement with the salon tradition, where music of this kind was performed to smaller audiences in more intimate settings. In such less formal contexts, these works may more naturally find their place than on the big concert stage. This, I believe, requires hermeneutic engagement as well: to illuminate the interpretive richness of works that lie outside of established tradition, and, in doing so, help expand what is considered worthy of attention.

Yet another reason for these pieces' relative obscurity may lie not only in the practical matters described above, but in the interpretive demands they quietly and unassumingly impose. They seem to resist the conventional roles we as performers are often trained to assume. On the one hand, while they present technical challenges, they offer limited opportunity for traditional virtuosity or theatrical display, i.e. virtuosity for its own sake; on the other hand, they do not comfortably inhabit the sphere of "serious" music or

large sonatas. Instead, they require something more elusive: a kind of expressive presence that is both individual and restrained, intimate yet strangely objective. This may be one reason why this role feels so difficult to inhabit. The interpretive posture they demand is neither that of the soloist in full voice nor that of the self-effacing servant of the score. Rather, the performer needs to find a way to navigate the unique emotional landscape they present.

My own engagement with these works has repeatedly confronted me with a question of perspective: Who am I within this music? Am I the subject, experiencing the music in first person in a direct or immersive way, inhabiting the music? Or, do I stand outside of it as a narrator, aiming to transmit the composer's voice and musical logic without imposing myself on it? My sense is that neither interpretative framework captures the inner life of Sibelius's miniatures.

Many of Sibelius's works for violin and piano simultaneously convey a unique individuality combined with an uncommon sense of distance or detachment. For example, the melody of the *Tanz-Idylle*, op. 79, no. 5, could belong to a simple, although melancholic, dance; but, in combination with the impressionistic textural and harmonic environment provided by the piano, it resists a one-dimensional interpretation. This expressive dualism has made me question what the music is communicating. Personally, I do not feel that the piece is attempting to invite people to dance, nor does it convey the experience of dancing itself. Instead, the juxtaposition of elements creates a sense of distance, either physical or temporal, which could suggest that what we are hearing is not the dance itself but the memory or dream of a dance. This reading aligns well with the symbolistic interpretive perspective discussed in the case study of Sibelius's *Three Pieces*, op. 116. However, the question of how to embody this space, between deep individuality and a distance to the actual subject, creates an intriguing challenge for the performer.

My sense is that performances of these works often tend to lean either too far towards objectivity, losing the personal intimacy the music contains, or become too subjective, where the performer imposes a form of individuality that does not align with the musical expression. I must admit that, while I have conceptually identified the mood and feeling I would like to convey, I am not convinced I have yet found the correct expressive means to communicate this strong sense of individuality filtered through distance.

In a similar vein, the *Berceuse*, op. 79, no. 6, again conveys a unique atmosphere of distance and longing. It is as if the music is not presenting a lullaby as it is, but the memory or dream of a distant one. The hesitancy, caused by the violin almost never beginning notes on the strong beats, makes it difficult to imagine singing this melody for a child who is falling asleep. The allusion of the music not presenting a thing itself, but an interpretation twice removed from the original subject, again invites the consideration of a symbolistic interpretation. Sibelius's *Berceuse* can with interest be contrasted to Henriques's *Wiegenlied,* which feels far more direct: a beautiful, simple melody that could be sung as an actual lullaby.

Other works also reflect this sense of detachment. Sibelius's *Sonatina*, op. 80, can be interpreted as reflecting memories of childhood or youth, based on entries in his diary, but while the music presents melodies of childlike simplicity the harmonic landscape is strangely static, impressionistic, and even detached. This simultaneous expressive duality may be a reason for the strongly differing impressions of the work, which range from calling it possibly the most idyllically sanguine that Sibelius ever composed to considering it predominantly cool, even detached (Furuhjelm 1916, 221; Barnett 2007, 249). While the differing opinions may be shaped by the cultural context in which the commentary was written, it still illustrates how differently the work can be perceived.[128]

As a whole, I would argue that a Nordic perspective on Sibelius has revealed aspects of his music which may not otherwise have been obvious. The Nordic context played an important role, both in the environment that surrounded Sibelius as well as in stylistic traits that appear in his music. While the Nordic perspective is not a necessity for interpreting Sibelius's works for violin and piano, an awareness of common Nordic characteristics provides a framework for thinking about them that can suggest new ways to engage with the music.

[128] For a deeper dive into Sibelius's *Sonatina*, refer to my article "Nordic Influences in Violin Sonatas by Edvard Grieg, Wilhelm Stenhammar, Jean Sibelius, and Christian Sinding" (Silén 2024, 153–162).

7. Afterthoughts

Looking back at the process that has resulted in this doctoral thesis, it is clear that the work was not a straightforward application of a research methodology, but was itself an example of a hermeneutic process where the research topic shaped my own thinking substantially. I believe that this thesis reflects the evolution of my thinking, moving from a primarily contextual approach, through the analysis of specific musical characteristics, towards a more open-ended line of inquiry into what this perspective can mean for us as musicians, researchers, and listeners.[129]

My engagement with the topic has shaped the whole process, leading me down paths that I had not initially anticipated—such as serving as editor for sheet music publications for music by Pacius and Kajanus, being deeply involved in recording a series of CDs highlighting the fascinating music of the Finnish-born, Jewish composer Moses Pergament, as well as writing peer-reviewed articles on related topics, which were in the end not included in this thesis. While these detours have inevitably prolonged the project, I believe they have also substantially contributed to my understanding of Nordic musical culture.

This process has also suggested that there are many possible avenues for future research related to the topic. While there is a wealth of material on Nordic composers, this research has predominantly been done within the composers' home countries. A broader Nordic perspective could still warrant significant research. Also, the application of a Nordic perspective could beneficially be applied to other works or other composers, exploring what insights emerge from the framing. Generally, the application of a specific perspective, which seeks to broaden our understanding rather than provide a complete picture, has proven to be a useful approach.

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[129] The working title for this thesis was, until the beginning of 2025, *Contextualising Jean Sibelius's Works for Violin and Piano*, reflecting my initial approach to the subject.

However, on a personal level it is the hermeneutic approach that has proven most transformative for my own thinking. Hermeneutics became a part of this project at a relatively late stage, as I realised that it could provide a framework for thinking about the central questions of my thesis. The introduction of hermeneutics fundamentally changed my engagement with the topic, from a primarily contextual approach towards a more explicitly interpretive one. The realisation that my interpretations are always shaped by both my own and the work's horizon is liberating, as it has reminded me that, while there are historical facts, my understanding of their meaning and implications is always shaped by my own historically situated understanding. It shifts the aim from searching for an absolute "truth" to looking for meaningful, well-reasoned possible interpretations. While interpretations can be understood to be better or worse, depending on the engagement with the material and its context, there is no objectively "best" reading. Instead, hermeneutics suggests that the question of what makes an interpretation valuable is itself open to interpretation.

Applying this perspective to music makes it obvious that there are numerous ways of approaching the same piece of music, for example by engaging with folkloristic musical elements through either folk music, performance practice, or a contemporary approach. None of these constitutes an interpretation that is true in any absolute sense, suggesting that the interpretative landscape is far wider than is usually acknowledged. My own experience with applying this framework to my playing has been interesting. It has had a substantial freeing effect, shifting my focus from trying to produce performances that others would approve of towards a greater trust in the value of my own understanding, convictions, and taste.

This was, however, not necessarily always seen as a positive development. For example, while working on the repertoire for my last doctoral concert I increasingly felt that the style of the works, in combination with my knowledge of their cultural context, strongly suggested that nineteenth and early twentieth century performance practice provided a relevant piece to the works' interpretative horizon and its expressive potential. I engaged with the question hermeneutically, letting my knowledge inform my artistic decisions without feeling that historical performance manuals needed to be viewed as rulebooks that had to be followed strictly. The resulting performance was arguably modern in style, but leaned into expressive techniques such as *portamento* and *rubato* more than I had done in previous concerts.

In order to explore the issue of style through artistic research and to present part of the process that goes into a doctoral work of this kind, I decided to model the performance of one short piece—Henriques's *Wiegenlied*—on the composer's own recording. As we recall, Henriques was a well-respected composer and violinist who had studied with Joachim in Berlin. His playing therefore provided a fascinating glimpse into a bygone era, an era that Sibelius undoubtedly was intimately familiar with. While I knew my performance would not be a copy of Henriques's, I attempted to imitate his *portamenti*, letting his extremely fluid approach to phrasing inform my own thinking, and tried to narrow my vibrato to be more in line with early twentieth-century style. I found the whole process immensely fascinating and informative.

When I performed the piece in my doctoral concert, I began by explaining to the audience that the performance they were about to hear would be an experiment in performance style. I concluded the introduction with the question: "Is it bad taste to play like this, doing all these old-fashioned things that are no longer in fashion? Or, if we know that this is how the composer wanted it, is it bad taste to not play it like this?" The performance was a personal highlight of the concert and was greeted with enthusiastic applause and cheering. It was, to my memory, the first time I had performed a slow, lyrical, and simple lullaby that ended in a gradually fading *pianissimo*, only to be greeted with such vocal acclaim from the audience.

The reaction of the audience can be contrasted with that of a well-respected member of my artistic board, whose role it was to evaluate my concert. Clearly, my active engagement with the work's history, style, and expressive potential produced a performance that did not conform with the expectations of current performance norms. This divergence from what was expected was not met approvingly. Paraphrasing the comments from memory, I was basically told that: perhaps experimentation like this might be alright in the practice room, but <u>do not</u> bring it on stage. The comment ended with: "I did not like it!"

Rather than understanding this critical comment as an artistic failure, I think it proves that my hermeneutic approach, where the whole cultural context surrounding a work, in combination with my own beliefs and interests, shaped my interpretation in clearly audible ways. Whether this is good or bad depends on the horizons of the individual listeners. However, from an artistic perspective I believe that it would be strange if I had

spent years working on this repertoire and actively trying to understand its place in history, only to end up performing the music entirely according to the norms of people who had not taken such a journey of artistic research.

A hermeneutic perspective shifts our thinking away from normative interpretations. While norms are part of the works' horizon, they are not the only thing that matter. My reading of Gadamer suggests that rather than asking ourselves if a specific reading of a work is correct, we can instead ask whether it is meaningful. While perfection can be an ideal to strive towards, hermeneutics suggests that objective readings are not necessarily the most communicative, or the most interesting. Perhaps this suggests a possibility of shifting the evaluation of the success of a performance away from measuring it against preconceived ideals and towards communication, meaning-making, expression, and imagination.

Hermeneutics also makes it clear that any performance of a piece of music results in the fusion of several simultaneous horizons. We are not only dealing with the fusion of horizons between the performer and the work, but simultaneously between all the individual performers, and also between the performers and every single member of the audience. Arguably, the only horizon we can affect directly is our own, while everyone else interprets the performance from their own unique perspective.

Looking towards the future, I believe the application of hermeneutics to music could warrant considerable study. It can be used both from the outside in, where context and culture shape our understanding of individual works and individual moments within them, and from the inside out, where our understanding of specific musical moments in music can be expanded into interpretations of complete works. Both views suggest possibilities to broaden our artistic possibilities, with the aim of enriching our artistry.

This thesis has sought to explore the ways in which hermeneutics can inform our musical interpretations. This inquiry has stayed within the traditional confines of hermeneutics, dealing primarily with written sources and communicating the findings through language. This aligns with Gadamer's notion that understanding is fundamentally tied to

language.[130] With regards to a Nordic hermeneutic perspective on Sibelius, this means that both the primary source material as well as the results can be communicated in writing. However, my work hints at the possibility of expanding this interpretative horizon.

While a thorough engagement with this subject would necessitate considerable future research, my current understanding of the topic already suggests several ways in which the application of hermeneutics to performance may divert from its traditional philosophical or literary roots. For example, a philosophically significant implication of applying hermeneutics more broadly to music performance in the future may well be the necessity to partially reject the Gadamerian notion that understanding and meaning is always mediated through language. This stems from the observation that a large part of a musician's knowledge is not linguistic, but embodied, experiential, tacit, or intuitive. A performance also does not necessarily need to be explained in words in order for it to be meaningful to a listener.

In addition, a hermeneutics of music performance invites the possibility that every kind of experience—including sounds, smells, physical sensations, emotions, imagination, intuition, embodied knowledge, traditions, and teacher-student lineages—can all shape our relationship to a piece of music. Such knowledge and understanding do not have to be "true" in a literal sense in order to be artistically actionable and meaningful. My preliminary impression is that a hermeneutics of music performance no longer seeks understanding in the traditional Gadamerian sense, but instead seeks meaning, as true understanding of musical works may be both impossible and unnecessary. As musicians, we do not need to know what a piece of music ultimately means. It is sufficient to make it meaningful, both for ourselves and for the listeners.

A hermeneutics of music performance opens the door to explore aspects of music and music-making that cannot be communicated verbally. These non-verbal aspects of knowledge can function both as part of the horizon that informs our understanding, as well as a channel through which the music itself is communicated through performance.

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[130] Gadamer discusses the fundamental connection between language and understanding at length in his book *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 2004 [1975], xxxi, 383–492).

This highlights the fact that experiential or embodied knowledge that cannot be satisfactorily translated into words can nonetheless inform our horizon. This would be a problem if the understanding had to be communicated through language, but musical understanding can instead be communicated through music itself. The exploration of the full implications of hermeneutics on music could provide a rich field for future research.

In the end, what this work has sought to show is that knowledge and deep engagement with a topic within music can serve an expansive function. Rather than providing definite answers, it suggests possibilities. I have thought long and hard about the question of what I "know" after my years of working on this topic. On the one hand, I believe I can argue that I now possess a respectable amount of knowledge about this subject. However, if someone were to point to a single passage in one of Sibelius's works for violin and piano, and ask how it should be performed, it is not a question I "know" the answer to. I could tell how I played it, my fingerings, the thoughts that went into my phrasing, and I could probably suggest five other ways of performing the same passage, but I could not claim to "know" how to perform the music. What I could present is my own opinion, and perhaps that is exactly the beauty of music. The lack of absolute truths and answers allows for a continuous, ever deeper engagement with it in search of new possibilities while seeking to communicate the aspects of the music that we find most meaningful as effectively as possible. In that sense, this thesis has not only explored Sibelius through a Nordic hermeneutic lens, but has also enabled that lens to reshape my own musicianship.

8. Appendix: Artistic components

This appendix contains the program notes I wrote for the artistic components of my doctoral work. Each takes a different approach to the subject and has its own character. The introductory text for each component discusses its role within the broader research project, outlining my initial expectations and goals as well as the insights gained through the process. The texts thus also reflect the evolution of my thinking and approach as the project progressed.

The relationship between these program notes and the main thesis text reflects the development and restructuring of the doctoral project over several years. At different stages, the notes were intended to be incorporated into the main text, omitted from the written thesis, or, as in the present version, included in an appendix. Consequently, there is considerable overlap between the notes and the main text, both in the topics discussed and the sources referenced, and occasionally even in the wording itself.

The program notes also contain discussions of individual works that complement the main text but did not fit into its final structure. Since these texts form part of the documentation of the artistic components and are not otherwise readily available in this form, I have included them here as part of the doctoral work as a whole. As each text was written to function independently, some repetition of the broader concerns of the research project is inevitable.

I have retained the texts largely in their original form, making only minor corrections, in order to preserve their character as documents of the artistic components.

8.1 Artistic Component 1: *Pacius, Kajanus, Sibelius*

This CD recording was conceived as a starting point to my doctoral project, by investigating aspects of local Finnish musical traditions that could have shaped Sibelius's development. The central research question behind the recording was whether engaging with music by Sibelius's Finnish predecessors, Fredrik Pacius and Robert Kajanus, might offer insights into Sibelius's early style. I hoped to uncover stylistic clues or points of continuity that could help position Sibelius more clearly within his cultural and musical environment.

Yet, while certain features did resonate, such as Kajanus's lyrical violin writing, structural clarity, and occasional gestures toward folklorism, the most striking outcome of the project was the sense of difference. Sibelius's music, even in his early violin works, seemed to operate on a different level of ambition, innovation, and expressive range. If anything, the pieces by Pacius and Kajanus appeared to frame the kind of cultural and stylistic world that Sibelius entered, and then quickly outgrew. Rather than discovering strong antecedents to Sibelius, I found myself observing what felt like echoes of his idiom in Kajanus's later works. In that sense, the project yielded an unexpected reversal: not so much a genealogy of influence as a backdrop against which Sibelius's originality became even more apparent.

