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Finding the inner fiddler
Folk music influences in Sibelius’ 7th Symphony

Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt arbete
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1 Introduction

The Finnish composer Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) was with no doubt the most important figure in creating a Finnish voice in music. He had a burning passion towards Finnish folklore and folk music which is a crucial part of his musical expression. Folk music was not only an influence for Sibelius but a starting point and a profound source of inspiration – in addition Finnish myths, legends and nature. For him composition was to take folk music’s essence and elevate and cultivate it to art music – his rhythmical structures, sense of groove and his harmonic logic all have roots in the traditional music of his country.

In Sibelius’ early works Finnish folk music is very evident in usage of texts from the Finnish national epic Kalevala, such as the story of *Kullervo*, rhythms typical to Finnish poem singing (trochaic tetrameter and 5/4) and in titles and themes inspired by Finnish mythology such as *Swan of Tuonela* (from *Four Legends*), *Tapiola* and *Luonnotar*. There is still another level of folk influence to be found in my opinion.

As a finn, Sibelius’ music is in my blood, and a lush and brooding rendition of *Finlandia* or the 7th Symphony never fails to tear me up. However, in central European orchestras musicians don’t have little connection to Finnish folk music. Some passages, such as syncopations or folk dance passages in the 7th Symphony, if interpreted and executed strictly in classical style, one misses the earthy qualities and the ‘finnishness’ that make Sibelius Sibelius. So what can we do as conductors and performers?

In the artistic part of the thesis I will rehearse and conduct Sibelius’ 7th symphony with Norrköping Symphony Orchestra during which I will experiment what a conductor can do in a symphonic environment in order to bring out the underlying layers of folk music influences. Written part of the thesis comprises of a brief introduction to Finnish folk arts - music, dance and poetry – a shot biography of Sibelius focusing on his exposure to Finnish traditional music and an analysis of the folk music influences in his music and especially in his 7th Symphony.
2 Finland – a country with polarized culture

Historically Finland has been divided into three main cultures: Lapps and the Sami people of the north, western Swedish-speaking population and eastern Finland. The dichotomy between the west and the east has been especially clear, as south-west has had close ties to Sweden and other western countries and eastern Finland to Novgorod and Russia.¹

The Finno-Ugric folklore of spells, ritual music, creation myths etc. dates back to time before 150 CE and was widely spread through the whole country until the 17th century and even until the 20th century in some parts of Karelia in the east. Eastern Finland being the more rural and more undeveloped area compared to the west coast lead to two important things for musical development: social interaction happened mostly within the clans and the lack of resources and wealth didn’t enable the musician to acquire or develop new musical instruments. These are few of the reasons why the ancient tradition was preserved in the areas for so long. West coast on the other hand was quite wealthy and was heavily influenced by Swedish folk music. Also having strong homogenous group, both culturally and ideologically resulted in a more integrated cultural development that spread to the whole country in the end of 19th century before the advent of the urban culture.

2.1 Finnish folk arts

German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder was one of the first to romanticize folk culture and using the term volkslied – german for folk song.² According to american scholar Benjamin Filene, Herder contrasted culture of the people, Kultur des Volkes with learned culture, Kultur der Gelehrten, and thus created the initial separation between folk and art music. By Herders definition, folk music is music developed outside classical or urban music culture. Filene writes that according to Herder, true Volk could only be found outside of the ‘high culture’ surroundings and even urban lower class people or in Herders words ‘rubble on the streets’ didn’t count as true bearers of folklore. His ideas inspired a generation of cultural treasure seekers to travel to secluded villages and communities to collect folk poems, stories and songs.

