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## CARL NIELSEN UNDER THE INFLUENCE

### Some New Sources for the First Symphony<sup>1</sup>

By David Fanning

*What really matters is never passed on from one composer to another.*<sup>2</sup>

Alfred Schnittke's warning is provocative. He was talking about a specific musical idea that Shostakovich heard in one of his student works and then recycled in his own Eleventh Symphony. Schnittke wanted to make the point that such borrowing – whether deliberate or inadvertent – was not shameful, and that the meaning of the borrower's work was not dependent on it. What 'matters' – to take Schnittke's observation a stage further – is what the borrower does with an idea rather than where he takes it from.

And yet Schnittke himself was one of the most voracious and explicit borrowers in the history of music. It would be hard to know where to begin with many of his works without pondering the significance of their quotations and stylistic allusions.

So with a wary but open mind, and without prejudice as to how much or how little the process may ultimately tell us, I propose to investigate some musical sources for Nielsen's music, especially for the First Symphony. My only criteria are that his borrowings (if such they be) should not have been investigated before, and that their identification should illuminate some aspect of the beneficiary work beyond the mere fact of the borrowing.

The 'sources' referred to in the title are hypothetical, because I cannot prove that Nielsen even knew most of the pieces I'm going to mention. And I add the phrase 'under the influence' for two reasons: because he himself occasionally used metaphors of intoxication when describing his music, and because I suspect that musical influence was not something he always absorbed soberly and calculatedly, but that he may just as often have found it de-inhibiting and liberating.

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1 This article is a lightly revised version of an essay with the same title in Anne Ørbæk Jensen et al. (eds.), *Musikvidenskabelige kompositioner: Festskrift til Niels Krabbe* (Musicological Compositions. Festskrift for Niels Krabbe), Copenhagen 2006, 437-455.

2 'Alfred Schnittke, in conversation with Alexander Ivashkin'. See Ivashkin (ed.), *A Schnittke Reader*, Bloomington 2002, 17.

The main part of this essay, then, will be about Nielsen and the Ecstasy, as opposed to the Anxiety of Influence. Harold Bloom's classic text of literary criticism has filtered into musicology via a number of widely read studies.<sup>3</sup> But his terminology is disconcertingly negative. Take 'misreading', for example, which Bloom uses to cover instances of creative reappropriation of artistic statements. The word implies incompetence, which seems unhelpful, to say the least, when applied to artists of the stature of Schubert, Bruckner, Brahms and Mahler (to mention some of the most obvious 'misreaders' of Beethoven). Whereas I would prefer to celebrate the similarities. If those similarities are conscious, then they may be springboards to flights of imagination that, after all, have to take off from somewhere.<sup>4</sup> And even if they are 'merely' unconscious, or even entirely coincidental, then there is still something here that is worthy of our attention, namely the existence of archetypal sources of musical expression. In fact whatever the status of the similarities, their identification has a role to play in our understanding of where pieces of music come from and what makes them unique; since to grasp the origins of an idea, or even its affinities, is to take a step towards seeing more clearly what the composer does with it and how he makes it his own, hence what his unique voice is and what he says with it. And that is what I believe (and I believe Schnittke believed) 'matters'.

How may we recognise influence as such? How might we distinguish between its manifestations as quotation, allusion and unconscious affinity? How to distinguish all of those from mere coincidence? And even when a specific identification seems unequivocally positive, what is the point of it? It is hard to know how to deal with such questions in a scholarly way. Although there is a sizable literature on the topic of musical quotation,<sup>5</sup> there is nothing that really tells us how to handle the issue sensitively or how to avoid the obvious pitfalls.

There was a time when Nielsen commentators routinely noted allusions or similarities to earlier music, in the apparent belief that to do so was self-evidently a good thing, necessitating no further comment. Ludvig Dolleris's commentaries are especially rich in this respect, and Frede Schandorf Petersen's contributions to the life-and-works study with Torben Meyer are not far behind.<sup>6</sup> Robert Simpson sprinkled his discussions with such observations, though more often than not referring to

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3 Such as Mark Evans Bonds, *After Beethoven: Imperatives of Originality in the Symphony*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996, and Joseph Straus, *Remaking the Past, Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition*, Cambridge, Mass. 1990

4 This is the argument advanced in Charles Rosen, 'Influence: Plagiarism and Inspiration', *19th-Century Music*, IV/2 (1980), 87-100.

5 See Bibliography in J. Peter Burkholder, 'Quotation', in Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (eds.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London 2001, vol. 20, 689-691.

