

Radio Within and Across Borders

Music as national and international in interbellum

Danish radio

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Between the two world wars radio landed like a UFO in the midst of cultures more or less nationally defined all over the world.¹ The beginnings were quite humble, but as the new medium caught on after 1925 it grew with an almost feverish speed. Radio came about mainly due to private initiative, but from 1922 onwards still more European countries defined radio as state monopolies (France and Spain being exceptions) and channelled huge sums into the new broadcasting corporations in order to develop the medium. By the mid-30s national broadcasting corporations had become the all-powerful cultural institutions in their countries.

In Europe this UFO landed in a large number of countries, many of which were only a couple of years old.² One of the important driving forces behind the Great War had been nationalism, and the peace treaties did not really alter that, even though the political context had changed a lot, especially in the Eastern parts of Europe. On the other hand, international cooperation grew immensely in the wake of the war. Internationalism was important to the workers' movements, and at the Paris peace negotiations US president Woodrow Wilson argued for establishing the League of Nations (1919–1946) to prevent future wars.

Radio became part of these struggles, mainly supporting the nation-building forces, but also engaging in European collaboration through the IBU (International Broadcasting Union, 1925) following the lead of the League of Nations. In the following I will discuss some aspects of interbellum radio's double nature with regard to supporting nationalizing and internationalizing tendencies and how music and the principle of transmission contributed to this. It seems that radio could easily support the heightened sensitivity to both nation- and continent-building and, by presenting 'the other' acoustically, make the world a little less strange. My comments are based on an analysis of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's (DR) daily radio programmes, especially the ones from the first week of November 1925–40, and other contemporary written sources.³

1 This article is a revised version of a paper delivered at the LARM conference 'Digital Archives, Audiovisual Media and Cultural Memory', University of Copenhagen, 14–15 November 2013.

2 Ireland (1919), Finland (1917), Estonia (1918), Lithuania (1918), Latvia (1918), Poland (1918), Hungary (1918), Czechoslovakia (1918), Yugoslavia (1918), Austria (1918) became individual nation states, while Denmark regained parts of Southern Jutland (lost to Germany in 1864).

3 Recently, the research infrastructure of LARM made it possible to access detailed information on all DR radio programmes since its first broadcasts. Surviving recordings of programmes have become available to students and researchers as well. This only amounts to approximately 150 recordings for the period in question, though (see <http://larm.sites.ku.dk/>).

There was an abundance of discourses linking music and nationality or music and universality, and they were propagated in various radio programmes. Such contextualisation often marked music as national or international, and if you look at programming in general, there is no doubt that the DR applied both discourses. Series of programmes celebrating the nation's great musical and literary sons and the playing of the national anthem at the end of each day were two obvious examples supporting the national perspective, while the many music transmissions from other countries supported the international perspective. In between was a large grey area where questions of national belonging could be answered in different ways according to circumstance. For example, does the large repertoire by Austro-German composers led by Johann Strauss Jr. indicate an internationalising tendency? The answer to this question is probably yes, as it mirrors the centre-periphery structure of musical life which developed in the nineteenth century and was accepted by most European countries. But this is a general convention; it does not apply to radio in particular. On the other hand, radio saw to it that this convention became more widely known. Dreaming of a blue, musicalized (and maybe slightly exoticized) Danube became possible for most Danes during the 1930s. If listeners knew this waltz – and they probably did, because 'An der schönen, blauen Donau' was played at least once every fortnight on average in the years 1930–1935 – we may presume that they had been introduced to it several times and, thus, that they at least knew the title and maybe stories about waltzing, Vienna, the river, or the Strausses.

From the other side of the national fence we may question whether anyone would have recognized Danish Strauss sound-alike Hans Christian Lumbye's music as Danish if they were not already familiar with it. Lumbye's music is primarily a part of the great European tradition for what DR labelled 'old dance music'. But then again, Lumbye was one of the most popular composers on Danish radio; one of his works was played at least once every three days in the same five-year period. Thus, most listeners would have been aware that Lumbye was Danish and able to make the connection between Lumbye's music and Danishness, even if the music did not in any way support such associations.