The program notes that follow were written for a general audience, and reflect a more casual, historically oriented style than the rest of the thesis. They were not intended as academic texts, but rather as public-facing material contextualizing unfamiliar repertoire. However, viewed within the framework of artistic research, they also represent part of a broader process of inquiry, where performance becomes both the method and medium of exploration. The following text was previously published in the booklet accompanying the CD (Silén and Malmgren 2020).

Repertoire:

Fredrik Pacius (1809–1891):
Variations on the theme: "Studenter äro muntra bröder" (1842)
Duo for Violin and Piano (1872)

Robert Kajanus (1856–1933):
Scherzo (Menuetto) (1874)
Melodie (1876)
Lied ohne Worte "Einsamkeit" (1877)
Melodie (1877)
Bagatelle (1884)
Air élégiaque, Op. 10 (1886) (arr. Silén)
Berceuse "The Pauper Girl's Lullaby" (1896) (arr. Silén)
Menuet Rococo (1920)
Nocturne (1929)

Menuet Ancien (1930)
Spiccato (1931) (arr. Silén)

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957):
Suite in E major, JS 188 (1888)

CD Booklet

The Fredrik Pacius (1809–1891), Robert Kajanus (1856–1933), and Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) are three of the most influential figures in Finnish music history. It was Pacius who laid the foundation and set Finland on a path towards a developed musical culture, for which reasons he is often remembered as the father of Finnish music. Kajanus was the *de facto* leader of the Finnish musical scene for fifty years, and was considered Finland's most promising composer until he was overshadowed by Sibelius. Today he is mostly remembered as Finland's first conductor of international stature, as the founder of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, and for conducting the first commercial recordings of Sibelius's symphonies. Sibelius took Finnish music to new heights, and has been widely regarded as Finland's greatest composer. His influence lives on today, and his birthday on the 8th of December is remembered as the Day of Finnish Music.

Despite the fact that Pacius was born in Hamburg and was almost half a century older than his Finnish colleagues, there are many threads that interweave the lives of these men. All three pursued an important part of their music education in German-speaking countries; all would, in their own ways, explore Finnish mythology in their music; and all were initially educated as violinists. Pacius was the only one of the three to achieve international stature as a violinist, while Kajanus's left-handedness and Sibelius's performance anxiety crushed their respective dreams of becoming violinists. An interesting detail is that Kajanus came from a musically interested family that regularly organized musical soirées at home, where Pacius, among others, performed regularly. In many ways, Kajanus would later take over the central role in Finnish musical life that Pacius had previously held during his career. In 1897 Kajanus also became the music teacher at the Imperial Alexander University in Finland (later renamed the University of Helsinki), taking up the position that had initially brought Pacius to Helsinki sixty-three years earlier.

Kajanus and Sibelius had a long and close friendship. Kajanus made his orchestra available whenever Sibelius finished a new work. Kajanus also actively performed and promoted Sibelius's music during his many trips abroad. Their friendship was not, however, without complications. One situation that strained their friendship occurred when Kajanus, with the help of his connections, secured the job as music teacher at the university, despite expert opinions in Sibelius's favour. At the time, Sibelius was struggling financially. Kajanus succeeded his own composition teacher, the German-born Richard Faltin (1835–1918), who in turn had taken over the position after Pacius's retirement. Yet, in 1930, when Sibelius had the opportunity to record his first two symphonies in London, he wanted Robert Kajanus to conduct the recordings.

About this CD

The present recording on which these three composer-violinists are represented constitutes part of an artistic doctoral project at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts, Helsinki, Finland. Most of the material on the CD is previously unrecorded, and the notated music exists only as manuscripts in various composers' archives. As not all the manuscripts are complete, I have had to recreate the incomplete violin part to Pacius's *duo*. In addition, because only a single minor work for violin and piano exists from Kajanus's most important compositional period, I decided to make arrangements for violin and piano from his works for violin and orchestra, in order to give a more complete picture of his compositional style. I have also prepared a concert edition of Kajanus's *Spiccato* by combining an earlier virtuosic violin part with the final version of the accompaniment.

The purpose of the recording is to provide insight into violin music composed in Finland primarily during the nineteenth century, and simultaneously to present a virtually unknown perspective on both Pacius and Kajanus. Musicians often look for clues about how the music should be performed by exploring a work's historical context, but in this case the music itself can tell us something about its time and about those who composed it. Pacius's works for violin are well written and exhibit a large degree of virtuosity, which indicates that Pacius was a skilled violinist as well as a well-educated composer. In Kajanus's early works for violin it is possible to make out a strong German influence, which existed in Finnish musical culture owing to Pacius and Faltin, among others. The pieces also suggest that Kajanus probably was not a virtuoso violinist himself. Sibelius's

early *Suite in E major* from 1888 suggests that even if Sibelius was not unaffected by his musical surroundings, he nevertheless exhibited a level of ambition that seemed to have exceeded that of his older colleagues. The *Suite* is large, technically demanding, and includes details such as violin cadenzas that give it a personal touch. It is not known, however, whether Sibelius himself ever performed the work in public.

All the music on this CD gives us an aural perspective on a time when classical music still had a somewhat different function than it does today. The gramophone had not yet become commonplace, and the first Finnish radio broadcasts were only made in the 1920s, which meant that the only way to enjoy music in the home was to play it oneself or to invite musicians to participate in musical soirées. As a result, music was often expected to educate as well as to entertain its listeners. The music presented here fulfils both requirements by being well composed, yet easy to listen to.

Friedrich "Fredrik" Pacius was born in Hamburg, Germany, on the 19th of March 1809, and at an early age showed signs of artistic talent. He spent much of his youth singing, dancing, drawing, and playing the violin. Despite his parents' hope that Pacius would one day take over the family's wine business, the boy managed to get their permission to study in the class of the hugely influential violinist Louis Spohr (1784–1859) in Kassel. It is not known why Pacius never completed his studies, but after two years under Spohr's rigorous tutelage Pacius began touring and making a living as a solo violinist. Spohr seems to have had a major impact on Pacius's musicianship, and the available concert reviews suggest that Pacius faithfully followed in Spohr's musical footsteps.

Spohr, and also Pacius as a result of his education, seems to have been relatively conservative in his approach to music and violin playing. This was a time when new winds were blowing across Europe's musical landscape. Violinists from France were developing a new approach to playing the violin, with an increased focus on a singing tone quality rather than a speaking quality. Simultaneously, a number of violinists, such as Heinrich Ernst (1812–1865), Ole Bull (1810–1880), and Johan Nagel (1807–1885), who were inspired by Niccolo Paganini's (1782–1840) extraordinary virtuosity, began pushing the technical limits of the instrument. These new trends were strongly questioned and opposed by Spohr and other leading violinists in the German-speaking parts of Europe, but it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that a change was underway. It has been speculated that Pacius, who had already shown signs of insecurity, may have

felt that he risked becoming obsolete in a rapidly changing world: by moving to Sweden and subsequently to Finland, he assured his artistic relevance in part of the Nordic world. What is known is that in 1828 Pacius was offered the opportunity to give concerts in Stockholm, after which he remained in the city and joined the Royal Court Orchestra. Despite a successful career as an orchestral musician, Pacius gradually began showing signs of dissatisfaction with his life. In 1834 he applied for the position of music director at the Imperial Alexander University in Finland.

When the 25-year-old Pacius arrived in Helsinki in 1835 as the newly appointed music teacher at the university, the town's musical life was almost non-existent. The Finnish capital had a population of around 11,000 inhabitants, yet its importance had grown steadily once it became the Finnish capital in 1812. The country's only university had also moved to Helsinki in 1828, after the university in Turku had been destroyed by fire the previous year.

Pacius quickly began organizing Helsinki's musical life, almost single-handedly. He played solo and chamber music concerts; he organized and conducted ambitious concerts and oratorios with a university orchestra consisting primarily of amateur musicians; and he established choirs as a means of getting people involved in music making. From a modern perspective we may wonder how it sounded when Pacius conducted Spohr's *Die letzten Dinge* or Händel's *Messiah* for the first time in Finland, but for the local population in Helsinki these were in many cases the most impressive performances they had ever heard.

The performance of Spohr's *Die letzten Dinge* offers a glimpse into how much classical music culture has changed since the nineteenth century. Whereas works by the great composers from the romantic era are often viewed today with near reverence, Pacius decided to write an *Overture* of his own when he realized that the available orchestra was not able to perform the original overture on a sufficiently high level. Sadly, Pacius's *Overture* has been lost, but it illustrates how even a work by Spohr, who was one of the nineteenth century's most celebrated musicians and composers, could be altered and adapted to make a performance possible.

Music had a multifaceted role during the nineteenth century. It was expected to contribute to an audience's level of cultivation, while still being entertaining and varied enough to pique people's interest. With this in mind, it is easy to understand why the

first solo work Pacius wrote for violin was *Variations on the theme "Studenter äro muntra bröder"* ("Students are merry fellows"). Pacius composed the work for his own use in 1842 based on one of his own student songs. The melody was well known, and therefore presented an excellent opportunity to show off his skills both as a composer and as a violinist.

In 1845 Pacius composed a violin concerto in one movement, which became his best-known work for violin. Yet, he is most remembered today for composing the Finnish national anthem *Vårt Land* (*Maamme laulu* in Finnish) in 1848 to a Swedish text by the Swedish-Finnish poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804–1877). Pacius also composed orchestral works, songs, and choral works, but it was his operas that caused the biggest sensations. *The Hunt of King Charles* (*Kung Karls jakt*) in particular was a huge success. It was premiered in 1852—the first opera to be composed in Finland.

Pacius's own performances as a violinist gradually decreased over time, until he practically disappeared from the concert stage. It was only after his retirement from his university position as music teacher in 1869 that he rekindled his violin playing. It is from this period that the score to his *Duo for violin and piano* comes. The work was written in 1872 and is based on the O*verture* to the opera *The Hunt of King Charles*. The score to the *duo* is incomplete, and exists only as a handwritten piano part with a partially notated violin part. A careful comparison of the piano part and the orchestral score of the *Overture* has, however, made it possible to reconstruct the work.

There are many questions surrounding the *duo,* but there are at least two possible explanations for the existence of the score. The overture to the *Hunt of King Charles* was one of Pacius's most beloved works, and was often performed at orchestral concerts. It is possible that Pacius wanted to perform the work at smaller events and soirées, but no concert programmes or reviews are known that mention the *duo*. There is also another possible explanation for arranging the *overture* for violin and piano. After his retirement, Pacius moved back to Germany for a few years, where he tried to arrange performances of his operas. This did not succeed, possibly because the libretti were on Nordic themes, which did not interest the Germans. Still, it is plausible that Pacius used the *duo* to introduce some of the opera's music.

After a few years in Germany, Pacius returned to Finland, where he lived until his death on the 8th of January 1891. Pacius's importance for Finnish musical life is hard to

overestimate, as he laid the foundation for organized musical culture in Helsinki. Considering that he also took on the roles of music teacher, orchestra and choir conductor, soloist, chamber musician, and concert producer, it is a wonder that he still found time to compose. His music remained stylistically German throughout his life, for which he has sometimes been criticized. However, considering that national romantic music mostly is represented by considerably younger composers, this is hardly something he should be blamed for.

During the last decade of Pacius's life, many things were happening in Helsinki's musical life. In 1882 the Helsinki Music Institute (today known as the Sibelius Academy, which is part of the University of the Arts, Helsinki) was founded, led by Martin Wegelius (1846–1906), its first director. Highly educated musicians, such as Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), Anton Sitt (1847–1929), Johan Halvorsen (1864–1935), and some years later Victor Nováček (1872–1914), were drawn to the city, enriching its musical life with their concerts. The same year, Robert Kajanus founded the Helsinki Orchestral Society (today the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra), which led to an additional influx of competent musicians into the city. These two institutions would for many years compete for the dominant role in Helsinki's musical life, leading to major personal conflicts between the two founders, but also to a significant increase in the city's concert activities.

Robert Kajanus was born in Helsinki on the 2nd of December 1856. He studied music theory and composition with Richard Faltin and violin with Gustaf Niemann (1841–1881) in Helsinki. Kajanus's first compositions, such as his *Scherzo (Menuetto)* from 1874, two *Melodies* from 1876 and 1877, and *Lied ohne Worte "Einsamkeit",* which are included on this CD, originate from this period. A violin sonata from 1876 is unfortunately incomplete. These works provide a picture of Kajanus's early music education, which was strongly influenced by the Austro-German tradition, with classical masters as Mozart, Schubert, and Beethoven as role models.

Prior to the founding of the Helsinki Music Institute, music education in Helsinki was limited, and aspiring young musicians like Kajanus often went abroad for instruction. Kajanus studied in Leipzig, Dresden, and Paris from 1877 to 1882. It was initially his violin playing that lured him abroad. He planned to study with the famous violinist and concert master Henry Schradieck (1846–1918) in Leipzig. Among the close connections involving these musicians was the careers of Kajanus's violin teachers, Schradieck and

Niemann. Both had studied with Ferdinand David (1810–1873), who had been Pacius's colleague in Kassel. Kajanus's plans, however, did not quite turn out as he had intended. Schradieck believed that, because Kajanus was left-handed, he should play the violin "the other way around", i.e. with the violin in the right hand instead of the left. It was too late for such a drastic change, which would in essence entail starting over from the beginning, so Schradieck encouraged Kajanus to focus instead on music theory, composition, and conducting.

Although Kajanus officially received his education from such well-respected German teachers as Hans Richter (1843–1916) and Carl Reinecke (1824–1910), it was a group of Scandinavians who made the biggest impression on him during his years abroad. This group included Kajanus's first wife, the singer Johanne Müller (1855–1883), as well as the composers Christian Sinding (1856–1941), Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), and Johan Svendsen (1840–1911). Svendsen, who would have a significant influence on Kajanus, was also Kajanus's composition teacher during his year in Paris. It was Svendsen who encouraged Kajanus to explore national characteristics in his music. This combination of German and Nordic music culture found expression in orchestral works such as Kajanus's *Kullervo's Funeral March*, op. 3 (1880); *Finnish Rhapsody Nr. 1 in d minor,* op. 5 (1881); and *Aino* (1885), which quickly earned Kajanus a reputation as Finland's most interesting young composer. These works lack the distinctive Finnish style that would come to be associated with Sibelius's music so strongly; instead, they seem to have been influenced by the music of Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Yet, despite stylistic differences, Kajanus's tone poem *Aino* still played an important role in paving the way for Sibelius's *Kullervo*, a composition that would serve as the starting point for a whole new chapter in Finnish musical history.

When Kajanus returned to Helsinki, he applied for a job as teacher of music theory at Wegelius's newly-founded music institute, but as Wegelius himself was interested in the position, the application was unsuccessful. Instead, Kajanus founded Finland's first professional orchestra. The speed with which the founding was accomplished suggests that plans for the orchestra were likely set in motion already before he returned to Finland. This efficiency can be seen in everything Kajanus undertook. During his long career, he served as the orchestra's chief conductor for half a century; he founded an Orchestral Academy, a symphonic choir, the Nordic Music Days, and an Association for Finnish composers; and he also taught music at the Imperial Alexander University in

Finland. When in 1884 Kajanus honoured Pacius on his 75th birthday, Pacius is supposed to have uttered the words: "In these hands I safely leave the future of Finnish music."

Kajanus's *Bagatelle* from 1884 is a previously unknown work. It was most likely intended as music for the home. In order to give a more complete picture of Kajanus's compositional style during the 1880s and 1890s, I have made arrangements for violin and piano of the *Air élégiaque* (1886) and *Berceuse, The Pauper Girl's Lullaby* (1896), which were originally composed for violin and orchestra. *Air élégiaque* is the only one of Kajanus's works for violin in which the Wagnerian influence – so prevalent in many of his other orchestral works – is noticeable. *Berceuse* is one of Kajanus's most popular compositions, and shows how attempts to create a uniquely Finnish tonal language found expression in his music.

Despite Kajanus's accomplishments as a conductor and his access to an orchestra capable of performing large-scale works, minor pieces that may have never been performed outside private gatherings constitute a large portion of his production. This affection for minor musical forms can be noted both in Kajanus's early works for violin as well as in *Menuet rococo* (1920) and *Menuet ancien* (1930), which were given to Kajanus's sister Selma Kajanus (1860–1935) on her sixtieth and seventieth birthdays respectively.

