
NIELSEN ON THE BOULEVARD:

Modernism and the Harlequinesque in *Cupid and the Poet*

By Daniel Grimley

When Carl Nielsen came to Paris in October 1926 to receive the *Legion d'Honneur* and attend the premiere of the first version of his Flute Concerto at the Salle Gaveau, he encountered a richly diverse cultural milieu, very different but no less vibrant than the one which had been such a formative influence on his creative development in the 1890s.¹ French reactions to the Concerto were accordingly varied, but largely positive. Maurice Imbert, for example, wrote in *Le Courrier Musicale & Théâtrale* that Nielsen's 'combinations of timbres are of a wholly modern bent, worthy of the writer of *The Soldier's Tale*, although the syntax would hardly have frightened Th. Dubois himself, locating the work somewhere between the *enfant terrible* of French modernism and Saint-Saëns's successor at the Madeleine. Meanwhile, Arthur Honegger, in a review for *Politiken*, diplomatically praised the concerto's vitalism. 'We admire Carl Nielsen as a technician of the first rank, and as an artist whose abundance of creative ability is continually renewed', Honegger wrote; 'all of his work gives the impression of health, power, and superiority.'² Alongside Honegger and Stravinsky, the leading members of a younger generation of musicians whose work were grabbing Parisian headlines included Maurice Ravel, Darius Milhaud, and Francis Poulenc. But it was arguably the writer, surrealist poet, and later filmmaker, Jean Cocteau, who had most sharply captured the spirit of the post-war decade in his polemical *Le Coq et l'arlequin* (1918).³

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- 1 The première of the Concerto took place on 21 October, performed by Holger Gilbert-Jespersen and conducted by Emil Telmányi. The following day Nielsen received the Cross of the Legion d'Honneur from Paul Leon, Minister for Fine Arts in the French government. The visit is summarised in Torben Schousboe (ed.) *Carl Nielsen: Dagbøger og Brevveksling med Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen*, Copenhagen 1983, 508-509. See also the relevant correspondence in John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen: Brevudgaven*, vol. 8, Copenhagen 2012.
 - 2 The two reviews are quoted in the commentary of the critical edition (*Carl Nielsen, Works*, II/9 *Koncerter*, Copenhagen 2002, xxix and xxx).
 - 3 For a colourful and detailed survey of this period in French musical life, which takes Cocteau as one of its central figures, see Roger Nichols, *The Harlequin Years: Music in Paris, 1917-1929*, London 2002. Nichols writes of the relatively infrequent performances of Scandinavian music in Paris during the 1920s,

Cocteau's manifesto was part a lament for a lost golden age of French creativity, part an angry attack on bourgeois trends in contemporary art, and part a raised eyebrow in the direction of some of his more earnest surrealist colleagues. As he declared:

The musician should cure music of its convolutions, its ruses and its card tricks, and force it as far as possible to remain in front of the hearer.

A POET ALWAYS HAS TOO MANY WORDS IN HIS VOCABULARY, A PAINTER TOO MANY COLOURS ON HIS PALETTE, AND A MUSICIAN TOO MANY NOTES ON HIS KEYBOARD.⁴

It may seem odd at first glance to place Cocteau, the librettist of Erik Satie's shocking 'Ballet realiste' *Parade* (1917), in the same context as Carl Nielsen: I am not arguing for a direct one-to-one correspondence. Rather, I am concerned with the aesthetic parallels between Nielsen's later music – from the *Wind Quintet* (1922) onwards – and the arrow-like aim of Cocteau's critique, especially his playfully provocative call in *Le Coq et L'Arlequin* for a new artistic order. According to Cocteau's preface, 'simplicity progresses in the same way as refinement',⁵ a sentiment Carl Nielsen would surely have endorsed. But it is the figure and the spirit of the Harlequin, of theatre and masquerade, which brings Cocteau and Nielsen more closely together. Carl Nielsen's brief Paris sojourn in 1926 may have helped to crystallise the harlequinique in his later music, as a source of inspiration and as way of negotiating both his attitude to contemporary modernist art and also his own musical legacy. And hearing Carl Nielsen's work through ears opened up by the music of such Parisian contemporaries as Satie and Stravinsky might also offer new perspectives on aspects of Carl Nielsen's reception and compositional process.

