

Danmarks gamle folkeviser XI: Melodier Old Popular Ballads of Denmark

By Bertrand H. Bronson

When Svend Grundtvig in 1847 launched his project of an inclusive edition of all the old ballads of Denmark, together with whatever could be recovered of their traditional melodies, he can hardly have imagined that he was initiating, as if for the curst dancers of Kølbigk, a merry chain-dance that would be bequeathed to a succession of participants for the next hundred and thirty years. With the publication of DgF vols. XI and XII in 1976, we have reached a terminal point for the series which he inaugurated. It is our present duty to survey only the contents of volume XI, the collected melodies of the previously constituted textual record.

Merely to enumerate the contents of this volume would fill a long paragraph. We have to recognize that, like a century-old and venerable tree which bears the visible evidence of climatic alteration, seasonal change, breakage of limbs, shape modified by outward circumstance both involuntary and from deliberate pruning, this vast work shows evidence of its age, while maintaining its strongly rooted will to live. Though it persists along the ordered canon of ballad-families established by the founder, it is not a simple accumulation of melodies attached one by one to the given text-types. Its emphases are modified, and to some extent even reversed, by the successive editors.

The tunes are entered in the DgF numerical order. It follows that the guiding principle of the collection is classification by identified story, not musically determined. Consequently, likeness between tunes will normally appear only when they are brought together by the DgF number; not when related tunes are mated with texts of different kindred. Within the numerical limits, homogeneous tunes might be juxtaposed; and if comparative study has value, such an ordering would be desirable. Another plan, however, has been here preferred: the tunes are ordered chronologically, by date of appearance in the record, whether printed or manuscript. Since that date is entirely fortuitous, having nothing to do either with inherent melodic kinship

or structural considerations suggestive of age, we seem to have sacrificed meaningful relationships for a specious advantage. Historical evidence gives no sure footing, apart from a scant dozen and a half early recordings. Mutual melodic and structural resemblance, therefore, would have seemed the most sensible way of ordering the variants within the inescapable numerical boundaries. But we do not find tonal or metrical similarities influencing the sequence.

There are several unusual features in the disposition of the melodies as printed. For ease of comparison, all are transposed to the G clef, within that portion of the diatonic scale from G below middle C to b above the first upper ledger line; and all are given a signature of one sharp. No bar lines are employed, and this necessitates superscribing an accidental sharp flat each time that note occurs. This can become a nuisance with no obvious advantage (cf. DgF 238/3, for example). Numerical figures are superscribed above the stressed notes of each phrase, and the beats of the tune's first bar are similarly marked to give the metre. The musical phrases are spaced apart from each other, either side by side or beneath one another, according to the verse-pattern. Each fragment is alphabetically labelled, with Arabic index figures and Roman numerals, explained in a preliminary key. Seven stanzaic types are listed, four of which have alternative forms.

Metrically considered, there seems to be a rough equivalence between 3-time and 4-time tunes. Taking the first hundred ballads for an average, we find 103 3-time, and 116 4-time tunes. There are five 6-time tunes, which might be added to the 3-time total. Thus, the preponderance of duple over triple rhythm is very slight. But other classes than the early groups of ballads might show stronger metrical preferences. On the whole, the metrical regularity of the collection is a noteworthy characteristic, probably a national feature.

Looking at casual comparisons internationally, one has the impression that the Danish gamut tends to be narrower than the British, often just short of the octave, or else from lower to upper leading-note (sharp 7th); that the sharp 7th in minor tunes, whether melodic (ascending) or harmonic, is more common than in Britain; and that in both traditions the sixth degree is more frequently missing (when the gap is not systematically hexatonic) than other degrees of the scale. In the Danish, the sixth is not infrequently omitted when its presence as a minor sixth would have combined with a raised 7th

to make a harmonic minor tune. This combination would always be suspect in British folk-tunes as editorial rather than traditional.

