5 The symphony since Mahler: national and international trends

DAVID FANNING

Priorities and principles

In 1918, the influential German critic Paul Bekker summed up symphonic composition since Beethoven as the fragmentation of the latter's legacy into various national and regional traditions and its reintegration by Gustav Mahler.[1] Nearly a century further on, any comparable summary of the welter of symphonies since Mahler would be hopelessly reductive. For one thing, it would have to have a dual starting-point, placing Sibelius alongside Mahler to represent the state of the art in 1911 (the year of Mahler's death and of the darkest and most radical of Sibelius's seven numbered symphonies, No. 4). Then it would have to recognise that national traditions of the kind Bekker identified in the nineteenth century have become ever harder to distinguish, thanks to the globalisation of communications, travel and information exchange, and to the spread of symphonic composition to almost all corners of the planet, leaving only Africa and parts of Asia untouched. Finally, unless something extraordinary has been going on beneath the musicological and critical radar, it would have to acknowledge that no symphonist active in the twenty-first century so far commands anything like the stature of a Mahler or a Sibelius. Even the stand-out composers and works chosen for consideration below may seem an odd choice in a hundred years' time (or less!), when reputations have been weighed, sifted and rebalanced.

Nonetheless, Bekker's study is not such a bad place to start. In the course of a mere sixty pages, based on public lectures, he put his finger on the humanist idealism that links Beethoven and Mahler and that has been one of the running threads in symphonic composition up to the present day (the course of this thread has been addressed in Chapter 1). This ethical and social dimension – what Bekker called the symphony's *gemeinschaftsbildende Kraft* (literally 'community-building power'), using a term that goes back through Mahler himself to Wagner, and a concept that was established in Beethoven reception as early as the 1830s[2] – was something that would be taken up with special enthusiasm in Soviet Russia, where Bekker's book was published in translation in 1926. In that country, especially after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, all the arts were, broadly speaking, validated according to their potential contribution to the project of forming a new society. It was accordingly there that the symphony retained – in adapted and increasingly distorted forms, but still to a greater degree than anywhere else – the high-mindedness and social ambition that all but fizzled out in Austria and Germany with the death of Mahler.

Related and overlapping imperatives operate in all other geographical branches of twentieth-century symphonism. They have to do with mapping the expressive range of the post-Beethovenian symphony onto large existential issues, often by means of grand-scale dualisms such as good/evil, life/death, light/dark, movement/stasis, mental/physical, old/new. These concepts are all more or less covered by the Russian translation of *gemeinschaftsbildend*, the even more tongue-defying *obobshchestvlyayushchiy*, which is usually translated back into English as 'generalising', but which actually carries the entirely positive sense of embodying archetypal significance or taking something to a higher plane. It describes symphonic 'content', but content at the opposite extreme from anecdote or pictorialism. In the USSR the term, together with its breadth of connotation, was established by Boris Asafyev in a number of key articles in the 1920s as well as in his translation of Bekker's essay. It was adopted thereafter by virtually all Soviet commentators expounding their own ongoing symphonic tradition. It served to validate the symphony across a broad stylistic, technical and even ideological spectrum. So long as the composer's application was high-minded, the adjective could be used to encompass and affirm, at one extreme, programmatic symphony-cantatas overtly aligned with the Bolshevik project (such as Shostakovich's Second and Third) and at another the purely instrumental, post-Tchaikovskian, essentially apolitical symphony as cultivated by Nikolay Myaskovsky and many of his pupils.

Understood in this broad sense, the community-forming aspect of the symphony is a core belief at least as central to Mahler's symphonies as his more oft-repeated aphorisms, such as, 'To me "symphony" means constructing a world with all the technical means at one's disposal' (summer 1895, while working on the Third Symphony)[3] and, in reported conversation with Sibelius, 'Symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything' (1907; this conversation is variously considered in chapters 9, 12 and 13 below).[4] If we take a step further and relate the community-forming dimension to the notion of positive and negative poles, we acquire a useful tool for discussing the relative status of individual symphonies and symphonists after Mahler – be it assigned by their contemporaries or afterwards. Those symphonies in which one or other pole is only weakly defined are unlikely to find more than local and ephemeral resonance, since the lack of strong dualisms in effect precludes engagement with existential issues and hence the ability to speak to large audiences. Debates over unjustified neglect (such as might be conducted over the likes of Havergal Brian, Edmund Rubbra or Andrzej Panufnik; Franz Schmidt, Karl Amadeus Hartmann or Hans Werner Henze; Roy Harris, Walter Piston or William Schuman; Myaskovsky, Gavriil Popov or Mieczysław Weinberg, and so on) cannot get very far without taking this aspirational aspect into account, at least as much as style, structure and craftsmanship.

Given the availability through recordings of several thousand symphonies composed since the death of Mahler, it is hardly surprising that few attempts have been made to justify or contradict notions of canonic status; not outside the Soviet Union, at least, where the centralised structures of reward virtually dictated that kind of discourse. Nevertheless, at least one prominent commentator has put his head above the parapet and flagged up a set of principles. Sixty years after Bekker, Robert Simpson – whose own symphonies have a strong claim to higher status than they currently enjoy – listed ‘those elements of music a composer must master if he is to write a true symphony’. He proposed: ‘the fusion of diverse elements into an organic whole . . . the continuous control of pace . . . reserves of strength . . . such as to suggest size . . . the dynamic treatment of tonality . . . [and the quality of being] active in all possible ways’.[5] The conspicuous omission here is the ethical dimension identified by Bekker and stressed over and over by Soviet Russian commentators. For precisely this reason, while Simpson’s criteria may be helpful in identifying aberrant kinds of symphonies (such as Stravinsky’s, which Simpson was determined to marginalise), they only provide blunt tools for critical evaluation.

Simpson looked on Mahler with distaste for what he diagnosed as chronic self-indulgence. His criteria for the ‘true symphony’ implicitly drew on the counter-examples of Sibelius and Nielsen (his writings about their symphonies do in fact touch on ethos, even if his symphonic desiderata do not). These two near-contemporaries of Mahler continued to write symphonies for fifteen years after the Austrian’s death, grappling with the problem of symphonic composition in the post-First World War era in a way that other distinguished figures of their generation such as Elgar, Glazunov, Rachmaninoff and Richard Strauss for one reason or another chose not to. Between them, Sibelius and Nielsen spearheaded a distinct brand of Nordic symphonism with markedly alternative priorities to those of their Austro-German forebears. Those priorities proved attractive to many, especially in Britain and the USA, the other principal centres of twentieth-century symphonic composition, though by the time of Nielsen’s international breakthrough in the 1950s, twenty years after his death, it was too late for his idiosyncratic brand of empathy and adventure to be as influential as Sibelius's elementalism had been throughout the 1930s and 40s. Broadly speaking, the Nordic alternative represented a different kind of interface with the 'world' from Mahler's. Its overriding priority was motion rather than emotion, expressed in the image of 'current', which both Sibelius and Nielsen explicitly related to natural phenomena. Like Mahler, they too could trace their priorities back to Beethoven. Indeed, when Sibelius, in the famous exchange already quoted from Mahler's side, expressed his view of the essence of symphony as 'severity of style and the profound logic that create[s] an inner connection between the motifs',[6] he was simply highlighting another dimension inherited from Beethoven, placing the emphasis on means rather than ends. For many years Sibelius lacked a critical advocate as eloquent as Bekker had been for Mahler – someone who might have pointed out that Sibelian 'profound logic' was in practice by no means an end in itself, and still less a means of embodying some kind of Nordic racial suprematism, as an influential strand of American reception had it in the first half of the century.[7] Rather it was the technical manifestation of an elemental outlook on Nature, allied to a stoical humanism and expressed in a paradoxical stylistic fusion of opposed kinds of musical pace, as represented by Beethoven and Wagner. It was Simpson himself who identified that crucial duality in Sibelius's most conspicuously stoical work, the Fourth Symphony.[8]

Clearly Sibelius's and Mahler's concerns as symphonists were by no means as mutually exclusive as their famous conversation might suggest. Sibelius's connection with Nature was as fundamental and passionate as Mahler's, and the motivic interconnections in Mahler's symphonies are as far-reaching as those in Sibelius's. But their articulation of distinct priorities and emphases still defines a polarity that remains useful to any broad historical survey. It also helps to explain why some major composers with very different outlooks – such as Debussy, Schoenberg, Janáček, Bartók and almost everyone associated with the 1950s serial avant-garde – made little or no contribution to the symphony. The general hostility of these composers towards the genre on grounds of its supposed outdatedness masked a simple absence of temperamental affinity. In a century the middle years of which were overshadowed by dictatorships and world war, socio-ethical concerns and the symphonic genre were if anything more relevant to one another, not less. And this is precisely where Mahler, with his unprecedented gift for musical angst and irony, became such a powerful enabling force for the likes of Shostakovich and Schnittke. For them the imagery of conflict, suffering, doubt and compassion – all so close to the surface in Mahler – could be appropriated with a particularly good conscience, since artists in the Soviet Union were officially mandated to comment in those areas. At the same time the quintessentially Mahlerian trope of irony gave them a voice with which to speak to the 'non-official' audience in their homeland. On the other hand, in an age where conceptions of travel and motion, and of cosmos and ecology, evolved just as dramatically as conflict and the capacity for self-destruction, the attractions of the Sibelian outlook to later composers are equally obvious. In this case, admittedly, the archetypal power generally lies deeper beneath the surface, and major symphonists as heterogeneous as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Robert Simpson, Peter Maxwell Davies and Per Nørgård have on the whole tapped into it at the level of large-scale process rather than surface image or style.

So far as the problematic concept of national traditions in twentieth-century symphonism is concerned, it has left traces at least in the sense that Sibelius was taken up with enthusiasm principally in the UK and the USA, while being regarded with widespread incomprehension (at least among critics) in France and Germany. In the latter countries, contributions to the symphony shrank dramatically, in direct proportion both to suspicion of the symphonic ethos and to the turn to alternative aesthetic priorities – such as epicureanism, entertainment, scepticism, alienation and fetishistic games with timbre. In addition, symphonic composition in France had to contend with its inherited association with political conservatism, for which active participants in the tradition such as D'Indy were as much responsible as any commentator.[9] This is one reason why Debussy eschewed the genre, declaring in 1900 that 'the proof of the futility of the symphony has been established since Beethoven'.[10] Blame for premature obituaries of the symphony cannot be laid at the door of critics alone.

