

Tracing ‘Neoclassicism’ in Norway: A Tentative Conceptual Survey

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In Norwegian music historiography, systematic studies of aesthetic positions, critical musical concepts, and stylistic currents in the context of broader critical discourses, cultural changes, and political conflicts, are still quite rare. Instead, Edvard Grieg’s outstanding position as a national genius inspired a long-standing tendency towards biographism, narrating music history from the viewpoint of the ‘man and his work’. In Norway, musical culture underwent a dramatic political turn, during and after World War II, when the Germans occupied the country from 1940 until 1945, upending the deep and long-standing cultural bond between the countries. Despite composers becoming deeply entangled with the ideological and political realities of this time, a more general understanding of how these individual struggles led to broader aesthetic and stylistic changes towards either more radical or more traditional positions is still not present in the literature. Generally, one might find such critical assessments embedded within biographic narratives of the protagonists of the interwar generation in Norway, as in the biographies of Harald Sæverud,¹ Ludvig Irgens-Jensen,² Geirr Tveitt,³ and David Monrad Johansen.⁴ These grand biographic narratives, emerging in the 1990s and early 2000s, have become valuable sources for music history in Norway. However,

they also highlight a critical weakness in this kind of historiography: the lack of accessible primary sources, such as the composers' private correspondences, which are necessary to independently verify the biographic narratives. In many cases, these are kept either in private possession or given to foundations or archives with rigid restrictions imposed by the composers' relatives.

In addition to the biographies, it is noteworthy to mention a major publication project that promises a less person-centered perspective on national music history: the five volumes of *Norges musikkhistorie*, edited by music historian Arvid Vollsnes together with several Norwegian musicologists, published between 1999 and 2001. Covering music history in Norway from the prehistoric period until 2000, its aim was to 'describe and provide analyses of Norwegian music and musical life in changing times and under diverging conditions'.⁵ Volume 4 covers music from 1914 to 1950, and starts out with a general introduction on musical life in Norway during this period, described as a confrontation of 'the modern' and 'the national'. Yet, it quickly falls back into the particular, assigning European stylistic currents influencing Norwegian music, such as impressionism or atonalism (neoclassicism is barely mentioned), to particular protagonists labeled as 'impressionist' or 'atonalist'.⁶

THE DIGITAL BOOKSHELF: A GAME CHANGER FOR NORWEGIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In 2009, a unique project was initiated by the National Library, profoundly changing the conditions for historiographical research in Norway: The 'Digital bookshelf'-project provided free access to a comprehensive body of Norwegian literature from the 1790s on to 2005, in full text digital format, including all kinds of publications, from daily newspapers to periodicals, novels etc.⁷ This initiative opened the door for groundbreaking new approaches to scrutinize how musical discourses developed over time in Norway, and to identify and trace the transfer of critical concepts such as 'neoclassicism' from European centres to national venues.

The screenshot of a search for '*nyklassisk*', confined to entries in periodicals from 1 January 1915 to 31 December 1960 (FIGURE 1) shows, how both the concepts '*nyklassisme*' and '*neoklassisme*' were established and in common use in the fields of architecture, fine arts, and literature at this time. In a musical context, the first instance of '*nyklassisk*' appears in the December 1924 edition of the music journal *Musik*, while '*neoklassisk/neoklassisme*' is not found until much later, after World War II (more on this later).

FIGURE 1. Search entries for 'nyklassisk' at the Digital bookshelf, Norwegian National Library, retrieved 19 Nov 2024.



The Digital bookshelf provides a long-awaited possibility to collect quantitative data and further qualitative analytical inquiries into full text documents, assembled from a variety of media, most of all newspapers and books, but also periodicals, journal articles, and broadcasting program reports.

These sources provide documentation of different levels of discourse: from the most public level, provided by national newspapers published in the period between 1920 and 1940 (*Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *Verdens Gang*, *Arbeiderbladet*, and *Morgenbladet*), including reviews, announcements, and broadcasting reports; to essays and articles on a more expert level, represented by the periodicals specializing in music published by several professional societies, associations, and institutions. A systematic study of journals specializing in music has not yet been made, though a brief and incomplete summary is available.⁸ Fortunately, the National Library now hosts digitalized issues of all, so to speak, historical journals active during the 1920s until the 1940s: *Norsk musikkliv*,⁹ *Musikkbladet og sangerposten*,¹⁰ *Musik – Tidsskrift for tonekunst*,¹¹ *Tonekunst*,¹² *Norsk musikerblad*,¹³ and *Hallo! Hallo! Kringkastningsselskapets programblad*.¹⁴

Another important source were lexica, which will be elaborated more later in this article. Here, again, we can differentiate between the specialized music lexica

meant to be academic and educational, and the conversational lexica aiming to enlighten the public.

The exploratory inquiry carried out for this article allows interesting observations to be made, which, of course, require more thorough assessments and inquiries to be solidified:

- In many cases, new terms appear for the first time in reports from abroad in Norwegian newspapers. These reports can be descriptions of concert events in major cities, such as Berlin, or summaries of musical life at certain places or events, such as festivals. These reports are written by correspondents for the big Norwegian newspapers, often written by Norwegian composers working in other countries (Pauline Hall as the most prominent of them). However, at the time these reports are written, the concepts introduced to the Norwegian public as a novelty might already have been in common use in their respective home countries.

- Other ways to introduce new terms and concepts are quotes from reviews, or newly published books, or articles written by foreign music writers, such as famous reviewers of the prestigious international papers (Olin Downes' review of Scandinavian festivals in the New York Times, cited in this article, and its re-quotation in *Vårt land* is a typical example of this).

- In general, specialized, critical terms are rarely coined within Norwegian music circles, as aesthetic debates or *querelles* concerning conceptual (mis-) interpretations have rather been the exception. The reason for this might be the sheer small number of qualified participants, and a general lack of higher education institutions engaged in the development of a native speaker expert terminology in Norway at this time. The language about music was therefore almost exclusively 'imported', and the invention of genuinely Norwegian terms (or variations of foreign terms) is rare.

However, the process of appropriation of 'borrowed' terms is interesting to trace by means of a survey enabled by the digital bookshelf. One can observe when a term appears for what is likely the first time, in which publication, and written by whom. Moreover, one can trace the dissemination of a term across different levels of discourse, from public to expert or vice versa. One can also follow the way a term is consolidated through its 'official' confirmation in Norwegian lexica.

Personal correspondence is another archival source which typically plays a crucial role in the interpretation of musical biographies and aesthetical views

of composers. However, in the case of Norwegian composers from the interwar period, this source material poses a certain challenge. Firstly, composers often lived close to each other geographically (most of them moving to the capital, Oslo, for the best opportunities in professional music). Hence, when feeling the need for expressing their thoughts, they did not feel the need to exchange letters amongst their peers; they simply would meet in person. Secondly, the circles, groups, or schools of musical artists propagating their aesthetic views by means of manifests, polemics etc, that we know of from other countries, were rare. Thirdly, in general the Norwegian cultural elite, rarely related artistic or aesthetic concerns with philosophical critique or intellectual issues. It is hard to find evidence of a significant exchange between Norwegian composers in their correspondence with contemporaries, being they philosophers, writers, or scientists; nor are any profound or ongoing debates about aesthetic issues or compositional poetics evident.

Again, these observations provide even more confirmation for the value of archived public sources and the accessibility of those granted by the Digital bookshelf.

BELATED MUSICAL 'ISMS' AND CULTURAL AMBIVALENCE IN INTERWAR NORWAY'S MUSICAL LIFE

[...] Denmark and Sweden are the more international in their culture. Norway and Finland are countries where the ancestrally creative spirit is the most potent and demonstrative in art. [...] For today practically every Norwegian composer, be he atonalist, neoclassic or modern romantic, nevertheless finds in the path opened by Grieg the one that he must follow, in his own way, with his own technique, and individual temperament. In a word nationalism – perhaps, it is true, in the aftermath of the tragical events from which Norway is now lifting her head, and which give her a special urge to assert herself creatively – nationalism, along the Grieg lines, is nevertheless the strongest motivating force in Norwegian composers of today.¹⁵

This way, the well-known *New York Times* critic Olin Downes characterized the main musical tendencies in his report about 'Northern festivals' in 1953. Visiting music festivals in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, he found that the influence of nationalism in Norwegian music was most apparent, compared to the other Scandinavian countries. With Grieg, Norwegian modernists had their own independent, national classical tradition to relate to, a relationship prolonged and enforced by the threatening experience of the five years of German occupation during World War II. At the same time, in the early postwar years, Norwegian music, as observed by Downes, mirrored the established stylistic landscape of

modern music in European centres, mentioning ‘atonalists’, ‘neoclassic’ and ‘modern romantic’. His review of Norway’s music scene is quoted in the Norwegian newspapers with pride, such as in the article with the title ‘The music festival in Bergen is given huge acknowledgement’ in *Vårt land*.¹⁶ This is also one of the rare appearances of the term ‘neoclassic’ in Norwegian press until then.

