JEAN SIBELIUS
Three Pieces for Piano

The Cavalier (1900)
To Longing (1913)
Spagnuolo (1913)

During the early 20th century, it was customary for magazines to print not only short stories and cartoons but also pieces of music. All three of these piano pieces were published in this manner during the aforementioned period. This led to some of Sibelius's music becoming more widely available to musical amateurs, while the income received from their publication helped to tide the composer over financially between more major compositional projects.

Kavaljeren (The Cavalier), the earliest of the three pieces, appeared in the Christmas 1900 edition of a Swedish-language satirical magazine called Fyren. Rather than using his own name, Sibelius published it under the pseudonym "Sipan". It is a brisk military march whose spirit reflects the instrumentation of marching bands: piccolo-like figures in the high register are complemented in the left hand by an accompaniment which reminds us of tubas and other bass-register brass instruments. This edition is based on the first edition as it appeared in Fyren, along with Sibelius's own manuscript (Helsinki University Library Collection Cat. No. 0779). Some discrepancies exist between these sources. This may be explained in part by the fact that Sibelius sent the manuscript to be published from Berlin, where he was when he wrote the piece. It is not clear whether he was able to check the proofs before publication. On the edge of the manuscript version we find an important indication in the composer's handwriting: "N.b.! Make sure that some genius reads the proofs..."

Till trånaden (To Longing) was published in a magazine called Lucifer in 1913 in a facsimile of the composer's manuscript. The title might be taken from a poem by J. L. Runeberg, at least when one bears in mind that at the time Sibelius was working on a tone poem called The Bard which seems to refer to a poem of the same name by Runeberg, even though the composer himself denied the connection. The melody of the piano piece is melancholy and restricted in range, but the harmonies and use of the tritone interval point to the harmonic style of the Fourth Symphony (1911) in all its modernism. The piano melody is broken periodically by sighing gestures which dissolve into an atmosphere of expectation.

Spagnuolo, though dating from around the same time as the previous piece, shares nothing of its melancholy or harmonic complexity. It is a fiery Spanish dance, a character piece, in which the piano imitates the guitar with a airy melody and uncomplicated accompanimental figure in the left hand. Spagnuolo appeared in facsimile form in a Christmas magazine called Joulutunnelma (Christmas Spirit) in 1913. The composer's original manuscript is held in the Helsinki University Library collection (Cat. No. 0786).

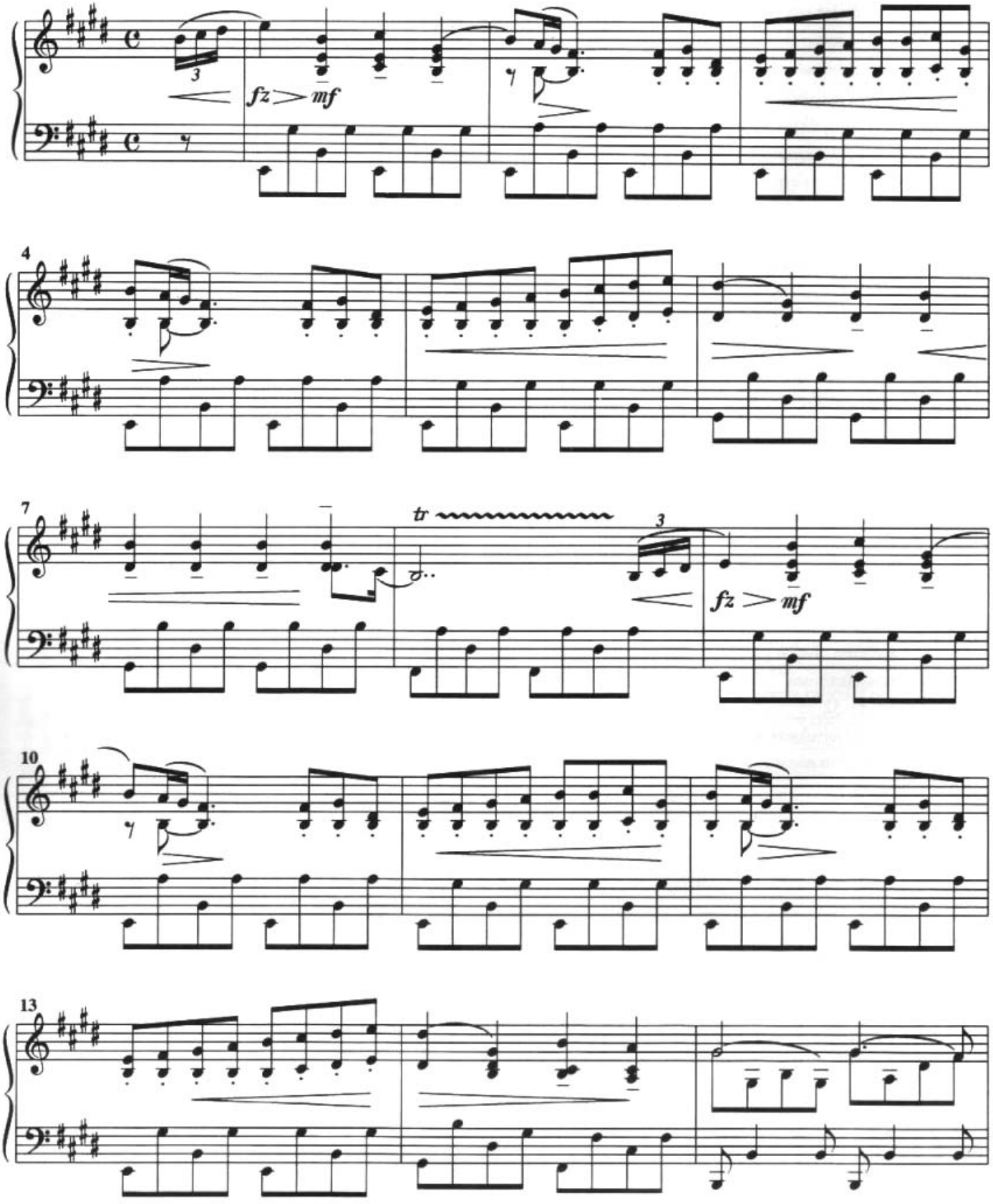
Laura Yli-Soini
English translation by Andrew Bentley

