

Jean Sibelius – Complete Symphonies (Ashkenazy)

Written by bluesever

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CD1 Symphony no.1 in E minor, op.39 1. *Andante ma non troppo - Allegro energico* 2. *Andante (ma non troppo lento)* 3. *Scherzo Allegro* 4. *Finale (quasi una fantasia)* 5. *Symphony no.7 in C major, op.105* CD2 Symphony No. 2 in D major, op. 43
1. *Alegretto* 2. *Tempo Andante ma rubato* 3. *Vivacissimo* 4. *Finale*
CD3 Symphony no.3 in C major, op.52
1. *Allegro moderato* 2. *Andantino con moto, quasi allegretto* 3. *Moderato - Allegro (ma non tanto)*
Symphony no.6 in D minor, op.104
4. *Allegro molto moderato* 5. *Allegretto moderato* 6. *Poco vivace* 7. *Allegro molto*
CD4 Symphony No.4 in A minor Op.63
1. *Tempo molto* 2. *Allegro molto* 3. *Il tempo* 4. *Allegro*
Symphony No.5 in Eb Op.82
5. *Tempo molto mode* 6. *Andante mosso* 7. *Allegro molto*
Philharmonia Orchestra Vladimir Askenazy - conductor

Vladimir Ashkenazy is a brave man to contribute another complete Sibelius cycle to a market in which there are already many fine full sets. His first cycle, for Decca (1978-1983), came at the dawn of the digital age, and the new cycle in DSD was set down in 2006-2007 (Ashkenazy was 70 in 2007). More or less the same set of tone poems and fillers are included as in the original set, which is still available at bargain price and is very well-regarded for interpretation, superb playing of the Philharmonia and its (then) state-of-the-art recording.

There's little point in buying individual Sibelius symphonies (there's only seven, and none are especially long) - much better to pick up a box of the entire cycle. So what's to recommend this one? The only real competition, I think, is Lorin Maazel's excellent set (also on Decca). However, I personally think that Ashkenazy, more than any other conductor, has the keenest understanding of the weird power Sibelius' music exerts - and the sound recording here is much

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superior too. True, the Maazel set is much cheaper - but you only get the symphonies. With this box, you get an additional ten orchestral pieces, including Finlandia, Tapiola, and the Karelia Suite - all of which are outstanding, and essential listening for a full appreciation of this unique composer. So basically, for the price of two CDs, this Ashkenazy set gives you five CDs containing well over six hours of outstanding music, a booklet with decent liner notes, and a box with a nice picture of a tranquil seascape. If you've only heard a little Sibelius and like it, dig in. This has to be one of the best Classical bargains to be had.

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