



Erkki Melartin's Symphony No. 1 C minor (op. 30, nro 1)

Of the six symphonies by **Erkki Melartin** (1875–1937), the first five, dated between 1903 and 1916, represent the National Romantic Finnish musical tradition based on Austro-German orchestral music heritage. At the time, their premieres became large patriotic celebrations according to the genre of *the national symphonic concert* born with **Jean Sibelius**. The hall-mark of these concerts was the composer's immediate presence. Melartin himself conducted the premieres of all his symphonies, and he invariably received great applause and lavish floral greetings from the Helsinki audience. The music critics of the time also gave great recognition to Melartin's symphonies.

Erkki Melartin felt that his vocation was primarily that of a composer, although he also worked as a professional conductor, teacher of music theory and composition – and since 1911, as director of the conservatory, an institution which later became the Sibelius Academy. When looking at his oeuvre, his symphonies and the opera *Aino* were of significant artistic importance. However, in the later decades of post-war ideals, they became over-shadowed by the works of Jean Sibelius on the one hand, and emerging modernist composers on the other. With the exception of Symphony No. 6, Melartin's orchestral works remained unpublished during his lifetime. Consecutively, the threshold for accessing and getting acquainted with them became rather high.

In April 1901, at the age of 26 and upon completion his two-year studies in Vienna, Erkki Melartin began composing his debut symphony. After extensive studies in composition in Finland and abroad, he was already expected to provide evidence of this prestigious genre of orchestral music. After all, Sibelius had also composed his *Kullervo* at the end of his studies abroad.

The first movement of the Symphony in C minor was completed in July in Vienna. However, upon his return to Helsinki, Melartin had a lot of music theory teaching at the **Martin Wegelius** Music College and received several composition orders. There was therefore no immediate time to compose the symphony, and it was not completed until October 1902 the following year.

After arranging schedules with the director of the Philharmonic Orchestra **Robert Kajanus**, the first concert of Melartin's compositions took place at the Great Hall of the University of Helsinki on March 7, 1903. Rehearsals had begun in February, and with very little conducting experience, Melartin both rehearsed the orchestra and conducted his own concert. Other numbers were the prelude to the incidental music Pohjola's Wedding (Op. 179) and its part no. 16, The Story of Light, for male choir and orchestra. The incidental music was composed for the inauguration of the National Theatre, which had been completed a year earlier. For the debut concert, Melartin arranged these parts for a large orchestra.

The concert received stormy applause from the audience. In a letter to his parents, the young composer described its reception as follows: "*The admiration was great, and I received flower deliveries and gifts for both home and the concert. I got a laurel wreath from Finnish composers [Faltin, Wegelius, Kajanus, Sibelius, Järnefelt and Merikanto]. They and their ladies held a party in honour of the concert. It was great, and many speeches were given. Kajanus is anticipating a tour in Europe*".

Melartin himself considered his artistic success to be unexpectedly good, but what he rejoiced most was hearing the symphony. It was, in his opinion, more informative than a year-long assiduous effort on paper: Now he knew what was meritorious and what was weak. In the symphony's autograph, one is able to see the young composer's slight inexperience with orchestral balance. The arduous process of the work is also reflected in the fact that the first movement, completed earlier, in particular has many corrections. Immediately after the first concert, Melartin began reworking the symphony and revising the final movements of the work. The end of Scherzo was shortened from the original, but in the 1904 version, especially the last movement has gone through changes and has been substantially condensed.

The first concert received a commendable rating in all Helsinki dailies: the debut symphony was considered to have fulfilled the promises the young composer had made of his abilities with his previous smaller works. All critics quite unanimously considered the central movements of the symphony to be the best controlled. **Alarik Uggla** of Hufvudstadsbladet described Adagio as an inspired song and dreamy poem, and **Karl Flodin** of Helsingfors-Posten thought that movement of it was one of the most melodically beautiful and internalized works in Finnish orchestral literature. **Oskar Merikanto** of Päivälehti, on the other hand, considered the Scherzo to be a true masterpiece, which has since been presented as a separate number of orchestral concerts both during and after the composer's lifetime. Melartin conducted the interludes in Turku in 1905, his entire renewed symphony in 1905 in Helsinki and the following year in Vyborg. Since then, this work has no longer been performed in its entirety. The third movement, scherzo has been very popular as an independent number in concerts, instead.

The composition concert was a milestone in Melartin's career – already because of the fact that his symphony was one of the earliest representatives of its genre in Finland. At the time of its birth, only Sibelius was active as a composer of symphonies, and the situation practically continued until World War I: alongside Sibelius, Melartin was the only symphonist in Finland.

Tuire Ranta-Meyer's research on Melartin's works has shown that the first symphony was based on the string quartet in C minor, the object of passionate creation in 1898. It was to be "energetic and healthy", and the Andante included the Finnish folk song *Oi' kaunis kesäilta* (A beautiful summer evening), which just had the "absolutely charming atmosphere of a spring's night" sought by the composer. However, the quartet was abandoned and never finished, and the themes shifted to a larger form in a few years.

Melartin's symphony in C minor has, according to the romantic tradition, four movements with the first in sonata form. It is a full-fledged work and thus a significant proof of the composer's trajectory. In spirit, it owes much to the Tchaikovsky symphonies. Melartin clearly responded to the national romantic currents of the time by weaving in the trio of the scherzo section as a counterpoint to the themes of the aforementioned folk song *Oi' kaunis kesäilta*. Already in this debut symphony – especially in its coda – the characteristic feature of Melartin's melodic language can clearly be seen: The construction of the culmination by combining the themes of different movements of the symphony with a skilful counterpoint approach.

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In 2006, the Erkki Melartin Society launched an editing and engraving project for Melartin's symphonies. The aim was to promote their performing, and help them become a living part of the music culture in Finland. Besides the works of Jean Sibelius, the public should be given a possibility of hearing the more lyrical symphonic music of Melartin, which has been more influenced by the Finnish folk songs, the Finnish scenery, and the idyll of summer. The editing and engraving project is also intended to facilitate the work of symphony orchestras, as the original handwritten scores contain errors, incoherencies, and problems of interpretation. In the past, orchestras and conductors have been required to make great effort to interpret old photocopies of handwritten scores and put the symphonies into performance. In addition, the works have sometimes been radically shortened in recordings and historical radio broadcasts. Therefore, it has been important to produce the orchestral materials of the symphonies now in the form in which they were written by the composer. Rather than making them into research-driven, critical editions, the aim of the Melartin Society has been to produce materials that are useful to orchestra conductors and musicians, serving the performing of symphonies.

The project was led by society chair Dr. Tuire Ranta-Meyer, and the editing and clean-copying was carried out by professional engraver, vice chair **Jani Kyllönen**. A further contributor to the project was board member, **Ari Nieminen**. More information on this project is available through sending an e-mail to tuire.ranta-meyer@metropolia.fi.

In 2006 and 2008, the Finnish Cultural Foundation gave the Erkki Melartin Society a considerable grant for editing and engraving Melartin's symphonies. Because of this grant, Melartin's Symphonies No. 3, 4, 5 as well as *Traumgesicht*, *Marjatta* and tableau music *Väinämöinen Creates the Kantele* were edited for publication. The scores and the orchestral parts are available at Fennica Gehrman (see www.fennicagehrman.fi). The edited scores and prefaces of the symphonies are openly available under

the title "Nuotteja – Scores and prefaces" at the home page of the Melartin Society:
<http://erkkimelartin.fi>.

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