



# CARL NIELSEN

THE MASTERWORKS VOL. 2

**CHAMBER AND INSTRUMENTAL WORKS**

The Danish String Quartet, Trio Ondine,  
DiamantEnsemblet, Herman D. Koppel

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The Danish String Quartet, Trio Ondine,  
DiamantEnsemblet, Herman D. Koppel  
Jon Gjesme and Tue Lautrup, violins  
Jens Elvekjær, piano

#### DISC 1

STRING QUARTET IN G MINOR, OP. 13 (1887-88/1897-98) ..... 26:11

- 1 I Allegro energico ..... 9:48
- 2 II Andante amoroso ..... 5:45
- 3 III Scherzo: Allegro molto ..... 4:56
- 4 IV Finale: Allegro (inquieto) ..... 5:42

STRING QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP. 44 (1906; rev. 1919) ..... 26:00

- 5 I Allegro non tanto e comodo ..... 7:52
- 6 II Adagio con sentimento religioso ..... 7:50
- 7 III Allegretto moderato ed innocente ..... 3:39
- 8 IV Finale: Molto adagio – Allegro non tanto, ma molto scherzoso ..... 6:39

STRING QUINTET IN G MAJOR (1888) \* ..... 25:22

- 9 I Allegro pastorale ..... 8:22
- 10 II Adagio ..... 7:10
- 11 III Allegretto scherzando ..... 4:30
- 12 IV Finale: Allegro molto ..... 5:20

*The Danish String Quartet:*

*Frederik Oland, violin (1st in op. 13 and op. 44); Rune Sørensen, violin (1st in String Quintet); Asbjørn Nørgaard, viola (1st in String Quintet); Carl-Oscar Østerlind, cello*

*Tim Frederiksen, viola \**

## DISC 2

STRING QUARTET IN F MINOR, OP. 5 (1890) ..... 34:15

- 1 I Allegro non troppo ma energico ..... 12:20
- 2 II Un poco adagio..... 7:23
- 3 III Allegretto scherzando ..... 5:55
- 4 IV Finale. Allegro appassionato..... 8:37

STRING QUARTET IN E FLAT MAJOR, OP. 14 (1897-98)..... 29:39

- 5 I Allegro con brio ..... 8:53
- 6 II Andante sostenuto..... 8:38
- 7 III Allegretto pastorale – Presto – Allegretto pastorale ..... 5:20
- 8 IV Finale. Allegro coraggioso..... 6:48

*The Danish String Quartet:*

*Frederik Øland, violin (1st in op. 5); Rune Sørensen, violin (1st in op. 14);*

*Ashjørn Nørgaard, viola; Carl-Oscar Østerlind, cello*

## DISC 3

PIANO TRIO IN G MAJOR (1883) \* ..... 10:51

- 1 I..... 5:30
- 2 II Andante ..... 3:19
- 3 III Allegro grazioso ..... 2:02

4 SERENATA IN VANO (1914)

*for clarinet, bassoon, french horn, cello and double bass* ..... 7:33

WIND QUINTET, OP. 43 (1922) \*\* ..... 28:04

- 5 I Allegro ben moderato ..... 9:16
- 6 II Menuetto..... 5:01
- 7 III Praeludium – ..... 2:07
- 8 IV Tema con variazioni ..... 11:40

9 FANTASY PIECE FOR CLARINET AND PIANO IN G MINOR (c. 1881) ..... 4:02

TWO FANTASY PIECES, OP. 2 (1889)

*for oboe and piano*

- 10 No. 1, Romance: Andante con duolo ..... 3:23
- 11 No. 2, Humoresque: Allegro scherzando ..... 2:56

12 CANTO SERIOSO (1913)

*for french horn and piano* ..... 3:27

FROM “MODEREN”, OP. 41 (1920)..... 4:43

- 13 Tågen letter (The Fog is lifting), for flute and harp ..... 2:15
- 14 Børnene leger (The Children are playing), for flute solo ..... 1:20
- 15 Tro og Håb spiller (Faith and Hope Are Playing), for flute and viola ..... 1:08

*DiamantEnsemblet: Anna Dina Schick, flute; \*\* Ulla Miilmann, flute; Max Artved, oboe; Søren Elbo, clarinet; Henning Hansen, French horn; Jens Tofte-Hansen, bassoon; Katrine Bundgaard, viola; Øistein Sonstad, cello; Katrine Øigaard, double bass*

*Guests: Jens Elvekjær, piano; Nina Kathrin Schlemm, harp*

*\* Trio Ondine: Erik Heide, violin; Jonathan Slatto, cello; Martin Quist Hansen, piano*

**DISC 4**

SONATA NO. 1 FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 9 IN A MAJOR (1895)..... 21:17

- 1 I Allegro glorioso ..... 8:36  
 2 II Andante ..... 7:14  
 3 III Allegro piacevole e giovanile..... 5:27

SONATA NO. 2 FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 35 (1912) ..... 20:37

- 4 I Allegro con tiepidezza ..... 7:52  
 5 II Molto adagio ..... 8:27  
 6 III Allegro piacevole ..... 4:18

PRELUDE, THEME AND VARIATIONS, OP. 48 FOR SOLO VIOLIN (1923) \* .. 18:02

- 7 Poco adagio e con fantasia ..... 4:34  
 8 Theme: Andante ..... 0:59  
 9 Variation 1: Più mosso ..... 0:52  
 10 Variation 2: Andantino quasi allegretto ..... 1:40  
 11 Variation 3: Andante espressivo ..... 1:42  
 12 Variation 4: Poco allegro, molto ritmico..... 0:55  
 13 Variation 5: Più mosso ..... 0:54  
 14 Variation 6: Tempo giusto ..... 1:21  
 15 Variation 7: Presto ..... 2:20  
 16 Variation 8: Poco adagio ..... 1:25  
 17 Tempo di tema ..... 1:20

PRELUDIO E PRESTO, OP. 52 FOR SOLO VIOLIN (1928) \* ..... 11:41

- 18 Preludio: Con fantasia ..... 7:59  
 19 Presto ..... 3:42

*Jon Gjesme, violin; Jens Elvekjær, piano; \* Tue Laurrup, violin***DISC 5**

SYMPHONIC SUITE, OP. 8 (1894) ..... 16:46

- 1 I Intonation (Maestoso) ..... 2:22  
 2 II Quasi allegretto ..... 3:45  
 3 III Andante ..... 6:46  
 4 IV Finale: Allegro ..... 3:53

