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■Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

■Symphony No.1 E Minor Op. 39 (38')

Sibelius began thinking about the framework of his Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 39 in the spring of 1898 in Berlin, the city he would revisit the following year to study composition with Albert Becker. The first version of the First Symphony was completed in early 1899, and its premiere took place in Helsinki on April 26, 1899, with the composer himself conducting the Helsinki Orchestral Society (it has also been suggested that Sibelius revised the symphony because the work had been intended to be performed in Paris during the 1900 Exposition). Sibelius decided to revise the composition in 1900 for his friend Robert Kajanus, who was scheduled to make a European tour with the Helsinki Orchestral Society. The original version is now lost, and Sibelius's revisions cannot be fully reviewed. It seems certain, however, that the slow introduction in the first movement was added at the time of the revision. The first performance of the modified version took place in Helsinki on July 1, 1900. The score calls for two flutes (both doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four French horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, harp, and strings.

Sibelius opens Symphony No. 1 in a very unique manner. The piece begins with an introduction that consists of the clarinet playing cadenza-like solo passages that extend over thirty-two measures. Here many of the thematic materials of the movement are included. In the opening section, the timpani playing *tremolo* also appears. It is extremely rare to see just two instruments, of which one is a drum, in the whole of an introduction of a substantially long symphonic work. The movement ends quietly with two pizzicato chords. The slow second movement begins peacefully with French horns, harp, and double basses producing long sustained notes in low register. Towards the end of the movement, the tempo progressively picks up, and the music becomes

dramatic, portraying storm-like scenes. The tranquil mood returns to conclude the movement. The third movement is a scherzo with a contrastingly slower middle section. The finale, subtitled “*Quasi una Fantasia (Almost a Fantasy)*,” begins with an introduction similar to that of the opening movement. After moving through a few melancholic slow sections that are filled with Romantic melodies, the finale ends with profoundly stated motives. The final two notes, however, are played pizzicato, similar to that of the ending of the first movement.

[Akira Ishii]