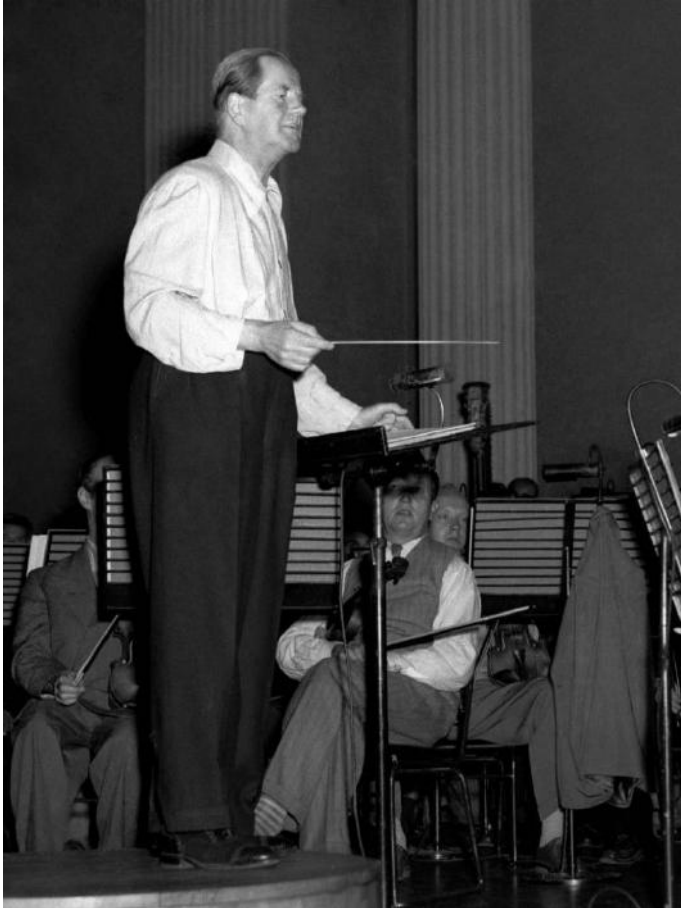


**FORGOTTEN ARTISTS**  
**An occasional series by Christopher Howell**

**29. TAUNO HANNIKAINEN (1896-1968)**



I will begin with a personal reminiscence.

It was a day's holiday at my boarding school in Kent. I would have been fourteen or fifteen, so we are in 1967 or 1968. I do not remember how my schoolmates were spending the afternoon, but my housemaster, one Colin G., decided to leave them to it and go up to the library with me, where the school had recently installed a new stereo gramophone. My contemporaries will remember Colin G. as a military-style martinet who obtained discipline by means that would likely have him in prison today, but if you got him onto classical music, he suddenly became a human being. Those were the roaring days of the Beatles, of the Rolling Stones, of haircuts and styles of dress that demanded instant repression, so I was maybe the only one who knew Colin's human side. He wanted to hear some of his stereo records properly, not in the

cramped conditions of his housemaster's flat, where they might as well have been in mono.

So up to the library we went, a room in an 18<sup>th</sup> century Robert Adam mansion that could have housed a full orchestra at a pinch and sometimes did host chamber ones, with the loudspeakers well separated, probably exaggeratedly so, but this was a new thing and it was our first taste of stereo. I forget all the things we tried, I think some disappointed, but I do remember Sibelius's Second Symphony in the World Record Club recording with Tauno Hannikainen conducting. I remember the snowy-pure brass rolling across the room and Colin G. pacing up and down and saying, "To me, this man just IS Sibelius". And so I became Hannikainen-conscious.

I did not immediately follow it up and, the Hannikainen discography being what it was, there wasn't very much to follow it up with anyway. I did hear *Tapiola*, but perhaps I was not yet ready for this much more austere piece. I was also very impressionable. I remember hearing, not all that much later, a Saturday morning Record Review programme on Radio 3 in which Edward Greenfield chose the "best" version of Sibelius Two. He mentioned that Hannikainen was Sibelius's preferred interpreter at the end of his life, and he compared the opening pages under Hannikainen and Kletzki, who he much preferred and who was, if I remember rightly, his final choice. His point was that Hannikainen made no attempt to bind the fragmentary ideas together, leaving them to stand separately. The point seemed a valid

one, when heard alongside Kletzki's more obvious moulding of the phrases to obtain continuity. If it comes to that, much more recently, in 2013, John Whitmore, [reviewing the Magdalen reissue for MWJ](#), remarked that "The stops and starts in Sibelius' material are exaggerated by the conductor", which is another way of saying the same thing. The question, as I see it today, is whether you should try to bind together these fragmentary statements, or whether you should leave them separate and wait for Sibelius himself to bind them together, as a single line, at the climax of the movement. Like a set of standing stones that at first seem separate, but actually, you realize gradually, form a giant ring.