Mega-symphonies and anti-symphonies

Bekker offered no comment on the state of symphonic composition in 1918, no diagnosis of or prescription for what in retrospect looks unmistakably like a crisis, and no prognostications of the kind that were much in vogue at this time of competing newly defined –isms. Neither Sibelius nor Nielsen appeared on his intellectual horizons. Indeed they barely did for any Germanic commentator at the time. And had Bekker taken soundings of the Austro-Germanic tradition at almost any point from then until his death in 1937, he could hardly have avoided the conclusion that Mahler proved to be as much a disabling force for symphonists there as he was an enabling one elsewhere. From Bekker's point of view it would have come as a nasty shock to observe that Strauss's 'Alpine' Symphony (1915) – a work as pictorial, self-confident and affirmative as Mahler is philosophical, angst-ridden and doubt-laden – would be the last symphony from that tradition to retain a place in the standard concert repertory.

Not that others in Austria and Germany did not attempt to don the Mahlerian mantle.[11] Arnold Schoenberg for one regarded Mahler as a messianic figure, and his obituary essay is a thinly veiled manifesto, designed to portray himself in the same light as his hero.[12] Having concluded his essay with the battle-cry 'we must fight on, since the Tenth has not yet been revealed to us' (not knowing at that time how much of Mahler's Tenth had actually been composed), Schoenberg set about putting actions to his words. Between 1912 and 1915 he sketched out a symphony that clearly measured itself against the example of Mahler's Eighth, including as it did, at various points in its evolution, vocal settings of Richard Dehmel, Rabindranath Tagore and the Old Testament books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, to be performed by colossal forces.[13] He abandoned the project with only some elements co-opted into his *Jakobsleiter* oratorio – itself incomplete and un-orchestrated – to show for his pains. Evidently the horizons of the 'world' Mahler had sought to encompass symphonically had now become impossibly broad. In fact Schoenberg's desk drawers were littered with unfinished symphonies, the only one of which he returned to was the rebarbative Second Chamber Symphony, begun in 1906, sporadically revisited in the 1910s and finally completed in 1939.

Also emblematic of the crisis was the failure of Schoenberg's pupil Berg to get beyond forty-one bars of the 30- to 45-minute single-movement symphony he planned at roughly the same time as Schoenberg was wrestling with his intractable magnum opus.[14] Those bars are cut from the same cloth as Schoenberg's Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16 (1909), and although this tortured language was perfectly adapted to the expression of alienation, Berg evidently found it impractical to expand to symphonic proportions – not helped by the presence of the overpowering superego of Schoenberg himself. Berg's symphonic impulses deflected instead into the Three Orchestral Pieces of 1913–14, whose title captures their avoidance of the symphonic genre's implicit demand to add up to more than the sum of its parts, in terms of conveying an overarching message or ethos. Those impulses also informed the second act of his opera *Wozzeck* (1914–21), whose five scenes are a simulacrum of a Mahlerian symphony – acknowledged in Berg's programme notes and lectures on the work – albeit largely as a passive container for a drama that is played out by theatrical means.

Equally held in Schoenbergian thrall was Anton Webern, who in 1928 entitled a two-movement chamber work 'Symphony' (a planned third movement was to be summatory, but was abandoned on grounds of tautology with the first). Here again the generic term is applied to what is no more than another passive container, this time for the exploration of abstract polyphony and variation principles by chamber forces, on what was for him admittedly a relatively large canvas. Webern's back was resolutely turned on the symphonic ethos of the post-Beethovenian or post-Mahlerian kinds.

Insofar as the Austro-German symphony survived at all, it was largely within the more modest terms of reference of Hindemith. Hindemith's musical language, derived from Bach by way of Reger and Strauss, was well adapted to the expression of urbanity and cynicism but made for a poor fit with the traditional ethical aspirations of the symphony, which in any case his self-proclaimed emphasis on craftsmanship resisted on principle. Of his five works entitled 'symphony', two are derived from his operas and two are primarily *Gebrauchsmusik* (music for performers' recreation rather than for listeners' edification). His *Mathis der Maler* Symphony (1933–4) is a noble and stirring work, but very much a suite travelling on upgrade, barely distinguishable in generic terms from the 'Symphonic Suite' from Berg's *Lulu* and not angled towards symphonic wholeness even to the limited extent of Prokofiev's opera-derived Third Symphony. In fact, Hindemith's only full-on engagement with the genre was his punchy Symphony in E flat of 1940. The general influence of his pungent linear counterpoint and energetic rhythms on symphonists worldwide was certainly huge, but apart from *Mathis der Mahler* his own symphonies have fallen into a disuse that currently shows no sign of reversing.

As much in the news as Hindemith in the early 1920s, the young Ernst Krenek produced three highly talented symphonies in rapid succession, all of which attempt a continuation of the Mahlerian tone but in the accents of post-Regerian linear counterpoint. The result is a curious sense of disempowerment and despondency that is itself emblematic of the German symphonic crisis. Krenek's two subsequent symphonies from the late 1940s have an unapologetic, gutsy energy but insufficient range of further qualities to earn repertoire status. Such qualities are arguably to be found in Alexander Zemlinsky's exuberantly neo-Romantic *Lyric Symphony* (1922–3) and Kurt Weill's acidic Second (1933–4), the latter written on the cusp of its composer's move from Nazi Germany and lent some degree of symphonic tension by that fraught context. It was, however, not until Karl Amadeus Hartmann's eight numbered symphonies, composed between 1936 and 1962, that Germany again produced a symphonist of something close to international standing, thanks to his creatively potent brews of expressionist and neo-classical ingredients. Yet for all their sterling qualities, these are hardly works that can be ranked for imagination and boldness alongside the contemporary symphonies of Vaughan Williams, Copland, Shostakovich or Prokofiev. Similarly, in the next generation, Hans Werner Henze's ten symphonies (1947–2000), which developed from modest neo-classical beginnings to increasingly expressionist richness and high-flown political and philosophical manifestos, lack the sharp focus of contemporary examples by Michael Tippett, Robert Simpson, Valentin Silvestrov, Giya Kancheli and others to be considered below. Even the three symphonies from the 1970s by Wolfgang Rihm, surely the finest German composer of orchestral and chamber music over the past forty years, are far from the most successful of his works.[15]

The symphonic crisis following the First World War was by no means exclusively an Austro-German phenomenon. So far as utopianism and the aspirations of the 'community-forming' symphony are concerned, it found expression in the United States with the work of the maverick Charles Ives. He managed to bring off the near-impossible in his magnificently sprawling Fourth Symphony (1909–16), which confronts vision and reality in layered textures as prescient aesthetically of Schnittke's First Symphony (1968–72) as they are technically comparable to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. But Ives bit off more than even he could chew with his 'Universe Symphony', sketched between *c.* 1911 and his death in 1954. Here he set out, in full awareness that it could never be more than an aspiration, 'to cast eternal history, the physical universe of all humanity past, present and future, physical and spiritual, to cast them [in] a "universe of tones"'.[16]

Even more obviously doomed to failure was the project known as *Mysterium* that Aleksandr Skryabin was working on in pre-Revolutionary Russia during the twelve years leading up to his untimely death in 1915. With an envisaged performance that would 'involve all people as votaries in a ritual enacting the miracle of terrestrial and cosmic transformation', this was the *augmentatio ad absurdum* of community-forming art.[17] One part of its reconstruction, undertaken by Aleksandr Nemtin from 1970 to 1996, was entitled 'Universe'. Skryabin had already long since abandoned the term 'symphony' in favour of 'poem' (the Third Symphony of 1904, also known as *The Divine Poem*, is pivotal), and his hubristic conception embraced opera, oratorio and symphony in the unique higher form of Mystery. But he did repeatedly talk of his necessarily unfinished magnum opus in terms of symphonies of colours, costumes, gauzes and the like.[18]

It seems that projects of such explicitly cosmic scope needed an additional focal point if completion was going to be a realistic possibility. Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* (1909), to poems of Walt Whitman, is a fine demonstration of precisely that. Intermittently as inspiring, but far less convincingly sustained, are the symphonic colossi of Charles Tournemire (No. 7, *Les Danses de la Vie* of 1918–22, tracing the history of mankind from primitive pre-history to the future), Havergal Brian (No. 1, 'Gothic', 1919–27 – in its combination of a *Faust*-inspired instrumental movement and a choral setting of the Te Deum, very obviously another would-be successor to Mahler's Eighth), Olivier Messiaen (*Turangalîla*, 1945, a celebration of cosmic-divine love, expanded from its initially planned four movements into ten) and Henri Sauguet (No. 2, *Symphonie allégorique* or 'The Seasons', 1949, conceived as an oratorio–ballet–symphony). The French examples come at the far end of a specific national tradition of 'message symphonies' with polemical import, an outgrowth of Beethovenian ethical symphonism that has only recently received its scholarly due.[19]

Expressions of the symphonic crisis are to be found equally at the opposite extreme from such mega-symphonies, in works that in various ways turned away from high-flown existential ambitions. In post-Great War central Europe, not only was the institutional infrastructure that had supported symphonic composition now under severe strain, but its underlying cultural assumptions and self-confidence had largely drained away too. Symptomatic of a wave of anti-symphonic disgust are the two-minute *Symphonia germanica* (1919) by the Bohemian-born Erwin Schulhoff (a vicious send-up of the German national anthem) and other Dada-associated phenomena such as Russian émigré Jef Golisheff's *Anti-Symphony: Musical-Circular Guillotine* (1919), whose title refers to the implement designed to saw off the rusted-over ears of the concert-goer. Milder anti-authoritarian manifestations characteristic of the post-war age also help to define symphonism through its negative image. These include Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* (1917), designed, according to the composer, to 'tease the geese' rather than saw off their ears. This ever-popular work completely ignores the positive polarities of social/national/cosmic affirmation and substitutes playful insouciance and balletic physicality; at the same time, the virtual lack of a negative pole other than that same insouciance places it outside the symphonic mainstream. It would take Prokofiev another twenty-five years to overcome his suspicion of the 'long' symphony, already expressed in his early correspondence with his lifelong friend and specialist in protracted symphonic gloom, Myaskovsky. In June 1908, at work on a pre-first symphony and contemplating the 120 score-pages of Myaskovsky's First, Prokofiev responded:

> Your *longueurs*, as you put it, and the 120 pages, make me very wretched. For what can be worse than a long symphony? To me, the ideal symphony is one that runs for 20, maximum 30, minutes and I'm trying to make mine as compressed as possible. Anything that seems in the least bit pompous I'm crossing out with a pencil, in the most ruthless fashion.[20]

Prokofiev did not have the grace to apologise when three months later his own apprentice-piece symphony weighed in at 131 pages.

