



THOMAS JENSEN LEGACY

VOLUME 4



CARL NIELSEN
SYMPHONIES 1 & 2
DANISH ORCHESTRAL MUSIC BY
KOPPEL • HOLMBOE • TARP • SCHIERBECK

CD 1

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Op. 7 (1891-92) *32:52*

[1] I. Allegro orgoglioso *9:04*

[2] II. Andante *6:41*

[3] III. Allegro comodo *8:17*

[4] IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco *8:40*

Decca ACL 279. Recorded June 14-15, 1952, Danish Radio Concert Hall

Little Suite for Strings in A minor, Op. 1* (1888) *15:02*

[5] I. Prelude: Andante con moto *3:06*

[6] II. Intermezzo: Allegro moderato *5:33*

[7] III. Finale: Andante con moto – Allegro con brio *6:19*

HMV DB 5256-57. Recorded January 31 & February 22, 1941, Odd Fellow Palace, Copenhagen

Symphony No. 2, Op. 16 'The Four Temperaments' (1901-02) *31:05*

[8] I. Allegro collerico *8:53*

[9] II. Allegro comodo e flammatico *4:15*

[10] III. Andante malincolico *10:45*

[11] IV. Allegro sanguineo *7:07*

HMV Z 7000-03. Recorded October 3, 1947, Danish Radio Concert Hall

CD 2

Herman D. Koppel (1908-1998)

[1] Fest-Overture, Op. 33 (1939) 6:58

Live broadcast, June 11, 1958, Danish Radio Concert Hall

Vagn Holmboe (1909-1996)

Epitaph: Symphonic Metamorphose, Op. 68 (1956) 19:28

[2] I. Allegro con fuoco 8:05

[3] II. Andante tranquillo - Piu mosso - Lento - Andante 6:52

[4] III. Allegro con brio 4:25

Live broadcast, May 22, 1959, Danish Radio Concert Hall

Svend Erik Tarp (1908-1994)

Symphony No. 2 in E flat, Op. 50 (1949) 19:19

[5] I. Meditativo 6:07

[6] II. Animato 8:45

[7] III. Sereno 4:22

Live concert, Helsinki, March 1962; broadcast July 22, 1962

Poul Schierbeck (1888-1949)

[8] Largo for string orchestra, Op. 33 (1935) 3:52

[9] Paraphrase over *I Danmark er jeg født*, Op. 43 (1938) 6:16

Live broadcast, February 15, 1959, Danish Radio Concert Hall

[10] Natten, Op. 41 (1938) 8:25
Symphonic Scene for orchestra with piano.
Boris Linderud, piano

[11] Häxa, Op. 48 (1939) 5:51
Scene for soprano, orchestra and organ
Kirsten Schultz, soprano
Live broadcast, June 5, 1958, Danish Radio Concert Hall

*Orchestra of Det Kongelige Kapel, Copenhagen
Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Thomas Jensen, conductor

Born on 25 October 1898 in Copenhagen, Thomas Jensen entered the Royal Danish Conservatoire of Music in 1913 where he studied with, among others, Carl Nielsen. Between 1917 and 1919 he was a solo cellist of the Northwest Skåne Orchestra in Helsingborg in Sweden. From 1920 to 1927 he played in the Tivoli Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen, first as 3rd, then 2nd cellist. The cellist Jensen nurtured ambitions as a conductor which he began to fulfil in 1923, as conductor of the amateur Euphrosyne orchestra. Two years later, his conducting of Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat* at Det Ny Theater (The New Theatre) attracted attention, and he decided to further his conducting career with periods of study in Paris and Dresden, returning once in a while to conduct at the Nørrebro Theatre, and at the Tivoli in the event of its

