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Song and movement **- Danish experiences and educational challenges for Sport for all¹**

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Abstract

Sport has an inner relation to sound and rhythm, which is different from activity to activity and from country to country. Danish 'popular sport', which started as a gymnastic movement, delivers a particular model of combining sportive activity with joint singing. People sing together both in local meetings and in the large national sports festivals as well as in the people's academies of sport. This particular feature has its roots in nineteenth century's social self-organisation. Democratic movements spread as singing movement, and this got new life by twentieth century's rock music. Singing sport implies some challenges for education in Sport for all. In a time of globalisation, it is not any longer self-evident 'what to sing'. Singing sports open towards new forms of intercultural communication and singing democracy.

Keywords: body culture, movement culture, popular culture, Denmark, democracy, intercultural education

If sport is seen as a part of culture, then song and music are its near 'neighbours'. Both sport and music are broad popular practices among the 'fine arts', more adequately called *musisch* (in German) or *musisk* (in Danish). But this disciplinary community of neighbouring subjects is not the only relation between the two fields of activities.

As movement practice, sport has also an 'inner' relation to sound and rhythm. This is what, among others, fighting arts from all over the world express. The Indonesian martial art *pencak silat* can be accompanied by drums or the gongs of *gamelan*. Drums give rhythm to traditional forms of Arab wrestling. The Turkish oil wrestling *yagli gures* is opened by the music of Janissary bands. Iranian *zurkhaneh* combines drum, bell, and chanting with club exercises, whirling, and wrestling. And the Afro-Brazilian *capoeira* is fight and dance at the same time, moving the body to the sound of the singer, the chorus, the drum, and the string instrument *berimbau*.

Deeper inside the sportive activity itself, movement and sound are connected by bodily resonance. Sports are activities of breathing and shouting, of rhythm and energy. You can 'hear' them. Attacking, the kendo fighter screams 'kiyai' – and kicks.

The concrete connection between sound and movement is, however, different from activity to activity and from country to country. A special model has developed in Danish popular gymnastics.

"When coming from outside, it is difficult to understand what Danish *folkelig* sport is, and I myself never really found out of it. But if you hear people starting by a song, this must be *folkelig* sport."²

By these words, a Swedish sport sociologist described his own problem of understanding of Danish popular sport. You can 'hear' folk sports. This hits an important point, which is worth educational attention in Sport for all more generally.

Singing gymnasts, singing academies, singing families

Danish popular sport can be characterized as a singing movement. The federation of Danish popular sport, DGI, has a songbook of its own, *DGI sangbog*.³ The songbook is one of the few elements, which unite the diverse activities in *folkelig* sports. It contains a broad range of genres: songs about seasons and time of the day, psalms, patriotic songs, songs about human life and love, historical tunes, folk ballads, children's songs, pop/rock, songs about community, English and international songs – from Nigerian folk and African American spirituals to The Beatles. Songs from this book are used, when official meetings of the organization are opened by joint song – which is the customary procedure.

The national festival of popular sport in Denmark, *Landsstævne*, has its own songbook, too.⁴ Joint singing of the thousands of participants is characteristic for this type of mass meeting. A specific festival song is composed by pop artists and serves as mediated leitmotiv of the event. This 'hit' is also used as joint song of the masses.⁵

In the everyday life of local sport associations, there are many opportunities of singing together. This tradition has, however, decreased at some places, where singing has been reduced to the more festive occasions. The annual assemblies of the club membership include joint singing, and often also a revue, which uses satirical song and scene play to comment on the course of the year.

The link between song and sports is permanently renewed through the influence of the people's academies (*folkehøjskole*), which have close connections with popular sports.⁶ Singing has an educational dimension.

Consequently, there is an audible difference between mainstream sport and popular sport in Denmark. The 'normal' type of sport, whether competitive or health-oriented, is without singing. The other, the *folkelig* sport, sings. As one easily can imagine, there is no clear line separating the one from the other.

When Danish *folkelig* sport appeared in the 1880s as a people's movement of gymnastics – being a part of the democratic farmers' movement – song culture was from the very beginning a characteristic feature. Popular gymnastics was originally linked to the institution of the people's academy. From that time on, 'popular education' was marked by a triad, which consisted of joint song, lecture and gymnastics.

Højskole education can, indeed, be characterized as a sort of singing education. The day's routines at a *højskole* begins normally with a morning assembly, which includes singing. And it is customary to open every lecture by: 'Let us sing number x.'

A typical *højskole* lecture will often use quotations from songs as arguments or illustration. This stretches from Grundtvig's psalms to actual rock lyrics. Quotations from songs – appealing to the memory of their rhythms, rhymes, and tones – create a certain common atmosphere or mood, *stemning*.