6 Ludvig Dolleris, *Carl Nielsen: en Musikografi*, Odense 1949; Torben Meyer & Frede Schandorf Petersen, *Carl Nielsen. Kunstneren og Mennesket*, Copenhagen 1947-1948.

general affinities rather than to specific pieces.<sup>7</sup> Occasionally contributors to *Carl Nielsen Studies* have themselves added to the store.<sup>8</sup>

But as has been pointed out, while this mode of commentary has thrived in history-of-art scholarship, it has significantly declined in musicology and literary studies,<sup>9</sup> partly, perhaps, because of a general narrowing of horizons under the pressure to specialize, but partly also on good intellectual grounds. For this is an area fraught with traps for the unwary, perhaps the most conspicuous being that of wishful thinking. When Jørgen I. Jensen, in his fascinating and path-breaking study, appends a long list of themes that descend from the fifth degree of the scale to the tonic, the idea is to point to something that is personal to Nielsen.<sup>10</sup> In fact that self-same shape has long been recognised as personal to Schumann too – possibly as a means of coded communication with Clara Wieck.<sup>11</sup> And a few moments' thought would confirm that this shape is an archetype of tonal music, not much more characteristic of Nielsen than of anyone else. If we want to look for more significant affinities, then it would probably be better to do so at the level of musical gesture and texture. And even here, Brahms's withering put-down, '*Das sieht jeder Esel*' – referring to the similarity between the main finale themes of his First Symphony and Beethoven's Ninth – lies in wait for all identifications that are just too obvious. Moreover, some similarities that may *seem* obvious must almost certainly be coincidences, as the late Jonathan Kramer noted in pointing out a resemblance between the 'Humoreske' from Nielsen's Sixth Symphony and the theme for the duck in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, composed ten years later.<sup>12</sup> In other instances the resemblance may be so tenuous that only the identifier himself believes in its significance, while readers may attribute it to an over-active imagination. Composers themselves do not necessarily hear what is obvious to their commentators. Admittedly sometimes one suspects that composers' scepticism may betoken a certain over-protectiveness towards their 'originality' or 'inspiration', which may go as much for the constructional processes of their music as for the ideas themselves. Stravinsky was perhaps the most notorious denier of the patent and provable origin of his themes, and he has been posthumously exposed;<sup>13</sup> that exposing is one type of contribution musicolo-

7 Robert Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London 1979.

8 Notably Friedhelm Krummacher, 'Steps to Modernism: Carl Nielsen's String Quartets', *Carl Nielsen Studies*, 2 (2005), 89-131.

9 Rosen, *op. cit.*, 88.

10 Jørgen I. Jensen, *Carl Nielsen – Danskeren* [Nielsen – the Dane], Copenhagen 1991, 467-475.

11 See Eric Sams, 'Did Schumann use Ciphers?', *The Musical Times* 106 (1965) 584-591; R. Larry Todd, 'On Quotation in Schumann's Music', in *idem*, *Schumann and his World*, Princeton 1994, 80-112.

12 Mina Miller (ed.), *The Nielsen Companion*, London 1994, 327.

13 To take just one famous case, see Lawrence Morton, 'Footnotes to Stravinsky Studies: *Le sacre du printemps*', *Tempo* no.128 (1979) 9-16; Richard Taruskin, 'Russian Folk Melodies in *The Rite of Spring*', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 33 (1980), 501-543.

gists can make towards uncovering the truth – or unmasking the untruth – of music’s origins. But it is not my purpose in this article. I would rather take composerly scepticism as a warning against musicological self-aggrandisement.

According to Charles Rosen,

In discussing musical influence in music, it would be wise to refuse in advance to consider the work of adolescent composers... [since w]ith the startling exception of Mendelssohn, a very young composer has no style of his own, and he is forced to get one somewhere else. His models have largely a biographical, but not much critical, significance – he may, indeed, reject his early models by the time he reaches his majority.<sup>14</sup>

All true. But in his First Symphony, composed mainly between the ages of 26 and 28, Nielsen had most certainly reached his majority. A year after its completion, he himself wrote to his benefactor William Behrend acknowledging the influences of Beethoven, Brahms, Grieg and Johan Svendsen on his early works, and declaring various degrees of respect for César Franck, Wagner and Bruckner.<sup>15</sup> And many commentators have detected the presence of some of these and other related models behind the First Symphony, if only in very general terms. Typical of such remarks are those of Simpson: ‘[Nielsen’s] debt to Brahms is often obvious, though his scoring, with its open bluntness of sound, is more like Dvořák’s’, while the first movement exposition material ‘may remind one at times of Brahms or Dvořák (with a possible Russian influence – perhaps Borodin – in [the second subject]).’<sup>16</sup> Dolleris picked up an echo of Svendsen (conductor of the premiere of Nielsen’s Symphony) in the third movement, but again without mentioning any specific piece.<sup>17</sup> Interspersed between Frede Schandorf Petersen’s more detailed comments on the First Symphony, Torben Meyer also mentions Svendsen, as a model for form rather than style, but he adds that at this stage, ‘Brahms is probably the only composer whose stylistic line leads to and is continued by Carl Nielsen.’<sup>18</sup> I myself have offered the reminder that in November 1890, by which time sporadic ideas for the Symphony were already taking shape, Nielsen had set himself the task of copying out from memory the first movement of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.<sup>19</sup> Not that there are obvious traces of Beethoven’s

