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CARL NIELSEN STUDIES

VOLUME VII · 2026



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Edited by David Fanning and Michael Fjeldsøe

Copenhagen 2026  
Carl Nielsen Centre, Museum Odense

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ISSN 1603-3663

**Sponsored by** The Carl Nielsen and Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen Foundation

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## O B I T U A R Y

### John Fellow

2 August 1947–24 August 2023

John Fellow (Larsen) was born in Odense, graduated from Nyborg Gymnasium, and saw himself primarily as a man of letters and an author. However, it was his publication of Carl Nielsen's writings and letters that came to be regarded as his most important achievement for Danish cultural life and Nielsen research.

The first landmark was the publication of the three volumes *Carl Nielsen til sin samtid* (Carl Nielsen to his contemporaries) (1999) with the subtitle *Articles, lectures, press contributions, work notes and manuscripts*. This was the first complete edition of all of Carl Nielsen's texts intended for the public, and with remarkable zeal the editor succeeded in locating virtually everything the composer had written or said with a view to publication. This made it possible for the first time to get an overview of 'the public Carl Nielsen' and, not least as a researcher, to have access to a carefully edited and annotated edition that broke with the image based on the texts from Nielsen's own collection of essays, *Levende Musik* (Living Music, 1925).

Similarly to Fellow's subsequent project, *Carl Nielsen Brevudgaven* (The Carl Nielsen Letter Edition), Fellow's work was

embedded in the Royal Library, which for a long period served as a centre for Nielsen research, with the critical-scholarly edition of all his works, *Carl Nielsen Udgaven* (The Carl Nielsen Edition), as its core. The basis for the letter edition was established in 2002 when Herbert Blomstedt donated his fee for three of his concerts, prompting a number of Danish foundations to provide grants. In addition to the work of locating, transcribing and annotating the more than 8,000 letters, Fellow's edition contains detailed introductions, each relating to the period covered by each volume. These introductions greatly assist the reader of the individual letters, and, at the same time, provide insight into Fellow's own understanding of the composer, which in many respects differed from the common perception of his life and work.

The letter edition was published in 12 volumes from 2005 to 2015 and has become an invaluable tool for subsequent Carl Nielsen research. Following the completion of his work, John Fellow deservedly received the Carl Nielsen Society's Honorary Award in 2016.

Although the letter edition was initially only available in Danish, it also paved the way for international Carl Nielsen researchers to access primary

sources, first with a selection of letters, translated and annotated by David Fanning and Michelle Assay, *Carl Nielsen: Selected Letters and Diaries*, published in 2017. Most recently, Multivers, the publishers of the Danish letter edition made the entire letter edition available online, including the original text, an English translation and facsimiles of each original letter.<sup>1</sup>

In an interview with *Dansk Musik Tidsskrift* in 2000, John Fellow explained that he started publishing Carl Nielsen's texts because he was frustrated by the lack of organisation and accessibility of the sources, which in his view made it impossible to competently write about the composer. Initially, he had not envisaged taking on the task himself, but no one else did.<sup>2</sup> The interview also provides an insight into the often polemical criticism that Fellow resorted to when he felt that Danish musical life and musicology were falling short. The interview concludes with a select bibliography of his key writings on Nielsen up to 2000.

Two further publications were a kind of spin-off from the work on the letter edition. The memoirs and preserved letters of the young Nielsen's sweetheart Emilie Demant Hatt, *Forårsbølger* (Spring Waves, 2002), provide information on a

period of his life that is otherwise very poorly documented by primary sources. And *Vil Herren ikke hilse på sin Slægt* (Will the Gentleman not Greet his Kin?, 2005), sheds light on other romantic relationships in his youth, including his connection to the mother of his son Carl August Hansen. In addition, John Fellow contributed a number of articles to *Carl Nielsen Studies, Fund og Forskning* and *Magasin fra Det Kongelige Bibliotek*.

Michael Fjeldsøe

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1 Available since November 2025 at <https://carlnielsencorrespondence.dk/en>.

2 Anders Beyer, 'Kulturkritikken der blev aflivet' (Cultural Criticism that was Stifled), *Dansk Musik Tidsskrift*, 74/8 (1999–2000), 254–63, <https://seismograf.org/dmt/74/08/kulturkritikken-der-blev-aflivet>, accessed 18 November 2025.