The main point here is that radio in a broad sense created new, different, and more communicatively effective types of contexts for stressing and understanding more music than ever before in national and/or international perspectives/frames. I am thinking of verbal explanations on the air, the pontificating style of address, written explanations and pictures in print (dailies and radio magazines), the staging of the medium as world-encompassing, and the ability to transmit in real time from specific places, be they within or outside of Danish borders. All this contributed to the contextualisation. The last example, transmission, points towards a main media specificity of radio: its ability to relay.

Heikki Uimonen has developed the concept of transphonia as the positive equivalent of R. Murray Schaefer's concept of schizophonia. Both concepts address the division of sound from its source, and transphonia refers more specifically to the 'mechanically and electroacoustically relocated sounds' that emphasize 'how sounds

are being used individually and communally?⁴ Different versions of the phonograph became the first medium for such mechanical relocations, and the telephone could transport sounds from one place to another in real time. Radio took all of this to another level by combining the two and by doing so with no strings attached, so to speak, from a single place to many places simultaneously. In time, radio also performed such transphonia at a low price.

In radio's early years the 'trans' of transphonia became concretized in transmissions, first from point to point, then from point to many points (the idea of broadcasting). Indeed this became the great marvel of radio: through the air it transmitted live sounds made by someone in one place to someone in another place. As radio developed and the signal chain became more complex, point-to-points transmissions were joined by point-to-point-to-points transmissions. That is, the popular meaning of the term transmission changed from transmission from the studio to listeners to transmission from events like football matches, concerts, or bridge openings attended by the royal family and the cabinet *via* the radio to the listeners. This notion and practice of transmission became an important means for nation-building and for opening up towards the rest of the world (mainly Europe, but also faraway places like Australia or the US).

I would argue that despite being placed at specific locations the radio studio was not localized in an actual or genuine sense. It was an abstract place, the place of ether and radio waves from where named voices without bodies sounded. Transmission, on the other hand, became a mediation of a concrete place inhabited by concrete people. Even if hardly any listeners had actually been there, the point of a transmission was to mediate for example a specific evening in a specific restaurant with Kai Ewans and his orchestra. Via the radio system you listened in on what was happening somewhere in the world. Transmission made places and spaces meaningful. The radio cliché 'and now back to the studio' illustrates the movement from existing places and people to the abstract space of radio.

Paradoxically, radio and transmissions both established and transcended distance, often at the same time. Geographically, the paradox could be experienced in (re)transmissions from the US, which came from far away, but could nevertheless be heard in your living room. Socially, the paradox could be experienced when the king or the prime minister would speak to you in the privacy of your living room. In both cases you could hear many of the details of the sound production, perhaps even more than if you had been present in the room with the speaker. The experiential schema for sound and distance broke down; or rather it was complemented by a completely different electro-acoustic sound schema.

4 Heikki Uimonen, 'Senses and Soundscapes' (PowerPoint presentation), https://noppa.aalto.fi/noppa/kurssi/01247/materiaali/01247_senses_and_soundscapes.pdf, accessed on 10 Nov. 2013, p. 34. R. Murray Schafer, *The New Soundscape: A Handbook for the Modern Music Teacher* (Ontario: Don Mills, 1969).

RADIO'S STRUCTURING OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SPACES

At a national level radio defined centre and periphery along the lines of capital versus province. Such structuring was hardly new, but as the number of listeners grew it became much more effective than any previous efforts at creating a national and hierarchical, imagined community. Until 1928 Copenhagen was at the absolute centre of radiophonic space. Dialect, musicalized time signals, and general discourse in news and cultural programmes stressed that. After 1928 it became easier to transmit from the province, as a net of local radio studios was built all over the country and the number of music transmissions from the province increased. Having been granted radiophonic existence the province also got a voice, although a small one. The net of studios and transmissions together with the playing of the national anthem each night, the radiophonic and -genic construction of a canon of great Danish musical and literary artists, and finally the proximity of the voices of king and cabinet ('the state') were among the main building blocks in the renewed branding of the Danish nation.

At an international level (mainly Europe) the emerging radio structures did not adhere to the centre-periphery principle, but to a network principle. The IBU was established in 1925 and soon saw it as its main job to coordinate the construction of a European radio infrastructure.⁵ Contrary to nation-building this 'continent-building' was new and followed in the footsteps of the League of Nations, which had been founded in 1919. It was based on technological coordination and distribution (e.g. transmitting frequencies) and the ideology of the peaceful modern man.⁶ In this sense Europe became ordered geographically according to frequency. In addition, having a national radio station was important to the new post-war countries in Europe. Like the older countries they got an ether voice and could partake in the democracy of the air.

