

**Desiring closure, yearning for freedom:
a semiotic study of tonality in three symphonies by Carl Nielsen**

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Abstract

Desiring closure, yearning for freedom explores Carl Nielsen's powerful and idiosyncratic engagement with tonality. The analytical case studies of three Nielsen symphonies are motivated equally by a desire to gain a fuller understanding of the composer's expressive deployment of contrasting tonal idioms and by an interest in the mechanisms of tonal signification. To this end, there are two theoretical starting points: Heinrich Schenker's powerful model of tonality and Eero Tarasti's adaptation of the French-Lithuanian semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas's work on narrative.

After some preliminary theoretical orientation, analyses of Beethoven's First and Fourth Symphonies are used to introduce some of the main principles of the semiotic description of tonal structures that forms the methodological heart of this dissertation. This provides the foundations for analyses of Nielsen's First, Second and Fourth Symphonies, each of which introduces new methodological and epistemological challenges: the study of the First Symphony gives rise to speculation on the significative potential of Nielsen's so-called 'progressive' tonal structures; *The Four Temperaments* provides an opportunity to explore how music is able to portray character and disposition, building on Greimas's work with Jacques Fontanille on the semiotics of passions; finally, an analysis of the expressive extremes of *The Inextinguishable* builds on the work of previous chapters in order to explore how Nielsen pushes towards the boundaries of tonality in various ways, at the same time as continuing to write music of the utmost diatonic simplicity. This polarised tonal palette is symptomatic of a productive tension in Nielsen's music between, on the one hand, a desire for the release of normative tonal closure, and, on the other, a yearning for freedom from the constraints of the major-minor system.

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Dedication and acknowledgements

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About the author

Tom Pankhurst is a lecturer in music and creative and performing arts at Liverpool Hope University College. Previous to his full-time appointment in September 2003, he taught at a range of institutions in the North West of England including the Royal Northern College of Music, University of Manchester and University of Liverpool. Since 2002 he has also conducted intensive courses in Schenkerian analysis for students at the University of Helsinki. Tom is the author of a website on Schenkerian analysis for undergraduates (www.schenkerguide.com) and completed in 2002 a PALATINE-funded project to develop web resources on tonality for Level I music students (www.tonalityguide.com).

Tom has published articles in *Carl Nielsen Studies* (Vol. 1, 2004) and *Musical Semiotics Revisited* (2003) and has contributed papers at the Carl Nielsen Symposium in Birmingham (2001), the Ninth International Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Seminar in Musical Semiotics in Helsinki (2002), and the Society for Music Analysis conference in Hull (2003).

Abbreviations

CNC Bjornum, B. and K. Mollerhoj, 1992. *A Catalogue of the Composer's Musical Manuscripts in the Royal Library: The Carl Nielsen Collection* Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.

Pitch names

