

Sibelius 7* NotePerformer Score Exchange

Review by Phillip R. Buttal

Much has happened since I last reviewed the Sibelius Notation Programme – then in version 3 – back in 2004. Naturally there are many new features in today's version 7, and some changes, too. Up to, and including version 6, Sibelius ran on most machines using Windows XP, but with **Sibelius 7** in 2011, users initially needed to consider upgrading to Windows 7, and beefing up various computer components, although any copy bought today will readily run on Windows XP and above, straight out of the box

More significantly, though, Sibelius 7 comes complete with over 38 GB of sound-files which, while allowing for a better playback experience, take up a fair amount of disc space, and can make large scores slow to open.

At the time, one work-around was to install an extra drive – ideally a Solid-State Drive (SSD) – essentially a data-storage device with no moving parts, offering virtually instant access. Today this is an increasingly common feature of new models, but initially was more the domain of the 'custom-built' fraternity.

True Sibelius 7 does ship with a 'Lite' version of its sounds, but there's a new way to enjoy really authentic playback, without the need to shell out for new computer equipment, courtesy of a nifty piece of software from Sweden's Wallander Instruments.

NotePerformer is an integrated sound-module that claims to produce a playback experience where 'notes and phrases are musically united in a way you've never heard before – except from live musicians'. Simple to install, and with its fully self-contained sound library taking up a fraction of the disc-space needed by Sibelius 7, it's fully compatible with Sibelius 6, 7 and the recently-introduced Sibelius First, on both Windows (XP and above) and Mac platforms

But does NotePerformer actually do what it says on the tin?

Well, there's no real substitute for a live performance, but simply playing back some orchestral and wind band scores, the effect, albeit subjective,

felt a bit like an authentic Smörgåsbord compared with your average cold-buffet.

The added immediacy, clarity of line and presence of inner parts were all eminently noticeable, especially when the same scores were optimized for NotePerformer playback – also a quick and straightforward process. While intended perhaps more for classical orchestral scores, the list of on-board sounds is still pretty comprehensive, and so NotePerformer is definitely well worth trying. Remember, though, Sibelius 6 or 7 must already be installed for it to function.

Private instrumental teachers today are sometimes asked for extra assistance by any of their students music at school, which may well necessitate some familiarity with Sibelius or similar. This might involve little more than the teacher's admiration for the way the student deftly navigates the programme, but it could also hint at the full real potential of such software for the teacher, too.

Sibelius-users used to enjoy a dedicated website, SibeliusMusic.com, where they could freely upload and share their compositions. However, in 2011, SibeliusMusic.com closed, but luckily in stepped two former employees, who set up a brand new company in its wake – **Score Exchange**.

For anyone looking for music, Score Exchange is one of the largest online retailers of new sheet music from composers and arrangers all over the world. It offers thousands of scores for download, for every imaginable instrumentation and musical genre. All the scores – some of which are free – can be viewed on screen, played back, in some cases transposed, and immediately printed off at home.

For composers or arrangers, Score Exchange makes it very easy to publicise, sell or share scores, with no setup or on-going costs, or fixed commission for selling music. Composers' income depends on sale price, of which Score Exchange initially takes 50%, but this figure drops the more music sold during each month.

One would be unlikely to retire on the proceeds, but it can still provide an extra monthly income, as well as making many new musical contacts worldwide in the process. There is also a useful selection of Worksheets, which may largely have originated in the form of personal help-sheets for

students, but which are now available worldwide and can also be freely added to, and then shared globally.

An MP3 file can be attached to any score / worksheet, which could either be an actual audio recording, or produced using Sibelius, and where NotePerformer's superior playback is a distinct advantage in 'selling' a score.

Either as a composer, or prospective buyer, use Score Exchange and it could well become profitable – in more ways than one.

A Sibelian postlude...

Sibelius was originally developed in 1986 by Ben and Jonathan Finn – hence using the leading Finnish composer for the product's name – under the name of 'Sibelius 7', and released to the public in 1993. In September 1998, the first Windows version was released (now simply called 'Sibelius', and with the version number reset to 1.0) – a Mac-compatible version was also released shortly afterwards, and this has continued to be the norm.

In August 2006, Sibelius Software Ltd. was acquired by the American company, Avid Technology, but in July 2012, Avid announced plans to divest its consumer businesses, and closed the Sibelius London office in order to relocate in Kiev, where it would set up a new development team. As a consequence, Avid laid off the majority of its UK development staff, while apparently still maintaining its 'commitment to Sibelius'.

Jean Sibelius completed seven symphonies, apparently with only rough sketches existing for an eighth. Similarly, the Sibelius notation programme has again reached 7, and if there are blueprints for a version 8, these surely are most likely locked away in the minds of that displaced London development team.

Given the team has since been head-hunted by Hamburg-based Steinberg, of Cubase fame, with a brief to come up with a fundamentally new notation programme, it would seem that anything substantially new to emerge may not be quite as far east of Greenwich, as Avid might hope.

*** STOP PRESS!** Since this review was written, Avid has brought out a Version 7.5 of the Sibelius Notation Programme. Unlike previous upgrades, which have always incremented by '1', this is not a full upgrade as such, but one which incorporates some useful extra features. Check local suppliers for the cost of Sibelius 7.5 as prices can vary depending on

the version, or, for those who already have Version 7, an upgrade is available at a lower cost.

Sibelius 7* Avid Technology www.sibelius.com

NotePerformer Wallander Instruments www.noteperformer.com

Score Exchange www.scoreexchange.com

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