
A P A T R I O T I C S O N G
A N D I T S C O N S E Q U E N C E S :
'Du danske Mand' through hundred years¹

By John Fellow

Danish identity has come out for another round and once again has us pinned to the canvas. We now have ourselves a national cultural canon,² which includes the high chair,³ the lego brick, Nielsen's *John the Roadman* (Jens Vejmand) and *The Inextinguishable*: Danishness from the cradle to the grave, and beyond the death of the individual.

Articles, dissertations and books are being written about Danishness in music and literature – and in Sandholmlejrren.⁴ Danish identity is discussed and problematised; some speak for it, some against, some believe in it, others deny its existence; some think that people who view it ironically are nonetheless expressing themselves in terms of Danishness. Whether you are an old Dane nor a new Dane, there is no way of avoiding Danishness. In Denmark eternal Danishness is a fact of life you have to come to terms with. "Follow the law of the land or get out", as the old Danes used to say. In Denmark the law is Danishness: for or against – the choice is yours.

Those of us old enough to have frequented the public Danish school system in the 1950s and 60s already then learned a kind of *modus vivendi* with Danishness. We had grown out of high chairs and lego, and those few of us who discovered *The Inextinguishable* made that discovery outside school and as a contrast to all the pop music that most of us, also away from school, surrendered to. There was no music education at state

1 This article is based in part on a talk given in the Concert Hall of Danish Radio on 3 October 2001 to mark the 70th anniversary of Nielsen's death.

2 In December 2004, the Danish Minister for Culture, Brian Mikkelsen, announced plans to compile a cultural canon for Denmark. Seven committees, each consisting of five members, were formed, with a remit to choose 12 works that would define what is characteristic and distinctive about each of the arts in Denmark (the music committee in the end chose 12 popular and 12 classical works). 175,000 copies of the resulting book were published in August 2006 and made available free to schools and colleges.

3 Nanna Ditzel's design of 1955 was famous in Denmark for introducing high-quality design into furniture for children.

4 Formerly a barracks in the north of Zealand, now accommodation for asylum seekers.

primary and lower-secondary schools in those days. While Shakespeare, Goethe and Dostoevsky were at least named, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms did not exist. At school we had singing lessons, in which we learned and sang hymns, psalms and Danish folk-songs *ad infinitum*, in every single singing class and sometimes also in some of the other lessons. How many times we sang Nielsen and Drachmann's *Thou Danish Man* (Du danske Mand), no one can say; it was certainly many times, and it was not an expression of any form of conscious acknowledgment of any form of Danishness.

We knew the words by heart. Psalm verses and rote learning had been part of our education from the first day at school. There was not so much beating about the bush then; learning and understanding did not always have much to do with one another. We learned psalm verses the way the Chinese digitise Danish dictionaries: error-free transcription, precisely because we understood nothing. On the other hand, many years later walking down the street we might suddenly be reminded of the old words and with wonder understand the deeper meaning in the impossible sentence, 'The Lord himself on Zion's mountains is shield and sword for his people.'⁵ What a load of drivel we learned back then – so most of us probably thought – while one of us perhaps got annoyed over the fact it had taken so long to reach the foothills of Zion, now that he finally understood. Maybe one day in the middle of a street in China the light will dawn on a Chinaman, and he will realise that he has a problem with Danishness.

We didn't have any problem with understanding the text of *Du danske Mand*, and when we got to it yet again just before the bell rang to signal the end of the lesson, we suddenly woke up and bawled along with cheerful irony 'about our old mother'.⁶ Perhaps we had to sing *Thou Danish Man* so often because the old teacher had realised that with this song he could even get the apathetic boys to join in the choir. No one took *Thou Danish Man* entirely seriously. If anyone had asked us whether we were sitting there with our bawling and asserting our connection with Danishness, or on the other hand whether we perhaps believed that we were undermining Danish identity with our irony, we would undoubtedly have answered, once we had stopped to think about it: 'the latter!'; and immediately we would have felt a touch of bad conscience about poking fun at the nation's past.

Times were changing; nationalism was passé, the future was becoming international, not yet global, and this development fortunately allowed us easily to forget everything about bad conscience and sacrilege with regard to *Thou Danish Man*.

Then in the early 1970s came the campaign for and against Denmark's membership of the Common Market. In spite of developments, half of the Danish population,

5 *Herren selv på Sions Bjerger for sit folk er skjold og værg.*

6 The first line of the song reads *Du danske Mand! Af al din Magt syng ud om vor gamle Mor!* [Thou Danish man, with all thy might, sing out about our old Mother [i.e. the homeland]].

not least those on the left wing – by contrast with today, where it is those on the right – with an elderly historian, Palle Lauring, and a young psychedelic poet, Ebbe Kløvedal, in the lead, proved to be more Danish than their parents or grandparents (who for the most part had never been outside Denmark's borders) had been in two world wars that had each threatened Denmark's existence as an independent state. Just as the national syndrome was about to die out, it had re-emerged; that ability seems to be one of Danish identity's most distinguishing features.

Carl Nielsen had not yet become 'The Dane' he was to become in the 1990s, but his Danishness had become an increasing problem for Danes. For although he was as great as the greatest – and besides was the only great composer Danish children got to know in school, not because he had written his great music, but because he had also written his little (Danish) songs – wasn't he also so quintessentially Danish that he did not have a real chance outside the Danish duck-pond? Was it now because we feared that he was not really so good that others could also take delight in him? Or was it rather that we wanted to have him for ourselves and did not want to part with him or risk being forced to change our perception of him?

