

# Carl Nielsen

THE ULTIMATE SOLO PIANO COLLECTION



OUR Recordings

Rikke Sandberg



## About Carl Nielsen by Torben Enghoff

It says a great deal about Carl Nielsen's artistic strength that, despite his status as one of Denmark's internationally renowned composers, he can still divide opinion and remain a subject of debate. One encounters musicians who, in all seriousness, claim that he could not orchestrate, and there are pianists who quite simply do not like playing his piano music. One also meets performers who point out that Nielsen's notation does not always lie particularly comfortably for the individual instrument, what musicians refer to as being idiomatic.

Yet despite all this criticism, his music continues to grip, captivate, and hold listeners fast all over the world. Why? Because Carl Nielsen, in every conceivable way, is utterly and completely himself. No one else, nowhere else, could have written

that music. Thus, in musical life he occupies a curious special position as both a national icon and a punching bag. something he can only be proud of in his heaven.

If one listens to orchestral music by other Danish composers of Nielsen's time, it is clear that they had complete technical mastery of instrumentation, of how to "set an orchestra" to a musical idea. This was done with a natural and comprehensible influence from Central European figures such as Brahms, Bruckner, and Wagner. Composers like Rued Langgaard, Ludolf Nielsen, and Louis Glass felt that Nielsen took the headlines, and they, through no fault of their own, came to stand in his shadow. It must be emphasized, however, that this did not happen with Nielsen's blessing; he himself was deeply committed

to helping others find their way. These lesser-known names created music of impressive sonic weight and substance, but perhaps, precisely because of these influences, not always with such a distinctive and personal watermark.

Nielsen arrived in the capital and tore aside the heavy velvet curtains of late Romanticism. He opened the window, aired the room, and let the fresh spring breeze fill the space. He brought something new and something surprising. He was spontaneous, he was playful, and he did not lay out grand, chrome-plated blueprints for his works, but allowed the music to seize him and carry him along, rather like a jazz musician, and he could scarcely put two notes together without their becoming a melody. In the most natural and effortless way, Nielsen could take a melody to the most unexpected places; he possessed a blessed ability to modulate. Of course, he was open and curious, of course he listened to the world around him, and of course he, too, was inspired by others, Stravinsky and Bartók are obvious examples, but he stood firm, and thank God for all of us, to what he called “my own tone”.

Carl Nielsen’s piano music spans nearly forty years and is a world unto itself. Light,

charming, at times almost childlike pieces that play with the material, leap and dance and smile at us, are followed by large, weighty works that over time have become milestones and reference points in Danish piano literature. From the simple folk-like tone to music that is wild, unruly, demanding, and on the edge of the atonal. Nielsen begins with simplicity and ends with simplicity, namely in the collection *For Young and Old*, which in a small format mysteriously contains his entire tonal world. Finally, a warning: one is never finished with Carl Nielsen, so beware, he is highly addictive.

# Personal notes by Rikke Sandberg

Whether Carl Nielsen captured the sound of Denmark, or whether the sound of Denmark has been defined by Carl Nielsen's music, is hard to say. What is certain is, that his music occupies Danish identity like no other composer's. High and low alike have grown up with his children's songs, and everyone in Denmark knows Carl Nielsen, whether they are aware of it or not.

It was a major decision, but also an obvious one, to set out to record all of Carl Nielsen's piano music. Obvious because, in the years prior, I had discovered and worked with Carl Nielsen's *Third Symphony* in his own four-hand arrangement, and obvious because I descend from a pedagogical lineage that leads directly back to Carl Nielsen. His music has filled my life for as long as I can remember, and regardless

of whether some of the piano music was less familiar territory to me than other, and regardless of the music's expansive, and at times frustrating, density and complexity, I have never experienced such an enchanting evolution in understanding, perceiving, and experiencing as I have with Carl Nielsen's music.

Carl Nielsen may have been more a musician than a composer. The manuscripts can be seen as maps, sometimes with large, unforeseen obstacles that the musician must find an organic and constructive way to navigate. Maintaining a slavishly metronomic tempo is rarely the solution, just as an overly romantic, rubato-heavy approach does not necessarily make the music easier to access or understand. The musician is quite simply forced to spend a great deal of time trying

to find the way, to understand, to feel, to listen, and to sing along.

*“Rhythm is life itself, revealing itself in fresh and whimsical irregularity... It is a rhythmic celebration to let the eye follow the crests of waves in a field of grain or on the sea. It is the irregular and the law-bound that have married and formed a beautiful, living whole. Such images of movement are organic, and this is the word I most prefer when speaking of rhythm. Rhythm must be organic; it must develop as consistently and naturally as the stream in the brook, the snow flurry through the air, or the little feather that, in small rhythmic hops, sails all the way up over the chimney..”* Carl Nielsen, *Living Music (Levende Musik)*

What is remarkable is that the more time one spends with Carl Nielsen’s music, the greater the love for it becomes. Boredom and triviality are simply nowhere to be found, and the landscape, the singable lines and the beauties, emerge and grow out of the works. Time and immersion are absolutely crucial to understanding and enjoying Carl Nielsen’s music.

