

SA Bandsman

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MAINTAINING THE FAMILY TRADITION

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SAB: Thanks for talking to SA Bandsman, Niels. You come from a very musical family, with your father of course being a well known composer in the SA banding world. What was life like growing up in the Silfverberg home?

NS: It was a loving, exciting and fun childhood, that gave me a lot of opportunity to learn. I remember my dad as always sitting by the piano or talking music, well supported by my mum. Quite often evenings were spent with me playing cornet solos with my dad at the piano, and my mum doing housework. My father was a very creative person, always finding new and often unconventional ideas, whilst my mother always kept her feet firmly on the ground. My father was a chemist, and I remember many very extravagant experiments at home when I was at primary school. As I grew older, he would often seek my advice on his music (and he did listen) and was confronted with how things work in reality, composition, publishing, leadership, people management etc. An important thing I learned was the value of teamwork – taking advantage of each other's competencies, as well as always being there for each other. You can say that the Musketeers' oath – one for all and all for one – was and is prevailing in the family.

Basically I learned a lot about music, growing other people – especially the young, the importance of getting inspiration and sometimes recharging in other contexts and both the good and bad about the Army – comprised of people, not all saints! Honestly, it was also a hard thing to have a name! My dad would never let the name be an advantage to himself or the family – sometimes resulting in quite the opposite, and the Danish culture did not make it any easier. One thing I have learned from that is, to give people the opportunity to grow and develop if they have potential and are willing to grab those opportunities, when you can.

An example of what it is like to grow up with a name, is that I have two CDs with some of my music recorded, but on the cover it says that the composer is Erik Silfverberg. When proofreading, they just take it for granted, and you learn not to take it personally and be proud instead. One is actually with the ISB!

SAB: At what age did you start showing an interest in composition? To what extent did your father influence you in that area?

NS: Thinking back to my childhood, it feels like my dad spent hours every day at the piano with a piece of music manuscript paper, in the process of creating a new band piece or song (he probably wrote about 300 of each during the time he was alive), so writing music was in my world a quite natural thing. As a child, I had a dream of having just one piece of music published, not to fulfil any expectations, but just to live up to the name. When I was around 11, I started by writing down soprano cornet parts from 78 records or cassette tapes, and writing my own parts for the YP Band. This developed into small arrangements for the YP Band and music camps, and later for the senior band, arrangements for a Danish tune book and so on.

At the time, I was not so aware of it as I am now, but my dad's biggest



influence was that I learned the importance of having a purpose with the music and to make it functional – making meaningful music. I grew up playing première performances of music like *Down the Street*, *The Happy Warriors*, *Christ is the Answer*, *A Song of the Fight* etc. and on joining the senior band, *The Awaited Welcome* (the first piece he had published) was played every Sunday as we marched down the street, so I am blessed by experiencing the making of these classics, and very grateful to have had him as a role model.

SAB: How would you describe your style as a composer/arranger? What is your process to writing?

NS: I don't feel I have a specific style – although I am sure I like others have specific characteristics, but I attempt to make music which is useful – something that will work with a band, which can connect to the audience and have something to tell. I mostly write for specific occasions or purposes, so I have a clear idea of the framing of performance. I wish it to be positive and encouraging music, even if it might be for devotional purpose, because that is how I understand Christianity. I don't always succeed, but I try to make all parts interesting and meaningful, and in contrast to my dad, I think more in sections than in parts.

My process is based on finding an idea and thematic material which I mentally work with for some time – maybe by scratching some ideas on





a blank paper, until I have an outline of more or less the full piece. Then I make a four-part short score, and work from that. My dad always began with a piano score, and always composed at the piano. I work with Finale, and don't use it much differently than I did with a paper score.

SAB: Can you tell us which composers, either SA or non-SA you are most influenced by?

NS: In my younger days, people like Bruce Broughton, James Curnow and William Himes inspired me with their works, and I think that shows in my first pieces. Edward Gregson's *Variations on Laudate Dominum* impressed me and became the first piece of deep study, but later the likes of Erik Leidzén and Emil Söderström have been a source of study, as to their ability to write music that has stood the test of time. I think the most important thing is that studying the music of others and their characteristics has helped me to find my own identity and way of doing things.

The biggest influence though has been from my father, especially his ability to write easy and accessible music, and over time, the ability to write with simplicity has been what I admire most.

