CARL NIELSEN AND THE NATIONALIST TRAP

or, what, Exactly, is *Inextinguishable*?

By Raymond Knapp

As a Danish composer writing in a generally tonal idiom, Carl Nielsen falls almost automatically, for most music historians, into the category of nationalist composer.[1] This is, to be sure, convenient. Once he is safely labeled a nationalist composer, we think we know what we need to know about him, and we have both a ready explanation for his quirky complexities and an equally ready excuse not to dwell too long on those complexities, given the array of other 'similar' composers whose music is better known to musicians and audiences. If we as teachers sometimes feel obliged to introduce our students to Nielsen's music, his Fourth Symphony, the *Inextinguishable*, serves well to demonstrate his putative nationalism, while giving some indication of his idiosyncratic manner (presumptively 'Danish'), which will intrigue some and allow others to put his music aside as a curiosity.

Musical nationalism, however, is not just a convenient category for the music historian that carries the added benefit of helping us to manage unruly composers

1 This essay owes much to the invigorating discussions that took place during 'Carl Nielsen: Texts and Contexts' (conference hosted by University of Manchester, January 2009); I would especially like to thank David Fanning and Daniel Grimley, who organized the conference and spurred me to pursue my long interest in Nielsen. I owe additional special thanks to Mark Martin and Colin Roth, who provided many valuable comments and compelling counterarguments to the original version of this paper after the conference; even if I have not addressed all the issues they raised, the essay is far richer for their contributions.

I also would like to acknowledge the more basic debt I owe, as a newcomer to Nielsen studies, to a number of scholars; most relevant to this essay, these include Robert Simpson, *Carl Nielsen, Symphonist*, London 1952, 2nd revised edition New York 1979; Tyler Goodrich White, '"The Music's Proper Domain": Form, Motive, and Tonality in Carl Nielsen's Symphony No. 4, Op. 29 ("The Inextinguishable")', DMA Dissertation, Cornell University 1991; Claus Røllum-Larsen, 'Preface' in *Carl Nielsen Works*, II/4 (*Symfoni nr. 4, opus 29: Det uudslukkelige*), Copenhagen 2000, xi-xxi; and Daniel Grimley. 'Horn Calls and Flattened Sevenths: Nielsen and Danish Musical Style' in Harry White and Michael Murphy (eds.), *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800-1945*, Cork 2001, 123-141.

such as Nielsen. Musical nationalism both has a political dimension and entails, often covertly, a belief system regarding musical value that is intricately bound up in the ways music accrued cultural prestige in the nineteenth century. It is somewhat ironic, if also inevitable, that its use as a category has denied many composers lasting canonic respect, however little or extensively they themselves may have fostered a 'national' basis for their art. We might well consider how this musical category, now deployed so casually, arose and came to define the context of reception for much 19th- and 20th-century music, especially symphonic music, in order then to reconsider how that context has shaped the reception of Nielsen's music, with particular attention to the Fourth Symphony.

Within traditional formulations, musical nationalism depends, fundamentally, on the belief that a composer's music can (and should) speak, authentically and powerfully, for a collective. There is a lot more to the mix, of course; somehow or other, a whole lot of things have to attach to that central dynamic, although not all need be present for it to work. These include, within most European contexts:

1. A sense of a valued landscape or region.
2. Something – often folk-like music – that can be understood to point to a specific people and their shared heritage, implicitly both uniting them as a people and validating their collective claim to that landscape or region.
3. The evocation of virtues that may be understood as exemplified both individually and collectively, such as heroism, perseverance, direct honesty, or the capacity for deep feeling and reflection, often in response to the specific landscape or region in question, often also merging into reverence, and strongly suggesting a Christian, or sometimes a pre-Christian perspective – all of which serves, as powerfully as a shared heritage, to validate a people's territorial claims.
4. A delineated narrative based on aspiration and possibility, pointing towards a rightful, and implicitly righteous, alignment of land and people.
5. An appropriately large-scale medium in which these ingredients can be effectively presented and received.[2]
6. And, of course, the embrace, in reception, of this mix of ingredients by significant and sufficiently numerous representatives of the collective in question.

