

Stenhammar's affective shimmer

Landscape, form and subjectivity in the *Serenade*, op. 31, first movement

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Listening afresh to Herbert Blomstedt's luminously beautiful recording with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra of Wilhelm Stenhammar's *Serenade* for Orchestra, op. 31 (Blomstedt, 2018), it is difficult to identify a single detail on which to dwell. One moment, however, lingers especially long in the memory: less than thirty seconds after the music has begun, the bustling orchestral figuration with which the opening movement commences gives way to a suddenly suspended passage of sonorous horns, gently swaying strings, and mysterious woodwind murmurs (Example 1). As with many such moments in Blomstedt's account of the score, the impression is of being imaginatively transported to a completely different time and place, without any firm sense of how we have arrived or how we might re-emerge once more on the other side. It feels like arriving in and seamlessly leaving a dream, as though caught midway between sleep and wakefulness.

In the opening volume of his landmark study of the composer and his music, Bo Wallner (1991, p. 25) suggests that 'timbre, tranquillity, expressivity and at the same time their artful articulation' are typical traits of Stenhammar's work, and argues that there is 'no nordic romantic who has so intensively listened to silence and has composed it in the design of his form' (1991, p. 45).¹ In this article, I will add the concept of *stämmning*, or affect, to Wallner's threefold list. From the outset, it is important to acknowledge the difficulty of rendering the meaning of *stämmning* accurately in English: Erik Wallrup (2015, p. 15) notes that, like its German cognate 'Stimmung', it is commonly translated as mood, atmosphere, or temperament, but cannot fully be captured by any of those terms alone.² It is rather through the notion of affect that English usage comes closest to the feeling of an involuntary change of state which *stämmning* implies. Hearing Stenhammar's music affectively, particularly through his powerfully transformative responses to landscape, sheds renewed light on vital questions

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¹ 'Timbre, stillhet, expressivitet och samtidigt denna konstfulla artikulation'; 'Det finns i varje fall ingen nordisk romantiker som så intensivt har lyssnat till tystnaden och som så har komponerat in den i sin gestaltning av formen.'

² See also Wallrup's contribution (2020) in the volume *Music as atmosphere* (Riedel and Torvinen, eds., 2020), and Grimley, 2016.

of place, form, and subject position. Inspired by Blomstedt's interpretation of the *Serenade*, this essay will begin to sketch an affective methodology for interpreting Stenhammar's work, an approach which locates his music firmly within a wider modern artistic practice at the turn of the twentieth century.

My argument falls broadly into two halves. In the first, I will attend to the local details which make the opening of the *Serenade* such a remarkable and striking passage: all too often, the means by which Stenhammar achieves his specific musical affects can pass relatively unnoticed or overlooked, such is their subtlety and apparent ease of articulation. I will assess the implications of this gesture for our understanding both of the formal structure of the opening movement (Overtura) within which it sits, and of the work as a whole, especially the extent to which it can be heard as a through-composed score. In the second part of the essay, I will draw out these analytical and hermeneutic strands in a more holistic reading of Stenhammar's wistfully evocative notions of subjectivity and place through the category of affect. My aim is not to try and be comprehensive – such a task would be impossible, particularly within the confines of a journal article. Rather, I hope to try and account for some of the ways in which I find Stenhammar's music so moving, returning to the opening of the *Serenade* as a paradigm for hearing his work affectively as a site of change and transformation.

Previous accounts of the compositional genesis of the *Serenade* have often emphasised the aesthetic role that a particular responsiveness to place – in this case, Italy – played in its creation. The likely origins of the *Serenade* may date from Christmas 1905, when Stenhammar bought the Baedeker guide to Italy in anticipation of planning a cultural and creative itinerary, or more likely his family's first visit to the country in the following year, when they travelled to Florence via Bologna and Verona.³

Italy's appeal is easy to understand. A Scandinavian literary and artistic colony had long been established in Rome, and the Circolo Scandinavo, founded in July 1860, welcomed Henrik Ibsen, Selma Lagerlöf, Edvard Grieg and Sigrid Undset among other luminaries (Pihl Atmer, Carlens and Lång, eds., 2010). Members of Stenhammar's immediate artistic and cultural circle had recently accommodated themselves in the south – notably the painters Prince Eugen, Georg Pauli and Richard Bergh, as well as his colleague, the composer and music critic Wilhelm Peterson-Berger. Italy was also consonant in Stenhammar's mind with Nietzsche's dramatic philosophical and aesthetic volte-face in his short polemical essay *Der Fall Wagner* (1888), subtitled 'a musician's problem': whereas the north had once been the site for the creation of a new Athenian golden age, the reinvigorated marriage of opera and drama through the vehicle of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, it was now associated in Nietzsche's mind with darkness, provincialism, obscurity, and a cumbersome and ponderous amateurism seeking to pass itself off as profundity (Harvey and Ridley, 2022).

³ Stenhammar was far from alone in this pattern of cultural stimulation, consumption and (re)imagination. See Schoolfield (2003), especially chapters 4 (on August Strindberg) and 7 (on Arne Garborg). For an especially insightful discussion of Strindberg's writings on Italy, and the extent to which Italy had started to become over-familiar, see Marcus, 2020.

