



A note from the **new london chamber ensemble** on the use of the new Carl Nielsen Edition of the Wind Quintet (Edition Wilhelm Hansen Copenhagen) on their Nielsen CD.

New Perspectives from Old Manuscripts

As luck would have it, the Wind Quintet was virtually the last piece we recorded for our Nielsen CD and we managed to get hold of a score of the new Carl Nielsen Edition in the nick of time. By drawing together all the manuscript sources, this latest edition aims to rationalise discrepancies in previous editions and to provide a 'definitive' version with careful justification for its editorial choices; from a performer's viewpoint it answers many questions as well as raising a few new ones! In addition to this new score, we were kindly supplied with an autograph manuscript of the Quintet¹ by Jeppe Plum Andersen at the Royal Library, Copenhagen.

There can be something revealing about the 'spirit' of a composer's handwritten score; one characteristic of the Quintet is Nielsen's use of small parallel lines at strategic tempo changes. How to interpret these is a matter we've often debated; seen in isolation in an instrumental part, it is tempting to interpret them as a 'comma' i.e. a small hiatus or musical 'breath mark'. But, looking at the handwritten manuscript with its less geometric style, these lines seem just to be Nielsen's notational shorthand clarifying where he intends a tempo change (ex 1 at the *a tempo* and ex 2 upbeat to letter D in the flute part).



ex1

This idea is perhaps most clearly supported by the appearance of these lines over a tied note in the flute part in the *Praeludium* of the last movement (ex 3); it makes no sense to suggest that Nielsen intended a 'comma' or 'breath mark' at this point as the flute note is held, but there is a need to clarify exactly where the *a tempo* is to begin, given that the other players (bassoon and clarinet) have moving parts. After some discussion we therefore decided to modify our interpretation of these markings, to lessen their 'comma' or 'breath mark' effect and to treat them more as a point of tempo change.



ex 2

There were many other minutiae that emerged from looking at the manuscript and the new edition; when we were recording our Nielsen CD, we felt that one or two of these were of sufficient interest to warrant a separate 'take'. In the *Menuet* of the second movement, there are inconsistencies in the articulation markings in the bassoon part amongst previously available parts and scores; the new edition rationalises these, and this is the



ex 3



ex 4

version we recorded. However, our bassoonist Meyrick Alexander, made an additional take of the *Menuet* (track 28) interpreting the somewhat ambiguous articulation markings directly from the manuscript (ex 4); he had not come across these subtle variations in articulation in any printed version and thought it would be of interest to record these 'for posterity'.

As the preface to the new edition states, 'The greatest problem in editing this work has been the handling of the two equally good sources, which exhibit a number of contradictions mostly in the dynamics; the printed score and the printed parts, both approved by Carl Nielsen at the same time.... However, the printed score has been selected as the main source, since it represents the last complete version approved by Carl Nielsen.'² One such example is the phrasing of the 'chorales' (i.e. the Theme) in the last movement: in previous editions the score and parts have contradicted each other, as did Nielsen's manuscripts. In the clarinet part, the eight-bar opening phrase is divided into two four-bar phrases, and the flute part is subdivided further (ex 5). Based on these markings, we've tended to perform the chorales in four-bar phrases creating the image, perhaps, of a church congregation needing breaths a little more frequently than a professional choir!



ex 5

However, in the new edition, the longer eight-bar phrase, implied by the manuscript of the score (ex 6), has been printed in both the score and instrumental parts, and surely this will give rise to new interpretations – a different tempo even? Having only recently acquired the new score, we were somehow not quite ready to surrender our 'traditional' interpretation for the recording, but we made an extra take (track 29) of the first chorale (i.e. the Theme) at a faster tempo, which facilitates the eight-bar phrases being played in one breath. We wonder if this might become a more common tempo in the future, as performers increasingly use the new edition?

Another point of interest raised by the manuscript is the use of cor anglais in the last movement. The story related by Torben Meyer, Nielsen's first biographer, is that 'Carl Nielsen became so enthusiastic about the cor anglais when he heard Svend C. Felumb³ behind the scenes practising a solo from Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* that the very same night after the concert, he phoned Felumb to ask whether one could change instruments in the middle of a movement. After being told one could, he is said to have immediately composed the prelude to the third movement.'⁴

The *Praeludium* (ex 3) is indeed scored for cor anglais. It is immediately followed by the first rendition of the chorale Theme; in the manuscript (ex 6) 'Obo' in the margin has been crossed out, 'Engl. Horn' has been pencilled in and the oboe line has been amended for cor