We had had some help from a world-famous American, thus demonstrating our internationalism in opposition to provincialism. Leonard Bernstein had been in Copenhagen for the composer's centenary in 1965, had performed the *Sinfonia espansiva*, rubbed off the edges, inflated him into a fat romantic, so that every Dane who knew a little about classical music could hear that he was just as good as Dvořák or Brahms. This reassured the Danes, or the small sector of them that made up the musical public of the time; at last they could hear how great he was and feel convinced. The belt held, although this kind of treatment represented a reduction of his musical personality, sanctioned by international celebrity.

Anyone could say to themselves – but they didn't – that the cloud of Danish incense surrounding their composer would have to blow away sooner or later. The old who had dragged his legacy around with them, who had their roots in or close to the composer's own time, were dying out. Danes were also, like civilised people in many other parts of the world, in the process of hastily exploiting the countryside, building little detached houses, roads, factories and institutions, destroying nature and agriculture, at the rate of 30 to 40 hectares a day for decades, not to mention the transformation of the remaining agriculture. It became harder and harder to sing 'I know a larks' nest'. It was no longer to be taken for granted that children would have seen a lark, never mind its nest, which a few decades earlier we had learned to take care not to tread on. The song composer's image of Denmark was rapidly changing.

Then after decades of waiting there finally appeared in 1991 a new book about this composer, entitled *Carl Nielsen, the Dane*.⁷ The 'little great Dane' the man was now

7 Jørgen I. Jensen, *Carl Nielsen – Danskeren*, Copenhagen 1991.

called on every page; now he was not only the composer of *Thou Danish Man* but the very incarnation of *Thou Danish Man*. But here it is time to get off the Danish wave and go back to find one of its points of origin: *Thou Danish Man* and its appearance 100 years ago.

1906 was not only the year of the premiere of the opera *Maskarade*, for the most part composed the previous year, which both proclaimed and made an issue of democratisation and equality; it was also the year in which the patriotic song *Thou Danish Man* was composed, performed and published (see Fig. 2), and began its triumphant sweep through Danish song and choral societies, thereby coming to represent the definitive breakthrough to the public at large for the high-culture composer.

There was a good deal of national incense in the air that year, not only in Denmark (where Christian IX, who had been King since 1863, died, and Frederik VIII was proclaimed King from the balcony on Amalienborg⁸), but also in Norway and Sweden, which had been united until Norway became independent the previous year.

In Denmark it had happened that when the assembled crowd on the Amalienborg courtyard on 30 January was due to break into song after the new King had been proclaimed, they divided into two groups. Some sang *Kong Christian* (King Christian), even though the king was now called Frederik, while others broke into *Det er et yndigt Land* (There is a beautiful country), perhaps because the king was no longer called Christian. The episode did not become an inspiration for Charles Ives, who had enough to do with musical collisions in public spaces in America; but it did unleash a great debate in the Danish papers about our patriotic songs. Among those who took part was Professor Vilhelm Andersen,⁹ the librettist of *Maskarade*, but not Carl Nielsen – at least not directly.

In Norway and Sweden the dissolution of the union had set national impulses free, not only in Norway which could finally enrol in the company of nation states, but also in Sweden, which now experienced its geographical reduction, just as Denmark had in 1864.¹⁰ It was symptomatic that in 1905 Wilhelm Stenhammar wrote and premiered his cantata *One People* (Ett Folk), in which he composed the national hymn ‘Sweden, Sweden, Sweden, our native land, / place of our longing, our home on earth!’¹¹

In 1906 for the first time a special Swedish music festival was held in Stockholm, at the end of May and the beginning of June. Nielsen was staying in Stockholm, and not only arranged contact with *Politiken*, which sent a correspondent, but also himself wrote an article about the music festival for the same paper. Here he dealt

8 The residence of the royal family in Copenhagen.

9 ‘Vore Nationalsange’ [Our National Songs], *Politiken*, 4.3.1906.

10 Following military defeat at the hands of Prussia.

11 ‘Sverige, Sverige, Sverige fosterland, / vår längtans bygd, vårt hem på jorden!’

with the national idea, and since *Thou Danish Man* must have been composed at the same time or immediately after the article, it may not be entirely irrelevant to see what the composer wrote on this occasion:

There is therefore a danger for art in the national element, and the more this quality is conscious, the greater the danger.

As soon as one begins to finger and paw lasciviously at this gentle creature, good and healthy art has had it. The national element must warm, colour and as it were breathe its spirit into art, but it dare not in any way become its Alpha and Omega. So it was very disappointing to read the invitation in the Danish press a little while ago to take part in a competition for an overture along the lines of earlier works of this kind. It is quite incomprehensible that this invitation should have come from an excellent musician, and moreover a creative artist. The recipe for such a work would probably go roughly as follows: take one part Andantino in six-eight metre, one part minor mode and one part Danish stewed pears marinated overnight; stir well together, place over a gentle flame and simmer for approx. 20 minutes, and so on. But joking aside. What I mean is this: set no store by false piety, but only by good art. The national tone will come about of its own accord; indeed it is something we can hardly deny, even if we wanted to.¹²

The competition Nielsen refers to was arranged by the Danish Concert Society on the initiative of the returned émigré Dane, Asger Hamerik, and the prize of 1.000 kroner was shared between the composers Ludolf Nielsen and Joachim Bruun de Neergaard, for works that not a single person knows today. No, Nielsen did not enter the competition with his *Maskarade* Overture, and not only because it had not yet been composed but was only done at the last moment for the premiere in November. In any case it would hardly have been received as truly Danish, even though curiously enough *Maskarade* has since been described more than once as a Danish national opera!

In the first full biography of Nielsen there is a story about the origins of *Thou Danish Man*.¹³ Its point is that Nielsen composed the melody without knowing the text. The story cannot be entirely substantiated from the existing sources, but neither is it contradicted by them. With this story as a starting-point, and supplemented by other sources, the following picture can be assembled:

12 'Svensk Musikfest' [Swedish Music Festival], *Politiken* 14.6.1906, reproduced in John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen til sin samtid*, Copenhagen 1999, 89.