A poignant but critically neglected example of the harlequinique can be found in Nielsen's overture to his incidental music for Sophus Michaëlis' play, *Cupid*

and notes (261) the relatively rare performance of Sibelius's Third Symphony at the Salle Gaveau in May 1920 and Nielsen's Third at the Concerts Philharmoniques in April 1927. He does not, however, comment on Nielsen's award, nor the première of the Flute Concerto. A number of younger Danish musicians did indeed spend time in the French capital in the 1920s, most notably Knudåge Riisager.

4 *Il faut que le musicien guérisse la musique de ses enlacements, de ses ruses, de ses tours des cartes, qu'il l'oblige le plus possible à rester en face de l'auditeur.*

UN POÈTE A TOUJOURS TROP DE MOTS DANS SON VOCABULAIRE, UN PEINTRE TROP DE COULEURS SUR SA PALETTE, UN MUSICIEN TROP DE NOTES SUR SON CLAVIER. Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'Arlequin – notes autor de la musique*, Paris 1918, 16, orthography original.

5 *la simplicité progresse au même titre que la raffinement.*

and the Poet (Amor og Digteren), written in 1930 for celebrations to mark the 125th anniversary of H. C. Andersen's birth.⁶ Nielsen described the origins of the project in an interview in the local newspaper, *Fyns Tidende*, on 3 April:

The idea of *Cupid and the Poet* is actually my own. A year ago I directed a performance of some of my works in Odense. Rector Holbech turned to me on that occasion and asked whether I would be willing to write the music for the festivities that would be held in the summer. I answered that, to be honest, a cantata could only inspire me with difficulty; I had already written several – but that I would prefer to think about a little opera or what one calls a festival play. So then I immediately leafed through the [Andersen] fairy-tales in my thoughts, and quickly alighted on the tale of *The Mischievous Boy*. This story of the poetic heart, which is old and yet still so amenable to love, has, among other things, the advantage that it contains a very dramatic situation – You know the moment when the mischievous boy, whom the poet has taken in, shoots him through the heart with his arrow. It is this fairy tale which Sophus Michaëlis has now dramatised, and for which he used H C Andersen's romance with the Swedish singer Jenny Lind.⁷

Andersen's story, *The Mischievous Boy*, which formed the basis for Sophus Michaëlis's stage play, is a characteristically bittersweet miniature. An old poet sits by the fire on a stormy evening, and receives a visit from a bedraggled young boy (Cupid). He takes in the young boy, with his 'eyes like two clear stars' and dries him by the fire, giving him wine and a roasted apple. As soon as the boy is recovered, he picks up his bow and shoots the poet through the heart with one of his arrows. The poet is left

6 For an account of the music's genesis, and further background to the festival, see Elly Bruunshuus Petersen's critical commentary in *Carl Nielsen, Works, I/9, Incidental Music II, Amor og Digteren*, Copenhagen 2007, xlvii-lviii.

7 *Ideen til Amor og Digteren skyldes egentlig mig selv. For et Aars Tid siden ledede jeg i Odense en Fremførelse af nogle af mine Værker. Rektor Holbech henvendte sig ved denne Lejlighed til mig og anmodede om, at jeg vilde skrive Musikken til en Kantate til de Festligheder, der skal afholdes til Sommer. Jeg svarede, at en Kantate vist vanskelig kunde inspirere mig – oprigtig talt: jeg har jo allerede gjort adskillige – men at jeg saa bedre kunde tænke mig en lille Opera eller hvad man kalder et Festsplil. Naa, og saa bladrede jeg i Tankerne straks Eventyrene igennem og standsede snart ved Eventyret om 'Den uartige Dreng.' Denne Fortælling om Digterhertjet, der vel var gammelt, men ak, stadig saa tilgængelig for Amor, har bl. a. den Fordel, at den rummer en meget dramatisk Situation... De ved det Øjeblik, da den uartige Dreng, som Digteren har lukket ind, skyder ham sin Pil i Hjertet. Det er dette Eventyr, Sophus Michaëlis nu har dramatiseret, idet han benytter H. C. Andersens Forelskelse i den store svenske Sangerinde Jenny Lind. Quoted in John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen til sin Samtid*, Copenhagen 1999, 554-557.*