² Filene, Benjamin, Romancing the Folk Chapel Hill & London : The University of North Carolina Press 2000
Tradition and oral transmission of tradition seems to be in the center of the concept of folk arts. International Folk Music Council (nowadays known as International Council for Traditional Music) defined folk music in 1955 as follows:

Folk music is music that has been submitted to the process of oral transmission. It is the product of evolution and is dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation, and selection.\(^3\)

One feature of folk music is that there is no 'correct’ version of it. Folk music is something that in its abundance surrounds and influences certain communities and its musicians. Unlike in early music movement in it’s early stages for example the goal isn’t only to conjecture historical performance practices based on research to preserve a certain style but rather to continue the tradition instead of re-creating it.\(^4\)

**2.1.1 Literary Finnish and Kalevala**

Literary Finnish in it’s modern form is quite young. Alienated from the spoken form written Finnish was essentially in the same state during the early 19th century as it was in the 16th century when the first Finnish versions of the Bible had been translated by Mikael Agricola (1510-1557).\(^5\) This was until 1880 when doctor and linguistic scholar Elias Lönnrot (1802-1884) published his Finnish-Swedish-dictionary which had over 200 000 words compared to Agricolas 6 000 -- 8 000. On the base of this work were his extensive travels to eastern Finland during 1828-45.\(^6\)

For 15 years Lönnrot gathered folk poetry, rune songs, riddles and dialect words combining the information with western dialects and thousands of his own words and thus created the written Finnish language as we know it today. Poems and runes collected by Lönnrot would eventually also be the basis of Finnish national epic Kalevala and it’s parallel work Kanteletar which were published in 1838 and 1840, respectively.\(^7\)

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Lönnrot didn’t only collect poems but also the melodies the runes were sung with. Lönnrot was a competent musician himself and would often accompany himself with a *kantele* (a five stringed lyre-like instrument) and carry a flute with him in his travels. He even created a notation system for writing down Kalevalic tunes. Hundreds of Finnish-Karelian folk melodies have been collected to only by Lönnrot but also by i.a. Axel August Borenius, who collected over 800 tunes, and Jean Sibelius.  

The poetic meter of Kalevala’s poems is always the same and consists of four trochaic feet. In Finnish the stress of essentially every word is on the first syllable. In rune singing the stress is however always put on the beginning of each foot which means that the stresses nearly never follow the natural stresses of the words. The ‘unnatural’ stress is often even emphasized when singing by having two repeated notes in the melody on each foot. This gives rune singing, or *runolaulu* in Finnish, it’s distinguished feel and rhythm. This can be observed for example in the first two lines of *Kalevala*. In the example, the natural stresses of the words are **bold** and sung emphasis **underlined**.  

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Mieeleni minun tekevi,
   aivoni ajettelevi
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Miele- | ni mi- | nun te- | kevi,
   aivo- | ni a- | jat- | levi
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### 2.1.2 Folk song

Rune singing can bee seen as the foundation for Finnish folk music. Every region from east to west was influenced by it and traces of it can be observed also in younger folk songs.

Typical Finnish-Karelian rune melody has two phrases – call and answer (although melody variants with one or multiple phrases exists). According to historical sources runes were traditionally performed by two men holding hands and singing in turn, although this wasn’t the case any longer when most of the poems were collected. Solo singer reciting the poems or a single singer alternating with a chorus was more common (see Ex.1). Kalevalic poems aren’t grouped in stanzas but the lines are recited in a repetitive trance-like manner with melodic and melismatic variation occurring along the

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8 Murtomäki, Veijo, *Sibelius and Finnish-Karelian folk music*  
Finnish Music Quarterly (FMQ), 2005  

9 Oramo, Ilkka, *Kalevalamitta ja Kalevalan Sävelmiä*  
way. Poems of Kalevala take much use of parallelism and alliteration and were rich in references to nature.

