

## Finlandia – From National Tableau to Triumphal Anthem

**Timo Huusko**

PhD.Lic., Chief Curator, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

First published in **Hanna-Leena Paloposki (ed.), *Sibelius and the World of Art***. Ateneum Publications Vol. 70. Helsinki: Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum, 2014, 253–60.

Jean Sibelius's *Finlandia* was originally composed as the last part of a six-part series of historical tableaux presented in Helsinki in November 1899. It was commissioned for a celebration of the Finnish press held at the Swedish Theatre in Helsinki, which stood as an example of the counter-censorship struggles of the time. *Finlandia* was performed after a tableau depicting the Great Northern War.<sup>1</sup>

The link between the composition and the awakening of Finnish national self-awareness was clear from the start. In the programme, the text describing the sixth part read: 'The dark powers have not succeeded in carrying out their dire threat. Finland awakes. From among the spirits of the age that are writing the pages of history, one rises up to tell the story of Alexander II. Memories of this awakening are evoked. Runeberg bending his ear to his muse, Snellman declaiming words of awakening to students, Lönnrot writing down the poems of two singers, the four spokesmen of the first Diet, primary school, the first railway engine.' The tableau also included a poem by the Finnish poet Eino Leino: '*Kyntäkää, kylvää, toukojen, toivojen aika on tää. / Toivehet milloin toteutuu, / milloin halla ne syö. / Nyt on Suomen toukokuu, / nyt on kynnön ja kylvön työ, / leikkuu, korjuu – kaikki muu / jääköön Herran huomaan.*'<sup>2</sup>

According to Erik Tawaststjerna, the patriotic force of the composition became clear at the latest in December that year, 1899, when it was performed at a concert in Helsinki, conducted by Robert Kajanus, as part of a symphonic series compiled from five compositions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sirén 2012, 200.

<sup>2</sup> Tawaststjerna 1997, 139. '*Now to ploughing! Now to seeding! / The time for planting and hopes is nigh. / Sometimes hopes are fulfilled, / Sometimes nipped by the frost. / Now is spring in Finland, / Now for the work of ploughing and sowing, / Cutting and tying – May everything else / Be with God.*' Translation from Goss, Glenda Dawn, 2009. *Sibelius. A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>3</sup> Tawaststjerna 1997, 139.



---

**Magnus Enckell, *Concert*, 1898, oil on canvas, 90 x 76cm**  
Hoving Collection, Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum  
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Jukka Romu

The piece was named *Finlandia* in March 1900. The idea for the title came from Axel Carpelan, an eccentric baron, music-lover and Sibelius's future patron, who suggested it to Sibelius in his first letter to the composer.<sup>4</sup> At the 1900 Paris World Fair, it was performed at the Trocadéro under the title *La Patrie*.<sup>5</sup>

## A Patriotic Tune

*Finlandia* is undoubtedly Sibelius's most famous composition in Finland. My aim in this text is to explore how *Finlandia* has retained its vitality. In a vote organised by the Finnish Broadcasting Company in 2013, the slow movement of the piece, the so-called *Finlandia Hymn* which lasts a couple of minutes, emerged as the most popular composition for a male-voice choir. Rather than the musical aspects of the work, however, I will examine the cultural and historical events and phenomena to which the composition has been an adjunct. I will also discuss the contexts in which the use of *Finlandia* has brought added value to the composition itself, while also adding to the (national) significance of the events. It is of course plausible that, with its allusion to the name of the country, the title 'Finlandia' in itself has compounded the affective meaning of the composition – just as it has enhanced the importance of Sibelius as the national composer *par excellence* – but it is impossible to say here to what extent the name has had an impact. We may note, however, that the broad range of products named 'Finlandia' that exists attests to the influence of the composition and its title.<sup>6</sup>

The 1900 Paris World Fair – and the related reports about it back in Finland – was undoubtedly one of the important events that bolstered Finnish national self-esteem.<sup>7</sup> At the Fair, Sibelius's *Finlandia* was performed by the Helsinki Philharmonic Society, which was on a tour that had begun in Stockholm and had also stopped in Berlin.<sup>8</sup> At concerts in Sweden and Norway the composition was presented as *Finlandia*, but elsewhere the name was not used for fear of a Russian backlash.<sup>9</sup> Carpelan's inspiration for the name derived from a fantasy written by Anton Rubinstein for the 1889 Paris World Fair that had consisted of Russian motifs and was entitled *Rossiya*; *Finlandia* would have been a kind of patriotic Finnish counter-proposal.<sup>10</sup>

