

Sibelius and the Russian Traditions

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To discuss the music of Jean Sibelius in the context of Russian culture and history is to broach complex questions of national identity and musical influence. Although Finland's status between 1809 and 1917 as a Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire has been the subject of considerable recent work by revisionist historians, the policies of extreme Russification that were in place between 1899 and Finland's eventual independence eighteen years later have tended to cast the debate in terms of how a small nation bravely won self-determination despite the predations of a vast and arrogant imperial power.¹ This historiographical discourse has implications for our understanding of Sibelius's music and personality too, since, as Glenda Dawn Goss suggests, the composer has long served as an icon of Finnish national consciousness: "The real Sibelius has been obscured . . . by the tendency to see him solely through a nationalistic lens. This view received powerful impetus in connection with Finland's valiant and prolonged resistance to Russian domination, a resistance that Sibelius's music came to symbolize in the world."² The consequences of this tendency can be seen in a Finnish review of one of the major Soviet-era publications on Sibelius. Although little about the 1963 biography by Alexander Stupel seems immoderate or controversial today,³ and indeed, many of its suggestions about Sibelius's connections to Russian music have since been independently corroborated and further developed, Dmitry Hintze's negative assessment of Sibelius's influence on Russian composers from Rimsky-Korsakov to Rachmaninoff is symptomatic of an era when political factors affected attitudes in the writing of national history.⁴

Notwithstanding such political considerations, many of the clichés that have come to be associated with Russian music as Europe's perpetual "Other"—Oriental exoticism, emotional intensity, technical insufficiency, even, as in the case of the reputation of Pyotr Tchaikovsky, sexual deviance and effeminacy⁵—have meant that commentators have tended to downplay comparisons between Sibelius and Russian composers, preferring

instead to incorporate Sibelius into the European mainstream. The posture adopted in Walter Niemann's early writings—interpreted by James Hepokoski as “a priestlike gesture within the cultic institution intended to keep pure the sacred space of Germanic symphonism”—is a case in point.⁶ Although dismissive of Sibelius's handling of the symphony, which he saw as nothing more than “an imitation of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* in a Finnish dialect,”⁷ Niemann was nonetheless keen to emphasize Sibelius's status as a composer with organic, Western-oriented links to Scandinavia rather than Finland's occupying neighbor to the east. Crucially, for Niemann, Sibelius's works were free from the emotional and structural shortcomings that were supposedly so characteristic of Tchaikovsky:

Sibelius's broad and expressive approach to melody frequently has an unmistakable affinity with that of Tchaikovsky, and as a symphonist, Sibelius has without question borrowed many ideas from the symphonies of the Russian master; above all the E-minor symphony and the *Pathétique*. Except that Sibelius is more reserved in his expression, less decorative, less contrived and sentimental, less differentiated than the Russian master, despite all of his striking intensity of emotion and Slavic fatalism. Against our will and as if hypnotized, we are at the mercy of the weak and sensual Russian. The stern and steely Finn appeals to heart and mind. You will search in vain in Sibelius for movements such as the half-barbarian finales of Tchaikovsky's symphonies.⁸

More unequivocal admirers of Sibelius's music continued this trend by pointing out how his symphonies departed from Russian models on both temperamental and structural grounds. Cecil Grey's argument that “the symphonies of Sibelius represent the highest point attained in this form since the death of Beethoven” rests on a concomitant dismissal of Russian music as “eastern rather than northern in geographical character and atmosphere.”⁹ Bengt de Törne, similarly keen to emphasize Sibelius's Teutonic credentials, ultimately dismissed the importance of Tchaikovsky's influence, seeing Sibelius as altogether more epic, virile, and self-possessed, and thus correspondingly free from the existential traits of the Russian soul: “Russian music is famous for its gloomy tints. Yet these magnificent sombre colours are essentially different from those of the North, being conditioned by the Slav atmosphere of submission, despair and death.”¹⁰ Any arguments in favor of Sibelius's exclusively and essentially Nordic identity are, whether consciously or not, indebted to a whole set of stereotypes about the national and emotional character of Russian music.

The situation has changed, of course, not least as a result of the publication of Erik Tawaststjerna's critical biography.¹¹ Not only did it paint a

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far more detailed picture of Sibelius's life than had previously been available, it also began to overturn widespread assumptions about his musical origins. As Tim Howell writes:

Erik Tawaststjerna has revealed that far from being a nationalist figure separated from mainstream European developments by living in his native Finland, Sibelius travelled extensively, was fully aware of current trends in music, thought, discussed and came to terms with the complex nature of twentieth-century composition and from various stylistic influences gradually formed a personal and highly original style.¹²

Within this welcome development in Sibelius criticism, however, the influence of Russian music has been the subject of comparatively little detailed analysis, and figures such as Sibelius's Russian violin teacher, Mitrofan Wasilieff, have only recently been restored to the historical record. As Goss argues: "The idea of a *Russian's* helping to shape the national icon was more than most Finns could stand in the aftermath of the horrible events of the first half of the twentieth century."¹³

Thus the purpose of this essay is first to set out the broad political and historical context that shaped Russo-Finnish relations between 1809 and 1917, and second to consider the close personal, intellectual, and artistic ties that bound together cultural figures on both sides of the border, before then turning to an examination of the various ways in which Russian music played a profound role in Sibelius's evolution as a Finnish and European composer.

The Russian Empire and the Grand Duchy of Finland

In trying to disentangle some of the myths surrounding Sibelius's role in the development of Finnish national consciousness and the move to political self-determination, the best place to start is, ironically enough, one of his most obviously patriotic and overtly political works: *Finlandia*. Traditionally read as a protest against Russian domination, the work was subject to a highly politicized interpretation in which Sibelius himself was complicit:

It was actually rather late that *Finlandia* was performed under its final title. At the farewell concert of the Philharmonic Orchestra before leaving for Paris, when the tone-poem was played for the first time in its revised form, it was called "Suomi." It was introduced by the same name in Scandinavia; in German towns it was called "Vaterland," and in Paris "La Patrie." In Finland its performance was forbidden during the years of unrest, and in other parts of the Empire it was not allowed

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to be played under any name that in any way indicated its patriotic character. When I conducted in Reval and Riga by invitation in the summer of 1904, I had to call it “Impromptu.”¹⁴

However, as Harold Johnson argues, this was a rather dramatic and even questionable interpretation of the situation, and one, moreover, that was written several decades after the events described:

It is true that at the concert to which the composer alluded the tone poem was officially listed on the programme as *Suomi*, a title that had no meaning for the Russians. But in all the newspapers it was listed as *Finlandia*. Just how late is “rather late” we cannot say. It is a matter of record, however, that *Finlandia* was performed under that title in Helsinki during November 1901 and through the remaining years when Finland was still a part of the Russian Empire. Had Governor General Bobrikov been interested, he could have purchased a copy of *Finlandia* from a local music store.¹⁵

An investigation into the origins of *Finlandia* reveals a still more complicated story. The music that was to become *Finlandia* derives from the six *Tableaux from Ancient History* that were staged in Helsinki in November 1899. Ostensibly designed to raise money for the pensions of journalists, the tableaux offered, in Tawaststjerna’s words, “both moral and material support to a free press that was battling to maintain its independence in the face of Czarist pressure.”¹⁶ In them were depicted significant stages of Finland’s history, from the origins of the *Kalevala* and the baptism of the Finnish people by Bishop Henrik of Uppsala, to the sixteenth-century court of Duke John at Turku, and the events of the Thirty Years’ War and the Great Northern War (during which Finland was ravaged by Russian forces between 1714 and 1721, a period referred to as “The Greater Wrath”). As Derek Fewster suggests, this particular historical scene may have been interpreted as an instance of anti-Russian sentiment around the turn of the century:

The fifth tableau was intended as a striking allegory to modern Finland: Mother Finland with her children, sitting in the snow and surrounded by the genies of Death, Frost, Hunger and War, during the Great Northern War. Performing such an offensive tableau—intended as a “memory” of what Russia was all about—was a striking choice and a fascinating example of how the previously complaisant and loyal Finns now could be served anti-Russian sentiments without half the public leaving the theatre in outrage.¹⁷

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In the sixth tableau, however, the depiction of Russia's involvement was subtly yet significantly transformed. Titled "Suomi Herää!" (Finland, awake!) it evoked the nineteenth century through a series of historical figures who had contributed to Finland's discovery of its own identity as a nation: "These included Czar Alexander II, the poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg, Johan Vilhelm Snellman inspiring his students to think of the possibility of Finnish independence, and Elias Lönnrot transcribing the runes of the epic, *Kalevala*."¹⁸

In order to understand the presence of such a seemingly unlikely figure as the Russian emperor Alexander II in the score that gave rise to a work as patriotic as *Finlandia*, it is necessary to look back at the circumstances of Finland's incorporation into the Russian Empire. Over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Russia had been involved in a number of conflicts with Poland and Sweden centering on political and economic control over the Baltic region. With its recently founded capital, St. Petersburg, vulnerable to attack from the West, Russia sought to incorporate territory that would provide it with an adequate form of defense. To this end, Russia invaded Finland in February 1808, with Tsar Alexander I declaring his intention to annex the Finnish territories that had been part of the Swedish kingdom since the thirteenth century. By the end of the year, Finland was conquered, and in 1809 it was formally declared a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. Russia's imperial expansion did not, however, immediately lead to a period of Russification. Alexander was wary of Napoleon's ambitions (despite his support for Russia's attack on Sweden) and needed to guarantee Finland's loyalty in the event of any conflict with France. As Edward Thaden argues:

Russia's position was not secure unless she could count on the cooperation of local native elites in newly annexed areas. To assure such cooperation, Russia allowed them to enjoy certain rights and privileges as long as they remained loyal to the tsar and with the implied understanding that they would maintain a well-regulated society arranged into traditional social orders.¹⁹

Russia itself was a multiethnic, multinational, multilingual empire, and its constituent elements enjoyed considerable de facto autonomy, not least because the empire's central administration was weak, and government across huge geographical distances was far from easy. It was also the case, as Janet Hartley has suggested, that "making Finland a Grand Duchy rather than directly incorporating the country into the Russian Empire would possibly also make Russia's gain more palatable to other European powers."²⁰ Within this context, Alexander's charter to the Finnish Diet at Porvoo (Borgå) in 1809 appeared to grant Finland considerable self-rule:

Having by the will of the Almighty entered into possession of the Grand Duchy of Finland, We have hereby seen fit once more to confirm and ratify the religion, basic laws, rights and privileges which each estate of the said Duchy in particular and all subjects therein resident, both high and low, have hitherto enjoyed according to its constitution, promising to maintain them inviolably in full force and effect.²¹

Even before convening a Diet (itself a striking gesture toward Finnish autonomy), Alexander had appeared to view Finland not just as an administrative province of Russia but as a nation in its own right. The manifesto proclaimed in June 1808 on the union of Finland with the Russian Empire contained the famous claim: “The inhabitants of conquered Finland are to be numbered from this time forth amongst the peoples under the scepter of Russia and with them shall make up the Empire.”²² Yet exactly what Alexander understood by such words as *constitution*, *basic laws*, and *rights* was open to considerable interpretation, as Hartley notes: “He was very careless in his use of potentially loaded words and concepts in his conversations and correspondence. . . . To some extent Alexander was simply using words and phrases which were fashionable at the time without much awareness of their potential significance.”²³ Moreover, the practical implications of his words also went unelaborated: “Finland received no written constitution (nor any agreement about the form of government at all), no declaration of the rights of man, but simply a vague acknowledgment of the *status quo*.”²⁴

Yet what mattered about Alexander’s statements was not what particular form of constitution he had subscribed to, but the very fact that he appeared to have agreed to limit the exercise of autocracy at all. Within this semantic, legal, and institutional vacuum, Finland soon began to enjoy considerable practical autonomy, even if this remained the gift of the Russian autocrat rather than an inviolable constitutional right. Indeed, having established an autonomous administrative structure for the Grand Duchy, Alexander—perhaps unwillingly—established the conditions for its political development, both as a nation and as a state, in ways that would have been impossible under Swedish rule. Ironically, Russian autocracy may even have been advantageous to the development of Finnish autonomy, since the Governor-General—the tsar’s personal representative in Finland and the only Russian official in the Grand Duchy—was the sole provincial governor not required to answer to the Governing Senate, the State Council, or the various ministries that exercised authority in Russia itself. Moreover, the constitutional position of Finland, and indeed of all the recently incorporated Baltic realms, was of direct interest to

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thinkers in Russia, too. Alexander had a reputation as something of a liberal reformer and, together with his adviser Mikhail Speransky, drew conclusions about the possible future of Russia from the social and political situation in the western provinces:

Alexander . . . believed that Russia had much to learn from Finland, Poland, and the Baltic provinces. The free peasants from Finland, the emancipation of the peasants in the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807, the emancipation of the Estonian and Latvian peasants in the three Baltic provinces between 1816 and 1819, and the Polish Constitutional Charter of 1815 all seemed to offer examples that Russia herself might follow.²⁵

