

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

**JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®**

School of Music

*presents*

**JMU Symphony Orchestra**

***A Sibelius Elegy***

**Foster Beyers, *director***

**Thomas O'Keefe, *MM conductor***

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

8 pm

Concert Hall



There is no intermission.

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# Program

Threnody: In Memory of Jan Sibelius

William Grant Still  
(1895-1978)

Thomas O'Keefe, *MM conductor*

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

Jean Sibelius  
(1865-1957)

- I. Allegretto
- II. Tempo Andante, ma Rubato
- III. Vivacissimo – Lento e Suave
- IV. Finale: Allegro Moderato

## Program Notes

### **Threnody: In Memory of Jean Sibelius (1965)**

The early 1900's was a time of turmoil for African Americans, a time marked by racial segregation. It was in this social climate that William Grant Still (1895-1978) made his mark. Still was raised as a relatively privileged African American while growing up in the early 1900s in Little Rock, Arkansas. His mother had aspirations for him to grow up and be successful in the white world while also helping his people achieve the same social status as white people.

Still's well-earned title "Dean of African-American Composers" came from writing over 150 compositions of all genres including opera, ballet, symphonies, and chamber music. In addition to his prolific output of compositions, he was a trailblazer for African Americans in the symphony orchestra. Among many other firsts, Still was the first African American to have music performed by major symphony orchestras around the United States; his music was widely accepted and he became well known both in the United States and abroad.

Written in 1965, Still's Threnody: In Memory of Jean Sibelius was one of his last compositions. Threnody was commissioned by Fabien Sevitsky, then the director of the University of Miami orchestra, to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of Jean Sibelius' birth (1865-1957). The characteristics of African American spirituals, bluesy harmonies, and syncopation heard in Threnody are reminiscent of Still's second period of writing during the early 1900s, often referred to as the "Racial Period." During this time period, Still sought to depict for white audiences a more authentic, personal portrait of African Americans for who they really were as people. Although the whites and blacks were physically segregated at this time, Still was able to integrate the musical styles of African Americans and Europeans. Still's most well-known composition, Symphony No. 2: Afro-American Symphony, (1930) is from this phase of his writing. When Sibelius heard Afro-American Symphony, he said of Still, "He has something to say." Especially now with continued racial tensions, Still's compositions continue to have something to say, musically reconciling different races

Notes by Eva Bayliss

## Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43 (1902)

Conflict versus peace; life versus death; tragedy versus triumph. Jean Sibelius (1865-1957), the leading composer from Finland during their independence movement, experienced all of these struggles during his lifetime. Sibelius was seen during his time as a national hero of Finland, as his music helped to provide a sense of national identity as the country moved towards independence from Russia during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After composing the famous tone-poem *Finlandia*, Sibelius followed in the footsteps of other notable composers, such as Tchaikovsky and Strauss, and spent the early part of 1901 in Italy, where he began to write what became his Second Symphony.

Unlike some of his contemporaries of the time, Sibelius believed more in the “Severity of form” and “profound logic” of the symphony, rather than the idea that the Symphony, as Maher stated “must be like the world, embracing everything.” Consequently, Sibelius was very meticulous with his writing – each note is justified, every part is marked to their own specific dynamic levels, and each rhythm is to be placed precisely. The symphony opens with a simple three-note motif, which can be found throughout the symphony, linking each movement together thematically. From this gesture spawns the rest of the movement, where all the main motifs are introduced, but in a rather broken up and stilted form, and it is only at the height of the movement, after an extended build-up, do we hear the central theme, with all the broken motifs put together.

The idea for the second movement began as a tone poem on the subject of Don Juan – the famous Spanish lover, who, when confronted by death himself, refused to repent, and was damned to hell. While staying in an old castle in Italy Sibelius was inspired to write “Don Juan. I was sitting in the dark in my castle when a stranger entered. I asked who he could be again and again – but there was no answer. I tried to make him laugh but he remained silent. At last the stranger began to sing – then Don Juan knew who it was. It was death.” This quote can be heard right from the start of the movement in the pizzicato cello and bass, representing Death’s footsteps. While the movement does stray from this vision, you can still hear the final damnation at the end, where after a very animated outburst, the movement ends suddenly, with two towering pizzicato chords bringing the movement to a close.

The third and fourth movements, while linked together attacca, display much of the turmoil and conflict mentioned earlier. The scherzo begins with an immediate rapid-fire statement from the violins in 6/8, and continues bouncing around the entire orchestra, with interjections in 4, creating significant rhythmic tension, which suddenly dies away into the lyrical G-flat major trio – a sharp departure from what was just heard. Just as suddenly as we got to the trio, the chaos returns, this time from Trumpets and low strings, which builds in a similar fashion, until once again, we return to the trio. This time, however, instead of descending back to chaos, we climb the mountain, both figuratively and harmonically, until we reach the peak at the Finale, where we return to our original home key of D Major.

