

TONIC

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EDITORIAL

New discoveries on Robert Simpson are going from strength to strength. A couple of years ago John Turner rediscovered Simpson's *Variations and Fugue* for recorder and string quartet of 1959, on which he has now most kindly contributed an article expressly for *Tonic*. Turner and the Camerata Ensemble recorded the work in 2000-1, the CD being released by Olympia in 2001 (OCD 710, entitled *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*) and after the company's disbandment sadly no longer available. Turner is Manchester born-and-raised and, apart from his student days, which were spent at Cambridge, he has continued to live there. His interest in music was inspired by his music master at school, a former assistant to Sir Thomas Beecham at Covent Garden. While reading law at Cambridge, he performed regularly, particularly with David Munrow. Although a professional solicitor, he has continued his pursuit of music for recorder, and he has become the world authority on British music for that instrument, of which he has recorded a huge amount of CDs, including several works written specifically for him.

But this year's *Tonic* contains more. From this summer the Robert Simpson Archive is located at the Bodleian Library Oxford. It has been renamed the Robert Simpson Archive (from Robert Simpson Society Archive) because it has now been amalgamated with the Archive formerly housed at Angela Simpson's home in Oxfordshire. Now much more comprehensive than previously, it will be an important research source for future generations.

The first fruits unearthed from the new Robert Simpson Archive at the Bodleian Library, by kind arrangement of Bodleian Music Librarian Martin Holmes, are three typescripts which had been long forgotten. Two are the texts of tribute and recollection of two important friends – Jascha Horenstein and Georges Enescu. While the Horenstein tribute appears to have been broadcast on 4 April 1973, the Enescu recollections are not dated. Nor is the longer text entitled "Ianus Geminus: Music in Scandinavia", a text written in the 1970s and available in two near-identical scripts. This latter text gives us a strong idea as to Robert Simpson's perspective not only on Scandinavian music, but also on the development of music in the 20th century, supplying additional *tessellae* to a full understanding of Robert Simpson and his thinking. Two personal recollections and impressions of Robert Simpson that reached me in the course of my chairmanship of the Robert Simpson Society round up the situation. Matthew Taylor's more extensive text (received in September 2009) follows below. Myer Fredman, in an email of 14 August 2008, gives a kind of sketchy and most personal account of his acquaintance with Robert Simpson. He writes:

“Thank you for your email about Bob which I was delighted to receive. Here are some recollections of mine about him and I have no objection if you want to use them.

I actually came to know him as a result of reading an article about Havergal Brian in *The Times* which spurred me to go down to Hove to meet him (we lived in Tunbridge Wells at the time) as I had always been curious about H.B. from reading Nettel’s book about music in the Potteries¹ from where my wife hailed. As a girl she had sung in May Walley’s Girls choir (who later recorded some of H.B.’s part songs. May is now 98 still plays the piano and determined to reach 100²).

H.B. told me he learnt composition from walking to Manchester to hear Hans Richter and the Hallé. He asked if I would like to sit in on the recording of his Violin Concerto with Ralph Holmes for the BBC in Maida Vale which was imminent.³ Naturally I went along and met Robert Simpson for the first time who of course produced the programme. Bob misunderstood my name and thought I was Marty Feldman!

After that over the years he invited me to conduct a number of broadcasts of such works as the three versions of the Tannhäuser Venusberg music (the first being more like Donizetti than Wagner), Dvorák’s 1st. Symphony, all of Sibelius’ other works for Violin and Orchestra ie. except the Concerto) Martinu’s 5th. Symphony and of course a number of H.B. works⁴ as well as those for Lyrita.

One summer Bob lent us his yacht for a boating holiday on the Avon and on numerous occasions I stayed with him and Squibs in their house near High Wycombe during which he tried to persuade me to hear something of Nielsen to no avail. He once said that I wasn’t like any other conductor as I wasn’t an egocentric megalomaniac! He moved to Ireland and we to Australia and I was delighted when Brass players in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra told me how much they enjoyed playing Bob’s scores for Brass like *Volcano* and a number of other works (Bob had originally been a Brass player). Through my association with him I met his son Pat who a number of times came out to Sydney and we had a convivial time together.”

I am very grateful to John Turner, Myer Fredman and Matthew Taylor for their texts, to David Jones for his careful proof-reading of this issue of *Tonic*, and to Angela Simpson for her continued support of the Robert Simpson Society and for giving permission to reprint Robert Simpson’s original texts.

Jürgen Schaarwächter

¹ Reginald Nettel, *Music in the five towns, 1840-1914: a study of the social influence of music in an industrial district*; with a preface by Frank Howes, Oxford University Press 1945.

² May Walley died in May 2009, aged 99. Havergal Brian’s accompanied choruses are all but one for women’s voices.

³ This recording, conducted by Stanley Pope, took place on 1 June 1969 and was first broadcast on 20 June of that year.

⁵ The Havergal Brian works Myer Fredman recorded for the BBC were Symphonies Nos. 8 (1971), 6, 16 and 24 as well as *Ave atque Vale* (all 1975), the latter one actually never broadcast. For Lyrita he recorded in 1973 the Sixth and Sixteenth Symphonies, now available on SRCD.295.

