

Growth Possibilities: Metamorphosis in Vagn Holmboe's Tuba Solos

By

Copyright 2013

Laura Brandreth Potter

Submitted to the graduate degree program in the School of Music and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.

---

Chairperson Dr. Michael Davidson

---

Dr. Ji Hye Jung

---

Dr. Thomas McDonald

---

Dr. David Alan Street

---

Scott Watson

Date Defended: December 16, 2013

The Dissertation Committee for Laura Brandreth Potter  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Growth Possibilities: Metamorphosis in Vagn Holmboe's Tuba Solos

---

Chairperson Dr. Michael Davidson

Date approved: December 16, 2013

## ABSTRACT

Danish composer Vagn Holmboe (1909–1996) wrote several pieces featuring the tuba, and his *Sonata for Tuba* (1985) and *Intermezzo Concertante* (1986) for tuba and strings are particularly accessible to tuba students, making them an ideal lens for teaching expressive elements. This document provides an in-depth discussion of Holmboe's work and influences in relation to Bela Bartók, Carl Nielsen and Jean Sibelius. Holmboe's use of metamorphosis principle in his compositional process is examined in light of his deep connection to nature and natural processes. A thorough theoretical analysis of the *Sonata* and *Intermezzo Concertante* incorporating metamorphic influences shows how small motivic ideas generate the larger architecture of the works. Holmboe's own writings on the role of the composer and performer are discussed and applied to potential interpretive choices on the part of performers. The document provides a comprehensive view of these works in the context of twentieth century Nordic art music and their relevance to students, teachers and performers.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction [1]
  2. Spheres of Influence [2]
  3. In Light of Landscape [7]
  4. Organic Processes and Metamorphosis [11]
  5. Establishing Motive: Sonata [15]
  6. Austerity Measures: *Intermezzo Concertante* [24]
  7. Performance Etiquette [31]
  8. Pedagogy of Performance [34]
  9. Epilogue [38]
- Bibliography [39]

## *Growth Possibilities: Metamorphosis in Vagn Holmboe's Tuba Solos*

Laura Brandreth Potter

### *1. Introduction*

Solo music for the tuba is a limited category. The late development of the tuba compared to other orchestral instruments and its supportive rather than melodic role mean that very few solo works are written by major composers renowned for their musical craft. Tuba players often lament this lack, and react by appropriating pieces for other instruments through transcription, or encouraging contemporary composers to write for the instrument. Repertoire for tuba students to study and develop musicality is particularly sparse. However, there are existing works that are overlooked because they may not be well known or understood outside their country of origin.

Vagn Holmboe's compositions involving tuba fall into this category. Holmboe (1909–1996) was a Danish composer from central Jutland, the peninsula that forms the western portion of Denmark. He was the son of a merchant, and both of his parents were amateur musicians who encouraged artistry among their children. Holmboe entered the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen in 1926, partially on the recommendation of famed Danish composer Carl Nielsen. A prolific composer, Holmboe wrote in every genre and is known in Scandinavia particularly for his symphonic works and chamber music. He rarely travelled and never promoted himself outside of northern Europe. He is thus barely known here in the United States, and his works are performed only sporadically.

Holmboe's music is consistently melodic and thoughtfully crafted in a distinctive, generative style, incorporating influences from Johannes Brahms, Béla Bartók and Nielsen. Holmboe wrote three pieces for solo tuba, a Concerto (1976), a Sonata (1985) and the *Intermezzo Concertante* for tuba and strings (1986). He also includes soloistic writing for tuba in his chamber music, such as his two brass quintets (1961–2 and 1978) and quartet for trombones and tuba, *Notater* (1981). The Sonata and *Intermezzo Concertante* are particularly accessible solo works. These two compositions will be investigated in depth in the context of Holmboe's influences, specific compositional style and construction, and views on interpretation.

## 2. Spheres of influence

*Are there not three main threads from Romanticism down to the music of today? The first thread leads through Wagner–Strauss down to Schoenberg. The other from Chopin through Debussy down to Stravinsky. Finally, the third thread goes from Brahms to Carl Nielsen and Bartók... . The question of in which thread we find health, strength and positive content is surely not open to discussion.<sup>1</sup>*

Vagn Holmboe's musical style and usage make it easy to see which influences have nourished his composition. The above quote serves to crystalize this position for those unfamiliar with Holmboe's music. His trademark development processes have a distinct Brahmsian bent.<sup>2</sup> He is openly indebted to Bartók, and the two share the influence of Balkan folk music in addition to their affinity in motivic and rhythmic treatment. Holmboe's criteria of health, strength and positive content draw a striking resemblance to Daniel Grimley's characterization of Nielsen's music; Grimley describes a bright, lean and athletic style<sup>3</sup> and the positive force of Nielsen's principles of growth in composition.<sup>4</sup>

Holmboe was more apt to cite Bartók as his major influence than he was to credit his countryman Nielsen. However, as John Yoell argued, "Holmboe aimed for the high ideals of Carl Nielsen but in his own way."<sup>5</sup> No Danish composer of Holmboe's generation, or perhaps any generation since, could avoid the impact of Nielsen's work. At the very least, his songs have entered into the Danish folk consciousness as a sort of recreation of the Danish folk tradition, and were widely sung in twentieth century *Folkeskoles*. Nielsen's particular instrumental style comprises his idiomatic sense for string writing and his attempts to "think through the instruments themselves" and distill their distinct essences coupled with his melodically and motivically conceived musical processes.<sup>6</sup> His stated emphasis was on "pure, clear, firm, natural intervals and virile,

---

<sup>1</sup> Lansing McCloskey, *Twentieth Century Danish Music: An Annotated Bibliography and Research Directory* (Connecticut: Greenwood, 1998), xvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 64.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>5</sup> John Yoell, *The Nordic Sound* (Boston: Crescendo, 1974), 122.

<sup>6</sup> Mina Miller, "Interlude 5: Nielsen's Compositional Procedures" in *The Nielsen Companion* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 454-5.

robust, assured, organic rhythm.”<sup>7</sup> It seems that Holmboe was able to latch onto the parallels between Bartók and Nielsen; in particular their methods of solving melodic, rhythmic and polyphonic problems, their unique and eclectic voices.<sup>8</sup>

In his brief 1965 essay *In Memory of Carl Nielsen* Holmboe admitted to a changeable view of Nielsen’s music, concluding that over time the symphonies in particular provoked his admiration and provided creative sustenance. Holmboe further observed that as a more discerning view of Nielsen’s work crystalized in his mind, he began to see his countryman’s work through the lens of both Bartók and Jean Sibelius.<sup>9</sup> To date scholars have not recognized Sibelius as a direct, palpable influence for either Nielsen or Holmboe, but rather as a coexisting force in Nordic music whose work could not have escaped their notice. Born in the same year as Nielsen (1865), Sibelius outlived his contemporary but did not produce any significant compositions past Nielsen’s death in 1931. Sibelius’ identity as a national icon in Finland, a Nordic country hitherto not noted for internationally recognized composers aligns him with Nielsen; they confronted similar musical problems and shared some similar solutions in commitment to motivic unity, teleological organization and natural inspirations, elements that are germane to Holmboe’s work as well. However, Danish composer Per Nørgård wrote in 1965 that Sibelius was generally negatively received in Denmark, largely because of the nation’s bias towards Nielsen’s aesthetic.<sup>10</sup> Though Sibelius’ works are now regularly programmed by Danish orchestras, much more so that in the U.S., it should be noted that in Nielsen’s time and Holmboe’s formative years as a composer, Sibelius was not championed in Denmark as a fellow and complementary Nordic composer.

Though Holmboe was composing during a tumultuous time for European art music, he was not drawn into the fray. Rather than participate in debates about the complexities of contemporary twentieth century music, Holmboe preferred to explore “primitive music and the idea that it could show the way towards simplification, in the best and deepest senses, in modern European art music.”<sup>11</sup> As a young composer,

---

<sup>7</sup> Carl Nielsen, trans. Reginald Spink, *Living Music* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1953), 53.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Vagn Holmboe, ed. Paul Rapoport, *Experiencing Music: A Composer’s Notes* (Exeter: Toccata Press, 1991), 123.