Russian interest in Finland was not always so high-minded, however, and one of Russia's primary interests lay in isolating Finland from Swedish influence. Partly this was a question of securing Finland's loyalty, as Fewster observes: "The early Emperors were well aware of the importance of distancing the Finns from their previous Swedish identity and heritage: fostering or promoting an alternative Finnish nationalism was one way of combating possible revanchism and rebellious sentiments."²⁶ Respect for Finland's status may also have been a question of defending Russia's own autocratic makeup, with the Grand Duchy acting as a *cordon sanitaire* designed to protect Russia from European influence, as Michael Branch argues: "Russia isolated itself against the virus of Swedish constitutional structures and of the liberality of Swedish society by making Finland in 1809 virtually a self-governing country."²⁷

Russian involvement in Finland was not simply based on benign absence or strategic self-interest. In a number of distinct ways, Russia actively supported the development of Finnish national consciousness and tolerated a degree of administrative autonomy. Many of the archetypal symbols of Finnish national consciousness were in fact dependent on Russian patronage and, at this early stage at least, were not indicative of any resistance or rebellion within the Grand Duchy itself. The establishment of institutions such as the University of Helsinki (moved to the capital after a fire at the Åbo/Turku Academy in 1827) and the Finnish Literature Society (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, founded 1831) was sponsored by the Russian authorities as a way of promoting a form of Finnish nationalism that would be both loyal and grateful to imperial rule.²⁸ The publication of Lönnrot's edition of the *Kalevala* by the Finnish Literature Society in 1835 was emblematic not just of the development of Finnish nationalism but, rather more subtly, of the shared intellectual interests of many Russian and Finnish scholars at the time. Branch points to the fact that

“for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the largest and probably the most outstanding centre for academic research and learning in the North-East Baltic region was the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg.”²⁹ In particular, the study of Finno-Ugric philology was a field that enjoyed considerable practical support in Russia:³⁰ “For almost 150 years, the Academy of Sciences together with bodies working under its aegis, provided a scientific apparatus for the planning and execution of fieldwork. Over the same period, the Academy assembled a library and an archive of Finno-Ugric materials that was unsurpassed in Europe.”³¹ Typical of this project was the work of figures such as Matthias Castrén and Anders Johan Sjögren. Before becoming the first professor of Finnish language and literature at the University of Helsinki in 1850, Castrén, supported by the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, carried out extensive ethnographic and philological fieldwork in northern Russia and Siberia. Likewise, the work of the linguist Sjögren, who traveled through Russia between the 1820s and the 1850s and did much to make St. Petersburg the leading center of Finno-Ugric studies, suggests that in the early phase of Finland’s incorporation into the empire, Russo-Finnish relations were characterized by a degree of mutual interest.

The reign of Nicholas I from 1825 to 1855 continued the course set by Alexander I, and the Finns demonstrated little of the independent spirit of Congress Poland that led to the uprising of 1830–31; indeed, the Finnish Guard actively participated in the Russian suppression of the Polish uprising, and as Jussi Jalonen suggests, Finnish autonomy was, at least in part, a reward for its early loyalty to its new ruler.³² Tuomo Polvinen argues that of all Russian provinces, Finland was the one that caused St. Petersburg the least anxiety:

Through the bestowal and preservation of autonomy the regime successful secured the loyalty of the Finns. It was not in vain that Nicholas I had earlier advised: “Leave the Finns in peace. Theirs is the only province in my great realm which during my whole reign has not caused me even a minute of concern or dissatisfaction.” As Osmo Jussila aptly points out, the Finns had acquired a “good conservative reputation” at the Imperial court in St. Petersburg; for a long time it was not considered necessary to question Finnish trustworthiness. On the contrary, during the reform era of the 1860s and 1870s the autonomous administration of the dependable Grand Duchy was decisively strengthened.³³

If Nicholas I pursued Alexander’s policy of benign coexistence, then the accession of Alexander II inaugurated a period of more explicit support for

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Finnish autonomous administration and offered what David Kirby has called “an end to the period of ‘frozen constitutionalism.’”³⁴ In part, Alexander II’s approach to Finland was characteristic of the liberal tenor of the start of his reign, which saw a number of major reforms in Russia itself, including the abolition of serfdom in 1861. In 1863, he convened the Finnish Diet for the first time since 1809, and it was to meet regularly thereafter. His speech to the Diet struck what had become the traditional balance between respect for Finnish constitutionalism and Russian autocracy:

Many of the provisions of the fundamental laws of the Grand Duchy are no longer applicable to the state of affairs existing since its union with the Empire; others lack clarity and precision. Desirous of remedying these imperfections it is My intension to have a draft law carefully prepared which will contain explanations and supplements to these provisions, and which will be submitted to the scrutiny of the Estates at the next Diet, which I contemplate convening in three years’ time. Whilst maintaining the principle of constitutional monarchy inherent to the customs of the Finnish people, and of which principle all their laws and institutions bear the impress, I wish to include in this projected measure a more extended right than that which the Estates now possess in regard to the regulation of taxation and the right of initiating motions, which they formerly possessed; reserving for Myself however the initiative in all matters concerning the alterations of the fundamental laws.³⁵

The tension here would play a major part in the conflicts that erupted around the turn of the century. On the one hand, Finns seized on Alexander’s reference to the distinctly unautocratic “principle of constitutional monarchy inherent to the customs of the Finnish people,” as well as on his intimation that any changes to Finnish legality would be subject to scrutiny by the Diet. On the other, the emperor arrogated to himself the explicitly autocratic right to alter the country’s fundamental laws. For the time being, however, Russian interference was minimal, not least because after its defeat in the Crimean War Russia had little energy or authority to squander on the fruitless subjugation of an otherwise loyal province.

Finland in fact thrived as a nation within the Russian Empire far more than it would have done as a provincial backwater of Sweden, developing many of the symbols and institutions associated with nationhood that it had lacked under Swedish rule. A national bank had been established as early as 1812, and a separate currency—the mark—was issued from 1860. The language edict of August 1863 established Finnish as an equal language alongside Swedish. Not only were the Finnish people represented

by a Diet and administered by a senate, but, from 1878, they were defended by an army commanded by its own officers.³⁶ Indeed, from the Russian point of view, there was considerable disparity between social and economic life on either side of the border. Partly this was a natural consequence of the different sizes of the two countries. Talented and ambitious Finns could readily take advantage of the career possibilities available to them through their much larger and comparatively underdeveloped neighbor, whether by serving in the Imperial army and the civil service (and not just in the State Secretariat for Finnish Affairs in St. Petersburg) or trading extensively and profitably with Russian partners. Conversely, institutional, social, and linguistic factors meant that Russians were often unable to achieve anything similar in Finland, which was governed primarily by local elites. Moreover, much of Finland's economic development was the direct result of not having to provide for many of the costs borne by the Russian Empire (Finns were not conscripted into the Russian army but could volunteer to serve). Thus when Nikolay Bobrikov arrived in Finland as Governor-General in 1898, his findings were typical of a strain in Russian nationalist thinking that was affronted by Finnish autonomy:

He recognised that the country had achieved considerable prosperity, but claimed that it was based on the privileges so generously provided by the Russian monarchy throughout the decades. He cited above all the incomparably light share of the military burden borne by the Finns. This had freed labour for other tasks and saved funds, which were channelled, for example, into education, railways construction, and other projects. The Finnish treasury took no part at all in financing the Foreign Ministry of the Ministry for the Navy; nor did it provide a penny towards maintaining fortifications.³⁷

This, then, was the context of Russo-Finnish political relations as it stood around the turn of the century. Finland's place in the loosely administered, multiethnic Russian Empire had provided the ideal conditions for its growth as a nation, and Finnish nationalists had made astute use of the opportunities available to them. Although tensions between Russia and Finland around the turn of the century ran high, it is important to recall that for a large part of the nineteenth century, the relationship had been cordial and productive.

By the 1890s, however, Russia had changed dramatically as well. Although still an empire in name, it had come to think of itself less as a diverse set of territories bound together by shared loyalty to the tsar, and more of a nation-state in the modern sense. It had begun to develop a far more efficient central administration, and formerly autonomous provinces came

increasingly under the control of the government in St. Petersburg. In the case of the western borderlands, the discourse of Pan-Slavism meant that nations such as Poland or Ukraine were subject to Russification on ethnic grounds. In the Caucasus and Central Asia, Orientalist theories justified expansion because Russia saw itself as a European power bringing civilization to barbarian lands in the east. Finland, however, constituted a unique case: Russification could barely be defended on ethnic grounds, since Finland was not a Slavic nation; and its flourishing economy and progressive social makeup meant that it was not in need of Russian intervention to promote its further development and enlightenment. Yet geopolitical factors did play a significant role in shaping Russia's attitude to the Grand Duchy. Where Finland had once provided a barrier against Sweden, it had now come to resemble the weak link in Russia's defense against a newly united and increasingly confident Germany, to whom many Finns looked with considerable sympathy.

If Russian policy in Finland was in part a pragmatic response to such factors, it was also driven by ideology. By the 1890s, the tendency of many Finns to assert that their country was a constitutional monarchy in union with Russia offended Russian nationalist faith in the primacy of autocracy (not least because Finns referred to Alexander I as the instigator of their particular constitutional arrangement). Accordingly, the years referred to as the first and second periods of oppression (1899–1905 and 1908–17 respectively) can be seen, at least in part, as an attempt to resolve the ambiguities inherent in the statements made about the nature of Russian rule in Finland by Alexander I and reiterated by Alexander II. Patriotic Finnish senators argued that no changes could be made to national institutions without the express agreement of the Diet; yet the Russians preferred to treat both the Diet and the Senate as consultative bodies, whose purpose was to ratify and enact imperial legislation in what was no more than a province within the empire. Although the Finnish postal system had been placed under Russian control as early as 1890, the main attempts at curbing Finnish constitutionalism date from the period of Bobrikov's tenure as Governor-General (1898–1904). In February 1899, Nicholas II issued his so-called February Manifesto, which aimed to limit Finland's legislative power to specifically local issues, reserving imperial matters to the tsar and his government in St. Petersburg (although the nature of the difference between local and imperial issues was not clarified). In 1900, the Language Manifesto defined Russian as the official language of administration within the Grand Duchy. The Conscription Act of 1901 sought to bring military service in Finland into line with policy throughout the empire and force Finns to serve in the Russian army. Censorship was increased, and from 1903, Bobrikov was granted quasi-dictatorial powers to pursue the policies of Russification.

Russian attempts to limit Finnish constitutional freedom and stifle the expression of national consciousness were always going to provoke a sharp response on the part of Finns, whatever their political views, class background, or sense of national identity. Petitions were made directly to Nicholas II reminding him that, as tsar, he had sworn to uphold the oaths made by his predecessors. The most dramatic of these petitions was the Great Address of March 1900, containing more than half a million signatures collected without the knowledge of the Russian authorities. Nicholas's refusal to accept the delegation bearing the address only added to the impression that he had betrayed his constitutional vow. After Bobrikov's assassination by Eugen Schauman in 1904, Russification became the official policy in the Grand Duchy.³⁸ Yet it is important not to view Russian rule in Finland as a monolithic affair. While conservative newspapers wrote approvingly of Bobrikov's policies, politicians and members of the court expressed considerable reservations. Sergei Witte, Russian finance minister between 1892 and 1903, feared that Bobrikov's policies would provoke the resentment of otherwise loyal subjects. There was even support for Finland from within the imperial family. The widow of Alexander III, the Dowager Empress Maria Fyodorovna, wrote to her son, Nicholas II, to denounce Russian policy in Finland:

It is a perfect mystery to me how you, my dear good Nicky, whose sense of justice has always been so strong, can allow a liar like Bobrikov to lead and deceive you! . . . Everything there, where matters always ran smoothly and the people were always happy and content, is now shattered and changed and the seeds of discord and hate have been sowed—and all this in the name of so-called patriotism! What an excellent example of the meaning of that word!

Everything that has been, and is being, done in Finland is based on lies and betrayal, and is leading straight to revolution. . . .

The few Senators whom Bobrikov has allowed you to meet were his henchmen, who lied to you in saying that everything was fine and that only a small minority in Finland were protesting. Those who tell you that the crushing of that country is your history's noblest page are blackguards. Here and throughout Europe, indeed everywhere, enraged voices can be heard.

What causes me to suffer above all is that I love Finland just as I love all of Russia, and what causes me despair is that you, who are so dear to me, have been induced to do all these iniquities, which you would never have done on your own initiative.³⁹

The Dowager Empress's views were certainly shaped by the fact that she was born Dagmar, Princess of Denmark, yet they are also testament to

the diversity of views within elite circles in St. Petersburg. As Polvinen notes, “Bobrikov did not represent all of Russia.”⁴⁰ And to see the history of Russo-Finnish affairs solely, or even predominantly, through the prism of his tenure as Governor-General is to neglect other significant aspects of the relationship between the two countries.

