

J. Haydon

takes 43 minutes including plastic tapes (tape now used after talk)

Severance Hall Cleveland

(1)

Reflections on Carl Nielsen's Symphony No. 4, The Inextinguishable

25 March 87

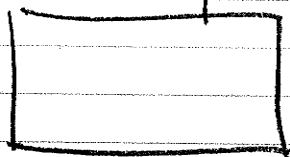
7:32 I. Appreciate the opportunity to speak with ~~you~~ you tonight, before we all go and listen to a live perf. of a fascinating work, Nielsen 4th (The Inextinguishable), a work from 1914-18 (WWI), now around 72 years old and clearly establishing itself as an increasingly familiar staple of the standard symph. repertory.

A. As I thought about tonight's talk -- wondered exactly what I should do -- and the immediate temptation is to stick with the tried & true, the standard set of program-notes repeated on records and program booklets ("Carl N., Danish composer, born 1865, 6 Symphonies, tonally adventurous, this is the 4th, in 4 munts played w/o pause, and so on") -- Or ^{another} possibility was the discussion of the history of the Scandinavian symphony, Nils Gade, Johan Svendsen, Jean Sibelius, Carl Nielsen...

B. But I thought it might be best -- and most helpful for us all -- to focus on the sounds of this Nielsen 4th, to help get them into our ears, and to start us all thinking about what the sounds might mean... to see if we can find a way to help us have a memorable experience w/this work tonight.

II. For it's not an easy work, and it's easy to get "off the track" -- The very opening sounds, for example, are hard to "hold onto" -- a jumble of loud fragments more likely to disorient and confuse than anything else

7:34



What do we make of that great barage of sound?

Well, we start by considering the symph's title, "The Inextinguishable" (Not many "pure symphonies" have titles given to them by the composer -- gives it a kind of expanded "Symphonic Poem" flavor). In fact, Nielsen gives us a PREFATORY NOTE at the beginning of the score to make it clear that a SINGLE POETIC IDEA (not a simplistic program) underlies this symphony. Nielsen writes

Its roots, but its each clearly Lisztian style of music modernized Lisztian

7:34 Under this title ~~the composer~~ ^{I have} endeavoured to indicate in one word what the music alone is capable of expressing to the full: *The elemental Will of Life.*

Every program note or talk about the Nielsen 4th quotes this... But what does it mean -- Music alone expresses WILL OF LIFE

Music is Life and, like it, is inextinguishable. ~~The title given by the composer to this musical work might therefore seem superfluous; the composer however has employed the word, in order to underline the strictly musical character of his subject. It is not a programme, but only a suggestion as to the right approach to the music.~~

7:35 some sense this WILL OF LIFE still ~~is not a musical and not a "program"~~ Hmm!

3rd pattern: this is not program music, easiest to dispense with: STANDARD 19th c. way of symphonic composers: with one hand they get you a juicy program (distinguishing it from the other they take it away) ... if you feel that things much more tied together in common -- Ambivalence about program... (Mahler!) ... point: music is spiritual, it exists beyond words (Wagnerian philosophy)... Music for greater than any description of it... but still descriptive and encouraged on progr. level

7:35

B. Let's unpack some of this bit by bit. 2nd is the easiest to unpack with "life". Well, what we would expect in the triumphant moments of the symph. we see the triumph of life -- triumph over destructive forces or forces that work against life. As music triumphs, so will life!

A letter from 1920 elaborates further: "The title 'The Inextinguishable' is not a programme but a pointer to the proper domain of music. It is meant to express the appearance of the most elementary forces among men, animals, and even plants. We can say: in case all the world was devastated through fire, deluge, volcanoes, etc., and all things were destroyed and dead, then nature would still begin to breed new life again, begin to push forward again with all the fine and strong forces inherent in matter. Soon the plants would begin to multiply, the breeding and screaming of birds be seen and heard, man's aspiration and yearning would be felt. These forces, which are 'inextinguishable,' I have tried to represent."