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14 Rosen, *op. cit.*, 88.

15 See John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen Brevudgaven*, vol. 1 1886-1897, Copenhagen 2005, 407-408.

16 Simpson, *op. cit.*, 23, 26.

17 Dolleris, *op. cit.*, 32.

18 Meyer & Schandorf Petersen, *op. cit.*, 110.

19 Torben Schousboe (ed.), *Carl Nielsen: Dagbøger og brevveksling med Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen*, Copenhagen 1983, 24; John Fellow (2005) *op. cit.*, 142.

themes; but that work is the *locus classicus* of thematic economy, and its dynamism and thrust find some echo in Nielsen's own first movement.

But there comes a point when all this generalized talk of affinities ceases to have much value. If we want to go deeper in our understanding, we have to take a deep breath and dive into musical analysis. Or else – and this is what I shall now attempt – we have to ask what specific pieces Nielsen might have had on his mind. I have ventured one instance from Svendsen (whose Second Symphony very definitely influenced Nielsen's *Symphonic Rhapsody*, to the extent that Nielsen was moved to abandon his piece for that very reason). But, with apologies, I am going to withdraw that identification below, in favour of something rather more direct in its resemblance and more suggestive in its implications.

### Brigands and Dynamite

Before that, a thought on Nielsen's superb opening theme. It is not Beethoven, not Brahms, not Dvořák, and not Svendsen who stand behind it. At least it is not any of those so much as Berlioz and the main theme of his 'Orgy of the Brigands' finale in *Harold in Italy* (Ex. 1). The resemblances, especially in terms of rhythmic gesture, are surely compelling enough to the eye not to require spelling out; though I cannot resist adding that the metronome mark –  $\text{♩} = 104$  – as well as the tonality and metre, is identical. Even the famous disjunction between the opening chord and the main tonality is there. The tied and syncopated figures in Berlioz's theme are precisely what Nielsen uses to drive the central section of his movement towards its climax (see bb. 153-164); and in a tranquillised form they become the initiating motif for the second movement (see Ex.1c).

Allegro frenetico  $\text{♩} = 104$

The image shows a musical score for the opening of Berlioz's 'Harold in Italy' finale. It is in 2/4 time, B-flat major, and consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system starts with a fortissimo (ff) chord in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system features a crescendo (cresc. molto) leading to a fortissimo (f) section. The notation includes various rhythmic figures, ties, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 1a: Berlioz, *Harold in Italy*, finale opening

Allegro orgoglioso  $\text{♩} = 104$

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system features a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The third and fourth systems include complex textures with triplets and dense chordal structures. The score is written for piano with treble and bass staves.

Ex. 1b: Nielsen, *Symphony No. 1*, first movement, opening

Andante ♩ = 60

Ex. 1c: Nielsen, *Symphony No. 1*, second movement, opening

Given that there is no evidence that Nielsen actually knew *Harold in Italy*, there is nothing more to be said about the status of this similarity as conscious allusion or coincidence. Even if it was conscious, that would not necessarily mean that any of the brigandly or orgiastic associations of Berlioz's finale necessarily carry over into Nielsen's theme, or that they need to in anyone else's reading of it; still less that there are any half-hidden Byronic topics needing to be teased out of Nielsen's symphony as a whole.

But that is not to say that there is no deeper point to the similarity. First, it prompts some thoughts about Nielsen's curious *Allegro orgoglioso* marking, without which few listeners would surely choose 'proud' as a description of the music's character. The music radiates energy, to be sure, but not pride, at least not in the sense of self-satisfaction. So in the light of Berlioz's *frenetico*, I wonder if Nielsen's *orgoglioso* may be there partly as a means of moderating any instinct a conductor might have for making the character too excitable — too Berliozian. If the *allegro* had been left unqualified (or with the composer's original *marcato*<sup>20</sup>), a touch of *frenetico* in performance would have been a perfectly understandable response. In line with this speculation, I recall that Nielsen himself on at least one occasion after the premiere dropped *orgoglioso* in favour of *moderato*, at the same time adding the proviso to his third movement, *non è scherzo*.<sup>21</sup>

20 *Carl Nielsen Works*, II/1, (2001), 162. For changes to the remaining movement superscriptions, see *ibid.*, xii.