<sup>10</sup> Mina Miller, “Introduction” in *The Nielsen Companion* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Rapoport, *Symphonic Metamorphoses* (Illinois: University of Illinois Urbana- Champaign, 1975), 10.

Holmboe began an in depth exploration of folk music. This was partially spurred by his marriage to Meta Graf, a Romanian pianist who he had met while studying in Berlin. Holmboe travelled to Romania with her in 1933, and was impressed by various aspects of Balkan folk music. In a 1934 article on Romanian folk music, Holmboe discusses his impressions of the “melodic severity” and variety of Romanian folk music, the rhythmic ostinatos, scales with “unusual intervals,” and the subordinate nature of the harmony in relation to other elements.<sup>12</sup> Certainly we see, at times, a “melodic severity” Holmboe’s notably for the purposes of this paper in the restrained, withdrawn lines of the tuba in the opening sections of his *Intermezzo Concertante*. Rhythmic ostinatos also play a role in the orchestral parts in that work, and like most of Holmboe’s music, it is generally populated by modal and other “unusual” collections, including octatonic and hexatonic fragments. However, perhaps the most striking relation of Holmboe’s commentary on Romanian music to his own style is the subordinate nature of harmony in relation to other elements.

In this way Holmboe aligns himself closely with Nielsen, whose harmonic use confounded many of his contemporaries, including his close colleague Thomas Laub. Nielsen responded to this commentary by asserting that his language was merely a “powerful new root” growing in the “garden” of tonality, nourished by the same essential elements.<sup>13</sup> Nielsen allowed intuition to guide his sense of harmony, with multiple key areas fused into a single tonality. He wrote, “We need to get away from the keys and yet still work with diatonic conviction. That is the issue. I feel within myself a struggle for freedom.”<sup>14</sup> Thus contemporary analysis yields characterization of Nielsen’s harmonic use as “progressive”<sup>15</sup> or “polyfocal”<sup>16</sup> tonality. Nielsen’s clear preference for the horizontal aspects generating form, leading “towards a definite goal in a steady stream,” take precedence over formal conventions relating vertical structures.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Rapoport, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Grimley, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Harald Krebs, “Tonal Structure in Nielsen’s Symphonies: Some Addenda to Robert Simpson’s Analyses”, in *The Nielsen Companion*, ed. Mina Miller (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 208.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Devoto, “Non-classical Diatonicism and Polyfocal Tonality: The Case of Nielsen’s Fifth Symphony, First Movement”, in *The Nielsen Companion*, ed. Mina Miller (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 268-9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 104-110.



Holmboe's similar views on the subordinate nature of harmony are further alluded to in his 1937 article concerning Arabic musical culture. He lauded Arabic music for continuing to develop rhythm, melody and phrase construction, asserting that in Western music the development of harmonic structure above all else has caused these other elements to become simplified and stagnant.<sup>18</sup> Nielsen referred to harmony as organizing and binding, a static force against the dynamism of horizontally directed melody treated as an expansive unfolding.<sup>19</sup>

A few of Holmboe's early compositions made literal reference to folk song inspirations, notably Op. 12a, a Romanian suite for piano (1937), and *Sinfonia Rustica*, Op. 25 (1941), incorporating folk song material from Jutland. However, in general he was more interested in the "abstracted essences of folk music,"<sup>20</sup> distillations of the elements of folk music. Holmboe's use of folk music is one of the elements that most shows his affinity for Bartók. Holmboe scholar Paul Rapoport cites the following surface manifestations of similarities between their work: "intensity and pervasiveness of motivic workings," "restricted or slowly changing melodic ranges," and "sharp rhythmic vitality."<sup>21</sup> These aspects can be viewed in light of the "abstracted essences" of the folk music that they were inspired by, and also in light of the eclecticism and synthesis each sought in their work. Each of Rapoport's above observations are found in Holmboe's Sonata for tuba, the motivic re-workings of the first movement opening gestures in tuba and piano, the limited and slowly expanding range of the tuba line in the second movement, the lively rhythms of the third movement. As Rapoport wrote in 1995, "[Holmboe] has developed and explored, embraced and challenged both musical and human ideas and ideals—whether from Romania, Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Haydn, Sibelius, Stravinsky, or nowhere in particular—in a constant struggle with himself to improve and deepen his and consequently our understanding of our world, our place in it, and the indescribable ways in which art may elucidate and affect both."<sup>22</sup>

Holmboe did not believe that music could depict anything outside the realm of music directly. As he wrote in the monograph *Experiencing Music*, "abstract content of

---

<sup>18</sup> Rapoport, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Grimley, 110.

<sup>20</sup> Rapoport, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>22</sup> Rapoport, *The Compositions of Vagn Holmboe* (Copenhagen: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 1996), xiv.

music does not have a meaning which can be expressed with words, or which can be justified or proved.”<sup>23</sup> Nielsen comes at the issue from a similar angle, observing that “music neither cannot nor will not bind itself to any concrete idea . . . it will be free,”<sup>24</sup> and “music, it must be remembered, has nothing to do with ideas.”<sup>25</sup> Both composers saw music as something self-generative that follows its own logic and that must be realized by the composer. However, these ideals do not preclude either composer from the direct representation of light in their works, most notably Nielsen in his *Helios* overture and Holmboe in his Symphony No. 8, *Sinfonia Boreale*.

---

<sup>23</sup> Vagn Holmboe, ed. Paul Rapoport, *Experiencing Music: A Composer's Notes* (Exeter: Toccata Press, 1991), 34.

<sup>24</sup> Grimley, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Carl Nielsen, trans. Reginald Spink, *Living Music* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1953).

### 3. *In Light of Landscape*

Nielsen's *Helios* overture tracks the sun across the sky. The opening pedal notes in the low strings frame gently echoing horn calls, incorporating a mixolydian inflection. Nielsen often used modal collections to suggest mist;<sup>26</sup> here the mist is soon burned off to reveal a clearer C major, leading towards the energetic Allegro that follows the introduction. Nielsen's depiction of sunrise in this work intersects with a larger Danish tradition of *Morgensangs* (morning songs),<sup>27</sup> which usually center on the rising of the sun and how it transforms the world. Light is a very important feature both in Danish life and art, due to its unique qualities and occasional scarcity.

Nineteenth century Danish Golden Age painters such as Eckersberg, Købke and Lundbye captured the qualities of light in their canonic landscapes. Light is represented in dialogue with characteristics of Danish landscape, "the physical character and terrain of the landscape itself suggests a sense of fluidity and change, the interlocking lines of land, water and sky created by Denmark's intricate post-glacial coastline and prevailing low topography often results in a feeling of impermanence and transparency."<sup>28</sup> Art historian Patricia Berman characterizes the Golden Age landscapes as possessing a liminal quality due to the particular geographical features, frequent proximity of the sea, and representation of light.<sup>29</sup> Discourse on Nordic identity in contemporary visual art marks the significance of this canonizing of landscape, "using color and light as ontological features of a site-specific Nordic topography/location, these visual elements were applied as carriers of atmosphere and emotion; nature became a mirror of a 'national soul'; and the landscape a 'soul landscape'."<sup>30</sup>

Nielsen's deep connection to the landscape of his childhood, the island of Funen, pervades his musical work. Nielsen's family were small claim holders, and he grew up working the land in poverty. He writes fondly of his childhood in his memoir *Min Fynske Barndom* (My Funen Childhood). The memoir is rife with descriptions of the landscape and its inspirational qualities, and bound up in these descriptions are characterizations of

---

<sup>26</sup> Grimley, 160.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 136–7.

<sup>29</sup> Patricia Berman, *In Another Light: Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Thames & Hudson), 106-119.