After the World Fair, *Finlandia* was performed widely at concerts of Sibelius's music both in Finland and abroad, during the first two decades of the new century.<sup>11</sup> Independence and the post-Civil-War need to strengthen – or rather redefine – the country's national identity seem to have clearly increased the frequency with which *Finlandia* was performed. In 1918 and during the period of pro-German enthusiasm, the most frequently played piece was of course Sibelius's *Jäger March*, which the composer's German publishers Breitkopf & Härtel seem to have anticipated would become the future Finnish king's parade march.<sup>12</sup> However, the situation in Finland was not settled until Germany lost the war and the Republicans won the parliamentary elections in spring 1919. The independence of Finland was recognised by Great Britain and the United States soon after, on 3 May 1919.

4 Dahlström 2010, 59. Carpelan himself was not particularly wealthy, but he procured patrons for Sibelius.

5 Dahlström 2010, 35.

6 In the context of naming the composition, *Finlandia* was a reference to the Latin name of the country. 'Products' with Finlandia in their name include the Finlandia Hall, Finlandia vodka, Finlandia marmalade jellies, the Finlandia Prize and the *Finlandia* cruise liner.

7 See Smeds 1996, particularly 284–325. On the deliberate construction of the image of Finland, see e.g. Paloposki 2014, 211–29.

8 On the concert in Paris, see Smeds 1996, 324–25.

9 Tawaststjerna 1997, 142.

10 Tawaststjerna 1997, 140.

11 E.g. Levas 1986, 176–78.

12 Tawaststjerna 1997, 302, 306.



**Magnus Enckell, Music, 1906, soft-ground etching, 33 x 42,5cm**  
 Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum  
 Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Yehia Eweis

The perception of *Finlandia* that prevailed at the time is revealed by a question that a journalist from the Danish paper *Berlingske Tidende* posed to Sibelius at the Copenhagen music festival at Whitsun in 1920. He asked: 'Is not your composition *Finlandia* an expression of the sorrow and longing of Finland?' Although Sibelius did not wish to emphasise any paramusical meanings, he did remark that the work had 'certain patriotic content'.<sup>13</sup> Thus the composition was clearly perceived as patriotic, although it was still at this stage rather exclusively the property of the cultured intelligentsia – that is, those who attended concerts or bought sheet music to play at home. However, even before

<sup>13</sup> Tawaststjerna 1997, 319.

the founding of the Finnish Broadcasting Company in 1926 and the rise of the recording industry in the late 1920s, classical music could be heard at popular concerts and popular symphonic concerts. In the early 1930s, for example, when the population of Helsinki exceeded 200,000, these concerts attracted about 10,000 listeners annually.<sup>14</sup>

## The Finlandia Hymn

A significant milestone on *Finlandia's* journey to becoming a composition known to all was the writing of lyrics to the *Finlandia Hymn* and its arrangement for vocal choirs. The first lyrics appear to have been written in 1919 to serve the needs of American-Finnish amateur choralists. Sibelius himself adapted a text written by the operatic tenor Wäinö Sola in 1937 for the first male-voice choir arrangement of the hymn, which premièred on Masonic premises in Helsinki on 21 April 1938. The version used today, Opus 26 No. 7, was created when Martti Turunen, conductor of the male-voice choir *Laulu-Miehet*, asked the poet V.A. Koskenniemi to write lyrics for the piece. With a few alterations, the version as it stands today was first performed by *Laulu-Miehet* at the choir's 25th anniversary concert in the Great Hall of the University of Helsinki on 7 December 1940.<sup>15</sup> The established form of the lyrics in Finnish is as follows:

*Oi, Suomi, katso, Sinun päiväs koittaa,  
 Yön uhka karkoitettu on jo pois  
 ja aamun kiuru kirkkaudessa soittaa  
 kuin itse taivahan kansi sois.  
 Yön vallat aamun valkeus jo voittaa,  
 sun päiväs koittaa, oi synnyinmaa.*