To trace the emergence and discursive reception of ‘neoclassicism’ in Norway depends on how one determines the nature of the concept. The dissemination and scope of the term ‘neoclassicism’, from its French origins to German adaptations (and all the related issues of translation) has been examined elsewhere, and is not necessary to retell here, instead the aim is focused on its reception in the specific public discourse of Norwegian musical life.¹⁷ In Norway, the concept ‘neoclassical’ rarely appeared, much more often the term ‘newclassical’ was used. To understand its connotations in Norwegian context, one must recall that, even after the turn of the century and Norway achieving political independence in 1905, the image of the Norwegian composer was still closely connected to the project of nation building. As mentioned, Grieg’s stardom eclipsed both his contemporaries and successors. This feeling of being in the shadow of the national icon was a burden felt even by the generation of composers starting their careers long after Grieg’s death. Additionally, what this generation shared with Grieg, was a deeply ambivalent relationship to the cultural and musical supremacy of Germany. As a young student at the world-famous music academy of Leipzig, Grieg experienced and very much enjoyed the rich musical life of the cultural metropole. Taking classes in piano performance, composition, and music theory with some of the best teachers available, he received what has been considered the highest ranked education in the field of music at his time, alongside many other students from all over Europe. At the same time, in a letter from 1885, he complained that he left the Leipzig music academy apparently ‘as stupid as [he] entered it’.¹⁸ What apparently was coined by Grieg as a self-critical comment on his personal creative development, has been understood since as a comment against the academic conservatism of the German educational institution he attended for three years. The Leipzig music academy was providing him with a high degree of generic craftsmanship, but at the same time inhibiting his path towards individual artistic autonomy. As is often the case with anecdotal remarks like this, they become sort of an aphorism, a catchy turn of phrase used to emphasize his national-cultural identity as a *Norwegian* composer for a Norwegian audience. It was the same audience, which in the concert halls cherished the canon of great masterworks coming to the periphery from the cultural centres Germany, Austria, France, and Russia, expecting from their ‘own’ artists to match the standards of this canon, yet,

at the same time, with Grieg always looming in the background, showing their ability to transform them into an original, national idiom. As mentioned, Grieg's ever growing international popularity and status as national icon, represented a continuous challenge for the generations starting their careers in the decades after 1905 and until the 1930s. To this group of composers belonged David Monrad Johansen (1888–1974), Pauline Hall (1890–1969), Ludvig Irgens-Jensen (1894–1969), Bjarne Brustad (1895–1978), Harald Sæverud (1897–1992), Eivind Groven (1901–1977), Sparre Olsen (1903–1984), Klaus Egge (1906–1979), Geirr Tveitt (1908–1981), and Anne-Marie Ørbeck (1911–1996).

A crucial issue this generation of composers had to face, was that their work has been highly politicized from the 1930s on, as they were drawn into the struggle of more and more polarized ideologies. First as part of the 'modern national movement' prolonging the 'national romantic' period in Norway after 1905, then of course, because of the German occupation from 1940 to 1945, (for most of them) as part of the patriotic resistance against the German suprematism of the nazi-era. Eventually, the experience of the German occupation led to a deeply conflicted re- and devaluation of the ideals of 'German high culture' in Norway, leaving the composers with four options: to become opportunists, going into 'inner exile', to become part of civil resistance, or to leave the country for a life in exile. However, Norwegian composers (also since none of them were Jewish) did stay in Norway, arranging their lives within the regime, cooperating with the rigid system rigged by the occupants, including censorship and streamlining of cultural institutions, concert life, as well as broadcasting.

Two articles published in 1924 and 1936 by Monrad Johansen, the leading voice of the interwar generation of Norwegian composers, shed light on the national sentiments which have been in consensus among Norwegian composers at this time. Monrad Johansen can be viewed as the spiritual leader of the group composers starting their careers in the 1920s and 1930s, and ideologically their strongest spokesman.

In an essay entitled 'Nordic music at its crossroads', written on occasion of a special issue of *Aftenposten* celebrating the 'Nordic day' (FIGURE 2), Monrad Johansen reveals a rather dark world view, and, in his opinion, stark divide between the Nordic and what he calls a 'Central European' music culture (FIGURE 3).

In the aftermath of World War I, the 'Ragnarokk' and world catastrophe, according to Monrad Johansen a desperate struggle of disparate currents and oppositional forces emerged in European music, leading to a purge of musical culture, from 'bleak romanticism' and aestheticism to excentric expressionism and over-sensitive impressionism. The cultural decay of the previous two decades

FIGURE 2. 'Nordens dag', *Aftenposten*. Special issue, 27 October 1936, front page.

dag 2 nummer. Løssalg 30 øre.

Nordens
DAG

Aftenpostens
spesial-
nummer

Nr. 542; Morgennr. Abonn.pr. Innenbys 4. 9.50 m. Utenbys 4. 10.50 m. Morgennr. 77. årg

Oslo, tirsdag 27. oktober 1936 Abonn pris: Utenbys 4. 10.50 m. Morgennr. 77. årg

TANKEN <NORDEN>

GJENNEM TIDENE

Av professor Fredrik Daasche



En gang i det 4. århundre f. Kr. som en av de store romerske historikere fra til tross for Nord-Norge «Barbarerne viste om hvor siden livet ligger», forteller han: «I disse strek hørte det at naturen blev ystet kort, som en steder to timer, andre steder tre; noen gikk ned, og en stund eller gikk den op igjen.»

Fortællere fra romersk historisk og begygnende middelalder har rede på øver og danner og enkelte norske folkeskatter; landene langt mot nord – «en annen, ukjent verden» – var allikevel kjent av en mangel for de fremmede. Navn som Tule eller Skandinavia eller kanskje «Skandinavia» fikk stå for hele det store, fjerne område, hvor det mørkeste var de lyse steners under.

I vikingenes tid blev det bedt til Gud i kristne land om hjelp mot det ville nord. Det var nok kjent at nordfolket egentlig var ferske folk; men denne bedre kunnskap hadde ikke så stor praktisk interesse, det falt naturlig å se vikingene under ett, både som frie og bedrøvet folk og hjemstavn i nord var felles for dem. Så blev de i regelen felles om navnet også, de blev «vikingene» eller «nordmenn» fra nord eller kaldet kanskje danser, alle sammen, efter det ene av folken.

I nordiske land blev folkeskapt, tros stammetrær og rikstrær, i nogen menn godkjent «Danst» de i England om sprøget vikingene talte; nordmenn og islandere overtok ordet, de sa ofte «dansk tungen» om sitt eget norrske mål. Til det nyere, lykke navn Norden avner i gammelnorsk «Norderlandene»; og med «nordmenn» menes det i gammelnorsk skandinavia men fra alle disse land, selv «nordmenn» kan stå med betydningen «nordisk» – som det er på Island den dag idag.

Likheten i språk og likhet i samfunnsforhold gav felles av felles uttømming. Det heter i en dansk kronike fra middelalderen at «Dansk den første konge i Danmark, var kongeriket fra Sverige og bror av «Nore». Forestillingen om «nordfolket i Norden» er da ikke fra igjen.

Skandinaviabegrepet eller benyttet til skandinavia – eller begge deler kanskje – merkes på flere en en bestemt i gammelnordiske leveteater. I handskriftene for Västergötland er det fastslått at om nordmenn eller danske blir drept, skal boten være nogen mark lavere enn for svensk mann, men adskillig høyere allikevel enn boten for engelskmann og tysker. Islandsk lover fra fristatsting gav uttalelser av dansk tungen bedre beskyttelse for liv og eiendom enn andre vikingedage hadde; «vikingen» eller «nordmann» er enda mer ukjent her; står ikke så godt som menneske fra «de tre kongeriker der vårt eget tungen» ligger. Islandsk lov satte fredshelhet for poster som dikket postene om skandinaviske statsoverbuds, det vil si om de nordiske, som dansere eller svenske eller nordmenns konger – ved de andre av verdens mektige har ordet vært frist, ser det ut til.

En legning av Frøydis Haavardsholm.

Som vel kjent er som det ofte til krig mellom folken i «Norderlandene»; det kjempet ikke at kjempen av samnavigen var der. Riktignok endte det at «skandinaviens» gjemte seg i krigens øyeblikk, og en annen nordisk konger søkte en samling av nordisk makt og kunde – som Knut den mektige, eller Magnus den gode sønn – true stette i seire det land han prøvet å bryte til sitt eget land. Men stort sett blev krigene en årsak til uvilje mellom nasjonene, de søkte erstatning, kritikk og mistenkelser som kan følge med naboskap og som fæstet i landene på forhånd. Fra gammelstid har de nordiske folk hatt adskillig å utsette på hverandre. I sagaverket Þingmáli er det sagt for at danner kommer i en mindre heldig belysning; den islandsk forfatter av verket triumferer over dem eller regner sig over dem på vegne av nordmennene. I en annen samling av sagn er det fremhevet ved svensken Torng lagmann, at han «har ikke meget til overs for danser»; og selv i en from norrøn legende, fortellingen om de gode vennene Erik «den norske» og Erik «den danske», merkes noget av tretten som pågikk, mannen fra Danmark kommer angrepet til kort mot mannen fra Norge. Så har vi det kraftfulle av alle norrske innlegg: ordene som sagnskriveren Jar Olav Trygvason si om danser og øver for dage ved Sverige.

Til gjensidig er Boko Grammatius, den danske historikeren, sterkt foretatt over nordmenns herkomst og upålitelighet. De når svensken Birger Jarl under trussel om dødsstraff fortbyr sine menn å «i «hagere» (stribokker?) til norske greter som ventet ved høsten, blir det klart både hvad Jarl har vist om det trydelige ved å erte nordmenn, og hvad han har tenkt om nabolikhet og dels farlige naboegenskap. Også i forholdet mellom islandere og norske var kritikk og misnøye mellom dem, de to frendefolkene kunde holde sammen mot fjernere frender – og kjæle storslet og innimellom.