<sup>30</sup> Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen and Kristen Ørjasaeter, eds. *Globalizing Art: Negotiating Place, Identity and Nation in Contemporary Nordic Art* (Århus: Århus University Press, 2011), 128-129.

light.<sup>31</sup> Though Nielsen lived much of his life in Copenhagen and travelled extensively throughout the major European cities, Funen remained a major inspiration throughout his life. He closes his monograph *Living Music* with a brief chapter “The Song of Funen,” in which he rhapsodizes about the sounds of his childhood, “It is a lilting Funen that the throstle flutes, and the laughter of the blackbird as it slips under the lilac bushes is an imitation of the starlings whims, themselves an echo of the Funen girls when they jest and laugh in the gardens behind the clipped hedges . . . . The stillness sings the same tune, too, and even the trees dream and talk in their sleep with a Funen lilt.”<sup>32</sup> Nielsen’s deep connection to the landscape and soundscape of his childhood pervades his creative process, manifested in musical gestures and workings.

Grimley writes of Nielsen “the finest effects of light are found in his music—cloud shadows scurrying over flowing water. The sun breaks through and conceals itself. Waves tower up and subside again.”<sup>33</sup> Danish scholar Jørgen I. Jensen takes a similar view, “[Nielsen’s] symbol is the sun, which illuminates and gives clarity and warmth; his element is fire, which purifies and gives energy and light.”<sup>34</sup> The use of natural and elemental forces to describe Nielsen’s work resonates with his own deep connection to nature, framed by his childhood and the prevalent Hellenistic spirit in Denmark beginning in the 1890s, popularizing the notions of health and nature as a source of life.<sup>35</sup>

Natural inspiration and the depiction of nature through instrumental music are major forces in Sibelius’ work as well. Like Nielsen, Sibelius’ life constituted and back and forth between city and immersion in the natural world, touring the major cities of Europe and working in Helsinki, and from 1904 on living at a remote villa in the Järvenpää forest. At the villa Ainola, named for Sibelius’ wife Aino, Sibelius was much inspired by the world around him. Most of the themes for his fifth symphony are associated directly with “mystical nature experiences” at Ainola.<sup>36</sup> He was particularly

---

<sup>31</sup> “I left the road to take a shortcut in the glorious sunshine; the words and files were in the full splendor of summer . . . I was intensely moved, sat down on the path, and looked in between the millions of gleaming cornstalks.”

Carl Nielsen, trans. Reginald Spink, *My Childhood* (Copenhagen: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 1972), 151.

<sup>32</sup> Nielsen, 78.

<sup>33</sup> Grimley, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Grimley, 96.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>36</sup> James Hepokowski, *Sibelius Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 32.

inspired by swans; in April 1915 while walking near his home he was circled by 16 swans and wrote in his journal that it was one of the greatest experiences in his life.<sup>37</sup> The ultimate musical goal of the Fifth Symphony, the “Swan Hymn,” was reinforced by this experience, scored in brass as Sibelius wrote, “Their call the same woodwind type as that of cranes, but without tremolo. The swan call closer to the trumpet ... .The fifth symphony’s finale- theme: Legato in the trumpets!”<sup>38</sup> Aside from this literal, symphonic evocation of swans, Sibelius’ orchestral works deal with the qualities of Nordic light, particularly through harmonic evasion in the tone poem *Vårsång* (Spring Song), and a musical sunrise figure in *Pan and Echo* featuring a glowing string texture coupled with a rising arpeggio in the bassoon.<sup>39</sup> Mythic representations of the Finnish forest are also common, such as in *Kullervo* and *En Saga*, characterized by dark scoring, insistent ostinatos and melodic repetitions, and “craggy orchestral textures”.<sup>40</sup>

Holmboe’s connection to landscape is equally elemental to that of Sibelius and Nielsen. In *Experiencing Music* he wrote “I have an eye for the external in nature, the picturesque, for grandiose or gentle views of landscapes, for distinctive details, mountain masses and salt marshes, forests and heaths.”<sup>41</sup> Holmboe’s eye for landscape and appreciation for nature is underscored by his choice to buy a tract of land near Lake Årre in northwestern Sjaelland, where he and his wife lived from 1953 on. He planted hundreds of trees there and spent a great deal of time roaming the property, committed to this natural oasis though he had to commute two hours each to Copenhagen to teach at the Royal Academy. He called his home *Årre Boreale*.

In *Sinfonia Boreale* (Nordic Symphony), Holmboe takes up the mantle of representing Nordic sensibility through sound. Orchestral flashes in the scherzo particularly seem to make reference to the famous Northern Lights. However, despite his deep affinity for nature, Holmboe did not readily admit to representing natural phenomena so directly in his work, claiming instead that “for me, to go out into nature is to take a spiritual bath, both a physical and a mental renewal and strengthening ... .But

---

<sup>37</sup> Hepokowski, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Grimley, “The tone poems: genre, landscape and structural perspective”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Grimley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99–102.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>41</sup> Holmboe, 54.

I am not aware of any direct musical inspiration from nature, unless using birdsong is to be called inspiration.”<sup>42</sup> Here we see a marked differentiation between Sibelius’ conscious and reverential incorporation of swan calls into his work and Holmboe’s casual admission of similar inspiration. Certainly Sibelius incorporated a great deal of natural inspiration, auditory and visual, in direct ways into his compositions. Nielsen also at times, though more occasionally, admitted to being inspired by a particular experience with a tree or other natural element that manifested itself directly in his work.<sup>43</sup> Holmboe was more apt to allow natural *processes* to infiltrate his work, a subject that should now be treated in great detail.

---

<sup>42</sup> Holmboe, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Grimley, Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism, 50.

#### 4. Organic Processes and Metamorphosis

The most important feature of Holmboe's work is the natural processes inherent in his compositional style. Like his use of folk music, this influence is incorporated as an 'essence' rather than a direct depiction. In *Experiencing Music*, Holmboe wrote about his connection to "that which is inherent in nature: the unique existence and life rhythm of plants ... the lives of animals and birds; the change of weather and the seasons, the endlessness, complexity, power and peacefulness of the sea."<sup>44</sup> This statement demonstrates that he is drawn to much more than the readily visible in nature, his ultimate fascination is with the elegance of natural processes. His and his wife's intimate connection with *Årre Boreale* shaped their lives and their work.

Holmboe's primary interest was in what he calls 'metamorphosis', a technique that also interested Nielsen, as well as other composers of Holmboe's generation. Contemporary Niels Viggo Bentzon called metamorphosis "the form of our times."<sup>45</sup> As Rapoport observes, metamorphosis as a technique is very difficult to define, as its effects are always dependent on context. Holmboe wrote that "metamorphosis is based on a process of development that transforms one matter into another, without it losing its identity, its basic characteristics."<sup>46</sup> Thus, metamorphosis is depicted as an active process that takes place throughout a work, though this still does not shed much light on how it might come about.

The idea of metamorphosis is perhaps best understood as small musical idea that contains a natural process of development inherent within itself. Sibelius articulated something akin to metamorphosis in 1912, writing with regard to motives generating larger structures, "I frequently think of the ice ferns which, according to eternal laws, the frost makes into the most beautiful patterns."<sup>47</sup> Norwegian composer Harald Saeverud writes of the use of "thematic budding" in his seventh Symphony (1944–5). He says, "Every theme of character carries its own fertile form element within itself," and that a single part of a theme "grows, and there arises a series of new generations, preferably just

---

<sup>44</sup> Holmboe, 54.

<sup>45</sup> Yoell, 47.

<sup>46</sup> Rapoport 38, 45.

<sup>47</sup> Hepokowski, 22.

as natural and regulated as if they were plants that popped up from the ground.”<sup>48</sup> The possibilities of the beginning idea, be it a theme, motive, or motive complex, are realized by the composer. The development comes directly from that original idea, not through a particular technique or artifice. Composers and theorists seem unable to resist making direct analogy to underlying natural processes when describing this type of technique.

