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## The Beecham Collection

Jean Sibelius (1865 - 1957)

Symphony No.6 in D minor, Op. 104

Symphony No. 4 in A minor, Op.63



### Symphony No.6 in D minor

1	Allegro molto moderato	7:27
2	Allegretto moderato	6:11
3	Poco vivace	3:46
4	Allegro molto	10:07

### Symphony No. 4 in A minor

5	Tempo molto moderato, quasi adagio	9:42
6	Allegretto moderato	4:15
7	Poco vivace	9:45
8	Allegro molto	9:22

Total duration 61:23

### Sir Thomas Beecham, Bart., C.H.

Symphony No. 6: Live Performance, Royal Albert Hall Promenade Concert with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 15 September 1954. Previously unissued.

Symphony No. 4: Studio Performance, The Criterion Theatre with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, 4 October 1951. Previously unissued.

Released in collaboration with the Sir Thomas Beecham Trust in support of the Scholarship Fund.

Executive Producer: Arthur Ridgewell

Digital re-mastering: Gary Moore

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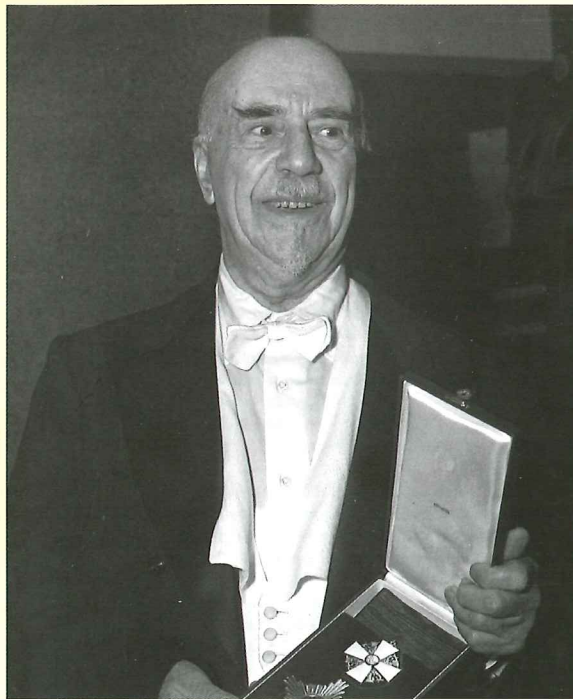
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## The Beecham Collection *Somm*

*Previously Unissued Recordings*



### JEAN SIBELIUS

Symphony No. 6  
in D minor

Symphony No. 4  
in A minor

Royal Philharmonic and  
BBC Symphony  
Orchestras  
Sir Thomas Beecham,  
Bart., C.H.

## BEECHAM AND THE SYMPHONIES OF SIBELIUS

The symphonies of Jean Sibelius are no strangers to concert programmes nor the record catalogues of today yet, in Sir Thomas Beecham's time, they were very much in need of champions both in Scandinavia and further afield. In Sir Thomas, Sibelius found just such a person and friend, to whom he remained for ever indebted. Indeed Beecham, having been a pioneer in bringing many works of Handel and Mozart before the British public for the first time, works with which we are relatively familiar today, also did the same thing for three of his own contemporaries whom he was also to count among his personal friends – Frederick Delius, Richard Strauss and Jean Sibelius.

Sir Thomas had been conducting for thirteen years before he chose to play any Sibelius, when he included the comparatively light *Valse Triste* in a programme in October 1912. It was to be another sixteen years before he ventured into major Sibelius works, conducting *Symphony No. 5 in E♭* for the first time in November 1931 with the London Symphony Orchestra. Between then and November 1937 when, with the Hallé Orchestra, he played *Symphony No. 7 in C* for the first time, he introduced audiences to all of Sibelius's symphonies, as well as other important works of the composer, including the *Violin Concerto*, *Tapiola*, the incidental music to *The Tempest*, *Scenes Historiques*, *Lemminkäinen's Return* and *The Swan of Tuonela*. By then Beecham had really embraced the nordic Sibelian sound world and identified with this music, by the following year also adding sixteen other works of Sibelius to his programmes. Of major pieces, only *Oceanides* had to wait until 1954 to receive Sir Thomas's attention.

Sir Thomas Beecham accorded whole festivals, as well as individual programmes, to the music of Delius, Strauss and Sibelius. We know of at least sixteen such exclusive programmes of Sibelius's music, including six he presented at a Sibelius Festival in October and November 1938, when he performed a complete cycle of all seven symphonies, the *Violin Concerto* and twenty-three other works of the composer. Announcing this festival in an article for *The Daily Telegraph*, he began:

*I have been asked more than once why I am giving a Sibelius Festival. I remember that nine years ago, when I organised the Delius Festival, the same question was put to me. Of course, the simplest answer in either case is: "Why not?" and as far as I am concerned it would be satisfactorily final.*

Behind his mounting such festivals and other specially dedicated occasions was his strong belief in the music which he wished to bring before the public and of which he felt that public was singularly

insufficiently aware. His secretary, Berta Geissmar, in her autobiography, recalled Sir Thomas's single-mindedness in the preparation and during such events, even his habitual courtesy sometimes momentarily deserting him. She remembered that, in the course of her duties at this time: "... when I once approached him at the time of the Sibelius rehearsals, he flashed back at me: "To hell with anything but Sibelius". Sibelius, not well enough to attend, sent his daughter to represent him but was able to hear the programmes via the radio. He was greatly moved by Sir Thomas's presenting such a quantity of his music and subsequently sent a letter and a telegram of appreciation and thanks to Sir Thomas.

