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## DANISHNESS IN NIELSEN'S FOLKELIGE SONGS\*

By Karen Vestergård and Ida-Marie Vorre

Carl Nielsen's songs have often been viewed as 'authentically Danish', both in Denmark and elsewhere. This perception seems to have taken root both with the man in the street and in specialist music circles. But are there any stylistic features that may be characterised as genuinely Danish, in the sense of concrete, demonstrable musical phenomena? Or is it rather a question of a construction, such that the Danish element must be considered an 'aesthetic fact', which exists in the consciousness of the population?<sup>1</sup>

If we consider the perception of Danishness in relation to music from a historical point of view, it is clear that the Danish ballads have played a decisive role in its definition. This is due to the fact that in connection with the flowering of nationalism in the 19th century it was assumed that the peasantry, which was designated 'the People', was uninfluenced by the international elite culture, and that it had therefore 'preserved' unaltered throughout history the original Danish essence – the Spirit of the People (*folkeånden*)<sup>2</sup> – in its character, language, history and culture. It followed that the genuine, unspoiled, Danish Spirit of the People was to be found in the ballads, viewed as the People's very own art-form, which – by contrast with art

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\* In this article 'folkelig' and 'folkelighed', literally 'folklike' and 'folklikeness' have been left untranslated. They connote both 'People' and 'Folk', but are not adequately rendered by either 'popular' or 'folksy'. They imply something shared between broad social groupings, in particular the urban middle class and the rural population, rather than exclusive to the latter. In the second half of the article, 'Alsang', here translated as 'mass song' or 'mass singing', has nothing to do with the Soviet '*massovaya pesnya*'; it is a phenomenon peculiar to the period of the Nazi occupation in Denmark, when it was used as a formalized means of social cohesion through the singing of Danish songs, hinting at 'spiritual' opposition towards the occupying forces.

[Editor's note]

1 Carl Dahlhaus makes use of this term in his discussion of music and nationalism. See Carl Dahlhaus, 'Nationalism and Music', *Between Romanticism and Modernism. Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, Los Angeles 1980, 79-100 and Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, Los Angeles 1989, 38.

2 This term, and the ideas associated with it, comes from Johann Gottfried Herder's thesis of the 1770s about *der Volksgeist*.

music – was free from the influence of the rest of Europe. The specifically Danish element was therefore sought, rediscovered and reanimated by means of studies of the life and culture of the peasantry, and in particular through collections and publications of ballads. Encouraged thereby, a national-romantic trend arose among Danish composers, who tried to capture Danishness musically, amongst other things by making the published folksongs the starting-point for their compositions (as in Gade's *Elverskud* (The Elf-King's Daughter), 1851-54).

From a purely factual point of view, however, there is nothing to support such an assumption: seen historically, Danish folksong divides into two broad categories: a secular tradition represented by folksongs from the Middle Ages, and a sacred tradition represented by Lutheran chorales. According to numerous commentators, both categories have origins in European genres, which in principle excludes the possibility that they can be definitely Danish in origin. This would already seem to negate the possibility of authentic Danish qualities in music, in the sense of facts directly demonstrable in the musical material.

Against this background, there would seem to be reason to identify the Danish aspect of Nielsen's songs as a form of construction within a national discourse, rather than as a musical essence. The decisive question therefore is: How are these ideas about the Danishness of the songs constructed? From our point of view the construction of nationality may arise on several distinct levels: in the composer's *intentions* with the songs, in their *practical use* for communal singing (*fællessang*), or in their published *reception*. The present article examines the above-mentioned possibilities<sup>3</sup> by taking as its starting point the 35 songs that make up Nielsen's contribution to the *Folk High School Songbook* (Folkehøjskolens Melodibog), 1993 edition. Since, as mentioned, we wanted partly to focus on the national constructions in connection with the use of the songs, Nielsen's contribution to this collection seems to offer a ready-made selection, in that this repertoire has for generations made up the core of the Danish communal song repertoire: the so-called 'Treasury of Danish Song' (*den danske sangskat*). By way of introduction we have considered it relevant to sketch certain principal trends in nationally-orientated *folkelig* communal singing among ordinary people, from Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig's<sup>4</sup> ideas about folk-enlightenment, Folk High Schools, and communal singing through

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3 See Karen Vestergård & Ida-Marie Vorre, *Den danske Sang – en undersøgelse af danskheden i Carl Niensens sange* [The Danish Song – an investigation of the Danishness of Carl Nielsen's Songs], (dissertation, University of Aalborg 2006), which gives further arguments for and elaboration of the position outlined here.

4 Danish historian, poet, politician and educator (1783-1872).

the growth of communal singing in High Schools in the second half of the 19th century, to the use of communal singing up to the present day, a period when communal singing and the growth of nationalism among the broad population in Denmark may to a great extent be said to have gone hand in hand.

### **The History of *folkelig* Communal Singing**

Grundtvig formulated his ideas for the Folk High School in 1832. His aim with this institution was that the rural population, which Grundtvig thought had retained 'the Danish Spirit of the People' most genuinely, should be awakened to an awareness of being Danish, through information about the homeland, Danish history, Nordic mythology, Christianity and the cultural heritage. For him 'the People' were identical with Danes (especially farmers) just as 'Danishness' in many ways meant the same thing as – or had a dialectic relationship to *folkelighed*. The latter term is a key word in Grundtvig's ideas on education, and the significance of this for him was many-sided. It meant both the specific qualities in the Danish people and the fact that there should be social equality in the nation; the goal he strove for with popular education at the High Schools was in the first place to promote a self-aware Folk Culture, which did not seek to disseminate the ruling class's cosmopolitan culture to the whole of society, but on the contrary had its point of departure in the People's own preoccupations and experiences. Folk Culture in Grundtvig's eyes would therefore be an authentic Danish culture, in that it would be rooted in the way of life of the country folk and at the same time safeguard a genuine Danish culture and maintain old Danish traditions (or what was seen as such). Grundtvig's aims with the Folk High Schools were, however, first and foremost political, in that the intention was to safeguard Denmark from German political influence. 'The People', so Grundtvig thought, were an essential and resource-rich part of society, which through education could be aroused to take part in political life in Denmark, make it more Danish and secure Denmark's future existence. The slumbering Spirit of the People should therefore be woken to consciousness with the High School pupils, so that they would come to feel themselves as part of a historical and *folkelig* community, thus being able to 'experience' their own Danish identity. According to Grundtvig the means by which this could be realised were to teach about Denmark and 'Danish values' through lectures, discussions and not least communal singing in the mother tongue. Grundtvig himself wrote numerous song texts, which came to define a core-repertoire in community singing in the first High School generations. These were written in a consciously non-elite *folkelig* style, in that they presented history, with rural life as the frame of reference and with simple construction and easily comprehensible language. The philosophy behind this project was that once the in-

dividual pupils had been educated and awoken, as they presumably would be in this way at High School, then they would become aware of themselves as Danes and subsequently become politically engaged.