The *Folkehøjskolens sangbog* can be regarded as the foundation of Danish people's academies.⁷ Generally, the people's academies lack any codified written texts. This type of schools is based on oral and practical traditions, not on 'the book'. The only exception is 'the blue book', the *højskole* songbook, which all people's academies, as different as they may be, have in common. Even the 'spirit of the founder', Grundtvig, is present not so much by his theoretical writings, as by quotations from his songs.⁸

The song tradition as historical reference is permanently actualised and linked to the personal life of the individual by the custom of the casual song. Every festivity, whether it is in

association or in family, in the academy or in the circle of friends, gives opportunity to make a casual poem, which is sung together. For the new-invention of songs, people take the tunes and patterns typically from the tradition of *folkelig* songs or/and from modern pop music. The songs may be very trivial, depending as they are of people's limited personal abilities. But culture encourages ordinary folk to express themselves in this form. The deep-rooted custom makes that, in our days, joint singing is not only a formal act of official, representative and stiff character, but also a personal and flexible practice. It has often ironical undertones.

Singing popular movements, singing democracy

The practice of singing together has roots in the culture of democracy. In the course of modern history, choral singing has often been linked with democratic movements.

This began with the French Revolution giving birth to the *Marseillaise*. Subsequently this revolutionary song engendered a long series of national patriotic anthems on one hand and of democratic and revolutionary tunes on the other.⁹

In Denmark, too, the early popular movements, whether religious or political, were singing movements. One has said that the patriotic singing from nineteenth century's Denmark has "defined the nation in song".¹⁰ This National Romantic tradition is the fountain from which the *folkehøjskole* drew its 'singing craze'.

What is special for the way of Danish democratic culture is, that it also has important roots in religious revivals. The Pietistic farmers' movement from the early nineteenth century, which spread as an oppositional movement against the state church and against the Absolutist monarchy, made Christian psalms from the Protestant tradition enter into the song tradition of the national and cultural movements. This explains the strong position, which Grundtvig's psalms have in actual *folkelig* songbooks.

Later, the workers' movement developed a socialist song culture with choirs, festivities and speaking choruses.¹¹ Some of this 'red' material entered the repertoire of *højskole* songs in the 1970/80s.

Another source of actual joint singing are the revues of the time between the world wars and after. Songs from revues and cabarets transported not only the critical contents of intellectual Cultural Radicalism, but also new undertones of an ironical and not-quite-serious habit.

During World War II, Danes met in *alsang* (all-singing). These were large song rallies, starting in July 1940 after the Nazi occupation of the country. In a subversive way, though peacefully, the singing Danes demonstrated against the occupant. It is estimated that at the largest all-singing rallies of September 1st 1940, more than 700.000 Danes joined to express their oppositional Danishness.¹² Danish *alsang* reminds of what happened around 1990 in the Baltic countries, when huge song rallies contributed to the collapse of Soviet rule.¹³

Another wave of revitalization came with rock songs from the Danish protest culture of the 1960/70s. Ironical song-composers and poets like Benny Andersen, Piet Hein, and Halfdan Rasmussen renewed the *folkelig* song. Jazz tones entered with Poul Dissing, rock rhythms with Kim Larsen and the anarcho-folk group Shu-Bi-Dua. The individual singers did not only translate new experiences into new song material, presenting this in a professional way 'on the scene', but their songs are sung by ordinary people in schools, academies and associations as *fællessang*, as joint singing.¹⁴

An important role was played by the people's movement against the European Community (later European Union), which rose in connection with the referendum of 1972. The broad opposition campaigned by cultural happenings, which gave important impulses to song culture.

Similar stimulations may nowadays come from the people's movements against capitalist globalisation as they are spreading since the tumultuous events in Seattle 1999. At the World Social Forum in India 2004, popular movements exchanged their respective songs under the heading "Art in resistance – resistance in art".

In the light of these developments, choral singing appears as something like a bodily correlative to people's democracy.¹⁵ By their voices, people establish bodily togetherness. They sing identity: 'We are the people!' They do not only 'let sing' – by professionals on the scene – they sing themselves and together.

At the same time, singing people express differences and inner contradictions. There is difference between what one sings, and what one does not sing. Singing is not an automatic or 'organic' process, but a dialectical practice – an expression of contradictions and diversity.

'Let us start by a song': Social bodily swing in the process of education

In choral singing, it is not – or not only – the text or the song-book, that counts, but also and primarily the bodily swing. The language of singing makes audible what language is more generally: More than grammar and dictionary, it is sensuality. Voice is more than 'communication' and 'code', it is rhythm and sound.¹⁶

Between song and bodily movement, singing sport implies an educational challenge both in theory and practice.¹⁷

There is social vibration and togetherness in singing. People are swinging together, creating rhythm in the intermediary space. Singing makes feel that the whole is more than the sum of its single elements. In singing, the 'we' of identity is related to – and growing out of – personal inter-bodily experience and practice.

