



## Erkki Melartin's Symphony No. 2, E minor (Opus 30, No. 2)

Of the six symphonies by composer **Erkki Melartin** (1875–1937), the first five from 1902–1916 represent a national romantic compositional tradition based on the Austro-German orchestral music heritage. In the past, their premieres became major patriotic celebrations according to the genre of *the national symphonic concert* born with **Jean Sibelius**. The hallmark of these concerts was that the composer himself was present at them and that the repertoire consisted entirely of his new works. It also meant that Melartin – like few other Finnish composers of the time – himself conducted the premieres of all his symphonies and most of his large-scale orchestral works. Because of the Russification measures that began at the end of the 19th century, the upper crust of the Grand Duchy of Finland was already patriotic. Melartin invariably received great applause and lavish floral greetings from the audience. Even the music critics of the time gave Melartin's symphonies a lot of value and positive publicity.

Melartin felt that his vocation was primarily that of a composer, although he also worked as a professional conductor, for 30 years teacher of music theory and composition – and 25 years as director of the conservatory, an institution that later became the Sibelius Academy. When looking at his oeuvre, specially the symphonies, a violin concerto, the symphonic poem *Traumgesicht*, the tone poem *Marjatta* and the opera *Aino* are works of significant artistic importance. However, after the composer's death and in the years of post-war modernism, our concert life nearly forgot or left them aside. When symphonies were not published, with the exception of the Sixth Symphony, the threshold of getting acquainted with them became rather high.

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 have 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.

In addition, the works have sometimes been radically shortened in historical recordings and 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 conductors and musicians, serving the performing of symphonies.

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After the premiere of his debut symphony in the spring of 1903, 28-year-old Erkki Melartin was extraordinarily active in Finnish music life. He was also clearly on the eve of his mature composition. He was commissioned for **Johan Ludvig Runeberg's** 100th anniversary celebration with its main work (symphonic poem *Siikajoki*, op. 28) and music for the National Theater's performance of **Zacharias Topelius'** play *Sleeping Beauty* (op. 22). With his opus 51, no.1 *Vårdträdet* for orchestra and male choir, he won first prize in the **Muntra Musikanter** Choir Composition Competition. In addition, he taught music theory at the Helsinki Music Institute.

In the summer of 1903, the energetic composer already had ideas and "sketches" in mind for a new symphony. However, he did not get more fully with them until the following year when he was at his parents' home in Liperi to spend the summer. *Joensuulehti* (July 26, 1904) and *Hufvudstadsbladet* (July 30, 1904) published little news with the same content, according to which "*composer Erkki Melartin is currently writing a new symphony for a large orchestra. Symphony, which becomes a half hour piece, will be finished in the autumn, when (...) the composer intends to present a musical concert in the capital.*"

Despite these references to the symphony, it appears that Melartin was uncertain about the nature and form of the work. He used the name "Symphonic Fantasy" in October 1904 to write to his parents that he was writing a score. Very little draft material has survived; however, in a single pencil-written sketch page in February 1904, with the themes of the second symphony, the title is replaced by the phrase "i den symfoniska fantasin". The draft page, dated Liperi in August 1904, still bears the title "Symfonisk fantasi". Even in his recension after the premiere (February 1, 1905), *Helsingforsposten's* critic Bis, or **Karl Fredrik Wasenius**, mentioned that the composer originally called the work a symphonic poem.

The faltering about the title of the work is still visible today. According to **Heikki Poroila**, who has compiled Melartin's catalog of works, it can still be seen from the autograph as the title "Symphony No. 2 (in E minor)" is written on top of an earlier, carefully scratched title. However, the original title of the work, Symphonic Fantasy, has survived in the orchestral parts. At that time, Melartin clearly pursued prestige as a symphonic composer. Therefore, he named the work as his second symphony at some point just before the premiere. Nevertheless, the symphony, consisting of only one movement, refers stronger in the direction of a symphonic poem or fantasy than a traditional four-movement symphonic form. In Finland, **Armas Järnefelt's** *Symphonic Fantasy* (1895) is an earlier example of this type of composition. It was not

until 1924 that Jean Sibelius fulfilled his idea of a one-movement symphony. He also called his seventh symphony in the beginning of the composition process "Fantasia sinfonica". Melartin's one-movement symphony was premiered interestingly between these two, when considering their time of birth.