After Denmark ceded South Jutland to Germany in 1864, there arose a great need among the population to safeguard 'Danishness', and on the initiative of Grundtvig's adherents – the Grundtvigians – various Folk High Schools were founded in the countryside regions in the following years. The High Schools became tremendously popular with the countryside population and were to a high degree contributory to its gaining a new self-understanding and self-reliance. Many professed Grundtvig's outlook on life and his ideal of 'Folk Culture', and Grundtvigianism therefore came to a great extent to influence the farmers' life-style in their homes and in the many new societies, where people found common interests of political, professional, economic or social kinds. The tradition of communal singing, which emerged from the High Schools, was particularly suited to express the farmers' shared attitudes, experiences and values, in that the song texts placed the farmer as well as Danishness at the centre of every aspect of existence, and the tradition thus found a way of becoming a fixed element in the culture of the rural population. With this a tradition of communal song established itself, in which the song texts showed a clear focus on the national. Helped along the way by the institutional school song, through which a homogeneous culture, loyal to the State, should be fostered, 'patriotic songs' became an integral part of everyday life for most Danes, and many of these songs found dissemination across geographical and social layers.

The rapid growth of communal singing and the production of song texts for it in connection with the growth of Grundtvigianism, quickly produced a kind of melody famine. At the High Schools they used already available or often just arbitrarily selected melodies, which fitted the metre of the poems, irrespective of the suitability of those melodies for communal singing. However, the desire quickly emerged to establish a firm tradition of melodies, in which each song-text would have its own melody, and after several decades with more or less successful attempts to contribute to such a tradition, an intense debate emerged at the beginning of the 20th century concerning the musical style of the *folkelig* song. One result of this was the publication of a whole succession of *folkelige* collections of songs, e.g. Johan Borup's *Danish Songbook* (*Dansk Sangbog*) (1914 and 1916) and Nielsen and Thomas Laub's *A Score of Danish Songs* (*En Snes danske Viser III*), in two volumes (1915 and 1917). These collections aimed at a renewal of *folkelig* song, but the new thoughts – and notes – only made a significant breakthrough with the publication of the *Folk High School Songbook* in 1922. The editors of this publication were Nielsen, Thomas Laub, Oluf Ring and Thorvald Aagaard, and in the preface they set out their aims: to create a collection of melodies with the right

'*folkelig* Danish character' to be used for Danish communal singing. At the same time they expressed the hope that the collection would be used in all settings where *folkelig* song was practised.<sup>5</sup> Their efforts are reflected in the fact that more than one third of the book's 600 melodies were newly composed (for the most part by the editors themselves).<sup>6</sup> At the same time as the musical renewal of the High Schools' communal song repertoire, this publication also brought about a change in the choice of song texts, based on the ideal both to preserve the heritage of song texts and at the same time to broaden awareness of a new generation of *folkelige* poets from various regions of the countryside, who described their native surroundings with pride.<sup>7</sup>

The *Folk High School Songbook* of 1922 was thus epoch-making both in relation to a broader literary line and in its supplying of an extensive number of new (would-be) *folkelige* melodies, which replaced the motley collection of melodies that had hitherto been used for popular communal singing. After the publication of this melody book, its songs came to constitute the core repertoire not only of High School singing but also of singing in the State Schools, and the seeds were thereby sown for a fusion of School singing and High School singing, which eventually produced what became known as 'the Treasury of Danish Song'.

During the German occupation of Denmark from 1940-45, the 'Treasury of Danish Song' – and especially its patriotic songs – experienced a colossal flowering. The country's continued existence as an independent nation appeared uncertain, which brought about an explosive rise in interest in everything that could be considered as Danish. National symbols (the King, the flag, and so on), the country's history and the cultural heritage, were all cultivated to a previously unheard-of degree, and in the first years of the occupation there were mass song gatherings (*alsangsstævner*), that is outdoor rallies with communal singing of patriotic songs. Mass singing functioned both as a 'spiritual rearmament' in protest against the German occupying forces and as a manifestation of Danish national identity. Nielsen's contribution to the Danish communal song repertoire featured prominently, and his songs were described as 'shining jewels in our treasure-chest of patriotic songs'.<sup>8</sup> And with that Nielsen's position as a symbol of genuine Danishness was manifested.

Communal singing maintained its status in the years immediately after the War, during which it more or less coasted. Gradually, however, a perception of nation-

5 Carl Nielsen, Thomas Laub, Oluf Ring, Thorvald Aagaard, *Folkehøjskolens Melodibog* (first edition) [The Melody Book of the Folk High Schools], Copenhagen 1922.

6 Not all these melodies were composed specifically for the *Folkehøjskolens Melodibog*, but the editors' contributions broadly speaking all came about from the effort to renew the *folkelige* song.

7 Frands Johan Ring, *Thorvald Aagaard. Mennesket – Musikeren* [Thorvald Aagaard. The Man and the Music], Odense 1955, 72.

8 Niels Friis, 'Vor store Komponist Carl Nielsen' [Carl Nielsen, our Great Composer], *Aalborg Stiftstidende* 6.6.1945.

alism began to spread at this time as something festering and politically loaded, which produced a distancing from patriotism and also from the nationally-orientated communal singing in the form and with the repertoire which had roots in the *Folk High School Songbook* (1922). Also the 'niceness' of the songs and their conformity with established society came under critical scrutiny in connection with the youth rebellion of the 1960s, which meant that the songs gradually acquired the status of a form of '*folkelig* high culture'. The consequence of this was that the traditional communal song repertoire was gradually partially replaced, so that popular songs, even quasi rock songs and foreign songs also made inroads into School and High School singing.

