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NIELSEN'S ARCADIA: THE CASE OF THE FLUTE CONCERTO

*The flute cannot deny its own nature,
its home is in Arcadia and it prefers pastoral moods.
Hence, the composer has to obey its gentle nature,
unless he wants to be branded a barbarian.¹*

By Ryan Ross

Nielsen's own remarks concerning his Flute Concerto (composed for and premiered by Holger Gilbert-Jespersen in 1926) have often appeared alongside descriptions of the work. The music's often sudden moments of lyricism seem to relate well to his invocation of the terms 'pastoral' and 'Arcadia'. However, while the concerto has recently been subjected to some fascinating examinations,² its 'Arcadian' nature as explicitly professed by Nielsen has barely been explored.³ In this essay I shall suggest that there are distinct patterns pertaining to the Flute Concerto involving the idea of 'Arcadia' as it contrasts an idyllic past with a troubled present. In my analysis, I will argue that his positioning of simple themes with relation to their surroundings in the concerto's two movements suggests a process-driven search for an Arcadian ideal. As such, and

1 *Fløjten kan ikke fornægte sin Natur, den hører hjemme i Arkadien og foretrækker de pastorale Stemninger; Komponisten er derefter nødt til at rette sig efter det blide Væsen, ifald han ikke vil risikere at stemples som en Barbar.* This and other remarks Nielsen made about his Flute Concerto may be found in *Carl Nielsen Works II/9: Concertos*, Copenhagen 2002, xxxiii-xxxiv.

2 Two such studies were published in *Carl Nielsen Studies 2* (2005) – Tom Pan-kurst, "'We Never Know Where We'll End Up': Nielsen's alternative endings to the Flute Concerto", 132-151; and Kirsten Flensburg Petersen, 'Carl Nielsen's Flute Concerto: Form and revision of the ending', 196-225. Both studies present valuable insights into the creative process of the work, with the former heavily exploring tonal/harmonic issues and the latter closely examining revisions for the finale. My essay is concerned primarily with the finished product and its aesthetic qualities as suggested by Nielsen.

3 In her D.M.A. dissertation, Beth E. Chandler examines the Flute Concerto and other works in terms of some neoclassic and other retrospective tendencies. See Chandler, *The 'Arcadian Flute': Late Style in Carl Nielsen's Works for Flute*, D.M.A. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2004, 92-136. This essay will go further in exploring the concepts of simplicity and Arcadia, and how they bring to bear upon specific musical processes in the Flute Concerto.

far from merely being an interesting work with several beautiful moments, the concerto is an important access point both for further understanding Nielsen's creative approach to form and his late-period preoccupation with the idea of simplicity.

Nielsen's invoking of 'Arcadia' with regard to the flute and the concerto he wrote for it is significant in light of the term's background. In the classical literary tradition, Arcadia was based upon an actual region in southwest Greece celebrated on account of its beautiful landscape and its agrarian inhabitants. It became the home of the shepherd god Pan and other fantastical characters in tune with their natural surroundings. On the authority of Virgil's *Eclogues*, Arcadia came to stand in Renaissance pastoral tradition for a figurative and idealized rural world in which shepherds and others live a leisurely existence according to upper-class sensibilities.⁴ As a connoisseur of classical culture, Nielsen probably knew the *Eclogues* and possibly Theocritus' *Idylls* (which served as a model for Virgil's pastoral poetry), being familiar with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and going so far to create a symphonic poem based on one of its pastoral episodes – *Pan and Syrinx*, Op. 49, first performed early in 1918.⁵

Certain of his written comments, addressed below, also suggest that Nielsen's conception of Arcadia included the juxtaposing a troubled reality with mythic paradises and happy innocence. This is a manifestation of its 'Golden Age' aspect that often appears in more recent literature.⁶ Comparing Arcadia to childhood, Brian Loughrey writes: 'Perhaps the most influential form of the new pastoralism has been the cult of the child. Post-Romantic conceptions of childhood, as a state of natural innocence, joy, and wisdom, corrupted by entry into the adult world, allowed the child to usurp the traditional role of the shepherd.'⁷ Peter V. Marinelli sees Arcadia in similar fashion: 'The issues of the great world of adulthood are transported into Arcadia or into the magic gardens of childhood as to a place and time in which they may be better scrutinized; they are given an objectification by being isolated, and the process may result in a clarification of the motives that bred the desire for escape in the first place.'⁸

4 Helen Cooper outlines Renaissance uses of Arcadia in pastoral poetry as contrasted with nature-writing in medieval literature. See Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance*, Ipswich, UK: 1977, 105-106.

5 Daniel M. Grimley in *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism*, Woodbridge 2010, Chapter 3, discusses Nielsen's relationship with Hellenic culture and mentions his 1899-1900 visit to Rome (p. 75).

6 The ideas of Arcadia and a Golden Age are recurrent themes in Renato Poggioli's volume on pastoral literature – *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal*, Cambridge 1975. Poggioli considers these concepts against a wide swath of literature from both ancient and later times, including post-Classical authors such as Cervantes, Rousseau, Goethe, Gogol, and others.

7 Brian Loughrey, 'Introduction,' in Brian Loughrey (ed.), *The Pastoral Mode: A Casebook*, London and Basingstoke 1984, 21.

