

JEAN SIBELIUS'S COMPOSITIONAL STYLE 1899/1903: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
THE ORCHESTRAL AND PIANO VERSIONS OF *FINLANDIA*

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Purpose

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) made a piano transcription of his tone poem, *Finlandia* (see Appendix A). The purpose of this study is to compare the piano and orchestral versions of this important work written during the years 1899-1900. My aim is to demonstrate how Sibelius transformed the textures and sonorities of the work from one instrumentation to another. As a case in point, the composer applied certain compositional patterns and musical ideas and made use of the piano's sustain pedal to suggest a kind of orchestral hum and the rich palette of overtones created by a symphony orchestra. He clearly aimed to make the piano transcription function as an independent concert piece. The piano transcription did that, but it also surpassed its initial standing and rose to a level of independent and fully established fantasy on the piano. Sibelius used similar patterns and musical idioms in other compositions from the same time period that included piano. As an example, I offer three piano pieces from op. 24, two songs from op. 37 and the *Malinconia* op. 20. They demonstrate that a closer look into the transcription process opens up new insights for interpreting Sibelius's piano works from the point of view of timbre, passagework, and pedaling.

Significance and State of Research

The piano works of Jean Sibelius are less known to the general public than his orchestral works. However, he composed more than 150 solo piano works and a vast number of individual character pieces for violin and piano, cello and piano, and voice and piano. "Sibelius's achievements in large-scale symphonic forms are widely recognized, but his miniatures have often been neglected or misunderstood and demand critical re-evaluation."¹ Sibelius's piano works have been criticized as unpianistic. I believe there is a misunderstanding of concept. Although Sibelius was a violinist himself, he loved to improvise at the piano. Together with Ferruccio Busoni and a few other friends, they had a group called Leskovits, where they improvised on piano to each other

¹ Veijo Murtoomaki, "Sibelius and the miniature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 137.

and exchanged musical ideas.² He also often used the piano for sketching his compositions and experimented with compositional ideas in small-scale works which later blossomed in his Symphonies.³

The years 1893-1903 are referred to as the “Kalevala Romantic Period.”⁴ Sibelius’s piano music of this time was particularly virtuosic. He applied rich and varied textures with arpeggios, thick chordal settings, multi-layered harmonies, brilliant martellatos and runs in octaves, and alluring singing melody lines. The influence of Franz Liszt on Sibelius at this time was notable—not merely in his piano writing, but especially in his application of the tone poem (a genre fully developed by Liszt), of which *Finlandia* is a prime example. Sibelius wrote to his wife, Aino, from Munich in 1894: “I am really a tone painter and poet. Liszt’s views about music are most closely related to my own.”⁵ Another strong influence was the great Italian pianist Ferruccio Busoni,⁶ who moved to Finland in the fall of 1888 to teach in the Helsinki Conservatory. Sibelius and Busoni became close friends: opposite personal characteristics must have drawn them towards each other. Busoni can be described as an intellectual while Sibelius was more of an intuitive thinker. Busoni enjoyed observing the nature Sibelius was living. Busoni had a great respect for Sibelius as a composer and he conducted Sibelius’s symphonies widely in Europe and the United States, introducing them to new audiences. Sibelius also learned a lot from Busoni, and the two spent together numerous evenings together filled with improvising and inventing themes, something that inspired Sibelius greatly in his compositional work.⁷ Busoni’s refined virtuosity on the piano set the standards for Sibelius’s piano textures.

² Erik Tawaststjerna, *Jean Sibelius, Biography Part 1* (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan painolaitokset, 1965), 112.

³ Juhani Alesaro, “Sibelius and his ‘Free Moments’ at the Piano,” in *Sibelius Forum II: Proceedings from the Third International Jean Sibelius Conference*, ed. Matti Huttunen, Veijo Murtomäki, and Kari Kilpeläinen (Sibelius Academy, 2003), 295.

⁴ “The first, the romantic phase, is coloured by the mental climate of the 1890’s and the turn of the century in his own country—the Finland of patriotic enthusiasm, nationalistic, romanticism and, as one particular form of this, ‘Karelianism’, later also of Czarist oppression.” Erik Tawaststjerna, “Phases of Sibelius’s Art,” in *The Pianoforte Compositions of Jean Sibelius*, (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan kirjapaino, 1957), 13.

⁵ Tomi Makela, “Influence and Resistance from 1880 to 1929,” in *Jean Sibelius*, (The Boydell Press, 2011), 156.