According to Holmboe, the development that takes place is determined by a strong ‘logic’ obvious to the composer. He considers this to be self-evident to composers, and ideally equally apparent to the performers and audience. Holmboe discusses his own creative process in *Experiencing Music*, and the ways in which certain motives or motive complexes occurred quite vividly to him, pregnant with possibilities. At one point he recalls a particular instance when a musical idea struck him, a “kernel which possessed the magical power to fill my mind with living gestures, with a strong urge to follow up the motive, to release its latent powers and create a large-scale work out of this seed.”<sup>49</sup> His compositional process follows the music to its logical conclusion, with each intermediary step occurring out of necessity.<sup>50</sup>

In this regard Holmboe again shows his connection to Carl Nielsen. German music critic Henrik Knudsen wrote in his 1913 critique of Nielsen’s Symphony No. 3 that the “composer couldn’t care less about tradition if it fails to satisfy *the inner demands of the work* ... .Musical thought must reach its proper conclusion.”<sup>51</sup> Grimley’s analysis of the *Helios* overture features organic analogy, characterizing the work as “the musical representation of apparently organic, self- determined growth from a kernel cell.”<sup>52</sup> This method of aligning musical development metaphorically with natural processes shows the deep correlation for these composers between nature and compositional process.

Hans Mersmann articulates a biological metaphor for musical development that resonates with the metamorphic process of composition, stating that “the first part of this force-process is positive: in the force (a note, a sound, a motive, a theme, a phrase) lies the principle of its growth. This force has the power of a germinal cell ... .Its power is its

---

<sup>48</sup> Rapoport, 39.

<sup>49</sup> Holmboe, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Rapoport 43.

<sup>51</sup> Grimley, 108.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 64.



expansive nature.” The opposing force is centripetal, “it works back towards the root and drives the synthesis of oppositions to a higher unity.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the forward, expansive progress of the work is held in tension with a binding force, and to Mersmann this tension is what generates musical growth. This discussion is a part of Mersmann’s articulation of wave form structures, which Grimley used effectively to analyze Nielsen’s third symphony, the *Sinfonia Espansiva*. The application of wave form analysis to Nielsen’s work serves to underscore the importance of natural metaphors in explaining freely developed music of the twentieth century.

Both Holmboe and Nielsen tended to place emphasis on the expansive elements; they see growth and horizontal development as the essence of their process of composition. Holmboe was careful to state that he does not view metamorphosis as a formal category per se, suggesting instead “I do not think that any metamorphic form is created yet. In any case I do not feel that I myself have realized such a form (and I do not hope that it will become so in my time). It has no absolute scheme; it is only a principle.”<sup>54</sup> As a principle, metamorphosis ensures a sense of synthesis in Holmboe’s work, giving rise to contrasts that are “complementary but not dualistic,” since they represent contrasts between parts of a whole.<sup>55</sup>

It is the connections between musical elements that fascinate Holmboe; “like the human being, music is built out of analyzable elements ... what we call music can arise only in connection with other elements, which means there has occurred a wonderful transformation of these individual parts which are now assembled into a whole and gain quality and substance, gain life.”<sup>56</sup> Holmboe believed that these elements develop one from another, hence the connections that arise are not driven by chance or formal artifice; rather, they exist because of the generative unity of the whole. The connections of elements on a horizontal level, on small and large scales, are what animate Holmboe’s compositions. As Nielsen wrote, “if we sit beside a brook or a stream, *it is its course*

---

<sup>53</sup> Grimley, 115.

<sup>54</sup> Rapoport, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Holmboe, 36.

*which interests us*, its meandering round obstacles and its many other movements en route, and not so much that, as we know, it flows into the sea.”<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Grimley, 129.

### 5. Establishing Motive: Sonata

Holmboe's *Sonata for Tuba* was written in 1985, for tubist Michael Lind. Lind is a Danish tuba player who has spent his career performing and teaching in Sweden. The Sonata is in three movements, *Allegro con brio*, *Lentamente* and *Vivace*. Short motivic ideas play a large role in this piece, and these motives continue to develop throughout each movement, lending unity to the work.

The first movement begins with an accented sonority sounded in the piano, set class 3–4 (015) with D doubled throughout three octaves with B $\flat$  and A interspersed between. The tuba rebounds with a *forte* statement of a three-note motive in the tuba, a member of set class 3–7 (025). The prominence of D in these two collections introduces the pitch as the broad focus in this first movement, and F–E–D motion is a very important feature throughout the work. In the second measure the piano plays its opening sonority as an ascending triplet figure beginning on A, leading into to a D major ninth chord struck on the downbeat of m. 3. A D minor triad in the left hand rebounds on beat 2, underpinning the tuba's F on the second beat. The F–E motion echoes that of the first measure, but here instead initiates the presentation of the diatonic fragment set class 3–2 (013). These three collections are salient features throughout the Sonata. Taking the interval content of the three sets together, the vectors  $\langle 111000 \rangle$  (3–2),  $\langle 100110 \rangle$  (3–4) and  $\langle 001110 \rangle$  (3–7) highlight the importance of ics 1, 2, 3 and 5. The trichords represented in the opening measures feature prominently in each movement, indeed the melodic surface is saturated with them, articulated discretely, concurrently and in interlocking sequences. The resultant sonorities give rise to a distinctive soundscape, lending the piece a cohesive sonic identity. There is a simplicity to the initial presentation of these features, in particular the tuba motive as a melodic feature calls to mind the starkness of the Danish landscape, sparse at first glance, but pregnant with potential meaning and associations.

**Example 5.1** Sonata, Mvt. 1 mm. 1–5

In m. 4 another important element is exhibited, the chromatic collection 4–1. This is generated from the 3–4 collection, the first two notes are A and B $\flat$  from the original statement, and a T<sub>2</sub> statement follows, ending the phrase in m. 5. Chromatic collections and inflections are found frequently in this work, and are generally articulated in a somewhat circuitous fashion. The chromatic idea is developed on through the following phrases, with frequently shifting accidentals forming small chromatic segments throughout the movement of the tuba lines, as with the 5–1 collection in m. 10, and 8–1 in mm. 12–13. Statements of 3–2, 3–4 and 3–7 occur between these chromatic gestures. Through this section the piano plays a sparse and vertical role, punctuating with quarter notes and occasional triplets as the tuba provides horizontal integrity, weaving shorter motives and gestures into a coherent line. The shifting chromatic lines call to mind subtle play of light, or the small inner workings of growth and decay.

With the anacrusis to m. 15 a statement of set class 3–4 sounds in the tuba, first at T<sub>5</sub> from the original pitch level, then at T<sub>7</sub>. These two statements have a declamatory character, each beginning with an assertive perfect fifth in eighth notes. The piano part in m. 15 underscores the importance of the collection at this particular moment, with ascending triplets presenting 3–4 at T<sub>0</sub> and then T<sub>5</sub>.

**Example 5.2** Sonata, Mvt. 1 mm. 21–25

Beginning at m. 20, the piano plays a larger role in the texture. In m. 21 the tuba develops a chromatically inflected eighth note motive, with the range and intervals of the figure expanding with each statement from mm. 21–23 and again in mm. 26 and 27, suggesting positive growth. The eighth note lines in the tuba interact with eighths in the piano, and in both instruments the trichords 3–2, 3–4 and 3–7 are incorporated. In between these eighth note workings, the original 3–7 motive returns in the tuba over a D major ninth chord in m. 25. Though the ordering of pitches is reversed, the motive retains its power and integrity.

**Example 5.3** Sonata, Mvt. 1 mm. 29–31

In the section from mm. 29–36, the tuba and piano interact in a manner similar to the opening measures. Strong articulations in each part spur an answer on the upbeat or next beat, creating a symbiotic interplay of lines. At m. 36, the piano adopts a more lyrical and horizontal style in a four measure interlude, incorporating a return of the opening piano material, with initial sonority modified to incorporate F to establish a

B $\flat$ M/m 6/5 chord. This interlude sets up a section characterized by more lyrical and expansive melodic treatment in the tuba part over constant eighths and quarters in the piano. The dotted half to quarter is an important rhythmic feature for the tuba this section, first appearing in m. 44, and generally featuring a descent by second or third. This repeated use of longer note values in a melodic function suggests the potential for direction and growth in a gradual manner.

The texture becomes sparse after the B octaves in the tuba in m. 49, with only small punctuations in the piano when the tuba is not playing. Chromatically inflected eighth note lines partner with the dotted half/quarter motive, here the moving lines come from OCT<sub>1,2</sub> in m. 53, and a combination of OCT<sub>0,1</sub> and HEX<sub>1,2</sub> in m. 56. A statement of 3–4 comes in between these in mm. 54–55. Holmboe's knack for weaving these smaller ideas together into an integral synthesis is evident. The slurred A octave that begins the section coupled with the sparse texture and shifting pitch collections create a liminal effect in this brief section.