13 Torben Meyer & Frede Schandorf Petersen, *Carl Nielsen, Kunstneren og Mennesket*, Copenhagen 1947-48, vol. 1, 286-287.

In 1906 the music hall writers Anton Melbye and Johannes Dam had decided to create an alternative show for Tivoli, which they called *The Summer Journey, a Copenhagen Vaudeville* (Sommerrejsen, en Kjøbenhavner-Vaudeville). In years to come it continued to play in the Tivoli Theatre, under the same title but with new musical numbers. The music was supplied by Olfert Jespersen, the café musician and composer of popular music, who as a young man had met Carl Nielsen in Odense, had been a guest in his little digs and had played there with him the violin sonata which the young military musician had composed, whereupon he had immediately recognised Nielsen's genius and had pushed to get him to Copenhagen and the world of great music. That had been the beginning of a lifelong friendship; Jespersen died shortly after Nielsen.

Olfert Jespersen's memoirs also tell us about *Thou Danish Man*, but he mixes up his own satirical patriotic song, *In little sea-encircled Radadulistan* (I det lille havomkranste Radadulistan), which does not come from the 1906 first version of *The Summer Journey*, together with *Thou Danish Man*, which indeed – rather like a draft for the little sea-encircled Radadulistan! – includes the line 'a circle of sea and fjord was laid around the house...'.¹⁴ That makes him useless as a source, even though Nielsen's preface to the memoirs calls the book 'truthful as rust-free steel'.¹⁵ The only trustworthy thing in Olfert Jespersen's report is probably the fact that he had nothing to do with *Thou Danish Man*, but that, as he writes, it was 'a kind of secretiveness that the authors of the text intended'.¹⁶

One day Melbye and Drachmann had been together in a café, according to *Politiken*. They had been talking about the issue of national song, which was much in the air at the time, and Melbye said to Drachmann: 'Well, after all you should write us the new patriotic Fatherland song!' 'If only I had the opportunity,' replied the bard. 'Aha, an opportunity,' said Melbye. 'If you really want an opportunity, then I'm writing a play at the moment, and I could certainly use a patriotic song there; there's your opportunity!'¹⁷

Drachmann was 60 that year, and the occasion was to be marked by a ceremonial performance at The Royal Theatre. Nielsen was engaged to write the music to the play *Sir Oluf, he rides*– (Hr. Oluf han rider–), which Drachmann was working on for the occasion. It ended up being a hectic time, with concurrent rehearsals for both *Maskarade* and *Sir Oluf*, which was to have its premiere a month before that of *Maskarade* on 11 November. *Sir Oluf* was to be one of Nielsen's most extended scores, though not a success; but that is another story.

Just as the collaboration between poet and composer was about to begin, Drachmann appeared one day in June, so the biography tells us, and invited Nielsen

¹⁴ *En krans af hav og fjord blev lagt om huset ...*

¹⁵ *Sandfærdig som rustfrit Staal.*

¹⁶ Olfert Jespersen, *Oplevelser* [Experiences], Copenhagen 1930, 127.

¹⁷ *Politiken*, 28.6.1906.

for lunch at the Langelinie Pavilion. ‘When they were waiting for their coffee,’ the story goes, ‘and countless funny stories had seasoned the meal, Drachmann said “Nielsen, let’s make a damned fatherland song!” On the menu he drew up a “mask”-verse, beginning with the nonsense lines:

A man was walking across Vesterbro¹⁸
He had a red skullcap on ...

Before they parted Nielsen was humming the melody to himself. And that is how *Thou Danish Man* came into the world.’¹⁹

On 26 June at 21.45 the premiere of *A Summer Journey* took place in Tivoli’s Theatre Hall, and the names of Holger Drachmann and Carl Nielsen were not on the poster.

‘It was like a Revue premiere, but without the Revue,’ wrote *Nationaltidende* the next day. ‘All the well-known faces, row upon row in the stalls – the whole pure-Copenhagen rose-bed.’ Whether poet and composer also adorned the bed, the story does not tell. The patriotic fatherland song was the first number in the show.

It began as a proper vaudeville in the old style, right down to a proper fatherland song, which insofar as one could hear the text, was really beautiful. We are on an American steamship, which one evening is sweeping past the gentle Zealand coastline, and we get to know a stout butcher lady, who has fallen in love with an actor returning home from an American tour, and her two daughters, who have attached themselves to a tenor and a lay-preacher. At some moments there is a real atmosphere, at others we are entertained by deftly invented tricks. And when the act ends, with the help of a movable backdrop – which will create a perfect illusion when the machinery works better – by giving us a changing view over the straits,²⁰ there is real excitement in the audience.²¹

It was Henry Seemann in the role of engineer Carsten Holst, the returning émigré, who sang *Thou Danish Man*. *Politiken* wrote in its review that he ‘sang as meltingly and believably as only a young, honest, Danish road-maker with full beard, trusting spaniel eyes and loose cuffs could do.’ The ladies contributed to enhancing the mood: ‘Miss Jutta Lund and Mrs Buemann swelled in competition, so that one’s heart warmed on their behalf, and the latter appeared at some points in a Spanish costume, which certainly

18 Part of central Copenhagen; literal translation: “Western Town Gate”.

19 Meyer & Schandorf Petersen, *op. cit.*, 286.

20 The Øresund: the straits separating Zealand from the southern Swedish province of Skåne.

21 *Nationaltidende*, 27.6.1906.

represented the far limits of daring for Tivoli, which is to say not so overwhelming, even though the little lady had neglected to do herself up at the back.²²

