
CARL NIELSEN AND THEORIES OF SYMPHONISM

By David Fanning

For a composer whose output is so clearly signposted by his six completed symphonies, and who was not exactly shy when it came to the spoken and written word, Nielsen said remarkably little about his attitude to the symphony as a genre or about symphonism as a principle. What he did say consists mainly of scraps, including off-the-cuff judgments about other composers' individual symphonies (where his negative views are often as interesting as his enthusiasms) as well as descriptive programme notes and interviews concerning his own. Imaginative and engaging though these words may be, in the end we are left with plenty of unanswered questions.

Not that this is entirely surprising, because no major composer in Nielsen's day or before – with the partial exception of Wagner – saw it as part of their duty to help us out in terms of a theory of the symphonic. Perhaps more surprising is the fact that critics and musicologists themselves have always been rather reluctant to venture into this area. The exceptions are one national tradition, to be discussed below, and one individual writer whose hugely influential work on Nielsen was embedded in his broader, trenchant views of symphonism in principle and practice. His ideas are worth recapping straight away, after which the two main parts of this article will comprise an exposition of an alternative theory of the symphony that is little-known outside its country of origin, and an examination of some salient features of Nielsen's first four symphonies in the light of that theory.

Robert Simpson and the 'true symphony'

Not regarding himself either as critic or musicologist, but a radio producer by profession and a composer by calling, Robert Simpson felt no reluctance to pronounce on the essence of symphonic composition, at least not when he was writing his introductory essays to the two volumes of a valuable little Penguin symposium on the Symphony. Here he generalised some points he had already made in his classic study

of Nielsen.¹ By the time of writing in 1967, Simpson already had behind him three of what would eventually be eleven symphonies of his own, and his writings can be seen as validating his own practice at least as much as they describe things from a neutral scholarly standpoint. A second not-so-well hidden agenda is polemical opposition to his sparring partner at the BBC, the legendary and formidable Hans Keller. Finally, and quite explicitly, his words are intended to explain the policy of excluding Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Hindemith and others from the pages of his second volume.

A combative element already emerges in Simpson's definition of the symphony, which he approaches via comparison with Haydn and Mozart's string quartets. These 'proved to be the means of conveying the highest degree of concentration' – interesting that Simpson assumed 'concentration' to be a self-evident virtue for music from the late-1700s. He goes on:

The name 'symphony' became attached to orchestral works aiming at the same kind of density and significance. And not only density; variety within a required unity was always tacitly regarded as vital, variety of both movement and character [...] The name itself [...] has come to mean a work for orchestra in which the composer has obeyed and mastered [...] not a set of rules but a body of principles, or standards.²

Up to the last clause, that part of Simpson's argument is hard to disagree with; indeed it is admirably precise and lucid in drawing broad generic distinctions between the quartet and symphony on the one hand and various forms of divertimento, sonata or concerto on the other. But then we get to 'a body of principles'. That may seem a more liberal formulation than 'rules', and it may be taken as a valuable reminder of the adaptability of the symphony to changing cultural/historical environments. But is it really possible to deduce any agreed 'body of principles' from the tens of thousands of works bearing the title symphony, or even from whatever smaller body within that number might conceivably be regarded as canonic? Even more worrying is the suspicion that by invoking such terms as 'obedience' and 'mastery', Simpson has strayed from description into prescription, as the intriguingly ambivalent word 'standards' betrays. Is that standards as in norms? Or as in a measure of quality? And in any case, who is to say what those standards are, let alone how they might be identified in any given work?

Where Simpson is heading is towards an explicit five-point plan for 'those elements a composer *must* master if he is to write a *true* symphony' [my emphases], Those points are here abbreviated, but not, I trust, misrepresented:

1 Robert Simpson, *The Symphony*, 2 vols., Harmondsworth 1967; Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, London 1952; revised edition London 1979.

2 Simpson, *The Symphony*, vol. 1, 12.

The fusion of diverse elements into an organic whole [...]

The continuous control of pace [...]

Reserves of strength [...] such as to suggest size

The dynamic treatment of tonality [...]

Activ[ity] in all possible ways [...] ³

Accepting for the sake of argument that the concept of the ‘true symphony’ is worth the bother, there are some conspicuous omissions here. Nothing about the ethical, aspirational quality of the Beethovenian and post-Beethoven symphony, for instance; or about any relationship to the outside world; nothing even about the use of orchestral forces, which might help to distinguish symphonies from the more ambitious instances of sonata.