8 Peter V. Marinelli, 'Pastoral', in John D. Jump (ed.), *The Critical Idiom Series*, London 1971, 11-12.

In nineteenth-century pastoral poetry, such Arcadian patterns are discernible in how some writers contrasted past innocence with contemporary anxieties. One thinks perhaps of William Wordsworth's ode *Intimations of Immortality* or Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar-Gipsy*, both of which position idyllic nature and rural figures as a means with which to idealize the special qualities of childhood on the one hand, and a past age associated with a youthful friend on the other.

I am convinced that the concept of Arcadia as a dichotomy of idyllic past versus troubled present is a helpful way to view Nielsen's *Flute Concerto*. Such a perspective owes much to key discussions in primary and secondary sources. In *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism*, Daniel Grimley closely examines the rural aspects of the *Sinfonia espansiva* and *Springtime on Funen*, among other works. Two intriguing lines of argument he makes, in conjunction with considering Danish visual art, are to connect Nielsen's invocation of landscape in the symphony to a 'seasonal cycle of growth and decay' and that in *Springtime in Funen* to invoking 'cultural memory' as a 'source of renewal' and a point of new departure.⁹ These compositions, in his analysis, transcend the mere portrayal of physical landscape commonly associated with negatively-viewed provincialism. Instead, Grimley emphasizes the importance of dynamic, time-related themes that hold the past and present in the same frame.

The *Sinfonia espansiva* and *Springtime on Funen* offer multiple points of similarity with the concept of Arcadia as outlined above. The latter work certainly references and even idealizes a cultural past in which Nielsen was reared. Also, the composer explicitly invoked a primal paradise when he claimed that the second movement of the *Sinfonia espansiva*, marked 'Andante pastorale,' was inspired by the Garden of Eden before the fall of Adam and Eve. This shows that even before his last years the idea of a past Arcadian wholeness later lost claimed a place in his musical imagination. However, these works do not feature the sharp juxtapositions of the kind found in the later symphonies and concerti. While one could argue that Nielsen's professed ode to Danish farmers' hard work in the final movement of the *Sinfonia espansiva* embodies a present, toil-filled rural reality (a kind of musical 'Georgic') that contrasts with the pre-fall bliss of Eden associated with the second movement, the characteristic conflicts of the later orchestral works are largely absent here. In these two compositions, then, the distant past – on the one hand fondly remembered and idealized, and on the other merely imagined – finds little or no harsh modern presence against which to provide a particularly Arcadian duality in the sense presently under discussion.

Such contrasts are arguably observed most keenly in Nielsen's late career and music. There are definite signs that this was a time especially characterized by reflection, in which he penned a memoir, *My Childhood on Funen*. This volume appeared in

9 Daniel M. Grimley, *op. cit.*, 132-177.

1926, the year he completed his Flute Concerto. In it he explicitly and fondly recalls scenes from childhood filtered through the lens of adult wisdom and experience. It arrived after a lifetime of personal and professional hardships for Nielsen that included protracted marital difficulties, a long struggle for respect as an orchestral musician, and health setbacks including ongoing cardiac problems. Given these considerations, a reflective mindset at this time seems understandable.¹⁰ Another indicator of Nielsen's mature engagement with simplicity and youth lies in his choice of musical projects in the 1920s and beyond. The commissions relating to juvenile and community themes, the pieces composed for amateurs (specifically the opus 53 collection of piano pieces targeted toward 'young and old'), and many songs of a simple, folk-like character are all examples.¹¹ Anne-Marie Reynolds's observation of how the latter group appeared during a time when Nielsen was elsewhere at his most musically complex and experimental is worth remembering in this context.¹²

Perhaps the most obvious musical contrasts may be found in single compositions – the battles waged between opposing forces beginning with the Fourth Symphony (*The Inextinguishable*) and frequently appearing in subsequent orchestral works. Nielsen described his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies in terms of Life or Renewal striving to survive in the face of destructive forces. In the Flute Concerto and Sixth Symphony, part of a group of last major orchestral scores, vivid tensions also emerge, but with a different focus. The few clues offered by Nielsen in connection with the Sixth Symphony suggest that the battle between Life and Destruction gives way later to a fascination with simplicity and childlike innocence, tinged with the doubt and uncertainty he associated with modern music. He explicitly describes the second and fourth movements of that work in such terms.¹³ Both these remarks and those he offered for the Flute Concerto recognizably relate to the idea of Arcadia as a past wholeness contrasted with a troubled present.

10 It is perhaps tempting to follow the example of Robert Simpson and label specific musical passages in late works such as the Sixth Symphony as signifying actual emotions and events in Nielsen's life. See Robert Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, New York 1979, 112-136. But I will instead heed the warnings of Anne-Marie Reynolds, Daniel Grimley, and others (not to mention Nielsen himself) and limit myself to postulating that Nielsen's real-life circumstances affected the tone and aesthetic of his late works in ways that are impossible to account for with exactitude.

11 Karen Vestergård and Ida-Marie Vorre discuss simplicity as a particularly Danish feature of the *folkelige* tradition and of Nielsen's *folkelige* songs, as well as its ties to notions of ruralness and the peasantry. See 'Danishness in Nielsen's *Folkelige* Songs,' in *Carl Nielsen Studies* 3 (2008), 88-92.

