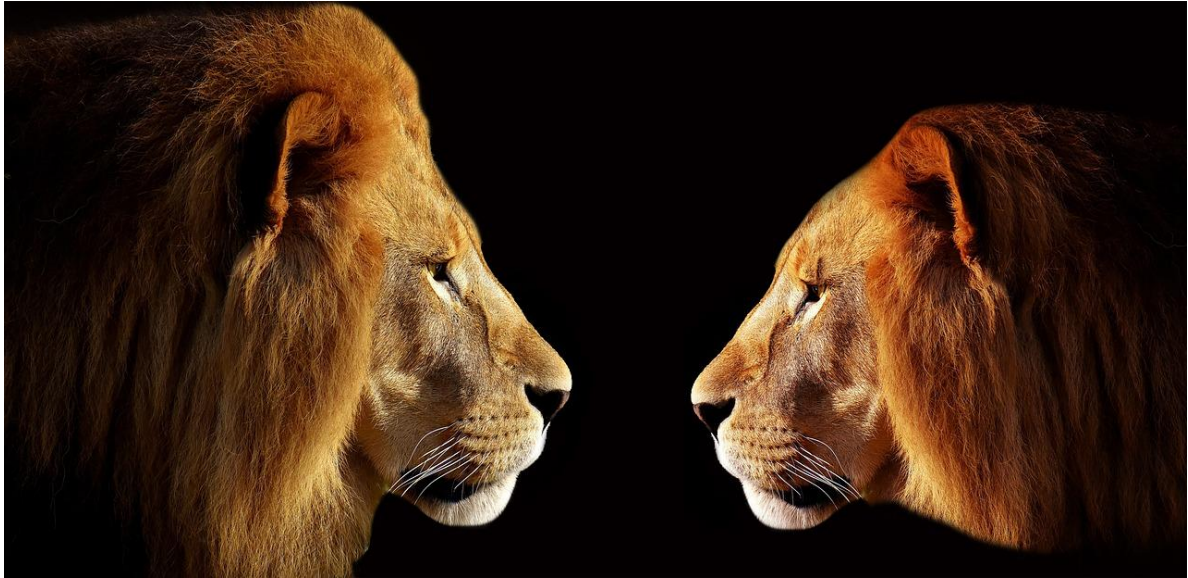# A Sibelius User Learns Dorico

Image Credit: Three-shots from Pixabay

I think my first exposure to music software was around 2005 when Sibelius 4 was released. I stayed with 4 for a long time, moving a few years later to 6, and more recently to 2023.6.

A lot of changes in those years! I've become fairly fluent in the programme, but I still happily pick up new tips from other users and never fail to get surprises (both good and otherwise).

Recently I took the decision to acquire and learn Dorico. This isn't because I'm fed up with Sibelius and want to defect (even though it's true that any software will irritate you from time to time). But change is in the air, and recent enquiries amongst music publishers indicate a growing preference for Dorico as the way forward there at least. This doesn't mean that Sibelius is being sidelined, however, especially by composers. Many people, myself included, have invested a lot of learning time acquiring the skills needed to be able to input and use Sibelius well, so we are not going to want to ditch all that overnight for another programme with its own steep learning curve. As an editor, it's crucial that I keep on top of Sibelius, because for many of my clients it is still their notation tool.

My initial foray into Dorico software has undoubtedly brought up some exciting advantages over Sibelius (as well as a few disadvantages) but I would say these are mainly of a typographical nature, a big pulling factor for publishers. Setting global defaults for consistent notation styles does feel easier in this programme. But for composers who want an immediate way of getting notes on screen and simply messing around, I suspect Sibelius is still the easier option.

Considering my background of twenty years' Sibelius experience as opposed to a mere one month with Dorico, this creates difficulties when trying to assess each programme's respective pros and cons. It's an unfair comparison, of course. But I have set myself the goal of learning Dorico over the coming year, devoting an hour every day for practice just like a musical instrument. I'll have more to say about it then. For now, I am painfully reminded of my early, slow stumbling steps with Sibelius all those years ago. But my editing experience has changed and developed too, so I need to be doing more typographical work these days. This means that the skills I need to use these days outweigh the basic ones I acquired back then.

For composers and arrangers I would say that you don't really need to change programme, and if you are fluent in Sibelius (or Finale) then stick with what you know. But if you have time to invest for the steep learning curve and want more typographical flexibility, Dorico might be worth adding to your arsenal. If you are still on an earlier version of Sibelius, why not consider an upgrade? Assuming you can get used to having a ribbon at the top of the screen, you will enjoy the advantages of faster cuing facilities as well as the magnetic layout, which eliminates most of the object clashes (such as slurs) that can happen in earlier Sibelius versions. And there's way more besides.

It's too early for me to make direct comparisons at this stage, but one striking feature is the speed at which Dorico can convert individual lines of separate orchestral lines (such as Flute 1, Flute 2 etc.) into one shared line as you expect to see in a conductor's score. This technique is called condensing. Sibelius can do this as well (under the Note Input tab, the somewhat melodramatically named 'explode' or 'reduce' option), but I find it easier on Dorico. Another feature is the ability to input larger intervals without having to correct their octave placement retrospectively when using mouse and keyboard.

Instead of a controversial ribbon at the top, Dorico has panels on all sides of the working space, which you can easily hide. There are four

global modes you can work in: Setup, Write, Engrave and Play. More impressively, it has a system of 'flows', which are effectively individual movements, so rather than trying to append separate files together (going through the hassle of ensuring each movement has the same instrumental staves), you can work on several consecutive and independent sections at the same time, with completely different instrumental setups if you like.

Despite these impressive developments, I'm still a great believer in Sibelius, and I very much hope Avid will keep a close eye on what's going on in the Steinberg camp. It would be a shame if such a magnificent, pioneering piece of technology were to dwindle away to a moribund dinosaur status, particularly when there are still so many 'native speakers' of its language around. If I didn't like the programme I wouldn't bother blogging as much as I do about it! But in my role as proofreader and editor, I certainly need both systems now.

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(written without using ChatGPT)

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