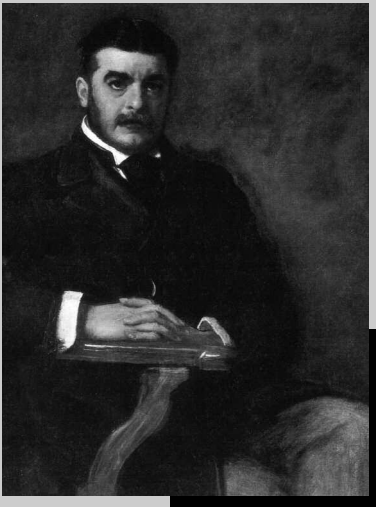
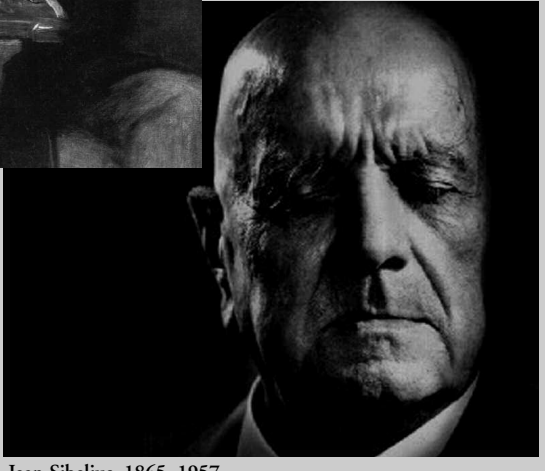
Sir Arthur Sullivan, 1842–1900





Jean Sibelius, 1865–1957

The art of Sir Arthur Sullivan is often regarded as very English in nature because his fame rests mainly on the huge series of light operas that he composed in collaboration with William Schwenk Gilbert, his librettist. The operas are full of very clever (and very English) humour, but careful listening reveals gorgeous and highly original melodies that would sit well within a great symphony or concerto even though they often underpin some of the most delightfully comic texts by Gilbert. The more serious side of the composer's art is to be found in such works as his Overture *In Memoriam* composed in 1866 in memory of his father, the Symphony in E, first performed in 1866, or *Te Deum* of 1872. In his early twenties Sullivan was appointed organist at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. That particular organ took on especial interest in 1871 when it was tuned to the modern pitch of A=440, long before this standard was accepted by the American music industry in 1925 and finally confirmed by an international conference in 1939. It was at this time he composed his first ballet music, the beautiful but neglected score for *L'Ile enchantée*, which was produced in May 1864.

It could be said, in general, that Sullivan's most-often performed 'serious' music comes from the earlier years of his career, an example being the recently revived Cello Concerto of 1866. His earliest major work, the incidental music for Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* was completed in 1861 when he was nineteen years of age. The first performance was given on 6 April of that year at the composer's graduation concert, and he conducted it himself. Later that year there was a concert performance in Leipzig where the complete score was played. No sooner had Sullivan completed his studies than he returned to England, bringing the score of *The Tempest* with him, and it was twice performed at the Crystal Palace in April 1862. The published concert suite now consists of seven numbers. It is evident that Sullivan's depiction of *The Tempest* displays some echoes of Mendelssohn, notably the opening PRELUDE, which begins in somber mood but lightens as soon as the tempo increases. It is tempting to suggest that there is influence from Mendelssohn, who was director of the Leipzig Conservatory where Sullivan later studied. Perhaps this element might even be traced back to one of the most important events of his childhood when, at the age of fourteen, Sullivan succeeded in obtaining the newly established Mendelssohn Scholarship. Nevertheless, a far greater influence was probably the musical environment of the mid-nineteenth century with its concentration on music for opera and stage drama. Examples of this are to be found in calmer episodes such as the BANQUET DANCE and the DANCE OF THE NYMPHS AND REAPERS. Here Sullivan's style hints at the conventions of the ballet composers of that time; the nymphs certainly trip lightly but always in the context of a dance interlude. Sullivan's approach to incidental music takes a general view of the drama – seeking to create the overall atmosphere of a scene. It is interesting that several of the selected movements are preludes rather than episodes involving specific characters

Throughout his career Sullivan was drawn to Shakespeare: he also wrote music for *The Merchant of Venice* (1873), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1874), *Henry VIII*

(1877-8) and *Macbeth* (1888). His immensely successful twenty-year collaboration with W. S. Gilbert ended in 1896 giving him more time to concentrate on more serious compositions, but they had limited success. The exceptions were a ballet, *Victoria and Merrie England*, composed at the time of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee (it ran for six months at the Alhambra Theatre), and his final completed work, a setting of the *Te Deum laudamus* to commemorate the British victory in the Boer War. Historians sometimes amuse themselves by pointing out the immense optimism of this project since at the time of composition the war had yet to be won. Sullivan did not live to hear its first performance.