12 Anne-Marie Reynolds, *Carl Nielsen's Voice: His Songs in Context*, Copenhagen 2010, 48-49. Reynolds also treats the *folkelige* songs extensively in this monograph. (See chapters 4 and 5.)

13 See *Carl Nielsen Works II/6: Symphony No. 6 (Sinfonia Semplice)*, Copenhagen 2002, xvi-xv.

In further investigating musical parallels with Arcadia in Nielsen's late orchestral works, we find some insights in his 1925 collection of various writings entitled *Living Music*.¹⁴ A duality that recurs repeatedly in the portions dating from the 1920s is Nielsen's distaste for certain contemporary musical attitudes and trends versus his belief in the value of simplicity. The term 'simple original' (and close variants) surfaces multiple times in connection with the latter. These discussions often make for provocative reading. With the exception of Richard Wagner, Nielsen declines to name specific people as the objects of his more pointed criticisms. But one cannot mistake a general reverence for simplicity at the expense of modern excess in statements such as that which closes his review of Thomas Laub's volume of Danish songs:

But I must point out that it is the easiest which is the hardest to understand these days. The plain and simple has become mysterious because the world of art as a whole has been so full of unrest, din, excitement, and delirium for so long that our senses have become coarsened. [...] The simple and primitive is the most difficult, and the spiritual state I refer to is a gift outside the reach of many. The drunkard finds it hard to be content with spring water, the harlot with morning prayers, the gambler with playing forfeits. Yet they were all unspoiled at birth. But they have forgotten it, and it is hard to get back to the simple and primitive.¹⁵

In another essay included within *Living Music*, 'Musical Problems,' Nielsen is careful to explain that he does not advocate merely adopting musical styles of particular time periods as a means of obtaining a 'simple original.' Rather, his conception of musical simplicity is of an aesthetic kind, one defined by character rather than by an era-specific style.¹⁶ In light of this, identifying how Arcadia manifests itself in Nielsen's late music such as the Flute Concerto should go beyond seeking out neoclassical tenden-

14 *Levende Musik*, Copenhagen 1925; Nielsen wrote each of these separate articles at different times during his life. However, those from which I draw heavily originally appeared in the years immediately preceding *Levende Musik*; they belong roughly to the composer's last decade.

15 Carl Nielsen, *Living Music*, translated by Reginald Spink, London 1968, 60. *Men jeg gør udtrykkelig opmærksom paa, at det letfattede er det vanskeligste at forstaa nu til Dags. Det enkle og klare er nu mystisk, fordi hele den kunstneriske Verden har været opfyldt af Uro, Larm, Ekstase og Vildskab saa længe, at vore Sanser er blevet forgrovede [...] Det oprindelige er det vanskeligste, og den Sjælstilstand, jeg taler om, er en Gave, der for mange er uopnaelig. Drankeren har svært ved at finde sig til Rette med Kildevand, Skøgen med Morgenbøn, Hasardspilleren med Panteleg, og dog var de alle fra Fødslen helt ufordærvede; men det har de glemt, og saa er det svært at finde tilbage til det oprindelige.* 'Nye Sange', 1921, quoted in John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen til sin Samtid*, Copenhagen 1999, 253.

16 Nielsen/Spink, *op. cit.*, 45-46.

cies and points of comparison with past paradigms. We must also take into account how the themes and gestures of these works relate to themselves and operate within a unique syntax.

But what did Nielsen associate musically with a troubled present? The key to answering this question is to understand his appreciation for conflict. Consider another statement in his review of Laub's volume: 'Conflict there must be that we may have clarity. Perception must be preceded by opposition. The bad is not bad by itself, not bad absolutely; we must see it opposed to something else.'¹⁷ Such a remark should act as a safeguard against misinterpreting Nielsen's critique of contemporary musical practices. For all his praise of tradition and simplicity, he was not against innovation, dissonance, or other concepts prized by early 20th century musical modernists, in and of themselves. ('Give us something else; give us something new; for Heaven's sake give us something bad, as long as we feel we are alive and active and not just passive admirers of tradition!,' wrote Nielsen in 'The Fullness of Time' [1925].¹⁸) Plainly put, Nielsen argued for a modern music that respects fundamentals. In 'Musical Problems' he writes: 'It is dangerous when art forgets its origins and becomes artificial. It may continue for a while to glow and give off scent; but it must wither and die, like cut flowers or mown grass. Hence in order rightly to understand we must occasionally get back to first origins.'¹⁹ Following this, Nielsen explains that these 'origins' are simple, natural intervals and rhythms. He calls the latter 'a child of time' that is mysterious and 'knows all the secrets of origins,' words that yet again sharply recall the notion of Arcadia as being part of a distant past. Nielsen references like ideas in 'The Fullness of Time': 'But, as I have repeatedly pointed out, what we must consider, the alpha and omega of music, is the tones themselves, the tonal register, and the intervals. These have been clean forgotten in all the experiments with so-called tonal colour and other externals.'²⁰ Finally, Nielsen faults contemporary music for its perceived failure to incorporate humor and humility. Returning to 'Danish Songs', Nielsen writes that most

17 Nielsen/Spink, *op. cit.*, 54. *Der maa altså strides, for at faa Klarhed. Noget modsat maa fremholdes, for at erkende. Det slette er altsaa i og for sig ikke slet, eller ikke absolut slet, før vi ser dets Anvendelse over for noget modsat.* (John Fellow, *op. cit.*, 248).