At almost exactly the same time as Prokofiev's 'Classical', Stravinsky, then domiciled in Paris but partaking in the broadly based cultural project known as 'Russia abroad', took an even more drastic swerve away from the academicised silver-age Russian symphony he had grown up with (and of which he had produced a talented but routine and derivative example as a student in 1905–7 with his Symphony in E flat). This swerve produced his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* of 1920, an assembly of folk-archaic and religious materials cut-and-pasted into an episodic design that flew in the face of almost every definition of symphonism before or since (except, possibly, at a bizarre tangent, its community-forming power).[21] This was in effect yet another anti-symphony characteristic of the escapism of the time. Its collage-style discontinuities would be hugely influential on resolute symphonic abstainers later in the century, such as Harrison Birtwistle, and so far as actual symphonies are concerned it supplied at least one vital ingredient for the idiosyncratic and maximalised responses of Messiaen's *Turangalîla* and Tippett's Fourth (1976–7).

Nordic and transatlantic renewals

For symphonists looking to get out from under the Austro-German-centred crisis, national distinctiveness remained a tempting option, but by no means a straightforward one. In the United States, it awaited composers who could respond to Dvořák's call to American music to 'strike roots deeply in its own soil' and develop an indigenous concert music based on its own folk heritage.[22] The search for the 'Great American Symphony' that followed was for something less bizarrely individualistic than, yet as open and democratic as, the visionary Ives (whose work remained little known prior to his posthumous rediscovery and whose influence on the symphony in America was negligible until the 1960s), and at the same time for something as well-crafted as, yet less stultifyingly academic than, the nineteenth-century examples of the likes of John Knowles Paine, George F. Bristow, George Templeton Strong and George Chadwick. Conductor Serge Koussevitzky played a sizeable part in commissioning and performing works to that end during his tenure at the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1924 to 1949. And Nadia Boulanger's school in Paris had a catalytic role in nurturing the technique and neo-classical outlook of numerous Americans who pursued the elusive goal, whether they resisted her influence (as in the case of Roy Harris, who hit something very close to the bull's-eye with his post-Sibelian Third Symphony in 1938) or embraced it (as did Aaron Copland, whose impressive Third Symphony of 1946 creaked under the burden of striving to be an adequate victory symphony).[23] Other musically more developed nations such as Poland, which, like the United States, neverthless lacked a vigorous nineteenth-century symphonic tradition, had shown signs of evolving one from nationalistic roots, as in Ignaz Paderewski's *Polonia* (1903–7) and Mieczysław Karłowicz's *Rebirth* (1907). But an alternative career and early death, respectively, prevented those individuals from developing as symphonists, while the more richly talented Karol Szymanowski adopted the tag of symphony mainly as an intensifier of other genres (tone poem, cantata, piano concerto in his Second, Third and Fourth Symphonies, respectively).

The boldest and most direct confrontations with the central-European symphonic malaise came from the North. Carl Nielsen, who had an ongoing project to renew Danish national song, nevertheless had to recognise during the Great War (in which his country was neutral) that 'nationalism, formerly the object of such pride, has become a kind of spiritual syphilis'.[24] Like Schulhoff, he experienced the need to enshrine that disillusionment in a kind of anti-symphonism, but in his case that led not to escapism or cynicism but to an enhancement of the negative dramatic pole, which in turn demanded to be balanced by enhanced positives. Allied to a strong creative will and to trust in intuition rather than inherited schemes, this produced a uniquely energetic sense of renewal, prophetic of later developments in the Soviet Union. Yet it was only decades after Nielsen's death that his music gained a receptive audience outside the Nordic region, and even then few in France or Germany could find the wavelength.

Nielsen and Sibelius had remarkably little contact with one other, and their mutual respect only burgeoned into outright influence in a minor way from Nielsen's point of view and not at all from Sibelius's. Nevertheless the coincidental parallels in their symphonic careers are illuminating. Each produced a symphonic masterwork in 1911 that would prove pivotal in their output. For Nielsen it was his Third Symphony, the *Sinfonia espansiva*, whose title encapsulates the outward-looking energy that makes this one of the most invigorating symphonies since Beethoven and Brahms (who are among its main stylistic progenitors). For Sibelius it was his untitled Fourth, examined in detail by

Daniel Grimley in Chapter 12, whose resolutely stoical outlook is symbolised in its blankly staring *mezzo-forte* ending, after the possibility of a Tchaikovsky *Romeo and Juliet*-style lyrical consummation has been glimpsed but rejected. At the heart of Sibelius's profoundly discomfiting symphonic drama is a fusion of Wagnerian, Brucknerian and Tchaikovskian elements. 'Anti-modern' it may be, in the composer's words, but only in the sense of turning its back on luxuriance, self-indulgence and exhibitionism.

The follow-ups to these symphonies were each composed while war was raging in Europe. Engaging with that experience at anything deeper than a surface level entailed the most intense creative struggles of Nielsen's and Sibelius's symphonic careers. Those struggles are reflected both in the music itself and in various documented layers of the creative process, but the result in each case – Nielsen's Fourth and Sibelius's Fifth – is a reaffirmation of the Beethovenian *per ardua ad astra* archetype. Such is the risk level along the way, and the willpower exerted in order to achieve reaffirmation, that each work has gained a firm foothold in the permanent repertoire, and together they confirm a fundamental shift in the symphony's geographical centre of activity.

In Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, the title *The Inextinguishable* is a neuter noun: that which is inextinguishable, i.e. the Life Force. Here the honest-to-goodness exhilaration of the *Sinfonia espansiva* is confronted with far more explicit negativity than ever before in Nielsen's output, memorably externalised in the Finale by two sets of timpani pitted both against each other and in tandem against the rest of the orchestra. The outcome is a blazing reassertion of a lyrical theme in Sibelian thirds whose adaptability has marked it out along the way for Darwinian survival. Sibelius's Fifth, untitled as are all his numbered symphonies, overcomes directionless lethargy and works its way round to a pantheistic celebration of tonality and the perfect cadence.[25] As in Sibelius's Second Symphony, the trajectory is towards hymn-like breakthrough, but this is no longer a hymn swelled with nationalist pride, still less with religious faith, but rather one that conveys euphoria through the coordination of layers of motion. That euphoria is redoubled by the presence of associative meaning, since the layers in question comprise runic chant and symbols of Nature both in its immediate manifestation (the famous horn theme inspired by a flock of swans) and in its underlying rock-like permanence (the augmentation of that same theme in the bass register).

Both Nielsen's and Sibelius's symphonies work with the inherited assumptions of large-scale symphonic form, but not within them. Ever since his First Symphony (1891–2), Nielsen had taken a pragmatic approach to tonal layout, allowing movements or works to end elsewhere than their starting-points. This phenomenon has been labelled 'progressive tonality'. But more important than any calculated directional strategy involved is the sense of adventure and openness to experience that motivates it. Mahler, too, was prepared to end in a different key from where he had begun (as he did in symphonies nos. 2, 4, 5, 7 and 9, as Chapter 10 investigates below), and there too the idea is evidently to give primacy to the psychological journey over the imperative to return home. In Nielsen's case, the journey is as intensely experienced within movements as between them, and the effect is arguably more immediate than with Mahler, thanks to greater concentration and focus, arising from more transparent textures and more classical time-scales. For Sibelius, even if he fashioned the drama of the Fifth Symphony out of resistance to and ultimate affirmation of a goal tonality, the return home remained an unchallenged given. But the large-scale layout of his symphonic movements was by no means so predestined. Only after a painful process of revision did he come up with the Fifth Symphony's masterly elision of first movement and Scherzo, while the design of the Scherzo in itself stakes his claim to being the finest exponent of the large-scale *accelerando* in musical history. Whereas Mahler could not easily sustain an affirmative tone and had to let his material fragment, Sibelius could not easily sustain a mood of fragmentation and felt driven to reaffirm. Different temperaments and world views may lean towards one or the other outlook (it is striking that few conductors have been equally at home with both). But the point is that both Mahler and Sibelius squared up to the polarity of affirmation and fragmentation so symbolic of the modern world, and fashioned mighty symphonic dramas out of it.

Nielsen revisited the existential drama of 'The Inextinguishable' in his Fifth Symphony (1920–2), now with even greater programmatic explicitness matched by even surer structural mastery. 'Bloody trenches music' was the response of one of his friends to the mayhem of the first movement, where the side drum attempts a coup against the rest of the orchestra. But behind the Symphony's conflict-torn surfaces, the fundamental dualism was something more abstract, noted by Nielsen in his draft score as 'dark, resting forces; awoken forces' and in an interview as 'resting forces in contrast to active ones'.[26] For Sibelius, the balance shifted back in favour of darkness in the comparatively rarefied world of his Sixth Symphony (1923), a remarkable instance of four supposedly fast(-ish) movements that nevertheless leave a fundamental impression of inwardness and self-denial, as if predicting the composer's ultimate retreat into creative silence. In the mid-1920s, when new kinds of cultural polarity offered themselves – shallow, hedonistic positives and deep, suppressed negatives – Nielsen and Sibelius pursued their respective strategies of engagement and disengagement. Nielsen struck out on a path of proto-polystylism in his *Sinfonia semplice* (1924–5), whose surfaces are riven by protest, panic, wistfulness and satire. In the process he drew – entirely coincidentally – similar implications from the spirit of the age as the teenage Shostakovich was doing while composing his First Symphony at exactly the same time. Meanwhile, Sibelius was tapping ever deeper into elemental forces of Nature and tying the symphonic threads more tightly than ever before in his single-movement Seventh (1924). Nielsen's angina and Sibelius's chronic self-doubt saw to it that their contributions to the symphony each finished before the second quarter of the century.