Impressionable once more, I also read reviews in which Gramophone's resident Scandinavian music expert, Robert Layton, was somewhat sniffy over Hannikainen, admiring his structural grasp but feeling a certain lack of poetry. And then I was off to Edinburgh University for four years. This was about the mid-way point in (soon to be Sir) Alexander Gibson's long rein with the (soon to be Royal) Scottish National Orchestra and at least one Sibelius symphony per season was the norm. As it happens, Robert Layton's reviews of Gibson's Sibelius, over the years, said exactly the same things as he said about Hannikainen. I could not see, and still cannot, what is supposed to be missing from Gibson's Classics for Pleasure recordings of Sibelius Two and Five (I never had the First, but his live performance was terrific), except that the orchestra is not quite up to those of Philadelphia or Boston. Perhaps my satisfaction with these two symphonies under Gibson explains why I never returned to Hannikainen. I may come back to Gibson in another article. The point is that it has taken me until now to assemble as much Hannikainen as possible and try to get a perspective on his career. As so often with these artists who are forgotten by the many, even when they are legends for the few, biographical details are sketchy and sometimes contradictory. The most detailed account can be found at Arena, a site containing many valuable documents from Finnish Radio<sup>1</sup>. Where I do not directly acknowledge the source of any information, you can take it that it comes from here.

### Early years in Finland

Tauno Hannikainen belonged to a family with firm cultural and patriotic roots. His grandfather Heikki Hannikainen, though principally a locksmith and a cattle breeder, was also a cantor and is said to have had a fine voice<sup>2</sup>. Heikki's brother, Pietari, wrote the first play in Finnish to be publicly performed, in 1847, *Silmänkantäjä*. If the battle for the Finnish language (against Swedish) had been substantially won by the time Tauno reached maturity, this was due in no small part to his own family. His father, Pietari Juhani Hannikainen (1854-1924), usually known as Pekka, was initially a largely self-taught violinist who for a time shared a desk with Robert Kajanus in the Helsinki University orchestra. Kajanus, well remembered for his pioneering Sibelius recordings, remained a life-long friend. In 1882, Pekka founded the Students' Union Choir, *Ylioppilaskunna Laulajat*, the first Finnish-language male choir in Finland. In 1886, he was offered a teaching post at Jyväskylä Seminary. Initially, this was to be for three months, but while there he fell in love with one of his students, Laura Alfhild Nikander, usually known as Alli, married her in 1888 and henceforth made Jyväskylä his home. Alli also made a career as a singing teacher and choral director.

Pekka and Alli had six children. Lauri Juhani, born in 1889, died in an accident in 1921. Their daughter, Toini, was born in 1891 and died at the age of three. Ilmari, born in 1892, became a composer and a pianist. **Tauno**, born in 1896, came next, followed by Arvo, born in 1897, who became a violinist and conductor, and Väinö, born in 1900, who became a harpist and a composer. Pekka branched into composition after the birth of his first son. He composed over 200 short vocal pieces, children's songs

<sup>1</sup> <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2020/02/26/kapellimestari-tauno-hannikainen-on-taiteilijakukkulan-ainoa-klassinen>. Retrieved 16.9.2022.

<sup>2</sup> <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2020/12/09/pj-hannikainen-perusti-ylioppilaskunnan-laulajat-kielitaistelun-keskella> Retrieved 18.9.2022.

and choruses, several of which are still performed in Finland, as are compositions by his sons Ilmari and Väinö. He also founded Finland's first music magazine, *Säveleitai*.

Pekka expected all his children to become musicians, but at first it seemed as if Tauno might instead become a priest. It is reported that, as a little boy, he would listen to the local priest's sermons, then come home and repeat them word for word. Nevertheless, the family tradition prevailed. After matriculating from high school in 1914, he went to Helsinki, where he combined the study of musicology, aesthetics, art history and languages at the University with cello, his first instrument, piano and organ at the Academy of Music. After two years, Tauno abandoned the University to concentrate on his musical studies at the Academy. The Academy was followed by military service, during which he learnt to play the trumpet. In 1919, with his brothers Ilmari and Arvo, he founded the Hannikainen Trio, which achieved considerable success both in Finland and abroad. Tauno also appeared as solo cellist for the first time in Helsinki in 1920.

In 1921, he went to Paris, where his teachers included Pablo Casals. However, as a result of an injury, playing became painful and he seized the opportunity to act as deputy to the ailing Oskar Merikanto, conductor of Finnish Opera. After this latter ran into financial difficulties, Tauno became conductor of the newly-formed Turku City Orchestra in 1927, where he remained for ten years.

In 1934, Tauno married the soprano Annikki Arvida Niskanen (1893-1974), a divorcée. The marriage provided him with a two-year-old stepson, Ylermi, but the couple had no children of their own<sup>3</sup>.

