



NIELSEN

DDD

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Symphonies
No. 2 “The Four Temperaments”
No. 3 “Sinfonia Espansiva”

National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland
Adrian Leaper



Carl Nielsen (1865 - 1931)

Symphony No. 2 , Op. 16, "The Four Temperaments"

Symphony No. 3, Op. 27, "Sinfonia espansiva"

A leading influence on Scandinavian music of the present century, the Danish composer Carl Nielsen was born in 1865, the son of a painter and village musician, in whose band he had his earliest musical experience playing the violin. In 1879, after learning to play the cornet, he joined a military orchestra at Odense and by 1884 had been able, with the help of sponsors, to enter the Royal Danish Conservatory in Copenhagen as a student of violin, piano and theory. After graduation in 1886 his compositions began to win a hearing, with a significant success in 1888 for his *Opus 1 Little Suite* for strings. The following year he became a violinist in the royal chapel, broadening still further his musical experience and in particular his knowledge of the music of Wagner, a subject of his serious study in Germany in 1890. Here he began the first of his six symphonies, completed in 1892. His work as a player in the royal chapel continued until 1905, followed by a growing demand for his services as a conductor, particularly of his own works, while a state pension allowed him to turn from teaching, a hitherto necessary means of survival, to concentrate on composition. His *Second Symphony, The Four Temperaments*, completed in 1902, characterizes the four humours of early medical theory. A third symphony, the *Sinfonia Espansiva*, followed in 1911, three years after his appointment as conductor at the Royal Theatre, a position he held until 1914. The *Fourth Symphony, The Inextinguishable*, was finished in 1916, to be followed in 1922 by the *Fifth*. The last of the six was completed in 1925, six years before Nielsen's death in Copenhagen in 1931.

Nielsen's work as a composer includes two operas and a number of orchestral works beside the symphonies, with concertos for violin and for clarinet. To choral works and songs may be added three published string quartets, a wind quintet and three violin sonatas, as well as a relatively small amount of music for the piano, an instrument that he had first taught himself as a young bandsman. His musical language, as demonstrated in the symphonies, is idiosyncratic and individual, essentially tonal, but covering an extended range of keys within a tonal system, with a cogent use of rhythms that adds impetus to an idiom that is, in some ways, a reaction against romanticism, while extending post-romantic harmonic, melodic and rhythmic vocabulary.

The idea of writing a symphony based on the Four Humours arose from the sight of a primitive peasant painting in a village inn and Nielsen's own particular interest at the time in characterization, seeing another character from the inside. The Four Humours of early medicine are the four liquids in the human body, yellow bile, phlegm, black bile and blood, a preponderance of any one of which will give rise to a character that is choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic or sanguine. Nielsen dedicated his *Second Symphony* to Ferruccio Busoni and it was first performed on 1st December 1902 at a concert of the Danish Concert Society in Copenhagen under the composer's direction. The forthright first movement, in B minor, begins, as Nielsen later wrote, impetuously with a theme that develops together with another little clarinet theme, rising to a fanfare before the appearance of the expressive secondary theme, again impetuously interrupted and leading eventually to a conclusion in the mood of the opening. The choleric is followed by the phlegmatic, in G major, a slow march that is in contrast to the preceding movement. Nielsen explained that he imagined here a young man of seventeen or eighteen, a trial to his teachers, idle in his lessons, but not to be scolded. His nature leads him to the countryside, where birds sing, fish glide through the water and the sun shines, all depicted in a mood remote from energy or strong feeling. The third movement is in E flat minor and characterizes, Nielsen continues, a man of deep melancholy, the theme brings a cry of deeply felt sadness and a sigh, a

little plaintive oboe melody, slowly developed and culminating in a lament. A calmer episode follows a short transition, now in B flat major, leading to a long static passage. Suddenly the first theme bursts forth again, the various themes together, the movement ending in calm serenity. Nielsen claimed that in the last movement he was depicting a man who acts without reflection, thinking the whole world his and that everything will come his way without effort on his part. There are moments of fear, where he may catch his breath, but all that is soon forgotten, even when the music moves to the minor, his cheerful and rather superficial character always looking on the bright side. From D major the music shifts in conclusion to an impetuous A major.

