

**Morten Hein**

## Carl Nielsen 150 years.

The composed that hated recorded music.  
-His only recording and the fabulous phonograph in Kiev

In Denmark 2015 has been the Carl Nielsen year. Celebrating the 150th anniversary of birth of the composer to be considered the greatest of Danish composer. His fame goes in several directions. He wrote Danish songs loved by everyone in Denmark - and rather unknown abroad. He wrote symphonies, chamber music and concerts now known worldwide - we believe in Denmark. He also wrote two operas of which the one 'Mascarade' is considered the Danish national opera. On account of the 150 years of Carl Nielsen I will go back to an episode that took place in 1999. As not everyone out of Denmark does know Carl Nielsen (1865-1931) this presentation is divided into two chapters: 1. The Danish composer Carl Nielsen - and - 2. The discovery of original material on wax cylinders and the digitalisation of the wax cylinders

### Chapter I

#### The Danish composer Carl Nielsen

Carl Nielsen was born poor on the island of Fyen, just like the fairytale writer Hans Christian Andersen although 60 years later. The composer learned music from his father a village fiddler. In his early age he was a boy bugler in the army. Later he had become educated violinist at the Royal Music Conservatory and played 2nd violin in the Royal Orchestra. Little by little he began to compose and to conduct. It was realised that here was a composer that set a new and complete unknown modern style for music in Denmark.

By writing songs easy to sing he became well known and appreciated by the general public.



So well known that his more complicated music was well accepted as well. His music was often so special that not all musicians could adjust to it. In his own time Carl Nielsen had a group of musicians around him that appreciated his music and were so closely associated with him that they understood his intentions and styles. They came from the Royal Orchestra and both the orchestra and a group of individual musicians were the spearhead in playing his music.

Carl Nielsen married Anne Marie Brodersen (1863-1945) a sculptor in 1891. They had a storming marriage and 3 children. She adapted not only his family name but also his

first name as Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen.

Soloists in music have always been travelling. Before the First World War Emil Telmanyi - the Hungarian violinist - also came to Copenhagen to give concerts. He met Carl Nielsen and they became good friends. In 1918 Telmanyi married Carl Nielsen's oldest daughter Anne Marie Frederikke. And Telmanyi got his base in Copenhagen. They too had a storming marriage and divorced. However, Nielsen and Telmanyi continued as good friends.

It is well known that Carl Nielsen disliked recorded music. I do not know the reasons. Maybe they were the same as the reasons Jean de Reszke gave, that the reproduction from a recorded did not reflected the real thing. There would have been many chances for Nielsen as members of the Royal Orchestra often participated in recordings at the time where he was 2nd conductor. He also knew most of the operatic singers that recorded. But there is no trace that he participated in recordings of any music and therefore not in recordings of his own music. Apart from his dislike of recordings his dislike for jazz and syncopated music was also rather clear.

There is a constant interest in 'creator's records'. A recording that reflects the original performers or the composer is of immense value for an assessment of a particular piece of music.

Not having any recording of Carl Nielsen music that can directly related to Carl Nielsen would be the same if other countries would be missing recordings of a great group of composers in that period:

In the Great Britain they would miss a direct relation to Edward Elgar. In France they would miss the recordings where Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel were directly

involved. In Germany there would be no recordings made by Richard Strauss personally. In Norway they would not be able to listen the master, Edward Grieg at the piano. In Italy they would not have creator's records with Ruggiero Leoncavallo and Pietro Mascagni.

I could go on the list of creator's records is long. One other composer of that time (and probably more) that has not left creator's recordings is Jean Sibelius from Finland.

But even if Carl Nielsen did not like recordings he could not prevent his music from being recorded. The first recording with his music is a sentimental song with a social



awareness. Music to a poem by a rural poet Jeppe Aakjaer. Jens, the road worker. A song about a hard working man and his too early death. It was the greatest hit in Denmark in 1909, song every where and popular as sheet music and it was recorded by the Danish operatic tenor Vilhelm Herold (Gramophone 2-82753).