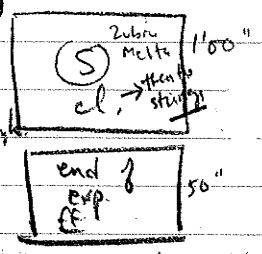
Similar sentiments are found in a letter from Mahler -- triumph over destruction (all this, in the context of a newly emerging W.W.I.) -- 1914-16 (Symph)

Now, one would of course assume that the music associated with "triumph" + resolution in the symph. is a SYMBOL OR SIGNIFIER of the LIFE-IMPULSE.

7:36

C. And in fact, there is a theme -- a cyclic theme brought back at crucial points -- that is such a signifier, a ^{such} ~~strong~~ theme that is the main "life" theme of the work...

- 1) Technically, the "subordinate theme" of 1st movmt (2nd theme) -- in shape, it's a stepwise descent from 5th scale degree down to the seventh -- first heard in the clarinets, about 1/4 min. into the symph.
- 2) A theme worked up at ^{climactic} points (like the end of the exposition) into CLIMACTIC PERORATIONS, triumphs



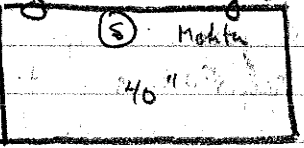
obj - the crucial thing to hang onto when listening

So we have here the musical signifier for Will to life or life -- But let's think some more about it!

7:39

III

Life theme formally introduced, as we heard, in the clarinets, in parallel 3rds ("sweet thirds" Nielsen called them) -- but softly, gently, not assertively at all... This is important. First formal appearance (SUBORDINATE THEME of 1st movmt.) gives me the impression of a swirling haze of life-potentiality, "seeds of life in the air," as it were, all potential, waiting downward lazily, then catching an errant breeze and being momentarily carried upward again (to diff. keys) before re-descending.

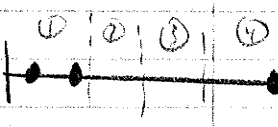


tonally, in A major at the beginning, but drifts off to other keys -- non-stable tonally -- "drifty" --

A. If this is a life or life-potential metaphor for Nielsen, as seems clear, it's life as yet unordered + unconfirmed, not rooted. It seeks the real CHARGE that would transform the life-principle into real, breathing focused life!! -- And the symph., in some respects, is about the charging of that potential into life itself... the triumphant miracle!

7:41

B. The great "charge" -- or the moment of transformation occurs 3 TIMES in the symph. -- 3 TIMES this mythical/electrical charge is provided: each is a nodal point of the symphony -- 3 POINTS of focus for the entire work/TWICE IN 1st MOVMT



- 1) end of the exposition (we just heard it), first movmt.
- 2) END of first movmt (recap.)
- 3) End of 4th movmt (end of whole symph.)

7:42

C. And these 3 moments are extraordinary! The "life theme" descends, fortissimo, descends, not merely from 5th scale deg. to 7th -- but descends in the bass (via bass) TWO FULL OCTAVES, from tonic to tonic two octaves lower. It's an amazing sound + an amazing feeling:

In metaphorical/poetic terms →

1) THE SORCERER that is NATURE passes its hand down through us from the top of our head down to the tips of our toes, ... The merely potential becomes actual, all the particles + fragments ^{of potentiality} line up in a grand design, a purposive, life-giving two-octave descent, firm and palpable.

30"
sorcerer
hand gesture
Mantium, CSO

Notice the kind of tremolo "halo" surrounding this life-force, like a glow around the animated being. -- excellent. orch.

7:44

2) 1st: end of expos. in A major

What was potential is now made actual... but (there's always a catch!) it's placed in the "wrong key"! (Nothing worse than ^{to find} a life-force in the wrong key!) Symph. about "evolving" a key, tonally speaking, E major, the "life-key".... This was A major (E's dominant, something that will resolve into the key of E)

3) 2nd appearance of this idea of triumph (end of 1st movement) does resolve it into E -- life key -- notice: it's lower, descending way down!