Still, rather than rubbishing or quibbling with Simpson’s prescriptions, it may be worth considering the mind-set they represent, before coming on to ideas from a different intellectual background that may offer an alternative angle from which to view Nielsen,

Where Simpson was coming from, apart from – obviously – his own published studies of Beethoven, Bruckner, Nielsen and Sibelius, was an inheritance rooted deep in British critical discourse. This goes back at least as far as the sharp turn away from Germanic symphonism at the time of the First World War (not just a British phenomenon, of course), and the search for alternative role-models, of whom Sibelius seemed easily the most attractive. And the terms of reference came also from intense critical engagement with Elgar’s symphonies, in relation both to their English predecessors and to the Austro-German mainstream. So Simpson’s precepts are distilled from arguments that were batted to and fro in the inter-war years by the likes of Ernest Newman, Cecil Gray, Constant Lambert and Donald Francis Tovey, whose broad aesthetic premises are traceable all the way back via the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Schlegel and the German romantics.⁴ For Simpson to have reasserted these precepts as universal truths in the 1960s may indeed seem anachronistic and/or high-handed. At the same time it may be understood as a bid for cultural-intellectual conservation, in response to an even higher-handed, even more selective and even more coercive brand of historicism, emanating from a still militant musical avant-garde that was implacably and irrationally hostile to the symphony as a genre. Simpson’s later essay on what he considered to be the modernist bias of London BBC Promenade Concert programming was a logical extension of the same line of thought.⁵

3 *Ibid.*, 13-14.

4 See Laura Gray, ‘“The Symphony in the Mind of God”: Sibelius Reception and English Symphonic Theory’, in Veijo Murtomäki, Kari Kilpeläinen and Risto Väisänen (eds.), *Sibelius Forum [1]: Proceedings from the Second International Jean Sibelius Conference Helsinki 25-29 November, 1995*, Helsinki 1998, 62-72.

5 Robert Simpson, *The Proms and Natural Justice*, London 1981.

Simpson's was in fact a more questing and rebellious spirit than some of his more authoritarian printed statements tend to suggest. In his own symphonies from the 1970s on, he shook himself free to a significant extent from his own precepts – notably the one concerning the dynamic treatment of tonality – taking on board elements that might be considered pre-eminently 'non-organic' (including symmetrical and twelve-note constructivist schemes, stasis, quotation and paraphrase). It is possible to detect a very high-level connection with Nielsen here. Simpson became an outstanding symphonist in part by taking on board elements he publicly regarded as anti-symphonic, using them as negative polarities in his symphonic dramas. And there is something of that in Nielsen's temperament too, in that he does not reject those styles or character-types he dislikes, but rather accepts them as phenomena to be dramatized and dealt with. That phenomenon is not precisely the subject of this article. But if it was, then I believe it could be rather effectively demonstrated using the ideas I am now coming on to. These ideas in many ways complement Simpson's precepts, and they open the way to reconsideration both of Nielsen's symphonic practice and of Simpson's views on it.

Soviet Theories of Symphonism

To go straight to the point, *Fig. 1* presents an alternative 'body of principles', derived from the early Classical, i.e. pre-*Eroica*, symphony. It comes from Mark Aranovsky's study of the Soviet Symphony in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s – a period in the late 'Thaw' years when Shostakovich's last four symphonies were overlapping with new initiatives from the likes of Boris Chaykovsky, Giya Kancheli, Arvo Pärt, Alfred Schnittke, Rodion Shchedrin, Avet Terteryan, Boris Tishchenko, Mieczysław Weinberg and many others. All those latter figures, roughly contemporary with the likes of Maxwell Davies, Birtwistle, Nørgård and Penderecki, were in the business of catching up with Western modernism. Yet they were also reluctant to abandon completely the values they had inherited from the Soviet symphonic tradition – above all, of course, Shostakovich. Aranovsky attempts to bring some kind of order to the welter of techniques, styles and aesthetics deployed in his chosen 15-year period by first taking a wide-lens view of the entire symphonic tradition.

Aranovsky's scheme and those that derive from it (see *Figs. 2-5* below) are well hedged around with cautionary explanations, and he is quite clear that a general theory of symphonism would need to allow for more dynamic historical elements. Whether the latter could possibly be accommodated in schematic form is open to doubt. But Aranovsky does believe that it is realistic to talk of a 'core of constant features constituting an invariant model of the genre, retained no matter what along the whole path of its development right up to the middle of the 20th century'.⁶ The word '*invariant*',

6 Mark Aranovsky, *Simfonicheskiye iskaniya* [Symphonic explorations], Leningrad 1979, 28.

	First movement	Second movement	Third movement	Fourth movement
	Homo agens	Homo sapiens	Homo ludens	Homo communis
1	fast tempo	slow tempo	fast tempo	fast tempo
2	sonata form	old binary or old sonata form, sonata without development, ternary, variations, more rarely rondo	ternary	rondo, sonata rondo
3	prevalence of development, separation [drobnosti], discreteness [diskretnosti] of structure	prevalence of exposition, wholeness [tselostnosti]	prevalence of exposition, wholeness	prevalence of exposition, wholeness
4	leading role of tonal-harmonic development and discreteness of thematic structures	leading role of melody	leading role of rhythm	relative balance of functional means