Kajanus's last works for violin, the *Nocturne* (1929), the previously mentioned *Menuet ancien* (1930), and *Spiccato* (1931), show how Kajanus followed the stylistic changes that were taking place in classical music at the beginning of the twentieth century. The emerging modernism could not be ignored; in Kajanus's hands it developed into a form of neoclassicism where the obvious boundaries of tonality began to fade away. These three works were premiered on Kajanus's 75th birthday concert on the 1st of December 1931, with Kajanus's son Kai (1908–1994) as soloist.

These three works survive in several manuscripts, both for violin and piano, and for violin and orchestra. A choice had to be made as to which version to present on this recording. *Spiccato* is a particularly complicated case, as the violin part underwent considerable simplification, probably shortly before the concert. This recording presents a "concert version", which combines the original virtuosic violin part with the final version of the accompaniment.

Less than six months after the 75th birthday concert, Kajanus conducted his orchestra for the last time. The concert concluded the orchestra's fiftieth season, and celebrated the orchestra's jubilee as well as Kajanus's life's work. After exalted cheering, fanfares, speeches, and gifts, Kajanus turned to his orchestra for the last time and said: "I will remember you as long as I live." A little more than a year later, on the 6th of July 1933, Kajanus passed away as his son Kai was playing the violin in the adjacent room.

Johan Christian Julius "Jean" Sibelius was born on the 8th of December 1865 in Hämeenlinna (Tavastehus), Finland. He would eventually be considered one of Finland's greatest composers, but at the beginning of his career the violin was front and centre. Sibelius dreamt of becoming a virtuoso violinist, and moved to Helsinki in 1885 to study music at the newly founded Music Institute, first with Russian violinist Mitrofan Wasiljeff (fl. 1880s) and then with Hermann Csillag (1852–1922). Wegelius himself taught Sibelius music theory and composition. Sibelius's violin playing improved rapidly, and he soon gained the privilege of participating in chamber music concerts with the Music Institute's teachers.

Sibelius's *Suite in E major,* JS 188, from 1888 was composed during his student years in Helsinki, and already shows signs of Sibelius's ambitions, both as a violinist and as a composer. The *Suite* fits naturally into the music culture into which we have gained insight through the music of Pacius and Kajanus, yet Sibelius's music hints at masterworks to come. The general tone is untroubled and easy to comprehend, but also shows both a scope and a dimension of creativity that seem to surpass the works of the two older composers. The music seems to flow effortlessly, while presenting many interesting details, such as minor solo cadenzas for the violin and melodic material that foreshadows Sibelius's later works.

But, then something happened that made Sibelius re-evaluate his goals. In the autumn of 1888 the 23-year-old Italian piano virtuoso Ferruccio Busoni moved to Helsinki to teach at the Music Institute. Despite his young age, Busoni was already a well-known pianist, and had been giving solo concerts since the age of nine. During his two years in Helsinki, Busoni gave around thirty piano recitals and chamber music concerts of such quality that he essentially crushed Sibelius's dreams of becoming a violin virtuoso. Suddenly, Sibelius understood what was required of a violinist of international calibre.

Nevertheless, during a study year in Vienna (1890–91), Sibelius auditioned for the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, but the experience was so stressful that it caused his body to tremble, brought a metallic taste to his mouth, and made him believe he might faint. It was Sibelius's last attempt to become a professional violinist. Afterward he put his focus completely on composing.

8.2 Artistic Component 2: *Nordic Connections*

This concert, which featured violin sonatas by Jean Sibelius, Christian Sinding, and Wilhelm Stenhammar, was designed as an inquiry into the role of Nordicness in non-programmatic music for violin and piano. While I avoided framing the works as examples of "absolute music", a term that carries complex philosophical baggage, these sonatas provided a useful framework for examining how cultural identity might be expressed beyond programmatic descriptions or titles.

The guiding question was whether and how a Nordic voice could be heard across these works. What emerged most clearly from the performance and preparation process was the multiplicity of ways in which this voice could take shape. No singular style or interpretive model defines the "Nordic violin sonata". Rather, each composer offered a unique perspective, mediated through their own background, ambitions, and aesthetic priorities.

Sibelius's *Sonata in F major*, for instance, felt deeply rooted in the local Finnish sound-world, yet interacted with music beyond it. Stenhammar's language, by contrast, projected a more formal classicism tinged with introspective lyricism. It is debatable whether these qualities can be understood as Nordic, but I came to see the music as aligning deeply with Stenhammar's own position and relationship to his local musical culture. What connected these two works was a related cultural context, manifesting in distinct artistic voices. This project led to a much deeper engagement with the topic, which ultimately became the focus of a separate peer-reviewed article (Silén 2024).

Repertoire:

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957): Sonata for Violin and Piano in F major, JS 178 (1889)

1. [Allegro]
2. Andante
3. Vivace

Christian Sinding (1856–1941): Sonate im alten Stil, Op. 99

1. Marcato
2. Andante doloroso
3. Menuetto
4. Allegretto
5. Un poco maestoso

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957): Sonatina, Op. 80

1. Lento – Allegro
2. Andantino
3. Lento – Allegretto

Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927): Sonata for Violin and Piano in A minor, Op. 19

1. Allegro con anima
2. Andantino
3. Allegro

Program notes

The concert explores non-programmatic music by three Nordic composers: the Finnish Jean Sibelius (1865–1957), the Norwegian Christian Sinding (1856–1941), and the Swedish Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927).

This concert plays a significant role in my artistic doctoral work, which focuses on the Nordic musical context that surrounds Jean Sibelius's works for violin and piano. Tonight's repertoire consists of three sonatas and a sonatina, with the aim of observing how these composers dealt with music that is not guided by a title that provides extramusical associations. This concert stands in contrast to my next two doctoral concerts, which will place the focus on music with connections to either song or dance.

The sonata was one of the leading musical forms during the nineteenth century. It usually consists of three to four movements, of which at least the first movement tends to be in sonata form. It can be observed that the structure and the organization of the musical content generally plays an important role in a sonata, and while not all sonatas are completely non-programmatic, the sonata still represents one of the most important forms of absolute music, i.e. music that is not describing anything extramusical.

One of the strongest advocates of the Sonata during the Romantic era was Ludwig van Beethoven, and the sonata came to be strongly associated with the German classical music tradition. Against this backdrop, it is fascinating to explore how the three Nordic composers whose music is performed in this concert deal with the violin sonata.

Sibelius, Sinding, and Stenhammar

Sibelius, Sinding, and Stenhammar were all leading composers in their respective countries during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. All three received part of their education in the German-speaking parts of Europe, but stylistically all three (in their own ways) came to combine their German education with aspects of the Nordic musical culture. This tension between the Germanic and the Nordic is one of the focal points of this concert.

I have chosen the repertoire for this concert because these three men were personal friends and had some influence on each other's compositional style. I therefore hope it

can provide some relevant context for understanding their music. There are two obvious ways in which these composers influenced each other. Sibelius composed his Piano Quintet, JS 159, in 1890 after hearing Sinding's Piano Quintet, op. 5, which was premiered in 1889. Later, Sibelius and Stenhammar became good friends, and Sibelius in turn came to have a considerable influence on Stenhammar's compositional style during the beginning of the twentieth century.

The links between these composers' violin sonatas are, however, less obvious. Instead, they raise many questions about "Nordicness" in music. Is there anything identifiably Nordic in the music of these composers? Is there a Nordic sound or character, or can the Nordic "tone" appear in many different guises, as Gunnar Bucht has suggested? Providing definite answers to these questions is challenging, but certain observations can help us understand the context that surround these works.

So, was Sibelius, for example, a "Nordic" composer? The answer to this question obviously depends on what we mean by a Nordic composer. An article by Mikko Heiniö, called "Suomalaisen musiikin suomalaisuus" (Engl. "The Finnishness of Finnish Music") illustrates the difficulty of such an inquiry. He identifies seven different ways in which music can be said to be considered Finnish. The same criteria can also be applied to Nordic music. He mentions that music can be considered Finnish when (1) it is composed by a composer who was born or is living in Finland; (2) it relates to Finnish national history; (3) its name or words refers to Finland; (4) it contains Finnish folk music; (5) it is "Sibelian" in character; (6) it is stylistically traditional, undeveloped, or limited, or not international; (7) or when it is Finnish in character, for example dark, melancholic, or sluggish.

These lines of inquiry are just as valid when exploring the topic of Nordic music. It suggests that the answer we get will depends on exactly what definition we choose to use. From a geographical perspective the music is inarguably Nordic, but this tells us nothing about the music itself. Regarding the second and third definitions, these four works do not play any major role in the history of the three countries, and their names do not refer to the Nordic countries.

When it comes to actual musical content of these sonatas the answers get more interesting, but they also increasingly depend on our personal understanding and interpretation of the music. An additional challenge is that while the Nordic countries,

especially nowadays, share many cultural and political characteristics, they are nevertheless distinct, with their own individual (although intertwined) histories and mythologies.

An interesting angle of approach to the question of "Nordicness" is whether the concept of "the North" in itself can be seen as a hermeneutic window on music by Nordic composers. The idea has received considerable attention in Canada, but it can also be applied to the question of Nordic music. I am indebted to Professor Markus Mantere for drawing my attention to this line of inquiry, most notably through his doctoral work about the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould.

I have therefore been asking myself if the ideals and values found in Nordic culture can be found in the four sonatas I perform tonight. In my interpretation, the works themselves show different perspectives of Nordic culture, but in every work I can find aspects that tie them to their local culture.

A general observation that needs to be acknowledged in order to understand Nordic music from the turn of the last century is that Sweden was culturally in a different position than its neighbours Finland and Norway. I am aware that any general observation is bound to be an oversimplification of the highly complex cultural dynamics, but the highlighting of certain details can shed light on both the music and its context.

Neither Finland nor Norway was independent during the nineteenth century, while Sweden was still a considerable regional power. This difference can be seen in how a considerable effort was made to create a unique cultural identity in both Finland and Norway, while Sweden tried to reconcile its slowly fading geopolitical influence. Another difference appears to be that due to Sweden's long history as an important power in northern Europe, it already had a developed cultural identity. This seems to have allowed them to question many central European ideals.

It is, for example, interesting to note that Martin Tegen's chapter on instrumental music in the third book of the series *Musiken i Sverige* states that: "Nordic music is inherently incompatible with the classical forms of music." Instead, he refers to the song form, often called an ABA form, as the core of Nordic musical expression. The composer and music critic Peterson-Berger also said that all instrumental music that aims to sound

Nordic in style needs use the sung tradition, which he saw as the most important aspect of Swedish musical culture, as a starting point. He considered Emil Sjögren's (1853–1918) sonatas for violin and piano the most important Swedish works in the genre. They were composed during the second half of the nineteenth century, and were, according to Peterson-Berger, in essence songs without words. It is therefore possible to identify points of tension between Nordic and the German musical culture. This tension is especially relevant for the music performed in tonight's concert, as all three composers received an important part of their education in the German-speaking parts of Europe.



Jean Sibelius, 1891.
Photo by: D. Nyblin. From the Picture Collections of the Finnish Heritage Agency.
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Jean Sibelius: Violin Sonata in F major, JS 178 (1889)

Jean Sibelius needs little introduction in Finland, as he is the most well-known Finnish composer. For understanding the works that we perform tonight, it is interesting to note that already during his youth he appears to have had a unique way of seeing the world through music. Tawaststjerna mentions Sibelius's ability to convert experiences and even smells into music. He was also a synesthete, which means that he saw music as colours.

While Sibelius's synaesthesia is most commonly linked to specific key signatures, I want to extend my gratitude to Folke Gräsbeck for drawing my attention to another interesting observation. If we assume that the synaesthesia also applied to individual pitches, the specific keys mentioned by Flodin (and quoted by Tawaststjerna) A – blue, C – red, F – green, and D – yellow, are exactly the pitches that feature most prominently in the beginning of the Violin Sonata in F major.

The Sonata in F major is considered one of Sibelius's most important early works. It was one of his most ambitious projects of the 1880s, and was the first time when Sibelius actively began using Finnish folk music as an inspiration for his composing. The sonata shows great similarities to Edvard Grieg's Violin Sonata from 1865 in the same key. The link between the two is so strong that Furuhjelm raises the question of whether Grieg

should be considered the true "father of Finnish music".[131] Although the two works show many similarities from an analytical perspective, they are still distinct. The musical expression is different, although both works draw inspiration from their respective countries' folk music. I would suggest that many of the most noticeable differences are caused by differences in the underlying idiom, as Sibelius's described a narrative that directly links it to Finnish country life. The two works also differ in their time signatures, which obviously causes significant differences in the feel of the music.

What is interesting is that in this sonata Sibelius consciously seems to have been going against the wishes of his composition teacher Martin Wegelius (1846–1906). Wegelius had strong opinions about music, and primarily valued the cultivation of the great German masters. Sibelius, on the other hand, also showed other interests, including for music by Tchaikovsky and Grieg. Tawaststjerna writes that Wegelius had discounted Tchaikovsky's *Sérénade mélancolique* as "violinistic nonsense", and did not hold Grieg's "nationalistic realism" in high regard either. For that reason, Sibelius did not show his Grieg-inspired Violin Sonata to Wegelius.

It is interesting that both Tawaststjerna and Furuhjelm mention realism when discussing the sonata. While realism was an important stylistic genre in the arts, realism in classical music is rarely discussed. This is understandable, since classical music cannot be "realistic" in its portrayal of people or events. Still, considering Sibelius's fascination with Strindberg, and the general interest in realism in Helsinki during the 1880s, it is easy to see a connection to Sibelius's sonata.

Sibelius has described the sonata in the following way in a letter to his uncle Pehr:

> The first movement, 2/4 in F major, is fresh and daring, as well as gloomy, with some brilliant episodes; the second movement, A minor, is Finnish and melancholy; it is an authentic Finnish girl who sings on the A string; then some peasant lads perform a Finnish dance and try to entice her to smile, but it doesn't work; she only sings with greater sadness and melancholy than before. The third movement, 3/8, F major, is fresh and spirited as well as romantic. There are

[131] The informal title is usually used in relation to Fredrik Pacius (1809 – 1891).

people in a meadow singing and playing on Midsummer Night. Meanwhile, a meteor falls down among them. They are amazed, but even continue playing, but not as readily as before, because everyone is more serious. At the end the mood becomes splendid but gloomy [the meteor!], and also playful and happy.

Despite the narrative's simplicity, a number of observations can be made. First of all, the pastoral setting seems to be central to the expression, while the "authentic Finnish girl" inspires Sibelius to write a folk-like melody, without upbeat, and which repeats the final note of the phrase in a fashion typical for Finnish folk music. The existence of a narrative in itself is interesting, because sonatas were, together with symphonies, among the most prominent forms of non-programmatic music. The use of narratives would later come to play a huge role in many of Sibelius's works. While Sibelius later in life was opposed to attaching clear narratives to his symphonies, there is a letter written in 1893 to J. H. Erkko that reads: "I believe that music by itself, that is, absolute music, cannot satisfy us. It certainly arouses feelings and emotions, but something is always left unsatisfied in our souls; we always ask 'For what reason.' […] Tones attain their real power only when guided by poetic meaning."



Christian Sinding, c. 1910. Photo by: L. Szacinski. From Byhistorisk samling at the Oslo Museum. (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Christian Sinding: Sonata im alten Stil, Op. 99 (1909)

Christian Sinding was one of the most important Norwegian composers during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. He studied and lived much of his productive life in Germany, and was held in high regard all over Europe. From a Finnish perspective, it is interesting to observe that Sinding and Robert Kajanus were the same age and became friends while studying in Leipzig. They both studied composition with Carl Reinecke and violin with Henri Schradieck. Sibelius and Sinding became friends while Sibelius was studying in Berlin in 1889–1890. Although Sinding lived in Leipzig, the older and more

experienced Sinding was something of an honorary chairman for Sibelius's group of friends in Berlin.

Considering Sinding's relative obscurity nowadays, it is surprising to realize how important a composer he was during his life. Despite stylistic differences, he was seen as a successor to Edvard Grieg, and his work *Frühlingsrauschen* (Rustle of Spring) became the prominent publisher Peter's Verlag's greatest single hit. To understand Sinding's style and reputation, it can be mentioned that after a performance of his First Symphony in Berlin in 1895 a critic pointed out Sinding as being able to take up Wagner's heritage. A bit over a decade later, the same year as he composed the *Sonate im alten Stil*, he was appointed an honorary member of the Königliche Akademie der Künste in Berlin alongside Giacomo Puccini and Richard Strauss.