alone, weeping in pain and sorrow, and resolves to warn people of the dangers of love. Yet, in the final paragraph, Andersen merely bemoans the fate of all ‘the good children, boys and girls’, for love makes fools of them all – even your old grandmother. The story ends: ‘But now you know him! And know, that he is a mischievous boy!’⁸ Michaëlis divided the play up into individual scenes, for which Nielsen supplied 11 items of music, mostly melodramas, and shifted the action to a room in Berlin on New Year’s eve in 1845. The old poet, in Michaëlis’s version, is Andersen himself; after cupid’s visit, the famous opera singer Jenny Lind visits, with whom Andersen was famously in love – Nielsen provided a pastiche Italian opera aria for the encounter the ‘Italiensk Hyrdearie’ (*Aria* ‘In un boschetto trovai pastorella’) to represent Lind’s enchanting presence, and a patriotic song, ‘Vi elsker dig, vort høje Nord’ (‘We cherish you, our lofty North’) in praise of their Nordic homeland. The final scene illustrates Andersen’s homecoming to Odense and the festivities to mark his return.

Cupid and the Poet gathers together a number of key themes in Nielsen’s critical reception. The element of autobiography is obvious: both Michaëlis and Nielsen were born on Funen, and so the decision to choreograph the action around the figure of Andersen himself invites a further layer of self-identification. The play’s setting thus goes beyond merely local colour. Funen becomes a means of authentication or legitimisation, a way for both Michaëlis and Nielsen to inscribe themselves into Andersen’s own myth of his Funen childhood and ground their work in a particular sense of time and place. In that sense, the project can be heard as an echo of Nielsen’s own autobiographical works, the memoir *My Childhood on Funen* (*Min fynske Barndom*) and his colourful cantata *Springtime on Funen* (*Fynsk Foraar*) from 1922, to which his newspaper interview obliquely refers. But the play also evokes the complex pattern of centre and periphery, of city and *pays*, identified by Fredric Jameson as one of the characteristic traits of modernity. The feeling of nostalgia or alienation is intensified by shifting the action to Berlin – the return to Denmark in Michaëlis’s text thus becomes a metaphor for the rediscovery of Andersen’s true creative voice. And in that sense, the play might also be understood in terms of contemporary cultural-political sensitivities in early twentieth-century Denmark, of the fear of German cultural domination and Danish territorial integrity especially following the military defeat in southern Jutland in 1864 and later events during the First World War. The patriotic hymn, ‘Vi elsker dig, vort høje Nord’ hence gains a sharper edge. But the story also has an obviously allegorical dimension, which need not be concerned explicitly with questions of national identity, but might be focused rather on the figure of the creative artist. Andersen’s pain, his unfulfilled

8 *Men nu kender du ham! Ved, hvad han er for en uartig dreng!*

desire for Lind, is more properly a creative anxiety, the fear of emptiness. Art (or, rather, music and storytelling) becomes a medium through which his desire is temporarily channelled, and the arrow which pierces his heart is an epiphanal moment of self-realisation, a pain which momentarily provides access to an underlying suffering from which Andersen's creativity is born.⁹ The title itself alludes to the idea of the double-man, the fractured modernist artist whose subjectivity is fundamentally split between opposing characters or forces – a tension which is only resolved in the glowing final pages of the play's closing chorus, in praise of 'Evig Sang og Poesi' ('Eternal song and poetry').