Men naboskapet, som førte til krig og trette, kunde virke i annen retning også; omstøt førte det til Kalmarsunionen, og til dagen da skiferfoket i Vadstena vedtok å ha til Gud for alle norderlands fremtid: «Disse riker, Sverige, Danmark og Norge, vil vi bestående ha med i alle bevarer».

En berømt nordisk historiker har sagt om unionen mellom de nordiske land at den var et tilfelle som ser ut som en tanke. Men det er vel nok sikkert at tilfellet som var der, da dronning Margrete og hennes sønn stod med arven efter alle tre nordiske kongeriker, blev prøvet og styrtet av tanken, av en som hadde vært ret i arbeide. I Kalmarsunionen til blev det stadig tatt om det fornuftige i å holde opp den «skandinaviske» forening, det har tydelig vært en allmødelig mening at unionen kunde trygg freden mellom landene og styrke stillingen for dem alle. Selv det svenske nasjonale parti – så erpp en mistro det hadde til foreningen – ventet lenge med å ta det avgjørende skritt og våge det åpent uttale farvel til unionen.

I 1449, da en aker-union mellom Norge og Sverige var påkrevet, blev det gitt grunnen for ønsket om en slik forening. De to landene hadde ikke ofte ligget i krig med hverandre; så kunde det hete at «fra alder og evighet har Norge og Sverige været sammen i god forstille og kjærlighet». Videre blev det sagt rett på, at «Gud har undfannt sammenslaget disse to riker, mere enn 4 til 5 hundre mil, det ene med det andre. Likvidat var det med foreningen som holdt og resulterte i dobbeltstaten Danmark-Norge, den blev forsvart med grunner: Danmark hadde båret som Norge trengte, og Norge kunde gi annet igjen.

Kalmarsunionen gikk i stykker; Sverige brøt ut, og folkeskrifter i Norge viste at ikke få nordmennene heller var nordisk forening så helt naturlig. En landområde av veldig statseking stundt stå under en eneste regjering, og det i de tider da staten var så vanskelig å overvinne! Det måtte gå dårlig, selv med beste ørne og vilje, og evnen ialfall var ikke alltid den beste. Derfor kom, at en Sverige og Norge ikke hadde egen kongerike nå, så hadde de stort lov, og loven var fulles østen. Svenskene reiste sig mot unionen i lovens helige navn; og til å lenge nordmennene bildog det vel at de lenge fikk beholde det de trodde var «si. Olavs lov».

Fredstidens Sverige og Danmark-Norge hadde til følge retthet og krig på krig. Men den gamle forestilling om samhartighet blev aldri helt ryddet ut; og på 1700-tallet vokste forestillingen i styrke. I nogen menn var uttalt med om å hjelpe den op igjen, i utlandet skilte man ikke så mye, men talte om «nordene», og talte begrepet om gammelnordisk land og kraft, diktere ut i Europa var blitt kjent med Riddarværd og skaldedikt. Og de tungende ord om betydningen av «det nordiske» fast gjennom i alle skandinaviske land, en nice svensk dikter forkyrte sit fædelskaps tid i Norden var endi, snart efter kom Delesenshilders diktning og alt det ærerende «nordiske». Begreptingen overlevde krigene som skilte Norge fra Danmark; samfølelsen stod på, og fra den var det borte til ønsket om samhold, den litterære skandinaviske i tiden gav næring til en politikk. På et nordisk studentermøte i 1865 krevde og fikk en dansk taler skandinaviske løfte om i liv og det å være

fortsettelse side 3.

FIGURE 3. David Monrad Johansen, 'Nordisk musikk på skilleveien', *Aftenposten*, 27 October 1936.

Nordisk musikk på skilleveien.

Av David Monrad Johansen

Et blikk på det musikalske Europa har vi fremført et hatet broket bilde. En rimelig av mislerte retninger og strømninger, av ytrestående afstemte og krefter klennet, en fortvilet kamp for å redde seg ut av det mørke som verdenskatstroen fremkaller også økonomen. Og nu vide det i denne forberedelse være av interesse å fremsette det spørsmålet: Er det sannsynlig at den musikalske kunst i seg selv har en uttrykkskraft som utvilsomt i fellesmålet, fortsettelse til i tillegg, i de akade- anders tanke og idetvenden, utløse i seg selv en ny og selvstendig skapelse? Al den uten å glemme de indre strømminger også når å omfatte det mer konkrete. Ja om man rett nok ikke kan polleke omveitninger? Når vi ut fra den oppfatning at all kunst, da ikke minst den musikalske, alltid inneholder en mer eller mindre skjult tendens, at i mer andre ord oppstår som følge av en re- og ikke overfor det foreliggende, så vil man kunne oppfatte at den ikke alene gjenoppretter menneskenes streben og halsing, i et hvilket som helst oppdrag, den fremmer også å kaste lyset på den menneskelige. Kunsten er en ekspansjon for livet, og utvilsomt gjenner en sterk personlig- Den oppfatning kan ingen fravike hvis han ikke vil deklamere kunsten til bare å om- ete et utvilsomt eksperimentell og god ete- k. Slik kan man nok også treffe på i kunst- nerne, men så er det en annen oppfatning som er i oppfatning og at undersøkelsen er nær. Var det å undres over at katalanen kom som den første den europeiske musikk på seg i de skoleveivangene i årene 1914-1918 den latinsk ikke som nogen overnat- k. I musikken verden var i ferd å løse seg ut av det som egentlig måtte på tilgrunne bekjente, benyttende kunsten som frem- ing en vill, utstende ekspansjon, og på samme side en helt oppvoren innestilling i sin overforleie trost med å føre musik- i over i et bitt og bitt etsett plan. Brodden stod på Norden rasst til å gjen- nek en slik katastrofe? Det må vi vel alle tenke at vi gjennomslende det meget drig- let. Og hvorfor? Jo, fordi vi ingen egentlig le hadde, ingen planmessig dyrking kun- de, hvor enner og krefter kunde få utfole i et intem sammenheng med deres vesene egen- og spesielle forutsetninger. Kort og godt: den hadde en utløser og de politiske- et musik kultur.

Det mest vesentlige i nærliggende tonekunst, det i har betinget at ikke alene vi, men også i den musikalske verden dug har et begrep i beret musikalsk, det er oppstått i en tildele- ing oppslutning mot den melismetriske musikk- kultur, det er blitt til under en velig på- nning. Ja så sterk kan den ha vært at ut- rene tildele har fått en næsten eksplosiv karakter. Og en så enormt styrke har vært det beste i nordisk musikk at man aner, at i de kunstneriske uttale ligger verdene av en- eliste enner og krefter. Det er dette som nordisk musikk den dype perspektiv og til- met av dens charme og fortellende. Det også dette som gir den dens friske preg av stas. Men nogen nordisk skole i musikk har vi ut ikke, og helt finner vi kanskje fortsettelse på den kulturelle uttalehet og skapelse- nger uforståelighet som ikke legger forståelse skakt. Kunstmusikken er ikke gammel i Norden, ja rekker til om vi når et par generasjoner sse. Men det grunnlag brovne den bygget i kide brovra den sprudler frem, den har uengannelig røt i landet. Ja, den har reter i tilbake til den tid da de nordiske land vir-

kelig kunde oppvise en skulpturstat. Og fra denne undergrunn, fra disse skjulte kilder er det at nordisk kunstmusikk bender sin næring. Det er gjenomsens generasjoner, ja gjenomsens århundre har hopet seg opp i folkesjelen, kappet seg inn i folkesjelen, det er det som skal stå i flamme i kunstmusikkens senere plan.

Må jeg her kanskje gardere meg mot den bane midtforledelse, at jeg vil ha antydning av kunstmusikk, det er bare å omsette de verdier som allerede eksisterer i folkesjelen? Vil jeg med enkle uttrykke som forsvare for «det nasjonale»? Nei! Deri har den norske dikter rett når han sier at «det nasjonale, det trenger ikke forsvare». Og han har utvilsomt rett, når han beror, at der består ingen ekte kunst uten den har preg eller idet fra sin musikk. Og jeg må få siere ham videre når han sier at alle arbeider i håndtverk, i museer, verker i kulturhistorie, i kunsten historie, i litteraturen, de har i virkeligheten samtlige til felles må å undersøke nye teater, i folket, i kunst, i det latinsk fremme enna tydeligere den, man allerede kjente. Det er mer eller mindre beviset de håndgripelige dokumenter på alle folke eet veien man finner der. Jeg forsvare da heller ikke «det nasjonale». Det er som å ville forsvare det erstatte. Det er, det er en realitet som ingen angivelig tenk og tenk, og det ved, men at kvele. Det er utvilsomt, og om man setter seg for å sepe det ut, så kommer hun dog ikke, den beste. Det er utvilsomt det vil si: like utvilsomt som folket selv. Det leier i alle kulturfolk. Og det dukker opp med melismen. Det er riktig forstått folket iboende musikk. Og i farlige tider er det i mi- ljon dannelsis viktige. Men er vi utvilsomt blitt enlig om å bruke gjenomsens musikk om de perioder, da det overvækkende boblene atter med fra folket og i vannkorpene.

