



CARL NIELSON

Helios Overture

Carl August Nielsen (9 June 1865 – 3 October 1931) is widely recognized as Denmark's greatest composer, and is also recognized as being a skilled conductor and a violinist. Brought up by poor but musically talented parents on the island of Funen, he demonstrated his musical abilities at an early age. At first, he did not gain enough recognition for his works to be able to support himself. During the concert which saw the premiere of his first symphony on 14 March 1894 conducted by Johan Svendsen, Nielsen played in the second violin section. However, the symphony was a great success when played in Berlin in 1896, contributing significantly to his reputation. Nielsen became increasingly in demand to write incidental music for the theater and cantatas to mark special occasions, both of which provided a welcome source of additional income. From 1914 to 1926, he conducted the orchestra of *Musikforeningen* or the Music Society and in 1916, he took a post teaching at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. The strain of his dual career, constant separation from his wife Anne Marie (and the accompanying affairs) and the devastation of World War I greatly influenced his late music, which includes his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, and Clarinet and Flute concerti. While his early music was inspired by composers such as Brahms and Grieg, he soon started to develop his own style, first experimenting with progressive tonality and later diverging even more radically from the standards of composition still common at the time.

The **Helios Overture** is one of Nielsen's most well-known and most-performed works. In 1902, Nielsen signed a contract with the publisher Wilhelm Hansen, which allowed him to go to Athens, Greece, to join his wife Anne Marie. Anne Marie, who had been granted the Ancker Award, was studying Greek art, while Nielsen, being a man of many interests, was interested in Archaeology. The local conservatory placed a study room with a piano at Carl Nielsen's disposal. Here he could sit and compose when he was not on excursions in the surrounding mountains with or without Anne Marie. Nielsen's stay in Athens gave him the inspiration of a work depicting the sun rising and setting over the Aegean Sea, an overture which he called *Helios*. On the score, Nielsen wrote: "Silence and darkness, the sun rises with a joyous song of praise, it wanders its golden way and sinks quietly into the sea."