

**Carl Nielsen at St David's Hall**

# The distinctive warmth and pleasure of Nielsen

By IFAN PAYNE

**REVIEWS**

**IT IS a wonderful idea to combine the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra with lunch-time at St David's Hall to give us the rare but welcome pleasure of hearing all of Carl Nielsen symphonies performed in chronological order.**

The imaginative programming will link each of these symphonies with a lesser known, this equally intriguing symphony by Joseph Haydn.

Thus Tuesday's lunch-time concert, the first in the series, opened with a suitably small scaled, nicely poised, account of Haydn's Symphony No 7.

Nielsen, like his fellow Scandinavian, Wilhelm Stenhammar seems to be one of the forgotten symphonists of our century, which is a pity, since his music is romantically attractive and extremely enjoyable.

Strictly speaking his first symphony is not a 20th century work since its composition was started in 1892 and completed in 1894.

More precisely, the music is stylistically a cross between Brahms, whose Symphony No 4

was completed eight years earlier, and Sibelius whose Symphony No 1 was to come two years later.

Yet Nielsen has his own distinctive voice and his Symphony No 1 contains music of a strange beauty.

All of this was well communicated by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, as Bryden Thomson conducted a glowing performance which, rather than highlighting or lingering over details, presented the noble architectural edifice of the work.

Of particular note was the contrast between the stillness of the impassioned andante and the robust, rhythmically vigorous final allegro. This last contained some notably plangent playing by the brass.

The second in the series may be heard in Tuesday, January 20th when Nielsen's Symphony No 2 will be coupled with Haydn's Symphony No 22 (The Philosopher) and the conductor will be Ole Schmidt, a Dane himself, who has recorded the complete cycle of Nielsen's symphonies for the Unicorn record label.