



# CARL NIELSEN STUDIES 2021



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CARL NIELSEN STUDIES

music&letters



# WELCOME

Welcome to Carl Nielsen Studies 2021, the first UK conference dedicated to Denmark's most important musical figure. This is a hybrid event hosted by the International Centre for Music Studies (ICMuS), Newcastle University, in partnership with the University of Copenhagen and the Anglo-Danish Journal *Carl Nielsen Studies*. This event takes place at Newcastle University and will be streamed online on 17 and 18 September 2021. The conference celebrates Nielsen's life and output. The committee would like to thank the 'Carl Nielsen – European Composer' research project, *Carl Nielsen Studies*, and *Music & Letters* for generously funding this event. I would also like to thank fellow members of the committee for their help and practical support, especially Prof. Michael Fjeldsøe for coordinating things from Denmark, Prof. David Fanning for his advice and guidance, as well as Carmela Barbaro and Tim Cranfield for their support in Newcastle. Speakers and committee members are warmly invited to attend the conference dinner on Friday evening. With 14 individual research papers, 2 keynote presentations, and plenty of discussion ahead, I am sure this will be a productive and enjoyable two days.

Dr Christopher Tarrant  
September 2021

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# PROGRAMME

## FRIDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

9.45 – Welcome

**Session 1** chaired by Michelle Assay

10.00 – Owen Burton: *A Nordic International: Carl Nielsen and the Tone Poem*

10.30 – Katarina Smitt Engberg: *Carl Nielsen and the Radical Circles in Turn-of-the-Century Copenhagen*

Coffee: 11.00–11.30

**Session 2** chaired by Julian Horton

11.30 – Peter Hauge: *Musical sound as the exhibited artefact: Creating a new exhibition for the Carl Nielsen Museum, Odense*

12.00 – Daniel M. Grimley: *Carl Nielsen's Dreamscapes*

12.30 – Christopher Tarrant: *Music in the Galant Style: An Andante by Nielsen?*

Lunch: 13.00–14.30

**Session 3** chaired by Marie-Louise Zervides

14.30 – Thomas Jul Kierkegaard-Larsen: *Theoretical traditions, analytical lenses, and organicist ideals: Nielsen's Wind Quintet as prism*

\*15.00 – Sarah Moynihan: *Dancing under quarantine: Carl Nielsen's Imaginary Journey to the Faroe Islands in 1927*

Tea: 15.30–16.00

**Keynote** 16.00 – Michael Fjeldsøe: *Reflections on Nielsen as a European Composer*, chaired by Christopher Tarrant

Conference Dinner

## **SATURDAY 18 SEPTEMBER**

**Session 4** chaired by Katarina Smitt Engberg

10.00 – Bjarke Moe: *Studying, teaching and composing counterpoint*

10.30 – Daniel Mortensen: *On an overgrown path – Leoš Janáček as another hitchhiker through modernity*

Coffee: 11.00–11.30

**Session 5** chaired by Michael Fjeldsøe

11.30 – Svend Hvidtfelt Nielsen: *Tonality versus Energetics: A new way of hearing Nielsen's 'Espansiva'*

12.00 – Julian Horton: *Orbital Tonality and Limited Two-Dimensionality in Nielsen's Symphony No. 4*

Lunch: 12.30–14.30

**Session 6** chaired by Owen Burton

14.30 – Marie-Louise Zervides: *Nielsen, Saul and David and the Symbolist Movement*

\*15.00 – Eva Hvidt: *The studio apartment in Frederiksholms Kanal*

Tea: 15.30–16.00

**Keynote** 16.00 – David Fanning: *Carl Nielsen: Verbalist*, chaired by Daniel M. Grimley

Closing Remarks

\*Papers marked with an asterisk are being given remotely via Zoom



# ABSTRACTS

## **Keynote: Professor Michael Fjeldsøe**

*Reflections on Nielsen as a European Composer*

Writing a monograph on Nielsen is a task that I at first was reluctant to accept. Now I am, together with my research team, in the middle of the process. Our approach is to consider Nielsen a European composer. This is not just a commonplace as musicology is a stronghold of providing national and historiographical narratives that affect common concepts of the world that surround us. In my presentation, I will present and discuss some of those basic reflections that guide our work. How can one write a story where local, national and European aspects are interrelated instead of competing for hegemony? How can one provide a narrative on a single composer without being restricted to a biographical perspective?