### **The United States**

In 1937, Hannikainen was invited to the United States to perform for American Finns. He attracted the notice of Koussevitzky, who engaged him to conduct Sibelius's Second Symphony with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. When war broke out at the end of November 1939, he was preparing a concert with the Helsinki City Orchestra, which was cancelled. Tauno was faced with a choice. He had a concert tour already planned in the United States, so where did his patriotic duty lie? His decision to leave for America was controversial, but, as he insisted, he had received official requests from home to go and make Finland's situation known in the United States. This he certainly did. At a Carnegie Hall concert by the Boston Symphony orchestra, for example, Koussevitzky conducted the first half, then gave a speech in favour of Finland before ceding the rostrum to Hannikainen for the second part. Hannikainen also gave concerts with his wife to raise money for the Finnish cause (see programme opposite) and initially gave his conducting fee to the Hoover Foundation for the benefit of Finland.

In 1941, the Helsinki City Orchestra chose Hannikainen as their chief conductor, but instead he remained in America, becoming chief conductor of the Duluth Symphony orchestra in 1942. This orchestra was only ten years old, having been originally created as an amateur band, but one with high ambitions<sup>4</sup>. Even in 1942, its bass drummer was a dentist, its concertmaster a stenographer at the Duluth Mental Hygiene Clinic, its timpanist a newspaper publisher, its first bassoonist a student at Virginia College while its first cellist operated a lift in a hotel. But they were all skilled musicians who were paid for their work in the orchestra, which had also succeeded in engaging such artists as Heifetz, Elman, Flagstad and Josef Hoffman as soloists. The *Time* article from which I am drawing this information remarked that Hannikainen's "muscular figure and round, beady-eyed face were as Finnish as his name", adding that "he likes the Duluth climate. It reminds him of Finland".

<sup>3</sup> In a number of places on Internet, it is said that the present day conductor Tuomas (Ollila) Hannikainen is the grandson of Tauno, which is incompatible with the fact that Tauno had no children. According to the entry in the Finnish Wikipedia, Tuomas is the grandson of Tauno's brother Arvo, and this is presumably correct.

<sup>4</sup> See article in *Time*, 9 November 1942.

In 1947, Hannikainen was named Assistant Conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. At this time, the orchestra was nearing the end of the somewhat brief (1943-1947) and, by general consent, not especially remarkable tenure of Désiré Defauw. It is worth pointing out that, in those days, there was not a “big five” among American orchestra, but a “big three” – New York, Boston and Philadelphia. Chicago and Cleveland were added in the 1950s as a result of the work done by Reiner and Szell. Chicago’s next Music Director, Artur Rodzinski, had great ambitions to place it on the map. When he stormed out from the New York Philharmonic, after four years, in 1947, he declared, “Since 21 years, Chicago is my goal”<sup>5</sup>. Rodzinski, unfortunately, had a considerable track record of taking on an orchestra, increasing its standards dramatically but falling foul of the orchestral management. This was not due to the abundant insults he handed out to the players, which nobody minded in those days if they produced results, but to a general capriciousness of behaviour that tended to undo whatever of good he had achieved. Within a few months, his last-minute changes of programme, involving extra rehearsals, and his insistence on full concert performances of *Elektra* and *Tristan und Isolde*, with expensive casts, had run up a deficit of around 30,000 dollars. The final straw seems to have come when, 24 hours before a concert, Mrs. Rodzinski called to say her husband was unwell and could not conduct that evening. Hannikainen, as assistant, began the work of preparing a concerto with Myra Hess and learning Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, which he had not conducted before. A few hours later, Mrs. Rodzinski called again to say her husband was better and would conduct the Shostakovich. Hannikainen could do the rest. Mid-way through the concert, the orchestra’s trustees called a press conference and announced that Rodzinski was fired.

Not everyone agreed with the decision. The redoubtable critic Claudia Cassidy declared, “Chicago’s musical future looks bleak indeed when a man like Rodzinski can be arbitrarily fired”. Another critic, Ashton Stevens, sent Rodzinski a wire and subsequently published it: “I used to think the Capone mob retarded civilization in Chicago, but tonight I feel that the orchestra hall boys have made Al and his gang look like Robin Hood and his merry men ... God help the knowing ears of Chicago”.

Another occasion – or maybe the same one recalled through other eyes and 43 years later – is related by Philip Farkas<sup>6</sup>, a longstanding horn player in the orchestra.

