

The Danish Trumpet Ensemble at the Court of King Christian III

- Some Notes on its Instruments and its Music.

By Peter Downey

Music at the court of King Christian III of Denmark has been the subject of much research recently, culminating in the publication of the unica of KB 1872 in *Dania Sonans* IV and V. Not only has that involved a comparative study of related manuscript and printed sources of music, but it has also included an exploration of the mass of archival information contemporary with the collection itself. Through these means it has been possible to identify the compiler(s), the composers, and the performers of the collection, as well as to come to some conclusions as to the origins of the repertoire and even its transmission. Unfortunately, little detail has been found concerning the instruments available to the original performers and there are very few scoring indications in KB 1872. With this in mind, I wish to report on some detailed information regarding them which is preserved in contemporary archival documents from the Danish court itself.

On 15 May 1555 Gert Reutter, King Christian III's representative in Lübeck, was instructed by letter to order some musical instruments 'of the highest [quality] and most elegant [appearance]' through his brother Philip.¹ The instruments were to be obtained as soon as possible from Nuremberg, in which city Philip Reutter was then residing, 'for there is a good master in Nuremberg who makes such'² and they were listed in a separate note as the following:

Erstlich am Nottigstenn Zwelff Deutsche Trummette[n]
gleich formig den Drummetten welsche H. g. zu Preusse[n]
negst verschinen zu Nurembergk Kaufft habenn
von den besten
Acht Wellsche Trummetten vonn denn
besten.
Eine Quartt Bussaune die sehr gutt sey
Zwey Kleine Bussaunen mit Zweifachen scheidenn
damit mhan die Bussaune verlengt die gutch
seinn.
Ein Futter Krumphornner mit funff Tenoren
Vonn den besten.
Ein mittelmessig Futter flotten mit 4 Tenorenn
die gutt sein.

Zwey par Kesselpaucken so man vber feldt fueren kan
mit schrauben vnnd aller zubehor vffs beste bereitt.³

These instruments were destined for the Danish court trumpet ensemble, whose members also performed the instrumental repertory of the court at that time.⁴ In addition to both 'German' and 'Italian' trumpets - the latter with their associated kettledrums - large sets of crumhorns and recorders and also two different sizes of trombone, of which the smaller were supplied with transposing crooks ('Zweifachen scheidenn'), were also ordered. Due to the fact that the 'German' trumpets had to be 'identical with the trumpets that the Duke of Prussia apparently purchased in Nuremberg' the instrument-maker Christian III wished to employ may be identified quite easily. In 1541 Duke Albrecht, Christian III's brother-in-law, placed a similar instrument order with Georg Neuschel (?-1557). Thereupon there ensued the famous protracted four-year dispute between the two over the price of the trumpets.⁵ Christian III's own head-trumpeter, Johann Heyde, also played a part in the dispute.⁶ Of the 'twelve 'German' and also twelve 'French' [that is, 'Italian'] trumpets just like those which the trumpeters of the Emperor and the King of the Romans have and use'⁷, and also kettledrums ordered by Albrecht, only the 'German' trumpets were, in fact, finally purchased in 1545.⁸ 'German' trumpets were the North European equivalent of the ceremonial 'trombe lunghe' found at Venice and elsewhere at this time. Neither was played with kettledrums, which were used only with 'Italian' trumpets. At any rate, Christian III had seen and had been impressed by Albrecht's particularly splendid 'German' trumpets and decided to obtain equally magnificent examples for his own trumpeters. Aware of the problems that his brother-in-law had encountered in dealing with Neuschel, Christian III attached certain conditions to the order: he would be informed of the cost, the instruments would only be paid for upon delivery, and Gert Reutter would settle the account before being reimbursed in his turn by the king.⁹

After an enquiry from Gert Reutter dated 15 July¹⁰ Christian III repeated the order on 23 July, stressing that the 'German' trumpets were to be 'of the highest quality [and] like those that the Duke of Prussia obtained from the master', thus confirming that Neuschel had indeed accepted the commission.¹¹ He also supplemented the original order:

Du wilt vns auch ein Futter mit gute Swerch oder Schweitzer pfeiffenn mit Achtenn,
Vnnd dann ein Futter Zincken auch mit achtenn, Mitt zweienn Bassenn Inn ledem
Futter Vnnd die fein sacht vnnd Lieblich geenn mocht[en] bestellen, das wir die auch
bekommen mochten.¹²

When he had heard nothing about the instruments by 20 November, the king urged Gert Reutter to be mindful of the matter and to have them delivered at the earliest opportunity.¹³ That he was becoming increasingly impatient is apparent in a further letter dated 18 December. The letter itself concerns a clock-mechanism, or 'Seigerwerck', that Christian III wished to have made. Details of the pitches and base-diameters of the thirteen bells required were sent with the letter so that they could be manufactured in Nuremberg; it was stressed that the bells would have to be 'fine and pure' and that they would not 'ring false or growl'.¹⁴ The king also reminded Reutter once more about his

desire to obtain the instruments as quickly as possible. The reminders were to no avail, and this resulted in an irate letter of 4 April 1556 to Reutter, ordering him to demand that the instruments, bells and other items that had been ordered from Nuremberg be sent at the earliest opportunity and to ensure that the king was himself informed of when that would be.¹⁵ As far as the instruments are concerned, the fault apparently lay with Georg Neuschel, for in a letter of 23 October 1556 Christian III excused the Reutter brothers of any complicity in causing the delay after reading a note from Philip in which the blame was fairly and squarely attributed to the lack of dependability of the master.¹⁶ The instruments finally arrived early in the new year, for on 9 February 1557 Christian III acknowledged receipt of them and sent payment for them to Gert Reutter.¹⁷

The instruments obtained by Christian III were purchased as much for their visual appearance as for their actual sound. The quality of those in the first list ranged from 'of the best', through 'very good', to 'good', while those of the second list had to appear 'elegant and play beautifully'. Although the price paid for them is not known,¹⁸ Christian III seems to have spared no little expense to obtain ornate instruments for use at the Danish court that would promote his own power, prestige and wealth. The list is impressive: twelve 'German' trumpets; 8 'Italian' trumpets and two sets of kettledrums; one large set of crumhorns, five of them tenors; one set of medium-sized recorders, including four tenors; one set of eight transverse flutes, two of them basses; one set of eight cornetts, again with two basses; one bass trombone; two tenor trombones with crooks allowing performance with not only the differently-pitched instruments already mentioned, but possibly also with the court chapel choir.¹⁹ The 'German' trumpets were for ceremonial usage, as was mentioned earlier, while the 'Italian' trumpets and kettledrums were for both military use and also for 'blowing-at-table' - the performance of trumpet ensemble pieces at the court.²⁰ The concentration on the tenor sizes of the crumhorns and recorders, the duplication of the bass sizes of the transverse flutes and cornetts, and also the small number of trombones are all notable features. While all of the other instruments could be employed in homogeneous ensembles, the trombones would appear to have played in heterogeneous ensembles along with alto and treble sizes of the other instruments. Moreover, as Georg Neuschel died early in 1557, there arises the tantalising possibility that the sole surviving trombone fragment made by him - and also dated 1557 - may have come from the bass trombone ordered by Christian III.

The order of 1555 is important as it was made at the very time when the instrumental music of KB 1872, dating from between 1545 and 1548, was in the process of being replaced by the newer music of KB 1873, begun in 1556.²¹ In particular, it tells us something about the instrumental versatility of the Danish court trumpeters and also verifies that the wind-only performance practice employed during the leadership of Johann Heyde was still being observed under his successor, Erhard Herdegen.²² The range of instrumental sound is wide, from soft recorders to loud crumhorns and from woodwind to brass, and this knowledge of the court instrumentarium provides a spectrum of instrumental colour against which the contents of KB 1873 may be placed to enable more accurate representations of their original performance at Christian III's court. The use of the same instrumental colours may also be applied to KB 1872 due to the nature of the instrumental indications that are included there.²³

