CARL NIELSEN AND THE IDEA OF MODERNISM

DANIEL M. GRIMLEY

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Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) is one of the most playful, life-affirming, and awkward voices in twentieth-century music. His work resists easy stylistic categorisation or containment, yet its melodic richness and harmonic vitality are immediately appealing and engaging. Nielsen's symphonies, concertos and operas are an increasingly prominent feature of the international repertoire, and his songs remain perennially popular at home in Denmark. But his work has only rarely attracted sustained critical attention within the scholarly community; he remains arguably the most underrated composer of his international generation.

This book offers a critical re-evaluation of Carl Nielsen's music and his rich literary and artistic contexts. Drawing extensively on contemporary writing and criticism, as well as the research of the newly completed *Carl Nielsen Edition*, the book presents a series of case studies centred on key works in Carl Nielsen's output, particulary his comic opera *Maskarade*, the Third Symphony (*Sinfonia espansiva*), and his final symphony, the *Sinfonia semplice*. Topics covered include his relationship with symbolism and *fin-de-siècle* decadence, vitalism, counterpoint, and the Danish landscape. Running throughout the book is a critical engagement with the idea of musical modernism – a term which, for Nielsen, was fraught with anxiety and yet provided a constant creative stimulus.

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Preface

Carl nielsen is one of the most playful, life-affirming, and awkward voices in twentieth-century music. His work resists easy stylistic categorisation or containment, yet its melodic richness and harmonic vitality are immediately appealing and engaging. Nielsen's symphonies, concertos, and operas are an increasingly prominent feature of the international repertoire, and his songs remain perennially popular at home in Denmark. But his work has only rarely attracted sustained critical attention within the musicological community. The reasons for this relative critical neglect are complex. Access to primary source material has previously been limited to Danish-speaking scholars, although strenuous efforts have been made (by the Carl Nielsen Edition, for example) to disseminate research more widely. With the completion of the Edition in March 2009, it is possible for the first time to perform and analyse Carl Nielsen's work from reliable, scholarly editions, with accompanying notes and editorial addenda. A more serious obstacle to full critical appreciation of his work, however, perhaps lies in a wider unwillingness to engage with music which lies outside the mainstream modernist canon. Nielsen's perceived peripheralised position, as a Nordic composer working on the historical and stylistic cusp of a full-blown continental musical modernism, has reinforced his marginalisation from much writing on twentieth-century European music. Though many scholars have sought to dismantle such received models of historical musical development, and stress the contested, multivalent nature of musical modernisms (in their plurality), such fixed patterns of geographical thought remain remarkably resistant to change. Nielsen's proper place, at the forefront of historical and analytical accounts of twentieth-century music, has yet to be conclusively established in the wider scholarly field. A related problem is the extent to which Nielsen's work challenges received models of musical analysis. Though the seemingly diatonic surface of his music positively invites a post-Schenkerian voice-leading approach, the lack of a stable diatonic middleground means that such readings ultimately remain provisional at best. Similarly, by Schoenbergian standards of motivic rigour, Nielsen's more associative approach to motivic development can appear frustratingly casual. But neither of these qualities point to inherent weaknesses in Nielsen's musical style. Rather, they are compositional strengths of his idiosyncratic musical language, and the starting point for contemplating deeper questions of musical meaning and value in his work, issues which this present volume seeks to address. Critical consideration of Nielsen's music is therefore timely. It offers the chance to rediscover a vibrant body of work whose popular appeal among international audiences is widening rapidly. Simultaneously, it presents the opportunity to reflect critically

upon broader issues of identity and musical modernism, and to reassess our theoretical approaches to twentieth-century music as a consequence.

Though I have argued that Nielsen's music remains undeservedly neglected within the wider musicological community, this book is nevertheless indebted to previous scholarly research on his work. The most important discussion of Nielsen's music in Anglo-American writing remains Robert Simpson's pioneering monograph, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist* (first published 1952, rev. 1979), a volume which has long served as a general introduction to the composer and has subsequently shaped his critical reception. This book often takes Simpson's work as a point of departure (my original intention was to entitle the current volume *Carl Nielsen: Modernist*, in dialogue with Simpson's discussion, as well as Jørgen I Jensen's later account, *Carl Nielsen: Danskeren*). Even though I am often sceptical about core elements of his thesis, I have frequently found myself building upon, rather than simply resisting, Simpson's readings as my own writing has progressed. Simpson's sensitivity to the affective qualities of Nielsen's music, and his sheer enthusiasm for works such as the Third Symphony, remains inspirational. Since the publication of Simpson's book, a number of international scholars have sought to update and promote our understanding of the composer and his milieu, including Mina F. Miller's early critical edition of the complete piano music and her edited anthology of essays, *A Carl Nielsen Companion* (London: Faber, 1994), and David Fanning's outstanding guide to the Fifth Symphony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). As this book goes to press, Anne-Marie Reynolds' monograph on Carl Nielsen's songs, the first study devoted exclusively to this central element in Nielsen's output, will also have appeared (published by Royal Library's Museum Tusculanum Press in Copenhagen), bringing new critical and analytical insights into his work as well as a fine sense of Nielsen's Danish contexts. More significant still has been the series of landmark projects in Denmark that have laid the groundwork for a thorough critical reappraisal of Nielsen's music and its historical environment. The publication (in 1983) of Nielsen's diaries and correspondence with his wife, the sculptor Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen, edited by Torben Schousboe, was the first stage in this process. The most important achievement, however, has been the completion of a complete scholarly edition of Carl Nielsen's music, based at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, under the leadership (since 1997) of Niels Krabbe. The edition has not simply provided a reliable textual source for Carl Nielsen's work; it has also prompted broader questions of genesis, performance, and interpretation. Completion of the edition has been paralleled by the inauguration (in 2002) of the Carl Nielsen Letters project, based at the Royal Library and painstakingly edited and annotated by John Fellow. John Fellow's earlier edition of Carl Nielsen's collected writings on music, *Carl Nielsen til sin Samtid*, further amplified our understanding of the composer and his musical development, and corrected a number of myths and misunderstandings that surrounded

his work. His subsequent discovery, in the Royal Library archives, of Emilie Demant Hatt's vivid memoir of the composer, *Foraarsbølger* ('Spring Waves'), has added immeasurably to our sense of Nielsen's formative years as a student at the Royal Danish Conservatoire in the late 1880s. From John Fellow's work, we have gained unique insights into Nielsen's often strained and complex personal life, as well as into his rich cultural contexts, both in Denmark and abroad.

