

Wilhelm Stenhammar

A European modernist

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Since the publication of Bo Wallner's three-volume biography *Wilhelm Stenhammar och hans tid* (1991), a wealth of new sources has been made accessible. Collections of Stenhammar manuscripts in libraries and archives have been augmented substantially, especially at the Gothenburg University Library, which has received several donations from the family over the last few years. These donations encourage further research not only with respect to Wilhelm, but also to Helga Stenhammar and other members of the family. In connection with recent reassessments of Stenhammar's life and works, further sources unknown to Wallner have been discovered (e.g. the collection from Signe Kallenberg, född [born] Weinberg, cf. Wiklund, 2017). The online resource *Levande muskarv (Swedish Musical Heritage)* provides up-to-date information, new editions and updated bibliographies of many of Stenhammar's works. European national libraries have made substantial efforts to digitize newspapers from Stenhammar's time. From this, new research has been directed (e.g. Haglund, 2017; Broad, 2018; Lindskog, 2019). Last but not least, musicians have contributed exciting performances and recordings, at times drawing from unpublished sources (e.g. Sturfält, 2007).

It might be timely to take one step backwards from the materials to reflect on new frameworks and methodologies. The present article approaches Stenhammar from a transnational perspective, placing him into the broader context of European musical modernism around 1900. First, the use of the terms 'modernity' and 'modernism' in the light of recent research on modernism in music will be clarified. Second, Stenhammar's European identity will be discussed with special focus on Copenhagen and Berlin. Third, some of Stenhammar's compositional strategies in his string quartet no. 3 op. 18 in F major will be discussed in the light of recent research on musical self-reflection.¹

This article argues that, throughout his life, Stenhammar aimed to contribute to a decidedly modern musical art within a community of modern composers, conductors and musicians. This community had a European outlook and maintained a continuous exchange across national and linguistic borders. The article builds on previous research by the author (Rotter-Broman, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2019, 2021) and on recent contributions on Stenhammar and modernism in Northern Europe to be discussed in due course.

¹ I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks to Daniel Grimley, Dorothea Hilzinger, Sandra Kebig, Dörthe Günther, Charlotte Wiesener, all participants of the Gothenburg 2021 conference, and to *STM-SJM*'s editors for stimulating discussions and valuable support which has significantly improved this article.

1. Modernism in music: transnational perspectives and musicians' self-images

Regarding terminology, English-language scholarship usually distinguishes between 'modernity' and 'modernism': 'modernity' refers to structures and processes in society, politics and economics (e.g. industrialization, democratization, also: modernization), whereas 'modernism' refers to arts, literature, painting, architecture, and music.

'Modernism' is a cultural movement, not a designation for a fixed period. Terming it an *-ism* even marks a certain distance between modernism and modernity: 'modernism' reflects and artistically transforms 'modern' phenomena and processes in society (Riley, 2010; Johnson, 2015). The German term 'Die Moderne', even if it is often translated as 'modernism', is not divided in such a clear-cut manner (Riley, 2007; Hilzinger, 2022).

In musicology, the understanding of musical modernism has changed decisively over the last twenty years. Björn Heile and Charles Wilson note that in recent research

responses to modernism that were previously considered ambiguous, reluctant, or equivocal have been subject to re-evaluation. Just as in literature the 'new modernist studies has extended the designation "modernist" [...] to [...] cultural producers hitherto seen as neglecting or resisting modernist innovation', so definitions of musical modernism have broadened to include repertoire that was previously typically regarded to lie outside its purview. In the space of just over twenty years, Sibelius, Elgar, Nielsen, Britten, Walton, Bridge and others have been claimed for modernism, in the process endowing the term with an increased currency, even a prestige, that would have seemed out of place – or rather out of time – just a couple of years earlier [...]. (2019, p. 3, with reference to Mao and Walkowitz, 2006)

Within that line of argument, the term 'modernism' seems close to Carl Dahlhaus' concept of 'Die Moderne', which he introduced in his *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts*. 'Die Moderne', in Dahlhaus' reading, means the last phase of the 'long nineteenth century', stretching from the late 1880s to ca. 1924. Dahlhaus argued that many composers at the turn of the century – among them Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler – both saw themselves as modern and were regarded so by their contemporaries (1980, pp. 280–281). When I refer to Wilhelm Stenhammar as a modernist, I follow him in this direction (Rotter-Broman, 2015, p. 181). Still, the aim is not to relabel any period as 'Die Moderne' or 'modernism', but to allow for a broader understanding of what it meant for composers around 1900 to be 'modern' (Hepokoski, 1993, p. 5; cf. Harper-Scott, 2006, 2012; Riley, 2007, 2010; Johnson, 2015). Throughout this text, 'modernism' is used in the broader sense, not to be confounded with terms as 'Neue Musik' or 'Avantgarde'.²

As mentioned before, the most important argument for this broader understanding is that there is strong historical evidence to support critique against the older normative

² The understanding of 'modern' proposed here differs from Leah Broad's, who places Stenhammar's incidental music for Per Lindberg's Shakespeare stagings into a 'modern' environment centered in the 1920s (Broad, 2018). Lack of space prevents me from a discussion of her stimulating article, including her reading of Stenhammar's phrase 'klar, glad och naiv' ('clear, happy and naïve').

understanding of ‘modern’ music. This normative understanding produces a teleological historiography trying to narrate ‘the’ history of western music leading towards Schoenberg’s atonality, which has given raise to analytical criteria with questionable historical relevance (Rotter-Broman, 2012, 2015; Bredenbach, 2018). To take the self-concepts of musicians and composers as ‘modern’ at face value, could lead to a clearer idea of music and its discourses around 1900 in relationship to modernity and modernism. Tobias Janz describes this methodological change as follows:

Modernity may either be understood as a fixed historical object – as an epoch or the designation of a certain social order – or as a discursive element used by a society to describe itself and to observe itself. Both can be observed again from a scholarly perspective: one can describe an epoch as ‘modernity’/‘modernism’ (‘Die Moderne’) or a society as ‘modern’ and ask for criteria that would justify such a description. But one can also ask what people are doing if they describe their time or the society they are living in as modernity or modern society. This is the question about the self-conception of modernity. (2009, p. 315).³

A further argument for this methodological change owes some of its explosiveness to debates on global history in the last two decades. Post-colonial theories have spurred critique about the idea of modernism itself and about how we narrate the history of modernism, especially regarding more or less implicit hegemonic implications. Janz and Yang speak about an ‘implosion of European modernity as a hegemonic discourse’ (2019, pp. 24–25). Both in the humanities and historical and social studies, a ‘decentering of Europe’ has been advocated (Dipesh Chakrabarty, cf. Janz and Yang, 2019, p. 29, and the literature discussed there).

