

Preface

Jean Sibelius became acquainted with the piano already in his early childhood. At first, he began on his own to pick out melodies and harmonies from the instrument, and soon he received his first piano lessons from his aunt. More than anything, the future composer liked to improvise on the piano, an activity that he would continue throughout his life.

However, Sibelius's main instrument came to be the violin, and his relationship to the piano remained somewhat contradictory. He reportedly called the piano an unsatisfactory, ungrateful instrument and complained that the piano cannot sing. In his diary, he expressed frustration over the fact that piano pieces and other smaller tasks prevented him from concentrating on his larger works. Yet Sibelius composed for the instrument throughout his active career, conceiving more than one hundred fifty original compositions for solo piano.

As an orchestral composer, Sibelius favored symphonic proportions, but the majority of his piano compositions are miniatures. Economic reasons undoubtedly contributed to the issue. The composer, who needed to support his family, struggled often with financial difficulties, and a reasonable solution was to provide the publishers what they were willing to buy. Easy, romantic salon pieces for the piano were in demand, thanks to the still widespread practice of making music at home.

Sibelius's piano music is highly original. Intimate rather than virtuosic, the compositions feature a fresh approach to the instrument, one based on improvisatory techniques and timbre, and an ability to reinterpret traditional romantic genres in a personal manner.

The collection at hand includes a selection of eighteen compositions that stem from a time period between 1887 and 1920. Sixteen of the compositions bear an opus number; in addition, this collection includes two works without opus number, *Au crépuscule* and *Marche triste*.

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, Sibelius sold many piano pieces to domestic publishers for immediate publication. These included a set of six Impromptus, which Sibelius likely composed during the summer or fall of 1893, and ten piano pieces composed between 1893 and 1903. Later, Breitkopf & Härtel published the Impromptus as Op. 5 and assembled the ten pieces as Op. 24. Impromptus Nos. 3 and 6 appear in this collection; No. 6 shares material with the melodrama *Svartsjukans nätter* (JS 125) Sibelius had written earlier in 1893. *Valse* (Op. 24 No. 5) was probably composed in 1898, and *Romance* (Op. 24 No. 9), one of the most famous piano pieces by Sibelius, in December 1901.

Similarly to Op. 24, the ten *Bagatelles* Op. 34 and ten *Pensées lyriques* Op. 40 contain diverse piano compositions written at different times. Sibelius completed *Valse* (Op. 34 No. 1), *Air de danse* (Op. 34 No. 2), and *Mazurka* (Op. 34 No. 3) in the fall of 1914, whereas *Réverie* (Op. 34 No. 6) dates from 1913. *Pensée mélodique* (Op. 40 No. 6) and *Rondoletto* (Op. 40 No. 7) date from the year 1914. *Rondoletto* was originally intended for private use, as it was composed as a dance improvisation for the composer's daughters. Breitkopf published both opuses in 1915.

In 1909, Sibelius composed *Ten Pieces* Op. 58 for the Berlin publisher Robert Lienau, but because of a disagreement concerning the fee, the opus was published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1910. The four *Lyrische Stücke* Op. 74 were composed for Breitkopf in 1914 and published in the same year. The pieces in both opuses bear descriptive titles; *Der Hirt* (The shepherd, Op. 58 No. 4), *Des Abends* (In the evening, Op. 58 No. 5), and *Sanfter Westwind* (Soft west wind, Op. 74 No. 2) appear in this collection. *Lied* (Song, Op. 97 No. 2), *Humoristischer Marsch* (Humorous march, Op. 97 No. 4), and *Impromptu* (Op. 97 No. 5) belong to a set of six *Bagatelles*, which Sibelius sold to Breitkopf in 1920. The publication of Op. 97 served to consolidate the relations between Sibelius and Breitkopf since the difficult war years.

Sibelius composed *Au crépuscule* (JS 47) during the summer of 1887, when he was staying in Korpo in the southwest archipelago of Finland. The young music student used to compose in the beautiful summer nights, and during daytime, he played chamber music at a local mansion. The mistress of the house, Ina Wilenius, was a proficient pianist, and Sibelius dedicated *Au crépuscule* to her. – Sibelius completed *Marche triste* (JS 124) in 1899. Soon afterwards, however, he crossed out the *Poco sostenuto* section from the manuscript and used that material in *Andantino* (Op. 24 No. 7). Both *Au crépuscule* and *Marche triste* remained unpublished during Sibelius's lifetime, but are now available for the friends of his unique piano music.

The musical text of the present edition is based on the complete critical edition *Jean Sibelius Works* (JSW, Series V: Works for Piano). Sources and their evaluation are provided in the Critical Commentaries of the four volumes. Editorial additions and emendations are shown by square brackets and broken lines.

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