



THOMAS JENSEN LEGACY

VOLUME 6



CARL NIELSEN
SYMPHONIES 3 & 4
SIBELIUS SYMPHONY 3
NIELS VIGGO BENTZON SYMPHONY 4

CD 1

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

[1] Helios Overture, Op. 17 (1903) 11:01

Royal Danish Orchestra

Studio recording, September 1942 (Odeon D 6436-7)

Symphony No. 3 (Sinfonia espansiva), Op. 27 (1910-11) 34:51

[2] I. Allegro espansivo 10:57

[3] II. Andante pastorale* 8:36

[4] III. Allegretto un poco 5:52

[5] IV. Finale: Allegro 9:12

*Kirsten Hermansen *soprano* Erik Sjøberg *baritone*

Live broadcast, June 20, 1959, Danish Radio Concert Hall

Symphony No. 4, Op. 29 'The Inextinguishable' (1914-16) 33:16

[6] Allegro - 10:56

[7] Poco allegretto 4:35

[8] Poco adagio quasi andante - 9:56

[9] Allegro 7:50

Live broadcast, September 2 1952, Danish Radio Concert Hall

CD 2

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Symphony No. 3 in C major, Op. 52 29:48

[1] I. Allegro moderato 9:47

[2] II. Andantino con moto, quasi allegretto 10:48

[3] III. Moderato - Allegro (ma non troppo) 9:06

Studio broadcast, May 31, 1963

Niels Viggo Bentzon (1919-2000)

[4] Mutations, Op. 123 (1960) 10:36

Live broadcast, 1960

Symphony No. 4, Op. 55 'Metamorfoser' (1948) 32:50

[5] I. Vivace - Moderato non troppo - Allegro 12:05

[6] II. Tempo di largamento 7:55

[7] III. Allegro ma non troppo 12:44

Live broadcast, 1961

Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Thomas Jensen, conductor

Born on 25 October 1898 in Copenhagen, Thomas Jensen entered the Royal Danish Conservatoire of Music in 1913 where he studied with, among others, Carl Nielsen. Between 1917 and 1919 he was a solo cellist of the Northwest Skåne Orchestra in Helsingborg in Sweden. From 1920 to 1927 he played in the Tivoli Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen, first as 3rd, then 2nd cellist.

The cellist Jensen nurtured ambitions as a conductor which he began to fulfil in 1923, as conductor of the amateur Euphrosyne orchestra. Two years later, his conducting of Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat* at Det Ny Theater (The New Theatre) attracted attention, and he decided to further his conducting career with periods of study in Paris and Dresden, returning once in a while to conduct at the Nørrebro Theatre, and at the Tivoli in the event of its permanent conductor Frederik Schnedler-Petersen being indisposed.

When Johan Hye-Knudsen left the Scala Theatre in 1925 to join the more prestigious Royal Theatre, Jensen was encouraged to apply for the vacancy. He chose instead to become conductor of the Philharmonic Society in Aarhus. The post enabled him to take on more purely orchestral repertoire, even when coupled with work at the Aarhus Theatre, but he probably also saw the opportunities afforded by the city's cultural potential. Plans were afoot for a university (founded in 1928) and even a permanent symphony orchestra. This ambition took another decade to bear fruit with the Aarhus Civic Orchestra, founded and named in January 1935 by Jensen himself. In the meanwhile, Jensen did not restrict his work to the relatively provincial Aarhus. In 1931 he was invited by the head of Danish radio, Emil Holm, to apply for a new post as a second conductor to the radio's symphony orchestra, assisting the work of Launy Grøndahl and Erik Tuxen. Even though several board members suggested hiring him without further ado, the management (mostly Holm) insisted on an open audition. Jensen came third, and the post went instead to the Austrian conductor Fritz Mahler, whose father was a cousin of the composer Gustav Mahler. Jensen's reputation had preceded him, however, so that he nevertheless returned to the DRSO as a guest conductor.

1935 was a watershed year for Jensen. As well as founding the Aarhus City Orchestra he made his debut with the DRSO in November with a programme of light popular music. The two ensembles continued to lie at the centre of his work for the next two decades. With 26 permanent members, the Aarhus Civic Orchestra was a Classically constituted ensemble, whereas the radio orchestra was more than twice as large, expanding from 55 musicians in the 30s to an 'international standard of 92 musicians in 1948. From 1936 to 1948 he also led regular concerts with the Tivoli Orchestra, acting as deputy to Svend Christian Felumb during the Aarhus orchestra's annual summer break.