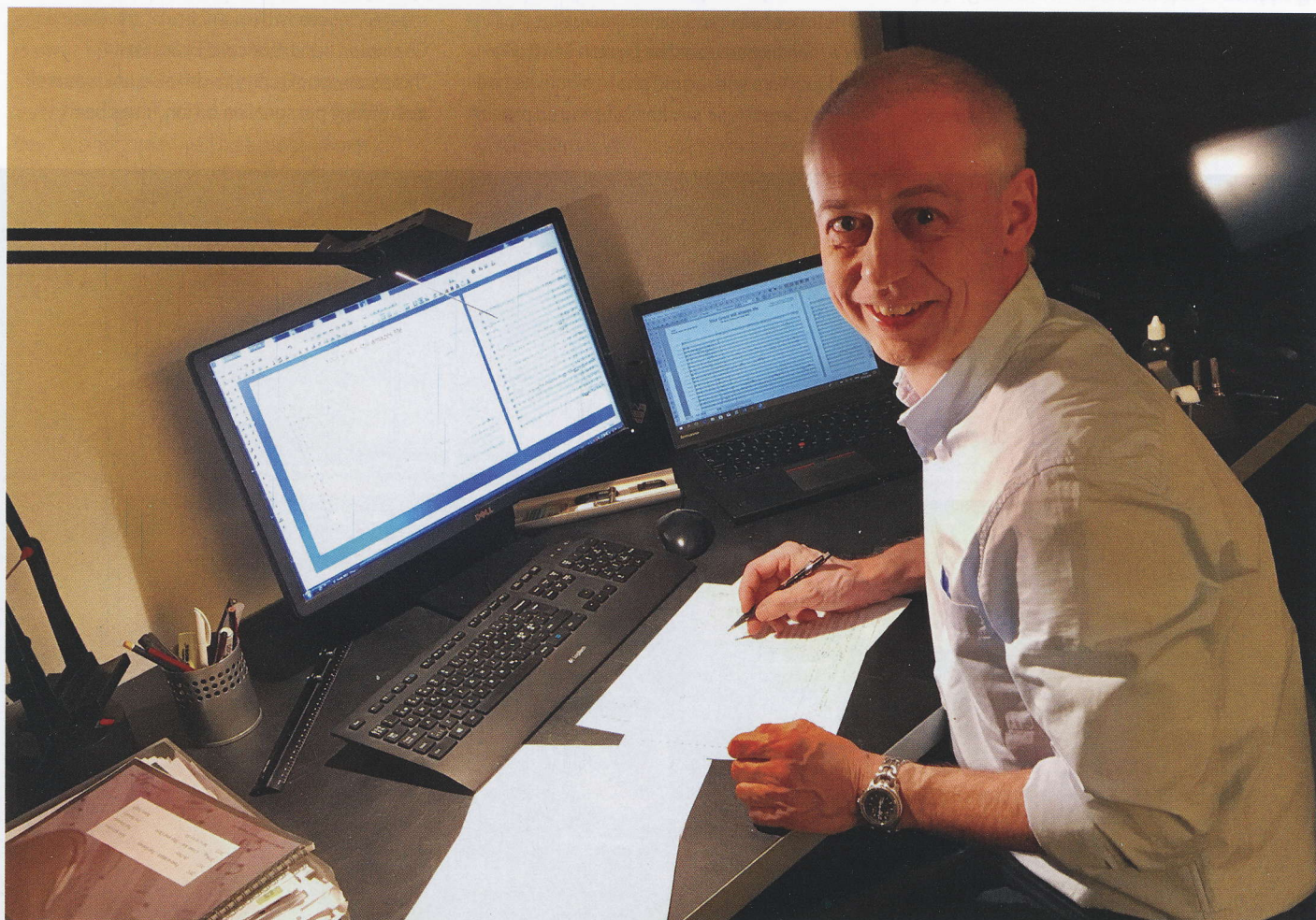
SAB: Your son, Marcus, is making great strides and following in your footsteps. You must be very proud that he is following the Silfverberg tradition?

NS: Yes, I am very proud of him. He is 28, and has been Bandmaster at our corps, Valby, for almost four years now. He has many good techniques for developing the band in all aspects and is quite ambitious. I really have great respect for his ability to come up with new relevant ideas and make them work. His advantage over me as a bandmaster for a Danish corps band is that he is more tolerant. We are a good team in that he uses my competencies to complement his, but I honestly have very little influence on how he is running the band. He is very much making his own name, although I think he feels a little pressure from the family name. There is no shortcut to obtaining recognition, especially in the Danish culture, but he is definitely earning that on his own.