Det er Hans E. Kinck som sier disse ord. Jeg mente det kunde være å ha ham med som en slags garant. Men finner jo ofte, at kanskje med god grunn, en innvitt mistillit til musikere når de gir seg av med å skrive. En musiker får jo åne nådegaver å å å direkte fra him- melen hvorfor skal han så overhodet bry seg med å skrive? Men tilbake til musikken, til den nordiske musikk. Hvordan har de kulturelle tilstande i de siste tre år europeiske musikk havnet på nordisk tonekunst. Hvordan har Norden deltatt i storekonserter som de store kulturmagaler med god grunn har vært å travelt bekvilget med?

Det ser næsten ut til at en hel del nordiske tonekunstnere har mistet sitt det vesentlige i prosessen og er kommet i skade for å stå ut bar- med med hoveden. Og kanskje nok synes dette mest å være tilfelle med de skole- de intellektuelle, de som er fremst fra all frakker matrikel. Disse hvis radikale men består i at de krittisk hopper eller hvor de store nasjoner går frem, selv når det gjaldet et utvilsomt mis- g. Men skal man så vilt ikke beskyide for å be- overleie handtverk. De har ikke rive med av en uppmønstret, selvforplendrende impuls. De etter som kjelle tilskuer, de iaktar og frast- tise distansier. Men såst merker ikke vi just derved er tiden dratt den ferd. De operer med det foreliggende, de innfinner seg bare på de fleste kampene, de utkjempet. Piren da kan man haiste erfaringer og dra nytte av uttalehet. De uttaler i sin innvitt radikalsme allerede fortid.

I enna er ungdommens strålende avantgarde drad videre, fri av mot, offerville og tro. Norden står på skilleveien sine. Vi står foran to muligheter. Den ene, det utvilsomt er bekvemmet å følge, det er en mer tilatnings- og oppgitt i den felteneuropeiske musikk-kultur. At så opp i musikken å si seg internasjonalsmen

i vold og derved betvile den sikre vei til kulturel- talefrelse. Det er denne vei som de siste tre år har vært ærlig sterkt befærdet i nordisk tonekunst.

Den annen vei består i selvbedelse. Tike den gode, selv gode isolasjon, men den frakbare beroven av egne, billige, utvilsomme verdier. Den forlanger personligheter som nok tør gå til møte med fremmede kulturer, dra nytte av andres erfaringer, men som aldri lar seg smitte av akkordene, enn så betvile selvopvåkelsen vei. Den forlanger personligheter med klarsyn til å forstå at om man tør håpe på en fortvile av europeisk kunstmusikk, så må den heller komme fra nasjoner med enna utvilsomme krefter, med ånede og tankens fruktighet, med uovervinnelige natur- ogdommer i bakkene, enn fra land hvor så å si hver kvadratkilometer er lagt under kultur.

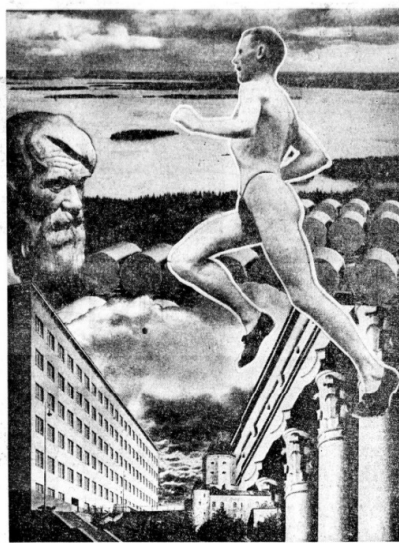
Det er slike personligheter som har det i musikk å gjenopprette begrepet «nordens i musikk». Det er dem som ideer skal rettferdiggjøre den gamle fortelling om «lyst fra nordens». Det er dem som skal gjenopprette Schumanns lenig- iv en «nordensdionse fantasie» — slik han på de store klavermusikk uttrykte det.

Er det pessimisme som taler ut av disse be- raktninger? Nei! Billedet for mørkt? Vil man, kanskje at vi skal følge i minnet og dikter- ses folger og utvilsomt genier både i det og i det? Nei, der er et oppmuntret for alvorlig, der i utvilsomt nordisk tonekunst for «en- to- tiktaler.

Men når sagt merke over de nordiske land? «Jag, det står ikke til å nekte. En oppmerksom skiltner kan vintvint hilt og her enne en lys- ting, men bare seg i nord, over landet med le øde skoger og de tusen øster funksjer en en- som altemen i betagende glans. Må den den østne flertal! Måte vi snart få se på den østne menneskene, som bebruer dagen «- nener til død og skende!»

For tidens fyde — det er vi

David Monrad Johansen



SANG TIL NORDEN

Av Emil Bønnelycke

Der er så deilig i Norges Land, som der kan være på jorden, med Midnatt og med Kristiansand — med Bergen og Oslo-Fjorden. Det er så helligt at staa og se den lyse Sommer, den lune Sne — de hvide, de vidløsende Vidder, hvor Gud i sin Almagt sidder.

Der er så deilig om Norges Gaard, hvor man kan vandre alene — og være Venn med tusind Aar — med Sten og Veivens Stene — Det er en usigelig Fryd at staa og se over Bjerge og Bjerges Blaa — og føle sig lykkelig lille, straalende ene og stille.

Der er så festlig i Norges Havn med Kampes-Silo og Kraner, — Dampene bærer det dunkle Havn — på noget, man elsker og aner... O milde Martyrium, Mindets Magt! — Man tier med alt, hvad man vilde sagt — og føle sig lykkelig lille, straalende ene og stille.

Det kimer og kalder fra Sverrigs Land, som messet en magtig Kirke — Den Lyd er lys over al Forstand, der bruser i unge Birke — Det er, som man hører den hele Jord. Elve og Stør og Skove i Kor — Hor Granernes mørke Tone, Fyrernes kogende Krone. —

Det kimer og klinger i Sverrigs Hus af Høje og hellige Tale! Et Bellman-Bager! Et Movitz-Krus! Man gaar i et Hav af Saa — Det er som det toner af Hverdagstang. Fanfare er Du, Du svenske Sang! — Og lad det — «Hørdet i i Karet, vi roede, tog Dig paa Ordet!»

Det kimer og kalder i Sverrigs By med 31 alets aarvaagne Stemme. Hvor glas-potter! Hvor funkis-ny! Hvor var det, jeg sidst var hjemme? Det var i Vorrennes glade Har! i Lysekronens og Løpers Skar — Der knyttedes tusinde Traade i Fjernes hvide Fraade...

Der er saa venligt i Danmarks Land med Keer i grønne Eng — Fra Guden Odds til Skogens Sand — Her Vuugen da havlans Gange — Det følger af Korn og det belger af Saa. Det bærer saa blidt om den grønne Ø — Toner, i ikke kender, Toner, i elsker, Vønner!

Der er saa hjemligt i Danmarks Land for en, som gaar paa det jævne — Han kender ikke til Åfærds Land — Han er, som det er hurs Evnt, Han er nok lille, hun er nok små — han synes dog stundom stor i det Smaa — Og ligger end laa Horisonten —, Hun passer dog Hverdagstonden!

Der er saa aabent i Danmarks Land, Vi ligger for alle Vinde — med Løjr ved den store Værdens Rand — Hvad véd vi om Fred og Fiende? Lad derfor, Venner, paa Nordens Dag, os sarks og samle Vi samme Sag — Lad knyttedes tusinde Traade i Fjernes hvide Fraade... Vi andre vi staar oss hunden. —

must lead to a new breakthrough of cultural redemption and rebirth. The re-commitment to the roots in Nordic culture might bring forth that renewal, according to the composer, founded on the 'thousand years old roots' and 'secret sources', having their origins in the great, ancient era of the Nordic culture. To Monrad Johansen, Nordic music culture is standing at a crossroads. To him, assimilating with musical 'internationalism' means losing any remnants of originality and creative power. Accordingly, it was time for Nordic music to take over the torch and rejuvenate music, rescuing it from the decadent culture of European centres, thanks to its 'unexploited, pristine Nordic natural resources [sic!]', 'Natural resources' conveys notions of a musical culture tapping into sources from 'pristine', folkloristic traditions, untouched by outside influences.

With his public lectures on ‘National values in our music’, published in *Aftenposten* more than 12 years prior, Monrad Johansen had already stepped forward as the leading voice of a new, national movement in Norwegian music.¹⁹ Here he draws up a pessimistic view of the future of music in ‘Central Europe’, mainly Germany and Austria. From Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms there goes a continuous tradition, with a consistent ‘clarity in texture, style, and form’. Further he adds ‘[...] from Reger and Strauss on, the stage of decay is reached, the first with his chilling resignation, and the latter with his cold, but shiny colours and light effects’. With Franz Schreker and Arnold Schönberg as the ‘Gods of their era’, the dissolution of German music has become a fact, according to Monrad Johansen. He continues to propose that this ‘phase of decay’, when German music culture is dying, fades into its ‘winter’, is at the same time a new beginning. This should be the time, where new forces are taking over, coming from other places than the ‘central European’ centres. However, for Monrad Johansen, these forces are still seeking towards these centres in decay, instead of cultivating their origins. Now the time has come to turn the weakness of being in the cultural periphery into the natural strengths of being the other.

