



LEIF OVE ANDSNES - SIBELIUS
**A personal tribute to the Finnish composer
and his unknown piano gems**



Leif Ove Andsnes will follow his string of award-winning Beethoven concerto recordings for Sony with an album of solo piano works by Finnish composer Jean Sibelius.

17 of Sibelius's 119 opus numbers are pieces for solo piano, but the composer's works for the instrument have long languished in the shadow of his orchestral music, often seen as lacking in the rich, sonorous textures that the composer brought to his full orchestral works and therefore largely disregarded. Andsnes has scoured the composer's entire piano output, carefully selecting the pieces he believes deserve recognition and with which he feels a strong personal connection, uncovering "intriguing works with the wonderful Sibelius qualities we know".

In taking to Sibelius's piano literature, Andsnes follows a small but illustrious clan of pianists who have argued the case for some of the composer's most neglected works, including Glenn Gould. "I really, really believe in this music and I want people to hear it", says Andsnes, "I feel like I'm on a mission here!"

The Norwegian pianist's new recording includes the composer's own piano arrangement of his famous *Valse triste*, excerpts from the popular Ten Pieces Op 24 and early Six Impromptus Op 5, as well as the piano score that is often considered Sibelius's finest: the expressive Three Lyric Pieces Op 41 subtitled *Kyllikki*. With the Six Impromptus, which date from the early 1880s, you can sense both the Finnish folklore which infused Sibelius' music throughout his life, as well as French influences of the time, clearly showing that the composer was experimenting with very different approaches from early on in his career. "In the first Impromptu there is a watery impressionistic feeling and in the second Impromptu it almost feels like a Nordic Satie".



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The Three Sonatinas Op 67, written by Sibelius during his 'pure, cold water' period of the early 1910s show yet more experimentation with the quest to find something new. "The first Sonatina is a real masterpiece" says Andsnes "so simple and so sophisticated at the same time. It inhabits a very private world and is almost not a piece for the public, but something to play for a friend or even alone."

An important aspect for Andsnes in compiling the recording was to follow the chronology of the works which span most of Sibelius's career. "In the majority of his piano music you do not sense a connection with the composer's symphonic writing but in his Opus 114, which is a set of Five Sketches written in the 1920's you can at last hear that reflection at a time when Sibelius was writing his 6th and 7th symphonies. It is a fascinating journey and one which was sadly to end when the composer stopped writing at the end of the 1920's ... but it is a confirmation that his piano compositions accompanied and grew with him throughout."

The music of Sibelius has long been a private passion for Andsnes. The pianist was introduced to the composer's distinctive sound-world by the Finnish conductor Paavo Berglund. "I played a lot with Paavo from the early 1990s and heard him conduct almost all the Sibelius symphonies and several tone poems", says Andsnes. "That touched me deeply and still does."

He recorded his new album at the Teldex Studio in Berlin at the beginning of this year. "There has been such a feeling of discovery", he says. "Everyone was astonished that there can be a major composer out there with such beautiful, accessible music that people don't know. The fact that many will be hearing it for the first time, that's a wonderful feeling."