



Rued Langgaard: Symphony no. 11 “Ixion” (BVN 303)

Critical first edition by Ole Ugilt Jensen and Bendt Viinholt Nielsen

Preface

About Symphony no. 11

The only material from Langgaard himself to shed any light on the title of the work is the following note:

Ixion was bound to an eternally rolling flaming wheel.

The story of the Greek mythological figure Ixion can be read in its most complete form in Pindar (c. 520-440 BC), but he is also mentioned by other poets including Homer and Ovid. Ixion had killed his father-in-law and as a result had to go into exile. However, Zeus took pity on him and invited him to Olympus as a guest. There Ixion became so infatuated with Hera, the wife of Zeus, that he could not resist the temptation to try to seduce her. This was a clear transgression of the terms of his invitation to the banquet, and as a punishment Ixion was tied to a flaming wheel which rotates for all eternity in the air in Tartarus, the deepest region of the underworld. The gods also ordered that Ixion was constantly to shout: “You should show gratitude to your benefactor”.

The symphony was begun in December 1944 – no more precise dating is known. The available sketch material is limited, and on one of the sketches Langgaard has in fact noted that the symphony was “drawn up in full score immediately”. The fair copy of the score bears the end-date 17th January 1945. The symphony was thus completed before Symphony no. 10, which was ready in fair copy a month later.

Langgaard, who was living in Ribe, immediately submitted the symphony to the Danish Broadcasting Corporation as a programme proposal through the conductor Launy Grøndahl. The score bore the title *Evighedskrig* (‘Eternal War’) and the designation *Stretto Symphony No. 11* (*stretto* means narrow or tight in Italian – the word was also used by Langgaard of the equally succinct Symphony no. 12). The manuscript was returned with a refusal to perform it on 2nd March 1945, but over the next six years the score went back and forth several times between Langgaard and the broadcasting corporation’s music department. In the correspondence with the corporation (in the present Danmarks Radio archives) Langgaard mentions the work innumerable times with constantly changing titles of a more or less provisional or provocative character. Besides *Evighedskrig*, which is the most ‘stable’ of the many suggestions, the titles are *Exsecratio*, *Solbrand* (Sunburn), *Brandsol* (Fire Sun), *Under Satans Sol* (Under Satan’s Sun), *Dødsejlerkrig* (Coffin Ship War), *Evighedsllyn* (Eternal Lightning), *Som Lynet er Kristi Genkomst!* (Like Lightning is the Second Coming) *Fanden personlig* (The Devil in Person), *Misterio* [i.e. *Mistero*] *radioso*, *Solvanvid* (Sun Madness), *Solámok* (*Solámok*) (Sun Amok), *Det uudslukkelige Solstik* (The Inextinguishable Sunstroke). The last of these is of course a polemic reference to Carl Nielsen’s symphony *The Inextinguishable*. In the preserved music manuscripts, however, we find a more limited number of title suggestions: *Evighedskrig*, *Mordacita*, *Brandsol*, *Ixion* and *Solrædsel* (Sun Horror).

In January 1951, when Langgaard sent the score in to the broadcasting corporation for the last time, it was under the title *Solrædsel*. The manuscript lay in the corporation’s music archives until 1965, when it was handed over to the Royal Library in Copenhagen. However, the very next year it went back to Danmarks Radio with a view to the writing-out of the parts and a performance. We must presume that it was in this connection that Constance Langgaard took the opportunity to correct the title on the score (in two places) to *Ixion*. The background for this was probably quite simply a pencil note written by Rued Langgaard in June 1952, that is a month before his death, where he refers to the symphony as *Ixion*. Constance Langgaard must have been convinced that *Ixion* was the composer’s final choice of title.

Ixion was already mentioned, however, in connection with the work shortly after its completion in 1945, and in July 1948 the name is cited as the actual title of the work. We must assume that Langgaard's brief note on the mythological character (on the page opposite) was formulated at the same time. The note, which is written on a music sheet, lost its relevance when the title of the work was changed once again. The sheet in question was re-used, however, as cover for the manuscript score, and thus the note coincidentally ended up at the back of score (on page 3 of the cover). From this hiding-place it has now once more been brought to light.

