

## **Finnish Folk Traditions and Jean Sibelius's Music**

### Jean Sibelius

- a Finnish composer (1865 - 1957)
- known for his seven symphonies, violin concerto, and tone poems such as Finlandia and Valse Triste

### Sibelius's Piano Music

- wrote over 150 solo works for piano
- Not performed often
- Follow the tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism (ie. Chopin, Liszt and Brahms)
- influence of the Finnish folk music

### Finland's Political Climate in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

- the increasing censorship from the Russian Empire (the Russification of Finland)
- Finlandia = a second Finnish National Anthem
- rise of the Finnish Nationalistic Movement

### Karelia

- an Eastern Region of Finland
- a region with a strong Finnish Folk tradition

### Three significant Finnish folk influences

1. Kalevala—a collection of folklore from Karelian region
2. Runic singing style—a traditional singing style, Kalevala was recited
3. Kantele—a Karelian plucking instrument similar to a dulcimer or zither, used as a solo instrument or to accompany runic singers

### Style of Finnish folk music

- cyclic and repetitive
- often in minor keys
- a dark and melancholic mood
- Sibelius: "I certainly do believe in Finnish music. That sonorous, remarkably melancholy monotony in all Finnish melodies, although it is a defect, properly speaking, is nevertheless characteristic."

Example Piece: *Romance in Db, Op.24* (1899)

## The Compositional Styles of Jean Sibelius's Piano Music

### Sibelius's Compositional Styles

- NOT just a late-Romantic composer
- influence of various contemporary compositional styles (ie. neoclassicism, impressionism, and expressionism)

### Sibelius's Three Compositional Periods

1. "National Romantic" period (1890-1905)—Finnish folk idioms with the rich romantic style
2. "Neoclassical period" (1906-1919)—simplified the romantic style and included some classical and baroque idioms
3. "Synthesis Style" (1919-1929)—thicker and richer compared to the middle period and included the influence of impressionism and expressionism

### Sibelius's Middle "Neoclassical" Period

- a leaner and less obvious use of Kalevalic style or Finnish folk style
- his goal = 'to write without artificial excess'
- more concentrated and compact (condensed writing)
- removed some of his Romantic writing, and included classical and pre-classical compositional idioms,

### *Three Sonatinas, Op.67*

- some of the most fascinating compositions
- Eric Blom, an author of *the Music of Sibelius*: "the sonatinas are undoubtedly the peak of Sibelius's achievement as a pianoforte composer."

### Glenn Gould

- promoted Sibelius's works
- Gould: "In Sibelius's piano music, everything works, everything sounds—but on its own terms, not in lieu of other, presumably more sumptuous, musical experiences."

### Example Piece: *Sonatina in Bb No.3, Op. 67* (1912)

### Sibelius and Finnish Nature

- Frederick Smith, the author of *Nordic Art Music*: "Geographically, the Nordic lands had long presented an other worldly character. The vast tracts of thick forests, dark waters, narrow fjords, and jagged mountains.... were unlike anything found on the Continent."
- Smith: "his sound is often cool and brooding, not to the point of austerity, but reflective of the Nordic environment in which he lived and worked (61)."