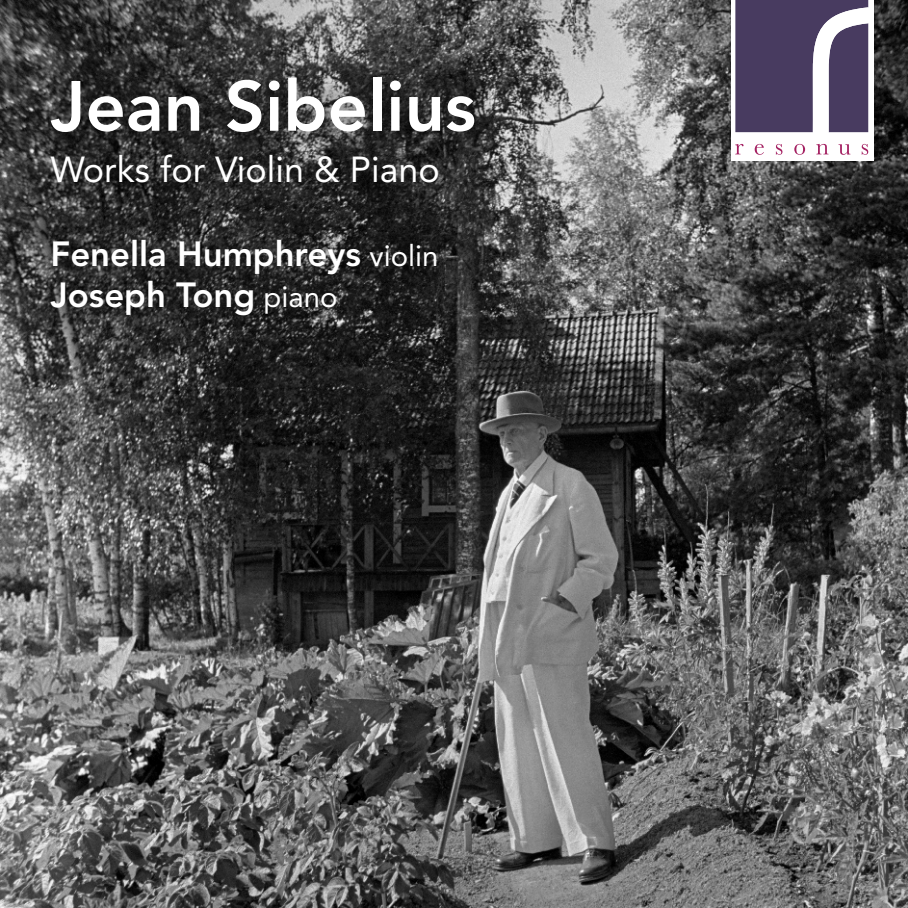


Jean Sibelius

Works for Violin & Piano

Fenella Humphreys violin

Joseph Tong piano



Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Works for Violin & Piano

Fenella Humphreys *violin*
Joseph Tong *piano*

About Fenella Humphreys & Joseph Tong:

'Fenella Humphreys's playing is a genuine revelation in the way it brings out the music's dark and introspective qualities'
BBC Music Magazine

'Tong's readings intelligently balance impulse and discipline, offering wide tonal variety, but never at the expense of textural clarity'
The Sunday Times

Four Pieces, Op. 78

- | | |
|--------------|--------|
| 1. Impromptu | [1:57] |
| 2. Romance | [2:55] |
| 3. Religioso | [5:30] |
| 4. Riguadon | [2:00] |

**5. Andante cantabile
in G major, JS 33**

[2:41]

Five Pieces, Op. 81

- | | |
|--------------|--------|
| 6. Mazurka | [2:27] |
| 7. Rondino | [1:53] |
| 8. Valse | [3:25] |
| 9. Aubade | [2:54] |
| 10. Menuetto | [4:33] |