2 Not all nationalist music is on a grand scale; indeed, the domestic setting for folk music (and other music-making that may be seen to provide a national basis) is arguably at odds with large-scale, ostentatiously public music. For music to contribute successfully to a politically aggressive nationalist ideology, however, it must operate in the public sphere.

But none of these things would work, even in combination, without the underlying (and usually unexamined) belief that a composer's music can and should speak for the collective in the first place.

It is an interesting question, and pertinent to the question I pose in my title, when exactly this quasi-shamanistic belief took hold. Scott Burnham, writing in *Beethoven Hero*, suggests that it was already implicit in the *Eroica* Symphony. Thus, regarding that symphony's strategy for projecting heroism, Burnham writes that its

> combination of narration and enactment models self-consciousness, merging the aggrandizing impulse of German Idealism with […] speculative empiricism. […] The music manages both to model the self and to inspire the awe due to the sublime. […] [It] demonstrates […] that the developing self can indeed be a thing sublime, that the rhythm of individual struggle can become the rhythm of the […] cosmos and vice versa. […] The heroic style offers a concrete locus of the merger of the individual and the universal.[3]

If this 'combination of narration and enactment' might initially seem to depart little from the effect of staged drama, which routinely enacts its narratives, it is nevertheless quite different in mode, since there are in an instrumental symphony no acting bodies on stage, no lines recited, no events actually portrayed or enacted – only music and the *suggestion* of action, with any actors and their deeds present only in the imagination. Thus, Beethoven, in renaming his Napoleon Symphony *Eroica*, made the first move in facilitating the slippery substitutions through which the deeply reflective listener, attending to the music as part of an audience, merges with Beethoven, the audience, and a projected larger collective, and thereby assumes, with Beethoven and that collective, the subject position Beethoven had originally meant for Napoleon.

As I have argued elsewhere,[4] the change in title was, however, only the first move, and does not alter the clear intent on Beethoven's part to adhere more closely to theatrical conventions: to narrate and enact, yes, but with a clear sense of historical moment and of the central player involved – who was, we should also remind ourselves, not exactly German.[5] Moreover, it seems unlikely that early audiences moved

3 Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, Princeton, 1995, 149-150.

4 Raymond Knapp, 'On the Inner Dimension of Heroic Struggle in Beethoven's *Eroica*: A Mahlerian Perspective (And What That Might Tell Us),' in *Beethoven Forum* 11 (2004), 41-89.

5 Napoleon, though French, in some ways and at particular historical moments was much admired in the German lands, where many believed him to be a powerful agent of Republican political reform; see Thomas Sipe's careful placement of the *Eroica* against the backdrop of contemporary events and their reception among reform-minded Germans and Austrians (*Beethoven: Eroica Symphony,* Cambridge Music Handbooks, Cambridge 1998).

much beyond this clear intent. Nor did Beethoven, at least not right away; as (again) I have argued elsewhere, the narratives of the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies focus on personal rather than collective experience, although the Sixth does at least project a merger of individual and group, in shared appreciation of nature and God.[6] But it was probably a later generation that actually managed fully to imagine that first Beethoven, and then themselves – as Germans – partook of the heroism of the symphony.[7] Burnham's account is thus, by my reckoning, accurate but slightly anachronistic.

But only slightly. By the time of Beethoven's death, and arguably by the time of the Ninth Symphony, the sliding identifications were securely in place, allowing the individual auditor, through Beethoven's music, to experience a sense of merging both with the collective, represented locally by the audience, and with the cosmos, represented perhaps by the faceless collective of the orchestra but more evocatively by the increasingly spiritualized – that is, effectively disembodied – music they produced.

Thus, Franz Grillparzer, at the beginning of his funeral oration for the composer, elided Beethoven, his mourners, and the German people: 'We who stand here at the grave of the deceased are in a sense the representatives of an entire nation, the whole German people.' And he ends by similarly eliding the less effable elements of the equation: Beethoven's music, the cosmos, and the response of future generations; thus the key phrases in his oration, 'the power of his works overwhelms you like a coming storm,' and 'your rapture pours out in the midst of a generation yet unborn.' This language not only meshes easily with Burnham's, but also grounds the whole thing in the mourners' by then assumed sense of an emergent 'German nation,' to be awakened by the 'coming storm' in 'a generation yet unborn.'

