

A survey of the written reception of Carl Nielsen, 1931-2006

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This paper falls into two main parts.

I. First, some introductory remarks on two general subjects:

- a. Carl Nielsen and Gothenburg
- b. Reception history and Carl Nielsen

II. Then, in the second part of my paper, a few points from crucial phases in CN reception from his death in 1931 until today, as documented in writing.

- a. The first presentations in Danish: M&S, Dolleris
- b. The centenary in 1965
- c. The diaries and Jørgen I. Jensen (1991)
- d. Simpson and the real breakthrough in the English-speaking world with Miller, Lawson, Fanning
- e. The major projects (articles, letters, the works, studies)
- f. The current situation and discussion
 - Carl Nielsen and 'the national'
 - Carl Nielsen and the new Danish cultural canon from 2006
 - The major monograph to come – is there one?
 - The worklist

Ia

There are many good reasons to talk about Carl Nielsen right here in Gothenburg. In a very hectic period of Nielsen's life, in the years between 1917 and 1923 – hectic in terms of his marriage, his health and his working situation – he found peace and quiet here in Gothenburg, where he worked for several seasons as a guest conductor at the Gothenburg Orchestral Society, standing in for his very good friend, the Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar.

On the marital front he had separated from his wife, the sculptress Anne Marie Carl Nielsen, and had to leave home because of an affair with their maid Marie Møller; and in his work he had been worn down by his labours, first as second violin and later as a conductor at the Royal Danish Theatre, and by all the intrigues that had followed in the wake of this work. As for his health, the heart problems – *angina pectoris* – which in the end were to prove fatal, had begun to afflict him.

What is more crucial, he wrote large parts of two of his most important

masterpieces while he was in Gothenburg: the great Fifth Symphony, of which he composed the second movement and fair-copied the whole while he was living in the city, and the Wind Quintet, which was also written here, and the finished draft of which he presented to one of his Swedish friends after premiering the work at a private performance in the latter's home. This friend, the bank director Herman Mannheimer, proudly wrote the following on Carl Nielsen's autograph manuscript: "Premiered on 30.4.1922, Sunday, on my birthday." Finally, Nielsen put many of his own works on the programme of the Gothenburg Orchestral Society in the many concerts he conducted in those years with an orchestra he considered one of the best he had ever conducted. In short, Gothenburg became a second home to Carl Nielsen and these circumstances laid the basis for the positive reception Carl Nielsen received on the whole in Sweden, in contrast to almost every other country outside the borders of Denmark. Only a single episode marred the otherwise very harmonious relationship between Nielsen and Sweden – the legendary performance in 1924 of the Fifth Symphony, not in Gothenburg, but in Stockholm. In a report telegraphed from Stockholm to a Copenhagen newspaper about the event we read:

The distance from the previous, more old-fashioned compositions was truly extraordinary. Here the almost 60-year-old composer reveals such an advanced modernity that the impression was too strong for a large part of the audience. In the middle of the first section with its rattling drums and "cacophonous" effects, panic actually broke out. About a quarter of the audience rushed for the exits in horror with wrath painted on their faces, and those who remained in their seats tried to boo down the row, while the conductor – George Schneevoigt – turned the orchestra up to full volume. This whole intermezzo emphasized the humorous-burlesque element in the symphony in a way that Carl Nielsen had probably never dreamed. His depiction of modern life with its confusion, crudity and conflict, all the unrestrained cries of pain and ignorance – and behind it all the harsh rhythm of the marching drum as the only disciplining element – took on, as the audience fled, a touch of almost diabolical humour.

Ib.

