

Carl Nielsen, (1865–1931), Denmark's most famous composer was born in the quaint rural village of Nørre Lyndelse on the Danish island of Funen. Hans Christian Anderson, the celebrated writer of fairy-tales was born quite close by. Both men grew up speaking the lilting, magical-sounding local dialect known as 'fynsk' which could easily be mistaken for the language of an elf in one of Anderson's fairy-tales. It was during my own twenty years living in Copenhagen, bringing up my two Danish-born sons in a house just a stone's throw from Tivoli Gardens that I came to realize that Denmark is actually a kind of fairy-tale country. A place where the child is valued and celebrated above everything else! Copenhagen is also the common city to all the composers on this program.

Johann Svendsen (1840–1911), emigrated to Copenhagen with the reputation of being one of Norway's greatest composers. He soon became one of the most important conductors of the Royal Danish Opera in its illustrious history. He was the 'Kappelmeister' there when the young Carl Nielsen played in the back of that orchestra's second violin section. They quickly became close friends and mutually inspiring colleagues. In 1888 for example, Nielsen dedicated his g minor quartet to Svendsen. (The same g minor quartet I have orchestrated and will present at this performance!) A few years later Svendsen returned the favor by premiering Nielsen's Symphony #1 with the orchestra of the Royal Danish Opera famously offering the composer a rather comical bow from the back of the second violin section at the end of the performance. Svendsen's Romance for Violin and Orchestra is his most often played work and has been compared to the beautiful Romance movement from Grieg's 3rd Sonata for Violin and Piano.

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) spent two decades living in Copenhagen just prior to Nielsen's arrival. The Holberg Suite of 1884 is his light-hearted homage to the great 18th century Danish writer, Ludwig Holberg. Grieg's music was a gigantic influence on both Svendsen and Nielsen and was internationally beloved even during his own lifetime. (He was one of the favorite composers of none other than Maurice Ravel!)

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) made numerous trips to Copenhagen during his lifetime, most famously in connection with his incidental music to Shakespeare's *Tempest*, commissioned and premiered by the Royal Theater of Denmark in 1925 (only a few years after composing his charming *Six Humoresques for Violin and Orchestra*.) This event firmly established a powerful Finnish connection for Copenhagen, one that continued with the extraordinary relationship the Royal Danish Opera had in the 1990's with the legendary Finnish conductor Paavo Bergland (who was incidentally, my own teacher in conducting for nearly a decade!)

*Four Movements for Orchestra (1888)* is the title I've given to my orchestration of Nielsen's ebullient early g minor String Quartet. Even in Copenhagen, most musicians and music lovers are unfamiliar with this work and many assume it to be a relatively immature student effort. Obviously, I beg to differ! This gem of a piece, like the great Bizet *Symphony in C* (also written when that composer was a student), is one of the most ingenious and inspired works I know by any young composer! I always wondered if Nielsen ever considered its orchestral textures and colorful timbres to be material for a *Symphony* rather than a quartet. Its passionate character is for me, too powerful to be contained by only four string players.

As for my orchestration, my goal was to find the most discrete, elegant and respectful way to highlight the orchestral nature of the work by adding the tone colors of the winds, brass and timpani to the original music for strings. I have been absolutely true to all of Nielsen's original notes and phrasings and have used his *Symphony #1* as my model for orchestration. I have also resisted all temptation to add any notes of my own! We can clearly hear hints of Nielsen's later music in this early quartet. Even at the youthful age of 23, he already seems focused on what will be his lifelong preoccupation, the juxtaposition and integration of opposites. In most of Nielsen's major works the bucolic, unchanging fairy-tale world of his harmonious Finnish childhood (with all the echoes of brass bands and church hymns), is

constantly contrasted with the cosmopolitan, industrial, dissonant, progressive, international modernism of the Copenhagen of his adult years. His aesthetic ideal to integrate and harmonize these and other opposites in his compositions and within himself exemplify for me, an enlightened and inspiring aspiration for a kind of psychological and spiritual 'wholeness'.

However, one must ultimately admit that over and above any of these considerations, Nielsen's works are primarily an expression of the incorrigible, irrepressible, childlike temperament of the composer himself, a particularly untamable, irreverent, comic and impulsive personality. Nielsen, the 'prankster' of a Hans Christian Anderson fairy-tale, unashamedly loved celebrating the child within him!

Joseph Swensen