In Norwegian music history, Monrad Johansen maintained a central role until the end of World War II, when his reputation became damaged because of his collaboration with the German nazi regime in occupied Norway. However, only a few years later, he returned to musical life, active as a composer, and respected as a leading figure of his generation until his death. In contrast to post-war Germany, Norwegian musical culture during the first decade after 1945 remained fond of the national style incorporating folk music features into a modestly modernized musical idiom, which had dominated the interwar period. This generation of composers was rather reluctant to ‘refresh’ their styles and embrace new currents, such as the political avantgarde, serialism or electronic music. Held back by a quite conservative corps of critics and audiences sceptical to new trends coming from abroad, new music of the post-war generation (when Darmstadt already was a firm name for international avantgarde) achieved increased influence as late as in the 1960s with figures such as Finn Mortensen (1922–1983) and Arne Nordheim (1931–2010). Until then, a strong commitment to cultural nation building in the spirit of Grieg held its position on the side of composers, critics, and audiences, despite of some exceptions, such as Fartein Valen (1887–1952) or Pauline Hall (1890–1969), exponents of the much smaller group of ‘musical internationalists’.

In the 1980s, the first modern wave of composers, whose breakthrough was in the late 1920s and 1930s, and who maintained a firm grip on the musical scene for decades, began to leave the stage because of age. Until then, the lines

of division in Norwegian music were drawn along one's position towards what has been called 'Central European' music: Firstly, there was the largest group, of nationalist composers, modernizing music by means of the 'unexploited creative powers' of Norwegian folk music. Secondly there was the much smaller group of 'internationalist' composers, adapting the 'Central European' (French or German) avant-garde, and refraining from any leanings to folklorism in their style. Finally, there was the group of 'traditionalists', clinging to the idiom of the national-romantic era, composing in a conservative, tonal style. The second group of 'internationalists' almost exclusively consisted of Valen and Hall. Valen was considered the pioneer of atonal music in Norway and was marginalized and ridiculed by the most conservative critics before and under the war. After 1945, as music exported from the Nordic countries, he gained an even greater reputation among international audiences and critics (which does not mean it got more popular with Norwegian audiences), whilst the most regressive conservative nationalists, often affiliated all too closely with the nazi regime's ideology, became obsolete, and many of the protagonists vanished from the scene.

What one can read from all this is that, in Norway, the discourse on stylistic concepts evolved on its own terms. Although new critical concepts were mostly coined abroad, they got transferred into Norwegian discourse by newspapers and periodicals. Accordingly, the critics and correspondents affiliated with these publications at different periods, representing the whole spectrum of stylistic preferences (and political positions), were balancing their judgements and opinions alongside nationalist-internationalist and modern-traditionalist axes. Hence, the national newspapers and, to a certain extent, music journals and radio program journals are to be considered the most important sources to trace the historical origins of critical terms and significant consistencies and differences in their use within changing contexts. Again, this depends largely on the accessibility of empirical data.

'NEWCLASSICISM' IN NORWAY'S PRESS 1920s–30s

As the sources show, in Norway, the term 'newclassical' (*nyklassisk*) emerged in the early 1920s, in concert reviews and reports from German musical life. The aspect of value judgement is prevalent, hence, the use of the qualifying term 'newclassical' depended on the reviewers' aesthetic positions. 'Newclassical' in general gained a rather positive connotation, emphasizing the tonal and classical features in the music of modernist composers after World War I. On the one hand, it was reminiscent of the struggle between progressive and more

conservative positions within musical modernism in Germany, on the other hand it seems to have had less ‘pejorative’ connotations than in the more polarized debates in Germany from the interwar period, and continued in postwar German historiography.²⁰ In Norway, its use was meant to indicate a countermovement to abundant, regressive romanticism on the one side, and to the expressionistic ‘excesses’ of atonal music on the other side. Later, ‘*nyklassisk*’ has also been related to the term objectivity (‘*saklighet*’). In the more specific sense, it also appeared in descriptions of the avant-garde movement ‘*Neue Sachlichkeit*’, which had its origins in Berlin.

As mentioned earlier, one of the earliest entries of ‘new classical’ can be found in a 1924 report from Berlin by Jón Leifs (1899–1968). Leifs was an Icelandic composer, who studied in Leipzig and later in Berlin with Ferruccio Busoni.²¹ In his contribution to the first issue of the newly founded journal called *Musik*, written in a quite polemical tone, he describes Berlin as a ‘machine’, driven by commercial interests preferring the international trends and big names. However, according to Leifs, the romantic era can be declared as being over, and the new art aims at being unsentimental, ‘therefore it is called newclassical’.²²

In 1926, another rare appearance of ‘newclassical’ can be found. This time in an announcement of the Bergen Philharmonic’s recital of music by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius and the Danish composer Carl Nielsen.²³ Here the critic compares Nielsen and Sibelius, describing the former as ‘more European, “newclassical”’ (with roots in the style of Bach), the latter as having more ‘national inwardness’.

In the beginning of the 1920s, the reception of new French music in Norway was most of all still confined to Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. Both enjoyed high popularity among Norwegian performers and audiences.²⁴ Then, during the 1930s, the Norwegian audiences were introduced to a new generation of French composers, most prominently among them were Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger. A survey of the so-called ‘New-French composers’ in the musical life of Oslo from 1900 to 1940 installs Debussy (over 300 performances) as by far the most performed, followed by Ravel (over 100). In comparison, Stravinsky, as the third most popular composer during this period, was performed ‘only’ about 35 times, whilst other prominent names, such as Paul Hindemith or Arnold Schönberg, were performed about 10 times in the same period. In their reviews of the composers belonging to the *Group des Six*, Norwegian critics emphasized the skill of these composers in ‘filling classical forms with modern content’, such as the critic Arne Erpekum Sem (1873–1951) did in 1931 in his review of Honegger’s *King David*.²⁵ However, one has to consider that these younger French composers

were performed quite rarely, thus, their style never achieved the familiarity of Debussy or Ravel among broader audiences. Among the composers belonging to the 'Group des Six', Honegger was performed the most in the period between 1920 and 1940, followed by Darius Milhaud and Francis Poulenc. Other French composers performed already in the 1920s were Albert Roussel and Louis Aubert, whilst, in comparison, composers such as Hindemith and Prokofiev received more attention later, mostly in the 1930s.²⁶

The Norwegian composer and music critic Pauline Hall had a huge impact on opinion making in Norway regarding musical modernism and the transfer of new musical concepts from Germany to Norwegian audiences and readers. Having studied in Paris from 1912 to 1915, as a composer, Hall was strongly influenced by Debussy. Later, she also opened up to French neoclassical impulses.²⁷ From 1926 to 1932 she spent most of her time in Germany and worked as a correspondent for the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet*. In 1928, she reported on Berlin's musical life, commenting on the new, powerful musical current she observed in 'From Berlin's operas' (FIGURE 4).

FIGURE 4. Pauline Hall, 'Fra Berlin's operaer', *Dagbladet*, 4 August 1928.

Pauline Hall:

Fra Berlins operaer.

III.
Berlin, i juli.

Librettoen til «Ezio» er så full av intriger og forviklinger som et film-manuskript, men den står tross alt høiere enn de andre tekstene Händel benyttet. Det falt i hans lodd å måtte ødsle sin musikk på litterært stoff som tyngedes av alle barokkens overdrivelser uten å eie noe av dens charme.

Men om det altså ikke nytter å forsere frem en scenisk Händel-renessanse, så er han i den siste tid allikevel rykket oss tett inn på livet. Den såkalte **ny-klassisisme**, den sterke musikalske strømning som nu river med sig de ledende komponister rundt omkring i landene, har sitt utspring i Händels verker. Bevegelsens parole lyder: objektiv musikk — en parole som vekker den største forargelse innen den generasjon som er opalet med Wagner. Men man må ikke betrakte retningen som reaksjonær, den betyr ganske enkelt det sunde instinkts opprør mot musikkens Tristanisering, og krig på kniven mot den musikk som er til å høre på **de figure**

dans les mains», som Jean Cocteau sier. Aubrey Beardsley offentliggjorde engang en tegning som forestilte publikum under en Tristan-opførelse, denne tegningen kunde gjerne bære titelen «Fra Siegmund Friends venteverelse», så skånselest har Beardsley avslørt sin tids — musikalske kompleks. Men nu i våre dager setter ny-klassisismen inn med sine krav til renhet, klarhet, strenghet: etter sviren i Venusbjerget kommer forsagelsen og askosen.

Städtische Oper opførte engang i vår den unge Korngolds siste verk, «Das Wunder der Heliane», og intet kan bedre illustrere nødvendigheten av en musikalsk luttingsprosess enn denne opera, hvis hele melodiske og dynamiske struktur kliner sig op til Isoldes Liebestod-motivet. Etter all den lummerheten virket den barske kjørlighet i Strawinskys «Oedipus Rex» som en frisk og svalende luftning. Klemperer bragte dette sistnevnte verk frem på Kroll-operan, i tysk uopførelse.

Det er ganske naturlig, at de komponister, som hylder ny-klassisismens idealer, vender til- bakte til klassisk diktning for å finne litterært stoff. Der gis mange eksempler: Malipieros mysterium «San Francesco d'Assisi», Honeggers gammeltestamentlige oratorier «Le Roi David» og «Judith», Milhands «Malheurs d'Orphée» etc. Men ingen har forfulgt målet med slik fanatisme som Strawinsky i opera-oratoriet «Oedipus Rex».

Teksten er Sophokles-tragedien i en sterkt sammentrengt bearbeidelse av Jean Cocteau, og sproget — latin. En «Sprecher» er innført som formidlende element, han forklarer på forhånd innholdet av hver enkelt episode; prologen begynner slik: «Ærede publikum! Man vil fremføre en latinsk bearbeidelse av «Kong Oedipus». Men Deres opmerksomhet og hukkommelse skal ikke anstreges unødvendig. Derfor vil jeg gjentakke Sophokles' drama i Deres erindring, o. s. v.»