Yet, the concentration on global imbalances between ‘the West and the rest’ and the heated debates on colonialism have to some extent blurred the concurrent challenge, namely the challenge of decentering modernism *within* Europe. How could we in this light re-think the music histories of European regions in respect to modernism – and hence critically evaluate established narratives, e.g. about centers and ‘peripheries’? (cf. Hárs et al., 2006) This also leads to the need to debunk the concept of ‘nation’ and ‘nation states’ as ‘containers’ for historiography and to develop a transnational perspective.⁴ In this respect, Northern Europe is a case in point. To ask for modernist

³ ‘Moderne lässt sich entweder als ein fest umrissener historischer Gegenstand verstehen – als eine Epoche oder als Bezeichnung einer bestimmten gesellschaftlichen Ordnung – oder aber als Element eines Diskurses, in dem die Gesellschaft sich selbst beschreibt und mit dessen Hilfe sie sich selbst beobachtet. Beides lässt sich wiederum wissenschaftlich beobachten. Man kann eine Epoche als ‘Die Moderne’ oder eine Gesellschaft als ‘moderne Gesellschaft’ beschreiben und nach den Kriterien fragen, die eine solche Beschreibung zulassen. Man kann aber auch danach fragen, was Menschen tun, wenn sie ihre Zeit oder die Gesellschaft, in der sie leben, als Moderne bzw. als moderne Gesellschaft beschreiben. Dies ist die Frage nach dem Selbstkonzept der Moderne.’ All translations into English are by the author unless otherwise noted.

⁴ ‘Transnational history’ aims to broaden the scope beyond national borders and to critically evaluate modes of historiography relying on the category of ‘nation’. It differs from an ‘international’ perspective insofar as the latter still presupposes existing entities (‘nations’) that might be transgressed or brought into interaction. For a useful introduction to transnational history, see Pernau (2011). For transnational perspectives on European music historiography of the nineteenth century, the writings of historian Axel

self-conceptions in Northern Europe means to contribute to a multilayered European music history and to reject questionable work readings and historical narratives with strong value judgments – in the past often infused with germanocentric undertones.

If we apply terms like ‘modernist’ or ‘modern’ to composers like Stenhammar or Nielsen, another question arises: what *musical characteristics* are related to this self-concept of musical modernism? Is music just an aesthetic mirror for social states or technical developments? Grimley, in his introduction to *Carl Nielsen and the idea of Modernism* with the headline ‘Nielsen at the edge’, rightly elaborates:

It is not sufficient [...] for Nielsen’s music simply to reflect aspects of modernity or urban change in early twentieth-century Copenhagen in order to be heard as ‘modernist’. [...] The first stage in this process is an acknowledgement of the dual temporal perspective of modernity, the sense that it looks both backwards and forward simultaneously [...] that is, the feeling or experience of modernity presupposes a sense of relative break or disjunction with the past. (Grimley, 2011, p. 8)

Stenhammar’s position in this spectrum will be discussed later. The pivotal twist in this reading of modernism and modernity is that ‘modernism’ is not only about innovation and revolution, but also about historical reflection and performative actualization. In the words of Tobias Janz:

In this sense, musical modernism is not an era of permanent innovation, permanent creative destruction of norms, traditions and conventions. Modernism is also characterized by the archiving and musealization of music, whose continued reflection and performative actualization has then become equivalent to the production of new music, and, as a mode of communication in musical modernity, perhaps even surpassed it in the end. (Janz, 2014, p. 539)⁵

Regarding musical works, this understanding of musical modernism aims to understand how composers themselves actually reflect this ‘dual temporal perspective’ (Grimley) in their compositions. Temporal self-reflection thus becomes a central issue for musical works and their analysis.

To sum up: Musical modernism reflects social, technological and political modernity. The starting point for investigations into musical modernism must take the self-conception of its agents as modern seriously. In order to decentre musical modernism in Europe, applying a transnational perspective seems necessary, opening up for a re-evaluation of musical modernism in Northern Europe. Regarding musical works and their analysis, procedures of temporal self-reflection are at the centre of attention.

Körner prove especially helpful; see e.g. Körner (2017). On global history and transnational history in general, see Conrad and Eckert (2007).

⁵ ‘Die musikalische Moderne ist in diesem Sinne nicht eine Epoche permanenter Innovation, permanenter kreativer Zerstörung von Normen, Traditionen und Konventionen, die Moderne ist ebenso geprägt von der Archivierung und Musealisierung von Musik, deren fortgesetzte Reflexion und performative Aktualisierung dann zu einem der Produktion von neuer Musik ebenbürtigen, ja diese am Ende vielleicht sogar überflügelnden Kommunikationsmodus der musikalischen Moderne geworden ist.’

2. Stenhammar as a European modernist – the Copenhagen–Berlin connection

If we want to trace Stenhammar's self-image as a 'modern' European composer, the first question is: which Europe? A concise answer is given in the source in Fig. 1, a source that to my knowledge never has been considered in Stenhammar research. It is a printed railway map where Stenhammar has drawn black ink lines to mark his travels.⁶