In 1965 when Carl Nielsen's centenary should be celebrated there were many ideas on what to do. EMI in Copenhagen had the idea that there should be a complete recording of both of Carl Nielsen operas: 'Saul and David' and 'Mascarade'. The Head Office said NO. None out of Denmark will understand and appreciate those operas. We know what we are talking about. We have constantly tried to promote Edward Elgar's music but we can't.

He is too English. In the same way you can not promote Nielsen outside Denmark. Instead there were plans to make recordings and a concert tour with Elisabeth Schwartzkopf and Karajan with Nielsen music but somehow that faded away. But that year Leonard Bernstein was awarded the



Danish Sonning Music Award. He came to Denmark and thanked by conducting Nielsen's 3rd symphony 'Sinfonia

Espansiva' with the Royal Orchestra. CBS recorded the symphony and it was spread world wide. Most people consider this as Nielsen's international break through. And that is not true.



The oldest non-Danish recording I have noticed is a 1922 recording of a song to a poem of J.P.Jacobsen: Irmelin Rose. Performed by Karin Branzell and Bruno Seidler-Winkler. (Deutsche Grammophon/Polyphon S4010).

Skandinavisk Grammophon Aktieselskab, the Danish branch of EMI had its very bottom line oriented founder Emil Hartkopp as managing director. He son, Eugen Hartkopp, was much more artistic oriented and pressed

on in the artistic line. One of the things missing was Danish recordings on HMV Red Label. I have no trace of the procedures but in 1936 Eugen Hartkopp managed to get what is known as the Scandinavian section of the HMV DA/DB series the 5200 series. It is known as the Scandinavian part, but it contains only Danish material and recordings (with a few exceptions). In Sweden they had great stars that went into the international catalogue. In Denmark we got our own little section. This gave broader selection of Danish music to be recorded compared to the Swedish music scene, Then I must ad a funny bit: During the war time the 5200 series was mixed up between what was allocated from London and what was allocated from Berlin. To avoid confusion a drastic step was made. The DB series started with DB100 in 1922 (Chaliapin) so the first 100 numbers were empty. Therefore the Danish DB 5200 series switched to an interregnum with DB1-DB16. But that is another story.

One could believe that the creating of a Danish Red Label series was designed to record Carl Nielsen's music. It started with his Wind quintet and much came out even before the war. The good thing was that all was recorded with the musicians that had been around Carl Nielsen so we are close to the phenomena 'creator's records'.



As they were part of the Red Label series they were available

internationally. And they were sold. I have seen good reviews in the magazine 'The Gramophone' in the late 30ies.

After the war Skandinavisk Grammophon

Aktieselskab continued the effort to record Carl Nielsen. On the 'to do' list was his Clarinet Concerto unfortunately the original soloist, Aage Oxenvad had died. In 1947 they got the French clarinetist Louis Cahusac to come to Copenhagen to record the concerto. I have met people that could give an account of the recording session. Louis Cahusac was not a youngster in 1947. He was 67 and did a



beautiful recording. That recording must have spread as well. A good example I have found in sleeves note by the rather

tough American critic Irving Kolodin who tells that Benny Goodman in 1949 told him that there was a wonderful clarinet concerto by Carl Nielsen and Kolodin should be interested in it. Benny Goodman recorded it himself in 1966.

Then there was Carl Nielsen's violin concerto. It had been played often by his son in law, Emil Telmanyi. It would have been natural to have it recorded with him. But he was out of rich for Skandinavisk Grammophon. Emil Telmanyi had been signed by Electrola before the war and had left them due to his opinion of the Third Reich. But as had broken a contract within the company the Danish branch could not sign him. Instead he started a contract with TONO. So in 1947 TONO could issue Carl Nielsen's violin concerto with Emil Telmanyi, a bit of a blow for Skandinavisk Grammophon.

