Pipe Organ Collections

By Benjamin A. Kolodziej

Copenhagen's Orgelsamling
A Treasury of Danish Organ Building

At the north end of Copenhagen's city center, nestled peacefully near the botanical gardens on Gøthsejøen lies the Sankt Andreas Kirke. Its exterior, unassuming by European standards, belies the musical treasures harbored within its cavernous interior, namely a collection of nine small church organs built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all of which were collected from throughout Denmark and which represent various Danish builders. These small pipe organs, ranging in size from one to four ranks, comprise Orgel- samlingen i Sankt Andreas Kirke, or "The Organ Collection of St. Andreas Church," a cooperative collaboration between the church and the collection's curator, Dr. André Palsgård, a Copenhagen physi- cian. Although the first organ was restored and installed in the gallery in May 1998, the collection was not inaugurated until February 2000, at the time comprising only four organs.1 The Orgelsamling's growth and development during the last decade, attributable to the passion and effort of Dr. Palsgård, not only allows scholars and church musicians a glimpse into Danish organ building practices, but also serves as an educational, interactive museum by which the pipe organ and its music are promoted.2

Historical background

Interested in music since a child, André Palsgård began acquiring and restoring modest pipe organs during the 1970s, even building a larger home to accommodate his growing collection of musical instruments, including a harmonium and a pneumatic organ that had been stored in a hen house! As Dr. Palsgård cultivated his knowledge of organ restoration, his colleagues would approach him regarding organs that had become redundant. His first such relocation project occurred in 1989 when he discovered that the I/6 organ built by Immanuel Storup (1862–1944) for the village church in Søndermark was to be replaced with a new organ. Through his initiative, it was brought to Copenhagen to install in the chapel of the Smørum, a social welfare institution. Although this idea never came to fruition, it was eventually installed as the choir organ of the Helligåndskirken, the Church of the Holy Spirit, in the medieval center of Copenhagen, undergoing a restoration by Svend Nielsen in 1990, which included the addition of significant casework and gilding.3 The redundant organs that would become available were not always the simple discards of a thoughtless church committee. That none of them have pedals and that all of them have unpretentious tonal schemes, negating the ability to play much organ literature, prompted some of their organizers to campaign for their replacement with more complete, modern instruments.

Recognizing the need for a permanent location for several historic instruments that might otherwise face destruction, Dr. Palsgård approached the pastor of the Sankt Andreas Kirke, Maids-Bjørn Jør- genesen, a former flight nozneus adminis- trator and a proponent of organ music, with the idea of establishing a permanent home in the church's wrap-around balcony. Having found a favorable reception, the Orgelsamling has been housed in the spacious side balcony since 1998 and has grown to seven instruments upstairs, one beneath the balcony, and one in the chancel, and all within view of the imposing Frobenius organ, the primary instrument for the church's lit- urgy, in the west gallery.

These organs must be considered in their proper historic context within the greater purview of the Northern European organbuilding tradition. Denmark being thoroughly Scandinavian, yet heavily influenced by its southern neighbor Germany. Since its founding in 1860, Marcussen & Søn, established by Jürgen Marcussen and, at least by 1820, assisted by Andreas Røtzer, has domi- nated the Danish organ landscape, with instruments attractive to buyers as much for their reliability as for their aesthetic ideals. Marcussen, based since 1830 in Åbenrå, found itself annexed to Pruss- sia (and subsequently Germany) from 1864 until 1920 with all of Northern Schleswig, allowing its remaining Dánish competitors room to develop, if not to flourish. And it is these competitors, some of whom specialized in the market for small church organs, or whose pipe organ building encompassed only a small portion of an output otherwise dedicated to pianos or harmoniums, whose work is represented in the organs of the Orgel- samling. In this essay, each organ shall be referred to by its place of origin.

The collection includes:

Badskær Kirke organ, 1890
Krummerup Kirke organ, 1898
Venus Kirke organ, 1900
Sindlev Kirke organ, 1900
Øster Hjermitslev Kirke organ, 1900
Bergum Kirke organ, 1903
Alling Kirke organ, 1906
Øland Kirke organ, 1906
"Dr. Felter's House Organ," 1943.

Nineteenth-century organs

Frederik Nielsen (1844–1903), who had established himself as a piano manufacturer in Copenhagen before adding organbuilding to his marketable skills, established an organ fabrik in Aar- hus, where he published a catalogue with nine different organ models from which to choose. The Badskær Kirke organ in the collection, built in 1890, is the first and cheapest of his nine specifications; an 1897 catalogue listed the price as 950 to 1000 kroner. Although the specification of this instrument is Principal 8', Gedaet 8', and Flute 4', Nielsen's cata- logue promoted other instruments with a Bordin 16', a practical advantage for any instrument lacking a pedal division. The keydesk is located on the side of this rather squat, square instrument, with its multiple Dorian columns lending an air of neo-classicism. A number of these instru- ments have keydesks located on the side, a practical necessity for a small village church with minimal space and possibly no choir loft. In this case, the organ's original location had been in the back corner on the ground floor, providing sufficient tonal egress as well as allowing the organist to see the chancel.