MATTHEW TAYLOR
NATURE MUSIC IN ROBERT SIMPSON – A PERSONAL RESPONSE

Few would associate Simpson's music with anything specifically programmatic or extra musical and there is no evidence from the many conversations that I had with Bob all of which I cherished, that he intended his music to be heard in any other way than an appreciation of the stuff itself – the manner in which it unselfconsciously embraces a powerful momentum over often large stretches of music and how it manifests the ability to construct big structures and wide open spaces.

Yet so often since Bob's death I have found myself drawing parallels between his music and nature. We know that Bob, like Beethoven before him, loved the countryside and was often exhilarated by Nature. But unlike Beethoven (as far as I'm aware) he never took a manuscript book with him when he was exploring the countryside, though the effect of his walks must have fired his creative imagination, albeit indirectly. Though he never made any conscious attempts to portray specific locations in music (one could never imagine a Simpson *Alpine Symphony*, *Egdon Heath* or *Tintagel* for instance) the sheer beauty and spaciousness of the music offers striking parallels for me with particular landscapes, many of which I have loved for as long as Bob's music, some of which were discovered at the same time.

It is unlikely that Bob ever intended his music to depict any of the following locations, dear to my heart, but for others that know these places of natural beauty the following thoughts might be of interest, and for those that don't, it might offer the opportunity to uncover new aspects in Simpson's magnificent music. And I do remember him saying that in his youth he used to associate Bruckner's music with parts of the Dutch countryside, so I hope my analogies are not too ill founded.

The broad, tranquil opening of the second movement of the 3rd Symphony always comes to mind when I'm walking on a stretch of "The Ridgeway" – just west of Wendover towards the Combe Hill Memorial. Not only the expansive vistas, but also a strange sense of solitude seem to pervade both music and landscape. I don't know if Bob knew this part of the country, but in 1962 when he was working on the 3rd Symphony he had recently moved to Chearsley in Bucks., only about 7 miles from this part of the country.

Another Simpsonian parallel struck me in 1984 when climbing Helvellyn, the third highest mountains in the Lake District. The effect here was different, but it brought to mind the closing section of the Simpson Sixth Symphony (1977), even though the narrative suggests that this very point of the music was the moment of birth. (Symphony No. 6 is dedicated to the distinguished gynaecologist Ian Craft.) The feeling of hard won

triumph when the music explodes into that tumultuous D major ending must surely be one of the most invigorating things in all music. The insistent rhythmical propulsion before it, the gritty determination, the ability to move onwards at all costs, for me provided striking similarities with the final ascent before the summit was reached. And at the peak, when the blaze of D major resounds resplendently in the brass there is the same sort of sense of exhilaration and achievement – a long haul, a tough climb at times, but so worth it.

Many of us were wondering whether Bob's move to Ireland in 1986 would have an effect on his music. Nobody would have ever predicted a Stravinskian change of clothes, but Bob himself hinted that at least his music might be entering something of a new phase, a shift of emphasis if you like. "I think I'm changing, getting calmer" he said after completing the Ninth Symphony. Once when strolling along the Tralee Bay with Bob shortly after he completed No. 9 he said "I just walk along the beach enjoying the air and the sea in its many colours. It is as if there was never any aggression in the world..." For me the ending of the Ninth Symphony most vividly captures exactly that. But there is a sense of wisdom, a grave beauty in the gentle string polyphony, the spare textures, the imperceptibly changing colours and movements of the sea, the feeling of open air, the wonderful sense of mystery in the closing bars...there seems to me a special uniting of musical and natural elements here, as evocative as anything in Debussy, Mahler or Sibelius.

These are only personal thoughts that can be embraced or rejected at will, but if they shed some light on Simpson's music their purpose will have been served.

JOHN TURNER
VARIATIONS AND FUGUE FOR RECORDER AND STRING QUARTET

Robert Simpson was born in Leamington in 1921 and died in Tralee, County Kerry, in 1997. He first came to prominence as a composer with the performance of his Symphony No. 1 in 1951 – the same year in which he began a long and fruitful association with the BBC. During this time he championed the music of Carl Nielsen, almost single-handedly ensuring that his music was rescued from oblivion; his enthusiasm for Bruckner and the authentic scholarship informing the performance of his symphonies was another of his concerns. As a composer he cited Beethoven as his principal mentor. His fifteen string quartets and eleven symphonies are amongst the most distinguished contributions to those genres in the twentieth century.

Variations and Fugue for recorder and string quartet was first performed by Carl Dolmetsch and the Martin String Quartet at the Wigmore Hall, London, on 9th February 1959 in a programme of otherwise entirely baroque works. The work was finished in some haste immediately prior to its premiere, and apparently the composer had no time to make a fair copy of the full score. The whereabouts of the original (pencil) sketch score (if it still survives) is unknown, and prior to his death the composer thought that the work was lost. Having known of the existence of the piece from reports of its first performance, I wrote to the composer shortly before his death, hoping to obtain a copy, and his wife wrote to tell me that the work no longer existed – his manuscripts had gone to the British Library, and that was not amongst them. There was even a suggestion that the work may have been withdrawn; however it had been included in the list of works in the Fiftieth Birthday Essays (by Robert Layton, Hans Keller and others) published in 1971 by Triad Press. I was aware too from other sources that the composer had in general severe reservations concerning the early instrument movement, which may possibly have had some relevance to the work vanishing.