## **Keynote: Professor David Fanning**

*Carl Nielsen: Verbalist*

What questions would we like to have asked Nielsen? That in itself seems like an odd question – even an ungrateful one – when we have thousands of his letters and diary entries and hundreds of his published essays, interview, programme notes and what-not to peruse. But these sources are as remarkable for what they don't tell us as for what they do.

Wouldn't we love to know more of what Nielsen discussed with Schoenberg or Stravinsky when he met them in the 1920s? Wouldn't we love to know whether Bartók really asked him 'Is my music modern enough?' Wouldn't we love to know what Nielsen really thought of Sibelius (and vice versa)? Wouldn't we love to know more about what went on in his composition classes? Wouldn't we love to know what he meant by calling Beethoven 'too subjective'?

We can probably guess what was on his mind when he noted that Beethoven was among those who had 'given their times a black eye'. And we can put that remark alongside his thoughts on Beethoven's Fifth Symphony when we think about his formative influences. This paper is going to develop that line of thought, in the spirit of confronting Nielsen's writings with his music, putting together some of his more furrow-inducing comments alongside some of his most characteristic musical utterances, and seeing – as it were – what they might have to say to one another and to us.

## **Owen Burton**

### *A Nordic International: Carl Nielsen and the Tone Poem*

The conflict of national and international perspectives is a crucial aspect of Carl Nielsen's music, as has been explored in existing scholarship. A genre that should form a part of this debate is the Tone Poem, the medium of choice for many nineteenth-century – and certain twentieth-century – composers who wished to engage with national subject matter. Nielsen's relationship with this genre is rather complicated, however. While *Saga-Drøm* (1907–08) depicts Nordic themes to an extent, his other

descriptive orchestral pieces look further. While the Tone Poem does not seem to have had the same potential for Nielsen as it did for Sibelius – a composer to whom he is often compared – he demonstrates experimentalism with this genre, which was accessible both in terms of length and extra-musical depiction. A number of critical commentators highlight their experimental qualities. After introducing certain contexts concerning Nielsen and tone poems, this paper will focus on *Pan og Syrinx* (1918) and how this piece might fit into his larger orchestral aims. Through musical analysis, it identifies some of the experimental processes in this work, highlighting notable aspects of tonality, form and texture. It is concluded that, for Nielsen, the Tone Poem was not primarily an opportunity to assert national, or even Nordic, self-identity, but to help him realise his unique orchestral voice.

### **Katarina Smitt Engberg**

*Carl Nielsen and the Radical Circles in Turn-of-the-Century Copenhagen*

In 1901, Carl Nielsen delivered the music for a cantata to the inauguration of a new building for *Studentersamfundet* (The Student Union) – a left-wing organization founded in 1882, which was dominated by the circle around the famous Danish cultural critic Georg Brandes. According to the newspapers, the cantata was received with great enthusiasm from the students, who allegedly carried Nielsen around in a golden chair after the performance. For radical journalist Ove Rode, 'no speech about what youth should be could find a deeper and richer expression than Carl Nielsen's lovely music to Drachmann's poem.'

This paper explores the genesis and reception of some of Nielsen's lesser-known musical works, which can be related to the radical movement in Copenhagen. Moreover, it examines Nielsen's relations to some of the key figures in the circles around Georg Brandes. On this basis, the paper discusses how closely Carl Nielsen can be associated with the modern intellectual climate of turn-of-the-century Copenhagen.

