THE “ARCADIAN” FLUTE: LATE STYLE IN CARL NIELSEN’S WORKS FOR FLUTE

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ABSTRACT

Revered as Denmark’s most celebrated musical figure and regarded as one of the finest, albeit under recognized composers, Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) holds a place as one of the most individual and creative artists of his time. Straddling the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and with consideration to the dramatically changing musical climate of that time, Nielsen’s vast output is stylistically complex. His music spans an array of styles, with elements of Romanticism in his early works, to an outright rejection of these same principles and an adoption of extensive progressivism in later works, all the while maintaining features of neoclassicism.

There are six known works by Carl Nielsen that include flute in a solo or chamber role. These works date from his late, mature compositional period and include a short piece for solo flute from the incidental music to *Aladdin*, Op. 34 (1918–19); three pieces from the incidental music to *Moderen* (The mother), Op. 41 (1920): “Taagen letter” (The fog is lifting) for flute and piano or harp, “Børnene spiller” (The children are playing) for solo flute, and “Tro og håb spiller” (Faith and hope are playing) for flute and viola; the Wind Quintet, Op. 43 (1922); and the Flute Concerto (1926). The latter two works enjoy particular significance and popularity in the flute repertoire.

This thesis demonstrates how the stylistic development in Nielsen’s late works evolves from simple, traditional roots and merges into a progressive, multifaceted style, as exemplified in the flute works. Through examination of these works, as well as other contemporaneous works by Nielsen, this study explore the nature and development of Nielsen’s style, identifying important compositional and aesthetic hallmarks. The analysis addresses Nielsen’s treatment of specific neoclassical or retrospective elements that are common to these late works, as well as the juxtaposition of many of these conventional elements with contemporary, innovative
features. Through consideration of both the similarities of and differences between these various works, this study traces how the progression and amalgamation of many influences and stylistic traits are evident in the works that feature the flute.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Revered as Denmark’s most celebrated musical figure and regarded as one of the finest, albeit under recognized composers, Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) holds a place as one of the most individual and creative artists of the twentieth century. Not only did he work in a multitude of genres, but his style depicts a broad range of characteristics. From his humble beginnings as a youth from a poor family, Nielsen sought a natural form of communication through art. Straddling the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and with consideration to the dramatically changing musical climate of that time, Nielsen’s vast output is stylistically complex. His music spans an array of styles, including elements of Romanticism, progressivism, and neoclassicism.

Born in Nørre Lyndelse, a small town on Denmark’s second-largest island, Funen, Nielsen was the seventh of twelve children. Both of his parents influenced his musical development. His father, Niels Jørgensen, was a house painter and a popular amateur musician who played violin and cornet at weddings and other festivities. His mother, Maren, often sang folk songs to the children and nurtured young Carl’s musical interests. Having learned the violin as a child, and later playing signal horn and alto trombone in a military band in Odense beginning at age fourteen, Nielsen studied at the Copenhagen Conservatory from 1884 to 1886, primarily focusing on violin and composition. Three years after his graduation, he won a second violinist position in the Royal Chapel, the orchestra of the Royal Theatre. Though the orchestra provided steady income, his true aspirations were in composition, for which he received a grant in 1890 to study for several months elsewhere throughout Europe. In Paris that fall, he met Anne Marie Brodersen, a Danish sculptress also traveling on a scholarship. They married soon after
and returned to Copenhagen in June 1891. Anne Marie was a motivated, strong-willed woman who exhibited considerable skill and talent. Like-minded in their artistic ambitions, the couple each forged their own careers. For many years, their individual careers and subsequent successes placed strain on their relationship, especially with the responsibilities to their three children. In addition to Nielsen’s avid compositional life, he also enjoyed frequent conducting appearances; however, throughout his career and much to his frustration, he experienced difficulties balancing his varied musical activities. In 1914 he left the theater and became an independent performer, conductor, and composer. From 1916 to 1919, he taught theory and composition at the Copenhagen Conservatory, eventually being appointed director of the institution shortly before his death in 1931.

Nielsen’s compositional life was diversely prolific. In addition to his six symphonies, for which he is perhaps best known, Nielsen composed operas, symphonic poems and overtures, concertos, keyboard music, choral works, songs, and chamber music. Influenced by his childhood on Funen, much of his music is based on folk-like material, some of which was his own, some of which was derived from traditional Scandinavian folksongs. His output of popular strophic songs helped to revitalize the Danish song tradition. Especially in his late exploratory works, Nielsen combines simple, retrospective elements with a modern idiom, featuring borrowed chords, modal ambiguity, tonal digression, and style blending, to create a characteristic sound. Philosophically, themes of struggle, growth, characterization, and music as a life force, all-encompassing and unending, pervade his oeuvre.

Of Nielsen’s many works, several have emerged as major contributions to wind literature. Indeed, some of his most effective writing is for wind instruments, undoubtedly influenced by his early musical experience in the military band. The Wind Quintet and the Flute Concerto are
among these significant works and, along with a few other minor works that include flute in a predominant role, comprise a body of works that are valuable pieces within the flute canon. Although Nielsen was not a flutist himself, he had strong instincts and ideas about the instrument, as he wrote in a program note, “The flute cannot deny its nature, it belongs in Arcadia and prefers the pastoral moods; the composer therefore has to indulge the gentle creature, if he does not want to be stigmatized as a barbarian.”¹ His reference to Arcadia suggests the simple paradise of classical literature. Whether his music reflects this impression remains debatable. A testament to Nielsen’s contributions to wind literature, as well as to the strength of his wind writing, lies in that the Quintet continues to be among the most frequently performed and well known pieces in its genre, while the Flute Concerto has been influential on many later twentieth-century flute concertos.

There are six known works by Carl Nielsen that include flute in a solo or chamber role. These works, all of which date from his late, mature compositional period, consist of a short piece for solo flute from the incidental music to Adam Oehlenschläger’s “Dramatic Fairy Tale” Aladdin, eller den Forunderlige Lampe (Aladdin, or the wonderful lamp), Op. 34 (1918–19); three pieces from the incidental music to Helge Rode’s play Moderen (The mother), Op. 41 (1920): “Taagen letter” (The fog is lifting) for flute and piano or harp, “Børnene spiller” (The children are playing) for solo flute, and “Tro og håb spiller” (Faith and hope are playing) for flute and viola; the Wind Quintet, Op. 43 (1922); and the Flute Concerto (no opus number,

An additional piece for instruments in the flute family is listed in the catalogue of Nielsen’s works, *Allegretto for two Blokfløjter* (Allegretto for two recorders) (1931), of which there is no published edition available; this brief piece will not be included in this study.\(^2\) Nielsen’s flute works enjoy varying levels of significance in the flute repertoire.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate how the stylistic development in Nielsen’s later works evolves from simple, traditional roots and merges into a progressive, multifaceted style, as exemplified in the solo and chamber works that include flute. Through examination of the six flute works, as well as other contemporaneous works by Nielsen, this study will explore the nature and development of Nielsen’s style, identifying important compositional and aesthetic hallmarks. The analysis will address Nielsen’s treatment of specific neoclassical or retrospective elements (many of which are found in early works) that are common to these late works, as well as the juxtaposition of many of these conventional elements with contemporary, innovative features. Through consideration of the similarities of and differences between these various works, this study will trace how the progression and amalgamation of many influences and stylistic traits are evident in the works that feature the flute, from the uncomplicated, yet charming character of the earlier incidental pieces, through the considerable scope of the Wind Quintet, to the culmination of the complex Flute Concerto. Additionally, it is this author’s intention to bring to light the variety within Nielsen’s music, with a focus on the works that

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\(^2\) Dan Fog and Torben Schousboe, *Carl Nielsen, kompositioner: en bibliografi* (Carl Nielsen compositions: a bibliography) (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag-Arnold Busck, 1965). Entries in the catalogue are listed as follows: *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp*, FS 89; *Moderen*, FS 94; Wind Quintet, FS 100; and the Flute Concerto, FS 119.

\(^3\) FS 157. The manuscript is held in the Royal Library, Copenhagen. Information regarding this work was supplied via e-mail correspondence between the author and Toke Lund Christiansen, principal flutist, Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, July–August 2003.
feature flute, and to heighten awareness of the smaller incidental pieces, so that they might be programmed more regularly.

There have been many writings on Carl Nielsen, including several on some of his works for flute. A significant portion of Nielsen scholarship is in Danish and has yet to be translated into English. However, recent research in English has made available more information about Nielsen’s life and works. Significant and timely is a collected edition of the complete works of Nielsen, published by Edition Wilhelm Hansen under the auspices of the Music Department of the Royal Library in Copenhagen. This edition, to be published in thirty-two volumes, provides for the first time critical commentary in English for all of Nielsen’s published works. To date, the works to be addressed in this study that have been released in the critical edition are Aladdin, the Wind Quintet, and the Flute Concerto. Mina F. Miller’s Carl Nielsen: A Guide to Research continues to be indispensable, although dated, in locating standard, as well as obscure materials relating to Nielsen research. Miller’s The Nielsen Companion includes essays by many different authors on a variety of topics pertaining to the composer and his music. Sandra K. Lunte’s D.A. document explores flute works of Nielsen, but it solely addresses the three incidental pieces from Moderen. Through surveying college teachers and performers throughout the United States, Lunte discusses the usefulness of these works in a pedagogical application. The document is rather limited in its scope and relevance, as it omits Nielsen’s most significant chamber work that

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7 Sandra K. Lunte, “A Pedagogical Analysis of Selected Chamber Works for the Flute by Carl Nielsen” (D.A. doc., Ball State University, 1993).
includes flute, the Wind Quintet. A recent thesis by Amy Catherine Nelson addresses the influence of the Flute Concerto’s dedicatee, Holger Gilbert-Jespersen, as well as provides an analysis of the concerto itself.\(^8\) Nelson’s study focuses on the historical influence that the performer had on the composition and première of the concerto and also provides translations of several useful articles and interviews, most of which were supplied to Nelson by Gilbert-Jespersen’s son and were previously available only in Danish. Christopher Charles Lanz’s D.M.A. thesis includes an extensive discussion of the Flute Concerto.\(^9\) However, his perspective is that of a conductor, and the performance issues addressed are related primarily to the preparation of the orchestra. Marcia Louise Spence’s D.M.A. thesis provides a concise historical overview of the Wind Quintet, with a listing of discrepancies between the manuscript and the only available edition of the work at the time of the thesis’s submission.\(^10\) Most beneficial is the inclusion of a copy of Nielsen’s manuscript of the Wind Quintet and a new critical edition score, edited by Spence. Robert Gary Mizener’s D.M.A. thesis addresses Nielsen’s solo and chamber works that utilize the clarinet.\(^11\) A discussion and analysis of the Wind Quintet are included, but the study addresses issues specific to the clarinet part. In addition to theses, Kevin Maloney’s article provides an enlightening analytical perspective on the Flute Concerto, although again it


only addresses the concerto. This thesis is the first to address all of the flute works in one document, and the first to study these works from the approach of a style study.

Some of the most informative of Nielsen resources are the writings of Nielsen himself. His Levende musikk (Living music) and Min fynske barndom (My childhood [on Funen]) are significant explorations into the mind, memory, and soul of the composer. Living Music is a collection of essays that reveals many of Nielsen’s perspectives on music, art, the mechanics of composition, and performance, while My Childhood is Nielsen’s autobiography of his first eighteen years on the island of Funen, revealing early influences and insights. Although in these two works there are virtually no references to the flute or wind instrument writing specifically, Nielsen’s philosophical approach to music is captured through his descriptions of the sights and sounds of his childhood, as well as his references to art, music, and composers that were important influences on his development. Nielsen’s writings supply the researcher with a sense of the composer as a man, a nature lover, and an artist seeking truth and enlightenment in the modern world. In addition, his many letters provide insight into his personal and professional relationships, especially as they pertain to his compositional work and his artistic motivations. Unfortunately, little of Nielsen’s personal correspondence has been translated into English. However, there are references to material from these letters in other sources that have been consulted in this thesis, such as in the preface and commentary of the critical edition. For this

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14 Nielsen, Works/Voerker.
This study begins with an overview of the development of Nielsen’s style (Chapter 2), as depicted through a variety of genres in which he composed. Through the study of the solo and chamber works that include flute, and comparison of these works to other representative works by Nielsen that date from the same general time period, particular features of Nielsen’s style are illuminated. These features include Nielsen’s blend of retrospective elements, such as reliance on traditional forms, emphasis on melody, conservative rhythm, and use of borrowed material, with features of a more contemporary idiom, including innovative treatment of instrumentation, texture, and timbre, as well as the permeation of harmonic progressivism in virtually all of his late works. This demonstrates the developmental trend in Nielsen’s compositions, with its beginnings in simple, lyrical material that progresses to a diverse amalgam of styles, sounds, and moods.

Because the four minor flute pieces from the incidental music to the two plays are brief, they are discussed together (Chapter 3). In relation to most contemporaneous works, as well as to the larger dramatic works from which the incidental pieces are extracted, these small works are uncharacteristic in their simplicity and relative conservatism. Specific musical features in these works include their straightforward formal structure, minimal material, relatively conservative tonality, and Nielsen’s choice of timbre through instrumentation. Although simple, the pieces do suggest hints of Nielsen’s more progressive late idiom. Other issues that are addressed include Nielsen’s characterization or implication of extramusical concept, folk or other cultural influences, and the incidental pieces’ functions within their larger stage works.
In studying the Wind Quintet (Chapter 4), some of the same compositional elements as those examined in the incidental pieces are highlighted, providing a benchmark of the conservative elements in the work. However, as the nature of the genre and Nielsen’s style are significantly more complex in the Quintet, less traditional facets are also considered. Issues include the blending of traditional elements, such as form and genre, as well as conservative melodic structure, with progressive elements, such as tonality, timbre, and the use of auxiliary instruments. Other issues discussed are the Quintet’s deviation from the style of previous works, characterization through timbre, the consideration of capabilities and limitations of each instrument, and significance within the wind literature. Unlike the incidental pieces, the Quintet is a complete form unto itself; therefore, it does not function within a context of a larger dramatic work or concept. There are also several salient features exclusive to the Quintet that make it unique. For example, the work was composed for the Copenhagen Wind Quintet, each member of which was known to have quite a distinctive personality. In addition to Nielsen’s interest in composing to highlight each instrument, he also attempted to capture each player’s personality. These and other issues will be explored as related to the Quintet.

The Flute Concerto (Chapter 5) features Nielsen’s merging of neoclassical and progressive elements to create his own style. His neoclassical predilection is evident in the use of a traditional genre, as well as thematic and cadential treatment; yet his place as a twentieth-century composer is accentuated through his increasingly progressive harmonies and advanced chromaticism, as well as inventive timbral excursions. The work also includes traits that strengthen its independence and importance within the flute canon. One of the most distinguishing is the element of dialogue between the soloist and the orchestra, and how the
orchestra is often used sparingly to create a chamber texture. Of Nielsen’s works for flute, the
Concerto exhibits the pinnacle of his late style.

Through score study, analysis, and consideration of historical context of each of
Nielsen’s flute works, this study’s approach is to elucidate the stylistic hallmarks of Nielsen’s
mature period. The wide variety of form and function of these works naturally lends itself to a
plethora of differences; nevertheless, these works do exhibit commonalities and are
representative of the style typified in various other works by Nielsen.

Without focus and specificity, a style study of this scope could become unwieldy and
vague, particularly in addressing dissimilar works. Therefore, for stylistic comparison this study
draws upon a few works from Nielsen’s output beyond the six flute works. There are differing
views amongst Nielsen scholars on the categorization of his works into separate style periods;
these divisions will be discussed in more detail below (Chapter 2). The late English composer
and Nielsen scholar Robert Simpson divides Nielsen’s career into four periods: 1.) the early
works through 1902–3, 2.) 1903–11, 3.) 1912–22, and 4.) 1923–31.15 For this study, Simpson’s
four-part paradigm has been adopted, as it seems to most specifically divide such a prolific
career, as compared to other scholars’ two-part models. The works that feature the flute fall
within Simpson’s defined last two periods; hence, this study focuses on only those works
composed from 1912 to 1931 for comparative purposes. For reasons to be further developed
below, the works of both the third and fourth style periods may be deemed mature works.
Although there are similarities that permeate the flute works of these last two periods, in
considering Nielsen’s total works of these periods, there are enough differences to warrant two

separate periods. Because Nielsen is noted as a symphonist, his orchestral writing exemplifies many facets of his style development. Symphonies Nos. 4, 5, and 6 were composed within the appropriate time frame and are therefore some of the most logical and substantial of Nielsen’s instrumental works by which to draw comparisons to the flute works. When pertinent, this study makes further references to some of Nielsen’s other music, such as the Violin Concerto, Op. 33 (1911), the instrumental chamber piece Serenata in vano (1914), the orchestral Pan og Syrinx, Op. 49 (1917–18), the Clarinet Concerto, Op. 57 (1928), and songs from various collections.

The works of Carl Nielsen that feature the flute are diverse—even disparate. Yet through study of the development of style characteristics of Nielsen’s other works contemporary to the six works that feature the flute, one may recognize similar development in his writing for the instrument. Even in the twenty-first century and with so many new contributions to the flute repertoire since Nielsen’s, his music remains imaginative and relevant. This project aims to promote further these works and their salient features, as well as to distinguish their sustained importance within the canon, in order to increase their performance and accessibility.
CHAPTER 2
PARADIGM OF STYLE

As apparently idyllic as was Carl Nielsen’s childhood on the island of Funen, the stylistic
development of his music was more complex. Represented in a multitude of genres, his music
spans an array of styles, with elements of Romanticism in his early works, to an outright
rejection of these same principles and an adoption of greater progressivism in later works, all the
while maintaining features of neoclassicism. From his early, youthful pieces, Nielsen’s Danish
heritage is evident. But his developing philosophical approach to music clearly manifests itself
in the mature style of his later works. An overview of his style development, from the earliest
works to those from the end of his life, is critical to appreciating the breadth of his oeuvre.

Defining and Classifying Nielsen’s Style

The multiplicity of styles within Nielsen’s oeuvre creates difficulty in classifying his
works. Accordingly, there exist several perspectives on how, and even if, Nielsen’s works
should be categorized into different style periods. Mina Miller explains that Ludvig Dolleris and
Knud Jeppesen, both students of Nielsen, viewed an attempt at the categorization of his works as
futile.1 Jeppesen argued that some of Nielsen’s works occupy a period unto themselves, while
Dolleris claimed, “Within different stages of Nielsen’s life, it is possible to identify a single work
toward which earlier works gravitate (as a kind of summary or synthesis), or a work which seems

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to generate subsequent compositions.”

Nielsen’s contemporary Povl Hamburger, as well as musicologists David Fanning and Jack Lawson, delineate a separation between works before and after 1914. Another perspective is that of Torben Schousboe, who viewed the year 1910 and the Third Symphony of 1911 as turning points and proposed that Nielsen’s works should be divided into two periods accordingly. Schousboe purported that the years until 1910 demonstrated Nielsen’s transformation of the sonata form through emphasis on motivic integration and development, as well as the utilization of linear structure to create tension on a large scale. Still a different view is that of John C. G. Waterhouse, who bifurcates Nielsen’s works at the year 1912.

However, Robert Simpson divides Nielsen’s career into four periods: 1.) the early works through 1902–3 (through Saul og David; Symphony No. 2, The Four Temperaments, Op. 16; and the Helios Overture, Op. 17); 2.) 1903–11 (from the choral work Søvnen, Op. 18, to the Violin Concerto, Op. 33, including Maskarade and Symphony No. 3, Sinfonia espansiva, Op. 27; 3.)

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4 Torben Schousboe, “Udviklingstendenser inden for Carl Nielsens symfoniske orkesterværker indtil ca. 1910” (Developmental tendencies within Carl Nielsen’s orchestral works until c. 1910), in Magisterafhandling (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 1968), 131; quoted in Miller, ed., The Nielsen Companion, 21. Schousboe identified the Third Symphony as both the last work in the first period and the first work in the last period.


1912–22 (from Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano, Op. 35, to the Wind Quintet, and including *Aladdin*, *Moderen*, and Symphony No. 5); and 4.) 1923–31 (including Symphony No. 6, *Sinfonia semplice*; the Flute and Clarinet Concertos; and *Commotio*, Op. 58.)

For the purposes of this study, Simpson’s paradigm has been adopted, as it provides the most specificity in addressing Nielsen’s works. Nevertheless, there is a marked change in Nielsen’s style beginning with the third period; therefore, because the works of the first two periods exhibit some continuity, these will be regarded as early works, while the works of the third and fourth periods will be considered late works. Despite more recent Nielsen research, Simpson’s still resonates as significantly relevant, as it continues to be cited with frequency by other researchers, including Miller, Fanning, Lawson, Krebs, and Eskildsen, to name a few.