Variations and Fugue is dedicated to the memory of a former BBC colleague of the composer, Horace Dann (1896–1958), himself a published composer, as well as an academic and an administrator. Dann's musical studies were interrupted by service in World War I, during which he served with the Middlesex Regiment and the Royal Fusiliers, before resuming his musical studies at the Royal College of Music. He was Professor of Music at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, before his appointment in 1932 to the BBC, where latterly he was in charge of radio broadcasts of opera. His song *Whenever my Mary Goes*, published by Boosey in 1950, was probably his last composition. For further information about Dann, the reader is referred to Philip Scowcroft's admirable article (2008) on Musicweb International.⁵

⁵ Philip Scowcroft, Horace Dann (1896–1958), http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2008/aug08/horace_dann.htm.

Simpson's (ostensibly anonymous) programme note reads as follows:

"This work, composed specially for Carl Dolmetsch, is also intended as a tribute to the composer's friend and colleague Horace Dann, whose recent sudden death was grievously felt by all who know him in the BBC and elsewhere. The music, though serious and even elegiac in parts, is by no means funereal, and the Fugue is light in texture, swift in pace. The recorder player is asked to use treble and soprano instruments; at first the recorder plays a subsidiary part, the theme being given to violin and viola (the latter taking the middle, lower-pitched section of it). This theme moves tonally from a D flat majorish - B flat minorish region into that of E Minor - G Major and back again. Each of the seven variations follows the same trend, and throughout the set there is a gradual increase in tension of feeling. The last variation is turbulent and the soprano recorder is pitted against the strings. After this crisis the music is pulled definitely into the key of E and the Fugue follows, *Vivacissimo grazioso*, nearly all *pianissimo* and never rising above piano, the soprano now showing its fleetness and delicacy. At the end the music floats into a slow, gentle, rather sad, coda that settles at last in E Major."

It should be noted that the theme and all seven variations are palindromic, and that the fugue subject is also derived from the theme.

Despite the loss of the score, the original manuscript instrumental parts were discovered at Haslemere by Andrew Mayes, during his research into the Dolmetsch commissions, and I was able to reconstruct the score from these, though four bars had been omitted by mistake from the manuscript second violin part (but it is an obvious elision). It is perhaps unfortunate that the composer and Carl Dolmetsch did not have the time to edit the recorder part, either before or after the first performance, as there are some passages where the fingerwork is well-nigh impossible at the indicated speed, and on several occasions the soprano recorder is used in the lowest register where the balance problems are severe. All these difficulties are susceptible to easy solution, and in the published score and parts I have included (bracketed) practical suggestions to obviate the problems.

The correspondence between Simpson and Dolmetsch prior to the première gives an indication of the composer's diffidence in writing for an instrument that was new to him (as to many other composers at that time). Robert Simpson to Carl Dolmetsch:

"Many thanks for your letter and the leaflet. Those red letters scared the life out me - almost. I hope it will be good enough. As so often with me I find the work is turning out a bit different (in character), more serious than originally intended, with a fugue to end with.....The dedication will be to you, but the music at the end is (or will be) a tribute to one of my dearest friends, who has just died very tragically. But don't worry, it won't be funeral music, or anything like it! I'm now about two-thirds way through the whole thing and hope to finish it over Xmas. It should be about 12 minutes - or maybe a bit longer, even 15. I'm full of trepidation lest it shouldn't be good enough for you, but you have moved me at least to take the recorder very seriously as an expressive instrument, even if my intention should fail to match your artistry." (23rd December 1958)

“My apologies for having been so long with the enclosed. An attack of ‘flu put me right back. I hope the parts are all right and tolerably legible – I haven’t had time to do a proper decent score, but perhaps the pencil one will do for a rough guide. The parts are more accurate and up-to-date than the score, as I made little changes while doing them. I do hope it’s all right! Some of it may be pretty difficult, especially the very fast pianissimo fugue that should go like the wind but at a whisper. Please let me know if there’s anything downright impossible, then perhaps we could meet over it when you’re next in town. I’m afraid it’s turned out as a real quintet – how it would come over with string orchestra I’m not sure. You’d need a pretty good orchestra to do it, I think. However..... we shall see. I almost dread hearing it, having done it in such a rush and with so many other things buzzing round my head. I hope it isn’t too bad.” (8th January 1959)

“I’m greatly relieved to hear that the recorder part works – it was that I was worried about. I’m sure the string parts will be playable, though there are difficulties here and there. Here is the programme note, which I hope I will be suitable. I’d suggest *not* putting my name or initials at the end of it – it seems to read anonymously all right, I think. Now you say your part is playable I’m much looking forward to hearing it at a rehearsal.” (14th January 1959)

(It is now known whether the composer did in fact attend any rehearsal.) After the performance he wrote to Carl Dolmetsch: “Just to say, once more, how grateful I was for that admirable performance last night. It went beautifully and I was more than satisfied. The whole concert was very enjoyable and I thought it a considerable feat on your part to keep going with such vitality for so long!” Walter Bergmann, in the audience that day, had obviously picked up on the balance problems referred to above, as in his (generally positive) review in *Recorder News*, March 1959, he wrote “Whether it would have been better not to make the recorder one of five parts, but to oppose it to the string quartet (as Mozart did with his Clarinet Quintet) is a question only the composer can answer.” It is clear from the parts that Carl Dolmetsch did in fact make some octave transpositions in the performance, but we have no means of knowing whether these were agreed with the composer at the time. Despite these slight problems, the work is one of the most distinguished and deeply felt works written for the recorder in the twentieth century.