The verbatim restatement of the opening two measures at m. 58 suggests a recapitulation of sorts, and reasserts the primacy of the opening motive. The answer to this motive comes as an elongated descent in mm. 60–64 beginning at C4 and winding downwards to E2 over the course of five measures and incorporating interlocking statements of 3–2 and 3–4. The original material has been expanded in every sense, and increasingly we see the salient trichords interacting and generating larger ideas.

A staccato treatment of the eighth note motive first presented in m. 21 follows in mm. 66–69, shifting in the second part of m. 69 to set up a return to the expansive idea, which dominates from mm. 70. Here again the familiar trichords generate the melodic line, including a restatement of the opening 3–7 motive in mm. 76–77, here slurred to fit the gentler mood of this section. In mm 78–79 the reordered notes of the motive move to E over a d minor 6/4 sonority with E added, foreshadowing the A-centric third movement while linking it to the primacy of D in the first movement.

**Example 5.4** Sonata, Mvt. 1 mm. 75–79

Further development of lyrical chromatic play follows, leading into a final two measure articulation of the expanding eighth note motive. The tuba line ascends from A3 to D4 in mm. 88–89, building towards a dramatic seven measure descending figure mm. 90–96 that echoes and expands on the similar motion in mm. 60–64, here beginning in the high tessitura on Eb4 and descending to C2. At m. 98 the opening 3–7 motive returns at a  $T_5$  transposition, moving directly to a restatement of the motive in its original form. The  $T_5$  guise returns once more before the movement closes on a sustained D in the tuba over D minor in the piano.

**Example 5.5** Sonata, Mvt. 1 mm. 98–106

In the first movement the opening three-note 3–7 motive develops along with usage of 3–2 and 3–4, chromatic ideas and expansive melodic elements. These features continue to come up throughout the remainder of the work, binding the movements together into a single whole.

Lilting half steps feature prominently in the second movement, as evidenced by the material in mm. 1–4. The syncopation at the beginning of each bar, followed by dynamically tapering sixteenths to a quarter note on beat 4 make the first two measures each feel like somewhat of an independent unit. In mm. 3 and 4 eighth notes sound on the last beat of the measure, forging more forward connection in the line. Repetitive rhythmic and intervallic structures pervade the movement, in alternation with material adapted from the first movement. The effect is ethereal and shimmering, representative of light and water.

**Example 5.6** Sonata, Mvt. 2 mm. 1–4

**Example 5.7** Sonata, Mvt. 2 mm. 7–12

In mm. 7 and mm. 10 the 3–7 motive from the first movement is featured at  $T_7$ , and in m. 7 it is paired with 3–4 in the piano, also at  $T_7$ , recalling the opening sonority. Sections of the second movement characterized by this material are a bit more expansive than the units in the opening four measures, the familiar elements forge a connection to what came before while pushing the material forward. The various guises of the 3–7



motive tend to cross the bar line, and elicit a connected answer. Alternation of static and dynamic elements dominates the second movement, with the ideas becoming increasingly merged from mm. 21 on. The movement closes on a sustained G3 in the tuba with D and F immediately preceding it, occasioning a final allusion to the 3–7 motive.

The third movement offers much more rhythmic vitality than the previously seen in the sonata, while continuing the characteristic intervallic structure of the work. The first three notes in the piano are a statement of 3–7, and the sixteenths in the second measure echo the half step sixteenths from the tuba part in the second movement. The tuba entrance in m. 3 begins on an accented D and moves to E–G–A, T<sub>2</sub> of the 3–7 motive. In mm. 4–5 the T<sub>2</sub> motive is coupled with D and F. In these small gestures the T<sub>0</sub> motivic content merges with content more suggestive of the important pitches in the final movement.

**Example 5.8** Sonata Mvt. 3, mm. 1–5

Beginning at m. 10 there is a rhythmically dynamic reworking of the chromatic eighth note lines from the first movement. The use of 4–1 in that measure recalls the introduction of chromatic ideas in m. 4 of the first movement. From m. 19, a sequence incorporating 3–7, 3–2 and 3–4 ascends to an accented A, further asserting the primacy of that pitch in this movement. A ‘filled in’ version of the T<sub>2</sub> 3–7 motive occurs in mm. 29–30, incorporating B as a passing tone. In the next two measures the rhythm repeats, this time alluding to 3–4 instead. In mm. 33–34 a combination of 3–7 and 3–2 is incorporated into a G–F–E–D motion. The *poco rubato* at m. 41 develops on the chromatic eighth note lines, leading into a lyrical section.

At the *meno mosso* in m. 46 the piano reiterates material found in the first and second movement. Particular emphasis on the half step sixteenths from the second movement recalls the ethereal mood. The tuba melody incorporates the collectional elements developed previously in the sonata into lines that are glassy, contemplative and serene.

The closing *Vivace* brings familiar intervallic structures with a fresh rhythmic construction. The piano opens with the same material from the first two measures of the movement, but with the tuba entrance new rhythmic ideas incorporating hemiola take hold. This final section weaves together the chromatic ideas with sequences of the significant trichords, driving the piece to a dynamic close. The movement comes to rest on an A major chord, with interlocking 3–7 trichords ( $T_9$  and  $T_8I$ ) expressed in the tuba in the penultimate measure. The primacy of 3–7 at the close of the movement fulfills the foreshadowing of the first movement, where the  $T_0$  motive occurred concurrently with both a D minor chord and an A–E open fifth. Here the final  $T_8I$  version of the motive incorporates both D and A, further bridging the pitch centers of the first and third movements.

The image shows a musical score for Example 5.9, Sonata Mvt. 3, mm. 100-104. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system is for the tuba, starting at measure 100. The bottom system is for the piano, also starting at measure 100. A box in the tuba part highlights the 3-7 trichords  $T_9$  and  $T_8I$  in the penultimate measure. The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns and chordal structures.

**Example 5.9** Sonata Mvt. 3, mm. 100–104

The sonata is thus saturated with characteristic sonorities, which inform motivic development and lend coherence and motion. Small trichordal seeds expressed succinctly in the first three measures generate the melodic material, which in turn creates the larger

architecture of the piece. This development is expressed in an expansive character, and the primacy of melody and expressivity is palpable.

## 6. *Austerity Measures: Intermezzo Concertante*

*Intermezzo Concertante*, Op. 171, composed in 1987, was also dedicated to Michael Lind. The score is signed “Årre boreale,” indicating that it was composed at Holmboe’s home in the forest near Lake Årre. The piece is written for solo tuba and strings. It is a through-composed work of about eight minutes in duration.

Holmboe had previously written a full length Concerto for Tuba Op. 127 (1976) for Jørgen Voigt Arnsted, tubist with the Odense symphony orchestra and professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. The concerto is quite busy, at times raucous, and technically challenging. It requires extended techniques such as multiphonics, and extreme high register playing in the cadenzas. Holmboe wrote the concerto to fit Arnsted’s particular playing style. Arnsted was Michael Lind’s teacher at RDAM, and also taught Jens Bjørn Larsen before Larsen won the Danish National Radio Orchestra audition, and took over as the professor at RDAM at Arnsted’s insistence. Larsen went on to record both the *Concerto* and *Intermezzo Concertante* with the Ålborg Symphony Orchestra, and had a dialogue with the composer about various performance decisions. Just as the concerto had been composed to suit Arnsted, the *Intermezzo Concertante* caters to Lind’s strengths. Lind is known particularly for his tone and lyricism rather than virtuosic pyrotechnics, and the focus on melodic development in the *Intermezzo* shows the strengths of a lyrical player quite well.