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Allegrissimo

ob. *fz* *p* *bn. 8^{va}* *p cresc.*

hns *fz* *p*

violins *f dim. p*

lower strings *f* *pizz. f*

arco (violas +8va) *pizz.*

6 1

cresc. *fz* *hns!* *f*

arco *p f cresc. fp*

11

cl.

bns and hn 3

horn 'Klang'

con sord.

f

pp

vla

fz

ffz

più p

16

Tempo molto sostenuto $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

fl.

p dolce

pizz.

p

arco

ppp

pp

23

ob., cl.

p

3

ob.

dolciss.

bn

pp possibile

p dim.

solo violin

p dim.

pp

Example 1. Wilhelm Stenhammar, *Serenade for Orchestra*, op. 31, 'Overtura', opening (up to rehearsal no. 2).

Wagner's legacy had become little more than a bag of cheap tricks, marketed earnestly to a slavishly commodified public. The south, in contrast, offered immediacy, vibrancy, vitalism, life and agency. For Nietzsche, it symbolised colour, passion, and humanity: precisely those qualities which he felt were sorely lacking in Wagner's work. '*Il faut méditerraniser la musique!*' Nietzsche (1967, §3, p. 159) famously declared: young artists should head south.

For Stenhammar, who had been a committed Wagnerian in the first part of his compositional career yet had already begun to harbour a familiar ambivalence about the influence of such a strong creative precursor, the new Nietzschean clarion call of the south must have seemed especially alluring. With his keen eye for architectural form and balance, and as an ardent admirer of early modern Italian artists such as Raphael and Michelangelo, the country presented an irresistible cultural point of reference. But Italy's impact also seems to have been more immediately corporeal. Stenhammar's correspondence from his first Florence sojourn provides compelling evidence of his material and sensory immersion in the south. In a letter to his colleague, the composer Karl Valentin, dated 6 December 1906, written at the very darkest time of the year in northern latitudes, he reported 'masses of southern sun, an indescribably beautiful prospect, a terrace covered in climbing roses and all of the south's floral magnificence'⁴ (Wallner, 1991, vol. 2, p. 371), and described how while staying at an elegant villa on the Via Farinata just up from the Boboli gardens behind the Pitti Palace, they had enjoyed 'wonderful weather almost the whole time. Sun, sun, sun and roses, roses. And it smells

⁴ 'massor av södersol, obeskriveligt vacker utsikt, en terrass omspunnen av klängrosor och all söderns blomsterhärlighet.'

so wonderfully mild and sweet, and the light shimmers in a way that makes everything light and transparent – there is a gentle radiance over this landscape, over the mountains and valleys, over the river and all the small white houses and over the remarkable town, which lies and smiles in the sunshine, cheerful and delightful⁵ (ibid., p. 373). An oft-quoted letter to Olallo Morales, dated 25 March 1907, paradoxically the time when he was working on his whirling paganistic celebration of the northern seasonal cycle, *Midvinter*, op. 24, gives an even more powerful impression of the south, and references ideas and motifs which may have been the first inkling of what would later become the *Serenade*:

I hope that a new orchestral piece, a sort of Florentine spring dithyramb, will sing clear in my head during the journey. D major – the Florentine bells always ring in D major (I shouldn't have said that: just now the bells apparently rang in F sharp major – but they have the character of D major in any case) – french horns and cor anglais and bass clarinet in dark tones, flutes and oboes that twitter like thrushes, and long yearning string phrases, something simultaneously sensual and chaste, like the strong scent of flowers in pure sunlight – yes, I know precisely what I want, and yet I do not know it at all. I will write as beautifully and gently about the south as only a northerner can.⁶ (Wallner, 1991, vol. 3, pp. 93–94)

Stenhammar's account is revealing on several levels. First, the idea of a spring dithyramb immediately suggests some form of Nietzschean Dionysian ritual, with its associations of new growth, youth, and regeneration. Second, the specific reference to the D major bells in Florence might be based on an attentive musician's keen empirical observation, or an unconscious allusion to Sibelius's Second Symphony—a score likewise powerfully associated with springtime in Italy, and whose tonal argument revolves around D and F sharp (although the score was sketched in Rome and Rapallo on the Ligurian coast, rather than in the Tuscan capital). (Tawaststjerna, 1994, pp. 151–153) Third, beyond the tonal orientation of the bells, Stenhammar's description suggests a heightened level of auditory awareness – the upper woodwind twittering like thrushes – and of haptic response: the sounds of the birds and bells seemingly commingles with the scents and colours of the landscape, conceived in figuratively instrumental terms. Finally, Stenhammar's closing dictum, namely that he sought to write 'as beautifully and gently about the south *as only a northerner can*' [emphasis added] signals particular problems

⁵ 'Ett förunderligt väder ha vi haft nästan hela tiden. Sol, sol, sol, och rosor, rosor. Och så luktar det något särskilt mildt och sött, och i luften är ett skimmer som gör allting lätt och genomskinligt—det är en mild glans över detta landskap, över bergen och dalen, över floden och alla de små hvita husen och över den underbara staden, som ligger och myser i solskenet, så munter och så ljuv'.