⁶ Erik Tawaststjerna, *Jean Sibelius, Biography Part 1* (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan painolaitokset, 1965), 110-115.

⁷ Erik Tawaststjerna, *Jean Sibelius, Biography Part 1* (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan painolaitokset, 1965).

The significance of my study is to provide a new point of view to Jean Sibelius's piano writing. No comparison between the orchestral and piano versions of the *Finlandia* has been done before. The significance of my work is to contribute to current Sibelius research and to thoroughly investigate his compositional techniques as they unfold in the different sources of the various versions of the *Finlandia*. Along with a more informed understanding of the compositional process and aspects of the musical texture of this work, my work will also provide important insight into performance practice of Sibelius's piano music.

For one thing—and, given the ear, it was no small achievement—Sibelius never wrote against the grain of the keyboard. At its best, his style partook of that spare, bleak, motivically stingy counterpoint that nobody south of the Baltic ever seems to write. And at not its worst—its most conventional, perhaps, his keyboard manner is still a far cry from the generalized, octave-doubling-prone textures espoused by most of his contemporaries.⁸

State of Research/Literature Review

The author who set the standards for significant Sibelius study and research was the Finnish musicologist, pianist, and pedagogue Erik Tawaststjerna. He wrote numerous books, articles, and essays (including his dissertation) about Sibelius. He was also a personal friend of the composer. Tawaststjerna's magnum opus and a true masterpiece was the five-volume biography of Sibelius, which, along with profound scholarly writing and analysis of his music, discussed a vast amount of personal materials such as letters and diary markings, all of which had not been available before. Tawaststjerna's scholarship, love, and passion for Sibelius's work, and his brilliant penmanship (not to mention the friendship of the two), set the highest standards for Sibelius studies.

In my research I am focusing mostly on part two of the Tawaststjerna's biography,⁹ which deals with the time period of the composition of *Finlandia* along with the first and second symphonies, op. 24 for piano,¹⁰ op. 20 for cello and piano and op. 36 and 37 for voice and piano. Tawaststjerna's volume provides excellent insight to the repertoire mentioned before. However, the

⁸ Glenn Gould, *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

⁹ Erik Tawaststjerna, *Jean Sibelius, Biography Part 2* (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan painolaitokset, 1967), 121-251.

¹⁰ Erik Tawaststjerna, *The pianoforte compositions of Jean Sibelius* (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan kirjapaino, 1957), 7-49.

detailed study of the piano transcription of *Finlandia* and a comparative study of the piano and orchestra scores has not been done before.

Major platforms for current Sibelius research are the conferences organized by the Sibelius Society that take place regularly every four to five years. The ensuing conference proceedings are important sources. With reference to my specific topic, I wish to point out a few of the articles. In his article “*Finlandia* Awakens,” James Hepokoski provides a thorough analysis of *Finlandia* based on Schenkerian analysis, an in-depth insight to the tonal structure and motivic development of the work.

Considered as a whole, this unusual, blunt-cut structure is doubtless marked by the influence of Liszt’s revolutionary formal ideas of 1855, which were in full resonance among early modern composers around the turn of the century. Most fundamentally, the piece that came to be retitled *Finlandia* illustrates a process of tonic- and structure-building. As such, in Schenkerian terms the entire composition may be heard as a large auxiliary cadence in Ab. From an only slightly shifted perspective, though, the entire piece suggests the forging of a single, ever-clarifying idea.¹¹

Another important article discusses the refined counterpoint of Sibelius based on very advanced use of the sustain pedal of the piano. Through understanding the composer’s true intention behind his pedal markings and seeing the layered harmonic development and counterpoint, the true idea of the sound becomes clear for the pianist. Juhani Alesaro mentions in his article “Hardly Pianoforte Music at All” that the pedaling illuminates Sibelius’s use of counterpoint in the keyboard works.¹²

In another one of his articles, “Sibelius and his ‘Free Moments’ at the Piano,” Alesaro discusses the importance of piano in Sibelius’s compositional process. He used the piano as a working tool and often used piano compositions as drafts for the large-scale works.

Sibelius usually worked at the piano when composing, especially when shaping the first ideas. Exceptions from this practice were rare, although sporadically the composer found it necessary to work without the aid of the piano. This constant association with the piano has deeply affected Sibelius’s instrumentation. This does not mean orchestrating in terms of

¹¹ James Hepokoski, “*Finlandia* Awakens,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 137.

