



Copenhagen 1622

Copenhagen and its Music in the Seventeenth Century

By Bjarke Moe

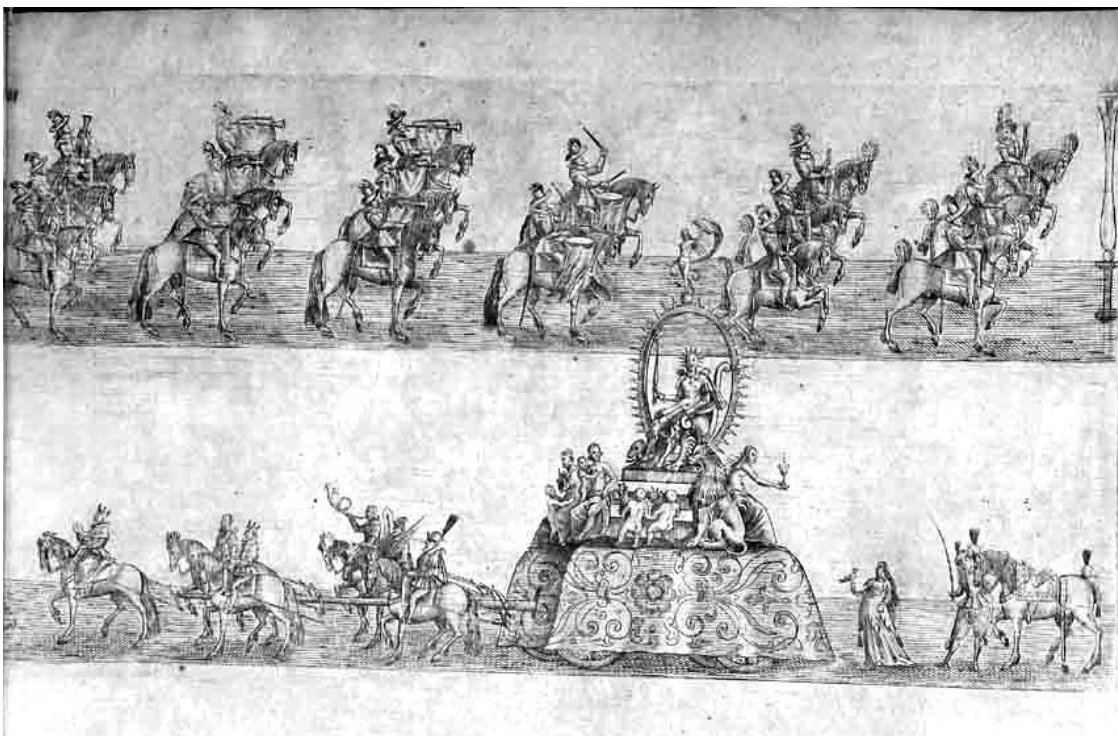
When imagining what seventeenth century Copenhagen was like, one first of all thinks of the architecture that still four hundred years later dominates the 'skyline' of the city – *Børsen, Rundetårn, Kastellet*. But how about the musical life: Where did performances of music by professional musicians take place, and where did the ordinary citizen of Copenhagen encounter such performances?

The large public musical scenes of the city were the churches. Here, music performed by professional and semi-professional musicians was a part of the citizen's religious everyday life. Music was used to frame religious ceremonies such as services, funerals and weddings. To the ordinary citizens, the churches were integral parts of their lives, and in that way the musical performances there were public events. Music was also performed independent of liturgical rituals, and during the seventeenth century the Copenhagen churches became venues of public concerts: The famous organist Johann Lorentz the younger was known to play the organ one hour every other day in St. Nicolai. At least the merchants that had their market stalls in and around the church must have been used to having this kind of background music. Lorentz was just one of several German organists that worked in the city during the seventeenth century. The brothers Christopher and Antonius Schuler from Braunschweig served at the cathedral for three decades before their cousin David Bernhard Meder took over the post for the next forty years. This year's jubilee Christian Geist was employed at the parish church *Helligsåndskirken* for 25 years and in addition served at the church of the royal navy, *Holmens Kirke*, and at the church of the university, *Trinitatiskirken*.