Although we know that in point of subject-matter, there are not infrequent parallels for textual or thematic similarity or narrative relationship, it is to the present reviewer surprising how seldom the body of Danish musical tradition here represented evokes recollection of the British, or vice versa. (Occasional exceptions are 252/1 and 416/23; but these are not textual parallels). And, again comparatively, where the textual kinship is undeniable, it almost never happens that a melodic kinship appears, even remotely. When one considers the relatively small compass of these tunes, their limited gamut, their brevity both of phrase and length over-all, it seems amazing that we should find such slender occasion for claiming similarity or borrowing in either direction. Possibly, this is the myopia of a man conditioned by the habit of dwelling on details. The wider horizon of a Wiora, a Danckert, or an Entwistle, might perhaps lead to a different conclusion. But, whilst, inside the national boundaries, one sees relationships, likenesses, echoes reverberating from all sides, the international echoes seem few and far between.

Judging by the evidence available in DgF XI, there are no tunes in the record for 250 of the Grundtvig numbers. Of approximately 290 ballads, tunes of which are here collected, those with the largest number are DgF 271 (*Redselille og Medelvold*) and 376 (*Hr. Peders Skriftemaal paa Havet*), each with 34 variants, and DgF 38 with 33. The closest runners-up are nos. 416 (24), 89 (21), and 527 (20). But the totals may not be a safe guide to popularity.

The student interested in formal comparisons will find it easy to file proportionate statistics for phrasal schemes, refrain elements, metrical frequencies. He will not find much readymade assistance from the edition in bringing melodic outlines together, or in reaching generalizations about tonal resemblances. The chronological order stands in the way.

More than 325 pages of the final portion of the present work actually constitute the initial stages of its composition. Appendix A is a reprint of a volume otherwise now unobtainable, published first in 1923: the Faroese tunes of the Danish ballads compiled by Hjalmar Thuren and H. Grüner-Nielsen, with their own preface and historical introduction; a pioneering work grounded in Thuren's original musicological research in unexplored territory and, after his death in 1912,

completed by Grüner-Nielsen for publication a decade later; and augmented with many of his own recoveries in the field, and with those of earlier collectors. Grüner-Nielsen next took up the task of providing a full and complete edition of all the Danish tunes for Grundtvig's, Axel Olrik's, and for his own textual compilation, volume by volume. With the help of collaborators, he carried this forward until his death in 1953, in portions of what was planned to be volume XI. The three finished parts appeared in 1935, 1938, and 1959, up through Grundtvig's no. 229; and that work, with its valuable notes, has been reprinted as Appendix B.

Thereafter, it was decided after a considerable interval, to resume the work on new principles; and the Committee pays tribute in its ultimate Preface, to Dr. Erik Dal, »without whose persistence, drive, and administrative ability«, added to »his keen interest, his wide-ranging knowledge of both texts and tunes«, and his technical expertise, the task could not have been brought to completion. The tunes of 1935–59 are now reedited and incorporated into the revised work, along lines quite unlike the earlier ones, which are reprinted for the sake of the annotations.

No one need quarrel with Thorkild Knudsen's opinion that a folk-melody is in a constant state of flux, not only as it passes from mouth to mouth, but even as the same song is sung by the same singer at different times, and in particular details as he passes from stanza to stanza, in the course of a single rendition. Many years ago, the English collector, Cecil Sharp, noticed that some of his best singers continually varied, perhaps by some almost unconscious impulse, the melodic line as they sang. Since he was without mechanical assistance, he tried to catch on paper as many of these phrasal modifications as he could; but he found that he could not record them at that speed as they arose, and learned that his best way was to get the singer to sing the song over and over, while he noted the most striking and characteristic alterations as best he could. These diminutive variations did not disturb the controlling image in the singer's mind, but he was not inhibited by the strait-jacket of a note-for-note memorization, any more than a good raconteur repeats his tale in identical words. The fullest Danish evidence of the process is in the successive copies made by E. Tang Kristensen of particular singers' repeated performances. The evidence of variability is incontrovertible. But when Knudsen pushes it to the conclusion that folk-tunes are