18 Nielsen/Spink, *op. cit.*, 72. [...] *giv os noget nyt, ja, giv os i Himlens Navn hellere det slette og lad os føle, at vi lever, i Stedet for bestandig at gaa rundt i daadløs Beundring for det engang vedtagne* (John Fellow, *op. cit.*, 342).

19 Nielsen/Spink, *op. cit.*, 43. *Ihvertfald er det farligt, naar Kunsten glemmer sin Oprindelse og bliver for kunstig. Isaafald kan den vel nok endnu en lille Tid udstraale Farvegloed og Duft; men den maa visne og dø som afskaarne Blomster eller slaget Græs paa Marken. Vi maa derfor af og til have fat i det elementære for ret at forstaa* (John Fellow, *op. cit.*, 263).

20 Nielsen/Spink, *op. cit.*, 74. [...] *som jeg bestandig har peget paa: at vende sig imod det, som er og bliver Musikens Alfa og Omega, nemlig selve Tonerne, Tonerækken, og Intervallerne. Dem har man rent glemt for Experimenterne med Klangfarver – som det hedder – og andre ydre Midler* (John Fellow, *op. cit.*, 343ff.).

musicians ‘have got caught in the great fly-papers that were put up for them in their youth.’ He continues: ‘The glue is dangerous indeed. It is made up of the following ingredients: imagination, emotion, pathos, profundity, and the like. No room, you see, for grace, gaiety, and humor!’²¹ Hence, Nielsen’s largest criticisms of modern music in these articles, published in *Living Music*, are reserved for what he saw as overwrought excesses that make no room for simple tunes and manners of expression. ‘It is not the piquant that is really valuable,’ he writes, ‘but that which flows gently from a spring.’²²

While the composer’s written words direct us to no specific method of analysis (nor forbid one), they collectively lead to the conclusion that Nielsen allotted musical simplicity a serious place in his imagination. Taking this in combination with what Daniel Grimley has taught us throughout *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* about the composer using concepts such as contrast and dialogue as foundations for a process-driven approach to form, I propose that understanding Nielsen’s late fascination with simplicity, and by extension Arcadian simplicity (in the Flute Concerto or elsewhere) depends upon a willingness to seek out its aesthetic roles in particular contexts. Of Nielsen’s late large-scale orchestral works, the Flute Concerto arguably goes furthest in highlighting simplicity within a dynamic framework.²³ Much of the reason for this likely relates back to the character of the solo instrument as he saw it. Here there is no snare drum, no timpani battle (though the timpani does have a modest role), and no ‘mad’ or ‘hellish’ fugue.²⁴ The conflicts in the Flute Concerto are of a subtler kind, more resembling a multihued search for consonance and tranquility than an epic battle between good and evil. David Fanning frames this work in terms of ‘well-mannered elegance in the face of brute opposition’.²⁵ Another element in the

21 Nielsen/Spink, *op. cit.*, 55. *I Musikens Verden er det saadan, at de fleste er blevet hængende i de store Flueplastre, der blev slaaet op for dem i deres Ungdom [...] Dette Klæbestof er farligt nok. Det bestaar af følgende Ingredienser: Fantasi, Følelse, Patos, Dybsindighed og – ligesindede. Som man ser, er der ingen Plads for Ynde, Letsind og Humor [...]* (John Fellow, *op. cit.*, 249).

22 Nielsen/Spink, *op. cit.*, 59.

23 One of the conclusions that Kirsten Flensburg Petersen reaches in her analysis of the Flute Concerto’s reworked ending is that ‘in the 1920s [he] place greater weight on the dynamic progress of a work rather than on the reprise of a theme or a closing cadence as a goal for the musical evolution, and it is precisely this element which is strengthened in the concerto with its altered ending.’ See Flensburg Petersen, *op. cit.*, 215. Such a view correlates well with Grimley’s discussions already cited and aligns with the dialogue-based reading of the work that I am about to offer.

24 In his excellent study on the Fifth Symphony, David Fanning uses these and like metaphors to describe certain intense passages of the first of two fugues in the second movement. See David Fanning, *Nielsen: Symphony No. 5*, Cambridge 1997, 59-65.

25 See Fanning, ‘Nielsen, Carl,’ in *Grove Music Online* <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19930> (accessed January 29, 2012).

concerto is humor, as the final pages of the score attest. The dialogue between the flute and the trombone, which performs slides and other lighthearted gestures, was intended in a joking spirit by Nielsen.²⁶

If there has been some discussion on the Flute Concerto's ending, both with regard to those bars he reworked and to the joke enjoyed by the composer at his friend's expense, less often mentioned is the possibility that the work also opens with a kind of joke. The initial gesture of the concerto is familiar enough territory. The upper strings and woodwinds open with a strong ascending A-D fourth over an E^b undertone in the cellos and basses, creating dissonant minor-second and tritone clashes. The treble voices then descend rapidly, followed by the lower voices, setting up the first entrance of the flute, which mimicks them with its own series of descending figures. After a brief transitional passage, the flute leads the way with the main theme. See *Ex. 1*.