Nielsen's overture outwardly provides a strangely blithe, cheerful response to this vision of creative angst – there is little sense of Romantic gloom, rather a comic glee in the Satie-esque categories of asymmetry and destabilisation, in playing off different kinds of music against each other to seemingly humorous effect. The overture begins with an almost disconcertingly consonant gesture: the side drum's initial *forte* strike is a sharp *rappel a l'ordre*, a mock military salute, after which the strings articulate a little cadential paradigm in E flat major:

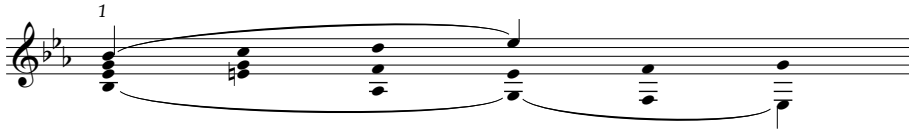
The musical score shows the beginning of the overture. It is in 2/4 time and E-flat major. The Tamburo piccolo (snare drum) has a forte (f) strike on the first beat. The strings (Violino 1, Violino 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabbasso) play a cadential paradigm. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto con brio' with a quarter note equal to 88-92. Dynamics include mf, poco, p, and poco cresc.

Ex. 1

This opening paradigm is neat and tonally closed – shockingly so for a work composed in 1930, so that that the gesture is already paraphrased, surrounded by a sense of contingency or of the conventional tag 'Der var engang' ('Once upon a time') with which Andersen's fairy-tales invariably begin. Underpinning this paradigm is a wedge-like

9 See also Colin Roth, "Carl Nielsen and the Danish Tradition of Story-Telling", in *Carl Nielsen Studies* 4 (2009), 164-85.

contrapuntal voice-leading progression, moving in contrary motion outwards from b^b to e^b , which will become increasingly significant as the Overture develops:



Ex. 2a

Yet, at first, the Overture seems disconcertingly diatonic – the opening 12 bars close with an imperfect cadence on V/V, after which a counterstatement of the opening gambit begins in the dominant. Even a cursory glance of subsequent formal events superficially reinforces this impression of musical good behaviour: there is a clearly articulated second subject group in b. 53, which also initiates a developmental middle section based on a series of imitative entries (beginning circa b. 86). A brief clarinet cadenza in b. 141 leads into a return of the opening subject – first via a false reprise (on the dominant) in b. 142, and then in the tonic, transformed in 6/8 (*Tempo I, Allegretto con brio*, b. 149)

The image shows a page of a musical score for Nielsen's Overture on the Boulevard. It features several staves for different instruments: Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. (Bb)), Cor in F (Cor. (F)), Tambourine piccolo (Tamb.picc.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.).

- Top section:** Starts with a clarinet cadenza (b. 141) marked 'cadenza 1.'. The tempo marking is 'un poco accelerando'.
- Middle section:** Features a 'poco a poco tranq.' (poco a poco tranquillo) section, followed by a 'ral - - len - - tan - - do' (rallentando) section. The clarinet part includes a 'lunga' (longa) note and a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking.
- Bottom section:** Continues with 'poco a poco tranq.' and 'ral - - len - - tan - - do'.

The musical score for Ex. 3 consists of several staves:

- Flute 1 (Fl. 1):** Starts at measure 142 with a melody in 3/4 time. Dynamics range from *mp* to *ppp*. Includes markings for *un poco meno*, *poco accel.*, and *poco rall.*
- Flute 2 (Fl. 2):** Enters at measure 149 with a melody in 3/4 time. Dynamics range from *pp* to *ppp*.
- Bassoon 1 and 2 (Bg. 1, 2):** Play a rhythmic accompaniment in 3/4 time. Dynamics range from *pp* to *ppp*. Includes a marking for *ff con passione*.
- Violin 1 (VL. 1) and Violin 2 (VL. 2):** Play a rhythmic accompaniment in 3/4 time. Dynamics range from *p* to *pp*. Includes a marking for *con sord. spicc.*

The score is divided into sections by double bar lines with repeat signs. The first section covers measures 142-148, and the second section starts at measure 149. The tempo is marked *Tempo I (allegretto con brio)*.