¹² Juhani Alesaro, “Sibelius’s Op. 75 No. 4 – ‘Hardly Pianoforte Music at All’?,” in *Sibelius Forum: Proceedings from the Second International Jean Sibelius Conference*, ed. Veijo Murtomäki, Kari Kilpeläinen and Risto Väisänen (Sibelius Academy, 1998).

pianistic writing, which was a feature, which he criticized, but rather adopting devices typical of the sound production of piano. This association with piano reveals itself e.g. in the composer's well-known characterization of a non-existent instrumental ideal which he had: 'The orchestra, you see, is a huge and wonderful instrument that has got everything-except the pedal'.¹³

Scores

Along with the published scores of the orchestral and solo piano versions of *Finlandia* and the works related to my research (op. 24 for piano, op. 20 for cello and piano and op. 36 and 37 for voice and piano), I will be using two manuscripts of the piano version: the original manuscript and the first handwritten copy of the manuscript, thanks to the Helsinki University Library, where the original sources are being kept. Except for one page, the original orchestra version is lost.

Recordings

There are several recent recordings of the complete piano works by Sibelius that include detailed and scholarly written program notes, to mention some: recordings by three Finnish pianists Eero Heinonen, Erik T. Tawaststjerna, and Janne Mertanen.

Method

In order to fully understand the idiosyncrasies between the two versions of *Finlandia*, a detailed comparative analysis of the piano and orchestral scores is necessary. For this purpose, I will primarily use the printed scores of both the piano and orchestral versions. In addition, the manuscript of the piano version of *Finlandia* will be consulted as an important resource. From the orchestra manuscript, only one page has been found. The analysis will focus on the comparison between the textures of both versions, thus, I will review full scores. Reductive analysis is not necessary since neither formal nor harmonic changes separate the two versions, although there are a few exceptions: Firstly, at the beginning of the Allegro assai—this is the tempo indication of the

¹³ Juhani Alesaro, "Sibelius and his 'Free Moments' at the Piano," in *Sibelius Forum II: Proceedings from the Third International Jean Sibelius Conference*, ed. Matti Huttunen, Veijo Murtomäki, and Kari Kilpeläinen (Sibelius Academy, 2003).

piano version; the orchestral version has *Allegro moderato*—the piano tremolo is cut short by one measure, probably in the interest of making the passage more feasible for the pianist. Secondly, in the piano version there is a first and a second ending at the end of the repeated section before the hymn section. And finally, there are some alternations in the coda, including one extra measure in the orchestral part similar to the first example below. After having outlined the differences between the two versions of *Finlandia*, I will compare the passagework of the piano version with similar instances in Sibelius's other works from the same period. This will demonstrate that the piano texture of *Finlandia* is not unique but, instead, typical for Sibelius's "Kalevala Romantic Period" (1899-1903). Perhaps the composer's own piano transcription of *Valse Triste*, along with its significant differences in texture and style, marks the end of this period. According to Erik Tawaststjerna, the three-movement piano cycle *Kyllikki* op. 41, which was written at the same time as the piano arrangement of *Valse Triste* in 1904, is "Sibelius's farewell to romanticism."¹⁴

In Sibelius's piano texture there are moments of expression that relate explicitly to his orchestral writing, without compromising his pianistic style. This is well expressed in the following quote from the pianist Eero Heinonen, who made a complete recording of Sibelius's piano works:

The sonorous power of expression and peculiar colours require the performer to explore. For instance, in the use of pedal Sibelius can be unconventional: his piano sound sometimes includes an orchestral, 'philharmonic' hum and a spectrum of overtones that does not detract from the clarity of the counterpoint. There are many ideas that seem orchestral, but these do not make the music any more un pianistic or difficult than that of Beethoven or Brahms.¹⁵

Sample Analysis

Section 1: Comparison Between the Orchestral and Piano Versions of Finlandia

One of the most obvious elements to compare relates to the manner in which Sibelius maintains the extensive use of orchestral tremolandos in the piano version. Orchestral tremolandos

¹⁴ Erik Tawaststjerna, "Phases of Sibelius's Art," in *The Pianoforte Compositions of Jean Sibelius*, (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan kirjapaino, 1957), 49.