The language of the Ninth Symphony is, in its way, no less plain. Using a familiar text from 1785 – Schiller's *Ode to Joy* – that expresses revolutionary sentiments well in line with its own historical moment (that is, between the American and French revolutions), a major portion of Beethoven's finale enacts a scenario of successful political revolution, with a kind of obviousness that has helped it escape notice. Understood this way (see *Fig. 1*), it begins with the incitement of a people through an assertion of common cause, proceeds to the raising of an army and the violent engagement of that army in battle against an unspecified enemy, and culminates, in the cleared smoke of the battlefield, with the celebratory victory parade of an ecstatic people in full voice,

6 Raymond Knapp, 'A Tale of Two Symphonies: Converging Narratives of Divine Reconciliation in Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53 (2000), 291-343.

7 Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), whose brand of Idealism involved intense subjectivism and the notion of an 'absolute consciousness,' and whose political writings often gave way to a fervent nationalism that included virulent railings against the Jews and the French, was a key figure in mapping nationalism onto this dynamic of assumed heroism; nationalism as such, however, does not figure prominently in Burnham's discussion.

a people numbering, as specified in Schiller's text, in the millions, whose revolution has, indeed, succeeded – and who then, naturally enough, seek and apparently find the blessing of a heavenly Father. And what is the cause they fight for? As Lawrence Kramer has argued – also directly from the text and musical procedures of the finale – that cause is no less than the supremacy of a projected German state, based in modern Christianity but retaining deep ties as well to a venerated Greek patrimony.[8]

1. Inciting the people	O friends, not these tones! […] All men become brothers […] Mix your joy with ours! […] *Ja* – whoever can call at least one soul his own on this earth!
2. Raising an army	Brothers, run your race, Joyfully as a hero going to victory!
3. Going to battle	(instrumental fugue)
4. Celebrating the victory	**Freude, schöner Götterfunken** […] **All men become brothers** […] Be embraced, Millions! This kiss for the entire world!
5. Seeking heavenly blessing	Brothers, above the starry canopy Must dwell a loving Father.

FIG.1: *Revolution Scenario in the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*

Regarding Beethoven, then, belief was quick to take hold, and encouraged by the composer in his lifetime. And, as it happens, the belief could fairly easily be applied retroactively. We will probably never know who first claimed Beethoven to be the true hero of the *Eroica*, but it has long since become a commonplace of reception. And the powerful and frightening voice Beethoven gave to 'Fate' at the beginning of the Fifth Symphony – and we must surely read 'fate' here as '*God*' – has likewise long since been taken as the empowering voice of Beethoven himself, frightening only to those who do not easily merge or align with its power. As for the visitor to the country in the Sixth Symphony, the connection to Beethoven is much easier to make, and first audiences must have recognized his invitation to join in its reverence for the projected countryside and its Creator.

8 See Lawrence Kramer, 'The Harem Threshold: Turkish Music and Greek Love in Beethoven's "Ode to Joy"', *19th-Century Music* 22 (1998), 78-90.

Moreover, this mode of understanding began to serve as a measure of authenticity, in a way that would prove gratifying to both composer and audience. Probably it was the success of the German and Italian nationalist projects, both immediate by-products of the Franco-Prussian War, that finally brought fully to the fore the central musical *loci* of national pride for these emergent nations, the symphony and opera, respectively, as essentially and most productively and authentically *nationalist* genres. In the case of the symphony, the dynamic of nationalist music was supported both by newly emergent paradigms based in German Idealism as applied to instrumental music, and a growing and stabilizing culture of concert-going and music festivals. Within these contexts, nationalism easily fused with collective consciousness and the infinite as that large *something* that music uniquely made accessible to the subjective self, creating a dynamic of reception and appreciation for which the symphony was the uniquely suitable vehicle.