Ex. 3

A short, whimsical coda, based on first subject material, begins in b. 195, completing the sense of balanced symmetry that the shape of the opening phrase had initially promised. Yet if the opening gesture demands to be heard in parentheses, with the conditional quality of ‘as if’, the overture as a whole needs to be approached with a similar sense of ironic distance. Nielsen himself revealed in a newspaper interview that ‘it amused me to write the Overture, which will work intangibly, in fairy-tale fashion’,¹⁰ and a corresponding feeling of ‘make believe’ pervades the whole piece, not merely the opening bars.

The fairy tale begins to unravel almost as soon as the opening gesture has been completed. After the lively arpeggiation in the first 4 bars, the repeated quaver figure on a single pitch in b. 5 assumes a slightly nagging quality. This is locally eased by sequential transposition and rhythmic compression in b. 7, and the music wanders slightly aimlessly towards the dominant of the mediant minor (V/iii) in bb. 9-10 – hardly an audacious move in terms of twentieth-century harmonic syntax, but sufficient here to provide a sense of the sharp-side chromatic colouration that will become more insistent as the overture proceeds. The jarring quality of b. 5 nevertheless continues, and the counterstatement of the initial theme swiftly becomes mired in harmonic and melodic inertia: the problems compound in b. 17, at the point corresponding to b. 7 in the original statement, the nagging quavers echoed a bar later in

10 *Det har moret mig at skrive Ouverturen, der skal virke uhaandgribelig, eventyragtig. Berlingske Tidende, 4.7.1930, quoted from John Fellow (ed.), Carl Nielsen til sin Samtid, Copenhagen 1999, 559.*

the violins, but then intensified after 3 further bars. The first entry of the horn adds a new timbral colour to the sharp side inflection of the phrase, and the violins' quavers now become the predominant textural element – so much so that they swiftly usurp the motivic primacy of the lower strings. Up until this point, it has been possible to continue to hear the music diatonically, but following the crisp return of the side drum in b. 23, any semblance of diatonic stability is completely lost. The horn attempts to anchor the texture on b^b (evoking the pitch class's former diatonic function as a scale degree, $\wedge 5$), but the violin's insistent $d-c^\sharp$ quavers now become pointed, clashing with an arpeggiated E^b7 sonority in the lower strings. The stepped entry of the woodwind in pairs (flutes, clarinets and oboes, bassoons) only heightens the tonal confusion, until the side drum forces a way through the impasse in bb . 31-32. The upper strings' response is a furious sequence, where arpeggiations of triads a third apart are juxtaposed with little sense of any functional diatonic relationship.



Ex. 2b



Ex. 2c

Each step is characterised by smooth chromatic voice-leading, but the feeling of coherence is deflected by persistent register transfer between each triadic sonority. The overture attempts to dissipate the energy of this passage through a highly chromatised linear intervallic pattern, governed principally by the wedge-shaped voice leading of the cadential paradigm from the opening bars, an effect intensified by rhythmic augmentation (each sequential step in bb . 37-39 lasts a bar and a half).¹¹ But the damage has been done. Within the space of barely 40 bars, the opening bars' structural innocence has been entirely deconstructed, reduced to a series of chromatically

11 I am indebted to Svend Hvidtfelt Nielsen for a highly fruitful discussion of the problems of reading such contrapuntal paradigms in Carl Nielsen's music. For Hvidtfelt Nielsen, it is more productive to invoke harmonic models as the underlying basis for elaboration in Nielsen's work (see his essay in the current issue of *Carl Nielsen Studies*). I would argue that such models are not necessarily mutually exclusive: contrapuntal patterns of this kind often imply particular kinds of harmonic movement, which may in turn suggest a basic modulatory pattern for further elaboration.

disconnected triadic gestures and voice-leading patterns, conventional diatonic stability abandoned in favour of angular modernist mid-century linear counterpoint. What had initially appeared to symbolise comforting familiarity (the wedge-shaped contrapuntal paradigm in the opening bars) now signals falling apart, collapse rather than bringing together.