**KLAVERMUSIK FOR SMÅ OG STORE****(PIANO MUSIC FOR YOUNG AND OLD), OP. 53 (1929-30)..... 26:11****Vol. I**

- 5 No. 1, Allegretto ..... 0:46  
 6 No. 2, Andantino quasi allegretto ..... 0:50  
 7 No. 3a, Allegro scherzoso ..... 0:50  
 8 No. 3b, Grazioso ..... 1:06  
 9 No. 4, Andantino ..... 0:28  
 10 No. 5, Allegro giocoso ..... 0:59  
 11 No. 6, Poco lamentoso ..... 1:19  
 12 No. 7, Marziale ..... 0:48  
 13 No. 8, Cantabile ..... 0:36  
 14 No. 9, Allegretto civettuolo ..... 0:46  
 15 No. 10, Lugubre ..... 1:09  
 16 No. 11, Andantino poco tiepido ..... 1:10  
 17 No. 12, Adagio dramatic ..... 1:01  
 18 No. 13, Andantino carino ..... 1:03

**Vol II.**

- 19 No. 14, Capriccioso ..... 1:03  
 20 No. 15, Adagio espressivo ..... 1:05

21	No. 16, Alla contadino .....	0:52
22	No. 17, Largo con fantasia .....	1:28
23	No. 18, Preludio.....	0:35
24	No. 19, “Alla Bach” .....	0:52
25	No. 20, Adagio.....	0:49
26	No. 21, Marcia di goffo.....	1:17
27	No. 22, Allegretto pastorale .....	1:34
28	No. 23, Étude: Allegro .....	0:47
29	No. 24, Molto adagio – Allegretto comodo .....	2:58

30	THEME AND VARIATIONS OP. 40 (1917).....	16:42
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*Herman D. Koppel, piano*

#### DISC 6

1	CHACONNE, OP. 32 (1916-17).....	10:28
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#### SUITE “DEN LUCIFERISKE” (THE LUCIFERIAN), OP. 45 (1919-20).....

2	I Allegretto un pochettino .....	3:15
3	II Poco moderato .....	2:33
4	III Molto adagio e patético .....	4:52
5	IV Allegretto innocente .....	1:51
6	V Allegretto vivo.....	1:17
7	VI Allegro non troppo ma vigoroso.....	7:03

	HUMORESQUE-BAGATELLES, OP. 11 (1894-97).....	6:04
8	No. 1, Goddag! Goddag! (Hello, Hello!) .....	0:57
9	No. 2, Snurretoppen (The Spinning Top) .....	0:46
10	No. 3, En lille langsom Vals (A Short Slow Waltz).....	1:17
11	No. 4, Sprællemanden (The Jumping Jack).....	0:38
12	No. 5, Dukke-March (Dolls’ March) .....	1:19
13	No. 6, Spilleværket (The Music Box).....	1:07

#### FIVE PIANO PIECES, OP. 3 (1890-91) .....

14	No. 1, Folketone (Folk Melody) .....	2:35
15	No. 2, Humoreske (Humoresque) .....	1:47
16	No. 3, Arabeske (Arabesque) .....	1:05
17	No. 4, Mignon.....	0:48
18	No. 5, Alfedans (Elf Dance).....	1:40

#### THREE PIANO PIECES, OP. 59 (1927-28).....

19	No. 1, Impromptu: Allegro fluent.....	3:03
20	No. 2, Molto adagio.....	2:31
21	No. 3, Allegro non troppo.....	5:02

*Herman D. Koppel, piano*

Would we have wished it otherwise? Well, yes, it would have been exciting if Carl Nielsen (1865-1931) had composed another string quartet at the mature age when he created masterpieces like the *Wind Quintet* (1922). But we are not poorly served either with the four string quartets that are in his official worklist, complete with opus number etc., three of which were composed a far back as pre-1900.

While today it is hard to draw any great distinctions among these four Nielsen quartets in terms of popularity, it was a different matter in his own time, when the earliest, the G minor quartet, was by far the least frequently performed, while the next one, in F minor, and the last, in F major, vied for a definitive first place, probably because they both belonged to the regular repertoire of well established ensembles like the Breuning-Bache Quartet and the Thorvald Nielsen Quartet. Both these ensembles also took them with them abroad.

The G minor quartet was not published until 1900, and therefore bears the opus number 13, although it was written before opus 1 *Suite for Strings*. It was one of the two great private Copenhagen chamber music societies of the day, Privat Kammermusikforening, that gave the work its musical christening. This was on 26th March 1889, and the quartet was to see at least a further four performances in the second of these societies, Kammermusikforeningen af 1868 and in the newly founded Vor Forening, before it was played for the first time in public at Nielsen's composition evening on 3rd February 1898 in the smaller hall of what was then known as Koncertpalæet, because it has not yet been taken over by the Order of Odd Fellows.

The work was the oldest in the all-Nielsen programme, and before this it had been subjected to a critical revision, perhaps prompted partly by an agreement with the music publisher Wilhelm Hansen to print it. The revision involved abridgements in the transitions between the various formal sections, not so much in the fundamentals of the structure, which remained the quite conventional one for the epoch, with a single exception: in the last movement, between the recapitulations of the first and second subject, Nielsen features a section entitled "Resumé", where he contrapuntally combines thematic material from the first, third and fourth movements and thus underscores the unity of the work.

The reviews were mainly positive, perhaps especially in their comparisons with more recent works in the programme: "Undoubtedly the most important, most beautiful and in all respects most appealing piece of music one heard at the concert, and finally, first and foremost, the most direct and wholesome. Unfortunately its genesis lies about a decade in the past" (*Dannebrog*). "The ten-year-old quartet provided a breath of youth and freshness that did the heart good. There was a pace and power in this beginner's work that delighted the audience" (*Vort Land*).

On publication the quartet was furnished with a dedication to the composer Johan Svendsen (1840-1911), whom Nielsen admired greatly, and who in his capacity as principal conductor at the Royal Danish Theatre also did his bit to procure the best opportunities for the young orchestral musician Nielsen to see to his composing work alongside his duties as a musician at the Theatre.

Carl Nielsen's only string quintet was written in 1888, on the heels of the G minor string quartet. It was given its first performance at a concert on 13th February the next year in the society Kammermusikforeningen af 1868. The composer himself played second violin, and did the same in the next performance on 28th April in the newly founded society Symphonia, which held its concerts in the Hornung & Møller concert hall.