In an age where news feeds and social media overflow with both banal trivialities

PHOTO: SØREN SOLKÆR



and deep, tragic calamities, it has been an oasis of happiness to immerse myself in music that is filled with substance and content, depth, singable lines, characters, humor, sorrow, sarcasm, and beauty. There are many voices, ideas, and phrases woven together into a remarkable artistic tapestry, and it can be challenging for both listener and performer to keep track of all the threads, let alone to catch and enjoy them all.

If one does not fully understand Carl Nielsen's music, I would venture the claim that one simply has not listened enough. It is a bit like reading Tolstoy or Rushdie: the words are many, the characters are complex and may have several different names depending on who refers to them, and many passages must be read many times, and then perhaps once more, before everything truly falls into place.

Immersion is the key word. Allowing oneself to dive into something complicated, allowing oneself not to understand the first, or the seventy-fifth time, yet continuing to search, shape, revise, and analyze.

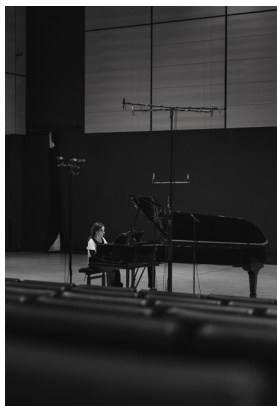
I am filled with gratitude that Carl Nielsen gave this gift of piano music to Danish

pianists, indeed, to the whole world! And I hope that with this recording I will awaken greater curiosity and help ensure that his piano music is heard, played, and recorded by many more musicians.

Once the decision to record had been made, it became clear to me, thanks to the help of Carl Nielsen scholar Bo Foltmann, that there was more material than had previously been recorded. Not only small solo pieces, but also incidental music and arrangements of orchestral works, arranged by Carl Nielsen himself, just as the *Third Symphony*, *Sinfonia Espansiva*, had been.

Out of curiosity, but also out of a desire to preserve and document a national cultural heritage, I decided to record everything.

I am aware that when listening to piano arrangements of orchestral works (or orchestral arrangements of piano works), one can immediately put on the critical glasses, or ears, and miss the sonority and narrative one is accustomed to in the original version. Suddenly it is a different voice telling the same story. Some things are omitted; others come more clearly to the fore. It is easy to put on the "no-hat," sit down in the carousel expecting a



roller coaster ride, and naturally end up disappointed. But it is just as easy to put on the “yes-hat” and listen to these works with an open mind, to hear them as Carl Nielsen himself arranged them and felt they should sound for solo piano.

Did he intend them to be performed or published? We do not know. He probably did not expect it or arrange them with that purpose in mind, but Carl Nielsen was a

full-blooded musician with tremendous vitality and humor, and even if he might have added or corrected certain things had he known they would enter the public domain, one can also view the works as they are here as a historical documentation of an extraordinarily productive composer. These piano versions allow even more people access to playing and enjoying Carl Nielsen’s music, since several of these small movements and dances are well suited to

advanced music-school students. Likewise, it is simply enjoyable to bring orchestral music into the smaller concert hall, for smaller ensembles or entirely solo.

It has been a wonderful experience to study manuscripts, scores, first editions, ink manuscripts, the *Carl Nielsen Edition*, and Mina Miller's edition; to try to find one's way, to compare, and to proofread a good deal of the material. That this work still could and had to be done for a composer who has been dead for nearly one hundred years, who is Denmark's national composer, and who in many ways has already been thoroughly examined and illuminated, has been a great honor and an archaeologically fascinating task.

In the end, my musical intuition had to lead the way, as Nielsen himself could sometimes be a little careless with his notation. Careless, quirky, multifaceted, at times somewhat cryptic, but never illogical. Carl Nielsen's music is profoundly human. After reading the complete edition of his letters, I can only describe him in the same way: vulnerable, demanding, humorous, sorrowful, egoistic, insecure, reflective, and impulsive, in short, a human being in all his facets. How I would have loved to have met him in person!





## Carl Nielsen's Piano Works

The composer Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) was a central figure in Danish musical life during the first third of the twentieth century. As a composer he was productive in virtually all genres, and in addition he had a wide-ranging career as a conductor, teacher, and author of numerous articles on contemporary musical and cultural topics. His piano works span from his teenage years in the 1880s until the final years of his life and include everything from large-scale, technically demanding compositions to small, simple five-note pieces with a pedagogical purpose. In addition, he left behind piano arrangements of incidental music for the theatre as well as a number of unpublished piano pieces, which with this release are recorded for the first time.

# Original Piano Works

Carl Nielsen's first published piano work, **Five Piano Pieces, Op. 3** (CNW 81), was composed between 1887 and 1890. The second and fifth pieces (*Humoresque* and *Elf Dance*) date from 1887–89, a period when Nielsen had a close relationship with his friend Emilie Demant Hatt; among her surviving papers are the earliest manuscripts of these two pieces, originally titled *Novellette* and *Elfentanz*. The remaining pieces were composed in the autumn of 1890 during Nielsen's first major study trip to Europe. Originally, the intention was to publish the pieces as a "Travel Letter to Mother," printed in letter format with an envelope, an idea that was never realized.