Henrik Glahn has drawn attention to the fact that, while some of the pieces of KB 1872 appear to have been originally conceived as instrumental works, most seem to be transcriptions of sacred and secular vocal models.²⁴ He also asks whether the latter compositions were originally meant for purely vocal, or for mixed instrumental and vocal performance. That question may be answered to some extent by another letter from Rigsarkivet (The National Archives). On 3 February 1557, just before he received the instruments from Nuremberg, Christian III wrote to his son-in-law, Elector Augustus of Saxony, and asked him for trumpeters who could not only play military and six-part ensemble trumpet music in the new 'Italian style' ('welschblasenn') but could also play at court ('auch zuhofiren zugebrauchen') on cornetts, transverse flutes and other instruments, to replace those he had just lost - including Johann Heyde.²⁵ He also enclosed the following short note to his daughter Anna, the wife of Elector Augustus:

Auch freundliche vilgelipte tochter Es hatt vnnser Cantorey vnsern Reim Ach Gott Schaff deinen Willen vnnd Zu gott mein trost allein In gesangs weis gesetzt vnnd componirt. Weil dann der Text vnns sonderlich Zugefallenn wie auch der gesang, Habenn wir D.L. solchen gesang vatterlich Zuschickenn willenn, das D.L. denselben Ires Herren gemahels Cantorey mocht vnd ergebenn Zue vnser gedechtnus vhor D.L. vnnd derselben Herren gemahelln Je ZuZeittenn Zusingenn, oder Im Hofierenn Zugebrauchenn, vnnd wolle D.L. solchs von vns vatterlich verstehn, Dann wir sonnst solchenn gesannng Niemandts fuglicher dann D.L. als der geliepten Tochter ZuZuschickenn gehapt Die auch solchs von vnns R. wirdt vermerckenn.²⁶

It is clear from the note that the works composed on two of Christian's royal texts had originally been written as vocal settings by the court chapel ('gesangs weis'), but that there were absolutely no qualms regarding purely instrumental performance of the same ('Im Hofierenn Zugebrauchenn'), at least at the Danish and Saxon courts. The first text is the well-known symbolum for which there survive six settings in KB 1872, and the second is a German translation of part of the Latin motto that is found on an engraving of Christian III made by Jacob Binck in 1535, 'In Domino aethereo semper spes fixa manebit Res aliae valeant hic mihi tvis erit'.²⁷ No setting of this text is to be found in KB 1872, but KB 1873 does contain an anonymous piece set in six-part imitative counterpoint. The style is vocal even though the piece is untexted, save for the two indications 'Zu Gott mein Trost alleinig stell' at the beginning of the piece and 'Sunst anders kein[e]r Heilandt nicht ist' at the start of the 'Sekun Pars'.²⁸ Here is clear evidence of a vocal origin for the music even though, apart from the incipits, only an instrumental version of the music has come down to us. Henrik Glahn's editorial addition of the text to a number of the unique works found in KB 1872 is thus founded on the authority of no less a personage than Christian III himself!

Of the fourteen pieces in KB 1872 that have been identified as purely instrumental music,²⁹ there is one that proves to have an interesting and unusual formal structure and origin. The anonymous 'Laudate Dominum' à 6 [Part II, number 14] is printed in *Dania Sonans V* on pages 175-179. The music as it stands requires correction to remove substantial errors in both the Tenor and Sexta Vox parts.³⁰ The Tenor moves homophonically with the other parts until bar 57 when it becomes one bar out-of-step with them for no apparent reason. This is due to the duplication of the music of bar 56 in bar 57. Removal

of bar 57 results in the Tenor moving along with the four other lower parts once more. Also, at bar 81 of the print (which will now be in bar 80 of the corrected music), a semibreve a must be inserted after the two c' notes to maintain the canon with the Altus and Discantus parts.