We know of two mottoes for the symphony, both associated with the title *Eternal War*. A rejected title page quotes from the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 24, Verse 27: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." The other one is a more cryptic suggested motto from 1949 among Langgaard's notes (in the Royal Library); it says: "The evil eye of the sun broke forth eternally, offers 'Development' eternal war and amok!"

From several notes and letters it is evident that Langgaard considered Symphony no. 11 to be one of his most important works. At one point he actually calls it "the acme of all music" (whether he mean this qualitatively or as a description of music that has been taken to the utmost limit, 'to the extreme point', is not quite clear). In the above-mentioned note from 1952 including the title *Ixion* Langgaard writes the following referring to symphony no. 11 and 16 and a reworking of Gade's *The Crusaders*: "These pieces of music are the fulfilment of music's mission in the world".

The first performance took place at Danmarks Radio on 29th July 1968 in a studio production with the Odense Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Aksel Wellejus. The next performance was a studio production broadcast on 22nd September 1979, with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ole Schmidt. The first recording was released in 1992 as part of the Danacord label's recording of Langgaard's collected symphonies with the Artur Rubinstein Philharmonie (Lodz) under the baton of Ilya Stupel. The symphony can be found on Vol. 5 of the series, DACOCD 408. The same conductor and orchestra were behind the first concert performance, which was given at the Aarhus Concert Hall on 24th July 1993. On this occasion the Århus tuba quartet Tub'Amore participated.

In view of the peculiarities of the work it seems relevant here to say something about the context of the symphony and the form of the work.

Symphony no. 11 marks a turning-point in Langgaard's artistic development, since here he moves in earnest into an area where art and concept, absurdity and provocation can hardly be distinguished from one another. The work is an obvious comment on the composer's isolated and absurd existence. Beyond this narrow autobiographical interpretation it seems very reasonable to view the work in the light of the world war that was culminating when the composition was written in the winter of 1944-45. The original title *Eternal War* and the apocalyptic motto quoted above can be viewed in this context. But it is also relevant to place the work in the context of musical history, as a provocative contribution to a current aesthetic debate on music in Denmark. This debate had been launched by Knudåge Riisager in 1940 in *Dansk Musik Tidsskrift* (Danish Music Review) in an article with the polemical title "The symphony is dead – long live music!" Riisager thought that 'the monumental musical work' had outlived its role after the Romantic epoch – a stance with which Langgaard must have been in profound disagreement. All these aspects play their part when the background for Langgaard's Symphony no. 11 is to be outlined – and at the same time the work can be understood, at a sober, direct level, as a symphonic poem with a motif from Greek mythology.

The role of the four solo tubas seems on the face of it absurd and cryptic. The instruments are to be placed, like traditional soloists, at the front of the concert stage. With a typical instance of Langgaardian humour he stipulates *four contrabass tubæ* (*tubæ*) in the score – tubæ to be understood as tuba in the plural (the point is that *bæ* is the Danish children's word corresponding to 'poo'). But the music is pitched very high for double bass tuba. Perhaps Langgaard imagined the impressive sight that four large tubas would present in front of the orchestra. The four instruments play in unison to intensify the sound, such that the rest of the orchestra becomes 'background' in relation to the long notes of the tubas. It is striking that the four notes have no melodic quality, simply forming an arpeggiated seventh chord played from the seventh down. One further notes that the four notes have the lengths (measured in crotchets) 5, 7, 9, 12. This might refer to a well-known mystical-symbolic number series which also included the numbers 1 and 3. This number series corresponds to the verse numbers in the Revelation of St. John, Chapter 6, in which the Lamb breaks the first six seals of the scroll. Whether Langgaard was aware of this or not, there is thus an apocalyptic symbolism in the series. True, Langgaard has no representation of the numbers 1 and 3, but these numbers are strikingly present in the work, partly in the one-movement monothematic form and partly by virtue of the triple time. At all events it seems

relevant to interpret the tubas as ‘last trumpets’ by association with the *Dies irae* hymn’s “tuba mirum” (Langgaard also wrote a work entitled *Dies irae* for tuba and piano – BVN 342).