### **Daniel M. Grimley**

#### *Carl Nielsen's Dreamscapes*

In an interview in the Danish newspaper Politiken in 1917, Carl Nielsen described the legendary Icelandic figure, Gunnar of Hlidrande, the subject of his 1908 tone poem *Saga-Drøm*, as 'that marvellous character from Njál's Saga, who plundered and slaughtered, but who was nevertheless made of finer stuff and was ahead of his time.' In his score, the composer explained, he had sought to capture the 'curious thoughts' ('sære Tanker') in Gunnar's dream, 'like four streams of thought, which each go their own way—differently and randomly in every performance—until they gather in a single point of rest, as though flowing into a sluice and commingling there.'

Much attention has been paid to the importance of dreams in early twentieth-century thought, not least in the wake of Sigmund Freud's ground-breaking 1900 volume *Traumdeutung* ('The Interpretation of Dreams') and its concern with the unconscious. But understanding this phenomenon principally through a Freudian lens, however, fails to reflect Carl Nielsen's interest in dream and its impact on his creative work. This paper offers some

preliminary thoughts on the role of dreams in Carl Nielsen's music and the literary works of his Danish contemporaries, especially J. P. Jacobsen, Johannes Jørgensen, Johannes V. Jensen and Jeppe Aakjær. What emerges is a shift in Nielsen's understanding of dream, from his early symbolist works to later scores such as *Saga-Drøm* and the Fifth Symphony, which he once referred to as 'Drøm og dåd' ('Dreams and Deeds').

### **Peter Hauge**

*Musical sound as the exhibited artefact: Creating a new exhibition for the Carl Nielsen Museum, Odense*

The Carl Nielsen Museum is organising a complete remake of their permanent exhibition. The framework of the earlier exhibition was based on the 'composer house' concept – that is, focusing on objects that inform and interpret a composer's professional and private life (e.g. Mozarts Geburtshaus, Salzburg; Beethoven Haus, Bonn; Bach Museum, Leipzig). The majority of exhibited artefacts in this type of museum do not represent musical works; most often, they are items such as portraits, musical instruments, letters and memorabilia. In general, although the 'composer house' concept often employs music audio examples, it tends to draw the audience's attention to the physical objects, rather than to the composer's music.

The project group working on the new exhibition has decided that Nielsen's music is the point of departure: the music itself is the artefact on display. Thus all physical, three-dimensional objects are relegated to secondary objects or assets employed for contextualising the storyline of Nielsen's music. Yet, if music as

an aural experience is defined as the primary artefact rather than the music score, an array of intricate problems arises. Music, then, is a 'spanned out' temporal object – an experience where the start is aurally evident (the sound commencing) but the end is not manifest until the sound terminates. A picture is defined by its frame. Music's frame is silence.

The present paper will discuss some of the issues that arise when music is an the aural experience. I will also attempt to answer two central questions: Is it possible to turn an intangible, temporal, and evanescent artefact into a tangible, frozen object that may be set on a plinth and draw attention? Moreover, what happens when the visual and spatial experience is transformed into a mainly aural and temporal experience?

### **Julian Horton**

*Orbital Tonality and Limited Two-Dimensionality in Nielsen's Symphony No. 4*

This paper brings together two threads of research into late-Romantic and modernist instrumental music, by considering the interaction of form and tonal planning in Nielsen's Symphony No. 4. Taking its cue from the analysis of the first movement pursued by Clarke (2014) and coupling her perspective with the notion of orbital tonality advanced in Horton 2017, I develop the perception that the Symphony's final E tonality is neither a global tonic nor the outcome of a directed tonal process, but one of three tonal 'orbits' (C, D and E), the intercutting between which generates the fabric of the work's tonal drama. Mobilising a limited variant of Steven Vande Moortele's theory of two-dimensional form (2009),

I interpret the Symphony's interpolation of three interior movements within an overarching sonata form interrupted between the first- and second-theme recapitulations as a strategy of cyclical dislocation, in which the interior movements distance the sonata's first theme, as an agent of orbital conflict, from the second theme, as the guarantor of E as the ultimate locus of tonal stabilisation.