In some cases, however, especially since the beginning of the 1990s, we can see a new cultivation of songs from the 'Treasury of Danish Song', which is either directly motivated by nationalistic impulses or else by a more 'unobtrusive', non-political interest in the songs. An example of the latter is a number of artists' CDs including repertoire from 'The Treasury of Danish Song'. The motivating factor here seems to be that the artists are seeking out the nation's musical roots – not represented by the ballads as it was the case in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – but by 'the Treasury of songs', which is now seen as part of the Danish cultural legacy.

### Nielsen's Intentions

The first area we deal with in our search for clarification of the songs' status as specifically Danish, is to what extent Nielsen himself intended to give his *folkelig* songs a Danish character or sought to project any particularly Danish stylistic features. We look first at his own statements. Then we examine his choice of texts and the actual musical construction of the songs, including the interplay between text and music.

There is not much doubt that Nielsen considered that music may have a specifically Danish character. On several occasions he declared that between Danes there is a common, intuitive understanding of Danish music:

With certain melodic inflections we Danes unavoidably think of the poems of, for example, Ingemann, Christian Winther or Drachmann, and we often seem to perceive the smell of Danish landscapes and rural images in our songs and music. But it is also clear that a foreigner, who knows neither our countryside, nor our painters, our poets, or our history in the same intimate way as we do ourselves, will be completely unable to grasp what it is that brings us to hear and tremble with sympathetic understanding.<sup>9</sup>

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9 Carl Nielsen, 'Svensk Musikfest' [Swedish Music Festival], *Politiken* 14.6.1906, reproduced in John Fellow, *Carl Nielsen til sin samtid*, Copenhagen 1999, 88-89.

In other contexts Nielsen likewise stated that it was ‘the spirit of Danish folksong’ which triggered this ‘trembling understanding’ of the music – that the spirit and the notes were two sides of the same thing.<sup>10</sup> So the thread back to the 19th-century belief in the ‘Spirit of the People’ as an underlying power that manifests itself in art, seems to be clear: understanding of national art proceeds from a collective consciousness and takes place with the individual on an intuitive level. In the composer’s description, therefore, Danishness in music seems to be a spontaneous ‘spiritual’ factor, which can best be described via the feelings it awakens, rather than as a set of musical characteristics that can be pointed out in the musical material.

While Nielsen thereby acknowledged and extolled a Danish quality in music, he nevertheless often expressed a strong aversion to consciously intended national music, as embodied in the work of national-romantic composers.<sup>11</sup> In this light Nielsen’s attitude to Danishness in music seems broadly speaking to boil down to discriminating between *wanting to be* and purely and simply *being* Danish. In other words, Nielsen was against consciously intentional nationalism in art, while he felt he recognised a national element in Danish music as an unconscious drive in the composer’s work and as a manifestation of Danish spirit and feeling. This is also confirmed by the following statement: ‘I myself think that both in my personality and in my art I am Danish – fortunately.’<sup>12</sup>

Even though Nielsen thus seems to have been very clear about his relationship to ‘national music’, there are also signs that point to his understanding of the term *folkelighed* in many ways as conforming to the Grundtvigian definition of the term, which was most often viewed as being identical to ‘Danishness’. This may be seen, for example, in the preface to the *Folk High School Songbook* (1922), where Nielsen and the other editors declare their efforts to give the new melodies a ‘*folkelig* Danish character’. Nielsen himself was not a self-confessed Grundtvigian, but both through his country upbringing and in his adult life he was in close contact with Grundtvigian milieus. On many occasions he expressed his sympathy and enthusiasm both for Grundtvigianism and for Grundtvig himself,<sup>13</sup> and his work on several songbooks for use in Grundtvigian circles, together with his numerous contributions to the High Schools’ current periodical, *Højskolebladet*, themselves bear witness to the fact that he sympathised to some extent with the ideals of the High School movement.

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10 See, for example, the official programme of the Open Air Theatre of 1915 and the article ‘Dansk Musik’ [Danish Music] in *Politiken* 14.11.1926, reproduced in Fellow, *op. cit.*, 188-189, 407.

11 See, for example, Fellow, *op. cit.*, 88-89, 354, 531.

12 *Berlingske Tidende* 30.10.1926, reproduced in Fellow, *op. cit.*, 404.

13 See, for example, Torben Schousboe (ed.), *Carl Nielsen. Dagbøger og brevveksling med Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen*, Copenhagen 1983, 458; Fellow, *op. cit.*, 201, 685.

In Nielsen's thoughts about 'the People's musical education', as they are expressed, for example, in connection with the publication of the *folkelig* songbooks already discussed, we can find several explicit similarities with Grundtvigian ideology of folk-enlightenment. Just as Grundtvig himself strove to write his poems in a simple, *folkelig* style, so that these would be easy to understand and remember, so it was also essential for Nielsen that the *folkelig* melody should not distract attention from the textual content. On the contrary, the music should support the text and further the aim of disseminating 'the songs and verses of the best Danish poets'.<sup>14</sup> This idea would seem to correspond to the Grundtvigian view of art: that *folkelig art* should have a high degree of practical applicability and should therefore be decidedly an art for use, which could further the project of enlightenment.

Nielsen's thoughts on People's education focused, however, not only on how the texts were to be disseminated, but also on improving people's musical taste:

A lack of ability to differentiate between good and bad music is evident everywhere ... Couldn't we do something in the direction of folk-training in unison song around the country's meeting houses, under the direction of organists or musicians, who could draw attention to the quality of the melodies during the songs?<sup>15</sup>

In the same way as Grundtvigianism wished to foster national self-awareness in the People, based on its own premises, so Nielsen may be said with his point of departure in the People's own culture to have wanted to further its awareness both of Danish art and of the qualities therein.

Against this background it seems that in his view of his role as a composer of *folkelige* songs Nielsen was influenced by Grundtvigianism's very concrete ideas about *folkelige* art. He may therefore have been influenced by the rhetoric of Grundtvigianism around the terms Danishness and Folk Culture, when he composed his *folkelige* songs, and when in connection with the publication of the *Folk High School Songbook* (1922) he formulated the idea that the melodies should have a '*folkelig* Danish character'.

The *folkelige* activity was, however, not merely an ideological project for Nielsen; it was also motivated by his feeling of belonging to the peasantry. On several occasions he stated that by virtue of his rural upbringing he felt himself to belong to the People

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14 See, for example, letter from Nielsen to Julius Röntgen, 5.4.1915 in Torben Meyer & Irmelin Eggert Møller (eds.), *Carl Niensens Breve*, Copenhagen 1954, 146.