*Oi nouse, Suomi, nosta korkealle  
 pääs' seppelöimä suurten muistojen,  
 oi nouse, Suomi, näytit maailmalle  
 sa että karkoitit orjuuden  
 ja ettet taipunut sa sarron alle,  
 on aamus alkanut, synnyinmaa.<sup>16</sup>*

As to why Koskenniemi's version is the one that has survived, the timing of the premièred (December 1940) should be taken into account. Finland had just survived the Winter War, and although it was peace time again, the country's future seemed uncertain as war continued elsewhere in Europe. The lyrics of the hymn fitted the ordeal of the Winter War. We may assume that then, at the latest, people became acquainted with *Finlandia*, or the hymn at least, thanks to radio broadcasts.

14 See Report on the Municipal Administration of Helsinki 45. 1932. Website.

15 See *Kaleva* 2011.

16 '*Finland, behold, thy daylight now is dawning, / the threat of night has now been driven away. / The skylark calls across the light of morning, / the blue of heaven lets it have its way, / and now the day the powers of night is scorning: / thy daylight dawns, O Finland of ours! / Finland, arise, and raise towards the highest / thy head now crowned with mighty memory. / Finland, arise, for to the world thou criest / that thou hast thrown off thy slavery, / beneath oppression's yoke thou never liest. / Thy morning's come, O Finland of ours!*' Translation by Keith Bosley, in *Skating On the Sea – Poetry from Finland*, 1997. Bloodaxe Books and in Finland in co-operation with the Finnish Literature Society.



---

**Wäinö Aaltonen, *Musica*, 1926**  
gilded wood, ht. 52cm  
Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum  
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Antti Kuivalainen

Wäinö Sola's lyrics from 1937 are clearly different, and make no direct reference to the Russian threat, appealing instead to God for the country's independence:

*Oi, Herra, annoit uuden päivän koittaa,  
 nyt siunaa armossas isäimme maa!  
 Soit aamuauringon yön varjot voittaa  
 ja taiston, ahdingon rauhoittaa.  
 Sua kansa kiittäen ain kunnioittaa  
 ja rauhaa toivoen uurastaa.  
 Korkeimman johtoon kansa Suomen luottaa,  
 vapaus-aarrettaan se puolustaa.  
 Se kylvää siemenen ja tyynnä vuottaa  
 satohon tyytyen jos sen saa.  
 Siunaus Herran meille onnen tuottaa  
 ja turvan parhaimman lahjoittaa.<sup>17</sup>*

## Finlandia as a Metaphor for the Experience of War

One of the factors that has linked *Finlandia* to war, particularly the Continuation War and more generally to Finland's survival of war and Russian/Soviet oppression, is the use of the hymn in the film *The Unknown Soldier*, directed by Edvin Laine and completed and premièred in 1955. Parts of the composition are used at the beginning and end of the film. *The Unknown Soldier* is by far the most viewed Finnish film in history. It has also been broadcast on television annually for many years, since 2000 always on Independence Day.<sup>18</sup> It should be borne in mind in connection with the film, and particularly the context of its making, that the 1954 novel by Väinö Linna on which the film was based was the first novel about the Winter War or Continuation War in which the events were depicted from the perspective of the common soldier, without any deliberate effort at glorification. In other words, it was a shift in a more popular direction in the tradition of representing war. In the same way, the film turned *Finlandia* into the property of the common people, although the screen adaption is in fact more sentimental and heroic than the novel. However, the inclusion of *Finlandia* in the film was author Väinö Linna's idea.<sup>19</sup> Susanna Välimäki has insightfully discussed the use of *Finlandia* in the film, pointing out its sacrificial symbolism: the narrative structure of the composition as a whole depicts how a massive threat is overcome through great sacrifice and almost superhuman effort. Coupled with the visual narrative of the film, this makes *The Unknown Soldier* an extremely charged work at the level of its content.<sup>20</sup>