On this particular early spring Sunday the 23-year-old violin-playing composer had in fact stretched himself almost to breakingpoint. For at 4 p.m. he appeared in one of the so-called *Folkekonserter* (Popular Concerts), where, along with his old academy classmate Julius Borup, he was the soloist in a concerto grosso by Händel, as well as conducting his own *Suite for Strings*, which had been performed for the first time late in the previous summer in the Tivoli Concert Hall. And then at 8 p.m. he had to take the stage in Symphonia, where the programme consisted exclusively of newly composed Danish music and – fortunately for him – was for mixed ensembles, such that at least he only had to appear in his own quintet.

Not only would it have pleased Nielsen that the two great names of Danish musical life then, Niels W. Gade and J.P.E. Hartmann, were both present; he also had reason to be satisfied when he read the Monday papers: "As a whole, judging from a first performance, this work makes a beautiful impression with its appealing melodiousness, its rounded form and no ordinary inventiveness in harmonic respects" (*Berlingske Tidende*). "An extraordi-

narily fresh and pleasing string quintet in G by the very young composer, Mr. Carl Nielsen, testified to a healthy, fertile talent for instrumental composition” (*Politiken*).

One might think that the new quintet would then gradually become established in the standard repertoire. But that simply did not happen – perhaps because it was overtaken and sidelined by new string quartets: the above-mentioned G minor quartet, already composed before the quintet, but given its first performance later than it, and an F minor quartet, written in 1890. In addition it was always a little more difficult to get a quintet performance together, even though Danish musical life before 1900 was typified more by ad hoc ensembles than by firmly established string quartet ensembles.

At all events the G major quintet was afterwards only played privately in Berlin during Nielsen’s study trip in 1890 (where he himself called it ‘overloaded’) and in Copenhagen a couple of times more in 1892 and once in 1911. Prior to the extensive festivities in connection with Nielsen’s 60th birthday in 1925, the violinist Thorvald Nielsen asked about the possibility of a new quartet and was instead furnished with the more than 35-year-old quintet, which still only existed in manuscript form. There were a further couple of performances, after which Nielsen showed his gratitude by giving the work a dedication to the young man with the same surname as himself (to whom he was not related).

In 1905 Nielsen took his leave as a violinist at the Royal Danish Theatre. His violin-playing would never have reached the soloist standard, but friends described him as an amusing and characterful quartet first violinist, and he still occasionally engaged in quartet playing, especially in the company of the Dutch musicians of the Röntgen family, whom he met regularly at the estate Fuglsang in beautiful natural surroundings on the island of Lolland.

Nielsen’s F major quartet was composed in Copenhagen in 1906, at a time when he was busy with the opera *Maskarade*. It has the same gaiety and grace as the opera, and – although written in a quite different musical idiom – it is clear evidence of Nielsen’s profound admiration of Mozart. It was performed for the first time privately at a chamber music evening at Fuglsang on 10th August. To his good friend the pianist Henrik Knudsen, Nielsen wrote the day before about the rehearsal work:

“Today we have played my new quartet and it sounds as I had expected. After all I am now close to complete familiarity with the true nature of the bowed instruments. Incidentally it is strange how many years one must coax and caress such a delicate creature as a

string quartet before she gives in. Only now do I think I have got more or less to grips with its coy, chaste character.”

The first public performance took place on 30th November 1907 at a Nielsen composition evening in Copenhagen. At this time the quartet bore the opus number 19 and the byname *Piacevolezza* (‘Delight’), which he was later to scrap. And perhaps this is just as well, for there is no eagerness to please in this highly modulated music. We are not meant to feel sure of very much: the first subject of the first movement is only nine bars long, but begins firmly in F major only to end just as firmly a semitone higher in G flat major. If that can happen, anything can happen!

And indeed the composer was rewarded with a lecture from *Politiken*’s Charles Kjerulf: “If what the four gentlemen on strings sat up there and played is seriously to be understood as good, beautiful music, then Messrs. Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann and associates, including Wagner and Tchaikovsky – the whole gang, and our own too, with Hartmann and Gade at their head – have all been pulling the wool over our eyes, indeed indulging in false advertising. And in that case sciatica is also a musical pleasure. For that is very unpleasant too.”

The slow movement of the work, “Adagio con sentimento religioso”, in fact clearly points forward, with its hymn-like introduction, to Nielsen’s above-mentioned last great chamber music work, the Wind Quintet. In the quartet, though, there is no question of varying the hymn theme, rather of something that can be described as a gradual metamorphosis.

In a partly new shape, the F major quartet was played a few times in 1919 and then presumably further revised before Carl Nielsen finally succeeded in having his string quartet swan song published in 1923 by Edition Peters in Leipzig, now without a by-name and with the opus number 44.

Although most of a decade separates the following two string quartets, like the other two quartets in his official worklist they belong to the more youthful end of his oeuvre. As a mature composer he did at one point in the 1920s consider plans for yet another quartet. But he abandoned them in the middle of bar 31 of what was presumably to have been a first movement, and threw himself into other projects.

The F minor quartet is from 1890, when the young, still unmarried composer was able to enjoy a regular salary again, now as a violinist in the Royal Danish Orchestra, something

he had not done since stopping as a regimental musician in Odense to go to the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. There had also been another stroke of luck: applying for the second time, he had been awarded the biggest grant in Danish cultural life, *Det Ancherske Legat*, worth DKr 1,800 – by comparison his annual salary as an orchestra musician was DKr 1,200.

With leave of absence from the Royal Theatre, Nielsen was able to set his course for Germany on 3rd September 1890. In his trunk he had a letter of recommendation from the composer Niels W. Gade, whose name was at least as famous in Germany as in Denmark, as well as the manuscript of the F minor quartet. He had begun work on it that spring, and had in fact meant to finish it before his departure. He had even worked on it in his summer holidays with his parents in the Funen village of Nørre Lyndelse. Nevertheless only the first movement was really finished.

The remainder of the work was written amidst a tumult of new impressions, for on this first journey outside the borders of his native country the 25-year-old composer was hungry for all kinds of artistic impulses, and received them in Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin in turn. In Dresden, for example, he was at the *Gemäldegalerie* on 5th September, where according to his diary he was greatly taken with Rembrandt's *The Gold Weigher* and Jusepe de Ribera's *Diogenes with His Lantern*. And in the rough draft of the fourth movement of the quartet we find a handwritten remark that clearly documents that he himself felt there was a connection between the two arts: "The 2nd time the secondary subject does not come; a snatch of the coda in the first part appears as such, but with many odd harmonies. Remember 'odd', little Carl. Think of Ribèra!!" The inspiration could also be of a more outward kind; after an elevated soirée on 26th September at the 'Böhmischer Bahnhof' Nielsen went home and composed an expansion of the first subject of the last movement, which had occurred to him on the way.