With the conclusion of those two symphonic careers came, in effect, the end of the generation of symphonists that had grown up alongside the later symphonies of Brahms, Bruckner, Tchaikovsky and Dvořák. The adaptability from which Nielsen and Sibelius both drew strength, and which in turn lent force to their renewal of the symphony as a genre, came partly from their openness of attitude, but also from other fundamental qualities. For Nielsen, these were empathy and an expanding world-view, which steered him around the temptations of megalomaniac utopian subjectivity and of brittle, cynical objectivity – the chief cause and aftershock, respectively, of the general symphonic crisis. With Sibelius, it was an ability to suggest more than he stated – something none of his many followers managed to emulate successfully. For Nielsen, the symphony was the vehicle for adventures into the unknown, in which the range of new experience was not merely welcomed but also actively processed, with nothing discarded in terms of style, and with reach and grasp advancing synergetically. His symphonic career can be roughly conceptualised as an ever-widening wedge-shape. For Sibelius it was more a matter of digging ever deeper towards a core of truth, discarding inessentials, spurning comfort, human presence and ultimately the vehicle of symphonic composition altogether. For Nielsen the symphony was a manifestation of the human mind's capacity for growth; for Sibelius it was the capacity for penetration.

It was the exhilaration of Nielsen's and Sibelius's symphonic journeys, and the sense of their inner necessity and immunity from fashion statement, that gave impulse to their careers in the post-Great War era. This was a time when the Western world's self-confidence was being rebuilt in material terms but was still groping for new spiritual, cultural and aesthetic bases. It was also a time when near-contemporaries such as Elgar, Glazunov, Rachmaninoff, Reinhold Glière and Josef Suk – all of whom had composed superb symphonies in the Mahlerian age – put their symphonic careers on hold or abandoned them altogether. Nielsen and Sibelius stand head and shoulders above their symphonic contemporaries because they not only asked fundamental questions of the symphony and its idealist conceptions but also proposed hard-won solutions that neither leant on the crutches of delusion nor represented a lowering of sights. In effect they built in, and dealt with, the negativity that German symphonists in the wake of Mahler found disabling. Ultimately, the symbolism of their symphonies reflects precisely the kind of inclusiveness and self-reliance that Ives was preaching in America but could not match with symphonic know-how. The natural, if unwitting, heir to Nielsen's humanism-under-threat would be Shostakovich. The heirs to Sibelius, in many cases fully conscious of their debt, were many and varied, including Arnold Bax, William Walton and Vaughan Williams in Britain, Howard Hanson and Roy Harris in America, later Aulis Sallinen in Finland, and later still Peter Maxwell Davies – testimony in itself to the archetypal power of his symphonic explorations of motion.

Around Nielsen and Sibelius in the post-war era a host of more minor symphonists were cultivating various brands of escapism, iconoclasm and avoidance strategies – exemplified in the so-called Celtic twilight of Bax, Rutland Boughton and Granville Bantock, in the hedonistic nostalgia of Zemlinsky's 'Lyric' Symphony and Szymanowski's Third ('Song of the Night', 1914–16) and in the edgy Parisian *style mécanique* of Prokofiev's Second (1924–5). Such symphonies were capable of producing stunning effects, and they stand far above dozens of their contemporaries. The pre-war cult of ecstasy and euphoria lives on in them, as it did in the more embattled arenas favoured by Sibelius and Nielsen. In the Nordic cases, however, ecstasy was earned through struggle, and euphoria arose from coordinated motion, which they derived from the world around them; those are the qualities that have probably helped them secure repertoire status. In the ten-year period after their last symphonies it is hard to detect achievements on a comparable level. While the musical world waited in vain for Sibelius's Eighth – whose manuscript he eventually immolated – unease was growing that the very capacity of the symphony to produce durable goods was disappearing and that Sibelius's much-lauded model for renewal might after all not prove viable. It was against this background that a startling re-engagement with symphonic ideals would emerge in the 1930s.

Competitions, commissions and discussions

In 1927 the Columbia Broadcasting Company announced a competition for the best completion of Schubert's 'Unfinished' B minor Symphony, with a view to the following year's centenary of the composer's death. The parameters were soon widened, to include any new symphony in the Schubertian lyrical spirit. Regional juries were appointed, to which at least 500 works were submitted for preliminary assessment. Final deliberations seem to have been between Czesław Marek's *Sinfonia*, Franz Schmidt's Third, and the eventual winner, Kurt Atterberg's Sixth. Interviewed after his award of $10,000, the Swede claimed not to have taken the competition too seriously (the piece is indeed feeble), and in the resulting mini-scandal his prize-winning work became known as the 'Dollar' Symphony.

The significant thing about the Schubert competition is not so much that it produced no outstanding works, though it could be argued that among the also-rans Havergal Brian's *Gothic* (whose first movement only was submitted) was a good deal more worthy of an award than any of the actual finalists. Rather it was the perceived need for a new lyrical symphony at all. This perception evidently reflected a widespread dissatisfaction – well before the decade was out – with the iconoclasm of the 'Roaring Twenties', whose symphonic representatives include Aaron Copland's *Organ Symphony*, George Antheil's *Jazz Symphony*, Prokofiev's Second and even Nielsen's *Sinfonia semplice* (in which, however, iconoclasm is objectified as the negative pole). Over the next few years a spirit of re-engagement filtered into the symphonic tradition, given social impetus by new challenges: the rise of fascist dictatorships in Europe, the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 and the subsequent economic Depression. The partial re-bourgeoisification of the Soviet Union under Stalin played its part, too, as did emigration from France and Germany to the United States, where the institution of the symphony concert was younger and more vital – albeit in largely conservative ways – than in Central Europe. Re-engagement with the symphony can be traced in the work of composers as diverse as Prokofiev, who was trumpeting the slogan 'New Simplicity' well before his Fourth Symphony actually embodied it in 1930, Hindemith, Copland (already in his Second Symphony of 1932–3), Shostakovich and Walton. And it has parallels in the work of those who continued to shun the symphony, such as Schoenberg and Bartók.

If the Columbia Schubert competition produced no lasting additions to the symphonic repertoire, Serge Koussevitzky had better fortune in 1930 when he commissioned new symphonic works for the fiftieth anniversary of his orchestra, the Boston Symphony. Apart from such estimable pieces as Ravel's Piano Concerto for Left Hand, Gershwin's Second Rhapsody and Copland's Symphonic Ode, Koussevitzky was rewarded with at least two symphonies that still cling to the edges of repertoire status (Roussel's Third and Prokofiev's Fourth), two that have since faded but would have outclassed anything in the Columbia competition (Honegger's First and

Howard Hanson's Second) and one that stands as a major landmark: Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. Other American orchestras soon followed Koussevitzky's lead in commissioning new symphonic work, with broadcasting stations and eventually even universities not far behind.

At one level, Stravinsky's readoption of the generic title of symphony is no more than a response to the Koussevitzky commission. A recent returnee to the Russian Orthodox communion, he wanted to compose three psalm settings, and it happened that their trajectory from supplication to thanks to praise and epilogue, together with their contrasts of tempo and mood, mimicked the external features of a symphony. In the context of Stravinsky's drastic re-imagining of the genre ten years earlier in the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, the *Symphony of Psalms* pointed back towards the symphonic tradition. Ten years further on, he would produce a still closer simulacrum of the classical symphony, though still keeping his distance from its ethical dimensions. His Symphony in C (1938–40) betrays nothing of his fraught personal circumstances at the time, nor of the looming global conflict. It plays at being 'in C', just as it plays at adopting the good manners of symphonic motion. Again the piece was composed for America, where Stravinsky had recently settled. By contrast, his *Symphony in Three Movements* (1942–5) took a step in the direction of the ethical concerns of traditional symphonism, at least if Stravinsky's own remarks concerning the Finale's images of goose-stepping soldiers and Hiroshima are to be trusted (his comments on his own music are almost compulsively misleading). In structural terms, however, the generic relationship is if anything looser than before, since the three pieces only came together as a symphony thanks to a commission from the New York Philharmonic for such a work, as the title partially acknowledges.

Stravinsky's flirtations with symphonism are prophetic in a number of ways. Taken as a whole, they anticipate a phenomenon of the 1960s and 70s, when composers such as Penderecki, Berio, Schnittke and Maxwell Davies who had previously shunned the genre hit the headlines by returning to the symphony, on their own modernist or postmodernist terms. The *Symphony of Psalms* stands as godfather to the new wave of spiritual symphonism and of the fusion of ancient and modern styles that characterised another phase of genre renewal in the second half of the century. And the Symphony in C and *Symphony in Three Movements* are joint role-models for the opportunistic brand of minimalism represented by John Adams (who referenced them blatantly in his quasi-symphony, *Harmonielehre*, of 1985) and by numerous other Americans at the turn of the twenty-first century. There is no need to look that far ahead to detect the influence of the *Symphony of Psalms*. Messiaen may not have needed its example in order to compose his *Turangalîla Symphony* in 1945 – whose techniques arise rather from *The Rite of Spring* and the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. But already in 1940 Britten's *Sinfonia da requiem*, in 1943 Hanson's Fourth Symphony, 'Requiem', and in 1945 Honegger's *Symphonie liturgique* were mapping movements from the mass onto those of the traditional symphony, as Schnittke would do in his Second Symphony of 1979–80.

In the end it was neither competitions nor commissions, nor even apostasy from anti-symphonic modernism, that produced the definitive renewal of the 1930s, though all of those were part of the enabling ethos. The renewal happened not in the Nordic regions, where Sibelius and Nielsen had been such vital forces during the previous three decades, nor in France, for all that Nadia Boulanger's harmony class at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau from 1921 was nurturing it. The decisive breakthroughs, scarcely foreseeable before 1930, came rather in the United States, England and above all in the Soviet Union.

Not resting on his laurels after his serendipitous commissioning in 1930, Koussevitzky kept up his exhortations to American symphonists to produce 'a great symphony from the West'. Roy Harris's First in 1933 was an early near-miss. But the breakthrough piece was his Third (1937), which managed to fuse the open-spaces frontier mentality of the American dream with single-movement symphonic momentum inherited from Sibelius.[27] Harris's Third certainly captured the American imagination far more immediately than did Rachmaninoff's (1936), though the latter has stood the test of time rather better, making a powerful case for the viability of the nostalgic symphony in the modern world (as do the Fourth and Fifth symphonies of Arnold Bax, 1931 and 1931–2). Rachmaninoff's return to the symphony after nearly thirty years has a remarkable near-parallel in the Third Symphony that Elgar left incomplete on his death in 1934 – an emblematic year for the English symphony.