Danses champêtres, Op. 106

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------|
| 11. Largamente assai | [4:46] |
| 12. Alla polacca | [2:23] |
| 13. Tempo moderato | [4:33] |
| 14. Tempo di Menuetto | [3:32] |
| 15. Poco moderato | [3:25] |

Four Pieces, Op. 115

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| 16. Auf der Heide / On the Heath | [2:20] |
| 17. Ballade | [3:52] |
| 18. Humoreske | [2:32] |
| 19. Die Glocken / The Bells | [1:21] |

Three Pieces, Op. 116

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| 20. Scène de danse | [2:23] |
| 21. Danse caractéristique | [2:46] |
| 22. Rondeau romantique | [3:14] |

Total playing time [67:32]

Recording supported by Sibelius One,
in memory of George Steven.

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Jean Sibelius: Works for Violin & Piano

Such is the dominance of Jean Sibelius in the history of Finnish music that it is easy to forget that his works were not composed in a vacuum. The quantity of Finnish violin music before Sibelius was not vast, but there were various chamber works and at least three concertos (Erik Tulindberg, Fredrik Pacius and Ernst Fabritius). Admittedly Sibelius is unlikely to have been familiar with much – if any – of this repertoire. His own violin music was rooted instead in the repertoire that he played during his formative years – for instance Haydn, Beethoven, Vieuxtemps and Bériot. He didn't use Finnish folk music as a source, though his works sometimes contain echos – by and large unconscious ones – of its moods, rhythms and melodic shapes. Occasionally, too, we catch a glimpse of Sibelius in his distinctive and characteristic role as a nature poet.

When Sibelius was a teenager he took his first official violin lessons – early enough to develop a lifelong passion for the instrument, but too late to hone the skills that would allow him to pursue his dream career as a virtuoso. Nonetheless, violin playing was an important part of his life for some years and he was keen to

participate in string quartets and other chamber ensembles, not least the family piano trio alongside his sister Linda and brother Christian. Hand-in-hand with playing the violin, he also wrote music for it: from his youth and student years there are ambitious sonatas and suites as well as miniatures, often composed as gifts for family and friends. One such piece is the *Andante cantabile* in G major, JS 33, dedicated to a sixteen-year-old family friend, Ruth Ringbom, with whom Jean, Linda and Christian played music every day during their summer holiday in Korpo in 1887. Its warmth and affable character are wholly typical of Sibelius at this period.

Sibelius's own violin had an unusual history. It was bought by his uncle, the sea captain Johan Sibelius, from an itinerant trader at a market in St Petersburg; neither buyer nor seller had any inkling of its value. Johan gave it to his violin-playing brother Pehr, who immediately recognized its quality when he saw the label inside, with the words: 'Jakobus Stainer in Absam 167...' Stainer was one of the most highly regarded violin makers of the seventeenth century. In 1886 Pehr passed the instrument on to Jean, who used it for the rest of his performing career.

By the time he wrote the four pieces in **Op. 78**

and five pieces in **Op. 81**, Sibelius's life had changed beyond recognition. He had rapidly become Finland's foremost composer, with worldwide fame and the status of a national hero. He had married and was by then the father of five daughters. He had survived a health scare and numerous operations for suspected throat cancer. From his villa in Järvenpää he travelled widely within Europe and as far afield as the USA. Since making his breakthrough in 1892, however, he had actually composed hardly any violin music – with the exception of his magnificent Violin Concerto, from the early years of the twentieth century.

The outbreak of the First World War, however, put things in a different perspective. Travel, especially abroad, became too risky. Much-needed income from his German publishers – though it had never been enough to make ends meet – now nosedived. Work on orchestral scores slowed down markedly and he struggled for years to revise his Fifth Symphony. At least the local market for miniatures remained strong and, to provide for his wife and children, Sibelius composed an abundance of such pieces for piano solo, or violin and piano. The Op. 78 and Op. 81 pieces were written separately between 1915 and 1918 and

allocated opus numbers when they were published.