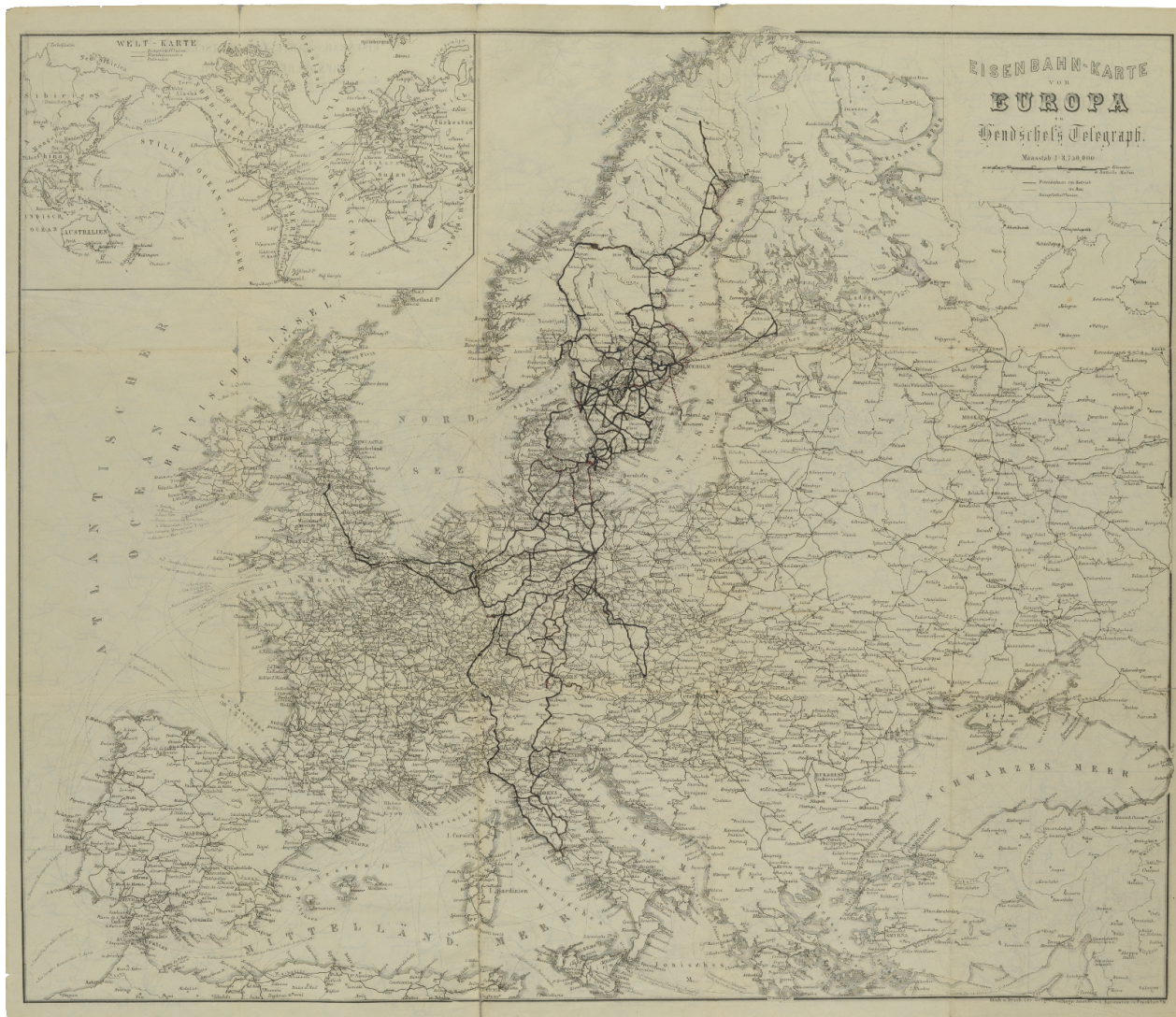


Fig. 1. Map where Wilhelm Stenhammar marked out all his travels (Gothenburg University Library).

⁶ Wilhelm Stenhammar bought his copy of *Henschels Telegraph* supposedly during his study year in Berlin. The marked trips stretch from his trip to southern Germany in the winter of 1892/93 to his tours with Henri Marteau in the 1920s. The description in the Gothenburg University Library register, which reads: 'Karta över Europa där Wilhelm Stenhammar prickat ut samtliga sina resor' ('Map of Europe where Wilhelm Stenhammar marked all his travels') therefore seems quite appropriate. *Kompositören Wilhelm Stenhammars arkiv (H 218)*, Göteborgs universitetsbibliotek.

This map was commonly used by travellers throughout Europe. It was issued at regular intervals by the company 'Hendschels Telegraph' as a supplement to their timetables for trains, boats and stagecoaches, providing essential information, including varying time and distance measures and calculation standards in different countries.⁷

By closer inspection, this map appears as a fascinating source because it can be read as Stenhammar's map of Europe. What we see is a network consisting of nodes and the connections between them. Some central nodes emerge clearly; these are, besides Stockholm, most prominently Copenhagen and Berlin. These cities were, as will be shown below, tightly connected, and not only on this map. In the light of what has been said above, they can be regarded as related sites of modernity and modernism.

Together, they shaped Stenhammar's self-conception as a modern composer in the 1890s, and remained places where he felt understood for the rest of his life.

Before going into further details, it is worth mentioning that Stenhammar's map of Europe also stretches to the south, referring to the turbulent sabbatical in Italy in 1906–07 (cf. Wallner, 1991, vol. 2, pp. 367–375) and to Great Britain, with his trip to Manchester as pianist with his First Piano Concerto in 1903. In 1911, Stenhammar was invited to the London IMS conference via *Musikaliska akademien*, but he declined.⁸ Other destinations were planned, but never reached. Stenhammar's impresario, Henrik Hennings, planned a solo recital for Stenhammar as a pianist in Moscow in the mid-1890s, but it had to be cancelled because it clashed with an Aulin quartet concert tour to Norrland.⁹ Even plans for an opera performance in Paris were in the air, on which a short remark follows later on.

The Danish capital Copenhagen was at the turn of the century a central meeting point for composers aspiring to a 'Nordic' modernism with a European perspective (Smitt Engberg, 2021). Regarding the role of Copenhagen as a forum for a specifically Nordic *musical* modernism, one person merits special attention: Stenhammar's friend, impresario and publisher Henrik Hennings (1848–1923) (Wallner, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 381–390; Haglund, 2019, p. 83). Since Stenhammar's breakthrough with his First Piano Concerto in B minor, a wealth of letters documents their intimate friendship.¹⁰ In the 1890s, Stenhammar was – alongside many other young talents – drawn into Hennings'

⁷ The steam train, one of the most common symbols of technical modernity, was at the centre of the relatively late but powerful wave of modernization and industrialization in northern Europe and especially in Sweden in the late nineteenth century. See Schivelbusch, 1977.

⁸ Stenhammar, letter to Karl Valentin, 27 March 1911, Kungliga Biblioteket (L112:1).

⁹ Stenhammar, letter to Henrik Hennings, 17 October 1895.

¹⁰ In my dissertation, I wrongly stated that their correspondence broke off after the stay in Florence in 1907 (Rotter[-Broman], 2001, p. 40). This was because the letters preserved at the Stockholm Music and Theatre Library's Stenhammar collection end there. But their contact continued, even if less regularly, as shown in a bundle of letters preserved in the Stenhammar collection at the Gothenburg University Library. An edition of Stenhammar's letters would be a very helpful research resource. All letters to Hennings cited in this article are preserved at the Stockholm Music and Theatre Library, unless the Gothenburg University Library is expressly mentioned.

enthusiastic *drive* to promote him and to publish his works. Hennings, in short, initiated Stenhammar's European musical career.