permanent conductor Frederik Schnedler-Petersen being indisposed. When Johan Hye-Knudsen left the Scala Theatre in 1925 to join the more prestigious Royal Theatre, Jensen was encouraged to apply for the vacancy. He chose instead to become conductor of the Philharmonic Society in Aarhus. The post enabled him to take on more purely orchestral repertoire, even when coupled with work at the Aarhus Theatre, but he probably also saw the opportunities afforded by the city's cultural potential. Plans were afoot for a university (founded in 1928) and even a permanent symphony orchestra. This ambition took another decade to bear fruit with the Aarhus Civic Orchestra, founded and named in January 1935 by Jensen himself. In the meanwhile, Jensen did not restrict his work to the relatively provincial Aarhus. In 1931 he was invited by the head of Danish radio, Emil Holm, to apply for a new post as a second conductor to the radio's symphony orchestra, assisting the work of Launy Grøndahl and Erik Tuxen. Even though several board members suggested hiring him without further ado, the management (mostly Holm) insisted on an open audition. Jensen came third, and the post went instead to the Austrian conductor Fritz Mahler, whose father was a cousin of the composer Gustav Mahler. Jensen's reputation had preceded him, however, so that he nevertheless returned to the DRSO as a guest conductor. 1935 was a watershed year for Jensen. As well as founding the Aarhus City Orchestra he made his debut with the DRSO in November with a programme of light popular music. The two ensembles continued to lie at the centre of his work for the next two decades. With 26 permanent members, the Aarhus Civic Orchestra was a Classically constituted ensemble, whereas the radio orchestra was more than twice as large, expanding from 55 musicians in the 30s to an 'international standard of 92 musicians in 1948. From 1936 to

1948 he also led regular concerts with the Tivoli Orchestra, acting as deputy to Svend Christian Felumb during the Aarhus orchestra's annual summer break. Jensen's background as a cellist surely influenced his repertoire choices as a conductor. He had played in the Danish premieres of Beethoven's Ninth and Mahler's Fourth and Ninth symphonies, given by the Tivoli Orchestra with Schnedler-Petersen. He had also played in the first performances of Nielsen's Fourth and Fifth symphonies, as well as most of the symphonies by Sibelius, under the baton of the composers. From 1937 onwards he gave only symphonic concerts with the DRSO, declining invitations to take on light-music programmes. His debut in the DRSO's regular Thursday concert series, the most prestigious of their engagements, took place on 2 December 1937 with a programme including the First Cello Concerto of Saint-Saëns and the Symphony by César Franck, and thereafter he gave one or two concerts in the series each season.

Jensen's connection with the DRSO deepened during the early 50s. The orchestra had come to international attention in concerts led by Fritz Busch at the 1950 Edinburgh Festival, and given a critically acclaimed account of Nielsen's Fourth in London under Launy Grøndahl the following year. In 1952 they embarked on an ambitious tour of the US, giving 39 concerts in 38 cities over 47 days. The punishing schedule did not suit the ageing Grøndahl, and the orchestra's members petitioned for Jensen to replace him. Sharing duties with Erik Tuxen, Jensen conducted 20 performances of Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, as well as works by Dvořák, Grieg and Richard Strauss. This led to a part-time post with the orchestra in 1953, and when Grøndahl retired in 1956 and Tuxen died the following year, Jensen was finally offered the coveted chair of permanent conductor in the autumn of 1957.

The offer came at a propitious time for Jensen. His relations with the management of the Aarhus Civic Orchestra had become frosty over time, and he departed in anger in the spring of 1957. Standing in front of the DRSO musicians for his first rehearsal as permanent conductor a few months later, he was welcomed with applause. However, Jensen, now close to 60, was not the conductor he had been a quarter of a century earlier at that unsuccessful audition. He had begun to suffer from progressive deafness, and he quietly remarked to the musicians that his appointment with them might have come a little too late. The orchestra itself was beginning to feel the pressure of success, which demanded both more concerts and a more challenging repertoire, leaving its musicians less time to rehearse and perform the international repertoire that had made them renowned both in Denmark and beyond. However, until Jensen's sudden and early death in 1963, he and the orchestra made a heroic effort to preserve and pass on a fast-vanishing heritage. They were the guardians of a performing culture derived from Nielsen, and from the orchestra's distinguished early conductors. After 1963, years passed without the DRSO engaging a permanent conductor, and both its playing and *esprit de corps* suffered accordingly. Thus the recordings in this series represent something of a last gasp of a lost tradition.

CD 1 presents three formative works in Nielsen's early career; his influence on the next generation of Danish composers is then traced on CD2 by works by Koppel, Holmboe and Tarp. Despite its opus number, the Little Suite was hardly Nielsen's very first work; as he remembered in his autobiography, he was eight or nine when he wrote a lullaby (now lost) and a polka (notated in the memoirs). However, composition was a modest part of his life at least until September 1887, when a concert at the Tivoli pleasure gardens in Copenhagen included the first performance of a piece for string orchestra, *Andante tranquillo e Scherzo*. Nielsen took the subsequent premiere of an F major string quartet in January 1888 as a definitive point of departure in his life as a composer, but a much stronger impression on the public at large was made by the Little Suite when it was first performed at Tivoli on 8 September 1888. The performance was conducted by Balduin Dahl, the Tivoli's music director for the past 15 years, who had advised the young composer to remove his original subtitles to the three movements: 'The Danaids', 'The Dance of the Charites' and 'The Procession of Bacchus'. 'It was a pleasure to hear Mr. Carl Nielsen's Suite for String Orchestra,' reported the *Avisen* newspaper. 'The young man obviously has a great deal on his musical mind that he wants to say, and what he told us on Saturday was presented in a beautiful, concise form, modestly and attractively, with excellent part-writing and an appealing fullness of sound that reveals an excellent eye for the string material. There is every reason to congratulate the young man on this – as far as we know – his public debut. The Suite was a decided success; the middle movement had to be played da capo, and after the last performance the composer, who clearly aroused much sympathy with his great youth, was called out three times. The applause was well deserved, and we may hope that it will stimulate