I am very grateful to both Jeanne Dolmetsch and Andrew Mayes for making copies of the parts and the correspondence available, and to Angela Simpson, for permitting the work to be published and for also agreeing that her husband’s letters may be reproduced. It has been published by the Peacock Press, Scout Bottom Farm, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire HX7 5JS.

ROBERT SIMPSON
TRIBUTE TO JASCHA HORENSTEIN (6 MAY 1898–2 APRIL 1973)

We have just lost one of the great conductors of our time and I have lost, in him, one of my dearest friends. This makes it doubly difficult for me to find the right words for the occasion, if indeed they exist. He would not have enjoyed a eulogy, for he was, despite the unmistakable impressiveness of his personality, the least pretentious of men. I well remember his quick reply to an enthusiastic young man who gushingly told him that he was the greatest conductor he'd ever come across – "Are you sure you don't mean the *second* greatest?". At such times he didn't take care to be tactful, though he could at the same time be both tactful and tactless, and with humour, as he was when someone tried to draw from him opinions about other conductors – "I think all my colleagues are wonderful". Remembering these things helps to alleviate while it intensifies the sense of loss – we think of the man and what an irreplaceable experience it was knowing him, so that in this sense he is not gone. His deep interest in human beings made him totally memorable to even those who encountered him slightly, and he had an extraordinary memory for, not merely faces and names, but people. It always astonished me what he would take in during a casual conversation; once when he was about to go to Australia I happened to remark, in passing, that I'd like to go there some time, as my father lived in Sydney. At the time I didn't think he'd even heard what I said. A couple of weeks later I got a telegram from Sydney – "Please send your father's address". Somewhat taken aback, I did so at once; after a while I got a letter from my father describing how the conductor Horenstein had suddenly telephoned him, taken him twice out to lunch, given him tickets for his concerts, and talked to him for hours about everything under the sun. A simple thing, perhaps, but how many such preoccupied people with such intense work to do would have bothered? The fact is that persons and their situations interested him as much as music, and this is why he kept his friends. It's also one key to the great range of his musical sympathies.

This direct and honest humanity came out in the way he made music. There was never any attempt to put a glossy surface on it, or to ingratiate himself with either the orchestra or the audience. Sometimes in rehearsal he would work with a kind of stoic persistence that could put the orchestra's good will at risk – but always in the end the nobility and faithfulness of his vision would emerge at the important time – the performance itself, when he would radiate concentration, will-power, and intense purity of feeling. The purity of his feeling was one of the chief things that distinguished him – I've many times heard him conduct works that were usually not congenial to me because they seemed to me always cloying, sentimental, or bombastic. Every time, he seemed some-

how to purify, to strengthen them in some way, and this was because he always sensed and grasped the essential structure behind everything else. Yet the intensity was such that very rarely was there a hint of coldness or pedantry. When the music was really great he could reach its essence on both the emotional and the intellectual levels. An ineradicable memory for me was the finest performance of Brahms's Requiem I ever heard.

The music we're about to hear is by composers close to his heart. One of them, Nielsen, he knew personally and could describe evocatively. As a young conductor he rehearsed Nielsen's Fifth Symphony for Furtwängler with constant help from the composer, which makes his recording of that work of special interest. *The Dream of Gunnar* [*Saga Drøm*], which is on the same disc as the symphony,⁶ gives Horenstein the means of revealing his insight into the subtle contemplative depths of which this composer is capable. The other composer, Bruckner, appealed to his sense of space and true grandeur, and the performance of the first movement of the Eighth Symphony⁷ is one of the most splendid examples of Horenstein's grasp of architecture, and his powerful sense of the dramatic that never allowed a moment's exaggeration. The tragic character of this movement is perhaps apt to what many of us feel now that he isn't with us any more. But the intense dignity and irresistible force with which he interprets it is a salutary reminder of the piercing instinct for truth which, in him, we were privileged to encounter.

⁶ The 1969 studio recording of both works with the New Philharmonia Orchestra was released by Unicorn-Kanchana. A 1971 live performance with the same orchestra is available on BBC Legends BBCL 4191-2.

⁷ Horenstein's recording of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony with the Pro Musica was made in c1955 for VOX. The famous 1970 BBC broadcast with the London Symphony Orchestra was most recently released on BBC Legends BBCL 4017-2.

ROBERT SIMPSON
SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF ENESCU

In nearly three decades as a BBC music producer I encountered many of the best musicians in the world; the best of them in the comprehensiveness of his gifts and the simple grandeur of his humanity was certainly Enescu. He would have become more obviously celebrated if he had sustained any one of his gifts at the expense of the others but he chose to enjoy them all, and to some extent paid the price – for people will not easily believe in versatility. He did not care much about that. Like other men of great natural genius, his outlook was apparently simple, but only apparently. Rationalizing or intellectualizing his thoughts did not appeal to him greatly; he preferred to trust his instinct, and whatever he did, it was with a whole heart and without calculation. Ambition, except to do the best he could, was unknown to him. It was a great privilege to have his friendship, though he would not have considered it so; to him, we were all straightforward people like he was himself, and he saw nothing special in his own nature. So it is with some of the very finest creatures.

