

Total performance time: approximately 125', including an interval of 20 minutes

London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Simon Rattle

[London Symphony Orchestra](#)
[Simon Rattle](#) conductor

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)
The Oceanides, Op.73 (1913–14) 10'

Tapiola, Op.112 (1926) 20'

INTERVAL

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)
Symphony No.7 in E minor (1881–3, rev. 1885) 60'
i. Allegro moderato
ii. Adagio: Sehr feierlich und sehr langsam
iii. Scherzo: Sehr schnell – Trio: Etwas langsamer
iv. Finale: Bewegt, doch nicht schnell

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Jean Sibelius and Anton Bruckner are both best known to concert-goers through their symphonies, and both composers made that form uniquely their own. Sibelius's tone-poems are (with the exception of *Finlandia*) much less frequently heard but they form just as important a strand of his output. Composers throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries used the tone poem to tell stories in music, some of them in immense detail – think, for example, of Paul Dukas and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Sibelius's attitude was rather different and he took myths and folk-legends as inspiration rather than something with which to construct blow-by-blow musical narratives. The two tone-poems that we hear this evening, *The Oceanides* and *Tapiola* both contain depictions of storms, the first at sea, the second in a huge dark forest. In *The Oceanides* the orchestration, with its rippling harps, might suggest the sea, and the sheer implacability of *Tapiola*, its complete lack of glamour, might suggest Finland's endless pine-forests. However, what makes both the masterpieces that they are is the way that Sibelius constructs his musical material.

The Oceanides was composed mostly in 1914 and was commissioned by two wealthy Americans, Carl Stoeckel and Ellen Battell-Stoeckel, for performance at the music festival in Norfolk, Connecticut, that year. Sibelius had sent a version off to the States in March but then began to rework it, finishing it only just in time for the premiere in June. He travelled to the USA to conduct it and it was an instant success. The musical material is built around two main ideas: the dancing flute duet that follows the hushed muted-string opening and a slower melody that begins (a minute or so later) on oboe, then clarinet. Sibelius alternates the two themes, the second reappearance of the slower one building to the huge 'storm at sea' climax. Watch the violins as their music takes them higher and higher up their fingerboards, almost to the very end!

Together with the 7th Symphony **Tapiola** was a kind of 'ultimate point' in Sibelius's music and in both cases it is hard to see where else his music could have gone. Although he lived for more than 30 years after writing *Tapiola* in 1926, Sibelius was to compose no more large-scale works – though we know that he tried. Nowadays we use 'minimalism' as a description of a style of music that began in the USA in the 1950s but Sibelius had, back in the 1920s, managed to construct the whole of *Tapiola* from the motif we hear right at the beginning – seven or eight seconds of music, a drum roll and a rising and falling phrase. Everything in the next 20 minutes or so derives in some way from it, including the mighty storm that grows out of virtual silence about three-quarters of the way through. Like *The Oceanides*, *Tapiola* was written for, and first performed in, the United States, by the New York Symphonic Society under Walter Damrosch. Unlike *The Oceanides* it was not an instant success and when it came to be published Sibelius was asked for some words of explanation. He came up with these:

Wide-spread they stand, the Northland's dusky forests,
Ancient, mysterious, brooding savage dreams,
Within them dwells the Forest's mighty God,
And wood-sprites in the gloom weave magic secrets.

'Tapiola' is the name of the 'mighty god' and in the Finnish language the suffix '-la' means 'home of ...' There are plenty of musical 'secrets' being woven in the tone-poem, ever more ingenious ways of reworking that short opening phrase – fast, slow, high, low, sometimes all at the same time. And, to end with, a major chord that manages to sound like no other. One early admirer wrote: 'Even if Sibelius had written nothing else, this one work would entitle him to a place among the greatest masters of all time'.

Like Sibelius – though in an utterly different way – Anton Bruckner was a master of controlling time. When he wrote his **7th Symphony** in the early 1880s, hour-long four-movement symphonies were still rare. The first one to gain a foothold in the repertoire was Beethoven's final symphony and it was a huge influence on Bruckner in several ways. One 'borrowing' is to begin with gentle *tremolo* strings, as Bruckner does several times in his symphonies. In the 7th what follows is the first of the opening movement's three main themes, with cellos and a solo horn soaring up an E major arpeggio before the cellos, joined by the violas, take us through several keys, major and minor, before handing the theme on to the violins and woodwind. The second theme begins in the minor on oboe and clarinet, over gently chugging brass. The third theme follows it, immediately after the first big build-up of sound and a sudden dramatic cut-off (a Bruckner fingerprint). The 20-minute movement proceeds on a Classical ground-plan, with a central section that develops and combines all three themes followed by a restatement of the same themes in their original order. At the very end of the movement we hear a contribution from the timpani for the very first time, when, like an organist drawing a 32' pedal-stop (Bruckner was a very fine organist), a drum roll underpins a section of the first theme.

Bruckner was a great disciple of Richard Wagner. He made a detailed study of Wagner's music, attended opera performances (although Wagner was rather horrified to discover that Bruckner had kept his eyes shut for much of the time!) and the two composers met once or twice. The second movement of Bruckner's 7th Symphony was written in the knowledge that Wagner was very ill. The movement begins with a quartet of 'Wagner tubas' (instruments developed for Wagner's music and played by members of the horn section) playing a solemn chorale before the strings play the first of the movement's two main themes. This, too, is chorale-like and is closely related to a theme in Bruckner's contemporaneous setting of the Te Deum, sung to the text's final words – 'O Lord, in thee have I trusted. Let me never be confounded'. (Bruckner was a devout and somewhat fanatical Roman Catholic.) The whole movement shows the influence of the slow movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony in its ground-plan: a main theme, a second that is gentler and

slightly faster, a repeat of each and then the first theme building to the movement's climax. The actual climactic moment (a modulation to a radiant C major) is often topped by a cymbal-crash and the gleam of a triangle. There is some doubt about Bruckner's final intentions regarding this, but no doubt at all about the glory of the effect. After the climax there is a passage for the Wagner tubas composed in the days immediately after Bruckner heard of Wagner's death – a very personal musical memorial.

Though the third movement scherzo is in a minor key the whole symphony's mood is beginning to lighten. The opening, repetitively bouncing, string rhythm has something of the rustic dance about it and Bruckner compared the leaping trumpet-tune to a cock-crow. There is a contrasting, relaxed trio section, marked 'gesangvoll' (song-filled), before a repeat of the opening section.

The final movement begins, like the first, with *tremolo* strings and an upward arpeggio-theme, but the mood is utterly different. Soaring becomes dancing and, later on, solemn chorales become gentle hymn-tunes. But, very much as fellow Austrian country-boy Josef Haydn used to do, Bruckner manages to make a perfect finale from his country-inspired ideas, and when the end is in sight and the music slows down the link between the openings of the finale and the first movement is clear for all to hear. And Bruckner, much of whose music had been treated so badly by audiences and critics, finally had a success on his hands. The first performance, in Leipzig's Gewandhaus under the baton of Arthur Nikisch, was a triumph and there were reports of a 15-minute standing ovation. The 60-year-old composer had never seen anything like it and it was never to happen again. In a comment that must have caused Bruckner a wry smile, one critic wrote of him 'How is it possible that he could remain so long unknown to us?'

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