The purpose of this book is fourfold: firstly, to offer a broad critical summary of Nielsen's work through detailed analytical exegesis of his musical language, engaging substantially with Robert Simpson's account of the symphonies and concertos as a preliminary step towards a deeper understanding of Nielsen's music. The intention is not to present a standard life-and-works study (a task which would require a discussion many times the length of the current project), but rather to offer an insightful critical survey grouped around key critical themes or concepts from which broader interpretative categories (such as dialogue, character, and musical identity) emerge. Secondly, the book seeks to provide analytical readings of selected excerpts from major works (principally Symphonies 1, 3, and 6, as well as selected vocal and keyboard works), adopting a pragmatic and eclectic methodological approach that draws elements from contrapuntal voice-leading models, semiotic analysis, and post-Riemannian harmonic theory (borrowing from work by Harald Krebs, Patrick McCreless, Richard Cohn, and others). Thirdly, the book attempts to outline a critique of the notion of Danish identity in Nielsen's work, building on the work of Jørgen I. Jensen, John Fellow, and Michael Fjeldsøe. The idea of Nielsen's Danishness has become a particularly thorny category given recent political developments in Denmark (most notably the official formation of a restrictive 'Cultural Canon' [*Kulturkanon*] dedicated to the dissemination of key texts in Danish art, music, film, and literature [see the official canon website at http://www.kulturkanon.kum.dk/]: Nielsen is represented by his Fourth Symphony). As Danish scholars have readily acknowledged, such narrow notions of national identity are profoundly exclusive, and are poorly reflective of Nielsen's more open and ambivalent musical outlook. Yet a central subtext in this book is a sense that Nielsen's local context nevertheless remains a central component in his creative practice, and that the wider narrative of early twentieth-century Danish modernism remains largely unknown outside Denmark. Hence, one of the tasks of this book is to articulate and negotiate Nielsen's shifting sense of musical *place*, both geographical and stylistic. Fourthly, as a result, it offers broader reflection on Nielsen's relationship with a European modernist musical practice. Recent work by writers such as Richard Taruskin and James Hepokoski has greatly widened and enhanced our historical understanding of the category of modernism in music. Yet, while Nielsen's work remains largely absent from their richly revisionist accounts, it can further promote such understanding,

and add a new theoretical perspective, for example, to our understandings of modernism and the early twentieth-century symphony. That is not to argue, necessarily, that Nielsen was himself a modernist: he would no doubt have resisted the term, especially given its local critical patterns of usage in contemporary music criticism. Rather, I suggest, his work is marked by its engagement with such notions of modernism, both within music and other media such as painting, sculpture, and literature, and that the idea of modernism itself becomes an interpretative framework or scheme for contemplating his work.

Although chapters are organised principally by theme and topic, discussion proceeds along approximately chronological lines. The introduction, 'Carl Nielsen at the Edge', presents the twin ideas of Danishness and modernism in Nielsen's music, and explores the ways in which they represent binary strands of his critical reception. Jørgen I. Jensen's notion of Nielsen's 'bi-personality' is useful here, as is John Fellow's analyses of the way in which Nielsen's work became associated with ideas of Danishness in the early years of the twentieth century (for example through the success of his song *Jens Vejmand*). The idea of the double-man will itself be dismantled as a modernist category, one that raises problematic issues of subjectivity, collective identity, and historical imagination in music historical writing more generally. The starting point of the discussion is two well-known photographs of the composer: the first taken from Nielsen's childhood on the island of Funen; and the second a portrait taken shortly after the completion of his comic opera, *Maskarade*, when Nielsen had first established himself decisively as an artist of national, and international, significance.

The second chapter, 'Thresholds', discusses Nielsen's relationship with symbolism, and with the emergence of modernist discourses in *fin-de-siècle* Danish culture. The idea of a 'modernist breakthrough' (*gennembrud*), first coined by Danish critic Georg Brandes in 1883, will be invoked both as an analytical and a historical category in Nielsen's music, notably the First Symphony. As applied by Theodor W. Adorno in his later analysis of Mahler's music, however, the term 'breakthrough' (*Durchbruch*) comes to refer to radical moments of destabilisation, usually introduced towards the reprise or recapitulation, which demand some kind of corrective response or resolution. This latter definition is highly relevant to Nielsen's symphonic designs, but Nielsen's formal innovation is to shift such moments of destabilisation towards the front of a work, so that the musical material is introduced in a seemingly unstable, fissile state. Images of breakthrough and destabilisation were prominent in early descriptive accounts of Nielsen's music, not least in Danish music criticism. This chapter begins to consider some of the fundamental differences between Mahler's and Nielsen's approaches to symphonic form, and concludes that, while Mahler's music (following Adorno) can frequently be heard as a mode of immanent critique, the trajectory of Nielsen's

music is essentially outwards, the projection of a more optimistic world view that ultimately embraces its own sense of contingency and openness.

This sense of an expansive opening-out, and the idea of music as an affirmative energetic force, underpins the third and fourth chapters. In the third, 'Hellenism', I begin with an analysis of Nielsen's overture *Helios*, inspired by his 1902 sojourn in Athens, and discuss his relationship with the vitalist wave in Danish art and literature in the early years of the twentieth century. Nielsen's interest in Classical Greek culture marries with his emergent sense of a new musical idiom – one which drew its strength primarily from late eighteenth-century musical style. Building on Jørgen I. Jensen's work, I assess the influence of Vilhelm Andersen's discussion of Nordic myth on Nielsen's neoclassical turn in his second opera, *Maskarade*, a work in which Nielsen arguably offers the vision of a modern democratic musical regime that simultaneously centres on his own Danish dramatic roots. In the fourth chapter, 'Energetics', I consider Nielsen's Hellenism from another side, through the idea of Helios symbolising a pulsating stream of linear musical energy or kinetic force. This is a reading inspired by an early analysis of Nielsen's music, Poul Hamburger's article, 'Formproblemet i vor tids music med analyse af Carl Nielsen's *Sinfonia Espansiva* (1 Sats)' ('The Problem of Form in the Music of our Time with an Analysis of Carl Nielsen's *Sinfonia Espansiva* (First Movement)') Published only in the final year of Nielsen's life, it was apparently regarded sceptically by the composer himself. Nevertheless, Hamburger's analysis suggests some interesting parallels with trends in contemporary German music theory, particularly the work of Hans Mersmann. Like Mersmann, and other German energeticists including Ernst Kurth and August Halm, Hamburger heard music as the outward expression of a dynamic inner tension between linear horizontal and vertical elements. In Nielsen's work, Hamburger wrote, 'the expansive, the will to as free and unhindered an unfolding as possible of the powers of movement, which lies behind all music, has always found strongest expression in the horizontal dimension, in Melody.' Rereading the first movement of the *Sinfonia Espansiva* in the light of Hamburger's analysis offers vivid insights into Nielsen's approach to symphonic structure, particularly his employment of energetic wave forms, and problematises his approach to the genre.

If the impetus in the first movement of the *Sinfonia Espansiva* is energetically outwards, its second movement is a turning within, a powerful evocation of place. In the fifth chapter, 'Funen Dreams', I consider how this movement, and works such as *Springtime on Funen* ('Fynsk foraar'), explicitly refer to sounds and images associated with Nielsen's birthplace. This chapter deconstructs the idea of Funen in Nielsen's music, and assesses its status and quality as a musical trope. The musical figures and textures that signify Funen in Nielsen's music are identified, and the wider role performed by Funen in the Danish cultural imagination will also be analysed, particularly in the

context of early twentieth-century debates about the nature of Danish identity, region, and its place within Europe, discussions which are ongoing today. Funen is better known internationally as the birthplace of H. C. Andersen (an association which has, to a limited extent, encouraged its commercial commodification), while the work of the Funen school of painters such as Peter Hansen, centred on Fåborg in the south and close to the artistic circles in which Nielsen and his wife moved, is particularly relevant for an understanding of Nielsen's musical representation of the island. The promotion of a particular place or region whose sensibility supposedly represents a purified form of local identity is a familiar nationalist strategy. The tensions that this generates, particularly between ideas of nation and region in Denmark, will be addressed. For Nielsen, Funen appears to embody both a sense of groundedness or homeland, and also an exotic escape or refuge, a site of intense auditory awareness opposed to the cosmopolitan urban environment of the capital, Copenhagen.