The complexity of Russian nationalism is mirrored as well by the intricacies of Finnish national identity around the turn of the century. Theories of nineteenth-century small-state nationalism tend to subsume Finland into a broad account of how homogenous ethnic and linguistic groups struggled to achieve self-determination within overarching multiethnic territories dominated by a particular ruling class (such as the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and even British empires).⁴¹ Yet Finland does not entirely fit this model, as Risto Alapuro argues: “It is not quite correct to picture Finland as a colonial territory on an Eastern European periphery struggling through nationalism to free itself from the dilemma of uneven development.”⁴² Alapuro then goes on to list the ways in which Finland constituted an exception to a widely accepted view of nationalism: Finland enjoyed its own autonomous administration within the empire; it was more economically advanced than the ruling power; and it was not governed by a foreign elite.⁴³ But the single factor that complicated nationalist responses to Russian rule in Finland was the complex composition of Finnish society. According to the received narrative of Finnish self-determination, a group of Finnish nationalists, freed from Swedish rule and unwilling to undergo Russification, developed a national language and culture that articulated its aspiration to statehood. Yet Finnish society in the nineteenth century was not always as homogenous or harmonious as this vision suggests. Divided into four estates (the nobility, the clergy, the burghers, and the peasants) and two major language groups (Finnish and Swedish), Finnish society was often subject to internal divisions—divisions that were further complicated by people who often had multiple allegiances to more than one social or linguistic faction. Thus, as Thaden notes, “when the long-dreaded full-scale attack of the Russifiers struck Finland the nation was in no condition to adopt a policy of united resistance. Although their dismay over the turn of the events was almost universal, the Finns’ internal conflicts were so bitter that no agreement on a national policy could be achieved.”⁴⁴

Finnish responses to Russian policy in the Grand Duchy were, then, contingent on significant differences within Finnish society itself. The Finnish nationalist (or so-called Fennomans) movement was, initially at least, the greatest beneficiary of Russian rule; its cause was supported by the Russians in an attempt to weaken Swedish influence, and both politically and culturally its members were often sympathetic to Russian values, at least before

the years of oppression. By contrast, members of the Swedish party (or Svecoman movement) “were on the whole more determined opponents of Russification than were Finnish speakers,”⁴⁵ and some even argued that “the ‘ultra-Fennomans’ were consciously or unconsciously serving the purposes of Russia.”⁴⁶ Moreover, the Fennomans movement was internally divided along generational lines: “The established leaders of the Fennomans party were intellectually conservative, Lutheran-clerical, and anti-Semitic; they had little sympathy for liberal ideas.”⁴⁷ Yet by 1880 or so, “some members of the party (particularly the younger ones), influenced in part by ideas from the West, considered it time to pay attention to problems of the modern world of wider relevance than Finnish-Swedish linguistic antagonism.”⁴⁸ The causes that were of greatest interest to the Nuorsuomalainen Puolue (Young Finnish Party) were not those of language, culture, and nationality that had proved too divisive within Finnish society in the middle of the nineteenth century, but those of “liberalism, democracy, and constitutionalism.”⁴⁹ Believing that these values were most ardently and effectively espoused by the Svecomans, the Young Finns put aside issues of language in order to defend the principles of Finland’s constitutional freedoms, whereas the “Old Finns” (led by Yrjö Sakari Yrjö-Koskinen, who had Fennicized his Swedish name of Georg Zakarias Forsman) preferred a policy of compliance with what they saw as more moderate elements in the Russian administration.⁵⁰ Thus the question of whether Finland should pursue a policy of resistance to or accommodation with Russia revealed sharp fault lines within Finnish society itself.

Sibelius is often read in the context of his own age, and it is true he came to maturity as an artist at the height of Russification, becoming a symbol of Finnish resistance to imperial domination. Yet we should also look back to the earlier, more optimistic years in the Russo-Finnish relationship, years that did as much to form modern Finland as did the events of 1899 to 1917. When, during the years of oppression, Finns laid flowers at the statue of Alexander II in Helsinki’s Senate Square, they were implicitly criticizing the current policies of Nicholas II by comparing him to his illustrious forebear. The monument to Alexander II depicts him surrounded by the symbols of “Law,” “Light,” “Labor,” and “Peace,” just as the nearby House of the Estates (1891) represents Alexander I confirming the basic laws of Finland at the Diet of Porvoo in 1809. And in 1900, in the wake of the February Manifesto, the Finnish pavilion at the Paris Universal Exposition included Ville Vallgren’s stele for Alexander II as a positive symbol of Russia’s role in Finnish history and society.⁵¹ *Finlandia*, itself a product of the first wave of Russification, thus encapsulates a specific moment in a dynamic historical process and should be read against the evolving background of both Russian and Finnish societies. In its allusion

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to Alexander II as the spirit of history, *Finlandia* encodes the various competing ideas that Russia could signify to patriotic Finns in 1899, and embodies an interpretation of Finnish history in which Russia had played a constructive role quite distinct from the repressive policies of Nicholas II and his nationalist supporters.

Russian Culture and the Arts in Finland

Although some of Sibelius's works were clearly written with a patriotic intent (and perceived as such), his personality was by and large apolitical.⁵² Ekman's biography quotes him as saying: "Politics have never interested me in themselves. That is to say—all empty talk of political questions, all amateurish politicising I have always hated. I have always tried to make my contribution in another way."⁵³ There were important personal considerations that led Sibelius to remain aloof from many of the most heated debates in Finnish society, not the least of which was his decidedly complex attitude to Finnish nationalism. Like many members of the Fennoman movement, he was a native speaker of Swedish. Despite the decisive influence of his marriage to Aino Järnefelt, a member of one of the most prominent Fennoman families, he was nonetheless capable of expressing considerable skepticism about key elements of the nationalist project. In 1910, for instance, he noted in his diary: "Looked at the *Kalevala* and it struck me—how I have grown away from this naïve poetry."⁵⁴ On the eve of the Great War, he likewise despaired about the quality of the Finnish leadership: "I would set greater store by the Swedish-speaking element of the population than I do by our Finns!"⁵⁵ Sibelius's silence on many of the key questions of turn-of-the-century Finnish politics (not least his explicit rejection of Robert Kajanus's interpretation of the Second Symphony as an anti-Russian narrative of Finnish self-realization) is persuasive evidence both of his acute sensitivity to being caught up in contentious topics and of the absolute primacy of artistic creativity in his emotional makeup.

The dominance of political factors in discussions of Russo-Finnish relations has tended to overshadow the profound cultural contacts that existed between the two countries. If Finnish politics were characterized by sharp debates about internal politics and external diplomacy, then the cultural sphere was more responsive to a broad range of cosmopolitan influences, of which Russia was but one.⁵⁶ Sibelius's exposure to Russia began early; his home town Hämeenlinna (Tavastehus in Swedish) hosted a Russian garrison. As Sibelius recalled:

The Russian officers and their families brought a breath of another and larger world, which it was interesting to become acquainted

with, and provided the good citizens of Tavastehus with much material for wonder and observation. The Russian element played an important element in my childhood, for at that time the relationship between Finns and Russians was not what it became later: both sides tried to maintain a good understanding.⁵⁷

Musically speaking, the many miniatures for violin and piano and for piano solo that Sibelius wrote from a young age clearly betray the influence of the Russian repertoire that would have been prevalent in the schools and salons of Hämeenlinna (and Helsinki, too). As Goss writes:

Clearly, it was the violinists associated with Russia and especially with Saint Petersburg who were of first importance to him. With some awe he writes of meeting the violin “virtuoso” Trostchefskey, probably a music-loving lieutenant in the local garrison; of the nearly unbelievable performance of Gerhard Brassin, a Belgian violinist based in Saint Petersburg; of the fabulous violin that had been owned by Ferdinand Laub, professor of violin at Moscow Conservatory; of playing the works of Henry Vieuxtemps, another Belgian violinist who taught at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory; and of Jacques-Pierre Rode, who had been violinist to the czar. Sibelius’s first violin teacher in Helsinki, Mitrofan Wasilieff, came to the Helsinki Music Institute from Saint Petersburg where he had played with the Imperial String Quartet; according to Sibelius, he bore the very best references from none other than Anton Rubinstein. Sibelius reports that he himself played Rubinstein’s C minor quartet at a glittering evening held in one of Helsinki’s elegant homes.⁵⁸

A broader and more clearly articulated vision of Russian culture emerged in 1889, when Sibelius became acquainted with the group of young Fennoman artists associated with the Finnish-language newspaper *Päivälehti*. For all their nationalist credentials, figures such as Arvid and Eero Järnefelt nonetheless had strong connections with Russian artistic and social circles, as did their sister, Aino, who became Sibelius’s wife in 1892. The Järnefelts’ interest in the Russian arts stemmed largely from their family background; their mother, Elisabeth Järnefelt (née Clodt von Jürgensburg), was born into a prominent St. Petersburg aristocratic family in 1839. (By contrast, their father, Alexander Järnefelt, embodied the administrative and practical links between the two countries. After serving in the Russian army he returned to Finland as governor of Mikkeli, Kuopio, and Vaasa, as well as serving in the administration of the Finnish Senate.) Along with being a major author in his own right, Arvid Järnefelt was a prominent disciple of Lev Tolstoy,

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several of whose works he translated into Finnish and whose ideals he tried to embody in his daily life.⁵⁹ Tolstoyan principles of social equality, proximity to the people, passive resistance to evil, and the cultivation of the simple life ran deep in the Järnefelt family, and many of the copies of Tolstoy's works in Sibelius's library belonged in fact to his wife.⁶⁰ Sibelius himself was not immune from moments of Tolstoyan romanticism, here expressed in a letter to his wife: "In my new sheepskin coat I look like a veritable peasant. It feels so nice: it would be good if one did not have to pretend to be upper class in other circumstances as well."⁶¹ Sibelius was generally more familiar with classical works of Russian literature, describing Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as "head and shoulders above Turgenev,"⁶² and sending Aino a copy of Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* from Vienna in March 1891.⁶³ But it was in the field of the visual arts that the Järnefelt family was most intimately connected with Russian culture. Elisabeth's family contained a large number of artists, including the sculptor Pyotr Clodt von Jürgensburg and the realist painter Mikhail Clodt. Appropriately enough, Eero Järnefelt trained at the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg from 1883



Figure 1. Eero Järnefelt, *Summernight Moon*, 1889.

to 1886, and his paintings betray the profound influence of nineteenth-century Russian realism (see Figure 1).⁶⁴

Eero was rather typical of Russo-Finnish relations in the visual arts.⁶⁵ Not only had previous generations of Finnish artists, such as Albert Edelfelt, also trained in St. Petersburg, but Russian patrons and critics generally looked to Finland for evidence of the vitality of the arts in the empire. Edelfelt himself was exhibited widely in Russia around the turn of the century and enjoyed the particular patronage of Nicholas II, painting a number of official and private portraits for the royal family.⁶⁶ And in the autumn of 1898, Sergei Diaghilev organized the inaugural exhibition of the *Mir iskusstva* (World of Art) group in St. Petersburg, in which paintings by both Russian and Finnish artists were displayed with equal prominence.⁶⁷ As the case of Edelfelt suggests, rising tensions between Russia and Finland did not necessarily impede cultural contacts between the two countries. Indeed, such contacts were indicative of a shared disdain for Russian autocracy, which frequently provided a common cause for Finnish and Russian artists. An important, if excessively mythologized, feature of the Russian arts was a critical attitude to authority. This attitude was typical of the liberal politics of the Russian intelligentsia, described by Richard Taruskin as “a noble tradition of artistic and social thought—one that abhorred injustice and political repression, but also one that valued social commitment, participation in one’s community, and solidarity with people.”⁶⁸ These were the politics of the Järnefelt family, as well as of many Finnish artists who adopted not just the artistic techniques but also the social commitment of their Russian colleagues. During periods of intense Russification, Russian artists lent their support to the Finnish cause, arguing that the autocracy did not represent Russia itself; similarly, Finnish artists could express anti-autocratic statements while maintaining their respect for what they saw as the positive aspects of Russian culture.