Man forstår hvorfor Strawinsky denne gang har forlatt den russiske lokalkoloritt: hans plan er å skape et objektivt musikkverk, og så har han tatt et litterært stoff, som alle kjenner, han har ennvidere innført denne «Sprecher» som ved sine stadige forklaringer ribber handlingen for ethvert spenningsmoment; derved opnår komponisten følgende: Teksten skyves ut av spillet, dens rolle blir rent tilfeldig, all handling samles i musikken — for intet skjer på scenen. Det er et avgjørende ledd i Strawinskys plan, at intet skal skje på scenen. Solistene optrer i stiliserte kostymer og masker, uten gester, som syngende statuer. Koret, som tilslutt overtar «Sprecherens» rolle og beretter om tragediens utgang, er en mørk ubevegelig masse.

Man kommer ingen vei om man prøver å finne frem i «Oedipus Rex» ved hjelp av tradisjonelle operabegreper. Musikken er løst fra enhver dramatisk funksjon, den er der bare for sin egen skyld. Og ved å benytte latinsk tekst har Strawinsky opplevet all deklamatorisk tvang, melodien får en ubegrenset frihet til å leve sitt eget liv.

Strawinsky dyrker de gamle former, rondo kanon, arie, recitativ, men i personlig utforming, han hører ikke til de komponister som bruker blåpapir. «Oedipus Rex» er gjennomført på tonalt grunnlag og uten tilløp til tematisk utarbeidelse; orkestret akkompagnerer, og begir sig sjelden ut på

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The so-called new classicism, a strong musical current taking with it the leading composers in the surrounding countries, has its origin in the works of Händel. The motto of the movement is objective music – a motto, that arouses the greatest outrage amongst the generation growing up to Wagner. However, this movement should not be considered as reactionary, it just means a healthy reaction to the ‘Tristanisation’ of music and waging a war against the music ‘qui s’écoute la tête entre les mains’, in the words of Jean Cocteau.²⁸

Hall quotes here Jean Cocteau’s, famous phrase ‘any music that is listened to with your head in your hands is suspect’ (‘toute musique qui s’écoute la tête entre les mains est suspecte’).

For Hall, a new work like Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* appeared as a ‘fresh and chilling breath of air, after all the sultriness’. New classicism with ‘its demands for purity, clarity and rigor’ comes like a relief with its asceticism and renunciation after the eroticism of Wagner. Composers adhering to the ideals of new classicism also refrain from using ‘local colours’, but set music to classical texts, such as Gian Francesco Malipiero, Honegger, or Milhaud. According to Hall, Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* is following this ideal, claiming for objectivity by using Latin language, installing a narrator creating distance to the content, using old forms like canon, rondo, aria, recitativo in an original manner, and shaping the form on a tonal base, but without thematic development.

The same season, 1927–28 is described as a ‘heavy Autumn’ in a chronicle of performances of the Oslo Philharmonic.²⁹ The choice of the conductors Issay Dobrowen and Hugo Kramm to give first performances of works by Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Prokofiev got mixed responses from Norwegian critics. ‘Both works, Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella-suite* and Prokofiev’s *The Love for Three Oranges Suite* represent a turn towards ‘neoclassicism’, which finally made its mark in the programs of the orchestra. A common feature of the language used by the critics at this time was to apply ‘atonal’ for all music that somehow sounded dissonant. Arbo’s review of Hindemith’s *Concerto for Orchestra*, composed in 1925, highlights his use of polyphony and polytonality, yet finds the ‘anti-romantic’ position, resulting in grotesque combinations of sounds still hard to listen to.

In 1931, several articles present *nyklassisme* in different contexts and representing slightly different aesthetic positions. Monrad Johansen mentions *nyklassisme* in negative terms in a review of his peer’s recent piano trio, based on Valen’s new, so-called ‘polyphonic dissonant’ way of composing, as a frantic attempt to solve a profound crisis in composition, which ‘was as desperate as it was short lived’.³⁰

The same year, the critic Sverre Hagerup Bull (1892–1976) reviews a concert by the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, with Hindemith's *Kammermusik Nr. 5* on the program. To Bull, this work shows a mastery of counterpoint and a smooth and capricious polyphony, light and elegant. At the same time, he notes that 'idiosyncratic and steady rhythms, surprising accentuations and free, but stable sense of tonal values' make '[...] slogans of "new objectivity" become obsolete experiencing such lively music'.³¹

Arbo's review of Bjarne Brustad's *Concertino* for viola and chamber orchestra might serve as an example of how 'newclassicism' has been incorporated as a stylistic model in positive terms, when assessing new works by the younger generation of national composers. Musical features related to 'newclassicism', such as 'simplifying the apparatus of the orchestra' are considered as a sound reaction to the 'hypertrophy of the romantic orchestra'. Transparent art of melodic lines, clarity of the musical texture, by highlighting the timbral characteristics of individual instruments, the playful use of classicist forms, rhythms, and melodic lines, with new means of expression cautiously woven into tonal foundations. As such, it epitomizes the style of 'modern classicism' considered as the future of national, Norwegian music at this time.³²

'Main trajectories of Norwegian music' by Arbo is another example of how music critics leaning towards conservatism draw a dividing line between local, national music, seeking back to the ancient origins of their folk music and poetry, and international musical modernism:

The most radical manifestations of musical modernism in international art music do not fit with our mentality and therefore will not find a positive response in our country. [...] the sound instincts of our young composers is characteristic, and thus, the atonal debaucheries evolving from a misunderstanding of Schoenberg's revolutionary principles, never got fertile ground for growing on our soil.³³

The same year, Arbo is given space to further elaborate on the latest developments in Stravinsky's music. In *Tonekunst* he describes the stylistic turn marked by works such as the Octet from 1924 as:

[...] stylizing renaissance of the ancestors' sense of form, and the piece's masterly richness provided the audience with an 'objective' joy. Its linear hardness and clarity, athletic angularity and nakedness, its downright ascetic-ironic humor, where there is neoclassical dignity, vernacular musicianship, playful timbre, variation style, homophonic art and polytonal polyphony, fugue – yes, whatever you want, from the simple to the complicated. We are in the middle of the 'classic' period.³⁴

In 1936, in another review of Honegger, Arbo once more elaborates his take on ‘newclassicism’.³⁵ The composer is here considered to be ‘applying new-classicism, polytonality, and a series of the newer music styles and impulses in his form, melody, harmony and rhythm’, when composing his *Concertino*.

The same year, the conservative composer and critic, Per Reidarson (1879–1974) used *nyklassisk* in opposition to (atonal) modernism. In his case, ‘newclassical’ is understood in negative terms. According to Reidarson, the Swiss composer Hermann Suter ‘[...] created a musical work in a style one could call newclassical. Because it does not assume to be modernism, – which mostly means disharmonic excesses [...] and lack of form as a substitution for the sake of “freedom” in absence of melodic inventiveness’.³⁶

In the program journal of the Norwegian radio, in 1937, Arbo celebrated a ‘new era of growth’ in Norwegian music, presenting new works by the composers Eivind Groven (1901–1977) and Sæverud:

It is a great time in young Norwegian music and many values from the deepest Norwegian and contemporary sense of tone (*tonefølelse*) have come to the fore.

Our national instruments and folk music are sources that many have taken inspiration from, and there has been a lot to say that composers have built on their experience of contacts with the actual musical life in our villages. It has shown to the core. Other tone-setters have received impulses externally, from musical trends in their times and have built on the techniques of today and on the new tools that have been able to serve as an expression of a Norwegian artist’s personality. Polyphony has been allowed to take part in this new development and the new Norwegian music is so rich and changing that almost every single work has shown a new side in form, technique, style, idea and details in the performance. The unity in this may be searched for in vain, because opinions, wills and personalities are so different, so independent; but all who are fond of the progress of our music must be grateful every time a new valuable piece arrives.³⁷

Obviously, critics during the 1930s, such as Arbo, Reidarson, and Monrad Johansen increasingly made use of the term ‘newclassicism’ in their reviews. What they have in common is that, even if they represent different aesthetic (and not least political) positions, they all use it to mark an opposition to expressionist atonality embodied by Schönberg, a contemporary musical current they felt was of ‘excessive’ or decadent character. Eventually, when Hindemith’s *Unterweisung im Tonsatz* was published in 1937, it would have exerted great influence in Norway, too, as it became widely disseminated among Norwegian composers (and critics) as a reference work in the education of music theory. In *Tonekunst* it was announced as a welcome contribution to the understanding of the development of tonality and the foundations of modern harmony, ‘the right book for its time’.³⁸ However,

its effect did not fully show before the period following World War II. The 1950s also turned out to be a climax for Norwegian musical neoclassicism following in Hindemith's footsteps, with compositions by Finn Mortensen, Harald Sæverud, Bjarne Brustad, and Olav Kielland.³⁹ By then the term 'neoclassical' had become naturalized in Norwegian language and general conversation, as it also is shown in its appearance in lexica, confirming its status in Norwegian music terminology.