The meaning of the chord of the seventh is evident when one studies the harmonic overview below. With the entry of the tubas in b. 99 there is a strong emphasis on this element, which has a personal symbolic and cryptic meaning. The motif appears in a number of works by Langgaard, and can possibly be interpreted as a ‘fate’ motif. One can further note that the seventh chord appears in several conspicuous places in Langgaard’s compositions where their presence seems rather to point towards concepts like ‘the divine’ or ‘the eternal’.

The work is fundamentally based on four modules, in the following called A, B, C and D. The modules are presented at the beginning of the work: A = bb. 5-8 (with upbeat in b. 4); B = bb. 9-12; C = bb. 13-17; D = bb. 18-21. These modules are repeated in the order A-D (A-C) in varying forms a total of eleven times in a constantly shifting progression of keys. From F major in b. 5 there is an ascent to A major in b. 80. In b. 99 the music returns to F major and from here there is a chromatic ascent to A major in b. 139. Finally there is a return to (and cadencing in) F major at b. 152. As will be evident from the overview below, the work begins with Module D, but otherwise this module only appears in the first half of the work. It should also be noted that there are changes in the modules, apart that is from D, with respect to length, instrumentation, dynamics and – in the case of Module A – in the rhythmic shape. Further details of this can be found in the editorial commentary.

Introduction:

D bb. 1 - 3

1st time

A bb. 4-8 (F)
 B bb. 9-12 (F) - C7
 C bb. 13-17 (D7 - G - C7)
 D bb. 18-20 (C7)

2nd time

A bb. 21-25 (F) C7 - Cm7
 A1 bb. 26-29 (Gm) - D7
 B bb. 30-33 (Gm)
 C bb. 34-38 (E7 - A - D7)
 D bb. 39-41 (D7)

3rd time

A bb. 42-46 (F#)
 B bb. 47-50 (F#) - C#7
 C bb. 51-55 (D#7 - G# - C#7)
 D bb. 56-58 (C#7)

4th time

A bb. 59-63 (Ab)
 B bb. 64-67 (Ab) Eb7
 C1 bb. 68-70 (F7 - Bb - Eb7)
 C2 bb. 71-75 (C#m7 - F# - B7) E7
 D bb. 76-78 (E7)

5th time

A bb. 79-83 (A)
 B1 bb. 84-85 (A) - E7
 C1 bb. 86-88 (F#7 - B - E7)
 C2 bb. 89-93 (D7 - G - C7)
 D 94-97 (C7)

6th time

A bb. 98-102 (F)
 B1 bb. 103-104 (F) - C7
 C bb. 105-107 (D#7 - G# - C#7)

7th time

A bb. 108-112 (F#)
 B1 bb. 113-114 (F#) C#7
 C bb. 115-117 (E7 - A - D7)

8th time

A bb. 118-122 (G)
 B1 bb. 123-124 (G) D7
 C bb. 125-127 (F7 - Bb - Eb)

9th time

A bb. 128-132 (Ab)
 B1 bb. 133-134 (Ab) - Eb7
 C1 bb. 135-137 (F#7 - B - E7)

10th time

A bb. 138-142 (A)
 Bo bb. 143 (A) E7
 C1 bb. 144-146 (G7 - C - F7)
 C2 bb. 147-150 (Em7) (A7 - D - G7) C7

11th time

A bb. 151-155 (F) C7 - Cm7b5
 Bo bb. 156 (C#7)
 C3 bb. 157-160 (D#7 - G#7) (G#7 - C#7) (C#7 - G7b9 - F/c)

Coda: bb. 161 to end

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