“Rodzinski ... was getting a reputation for not turning up at out-of-town concerts. He would continually call in sick or have some other excuse. I recall one time we were to play a concert in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and the officials there insisted that the contract clearly state that Arthur Rodzinski would appear in Green Bay. Well, when we went there that night for the concert Rodzinski did not appear ... Maestro Tauno Hannikainen took over. But first, the manager there came on stage and announced that Maestro Rodzinski could not appear for the concert because he had such a severe case of bursitis that he simply could not raise his arms above his shoulder. The audience booed and hissed ... However, the very next morning the Chicago Tribune ... published this row of pictures ... and in one of them Rodzinski was holding a glass of champagne on high, way over his head. It told the date of this party, which was the exact time of the Green Bay concert, proving beyond doubt that he wasn’t ill.”

Hannikainen might have felt he morally deserved to be appointed Music Director forthwith, and in 1949 he was promoted from Assistant to Associate Conductor. It already looked like the trustees were going to pass him over for the top job, but he understandably took umbrage when, in 1950, the choice fell upon an inexperienced, if charismatic conductor eighteen years his junior – Rafael Kubelik. “I would

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<sup>5</sup> See article in Time, 26 January 1948

<sup>6</sup> Philip Farkas – Oral History Project, Chicago Symphony Program Jan 17-22, 1991

have stayed if Toscanini, Furtwängler or Walter had been chosen”, he stated later. Looked at from today’s vantage point, in the full knowledge of Kubelik’s highly successful period with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, it may seem that Hannikainen had an almighty high opinion of himself. One wonders if even Reiner would have been good enough for him. But at the time, when Kubelik was seen basically as the son of a great violinist and a fugitive from Communist Czechoslovakia who had yet to make a name for himself, Hannikainen’s reaction, and consequent resignation, appears understandable.

### Back to Finland

It has been claimed that Sibelius was influential in persuading Hannikainen to return to Finland<sup>7</sup>. Such advice, if given, was probably superfluous. Having been passed over in Chicago, Hannikainen’s prospects in the USA were not good, and providentially, the conductorship of the Helsinki City Orchestra, whose overtures he had rejected in 1941, was falling vacant again. After Hannikainen’s earlier refusal, the orchestra had been conducted for a year by Armas Järnefelt, then by Martti Similä, whose term was ending. Hannikainen took over in 1951 and remained until 1962. His attempts to expand the repertoire were not welcomed at first, but by the time of his last season, the press were pleased to report that the orchestra’s repertoire was now 45% domestic, compared with 32% in Oslo and 21% in Stockholm. This according to the Areena site I have acknowledged as my chief source. Oddly enough, the site of the Helsinki City Orchestra itself – generally known today as the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra – says almost the opposite<sup>8</sup>. Namely, that critics protested at the lack of Finnish music in his programmes. Hannikainen’s response was that orchestras were there to play what people wanted to hear, and that included Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. It seems he even carried out an opinion poll to prove his point. The Helsinki orchestra’s site also tells us that Hannikainen conducted the majority of the concerts himself, calling on guest conductors only rarely – one assumes no invitation was extended to Kubelik – and that his leadership was considered “steady, consistent and efficient”. It tells us, moreover, that he attempted to programme Stockhausen’s *Kontrapunkte* in 1960 but had to abandon the attempt because no pianist could be found in Helsinki who felt able to play it. This is hard to reconcile with the alternative view that he grew increasingly unwilling to learn new works. Unless he announced the work to deflect criticism, knowing full well that nobody in Finland at that time could play it, so he was safe from the need to actually learn it. After all, if he had really set his heart on conducting *Kontrapunkte*, there were several German pianists who would doubtless have been happy to visit Helsinki<sup>9</sup>.

After 1963, Hannikainen continued to appear as guest conductor. He visited Japan in 1964 and was well received. According to Areena, he had conducted in 65 countries by the end of his career, but I wonder if something has been mistranslated. Maybe they mean 65 cities. Towards the end, a combination of heart disease and alcoholism took its toll. After a concert in 1967 in which he inadvertently went on beating after the music had finished, he gave up conducting and died the following year.

### A Chicago recording

The only sample of Hannikainen’s work in Chicago that I have been able to hear is an incomplete recording (the first movement starts about halfway through) of a violin concerto by Arne Oldberg. This

<sup>7</sup> This is stated in John Holmes’s *Conductors on Record*, Gollancz, 1982.

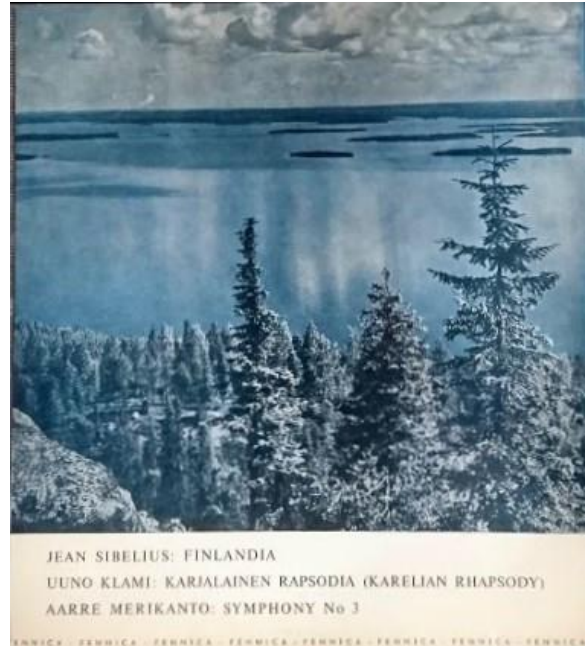
<sup>8</sup> <https://helsinginkaupunginorkesteri.fi/fi/aikajana/historia/tauno-hannikainen-kaupunginorkesterin-johtajana>, retrieved 20.9.2022.