These pieces are rooted in the Romantic character piece, as known for example from Nielsen's teacher Niels W. Gade. Both the

simple, unpretentious style and the titles *Arabesque*, *Mignon*, and *Humoresque* (with the original title *Novellette*) point toward an affinity with composers such as Gade and Schumann. Despite these obvious models, the pieces already display Nielsen's unmistakable melodic and harmonic language. The third piece, *Arabesque*, was originally titled *The Devil*, but was later renamed and furnished with the motto "Have you lost your way in dark forests? Do you know Pan?" from J. P. Jacobsen's poem *An Arabesque*. This piece is perhaps the most personal of the set, and its abrupt accents and rapid figurations point forward to the style of Nielsen's mature piano works. The young composer was well aware that he had achieved something very personal with this piece, and in his diary he noted, not

without a certain pride, that his friend Fini Henriques considered it something entirely new in music.

Shortly after the successful premiere of Carl Nielsen's **First Symphony** in March 1894, he began work on the **Symphonic Suite, Op. 8** (CNW 82). With this piece, Nielsen for the first time attempted a large-scale form in piano music. The suite bears the following motto by Goethe: "*Ah, the tender hearts! A bungler can move them*", a statement that must be read as an expression of Nielsen's resistance to the softness of late Romantic music of his time. As the title suggests, the style is orchestral, with clear models in Brahms's piano works, especially the Sonata in F minor, Op. 5. The introduction to the third movement bears a striking resemblance to the second movement

of Brahms's sonata, just as the *Résumé* section in the fourth movement is clearly indebted to Brahms's *Rückblick*. During a visit to Vienna in the autumn of 1894, Nielsen even handed the manuscript of the suite to Brahms in the hope of receiving a comment from the master, but apparently no response ever came.

The first movement, *Intonation*, is written in a pompous homophonic style with massive columns of chords that move throughout the movement at a dynamic level between *ff* and *fff*. Regarding the inspiration for this movement, Nielsen himself stated:

*"In one of my piano pieces ('Intonation' in the 'Symphonic Suite') I allowed myself to be influenced by a large, ancient oak tree at Gjorslev. During the days when I was writing*

*the piece, I walked to the tree every day and received a powerful impression, which I then attempted to convey through a series of forceful chord progressions in the piece.”*

The remaining movements are more strongly characterized by contrapuntal development of the material. The suite was premiered by Louis Glass at a concert in the smaller hall of the Koncertpalæet on 4 May 1895. As with several other works by Nielsen from this period, critics found it over-conceived and constructed. One reviewer wrote that it was “a work from which sparks fly like those from the chiseling hammer, bearing witness to the composer’s abundance of knowledge and his sense for filling it out, but perhaps too much a work of sheer will. One misses a sense of atmosphere in the vast masses of sound with which the suite grapples.” The printed edition appeared the same year and was dedicated to Nielsen’s friend and mentor, the pianist and composer Victor Bendix.

The **Six Humoresque-Bagatelles, Op. 11** (CNW 83) were composed between 1894 and 1897. Knowledge of the circumstances surrounding their creation is very limited, but it is generally assumed that the pieces were written for the composer’s own children,

Irmelin, Anne Marie, and Hans Børge (born in 1891, 1893, and 1895 respectively). The work is therefore written in a relatively uncomplicated style, although movements such as *The Spinning Top* and *The Music Box* still make notable technical demands on the performer. With very simple means, Nielsen succeeds in creating a series of musical snapshots bubbling with life and humor.

A recurring feature of these pieces is the use of five-note figures, in which the pianist does not need to cross hands or use thumb-under technique (particularly in *The Spinning Top*). This method of writing would later become a highly characteristic element of Nielsen’s mature piano style, and in his final piano work would be elevated to the governing principle itself: the five-note pieces **Piano Music for Young and Old, Op. 53**. The Bagatelles were premiered by Adolfa Johnsson on 3 February 1898 at a concert in the Koncertpalæet, where the work was well received, although one reviewer wrote that it was not really music intended for the concert hall, while another remarked that the pieces “seem to be intended for children of thirty years.”

Carl Nielsen’s pianistic abilities were quite limited, and he only rarely appeared as

a pianist. However, one of the few works he performed in public concerts was his *Humoresque-Bagatelles*. He played them in 1902 on a tour of Denmark with members of the Royal Danish Orchestra, and again on 17 April 1909 at a concert in the Student Society. Moreover, the only surviving sound recording featuring Carl Nielsen is a movement from the Bagatelles, in which he plays *The Doll's March*. The recording, made on a wax cylinder in the early 1920s, is of very poor sound quality and can scarcely provide a reliable picture of Nielsen as a pianist. It can only be noted that he plays the piece in 1 minute and 24 seconds, which is slightly slower than it is usually heard today.

From 1897 onward there followed a period of nearly twenty years during which Carl Nielsen composed very few works for piano, all of them short occasional pieces.