Skandinavisk Grammophon had worked hard for having a recording of the violin concerto with an artist that could rank Telmanyi. They

asked the head office for assistance and suggested several artists. Ginette Neveu was one of the artists that they were looking for. However, she died in a passenger plane disaster on the approach to the Azores on 28 October 1949. There were probably not any negotiations at all and Skandinavisk Grammophon was continuing searching for a soloist. In 1949 Nathan Milstein came to Copenhagen for a concert. The record company should entertain and dine the celebrity. And during that they asked if he would be interested in recording the violin concerto. When he saw the opening of the score he declared that he was too old to learn something new. He was 45 at that time. But of course it looks difficult.



The three more years elapsed. Then came Yehudi Menuhin to perform in a concert. Again the record company made the

entertainment. They had also showed the score to Menuhin but he declined. On the last evening Mrs and Mr. Menuhin was walking back to Hotel d'Angleterre together with Mrs. and Mr. Hartkopp. Mrs Menuhin saw a mirror in an antique shop and fell in love with that mirror. She wanted it but their plane had left in the morning before the shop would open. The Eugen Hartkopp said: If you can persuade your husband to record the Carl Nielsen Concerto I will send you the mirror. A positive answer can a few days later. By the way the recording happened to be the first

Danish HMV Long Playing recording. The critics said Menuhin made a performance that indicated that he was not dedicated. Year ago I persuade EMI to reissue the concerto. It sounds so Carl Nielsen and so Danish: Menuhin had learned the tricks. The Head Office was very angry that he was recording for a branch,

Just to say that Nielsen was known internationally before the Bernstein concert and recording. And since then the international fame has raised constantly.

## Chapter 2

### The discovery of original material on wax cylinders and the digitalisation of the wax cylinders

Until some years ago we believed that no sound recording existed with the Danish



Carl Nielsen playing for the Michaelsen family

composer Carl Nielsen (1865-1931). Then one day the musicologist Knud Ketting interviewed the youngest son of Carl Johan Michaelsen. The son at a rather old age told that one day they had recorded Carl Nielsen on the family phonograph. After the parents

had died he had donated the phonograph and the recorded cylinders to the National Sound Archive.

Carl Johan Michaelsen was managing director of a large company. He had great interest in music and had been a student with Carl Nielsen. He was rather well off and could arrange concerts where parts of the Royal Orchestra after theatre time were taken by bus to his country house north of Copenhagen to perform something new by Carl Nielsen. The clarinet concerto had its premiere at a concert in the country house with Aage Oxenvad as the soloist. The orchestra was conducted by Emil Telmányi.

The donation was not recorded in the National Sound Archive. The archive was later moved from being a part of the National Museum to be a part of the State and

University Library in Aarhus. Due to Knud Ketting's account they started to look for potential cylinders. By the end it looked as if 3 cylinders could be the topic for further investigation.

At that time (1998) the library had no modern cylinder player and no knowledge in playing cylinders. That has changed years ago, so all cylinders are digitised today. I was asked to be project manager for the project. We made the strategy that we chose 2 cylinders with the Danish tenor Vilhelm Herold (1865-1937) produced by Dansk

Fonograf Magasin in 1904: 'O Lola' from Cavalleria Rusticana and a Danish song 'Lille Karen' where the library had so many copies that they were expendable

Vilhelm Herold made more than 200 recordings between 1899 and 1914. His records sold in large quantities and it is easy to get a good understanding of his voice and his singing. Which could be essential in comparing different transfers.

We sent the cylinders to three different collections in Europe and asked them to digitise them to see what could be done. By choosing Vilhelm Herold we had something more. The overwhelming enthusiast and collector Knud Hegermann-Lindencrone had on the occasion of Vilhelm Herold 70th birthday in 1935 issued an album where he had transferred 6 of Herold 10 cylinders into 3 78 rpm discs.



We got a reply from all three centres. But it was disappointing. At one centre they had broken a cylinder. It sounded terrible from any point of view. And compared to the 1936 transfers it was even worse. One may ask if there is a deterioration of even well kept cylinders? We had absolutely no method for the potential Carl Nielsen cylinders.

