

THE MUSIC OF FINLAND

Sibelius The National Hero

A FEW years ago all we knew of the music of Finland was "Valse Triste" and "Finlandia."

Ernest Newman tells a story about a rehearsal of the Fourth Symphony, when Sibelius himself conducted at the Birmingham Festival in 1912. Mr. Newman was following the playing from a score, over which an unknown neighbour peered with a mystified expression. When the rehearsal was over, he said to Mr. Newman: "Queer stuff, isn't it?" The critic pointed out that the music came

from a different national and cultural heredity from ours. "It comes from Finland," he explained. "Ah!" said the man, with an air of one on whom the light has dawned, "that's it, ah coom from Halifax myself."

The gulf separating Halifax from Helsinki has narrowed since 1912.

Seven Hundred Years of Bondage

A Finnish proverb says, "Sorrow is the source of singing." Since the thirteenth century, when Sweden over-ran the country, Finland has been the cockpit of Russian and Scandinavian struggles to dominate it. Sweden remained in control for six hundred years, and Russia for one hundred, so that there was a stretch of approximately seven hundred years during which the Finns sighed for freedom.

But in spite of all those years of bondage, Finland has become one of the most highly cultured nations in the world. In the 1830's the University of Helsinki decided to establish a music school and appointed a German, Friedrich Pacius, to organise and direct the proposed classes. Pacius, a violinist, was a pupil of an even more famous violinist, Ludvig Spohr, and when he went to Finland in 1834, he stayed there until he died in 1891. He composed in the German style of course, largely songs and choral pieces to the words of Finnish poets.

Nearly all the Finnish composers of the latter part of the last century were pupils of Martin Wegelius, who founded the Helsinki Conservatoire of Music in 1882. These included Sibelius, Melartin, Jarnefelt, and Kuula—but they all completed their studies abroad, mostly with the help of the State.

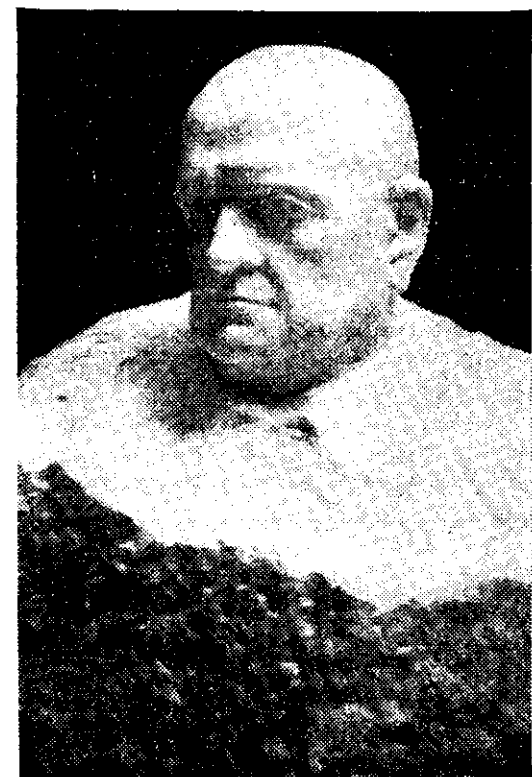
Foundations of National Music

Perhaps the first one to lay the foundation of a true Finnish music was Robert Kajanus, who directed the Finnish National Orchestra. Originally this was the Helsinki Symphony Orchestra, which Kajanus founded in 1882. One of its main objects had been to encourage the work of Finnish composers, and in 1900 Kajanus and Sibelius took the orchestra on a tour through Scandinavia, Germany, Holland, Belgium, and France. Subsequent tours included Russia and Great Britain.

The Place of Sibelius

If Finland had to choose one man, by the vote of the whole population, as the representative Finn of our time, his fellow countrymen would elect Sibelius without having to stop and think. He is not only the national laureate, but a national hero, in a way which it is difficult for us to realise. His music is racial as no other's has yet been; in it the land of a thousand lakes, with its vast forests and wide moors, its granite reefs and its long seashore, is expressed and lives for all time.

Born in 1865, he has written mostly symphonic



Bust of Sibelius, by Aaltonen

works and some songs, but for all his tuition in Berlin and Vienna, and his extensive travel, this reserved and profound thinker among musicians went to Finnish sources for his inspiration. In 1897 he had attracted sufficient attention for the Finnish Senate to vote him an annual pension for ten years, a sign of respect for culture not at all common among nations. That gesture enabled Sibelius to devote himself to composing. Details cannot be given in a short article, but his creative genius has placed the world for ever in his debt.

The Others

Armas Jarnefelt's name is often coupled with that of Sibelius — for one thing they are brothers-in-law; for another the critics say that where Sibelius expresses the lyrical and dramatic qualities of their native poetry, Jarnefelt expresses the epic qualities.

Oskar Merikanto is well known for his songs, and he has done much for the development of operatic art in Finland as conductor of Finnish opera.

Selim Palmgren, a brilliant pianist, also related to Sibelius and Jarnefelt by marriage, is best known for his pianoforte music, but he has also operas, choral works, and a number of songs to his credit. In 1934 he went to Rochester, U.S.A., as Professor of Composition in the Eastman School.

Tiovo Kuula was a superb contrapuntist, a powerful nationalist, and a master of both choral and instrumental composition. This undoubted genius was killed during the Finnish War of Independence (when Sibelius himself was in danger of his life, being forced to hide for days in a cellar).

Yrjö Kilpinen is something of a Hugo Wolf of Finland, since he writes little but songs, and often sets to music whole batches of poems from the same poet. He is a composer of Lieder of great beauty and originality.

There are at least a dozen other good Finnish composers, but their names signify little to us because their works are never heard. Nevertheless these musicians, who still live and continue to compose, have in their own fields helped in the output of a genuine national music.

FINLAND'S NATIONAL ANTHEM

"OUR COUNTRY" (Vart Land), was written by Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804-1877), Finland's greatest poet. Something of its beauty will be found in its closing four stanzas given here. The late Sir Edmund Gosse declared the poem to be "one of the noblest strains of patriotic verse ever indited; it lifts Runeberg at once to the level of Callinus or Campbell — to the first rank of poets in whom art and ardour, national sentiment and power of utterance, are equally blended." The poem became at once, and has ever since remained, the national song of both Finn and Swede, who are now bound together by the genius of the poet in a closer union than the old political tie. The music was composed by Friederich Pacius (1809-1891), who wrote songs and choral pieces to the words of native poets. He was responsible for another piece, especially beloved by children, which has become a second national song — "Soumen Laulu" (Finland's Song). Pacius, a German, was a pupil of Ludvig Spohr. He went to Finland in 1834 to organise and direct the music department of the Helsinki University, and remained there until his death in 1891.

"VART LAND" (OUR COUNTRY)

*Here all about us lies this land
Our eyes may see it here;
We have but to stretch forth our hand,
And blithely point to sea and strand,
And say, Behold this land so near,
Our tatherland so dear.*

*And were we called to dwell on high,
Of heaven's own blue made free,
To dance with stars that deck the sky,
Where falls no tear, and breathes no sigh—
We still should yearn, poor though it be,
This land of ours to see.*

*O land! thou thousand-laked land,
With song and virtue clad,
On life's wild sea our own safe strand,
Land of our past, our future's land,
If thou are poor, yet be not sad —
Be joyous, blithe, and glad.*

*Yet shall thy flower in beauty ope
Its petals without stain;
Our love shall with thy darkness cope,
And be thy light, thy joy, thy hope,
And this our patriotic strain
To nobler heights attain.*