The convergence of such political and artistic agendas is perhaps clearest in the relationship between Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Maxim Gorky. In the wake of the first Russian Revolution of 1905, Gallen-Kallela organized a literary and musical evening that revealed the shared interests of Finnish nationalists and Russian radicals at the time:

On 1 February 1906 . . . an unusual literary and musical evening took place in the Finnish National Theatre. Maxim Gorky and Eino Leino read excerpts from their works, and Kajanus conducted Tchaikovsky’s *Serenade for Strings* and Sibelius’s *Spring Song* and *The Ferryman’s Bride* while the proceedings went to those who had suffered during the recent unrest in Russia, i.e., the revolutionaries. The thought of Tchaikovsky and Sibelius as symbols of the bond between Finnish in-

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tellecuals and Russian radicals is not a little bizarre. After the general strike, many Russian revolutionaries took refuge in Finland where police vigilance was less strict, and where they could count on the support of both the bourgeois and the socialist elements in society. Gorky's journey had been organized on the Finnish side by Gallen-Kallela who was an active supporter of the resistance movement, even to the extent of hiding smuggled arms in his drawing-room sofa, and receiving Russian revolutionaries in his home. However, his ardour was somewhat cooled by the plans for a bank robbery that were mooted by some of the group, and he quietly withdrew to his country retreat!⁶⁹

Gallen-Kallela eventually helped to smuggle Gorky out of Finland and away from the attentions of the Russian authorities (Gorky would spend the next seven years in exile on Capri). Eero Järnefelt shared something of Gallen-Kallela's sympathy for the Russian radicals, although Sibelius—who attended a dinner hosted by his brother-in-law a few days later in honor of Gorky and Gallen-Kallela—does not appear to have recorded his reactions (more evidence, if any were needed, of his cautiously apolitical nature). Whatever the private feelings of Finns toward Russian revolutionaries, what is most striking about Gorky's stay in Finland in 1906 is the way in which Finnish artistic nationalism and Russian radical activism intersected and overlapped, at least for a time. Gallen-Kallela's 1906 portrait of Gorky is but one artistic trace of this particular moment, just as Ilya Repin's portrait of Gallen-Kallela in turn captures a later, more troubled episode in Finnish-Russian relations (Figures 2 and 3).

Yet the straightforward association between Finnish artistic nationalism and Russian liberal politics was not always so easily maintained, as the career of Robert Kajanus, Finland's leading orchestral conductor at the end of the nineteenth century and Sibelius's supporter (and sometime rival), suggests.⁷⁰ Kajanus enjoyed strong connections with Russia, traveling there regularly to conduct and performing Russian works back in Helsinki. When, in 1905, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov was dismissed from his position at the St. Petersburg Conservatory for supporting the right of students to engage in political protest,⁷¹ Kajanus refused to conduct in Russia until Rimsky-Korsakov (as well as Alexander Glazunov and Anatoliy Lyadov) had been reinstated.⁷² Yet Kajanus's behavior was not always so high-minded. In 1896, along with Sibelius and musicologist Ilmari Krohn, Kajanus applied for the position of director of music at the University of Helsinki. When Sibelius was nominated by the Finnish committee, Kajanus resorted to a number of strategies to have the decision overturned:

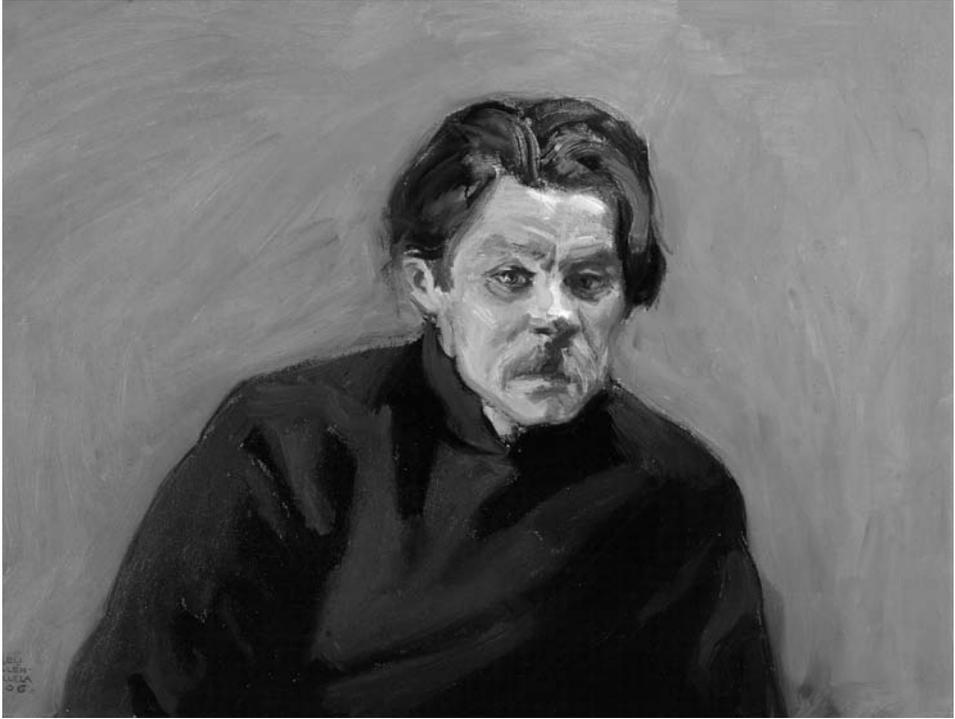


Figure 2. Axel Gallen-Kallela, *Portrait of Maxim Gorky*, 1906, Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki.

A series of labyrinthine bureaucratic twists playing out over many months gradually revealed where the real power lay. It began with Kajanus's bitter objection to the decision and his demand for a new vote. He gained one supporter. Sibelius's name then went forward to Saint Petersburg, to the man with the final authority: Carl Woldemar von Daehn (1838–1900), Finland's minister-secretary of state. In a resourceful episode of shuttle diplomacy for which he later became notorious, Kajanus himself visited Saint Petersburg. . . . On July 29, 1897, von Daehn overruled the Finns' recommendation and appointed Robert Kajanus to the position.⁷³

Although what actually happened remains unknown, Kajanus's direct appeal to the St. Petersburg establishment tainted his reputation for decades to come (Krohn was still repeating the story in the 1950s).⁷⁴ Even fifteen years later, in 1912, when Kajanus successfully urged the Russian authorities to support Finnish musical institutions threatened with major cuts to

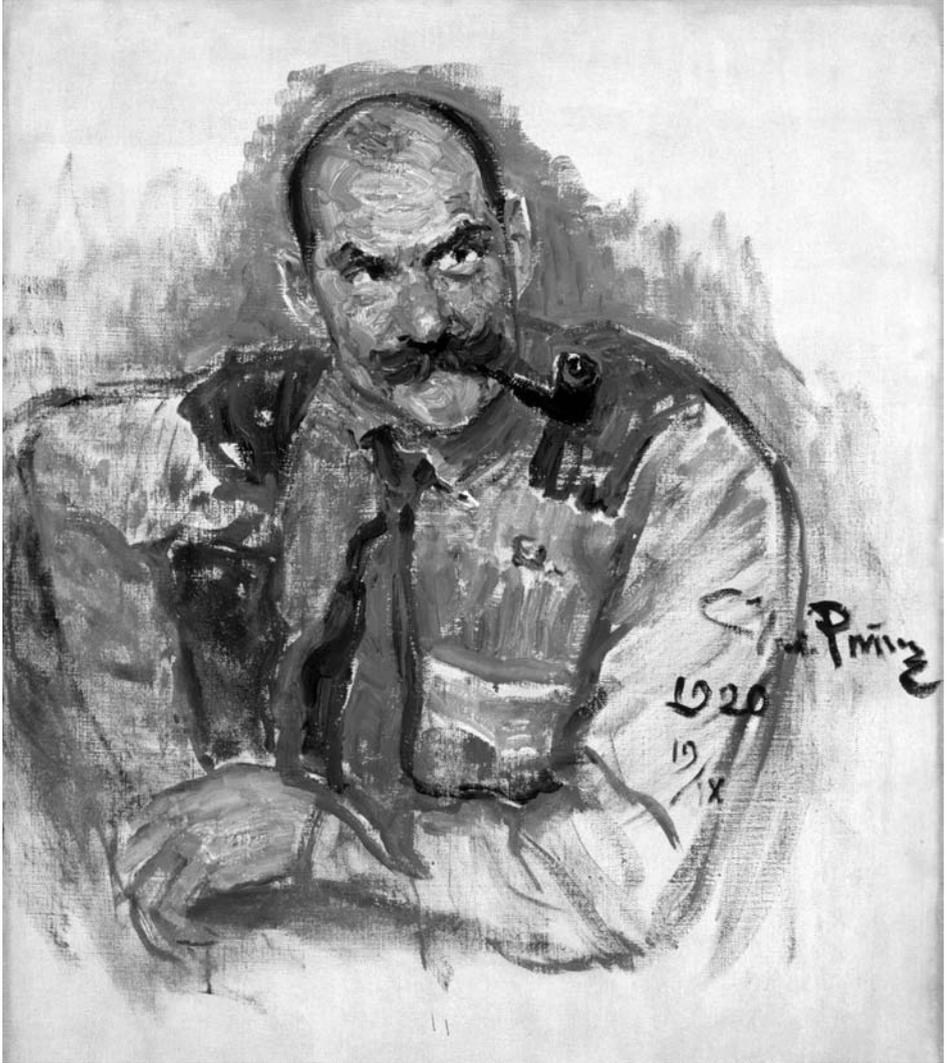


Figure 3. Ilya Repin, *Portrait of Axel Gallen-Kallela*, 1920, Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki.

the financial support provided by the Finnish senate, his astute intervention was greeted with hostility:

Kajanus went to St. Petersburg to plead the orchestra's case with Glazunov and he obtained a meeting with Kokovstov, the President of the Council of Ministers who promised to take up the matter with

the Governor-General of Finland, Seyn. There is no doubt whatsoever that Kajanus acted in a spirit of complete altruism but his intervention was much resented by certain nationalist elements and aroused strong feelings, particularly among the Swedish-speaking community, who saw him using his personal influence in the Imperial capital to further his own ends. As a result he became the victim of a highly vocal campaign and his concerts were boycotted.⁷⁵

Even Sibelius was disturbed, noting in his diary that “Kajanus has again appealed to St. Petersburg . . . and will bow and scrape to Kokovstov and Seyn.”⁷⁶ The various stories about Kajanus’s involvement with Russian artists and institutions illustrate the complex interaction of politics and national identity that shaped not only how individuals acted but also how they were perceived.

Sibelius and Russian Music

The potential influence of Russian music on Sibelius has been an important theme in critical discussion of his works from the very beginning of his career as a composer.⁷⁷ Ironically enough, given the political situation at the time, the impact of Russian works has been perceived most readily in his compositions of the 1890s and early 1900s, from *Kullervo* (1891–92) to the Violin Concerto (1903–4, revised version 1905). Although Sibelius’s letters and diaries contain few explicit or extended references to Russian music, he was happy enough to affirm his admiration for Tchaikovsky in particular, admitting to his wife that “there is much in that man that I recognize in myself.”⁷⁸ The details of Sibelius’s involvement with Russian music are, however, largely tangential. As a young musician resident in what was then part of the Russian Empire, Sibelius could well have pursued his studies in the nearest city with an established and influential conservatory: St. Petersburg. Yet despite the encouragement of his brother-in-law Eero Järnefelt, Sibelius went instead to Berlin and Vienna.⁷⁹ (It would be a later generation of Finnish composers who would orient themselves more explicitly toward Russia.)⁸⁰ In 1895, supported by Ferruccio Busoni, Glazunov, and Rimsky-Korsakov, Sibelius approached Mitrofan Belyayev, whose influential publishing house dealt exclusively with Russian composers around the turn of the century; again, the venture came to nothing.⁸¹ Sibelius’s first trip to Russia—excluding passing through St. Petersburg on his way to Italy in 1900—took place as late as December 1906, when he conducted performances of *Pohjola’s Daughter* and “Lemminkäinen’s Return” in St. Petersburg.⁸² He returned the following November, con-

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ducting the Third Symphony in both St. Petersburg and Moscow, where he also performed *Pohjola's Daughter* and a number of smaller pieces.⁸³ Initial reactions were promising. He had a firm advocate in the conductor Alexander Siloti, and even before his arrival, his name was mentioned in specialist music periodicals.⁸⁴ Years later, in an interview with *Svenska Dagbladet*, Sibelius recalled his reception in Russia with affection: "My most vivid recollection is of a concert in Moscow during the old times. There is an understanding of and an enthusiasm for music which has no counterpart elsewhere. For the Slavs, music lies in their blood."⁸⁵ The reviews of his first appearance in Russia were enthusiastic, with one explicitly linking him to the Russian tradition:

Of contemporary artists, Sibelius, as a composer, stands closest of all, by virtue of his taste, inclinations and direction, to Rimsky-Korsakov. There is the same national feeling in music, natural, spontaneous and free, the same tendency to paint in sound, the same feeling for the world of fairy tales and ancient myth, and above all, the same sense of fantasy and boldness when it comes to orchestral color. . . . Having heard this piece ["Lemminkäinen's Return"], one can only regret that the late V. V. Stasov was unable to hear it performed. How this music would have enchanted him, with his hunger for talent and originality and his happy ability to relish things, which he retained in his old age.⁸⁶