15 'Folkelig Musikopdragelse' [Music Education of the People], *Højskolebladet* 8.6.1917, reproduced in Fellow, *op. cit.*, 201.



and that he knew ‘the thoughts and feelings of the ordinary man.’<sup>16</sup> That Nielsen felt himself to be rooted in the rural population also finds expression in his various accounts of how in connection with the composition of *folkelig* songs he felt himself to be a medium for what was best in the Danish people:

It is remarkable that when I am writing these accessible, simple melodies, it is as though it isn’t me at all who is composing; it is as though – how shall I put it? – it were the people from my youth over on Funen, or as though it was the Danish people who wanted to express something through me.<sup>17</sup>

Here there is an indication that it was the ‘Spirit of the People’ that virtually autonomously manifested itself in his music. But at the same time as Nielsen thought that ‘the Spirit of the People’ (which presumably had the same meaning for him as ‘the spirit of the folksong’) was influential on the composition of his music, he also had some definite ideas about musical construction, which may be said to represent a form of musical essentialism. In several contexts Nielsen argued for the need of music to go back to a more elemental and original form – different from 19th-century art music, which according to him was both overloaded and overbearing.<sup>18</sup>

The ideal of musical simplicity was one that Nielsen undoubtedly felt to be fulfilled in J.A.P. Schulz’s compositional principles in his *Lieder im Volkston* from the end of the 18th century, which Nielsen himself pointed to as exemplary for his own *folkelige* compositions.<sup>19</sup> Schulz defined the *folkelige* song as simple, easily accessible and formed in such a way that the music served and supported the text,<sup>20</sup> and Nielsen’s various articles and essays – from both before and after the publication of the *Folk High School Songbook* – make it clear both directly and indirectly that Schulz was an important point of reference. In this way Nielsen was at the same time keeping his distance from the 19th-century art-song tradition, which he considered had moved too far away from the ‘original’ in music.

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16 Letter from Carl Nielsen to A.C. Meyer, 23.2.1918 in Meyer & Møller, *op. cit.*, 171-172.

17 Schousboe (1983), *op. cit.*, 456. See also Meyer & Møller, *op. cit.* 1954, 220.

18 See, for example, Meyer & Møller, *op. cit.*, 106 and Fellow, *op. cit.*, 262-272.

19 This may be seen, for example, in Nielsen’s correspondence with Laub surrounding the creation of *En Snes danske Viser* [A Score of Danish Songs]. These letters are published in various sources, including Torben Schousboe, “Det skulle være jævne viser”: Notater om et skelsættende samarbejde mellem Carl Nielsen og Thomas Laub’, (“It should be simple songs”: Notes on an epoch-making collaboration between Nielsen and Laub’), *Festskrift Henrik Glahn*, Copenhagen 1979, 151-182.

20 Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, preface in *Lieder im Volkston I* (2. edition), 1785. It should be added here that for Schulz the ‘Volkston’ did not have nationalist overtones but was exclusively a stylistic term.

Against this background it may seem at first blush paradoxical that Nielsen both perceived the Danish 'spirit of folksong' as essential to the nature of his *folkelige* songs and at the same time acknowledged the model of Schulz for his *folkelige* musical style, by pledging himself to keep stylistically within the framework of the latter's compositional principles. Our point is that Nielsen did not necessarily draw a sharp line between musical Danishness and the musical *folkelige* style. Nielsen thought that his songs, just as his other works, would be naturally 'Danish' by virtue of his own Danishness. By engaging with and placing himself at the service of what the Danish people wanted through him in his compositions, his music became still more Danish, but it also became thereby more *folkelig* in the sense that the ballads also were in the spirit of the Danish people. If in addition Nielsen strove in the compositions themselves for a 'primordial' simple style, his music would not only be well suited to educate the People, it would also correspond better to the musical principles that made themselves felt in the People's own songs – in ballads. In this way Nielsen's aims with his songs – with reference to Grundtvig's term of Folk Culture (*folkelighed*) – may be said to have been that he wished to create something that was not just Danish and folk-like (*folkelig*) but authentically 'like the Danish folk'. According to this principle his music would not be directly, intentionally national, but its *folkelighed* ('folklikeness' in all senses of the word) would – just as in Grundtvigian contexts – enter into a close relationship with Danishness, and thereby the songs may be said to be intentionally '*folkelig*-Danish' on a different level from the intentionally national music that Nielsen was reacting against.

Judging from Nielsen's own statements, his primary intention with the composition of his *folkelige* songs may thus be seen as folk-educational, not as an express attempt to give his songs Danish features. But in that one must presume that the reception of the *folkelige* element in Nielsen's songs was closely bound up with 'Danishness' – also in the purely musical respect – one can say that Nielsen had an indirect intention to promote a Danish quality in music, which was in the Spirit of the People. This did not – as it did with the national-romantic composers – arise from a distanced attitude to the People, but rather from the fact that he felt himself to be an integrated part of the Danish People.

### **Analysis of text, music and the relationship between them**

With a view to assessing to what extent Nielsen attempted to give his songs the above-described '*folkelige* Danish character', we will in the following section give a survey of *folkelighed* in texts, music and their inter-relationship, confining ourselves to his songs in the 1993 edition of the *Folk High School Songbook*.

Nielsen himself named no criteria for the choice of poems for his *folkelige* song compositions other than that 'anything artificially literary' should be excluded. With

this he himself indicated that the poems should be *folkelige* in the sense that we also find with Grundtvig: which is to say easily accessible, simple in construction and written in readily comprehensible language. At the same time it was decisive for Grundtvig that the poems should also be non-elitist in the sense that they took as their starting-point the environment and everyday life of the farming community, so that they could express common attitudes, experiences and values.

Viewed in relation to these criteria, it seems that this selection of song texts indeed has a high degree of '*folkelige* qualities'. The above-mentioned environment is, with a few isolated exceptions, clearly rural and – so far as the rural community is concerned – domestic, and at the same time the starting-point is the Danish communal frame of reference as it was in Nielsen's day (and to some extent still is): Nature, the Christian faith, and the Homeland, together with general human feelings. The poems range over a broad spectrum in their thematic content, from carefree tales of situations and events, to more profound, philosophical, solemn reflections on existential matters, and thus they encompass various 'moods', at the same time as they illustrate many different aspects of life.