The incomplete concert records indicate that, of Sibelius's symphonies alone Sir Thomas gave over 275 performances between November 1931 and 1960. In concert life today, of those symphonies it is *Symphony No. 4 in a minor* and *Symphony No. 6 in d minor* which are the least frequent to appear in programmes, largely because they are relatively the two most difficult of the seven for both performers and listeners – especially the powerful and austere No. 4 – but not so for Sir Thomas, for whom No. 6 was as frequently performed by him as *Symphony No. 1 in e minor* and almost as often as *Symphony No. 2 in D* and *Symphony No. 7 in C*. Only *Symphony No. 3 in C* and *Symphony No. 5 in E♭* appeared more rarely in his programmes. Sibelius himself was particularly pleased and satisfied with Sir Thomas's accounts of *Symphonies Nos. 4, 6 and 7*. After hearing his broadcast with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra from the BBC Studio No. 1 at Maida Vale on 22nd January 1949, he sent a telegram to Beecham:

*Having listened to your splendid performance of my 4th symphony I send you my cordial admiring greetings.  
Jean Sibelius.*

On the occasion of Beecham's 70th birthday in April 1949, Sibelius wrote him a letter in which he said:

*I highly appreciate your deep understanding and brilliant interpretation of my compositions, which has been of great importance to me . . .*

In the July of 1949 he again wrote to Sir Thomas:

*Dear Sir Thomas,  
For your kind letter of July 4th I thank you most cordially. Your recording of my 7th symphony is excellent. It has all the qualities that make your performances of my works so living and effective . . .*

With warmest regards,  
Yours very sincerely,  
Jean Sibelius.

*Symphony No. 4 in a minor* was included by Beecham in the programme given to a packed Royal Festival Hall on 8th December 1955 to mark the 90th birthday of Sibelius. During the interval there was a short ceremony in which the Finnish people recognised Sir Thomas's contribution to the service of Finnish culture and especially the music of Sibelius, when the Finnish Ambassador and the Secretary of State of the Finnish Foreign Ministry presented Sir Thomas with The Order of the White Rose of Finland, Commander First Class. Earlier, in 1928, Beecham had received the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society. In the interval of the Royal Philharmonic Society's concert in the Queen's Hall with his London Philharmonic Orchestra on 7th November 1935, at which he had conducted *Symphony No. 6 in d minor* to end the first half, Sir Thomas presented the Society's Gold Medal awarded to Sibelius, to the Finnish Minister in London on behalf of the composer who was unable to travel to receive it in person.

The recording preserved here of *Symphony No. 4 in a minor* comes from a concert Sir Thomas gave with the BBC Symphony Orchestra on 4th October 1951 in the Criterion Theatre and broadcast at 20.15 on the BBC Third Programme, the Criterion Theatre being used at that time as an overflow rehearsal hall for London orchestras and an extra recording studio for the BBC. Basil (Nick) Tschaikoff, who was second clarinet to Jack Brymer, remembers this occasion and recalls the diligence with which Sir Thomas rehearsed the symphony, devoting much time and concentration to it. With typical understatement, at the end of the final rehearsal he commented to his players: "That was a hard nut to crack". The programme opened with Mendelssohn's *Overture: The Fair Melusine* (Op. 32) which was then followed by the Sibelius symphony. Then came the *Overture: Banners* by Maurice Johnstone, one of the British works Sir Thomas gave at this time in association with the post-war celebration of the Festival of Britain that year. Maurice Johnstone had been Beecham's secretary from 1932 to 1935 and later became Head of Music at the BBC in 1952 after several years as Head of Music for the BBC North Region. The programme ended with Rimsky-Korsakov's *Symphonic Suite: Antar* (*Symphony No. 2, Op. 9*).

The performance of *Symphony No. 6 in d minor* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra comes from the Promenade Concert at the Royal Albert Hall on 15th September 1954. Sir Thomas's appearances at the Robert Newman/Henry Wood "Proms" were limited to just three occasions, the first as early as 1915 and the other two on consecutive nights in 1954, well remembered by all who were fortunate enough to have taken part or been present. The first of these concluded with Schubert: *Symphony No. 5 in Bb* and

Berlioz: *Overture: Le Corsaire* but the first half was given over entirely to the music of Sibelius: *En Saga*, *Symphony No. 6 in d minor* and the *Violin Concerto* in the same key, in which the soloist was Henry Holst. While the second of these two "Proms" is preserved on record, sadly little of the first has survived but at least we do have the fine account of the Sibelius symphony.

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*Symphony No. 6*: Recorded during a Promenade Concert at the Royal Albert Hall with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on 15th September 1954.

*Symphony No. 4*: Recorded from a concert given with the BBC Symphony Orchestra on 4th October 1951 in the Criterion Theatre and broadcast at 20.15 on the BBC Third Programme

NB: It should be noted that both these recordings were taken from LP acetates, which now display some wear and tear. There are therefore, parts of the 6th Symphony but particularly the 4th Symphony where the sound quality is variable.

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Promenade Concert, Royal Albert Hall, 15 September 1954