FIG. 1: *The early-classical symphonic archetype (from Mark Aranovsky, Simfonicheskiye iskaniya [Symphonic Explorations]. Leningrad, Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1979, p. 27).*

used both as noun and adjective, does not register quite so dogmatically in Russian as it does in English; ‘archetype/archetypal’ may be a more appropriate rendering, even though this term was rather new-fangled in Russian musicology of the time.⁷ With that caveat, I shall refer to the scheme in Fig. 1 as the ‘Aranovsky Invariant’.

What lies behind the Aranovsky Invariant is a tradition of thought that goes back to two specific German sources. The more important of these is a little book by the critic Paul Bekker, based on a series of public lectures given 1918, which takes a panoramic view of the symphony from Beethoven to Mahler. Bekker asserted that Beethoven’s symphonic legacy was dispersed among different national traditions after the composer’s death and only resynthesized into a new idealism by Mahler.⁸ (Neither Sibelius nor Nielsen was on Bekker’s radar, incidentally; it is a very slim book, targeted at a lay readership.) Secondly, there is an equally concise but more scholarly investigation by the otherwise virtually unknown Robert Sondheimer, concerning 18th-century writings on the symphony, especially those that draw connections between tempo and character, based on the Doctrine of the Affections.⁹

Bekker’s work was translated into Russian in 1926 by Boris Asafyev, by that time already a major force in Soviet musicology. Asafyev had already coined the term

⁷ See *ibid.*, 35.

⁸ Paul Bekker, *Die Symphonie von Beethoven bis Mahler*, Berlin 1918; translated by Boris Asafyev as *Simfoniya ot Bëtkhovena do Malera*, Leningrad 1926.

⁹ Robert Sondheimer, *Die Theorie der Sinfonie und die Beurteilung einzelner Sinfoniekomponisten bei den Musikschriststellern des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig 1925.

'symphonism' some years before, and he would continue to influence Soviet writings in this area more or less until his death in 1948. It was a relatively short step for Asafyev and others – such as Ivan Sollertinsky, Shostakovich's friend and intellectual conscience in his twenties and thirties – to spin Bekker's work into a defence of the symphonic tradition as a genre for the masses, and therefore as something that the Soviet Union could not only support with a clear conscience but also claim to have inherited, at the time when the symphony was supposedly in terminal decline in the West (the last point is by no means confined to Russian commentators, of course).¹⁰ From the mid-1930s that spin became ever more necessary, as attacks on Soviet symphonists were mounted from on high by officialdom and from disaffected peer groups, especially exponents of proletarian music who had lost out in the power struggles at the time of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan. Shostakovich was the main figure caught in the cross-fire. But that is definitely another story.

Aranovsky, writing several decades after the heyday of Soviet ideological debates, could afford to take a more Olympian view of symphonic evolution, but it is still one profoundly informed by social considerations. He generalises his Invariant still further, as an interface between music and the world by means of the polar opposites of activity and meditation, which together enable the 19th-century symphony to function as a kind of 'secular mass'.¹¹ And he further proposes the Invariant as a useful tool for discussing innovations as late as his chosen period of the 1960s and 1970s.

None of this represents state-of-the-art musicological thinking about the historical roots of symphonism; perhaps the closest to that in English is James Hepokoski's work on Beethoven reception.¹² But because Aranovsky presents his thoughts with such visual clarity, his tabular summaries are extraordinarily useful. His Invariant certainly throws into relief the formalism of prescriptions such as Simpson's; and it is a reminder that arguments about the detail of those prescriptions are less important than the dimensions they completely omit. Aranovsky brings the audience into the picture along with the composer, and shifts the emphasis towards the why, rather than merely the what and how, towards philosophy rather than technique, towards social functions as well as artistic features. And all of this without getting entangled in politics or – thinking of recent Western debates in the area of the Soviet symphony – confusing artistic innovation with dissidence. The Invariant can even support discussions of artistic value. In the introduction to his 1926 translation of Bekker's booklet, Asafyev opined that the symphony was in danger of becoming no

10 For more on the affinities between Asafyev, Sollertinsky and Nielsen, see David Fanning, 'Carl Nielsen and Early Twentieth-Century Musical/Aesthetic Theory', *Carl Nielsen Studies* III (2003), 9-17.