Sibelius's diary from these years reflects his changing moods: 'The days are major and minor, my thoughts major and minor, my work major and minor' (17 July 1915). Nostalgia for times past ('Dreamed that I was twelve years old and a virtuoso' 14 February 1915) vied with self-doubt, hypochondria and anxiety about his reputation – encapsulated by a quote from his favourite poet, J.L. Runeberg: '[I] only felt, deep in my heart, that the beautiful is transient, the delightful does not last' (15 February 1917).

The skilfully crafted pieces in Op. 78 and Op. 81 do not betray the challenging times in which they were written. The melodies and harmonies are totally Sibelian even if they rarely challenge the essentially conservative tastes of their intended clientele. The partiality for dance forms that Sibelius had retained since his earliest years is evident; among these pieces we find a rigaudon, a mazurka, a waltz and a minuet. The most popular of them are also the most traditional: the elegant F major 'Romance' from Op. 78, and the graceful, classical 'Rondino' from Op. 81. The equally elegant 'Aubade' from Op. 81 is the only piece in these two opus groups with a title



that hints at the world of nature. Special mention should be made of 'Religioso', from Op. 78: a musical prayer dedicated to his cello-playing brother Christian. All the Op. 78 pieces exist in versions for cello and piano, Religioso being especially well-suited to that instrument.

Six years and three symphonies after the last of the Op. 81 pieces, Sibelius made a start on his **Danses champêtres, Op. 106**, completing the first two in July 1924 and the last three the following January. They mark the beginning of his last stylistic period as a composer of violin music: the writing is bolder and the emotional range wider. Despite their title ('country dances'), there is no hint of folk music here. Instead, they have the character of virtuoso studies that from time to time pay lip service to conventional dance genres. Such is the intensity that Sibelius draws from the violin and piano that the moments of relaxation or wit are cast into greater relief – above all at the end of the second dance, a sparkling 'Alla polacca', where Sibelius cheekily parodies the slow movement of his own Fifth Symphony.

Although the *Danses champêtres* were written in the immediate aftermath of the Seventh Symphony, they do not share its

serenity and Olympian majesty. In their ability to conjure up a wide variety of moods and characters, to paint vivid portraits in just a few bars, they are stylistically much closer to the incidental music that Sibelius was writing for Shakespeare's *Tempest* at the same time.

Op. 115 and **Op. 116** date from the very last phase of Sibelius's productive career. His last works for violin and piano, they were written in 1929, some two years after he had paid off the last of the debts that had crippled him throughout his professional life. He wrote to his sister Linda: 'Now things are fine from a financial point of view, and I can concentrate on whatever I like. Isn't it wonderful?' But this apparent new opportunity for creative freedom was an illusion. He was increasingly troubled by a shaking hand that made it physically uncomfortable to write his music down. He had also given up conducting, and was attending fewer concerts (he missed the Finnish premieres of his own Seventh Symphony and Tapiola). Without the stimulus of live music, his own muse faltered – hence, ultimately, the non-appearance of the eagerly awaited Eighth Symphony.

The Op. 115 and Op. 116 violin pieces probably give as good a clue as any what



the symphony might have sounded like. Unlike the wartime compositions, six of these seven works are among Sibelius's most experimental, making few concessions to popular taste. If some of the earlier pieces inhabit Tchaikovsky's world, these late examples rub shoulders with Bartók and even Stravinsky. Sibelius constantly explores new textures: the pared-down nature image in 'On the Heath', the spiky dance-like numbers and the enigmatic *con sordino* study 'The Bells'. The odd one out is the very last piece, 'Rondeau romantique', in which the sometimes belligerent austerity of the earlier pieces is cast aside in favour of playfulness and reassurance.

In his old age Sibelius was no longer physically able to play the violin; he passed his beloved Stainer on to his granddaughter Satu Jalas. But his feeling for the instrument never left him. 'When he was sitting silently in his green chair in the library,' Jalas recalls, 'his left hand fingers often moved on his right arm as if it were the fingerboard of a violin.'