The ordering became visualized on the radio dial. It could be round (Europe as a globe) or a horizontal line (Europe as a scale). Well-known cities were lined up on the dial together with rather obscure places (e.g. Königs Wusterhausen, Kalundborg, Monte Ceneri), which thus became new European geographical points of reference. Also, in local news-related radio programmes (news, weather, shipping, market) the strangest places might be mentioned (e.g. Utsira), and on the short wave band you could pick up foreign languages you had never heard before. Such orderings were accidental, but via transmissions the national radio stations could also transport you to well-known places (the US or Australia), demonstrating that the world was becoming still smaller and that people actually existed 'out there'.

In the early years the radio medium as such was considered international. Using crystal sets young men roamed the airwaves searching for signs of life. 1920s-radio

5 Andreas Fickers and Suzanne Lommers, 'Eventing Europe: Broadcasting and the Mediated Performances of Europe', in Alexander Badenoch and Andreas Fickers (eds.), *Materializing Europe: Transnational Infrastructures and the Project of Europe* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 314.

6 Suzanne Lommers, *Europe – On Air. Interwar Projects for Radio Broadcasting* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 84–85.

amateurs were thrilled if they could find a clear signal, and written documentation of contact was an important trophy. In *Radiolytteren's* mast head the listener listened to two worlds (the West and the East), and the Blaupunkt advertisement below stresses the notion of world-embracing radio waves and radio products emanating from one point (see Ill. 1).



Ill. 1. The front page of Danish radio magazine, *Radiolytteren* (The Radio Listener), 15 Sept. 1928. Notice also the male listening to the world in the logo.

RADIO PRACTICES DELIMITING AND TRANSCENDING BORDERS

Throughout the interbellum period the IBU organized series of concerts produced by one member station and transmitted to the others (*Nuits Nationales* 1926–31, *Concerts Européens* 1931–39).⁷ The logistics of the technological aspect of these transmissions was extremely complex, and the concerts became major tests of practical European cooperation. They also contributed to the mapping by giving specific places within Europe a sound and/or a music. The IBU transmissions were quite spectacular, but more simple binational transmissions took place almost on a weekly basis. Acoustically Berlin, Stockholm, and London became well-known places, and through retransmissions via the BBC even North American radio stations reached Danish homes.

From the point of view of Danish radio programming it was a fact that international musicians were better than the Danish. Special concerts became special because of foreign performers. For example, Martin Granau has documented how the conductors Nicolai Malko, Fritz Busch, and Egisto Tango supplanted local conductors at more prestigious concerts.⁸ Such performers demonstrated that Denmark (i.e. the national radio) was part of an international circuit of musical stars, and by being part of international concert life Denmark earned its place among its peers – the other European countries.

As indicated in connection with the remarks on Strauss and Lumbye above it is hard to decide whether or not music has national marks. Questions of context and reception are more important than nationally defined styles or composers' and performers' national backgrounds. This is also true of the interbellum years, but it does not reflect how the radio programmers thought about music. To them music reflected nationality to a very high degree (even though it might be universal as well), as can be gathered from the numerous Italian, French, German, and Danish nights. From this point of view it makes sense to point out that the majority of the music played on the radio was not Danish. Danish music was used, among other things, to stress national pride, and the international repertoire complemented this by stressing Denmark's place in a larger community.

Language was, of course, the most important indicator of nationality. But this was complemented by the frequent broadcasting of foreign tongues, mainly German, English, and French. Early on language tuition became a main stay in Danish radio. Most days there would be tutorials around dinner time. What is more surprising to a contemporary listener is that in the early years you could even find full 20–30-minute lectures in the language in question.

Radio magazines and newspapers also contributed to radio's international dimension by publishing the programme schedules of several European radio stations throughout the period. This contributed to the feeling that you could entertain the whole of Europe in your living room, if you wanted to. It is difficult to say how

7 Fickers & Lommers, 'Eventing Europe', 309–24.

8 Martin Granau, *Holms vision. Radiosymfoniorkestret 75 år* (Copenhagen: DR, 2000), 71–137.

many actually listened to foreign radio stations and whether the double-spread articles of *Radiolytteren* with pictures of the buildings and announcers of foreign radio stations were intended for existing or future listeners.⁹ Nevertheless, receiving radio signals from faraway places confirmed their existence in other ways than written reports could do, as you could actually hear them speak in their own tongue.

