



Carl August NIELSEN

Symphony No. 4, Op. 29

"The inextinguishable"

Carl August Nielsen (9 June 1865 – 3 October 1931) was a Danish musician, conductor and violinist, widely recognized as his country's most prominent composer. Brought up by poor but musically talented parents on the island of Funen, he demonstrated his musical abilities at an early age. He initially played in a military band before attending the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen from 1884 until December 1886. He premiered his Op. 1, *Suite for Strings*, in 1888, at the age of 23. The following year, Nielsen began a 16-year stint as a second violinist in the prestigious Royal Danish Orchestra under the conductor Johan Svendsen, during which he played in Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff* and *Otello* at their Danish premieres. In 1916, he took a post teaching at the Royal Academy and continued to work there until his death. Although his symphonies, concertos and choral music are now internationally acclaimed, Nielsen's career and personal life were marked by many difficulties, often reflected in his music. The works he composed between 1897 and 1904 are sometimes ascribed to his "psychological" period, resulting mainly from a turbulent marriage with the sculptor Anne Marie Brodersen. Nielsen is especially noted for his six symphonies, Wind Quintet and concertos for violin, flute and clarinet. In Denmark, his opera *Maskarade* and many of his songs have become an integral part of the national heritage. Nielsen maintained the reputation of an outsider during his lifetime, both in his own country and internationally. It was only later that his works firmly entered the international repertoire, accelerating in popularity from the 1960s through Leonard Bernstein and others.

Symphony No. 4, Op. 29, also known as **The Inextinguishable** (Danish: *Det Uudslukkelige*), was completed by in 1916. Composed against the backdrop of the First World War, this symphony is among the most dramatic that Nielsen wrote, featuring a "battle" between two sets of timpani. The name does not apply to the symphony itself, but rather to "that which is inextinguishable". In his notes for the symphony, Nielsen refers to "the elemental will to live". The symphony's four movements are played without breaks. The first movement begins with a fierce *tutti* pitting D minor against its flat seventh, C, in an almost antiphonal manner. After the *tutti*, the clarinets introduce in A major the lyrical theme that will culminate the work. The second movement, for woodwind in G major, is more an intermezzo than the expected adagio. That function is fulfilled by the third movement, which opens with a *cantilena* from unison violins, then builds to a climax before concluding with a single oboe playing over trills in the upper strings. The clashes of the first movement reappear in the final movement, in which two sets of timpani duel from either side of the orchestra. This passage calls on the two timpanists to change the pitch of the timpani while playing. At the very end E major emerges as the key to conclude the work. The contrabassoon (played by the third bassoonist) has only one note to play in the symphony: the single, held note is a written B2 (the second line of the staff for contrabassoon, sounding an octave lower) and opens the coda of the fourth movement accompanied by timpani. The remainder of the third bassoon part, in contrast, occupies the player with many notes.