Yet reactions to performance of the Third Symphony in 1907 were more critical, and Sibelius's reputation was little helped by Siloti's careless premiere of *Nightride and Sunrise* at the end of 1908.⁸⁷ Ultimately, it would not be until after the Second World War that Sibelius's music became widely performed and appreciated in Russia, where his nationalist credentials, commitment to traditional forms, and moderate form of modernism could be readily accommodated within the framework of Socialist Realism, especially after the death of Stalin in 1953, when the Soviet Union once again began to open up to limited outside influences.⁸⁸

If the story of Sibelius's encounter with Russia itself is largely one of misunderstanding and missed opportunities, then accounts of his openness to its music have been altogether more productive. Tawaststjerna's biography points repeatedly to Russian influences on works of the early period. The opening bars of the first movement of an early Suite for Violin and Piano (JS187, 1887–88) are held to "breathe an air of Slav melancholy" deriving ultimately from Tchaikovsky,⁸⁹ and the piano work "Au crépuscule" in F-sharp minor (JS47, 1887) is described as "a rather Tchaikovskian miniature."⁹⁰ Tawaststjerna also speculates that Sibelius's characteristic use

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of “long-sustained pedal points on the tonic in the major key which become mediant in the related minor” may be related to precedents in works by Mily Balakirev (*Islamey*) and Alexander Borodin (*The Polovstian Dances* from *Prince Igor*).⁹¹ The work that evinces the most thorough-going engagement with Russian models is, though, the First Symphony (1899, revised 1900), whether in “the use of a motto theme that appears at the opening of the work,” “many orchestral details,” or “the chord of the dominant ninth . . . poised over a mediant pedal point,”⁹² all of which are traced back to Tchaikovsky, particularly to his Sixth Symphony. By contrast, the alleged similarity between the main theme of the first movement and that of Borodin’s First Symphony is, according to Tawaststjerna, “more readily discernable on paper than in performance.”⁹³ (See Example 1.) Here, Tawaststjerna alludes to Cecil Gray’s 1931 summary of Russian influences on the First Symphony:

One notes in particular a strong Russian influence here and there, especially in the thematic material, which is unusual in his work. The first subject of the initial movement, for example, is strikingly akin to that in the first movement of Borodin’s symphony in E-flat major, only sharpened and intensified; that of the second movement is distinctly reminiscent of Tchaikovsky, and the broad, sweeping theme of the *finale* is very much the kind of theme one finds in the last movements of Rachmaninoff or Glazounoff, only very much better.⁹⁴

Gray’s original observation was picked up and developed by Gerald Abraham, whose familiarity with Russian music meant that he was both more able and more inclined to discern such parallels:

As Mr. Gray points out, the first subject proper is strikingly akin to that in the first movement of Borodin’s Symphony in E-flat. . . . Admittedly, the relationship is merely one of melodic outline, not of rhythm, inflection, or general feeling. But, more curious still, there

Allegro energico ($\text{♩} = 108$)

Adagio

Example 1. Comparative first movement themes in Sibelius and Borodin. Sibelius, Symphony no. 1, first movement (principal theme) and Borodin, Symphony no. 1, first movement (opening).

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is a similar relationship between the latter part of the Borodin theme and Sibelius's *second* main subject. . . . Moreover, there are other Borodinesque traits in this first Sibelius Symphony: the throwing of the orchestral weight on to the second crotchet . . . , while only tuba and a drum mark the down-beat (cf. the scherzo of Borodin's Second Symphony), the overlapping descent of a figure through the orchestra coming off the climax just before the appearance of the second subject, the character of the scherzo with its quick repeated notes, the brassy scoring of the whole symphony.⁹⁵

The novelty of Abraham's argument lay less in recognizing discrete and superficial motivic borrowings, and more in asserting the profound influence of Borodin's attitude to symphonic form on Sibelius's own practice. Gray had claimed that Sibelius achieved something entirely original in respect of symphonic form:

The nature of this revolution can be best described by saying that whereas in the symphony of Sibelius's predecessors the thematic material is generally introduced in an exposition, taken to pieces, dissected and analysed in a development section, and put together again in a recapitulation, Sibelius . . . inverts the process, introducing thematic fragments in the exposition, building them up into an organic whole in the development section, then dissolving and dispersing the material back into its primary constituents in a brief recapitulation.⁹⁶

Abraham, keen to defend the status of Russian music by asserting its prior originality, argued that "Borodin had done this sort of thing more than thirty years earlier,"⁹⁷ before proceeding to give a summary both of Borodin's own method, and Sibelius's appropriation of the technique. Although both Gray's original observation and Abraham's subsequent development of it have since been questioned,⁹⁸ the notion that the Russian influence on Sibelius had as much to do with structure, argument, and development as with obvious thematic parallels remains a productive one.

Taking up the leads first suggested by Gray and Abraham (and subsequently developed by Tawaststjerna), other scholars have distinguished further Russian resonances. Joseph Kraus has considered similarities in voice leading, harmonic language, and tonal plan as evidence of Tchaikovsky's influence on the First Symphony.⁹⁹ Eero Tarasti has argued that "the endless repetition of short motifs or themes" in *En saga* (1892, revised 1902) is derived from "the techniques of Rimsky-Korsakov or Tchaikovsky."¹⁰⁰ Veijo Murtomäki situates *Skogsrådet* (*The Wood Nymph*) in a genealogy of Russian musical ballads, including Balakirev's *Tamara*, Tchaikovsky's *Voyevoda*, and

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Sergey Lyapunov's *Ballade* (a tradition subsequently continued by Glazunov and Sergey Taneyev),¹⁰¹ and compares the work's "tragic slow finale" to "the Adagio lamentoso conclusion of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony."¹⁰² Other works by Sibelius reflect the lighter and more lyrical aspects of Russian music. The *Romance in C* (1904) has been heard as an echo of Tchaikovsky (particularly his *Serenade for Strings*).¹⁰³ And it was the *Canzonetta* (1911) that prompted Igor Stravinsky—not otherwise sympathetic to Sibelius, whether as a romantic nationalist or a progressive modernist—to identify the musical links between Finland and Russia: "I like that Northern Italianate melodism—Tchaikovsky had it too—which was part, and an attractive part, of the St. Petersburg culture."¹⁰⁴ George Balanchine returned Sibelius's homage to this aspect of the St. Petersburg tradition by choreographing *Valse triste* as a ballet in Petrograd in 1922.¹⁰⁵

Such arguments are particularly useful for challenging the still commonly held view of Sibelius that emphasizes his autonomous development and exclusively Finnish origins. Yet Sibelius himself denied such influences—as, for instance, in the case of Borodin's *First Symphony*¹⁰⁶—and there is little conclusive evidence he was familiar with the works in question (his library contains few Russian scores and his letters and diary give few clues). Moreover, the comparisons adduced are often rather slight in the overall scheme of a given work.¹⁰⁷ In spite of Sibelius's denials, there is nevertheless a frequent tendency in criticism to assert that the characteristic features of Russian music were simply "in the air." Robert Layton, for instance, distances himself from Abraham's assertion that Sibelius's *First Symphony* was directly influenced by Borodin's *First*, yet defends his own sense of the importance of Russian works in indirect terms:

The resemblances to which I alluded between "Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island" and the *First Symphony* of Balakirev, and the slow movement of Sibelius's *First Symphony* and Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* were intended to show a common cultural language. Sibelius obviously could not have known the Balakirev and probably did not know the *Souvenir de Florence* either.¹⁰⁸

There were a number of ways in which Sibelius could have participated in the "common cultural language" that linked Helsinki with St. Petersburg and Moscow. As conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Kajanus regularly programmed Russian orchestral works.¹⁰⁹ Even if Sibelius was absent from such concerts, it seems likely that the two men discussed music that was of such particular interest to Kajanus. Busoni—who spent a considerable amount of time in Russia and Finland in the early 1890s—was a further possible channel of information. Sibelius would

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also have encountered a good deal of Russian music while conducting his own works in Russia or while visiting European capitols such as Berlin, Vienna, and Paris (his reactions to hearing works by Anton Arensky and Sergey Rachmaninoff in Berlin in October 1910 are noted in his letters and diary, for instance).¹¹⁰

Whether or not Sibelius's music derives certain structural and thematic features directly from Russian models, the audible parallels may also be related to the fact that both Russian and Finnish music share certain common sources. The first of these is Liszt's approach to the genre of the tone poem, the impact of which Sibelius readily admitted:

I have found my old self again, musically speaking. Many things are now clear to me: really I am a tone painter and poet. Liszt's view of music is the one to which I am closest. Hence my interest in the symphonic poem. I'm working on a theme that I'm very pleased with. You'll hear it when I get home; that's if I have got so far with it and don't begin to have too many doubts.¹¹¹

This statement—frequently cited in the secondary literature—has been interpreted in various ways. In part the result of Sibelius's self-perceived failure to write a Wagnerian music drama, it reveals his discovery of the music of the New German School, especially the tone poems of Richard Strauss, whose *Don Juan* had deeply impressed him in Berlin in 1890. Yet Liszt played a decisive role in Russia, too, where composers built on his legacy (as well as that of Hector Berlioz) in their search for a music that would fuse elements of the national, the programmatic, and the quasi-realistic. Indeed, as Pierre Vidal suggests, Sibelius's concept of the form drew more from Russian and Slavonic precursors than from Strauss:

Inspired by his country and by ancestral myths, Sibelius did not draw upon the same sources as Strauss, for Sibelius avoided metaphysical, philosophical, and idealistic themes. Rather, we associate him instinctively with Smetana and the Russians, whose paradigms descend more from Balakirev's *Thamar* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* than from Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* or *Francesca da Rimini*, which are human dramas transposed onto the romantic-overture tradition. Sibelius was more captured than his forerunners by a sense of primeval beauty.¹¹²

At the same time, Russian composers were reinventing the symphony from the European periphery, with a work such as Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* standing as much—if not more—for the very latest in musical modernity, as for any sense of national idiom (the very thing that Tchaikovsky so self-consciously repudiated). Murtomäki notes the prominent role played by

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Russian composers in rejecting the conventional division between the competing genres of the symphony and the tone poem, and in using elements derived from one genre to revivify and extend the possibilities of the other: “Many Romantic composers after Liszt—for example, Borodin, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Strauss, Rimsky-Korsakov, Scriabin—created works that narrowed the gap between symphony and symphonic poem.”¹¹³ More generally, he posits the influence of Russian music on Sibelius’s explorations of symphonic form:

There were also Russian sources for the musical fantasy. In the latter half of the nineteenth century subtitles like “orchestral fantasy” and “symphonic fantasy” were often used. Mussorgsky’s *Night on Bare Mountain*, for instance, is a “symphonic fantasy,” Tchaikovsky’s *Francesca da Rimini* is a “fantasy,” and his *Hamlet* and *Romeo et Juliette* are “overture-fantasies.” . . . As there were close cultural contacts between Russia and Finland during the nineteenth century and as Tchaikovsky had been an important influence on Sibelius’s music until his Second Symphony (1902), it is possible that the idea of the “symphonic fantasy” came to Sibelius from a Russian context.¹¹⁴

Once again, we are faced with speculation about a potential Russian influence on Sibelius that can be neither proven nor refuted. Instead, it is David Haas’s analysis that more subtly links Sibelius to the Russian traditions in this respect:

Although belonging to different generations, Sibelius and Tchaikovsky were chronologically situated to be heirs to the Beethoven symphony and the Liszt symphonic poem and unlike so many of their contemporaries declined to favor either genre, producing instead parallel series of numbered symphonies and programmatically entitled symphonic poems.¹¹⁵

If there are parallels here between Sibelius and Russian composers (particularly Tchaikovsky, but also symphonists from the “nationalist” school such as Balakirev, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov), they relate primarily to their cognate reactions to a particular issue in European music more broadly, that is, the tension between the symphony and the tone poem.