## **Eva Hvidt**

### *The studio apartment in Frederiksholms Kanal*

In 1915 the Carl Nielsen family moved into the big studio residence in Frederiksholms Kanal 28. It was Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen, who as a sculptor was bestowed this honorary residence, where former famous sculptors as Nicolai Dajon, Johannes Wiedewelt, Herman Ernst Freund and two generations Bissen had worked and lived. Anne Marie's major task was to finish the big equestrian monument of the king Christian IX, which lasted several years. Carl Nielsen was finishing his fourth symphony *The Inextinguishable* at the time, when they moved in, and he had yet several of his famous works ahead. At the time when they moved in, it was a chaotic period of the married couple Nielsen's life, and the celebration of the composer's fifty years birthday turned out to be a rather painful experience for family and friends. The matrimonial crisis resulted in several years of separation. But when Carl Nielsen turned sixty years, the couple had found each other again, and his birthday gave occasion for a big musical celebration with greetings from far and near.

Through studies in the interior, the history of this residence and in reading accounts from the members of the Nielsen-family, it is obvious, that the taking over of this residence influence the Nielsen-family a lot. Nowadays the residence is preserved and carefully kept in repair, not at least because of the beautiful decorations of the rooms made by H.E. Freund (1786–1840). Thanks to the present occupant of the studio apartment, a good friend of mine, I've had the opportunity to explore the history of the residence more closely.

### **Thomas Jul Kirkegaard-Larsen**

*Theoretical traditions, analytical lenses, and organicist ideals: Nielsen's Wind Quintet as prism*

It is well-known that Western tonal theory and harmonic analysis has long been divided into two separate and influential traditions: adaptations of Riemann's function theory dominate European music theory, while Schenkerian approaches take a similar role in Anglo-American scholarship. This gap of traditions is also evident when comparing European (especially Danish) and Anglo-American analytical studies of Carl Nielsen's music.

This paper examines how the gap of traditions has influenced the analysis of Nielsen's music, focusing especially on how their different analytical lenses have construed Nielsen's organicist ideals in dissimilar ways. Nielsen explicitly embraced ideals such as 'coherence,' 'logic,' and 'unity'; interestingly, these ideals are often pursued in analytical studies, but they are equally often problematised by invoking their apparent antonyms 'structural decay,' 'disunity,' and similar notions. The comparative



perspective offered by this study suggests that the *kinds* of 'coherence' or 'logic' – or their antonyms – that analytical studies claim to find in Nielsen's music are greatly affected by theoretical assumptions and analytical practices of each tradition.

Special attention will be devoted to the prelude of the third movement of Nielsen's Wind Quintet, and to two published analyses of this music – one from each tradition (Parks 1994; Fjeldsøe 1999). This often-discussed prelude seems to function as a prism that renders visible fundamental aspects – and blind spots – of Riemann- and Schenker-tinted spectacles. The paper ultimately argues in favour of a pluralist approach: in understanding Nielsen's music, his organicist ideals, and our analytical tools, much is to be gained in alternating between analytical perspectives.

## **Bjarke Moe**

### *Studying, teaching and composing counterpoint*

As a music student at the Copenhagen Conservatory 1884–1886, Carl Nielsen drew up several hundred exercises in counterpoint, and when he started teaching there himself in 1916, he continued the pedagogical strategy of training the students in polyphonic writing. The first part of the paper will demonstrate how models by Fux, Bellermand and Richter was part of the music curriculum. Secondly, the paper will investigate to what extent Nielsen drew on these models in his compositions. Of special interest is the question of how he might have adapted polyphonic techniques when drafting new works.