SAB: Both Marcus and yourself are members of the German Staff Band. Can you tell us how you manage to fit that into your busy schedules? What have been some of the highlights during your time with the band?

NS: First of all, I very much enjoy being in the German Staff Band (GSB) with Marcus. Having a seven-hour drive to and from band practice gives us a good chance to talk. Luckily, the band doesn't practise every week! Coming from a very small Army territory, playing in the GSB is an opportunity that we both cherish. There is good fellowship and musicianship. Of course, it has to do with personal ambition, but also about getting inspiration, and that it is purposeful. So basically, this is a matter of giving it priority.

There have been many highlights of different nature, but the first weekend with the ISB in Germany stands out. The setup for the joint concert, with hundreds of people waiting for the doors to open to get a good seat, and playing some of my own music, was special. Going to Italy with the band, and experiencing the emotion of local Salvationists, as the GSB marched the streets, made a great impression as well, but my personal highlight was the band's pre-contest concert a few years ago. Despite high priced tickets, and the opportunity to attend a concert two days later with Black Dyke, the amazing and large concert hall was packed with an excited crowd.



of brass band enthusiasts, and the band did its very best, which was clearly appreciated. This was an experience where everything just came together.

SAB: Your book, *Fighting for the Lord*, which documents the history of the Danish Staff Band, received great acclaim on its release in 2012, so much so that a revised version was later released. Can you tell us about the book and the research that went into it writing it?

NS: Growing up I hardly knew there had been a Danish Staff Band (DSB), except from frequent anecdotes told by one of our old band members. I remember them almost being forced on us young people, and that he sometimes turned up for band practice having left his teeth at home!

My father asked me to help him research the history of the DSB when he was writing about the Army's music for a history book in 2010. I realised what an impact the band had had in Denmark and Scandinavia, and was shocked that I could find a grand total of just two pages about the band in the Army's history books, despite its importance and 42 years of active service. It excited me and I knew that if I didn't write the story, probably nobody ever would.

The Army gave me access to its archives, but didn't support in any other way. I read through

every single page of *The War Cry* from 1889 to 1935 and searched the archives for anything relevant. I also went through dozens of boxes of uncategorised old photos, private scrapbooks, diaries, interviewed relatives etc., so for months our house looked like a DSB museum! I don't know how my wife survived that, but her support was far beyond duty! I had a limited timeframe of about 10 months, if it was going to be ready for the 125th anniversary of The Salvation Army in Denmark, in 2012. Despite knowing that the book would come up short on research, I decided to write it anyway, using it as a way to create awareness of the research and thereby open doors to information. I knew there would be opportunity for further research, so at that time I had already decided on a second edition.

In the following five years, I was contacted by people from many countries around the globe who wanted to share knowledge with me – anecdotes, photos, diaries etc. I had an expanded opportunity to search digitalised archives all over the world – newspapers, family history, files from various government agencies and much more. I also made more interviews, and got friends in England, Sweden, Finland and Germany to help me search in archives. Sometimes help came quite unexpectedly. One day a man turned up at the Danish Territorial Headquarters with an old photo album he had found at an antique market. It featured private

photos of the DSB from two seasons, and most were new to me.

I still have people contacting me who I have never met before, and discovering new aspects, so my journey with the DSB just continues. The book is not written for aficionados, but with an intention to also inspire the reader to dig deeper into the amazing SA banding world. If you haven't read the book yet and want a taster, check out danishstaffband.jimdo.com.

SAB: In addition to your involvement in SA bands, you have recently been playing with the Band of the 8th Regiment. How did this opportunity come about and have you had chance to develop links between the band and the SA?

NS: In 2012, I gave a lecture to the International Military Music Society on SA banding and band music. That led to personal contacts and some consultation on SA music, which in 2017 led to being offered a substitute soprano cornet position. In the past, Danish SA bands have been very segregated from other music scenes, which for me always has been odd, and as Marcus is trying to open up for connections with our corps band (like masterclasses with members of the Danish Champion band, Concord Brass Band), I saw this as an opportunity to develop links, as well as fulfilling personal ambition. It has been





exciting and fun for me, but has also opened up new perspectives and relations. I trust the members have got a more positive and realistic view on Salvationists and SA bands, but it has also opened up opportunity for mutual help, as some of them play in other brass bands. The band is a great way of connecting new people to the Army, not just by playing, but also by taking part in band devotions at rehearsals etc., and I have been so happy to see how well 'outsiders' have felt at home with our corps band. Basically, this is for me another way of doing ministry.