The Krummerup Kirke organ dates from 1899, when it was built by Chris- tian Anton Schuster (1850–1911) for the Johan P. Andresen Company, Johan Andresen (1854–1926), an amateur musician, opened a furniture factory in Ringkøbing in 1882 in which he also repaired harmoniums, giving impetus to his interest in building the musical instruments that he called "Orgel- Harmonious." Although his firm would build 15,000 harmoniums from 1891, Andresen apparently employed Schus- ter in his pipe organ division, a fact that might not have been known except for Schuster's signature within the organ. Schuster's exact role in the building of
this instrument is not known, but the questions raised elucidate some of the common business practices in which organ firms engaged.

Born in Denmark, Schuster apprenticed with organbuilders in Copenhagen before settling in Sweden, where his instruments are known. However, between 1896 and 1901 he seems to have built no instruments, although his address in 1898 was in Ringepløjeborg, suggesting a connection with Andresen. Both Schuster and Andresen had been in Germany in 1896 to study contemporary building methods, and it is possible they entered into an agreement for Schuster to work at the Andresen factory. It is also likely that, rather than building new organs for Andresen, Schuster merely assembled them as they were shipped to Denmark from a continental builder, a practice common in these days.

The late nineteenth century was a period of great change in organbuilding, with traditional methods giving way to more industrialized approaches. This was due, in part, to the development of standardized components and the use of mass production techniques. In the late 1890s and early 1900s, organbuilders began to incorporate the clockwork reliability of the European railroad system into their instruments, allowing them to be built cheaply, efficiently, and be delivered to their ultimate destination without the need for a skilled organbuilder to accompany the instrument.

Technological innovation was a key factor in this progression. The use of pneumatic and mechanical stopping mechanisms allowed for the creation of new and improved designs of church organs. The Venø Kirke organ, having been placed in two successive churches, a museum, and finally an abbey church, demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of these instruments. Requiring no more space than a harmonium, the instrument could be constructed, shipped, and installed with economical ease.

Turn-of-the-century organs

These chronological distinctions between the picturesque and the modern, the Venø Kirke organ dates from 1900, only two years later, again from the Johan Andresen firm through the craftsmanship of Christian Schuster. This little organ, bearing the appellation “the smallest organ in Denmark,” contains only a Geigenprincipal 8′, supplemented with a bass and treble coupler of the same mechanism as employed by contemporary harmoniums.

The Krummerup organ, restored in 1995–96 by Dr. Palsgård, was the first of these instruments to be evaluated. The instrument possesses a Bordun 16′, Gedakt 8′, and Flöte 4′, to which a Gemshorn 2′ was added on the other side of the case, resulting in a four-rank organ requiring no fewer than three people to play! Dr. Palsgård posits that this rather unwieldy arrangement might have been an attempt to imitate the characteristics of pneumatic action without actually having to incorporate the new technology, which only by the turn of the century had reached southern Denmark. Unable to escape
Pipe Organ Collections

Later organs

The Øster Hjermitslev Kirke organ, built in 1902 but acquired by the Orgel-samlings in 2007, sits beneath the balcony. Having a Geigenprincipal 8′, Gedackt 8′, and Gemshorn 4′, a pull-down pedalboard had been added but was removed with the restoration. Although its exact provenance is uncertain, with its conspicuous trapezoidal facade it bears a similarity to the organ at the Garder Church in Norway, an instrument built in 1900 by Rieger. So, too, would Rieger have built this instrument under the auspices of Andersen. Dr. Palsgård observes that this instrument utilizes slider chests, placed in an organ case typical of Rieger’s, which normally employed cone chests (Kegellade). Interestingly and perhaps surprisingly for organs of such limited tonal resources, none of the instruments has a divided keyboard, as their American contemporaries certainly would have had.

A conclusion is dangerous to posit, especially given. Denmark’s rather isolated, parochial organ culture, but one can surmise that, if the primary goal of these instruments was to lead the congregation in the chorales, there would be at least some use for a divided keyboard as there would be for colorful solo stops.

Gebrüder Rieger likewise built the Berglum Kirke organ at Opus 337, but the instrument was delivered and installed by the Andreasen firm in the Bangsbostrand Kirche in Frederikshavn in 1903, where it remained until it was moved to Berglum in 1949. This mechanical cone chest instrument has a Rorflote 8′, Principal 8′, and Octave 4′, with a Bordun 16′ extended from the Rorflote. The Rorflote is curiously double-labiated, with the mouths oriented on opposite sides of the pipe to form the equivalent of a Doppelflöte but with the row (chimney). The only registration aid is a tutti pedal. The organ was restored by Dr. Palsgård in 2000 and entered the collection the following year.