An entertaining story that took place a few years later sheds further light on Sinding's life. A man who presented himself as Christian Sinding checked into one of the best hotels in Rennes, France. Thanks to Sinding's good reputation he quickly gained access to the city's high society. The fact that the man was an impostor was only exposed when a guest who had been invited to a dinner by the city's archbishop in honour of the distinguished "composer" happened to be an acquaintance of the real Sinding. This suggests that Sinding's reputation preceded him far outside of Germany and Norway.

There is, however, a sad shadow cast by events during the very end of Sinding's brilliant career that at least partly explains his relative obscurity today. During the last decade of his life, his health began to falter. His hearing began failing him, and he began showing signs of dementia. Sinding became an easy target for German propaganda efforts. While Sinding's personal beliefs and actions did not seem to have agreed with the Nazi ideology, his strong connections, and his appreciation and love for the Germany he used to know, made him easy to exploit. At the very end of Sinding's life there were two unfortunate events that sealed his legacy.

Sinding gave a speech that was broadcast by the Norwegian Radio on his 85th birthday, on the 11th of January 1941. Vollestad, who has written the most recent biography of Sinding, argues convincingly that the speech appears to have been written by Eyvind Mehle, who was the press manager for *Nasjonal Samling*, the right-wing party in power during the Nazi occupation of Norway. The speech includes incorrect statements about Sinding's life in Germany, and generally shows a strong similarity to an interview Mehle

had conducted with Sinding in 1937. Mehle had originally interviewed Sinding after a successful trip to both Berlin and Dresden, where Sinding had been lavished with praise, but Sinding's enthusiasm for his experiences found a new, darker meaning in the now occupied Norway.

Personal accounts of Sinding's life during his last years suggest that he was not able to grasp the way in which he was being used for German propaganda. About a month before his death, Sinding joined *Nasjonal Samling*. The messy signature on the application document is likely Sinding's, but the rest of the document appears to have been filled out by someone else. It is also telling that the document contains text written in red, which states that the bill for the membership fee should be sent to the German *Generalkonsul* in Norway instead of to Sinding himself.

These events came to have a significant impact on Sinding's legacy. After the war the Norwegian radio (NRK) banned all performances of Sinding's music, and while the country's orchestral societies never formally boycotted Sinding's music, the orchestra's repertoire still reflected the same reality. For that reason, Sinding—who just a few years previously had still been one of Norway's most popular composers—passed into oblivion.

It can be noted that attempts were made to use Sibelius's fame and reputation in a manner similar to Sinding's, but Sibelius declined most invitations, and instead received prizes and awards given by the German government in his home in Finland.

Sinding's *Sonate im alten Stil* is a fascinating work. It highlights a strong interest in older music and older times in Norway. It is striking that many of the Norwegian composers' most famous works have a connection to the past. Edvard Grieg's *Fra Holbergs tid, Suite i gammel stil*, op. 40, was written to celebrate the author and playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), and consists of a series of Baroque dances. One of Johan Halvorsen's most famous works is his *Passacaglia* for violin and viola, which is based on a theme by George Friedrich Händel, and Sinding's most performed work for violin is *Suite im alten Stil*, op. 10.

It is relevant to ask why the *Sonate im alten Stil,* op. 99, is called a sonata at all, since none of the five movements follow sonata form. Perhaps Sinding simply wanted to avoid confusing the new sonata with the earlier suite, but more likely the name suggests a

deeper connection between the movements than what might initially be apparent. Upon inspection, all of the movements share a strong motivic connection to each other.



Figure 1. All the movements in Sinding's Sonata im alten Stil build upon the theme that is introduced in the first movement. In the second movement the first interval becomes an accompaniment, while the order of the notes is changed in the third movement.

The first movement begins with the notes D, A, (G), and F. This simple outline of a minor chord serves as a key idea for the whole work (see Figure 1). It is also noteworthy that as the first theme is developed the piano introduces a falling line that is the seed out of which the second movement grows. In the second movement this falling line is accompanied by a repetition of the notes D and A. The third movement, a menuetto in D major, again builds around the same core idea. The main theme builds around the notes A, D, and F sharp, while a remnant of the falling line from the second movement can be found in the bass line. The time signature for the fourth movement is interestingly enough in 5/4, while the melody initially moves back and forth within the interval of a fifth on the by now familiar notes. While the connection is most likely without deeper meaning, I was struck by how the melody's initially narrow ambitus in combination with the time signature shows certain similarities with Finnish folk music. The last movement provides a triumphant ending that is again built on the same notes, but once again in a new character. The introduction, which is played by the violin alone, creates a joyful and folk-like character.

Jean Sibelius: *Sonatina*, Op. 80 (1915)

In Jean Sibelius's *Sonatina* from 1915, we again encounter a completely different approach to the violin sonata. The work was originally planned to be a sonata, but Sibelius changed the name to *Sonatina* during the composition process.

In many ways Sibelius lived a life of contradictions. Reading biographies about his life, there are many tensions or contradictions in his personality. These include his relationship to the rural and the urban; to the national and the international; to his own belief in his worth and abilities, and his crushing self-criticism; to his own mother tongue of Swedish and the Finnish language, which he increasingly adopted. There are also stylistic differences between his large orchestral works and his smaller chamber music pieces.

Many of these contradictions can be found in Sibelius's *Sonatina* as well. His own relationship to the work seems to have fluctuated between considering it a skilfully crafted sonata, to brushing it off as virtually worthless. This can be seen in both his diary and his letters. One comment that has been helpful in interpreting the work is found in Sibelius's diary. It reads: "I've been dreaming about being twelve years old and a virtuoso. The sky of my childhood and stars – lots of stars." This link to the composer's childhood can, in my opinion, be heard in the music. There is, however, something distant about the musical expression. It is as if the music portrays the joys of childhood, but as remembered through the fog of time.

Despite its simple external expression, the *Sonatina* presents substantial challenges, both technical and musical. The simple exterior also hides a surprising adherence to the traditional sonata form, and simultaneously shows a strong thematic cohesion between the movements.

The brief introduction in *Lento* presents all the *Sonatina*'s main musical ideas. The first motive, which consists of an ascending fourth followed by a descending second, is played in thirds, and already shows a surprising ambiguity about the importance of the different elements. By filling in the missing notes of the ascending fourth in a scalewise manner, we get the four first notes of the main theme of all three movements, although the motive is inverted in the second movement. The same four note motive is also played by the violin in the introduction of the first movement. The interval of a fourth and the

fifth. which we find in the very first bar, also becomes the accompaniment of the theme in the first movement (see Figure 2).

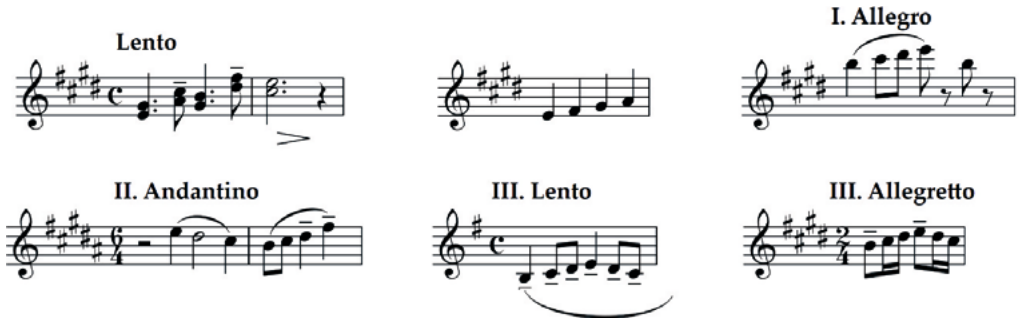


Figure 2. The Sonatina's first interval outlines the ambitus of the motive, which is found in different guises in all the three movements.

© by Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden

Another important interval in the first movement is the ascending sixth, in combination with a dotted rhythm. This is exactly the rhythm that is introduced in the beginning of the piece, albeit at a slower tempo, and while it is not immediately obvious, the ascending sixth is also present in the opening bar between the lower third of the first note and the upper third of the second note. We can also find the scalewise motion hidden in the thirds if we explore the line, which uses the upper third of the first note, the lower third of the second, and again the upper note for the third. If we add one more note, we find material that is found in the second movement.

I would normally question the importance of motivic similarities that are based on such common musical gestures, but in this case these motives can be found all throughout the work. The extensive use of this musical seed is likely what causes the coolness and even detachment that Barnett mentions when discussing the work. This can be contrasted with Furuhjelm's description, which in 1916 called the work possibly the most idyllically sanguine that Sibelius had ever composed.

While I can agree with both descriptions, they are in many ways contradictory. The work can feel cool and detached while simultaneously youthfully innocent and energic; it often feels naively simple, while adhering to a mature composer's strong inner logic; and to

my understanding the music should ideally sound effortless while momentarily presenting substantial challenges.

The very end of the *Sonatina* is a prime example of these inner contradictions. After skilfully building towards a brilliant ending, the last chords are thrown away inconclusively, as if to assure that no-one would take the work too seriously.



Wilhelm Stenhammar, 1905. From the Swedish Performing Arts Agency.

Wilhelm Stenhammar: Violin Sonata, Op. 19 (1899–1900)

Wilhelm Stenhammar was one of Sweden's best pianists, conductors, and most respected composers during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Similarly to both Sinding and Sibelius, Stenhammar also studied in Germany, but in his case only briefly. After studies with Richard Andersson in Sweden, Stenhammar moved to Berlin, where he studied with Heinrich Barth for seven months. Heinrich Barth was the primary accompanist of the famous violinist Joseph Joachim, and was therefore part of Johannes Brahms's circle. For this reason, Stenhammar's education was strongly influenced by the more conservative and classically rooted views on German Romantic music.

Stenhammar gained a reputation as an excellent conductor and performer of music by Beethoven, although an interpretation of Beethoven's Spring Sonata together with violinist Tor Aulin in 1902 was criticized by Peterson-Berger for being too classical. Stenhammar's understanding of the Classical repertoire also seeped into his own music. Although the musical expression is late-Romantic, the formal discipline brings to mind music from an earlier era.

Regarding Stenhammar's Violin Sonata in A minor, a few observations can help understand the musical expression and highlight some of the differences between Stenhammar's sonata and the other works that are performed tonight. As a performer, it immediately becomes clear that Stenhammar was a pianist and composer, while

Sibelius and Sinding were first and foremost composers whose first instrument was the violin. The difference in writing for both instruments is noticeable. Stenhammar's Sonata includes almost no double stops, whereas they play an important role in both Sibelius's and Sinding's sonatas. Instead, issues concerning sound and volume become challenging for the violinist, as he or she often needs to soar above the lush and brilliant piano part.

The wonderful lyricism of Stenhammar's Violin Sonata follows in Emil Sjögren's musical footsteps, whose violin sonatas at the time were considered the most important Swedish works of the genre. Wallner, who has written the most extensive biography of Stenhammar, sums up his thorough investigation of the sonata by discussing the challenges of performing the work. He considers the challenge to arise from the sonata's "double essence", which combines classicism with sensitive poetry. As a performer, I also sense a form of duality in the sonata's musical expression. It combines a strong Romantic idiom, which includes a sense of longing, with a feeling of acceptance and contentment. The music is never aggressive, never ugly, and never forced, and it retains a nobility and beauty throughout the work, despite not lacking in musical drama.

The first movement begins with the violin alone, playing an ascending minor sixth. This expansive interval clearly plays a key role in the sonata, as it keeps reappearing at key moments. One interesting detail about the first movement is that while the piece is called Sonata in A minor, the key of A minor is only firmly established at the end of the first movement.

One of my favourite moments of the sonata happens in the middle of the second movement, where the music suddenly takes an unexpected turn and gives a glimpse of what the musical salons of the late nineteenth century must have been like. Although the section flirts with some old-fashioned sentimentality, Stenhammar does it with such grace and charm that it only enriches the whole sonata.

We should not forget that Stenhammar had personal experience of the intimacy and atmosphere of the musical salons, which would soon go out of style. Even though salon concerts, and especially salon-style pieces, are nowadays often viewed with some contempt, the increase in popularity that necessitated moving chamber music concert to concerts halls was not seen entirely as a positive development. The directness of the communication between the musicians and the audience could not be reproduced in the

larger venues, where the audience was formally seated in neat lines at some distance from the performers.

The last movement is built around a dactyl rhythm (long, short, short). While the rhythm is so common in classical music that its relevance is unclear, it is worth noting that Tawaststjerna associates it with folk music in his discussion of Sibelius's Violin Sonata in F major. The same rhythm can be found in all the works performed tonight. The ascending sixth, which served as a key interval in the previous movements, does not have the same prominence in the finale, but when it finally is reached it brings the music back home in brilliant fashion.

8.3 Artistic Component 3: *Jean Sibelius and Nordic Dances*

These program notes were initially intended to accompany a concert exploring how Nordic composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engaged with the dance idiom. However, due to circumstances beyond my control, the concert was postponed. In the interim, I took the opportunity to expand the research I had begun for the program into a more in-depth written text, which I initially envisaged as a separate chapter in my doctoral thesis. However, following subsequent decisions about the structure of the thesis, the text was ultimately left out of the main body of the work.

When the concert eventually took place, I chose to use this expanded version as program notes. The resulting text was closer to an academic article than a conventional program note, complete with sources, stylistic analysis, and contextual framing.

The material covered here thus remains unique to this section and does not appear in greater detail elsewhere. In that sense, it represents a self-contained case study. By including it here, I aim to make the development of the doctoral work transparent, including the occasional detours prompted by circumstances and changes in the research questions.

Repertoire:

Introduction:

Jean Sibelius (1865 – 1957): From *Five pieces*, Op. 81 (1915 – 1918):

- Mazurka
- Waltz
- Menuetto

Jean Sibelius: From *Six Morceaux*, Op. 79 (1915 – 1917, rev: 1917/18):

- Tempo di Menuetto
- Danse caractéristique
- Tanz-Idylle

Denmark:

Niels Gade (1817 – 1890): From *Folk Dances* (in Nordic character), Op. 62 (1887):

- No. 3, Allegro moderato, ma vivace

Fini Henriques (1867 – 1940):

- *Nordisk Dans* (Dance of the North)
- *Djævledans* (Devil's Dance)

Sweden:

Tor Aulin (1866 – 1914):

- *Midsommardans* (Nordic Dance) (1906)

Julius and Amanda Röntgen (1855 – 1932, 1853 – 1894): From *Schwedische Weisen und Tänze*, Op. 6 (1882/1887):

- No. 4, Allegro
- No. 6, Allegro

Norway:

Edvard Grieg (1843 – 1907): From *Norwegian Dances*, Op. 35 (1880) (arr. Hans Sitt): - No. 2, Allegretto tranquillo e grazioso

Johan Halvorsen (1864 – 1935): From *Norwegian Dances* (1897):

- No. 1, Allegro con brio
- No. 2, Allegretto

Finland:

Jean Sibelius: *5 Danses champêtres*, Op. 106 (1924/1926):

- Largamente assai
- Alla polacca
- Tempo moderato
- Tempo di Menuetto
- Poco moderato

The historical context

Dances have been an integral part of music for millennia, but the roots of many of the dances most commonly found in classical music can be traced back to the Baroque or Renaissance. The legacy of the Baroque dances can be seen in tonight's concert programme, as the menuetto (or *minuet* in English) was one of the most popular Baroque dances. However, while German, French, Italian, and English Renaissance and Baroque music found its way into the Danish and Swedish courts, there was another tradition and another set of dances that came to play an even larger role in shaping Nordic music.

Current scholarship suggests that the Nordic folk music tradition was strongly influenced by the Polish dances that became popular among both musicians and audiences. However, the influence was not geographically restricted, and based on the earliest manuscripts the influences came both from Polish- and German-speaking areas (Gustafsson 2016, 812). It has also been noted that Polish, German, Slovakian, and Hungarian music collections from the seventeenth and eighteenth century can be surprisingly similar to Swedish collections from the same centuries (ibid.).

Many of the melodies that are nowadays strongly associated with Nordic folk music can be traced back to renaissance dances from the sixteenth century. These dances gradually became known as *polonäs, polska, pols,* and *springlek* (ibid., 21). In this context, Nordic folk music primarily refers to music from the Scandinavian peninsula. Finland is in some ways a more complicated case, which I will describe separately below.