Mr. Nielsen to new efforts to make his unmistakable talent bear fruit. The performance of the Suite was excellent, and Mr. Dahl deserves warm appreciation, because he offers the young shelter under his musical wings; there are unfortunately so few places in this country they can turn to.' Not everyone was so enthusiastic about the Suite; Niels W. Gade, Nielsen's old conservatoire teacher, for one, with the possibly apocryphal but pithy remark that 'Little Nielsen, you mess too much!' Perhaps Nielsen took Gade's words to heart, because he subsequently revised the suite's finale as well as the movement titles. If anything the delicacy and airy textures of the string writing in the outer movements anticipate the style of Nielsen's Finnish contemporary, Jean Sibelius – another 'slow developer' in music – while clearly flowing from the same neoclassical source as the Holberg Suite composed by Grieg four years earlier. Nevertheless there are traces of the voice that would become Nielsen's own in the characteristic major-minor vacillation which imbues the second movement with its hesitant quality and surges of purpose. Thomas Jensen conducted this mid-war performance with the ensemble which has a justified claim on the title of the world's oldest orchestra, belonging to the Royal Chapel in Copenhagen, with its roots in the trumpet corps founded in 1448 during the reign of King Christian IV.

While the Suite achieved a measure of success, the watershed moment in Nielsen's career arrived with the First Symphony, given its first performance by the orchestra of the Royal Chapel in March 1894 conducted by Johan Svendsen. Five years earlier the composer had joined the ensemble as a full-time member and just as he had done for the premiere of the Suite, he played in the second-violin section. A laconic note in his diary attests that 'The symphony brought great happiness and I was evoked three times after the last movement.'

What has become known as Nielsen's voice is established from the very outset of the First Symphony by its decisive C major chord and unexpected twist into G minor, where most of the action takes place. A battle between the two tonalities (distantly related through the kind of modal harmonies familiar to Nielsen as a folk-fiddler from his childhood on the island of Funen) is fought throughout the four movements, sometimes covertly, sometimes in the open, and the struggle is not less satisfying for the eventual outcome being hardly in doubt.

Eight years passed before the premiere of the Second Symphony in November 1902, and during that time Nielsen's language evolved considerably, especially in the matter of orchestral technique. The opening statement of the Second is considerably crisper and lighter on its feet than the First, having shed a few Brahmsian pounds along the way. Meanwhile the symphony as a form is now conceived as a corporeal body, bearing a subtitle ('The Four Temperaments') and expressive indications for the four movements that The 2nd Symphony – with the title *The Four Temperaments* – from November 1902 was completed between the two operas which refer to medieval theories of medicine, embodying states of anger (*Allegro collerico*), indolence (*Allegro flemmatico*), melancholy (*Andante malincolio*) and finally optimism (*Allegro sanguineo*). With a disarming and perhaps disingenuous shrug of the shoulders, Nielsen himself disavowed any deep psychological undercurrent to the symphony, claiming to have taken his inspiration from wall-paintings he once encountered in a country pub in the region of Zealand. However, as his own programme note for a 1926 performance elaborated, each movement also contains its contrasting passages: 'But the violent character can have its gentler moments, the melancholy its violent or lighter moments, and the exuberantly joyous

can become thoughtful, indeed quite serious; yet only for a moment. The torpid, the indifferent type, however, has difficulty getting out of his phlegmatic state, which is why this movement is both short (he can't be bothered) and unvarying in its development.' Jensen's tempo for the Allegro collerico is notably quicker and more fiery in this 1947 recording for HMV than his later broadcast performances, and his vision of the symphony's narrative is superbly focused, playing up the contrasts between the four temperaments to a degree rarely matched on record.