Another work of art, quite well-known in its time, in which Sibelius's *Finlandia* merged with the work's content and the experience of the war, was a pair of frescoes painted by Lennart Segerstråle for the entrance hall of the Bank of Finland in 1943. Entitled *Finland Awakens* and *Finland Builds*, the two works were jointly called *Finlandia* by the artist. According to Segerstråle, *Finland Awakens* had close links with influences from Sibelius's composition. On a metaphorical level, the work is about national awakening and the struggle

17 'O, Lord, you let a new day dawn for us, / O in Thy mercy bless our Fatherland! / You let the morning rays defeat the shadows / And calm the strife, the battle pacify. / The people sing your praises ever thankful, / And toil away in hope of peace. / The Finnish people place their trust in Thy hands / When they defend their treasured liberty. / They sow the seed and await its growth serenely / Content with the harvest that fate will yield. / Our happiness relies on the Lord's blessing, / He bequeaths us greatest refuge.'

18 The information is from the Elonet web page on *The Unknown Soldier* (1955).

19 Varpio 2006, 274.

20 Välimäki 2008, 84.

to reach the light. The battles of Summa and Taipale in the Winter War represented for Segerstråle the climax of a struggle that banished the last vestiges of darkness.<sup>21</sup>

## New and Faux-Traditional Levels of Meaning

Subsequently Sibelius's *Finlandia* has acquired new cultural nodules of meaning in Finland. One of them is its use in films. Anssi Tikanmäki wrote a variation of the hymn for electric instruments, lasting just over two minutes, for the film *The Worthless*, directed in 1982 by Mika Kaurismäki. In Kaurismäki's film, the composition is no longer emblematic of patriotic loyalty, but rather a symbol of the sense of freedom and liberation from oppressive norms that is characteristic of road movies. Belonging to the early work of the Kaurismäki brothers, the film also symbolises a kind of shift from the politicised 1970s to the more individualistic 1980s, and was a factor that strongly contributed to generational experience.

Against the experience produced by *The Worthless*, it is interesting to observe how *Finlandia* is linked to the wave of neo-nationalism that has been on the rise since the late 1990s in Finland. In addition to the annual broadcast of *The Unknown Soldier*, one of its manifestations are the celebrations of the success of the Finnish national ice hockey team. When Finland won the World Championships for the second time in history in spring 2011, a public celebration was organised at the Market Square in Helsinki, a highlight of which was the *Finlandia Hymn* performed by singer/actor Sakari Kuosmanen.<sup>22</sup> In a sense, that patriotic moment, which touched different strata of the population but perhaps most acutely the so-called Generation Y,<sup>23</sup> represented a distillation of the idea of a struggle that initially seems impossible and requiring extreme effort and even sacrifice, but which ends with Finnish victory. The structure of the event can therefore be likened to the pattern of the Finnish war experience and its emphasis on heroism.<sup>24</sup> It is also interesting to note that in spring 1995, at a time when Finland was still suffering from economic depression, our first ice hockey World Championship victory was celebrated to the tune of a more conciliatory song, *Sankarit (Heroes)*, the main message of which is 'we are all heroes' and which underlines the equality of human effort.<sup>25</sup>

*Finlandia* has also acquired several levels of meaning abroad. In some American protestant hymnals it appears under the title *Be Still My Soul*, and it was used at a memorial service for the victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 and at the funeral of Ronald Reagan on 11 June 2004. Between 1967 and 1970, it was used as the national anthem of Biafra, a country that seceded from Nigeria. It was adopted as a signature tune by a democratic student movement in China,<sup>26</sup> and in contrast as a motivational tune by neo-Nazis in Dresden.<sup>27</sup>

The latest culturally interesting performance of the *Finlandia Hymn* was in December 2013 at the Tampere Hall, where it formed the climax of a concert during the Presidential Independence Day reception. The event was not as elitist as in former years, and the

21 Segerstråle 2011 (1943), online publication. It should be borne in mind that Segerstråle's text is from 1943, that is to say, from a period when Finland's fortunes had not yet turned in the war, as they did during the Continuation War and the accompanying public discourse.

22 Sakari Kuosmanen also sang the *Finlandia Hymn* in a much more carnivalistic context on stage in Tallinn during the Rock Summer Festival in 1988, dressed as a sumo wrestler. The idea there was to appeal to national sentiments, although the reference this time was to the Estonians' wish for independence.