Nielsen completed his *Third Symphony*, the *Sinfonia Espansiva*, in 1911 and conducted the Royal Danish Orchestra in the first performance, given in Copenhagen on 28th February 1912, in the same programme as his *Violin Concerto*. It was an immediate success and two months later he conducted the work in Amsterdam with the Concertgebouw orchestra and subsequently in Sweden, Finland and Germany. The title *Sinfonia Espansiva*, an afterthought, has been explained by Robert Simpson as suggesting an expansion of the scope of the mind and of the life that comes with it. The first movement, starting with a repeated and emphatic A, turns, eventually, into a great symphonic waltz. The traditional symphonic form still includes a principal theme, the basis of the later waltz. The energetic opening material is followed by a gentler theme from the woodwind, a mood pursued by the strings with further strongly expressed ideas, leading to a secondary theme from the flute, accompanied by two clarinets, material that is all developed before the great waltz, led by horns, trumpets and trombones. The slow movement, a gentle idyll, with its vocalises for solo soprano and baritone, is pastoral in mood. Here there are three themes, the first two improvisatory in character and the third a lyrical melody for the strings, with the voices blending like instruments with the orchestra at the climax of the movement. The third movement, without the immediate impetuous caprice of a scherzo, nevertheless provides a contrast, returning to the real world from the idyllic countryside of the

Andante pastorale and exploring a new tonality, that of C sharp minor, in moving thematic material and moments of contrapuntal development. Nielsen described the last movement as a hymn to work and the healthy enjoyment of everyday life. The rondo breathes a mood of optimism, dominated by its principal theme, which returns in conclusion, after episodes often overtly simple in their thematic material.

National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland

The RTE Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1947 as part of the Radio and Television service in Ireland. With its membership coming from France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Hungary, Poland and Russia, it drew together a rich blend of European culture. Apart from its many symphony concerts, the orchestra came to world-wide attention with its participation in the famous Wexford Opera Festival, an event broadcast in many parts of the world. The orchestra now enjoys the facilities of a fine new concert hall in central Dublin where it performs with the world's leading conductors and soloists. In 1990 the RTE Symphony Orchestra was augmented and renamed the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, quickly establishing itself as one of Europe's most adventurous orchestras with programmes featuring many twentieth century compositions. The orchestra has now embarked upon an extensive recording project for the Naxos and Marco Polo labels and will record music by Nielsen, Tchaikovsky, Goldmark, Rachmaninov, Brian and Scriabin.

Adrian Leaper

Adrian Leaper was appointed Assistant Conductor to Stanislaw Skrowaczewski of the Hallé Orchestra in 1986, and has since then enjoyed an increasingly busy career, with engagements at home and throughout Europe. Born in 1953, Adrian Leaper studied at the Royal Academy of Music and was for a number of years co-principal French horn in the Philharmonia Orchestra, before turning his attention exclusively to conducting. He has been closely involved with the Naxos and Marco Polo labels and has been consequently instrumental in introducing elements of English repertoire to Eastern Europe. His numerous recordings include a complete cycle of Sibelius symphonies for Naxos, and Havergal Brian's Symphony No. 4 ("Das Siegeslied") for Marco Polo.

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STEREO

**Carl
NIELSEN**
(1865 - 1931)

Symphonies Nos. 2 & 3

National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland
Adrian Leaper

DDD

Playing
Time:
68'19"

Symphony No. 2 Op. 16 "The Four Temperaments"

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|---------|
| 1 | Allegro collerico | (8:53) |
| 2 | Allegro comodo e flemmatico | (4:33) |
| 3 | Andante malincolico | (11:50) |
| 4 | Allegro sanguinoso | (7:07) |

Symphony No. 3 Op. 27 "Sinfonia espansiva"

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|----------|--------------------|---------|
| 5 | Allegro espansiva | (11:11) |
| 6 | Andante pastorale | (8:59) |
| 7 | Allegretto un poco | (6:07) |
| 8 | Finale: Allegro | (9:34) |

Recorded at the National Concert Hall, Dublin
on 10th and 15th January 1994.

Producer: Chris Craker

Engineer: Simon Rhodes

Music Notes: Keith Anderson

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by J. F. Willumsen



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