Considering his importance at the nodal centre of a web of Northern European composers in the latter years of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth, it is remarkable how little scholarly attention Hennings has received. He was director of the 'Kongelig Hof-Musikhandel' from 1881, which he acquired in 1887 and renamed several times (1895 'Det nordiske Forlag'; 1902 'Nordisk musikforlag Henrik Hennings'; Wallner, 1991, vol. 1, p. 382). Hennings had close connections with the radical circles in Copenhagen, and even published several more or less short-lived music and theatre journals in this milieu, among them the forum for *Teaterstriden, Reform: Uge-Revue for Theater og Musik* (1889–90, later transformed into the *Revue for Theater og Musik* with Charles Kjerulf as editor), and the *Skandinaviske Signaler for Musik, Theater, Literatur og Kunst* (1895–96), with more pronounced music-related tendencies, proclaiming his Scandinavianist outlook expressly in its title.¹¹

Hennings' Scandinavianist convictions were already apparent in his promotion of the Norwegian composer and conductor Johan Severin Svendsen, who successfully applied for the post of *Hofkapelmester* at the Royal Danish Opera orchestra in 1883 after Niels W. Gade's retirement (Wallner, 1991, vol. 1, p. 382). Hennings even actively participated in Nordic music publishers' commissions in their struggle for just copyright rules within the European music economy together with August Warmuth in Christiania (Hennings, 1889, pp. 388–389), and in the first Nordic music festival in Copenhagen 1888.

Katarina Smitt Engberg has recently mapped out in detail the ideas and convictions of the 'radical' circles in Copenhagen around 1900 often reproached by the establishment for morally dubious *Fritænkeri* (2021, pp. 113–118). With respect to Stenhammar's own background in the 1890s, it is very natural that he responded sympathetically to this environment. We read his enthusiasm for Hennings between the lines from his first letter to him (21 May 1894), where Stenhammar playfully addressed the transgressions between the Danish and Swedish languages using the Danish 'dejlig' ('nice') in the address:

My wonderful ('dejlige') Henrik! A Swedish concert at Berlin, this would be something fantastic ('dejligt'). And I would be extremely happy if I were allowed to play my piece there.¹²

In his autobiographical sketch (1918), Stenhammar recalls his youthful revolt against the establishment in typical *Fritænker* formulations:

Remorseful confirmation period. School work more and more neglected. Lohengrin. Wagner-worship. [...] Encounter with Richard Andersson. Became his pupil in 1887. Alternately finger exercises and Wagner's piano reductions. Meistersinger – Strindberg –

¹¹ For recent research on Scandinavianism, see Hvidt, 1994; Hillström and Sanders, 2014; Hemstad et al., 2018; Glenthøj and Ottosen, 2021.

¹² 'Du dejlige Henrik! En svensk konsert i Berlin, det vore ju något dejligt! Och det skulle glädja mig ofantligt ifall jag finge spela mitt stycke där.'

Tolstoy – Heine – J.P. Jacobsen. Atheism, pessimism, Darwinism. [...] Revolt against school attendance. On May 15th, I left school.¹³

Hennings incorporated not only Stenhammar, but also Aulin and the whole Aulin-quartet, a *clique* of young ambitious Copenhagen-based composers, including Louis Glass, the slightly elder Peder Erasmus Lange-Müller, and even other Swedish composers: Bror Beckman, Emil Sjögren, and Hugo Alfvén. For Stenhammar, the most stimulating figure among this circle was Louis Glass, at the time one of the most aspiring composers of his generation, but today largely forgotten outside Denmark.¹⁴ After having performed Glass' piano trio, op. 19, with Aulin (25 November 1895), Stenhammar wrote to Hennings: 'Many greetings to Glass – he's a genius!' ('Helsa Glass mycket. Han är genial!'), and a year later, Stenhammar expresses his highest esteem of Louis Glass' Piano Quintet in C minor, op. 22 (1895/96), published by Hennings and dedicated to Tor Aulin. Stenhammar and the Aulin Quartet performed the work both in Stockholm (12 January 1897) and in Copenhagen (24 January 1897), still from the manuscript.

After the first Stockholm performance (12 January 1897),¹⁵ Stenhammar wrote:

Glass' quintet is marvellous, but was hissed down awkwardly here. Well, it is not easy to be a gifted composer in these times. If you are, like Glass, original and fearless, and give the best of yourself, then it goes totally wrong.¹⁶

These last words seemingly apply not only to Glass, but also to Stenhammar himself. How their friendship left traces in Stenhammar's string quartets will be addressed later. For the moment, we can conclude that in Hennings' Copenhagen, Stenhammar and Aulin found themselves in good company – in a flock of young Nordic composers in their twenties trying to find answers to up-to-date musical questions.

From Copenhagen, steam trains and boats went at regular intervals to the second node in Stenhammar's Europe: Berlin. Around 1900, Berlin was expanding both economically and culturally (*Gründerzeit*), and the city tried hard – and not always successfully – to compete at all levels with older imperial cities such as London, Paris, and Vienna. Within the broad spectrum of music on display, Stenhammar here developed his own stance towards the possibilities for composers and musicians within the mechanism of modern, i.e., commercialized, musical life. Berlin was at that time the centre of intensive music copyright debates (*Urheberrechtsdebatte*), with Hennings' partner, the impresario Hermann Wolff, at their heart (Hatano, 2020).

¹³ 'Samvetskvad konfirmationstid. Skolarbetet mer och mer försummat. Lohengrin. Wagnerdyrkan. [...] Sammanträffande med Richard Andersson. Elev av denne 1887. Omväxlande fingerövningar och Wagner-klaverutdrag. Meistersinger – Strindberg – Tolstoy – Heine – J. P. Jacobsen. Ateism, pessimism, darwinism. [...] Revolt mot skolgången. Den 15 mars 1888 slutade jag skolan.' (Stenhammar [ca. 1918], pp. 153–154).

¹⁴ For recent research on Louis Glass, see Smitt Engberg, 2021; Røllum-Larsen, 2006, 2020. On Glass' relationship to Stenhammar, see (with problematic value judgements) Wallner, 1991, vol. 1, p. 383.

¹⁵ According to Wallner, vol. 1, p. 350.

¹⁶ Stenhammar, letter to Hennings, 15 January 1897.

Berlin stood not only for commercial intensity but also for a broad spectrum of musical ideals on display. Especially important for Stenhammar were those reigning at the *Königliche Hochschule für Musik*. It has to be mentioned that Stenhammar was never formally enrolled as a student. His name is missing from student lists and other archival sources of the *Hochschule*.¹⁷ This was, though, not uncommon at that time, as Stenhammar took – like many other professionally educated pianists from abroad – private lessons with Heinrich Barth. Still, through his piano lessons and his contacts with other students (including some of his Stockholm friends), Stenhammar gained direct contact to the ideals and aesthetic realms of the *Königliche Hochschule für Musik*. Having acquired high-level standards for the composition and execution of chamber music already in his youth, he found these being extremely supported in Joseph Joachim's Berlin circles. Joachim, as an internationally experienced violin virtuoso, had by the late nineteenth century succeeded in setting his trademark on the *Hochschule*, and served as its director until his death in 1907. From there, Joachim also deeply influenced the city's musical life, i.a. through public concerts with the Joachim Quartet and through the foundation of the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra in which he was involved (Schenk, 2004; Borchard, 2005).