⁶ 'Jag hoppas att ett nytt orkesterstycke, något slags florentinsk vårdityramb, skall sjunga sig klar i min hjärna under denna resa. D-dur – den florentinska klockklängen går alltid i D-dur (det skulle jag inte ha sagt: just nu ringa klockorna alldeles tydligt i Fiss-dur – men det har karaktären av D-dur i alla fall) – valthorn och engelskt horn och basklarinett i mjuka klanger, flöjter och oboer som kvintilera [sic] som trastar, och långa sugande stråkfraer, något på samme gång sensuellt och förändligt, som stark blömdoft i ren solluft – ja, jag vet så väl hur jag vill ha det, och ändå vet jag det inte alls. Jag vill dikta så vackert och vekt om södern som endast en nordbo kan.' Wallner gives the quotation twice in his study with minor differences between the two versions.

of positionality (reinforcing some unreconstructed assumptions about the supposed cold, logical rigour of the north versus the more commodious and accommodating environment of southern climes that might otherwise tend in an all-too-familiar colonising direction) as well as complicating questions of agency and place. We shall return to these in due course.

* * *

It is conceivable that some of these more intractable questions may explain the work's otherwise puzzling reception history. The *Serenade* was first performed in Stockholm on 30 January 1914, alongside *Midvinter*, the two *Sentimental Romances*, op. 28, and the Second Piano Concerto, op. 23. But Stenhammar swiftly withdrew the score, and the revised version was premiered only on 3 March 1920. The principal differences between the two versions, as is well known, were the transposition of the two outer movements from their initial key of E to F major, supposedly because of the difficulty of the string parts (Wallner, 1991, vol. 3, pp. 94–95), and the removal of an entire movement, a minuet entitled *Reverenza*, which had originally been placed second. Stenhammar's reservations about *Reverenza* are especially puzzling in light of the work's chilly reception after the first Stockholm performance. *Dagens Nyheter*, for example, reported that:

The composer strives to combine modern and antique ideals and thereby create something whole, but the work does not succeed either in terms of inventiveness or resourceful orchestral effects. As a rule our modern composers suffer at the very least from clothing their ideas in a rich orchestral garb. But either the collaboration between the conductor and orchestra was inadequate or they did not find much to chisel out. Most effective was the second movement, *Reverenza*, and the Scherzo, where it was possible to discern something of the composer's spirituality. The outer movements appeared strained.⁷ (Wallner, 1991, vol. 3, p. 151)

Birger Anrep-Nordin likewise described *Reverenza* as 'of course the best' among the six movements. (ibid., p. 152) And even one of Stenhammar's more committed supporters, Ture Rangström, wrote in *Stockholms Dagblad* claimed that the work contained 'pretty moods, above all in the gentle Notturmo-movement, but suffered from a certain shortage of concentration and contrast and lacked any genuinely engaging impulse' (ibid., p. 153).⁸ Such accounts might have been prompted by sub-optimal elements in the initial performance: Stenhammar's score places particular demands on the orchestra in terms of ensemble, rhythmic articulation, and balance. But they also seem motivated by

⁷ 'Tonsättaren söker här blanda moderna ideal med antika och därav bilda något helt, men lyckas icke övertyga varken om rik uppfinning eller om fyndig orkestral klangverkan. I regel pläga våra moderna tondiktare åtminstone kläda sina idéer i en rik orkesterskrud. Men antingen var samarbetet mellan dirigent och orkester alltför otillräckligt eller också fanns det ej mycket att utmejsla. Mest tilltalande var andra satsen, *Reverenza*, och Scherzot, där man försporde något av tonsättarens spiritualitet. De övriga satserna föreföllo ansträngda.'

⁸ 'vackra stämningar, framför allt i den veka Notturmo-satsen, men lider av en viss brist på koncentration och kontraster och saknar i egentlig mening fängslande uppslag.'

ambiguities of form and genre: the impression that the shape and ultimately the meaning of the work remained elusive. Critical reaction to the revised version of the score in 1920 was more broadly positive, perhaps because of greater confidence in the work's execution or because Stenhammar's orchestral music seemed more immediately familiar and approachable, not least because of his long-standing association with the Gothenburg players. But it is precisely by returning to and actively engaging this more ambivalent sense of time and place, I will suggest, that a clearer understanding of the *Serenade's* significance emerges.

* * *

This is the moment, then, to return to those opening bars and to the arresting impact of that early episode which feels like such a disconcertingly diversionary swerve. In retrospect, elements of the episode's disruptive quality are present almost from the very start. The Overtura opens, *Allegriissimo*, with a simple diatonic cadential gesture in the strings: the very same device in fact reappears symmetrically at the movement's close. The crispness and delicacy of the figuration suggests a heightened state of excitement – perhaps the anticipation of departure and arrival, and the not wholly unpleasurable anxiety of travel. But this cadential gesture is rapidly redirected, not least through the early incursion of the work's first problematic chromatic pitch element, C sharp, in the second bar. This chromatic element is reinforced by the horns and lower strings five bars later, and then by the descending gapped scale in the cellos and basses which lands with a bump on A flat (enharmonically g sharp) at rehearsal no. 1. This is overlaid by a series of oddly dissonant horn calls, cadencing on D flat, and a series of rudely interruptive gestures in the violas and violins – possibly a throwaway reference to the opening of Beethoven's F major Quartet, op. 135, a work which Stenhammar knew well, in which A flat and D flat are again prominent.⁹ The diatonic confidence of the opening bar, in other words, has been rapidly overturned, F major displaced by its altogether foreign tonal shadow, D flat. What follows then is a complete change of mood and character: the pizzicato strings and muted horn chord act as a transition to the slower pace and tonal realm of the *Tempo molto sostenuto*.¹⁰