21 Peter Hauge, Preface to *Carl Nielsen Works*, II/1, (2001), xix.

The Berlioz example offers other tempting paths towards the inner workings of Nielsen's *Allegro*. Looking away from the page and reconstructing the Brigands' theme from memory, I suspect many of us would mis-remember the opening chord as a tonic G minor. Even if we remembered it correctly as a dominant, we might naturally assume that it comes on the up-beat – where the textbooks say a dominant in a perfect cadence should be, and where it is 'correctly' located later on when the movement gets properly launched. Berlioz's initial placing of his emphatic dominant seventh on the *down*-beat is in itself enough to set his Brigands' theme on an excitingly unstable platform, and his immediate plunge into an unharmonised tonic-triad-based theme confirms that something wild and wilful is in the air. All this is taken up and tweaked by Nielsen with his C-major *premier coup d'archet*. With that bold 'tonic-equals-subdominant' affirmation he immediately takes us into a world in motion. Like Berlioz, he as it were puts an exclamation mark before his first word. As the symphony progresses, Nielsen's invocation of Berliozian thematic energy will in due course unite at the highest conceptual level with the large-scale architectural energy of the off-tonic opening gambit (as in Beethoven's Op. 5 Cello Sonata, Fourth Piano Concerto, Second 'Razumovsky' Quartet and 'Archduke' Trio). As with Beethoven, so with Nielsen, an exclamation mark thus broadens out, metaphorically, to motivate an entire musical drama.

Berlioz's theme is brilliantly suited to launching his finale, just as all the above-cited Beethoven off-tonic openings are. But what boldness for Nielsen to use the same intonations to launch a *first* movement. Of course, this was 1892, or thereabouts, not 1834 (Berlioz *Harold*) or 1796 (Beethoven Op. 5). The world had moved on, and musical language with it. Merely to imitate without intensification, however perceptively, would have been to settle for complacency. Whereas it is Nielsen's willingness to take risks that marks him out – along with Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Bruckner, Mahler, Sibelius and not so many others – from the hundreds of fellow-symphonists active in the 1890s. In this respect, the most enthusiastic review of the 14 March 1894 premiere hit the nail on the head: 'Restless and reckless in its harmonies and modulations, yet overall as wonderfully innocent and unselfconscious as a child playing with dynamite.'<sup>22</sup> Except that the game may not have been as innocent and unconscious as all that.

Did Nielsen bring it off? Perhaps he was not best advised to follow Berlioz in letting his theme sit down so firmly in the tonic at the end of 20 bars. Berlioz's theme does so only because his broader strategy is to pass in review the main themes from his previous movements before launching the finale properly, at which point the full

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<sup>22</sup> Uroligt og hensynsløst i Harmoni og Modulation, men altsammen dog saa forunderlig uskyldigt og ubevidst, som saa man et Barn lege med Dynamit. Charles Kjerulf in *Politiken*, 15.3.1894, cited in *Carl Nielsen Works*, II/1, xiii (translation adapted).

close is swept away in a torrent of modulatory energy. So I draw the opposite conclusion from Simpson, who felt that ‘The breadth [!] of [Nielsen’s] conception is immediately shown by the fact that this [idea] is the start of a 20-bar sentence for the full orchestra ... ending with a firm G minor cadence.’<sup>23</sup> Since when did a 20-bar opening sentence indicate breadth of conception? At any rate it hardly did so in 1894. If anything, it is surely Nielsen’s terseness and concentration that deserve praise. Making his symphonic debut, Nielsen still had a somewhat compartmentalized approach to large-scale form, though what he did in compensation is remarkable enough, as I have probed on more than one occasion.<sup>24</sup> That is really no surprise at a historical juncture where half a century of the Leipzig-centred domesticated version of the symphony had all but extinguished the flaming immediacy of its Beethoven/Berlioz incarnations (recall the memorable encapsulation in a contemporary description of Nielsen’s Danish symphonic godfather Niels Gade – the one potential influence that Nielsen most emphatically wanted not to be constrained by – as ‘Mendelssohnacidic Schumannoxide’).<sup>25</sup> All I am really claiming is that ideas such as Berlioz’s Brigands’ theme may have given Nielsen a decisive impulse and spur to his imagination and craftsmanship, inspiring him with the recognition that there was a kind of excitement and intensity waiting to be explored in music, in a quite different dimension from the prevailing Wagner/Brahms polarity.