The emotional togetherness of choral singing is created by voice and counter-voice, expressing or producing what in Danish is called *stemning*. *Stemning* is the atmosphere of an event or the mood of a group. A common 'energy' and morale is created by tuning, pitch and sound. The word *stemning* is derived from *stemme*, the human voice.¹⁸ It is not by accident that some languages derive the word designating the psychic 'atmosphere' of a group (in German *Stimmung*) from 'voice' (in German *Stimme*), and this derivation is more than only linguistic.

Yet, songs are different from culture to culture, and also different inside a particular culture. One cannot just sing in general – one always sings a special song, a special tune. It is in this situation of concrete choice, that languages, customs and tastes will divide. In this respect, people always sing difference. Singing expresses the presence of difference in a bodily language.

Singing is not politically innocent, it can be politically subversive. Though sometimes conforming to the state and exploited by the market, choral singing can be 'dangerous' because it opens up the possibility of civic activism. The Baltic peoples showed the way by their 'singing revolutions'.¹⁹ And the South African liberation from the Apartheid rule has been called a 'singing revolution', too.²⁰

Singing is a 'traditional' heritage, but not only this. It is also a field of wild hybridisation and permanent innovation. Not by accident, the Danish *højskole* songbook consists of a mixture of folk songs and ballads, Christian psalms, National Romantic songs, songs from twentieth-century revues, 'red' songs ('The International') and rock songs. This diversity witnesses of change in history and of an open horizon into the future.

The impact of rock music on Danish popular choral singing, lasting through one or two recent generations, is especially interesting because it is paralleled by the influence, which rock singing has had on other folk cultures, too. Rock music has revitalized Arab, American Indian, Hungarian, Breton folk music... "*People's music*" is the title of a rock magazine in Communist China, where rock music has contributed more to the oppositional students' movement than have the abstract theories of democracy.²¹ And when singing African-American spirituals, people may discover the folk in themselves.²²

'Exotic' influences of the last generations have added particular rhythmic elements to joint singing. Live music and especially the drum of rock music have invaded the field of sport and movement culture. For Danish popular sport, the cultural exchange with Tanzania has had some important effects. By people meeting people in the villages of Sukuma in the context of sport

development aid, *ngoma* drumming was introduced to the Northern country. The *utamaduni* drumming groups became surprisingly a new element of Danish youth culture.²³ In another way, Brazilian capoeira brings movement and joint singing together, expanding into the Western metropolises.²⁴ All this has in unexpected ways established new links between sport and sound.

It has also sharpened the attention to the fact that choral singing is movement in community. Singing connects bodily movement, emotional movement and social movement.

‘Which song shall we sing?’ Some problems

Using song in an educational context is not without problems. Singing is not just one, it is a multiplicity of actions and choices.

This shows at a closer listening to singing practice in Danish sports. In Denmark, ‘popular song’ (in Danish *folkelig sang*), which is used in DGI sports and people’s academies, is not identical with ‘folk song’ (in Danish *folkesang*). *Folkelig* song is a larger range of styles and music traditions, mainly expressing an ideal striving in the National Romantic tradition – while folk song is grown from below and has no ideal purposes. *Folkelig* song is song ‘for the people’ – while folk song is song ‘of the people’. *Folkelig* song is defined by essential contents and good intentions²⁵ – while folk song may be pure nonsense. Or as one has said:

“*Folkelig* song is what they want us to sing, while folk song is what we would like to sing ourselves.”²⁶

Differences in singing show also bodily. Danish *folkelig* singing happens mostly in sitting poise and with the use of a songbook. This shows the influence of the people’s academy, of the school²⁷ – and longer back in history the tradition of the church. The practice of singing while marching, which was practiced in gymnastics in the time between the world wars, has lost its significance. What remains is the clash between the dynamic of bodily movement in sports and the static sitting poise of singing. Rock music and ‘exotic’ forms of dance are breaking this dual pattern, but a new type of integrating popular culture is not visible. Underneath the *folkelig* song tradition, however, children’s games combine the movement of play and game, clapping and song.²⁸ This is far from the sitting-and-singing-from-the-book culture of the grown-ups.

Another problem is connected with the disappearance of song traditions. In some national movements of popular sports, traditions of singing together, which had been well established through longer time, have waned during the last decades. German *Turner* gymnasts report that their traditions of singing, which also in Germany had National Romantic roots, disappeared after World War II. Attempts to ‘conserve’ the obsolete practices by top-down constraint seem not to be reasonable, nor does it help to deplore their fading-out. Though the disappearance of singing can be evaluated as a loss of cultural richness, indeed. It seems more promising if young sports people develop new initiatives of song movements.²⁹

The fusions of rock music, sport and popular heritage in Danish *folkelig* sport may therefore deliver an interesting model between tradition and innovation. It may be compared to the dynamics of American folk song and to the Irish-Scottish fusions of folk-rock in the context of recent social movements and youth culture.³⁰ But by the relation of song culture to sports and gymnastics, the Danish case also comments on different cultural ways under the impact of cultural industry and capitalist globalisation.