It was Miss Jutta Lund in the role of the butcher's widow Caroline Lassen, who after the patriotic song performed her song about *Poor Lassen* (Salig Lassen) – in waltz time, with music by Olfert Jespersen and text by Anton Melbye and/or Johannes Dam. The first verse went:

Poor Lassen really was a good man,
Nor was he disappointed in me,
Yes, but to love a dead husband,
No, I'm damned if I will.
Ah, but think, what he said a few minutes before
His soul flew up to heaven:
Line [i.e. Caroline], before I die,
Listen well now,
I'm damned well asking you:
Not to re-marry.
My God, I obeyed my husband oh so often,
But God knows, the dead can go too far,
Shall you now, poor widow, be a wallflower?
Not on your life, Lassen!
My God, I obeyed my husband all too often,
But God knows, the dead can go too far,
Shall you now, poor widow, be a wallflower?
Not on your life, my friend!

Two days later several Copenhagen newspapers revealed who the creators of *Thou Danish Man* were. The whole thing has the look of a certain calculation on the part of Tivoli and the authors of the revue. Then not many days went past before the question arose of publishing the song separately. Anton Melbye wrote to Nielsen on a Sunday shortly after the premiere – which would make the date in all probability 1 July 1906:

My dear composer!

Thank you for the song – I would have thanked you more effusively, had it been heard to better advantage that evening, but tenors and block-heads seem nine out of ten times to be one and the same. Be that as it may (as it happens the song is more and more of a success every evening, and it may well be that

²² *Politiken*, 27.6.1906.

it will become something like what we were aiming for, even though Drachmann didn't find the right words) I am in no doubt that the melody is first-rate and will carry the song aloft.

Of course you won't have anything against the song's appearing with your music in a special edition from Wilhelm Hansen, will you? Wouldn't it be an idea for your wife to design a front cover, so that we can avoid the terribly banal drawings Hansen so often comes up with.

Herewith the text. Please be so good as to get the song done as soon as possible.²³

This seems to confirm that the story of Drachmann's "mask"-verse as the basis for Nielsen's melody has some foundation or other in reality; why else should Nielsen have had the text sent to him at this late stage? But the text that was enclosed with the letter has not survived. The surviving autograph in the Carl Nielsen Collection²⁴ – a printer's copy with corrections in Drachmann's hand to the text in the first and second verses – is undated, and in all probability it was prepared after the premiere and after Nielsen had received the text with Anton Melbye's Sunday letter. A surviving pencil draft is similarly undated (see Fig. 1),²⁵ but corrections in the underlaid text (for instance, '*Syng ud hver Dansk*' [Sing out, every Dane] corrected to '*Du danske Mand*') may indicate that the text was created for and adapted to the notes. Besides, the draft originally belonged to Henrik Knudsen,²⁶ who may also be supposed to be the source of the story about the origins of *Thou Danish Man*.

An undated manuscript of the text in Holger Drachmann's hand is also preserved.²⁷ According to a note on the envelope it comes from Anton Melbye's widow, and it may be assumed to have been the basis both for the text that Henry Seemann sang at the performance and for the one that Melbye sent Nielsen with his Sunday letter. This manuscript must have come into being after Nielsen's sketch, which is the only source to disclose the variant opening words, and before the printer's copy, in which Drachmann made corrections in relation to his manuscript, as for example in the last line of the second verse: from '*Saa straal'er Livets Friskhed som Frihedens lyse Skat*' (Thus shines the freshness of life, like the bright treasure of freedom) to the familiar '*Saa lyser Livets friskhed fra Frihedens dyre Skat*' (Thus the freshness of life is lit up by the precious treasure of freedom).

In the printer's copy Nielsen originally gave the third verse in accordance with the Drachmann manuscript we know, with the last three lines thus:

23 DK-Kk, CNA 1ab.

24 DK-Kk, CNS 130a.

25 DK-Kk, CNS 130d.

26 Cf. DK-Kk, CNS 254, K 1.

27 DK-Kk, NKS 2936 4°. My thanks to Elly Bruunshuus Petersen for drawing this manuscript to my attention.

If the farmer has tilled the land
Then he meets the water:
There the Danish sailor steadily keeps guard like a Viking²⁸

Then he crossed out these lines and wrote the words we know:

And as the plough furrows the land,
So the keel plies the water.
Patiently the Danish sailor stands his Viking-Guard at the sea ²⁹

In Drachmann's manuscript, written in ink, the third verse is crossed out and re-written in its final version in pencil. In the printer's copy Drachmann signed Nielsen's correction of the last three lines, and it is hard not to conclude that these lines are the work of Nielsen, subsequently approved by Drachmann. Nielsen too, so it seems, felt that Drachmann had not 'found the right words', as Melbye wrote. There is some evidence that Henry Seemann sang various versions of the text before it was finalised.

A letter from Melbye to Drachmann of 7 June may be the first eye-witness evidence of the process that led to *Thou Danish Man*. Melbye had just been visited by Nielsen, who had just returned from the Swedish Music Festival in Stockholm, and he asked Drachmann for a meeting of all three men the next day, 'in connection with the matter you probably know about'.³⁰ We do not know whether this meeting came to anything, whether Melbye's letter perhaps led to the above-mentioned lunch at the Langelinie Pavilion, or whether the facts are altogether otherwise. In any case, on 17 June a melody was composed for a song, whose title was *Du danske Mand*, and with which Melbye was apparently (still) not satisfied. For Nielsen wrote:

Dear Anton Melbye!

The conclusion of the melody cannot be otherwise, if it is going to make proper sense: but in case H.D. has another poem I dare say I can toss off a completely new one, perhaps also invent others [i.e. melodies] for *Thou Danish Man*, but I think as a whole the thing isn't so bad as it stands.