30"
(then the diff?)
Mantium, CSO

And viola B7 end of 1st mmt.

Orchestral life has appeared! ~~end of 1st mmt~~ 10 minutes in... It will sprout further in mmt 2, be challenged in mmt 3 + 4 + reassert itself (in E) at very end!

7:47

IV Thus → a life-force theme in 3 crucial appearances, and fragments of this descending theme are sprinkled all over the symphony (esp. as S of 1st mmt.) -- Helps, in fact, to explain the very opening of the symphony → that complex jumble or barange that we heard some time ago -- Symph. begins, you remember, with a tremendous onrush of chaotic sounds...

MOVE

A. These are, I suspect, "creation sounds," a kind of BIG-BANG OPENING that throws forth all the material of the symphony: good/evil, positive/neg. life/death 1) An explosion of sorts flinging out fragments at full volume -- one is the tritone negative motive (SING) but another, sounded gloriously in the trumpets about 30 seconds in, the descending life-idea, desc. from 5th scale step, fortissimo, down to the 7th. Listen for it.

-- creation sounds --
What Wm. James would call a "blowin' buzzin' confusion"

46"
Mantium, CSO
HEAR IT?

"5... 4... 3... 2... 1... 7"
top

2) After a minute or so more, this settles down into the so-called (S) theme, the "sweet thirds" life theme in the clarinet, life-potential swirling sound...

B. It is curious though, that the main life theme, even in swirling form, is mainly a downward pointed theme, a theme that settles downward

21

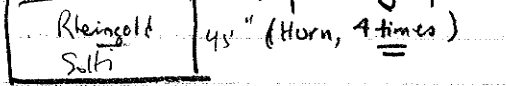
... rather than, as one might expect, sprouting upward... This is curious -- Very curious!

7:51

7:52

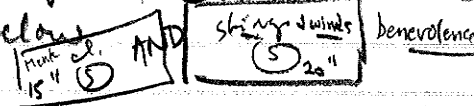
again,

C. Curious, because one would naturally assume that sprouting-life themes would go upward: that would be the normal thing in music... EXAMPLE (CLASSIC) → image of the emergence of life (the creation, as it were) at the very beginning of Wagner's Ring — Das Rheingold → here, too, in 1853-54, we hear the depiction of new life, not via a big bang (as in Nielsen), but as a natural, sprouting-upward motion, the earth now stretching up heavenward in new life!



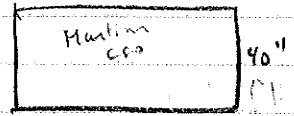
D. But not Nielsen's theme: it settles downward from 5th scale st. to 7th... probably very important (contours of theme are crucially important) → suggests debris of the opening still settling downward, wafting down; OR maybe a kind of benevolent NATURE-FORCE from on high bestowing life-potential on the earth below. — Very diff. from Wagnerian ^{organic rising} metaphor for life.

7:54



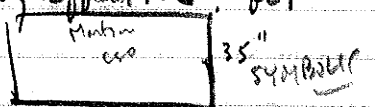
V Well, such then is the MAIN SYMBOL of this symphony. It reverberates throughout the work, + each mmnt. refers to it. For example (4 mmnts) 2nd mmnt. (Scherzo) is very easy to grasp → Simplest of all the mmnts: Scherzo Theme - Contrast - Attend Scherzo Theme (all this after 2 hrs, fearful, 2-octave descants)

A. Scherzo idea obv. an expansion or variant of life theme → the paired clarinets come back, the parallel 3rds come back, the ^{scaly} descent from 5 to lower 7 comes back, and so on — This is pleasant, positive, unchallenged, the happy ^{contended} germination + spread of life, as expressed in the motto theme (if one wishes to speak only in musical terms) →



7:57

B. Scherzo ^{section} played by WW only! (no strings) → Contrasting middle section of 2nd mmnt → sudden shift in color to pizzicato strings: very effective: but above the pizz., life-bearing WW's begin to add cpt.