Throughout Nielsen’s career, many influences formed his musical style. Not the least of these was Nielsen’s own psyche, as his major compositions reflect his attitude at the particular time in his life. His influences were varied, but there are several that are most important to his instrumental music. In an analysis of Nielsen’s late instrumental works, James Hiatt summarizes influences on his total output as the following: 1.) Danish folk music, particularly modal chord progressions and melodies, especially those containing a “Mixolydian seventh,” that is, a flattened seventh scale degree in a major key; 2.) earlier polyphonic styles, such as sixteenth-century vocal polyphony, seventeenth-century organ music, and the music of J. S. Bach; 3.) Classical styles, particularly Mozart, as evidenced by Nielsen’s “fondness for triads” and his use

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of classical forms (observable in even his very early works); 4.) Beethoven and tradition-oriented composers of the late nineteenth century, such as his teacher Niels W. Gade, other Scandinavian composers, such as Johan Svendsen, and Brahms, as manifested by Nielsen’s use of traditional seventh chords (although still subservient to the favored triad), expanded Classical instrumental forms, motivic unity, cyclic reappearance of themes, and texture; and 5.) Wagnerian chromaticism. Despite Nielsen specifically addressing some of these purported influences as detrimental to modern music, namely Wagner and cyclicism, their influence cannot be denied.

First Period: Youthful Influences and Early Works

In Simpson’s first period of Nielsen’s career, works included are his earliest through those of 1902–3. These works illustrate a tendency towards imitation of Classical Viennese style, conservative in harmony and form. Other stylistic hallmarks of this period include memorable diatonic tunes with both modal and tonal elements, simple textures, and a clear sense of form. This latter trait is evidence of the Brahmsian influence, as Nielsen regarded the German composer as the most firmly disciplined master of his time. Many of these early works stylistically echo not only Brahms, but also Dvořák and Svendsen, with a Beethovenian attitude in their rhythmic drive and motivic economy. Even in these early works, however, Nielsen exhibited independence through novel handling of tonality (although conservative by Nielsen’s later standards), as well as strong rhythms and a gradual departure from stereotypical forms. The

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earliest songs are through-composed, and in various works his fascination with the human character also emerges.

Although Nielsen’s first known work is a polka that he composed as a child, it was during his time in Odense’s military band (1880–83) that he gained fundamental formal musical training, acquired a piano, and composed several works. It was also at this time that he was introduced to F. J. Haydn, W. A. Mozart, Beethoven, and J. S. Bach through his acquaintance with an older pianist. Most of Nielsen’s earliest works are chamber pieces, including several string quartets that he could play with friends.

As a composition student of J. P. E. Hartmann, Orla Rosenhoff, and Niels W. Gade at the Royal Conservatory in Copenhagen, Nielsen came to oppose the Romantic tradition represented by his teachers. Although he eventually became a master of evolving key schemes, nearly all of his early works are remarkably unadventurous, harmonically. However, his serenade-like first opus, with obvious influences of Mozart and Grieg, is representative of Nielsen’s ability to write a charming diatonic tune.

Despite Nielsen’s formal training, he opposed the “smoothed-over-Germanic composing style,” typical at the time. Biographer Johannes Fabricius describes his resistance:

Rooted in his primitive peasant milieu, Carl Nielsen wanted a renovation of late Romanticism with its lush melodies and diffuse forms. The renovation was to come through a clear and strong form resting on counterpoint and polyphony and cultivating the primordial elements of music: plastic intervals and melodies, [and] original rhythm.

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13 He composed his Polka in A Major in 1874 (FS 1) at the age of nine.
14 Simpson, Symphonist, 228.
16 Fanning, New Grove, 17:891.
17 Ibid., 17:888.
18 Johannes Fabricius, 19.
Undoubtedly, much of Nielsen’s dependence on form was derived from his admiration for Mozart and the clarity of works in the Classical style. Although he had made acquaintance with the great masters in his youth, Nielsen’s European travels as a young composer gave him exposure to the works of Wagner, Brahms, and the other leading composers, as well as awareness of the visual arts, literature, and philosophy—all of which would influence his artistic vision.

After leaving the Conservatory, Nielsen began to compose his first substantive works. With his Third and Fourth String Quartets, Op. 14 and Op. 44 respectively, he explored a free-flowing style, while remaining within the boundaries of a tonally centered form. Although he had had several string works performed prior, it was his Little Suite for Strings, later designated as his Op. 1, which brought attention to the young composer through a performance at Tivoli Gardens on 8 September 1888.

In addition to instrumental works, Nielsen focused his compositional efforts on songs, the earliest of which were formal Romantic Lieder, or “professional” art songs, written for soloist and piano and intended for recital performance. The first two published song collections (1892 and 1893) each contained five settings of poetry by the contemporary Danish poet Jens Peter Jacobsen. Even though these works are rooted in the Danish Romantic style, elements of exoticism and modulatory progressivism are apparent. His third published collection of songs was composed in 1894 and contained settings of poetry by Ludvig Holstein. The poetry itself offers a less Romantic, realistic portrayal of nature, to which Nielsen composed his settings in a

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19 Lawson, 64.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
markedly different, simple and lyrical style, but with a less typical melodic structure. Critics did not easily accept either the subject matter, which included that of the working people, or the melodic and harmonic style. It was this style, however, that soon emerged from the concert hall into a type of popular song for which Nielsen would later be credited with having revitalized Danish folksong.

There has been much discussion regarding Nielsen’s stance on the so-called Brahms-versus-Wagner debate.\(^2^2\) Indisputably, Nielsen’s foundation was rooted in the tradition of Brahms, with its fundamental principles of form and function. However, his perception of Wagner’s work was that of curiosity, albeit suspiciousness. Even thirty years later Nielsen wrote of his impressions that clearly began upon contact with Wagner’s music:

> It is the taste, the Überschwängliche [rapturous, overripe, overpowering] and unwholesome, in Wagner’s theme that is intolerable. The only cure for this sort of taste lies in studying the basic intervals. The glutted must be taught to regard a melodic third as a gift of God, a fourth as an experience, and a fifth as the supreme bliss. Reckless gorging undermines the health. We thus see how necessary it is to preserve contact with the simple original.\(^2^3\)

Nevertheless, Nielsen’s desire to simplify the compositional trends of the time should not be interpreted as his yearning to return to an older music. He simply adhered to the idea of allowing music to speak for itself, in an unadulterated and supposed pure state.

During this first period, Nielsen mastered the form of the string quartet and then turned to symphonic writing. The genre of the symphony was the one through which Nielsen became most renowned, and it best represents the stylistic development throughout his entire oeuvre. With his First Symphony in 1892 at the age of twenty-seven, Nielsen demonstrated his skill and


\(^{23}\) Carl Nielsen, *Living Music*, 42; and Lawson, 67.
imagination to earn a place amongst Danish artists. Clearly an expression of Nielsen’s compositional individuality, this symphony is founded on traditional formal principles, yet it explores some fairly progressive concepts. Even in this first symphony, the handling of tonality is fresh and bold, and Nielsen began his assertion that “a sense of achievement is best conveyed by the firm establishment of a new key.”24 Central to this new view of tonality is that the symphony begins in one key as a starting point, G minor, and journeys through others to arrive at another key from that in which it started, C major, a feature that may have been a first in symphonic writing.25 This innovation in tonal structure, according to Simpson, “is something that might have occurred to him at almost any stage in his career, and the technical adroitness with which he carried it out suggests that he must have destroyed many preliminary studies in orchestration.”26 The Brahmsian influence is evident through its construction, yet a nod to Dvořák is illustrated in its orchestration’s “open bluntness of sound.”27 Composed at about the time of Debussy’s Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune and Brahms’s Clarinet Quintet in B Minor, but before Dvořák’s Symphony from the New World had been completed,28 Nielsen’s First Symphony represents the crossroads of musical culture of its time.

Nielsen turned his creative attention to composing a few works for piano, as well as his First Violin Sonata, the String Quartet No. 3, the oratorio Hymnus amoris, and the opera Saul og David. Nielsen continued to develop his keen interest in musical characterization and the

25 Ibid., 24.
26 Ibid., 23.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 36.
psychological portrayal of humanity through music, as well as the idea of good versus evil and triumph through struggle. Moreover, he continued to reject overt sentimentality and the traits of romanticism. But incongruous to his anti-romantic stance was his contradictory perspective on program music. As he explained in his essay “Words, Music, and Programme Music” of 1909, later included in Living Music, he was fundamentally opposed to the concept of program music. 29 Yet paradoxically, his interest in composing dramatic works with extramusical ideas became a priority in his compositional efforts.

Nielsen’s Second Symphony, De fire temperamenter (The four temperaments), Op. 16 of 1901–2, examines the extramusical idea of a painting that he had seen in a Zealand country inn. Regardless of his later writings on program music that seemed to dismiss its value, Nielsen published an explanation for this symphony on 1 September 1931, several weeks before his death. This note explained that, although not programmatic per se, the movements of the work were based on the four temperaments depicted in the picture he had seen: The Choleric, The Phlegmatic, The Melancholic, and The Sanguine. 30 Musically, the work explores many of the same features that had begun his symphonic output in the First Symphony. In the year following the Second Symphony, and in spite of Nielsen’s late documented aversion to program music, his output includes another programmatic work, the Helios Overture, Op. 17. Inspired by his stay in Greece, the work depicts the sun’s movement across the heavens. 31 In a letter to organist and composer Thomas Laub, with whom he collaborated extensively on Danish folk songs, Nielsen wrestles with the issue of programmaticism:


30 Simpson, Symphonist, 53. Even in the program note, Nielsen writes, “I don’t like programme music.”

And you can give me your opinion of so-called Programme Music, to what extent you think a programme is permissible, and so forth. It is of some interest to me, as I have just done such a piece: that is to say, not a detailed programme. My overture describes the movement of the sun through the heavens from morning to evening, but it is only called Helios and no explanation is necessary.… Such a programme title is not a nuisance. Light, Darkness, Sun, and Rain are almost the same as Credo, Crucifixus, Gloria, and so forth.32

The last few works of this period in Nielsen’s output manifest the beginning of an optimism in artistic culture in general, which continued up until the First World War.33

The works of the first period exhibit the fundamental principles on which Nielsen’s style is founded. From even the earliest works that tend to imitate classical style, Nielsen’s formal structures are lucidly crafted, demonstrating his admiration for Brahms’s mastery of construction. Although Nielsen adamantly rejected the tenets of romanticism and sentimentalism, the works of this period feature straightforward and endearing melodies, yet absent of dense sonorities and complex textures. Within this simplicity, Nielsen introduced a progressive concept of tonality, while beginning to expand the limits of established forms. These works demonstrate the fundamentals of a style that becomes more refined in the works that follow.

Second Period: The Path to Compositional Maturity

The second period of Nielsen’s career, 1903–11, includes a variety of works in which his style is continuously developing. These works express an optimism not fully heard in earlier works, as well as Nielsen’s growing confidence. Many of these reveal the composer’s fascination with psychological growth and the concept of a life force. Nielsen also began to

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explore dissonance as a means of expression, particularly evidenced in his orchestral, choral, and chamber works. At the same time, the increasing complexity of these works is contrasted by his constant search for the simple original, as manifested in his extensive output of strophic songs. Simpson calls this second period Nielsen’s “sunniest…filled with a Jovian sense of well-being.”

Nielsen wrote ten commissioned cantatas during his lifetime, and the first of these, *Søvnen* (Sleep) of 1903, established a benchmark for the composer in its innovation and expression. Set to a text by the Danish poet Johannes Jørgensen, *Søvnen* demonstrates significant progress in Nielsen’s compositional technique. In contrast to the period’s characteristic exuberance, the cantata’s relatively placid opening is followed by a nightmare scene that is “one of the first expressive uses of dissonance to enter twentieth-century music: it anticipates by ten years Igor Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* which, in 1913, marked the eventual turning point away from the supremacy of tonality, based as it is on the tension between diatonicism and chromaticism.” Nielsen claimed *Søvnen* to be his most noteworthy and accomplished work thus far and believed he had succeeded in expressing his intentions. Critics despised the work’s disturbing mood and progressive tonality, rejecting this new treatment by a forward-thinking Scandinavian composer who was relatively unknown outside his homeland.

After recovering from the depressive period following *Søvnen*’s lack of acclaim, in 1906 Nielsen completed his second opera, the comic *Maskarade*. The opera features a humor and wittiness not before explored by Nielsen, and its music has been described as having “the

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35 Lawson, 102.
masterful touch of a modern Mozart.” Written by Vilhelm Andersen, the libretto is based on revered Danish playwright Ludvig Holberg’s play of 1724, *Mascarade*. The comic opera is in contrast with the earlier *Saul og David*, in that *Mascarade* is based on plot, rather than characterization, and provides social commentary of the time. Critics and audiences responded positively to performances of the opera, proving Nielsen’s versatility as an artist.

Other works of the second period include the String Quartet in F Major (the fourth and last), the Third Symphony, and the Violin Concerto. These works continue the optimistic spirit and joyful sound of *Mascarade*, and they explore Nielsen’s psychological interests. Through these works, Nielsen admittedly began to fully understand composing for particular instruments, discovering both their independent and conversational possibilities.

The Third Symphony, *Sinfonia espansiva*, reiterated Nielsen’s Danish heritage, with its straightforward approach and vigorous atmosphere that alludes to a connection with his country’s people. Yet it also explores his fascination with an organic life force, one that is powerful and unending. Again, progressive tonality is a characteristic throughout the work, providing formal organization, though its four-movement form preserves an element of traditionalism. The work is also significant for the progress it demonstrates in transforming sonata form through motivic treatment and development, as well as its emphasis on a strong rhythmic undercurrent. The first movement journeys fluidly through many tonalities, perhaps

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36 Ibid., 106.
37 Ibid., 107.
reflecting the energetic nature of the human spirit. To further reiterate the concept of the life force, Nielsen himself suggested that “the finale could be taken as a hymn to work and the ordinary man.” Nielsen bestowed upon the work the title “espansiva” not to define the work itself, but rather as a depiction of “the outward growth of the mind’s scope and the expansion of life that comes from it.” Although John C. G. Waterhouse presents an alternative categorization of Nielsen’s works to that of Simpson, he describes the significance of this symphony:

The culmination of Nielsen’s early style [here: first and second periods] is the joyous and exuberant Third Symphony, Sinfonia espansiva, of 1911, which gathers together most of the best qualities, and very few of the weaknesses, of his music up to that time, while still showing little sign of more problematical developments to come.

The weaknesses to which Waterhouse refers are debatable, as his only hint of criticism of the early pieces is their imitation of Brahms and Dvořák. It is apparent, however, that, following the Third Symphony, Nielsen’s style changed dramatically.

**Early Style of First and Second Periods**

Compared to the considerable analysis of the later works, little has been written about Nielsen’s works of the first and second style periods, probably because they are relatively straightforward. Some of Nielsen’s admirers have found the best of his early music to be, in the

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41 Nielsen, quoted in ibid.
42 Simpson, *Symphonist*, 57.
43 Waterhouse, 426.
44 Ibid.
end, “more satisfying, if less immediately arresting.” Early pieces are generally regarded as representing the Danish version of the Brahmsian tradition, yet “lacking Brahms’s tragic intensity and romantic warmth.” Much like Dvořák’s Czech version of the same, these works illustrate a “sunny, slightly ingenuous optimism, and similar bright, clear outlines and textures.”

Particularly in Nielsen’s instrumental pieces of the first two periods, there are several characteristics that emerge, many of which are typical of classical form and tonal treatment. Robert Simpson refers to the hallmarks specific to Nielsen’s style as “fingerprints,” which include “the swinging athletic triple time, [and] the amazingly simple, yet original, use of major and minor thirds,” among numerous other characteristics. James Hiatt astutely summarizes some of the traits of the first and second periods, primarily in the symphonies and other multi-movement forms. Although there is occasional use of modal melodies and harmonic progression, for the most part a standard major-minor tonal system is used as the basis for melody and harmony. This harmonic language consists of triads and seventh chords, but chromaticism plays an increasingly prominent role throughout both of the early periods. Textures tend to be contrapuntal. In the symphonic writing of these two periods, Nielsen relies on the typical classical four-movement scheme (similar to \textit{allegro-andante moderato-minuet/trio-allegro or presto}), with each movement generally being centered around one

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.} 
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.} 
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.} 
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{48} Simpson, \textit{Symphonist}, 20.} 
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{49} Hiatt, 7–10.}
principal key and in a standard classical form. The relationships between the keys of the middle movements and the primary keys of the outer movements may vary, but both diatonic and chromatic third relationships are common. Among favored forms are ternary form and sonata form (with few examples of significant modifications), while rondo form is used occasionally. As is typical in classical style, first movements tend to be in sonata form, although often with the addition of a coda, while second movements are in three-part form. Third movements are frequently in a compound ternary form, while fourth movements usually return to sonata form.\textsuperscript{50} Introductions are used sparingly, while codas are used frequently.

Tonal relationships within movements vary, but certain key relationships are common, as represented by standard tonal motion in a typical sonata form movement. In Nielsen’s harmonic treatment of ternary forms, the structure is often paralleled by a principal key, leading to a closely-related key, and then returning to the principal key. Occasionally when the principal key is in major, there is simply a move to the parallel minor and then a return to the principal major key. However, when a three-part scherzo is in a minor key, there may be motion towards the major dominant, with a return to the principal minor key.\textsuperscript{51} Although Nielsen used many of these relatively traditional features in imaginative ways, generally, with the exception perhaps of harmonic treatment, the pre-1912 works are somewhat conservative.

However, by the end of the second period, distant key relationships become more common, with passages of unstable tonality occurring with increasing regularity. Throughout his career, Nielsen “developed a dynamic view of tonality.”\textsuperscript{52} Simpson perceives that “most of his

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Douglass M. Green, \textit{Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehard, and Winston, 1979), 145, quoted in Hiatt, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Hiatt, 7–10.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Simpson, \textit{Symphonist}, 21.
\end{itemize}
mature works treat a chosen key as a goal to be achieved or an order to be evolved, and his final establishment of the key has all the organic inevitability and apparently miraculous beauty with which the flower appears at a plant’s point of full growth.”53 It is this approach that, despite its basis in traditional formal structure, lends itself to creative and progressive treatment of tonality within a modern idiom.

In fact, several instrumental works from the first two periods exemplify progressive tonality by beginning in one key and ending in another, as Nielsen had demonstrated as early as the First Symphony. He also made use of motivic occurrence, recurrence, and development, so as to provide a cursory formal coherence, particularly as key relationships became less standardized.54 However, he tended to avoid using these motives in a cyclical manner, as many of his contemporaries were prone to do.

Through these characteristics in Nielsen’s first and second periods, he balanced neoclassical principles, such as design and form, with more progressive elements, most notably tonality and rhythm, to achieve a blended style. The mood and sound of much of this music is of optimism and joy. It is the music of a clearly emerging personality of an individualist artist. And it is perhaps the music of greater innocence than what is to follow. The tumult and struggle that follows in Europe, as well as his personal life, is evident in the works of the next period.

**Third Period: A New Aesthetic and Change in Style**

With his third period, 1912–22, Nielsen’s style makes a radical leap. Although he continued to refine his style through the end of his life, in essence, the third period marks the

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53 Ibid.

54 Hiatt, 7–10.
beginning of his mature works. Though viewed with rather opposing perspectives, many works of this period illustrate the wide palette of musical styles, elements, and timbres with which Nielsen composed. In these works, an increased tenacity and power is evident, as conveyed through Nielsen’s interest in the theme of negativity conquered through conflict by a perpetual life force. Many of these works feature an increased abstractness, with fractured continuity, as well as a new sense of organicism. Exotic harmonies and timbres, an expanded role of dissonance, and a more developed use of counterpoint also are prevalent. Nielsen became involved in more dramatic projects, which often provided ideas for his symphonic works, and his interest in writing for wind instruments progressed. His effort to revitalize the national song tradition also flourished. Nielsen’s renewed (and in some cases, new) interest in particular genres or timbres, as well as advancements in his compositional technique and the heightened emphasis on philosophical issues in his music, redirected the works of this period to a greater depth and seriousness than those of the previous periods.

Nielsen was never one to follow the trends of his time. For example, he never fully absorbed the experiences of Wagner or Debussy. In fact, Waterhouse claims that Nielsen “remained almost totally impervious to their influences and seems to have had little sympathy for their underlying spiritual attitudes,” even though Hiatt observes Wagnerian chromaticism as one of the characteristics of much of his early music. As Nielsen’s style matured, he became increasingly removed from standardized representations of traditional forms, and his greatest mastery is that of tonality. At a time in which so many other composers were straying from the

55 Waterhouse, 427.
56 Hiatt, 6–7.
57 Simpson, Symphonist, 20.
confines of tonality, Nielsen managed to discover new significance and profundity in it.\textsuperscript{58} It was this refusal to compose in a contemporaneous style that made Nielsen’s own style an amalgamation of the old and the new.