The word "reception" in the title of this paper naturally evokes the more exacting term "reception history". Having been a kind of fashionable discipline within our subject for a few years, the cultivation of a reception-history approach to a composer or a repertoire has now become a quite legitimate concern – for some even the *only* legitimate concern for a music historian. On the other hand we can hardly say there is any consensus on either the object or methodology of this field. Here as elsewhere, there seem to be crucial shades of difference in the perception of the

issue between a Germanic and an Anglo-American tradition. This is not the occasion to enter into a proper methodological discussion of reception history. I will simply suggest that in the German understanding the primary object of the reception historian is a work or a repertoire. In this case the historian analyses how changing times have “received” a particular – often canonized – work or type of music. In this understanding there is a close connection between *Rezeptionsästhetik* and *Rezeptionsgeschichte*: the interaction between the aesthetic effect and the aesthetic reception is put into historical perspective – not in order to proclaim a particular type of reception as the correct one, but to question the emphatic, so to speak one-dimensional work concept. Prominent German reception historians in this sense include Carl Dahlhaus,¹ Friedhelm Krummacher and Hermann Danuser, to mention but a few.² Simplistically put, the effect and reception of the music rather than the circumstances of its creation and the reflection of the composer’s inner and outer life are the music historian’s object, just as it is the judgement of the individual rather than of the collectivity that takes centre stage.

In Grove Music Online the Anglo-American understanding of “reception” and “reception history” is a little broader. Jim Samson’s article in the entry “Reception” leaves scope for a more social-historical approach. It makes themes like the composition and behaviour of the audience, the composer’s social position, concert planning, the refunctionalization of individual genres, changing views of the composer etc. legitimate fixed points for the analysis. In this case reception covers much more than the actual resulting sounds or the written work; in certain respects reception history in this sense approaches social history. But in both the German and the Anglo-American understanding of reception history as discipline and method, we still have an undermining of the idea of the autonomous, uniquely meaningful work of art. This does not mean that it is not the individual work of art that constitutes musical history; but that the work eludes a single, definitive determination.

A special corner of reception history which is not really covered by the two positions described – the German and the Anglo-American – could be characterized as the reflective review of the **written presentation of a composer**: his character, his changing significance, his music and the relationship between his life and his oeuvre. Whether one wants to acknowledge that such things can be called “reception history” or not, it is such an approach that is gradually gaining ground when it comes to Carl Nielsen. It appears that two conditions have to be met before an

¹ *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte*.

² Danuser und Krummacher (Hrsg.), *Rezeptionsästhetik und Rezeptionsgeschichte in der Musikwissenschaft*, Laaber 1991

analysis of this kind becomes meaningful: the composer must have achieved a certain ‘age’ – presumably at least 100 years – and he (or she) must be among the composers who belong to a ‘canon’ in their field – to use another fashionable expression.

No such reception-history analysis of Carl Nielsen in this sense of the concept has been conducted until recently, nor will one be offered here today. That is a much more ambitious enterprise than a brief conference paper. But I would claim that the time is ripe for such an analysis for the following reasons:

- X CN has now definitively been canonized – both as part of a recognized canon of composers from the first half of the twentieth century and (as of the autumn of 2005) as part of the Danish “music canon” of twelve selected musical works initiated by the Minister for Culture (I will return to this at the end of this paper). True, he still stands in a weak position in Germany and southern Europe, but no one is likely to question his validity as a composer.
- X From around 1910, when he made his impact in earnest on Danish musical life, until today, the predicate “national” has been associated with his name – both as a quality and as a restrictive caricature. In recent years there has been a considerable amount of theorizing about the formation and significance of “the national” – both in the broader history of mentalities and in the narrower history of music – partly in the context of overall sociopolitical debate on the concept of nationality, for better or for worse. In this context Nielsen, as our unquestionably most important composer, has played a decisive role. To put it rhetorically, can “the national” in Carl Nielsen be demonstrated in the music in the form of particular themes, harmonies, sounds, forms etc., or is it a pure construct of reception history?
- X For the first time since the centenary celebrations in 1965, criticism has been raised recently in the Danish specialist and general press of the unbudgeable pedestal upon which the Danish musical world has placed him.
- X The major national projects surrounding the publication of his works and letters are in full progress and have ransacked the source material once more.
- X Musicological presentations of his life and work (especially the latter) have spread beyond Denmark’s borders, not least to England and the USA.

As mentioned before, the following paper is far from claiming to be a critical

account of the literature on Nielsen; perhaps it cannot even be accommodated by the concept of “reception history”. Instead – more modestly – I will touch on a few milestones in the Danish and foreign literature on Carl Nielsen from his death until today, which must be relevant not least at a “RILM session” like this. After all, it is still the written literature that is RILM’s main concern!