<sup>9</sup> Hannikainen’s extensive tape collection, discussed below, includes a performance of Stockhausen’s *Gruppen* directed by Boulez, Maderna and an unidentified third conductor, so he seems to have been genuinely curious about the latest avant-garde.

was the first broadcast performance, given on 25 June 1947, of a work that had been premièred under Defauw the previous year. The soloist is John Weicher. Once one has overcome one's surprise at discovering a work written in the 1940s in the style of Max Bruch – it virtually cites the First Concerto in the second movement – the piece is agreeable enough. The recording, though crackly, is clear and the Hannikainen accompanies effectively. It is hardly enough to draw any conclusions about his Chicago period.

### Fennica Recordings

Hannikainen's earliest commercially issued recordings seem – dates are hard to come by – to be those issued by Fennica. This was an extensive series of LPs dedicated to Finnish music, of which nos. 9 and 11 featured Hannikainen and the Helsinki City Orchestra. Though there is no applause, a few noises suggest these may be live performances, perhaps licensed from Finnish Radio. Each LP started with a work of Sibelius. *Finlandia* hardly seems a necessary choice, but Hannikainen's reading is notable for the separated chords near the beginning, which many conductors bind together, the fiery impetus with which the main Allegro starts and a flowing, not sanctimonious, exposition of the famous theme. However, he does all this with an added intensity, in his later Melodiya recording. *Spring Song*, which opens the other disc, was a more enterprising choice. Indeed, I wondered if it was the first recording – I have not traced an earlier one<sup>10</sup>. The opening is a little perfunctory, but



it soon develops a fine fervour. The rest of Fennica's LP 9 consists of the Karelian Rhapsody op. 15 by Uuno Klami and the Third Symphony by Aarre Merikanto. This last is a rather interesting work that starts very lightly with a Scherzo, but develops gravitas later on<sup>11</sup>. Fennica's LP 11 is completed with the Suite *Under the Skies of Lapland* by Ahti Sonninen and more Merikanto: *Largo misterioso* from *Ten Pieces* and the Third Piano Concerto, in which the pianist is Tapani Valsta. There is sometimes an impression that these composers are more successful in not sounding like Sibelius – one appreciates the problem for a Finnish composer – than in establishing worlds of their own. However, these pieces are all worth exploring and Hannikainen clearly knows how they go.

<sup>10</sup> According to the highly reputed Classical Discography by Mike Grey <https://classical-discography.org/search2.php>, this piece has never been recorded at all. Recordings from the LP era by Groves, Berglund and Gibson spring to mind, all considerably later than the Hannikainen.

<sup>11</sup> Hannikainen conducted a performance of this work on 21 September 1958, so perhaps this is the source of the Fennica recording.