Kavaljeren

Kavaljeeri – The Cavalier

Marschmässigt

JEAN SIBELIUS (1900)



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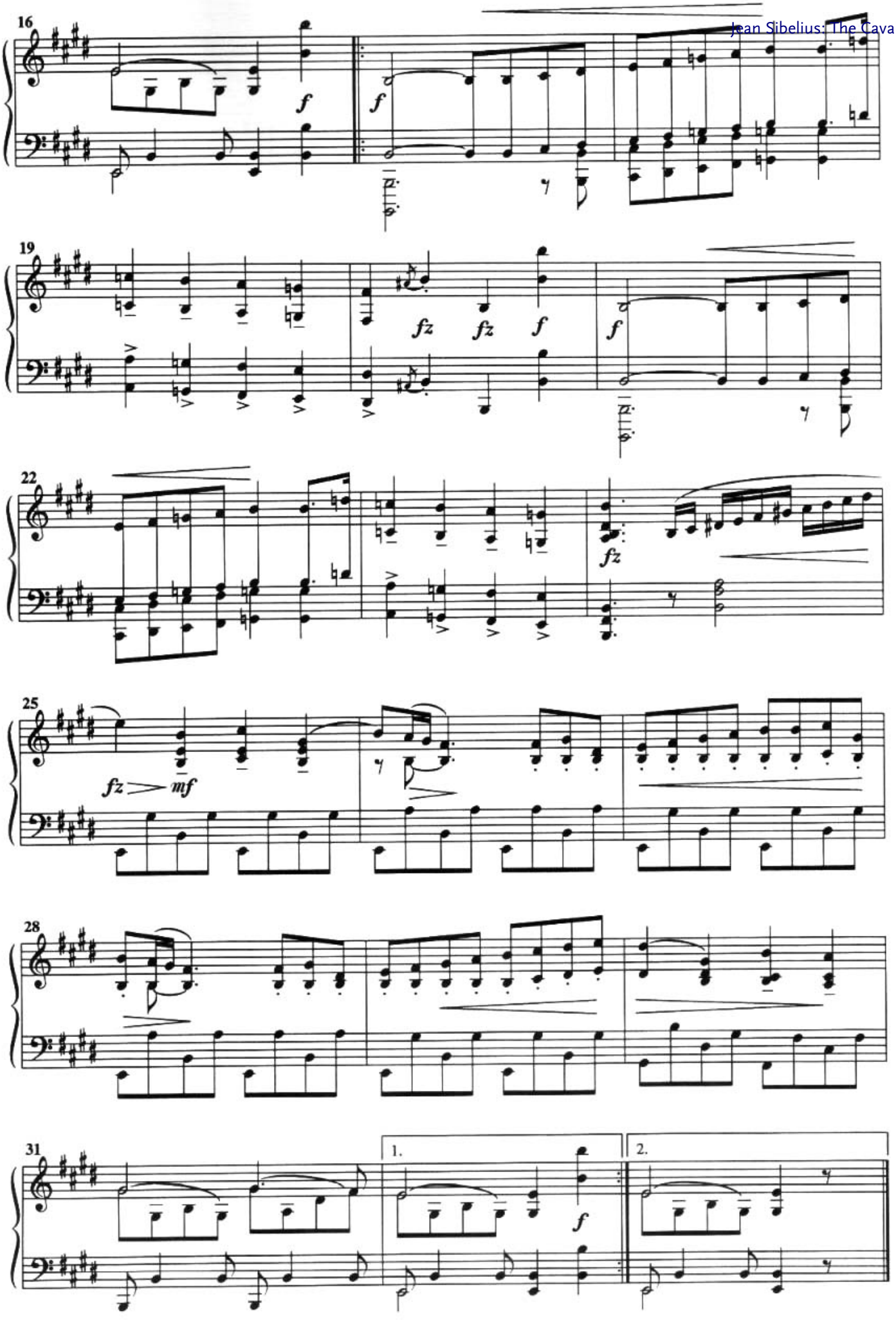
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