IIa

The two big early biographies

In 1948 and 1949 respectively – that is, a good fifteen years after Nielsen’s death – two large monographs appeared independently of each other, and for almost fifty years constituted the main sources for our knowledge of the composer’s life and work. These were Schandorf & Meyer, *Carl Nielsen, Kunsteren og mennesket* (“The artist and the man”) and Ludvig Dolleris, *Carl Nielsen, en Musicographi* (“Carl Nielsen – a musicography”)

Meyer’s and Schandorf’s two-volume work falls into two separate parts: a purely biographical part written by the journalist Torben Meyer, with inserted, purely musical analyses of individual works written by the music journalist Schandorf Petersen. In fact the two elements of the book can be read quite independently of each other. The biographical part, which is the most important, is characterized by two factors that are hardly optimal for a biography as we see the genre today: the author’s adulation of his subject, and source material that is very much based on the author’s personal conversations with descendants and friends of the subject. These factors give us a rather one-sided picture of Nielsen – a picture that has coloured the general perception of and mythologization of the composer right up to our own time. The problem with Meyer’s presentation is that he was forced to take a selective approach to his information. Shortly before he died he told the undersigned how, to get certain items of information, he had to suppress others. There were so to speak a number of “skeletons in the closet”. This does not alter the fact that one can regard Meyer and Schandorf as a worthy counterpart to the great classic first-hand biographies (Abert’s of Mozart, Spitta’s of Bach and Pohl’s of Haydn, to mention just a few striking examples).

Dolleris was himself a composer, and had in fact been a pupil of Carl Nielsen. His book came to be overshadowed somewhat by Meyer and Schandorf from the previous year, but in fact it contains a number of very fine analyses of Nielsen’s music, many of which have a first-hand character. The author stresses that it is not so much through the external circumstances of the life that he wishes to paint a picture of the composer. It is this approach that lies behind the slightly mannered subtitle “a musicography” – a kind of neologicistic counterpart to the normal

“biography”.

Dolleris states his programme as follows in his introduction:

For anyone interested in biography it can be fascinating to learn about the circumstances of life and the people that have had a determining influence on an artist's works; but in the final analysis this has nothing to do with the actual appropriation, the actual enjoyment of these works....One must therefore offer another kind of description of the life: by clarifying the works themselves, by penetrating the style, one can produce such a clear picture that the artist will emerge. When the subject is a composer, one could call this the musico-graphical, the music-descriptive form.

In one respect Dolleris' analyses can become a little wearisome in the long run: I mean his use of the melodic principle to which he reverts on almost every third page of the book, and which he calls “the antique tonal principle” – what one would call in more technical terms the flat, “modal” seventh as an alternative to the leading note. He sees this melodic feature everywhere in Nielsen's music – from the biggest orchestral works to the simplest songs; and not just as a stylistic feature, but as nothing less than a fundamental principle in Nielsen's melodic idiom. In subsequent years and until the present day this is still a melodic characteristic of Nielsen that the analysts drag out – now as evidence of “the national” in Nielsen's music.

When we consider the source situation in the 1940s we must admire the work and the breadth of outlook invested in these two classic accounts of Nielsen, and although many Danish Nielsen scholars have later almost made a sport of demonstrating empirical errors in the two books, they have still, as suggested above, remained the foundation for most work on the composer's life and oeuvre until the past 10-15 years.