Also stylistically the texts appear to be *folkelige*, in that for the most part they are strophic, with relatively short verses, simple versification and a logical rhyme-scheme. Also contributory to their immediate usefulness and their degree of *folkelighed* is the fact that they are written in an easily comprehensible language, without complicated symbolism. In this respect it is also remarkable that they most often make use of the omniscient third-person narrative point of view, which gives the impression that the singer has been told the truth about the topics in question: a style feature that seems to be in step with Grundtvigian ideas about folk-enlightenment.

In order to be able to evaluate the composer's intentions through his choice of text, we have found it essential to investigate the degree of nationalism as well as the *folkelige* qualities in the original poems. Our analyses show that nearly a third of the texts in the songs here analysed are actual patriotic songs, with a nationalistic message as their main focus. These messages cover a wide range, from descriptions of inner, personal love for the homeland to motivational calls to appreciate and to be responsible for the country, both in terms of the national, historical awareness and of the duty to defend the country. Characteristic of these texts is the fact that they all concern love for the homeland, for the Danish 'folk-character' and way of life, for the Danish countryside and for the country itself, with its traditions and history. Taken together, these conditions make up the non-material values all Danes can in principle unite around across social and geographical circumstances, and therefore the emphasis placed on them in the song texts, combined with the omniscient narrator's point of view, appears to be an effective means for construct-

ing and manifesting 'Danishness'. Apart from these explicitly patriotic songs, there are almost as many texts with nationality-constructing features though to a less developed extent. These conditions indicate that Nielsen found it important to spread a national message with his songs to a rather large extent and in accordance with Grundtvigian ideology.

Musical *folkelighed* seems on the face of it to have been a purely stylistic quality for Nielsen, which he rediscovered in Schulz's songs, and which enabled him to realise his folk-educational aims in his songs. But at the same time it appears, as we have described, that in all probability he also thought that his *folkelige* songs, thanks to their close connection to 'the spirit of the Danish people' would involuntarily acquire a strongly national stamp. 'The spirit of folksong', which Nielsen ostensibly felt manifested itself in this way in his music, seems impossible to pin down, but inasmuch as it was closely bound up with musical *folkelighed* in Nielsen's scheme of thinking, it nevertheless appears possible to investigate the extent to which he attempted to embody the above-discussed '*folkelig* Danish character' in his songs.

In Schulz's *folkelige* style, which Nielsen extolled, music assumes an accompanying role to the text, as already described, in which 'simplicity' and 'accessibility' are the key words when it comes to the musical construction.<sup>21</sup> Our analyses show that the songs we have focused on to a great extent observe the following criteria:

- They are strophic and in fixed metre, in either duple or triple time.
- They have a regular periodic phrase-structure with an even number of bars in each unit.
- The vocal melody is so far as possible syllabic; where melodic decorations occur, these are most often text-dependent, and there are no examples of actual melismas.
- The melodic structure is simple, and based on a diatonic mode .
- There is a marked use of stepwise movement and of melodies outlining a triad, most often laid out in arc-shaped phrases and sequences within a narrow pitch-range.
- The melodies are rhythmically simple and characterised by sequences and recurring motifs.
- The melodies are integrated into the accompaniment, which in this way has a supporting function.

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21 Schulz's *folkelige* style is summarised in Per Drud Nielsen, *til månen* [to the Moon], Gylling 2003, 16-20, and our analytical method is based on this survey.

Yet especially in the area of harmony it appears that Nielsen in a number of cases may be said to have moved beyond the *folkelige* style. With Schulz a *folkelig* song unfolds generally in the major mode and remains within that framework. This falls in well with the fact that as many as 32 of the 35 Nielsen songs we analysed are in the major mode. However, it is also characteristic of a large proportion of the song-settings that Nielsen made extensive use of harmonic deviations within the mode. It may appear somewhat paradoxical that Nielsen often moved far away from the main key, since he himself declared that it was one of his compositional aims in this genre 'not to create interest by moving outside the key'.<sup>22</sup>

Our analyses also indicate that Nielsen sought a close interplay between text and music in his *folkelige* songs by paying great attention to the form, scansion and rhyme-scheme of his texts – that is the musical flow implicit in the text sources. In particular the rhythmic construction of the songs is often aligned with the poetic metre to such a degree that it seems to derive directly from it. It is more difficult, however, to give a theoretically founded demonstration of the extent to which Nielsen also succeeded in creating an interaction between text and music by translating the basic mood of the text into music, in that this aspect is bound up with a personal interpretation of the text. Nevertheless we venture the assertion that through his musical embodiment he was able to illustrate, for example, the differences in the rhetoric of his song texts. Against this background there seem to be reasons to conclude that one of the primary concerns for Nielsen in connection with the construction of his *folkelige* songs was to allow the music to reflect the poetic sources used, which applies both to their structural formation and to their basic moods, and which is clearly in line with Schulz's principles. By this means he made the songs easier for performers to pick up and thereby augmented their level of *folkelighed*.

### **The Songs used in connection with Communal Singing**

Nationalism and the growth of the communal singing in Denmark's population at large can, as mentioned, to a great extent be said to have gone hand in hand, and the two phenomena have throughout history been mutually reinforcing: communal singing has been used to disseminate and manifest national messages, and on the other hand songs with nationally orientated song texts – patriotic songs – have to a great extent made it possible to create a solid tradition of communal singing in Denmark. This state of affairs has led us to suppose that there may be a relationship between the use of Nielsen's *folkelige* songs in connection with communal singing on the one hand and the reception of these songs as something peculiarly Danish on the other. On the basis

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22 Interview in *Berlingske Tidende*, 9.9.1924, in connection with the publication of the new melodies for *Sangbogen Danmark*, reproduced in Fellow, *op. cit.*, 316.

of this approach we shall look more closely at the circumstances surrounding communal singing that may have contributed to the constituting of a national self-awareness – a national identity – in individual participants in communal singing, and further, whether the songs in question may have achieved a status as peculiarly Danish.

