

A Projected Volume on Nordic New Music

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Since 1986, from my home base at the University of Florida and abroad, I have been exploring the new music of the Nordic countries. Having recently held a Fulbright Fellowship to Reykjavik and even more recently an American Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship to Gothenburg, I came to the conclusion that a book about Nordic new music was needed. Early on I realized that it was too big a task for one person, so over the past year I have enlisted the help of four co-authors and the book, tentatively entitled *New Music of the Nordic Countries*, will be in five Parts each authored by one of us. I will also serve as Editor, and the book is contracted for publication in the year 2001 by Pendragon Press of Stuyvesant, New York, Robert Kessler, Managing Editor.

Bound together philosophically, geographically, and to a significant extent ethnically, the five Nordic countries hold a unique place in today's world. There is no other group of several contiguous nations which have so much in common culturally, politically and economically; and there are no other countries on this Earth which seem to get along so well together as these five sovereign states of the far north. They are peopled by talented humane achievers, not least in the fine arts, yet each national aspect of this pentagon possesses its own special qualities. This is certainly true of music, yet little of Nordic "tone art" is widely known outside of Northern Europe, especially music of the late twentieth century.

Thus, the purpose of the projected book is to impart information about contemporary art music in the Nordic countries to a wider world readership – concert audiences and home listeners as well as the professional and scholarly musical community. Being of Norwegian descent, I have always held a predilection for things Scandinavian, but the seeds of the project were planted in 1986 on my first visit to Iceland. I and my colleagues at the University of Florida Department of Music began then to carry on several exchange programs with musical institutions in Nordic countries. These involved bringing Nordic students and faculty to our institution to present concerts and lectures on several occasions, and our musicians traveling for similar purposes to the Nordic institutions including the Reykjavík Conservatory, the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, the University of Turku and the Sibelius Academy. In this day of the "Global Village" it is a practice which I highly recommend, and for me and my American colleagues and students it has greatly expanded our international understanding. No doubt this is also true of the Nordic musicians who joined us in these exchanges. Professor Mikko Heiniö of the University of Turku, the Turku Chamber Ensemble, Atli Heimir Sveinsson of the Reykjavik Conservatory, Gudridur Sigurdardottir of the Icelandic Symphony, and a group of students and

professors from the Royal College of Music in Stockholm were among the many Nordic musicians who visited us at the University of Florida.

For me, no less than a dozen extended visits to northern Europe over the past twelve years has established many Nordic contacts for me which, directly or indirectly, led to the joint authorship of this projected book.

One of my co-authors is Professor Jean Christenson who received her Ph.D. in musicology from the University of California, Los Angeles. Director and founder of the Center for the Study of Danish Music at the University of Louisville, she is also the Director of Graduate Studies in the School of Music at U.L. where she has taught since 1979. An authority on contemporary Danish music, she will be the author of Part I, "New Music in Denmark." She has also written on topics relating to Arnold Schoenberg and the history of jazz in metropolitan Louisville. Ashgate Publishers of England is publishing her set of translations of interviews with composers of many nationalities conducted by the Danish scholar Anders Beyer. She held a Fulbright Scholarship to Denmark and Sweden in 1988 and has also been supported by the American Scandinavian Foundation, The National Endowment for the Humanities and the Martha Baird Rockefeller Foundation, among others.

The other three co-authors are natives of the nations they will write about in *New Music of the Nordic Countries*, and, like Professor Christenson, they are all eminent writers on musical subjects. Kimmo Korhonen (b.1959) of Helsinki will be the author of Part II, "New Music of Finland." He studied musicology and other art subjects at the University of Helsinki, obtaining his M.A. in 1988. He is a freelance music critic and the author of several books on Finnish music. Most notable is his series of books on various media of Finnish music published by the Foundation for the Promotion of Finnish Music and the Finnish Music Information Center.

Professor Harald Herresthal (b.1944) of The Norwegian State Academy of Music in Oslo is writing Part IV, "New Music of Norway." A former rector of the Academy, he is an organist of international reputation who has performed throughout Europe and the United States. Writing in French, German, and Norwegian, he has published many articles and books on Norwegian music, most recently *Carl Arnold. Ein europäischer Musiker des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Wilhelmshaven: Nötzel Verlag, Germany, 1993); *Med Spark i Gulvet og Quinter i Bassen: Musikalske og politiske bilder fra nasjonalromantikken gjennombrudd i Norge* (Oslo: Universitetsforl., 1993); *Les musiciens norvégiens en France au temps de Grieg* (Presses Universitaires de Caen, France, 1944); and numerous other writings about Edvard Grieg and his contemporaries. Professor Herresthal is also coeditor of a planned new Norwegian music history, and is responsible for the articles about Norwegian music in the new edition of *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.

The author of Part V, "New Music of Sweden," will be Per E. Broman (b. 1962), a member of the faculty of the School of Music of Luleå University of Technology in Piteå. Presently a Ph.D. candidate in musicology at the University of Gothenburg, he studied violin at Ingesund College of Music, Arvika, Sweden, music theory at The Royal College of Music in Stockholm, and musicology at McGill University in Montreal. He has contributed articles to many books and journals including *The Swedish Journal of Musicology*, and the forthcoming edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. He also was editor-in-chief of *Crosscurrents and Counterpoints: Offerings in Honor of Bengt Hambraeus at 70* published in 1998 by the University of Gothenburg.