To what extent individual artistic maturity or national/global contexts fostered the symphony's renewal in the mid-1930s remains an open question. Certainly an element of weariness with the brittle cynicism of the Roaring Twenties must have played its part, along with the gathering clouds of new dictatorships and potential conflict. But the violent streak unexpectedly revealed by Vaughan Williams in his Fourth Symphony (1931–4) – something like César Franck imagined through the prism of Hindemith – can be traced independently of the *zeitgeist* back to the Satanic music for his 'masque for dancing' *Job* (1928), which supplied almost as many impulses for his equally fine Fifth and Sixth Symphonies (1938–43 and 1944–7). Walton's First (1931–5) is evidently an attempt to marry the symphonic idiom of Sibelius with the Elgarian ceremonial tradition (which makes for a creaky finale after three strikingly brilliant movements). Edmund Rubbra's First (1935–7) stands not so very far behind them as a creative achievement, and it is animated by an attempt to reconcile symphonic momentum with centuries-old polyphony,[28] just as Tippett's First (1944–5) is a fusion of Beethovenian fugue, Purcellian ground bass and Hindemithian harmony. Even the arch-Romantic Arnold Bax, after his highly Sibelian Fifth (1932), produced a remarkably tough and spare Sixth (1934), regarded by his champions with some justification as his symphonic pinnacle. The cluster of tough-minded English symphonies around 1934 seems to bear out Constant Lambert's contention – in his polemical book *Music Ho!* published that year – to the effect that Sibelius was a far more productive influence than Schoenberg.[29] And while Britten's *Simple Symphony*, also assembled in 1934, is a playful anti-symphonic romp in the manner of Prokofiev's 'Classical', it shares the same quality as most of its fellow-countrymen of facing away both from the folksong tradition (which had been memorably reconciled with symphonism in Vaughan Williams's Third, 'Pastoral', of 1921) and from the prospects of a new cataclysm in central Europe.

In fact, none of these attempted or actual renewals were as fraught in their background circumstances, yet as profoundly consequential, as their contemporaries in the Soviet Union: above all Shostakovich's Fourth and Fifth Symphonies (1934–6, 1937). Here there is no question that the socio-political context is germane, and both works square up to it. Indeed the ferment from which Shostakovich's twin symphonic peaks arose is unique in the extent to which it determined the environment in which composers worked; unique, too, in the degree of documentation and the heat of argument generated. The three-day 'Discussion on Soviet Symphonism' hosted at the Soviet Composers' Union in February 1935 came at the far end of a decade of Soviet debate about the genre. Among the strands of those arguments were: how and whether the legacies of Beethoven, Mahler and the pre-Revolutionary Russian symphony might be co-opted to the cause of the new society, as Pauline Fairclough elaborates in Chapter 16; whether a new topicality based on approved socialist themes could be reconciled with those legacies; and whether new hybrid genres might more productively embrace the disparate interests of the proletariat and the intelligentsia. Those debates were all given a new impulse from 1932 thanks to the new-born concept of Socialist Realism, first applied in the field of literature. Its undeclared purpose was to unite the power-driven agendas of the Party with the ethical traditions of Russian culture. But its mendaciously prescribed 'truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development', hard enough for writers to adopt, was impossibly nebulous for composers.

Shostakovich, who had plenty to say at the 1935 ‘Discussion’ about the successes and failures of the Soviet symphony, had already announced his work on a ‘symphonic credo’, namely his Fourth. Debates continue as to how this white-hot masterpiece lives up to or subverts Socialist-Realist expectations. Less debatably, its own undeclared articles of faith may be read from its virtuosic welding together of the everyday and the transcendent, pushing the Mahlerian understanding of the ‘world’ to regions where utopia and dystopia are hard to separate and where credo and anathema are pronounced with equal vehemence. The fine line Shostakovich treads between utopia and dystopia, euphoria and terror, is one reason why his Fourth Symphony feels like the most exciting and authentic symphonic document of its decade. Composition of the Finale was interrupted in January and February 1936 by the notorious dual denunciations in *Pravda* of his recent operatic and balletic output. There he was informed in no uncertain terms that his recent creative path could not serve as a model either for him or for any of his composer colleagues. Whether or not he considered that the Fourth Symphony might actually help the cause of his rehabilitation could be argued either way. He was certainly not to know that the purges of the Party carried out in 1936 would escalate into full-scale civic Terror in the following year. Although he completed the Fourth Symphony and put it into rehearsal, he had to bow to *force majeure* and withdraw it just before the scheduled premiere, which had to wait another twenty-five years. In an astonishing act of self-reinvention, Shostakovich came up with his Fifth Symphony in 1937. Here the narrowed field of stylistic vision, compared to the Fourth, was richly compensated for by a more disciplined language and structure, trading a degree of vivid representation for gains in reflective philosophical wisdom. In its expressive depths and humanity, the Fifth Symphony offered a safety valve for a population at the height of Stalin’s Great Terror, when the more explicit languages of words and images had become too dangerous for candid communication. The symphony was not unintelligently glossed – by author Aleksey Tolstoy, using a standard cliché of Socialist-Realist literary criticism – as ‘the Growth of a Personality’, a formulation that strikes much the same balance between official acceptability and humanist values as the music itself. As a feat of artistic manoeuvring – both within the panoply of Soviet symphonic styles represented by Shostakovich’s most talented Soviet contemporaries (Gavriil Popov, Nikolay Myaskovsky, Vladimir Shcherbachov, Vissarion Shebalin and hosts of others) and within the vacillating agendas of Socialist Realism – the Fifth was an achievement no less staggering than the Fourth. Even in countries that had little or no knowledge of such manoeuvrings, it registered as epoch-making, though approval was far from universal. Stravinsky and Bartók were almost as scornful of Shostakovich's apparent stylistic backsliding as *Pravda* had been of his previous apparent progressivism. Controversies apart, Shostakovich's Fifth soon established itself as the first example of a truly 'community-forming' symphony since Mahler.

In its aspirational *per ardua ad astra* trajectory, unabashedly exploiting the new democratic idiom of film music alongside that of traditional symphonism, Shostakovich's Fifth had managed to hit on a musical formula for Socialist Realism that none of the doctrine's proponents could clearly define or envisage. At a stroke he also brought about what many at the February 1935 'Discussion' had wishfully and prematurely declared: the passing of the symphonic torch from a decadent West to the bolshevised Soviet Union. He would consolidate that achievement four years after the fifth, when his Seventh Symphony, the 'Leningrad', produced another archetypal example of the symphony's community-forming power, enshrining the cruelty of war, resistance and hope in a hugely morale-boosting work, three quarters of it composed in the besieged city itself. The 'Leningrad' became the object of an unprecedented media frenzy – above all in the USA[30] – and together with the Fifth it became a touchstone for critical–aesthetic debates in the West. Hardly a single symphonist anywhere in the world after 1942 could continue to compose symphonies without having Shostakovich's Fifth and Seventh at some level in their consciousness, whether or not they shared similar aspirations. Meanwhile his Sixth Symphony (1939) showed that he could deploy similar theatrical and cinematographic elements to other, more personal and more elusive ends.

The number of symphonists who also wrote film scores, and indeed the number of film composers who wrote symphonies, is legion. Not only Shostakovich but also Honegger, Britten, Walton, Copland, Vaughan Williams and Prokofiev head the former category, with Miklós Rózsa, Bernard Hermann, Franz Waxman and Erich Wolfgang Korngold making worthy contributions in the latter. Along with the imagery of film, the ambivalent tone of voice in Shostakovich's Fifth gave a new lease of life to musical pathos, which might have been thought forever superseded by the sobriety of neo-classicism. Within the symphonic tradition, Shostakovich had learned that tone from Mahler, but his instincts had also been sharpened by the examples of Stravinsky and Hindemith. Even Prokofiev, whose early aversion to symphonic pathos ran deep, proved to be not immune to the power of ambivalence. This is plain from the final pages of his two greatest symphonies – the wartime Fifth (1944) and the post-war Sixth (1945–7). Even his outwardly modest Seventh (1952) ends – at least in its original version – in a wistful retrospection that questions rather than asserts. Having edged his way back to the traditional symphony via a Third Symphony (1928) derived from his lurid opera *The Fiery Angel* and a Fourth (1929–30) based on his far more sober ballet, *The Prodigal Son*, the fact that Prokofiev eventually accomplished so complete a return to the 'long' symphony is remarkable enough in itself. But without the example of Shostakovich, that return would surely not have happened, or at least not with a fraction of the artistic potency it did – though this is a point Prokofiev would have hated to acknowledge. The quality of Shostakovichian ambivalence emerges all the more strikingly when 'victory' symphonies such as Shostakovich's Ninth of 1945 and Prokofiev's Sixth are compared with others where it is absent. Within the Soviet tradition, Aram Khachaturian's gloriously kitschy Third of 1947, also titled Symphony-Poem, is a good example, with its coruscating organ obbligato and fifteen extra trumpets. Elsewhere Copland's extremely blatant Third of 1944–6 can be entered into evidence, with its grafting of his 1942 *Fanfare for the Common Man* into the Finale (even allowing for the fact that the fanfare itself was written more with the oppressed working classes in mind than anything to do with the American Dream or the War effort). Among other symphonies of the mid-1940s, only Vaughan Williams's vehement and desolate Sixth (1944–7) has the stature of Prokofiev's and Shostakovich's finest, and only Messiaen's *Turangalîla* (1946–8), with its very different agenda, holds a comparably firm place in the repertoire.