11 Aranovsky, *op. cit.*, 25.

12 Hepokoski, James. 'Beethoven reception: the symphonic tradition', in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music*, Cambridge 2001, 424-459.

more than a dead scheme. He was thinking of the likes of Glazunov and Steinberg – Shostakovich’s teachers – and almost certainly writing in ignorance both of Shostakovich’s First Symphony and of Nielsen’s last, each of which was premiered around the time of the Asafyev/Bekker publication. In fact, beyond the occasional two- or three-line mention in musicological journals, the Soviets were seemingly completely unaware of Nielsen at this time. But that is not the point. Looking at Shostakovich’s First and Nielsen’s Sixth, or indeed almost any of their symphonies, in the light of Aranovsky’s schemes, provokes new thoughts about what makes them unique and what raises them above the work of their symphonist contemporaries – which is not so much their comprehensive coverage of archetypal qualities as the way they deliberately unbalance, rebalance and confront them with opposite poles, in the process tracing new dynamic trajectories across the inherited multi-movement scheme.

Aranovsky’s Introduction goes on to examine the typical characteristics of each movement of the traditional symphonic cycle, especially the nature of contrasts within and between them, again with reference to the proposed early-classical archetype. His tables are worth presenting here, without going into their more debatable qualities or his explanatory glosses (*Figs. 2-4*, below). Aranovsky’s sets out formal and semantic similarities and differences between first and second movements, second and third, and third and fourth. At this level the contrasts are at their greatest between the first and second movements (hence the preponderance of points in separate columns on *Fig. 2*), and they gradually decrease in favour of similarities, until the archetypal finale provides a kind of synthesis. This progression is shown visually in the way basic features move progressively into the middle of the tables on *Figs. 2, 3 and 4*.¹³

Aranovsky does also compare first and third movements, first and fourth, and second and fourth, and these tables are given below for the sake of completeness (*Figs. 5-7*). But those comparisons, though by no means uninteresting, do not form such a vital part of his dynamic view of symphonic dramaturgy. More pertinent to Nielsen is what he has to say about the historical evolution of the symphony. Aranovsky claims that the signs he identifies stand for ‘components of a conception of Mankind’, calling the Invariant a kind of ‘restraining principle [...] acting as the bearer of the “genetic memory” of the genre’.¹⁴

The closer we come to individual works, the more the columns and rows of Aranovsky’s tables seem over-schematic. But he is making a point about the overall dramaturgy of the symphonic cycle, using his schemes only as means to an end. Sceptical semioticians might note that he writes explicitly about setting up discussions of

¹³ Aranovsky, *op. cit.*, 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

Formal signs	First movement	Second movement
	1) Fast tempo 2) Sonata form 3) Prevalence [<i>preobladaniye</i>] of development 4) Frequent changes of material, texture and types of motion 5) Harmony 6) Prevalence of small, detailed, discrete structures 7) Prevalence of discreteness of [phrase]-construction	– slow tempo – old two-part or sonata forms, rondo, sonata without development – prevalence of exposition – relative constancy of material, texture and types of motion – melody – prevalence of extended [<i>krupnikh</i>] structures – prevalence of flowing [phrase]-constructions
Semantic signs	1) Motion 2) Action 3) Events 4) Real 5) ‘Displacement [<i>sdvigi</i>] in expression’	– stasis – meditation – appraisal [<i>otsenka</i>] – psychological – relative stability of affect

FIG. 2: First- and second-movement archetypes, from Aranovsky, *Simfonicheskiye iskaniya*, p.31.

Formal signs	Second movement	Third movement
	1) slow tempo 2) old binary or sonata form, sonata without development, more rarely rondo or variations 3) melody	– moderately fast tempo – ternary – rhythm
	4) prevalence of exposition 5) relative constancy in forms of motion 6) prevalence of wholeness over discreteness 7) prevalence of extended structures	
Semantic signs	1) stasis 2) meditation 3) psychological	– motion – play – reality as everyday-generic [<i>zhanrogo-bitogoye</i>]

FIG. 3: Second- and third-movement archetypes, from Aranovskiy, *Simfonicheskiye iskaniya*, p. 32.

Formal signs	Third movement	Fourth movement
	1) fast tempo	
	2) ternary	- rondo, sonata rondo, sonata
	3) prevalence of exposition	
	4) rhythm	- balance of functional means
	5) prevalence of extended structural entities	
6) prevalence of flowing [phrase-]constructions		
Semantic signs	1) motion	
	2) play	- life as a whole [kak tseloye]
	reality (as everyday-generic)	

FIG. 4: Third- and fourth-movement archetypes, from Aranovsky, *Simfonicheskiye iskaniya*, p. 33.

Formal signs	First movement	Third movement
	1) fast tempo	
	2) sonata form	- ternary
	3) prevalence of development	- prevalence of exposition
	4) harmony	- rhythm
	5) frequent changes of materials, textures and types of motion	- relative constancy of materials, texture and types of motion
6) prevalence of small, detailed structures	- prevalence of extended structures	
Semantic signs	1) motion	
	2) action	- play
	3) reality	
	(eventfulness) [sobitiynoye]	everyday-generic

FIG. 5: First- and third-movement archetypes, from Aranovsky, *Simfonicheskiye iskaniya*, p. 32.