## **Daniel Mortensen**

*On an overgrown path – Leoš Janáček as another hitchhiker through modernity*

The ambition to relate Janáček and his music to modernity has been following Janáček reception ever since he as an elderly man emerged as an internationally acclaimed modern composer in the 1920s. To uncover the possible problems of this project – which has succeeded in making Janáček modern, but also in placing him in a rather strained position between folkloristic localism and universalistic modernism – can be thought to be highly relevant also when looking at the reception of other so-called modernist composers – such as Carl Nielsen. On one hand Janáček has been categorized as a Czech relative of Bartók, sometimes Stravinsky, and even Debussy, Berg, Puccini, apparently sharing general inspirations and connections to both impressionism, expressionism, verismo and folkloristic modernism. But simultaneously, his place among the moderns has also been defended through his music's alleged complete difference from everything else, creating the image of a slightly odd and much older modern uncle of modernist colleagues. A main reason to these impasses within the Janáček reception can be identified in the general disregard of Janáček's own aesthetic thinking and of its ability to shed any direct light on his music. The main concern of the present paper is therefore the attempt to free certain potentials of Janáček's music through a reconstruction of his own field of thinking, by an inquiry into the literary, musical, theoretical and geographical places in his work, at in some cases haven't entered the academic limelight due to various incompatibilities with more standard routes to modernity.

## **Sarah Moynihan**

### *Dancing under quarantine: Carl Nielsen's Imaginary Journey to the Faroe Islands in 1927*

In January 1927, Carl Nielsen began work on his Rhapsodic Overture: An Imaginary Journey to the Faroe Islands. The work was to commemorate a Faroese Gala, for which Faroese dancers were to travel along the newly established route to Copenhagen on the S/S Tjaldur. Nielsen's published programme imagines a boat journey in the opposite direction, across the 'calm sea' to the Islands' shores where the sounds of 'shouting, [...] stamping', and Faroese melodies are heard. Yet it was not until the end of the year that the programme was published or that Nielsen finalised the overture. The reason for this delay is now sadly all too familiar: the first performances were cancelled by the Minister of Health due to a resurgence of Spanish influenza in Copenhagen, which necessitated a ban on dancing in public spaces.

This paper will present one of the first rigorous formal analyses of the *Rhapsodic Overture* using voice-leading analysis to arrive at a programmatic reading of the work that contextualises it alongside twentieth-century musical nationalism and the European folk revival. The analysis will explore Nielsen's depiction of an unpitched 'nature'-seascape as well as the implications of his treatment of traditional Faroese dance melodies, particularly with regard to their harmonisation. From a post-colonial perspective, the Faroe Islands are unusual in that both the coloniser, Denmark, and colonised, the Faroe Islands, share a common cultural and linguistic heritage. Nevertheless, functional tonality is not part of Faroese folk culture, and Nielsen's

harmonisation might be heard as an imposition from central European musical culture or, alternatively, as one of cultural exchange. Finally, the striking historical context in which the work's completion was postponed will be explored from the vantage point of the present-day pandemic in a critical reflection on our own relationship to nature, music-making, and community under quarantine.

### **Svend Hvidtfelt Nielsen**

*Tonality versus Energetics: A new way of hearing Nielsen's 'Espansiva'*

Ever since the release of Robert Simpson's book on Nielsen's Symphonies, the major part of the existing Nielsen-reception has been anglo-American, and has developed and on the premises of anglo-American theoretical thinking. In this thinking, tonality apparently takes a dominant position. So dominant, that Nielsen's alternative ways of handling tonal progression in many studies has been turned into a focus point for understanding what Nielsen did and wanted to do. In this reception Nielsen's often quoted statements 'let's see where it takes us' and 'we need to get away from the keys and yet still work with diatonic conviction,' has been more or less ignored in attempts to define Nielsen's obvious tonal planning, unfolded as either *directional tonality* (as Simpson and Krebs has put it) or even *polyfocal tonality* (as Devoto suggests). If we consult contemporary Danish reception, mainly represented by Hamburgers analysis of 'Espansiva' and Jeppesen's lectures on the Symphonies, we find no mentioning of a large tonal planning, where every step on the way lay ready in the composers mind from the outset, and where any motivic

gesture or development is nothing but the means by which, the essence of the music – the tonal relations – could be sounded. Danish reception hears the music strikingly different. Nielsen's contemporary Danish reception – here represented by Povl Hamburger and Knud Jeppesen – hears thematic development organicism, tension and energy not as a means for bearing forth some sort of all defining 'tonality', but as an essence in itself. Swept in a fluid ever changing tonality more rightly characterised as just diatonicism. It is tempting to believe, that Nielsen heard his own music along the same lines as his contemporaries.