Given this context, the bassoon-horn bass line in bb. 45-46, F-B^b-C-F, might be heard as a faint attempt to re-establish control, an associative signpost that points distantly towards an imperfect cadence on V/V (at precisely the moment, corresponding to the medial caesura, where such cadential articulation might otherwise have been expected). The clarinet's response is suitably derisory – an uneasy slide that entirely misses any reference to the bassoon-horn line, followed by a sudden alarm signal or screech in b. 50, accompanied by a snarl of the side drum. The entry of the second subject, in b. 53, is thus preceded by a jagged cut (like a bad cinematic edit) rather than a smoothly negotiated transition. In spite of these obvious disjunctions, it is possible to hear a faint vestige of diatonic formal syntax in the second subject's pitch organisation – in so far as the melody belongs to any tonal domain, the implied d minor field might be heard as a simply relative minor substitute for F (V/V), as prefigured at bb. 9-10. But it is doubtful whether such diatonic thinking is still operative at this stage of the proceedings – more important, expressively, is the music's adoption of a dogged, martial character, and the melody's resemblance with similar ostinato-based march types in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony (a structure likewise troubled by diatonic/modal ambiguity, inertia, and nagging quaver figuration).

The second subject therefore brings a degree of gestural stability, even while it fails to resolve the pervading harmonic confusion and lack of clear musical direction from the first 40 bars. The opening of the developmental central section might be heard in a similar way, the adoption of a fugal imitative texture a further attempt (with furrowed brows) to provide both a sense of gestural focus and musical direction. Initial signs are promising – early entries of the strings sound suitably purposive, and the fifth entry (bassoons, lower strings) even succeeds in landing on B^b (b. 115) – precisely the pitch class (^5) towards which the development might conventionally have been heading. But the suggestion of conventional good behaviour is sufficient once again to provoke the strings into chromatic fury, and an ugly, machine-like passage results (bb. 119-125), initially structured around versions of bb. 37-39 wedge shapes, and later by distorted (016) trichords. The chromaticised linear counterpoint of bb. 37ff has seemingly triumphed. But though the upper strings explicitly recall their earlier outburst at b. 129, they suddenly strike the same B^b pitch class which had sparked the latest round of chromatic chaos on the second crotchet beat of b. 131, again *evoking* the idea of B^b as scale degree and functional dominant root. This

time, the music even more desperately tries to restore diatonic order – the syncopated chord in the woodwind and string semiquaver figuration hangs on to B^b, while even the chugging lower strings circle around the same pitch class, slowly bringing the music to a grinding, juddering halt with the side drum applying an extra set of rhythmic brakes. The clarinet's cadenza is a structural drawing of breath, an exceptional moment of reflection that allows the music to pause and restore its proper sense of poise, the hanging bass B^b-F in b. 140-41 again suggesting an imperfect close that corresponds to the earlier moment of cadential articulation in bb. 45-46.

The beginning of the false reprise in b. 142, ostensibly 'on the dominant', is in some sense prepared by the music that precedes it, an impression of structural integrity reinforced by the tonic 're-take' in b. 149 and the second flute's pointed recollection of bb. 133-137's reattainment of (^5) at b. 145. But, as the trajectory of Andersen's story suggests, the reprise is not as well behaved as it initially seems. The music's imitative fugal texture recalls the development, as much as the opening, and the quiet spiccato string figuration suggests a Queen Mab-like scherzo¹² rather than the opening's toy march – as easily demonic as benign. To suggest this capacity for malevolence, the nagging quaver figure from b. 5 returns insistently, once again provoking chromatic disorder and harmonic ambiguity. The return of the second subject in b. 174 hardly sounds reassuring as a result, the clarinet quavers repeatedly sounding b. 5's figure like a motto: it is this element which dominates the coda. The closing bars have the feeling of characters gradually leaving a stage – the final entry of the solo bassoon, with a version of the overture's opening gesture, is a cameo curtain call, a guest appearance from the closing bars of Nielsen's Sixth Symphony (likewise grounded on B^b), a work whose even more complex and ambivalent narrative journey I have explored elsewhere.¹³ Though diatonic order is finally restored, any permanent sense of stability remains, of course, highly precarious, and it is unclear in the very final bar whether the overture's nightmarish fantasies have entirely been put to rest. The side drum's closing sizzle, echoing its initial shot in the opening bar, is a characteristically ambiguous farewell gesture.