Nielsen did include Berlioz in his famous list of those artists who had ‘brandished the hardest fist [and]... given their times a black eye’ and who would therefore be remembered longest.<sup>26</sup> But he rarely noted his specific contacts with Berlioz’s music, hardly ever praised it and only ever conducted the odd overture or excerpt from larger works. Yet the affinities are compelling and multi-faceted. Berlioz and Nielsen are two of the great adventurer-composers in the history of music. Both were impelled by the example of Beethoven towards a rhythmic style that is invigorating to the point of wildness; both took an empirical, emancipated view of harmony and tonality; both wrote an abundance of warm, tender, even amorous music, yet with a kind of chasteness that spurns languishing and erotic explicitness; both had an unsentimental yet passionate identification with the pastoral, and so on. Nielsen certainly knew the *Symphonie fantastique* as early as February 1891, when he heard it in Leipzig, just before he began work on his First Symphony.<sup>27</sup> And leaving the First Symphony to one side, it

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23 Simpson, *op. cit.*, 25.

24 David Fanning, ‘Carl Nielsen’s Progressive Thematicism’, in Mina Miller, *op. cit.*, 173-178; ‘Carl Nielsen and Early Twentieth-Century Musical/Aesthetic Theory’, *Carl Nielsen Studies*, 1 (2003), 12-13.

25 Cited in Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization*, London 1963 (originally published 1941), 959.

26 Schousboe, *op. cit.*, 29; Fellow (2005), *op. cit.*, 160.

27 Schousboe, *op. cit.*, 43; Fellow (2005), *op. cit.*, 196.

seems a reasonable hypothesis that the writing for timpani in the *Fantastique* left a deep imprint on Nielsen's subconscious, as did its intervallic distortions, its antiphonal effects and its crazy fugue, all found in the 'Witches' Sabbath' finale. Of course in saying this, the Nielsen example I have in mind is the finale of *The Inextinguishable*. Also, Nielsen conducted excerpts from Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* Symphony on more than one occasion, and he could hardly have failed to observe in that score the repeated-note chimes on antique cymbals and the bottom B-flats for bassoon (representing the soldier's snores) in the 'Queen Mab' Scherzo, the very sounds that would provide the frame for his *Sinfonia semplice*. He could equally have derived some of the bizarrerie of the 'Humoreske' in that work from the convulsive music for Juliet's awakening in the last instrumental movement of *Romeo and Juliet*. Historically the Berlioz influence may be at its most conspicuous in such melodrama specialists as Liszt, Tchaikovsky and Mahler. But surely the Frenchman would have recognised a kindred spirit in the Nielsen of the 'Choleric' Temperament, the Clarinet Concerto, the *Presto* fugue in the Fifth Symphony, numerous other structure-intensifying fugatos, and so on.

### Symphonies and Mountains

Svendsen himself must have been a Berlioz enthusiast, if pieces like his *Carnival in Paris* are anything to go by. This 'Episode', composed in 1872, is very conspicuously a Scandinavian answer to Berlioz's *Roman Carnival* Overture, and Nielsen was captivated by it in 1890,<sup>28</sup> just as Wagner had been in the 1870s. I have previously cited *Carnival in Paris* as a likely source for one of the most characteristic harmonic progressions in Nielsen's First Symphony.<sup>29</sup>

The progression in question features in all four of Nielsen's movements, almost always at the same pitch level of E-flat last-inversion dominant-seventh moving to C major (as in the first movement: bb. 61-63, 194-196, 334-335, 338-339; second movement: bb. 31, 70; third movement: bb. 11-14; 92-97, 183-185, 203-206; finale: bb. 254-270). From the First Symphony this progression passes down as a Nielsen fingerprint to the first movements of *The Four Temperaments* (De fire Temperamenter) and the *Sinfonia Espansiva*. The instance shown in *Ex. 2a* from the third movement of the First Symphony may be tiny, but to anyone familiar with his work the sound of it instantly says 'early Nielsen' (another instance is shown in *Ex. 5b* below). The way Nielsen frames this progression and uses it as a pivotal force in the broader scheme of things makes it a compelling part of the First Symphony's overall tonal journey, bringing as it does constant reminders of the initially anomalous C-major that is eventually to serve as the destination of the finale.

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28 Schousboe, *op. cit.*, 33; Fellow (2005), *op. cit.*, 179.