The **Festive Prelude at the Turn of the Century** (CNW 84) was composed in 1900 and published in *Politiken* on 1 January 1901 as a facsimile of Nielsen's fair copy under the heading *Prelude to the New Century*. Later that year the piece was printed by Wilhelm Hansen with a dedication to Nielsen's friend, the painter J. F. Willumsen. In the following years the prelude was performed

regularly on the piano and occasionally on the organ. Many years later, Nielsen arranged the piece for wind band, a version he himself conducted at the centenary of the Polytechnic Institute in 1929 and at the Danish Art Festival the same year.

The small piece **The Dream of "Silent Night"** (CNW 85) is, as the title suggests, a fantasy on Franz Gruber's famous melody *Stille Nacht*. The piece was composed in 1905 and published the same year in a booklet of Christmas piano pieces issued by the Danish Society of Tone Artists. The booklet contained nine piano pieces, composed in addition to Nielsen's by Christian Barnekow, Victor Bendix, Louis Glass, Gustav Helsted, Fini Henriques, P. E. Lange-Müller, Otto Malling, and Alfred Toftt.

Around 1916, Carl Nielsen once again began working on solo piano music on a larger scale, and within just four years he composed the three major piano works **Chaconne, Op. 32** (CNW 86), **Theme with Variations, Op. 40** (CNW 87), and **Suite, Op. 45** (CNW 88). In these works, Nielsen established a distinctive, deeply personal piano style, characterized by strong contrasts, use of the piano's entire dynamic ranges from *ppp* to *fff*, and a predominantly linear treatment

of the material with frequent use of striking rhythmic ostinato figures.

With the **Chaconne, Op. 32**, composed in 1916–17, Nielsen turned back to the Baroque variation technique in which a single theme in the bass is continuously repeated with changing variations in the upper voices. The model for the work, according to Nielsen himself, was Bach's *Chaconne in D minor* for solo violin. Nielsen opens his chaconne in entirely traditional fashion by presenting the eight-bar chaconne theme monophonically in the bass. In the first variation, a second theme is introduced, forming a counterpoint to the chaconne theme. This is followed by 19 variations in which the two themes are developed with surprising freedom, often linking the individual variations closely together through motivic relationships across them. The movement culminates in a violent sonic outburst in variations 16–17, where rhythmic ostinato figures with harsh dissonances in the upper voices are set against the bass theme. After the twentieth variation, the movement concludes with a coda that finally fades away into a filigree of tonal garlands.

The *Chaconne* was premiered by Alexander Stoffregen on 13 April 1917 at a concert

in the Odd Fellow Palace and was so well received by the audience that the concluding section of the work was played *da capo*. Critics were more divided in their judgment, but already during Nielsen's lifetime the work was performed numerous times and established itself as a major work in modern Danish piano literature.

**Theme with Variations, Op. 40** was composed in 1917, immediately after the *Chaconne*. The occasion for the work arose somewhat by chance. While studying Brahms's piano style, Nielsen improvised at the piano on a theme by Brahms and thereby arrived at the tone sequence that forms the theme of Op. 40. Finding the theme interesting, he soon began work on his second large variation work for solo piano. The sixteen-bar theme, which is primarily harmonized in pure triads, begins in B minor and, through strong modulations, ends in G minor. This very feature encouraged Nielsen, as it allowed him to avoid the tonal monotony that he felt was often a weakness of variation works. In contrast to the tight interconnection of variations in the *Chaconne*, the individual variations in Op. 40 stand as clearly distinct movements, each with its own character. After the sixth variation, the seventh introduces a

reworking of the original theme, which then serves as the basis for the following three variations. The final five variations return to the theme in its original form.

As with the *Chaconne, Theme with Variations* was premiered by Alexander Stoffregen, at a concert in the Odd Fellow Palace on 29 November 1917, where the program consisted exclusively of works by Carl Nielsen. Once again, critics were divided, although Stoffregen's performance received general praise. One reviewer felt that the variations "mostly sounded mathematical, without any natural connection to the ear," while another wrote that "the theme was excellently presented and formed the germ of sixteen variations full of ingenious ideas, including a ravishing two-voice canon."

**Suite, Op. 45** was composed between 1919 and 1920 and is dedicated to the Austrian pianist Artur Schnabel. Nielsen originally gave the suite the subtitle "*The Luciferian*" in the sense of "light-bringing," but since the common interpretation of the term is "satanic," he removed the designation to avoid misunderstandings. Nevertheless, the subtitles have since gained common currency. The six-movement suite is Nielsen's most extensive piano work and also one that places

extraordinarily high technical demands on the performer. Although all movements are based on major-minor tonality, the tonal framework is frequently broken in favor of a freer or polytonal style. The second movement also shows that Nielsen was not entirely unaffected by Debussy's impressionistic sound world.

In the preface to the first edition, Nielsen wrote about the performance of the suite:

*"If I were a piano virtuoso, I would perform my opus approximately as follows: The beginning of the first movement somewhat cold and brittle in tone and in a calmly flowing tempo. At the un poco meno tempo it is somewhat slower, but with more inner life. At con fuoco, it is very intense. Second movement: poco moderato with the most delicate sound and refined use of the pedal, as if listening. Third movement with supreme calm and strength, and in some places, e.g. bars 5 ff. and 20 ff., with a certain brutal humor. Fourth movement with a completely cool and crystal-clear delivery, without any trace of Gefühl, but with refined tone. The fifth movement speaks for itself. The sixth movement throughout with a background of demonic mood, driving the performer to strong contrasts and vehement accents."*

The suite was premiered at a concert in the smaller hall of the Odd Fellow Palace on 21 March 1921, with Johanne Stockmarr at the piano. The work was well received, and several reviewers noted that the composer had to rise from his seat to receive the audience's ovation. It is not known whether Artur Schnabel ever performed the work publicly.