The Berglum organ demonstrates one hitherto unexplored characteristic of Dr. Palsgård’s restoration technique, namely the color scheme. Painted pink with light blue trim and green cornices, complete with faux marble on the Doric columns of the facade, the organ certainly appears more vibrant than its original oaken hues. The Veni organ is light blue, the Badskær organ is the same color with red and white trim, and the Krummerup organ is pastel pink and blue, with only the Indlæv organ retaining its original varnished wood. The controversial color scheme broadly mirrors the symmetry and patterns of the original decorative patterns of the church and choir loft, suggesting an organ uniquely tailored for its location even by a “factory” builder. This distinctive character is only enhanced with a silver plaque on the keydesk, which notes that the organ was a gift in memory of Søren Lænserup and his wife Johanne Kathrine Westergaard.

In its restorations, Dr. Palsgård has retained each rank’s original voicing, revealing principals of clear but mellow character, and flutes of restrained, pure tone. Each of these organs exhibits a comparable specification based on the Principal 8′ (with the occasional addition or substitution of a weighty string for a principal), their stoplists dictated by the ubiquitous practicalities of liturgical performance and hymn singing rather than by any sort of Danish national musical stylistic consciousness. Instead, the Danish musical aesthetic is present in the voicing and character of each stop, Dr. Palsgård equating these sounds with the bowing of a stringed instrument, producing a lively “singing” tone whose affinity to the human voice promotes lyricism whose primary task is to support the human voice.

The Øland Kirke organ, built by AC Zachariases Orgelbyggeri in 1908 and an early acquisition of the collection, exemplifies the belated adoption of pneumatic technology in Denmark. Although pneumatic action had been developing for almost two decades in the German lands, Denmark had been reticent in exposing the new technology. However, a number of practical reasons had begun to mitigate the predominant use of the slider chest. The gradual installation of furnaces in church buildings, often engaged shortly before a service, resulted in abrupt changes in temperature and humidity to which slider chests were not acclimated, pneumatic action being less susceptible to leaks. Furthermore, the homophonic and colorful textures of Romantic repertoire necessitated playing aids such as octave couplers, freikombinationen, and the Walzkreuz pedal, all of which could be easily and cheaply achieved with pneumatic action. Smaller instruments, such as those by Zachariases, were primarily designed for liturgical, not concert use. Pneumatic action was more of a hindrance in terms of increased maintenance and a sluggish key response in the church organ. Dr. Palsgård modified the keyboard slightly to generate a more responsive action.

The Zachariases firm traced its lineage to P. U. F. Demant (1802–1868), a talented Odense builder whose son J. A. Demant (1830–1878) profited from organ work in Jutland where Ahlæs, where the Marcusen firm was located, was reappropriated into German territory. After the younger Demant’s death, Frederik Nielsen took over the company, which went bankrupt in 1906 after Nielsen’s own son was unable to maintain profits. As a consequence of the bankruptcy, organbuilder A. C. Zachariases (1857–1954) bought Nielsen’s tools and machines, eventually establishing his...
own organ factory in which the illustrious organbuilder Theodore Frobenius (1885–1972) was hired in 1907. A. C. Zachariasen had observed and possibly apprenticed with German builders prior to establishing his own firm. His 330 pipe organs include many in Copenhagen and even a large installation in Iceland. Zachariasen himself voicing each instrument. The Öland organ, which was electrified in 1943, has an Italianate instrument. The Øland organ, which was built by Jens Johan Peter Schierf in 1843, which are undergoing renovation supplemented by seven more instruments, including a four-rank organ. 

The final organ, referred to as “Dr. Felter’s House Organ,” differs greatly from the remainder of the instruments in the collection. Built by Danish builder Wilhelmi Hemmersam (1809–1994) as his Opus 1 in 1943, this organ reflects the ideals of the Orgelbewegung both in terms of its façade and disposition. Its lack of non-functional casework contrasts with the neo-classical or semi-Victorian casework of the instruments dating from only four decades prior. The stoplist of Gedakt 5′, Principal 4′, Quintatön 2′, and Quint 1 1/3′ utilizes slider chests.

Wilhelm Hemmersam trained with Marcusen and would build 25 organs, mostly in Sweden. This organ was built for the Jægersborg Kirke in 1944 but went through a succession of owners before it was purchased by Dr. Ralph Felter, a specialist in diagnostic radiology, as his home organ around 1971. In 2003 Dr. Falsgård, with the help of Pastor Mads-Bjørn Jørgensen, negotiated to purchase this organ for the collection from Dr. Felter’s children, Pastor Thomas Felter and Charlotte From. The organ is placed in the chancel, where it is able to serve the church as a choir instrument.

A living legacy

The Orgelsamling’s nine organs are supplemented by seven more instruments, including a four-rank organ built by Jens Johan Peter Schierf in 1943, which are undergoing renovation and have yet to be displayed. All stand as a testimony to those builders and musicians who supplied music to small churches over a century ago. Yet, their legacy is not merely liturgically academic but of serious concern, which was being challenged by foreign hegemony that the twentieth century perhaps represent a time of ecclesiastical hegemony that the twentieth century would soon subvert. These concerns are as applicable to the present day as they were over a century ago and, for organists, is a pleasant lesson when it can be learned from the singing tone of a well-crafted organ pipe.