¹⁵ Heinonen, Eero. "Sibelius." Liner notes for *Sibelius's Published Original Works for Piano*, by John Sibelius. Eero Heinonen. Finlandia CD8573-80776-2, 2000, compact disc.

may be differentiated as shown in Example 1, from the beginning of the Allegro section. Here, timpani and low strings play an extended tremolando over the main motive that is juxtaposed like a motto in this introductory section, which is gradually building up towards the presentation of the work's main theme (for a quick orientation regarding the structure of *Finlandia*, see the graph in Appendix B). A closer look of the piano score reveals an interesting rhythmic detail that sets the transcription apart from the orchestral version. In the orchestra, two layers of tremolando exist: the rhythmically undefined timpani trills and the low strings' sixteenth-note tremolando. These two layers are unified into a single layer in the piano version in a passage played by the left hand in the low register. The rhythmic appearance is that of sixteenth triplets, with a total of 24 sixteenth-notes in each measure. The orchestral version, instead, only provides sixteen sixteenth-notes. In the low register of the piano the increased rhythmic density leads the passage to become a timbral rather than a motivic effect.

Example 1: Excerpt from the orchestral version

D *Allegro moderato.*

Flauti.
Oboi.
Clarinetti in B.
Fagotti.
I. II.
Corni in F.
III. IV.
I. II.
Trombe in F.
III.
I. II.
Tromboni.
III.
Tuba.
Timpani.
Gran Cassa e Piatti Triangolo.
Violino I.
Violino II.
Viola.
Violoncello.
Contrabasso.

D

Excerpt from the piano version

Allegro assai.

ff
cresc. possibile
f
f

In the second example we see a more elaborate level of arrangement as the texture of the arpeggiated patterns has been changed. Here, both the pitches and the rhythmic pattern have been completely modified, likely in order to create an orchestral effect with pianistic means. The first note in the piano part is the A, which the cellos and basses held as a long-sustained note in the orchestral version. Incidentally, I believe that in order to reach the most transparent sound, the A in the piano should be treated as a pedal point with either the use of the piano's sostenuto-pedal combined with the sustaining pedal or, alternatively, by using the sustaining pedal very subtly. The changed pitches serve to help the overtones of the piano ring, and again, with subtle use of pedal, the overall sound effect does well in imitating orchestral hum. The slurs are written differently in the two versions: in the orchestral version, the slurs separate each group of triplets whereas in the piano arrangement, the whole measure is covered with one slur. From the performer's point of view, it is essential to keep the four big beats of the measure crescendoing to the downbeat of the next measure, thus creating a wave-like effect, and to start softer again in the following measure. This sequence occurs several times in the piece.

Example 2: Excerpt from the orchestral version

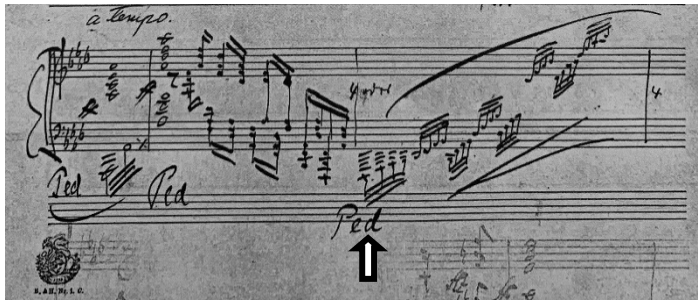
This image shows a page from an orchestral score. The instruments listed on the left are: Flauti, Oboi, Clarinetti in B., Fagotti, Corni in F. (I. II. and III. IV.), Trombe in F. (I. II. and III.), Tromboni (I. II. and III.), Tuba, Timpani, Gran Cassa e Piatti, Triangolo, Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabbasso. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with dynamic markings of *mf* and *cresc.* for several instruments. The second system shows a more complex texture with many instruments playing. An upward-pointing arrow is located at the bottom of the first system, pointing to the *mf* marking in the Contrabbasso part.

Excerpt from the piano version

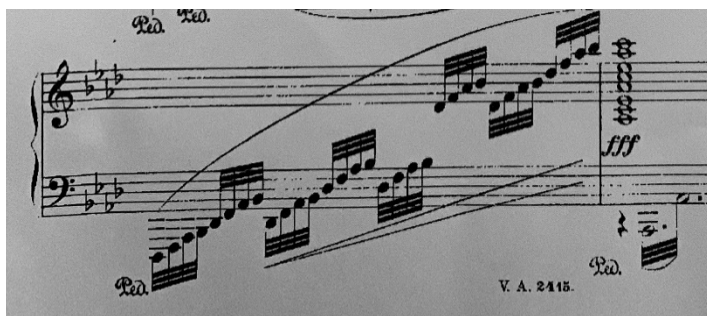
This image shows a page from a piano score. It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts with a *mf* dynamic and a *cresc.* marking. The second system features a *f* dynamic and a *m.s.* (mezza sostenuto) marking. An upward-pointing arrow is located at the bottom of the first system, pointing to the *mf* marking in the left hand.