Nielsen's ambivalent attitude towards the idea of modernism is reflected also in his concern with musical archaisms: from baroque organ music (Bach and Buxtehude) to sixteenth-century polyphony (Palestrina) and Classical Greek and Latin texts. This interest with older musics can be seen as part of a wider European concern with the 'invention' of musical tradition, and with the origins of the historical performance practice movement. In Nielsen's work, this interest is embodied primarily through his development of linear contrapuntal structures in works such as the *Chaconne* and the *Theme and Variations* for solo piano, the 3 motets composed for Mogens Wöldike's Palestrina Choir, and his final composition, the organ fantasy *Commotio*. It is also reflected in his reception of Knud Jeppesen's thesis on Palestrina, and in his lectures on Greek music in Copenhagen in the 1920s. Building on an earlier essay on Nielsen's piano music, I explore the aesthetic background and status of Nielsen's interest in counterpoint by borrowing Martha Hyde's notion of anachronistic allusion. 'Counterpoint' can be understood in a broad sense, referring both to musical texture and to the deliberate juxtaposition of opposed musical styles or historical periods as a form of dialogue or musical play. This wider 'contrapuntal' practice becomes a crucial component of Nielsen's musical imagination.

The final chapter, 'Cosmic Variations', is devoted to an analysis of a single work, the Sixth Symphony (1925–6). The *Sinfonia semplice* is arguably Nielsen's most complex and challenging score, and it is the work that has generated the greatest controversy among Nielsen scholars and audiences alike. For some, the symphony is the expression of a tired creative imagination, and does not properly belong within the canon. Yet for others, it is a powerful and provocative testament to Nielsen's engagement with a younger generation of avant-garde composers. As Jonathan Kramer has argued, it can even be heard (problematically) as a 'postmodernist' work. My reading deconstructs Kramer's

account, and engages substantially with Robert Simpson's two contradictory responses to the symphony, published in the first and second editions of his monograph respectively. In particular, the final movement (a set of theme and variations) builds out from the basic opposition between synchresis and diachresis which underpins all reiterative variation forms, and articulates a fundamental dualism between stability and disorder, closure and lack of containment. Tracing Nielsen's attempt to negotiate such opposed states, and reach a point of equilibrium or balance, provides a dynamic model for reading his work, and raises important questions about the nature of Nielsen's musical discourse and his critical reception. Far from being a flawed work, or the reflection of a compromised or spent creative force, the symphony emerges urgently as one of the most compelling encounters in early twentieth-century musical thought.

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Abbreviations

Breve	*Carl Nielsens Breve*, selected and with comments by Irmelin Eggert Møller and Torben Meyer (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1954)
CNA	Carl Nielsen Archive, Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen
CNB	*Carl Nielsen Brevudgaven*, ed. John Fellow, 5 vols (Copenhagen: Multivers, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009), ongoing
CNS	*Carl Nielsen Studies*, ed. Niels Krabbe, David Fanning, Daniel Grimley, and Knud Ketting, 4 vols (Copenhagen: Royal Library, 2001, 2005, 2008, 2009)
CNU	*Carl Nielsen Udgaven* [Carl Nielsen Complete Works], multiple volumes (Copenhagen: Wilhelm Hansen, 1998–2009). Works are identified by the series and volume number, as well as their respective editor.
Dagbøger	Carl Nielsen, *Dagbøger og Brevveksling med Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen*, ed. Torben Schousboe, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1983)
Danskeren	Jørgen I. Jensen, *Carl Nielsen: Danskeren* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1991)
DMT	*Dansk Musiktidsskrift* [journal], Copenhagen
Samtid	*Carl Nielsen til sin Samtid*, ed. John Fellow, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1999)
Symphonist	Robert Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, 2nd edn (London: Kahn & Averill, 1979, repr. 1983). In Chapter 7 the first and second editions are shown as *Symphonist*[1] and *Symphonist*[2] respectively.

Carl Nielsen Chronology

The following is collated from sources in Schousboe (ed.), *Dagbøger*, and volumes in John Fellow's *Carl Nielsen Brevudgave*.

1865 Carl August Nielsen born 9 June, Sortelung, Nørre Lyndelse, Funen, year after Danish defeat in second Prussian-Danish war. Seventh of twelve children. Father (Niels 'Maler' Jørgensen, 1835–1915) painter and part-time musician. Carl baptised 13 August.

1874–5 Joins local music society, 'Braga', takes part in village concerts and dances.

1879 Joins 16th battalion, Odense, as a cornet player.

1881 Earliest extant compositions, including Fantasy for clarinet and piano.

1883 May, travels to Copenhagen to sit entrance exam for Royal Danish Music Conservatory, December.

1884 January, joins conservatory, studies composition with Niels W. Gade, violin with Valdemar Tofte, theory with Orla Rosenhoff.

1886 Graduates from conservatory; joins Tivoli Concert Hall Orchestra as second violinist (first full-time musical post).

1887 First summer on Limfjord with Demant Hatt family, Selde (Jutland). 17 September, *Andante tranquillo e Scherzo* for string orchestra played at Tivoli concert hall (first official public performance).

1888 Birth of first son, Carl August Hansen. September, *Little Suite for Strings*, op. 1, premiered at Tivoli.

1889 Joins Chapel Royal Orchestra as second violinist. Conducted by Johan Svendsen (1840–1911).

1890 Awarded travel grant (Anckerske Legat) to spend year abroad. Leaves for Germany in June. Meets Sibelius, Busoni, and Edvard Munch in Berlin.

1891 Travels to Paris. Meets wife, sculptress Anne Marie Brodersen (1863–1945). Marriage takes place on 10 May at English Church, Florence. First daughter (Irmelin) born, 9 December.

1892 Composes First Symphony. First composition concert ('Soirée') including premiere of Jacobsen Songs, op. 4.

1893 Premiere of single-movement *Symfonisk Rhapsodi*, 24 February. Birth of second daughter, Anne-Marie, 4 March.

1894 First Symphony premiered, 14 March. Autumn, travels to Vienna and Berlin and meet Richard Strauss and Johannes Brahms.

1895 Premiere of *Symphonic Suite*, Violin Sonata in A, 5 May. Second son, Hans Børge born, 5 September.

1897 Premiere of *Hymnus Amoris*, 27 April.

1902 First opera, *Saul og David* (libretto by Einar Christiansen) premiered, Royal Opera, cond. Nielsen, 28 November. Second Symphony, *The Four Temperaments*, premiered, Koncertforeningen cond. Nielsen, 1 December.

1903 Travels to Greece and writes *Helios* Overture (premiered 8 October, Chapel Royal cond. Svendsen). Conducts Second Symphony with Berlin Philharmonic as part of concert series arranged by Busoni, 5 November.

1904 Takes over as temporary conductor at Royal Theatre, but contract not renewed and resigns following year. Beginning of serious marital difficulties.

1906 Second opera, *Maskarade* (libretto: Vilhelm Andersen after Ludvig Holberg) premiered, Royal Theatre cond. Nielsen, 11 November. Sell-out success.

1907 Composes *Jens Vejmand* (text: Jeppe Aakjær), Nielsen's most popular piece during his lifetime.

1908 Offered position as permanent conductor at Royal Theatre.

1912 Third Symphony, *Sinfonia Espansiva*, and Violin Concerto premiered, Royal Chapel cond. Nielsen, 28 February. Third symphony performed by Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, 28 April, cond. Julius Röntgen.