The distant horn chord which underpins this transition (highlighted by the boxed text in Example 1, bar 15), in reality no more than a second inversion triad, is one of the *Serenade's* default acoustic reference points or *Klang*: a sonic object that suggests timelessness, displacement or enchantment. The *Klang* gains additional sonic richness from Stenhammar's characteristically refined and sensitive orchestration, the horn ensemble scored with the perfect fifth (F–C) prominently on top of the texture so that

⁹ On Stenhammar's referential relationship with Beethoven, see Rotter[-Broman], 2001, as well as her contribution in the current volume. I am presupposing a similar category of historical self-reflection, albeit more unconsciously realised, in this gesture.

¹⁰ The sequential pizzicato figure in the strings is a significant motivic element that appears later in the score: for instance, in the interruptive horn calls in the Scherzo's trio (*Lo stesso tempo un poco stretto*, rehearsal no. 30³), and in the string passagework in the central section of the finale (*da qui discretamente animando*, rehearsal no. 10).

the chord 'rings'—or shimmers—with its resonant upper partials.¹¹ The entry of the violins's soft, swaying figure against this backdrop, and over the A flat pedal, creates a more complex non-diatonic sonority (in effect, a subdominant ninth in fourth inversion) which initially leans strongly toward D flat, before moving very slowly back toward the tonic via an elided cycle-of-fifths motion as the texture grows and becomes more elaborate. Of particular note here is Stenhammar's delicately pointillistic approach to orchestral timbre: in addition to the woodwind bird calls (perhaps an echo of the twittering Florentine thrushes he had first described in his letter to Morales), the entry of the solo violin introduces an element of individual subjectivity (Cumming, 1997), amplified by an echo of that referential horn *Klang*, into a soundscape that might otherwise seem anonymously ambient, an effect rendered particularly beautifully in Blomstedt's recording. The writing for the remainder of the string section, carefully modulating from the *dolcissimo* and *quasi niente* instruction in the violins and violas through the precisely graduated scoring for individual desks in the cellos, creates a particularly finely shaded timbral context. It is only once Stenhammar has introduced each of these elements in turn that the music can seemingly gather itself together once more and relaunch its opening gesture, this time with a renewed feeling of purpose and forward momentum.

Formally, then, the *Tempo molto sostenuto* may seem little more than a passing interlude, a premature Schubertian excursion toward the subdominant (via the flat submediant) that has little consequence for the music that follows once the *Allegrissimo* has been regained. This is, in itself, a relatively common formal procedure in nineteenth-century music: the first movement of Schubert's famous Piano Sonata in B flat, D. 960, provides a comparative model.¹² As Stenhammar's Overture begins to modulate toward the dominant in a more regular and conventional manner, that fleeting and inconsequential impression of the *Tempo molto sostenuto* passage only seems to be reinforced. But the movement's subsequent progression is not quite as straightforward. The long-breathed cantabile violin melody at rehearsal no. 6 that occupies what initially appears to be the second subject space, for example, is in the tonic, rather than in a contrasting key. And even here, the melody's otherwise regular diatonic antecedent pattern is spiced by the prominent chromatic inflection two bars before rehearsal no. 7,

¹¹ This is a reference to the distinctive horn call that opens Sibelius's 'Lemminkäinen and the Island Maidens' ('Lemminkäinen ja saaren neidot') from the *Four Legends*, op. 22/1. Sibelius himself referred to the gesture later both at the opening of his Fifth Symphony, op. 82 (1915) and in his music for Strindberg's *Svanevit*, JS189 (1908). The programmatic links between the evocative opening of the tone poem and the 'exoticised' setting of Stenhammar's *Serenade* are symbolically close. Stenhammar references other works by Sibelius (the Third and Fourth Symphonies) elsewhere in the score.

¹² For influential readings of the (sub)mediant relationships in D.960, see Cohn, 1999, and Clark, 2011, especially Chapter 3, 'Music theory and the musicological imagination: perceptions of Schubert's sonata form' (pp. 146-203). It is worth noting that F, D flat/C sharp, and A (the key of the Notturmo) are the nodal points of Cohn's so-called 'eastern' hexatonic system. Stenhammar juxtaposes the three nodes in the concluding 'calmando' section of the finale, after rehearsal no. 19, immediately preceding the climactic closing play-over of the second subject, suggesting that he recognised their structural significance across the work as a whole.

pointedly referencing C sharp once more [Music Example 2]. This return of the catalysing chromatic element from the Overtura's opening gambit becomes even more pronounced after the melody winds up into a series of increasingly expansive cadential flourishes at rehearsal no. 8. This is another crucial moment of formal ambiguity: the first violins alone hold on to a single sustained C sharp, with a diminuendo, which is then tonicized by an entirely new passage in C sharp *minor*, scored for divided cellos and violas. If the *Tempo molto sostenuto* had initially appeared to be merely a parenthesis, this new hymnic episode gives it much greater formal and expressive significance, an early indication of a completely different state of musical time and being.