Although melodies have lots of regional variation, they were typically in a range of a dorian pentachord d-e-f-g-a which sometimes extended to b natural. Although the Dorian or Aeolian mode is very common, very often a major key is used too. Meter is usually in 5/4 with a characteristic stress on the last two syllables (often on the "tonic", the root note, or a second above) which were twice as long as other notes. (Oramo, Kolehmainen 2001)

```
chorus: mie-le-ni mi-nun te-ke-vi,
ai-vo-ni a-jat-te-le-vi

sole: Mie-le-ni mi-nun te-ke-vi,
ai-vo-ni a-jat-te-le-vi,
```

Ex. 1

Although Kalevaic poetry slowly gave way to four-line song with end-rhymes starting in the 17th century traces of ancient style can been seen in younger folk songs. Some of these stylistic characteristics include call and answer form (Ex. fig. 2), use of Dorian mode (Ex. 3) and stress on the last two syllables (Ex. 2, 3 & 4). These features blend in with other influences from western Finland and Sweden such as instrumental folk music rhythms.

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Kullan ylistys

Mi-nun kul ta-ni kau-nus on, vaik on kai-ta-lui nen. Hei luu-li-a il-lä-la, vaik on kai-ta lui-nen. lui nen.

Ex. 2
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Niin kau-an minä tramppaan


Ex. 3
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2.1.3 Instrumental music and dance

Most traditional Finnish folk music instruments are *kantele*, a plucked zither and *jouhikko*, a type of bowed lyre. Jouhikko has 2-4 strings – one string used to play the melody and other strings vibrating simultaneously creating a *borduna*. It came to Finland via Scandinavia and was especially popular in eastern parts of Finland until the accordion spread there in 1840’s. Fiddle came to Finland in the 17th century and became very popular in the west and the south.¹⁰

Finnish folk dances were an important part of celebrations, such as weddings.¹¹ Most common line-up to accompany the dances was a duo of a kantele and a jouhikko; later also a solo fiddle, or in some cases two or three. A harmonium would be used sometimes to provide the harmony but this wasn’t until the end of the 19th century. Since the line-up was only two or three players strong, the style of playing was crucial – after all, everyone in the audience had to be able hear and feel the rhythm of the music while dancing.¹²

A very common practice to overcome this problem was a jouhikko playing technique called *puntti*, which is essentially putting an accent on the weak beats. Accents are done usually with a combination of bow pressure and speed. This way the fiddler could provide both a melody and a rhythmical structure to for example a waltz (see Ex.5). Another popular method is to use a syncopating bow, this is especially used in polkas (see Ex.6).¹³

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These jouhikko playing techniques are in the core of Finnish folk music sound, and as the fiddle migrated to Finland, this style of playing transferred to the playing style of the Finnish fiddlers. Later when i.a. accordion and clarinet came to Finland, same characteristics, even though not being bowed instruments, were imitated by them. Other special features of jouhikko playing transferred to violin were include playing mostly on the string without vibrato, using variation and ornaments in nearly improvisatory manner and using open strings to create harmony or a *borduna* to support the melody.

Like folk poetry and music, Finnish folk dances were collected in the turn of the century. Collected dances represent the style of the 19th century but older elements are well preserved and traceable. Most dances came to Finland from European courts and were transformed into a more folk-like style.¹⁴

Oldest dances danced to an instrumental accompaniment were minuet, a couples’ dance originally from French courts, and polska. They were often danced as a pair: first a solemn minuet followed by a cheery polska. Most notable musical characteristic both dances share, other than being triple meter dances, is the emphasis of the first and third beat.

Polska is of Polish origin as the name suggests and came to Sweden during the 16th century when Poland and Sweden where under the Vasa dynasty. From Sweden it then

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¹⁴ Heikkilä, Sari, *Finnish Folk Dance*
migrated to Finland. Polska has both double and triple time variants but in Finland the word means more broadly couple- or group dances in 3/4 time.\footnote{Bonuš, František, \textit{Polska}, The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians second edition Massachusetts : Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001}

Other important dances were mazurka, waltz, schottis and polka. A very Finnish specialities were the ceremonial dance potpourri, which combined multiple different dances mentioned before, and \textit{jenkka}, a Finnish variant of schottis and/or polka.
3 Jean Sibelius

Sibelius’ love for his home country and it’s folklore is well documented and also present in his works. Nevertheless he seldom wrote or talked about his method or philosophy of composition. However scholars have gathered knowledge from his letters and drawn conclusions from facts like his social circles, birthplace, teachers and some of his activities such as collecting folk melodies from renown rune singers. He also gave a very interesting lecture in University of Helsinki in 1896 about folk influences in art music.