In haste, your

Carl Nielsen³¹

28 *Har Bonden pløjet Landet / Saa mødes han med Vandet: / Dèr ta'r den danske Sømand som Vikingen støt sin Vagt*

29 *Og furer Ploven Landet, / Saa skurer Kølen Vandet, / Støt staar den danske Sømand paa Havet sin Viking-Vagt*

30 DK-Kk, NKS 4653 4°.

31 DK-Kk, NKS 4619 4°, and Irmelin Eggert Møller & Torben Meyer, *Carl Niensens breve*, Copenhagen 1954, 76.

C II, 10 [Carl Nielsen]

Syng ind ~~her~~ ~~den~~ af al din Magt: ~~For~~ ~~syng~~ om vor gam-le
Du dan-ske Mand syng ind

Men en Krans af ~~Stær~~ ~~og~~ ~~Sjæne~~ ~~blev~~ ~~lagt~~ ~~om~~ ~~Her~~ ~~og~~ ~~her~~ ~~hvor~~ ~~hvor~~ ~~hvor~~
hvor hun

bor! Med grøn-ne ~~side~~ ~~stær~~ - de grøn ~~stær~~ ~~de~~ ~~stær~~ - de

Den - de og o - vor Kor - nits Guld - glans stær Vi - kong - ste - men

Kor
Vagt, stær Vi - kong - ste - men Vagt!
Vi - kong - ste - men Vagt!

(1946-47. 399 a.)

FIG. 1: Nielsen's sketch of Thou Danish Man. The Royal Library, Copenhagen, CNS 130d



FÆDRELANDSSANG

af HOLGER DRACHMANN

Musik af **CARL NIELSEN**

TITELBILLEDET AF HANS NICOLAI HANSEN

Forlæggerens Ejendom for alle Lande

WILHELM HANSEN, MUSIK-FORLAG, KØBENHAVN & LEIPZIG

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II

Arkiv-Eksemplar

13869

FIG. 2: Song of the Fatherland. (*Fædrelandssang*). Title page of the first edition from 1906 of Nielsen's song, "Thou Man of Denmark". See music and text on the following pages

Det er forbudt Biblioteker,
Skoler, Lærerskoler, For-
eninger eller lignende at ud-
laane eller udleje dette Værk
uden Forlagets Tilladelse.

Fædrelandssang.

CARL NIELSEN.

SANG. *Tempo giusto.* *mf*

1. Du dan - ske Mand! af al din Magt syng

PIANO. *f* *mf*

ud om vor gam - le Mor! En Krans af Hav og Fjord blev lagt om

Hu - set, hvor hun bor: Mod grøn - ne, si - de Stran - de gaar

p

stær - ke, stri - de Van - de, og o - ver Kor - nets Guld - glans staar

Kor. *f* *poco rall.*

Vi - kin - ge - ste - nen Vagt, staar Vi - kin - ge - ste - nen Vagt.

2.

Syng ud - og Sorg fra Fortids Nat
 Blir Smil paa hver Glædesdag,
 Vor Himmel skifter Farve brat
 Men aldrig Folkets Flag.
 Som Danmarks blide Kvinder
 Har røde-hvide Kinder
 Saa lyser Livets Friskhed i: fra Frihedens dyre Skat. :)

3.

Vort gamle Land! af al vor Magt
 Vi øger din Rigdoms Ring,
 Gaar fremad seigt og uforsagt,
 Om ej i store Spring.
 Og furer Ploven Landet,
 Saa skurer Kølen Vandet
 Støt staar den danske Sømand i: paa Havet sin Viking - Vagt. :)

HOLGER DRACHMANN.

Two months after the premiere of *The Summer Journey*, more precisely on 28 August 1906, Wilhelm Hansens Musikforlag announced the publication of Holger Drachmann's and Carl Nielsen's 'Patriotic Song' in *Politiken* and elsewhere. The song could now be purchased for 75 øre. In the same announcement, a piano score of extracts from Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* was advertised at 2 kroner. The operetta had been conquering the world since its premiere in Vienna on 30 December 1905, and ten days before Hansens' advertisement it had been staged in Copenhagen, on 18 August at the Casino Theatre, where Lehár himself conducted. Later that same year Nielsen said laconically in a lecture that there could be no comparison between 18th-century composers and luminaries of the day – 'not even excepting the composer of *The Merry Widow*'.³²

Thou Danish Man also appeared in an edition for mixed choir, arranged by the composer, in the coming years becoming standard repertoire in most Danish choral societies, and we may safely say that the original circumstances were forgotten. In a curious way the song does, however, play a role in an episode retold seven years later by the actor Johannes Nielsen on the way to Oslo, in a letter from a Scandinavian-American Line steamship. The movable backdrop in the Tivoli revue is replaced by the real Danish landscape, and what was originally a return home is now a voyage away:

Dear Carl!

I'm on a lightning trip to Christiania [Oslo] by steamship. Just now (9 in the evening) I was standing on deck and heard a flock of émigrés singing farewell to Denmark with remarkable, melancholy enthusiasm. Last and loudest they sang Carl Nielsen's *Du danske Mand*. That made me think of you and about the significance of good art as a binding force between human minds. So, my greetings to you this evening. I know that ten Danes – young and not so young on the way to meet their fate – have said farewell to the past in tones that first sounded in your – dare I say it? – heart. Mine was glad to hear it. The whole thing was so artless and beautiful. At two o'clock when we were sailing along, tears ran down their cheeks; now their pains fade away in simple harmonies – a farewell in which gratitude shines and which awakens strength and hope – kind, good folk, the West Jutlanders. I wanted to chat to them, but they were taciturn and drew back. I hope it amuses you to hear that you gave their feelings a good course to follow.