**The Three Piano Pieces, Op. 59** (CNW 90) were composed in 1928. The work was originally titled *Three Impromptus*, but since the first edition only the first piece has borne the designation *Impromptu*. With these three pieces, Nielsen continued his exploration of the modernist stylistic traits from *Suite* Op. 45, but here in a simpler and more transparent musical texture, a tendency also evident in his orchestral works from these years, such as the Sixth Symphony. Tonally, elements of atonal expressionism are combined with a more traditional tonal style: the pieces are predominantly atonal, but all conclude with a clear tonal center (C major, E-flat major, and E-flat major respectively). In the third piece, a fugue subject appears that is built on all twelve tones of the chromatic scale, though not as a twelve-tone row in the Schoenbergian sense. In the same piece, the

piano is used as a percussion instrument, as Nielsen prescribes that two accents meant to suggest a bass drum be executed using a handful of the piano's lowest keys.

After a few concerts featuring the first two pieces in 1928, the first complete performance took place at a concert in the festival hall of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek on 6 April 1930, with the pianist Christian Christiansen. The pieces won general recognition among critics, though it was noted that this was music appealing only to a narrow audience. One review stated that the pieces were "very typical of their author, even if they perhaps do not belong to those of his works that will gain the widest currency."

The collection **Piano Music for Young and Old: 24 Five-Finger Pieces in All Keys, Op. 53** (CNW 92) was composed in early 1930 and is thus, despite the opus number, Carl Nielsen's final published piano work. In fact, the work consists of 25 pieces, as there are two pieces in G major (Nos. 3a and 3b). In a preface to the first edition, Nielsen wrote:

*"At a meeting of the 'Music Pedagogical Association' last December, the question was discussed whether our composers might consider composing easy, pedagogically*

*useful small pieces for piano. The present collection of short and easy pieces in all keys is an attempt to expand the concept of 'five-finger piano pieces.' I have indeed not exceeded the five-finger range (the span of a fifth) in these small pieces, but within these modest limits I have sought, through modulatory and polyphonic elements, to meet a general contemporary desire to approach the great musical literature somewhat better prepared, and perhaps also with quicker understanding."*

The expansion of the five-finger concept consists in using all eight chromatic tones within the interval of a fifth, while the position of the fifth is not restricted to the first five scale degrees of the key but can be chosen freely, allowing for harmonic variety. Despite the limited means, Nielsen here demonstrates his exceptional ability to create richly varied musical characterization within the smallest possible form. Although the pieces were not intended for the concert hall, excerpts were performed publicly once during the composer's lifetime, at a concert at the Royal Danish Academy of Music on 27 October 1930, where Herman D. Koppel gave a recital devoted entirely to Nielsen's piano works, which he had studied with the composer. The small pieces were received

enthusiastically, and one reviewer noted that these "*instructional piano pieces show the range of his genius just as clearly as his greatest art music, because they achieve perhaps the most difficult thing of all, the great within the small.*"

A few months after Carl Nielsen's death, a small piano piece (CNW 95) was published in *Dansk Musiktidsskrift*. The only source for this movement is this printed edition, which states that the piece was composed after *Piano Music for Young and Old* and thus belongs among Nielsen's very last compositions.

Among Carl Nielsen's surviving manuscripts are a number of piano pieces that remained unpublished during his lifetime and whose origins range from the 1880s to around 1930. Only two of these works survive in ink fair copies; the rest consist of more or less worked-out pencil sketches, several of which are written into manuscripts of other works (a particular habit of Nielsen's). The **Two Character Pieces** (CNW 73) probably belong among Nielsen's very earliest compositions from his time as a military musician in Odense in the early 1880s. The manuscript clearly shows the young, inexperienced composer's great care with

notation. The movement *Andante* (CNW 75) likely dates from his conservatory years, 1884–86, as it is written on the reverse side of a sheet of manuscript paper containing a counterpoint exercise. *Norwegian Folk Dance* (CNW 74) and *Clavierstück* (CNW 76) may have been intended for the collection *Five Piano Pieces*, Op. 3 (1890). A sketch titled *Peasant Dance* (CNW 77) is written in a manuscript that also contains sketches for the choral work *Hymnus amoris* (1896), roughly contemporaneous with the *Humoresque-Bagatelles*, suggesting that the movement may originally have been planned as part of that collection.

