

## THE MUSICAL WORLD OF AAGE OXENVAD

Gregory Barrett

### Context and research questions

Aage Oxenvad was born in 1884 in the small rural village of Gettrup, Denmark. Here, far from Copenhagen, in the northern part of the Jutland peninsula, Oxenvad received his first musical influences from his father who was a sharecropper and also the village *spillemand*, or town musician. Up to the age of 12 Aage played the flute with his father and brothers at dances. A switch to clarinet was made with the complaint that the flute was “boring...with such a cool, uninteresting tone.” This quest for more passion in his music making points the way toward the strong emotions Oxenvad would show during his adult years both in and out of music. As a teen he made the long trip to Copenhagen every two weeks to study with Carl Skjerne, solo clarinetist with the Royal Danish Orchestra. Skjerne had been a pupil of Brahms’s clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld.

Oxenvad’s musical education continued at the Royal Conservatory in Copenhagen from 1903-1905, followed by a brief study period in Paris. In 1909 he joined the Royal Danish Orchestra. Future friend, musical inspiration, collaborator, and soul-mate Carl Nielsen had been a second violinist with the orchestra and was now a conductor. Like Oxenvad, Nielsen had a rural upbringing. Tage Scharff, a clarinet pupil of Oxenvad’s from 1940-44 remarked “Even in urbane or royal company, Nielsen and Oxenvad ‘both had mud on their boots.’ ” This characterization would infuse Oxenvad’s musical orientation throughout his life. In 1919 Oxenvad was promoted to solo clarinetist. He occupied this position until his death in 1944 even though Mengelberg invited him to join the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

Through performances of standard and Danish ballet, opera, concert, and chamber repertoire Oxenvad participated in a wide variety of music. He collaborated with Igor Stravinsky for a Copenhagen performance of the trio version of *L’Histoire du soldat*. Starting at least by 1905, Oxenvad wrote a series of compositions including songs, piano pieces, string quartets, wind quintet movements, string orchestra works and a sonata for clarinet and piano. The Royal Danish Library has manuscripts of 39 of these works in its collection.

Due to Oxenvad’s prominence, from the 1920’s to the 1940’s a series of clarinet works were dedicated to him by leading Danish composers. Among these works, the Carl Nielsen *Koncert for Klarinet og Orkester* (1928) is well-known, but what are the other works and their characteristics? And what of Oxenvad’s own compositions?

Aage Oxenvad died on April 13, 1944. The following month a remembrance was published in the magazine of the Association of Danish Music showing that Aage was a beloved man, musician, and teacher. He was regarded as the ideal wind player for both chamber and orchestral music. He was recognized for being an expressive master in his playing, able to portray a range of emotions, as well as being an industrious worker. Above all he was recognized for his musicianship, connection to nature, and expression of his feelings.

## Project background

During spring semester 2008 I took a sabbatical leave to examine the breadth of the Danish clarinet repertoire. With the roots of the Danish Royal Orchestra going back to the Trumpet Corps at the court of King Christian I in 1448, I knew there was a long and varied history of wind music in Denmark. I examined hundreds of manuscripts and published scores at the Royal Danish Library, the Royal Conservatory, the University of Copenhagen, the Secretariat for New Music, the Music Museum, Edition Wilhelm Hansen, Edition Samfundet, and from the private collections of noted clarinetists.

In general, the works parallel developments found in other European countries as well as in the U.S. One standout characteristic of Danish musical life was the large influence of Carl Nielsen and his groundbreaking works. The period of friendship between Oxenvad and the older Nielsen was simultaneous with Nielsen's pre-eminence. In Oxenvad, Nielsen found a kindred spirit who could perform his musical inventions in an expressively persuasive manner. Oxenvad and Nielsen both shared rural upbringings and similar values that came into play in their shared approach to music. Oxenvad was known to be moody and not to shy away from showing his feelings. He used this characteristic effectively in his performance of musical ideas. This concern for expression of character was exactly the development that was the stylistic breakthrough for Nielsen. Nielsen gave strong character to independent, though simultaneously playing instruments in his compositions; in a sense, unique personalities. These musical personalities coexisted, sometimes harmoniously, other times in conflict. This parallel between Nielsen and Oxenvad resulted in the singular *Koncert for Klarinet og Orkester* (1928) by Carl Nielsen dedicated to Aage Oxenvad.

## Other works dedicated to Aage Oxenvad

### Jørgen Bentzon

Oxenvad's influence on composers was not restricted to Nielsen. Several other composers also penned works dedicated to him. One of them, Jørgen Bentzon (1897-1951) became a student of Nielsen in 1915 and developed his own manner of imbuing co-existing musical parts with individual personalities. Study in Leipzig followed in 1920. Coexisting with his musical studies was the study of law. Returning to Copenhagen in 1921 he soon completed his law degree and was engaged as a secretary at the Ministry of Justice.