As Amy Catherine Nelson and Beth Chandler have written, this is a recasting of much earlier music by Nielsen – the second of two *Fantasy Pieces for Oboe and Piano*, Op. 2.²⁷ There the piano rather than the orchestra introduces the exact same intervallic leap a fourth up to quarter-note D, from which rapid sixteenth notes in groups of four descend after a tied suspension. The transition to the main theme found in the Flute Concerto is absent; instead the oboe and piano abruptly begin the first theme immediately after the opening bars. See *Ex. 2*.

The resemblances between this passage and that found at the outset of the Flute Concerto are striking if not exact. The gestures not only share a close pitch trajectory, but the ideas juxtaposed are also very similar. Both begin with declamatory motions from which follow descending flurries of sixteenth notes in regular groupings. Both then move (albeit at different junctures) to rapid, march-like themes with 'oom-pah' accompaniments.

The *Fantasy Pieces for Oboe and Piano*, composed in 1889 and premiered in 1891, are among the first mature instrumental works that Nielsen published. They situate nearly as far opposite as possible from the Flute Concerto (one of his last instrumental works) in terms of when they were composed within the timeline of his career. Although there is no empirical evidence that Nielsen fully intended the beginning of the Flute Concerto to be a retrospection upon the beginning of the oboe *Humoresque*, such a connection adds a special dimension to an Arcadian conception of the concerto. This is particularly true in light of key musical differences between the two openings. Although fine pieces in and of themselves, the oboe fantasies lack the

²⁶ See *Carl Nielsen Works II/9*, xxxiv.

²⁷ See Amy Catherine Nelson, Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 2002, 37-38; and Beth Chandler, *op. cit.*, 106-108.

I

Allegro moderato (♩ = 100 - 112)

Flauto

Piano

4

7

11

f *m.d.* *f* *m.s.* *mf* *f* *dim.* *p* *f* *mp* *dim.* *p* *f* *p* *molto staccato* *pizz.* *cl.* *mp* *mfz* *p*

Ex. 1. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, first movement, bb. 1-13

mannerisms and strong originality that characterize Nielsen's late music. There is no clearer contrast between the similar openings in question than their respective tonal layouts. The *Humoresque* begins squarely in D minor, complete with a half cadence to A major at the end of the initial 4-bar melodic phrase. Though it contains some mild surprises, such as a D major ending, the remainder of the piece stays largely within Common Practice boundaries. The Flute Concerto, like much of Nielsen's late music,

HUMORESQUE
HUMORESQUE
Allegretto scherzando

Oboe

Pianoforte

f

dim.

5

mf

ff

p

mf

ff

p

Ex. 2. Nielsen, *Fantasy Pieces for Oboe and Piano*, Op. 2, No. 2: *Humoresque*, bb. 1-9

frequently confounds attempts to label certain of its areas in terms of clear major or minor frameworks or tonal schemes. The opening E^b against the A-D ascending interval is a good example.

Even if Nielsen did not intend frame the opening of his Flute Concerto humorously, it strengthens the work's Arcadian credentials in an obvious way. By taking a stylistically simple and 'unalloyed' gesture from a piece composed during his youth, transplanting it to a late work with expressed Arcadian overtones, and adjusting its tonal and harmonic parameters in a manner that conforms to the more experimental side of his later idiom, Nielsen is in effect alerting aware listeners that one of the work's salient themes will be to contrast present complexities with youthful simplicity. Another will be for the flute to actively seek out that simplicity under duress.

The succession of three musical themes in the first movement follows a course not unlike a search for Arcadia that eventually succeeds, if only briefly. I have already touched upon the first, a running figure played by the flute and soon taken up in the orchestra. It is deceptively simple and soon shows a melodic and harmonic malleability that frustrates attempts to circumscribe clear boundaries for it. The restless quality of this idea and its different manifestations propel the musical narrative forward; some destination is clearly being sought. It is not long before one is reached with the second thematic idea of the movement at Rehearsal B, initially stated by the orchestra (see Ex. 3).

33 *rall.* **B** *a tempo, ma tranq.* *mf espressivo*

p *a tempo, ma tranq.* *p*

Ex. 3. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, first movement, bb. 33-37

The character of this melodic idea is not far removed from that of another memorable tune from a past work – the subordinate theme in the first movement of the Second Symphony, dubbed *The Four Temperaments* (composed 1901-1902). See Ex. 4.

p espressivo

p *f* *p*

Ex. 4. Nielsen, *Symphony No. 2, The Four Temperaments*, first movement, bb. 65-69

Not only do these two themes bear some aesthetic resemblance to one another with their broad, sweeping gestures, but they also perform similar functions in their respective works. In the earlier symphony, the subordinate theme serves as a brighter, more restful foil to the agitation and volatility of the initial ‘choleric’ theme. In the Flute Concerto, the second theme provides a more static counterbalance to the constant motion of its predecessor. The F Mixolydian flavor of the melody (determined by the E^b pitch reached at its highest point in the orchestra’s initial statement of it), signals that the music has at this point attained some kind of stability as well as some possible pastoral repose on the account of its folksong-associated modality.²⁸ However, it soon becomes clear that this theme offers no attainment of Arcadian peace. First, the repeated changes in its pitch collection with each successive entrance in the flute and orchestra compromise any sense of lasting rest and begin to introduce the tint of rumination. Such suspicions are confirmed after a lengthy quasi-cadenza for flute when the theme once more attempts to reassert itself at bar 70 in the violins.

