1 Introduction: understanding the symphony

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Contexts

Writing in 1849, Richard Wagner famously announced the symphony's death at Beethoven's hands and its transformation into music drama. Chiding contemporaries for misunderstanding Beethoven's symphonic achievement, Wagner dismissed subsequent efforts as mere form and style without historical significance:

> The forms in which the Master [Beethoven] brought to light his world-historical wrestling after Art, remained but *forms* in the eyes of contemporaneous and succeeding music-makers, and passed through Mannerism across to Mode; and despite the fact that no other instrumental composer could, even within these forms, divulge the smallest shred of original inventiveness, yet none lost courage to write symphonies . . . without for a moment happening on the thought that the *last* symphony [Beethoven's Ninth] had *already been written*.[1]

A century later, Theodor Adorno compounded such qualms with anxiety over the death of the symphonic listening experience.[2] Adorno fretted that the necessary conditions for absorbing the Beethovenian symphony were being undermined by the practice of radio broadcasts, which for him destroyed the genre's social identity by reducing it to the condition of domestic music; in effect, the symphony ceased to be a public experience and instead became 'a piece of furniture'.[3] The initiation of a symphonic argument moreover relied for its perception on a 'dynamic intensity', which for Adorno could only be realised in live performance, through the establishment of a species of symphonic 'time-consciousness'. Denuded of this possibility, the music is 'on the verge of relapsing into time', that is, into an atomised succession of musical events.[4] The symphony thus becomes trivialised as an object of mass consumption, thereby assisting the commodification of art music and concomitantly accelerating the 'regression of listening'.[5]

Wagner's and Adorno's remarks furnish a useful starting point from which to introduce the formidable historical, philosophical and analytical challenges that the symphony poses. On the one hand, reports of the genre's

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demise have been regular, and usually involve complaints of anachronism, cultural redundancy or incompatibility with modern musical systems or expressive needs. Thus Wagner's comments reflected concerns for the symphony's health tracking back into the 1830s; a comparable crisis developed in the Austro-German context in the wake of Mahler's achievement; and the attitude of the avant-garde after 1945 represented an even more virulent assault on the symphony's technical, cultural and political *raison d'être*. On the other hand, such reports are invariably greatly exaggerated. Wagner's prognosis, like those before and after, proved premature: the symphony did not wither away or become subsumed into an all-encompassing music drama, but reinvented itself in a bewildering variety of guises, folding into its remit influences from the chamber-musical to the operatic, addressing audiences from the whole of humanity to an elite minority and serving ideological masters as disparate as socialist realism and radical individualism.

Similarly, although opportunities to take the symphony out of the concert hall have since proliferated to an extent that Adorno could scarcely have imagined in 1941, the genre's position in the orchestral repertoire remains firm, and the persistence of the kind of time consciousness that Adorno considered endangered is instantiated in diverse trends in reception history since his death, most obviously the surge of interest in Mahler and Bruckner in the English-speaking world, which has played a key role in refreshing public symphonic appetites (the issues surrounding this persistence are finessed by Alan Street in Chapter 18). Moreover, as both David Fanning and Daniel Grimley observe below, twentieth-century symphonists also embraced alternative modes of temporal understanding: the genre survives in the age of musical mass media because composers are able to make the fractured sense of narrative it engenders an object of symphonic discourse.

To understand the symphony is therefore in an important sense to understand its capacity for renewal. This is, in part, the product of an inherent flexibility, born of the fact that the aesthetic and technical connotations of the term 'symphonic' have, for much of the genre's history, run considerably ahead of any constraints placed on them by the title 'symphony'. Over time, this has enabled a remarkable generic elasticity, which has allowed composers to shift continuously the symphony's terms of reference. Thus the genre's relative clarity at the turn of the nineteenth century was rapidly obscured by post-Beethovenian incorporations of dramatic, literary and poetic aspirations. Such suppleness is boldly announced by Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* of 1839. Classical genre markers are present in the orchestral first movement (the 'Introduction'), slow movement (the 'Scène d'amour'), Scherzo ('La Reine Mab') and multi-part choral Finale, but they are woven together with a succession of operatic

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scenes, which bring the symphony into direct confrontation with its theatrical counterpart. A comparable situation prevails in Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 2 of 1840, except that Mendelssohn questions the distinction between symphony and oratorio: the first three movements, which proceed along normal generic lines, emerge at the start of the Finale as the 'Sinfonia' of a sacred oratorio, the nine numbers of which parody Handelian and Bachian practice. Both Berlioz and Mendelssohn respond directly to Beethoven's 'Choral' Symphony, emphasising in turn its theatrical and liturgical implications. By the end of the nineteenth century, Mahler could comfortably apply similar thinking in a broad range of generic conflations: symphony and orchestral lied (Second, Third and Fourth symphonies); symphony and cantata (Second Symphony); symphony and oratorio (Eighth Symphony).