Formal signs	First movement	Fourth movement
	1) Fast tempo	
	2) sonata form	- rondo, sonata rondo
	3) prevalence of development	- prevalence of exposition
	4) harmony	- balance of functional means
5) prevalence of short structures	- prevalence of extended structures	
Semantic signs	1) motion as a process of qualitative change	- motion in the physical sense
	2) eventfulness	- life of the surroundings [sredi] as a whole
	3) action as a form of individual behaviour	- dissolution in the life of the collective

FIG. 6: First- and fourth-movement archetypes, from Aranovskiy, *Simfonicheskiye iskaniya*, p. 34.

	Second movement	Fourth movement
Formal signs	1) slow tempo	- fast tempo
	2) old binary or sonata form, variations, rondo, sonata without development	- rondo, sonata rondo
	3) Prevalence of exposition	
	4) melody	- balance of functional means
	5) relative constancy of types of motion	
	6) prevalence of extended, complete [<i>tselostnikh</i>] [phrase]-structures	
Semantic signs	1) stasis 2) meditation 3) the individual 4) psychological	- motion - representation of 'external' life - the collective - reality

FIG. 7: *Second- and fourth-movement archetypes, from Aranovskiy, Simfonicheskiye iskaniya, p. 34.*

syntagmatic processes on the basis of his paradigmatic schemes,¹⁵ and the stronger parts of his book put this aspiration into practice. In fact one of the most impressive features of his study is the way it commutes between close-up views of individual works, using specialist terminology, and non-specialist big-picture representations couched in layman's terms.

The genre of symphony, according to Aranovsky, is designed to express a 'system of relationship between Mankind and Reality' [original emphases and capitals], parallel to the 'universal philosophical systems of the 18th and 19th centuries'.¹⁶ And he characterises the historical development of the symphony as a parallel musical and extra-musical (or abstract / concrete) process, the musical-abstract line being more pronounced in the likes of Brahms and Taneyev, the extra-musical-concrete one more so in Tchaikovsky and Mahler. Of course there is a constant negotiation between the two aspects, and Aranovsky recognises that the problem of balance between those poles was already posed by Beethoven, in whose symphonies the interpenetration of the established archetypal qualities of movements in no small measure accounts for their individuality and stature.¹⁷

Aranovsky's overview of the 19th-century symphony concentrates on lyricisation and the programmatic element, jointly characterised as an attempt to objectify the subjective. Brahms's contribution includes an interpenetration of qualities in the inner movements – lyricising the scherzo and introducing generic elements into slow movements – while more radical instances of the lyrical-programmatic process are to

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

be found in Tchaikovsky and Mahler.¹⁸ Finally, so far as the 20th-century symphony is concerned, Aranovsky notes that the increasing tendency to mirror social catastrophe, emphasizing doubt and instability, fundamentally shakes up the archetypal balances, particularly affecting the aspect of *homo communis*, so that it tends to fuse with *homo agens*, thereby transferring aspects of the first movement archetype to the finale (see Fig. 1, above). In Shostakovich's case, something of the balance is restored by transferring aspects of the meditative slow movement back to the first.¹⁹ So, for example, if we need to explain why the first movement of Shostakovich's Fifth is so special, then it is less valuable to talk in terms of 'Sonata deformation' than to ponder the re-balancing of archetypal characters. And by extension, the problem of Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony, which by textbook standards seems to lack a first movement altogether, disappears if we take it as a rather extreme example of dissolving boundaries between movement archetypes. Those are both examples that Aranovsky himself cites.²⁰

The end of Aranovsky's introduction modifies Bekker's view of the 'community-forming' power (*gesellschaftsbildende Kraft*) of Beethoven's and Mahler's symphonism, by proposing that the dynamism of social and intellectual development in the twentieth century was reflected in modifications to the semantic invariant of the conception of Mankind, and by analogy in the invariant schemes of the symphony. His main purpose is then to elucidate developments in the Soviet symphony between 1960 and 1975. Mine is now to look at Nielsen's first four symphonies in the light of Aranovsky's arguments. Apart from their individual expressive and innovative qualities, these works show a compelling evolution in their handling of the inherited four-movement symphonic scheme. In the Fifth Symphony, which I have probed in some detail elsewhere, the two-movement design is both a fundamental departure and a redistribution of the Invariant elements that speaks eloquently for itself.²¹ The Sixth on the other hand presents such a complex case – in part because of the additional problem of 'tone of voice' – that it may perhaps best be viewed as an inversion or subversion of those elements. As such it deserves a separate study, embracing multiple theoretical viewpoints.

