



## *Väinämöinen Creates the Kantele* – Tableau Music for orchestra EM256 (1906)

**Erkki Melartin** (1875–1937) 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 that later became the Sibelius Academy. When looking at his extensive oeuvre, his symphonies and the opera *Aino* were of significant artistic importance. However, in the later decades of post-war ideals, the works of **Jean Sibelius** on the one hand, and emerging modernist composers on the other overshadowed them.

With the exception of *Symphony No. 6*, Melartin's orchestral works remained unpublished during his lifetime. Consecutively, the threshold for accessing or getting acquainted with them became rather high. In 2006, the Erkki Melartin Society launched an editing and engraving project of Melartin's symphonies. Its objective was to promote the performance and formation of Melartin's works as part of the Finland's musical culture. Not only should today's music audience be able to enjoy Jean Sibelius' music, but they should also be given the chance to become familiar with the more lyrical symphonic oeuvre of his contemporary Erkki Melartin. Contrary to that of Sibelius, Melartin's music was more directly influenced by Finnish folk songs, the national landscape and the country's idyllic summer.

As a spin-off of the editing and engraving of Melartin's symphonies, Erkki Melartin Society also decided to edit following pieces: The symphonic poem *Traumgesicht* (opus 70) from 1910, the tone poem *Marjatta* for soprano and orchestra (opus 79) from 1914 and this respective piece *Väinämöinen Creates the Kantele* (*Wäinämöinen danar sin kantele*) from 1906.

The idea of creating a Finnish opera had been simmering in the country's cultural circles for a long time. As early as 1891, the Finnish Literature Society had launched a competition to compose an opera that would take its subject from the mythology or history of the country. However, no participants had signed up by the deadline, and it was not until much later (1898) that **Oskar Merikanto** composed *Pohjan neiti*

(*The Maiden of the North*). Nevertheless, theatre director **Jalmari Finne** had already proposed to young composition student Melartin that they should make an opera based on the *Kalevala* poem Aino. Although the project didn't take off at the time, the subject still remained in the minds of both.

At the end of 1905, Melartin became seriously ill with tuberculosis. Without any guarantee of recovery, he had to retreat to the Nummela sanatorium for two years. Some weeks after Melartin being confined to bed, Finne called on him at the sanatorium. His visit became the conceiving point of *Aino* – apparently as a counterbalance to the frustration caused by the harsh treatments, compulsory rest and an absolute ban on composition. “*When are you going to send me the opening to Aino?*” Melartin wrote in his next letter to Finne on December 23, 1905, suggesting that the first scene in the opera be Aino picking up birch twigs for the sauna.

By March 1906, Melartin's recovery had progressed, allowing the patient to compose two hours a day. The permission came at a good time, as the board of the Helsinki Philharmonic Society ordered music for a tableau organized by **Axel Gallén**. The depiction was to be presented at a fundraising party, the proceeds of which would be given to promote the construction project of a decent concert hall, the “Palace of Art,” needed in the capital.

After getting to work, the young composer soon completed the entire score. He was enthusiastic about his task, especially because he was able to experiment the ideas he had already designed and composed for the opera and immerse them in the tableau music.

When the Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by **Robert Kajanus**, played the work, he had the opportunity to hear and evaluate the topics and orchestration of his future opera in advance. “*I wrote the overture and the tableau music for the event arranged by Gallén (for that art palace). It is Väinämöinen's kantele and I had the opportunity to use a contemporary orchestra with contrabassoons, etc. in a discreet way, as well as all kinds of Aino motifs. Pleasant 'förstudie' and very informative,*” he wrote to Finne on a postcard.

On the final page of the autograph of *Väinämöinen Creates the Kantele*, Melartin marked an entry “*Studie till Aino förspelet, a study for Aino's overture*”. Based on the handwriting, this entry was written at a later stage – possibly only in connection with the 1930 performance – it is a clear confirmation of the relationship of this work to the overture to the opera *Aino*, which was completed a few years later (1909).

Although the short tableau piece, only lasting about five minutes, is mainly based on Aino's and Väinö's *leitmotifs* in the opera, it is still an independent entity. Of the 81 bars in the work, 45 are the same as in the opera's overture. The overture is a total of 97 bars, *Väinämöinen Creates the Kantele* bars 2–30 corresponding to *Aino's* overture bars 31–59; bars 31–46 in turn bars 63–78 of the overture. When comparing the tableau music to the final overture of the opera, one can see that Melartin has made some slight changes in the harmony and orchestration of the latter.

Of the 22 *leitmotifs* of the opera, five occur also in *Väinämöinen*: Aino, Väinö, The Joy of Spring, Adolescence and The Birch. Towards the end of *Väinämöinen*, however, the Birch motif is included in a section that cannot be found in the overture. As Melartin edited the opera overture to its final form, he added to it the themes of Destruction, Nature, Birth, Mass, and Awakening. All of the latter, which therefore do not occur in *Väinämöinen* at all, are placed in the beats 1-30 of *Aino*'s overture.

The basis for this editing work is an autograph, which is kept in the library of the Sibelius Academy (SibA Mel. 5:35). **Jani Kyllönen**, editor, professional engraver and board member of the Melartin Society, has been responsible for the editing and clean-copying. He has also edited all the other orchestral works involved in the project. The editing project was led by the chair, Melartin researcher **Tuire Ranta-Meyer**, from whom you can get more information about the project ([tuire.ranta-meyer@metropolia.fi](mailto:tuire.ranta-meyer@metropolia.fi)).

All edited scores and prefaces can be found and openly accessed on the Erkki Melartin Society's website at [http://erkkimelartin.fi/em/?page\\_id=23](http://erkkimelartin.fi/em/?page_id=23). The parts are available from [Fennica Gehrman](mailto:hire@fennicagehrman.fi) on the e-mail address [hire@fennicagehrman.fi](mailto:hire@fennicagehrman.fi). The original manuscripts are available on the digital material management system Doria at [www.doria.fi](http://www.doria.fi).

Lastly, the Erkki Melartin Society wants to express its most cordial gratitude to the Finnish Cultural Foundation for making this important project possible.

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Tuire Ranta-Meyer

Jani Kyllönen