



## Rued Langgaard: Symphony no. 5, version 2 “Steppe Landscape (Summer Legend Drama)” (BVN 216)

Critical first edition by Bendt Viinholt Nielsen

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### Preface

#### About Symphony no. 5, version 2

Symphony no. 5 constitutes a special ‘family of works’ within Rued Langgaard’s output. The starting-point was the orchestral piece *Summer Legend Drama*, which was written in 1917-18 and premiered at the Nordic Music Festival in Copenhagen on 16 June 1919 with Frederik Schnedler-Petersen as conductor. After a revision in 1941 this work was entitled *A Thing of the Past* (BVN 140). In 1920 Langgaard wrote his *Symphonic Festival Play* (BVN 166), which he based on *Summer Legend Drama* but which incorporates a new middle section and a new conclusion and at the same time is considerably shorter. The composer conducted the *Symphonic Festival Play* himself at the Danish Concert Society on 20 April 1921. In the following year the work was performed in Berlin by the Blüthner Orchestra and in Vienna by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, on both occasions under the direction of the German conductor Hans Seeber-van der Floe. Langgaard’s next step was to abbreviate and revise the *Summer Legend Drama* in 1926; he presented it at a concert on 11 April 1927 in Copenhagen under the designation Symphony no. 5 (one movement). This is the version that the composer later named “version 1” and which the Rued Langgaard Edition published in 2002.

Around 1930 Langgaard began to work on these pieces again. It would seem that he focused initially on version 1, which he now entitled *Symphony à la russe*. Then he apparently transferred that title to the *Symphonic Festival Play*, the main title of which he had already altered to “Symphony no. 5 (F major)”. Here we find him in a phase of reflection and transition that is mirrored somewhat confusingly in the sources, not least with regard to the titles he conferred on the three existing scores; these were variously renamed *Fairy Play* or *Fairyland* and then *Symphony à la russe* or *The Vastness of the Steppes*. A decision was arrived at when Langgaard in the summer of 1931 began to compose a new version of the work with the *Symphonic Festival Play* as his immediate starting-point. He quite simply used the score of that work as his draft of the new version, copying however some short passages from Symphony no. 5, version 1, and adding some newly composed material. The extant sketches for the new sections are dated 8 June and 31 July 1931, and the first page of music in the fair-copied score bears the date 8 June. The manuscript was completed on 5 August 1931 on Thurø, where Rued and Constance Langgaard spent the summer of that year (from 1 July to 15 August).

There are annotations in the sources showing that Langgaard was concerned to give this new version of the symphony a more logical and perceptible form than was present in the rhapsodic version 1. He emphasised this by calling the main section “Sonate” and the final coda “‘Sonate’ con Variazioni” (b. 351 ff). The music newly composed in 1931 consists primarily of two substantial sections, viz. bb. 190-276 and the conclusion of the whole work from b. 461 (with the exception of six bars). Approximately two thirds of the composition thus consists of more or less revised passages from the *Symphonic Festival Play* and Symphony no. 5, version 1.<sup>1</sup>

The first title for this new version was *Symphony no. 5 (à la russe)*, probably inspired by Langgaard's use of a 'Russian bell motif' (in the present edition this motif occurs in the woodwinds at bb. 38-40; it is also found in version 1 and in the *Symphonic Festival Play*). Certain features of gesture and instrumentation are also reminiscent of Tchaikovsky, though perhaps more noticeably in the first version than in that edited here. Shortly after completion the score was renamed *Fairyland*, and at one point a related motto was assigned to the composition in the form of a quotation from a Danish ballad: "And they rode into Fairyland where the sun shines red as fire" (Langgaard found this text in Thor Lange's *Langt borte* [Far Away], Copenhagen 1917, p. 188). A couple of years later the title variant *Fairy Meadow* turns up in the sources but in October 1936, when Langgaard submitted the score to the State Radio with a view to a broadcast performance, he had decided on the final (double) title *Steppe Landscape (Summer Legend Drama)*. The designations "version 1" and "version 2" for the 1926 and 1931 redactions of the symphony were introduced by Langgaard in the 1930s, perhaps as early as 1933. The designation "version 2" does not appear in the fair copy of the piece published here, but the score of the 1926 version (RLS 17,2) has *Version 1* on the title page, where the 1931 version is also referred to: *Revised. 1931 (second version)*. There is in other words every reason to believe that Rued Langgaard regarded the two versions as of equal status.

No clarificatory motto or note from the composer's hand exists to explain the double title of the piece. We can therefore only speculate how the summer atmosphere of a Nordic fairyland is to be understood in combination with the wildness of the Russian steppes. Perhaps Langgaard merely wanted to point out the Russian and Nordic elements in the tone of the work. And the steppes and the Nordic fairyland probably both stood for him as a symbol of something strange and exotic, a kind of imaginary world which one enters and leaves to the accompaniment of the 'foggy', muted string music that begins and concludes the work.

The symphony was accepted by the State Radio and the premiere was broadcast on 8 June 1937 with Launy Grøndahl conducting the Radio Symphony Orchestra. Since this was a live studio performance without an audience, no reviews were forthcoming. After an interval of almost 40 years the work was broadcast again on 15 June 1976 in a production with the Southern Jutland Symphony Orchestra conducted by Carl von Garaguly. The first concert performance was given on 14 May 1991 in the Tivoli Concert Hall in Copenhagen with Neeme Järvi conducting the Radio Symphony Orchestra. Two CD recordings were issued the following year, the one with the Radio Symphony Orchestra under Järvi and the other with the Artur Rubinstein Philharmonic from Lodz (Poland) under Ilya Stupel, as part of that orchestra's complete recording of the symphonies. Thomas Dausgaard subsequently recorded both version 1 and version 2 in his new interpretation of the symphonies with the DR Symphony Orchestra.<sup>2</sup>

#### Notes

1. The critical commentary includes a list of bars recurring in the three works.
2. The three recordings are on Chandos (CHAN 9064), Danacord (DACOCD 407) and Dacapo (8.224215). The last-mentioned recording was reissued in 2009 in an SACD-version in a box containing *Rued Langgaard The Symphonies* (Dacapo 6.200001).

*Bendt Viinholt Nielsen, September 2010*  
*English translation: Michael Chesnutt*