

## The Muse of Winter

It is no great surprise that the great composer Jean Sibelius was a native son of Finland, the country of endless winter and reindeer and fantastically warm hats. Finland is a small country in terms of population and sits at the very edge of the world we call 'civilization'. His music sat at the edge of the mainstream, the music of his day. It was never outlandish but always more than a little surprising. If you look in the dictionary under the word 'Moody' and if you squint and try really hard you'll see a portrait of Jean Sibelius. He was a true son of winter, brooding, brittle and not prone to an easy smile.

He had snow in his veins. He had ice in his ears. And like all good Norsemen, when his fire burned, there was no warmer heat. When he let it happen his music would rush up in impossibly melodic, romantic bursts pointing at the phrases that played in his music before and after and shouting. "See, this is what burns inside the snow man, the Finn." He could have written everything from his fireplace rather than his ice house but then he would not have been Sibelius. I think he must have known, absolutely, that there is no warmth without the cold, no hope without despair, no love without indifference. I think he suffered for that. I think he owned both sides of the coin and that when he was sad he was very, very sad. But, my goodness, when his heart sang for joy it was June and blooming and laughter and promise.

I would like to tell everyone to listen to his work but I harbor a fear. I'm afraid that for many people who might be on the edge of some personal abyss his sound, his melancholy sound, might just be too much. I think that when he looked over that edge and saw no place to land he did what most of us can't. He wrote it down in a score and thereby exorcised it. The great majority of our species are not so fortunate. For too many of us the edge is as far as it goes.

On the other hand maybe, just maybe, you can brave the edge with him. Maybe you can put yourself in his sonorous hands and be upheld. Maybe you can take the fall with him and come out in that June sunshine that is just on the other side. What if the great, perpetually cranky Jean Sibelius could be a staff, a net? Wouldn't that be something?

I wonder if he, in his far fetched musings, ever thought of himself as the catcher of falling hearts. I don't think that he did and I'm glad for it. It would have exposed his private Finnish heart. He would have been embarrassed by the tenderness, the vulnerability and not have written what he wrote. Isn't that a thought? The composer as reluctant counselor.

It is a prejudice of mine that geniuses are necessarily a self centered lot, focused on their own production be it music or software. I don't begrudge them this. It is probably necessary for their work albeit not their sanity. How could one produce the paintings of Van Gogh or the music of Beethoven or the swing of Ted Williams and have room for anything else? We are not in their equation, by and large, at least not to the extent that they would shepherd us through the valley.

And that makes it all the more delicious. Here we have the towering intellectual, the giant of music from the Northland, the ice king who suffered greatly for his genius, offering his outstretched hand. He may not have even known it. We, the audience may have been nothing to him, I don't know. But here we are. We listen. We hear the struggle. We know his music is not about the happy ending. It is about the winter, the winter of life.

So how about this; long after he's gone we take his music and ride it through a world where we might otherwise be without a navigator? How if we ride his courage to face the abyss and take the co-pilot's chair? How about we take the shy Finnlander's invitation and chance a look the dark 'maybe' with him? What if this son of the Northland actually soothes the ache and opens the door? Wouldn't that be sweet? He might even smile.

Anyway, here's what I'm saying. We are Norselanders too, being that we live here where winter is long and more than a little challenging. And here's this great musical mind who felt everything we do and more. Why not give the man a listen and see if he's talking about what's in your heart? You never know. After all, the muse of winter must surely sing somewhere in all of us. Why else would we live here?