The first two examples represent the type of choices Sibelius made in the process of arranging the orchestral version for piano. I will next demonstrate by two examples, how Sibelius used the material from the piano arrangement in his piano compositions, which could be seen in a different light after understanding his arrangement techniques. In the third example, we see how a pattern written in the *Finlandia* arrangement (mm.210) is almost identical to a passage appearing in the piano part of his *Malinconia* for cello and piano op. 20. This passage is in fact one of the most important motifs in *Malinconia*, which is repeated numerous times in a rapid and a flourishing manner throughout the piece. I have attached a copy of the measure from the original manuscript as well.

Example 3: Excerpt from the piano manuscript



Excerpt from the piano arrangement



Excerpt from *Malinconia for cello and piano Op. 20*

The image shows a musical score excerpt for two systems, measures 9 and 10. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). Measure 9 starts with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The music features a melodic line in the treble staff and a more complex, rhythmic accompaniment in the bass staff. A large slur covers both staves across measures 9 and 10. In measure 10, the dynamic marking changes to *cresc. poco a poco*. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks.

In the final example, we can see how thematic material is used as a tool for expression.

Sibelius takes the main theme of the hymn section of *Finlandia* and uses it almost identically in his *Romance* op. 24 no. 9 for piano. The key is changed from A \flat to D \flat , and he changes the main theme played with winds in a quiet (piano dynamic) and in a sweet (dolce) manner, to a richer, cello-like sound played by the left hand in the *Romance*. This theme develops and builds up to a fortissimo climax, using a melodic motif from the beginning of the piece. The elements of this theme are found also in his song *Flickan kom ifran sin alsklingsmote* (The Tryst) op. 37 No. 5 and in *Nocturno* for piano op. 24 No. 8.

Example 4: Excerpt from the piano version

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. The top system is marked 'Sempre Allegro.' and features a forte (*fff*) dynamic. The bottom system is marked 'Cantabile' and features a piano dolce (*p dolce*) dynamic. The score includes various performance instructions such as 'una corda' and 'tutte corde', and dynamic markings like 'mf'. A downward-pointing arrow is positioned above the 'Cantabile' section.

Excerpt from *Romance Op.24 No. 9 for piano*

The image shows a musical score for an excerpt from *Romance Op.24 No. 9 for piano*. The tempo is marked 'Andantino'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes the instruction 'ben marcato'. The second system starts with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and also includes 'ben marcato'. A dynamic marking of mezzo-piano (*mp*) is present in both systems. An upward-pointing arrow is positioned above the *mp* marking in the second system.

These are just a few examples to demonstrate the compositional techniques Sibelius used in his transcription and then again in his compositions for piano from the same time period. There are many more fascinating details and examples along these lines.

Tentative Chapter Headings

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory chapter will outline the purpose and significance of the topic. It introduces the problem and gives a brief overview of the study in general with description. The subsequent chapters will include historical background information.

Chapter 2: Sibelius and Busoni: The Inspiring Interaction and Influence Between the Two Masters

This chapter will examine the significance of the relationship between the two masters throughout Sibelius's productive years, and how Sibelius in his piano writings took inspirations from Busoni's great artistry and virtuosity.

Chapter 3: The Comparison of the Musical Scores: Orchestral Score, Piano Score and the Manuscript of the Piano Score

A detailed analysis, which is based on a comparison between the sources, combined with the information from the literary sources. The analysis will include a comparison of the timbre and pedal effects.

Chapter 4: Common Musical Idioms of the Piano Music Sibelius Wrote Around the Time of the Creation of *Finlandia* (1899-1902): Discussion of Op. 24 for Piano, Op.20 for Cello and Piano and Op. 56 and 57 for Voice.