Like opera, the symphony for a time seemed wedded to the nation that first claimed it as theirs. Beethoven, quickly becoming a symbol of German musical supremacy, played a large role in this, since new symphonies, throughout the nineteenth century, inevitably were compared to his. But Beethoven also provided one or two ways out, since the operative construct only partly captured the ways his symphonies could serve as models and standards of value. The persona-based narrative, especially as it paralleled staged drama, gave Berlioz, and then Liszt, some room to operate, without nation as such seeming to be the central issue (although both Berlioz and Liszt would find themselves drafted into a projected 'New German School' by Franz Brendel). And, in seeming to pull away from this mode towards something more purely musical, Schumann and then Brahms created an Idealist alternative, facilitating claims of universality (which still persist) while not for a moment forgetting the specifically German basis of their art (most obviously present in Schumann's *Rhenish* Symphony). Indeed, Brahms's obvious allegiance to Beethoven in the main theme of the finale of his First Symphony has until recently eclipsed his equally obvious reliance, in that very movement, on the first five of the nationalist elements listed above, with his Alpine landscapes, folk hymns, trombone chorales, and heroic struggles, all fitted into a 'from darkness into light' scenario on a large scale.[9]

The generation immediately after Beethoven also found, in combining folk-based music and evocations of landscape, a useful vehicle for a kind of musical tourism. Perhaps because the most successful examples of this mode came from compos-

9 Matthew Gelbart presented a reading of Brahms's finale along these lines at the 2003 national meeting of the American Musicological Society (Houston, November 13-16), 'Nation, Tradition, and Meaning in the Finale of Brahms's First Symphony'; as of this writing, his paper is forthcoming in *Nineteenth Century Studies* as 'Nation, Folk, and Music History in the Finale of Brahms's First Symphony.'

ers who were for some hard to accept as either German or universal – thus, Mendelssohn and Berlioz, specifically the former's *Italian* and *Scottish* Symphonies, and the latter's *Harold in Italy* – this mode easily broke away from the others, so that, when aligned with an authenticating national advocacy in the later nineteenth century, it provided a kind of secondary mainstream for symphonic expression.

By the late nineteenth century, within this schematic map of symphonic modes of expression, there were three main and partially overlapping categories, and two main contexts in which these categories mattered. Moreover, all three categories and both contexts were rooted dually in Beethoven and in Beethoven reception, and through this derivation were intimately bound up with the evolving sway of German Idealism over concert music, broadly speaking. During this 'second age of the symphony' (to borrow Carl Dahlhaus's term for this late-nineteenth-century blossoming),[10] the three main options for symphonic expression were:

1. To base a symphony or similar work on programmatic narratives, however elaborated. This is an option, extending from Beethoven's *Pastoral* and Ninth Symphonies through Berlioz and Liszt, that Mahler and Strauss, in particular, were understood to advance. By the late nineteenth century, this option took on a Wagnerian cast, deriving both from his avowed opposition to 'Absolute' music and from his actual musical practices, which were based in the evocative and highly charged associative capacities of musical motives set in the orchestra.
2. To base a symphony or a related work on something considerably less definite than a programme, whether on an 'ideal type,' on a specific 'character' (whether specified or implied), or on a more abstract understanding of music and musical processes. This 'Abstract' approach, more obviously in line with the ideals of 'Absolute' music, was grounded in part on Hanslick's theories of musical expression, and in part on the conceit spawned by German Idealism that music could, and in the best circumstances should, provide a conduit between the contemplating self and something ineffable and sublimely large – be it the infinite, absolute consciousness, or the Will. Moreover, this approach could most easily allow music to support claims that music was, or should be, 'universal.' This strand, also deriving from Beethoven and his immediate predecessors, extended through Schubert and Schumann to Bruckner, Brahms, and later Mahler.

10 Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, translated J. Bradford Robinson, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1989; originally published Wiesbaden 1980, 265.

3. To base a symphony or related work on a nationalist project, as I have already elaborated. While most symphonists could be and were understood as in some sense nationalist, with the curious pseudo-exception of German universalism, to the extent that the nationalist symphonic work emerged as a separate type, the composers achieving the greatest international success in this and later generations were Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Richard Strauss, Sibelius, and Shostakovich.

