

Apart from Hamlet, the first thing I knew about Denmark was Carl Nielsen. Around 1970, when I was still a student at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, I became interested in Scandinavia (probably from watching Bergman's films). I bought a travel book, *Danish Episodes* by Robin Bryans, about Denmark which fascinated me, and I heard a recording of Nielsen's 5th symphony, and particularly admired the freedom given to the drum. I bought a selection of Nielsen's songs and found them very beautiful, and sang a few, though I had no idea about how to pronounce the words. In 1972, I attended an early music summer course in Belgium — almost all European countries were represented, but each country could send only a maximum of two people. I made several friends there, including a singer from Denmark, Birgit, who, when she discovered my taste for Nielsen's songs, very kindly taught me how to pronounce the words.

I had brought a small tent with me and planned to go off on my own somewhere. Birgit suggested Denmark, where I could have the use of their flat in Copenhagen, while she and her family were away in the summer house. So by train through Germany I arrived in Denmark, having experienced my first Danish buffet on the ferry boat. It was early August and I spent the next two weeks there: first in Copenhagen, where I explored art galleries, pipe smoking, beer, a puppet theatre, Hamlet's Elsinore, and mushrooms. Then I decided to visit an island and took a small ferry to Langeland. It rained heavily, but I was perfectly happy to get wet - the beaches were deserted and the woods fecund. One night some of the tents at the campsite were washed away in a thunder storm; luckily I had pitched my tent on higher ground and slept through the night. I then returned to Copenhagen and was invited out to join Birgit's family in the summer house: and here I witnessed another essential element of life in the north.

Back in England I read about Aksel Schiøtz and listened to his recordings. Apparently he had a strong reputation as a teacher, so I wrote to ask him if I could come and study with him. He wrote back saying 'yes', but I could raise no funds for the trip and had to forego the pleasure of working with him. I assumed I would return to Denmark 'soon', but in fact I became very busy as a singer and (eventually) conductor, and over the next twenty years only visited Denmark on two very brief occasions to give concerts.

In the 1990s I lived in the USA, and I thought I had left Europe for good. In 1996 however, I was booked to tour in Germany and in Copenhagen (with Steve Reich and his musicians, plus the singers of my own group, Theatre of Voices). Before leaving home I had received a letter from the group Ars Nova, who wanted to invite me to guest-conduct them. So in between the Reich rehearsal and concert, I met one of the Ars Nova singers and the group's manager, a charming young woman. Several things happened as a result of this brief and innocent meeting. I returned the following year to conduct Ars Nova, and on several occasions after that. The manager went off to study singing.

During my time at Indiana, Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen was one of a group of Danish musicians who visited the university for a short festival of Danish music, and I very much enjoyed his sense of humour and his compositions (neither of them 'politically correct'). I started visiting Denmark each summer to lead an early music summer school at Fuglsang Castle on Karen Englund's initiative — I was enchanted by the place and its connections to Carl Nielsen. My inclination to spend more time in Denmark began to take on a serious sense of having found the place where I wanted to be.

A year or two later I accepted to become Ars Nova's chief conductor, (following in the footsteps of the wonderful Tamás Vetö), and then, not entirely by chance, I met the ex-manager one more time. As a result, I quit my tenured position as head of the Early Music Institute, at Indiana University, Bloomington, (in the USA), moved to Denmark in 2004, and married the ex-manager.

Looking back, it now seems that I was destined to return to Europe and live in Denmark. So on several levels it means a lot to me, both musically and personally, to receive the Carl Nielsen prize.

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