1914 Resigns from Royal Theatre. Begins collaboration with educationalist Thomas Laub, *En Snes danske Viser* (*A score of Danish songs*) premiered 13 April 1915.

1916 Fourth Symphony, *The Inextinguishable*, premiered, Musikforeningen cond. Nielsen, 14 January. Carl and Anne Marie begin legal separation proceedings.

1917 Premiere of *Chaconne* and *Theme and Variations* for Piano.

1918 Appointed conductor of Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra as replacement for Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927); stays with Carl and Vera Michaelsen.

1922 Fifth Symphony premiered, Musikforeningen, cond. Nielsen, 24 January. Wind Quintet premiered in private performance, Gothenburg, 30 April. Publication of *Folk High School Songbook*. Beginning of serious heart problems.

1923 Visits Britain. Conducted Fourth Symphony at Queen's Hall, 20 June. *Prelude, theme and variations* for solo violin premiered by Emil Telmányi, 27 June.

1924 Highly controversial performance of Fifth Symphony in Stockholm. Half the audience leave the building after the first movement.

1925 Probably hears Suite from *Petrushka* in Copenhagen, 7 January. Meets Schoenberg (1874–1951) in Nice, February. Sixtieth birthday celebrations in June. Publication of *Living Music*. Sixth Symphony, *Sinfonia semplice*, premiered, Chapel Royal cond. Nielsen, 11 December. Considered controversial (first movement played in Stockholm, 1 November).

1926 Flute Concerto premiered, Salle Gaveaux, Paris, 21 October, with provisional ending. Concert also includes performance of Fifth Symphony. Meets Ravel, Honegger and Milhaud.

1927 Wilhelm Furtwängler conducts a highly acclaimed performance of the Fifth Symphony as part of the ISCM festival, 1 July. Programme also includes premiere of Bartók's First Piano Concerto.

1928 *3 Piano Pieces* and *Preludio e Presto* for solo violin premiered, 14 April. Clarinet Concerto premiered, 14 September.

1931 *Commotio* for organ, last major work, premiered, 24 April. Dies 3 October.

Fig. 1.1 *(above)* Carl Nielsen, *c.* 1908: photograph by George Lindstrøm

Fig. 1.2 *(right)* Carl Nielsen, *c.* 1880?

1 Introduction: Carl Nielsen at the Edge

Critically contemplating a composer's iconography – the visual trace they leave in our collective imagination – can be a challenging but worthwhile task. Carl Nielsen is a compelling case study. Two photographs of the composer stick obstinately in my mind. The first is a portrait of an early middle-aged man, elegantly dressed in a pale linen suit with gold watch chain and walking cane, gazing nonchalantly towards the camera with a searching look in his eyes – an expression that suggests powerful, intense inner concentration. The second is a snapshot of the composer as a young boy in an almost comically oversized military uniform, carrying a cornet in his hand and a slide trumpet by his side (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). It is difficult to try to reconcile the two sharply contrasting images with the same historical figure; both seem slightly unreal, and have the quality of dream pictures or memories from an uncertain or mythic past. The first, taken by portrait photographer Georg Lindström in summer 1908, midway between the composition of Nielsen's Second and Third symphonies and two years after the unexpected popular success of his second opera, *Maskarade*, presents a cosmopolitan *fin-de-siècle* artist or *bohème* at the height of his powers, the consummate *homme du monde* like a character from a Thomas Mann novel. The second photograph, in contrast, taken *c.* 1880 of Nielsen as a fourteen-year old boy in the Odense town battalion, offers an image drawn from a predominantly agricultural society and the rural Danish working class. Even allowing for the thirty-year time difference between Nielsen as young boy and mature adult, the two images seem irreconcilable, pointing in opposite temporal directions: back towards the nineteenth-century world of provincial Denmark, and forwards towards a confident, modernist European artistic future. The composite picture of Nielsen that emerges seems strangely fractured, broken, and incomplete.

In this introduction, and throughout this book, I will argue that such apparently conflicting or opposed images are in fact central to a proper understanding of Nielsen's life and music, and that the twin ideas of Danishness and modernism which they support are a fundamental, but problematic, quality of his work. At the most basic level, they represent binary strands of his critical reception. In Denmark, Nielsen was widely regarded during his own lifetime as the greatest composer of his generation, and key works assumed the status of national classics: most notably *Maskarade*, the Third and Fourth symphonies, and songs such as 'Jens Vejmand'. Through his collaborations with Thomas Laub in collections such as the *Folkehøjskolens Melodibog* (1922), Nielsen's tunes entered schools, colleges, and parish halls across the country, and became an integral part of Denmark's national

musical culture – so much so, in fact, that many Danes still grow up having learnt Nielsen's tunes without consciously registering the identity of the composer. As Jørgen I. Jensen remarks at the start of his richly provocative cultural biography of the composer, 'when he died, Nielsen had already, for many years, been regarded as unarguably the greatest composer Denmark had fostered for centuries, and today his name is such a self-evident idea in Danish culture that one can forget to marvel at him or his music.'[1] But the canonic status of Nielsen's Danishness is deeply ambivalent and contingent. As this introduction will demonstrate, the idea of Nielsen as a 'Danish composer' is a highly contested category, one which serves both to promote and to marginalise his work.[2] Tracing Nielsen's Danish identity can be both liberating and restrictive. It can serve as a hermeneutic window that opens up a new critical space for analysis and close reading of his music. If not critically framed, however, the image that results becomes an all-too-easy historical trope which peripheralises his work rather than locating it within wider narratives of early twentieth-century European musical modernism. As John Fellow's analyses of the often circumstantial processes through which Nielsen's work became associated with ideas of Danishness reveal (for example, through the success of his patriotic song 'Du danske Mand'),[3] such patterns of identity are complex and often contradictory. Jørgen I. Jensen's notion of Nielsen's essential 'bi-personality' is useful here: the idea of the 'double-man' can itself be dismantled as a broader European modernist category (it is prominent, for example, in critical writing on Nielsen's contemporaries such as Elgar and Mahler). This book will hence interrogate models of individual subjectivity, collective identity, and historical imagination in music historical writing generally, and consider issues of place and iconography in Nielsen reception. Closer examination of Nielsen's early works from the late 1880s and early 1890s, particularly his songs, provides a rich starting point for problematising issues of place, identity, and musical modernism in Nielsen's work. And in turn, this enquiry prompts deeper questions about the trajectory of much writing on twentieth-century musical history and Nielsen's proper place within broader histories of musical modernism. For Jensen, such questions point towards the profound

[1] 'Da han døde, havde han allerede i mange år været betragtet som den ubestridt største komponist, Danmark havde fostret i århundreder, og i dag er hans navn et så selvfølgeligt begreb i dansk kultur, at man kan glemme at undre sig over ham og hans musik.' *Danskeren*, 9.

[2] A recent attempt to resist the idea of Danishness, or rather to demonstrate that it is not in any sense an inherent property of Nielsen's music, can be found in Karen Vestergård and Ida-Marie Vørre, 'Danishness in Nielsen's *Folkelige* Songs', *CNS* 3, 80–101, which summarises an argument developed more fully in their 'Den danske Sang – en undersøgelse af danskheden i Carl Nielsens Sange' (PhD dissertation, University of Aalborg, 2006).

