

and avoid long, purely orchestral passages. He certainly took his own advice, as the violinist takes up the expressive main theme of the first movement in the fourth bar, and rarely relinquishes center stage for the remainder of the concerto's half-hour duration.

The opening movement, cast in first-movement sonata form, contrasts passages of restraint and melancholy with passages of great force and intensity. One unusual feature is the mid-movement cadenza for the soloist, which shares some qualities with like passages in the great virtuoso concertos of the nineteenth century, but is more substantial and more fully integrated into the overall form of the piece. Wind duets start the slow second movement, after which the soloist takes up the lush, almost Tchaikovskian main melody. Later in the movement the violinist is called on to play a fiendish two-part counterpoint. This is but one of the numerous technical hurdles the soloist must conquer in this work; many more arise in the brilliant, dance-like third movement, with its insistent rhythm and the folk-like cast of its melodies. The excitement and momentum carry through to the very end of the work.



HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS

HEIFETZ

SIBELIUS VIOLIN CONCERTO / CHICAGO SYMPHONY

Walter Hendl, Conductor



The Violin Concerto is not the only work Finland's Sibelius wrote for solo violin with orchestra; he wrote a variety of excellent, shorter works including Two Serenades (1913) and Six Humoresques (1917). But the concerto is certainly the most ambitious of all these works. Despite the early enthusiasm of a few violinists -- notably Maud Powell, who was the soloist in the American premiere with the New York Philharmonic in 1906 and repeated the work several times on a transcontinental tour -- the concerto was slow to catch on with audiences. Not until Jascha Heifetz took up the work and recorded it in the 1930s did the concerto become what it is today, one of the most popular of the national Romantic concerto repertory.

Sibelius was himself a fine violinist. He took up studying the instrument at 15 with his hometown's military bandmaster, and shortly thereafter was taking part in chamber music performances and playing in his school's orchestra. He felt he had taken up the violin too late in life to become a true virtuoso, but he brought his intimate knowledge of the

instrument to bear on this, his only concerto, which he completed in 1903. The soloist at the first performance was to be the composer's friend Willy Burmeister. But when scheduling difficulties intervened, Viktor Novacek was given the honor of premiering the work in Helsinki on February 8, 1904, with Sibelius himself conducting. After this indifferently received performance, Sibelius withdrew the work for revision. Ultimately, the work was shortened, including the excision of one solo cadenza, and featured a brighter orchestral sound. The first performance of the revised score took place on October 19, 1905 in Berlin, with Richard Strauss conducting and Karl Halir, a member of Joseph Joachim's quartet, as soloist.

Sibelius had a less than high regard for virtuoso violinists or for many of the works written for them. In his concerto, he manages to strike an ideal balance between instrumental brilliance and the more purely musical, structural, and emotional values. At one point he gave a pupil some advice about writing concertos, saying that one should be aware of the audience's patience (and the stupidity of many soloists!)

Sibelius Violin Concerto

violin, Jascha Heifetz

Walter Hendl / The Chicago Symphony Orchestra

1 Allegro Moderato 13:37

2 Adagio Di Molto 6:18

3 Allegro Ma Non Tanto 6:48

Recorded by RCA January 10 & 12, 1959, in Orchestra Hall, Chicago
Engineer – Lewis Layton Producer – John Pfeiffer



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