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Photography: Gareth Barton

Fenella Humphreys (violin)

Winner of the 2018 *BBC Music Magazine* Instrumental Award, violinist Fenella Humphreys enjoys a busy career combining chamber music and solo work. She has broadcast for the BBC, Classic FM, and German, Canadian, Australian and Korean radio and TV.

A champion of new and unknown music, a number of eminent British composers have written works for Fenella. During 2014/15 she premiered a set of six new solo violin works by leading British composers including Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Sally Beamish and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, with performances at Aldeburgh, and the St Magnus and Presteigne festivals. She has been fortunate to record these works on two critically acclaimed discs for Champs Hill Records, both discs chosen by *BBC Music Magazine* as Instrumental disc of the month (October 2015 and January 2017) with five-star reviews, and the second also picked as Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* magazine.

Concertmaster of the Deutsche Kammerakademie, Fenella also enjoys guest leading and directing. As a chamber musician, she has collaborated with artists including Alexander Baillie, Adrian Brendel, Pekka Kuusisto, Nicholas Daniel, Sir John Tomlinson

and Martin Lovett, and is regularly invited by Steven Isserlis to take part in Open Chamber Music at the International Musicians' Seminar, Prussia Cove. Fenella can also be found playing Tango with the great Uruguayan bandoneonist, Héctor Ulises Passarella.

Her teachers have included Sidney Griller CBE, Itzhak Rashkovsky, Ida Bieler and David Takeno, studying at the Purcell School, Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Robert-Schumann-Hochschule in Düsseldorf graduating with the highest attainable marks.

Fenella is grateful to W.E. Hill & Sons for the loan of one of their beautiful instruments for this recording; a 2018 copy of a fine violin by Nicolo Bergonzi.

www.fenellahumphreys.com

Joseph Tong (piano)

Joseph Tong has established a reputation as one of the most versatile and imaginative pianists of his generation. Much in demand as a soloist, duo pianist and chamber musician, Joseph made his London Wigmore Hall debut in 1997 as winner of the Maisie Lewis Young Artists Award and now gives regular recitals throughout the UK and abroad.

His recent Sibelius recording project has seen two albums released on the Quartz label to widespread critical acclaim. Joseph Tong has already made several concert tours to Finland, including recitals at Ainola on the composer's original Steinway grand piano, the Sibelius Museum in Turku, the Korpo Sibelius Festival, Camerata Hall in Helsinki and Hämeenlinna City Hall.

He has broadcast for BBC Radio 3, appearing on *In Tune* ahead of his St John's, Smith Square recital at which he performed an all-Sibelius programme to mark the composer's 150th anniversary.

Other recent highlights have included recitals in Germany and Spain, at the Presteigne Festival, St David's Hall Cardiff, St George's Bristol, Fairfield Halls Croydon and Hatchlands in Surrey.

His recent disc of Schumann on the Quartz label, recorded at the Sendesaal in Bremen, was Instrumental Choice in *BBC Music Magazine* (November 2019).

Joseph has a keen interest in contemporary music and has given premieres of new works in his piano duo with Waka Hasegawa, Piano 4 Hands, by composers including Dai Fujikura, Nicola LeFanu, Daniel Kidane, David Matthews, Edwin Roxburgh and the late John McCabe. Piano 4 Hands has given recitals at Wigmore Hall, the Purcell Room, St John's Smith Square, the Cheltenham Music Festival and in USA, Germany and Japan. They gave the world première of Edwin Roxburgh's 'Dialogue and Toccata' at St James's Church Piccadilly in October 2021.

Joseph was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2008. Future projects include the commission of a set of solo pieces from David Matthews as a companion to Sibelius's 'The Trees', recitals in Germany and Finland and at UK Festivals including Three Choirs and Presteigne.

Joseph Tong is a visiting piano teacher at Wells Cathedral School and an adjudicator for the British and International Federation of Festivals.

www.josephdong.co.uk



Photography: Patrick Allen

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Executive Producer: Adam Binks
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(The Finnish Museum of Photography)

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