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Hans Keller

drawings by
Milein Cosman

edited by
Christopher Wintle *and* Fiona Williams

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Appendix B

'Symphonic Thought and Feeling'

The difference or dichotomy between thought and feeling, intellect and emotion, was invented by those who don't feel enough or don't think enough, and there are plenty of them, which is why the differentiation has become official – a majority verdict. In creative reality, however, thought is rationalized feeling; where it isn't, or where it is absent altogether, art does not arise – certainly not art that says something, clearly conveys something new.

For the unthinking observer, the psychological situation is further complicated by the fact that there is such a thing as unconscious – e.g. Mozart's! – thought, which he readily mistakes for feeling. In any case, Wagner's dictum (in *Opera and Drama*) that 'in drama, we must become *knowers through feeling*' (his italics) can be extended to cover art as a whole – but then, he had extended the concept of 'drama' in the first place, to cover the world of symphonic thought.

Josef Tal's Third Symphony, completed about a year ago and dedicated to Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, is not merely a demonstrable masterpiece; it is the kind of festival of rationalized feeling without which a symphony as we have come to know it does not deserve its name – a name whose history is indiscriminate, but which has yet acquired definite meaning, however ill-defined, however controversial its definitions. Two essential characteristics of symphonic thought, in any case, cannot be denied, and both of them involve large-scale invention: the dramatic development of themes, and the extended integration of contrasts.

Now, Tal's single-movement structure invests not only the idea of contrast, but even that of a theme with novel meaning – so much so that in his programme note for the first performance (in the opening concert of the Israel Festival on July 3rd), he proved unwilling or unable to say anything about them, or indeed about anything else:

> I do believe in the listener's capacity to free himself from irrelevant comparisons with music well known to him. Instead, he might follow, with his inherent . . . curiosity, new patterns, new

> textures, new relationships, and new sound materials. In short, let a different world of music sink in undisturbed by preconditioned evaluations.

Musically, in his score, Tal has rationalized his new ideas with comprehensive logic; conceptually, verbally, he is rejecting the task – and therefore overlooks the role our awareness of 'well-known' music plays in not only the understanding, but indeed the creation of 'a different world of music': all meaningful newness is oldness with a difference, expectation consistently contradicted. Stage by stage, Tal's Symphony can thus be analyzed – and for a first hearing, it will be convenient to throw verbal light on the first stage, i.e. the build-up of the string chorus after the opening, basic thought – literally 'up', from the double-basses up to the violins. This innovatory texture is defiantly composed against the background of a fugato; it's a fugal exposition with a drastic difference, to wit, without fugue, without canonic imitation. But the pattern of the successive entries, always at 5 crotchets' difference, establishes the fugal background against which this new sound is thrown into relief, until the combined entry of second and first violins (the two groups being of the same colour) adds a final contradiction of fugal expectation.

The structural significance of texture thus immediately becomes evident, in proportion as attention is deflected from the definition of separate parts; and it is not long before one realizes that contrasts of texture play the leading role in this symphonic evolution – to the extent of making textures thematic, of investing local sonority with dramatic total meaning. The textural variety, therefore, is extreme, ranging from soloistic instrumentation (including even six bars of symphonic thought's purest prototype, the string quartet) to powerful orchestral utterances – and the thematic textures themselves show the influence of the composer's electronic thought, right to the end which, significantly enough, Tal's non-programme-note describes as a 'fade-out'; in fact, he here solves the most persistent problem thrown up by the abandonment of the perfect cadence – how to say, unmistakably, that 'this is the end'. I think it is due to his electronically sharpened ear, too, his acute awareness of the noise value of sound and the sonorities of noise, that he is the only composer I know who, although working a great deal with equal note values, never thus loses rhythmic vitality and thematic definition, articulation and – most important – characterization. As for the marimba concerto which, with many such equal values (which no doubt should be interpreted freely, virtuoso-like), lies embedded in the Symphony, it only serves to remind us that we must

accept the next work on tonight's programme [Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, Op. 58] as symphonic thought, too: yes, the new can illuminate the old as well, and under the influence of dozens of shallow concertos, the difference between concerto and symphony has come to be exaggerated – even in the most learned circles, despite our age's concertante treatment of the orchestra.

Beethoven was indeed nothing if he was not a symphonic thinker, in spite of everything he did. And unlike Mozart, he tended to think his feelings consciously, alive to their challenge to the very traditions within which – beyond which – he had decided to work: they invariably prompted him to find untraditional solutions to traditional problems. Brahms was fond of quoting a characteristic saying of his: after leading a train of thought to its logical conclusion, Beethoven is reported to have added, "Maybe the opposite is true, too."