Several of the third period works encapsulate the tenets of Nielsen’s philosophical approach to music, including the first significant work of this period, the Second Violin Sonata of 1912, and the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies. Simpson explains that this period exhibits “a new quality of steely determination whose climax is the overwhelmingly powerful Fifth Symphony, one of the highest of all his attainments.”\textsuperscript{59} The Second Violin Sonata clearly initiates this period in its remarkably different style from the earlier works. Waterhouse depicts this sonata as “enigmatic” and “troubled”:

\begin{quote}
Here for the first time we find an unexpectedly “modern” sense of anxiety and disintegration, which causes tonality to waver and dissolve in a manner quite different from the confident, “expansive” succession of keys in the symphony, and which from time to time throws up jagged, dynamic eruptions and vicious angular phrases…. Nielsen now seems to be grappling with new forces that he still only half understands.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

However, as different is the work from its predecessors, so were its critics’ impressions. Lawson discusses this sonata as “ground-breaking,” with a tonal scheme that was “now totally liberated and a traditional form absent.”\textsuperscript{61} Regardless of interpretation of a specific work’s function within Nielsen’s total output, with this period it can be heard that his style was changing, perhaps paving the way for the tough style of his later works.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 21.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Waterhouse, 426.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Lawson, 136.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
From 1912–14, Nielsen focused on chamber music and song composition. His interest in folk song escalated, particularly upon the prompting of organist and church composer Thomas Laub to collaborate in reinvigorating Danish song. Nielsen had already contributed a small number of hymn melodies to collections of poetry by Bishop N. F. S. Grundtvig, founder of the Danish Folk High School Movement for adult education, among others.62 Ironically, Laub openly protested against Nielsen’s dissonant style, even though his own compositional style was modern by Romantic standards. However, they found common ground in their unified desire to eliminate German Romantic style from the Danish song tradition and to create a simple ballad style that would be accessible.63 Together their work resulted in the publication of several song collections which popularized Danish poetry and rejuvenated a national song tradition.

As the strains of war, a perceived imbalance of duties within his career, and marital strife began to take their toll, Nielsen entered a period of creative crisis. The Fourth and Fifth Symphonies are representative of this crisis and “a long and complex stylistic upheaval…which lasted for at least sixteen years.”64 These symphonies reflect a modern style, with less easily understood coherence and a dramatically more conflicting aesthetic.

With the Fourth Symphony, *Det uudslukkelige* (The inextinguishable), Nielsen entered his “organic” period. He had used the word “organic” to describe music, especially polyphonic writing and harmonization, as that which grows out of itself in the compositional process, rather than that which has been worked out initially through the expansion of sketches.65 He believed

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62 Ibid., 143.
63 Ibid., 144.
64 Waterhouse, 426.
65 Lawson, 150.
in the concept of an unending life force, both physical and spiritual, transformed by the struggle for survival through all obstacles. The Fourth Symphony is based on this concept, as Nielsen publicly admitted:

The title *Inextinguishable* suggests something which only music itself can express fully: the elementary will of life. Only music can give an abstract expression of life, in contrast to the other arts which must construct models and symbolize. Music solves the problem only by remaining itself, for music *is* life whereas the other arts only *depict* life. Life is unquenchable and inextinguishable; yesterday, today and tomorrow, life was, is, and will be in struggle, conflict, procreation and destruction; and everything returns. Music *is* life, and as such, inextinguishable.66

As the Third Symphony was unified by an overall tonal structure, the Fourth Symphony is continuous, with four distinct movements that are linked *attacca*. Although the work vehemently rejects any tangible programmatic correlation, the theme of war is undeniable. Accordingly, new sounds in orchestration and texture are explored, notably through the battle between two sets of timpani set in opposition at the front of the stage.

In the midst of his late symphonic composition, Nielsen composed in a variety of other genres, still in a blended style. Among these works are songs; piano works; the orchestral work *Pan og Syrinx* (Pan and Syrinx); large-scale dramatic works, including incidental music to Adam Oehlenschläger’s “Dramatic Fairy Tale” *Aladdin* and to Helge Rode’s play *Moderen* (The mother); the choral work *Fynsk foraar* (Springtime on Fyn); and the Wind Quintet (the latter two providing respites from the composition of the Fifth Symphony). Elements of exoticism appear in *Aladdin* and *Pan og Syrinx*, and a celebration of Danish heritage is evident in *Moderen*. The child-like perspective of nature and life on a Nordic island is captured in *Fynsk foraar*. Yet the culmination of Nielsen’s oeuvre to this point is encapsulated in the Fifth Symphony.

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66 Nielsen, quoted in ibid., 153.
Regarded as his symphonic masterpiece, the Fifth Symphony exhibits originality and a scope not before examined by Nielsen. The exploration, or even exploitation, of a philosophical basis to composition in the Fourth Symphony, primarily the idea of struggle, also pervades the Fifth. Lawson even suggests a social-political context for the work: not unlike the end of the Great War that, despite its conclusion, failed to destroy all evil, what had not been fully pursued in the Fourth Symphony, namely the true triumph of good over evil, had to be resolved in the Fifth. The work is in two movements, the first of which presents the conflict itself, while the second provides seemingly impossible rebirth, a “rise out of the ashes” and “ruins left by the conflict” to “a great fount of regenerative energy.” As partially represented by a side drum set against the orchestra, the work achieves various levels of triumph through struggle, also indicated by extreme formal and tonal excursions. With this work and the Wind Quintet, Nielsen’s third period concludes.

**Fourth Period: The Final Years**

The fourth and final period of 1923–31 is one in which Nielsen “finds him[self] exploring new lands.” At the end of his life, he was disappointed with the state of music, and as his health continued to decline, he came to accept his own mortality. His music of this last period is sometimes serious, sometimes relaxed, yet always exploratory, as if he wrestled with his own outlook, but finally came to terms with it. These works feature an advanced tonal language, with much dissonance, and stray from standardized forms. In contrast, this period also signifies a

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67 Lawson, 173.


69 Ibid., 22.
return to what Nielsen called “pure sources,” with further strengthening of his roots through an outpouring of new Danish folksongs. In addition to folksongs, this period produced the Sixth Symphony, *Sinfonia semplice*; the flute and clarinet concertos; motets; and his final work, *Commotio* for organ, modeled on Bach’s toccata style. In addition to seeking a purity and clarity in these works, Nielsen strove to find a “more intimate means of expression” through chamber music-like orchestration within a large genre, such as the symphony, a concept which he had begun to explore in *Fynsk Foraar* and the Wind Quintet. To this same end, he was increasingly concerned with transparency in his music and sought to create clarity through sparse textures.

As its subtitle implies, the Sixth Symphony was intended to be of a simpler, purer, more idyllic nature than his previous symphonies. However, the result is actually something quite different, as it presents a seriousness not unexpected following the preceding symphony. This work is the least optimistic of Nielsen’s works, and Simpson suggests it to be somewhat autobiographical. This explanation is plausible, considering Nielsen’s worsening illness, the realization of his impending fatality, the frustration and disillusionment at his lack of stature within the international music community, and the disappointment with the condition of modern music.

The Sixth Symphony is the most complex and enigmatic of his major works, and although it still incorporates a few retrospective elements, it encapsulates progressive elements to

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72 Ibid., 115.

an extent far beyond his previous work. On the one hand, this work revisits the characterization of the individual instruments developed in the Wind Quintet, as Nielsen described that “each instrument is like a person who sleeps, whom I have to wake to life….I think through the instruments themselves, almost as if I had crept inside them.”\footnote{Nielsen, interview by Andreas Vinding, \textit{Politiken}, December 1925, quoted in Simpson, \textit{Symphonist}, 112.} However, elements of hindsight nearly stop there. Whereas the previous symphonies utilized a specific tonality as a goal to be achieved, the Sixth continuously avoids tonality, as Simpson declares this work to exhibit a reversal of Nielsen’s priorities.\footnote{Simpson, \textit{Symphonist}, 115.} Additionally, its thematic material is regularly introduced, only to be interrupted, and quotations from Nielsen’s and others’ music are deeply embedded, then dismissed.\footnote{Lawson, 190.} The structure is disjointed, rhythms are “quirky,” and the work is generally difficult to comprehend and analyze, characteristics that are all a great distance from the work’s intended simplicity.\footnote{Ibid.} Perhaps most curious of all is that the Sixth is allegedly Nielsen’s only symphony which can be considered absolute music, without a program or association with an extramusical idea. However, the allusion to the work’s autobiographical origins, as well as its parodical commentary on modern music and society (through quotations of other music and references to his rivals’ style of composition), suggest the work to have a fundamental disconnection from absolute music.

Many regarded the Sixth Symphony as a temporary aberration, especially in light of some of the works that followed. In the last years of his life, Nielsen endured scrutiny by his critics, while at the same time he carefully assessed the direction of modern music. He analyzed many
of the new compositional techniques, processes, and sonorities in which others were working, yet only absorbed elements of those to which he related on some level. These elements were explored in various works of this period, including the Flute Concerto, the *Three Piano Pieces* of 1927, and the Clarinet Concerto of 1928. This last work in particular exhibits a new experimentalism for Nielsen in its rawness, intensity, and technical prowess required of the performer, all the while within a modified classical genre.

The final three years of Nielsen’s life marked in his output a return to ancient polyphony with a modern bent. He resumed studies of Palestrina and the Dutch masters to produce, among others, *Three Motets* for unaccompanied choir, Op. 55, and then *Commotio* for organ, Op. 58, a work which many regard as a masterful culmination of his prolific career and his greatest achievement.78 Nielsen’s career ended in 1931, having contributed many great works to the twentieth-century repertoire that successfully merge elements of varying styles, influences, and philosophies.

Without having examined Nielsen’s style development from the earliest pieces, it would be difficult to draw any conclusions about the style of the late works, those from the third and fourth periods. It is certain, however, that the style of a composer with so many diverse interests would not follow a continuous, unobstructed path. In the words of biographer Johannes Fabricius, Nielsen’s music “unites a deep sense of tradition with an unlimited musical imagination….Nielsen is always the man in the middle—between conservatism and expressionism, nationalism and cosmopolitism, romanticism and modernism.”79 An assessment

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79 Johannes Fabricius, 69.
of this breadth can only attempt to capture the multitude of dimensions that is contained in the
music of Carl Nielsen.
CHAPTER 3

INCIDENTAL PIECES FROM *ALADDIN, OP. 34, AND MODEREN, OP. 41, THAT FEATURE THE FLUTE*

By the late 1910s, Carl Nielsen had established himself as a respected figure in Danish artistic and cultural life and was seeking further recognition across Europe. His works that date from the late teens and early twenties (the last few years of his third style period) include incidental music for two dramatic works: Adam Oehlenschläger’s “Dramatic Fairy Tale” *Aladdin, Eller den Forunderlige Lampe* (Aladdin, or the wonderful lamp), Op. 34 (1918–19), and Helge Rode’s play *Moderen* (The mother), Op. 41 (1920). Simpson and other Nielsen scholars consider both of these works to be two of his most important contributions to incidental music for the stage.\(^1\) Within these works are four short incidental pieces for flute: one for solo flute from *Aladdin* and three pieces from *Moderen*. These works collectively represent an important phase in Nielsen’s style development, particularly in demonstrating his interest in writing for the stage. However, it is the miniature pieces for flute within these larger works that will be studied here in detail.

By the time of *Aladdin*’s composition, Nielsen had already composed four symphonies and numerous other works in a range of genres, through which he had illustrated his own blend of varying style traits. Not unexpectedly, the dramatic works exhibit many of the characteristics of his third style period, such as harmonic progressivism, modal ambiguity, and exoticism. However, the incidental pieces that feature the flute are anomalous to Nielsen’s third period; even though there are instances of modal mixture, and the melodic content is characteristically

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Nielsen, they primarily display traditional, rather than progressive, elements. Even so, these small pieces are reminiscent of an earlier period, but demonstrate the simplicity and charm shown in other genres of the third period, such as in his song collections, including *Salmer og aandelige Sange* (Hymns and sacred psalms) of 1912–16.

**Exploring the Exotic: *Aladdin, Op. 34***

The music for *Aladdin, Op. 34,* is Nielsen’s largest work, aside from his two operas. His friend Johannes Nielsen, then artistic director of the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, invited him to compose the incidental music to Adam Oehlenschläger’s fairy tale. Nielsen began sketches in 1917, although most of the music was composed over a seven-month period from July 1918 to January 1919.2 Considered one of Denmark’s leading dramatists in Nielsen’s time, Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850) had based his *Aladdin* on *The Arabian Nights,* a collection of legendary folk tales that originated from the tenth century.3

Nielsen regularly immersed himself in a subject in order to capture the appropriate flavor of the culture or material he was aiming to present, especially in the composition of his dramatic and vocal works. For example, his “preparation frequently involved the close study of related cultural-historical contexts, as…in his engagement with exotic legends of the Far East as the basis for *Aladdin.*”4 As Nielsen was determined to compose music that exoticized the Orient, the music seems to deny any trace of its roots in a Danish composer.5 Without a doubt, Nielsen’s

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2 Fanning, ed., preface to *Aladdin,* xi.

3 Ibid., xii.


5 Lawson, 164.
visit to Constantinople in 1903, where he observed dancing dervishes and other Asian cultural activities, also enabled him to draw upon the culture he was seeking to emulate in *Aladdin*.\(^6\)

The first production of *Aladdin* was an exorbitantly expensive failure and an embarrassment to Nielsen. In fact, after the première of Part I (the length of the work dictated a première in two parts on two different evenings\(^7\)), Nielsen issued the following statement:

> In previous information given about the performance of *Aladdin*, it has been stated that I composed the music. On account of the placing and restrictions of the orchestra, and because of the manner in which the production has generally used my compositions, I must disclaim any responsibility for the musical side of *Aladdin*. As a result I have written to the Theatre Royal…indicating that I did not want my name displayed upon the programme or posters…and that only on this condition would I refrain from withdrawing my music.\(^8\)

Much of Nielsen’s frustration stemmed from the director’s staging that precluded the orchestra’s placement in the pit, forcing the musicians to play behind the scenes; therefore, music was kept at a distance. Nielsen’s disappointment in the way his music had been treated caused strained relations, and ultimately, irreconcilable differences between the composer and the theater, thus ending their collaboration. However, Nielsen frequently conducted orchestral extracts from the score, compiled and published separately as the *Aladdin Suite*, much to the acclaim of audiences and critics alike. With this success, Nielsen’s followers “believed that his music for *Aladdin* could eventually do the same for his reputation as *Peer Gynt* had done for Grieg.”\(^9\)

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\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Because the sets were difficult to assemble, Part I ran for a week, beginning on 15 February 1919, before the stage was reset for a week’s run of Part II, beginning on 22 February 1919. (Fanning, ed., preface to *Aladdin*, xvii.)

\(^8\) Nielsen, February 1919, quoted in Lawson, 165.

The eighty-to-ninety minutes of music encompass some of Nielsen’s most imaginative writing.\textsuperscript{10} The work in its entirety consists of five acts with thirty separate numbers. Many of these are orchestral dances and processions, in the style of a divertissement. At the time of Aladdin’s composition, Nielsen’s musical style was characterized by “an outspoken talent for dramatic accent and psychological expression, often combined unmistakably in what may be called ‘musical gesture.’”\textsuperscript{11} The subject matter of Aladdin required Nielsen to invent an exotic musical language that expressed violence, imprisonment, and portrayals of good and evil, themes that later became relevant in the abstract contexts of his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, as well as the flute and clarinet concertos.

Aladdin is progressive in many ways, not the least of which is in the occurrence of the market scene, during which four orchestras play simultaneously, each in its own tempo, character, rhythm, and tonality.\textsuperscript{12} Left to its aleatoric devices, the utilization of polytonality and indeterminacy in this scene echoes similar instances in the music of Igor Stravinsky and especially Charles Ives, with his reminiscence of opposing marching bands converging in a town square.\textsuperscript{13} The logistics of performing this scene, “En skøn plads i Ispahan” (A beautiful square in Isfahan), are complicated, but Nielsen supplied extensive instructions in the score.

\textsuperscript{10} Fanning, ed., preface to Aladdin; and idem, Grove online, www.grovemusic.com/data/articles/music/1/199/19930.xml?section=music.19930.11.

\textsuperscript{11} Torben Schousboe, liner notes to Nielsens: Aladdin, Chandos CHAN 9135, 1993, compact disc.


\textsuperscript{13} There are numerous examples throughout Ives’s work that utilize this technique, such as the band piece Jerusalem, The Golden and the orchestral The Fourth of July.
The score for *Aladdin* is generally characterized by a slightly exotic flavor, with “a kind of melodic primitiveness.”\(^{14}\) The melodies frequently move within a narrow range, often no larger than a fourth or fifth, with repetitive figures and small intervals circling around a third or fourth.\(^{15}\) The overall tonal scheme tends to revolve around A minor/major as the primary key area. Even though it was composed as incidental music for a spoken stage drama, and the musical numbers are interspersed within the text, this tonal focus of each number on A provides unity and coherence. As is increasingly the case in Nielsen’s late works, a blend of styles is apparent, merging traditional features, such as melodic conservatism, with a new, exploratory approach, such as harmonic progressivism.

Although the score of *Aladdin* as a whole demonstrates many progressive compositional traits, the flute solo in Act I is simplistic. The solo, listed as “No. 2 (Flauto Solo)” in the list of musical numbers, is the second number in the work, occurring between “No. 1, Prolog (Ringens Aand) [Prologue (Genie of the Ring)]” and “No. 3, Ligbærernes Marsch (March of the pallbearers).”\(^{16}\) The synopsis indicates that the flute solo is played at the opening of Act I, a scene set in “Haandværkeryden, Mustaphas Værksted (Craftsman’s Alley, Mustapha’s workshop)”: \(^{17}\)

Aladdin’s aging parents, Mustapha and Morgiane, are sitting in their poor tailor’s workshop, lamenting the troubles of life and the idleness of their Aladdin. On Aladdin’s arrival Mustapha becomes angry. During their squabble some material in the workshop catches fire, and Mustapha dies in the flames.\(^{18}\)

\(^{14}\) Schousboe, liner notes, 5.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Fanning, ed., *Aladdin*, xxx.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., xxxii.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
The calm nature of the flute solo would only be appropriate to reflect the events in the beginning of the scene. There are no scene directions indicated before or after the flute solo (No. 2), only four staves of music for flute (Example 1).


The musical features of the solo are unexpectedly straightforward, considering the less conventional treatment of many of the orchestral numbers. Marked *Allegretto*, the solo is in common time and is sixteen measures in length. The only variances in tempo are a *poco rallentando* indicated halfway through the solo, and a *rallentando* at the final cadence. The total range of this selection is a relatively narrow twelfth (from d' to a').\(^{19}\) In Dorian mode, the melody is a bit repetitive, with balanced two-measure phrases and an antecedent-consequent structure. These melodic characteristics exhibit a nod to earlier forms and styles, such as medieval modality and the periodicity of the Classical style. The rhythmic values are simple and conservative, ranging from half notes to sixteenth-note triplets, with fermatas indicated at the end of each phrase. With the exception of a *diminuendo* in the final measure of the solo, the piece is

\(^{19}\) In this study, octave designation of pitch is as follows: middle C is indicated as c', the octave above middle C as c'' and so on, the octave below middle C as c, two octaves below as C, three octaves below as C\(_1\), and so on.
absent of dynamics, despite the challenges in projecting this lower register of the flute from a pit, offstage, or behind scenery, as it was performed in the première. The style elements of this solo are entirely conservative; what this simplicity does suggest, however, is the folk-like nature of many of Nielsen’s songs.

Based on his characterization of the flute as “pastoral” and “Arcadian,” Nielsen chose to use the flute in this musical section of *Aladdin* to convey the alleged repose and introspectiveness of the beginning of the scene. Improvisatory in nature, the solo conveys a mood that is somber, yet lyrical. Particularly effective is the use of a gentle solo instrument, which precedes with vivid contrast the chaos that later ensues in the drama. The use of a solo instrument, particularly the flute, in the midst of this large dramatic work seems unusual, which is why perhaps the piece is so striking.