This obviously does not mean that there was no prior music in the Nordic countries – the earliest Nordic song can be found on a parchment from around 1300 – but Polish music came to be integrated to the point of it becoming ubiquitous. In Sweden these dances gradually became commonly known as "polska", which uses the identical spelling as the Swedish word for "Polish". In earlier collections these polskas were often described as polonaises (ibid. 810–811).

What is notable is that the Nordic folk tradition provided a foundation and a tonal language for the first Nordic works of classical music that were identified as possessing unique Nordic characteristics. The earliest reference to the "Nordic tone" was a review of a performance of Niels Gade's *Echoes of Ossian* in Leipzig in 1842. Robert Schumann was among the German critics who enthusiastically praised Gade's work (Fjeldsøe and Groth 2019, 5).

Gade's knowledge and use of the Nordic folk idiom was no accident. He had studied with Andreas Peter Berggreen (1801–1880), who spent his life collecting folk melodies all over the world. Berggreen published his work in eleven large volumes called *Folk Sange og Melodier* between the years 1842 and 1871. While it may be obvious, it is still worth highlighting that the musical elements that were most strongly linked to the Nordic countries predate Gade's composition and find their roots in the folk tradition. That is to say that Gade did not invent a Nordic style all on his own, but found a unique musical voice by applying elements found in Nordic folk music.

Since I am interested in exploring whether Sibelius's dances show Nordic characteristics, I have primarily chosen dances by Nordic composers which refer to the Nordic countries, either individually or as a group. Based on the Nordic dances performed in this concert, it seems apparent that the connection to Nordic culture is most often achieved by using Nordic folk music as inspiration.

While it is convenient to refer to Nordic folk music as a single tradition, it can be noted that the reality on the ground shows great diversity. Despite a shared history, Nordic folk music differs widely from country to country, and sometimes even from village to village. Melodies often evolved or changed as they travelled from one area to the next over the centuries. Berggreen described these national differences in the following way in 1842, in the foreword to his folk music collection:

> The melodies, more than the texts, bear the impression of the individual character of the nation in which they originated. It seems to me that grace and a deep erotic feeling is more common in Swedish than in Danish melodies, of which most have a quality of greater seriousness. In Norwegian melodies an idyllic cheerfulness prevails, along with a feature of melancholy that is common in all Nordic songs.

When it comes to Finnish folk music, the picture becomes somewhat more complicated. Finland can pride itself with having not just one, but two folk music traditions (actually three, but I will get to that later). One is an outgrowth of the Nordic folk tradition, and shows some similarities with Swedish folk music. This form of folk music is often called *pelimanni* music, a word derived from the Swedish word *Spelman,* which can be loosely translated as fiddler (although the word is not tied exclusively to the violin).

A second tradition can trace its roots to the ancient Karelian tradition known as rune-singing. Rune-singing is strongly linked to the *Kalevala,* and was of great interest to Sibelius as he developed his mature compositional style during the 1890s, which came to revolutionise Finnish music. Sibelius had a chance to hear the lamentations of Larin Paraske (1833–1904) in 1891, and travelled to Karelia on his honeymoon to learn more about this ancient tradition the following year. The topic was important to Sibelius, to the extent that he gave a trial lecture on the subject in his (unsuccessful) attempt to be appointed as Faltin's successor as music teacher of the Imperial Alexander University of Finland (later renamed the University of Helsinki) (Oramo 2020 [1980]).

Glenda Goss (2009, 130) has argued that Sibelius's sources of inspiration may have been even wider when he was working on *Kullervo* (1892). During the process, Sibelius had access to at least two collections of folk songs. One was Emil Sivori´s *Folk Songs of Mäntyharju*, but the other one seems to have been a Russian collection. It seems likely that Russian characteristics in Sibelius's music were not always a result of direct influence, but rather that Karelian folk songs served as an inspiration for Russian composers as well (Bullock 2011, 36).

I want to highlight these complexities in order to make an observation.[132] It is tempting to imagine cultural origins as something simple, pure, and unspoiled that later became corrupted by outside influence. However, culture does not come out of nothing. While we can choose an arbitrary point in time as the beginning of a historical narrative or a story, this starting point will inevitably be the middle or the end of another.

The point I am trying to make is that both culture and history are complex, and any attempt to organize them into neat categories is bound to be an oversimplification. The uniqueness of the Finnish language may have shielded it from outside influence, but the parallels between, for instance, Norse mythology and the *Kalevala* suggests that the two cultures were not without interaction.[133]

For the sake of completeness, it is worth acknowledging that there is another folk music tradition in the Nordic countries that was not as strongly influenced by music from central Europe. That is the traditional Sámi music in the north of Scandinavia and Finland. The exoticism of both the Sámi culture as well as the barren landscape caused composers to look for inspiration within this unique environment. To give one example, the Swedish composer and critic Peterson-Berger wrote his Third Symphony *Same-Ätnam* on melodies from Lapland in 1913–1915.

The interest in Sámi music also existed in Finland. Sibelius's student Armas Launis (originally Lindberg) (1884–1959) travelled to Lapland to collect melodies in 1904

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[132] This point was made by Timothy Snyder in a lecture at Yale University, The Making of Modern Ukraine. Class 7. Rise of Muscovite Power (2:20).

[133] See for instance Frog (2010).

(Pekkilä 2016, 11). Sibelius can therefore be assumed to have had some awareness of Sámi music, but it does not appear to have affected his compositional style in any obvious way. Launis composed an opera called *Aslak Hetta* in 1922, but the work was only premiered in 2004.

If we broaden our perspective to encompass larger European cultural developments, we can observe that the interest in and incorporation of folk elements into classical music was not limited to the Nordic countries. During the nineteenth century, nationalism was on the rise all across Europe, and many nations and composers used the previously untapped potential of their local folk music to differentiate their music from the German, French, or Italian mainstream.

This development served a dual purpose. Locally, it provided a sense of identity, and often became strongly linked to a striving for independence. The existence of a unique local culture provided proof of distinctiveness to surrounding peoples or nations. On a global level, the influx of nationally derived music presented an expanding world of musical exoticism. While this exoticism was often treated with some combination of contempt and suspicion in the large cultural centres, it still greatly enriched the musical culture.

In Germany, Nordic exotism gained eminence. One reason for the German interest in Nordic culture was that it was thought that the Nordic countries had retained some of the purity that was getting lost in the increasingly Romantic German classical music.

Dances in Jean Sibelius's Five pieces, Op. 81 and Six Morceaux, Op. 79



Jean Sibelius, 1913. Photo by: Daniel Nyblin. From: What We Hear in Music, Anne S. Faulkner, Victor Talking Machine Co., 1913. (CC-PD-Mark)

Within the framework that has been provided above, a striking feature of the dances that are found in Sibelius's *Five Pieces*, op. 81, and *Six Morceaux*, op. 79, is that they seem to draw inspiration from a very wide range of sources. All these works were composed during the First World War, but it is difficult to identify any trace of either the ongoing war or of the local political turmoil in the music. However, before dealing with the musical content of these works, it is worth addressing these works' reputation and publication history.

The juxtaposition of Sibelius's larger and smaller scale works has caused many critics to decry the quality of Sibelius's miniatures. These miniatures lack many of the qualities for which Sibelius is most famous. They often lack the organic development of core ideas, which can be found in his symphonies, since such processing of musical material is impossible in a piece that lasts mere minutes. They also often miss the atmospheric tone painting that Sibelius regularly uses to depict nature and landscapes.

The works are also untypical when it comes to the instrumental writing, both for violin and piano. If we compare Sibelius's violin miniatures to the most famous miniatures from the beginning of the nineteenth century by other composers, one finds that Sibelius approached these minor works in a unique way. Instead of aiming for simple charm or flashy virtuosity — characteristics which were common in other miniatures of the period — Sibelius finds a unique voice by combining musical elements that are found in his larger works with his original method of writing for both the violin and the piano. However, rather than dismissing these small pieces for not being symphonies, or for not sounding like typical miniatures from the turn of the century, we may discover a part of Sibelius that is hard to detect in his more well-known works, if we approach them with an open mind.

I find it interesting that, if we think about famous artists more broadly, there is usually a great interest in anything that may increase our understanding of their creative process or thinking. It is common to find sketches made by visual artists presented alongside larger works or paintings. We can enjoy short stories just as much as larger novels. But, when it comes to Sibelius, I often get the impression that many critics would hold Sibelius in higher regard if he had not composed his miniatures. The idea that a great composer would compose miniatures around the turn of the century, using techniques from the nineteenth century, was viewed with suspicion (Murtomäki 2004, 139). However, rather than just assuming that these works are unworthy of attention because they do not fit neatly into the stereotypical understanding of Sibelius as a composer, we need to accept that these approximately 200 pieces for piano, piano and violin, and piano and cello represent a part of Sibelius's production, without which our understanding of Sibelius and his music is incomplete. These works are interesting exactly because they differ from what would be expected.

I also want to note that even if we would assume that these works were hastily assembled (an assumption that, at least in the case of some works, can be easily disproven), they would still provide an insight into Sibelius's composition process, musical intuition, and his understanding of the instruments in question. Would a quicker composition process not give us a glimpse of the type of music that Sibelius could produce more spontaneously, if they were not as intensively worked and reworked?

Yet another view was presented by Cecil Gray. He saw a duality in the Swedish and Finnish characteristics of Sibelius's personality. He argued that Sibelius possessed both the "amiable social attributes" associated with the Swedes as well as a "deeper and more fundamental […] substratum of Finnish granite" (C. Gray 1934, 57). This duality explained the contrast between Sibelius's ephemeral salon music and the deeper symphonies (Adams 2011, 135).

Despite all the criticism hurled at Sibelius for his miniatures, Sibelius himself saw no problem in combining the large and the small. On the 16th of May 1910, Sibelius wrote in his diary: "I should be able to combine things large and small. Symphonies and songs" (Dahlström 2005, 44). It is also notable that musicians who actually perform Sibelius's miniatures have generally been far more enthusiastic about their qualities than the critics.

Among the most famous pianists speaking out in favour of Sibelius's miniatures, we find Glenn Gould and Alfred Cortot (Murtomäki 2004, 138).

There is no doubt that financial interests played a role in Sibelius's decision to compose these miniatures. They were composed during a period when Sibelius struggled with his finances, and the ongoing war made many of his usual income streams unreliable. However, if composing for money is unacceptable, we should reject a large part of the greatest masterworks in the canon of classical music, including all the cantatas by Bach (Heinonen 2000, 3 quoted in Murtomäki 2004, 139).

The first selection of dances by Sibelius highlights his broad interests. The ***Mazurka***, op. 81, no. 1, is one of Sibelius's most popular miniatures for violin. The name refers to a polish dance, but is a far cry from the mazurkas by Wieniawski or Chopin. A striking feature of Sibelius's *Mazurka* is the common use of large intervals within the violin's melodies. These large melodic leaps can often be played as harmonics, which is common for Sibelius's works for violin.

What is musically even more interesting is the combination of phrase lengths and harmony. The harmony is often adventurous, with regular use of big chords that includes both the seventh and the ninth scale degree. These large, romantic chords contrasts with the phrasing, which regularly goes in groups of three, instead of the more common four bars.

The ***Waltz***, op. 81, no. 3, is one of Sibelius's most sublime pieces. It is simple and beautiful, and brings to mind waltzes by Tchaikovsky. Sibelius scholar Andrew Barnett has also noticed a similarity between the waltz's main theme and the first wind entrance of Sibelius's Second Symphony, op. 43 (Barnett 2007, 268). Despite the *Waltz's* beauty, it has a sort of detachment or objectivity that is not often found in miniatures from this period. Many miniatures were written as a way for performers to present their musicality and their subjective musical convictions.[134] The *Waltz*, as well as many others of

[134] See for instance Martens, Frederick Herman. 1919. *Violin mastery; talks with master violinists and teachers, comprising interviews with Ysaÿe, Kreisler, Elman, Auer, Thibaud, Heifetz, Hartmann, Maud Powell and others*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes company.

Sibelius's miniatures, retains a form of detachment, which at least in my opinion makes excessively subjective interpretations problematic. It is almost as if the *Waltz* is a distant echo of a simpler time that is in danger of being lost. This impression is strengthened by a section where the violin part has been marked *smorzando* which means dying away. This does not happen at the end of a phrase, as one would expect, but in the middle of it. One ponders whether the association between the violin and Sibelius's memories of his youth — which is regularly mentioned with regards to Sibelius's *Sonatina* op. 80—holds true for his works for violin and piano more broadly. Were the calmness and tranquillity of the *Waltz* an escape from a reality that was marked by both war and political turmoil?

The ***Menuetto***, op. 81, no. 5, is a peculiar dance. Of all the dances on this concert program, I have found it the hardest to find words to describe. It is strangely hesitant in the way the music starts and stops, and simultaneously defiantly opposed to any expectations of what a minuet should be. It also plays around with the feeling of the beats in a way that I believe would make dancing to the music rather complicated. The music leads into a section of repeated dissonant double stops — first written in the interval of a second and later as a seventh — which adds musical direction to the initially hesitant character. However, once the dance finally reaches a joyous character, the flow of the music is almost immediately interrupted, and the music returns to the opening material, which brings the first section of the dance to a close.

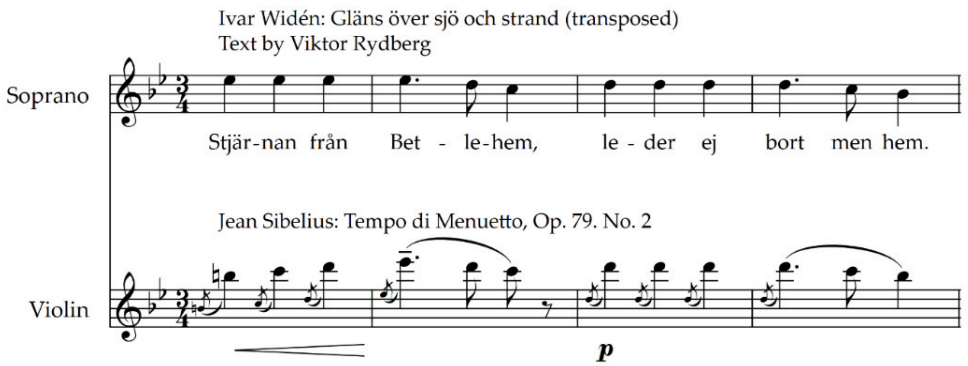
The middle section transforms the music from D minor to D major, and presents a beautiful melody that is played in double stops. Barnett has described this middle section as a *reverie*, which is an apt description of the moment of calm and positive beauty (Barnett 2007, 277). The dance ends with a return to the initial minor section. Folke Gräsbeck has noted that the menuetto was the dance idiom that Sibelius knew best during his youth (Gräsbeck 2003, 111). It seems likely that Sibelius's deep knowledge of the minuet allowed him to play around with the expectations of what the dance should be.

The ***Tempo di Menuetto,*** op. 79, no. 2, from *Six Moceaux*, shows a very different treatment of the dance form. The main theme of this minuet is dramatic, powerful, and

Baroque-like. The violin part is riddled with double and triple stops, which add weight to the theme. From an intertextual perspective, the *Tempo di Menuetto* is fascinating in the way the material, themes, and textures evoke associations to other works, both by Sibelius himself and by others.

The first, dramatic Baroque-like theme has a strong similarity to the first movement of Christian Sinding's *Sonate im alten Stil,* op. 99. The themes share a key, character, and time signature, and both use double stops nearly constantly. As the first theme draws to a close, the music takes on a more fragmentary quality. Within this section Sibelius uses a playing technique where a series of sixteenth notes combine double stops with a pedal point on an open string. The writing is idiomatic, and can be found in many works for violin. However, within the context of this doctoral work the most obvious connection is to the very end of Johan Halvorsen's *Passacaglia* from 1893, which is based on the *Passacaille* from Handel's Suite in G minor, HWV 432. Similar writing can also be found in the end of the last movement of Sibelius's violin concerto, at rehearsal mark 10, although there Sibelius uses the open A string instead of the G string.

Since I have an interest in exploring the Nordic connections that can be found in these pieces, I want to highlight a surprising link. The B-section of the *Tempo di Menuetto* contains a melody that shows a strong similarity to Ivar Widén's version of the Swedish Christmas Carol *Gläns över sjö och strand* (the song is more commonly performed using a melody by Alice Tegnér). Widén's song was written in 1916 and published in 1917, but it is unclear if Sibelius knew of it.