Conflictlessness and cold war

Neither Beethoven nor Mahler had to contemplate barbarism on the scale of the two world wars, the atrocities of the Nazi death camps and the Gulag, or the cataclysm of the atom bomb. In the post-war era these enormities were visually accessible as never before, with the exception of the Gulag, where memoir-based literature was the prime source, and a time-delayed one at that, thanks to the survival of Stalin's dictatorship until his death in March 1953. Symphonists in these years who clung to Mahlerian ideals, or who might have been otherwise inclined towards creative acts of commemoration, had only a shaky legacy to build on, especially in the Soviet Union. There Shostakovich's Eighth (1943), written in the midst of war but looking beyond it, and Prokofiev's Sixth, written after the war but looking back on its horrors, might have pointed the way. But both works were banned in the aftermath of the 'anti-formalism' campaign that hit Soviet composers in 1948. That campaign, spearheaded by Stalin's henchman Andrey Zhdanov and hence known as Zhdanovshchina (the Zhdanov business), urged composers to re-engage with music for the 'people', not least by returning to ethnic sources, rather than add to the mountain of supposedly elitist symphonies, quartets and sonatas.[31] The ban itself was short-lived, but the works affected (also including Khachaturian's Third Symphony) remained too hot for Soviet promoters and practitioners to handle, which in turn delayed their potential export to the West. Shostakovich read the omens accurately and held off from symphonic composition until the death of Stalin in 1953, when he produced his Tenth. Even this masterpiece had to undergo a three-day peer review in the Union of Composers before being approved for continued public consumption. Since then, however, Shostakovich's Tenth has become widely regarded as his symphonic masterpiece, thanks to its integration of immanence and transcendence at a higher level than the Fourth Symphony, to its harnessing of Beethovenian economy to Bachian counterpoint, to its sheer force of musical personality and not least to its unimpeachable orchestral technique.

Shostakovich's Tenth is in many ways a summary of the achievements of mid-twentieth-century ethical symphonism, and not only in the USSR. Yet it was also to prove an end-point. Though numerous Soviet symphonists responded to its challenge, as they would again in the 1960s following the delayed premiere of Shostakovich's Fourth in December 1961, he himself turned to other branches of the genre – principally to the programmatic-epic (in symphonies nos. 11 and 12) and to the cantata/song-cycle hybrid (in symphonies nos. 13 and 14). Vaughan Williams in England did similarly after his central symphonic triptych, with his film-score-based *Sinfonia Antartica* (No. 7), his elliptical Eighth and his stoical Ninth. Even after the post-Stalin Thaw had given way to a prolonged 'Stagnation' from the mid 1960s, the channels of information exchange that had been tentatively established with the West remained more or less open, ensuring that the Soviet symphony would be less insulated from the rest of the world than before, which also meant more susceptible to Western hang-ups. Gradually the heroic-epic symphony in its pure form became even less viable than it otherwise would have been, though there were still numerous attempts to fashion hybrids with concepts permeating from the West.

Even in the late-Stalin era, from 1948–53, there are some parallels to be drawn between East and West. Soviet symphonists, cowed in the aftermath of the Zhdanovshchina, had to put high ambitions on hold, and the resulting more or less compulsory mildness of tone became known – and increasingly deprecated – by the term coined for that kind of literature: 'conflictlessness'. In the West, too, in the aftermath of the Second World War and genocide, and with the perceived nuclear threat in the headlines, the reaction was to look inwards or backwards, disavowing music's potential community-forming power altogether and proceeding as though only a retreat from humanism into material objectivity or mysticism was artistically responsible. The projects of the 1950s Western avant-garde were seemingly diametrically opposed to Soviet Socialist Realism in stylistic terms, since they were for the most part recklessly adventurist, experimental and hostile to all such received genres as symphony, rather than, as in the USSR, guardedly pusillanimous, conservative and wedded to the past. But the two traditions were at one in their disengagement from social issues. An unwitting pawn in the Cold War, the Western avant-garde was sustained by a network of pundits and politicians who saw its revivified modernism as a potential bulwark against the no-less doctrinaire world view of a newly militant Eastern bloc. And when the CIA's covert financial sustenance collapsed in the 1970s, thanks to economic strictures consequent on the Middle Eastern oil crisis, so too did much of the avant-garde's delusional mythology, along with its hostility to the symphony.

Western symphonists were also in the mood for detoxification. Hence the phenomenon of the 'Cheltenham Symphony' in England, named after the Festival supported by a well-intentioned Arts Council. From the late-1940s through to the 1960s, the Cheltenham Festival commissioned dozens of well-constructed, workmanlike but musically dilute neo-classical symphonies, almost all with worthy aims but narrow horizons, from the likes of Lennox Berkeley, Peter Racine Fricker, Alun Hoddinott, Alan Rawsthorne, William Wordsworth and William Alwyn. Meanwhile in America, institutions such as the Juilliard School and the better-endowed of the universities and orchestras provided havens not only for the experimentalist avant-garde but also for redoubtable symphonists such as Peter Mennin, Paul Creston and William Schuman. Their works were generally speaking as hermetically sealed against the contamination of the outside world as those of the avant-garde, and therefore proved equally ephemeral. Symphonies far superior to theirs were composed in the 1950s by mavericks and independents such as the Dane Vagn Holmboe (No. 8 *Sinfonia boreale*, 1951) and the Englishmen Robert Simpson (No. 2, 1955–6) and Malcolm Arnold (nos. 2 and 3, 1953 and 1957), all of whom found ways to make the Nordic priority of elemental animation feel like part of an ethos of reconstruction. Even a symphony as fine as Tippett's Second (1956–7) – possibly the only one from the 1950s worthy of mention in the same breath as Shostakovich's Tenth (as Mieczysław Weinberg's Fifth of 1962 definitely is) – operates at a highly abstract level of post-Vivaldian-cum-Stravinskyian energeticism. That a composer already as deeply engaged as Tippett with existential and contemporary political issues should only feel able to incorporate them into symphonies after the seismic shifts of the 1960s, is indicative. It would take those shifts, and the painful confrontations they entailed, to re-establish symphonic composition on something like its former level of prestige.

Anti-anti-symphonies, apostates and apostles

The defining event in the symphonic/anti-symphonic battlegrounds of the 1960s was the *Sinfonia* of 1968–9 by Luciano Berio (another focal work of Chapter 12). This deliberately pluralistic rag-bag of a piece is admittedly as much a prisoner of its fashion-conscious decade as the fashions it seeks to comment on. It stands as a culmination of years of symphonic confrontation with phenomena supposedly antithetical to the genre: twelve-note constructivism; stylistic mixtures; chamber and other idiosyncratic forces and layouts; concerto elements; incorporation of vocal/choral forces; aleatoricism (chance elements) and sonorism (extended instrumental techniques and noise effects); religious contemplation and political engagement. (One of the few elements of this kind that did not spark many symphonists was the newish field of electronics, though it did produce at least one superb example in Roberto Gerhard's Symphony No. 3, *Collages*, of 1960.) The results were often appealingly weird and wacky, occasionally wonderful, and in many cases explicable as anti-authoritarian responses to a decade that witnessed the brink of global nuclear conflict (the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962), race riots, the Vietnam War and military conflict in the Middle East.

Among the more headline-grabbing symphonies in the 1960s and early 1970s, the weakest (such as Arvo Pärt's First and Second, or Hans Werner Henze's Sixth) wore one or more of those anti-symphonic elements as embarrassing fashion statements, rather as middle-aged hippies adopted alternative lifestyles. The finest, by contrast, built them in to their symphonies as new negative poles, to be wrestled with in the service of existential conflict on a new plane. Examples of such accentuation of the negative are Shostakovich's Fourteenth (1969), whose contrasting tonal and twelve-note ideas support a dualism of physicality and death, and his Fifteenth (1971), where quotation and self-quotation participate in a drama of memory and creativity. Similarly, in Tippett's Third (1970–2), blues and quotation from Beethoven's Ninth combine to symbolise a questioning of the brotherhood of man. Aesthetic success or failure apart, such renewed receptivity to the notion – and indeed the problems - of community-forming symphonism was furthered by the rediscovery of Mahler following his centenary in 1960 and around the same time of Ives as the godfather to avant-garde experimentalism of a non-doctrinaire, inclusive kind, not to mention the global phenomenon of The Beatles. In their very different ways each of these offered models of transcendental messages conveyed through a fusion of musical vernacular and rarefied experiment.

Socio-economic parallels between the transition from the Roaring 1920s to the 1930s and that from the Swinging 1960s to the 1970s offer a useful means of orientation. In each case, an economic crisis issued a wake-up call to Western societies (felt intensely after 1973 when the OPEC nations suddenly increased the price of oil) and permissive hedonism gave way to more sober outlooks. In terms of the symphony, practice had already been evolving less by expansion and growth than through encounters with new negatives. As the examples of Shostakovich and Tippett suggest, these encounters found a place in a replay of traditional symphonic dramas but now at a higher level – involving contrasts not just between themes and movements but between styles and aesthetics or belief systems. Even Robert Simpson, having published his desiderata for 'true' symphonism in 1967, just at the time when symphonists were deriving new energy from most of the qualities he was excluding, was himself in the middle of a symphonic sabbatical. From this he would return with a vengeance in the 1970s with a succession of imposing works, each of which showed, from the perspective of one who had never dabbled in modernism, how such 'unsymphonic' elements as twelve-note aggregations and atonal stasis could be incorporated as new negative poles. Such negativity, Simpson the composer realised, can create friction and demand to be dealt with, rather than merely presented as neutral material. Simpson's mature symphonies were therefore, in effect, anti-anti-symphonies, and their extensive paraphrases of Beethoven (in No. 4, 1972) or quotations of Bruckner (in No. 9, 1986) appear virtually as manifestos for the enduring eloquence of the symphony in the late twentieth century. But not only that; for Simpson's concentration on substance and inner drive unmasks whole swathes of audience-friendly symphonism – especially in the USA – as feeble-minded by comparison. Conspicuous exceptions to that generalisation are the three symphonies of Christopher Rouse (1986, 1994 and 2011), Elliott Carter's *Symphony of Three Orchestras* (1976) and, even more so, his *Symphonia*, completed in 1996. At the same time, however, Simpson's avoidance of cultural-political topicality, and his resolutely unflashy scoring, have militated against his symphonies' finding a permanent place in a market-driven orchestral repertoire. His power-packed Fifth (1972), was the nearest to a breakthrough piece.