In Finnish history, Melartin's second symphony was composed and premiered in the very period of pan Slavic oppression and russification measures. The general anxiety led to the audience interpreting the content of the symphony as a symbol of a small country's struggle for autonomy, and as a final victory against a great empire. This happened regardless of the fact that dailies had promoted the ideology behind the work being "the struggle of an individual in the storm of times into an independent, free and sound joy of life". However, in his recension of the premiere, the music critique **Alarik Uggla** in *Hufvudstadsbladet* (4.2.1905) stated that Melartin had in his symphony "addressed in an appropriate and successful way those feelings and emotions, which were in the minds of every intellectual citizen of the country."

On one hand, the composer himself has emphasized the deviation of the symphonic form and its interrelated thematic material from the traditional four-movement construction. On the other, in his own written analysis, he has put weight on the fact that the listener can furthermore outline the four-movement structure within the bigger one-movement entity. The first two movements are entwined in a distinctive way. The slow introduction in Andante tranquillo is followed by exposition, a prompt Allegro. The next section, Andante, replaces the traditional development section, and the recapitulation has been totally dropped out. Melartin only slightly refers to the recapitulation in the intermediate section between Scherzo and Finale, as he uses there the brass fanfare and the main theme from the beginning of the symphony.

In this symphony, the composer seems to profile himself willingly as an expert of counterpoint-based solutions. In his own written analysis in the *Finsk Musikrevy*, he describes his orientation to counterpoint quite in detail: words like counterpoint-based, diminution, retroversion, canon in retro-version and canon-based play are often in use. Skillful counterpoint is characteristic for Melartin's symphonies in general.

In comparison with other Melartin symphonies, the second bears distinct affiliation to Sibelius' music, especially to the oeuvre in his Karelianistic period. Moreover, the 60-bar ostinato in the Andante of the second symphony refers to Sibelius. In fact, Melartin uses in his Scherzo and Vivace Finale melodies that associate strongly with Karelian folk song without carrying any nuance of descriptive folklorism. Of all his contemporary composers, Karelian born Melartin was the only one who from childhood on had an imminent contact to *Kalevala*-based Karelian rune singing.

The composition concert in 1905 was an important step for Melartin. With the symphony, he confirmed his position in Finland as a composer of symphonic stature. At the time the symphony's birth, as was the case with the first symphony, only Sibelius was active as a composer of symphonies. This situation practically continued until the Great War: alongside Sibelius, Melartin was the only symphonist in our country.

Despite its commendable reception, the new work was never again performed during Melartin's own time. The composer himself made a somewhat exceptional solution compared to future large-scale works: The second symphony did not get an opus number of its own, but the composer associated it with the first symphony in the same opus (op. 30) as numbers 1 and 2. We can only guess if Melartin did this in order to send a hidden message, stating that these first comprehensive orchestral works, in his view, did not correspond yet to symphonies that were mature in weight. In any case, Symphony No. 2 had to wait more than 112 years after its premiere before Helsinki Concordia, conducted by **Tuomas Rousi**, performed it at the Helsinki Conservatory's Finnish Music Festival on 17 November 2017.

Between 2006 and 2015, Erkki Melartin Society received three times a significant grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation for editing and engraving the symphonies. Thanks to this, Melartin's symphonies No. 1, 3, 4 and 5, and the works *Traumgesicht*, *Marjatta* and the tableau music *Väinämöinen Creates the Kantele* have so far been completed. The scores and prefaces are available for public download under the title Nuotteja – Scores and Prefaces on Society's website at [http://erkkimelartin.fi/em/?page\\_id=23](http://erkkimelartin.fi/em/?page_id=23). Orchestra parts are available at Fennica Gehrman ([hire@fennicagehrman.fi](mailto:hire@fennicagehrman.fi); see also [www.fennicagehrman.fi](http://www.fennicagehrman.fi)).

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 the project is available via e-mail: [tuire.ranta-meyer@metropolia.fi](mailto:tuire.ranta-meyer@metropolia.fi).

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