There are many relevant observations to be made about these categories, but the most important thing to note is how far from airtight they are, even on the face of it. 'Programmes' were suggested for Brahms's symphonies, for example, and, as Matthew Gelbart has demonstrated (as noted above), a clear nationalist agenda is at work in at least the First. More fundamentally, all three categories rely, in somewhat different ways, on how music was being newly understood in the extended wake of German Idealism, which elevated it to the highest rank among the arts specifically for its capacity to link us to the ineffable great beyond. The extended life of the symphony was inextricably linked to this capacity, which not only served as a measure of judgment against 'lesser' works – providing a mechanism that caused Haydn's and most of Mozart's symphonies to fade in importance across the nineteenth century – but underwrote the perceived potential of the symphony's 'absolute' dimension, along with the fundamental belief structure of nationalist music, that a composer's music could speak for and to something ineffably large, such as a people. Only the programmatic option, of the three main categories, had a shaky foundation in German Idealism, and hence risked a loss of prestige, yet Beethoven's careful distinction between 'feelings' and 'description' in his *Pastoral* Symphony – however oddly implemented – cleared a space for Idealist expression in programmatic music, as well. Indeed, Mahler's change of heart regarding programmatic music arguably stems from precisely this distinction, along with the notion, buttressed by Idealist beliefs about music's capacities, that music's true value lay beyond any programme that it might argue or advance.

Mahler's change of heart, in fact, echoes Beethoven's removal of 'Bonaparte' from the title page of his Third Symphony, and Mahler's wish to withdraw his programmes and explanations from his earlier works echoes the manner in which Beethoven's work, particularly the *Eroica* and the Fifth, became vehicles for the sliding identifications of composer, the collective, and the cosmos – what we might think of as 'the three C's.' There was always room for reconsideration, but the traffic was all going in one direction, towards the extreme valuation of the continuum defined by the three C's, outward to the cosmos. But if there were three nodes in this continuum, there were only two real contexts that applied: that of the composer, whose

authority as both author and spokesperson accrued considerable agency, and that of the consideration and reconsiderations of the collective, moving from the original audience, to the composer in reaction, and to those generations then unborn who would render history's judgment.

In a curious way, then, the 'absolute' potential for music, which occupies the most prestigious position among the options I have delineated, both consigns nationalism to a lower order – hence Richard Taruskin's characterization of nationalist symphonies as 'colonialism in disguise' – and was utterly dependent on it.[11] And that dependence is twofold. First, the universalist pretensions of 'absolute' music are at bottom an extension of German nationalism, continuing what Burnham has called, in the passage I quoted earlier, the 'aggrandizing impulse of German Idealism.' And, second, the buck actually stops with the collective, whose membership might potentially be international but rarely is; in any case, there is no evidence (so far) that the cosmos actually appreciates any of the symphonies that have been offered up to it.

And therein lies the first stage of the 'nationalist trap'. All the impulse is towards the cosmos, or to some other grand vision, but the gravitational pull has been overwhelmingly towards nationalism, which both bestows authenticity on a composer's 'voice' and occupies the most important channel towards whatever larger aim might be involved. And it has been increasingly rare for composers to escape that gravitational pull or even to try to, following habits of mind that persist against all odds. The two world wars and the variety of ethnic cleansings that have been perpetrated across the bloody twentieth century and into our own – all resulting from the nationalist conceit that a specific people, defined to a large extent in exclusionary terms, have *by right* an exclusive claim on a specific land region – have, one might hope, irreparably tarnished nationalism as an ideal. But the parallel attempt to remove music from politics except as a force for good has managed to make nationalist music itself seem relatively harmless, whether as a dimension of older musical works or as a current practice. We may perhaps trace this persistence to the lingering effect of German Idealism on the historical course of what we call Western music: ironically, music owes its elevated status as an art to the very belief system that fostered nationalism in its most virulent form, and now its practitioners cling to that elevated status while at the same time denying that music has any substantial role to play in the real world (as if World War II did not have a musical soundtrack …).