This episode in *Aladdin* is not the first in which Nielsen featured the unaccompanied flute in a larger work. Throughout the opera *Maskarade* of 1904–6, the flute was used in extended cadenza passages to depict Venus, the goddess of love. Although it has been well documented that Nielsen avoided over-influence by those of his contemporaries, it is perhaps not coincidental that Nielsen chose the same subject as Debussy’s 1913 piece for solo flute, *Syrinx*, for his own *Pan og Syrinx: Naturscene for Orkester* (Pan and Syrinx: A nature scene for orchestra) of 1917–18, only one year before *Aladdin*. However, Simpson minimizes the connection: “One might expect, perhaps, to find some affinity in this music with Debussy, but there is little of French so-called ‘impressionism’ in it. The atmosphere that Nielsen creates for the small drama is warm and sunlit….” In a note in *Pan og Syrinx*’s score, Nielsen describes the setting’s appropriateness for his characterization of the flute:

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*Simpson, Symphonist, 148.*
The goat-footed sylvan deity Pan happens to spy the nymph Syrinx among the satyrs and dryads in the hilly Arcadian forests; he persecutes her with his dances and bleating homage. She, terrified by this fierce wooer, flees to the edge of a forest lake. From here there is no escape left for her, and the gods, taking pity on her, transform her into a reed.\footnote{Nielsen, quoted in ibid. This program note, however, is not included in the 1926 Wilhelm Hansen published edition of \textit{Pan og Syrinx}.}

The myth naturally lends itself to utilizing the flute; however, given Nielsen’s creative use of timbre, he could have portrayed the setting with another instrument. Despite Simpson’s denial of any similarity to Debussy, the flute seemed to be the instrument of choice for the particular atmosphere Nielsen sought to create.

\textit{Pan og Syrinx}, “the best of all Nielsen’s lesser symphonic works,”\footnote{Simpson, \textit{Symphonist}, 147.} explores some of the same exoticism as is found in the whole of \textit{Aladdin}. Although \textit{Aladdin} is obviously directed in large part by Oehlenschläger’s text, Nielsen had composed several works that suggested programmatic elements; in this regard, drawing a parallel to the atmospheric nature of impressionism may not be entirely inappropriate. Even in his association with the greatest Danish dramatist of the time, Nielsen did not meld music and drama; whereas the play has not remained in the standard dramatic repertory, Nielsen’s music continues to resonate.\footnote{Balzer, “Dramatic,” 101.}

Despite the independence in style of the flute incidental pieces, the large dramatic works from which they are extracted share some stylistic elements with other works of the late-teens. These include the extensive use of percussion, as exemplified in the dueling timpani in the Fourth Symphony, modalism and other features of orientalism, greater attention to sonority in general, and perhaps above all, melody as a characteristic of utmost importance. In addition, there are frequent and extensive solo passages for winds, and a sparse orchestral texture that
alludes more to chamber music than to a full orchestral piece, a texture which will again be heard in the Flute Concerto. Nielsen’s exploration in both timbre and harmony in *Pan og Syrinx* and *Aladdin* set the stage for more abstract use in the Fifth Symphony. Despite influences from the Fourth Symphony, the music of the first part of the Fifth Symphony demonstrates features that had been explored in works like *Pan og Syrinx* and *Aladdin*, particularly the extensive use of percussion, in which the side drum is featured with its “inciting rhythmic ostinato.” Indeed, Nielsen always found a way to make much of the material progressive and new within an accessible context.

**A Patriotic Effort: Moderen, Op. 41**

In contrast to the orientalism of *Aladdin*, Nielsen’s incidental music to *Moderen* (The mother), Op. 41, is quintessentially Danish. For a commission by the Royal Theatre, one that he accepted for patriotic reasons, Nielsen composed incidental music to Helge Rode’s romantic fairy-tale play in the spring of 1920 while on a tour through Spain. *Moderen* (The mother[land]) was to commemorate an event in Danish history, when, following World War I, a majority of North Schlesvig (now Southern Jutland) citizens voted to reunite with Denmark after fifty-six years under German rule. The play was a modern allegory about the return of a kidnapped child. The original work included at least thirteen musical numbers. Some of the music, most of which is nationalistic in flavor and based on Danish folk music, has outlived the


26 Fog and Schousboe, 32. *Moderen* is listed as catalog number 94.
dated play. However, much of the music to *Moderen* is essentially unknown and consequently has received little scholarship.

The work premiered on 30 January 1921 to varied reactions. In a review Valdemar Rørdam predicted:

> Not all art can or should be enduring….Within the past half century we have seen plenty of skilfully [sic] written plays which, when they first appeared, delighted the public, but which have long since been forgotten….But…each will leave behind a song, a dance or a hymn—that kernel of immortality that gave their fleeting period of blooming freshness and grace for a half or a whole century.

Rørdam’s forecast was correct, as not only does *Moderen* contain some of Nielsen’s most representative songs, but several of the songs have become part of the Danish song tradition.

Among the best-known songs from *Moderen* are the patriotic “Saa bitter var mit hjerte” (So bitter was my heart) and the charming “Min Pige er saa lys som Rav” (My girl is as fair as amber). The music of *Moderen* expresses the idea that “the mist which until now has enveloped lost land is now clearing, enabling people from Denmark to see its magnificence clearly.” It captures the essence of “the open fields and fresh air, and the simple strength of the peasantry.” Understandably, Nielsen’s love for country must have motivated his creative efforts in *Moderen*.

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28 Valdemar Rørdam, *Teatret* (The theatre) magazine, quoted in Ketting, liner notes.


31 Eskildsen, 68.

There are three solo and chamber pieces for flute from the incidental music to *Moderen*, which, together with the flute solo from *Aladdin*, are relatively independent of Nielsen’s diversified style of the third period in their simplicity. Arguably the most well known instrumental piece to the Danish people is “Taagen letter” (The fog is lifting), scored for flute and harp or piano and the first number in *Moderen*. The other two pieces are “Børnene spiller” (The children are playing) for solo flute and “Tro og håb spiller” (Faith and hope are playing) for flute and viola. These three pieces are charming trifles that, despite their brevity and simplicity, illustrate characteristics that are quintessential Nielsen.

“Taagen letter” begins the allegory with several elements of the pastorale, such as instrumentation, rhythm, and texture, to create an idyllic mood. A musical pastorale by definition evokes life in the countryside, including the use of drone basses, a slow 6/8 meter, and the use of the flute. Within *Moderen*, the first scene of the fairy tale finds a king who has come to see the lost country that lies hidden in the fog, and it is at this moment when the sounds of “Taagen letter” are played by the flute and harp or piano. Nielsen once said, “I don’t care for refinements….A harp in an orchestra is like a hair in a soup.” However, not only did he use the harp paired with the flute in “Taagen letter,” but he had also used it in *Saul og David*, as David plays the harp. Despite Nielsen’s negative remarks about the harp, his choice to pair it with the flute underscores his characterization of the flute, as the piece endears the listener with its gentle

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33 This order is listed in the Fog and Schousboe catalog (FS94) under the first edition.
34 These two pieces are not included as musical numbers within the Fog and Schousboe entry, but are listed as separately published pieces. (Fog and Schousboe, 33.)
nature and lyrical lilt. If performed with a piano, as Nielsen also suggested, the character of the piece may still be preserved, albeit with a slightly different timbre.

Rhythm and texture also support the calm mood of the piece and its allusion to a pastorale. In 6/8 meter and marked *Andantino quasi allegretto*, the piece primarily focuses on eighth- and sixteenth-note figures, with an occasional longer note value. With the rather transparent texture and timbre of the flute and harp or piano, the tranquil mood is evident.

The relatively unconventional harmonic motion in this piece, as well as the melodic patterning, is indicative of Nielsen’s third style period. In ternary form, the piece’s brief length of thirty-four measures is compensated by its melodic and harmonic interest. Centered on C, the broken arpeggios in the harp/piano part oscillate between major and minor for the first five measures, revealing Nielsen’s penchant for modal mixture (Example 2).

![Example 2: Nielsen, “Taagen letter,” mm. 1–5](image)

The flute contributes to the ambiguity by beginning on and emphasizing the fifth scale degree. In this piece, Nielsen made use of chromaticism to a much greater extent than he did in the solo
from *Aladdin*. After brief forays through F major/minor in measures 5–7, and harmonic chromaticism in measures 8–13, the key area of C briefly returns in measure 14 (Example 3).

Several other key areas are explored, eventually to return to C with the recurrence of the A section in measure 27. There also seems to be an emphasis on the plagal relationship between C and F, as the piece frequently alternates between the two key areas, even in the concluding measures of the work (Example 4).
Nielsen is able to achieve coherence and unity throughout these unusual harmonic shifts through sustained pedal points in the harp/piano part, similar to the drone bass of a pastorale.

Other melodic features, such as direction and patterning, are representative of Nielsen’s late style. The descent from scale degree 5 to scale degree 1 occurs with frequency, as in the flute part, measures 3–5 (Example 5).

This is utilized to a more significant degree in some of Nielsen’s symphonic works, particularly the Fourth Symphony, and elsewhere in *Moderen*. The range of the piece is narrow, that of a twelfth (a-flat' to e-flat'''), and often features repetitive and oscillating half-step groupings, such as in measures 16–17 in the flute part (Example 6).
Example 6: Nielsen, “Taagen letter,” mm. 16–17 (flute part only)

In the Flute Concerto, this feature is also utilized. Despite the simplicity and concision of “Taagen letter,” it is more representative of Nielsen’s late style (that of the third and fourth periods) in its harmonic and melodic devices than the other incidental pieces for flute.

Scored for unaccompanied flute, “Børnene spiller” (The children are playing) demonstrates a similar simplicity and effectively characterizes a youthful and capricious mood. Marked Allegretto, the piece is in 2/4 meter and forty-one measures in length, although the score indicates that the piece may be repeated from the end of the penultimate measure (measure 40). The texture is simple because of its scoring for flute alone, although there is constant rhythmic activity. In G major, the piece is entirely diatonic, with a notable exception in measure 21 (Example 7).

Example 7: Nielsen, “Børnene spiller,” mm. 19–24

This F-natural occurs at a poignant moment in the work, alluding to a cadence in C major; however, the cadence never occurs, and the piece continues to a half cadence in G at measure 24.
Although there is a brief suggestion of a modulation to E minor (the submediant) in measures 8–10 (Example 8), the implied harmony conveys a straightforwardness, supporting the incidental pieces’ general nonconformity to Nielsen’s full-scale late style.

Example 8: Nielsen, “Børnene spiller,” mm. 8–10

Other stylistic features include simple rhythms, consisting of sixteenth and eighth notes, with the occasional triplet, as well as a variety of articulation. Most of the phrases, however, are slurred, conveying a gentleness in spirit. The few staccato markings occur after the unexpected F-natural and denote a slight stylistic and melodic variation. Through the conservative treatment of harmony, rhythm, and articulation, a calm mood and retrospective style is conveyed.

“Børnene spiller” represents several features of Nielsen’s late melodic style. The melodic range is again that of a twelfth (g’ to d’”), such as it is in “Taagen letter,” as well as in the solo from Aladdin. And similar to “Taagen letter,” the 5–1 scale degree descent occurs and recurs throughout the piece, as in measures 8–10 shown above (Example 8) and in measures 1–3 (Example 9).
This piece also features the repeated, oscillating motive, but in this instance, the motive alternates between thirds. Although the melody clearly circles around G major, Nielsen utilized tonic avoidance, as G is only heard within a quick succession of other diatonic notes, and never as an arrival point. Even the final cadence is imperfect, as the unaccompanied flute ends on a B, the third scale degree. Despite the lack of adventurousness in the harmony and rhythm, hints of melodic traits characteristic of Nielsen’s third and fourth style periods are evident in “Børnene spiller.”

“Tro og håb spiller” (Faith and hope are playing) depicts interplay between Hope, as portrayed by the flute, and Faith, as portrayed by the viola. In the fairy tale both Faith and Hope are children who have been sent with a young boy on his adventures. Marked Allegro marciale and in common time, the piece exudes a bright, happy, and playful spirit. It is a mere twenty-three measures in length, with an indication that the piece may be repeated save the final fermata the first time. The flute part contains the primary melodic material, while the viola part provides accompaniment. The melodic range is that of less than two octaves in the flute part (g’ to f"), and two octaves in the viola part (e-flat' to e-flat'''), a slightly wider range than that of the two other pieces from Moderen. The piece is completely diatonic in E-flat major, with the slight exception of two chromatic notes in the viola part in measure 7, which briefly tonicize the relative minor (C minor) in the melodic mode (with raised sixth and seventh scale degrees) (Example 10).
Rhythmic values range from half notes to sixteenth notes, with grace notes used to accentuate melodic notes in the theme. Articulation is assorted, with staccato indicating a detached style in the thematic material, many slurs, and a few instances of tenuto marks and accents. In comparison with “Taagen letter,” “Tro og håb spiller” and “Børnene spiller” represent less formalized structures, with simple rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic contents.

The three incidental flute pieces from *Moderen* and the flute piece from *Aladdin* are primarily independent of Nielsen’s third and fourth period late style of the symphonies and other large-scale works. However, the pieces from *Moderen* do exemplify a few characteristics typical of Nielsen’s late style, such as tonal and modal ambiguity, as well as melodic direction and patterning, albeit in some of these traits’ purest, most basic forms. Because Nielsen’s style consists of an amalgam of many different influences, techniques, and styles, it is understandable that the traits of the incidental pieces, especially in relation to their larger works, are anomalous to his late style. Through the lyricism and peaceful atmosphere of these pieces, Nielsen’s folk influence is evident, and similar examples can be found in his song composition.
As Nielsen’s song composition continued prolifically throughout much of his life, it is this song material that perhaps correlates most directly to the incidental pieces for flute. His commitment to the strophic song is seen in the songs for Danish schools and Folk High Schools. In fact, from this period with few exceptions, Nielsen wrote only strophic songs. He also used the form extensively in his larger dramatic works, including both *Aladdin* and *Moderen*. This period was a time when “Nielsen’s productivity of songs was at its height.” Nielsen’s collaboration with Thomas Laub on Danish songs continued for many years. As indicated in his letters, especially in 1920–21, he was continuously occupied with writing Danish songs, encouraged by his association with the Danish Folk High School. After three or four of his song collections had been published, Nielsen had little interest in disseminating his songs through traditional means, opting instead to personally invite singers to perform them; hence, many of his songs remain unpublished today. His song output is as varied as his instrumental works, with a wide range of poetic themes, as well as musical style. Nils Schiørring claims that “it is possible to follow the line which runs through Nielsen’s preoccupation with song as a genre, but he did not consciously thread that line through his work, and in fact it is not clearly perceptible until late in his career as a composer.”

Within *Modern* and *Aladdin*, consideration must be given to Nielsen’s choice of instrumentation in relation to the pieces which feature the flute. In many of his earlier works,

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38 Ibid., 127.

39 Sørensen, 112.

40 Ibid.

41 Nils Schiørring, 120.
such as the Third Symphony, Nielsen did not attempt to make his work accessible through “any studied elegance in the instrumentation.”\textsuperscript{42} Nielsen often expressed impatience when someone asked about his instrumentation. He replied to a friend who cautiously criticized his instrumentation, “You know nothing about that—my instrumentation covers the content of my music completely.”\textsuperscript{43} Thorvald Nielsen agrees with Knud Jeppesen’s observation that “Nielsen’s instrumentation in particular has an aura of its own which is quite in harmony with the essence of the music—the purely spiritual content.”\textsuperscript{44} Nielsen’s use of the flute in these incidental pieces supports this observation: each of these pieces conveys an element of the spirit of its respective drama.

Several characteristics represented in the incidental pieces from \textit{Aladdin} and \textit{Moderen} that feature the flute, such as simplified structure, rhythm, and tonality, suggest a contrast to the progressivism in some of Nielsen’s other works of the third period. Despite the presence of a few elements typical of Nielsen’s more substantive works of this period, such as harmonic ambiguity and melodic structure, these pieces are atypical of his late style. These pieces’ simplicity and relative tenderness suggest traits of Nielsen’s late song style, and, as effectively conveyed through instrumentation, embody the roots of his rural childhood. It is the combination of these characteristics, both of his traditional heritage and of his modernist proclivity, which will be exploited in the Wind Quintet and the Flute Concerto.

\textsuperscript{42} Thorvald Nielsen, 9.

\textsuperscript{43} Carl Nielsen, quoted in Thorvald Nielsen, 9–10.

\textsuperscript{44} Knud Jeppesen, in \textit{Jyllandsposten}, quoted in Thorvald Nielsen, 10.
CHAPTER 4
WIND QUINTET, OP. 43

A New Genre for Nielsen

While working on his Fifth Symphony in 1922, Carl Nielsen diverted his attention to compose the Wind Quintet, Op. 43. Considering his increasing interest in wind instruments, it is not surprising that his exploration into a new genre would be that of the woodwind quintet. As the tension of composing the Fifth Symphony mounted, the Quintet was a relaxing and much needed respite for Nielsen. In stark contrast to the intensity and conflict of the Fifth Symphony, the Quintet as a whole offers an optimism and lightheartedness that suggest the spirit of an earlier period. There are, however, moments of darkness in the Quintet that confirm its place as a late work. Simpson goes so far as to label the work “a deeply sympathetic confirmation of the humanism he fought to establish in the Fifth Symphony.”

Nielsen’s longtime interest in the human psyche continued to develop in this period. Influenced by humanity’s wartime hardship, the Fifth Symphony reveals “the internal energies of the human creature, generating creative urges as well as the seeds of war.”

Yet while his symphonic voice pleaded for understanding and resolution in the midst of conflict, Nielsen released his alter ego not only through the Quintet, but also through the utter simplicity and joy of the choral work *Fynsk foraar* (Springtime on Fyn), Op. 42, as well as various songs. The levity in the Quintet and these other works is balanced by an exploration into progressive compositional elements that characterize Nielsen’s late style. As Nielsen’s contemporary Povl

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Hamburger summarized, the Quintet is “chiefly diverting, a charming piece of music, full of freshness and good humour, which only in the prelude to the variations gives way to demoniacal ravings which seem almost like a reflection of the immediately preceding Fifth Symphony.” A lighter sentiment is expressed by Simpson, describing the Quintet as capturing “true Mozartian grace and clarity; there is also an open-hearted humour that suggests Haydn. Yet it is in [Nielsen’s] maturest style, completely Danish in feeling, full of subtle originality.” This work effectively demonstrates the dichotomy of Nielsen’s late style, merging old with new, conflict with resignation, and frustration with hopefulness.

Prior to the Quintet, Nielsen had dabbled in other genres of composition for wind instruments. His interest in winds (both brass and woodwinds) was influenced by his early musical experience in the military band in Odense. In addition to the small chamber pieces for flute and harp or piano, and flute and viola from *Moderen*, as well as pieces for oboe and piano, and horn and piano, he made substantial use of wind instruments in his symphonies. However, aside from a few pieces of juvenilia, his *Serenata in vano* (Serenade in vain) of 1914 was the first chamber piece in which multiple winds were featured. Scored for clarinet in B-flat, bassoon, horn, violoncello, and double bass, the work demonstrates some of Nielsen’s early experimentation with wind instruments in the transparent texture of a chamber work. This piece

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5 These pieces are *Fantasistykke for Klarinet i B og Piano* (Fantasy piece for clarinet in b-flat and piano), FS 3h, ca. 1881; *Fantasistykker for Obo og Piano* (Fantasy pieces for oboe and piano), Op. 2, FS 8, 1889; and *Canto Serioso for Piano og Corno i F* (Canto serioso for piano and horn in F), FS 132, 1913/ca. 1928.

6 The earliest pieces consisted of various early brass trios and quartets, c. 1879–83, now lost. *Serenata in vano*, FS 68.
foreshadowed an important contribution to wind literature by Nielsen, which was realized in the Quintet.

The woodwind quintet as a genre combines five instruments of disparity in an effort to blend them into a unified ensemble. There are distinctive challenges in this genre because, unlike the string quartet, these wind instruments “are individually so characteristic that they in a way crave a distinct individual consideration.”

Yet Nielsen used this alleged disadvantage to his benefit, as the characterization of each instrument is a salient feature of the Wind Quintet.

Nielsen not only developed his compositional skill through chamber music writing, but also somewhat altered his aesthetic, as his later output demonstrates a penchant toward composing for smaller genres. In a discussion of Nielsen’s late works, Maegaard comments:

In the Prelude and Eleven Variations [of the Quintet’s final movement], it is clearly shown that Carl Nielsen, on full purpose, took aim to characterize the instruments through the music….The consequence was Nielsen’s new partiality for the chamber music ensemble, opposite his earlier classical-romantic inspired symphonic ideal, which had clouded his earlier periods of chamber music.

Although the Sixth Symphony and two wind concertos were yet to come, the remainder of Nielsen’s compositional career after the Wind Quintet was devoted to exploring intimate means of expression through smaller forms.

Despite having had his first serious attack of angina in the spring of 1922 while composing the Fifth Symphony, Nielsen demonstrated significant creative forces at work in his output of this period. Regarding the Quintet, Thorvald Nielsen observes, “Here is no trace of flagging inspiration. This holds true of everything that followed until he laid down his pen for

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8 Ibid.
good.” The Quintet was premiered privately in Gothenburg, Sweden, on 30 April 1922, followed by the public première in October at the club Ny Musik in Copenhagen. Even at the première, the work was received with critical acclaim and has since become one of the most significant and popular works in the genre.