[3] John Fellow, 'A Patriotic Song with Consequences: "Du Danske Mand" through Hundred Years', *CNS* 3, 28–49.

dualism at the heart of Nielsen's music: 'the composer who, unlike any other renewed the popular song and created a new, clarified and simple tone in the Danish language, is the same who led Danish concert music towards the abstract, difficult, inaccessible, advanced and dissonant zones – towards atonality and modernism, and beyond'.[4] Understanding this dialectic provides a key to unlocking analytical and historical problems in Nielsen's music. But it also prompts wider questions about the nature of musical modernism, and about the canons that such stylistic categories inevitably create.

Strenuous efforts have been made in recent years to offer persuasive 'modernist' reinterpretations of composers (including Elgar, Sibelius, and Vaughan Williams)[5] whose work has hitherto been regarded as essentially conservative or backward-looking, not least as means of unpacking familiar narrative readings of twentieth-century music. Such accounts have often dismantled the binary model of twentieth-century modernism focused on the twin figures of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, prevalent in academic writing ever since the publication of Adorno's seminal *Philosophy of Modern Music*, and have energetically challenged the primacy of a particular avant-garde repertoire as the century's progressive aesthetic mainstream. Other studies have enriched and widened our understanding of musical modernism by presenting contextual interdisciplinary accounts of cities that became centres of modernist cultural practice (Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, and Paris), diverting attention from the authority of a single authorial figure towards their broader historical milieu and place. It would be satisfying to locate the current book alongside these other studies, and make a strong case for 'Carl Nielsen: Modernist' within one of the categories (perhaps that of 'indigenous modernisms') identified, for example, by a commentator such as Leon Botstein in his entry on 'Modernism' for the revised *New Grove Dictionary*. Nielsen gains only a low profile or is unaccountably absent from many major music-historical surveys: his work appears only peripherally in the *Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, for instance, as a relatively minor player in a larger critical account of symphonic composition after Beethoven; his work does not figure

[4] 'Den komponist, der som ingen anden fornyede den folkelige sang og satte en ny, afklaret og enkel tone til det danske sprog, er den samme, som førte den danske koncertsalsmusik ind i abstrakte, vanskeligt tilgængelige, avancerede og dissonerende zoner – mod atonalitet, mod modernisme, og endnu længere fremad.' *Danskeren*, 14–15.

[5] For recent vigorous interrogations of modernism as a canonising category in early twentieth-century music, see for example, J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar: Modernist* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006); Tomi Maekelae, *Sibelius: Poesie in der Luft* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2007), and Alain Frogley's trenchant editorial introduction in his anthology, *Vaughan Williams Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 'Constructing Englishness in music: national character and the reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams', 1–22.

at all in the companion *Twentieth-Century Music* volume, effectively aligning (and hence marginalising) his music within the historical trajectory of the previous century.[6] On the basis of such startling neglect, the canonic impetus for a modernist reading of Nielsen's work remains pressing. But this book in fact offers a more anxious reading of Nielsen's modernism, one which draws its ambivalence from the idea of the 'bi-person' identified by Jensen as an essential character of Nielsen's personality. This need for ambivalence is not simply the result of a desire to avoid the centralising thrust of the 'grand narratives' that have become increasingly unsustainable in recent historical and theoretical musicology: it is more properly a reflection of the tone of much of Nielsen's life and work. But it also prompts questions about the way in which we understand and model musical modernism generally. And, in that sense, it concerns the ways in which modernism is itself defined.

For many writers, the terms 'modernism' and 'modernity' are effectively synonymous. This, for instance is the thrust of Botstein's proposition that 'Modernism is a consequence of the fundamental conviction among successive generations of composers since 1900 that the means of musical expression in the 20th century must be adequate to the unique and radical character of the age'.[7] The premise that a musical language must somehow be 'adequate' to its time, whether radical or not, is surely one that is potentially problematic for any particular historical period. But this notion of modernity nevertheless provides a fruitful and provocative angle for hearing Nielsen's music. As John Fellow notes in the preface to the first volume of the monumental letters edition, for example, 'Carl Nielsen lived in the years when modern Denmark and the modern world emerged, in the years when one section of the population after another found their voice, and the right to vote, and rose to honour and dignity, in the years when technological progress and material growth became the order of the day and when old moral and restrictive ties loosened themselves and thus set psychological growth and evolution on the programme. In a great many ways he translated this human expansion in musical terms.'[8] Fellow's vision of Danish modernity is interestingly conceived in terms of utterance and enfranchisement as much as scientific

[6] An obvious exception is Arnold Whittall's survey, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52–9, which accords Nielsen a special place in discussions of early twentieth-century symphonic modernism alongside Sibelius and Vaughan Williams.

[7] Leon Botstein, 'Modernism', *Grove Music Online* (accessed 14 October 2008).

[8] 'Carl Nielsen levede i de år da det moderne Danmark og den moderne verden blev til, i de år hvor den ene befolkningsgruppe efter den anden fik stemme, og stemmeret, og kom til ære og værdighed, i de år hvor teknologiske fremskridt og materiel vækst kom på dagsordenen og hvor gammel moral og snærende band løsnede sig og også satte en psykisk vækst og udvikling på programmet. Selv satte han i mangt og meget denne menneskelige ekspansion på musikalsk begreb.' *CNB* 1, 9.

progress or cultural change, an interpretation which grounds Nielsen's music in its complex social contexts. Indeed, contemporary developments in infrastructure and the Danish built environment provide a telling backdrop: many of the architectural landmarks that now define Copenhagen's townscape, for example, date from the time of Nielsen's residence in the city and correspond, in more or less approximate ways, with particular phases of his compositional work: Martin Nyrop's grand Italianate town hall at the heart of the city, for example, with its echoes of Siena and Venice, was completed in 1909,[9] and the central railway station, with its carved stylised figures from Nordic mythology – still the gateway for most international visitors to the city – was opened in 1911, the years when Nielsen was working on his Third Symphony, the *Sinfonia espansiva*. Similarly, Kai Nielsen's stunning sculpted granite relief around the perimeter of Blågårds Plads in the Copenhagen suburb of Nørrebro depicting various forms of human work (including construction, motherhood, and music), completed in 1912–14 in a suitably muscular style as part of the urban development of the quarter, provides a compelling counterpoint to the symphonic vision of a diverse social community confidently unfurled in the finale of Nielsen's symphony – an image to which we will return in Chapters 4 and 5 below. Nielsen's music is hence clearly 'adequate', in Botstein's sense, to the spirit, and the stonework, of its own time.

But as Astradur Eysteinsson remarks, such easy parallels between modernism and modernity can swiftly become overly reductive. In such circumstances, 'modernism, and the social experience it utters, assumes the role of a reverberation and even reflection of social modernisation. Such an analogy can easily miss the sociocultural and ideological positioning of modernism with regard to social modernity, or can reduce it to a unilaterally reproductive or symbolic act.'[10] In other words, the critical edge that defines modernism, the sense of mind that is somehow sharply fractured from its immediate cultural environment and hence alienated, can become flattened out and normative. One aspect of this process, as Eysteinsson concedes, is the tendency for modernism simply to become a form of affirmation through denial, where 'modernism can be seen as the negative other of capitalist-bourgeois ideology and of the ideological space of social harmony demarcated for the bourgeois subject'.[11] Modernism thus undermines its own premise, the ostensible

[9] For an insightful discussion of the construction of the town hall, see Kristian Hvidt, 'Københavns Rådhus – "et Gesamtkunstwerk"', in *Drømmetid: Fortællinger fra Det Sjælelige Gennembruds København*, ed. Henrik Wivel (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2004), 214–27. Nielsen's wife, sculptor Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen, was awarded the commission for the decoration of the main entrance in 1895 (*CNB* 1, 413).