Appearing a year after Simpson had published his desiderata for 'true symphonism', Berio's *Sinfonia* could hardly have been more subversive of them. It was to be far from the last such act of subversion in the symphonic tradition, even though for Berio it remained a one-off. There was to be no bolder statement of a new negative pole than in Schnittke's First Symphony (1969–72), which he at one stage considered actually dubbing 'anti-symphony'. This was bold by virtue of the fact that the taboos it broke were far more real in the USSR than any operating in the West (which also means, paradoxically, that transgression *per se* was far easier to achieve). Schnittke's First took the confrontation of symphony with its opposites to unheard-of levels, not so much constructing dramas from new positive–negative polarities in a spirit of renewal, as systematically snuffing out all positives until just the faintest hint of redemption dawns in the Finale, with a conglomeration of diatonic chants in resistance to the marauding *Dies irae*. That such willingness to question the essence of the symphony was not a local phenomenon is further confirmed by Tippett's Third Symphony, in which the anxieties of the twentieth century and of the symphony itself are symbolised by the brushing aside of Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' from the Choral Symphony in favour of a queasy blues. This is the other side of the coin from Simpson's Fourth Symphony (1970–2), which fashions its Scherzo as a paraphrase of the Scherzo from the same Beethoven symphony, but here as an unequivocal statement of faith in the continuing viability of Beethovenian energy.

In principle, Tippett's symphonic trajectory was a continuation of the Stravinskyan project to re-engage with the genre at the same time as redefining its potential – a paradoxical affirmation out of scepticism. By contrast, Schnittke's First, like Berio's *Sinfonia* (which Schnittke knew and analysed) is as much a manifesto as a work of art – from the opposite party platform to Simpson's. Whereas Berio adheres to minimal standards of taste and craft, Schnittke deliberately (or perhaps inadvertently) serves up a mess instead of music, daring commentators to fling up their hands in outrage (which they duly did). In fact there is rather more craft in Schnittke's work than meets the ear. And because of the strength of their scepticism, neither Schnittke's nor Tippett's work is quite the act of apostasy it might seem to be (in the sense of going against the avant-garde's determination to stigmatise the symphony as a dead form). But they certainly prepared the ground for that phenomenon later in the 1970s, when composers such as Penderecki and Maxwell Davies, who had been avant-garde iconoclasts through the 1950s and 1960s, startled the musical world by rediscovering points of contact with symphonic tradition, via Mahler and Sibelius, respectively. Admittedly neither composer is likely to be remembered for his symphonies, which lack the focus and dramatic edge of their most distinctive work. Penderecki's symphonies have been increasingly vitiated by neo-Romantic posturing and

Maxwell Davies' by obsessive-compulsive note-spinning. In neither case is the negative pole dramatised anywhere near as effectively as by Schnittke or Tippett.

The crucible of communicative post-war musical modernism was Poland, where the surface attractions of the avant-garde combusted with the audience-friendly rhetoric of the East. Here, after the first flurries of excitement had died down, most composers willingly ditched the modernist baggage for the sake of re-engagement with the symphony. What they retained from that flirtation, at least for a while, were the elements of chance and sonorism (indebted to Cage and Bartók, respectively), which were later to be replaced by spiritual subject matter and moody contemplation. Witold Lutosławski forged an uneasy compromise with his Second Symphony (1968), styling his two movements as 'Hesitant' and 'Direct' in a way that recalls Sibelius and Nielsen in principle though not in practice (the same ploy features far more potently in the first movement of Tippett's Third, as 'Arrest' and 'Movement').[32] But Lutosławski hit something much closer to the bull's-eye in 1983 with his Third Symphony. Meanwhile Henryk Górecki took a more drastic path from the violence of his Second Symphony ('Copernican', 1972) to the consoling beauty of his Third ('Symphony of Sorrowful Songs', 1976). The latter made little impact on its initial appearance but gained a cult following in 1992, following astute marketing of a CD markedly inferior to the Polish recording that had long been in circulation without attracting much media attention. In one of the most fascinating case-studies of musical appropriation, Górecki's Third then became a soundtrack for documentaries about the Holocaust, which had been no part of the composer's intentions.[33]

The New Spirituality, generally expressed in pacific neo-tonal or neo-modal idioms, was the one ingredient implied in the expansions of 1960s symphonism that Berio had not enshrined in his *Sinfonia* and that Schnittke had barely hinted at in his First Symphony. It would flourish through the 1970s and beyond. Of course, symphonies with more-or-less overt spiritual programmes had been composed periodically through the twentieth century and before, sometimes even with the label 'sacra' attached (beginning with Holmboe's Fourth in 1941, and with Andrzej Panufnik's Third of 1963 as the salient example). The strikingly new project was to marry that impulse with a fresh consideration of folk sources (itself a long-established escape route from modernist-materialist impasses) and increasingly with aspects of ecumenicism and new-age contemplation as well. These dimensions were the flip side to the militant Islamic fundamentalism that fulminated after the Arab–Israeli conflict of 1967 and that came to the surface with the deposing of the Shah of Iran and the establishment of theocratic rule there in 1979. The rising materialism of the 1980s in the West, with powerful right-of-centre governments in the UK and USA setting the agenda for revived capitalism and a precipitous collapse of the socialist alternative, seem to have prompted an urge among symphonists to redress the balance, with a renewed emphasis on spiritual values. It is important to recognise that the concomitant rehabilitation of tonality had nothing necessarily to do with affirmatory aesthetics or right-wing politics but could equally betoken apostasy from a discredited and dysfunctional avant-garde.

All these trends can be traced quite clearly in the work of four composers who worked in the satellite republics of the Soviet Union and were thus to some extent immune from the worst effects of centralised control. The weakest representatives are the three early symphonies of the Estonian Arvo Pärt, which are a parade of attempts to drag the Soviet symphony into the world of modern -isms – from serialism and sonorism, through polystylism and symbolic quotation, to archaism, stopping at the threshold of the full-blown spiritualism that coincided with his abandonment of the symphony from the 1970s (his Fourth Symphony had its premiere in Los Angeles in January 2009 and proved a very damp squib). Far more potent are the seven symphonies of the Georgian Giya Kancheli, whose starting-point was the encounter with Shostakovich's rehabilitated Fourth, but which soon moved into polarised regions of contemplation and explosion, indebted to Stravinsky, Shostakovich and the spirit of Georgian folk music. Kancheli's symphonies nos. 3 to 6 (1973–81) are single-movement structures of twenty-five to thirty-five minutes at least (when taken at the uncompromisingly slow tempi on which Kancheli insists). All offer fine examples of controlled accumulation and release of tension. In his eight symphonies (1969–89) the Armenian Avet Terteryan retained more of the trappings of Polish-style sonorism than did Kancheli, and at the same time placed folk elements closer to the surface of his music in the shape of actual folk instruments, making for a remarkable fusion of militancy and meditation. Finally the Ukrainian Valentin Silvestrov, also with eight numbered symphonies so far to his name, plus several symphonic upgrades from concertante works, began with flirtations with a poeticised Webernian pointillism. At the apex of his output is his masterly Fifth Symphony (1980–2), the finest symphonic embodiment of his self-declared act of 'disarmament', wherein hypnotic memories of Mahler and earlier Romantics evoke a beauty that is craved but no longer graspable. All these works in their various ways show symphonists disengaging from the world, at a time when the West was facing up to the consequences of new economic realities and when Ronald Reagan in the USA and Margaret Thatcher in the UK had sat down heavily on the anti-socialist end of the political see-saw. Those realities eventually forced the Soviet Union into its reformist period of glasnost and perestroika under Mikhail Gorbachev from 1985, leading ineluctably to the collapse of communism and of the Union itself in 1991.

By comparison with the best work of these four composers, the blend of modernism and spirituality in the 1980s symphonies of the bigger names in post-Shostakovich Russia – principally Edison Denisov, Schnittke and Sofiya Gubaidulina – seems speculative and schematic, largely because of their heavy reliance on symbolism, evidently seeking to compensate for under-developed compositional strategies and insufficient aural filtering. The one symphony of Schnittke's that fully lives up to his reputation is in fact his first to eschew spiritual symbolism altogether, namely the Concerto grosso No. 4/Symphony No. 5 of 1988, a virtuoso genre-fusion that moves from post-Stravinskian concerto grosso to post-Mahlerian symphony, displaying a magnificent gift for dystopian frenzy throughout. The only other symphonies from the last decade or so of the Soviet era that can be ranged alongside Kancheli, Terteryan, Silvestrov and Schnittke's Fifth for communicative intensity are those of the maverick Galina Ustvolskaya, beginning with her Second of 1979 ('True, Eternal Bliss') and ending with the Fifth of 1991 ('Amen'), whose agonised spirituality is conveyed with extreme intransigence and hard-hitting intensity, indebted to Bartók and Stravinsky.

Politics and popular music

Outside the Soviet Union there have been any number of symphonies written with overtly spiritual content, but few that can match Kancheli, Terteryan, Silvestrov and Ustvolskaya for a sense of inner necessity or control over large time-spans. The Scot James MacMillan, directly influenced by Ustvolskaya's work, arguably did so in his First and Third Symphonies ('Vigil', 1997; 'Silence', 2002). MacMillan, a composer with a high profile for his political as well as religious views, has tended to channel the former in the direction of opera and the latter in the direction of symphony. Others have sought a fusion, producing symphonies with comparably grand ambitions but far less creative potency. From China, Tan Dun's 'Symphony 1997: *Heaven, Earth, Mankind*' and his *2000 Today: A World Symphony for the Millennium* are cases in point, their compendious programmes being in inverse proportion to their musical interest. These and other symphonies from the East, such as those by the Japanese Takashi Yoshimatsu, have in their favour a sensibility unencumbered by Western assumptions of taste and technical competence. But their immediately gratifying surfaces and politically correct programmes offer little substance to chew on. Meanwhile symphonies have been written about conflicts in Vietnam, the Balkans and Iraq, about the bringing down of the Berlin Wall and about the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. But none of these has generated more than local or ephemeral interest. Meanwhile, those who have dared to broach such topics as power politics, fundamentalist religion, terrorism and climate change – the preoccupations that drove disease, post-communism and civil rights off the front pages in the first decade of the twenty-first century – have generally done so in genres other than symphony, such as opera and oratorio. Yet given the pluralism of postmodern attitudes to style, there would seem to be no reason in principle why fine symphonies should not emerge with such agendas, if only the music and the message can be made to serve one another.