29 Fanning, 'Carl Nielsen', in Robert Layton (ed.), *A Companion to the Symphony*, London 1993, 354.

In fact Svendsen's *Carnival* has a far weaker claim to parenthood than Liszt's tone-poem *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne*, otherwise known as the *Bergsymphonie* (Mountain Symphony). The progression materialises from the mysterious shimmering of the opening bars, which are presumably a response to the opening of Victor Hugo's poem printed in the score: 'O altitudo! / Avez-vous quelquefois, calme et silencieux, / Monté sur la montagne, en présence des cieux?' A choir of woodwind and low horns announces the progression, in the carefully framed manner of Nielsen's third movement (Ex. 2b). A few pages further on in Liszt's score, at the *poco a poco più moto*, the same progression may be found stretched out and coloured by trombones and tuba, to complete the resemblance with Nielsen's third movement.

Andante sostenuto ♩ = 120  
*mf espress.* *mf*  
*mf p* *mf p*

Ex. 2a: Nielsen, *Symphony No. 1*, third movement, bb. 92-94

Poco Allegro

Ex. 2b: Liszt, *Mountain Symphony*, bb. 9-12

Liszt was another of Nielsen's non-favourite composers, not even featuring alongside Berlioz in the famous list of 'fist-brandishers'. There is no record of Nielsen's ever having conducted a note of Liszt's music, and the *Mountain Symphony* does not figure in his copious diary entries. Moreover, in an entry of 7 November 1890, he referred to the tone-poem *Tasso* 'a piece of sh\*\*\* ...; he can't pull the wool over my... ears',<sup>30</sup> though

30 Schousboe, *op. cit.*, 25; Fellow (2005), *op. cit.*, 143: *Det er noget Sk...; han kan ikke stikke mig Blaar i ... Ørerne.*

a few weeks later he did note the Third Hungarian Rhapsody as ‘good’. Nielsen even took Liszt as a counter-example to musical good taste, when he referred disparagingly to music that was rather too inclined to pictorialism, ‘but that at least never screams and screeches as in Liszt’s poster-art, which seems to be all the rage these days’.<sup>31</sup>

This may be the point at which to side-step once again away from Nielsen’s First Symphony and to mention the arch-pictorialist Richard Strauss – also a target for Nielsen’s scorn (but occasional enthusiasm, as for *Tod und Verklärung* in 1891),<sup>32</sup> and whose personal encounter with Nielsen in 1894 left an extremely negative impression.<sup>33</sup> The Bavarian may also have to be credited with one of Nielsen’s most famous ideas. Coincidentally, it concerns another sunrise in the mountains, in yet another programmatic symphony. In Strauss’s *Alpine Symphony* (rehearsal no. 7 in the score), the full-orchestral A-major scalic descent and dotted rhythms prefigure the redemptive theme of *The Inextinguishable* (Det Uudslukkelige, – see especially fig. 11 in Nielsen’s score, where it appears in A major) (*Ex. 3*). This resemblance was picked up as early as 1949, when Dolleris sought (not very convincingly) to defend Nielsen from possible charges of plagiarism by reminding his readers of a previous scalic descent in the coda to the ‘Phlegmatic Temperament’.<sup>34</sup> In fact few listeners who know both the Nielsen and the Strauss can have failed to spot the resemblance. However, proving or disproving plagiarism would be a Sherlock Holmesian task. Strauss’s symphony was completed in February 1915, premiered on 28 October and published the same year. Nielsen’s concept for *The Inextinguishable* goes back at least as far as May 1914, but he seems to have been uncertain about its progress as late as March 1915, and there

Festes Zeitmass, mässig langsam

The image shows a musical score for Richard Strauss's *Alpine Symphony*, rehearsal no. 7. The title above the score is 'Festes Zeitmass, mässig langsam'. The score is written for piano in 4/4 time, A major. It features a scalic descent in the upper voice and dotted rhythms in both hands. The dynamic marking is 'ff' (fortissimo). The score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, with various musical notations including notes, rests, and slurs.

Ex. 3a: Strauss, *Alpine Symphony*, ‘*Sonnenaufgang*’

31 som dog aldrig skriger og hviner som i den Liszt'ske Plakat-Kunst, der ellers for Øjeblikket er i Mode allevegne. ‘Svensk Musikfest’, *Politiken*, 14.6.1906, reprinted in Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen til sin samtid*, Copenhagen 1999, 89.

32 Schousboe, *op. cit.*, 45, 46; Fellow (2005), *op. cit.*, 207.

33 Schousboe, *op. cit.*, 111-112; Fellow (2005), *op. cit.*, 372.

34 Dolleris, *op. cit.*, 205.

is no evidence of notated material before that date. He could therefore conceivably have pinched his theme from Strauss (clearly it could not have been *vice versa*). But whether that is a more likely scenario than both composers drawing on an available archetype or on some yet-to-be-identified specific source, remains an open question. For example, compare the theme for horns and tubas three minutes or so into the Adagio of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, described by the composer himself as a 'Farewell to Life' (Ex. 3c).<sup>35</sup>

[Pesante ma glorioso]

fff

fz

Ex. 3b: Nielsen *The Inextinguishable*, first movement

[B] [Langsam, feierlich]

mf

f

dim.