The movements *Allegretto* (CNW 78), *[Untitled]* (CNW 79), and *Menuet* (CNW 80) cannot be dated with certainty, but judging by the handwriting they stem from Nielsen's mature years. Their relatively simple style may suggest that they were composed with pedagogical music in mind, an area that greatly occupied Nielsen during the 1920s. The very small piano piece (CNW 89) can be dated to 1921 and survives in a manuscript that also contains three songs for the collection *Melodies for the Songbook "Denmark."* *Andantino* (CNW 91) survives in an ink fair copy and has been associated with an unfinished

opera project based on Ben Jonson's comedy *The Silent Woman*, which Nielsen worked on between 1926 and 1929. The piece may have been intended as a musical joke, as Nielsen added the following curious inscription beneath the notes: "The piece is nailed down and insured with 'The United Jutland Fire Insurance Companies' under the mark: 'Poplar Leaf.'" A few years later, Richard Strauss composed an opera on the same text, *Die schweigsame Frau. [Piece for Keyboard Instrument]* (CNW 93) can be dated to 1929, the same year Nielsen composed *29 Short Preludes for Organ or Harmonium*, Op. 51. It cannot be determined with certainty whether this is a piano or organ piece. A small piano piece (CNW 94) is written on a sketch for the organ work *Commotio* (1930–31) and is presumed to originate from the same period.

The two small pieces *Gade* (add. 46 CNW 413) and *Welcome to della grazia 20, little Marie!* (add. 48 CNW 415) can scarcely be called piano pieces; rather, they are a musical remembrance and a musical greeting. Both are written in a sketchbook that Nielsen used in his youth. *Gade* is a seven-bar piece built on the tones G–A–D–E, a musical spelling of the surname of

Nielsen's teacher, the composer Niels W. Gade. The piece was likely written under the impression of Gade's death in 1890, news of which Nielsen received while staying in Berlin and which affected him deeply. *Welcome to della grazia 20, little Marie!* is presumably a musical greeting to his wife Anne Marie, dating from the couple's study trip to Italy in 1900. The address possibly refers to a location in Naples, where they stayed in May of that year.

## Carl Nielsen's own piano arrangements of incidental music and original piano works for the theatre

In 1893, Carl Nielsen composed music for Holger Drachmann's melodrama *Snefrid*, based on Snorri's tale of King Harald Fairhair and his beautiful Finnish wife Snefrid. The music was performed in concert the following year, but only in 1899 was it staged at the Dagmar Theatre in Copenhagen. For this occasion, Nielsen made a thorough revision of the music. However, already in 1895 the prelude appeared in Nielsen's own piano arrangement in the journal *Ungt Blod*. The rest of the music remained unpublished during his lifetime.

When Nielsen composed music in 1906 for Drachmann's play *Sir Oluf Rides*, he reused the movement *Elf Dance* from *Five Piano Pieces*, Op. 3, reworking it and adding a new middle section with motives from the incidental music. This version, titled *Elfin Dance*, was

orchestrated by Nielsen's close friend, the Dutch composer Julius Röntgen, and in the same year a printed edition of Nielsen's own piano version of the revised piece appeared.

In 1908, Nielsen composed several short piano pieces for Otto Benzon's play *Parents*, which premiered at the Royal Theatre on 9 February 1908. The play revolves around the human conflict between duty and desire. It follows a pair of parents whose son must choose between studying law and his love for a married woman who inspires him to compose music. The play is framed by one of the son's compositions, which the father plays at the beginning and again at the end as the curtain falls.

A few years later, in 1910, Nielsen wrote music for Adam Oehlenschläger's tragedy

*Hagbarth and Signe*, which tells the legend of the Norwegian prince Hagbarth and the Danish princess Signe and their impossible love. The music was used for an open-air production in Dyrehaven north of Copenhagen. The performance was a great success, and in October of the same year Nielsen's own piano arrangement of *The Maidens' Dance*, originally orchestrated for wind band, was published by Wilhelm Hansen.

Between 1917 and 1919, Nielsen composed extensive incidental music for a new production of Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* at the Royal Theatre. The play premiered in February 1919 after a very problematic rehearsal process, which culminated in Nielsen submitting a statement to several Copenhagen newspapers the day

before the premiere, disclaiming artistic responsibility for the music due to cuts and the unfortunate placement of the orchestra. He also demanded that his name be removed from the program and posters, threatening to withdraw the music if this was not done. After fifteen performances, the production was taken off the stage. Two years later, in 1921, Nielsen assembled a suite from the *Aladdin* music, giving it an independent life outside the theatre. The seven-movement suite quickly became one of Nielsen's most popular orchestral works and was performed numerous times during the 1920s both in Denmark and abroad, often with the composer himself conducting.

Nielsen also arranged several of the dances from *Aladdin* for piano with a view to publication, but for reasons unknown these

arrangements remained unpublished during his lifetime. However, in 1926 a piano arrangement of the immensely popular *Oriental Festival March* was published by Borups Forlag. The printed score does not indicate who made the arrangement, but since Nielsen himself arranged the other *Aladdin* dances for piano, it is quite possible, though not definitively documented, that this arrangement also came from his hand.

In connection with the celebration of the reunification of Southern Jutland with Denmark in 1920, the author Helge Rode wrote the play *The Mother*, for which Nielsen composed incidental music. The play premiered at the Royal Theatre on 30 January 1921, but even before that Nielsen had ensured that several of the pieces were published in piano arrangements so

the music could reach a wider audience. The music for *The Mother* also includes an original piano piece, the so-called *Gramophone Waltz*, which appears in a scene set in an inn, where people dance to the sound of a gramophone.

