



# NIELSEN

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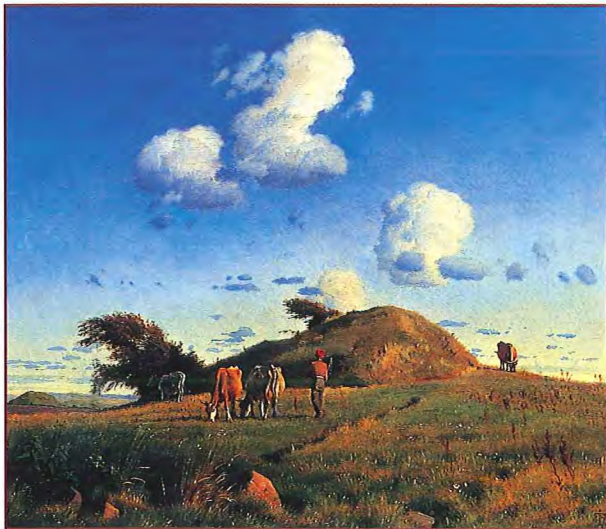
## Complete Piano Music

### Volume 2

#### Festival Prelude • Suite, Op. 45

#### Three Piano Pieces • Piano Music for Young and Old

#### Peter Seivewright, Piano



**Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)**  
**Complete Piano Music Volume 2**  
**Festival Prelude**  
**Suite, Op. 45**  
**Three Piano Pieces, Op. 59**  
**Piano Music for Young and Old, Op. 53**

"It is a fact," Nielsen wrote in his young days, "that the artist who is handy with his fists will secure for himself the most lasting reputation: Beethoven... Bach, Berlioz... and similar men have all given their contemporaries a black eye!" However, in 1906 he wrote that a composer who shows a little independence is wrongly described as a revolutionary because of the continuity which cannot be killed or stifled in the spiritual-artistic life. Nielsen's progressive tendencies and his discipline to preserve musical principles are polar opposites which call for the discovery of a thread between the piano works, otherwise so diverse, on this disc.

As is well-known, Nielsen was born in the rural surroundings of Fyn in 1865, the seventh of twelve children in a modest farm-labourer's cottage. At the age of about six, he was handed a three-quarter-size violin which belonged to his father, "Painter Niels", who was also a village musician, and the boy began to pick out tunes sung in the weak but sweet voice of his mother. In the celebrated book *My Childhood* Nielsen recounts his winning a place in the military band at Odense, the capital of Fyn, and his promotion at the age of sixteen to the rank of corporal: "My constant aim was to get a piano, no matter how poor, provided it would play so that I could find the chords... I had heard there was a little old piano for sale at a watchmaker's in Overgade, and having brought my fortune up to 20 kroner I went and had a look at it... That same day it stood in my room, and from then on I spent all my spare time at the piano."

In a basement tavern Nielsen became friends with an elderly pianist who had fallen from better things and who taught him about some of the great music. In these premises, a casual meeting with a popular conductor and composer of light music named Olfert Jespersen led Nielsen to believe that he could have a career in music if only he could be admitted to the Copenhagen Conservatory of Music. In May 1883 he travelled across the Storebælt (Great Belt); the sea between Fyn and Zealand) and gained admittance. Although he did not study composition in his curriculum, he advanced his piano abilities under J. Gottfred Mathison-Hansen (1832-1909) although never accomplishing the skill to become a concert performer of his piano works. As discussed in Volume 1, a misconception which needs to be dispelled is that Nielsen was really a symphonist who trained as a violinist and wrote awkwardly for the piano. The description "unpianistic" is used to mean unplayable (evidently the shortcomings of many performers who leave the music before grasping it) or sounding untypical of the genre. Apart from Denmark, in which his songs are best known, it is his symphonies which typecast Nielsen, yet Robert Simpson, the English authority on these orchestral works, identified a pianist, the Dane, Arne Skjold Rasmussen, as "by far the greatest interpreter of Nielsen in any medium."

France Ellegaard, a pianist born in Paris but whose parents were Danish, saw Nielsen's detachment from piano virtuosity as a great liberation which permitted his imagination to treat the instrument with innovation. In a programme note of 1953, she wrote, "His mind was never tied to what his own hands could do... Like Beethoven, Nielsen writes exactly the sound he imagines; Beethoven knew nothing of the conventional nineteenth-century techniques which were to dominate his successors. Nielsen cuts a path clean through the whole Romantic school, straight to Beethoven himself, objective and direct."