In remembering him the first quality that comes to mind is therefore, naturally enough, his humility. My earliest memory of him was a wonderful performance of the B minor Mass, totally selfless; his knowledge of the score was of course perfect, but he made no point of it, and his authority was maintained without force, with a gentleness that conveyed only love for the music. The result was an inspired performance, over which he seemed merely to be quietly presiding. That was the way he always conducted – towards the end, when his health deteriorated, he found it hard to maintain a vigorous tempo, and the performers would try to help him; no one would argue or complain, not because he was ever likely to react violently, but because they knew what he wanted for the music's sake. Sometimes his simplicity could lead to a kind of disaster; I remember walking one day into the studio at Maida Vale when he was rehearsing the third Brandenburg Concerto. With horror and disbelief I noticed that he was using the full BBC strings, with the inevitable effect of coarse inflation, the continuo inaudible except by means of a special microphone. It was the end of the final rehearsal, and since I was not involved as producer of that particular concert, I refrained from disturbing him with questions. But after the concert I was determined to ask him why, with all his knowledge of Bach, he had not cut down the strings in this piece to the proper solo lines instead of allowing the Straussian rhodomontade we had heard. "Oh", he said, "Could I have cut them down? I didn't like to ask".

Even when he was conducting his own music the same humility was evident, and the same innocence. One passage in his richly inventive First Symphony involved a sudden change to duple tempo; to the orchestra's vast amusement (which left him a trifle

puzzled) he raised two fingers each time this occurred, at the concert as well as the rehearsals. It is a great pity that the BBC recording of this symphony was not preserved; I have heard it played a few times since under other conductors, but never with the warmth and impetus as under the composer.

When I knew him it was in his last few years, when his days as a great instrumentalist were almost over; I heard his violin playing a couple of times in the flesh, again in Bach, where the wonderful and simple sustaining power of his mind came through playing hindered painfully by arthritis, and I heard him illustrating his thoughts in conversation at the piano – whatever music he thought of came out through his fingers. But it was as a conductor that I knew the practical musician best and, of course, as composer. We talked often about the state of contemporary music; he was always interested in what was new, though not in fashions, and his huge knowledge of classical music made it essential to him that any composer worth his salt must learn from the past, as well as from his native soil. His inner ear was prodigious. There are plenty of musicians who can hear wrong notes in complicated textures, but few who can sit in an armchair with a pencil score of a new piece and read it like a book, though the idiom be unfamiliar and no piano in sight. “You must mean a natural here, not a flat, surely?”. So it was when I took him the first of my quartets in the hotel room in London; he was always right, and found every slip, and it somehow made the dedication to him the more apt – the score owes to him many of its corrections as well as its very origin. As he read it, he hummed and muttered to himself, and every comment he made proved to me that he could hear every single note in his head.

No one need be surprised that I loved him dearly, or that when I heard he was so ill that he might not recover, the thought of not seeing him again was unbearable. So I got on the next plane to Paris – the first and only visit to that city – and went straight to the Rue de Clichy to ask if there was a chance to see him just for a moment. Yes, he would like that – so I spent an hour with him. He had already seemed ill when I had last seen him, so his appearance was less shocking than it might have been; but he was very weak, with constant pain and nausea. All the same he wanted news of his friends in London, and he asked about members of the BBC orchestra, and about what was happening in the musical world, whether there were any interesting new works, what I was doing myself – all these things came from genuine feeling; even if he had ever been a man given to empty courtesies, he would not have had the energy for them now. At length he closed his eyes and I wondered if he had drifted to sleep; his wife sat at the opposite side of the bed and continued to talk a little to me – “What are you composing now?” she said, “I hope it’s not any of this awful modern music!” I was considering how to reply to this tricky question when Enescu opened one eye in a kind of reversed wink. “Lah – she’s a reactionary!” he said with comic contempt. The eye closed again, and soon I slipped out of the room. It was the last thing I heard him say, and a week later he was gone.⁸ There will never be another like him. He was made of music, and of kindness.

⁸ Enescu died on 4 May 1955.

ROBERT SIMPSON
IANUS GEMINUS: MUSIC IN SCANDINAVIA

The late flowering of the arts and humanities in the North is a phenomenon of more than local significance. To over-simplify the matter: human culture began in the sun, and its subsequent growth in regions where conditions are less favourable is the result of more recent technologies. Were it not for a general human advance in scientific and technical knowledge, civilized life in harsh climates would not be possible. The significance of modern Nordic culture is therefore human in a general sense – especially for the future. The present state of things in Scandinavia (including, for the purposes of this chapter, Finland) exerts, however, a dual fascination. It must not be forgotten that Scandinavian civilization as we know it now is not much more than a couple of centuries old. This means that the long stern past is still barely hidden beneath new soil; occasionally in the arts, and in individual persons, one can be suddenly aware of outcroppings of hard, sharp rock, jutting obstinately from the carefully tended surface. The grim past, and the constructive attitude towards the future that dominates many Scandinavian minds, provide this dual fascination for the onlooker. In this region, more noticeably perhaps than elsewhere in Europe, arts and attitudes express a characteristic blend of the initiative and positive on the one hand and the civilized man's conscious awareness on the other.

