

THE GERMAN INFLUENCE ON FINNISH VIOLIN MUSIC FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Sebastian Silén

YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67ATdA76qV8&list=PLLDpJXjA-sYJVoG41XXttLuk8ddxdH3Uy&index=55>

Excerpts from:

Fredrik Pacius:

- Variationer öfver motivet "Studenter äro muntra bröder" (0.08)
- Duo for Violin and Piano (14.13)

Robert Kajanus:

- Scherzo (22.56)
- Air élégiaque (25.32)
- Berceuse (35.25)

This text serves as a summary of a lecture recital which was performed on September 5, 2018, in Juozas Karoasa Hall during the Doctors in Performance conference in Vilnius. The presentation was part of an artistic project whose primary goal was to record a CD containing largely neglected music for violin and piano by Fredrik Pacius (1809-1891), Robert Kajanus (1856-1933), and Jean Sibelius (1865-1957). The CD will be released by SibaRecords by the end of 2019. The recording constitutes a part of an artistic doctoral work titled *Contextualizing Jean Sibelius's Works for Violin and Piano* at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland.

The project has focused on these three composers for several reasons. My artistic doctoral work explores the Nordic musical context surrounding Jean Sibelius's violin works, searching for similarities and differences between Sibelius's works and works for violin and piano by his Nordic contemporaries. In order to understand the music which Sibelius composed during his early career, a natural starting point is to begin by exploring Finnish music from the nineteenth century.

Pacius, Kajanus, and Sibelius were among the most influential figures in Finnish music history and played an invaluable role in developing Finland's culture. The German-born Pacius lay the foundation for Finnish musical culture while serving as music teacher at the Imperial Alexander University in Finland (later renamed the University of Helsinki in 1919) from 1835-1869. Kajanus founded Finland's first professional symphony orchestra in 1882 and was considered Finland's most promising composer until he was overshadowed by Sibelius and instead chose to primarily focus on

his numerous other undertakings. Sibelius created a uniquely individual Finnish musical style which quickly made him the most important composer in Finnish history.

By preparing and performing these three composers' music, and by studying their lives and work, a number of things have become apparent. It is well known that Finland's musical culture was strongly influenced by German culture. Both Pacius and his successor Richard Faltin (1835-1918) were born and educated in Germany, which meant that one of the most influential positions available for musicians in Finland was occupied by Germans for 59 years.¹ This was during a time when a large cultural development was underway, which created a foundation strongly rooted in the German tradition. Until 1882, when Martin Wegelius, who himself had received his education in Leipzig (Sarjala 1999), founded the Helsinki Music Institute, there wasn't any formal music education in Finland. For this reason, aspiring musicians usually sought out their education abroad, most commonly in German-speaking areas of Europe. The German influence was therefore twofold due to German musicians being in key positions and developing Finland's musical culture and because the most prominent Finnish musicians had received their education in Germany.

What, however, has become apparent while working on the project, is that the German influence also seems to extend to both writing for violin and to violin playing itself. Pacius, who was born in Hamburg and studied violin with Louis Spohr (1784-1859) in Kassel, was strongly rooted in the German musical tradition. The available concert programs show that, although his repertoire at least initially was relatively limited, his forte seems to have been virtuosic violin works by Germanic composers. The exact titles of the pieces he performed are not always clear, because the concert programs often lack detailed information, but his most often performed works included the Violin Concerto by Spohr² and Concert Variations by Joseph Mayseder (1789-1863) (Vainio 2009: 69).

While we retain some familiarity with Spohr, Mayseder is a largely forgotten composer. Both composers' violin works represent a virtuosic German violin tradition which was, to a considerable degree, superseded by violinists who placed a greater emphasis on pushing the violin's technical possibilities, such as Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840), Henri Vieuxtemps (1820-1881), and Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880). Spohr, who at the time was considered one of the greatest musicians and composers of his era (Brown 2006), and his dedicated student Pacius, seem to have been relatively conservative in both their approach to both composing and violin playing. Pacius's variations on the theme "*Studenter äro muntra bröder*" (YouTube time code 0.08) shares many characteristics with Mayseder's writing for violin.

What makes Pacius's tutelage with Spohr especially interesting from an artistic research

¹ Pacius served as music teacher at the University in Helsinki from 1835-1869 and Faltin from 1871-1896 (Lappalainen 2001, Lappalainen 2000)

² Most likely the Violin Concerto in e minor nr. 11, op. 38. (Mäkelä 2009: 58)

perspective is that Spohr's approach to both violin playing and music in general has been amassed into his well-known *Violin School*, which was published in 1832 (Spohr 1832). *Violin School* is one of the most important sources for understanding German violin playing from the nineteenth century and shows many ways in which his approach differed from what we are used to today. Vibrato was used sparingly, which he clarifies in great detail in his numerous annotated scores; *portamento*, that is, sliding from one note to another, was an essential expressive tool, probably exceeding vibrato in importance; bounced bow strokes were largely avoided; and Spohr expected the violinist to go beyond the written score and add articulations and separations of phrases to achieve what he called “fine style” (Brown 1999: 30). *Violin School* can, in combination with the observation that reviews of Pacius’s concerts indicate that he stylistically followed in his teacher’s footsteps, provide us with at least a rudimentary idea of how Pacius approached violin playing. We should keep in mind that reading a book likely can convey only a small part of the knowledge Pacius must have gained from his teacher, but it can still help us understand the violinist who, in essence, laid the foundation for Finland’s musical culture.

