

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

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester
for the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts

March 2004

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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 significant 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

Studying for a Ph.D. part time is an all-consuming task, and thanks are due to many friends and colleagues who have shown patience and understanding. I owe a particular thanks in this regard to my colleagues Philip Duffy, Robin Hartwell, Stephen Pratt and David Walters at Liverpool Hope and my former employer Jean Longshaw for their support and also their feedback on ideas when they were foolish enough to enquire about my research. For their support at various times, and for many formative conversations and arguments, I also owe particular thanks to my friends Deniz Ertan, Paul Jones and John Stephen.

Not one word of this thesis would have been written without the guidance of my supervisor David Fanning, who has given of his scarce time generously and beyond the call of duty. He skilfully and subtly prodded me down interesting avenues of research and then offered constructive and supportive criticism at all stages of the project, showing an unnerving eye for errors and problems both large and small. I also am grateful for the support and interest of Eero Tarasti, whose ideas I find inspiring and whose generosity has been both encouraging and heart-warming.

My parents Jo and Chris have given vital financial and emotional support throughout my much-extended student years, and I owe to them, and to my sister Becca, a debt of thanks for their stimulating and supportive friendship.

Finally, I will forever owe a debt of gratitude to my wife Rachael, who has been with me for every step of this project. Her generosity, support, patience and belief have made my professional life possible, and my personal life happier than anyone could reasonably expect. Furthermore, as one of the few people to have read every word of this thesis, she has shown genuine interest and understanding, and her eye for a weak argument and unclear expression, not to mention my many typing mistakes, has improved what follows beyond measure.

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), which he is adapting and expanding into a textbook for Routledge (expected publication 2006). In 2002 he completed 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 Bjørnum, B. and K. Møllerhøj, 1992. *A Catalogue of the Composer's Musical Manuscripts in the Royal Library: The Carl Nielsen Collection* Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.

Pitch names