The basis for identifying oneself as Danish through communal singing – and perhaps along these lines for perceiving the sung melodies as Danish – may be sought already in the period before Nielsen composed his *folkelige* songs. In the numerous High Schools that sprang up in Denmark at the end of the 19th century, there were established (according to Grundtvig's precepts and in a goal-directed fashion) the experiences and the culture that were considered as furthering the formation of the pupils' national identity. All material and spiritual elements were permeated with constructions of Danishness, and at the same time the High Schools made available an interpretation of existence in which the borders between Danishness (*folkelighed*), the Spirit of the People and Christian faith were fluid, in that these three elements appeared as an inter-connected whole, as a single organism. Whereas the individual had hitherto had the meaning of life explained in church, he could now seek for himself answers to the great questions in life, such as his own place in the universe, through this organism-thinking, and in this way understand himself as Danish. Communal singing, which was understood as a fundamental element in this process, had the advantage that it enabled the pupils both to expand their knowledge of the homeland and its history and at the same time to strengthen their feeling of community through the physical and spiritual activity stemming from their singing together. A large proportion of the song texts used were by Grundtvig himself, in which statements about the homeland, the Spirit of the People, the life of the People, history and the Heroes of Old were very often communicated in a rhetoric that bore evidence of his own linking together of the Danish, the *folkelige* and Christian identity. In these texts Grundtvig had sought to accommodate the demands of folk-enlightenment by communicating messages in a *folkelig* style. When at the same time he allowed the reflections or stories of his poems to take as their starting-point the everyday life of farmers (the High School pupils) thus using them as frames of reference for the poems, it is highly probable that the High School pupils would have been able to understand the song texts immediately and to relate them to their own lives. Through the simultaneous articulation of the singing group, the song texts could therefore immediately acquire the status of being an expression of communal experiences and values. At the same time it may be said of the individual participants that, by literally having the nationalistic words and feelings placed in their mouths as their own statements they could be aroused to the consciousness of being part of a national community. If one was thus enabled through communal singing to 'experi-

ence' oneself as part of a whole, in which both spiritual life and physical environment called attention to 'Danishness', it would seem obvious that the song melodies too, irrespective of their suitability to accompany the respective text or to be used in communal singing as a whole, were perceived consciously or unconsciously as a part of this 'organism'. Of course it is hard to know whether in the experience of communal singing any distinction was made between text and melody, or whether one experienced the national feelings the songs could awaken as arising from the song as a unity. But in that the songs can be asserted to have been a contributory factor in the individual's understanding of himself, through which national self-awareness was fostered, this would be in the form of a 'mirroring effect' whereby national feelings were projected back onto the songs (both text and melody), such that these feelings were experienced as 'Danish'.<sup>23</sup> Such a perception among 'the People', as would later be seen in connection with Nielsen's songs, can therefore on this basis be said to have been already present latently, even before he began to compose his *folkelige* melodies. Nielsen may therefore be said to have composed his songs at a historically opportune moment.

With the publication of *Folk High School Songbook* the musical repertoire was suited to the purpose of practicing communal singing, and Nielsen's contribution to this may to a great extent be said to further the communication of the messages of the texts: the simple, singable melodies lend themselves to the texts by reflecting their structural layout as well as their basic moods, the result being that there is nothing in the music that distracts the singers' attention from the message of the text. At the same time these texts – as Grundtvig's – to a great extent take their starting-point in the everyday life of the population in the countryside, so that the messages communicated – often nationalistic – were easy for this target group to relate to. Notable in relation to this context is also the extensive use of the omniscient third person, which gives the impression that the songs are communicating 'the truth'. These songs may therefore be considered especially well suited to disseminating or embodying national messages, and it is thus highly likely that the new melodies were instrumental in promoting national identity. In the same way, one may reasonably assert that the probability of understanding the musical side of these songs as especially Danish grows with this high degree of stylistic *folkelighed*.

Whereas Danish 19th-century nationalism was to a great extent motivated by a political demand for national self-reliance in relation to Germany, which at that time had political control over South Jutland, one can imagine that the need to manifest Danishness in the period after 1920 when Denmark recovered this territory,

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<sup>23</sup> These considerations apply similarly to the practice of communal singing in schools, and also in circles surrounding the national folk high schools where the Grundtvigian ideology – including nationalism – was circulating in the second half of the 19th century.

was of diminishing urgency. At the same time, however, it is conceivable that the new communal singing repertoire, which dates from the publication of the first edition of the *Folk High School Songbook* in 1922, and which 'set the tone' both for High School communal singing and for the official School song repertoire, contributed to the fostering of national identity and therefore to preserving nationalism.

In connection with the German occupation of Denmark during the Second World War, in which there was seen a new passionate interest in everything that was Danish, these songs – especially those contributed by Nielsen – received renewed attention, as stated above. With the aim of manifesting the individual's national feeling as well as a national group-identity, these songs were now sung at Mass Song rallies. With songs as prescriptions for feeling, and in settings which automatically had a great focus on 'Danishness', one could thus through a goal-directed process strengthen one's national feelings. If the melodies were in addition experienced as Danish, this may be connected with the fact that a kind of mirroring effect also took place here, such that the national feelings, which the texts directly induced, were projected back both onto the text and onto the melody, while both were perceived as embodying especially Danish qualities. Another decisive factor may be, moreover, that at this time and in the following years there was presumably a special willingness to assign those melodies that were part of furthering the feeling of Danish national identity a status as something especially Danish.

In the period from the Second World War until today, when the general attitude to nationalism has gradually become modified, and other frames of reference have come to dominate, 'Danish identity' has similarly changed from being received as some kind of inviolable truism to being viewed as an attitude that an individual may choose to adopt. At the same time the use of 'the Danish Song Treasury' seems to have narrowed to communal singing in traditional contexts, alongside a new song repertoire, in recent times having its musical qualities stressed or being used with a very clear political agenda. With the exception of the last-named case, the songs can therefore no longer be said to have the same degree of 'identity-forming effect' for the population at large as they previously had in the High Schools and at the time of the German Occupation, for which reason the chances of the younger generation's perceiving the songs as peculiarly Danish likewise seem less pronounced.

In more general terms there would nevertheless seem to be grounds for asserting that the perception in the broad population of Nielsen's songs as 'specifically Danish', in all probability arose from the population's own experiences with the practice outlined here of communal singing in those settings where Danishness was fostered. The textual content of the songs appears inevitably more 'trustworthy' in communal singing, in that they acquire the function of expressing a communal con-



viction, supported by the surrounding culture. If the song texts have still been able to awaken the national feelings of the individual singer, such that the singer has been able to experience himself as Danish – and as a part of a Danish community – then presumably a form of mirroring has taken place in the singer’s consciousness, such that not only the textual but also the musical elements of the songs have been understood as sources of these feelings, whereby they are ‘recognised’ as Danish. Of course it is difficult to judge to what extent the individual participants in communal singing reflected on ‘Danishness’ in Nielsen’s songs but there nevertheless seems to be a strong likelihood that the widespread use of the songs in settings where Danishness was a focus left its mark on their perception.