6

cl. **f**

bns **pp**

hns **p cresc.** **mf**

vln 1, lower strings *cantabile*

pp cellos, db **cresc.** **f**

poco cresc. *più cresc.* *cresc.*

7

+ ob. cl. **p dim.** **pp** **pp**

f **p dim.** **pp**

mf **p** **cresc.**

f dim. **p** **pp** *poco cresc.*

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2

ob.
p cresc.

bn + hn
pp cresc.

più cresc.

sempre cresc.

più cresc.

sempre cresc.

+ fl.

f

ff

f

ff

f cresc.

ff

f cresc.

ff

8

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

Example 2. Wilhelm Stenhammar, *Serenade for Orchestra*, op. 31, ‘Overtura’, from rehearsal no. 6.

The implications of this episode, and its relationship with the *Tempo molto sostenuto*, for a formal overview of the movement as a whole are significant. The passage feels icily remote from the tonal and expressive domain of the opening music: a manifestation of C sharp at its most alien and disruptive. What follows is a third reiteration of the *Allegrissimo* music, but now in a far more unstable and tonally fluid idiom. This iteration follows broadly the same pattern as the second, albeit in a very different and intensified manner, playing with elements of the dissonant horn calls from rehearsal no. 1 and the pizzicato string figures with which they were associated, and culminating in a second statement of the violin melody from rehearsal no. 6, now played by the first and second violins in unison (rehearsal no. 19). Much of this music seems preoccupied with recontextualising and hence resolving the C sharp elements from earlier in the Overtura. The melody’s antecedent phrase, for example, pointedly omits its previous reference to the problematic pitch element (two bars before rehearsal no. 20), and the cadential tail which had earlier ushered in the central C sharp minor episode is now recast as D flat, an enharmonic shift that might be heard as a structurally less disturbing reference to the tonic minor (in which D flat is a more regular component).

That is not quite the end of the matter, however, at least as far as the Overtura is concerned. The modal D flat inflection of the second play-over of the violin melody gives way to a reprise of the C sharp minor episode in the *tonic minor*—a resolution of sorts, but classically in the wrong mode. But at almost the last moment, the *Tempo molto sostenuto* does return in highly abbreviated form, in the submediant major. This provides one last glimpse of music that had seemingly been left behind, now in such a manner as to neutralise the disruptive impact of the prevalent C sharp element, and the movement can close in swift order with its symmetrical recall of the opening page. But even here, the final cadence still flickers with the presence of that persistent chromatic element, its presence still not fully resolved. Furthermore, Stenhammar’s careful tonal elision at the start of the second movement, the Canzonetta, which begins in F and then drifts slowly toward its home key, E minor—surely an innovation introduced when the

score was revised for its 1920 performance after omitting *Reverenza*—only heightens the feeling of contingency and of the provisional nature of the *Overtura*'s conclusion. Indeed, the end of the *Overtura* and the beginning of the *Canzonetta* are effectively run together, just as Stenhammar composes across the breaks between the second, third, and fourth movements: the carnivalesque horns from the *Scherzo* reappearing in the *Notturmo* as though heard from afar to complicate (or enrich) the elision of the different movements. Even the finale follows this pattern: its opening gesture picks up and harmonically recontextualizes the octave unison (A natural) with which the *Notturmo* finishes, and its final bars are coloured by precisely the same chromatic inflection (C sharp) which permeates the *Overtura*, a gesture which looks back wistfully to the work's opening page and that hence gathers up the whole work into a single, sustained musical span. This reading challenges Stenhammar's reported suggestion to Kurt Atterberg that the work need not necessarily be performed in its entirety, and that selected movements might be extracted individually (Wallner, 1991, vol. 3, p. 95). But Stenhammar's proposal was presumably based solely on pragmatic grounds, similar to Mahler's practice of extracting some of the shorter movements from his symphonies for concert use. The extent of the cross-reference between movements in the *Serenade*, in addition to the elisions mentioned above, reflect the score's high degree of integration and Stenhammar's compositional concern with different kinds of formal symmetry. This may also explain why he decided to drop *Reverenza* from the 1920 revision of the score: the minuet both disrupted the formal balance of the more streamlined five-movement scheme, and diluted the structural significance of the F-D flat/C sharp-A axis which emerged more clearly as a tonal-motivic *Grundprinzip* when the outer movements were transposed.

Where then, does this leave the question of the *Overtura*'s formal structure? Stenhammar himself insisted, in a letter to Morales dated 30 August 1920 in connection with the Gothenburg premiere of the revised version, that he had consciously referred to the form of the Italian *Overtura*, namely a simple binary form structure without an independent contrasting development section, or what James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy (2006, chapter 17) would prosaically label a 'Type 2 sonata'. In that case, it would be possible to hear the music as cast in two broad phases, the second beginning after the close of the C sharp minor episode, which cover broadly the same thematic terrain and are premised on the movement away from the initial tonic via the intrusion of C sharp in the first phase and its gradual return (confirmed by the string melody at rehearsal no. 19) in the second. The basic reflective design of this arrangement is then bookended by the pattern of the opening gesture – the initial attempt to launch the *Allegrissimo* that prompts the early diversion into the *Tempo molto sostenuto* – and its mirror-like return in the movement's coda. The *Overtura* is thus governed by a strong arch-like framing structure, based on the binary iteration of the two-phase structure of the *Allegrissimo*-Episode pattern, whose tonal and expressive drama is set up by the early incursion of the C sharp element in the introduction and its affective implications (figure 1).