3.1 The cultural and political environment of Sibelius

Jean Sibelius was born in 1865 in the small town of Hämeenlinna (approximately 100 km north from Helsinki) into a stirring culture-political climate. Finland had been autonomous grand duchy of Russia since 1809 after a long reign under Sweden. Even though Swedish-speakers were a minority in Finland by the time they predominated the upper class, including the government, and there was a strong sense of duality between Swedish and Finnish languages. Swedish was considered a more sophisticated one and Finnish while having no relative languages in the old world a mere peasants tongue. Sibelius’ father Christian was a doctor and was thus connected to the Swedish-speaking community and even though he went to a Finnish-speaking secondary school Swedish was his primary language and he didn’t show much interest in the Finnish language and folklore before 1890.16

It was around this time in Helsinki during his final year of studying at Helsinki Music institute that Sibelius made friends with Järnefelt brothers: Eero the painter and Armas a fellow composer. Their father, Alexander Järnefelt, was an officer in the Russian army and later in his life a senator and a governor. Although raised in a Swedish-speaking noble family he was a passionate fennoman, a pro-Finland activist. He was sure to have his children learn Finnish as well as it was possible at the time: they all went to Finnish schools and he would read them Finnish literature written so far and by doing so imprinting his children with his own passion towards the language and culture. Meeting this distinguished pro-Finland family was a turning point for Sibelius. Not only did he

become deeply interested in Finnish language and the newly collected folk poetry but he also met and fell in love with his future wife Aino Järnefelt.\footnote{Kopponen, Tapio, \textit{Järnefelt, Alexander}, Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu, Studia Biographica 4 Helsinki : Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997- (accessed 12.4.2017)}

3.2 Sibelius’ view on folk music

The Järnefelts weren’t the only influence to push Sibelius towards Finnish folklore. Another important figure was composer and conductor Robert Kajanus. Kajanus had composed many Kalevala-based pieces such as \textit{Kullervo’s death} (1880) and \textit{1st Finnish Rhapsody} (1881) and even few piano arrangements of Finnish folk songs to ”study the characteristics of folk tunes”. In 1890 Sibelius heard Kajanus conduct his symphonic poem \textit{Aino} with the Berliner Filharmoniker and was deeply impressed by the use of a story and thematics of \textit{Kalevala} in music. This would soon lead to his own Kalevala-based compositions.\footnote{Lappalainen, Seija, \textit{Kajanus, Robert}, Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu, Studia Biographica 4 Helsinki : Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997- (accessed 12.4.2017)}


1890 marks not only finishing Sibelius’ studies in Helsinki and moving to Vienna but a major change in genre of his compositions. So far most of his pieces had been for smaller ensembles but in Vienna he begun to explore the orchestra. He started to work on his first symphonic poem \textit{Kullervo}: his first big work based on a story from \textit{Kalevala}.

We know that Sibelius went to listen poem singers a couple times himself: 1891 he heard laments and rune singing of Larin Paraske in Porvoo and in 1892 during his and Aino’s honeymoon to Karelia he met Petri Shemeikka, a singer of a legendary status. Sibelius describes Shemeikka as ‘ancient spirit so manly and noble’ that his visit to him was more valuable than any of his study trips before.

3.2.1 Sibelius’ lecture about folk music

In 1896 Sibelius gave a lecture during the application process for a full-time professorship at University of Helsinki. While otherwise delfective on his philosophy of composition the lecture gives a revealing insight. In semi-private sources, such as letters and diaries,
Sibelius stresses, according to Daniel Grimley, a natural occurrence of folk music in his own music instead of an analytical approach. Also during the lecture he keeps a good pragmatic distance to his own work. Some of his attitudes can however be easily observed and the results studied especially in his early works.