Internationalism came just as naturally to Danish radio producers as did nationalism. I have mentioned radio's contribution to the Danish infrastructure. Apart from that, DR carried on the musical nationalism of the nineteenth century and pointed to the discursively constructed national music heritage, which included symphonies by Gade, Hartmann, and Nielsen and art songs with Danish lyrics (especially Lange-Müller). Such music was played in programmes that combined literature and music, using the affective aspects of music and the semantic aspects of literature to create an effective message concerning the nation's great sons.

More popular music traditions took up broadcasting time as well. Popular songs from the folk high school tradition (a word not used by the radio) were quite frequent, while popular music with lyrics from the North American tradition did not emerge until the 1930s. Folk music, the radio's term for small instrumental bands performing traditional dance music repertoire, could be heard as well.

Daily transmissions (sometimes even twice a day) from a relatively small number of Danish restaurants contributed to a sense of everyday Danishness not based on the 'nation's best', but on popular culture. Danish conductors and their bands played one to two-hour shows, at first only from Copenhagen, but soon restaurants in provincial towns also became involved. Transmissions from other music localities (i.e. the music conservatory in Aarhus, the regional symphony orchestras, the Copenhagen music societies) also appeared, creating general knowledge about what was going on in bourgeois music circles.

Music was also used to mark the passing of radio time. The national anthem closed each day, while the Copenhagen Town Hall carillon marked when the clock had struck noon, six pm and midnight.¹⁰ The pause signal, the first station indicator (the jingle), appeared in 1931. The signal was the allegedly oldest notated Danish melody: 'Drømte mig en drøm' ('I had a dream').¹¹

CONCLUSIONS

Through its programming practices the Danish national radio sometimes stressed the national, sometimes the international. It was not a question of either or. Both discourses made sense, maybe even at the same time. I have pointed to a few central programme activities to support the claim that radio music (and other) contributed extensively to a heightened sensibility towards the national and the international.

9 One example is 'Stationer vi hører I: Berlin-Zeesen', *Radiolytteren*, 3 (1931), 24–25.

10 The carillon played a watchman's song pastiche composed by P.E. Lange-Müller (cf. <http://www.kb.dk/da/nb/tema/fokus/raadhus.html>, accessed on 3 Dec. 2013).

11 Torben Sangild, 'Jingler – radioens lydige indpakning', *Seismograf/DMT* (special issue on radio), 2013, <http://seismograf.org/artikel/jingler-radioens-lydige-indpakning>, accessed on 20 Oct. 2014.

I have also argued that a specific radio format, the transmission, was an important reason for this heightened intensity.

Like the Internet today, interbellum radio made it possible to listen to immense amounts of music, but unlike the Internet it became contextualised – not necessarily explained in detail, but at least framed by the programme flow, institution, presenter, and newspaper publicity. Radio helped people (i.e. license holders) make sense of a world which many considered to be modern. The apparatus was welcomed into the home as entertainment, as newsagent, as teacher. Furthermore, radio helped listeners take part in public life, or rather to follow its development, and radio presented ‘the other’ within the nation state, taking on many different forms: other provinces or completely different cultures. In this way certain genres of music and radio in general helped build the imagined community of the nation and, at the same time, to view this community as part of something even larger.

SUMMARY

Politically, Europe was dominated by both renewed national movements and tendencies towards internationalism in the decades following World War I. As a new and strong medium, radio became a tool for supporting nation-building in individual countries and for developing international relations, for example through the International Broadcasting Union (IBU). In this article I look at this apparent paradox by investigating a few aspects of the Danish music repertoire and the principles for radio transmission. I demonstrate how the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) practised both principles in their programming without seeing it as a problem in any way. The enormous amount of music, which radio made it possible to listen to, contributed to this – not least because the music always became more or less contextualized thanks to radio’s many metatexts. In this way music in early radio contributed to a certain understanding of the modern, the ‘other’, and the new, making them less strange. At the same time radio articulated a well-known, ‘homely’ music background as the basis for understanding the new.