In 1999 the internet was not what it is today. I spend a day or two searching. And then there was a potential solution: The Institute for Information Recording, being a part of the National Academy for Sciences of Ukraine.

This institute was original one of the Cold War military centres that had been turned into a scientific information centre. In Ukraine Leonid Kuchma became president in 1996. Soon after he should go to Israel on an official visit. He wanted to bring a special gift along. Then he remembered the Judaic collection in the National Library in Kyiv.

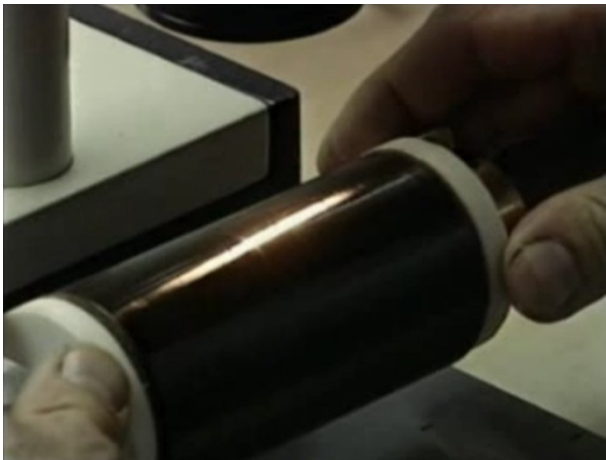
This collection is one of the most important Judaic collections world wide. He also remembered that this collection had a collection of phonographic cylinders made in the period 1910 to 1940. Cylinders coming from Jewish communities in different places in Russia and later the Soviet Union. They had been collected in Kyiv and for safety reasons shipped to the other side of Ural during the war time. That would be a present to present a modern version of these cylinders. So Leonid Kuchma ordered the Institute for Information Recording to make a transfer of the cylinders into a modern digital media. And so they did. They knew nothing about cylinder technology. But they figured out that the problems of running a needle in a cylinder at the accurate speed would give noise and problems. So the

basic theory was that it should be slow. The next theory was the stylus weight should be as little as possible. But stating this is calling for new problems. To go down in speed and weight would create many factors that would influence the process negatively.

Any phonograph according to this should be stable. So they made a basis of a couple of tons of concrete. Then they made a mechanical system that would rotate 6 times a minute. It had a weight of several hundred kilos to secure that it was stable. Then they made a stylus that weighted 0,5 gram all included. Including a mirror or two where laser beams could record the movements. In theory simple in realisation complicated.

We read about it and asked about details and got some samples in return that were overwhelming in sound reproduction. The we shipped Vilhelm Herold cylinders. That was rather difficult in those days it had to be

through our Foreign Office and diplomatic mail. But we managed and got some very



good results back. Then we made a contract. And off we went, Henning Trab from the library and I together with a film team that was interested in the story.

We went to Kyiv for some days and



participated in the process. And we got sound out of all three cylinders. And when we came home we started the dissemination of the sound we had brought home.

What do we know?

The wax cylinder -

Provenience 1

3 direct cut brown wax cylinders

Type: Standard Edison 2 minuet

Age can not be determined from physical appearance

Cylinders may be of different origins and age - colours are varying

Visual inspection considered the cylinders to

Are there more Nielsen cylinders?

A thorough search has not indicated any potential cylinders. There are 6000 cylinders in the collection of which 600 are direct cut brown wax cylinders. Some cylinders could have been broken on arrival at the sound archive and discharged. They could have been broken when the sound archive was transferred from the National Museum to The State & University Library in 1989. They can exist unidentified in the collections. The collection of cylinders was not - at that time - catalogued in the modern sense due to the complexity of the material. In this process no further Carl Nielsen cylinders have emerged.