II b

In 1965 the centenary of Nielsen's death was celebrated with pomp and circumstance: the music festival in Copenhagen, the award of the Sonning Prize to Leonard Bernstein for his recording of the Third Symphony, and a flood of publications of both scholarly and more popular kinds – with a single collection of essays in English into the bargain. On this occasion Nielsen was canonized as Denmark's absolutely greatest composer and safest trump card when it came to cultural exports abroad; but it did not seriously affect the picture that had been painted since his death. It was still the national icon who took pride of place, and the key concepts – “die Rezeptionskonstanzen”, as Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht has called them – were still things like

*simplicity and straightforwardness,
the unspoilt son of nature,
the watchman against trends from the South,
the Dane.*

Rather than a reassessment of Nielsen in the Danish and international context, it was an attempt to market the familiar Nielsen internally and even more so externally. The latter succeeded to a certain extent, and one must note that from 1965 on Nielsen's music gradually began to make an impact in foreign concert halls and on the international recording market. Now the basis had been laid for a highly controversial evaluation which the most recent Danish musical debate in particular has been questioning: that is, the assessment of Nielsen alongside the "modern" European classics from the beginning of the twentieth century: Sibelius, Stravinsky, Bartók, Hindemith and others.

II c

Jørgen I. Jensen, *Carl Nielsen, Danskeren* (Carl Nielsen, the Dane), 1991

Jørgen I. Jensen's much-discussed book with its characteristic title appeared in the wake of the publication in 1988 of the composer's diaries and the correspondence between the two artist-spouses – both sources that went very close to Nielsen's personality and not least his dramatic marital history.

As his point of departure the author maintains that after the publication in 1988 of Nielsen's diaries and correspondence with his wife, the sculptress Anne Marie Carl Nielsen, there is no longer any need to find new material about the composer – that it is now only a matter of summing up and interpreting the existing material. Such a view was and remains problematical, inasmuch as at this time – that is, the beginning of the 1990s – there were large numbers of sources that were not yet known; sources, indeed, that would have greatly benefited the author's own methodological approach. I am thinking especially of the more than 3,000 letters from Nielsen that the author, for good reasons, was unable to use.

But regardless of this limitation the author – on the basis of his own declared premises and openly admitted interest in the mentality of the composer – provides the first real *interpretation* of Nielsen, both his personality and the connection between the life and the work; and he does so in a convincing, thought-provoking way – but also in a way that invites contradiction.

Jensen sees Nielsen's life as conditioned by an interplay between the subject's own immanent constitution and the surrounding social, cultural and family context.

He sees him as a split – or rather a composite – personality who was only to

outward appearances the whole, harmonious human being that the tradition likes to evoke. Methodologically he arrives at this conclusion not least by way of a close analysis of the Danish cultural elite around the turn of the century, in which Nielsen mirrored himself, and which the author sums up with the art-historical term “Symbolism”.

If he speaks in the title – and as a constant strand throughout the account – of Nielsen “the Dane” – this is because in Nielsen he sees a reflection of a typically *Danish* syndrome: that is, the coexistence of Danish self-assurance with the Danish tendency to make excuses for oneself – something he believes to be typical of a small country like Denmark. In other words, the coexistence of faith and doubt. He sees this clash strikingly represented throughout Nielsen’s biography and his whole musical universe. The author markets a concept in relation to Nielsen that he calls *biperson-syndromet*, “the minor character syndrome”.

This approach permits him to read into Nielsen’s music both the vicissitudes of Nielsen’s private life (not least his marital history and marital crisis) and the ups and downs of the great world surrounding him. And this is not just a matter of parallels with the overall musical expression, but of postulated effects on the actual musical material (the formation of themes, rhythmic figures, instrumentation etc., etc.). For example, the melodic motion through a descending fifth is elevated to the status of a bearer of Nielsen’s whole personality.

The book aroused – and still arouses – considerable discussion. On the one hand it was a book written by an author quite outside the environment of musical scholarship (Jørgen I. Jensen is a theologian and church historian); on the other, no one has dared before or since – in such an extensive presentation – to plunge into a truly interpretative biography of Nielsen. It was as if his freedom from the musicological milieu gave the author far greater scope. And of course the criticism levelled at him on the other hand is that his approach and his choice of empirical material seem highly selective and limited; but if it comes to that, this is surely a condition of all biography.

To sum up, one must say – whether one agrees with the book’s approach or not – that it is the most comprehensive attempt so far at a reflective account of important aspects of CN’s life and work. But it is not the ultimate biography (one should hardly operate with such a concept at all) – simply because it was written with no knowledge of the whole source material that has been made available since.

II d.