The following discussion needs to be followed with reference to Fig. 1 above.

Nielsen's Symphonies Nos. 1-4 and the Aranovsky Invariant

As for the First Symphony, it is surely not wrong-headed to think of it as an exceptionally invigorating version of the kind of post-Schumann symphony, sometimes called Leipzigian, that was extremely common towards the end of the 19th century and had

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

²¹ See David Fanning, *Carl Nielsen: Symphony No. 5*, Cambridge 1997.

its counterpart in Russia in the ‘Belyayevist’ symphony, most notably represented by Nielsen’s exact contemporary, Alexander Glazunov.²² It has little or nothing to do with more radical representatives of the post-1875 ‘Second Age of the Symphony’ (in Carl Dahlhaus’s formulation) such as Bruckner, Mahler or Tchaikovsky, and just as little with the programmatic/lyrical impulses that Aranovsky, following Bekker, identifies as prime modifiers for the 19th-century symphony. Rather it is a kind of self-enfranchisement – staking a claim to join the symphonic community and have a say within it, rather than setting a radically new agenda.

The four movements and their internal divisions conform closely to familiar textbook forms and apparently also to the Aranovsky Invariant, except that the third and fourth movements are increasingly taken over first by *homo sapiens* (the lyrical-reflective) and then *homo agens* (the active-conflictual). In plainer terms, the playful elements of the generic scherzo give ground first to introspection then to energy, while the finale is dominated by energy, not just as a contrasting element but as something fundamental to the symphonic dramaturgy.

Where does that leave the downplayed *homo ludens* and *homo communis*? In a fairly recent study I suggested that the opening paragraph of the first movement takes as its jumping-off point the ‘Orgy of the Brigands’ finale from Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy*.²³ If that allusion is accepted as real for the sake of argument, it may be understood as representing *ludens* and *communis* rolled into one, or at least as modifiers to the archetypal *agens* of the first-movement Invariant. So whereas one defining characteristic of Shostakovich’s epic symphonies, in Aranovsky’s view, is that finales infused with *homo agens* are balanced by first movements infused with *homo sapiens* from the slow movement, maybe one part of the distinctiveness of Nielsen’s First has to do with its unusually pronounced element of *homo communis*.

In effect, the possibility that Aranovsky has prompted me to consider is that the particular character-types of Nielsen’s first, third and fourth movements are not merely individualised in a way that marks the First Symphony as ‘a bold and deliberate assertion of [Nielsen’s] individuality’,²⁴ but also redistributed across the four-movement cycle in reciprocal fashion, in such a way as to achieve balance at the highest structural level. I also find myself wondering whether there may not be more connection than I had previously realised, and at more levels, between this first-movement *Allegro orgoglioso* and the *Allegro collerico* of the Second Symphony; in that the Choleric Temperament, for all that it is programmatically about an individual, also has quite a

22 See Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, Oxford 1996, vol. 1, 163-233.

23 David Fanning, ‘Carl Nielsen under the Influence’, *Carl Nielsen Studies* III (2008), 13-18.

24 Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist* (1979), 24.

lot of the orgiastic-communal in its nature. In general, it is not just the case that the Second Symphony maximalises certain of the stylistic and dramatic elements of the First, but also that it inherits the idea of character-archetypes and their rebalancing.

Again, I want to use the Aranovsky Invariant to recast something I have previously asserted about the Second Symphony, namely that Nielsen takes the cue from the concept of *The Four Temperaments* to go over the top in his character depictions, then, crucially, accepts the challenge this over-the-topness presents to his technique – namely, to keep those excesses from bursting the bonds of style and form. In other words, his compositional strategies for transition and integration have to evolve in order to cope with pressures of potential disintegration. Those pressures arise from such features as the two main themes of his first movement appearing not only in different tempos, which would not be so unusual, but also in different metres, which really is exceptional, even for 1902.²⁵ To translate all that into the terms of Aranovsky's Invariant schemes, the 'separation' and 'discreteness' characteristic of first movements in general have now become so extreme that *homo agens* is coming under severe pressure from his own inner negative forces, and the problem of separation becomes the central drama of the movement, symbolising an existential dilemma.