The content of the cylinders

Cylinder #1

0:00:00 - 0:05:10 The cylinder is started

0:05:10 - 0:08:19 Introduction by Emil Telmanyi

0:08:19 - 2:48:20 J. S. Bach: Sonate 1 g-mol - præludium BWV 1001. Played by Emil Telmanyi

2:49:00 One word

2:49:00 - 2:59:20 Noise

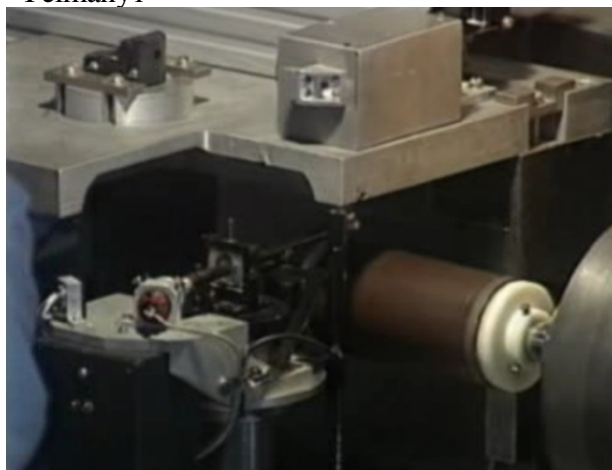
Cylinder #2

0:00:00 - 0:16:00 Carl Nielsen is speaking about J.S.Bach

0:16:00 - 0:23:00 His daughter Anne Marie Nielsen 'Søs' is speaking

0:23:00 - 0:29:00 Pause

0:29:00 - 3:05:10 J. S. Bach: Partita nr. 3 præludium BWV 1006 Played by Emil Telmanyi



3:05:10 - 3:18:14 Running out needle jump  
Cylinder #3  
0:00:00 - 0:06:20 Not understandable  
speaking some words may be identified. The  
voice can resemble to the voice on #2. It  
could be Carl Nielsen  
0:06.20 - 1:33:00 Carl Nielsen: Humoreske  
Bagateller, Opus 11 #5: Dukkemarch/The  
doll march (1895-97) Carl Nielsen is playing  
1:33:00 - 1:43:00 Noise the cutter is lifted  
and repositioned  
1:43:00 - 3:42:30 Carl Nielsen: Som en  
rejselysten Flaade, (1917?/1920?) Incidental  
music to the play Moderen/The Mother by  
Helge Rode 1920. Carl Nielsen is playing

Without any external documentation from the time of recording it can be extremely difficult to assess and understand the content of any sound document. How can we know that it is Carl Nielsen? The conclusion is the assessment of cylinder #2. It starts with a male voice hardly understandable that speaks of the great work of Bach. Then there is a female voice saying: "Daddy is still babbling. Now we shall hear what Emil will play". Emil Telmanyi was such a celebrity at that time that only a very few will call him by his first name. At the same time the word Emil is spoken with the affection of a woman in love and it is pronounced with a long 'e' like Eeeemil as it done in German or Hungarian language and not as in Danish where the 'e' is very short. This can only reflect the voice of Carl Nielsen's daughter who was married to Telmanyi. Therefore the father mentioned must be Carl Nielsen.



Carl Nielsen's funeral at the Copenhagen Cathedral in 1931

Dating the recordings is also difficult. Emil and Anne Marie married in 1918 and settled in Hungary. But life was too complicated there so they returned to Copenhagen. On cylinder #3 Carl Nielsen is playing 'Humoreske Bagateller' written in 1898 and 'Som en rejselysten flåde' part of incidental music to the play 'Moderen' about the reunification of Denmark and North Schleswig after the First World War. The unification took place in on the 10th of July 1920 when King Christian the X crossed the former border on a white horse. The play 'Moderen' (the mother) opened at the Royal Theatre in January 1921. From Carl Nielsen's playing one could believe that he was not fully aware where the melody would end or he was just not a good piano player. The music was written on a holiday in Spain early in 1920. As the warm feelings between Anne Marie Telmanyi and her husband faded away in the mid twenties we have a dating span from late 1920 to somewhere in 1923. My guess is around 1921.

It is not a great music experience to listen to the cylinders but is an account where you come closer to a great composer.