Nielsen's pianistic path clearly falls into three chronological clusters or phases of key works. The first period of his mature works stretches from the *Five Piano Pieces* of 1890, *Op. 3* until the *Humoreske-Bagateller* of 1894-97. These pieces began where Grieg ended, a piano music which was light and accessible. In between the two extremes of the first period is the *Symphonic Suite* of 1894, which the Italian-German composer Busoni called "positively unpianistic" and Nielsen himself described as orchestral. From then, however, Nielsen maintained distinct aims and methods for each genre in which he wrote. Nielsen's second pianistic phase is represented in this disc by the *Suite, Op. 45* of 1919-20 initially called *Den Luciferiske*. The major works from the third and final period are *Tre Klaverstykker* (Three Piano Pieces), *Op. 59* of 1928 and *Klavermusik for Smaa og Store* (Piano Music for Young and Old, literally, Small and Large), *Op. 53* of 1930.

The *Festival Prelude* (FS24) is a short piano piece written in 1900 to commemorate the new century. Originally scored for string and wind instruments, it briefly recalls some of the *Symphonic Suite's* orchestral qualities. In 1901 it was first printed in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* and by Edition W. Hansen, and performed by Dagmar Borup.

The *Suite, Op. 45*, (FS91), arguably Nielsen's most ambitious work for piano, was dedicated to the virtuoso Artur Schnabel. It was composed mainly in Sweden during the 1919-20 season, when Nielsen was engaged as conductor of Stenhammar's Gothenberg Symphony Orchestra, and first performed on 14th March 1921 by Johanne Stockmar. When the work was published (by Peters in Leipzig, as the Danes would not pay well enough) the composer dropped the title *Luciferan*: instead of the Greek mythological Bringer of Light, listeners were expecting some association with the devil. Only the sixth movement has a diabolic element,

according to the composer, "urging the player on to stronger contrasts and more violent accents." Nielsen's foreword acknowledged the freedom of each performer to find his or her own interpretation, but advised: "... the beginning of the first movement rather cold and restrained in tone with a peaceful flowing tempo... The second movement *poco moderato* with the most beautiful tone and subtle use of pedals, as if one were listening. The third movement with transcendental calm and power, and in many places... a certain brutal humour. The fourth movement with a chilly, glass-like execution, without the slightest trace of feeling, but with exquisite tone. The fifth movement is self-evident."

The third and final phase of Nielsen's piano music began with some of Nielsen's ultimate statements in modernism. He had met, among others, Bartók and Schoenberg, and had returned from the 1927 Music Festival in Frankfurt where the eminent German conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler had conducted Nielsen's *Fifth Symphony*. *Three Piano Pieces, Op. 59* (FS131) were composed in the following year. Initially two separate impromptus dated 15th January and 1st March were first performed by Christian Christiansen on 14th April (in reverse order and with the titles *Adagio* and *Impromptu*). The third piece was completed on 6th November and the collection was posthumously published in 1937. Like the *Sixth Symphony* and the *Flute and Clarinet Concerti*, the *Three Piano Pieces* not only reflect but anticipate modernism. They reveal Nielsen's deep concerns in the direction of the new music with its minimal and transparent textures, disintegrating tonality, and thematic discontinuity. Thus it may be in the piano music that Nielsen reaches out to his furthest point of musical impressionism, with subjects containing all twelve notes of the scale (in the *fugue* of the third piece) and the prominent rôle of the augmented fourth, the *diabolus in musica*.

Three years before, Nielsen wrote, "As far as music is concerned... everyone may use the notes as he wishes. The old rules can be applied or rejected, just as one pleases. There is no longer any schoolmaster to pull our ears; strokes and lashes are abolished, abuse and invective are heard no more... You yourself must listen, seek, think, be silent, pick and choose, until you find of your own initiative what our strict ancestors in the art thought could be drummed into our heads."

Nielsen's last years were filled with official duties. The *Piano Music for Young and Old, Op. 53*, (FS148), was written in response to a request from the Music Teachers' Society in December 1929 asking Danish composers to write some piano pieces for teaching purposes. Two volumes contained 24 pieces without thumb-crossing (proceeding up by fifths) but a 25th piece emerged (there were two in G major), each piece in a major key is followed by its relative minor.

Along with Volume 1 in this series, Peter Seivewright has thus presented Nielsen's complete piano music, i.e. all that was published in his lifetime or posthumously, and this was the *œuvre* included in Mina Miller's modern Critical Edition. In his last year Nielsen wrote a fragmentary *Piano Piece in C major* which was catalogued as item FS159 in the list of compositions published by Fog and Schousboe. The piece in C was printed in the magazine *Dansk Musiktidsskrift* in the year after the composer's death. On the suggestion of Peter Seivewright, this piece, not prepared for publication by the composer, has been omitted from what is, in other respects, a complete survey of Nielsen's completed piano works.