little more than an arbitrary, almost random collocation of stereotypic phrases, combined to suit the verbal text, and that it is idle to specify the total foundation, the mode, of a particular melody, he goes, in our humble opinion, too far. His generalization, moreover, is contradicted by the massed collection of some 1600 tunes that comprise the main body of this work, most of which are readily classifiable in the familiar modal norms: Ionian, Æolian, Dorian, and the hexatonics lying intermediately; with few anomalies, and nearly always ending on their own tonic or tonal center. It is disturbing to suppose that Knudsen might claim that this is only because the data are insufficient. We must assume that where, as in the case of Kristensen's copybooks, the variant readings were abundant, the present editor, Svend Nielsen, weighed the evidence and made rational choices between possible alternatives, and that where no choice existed, the clear evidence of modality was indisputable. It is perhaps regrettable that where a significant choice lay before the editor, he did not print it, as, for example, Sharp did by adding variant readings at the foot of the tune. But it is disconcerting to realize that what we have throughout this work as our only given version of any tune may be less firm than it looks, — in fact may represent a web of subjective editorial judgments, based on choices not allowed to the reader; a version of the tune which may never once have been sung in that way by the singer to whom it is attributed. Would it not have been better to give one faithful reading of one stanza actually sung, adding noteworthy departures from it by the same singer, either in other stanzas or at other times, rather than an arbitrary conflation?

The first four sections of Thorkild Knudsen's essay on Editorial Principles and folk composition in Melody are mainly expository. He declares that the two leading figures in the field at the start of Danish ballad research, Grundtvig for texts, Tang Kristensen for tunes, saw the subject from opposite points of view. Grundtvig hoped to recover a medieval cultural inheritance, a national literary treasure; Kristensen sought to preserve a living possession of the Danish people, dear to the hearts of common folk in song and dance, words and music inseparably joined. A generation later, we can find a close parallel between Child, who modelled his work on Grundtvig's, and Cecil Sharp, who sought his treasure-trove not in libraries but in the fields, from the lips of untutored country singers.

Knudsen deprecates the impossibility of representing in volume XI

what the singers really sang, as they sang it, and the necessity of publishing editorial surrogates. Kristensen, he thinks, was on the true road, but until electronic devices became available, the ideal was out of reach; and the only possible course was to present »all that can serve to illuminate the construction or compositional system of the ballad melodies in the period of collection represented by the text edition«.

He then gives a careful explication of the technical procedures followed in editing the tunes, and their relation to the foregoing texts in the previous ten volumes. He describes the special character of Kristensen's tune notebooks; and displays in synoptic tables his attempts to transcribe ten of the ballads of a particularly gifted singer, Sidsel Jensdatter, to exemplify the fluidity of folk-singing. Knudsen next defines the slight and continuous alterations of a singer's renditions of a single song as *variants* of his own *version*; other singers' consonant versions of the same song as variants of a *type*; and, more widely inclusive, similar types as *models* and modelvariants. With many pages of illustrative examples, he shows how some tunes begin with phrases closely akin, varying in later phrases; how other tunes show close kinship in their middle phrases, but vary in first and last; how others coincide in terminal phrases, but differ in first and middle phrases. He then exhibits styles of melody in a series of illustrations, distinguishing between the call, the chant, the pipe, the fiddle, and the dance-tunes, with some attention to function in performance, and with conjectural remarks on men's and women's rôles at earlier periods than records survice to show, and the use of instruments to accompany the songs and dancing.

In the final section of his essay, the »Reservations and Conclusions«, Knudsen expresses, rather as notes for an essay than as a connected discourse, his discontent, bordering on frustration, with the volume in hand. This frame of mind stems obviously from a sociological orientation which could not find its proper outlet in a work conditioned by decisions formulated as methodical principles more than a century ago, by Grundtvig and his disciples as »representatives of educated culture«. Knudsen would have shown, had it been possible, the part played by the ballads in »popular culture«, — the way in which they were embedded in the daily living, the communal activities, joys and sorrows, of ordinary men and women, of the people as a whole, their traditional form of expression from time immemorial.

It is plain that he is antipathetic or temperamentally indisposed -- at least for the nonce -- to approaching the ballads as a topic of musical research from a technical point of view. This bias accounts for his relative silence on conventional questions like scale patterns, modes, tonal range, metrical problems, etc., to focus instead on functional types. Perhaps more surprising is the absence of any comment, however brief, of an appreciative or evaluative or discriminatory kind on the quality or suitability of these melodies to their textual components. Would that be regarded as embarrassingly naïf? But then why are some of the ballad texts so often eulogized with unabashed appreciation?