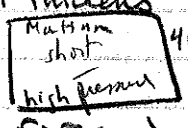


~~1) Technique (orchestral) common to Nielsen + central: contrasting orchestral groups dividing up orchestra into different color-blocks and letting the sheer, different timbres contrast: music as sound-texture groups~~
~~2) The term: "GROUP POLYPHONY", very obv. in 2nd mmnt. Similarly, in the ensuing Scherzo reprise, the whole group comes back, but is accented by a few strings very early to begin.~~

8:00

VI. Summary so far: 1st mmnt = BIG BANG and the establ. of life-potential theme, twice energized into two focal mmnts ^{two octave} for climax. 2nd → group polyphony "chorus" → life germinating further, relatively undisturbed... all is going well.

A. Now the plot thickens → In 3rd mmnt (slow mmnt.), we find impassioned, long lines, beginning unison strings (Desc. lines = life force) ^{high tension} — but toward the end of the mmnt. some pointedly disturbing elements are introduced:



These are insistent and repetitive sounds, gnawing and clipping away at the more positive life-related ideas... In 3rd mmnt the idea of NEGATIVITY

8:01

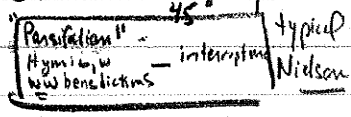
and possible destruction + anxiety enter into the picture; these ^{represent} the looming threats to life, one supposes, the threats that Nielsen himself referred to in his letters

B. 3rd mmt. (linked to 2nd w/o pause, about 18 minutes in) a big, grand, lyrical "ABA" mmt. (Theme/Contrast/return to varied theme) → And it's in that RETURN (last 1/3 of mmt.) that the threat begins... ~~again in group~~

In one group ^{orch.}

1) STRINGS + flute want to stay on the lovely, hymnic "B" theme (Parsifal-like) when suddenly the ob./cl./bsns break in, non sequiter, insistently circling around a single pitch, chipping away --

And strings (the first group) ^{simultaneously} do a sudden musical "double-take" → they shift to pizzicato as if to say (musically); "What's that?" "Who's disturbing our song? -- and conflict begins

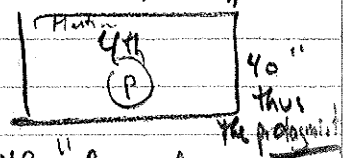


C. All this, however, is merely to gear up for the final battle of NEGATIVE vs. POSITIVE, the fourth mmt. ... Where NEGATIVE or death-forces try to attack and overthrow the life idea from 1st mmt. → all very clear in the music.

8:04

1) 4th mmt. ^{MAIN} theme: a sudden striding forth, confidently, into battle, I suppose.

(Again, all of this could also be explained in purely musical terms, but the musical techniques are obv. symbols → Nielsen: "Music is life, motion")



8:05

D. So: 4th → a kind of musical BATTLE mmt., + if you keep the "characters" straight, not difficult to follow. -- esp. towards the end, a little ways into the recapitulation. Characters include the "friendly" + the "enemies"

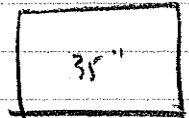
1) The "enemies" here → esp. the two SETS of timpani, specially placed, + pounded for all their worth (Heaven for a TIMPANIST !!) -- But here (esp. in WWI context) these are "militaristic" negative sounds striving to bombard and grenade life itself away (in musical terms, if one prefers, an attack ^{on tonality} on the motto-theme, or clearly pitched sounds).

2) In short → toward end of last mmt., Nielsen permits the free clashing of the SYMBOLIC IDEAS OF THE WHOLE PIECE → Totally clear and almost cinematic (movie-like) in its graphic quality and quick "scene-shifts"

8:07

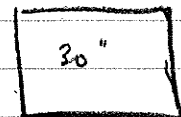
3) In summary; the characters of this battle are:

a) 4th mmt. "hero" figure (musical subject of 4th mmt.) bravely striding off to battle ...