It is in these waters that Stenhammar set sails – spurred by Hennings – to become famous in Europe ('eupeiskt ryktbar', to Hennings 26 July 1906). A significant source, taking us backstage and revealing the conditions of such a career, is Stenhammar's sketch for a *Biographische Notiz*, written to Hennings for a program booklet to a performance of *Snöfrid* op. 5 with the Berlin Philharmonic and Carl Muck in 1897:

Ochs wants biographical notices. What does he want to know? That I was born in Stockholm on 7 February 1871, that my father was an architect and also an organist, a thoroughly-educated musician and good composer, that I finished school when I was seventeen and started to study piano with Richard Andersson, composition with Sjögren, Dente, and Hallén, played piano with Barth in Berlin 1892–1893, have composed [a] piano concerto (which I myself played in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Copenhagen, Stockholm, etc.), a piano sonata and piano pieces, vocal compositions, the opera *Gildet på Solhaug*, *Excelsior!*, three string quartets and much more, that *Snöfrid* was composed in 1891 on an island in Stockholm's archipelago where most of my compositions have seen the light of day, that I am a really good chamber musician (I am, indeed!), that my musical fathers are Beethoven, Wagner, and Franz Beerwald [sic], that, well, what else, isn't that sufficient? Just between you and me, I do not really understand the idea of these biographical notices – they are an expression of this artificial quasi-science that is so typical of modern German musical life. If you would add to the biographical notices that I am a strict enemy to all humbug, however thoroughly German it may be, it would not be against my convictions.¹⁸

¹⁷ Heartfelt thanks to the head of the archives of the Berlin *Universität der Künste*, Dr. Dietmar Schenk, for this information.

¹⁸ 'Ochs vill ha biografiska notiser. Hvad vill han då veta? Att jag är född i Stockholm d. 7 febr. 1871, att min far var arkitekt samt dessutom organist, genombildad musiker och god komponist, att jag vid sjuåttårs ålder öfvergif skolstudierna och började studera klaverspel för Richard Andersson, komposition för

The order of the piano concerto's sites of performance is significant: first Berlin, then Leipzig, Dresden, then Copenhagen and lastly Stockholm. In line with the text's function, the map of musical activities is ordered from a Berlin perspective. What also immediately strikes the reader is the predominance of 'international' genres: piano concerto, piano music, the opera *Gildet på Solhaug*, the overture *Excelsior!*, and three string quartets.¹⁹ If we recall the general reluctance of Stenhammar to praise himself, it is remarkable that he expressly emphasizes his qualities as a chamber musician. Yet, this is consistent with him orienting himself to the Berlin public, even though the performance for which the biographical sketch was requested was of a choral work.

Another interesting instance of Stenhammar's transnational outlook in terms of international genres is *Gildet på Solhaug*, based on Ibsen's play. Stenhammar was fully aware that 'Nordic' literary modernists of the older generation – among them Ibsen and Bjørnson – were seen in Berlin and on the European stages as part of an international modernist literary movement (cf. Grimley and Bullock, eds., 2021). This was true even for Stuttgart, the place of *Gildet's* first performance. We also have to take into account that there existed a European network of musical journals that made these opera performances visible. The *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* reports in 1897 about *La festa di Solhaug's* acceptance at the Berlin Court opera.²⁰ In the end, it took much more time before the Berlin Hofoper premiere finally took place, in 1905.

When Wallner regarded *Gildet's* 1900 Stockholm performance as decisive and all other performances as secondary (Wallner, 1991, vol. 1, p. 580), his premises are open to question. For one, Stenhammar was not at all satisfied with *Gildet's* Stockholm premiere. He was especially upset by the narrow patriotic position of the secretary of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, Vilhelm Svedbom, who (in the wake of the *union crisis*) insisted on a performance in Swedish as *Gillet på Solhaug* to make it – in the

Sjögren, Dente och Hallén, spelade klaver för Barth i Berlin 1892-1893, har komponerat klaverkonsert (som jag själf spelat i Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Kopenhagen, Stockholm etc.), klaver-sonat och klaverstycken, sångkompositioner, operan *Gildet på Solhaug*, *Excelsior!*, trenne stråkkvartetter m.m., att *Snöfrid* är komponerad 1891 ute på en ö i Stockholms skärgård, där de flesta af mina kompositioner sett dagen, att jag är en utmärkt god kammarmusikspelar (det är jag nämligen!), att mina musikaliska fäder heta Beethoven, Wagner och Franz Beerwald [sic], att, ja, hvad mer, kan det inte vara nog? Oss emellan sagdt förstår jag mig inte riktigt på idén med dylika biografiska notiser, – det är en yttring af denna tillgjorda quasi-vetenskaplighet, som är så karaktäristisk för det moderna tyska musiklifvet. Vill du i de biografiska notiserna tillfoga att jag är en afgjort fiende till all humbug, äfven om den är aldrig så tyskt grundlig, så är det mig inte emot.' Stenhammar, letter to Hennings, 21 December 1897.

¹⁹ This counting must refer to the string quartets opp. 2, 14, and the F minor quartet. In 1897, the F major quartet was not yet finished, so the last of the 'three quartets' must mean the F minor. It is unclear when Stenhammar definitively withdrew the F minor quartet, but it must have been after 1904. Cf. Rotter[-Broman], 2001, pp. 62-63.

²⁰ 'L'Opera Reale di Berlino ha accettato un'opera nuova intitolata "La festa di Solhaug", da cui i compositore svedese Wilhelm Stenhammar ha scritto la musica.' *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* 12 August 1897.

terms of the opera administration – a properly ‘Swedish’ work.²¹ Stenhammar voted strongly for Norwegian, being the original language of the drama. For him, *Gildet* was an internationally directed opera project that could pave his way on European stages. In the wishful thinking mode of Henrik Hennings, this ambition stretched even as far as Paris and the *Opéra comique*.²²

Through Stenhammar’s and Hennings’ Berlin network, long-lasting contacts to conductors and composers as Carl Muck, Hans Richter, Paul Juon, and Richard Strauss emerged. These contacts made possible further European connections, e.g. Stenhammar playing with Richter’s Hallé orchestra in Manchester in 1903, or Stenhammar’s membership of the *Genossenschaft deutscher Tonsetzer* in 1909.²³ Even Hennings’ ideas for Stenhammar’s sabbatical at Florence were, according to a letter from Stenhammar to Hennings from April 1907, first developed in an ‘unheated first-class coupé’ in a night train between Berlin and Leipzig.²⁴

3. Being modern as a composer – self-reflection in the String Quartet F major op. 18

Between 1894 and 1916, Stenhammar composed seven string quartets of which he withdrew the chronologically third quartet in F minor (1897), composed between the string quartet no. 2 in C minor (1896) and the F major quartet op. 18 now counted as no. 3 (1897–1900). Stenhammar’s string quartets are eminent contributions to the genre around the turn of the century, not only within Swedish chamber music but also from an

²¹ ‘I am furious, but to no avail – Mr. Svedbom is all the same superior to me – in terms of power, stubbornness, and fat.’ [‘Jag är ursinnig, men hvad hjälper det, – herr Svedbom är mig likväl öfverlägsen – i makt, envishet och fett.’] Stenhammar, letter to Hennings, 20 December 1900.