The only other major new trend to have emerged in the symphony since 1990 is a reconsideration of possible interfaces with popular music. Coming from the direction of the high-art composer, John Adams's Chamber Symphony of 1992 achieved an unlikely but effective fusion between Schoenbergian atonality – which occasionally surfaces very usefully as a negative pole in his otherwise relentlessly affirmatory style – and popular cartoons, notably Roadrunner (Adams's 'Son of Chamber Symphony', premiered in 2009, is similarly urbane and hyper-active). Far less interesting is Michael Daugherty's attempt to upgrade the Superman story to symphonic status ('Metropolis' Symphony, 1988–93). Among his eight numbered symphonies to date, Philip Glass's First ('Low', 1992) and Fourth ('Heroes', 1996), paraphrasing albums by David Bowie and Brian Eno, are by no means the most turgid. But from the pop/rock end, perhaps the most interesting phenomenon is New York-based guitarist Glenn Branca, who has produced a series of ambitiously titled symphonies (the latest to the time of writing being No. 13, 'Hallucination City' for 100 guitars, premiered in 2006, No. 14, 'The Harmonic Series', premiered in 2008 and No. 15 'Running through the World like an Open Razor', premiered in 2010). These have won some recognition and if nothing else have a feel of needing their large-scale dimensions in order to convey matters of depth and urgency, avoiding the instant gratification of most of their art-symphony compatriots.

Instead of prognostication

Writing as the centenary of Mahler's death approaches, it is as hard, and as pointless, to make predictions as it would have been for Paul Bekker in 1911. Symphonies are still commissioned, or written in response to non-specific commissions, by such bastions as the London Proms, among the most prominent from that source in the past quarter-century being the Dane Poul Ruders's

Himmelhochjauchzend, zum Tode betrübt (1989) and three from England: Robin Holloway's First (1998–9), which seeks to chart the musical course of the twentieth century; John Casken's First ('Broken Consort', 2004), in which a concertante gypsy ensemble defines the topic of cultural difference; and David Matthews's finely argued Sixth (2007). But symphonies have long since ceased to be solicited by competitions, which nowadays tend to specify the medium (usually small) but not the genre. And they are unlikely to feature as topics for composers' symposia any time soon. The demand for large orchestral works has become more focussed on symphonic poems (in effect if not name) and concertos, which a number of star soloists are happy to support, while the popularity of concertos for orchestra fuels suspicions that for better or worse composers remain daunted by the notion of the symphony (no bad thing, it might be thought). Meanwhile the infrastructure that supported more than 250 years of symphonic composition has shown unmistakable signs of fragility. Pundits both Eastern and Western have been observing – if not lamenting – the shift of the symphony concert to the status of lifestyle accessory driven by the imperatives of marketing, rather than of quasi-religious observance.

As for composers with established reputations as symphonists, of the generation of the 1920s and 1930s still creatively active in the twenty-first century, Henze completed his Tenth in 2000, and only ill health seems to have prevented a continuation of the cycle; Kancheli put a full stop to his symphonic output with No. 7 ('Epilogue', 1986), though he has continued to compose long orchestral pieces that could carry the generic title without embarrassment. Like him, Per Nørgård seemed to have closed the book with his millennial Sixth ('At the End of the Day') only to reopen it with an impressive Seventh in 2006. Fans of the mystical aura of the 'Ninth Symphony' may note the significant number of composers seemingly stalled at its threshold. Maxwell Davies put a comma to his symphonic output with his Eighth ('Antarctic') in 2000, returning only in 2012 with his Ninth, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth II in her diamond jubilee year; Einojuhani Rautavaara reached his Eighth ('The Journey') in 1999, Penderecki his ('Songs of the Past') in 2005 and Silvestrov his in 2007. Schnittke was working on his Ninth up to his death in 1998; but if its reconstruction by Alexander Raskatov is anything like an accurate deciphering of its almost illegible manuscript, it has to be reckoned no more coherent than Schnittke's previous three symphonies.

Finland continues to produce a plethora of high-grade symphonies, thanks to public and political assent to the value of subsidy for the arts (the same applies to opera), and thanks to the creative vigour of individualists such as, above all, Kalevi Aho, whose Fifteenth Symphony was first heard in Manchester in March 2011. Certainly, anyone who can take on and make such a magnificent job of a commission for a symphony to be performed on the slopes of a hillside in Lapland, with musicians up to 300 metres away from the conductor (No. 12, *Luosto*, 2002–3), cannot be accused of lack of symphonic ambition. Aho's Ninth (1994) has a fair claim to being the finest of his numerous post-Mahlerian concertante symphonies (the solo instrument here being trombone, doubling on sackbut). In the year that symphony was composed, Richard Taruskin, introducing an appreciative essay on Vagn Holmboe, produced one of his most apposite sound-bites: 'In the twentieth century the symphony moved to the suburbs.'[34] That remains true today, when Finland, Britain and the USA continue to provide the breeding-ground for fine symphonies. However, in a less well-judged postscript from 2008 Taruskin opined that with Holmboe's death in 1996 the world had lost its 'greatest living traditional symphonist' and that 'there is no one living now to whom such an epithet could be meaningfully applied'.[35] By virtue of openness of outlook and virtuosity of technique, Aho's ongoing symphonic output makes a clear riposte to that claim.

Jeremiads concerning the death of the symphony, or of classical music altogether, have been sprinkled around ever since the 1830s, and they generally look stupid almost as soon as they are made. It would be comforting to respond – as Mahler reportedly did in conversation with Brahms about the death of music – that the urge to compose symphonies and to listen to them is as unstoppable as the flow of water to the sea. If the flow appears to stagnate from time to time, then climate change will inevitably intervene and cut new channels. From the perspective of 1918 it would have been next to impossible for Paul Bekker to foresee the flowering of the symphony in Russia, Britain and the United States in the following decades. Nearly a century on, the seeds of the next symphonic renewal may be just as hard to discern. But so long as the ambition to enshrine the human condition in sound remains intact, they will surely continue to germinate.

Notes

1 Paul Bekker, *Die Sinfonie von Beethoven bis Mahler* (Berlin, 1918), esp. 20, 32, 58–61.

2 See, for example, Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, 'Über die Symphonie', *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, 37 (1835), cols. 505–11, 521–4, 557–63.

3 Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler* (London 1980, orig. Leipzig, 1923), 40.

4 See Karl Ekman, *Jean Sibelius: His Life and Personality* (New York, 1946), 191.

5 Robert Simpson, ed., *The Symphony* (Harmondsworth, 1967), vol. II, 13–14.

6 Ekman, *Jean Sibelius*, 191.

7 See Glenda Dawn Goss, *Jean Sibelius and Olin Downes: Music, Friendship, Criticism* (Boston, 1995).

8 Robert Simpson, *Sibelius and Nielsen: A Centenary Essay* (London, 1965), 21.

9 See Brian Hart, 'The French Symphony after Berlioz', in A. Peter Brown, *The Symphonic Repertoire*, vol. III, Part B: *The European Symphony from ca. 1800 to ca. 1930: Great Britain, Russia, and France* (Bloomington, 2008), 527–755, here at 657.

10 Claude Debussy, 'Monsieur Croche the Dilettante-Hater', in *Three Classics in the Aesthetics of Music* (New York, 1962), 17.

11 For the most wide-ranging study of the Austro-German symphony in the inter-war period, see Manuel Gervink, *Die Symphonie in Deutschland und Österreich in der Zeit*

zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen (Regensburg, 1984).

12 'Gustav Mahler', in *Style and Idea* (London, 1975), 449–72; and see commentary in Peter Franklin, *The Idea of Music* (London, 1985), 77–90.

13 See Josef Rufer, *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg* (London, 1962), 115–18, and Jan Maegaard, *Studien zur Entwicklung des dodekaphonen Satzes bei Arnold Schönberg* (Copenhagen, 1972), vol. I, 80–5 and 'Notenbeilage', 93.

14 Published in facsimile and transcription as Alban Berg, *Symphonie-Fragmente* (Vienna, 1984).

15 But see the composer's penetrating introductory texts in Ulrich Mosch, ed., *Wolfgang Rihm: ausgesprochen* (Mainz, 1997).

16 Larry Austin, CD booklet note to Centaur CRC2201 (1994), 3.

17 See Simon Morrison, 'Skryabin and the Impossible', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 51 (1998), 283–330, here at 284.

18 See Leonid Sabaneyev, *Erinnerungen an Alexander Skrjabin* (Berlin, 2005), 136 and 263.

19 Hart, 'The French Symphony after Berlioz', 656.

20 Dmitry Kabalevsky, ed., *S.S. Prokof'ev i N. Ya. Myaskovsky: perepiska* [*Prokofiev and Myaskovsky: Correspondence*] (Moscow, 1977), 52.

21 For a definition of symphonic as the opposite of episodic, see Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 462. For a speculative comment on the community-forming aspect of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, see Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, 1997), 400–5.

22 Cited in Michael Beckerman, 'The Real Value of Yellow Journalism', *Musical Quarterly*, 77 (1993), 749–68, at 749.

23 See Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. IV: *The Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2005), 637–73, and vol. V: *The Late Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2009), 3–6.

24 Irmelin Eggert Møller and Torben Meyer, eds., *Carl Nielsens Breve* [Nielsen's Letters] (Copenhagen, 1954), 144.

25 See James Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. 58–60.

26 See David Fanning, *Nielsen: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge, 1997), 97.

27 See Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. IV, *The Early Twentieth Century*, 637–73.

28 See Leo Black, *Edmund Rubbra: Symphonist* (Woodbridge, 2008), 41–55.

29 Constant Lambert, *Music Ho!: A Study of Music in Decline* (London, 1934). For a stimulating overview of the British symphony in the 1930s and 40s, see Guido Heldt, 'Erste Symphonien – Britten, Walton und Tippett', in Wolfgang Osthoff and Giselher Schubert, eds., *Symphonik 1930–1950: Gattungsgeschichte und analytische Beiträge* (Mainz, 2003), 84–108. For more comprehensive coverage see Jürgen Schaarwächter, *Die britische Sinfonie 1914–1945* (Cologne, 1995).

30 See Christopher Gibbs, '"The Phenomenon of the Seventh": A Documentary Essay on Shostakovich's "War" Symphony', in Laurel Fay, ed., *Shostakovich and his World* (Princeton, 2004), 59–113.

31 See Alexander Werth, *Musical Uproar in Moscow* (London, 1949).

32 For more on this and other dualisms in Tippett's Third, see Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and his Music* (London, 1984), 436–56.

33 See Luke Howard, 'Motherhood, *Billboard*, and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Receptions of Górecki's Symphony No. 3', *Musical Quarterly*, 82 (1998), 131–59.

34 'A Survivor from the Teutonic Train Wreck', in Taruskin, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley, 2009), 43.

35 Ibid., 45.