Approaches abroad

Just as CN’s life and work was surrounded by myths from the outset, so was the Danish administration of Carl Nielsen’s legacy. In the relatively sparse literature in languages other than Danish – and this means in all essentials in English – it has

almost taken on mythological status that Danish musicology has neglected its obligations towards its great composer. Again and again one reads that Danish musicology has taken no interest in his music; that research resources have not been invested in the work with it; and at the same time that source material and access to sources have been withheld from visiting foreign researchers. The last point in particular has been gratefully seized upon by Danish newspapers every time a foreign musicologist has found reason to complain about it. Researchers from abroad have claimed – with some justification, I suppose – that the standard view in Denmark has been that only Danes can fully understand their national composer, and that they were therefore in the final analysis the only legitimate administrators of the source material.

One of the reasons for this slightly strained relationship between Danish and mainly Anglo-American Nielsen research is probably less a question of who has the proper understanding, than of the musicological tradition and paradigm. Danish Nielsen research has hitherto concentrated on two primary fields: the making available and annotation of the source material; and research on the connection between life and work with the emphasis on the biographical.

By contrast, non-Danish Nielsen scholars – for obvious linguistic reasons among others, but also as a result of a different general musicological tradition – have been more interested in a decidedly analytical approach to Nielsen's music. For these foreign Nielsen researchers the lack of serious musical analysis from Danish research has been a sign of an insufficient "scholarly" concern with the composer. As suggested before, the fronts have recently been softening up, but one still comes across remarks – for example in English and American PhD dissertations, but also from well established senior researchers (if not elsewhere, then in the footnotes) – about Danish reluctance to deal "seriously" with Carl Nielsen. It should be superfluous to remark that I consider this criticism erroneous – at least when it comes to the Danish Nielsen research of the past 10-15 years.

The number of monographs or major essay collections on Nielsen in other languages than Danish is limited.

The oldest – and still classic – presentation is Robert Simpson's *Carl Nielsen Symphonist*, which appeared as early as 1952, and which was the first really detailed analytical work on Nielsen's symphonies and concertos. The book offers the international public an overview – impressive by the standards of the time – of Nielsen's musical output, especially the six symphonies. Simpson's focal point – Nielsen's inclination to end in a different key than the one in which he began – has for better or worse influenced much later Nielsen analysis. The expression "progressive tonality" has dogged Simpson's approach ever since. In his concluding summing-up Simpson puts it as follows:

“His [i.e. Nielsen’s] use of tonality has not yet been properly explored by others: many composers, of course, end works in different keys to those in which they began, but few have learned to evolve a tonality out of an extended process, or to regard it as capable of development in the real sense”.³

There can be little doubt that with his book Simpson helped Nielsen to gain a foothold at an early stage, especially in England, not only in musicological circles, but first and foremost in professional musical life.

Charles Lawson, chairman of the former *Carl Nielsen Society of Great Britain*, published his book *Carl Nielsen* in the highly esteemed Phaidon series *20th-Century Composers* in 1997. This work too gave rise to much public polemic in the Danish press in connection with Lawson’s study trip to Copenhagen and Odense. For one thing the author maintained the familiar view that Denmark was neglecting its Nielsen legacy; for another he claimed that our eyes were not open to the “international stamp” of his music; and finally, official Denmark – and in Lawson’s case that meant The Royal Library and the University of Copenhagen – was quite simply keeping the source material from the relevant researchers. The debate was closed when the director of the Royal Library was forced to account in strong terms in the press for Danish archive legislation. and thus to make it clear that any inadequate access to a very small part of the Carl Nielsen Archive had nothing to do with the institution’s attitude to Nielsen, but was solely due to Danish (and European) law. And so it remains in fact to this very day. There is still a small envelope with Nielsen’s letters in The Royal Library which no one may see until New Year’s morning 2021 – including the undersigned head of the department!

Lawson does not claim to be a musicologist by profession, and his books makes no claim to be based on primary research, only on the accounts and collections of sources that were already available. It is only on the basis of the already well known facts that Lawson pursues a different approach to Nielsen’s life and work.