Nielsen's musical personality was so strong and so individual that Danish composers of the next generation struggled to develop a personal identity despite Nielsen's open-mindedness as a teacher of composition at the conservatoire in Copenhagen. Rued Langgaard notoriously found he had to work against the grain to assert his own style. Others had more success in synthesising the influence of Nielsen with other aspects of their musical formation. CD 2 opens with the Festival Overture by Herman David Koppel, who was born in Copenhagen to Jewish immigrants from Poland. Koppel studied at the conservatoire as a pianist, and it was in that capacity that he became a familiar figure in mid-century Danish musical life, as well as, eventually, professor of piano at the conservatoire. He is the soloist on a live recording of Stravinsky's Concerto for Piano and Winds conducted by Jensen and previously issued in the Thomas Jensen Legacy vol. 2, and the Overture is shaped with the angular lines of Russian modernism – owing something perhaps not only to Stravinsky but to the composers who stayed in Russia such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich – as well as Nielsenesque turns of harmony. Nevertheless the most durable strain of Nielsen's influence over subsequent generations of composers in his homeland is carried by the work of Vagn

Holmboe, not only through his own music but as the teacher of the brightest lights in the following generation such as Per Nørgård (b.1932), Ib Nørholm (1931-2019) and Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (1932-2016). Holmboe was born in Horsens, on the east coast of Denmark in the Jutland region. He arrived in Copenhagen as a 17-year-old student of theory and composition at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. In 1933 he married the Romanian pianist Meta May Graf (1910-2003), who took classes with Hindemith, and through her Holmboe became interested in Romanian folk music. At this time he began writing the symphonies and string quartets which would in time establish his reputation as the senior composer of generation, but he crystallised his language in the 1950s with what he called a technique of metamorphosis. 'The butterfly is transformed from egg to larva and from pupa to insect,' he explained to Nørgård, 'but remains the same individual. Likewise, the musical idea or substance, the starting point of the metamorphosis, must remain itself regardless of the nature and form of the transformation or transformations.'

Holmboe expressed it another way in his book on *Modern Nordic Music* (Stockholm 1957): 'The urge for transformation, to be another and yet oneself, is obviously deep in man, and we can observe it in many forms, from mask games and games to the mystical thoughts about a man's second birth. The legend of the Bird Phoenix says something significant about this – psychological – side of the metamorphosis.' The most intricately worked demonstration of the technique is found in four works latterly gathered together as a cycle of 'Symphonic Metamorphoses': *Epitaph* (1956), *Monolith* (1960), *Epilogue* (1961-2) and *Tempo variabile* (1971-2). The trumpets outline the main motif of *Epitaph* in the opening bars: a descending minor second, then a descending

minor third, then a rising minor third, in a dotted rhythm which survives through the motif's transformations over the course of the three movements, even while the more lyrical episodes soften its contours. Commissioned by and dedicated to the new BBC Third Programme, *Epitaph* was given its premiere in London at a BBCSO studio concert conducted by Stamford Robinson in 1956; Jensen conducted the present performance as part of a 1959 festival of ballet and music in Copenhagen.

Where Koppel drew on Stravinsky and jazz in evolving a personal voice, Svend Erik Tarp also looked to Paris, and more specifically the biting, neoclassically contained style of the composers known as 'Les Six'. Born in northern Jutland, Tarp studied theory and piano with Knud Jeppesen and Rudolph Simonsen in Copenhagen. He became director of Koda (the Danish performing rights organisation), a longstanding board-member of the Danish Composers' Association and a consultant to Danish radio; all the while writing operas, 10 symphonies (1945-92), concertos, songs and chamber music. The wandering clarinet melody and sour tang of the accompanying major-minor chords to launch Tarp's Second Symphony make a striking example of how Danish composers could not forget the example of Nielsen even had they wanted to. The evolution of the opening *Meditativo* movement establishes a seriousness of mood and purpose (working through the example of late Beethoven, perhaps, mediated by Nielsen himself doing so in the string quartets) which is only partially lifted by the busy counterpoint of the succeeding *Animato*, at least until its buoyant, wind-led second section. The final *Sereno* movement may be heard in the light of comparably restrained symphonic finales from the era by foreign contemporaries as diverse as Honegger and Vaughan Williams, even if the prominent timpani tattoo inevitably recalls

the example of Nielsen. Jensen conducted this performance in Helsinki as part of a week of Danish music which took place at the end of March 1962. The last composer on this album, Poul Schierbeck (1888-1949) was born in Copenhagen in 1888 and began playing the mandolin, recorder and piano at an early age. He read Law at university with the intention to make it his career, but joined a male-voice choir as a student and began to study music privately. Having dropped the course in law, he studied piano with Henrik Knudsen (a friend of Nielsen's) and organ with Paul Hellmuth, as well as theory and composition with Thomas Laub and Nielsen himself. In 1916 Schierbeck took up a post as organist at the church in Skovshoved, a coastal town north of Copenhagen, where the choir included the soprano Sylvia Larsen, whom he married in 1919.