'NEOCLASSICISM' IN NORWEGIAN LEXICA AND MUSIC JOURNALS

In Norwegian lexica, the precise terms 'neo/newclassical' do not seem to appear before the period following World War II. However, in particular cases of composers or summaries of general musical trends, 'neoclassical' stylistic features are already reported to a certain extent. In *Gyldendal Conversation Lexicon* from 1933, Hindemith is thus characterized as 'seeking for a linear, polyphonic and objective tone art, in opposition to the elder romantic, homophonic and subjective music'.⁴⁰

In another volume of the same lexicon, published a year later, a survey of German music describes 'a common feature' for 'several modern composers' as a voluntary reaction to romanticism:

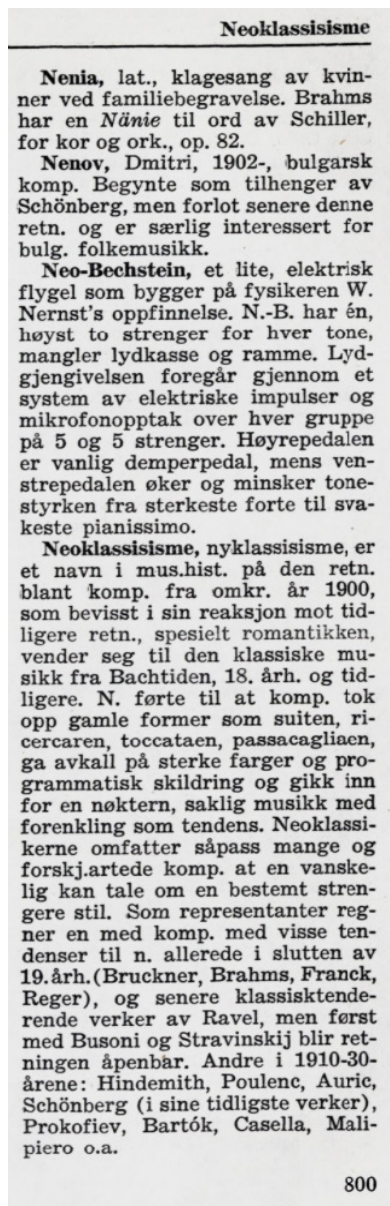
The young avoid cyclical forms (symphony and sonata), have an affinity for one movement forms, and a strong concentrated mode of expression [...] they aspire at giving the singular part the highest possible independence. The result of this one-sided contrapuntal view is a music which in part is very free regarding tonality (Hindemith), in part is totally atonal (Schönberg), in part polytonal [...] The most well-known modern composers are H. Wolf, v. Schillings, Braunfels, Schreker, Hindemith, Korngold, Krenek among others.⁴¹

After the war, in 1947, in another conversation lexicon, neoclassicism is still left out, yet Hindemith's 'anti romantic, bold style' is described as a reaction against 'sentimental, egocentric' developments in German music and a tendency towards a more moderate musical language after 'our century's modernism' has broken down as a 'new, grand style of the century'.⁴²

The early postwar years, when 'nyklassisk' and 'neoklassisk' are to be found in the music lexica, a new generation of academically educated musicologists took on their work in higher education, updating the entries, definitions, and terminology in Norwegian musicology according to the international standards at their time. Olav Gurvin became the leading authority in Norwegian musicology after the war, and the first music professor affiliated with the University of Oslo,

founding the department there. In the music lexicon edited by Gurvin, published in 1949, '*neoklassisk*' finally appears as a distinct entry, marking the term's 'official' incorporation in Norwegian language (FIGURE 5).⁴³ '*Neoklassisisme*' appears here

FIGURE 5. Olav Gurvin, '*Neoklassisisme*', *Musikkleksikon*, Oslo: Dreyer, 1949.



as a synonym of '*nyklassisisme*'. The article comprises what has been established as generic features of neoclassicism, such as the opposition to romanticism and the return to musical forms and composers from the eighteenth century, Bach, suite, passacaglia etc, a tendency towards simplicity and objectivity, and the turn away from colours and programmatic content. Further, according to the article, neoclassical features became common in works by composers such as Busoni and Stravinsky, but also by Hindemith, Poulenc, Auric, Prokofiev, Schönberg, Bartók, Casella, and Malipiero, among others.

Another publication from the same year, Johannes Hanssen's *Practical Handbook for Music* also includes *neoklassisisme*, aiming at a broader group of readers.⁴⁴ Hanssen was a central figure in the very popular *musikkorpsforbundet* (military/brass band-movement) in Norway, and his lexicon obviously reached out to a large group of amateur musicians and their instructors. In Hanssen, *neoklassisisme* is described as a musical movement in the twentieth century characterised by composers seeking to recall forms of music typical for the Baroque period (Bach and before). The composers mentioned in the article are Busoni, Stravinsky, and Hindemith.

Music journals such as *Tonekunst*, *Musikbladet*, or *Sangerposten* played an important role in shaping a professionalized public discourse in Norway until academic institutions such as university music departments and state music academies were

established. These journals were mostly published by societies and associations, such as those of music teachers, choral singers, composers etc. with a quite broad outreach of both professionals and amateurs. The content was a mix of essays, announcements, news, reports, commercials, and portraits introducing important composers. Both Norwegian and international had a prominent place. As such, the study of these publications reveals the aesthetic views considered 'mainstream'. At the same time, occasionally controversies emerged about new styles or recently introduced musical concepts. These debates were often brought forth by amateurs, even non-musicians, and thus had a rather insignificant impact on the general understanding. Generic terms such as the major stylistic 'isms' were discussed quite rarely, instead introduced mostly by journalists and critics in daily newspapers, who again picked them up from the international press.

A PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

What preliminary conclusions can be drawn from this survey? In general, the term 'new/neoclassicism' was used mostly in opposition to atonalism. Regarding the application of the term on its own, to categorize the national music scene and Norwegian stylistic currents, compared to 'Central European' venues, it seems as if Norwegian debates take their own path. In Norway, the dividing lines were drawn between 'international' and 'national modernists' rather than between 'modernism' and a pejoratively understood 'classicism', as was typical of German-speaking musical criticism and historiography. As the most influential group in the interwar period, the 'national modernists' have been associated most closely with what might be labeled as 'neoclassical'. Yet, there is little evidence that the reception of this group of composers has been significantly influenced or framed by the terms 'neoclassical' or 'newclassical'. The otherwise well-established features of classicism, such as the recurrence of ancient forms, modesty of musical means (such as a modest form of extended tonality), and a more objective, 'natural' or 'pure' level of expression and clarity of forms, clarity of texture etc., are rarely discussed in critical terms. Instead, they are used in a more descriptive way, and mostly with positive connotations. In the few instances the term was mentioned by critics, they used it to address the singular features of a new composition or a composer, without referencing an archetype or a group style. For a Norwegian composer, recurring to ancient fugues or polyphony was a rather ambivalent task: on the one hand, they were considered 'universal' compositional forms and procedures. On the other hand, the Norwegian composers' attitude towards incorporating styles, forms, and procedures from the classical (German) tradition was different

from modernists such as Schönberg, Reger, or Hindemith, determining their style as a dialectical, yet affirmative, relationship to the 'German tradition' they were inheriting. Norwegians sought to confirm their individuality as national composers, and as such, with their vernacular idiom, they were searching for an amalgamation of the universal musical language, the classic 'lingua franca' tapping into what they considered the true, pure, and immediate origins of nature and creativity. Accordingly, a 'vernacular' form of musical neoclassicism developed in Norway, promoting its affirmative relationship to the 'great', national (old Norse) past. The procedures used had to be polyphony (yet not too complex), and tonal harmony, entangled with regional, 'pure' traditions of folk culture, such as modal tonality, 'good craftsmanship' in terms of motivic consistency, 'natural' harmonies and rhythms, and a certain 'honest' simplicity of form.

'Simplification' was the motto, a general quest for the 'natural', 'honest', and 'non-artificial', created by recognizable melodic lines, vernacular rhythmic patterns (folk dances), 'simple' architecture, use of polyphony to emphasize parts and shape clear textures, restrained use of chromaticism or atonality, rather, the use of modal tonality, and in general, the structural integration of folk elements in musical parameters. The composers themselves were rarely contributing to the categorizing debates, since they were not identifying with generic style concepts in their individualistic approach and quest for self-stylization. Moreover, they struggled with abandoning the 'colonial complex', trying to find a genuine Norwegian idiom, and attempting to build their own musical tradition independent from any 'Central European' frameworks and categories. International impulses were appropriated to a certain degree, universal tropes and techniques were transformed and transported into a local, original idiom. Yet, this was not accomplished by receding into musical provincialism, nor into eccentric experimentalism, but by integrating 'solid' musical principles: classical procedures and forms, such as polyphony, modality, natural scales, variation form, melodic principle, or rhythmic inventiveness.