It is significant, too, that both in spite of and because of its long crepuscular past, modern Scandinavia has taken stock of both achievements and failures of its Southern precursors. The accumulated humane and technological discoveries of older cultures have been freely available to the Scandinavians who have, in building freshly, made use of them in their own ways. So we find the Nordic cities are municipally and technically highly organized and equipped; Northern laws are in general more humane and logical than, say, those of the Mediterranean countries. All this is basically the result of modern science, for the climate is no kinder than ever it was. It is now possible for the higher types of culture to flourish in climates hitherto hostile to them, and this enthralling change is still fairly new. Whether, as some critics aver, it is too sudden and is causing softness and complacency, still mains to be proved, though it must be confessed that the last twenty years of the arts have not produced such reassuring evidence. All the Scandinavian arts are at present reflecting the same conflicts that now increasingly obsess humanity at large, and it is not altogether encouraging to contemplate the way in which artists of the North now tend, with most of their colleagues abroad, to reflect anonymously these conflicts rather than to offer constructive solutions to them.

Any consideration of Scandinavian music must take into account all these facts. Music is always the last, the crowning artistic manifestation of any civilization where

musicality is reasonably common. The other arts always precede it in high development; music, less concerned with explicit representation of literal ideal, bides its time. The so-called "baroque" in architecture, for example, was almost at its end when what is loosely known as "baroque music" began to flourish; "romanticism" as a conscious cult took place in music some fifty years after it characterized the literary and visual arts. In Norway Ibsen was creating a new world in the theatre while Grieg (fifteen years younger) was content to write charming "romantic" drawing-room music, unable or unwilling to emerge from the snug cocoon of domesticity into the real Norwegian world outside, the existence of which is he nevertheless timidly reflects. It was left to Sibelius and Nielsen, some forty years later, to do for Scandinavian music what Bjørnson and Ibsen did for drama. The situation of music is prepared and consolidated by the other arts; it is as if Orpheus, watching from the Elysian fields, waits for the apt moment to fill the air with sound, expressing his feelings about the state of mind Man has got himself into.

Jan Sibelius and Carl Nielsen, who were both born in 1865, represent to perfection the two sides of the dual nature of the Nordic consciousness. In listening to Sibelius, one becomes part of a dim and savage past; for him it is no apparent effort to feel as Lemminkäinen might have felt. Although he was of partly Swedish blood (which may account for his more urbane side) his music belongs essentially to the Finnish past, as if centuries of pent instincts had at last found a mighty voice. Nielsen, on the other hand, looks forward. He has the toughness of the old Viking, but his heart and intelligence are vigorously applied to the potentialities of the modern world. Arriving when the North had definitely reached its new and refreshing civilization, and after artists in other fields had fertilised the new soil for music, he was able to vent new hopes, not unmixed with severe conflicts. It was impossible that these two masters should fail to know each other's work, though whether each understood the full significance of the other is doubtful. Two sides of the same coin must necessarily face in opposite directions. So far as can be discovered Nielsen never wrote down his opinion of Sibelius, though he always admired and respected him; Sibelius, however, sent a message to the Copenhagen Nielsen Festival of 1953, and it is worth quoting, since it illuminates more than the points of contact between the two: -

"Carl Nielsen, Denmark's great son, was a born composer of symphonies, although his work embraced all forms of music. Through his great intelligence he developed his genius, in order to attain the aims which were - as I see it - dear to him from the beginning. Through his strong personality he founded a school and greatly influenced composers in many countries. One speaks of head and heart; Carl Nielsen had both in the highest degree. The principles he followed, such as the reaction against romanticism, are actual at this moment. Therefore his music exercises a strong appeal in our day."

The honesty and dignity of this tribute reveal not only Sibelius's genuine admiration but also certain radical points of difference. Sibelius is careful not to say whether or no he

approves of Nielsen's "reaction against romanticism". Clearly he reserves judgment, since his own natural tendencies originally lay in the reverse direction. In his magical conjuring of the ancient Nordic spirit, Sibelius is the finest type of "romantic" artist, the type for whom the artist's individuality is both subordinated to and strengthened by a vast impersonal imagination that explores remote racial instincts within itself. This was not achieved at once. The early Sibelius can be dangerously romantic in the bad, unreal sense. The huge *Kullervo* of 1892 (called a symphony but in reality a loosely constructed suite) shows some of these tendencies as well as great promise, and the ultimate achievement of Sibelius lies in his enormous and progressively powerful self-discipline. Comparison of his first Symphony with the Sixth or Seventh reveals a striking transition from opulence to rigorous and refined concentration. That he was always conscious of his Finnishness is certain; long before he had attained anything as a composer he had searched the heart of the old Finnish epic, *Kalevala*, and it is important to notice that most of the works based on the *Kalevala* are early. Such poetry itself tempts a composer to richly colourful, vigorously sensuous music – and why not? But Sibelius's insight into his own racial heritage was deeper; he seems to have known that to equal the *Kalevala* in power his music must be no more decorative fresco; it must have equal independence. The splendid legendary clothing was gradually dropped and put away, naively illustrative impulses stiffly resisted, until perfect truth emerged. Sibelius's music is far more Finnish in its independent maturity than when preoccupied with illustrating the *Kalevala*. In it the past somehow concentrates itself, rising through the consciousness of a man whose critical intelligence is the product of modern civilization.

