

Jean Sibelius - Karl Ekman

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This book contains an unusual biography of the well-known Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, focusing mainly on the man behind the music. Preface: 'It is not our intention in this book to enter into competition with the numerous responsible and subtle commentators, who have analysed and described Jean Sibelius the composer and his work in an excellent way. We are attracted by a hitherto untrodden field and have devoted our interest to Jean Sibelius the man, the unique personality behind his work. Whenever we have found it necessary to discuss some of the creations of this master hand as especially typical of important stages of his life and of striking features of his personality, we have kept our analysis and characterisation on the plane of common humanity. An attempt to give a complete picture of Jean Sibelius the man calls for no excuse. Like every artist of a high order Sibelius has exerted an influence on his contemporaries far in excess of the limits of the direct effects of his art. As a proclaimer in music of the feelings and dreams of his people he has become a leading figure in the history of Finland, as a fearless combatant in the lists of universal musical art one of the great, whose struggle and purpose contributed towards forming the spiritual physiognomy of the twentieth century. What such a man experienced, how he viewed the personalities he met, how he wrestled with the problems that life set him, how he reacted to tendencies and events in various spheres of life - none of this can be a matter of indifference to his contemporaries. Most of the materials of this book are the result of personal conversations with Sibelius in a dozen sittings lasting all day in his country home at Jarvenpaa, an hours journey by train to the north of the capital of Finland. In our talks the master placed himself at our disposal with all the kindness of his generous nature without allowing his persistent questioner to notice any sign of impatience. We have endeavoured as far as possible to express Sibelius views of all that is important in his life - and even of what is less important, when this has come quite naturally in the course of easy conversation in his own words, either as we jotted them down on paper during our sittings or wrote them down immediately after, as the train steamed through the countryside of Nyland towards Helsingfors in the twilight. During our talks in Jarvenpaa we had occasion more than once to recall that formerly Sibelius had consistently frustrated all attempts at inducing him to speak at all about himself and the reality that formed the

background of his works this attitude was due on the one hand to the noli me tangere of an aristocratic and susceptible nature towards the insistent outside world, and on the other to the spontaneous revulsion of a proud artist against the mere idea of being suspected of wishing to encourage public interest by any other means than his art. We must admit that we, too, failed to ascertain all that we, and, no doubt, our readers would have liked to know.'

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