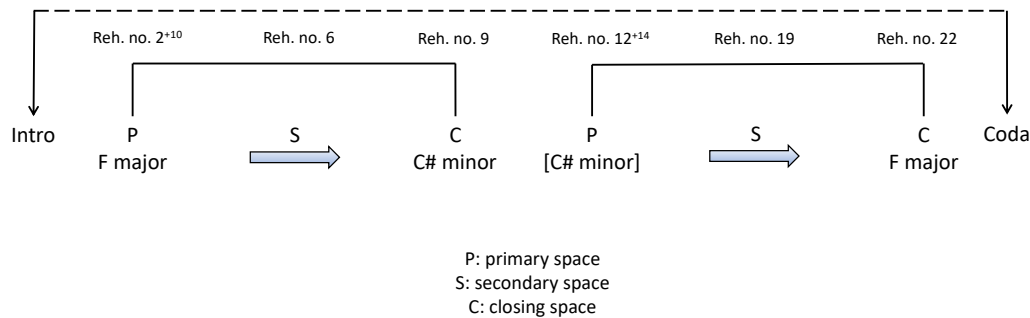


Figure 1. Wilhelm Stenhammar, *Serenade for Orchestra*, op. 31, ‘Overtura’, formal outline.

Stenhammar’s letter to Morales contains a further suggestion, however, which leads in a rather different hermeneutic direction. ‘Behind the traditional movement titles lies in that sense the concealed suggestion of a programme’ he maintained; ‘*it is not only the titles that are Italian*’ (Wallner, 1991, vol. 3, p. 94 [emphasis original]).¹³ It is worth pondering the implications of Stenhammar’s cryptic suggestion: the putative programme might refer, as Wallner implies, to the topical associations of the *Serenade* as a genre: music which is played outdoors at night, suffused, as he suggests, in its ‘sense of atmosphere and dreams and to listening to the voices and sounds of nature’ (ibid., p. 93),¹⁴ and also to its traditional role as a love-song or romance. The serenade is also pointedly *not* a symphony, a distinction which becomes especially clear in Stenhammar’s case by comparison with the closely contemporary composition of the Second Symphony, op. 34, a work that adopts a very different set of formal and expressive assumptions. But these arguably do not add very much to our appreciation of the work, beyond a vague sense of local colour. It is more rewarding, perhaps, to return to that idea of Italy, and specifically Florence, as the site for a particular kind of aesthetic experience, which in turn might reveal a more intensive sense of engagement with questions of subjectivity and place.

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A key figure in this discourse is Richard Bergh. Stenhammar presumably became acquainted with Bergh via his wife, the painter Helga Westerlund, who studied with Bergh and Georg and Hanna Pauli and who was also a visitor to the Académie Colarossi in Paris where Bergh had trained. Bergh was a member of the reformist anti-establishment group of artists including Anders Zorn, Karl Nordström, and Carl Larsson, who were opposed to the academicism of the Konstakademie in Stockholm and who were inspired by the work of French naturalists such as Jules Bastien-Lepage, Jean-Baptiste Corot, and members of the *plein-air* Barbizon school. Bergh joined Larsson in the Swedish artistic colony at Grez-sur-Loing, south of Fontainebleau, in the

¹³ ‘Obs. Den italienska formen Overtura. Bakom de traditionella satstitlarna ligger i detta fall en förstucken antydan av ett program. *Det är inte bara titlarna som äro italienska.*’

¹⁴ ‘... stämningssupplevelser och drömmar och till lyssnandet på naturens röster och ljud.’

1880s, where the composer Frederick Delius later settled, and travelled extensively to Italy. Wallner quotes a long passage from an important essay entitled 'A Swedish Artist's Temperament' which Bergh published in the periodical *Ord och Bild* in 1900 and that draws richly on his experience in Italy in 1897–1898:

I stood on a height outside Florence – an evening in February the previous year. Spring was just in the air. Round about me mountain ranges undulated in classically beautiful lines. At the ends down in the valley shone almond trees in their first white blossom. The sun sank, and all of the heights glowed. Over the whole city in the valley beneath spread a growing evening shadow, cool and dense; eventually on the cathedral's highest dome there glowed just a spark of light. At the same moment as the light fell, as though at a given signal, all of the city's church bells sounded simultaneously; it became a gentle melody in finely tuned scales. It spoke loudly and clearly to me of an old refined culture, which discreetly acted upon all sensory powers of beauty. – Poor Sweden, I thought, you lie so far north, far from civilisation and beauty! The pine trees in my immediate vicinity slowly sighed in the evening breeze from the mountains, and their sigh mingled like a murmur of voices among the song of the bells across the valley. I stood as though transfixed – with intoxicated senses. (Bergh, 1900, p. 133)¹⁵

Bergh's rich and detailed description suggests multiple parallels with Stenhammar's own experiences in Florence seven years later: a similar preoccupation with the natural beauty of the setting, cradled in the mountains, and with the striking acoustic quality of the city's bells (presumably in D major), heard across the valley in the evening. Wallner nevertheless underplays the actual point of Bergh's argument, namely that the immersive experience of the Florentine spring in fact had the opposite effect on Bergh's creative imagination, stimulating his thoughts not of classical antiquity but of the more elusive beauties of the Swedish landscape:

Poor Sweden, I repeated. Then the bells fell silent, one by one, and finally I heard only the sighing of the pines. It sounded like the sigh in a fir wood. A fir wood! That struck me in the heart. While gradually there come over me a longing, a longing so powerful that tears prickled in my eyes – a longing for Sweden, that silent, white land in the north. I saw it in an instant before me, so still, so clear and beautiful under its white jacket! Involuntarily I held out my arms. Then my eyes fell upon the pines, and my arms sank. They struck me suddenly as so strange. Never would I be able to indulge in taking anything from these fine trees, pines or cypresses, into my embrace. I was then almost ready to take my hat off to them every day, as though in front of fine strangers. No, spruce and fir, they are of the same timber as my own kind – we are brothers. I can embrace them. How I longed at that moment to be able to do so! Never, never – I knew

¹⁵ 'Jag stod på en höjd utanför Florens – en afton i februari förra året. Det hade just kommit vår i luften. – Rundt om mig vågade bergskedjorna i klassiskt sköna linjer. På slutningarna ned emot dalen lyste mandelträden i sin första vita blomning. Solen sjönk, och alla höjder glödde. Öfver hela staden där nere i dalen bredde sig redan aftonskuggan, sval och tät; endast på dömens högsta hvälfning brann ännu en gnista af ljus. I samma stund den slocknade började, som på en gifven vink, alla stadens kyrkklockor att samfäldt ljuda; det blef till en smekande melodi i fint stämda tongångar. Den talade högt och tydligt till mig om en gammal förfinad kultur, som taktfullt aktgivit på alla sinnens skönhetskraf. – Stackars Sverige, tänkte jag, hvad du ligger långt åt norr, långt från civilisationen och skönheten! – Pinjerna i min omedelbara närhet började sakta susa i aftonvinden från bergen, och deras sus blandade sig som ett mummel af röster med klocksången öfver dalen. Jag stod som fastnaglad – med berusande sinnen.'

in an instant – would I be able to paint a pine with the same affection as a fir, never Italian nature, never the south’s domain, never the classical lines with the same warmth and intimacy as the north’s barren, rugged fellsides (ibid., p. 133).¹⁶

Bergh’s argument is perhaps less interesting as a paradigmatic example of Romantic nostalgia – the revelatory acknowledgement of the simultaneity of the strange and the familiar, and the sense of recognition and alienation or displacement that results – so much as an account of the landscape’s affective agency, the way in which it shifts and inverts Bergh’s mood. What is striking then is not so much the detail of the panorama, carefully orchestrated in Bergh’s text, but rather the trace of its impact upon his own sense of being and place – or, rather, of being somehow out-of-place. What makes the experience of the Florentine evening so powerful is the feeling of presence and loss that emerges from the encounter, the way in which such an intense moment of sensory immersion and identification – the overpoweringly bodily feeling of communion with the trees – prompts the memory and anticipation of a completely different time and location, one that became so affectively charged and meaningful.

This immersive process of transformation, presencing and displacement, is gathered together in one of the defining preoccupations of Scandinavian artists and musicians of the 1890s and early 1900s: the principle of *stämming*, a word which appears frequently in Bergh’s work and in writing on Stenhammar’s music (including the composer’s own correspondence). Beyond the term’s connections with mood, atmosphere, temperament, disposition, feeling, emotion, character, inclination and accordance, *stämming* also gains significance via its association with voice, or rather with the idea of envoicement. Plus, in a more strictly musical sense, it can refer to tuning, intonation, or attunement – the act of tuning-in to a particular state of mind or being. Importantly, *stämming* implies some kind of affective modulation or change of state that is instigated or takes its cue from some exterior impulse or phenomenon. As Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2012, p. 74) has written, ‘atmospheres and moods ... are dispositions and states of being that are not subject to control by the individual they affect. Everyday and literary language both associate them – almost obsessively – with changes in the weather or the variation of musical sounds.’ They can hence seem almost incidental or quotidian – precisely the quality ascribed by Bergh to the Florentine pines that suddenly seem so strange. What is more important, according to Gumbrecht, is the affective potential that

¹⁶ ‘Stackars Sverige, upprepade jag. Då tystnade klockorna, en för en, och jag hörde slutligen endast suset i pinjerna. – Det lät som suset i en furuskog. – En furuskog! Det slet till i bröstet på mig. Men ens föll det öfver mig en längtan, en längtan så våldsam, att tårarna ville stiga till ögonen – en längtan till Sverige, det tysta, hvita landet i norr. Jag såg det i ett nu så tydligt framför mig, så stilla, så klart och vackert under sitt rena snötäcke! Ofrivilligt sträckte jag ut armarne. Då föllo mina ögon på pinjerna; och armarne sänktes. De föreföllo mig plötsligt så främmande. Aldrig skulle det kunna falla mig in att vilja taga ett af dessa fina träden, pinjerna eller cypresserna, i min famn. Jag var ju nästan dagligen färdig att taga af mig hatten för dem, liksom för fina främmande. – Nej, gran och fur, de äro af samma virke som min egen släkt – vi äro bröder. Er kan jag ta’ i famn. – Hur jag i den stunden längtade att kunna göra det! – aldrig, aldrig – det kände jag med ens – skulle jag kunna måla en pinje med samma kärlek som en fura, aldrig den italienska naturen, aldrig söderns rikedom, aldrig den klassiska linjen med samma värme och innerlighet, med hvilken jag skulle tolka en af nordens kargaste, raggigaste bergåsar.’

stämning offers, the idea of being transported 'via imagination, into situations in which physical sensation and psychic constitution become inseparable' (ibid., p. 75).