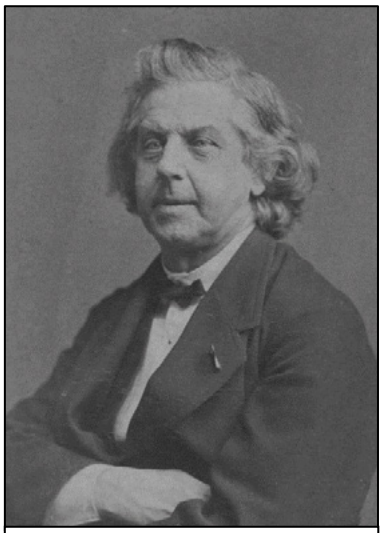


Some details within the *Tempo di Menuetto* also have interesting connections to Sibelius's Violin concerto. Both works are in d minor, which assures that similar passages feel familiar to the performer. For example, the fourth bar of the *Menuetto* includes a descending line of triple-stopped chords. The same series of chords (excluding the first one) can be found in the third movement of the Violin Concerto, five to six bars after rehearsal figure 9. Also, the use of rapid scales brings to mind the cadenza of the first movement in the violin concerto.

Danse caractéristique, op. 79, no. 3, once again takes a different tack in his approach to dance forms. The main theme is dark, rhapsodic, and not particularly dance-like in character. It uses strong, sustained dissonances to create a brooding mood. The second theme, on the other hand, immediately brings to mind folk dances. Veijo Murtomäki has identifies the dance as a Ukrainian Gopak (Murtomäki n.d.).

Tanz-Idylle's, op. 79, no. 5, main theme juxtaposes two strongly contrasting elements. The violin's melody is a simple dance in e-minor in ¾ time. The simple beauty of the melody contrasts with the piano accompaniment's impressionistic gestures and chords. The piano's texture brings to mind the piano part in Sibelius's *Sonatina*, op. 80, which creates sustained static textures. While the harmony is not static, the writing shares some resemblance to the use of the so-called "Nordic drone", a gesture that creates harmonic landscapes within which the melody can move. The resulting melody is simple and beautiful, but also has a feeling of sadness and emptiness. I believe the feeling at least partly arises from the lack of clear direction or development. Despite attempts to move the music in new directions, the melody always returns to the beginning, as if nothing had happened. When the music cannot stay put any longer, the main theme is interrupted in the middle of the phrase by a folk-like second motive. The dissonant use of the open strings immediately brings out a folk-like character, and is reminiscent of the style found in Halvorsen's collection of folk music.

Niels Gade and Fini Henriques



Niels Gade. Photo by: Hansen, Schou & Weller. From: *Edvard Grieg Archives at Bergen Public Library*. (CC-PD-Mark)

Denmark is in many ways the Nordic country that is the most connected to central Europe, and most importantly to Germany. The musical interactions between these two nations were extensive, and the borders between them were often unclear. For example, Dietrich (Diderik Hansen) Buxtehude was an important Baroque organist and composer who — although he was born in Denmark — is often considered German. Similarly, the German Friedrich Kuhlau was considered one the Denmark's leading composers during the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Niels Gade is a composer whose music is surprisingly rarely played, considering his many accomplishments during his lifetime. As I mentioned above, Gade was the first composer whose music was recognized as stylistically Nordic in Germany (although Johann Hartmann (1805–1900) is often described as the founder of Scandinavian national music). Gade taught at the Leipzig Conservatory, and served as assistant conductor of the Gewandhaus orchestra. After Mendelssohn's death in 1847, Gade was appointed chief conductor, but he had to leave his position already in 1848 due to the First Schleswig War between Denmark and the German Confederation. Gade also served as joint director of the Conservatory in Copenhagen, together with his friend and father-in-law Hartmann. He was therefore placed at the centre of Nordic music just as the nationalistic tendencies became increasingly important.

If we look at Niels Gade's Folk dances for violin and piano, they can be seen as following in the footsteps of the highly popular *Hungarian Dances* by Johannes Brahms and the *Slavonic Dances* by Antonín Dvořák. Whereas Joseph Joachim arranged Brahms's dances for the violin, Gade's dances were written for violin and piano and dedicated to Joachim.

Gade's dances are light in character but can be considered virtuoso works as they use many technical tricks, such as fast staccatos and left-hand pizzicatos. The dances can be seen to belong to a group of works that highlight the interest in Nordic music and dances in particular. Grieg wrote his four *Norwegian dances*, op. 35, in 1880; Julius and Amanda Röntgen-Maier published a selection of Swedish dances and songs in 1882, whereas Gade's folk dances followed in 1887. Notably, it was not only Nordic composers who composed Nordic dances. Max Bruch published 14 Swedish dances in 1892, and Édouard Lalo published *Fantaisie norvégienne* in 1880 and the related *Rapsodie norvégienne* in 1881.

Gade did not, to my knowledge, directly influence Sibelius. Gade was almost half a century Sibelius's senior and belonged to a different generation of composers, and his name almost never appears in the literature about Sibelius. Interestingly, Gade's music was performed at the Helsinki Music Institute and by the Helsinki Orchestral Society during the end of the nineteenth century, but it is unclear whether Sibelius was present at the concerts. An argument can still be made that Gade laid much of the groundwork upon which Sibelius built his style. Gade was an influential person, and references to his style, approach, and importance can be found in Edvard Grieg's music. Grieg in turn set an example for Sibelius, who consciously or unconsciously imitated aspects of Grieg's style in some of his early works.

As we move on to our other Danish composer for the evening, Fini Henriques, we will discover a different side of Danish musical life. Not much has been written about Henriques, and the material I have found is sometimes contradictory. This is surprising, considering Henriques's influential position among Danish musicians of his generation.



Fini Henriques. Photo by: Unknown photographer. From: *Danske Komponister (1917)*. (PD-anon-70-EU)

One would expect that most talented Danish musicians of Henriques's generation would come in contact with Gade, but surprisingly Birger Petersen's preface to Henriques's orchestral suite *Vølund Smed* mentions that Gade considered Henriques less gifted and advised against him studying at the Copenhagen Conservatory. Considering that Henriques was accepted to Joachim's prestigious violin class in Berlin a few years later, this claim is hard to understand. Nonetheless, Henriques received violin lessons by Valdemar Tofte and lessons in music theory by Johan Svendsen.

The main reason for my interest in Henriques is that he became one of Sibelius's closest friends during the year that Sibelius spent in Berlin. Henriques studied in Berlin from 1888 to 1891 with Joseph Joachim and Woldemar Bargiel (who in turn was a student of Niels Gade). Erik Tawaststjerna has described Henriques as a "bohemian even among bohemians", who was "a much-sought-after chamber player even if he forgot to turn up to rehearsal" (Tawaststjerna 1976, 59).

Considering Sibelius's reputation as a stern-faced, granite like colossus, it is interesting that one of Sibelius's closest friends in Berlin was almost the complete opposite. Henriques was known for his straightforwardness and humour, and his solo recitals where he told jokes between the pieces were very popular. I have found a single recording by Fini Henriques from 1936, which has kindly been made available by the Nielsen Music Museum.[135] On the record, Henriques performs his own *Vuggevise* (Lullaby) with Børge Rosenbaum on the piano. Rosenbaum is better known under his stage name Victor Borge and was one of the artists who most successfully combined music and comedy. Henriques's playing shows great charm, and while he uses an almost

[135] I have since located a second recording, as mentioned in the program notes to *From Dawn to Dusk*.

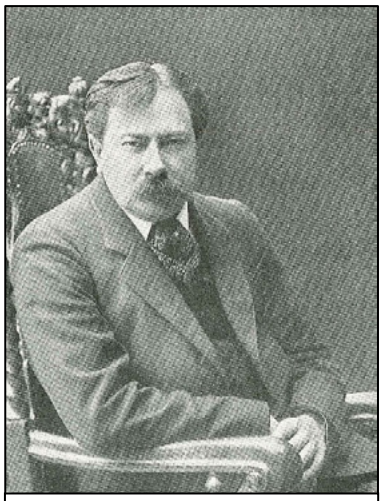
constant vibrato, his *portamenti* and *rubato* belong to style that had already started to go out of style.

Another violinist who seemed to follow in the footsteps of Henriques was Wandy Tworek, who had played for Henriques as a boy. A few of Tworek's concerts and a number of recordings can currently be found on YouTube. His concerts are casual in style, include lots of audience interaction and jokes, and provide a reminder that classical music does not always have to be serious.

Henriques's music also highlights these light-hearted qualities. The *Nordic Dance* initially presents a seemingly serious folk-like theme, but the seriousness quickly dissipates. An interesting feature of the dance is that a shifting between the same key's minor and major modes is a key feature. This alternation between major and minor modes is an element that critics already in the 1840s identified as 'Nordic' (Fjeldsøe and Groth 2019, 17). As an interesting detail, it can be mentioned that Sibelius, during his studies with Becker in Berlin, was harshly reprimanded for using the same chord's major and minor modes in succession (Tawaststjerna 1976, 55).

In *Djævledans,* Henriques really goes all out with presenting humour and musical tricks. In Henriques's hands the devil does not come across as scary, but instead presents tricks beyond the ordinary.

Tor Aulin and Amanda Röntgen-Maier



Tor Aulin, 1914.
Photo by: unknown photographer. From: *Svensk musikkalender 1914* (Stockholm 1914). (PD Sweden)



Amanda Maier-Röntgen.
Photo by: M. Büttinghausen.
From: *Edvard Grieg Archives at Bergen Public Library*.
(No known copyright restrictions)

If we compare the Nordic countries to each other, Sweden does not have any single composer who towers above everyone else. In Norway there is Grieg, in Denmark Nielsen, and in Finland Sibelius, but who was (or is) the most important Swedish composer? Two of the biggest names are arguably Franz Berwald and Wilhelm Stenhammar, but at least when it comes to international recognition, they are not in the same league as Grieg, Nielsen, or Sibelius.

In the case of Berwald and Stenhammar, neither one dedicated his life primarily to composing. Despite Berwald's talent for music, he made a living by opening a successful orthopaedic and physiotherapy clinic in Berlin. Later he also worked at a glasswork and a brick factory. Stenhammar dedicated his life to music, but his talents as pianist, chamber musician, and conductor divided his attention, which likely affected his compositional output. Stenhammar also suffered from severe self-doubt, especially when it came to his composing.

When it comes to and Tor Aulin, and most especially Amanda Röntgen-Maier, one wonders what music they could have composed if they had had the chance to focus more on their composing. Aulin was one of his generation's greatest Swedish violinists. He was a much-loved chamber musician, and the Aulin-quartet was arguably the most important Swedish string quartet of his time. He frequently gave concerts with Wilhelm Stenhammar, both as a duo and together with his quartet. He was also a

good conductor and concert master. But, when it came to Aulin's composing, he considered himself mostly self-taught (although he had studied composition with Philipp Scharwenka in Berlin) and preferred to perform music by his "more deserving" compatriots. Nonetheless, Aulin made a major contribution to Swedish musical life, and also played an important role in "rediscovering" the music of Franz Berwald.

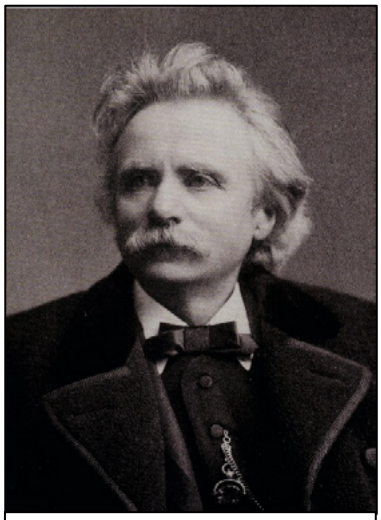
The case of Amanda Maier is illustrative of the difficulties female composers have faced throughout the history of classical music. Maier was a brilliant violinist and composer, and in 1872 became the first woman to graduate as Director of Music (Swedish: musikdirektörsexamen) from the Royal Swedish Academy of Music in Stockholm. The following year, Maier continued her studies in Leipzig. She composed a highly acclaimed violin sonata in 1873 (often claimed to be composed in 1874), and a violin concerto in 1875 that she premiered in Halle and later also performed with the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig. Judging by her success, one would expect Maier to have all the prerequisite for having a great career, both as a violinist and as a composer.

Sadly, she suffered the same fate as so many other women in music. Her career largely ended when she married. She married the pianist and composer Julius Röntgen in 1880, with whom she moved to Amsterdam. Julius was a well-respected musician in his own right, and the son of Maier's violin teacher Engelbert Röntgen. While Amanda and Julius arranged concerts where Amanda occasionally performed, she largely withdrew from public performance as a soloist. Her compositional output also decreased significantly.

One of the works she published after her move to Amsterdam was a collection of *Swedish Songs and Dances*, which she published together with Julius Röntgen in 1882. In this concert I will perform two dances from the collection. These virtuosic dances highlight Maier's great understanding of the violin, and the natural flow of her music.

Maier passed away aged only 41 in 1894. She died from tuberculosis, which she had been suffering from since 1887. Maier's life serves as a reminder of why many women never got the opportunity to reach their full potential as composers. Societal norms and expectations hindered her from having a full-fledged career as a composer and performer. Considering the high quality of Maier's work, one wonders what she could have achieved if she had been given the same opportunities as her male colleagues.

Edvard Grieg and Johan Halvorsen



Edvard Grieg, ca. 1888.
Photo by: Elliott & Fry.
From: *Edvard Grieg Archives at Bergen Public Library*.
(No known copyright restrictions)

The situation in Norway was in many ways quite similar to the one found in Finland. During the nineteenth century there was a strong and conscious effort to prove that Norway had its own history and cultural legacy, independent from Sweden and Denmark. The effort included everything from development of new schoolbooks to the construction of an independent Norwegian language. Literature and theatre played a particularly strong role in this effort.

Within this national movement Grieg was the leading Norwegian composer, and his music quickly became known all across Europe. It is hard to underestimate Grieg's international success. At times he was Peters Verlag's best-selling composer. As a curiosity it bears mentioning that Peters Verlag's bestselling single work was *Frühlingsrauschen,* which was composed by Sibelius's friend, the Norwegian Christian Sinding (Holth 2014, 46).

Whereas Gade can be accredited as the first composer to bring awareness to Nordic music, it was Grieg who brought it to new heights. After completing his studies in Leipzig, Grieg met with Gade and Hartmann in Copenhagen. According to his own words had the realization that he could only develop further by using a national foundation, and by letting Norwegian folk music lead the way.[136] Daniel Grimley has argued that while Dahlhaus saw Grieg's later music as advanced because it used contemporary techniques, such as bitonality and chord streams, which were found in the

[136] Interview with Edward Grieg in Berliner Lokal-Anzeiqer, April 4, 1907. Quoted in Benestad, Finn, and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe. 1988/1980. *Edvard Grieg, The Man and the Artist*. Translated by William H. Halverson and Sateren B. Leland. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, p. 334.

Austro-German mainstream, the existence of such radical elements in Grieg's music rather seem to arise from its Norwegian roots and its remoteness from the mainstream (Grimley 2006, 101). In a letter to Halvorsen from 1897, Grieg brings up his increasing distaste for German music. He writes:

> Down here art is all too much just art – and not nature. Therefore I long for the great nature back home, which more than anything is related to great art. German art now – especially the performed, perhaps – is either School art or the art of guts! Both lack the higher purer level, and therefore smell as though they belong in the school room or anatomy chamber (Letter from Grieg to Johan Halvorsen, 26th of January 1897. Quoted in Grimley 2006, 6).

Johan Halvorsen also played a key role in the exploration of Norwegian folk culture, and even contributed to Grieg's artistic development. In 1896 Grieg wrote to Halvorsen that he would be the right man to travel around the country and systematically collect folk tunes (ibid., 93). Halvorsen published a collection of folk melodies in 1900, which would serve as a starting point for Grieg's piano work *Slåtter*. This interaction highlights the close collaboration between these two composers.

Although my doctoral work primarily focuses on Sibelius and his immediate Nordic contemporaries, Grieg's outsized role within Nordic music, and in particular Norwegian music, makes him hard to ignore. In order to present his music, I have decided to perform his *Norwegian Dance No. 2,* op. 35, which was arranged for violin and piano by Hans Sitt. This also highlights the importance of arrangements during the nineteenth century. It allowed for popular works to be performed by numerous different-sized groups and instruments.