Daniel Grimley notes this other way of listening in his analysis of *Espansiva*, which leads him to adapt an 'energetic' view on the Symphony, expressed in the formal proposals of Hans Mersmann. Still when Grimley at a certain point characterize the Symphony as 'waves that propel the musical stream of consciousness in the *Allergro Espansivo*' which 'constantly rise and break through the spiralling gyres of [...] spliced sonata structures so that the music carries its own destructive current within its energetic motion' (Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism*, 2010, 130), it is still *tonality* that spirals; it is *tonality* that defines the 'spliced sonata structure'. My ears are very much like the ears of Hamburger and Jeppesen. Tonicity is the last thing I hear in Nielsen's music. I hear movement and energy manifested in the motivic – and not tonal – relations. This way of hearing can be theoretically captured through another aspect of Mersmann's thinking: His attempt to define energetic force in music by the dual concepts of 'Expansiv – Zentripetal', 'Kraft – Raum' and 'Stauung – Beschleunigung'. Heard through these concepts first movement of *Espansiva* reveals new

structures and construction principles, that has until now been overheard. That is at least, what I will argue, and try to demonstrate through and Mersmannian analysis of the exposition (bars 1–226) of first movement of the *Espansiva*. I will firstly explain the meaning of Mersmann's three dual concepts and then apply them to Nielsen's music, showing how the 'spiralling' and the 'splicedness', that Grimley hears, can be heard as series of interwoven forces of 'expansion' and 'centripetality', of 'force' and 'space', of 'piling-up/building-up' and 'acceleration'.

### **Christopher Tarrant**

*Music in the Galant Style: An Andante by Nielsen?*

Carl Nielsen's predilection for eighteenth-century music is well known and is clearly documented in his essays and letters. His admiration of eighteenth-century composers – especially Mozart – is also detectable in his compositional output. Analysts have most commonly focused their efforts either on the lower levels of musical organisation (such as his approach to harmony and habitual use of contrapuntal techniques, especially fugue) or on the higher formal level (encompassing his employment of variation form and his relationship with the Beethovenian sonata tradition). This paper proposes an approach to the middle level of the structural hierarchy in order to develop a richer understanding of Nielsen's musical syntax.

Robert O. Gjerdingen's 2007 study of galant musical style provides a rich nomenclature for discussing musical syntax and represents an alternative to William Caplin's more widely used theory of formal functionality (1998). Gjerdingen's theory, with

some modification, provides a fresh means of understanding Nielsen's idiolect. While this was neither the repertoire for which Gjerdingen had intended it, nor does all of Nielsen's output lend itself to this approach, in certain specific cases an understanding of galant schemata can deepen and enrich our understanding of Nielsen's music. This paper will focus on the Andante second movement of Nielsen's First Symphony.

### **Marie-Louise Zervides**

*Nielsen, Saul and David and the Symbolist Movement*

My presentation explores the position of the Danish composer Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) and his first opera *Saul and David* (1898–1901) in the European symbolist movement of the 1890s. Through a study of Nielsen's published letters and diary entries from the period, it is possible to present the composer's wide interest in art and engagement with artists – both in Denmark and on his extensive European travels – at a time when symbolism was dominating the modern art scene. Furthermore, one can trace artistic strategies in Nielsen's early work – in this case, the opera *Saul and David* – that correspond to different ideas of symbolism. This includes combining archaic materials with contemporary techniques, as well as creating a subjective expression through mood and simplified, non-naturalistic styles.







## **COMMITTEE**

Michelle Assay

David Fanning

Michael Fjeldsøe

Daniel M. Grimley

Christopher Tarrant (Conference Convenor)

Carmela Barbaro (Conference Assistant)

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## **ZOOM LINKS**

Carl Nielsen Conference Day 1

<https://newcastleuniversity.zoom.us/j/82695148868>

Meeting ID: 826 9514 8868

Passcode: 453119

Carl Nielsen Conference Day 2

<https://newcastleuniversity.zoom.us/j/89450266385>

Meeting ID: 894 5026 6385

Passcode: 107621

## **Emergency contacts**

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