Nordic composers of the past such as Edvard Grieg and Jan Sibelius are household words in musical circles, and the names of Carl Nielsen, Jon Leifs, and Wilhelm Stenhammar are becoming increasingly famous as their works become better known. Yet the music of living Nordic

composers has far less circulation outside of the Nordic countries, particularly in the United States and other English speaking countries. There is considerable informal exchange of new music within the Nordic Alliance as Danish musicians travel to perform in Iceland, Finns and Norwegians to Sweden, and a wide variety of other kinds of exchanges. Among the formal efforts among the five countries to benefit new music is *Ung Nordisk Musik*, an association founded in 1974 for the purpose of promoting the music of composers under the age of 30. *NOMUS* (Nordic Committee for Musical Cooperation) regularly commissions new works, and there is an annual “Nordic Prize” for a work by a Nordic composer which has been an important career incentive to a number of Nordic composers. Also, the annual “Nordic Music Days” is hosted each year by one of the five countries and new music is invariably a prominent feature of this festival. In addition, there are many lesser sites throughout the Nordic countries where new music is featured as a part of annual or biennial festivals.

Thus, while there are many venues for the dissemination of new Nordic music within those countries, it deserves to be known more widely. The Nordic peoples are among the most musically active societies in the world, and new music for the concert stage is far more popular than it is in most other countries – certainly more so than in the United States. In Iceland, for example, Jon Nordal, Atli Heimir Sveinsson, and Thorkell Sigurbjörnsson are well known musical names, even to the occasional concert goer. By contrast, George Crumb or Elliott Carter are hardly household names in the United States where only athletes or rock stars attain true fame. There is also infinitely greater state support for music, as well as the other arts, in the Nordic countries (per capita) than in the United States. While this is partly due to the great size of the U.S., I think it is also due to a lower cultural and intellectual level, on the average, among our vast American population. Recently this is manifest in legislative attempts to diminish federal support for the arts and humanities, and even in attempts to censor or dictate the free flow of artistic ideas.

While some attempt will be made in this book to be consistent in the format of the five Parts, each of the authors will allow the unique nature of the music of his or her subject country to influence the organization of that part. Also, each author demonstrates a personal writing style and an individual perspective on musical subjects in general and this is as it should be. In Part III, for example, I felt that some history of the development of music in Iceland from medieval times was appropriate, because this is a subject which is little known outside of that country, and because it has had a strong influence on the nature of contemporary Icelandic music. This is probably less true in a nation like Denmark because it is literally a part of continental Europe and bears closer ties to the widely known history and philosophy of Europe. Each of the other three countries has its own unique history which will to some extent influence the shape and perspective of those parts of the book.

By way of an Apologia, I must say that it is difficult to write about the music of living composers because they and their associates are “there” to read ones writing, so each author writes with considerable risk of being caught up in error or misjudgment. Also, history may ultimately prove any critical author to be grossly wrong. One has only to browse through the *Lexicon of Musical Invective* by Nicholas Slonimsky to realize that contemporaneous writers in any period of music history have made frequent and grievous errors in musical judgment. Yet documentation of contemporaneous opinions of any composer’s work is an essential perspective to the history of musical thought. Heinrich Christoph Koch in his *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition* cited the music of Scheinpflug and Benda along with that of Josef Haydn as if they were of equal stature. Yet we still read Koch with considerable interest because he represents one aspect of eighteenth century musical thought.

Thus, I think I speak for all of the authors of this book, especially myself, when I say that there may well be errors in musical judgment therein, and if so, we alone will be to blame for them. Yet the value in this book will lie in whatever worth it has as a work of musical criticism of a body of music literature which has not received the critical attention it deserves. Composers themselves are often good critics of the work of their peers – witness Robert Schumann and Virgil Thompson. Indeed, at one point early in this project I considered the possibility of asking a composer to write about the music of the fellow composers of his Nordic nation. I soon realized, however, that in such a case the spirit of artistic rivalry might invite bias or at least the possibility thereof. Thus, although I am a composer, I am not an Icelandic composer and possess an esthetic distance which I hope allows me to fairly assess the music of that country in Part III. Each of the other authors writes with a similar posture, and each is a scholar dedicated to the new music of the subject country who I know will make a sincere and informed effort to make intelligent musical judgments.

In preparing for *New Music of the Nordic Countries*, have had a great deal of help from many Nordic musicians and scholars. Laila Barkefors, Editor of *The Swedish Journal of Musicology*, helped me to become acquainted with some of the distinguished writers whom I have enlisted as co-authors of this book. Professor Mikko Heiniö of the University of Turku Department of music (and a distinguished composer) helped me to identify the author of Part II. Anders Beyer, Editor of *Dansk Musik Tidsskrift* and *Nordic Sounds*, introduced me to the author of Part I. The Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board and The United States Information Service furnished fellowship support to two of the co-authors as did also the American Scandinavian Foundation. It is quite possible that more grant support will become available for this project.

Each of the Five Nordic countries has a Music Information Center, a national agency established for the purpose of disseminating information about the musical culture of the country, particularly in relation to contemporary music and their composers. The diligent personnel of these Centers furnished and continue to furnish composer brochures, recordings, and musical scores to all five of the co-authors of this book, and each of us recognizes that without the help of these five Nordic Music Information Centers our tasks will be much more difficult. Other help has come and continues to come from many individuals in the Nordic countries in the hope that *New Music of the Nordic Countries* will be the valuable volume it aspires to be.