More or less finished with the quartet, and armed with Gade's introduction, Nielsen now looked up one of the leading musical personalities of the day in Berlin, the conductor and composer Joseph Joachim (1831-1907). He had known Gade since their youth and promised to listen to and comment on the new work. So after five rehearsals an ad-hoc ensemble (Nielsen himself, Fini Henriques, Frederik Schnedler-Petersen and the American cellist Paul Henry Morgan) gave the work its informal christening on 18th December at the *Hochschule für Ausübende Tonkunst*, where Joachim was a highly esteemed teacher.

"It is extremely difficult to play well, since there are so many modulations and often enharmonic affairs that have to be played so purely that the half of it would have been enough. If you add to this the fear of playing for Joachim, you can imagine that it did not go all that well," Nielsen wrote back afterwards to his old theory teacher from the academy years, Orla Rosenhoff. In other words Nielsen knew very well what made – and still makes – his quartets difficult to play.

The old master responded with both praise and criticism; he recognized both imagination and talent in the music, but on the whole it was too radical for him, and he wanted to suggest some changes. Nielsen replied that he was afraid the work would lose its character, and the good-natured Joachim seems to have retreated: "Well, my dear Mr Nielsen, perhaps I am after all an old philistine. Write as you will, just as long as that is how you feel it."

The young Nielsen stood his ground. The Danish newspaper reviewers, who otherwise often scolded him, were nevertheless surprisingly positive when the quartet was given its first public performance in Copenhagen on 8th April 1892. Most unreserved was *Politiken's* Charles Kjerulf: "Carl Nielsen is clearly a considerable talent; none of his works has shown him as assured as this quartet, which besides the most youthful dauntlessness exhibits a will and skill matched by very few of the works of our other very young composers."

The F minor quartet was printed by the publisher Wilhelm Hansen in 1892 and could now be performed by ensembles who did not first have to borrow the manuscript music from the composer. In October 1894 when Nielsen, in the company of the music publisher Alfred Wilhelm Hansen, ran into the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931) in the railway station in Leipzig after hearing him play earlier that evening in the Gewandhaus, the latter immediately declared that Nielsen was not wholly unknown to him – he had recently heard the F minor quartet performed in Nice, had liked it and had procured the music. As proof he hummed the beginning of the first movement! Ysaÿe may have later done more than simply hum: the four string players in one of the top ensembles of the day, the *Quatuor de Bruxelles*, had a shared point of departure in master classes with Ysaÿe, and a few years later they put the F minor quartet on their repertoire. They first played it at a concert in Copenhagen on 13th February 1909, then later the same year they presented it in Mexico City and Buenos Aires. Thus it also became the only one of the four string quartets ever to cross the Atlantic during the composer's lifetime.



The E flat major quartet (composed in 1897-98) is associated with a tragicomic episode that meant that the birth of the work was drawn out longer than anticipated. The composer himself has given an account of it, but only far later, in a retrospective article marking his sixtieth birthday in 1925:

“I had composed a string quartet. The first two movements had already been copied by the music copyist; I had tried them out with my comrades, and we agreed that it was a work with which I had made a great effort. Now I also had the last two movements finished, so I packed it all into a large roll, took my bike and set off along Gothersgade towards Nørrevold, where the music copyist lived. When I got to Rosenborg Brøndanstalt [a mineral water factory], I saw a vehicle with two horses, one of which had fallen over and lay floundering with its legs in over the pavement. The driver looked very helpless, as the horse had ended up lying in a strange lopsided position. Since as a young man I had worked with horses and had often myself been a driver, I jumped off my bike, put it up against the Brøndanstalt, showed my music roll into the hands of a boy who was standing in the crowd, and asked him to hold it for a moment. It was only the work of a couple of minutes to cut one of the traces of the cart over, get a horse blanket under the forelegs of the horse and get it up on its legs; but when I got back the boy had vanished, probably into the Vognmagergade area, with my great work. I rode home in despair and told my wife about my loss. Then she got the idea that we should go up into the neighbourhood and arouse some attention about the matter among the young people of the streets, and in time we succeeded in gathering a very large crowd to whom we announced that whoever could find the boy with the roll of music would get a large reward [...] However, I never got my work back, but had to reconstruct it laboriously from various notes and sketches and from memory.”

The episode must have taken place in the autumn of 1898, but cannot be directly documented by contemporary sources. They only mention the preceding work: “Finished the work on the first movement of a quartet in E flat major in December ‘97. Am working on the andante at present,” the composer had noted in his diary on 6th January 1898. Nevertheless a good part of the year evidently passed before he was ready to saddle up his bicycle with the finished score. He had met his wife Anne Marie, who was a sculptress, in 1891 in Paris, dur-

ing the above-mentioned study trip. Now in this very year, in the summer of 1898, they had one of their periods of friction, for reasons that are not hard to understand. He spent his holiday from the Royal Theatre on her family’s farm in Jutland, where he tried at one and the same time to keep the farm going and to write a string quartet, while she stayed at home in Copenhagen to take care of her sculptural work – she was modelling a red stallion – and their three small children. “Can’t you see and get your final movement done and I’ll be busy with my horse and then we’ll never again spend a summer like this year’s, will we, my own dearest?” she had written to him on 2nd August in a clear attempt at reconciliation.

We do not know exactly how long it took Nielsen to reconstruct the last two movements of the quartet, for it is unlikely to have been true when he described the work as in the process of publication in an application for a ministerial composer subsidy dated 7th November 1898. He did not hand in the score to Wilhelm Hansen until the early summer of 1899, and the printed edition was not available until December 1900. On the title page the work was then dedicated to his older colleague Edvard Grieg, who was among the family’s circle of friends.

By then the quartet had already seen a semi-private first performance on 1st May 1899 in the relatively newly-founded *Vor Forening*. The public one was given by the newly-formed Høeberg Quartet on 4th October 1901, also in Copenhagen. The latter elicited a very clear-sighted review in *Illustreret Tidende*, written by the almost ten-years-old Hother Ploug, who alongside a career in the central administration also worked as a music writer and composer:

“A strange work, like everything that has come from his hand, but more a work for connoisseurs than for the general public. In particular, the energetic first allegro with its enclosed structure and the highly convoluted contrapuntal work proved caviare to the general ... Here we meet a young Danish composer with a sense of form and the sculptural not strongly evident in many others at present than perhaps Johan Svendsen, and people are repelled by it. In a way this is explicable enough: when one is bottle-fed day in and day out with ‘romances’ and romance-like music, in the end one forfeits the feeling for stronger fare.”