This chapter offers a comparison of the similar patterns, musical ideas and the idiosyncrasies between the piano compositions from this period, which was a significant part of Sibelius's Kalevala Romantic Period will be examined.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The conclusion offers a summary of Sibelius's correlations between his orchestral and piano writing, and which influences were drawn from Busoni's mastery of the genre. It also further emphasizes the necessity of using this information to interpret other piano works by Sibelius.

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Appendix A

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Kieferbaum

Jean Sibelius.

Finlandia.

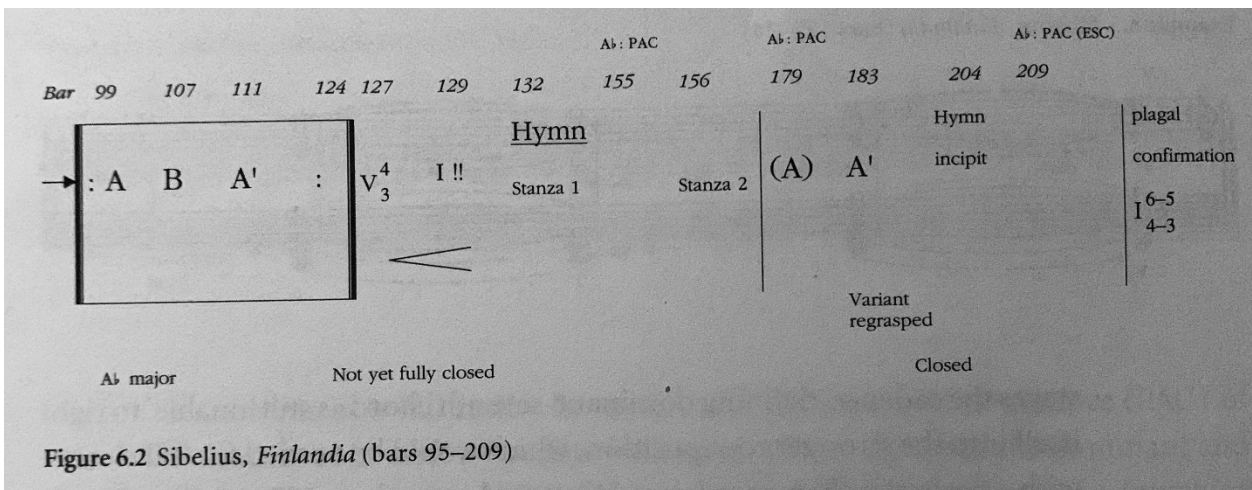
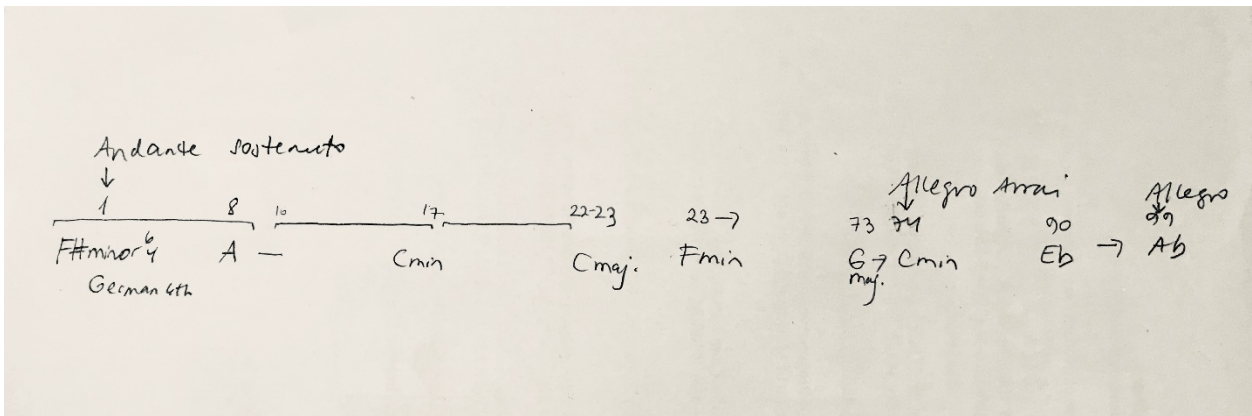
Tondigt för orkester.
Säveltygs orkesterstilke.
Tonabichtung für Orkester

Piano arrangement.

(1473) in

(M5)

Appendix B



The image above is taken from the following source: James Hepokoski. “*Finlandia Awakens.*” In *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*. Edited by Daniel M. Grimley. Cambridge University Press, 2004.