²² This can be inferred from Stenhammar’s skeptical remarks on a possible performance of *Gildet* in Paris in letters to Hennings 6 March 1899 and 9 March 1899.

²³ Cf. Paul Juon’s letter to Wilhelm Stenhammar 16 May 1912: ‘Sehr verehrter, lieber Herr Stenhammar, Ihr lieber Brief hat mich sehr gefreut. Ich begrüße Sie herzlichst als Mitglied der Genossenschaft. Nun zu Ihren Fragen. Wenn Ihre Verleger auch Mitglieder sind, so brauchen Sie natürlich keine Belege an uns zu senden. [...] Dass es Aulin besser geht, freut mich von ganzem Herzen. [...] Ich freue mich von ganzem Herzen, Sie am 13. Juni bei mir zu sehen und hoffe sehr, dass Sie mir die Freude machen, bei uns Mittag zu essen. Bitte schreiben Sie mir nur, wann Sie in Berlin ankommen und in welchem Hotel Sie absteigen, ich werde Sie dann dort abholen und dann fahren wir zusammen zu mir, damit Sie nicht zu suchen brauchen. Wenn Molander, Blomquist und Claeson mitkommen, so würde mich das sehr freuen. Heute sagte mir Strauss [?], dass Sie mein Triplekonzert aufführen wollen? Das wäre wirklich reizend! Beiliegend ein kleiner “Reklamezettel”! Geben Sie ihn bitte gelegentlich Aulin, es wird ihn interessieren, weil das Stück ihm gewidmet ist. Bitte grüßen Sie Ihre Frau Gemahlin, die Kinder und alle guten Freunde. In herzlichster Freundschaft Ihr Paul Juon.’ (Gothenburg University Library)

²⁴ ‘Låt mig då börja från början eller från den dag då du i en oeldad förstaklasskupé mellan Leipzig och Berlin för mig utvecklade din idé att skaffa mig medel till att i frihet kunna egna mig åt min kompositionsverksamhet.’ Letter från Stenhammar to Hennings, 23 April 1907 (Gothenburg University Library).

international perspective.²⁵ Stenhammar's string quartets display an exceptional level of compositional attainment and can be said to be exemplary as a 'self-critical reflection upon musical language' (Johnson, 2015, p. 7). They are, in short, essentially modernist works. If analysis can contribute to our understanding of Stenhammar as European modernist, which criteria apply? The path advocated here is to take Stenhammar's compositional decisions seriously; more precisely, to regard his unmistakable allusions to preexisting compositions as active, self-conscious choices, not as 'influence' or subservience to uncritically received models.²⁶

In my dissertation, I discussed a variety of self-reflective procedures in Stenhammar's String Quartets nos. 3 to 6 under the term 'historical reflection' ('historische Reflexion', Rotter[-Broman], 2001, pp. 405–406 and *passim*). Since the publication, analytical strategies concerning composing techniques of self-reference and self-reflection have been substantially refined and revised, in accordance with the broadened concept of modernism. The following examples focus on this aspect. The analytical reading of self-referential procedures is indebted to writings by Tobias Janz (2009, 2014, 2019) and Siegfried Oechsle (2011). The aim of the analysis is to show how Stenhammar works from his self-perceived position as a modern composer who is fully aware of the wealth of possibilities he has at his disposal. The central category for this is, as already mentioned, musical self-reflection.

Stenhammar was never a programmatic writer and published no written *manifestos* or *credos*. In this way, his self-image as a composer is best documented in his scores. But he has left some verbal statements which might support a focus on reflective strategies in his compositions.²⁷ In a letter to Olallo Morales in 1900, Stenhammar wrote:

With every day that passes, I am becoming more and more aware that everything within the world of art which is called original, interesting etc. is the purest worthless nonsense. The only, *only* thing needed, being a precondition for all real art, is expressivity. I must know what I mean and then express it in an as naturally expressive way as possible. For that reason, Beethoven is incommensurably great, for that reason, Wagner is a giant.²⁸

²⁵ This paragraph is based on the extensive analyses provided in my doctoral dissertation (Rotter[-Broman], 2001). On Stenhammar's string quartets, see also Krummacher, 2003, pp. 126–129.

²⁶ I would strongly advocate reserving the term 'influence' only to phenomena that in fact are working as unconscious or subordinate 'in-fluences' of values or techniques due to external power or 'father figures'. Cf. the recent contribution from art history by van Brevem (2019).

²⁷ Cf. Rotter-Broman, The string quartets of Wilhelm Stenhammar, *Levande Musikarv/Swedish Musical Heritage*, forthcoming.

²⁸ 'För var dag som går får jag mer klart för mig att allt inom konstens värld som kallas originellt, intressant etc är renaste värdelösaste nonsens. Det enda, enda som är av nöden, och som är villkoret för all verklig konst är uttrycksfullhet. Jag måste veta vad jag menar och sedan uttrycka det på ett så naturligt uttrycksfullt sätt som möjligt. Det är därför Beethoven är så oändligt stor, det är därför Wagner är en jätte.' Stenhammar, letter to Olallo Morales, 5 July 1900. KB Stockholm, Acc 1988/13.

As models for chamber music, he names in other sources Beethoven, Brahms and Franz Berwald.²⁹

From here, we can get a glimpse into Stenhammar's musical aesthetics of the 1890s and 1900s. 'To show what you mean' means to draw creative consequences from your own position encountering musical traditions, genre norms, and musical idioms – across political borders. In his string quartets nos. 3 and 4, Stenhammar comes very near to this ideal, in alluding to the string quartet tradition from Haydn, Beethoven (especially the late string quartets) and Brahms, introducing into the genre his deep familiarity with Wagnerian harmony. Referring overtly to these traditions goes hand in hand with thematizing the actual distance from these traditions. It is this double-facedness which becomes a vital creative force for Stenhammar. Even when internally breaking overtly with norms, the inner unity of the work has to be left untouched. Under these preconditions, the self-imposed compositional task amounts to a serious challenge. The formulation 'to give the best you can give' in the letter about Louis Glass comes to mind.