This diversification accelerated in the early twentieth century, as already precarious generic distinctions collapsed along with the very notion of a common practice. These circumstances applied not only to classical paradigms, but also to typical nineteenth-century distinctions. Liszt, for instance, clearly distinguished between his *Eine Faust-Symphonie*, which is a multi-movement programme symphony, and his single-movement symphonic poems. Yet by the First World War, this separation had lost much of its meaning. On the one hand, Schoenberg deployed a conflation of movement cycle and sonata form in his Chamber Symphony Op. 9 and the symphonic poem *Pelleas und Melisande*. On the other hand, as Steven Vande Moortele investigates in Chapter 11, Strauss enlarged Liszt's single-movement prototype to the point where the symphonic poem mutated back into the symphony, most obviously in the *Sinfonia domestica*, in which the programmatic narrative follows a linked succession of symphonic movement types.

No less remarkable is the symphony's adaptability to diverse systemic contexts. The classical symphony is a cycle of tonal forms, which articulate the basic relationships of diatonic tonality. The same forms, however, persist in changed systemic circumstances: nineteenth-century symphonists introduced tonal relationships, chiefly cycles of thirds and semitonal pairings, which classical composers scarcely employed; and classical forms continued to exert an influence even in a post-tonal context. This is possible because the symphony's formal parameters are separable: the tonal properties of sonata form can be modified or abandoned, but a recognisable genre marker will remain in place so long as sonata-type thematic or textural procedures are deployed. Similarly, a symphonic movement may be loosely rhapsodic or densely motivic; yet if it applies generic concepts of material, textural or tonal contrast, then the resulting structures will be recognisably symphonic.

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The technical challenges that such adaptations engender have contributed in no small measure to a further sustaining characteristic, which is the genre's aesthetic prestige: the symphony continues to attract composers even as the idioms and musical systems from which it arose slip from universal usage, because symphonic mastery still confers technical legitimacy. Practitioners dismissive of the symphony's relevance or confident in their ability to subsume it and move on betray more than a hint of excessive protestation in so doing. Wagner's polemics for instance conceal uncertainty at the prospect of composing symponic structures without a dramatic, theatrical scaffold;[6] and even the most acerbic post-war modernists have smuggled symphonic ambitions, if not symphonic forms, into their music. Stockhausen's *Gruppen*, for example, simulates a kind of panoptically Mahlerian symphonic experience, despite its integral–serial mode of expression and lack of any discernible symphonic genre markers. When the epithet 'symphony' fails as a generic category, the cachet of symphonic competence nevertheless persists.

Case study: symphonic idealism as history, form and politics

Many of the issues broached here will be addressed in detail in the following chapters. The durability they help to explain can be illustrated *in nuce* by scrutinising one historical thread: what might be termed the 'idealist' symphony, that is, the symphony as a vehicle for utopian aspiration. Like all subsequent aspects of the genre's extra-musical complexion, symphonic idealism has its roots in the fact that the first fifty years or so of the symphony's history straddle the Enlightenment. This means that, in addition to exemplifying the emergence of *galant* styles out of the high Baroque, it also reflects a progression from the aristocratic and monarchic structures of early modern Europe to the industrialised, democratic, secular and market-driven economies that prefigure our own time. Developing out of early eighteenth-century baroque courtly and theatrical genres, the symphony had by the century's end become enmeshed in a mode of mercantile reception and consumption, which furnished the grounds for the genre's reinvention as the quintessential musical narrative of emancipation.

By the 1830s, contact with idealist philosophy and the sheer force of Beethoven's symphonic achievement had transformed the genre into a paradigm of artistic autonomy and utopian ambition.[7] Comparisons of Beethoven's musical achievement with Hegel's philosophy, which are numerous and persistent, exemplify this with special clarity; Wagner's identification of the world-historical aspect of Beethoven's symphonies

foregrounds precisely this association.[8] In a crucial sense, the post-Beethovenian symphony is therefore a vehicle of bourgeois idealism, which in socio-political terms is manifest in the notion of aesthetic community, given literary voice in the 'Pedagogical Province' described in Book II of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, and most pragmatically embodied in the numerous music festivals that sprang up in the German lands in the early nineteenth century, which invariably made Beethoven's symphonies their core repertoire.[9] In aesthetic terms, idealism takes the form of an ambition to embody literary, poetic or philosophical ideals in formal and material narratives, formatively expressed in the so-called struggle–victory plot archetype of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, as well as in the natural pictorialism of his Sixth.[10] Although challenged by the claims of Wagnerian music drama, the ambition to curate progression towards an imagined better world remained potent up to the threshold of the First World War, being variously evident in (for example) Brahms's First Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Fifth, Mahler's Eighth and Elgar's First.

