



THE RUED LANGGAARD EDITION · EDITION WILHELM HANSEN

Rued Langgaard: Symphony no. 10 “Yon Hall of Thunder” (BVN 298)

Critical first edition by Bendt Viinholt Nielsen

Preface

About Symphony no. 10

Motto:

“What if it tempt you to the dreadful summit of the cliff – “
(Shakespeare: Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 4)

According to Langgaard’s manuscript datings the symphony was begun in the spring of 1944. However, an unsigned draft of the first three bars is dated as early as March 1943. The whole composition was sketched out in Ribe in the days from 8th to 18th August 1944, and the fair copy of the score was end-dated in Ribe on 20th February 1945.

The title refers to the rocky peninsula Kullen (Kullaberg) in Scania, Sweden and was constructed by Langgaard from a description of Kullen in Steen Steensen Blicher’s (1782-1848) Ossian-inspired poem *Jyllandsreise i seks Døgn* (1817):

“[...] yon cliff there,
That hangs as black as cloud over foaming breakers,
Yon gloomy rock is none of the hills of my birthland [...]
So sombre and naked are not my leafy hilltops
As this mountain ridge, the hall of the wind and thunder.”

Rued Langgaard knew Kullen from his annual summer stays, especially in the fishing village of Arild, in the periods 1898-1908 and 1931-39. After the war (and the writing of Symphony no. 10) he went back there in 1946-51. The one-movement symphony evokes the landscape of Kullen in a series of atmospheric pictures with the emphasis on the dramatic and magnificent, as the title suggests.

The motto from *Hamlet* is from Horatio’s warning to Hamlet that his father’s ghost, whom they see on the bastions of the castle of Elsinore, may lure Hamlet to his death. Langgaard had an idea that the rock mentioned in Niels Møller’s Danish translation had to be Kullen, which can in fact be glimpsed from the castle (on the other side of the sound) – since at Kronborg Castle itself there is only a flat sandy beach. The point of the motto, though, is hardly likely to be this highly dubious Kullen reference. It is evident from a couple of suggested titles for the symphony – *The Flying Dutchman* and *Flying Dutchman over Kullen* – that Langgaard viewed the work, with its clear reminiscences of Wagner and Richard Strauss, as a kind of phantom music. New music of such a conservative persuasion was not looked upon kindly in the pace-setting circles of contemporary Danish musical life, and the choice of motto should undoubtedly be seen as a comment on this situation; that is, as an ironic hint that the listener risks being attracted – like Hamlet by the ghost – by this ‘dangerous’, appealing ghost music. In the composer’s distinctive and special universe the picture of Kullen and the re-composed Romantic music merge with apocalyptic presentiments, which seems to be the background of the ‘symbolic’ quotation, at the end, of the Judgement Day hymn “Zion’s Watchmen raise their Voices” (bb. 776-778; melody by Philipp Nicolai, 1556-1608).

Immediately after its completion Langgaard sent the manuscript of the symphony to the national broadcasting corporation *Statsradiofonien* (now *Danmarks Radio*) with a view to performance. On 28th February 1945 the corporation acknowledged receipt of the work, which at that juncture bore the name *Pastorales*. On 3rd March 1945 the manuscript was returned to the composer with a refusal to perform it, but on 20th December the same year the corporation again received the manuscript as a programme proposal from the tireless Langgaard, this time with the title *Hin Torden-Bolig* (*Yon Hall of Thunder*). From the conductor Emil Reesen's and the head of music programming Peder Gram's comments in the relevant documents (in the Danmarks Radio archives) it is clear that they could not agree on whether it was the same symphony as they had rejected a few months before! Whether the work was evaluated again is uncertain; the next document in the matter is a telegram from Langgaard with the following wording sent from Ribe on 1st February 1947: "Will the Radio have No. 10 written out in Copenhagen at my expense and perform it entitled *The Flying Dutchman*. R. Langgaard". Perhaps it was through the mediation of the conductor Launy Grøndahl, who took an interest in Langgaard, that the parts were written out as suggested and the symphony was premiered (under the title *Hin Torden-Bolig*) on the radio on 22nd July 1947. This was a live studio performance with no audience and with Grøndahl as conductor. Langgaard was on holiday that summer in Ordrup (Charlottenlund, near Copenhagen) and undoubtedly himself attended both rehearsals and the performance.

The second performance of the symphony – its first concert performance – took place on 27th August 1977 in the Tivoli Concert Hall with the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ole Schmidt. This performance was released on an LP in 1985 as the first recording of the symphony (Danacord DACO 230). The present critical edition was performed for the first time on 11th January 2001 at the Danish Radio Concert Hall by the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Thomas Dausgaard, and was recorded by them on Dacapo 8.224182 (2001).

Bendt Viinholt Nielsen, December 2000 (Dec. 2002)
English translation by James Manley