But how can we transform categories as 'self-reference' or 'self-reflection' into working categories for analytical studies? Oechsle, in his *Selbstreferenz und Selbstreflexion in der Musik*, generally names three criteria that distinguish musical self-reflection from simple references from one piece to another which were common for a long time: Self-reflection (1) integrates several musical-temporal levels into one process,³⁰ (2) makes the compositional subject visible to the listener/player,³¹ and (3) encompasses the work as a whole.³²

All three criteria apply to Stenhammar's Third String Quartet no. 3 in F major, composed 1897 (the first movement) and 1900 (movements 2-4).³³ A case in point is the last movement, which in itself is divided in two parts: It begins with an introductory *fantasia*, followed by a *fugue*. This fugue becomes a kind of 'finale within the finale'. Even if Stenhammar's designations allude to compositional criteria from the eighteenth century, this would not itself prove sufficient as a self-reflective procedure. But its thematic subject contains a signal which unmistakably opens up a second temporal layer: its presentation in the viola leads the thoughts of all chamber music *connoisseurs*

²⁹ Berwald was frequently played by the Aulin Quartet but not until ca. 1900 were his string quartets recognized as valuable contributions to Swedish chamber music. Hennings' first issue of the *Skandinaviske Signaler* 1894 programmatically opened with an article on Franz Berwald by Adolf Lindgren (Lindgren, 1894).

³⁰ 'Eine weitere Ebene der Selbstreferenz ist dann gegeben, wenn zur stofflichen die zeitliche Unterscheidung tritt. [...] Das Moment der Selbstbezüglichkeit gründet hier in der Anwendung des Prozesses auf sich selbst.' Oechsle, 2011, p. 104.

³¹ 'Diese reflexive Wendung macht das Komponieren als Komponieren und damit das kompositorische Subjekt sichtbar. Der Komponist wirft die im Werkverlauf objektivierte Norm über den Haufen und stellt sich darin "über" diese Ebene.' Oechsle, 2011, p. 101.

³² 'Nur wenn ein System sich insgesamt auf sich selbst bezieht, liegt demnach Selbstreflexion vor.' Oechsle, 2011, p. 105.

³³ For the following, cf. Rotter[-Broman] 2001, Chapter 'Reflexion der Gattungstradition und individuelle Zyklusgestaltung in den Streichquartette Nr. 3 F-Dur op. 18 und Nr. 4 a-moll op. 25' (pp. 138-278), especially pp. 184-208.

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directly to the opening measures of Beethoven's String Quartet in C# minor, op. 131. Such an allusion does not simply happen to a composer. It is obvious that Stenhammar wanted it to be perceived by the musically erudite among the audience, knowing that several of them were ambitious quartet players themselves.

The image displays four systems of musical notation for a string quartet. The first system includes the marking 'sotto voce'. The second system has a measure number '51' above the staff and 'sotto voce' below. The third system continues the musical line. The fourth system features the dynamic marking 'p molto' in multiple staves and 'sotto voce' in the bass staff.

Example 1a. Stenhammar, op. 18, Finale, Fugue, bb. 136-157. *Edition Musicalia*, No. 962, N.M.S. 5433. Stockholm: Nordiska musikförlaget, 1961.

Nr. 1

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo

Opus 131

The image shows a single system of musical notation for a string quartet. It includes dynamic markings 'sf > p' in the upper staves. The notation is in a key with three sharps and a common time signature.

Example 1b. Beethoven, op. 131, First movement, bb. 1-7. *Beethoven-Gesamtausgabe, Studien-Edition*, ed. Emil Platen. Munich: Henle Verlag, 2003.

Stenhammar's fugal subject is designed to be heard as a reference to Beethoven and the values he represented. Harmonically, though, Stenhammar marks the temporal difference from Beethoven through chromaticism. The chromatic inflections in the subject already unfold in the first exposition. The half-tone steps make it difficult to perceive a clear tonal centre, implying (in contrast to the accidentals given) a *Db* major or *Bb* minor tonality, and soon induce a chromatic gliding downwards, which in the fugue exposition already leads to altered chords and the lowest regions in the cycle of fifths. Taking such allusions and distancing measures together, listeners perceive three historical layers simultaneously: eighteenth-century *Fantasia-and-Fugue* organ traditions, the late Beethovenian string quartet, and post-Wagnerian chromatic harmony, the latter around 1900 expressly regarded as 'modern', signalling the 'present' time of the work. With this 'pluritemporality' (Fryxell, 2019, p. 289) Stenhammar's procedure signals overtly its self-reflectory condition and thereby accords with Oechsle's first criterion.

The image shows a page of musical notation for Wilhelm Stenhammar's op. 18, Finale, Fugue, Breakthrough and Distancing from the serious "fugue" tone, bb. 253-267. The score is in three systems, each with four staves (treble, alto, tenor, bass). The first system is marked "molto animato" and "rit.". The second system is marked "Sostenuto trionfale" and "Tempo animato". The third system is marked "Tempo animato". The score includes various dynamics such as "ff", "rit.", "menof", "cresc.", and "sostenuto".

Example 2. Stenhammar, op. 18, Finale, Fugue, Breakthrough and Distancing from the serious "fugue" tone, bb. 253-267. *Edition Musicalia*, No. 962, N.M.S. 5433. Stockholm: Nordiska musikförlaget, 1961.

The finale's fugue proceeds through the usual stages with their dramaturgical functions (interlude, development, stretto) providing a relatively straightforward and 'traditional' structure for the 'finale-in-the-finale' model. But the overall question still remains how this 'finale-in-the-finale' could produce a sufficient sense of closure – both for the

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movement and for the four movements as a whole – in other words, how it could solve the finale problem (cf. Oechsle and Kirsch, 2019). This question receives its answer in one of the most intriguing phases in Stenhammar’s quartet production. Stenhammar lets the fugue transgress its self-imposed frames from within – and makes himself thereby heard as the compositional subject, posited not in the past alluded to, but in the present, at the tip of time’s arrow. After a three-fold stretto, the F major tonic breaks through together with an emphatic presentation of the fugue subject, evoking a symphonic breakthrough. Having thus drastically marked the temporal distance from late Beethoven at the pivotal point of the movement, the compositional subject Stenhammar starts to break the Beethoven subject into pieces and to play with them in the most *spirituoso* way, making himself visible and audible as composer. At this point, Oechsle’s second criterion is fulfilled.

The image shows a musical score for the reconstituted theme of the first movement of Stenhammar's op. 18, Finale, Fugue. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of four systems of staves. The first system is marked "Quasi Andante" and features dynamics like "p dolce" and "sfz dim.". The second system is marked "pp dolcissimo" and "dim.". The third system is marked "Tempo animato" and "pp", with "cresc." markings. The fourth system features "f", "p", "dim.", "tr.", "pp", and "ff" dynamics.