A crucial structural feature of such aspirations resides in the shift from classical 'concentric' planning, which located much of a work's weight in its first movement and conceived of the finale as a region of security and consolidation, to nineteenth-century goal-directedness or 'teleology', which gave new emphasis to the finale and the processes of which it is a culmination.[11] This innovation, normally traced to Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth symphonies, exploited deferral of cadential, modal and expressive resolution as the technical means of the nineteenth century's new idealism; the struggle–victory narrative is facilitated by a reorientation of classical form.

The effects of this shift can be clarified through comparison of three C minor symphonies composed within a hundred-year period: Haydn's Symphony No. 95 of 1791; Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 of 1808; and the 1890 revision of Bruckner's Symphony No. 8. Haydn places his Symphony's pivotal turn from C minor to C major in the transition from first to second theme in the first movement's recapitulation. This is achieved with considerable nonchalance: the exposition's nineteen-bar transition is replaced by a three-bar extension of the first theme, which slides sequentially into the C major reprise of the second theme at bar 129, in which key the movement remains until its conclusion. This mode switch allows Haydn to recapitulate his expository major-key second theme in the tonic without changing its modality (III becomes I). The result is that the 'hankering of C minor for its parallel major', which Joseph Kerman identifies as a basic trait in Beethoven's C minor works, is fulfilled two thirds of the way through the first movement, leaving the Finale

simply to reinforce a resolution that has already been attained.[12] And this is precisely what happens: aside from the sixteen-bar minor-mode interjection beginning at bar 152, Haydn's Finale makes scant attempt to revisit the tonic minor, maintaining C major in a sonata form without development.

Beethoven's first movement, in contrast, makes a dramatic point of failing to sustain C major. Haydn's mode switch is initially imitated; but the major-mode recapitulation of the second theme and closing section is undone by the coda, which categorically enforces C minor. As the Symphony unfolds, Beethoven makes this negation do markedly unclassical aesthetic labour, turning C major's deferral into an agent of teleology. The first movement's modal uncertainty is swept away by the famous elision of Scherzo and Finale, which imposes forcefully the latter's triumphant C major march. This initiates a movement which in the scale of its design, orchestration and gesture dwarfs its predecessors, culminating in the coda's unprecedented post-cadential excess. Beethoven not only relocates the mode switch to the start of the Finale, but dramatises it in a way that is alien to Haydn's musical sensibility.

Bruckner takes Beethoven's idea considerably further, making structural and expressive capital not only out of sustaining C minor beyond the first movement, but of questioning its very identity as a global tonic. In the first movement's main theme, C minor is presented as one possible tonic, which is denied cadential confirmation for the entirety of the movement, thanks to the persistent intrusions of D-flat major and B-flat minor.[13] As the Symphony progresses, this condition worsens: the Scherzo contains one tonic perfect cadence, which is located in the middle of its development section (bars 91–5); the Adagio tonicises D♭; and it is left to the Finale's coda (beginning at bar 647 in Leopold Nowak's edition) both to stabilise C minor and convert it into C major.

The differences between classical 'concentric' planning and nineteenth-century teleology are starkly exposed here: Haydn achieves C major in bar 129 of his first movement, Beethoven in bar 1 of his Finale, and Bruckner only 23 bars before the end of his Symphony. Not only tonal strategy, but also a host of material processes reinforce these different orientations. Haydn, for instance, has little use for overt cross-movement thematic references; Beethoven relates his movements through loose recall of his first movement's main theme; Bruckner deploys inter-movement relationships extensively, celebrating the attainment of C major at the end with a grand conflation of the primary themes of his Symphony's four movements.

With the approach of the Great War, such lofty ambitions collapsed into their opposite, at least within the Austro-German sphere. In response to Mahler's world-encompassing aims, Schoenberg composed chamber symphonies, thereby transmuting the genre into a private, domestic