23 Generation Y refers to the generation born between the early 1980s and the early 1990s.

24 Although Finland was one of the losers of the war, there has been some discussion about whether the outcome of the war should be termed a defensive victory rather than a defeat. See, e.g., Max Jacobson, 'Torjuntavoitto avasi tien rauhaan', *Helsingin Sanomat* 3 September 2004. In the popular imagination, defensive victory seems to be the more prevalent discourse today.

25 The song is by the Finnish singer-songwriter J. Karjalainen.

26 Välimäki 2008, 104–05.

27 Mäkelä 2007, 137–38.

concert and the performance of literary excerpts that accompanied it were described as a journey into the Finnish mindscape.<sup>28</sup> On that occasion of performance and reception, the hymn, performed by a youth choir, was elevated into a kind of manifestation of a unified – albeit not very happy – Finland that carries past experiences in its soul.<sup>29</sup>

## Sources and Bibliography

### Printed sources

Dahlström, Fabian (publ.), 2010. *Högtärade Maestro! Högtärade Herr Baron! Korrespondensen mellan Axel Carpelan och Jean Sibelius 1900–1919*. Helsingfors: Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland.  
*Helsingin Sanomat* 3 September 2004.  
 Office of the President of the Republic, Press Release 62/2013.

### Literature

Levas, Santeri, 1986. *Jean Sibelius. Muistelma suuresta ihmisestä*. Porvoo: WSOY.  
 Mäkelä, Tomi, 2007. *Sibelius, me ja muut*. Helsinki: Teos.  
 Sirén, Vesa, 2012. *Aina poltti sikaria. Jean Sibelius aikaisten silmin*. Helsinki: Otava.  
 Smeds, Kerstin, 1996. *Helsingfors – Paris. Finlands utveckling till nation på världsutställningarna 1851–1900*. Skrifter utgivna af Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland Nr 598. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland & Finska Historiska Samfundet.  
 Tawaststjerna, Erik (Ed.), 1997. *Sibelius*. Keuruu: Suuri Suomalainen Kirjakerho.  
 Varpio, Yrjö, 2006. *Väinö Linnan elämä*. Porvoo: WSOY.  
 Välimäki, Susanna, 2008. *Miten sota soi? Sotaelokuva, ääni ja musiikki*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

### Online sources

Independence Day reception, 6 December 2013. Yle Areena. <<http://areena.yle.fi/tv/2102010>> (accessed 23 May 2014).  
 Kaleva, Tuomas, 2011. Miten Sibeliuksen Finlandia-hymnin kuoroversio sai nykyisen muotonsa? *Sulasol-lehti* 1/11. <<http://www.sulasol.fi/lehti/arkisto/111/finlandia/>> (accessed 23 May 2014).  
 Kertomus Helsingin kaupungin kunnallishallinnosta 45. 1932 (Report on the Municipal Administration of Helsinki No. 45. 1932, in Finnish). City of Helsinki Information Centre (Tietokeskus), repository of digitised documents. <[http://www.hel.fi/static/tieke/digitoidut\\_asiakirjat/helsingin\\_kunnalliskertomukset/pdf/1932/1932\\_38.pdf](http://www.hel.fi/static/tieke/digitoidut_asiakirjat/helsingin_kunnalliskertomukset/pdf/1932/1932_38.pdf)> (accessed 23 May 2014).  
 Segerstråle, Lennart, 2011 (1943). Finlandia fresco paintings in the Bank of Finland. *Lennart Segerstråle, Finlandia Frescos*. Bank of Finland. <[http://www.suomenpankki.fi/en/julkaisut/muut\\_julkaisut/Documents/eDock2/Segerstrale\\_A5\\_EN.pdf](http://www.suomenpankki.fi/en/julkaisut/muut_julkaisut/Documents/eDock2/Segerstrale_A5_EN.pdf)> (accessed 22 May 2014).  
*The Unknown Soldier* (1955). Elonet page. <<http://www.elonet.fi/fi/elokuva/113528>> (accessed 23 May 2014).

28 Office of the President of the Republic, Press Release 62/2013. After the *Finlandia Hymn*, the choir and guests all joined in singing the national anthem.

29 The entire Independence Day reception can be viewed online at Yle Areena.