[10] Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 21.

[11] Ibid., 37.

rejection of such bourgeois ideology, through its own mode of operation – a paradox which Peter Bürger, amongst others, has addressed through his theory of the avant-garde.[12] It is not sufficient, in that case, for Nielsen's music simply to reflect aspects of modernity or urban change in early twentieth-century Copenhagen in order to be heard as 'modernist'. But neither would the blanket rejection of such bourgeois forms of cultural consumption ultimately fulfil the modernist criteria outlined by Eysteinsson above. Clearly, a more nuanced definition of modernism is required, one which conceives such processes as part of a dialogue or exchange, before any such study can proceed.

This need for critical reappraisal responds to Carlo Caballero's recent call for a more cautious and historically contextualised approach to the use of modernism and modernity as descriptors in writing on music.[13] As Caballero has suggested, it is all too easy for modernism to become a self-canonising category. The simple appellation 'modernist' can lend a deceptive veneer of innovation, progressiveness and aesthetic autonomy to a particular body of work – qualities which have been highly valued in much musicological writing, sometimes regardless of the extent to which such categories are historically justified. Fredric Jameson, for example, argues that 'the trope of modernity bears a libidinal charge: that is, it is the operator of a unique kind of intellectual excitement not normally associated with other forms of conceptuality … to affirm the "modernity" of this or that historical phenomenon is to generate a kind of electrical charge: … to awaken a feeling of intensity and energy that is greatly in excess of the attention we generally bring to interesting events or monuments in the past.'[14] It is hard to resist drawing upon the idea of the 'libidinal/electrical charge' of Nielsen's modernity in hermeneutic readings of works such as the Third Symphony, as Chapter 4 will argue. But, as Jameson's analysis suggests, attaching the label 'modernist' to a composer's music, without proper regard to their actual aesthetic outlook, simply elevates their work into a particular academic museum or pantheon, and often reflects more the political state of the discipline than the actual status of their work. Caballero thus argues for more careful attention to the ways in which the terms were historically used (as opposed to other near-cognate terms such as 'ultramodernism', the 'avant-garde', or 'futurism'). As Caballero notes, documentary evidence suggests that the word 'modernism' itself was

[12] Peter Bürger and Christa Bürger, *The Institutions of Art*, trans. Loren Kruger, with an introduction by Russel A. Berman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

[13] Unpublished contribution to evening panel discussion, 'Early French Musical Modernism: its Sources and Idioms', Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Quebec City, 1–4 November 2007.

[14] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 34–5.

employed relatively rarely, at least until the 1930s, and that it was initially as much a term of abuse as a modicum of praise. That was certainly the case in the reception of Nielsen's music. Contemporary Danish writers used the words 'modern', 'modernism', and 'modernity' relatively freely, as we shall see below: often as pejorative terms, but sometimes as a more neutral description of his music's perceived newness. But for many listeners, Nielsen's 'advanced modernism' remained fundamentally problematic, up to and including a controversial performance of his Fifth Symphony in Stockholm in 1924.[15] Later works, such as the Sixth Symphony and the Clarinet Concerto, are no less 'modernist' in outlook than earlier pieces, a quality which will be addressed in the final chapter below. But the danger remains that, without further critical scrutiny, the term simply becomes anachronistic, a way of canonising Nielsen's work without fully accounting for its critical edge.

Jameson's writings suggest a deeper shift in the nature of modernism and modernity (significantly, he does not treat the two terms as equal), one

[15] The Stockholm performance of the symphony was described in a number of newspaper reviews at the time. The Danish daily *Berlingske Tidende*, for example, recorded: 'The now 60-year-old composer unleashed such advanced modernity here that the impression was too powerful for a large part of the audience. In the middle of the first part, with its thunderous drums and "cacophonic effects", *genuine panic* broke out. Around a quarter of the listeners dashed towards the exits with horror and rage painted across their faces, and those, who stayed in their place, attempted to hiss down the "spectacle" while the conductor whipped the orchestra up into the greatest intensity. The whole of this intermezzo underlined the humoristically burlesque element in the symphony in a way that Carl Nielsen had never dreamt of. His description of modern life with all its confusion, brutality and struggle, all the uncontrolled cries of pain and ignorance – and behind it all, the hard rhythm of the side drum as the only discipline – gained, as the audience fled, a touch of almost diabolical humour.' [Den snart 60-aarige Komponist afslører her en saa fremskreden Modernitet, at Indtrykket blev for kraftigt for en stor Del af Publikum. Midt i første Afdeling med dens skraldende Trommer og ‚kakofoniske' Effekter udbrød der en *virkelig Panik*. Omtrent en Fjerdepart at Tilhørerne styrtede til Udgangene med Rædsel og Vrede malede i deres Ansigt, og de, der blev paa deres Pladser, forsøgte at nedhysse ‚Spektaklet', medens Dirigenten satte Orkestret op til den yderste Styrkegrad. Hele dette Intermezzo understregede det humoristisk burleske Element i Symfonien paa en Maade som Carl Nielsen sikkert aldrig har drømt om. Hans Skildring af det moderne Liv med dets Forvirring, Raahed og Kamp, alle de ubeherskede Raab af Smerte og Uvidenhed – og bag det hele Marchetrommens haarde Rytme som det eneste disciplinerende – fik, da Publikum flygtede, et Anstrøg af næsten diabolisk Humor.] 'Carl Nielsens 5te Symfoni vækker Panik i Stockholm – Publikum forlader Koncerten i Vrede men den‚5te Symfoni' besejrer Kritiken' ['Carl Nielsen's Fifth Symphony awakes Panic in Stockholm – Audience Flees Concert in Anger while the Fifth Symphony Conquers the Critic', article by 'Pastel', in *Berlingske Tidende* (Aften), 22 January 1924; *Samtid*, 304–6, at 304. It is interesting to note how *Berlingske Tidende*'s description of a 'humoristically burlesque intermezzo' in fact anticipates the second movement of the Sixth Symphony.

that offers a stronger basis for reading Nielsen's work. The first stage in this process is an acknowledgement of the dual temporal perspective of modernity, the sense that it looks both backwards and forwards simultaneously, what Jameson calls a 'dialectic of the break and the period, which is itself a moment of some wider dialectic of continuity and rupture (or, in other words, of Identity and Difference)'.[16] That is, the feeling or experience of modernity presupposes a sense of radical break or disjunction with the past, a category that in turn comes to shape and define a whole historical period rather than an isolated moment. This periodisation, however, implies a broadly cyclic view of time, one premised as much upon the notion of recurrence and return as rupture and disjunction (for the reason that earlier moments of modernist crisis invariably result in the creation of a new hegemony, which in turn prompts a further crisis and process of displacement). Hence, as Jameson concludes, 'the trope of "modernity" is closely related to that other chronological or historicising, narrative, the trope of "for the first time", which also reorganises our perceptions around the premise of a new kind of time line … the trope of "modernity" is always in one way or another a rewriting, a powerful displacement of previous narrative paradigms.'[17] This narrativisation of modernity has significant implications for the idea of Carl Nielsen as exemplar of a Danish modernist cultural practice. The sense of rupture, or 'breakthrough' that characterises much of Nielsen's work, analysed in greater depth in the following chapters, emerges here as a narrative category, as a mode of writing or composition. In other words, it becomes a rhetorical device or gesture, employed in order to evoke a particular sense of style, angle, or musical attitude.[18] This is, arguably, a strongly Nordic trend; as two important earlier commentators on literary modernism, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, suggest, 'in trying to pin Modernism down – tentatively and crudely – in terms of men, books, and years, attention is first drawn to Scandinavia: to the publication in 1883 of a series of critical essays by the Danish critic Georg Brandes with the significant title of *Men of the Modern Breakthrough*'. Nielsen's relationship with Brandes will be explored more fully in the following chapter, but it is significant, in the light of Jameson's essay,

[16] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 23.