Greetings to you and yours!

Yours sincerely

Johannes³³

³² John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen til sin samtid*, Copenhagen 1999, 60.

³³ DK-Kk, CNA 1Ab, Johannes Nielsen to Carl Nielsen 20.2.1913.

After Nielsen's death *Thou Danish Man* was daily fare in Danish folk high schools and public primary schools³⁴ and everywhere where there was mass singing. During the Nazi occupation it also became part of a general version of mass singing (the so-called "alsang"), and when Einar Nørby made his famous recording on 26 October 1943, it was during the rescue operation for Danish Jews, which marked the move among the Danish population towards support for the line of resistance. The closing lines, 'Steadily the Danish sailor stands his Viking-Guard at sea' then made *Thou Danish Man* into a song of struggle and mobilisation.

We can conclude: When those of us who were only born after the Second World War – after the culmination and eventual defeat of nationalist hysteria, as we believed at that time – ironically bawled out *Thou Danish Man* in Danish schools in the late 1950s and early 60s, we were, without realising it, in closer contact with the song's original context than our elders had been, for whom the song had been a serious matter and for whom it meant so much.

Thou Danish Man came into being as a result of the *Maskarade* pranks; it could have been sung by Henrik in the opera! Of course we could not have guessed that. We knew *Thou Danish Man* and the other songs before we got to know the opera – if we ever did get to know it; for most of us the slide into the world of commercial West-European music intervened. The bawling of the song was combined with a certain delightful feeling of guilt and for me it was a revelation many years later to discover the true – ironic – context of the story and the song.

The transformation process of *Thou Danish Man* began already with its publication. It was not Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen who designed the cover, as Anton Melbye had suggested it should be. Instead it was provided with an ordinary – Danish – picture by Hans Nicolai Hansen: in the foreground was the corner of a cornfield and a grave from olden days, in the middle a farmer's and a fisherman's house and two large windblown trees. How this illustration came about, and whether there was any conflict involved, we do not know, but there certainly is a story to tell concerning a similar matter:

In 1924, eighteen years after *Thou Danish Man*, Nielsen edited *Melodies for the Songbook "Denmark"* for Wilhelm Hansens Forlag.³⁵ From the surviving correspondence we can see that he himself thought that he and the publishers had an agreement that he and wood-engraver Frederik Hendriksen could decide how the title page should look. Joakim Skovgaard was considered for the job, but he did not have

34 The folk high schools ("Folkehøjskoler") were based on the ideas of N.F.S. Grundtvig, originally attracting farmers' sons and daughters in their teens and twenties. The teaching was based on what Grundtvig called "the living word", concentrated on Danish history and literature. It was Grundtvig's way of enlightening the Danish rural population.

35 Carl Nielsen & Hakon Andersen *Melodier til Sangbogen "Danmark"*, Copenhagen 1924.

time, and Nielsen therefore got his daughter Anne Marie Telmányi (known as Søs) to make some sketches, including singing children's heads for the front, and for the reverse a cupid riding on the back of a singing lark. Nielsen and Hendriksen were both happy with this proposal.

But the publishers were not. For such a songbook they wanted a *Danish* motif, 'something along the lines of *The Ploughman*,³⁶ for example', and they proposed the illustrator Kristian Kongstad. That suggestion provoked the following characteristic piece of prose from Nielsen:

This songbook was interesting for me to produce, and I want it to appear both externally and internally in an artistic spirit. So far as the title-page is concerned, I cannot permit that a fourth-rate artist (as has been named) should produce it. I prefer an artistic hand over a nice and smooth but meaningless drawing. I would remind you that my Chaconne, [Theme and] Variations and Second [Violin] Sonata are only provided with the simple letters, in modest by no means poor taste. That is far preferable to pictures and drawings when they show no talent. In the world of books as a rule a certain traditional culture has been retained, but if we look at music shop-windows all over Europe, what we have to put up with is so hideous, stupid, tasteless and surpassingly nonsensical, that it beggars description. Since my early youth I have mixed with visual artists more than with musicians (my friends include the painters Tuxen, the Anchers, Willumsen, [Johannes] Kragh, Karl Madsen and others), so Hr. Asger Wilhelm Hansen can probably rest assured and keep to the agreement, namely that I, together with Hr. Hendriksen and some artist or other, can sort this little matter out.³⁷

But the publishers dug their heels in. Then Nielsen declared that he could not 'prevent the firm from going back on its agreement and making a new title page. But I hereby inform you that the songbook cannot be published for the present, since I shall at least have to withdraw my new melodies and replace them with other existing ones.'³⁸

The firm answered that they had approached Joakim Skovgaard in connection with the design of the title page, and that they intended to bring out the songbook in accordance with the contract of 11 April. What then transpired between the parties, the surviving correspondence does not reveal, but Skovgaard presumably still did not have time, or else he did not want to get embroiled in such an inflammatory situa-

36 Famous painting by Peter Hansen (1868-1928), one of the 'Funen Painters'.

37 Carl Nielsen to Wilhelm Hansen 27.6.1924 (DK-Kk, Wilhelm Hansen Archive).

38 Carl Nielsen to Wilhelm Hansen 6.8.1924 (DK-Kk, Wilhelm Hansen Archive).

tion, and six days later the publishers informed the composer, who was staying in Skagen, that they had that same day ‘written to Søs and invited her to draw a title with a Danish motif for the Collection of *Melodies for the Songbook “Denmark”*’.

For those Danes old enough to have forgotten it, and those younger ones who have never had the *Collection of Melodies for the Songbook ‘Denmark’* in their hands: the drawing on the title page shows a Danish landscape with the sun rising over the horizon, and in the foreground a farmer with a plough drawn by two energetic horses: in other words a proper Danish ploughman, drawn not by the fourth-rate artist named, but by Anne Marie Telmányi, i.e. by artistic, yet tied hands! And the moral of the story: even the greatest are powerless against the spirit of the times.

