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- 2 · Special section, *70th anniversary of the Danish Musicological Society*
- 3 · Reviews
- 4 · Bibliography
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Symposium

Danish Musicological Society's 70th anniversary symposium

To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Danish Musicological Society, a symposium was held on 27 September 2024 at the University of Copenhagen to discuss the status of contemporary Danish musicology with an aim to reflect on its research approaches and reception. The symposium, titled 'Music Research in (Danish) Society', was organised by Mikkel Vad (KU) and Thomas Husted Kirkegaard (AU). The symposium was divided into three separate topics representing key musicological fields and, most importantly, their impact on today's society. Each panel consisted of three invited speakers, whose individual presentations were followed by open discussions between the panel and the audience.

The first panel concerned the meeting between musicological research and the media. Mikkel Vad served as the first moderator and the panel consisted of three musicological scholars: Lea Wierød Borčak (AU; Sangens Hus), Anders Reuter (Lund) and Rasmus Riegels (Lund; KU), who shared their experiences communicating their findings and analyses to the media. They reported that media platforms, as a rule, are highly interested in topical news on music, but also eager exploiters of goodwill among academic researchers, expecting academics to hand out ready conclusions as acts of altruism.

The unavailability of musical simplification to fit a journalistic narrative was also hotly debated. The strongest symptom of which being the fact that music theory is seemingly completely absent in mainstream media analyses – even to the point that a language for popular music theory is practically yet to be developed. The panel strongly encouraged musicological researchers to pick up the baton and exploit the fact that they have the expertise needed to communicate music to an enthusiastic audience. Thereby, musicologists have the potential to elevate the level of the discussions and understanding of music among the general public.

The second debate was moderated by Holger Schulze (KU) and was conducted in English under the headline 'Danish musicology in international perspective'. Three non-Danish music scholars took part in the panel: Klisala Harrison (AU), Maria Rijo Lopes da Cunha (AU) and Jessica Holmes (KU). While the definition of 'Danish' musicology in this context was somewhat unclear, the debate offered some insightful examples as to how different cultural points of view represented by international scholars can have a positive influence on and broaden the scope of Danish musicologists too.

The panel presented their cross-cultural approaches to musicology through field studies conducted in Greenland, Finland and the Middle East, demonstrating how a more diverse and inclusive focus on music, among other things, could be used to treat trauma and strengthen the social position of minority groups such as asylum seekers and people with disabilities. Some lacunae in Danish anthropological research approaches were pointed out as well as speculations as to reasons why. For outsiders in the field, however, fewer generalisations and a couple of specific examples would have been helpful as to what specific challenges differences in value systems, power imbalance and colonialist traditions could cause, including how to overcome them and implement strategies like epistemic disobedience in practice.

Thomas Husted Kirkegaard moderated the final debate whose topic was music biographies, hereby returning to the theme of the first debate: communication of musicological research, this time with the book as the medium. The panel consisted of Michael Fjeldsøe (KU) and Thomas Michelsen (*Politiken*), who are authors of biographies on composers Carl Nielsen and Vagn Holmboe, respectively, as well as Jonas Damgaard-Mørch (Multivers) as stand-in for Jens Cornelius (DR; the editor behind Multivers' book series on Danish composers, *Danske komponister*), who had fallen ill.

Having been unpopular and seemingly dying out until less than a decade ago, the composer biography has experienced a true revival in Denmark in recent years. The genre's great public appeal was emphasised and ethical standpoints were debated, both to which extent biographical knowledge is relevant to the understanding of a piece of music, and how to avoid reinforcing the conservative and romanticised canon of music history. The panel argued that an already popular main character can work as an offset to entice readers and simultaneously be utilised as a prism through which additional and more nuanced narratives can be investigated. On the other hand, greater representation of e.g. female composers could be ensured through short, reader-friendly introductions to composers whose stories have never previously been told, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of our musical legacy.

The celebration of the anniversary of the Danish Musicological Society seemed a most welcome excuse for experts across different musicological fields to gather and share their research approaches, results and aims. The attendees seemed to greatly enjoy the company of fellow music scholars, experts and aficionados, and the symposium concluded with a lively reception and a dinner.

It is evident that there is a great need for musicological research in Danish society: popular music is widely debated in the media; biographies on classical composers are on high demand; and historically neglected musical activities relating to, for example, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities could benefit from new and diverse approaches to musicking and historical as well as contemporary representation. Various communication strategies and goals are at play concurrently, and a closer understanding of the work of colleagues operating in different musicological areas is surely beneficial

to successfully communicating complex matters in a convincing and engaging fashion without compromising academic integrity. It would thus be most fruitful for Danish musicology with more symposiums like this one in the near future to elaborate this debate further.

Nanna Staugaard Villagomez