[17] Ibid., 35.

[18] A similar critique has been advanced in a study by Ian Hunter, who observes the way in which the idea of the breakthrough becomes a philosophical trope in the history of critical theory, advanced by writers as diverse as Thomas Kuhn and Jacques Derrida, in response to a fear of empirical formalism; Ian Hunter, 'The History of Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Autumn 2006), 78–112. Hunter describes it as 'a philosophical ascesis associated with the cultivation of a particular intellectual persona' (p. 112). In this study, I use the term 'breakthrough' in a more focused historical sense, as a tool to analyse aspects of Nielsen's musical style, although the parallels with early developments in phenomenological thinking are striking.

that it is the idea of modernism as a narrative trope that is subsequently foregrounded by Bradbury and McFarlane, rather than a fixed or stable definition of modernism itself (and refreshing that, in spite of its later critical neglect in other accounts, Denmark emerges as the starting point for a European wave of modernism in the early 1880s). And, furthermore, that attention is paid to the binary nature of such categories – as simultaneously cycle and break – rather than as a monolithic unity.

The next stage in Jameson's reappraisal of modernism and modernity is more contentious. Having established that modernity is more properly a narrative category than a philosophical predicate, Jameson argues that 'the narrative of modernity cannot be organised around categories of subjectivity (consciousness and subjectivity are unrepresentable; only situations of modernity can be narrated)'.[19] For Jameson, this is because the idea of consciousness is itself already a representation rather than a transcendental (Kantian) category. Even Kant's notion of synthetic apperception, for Jameson, merely reveals an attempt to try and bridge the distinction between the knowing subject and its conscious representation. Such distinctions therefore become unworkable, except through appeals to problematic mythic (e.g. Heideggerian) notions of being and becoming. This is relevant because, to some extent, it illustrates Jameson's desire to escape from the paradoxical critique of the subject that ultimately reaffirms its bourgeois status, as Peter Bürger has argued. In other words, it seeks to clear a genuinely critical space within which an idea of modernism can intervene. But it is also significant because other scholars, for example J. P. E. Harper-Scott, have usefully invoked Heidegger's work as an alternative model for the modernist musical subject, as a means of negotiating the complex status of representation and subjectivity in music analysis.[20] A similar strategy will not be pursued here; rather, I will be concerned more immediately with Nielsen's relationship with certain closely contemporary writers in German music theory (August Halm, Ernst Kurth, and Hans Mersmann). Nielsen's music, I will argue in Chapter 4, is fundamentally bodily, and the task of musical analysis in this sense is to try and account for what we might call its choreography, the organisation of its corporeal gestures in time. Any attempt to describe this music's referentiality, however, as in all forms of musical analysis, remains stubbornly metaphorical. But this metaphorical discourse itself reflects another aspect of the process of modernity, namely the apparent autonomy of the subject and hence of the modernist work of art – an autonomy that is ultimately deceptive. As Jameson suggests, 'autoreferentiality is the very dynamic of this process, in which the work of art designates itself and supplies the criteria whereby it is supposed to be used

[19] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 57.

[20] Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar: Modernist*; and J. P. E. Harper-Scott, '"Our true north": Walton's First Symphony, Sibelianism, and the Nationalization of Modernism in England', *Music & Letters* 89/4 (November 2008), 562–89.

and evaluated. It is not necessary to see this level of the work's meaning as an exclusive one; rather it constitutes one allegorical level – for the artists themselves, no doubt, the anagogical one – among many others.'[21] In other words, the subject's appearance of autonomy, the crucial fracturing of artist and society that provides the foundation for many familiar readings of musical modernism, in turn becomes another aspect of modernism's narrative character. It is a disjunction that demands critical scrutiny and interpretation, in order to be properly heard, read, and understood.

The two photographs which hang beside my desk, of Nielsen the cosmopolitan worldly composer and provincial military cadet, might therefore be interpreted as part of this modernist narrative, as emblematic of the split or fractured personality that shapes and alienates the modernist artist. But they also raise intriguing questions about the precise nature of Nielsen's Danishness, and how such notions of national identity accommodate or deflect the problematic modernist trajectories discussed above. Interrogating such questions offers insight into the formation of Nielsen's canonic status within Danish musical culture in the early years of the twentieth century. Evidence of his eminence is extensively demonstrated in his critical reception, not least from the tributes and obituaries that were penned in the months following his sudden death in 1931. The complex story of Nielsen's legacy – and his influence on a younger generation of composers – will be addressed more fully below. But it is useful to register at this stage the almost universal degree to which Nielsen was hailed as a national figure in the final years of his life. This was partly a reflection of his institutional importance – in some senses, not least through his work with Thomas Laub on the Danish popular song, Nielsen's legacy was as much pedagogical as compositional.[22] Though his earlier career had been marked by profound disagreements and sudden breaks with other national institutions, most notably the Royal Theatre, in the final decade of his life Nielsen had become almost an establishment figure, actively engaged in the creation, regulation, and maintenance of a local Danish musical tradition. For some writers, it was the creation of this tradition alone which ensured his status as national composer. Otto Mortensen, for example, wrote:

> With Carl Nielsen we had the beginnings of an independent Danish musical culture. For too long we have made do with a ready-made, Germanicised musical life which, when it came to it, does not suit us.

[21] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 159.

[22] On Nielsen and the popular song, see Anne-Marie Reynolds, *Carl Nielsen's Voice: his Songs in Context* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010), 121–62. Nielsen was also active throughout his life as a teacher. He was first appointed on the teaching staff at the Royal Danish Conservatoire for a three-year period between 1 January 1916 and 31 December 1919, succeeding Otto Malling – he was followed in his turn by his pupil Knud Jeppesen (*Dagbøger*, 400); he later served as Head of the Conservatoire from January 1931 until his death later that year.