Singing diversity

The practice of sport and singing contributes to cultural diversity, as it was expressed in general terms by the UNESCO in 2001:

Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up mankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is necessary for mankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the

common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.³¹

This touches a further problem, especially when sport and singing is taught on a European or international level: the question of intercultural communication. If one begins a training lesson, a lecture or a study circle by singing together, the question arises, which song people really can sing together. If the participants come from different countries, it is not so easy to find a solution.

One possible way is to teach each other songs from one's respective home culture. This is a beautiful chance of learning and shows the multiplicity of cultures, which is the subject of intercultural understanding. However, it is difficult and takes time.

Another – quicker – way is to choose songs in English that are known to most of the participants. Experience has shown that most people know the Beatles' songs and international pop. These songs bring the singers into rhythm movement, and at the same time give them an occasion to discuss the neo-colonial dimensions of industrial pop culture. However, the choice excludes the larger part of the European, African, Asian and Native American cultural heritage.

There is no simple method to solve this problem. But the dilemma has its value: It can be used as challenge for the students as the singers. It is an entrance into the practical problems of inter-cultural exchange.

The problem of choosing a song underlines the need of intercultural education in the field of sport and culture. It may, indeed, imply the need of a common songbook. But it touches much deeper needs and dimensions of education. It is about bodily togetherness and the recognition of diversity.

A deeper examination into the practices of singing, sound and rhythm in different national sport cultures is required. It will contribute to bodily democracy.

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¹ This article is a reworked and enlarged chapter from: *Education through Sport: Towards an International Academy of Sport for All*. A report to the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) and the European Commission. Gerlev: International Movement Studies 2004 – <http://www.iasfa.org/literature.htm>

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- ² Bo Schelin, sociologist at the University of Lund, in 1996.
- ³ *DGI sangbog* 2000.
- ⁴ *Stævnehåndbog* 2002: 117-131.
- ⁵ Eichberg/Madsen 2006.
- ⁶ About the historical and actual link between sport and people's academies in Denmark see Eichberg 2005.
- ⁷ *Folkehøjskolens sangbog* 1995.
- ⁸ Grundtvig's life history in songs: Reich 2000.
- ⁹ Detailed research about song, music and festivity in democratic revolution: Ehrard/Viallaneix 1977.
- ¹⁰ Kuhn 1990.
- ¹¹ *Arbejdersangbogen* 1987.
- ¹² The 'resistance' of *alsang* has, however, received ambivalent evaluations. Sometimes, *alsang* and armed political resistance were polemically confronted with each other. See Feldbæk 1992: 13 and Warming 2004. The contradiction between singing resistance on one hand and shooting resistance on the other existed, indeed. The psychological relation between cultural 'awakening' and active resistance was, however, more complex.
- ¹³ Kiisk 1967, Rüütel 2003.
- ¹⁴ Warming 1988 and 1992. About Sweden: Malm 1981.
- ¹⁵ Eichberg 2004.
- ¹⁶ Hall 1984, Bjørkvold 1992 and 2003. The first to discover the poetic and sensual quality of song as the origin of language and literature was Johann Gottfried Herder.
- ¹⁷ About the educational dimensions of music more generally: Nielsen 1999 and Bastian 2000
- ¹⁸ Fink-Jensen 1998, Eichberg/Madsen 2006, chap. 5.
- ¹⁹ Rüütel 2003.
- ²⁰ Hirsch 2002.
- ²¹ Steen 1996.
- ²² About spirituals in international joint singing: Eichberg 2004: 179-183.
- ²³ Bischoff 1996. About *ngoma* in Tanzania also Malm 1981 and Larsen/Gormsen 1985.
- ²⁴ Danish reception of capoeira: Borghäll/Capoeira 1997. About capoeira in Amsterdam: Crum 2001.
- ²⁵ *Folkelig* song can therefore be criticized, for instance as to be deficient of class struggle and psychoanalysis or of having lost its connections with actual social movements, see Warming 2004.
- ²⁶ Ejnat Kampp, quoted from Warming 2004.
- ²⁷ Also primary schools in the Danish public system often practice morning assembly with joint singing.
- ²⁸ Research on actual children's culture of song and play: Kaas Nielsen 1986.
- ²⁹ From German sports youth: Zemella 2003.
- ³⁰ Eyerman/Jamison 1998.
- ³¹ UNESCO 2002, article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. The declaration was adopted by the 31st session of the UNESCO General Conference, Paris, November 2, 2001.