Robert Kajanus was also initially trained as a violinist by two teachers who had studied with Pacius's good friend and colleague, Ferdinand David (1810-1873), who in turn had studied with Spohr. Kajanus's violin teacher in Helsinki was the German violinist Gustaf Niemann (1841-1881) (Vainio 2002: 43-44, year of birth and death from Kuha 2017: 151), who at the time served as the concert master of the Theater Orchestra in Helsinki. Kajanus's early works, which he wrote as a student for Faltin, show a strong German influence. This can be seen in, for example, his work for violin and piano, Scherzo (Menuetto) (YouTube time code 22.56) from 1874, which has been described to bring to mind music by Schubert, Haydn, and even Pacius (Vainio 2002: 51).

Kajanus continued his studies in Leipzig with another student of David, Henry Schradieck (1846-1918) (ibid: 69), but these studies were cut short because Schradieck considered Kajanus's left-handedness an insurmountable obstacle to becoming a concert violinist. For this reason, Kajanus instead put his primary focus on music theory, composition, and conducting. During this time Kajanus's style of composing changed markedly. The Wagnerian influence often recognized in Kajanus's orchestral work is only present in one of Kajanus's works for violin, *Air élegiaque* from 1886 (ibid: 210-211) (YouTube time code 25.32).

After five years abroad, Kajanus quickly established the first Finnish professional orchestra upon returning to Finland. This orchestra would eventually become known as the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. The orchestra consisted of 36 musicians, of which only seven were of Finnish origin (Marvia and Vainio 1993: 50). Of these seven musicians, at least Gustaf Dahlström had studied in Germany with Joseph Joachim (1831-1907) (ibid: 55), while the musicians brought from abroad were often of German origin or had previously either studied or worked in Germany.

Despite these strong German influences, a new type of musical expression began to emerge in Finland during the 1890s. Although Finnish folk melodies had been used in works by both Pacius and Kajanus, these melodies were often placed in musical contexts which are more reminiscent of German music than anything we would consider Finnish today. Sibelius broke free from the German style in his *Kullervo* Symphony (1892) and created a musical style which seemed immediately familiar to Finnish audiences, even though the music was unlike anything which had been previously heard (Päivälehti 1892). After his initial success, Sibelius would lead the way in the following decades in developing a unique Finnish musical style. This newly found musical expression also found its way into the music of other composers. This can be seen, for example, in Kajanus's *Berceuse* from 1896, which a few years later was hailed as the most Finnish of Kajanus's compositions (Flodin, 1900: 25).

With the current interest in the German Violin School from the nineteenth century (see, for instance, Brown 1999, Milsom 2003, and Wilson 2014), the observation that both Finnish musical culture and Finnish violin playing are strongly influenced by the German music and violin traditions may provide clues to the performance practice of Finnish music from the nineteenth century. Many of the characteristics of the German performance tradition can likely be applied to, for example, Sibelius's early orchestral works, such as the *Kullervo* Symphony. Even though it seems likely that Mitrofan Wasiljeff (years of birth and death unknown), Sibelius's violin teacher, exposed Sibelius to the Franko-Belgian style of playing during Sibelius's first year of study in Helsinki (Goss 2009: 68-72), it seems likely that many aspects of the German violin school are also informative with regard to at least Sibelius's early works for violin and piano.

Sources:

Brown, Clive. 1999. *Classical and Romantic performing practice 1750-1900*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Brown, Clive. 2006. *Louis Spohr: a critical biography*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Flodin, Karl. 1900. *Finska musiker och andra uppsatser i musik*. Helsingfors: Söderström & c:o

Goss, Glenda Dawn. 2009. *Sibelius: a composer's life and the awakening of Finland*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kuha, Jukka. 2017. *Suomen musiikkioppilaitoshistoriaa: toiminta ulkomaisten esikuvien pohjalta vuoteen 1969*. Helsinki: Studia musicologica Universitas Helsingiensis.

Lappalainen, Seija. 2000. Faltin, Richard. *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu*. Studia Biographica 4. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997–, November 2000.
<http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sks-kbg-001468> (accessed 23 September 2019).

Lappalainen, Seija. 2001. Pacius, Fredrik. *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu*. Studia Biographica 4. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997–, February 2001.
<http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sks-kbg-001441> (accessed 23 September 2019).

Marvi, Einari, and Vainio, Matti. 1993. *Helsingin Kaupunginorkesteri 1882-1982*. Juva: WSOY.

Milsom, David. 2003. *Theory and practice in late nineteenth-century violin performance: an examination of style in performance, 1850-1900*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Mäkelä, Tomi, and Silke Bruns. 2009. *Fredrik Pacius, kompositör i Finland*. Jyväskylä: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland.

Päivälehti, 28.04.1892, no. 97, p. 2

<https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/sanomalehti/binding/566039?page=2>

National Library's Digital Collections (accessed 23 September 2019).

Sarjala, Jukka. 1999. Wegelius, Martin. Kansallisbiografia-verkkójulkaisu. *Studia Biographica* 4. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997–, February 1999. (viitattu 23.9.2019) <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sks-kbg-001447> (accessed 23 September 2019).

Spohr, Louis. 1832. *Violinschule: mit erläuternden Kupfertafeln*. Vienna: Tobias Haslinger.

Vainio, Matti. 2002. “Nouskaa aatteet!” Robert Kajanus Elämä ja taide. Helsinki: WSOY.

Vainio, Matti. 2009. *Pacius. Suomalaisen musiikin isä*. Jyväskylä: Atena.

Wilson, Robin. 2015. *Style and interpretation in the nineteenth-century German violin school with particular reference to the three sonatas for pianoforte and violin by Johannes Brahms*. Sidney: Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sidney doctoral dissertation.