The features that Holmboe appreciated in Romanian folk music mark the melodic and rhythmic features of this work. The ‘severity’ of melody is prevalent, most especially in the tuba lines, which are simple and austere for much of the work. These gestures are underpinned by a rhythmic vitality in the string parts, which often take up elements of rhythmic ostinato. The work draws mostly from the diatonic collection using modal collections and octatonic fragments, and also at times interpolating hexatonic references that incorporate the augmented second that Holmboe so admired in his 1934 observation of ‘unusual’ use of intervals in Romanian folk music.<sup>58</sup> However, this is not to say that the piece has a Romanian folk sound per se, it is only the bare elements that Holmboe takes from folk music, the essences of what he believed made the folk music effective that are incorporated in this work.

---

<sup>58</sup> Rapoport, 10.

The piece opens with a *fortissimo* accented D in the strings, with the contrabasses entering in the second measure with an ascending line, D–E–F under an A in the upper cellos. This D–F interval becomes very important in this work, and the tension between D and A as important and grounding pitches is also prevalent throughout. These opening measures allude to D Aeolian. Though D–F–A describes a minor triad, Holmboe’s usage does not frame these pitches in a tonal sense, even when they are treated triadically or seem to insinuate traditional key relationships; rather the use of tonality here is free not than functional.

The placement of triplets on the final beat of the bar in the string introduction sets up rhythmic feature that pervades the work, most notably in the solo tuba line. The opening melodic gesture in the tuba, beginning in with the anacrusis to m. 19, includes smaller note values, often eighth notes, only on the last beat of a bar. This element serves to propel the rhythmically simple melody forward. This opening gesture centers around D and F, going to G and E in m. 20, reiterating the importance of the minor third. The collection used in the solo tuba mm. 19–21 can be analyzed either as a diatonic fragment, or a four note segment of OCT<sub>1,2</sub>. The same is true of mm. 22 and 23, with OCT<sub>0,1</sub>. The use of discrete octatonic segments from the A-Phrygian collection creates a particular interval structure, giving the phrase a distinctive character.

The image shows a musical score for measures 18-23 of 'Intermezzo Concertante'. The top staff is for the tuba, starting with a half rest in measure 18, then a melodic line. The piano part is in grand staff. Measures 19-21 are labeled OCT<sub>1,2</sub> and measures 22-23 are labeled OCT<sub>0,1</sub>. The piano part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and triplets. The tuba part has a melodic line with eighth notes on the final beat of each bar.

**Example 6.1** *Intermezzo Concertante* mm. 18–23

A hexatonically influenced string line beginning in m. 29 precedes the next entrance for tuba at mm. 30. This statement reverses the direction of the opening line and is framed by E–G rather than F–D, it can be clearly heard as a derivation of the opening

tuba motive though the collection used, set class 4–11 (0135) is a diatonic but not octatonic fragment. The answering gesture, in mm. 32–34, treats the opening material similarly; it includes a move from F–D, but in a rather convoluted manner, the main motion is A–D.

**Example 6.2** *Intermezzo Concertante* mm. 29–35

Starting with the upbeat to m. 40 the original melody returns, but the answer in m. 42 pushes upward before beginning its descent to A, which comes on beat four of m. 44 and leads to a whole note E, followed by a fermata unison E in the strings. The overall motion in the tuba m. 40–45 suggests E-Phrygian, though the strings shift to E-Aeolian at m. 44. In functional tonal writing, the emphasis on E provides expectation of resolution to A, and after the fermata the tuba line actually does emphasize A-Aeolian while reiterating some rhythmic elements of the opening gesture and incorporating half notes that tie over the measure. This line comes to rest in a tonally unconventional cadence from C–D.

The strings continue on with a unison D rhythmic ostinato at m. 57, which builds to the *forte* tuba entrance at m. 61, by far the strongest tuba statement to this point in the composition. Here the upper strings abruptly shift from eighths to a free development of the triplet figures in the opening measures, grounded by eighths on beats one and three in the cello line. The tuba part further asserts the minor third as an essential melodic and structural interval, in the guise of a C–A motion. A return of the opening tuba gesture follows at *mezzo piano*, while the top cellos offer a sort of echo in counterpoint, with the upper strings still busy with undulating triplets. At m. 69 the strings have a variation of the eighth note rhythmic ostinato of mm. 57 to 60, which acts as a frame for this brief section.

At the Andante at m. 74, the strings develop the melodic material that the tuba has played up to this point. The treatment of melody rhythm here is much freer, and the melodic gestures begin to lose their austerity. Syncopated, chromatically inflected expressive solo lines in the first and second violins and the first cello create a dynamic interplay. This complex interplay of virtuosic lines stands in contrast to the stark melody built off of the original motive, these elements are opposed yet unified, suggesting that which seems simple or static may be teeming with life below the surface.

At m. 83 the multi-voiced texture coalesces for a moment into a *forte* statement of the D–F motive, emerging suddenly and reasserting its fundamentality. Then the solo lines resume their play, with the tuba entering at mm. 93 in a rhythmically simplified, echoing interplay with the solo first violin, developing the opening idea and pushing it inexorably forward. The tuba and first violin interaction builds for four measures to the *forte* in mm. 98. In mm. 98 and 99 the tuba makes a statement made dramatic by the use of a fragment from the HEX<sub>3,4</sub> collection and a syncopated figure, the first time either of these elements have been used in the solo line. The greater variation in rhythm and intervallic content of the string accompaniment has begun to germinate in the tuba part. However, the tuba quickly shifts to familiar rhythmic patterns and initiates a stately Aeolian descent to C2.

The solo string lines continue their interaction at m. 110, now incorporating sixteenth notes and more articulated figures, with solo viola joining the fray. The tuba reenters in m. 114 on a *forte* F, but rather than making the by now expected descent to D, the line skips it over and finally shakes of its severity, displaying a heroic virtuosity and freedom. Unpredictable rhythms and arcing lines push forward, and the melodic material comes from modal collections as well as OCT<sub>0,1</sub>. E-Phrygian guides the line from m. 121 to m. 129, where it is undermined by chromatic inflections before coming to a rest on E. Minor thirds in eighth note figures mm. 126–130 re-ground the line. Solo first violin closes out the section with a return to the more somber guise of the melody.

The 3/4 *Allegro con brio* at m. 137 opens on unison E pizzicatos in the strings, which quickly shift to a D triad in mm. 141–142, marred slightly by an E in the solo cello. The tuba enters with an assertive and articulated character, incorporating larger intervals while emphasizing A-Aeolian. Half step inflections dominate the string

accompaniment. At m. 150 the tuba shifts to D-Aeolian, leading to an accented F–D that emphasizes the continued importance of these pitches in the new melodic line. This is the first time an accent has been used in the solo part, further underscoring the structural significance. An accented D–F motion echoes in the string parts at m. 160, where the tuba in turn makes an unaccompanied descent from C4 to low D2.

The image shows a musical score for Example 6.3, Intermezzo Concertante mm. 170-174. The score is written in bass clef and consists of three staves. The top staff is the tuba line, which begins at measure 170 with a triplet of eighth notes (F, G, A) and continues with more triplets. The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring chords and rhythmic patterns. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring rhythmic patterns and chords. The score is marked with a forte (f) dynamic and includes accents and slurs.

**Example 6.3** *Intermezzo Concertante* mm. 170–174

At m. 171 the tuba takes up triplets for the first time in the work, with a vigorous, articulated ascending line drawing heavily from set class 3–7. The tuba adopts motion previously relegated to the strings, further unifying the earlier opposition in the work. An echo of the opening motive occurs in m. 180, though F is approached by G rather than D, and the melody quickly moves beyond the confines of its original state, shifting to C-Aeolian as it descends.

From m. 183 the tuba ascends gradually from the depths, beginning on a G1. For the first time in the work, the solo line is doubled. The partnering of the tuba with contrabasses lends power and depth to the sound, and G-Dorian is suggested, lending a brooding mood to the figure. The line culminates on a *crescendo* F–E–D motion (mm. 198–199), with the final D accented at *fortissimo*. Beginning in mm. 199 the strings take up their own opening material, quickly interrupted by the high tessitura tuba melody that goes on unaccompanied. Though this statement begins on an E4, it quickly shifts to C-Aeolian. The line emphasizes D–A, then uses the F–D third as a set up for a G–C cadential motion. The strings take the C and reiterate it in unison, then again return to



material from the opening eight measures (mm. 209–212), only to be interrupted by the solo tuba once again, which has broken free of the withdrawn mood of the opening sections.