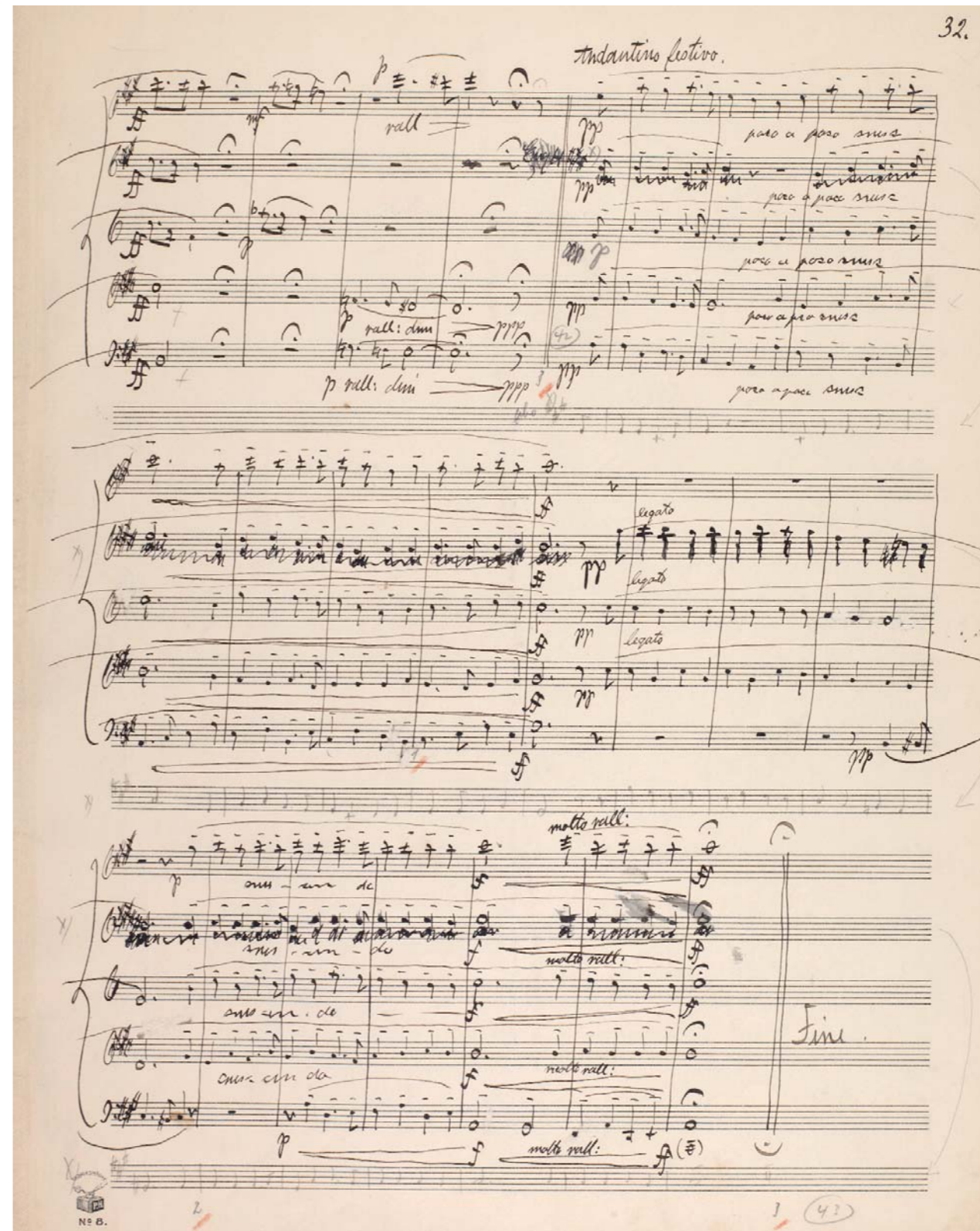


ex 6

anglais; interestingly, the closing chorale (ex 7) is also notated in ink for cor anglais with an oboe line crossed out immediately below it, but ultimately, it was amended for oboe (just visible, sketched underneath in pencil on the 6th, 12th and final staves) and this is how it is normally performed. Cor anglais would presumably have been Nielsen's preferred choice for the closing chorale, to match the scoring of the first chorale, particularly given the low tessitura and quiet dynamic of the opening phrase. However, it is not really practicable in live performance to swap back to cor anglais in the three bars before the chorale, as there is hardly sufficient time to change instruments. We decided to make an extra 'take' of the closing chorale (*Andantino festivo*) with cor anglais (track 30) to reproduce the effect Nielsen would almost certainly have wanted had it been practicable in live performance.

Since we made the CD, the instrumental parts of the new Carl Nielsen Edition have become available in the UK; yet more minute editorial details of phrasing, notation and dynamics came to light once we started rehearsing from these, although the most significant are those we have noted above. The emergence of this new edition inspired us to question our interpretation and also to take a look at Nielsen's autograph manuscript; we are indebted to the Danish Royal Library for their exceptional efficiency and assistance in making this possible and for their kind permission to reproduce extracts from Nielsen's autograph manuscript. In particular we should like to thank Research Professor Niels Krabbe, Editor-in-Chief of the new collected edition of Nielsen's works, for so generously taking the time to discuss some of the questions it raises.

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ex 7

NOTES

- 1) Nielsen's fair copy (listed as Source B in the new Carl Nielsen Edition), held in the Royal Library, Copenhagen.
- 2) Elly Bruunshuus Petersen, Preface to the Quintet, in Volume II/11, *Chamber Music 2*, Edition Wilhelm Hansen, Copenhagen 2003, p. xl.
- 3) Oboist in the Copenhagen Wind Quintet, for whom the Quintet was written.
- 4) Meyer, in Torben Meyer and Frede Schandorf Pedersen, *Carl Nielsen. Kunstneren og mennesket*, vol. 2, Copenhagen 1948, pp. 214–15, as cited in *Chamber Music 2* (see note 2), p. xxxvii.