**Jack Lawson**

*Secretary of the Carl Nielsen Society of Great Britain  
and author of the first English biography of the  
composer, published in Spring 1997*

## **Peter Seivewright**

Peter Seivewright was born in Skipton in 1954. He studied music at Oxford and spent three years as a post-graduate student at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, studying piano with Ryszard Bekst. In addition to his performing career he is a lecturer in music at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and from 1990 to 1993 also held the position of University Pianist at the University of Strathclyde. Peter Seivewright has performed extensively as recitalist and concerto soloist throughout Great Britain, Ireland, Norway, Germany, Belgium, Denmark (eight recital tours), Australia, Latvia and Vietnam. One of the few British pianists ever to be invited to perform in the International Master of the Keyboard series in Bruges, Belgium, his performances of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Rachmaninov's *Second Piano Sonata* in 1994 were rapturously received with a prolonged standing ovation. In Denmark he has appeared regularly in many leading Danish concert venues, including the Aarhus Festival, the Carl Nielsen International Piano Festival and the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. As a concerto soloist he has appeared with many leading British orchestras, including the Hallé Orchestra, the Bardford Chamber Orchestra, the Scottish Sinfonietta, the Strathclyde Sinfonia and the Paragon Ensemble.



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<b>1</b>	<b>Fest-præluidium (Ved Aarhundredskiftet) (FS24)</b>	<i>1:33</i>	<b>15</b>	<b>4. Andantino</b>	<i>0:29</i>
	<b>(Festival Prelude "Turn of the Century")</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>5. Allegro giocoso</b>	<i>0:54</i>
	<b>Suite, Op. 45 (FS91)</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>6. Poco lamentoso</b>	<i>1:30</i>
<b>2</b>	<b>Allegretto un pochettino</b>	<i>3:58</i>	<b>18</b>	<b>7. Marziale</b>	<i>0:40</i>
<b>3</b>	<b>Poco moderato</b>	<i>2:12</i>	<b>19</b>	<b>8. Cantabile</b>	<i>0:38</i>
<b>4</b>	<b>Molto adagio e patetico</b>	<i>7:06</i>	<b>20</b>	<b>9. Allegro civettuolo</b>	<i>0:38</i>
<b>5</b>	<b>Allegretto innocente</b>	<i>1:58</i>	<b>21</b>	<b>10. Lugubre</b>	<i>1:22</i>
<b>6</b>	<b>Allegretto vivo</b>	<i>1:27</i>	<b>22</b>	<b>11. Andantino poco tiepido</b>	<i>0:56</i>
<b>7</b>	<b>Allegro non troppo ma vigoroso</b>	<i>7:13</i>	<b>23</b>	<b>12. Adagio drammatico</b>	<i>1:20</i>
	<b>Tre Klaverstykker, Op. 59 (FS131)</b>			<b>Book II</b>	
	<b>(Three Piano Pieces)</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>13. Andantino canto</b>	<i>0:47</i>
<b>8</b>	<b>Impromptu: Allegro fluente</b>	<i>2:59</i>	<b>25</b>	<b>14. Capriccioso</b>	<i>0:59</i>
<b>9</b>	<b>Molto Adagio</b>	<i>2:42</i>	<b>26</b>	<b>15. Adagio espressivo</b>	<i>1:10</i>
<b>10</b>	<b>Allegro non troppo</b>	<i>5:40</i>	<b>27</b>	<b>16. Alla contadino</b>	<i>0:46</i>
	<b>Klavermusik for Smaa og Store, Op. 53 (FS148) (Piano Music for Young and Old)</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>17. Largo con fantasia</b>	<i>1:59</i>
	<b>Book I</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>18. Preludio</b>	<i>0:35</i>
<b>11</b>	<b>1. Allegretto</b>	<i>0:29</i>	<b>30</b>	<b>19. "Alla Bach"</b>	<i>0:35</i>
<b>12</b>	<b>2. Andante quasi Allegretto</b>	<i>0:43</i>	<b>31</b>	<b>20. Adagio</b>	<i>1:15</i>
<b>13</b>	<b>3a. Allegro scherzoso</b>	<i>0:37</i>	<b>32</b>	<b>21. Marcia di goffo</b>	<i>0:45</i>
<b>14</b>	<b>3b. Grazioso</b>	<i>0:41</i>	<b>33</b>	<b>22. Allegretto pastorale</b>	<i>1:12</i>
			<b>34</b>	<b>23. Étude</b>	<i>0:54</i>
			<b>35</b>	<b>24. Molto adagio - Allegretto comodo</b>	<i>3:32</i>

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Musical Notes: Jack Lawson

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Playing  
Time  
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