In his lecture he speaks admiringly of composers and musical genres influenced by folk music. According to Sibelius there is no denying the influence folk music in Italian and English opera and expresses his admiration for J. S. Bach and his dance suites. As for Finnish folk music Sibelius finds the amount of odd, compound metres (such as 5/4, 7/4, 13/4 etc.) an unique and intriguing feature compared to the other countries indigenous music. He also observes that Finnish rune melodies lack a final note (unlike church modes) from which he concludes that Finnish tunes actually have no tonality. According to him Finnish folk music is often mistaken as monotonous and melancholic because of it’s one-sided harmonization. For example he finds harmonization of D dorian mode (the one most prominent in Karelian tunes) with D minor chord, which was a common practice in rekilaulu, ’dull and sluggish’ and according to him can be done better: essentially by letting the pentachord ‘rest’ on a lower pentachord with G root resulting in a G major ninth chord.

Sibelius’ lecture’s last words are fascinating: it’s almost like a plea. By the time of the lecture, in the turn of the century, western classical music was in a crossroads, in Sibelius’ words ‘our tonality is shaking’. He compares the situation to that of the 17th before Bach when ‘the church keys were in a state of dissolution’ and ‘they could not be retained because they were constructed, and hence lacked a firm foundation’. According to him, the solution, tonality, was eventually found ‘within a folk song’, and there it could be found again in 1896, when tonality was looking ways to renew itself. This task he continued to fulfill, and search for his own harmonic logic. The first steps can be heard in Kullervo but he kept experimenting with the ‘finnish modes’ and their reharmonization even in his last orchestral works Tapiola and the Seventh Symphony.

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Grimley, Daniel M., *Jean Sibelius and his words*  
4 The folky bits of Sibelius

As described in the previous chapter, Sibelius never wanted to make direct quotations or versions ‘in style’ of certain folk dances like Dvořák in his Slavonic Dances for example. Rather what we can understand from his lecture, and hear in his works, is a natural influence of folk music in his musical language. He even tried conceal these influences while trying to find his place in the music world in the turn of the century.

In addition to rune songs he collected during his career he must have been saturated by folk music already as a child. He admitted that one of his early teachers Arvid Genetz, who was a folk music collector himself, had given him ‘some impulses’ and as Murtonäki (2005) suggests he must have heard ‘a village fiddler playing polkas and dances’ which were highly popular at the time.

Sibelius continued to compose stories and legends from Kalevala for the all of his composing career and used poems from Kanteletar too for his vocal pieces. Such works include Aallottaret (The Oceanides), Luonnnotar, Four Legends and Tapiola. In his early works such as Kullervo folk music influences are more prominent but later they become more and more diluted. They can still be found in numerous underlaying structures and may even have been used subconsciously.

4.1 Rune song

In his lecture of 1986, Sibelius said that a composer ‘must liberate himself from the local [folk music] as much as possible’ but it is the surroundings where the great extent of their originality lies. To that extent Sibelius himself restrained from direct quotations of rune melodies but instead tried to capture the essence of such songs. A good example of such is the beginning of Kullervo’s second movement, Kullervo’s Youth. (Ex.7)

![Ex. 7](http://www.sibelius.fi/english/musiikki/ork_kullervo.htm)

Andante molto

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21 Grimley 2011, trans. from Swedish by Margareta Martin

22 Sibelius, Jean, Letter to Aino Sibelius

See appendix 1 for the original letter
First of all the melody of the excerpt follows a B Dorian or a B-C#-D-E-F# pentachord with a extension to G# – an archetypal rune song mode (also a common tuning system of kantele, as Sibelius mentions in his lecture). The melody entices to harmonize the passage with a B minor chord but instead Sibelius uses an open 4th as a pedal point and contrasts the Dorian characteristics with varied harmonies including G natural and D sharp whilst B minor, ‘the tonic’, occurring only once on an passing note.