### The Literary Reception of the Songs

With a view to investigating to what extent the literary reception may have influenced the understanding of Nielsen’s songs as something especially Danish, we shall now attempt to identify when national constructions in the descriptions of Nielsen’s songs may be said to have appeared, and furthermore within which kinds of discourse this national representation emerged, functioned and became established.<sup>24</sup> Our survey is based both on journalistic criticism of the songs in their own day and on musicological reception in the form of contemporary and later articles from journals and newspapers, together with biographies, in order to give us an impression of how far the attitudes represented by that reception were disseminated in specialist music circles alone, or whether they may also be presumed to have reached a broader sector of the population via journalism.

It is precisely journalistic contributions from Carl Nielsen’s time that show that reviewers up to and including the publication of *A Score of Danish Songs* (En Snes danske Viser) did not definitely assign national meaning to Nielsen’s songs. According to Fie Thaning, the scepticism of critics may most often be ascribed to the fact that at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, it was national-romantic music and the romance-song that were seen as a musical expression of Danishness. Already at this time, however, we can also see among some reviewers a tendency to consider the most ‘natural’ and simple – and therefore *folkelig* – songs as the composer’s most successful contributions to the genre.<sup>25</sup>

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24 Many authors have dealt with questions of reception history in relation to Nielsen. One of the most recent dissertations is Fie Louise Skovsbøg Thaning, *Nationalitetskonstruktioner i receptionen af Carl Nielsen – en receptionshistorisk analyse* [Constructions of Nationalism in the Reception of Carl Nielsen – a Reception Historical Survey], (University of Copenhagen 2005). See this source for a more detailed survey of the historical lines in the general reception of Nielsen’s musical production, including the songs.

25 Ludvig Dolleris, *Carl Nielsen. En musikografi* [Carl Nielsen – a Musicography], Odense 1949, 28-29, 37-38, 50; Torben Meyer & Frede Schandorf Petersen, *Carl Nielsen. Kunstneren og Mennesket*, Copenhagen 1947-48, vol. 1, 103; Thaning, *op. cit.*, 24-26, 45, 96.

The split in criticism between those for and against the value of Nielsen's songs in a national perspective, endures until about 1920. However, around this time there is a change in the perception of Nielsen's importance as a composer, and this leaves traces in musicological accounts of him and his music, not least in discussions of the songs. In her survey, Thaning argues that the first performance of the Fourth Symphony in 1916 was decisive in relation to the establishing of a national frame of understanding around Nielsen, and that a consensus emerged thereafter as to his status as a great Danish composer, which manifests itself in the fact that it is hard after this time to find texts – neither journalistic nor musicological – that take a critical stance either to the composer himself or to his music. In the reception of the songs this is seen in concrete terms in the fact that the authors begin to evaluate them positively in terms of Nielsen's critical distance from Romanticism, and that his personal style becomes synonymous with the national style.<sup>26</sup>

Especially in publications from the 1920s and 1930s, Nielsen's songs are presented as 'genuine folksongs', and a close connection is found between them and an authentic musical expression in the form of folk music and/or early religious music (Gregorian chant as well as vocal polyphony of the Middle Ages and Renaissance). The songs become valuable precisely by virtue of the fact that Nielsen dissociates himself from 19th-century ideals and in places looks back to what commentators consider as the roots of Danish music. High School teacher Thorvald Aagaard<sup>27</sup> is the first to point out the importance of Nielsen's upbringing in rural surroundings. Thanks to his childhood, Nielsen is presented as a person possessed of an unspoiled, inherent *folkelighed* and thereby also Danishness, and this quality – according to Aagaard – is transferred to the songs, which thereby become infused with the Spirit of the People. The notion of the influence of childhood on Nielsen and his songs thereafter becomes dominant in the reviews and other texts. These two notions continue to hold sway through the time of the German occupation up to the centenary of Nielsen's birth in 1965, when interest in the composer flourished. In line with the growing scepticism towards nationalism, however, the following period sees only a few contributions to musicological accounts of the songs; moreover the nationalistic rhetoric in these accounts no longer seems so pronounced. Around 1990, however, at the same time as a general renewed attention towards 'the national', several musicologists begin to show interest in presenting Nielsen and his songs in a national perspective.<sup>28</sup>

26 Thaning, *op. cit.*, 46, 53, 97.

27 See Thorvald Aagaard, 'Carl Nielsen og den folkelige sang' (Nielsen and the *folkelige* song), *Dansk Musiktidsskrift VII* (1932), 11-14.

28 As may be seen, the historical lines in the literary reception of the songs can to a great extent be seen in parallel with the historical lines around communal singing and the growth of nationalism in Denmark, which are sketched above in this article. However, Thaning reaches a similar historical division of the reception exclusively based on her analysis of the nationality-constructing literature on Nielsen (see Thaning, *op. cit.*).

The part of the literature dealing with constructions of nationality from this time may, according to Thaning, be divided generally speaking into two directions:<sup>29</sup> while some authors stick to the models of explanation that were established already in the 1920s, others attempt to mark out new paths. In this connection it does not seem to us relevant to examine more closely those authors who represent the more traditional line of presentation of Nielsen in this period, in that these do not specifically discuss the songs but rather Nielsen and his work in general. On the other hand it is worth naming Daniel Grimley and Jørgen I. Jensen, who both represent alternative national-constructing interpretations of Nielsen and his music.<sup>30</sup> Both maintain that it is possible to draw a direct line between musical character features – ‘processes of elementalisation’, horn fifths and flattened sevenths and ‘the falling motif’ respectively – and the Danish quality in Nielsen; and they argue on this basis that it is precisely by using these features that Nielsen concretely embodied ‘Danishness’ in his music.

In general terms our analysis of the literary reception shows that the songs are assigned great national value from the 1920s on. Whether one looks at journalistic criticism or at musicological accounts, it is a consistent feature that the authors primarily focus on and emphasize the *folkelige* part of the composer’s song production. The reason for this is presumably to be found in the fact that the terms ‘the People’ and ‘*folkelighed*’ are of key importance in the prevailing view of ‘the Danish’, and that the *folkelige* songs, which thanks to their stylistic qualities were and are suited precisely for use among ‘the People’, therefore seem to be well adapted to confirming understanding in national terms.