The impetus behind the Quintet is indicative of Nielsen’s priorities in the work. Upon hearing members of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet rehearsing Mozart’s Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat major, K. 297b, through the telephone on a call to pianist Christian Christiansen, Nielsen was reportedly fascinated by the sound of the ensemble. He immediately joined the rehearsal in person, and after much playing and discussion of Mozart and wind instruments, Nielsen vowed to compose a quintet, if the players would commit to the performance of the new work.10 The players of the Copenhagen group, nicknamed “the old wind players,” were Paul Hagemann, flute (1882–1967); Svend Christian Felumb, oboe (1898–1972); Aage Oxenvad, clarinet (1884–1944); Knud Lassen, bassoon (1854–1938); and Hans Sørensen, horn (1893–1944).11 The flutist Hagemann was an able amateur, but was later replaced by eminent Danish flutist Holger Gilbert-Jespersen (1890–1975). It was this chance meeting through which each of these players became personal friends of Nielsen and, ultimately, inspired many of his late instrumental works. In fact, Nielsen had planned to write concertos for each instrument and player, but unfortunately, his deteriorating health allowed for only the flute and clarinet concertos to be completed.

Concluding the third of Simpson’s designated style periods of Nielsen’s output, the Wind Quintet exhibits a variety of features typical of this period, while reaffirming an attachment to

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9 Thorvald Nielsen, 14.


fundamental principles of some of his earlier works. As the flute incidental pieces from *Aladdin* and *Moderen* are largely uncharacteristic of this period, the Quintet displays the flute and other instruments in a manner more representative of the style of contemporaneous works. In addition to his increased interest in wind instruments throughout the third period and into the fourth, Nielsen’s effort to gain a personal knowledge of the instruments and players for which he was composing is apparent in this work.

**A Cast of Characters**

The novelty of the Wind Quintet is that Nielsen captures the spirit of each individual player’s personality, as well as the characteristic nature of his instrument. These depictions are most evident in the diverse variations of the third movement, in each of which Nielsen captures the essence of the chosen instrumentation. Through this musical depiction, Nielsen was able to “invest woodwind instruments with a ‘soul’ or personality,” as he did in several other late instrumental works.12

Nielsen’s interest in the timbral and expressive qualities of each instrument had been explored in earlier works, such as *Pan og Syrinx* and the first half of the first movement of the Fifth Symphony.13 But with the Quintet continues this affinity to a much greater degree than in any previous work.14 His interest in the idiosyncratic nature of each instrument continued to be explored in the Sixth Symphony, as well as in the concertos for flute and clarinet.

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12 Lawson, 88.


In addition to capturing the essence of each instrument’s idiom, Nielsen characterized each musician’s personality. According to the oboist in the Copenhagen Wind Quintet, Svend Felumb, bassoonist Knud Lassen was known as being “easygoing and unconcerned, but with sophistication,” as represented in the opening measures of the Quintet. These first measures highlight the work’s carefree and joyful spirit, at the same time reflective of Lassen (Example 11).

Likewise, Felumb remembered that the second movement minuet was “conceived as a pastiche of a Classical-era woodwind quintet,” paying special tribute to clarinetist Aage Oxenvad.16

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15 Felumb, quoted in Spence, 15.
16 Ibid.
However, Oxenvad was known to have a “hot” temper, as demonstrated in the fifth variation of the third movement.

The eleven variations of the finale present a wide array of musical characters and effectively portray the instruments and the work’s debut players. The variations range from the “calm reflection” of the horn and bassoon in the first, to the “grotesque humour” in the fifth, “a dialogue between an irascible clarinet and an infuriatingly imperturbable bassoon.”17 In the fifth variation, Nielsen acknowledged clarinetist Oxenvad’s fiery temperament, as he told the two players to “play like a married couple who are arguing, where the husband (the bassoon) finally gets quiet at the end,”18 although he does have the last word (Example 12).

![Example 12: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, III. Var. V, mm. 13–16](image)

By contrast, the eighth variation features the melodic voice of the oboe with an underlying counterpoint in the clarinet and later in unison with the flute (Example 13). In this variation Nielsen explores the exoticism presented in *Aladdin* and the Fifth Symphony through its use of modality, as well as the drone in the horn and bassoon.

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18 Felumb, 37, quoted in Spence, 17.
Many other reflections of personality and skill in homage to its dedicatees may be found throughout the work. In his effort to portray the musicians for which the Quintet was composed, Nielsen effectively captured the distinctive timbre of each of the five instruments.

**An Amalgamation of Styles**

As in most of Nielsen’s late works (those from the third and fourth style periods), the Wind Quintet merges elements of earlier works and styles with those of a newer, contemporary idiom. Retrospective qualities can be found on several levels of the work, even though Nielsen had not previously composed a woodwind quintet. Conservative melodic structure congruent with the patterns and shapes of other late works, increased use of counterpoint, and borrowed material, such as that from the church tradition, are also included. In addition, he made use of established forms within each movement of the Quintet, such as sonata form, minuet and trio, and theme and variations. Nevertheless, Nielsen expanded some of these conventional traits to formulate an individual style, such as his exploration of new sounds through the substitution of the English horn and the extension of the instruments’ ranges, particularly those of the flute and
bassoon. Additionally, within the context of a traditional genre and formal structure, Nielsen implemented several innovative traits in this work, many of which are exemplary of his late style, such as progressive harmonic treatment, timbre, and texture. Through a blending of features both old and new, Nielsen created a work that is still revered within its genre.

**A Nod to Traditionalism**

Even though the Quintet tends to be less traditional and more complex than Nielsen’s earlier chamber works, it is firmly based on several retrospective elements, including instrumentation, melodic and motivic structure, counterpoint, musical material, and most notably, form. Nonetheless, it is some of these same elements that Nielsen modified to suit his own style. As is evident in the Quintet and throughout Nielsen’s oeuvre, his approach frequently combines retrospective characteristics with more forward-looking features to create an amalgamated style. This blending of elements occurs in every style period, yet they are merged with increasing intricacy in the third and fourth style periods to create a complex late style.

Although the instrumentation of the woodwind quintet was new to Nielsen, by the time of the Quintet’s composition, the genre itself had become standard amongst European composers. The re-establishment of this genre was primarily a result of the efforts of the Parisian Société de musique de chambre pour instruments à vent. As with his choice of instrumentation in other works, Nielsen made decisions solely based on which combinations of instruments would best capture the spirit of his music, and the Quintet is no exception. What is different than the standard woodwind quintet instrumentation is Nielsen’s substitution of the English horn for the

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oboe in the *Praeludium* and theme of the third movement. According to notational markings in the holograph, Nielsen apparently experienced some degree of difficulty in determining the appropriate timbre and instrumentation for the *Praeludium*. At the time of the Quintet’s composition, Nielsen was conductor of Copenhagen’s *Musikforening* (Music Society), in which several of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet members performed. During a performance of Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*, Nielsen was moved by Felumb’s English horn playing. After asking him if it were possible to change from English horn to oboe within the same movement, Nielsen settled on the timbre for the opening of the *Praeludium*. Felumb recalls, “I was young and courageous and said cheerfully yes. It has caused me (and also my followers) big trouble—but the cause was worth it because this is the most distinctive place in the entire Quintet.” Through the inclusion of the English horn, Nielsen’s timbral expansion of the quintet illustrates his modification of an established genre to create a new sound.

In addition to using an auxiliary instrument, Nielsen expanded and exploited the range of the instruments to create a depth and richness in the sound of the work. The most effective of these range expansions occurs in the bassoon part on the final chord of the work, in which Nielsen indicated an optional A in parentheses (Example 14).

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22 Felumb, 37, quoted in Spence, 16.
Example 14: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, III. *Andantino festivo*, final three measures

As the modern bassoon’s range only extends to B-flat, the parenthetical note is not possible without lengthening the tube of the instrument. Therefore, to accommodate the lower note and to provide depth and richness to the sound, as Nielsen undoubtedly desired, it is common practice for the bassoonist to place a small tube into the top opening of the instrument to extend the range.23 In addition to range expansion, an example of range exploitation occurs in the flute cadenza in the *Præludium*, measures 8–10, in which there are four Bs (Example 15).

Example 15: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, III. *Præludium*, mm. 8–10 (flute part only)

As the flute’s normal range extends down to c’, playing the notes that Nielsen indicated are only possible if the instrument is fitted with a footjoint that extends the length of the tube, thereby

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23 There are extensions manufactured for this purpose, although many performers use a handmade one of paper or cardboard. Some performers use the bell of the English horn, as it is not in use at this point in the work, is the appropriate size and length (to fit, although not ideal for pitch), and projects better than the handmade option because it is made of wood.
extending the range to b.\textsuperscript{24} The range in this passage is large, and by continuing to the lowest note possible on a flute with a b-footjoint, here, as in the bassoon example, Nielsen undoubtedly sought to capture a certain timbral intensity. In addition to expanding the range of the bassoon and flute, Nielsen utilized the clarinet in A, a lower-pitched instrument than its B-flat counterpart, to reinforce this timbral richness. By adapting and expanding the existing norms of instrumentation within the quintet genre, Nielsen created a work in his own inimitable style.

An identifiable hallmark of Nielsen’s late style is melodic structure. Melody is one of the Quintet’s most endearing traits, as it features tunes that are memorable, light-hearted, and sunny, reminiscent of Nielsen’s childhood on Funen and his love of nature. As Simpson describes, it is “full of pastoral and forest sounds”: the second movement especially captures this sentiment as “a lazily comic minuet, with long stretches of unashamed two-part writing, and a mischievous trio.”\textsuperscript{25} Nielsen’s melodies are conservative in that they are often scalar and conjunct, although they tend to gradually develop to encompass a wide range. Particularly in the first two movements, much of the melodic material is diatonic, with the inclusion of some modal mixture. Yet poignant chromatic insertions occur at opportune moments. There is also extensive use of motivic and melodic figuration that assists in unifying the work. One of these figures is an oscillating figure, common in many of Nielsen’s late works (Example 16).

\textsuperscript{24} A flute with a b-footjoint is now common, although some performers still prefer a c-footjoint.

\textsuperscript{25} Simpson, \textit{Symphonist}, 161.
Example 16: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, I. *Allegro ben moderato*, mm. 27–29

In this example, the flute, clarinet, and bassoon parts demonstrate this melodic pattern. This type of figuration occurs throughout much of Nielsen’s music, including the incidental flute pieces "Taagen letter" and "Børnene spiller" from *Moderen*, and in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony (Example 17a–17c).

Example 17a: Nielsen, “Taagen letter,” mm. 15–17 (flute part only)

Example 17b: Nielsen, “Børnene spiller,” mm. 1–3
Example 17c: Nielsen, Symphony No. 5, I. *Tempo giusto*,
3 measures before rehearsal 6 to 1 measure after 6

The work also explores an assortment of nature sounds through motivic elements, portraying an allusion of summer on Funen. Among these are the “chirping” motives in the *Allegro ben moderato*, which evoke images of birds and nature through grace notes and short rhythmic gestures, the first of which occurs at the entrance of the flute and oboe (Example 18).

Example 18: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, I. *Allegro ben moderato*, mm. 4–6
The secondary theme, played again by the flute and oboe, also conveys a similar bird-like call (Example 19).

Example 19: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, I. *Allegro ben moderato*, mm. 31–32

Still another moment in which sounds of a breezy summer day are evoked occurs in the relaxed and endearing tune of the *Menuet*, played by the clarinet, with a buoyant bassoon accompaniment (Example 20).

Example 20: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, II. *Menuet*, mm. 1–8
These recurring melodic figures and motives provide cohesiveness within the work and demonstrate a stylistic feature of Nielsen’s late instrumental works.

A feature of increasing importance during Nielsen’s third style period is that of counterpoint. As influenced by his Baroque and Classical predecessors, the complexity in Nielsen’s use of counterpoint enabled a greater freedom from harmonic control than he had previously experienced.26 The use of counterpoint is most evident in the second and third movements. Maegaard describes the contrapuntal passagework in the Quintet as a “counterpoint of characters,” a comment applicable to not only the melodic nature of the work, but also the characterization of the individual instruments and performers.27

Some of the musical material utilized in the Quintet stems from traditional roots, particularly church music. This conservatism is nowhere more evident than in the Thema of the third movement. Self-borrowed from Nielsen’s four-part chorale-style hymn tune Min Jesus, lad mit Hjerte faa (My Jesus, make my heart to love Thee),28 the Thema epitomizes Nielsen’s most refined tonal style. Parks identifies this feature as traditional, calling the use of this hymn tune “anachronistic,” but hinting toward the “multi-layered tonal structure” of Dvořák and Brahms.29 The hymn tune (Example 21) dates from between 1912 and 1916 and was published in Nielsen’s song collection, Salmer og aandelige Sange (Hymns and sacred songs). This tune expresses, as

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27 Ibid.

28 Simpson suggests that this is “a poor translation of the Danish, but the only effective one in English.” (Simpson, Symphonist, 161.)

29 Parks, 544–45.
virtually every tune in the Quintet does, a cheerful exuberance that hearkens back to Nielsen’s childhood and reverberates with a Scandinavian coolness and clarity.

Example 21: Nielsen, *Min Jesus, lad mit Hjerte faa*

Although the theme is a hymn tune, there is no apparent religious significance in its use in the Quintet. Nielsen was criticized by many, including his frequent collaborator Thomas Laub, for writing hymn tunes they claimed were inappropriate for church use. However, Nielsen sought to create tunes for use outside the church, even if the text was of a spiritual nature. Many of the harmonizations to the tunes in this collection, including *Min Jesus, lad mit Hjerte faa,* were later attributed to composer and organist Paul Hellmuth (1879–1919), in addition to those adaptations by Nielsen of Hellmuth’s work.30

In the first appearance of the tune in the Quintet, Nielsen altered it slightly from the original (Example 22). He added two additional phrases, doubled the highest voice of the tune an octave higher in the flute part, and re-metered it from 3/2 to 3/4.

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Example 22: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, III. *Tema*, mm. 1–16

In the key of A major, the harmonization of the tune remains virtually unchanged from the original, with the exception of measure 2, in which the bass voice (bassoon) descends in parallel thirds with the soprano voice (flute); thus, the changed note (B) becomes a passing tone to maintain the tonic harmony, rather than the original note (D) providing a harmonic change to the subdominant to produce a plagal cadence. Furthermore, the theme is in one key, and is tonal and triadic, which reiterates its traditional basis. Phrase structure in the theme is periodic and classically balanced, in that there are four four-measure phrases, each pair in an antecedent-consequent structure. The theme returns at the end of the movement, marked *Andantino festivo* and in common time. Also altered slightly from the *Tema* is the instrumentation, as the oboe is substituted for the English horn. Furthermore, there is a two-measure extension to conclude the
work. Nielsen’s use of traditional materials, such as those influenced by church music, firmly establishes the Quintet’s conservative roots.

One of the most salient features of the Quintet is the utilization of a conventional form in each movement. The first movement, *Allegro ben moderato*, is in sonata-allegro form. Adhering to textbook sonata form, the extensive exposition features at least two contrasting themes (with associated motives), the first of which is in the tonic of E major, the second in the dominant, B major. The development expectedly explores ideas based on motivic and thematic material presented in the exposition. However, the brief recapitulation coincides with the return of the secondary theme, now resolved in the tonic of E major, followed by the primary theme, identifying this movement as a retrograde sonata form. The movement’s structure closely follows the early classical model in that the development and recapitulation are brief, compared to the more substantial exposition.\(^{31}\)

Also representative of traditional formal structure is the second movement, *Menuet*. A model example of a minuet and trio, this movement features well balanced, contrasting A and B sections in both the minuet and trio, with the addition of an eight-measure coda.\(^{32}\) The simplicity of this ternary form, a favorite of composers in the classical period, contrasts the opening sonata form and the complexity of the final movement.

Reminiscent of Haydn’s string quartets and symphonies, the finale is a theme and variations, prefaced by an extensive *Præludium*. Twenty-six measures in length, this prelude features a cadenza for the flute, followed by a section highlighting the English horn and an accompanied cadenza-like passage for the clarinet. The theme precedes eleven variations, each

\(^{31}\) Parks, 553.

\(^{32}\) In the minuet, the A section is sixteen measures repeated (mm. 1–16), while the B section is twenty-eight measures (mm. 17–45), for a total of sixty-one measures. The trio is twenty-eight measures (mm. 46–73), with a *da capo* of the A section of forty-four measures (mm. 1–44). The coda comprises mm. 74–81.
of which features a particular solo instrument or combination of instruments, before returning to an altered form of the theme. In each of the variations, not only is the tonal structure of the theme replicated (albeit in three cases in the parallel minor), but the formal strophic structure of the theme is also maintained. Nielsen must have been intrigued by the result of the third movement’s form, as it also provided the model for his later *Praeludium og Tema med Variationer* (Prelude and theme with variations), Op. 48, for solo violin (1923).³³

Conventional as each of these traditional forms may be, particularly in relation to Nielsen’s increasingly progressive idiom, he used them to achieve unity and coherence. Adopting a different formal scheme for each movement of the Quintet maintains variety and allowed the composer freedom to provide interest through other means. Despite the Quintet’s strong foundation on a traditional formal structure, as well as the use of self-borrowed material, there are progressive elements that complicate the classification of the work as purely traditional and demonstrate Nielsen’s blended late style, begun in the third period.

**New Horizons**

As abundant are the musical elements that reiterate Nielsen as a composer adapting established norms to suit, the Quintet also demonstrates features of his late style through his propensity to break the mold of convention. Indeed, the mere use of traditional elements in such a structurally important way, as seen in the Quintet, seems to exaggerate the ways in which Nielsen strays from tradition into a modernist realm. These contemporary elements in the Wind Quintet include typical characteristics of Nielsen’s late style, such as progressive tonality, timbre, and texture.

As in most of Nielsen’s mature works, treatment of tonality is a significant element of progressivism in the Quintet. However, as Hiatt observes, tonal structure in Nielsen’s late works does tend to provide an underlying organizational method, both locally and within a complete movement.34 Although not wildly progressive in its tonal structure, the first movement is centered on E major, with strong leanings toward A, the key of the remaining two movements.35 But even in the opening three measures of the bassoon melody, C major is suggested in measure 3 by the F-natural on the downbeat, as well as the D-natural and C-natural (Example 23).

Example 23: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, I. *Allegro ben moderato*, mm. 1–4

On the downbeat of measure 4, the B in the bassoon part functions as a leading tone in C major, until the flute, oboe, and clarinet enter solidly in E major to reaffirm the tonic. As throughout the work, the *Menuet* features modal mixture, especially the flattened-sixth and flattened-seventh

34 Hiatt, 10.

scale degrees.36 An underpinning of the submediant drives the trio, while the mediant predominates measures 20–30 of the minuet.37 Despite the relatively prudent, albeit occasional tonally ambiguous excursions in the first two movements, the prelude of the third movement exemplifies Nielsen’s harmonic innovation.

The third movement of the Quintet commences with the *Præludium* that bears little harmonic resemblance to the remainder of the work and exemplifies Nielsen’s progressive approach to harmony typified in his late works. Initially alluding to the key of C minor,38 the prelude’s tonal organization quickly dissolves into a fast-paced excursion through many tonalities, with extensive use of chromaticism. Through numerous enharmonic spellings, non-harmonic notes, and dense counterpoint, any reference to an identifiable key area is not only obfuscated, but essentially avoided. Parks attempted to prove through Schenkerian analysis the tonal structure of the prelude:

…a prefix prolongation of E, dominant of A major (which is, of course, the key of the Theme) by means of an Italian augmented-sixth (It+6) chord. This reading is obscured, however, until the very end of the Prelude by a number of features, including a contradiction between the key signature, which points to C minor, and the abundant chromaticism that saturates these twenty-six bars, which points to the key of B-flat minor.39

The prelude’s tonal ambiguity is more representative of Nielsen’s progressive treatment of harmony in other works from this compositional period, namely the Fifth Symphony, than the easily identifiable tonality of the remainder of the Quintet.

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36 Parks, 552.

37 Ibid., 553.

38 The case for C minor is supported by the key signature, as well as the leading tone B-natural in measure 3 in the bassoon part.