Knudsen regrets -- probably with good musical reason -- the omission of the coarse or »jocular« ballads because they were incompatible with the initial conception of a lofty poetical inheritance. He deplores the fact that the edition disables the study of singers' personal styles and repertory, the absence in it of accompanying texts that would facilitate the study of coordinated text and music. He introduces at the close some conjectural remarks on the possible links between the ballads and dramatic or theatrical performances, by medieval stage troupes and minstrels in street plays. He has suggestions about situational improvisation, whether in work, lament, or dance; and about the interplay between voices and instruments wind or stringed, and the natural rôles of men and women in emergent circumstances, be they in festival, mourning, labor, or seasonal commemoration. These ideas are tossed out more as questions than as assertions confidently advanced. They are stimulating, but they are not well accommodated within the covers of the book before us. They would find more congenial company in such a book as David Buchan's *The Ballad and the Folk*, London, 1972.

The introductory essay by Nils Schiørring, on the Transmission and Study of the Melodies, is a 30-page historical survey, admirably straightforward, lucid, and sufficient. Starting with Grundvig's original conception of an all-inclusive national collection of the Danish ballad-corpus, with tunes, Nils Schiørring gives a bibliographical list of the seventeen ballad-tunes set down before 1700, and goes on to describe the relevant publications with such melodies down to the present. The accumulation was random and sporadic until the five-volumed collection of Abrahamson, Nyerup, and Rahbek appeared in 1812-14, and even there was composed of casual and undepend-

able recoveries from voluntary contributors. A great advance was made by A. P. Berggreen, who began to publish his international collection of folk-songs in 1842. These were widely noticed, and came into use on the stage, in vaudeville and ballet performance -- a century after John Gay started the fashion of ballad-opera with his immortal *Beggar's Opera* (1728) -- and they were set as piano pieces by Kunzen, Weyse, and Kuhlau. In successive editions, Berggreen gradually enlarged his work to eleven volumes, latterly with numerous traditional tunes sent to him and to Grundtvig, and edited by him with piano accompaniments which ironed out their modal character by imposing modern major-minor harmonization on them. Although conscientious according to his lights, he omitted tunes that would not submit to orthodox harmonic treatment.

Berggreen became the sole supreme authority before his death in 1880, and his musical opinion controlled Grundtvig's until the latter's death in 1883. Meanwhile, Ewald Tang Kristensen had begun, in the 1860's, his vast collection of popular lore, which by the time of his death in 1929 included 1000 melodies and 3000 ballads, besides 2500 »jocular« ballads, and huge quantities of other folk-material. As a collector, he thus became the counterpart of the Englishman Cecil Sharp, of the Scots Gavin Greig and J. B. Duncan, whose span of life he overlapped with a thirty-year headstart. He began to publish in 1868, and in 1871 brought out the first of thirteen volumes of folklore, ballads, and tunes gathered from living singers. A second volume, published in 1876, brought his total of texts to 233, of melodies to 193. Berggreen's adverse opinion of the musical component was a crushing discouragement to his further musical publication, and apparently in some degree to his collecting as well. But after an interval, marked by the deaths of both Grundtvig and Berggreen, he published further ballads, a tenth volume without tunes, an eleventh with a melodic supplement for volume ten, and 53 tunes for the old ballads of the new volume, plus 49 for later ballads.

Although disappointed during his lifetime, it is very evident that Kristensen, as Schiørring declares, »rescued more Danish traditional matter from oblivion than all other collectors put together«. He left his whole collection to the Society which he founded (Dansk Folke-minde-samfund). That part of it which bears on the Folkeviser established new goals and set new standards for subsequent collectors and editors; and without his entrance into the picture the present volume

would have lacked much of its importance as a national repository of popular music.

In the subsequent pages of his introductory essay, Schiørring traces the history of the post-Kristensen work accomplished in building and completing this arduous, difficult, and truly impressive compilation. He does ample justice to the succession of scholars, collectors, and editors who have brought it to a fortunate conclusion. His accurate and judicious review of the contribution towards this issue of the musicologist Thomas Laub, with his influential combination of theory and practice in relating folk- and church-song; of Axel Olrik's enthusiastic labors in continuing Grundtvig's textediting, and disseminating knowledge and widespread appreciation of the ballads as an invaluable treasury; of Hjalmar Thuren's extension of the horizon both in space and time, which is acknowledged to have laid the foundation for the present edition; the continuation of his work as collector and of the text-editing as well, of Hakon Grüner-Nielsen, who was in full command of all that had been achieved thus far; the consequent radical alterations of procedural policy necessitated by fresh accessions since 1950, and the impossibility of incorporating the latest texts into the body of the work; the significant and far-reaching contributions to theory and method introduced by Thorkild Knudsen's researches: all these and lesser matters are covered in this enlightening summary of what, in terms of normal human endeavor, can only be called an awesome enterprise. The meticulous way in which every tune has been identified, by DgF number and variant number, by Archive number, period, collector, singer, date, and area of recording, with biographical data, sequence and context of collection: all this has been under the adjudication of Svend Nielsen, along with the regulation of every phrase of every tune. His impact lies on every page. The care for detail staggers the imagination.