Within this frame of reference we can observe two fundamental notions: on the one hand the perception of a connection between Nielsen and authentic musical Danishness, and on the other hand the notion of the *folkelig* as an essence both in Nielsen himself and in his songs. Both these general notions are anchored in the view of art that lies behind ideas about the Spirit of the People, and they establish themselves in the literature in the form of myth-making around Nielsen’s personality and music: by virtue of an inherent ‘*folkelig* authenticity’, Nielsen is considered to have a direct connection to a primordial Danish music, and furthermore he possesses genuine Danish qualities, which render him and his songs the quintessence of Danishness.<sup>31</sup>

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29 For a survey of reception after 1990 see Thaning, *op. cit.*, 81ff.

30 Daniel Grimley, ‘Horn Calls and Flattened Sevenths: Nielsen and Danish Musical Style’, Harry White & Michael Murphy (ed.), *Musical Constructions of Nationalism. Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800-1945*, Cork 2001, 123-141; Jørgen I. Jensen, *Carl Nielsen – Danskeren* [Carl Nielsen – the Dane], Copenhagen 1991.

31 Roughly the same view, so far as the basic notions in the literary reception of Nielsen are concerned, may be found in Thaning, *op. cit.* She considers that these notions are concretised via three specific myths, which she calls ‘the myth of originality’, ‘the myth of childhood’ and ‘the myth of kinship’ (Thaning, *op. cit.*, 3, 94-95).

If Nielsen's *folkelige* songs have therefore to a great extent been understood from a national perspective, both in musicological writings and in reviews and articles in the non-specialist press, this picture has permeated both music-specialist circles and the population at large. On this basis it thus seems highly likely that the general perception of the songs as something especially Danish may have sprung from – and have spread through – their published reception.

### Conclusion

From the above survey it may be seen that Nielsen's own intentions with his *folkelige* songs, their use in the practice of communal singing, and also their literary reception, may all have been contributory factors in the understanding of these songs as something especially Danish. At the same time it is a constant factor in these contexts that belief in the Spirit of the People has to a great extent worked as a 'covert agent' and has influenced the perception of the songs in all these respects. Therefore we cannot say that just one or the other circumstance constitutes an explanation of how the perception of Nielsen's songs as peculiarly Danish has been constructed. The explanation seems rather to be that the factors described above have all been in operation within the frame of understanding provided by belief in the Spirit of the People, and that they have therefore mutually influenced one another and together come to constitute this perception. Thus if a person experienced or declared himself as a national individual through the communal singing practice of Nielsen's songs, and further if he saw these songs discussed as something especially Danish in reviews, articles and other writings, it is obvious that the person in question would not doubt the songs' 'Danishness'; in the same way it is obvious that music commentators and researchers have to a certain degree written against the background both of the composer's statements and of their own experiences with the songs.

Also the view of Nielsen as a national icon, as was already seen in the reception around 1920, but which was seriously manifested in the population at large during the Second World War, may be assumed to have had decisive significance for Danes' relation to his songs as 'national jewels'. That Nielsen's *folkelige* songs are claimed to be Danish – above those of, for example, Aagaard and Rings, whose texts also have a high degree of nationality-constructing elements – must presumably be seen as a consequence of both Nielsen's rural upbringing and his success among both 'the People' and the bourgeoisie. As a child of what was considered the 'un-alienated' People in the countryside, and much helped along the way by his autobiography *Min fynske Barndom* (My Childhood), he was perceived as an authentic, unspoiled Dane, who aimed to create and propagate something great for Danes. It is likely that it is also in this respect that we can find an explanation for the fact that those of

Nielsen's *folkelige* songs that do not have a nationalistic textual content and therefore cannot be said to have played a direct role in the construction of national identity, have also been perceived as Danish. One can imagine that a kind of synergy-effect has arisen based on the perception of Nielsen as the quintessence of Danishness and the function of nationalistic songs in the practice of communal singing, such that the perception has spread out to embrace the entirety of Nielsen's *folkelige* song production, whereby 'Danishness' has become an indicator for the whole field.

On this basis one may assert that the construction of Danishness in Nielsen's songs covers a complex network of aesthetic judgments and historical circumstances. Via the notions for which belief in the Spirit of the People defined the framework, the composer could perceive himself as rooted in the People and thereby as Danish, which gave him cause to feel that in the composition of his *folkelig* songs he was only a medium for the wishes of 'the Danish People'. At the same time these songs were able to participate in the creation of national identity and thus to be experienced as Danish; and finally the literary reception of the songs was able both to activate and to reinforce the notion of Danishness in these songs; taken together, these factors in their interaction constituted a self-reinforcing process.

If the nationally orientated perception of the songs still clings on today, when nationalism to a great extent is seen as 'politically incorrect', and the songs are in addition receiving renewed attention as national jewels, this may be connected with the fact that that perception is especially tenacious; the songs have once and for all been adopted as being especially Danish, and this perception may thus be said to have won status as an aesthetic fact.

*Translated by David Fanning*

## A B S T R A C T

Nielsen's *folkelige* songs have been linked in many contexts with something especially Danish. In this article we deal with how this perception has arisen – from the composer's declared intentions, from the practice of communal singing, and from their literary reception.

As an introduction we sketch certain central lines in the history of *folkelig* communal singing. With a view to evaluating the composer's intentions we then outline the main points from our interpretations of Nielsen's own statements and our analyses of text, music and their interaction, using the selection of Nielsen's songs to be found in the *Folk High School Songbook* (1993). From this it is concluded that in his own way Nielsen may be said to have had the intention to give his *folkelige* songs a 'Danish' character.

From our analysis of the practice of communal singing that surrounded the songs, there appears to be a great likelihood that the nationalistic perception of these songs may have arisen by this means, and similarly we demonstrate in the analysis of the reception history, that the published treatment of the songs may additionally have had decisive significance.

The explanation for how the perception of Nielsen's *folkelige* songs as especially Danish has arisen is thus not to be found in any single one of the circumstances here considered. Rather it should be seen in the light of the national discourse, in which ideas about a national essence, the Spirit of the People, have been prominent. The composer himself, the communal singing practice in which the songs were used, and their reception, all seem to have worked within the framework of understanding provided by the idea of a 'Spirit of the People', and in this way these factors may be said to have mutually influenced one another and at the same time to have constructed the perception that Nielsen's *folkelige* songs are especially Danish.