Caviare to the general or not – during the composer’s lifetime the E flat major quartet remained the most critically acclaimed, but also the least performed of the works!

What elevates a composer above the generality of colleagues who have in all ages vied for the favour of the public; and in the longer term, what makes him survive the merciless judgement of time? A good deal of the answer must be that the composer's music has a personal profile that makes it recognizable among all the others who only accommodate the tendencies of the age without adding individual features.

Composition has an element of sheer craftsmanship that has to be acquired, and in this respect it is surely natural that the learning process starts with the already generally acknowledged idioms of the past. A composer's development will therefore usually progress from youthful, perhaps even child-like imitation to the degree of individuality which in the final analysis – one hopes – becomes crucial to the composer's reputation. In that respect Carl Nielsen is no exception, and the present CD fully confirms this with its stylistic range, from the very early *Piano Trio* and the *Phantasy Piece for Clarinet and Piano* (c. 1881) to a mature work like the *Wind Quintet* (1922).

Nielsen was of course himself aware of this development, and the *Fantasy Piece* is therefore not numbered among his official oeuvre, which only begins a few years later with the *Suite for Strings*, published in 1888 as his opus 1. The musical language in Nielsen's early (and only) piano trio is unmistakably coloured by the Viennese classical chamber work he played with his colleagues in Odense. If we were to point to a stylistic model for the *Fantasy Piece*, it might very well be the most famous Danish composer of the preceding age, Niels W. Gade. This is all the more likely as Nielsen's manuscript bears the very motto from Uhland ("*Formel hält uns nicht gebunden, unsre Kunst heißt Poesie*") with which Gade had furnished his breakthrough work, the overture *Echoes of Ossian*. The *Fantasy Piece* is dedicated to an M. Hansen, who – we must assume – was a regimental musician in Odense, as young Nielsen himself was. However, since he had several colleagues to whom the designation could apply, we shall probably never clear up the exact identity behind this, Nielsen's earliest dedication.

With the *Two Fantasy Pieces*, opus 2, for oboe and piano, we have passed through Nielsen's academy years in Copenhagen (1884-86) and entered into his official composing

career. The tone has now become more personal, and the dedication also aspires higher, for Olivo Krause (1857-1927) had been a much-prized oboist in the Royal Danish Orchestra since 1882, seven years before Nielsen himself won a place in the Orchestra and became his colleague. Nielsen was aware that he was still a fledgeling composer, so prior to the first performance and publication in March 1891 he had sent the manuscript to his theory teacher from the Academy, Orla Rosenhoff (1844-1905), who had suggested a few alterations in the piano texture.

The genesis of the *Canto serioso* is also related to the Royal Orchestra: in April 1913 there was to be a competition for a vacant hornist position, and for the occasion Nielsen, now a conductor at the Royal Theatre, composed this short, beautiful piece, which was only printed after his death, but of course immediately written out in (at least) six copies for the use of the applicants. The piece makes particular use of the low register of the french horn, which is hardly surprising, since the Orchestra was looking for a fourth horn (in a classic orchestral horn section of four it is the second and fourth horns that play the lower parts). The competition was won by the just 23-year-old Martin Christian Sørensen, who like Nielsen had a background as a regimental musician – in Sørensen's case, though in the Band of the Life Guards.

For several years the double-bassist Ludvig Hegner (1851-1923) from the Royal Orchestra was responsible for a summer tour to the Danish provinces, where, along with some of his colleagues from the orchestra, he entertained a music-hungry public that otherwise had few chances of hearing chamber music for large mixed ensembles of strings and winds. In 1914 Hegner was to go on tour with a programme of among other works Beethoven's *Septet*, and he asked Nielsen for a shortish piece whose maximum ensemble was that of the Beethoven work. So Nielsen came up with this little 'unavailing serenade', *Serenata in vano*, which did however make use of five of the seven instruments.

It was first performed in Nykøbing Falster on 3rd June 1914 and was apparently composed and rehearsed in great haste in the week preceding the first performance. But what might easily have become no more than an occasional composition of no lasting value nevertheless passed the test of time. Nielsen himself described it as a joke: "The gentlemen first play a little chivalrically and impressively to lure the beauty out on to the balcony, but she doesn't show herself. Then they play a little touchingly (poco adagio), but that doesn't help either. Then when they've played in vain (in vanno [sic!!]) they give up caring about the

whole business and 'shuffle off' home during the little final march that they play for their own amusement."

The three extracts from Nielsen's stage music for Helge Rode's *The Mother* were not originally chamber music, only thinnertextured passages in a very large orchestral score. The play was the Royal Theatre's celebration of the reunification of part of South Jutland/North Schleswig with the old Danish Kingdom in 1920. However, the piece was not premiered until January 1921, and was a considerable success with a total of 31 performances over two seasons. There was an unsuccessful attempt to revive it in 1935, and it could hardly be performed today. It is far too uneven stylistically and too closely tied to the patriotic emotions that the Reunification naturally prompted.

"Tågen letter" (The Fog is Lifting), which has since become one of Nielsen's most popular compositions, describes exactly what the title says: since the fog no longer hides the landscape, it forms the setting for a highly symbolic scene where 'Mother Denmark' must say farewell to her South Jutland son, whereupon a wall of ice suddenly rises and separates them. Now the two allegorical figures, Faith and Hope, appear. They play their little marchlike duo when they are first confronted by the ice-wall. In the scene with the playing children it is Hope who accompanies their game after first helping them to find each other, since they come from each side of the wall. The original inspiration for the Wind Quintet was a telephone call at some point in the autumn of 1921 to Nielsen's friend, the pianist Christian Christiansen (1884-1955), who was just then sitting practicing Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante* with four of the five members of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet. Christiansen took the phone while the winds continued to play. Nielsen heard it and asked if he could come over and listen. There he heard how Mozart – not least in the set of variations in the last movement – underscores and plays with the character of the simple instrument. Shortly afterwards he told the oboist of the quintet, Svend Christian Felumb (1898-1972), that he would like to write a quintet for them.

On 1st February 1922 he went to Gothenburg, where he had an engagement as a conductor. There he went to work composing. In March he was in Bremen conducting his own works, and in Copenhagen for a Music Society concert, where he conducted among other works Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique*, in which Felumb played the large cor anglais solo behind the scenes. In the middle of the night after the concert, Nielsen called Felumb to

ask if it was possible for the oboist to switch to the cor anglais during a work. Felumb said yes – and ever since oboists all over the world have cursed having to change to cor anglais in the expressive prelude of the last movement, then back to the oboe in the variations on Nielsen's own hymn melody *Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få* ('Oh Jesus, let my heart acquire a taste for you').