The Sexta Vox also ceases to move in step with the rest from the third beat of bar 57. In this case the cause is a transmission error and the next twelve-and-one-half bars of music have been omitted. The missing bars may be reinstated quite easily due to the constructional process employed in the piece. The result is homophony in all six parts until bar 79, when canons break out in the upper voices over rhythmically reiterated drones in the two lowest parts. Two minor changes must also be made to the same part: the bb' in bar 65 of the print (now in bar 77) should be a c'', and the editorial alteration of one f'' may now be ignored. The corrected musical text, beginning from bar 57, is given as example 1.

'*Laudate Dominum*' à 6 does not appear at first sight to merit such close attention. After all, it consists of ninety bars of more-or-less homophonic reiterations of an F major triad which is only very occasionally relieved with C major chords. However, it actually contains a type of double variations form in six sections which, although it is especially evident in the Sexta Vox, is governed by a pseudo-cantus firmus in the Bassus part. That pseudo-cantus firmus is a monophonic trumpet signal which has been transposed down one octave to permit its use as a bass part.³¹ Two short motives are found in the first section of the music of this part and they are both varied in the same order in the subsequent sections. The thematic motive „A“ consists of rhythmical reiterations of the single pitch f (natural harmonic 4) and it is followed by motive „B“ which, by contrast, alternates the f with the c below it (natural harmonics 4 and 3 respectively) and which is actually a section-ending formula also found in slightly later trumpet signal music. Table 1 summarises the musical construction of both the Bassus part and the complete piece itself, since the upper parts follow the same pattern of variation also.

Table 1

| Sections | Bars | Content |
|----------|--------|--|
| I | 1-6 | Dran. A. |
| | 7-14 | Dran. B. |
| II | 15-24 | A'. |
| | 25-31 | B'. |
| III | 32-36 | Dran. A'' |
| | 37-41 | B'' |
| IV | 42-45 | A''' |
| | 46-53 | B''' |
| V | 54-60 | A'''' |
| | 61-63 | B'''' |
| VI | 64-75 | A'''''. B''''' |
| | 76-end | Further variations of motive „A“ beneath canonic upper parts. |

"Laudate Dominu

VI (57) (60) (65)

D

A

T

V

B

(75) (80)

VI

D

A

T

V

B

VI

D

A

T

V

B

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m, conclusion with corrections included

(70)

Handwritten musical score for the first system, measures 70-75. The system consists of six staves. The notation includes various note values (quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes), rests, and bar lines. There are some corrections and annotations in the original image, such as a circled '70' above the first measure and some markings in the second and fourth staves.

(81)

Handwritten musical score for the second system, measures 81-86. The system consists of six staves. The notation includes various note values (quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes), rests, and bar lines. There are some corrections and annotations in the original image, such as a circled '81' above the first measure and some markings in the second and fourth staves.

Five sets of empty musical staves, each consisting of five lines, arranged vertically.

Example 1.

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„A“ and „B“ represent the two motives, while „A‘“, „B‘“, and so on, indicate the different variations of the same. „Dran“ - a sustained natural harmonic 3, in this case c, which is slurred up to a similarly sustained harmonic 4, or f - indicates another figure found in Renaissance trumpet signal music that was often employed at the starts and ends of phrases; it is also met at the end of motive „B“.

Comparison with a later trumpet signal shows the similarity quite clearly. The Danish court trumpeter Magnus Thomsen (d. 1612) began compiling the trumpet book *Gl. kgl. Saml.* 1875a, 4o, around 1590. Included there is an 'Ingangk' - a piece of monophonic trumpet music that was either played on its own or else preceded, and often followed, an actual cavalry signal piece. The first two sections of both the bass part of 'Laudate Dominum' and of Thomsen's trumpet signal 'Ingangk' are given in Example 2. Care must be taken in comparing the two since the signal that is found in the 'Laudate Dominum' predates by some years the introduction of the 'Italian style' of trumpet music at the Danish court which is found in Thomsen's book and which was imported from Saxony on 5 April 1557.³² However, in comparing the two lines of music it is clear that they contain a considerable amount of common material. This is due to the fact the 'Italian style' absorbed and simplified an earlier 'French style' of trumpet music as well as introducing its own new material. The bass part of the 'Laudate Dominum' thus preserves a trumpet 'Ingangk' which was used at the Danish court at the time of Christian III.