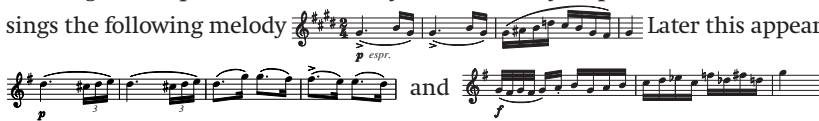
This in turn leads to a still more general point about the Second Symphony. The Choleric Temperament is special precisely because despite its determination to act (*agere*), in the sense of overcoming its demons, it repeatedly and ultimately fails in that mission. And then why did Nielsen not place the Melancholic slow movement second? Simpson's answer was in terms of the downward trajectory of the temperaments – from Choleric down to Phlegmatic down to Melancholic, then up to Sanguine – rather than an apparently haphazard course of the kind Hindemith offers in his quasi-Piano Concerto of 1940 with the same *Four Temperaments* title (Hindemith's layout is a Theme followed by Variations in the order Melancholic, Sanguine, Phlegmatic, Choleric). We can approach a different answer via Aranovsky's theory. This, we may remember, holds that the contrasts between movements in the archetypal symphonic scheme move from maximal to minimal, in the direction of ultimate synthesis. In terms of maximalising contrast, if Nielsen's slow movement had been placed second, then despite the huge tempo contrast on the surface there would have been too much similarity at the deepest levels, including the archetypal: not just the excess of minor mode, but the fact that the Melancholic temperament tries to deal with its negativity but fails, in just the same way as the Choleric does. What then of the Phlegmatic temperament, which Nielsen placed second instead? This Brahmsifies the 'playful' scherzo in the direction of an 'idle' – non-agens – intermezzo, and

25 See David Fanning, 'Carl Nielsen and Progressive Thematicism', in Mina Miller (ed.), *The Nielsen Companion*, London 1994, 178-181.

in it the three qualities that unite first and third movements in Aranovsky's scheme (fast tempo, motion and reality) are all downplayed, leaving the archetypal contrasts noted in Fig.5 above to stand in higher relief. Above all, the Phlegmatic temperament does not strive to *deal with* its negativity (in this case its lassitude), making for maximal contrast with the Choleric, which struggled so mightily in the direction of nobility; then the Melancholic third movement does try to deal with its negativity, but fails; the Sanguine finale again does not actually try, but is forced to reflect and to some limited extent succeeds, in the process giving us a genial and highly personal twist on the notion of synthesis. Some of the terms of the above description are admittedly borrowed from Simpson, but viewing them through the lens of Aranovsky's Invariants at least gives a fresh perspective on the work and the chance to relate it to a broad, historically informed theory of the symphonic.

With the *Sinfonia espansiva*, the third movement is the subject of the most cursory and unhelpful of all Nielsen's programme notes. This is what he wrote about it in 1912, in full:

The *Allegretto un poco* is introduced by four bars of syncopations, then the oboe sings the following melody



which is fugued and brought together in various ways. The movement ends as it began, in an ambivalent mood between major and minor.²⁶

His other two programme notes are even more laconic: in 1927, 'The third movement is in contrast to this [i.e. the second movement]'; and in 1931, 'The third movement is a thing that cannot really be described, because both evil and good are manifested without any real settling of the issue'.²⁷ The latter description surely betrays a certain amount of hindsight, based on the experience of his three subsequent symphonies.

It should not be too hard to add some flesh to those bones, even at this high level of generalization. This movement very obviously rubs up against the scherzo-trio-scherzo *homo ludens* archetype, being highly developmental, active and contrastive. It pulls itself together by means of its knotty fugal writing, giving us a microcosm of the problem-solving, dark-to-light trajectory that has been the prerogative of so many symphonies since Beethoven's Fifth. Despite its modest dimensions, the *Allegretto un poco* deals not only with internal matters peculiar to the *Sinfonia espansiva* but also with some unresolved business from the Second Symphony, which,

26 Preface to *Carl Nielsen Works*, II/3, xviii (misprints in the first and third music examples corrected).

27 *Ibid.*, xix, xx.

as suggested above, only managed to ‘deal with’ anything almost by accident, in its Sanguine finale. In this sense the movement punches far above its weight. And this feature represents a crucial stage on the way to Nielsen’s Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, where the stakes are higher in existential terms, and where the penultimate movement (or penultimate section in the case of the finale of No. 5) is a crucial problem-solving arena. In fact, looking again at Aranovsky’s scheme for comparing first and third movements, the third movement of the *Espansiva* appears to have more or less all the archetypal characteristics of a *first* movement (see Fig. 5). And if we remember that the first movement of the symphony, the *Allegro espansivo*, has a development section that is pretty much entirely a symphonic waltz, it does not seem unrealistic to suggest that there is a certain reciprocal exchange of characters going on here too, in that the first movement has appropriated some of the archetypal quality of *homo ludens*, allowing the third movement to compensate with a large dose of *homo agens*.