Jensen's background as a cellist surely influenced his repertoire choices as a conductor. He had played in the Danish premieres of Beethoven's Ninth and Mahler's Fourth and Ninth symphonies, given by the Tivoli Orchestra with Schnedler-Petersen. He had also played in the first performances of Nielsen's Fourth and Fifth symphonies, as well as most of the symphonies by Sibelius, under the baton of the composers. From 1937 onwards he gave only symphonic concerts with the DRSO, declining invitations to take on light-music programmes. His debut in the DRSO's regular Thursday concert series, the most prestigious of their engagements, took place on 2 December 1937 with a programme including the First Cello Concerto of Saint-Saëns and the Symphony by César Franck, and thereafter he gave one or two concerts in the series each season.

Jensen's connection with the DRSO deepened during the early 50s. The orchestra had come to international attention in concerts led by Fritz Busch at the 1950 Edinburgh Festival, and given a critically acclaimed account of Nielsen's Fourth in London under Launy Grøndahl the following year. In 1952 they embarked on an ambitious tour of the US, giving 39 concerts in 38 cities over 47 days. The punishing schedule did not suit the ageing Grøndahl, and the orchestra's members petitioned for Jensen to replace him. Sharing duties with Erik Tuxen, Jensen conducted 20 performances of Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, as well as works by Dvořák, Grieg and Richard Strauss. This led to a part-time post with the orchestra in 1953, and when Grøndahl

retired in 1956 and Tuxen died the following year, Jensen was finally offered the coveted chair of permanent conductor in the autumn of 1957.

The offer came at a propitious time for Jensen. His relations with the management of the Aarhus Civic Orchestra had become frosty over time, and he departed in anger in the spring of 1957. Standing in front of the DRSO musicians for his first rehearsal as permanent conductor a few months later, he was welcomed with applause. However, Jensen, now close to 60, was not the conductor he had been a quarter of a century earlier at that unsuccessful audition. He had begun to suffer from progressive deafness, and he quietly remarked to the musicians that his appointment with them might have come a little too late. The orchestra itself was beginning to feel the pressure of success, which demanded both more concerts and a more challenging repertoire, leaving its musicians less time to rehearse and perform the international repertoire that had made them renowned both in Denmark and beyond.

However, until Jensen's sudden and early death in 1963, he and the orchestra made a heroic effort to preserve and pass on a fast-vanishing heritage. They were the guardians of a performing culture derived from Nielsen, and from the orchestra's distinguished early conductors. After 1963, years passed without the DRSO engaging a permanent conductor, and both its playing and *esprit de corps* suffered accordingly. Thus the recordings in this series represent something of a last gasp of a lost tradition.

This compilation offers a contrast between the Third and Fourth symphonies of Carl Nielsen with the Third and Fourth of Jean Sibelius and Niels Viggo Bentzon respectively. There is a sharp divide in Nielsen's output between these two works, much as commentators have often found between the Second and Third symphonies of

Beethoven and Sibelius before him, where the composer crosses over a private Rubicon between the summit of his achievement as a Romantic composer and the point of departure for new musical worlds, the epic confrontation of the Fifth Symphony and surrealist masquerade of the Sixth.

CD 1 begins with the concert overture *Helios* which Nielsen composed in Athens in 1904. His wife, the sculptor Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen, had been awarded a scholarship to study ancient Greek art in situ. The overture depicts the rise and fall of the sun over the Aegean Sea. From darkness through a sliver of light to its emergence in full majesty, sunrise is evoked with uncanny power by the overture's introduction. The main body describes its passage across the sky with a striding theme which rises to a brassy apotheosis and then an athletic string fugato, but the stroke of dramatic genius arrives with the quiet close of sunset and the reprise of the opening darkness: a summary anticipation of the form of the Alpine Symphony which Richard Strauss composed 12 years later.

The orchestra of Det Kongelige Kapel (The Royal Chapel) gave the premiere of *Helios* in October 1903 under the baton of Johan Svendsen, to a rapturous popular reception and more muted critical one: 'It is the unfortunate shortcoming for a piece themed about the sun,' wrote one reviewer, 'that it does not shine and does not warm'. This is one of the first commercial recordings of the work, made by Jensen and the DRSO in September 1942 for the Danish Odeon label.