To this very day, lyrical song and dramatic symphonism (lyrical 'feeling' and symphonic 'thought'?) have always been considered opposites – so much so that the greatest lyricists, such as Schubert and Schumann, have ipso facto been found lacking in their symphonic sorties. "Maybe the opposite is true, too," said Beethoven foreknowingly, and wrote the lyrical symphony par excellence – in the form of his most lyrical concerto [1805-1806], whose unprecedented solo opening, exposing the basic lyrical idea piano and dolce, gives little inkling of its own opposite face, its dramatic fortissimo reprise. But even within these five recapitulatory bars, he is quick to apply yet another turn of the symphonic screw – to prove the truth of the opposite of the opposite: if anything, the latter half of the statement is even more lyrical in the recapitulation than it was at the outset, notwithstanding its added pianistic elaboration.

In between, it isn't only lyrical and dramatic ideas that are symphonically contrasted, developed, and united, but the potential drama of lyricism itself, the degree to which lyrical thought alone can give rise to dramatic contrast of far-reaching symphonic significance, is explored with extreme economy of means – and, therefore, with crystalline clarity.

Take that initial statement again – this time, however, proceeding to the strings' response to the soloist, whose opening, ever-recurring B is subjected to a breath-taking reinterpretation, the more dramatic for its anti-dramatic pianissimo: the abrupt B major chord visits, as it were, the music from another planet; yet the key is not as remote as it feels. To be sure, it's four sharps up – but if it had been B minor, it would have been the dominant's relative minor,

whose tonic major appears instead. Thus Beethoven combines overwhelming contrast within the narrowest of spaces with close, if hidden unity, enabling us to follow the continuity of his dramatic lyricism without difficulty.

However, continuity is one thing; extended, large-scale unity another. Both the harmonic dislocation of this basic theme and its textural juxtaposition of piano and strings look deep into the concerto's further symphonic evolution. So far as the textural contrast is concerned, Beethoven may be said to have foreheard Tal, too: the Andante, an interlude of the kind he explored at the time (cf. the Violin Concerto's slow movement), is shaped by the juxtaposition of strings and piano, antithetical at first, but resolving into unanimity in the end; and the finale continues to rely on these textural components for 30 bars, i.e. for the duration of the theme's material, until its outer section returns in the full orchestra, in a powerful affirmation of the total texture – which, thus, has never been heard at the beginning of a movement.

As for the opening's drastic deflection from G major, why, the finale doesn't even start in the home key, but – like that of the E minor 'Rasumovsky' Quartet written at the same stage in Beethoven's development, as part of his next opus – in C major, of which key the rondo theme finds it indeed difficult to rid itself: willy-nilly, the home key has to assimilate the subdominant foreigner, eventually to grant him citizenship.

If, then, there is less G major in this G major Concerto than meets the unlistening eye, precisely the same thing can be said about tonight's G major Symphony [No. 8, Op. 88], about whose feelings Dvořák thought with conscious originality when he composed it in just over two months in 1889. It was not going to be the traditional kind of symphony: the drama was to be idyllic rather than fraught. Yes, Beethoven's lyrical revolution must have affected Dvořák's creative mind, and when we consider that the work's most revolutionary formal step can, in fact, be traced back to Beethoven too, the paradoxical conclusion emerges that this anti-German symphony was inspired by the German symphonist par excellence; or at the very least, Beethoven foreheard Dvořák as well as Tal.

It isn't just that, regardless of the key signature, the Symphony starts in the wrong key; no, the structural role of this G minor theme recalls one of Beethoven's specific symphonic innovations – recurring as it does at the end of the exposition, before the development proper. In the first movement of his F major 'Rasumovsky' Quartet, that is to say, Beethoven had returned to the first subject in the tonic at the beginning of the development, simulating a conventional repeat of the exposition. Dvořák does the same – but not with the

first subject as such: the introductory G minor theme precedes the first subject proper, and the eminently symphonic contrast between the two returns at the end of the exposition – again as if it were going to be repeated, wrong-key introduction and all.

The Adagio's contrasts, likewise, are none the less sudden and striking for being un-worried, and instead of a symphonic scherzo, Dvořák succeeded in inventing one of the very few perfect waltzes in the history of symphonic thought; only Tchaikovsky and his idol Mozart – in the first (!) movement of his early G major Quartet, K. 156 - had solved what, without these three composers, might have seemed a monstrously problematic proposition. But the very last thing Dvořák would here present us with is problems; and when, after the G minor (rather than major) waltz, the finale's inventive interpenetration of rondo and variation form at last declares its allegiance to the home key (in which no movement has yet started!), we realize that G minor has meanwhile been naturalized in its turn. For the rest, Dvořák may have written at least one more popular symphony, but he never wrote a greater one.

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