As Sibelius looks back to a reality that has formed him, Nielsen contemplates a reality he is helping to form. It is wrong to describe Nielsen as an "anti-romantic". He is simply not "a romantic". As a straightforward, richly imaginative realist, he was never compelled to resist the sort of temptations that might have led a different temperament astray. He was never in danger of romantic exaggeration; whatever he expressed, even in his mature works, was the unvarnished truth about himself and the world as he saw it. He appeared late enough to sum up the aspirations of his time and early enough to show confidence in the future. What his greatest music expresses (the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, for instance, or *Commotio*) is still directly relevant to the problems of today; in it we are confronted with the forces that are still in opposition in modern society. Nielsen is surely aware of the obstacles and traps that lie in wait for his hopes and his gritty optimism postulates convincing ways of overcoming them. Where Sibelius creates compelling visions of essentially static nature, Nielsen lets out a dynamic urge.

Analysis confirms all this in terms of internal evidence. Consider tonality, for example. Sibelius's treatment of this prime element is deeply contemplative and conservative; each of his symphonies lies firmly embedded in its chosen tonality, upon which it broods; each is fixed upon an immovable rock. Such areas as are tonally ambiguous or openly chaotic serve only to confirm the basic proposition by throwing it into relief. If there is a

mass of shifting contradictory tonalities, as is the finale of the Third Symphony, Sibelius reacts to this by hammering home the tonic with persistent blows that render further argument impossible. Even the wonderful opposition of keys a tritone apart, A and E flat, in the Fourth Symphony cannot disturb the mysteriously inexorable control of A minor. Whatever storms engulf Sibelius's music, it always emerges static and awesome as Everest.

Tonality in Nielsen is something else, fluid, often used psychologically or symbolically. For him a tonality is usually the starting point for an adventure towards another tonal country. The intention is entirely dynamic. He insisted that his music should have a "current", without which it would be as nothing. When in his Third Symphony (*Sinfonia espansiva*) he uses the same pair of opposite keys (A and E flat) as does Sibelius in his No. 4, he means to create the impression of expedition; in Sibelius the effect is of crosswinds disturbing the surface of deep still water. The Fourth Symphony of Sibelius leaves a sense of quiescent tragedy and stoicism when the crosswinds cease to blow; the tragedy in the first movement of Nielsen's Sixth Symphony comes from a wonderfully suggested fruitless search for the childlike happiness of the opening G major, which never returns. Such dynamic, mobile treatment of tonalities is one of the subtlest phenomena in music, and one of the most deeply original. In his use of the orchestra Nielsen is more dramatic and less homogeneous than Sibelius. The Finn's essentially static conceptions demand a more closely circumscribed, consistent treatment of colours and sonorities, together with a set of personal, easily identifiable characteristics that do not offend because they are as needfully recurrent as the leaves upon a tree (others who have imitated these habits fail, not because they cannot score or invent themes and textures like Sibelius, but because they miss the static depths from which Sibelius's larger forms originate). With Nielsen orchestral colours are used unerringly to illuminate and enliven the tonal current, often with vivid drama. No one has ever before dared to allow a side-drummer to improvise disruptively against a great symphonic development, as Nielsen does in the Fifth Symphony; no one is likely to risk it again. It is a stroke that must remain unique, like every other in this work, and Nielsen's willingness, even eagerness, to take almighty risks is nearly always justified by his imagination, generating a peculiar radiance that can even be a source of inspiration to younger composers.

The inexhaustible comparison of Nielsen and Sibelius as the two faces of a Nordic Janus need never result in the detriment of either. Not surprisingly, there has been reaction against them both in Scandinavia, against Sibelius because his personal fingerprints have proved all too imitable, and against Nielsen because he set his face against fashions, though his enormous vitality has been a positively encouraging force. Sibelius was not quite correct in saying that Nielsen founded a "school", but the Dane has certainly helped others find themselves. So far these two masters have not been matched in imagination or intellectual power by any of their successors, and throughout Scandinavia, as in many other countries, there are groups that lurk behind the dictates of fashion, abjectly reflect-

ing what they imagine to be the Dispirit of the Age, or chasing pseudo-intellectual mirages. It is all too easy to mistake the rotting remnants of a bed of flowers for something new simply because the smell is different, and the malodorous remains of nineteenth-century romantic decay, arranged into ingenious patterns by various sorts of industrious *Leichenbegleiter*, may be sniffed even in the fresh air of the far North. But there are a few healthier elements to be considered.