With *Thou Danish Man* something happened with Nielsen’s relationship to his target group, to put it in modern terms. He, who came neither from the upper class, nor from the middle class or the culture-bearing strata in the large towns, but who from the beginning had striven towards the ‘great music’ that sought its public especially in these circles, had suddenly in a short space of time experienced that he was in a position to write music that appealed to the broader layer of society. In the next few years it happened yet again, with *John the Roadman*, and while we may perhaps dispute the value – at any rate the degree of patriotic seriousness – in *Thou Danish Man*, there is no gainsaying the artistic and social seriousness in *John the Roadman*.

Jeppé Aakjær’s poem was first published in *Politiken* on 27 June 1905. We know from Nielsen’s diary that he composed the melody for it almost exactly two years later, on 25 June 1907. He did not hit on the melody as easily as he had in the case of *Thou Danish Man*, and here the text was to a marked degree the starting point and source of inspiration. In an interview from 1918 he himself related:

And often for me a great deal of work goes into a little thing. For example, the melody to ‘Jens Vejmand’ cost me many – probably more than 50 – vain attempts in the course of three to four months; I felt that all the melodies I invented were too artificial, and I had actually put the poem out of my thoughts. But then one fine day the melody appeared by itself – when I was about to catch the train to Klampenborg – and then it was written down in the course of a few minutes.³⁹

The same year it appeared in the collection entitled *Strofiske Sange*, Op. 21, and it by no means turned out to be an immediate hit. But two years later one of the day’s

39 Fellow, *op. cit.*, 226.

greatest and most popular tenors, Vilhelm Herold, who was fortunately Danish, took *John the Roadman* into his repertoire, and he recorded it on gramophone records, a very new and very scratchy medium at the time.

‘It was like an epidemic’, as Nielsen himself put it. On a train journey across Funen, together with his family and in the company of author Jakob Knudsen and his brother Lars Knudsen (who had created the role of Arv in *Maskarade*), he witnessed his fellow-travellers singing and playing *John the Roadman*. Nielsen’s wife, the sculptress, said to a man who was playing the mouth organ: ‘How can you bear to play that terrible melody?’, but the other travellers, who clearly did not know who was with them, got cross, and the man growled: ‘It’s *not* terrible!’⁴⁰

‘It really seems to be as though the whole population is singing this song’, Nielsen wrote in his diary after that experience.⁴¹ But *John the Roadman* – not only the man but also the song about him – was also mistreated. Walking one day from Frederiksholms Kanal to Islands Brygge Nielsen one day heard ‘five barrel organs performing ‘Jens Vejmand’ in *waltz-time*’,⁴² and in 1910 a Copenhagen ‘Gramophone orchestra’ recorded a polka arrangement of the song.

The other smash hit that year was Anton Melbye’s and Berniaux’s *Jeannette i den grønne Skov* (Jeannette in the Green Wood); now Nielsen was no longer collaborating with Melbye – they had become competitors! One day when Nielsen was visiting the Parliament building (his brother Valdemar was for a short time Member of Parliament for the *Radikal* Party), ‘an honourable member over from Jutland’ said to him: ‘Listen, you’re a musician, can’t you tell us which melody is worse, ‘Jens Vejmand’ or ‘Jeanette i den grønne Skov’; they’re both ugly melodies. He did not know that I was to blame for ‘Jens Vejmand’, and my opinion of the melody was of course rather different from his’, Nielsen commented.⁴³

Thou Danish Man and *John the Roadman* each in its own way showed Nielsen that he had the chance to speak to a larger public, and also to go beyond the boundaries of concert music. This experience precedes his work on reforming the *folkelige*⁴⁴ song, which he threw himself into for the rest of his life, side-by-side with his high-art music. Others in this situation would perhaps have thought of financial gain and would have switched to composing hit songs and tunes. But it was not money that Nielsen was after. ‘I advise youngsters not to become artists, because it’s impossible to make a living at it in this country, unless you have luck with a foxtrot or something like that’, he observed at the height of his fame in 1926, adding that he had received

40 Fellow, *op. cit.*, 295.

41 Diary entry of 6.7.1910 (DK-Kk, CNA IC). Cf. John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen Brevudgaven*, Copenhagen 2007, vol.3, 865.

42 Fellow (1999), *op. cit.*, 295.

43 *Ibid.*

44 See introductory note of Vorre’s and Vestergaard’s article, p. 80.

only 50 kroner for *John the Roadman* once and for all!⁴⁵ Shortly before that, Jacob Gade's *Tango Jalousie* had begun its worldwide conquest, and gold had begun to pour in for a quite different type of composer.

Nielsen did not formulate either his theory and aesthetics of music or his artistic philosophy directly; he lived and practised them all together – and said a good deal about them on various occasions. To the social democratic politician A.C. Meyer he wrote for example in 1918: 'Recently I have given lectures about the Original and Simple in music, and I pointed out precisely that without going back to the easily understandable in art, music – including the higher art-music – has lost its way and has sacrificed its importance as a means of education for the people.'⁴⁶ In the lecture in question, which he gave several times in 1917 and 1918, he also bracketed, without actually making art into religion, the great artists with the founders of religion: 'At a certain moment they had a visionary sensation: a state of ecstasy, a feeling of infinite joy, an indescribable feeling of power'. And those who know nothing of the kind he advised in no uncertain terms to 'put art aside and become good everyday people'.⁴⁷

An art that is a means of education for the people; artists under the obligation of a fundamental experience that bears comparison with the founders of religions! Evidently what drove Nielsen was neither his own time's notions of art and culture nor our own. And if he could say: 'We are living in a time when spiritual life for the most part is superficial',⁴⁸ what would he have said about our own time? Nielsen's artistic standpoints resemble those of antiquity more than they do ours, and if we only confront him and his work with our own contemporary questions, then we have written off in advance any chance of understanding his essence.