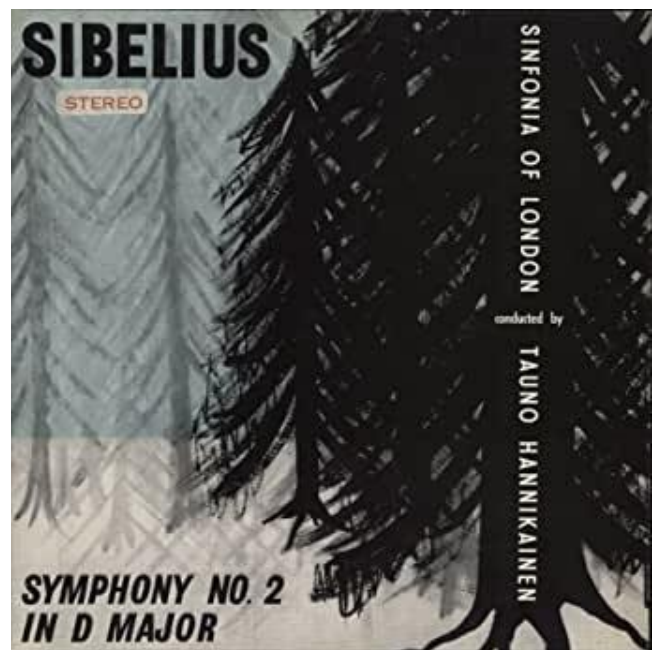
### Melodiya Recordings

Next in order – though again, I have no hard dates, c.1957 is the best I can find – are a brief series of recordings made for Melodiya with the USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra. These were recently reissued by Maestro editions and Jonathan Woolf, in [his review for MWJ](#), concluded that “If you’ve not come across Hannikainen’s Moscow recordings make haste to hear them; they’re that good.” I am tempted to leave it at that, but I will add a few brief remarks. The major offerings are a dedicated, passionate reading of Sibelius’s *Four Lemminkainen Legends* and a brooding, elemental Fourth Symphony. You only have to hear the opening growl of this latter and then listen to the way the music recedes to the very depths of the mysterious Finnish forests to realize

this is the real thing. Only Robert Layton sounded a more negative note: “Tauno Hannikainen’s set of the *Four Legends* acquired a cult status, though it was difficult to discern any superiority over the pioneering set by Thomas Jensen and the Danish State Radio Orchestra ... It was certainly no match for the later recording by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia orchestra ...”<sup>12</sup> I have already mentioned *Finlandia*. *Valse triste* is neatly turned but this is perhaps a case where an over-the-top approach gets more out of this jaded favourite. There are also a couple of items from other Finnish composers: *Terchenniemi* from Klami’s *Kalevala Suite* and Järnefelt’s *Prelude* and *Berceuse*, the latter played with much tenderness.

### World Record Club and Everest Recordings

Hannikainen’s London recordings were made in 1959 and were all issued in the UK by World Record Club. I will therefore deal with them together, though in fact the Second Symphony and the coupling of the Fifth Symphony with Karelia Suite were specifically made for World Record Club with the Sinfonia of London, whatever that was, while the Tossy Spivakovky’s performance of the Violin Concerto coupled with Tapiola were made for Everest with the London Symphony Orchestra<sup>13</sup>. Structural strength and a powerful onward vital current are the principal features of the two Symphonies. To my ears – though, as mentioned at the beginning, not to everybody’s – the poetry and magic of the music emerge fully without any further pleading. Indeed, the performances seem all the stronger for the lack of obvious emoting. This does not automatically make them the ultimate performances even for those who favour this approach.



<sup>12</sup> Sibelius Studies ed. Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki, Cambridge University Press 2001, p.30.

<sup>13</sup> Hannikainen was not a complete stranger to the London Symphony Orchestra, having conducted two concerts with them in 1953. That of 17<sup>th</sup> May was all Sibelius – En Saga, the Suite from Pelléas et Mélisande, Tapiola and the Second Symphony. On 19<sup>th</sup> May, he conducted Ultima Thule by Tauno Pykkänen, a Symphonic Fantasy by Aarre Merikanto, the Autumn Scene from Ahti Sonninen’s Pessi and Illusia and Sibelius’s First Symphony.

Turning to the first movement of the Second in Gibson's Chandos recording, I found a virtually identical approach but with staccatos fractionally less staccato and marginally more breathing space, which allowed a greater sense of wonder. On the other hand, I found no reason to prefer Gibson's Chandos recording in the first movement of no. 5 and in the first movement of no. 4, in comparison with Hannikainen's Melodiya recording, Gibson seems to be gliding over the surface. This is not to suggest that I think Hannikainen and Gibson are the only conductors whose Sibelius is worth consideration, but they often share a common viewpoint in their plain-speaking approach, which makes the comparison interesting. Suffice to say that these Hannikainen recordings have a secure place in the annals of Sibelius interpretation. Tossy Spivakovsky's fiery performance of the Violin Concerto, too, is a strong contender and a valuable counterweight to the more static readings that have become common<sup>14</sup>.

### Finlandia Classics

The list of Hannikainen's commercially made discs ends here, but fortunately there is a little more to note. Finlandia Classics was created at the beginning of this century by Tero Halvorsen<sup>15</sup>. Halvorsen's early ambitions were to be a singer and, while this did not happen, he cultivated the friendship of many Finnish singers, active and retired. When one of the latter played him some old tapes of his performances, Halvorsen realized that documentary memories of a whole world of Finnish music making risked disappearing. Finnish musicians at that time were mainly off the international circuit, so made no records. Finnish radio had conserved some tapes but, as radio stations tend to do, had erased many others. So in many cases, these performances survived only in the artists' own collections. As a once-hopeful singer, Halvorsen's primary interest was singers, but instrumentalists and composers followed. As of now, his catalogue does not specifically document conductors, though many of the tracks allow glimpses of the Finnish maestros of the day. These records are mainly available now through streaming channels which often provide minimal information about what they are offering. So, hoping that I have not missed anything, Hannikainen can be heard on at least five issues by Finlandia Classics, conducting the Helsinki City Orchestra in each case. All the recordings I have heard are sonically more than acceptable for their date and provenance.