medium and undermining decisively a distinction that was basic to his Beethovenian antecedents' social character. Simultaneously, the genre was adopted as one of the principal vehicles of musical nationalism, becoming essential to the construction of nationally defined traditions in Britain, France, Scandinavia, Russia, the Czech lands and the USA. The manufacture of cultural identity, which accompanied symphonic idealism within the German lands in the early decades of the nineteenth century, was consequently repeated at a distance in other contexts, from *ars gallica* in France after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871 to Scandinavia, the English musical renaissance and Russia, where the symphony's importance persisted from Balakirev to Shostakovich unimpeded by the sense of cultural crisis gripping *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. By the 1930s, however, even these idealist strains proved hard to sustain. Sibelius turned towards an increasingly abstract mode of thought, culminating in the dense single-movement design of his Seventh Symphony (1924); Stravinsky objectified rather than extended Beethovenian paradigms in his Symphony in C (1938–40); Vaughan Williams replaced the post-Elgarian sweep of his *Sea* and *London* symphonies with the more economical and ideologically critical expressive stance of the *Pastoral Symphony* and the trilogy of symphonies flanking the Second World War; and in Soviet Russia, nineteenth-century utopianism persisted as an officially sanctioned public veneer, which masked the terrifying realities of Stalinism.

The dissolution of goal-orientated idealism in this time is particularly acute in works that seem transparently indebted to it. Vaughan Williams's Symphony No. 4, completed in 1934, is notable for its extensive reliance on nineteenth-century precedents, primarily Beethoven's Fifth.[14] This is most blatant in its elision of Scherzo and Finale, which draws on Beethoven's example to an extent that borders on literal quotation. Beyond this, Vaughan Williams makes considerable use of thematic cross-referencing, founding all four movements on a common pool of ideas, which are drawn together in the Finale's fugal coda.

The crucial difference between Vaughan Williams's Symphony and its nineteenth-century forebears resides not only in its obviously post-tonal idiom, which exploits modal dualism to generate a strikingly dissonant harmonic palette, but also in the fact that its aping of the struggle–victory narrative and strenuous efforts at cyclical integration ultimately count for nothing. At the Symphony's end, its opening returns, and with it the grating semitonal conflict characterising that material in the first movement. The final bars starkly reiterate this opposition without mediation or resolution, piling G-flat minor onto F minor, before closing with a single, brutal assertion of the open fifth F–C. Whereas Beethoven achieves his moment of overcoming at the Finale's opening, and Bruckner at its end,

Vaughan Williams's exhaustive contrapuntal synthesis effectively leads nowhere: the whole edifice of formal-thematic integration culminates in a restatement of the Symphony's generative problem, negating the teleological process with startling pessimism.

If symphonic idealism can be problematised compositionally by short-circuiting its well-worn narrative trajectories, it can also be interrogated critically by exposing cultural-political subtexts. Prominent in this respect is Susan McClary's interpretation of the recapitulation in the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth as an allegory of sexual brutality: the point of reprise for her embodies a 'juxtaposition of desire and unspeakable violence', engendering 'an unparalleled fusion of murderous rage and yet a kind of pleasure in its fulfilment of formal demands'; Robert Fink has more recently carried this reading into the Finale, pointing out that crucial voice-leading characteristics enabling McClary's interpretation resurface as cyclical devices.[15] As a homosexual counterpart to her reading, McClary has posited a threefold dialogue in the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony between a militaristically construed 'fate' (the introductory theme), an effeminate masculine first theme and a sexually threatening feminine second theme.[16] Altogether, for McClary, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky reveal two contrasting facets of masculine symphonic sexual politics, the former masking impotence with patriarchal violence, the latter portraying femininity as sexually alien.

No less problematic is the tendency to channel post-Beethovenian utopianism into twentieth-century extremism, in which respect Bruckner's case is especially revealing. The so-called 'war of the Romantics', which in late nineteenth-century Vienna pitted Brahmsian conservatism against Lisztian programme music and post-Wagnerian (that is to say, Brucknerian) symphonism, became an aesthetic variant of the dispute between the liberal centre and the nationalist, pan-German right.[17] For the liberals, Brahms's rationalism, embodied in the motivic logic of his symphonies, guaranteed their aesthetic credibility, and as such stood against Bruckner's apparently formless Wagnerism. For Bruckner's supporters, Brahms confused public and domestic modes of musical thought (symphonic monumentality and chamber-musical rationalism), thus reducing the symphony's status in the name of an arid academicism. Both positions were foils for political opinion: the Brahmsians associated with an increasingly embattled and characteristically Semitic liberalism, which had held sway in the 1860s and 70s; Bruckner's most extreme apologists were also staunchly anti-Semitic proponents of the new right, which secured political ascendancy with the appointment of Karl Lueger as Mayor of Vienna in 1897.[18]

Whilst Brahms's superficially conservative technique became paradigmatic for second-Viennese modernism, post-Wagnerian commentators in