Johan Halvorsen, ca. 1900. Photo by: Hilfling-Rasmussen, Jens Carl Frederik. From: *Oslo Museum.* (CC BY-SA 3.0)

In addition to arranging the dances for violin and piano, Hans Sitt also arranged them for a full orchestra. Peters Verlag became so enthusiastic about the dances that they inquired if the second dance (the one performed tonight) could be included in Grieg's Peer Gynt Suite op. 55. Grieg rejected the idea, stating that "the theme is not by me, but borrowed from a folk dance."[137]

This is a thing that both Grieg's and Halvorsen's dances have in common. Both composers used a folk music collection by Ludvig Mathias Lindeman called *Ældre og nyere norske Fjeldmelodier* as a source. It should, however, be noted that whereas Ole Bull believed that the Norwegian art "stood ready and waiting upon the mountains", both Grieg and Halvorsen reworked Lindeman's material to create compositions of their own (Herresthal 1993, 150).

Jean Sibelius's Five Danses champêtres, Op. 106

Sibelius's *Five Danses champêtres*, op. 106, hold a special place in my heart. Of all Sibelius's works for violin and piano, these dances were the ones that most strongly encouraged me to begin researching Sibelius's works for violin and piano more thoroughly. They are energic, entertaining, and virtuosic, but also enigmatic and surprising. Rebekah Brown has written that during these dances "we find ourselves spending more time flirting at the punch bowl than on the dance floor; perhaps because we are never certain which dance is being played" (R. A. Brown 2003, 142).

[137] Letter to Max Abraham, dated 12.02.1892. Quoted in Heinemann, Ernst-Günter, and Einar Steen-Nøkleberg. 2017. "Preface", In *Norwegian Dances*, op. 35, by Edward Grieg, IV–V. Munich, Oslo: Henle Verlag.

Andrew Barnett sees a "a significant toughening in style" compared to Sibelius's earlier works for violin and piano, and considers them as "the beginning of Sibelius's last stylistic period as a composer of violin music" (Barnett 2007, 310). The dances are more complex, and more intense than his earlier works for violin and piano. Veijo Murtomäki also points out that the works are more orchestral than Sibelius's previous works (Murtomäki, Chamber music for violin, and for piano and violin).

As we begin to explore these works, the first question arises from the name. The French name *Danses champêtres* can be translated either as country dances or rural dances, but the dances avoid easy categorisation within either a national or rural context. Instead, they seem to draw inspiration from a wide range of sources. Murtomäki argues that the dances are neither folkloristic nor rustic, but my own interpretation of the works differs somewhat from Murtomäki's view (ibid.).

Where I would agree with Murtomäki, is that the dances are very different from the other national folk dances which are performed in this concert. Whereas Grieg's and Halvorsen's *Norwegian Dances*, Röntgen-Maier's *Swedish Songs and Dances*, Gade's *Nordic Folk Dances,* and Henriques' *Nordic Dance* openly draws inspiration from the composers' respective local culture, the connection is anything but obvious in the case of Sibelius's *Danses champêtres*.

In my experience as a performer, the dramatic introduction to the first dance, marked ***Largamente assai,*** op. 106, no. 1 brings to mind a Hungarian character due to its emphasis on the first beats and frequent use of rhythms where a short note falls on a strong part of the measure. This is a frequent element of Hungarian music, and is tied to the spoken Hungarian language. While Finnish and Hungarian are part of the same Fenno-Hungarian language group, these rhythms are not as frequent in Finnish music as they are in Hungarian. Despite this Hungarian-inspired rhythm, the theme shares melodic features with the theme of the second movement of Sibelius's Sonata for Violin and Piano in F major, which has been credited with being the first time that Sibelius found an authentic Finnish expression in his music. The contrasting *Vivace* section has a polka-like character, due to its accompaniment (ibid.).

The first dance also treats modality interestingly. Both the melodic and harmonic material mostly suggest a Dorian mode by raising the B flat found in d minor to a B natural. However, as the slow *Largamente* section draws to a close, the momentary

optimism of the raised sixth is lost as the music at the end of a phrase lands on a G minor chord, which lowers the sixth back to B flat.

The second dance, ***Alla polacca***, op. 106, no. 2 is a light-hearted, virtuosic, and energetic Polish dance. Stylistically the piano's introduction suggests that the dance is a polonaise, but Sibelius's treatment of it is unconventional. Both Murtomäki and Barnett find humour in this dance. Murtomäki sees the *Alla polacca* as a parody on the genre, whereas Barnett finds within it a cheeky parody of the slow movement of Sibelius's Fifth Symphony (ibid. and Barnett 2007, 310).

The third dance, ***Tempo moderato***, op. 106, no. 3, is the most powerful of the collection, with heavy uses of double stops — including some that are dissonant — and extended sections in quick octaves on the piano. The dance comes across as rustic and intense, but with an improvisatory feeling in the slower sections. Once again, there is something about the music that, at least for me as a performer, once again brings my thoughts to Hungarian music.

The fourth dance, ***Tempo di Menuetto***, op. 106, no. 4, feels like a deconstructed minuet. The dance elements are present, but the flow of the dance is constantly interrupted by sudden stops or musical course corrections. The whole introduction gives the impression of searching for a way forward without finding the correct path. The music's uncertainty gives the dance an improvisatory quality. To Brown, this dance sounds like a "long search for a dancing partner, followed by a very short dance, a promenade from the floor, then a search for another partner" (R. A. Brown 2003, 142).

The solution to the introduction's uncertainty presents itself through a Picardy cadence, which unexpectedly moves the music from A minor to A major. Whereas the introduction felt searching, the middle section of the dance feels happy, carefree, and folk-like. While I do not know if Sibelius based the melody on a specific folk dance, it bears resemblance to, for instance, Menuett 264 from Dragsfjärd, from Otto Andersson's collection *Finland Svenska Folkdiktning – Folkdans* (O. Andersson 1963, 120). Sibelius uses the folk-inspired menuet to have some virtuosic fun, such as writing quick jumps of an octave that are marked to be played on one string.

After a while the folk dance loses its way, and the music returns to the material that was presented in the beginning of the dance. The very end includes an interesting detail. The

music shifts back and forth between A minor and A major, as if the music cannot decide if it should reach a happy or a sad ending. As mentioned previously, this shifting between major and minor is a common feature in Nordic music, but something that Sibelius's German teacher, Albert Becker, did not find appropriate.

The last dance, ***Poco moderato – Allegretto***, op. 106, no. 5, is lighter in character than most of the previous dances, and has a folk like quality. Interestingly, the violin's opening motive shares the exact same notes (d, e, f-sharp) as the piano's opening to the previous dance. The last dance also includes other interesting intertextual connections. The repeated staccato notes in the beginning of the *Allegretto* brings to mind the repeated notes of the *Menuetto* op. 81, no. 5, which has been described above. The connection is especially noticeable as both pieces use the motive in the interval of a dissonant minor seventh.

The very next bar of the *Allegretto* uses a motive that consists of a dotted rhythm which is the same rhythm as the main theme to the second dance, *Alla polacca.* The only melodic difference is that the notes have been inverted (i.e., moving down and then up instead of up and then down). The underlying accompaniment's open fifths also have a strong intertextual connection, as folk music often uses this element. The syncopated rhythm of the piano's right hand adds to the folk-like character. The *Allegretto* also includes quick pizzicato-chords, not unlike the ones found in the *Alla polacca.*

8.4 Artistic Component 4: *From Dawn to Dusk*

This final concert marked a shift in focus from the detailed stylistic questions of previous recitals—such as sonata form, early Finnish repertoire, or the treatment of dance forms—toward something broader and more elusive. I wanted to explore whether a shared sensibility, an atmosphere, or a kind of expressive character might emerge across the landscape of Nordic music, particularly in musical miniatures and character pieces.

The program featured works by Jean Sibelius, Fini Henriques, Ole Bull, Johan Halvorsen, Wilhelm Stenhammar, Johan Svendsen, and Christian Sinding, composers with distinct voices, but with shared cultural connections. The guiding idea was to allow the music's affective world to unfold through performance: to ask what kinds of moods, gestures, or inner landscapes recur, and how they resonate within a Nordic aesthetic horizon.

This concert also marked a shift in how I approached the program notes themselves. Rather than focusing on describing the music and its context, I chose a more reflective, personal voice. The aim was to explore atmosphere and landscape, not only as musical topics, but as interpretive tools. I wanted to explore ways of understanding how the character of a piece, or a sequence of pieces, might speak to something larger than its national or stylistic identity.

In this sense, the concert served as a closing reflection on the core questions of this doctoral project: not only *what* Nordicness might be, but *how* it can be felt, interpreted, and performed.

Repertoire:

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957): From Five Pieces for Violin and Piano, Op. 81 (1915–1918):
- *Aubade*
- *Rondino*

Ole Bull (1810–1880): *Et Sæterbesøg* (A Mountain Vision) (1865)

Jean Sibelius: Four Pieces for Violin and Piano, Op. 115 (1929):
- *Auf der Heide*
- *Ballade*
- *Humoreske*
- *Die Glocken*

Johan Svendsen (1840–1911): Romans, Op. 26 (1881)

Fini Henriques (1867–1940): *Myggedans* (Dance of the Mosquitoes), Op. 20, No. 5 (1900)

Jean Sibelius: Four Pieces for Violin and Piano Op. 78 (1915–1917):
- *Impromptu*
- *Romance*
- *Religioso*
- *Rigaudon*

Johan Halvorsen (1864–1935): *Air norvégien*, Op. 7 (1896)

Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927): *Sentimental Romance* in F minor, Op. 28, No. 2 (1910)

Jean Sibelius: From Six Morceaux, Op. 79 (1915 – 1917, rev: 1917/18):
- Souvenir
- Serenade
- Berceuse

Fini Henriques: *Wiegenlied* (1915)

Sibelius: Three Pieces for Violin and Piano Op. 116 (1929):

- *Scène de danse*
- *Danse caractéristique*
- *Rondeau romantique*

Christian Sinding (1856–1941): *Abendstimmung*, Op. 120 (1915)

Introduction

Over the course of my doctoral research, I have explored how Jean Sibelius's works for violin and piano align with the broader Nordic musical landscape. My approach combines artistic and scholarly perspectives by using a practice-led research framework in which my artistic practice guides my research questions while my academic research informs my artistic choices. This concert focuses on character pieces—one of the most central forms of Nordic violin music during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While my previous concerts explored different aspects of the Nordic violin repertoire, tonight's program shifts the focus toward atmosphere and experience.

Each of my previous artistic components has examined a distinct theme. The first, a CD recording of works by Fredrik Pacius, Robert Kajanus, and Jean Sibelius investigated whether the violin music by Pacius and Kajanus could provide any insight into Sibelius's early compositions. The second, a recital centred on non-programmatic music, i.e. sonatas, explored whether Nordic composers shared common traits when writing music without extramusical titles. The third focused on dance-inspired violin works, questioning how both international and regional dances shaped Nordic compositions. Tonight I turn to character pieces, asking whether they convey characteristics unique to the Nordic countries.

In literature on both Sibelius and Nordic music more broadly, themes of nature and landscape frequently play a significant role. However, in the repertoire I have chosen for this concert, the nature and landscape rarely feel like external elements. Instead, the experience of the landscape often becomes internalised as an experience or a feeling. This feeling of the environment is a major part of what I am interested in exploring in this concert.

To approach the question of the Nordic experience, I suggest that Gernot Böhme's thoughts on atmosphere can provide a valuable perspective. In his view, atmosphere is not merely a subjective interpretation of one's surroundings, but a relational phenomenon that arises between a subject and the environment. This relational atmosphere is experienced both affectively and emotionally, and it impacts how one experiences spaces, landscapes, and even social situations. This means that nature or landscape does not in itself possess an atmosphere, but that the atmosphere arises once the environment is experienced by someone. Interestingly, the atmosphere is affected by both internal factors, such as the subject's sensory perceptions, mood, and attention, and external factors, such as lighting, weather, smells, or temperature. The atmosphere is not so much interpreted as it is experienced.

These themes can serve as *hermeneutic perspectives*—interpretive points of view that shape our thinking, possibly revealing insights or connections that might not otherwise be apparent. While hermeneutics has been widely used as a means of inquiry into music and interpretation—most notably in the work of Lawrence Kramer—my approach aligns more closely with literary and philosophical hermeneutics, drawing on thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer.

The idea of using nature, landscape, and atmosphere as conceptual frameworks that can guide our listening resonates with my understanding of the music I am performing tonight. Many of the works do not evoke pictures of landscapes, but rather a mood or an experience that can be loosely associated with Nordic nature or culture. This raises the question of whether the Nordic nature, geography, seasons, long summer nights, or the dark winters affected the composers living in the Nordic countries in a way that can be felt or heard in their music. If we assume an affirmative answer to the question, we then may need to ask if this environmental influence on Nordic art is shared across the Nordic countries, or if it is entirely subjective. The answers to these questions are highly dependent on how they are approached, but I think it is safe to say that there are aspects of the Nordic experience that are common and shared across borders, and also aspects that are so regional or local that they do not affect areas beyond a limited locale, and that the subjective lens through which these environmental factors are experienced is almost entirely individual. This means that even if we assume that the environment affects the works of composers, we should not expect any universal agreement on the consequences of this influence.

With this framework in mind, it is interesting to ponder whether the music performed tonight does communicate something uniquely Nordic. I have lived with this question and this music for the many years I have worked on my doctoral research, and I am increasingly under the impression that this is the case, however allusively. There is something about the Nordic atmosphere that seeps into the music in a way that can evoke a unique mood, even without, for example, extensive borrowing of musical elements from folk music. It is, however, difficult to pinpoint what specific elements give rise to this feeling. While I have found many musical elements that can be seen as contributing to a Nordic style, the individual elements have limited explanatory power, since it is possible to find examples of similar musical gestures far beyond the Nordic countries. Instead, the Nordic tone appears to arise from interactions between these elements. These elements will be explored in greater detail in my written thesis.

As we listen to the music performed tonight, it may be interesting to think about how we understand and internalize the music. Does the music convey a landscape or an atmosphere? Does it feel external or internal? While this varies from piece to piece, my own impression is that there is often a difference between how Sibelius communicates his music compared to his Nordic contemporaries, despite them sharing many commonalities.

About the repertoire

The repertoire for this concert unfolds as a loose narrative, charting the passage of time from morning to evening. Yet this journey not only guides us through the hours of a day, but also reflects the arc of life and, perhaps most poignantly, the closing chapter of an era. The world this music represents may have faded, but its beauty endures, preserved for us in the music itself.

We begin with Sibelius's ***Aubade*** op. 81, no. 4, a musical greeting to the morning. It opens with radiant, upward-reaching arpeggios, like the first rays of sunlight spilling over the horizon, bathing the world in delicate colour. As the piece unfolds, it carries the freshness of early morning—not yet the full brightness of day, but a positive energy, full of promise. The light-hearted and trouble-free ***Rondino*** op. 81, no. 2, prepares us for the day to come, as we prepare to head out into the world to explore the Nordic landscape.

Late Morning in the Great Outdoors

The following selection of works takes us out into Nordic nature. First, Ole Bull leads us up to a Norwegian mountain farm in his work ***Et Sæterbesøg*** (A Mountain Vision). We witness through music and song how a herdgirl tries to keep her relationship with a local boy secret from her strict uncle. She sings a selection of folk songs to secretly message her lover whether it is safe to approach her house or not. Bull uses actual folk songs to evoke the mood of the Norwegian countryside. He believed that the Norwegian culture stood ready and waiting on the mountain tops, and that the only thing Norwegian culture needed was to bring it down. In this work we get a glimpse of how Bull aimed to introduce the world of classical music to the unspoiled folklore of his homeland.

We continue exploring the Nordic landscape in the second-to-last opus that Jean Sibelius published during his lifetime, ***Four Pieces for Violin and Piano,* op. 115**. Sibelius's experience of nature, however, differs markedly from that of Bull's *Mountain Vision*. Sixty-four years separate the two works, and instead of traveling up the Norwegian mountains, Sibelius takes us out onto a heath in the piece ***Auf der Heide***, op. 115, no. 1. Despite the separation in time, place, and environment, one thing remains: the importance of nature. For many Nordic artists nature provided a place of solitude, inspiration, and introspection.