SAB: How would you say your spiritual life is impacted by your music making?

NS: Music making and my spiritual life is very closely connected, and has always been. Good music is for me based on authenticity, and my writing music is about expressing a spiritual experience or my faith. This has resulted in a lot of Bible study and looking into lyrics, but also a lot of soul-searching.

When instructing, no matter if it is my corps band or a non-Army band, I always prepare by exploring the thematic material and lyrics and work through my Bible for relevant references, because there is more to the music than just entertainment. The same when performing - it is very important for me to make the music meaningful, and I often feel God's presence in a very strong way when playing, and for me the best sermons may well be a piece of music. I wrote a trilogy for the ScanBrass series some

years ago, although I only realised the link between the three pieces afterwards. All three pieces were expressing personal thoughts and experiences on a common theme. This is not the only time, as afterwards I have realised that the music held something spiritually deeper.

SAB: Can you tell us what you do professionally?

NS: I took a degree in social work, but when I got my first leadership position I began studying management as my jobs changed. Getting more and more involved in teaching and learning processes, I took degrees in Educational Psychology and Professional Development, and have for the last 15 years or so worked with education in different ways. I have been Associate Professor in Behavioural Medicine, lectured in learning theory, social work, organisational theory and more, been in two research positions as well as developing education at University Colleges and Universities. The last couple of years I have freelanced as a consultant, primarily on educational projects, but also making assessments and evaluations, as well as supervising.

SAB: Finally are you working on any particular musical projects currently?

NS: As you can understand, learning and development is very close to my heart, so my main project has for the last two years or so

been working with youngsters at the corps, as we have some very motivated and talented youngsters. I give lessons several days a week in brass, music theory or composition. Another thing I appreciate is the mentoring obligation - getting to know them, and being there for them in their lives. One of the youngsters I teach is a young lady, who just three years ago could not imagine the band as being part of her future. Now she is writing a paper at college about the relevance of SA banding in 2018 and gets lessons twice a week on top of band practices! I love to experience their engagement pay off and see them grow as musicians and Christians - that makes it all worthwhile. Regarding writing, I have the last couple of months worked on some arrangements for the band's open-air book, which is one of Marcus' projects. This follows up on an idea from last Christmas, where we had a group of five young people and myself playing popular Christmas music by cafés in the local area, which was quite popular, and gave some people a more approving look at the Army. The book will contain 52 functional pieces that will suit the band (even if a few may be missing) at open-air, so we always have playable music that is relevant in connecting with our audiences, playing in the local community or at shopping areas with lots of tourists. Of course, we already have a lot of useful music, but some specific arrangements are welcome additions. Finally, I am working with some loose ideas for a piece for our corps band for the Danish congress this spring.

Australian heat no barrier for Forster/Tuncurry Band Christmas ministry

Peter Trick reports

Forster/Tuncurry is a beautiful seaside town on the New South Wales Mid North Coast of Australia. There is also a thriving corps with a small band of mature male players and one young lady. The band is fortunate to have a good balanced sound and over the Christmas season was in demand to take part in community events, as well as corps work.

The band commenced its carolling season in mid-November at the launch of the K Mart giving tree. This is a large variety store and very supportive in supplying gifts for our community, where over 100 families are helped. This has been going on for 30 years. Another great supporter is the Bunnings DIY Centre. They hold a family evening where again the band participates playing many carols and Christmas songs.

We have the pleasure of playing carols at many retirement homes, and the band often sings a verse or two as well. We combine with Taree Army band as well for our final big bash, at a Baptist nursing home.

As an English/Australian man, I often find it hard playing carols in the

heat of Australia. I love *See Amid the Winter's Snow*, but if I choose it then I receive jibes from the other members! There are unique Australian carols, but we don't play those, as the music is hard to obtain. We also have to use plenty of insect repellent to combat flies and mosquitoes. Despite all this though, we love proclaiming the true Christmas message.