*Niels Bo Foltmann, 2026*

# Rikke Sandberg

Rikke Sandberg approaches music as a living organism, shaped from within, guided by structural clarity and an instinct for organic flow. Her playing unites intellectual precision with tonal refinement and an intensity that never seeks display for its own sake. Virtuosity, in her hands, serves expression; sound becomes thought made audible.

The Danish press has repeatedly emphasized this artistic integrity. “She gathers torrents of notes into long, breathing arcs with sharply etched detail and colourful nuance,” wrote the newspaper *Politiken*, continuing: “First and foremost she is an artist, display does not interest her.” The same paper observed: “Few Danish pianists make as great a difference in our musical life as she does.”

At the center of her repertoire stand the Romantic tradition and the expressive landscape of the twentieth century. In the music of Johannes Brahms she has established herself as a pianist of rare authority and poetic depth. The newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* praised her “richly nuanced and superbly controlled playing,” while a five-star review in *Politiken* noted that she is “not afraid to measure herself against the elite.” Internationally, *Piano News* highlighted the distinctive balance of her interpretations: “Nichts klingt geheizt oder überspielt .. voller Feuer und sprühendem Esprit .. so verhaltener Dynamik, dass einem der Atem stockt.”

Alongside the central European canon, Sandberg has played a vital role in contemporary Danish music, premiering a





PHOTO: SØREN SOLIKÆR

substantial number of solo works, piano concertos and chamber compositions written for her. Her discography, spanning major Romantic repertoire, twentieth-century music and numerous first recordings, reflects a sustained artistic commitment rather than isolated projects.

This dialogue between heritage and renewal finds a natural culmination in the piano music of Carl Nielsen whose rhythmic vitality and structural boldness resonate deeply with her musical ethos. Reviewing a performance of Nielsen's *Second Violin Sonata* in New York, *The Strad* noted her "vibrant pianism that created a true partnership and also offered sensitive support," highlighting the collaborative sensitivity and energy that characterize her musicianship.

Her artistic philosophy extends beyond the stage. Rikke Sandberg is a member of the Piano faculty at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, where she mentors young musicians toward the same depth of listening and structural awareness that defines her own work. As Artistic Director of the Nordic Chamber Music Festival she fosters a living dialogue between tradition and contemporary creation, shaping not only performances, but artistic environments.

Rikke Sandberg stands as one of Denmark's most distinctive pianists: an artist of conviction and clarity, whose performances unite architectural strength with inward poetry.

[www.rikkesandberg.com](http://www.rikkesandberg.com)



# 1

## CD 1

- |   |   |       |
|---|---|-------|
| 1:  | <b>Welcome to 20 Della Grazia, Little Marie!</b> (Add. 48)..... | 0:22  |
| 2:  | <b>Chaconne Op. 32</b> .....                                    | 11:32 |
| <b>Five Piano Pieces Op. 3</b>                            |   |       |
| 3:  | Folk Tune.....  | 2:51  |
| 4:  | Humoresque.....   | 1:58  |
| 5:  | Arabesque.....  | 1:25  |
| 6:  | Mignon.....   | 0:52  |
| 7:  | Elf's Dance.....  | 1:33  |
| <b>Symphonic Suite Op. 8</b>                              |   |       |
| 8:  | I Intonation, Maestoso.....                                     | 2:31  |
| 9:  | II Quasi Allegretto.....  | 3:45  |
| 10:   | III Andante.....  | 7:22  |
| 11:   | IV Finale, Allegro.....   | 4:41  |
| <b>Souvenirs from Carl Nielsen, 11 Small Piano Pieces</b> |   |       |
| 12:   | Norwegian Folk Dance (Add.17).....                              | 0:40  |
| 13:   | Andante (Add.18).....   | 0:42  |
| 14:   | Piano Piece, (Add. 19).....                                     | 0:43  |
| 15:   | Peasant Dance, Polka (Add. 20).....                             | 0:33  |
| 16:   | Allegretto (Add. 21).....                                       | 0:19  |
| 17:   | Unnamed piece (Add. 22).....                                    | 0:43  |
| 18:   | Minuet (Add. 23).....   | 1:06  |
| 19:   | Unnamed piece (Add. 24).....                                    | 0:42  |
| 20:   | Andantino (Add. 25).....  | 0:55  |
| 21:   | Unnamed piece (Add. 26).....                                    | 1:02  |
| 22:   | A Little Piano Piece (Add. 27).....                             | 0:40  |