In 1908 Nielsen succeeded Svendsen as second *kapelmester* at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, and his compositional output suffered accordingly. Until he went freelance in 1914 he completed no further orchestral works of substance; he began to sketch the Third Symphony in 1910, but the work took shape slowly. Inspiration for the opening came suddenly to Nielsen on a tram. Having no paper to hand, he wrote down the idea on his shirt-sleeve.

The opening theme itself – an accelerating repetition of A, opening out into a D minor triad – initiates a resilient melody that extends far into the movement. By contrast, the second theme shares a placid quality with the second movement of the

Four Temperaments Symphony: something of an autobiographical character study, perhaps, from a composer familiar with both surges of inspiration and lapses into indolence.

The second movement of the *Sinfonia espansiva* is a pastoral idyll which culminates in an ecstatic union of man and woman with nature. 'I'm lying beneath the sky,' Nielsen wrote in the manuscript at the point where the soprano and baritone vocalises enter; 'all my thoughts have vanished.' The Scherzo, initially drawing on the same pastorally oboe-led soundworld, sends out warning signals that the idyll cannot remain unclouded, though its progress achieves a measure of serenity which serves as an upbeat to the confidence of the finale. According to Nielsen himself (in a programme note for a 1931 performance in Stockholm) the finale is 'a hymn to work and the healthy activity of everyday life. Not a gushing homage to life, but a certain expansive happiness about being able to participate in the work of life and the day and to see activity and ability manifested on all sides around us.'

Nielsen elected not to give the symphony metronome markings; it was Launy Grøndahl who established a performance tradition for the piece followed in this 1959 live recording by Thomas Jensen. Six years later, receiving the Léonie Sonning Music Prize in Copenhagen, Leonard Bernstein marked the occasion by conducting the *Sinfonia espansiva*, and his advocacy transformed the international reputation of the piece. However, Jensen's recording belongs to an interpretative tradition traceable back to Nielsen himself.

Nielsen began work on the Fourth Symphony shortly after resigning his post at the Royal Theatre in 1914. The ideas took time to find their form: 'It is very different from my three others,' he wrote to a friend in 1915, 'and it is based on a particular idea: that the most elementary essence of music is light, life and movement, which chop the silence into pieces. In other words, what I have wanted to describe is all that has the will and the urge to life that cannot be kept down. Not in the sense of reducing my art to mere imitation of nature, but of letting it try to express what lies behind. The calls of the birds, the cries of sadness and joy of animals and human

beings, their hungry murmurings and shouting, fighting and mating, and whatever all the most elementary things are called. '

To another friend, Nielsen wrote: 'Music is life, and like it inextinguishable.' But it was important for Nielsen to make a clear distinction between the kind of literary programme that dictated the course of tone-poems by Liszt and Richard Strauss, and the titles he used to suggest or emphasize an idea: 'The music cannot and will not connect to any concrete thoughts. It wants to be free...' as he wrote in the essay collection *Levende Musik* (Live Music) from 1909. We might understand the subtitle of the Fourth Symphony as more of a motto than a manifesto or narrative plan. Nielsen conducted its first performance on 1 February 1916 within the Dansk Koncertforening season.

There are four movements, designed to be played without a break, opening with an eventful Allegro of Beethovenian weight and purpose. A lilting country dance and an anguished slow movement build up to the finale's titanic conflict, which is epitomized by the duel between two antiphonally placed sets of timpani soon after its opening and finally resolved in the most exhilarating fashion imaginable with the triumphant return of the first movement's motto theme.

Thomas Jensen could claim hardly less symbiotic feeling with the music of Jean Sibelius, having played most his symphonies in the Tivoli orchestra under the composer's direction. The Third from 1907 turns away from the nationalist themes of the First and Second to achieve a new classicism in its novel three-movement form, though the evolving tempo scheme of the finale in particular also points towards the radical innovations of the composer's later idiom.

Niels Viggo Bentzon (1919-2000) was perhaps destined to be a musician and composer. On his father's side, he was a cousin of both the composer Jørgen Bentzon and the flautist Johan Bentzon, a member of the DRSO who played an influential role in its development in conjunction with the orchestra's chairman, Waldemar Wolsing. On the mother's side, Bentzon was the great-grandson of J.P.E. Hartmann, who together with Niels W. Gade had dominated Danish music for most of the 19th century.