> It is not romantic patriotism that we should desire our own Danish musical life, but because that is the only satisfactory one.[23]

Mortensen's tribute reveals a profound cultural-political anxiety about the geographical integrity and stability of Danish musical culture, a fear of marginalisation. His sensitivity to the 'Germanisation' of Danish musical life can be understood on several levels – as a response to Denmark's territorial border disputes with Prussia in 1848 and 1864 (the year before Nielsen's birth) in southern Jutland, for example, to the domination of Leipzig-trained musicians such as Niels W. Gade in nineteenth-century Danish music and of German cultural imperialism, or to the perceived 'threat' of avant-garde European modernism represented by Arnold Schoenberg and Paul Hindemith, both of whom had visited Copenhagen in the 1920s. But it is significant in terms of his reception that Nielsen here becomes the representative for an insular, inward-looking idea of Danishness, one which seems more content with the idea of Nielsen as 'little Dane' than as a challenging European modernist. Indeed, this tension between inward and outward notions of Danishness, between a narrow conservative provincialism and a more cosmopolitan European impulse, remains equally pervasive in current Danish political debates: it is a familiar strategy for small nations (such as Denmark) who feel threatened by larger, more energetic neighbours (in Mortensen's case Germany, but less precisely defined in recent years). For many commentators, this attitude is encapsulated in the notion of the *Jantelov* ('Law of Jante'), a term first coined by Aksel Sandemose to describe the peculiarly Danish combination of uncertainty, crippling self-doubt, and apparent self-sufficiency, the conformist idea that 'you must never believe that you have become someone'.[24] For Jørgen I. Jensen, this attitude is expressed in the figure of the 'biperson', a 'bystander' or subordinate character – someone who feels removed from the centre of the action, displaced, or marginalised.[25] According to Jensen, the tension between this dual sense of centredness and displacement, characteristic of the *Jantelov* or 'biperson', runs through Nielsen's music. But his insistence that 'Nielsen's life and art are typically Danish and must be maintained as typically Danish' is a problematic starting point, one which points to an ambivalence in Nielsen's work that demands further scrutiny.[26] The extent to which Nielsen's music

[23] 'Med Carl Nielsen gjorde vi en begyndelse til at nå en selvstænding, dansk musikkultur. I alt for lang tid har vi overtaget et færdigsyet, germaniseret musikliv, der jo, når alt kommer til alt, ikke rigtig passer os. Det er ikke romantisk patriotisme, når vi vil have vores eget, danske musikliv, – men kravet om det eneste tilfredsstillende.' Otto Mortensen, 'Musik og musikliv', *DMT* 6/7 (September 1931), 172–5, at 172.

[24] For a succinct definition of *Janteloven*, see Reynolds, *Carl Nielsen's Voice*, 16.

[25] *Danskeren*, 22.

[26] 'Carl Nielsens liv og kunst er typisk dansk og må fastholdes som typisk dansk.' *Danskeren*, 21.

can be heard as 'typically Danish' is itself a questionable premise, even while it appears as a prominent thread in his critical reception. And, as I will argue below, Jensen's category of the 'biperson' suggests another, more provocative reading than the notion of the bystander alone suggests.

A more complex example of Nielsen's canonicisation as 'great little Dane' is offered by Gunnar Heerup, in an article pointedly entitled 'The Way to the New Music' published in 1929. Heerup's title alludes to Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School, urgent topics of debate (and resistance) in Danish musical circles in the late 1920s. But Heerup begins by comparing Nielsen with an earlier generation of European composers – principally Strauss, Mahler, Wolf, Puccini, Sibelius and Debussy – a group subsequently described by James Hepokoski, following Carl Dahlhaus, as 'early modernists'.[27] For Heerup, 'Carl Nielsen's ability to sculpt, form and develop the new, the liberated musical materials, sets him in opposition to all these composers',[28] who, according to Heerup, have either lacked sufficient formal discipline (a composer's 'formsans' or 'sense of form' is a recurring trope in writing on, or by, Nielsen, and goes back to his first encounter with Niels W. Gade),[29] or who have failed to engage with genuinely progressive new musical resources. Heerup's claim is of course contentious, and considerable musicological effort has been expended in recent years to demonstrating the extent to which such 'early modernists' were no less 'progressive' in their outlook than many of their younger, more obviously avant-garde colleagues (a process towards which this book will also contribute). But more interesting is the way in which Heerup attempts to demonstrate the inherent value and meaning of Nielsen's work. According to Heerup, in an explicitly canonising gesture, Nielsen becomes the proper inheritor of European nineteenth-century music – in that sense he becomes a truly cosmopolitan figure. But set against that image of universality is a more strongly localist tendency that reinforces the inward impulse identified in Mortensen's obituary note:

> Carl Nielsen collects together the force from the previous century's two strongest musical streams, he has the same unbending formal will as the classical romantic (Brahms), and he has the same desire to liberate himself from all classical-romantic dogma as the radical

[27] James Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony no. 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

[28] '[Carl Nielsens] evne til plastisk at forme og udvikle det ny, det frigjorte tonestof stiller ham i modsætning til alle disse komponister'. Gunnar Heerup, 'Vejen til den ny musik', DMT 4/2 (February 1929), 25.

[29] Gade is supposed to have looked over the manuscript of Nielsen's early Quartet in D minor, and said simply 'You have a good sense of form' ['(De) har god formsans']. *Min Fynske Barndom*, 215. But the idea of 'god formsans' subsequently becomes a *Leitmotiv* in much contemporary Danish music criticism – for example, in reviews by Charles Kjerulf and William Behrend.

> nationalists. How much of his own is derived from these two directions is difficult to discern; his father was a smallholder, who was additionally a musician at farmers' parties, and Carl Nielsen has retained the farmer's primitive ability to approach his material from an unprejudiced and practical standpoint[;] he has not been limited through his growth by musical traditions, he has therefore only taken precisely what he has use for, influence from outside needs not have been absolutely necessary, even if his music's melodic kinship with Danish folksong is unmistakeable. Carl Nielsen is from the folk himself, in his works he has always retained some of folk music's qualities, his music has therefore in some ways continued to remain folk music.[30]

Heerup's discussion of folk music serves a powerfully ideological function – grounding Nielsen's music, figuratively, in the Danish soil, and also presupposing a national audience or community for his work in a way that seeks to establish collective ownership and identity. It also offers, neatly enough, a historical model for the development of Nielsen's compositional voice, although concrete evidence of his music's 'melodic kinship' with Danish folksong in fact remains elusive. The very notion of a Danish folk tradition is ambivalent here, since it is unclear whether Heerup is referring to the ethnomusicological work undertaken by collectors such as Evald Tang Kristensen, of whom Nielsen was certainly aware even if he didn't take part in such activities directly himself, or the more synthesised, modernised idea of a 'renewed' popular song to which Laub and Nielsen contributed extensively. More significant, perhaps, in the cultural and social political milieu of early twentieth-century Denmark, is Heerup's invocation of the Grundtvigian figure of the smallholder, and of the 'farmer's primitive ability to approach his material from an unprejudiced and practical standpoint'.[31] As Chapter 5 will argue below, the enfranchisement of

[30] 'Carl Nielsen samler i sig kraften fra det udgående århundredes to stærkeste Musikstrømme, han har den samme ubøjelige formvilje som den klassicerende romantik (Brahms), og han har den samme vilje til frigørelse fra alle klassisk-romantiske dogmer som de radikale-nationale komponister. Hvor meget af hans egenart, der skyldes direkte påvirkning fra disse retninger er vanskeligt at afgøre; hans far var en husmand, der tillige var spillemand ved bøndernes gilder, og Carl Nielsen har bevaret bondens primitive evne til at betragte sit stof fra et uhildet og praktisk standpunkt, han er ikke gennem sin opvækst blevet bundet af musikalske traditioner, han har derfor kunnet gribe netop hvad han havde brug for, en indflydelse udefra har ikke behøvet at være det absolut afgørende, selv om hans musiks melodiske slægtskab med den danske folkevise er umiskendelig. Carl Nielsen er selv af folket, han har i sine værker altid bevaret en del af folkemusikkens egenskaber, hans musik er derfor på en vis måde vedblevet at være folkemusik.' Heerup, 'Vejen til den ny musik', 25.

[31] Theologian, philosopher, and educationalist N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) was one of the formative figures in Danish social and cultural life in the nineteenth century. Influenced by German Romanticism, he developed an early interest