Inevitably, Sullivan and Sibelius approached Shakespeare's famous play with considerable difference. Writing at the beginning of his career, Sullivan was influenced by mid-Victorian English tastes, whereas Sibelius approached *The Tempest* in 1926, very close to the end of his distinguished compositional career. In the 65 years that had passed since Sullivan's realisation of the play there had been revolutionary changes in the use of harmony and powerful outside social influences, not least some devastating wars.

In 1924, Sibelius had enhanced his already distinguished reputation through the awesome success of his Seventh Symphony. After its triumphant premiere in Stockholm, he travelled to Denmark and conducted the work on five further occasions to enormous acclaim. This persuaded the publisher Thomas Hansen to commission Sibelius to compose music for *The Tempest,* many of the scenes requiring vocal and choral parts. The first performance took place on 16 March 1926 and was sung in Danish (interestingly, Sibelius had used a Swedish translation when working on the music). The contrast between this music and the tense, skilfully constructed Seventh Symphony is immense. Sibelius is said to have been very pleased to be able to vary his use of orchestration and melodic style in order to portray individual characters within the play. For example, Caliban is made awkwardly grotesque, but Prospero is given a noble peacefulness and is introduced in a movement of pastoral gentility. Music for Miranda is suffused with elegant beauty, but Ariel is mysterious, as if the character were unfathomable.

Sibelius's incidental music comprises a PRELUDE and 35 separate episodes, from which he arranged his two concert suites. These include a certain amount of reworking and changes to orchestration; they are not just a rearrangement of the existing material. The suites became popular concert items, but in order to make each self-sufficient Sibelius did not keep to the chronological sequence of the scenes in the play. The PRELUDE depicts the shipwreck and part of this music was also used in the "Storm" scene that ends Suite No. 1. In order to round off the sequence of movements in a logical way, Suite No. 2 is presented first here so that THE STORM logically concludes the whole sequence.

As planned for the stage, the original incidental music was demanding on the players, with instructions for instruments such as harp and harmonium to be placed high above the stage. The concert orchestrations still reflect the ethereal nature of such effects but within the confines of the symphony orchestra. At this point in his career Sibelius was the absolute master of orchestration and must have revelled in making the subtle changes when transferring his creation from incidental music to orchestral suite. Above all, his terrifying storm music is overwhelmingly evocative – the melodies are

simple enough but the essence of the writing lies in its orchestration: strings rise and fall menacingly, brass interrupts jaggedly and woodwinds speed through the scene eerily. This scene-painting is of the highest order. In huge contrast, the portrayal of Caliban has humour within its deliberate clumsiness, yet the DANCE OF THE NYMPHS has a filigree delicacy that recalls Berlioz.

It is amazing that so soon after this composition there came what commentators refer to as the "silence from Järvenpää," his comfortable if simple home outside Helsinki, where he died in 1957, aged 91. *The Tempest* and the famous tone poem *Tapiola* were composed at about the same time (although the latter was given a later opus number) but these were to be his last orchestral compositions. A handful of minor works were subsequently produced, but the great outpouring of major compositions had suddenly ceased, leaving the musical public to wonder about the great mystery of Symphony No. 8, which for years, Sibelius said was almost complete. He promised the premiere of this symphony to Serge Koussevitzky in both 1931 and 1932, and a London performance in 1933 under the British conductor (and the composer's close friend) Basil Cameron was advertised. Cameron visited Sibelius and described sitting down with the composer to play some of the Symphony on the piano, transcribing at sight from the manuscript score. In 1945, Sibelius wrote to Cameron saying that the Symphony had been "finished many times," and that he was about to put it into his hands for performance.