This music is not all triumphant, however. After much celebration, low-strings plunge us back into F-sharp minor, where we wander around, lost for a bit, until emerging into one of the most serene passages in the symphonic repertoire, which Sibelius described as being “Under the Stars.” From here, we begin building once more, until we get back to the mountaintop, although this time it’s even more triumphant than before. We are not done here yet; however. As we struggle once more, we return to the original three-note motif once more, but this time, we finally ascend to the coveted fourth note in closing pages, a passage that Finnish conductor Osmo Vanska described as “smiling through tears.

Notes by Chris King and Foster Beyers

## Biographies

**Foster Beyers (*conductor*)** is the Director of Orchestras and Assistant Professor of Orchestral Conducting at James Madison University where he conducts the Symphony and Chamber Orchestra and leads the Opera each Fall. His duties also include courses in orchestral literature and mentoring of students in the Masters and Doctoral program in Orchestral Conducting. Beyers came to Virginia from Minnesota where he was Director of Orchestras at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN.

Beyers is a committed advocate for and partner to music educators at every level. He began his career in the public schools of Green Bay, Wisconsin where he served as Music Director of the Green Bay Symphony Youth Orchestras while also teaching orchestra and band in the Green Bay Public schools for five years. As an educator he has conducted the Merit School of Music Symphony Orchestra, Music Institute of Chicago Junior Academy Orchestra and the 2010 Minnesota Middle Level Honors Orchestra as well as numerous regional honors orchestras throughout the Midwest and East. Most recently Mr. Beyers conduct the All-Virginia Orchestra in March of 2019 and the North Carolina Eastern Regional Orchestra in February of 2020.

**Thomas O'Keefe (*MM conductor*)** is a Graduate Assistant at James Madison University, where he is pursuing a Masters of Music in Orchestral Conducting under the direction of Professor Foster Beyers. He is one of the directors of the Chamber Orchestra, and serves as an assistant conductor for the Symphony Orchestra and the Opera Orchestra. O'Keefe also remains active as violinist, serving as principal second violin in the Symphony Orchestra as well as concertmaster for JMU Opera's recent production of *Don Giovanni*.

Prior to pursuing his Masters, O'Keefe was a teacher for West Fargo Public Schools, where he taught strings to students from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. His other conducting credits include serving as the assistant conductor at the Lutheran Summer Music Festival and Academy in 2019, as well as guest conducting Sinfonietta Memphis, a Tennessee-based chamber orchestra dedicated to the historically informed performance of Classical era repertoire.

# List of Ensemble Members

Members are listed alphabetically by section

## Violin I

Lauren Bristow  
Aidan Coleman  
Isaac Cotnoir  
Adeline King  
Tomona Mims  
Rachel Tan  
Patrick  
Shaughnessy\*- CM

## Violin II

Paul Anderson  
Briana Clark  
Louanna Colon  
Nathaniel Gordy  
Thomas O'Keefe^\*  
Sierra Rickard  
Emily Werner

## Viola

Mary Binder  
Kamryn Cajohn  
Madeleine Gabalaski  
Ryan Haymans  
Chris King^  
Nina Ravel  
David Swanson

## Cello

Alison Lilly  
Kyle Mendez  
Isaiah Ortiz  
Jessi Sfarnas  
Kim Souther^\*

## Bass

James Adkinson-  
Piccirello  
Tina Battaglia  
Michael Cseh  
John Foley  
Alex Haldane  
Joey Lane  
Gabe Ravel^

## Piccolo

Ariel Collins

## Flutes

Dominic Baldoni^\*  
Bo Boisen

## Oboes

Rebekah Gernert  
Will Slopnick^

## Clarinets

Josie Garner  
Gregorio Paone^\*

## Bassoons

Hanna Maranzatto  
Matt Tignor^

## Horns

Jacob Anderson  
Andrew Parker  
Jordyn Shultz^\*  
Jackson Van Hying

## Trumpets

Eva Bayliss^\*  
Owen Brown  
Max Parrish

## Trombones

Shiv Love^  
Thomas Valentine

## Bass Trombone

Will Crowson

## Tuba

Jake Munn

## Harp

Vanessa Putnam\*

## Timpani

Will Alderman\*

## Percussion

Josh Cummings^  
Tyler Ende  
Aaron Soferenko

## Key

\* Graduate Student  
^Principal

## JMU School of Music Diversity Statement

Difference in identity enriches our community, fosters artistic and intellectual growth, and is vital to creating thriving venues for expression in a global world. In addition to welcoming all individuals and perspectives regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, socio-economic status, or citizenship status, we wish to make the following acknowledgements and affirmations, adapted from Americans for the Arts:

- In the United States, there are systems of power that grant privilege and access unequally such that inequity and injustice result. We resolve to educate ourselves, keep vigilant watch, and act to bring an end to systemic oppression.
- Cultural equity—which embodies values, practices, and policies that ensure all people have access to, and are represented in, the arts—is critical to the sustained engagement of music in society.
- Acknowledging and challenging our inequities and working in partnership is how we will make change happen.
- Everyone deserves equal access to a full, vibrant creative life, which is essential to a healthy and democratic society.
- The prominent presence of musicians in society can challenge inequities and encourage alternatives.



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