²⁸ Daniel Grimley has recently treated the matter of flattened sevenths in Nielsen’s music, showing among other things how they perform consonant functions in his music. See Grimley, ‘Horn Calls and Flattened Sevenths: Nielsen and Danish Musical Style,’ in Harry White and Michael Murphy (eds.), *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture, 1800-1945*, Cork 2001, 123-141.

But things go startlingly awry when the whole orchestra suddenly uses the repeating notes that form the incipit of the theme to embark upon the most disturbing episode of the concerto up to this point as the instruments accelerate. Equilibrium is tentatively restored when the flute once more takes up the initial theme.

Arguably the very heart of the concerto is the lyrical theme (the third) in nearly the precise middle of the first movement. This is preceded by a tutti passage that at first glance would appear to mark the section's central climax, after the manner of many Romantic concerti for various instruments. Only after we hear this is it clear that the tutti passage has prepared this third melodic theme that follows rather than acting itself as a central climactic pillar. This flute-assigned melody is the most striking juncture of the first movement and unique in terms of its diatonic, E major stability (with a few unobtrusive accidentals at the very end), its confined space and intervals, and its modest accompaniment. Ben Arnold wrote that, in his concertos, Nielsen often uses 'second-theme areas which provide clear contrast to the first themes.'²⁹ One might extend this idea and argue that the third theme shown below contrasts with the second theme to the extent that both do with the first. See *Ex. 5*.

Nielsen's placement of such a theme at this particular juncture is a masterstroke that seems deliberately designed to extol simplicity. It is a gesture sharply in line with his remarks quoted above in that with it he refuses to make the densest, most 'piquant' point the apex of the movement. (In this opposite vein, one thinks perhaps of the cluster chord that forms the climax of the first movement of Mahler's Tenth Symphony.) Rather, we have a conscious, purposeful return to a 'simple original,' not unlike a glimpse of an untroubled past. Indeed, Nielsen's written program note for the concerto, cited at the outset of this writing, strongly implies that he connected this theme with Arcadia. In the course of recounting the first movement's successive highlights, he alights upon what is obviously the central tutti just described. He then makes an indirect reference to the central lyrical theme, connecting it with the character of the flute as he saw it and that forms the epigraph to this essay: 'Gradually the orchestral texture becomes fuller and more mobile, but this does not last long; for the flute cannot deny its nature, it belongs in Arcadia and prefers the pastoral moods; the composer therefore has to indulge the gentle creature, if he does not want to be stigmatized as a barbarian.'³⁰

Only after we hear this central melody and carefully look back does it become clear that Nielsen has embedded it into the fabric of the action leading up to this point, further bolstering its structural importance. In the central orchestral climax, it is presaged before its full appearance in the winds and brass.

29 Ben Arnold, 'Tradition and Growth in the Concertos of Nielsen,' in Mina Miller (ed.), *The Nielsen Companion*, Portland 1994, 351.

30 See *Carl Nielsen Works II/9*, xxxiv.

a tempo, ma tranquillo

110 *p espressivo*

cl. *pp*

a tempo, ma tranquillo

va. *p*

pp quasi senza Ped.

113 *p*

str. *mp espr.* con pedale

116

119 *dim.* *dim.* *pp* *f* *ob.* *pp* *fg.*

122 *p molto staccato* *pp pizz.* *p* *ob.* *mp* *p*

Ex. 5. Nielsen, Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, first movement, bb. 110-124 ('Arcadian Theme')

Ex. 6. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, first movement, bb. 101-106

The theme returns only partially two more times in the movement, on both occasions in contexts that compromise its character as established in the only full appearance discussed above. The first instance arrives well into the flute's lengthy cadenza toward the conclusion of the movement, where the clarinet has assumed the prominent role of a secondary solo presence. The two instruments take brief turns playing a short incipit of the melody amidst angular, dissonant virtuoso passage work played by the other. It is difficult not to view this as an important contrast wherein each instrument attempts unsuccessfully to resurrect the theme in the face of the other's unrest.³¹ See Ex. 7.

The flute attempts one last time to reestablish the central melody at b. 164, after the orchestra restates and develops the secondary theme shown in Ex. 3. Here it is unsuccessful by its own doing when it abruptly switches to the main theme before quickly losing interest in that as well. The solo flute then soars quickly to a high E while the surrounding orchestra suddenly frames in within an ominous E minor triad in staggered eighth notes. After more bars where nothing lasting is established, the orchestra eventually moves to a G flat major end arrival, which the flute matches at the last moment and after a tonally dubious climb to the corresponding tonic pitch.

The end of the first movement, despite settling upon a consonant harmony, feels very provisional after the cadenza and its aftermath. Part of the reason is that

31 Robert Simpson's brief analysis of the concerto states that the clarinet at this juncture joins 'in a gloomy search for [the central theme],' the latter of which he describes as 'one of the loveliest moments in the work, based on a very simple figure.' See Simpson, *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*, London 1979, 141.

151 1. *poco espressivo*

153 1. *espressivo*

154 1.