Resemblances may also be explained by the recourse to shared material. As Tina K. Ramnarine observes, “Much of the folk material which inspired Finnish artists and scholars and which contributed to a national culture was paradoxically collected from a region which had been claimed, shared, and divided by both Finland and Russia.”¹¹⁶ The region in ques-

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tion is, of course, Karelia, whose culture played a decisive role in the formation of Finnish national identity. Yet Karelia extended well beyond the Finnish border into northern Russia; indeed, it was Russian Karelia—untouched by the Swedish influence that was predominant in southern and eastern Finland, and unaffected by the traditions and practices of the Lutheran Church—that was perceived by Finnish nationalists as preserving Karelian culture in its most pristine form. Lönnrot's first edition of the *Kalevala* was based on material collected in both Finland and Russian Karelia, and an influential travelogue—A. V. Ervasti's *Muistelmia matkalta Venäjän Karjalassa kesällä 1879* (Recollections from a trip to Russian Karelia during the summer of 1879)—further revealed the significance of the region across the border for the development of Finnish national consciousness.¹¹⁷ In a letter to his wife in October 1891, Sibelius referred to the Finnish runic singer Larin Paraske as “a runo-singer from *Russian Karelia*” (my emphasis).¹¹⁸ The impact of folk music from neighboring regions does much to explain apparent similarities between Sibelius and works by Russian composers. As Murtomäki speculates: “Could it be . . . that the ‘Finnishness’ in Sibelius’s music consists of lifting certain traits from Karelian/Russian folk music and melodic traditions, a source shared by the extremely folk-music-conscious young Russian composers as well?”¹¹⁹ In fact, this argument had already been made in the 1950s by Simon Parmet:

The specific musical resemblance between Tchaikovsky and the young Sibelius, in particular, is to be found in certain easily recognizable turns of melodic phrase, in the long, sweeping lines, in the spontaneity of the music and its immediate, natural charm, and in its proximity to folk music. This last resemblance is particularly significant, as it supports the idea that Finnish folk music is more closely related to Russian folk music than we are generally inclined to believe.¹²⁰

Indeed, Gray explicitly singled out Sibelius's Karelian works as those closest in spirit to the Russian national tradition:

In writing music ostensibly Karelian in character and style Sibelius approaches as closely to that of Russia as Karelia itself does to Russian soil. The thematic material is sometimes strongly suggestive of various Slavonic masters, and the eightfold repetition in the trio of the “Alla Marcia” in the suite is as characteristic of Russian music as it is rare in that of Finland. “Karelia,” indeed, is the sole work of Sibelius that one could easily believe to have been written by a Russian if one were to hear it without knowing who had composed it.¹²¹

Russian critics, too, have been particularly responsive to such arguments. Stupel suggests that a melody in the first of the *Lemminkäinen* Legends resembles a theme from Rimsky-Korsakov's tone poem *Sadko* (although he does not give details). The significance of his observation rests, however, less on the veracity of the resemblance than on the potential reason for its appearance: "This may be a question not just of direct influence, but also of the intonational proximity between the Karelian lyricism that nourished Sibelius's work, and that of northern Russia which inspired the author of *Sadko*."¹²² A similar point is made by Vera Aleksandrova and Elena Bronfin: "Of particular interest is the question of the intonational relationship of certain of Sibelius's themes and melodies to Russian folk songs; it would seem that the reason for this is rooted in the proximity of ancient northern Russian folk melodies to early Karelo-Finnish musical folklore."¹²³

The widely asserted influence of Karelian runic singing on Sibelius's musical language has been helpfully summarized by Robert Layton:

Generally speaking the runic melodies that Sibelius took down from Paraske comprise two more or less rhythmically symmetrical four or five beat phrases that are within the compass of the first five notes of the major or minor scale. The notes, sometimes extended to embrace the flattened sixth or the flattened leading note, generally correspond with those of the five-stringed *kantele* and the main melodic protagonists in the *Kullervo* Symphony leave no doubt as to these runic influences. They persist throughout his career right up to *Tapiola*, whose basic idea falls within the compass of the *kantele*.¹²⁴

These features are also characteristic of some nineteenth-century Russian music, especially that based on folk sources (see Example 2). In rhythmic terms, the key source here is the "Bridal Chorus" from Act 3 of Mikhail Glinka's *Life for the Tsar*, the prototype for subsequent 5/4 movements in similarly folkloric vein by Borodin, including the finale of his Second Symphony, the Scherzo of his Third Symphony (posthumously completed by Glazunov), or the maiden's chorus in Act 1, scene 2 of his *Prince Igor*. Stripped of its folkloric quality, this rhythmic trait is exploited in the second-movement waltz of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony and Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead*. Likewise, the limited melodic outline of runic song is cognate with aspects of Russian folksong, especially as used by nineteenth-century composers. The song on which the finale of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony is based—"Vo pole beryoza stoyala" (In the field there stood a birch tree)—is constrained within the interval of a fifth, just as the first subject of the first movement of Vasily Kalinnikov's First Symphony traces that same interval before breaking out of it (it echoes, moreover, the opening theme of

“Karelian” model (Petri Shemeikka to Sibelius, 1892, cited in Murtomäki, “Sibelius and Finnish-Karelian Folk Music,” 35)

1st singer 2nd singer 1st singer 2nd singer

The notation shows two staves of music. The top staff is for the 1st singer and the bottom staff is for the 2nd singer. The time signature is 5/4. The melody consists of a series of eighth notes with stems pointing up, followed by a double bar line, and then another series of eighth notes with stems pointing up.

Glinka, “Bridal Chorus,” *Life for the Tsar*, Act 3

Raz - gu - lya - la - sya, raz - li - va - la - sya vo - da vesh - nya - ya po__ lu - gam.

The notation shows a single staff with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: Raz - gu - lya - la - sya, raz - li - va - la - sya vo - da vesh - nya - ya po__ lu - gam. The melody is simple, with notes corresponding to the syllables of the lyrics.

Borodin, Symphony no. 2, finale opening (from rehearsal number A)

The notation shows two staves of music. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 3/4. The melody is complex, with many notes and rests, and includes dynamic markings like accents (>) and slurs.

Borodin, Symphony no. 3, Scherzo

The notation shows two staves of music. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 5/8. The melody is simple, with notes and rests, and includes dynamic markings like accents (>) and slurs.

Example 2. Nineteenth-century Russian music based on folk sources.

Borodin, "Maiden's Chorus," *Prince Igor*, Act 1, scene 2

Ti po - mi - luy nas, ne vo gnev te - be, ne vo -

bi - du bud', e - to on zhe vsyo, nash bla goy - to knaz' Vo - lo -

di - mir - to Ya - ro - sla - vich, nash knyaz' to Ga - lits - kiy!

Tchaikovsky, Symphony no. 6, second movement

Example 2 continued

Rachmaninoff, *Isle of the Dead*, opening

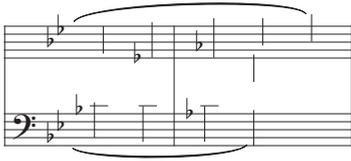
Musical score for the opening of Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead*. The score is written for two staves, both in bass clef with a 5/8 time signature. The upper staff features a melodic line with slurs and ties, while the lower staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and ties.

Tchaikovsky, *Symphony no. 4, finale, second subject*

Musical score for the second subject of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony no. 4, finale*. The score is presented in four systems, each with two staves. The upper staff of each system contains a melodic line with slurs and ties, and the lower staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and ties.

Example 2 continued

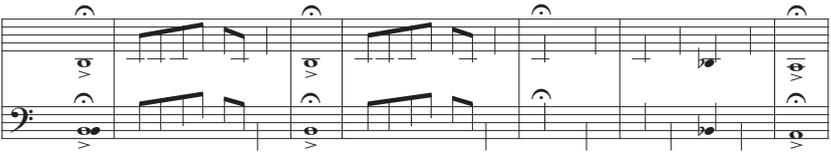
Kalinnikov, Symphony no. 1, opening



Borodin, Symphony no. 3, opening



Borodin, Symphony no. 2, opening



Example 2 continued

the first movement of Borodin's Third Symphony). And to invert the argument, the shape of the opening motive of Borodin's Second Symphony even recalls the very contours of runic song itself. Thus, if a work like *Kullervo* appears to betray a number of distinctly Russian influences, this is not necessarily because it is explicitly modeled on Russian sources (although Goss has recently suggested that Sibelius may indeed have drawn on Russian folk-song collections during the composition of the symphony).¹²⁵ Rather it is because Sibelius's Karelian sources are similar to some of the folksongs that fed, directly or otherwise, into the works of Russian composers.¹²⁶

Apart from any purely musical parallels, there are certain thematic associations in Sibelius's compositions inspired by the *Kalevala* and Russian works based on *bilini* (epic poems), such as Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* (performed in Helsinki in 1895), and later pieces such as Reynhold Glière's Third Symphony (*Il'ya Muromets*, 1909–11). Although it has not been a dominant theme in the study of the *Kalevala*, a number of folklorists have argued that similarities between elements of the *Kalevala* and certain of

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the Russian *bilini* attest either to the shared origins of or mutual influence between the Karelian and Russian traditions.¹²⁷ In the late nineteenth century, for instance, Vsevolod Miller pointed to a series of parallels between the figures of Sadko and Väinämöinen that were, he suggested, the result of the close links between the Finns and the citizens of the medieval city-state of Novgorod, to the northwest of the East Slavonic heartlands of medieval Kievan Rus.¹²⁸ Whether or not there are any direct connections between Finnish and Russian works inspired by the *Kalevala* and the *bilini*, they nonetheless attest to a shared interest in myth and origins that was characteristic of Russian and Finnish art around the turn of the century.¹²⁹

If critics have been assiduous in positing connections between Sibelius and Russian music in his earlier, “romantic nationalist” works, they have also tended to assume that in the wake of his turn to classicism and modernism from the Third Symphony onward the Russian influence wanes, or simply vanishes. Where Russian works had been so generative when it came to the questions of nationalism, folklore, and myth central to Sibelius in the 1890s and early 1900s, they seemed less likely to inspire his turn to abstraction and the search for a pan-European, quasi-universal form of musical communication. Murtomäki summarizes Sibelius’s change of style in the early twentieth century as an explicit rejection of the kind of nationalism he had learned from Russian models:

With the revisions of *En saga* (1892/1902) and the Violin Concerto (1904/05), he was distancing himself from the nineteenth-century romantic style and trying to find a new, more classical way of composing. According to this explanation, Sibelius sought to reorient himself away from Wagnerism and the New German School; those composers who had espoused these ideals in Bohemia, Russia and Scandinavia tended to be associated with national Romantic schools and denigrated as folklorists.¹³⁰

The work that seems best to encapsulate this process of evolution is the Third Symphony. Writing about a Russian review of a 1907 performance of the symphony in St. Petersburg, Johnson argues: “It is worth nothing that there were no references to Tchaikovsky. Indeed, the Third may be regarded as the beginning of Sibelius’s attempt to break away from the style of the heavy-handed ‘Romantic’ symphony.”¹³¹ Yet even here, some observers have detected residual links with the Russian traditions. Edward Garden, for instance, suggests that Sibelius took “Balakirev’s First Symphony in C major as a starting point for his Third Symphony in the same key.”¹³² While observing a superficial similarity between the opening figure of the Third Symphony and that of Borodin’s Second,¹³³ Burnett James prefers

to see the relationship between Sibelius and Borodin in terms of their sense of organic symphonic growth stemming from a process of “preliminary thematic fragmentation.”¹³⁴ Tawaststjerna suggests a further Russian parallel: “The work can be most nearly compared with Glazunov’s pastoral Eighth Symphony, also composed in 1907, although Glazunov’s classicism seems far smoother and more traditional than that of Sibelius.”¹³⁵ If there is some confusion in Tawaststjerna’s description of the Eighth (it was in fact the Seventh Symphony of 1902 that was called “The Pastoral”), then his analogy reminds us that Russian music stands for far more than the nationalist legacy of the second half of the nineteenth century. When critics interpret the classicism of the Third Symphony as a move away from a nationalist dialect heavily influenced by Russian originals, they often fail to note that a similar move was under way in Russia itself (and if musical comparisons are made, they tend to be with Busoni’s “junge Klassizität”). Goss alludes to early twentieth-century visual culture in this respect—“Graphic clarity and classical impulses were streaming in from many directions, and Saint Petersburg was one. A number of that city’s artists, among them Valentin Serov, had begun to rethink their styles”—and cites Solomon Volkov’s evocation of the classicism of such poets as Mikhail Kuzmin, Nikolay Gumilyov, and Osip Mandelstam.¹³⁶ Yet in the musical field, too, younger composers were rejecting what they perceived to be the nationalist prescriptions of Balakirev and Stasov in favor of greater academic discipline—something already presaged in Rimsky-Korsakov’s works from the 1870s onward¹³⁷—and a greater range of cosmopolitan influences from contemporary Western Europe. The dominance of Stravinsky’s works of the 1920s onward in discussions of Russian musical neoclassicism has tended to eclipse this intervening generation. In St. Petersburg, it was Glazunov (Sibelius’s exact contemporary) who was striving to fuse elements of the national with the supposedly “universal”; and in Moscow, the German classical tradition was enthusiastically promoted by Taneyev (who, incidentally, thought Sibelius’s Third Symphony “an unusually poor composition.”)¹³⁸

The most complete account of the Russian aspects in the Third Symphony is, though, by Glenda Dawn Goss. Noting that Sibelius’s personal and professional connections with Russia were particularly strong around the time of the work’s composition (in particular in the form of his relationship with Siloti), Goss argues that the “new symphony’s features seemed gauged to suit the Saint Petersburg milieu.”¹³⁹ Although her initial piece of evidence—“that theme in the first movement, undulating sensuously over bass drones sounding the perfect fifth in the strange key of B minor”¹⁴⁰—is very much in the established tradition of citing isolated and superficial likenesses as evidence of Russian influence (here, as an in-