Sibelius' music for Shakespeare's remarkable play showed new and original thinking, especially in respect of the composer's approach to instrumentation, and it seems that a new era of his compositional style was beginning. How disappointing then that Sibelius's created no further orchestral works – and how interesting, by complete contrast, that Sullivan had created no orchestral works prior to his musical realization of *The Tempest.*

–Antony Hodgson

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Recordist: Sean Royce Martin

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The Kansas City Symphony was founded by R. Crosby Kemper, Jr., in 1982, just months after the dissolution of the Kansas City Philharmonic. Under Kemper's leadership, the founding trustees of the Symphony created a sound structure for the board and established the initial endowment. Today, the KCS is a major force in the cultural life of Kansas City and the region.

Now under the dynamic leadership of acclaimed music director Michael Stern, the Kansas City Symphony has experienced impressive artistic growth through its history and under the batons of Russell Patterson (1982-1986), William McLaughlin (1986- 1997), and Anne Manson (1998- 2003).

The Kansas City Symphony serves a metropolitan population of 1.8 million people. The orchestra's 80 full-time musicians are area residents and vital contributors to the artistic life of Kansas City.

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MICHAEL STERN

Music Director, Kansas City Symphony

The 2007-08 season marks Michael Stern's third as Music Director of the Kansas City Symphony. Performances in the inaugural year were greeted universally with public and critical acclaim and the subsequent season was hailed for the remarkable artistic and institutional growth and development. The Symphony and Stern concluded their first year together by making a recording for the Naxos label that was released in February of 2007.

Stern is also founding Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the IRIS Orchestra (Germantown, Tennessee). Under Stern's direction, the IRIS Orchestra has been unanimously heralded for the brilliance of its playing, its varied programming with special emphasis on American contemporary music, and for its acclaimed recordings on the Naxos and Arabesque labels. IRIS has embraced as a central part of its mission a deep commitment to furthering American composers and has commissioned works by Stephen Hartke, Richard Danielpour, Edgar Meyer, Jonathan Leshnoff, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, among others.

In 2000 Stern concluded his tenure as chief conductor of Germany's Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra. The first American chief conductor in the orchestra's history, he was offered the post almost immediately after making his debut with them in March 1996. In addition to their work in concert, for broadcast and tour, Stern and the orchestra made several recordings of American repertoire, notably a disc of Henry Cowell's works, as well as a series devoted to the music of Charles Ives, including a live recorded performance of the "Universe" Symphony and their first recording of the "Emerson" piano concerto.

In September 1991, Stern was appointed permanent guest conductor of the Orchestre National de Lyon in France, a position which he held for four years. He has also appeared with the national orchestras of Paris, Bordeaux, Lille, and Toulouse. Elsewhere, Stern has led the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, the Oslo Philharmonic, the Bergen Symphony, the Beethovenhalle Orchestra in Bonn, the Deutsche Symphoniker (DSO) in Berlin, the Budapest Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic, the Moscow Philharmonic, the Helsinki Philharmonic, the Santa Cecilia Orchestra in Rome, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in Munich, and the Chamber Orchestra of Lausanne. He has also been a frequent guest conductor of the Tonhalle Orchestra in Zurich and has recorded both with that orchestra and with the London Philharmonic for Denton Records. In the United Kingdom, he has conducted the London Symphony, the London Philharmonic, the BBC Symphony, and the English Chamber Orchestra. Stern has appeared in the Far East with such orchestras as the National Symphony of Taiwan, the Singapore Symphony and Tokyo's NHK Symphony, and in September 2001, he led the Vienna Radio Symphony on a tour of China.

In North America, Michael Stern has conducted the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Saint Louis Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, the Houston Symphony, the Baltimore Symphony, the Toronto Symphony, the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Indianapolis Symphony, and the National Symphony in Washington, D.C., among many others. He also appears regularly at the Aspen Music Festival and has served on the faculty of the American Academy of Conducting at Aspen. From 1986 to 1991, Stern was the assistant conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra. In September 1986, he made his New York Philharmonic debut as one of three young conductors invited by Leonard Bernstein to participate in a conducting workshop that culminated in two concerts at Avery Fisher Hall.

Stern received his degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where his major teacher was the noted conductor and scholar Max Rudolf (whose famous textbook, *The Grammar of Conducting*, Stern co-edited for its third edition). He also edited a new volume of Rudolf's collected writings and correspondence, published in January 2002 by Pendragon Press. His studies have included two summers at the Pierre Monteux Memorial School in Hancock, Maine, under the tutelage of Charles Bruck. Born in 1959, Michael Stern is a graduate of Harvard University, where he earned a degree in American History in 1981.