155 1. *ff* *a2*

Ex. 7. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, first movement, bb. 151-156

this concerto, like many other large-scale compositions by Nielsen, uses traditional harmonies in a very selective manner, often bypassing long-current progressions in favor of dialogue-like textures where melodic motives and other gestures freely comingle.³² Another contributing factor is the unusual formal structure of the movement and the sequence of its themes discussed above. Nielsen positions the third, Arcadian theme as a focal event shifting the traditional balance of stability from the beginning and end to the center, which in sonata-allegro tradition had usually been the point of greatest tension (the development section). The foreshadowing of the Arcadian theme before its full appearance, and the failed attempts by the flute and

32 This issue has been a prominent concern in recent Nielsen scholarship. Part of the discussion hinges on criticism of Robert Simpson's analyses in his book *Carl Nielsen: Symphonist*. Daniel Grimley and Anne-Marie Reynolds, for two examples among others, have remarked upon Simpson's interpretive subjectivity and excessive reliance on key function to describe the composer's music. See Grimley, *op. cit.*, 245-248; and Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 36-37.

clarinet to resurrect it after, reinforce this distribution of stability. In such a scheme the melody shares much with the idea of Arcadia viewed from a later time, in which a simple wholeness is striven for, briefly glimpsed, and re-sought in vain. It is perhaps not surprising that this theme returns near the conclusion of the final movement and there plays multiple important functions within it and with relation to the first movement. However, much that is noteworthy precedes this reprise, and so we turn our attention to the beginning of the finale.

The second movement is home to many of the work's most interesting tensions and contrasts. Similarly to what occurs in the first movement, it opens in tonal ambiguity before finally settling upon a consonant rondo theme that initially centers around G major. Nielsen described the opening sixteenth notes as 'slightly malicious' and the rondo theme as 'quite childlike and innocent,' as if to emphasize immediately the contrast of unrest and Arcadian repose.³³ Another commentator, Herbert Rosenberg, speaks of the softening effect of this 'idyllic rondo theme' after what precedes it.³⁴ See *Ex. 8*.

Though this main theme recurs throughout the second movement, as one would expect even in a 'loose rondo' (Nielsen's term), it has a rather more tenuous presence than does the central lyrical theme of the preceding movement. What the opening here really establishes, and what key points throughout the rest of the movement affirm, is that this manifestation of innocence will have a more difficult time maintaining itself against its surroundings. This is all the truer with Nielsen's revision of the finale from what it originally was, extending the dialogue between flute, trombone, and the larger ensemble considerably. He may have finally avoided being 'branded a barbarian' here, but perhaps by a narrower margin.

It does not take long for the movement to lose its tepidly brisk pace after the first statement of the rondo theme and its B-theme counterpart, which arrives beginning in bar 39. Bar 62 introduces an adagio section with a new theme that Nielsen characterized as a 'lamenting melody.'³⁵ See *Ex. 9*.

The placement of the adagio theme in the finale of this flute concerto sharply recalls a moment in the finale of another concerto with pastoral overtones – Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Concerto for Oboe and Strings*, composed nearly two decades later at the height of World War II. In that finale, revealingly coined a 'scherzo' by its composer, a sudden, anxious *lento* interrupts a predominantly upbeat opening sequence. There the solo oboe plays a melody that dramatically contrasts with the finale's initial theme group. Vaughan Williams's younger friend, Michael Kennedy, describes

33 See *Carl Nielsen Works II/9*, xxxiv.

34 Herbert Rosenberg, 'Concertos,' in Jürgen Balzer (ed.), *Carl Nielsen: Centenary Essays*, London 1966, 51.

35 See *The Carl Nielsen Edition: Concertos*, xxxiv.

Allegretto, un poco (♩ = ca. 100)

str. *ff* segue segue cor. *dim.*

p *dim.* *pp* *dim.* *ppp* *dim.* *pppp* *mp grazioso* *p*

pp *ppp* *pp* *fg.*

Ex. 8. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, second movement, bb. 1-20

this *lento* as ‘a passionate and regretful episode’ that ‘seems to be yearning for some lost and precious thing.’³⁶ A similar description could apply to the *adagio* theme which begins at bar 62 in the finale of Nielsen’s work, all the more considering the composer’s labeling of the melody as ‘lamenting.’ The violent three-note outbursts that follow in the orchestra not long after, and that close the *adagio* section, seem to confirm the flute’s ‘sorrow’ and unease.³⁷

If the attainment of an Arcadian ‘simple original’ unexpectedly forms the central climax of the first movement, the middle of the second is more doubtful both in light of the previous events described above and what follows. The ‘innocent’ rondo theme proves to be less successful in establishing itself. When the tune returns after

36 Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Second Edition. Oxford 1980, 347.

37 In his article already cited, Tom Pankhurst labels the transition from measure 61 to 62 as a fading of Arcadian tranquility. See Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, 133.

Adagio ma non troppo

60 *ral - len - tan - do*
mp espressivo *mf* *p*

ral - len - tan - do
pp *pp vl. con sord.*

67 *p*
cor.
p espress.