39 Parks, 563.
This portion of the work is the most complex, not only harmonically, but also in mood and gesture. Contrasting with the first two movements of immediately appealing pleasantness and warmth, this movement begins with a surprising and seemingly unrelated demeanor, echoing more the consternation and conflict of the preceding Fifth Symphony than this work’s initial exuberance. Flemming Weis, a contemporary of Nielsen, described his impression:

The prelude before the variations of the *Wind Quintet* is one of those productions which has made the biggest and most lasting impression. Here meets the free and unbidden with the strongest regularity,—the hard and insensitive with the highest degree of expressiveness. This virile and primitive force in the boldly swung melodious arabesque, the whole polyphonic independence, and the harmonious emancipation within a kept tonality is of such primitive greatness that one may draw parallels (hopefully without being misunderstood) with Michelangelo’s *Creation of Man.*

Weis’s analogy to the Sistine Chapel and of Michelangelo’s scope of imagination and perception of beauty is indeed a tribute to Nielsen’s powerful voice as heard in the *Præludium.* As in the Fourth Symphony, in which Nielsen exploited organicism and the concept of an inextinguishable life force driven by the inherent laws of nature, this music seems to contemplate these same principles with exposed, elemental abandon. Yet the true impact is found in the immediate dissolution of this complexity into the relative simplicity of the theme. Simpson agrees that the prelude is “the deepest part of the Quintet, the most bare kind of nature-music, returning for a moment to the wild sounds of some of the Fifth Symphony. But it fades, and the last movement begins with a gentle tune.” The prelude’s tonal chaos and the stark contrast provided by the following theme pose the question: did Nielsen have some extramusical experience in mind? Parks suggests Nielsen’s possible influence by programmatic ideas as an attempt to prepare the

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immediately rectifying hymn tune of the theme, which acts “as a balm.” Regardless of impetus, the prelude may have provided an opportunity for contemplation, growth, and finally, relief for not only its listeners, but also perhaps for the composer himself.

As anomalous as the *Præeludium* is to the overall work, the timbre of the Quintet as a whole also defines innovation in Nielsen’s late style. Created through an understanding of the idiomatic nature of each instrument, as well as the use of an auxiliary instrument, the sound of the work is atypical of a woodwind quintet. When compared to the sonority of other woodwind quintets, the Nielsen Quintet stands alone—it simply does not sound like a woodwind quintet. Parks agrees that this distinction stems from both the scoring and texture. For the many today who are averse to the typical woodwind quintet sound because of the lack of cohesiveness in the instrument combination, Nielsen’s work tends to provide immediate appeal, just as it was received at the time of its composition. Through successful blending of these wind instruments’ disparate sounds, Nielsen achieves a balanced sonority.

The variety of textures throughout the Quintet also supports its distinctive profile. Despite the context of a chamber piece, Nielsen’s use of texture is nearly orchestral at times, with a full, rich blend in the sound. This fullness can be heard at the end of the exposition of the first movement (Example 24). All five instruments are playing, with the flute and clarinet exchanging a motivic ostinato and the horn playing a countermelody, while the double reeds play the melody in octaves.

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42 Parks, 563.

43 Ibid., 592 (n. 2).
Example 24: Nielsen, Wind Quintet, I. *Allegro ben moderato*, mm. 48–57

As the dynamic level begins *piano*, it develops quickly into a *forte* by measure 52, which contributes to the full sound. But it is the layering of simultaneously occurring motives and melodic material that seems to amplify the sound, and, despite there only being five instruments, simulates an orchestral texture. The reverse is true as well in Nielsen’s symphonies, as his orchestration is often chamber-like, especially using wind instruments in a transparent and
individual manner. At times in the Quintet, as in his symphonies, Nielsen explores and exploits the unique color of each instrument individually, as well as in groupings. The variations of the third movement exploit to a significant degree a wide variety of textures, as each one is scored for a different solo instrument or combination of instruments (Table 1).

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44 This technique is utilized frequently in the Flute Concerto, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.
Table 1: Instrumentation and Texture in Nielsen, Wind Quintet, III. *Praeludium—Tema con variazioni*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>INSTRUMENTATION</th>
<th>MEASURES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Praeludium</strong></td>
<td>English horn, horn in F, bassoon, clarinet in A</td>
<td>1–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flute cadenza</td>
<td>5–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addition of accompaniment</td>
<td>8–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English horn with accompaniment</td>
<td>11–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarinet cadenza with varied accompaniment</td>
<td>17–26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tema</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. I</strong></td>
<td>Horn, bassoon</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. II</strong></td>
<td>Flute w/ sparse clarinet, horn accompaniment</td>
<td>1–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bassoon interjection</td>
<td>4–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All (mostly), including oboe (changed from English horn)</td>
<td>9–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. III</strong></td>
<td>Oboe, horn, bassoon (mostly)</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addition of clarinet</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flute interjections</td>
<td>7–8, 11–13, 15–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. IV</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. V</strong></td>
<td>Bassoon, clarinet</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. VI</strong></td>
<td>Flute, clarinet, bassoon</td>
<td>1–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horn fills out harmony</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flute, oboe, clarinet</td>
<td>4–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bassoon, horn</td>
<td>8–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flute interjection</td>
<td>10–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>12–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. VII</strong></td>
<td>Bassoon solo</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. VIII</strong></td>
<td>Oboe, clarinet w/ horn, bassoon drone</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flute interjection</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addition of flute</td>
<td>8–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. IX</strong></td>
<td>Horn solo</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. X</strong></td>
<td>Flute in 6/8, bassoon in 2/4</td>
<td>1–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addition of oboe, clarinet, horn in 6/8</td>
<td>6–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exchanges between all (bassoon now in 6/8)</td>
<td>17–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>25–32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Var. XI</strong></td>
<td>Exchanges between all</td>
<td>1–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>11–29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Andantino festivo</strong></td>
<td>(return of <em>Tema</em>, modified)</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>1–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oboe, clarinet, horn</td>
<td>9–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addition of bassoon</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>13–18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Textural variety, especially through the use of pairs of instruments, varying combinations, and solo instruments, provides interest in the third movement.

Despite the variety of spirit inherent in the variations, virtually all of them present specific challenges to the performers. Regarding the two solo variations, the seventh for the bassoon and the ninth for the horn, Felumb recalls:

[Bassoonist] Knud Lassen found his variation quite intuitive in his own phrasing. I think Carl Nielsen was surprised because all he had to say was that was how he thought it ought to be, and I remember he was really touched. It was different with the horn variation, which Hans Sørensen blew with dazzling virtuosity.... “Dear Sørensen,” he was told, “try to think of yourself on a Danish summer day, standing on top of a hill, blowing your horn out in the beautiful countryside. It is not 1, 2, 3, 4—no, take your time. You do not have to go on to the next phrase before all the echoes have finished.” Hans blew the horn elegantly, but continued until the end to have difficulties taking his time. It’s a lot to expect that you have to take your time when you sit as a horn blower—quite alone and have to do something so simple that it is really quite difficult.45

At the bottom of the pencil holograph for the horn variation, Nielsen indicated, “Unless done with great naïve abandonment of the atmosphere of nature it’s no good,” further reiterating the necessity to play with freedom and spontaneity.46

The Wind Quintet illustrates many compositional and musical elements that are of a contemporary bent and represent characteristics of Nielsen’s late style. Through an increased use of counterpoint, progressive tonality, timbral experimentation, and textural variety, Nielsen created a work that explores new territory, full of both optimism and contemplation. The Quintet acts not as the pinnacle of the third style period, but as a postscript before continuing in a different direction.

45 Felumb, 37, quoted in Spence, 16–17.

The Woodwind Quintet Beyond Nielsen

As Nielsen’s Wind Quintet has been influential and popular amongst performers, so had it inspired the younger generation of Danish composers. According to biographer Petersen, “Carl Nielsen created such an interest among younger Danish composers for chamber music for wind instruments that works of this or a similar nature have become a characteristic feature of Danish chamber music in the succeeding years.” These works include many woodwind quintets, such as Nielsen student Poul Schierbeck’s (1888–1949) Capriccio of 1941; Niels Viggo Bentzon’s (1919–2000) Quintet of 1942; Otto Mortensen’s (1907–1986) Quintet of 1944, in which, following Nielsen’s model, the English horn is used in the third movement; Jorgen Jersild’s (b. 1913) Serenade of 1947; Mogens Winkel Holm’s (1936–1999) Sonata for Wind Quintet, Op. 25; Henning Wellejus’s (1919–2002) Quintet of 1966; and Erik Jorgensen’s (b. 1912) serial piece Improvisations of 1971. Despite Nielsen’s influence, little of this repertoire has earned a place in the woodwind quintet canon. However, other twentieth-century quintets by composers of other nationalities better established the ensemble, some of whom were undoubtedly influenced by Nielsen’s work, including Paul Hindemith’s Kleine Kammermusik for five wind instruments, Op. 24, No. 2, also of 1922; Arnold Schoenberg’s Quintet, Op. 26 of 1923–24; Samuel Barber’s Summer Music of 1955; and David Maslanka’s three quintets, the last of which (1999) is based on chorale melodies and features yet another link to Nielsen’s Quintet, an extended flute cadenza to open the second movement. Not only is Nielsen’s Quintet a substantive and significant work in the woodwind quintet genre, but it also holds a rightful place within the chamber music repertoire at-large.

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47 Petersen, 15.
CHAPTER 5

A CONCERTO FOR THE “ARCADIAN” FLUTE

The flute cannot deny its nature, it belongs in Arcadia and prefers the pastoral moods; the composer therefore has to indulge the gentle creature, if he does not want to be stigmatized as a barbarian.

Carl Nielsen, concert program note, Flute Concerto

A Concerto, Revisited

Nielsen’s final style period, according to Simpson, begins in 1923 with works immediately following the Wind Quintet and continues through the end of his life. Included in this prolific period is the Flute Concerto, in addition to his sixth and final symphony, numerous songs, the Clarinet Concerto, three motets, several small chamber pieces, piano works, and Commotio for organ. This period illustrates Nielsen at the pinnacle of his mature style. Marked by overflowing compositional creativity, this last style period features Nielsen’s desire for a more intimate means of expression, in which he sought purity, transparency, and simplicity. To this end, the works of this period demonstrate that his polyphonic technique became increasingly sensitive, while his exploratory view of tonality continued. In viewing Nielsen’s complete oeuvre, Simpson suggests that this last style period could be viewed as transitional, although as Nielsen’s health continued to decline, he was increasingly aware that his time was limited and that any of these works could be his last.¹

Although Nielsen had featured the flute in various contexts of earlier works, the Concerto was his first and only major work that used the flute as a solo instrument. He had previously delved into the concerto genre with his Violin Concerto, Op. 33, in 1911. After a fifteen-year hiatus and having undergone considerable compositional experimentation during the lapsed time,

¹ Simpson, Symphonist, 22.
he returned to the form. The differences between these two concertos are astounding, as the former is unerringly based on the classical concerto tradition. The Flute Concerto, however, contains the hallmarks of Nielsen’s late style in their fullest form, as well as a lucid understanding of the instrument for which he wrote.

Nielsen had a particular view of the flute’s character and the manner in which it should be portrayed musically. Through his flute writing in symphonies, dramatic works, and the Wind Quintet, he had become intimately familiar with its characteristics, limitations, and strengths. Besides these impressions of the flute, or perhaps in spite of them, the impetus for the Flute Concerto was also because of his acquaintance with renowned Danish flutist Holger Gilbert-Jespersen, who had replaced Paul Hagemann as flutist in the Copenhagen Wind Quintet around 1927. As he did in the Wind Quintet, Nielsen composed the Flute Concerto with its dedicatee very much in mind. The work well suited Gilbert-Jespersen’s refined character, “inclined to fastidious taste and a love of French music, though there is nothing French in this music.”

Gilbert-Jespersen recalls:

When Carl Nielsen started composing it, he didn’t ask me for advice, not even once. It was already complete when I received it. Not once did he ask: “How can this be played?”—“Is this good enough?” or anything along those lines. When I finally received it, and we had added a couple of additional parts, he said: “Well, I told you that you were going to get a concerto. I’ve inserted some strokes of the bow, but you may play it as you wish.”

Nielsen was not only focused on highlighting the characteristic qualities of the flute, but he also sought to create a musical portrait of his admired flutist and countryman. The work displays the

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3 Simpson, Symphonist, 140.

instrument in its best light, allowing the performer to demonstrate facile technique and to express a broad palette of colors, from the sensitive to the powerful. Even today, the Concerto remains an important part of the twentieth-century flute repertoire.

A Challenging Road to a Historic Performance

Nielsen composed the Flute Concerto on a journey to Italy in August through October of 1926. The process was not without challenge, in part because he was ill through much of its composition. In May of that year, he had planned to compose “a largish thing for clarinet and small orchestra.” However, by July he expressed uncertainty in his plans, as he wrote to friend and Danish wholesaler Carl Johan Michaelsen:

I haven’t begun on the clarinet thing and now and then I have had an idea that would “suit” the flute well.—Should I rather write a flute piece first?
I’m thinking in this respect about Paris and I’d like to hear a word or two from you about the matter; whether Gilbert is going and what could come of it.

Nielsen’s reference to Paris was to a concert of his music being planned there for 21 October 1926, with financial support from Michaelsen. A successful concert of this magnitude would certainly enhance the composer’s reputation throughout Europe, so the programming was an important consideration.

Nielsen decided to compose the flute work first, and throughout the months leading up to the Paris concert, he made numerous references to it in his letters, documenting the work’s difficult compositional process. He had developed a reputation for working immediately up to a

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5 Carl Nielsen, letter to daughter Anne Marie and son-in-law Emil Telmányi, 13 May 1926, quoted in Petersen, ed., xxiv–xxv.


7 Eskildsen, 80–81.
performance date, and his composition of the Flute Concerto was no exception. As late as 4
September 1926, nearly six weeks before the scheduled concert, Nielsen was still making
important compositional decisions. He expressed to Michaelsen:

The flute concerto is going well and just today I have finished the first movement, which
has come out well; but it is very difficult for the soloist, so there will be something to study
for the good Gilbert. This movement will be by far the most important, from the content
side too; it plays 10 minutes and in fact could stand alone, so if I were to drop the rest—as
I do not hope to, or have in mind—then it can easily be played alone. The other
movements will of course be short. Unfortunately I have forgotten the first sheet of the
score at home but have written for it and on Monday the flute part with the outline
accompaniment can be in Copenhagen. I am sending it to you since I do not know
Jespersen’s address. I only hope the two of you will like the piece; I have worked and
thought a lot about the instrument and the orchestral accompaniment is very finely honed,
almost like chamber music.8

Although it seems he was making good progress, he began to articulate to many of his family
and friends his difficulty in completing the work. A few days after this letter to Michaelsen,
Nielsen again wrote to him:

I am working concentratedly on the second section—there will only be one pause in the
flute concerto—is still not clear to me. Yet I think that two or three small movements will
be intertwined as in the violin [concerto]’s second, more or less.9

Nielsen seemed to express uncertainty in his efforts, as well as an eagerness to describe the work
to colleagues, perhaps seeking their approval. As he corresponded with Danish pianist and
composer Rudolph Simonsen, the work was taking shape:

I am looking forward to seeing you and your wife and hearing what you say to my flute
affair, which has kept me very busy. The first section is very large and has been kept
chamber-like with a contrapuntal-symphonic development, and I think it has succeeded; at
all events I have taken great trouble with it. The second part will be an intertwining of an
allegretto and andante, sort of rondo-ish in form; but at present I only have it in my head,
since I have had to send the fair copy and the written-out solo part to Copenhagen for
rehearsal by Gilbert J., who is to play it in Paris on 21st October.10

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8 Nielsen, letter to Carl Johan Michaelsen, 4 September 1926, quoted in Petersen, ed., xxv.
9 Nielsen, letter to Carl Johan Michaelsen, 13 September 1926, quoted in ibid., xxvi.
10 Nielsen, letter to Rudolph Simonsen (1889–1947), 14 September 1926, quoted in ibid.
Less than three weeks before the première was scheduled, however, Nielsen expressed hesitation and pessimism regarding the work, as he wrote in a letter to Anton Svendsen, Danish violinist and director of the Royal Danish Academy of Music:

I have written a flute concerto, it plays for about 16 minutes: that is enough for a flute, which does not have the variety of a string instrument with bowings, double-stopping, harmonics etc., isn’t it? I have taken a great deal of trouble with it and hope it is not a total failure.11

Paris was a particularly appropriate venue for the première of the Flute Concerto, as the city had been profoundly important in the development of the flute and its repertoire for decades. Sponsored and arranged by a large number of people and organizations, the first performance of the Concerto was held as scheduled at Maison Gaveau, Salle des Concerts.12 Gilbert-Jespersen was the flute soloist with L’Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. In an all-Nielsen program, the composer himself conducted the Violin Concerto (with soloist Peder Møller) and five pieces from Aladdin, while Emil Telmányi conducted the Prelude to Act II of Saul og David, Symphony No. 5, and the Flute Concerto.13 The concert was a milestone in Nielsen’s career, and in attendance were several musical luminaries of the day, including Maurice Ravel and Arthur Honegger.14

Fortunately, given Nielsen’s desperate aspiration for establishment within the European cultural scene, the Flute Concerto was generally well received. However, some critics were not

11 Nielsen, letter to Anton Svendsen (1846–1930), 2 October 1926, quoted in ibid.

12 In addition to Michaelsen’s financial support, the concert was arranged by L’Association Française d’Expansion et d’Échanges Artistiques, Borups Musikføløag’s representative (and oboist) Svend Christian Felumb, and the Danish Embassy in Paris. (Petersen, ed., xxviii.)

13 Petersen, ed., xxviii.

14 Eskildsen, 81.
responsive to the concept of an entire concert featuring the works of one composer. Reviews of the concert on the whole cited the originality of the works, instrumentation, timbral contrasts, and the highly personal interpretation of the works within the context of their reflection of the aesthetics of the period.\textsuperscript{15}

The reception history of the première not only offers valuable insight into how contemporary audiences received the work, but it also provides details regarding some of its features. In many of these reviews, critics cited an excellent performance by Gilbert-Jespersen, while having mixed perspectives on the Concerto itself. Because the Concerto presented various new musical concepts, critics expressed strong sentiments. Many were anticipating a concerto in the classical sense, including the expected harmonic motion (and the supremacy of the tonic-dominant relationship), an easily comprehensible formal structure, and a distinctive role between virtuosic soloist and the orchestra as accompaniment. Paul Le Flem wrote, “It has piquancy, drive and does not lack humour,”\textsuperscript{16} while H. de Curzon declared that he found “a free treatment, capricious echoes of the sonorities of nature, rather than a composition properly speaking.”\textsuperscript{17}

Furthermore, some praised the work’s new sounds. An especially remarkable review came from Maurice Imbert:

With a robust technique from the contrapuntal or orchestral point of view, M. Nielsen has perfectly absorbed the style of these musicians, to the point of making use of them in a developed fashion which takes on the stamp of personality. Thus it is in the Concerto for Flute, for example, where the combinations of timbres are of a wholly modern bent, worthy of the writer of \textit{The Soldier’s Tale}, although the syntax would hardly have frightened Th. Dubois himself.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} Petersen, ed., xxviii–xxix.

\textsuperscript{16} Paul Le Flem, \textit{Comoedia}, 24 October 1926, quoted in ibid., xxix.

\textsuperscript{17} H. de Curzon, \textit{Le Ménestrel}, 29 October 1926, quoted in ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Maurice Imbert, \textit{Le Courrier Musical & Théâtral}, 1 November 1926, quoted in ibid. Reference to contemporary French composer Theodore Dubois (1837–1924).
For Nielsen to be compared to Stravinsky indicates his rising reputation within the European musical milieu outside Scandinavia.

There were, however, a couple of disapproving reviews of the Flute Concerto. One critic “did not care for [it] at all; it was beyond [his] comprehension,”\(^\text{19}\) while another perceived the work as “massive and difficult to comprehend.”\(^\text{20}\) Despite a few critical remarks, Honegger defended Nielsen’s reputation:

> The flute concerto, which gave us the opportunity to admire the delightful tone and suppleness of Gilbert-Jespersen’s style, is of lesser proportions, but full of beautiful combinations, for example the dialogue between the flute and timpani or the bassoon….We admire Carl Nielsen as a technician of the first rank and as an artist whose abundance of creativity is constantly renewed. His whole oeuvre gives the impression of wholesomeness, power, and superiority.\(^\text{21}\)

Such a positive public statement by a leading French composer indicates that the performance must have piqued the interest of Parisian musical society. Nevertheless, given the wide array of responses by the Concerto’s first audience, the concert had undeniably stirred controversy.

Following the Paris concert, additional performances of the Concerto were programmed in Oslo and Copenhagen, with Gilbert-Jespersen as soloist and Nielsen conducting. Dissatisfied with the ending of the Concerto as performed in Paris and Oslo, Nielsen composed a new ending shortly before the Copenhagen performance on 25 January 1927.\(^\text{22}\) The revised ending is the one that was published and has remained in subsequent editions.\(^\text{23}\) The Copenhagen première

\(^{19}\) Jan Meyerheim, *Paris Telegram*, 31 October 1926, quoted in ibid.


\(^{21}\) Arthur Honegger, *Politiken*, 26 October 1926, quoted in ibid., xxix.

\(^{22}\) Nelson, 80, quoted in ibid., xxxi.

\(^{23}\) Details of the ending’s modification will be discussed below.
enjoyed mostly positive response. Following this performance, critic William Behrend described the work and Nielsen’s contribution:

The actual concerto is a fantasy, living, speaking, often surprising, now intimately communicative, now escaping into gentle, faraway dream.