With a livelihood assured Bentzon's composition work accelerated. From 1924 to 1941 Bentzon dedicated three works to Oxenvad. The *Sonatine for Flute, Clarinet, and Bassoon*, Op 7 (1924) uses his "character polyphony" where individual instruments freely express their own character. The *Sonatine* was Bentzon's vehicle for an international breakthrough due to the acclaim it earned at the ISCM Music Days in Frankfurt am Main in 1927.

In 1928 Bentzon met Paul Hindemith and was inspired by his activities to develop plans for a "school of people's music." This became a reality with the opening in 1931 of the Københavns Folke-Musikskole. From this same time came his next work dedicated to Oxenvad: *Tema med Variationer*, Op. 14 for solo clarinet (1928). Neo-classically

informed, it is based on an unassuming yet forceful theme, perhaps a parallel to Oxenvad.

The final work Bentzon composed for Oxenvad was the *Kammerkonzert No. 3*, Op. 39 (1941). The *Kammerkonzert No. 3*'s third movement *Allegro pesante e con forza* is a foot-stomping ländler-type movement that one could imagine going full circle back to Oxenvad's *spillemand* beginnings.

#### Harald Agersnap

Another pupil of Nielsen who also dedicated a work to Oxenvad was Harald Agersnap (1899-1982). He was trained at the Royal Conservatory from 1914-1917 and then enjoyed a diverse career as cellist, pianist, composer, conductor and administrator. His hundreds of works include ballet and incidental music, orchestral works, chamber music, songs, solo piano works and the *Suite pour Piano et Clarinet in A* (1922-24) dedicated to Oxenvad. The *Suite*'s first movement is a melodically expressive Lento. The second is in 9/8 and is in a pastoral style. The unique third movement is a 5/4 Allegro moderato. The concluding fourth movement is fantasy-like with a variety of contrasting tempos.

#### Herman D. Koppel

A third composer to write for Oxenvad is the most prominent figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century Danish music after Nielsen. Herman D. Koppel (1908-98) was born to a Polish-Jewish couple who immigrated to Copenhagen. From the age of five Koppel played the piano. As a piano student he entered the Royal Danish Conservatory at 17. He met and became an assistant to Carl Nielsen who was a teacher and then director at the Conservatory from 1916-1931. From Nielsen, Koppel received advice but not formal instruction in composition. Nevertheless Koppel debuted as a composer in 1929 and as a pianist in 1930. International study and performing followed where he was influenced by many threads of modernism, world music and jazz. He had a lifelong career as an important piano soloist and accompanist.

In 1940 Germany occupied Denmark. It was during this time that Koppel composed for Oxenvad the *Koncert for Klarinet og Kammerorkester*, Op. 35 (1941). In 1943 Koppel and his family fled for safety to Sweden. Oxenvad died in 1944 and Koppel did not return to Denmark until 1945. For 65 years Koppel was active as a composer in all genres from solo pieces to concertos, symphonies, and choral-orchestral works. Writing generally in a clear neo-classical style his oeuvre was marked by constant development though he never embraced a serial technique. In 1994 he composed his last work, *Memory*, a piece for strings.

#### Research presentation

My presentation will focus on the works composed for Aage Oxenvad by Jørgen Bentzon, Harald Agersnap, and Herman Koppel as well as the unfinished *Sonata for Klarinet og Klaver* by Oxenvad himself. I will give descriptive analyses, live clarinet, and recorded demonstrations. I will demonstrate how Oxenvad's own character informed the style of these works.

I will frame the discussion of the music with background information about Oxenvad and each of the composers, explaining their connections to the central figure of Danish music, Carl Nielsen, and how his and Oxenvad's shared humanitarian and expressive views inspired the next generation of composers to compose for Oxenvad.

### Sources

#### Works dedicated to Aage Oxenvad.

- |   |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| Agersnap, Harald                        | Suite pour Piano et Clarinet in A                         | 1922 |
| Danish Royal Library                    | Working draft and fair copy.                              |      |
| Bentzon, Jørgen                         | Tema med Variationer for solo clarinet, Op. 14            |      |
| Edition Wilhelm Hansen                  |   | 1928 |
| Bentzon, Jørgen                         | Kammerkonzert No. 3 for Kl solo og mindre orkester, Op 39 | 1941 |
| Samfundet, Edition Dania (pn reduction) |   | 1943 |
| Bentzon, Jørgen                         | Sonatina Op. 7 for flute, clarinet and bassoon            |      |
| Skandinavisk                            |   | 1948 |
| Koppel, Herman D.                       | Koncert for Klarinet og Kammerorkester, Op. 35            | 1941 |
| Skandinavisk                            |   | 1951 |

#### Manuscripts of compositions by Aage Oxenvad. Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Brudevals til en lys ung Pige  
For klaver

Kjørmes Knud  
1923.  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Tekst: 'Jeppe Aakjær'

Quartet i g-mol

Quartet i c-mol

Adagio for Strygeorkester 1905.