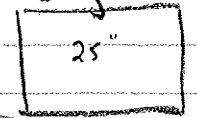


The hero's mission:

b) ~~trying~~ to preserve the forces of "life" -- that is, to preserve musically the return of the "life-force theme"



c) Against the forces of destruction (pounding timpani, often pounding in tunes Cold symbol of the negative in music)



d) Amidst the battle we hear (literally) cries and shrieks from the "life-group" (strings just w/ winds) + fragments of "life-force" theme ^{striving for attention}

8:09

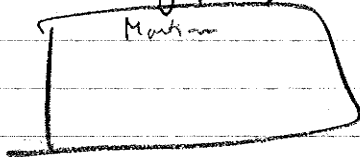
8:09

4) Very graphic -- this, of course, is the End of Symph. + as life triumphs the point is "INEXTINGUISHABLE" of life.

5) So: the order of events.

- a) Subject or hero, approaches the conflict to come in a grim, jaw-setting minor mode, + crescendos into the battle. determined
- b) battle itself (timpans) + shrieks + cries from violins + flutes.
- c) more battle, + frag. of "life-force" theme trying to be heard above the fog, (trumpets, horns, piccolo → listen carefully for that descending life theme)
- d) Timpans - pounding stops + strings build aggressively up to the grand climax → the life-force theme, fortissimo, in the "life-key" of E major, and ending gloriously with, for the 3rd + final time that GRAND 2-OCTAVE descent in low brass, NATURE a SORCERER once again charging the particles of life-potential into a grand + solid design at the symphony's conclusion.

6) let's hear it the last 3 1/2 minutes of the symph. ... the great battle.



Thus the "inextinguishability" of life, according to Carl Nielsen...

IV All of this, of course, a spectacular orchestral tour-de-force (paradise for the timpans and trombones; they live for moments like this) - - -

And so, I suspect, do we new listeners -- We're in for a real orchestral treat tonight with the Nielsen 4th -- And if all goes well, if life wins out yet one more time, as we might predict, we might hope that our memories of this evening will be wonderful, and similarly INEXTINGUISHABLE.

Thu 10



THE JUNIOR COMMITTEE OF
THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

SEVERANCE HALL

CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106

October 14, 1988
Laura J. Gorretta
The Junior Committee of
the Cleveland Orchestra
Severance Hall
Cleveland, OH 44106

Mr. James Hepokoski
Oberlin College Conservatory
Oberlin, OH 44074

Dear Prof. Hepokoski:

I am writing to confirm your participation in the "Fridays at Severance Hall" lecture series this season. As I explained to you when we last spoke, the Medley Committee of the Junior Committee of the Cleveland Orchestra would like you to speak on Friday, March 25, 1988. Yoel Levi will be conducting that evening and Ken Noda will be the guest artist. The program will include Le Tombeau de Couperin by Ravel, the Piano Concerto No. 20, K. 466 by Mozart and Neilson's Symphony No. 4, "The Inextinguishable."

Traditionally, the pre-concert lecture relates to the program of the evening. We would like you to speak on the topic of the life and music of Carl Neilson with particular emphasis on his Symphony No. 4. The lecture will begin at 7:30 and will be 45 minutes in length. Audio-visual equipment will be available.

The Committee is pleased to be able to provide you with two tickets to the evening's concert, and a parking pass as well as a \$50 honorarium. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 586-7506 (work) or 247-5274 (home). We will be in touch with you in early March to discuss last minute details.

Again, thank you for accepting our invitation to participate in the "Fridays at Severance Hall" lecture series. We look forward to your program.

Sincerely,

Laura J. Gorretta
Medley Committee

cc: Mary Landers, Chairman
751-7414

*Susan Tebride
met us, introduced
me at the
actual lecture
JAG
16 March
88*