Thorkild Knudsen ends his essay with an exhortation to put the edition to use. And it is only natural to hope for some future realization of his wishes, in the form of an edition that will select the choicest examples of Danish melodic tradition signalized in this work, that will unite them with their own proper texts, fully laid out with the melodies in harmonious juxtaposition, so that they may be experienced as a living reality of song, undivided and entire, a true national monument -- a consummation devoutly to be wished, and a tribute to all who through the generations have so faithfully labored to this end.

Editorial Note

The century-old Danish ballad edition *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* consists of ten text volumes (1853–1965, reprinted 1966–67) and was concluded by vol. XI The Tunes and vol. XII Indices, Akademisk Forlag, Copenhagen 1976. The history of the text edition was resumed and the index volume reviewed by Jørgen Lorenzen in *Danske Studier* 1977, and now the editors have pleasure in presenting a review of the music edition by Professor *Bertrand H. Bronson*, Berkeley, California; it should be added that his own monumental edition *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* (of which see *Danske Studier* 1960, 1963, 1976) was followed, also in 1976, by an abridged edition *The Singing Tradition of Child's Popular Ballads* (Princeton U. P., 46 + 530 pp.).

As pointed out by Professor Bronson, *DgF XI* is a rather complex undertaking. Bibliographically, it could be presented thus:

Danmarks gamle Folkeviser. XI: Melodier. Udgivet af Thorkild Knudsen, Svend Nielsen, Nils Schiørring. Med to tillæg i fotografisk optryk: A: Hjalmar Thuren & H. Grüner-Nielsen: Færøske Melodier til danske Kæmpeviser (1923). B: Den uafsluttede udgave af *DgF XI* (Hæfte 1–3, 1935–59). Universitets-Jubilæets Danske Samfund – Akademisk Forlag, København 1976.

Also with English title: Old popular ballads of Denmark. XI: The Tunes. Edited by Thorkild Knudsen, Svend Nielsen, Nils Schiørring. With two addenda in reprint: &c&c.

The disposition is the following:

*9–*39: Nils Schiørring: Melodioverlevering og melodistudium. Transmission and Study of the melodies.

*41–*121: Thorkild Knudsen: Udgavens principper og melodiernes kompositionssystem. Editorial principles and compositional system of the melodies.

*122–*126. Nøgle til udgaven. Key to the edition. *These three chapters are printed in Danish and in an English translation by Dr. John Bergsagel.*

1–468: Melodierne. Manuskript ved Svend Nielsen. The notes of the edition are given in English only, and it comprises fascimiles, a map of Denmark, and indices of first lines, titles, informants, recorders, and a word list.

A I–XXII and 1–84: H. Grüner-Nielsen's and Hjalmar Thuren's edition of Faroese tunes to Danish ballads, 1923, including an introduction, indices, and Scandinavian parallels.

B I–XXVIII and 1–192: The unfinished edition of *DgF XI*, 1935–59, i.e. three instalments with preliminary comments and the tunes to ballads 1–229.

The editors of *Danske Studier* wish to express their sincere thanks to Professor Bertrand H. Bronson for his distinguished contribution, to Svend Grundtvigs og Axel Orlriks Legat for having covered the printing costs of the review, and the Swedish Folksong Archives for an agreement of publishing the reviews of Jørgen Lorenzen and Bertrand H. Bronson as a number in their reprint series *Meddelanden från Svenskt Visarkiv*. Finally, it should be mentioned once again that the expenses of the edition have been carried since about 1890 by that indispensable institution The Carlsberg Foundation, and that *DgF XI* and *XII* saw light in the centennial year of the foundation.