Perhaps the strongest composer now living in Scandinavia is the Dane Vagn Holmboe (b. 1909). This Jutland musician, with his ten symphonies, dozen string quartets⁹ and many chamber concertos, is predominantly an instrumental composer. His mind is of genuinely symphonic cast and he is more able than any of his contemporaries to think and feel in large spans, sustained by music of strong and naturally generated energy. His gift for clarity and polyphony makes his string quartets highly distinguished, and the concentration of these works is likely to give them an increasing and lasting value, while his symphonies are generally lean and powerful, and unmistakably individual. The clarity of his lines is very Danish; Nielsen has something to do with it. But he has also achieved a successful synthesis of two apparently irreconcilable ways of thought. At one time he was much influenced by Bartók, whose angular manner and percussively balletic use of rhythm do not easily aid the building of the long processes necessary to large-scale symphonic tensions. Holmboe has somehow contrived to have the best of both worlds; although he does not project so immediately obvious a personality as Bartók or Nielsen, he is strikingly free to move suddenly from a Nielsen-like continuity of contrapuntal texture to a Bartók-like abrupt percussive astringency without damaging the cogency of his thought. His music has individuality without self-consciousness; it is spontaneous and severely passionate, disciplined with great rigour.

In Norway the dominant figure is still Harald Saeverud (b. 1897).¹⁰ In his way he is as Norwegian as Sibelius is Finnish, though of less stature. The best of his music manages to express the spirit of his country's past and its scenery, mysterious, vigorous, sometimes harsh, intemperate, with an awkwardness that can be positively compelling. There is humour in it, but no polite conversation; roughness is frequent and a tough core of hard-headed obstinacy may be felt. Saeverud is not really an architect, which makes his large-scale works sometimes uncertain in structural matters. But the sheer character is usually enough to make one suspend disbelief. Perhaps the Piano Concerto is the best introduction to his mentality, with its subtle poetry and sharp contrasts, while his *Peer Gynt* music achieves exactly what Grieg's failed to do; again music is half a century in arrears! Saeverud has also followed Grieg in a sensitive and original reflection of Norwegian folk music, with many small pieces, often for piano, which may very well turn out to be his most lasting achievement.

⁹ When Holmboe died in 1996, he had thirteen symphonies (plus three unnumbered ones) and 21 string quartets (plus ten unnumbered ones) to his credit.

¹⁰ Saeverud died in 1992.

So far Sweden has not produced a musician capable of expressing what Sibelius has done for Finland, to say nothing of Saeverud's function for Norway. The Swedes perhaps have been more dominated by German influences than the other Scandinavians, and one can see some force in the Danish jibe that the Swedes are Germans in human form. Of the older composers Hilding Rosenberg is perhaps the most notable, though he cannot truly be called anything like a national figure; in his best moments there is a certain Old Testament dignity, but also a tendency to inflation – both these qualities are apparent in his symphony *The Four Ages of Man*. The fact that Swedish culture tends more to the eclectic or cosmopolitan than those of its neighbours is shown in the unremarkable extremes into which it falls; smooth urbanity is opposed by equally vapid avant-gardism. One can at least say that the urbanity of Dag Wirén [1905–1986] has definite Swedish qualities, but the conformity by many of the younger composers to the imagined advancement of fashion results in a far more serious loss of identity. The same is largely true in Finland, though [Einojuhani] Rautavaara (b. 1928), [Leif] Segerstam (b. 1944), [Kari] Rydman [b. 1936], [Joonas] Kukkonen [1921–1996] have genuinely imaginative talents, but apart from that fine, prolific and grievously neglected song writer Yrjö Kilpinen (1892–[1959]) there have been no really striking figures since Sibelius. In Denmark and Norway the younger element is showing similar tendencies; one meets continually with different kinds of adroitness, but rarely a hint of anything organic. A figure in Denmark who embodies in great natural talent this want of firm direction is the enormously productive Niels Viggo Bentzon (b. 1919 [d. 2000]); some of his music is showing signs of being really durable – the Third and Fifth piano sonatas, for instance, both magnificently vital and original works, standing out from many other pieces that seem to have been put down either by reflex actions or by means of a rubber stamp. If one is looking for characteristic Scandinavian art of the present time, the best of Bentzon is indispensable, and most of Holmboe, with frequent surprises in Saeverud. These are all now in middle or later life, and if one cannot find such character in the following generation, that is not because the talent is lacking, or because insufficient time has elapsed to allow assessment. It is because the younger Scandinavian composers are becoming less like themselves and more like the nondescript general-purpose followers of fashion in every other country. This observation arises, not from that stuffy conservatism that would object to everything exploratory, but from a frustrated hope of encountering somewhere positive vitality, positive determination, not to make new noises, but to find a way forward through energy, to discover how music may continue to be an inspired analogy of organic life. Talent is not enough by itself. In a time when the absurdity of frontiers is defined by the appallingly empty sameness of cultures that were once so different from each other, artistic nationalism is no longer a sensible possibility. This is, moreover, an age of disposable objects, in which built-in obsolescence is a commercial requirement. Is it therefore surprising that the arts are becoming also disposable? The fact that regional differences are no longer of such importance is not in itself a matter for regret; the Scandinavians, like everyone else,

are citizens of the world – but it is a world where the organic force that can make a work of art behave like a living thing is menaced by the condition of life. National characteristics are not important now, but human characteristics are, and it is vital to look for artists whose work arises from an organic necessity which it transforms directly into growth, into deeply energetic form. Nielsen profoundly and simply remarked that music was the sound of life; he would be sad to find that most of what is now being produced, in whatever country, is (when it is anything at all) the sound of life as it is all too obviously half lived.

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