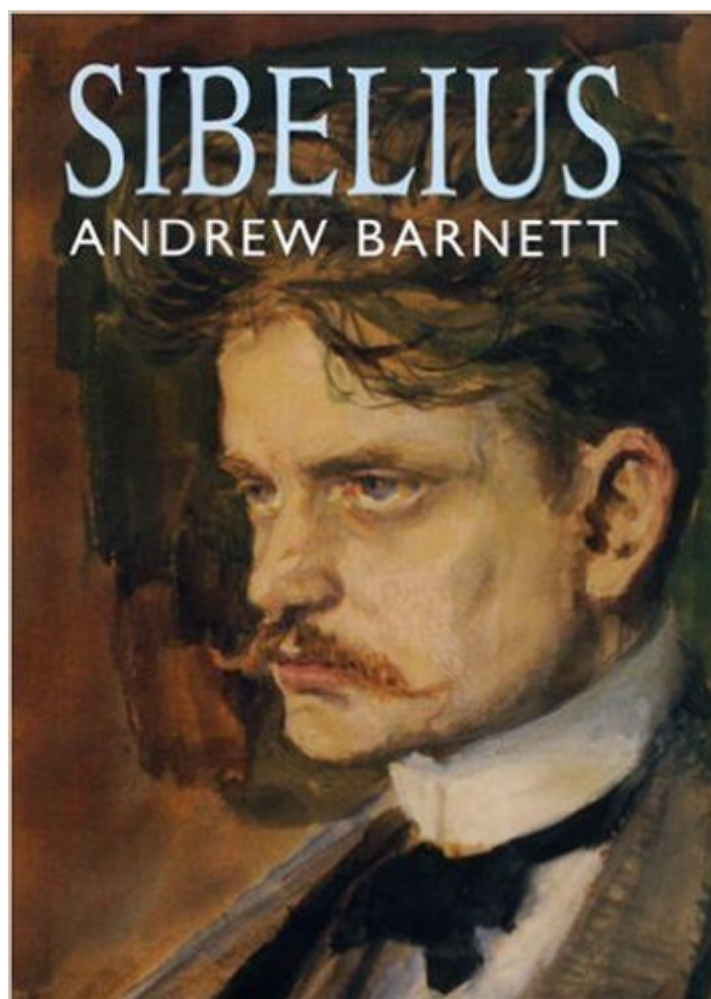


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Sibelius



Synopsis

Informed by a wealth of information that has come to light in recent years, this engaging biography tells the complete story of the life and musical work of Finnish composer Jean Sibelius (1865-1957). Drawing on Sibelius's own correspondence and diaries, contemporary reviews, and the remarks of family and friends, the book presents a rich account of the events of the musician's life. In addition, this volume is the first to set every work and performable fragment by Sibelius in its historical and musical context. Filling a significant gap, the biography also provides the first accurate information about much of the composer's early music. Writing for the general music-lover, Andrew Barnett combines his own extensive knowledge of Sibelius's music with the insights of other scholars and musicians. He lays to rest a number of myths and untruths—that Sibelius wrote no chamber music of value, for example, and that he stopped composing in 1926 and didn't need to compose to earn a living. Barnett completes the volume with the most thorough worklist available and an authoritative chronology of Sibelius's entire output.

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Customer Reviews

After having been bored and disappointed with Foreman's new biography of Bax, I found myself the same but more so while reading this new biography of Sibelius. The problem is that it isn't in any real sense a biography at all. It is an exhaustive (and exhausting) annotated chronological inventory of all Sibelius's compositions, interspersed with cursory descriptions of his activities during a

particular year. The approach is hopelessly clerical and dreary. Year by year works are listed in a narrative of the "and then, and then, and then" variety. Events in Sibelius's life are approached in the exact same way: "on so and so a date he travelled to this or that place where he conducted such and so a piece after which he returned home". There is no sense of depth, let alone of getting to know the composer. What about his alcoholism, which was at times extreme (at one point, a drunken Sibelius stopped the orchestra in the middle of a performance because he had forgotten he was conducting a public concert and thought he was at a rehearsal!). What about the silence of the last 30 years - did a man of Sibelius's artistic integrity really stop composing simply because he finally achieved financial stability? Or is there more to it? Don't expect Barnett to dwell on such essential matters. People around the composer, like the vibrant if bibulous circle of artist friends in Helsinki, remain mere ciphers, and references to the wider historical and cultural context are scanty at best. Moreover, the urge to mention every composition precludes any in-depth analysis of the works as such; any average CD-booklet does better.

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