The disc dedicated to the soprano Liise Linko-Malmio (1917-2017) concludes with a performance of Sibelius's *Luonnotar* conducted by Hannikainen. The only date is the generic 1955-1966 covering the whole collection. After a notable career with Finnish Opera from 1940 to 1960, Linko-Malmio became a much sought-after teacher. Her best known student is probably Karita Mattila. The considerable difficulties of *Luonnotar* leave her unfazed and Hannikainen provides atmospheric support.

More vocal Sibelius comes on the tribute to the contralto Maiju Kuusojä (1925-2008), where Hannikainen accompanies her in three songs, opp. 17/7, 36/6 and 50/3. Within their brief span, they show a steady, pliant voice. The orchestra is backwardly recorded and has not much to do. Considerably more interesting, from the Hannikainen point of view, are two extracts from what is presumably, given the presence of choral interjections, a complete performance in German of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. *Sei stille dem Herrn* will surprise those used to the British choral tradition. It is unusually fast and beseeching, as though urging listeners to "rest in the Lord" rather than reassuring them that they will do so. The second extract is not the other contralto aria, but a recitative with

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<sup>14</sup> Mike Grey's catalogue also names Hannikainen as the conductor of Spivakovsky's recording of the Tchaikovsky Concerto, made at about the same time. According to the record label, the conductor was Walter Goehr, and I have never seen any other suggestion that this might be wrong.

<sup>15</sup> See article in Finnish Musical Quarterly, <https://fmq.fi/articles/the-story-of-finlandia-classics>, retrieved 1.10.2022.



chorus, *Habt ihr's gehört*, performed with great drama by all concerned. A complete *Elijah* with these premises might be a refreshing affair, if the whole performance exists.

I am not quite so sure about the Verdi *Requiem*, from which we get four extracts involving Kuusoja but also allowing us to hear the other soloists – Linko-Malmio again as soprano, Jorma Huttunen (tenor) and Jorma Pukkila (baritone). Kuusoja is splendid and Linko-Malmoe sings well, but the two male singers make a rather pallid impression. Hannikainen's approach, though deeply felt, seems more stately than *slanciato* but, to be fair, it would be necessary to hear how this works out over the whole piece. Again, just a generic dating 1954-1970.

The CD featuring the baritone Lauri Lahtinen (1913-1990) contains three excerpts, amounting to about twelve and a half minutes, from Madetoja's opera *Pohjalaisia* – also known as *The Ostrobothnians*. In two of them, he is joined by the soprano Sinikka Koskela. If Madetoja is your principal interest, this may seem insignificant since two complete recordings are available. However, Lahtinen is a fine singer and there is the added interest that Hannikainen had conducted the première of this work in 1924. Once more, just a general date of 1951-1962 for the compilation.



On the tribute to the pianist Maire Halava (1911-2004), Hannikainen provides sympathetic support for her warm, limpid, but occasionally splashy, account of Schumann's Piano Concerto.

Lastly, the CD devoted to the pianist Tapani Valsta (1921-2010), opens with the Piano Concerto by Hannikainen's brother Ilmari. Ilmari Hannikainen wrote this while studying in St. Petersburg with Alexander Siloti in 1916-17. It is important to bear in mind that he was only fifteen when he completed it, since we may smile indulgently at, and even be caught up by, the teenager's wholesale cribbing of every trick in the Russian romantic piano concerto book. A smile that would turn

more cynical if it was the work of an older man unless, like Addinsell, he intended it as parody. The performers sound as if they believe in it. The performance was given, I have verified elsewhere, on 28 February 1958 in memory of the composer who had died in 1955. Ostensibly, this was the result of a boating accident but some, including Aarre Merikanto, believed it was a case of suicide.

### **Istituto Piano Brasileiro**

A further opportunity to hear Hannikainen in non-Finnish music comes from an unlikely source. The Instituto Piano Brasileiro has placed on YouTube a considerable collection of performances by Brazilian pianists. Their section dedicated to Jacques Klein (1930-1982) contains performances of the Haydn D major Concerto and Honegger's *Concertino* given with Hannikainen and the Helsinki City Orchestra on a date they can only narrow down to 1957-1963. The recording sounds like an in-house affair subjected to excessive de-noising, but Klein comes across as a volatile, mercurial artist. The Haydn has much to gain from this, especially since Hannikainen is able to bring vitality and conviction without overloading the texture. The Honegger is performed in a manner more befitting Shostakovich, but the hard-hitting approach comes off.

### Finnish Radio Recordings

The Areena site, which I understand to be an outlet of Finnish Radio, has made available in streaming a large number of historical broadcasts. These include several by Hannikainen. It is not clear to me whether this is an ongoing programme or whether they have by now posted everything they have. It is also not clear to me whether there is any time limit to availability – whether they will remain for the foreseeable future or only for a limited period. Those interested are advised to visit the site now, and maybe revisit it periodically.