Unlike traditional rune melodies the meter of the melody is a more conventional 3/2 instead of the characteristic 5/4. Certain feel of asymmetry is nevertheless achieved in bars 3-4 with blurring of the bar line with a 4+2 (mimim’s) phrase structure. One can also read every minim as ‘feet’, exactly like in Kalevaic rune melodies, but instead of four the last minim of the third bar extends the ‘line’ to five ‘trochaic feet’. This gives the phrase a clear form and feel of dactyl-trochee-trochee-trochee which is even underlined in the bass line. The last foot ends a fifth above the root note B, thus blurring a sense of a key, but again as in basic models of rune melodies ‘the syllables’ are twice as long than the previous ones.

4.2 Dance rhythms and playing techniques

In his orchestral works, Sibelius’ accompaniments with their endless static syncopations tend to cause problems: they are difficult to keep together and blurs the pulse, if executed in a wrong way. It’s important to understand where they come from. Syncopations are of course a common orchestration tool used by many composers for creating a luscious texture, like for example Brahms in his 3rd Symphony (see Ex.8), but with Sibelius it seem to have also another purpose. As described in the previous chapter, accenting weak beats and playing with syncopating bowing was a common practice in fiddle playing. Sibelius uses this exact technique in many occasions (see Ex.9 and Ex.10).

Another folk music sound Sibelius seems to be fond of is playing on the string, mit liegendem Bogen in German (see Ex.11). Use of this technique combined with constant hemiola feel (an effect that accents on the off-beats create in triple meter pieces) makes the second movement of the Third Symphony feel and sound like slow polonaise more than a lighter swingy 6/4. The first movement, if articulated as written, also has a certain feel of a Finnish polka. It seems that much of Sibelius’ rhythmical ideas have roots in folk dance rhythms and can be found in many of his other pieces.
Ex. 8 Brahms 3rd symphony, first movement

Ex. 9 (3rd Symphony, first movement)


24 Sibelius, Jean, *Symphony No. 3 in C-major, op.52* Berlin: Schlesinger, 1905
4.3 The Seventh Symphony

7th Symphony is one of the last orchestral works of Sibelius, followed only by Tapiola and incidental music to The Tempest. It was still titled Fastasia Sinfonica no. 1 in it’s premiere 1924 in Stockholm (conducted by the composer) but he changed it to Symphonie Nr.7/In einem Satze prior to it’s publication in 1925. Although only 22 minutes in length is considered as the pinnacle of Sibelius’ work in it’s unyielding inner logic and for it’s brooding nature-influenced soundscapes and unprecedented structure of revolving close-knit themes. As described in previous chapters Sibelius’ musical language is saturated with folk music influences and the 7th Symphony isn’t an exception.

As described earlier Sibelius’ uses syncopation extensively in his orchestration. Often it’s used to create texture (like in Ex.12) but sometimes, also in this symphony, it has a clearer rhythmical purpose that traces back to folk music articulation and phrasing. In examples 13 and 14 we see how the accompaniment is entirely syncopations. I interpret the syncopations as puntti, the typical accents on weak beats dance musicians use to establish the rhythm and the groove of the pieces with. Melodies in the examples have the same tendencies and the weight is even emphasized in example 14 with accents. Ornaments in

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25 Sibelius, Jean, Violin concerto in D minor, op.47
Berlin : Schlesinger (Lienau), 1905
example 13 (also occurring elsewhere in the symphony) makes the quasi-folk feel of the passages even more prominent.

Ex.12 (7th Symphony, bars 6-10 from letter Ö) 26

Ex.13 (letter G)

26 Sibelius, Jean, Symphonie Nr. 7 in einem Satze, op.105 Copenhagen : Wilhelm Hansen, 1925
In example 13 we also see the exact same harmonization of the ‘Finnish mode’ he described in his lecture of 1896. Melody of the excerpt is in G dorian with high 7th, a loan from ‘nordic scale’ described by Sibelius, and it’s harmonized with a C major 9th chord giving the passage floating non-key bounded feel.