There are (fortunately) no signs of weakness to be found in this music; on the contrary both will and a freely flowing mind, now inspired by nature, now fickle following its own deeper urges, but all is pure music—without ulterior motives or pitfalls of “cleverness.” Both humour (duet between flute and trombone) and imagination (the extended cadenza-like section towards the end of the first movement) have their place in this concerto, in which the orchestra too, not least its winds, showed themselves as “stout fellows,” brought both composer and soloist equal acclaim.²⁴

However, like the Paris performance, there were some who found the work difficult to comprehend and did not care for some of its distinctive traits. Critic Brieghel-Müller provided a less enthusiastic reception of the work:

Irrespective of other valuable musical qualities, because of inherent formal deficiencies [the concerto] had difficulty making any stronger or enduring impression. The flute concerto…hardly lived up to its name; it was rather to be viewed as two improvisation-like sketches. The dialogic contrast between the concertante instrument and the orchestra was replaced here by a friendly chat, often coloured by a sarcastic temperament, between the flute and other orchestral units, or else the flute—there was only Mr. Gilbert Jespersen’s—formed part of an overall orchestral texture. The only truly concerto-like thing was the cadenza at the end of the first movement, which like the rest of the flute part was supremely executed. The musical ideas in the piece—and this should be stressed—were expressed with a freedom and naturalness that was as attractive as it was refreshing.²⁵

Nielsen had not aimed to present a work that was conventional or predictable. On the contrary, the Concerto displayed the composer in his most mature, refined state, with his amalgamated style at the forefront. However, some were not expecting such a dramatic departure from Nielsen’s previous concerto idiom. Upon hearing the Concerto for the first time, reviewer Gunnar Heerup described his impression of Nielsen’s deviation:


²⁵ Brieghel-Müller in *Dansk Musiktidsskrift* 2, no. 5 (1927), quoted in ibid., xxxi–xxxii.
The event of the evening was the first Danish performance of *Carl Nielsen’s* new flute concerto in two movements. The first movement fulfilled all justified expectation, while the second movement disappointed. In several of his recent compositions Carl Nielsen has worked more than before with the sound as such, and with the imaginatively improvisational, not rarely at the expense of the clear sculptural qualities that are so extraordinarily typical of his earlier works. It is as if these two things, the sculptural and the imaginative (one is tempted to say the old and the new Carl Nielsen) have not yet become reconciled to each other. What we have here is a stylistic renewal for Carl Nielsen, which one must hope he manages to carry through to become something classic. In the new work, the flute concerto, too, the two beings struggle, but in the first movement they have come to what seems to be a happy compromise: there are loose but clear outlines, framing a fullness of imaginatively improvisational wonders; the freshness of all these brilliant spontaneities fully makes up for the apparently rather loose and vague structure. The second movement is a different matter; it makes too much of a piecemeal impression, and the wealth and freshness of the ideas do not seem the same as in the first movement; in particular the last third of the movement seems without justified connection with the rest, and along with the rhapsodically abrupt ending gives the movement a strangely short-tailed impression. One has the feeling that at least two movements have been tinkered together into one, and that both head and tail have been lopped off the last one, so that it will fit better.26

In spite of the conflicting impressions that the new Flute Concerto had left on its first listeners, the work elicited attention, which only aided Nielsen’s recognition as a serious musical force.

As many of the critics observed, the Concerto ventures into unexplored territory in its genre. Many of the same features that critics found enigmatic are those that define the work as unique. With his style still hinging on traditional fundamentals, in the Flute Concerto Nielsen sought to expand the genre in imaginative ways. The work provides new definition for the genre and remains significant within Nielsen’s total output as exemplary of his late style.

**A Stylistic Overview of the Flute Concerto**

Composed within Nielsen’s last style period and just more than a year after the completion of his sixth and last symphony, the Flute Concerto is one of Nielsen’s major works.

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The Concerto is founded on classical elements, such as thematic formation, form, cadential harmony, and harmonic rhythm, all the while relying on melody and rhythm as primary features. Yet the work exhibits additional contemporary elements, such aschromaticism and timbre. The Concerto displays Nielsen’s trademark amalgamated style, in which old merges with new to create a unique idiom. In addition, Nielsen makes use of self-borrowed material. Ben Arnold observes, “Nielsen’s marvellous [sic] synthesis of classical restraint (which he never fully abandoned) and of romantic daring and intemperateness is what makes his mature style so genuine and arresting.” The Concerto demonstrates this synthesis and, through its frequent performances and appreciation by flutists, remains influential.

A Neoclassical Propensity

The classical concerto model provided a lucid, disciplined form in which Nielsen could highlight a solo instrument, and one which continued to be pertinent, even in the last years of his life. The prominent features that exhibit this neoclassical inclination include form, melodic construction, counterpoint, thematic treatment, motivic devices, and cadential motion. Nevertheless, in this context Nielsen modified retrospective elements to suit his own purposes.

Nielsen’s admiration for Mozart is well documented, and the influence of Mozart’s music on Nielsen’s is significant. Nielsen declared that Mozart was “freer and less constrained in form than any of the classical masters who have employed the difficult sonata form so favoured by

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28 Arnold, 351.
composers since [Carl] Philipp Emanuel Bach—the form on which the symphony is based.”

Of Mozart’s music, Nielsen wrote, “Composition so consistently superb, form so flexible yet austere and compelling, sweetness and melody so enchanting, and counterpoint so intelligent, so wise—have never been known before or since.” Undoubtedly, the reverence that Nielsen had for Mozart’s craftsmanship influenced the formal considerations of the Flute Concerto.

Form is utilized in the Concerto as an organizational feature; however, Nielsen modifies the formal structure to suit his style. Like the earlier Violin Concerto, the Flute Concerto contains only two movements. This structure deviates from the established three-movement classical concerto form. Nielsen’s two movements, marked Allegro moderato and Allegretto, are each sectionalized, providing tempo, mood, and style contrasts. Furthermore, neither of the movements reveals a precise formal structure within itself. In order to determine how best to classify the form of each movement, a variety of analyses will be examined.

The first movement presents features of multiple formal paradigms. Several writers on Nielsen, particularly Ben Arnold, James Hiatt, and Kevin Maloney, purport that this movement is in modified sonata form. This classification is logical, considering that the movement contains material that resembles an introduction, followed by an exposition containing two thematic groups, a development, a cadenza, and a recapitulation, with various closing themes and transitional material throughout. However, the harmonic motion of the movement does not suggest sonata form, as the classical tonic-dominant progression in the exposition is conspicuously absent, as well as is a return to the tonic within the recapitulation. Certainly there

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30 Ibid., 20.

are numerous examples of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century sonata forms that have been modified. But in Nielsen’s Concerto, there seem to be more anomalies than norms to classify the movement as sonata form.

Amy Nelson contends that the Concerto as a whole is actually a two-part fantasy, with the first movement as the first part.\textsuperscript{32} Nelson claims that, although the formal scheme of this movement is reminiscent of a classical form, in reality it is a highly original fantasy form, embedded with traditional elements of an introduction, exposition, development, cadenza, closing, and coda.\textsuperscript{33} Nelson’s observation that the first theme never fully returns at the conclusion of the movement, nor do the tonal areas that are established through the thematic material of the movement (D minor, E-flat minor, F major) recapitulate, support the categorization of the \textit{Allegro moderato} as the first part of a two-part fantasy.\textsuperscript{34} Additionally, Nelson cites the similarity of motivic material between the two movements as further evidence for the designation of the work as a two-part fantasy.\textsuperscript{35} Although Nielsen did not make extensive use of cyclicism, there are hints of recurring thematic material within both movements of the Flute Concerto. Nevertheless, classification of the formal structure of the \textit{Allegro moderato} is problematic and reiterates Nielsen’s practice of modifying existing forms for his own purposes.

There is also disagreement in identifying the formal structure of the second movement. Again, Arnold, Hiatt, and Maloney take the traditionalist approach, labeling it a rondo.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Nelson, 36.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 36, 180–82.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 36.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Arnold, 359, 361–62; and Hiatt, 22.
Arnold’s argument of the movement as a seven-part rondo form is generally convincing, supported by his detailed illustration of the primary theme (Example 25) acting as a refrain (A) to which the movement repeatedly returns (in measures 93, 145, 195, and 231).

Example 25: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, II. *Allegretto*, m. 12–18 (flute part only)

However, he includes with the refrain the new thematic material beginning in measure 39 (Example 26).

Example 26: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, II. *Allegretto*, m. 39–43 (flute part only)

Contrary to Arnold’s analysis, both Hiatt and Maloney define this thematic material as an episode (B). This classification is more convincing than that of Arnold, in that this thematic material, although somewhat related to the material of (A), is obviously different and should therefore be treated as such. Despite Hiatt’s categorizing the movement as a rondo, he does allude to the possibility of another interpretation. He allows that the Flute Concerto is more complex and longer than other examples of rondo forms in late Nielsen works and, therefore, is

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37 Hiatt, 24; and Maloney, 8.

38 Hiatt, 24.
less susceptible to being classified as a standard rondo form.\textsuperscript{39} By definition, the elements of a traditional rondo include a recurring refrain (A), with contrasting episodes (B, C, D) occurring between appearances of (A), with the refrain occurring as the first and last sections in the movement.\textsuperscript{40} Hiatt’s formal diagram illustrates that the \textit{Allegretto} diverts from this rondo model on two occasions: 1.) measure 62 marks a new episode (C), without having returned to the refrain (A) following the immediately preceding episode (B) (measures 39–61); and 2.) some sections are cited as fragments, not complete episodes.\textsuperscript{41} Maloney agrees that the movement contains elements of rondo form, but also suggests that there are loosely adapted elements of sonata-allegro form.\textsuperscript{42} As does Hiatt, Maloney observes that the movement lacks a definitive element of rondo form, since there is no return to the refrain (A) between episodes (B) and (C).\textsuperscript{43} And to debunk the relationship to sonata form, the harmonic underpinnings of sonata form do not exist in the movement.\textsuperscript{44} By contrast, Nelson supports her analysis of the Concerto as a two-part fantasy, with the \textit{Allegretto} serving as the second part. However, she permits that, even within the context of the fantasy, the movement is similar to a rondo.\textsuperscript{45} She indicates that the deviation from a traditional rondo is restricted to the first theme returning in measure 145 with the same

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 22–24. Other examples of rondo forms in late Nielsen works are the second movement of \textit{Preludio e Presto} (Prelude and presto) for solo violin, Op. 52, FS 128; the fourth movement of the Clarinet Concerto, Op. 57, FS 129; and the second movement of \textit{Tre Klaverstykker} (Three Piano Pieces), Op. 59, FS 131.

\textsuperscript{40} Green, 153, quoted in Hiatt, 26.

\textsuperscript{41} Hiatt, 24, 26.

\textsuperscript{42} Maloney, 6.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Nelson, 67.
pitch content, but in a different meter and style (that of a 6/8 march). Although this single instance of deviation does not present an entirely compelling case for the movement to not be classified as a rondo, Nelson’s argument for the case of a two-part fantasy is persuasive. Nonetheless, a fantasy form is a more unrestricted designation than sonata or rondo form and allows for flexibility, if not imprecision, in analysis. Despite nomenclature, Arnold, Hiatt, Maloney, and Nelson all agree that the Allegretto is rondo-like in form.

A retrospective element in the Flute Concerto is Nielsen’s self-borrowing. The introductory gesture of the Concerto, which is then imitated in modified form at the flute entrance (measure 5), is derived directly from the opening of Nielsen’s own Fantasy Pieces, Op. 2, for oboe and piano (1889) (Examples 27a and 27b).

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46 Ibid.
Example 27a: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 1–4

Example 27b: Nielsen, *Fantasy Pieces*, Op. 2, for oboe and piano, II. *Humoresque*, mm. 1–4
Although the pieces are in different meters and keys, the intervallic structure and rhythm are nearly identical. It is remarkable that, given the advancement in Nielsen’s compositional skill and artistic growth by the time of the Concerto, he chose to borrow material from such an early piece.

The melodic content of the Concerto continues to be conservative, although to a lesser extent than in previous works. The melodic material is mostly diatonic, yet it is now blended with considerable chromaticism. Also, the melodic range is wider than in the other flute works, primarily because the orchestral ensemble has a much greater capacity to expand that range, in comparison with the limitations of the solo instrument or small ensembles for which his earlier flute works were written. Similar to the other flute works, the Flute Concerto makes extensive use of oscillating patterns. There are numerous examples of this figuration throughout the work; one example is from early in the Concerto, in which the flute part circles around a range of an eleventh (Example 28).

Example 28: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. Allegro moderato, mm. 8–11 (flute part only)

There is also evidence in the Concerto of melodic material that seems directly derived from the incidental pieces from Moderen, including “Taagen letter” (compare Examples 29a and 29b).
Nielsen’s melodic style is conservative, yet naturally tuneful and songlike. In the Concerto, as in his other flute works, both his song composition style and his folk heritage were influential.

In addition to oscillating figures, Nielsen’s melodic construction includes repeated-note melodies, as exemplified in the Concerto and other works of this period. This feature is suggestive of neoclassicism, and Arnold draws numerous correlations between Nielsen’s writing in the Flute Concerto and that of Mozart, particularly as related to melodic construction. This analogy is not surprising, given Nielsen’s affinity for and influence by Mozart’s music. Like Mozart, Nielsen made extensive use of repeated-note melodies, especially in what Arnold identifies as second-theme areas.47 For example, the second theme of the Concerto’s Allegro moderato (Example 30a) is comprised of slow, repeated notes, reminiscent of Mozart’s Piano Sonata in F, K. 332 (Example 30b).48

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47 Arnold, 351.

48 Ibid.
Example 30a: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, second theme, mm. 34–38

Example 30b: W. A. Mozart, Piano Sonata in F, K. 332, I. *Allegro*, second theme, mm. 41–48

There are numerous examples of this figuration in Nielsen’s other works, such as in the Sixth Symphony of this period, in which the upper winds play the repeated note second theme in measure 80, followed by the bassoons and horns in measure 82 (Example 31).
Example 31: Nielsen, Symphony No. 6, I. *Tempo giusto*, second theme, mm. 80–83
In the Flute Concerto, other repeated note themes or motives occur in both fast and slow contexts in measures 12–13 (Example 32a), 86–89 (Example 32b), and 147–48 (Example 32c) of the *Allegro moderato*, and measure 12 of the *Allegretto* (Example 32d), among others.\textsuperscript{49}

Example 32a: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 12–13

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
Example 32b: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 86–89

Example 32c: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 147–48
Nielsen’s treatment of melody, including the use of oscillating patterns and repeated-note themes, is a distinctive feature of his late style.

Counterpoint played an increasingly important role in Nielsen’s late works. In the Flute Concerto there are several instances in which a countermelody is added on the reappearance of a theme, such as in the violins beginning in measure 135 of the Allegro moderato (Example 33).50

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50 Ibid., 356.
Example 33: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 134–37

Nielsen also makes extensive use of sequences. His reliance on this technique is a weakness, Arnold reproaches, as it typically inundates first movements of the concertos, especially the Flute Concerto.\(^5\) There is also occasional use of other developmental devices, such as augmentation, diminution, and stretto, reminiscent of Baroque compositional techniques.

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\(^{5}\) Ibid., 357.
Another neoclassical component in the Flute Concerto is the use of cadences as an organizing feature, despite Nielsen’s expanded tonal language, and the use of trills to demarcate structurally important moments. Trills occur prominently in the solo flute part as a driving force into a cadence or climactic point. The utilization of trills in this manner is extensive throughout the classical concerto repertoire, albeit within a conservative tonal language. In Nielsen’s work these trills usually occur at a forte or fortissimo dynamic level and on a high pitch, such as in measures 143–45 in the Allegro moderato to prepare the cadenza (Example 34a) and in measures 192–96 in the Allegretto as an impetus for the return of the first theme in the trombone part (Example 34b).52

Example 34a: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. Allegro moderato, mm. 143–45

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52 Ibid., 352.
Even though Nielsen avoids a standardized cadential harmonic formula, the trills assist in making the harmonic motion comprehensible.

Another element of classicism is thematic restatement. Arnold discusses the recurrence of themes throughout Nielsen’s concertos and refers specifically to the restatement of themes in contrasting secondary theme areas in the Flute Concerto. In these instances, thematic restatements are present within soft and light textures, and with key changes, such as at the first
movement’s *A tempo ma tranquillo*, in which measures 34–36 (Example 35a) are restated in measures 37–39 (Example 35b).\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{example}
\begin{music}
\begin{musicnot}
\example A\hspace{1em}Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. Allegro moderato, mm. 34–36
\end{musicnot}
\end{music}
\end{example}

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
Restating thematic material soon after its original statement provides classical balance and symmetry.

The retrospective features of Nielsen’s Flute Concerto include the use of self-borrowed material and established forms, melodic construction, thematic and motivic treatment and restatement, and an emphasis on cadential motion through neoclassical devices. These features, although significant to the design of the work, are not used strictly, but in a malleable manner to
suit Nielsen’s own style and purposes. The freedom with which Nielsen returns to his roots allows creative license through modern features.

**Modernism in the Flute Concerto**

Nielsen’s treatment of the concerto was revolutionary in that the Flute Concerto did not identifiably resemble its predecessors, as attested by the reception to the work’s first performances. The merging of traditionalism and progressivism present in the Concerto is representative of Nielsen’s late style. Ole Gad characterized the Concerto as “an intimate divertimento, less traditional because of its thinner orchestration, less extensive thematic development, and freer melodic-harmonic treatment.”

The treatment of not only orchestration, but also instrumentation is innovative. Other features include handling of timbre and texture; a varied role for the soloist in relation to the orchestra, including an inventive use of cadenzas; and perhaps the most identifiable hallmark of Nielsen’s mature style, progressive tonality.

Orchestration and instrumentation entail important components of what distinctively identifies Nielsen’s late music. With Nielsen’s three concertos, the orchestra for each is subsequently smaller. The previous concerto, for violin, was scored for a comparatively large orchestra: double woodwinds, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings. The Flute Concerto omits the orchestral flutes and trumpets, decreases the horns by half, and reduces the trombones to one, while the Clarinet Concerto is essentially scored for a large chamber ensemble: two bassoons, two horns, snare drum, and strings. This progression to a

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smaller ensemble is representative of Nielsen’s growing interest in chamber music. Even in his symphonies, the stylistic change to more minimal orchestral forces is noticeable. The first four symphonies utilized triple and double woodwind sections, with large brass sections, an assortment of percussion, strings, and in the case of the Third Symphony, vocal soloists. By the last two symphonies, Nielsen reduced the woodwind sections to only pairs, although still with large brass and percussion sections. The Sixth Symphony, in particular, sought a simplicity and tranquility different from earlier works.

During this last period, Nielsen sought to grasp a greater intimacy: he aimed for what Simpson defines as a new “transparency.”55 The instrumentation in the last symphonies is allied with Nielsen’s effort to feature the woodwinds more prominently as soloists. And as in the Wind Quintet, Nielsen used the last symphony to explore the individual characteristics of each instrument, as he said, “Each instrument is like a person who sleeps, whom I have to wake to life…. I think through the instruments themselves, almost as if I had crept inside them.”56 This attention to the natural timbre of each instrument rings true for the Flute Concerto as well.

Nielsen’s interest in the characteristic timbre of individual instruments is demonstrated through both the solo flute writing and the orchestration of the Concerto. The relatively small orchestra for which the Concerto is scored essentially replicates a double wind quintet (minus one flute), with the addition of another single brass instrument; percussion (timpani), as is pervasive in his last symphonies; and of course, strings. This shift to a smaller ensemble which features the distinctive voices of particular instruments can, according to Arnold, be viewed as part of the neoclassical “rage that erupted in the 1920s as seen in Stravinsky’s Concerto for piano

55 Simpson, Symphonist, 112.

56 Nielsen, in an interview with Andreas Vinding, Politiken, December 1925, quoted in ibid.
and winds (1924) and Berg’s Chamber Concerto for piano, violin, and thirteen wind instruments (1925)."57 However, Nielsen did not explore the scheme of the ritornello concerto with contrast between the solo and tutti groups.

The length of each of Nielsen’s concertos tends to be progressively briefer, exemplifying his desired aesthetic of simplicity. Arnold writes that the Flute Concerto lasts for approximately twenty-one minutes, as opposed to the Violin Concerto’s thirty-five minutes.58 This relative brevity could be considered a reaction against the massiveness of late Romantic concertos and symphonies. In comparison to the genre of the Romantic symphony, Nielsen’s symphonies are also relatively brief, with none lasting more than approximately thirty-seven minutes.59 Although the size of the orchestra and the duration of the work suggest a classical propensity, the way in which Nielsen utilized the orchestra in relation to the soloist exhibits a modernist bent.