The Copenhagen grammar school was an important musical institution in association with the cathedral. The students were trained to sing hymns under the supervision of music teachers in order to participate at

services in the parish churches, *Vor Frue Kirke*, *Helligåndskirken* and *St. Nicolai Kirke*. The students had several hours of music lessons very week, and they rehearsed large vocal pieces so that they could perform grandiose music together with civic musicians in the churches at the high feasts, such as Christmas and Easter. One gets a glimpse of how extensive the schools musical activities were from some of the rector's preserved documents; when bridal pairs celebrated weddings in the churches, they could choose from a list what kind of music they would like the choir to sing. If they were wealthy and willing to spend 16 *Rigsdaler* (an amount comparable with the monthly wages of the choir leader), the choir would sing "large and complete music" throughout the entire wedding ceremony to celebrate their love. The musical repertoire of the school was dominated by German music by protestant composers such as Michael Praetorius, Johann Hermann Schein and Andreas Hammerschmidt.

King Christian IV (1577-1648) not only initiated a visual renovation of his capital that we witness today; he was also concerned about the musical life of the city. Professional musicians were employed at his court that resided at the Copenhagen castle. These musicians had several tasks: they performed music during the services in the king's chapel; they played during dinner and dancing; and they entertained the king in his chamber. We know of many famous musicians and composers that were employed in Copenhagen during the seventeenth century, such as John Dowland, Heinrich Schütz and Kaspar Förster, and their music is often played at concerts and in the radio today. Contrary to what we often imagine of the king's music, the performances at the Copenhagen castle was mostly heard by a small number of people, namely the servants and other courtiers, visiting guests and sometimes the royal family, if they (at all) were present at the castle. Like we today not usually get the opportunity of witnessing what kind of music is played at the queen's palaces, the seventeenth century Copenhagen citizens did not pay attention to the king's music. Only when the king met his Danish subjects, his musical establishment was showing off the magnificence of his power. Like other rulers of his time, Christian IV was focused on displaying his glory: when making parades, his musicians played on shiny silver trumpets and noise-making kettledrums. Despite its almost hidden existence on an everyday basis, the musical activity at the Danish court supersedes our wildest imagination. Christian IV spent thousands of dollars every year to keep his musical staff up-to-date.



The Danish royal parade in Hamburg 1603 – notice the trumpeters and drummers in the upper left corner

The court in Copenhagen was highly influenced by currents coming from Germany. The Danish royal family was related to members of several German courts, and as duke of Schleswig-Holstein, the king of Denmark naturally united his kingdom with the neighbour to the south. In these days the Danish and the German courts shared a common fascination of Italian music. Music by Italian composers impressed musicians and art-lovers throughout Europe. Italy was regarded as the motherland of music – the source of musical creativity. The fascination was a phenomenon that had an impact on musical life in the North on several different levels, socially as well as musically. The status of Italian music was showed by the fact that the most powerful leaders of Europe put an extraordinary effort in associating with it. Music and musicians from Italy became a means of representing the ruler's good taste, his sense of quality and his ability to be fashionable. Since Italian musicians were desired, they were expensive to hire and to keep. As a result, the rulers profited from having them at their courts – they became a symbol of power.

The German Emperors that lived in Prague and later Vienna employed several Italian musicians, and they even aimed at letting a musician from Italy lead the chapel. From the late sixteenth century onwards, the Polish king established his music at court based on a group of Italians. They were picked up directly from the musical circles around the pope in Rome. Christian IV and his staff too intermingled with Italians. Around 1600 the king sent off the first wave of Danish musicians heading towards Italy. Here they studied with the famous organist Giovanni Gabrieli. Their stories are well known and have been told numerous times: Danes such as Mogens Pedersøn travelled to Venice and learned how to compose madrigals; a vocal genre at that time that came to represent their ventures into Italian music. Pedersøn and his colleagues were cultural diplomats travelling on behalf of the Danish king, and during their southward journeys across Europe, they collected all kinds of musical experience and material in order to bring it back home to the court. Beyond making contacts with musicians abroad, they also brought sheet music along for the purpose of making it part of the musical repertoire at court. From the cover of one of the Danish madrigal publications, it is easy to imagine how the court musicians back home in Copenhagen played polychoral music by Giovanni Gabrieli in the royal palace. Also music by famous composers such as Claudio Monteverdi and Luca Marenzio became part of the repertoire.



From the madrigal anthology Giardino Novo, published in Copenhagen 1606

Italian singers and instrumentalists were employed at the Copenhagen court during the seventeenth century. It was not sufficient to the kings to let Danish musicians visit Italy. Christian IV kept contacts with the Emperor's court and sent off courtiers to Poland in order to arrange for virtuoso Italians to come to Denmark. By hiring the German composer Heinrich Schütz as *Kapelmester* in 1633, Christian managed to place one of Europe's most talented Italianate composers in the middle of his court. But he was not satisfied yet. Shortly before his death, he convinced a talented Italian singer, Agostino Fontana, to become the first Italian leader of the courtly music.