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stance of the work's Oriental coloring), Goss's argument rests principally on the symphony's innovative construction, and in particular the ambiguous form of the third-movement finale that has proved such a distinct challenge to analysts and commentators.¹⁴¹ Taking issue with a widespread interpretation of the symphony, according to which it constitutes a self-conscious rapprochement with the mainstream, Austro-German school, she sees the symphony as embodying an ambivalence about Germanic forms of symphonic argument that was shared by earlier generations of Russian composers. Noting in passing that the symphony shares the key of Rimsky-Korsakov's Third Symphony, she ultimately posits Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*—and in particular its initial juxtaposition of two apparently dissimilar themes that are subsequently revealed to be related, as well as its structure as a series of ostinato variations—as a possible source for the constructional principle of Sibelius's work.¹⁴² The sonata-form first movement develops the idea of “two sharply differing themes that, in the course of development, are revealed as springing from the same fundamental idea,” and the finale explores the principle of Russian variation technique: “Rather than being ‘developed’ in any systematic, Germanic way, his theme revolves, its circular iterations driving the symphony to a close in a triumphal C major.”¹⁴³ Most crucially, Goss posits significant Russian influences even where they do not necessarily strike the listener; the Third Symphony cannot sensibly be said to sound anything like *Kamarinskaya* or the later Russian works it inspired. As Howell suggests, for all Sibelius's potential debt to Russian works, his approach to symphonic structure was altogether more organic: “Simplistically, the Russian idea of ‘transition,’ particularly as evidenced in Tchaikovsky, concerns a passage which *separates* two surrounding blocks of material and this is completely at variance with Sibelius' technique of continuity.”¹⁴⁴ From now on, the lessons of Russian music were to become more profoundly assimilated into Sibelius's own musical language and may indeed have become more productive, relating less to superficial motivic detail and orchestral color than to issues of symphonic structure and harmonic language. Moreover, the realization that Sibelius's later compositions draw part of their inspiration from Russian models allows us to perceive deep and underlying connections between works from all periods of his career, from *Kullervo* through to *Tapiola*.

The notion that Russian models may have inspired new thinking about symphonic structure accords well with James Hepokoski's various analyses of Sibelius in terms of rotational form. As Hepokoski explains, “rotational form” refers

to the presence of an extended, patterned succession of musical events (often a collection of “themes”), which are then revisited one or more

times (recycled or “rotated through”) with internal variations in intensity, motivic growth, interpolated or deleted material, and so on.¹⁴⁵

Hepokoski’s definition suggests numerous Russian precursors, beginning with Glinka’s double variations in *Kamarinskaya*, to the variations, sequences, and repetitions that were so central to the symphonic practice of the nationalists and Tchaikovsky. Indeed, Hepokoski draws attention to the Russian roots of Sibelius’s technique:

It was doubtless also from Russian symphonic composition, which at least from Glinka’s *Kamarinskaya* onward had also explored circular stasis, that Sibelius learned of some of the most common generic slots within a “nationalistic” symphony or concerto for such repetitive “peasant” themes. These include the scherzo’s trio and especially the first or (even more characteristically) the second theme of the finale—as a kind of “concluding” device or reductive “folk-goal” of the entire work: one thinks, for example of Tchaikovsky’s Second and Fourth Symphonies or the Violin Concerto; and even Stravinsky’s early Symphony in E-flat and, for that matter, the conclusion of *The Firebird* pay homage to the convention. In Sibelius the Second Symphony (three reiterations of the same theme in the finale’s exposition, eight in its recapitulation) and the Violin Concerto have already been mentioned in this respect, and to them we might add the earlier *En saga* and “Lemminkäinen’s Return.” (The Fourth Symphony is also exemplary, but less obvious.) More remarkably, the entire finale of the Third Symphony is overtaken by the reiterative principle. And when the Fifth Symphony drives ultimately to the circular “Swan Hymn” of its finale, it is this convention that provides its most immediate ancestry.¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, Hepokoski’s arguments suggest that Sibelius’s interest in Russian models was not just a question of symphonic form in and of itself, but was also profoundly linked to issues of national identity. In borrowing and developing aspects of Russian practice, Sibelius was seeking to reposition his own work in relation to the dominant traditions of symphonic form as represented by the Austro-German tradition: “Much of the most characteristic language of the Fifth Symphony’s first movement is one of stasis, circularity, and neighbor-note activity. These procedures are fundamentally opposed to ‘the principle of teleological progression’ that had underpinned the traditional Germanic symphonic repertoire.”¹⁴⁷ Citing once more the example of the Third Symphony as a work of profound transition, Hepokoski usefully illustrates how Sibelius’s innovation was in part a product of a dialogue between national (and even nationalist) traditions in the era of early modernism:

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From the last two movements of the Third Symphony (1907) onward, Sibelius seems to have embarked on one of the most remarkable (and least understood) formal projects of his age. As he proceeded into the last half of his career, he grew dissatisfied both with the received notions of musical form as identified in the reified schemata provided in the various *Formenlehre* textbooks (architectonically balanced sonatas, rondos, themes and variations, and so on) and with the various *de facto* families of formal deformation that had become common practice among the early modernist composers around the turn of the century.¹⁴⁸

Turning briefly to Taruskin's analysis of Stravinsky's modernist style in terms of *drobnost'*, *nepodvizhnost'*, and *uproshcheniye* ("the quality of being a sum of parts," "immobility," and "simplification"), we can observe a parallel, if rather different response to the same Russian tradition that stimulated aspects of Sibelius's rotational technique.¹⁴⁹ In both cases, Russian models—Glinka, the New Russian School's nationalist works of the 1860s onward, explorations in symphonic form by Balakirev, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Tchaikovsky—explicitly served both Sibelius and Stravinsky in their early and explicitly nationalist phases (Sibelius's *Kalevala* works of the 1890s through to the revised version of *En saga*, Stravinsky's ballets for Diaghilev). Yet they also stimulated the seemingly more abstract developments in form, structure, and argument that characterized both composers' postnationalist periods (Sibelius's four last symphonies and *Tapiola*, Stravinsky's neoclassicism).

Another approach to understanding the sources of Sibelius's musical language is that taken by Howell. Having surveyed potential Russian influences on Sibelius's early symphonic works,¹⁵⁰ Howell argues:

Much in the way of analysis of the music by Sibelius has concentrated, often exclusively so, on the thematic level. This tends simply to reveal the most obvious, easily detected and assimilated correspondences which, despite providing a satisfying network of germ-motive identity, prove unsatisfactory in the shallow and distorted musical viewpoint arising from such selectivity.¹⁵¹

Not only do such accounts fail to deal with the deeper structural organization of individual compositions; they fail to discern underlying principles that link works from different periods. Howell's particular interest is in tracing how Sibelius's melodies (derived, in part, from elements of runic song) affect structure and form across the entire chronological range of his output: "What is of interest melodically is the use of modality, its effect

on the tonal organisation of early pieces and the repercussions this was to have in the extended tonal language of Sibelius the symphonist.”¹⁵² Many of the features he explores—cyclical and extended tonality, and forms of modality based on whole-tone scales and octatonic sets—are also to be found in the works of Claude Debussy. However, because Sibelius appears to have been unfamiliar with his music until 1905 at the earliest,¹⁵³ Howell attributes them to “their independent absorption of Wagnerian influence.”¹⁵⁴ The influence of Richard Wagner on both composers is genuine enough, yet the harmonic characteristics singled out by Howell have analogies in the Russian tradition, too. Thus any similarities between the ways in which Sibelius and Debussy handle the relationship between modality, harmony, and long-range structure may well be related to the impact of Russian music, and when contemporary critics heard echoes of the French impressionists in Sibelius, they were most likely responding to a shared Russian influence, albeit at one remove. In both France and Finland, composers exploited the means revealed to them by Russian composers to establish new means of tonal organization and symphonic syntax quite unlike the schemes inherited from the Austro-German tradition. And in each case, the legacy of nationalism drove the search for new forms, establishing the Franco-Russian axis (taking in, of course, Helsinki) as the leading instance of modernity around the turn of the century.¹⁵⁵

A prominent theme in the secondary literature on Sibelius has been his use of mediant relations both as a means of effecting modulations at the local level and as an approach to structuring symphonic form more profoundly. Of the third movement of *Kullervo*, Tawaststjerna notes that “the central key relationship, F–C-sharp–F, a major third, provides a strong form-building factor. In many later symphonies similar relationships play a decisive role.”¹⁵⁶ In the First Symphony, Goss notes “the fluid interplay between keys a mere third apart: E minor and G major in the first movement; E-flat major and C minor in the second; and C major and A minor in the fourth.”¹⁵⁷ In that same work’s finale, Murtomäki similarly notices the importance of mediant modulation: “In the recapitulation the second theme wanders around in thirds and descends through the series A-flat major–F minor/F major–D-flat major/B-flat minor–G-flat major/E-flat minor–B major before settling on the dominant of the main key.”¹⁵⁸ Layton traces “the considerable tonal freedom” in *En saga* to its use of mediant relations: “The work opens in A minor and ends in E-flat minor, its furthestmost pole, while the most important key area of the work is C minor and its relative major, E-flat major.”¹⁵⁹ Sibelius’s own claim that the *Lemminkäinen* Suite was a symphony in all but name is corroborated by Howell’s observation that, whatever the order in which the movements are played, the mediant relationships between them lends the suite an overall sense of formal unity:

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The overall key-scheme, considering later concerns for a tonal cycle operating over an entire work, would support the symphonic view: E-flat major–A minor–F-sharp minor–(C minor)/E-flat major, displaying minor-third relationship which so often characterize internal key schemes of the component pieces. Ironically, it is the original order of the movements which would make this more schematic: E-flat–F-sharp–A–(C)/E-flat.¹⁶⁰

Now, it cannot be claimed that the prominence of such key relationships in Sibelius derives solely from the Russian context. As Murtomäki observes, such canonical works of the Austro-German tradition as Brahms's Second Symphony and Beethoven's Ninth also employ aspects of mediant tonality.¹⁶¹ In Sibelius's Second Symphony, Murtomäki suggests that "the tonal progression D major–F-sharp minor–A major . . . which resembles obviously the three-key exposition developed by Schubert,"¹⁶² and also that "the influence of Liszt may have served as a starting point."¹⁶³ Liszt and especially Schubert were, of course, held in high regard by Russian composers, not least for their innovations in harmonic structure. As Richard Taruskin points out, Schubert became "the godfather of the New Russian School" by dint of "the mediant progressions that are the very essence of early Romantic harmony."¹⁶⁴ Russian composers displayed their indebtedness to such models with little sense of restraint, evincing "a notable tendency to make the symmetry of the third relations explicit in a literal way that composers to the west normally did not exploit."¹⁶⁵ The first movement of Rimsky-Korsakov's Third Symphony is structured around a series of rotations through major and minor thirds, and Tchaikovsky exploited the potential of this technique in the first movement of the Fourth Symphony, which "with its key relationships of rising minor thirds (F minor–A-flat minor–C-flat major/B major–D minor–F major/minor) is one of Tchaikovsky's great inventions."¹⁶⁶

As well as structuring the relationships between movements and sections, this emphasis on the interval of a third had distinct implications for the role of harmony in a work as a whole. In the Second Symphony, as Tawaststjerna points out, "rising [major] thirds often give an impression of the whole-tone scale."¹⁶⁷ Murtomäki sees the Third Symphony as taking this blurring of the boundaries between diatonic and the whole-tone material a stage further: "The tonal scheme of the Third Symphony forms a logical pattern centered around the axis of major thirds C–E–G-sharp/A-flat, but it also contains progressions in minor thirds as well as the tension between diatonic and whole-tone material—all elements on which the later symphonies are based."¹⁶⁸ As well as the whole-tone scale, mediant relations (whether in the major or the minor) are likely to lead to the creation of so-called octatonic sets—that is, modes constructed out of

alternating tones and semitones. The interplay between conventional diatonic harmony and the modal world of whole tone and octatonic scales is pursued most rigorously in the Fourth Symphony, a work in which Sibelius achieves a particularly close integration of surface melodic gesture, intermediate harmonic progression, and profound symphonic syntax. The opening gesture of C–D–F –E ushers us into a world where whole-tone scales, octatonicism, and mediant relations predominate. Writing about the first movement exposition, Tawaststjerna illustrates how the key relations are derived from the opening thematic material: “a Dorian A minor —leading to a Lydian C major—then F-sharp major. Thus we see that the augmented fourth of the germinal cell is reflected in the basic tonal layout.”¹⁶⁹ This process is further played out at the level of the symphony as a whole, with the four movements unfolding in the order: A minor–F major–C-sharp minor–A major.