Back in Gothenburg he carried on writing the quintet, and at the end of April it was finished. It was played for the first time privately on 30th April, at the house of his friends the Mannheimer family. The first public performance of course took place back in Copenhagen on 9th October 1922 with the ensemble for whom the work was written: besides Felumb, the flautist Paul Hagemann (1882-1967), the clarinetist Aage Oxenvad (1884-1944), the hornist Hans Sørensen (1893-1944) and the bassoonist Knud Lassen (1854-1938).

When Nielsen composed his *Wind Quintet*, the genre was only then being rediscovered after hardly having been cultivated since classics like Reicha and Danzi. At exactly the same time as Nielsen, Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) wrote his considerably more neoclassical *Kleine Kammermusik* no. 2, and the next year Arnold Schoenberg began his *Wind Quintet* and his pupil Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) his *Divertimento*, opus 4. Both the latter, unlike Nielsen's work, were atonal, yet in their transparent treatment of the instruments they are closer to Nielsen than to Hindemith. However, none of them has become a repertoire work to the same extent as Nielsen's.

It may be that the Dane's experiment with unaccustomed colourings and extended solo passages stemmed partly from a wish to write music that suited the individual temperaments of the five musicians who gave the work its first performance – indeed to some extent it portrayed them. That has not prevented wind quintets all over the world from playing and recording this modern wind quintet classic.

Like many other composers of his time, Carl Nielsen (1865-1931) preferred to conduct his own first performances of his orchestral works. True, he had no formal training in conducting, but in time he acquired a certain experience. One might therefore think that he would also have played a direct role in the first (or later) performances of the works recorded here; he was after all a violinist by training.

He did play the Adagio from the A major violin sonata at a relatively informal but still public summer concert in Lønne Church in West Jutland on 30th July 1905, accompanied by his friend the pianist Henrik Knudsen (1873-1946). But this is really only the exception that proves the rule: Nielsen had very quickly abandoned the idea of a more soloist-oriented violin career, and his job as an orchestral violinist was no challenge. It was a way of putting food on the table, given that the composition work could not earn enough for the family's survival, and he gave it up without regrets when he glimpsed the better prospect of being a conductor.

The A major violin sonata was composed in 1895, when Nielsen had already made something of a name for himself in the public eye. His previous works had on the whole had a friendly reception from the Danish music critics. But at the first performance of the sonata in Concertpalæet (the later Odd Fellow Palæ) in Copenhagen on 15th January 1896 they changed tack:

“Miss Johanne Stockmarr and Mr. Anton Svendsen, who had undertaken the difficult and hardly rewarding task of introducing the new oddity, applied all the persuasiveness of their excellent art to obtain a good reception for their protégé. But despite beautiful and charming episodes, it refused to leave any pleasing overall impression” (Ludvig Schytte in *Berlingske Tidende*). “It would be a great shame if Mr. Carl Nielsen were to waste his talent on such futile experimentation” (Charles Kjerulf in *Politiken*). “This argument between the violin and the piano more or less had the effect of two contending parties who had flown at each other and without further ado given each other a drubbing, as happens on such occasions, each animatedly shouting the other down with his arguments without caring the least about his opponent’s” (Angul Hammerich in both *Dagbladet* and *Nationaltidende*).

When one considers the other musical offerings in the Copenhagen musical life of the 1890s, the negative reactions are perhaps not wholly incomprehensible. The abrupt first subject of the first movement is presented first in A major and just two bars later in the remote F minor, and such abrupt themes and bold modulations were not daily fare on the Danish reviewers’ menus.

The A major sonata was published by Wilhelm Hansen shortly after the first performance with a dedication to the Swedish-French violinist, conductor and composer Henri Marteau (1874-1934), who did not play it, however, until a concert in Copenhagen on 27th November 1930 with the Danish pianist Christian Christiansen.

Unlike the A major sonata, Nielsen’s second violin sonata from 1912 was created with two particular musicians in mind: Henrik Knudsen, who with the violinist Peder Møller (1877-1940) wanted to hold a sonata evening in Copenhagen. And indeed Nielsen was thoroughly familiar with Møller’s musicianship, as the latter had recently played his Violin Concerto successfully in the first performance on 28th February 1912. He went to work composing in the early summer, and as a point of departure designated the new sonata as being in G minor. But the key designation disappeared even before the first performance, and with good reason: the first movement begins in G minor, but ends in E flat major, while the last begins in B flat major and ends in C major.

The first performance took place in a concert in the smaller hall of the Odd Fellow Palæ in Copenhagen on 7th April 1913. Unfortunately Møller was ill, and instead Knudsen had engaged the violinist Axel Gade (the son of the composer Niels W. Gade). The reviews were very mixed. Most positive and thus most in line with the judgement of posterity was Emilus Bangert (1883-1962), who wrote in *Hovedstaden*. He also had a close understanding of Nielsen and his music, having been a private pupil of the composer and then helped him in connection with a couple of commissioned works:

“We lack the ingenuity to give a detailed analysis of Carl Nielsen’s new sonata after a single hearing – for that, the sonata presented too many surprises in both form and content. The overall impression was of a beautiful, unbroken line – a flow of notes – where in particular a wonderful second subject in the first part and the pure, high sphere of the last part were captivating.”

The other critics had more reservations: “One gained no truly reliable impression of this work; the subjects were far too short and difficult to get a grip on – throughout there was too much musical philosophy ...” (S.M. in *Berlingske Tidende*). “There was something unbalanced about it as a whole ...” (‘Vicar’ in *Politiken*).

Perhaps it was the mixed reception that prompted Wilhelm Hansen to hesitate with a printed edition, which did not appear until 1919 as Nielsen’s opus 35. By that time the sonata had already been played several times by the violinist who was to mean most for the dissemination of Nielsen’s music, the Hungarian Emil Telmányi (1892-1988).

Telmányi had first met Nielsen at a supper after a concert in Copenhagen in October 1912, and had been given the music for the A major sonata by Nielsen’s publisher, Alfred Wilhelm Hansen. The next year, when he was to embark on a tour of Denmark, he sought direct contact with Nielsen. Henrik Knudsen was present too, Telmányi recounts in his memoirs:

“Carl Nielsen had called him so they could play the second sonata for me. As I was unaware that Carl Nielsen himself would play the sonata, I had taken my violin with me. So I heard a highly individual, very unconventional and extremely interesting work.”