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For artists and musicians of the symbolist generation, including Bergh and Stenhammar, *stämning's* immediacy was perhaps its most profound and significant trait. But no less important was its concern with embodiment and agency, 'the interrelation between listener and sounding musical world', as Wallrup suggests (2015, p. 238), through which a wider and deeper environmental consciousness might be gained. Here lies the more radical aspects of *stämning* and the idea of attunement, Wallrup explains, in the notion of the lived body as 'a transformer, bringing together different spheres of human existence: emotion, perception, intellect.' (ibid.) It is precisely through this transformative experience, unsought for and involuntary, that the musical or acoustic act of presencing takes place. It is a form of musical spatialisation, Wallrup claims, which is 'nothing other than the expanded spatiality of the lived body: the music articulates a spatiality that changes the listener if he or she is attuned to the musical event.' (ibid.) And central to this notion of transformative change is the encounter with difference, once again unbidden and immediate. 'The attunement does not start with knowledge about a foreign culture', Wallrup notes, 'instead, it comes over the listener. In a moment like this, the listener does not have to understand what he or she hears. Instead, it is all about attunement to something unknown which is in conflict with the established order of self, but at the same time brings about resonance in that same self. The alien is never simply alien' (ibid.). Bergh's experience in Florence captures precisely this moment of alienation and self-revelation in which attunement brings an overpowering feeling of displacement – the foreignness of the southern pines, the sudden longing for the Swedish countryside – as a heightened act of presencing or being-in-place. Italy hence serves not as a cipher, still less as a restorative site of post-Wagnerian recovery and aesthetic realignment. Rather, it is the trigger to a more reflexive, existential but ultimately everyday relationality: an acoustic mode of engagement that signals a deeper embodiment and relatedness drawn out of that fleeting instant of sonic immersion.

Here, then, lies an affective basis for understanding the particularly intense and contingent character of Stenhammar's response to the Italian landscape in the opening pages of his *Serenade*. Italy for Stenhammar, as for Bergh, marked an overwhelming sense of that immersion in his acoustic environment which found its deepest expression in his musical preoccupation with atmosphere and mood—with the principal of *stämning*. Stenhammar's own resistance to straightforward notions of musical representation and his allusion to a concealed programme beyond the generic titles of the *Serenade's* movements alone hence does not appear contradictory or confused. Rather, it reflects precisely that moment of affective transformation which such encounters seem to embody and which he sought to render acoustically in his musical works. The act of tuning-in or of attunement – of attending to the inner voice—was one aspect of that process. But another was the opening out to other kinds of experience and musical being that such transformative encounters induced: the perception of an

environmental tone beyond the physical boundaries of the listening self. This is perhaps the most enduring and sustained quality of Stenhammar's music, not only in the *Serenade*, but throughout his later works, from the Fourth Quartet and the Second Symphony through *Sången* and his late Bergman settings, most notably the remarkable 'Klockan'. 'This is the edge of the world, and silence rules in an empty space', Wallrup suggests (2015, p. 239). But he goes on to argue that 'what makes us resonate does not have to be meaning. Instead, we can be struck by that strange sound; we can be struck like a string. And then the empty space turns into a resonating chamber.' Silence, then, does not signal negation or absence, but rather potentiality, an opening-out. As Wallner sensed, few composers have attended so closely to the sound of those sympathetic strings as Wilhelm Stenhammar, and it is surely this ability which underpins his claim that there is 'no Nordic romantic who has so intensively listened to silence and has composed it in the design of his form.' Returning again to Blomstedt's shimmering account of the opening pages of the *Serenade*, as the music drifts seemingly imperceptibly into the gently swaying motion of the *Tempo molto sostenuto*, it is as though there sounds, merely for an instant, another time, another place, and another way of being.

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Abstract

In the opening volume of his landmark biography of the composer, Bo Wallner lists ‘timbre, tranquillity, expressivity and at the same time their artful articulation’ as typical traits of Wilhelm Stenhammar’s work, and suggests that there is ‘no nordic romantic who has so intensively listened to silence and has composed it in the design of his form.’ This article adds the concept of affect to Wallner’s list, following Erik Wallrup’s thoughtful discussion of the term’s relationship with mood, atmosphere, and *stämming*. Hearing Stenhammar’s music affectively, particularly through his powerfully transformative response to landscape, sheds renewed light on vital questions of place, form, and subject position. Inspired by Herbert Blomstedt’s radiant live recording of the work with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, the article assesses the opening movement of the Serenade in order to begin to sketch an affective methodology for interpreting Stenhammar’s work.

Keywords: Wilhelm Stenhammar, Richard Bergh, landscape, subjectivity, form, affect theory, cultural geography, music analysis

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