11 See Richard Taruskin, '"Nationalism": Colonialism in Disguise?', *The New York Times*, 22.8.1993), later published, with a 'Postscript, 2008' in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2009, 25-29). While self-imposed colonialism is only one dimension of nationalism, as seen from a position of assumed cultural authority, Taruskin's characterization does capture the stigma that nationalist composers have struggled with since the late nineteenth century, especially in terms of lasting prestige.

There have been exceptions – symphonists who have seemed to evade the nationalist trap, or at least have stood in an interesting relation to it. Early on, and well before the second age of the symphony, Niels W. Gade, one of the first internationally successful composers to write music that was heard to have a distinct Nordic quality, chose to pull back to a more Mendelssohnian sound-world (and, arguably, a Mendelssohnian expressive aesthetic), a move that drew criticism even then, and quite obviously contradicts the authenticity line regarding nationalism unless one simply devalues the bulk of his output in favor of a few truly 'Danish' works. Thus, while he effectively escaped the gravitational pull of nationalism, which had not yet become the red giant it soon would become, his long-term reception has suffered as a result – mainly, I would say, because people do not quite know what to do with him.[12] Composers working in or close to German traditions, such as Brahms or Bruckner, have sometimes managed not to seem nationalist. Mahler, like Mendelssohn, was never fully accepted as a German composer, even though his symphonies and their reception have been profoundly shaped by German nationalism. But perhaps the oddest contributions from the late nineteenth century are first, Dvořák's *New World* Symphony – an international blend of Indianist, African American, octatonicist, and other Eastern European musical practices offered up as a prototype of American nationalist music – and second, the symphony Amy Beach wrote in response, her *Gaelic* – one assumes as an alternative Americanist prototype, ostentatiously fair-skinned, and steeped in Brahms, Wagner, and Mendelssohn.

Which brings us, more or less, to Nielsen and his Fourth Symphony, the *Inextinguishable*. Because it was written between 1914-16, the fraught years of the First World War, and because it includes features that may be understood as 'Nordic,' while tracing a large-scale triumphalist trajectory based on the re-emergence in the finale of a first-movement tune that, if not actual folk-music, is folk-adjacent, a nationalist reading would seem almost reflexive, especially for foreign audiences. There's a lot wrong with this summary, to be sure, beginning with its sliding over what was fraught for Nielsen himself during the mid-teens, when he resigned his conducting post (after considerable conflict and intrigue) and his marriage was breaking up, and ending with the ways the symphony's specific musical gestures may be read differently out-

12 Colin Roth sees Gade's decline from a once-high canonic status as resulting from the recording industry's growing influence over concert programming, and suggests that Gade's simpler style proved a barrier to his international canonic survival (personal communication). Both Roth and Mark Martin have suggested, independently, that Mendelssohn, Gade, and Brahms (among others) form a network of composers working in a similar idiom; Mark Martin, who also includes Spohr, Schumann, Berwald, Grieg, and a few others in this group, notes among its hallmarks a Nordic 'sphere of influence' and a shared allegiance to 'classical' stylistic elements fostered by the Leipzig Conservatory (personal communication).

side the context of a presumed nationalism. But it is worth exploring what makes a nationalist reading seem to work with this particular piece, in order to understand better how the gravitational field of nationalism operates.

The symphony opens at what seems to be a critical moment of struggle or conflict, introducing several motives that will return later. The stark brutality of the presentation may betoken a northern setting, although not conclusively (bb. 1-28).[13] All this reduces to an oscillation that forms the basis for an extremely sanguine presentation of a folk-like tune in A major played by the winds in thirds, descending stepwise with a distinctive grace-note figure – all markers that will prove useful in development and variation (bb. 51-139). As the tune is elaborated, it soon pulls away from its simple character, becoming chromatic, reaching upward in apparent aspiration, modulating but recovering its harmonic balance for a brief, warm presentation by the strings (b. 67). As it again wanders chromatically, thrown further off by a disturbing repeated-note figure, a raucous variation of the tune reorients the harmony (b. 97, now in the dominant of A major), only to pull it away in yet another direction, leaving it to a more overtly 'Nordic' brass choir to provide an apotheosis of sorts, returning to A major for a full-orchestra statement of the theme, marked 'pesante e glorioso' (b. 121).