Schierbeck's work as a composer naturally centred on vocal music: songs, cantatas, church music and an opera, *Fête galante* (1926-30). His slender instrumental output includes a single symphony (1911-21) available on Danacord DACOCD 417 and the pair of pieces for string orchestra compiled here. He wrote the *Largo* in 1935 and dedicated it to his uncle Valdemar. Unpublished during his lifetime, this melancholy and gripping piece found fame in Denmark and beyond as a mood-setting component to the soundtrack of *Ordet* (The Word), a 1955 film directed by Carl Th. Dreyer. Based on a play by the poet and Lutheran priest Kaj Munk, the film is a powerful tale of madness, redemption and resurrection set in the harsh but beautiful landscape of West Jutland.

I Danmark er jeg født (In Denmark I am born) is an instrumental paraphrase from 1938 of a hymn which Schierbeck composed in 1926. The original lyrics by HC Andersen celebrate the Danish nation, its language and character,

and each verse ends with 'I love you, Denmark, my fatherland'. The melody of the refrain opens the paraphrase, before the full song is treated to a richly lyrical development in the strings. Both these pieces would have won warm and instant recognition among the audience in February 1959 at a concert given by Jensen and the DRSO to mark the tenth anniversary of Schierbeck's death.

Natten (Night-time) is another paraphrase, this time from a ballet score which Schierbeck reworked as a concertante piece for piano and orchestra, given its premiere in 1938 in Gothenburg with the conductor Tor Mann and the pianist Sejr Volmer Sørensen, better known in Denmark as an actor, theatre director and TV personality.

Quite different again is the idiom of *Häxa* (The Witch), a brief scene for soprano, orchestra and organ. The poem by the Finnish-Swedish poet Erik Axel Karlfeldt describes the visions of a young woman at a witches' Sabbath, where she appears to meet a sequence of Hell's most prominent inhabitants. Schierbeck later stated that 'The work has amused me royally... there is a certain ecclesiastical tone in my music that should evoke a monastic atmosphere, the witches' bonfire, incense and everything else you can read in the poem.' The composer's wife took the soloist's part at the premiere in Gothenburg; on this recording we hear the Danish soprano Kirsten Schultz (1929-98), married for a time to the composer Svend S. Schultz. She made her debut at the Royal Theatre in 1956, two years before she appeared in this live broadcast with Thomas Jensen and the DRSO.

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The Thomas Jensen Legacy, Volume 4

Both in his native Denmark and around the world, Thomas Jensen became known for his uniquely authoritative interpretations of Carl Nielsen's music. His postwar Decca and HMV studio recordings of the first two symphonies are inflected with unrivalled sweep and passion. They are coupled here with previously unpublished broadcasts of music by four Danish composers from the generation after Nielsen, including the brooding *Largo* which set the scene for Carl Th. Dreyer's cinematic masterpiece, *Ordet* (The Word).



2 CD

The Thomas Jensen Legacy, Volume 4

DACOCD 914

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2 CD

Total playing time:
79:23 + 71:03

First release
CD 2

Transferred by
Claus Byrith

Cover photo
Svend Ravnkilde

Cover design
Hannah Jørgensen

Executive producer
Jesper Buhl

www.danacord.dk
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LC 07075



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Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

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Decca ACL 279. Recorded June 14-15, 1952, Danish Radio Concert Hall

[5] - [7] *Little Suite for Strings 15:02

HMV DB 5256-57. Recorded January 31 & February 22, 1941, Odd Fellow Palace, Copenhagen

[8] - [11] Symphony No. 2 31:05

HMV Z 7000-03. Recorded October 3, 1947, Danish Radio Concert Hall

CD 2

Herman D. Koppel (1908-1998)

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Live broadcast, June 11, 1950
Danish Radio Concert Hall

Vagn Holmboe (1909-1996)

[2] - [4] Epitaph: Symphonic

Metamorphose, Op. 68 (1956) 19:28
Live broadcast, May 22 1959

Svend Erik Tarp (1908-1994)

[5] - [7] Symphony No. 2 19:19

Live concert, March, 1962, Helsinki

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