By extension, that helps us to say something more about the fourth movement, rather obviously a relaxant finale, to borrow Michael Talbot’s helpful taxonomy of summative, relaxant and valedictory finales.²⁸ Apart from the semi-programmatic aspects familiar from Nielsen’s programme notes – ‘the apotheosis of Work’, ‘the healthy activity of everyday life’, and so on²⁹ – one reason why this finale does not need to worry too much about high-level synthesis is that the *Allegretto un poco* third movement has already done a significant part of that job. In so far as there is any synthesis in the finale, it is arguably between the symphonic and the lyrical principles, the lyrical in this case being a kind of maximalised version of Nielsen’s most famous song, *Jens Vejmand* (John, the Roadmender). The compensatory aspect in this instance concerns the Andante pastorale second movement, where the predominantly trance-like mood is interrupted by passionate strivings, and where despite the presence of the arcadian soprano and baritone vocalises, there is still overall a deficit of *homo sapiens* in the lyrical aspect, which the finale will then amply rebalance.

And so to *The Inextinguishable*. Here we find a similar relationship as in the *Sinfonia espansiva* between the third and fourth movements, in that the third finds itself once again in a problem-solving arena with respect to the overall symphonic dramaturgy. Like its counterpart in the *Espansiva*, this Poco adagio quasi andante coopts fugue in the struggle, and it too features a breakthrough to a tonality that prepares the ground for the drama of the finale.³⁰ But in this instance, far from being relieved of the pressure to provide synthesis, the finale is battle-torn in the extreme: it is the mother of all summatory-synthetic finales. In Aranovskian terms, its premise is *homo ludens* – expressed in an athletic three-four metre with plentiful hemiolas

28 Michael Talbot, *The Finale in Western Instrumental Music*, Oxford 2001, *passim*.

29 Preface to *Carl Nielsen Works*, II/3, xviii, xx.

30 Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist* (1952), 59-60, 76.

– which the three preceding movements conspicuously lack. This archetype of the dance, well established in the first movement of the *Espansiva* and in other earlier works of Nielsen as a hedonistic-positive symbol, now has to muscle up, mutating into *homo agens* in order to fight the first movement’s unresolved battles – on behalf of *homo communis*, one might say, before *homo sapiens* wins the day with the apotheosis of the cyclic lyrical theme. And that battle of the archetypes truly deserves the appellation ‘synthesis’.

One final point about *The Inextinguishable*: the first movement has something of the Choleric Temperament’s striving for nobility, except that the transition section, which was one of great compositional glories of the Second Symphony, has here shrunk to the point where one might suspect straightforward weakness (the curious linking passage with the solo cello, which can all too easily sound like a piece of emergency musical surgery). The development section reacts to this ‘failure’ – if such it be – with a perception of impending crisis, but can seemingly do nothing to repair the rupture. This apparent weakness is addressed in the finale, however, in the sense that the seemingly unreconcilable contrasts are first ruthlessly exposed, then dealt with by the exertion of colossal creative will-power. So one could point to Aranovsky’s juxtaposition of first movement and finale archetypes (see Fig. 6, above) and suggest that Nielsen’s downplaying – even crisis-making – of the ‘prevalence of development’ in the first movement of *The Inextinguishable* – leaves a long-term tension hanging in the air that will only properly be dealt with in the finale.

It would be possible to make a similar point about the two large sections in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony. But that would arguably not show anything very new. As for the *Sinfonia semplice*, its paradoxes and paroxysms resist all summaries at this broad level. What might nonetheless be revealing as a follow-up is to put all six Nielsen symphonies end to end, and to compare their degrees of departure from the Aranovsky Invariant, if it is indeed possible to quantify such intangible qualities. My hunch is that this would show a progressive increase in Nielsen’s incorporation of ‘anti-symphonic’ elements – those that lie outside the archetypal scheme or stand in opposition to it – challenging the stability of the archetypes themselves. This is, of course, a quality he shares with the other great 20th-century symphonists, above all Sibelius, Mahler and Shostakovich, but also, as I suggested at the outset, Robert Simpson. And it may also well be one reason why these composers – not including Simpson, admittedly – stand so high above their contemporaries in the symphonic canon (the other reason being to do with necessary expansions in craftsmanship entailed in retaining aesthetic balance). But to demonstrate that is a challenge for a different occasion.

A B S T R A C T

With few exceptions, theorists have been reluctant to define the essence of the symphony as a genre. One of the exceptions is Robert Simpson, whose five proposed characteristics for the 'true' symphony, published in 1967, are based in part on close analytical engagement with Nielsen's works. Another exception is Mark Aranovsky in the Introduction to his book on the Soviet Symphony from 1960-1975.

Aranovsky's identification of archetypal qualities in each movement of the classical symphony, and his discussion of processes of dynamic evolution between those movements, may serve both as a critique of Simpson's more formalistic prescriptions and as a template against which to measure aspects of Nielsen's first four symphonies, in particular their dramatic redistribution and rebalancing of archetypal qualities between the movements of the cycle.