Timbre and texture are used in imaginative ways throughout the Flute Concerto, especially in relationship to the soloist. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the work is the element of dialogue between the flute and the orchestra, and how the orchestra is often used sparingly to create a chamber music texture. Notable is the relationship between the flute and the bass trombone, with the latter acting as the former’s nemesis. As David Fanning describes, this interaction exhibits “well-mannered elegance in the face of brute opposition.”60 The disparity in register and character of these two instruments’ timbres provides an innovative component upon which to found their musical disagreement. It has been suggested that the

57 Arnold, 366.
58 Ibid. However, the Clarinet Concerto is slightly longer than the Flute Concerto.
59 Ibid., 366, 375.
60 Fanning, New Grove, 17:892.
trombone, acting as a buffoonish character, might even represent the composer himself, attempting a slight joke at the expense of his genteel flutist friend.\(^6\) Or perhaps the unlikely pairing suggests that relations between Gilbert-Jespersen and a bass trombonist colleague were not always agreeable. Regardless of impetus, the coarseness in the bass trombone writing contrasts with both the lyricism and sprightly character of much of the writing for the flute and other woodwinds. For example, in the first movement, after an exploration of the peaceful secondary theme by the flute, the bass trombone enters at measure 81 with aggression and gall, as indicated by his *forte* dynamic marking on the b-natural, encouraged by a supporting timpani (Example 36).

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\(^6\) Lawson, 196.
Example 36: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 81–84

The flute responds with an insistent and shrewd resolve in measure 83, with accented, abrupt, and repetitive rhythmic punctuations. The confrontation continues until measure 97, when the strings and other winds intervene with the primary melodic material. The flute and timpani join forces in measures 211–30, with sarcastic commentary by the bass trombone’s *glissandi* in measures 220–21 (Example 37).
Example 37: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, II. *Allegretto*, mm. 211–21

Such prominent use of the trombone and timpani presents progressive timbral excursions rather unusual for a concerto at the time of Nielsen’s composition, particularly in their disunity with the solo instrument. Other contemporary effects include the trombone *glissandi* that punctuate the end of the Concerto, as well as a variety of unconventional instrument groupings.

In addition to the flute, bass trombone, and timpani interaction, there are several other instances of chamber textures within the full orchestral context of the Concerto. In the *Allegro moderato*, the flute acts as part of a trio with the clarinet and bassoon in measures 37–42 (Example 38).
Example 38: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 37–42

There is also a trio with the clarinet and first violins that begins in measure 58 (Example 39).

This texture continues, eventually thinning to a duet with the clarinet, while the violins punctuate the texture until measure 70.

Example 39: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 58–61
A double cadenza highlights a contrapuntal weaving between the flute and clarinet in measures 126–33 (Example 40), and again in measures 147–55, with the joining of the bassoon in measure 156.

Example 40: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. Allegro moderato, mm. 126–33
The Allegretto showcases other instances of this chamber music texture through the flute and bassoon duet in measures 18–29 (Example 41a), and the flute, horn, and viola in measures 97–113 (Example 41b).

Example 41a: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, II. Allegretto, mm. 18–29

Example 41b: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, II. Allegretto, mm. 97–113
Rarely are all of the winds heard in combination with the flute at any one time. Through a variety of different combinations of small ensembles within the orchestra, Nielsen kept the texture and timbre fresh and appealing.

Nielsen also strayed from the classical concerto through his treatment of the soloist in relation to the orchestra and his use of cadenzas. The flute is often used almost as a member of the orchestra, or more accurately, as an equal part of a chamber ensemble. Nevertheless, there are many musical moments throughout the work in which the flute is featured above a thin, transparent texture in the orchestra. Usually these instances occur when the flute is depicted as elegant and lyrical, for which Nielsen provides a background of faint string sounds so that the flute can easily project, such as in measures 5–9 in the Allegro moderato (Example 42).

Example 42: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. Allegro moderato, mm. 5–9

The flute is frequently left to its own devices through Nielsen’s omitting nearly all other instruments within the orchestra, such as in measures 29–33 (Example 43a) and 163–78
(Example 43b) in the *Allegro moderato*, throughout much of the *Allegretto*, and of course, in the cadenza passages throughout the Concerto.
Example 43b: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, mm. 163–66

Cadenzas occur more frequently in this work than in most concertos and denote a break from the traditional improvised cadenza found before a classical concerto’s final tutti. In the Flute Concerto there are four cadenzas or cadenza-like passages, each of a different length, character, placement, and accompaniment (measures 58–69, 133, 146, and 157). As Nielsen’s cadenzas are more embedded within the Concerto, when compared with their classical concerto counterparts, these cadenzas still require virtuosity, while allowing the soloist to be integrated into the whole of the texture.

Nielsen’s ever-expanding tonal harmony and chromaticism are exploited in the Concerto. This harmonic expansion is evidenced most fully in that both movements, as well as the entire work, end in different keys from that in which they began, a practice Nielsen employed as early

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62 Arnold, 368.
as the First Symphony. Even the opening gesture is a dissonance, with an A-to-D motive in the high strings and winds over an E-flat in the bass; hence, the first harmonic sounds of the piece are a tritone and a major seventh (Example 44).

Immediately, the progressivism in the harmony is striking through the use of dissonance and modality. The D dorian emphasis continues above the E-flat pedal through the flute entrance, which occurs in measure 5, now above a G pedal (Example 45).
Example 45: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, I. *Allegro moderato*, m. 5

The remainder of the movement passes through various modulations, tonicizations, and modal mixture in, among others, E-flat, F, C, and E major, to end on a G-flat major chord, an entirely new key. The *Allegretto* also exhibits an expanded harmonic language, but in a milder presentation. Again, this movement contains many instances of modal mixture, as in Nielsen’s previous flute works. Although the movement begins in G major and frequently returns to it, there is a brief but important element of bitonality that will be discussed below. Not only does the first movement stray from its initial key (D dorian over an E-flat pedal) to a new tonality (G-flat), but the Concerto as a whole concludes in a distant key from the opening (E major, a whole-step above D dorian and a half-step above E-flat).

The conclusion of the Concerto merits attention, as it contains a harmonic element of importance. Because of his illness and haste in composing the Concerto, Nielsen revised the
ending of the last movement prior to the Copenhagen première. Although the fact that the work was sent to Gilbert-Jespersen in fragments on postcards from Italy\textsuperscript{63} might be reason to warrant reconsideration by the composer after hearing the work performed in its entirety, Simpson suggests an alternative explanation for the conclusion’s revision. The original ending continued the 6/8 *Tempo di Marcia* begun in measure 145, with brief and intermittent episodes in 2/4 meter, to a cheerful close in D major, the dominant of the initial key of G major.\textsuperscript{64} However, Simpson hypothesizes that Nielsen thought better of such a simplified and comfortable resolution, even though the final cadence was on the dominant (still not in the original key, but even the dominant cadence would be relatively conservative for Nielsen). In the revision, without a meter change, the bass trombone again enters in measure 195 on a D-flat to add an element of bitonality, in chromatic contrast with the abundant diatonicism in this movement (Example 46).

\textsuperscript{63} Gilbert-Jespersen, “Interview,” published in Nelson, 142.

\textsuperscript{64} Nielsen, Flute Concerto excerpt, facsimile of holograph score, II. *Allegretto*, mm. 138–195, Carl Nielsen Edition, Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark; included in Nelson, rear pocket. This holograph is enlightening, as no published version of the original ending exists. In the holograph, Nielsen crossed out a large portion of the ending, mm. 150–64 and 169–95 (the original end), although the material remains mostly legible. He did, however, incorporate some of the material into the revised, published ending.
Example 46: Nielsen, Flute Concerto, II. *Allegretto*, mm. 195–200

He proceeds chromatically and almost haphazardly to a new tonic of E major in measure 198. Therefore, Simpson suggests that Nielsen thought it humorous to allow the bass trombone, of all characters, to stumble accidentally upon the satisfying and familiar key of E major, which had been established in the first movement development, to round out the work.\(^65\) The flute is caught

\(^{65}\) Simpson, *Symphonist*, 142.
off-guard by the unintentional cleverness of the trombone and eventually arrives, albeit
reluctantly, in E major in measure 200 with support from the orchestra, to conclude the work.
Reminiscent of the flute and bass trombone’s quarrellings in the first movement, the bass
trombone has the last harmonic word. Besides the musical humor in Nielsen’s revision of the
Allegretto, that the movement ends in E major, a minor third below the opening key of G major,
is typical of Nielsen’s penchant for third relationships, as demonstrated in nearly every
symphony, and especially the Sixth.66 Nielsen’s unconventional use of tonality is one of the
most characteristic features of his late style; yet ironically, he effected a complete turnaround in
the harmonic treatment of the Clarinet Concerto, which, despite its distant tonal excursions and
instances of polytonality, ends in the key in which it began—a surprise to his many critics.

More than any other work in which Nielsen featured the flute, the Concerto exemplifies
many traits of his compositional style established in his last style period; to this end, it also
demonstrates marked growth and stylistic change from his earlier periods. His “ability to retain
his classical heritage and infuse it with experimentation in tonality and instrumentation”67 is
evident in this concerto, exhibiting fine craftsmanship through the exploration of modernist
ingredients within a classical framework. Nielsen’s choice of formal organization, as well as his
construction of melodic, thematic, and motivic content, embody traits of the conventional
classical concerto. Even so, some of these traits suggest an unconventional approach to form,
even for the early decades of the twentieth century. This modernism is strongly apparent in the
Concerto’s orchestration, timbre, texture, and most identifiably, tonality.

67 Arnold, 375.
Nielsen’s Influence on Later Flute Concertos

Nielsen’s Flute Concerto stands alone as one of the most individual works within the canon of twentieth-century flute repertoire. Simpson predicted that, of Nielsen’s three concertos, the Flute Concerto would “achieve the greatest popularity, for it has a ripe sense of fun with a deeply poetic insight into human character; in many ways it is the richest and most original concerto ever written for the flute.”\(^{68}\) Now into the twenty-first century and its ninth decade of performance, the Flute Concerto remains popular. Performers and audiences alike continue to describe Nielsen’s style as peculiar or eccentric, yet the Concerto still holds appeal. Arnold agrees and summarizes the impact of the work: “The Flute Concerto, with its sardonic wit and seemingly incongruous elements, remains fresh and engaging hearing after hearing and takes its place among the great flute concertos of the century.”\(^{69}\) Innovatively featuring the solo flute within an orchestral texture, suggestive of the chamber music idiom, Nielsen allowed the musical experience to be more interactive for all involved than in earlier concertos. This concept, along with the many other attractive characteristics contained in this work, paved the way for other significant contributions to the flute concerto genre. As the genre had been flooded in the Romantic era with works for piano and violin, which continued into the early twentieth century, few substantive flute concertos were composed. Nielsen’s Flute Concerto filled a significant void. Some works that followed include Jacques Ibert’s *Concerto* (1932–33), André Jolivet’s *Concerto* (1949), Malcolm Arnold’s *Concerto No. 1* (1954) and *Concerto No. 2* (1972), Bernstein’s *Halil* (for flute and percussion, 1981), and Christopher Rouse’s *Concerto* (1993). Some of these works pay homage to Nielsen in specific stylistic ways, such as the orchestration.

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\(^{68}\) Simpson, *Symphonist*, 146.

\(^{69}\) Arnold, 375.
and texture of Arnold’s concerto, the instrumentation of Bernstein’s work for flute and percussion, and modified formal structures of Jolivet’s two-movement work. More importantly, however, was Nielsen’s influence: his work was the first in the twentieth century to help elevate the flute to the stature of a serious instrument, worthy and capable of soloing with an orchestra.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

The last years of Nielsen’s life saw continued creative activity, and as his health worsened, he turned to spiritual sources for strength. Although not a religious man and having no belief in an afterlife, he did seek inspiration through that which expressed purity and simplicity. It is perhaps this motivation that drew him back to Renaissance polyphony and the Baroque toccata, both of which infiltrated his 29 små praeludier (29 little preludes), Op. 51 (1929), Tre Motetter (Three motets), Op. 55, and his masterpiece, Commotio for organ. After decades of combating his heart condition, it finally brought his death on 3 October 1931.

In assessing Nielsen’s oeuvre, one finds it broad, diverse, and unrestrained, covering a variety of genres and a multitude of styles, sentiments, and influences, all combined to create Nielsen’s inimitable style. Thus, classifying his style is difficult. Scholars have attempted to trace developmental changes through his oeuvre, and Simpson’s paradigm, in particular, exerts commendable effort, delineating it into four periods (rather than others’ bifurcation). However, in Nielsen’s case, dividing his works is limiting. Simpson himself seems to have difficulty in defining each of Nielsen’s four style periods, especially in specifying the characteristics exclusive to each period. The works within each period are all independent, and many are unique within their respective genres. Yet so many of Nielsen’s tendencies as a composer appeared in early works, and to some extent, the works of the first two periods are more similar than the works that followed. Hence, it is reasonable that the works of both the first and second periods defined Nielsen’s early style, albeit with evidence of compositional refinement. As he matured, these traits continued in fuller, more advanced ways through the last. Especially the
works from the third and fourth periods exhibit similar characteristics. Therefore, it seems logical to cluster the works of these last two periods not into a single period, as each explored different aesthetics, but generally to define Nielsen’s late style. By remaining true to the principles and values in art and life that he adopted as a young musician, Nielsen came to fully realize his compositional ideals through his final years.

While there exist style traits specific to each period, many of Nielsen’s signature characteristics are exhibited in nearly every piece. As the earliest works in Nielsen’s first period are initially imitative of Haydn and Mozart, his style quickly developed to illustrate a more adventurous inclination. He was impressed with Brahms, and this influence proved strong in his craftsmanship of works from late in the first period. Even in this earliest period, he experimented with genres as diverse as the song, the string quartet, and the symphony. As he became compositionally more daring, he extended his harmonic vocabulary to encompass an awareness of modern devices, all the while remaining independent of serious influence by his contemporaries. At the same time, his works continued to be grounded on classical elements with an air of traditionalism. His second period found him exploring new territory in opera and the concerto, while further refining his skill in genres familiar to him. He also developed a keen interest in the human character and the portrayal of it through music.

While the works of the third period demonstrate a novel strength and determination in his composition, especially in regards to his increasingly progressive treatment of tonality, he also maintained a connection with many traditional forms and devices. He experimented with new aesthetic principles, while further developing existing ones. This balance of new vigor and old organizational methods is displayed through, among others, his symphonies and incidental music for the stage, as well as his chamber music.
Into the fourth period Nielsen became even more experimental, featuring works of advanced polyphonic and textural complexity, despite an insistence to return to the basics. To him, however, emphasis on the fundamentals was a way in which to clear away the excess and unnecessary, of which his music demonstrates few instances. Despite the toughness heard in some of his last works, such as the final symphony and last concerto, the simplicity he sought was manifested in the effortlessness with which he desired to compose and his recollection of retrospective influences, as shown in the final keyboard and choral works. In spite of his innovative treatment of many compositional devices, he never lost sight of his simple roots and folk heritage. That he made use of self-borrowed material to reinterpret in a current context reiterates his connection with his past. The constant development of Nielsen as a man and his music is definitively expressed through his complete body of work.

In discussions of Nielsen’s progressivism, his treatment of harmony plays a prominent role; despite his modern tendencies, in no way is he an atonal composer. He stretched the bounds of functional harmony, but was reluctant to fully adopt the extreme chromaticism of many of his contemporaries. Nor was he in favor of the principles established by his romantic counterparts. However, his expanded and modernized harmonic vocabulary does allude at times to the sonority of some atonal works. This progressive language, nevertheless, is still couched through conventional elements, such as voice-leading and form. In fact, Nielsen’s work often is more loosely structured than that of his atonal counterparts, which gave him a freedom that others did not have. Nielsen benefited from an insatiable impulse to explore, while using conventional means, as proven by his liberal adaptation of traditional forms; hence, a compositional technique that did not afford him flexibility, such as twelve-tone, was not useful to him. Parks describes the trend of portraying Nielsen as a revolutionary:
The secondary literature depicts Nielsen as a composer possessed of a highly idiosyncratic and distinctive compositional voice, whose musical language is generally conservative and tonal but encompasses sporadic sallies into modernism. The latter evince a sonus that resembles the radical music associated with the early twentieth-century atonal composers.\(^1\) Parks argues that “attributions of radicalism to Nielsen’s style are exaggerated.”\(^2\) It is ironic that Nielsen would be rendered a radical, as his own words deny that intent: “No sooner does an artist display a little independence than he is declared a revolutionary; and many are so naïve as to be flattered by it.”\(^3\) He made no effort to compose in a way so as to spark curiosity for curiosity’s sake, but only in a manner that was natural and personal for him. It remains to be seen how future scholarship will represent Nielsen’s merging of seemingly opposing approaches to composition.

Despite the difficulty in categorizing his music, Nielsen sought a purity and simplicity in his life and works. He began his career at a time when more in music and art was better, when the artist reigned supreme, and when an outpouring of emotion was desirable. Yet for Nielsen, nature and life exemplified what music should be—solely music, nothing more or less. His rebellion against these Romantic ideals was, to him, an inevitable process:

> It is an old experience that when an everyday object gradually loses its original form owing to over-embellishment, there is often a sudden return to the original, to the plain and simple, the purpose of which is abundantly clear. It is almost a law of Nature.\(^4\)

He adhered to these principles throughout his life—emphatically so in his final style period. His enormous output of strophic Danish folk songs perhaps reveals this simplicity in its most basic form. Yet it can be found in his large works as well.

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\(^1\) Parks, 542.

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Nielsen, *Living Music*, 17.

\(^4\) Ibid., 38.
The enormous breadth and variety of Nielsen’s output is illustrated succinctly in his works that feature the flute. Even though these works are included in the third and fourth style periods, and thus are of his mature style, they demonstrate the diversity within that style. Through the consummate simplicity and economy of the incidental pieces from *Aladdin* and *Moderen*, one can glimpse into the past of Nielsen’s childhood. In the midst of the increasing complexity of his larger-scale works, that of his symphonies, choral, and dramatic works, Nielsen tapped into the natural, the innocent, the uncomplicated and optimistic world of his early life on a Nordic island. Through these miniature pieces, Nielsen expressed some of his innermost affinities.

Nonetheless, he also fully exploited the flute in the large genres in which it is featured. The Wind Quintet illustrates the instrument in a timbral kaleidoscope, portraying a broad spectrum of colors and characters. This work displays many of Nielsen’s eccentricities as a composer, with its lighthearted optimism in the first two movements, followed by a deep darkness in the prelude. Balancing this poignant contrast are the chorale tune theme and its eleven variations, which seem to endow multiple personalities in each of the instruments independently, as well as in their combinatorial groupings. One can hear the remnants of the incidental pieces for flute in this grander work.

Even more advanced in intricacy as well as cleverness is the flute as featured in its Concerto. Its compound role as sometimes a solo instrument, sometimes an equal member of a chamber ensemble disguised as an orchestra, flaunts its flexibility and range in technical and emotional capability, while demonstrating Nielsen’s facility to create diversity and resourcefulness, despite using conventional materials. Nielsen’s works that feature the flute are exemplary in their modeling of much of his oeuvre as a whole, and especially his mature style.
Nielsen’s view of the flute as “Arcadian,” “pastoral,” and “gentle” undoubtedly guided his composition for the instrument. Certainly, the incidental pieces capture these characterizations. However, the myriad of characters that are evoked within the more substantial Wind Quintet and Concerto suggests that his own perception of the instrument might have been limiting. Although the flute is never represented as raucous or bombastic, it does exhibit qualities that surpass Nielsen’s perception of it as purely a placid and mild instrument. His comments, nevertheless, do provide guidance for the performers of these works, so as to allow his music to be treated with care and consideration. It is illuminating to understand a composer’s regard for a particular instrument, and fortunately, Nielsen left this bit of evidence in his writings.

Throughout Nielsen’s life, he struggled to attain a level of not only recognition, but also distinction and respect within the European musical community. He evidently enjoyed this esteem in his homeland, as his sixtieth birthday marked a grand celebration in Denmark. In addition to an evening concert at Tivoli Gardens, where Nielsen conducted the Fifth Symphony and Fynsk foraar, there were numerous visits by dignitaries to Nielsen’s home throughout the day, a congratulatory dinner and parties, and a torch procession through Copenhagen. In honor of this milestone and of Nielsen’s contribution to Danish artistic life, a piano manufacturer gave him a new piano, and a music press published several of his essays as Levende musikk. Upon his death six years later, his country marked the sad occasion as a national day of mourning. Even today, his country’s musical culture declares that he is the greatest and most important figure in the history of Danish music since the Middle Ages.\(^5\) Indeed, Nielsen affected Denmark’s culture and inspired its people and those throughout the region in ways far beyond his realization. Just as his poverty-stricken upbringing was an unpredictable beginning to achievement as the

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monumental musical icon he became, so was his successful assimilation of many disparate musical elements to forge an individualistic style. It is perhaps this unpredictability that juxtaposes with the probability that Carl Nielsen’s music will continue to resonate beyond the shores of his homeland.
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