In mm. 218 and 220 the tuba mixes the ascending triplet motion from mm. 171–176 with eighth notes on the final beat of each measure. In this particular guise, this rhythmic figure serves to belabor movement into the next measure rather than push it forward. The ascent of this line culminates in a high tessitura statement of F–D, accented at *ff* the F4 is the highest tuba note in the piece. This gesture is then echoed *piano* in the staff. A brief resurgence of triplets in mm. 224 leads to a D which settles A, touching down to F briefly in mm. 226 and 228 before returning to A. Meanwhile, an A–E fifth articulated in the cellos moves inward as part of a contracting wedge to center on D in mm. 226, which underpins the A3 in the tuba and attempts to prolong D-Aeolian until m. 229, where an A minor triad sounds in the strings, signaling the shift to A-Aeolian for the final *meno mosso* section. The next seven measures see a descent to A2. In mm. 237 and 238 material from the Andante (mm. 74) returns in the strings, featuring a fifth between A and E and a B in the viola part. The final ascending tuba gesture, an A–E–F–A line *con forza*, is underpinned by a unison movement of D–C in the strings, who then finish the work on two unison As. Though the piece began as very D-centric, and indeed the incorporation of D into the final measures is a nod to its importance, it is ultimately overpowered by A.

237

237

*ff* *con forza*

*ff*

*ff*

pizz.

Example 6.4 *Intermezzo Concertante* mm. 237–241

Grimley observed that Nielsen often used modal collections to suggest mist,<sup>59</sup> and in the early sections of this piece the combination of modal collections with melodic features that are at times stark is suggestive of a similar effect. Unlike Nielsen's *Helios* overture, Holmboe's mist does not burn off through a clear tonal arrival, but rather through the evolution of modal motives that retain their essential identity. Grimley also identified Sibelius' penchant for "craggy" orchestral textures when evoking the Finnish landscape in tone poems,<sup>60</sup> here the more temperate texture of the solo tuba line can be seen as evoking the gentler character of the flat Danish landscape. The strings and tuba begin as essentially opposed forces, one steadfast in melodic parsimony, the other changeable and rhythmically dynamic. They gradually sustain each other, and create synthesis among the various salient elements in the work.

---

<sup>59</sup> Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism*, 160.

<sup>60</sup> Grimley, "The tone poems: genre, landscape and structural perspective" in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Grimley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99-102.

## 7. Performance Etiquette

*How shall the music be performed? Can the notation give such precise information that there is only one way to play a work? Is a note- perfect rendition absolutely necessary, or can there be a certain leeway for the practicing musician? Can performers allow themselves to display their own temperament, their particular technique and personal skill without betraying the composer's intentions and doing violence to the integrity of the work?*<sup>61</sup>

These questions, which I myself and many other performers have grappled with when interpreting a composer's work, come directly and refreshingly from the composer himself. Far from the rigid attitude adopted by many twentieth century composers demanding a narrow interpretive approach, Holmboe offered a reasonable and thoughtful guide for performers. He continues, "These questions lead directly to a discussion of the form of existence of the work, whether it is complete when the composer has written the last note, and whether its existence can be threatened by being performed—a discussion of its identity and integrity."<sup>62</sup>

A musical score consists of a variety of signs and instructions that would ideally lead to a performance that resonates with what the composer imagined. As Holmboe wrote about his compositional process, "you can mentally combine notes into constructive unities, connect them with varied rhythms and sonorities, have combinations of notes arise, resolve them, and form new ones—you can develop them, shape and finalize their form in a purely mental process."<sup>63</sup> Thus, Holmboe asserts that he has a very clear mental conception of how a work should sound, which may be completely removed from use of actual sounding instruments as inspiration for his creative process. However, he admits that a first performance, particularly of a large- scale orchestral work, will rarely live up to his expectations. Not all details can be visually shown; as he cautions "the length of a bowing stroke, quality of a voice, width of a vibrato, and dynamics of a phrase cannot be described precisely but only approximately."<sup>64</sup> In short because music is an entity not fully describable by any other means, through signs,

---

<sup>61</sup> Holmboe, *Experiencing Music*, 62.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 63.

symbols or words, some elements must always be left to ‘chance’, to the will, intellect and sensibilities of the performer.

As Alf Gabrielsson writes in *Emotional Expression in Music*, “the same notated structure can be performed in a number of different ways, and the way it is performed may influence the listener’s impression of the music in profound ways. Moreover, the mechanisms underlying emotional expression via performance might be different from those underlying emotional expression via composed structure.”<sup>65</sup> There may be a disparity between what the performer can express and what the composer has expressed in the composition. Holmboe was prepared for this turn of events, referring to the score as a “description of the *possibilities*,” that is, he relinquishes control over the final product to the performers. This does not mean that any interpretation of the score is acceptable; rather Holmboe states that performance must allow for the “degree of spirit in the performers” as well as the effect of the audience and the acoustical conditions, which cannot be foreseen by the composer for each performance. He admits that performers have “human emotions and artistic intentions, which may and must be realized.” The logic and necessity of the music has been actualized in the score by the composer, but must be brought to life anew in each performance. Consequently the task of “releasing the powers latent in the music” must be given over to the performers, and the composer must trust that their artistic design will be realized.<sup>66</sup>

Holmboe noted that interpretation must be based on the established practices concerning the character of the music. He articulates a thin line between acceptable interpretation and ‘self- glorifying display’ by the performer. However, his views on the role of the performer are much more empowering than they are restrictive. There is a margin for interpretation, a scope of movement for the performers. In Holmboe’s ideal performance situation, performers have a deep enough understanding of the work and its elements to rely on their instinct and intuition. “The closer a musician comes to the essentials, to the shaping and the expressive force in the music, the greater is the artistic experience.”<sup>67</sup> Holmboe invites performers to engage with the forces that animate his

---

<sup>65</sup> Gabrielsson, *Emotional Expression in Music*, 506-7.

<sup>66</sup> Holmboe, 63-64.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

music, to feel the processes at work and to realize them through the lens of their own experience.

## 8. *Pedagogy of Performance*

Knowing how Holmboe viewed the role of the composer and performer, it is possible to extrapolate some best practices for the interpretation of the Sonata and *Intermezzo Concertante*. These pieces are written idiomatically for the tuba, mostly in the resonant middle register with an emphasis on free blowing lines. The primacy of horizontal elements and melodic development make these two works excellent additions to the repertoire, particularly for tuba students.

Interpretation and musicality are very important skills for students to develop, but can be difficult from a teaching standpoint. As Brenner and Strand observed in a *Journal of Research in Music Education* case study on teaching musical expression to young performers, “when teaching performance means teaching instrumental or vocal performance technique and helping students to memorize repertoire, read notation, and acclimate to an audience, encouraging expressiveness can become a challenge.” In this context, the researchers defined expressivity as the “process a performer uses to identify and manipulate the moments in a piece of music that are, according to sensible patterns of change, appropriate for deviations from the norms of tempo, dynamic level, articulation, and tone quality.”<sup>68</sup>

Students are generally developing skills in many areas simultaneously, and often maturation of satisfactory technique and sound production becomes a primary objective without the explicit incorporation of expressivity. Identifying and manipulating salient structures is an important process that can be initiated in the context of various styles of music. As the above analyses of Holmboe’s works show, his music in particular creates opportunities to build these skills. Focus on such music, encouraging performers to make thoughtful and active interpretive and expressive decisions, can help promote qualities of musical agency among students.

The limited nature of the tuba repertoire is an issue here. Often students are asked to perform works that may not have the melodic integrity and sophisticated construction of Holmboe’s writing. Though Holmboe is not completely unknown in the United States, his works are rarely performed and certainly his works for tuba have not entered into the

---

<sup>68</sup> Brenda Brenner and Katherine Strand, “A Case Study of Teaching Musical Expression to Young Performers”, *Journal of Research in Music Education* 6, (2013), 1.

mainstream repertoire. That these pieces were written specifically for a masterfully lyrical tuba player by an artful and thoughtful composer makes them a significant addition to the repertoire.