This triumphalist trajectory comes relatively early in the piece, and it is short-lived. A distressingly spare development ensues, gradually building to a recapitulation that omits nearly all of this 'arrival' material, although it ends similarly, fading into a kind of void, made all the more desolate because the music does not stop, but rather maintains a single violin line over the irregular heartbeat of the timpani. The second movement,[14] however, takes us to an almost Brahmsian, at times even Mahlerian pastoral,[15] a type familiar to nationalist music in its evocation of a welcoming land-

13 Here is one example of how one's understanding of musical gesture may be prejudiced: whereas a nationalist (or otherwise political) reading will tend to hear struggle in this opening, Nielsen himself described it in terms of a fairly neutral event in nature ('chaotic, like a tumbling boulder'; quoted in Tyler Goodrich White, *op. cit.*, 27). Yet, more complexly, Mark Martin hears in this opening a 'subjectivized stormy sea,' suggestive of waves crashing against the rocky islands off of Jutland (personal communication) – nature, to be sure, but (consistent with a nationalist reading) located within a specific landscape and internalized. Moreover, Jutland was the site of a major naval battle in World War I, between the British and the Germans (Spring 1916); that the battle didn't involve Denmark directly may well be reflected in the way the timpani duel in the finale of *The Inextinguishable* emerges.

14 Nielsen considered the symphony to be in one extended movement, and does not indicate movement divisions in the score. As has often been pointed out, however, the layout of the four broad sections of the symphony accords easily with a conventional symphonic cycle, even inclusive of formal structures within each movement; I here follow the well-established practice of referring to the symphony's four broad sections as movements.

15 Cf. Tyler Goodrich White, *op. cit.* 20: 'The second movement of "The Inextinguishable" carries the relatively light, small-scale character of the Nielsen's Brahmsian scherzo-substitute model to a new extreme.'

scape; moreover, as pastoral, it offers, quite traditionally, a point of repose before the heroic quest begun in the first movement is resumed. Its tune is a clear but simplified variant of the A major tune of the first movement (bb. 424-447, etc.).

The third movement opens with an anguished reawakening (b. 544), but its extended middle section is based on a warm chorale tune initially presented in E major (bb. 584-661). Early on, the presentation of the chorale fairly drips of pastoral even with its occasionally dissonant counterpoint and dips into the minor mode. Although the section modulates widely, its principal key, E major, lies harmonically adjacent to the A major tune of the first movement. As the section unfolds, the 'Nordic' brass choir counters (initially without much effect) a recurring threat from a repeated-note figure derived from the first movement (beginning b. 603), launching a heroic trajectory across the extended chorale-based middle of the movement. A fugal buildup provides early intensification in this trajectory (beginning b. 613), exemplifying a contrapuntal dimension of the symphony that emerges ever-stronger across the work, and which has also been identified, generically, as a 'Nordic' element. After this fugal episode, the heroic brass choir brings us back to the chorale tune and, eventually, to another apotheosis in E major (bb. 628-645), the chorale's original key (and also the key in which the symphony will end).

Thus do the middle movements recover in stages from the first movement's failure to reclaim its early triumph, setting up a dramatic finale that unfolds in two broad stages, each propelled forward by the symphony's startling deployment of dueling timpanists, played from opposite ends of the orchestra (first emerging suddenly in b. 764 and then returning in b. 1059, this time after anticipatory preparation beginning in b. 1035). It is in the second of these broad stages, leading to the second emergence of the dueling timpanists, that the big tune from the first movement returns; what seems most remarkable about this return is the way it harnesses the energy of a spectrum of conflict-ridden material that includes the warring timpani and returning material from the very opening of the symphony (the latter providing the basis for another dramatic fugal passage). The first clear anticipation of the returning tune (bb. 1004-1016) occurs against a canonic treatment of the finale's main theme (itself based on the chorale tune from the previous movement), which summons each accruing element in turn until the culminating returns of the big tune in E major (initially b. 1140, then more fully in b. 1156).