Section I

The 'Laudate Dominum' à 6 of KB 1872, while quite unlike the other pieces that are found in this pre-1550 Danish source of instrumental music, is not without parallels in the wider European context, for there is a similar vocal/instrumental piece in the Leipzig manuscript Cod. 1494.³³ This 'Symphonia nobili frenetur organo à 4', subtitled „Zu Lande“, also includes a piece of monophonic trumpet music in its bass part, in this case three sections of the 'Cavalry March' signal. Again, only two pitches are employed: a thematic motive based on reiterations of the note *f* and a 'dran' which rises from *c* to *f* at the start of each section. The other three parts also move in simple homophony with the bass and use the same major triads of *F* and *C* as required. However, in this case the three sections of trumpet signal music are separated with other contrasting sections in which a greater variety of pitches in the bass part enables more interesting music in the others. Fragments of trumpet signal music are also to be found in various 'battle music' compositions that were very popular during the sixteenth century, with Janequin's famous „La Guerre“ of 1528 only the most famous example. Yet, the 'Laudate Dominum' à 6 remains unique in that it is the only source to preserve a complete piece of monophonic trumpet music dating from the first half of the sixteenth century and written according to an old 'French style'. As the source was compiled by a trumpeter, as the music was performed by trumpeters, and as the piece betrays a detailed and first-hand knowledge of the construction of signal trumpet music, the unnamed composer may well have been Johann Heyde himself.



Example 2

Noter

- 1 The letter is found in Rigsarkivet, København, TKUA, Almindelig Del:1. Ausländisch Registrant Nr. 29 fols 358v-359, with the quotation on fol. 358v: 'vff das alderbest vnnd Kunstlichst'.
- 2 Ibid.: 'Weill dan ein guther Meister zu Nurmbergk ist der solch...zumachen weig[en]'.
- 3 Ibid.: fol. 359.
- 4 See in Henrik Glahn's '„Det kongelige Kantoris Stemmebøger“ = Trompeterkorpsets Stemmebøger' in: Dansk Årbog for Musikforskning VIII, on pages 137-39, and in his commentary on Gl. kgl. Saml. 1872, 4o, in: *Dania Sonans* IV (1978).
- 5 This was first reported, with errors and omissions, by Th. von Miltitz in 'Briefe von Jorg Neuschel in Nürnberg, nebst einigen anderen' in: *Monatshefte für Musikgeschichte* IX, pages 149-159. Copies of the original documents have been used for the present study.
- 6 See facsimiles 4-6 and page 25 of *Dania Sonans* IV.
- 7 Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, HA STA Königsberg Ostpr. Fol. 29 p. 123, letter of 3 September 1541: 'zwolff teuzshe dess gleichenn zwolff frantzösische [that is, 'welsche'] Trommeten wie kay. vnnd Ro. Ko. Matt. Trommeter solche habenn vnnd gebrauchenn'.
- 8 A letter of 1 September 1545 confirms the purchase: as footnote 7, Fol. 30, on pages 408-09.
- 9 Ausländisch Registrant Nr. 29, fol. 359.
- 10 I was unable to locate the letters from Gert Reutter in Rigsarkivet during a short visit there.
- 11 Ibid., fols. 388r-v: '...Vff das beste Verfertigt, gleich wie der Hertzog vonn Preusse[n] die selbenn vonn dem Meister bekommen...'.
- 12 Ibid., fol. 388v.
- 13 Ibid., fol. 427.
- 14 Ibid.: '...Das sie ÿo fein reyn, vnnd nicht falsch klingen oder schnarren mochten...'.
- 15 Ausländisch Registrant Nr. 30, fols. 43v-44.
- 16 Ibid., fol. 172: 'Wir haben dein schreiben empfangen...neben deines bruders Zeigunge gegenn dem Meister, so nicht glauben gehalten...'.
- 17 Ibid., fol. 233.
- 18 During my visit in Copenhagen I was unable to trace any payment for the instruments in the Regnskab for that year.
- 19 From a letter from Georg Neuschel to Duke Albrecht of Prussia dated 15 October 1541, (Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, HBA A4 1541 Okt. 15 [K. 206], most easily available in the source given in fn. 5, on page 150) the equivalent of Christian III's 'Zweifachen scheidenn' is found to be '4 Zuge[n]'. This single-looped crook was to be used so that the trombone would 'gehört Zw dem gesang vnd Istrumente[n]'.
- 20 Note that, in 1556, there were only nine members of the trumpet ensemble: one of them was also the kettledrummer. Thus only eight 'Italian' trumpets were ordered. See in Rigsarkivet, Regnskab Nr. 45, on fols. 85r-v.
- 21 See in *Dania Sonans* V, on pages 12 and 20-21.
- 22 Despite the often-repeated statement that the term 'trumpeter' also included players of other instruments (see, for example, in *Dania Sonans* IV, on page 19), study of the Danish court „Regnskaber“, as well as the letter mentioned in footnote 25 below, confirms that, until 1574, they were all trumpeters who were employed to play the trumpet and/or kettledrums and also