Students approaching these works will likely not have the level of background information presented here. As discussed previously, Holmboe's melodies are often rather stark, and he does not include a large number of markings to guide interpretation, providing only "possibilities." The performer must find a way to enliven the lines, give them direction and shape according to their inherent characteristics, "releasing the powers latent in the music."

Holmboe wished for performers to rely on their instinct in interpreting his music, and found that in professional performances there was not always enough time to reach the point of familiarity where this was possible. For students it may be more practical to spend time getting to know the music, and developing an understanding for it. In order to render the melodies effectively, it will be necessary for a player to develop their musical instincts, and adapt them to Holmboe's style.

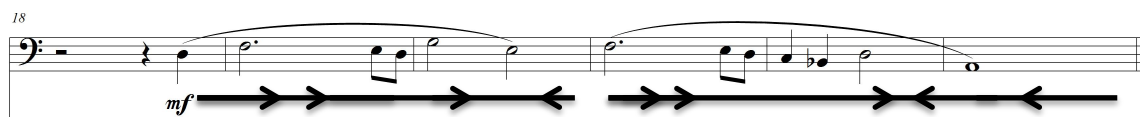
Capturing the essence of what a composer intended is not an easy feat, and can often seem unattainable to student performers. To reiterate Holmboe's views on rendering his music, "the closer a musician comes to the essentials, to the *shaping* and the *expressive force* in the music, the greater is the artistic experience." Parsing the particular forces at work in the music at each moment may seem daunting, but once a feel is developed for the style and structures it can flow quite naturally.

Holmboe's penchant for establishing smaller motives and weaving them into a coherent horizontal framework provides challenges and expressive benefits to the performer. Recognition of repeating and metamorphosing structures can enable students to build an understanding of how the works function, and render them appropriately. Awareness of the recurring motives and interweaving trichords in the Sonata, for example, can aid in placing emphasis and making phrasing decisions. In the outer movements the main motive tends to be articulated clearly, but in the second movement it more often embedded in the phrase, incorporating syncopation and crossing the bar line. This is a situation where recognition of the motive can affect the shaping and emphasis within the phrase to make clear salient features of the composition. Placing particular

stress on the motive within the context of the larger lyrical phrase connects the declamatory idea from the first movement to the expressive style of the second movement. Contemplation of smaller structures can lead to coherent and affective phrasing choices at higher levels, and a sense for the organic flow and growth of these structures further informs musical choices.

In the Sonata, the moving, chromatically inflected lines (i.e. at m. 21 in the first movement) establish webs of tension that affect the realization of the idea. To play these lines “straight,” without acknowledgement of the inner tensions would create a flat, mechanical effect. Paradoxically, these lines must be achieved with both smoothness and a tensile strain that distinguishes the antagonism between competing pitches. The inherent tension in the lines must be allowed to build, develop and flower into a coherent statement.

The nature of the melodies in these works also may necessitate development of timbral coloration. The melodic lines, especially in the *Intermezzo Concertante*, require a clear and resonant tone and have little to no tolerance for abrupt timbral shifts. Taking the first tuba entrance as an example, we have a five-measure phrase with an essentially arcing shape. Evenness and control of tone, and a concept of creating a smooth line are paramount. However, achieving control and stability of tone is not enough to render the melody effectively. The performer must provide direction to the line, enlivening it and causing the melody to “sing” forth. In my interpretation, intensity should ebb and flow through the longer notes, building through the F dotted half in m. 19 and G half note in m. 20, relaxing a bit on the E half note. Intensity should again fuel the dotted half in m. 21, and begin to slacken ever- so- slightly on the D half note in m. 22, allowing the whole note in m. 23 to establish and taper. Acknowledgement of the underlying collectional structures and the necessity of making a clear statement with the first entrance are important to set up the maturation of musical material throughout the piece.



**Example 8.1** *Intermezzo Concertante*, mm. 18–23, suggested direction of line



Mental images can be helpful in instructing expressivity, though it should be noted that they are merely metaphorical tools to encourage musical agency on the part of the performer. These images cannot get at the true musical content, but may be useful in encouraging imaginative treatment of expressivity. The melodic motives in the opening of the *Intermezzo*, for example, could be visualized in terms of shifting light, gently sloping landscape, the ebb and flow of the sea, the slow growth of plants. I choose these images as appropriate because they are naturally occurring elements that Holmboe was known to take creative nourishment from, even if they are not direct sonic inspirations. The essences of these images can be incorporated into, or even suggested by a coherent interpretation, but the bulk of the interpretive inspiration should come directly from the musical structures.

Interpretation must rely primarily on the features of the music, and how they interact and change throughout the work. The same motivic idea may occur under a variety of stylistic guises, necessitating its rendering to vary based on context. There is no one correct way to interpret the music, but an understanding of its shape, course, tension and construction can guide the performer's choices towards the essential character of the music.

## 9. Epilogue

Vagn Holmboe's compositional style incorporates a variety of elements. Influence of other composers, folk music and natural processes are important to his stylistic identity. He was a true musical craftsman, guiding small seeds of inspiration into coherent and integrated musical structures. Understanding of his influences and artistic agency can inform interpretation, but his music is also capable of speaking for itself.

Holmboe's work forms an interesting vein of twentieth century music. He rejects the binding nature of traditional harmony, yet continues to use many of its structures to his own ends in combination with non- diatonic features. At a time when many composers pursued increasingly fragmented means of expression, his emphasis on the horizontal and melodic is refreshing. The relentless melodic development present in his works makes them an ideal lens for expressive elements.

For tuba performers and teachers, Holmboe's work offers opportunities to establish and expand elements. Focus on resonance and forging musical connection can help players to grow musically, establishing their own interpretive agency. Exploring the possibilities of expression in the Sonata and the *Intermezzo Concertante* is a musically nourishing and potentially revelatory experience.

## Bibliography

- Brenner, Brenda and Katherine Strand. "A Case Study of Teaching Musical Expression to Young Performers." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 61 (April 2013): 80-96.
- Finney, Ian. "Vagn Holmboe: quartet composer at work." *Tempo* 171 (December 1989): 12-17.
- Gabrielsson, A., and P. N. Juslin. "Emotional expression in music." In *Handbook of affective sciences*. Edited by R. J. Davidson, H. H. Goldsmith, & K. R. Scherer, 503-534. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Grimley, Daniel. *Carl Nielsen and the idea of modernism*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010.
- Grimley, Daniel. "The tone poems: genre, landscape and structural perspective." in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*. Edited by Daniel Grimley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Grimley, Daniel. "Modernism and Closure: Nielsen's Fifth Symphony." *Music Quarterly* 86 (Spring 2002): 149-174.
- Grimley, Daniel. "Organicism, form and structural decay: Nielsen's 'Second Violin Sonata.'" *Music Analysis* 21 (July 2002): 175-205.
- Hepokowski, James. *Sibelius Symphony No. 5*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Holmboe, Vagn. *Experiencing Music: A Composers Notes*. Edited and Translated by Paul Rapoport. Exeter: Toccata Press, 1991.
- Kappel, Vagn. *Contemporary Danish composers against the background of Danish musical life and history*. Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1950.

McLoskey, Lansing. *Twentieth Century Danish Music: An Annotated Bibliography and Research Directory*. Connecticut: Greenwood, 1998.

Miller, Mina, ed. *The Nielsen Companion*. Oregon: Amadeus Press 1994.

Nielsen, Carl. *Living Music*. Translated by Reginald Spink. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1953.

Rapoport, Paul. *The Compositions of Vagn Holmboe*. Copenhagen: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 1996.

Rapoport, Paul. *Vagn Holmboe's Symphonic Metamorphoses*. Illinois: University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1975.

Rassmusen, Karl Age. *Noteworthy Danes, portraits of eleven Danish composers*. Copenhagen: Wilhelm Hansen, 1991.

Thomsen, Bodil Marie Stavning and Kristen Ørjasaeter, eds. *Globalizing Art: Negotiating Place, Identity and Nation in Contemporary Nordic Art*. Århus: Århus University Press, 2011.

Yoell, John. *The Nordic Sound*. Boston: Crescendo Publishing, 1974.