Tawaststjerna suggests that “this tension between tonality as a structural force and whole-tone textures was typical of the time, and part of the wider erosion of major-minor classical tonality.”¹⁷⁰ He even alludes to potential parallels in the Russian musical world: the Coronation Scene from Modest Musorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* and Alexander Scriabin’s *Prometheus* chord.¹⁷¹ Yet the notion that Sibelius’s explorations in non-diatonic forms of harmonic procedure might have explicitly Russian roots seems barely to have been considered. Elliott Antokoletz, in one of the most detailed studies of such elements of the Fourth Symphony, suggests that the similarities are indicative of affinity rather than influence: “Sibelius’s general use of semi-functional diatonic folk modes and their cyclic-interval (whole-tone and, as we shall also see, octatonic) transformations reveals an affinity more with the melodic-harmonic palette of his folk-inspired contemporaries (e.g. Bartók and Stravinsky) than with the ultrachromaticism of nineteenth-century Romantic composers.”¹⁷² Joseph Kraus makes a passing comparison between the use of the octatonic set in the Fourth Symphony and “‘magical’ music from 19th-century Russian opera, particularly Glinka’s *Ruslan and Lyudmila*.” It is, he conjectures, “as if some distant musical memory from Sibelius’s exposure to the St. Petersburg circle has now been refashioned by the composer into music so very much his own.”¹⁷³ But Sibelius was alert to far more than the formal potential of Russian-inspired harmonic procedures, having also discerned what one might term the “semiotic” potential of octatonicism and whole-tone scales. Going back to Glinka, and the music for Chernomor in *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, these techniques had been used by Russian composers to evoke the otherworldly and the fantastic, reaching their apogee in Stravinsky’s Russian ballets. In the case of Sibelius, the associative implications of this musical language are

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explored most resolutely in iconic works dealing with the Finnish landscape and mythology, such as *Luonnotar* or *Tapiola*. Having learned not only what Russian music sounded like, but also what it meant (to both composers and audiences), Sibelius was able to employ its techniques to evoke similar associations with the pagan and the primitive in Finnish culture.¹⁷⁴

In the case of the Fourth Symphony, though, the suggestion of links to the fantastic realm of the Russian and Finnish folk imagination seems altogether more singular. After all, it is the uncompromising severity, austerity, and purity of this work that has long served as evidence of Sibelius's commitment to some form of musical modernism. Yet there is evidence that the work was not conceived as the ultimate expression of absolute symphonic form. In the wake of its first performance in April 1911, the critic Karl Fredrik Wasenius asserted that the Fourth Symphony depicted a journey to Mount Koli and Lake Pielinen.¹⁷⁵ Sibelius publicly denied this account, although it is possible that this was due to Wasenius having revealed the initial inspiration behind what was a very private composition. But even without the knowledge that Sibelius and his brother-in-law Eero Järnefelt had indeed visited Mount Koli and Lake Pielinen in September 1909, the Fourth Symphony betrays the influence of one of Sibelius's own explicitly programmatic and folkloric works. Tawaststjerna traces the symphony's use of modal elements and the interval of an augmented fourth/diminished fifth to similar instances in the much earlier *Kullervo*, as well as suggesting that "its opening bars give the . . . impression of entering Tuonela" (the realm of the dead in Finnish mythology).¹⁷⁶ But the decisive parallel is with *Pohjola's Daughter*, which, he argues, "anticipates the Fourth Symphony in its tonal layout":

It has moved from G minor through B-flat to E major just as the exposition of the first movement of the Symphony moves from A minor to C major and then F-sharp. So we can see Sibelius replacing the classical tonic-dominant key relationship with a contrast based on the tritone. But the parallel between the tone poem and the Symphony goes even further. In the final group there appears a sequential motive into which the tritone is woven. These four notes anticipate the opening idea of the Fourth Symphony.¹⁷⁷

The link back to *Pohjola's Daughter*, warmly received on the occasion of its premiere in St. Petersburg as a work with profound links to the Russian traditions, allows us to posit the Fourth Symphony as a work similarly related to those traditions. Sibelius's profound assimilation of Russian influences extends far beyond programmatic tone poems on a nationalist theme to symphonic structures that appear, initially at least, to have little

in common with that school. The recognition that works as original as the Fourth Symphony and *Tapiola* build on techniques inherited much earlier likewise suggests that works such as the Fifth Symphony, in which “all movements are based on axial tonality, and both minor and major third axis are exploited equally,”¹⁷⁸ and the Sixth Symphony, whose modal tonality is characterized by whole-tone and tritonal inflections,¹⁷⁹ also belong to this genealogy. What Sibelius learned from Russian music was not so much its ability to convey psychological narrative or evoke place through ethnographic detail (witness his horror at Wasenius’s claim to know the supposed topographical inspiration for the Fourth Symphony), but rather its capacity for suggesting the hidden yet palpable forces at work in the natural world. Much as he was a composer shaped by modernity, he was also keenly aware of the lingering presence of the premodern, the primitive, and the pagan; the subjective and highly personal perception of this presence forms the subject matter of many of his works—even one as apparently abstract as the Fourth Symphony—and constitutes his most significant debt to Russian models.

Russia was more than just a productive influence on the formal and technical means available to Sibelius; it also served as a salutary warning about the potentials and perils of musical nationalism. From the outset, critics had discerned the influence of Tchaikovsky in many of Sibelius’s works. In Finland, this could often be a sign of admiration, as in Karl Flodin’s review of the *Lemminkäinen* Suite,¹⁸⁰ or both Flodin’s and Kajanus’s reaction to the Second Symphony.¹⁸¹ If Sibelius was happy enough to concur with such assessments, then this was because, domestically at least, Russian music represented the search for national identity in music, as well as the latest in progress and modernity. Inspired by his friends and colleagues, he cultivated a deliberate interest in Russian music as a way of countering what he saw as Germanic conservatism and cultural superiority. His teacher at the Helsinki Music Institute, Martin Wegelius, had little time for Russian music, dismissing Tchaikovsky’s *Sérénade mélancolique* as “violinistic drivel.”¹⁸² His teacher in Berlin, Albert Becker, was “the personification of musical conservatism,”¹⁸³ and writing to his fiancée from Vienna in January 1891, Sibelius offered the following summary of the views he encountered there:

The Germans are far too conventional and do not respond in the least to new movements in either art or literature. They loathe both the French and the Russians, and one cannot talk about anything Scandinavian without trotting out the conventional nonsense about “barbarians.” One cannot escape the conclusion that as far as art is concerned the Germans are finished. They could not produce an Ibsen, a Zola or a Tchaikovsky; they see everything through blinkers

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—and bad ones at that!¹⁸⁴

By signaling his belief that the German tradition had run its course, and aligning himself with the latest developments in European art in Scandinavia, France, and Russia (and note that Tchaikovsky is the only composer in his list), Sibelius was making an implicit point about the future direction of Finnish music, as well as espousing a deliberately cosmopolitan outlook. For Sibelius at this time, Russian music was to be valued not so much because it was national, but more profoundly because it was modern.

Outside of Finland, however, such comparisons took on a quite different set of connotations. If, on Sibelius's trips to Berlin and Vienna in the early 1890s, the example of Russian music had offered liberation from the Germanic conservatism and the validation of his vocation as a composer of Lisztian tone poems, then subsequent visits to Continental Europe revealed to him the perils of nationalism. As Hepokoski argues:

From Sibelius's point of view, the most galling problem was one of reception. The European public that he had hoped to address (the public concerned with legitimating and institutionalizing "modernism" in the arts) had repeatedly refused to perceive his more recent symphonic works in categories commensurate with his musical thought. Listeners and critics—with the influential Walter Niemann perhaps first among them—had often collapsed him into a mere "nationalist," an epigone of Tchaikovsky and the Russians, the exotic composer of the cold North, and so on.¹⁸⁵

Sibelius's perception of these anxieties was particularly acute during his trip to Paris in 1900. He was accompanying the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra on its European tour during a period of intense Russification in the wake of the February Manifesto, and nationalist rhetoric in the Finnish party ran high. Finland had gained its own pavilion at the Universal Exposition in Paris only after considerable effort and intrigue.¹⁸⁶ Aware that France and Russia were political allies (having signed an *entente* in 1894 against the triple alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Italy), Sibelius seems to have suspected Russian involvement everywhere:

Would you believe it, but they have printed *Russie* on the concert tickets! That will now be crossed out and they will put *Finlande*. Kajus [i.e., Kajanus] was here this morning and said he was worried about this. One notices Russia's influence here in all sorts of ways, we've had difficulties in getting rehearsal time at the Trocadéro. They constantly make difficulties and keep on altering times. [Aino] Ackté has

been a tireless organizer. Well, we'll see what will happen to our concerts: I am very curious. The pro-Russian papers are bound to heap abuse on us, above all me as I am so nationalistic.¹⁸⁷

In fact, French reaction to his music appears to have been largely positive, and sympathy for the Finnish cause was palpable.¹⁸⁸

For all that Sibelius's patriotism was stirred by being in Paris, the tour may also have caused him to reflect on his reception as a nationalist composer, particularly as he tried to establish a reputation as a symphonist in Germany. As he strove to develop a more abstract and supposedly "universal" musical language from the early 1900s onward, recurrent references to other nationalist traditions—usually Russian, but also in the form of comparisons with Edvard Grieg—constituted both an affront to his Finnish patriotism, and a failure to understand his most recent development as an artist. As Hepokoski maintains:

Under such categories, all of which had permitted those employing them to consign his music to the periphery, Sibelius's more recent music—puzzling in its acerbic character, markedly strained, and decidedly "difficult"—was subject not only to be radically misconstrued but also, in practice, to be casually dismissed.¹⁸⁹

The very nationalism that had been so central to establishing Sibelius's reputation both at home and abroad, simultaneously threatened to confine him to a critical ghetto from which it would be all but impossible to escape. Such had been the fate of Russian music a decade or so before: the Universal Exposition of 1889 had done much to introduce French audiences to Russian composers, and in the intervening years, Russian music came to enjoy considerable prominence in concert programs throughout Western Europe.¹⁹⁰ Yet, as the case of Tchaikovsky demonstrates, even where Russian composers aspired to the techniques and standards of the European mainstream (as Sibelius himself did), they were frequently judged as exotic, barbaric, and quasi-Oriental. Whether his journeys through Continental Europe had alerted him to this phenomenon or not, Sibelius's reactions to composers from other nationalist traditions certainly suggest that he wished to learn from—and even distance himself from—their experiences. Traveling back to Finland from Italy in May 1901, Sibelius was introduced to Dvořák. The meeting, which he described in a letter to Axel Carpelan, seems to have provoked him to reflect on the nationalist cause: Verdi, he argued, had managed to be both national and European, yet Grieg spoke in little more than a local dialect.¹⁹¹ The visit of Glazunov to Helsinki in November 1910 provoked yet more intense

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anxiety about his own reputation. Stirred by comments in both the Finnish and European press, he confided to his diary: “Am I nothing more than a ‘nationalistic’ curiosity, who must rank second to any ‘international’ mediocrity?”¹⁹² His sensitivities were in part provoked by his suspicion that he had been supplanted by Glazunov in Kajanus’s affections,¹⁹³ but they were also clearly related to his apprehension that the reputation of any nationalist composer would hinder the reception of any works conceived in a more abstract and universal vein (such as the Fourth Symphony, on which he was then at work). If the absence of any obvious Russian influences in works dating from after, say, the Violin Concerto, bespeaks an ambivalence about the specific value of the Russian traditions, then it also demonstrates Sibelius’s profound sense of unease about the nationalist project itself.

By looking toward Russia, Sibelius learned a way of using folk motives, explored the parallel forms of the symphony and the symphonic poem, refined his harmonic language, and pursued a series of highly original explorations in symphonic syntax. Russian music offered a model of how to balance the lure of nationalism, the specific, and the self-consciously provincial on the one hand, and an interest in the abstract, the general, and the universal on the other. All of this may add substantially to our understanding of Sibelius as a composer—his sources, his borrowings, and his self-fashioning as a composer. Within the more general context of Finnish history, to look at Sibelius’s interest in Russian music is to tell a more complicated story of a small nation’s engagement with its bigger imperial neighbor not through the well-worn narrative of resistance and rebellion but through that of a creative and often ambiguous stimulus. It may also make us rethink the role played by Russian culture in Europe around the turn of the twentieth century, when Russian literature, music, and visual arts came to enjoy a new prominence in the early phase of European modernism. Most of all, though, to talk about Sibelius and the Russian traditions is to begin to refashion our view of Russia itself—not just as exotic, Eastern, untutored, mysterious, and barbarous, all of those myths that propelled the Ballets Russes and Stravinsky’s early fame in Paris and London—but also as a modern, civilized, and advanced culture, one that was well connected to and profoundly integrated with Europe’s other northern realms. If we have come to accept the complexity of Sibelius’s place in Finnish history, culture, and society—a complexity itself indicative of Helsinki’s exemplary status as a cultural crossroads between east and west, and even north and south, rather than as an isolated and even idealized outpost of Nordic national identity—then we also need to attend more carefully to the intricacy of Russia’s musical meanings in the West.