Clearly, then, the dramatic arc of the work supports a nationalist reading well, culminating in what sounds distinctly like a military triumph. Indeed, the absorption of the war-like counterpoint beneath the returning theme (b. 1156) is directly evocative of the big return midway through the finale of Beethoven's Ninth. All of the necessary elements are in place: landscape, people, a variety of virtues

(including religious piety), an aspirational narrative, and largeness of scale. What, then, is the problem?

The problem is twofold, really. On the one hand, we run the risk of reducing the symphony's statement if we respond mainly to its apparent nationalist narrative. It is not Denmark, after all, that Nielsen asserts to be 'inextinguishable,' but rather music, in parallel to its capacity to evoke life, to *be* life. Nielsen is aiming past nation to something more universal. Moreover, he is asserting something essential in the precise manner in which the big tune returns, which is, that by that point in the finale, we are not in the same stream in which we began. What we hear is not the reinstitution of the earlier statement (as in the restorative dimension of most nationalist agendas), but something larger, enlarged precisely by the struggles that have taken us to that re-emergence. Nielsen is not, like Beethoven in the *Eroica*, recounting the trajectory of a single life, but of life itself, where renewal occurs only with significant displacement and transformation – and, we might say, a bit of cross-breeding. All of which is considerably more relevant to Nielsen's domestic and professional crises than to Denmark's situation in the war.

Importantly, as well, even putting aside Nielsen's stated expressive intentions, we may well understand the 'nationalism' expressed in the symphony quite differently. Denmark was not and did not aspire to be a military power in 1914; in the outburst of the timpani-duel we may thus easily sense an ironic distancing effect, a quality of distinct foreignness to the intrusion that points ahead, perhaps, to Nielsen's wry deployment of the snare drum in the Fifth Symphony and Clarinet Concerto. This ironic understanding could well lead to an overall reading of the symphony's statement as anti-nationalist (or at least anti-military), or as an expression of a rather quizzical nationalism as compared to other more familiar European modes of nationalism, representative of a nation more concerned with philosophical questions, and pointedly aloof from (and perhaps resentful of) more conventional political and military questions.

And, even if we accept Nielsen's programme, we will continue to be drawn to consider its national context, to query Nielsen's choice of subject, at this historical moment, as an expression of Danish attitudes and outlooks. And it is here, perhaps, that we confront the real trap of nationalism, or at least its second stage: that nationalism and its claims not only matter, but are also pervasively relevant, that whatever else might be said of a symphony, nation remains a vitally important context for understanding it and its reception. Already in the *Eroica*, despite Beethoven's clear intentions to depict Bonaparte, the hero is not precisely Napoleon, but a Napoleon reimagined with a distinctly German-Idealist soul. We are thus correct to claim that the symphony's real hero is Beethoven, and that it belongs to, enriches, and celebrates German culture. So also with the *Inextinguishable*: its hopeful view of music

and life is nationalist in precisely the way the *Eroica* is: it is a creation of a single person that captures a hopeful cultural moment, rooted in the developing fate of a nation. Ultimately, then, we are stuck with nationalism because, as it turns out, it holds an important part – indeed, an inescapable part, maybe even an inextinguishable part – of the truth.

But this assumes that music can actually *be* the bearer of truth. While this may be questioned, it is nevertheless a curious component of instrumental music's implicit ontology that it asserts itself as 'true' through its very existence. By its very capacity to produce persuasive outcomes, achieved in this case by reconciling seemingly intractable harmonies and counterpoint, it insists on its own truth. And hence the oddness of the assertion in Nielsen's motto for the symphony ('Music *is* life, and, as life, inextinguishable'), for it is the conviction with which music can capture our sense of what life *is* that convinces us – for a few moments, at least – that both are inextinguishable.

ABSTRACT

Nationalist music evokes such elements as a mythologized landscape and a virtuous people who 'belong' to that landscape, presented, through narrative or tone, with either nostalgia or a sense of aspiration (or both). More fundamentally, however, beginning early in the nineteenth century, musical nationalism has depended on the belief that a composer's music can and should speak, authentically and powerfully, for a collective. This essay first describes how this belief took hold, initially through Beethoven reception and the influence of German Idealism, and then presents a nationalist reading of Nielsen's *Inextinguishable* in order to demonstrate the gravitational pull of nationalism on symphonic works and their reception.