Adagio for Strygeorkester af Aage Oxenvad, 1905.

3 Sange  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver Content: Vinternat ("Den høje bitre Vinternat") / Thøger Larsen ; Fuglene ("Der er gemt i Fugl i dit Bryst") / Hans Hartvig Seedorff Pedersen ; Sædemand ("En Bonde med sin Sædekurv") / Jeppe Aakjær

Allegro con fuoco  
For blæserkvintet

Allegro con fuoco  
For strygeorkester

Allegro for Strygeorkester

"Blikket"  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Du aabner halvt kun Øjet"  
Tekst: Emil Aarestrup

Brudevals til en lys ung Pige  
For klaver

Børnesalme  
Dansk tekst  
For 3 lige stemmer  
Førstelinie: "Lover Gud! I Barndoms stille"

Danmark-Sangen  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Jeg har sortnende Hede"

Danmark-Sangen  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Jeg har sortnende Hede"

Danmark-Sangen  
Dansk tekst  
For 4-st. blandet kor  
Førstelinie: "Jeg har sortnende Hede"

De danske taalte ikke Tvang  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Indeholdt i: Oxenvad, Aage: Vaaren er kommen med Majsol i Brand (MA ms 6444)

Den dræbte And/(Kaalund)  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "I Skoven risler den klare Aa"

Finale  
For klaver

Forspil til "Rugens Sange"/af/Jeppe Aakjær  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Jeg lægger mig i Læet"

Grenenes Lyd  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Hør! hører du den lange"

Grubleren/(Aarestrup)  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Lad mig sige Dig Besked"

"Heden"  
Dansk tekst  
For mandskor  
Førstelinie: "Stille og mørkladen er vel min Hede"

Henrykkelse  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Du glade Fugl som flyver"  
Tekst: Emil Aarestrup

Klokke ring Fred  
Dansk tekst  
For klaver med underlagt tekst  
Førstelinie: "Ring, Klokke, lydt over Land"

Nu falder blidt og blødt  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver

Scherzo  
For strygeorkester

Sig nærmer Tiden da jeg maa væk/(St.St. Blicher)  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver

Skovensomhed  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Igennem Bøgeskoven"  
Tekst: Emil Aarestrup

Sonate for Clarinet og Klaver

"Stensamlersken"/af/Jeppe Aakjær  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Hvi vanker du gamle Kvinde dér"

"Studentersang"  
Dansk tekst  
For klaver med underlagt tekst  
Førstelinie: "Vær hilset Kammerater"

"Studentersangen"  
Dansk tekst  
For klaver med underlagt tekst  
Førstelinie: "Vær hilset Kammerater"

"Studentersangen"  
Dansk tekst  
For 4-st. blandet kor  
Førstelinie: "Vær hilset Kammerater"

Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver

Til "Hende"/fra/"Ham"  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Der er Solglimt i Øje"

Vandresang af Piet Hein  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Er du træt af Klodens Hverdagskiv"

Ved Engsøen/(Jeppe Aakjær)  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver  
Førstelinie: "Maa jeg tage din Haand"

Vaaren kommer med Majsøl i Brand  
Dansk tekst  
For sangstemme og klaver

#### Dissertation

Monroe, Douglas. Conflict and Meaning in Carl Nielsen's Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, Op. 57 (1928) D.M.A. Document The Ohio State University. Online at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/7626079/Nielsen-Concerto-for-Clarinet->

## Websites

Da Capo Records website. Biographical information about Jørgen Bentzon.  
<http://www.dacapo-records.dk/?page=artist&id=1390>

Herman D. Koppel official website.  
<http://www.hermankoppel.dk/index.php?id=246>

Eric Nelson post of February 9 and 11, 1997. Eric studied clarinet in Copenhagen in 1979. He compiled, and then translated from Danish, information from several newspaper interviews, the Danish Biographical Lexicon, and personal interviews with people who knew Oxenvad.

<http://www.woodwind.org/clarinet/Klarinet/>

Royal Danish Orchestra  
<http://www.kglteater.dk/OmTeateret/Teatrets%20historie.aspx>

Edition Samfundet website. Music publishing house.  
[http://www.samfundet.dk/artikel\\_text.php?art\\_id=75&op=sectioninfo&art\\_sid=17](http://www.samfundet.dk/artikel_text.php?art_id=75&op=sectioninfo&art_sid=17)

Det Virtuelle Musikbibiotek  
Reprint of remembrance item from May 1944. Aage Oxenvad by S.C. Felumb in Dansk Musik Tidsskrift  
<http://dvm.nu/>