He wants a showdown with the “Dane syndrome” he considers to have prevailed, and to show Nielsen as an international composer, with a voice which, although distinctive, is nevertheless international. To a certain extent he sets himself up both explicitly and implicitly against Jørgen I. Jensen’s book about “the Dane” Carl Nielsen. He further claims that Danish Nielsen research has tried to give an idyllic picture of Nielsen and thus conceal the many conflicts of an internal and external nature that dominated his life and his work. In this Lawson is in my opinion

³ Simpson, pp. 181-182

quite on the wrong track. It may have been true of the early biographies from the end of the 1940s, but afterwards this very point has increasingly become the focus of all later, serious, Danish, biographical Nielsen scholarship, and against the background of the many new sources future biographies will be able to further question this alleged “Nielsen myth”, which no longer plays any role.

In a kind of manifesto for his presentation Lawson says among other things:

“From the *Little Suite for Strings* (1888) to *Commotio* for organ (1931) one constant theme unites a wide gulf of musical development and style. It is the humanist ideology, or what may be termed as “the phenomenon of Man”. Nielsen’s music grew from behavioural traits he had directly observed, in contrast to the central European soul-searching of many of his contemporaries”⁴

In Denmark the book hardly played a major role, but although it – quite understandably – contains a number of actual errors and misunderstandings, it appears to non-Danish-speakers to be the fullest traditional Carl Nielsen biography to date, despite the fact that it quite fails to take a theoretical stand on biography as a genre.

The American pianist and musicologist Mina Miller has made a particular contribution to the dissemination of Nielsen’s piano music, partly through CD recordings of all the piano works, partly through an edition – highly problematical, it is true – of his collected piano music; and finally through a number of analytical articles in English about his piano music. But in view of what has been said above it can come as no surprise that Mina Miller too suffers greatly from the myth of Denmark’s indifference to our great composer. Among many examples, I will cite just one here, in the form of a quotation from one of Miller’s publications about Nielsen:

In view of the importance of Nielsen’s music in general, and his specific position in Danish culture today as a “national treasure”, it is disappointing that even Danish scholars have not been more industrious in investigating and documenting Nielsen’s life and work [...] Denmark has not been as active a research centre as one might have hoped.

Mina Miller’s most important contribution to international Nielsen scholarship has been as editor of *The Nielsen Companion* from 1994, consisting of a collection of

⁴ Lawson p. 10

articles in all essentials divided up by genre, and with a few exceptions written by non-Danish researchers. The book ranges wide, from purely hermeneutic and aesthetic reflections to hard-core Schenker analyses. Given its whole inclination, it is of course highly kaleidoscopic, but the book has helped to introduce a number of the younger Anglo-American researchers who have later worked on and delved deeper into Nielsen's music.

To conclude this overview of Nielsen literature in foreign languages I must mention David Fanning's justifiably praised monograph on the Fifth Symphony, which appeared in 1997 in the series *Cambridge Music Handbooks*. In exemplary fashion Fanning covers all aspects of this major work in Nielsen's output: the circumstances of its genesis, the transmission of the sources, an analytical review of the work and its reception – altogether a combination of top-class musicological competence with impressive insight into Danish language and society. Fanning has since worked as Corresponding Editor on the collected edition of Nielsen's works.

As regards ongoing bibliographical control, Nielsen research is well served. In 1987 the American pianist Mina Miller's *Guide to Research* appeared, consisting of an ample annotated bibliography, not only of books and articles on the subject, but also of a number of unpublished university theses from Danish and foreign institutions. The strength of the bibliography – not least for non-Danish-speakers – is the English annotations, especially of the Danish titles. Miller's bibliography, which goes as far as 1985, is complemented for the succeeding period by the ongoing Carl Nielsen bibliography which has been published since 2002, partly in *Carl Nielsen Studies*, partly at the Carl Nielsen Edition's website, where it is regularly updated.