Ex. 9. Nielsen, Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, second movement, bb. 60-72

86 *ff* *poco accel.*

ff *poco accel.*

90 *sempre ff* *mp grazioso*
Allegretto

cl. *vl. con sord.*
molto dim. *ral - - len - tan - - do* *ppp*

Ex. 10. Nielsen, Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, second movement, bb. 86-94

113 **F** *f* *cresc.*

114 *str. pizz.* *arco cantabile* *mf*

115 *1-5* *cresc.*

116 *1-5*

117 *1-5* *di-*

118 *scen- do* *1-5*

119 *mi- nu- en- do* *p*

120 *p* *molto cresc.*

121 *p*

122 *p*

123 *p*

124 *p*

125 *p*

126 *p*

127 *p*

Ex. 11. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, second movement, bb. 113-127

the events depicted in Ex. 10, we soon sense that it is in danger of losing the battle with those darker, ‘troubled present’ forces. Here there is a conspicuous lack of stable harmonic accompaniment compared to the theme’s earlier statement. Instead, horn, violins, and solo viola work to pressure the flute’s melody rather than support it. The increase in accidentals, trills, and dynamics work to both break down the theme’s stability and G major harmonic center, and presage another unsettling arrival to come. But first there occurs an interruption in the form of a volatile, nervously lyrical orchestral interlude.

Then suddenly the most violent episode of the entire concerto occurs, with the flute piping shrilly above the Nielsen-coined ‘malicious’ dissonant sixteenth notes that opened the movement. During bb. 130-136, the flute insistently plays high Gs in triplets before oscillating between this pitch and the neighboring A, and final-

Ex. 12. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, second movement, bb. 128-137

ly trails off with a descending figure as the section ends abruptly. It is tempting to see this as the flute's desperate attempts to reassert itself and its fragile, innocent G center against insurgent, a-melodic adversity in the strings. As if to reaffirm the nature of this conflict, a short reprise of the earlier adagio section enters immediately after, with the flute referencing, but not precisely duplicating, its former mournful melody. Perhaps sensing that something special would be necessary to convincingly reestablish a childlike, playful quality in the movement, Nielsen at this point brings back the rondo theme in the woodwinds, rather than the solo flute. It also appears in a new guise as a 6/8 *Tempo di marcia* variation. See Ex. 13.

Ex. 13. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, second movement, bb. 145-150

200 *poco tranquillo*
mp
p
mp espressivo
poco tranquillo
str. pizz.

205
p
mf (quasi gliss.)

Ex. 14. Nielsen, *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, second movement, bb. 200-209

This is reprised by the flute approximately a dozen bars later over spare accompaniment, followed by some energetic banter between soloist and ensemble beginning at b. 161. The clearest indication that the concerto will end in a spirit of gentleness and humor, and that the ‘lamenting and maliciousness’ will not return, arrives at b. 200. Here the tempo marking reads *Poco Tranquillo*. A very similar tempo marking also using the word *Tranquillo* had ushered in the simple Arcadian theme from the middle of the first movement. This is the cue for that theme to enter with the trombone under what may impress listeners as a pastoral dance in the flute and orchestra. The soft dynamics lend to a feeling of repose. See Ex. 14. The playful nature of the dialogue between the flute, trombone, and orchestra that follows, and that concludes both movement and work, perhaps suggests that now the ensemble of instrumental characters has made peace with the notion that Arcadia will never be truly regained. Rather, they content themselves with the memory of past innocence with a smile and laugh in the trombone.

Considered within Nielsen’s broader output, the Flute Concerto is an important work because it demonstrates that even during his most experimental and challenging stylistic period, he was capable of composing large-scale music that finds original ways to validate consonance and simplicity as sources of renewal. Even in his later works that do so with less certain outcomes (such as the Sixth Symphony

and Clarinet Concerto), simplicity itself is evoked in a way that betrays the composer's deep preoccupation with the idea. The trope of lost innocence never seems very far away from these and other works. Looking beyond Nielsen, it is remarkable how many other composers of his approximate generation took up this theme. I have already mentioned Vaughan Williams, whose *Blake Songs for Oboe*, and Ninth Symphony (or at least the work's programmatic origins) in some way or another contrast fragile youth and innocence with harsh adult realities.³⁸ To Nielsen's and his names could be added other twentieth-century composers preoccupied in their later years with former innocence – Leoš Janáček (*Along An Overgrown Path*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*) and Dmitri Shostakovich (the Second Piano Concerto and Fifteenth Symphony) are two prominent examples. All of these composers would suffer marginalization or ridicule at the hands of postwar academics, critics, and others who dismissed earnest glances at any kind of past, real or imagined. But what a broadly defined Arcadian ideal did for Nielsen was serve as a vehicle with which to contextualize the present world, to retreat from it in order to view it in better relief. In this way, the Flute Concerto is a monument not merely to the search for Arcadian simplicity, but to an artistic attitude that values multiple perspectives and humble reflection without shame.

A B S T R A C T

In this essay I suggest that there are distinct patterns pertaining to the Flute Concerto involving the idea of 'Arcadia' as it contrasts an idyllic past with a troubled present. In my analysis, I argue that his positioning of simple themes with relation to their surroundings in the concerto's two movements suggests a process-driven search for an Arcadian ideal. As such, and far from simply being merely an interesting work with several beautiful moments, the concerto is an important access point both for further understanding Nielsen's creative approach to form and his late-period preoccupation with the idea of simplicity.

³⁸ For more on this symphony's creative origins, consult Alain Frogley's definitive study, *Vaughan Williams' Ninth Symphony*, Oxford 2001.