## Piano Music for Young and Old Op. 53

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| 23: I Allegretto                         | 0:46         |
| 24: II Andantino quasi allegretto        | 0:58         |
| 25: IIIa Allegro scherzoso               | 0:54         |
| 26: IIIb Grazioso                        | 1:13         |
| 27: IV Andantino                         | 0:31         |
| 28: V Allegro giocoso                    | 1:09         |
| 29: VI Poco lamentoso                    | 1:27         |
| 30: VII Marziale                         | 0:46         |
| 31: VIII Cantabile                       | 0:48         |
| 32: IX Allegretto civettuolo             | 0:49         |
| 33: X Lugubre                            | 1:42         |
| 34: XI Andante poco tiepido              | 1:20         |
| 35: XII Adagio drammatico                | 1:40         |
| 36: XIII Andantino carino                | 1:04         |
| 37: XIV Capriccioso                      | 1:01         |
| 38: XV Adagio espressivo                 | 1:15         |
| 39: XVI Alla contadino                   | 1:13         |
| 40: XVII Largo con fantasia              | 1:48         |
| 41: XVIII Preludio, Andante              | 1:12         |
| 42: XIX Adagio                           | 0:50         |
| 43: XX Con sentimento                    | 1:15         |
| 44: XXI Marcia di goffo                  | 1:18         |
| 45: XXII Allegretto pastorale            | 1:58         |
| 46: XXIII Etude, Allegro                 | 0:58         |
| 47: XXIV Molto adagio- Allegretto comodo | 3:23         |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>78.27</b> |

# 2

CD 2

- |                                       |   |              |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------|
| 1:                                    | <b>Prelude for the New Century</b> .....    | 1:46         |
| <b>Three Piano Pieces Op. 59</b>      |   |              |
| 2:                                    | Impromptu, Allegro fluente .....            | 3:15         |
| 3:                                    | Molto adagio .....                          | 3:31         |
| 4:                                    | Allegro non Troppo .....                    | 5:36         |
| 5:                                    | <b>Theme with Variations Op. 40</b> .....   | 18:37        |
| 6:                                    | <b>Piano Piece</b> .....                    | 0:41         |
| <b>Humoresque-Bagatelles Op. 11</b>   |   |              |
| 7:                                    | Good Day! Good Day! .....                   | 0:58         |
| 8:                                    | The Spinning Top .....                      | 0:54         |
| 9:                                    | A Little Slow Waltz .....                   | 1:36         |
| 10:                                   | The Jumping Jack .....                      | 0:56         |
| 11:                                   | Doll's March .....                          | 1:20         |
| 12:                                   | The Musical Clock .....                     | 1:08         |
| <b>Two Character Pieces (Add. 16)</b> |   |              |
| 13:                                   | Andante con moto .....                      | 3:11         |
| 14:                                   | Andante quasi allegretto .....              | 3:26         |
| <b>Suite Op. 45 "The Luciferian"</b>  |   |              |
| 15:                                   | Allegretto un pochettino .....              | 4:02         |
| 16:                                   | Poco moderato .....                         | 3:30         |
| 17:                                   | Molto adagio e patetico .....               | 6:42         |
| 18:                                   | Allegretto innocente .....                  | 2:30         |
| 19:                                   | Allegretto vivo .....                       | 1:47         |
| 20:                                   | Allegro non troppo ma vigoroso .....        | 8:32         |
| 21:                                   | <b>The Dream about 'Silent Night'</b> ..... | 3:13         |
|                                       | <b>Total</b> .....                          | <b>77:14</b> |

# 3

CD 3

## Arrangements & Incidental music

### Excerpts from 'The Mother' for Piano (Add. 35)

- |     |  |      |
|-----|--|------|
| 1:  | The mist is lifting .....  | 2:34 |
| 2:  | Gramophone-Waltz .....   | 2:21 |
| 3:  | Prelude to Scene Four .....  | 3:34 |
| 4:  | Minuet .....   | 1:49 |
| 5:  | Prelude to Scene Seven .....   | 3:02 |
| 6:  | March .....  | 4:59 |
| 7:  | <b>'Dance of the Handmaidens' from 'Hagbarth and Signe'</b> (Add. 32) .. | 1:36 |
| 8:  | <b>Prelude to 'Snefrid' for Piano</b> (Add. 29) .....                    | 2:33 |
| 9:  | <b>'Elves Dance' from 'Sir Oluf he rides'</b> (Add. 31) .....            | 3:19 |
| 10: | <b>Music for Otto Benzons Play 'Parents'</b> .....                       | 1:31 |
| 11: | <b>Oriental Festival March</b> .....                                     | 3:38 |

### Dances from 'Aladdin' for piano (Add. 34)

- |     |                                  |              |
|-----|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 12: | Chinese Dance .....              | 3:48         |
| 13: | Prisoners' Dance .....           | 5:06         |
| 14: | Hindu Dance .....                | 3:03         |
| 15: | African Dance .....              | 4:47         |
| 16: | Dance of the Morning Mists ..... | 3:01         |
|     | <b>Total</b> .....               | <b>50:47</b> |



PHOTO: NIKOLAJ LUND

Recording Producer, Editing, Mix and Mastering: Preben Iwan  
Booklet notes: Bo Foltmann, Torben Enghoff and Rikke Sandberg  
Executive producer: Lars Hannibal  
Artwork: Toke Bjørneboe  
Cover photos: Søren Solkær  
Stylist: Patricia Bongo Baier  
Recording session photos: Nikolaj Lund  
Piano tuning: Christian Laub

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4x DPA 4011 & Royer SF24 for Dolby Atmos  
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# Carl Nielsen

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Rikke Sandberg



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