In 1918 Telmányi married Nielsen’s daughter Anne Marie, and of course this further strengthened his bond with the composer. Both Carl Nielsen’s works for solo violin owe their genesis to him.

On 22nd June 1923 Carl Nielsen was to conduct an orchestral concert of his own works in London. Telmányi was to be the soloist in the Violin Concerto. The violinist also gave a couple of recitals in the Aeolian Hall, and for his last performance there (on 27th June) Nielsen wrote a new solo piece entitled *Prelude and Theme with Variations*.

The starting point was Bach’s sonatas and partitas for solo violin, which Telmányi had just recently played in a concert in Copenhagen. Of course the musical idiom was different, but the inspiration was still palpable. In principle Nielsen finished the work a few weeks before his departure for London; but Telmányi was not quite satisfied, he says, with the penultimate variation out of the total of eight:

“So – thought Carl Nielsen – if you think it’s too easy, you’ll get what you want. And then he composed a variation in sixty-fourth notes, a ‘Presto’ as confoundedly difficult as the worst Paganini caprice. I was well and truly punished, since it was not finished before we left for London. We lived in a hotel on Russell Square, a quiet place where I was the only person to break the silence with my perpetual practicing. Carl Nielsen sat in his room and sweated with inspiration to get the diabolical variation finished ... The piece was an amazing success with the audience. I was called out a whole six times, something quite unheard-of in the conservative English musical world after a modern, highly personal solo violin piece. At the last call the composer had to take a bow too, and I think he was happy ...”

Nielsen must also have been happy about the review in *The Times* and in particular its comparison to Bach, whom he idolized:

“This is a work of some dimensions for unaccompanied violin, which bears the inevitable comparison with the Bach Chaconne very creditably. The Introduction contains passages of real beauty, while the Variations exploit most of the resources of the violin. M. Telmanyi’s brilliant playing commended it to the audience and held their attention throughout its considerable length.”

By now the relationship between Nielsen and his Danish publisher, Wilhelm Hansen, had become so strained that both parties took a positive view when the publisher Peters in Leipzig declared an interest in publishing some Nielsen works. So it was Peters who printed the new solo work in 1925 as Nielsen’s opus 48, but only after Telmányi had come in person and played it for the director of the publishing house, Henri Hinrichsen.

On 20th December 1927 the Danish violinist and composer Fini Henriques (1867-1940) turned 60. He and Carl Nielsen had known each other ever since their student years. Henriques was far more conservative in his view of music, but had nevertheless performed the two Nielsen violin sonatas in several concerts. As a public birthday greeting Nielsen therefore wrote for the newspaper *Politiken* a hastily scribbled and unfinished prelude for solo violin.

Thus it was not Henriques, but Telmányi who asked Nielsen to complete the composition. And it was he who was able to ‘baptize’ *Preludio e Presto*, as the new piece came to be called, in the music society *Ny Musik* (the Danish section of ISCM) at the college Borups Højskole in Copenhagen on 14th April 1928. There, too, two of Nielsen’s three Piano Pieces, opus 59, were given their first performance, and it was determined in advance that the new pieces were to be played twice because of the difficulties they posed for the audience.

Like the previous solo work, *Preludio e Presto* was a great technical challenge. During Nielsen’s lifetime it was only Telmányi who played it, although from 1930 on it was available in a printed edition funded by the composer himself. In the first performance it was presumably as much the technical difficulty as the tonal emancipation that aroused the enthusiasm of the reviewers. In *Politiken* Hugo Seligmann wrote:

“Technically speaking, of a boldness that cocks a snook at many an artful, rash modernist’s most forbidding fabrication. It is never either forced or against the nature of music. For Carl Nielsen knows no deceit; the well of wholesomeness on which his nature draws is never muddled by impure elements. What Reger never achieved with his tonal mathematics traced over Classicism, Carl Nielsen achieved: he arrayed classical art in the true garments of modernism. In that sense he became in his latest work the *Bach redivivus* of the solo violin sonata.”

Here too a comparison to Bach. For in Denmark Nielsen had won the status of a national icon. And *Preludio e Presto* may have been just as progressive in *its* time as the first violin sonata had been in *its*. But one does not meddle with icons.

## DISC 5-6 THE PIANO WORKS *Notes by Niels Bo Foltmann*

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The *Five Piano Pieces* op. 3 were composed in 1890 and are Carl Nielsen’s first real attempt at piano music. Originally he intended the pieces to be published as a ‘Travel Letter to Mother’ printed in letter format and in an envelope, an idea that was however never realized. These pieces take their point of departure in the Romantic character piece familiar, for example, from Nielsen’s teacher Niels W. Gade. Both the simple and unpretentious style and titles like *Arabesque*, *Mignon* and *Humoresque* indicate affinities with composers like Gade and Schumann. But despite the obvious models these early pieces are already full of Nielsen’s unmistakable brand of melody and harmony. The third piece, *Arabesque*, is furnished with the motto “Have you gone astray in the deep forests? Do you know Pan?” from the poet J.P. Jacobsen’s *En Arabeske*. The motto is illustrated musically by the way the tonic chord (D major) is avoided through-out the piece, only entering as the very last chord. This piece is probably the most personal one in the work and at the same time its abrupt accents and quick figures in the right hand point forward to the style of the mature piano works. The fifth piece, *Alfedans* (Elf dance) was used again by Nielsen in an expanded form in 1906 when he composed the music for Holger Drachmann’s play *Hr. Oluf han rider* (Sir Oluf he rides). On this occasion it was Nielsen’s good friend, the Dutch composer Julius Röntgen, who orchestrated the piece.

With the *Symphonic Suite* op. 8 (1894) Carl Nielsen for the first time tried his hand at the great form in piano music. The suite has the following motto by Goethe: “Ach, die zärtlichen Herzen! Ein Pfüscher vermag sie zu rühren.” (Oh, the sensitive hearts! A bungler is able to touch them) – a motto that must be read as a strongly anti-Romantic statement. The style, as the titles suggests, is orchestral, with clear models in Brahms’ piano works. In particular, Brahms’ F minor sonata op. 5 seems to have been a source of inspiration. Thus the introduction to the third movement has a striking resemblance to the second movement of Brahms’ sonata, and the section “Resumé” in the fourth movement is clearly indebted to the movement *Rückblick* by Brahms. The first movement, *Intonation*, was written in a majestic homophonic style with massive columns of chords, which throughout the movement lie at a dynamic level between *ff* and *fff*. The other movements are more

influenced by a contrapuntal development of the material. That the suite is not exactly easy for a pianist to get to grips with was something Carl Nielsen was told after the composer and pianist Ferruccio Busoni had played it through for his pupils. Nielsen asked Busoni if he would get the pupils to practice the work, but Busoni replied: “No, it won’t do, because it is orchestrated wrong”!