Ex. 3c: Bruckner, *Symphony No. 9*, third movement

35 See Robert Simpson, *The Essence of Bruckner*, London 1992, 221.

### Symphonies à la russe

Sibelius and Nielsen were not the only symphonists born in 1865. In St. Petersburg, Alexander Glazunov was destined to become one of the defining musical voices of Russia's Silver Age. 45 years later his symphonic output came to an abrupt halt. But at the time of Nielsen's First Symphony, with four symphonies under his belt, Glazunov already had a strong claim to the mantle of Tchaikovsky. He was off the symphonic starting-blocks as early as 1882, at the age of 17, more than ten years before Nielsen. That work still radiates warmth, freshness and energy, especially in its first movement, notated in a swinging 6/8 metre with plentiful hemiolas, that is something of a missing link between Schumann's 'Rhenish' and the athletic triple-time motion of Nielsen's *Espansiva* first movement, the finales of his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, and above all the third movement of No. 1.

I would happily pass over the general similarities of character and motion in these movements as no more than generic, were it not for the beginning of Glazunov's development section, where the melody passes down from octave to leading-note and flattened leading-note on the way to a sequential restatement. Nielsen's sequence rises rather than falls, but otherwise the resemblance is striking; I have taken the liberty of renotating Glazunov's 6/8 as 6/4 (Ex. 4).

[Allegro ♩. = 80]

Ex. 4a: Glazunov, *Symphony No. 1*, first movement, metrically renotated

Tempo I (Allegro comodo) ♩. = 96

Ex. 4b: Nielsen, *Symphony No. 1*, third movement (opening of development section in both cases)

The flattened seventh is a frequently cited marker of Nielsen's musical language; it was somewhat hyperbolically discussed by Dolleris as '*det antikke Toneprincip*' (the antique

melodic principle). But in fact it is not so remarkable, and the Glazunov instance could easily be multiplied from within the 19<sup>th</sup>-century symphonic repertoire. It is the combination with the chromatic descent and the broader sequential progression that makes the resemblance in *Ex. 4* so persuasive, and that emboldens me to pick out in addition the climax of Glazunov's development section and compare it to the highpoints of Nielsen's exposition and reprise (*Ex. 5*). Admittedly the first movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony supplies a model for the driving rhythm in both cases. And the real point is that for all the surface similarity with Glazunov, Nielsen's embodiment of the 'apotheosis of the Dance' (Wagner's description of the Beethoven, of course) is far more crisp. Anyone who doubts Nielsen's brusque concentration or the power of its structural embodiment, by comparison with Glazunov's easy conventionality, need only expand the focus from *Ex. 5* and consider how those passages are prepared and extended.

[Allegro ♩ = 80]

*Ex. 5a: Glazunov, Symphony No. 1, first movement, development climax, metrically renoted*

Allegro ♩ = 96

*Ex. 5b: Nielsen, Symphony No. 1, third movement, exposition climax*

### Symphonies on home ground

Glazunov and Nielsen is not a conjunction to be found in the musicological literature, apart from their joint participation in the 1928 Schubert competition and their contributions to a German newspaper's compilation of comments on the Beethoven centenary the previous year.<sup>36</sup> Whereas there is a clear thread connecting the careers of Nielsen and Peter Erasmus Lange-Müller. The two were often to be found on the same concert programmes, and despite fundamental differences of temperament they were more often than not respectful of one another's work. There would be nothing more natural than to find pre-echoes of Nielsen in the two symphonies Lange-Müller composed in the 1880s, but it was not until their appearance on CD – the symphonies remain unpublished in score form – that most of us had the chance to judge. The First was premiered in the Musikforening on 11 February 1882 and was also heard at Tivoli later that year. Whether or not Nielsen heard it by the time of the First Symphony, he could conceivably have known the piano duet score (published in February 1882 according to Dan Fog's unpublished Lange-Müller work catalogue) and he would have at least eight opportunities to hear the work in the early years of the new century. Conductor Douglas Bostock has picked up on the abrupt opposition between solo clarinet and full orchestra just before the middle section of Lange-Müller's slow movement as a likely inspiration for passages in the first movement development section in *The Inextinguishable*; and he suggests a connection between the main finale theme and the opening of Nielsen's First Symphony (*Ex. 6, cf. Ex. 1b*).