Germany and Austria stressed Bruckner's conservatism with mounting stridency, culminating in the cultural politics of the Third Reich. The Nazi view of Bruckner is encapsulated in Joseph Goebbels's speech to the International Bruckner Society, given at the Regensburg Bruckner Festival of 1937, at which Hitler received the Society's honorary medal.[19] Goebbels elevated Bruckner's music as a purely German expression of 'blood and soil', praising its emotional stance as a triumph of true feeling over shallow (by which Goebbels meant Jewish) intellectualism, and in so doing annexing the composer as a precursive standard-bearer for National Socialism. The *Zeitschrift für Musik* reported the Festival with appropriate solemnity; its account is accompanied by photographs, one of which shows Hitler standing reverently before the bust of Bruckner in the Regensburg Valhalla.[20] The catastrophic Central-European endgame of post-Beethovenian symphonic idealism is captured in a single image: a profoundly Catholic Austrian composer, whose vision of symphonic utopia was characteristically Christian, is transformed into an icon of German fascism, before whom the architect of European war and genocide stands humbled.

The legacy of the Second World War posed fresh dilemmas for composers with a lingering interest in the nineteenth-century model. Yet the international avant-garde's forceful rejection of past modes of expression in the 1950s, which seemingly ruled out of court anything as bourgeois or traditional as the symphony, led in time to a new diversity of symphonic practice, which scrutinised the idealist lineage through a self-consciously deconstructive lens (Berio), or absorbed recognisably its formal preoccupations into a late-modernist idiom (Lutosławski; Carter; Maxwell Davies; Henze). At the same time, the lasting popularity of the nineteenth-century symphonic repertoire attests to a taste for idealism, which persists in the concert hall and the recording studio, even if it endures only as a more-or-less covert trace in contemporary composition. In a sense, we still aspire to the better worlds expressed by this music.

Objectives

The Cambridge Companion to the Symphony offers scholarly yet accessible essays on these and a wide range of other symphonic subjects. It is not a chronological survey of works or composers, although sensitivity to chronology is built into its design. Such accounts are readily available: prominent English-language examples include the volumes edited by Robert Simpson, D. Kern Holoman, Robert Layton and Michael Steinberg, as well as the monumental review of the genre initiated by the late A. Peter Brown, which remains ongoing.[21] Neither does it advance a

comprehensive or unified appraisal: the volume's coverage is wide, but lacunae inevitably occur; and no attempt has been made to resolve divergences of opinion where they arise.

Rather, the *Companion* furnishes diverse perspectives on the symphonic repertoire, in three broad methodological categories – history, analysis, and genre, reception and performance – which define the book's parts. Part I comprises four essays, which together appraise the genre's history from its origins to the present: John Irving and Mary Sue Morrow focus on the eighteenth century, dealing respectively with Vienna and other national contexts; David Brodbeck addresses the symphony's development from the immediate reception of Beethoven and Schubert to the Vienna of Mahler and Schoenberg; and David Fanning takes up the narrative in the early twentieth century, pursuing the diverse consequences of the Mahlerian legacy and the dual achievements of Sibelius and Nielsen up to the present time.

Part II follows the same chronological path, but mines into the repertoire's analytical detail. In Chapter 6, Michael Spitzer offers an account of formal strategies in the early symphony, paying close attention to Sammartini, Stamitz, Kraus, C. P. E. Bach, J. C. Bach and Boccherini. Simon Keefe and Mark Anson-Cartwright respond in chapters 7 and 8 with studies of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, exploring a range of factors articulating form, from theme to timbre. My own twin contributions in chapters 9 and 10 complement David Brodbeck's essay, considering in turn cyclical thematic transformation and tonal strategy as structural features of the nineteenth-century symphony. Steven Vande Moortele's chapter then investigates what he terms 'two-dimensional form', that is, the practice, evolving from Liszt to Sibelius and Samuel Barber, of conflating sonata form and the traditional symphonic movement cycle in a single-movement design. Lastly, in Chapter 12, Daniel Grimley introduces core analytical problems raised in dealing with the twentieth-century symphony, instantiated in five representative works: Sibelius's Fourth Symphony; Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*; Berio's *Sinfonia*; Carter's *Symphony of Three Orchestras*; and Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *Symphony, Antiphony*.

The essays collected in Part III turn to broader contextual questions. In Chapter 13, Richard Will offers an account of the relationship between the symphony and the development of the orchestra in the eighteenth century; this is balanced by Alan Street's assessment of the symphony in the modern performing canon in Chapter 18. Between these poles, chapters 14 to 17 focus on questions of reception and generic identity: Mark Evan Bonds looks at the nineteenth-century reception of Beethoven; John Williamson investigates the range of works and ideas emerging under the rubric of the programme symphony; Pauline Fairclough examines the Austro-German legacy