As should be apparent from the preceding account, the overture's deceptively easy-going surface is deeply complex and ambivalent, torn between wildly different modes of musical behaviour. It is tempting to ascribe this quality to the design of Andersen's

12 The reference is to Hector Berlioz, not Shakespeare: for Berlioz's impact on Carl Nielsen, see David Fanning, 'Carl Nielsen under the Influence', *Carl Nielsen Studies* 3 (2008), 13-18.

13 Daniel M Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism*, Woodbridge 2010, chapter 7.

short story – the innocent opening betrayed by the ‘mischievous’ behaviour of the middle section, the final bars a typically *Andersensk* leave-taking that resolves little of the story’s previous tensions even while it outwardly obeys the conventional rituals of narrative closure. But this trajectory is hardly unique in Nielsen’s output: it is hard, in that sense, to align the overture solely with the short story. Rather, it might be preferable to identify a more broadly *novelistic* tone in Nielsen’s work, a process which is intimately bound up with the mechanics of story-telling and narrative, but which does not itself presuppose a single fixed plot.¹⁴ Nielsen’s music, in other words, is populated by various speaking characters and dialogues, with other passages that assume the quality of conversation, commentary, or description. The evocation of particular formal or generic types such as fugal passages or mock-military marches is similarly a writerly device, topics employed both for their particular expressive *Affekt* and for their role within a more abstract process of employment. And the overarching comic trajectory of Nielsen’s overture, its pervasive sense of a ‘mixed style’, is what underpins the music’s expressive force throughout.

Previous writers have, of course, dwelt on the novelistic character of much twentieth-century music. T. W. Adorno, for instance, writes of Mahler’s music that ‘it is not that the music wants to narrate, but that the composer wants to make music in the way that others narrate’.¹⁵ Mahler’s music, Adorno argues, adopts a paralinguistic character, assuming the speaking roles or tone of characters within a literary work without, in fact, saying anything in actual linguistic terms. The task of the analyst is to recognise that, in Mahler’s work, ‘a purely musical residue stubbornly persists that can be interpreted in terms neither of processes nor of moods. It informs the gestures of his music. To understand him would be to endow with speech the music’s structural elements while technically locating the glowing expressive intentions.’¹⁶ We need not subscribe wholly to Adorno’s potentially problematic notion of intentionality (which is not, in any case, meant in any privileged unmediated sense) to extend the idea of the novelistic gestural nature of Mahler’s work to Nielsen. This gestural character is as explicitly foregrounded in Nielsen’s overture as it is in any of Mahler’s

14 This is a familiar idea from much musicological writing on narrative. See, for example, Lawrence Kramer’s ground breaking discussion in ‘“As if a voice were in them”: Music, Narrative, and Deconstruction’, in *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*, Berkeley 1990, 176-213. Particularly pertinent here is Kramer’s use of *other-voicedness*, which he borrows from Nietzsche, Derrida, and de Man. As Kramer writes, ‘One can speak the words of the same but in another voice, a voice that emerges from within language to spread itself throughout the whole system, fissuring it in every direction.’ (178).

