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# CARL NIELSEN

Symphony No. 4 "The Inextinguishable," Op. 29

THE ROYAL DANISH ORCHESTRA

IGOR MARKEVITCH, Conductor



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"Music can only be understood musically," Carl Nielsen once said. The statement signifies more than meets the eye when one takes into consideration the fact that Nielsen spoke it at a time when composers were inspired by literary conceptions and wrote programme music. Still, Carl Nielsen's Fourth Symphony does not contain an exclusively musical meaning. Like all significant music, the Fourth Symphony is inseparably bound up with something in its originator's spiritual make-up; the sum of his own experiences made concrete through the musical organization of the work at hand.

Nearly all music on the symphonic level "deals with" so elementary a psychological concept as conflict, the reconciliation of differences through a rich selection of musical media. It is clear to anyone who listens to "The Inextinguishable" that here the substance of conflict has arrived at an extremely drastic culmination, when one compares it both with Nielsen's other five symphonies, and with the music of around 1915 as a whole. The openings of the first and fourth movements in the Fourth Symphony have tensions which seek release beyond the accustomed ideas of beauty, beyond the musical implements available to composers of Carl Nielsen's generation.

It is actually as though an experience of deep inner conflict is fused with awareness of a global, external conflict in this symphony. Such a supposition is in accordance with the dates. Carl Nielsen was Royal Conductor from 1908 to 1914. He had many, predominantly economic, reasons for accepting this post, and it was not gratifying for the Royal Opera, and scarcely for

Nielsen either. As a conductor he was self-taught, and even though he conducted outstandingly in that portion of the repertoire which interested him personally, he could not devote himself properly to it as a whole. The coldness of theatre life and the awareness of his own inadequacy came close to silencing Carl Nielsen as a composer, and immersed him in a state of despair which shows up in these lines from a letter to the friend of his youth, Royal Concert Master Anton Svendsen: "I don't believe that I am by nature of a sentimental disposition, but when I left you today I had a lump in my throat. I have not felt so strongly moved for many years, and only thus can I understand myself; that your glance and your handshake radiated something of the warmth which, without knowing it and without wanting or daring to ask for, I have for so long and dissolutioning a time needed so terribly, more terribly than anyone suspects."

This, expressed with Carl Nielsen's warmth and his moderation, is a profound experience of loneliness at its apex. Greater depression we hardly ever come across in this mild and by nature happy and outgoing man. Perhaps Carl Nielsen's tenure as conductor was a painful period in his life. Perhaps it was artistically one of the most important stages in his life.

The Fourth Symphony was composed during the First World War, while "the whole world is disintegrating," at a time when "national feeling, which hitherto was regarded as something lofty and beautiful, has become like a spiritual syphilis that has devoured the brains, and it grins out through the empty eye-sockets with moronic hate."

On such internal and external impulses, Carl Nielsen wrote his heretofore grandest, most audacious, and perhaps from one end to the other, most finished work, "The Inextinguishable", a title "which with a single word seeks to hint at what only the music itself has the power to express fully: the elementary will to life." The symphony occupied Nielsen throughout the entire year of 1915, and was completed on January 14th, 1916. Its external form is plainly in four parts (Allegro — Poco allegretto — Poco adagio quasi andante — Allegro), but Nielsen has chosen, in accordance with contemporary models, to link together the four movements so that the work elapses in one stretch. There are a great many places in this music which we may immediately connect with terror and the threat of death—the principal theme and the culminating passage in the first movement, the famous kettledrum-duel in the last movement. But Carl Nielsen was one of the great creative artists during the epoch of Northern Optimism, and by re-introducing in the finale the first movement's secondary theme in complete triumph, he acclaims the very life that nothing can extinguish.

"The Inextinguishable" was first performed only a few weeks after the score was completed. The symphony was received as "A monumental work, towering up into the clouds"—a contemporary judgment that still holds today.

*Robert Naur*

*Translated by Kenneth T. Tindall*

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CARL NIELSEN  
SYMPHONY NO. 4, Opus 29  
"The Inextinguishable"  
Allegro  
Poco Allegretto

TV 34050S

Side 1  
14:30 min.

The Royal Danish Orchestra  
Igor Markevitch, Conductor

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CARL NIELSEN  
SYMPHONY NO. 4, Opus 29  
"The Inextinguishable"  
Poco adagio quasi andante  
Allegro

TV 34050S

Side 2  
18:15 min.

The Royal Danish Orchestra  
Igor Markevitch, Conductor

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