other wind instruments; one was even employed as a lute-player during the 1550's. The only other instrumentalists employed before 1574 were the organist, the 'Tornmand' who generally played the cornett, and, between 1557 and 1560, three lutenists.

- 23 See in *Dania Sonans* IV, on page 19. Some of these are a little problematical, however.
- 24 *Dania Sonans* V, on pages 13-16 and also 22-25. In connection with sources associated with KB 1872, it is worth noting that the Königsberg manuscript Ms 1740 was not completely lost as a result of the Second World War as was once thought (see in *Dania Sonans* IV, on page 64, for example). The Bass partbook still survives and is preserved at the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin with the shelfmark GStAPK, XX. HA StUB Königsberg, Nr. 7 (früher: Ms. 1740).
- 25 Ausländisch Registrant Nr. 30, fols. 222v-223v: see my article 'A renaissance correspondence concerning trumpet music', in: *Early Music* IV, 3 (1981), on pages 325-29.
- 26 Ibid., fols. 223v-224.
- 27 See the frontispiece to *Dania Sonans* IV.
- 28 The piece is found in the part-books as follows: Discantus on fol. 96v; Tenor on fols. 62v-63; Bassus on fol. 75r-v; Quinta vox on fols 111v-112; Sexta vox on fol. 39r-v; a sixth part for the setting is missing. I wish to thank Jens Egeberg of Musikafdelingen at Det Kongelige Bibliotek for his assistance in confirming the existence of the piece at very short notice.
- 29 See in *Dania Sonans* V, on pages 13-14 and 22.
- 30 Minor errors include the addition of ties across the barlines at bars 3-4 of the Tenor and at bars 15-16 of the Sexta vox, and the substitution of a rest for the minim on the first beat of bar 77 of the Quinta vox.
- 31 It is worth noting here that Cesare Bendinelli included a range table for a 'Trombetta Antiqua' pitched in F in his 'Tutta l'arte della trombetta' of 1614 (facsimile edition, Kassel, Basle, 1975). Here too, the notes are written one octave too low.
- 32 See in fn 25 above.
- 33 *Istituzioni e Monumenti dell'Arte Musicale Italiana*, Tomo I, (Milano, 1937/9), facsimiles 2 and 3 after page XCIV. Three of the parts are underlaid with text in Italian. However, the bass part, which contains the trumpet signal music, is without any text whatsoever.