Carl Nielsen bibliography:

-1985:

Mina F. Miller, *Carl Nielsen. A Guide to Research*, N.Y. & London 1987

1985-1995

Kirsten F. Petersen, "Carl Nielsen Bibliography 1985-1995" (*Carl Nielsen Studies* 1, Copenhagen 2003)

1996-2003

Kirsten F. Petersen, "Carl Nielsen Bibliography 1995-2005" (*Carl Nielsen Studies* 2, Copenhagen 2005)

1985-

<http://www.kb.dk/kb/dept/nbo/ma/cn/bibl.htm>

II e

The mid-1990s saw the breakthrough of the major publicly and privately supported Carl Nielsen projects in the million-kroner class: the publication of his collected writings, his collected musical works, his collected letters and as the latest project so far the establishment of the English-language periodical *Carl Nielsen Studies*.

Nielsen's collected writings in the form of articles, lectures, work notes and interviews from a wide variety of sources appeared in an annotated edition in three volumes in 1999, edited by John Fellow. Nielsen's aesthetic judgements on music are not all equally stringent, and precisely the constantly repeated, loose use of a few well known Nielsen statements have contributed to the establishment of the above-mentioned Nielsen myth as defined by the quoted *Rezeptionskonstanzen*. With this edition, at all events, it becomes possible to view them in their context and in their proper chronology. Hitherto the many Nielsen quotations have been used in contexts where they simply did not belong, and have therefore appeared in a rather dubious light. The editor's title for the three volume is in this connection very precise: *Carl Nielsen til sin Samtid* ("Carl Nielsen to his Contemporaries").

The Carl Nielsen Edition, which was started on the initiative of the then Minister for Culture, has the object of publishing all the works in a practical/scholarly edition. It is expected that the work will be concluded by the end of 2008, after which there will be a total of about 30 volumes. There can be no doubt that the Edition has led to increased interest in Nielsen's music in general, and in the works in their authentic form in particular. All the sources for each work have been sought out and evaluated, and the work of the Edition has produced hitherto unknown insights into the whole transmission and the issue of authenticity. In addition, the introductions to the individual volumes themselves constitute a very full history of the works on an entirely empirical basis. Thanks to the work with the sources we have gained extensive insight into the actual composition process and the composer's involvement of others in the work. In particular, new light has been shed on outside involvement, which consists partly of changes in articulation and dynamics, partly of the actual instrumentation in parts of a work or in a whole work – both done by others than the composer himself. It has always been known that Nielsen was very liberal towards other people's interventions in his music, but the details and extent have been elucidated in earnest with the source study of *The Carl Nielsen Edition*. With very few exceptions, however, the Edition has not brought previously unknown works to light; the extent and content of Nielsen's oeuvre will not be altered significantly, and unfortunately we shall not stumble upon an

unknown “Seventh Symphony”!

Nielsen was a tireless letter-writer, and in contrast to what one sometimes finds with other composers, his letters contain a wealth of information about the music itself – alongside reflections on all other aspects of life, large and small. He was moreover a *good* letter-writer. Reading Nielsen’s letters is spending time in the company of a wise man. Although no one presumably knows the exact number, it is estimated that there are over 3,000 letters *from* Nielsen, to which we can add an even larger number of letters *to* Nielsen. Not only are these letters a goldmine when it comes to his own life and work; they also give us vital insight into Nielsen’s times and the intellectual milieu of which he was a part. The first volume of an annotated collected edition of the letters, published by John Fellow, became available in 2005, and in the course of the next 6-8 years a further ten volumes are expected.

Finally, in 2003, the publication of *Carl Nielsen Studies* began. Its articles by Danish and foreign scholars shed light on facts about or related to Nielsen and his music. So far two volumes have appeared in the series, and a third is to be published in the course of the year ahead. Hitherto it has been difficult to attract contributors to the *Studies* outside the narrow circle around the large Nielsen projects, but it is the hope of the editors that the possibility of publication in such a scholarly journal will prompt other researchers to embark on the study of the subjects relevant in this context.

In general, it should be mentioned with regard to these highly resource-intensive projects that the actual publication form gives rise to reflections: is it reasonable to continue publishing the works, and the letters in particular, in paper form, or should we from the outset have chosen the far more inexpensive and flexible method of publication on the Internet? So far the discussion has been dismissed as irrelevant, probably because these are “national” projects with both public and private support; nor does it make much sense now that the projects are in progress. But if we were to start today, we would probably have taken a different approach.