Example 3. Stenhammar, op. 18, Finale, Fugue, reconstituted theme of the first movement (“Quasi andante”, b. 322ff.), bb. 318–340. *Edition Musicalia*, No. 962, N.M.S. 5433. Stockholm: Nordiska musikförlaget, 1961.

Finally, at the end of the movement, the composition even matches – in a fascinating manner – the third criterion, requesting that the reflexion should encompass the work as a whole ('aufs Ganze gehen'). The playful transformations mark a decisive break with the 'serious' tone of the fugue and its sphere of 'learnedness'. After this breakthrough, there is, musically speaking, no way back. But where could this fragmented transformation lead, without risking the inner unity? How could a definitive close be reached? Only some twenty bars before the end of the movement, the listener becomes aware that Stenhammar has transformed the finale's motivic material into the main theme of the first movement in its four-part structure. When the first *adagio* theme sounds, rounded up by some playful fragments of the finale, the cycle is closed. Stenhammar's finale solution re-legitimizes the basic material of the whole work from within. Even the opening theme of the work refers to Beethoven, building on motivic models from op. 59 and structural models from op. 135 (for details see Rotter[-Broman], 2001, pp. 143–148).

Stenhammar hence demonstrates that he has all of the late Beethoven characteristics, even when most playfully presented, in an artificially and perfectly handcrafted form at his disposal. It is only here that the first movement's *Quasi andante* theme reaches its final destination. Through temporal self-reflection, Stenhammar achieves the work's inner unity in the 'present', encompassing the work as a whole.

In the aftermath of music critic Wilhelm Peterson-Berger's attacks following the first performance of his Second String Quartet,³⁴ Stenhammar sensed that the circle of potential sympathisers for his ambitious undertaking was rather small. He did not hide his despair from Henrik Hennings when it transpired that even Tor Aulin had been somewhat reluctant concerning the F major quartet.³⁵ But there was still one person on whom Stenhammar relied: his fellow Copenhagen modernist, and the work's dedicatee, the chamber music composer Louis Glass.³⁶

This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion on their friendship and their mutual exchange as composers. As a starting point, one could take a closer look on Louis Glass' String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, op. 23 (1896, revised 1929)³⁷ and Stenhammar's second string quartet in C minor, op. 14, from the same year. Both combine post-Wagnerian harmonic language, Brahmsian motivic-metrical ambivalences, allusions to Grieg's quartet in G minor op. 27, and late-Beethovenian quartet gestures. Both use these elements not as reverences to the past, but they self-consciously conceive musical works that seem forced to ground and legitimate their own musical syntax 'from scratch'. It is this constructive reflection on their own pluritemporal condition of

³⁴ Cf. Wallner, 't- går till anfall' (1991, vol. 1, pp. 503–512).

³⁵ Cf. Stenhammar, letter to Hennings 8 June 1902: 'Would you like to print my latest string quartet that is made in a way that seemingly not even Aulin wants to play it?' ['Skulle du också vilja trycka min sista stråkkvartett, som är så beskaffad att inte ens Aulin tycks vill spela den?'].

³⁶ The dedication is missing from the printed score (Edition Musicalia, No. 962, N.M.S. 5433, Nordiska musikförlaget, Stockholm, 1961).

³⁷ Louis Glass, *Strygekvartet i a-moll*, op. 23, score (ms.). Det Kongelige bibliotek, Copenhagen, Louis Glass collection.

modernity that is in my view decisive for ‘modern’ composers around 1900. In later years, Stenhammar will turn to other strategies of musical self-reflection, especially after his counterpoint studies with Bellermann in the 1910s.³⁸

Conclusion

Even if Stenhammar ultimately decided to settle ‘north of Schleswig’³⁹ – and after 1907 to work as composer and conductor in Gothenburg – this does not diminish his European perspective and his connections with a group of cosmopolitan musicians deeply involved in the musical life of continental metropolises. To regard Stenhammar as a European modernist means to recognize him working within a transcultural framework, striving to contribute through this to ‘our modern Swedish society’.⁴⁰ He shared musical ideals with the peers he met at Stockholm, Copenhagen, Berlin, and elsewhere. And, as a composer, he worked in full consciousness of the wealth of traditions at hand – which he even knew intimately as a performer. Acting within international networks, supported by impresarios and publishers, at a time when travelling across borders by steam train had become a common part of modern life, seems to be the standard framework for this generation of musicians to identify as modern composers.

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Map, ca. 1890 (‘Karta över Europa där Wilhelm Stenhammar prickat ut samtliga sina resor’, based on map from *Henschels Telegraph: Eisenbahn-, Post- und Dampfschiff-Coursbuch*, ca. 1892). Kompositören Wilhelm Stenhammars arkiv (H 218)

Letters from Stenhammar to Hennings, Kompositören Wilhelm Stenhammars arkiv (H 218)

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³⁸ I have analyzed Stenhammar’s strategies of musical self-reflection in the later string quartets nos. 5 and 6, the Symphony op. 34 in G minor, the *Cantata for the Opening of the Stockholm Arts and Industries Exhibition* in 1897 and in *Sången* (Rotter-Broman 2001, 2002, 2004, 2013, 2019, 2020, 2021b).

³⁹ ‘Min plats är norr om Slesvig, det har jag aldrig känt tydligare än nu. För öfrigt blir hela yttervärlden mig mer och mer en plåga, jag längtar inåt!’ Stenhammar, letter to Hennings, 5 August 1902.

⁴⁰ ‘[...] så måste jag säga mig själf, att likväl som jag antagligen skulle vara af oändligt ringa betydelse som producerande konstnär, om jag lefvat – låt oss säga i Tyskland för hundra år sedan, likväl kan jag utföra en stor och betydande mission, fylla ett välberättigat rum inom vår moderna svenska kultur.’ Stenhammar, letter to Hennings, 1 September 1903.

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Abstract

Wilhelm Stenhammar's contributions to Swedish musical life around 1900 are widely acknowledged. But his activities stretched well beyond the Swedish borders. The present article approaches Stenhammar from a transnational perspective, placing him in the broader context of European musical modernism around 1900. Following a clarification of the use of the terms 'modernity' and 'modernism' in the light of recent research on modernism in music, Stenhammar's identity as a European modernist is discussed with special focus on Copenhagen and Berlin. Stenhammar's compositional strategies in the finale of his String Quartet no. 3 op. 18 in F major are then analysed in terms of musical self-reflection, offering a new perspective on his compositional agency with a wealth of musical traditions at his disposal. At a time when travelling across borders by steam train had become a common part of modern life, transcultural interconnectedness seems to be a common framework for musicians to identify as modern composers.

Keywords: Wilhelm Stenhammar, Henrik Hennings, Louis Glass, modernism, modernity, music analysis, self-reflection, European music historiography.

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