Now while Sibelius doesn’t write *mit liegedem Bogen or alla corda* it’s easy read from the extensive use of tenutos (Ex.15 and 16) that it is the more archaic sound of playing on the string he is aiming for instead of more of an European tradition of lighter bouncy bow, for example in style of Johann Strauss’ waltzer. Rhythmical structure in example 16 is an *alla corda* pattern and also has a hemiola feel to it, which is, as described in previous chapter, typical in triple meter folk dances.
Although Sibelius didn’t make direct quotations of certain dances in his pieces, certain aspects of them can be pointed out. Example 17 is one of the main themes of the symphony, one of the candidates for the theme Sibelius referred to as ‘hellenic rondo’ in his first sketches for the symphony in 1918. The excerpt is in two but the accompaniment and certain parts of the melody have strong triple feel to them. In three the passage has a certain feel of a lively polska. Characteristic rhythm of a slow mazurka can also be found in example 18 and in the theme in which this motif develops to.
Ex.18 (bars 2-4 from letter A)
5 Conclusion

As stated earlier, Sibelius truly defined the Finnish sound in classical music. And for me, big part of it is the folk music – the obvious hints and the underlying structures. But what can we, as conductors and performers, use this information for? What would Sibelius do?

It’s the age old question of should we try to re-create composers music exactly as they expected it to sound and to what extent. Times, esthetics, orchestras and instruments are different now than over a hundred years ago when Sibelius wrote down first sketches of his seventh symphony. While some composers at the time were very specific with their notation and left behind writings about their philosophies on music and art, preferences towards articulation and sound etc. Sibelius to this day remains slightly enigmatic. There is living tradition in Finland, and the whole Scandinavia for that matter, on how to play Sibelius. Most of his pieces were premiered by Helsinki Philharmonic and while the orchestra has gone through a lots of changes and developed it’s sound the tradition is still there. Nowadays orchestras are capable of much more than a century ago – also of things the composer could have liked.

When it comes to Sibelius, it’s important to remember, as mentioned before, that he didn’t make direct quotations of folk songs or rhythms. The question remains, when we detect clear folky bits in his pieces, should we emphasize them and play in quasi-folk style or play them with classical way and thus elevate the folk songs to art music so to say?

I personally think that greatness of Sibelius lies in his huge structures, long lines and musical logic that hold everything inside. As long as this architecture is realized and the overall mood and spirit reached, details such as specific playing techniques are a matter of conductors or performers taste. One doesn’t need to change the grip of their bow or discard or change dynamics or articulations in order to reach some ‘authentic’ result. Instead, a free-spirited way of playing can be encouraged.

In the process of rehearsing the 7th Symphony with Norrköping SO, I came up with few simple ways to bring out the earthy qualities of work. Example 12 is traditionally played by shortening the notes to essentially quarter-notes. In my opinion, a better way to establish the rhythm, is to play two notes on each bow with very subtle separation, and to add an accent, played with both bow speed and pressure, to the first notes. (Ex. 19)

![Ex. 19](image)

Ex. 19
Two last eight-notes of the fifth bar of example 15 are sometimes played late, almost like a viennese waltz. I prefer keeping the passage more grounded, mostly played on the string and quite steadily in tempo. This will bring it closer to the Finnish folk music variant of waltz. Other than that I advised to let the exuberant folk-like melodies (ex.8 and ex.16) and accompaniments have their natural swing and strong accents to them and use slightly shorter and crispier bowing (ex.15) to dig up that earthy sound. Some passages also really benefited from minimal use of vibrato and playing on the string. I really enjoyed the contrast between the slightly rough folky bits and the gorgeous and lush orchestra tutti passages. It is in my opinion the down-to-earth tones in combination and in balance with his post-romantic ideals from his German training and his unique imagination that make Sibelius truly a voice of Finnish music – and one of my favourite composers.
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Appendix

Sibelius’ letter to Aino with draft for *Kullervo’s youth.*

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