[Allegro con fuoco]  
poco più mosso ♩ = 126

Ex. 6: Lange-Müller, *Symphony No. 1, fourth movement, bb. 13-16*

It is true that the motif bracketed on *Ex. 6* (compare Nielsen's second and third bars) becomes the main driving force for Lange-Müller's finale. But both he and Nielsen could easily have got it from other sources, such as the finale of Schumann's D minor

<sup>36</sup> Fellow (1999), *op. cit.*, 431.

Symphony. Even so, the point could be proposed that, as with the Berlioz Brigands' theme, Nielsen here took an idea usually associated with a sense of cutting-loose – typical of finales – and unlocked its potential for the more abstract energy of a symphonic first movement.

Yet I find that my ear is caught rather more by the passage from just before the middle section of Lange-Müller's slow third movement, which irresistibly recalls one of Nielsen's most characteristic turns of phrase, the plagal cadence with the flattened seventh (also to be found in Dvořák, of course – his Cello Concerto is virtually an encyclopedia of the plagal cadence). Nielsen repeatedly uses the subdominant with flattened seventh to lend a mixture of wonder and nobility to his phrases, most strikingly in the slow movement of the First Symphony at the retransition – it is partly his uncharacteristic *nobile* marking for the actual return of the theme that prompts me to use that description. And his most shattering use of this harmony is at the *glorioso* climax in the finale of *The Inextinguishable*, where all four horns blaze out the subdominant seventh – in the same key as Lange-Müller, as it happens, but also (as distinct from Lange-Müller) with a mass of larger-scale structural forces coalescing at this point, as well as the horns' carried-over E, making this one of the most spine-tingling moments in all of Nielsen's music (Ex. 7).

Lange-Müller's Second Symphony, also in D minor, was heard in Copenhagen at a Philharmonic Concert on 27 April 1889 that Nielsen could easily have attended. Here the first movement – in 6/4 with plentiful hemiolas – brings numerous anticipations of Nielsen's third movement, even before the specific passage Bostock notes, where the tempo slows for a moment of chorale-like reflection before the recapitulation. Similarly one could look at Lange-Müller's 3/2 finale and draw numerous connections with the first movement of *The Inextinguishable*.

[Andante: poco piu vivo ♩ = 80]

Ex. 7a: Lange-Müller, *Symphony No. 1*, third movement, bb. 80-89

Tranquillo ♩ = 60

mf

mf dim.

p nobile

pp

pp

Ex. 7b: Nielsen, *Symphony No. 1*, second movement, bb. 53-57

glorioso ♩ = 63

f

ff

ff

Ex. 7c: Nielsen, *Symphony No. 4*, fourth movement, bb. 827-838

It is hard not to ponder that if this single compact disc of previously forgotten and unpublished music has so much to suggest to us about the origins of Nielsen's early style, what further riches might there be among the work of the numerous other composers active at the time, for instance among those discussed in the 550 pages of Gerhardt Lynge's *Danske Komponister i det 20. Aarhundredes Begyndelse* (Danish Composers at the Beginning of the 20th. Century, Aarhus, 1917). And there is really no need

to fear the results of such enquiry. If a little bit of de-mythologising is called for – if we no longer credit Nielsen with the invention *ex nihilo* of ideas that we would like to think of as quintessentially Niensenesque – then that is merely part and parcel of a process of growing up. In any case, as I have tried to show, the identification of similarity and/or influence is only the means towards more ambitious ends, as expressed by Charles Rosen in conclusion to his 1980 benchmark article on the topic of influence:

What Brahms had to say about his relation to history and to the past, he let his music say for him. This goes to show that when the study of sources is at its most interesting, it becomes indistinguishable from pure musical analysis.<sup>37</sup>

Nearly 30 years on, it may be harder to think of ‘pure musical analysis’ as an unblemished positive. But Rosen’s meaning is clear. All paths that connect where music comes from to a rich experience of it have to be good. In that sense, what passes from one composer to another really does matter.

#### A B S T R A C T

Nielsen’s general musical affinities are often mentioned, and in some cases they are well documented. But even in a work as characterful and characteristic as the First Symphony, there are several *prima facie* cases of allusion to specific works – from Berlioz to Lange-Müller – that have not previously been identified. The point of proposing and discussing them here is not to downgrade the originality of Nielsen’s symphonic breakthrough piece, but rather to lead towards a closer understanding of what makes it unique, by showing how it borrows ideas only to go beyond them and to reveal new potential.

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<sup>37</sup> Rosen, *op. cit.*, 100.