



THE RUED LANGGAARD EDITION 7 EDITION WILHELM HANSEN

Rued Langgaard: Symphony no. 5, version 1 (BVN 191)

Critical first edition by Bendt Viinholt Nielsen

Preface

About Symphony no. 5, version 1

Motto

“The nix plays for the small stars,
he knows that Heaven will never be his.”

Erik Bøgh (1822-99)

From the poem *Nøkken*, printed on pp. 173-174 in *Halvandet Hundrede Viser. Tekst*. Copenhagen 1881. First stanza with changes by RL.

The work was originally not called a symphony. The point of departure was the orchestral work *Sommersagnsdrama* (“Summer Legend Drama”, later entitled *Saga blot* “Only a Saga”, BVN 140), composed in December 1917 and concluded in score form on 28th December 1918. This work was given its first performance during the Nordic Music Festival in Copenhagen on 16th June 1919 under the baton of Frederik Schnedler-Petersen, but had a lukewarm reception from the press. Most positive was *Berlingske Tidende*, where A.T. (Alfred Toft) the next day wrote, among other things: “With the aid of scissors an effective piece could be got out of it; there is in fact content enough and amusing instrumental ideas. One may hope that the composer has the resignation to cut the superfluous away.” But at first the only result was a modest revision and abridgement, dated December 1919. In 1925 the composition was then included in the numbered sequence of symphonies (at first for a short period as No. 6, then as No. 5) with the slightly modified title *Sommer-Sagn drama*.

Langgaard carried out an extensive revision in 1926. The symphony was considerably shortened and the original tempo markings removed to a great extent. Among the additions were the harp part (or most of it) and a few short passages (bb. 1-5, 306-321, 440-448, 504-506). In this form the work was presented in public for the first time as *Symphony No. 5 (One Movement)* at a “Popular Orchestral Concert” which Langgaard held with his own works at the Odd Fellow Palæ on 11th April 1927. The Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by the composer. The motto by Erik Bøgh was quoted in the programme. *Nationaltidende*’s reviewer “-r -h” (Richard Hove) gave the symphony positive mention in his concert review the following day:

When one hears a work like this ... one cannot help but be filled with admiration for the truly original and muse-born talent to which Langgaard’s music at its best testifies. ... In this symphony one finds idea, imagination and *inspiration*. The beginning, with its excellently orchestrated mood of sky-high vision, for example, is outstandingly formed, and promises to lead to a great musical development. However, this development confines itself to a rather ordinary fugato treatment; later comes an ecstatic climax which has both passion and sculptural form; and as the end of this pleasantly short symphony

comes a really unusual broad-lined idea with an (again excellently orchestrated) elegiac theme with the evocative mystery of the beginning as its background. This symphony – formally small – seems to be the largest in content that Rud Langgaard has written ...

A few passages were revised shortly after the performance, but Langgaard apparently judged that the musical material had more potential, for in 1931 he composed a new Symphony No. 5 (Version 2), which was entitled *Steppenatur* (Steppe Landscape) with the subtitle *Sommersagnsdrama* (Summer Legend Drama) (BVN 216). This work takes its point of departure in *Symfonisk Festspil* (BVN 166), a 1920 offshoot of the original *Sommersagnsdrama*, but it also has a good deal of newly composed material. In Version 2 we find a few hundred bars of Version 1, partly in revised form. Langgaard himself used the terms “first version” and “second version”, such that the two scores must be regarded as equally valid.

At the end of the 1920s the symphony had by-names like *The Nix*, *Elf Music* and *Steppe Expanses*, but in the end Langgaard chose not to use a descriptive title. Among the sources there is an undated note from the last half of the 1920s referring to the end of the work. It consists of the following (slightly adapted) quote from Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940): “At that very moment he thought that from the river he heard some clear metallic notes as when one plucks at a string to see if it is in tune: ‘Look, look, there we have the nix himself! He is beginning to play his violin’” (from *Spillemanden*, printed in *Legender og Fortællinger. Ny Samling*. Copenhagen 1908, pp. 147-161).

Symphony No. 5, Version 1, was released on CD for the first time in 2002 in a recording by the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Thomas Dausgaard (Dacapo 8.224215). For the recording the present critical edition was used.

Bendt Viinholt Nielsen, June 2001 (May 2002)

English translation: James Manley