It is interesting to contrast Bull's and Sibelius's depictions of nature. Bull's view seems immediate, as if he wanted to present the mountain as it was, complete with cuckoos, birdsong, and folk-fiddlers. In contrast, Sibelius's heath feels more like an impression than a landscape, as if what we are hearing is not the landscape itself but rather Sibelius's thoughts and feelings as he traverses through nature. This can be used to highlight the difference between the application of the terms landscape and atmosphere to music. If we compare these two works, Bull's *Mountain Vision* feels more like a landscape, whereas Sibelius's *Auf der Heide* comes across as an atmosphere.

The following two pieces, ***Ballade***, op. 115, no. 2, and ***Humoreske***, op. 115, no. 3, do not have obvious narrative implications, but perhaps it could be imagined that the untamed wilderness of the heath provides room for a broader exploration of the human experience. The term "ballade" has ancient connotations. It is associated with the stories and songs sung by bards, who often told about heroic or romantic deeds. Viewed from this perspective, the drama of the *Ballade* is more likely to be indicative of internal

thoughts and feelings rather than external events. The following *Humoreske* is a playful piece that alternates between two distinct moods, a calm and tranquil *wanderer* and a more active folk-inspired dance.

The following ***Die Glocken*** (The Bells), op. 115, no. 4, is short and virtuosic, and feels more like a representation of a mood or mental state than a traditional character piece. It is not known what meaning Sibelius ascribed to the bells, but during the Romantic era bells could often symbolize themes such as mortality, eternity, or the passage of time. Viewed from this perspective, the rushed atmosphere of this short piece can perhaps be seen as an aging composer grappling with the inescapable nature of life's brevity.

Svendsen's ***Romance***, op. 26, is one of the most popular pieces in the Nordic violin repertoire. It was sketched spontaneously during a single afternoon in 1881, and finalised the very next day. While Svenden's *Romance* does not directly refer to nature, it includes several features associated with Nordic music, national romanticism, and folklorism. These include the sweeping lyrical melody, with its expansive raising fifths and fourths, harmonic chromaticism, pedal points, and hints of modality. While the piece is clearly rooted in G major, with a middle section in G minor, the violin's melody centres around the pitch D, a fifth above the harmony, which gives the impression of the melody floating, as if yearning to reach something beyond the grounding of the harmony. While this momentarily imbues the melody with a modal character, the piece as a whole expresses an openness and freedom that nonetheless is strongly rooted in the classical tradition.

The *Romance* does not follow a conventional narrative of human romance, but instead channels the emotional language of the Romantic era—capturing longing, nostalgia, and a sense of beauty. Its sweeping, lyrical quality calls to mind the untouched Nordic landscapes and evokes an emotional connection to something greater than the self. This deeply personal piece is a reflection of the Nordic Romantic tradition, where nature, beauty, and the human experience are intertwined in a timeless dialogue. The romance as a musical form had a central position within Nordic classical music, as can be seen by this concert featuring no less than three romances: the first one by Svendsen, the second by Sibelius, and the third by Stenhammar.

The final piece—before we return home from our exploration of the vast Nordic landscape—deals with an unavoidable aspect of Nordic nature, mosquitoes. Henriques's

Myggedans (Dance of the Mosquitoes) is a humorous miniature in the word's true sense. Perhaps the piece can serve as a reminder, that while music can possess great beauty and depth, sometimes a simple smile can be just as welcome.

Mid-day

Within this concert program, the following pieces will deal with different aspects of everyday life. They reflect the various thoughts, ideas, and impulses that accompany us throughout the day. We begin with Sibelius's ***Impromptu***, op. 78, no. 1, which feels more like a fleeting thought or idea than a fully formed narrative. The piano's casually lilting accompaniment creates an inviting atmosphere on top of which the violin can explore different melodic ideas. Many of these motifs exhibit a characteristically Sibelian S-shape, beginning and ending on the same note while briefly dipping below and rising above it in the middle. The harmonically extremely static music gradually expands until it suddenly fades away surreptitiously—as if the fleeting thought dissolved as unnoticeably as it arrived.

Sibelius's ***Romance*** op. 78, no. 2, brings a different shading to the concept of a romance than the ones by Svendsen and Stenhammar. Whereas Svendsen's romance has an almost floating and expansive sensuality, and Stenhammar's romance is momentarily openly sentimental, Sibelius's *Romance* is marked by purity and clarity of expression. It feels intimate and restrained, yet profoundly moving. It brings to mind the Swedish painter Richard Bergh's famous painting *Nordisk sommarkväll* (Nordic Summer Evening), where the two figures stand at a respectful distance, as if to affirm the emotional propriety of the beautiful encounter. Sibelius's *Romance* captures a moment of affection that remains in the realm of possibility, never overindulging in overt emotionality. There is an understated elegance to the piece, where emotions are subtly conveyed without overwhelming the listener. This restraint is not a lack of depth, but rather a remarkable ability to communicate profound feeling with simplicity. It represents a kind of everyday romance—quiet, intimate, and proper—offering a moment of purity that invites reflection amid the broader spectrum of human emotion.

The following ***Religioso*** op. 78, no. 3, is a beautiful and solemn piece, dedicated to Sibelius's brother Christian. What makes it particularly striking is how its sense of religiosity feels deeply personal rather than communal. Many sacred works, especially choral hymns, evoke a kind of reverence that seems to transcend individual experience,

as if the music stands above human concerns. In contrast, *Religioso* directs the attention inward. The atmosphere is almost confessional, as if it is a personal meditation rather than an open declaration of faith. Sibelius considered titles such as *Mélodie sérieuse* and *Preghiera*—the latter meaning 'prayer'—which suggests a private act of devotion rather than a grand, collective ritual. Sibelius was raised in a Lutheran household, and while religion was strongly present during his upbringing, his mature spirituality seems to have been more personal, shaped by pantheism and intertwined with his deep reverence for nature. *Religioso* can be heard as a reflection of this deeply personal connection to the divine.

After the previous more introspective pieces, ***Rigaudon*** op. 78, no. 4, bursts forth with light-hearted, folk-like energy. Even though the name comes from a Baroque dance, Sibelius treats it with a freedom that feels more spontaneous than courtly. It is a reminder that, beyond his reputation for grandeur, severity, and granite-like sternness, his music could also be witty and full of character. This lighter side of his character was well known to his friends—including the Danish composer Fini Henriques, whose openly entertaining music also features in this concert. *Rigaudon* adds a lively contrast to the program's journey with its playful *pizzicati*, *ricochets*, and humorous grace notes, which give the piece a youthful sense of joy.

As the day gradually progresses towards evening, the works increasingly begin to deal with aspects of memory. Halvorsen's ***Air norvégien*** is a clear nod to Bull's *Et Sæterbesøg,* which we heard in the first half of the concert. Halvorsen performed Bull's work regularly, and gradually became interested in creating a similar work of his own. As such, Halvorsen's *Air norvégien* can be viewed as a reimagined version of Bull's work (or a misreading, if we prefer to use the language associated with Kevin Korsyn's theories on musical influence). Interestingly, while Bull uses melodies associated with peasant life, Halvorsen looks back even further, starting with St. Thomas-klukkelåten (The Ringing of the St Thomas Bells) but following it up with music referring to Nordic mysticism. These include the witches-song *Huldrelokk*, the troll-song *Asmund Fregdegjævar,* and finishing with *Underjordisk Musik*—music from the underworld.

Stenhammar's ***Sentimental Romance, no. 2*** also has a backwards-looking character. The exact reason for why Stenhammar called the work *Sentimental Romance* rather than just *Romance* is unclear, but the Swedish musicologist Bo Wallner offers four different

potential explanations. He argues that one way of understanding the work is as a series of nostalgic images, or a form of "sentimental journey". Another explanation could be that the word *sentimental* in this context should be understood as meaning *con sentimento,* simply meaning with feeling. A third explanation is that Stenhammar indeed felt that the romances were sentimental, and was under no allusions otherwise. And, Wallner's fourth explanation is that Stenhammar himself was not quite sure what his imagination had given rise to, and that the tonal language was leaning on a type of Romanticism that his compositional style was trying to grow away from. No matter which interpretation we choose to prioritize, the work gives the impression of looking back to a form of nineteenth-century Romanticism that at the time was becoming obsolete.

The title of Sibelius's ***Souvenir,*** op. 79, no. 1, again suggests a look backwards in time. The British Sibelius-scholar Andrew Barnett has noted that the theme of the souvenir can be found in a collection of sketches for piano pieces for children from 1899. Thus, the piece quite literally looks backwards in time. The piece gives the impression that it serves as a reminder of a time or a place that is now long gone. The piece beautifully captures the feeling of simultaneous happiness and sadness, as if you know that you can never relive the treasured memories of the past.

Evening

Sibelius's ***Serenade***, op. 79, no. 4, gradually leads towards the onset of evening. A serenade is an evening song, usually performed outdoors in honour of someone or something. This can be contrasted with an *Aubade*, which is a morning song. Sibelius's *Serenade* is light-hearted, spirited, and playful, and differs significantly from his two earlier *Serenades* op. 69. Perhaps one can imagine it as the burst of energy often associated with twilight—the vibrancy of the day transitioning towards evening.

Sibelius's ***Berceuse***, op. 79, no. 6, is one of his most peaceful miniatures, with the violin floating above the piano's calm, repeating harmonies. A few noteworthy compositional details contribute to the piece's unique atmosphere. In the whole piece, there is only a single instance where the violin plays a note on the first beat of a bar. This contributes to a distinctive sense of hesitancy, as if the violin is always reacting, never leading the music. Another interesting detail is that while the piece is arguably in C-sharp minor, there is not a single instance in the whole piece where this chord appears in root position. These elements contribute to the piece's ethereal and almost otherworldly beauty.

Sibelius's *Berceuse* is followed by another lullaby, this one composed by his good friend, the Danish composer Fini Henriques. In contrast to Sibelius's introspective *Berceuse*, Henriques's ***Wiegenlied*** offers a more intimate and openly Romantic interpretation of a lullaby. Henriques's *Wiegenlied* was originally composed for piano, but was later arranged for violin and piano by the composer. Notably, Henriques's *Wiegenlied* and *Mosquito Dance* are the only two pieces in the program recorded by the composer himself, serving as historical snapshots of early 20th-century performance practice. These recordings serve as a reminder of just how much the expressive ideals (e.g., the use of *rubato*, *portamenti*, and the style of phrasing) have changed during the past century.

It is interesting to compare these two lullabies. The intimacy, warmth, and friendly character of Henriques *Wiegenlied* makes it easy to imagine singing this melody for a child who is falling asleep. Sibelius's *Berceuse* in turn captures the mood and atmosphere of a lullaby, but the music feels distant, as if it conveys the memory of a lullaby sung long ago. This is a characteristic that I have noticed in many of Sibelius's miniatures. Whereas many character pieces evoke immediate emotions, Sibelius often creates the illusion of a distance between the things his music communicates and the listener. If we apply this thinking to the two lullabies, Henriques's *Wiegenlied* feels like an actual lullaby, whereas Sibelius's *Berceuse*, by contrast, conveys not the lullaby itself, but its echo—a memory of a distant, perhaps even idealized, experience of a lullaby.

As the day is moving towards its end, it feels suitable to explore the very last opus Sibelius published during his lifetime, ***Three Pieces for Violin and Piano*****,** op. 116**.** These peculiar short works highlight how Sibelius's style kept evolving throughout his active career. These three pieces do not deal with the evening as such, but knowing that they were Sibelius's last opus, it is easy to interpret them with a sense of finality. The two first pieces, ***Scène de danse***, op. 116, no. 1, and ***Danse caractéristique***, op. 116, no. 2, are by no means typical dances, even though the titles suggest such a connection. *Scène de danse* feels less like a dance than an unsettling image that contains some elements of a dance. The relentless and menacing chords in the piano suggest an element of inevitability, while the violin's initially Phrygian melody gives the piece a raw and mysterious character. The elements that can be associated with dancing are brief and transitory, more like a fragment of a past dance than anything that could actually be danced to.

Danse caractéristique continues in a similar unresolved atmosphere, but the character is initially almost dreamlike. The opening suggests a faltering waltz that never manages to get going. The drama gradually increases until the piece leads into a strongly contrasting *Agitato* that is highly dissonant.

If the first two pieces are strange and almost disturbed, the third one, ***Rondeau romantique***, op. 116, no. 3, presents a wholly different perspective. The tone is suddenly warm and positive, looking back to the Romanticism of the previous century. After the introduction, the piano introduces a beautiful and carefree melody, which contrasts strongly with the earlier pieces. The melody shifts between D major and D Lydian (with a raised fourth), which gives it a bright and ethereal quality. It is almost like a spring stream that breaks forth from the darkness of winter. The piece conveys a sense of optimism, as if suggesting the possibility of a new creative spring.

Sadly, the *Rondeau romantique* is the last work of the last opus that Sibelius composed. He still wrote a suite for violin and strings (JS 185), which remained unpublished until relatively recently, some arrangements or revisions of earlier works, a minor piano piece for his wife Aino (JS 161), a piece for organ (op. 111b) for the funeral of Akseli Gallen-Kallela, and a short choral work called "Karjalan osa" (JS 108), but the *Three Pieces*, op. 116, nonetheless feel more like an end than a new beginning. What followed was dominated by the almost 30 years of what is commonly referred to as the silence of Ainola. The world waited for a creative spring, and for the 8th Symphony which sadly never arrived.

The last work on tonight's program, Sinding's *Abendstimmung*, op. 120, also feels like a long farewell. It was Sinding's last published work for violin and piano. While Sinding kept composing for many more years, there is a strong sense of longing and nostalgia in this work. The piece's many modulations evoke associations with Wagner and Strauss, but there is in my opinion something Nordic in the general expression. This serves as a reminder that Nordic music should not be seen as an island, independent from the cultural currents elsewhere, but as a part of a larger musical landscape that interacted with and built upon other traditions.

Sinding's work conveys the feeling of the beauty and calmness that can be experienced during evenings in the north. While the work is about the final moments of a day, it can also be interpreted as dealing with the evening of Nordic Romanticism. The golden age

of Nordic Romantic music, which had begun a century earlier with composers such as Niels Gade, Johann Ernst Hartmann, Ole Bull, and Franz Berwald, and included figures such as Edvard Grieg, Johan Svendsen, Carl Nielsen, and Jean Sibelius, was clearly coming to its close. Sinding, Nielsen, and Sibelius were at the time still active, but their musical idioms were no longer openly Romantic.

Afterthoughts

As the last notes of the concert fade into silence, it marks an end to our imaginary journey through a day, and also to a chapter of my own artistic and academic journey. This concert traces a passage of time—one that moves from morning to evening, but even as the brightness of day turns into night, the darkness and silence are not an ending. The memories and the music live on, even as the golden age of Nordic Romanticism unquestionably has faded into history. In the same way, the works performed tonight do not simply belong to the past, nor are they fixed within a single frame of meaning. They exist between perspectives, between landscapes and atmospheres, between Nordic identity and something beyond it.

Sibelius, in particular, stands at this crossroads. His music undeniably carries traits long associated with Nordic music—some of which can be traced deep into Nordic folklore, while others are strongly associated with aspects of national Romanticism. The presence of nature, a certain austerity, and a sense of vastness are all features that align with how Nordic music has often been described. Yet, Sibelius does not, in my opinion, sound like any other composer from the region. His music is unmistakably his own. To call it purely Finnish, purely Nordic, or purely universal would be to impose a single perspective on something that is far more complex and interesting. Instead, each of these viewpoints offers a different way of listening, a different way of understanding.

Perhaps, then, the question is not whether Sibelius belongs to the Nordic tradition, but what we gain by viewing him through that lens. The concept of landscape in music can serve as a way of listening, just as the idea of atmosphere may open another sense of understanding. Neither is absolute, neither tells the whole story, but together they offer an invitation to listen to the music with fresh ears.

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What becomes visible when we approach Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) and his music from a Nordic perspective? Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics, this thesis explores how awareness of the cultural contexts surrounding Sibelius, particularly his connections with Nordic culture, can enrich our understanding of his works for violin and piano. It also investigates musical characteristics associated with Nordic traditions and examines how, and to what extent, they manifest in his music.

Such contextual awareness does not merely provide a backdrop to the music but opens up interpretive possibilities. Within this landscape, numerous well-reasoned, sometimes mutually exclusive interpretations may coexist. Exploring a wider range of approaches can deepen our understanding of the music and inform the performer's decisions. This approach invites us to discover the richness of Sibelius's musical world and appreciate how different interpretations may illuminate different aspects of his music.



EST 99
ISBN 978-952-329-440-0
ISSN 1237-4229

UNIARTS HELSINKI

SIBELIUS ACADEMY