15 T.W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Chicago 1992, first published 1971, 62.

16 Adorno, *op. cit.*, 3.

symphonic movements, and Nielsen's music, as argued above, seems acutely conscious of the sudden changes in its tones of voice. This affects both the individualistic behaviour of particular musical instruments – the clarinet cadenza and the bassoon cameo in the coda, for example – and also the disjunction of different musical styles or modes of utterance. Hence, the development section becomes a confrontation (or show down) between an authoritarian fugal style, with its old-fashioned hierarchies and anachronistic musical traditions, and a more explicitly modernist, machine-like music, whose propulsive character seems driven entirely by its own mechanical momentum. The clarinet's cadenza therefore becomes a means to trying to assuage the tension between these two different musical personalities (like a gracious intermediary), even while it simultaneously serves an obvious structural formal function, pre-figuring the return of the opening material.

For Adorno, Mahler's characters, taken together, make up a world of images. At first glance it seems Romantic, whether in a rural or small-town sense, as if the musical cosmos were warming itself by an irretrievable social one: as if the unstilled longing were projected backwards.¹⁷ But Mahler's music is concerned not with recapturing that world of images, but with the process of recollection and its simultaneous impossibility. This sense of unfulfilled longing is given a particular ironic twist, Mahler's music often dwelling poignantly on the moment of denial or violently reacting to its inability to transform present into past.¹⁸ Nielsen's evocation of his Funen myth in *Cupid and the Poet* threatens a similar nostalgia, yet the overture's mood is radically different, and the music characteristically follows a sharply different expressive curve. It exemplifies instead Mikhail Bakhtin's vision of the comic novel, containing 'heroes of free improvisation and not heroes of tradition, heroes of a life process that is imperishable and forever renewing itself, forever contemporary – these are not heroes of an absolute past'.¹⁹ Nielsen's work is concerned at a fundamental level with the play of masks and musical conventions – the overture is a Rabelaisian comedy, to pursue Bakhtin's model, whose ludic outlook is essentially positive, projecting forwards, rather than being inwardly nihilistic. Through the energetic vitalism of *Maskarade* and his middle symphonies to the carnivalesque gestures of his large-scale pieces in the 1920s, Nielsen retains a remarkable consistency of musical vision. Yet his consistency is, to return to the spirit of Cocteau's Paris, rooted in a sense of groundedness: 'Enough of clouds, waves, aquariums, water-sprites, and noc-

17 Adorno, *op. cit.*, 46.

18 For an eloquent account of this tendency, see Thomas Peattie, 'In Search of Lost Time: Memory and Mahler's Broken Pastoral' in *Mahler and his World*, ed. Karen Painter, Princeton 2002, 185-198.

19 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin 1981, 36.

turnal scents', Cocteau proclaimed, 'what we need is a music of the earth, AN EVERYDAY MUSIC'.²⁰ Nielsen was no less concerned with the transformation of appearances and of speaking characters, and with dialogue, conversation, and exchange as the primary vehicles of musical expression. Eloquently playing the musical clown, the harlequinesque parade in Carl Nielsen's music, as for Cocteau, always pointed in more complex and challenging directions.

A B S T R A C T

Carl Nielsen's music for Sophus Michaëlis' festival play *Cupid and the Poet*, written in 1930 for the 125th anniversary of H C Andersen's birth, is one of his most immediately engaging but neglected late scores. The story of an old poet whose heart is pierced by Cupid, disguised as a bedraggled young boy, suggests an obviously autobiographical interpretation, which locates Carl Nielsen once more in the familiar surroundings of his native land. But the overture, which has gained some mileage as an independent concert piece, is startlingly cosmopolitan, and invites a number of more searching analytical interpretations, especially in the light of other pieces such as the Sixth Symphony and the two Wind Concertos. In this paper, I will offer a close reading of the overture, drawing particular attention to the (ambivalent) presence of Carl Nielsen's European modernist contemporaries Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky among the work's richly complex array of musical characters.

²⁰ *Assez de nuages, de vagues, d'aquariums, d'ondines et de parfums la nuit; il nous faut une musique sur la terre, UNE MUSIQUE DE TOUS LES JOURS*. Cocteau, *op. cit.*, 32.