Chief among the Hannikainen offerings are two concerts that I take to be complete, from the Sibelius weeks of 1954 and 1955. The concert of 13 June 1954 began with the Third Symphony, after which the American soprano Ellabelle Davis sang, in German, the Six Songs op. 18 with orchestrations by Jussi Jalas. The programme ended with *Night Ride and Sunrise*. The Third Symphony and *Night Ride and Sunrise* were played again in the concert of 14 June 1955. Also on the programme were Klami's *King Lear Overture* – a fair amount of space seems to have been given to other Finnish composers at these Sibelius Week concerts – and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf was the soloist in Sibelius's *Luonnotar*. From the 1959 Sibelius Week, on 11 June, we have Tossy Spivakosky playing the Sibelius Violin Concerto – a performance that preceded the famous recording by a few months, exceeds it in volatility and fire and probably supersedes it if mono sound is not an issue. It is frustrating to discover that Sibelius's Seventh Symphony was also on the programme, and we can only utter a fervent prayer that it will come to light one day. From 1956, there is a performance of Robert Kajanus's *Aino*, a tone poem with choral finale – sung by the Student Union Singers – which supposedly influenced Sibelius's much more ambitious *Kullervo*.

All these are with the Helsinki City Orchestra. On 8 December 1965, Hannikainen conducted the Finnish Radio Orchestra in the prize-winners' concert of the first Jean Sibelius International Violin Competition. This is a good but far less exceptional performance than Spivakosky's. However, a video of this event, which was evidently televised, can be found on YouTube and offers our only chance – so far as I know – of seeing Hannikainen in action. Given the occasion, the cameras unsurprisingly concentrate on the violinist, and even during the orchestral episodes, they often train on individual sections of the orchestra. We see enough of the conductor to note that Hannikainen had a very straightforward, clear though eloquent beat. When we get his back view, he does not look especially impressive, but at the climax of the first movement we see him front-wise at last and we realize that, as so often with apparently “unimpressive” conductors, the orchestra saw something much more intense and fiery. This climax really takes wing.

The Symphony and *Night Ride* suggest that, on home ground and live, Hannikainen was more fiery and eruptive than in the London studios. It would be difficult to find more powerful renderings of what sometimes passes as the least involving of Sibelius's symphonies. Hannikainen takes a measured, atmospheric view of the middle movement, in contrast to the clucking Haydnesque interpretation of Anthony Collins that held sway for many years. Given Hannikainen's closeness to Sibelius, who was still alive and would surely have heard the broadcasts, we can take it that this is how the composer wanted it to go. By a tiny margin, the 1955 performances are even more intense and detailed than those of 1954, but the differences are not great enough to assuage regret that we have these pieces twice over while Symphonies 1, 6 and 7 and several tone poems are still missing. Schwarzkopf is predictably in control of *Luonnotar* and perhaps only a Finn could tell us whether she conveys its spirit as well as Linko-Malmoe.

**The Hannikainen tape collection**

On his death, Hannikainen bequeathed to posterity a collection of 621 reel-to-reel tapes, containing his own broadcast performances and some by his colleagues, as well as interviews and other material regarding his family. These were donated to the library of Jyväskylä Conservatory, which unfortunately lacked the space and funds to deal with them. They ended up in the Principal's garage and might have disappeared for ever if Hannikainen's great-nephew, the conductor Tuomas Hannikainen, had not discovered them, retrieved them and donated them to the National Library of Finland. They have now all been digitized. A catalogue is available online<sup>16</sup>, but in order to hear them you have to make an appointment and go to their listening room. This is all very well if you live in Helsinki or thereabouts. It can only be hoped that a selection might one day be offered in streaming – for payment, I don't demand to hear them free! Or that some Finnish based recording company, the local version of Lyrita maybe, might issue some. The recordings stretch back to 1940, as well as covering the Helsinki years, so an assessment of Hannikainen's work in Chicago is theoretically possible. There are also tapes of his concerts with his wife in aid of the Finnish cause. The missing Sibelius Symphonies 1, 6 and 7 are present, as well as alternative live performances of the others and many of the tone poems. Plus symphonies by Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms (all four), Bruckner, Tchaikovsky and much more. In short, a substantial swathe of the standard orchestral repertoire. What remains unknown, except to any Helsinki resident who may have felt inclined to sample the collection, is whether the sound quality is acceptable for the date or merely archival, and whether Hannikainen conducted at least some of these composers with the same insight as he did Sibelius. At the very least, the missing Sibelius works surely demand to be heard.

***Christopher Howell © 2022***

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kansalliskirjasto.fi/en/collections/recording-archive-tauno-hannikainen>, retrieved 4.10.2022.