Having received piano tuition from his mother, the pianist Karen Bentzon, he enrolled as a 19-year-old student at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, graduating in theory and piano in 1941 and in organ the following year. In 1943 he made his professional debut as a pianist. A few years later he became a teacher at the Jutland Academy of Music in Aarhus, and in 1950 he returned to his old conservatoire in Copenhagen as a teacher of music morphology and later theory – a position he held until 1988.

Though Bentzon came relatively late to composition, he made up for lost time with a catalogue eventually amounting to over 650 opus numbers, including 24 symphonies, over a hundred pieces of chamber music, 12 collections of *The Tempered Piano*, organ and vocal works, ballets and operas. Such industry, allied to a strong and quirky personality, made him a dominant figure in Danish music throughout the second half of the last century. He was well known as a provocateur and fluxus artist, but his status as an establishment figure was also confirmed in 1984 when he wrote a jingle for DSB (Danske Stats Baner, the national railway company) consisting only of the three notes D, E flat (pronounced es) and B flat (likewise known as B in German-derived terminology).

His earliest work betrays little trace of modernism, but the influence of Bartók and Hindemith becomes evident in pieces from the 1940s, which adopt Baroque forms such as the toccata and passacaglia and a neoclassical language, culminating in the concerto-grosso style of the Chamber Concerto Op 52. His output from the late 40s and 50s absorbs the impact of both Schoenberg's 12-tone system as well as Britten's feeling for the orchestra. Just as Schoenberg had invented a new technique in order to express his own nature as a creative personality, Bentzon determined to follow suit. He called his own technique 'metamorphosis' and identified it as a formal staging post between variation and chain forms, where variation technique had audible thematic affinity, while chain forms did not.

Dating from 1948, the Fourth Symphony is a key work in Bentzon's development, not coincidentally subtitled 'Metamorphoses'. Thematic material is most often presented by brass and woodwind, while the strings form a sonic background. The main

themes of the symphony as a whole are all stated in the first movement, on flute, oboe and trumpet. There is a Britten-like cast to the harmonies of the harp flourishes opening the contemplative second movement, which acts as an interlude before the symphony's main argument is resumed in the finale (not the only formal resemblance of the work to Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements* which had been first performed just two years earlier). This movement introduces a new theme but culminates in the restatement of the main themes, which have in the meanwhile undergone significant if often subtle 'metamorphosis'.

Bentzon continued to defy categorisation in his later output, which puts both atonality and neoclassicism to use in different contexts. There are elements of both techniques in *Mutations*, Op 123, which Bentzon wrote as the penultimate work in a sequence beginning with *Elementi aperti*, Op 120, for mezzo-soprano and strings. A Danish TV profile from 1960 (available on YouTube and contemporaneous with *Mutations*) shows the composer talking about the important place of the Fourth Symphony within his output, the influence of Stravinsky, and working at the piano on the kind of dense, tonally derived chords which characterise this period of his career. The documentary continues with rehearsal excerpts from Jensen and the DRSO polishing the Fourth Symphony, probably in preparation for the same performance on this compilation, showing Jensen's clear beat and elegant technique to advantage in modernist repertoire.

Mutations begins with a compact string theme, followed by a solo trumpet. As the work approaches its culmination, thematic ideas push each other towards an explosion, where the work's sub-elements (themes and ideas) according to Bentzon himself are blown to pieces – the process of 'mutations'. The close is calm and quiet.

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The Thomas Jensen Legacy, Volume 6

Thomas Jensen in his element: a trio of classic Nielsen recordings, plus a first-time release for broadcast performances of Sibelius's Third Symphony and two pivotal works by Jensen's countryman and contemporary, Niels Viggo Bentzon. Newly remastered direct from the original tapes, these live recordings find Jensen on fiery form, giving incisive interpretations well suited to the formal innovations of these masterpieces of Danish and Finnish modernism.

CD 1

CD 2

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

[1] Helios Overture, Op. 17 (1903) *11:01*
 Royal Danish Orchestra
 Studio recording, September 1942
 (Odeon D 6436-7)

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 Live broadcast, 1960

[6]-[9] Symphony No. 4, Op. 29
 'The Inextinguishable' (1914-16) *33:16*
 Live broadcast, September 2 1952,
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[5]-[7] Symphony No. 4, Op. 55
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 Live broadcast, 1961

Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra
Thomas Jensen, conductor



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