IIf

Today Nielsen is more topically relevant than ever in Danish musical and cultural debate, and at least four important points are on the agenda – points I can only suggest here in conclusion:

A.

We await the **major comprehensive monograph** on Nielsen’s life and work, based on an overall view of the large body of source material that the big national projects have brought to light. There are those who think that when *The Carl Nielsen Edition*

is finished in 2008 and the *Letters* are completed around 2010, the time will be ripe to write *The Book* about Nielsen. However, this idea ignores recent meta-discussions of biography as a genre: issues such as the subject-object relationship, the problematic nature of the accumulation of facts, the belief in value-free research etc., cannot simply be ignored. Among many presentations of this subject I will here only point to one of the latest, the book from 2006, *Musical Biography. Towards new paradigms*, edited by Jolanta T. Pekacz.

B.

We also await a “*Carl-Nielsen-Köchel-Verzeichnis*” – that is, a fully comprehensive thematic-bibliographical list of his collected works of the same standard as the great worklists of Köchel, Hoboken, Dahlstrøm and many others. The preconditions for the realization of this important aid to Nielsen scholarship exist by virtue of the philological and source-critical work that has been done over the past ten years. It is our hope that *The Carl Nielsen Edition* will be able to begin work on this after 2008.

C.

For the first time since Nielsen’s death in 1931, public debate has begun in Denmark on whether Nielsen actually *is* as great a composer as we would like to make him. Or, put differently, whether we in Denmark have made him so great that the reception has put obstacles in the way of currents from the outside on the one hand, and on the other hand of Danish composers who wrote or write in another tradition than the one for which Nielsen ostensibly stands. Such a discussion would probably be inconceivable in cultural areas like Germany, England or France; but in a small area like Denmark with its relatively few cultural personalities with the format we are talking about here, it arouses very strong feelings.

The discussion took on new actuality this winter, when the Ministry of Culture published its new, state-authorized canon of twelve selected Danish musical works; in this canon there are two works by Nielsen – the opera *Masquerade* and the Fourth Symphony *The Inextinguishable* – besides two songs in a group of 12 Danish songs that has been elevated to the status of one of the cultural canon’s “works”. This whole canon debate is still in full swing, and among the critics of the traditional picture of Nielsen the canon is used to cement his position as Denmark’s “national” composer.

D.

This leads me to the fourth and last point: Nielsen as a national composer.

As suggested above, the discussion of “the national” in music has played an important role in the discourse of reception history ever since Dahlhaus’s watershed article in his *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte* from 1977. Briefly, the issue is

whether “the national” can be demonstrated in the actual music-historical material (‘horn fifths’, drones, flat sevenths and the like) or whether this is a construct of reception history. For Carl Nielsen the debate is at present as topical as ever, and this is also due to the general Danish social debate on national identity as an extension of the political situation in Denmark.

Both views of “the national” are marketed with great zeal, and in this area the lines are drawn up with relative clarity – and in fact quite understandably – between English and Danish: the English side (for example Daniel Grimley and Anne Marie Reynolds) attempts to demonstrate “Danish” features in the music itself, while the Danish side focuses more on “the national” as a construct.

Time does not permit me to go into detail about this area, but in conclusion I want to let Nielsen himself say something about this subject – although it is anything but objective, and deeply ironic:

“One takes an andantino in six-eight time, some minor mode, and some Danish pear stew that has stood overnight: stir them together well, set it over the fire and let it cook for around twenty minutes”.

To conclude:

The reception of Nielsen has reached a crucial turning-point for two reasons: in the first place, within a few years the source material will in all essentials be fully available, with all that implies of empirical data on the composer’s life and work.

In the second place the younger researchers at home and abroad in particular have on a competent and serious basis questioned the traditional Nielsen myth and put the concept of “nationality formation” on the agenda.

Both these factors are creating fertile soil for a renewed approach to Nielsen’s life and work, viewed in the light of the first decades of the twenty-first century.