The six *Humoresque-Bagatelles* op. 11, composed in 1894-1897, were written for the composer’s own children. So the work was kept in a relatively simple style, although the movements *Snurretoppen* (The Spinning Top) and *Spilleværket* (The Music Box) make no mean demands on the player. With very simple resources Nielsen manages here to paint a number of musical thumbnail sketches which bubble with life and humour. A recurring feature of these pieces is the five-note figures where the pianist needs to use no finger-passing (especially in *The Spinning Top*). This way of writing was later to become a very characteristic element of Nielsen’s mature piano style, and was finally elevated in his last piano work to a bearing principle, i.e. in the five-finger exercises in *Klavermusik for Smaa og Store* (Piano Music for Young and Old) op. 53.

In 1916, after a break of 19 years, Carl Nielsen again began to work with the piano as a solo instrument and within just four years he had composed the three great piano works *Chaconne* op. 32, *Theme and Variations* op. 40 and *Suite*, op. 45. In these works Nielsen established his own deeply personal piano style, characterized by a contrast-rich texture using the whole dynamic register of the piano from *ppp* to *fff* and a mainly linear treatment of the material with frequent use of striking rhythmic ostinato figures.

With the *Chaconne* op. 32, composed in 1916-17, Carl Nielsen went back to the popular variation technique of the Baroque, where a simple theme in the bass is constantly repeated with variations in the upper parts. The model for this work, according to Nielsen himself, was Bach’s *Chaconne* in D minor for solo violin. Nielsen opens his *chaconne* in quite traditional fashion by presenting the eight-bar *chaconne* theme in unison in the bass. In the first variation another theme is introduced, which forms a counterpoint to the *chaconne* theme. Then follow nineteen variations where the two themes are developed with surprising freedom, often such that the individual variations are closely linked by motivic affinities across the variations. The piece culminates with a violent discharge of sound in Variations 16-17, where rhythmic ostinato figures with harsh dissonances in the upper

parts are set against the theme in the bass. After the twentieth variation the piece ends with a coda which at last dies out in a filigree of note clusters.

*Theme and Variations* op. 40 was composed in 1917 immediately after the *Chaconne*. It was prompted by something of a coincidence. In connection with studies of Brahms’ piano style Carl Nielsen was playing imaginatively with a Brahms theme and thus ended up with the note row that forms the theme in op. 40. He found the theme interesting and soon afterwards began on his second major variation work for solo piano. The sixteen-bar theme, mainly harmonized in pure triads, begins in B minor, ending after strong modulations in G minor. And this very feature was an incitement to Nielsen, since he could thus avoid the tonal monotony that in his view was often a weakness of sets of variations. Unlike the close linking of the variations in the *chaconne*, the individual variations in op. 40 are clearly separate movements each with its own special nature. After the sixth variation, the seventh is introduced as a reworking of the original theme, which then forms the point of departure for the next three variations. The last five variations refer back to the theme in its original form.

The *Piano Suite*, op. 45, was written in the years 1919-1920 and is dedicated to Artur Schnabel. Carl Nielsen had originally given the suite the by-name ‘The Luciferian’ (in the sense of ‘light-bringing’), but since the normal interpretation of the word would be ‘Satanic’ he removed this name to avoid misunderstandings. For posterity, however, the original by-name has won general recognition. The six-movement suite is Nielsen’s most expansive piano work, and makes extraordinary demands on the technical abilities of the pianist. Although all the movements start with major-minor tonality, in many passages the tonal framework is exploded in favour of a more free or polytonal style. The second movement further shows that Nielsen was not entirely uninfluenced by Debussy’s impressionistic sound world. Of the performance of the suite Carl Nielsen wrote in the preface to the first edition: “If I were a piano artist, I would play my opus something like this. The beginning of the first movement rather cold and brittle in tone, and at a calmly flowing tempo. In the “un poco meno” tempo probably rather slower but with more inner life. At “con fuoco” very inward. The “poco moderato” of the second movement with the most delicate sound and exquisite use of the pedal, almost as if listening. The third movement with serenity and power, and at some points, for example bar 5 etc. and bar 20 etc. with a certain rough humour. The fourth movement with a completely cool and crystalline execution with

no trace of 'Gefühl' but with an exquisite sound. The execution of the fifth movement is self-evident. The sixth movement with a background of demonic atmosphere through-out, driving the performer to strong contrasts and intense accents."

The collection *Piano Music for Young and Old op. 53*, 24 small five-finger exercises in all keys op. 3 was composed at the beginning of 1930 and is thus – despite the opus number – Carl Nielsen's last piano work. The work actually consists of 25 pieces, since there are two in G major (nos. 3a and 3b). Of the work Nielsen himself wrote in a preface to the first edition: "At a meeting of the Music Teachers' Association in December last year there was a discussion of whether our composers would like to compose small pieces for piano, easy and useful for teaching. This collection of short, easy pieces in all keys is an attempt to expand the concept of 'five-finger exercises'. While it is true that I have not exceeded the five-finger area (the span of a fifth) in these small pieces, within the modest framework I have tried with modulatory and polyphonic elements to accommodate a general urge of the time to come with rather more preparedness and perhaps quicker comprehension to the great literature of music." The expansion of the five-finger concept involves using all the eight chromatic notes within the interval of a fifth, while the fifth interval is not limited to the first five notes of the key, but can be chosen at random with the resulting possibility of harmonic variation. Despite the limited resources, Carl Nielsen here shows his unique talent for richly varied musical character drawing within the smallest form.

The *Three Piano Pieces op. 59* were composed in 1928. Originally the work was called Three Impromptus, but ever since the first edition only the first piece has borne the title Impromptu. With these three pieces Carl Nielsen continued his exploration of the modernist stylistic features of the *Piano Suite op. 45*, but in contrast to the suite, now in a simpler, more transparent musical texture – a tendency that was also to be found in his orchestral works from these years, for example the *Sixth Symphony*. In the tonal area, features from atonal expressionism clash here with a more traditional tonal style – the pieces are mainly atonal, but all end at a clearly tonal reference point (C major, E flat major and E flat major respectively). In the third piece a fugal theme appears which is based on all twelve notes of the chromatic scale, although it is not a twelve-tone row in Schoenberg's sense. And in the same piece the piano is used as a percussion instrument, since Nielsen prescribes that two accents meant to sound like a bass drum are to be played with a handful of the lowest keys of the piano.



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