Notes

- 1 Lorentz Reitan, *Harald Sæverud. Mannen, musikken og mytene*, Oslo: Forum/Aschehoug, 1997.
- 2 Arvid Vollsnes, *Komponisten Ludvig Irgens-Jensen – europeer og nordmann*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 2000.
- 3 Reidar Storaas, *Mellom triumf og tragedie – Geirr Tveitt – ein biografi*, Oslo: Samlaget, 2008.
- 4 Ivar Roger Hansen, *Mot fedrenes fjell – komponisten David Monrad Johansen og hans samtid*, Oslo: Kolofon Forlag, 2013.
- 5 Arvid Vollsnes et al., *Norges musikkhistorie, Bind 1*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 2001, p. 9.
- 6 Arvid Vollsnes et al., *Norges musikkhistorie, Bind 4*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 2001, p. 11–ff.
- 7 Press release by National library, 13 October 2023: 'New Bookshelf agreement gives you digital access to 400,000 books': <https://www.nb.no/pressemeldinger/ny-bokhylla-avtale-gir-deg-digital-tilgang-til-400-000-boker/> [last accessed 26 May 2025].
- 8 See Øyvind Norheim, 'Norwegian Music Periodicals in Past and Present', *Fontes Artes Musicae*, XXXIV/2–3, p. 121.
- 9 *Norsk musikkliv – Månedblad for Sang og Instrumentalmusikk*, published from 1934 by Norges Sangerlag, as the 'organ for Norges sangerlag, Norges organistforening, Kirkesangforbund for Oslo Bispedømme, Norges Musikk lærernes Landsforbund.'
- 10 *Musikbladet og sangerposten*, published from 1922 (continued as *Norsk musikkliv*).
- 11 *Musik – Tidsskrift for tonekunst*, published 1924–25 by *Hjemmenes notesentral*.
- 12 *Tonekunst – Tidsskrift for norske musikkvenner, sangere og sangforeninger*, published from 1927 to 1937.
- 13 *Norsk musikerblad – Organ for norsk musikerforbund*, published from 1914.
- 14 *Hallo Hallo! Kringkastnings selskapets programblad*, published from 1925 to 1940, later *Norsk programblad* and *Programblad* from 1946 to 2000.
- 15 Olin Downes, 'Northern Festivals', *New York Times*, 12 July 1953: <https://nyti.ms/3KPSdBy> [last accessed 26 May 2025].
- 16 'Musikkfesten i Bergen gis stor anerkjennelse', *Vårt land*, 20 July 1953
- 17 See Markus Bandur; 'Neoklassizismus', in: Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, *Terminologie der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995, pp. 278–298; Peter Gülke: 'Neoklassizismus. Überlegungen zu einem legitimationsbedürftigen Stilbegriff', in: *Die klassizistische Moderne in der Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Internationales Symposium der Paul Sacher Stiftung Basel 1996, hrsg. von Hermann Danuser, Winterthur: Amadeus, 1997 (Veröffentlichungen der Paul Sacher Stiftung, Bd. 5), pp. 21–26; Volker Scherliess, *Neoklassizismus. Dialog mit der Geschichte*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998; Wolfgang Danuser, 'Classicism of the interwar period', in: *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Music*, ed. by Nicolas Cook, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 260–85.
- 18 '[...] jeg må, i motsetning til Svendsen, si at jeg forlot Leipzig konservatoriet like så dum som da jeg kom dit. Jeg hadde nok lært en del, men min egen individualitet var fremdeles en lukket bok for meg.' (Edvard Grieg in a letter to Aimar Grønvold, 25 April 1881. See Finn Benestad (ed.), *Grieg, Edvard. Brev i utvalg*, Oslo: Aschehoug, 1998, p. 246).
- 19 David Monrad Johansen, 'National values in our music', *Aftenposten*, 5 July 1924. Public lectures hold in Spring and Summer 1924.
- 20 See Danuser, 'Classicism of the interwar period', p. 281.

- 21 Rune Andersen: 'Jón Leifs', *Store Norske Leksikon*: https://snl.no/Jón_Leifs [last accessed 26 May 2025].
- 22 Jon Leifs, 'Nogen musikkbetraktninger fra Berlin', *Musik*, 1, December 1924, p. 223.
- 23 'Carl Nielsen og Jean Sibelius', *Bergens tidende*, 11 March 1926: <https://www.nb.no/items/fad6b8b58f1fb0a79fb568575ef66943?page=5&searchText=nyklassisk> [last accessed 26 May 2025].
- 24 See Rune Andersen, 'Ny-franske komponister i norsk musikkliv 1900–1940. En resepsjonshistorisk introduksjon', online publication, University of Oslo, 2010.
- 25 Andersen, 'Ny-franske komponister i norsk musikkliv 1900–1940'
- 26 Andersen, 'Ny-franske komponister i norsk musikkliv 1900–1940'
- 27 Rune Andersen, 'Pauline Hall', in: *Store Norske Leksikon*: https://snl.no/Pauline_Hall [last accessed 26 May 2025].
- 28 'Den såkalte ny-klassisme, den sterke musikalske strømning som nu river med seg ledende komponister rundt omkring i landene, har sitt utspring i Händels verker. Bevegelsens parole lyder: objektiv musikk – en parole som vekker den største forargelse innen den generasjon som er opalet med Wagner. Men man må ikke betrakte retningen som reaksjonær, den betyr ganske enkelt det sunde instinkts opprør mot musikkens Tristanisering, og krig på kniven mot den musikk som er til å høre på "la figure dans les mains", som Jean Cocteau sier.' (Pauline Hall, 'Fra Berlin's operaer', *Dagbladet*, 4 August 1928).
- 29 Hampus Huldt-Nyström, *Fra munkekor til symfoniorkester*, Oslo: Filharmonisk selskap, 1969, p. 235.
- 30 David Monrad Johansen, 'Neue Musik. Fartein Valens trio', *Aftenposten*, 3 February 1931.
- 31 Sverre Hagerup Bull, 'Paul Hindemith', *Dagbladet*, 24 Mars 1931.
- 32 Jens Arbo, 'Hovedlinjene i ny norsk musikk', *Morgenbladet*, 21 February 1931.
- 33 'De mest radikale utslag modernismen har fått i meget av den internasjonale kunstmusikk passer vel ikke for vår mentalitet og vil derfor neppe ha betingelser for å finne gjenklang i vårt land. [...] det sunde musikkinstinkt hos våre unge toneskapere har formådd å holde linjene klare, så de atonale utskielser som i Tyskland skyldes misforståelser av Schönbergs revolusjonerende prinsipper ikke har funnet grobunn hos oss.' (Arbo, 'Hovedlinjene i ny norsk musikk').
- 34 '[...] stiliserende renessanse av forfedrenes formfølelse, og stykkets mesterlig rikholdighet skaffet tilhørerne en 'objektiv' fornøyelse. Dens lineære hardhet og klarhet, atletiske kantethet og nakenhet, dens likefrem asketisk-ironiske humor, hvor der er nyklassisk verdighet, landsbymusikanteri, klangspill, variasjonsstil, homofonkunst og polytonal polyfoni, fuge – ja hvad man vil ha, fra det enkle til det kompliserte. Vi er midt inne i den "klassiske" periode' (Jens Arbo, 'Igor Strawinsky', *Tonekunst*, XXIV/1, p. 222).
- 35 Jens Arbo, *Hallo! Hallo! Kringkastingselskapets programblad*, XI/8, 1936.
- 36 Per Reidarson, 'Church concert', *Arbeiderbladet*, 10 March 1936.
- 37 '[...] Det er grotid i den unge norske musikk og mange verdier fra det dypeste i norsk og samtidig tonefølelse er kommet frem i dagen. Våre nasjonale instrumenter og folkemusikken er kilder som mange har øst av og det har hatt meget å si at tonesettere har bygget på erfaring fra sin kontakt med selve musikklivet i bygdene våre. Det har vist inn til kjernen. Andre tonesettere har fått impulser utenfra, fra musikkstrømningene i tiden og har bygget på teknikken av i da og på nye virkemidler, som har kunnet tjene som uttrykk for en norsk kunstners personlighet. Polyfonien har fått lov å være med i denne nye utviklingen og så rik og skiftende er den nye norske musikken at nesten hvert eneste verk har vist en ny side i formen, teknikken,

stilen, idéen og detaljene i utføringen. Enheten i dette vil man kanskje lete forgjeves etter, for meningene og viljene og personlighetene er så forskjellige, så selvstendige og frittstående, men alle som er glad i vår musikk framgang må være takknemlig hver gang et nytt verdifullt stykke kommer frem for offentligheten' (Jens Arbo, 'Ny norsk musikk på Harmoniens konsert søndag', in: *Hallo! Hallo! Kringkastingselskapets programblad*, XII/15, 1937).

- 38 'Paul Hindemith som teoretiker', *Tonekunst*, 30, 1937, p. 161.
- 39 See Magnar Breivik, 'neoklassisme', in: *Store Norske Leksikon*: https://snl.no/neoklassisme_-_musikk [last accessed 26 May 2025].
- 40 'Hindemith, Paul', in *Gyldendals konversasjonsleksikon*, Oslo: Gyldendal, 1933, p. 279.
- 41 'De unge undgår sykliske former (symfoni og sonate), har en forkjærlighet for ensatsede verker, og en sterkt konsentrert uttryksmåte. De søker bort fra den homofone skrivemåte og setter som mål den størst mulige selvstendighet for hver enkelt stemme. Resultatet av det ensidige kontrapunktiske syn er en musikk som dels er meget fri i tonal henseende (Hindemith), dels er helt atonal (A. Schönberg), dels polytonal. – Til det moderne Tysklands (og Østerrikes) mer kjente komponister kan f.ø. regnes H. Wolf, v. Schillings, Braunfels, Schreker, Hindemith, Korngold, Krenek m.fl.' ('Tysk musikk', in *Gyldendals konversasjonsleksikon*, Oslo: Gyldendal, 1934, p. 459).
- 42 'Musikk', in *Norsk konversasjonsleksikon*, 1947, p. 2115.
- 43 Olav Gurvin, 'Neoklassisme', *Musikkleksikon*, Oslo: Dreyer, 1949, p. 800.
- 44 Johannes Hanssen, 'Neoklassisme', *Praktisk musikkhåndbok*, Oslo: Mortensen, 1949, p. 122.