His output of songs, which in the earlier cycles began as 'higher art-music', developed into a pedagogic project that made use of strophic songs. His experience with the revue-vaudeville-patriotic-song *Thou Danish Man* must have been decisive for that development. The songs were called Danish songs in their day; they naturally set Danish texts – German songs could hardly have served his pedagogic aims. Some of the song texts also make use of a nationalist vocabulary that can seem to go against the composer's many critical declarations down the years about the 'national'. An investigation into the matter, however, demands more than a weighing of the content of a selection of the song texts, made from the point of view of today's understanding of the national, or the nationalistic, as university jargon now quite unhistorically has it.

45 Fellow (1999), *op. cit.*, 385.

46 DK-Kk, CNA, Carl Nielsen to A.C. Meyer 23.2.1918. Cf. Eggert Møller & Meyer, *op. cit.*, 171.

47 Fellow (1999), *op. cit.*, 214.

48 Fellow (1999), *op. cit.*, 213.

In opposition to the Second Viennese School, who for years consciously chose to shut themselves away in a private society, away from a public they in any case did not have, Nielsen's cultural premises were 'softer'. In Denmark there was a living folk tradition, with its starting point in Grundtvig and the folk high school movement, and Nielsen himself as a child had experienced a spiritual awakening on his home ground, via his encounter with Klaus Berntsen and with that movement. There is nothing to indicate that he endorsed the substance in the folk high schools' curriculum uncritically, but to the last he talked positively about its pedagogic, educational power, and with his output of songs he sought to influence musical development directly and from the bottom up. In this way he was crucial.

The national incense belonged to that time. In Denmark (then) it represented not an aggressive nationalism, but a threatened country's attempt to hold its head high. For another time and another attitude, also for mine, the national incense may seem bogus and tasteless, but that does not mean that every nature- or folk-life picture from the Danish past is an instance of nationalism. Whether Nielsen contributed to making the music of his time more or less national can only be answered if the field of investigation is widened to include also the lesser and forgotten spirits, and the period as a whole. The question is surely also to what degree it was the composer's times that drew *him* more in a national direction? The example of the beginning with *Thou Danish Man* is striking. Nielsen's position, and the Danish tradition, which allowed him at one and the same time to be a humanist-utopian and a day-to-day practitioner in music great and small, meant of course that he ran the risk of getting his fingers burnt. That he was able to make use of the special Danish circumstances in an attempt to bind culture together from top to bottom did not make him especially Danish; at the end of the day it perhaps provided him with rather more favourable conditions for being universal.

The motives behind the individual songs may be very different – witness *Thou Danish Man* and *John the Roadman!* – and hard to discern. Both for Nielsen's psalms and for many of his songs, it seems that his attitude to the text was not always as decisive as his attitude to an existing and widely disseminated, bad melody, which needed to be replaced. In many cases it was others who chose the texts for him: for some of the songs Thomas Laub, for the psalms Valdemar Brücker. Many of the best-known songs have their origins in theatre music and occasional works, whose texts the composer did not know when he agreed to write the music. He wrote music to other texts on the basis of personal acquaintance with the authors. The motives are manifold, and *Du danske Mand* is not the first song whose history places it in another light. In the case of *Danmark i tusind Aar* (Denmark for a thousand years), the secular concluding

chorale to the 1917 *Cantata for the Society of Wholesalers*, Valdemar Rørdam wrote the words to a melody that Nielsen had written the year before for the Shakespeare celebration at Kronborg,⁴⁹ and it was not incorporated into the folk high school tradition by Nielsen himself, but was only included in 1940, following the German occupation of Denmark, during which it came to play a role in the *alsang*-movement – and after the war in the school singing classes, even though the author of the text had during the war not exactly taken the part of a good Dane!⁵⁰

As for Nielsen – and his time and afterwards – we cannot know too much if we want to avoid barking up the wrong tree. Let that be yet another argument for doing all the massive source-work with notes and texts, for both the main works and the occasional ones, the writings, the letters and the documents. The more we know, the better the questions we can address both to the past and to the present. Art and scholarship, indeed every work of the human soul, presumes the ability and the will to rise above the endless carousel of the spirit of the age, not the ability to read the way the wind is blowing or the inclination to surrender to one's own times.

Translated by David Fanning

A B S T R A C T

From his starting point in the instrumental music of his native Funen, Nielsen aspired towards the world of great art music, placing himself in the continuation of the classical central European tradition. In the first decade of the new century, two of his songs became national treasures, *landeplager* – i.e. ‘all the rage’, or ‘hits’ as later generations would have called them. He composed the first one, *Thou Danish Man* (*Du danske Mand*), as an ironic song for a music hall show, and without knowledge of the text. Even so the song was received as a manifestation of the Danish national spirit, which continued to be the case as late as the mobilisation of public opinion against the German occupation of Denmark in the Second World War. From the composer's point of view these songs showed first and foremost that he was able to reach a wider public, and they formed the background for the pedagogic project (not National but *folkeligt*, i.e. Popular, in spirit) that he developed for the rest of his life through his song output, running side by side with his ‘great’ works.

49 The setting for *Hamlet*, at Helsingør (Elsinore) on the north-east coast of Zealand.

50 Valdemar Rørdam, Danish poet (1872-1946). During the German occupation Rørdam praised the German attack on The Soviet Union, and after the War he was excluded from the Danish Society of Authors because of “non-national attitudes”.