

BOOK REVIEW

Silfverberg, Niels. *Fighting for the Lord: A History of the Danish Staff Band of The Salvation Army*. Books on Demand: Copenhagen, Denmark, 2012. ISBN 978-87-7114-429-1. 221 pages. Contains selected index, footnotes, and bibliography; Many photographs and illustrations. Foreword by composer, Colonel Robert Redhead.

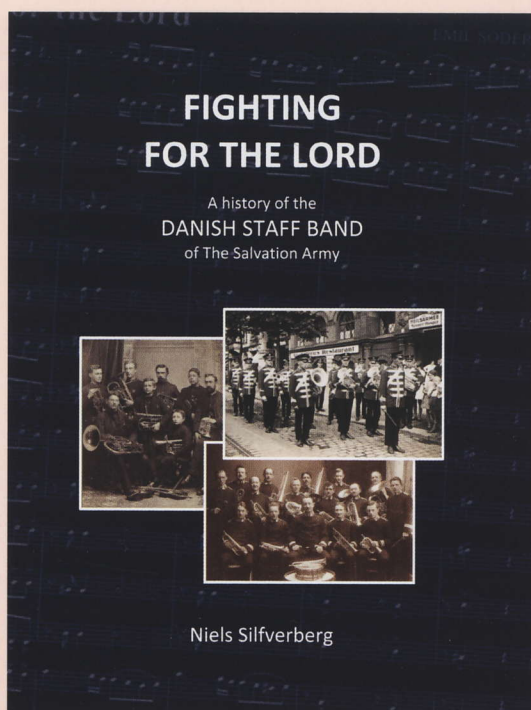
Last June, The Salvation Army held a great celebration in London on the occasion of the International Staff Band's 120th anniversary. The eight current staff bands joined up for one of the high water marks in brass band history. Yet, there was a time when there were many more 'staff bands' around the SA world, including the Danish Staff Band. Niels Silfverberg has provided a highly readable, informative history of this band that flourished for 42 years, founded December 1890 and disbanded August 1932.



Danish Headquarters Staff Band, 1921, BM Brigadier Ernst Söderström, front row, centre, and son, Emil Söderström, front row, far right.

When it first performed in public in February 1891, the small group naturally resembled the Scandinavian, or continental sextet tradition. The DSB then consisted of a Bandmaster and six instrumentalists, which as far as can be determined, consisted of an E Flat cornet, B Flat cornet, E Flat horn, two Tenor range instruments in B Flat and a Bass in either E Flat or F. One can still hear this combination in Scandinavian town parks, frequently the instruments more in the Bugle family than saxhorn - cornet with pistons tradition and with rotary valves. The sound is quite unique and attractive. Early SA Swedish brass band journals targeted this instrumentation and most Scandinavian 'bands' of the 1890 - 1910 era were of this size and make-up.

The group's main tasks were to promote the development and expansion of music



and musical evangelism in Denmark, especially bands, and support various congresses, preaching tours by SA luminaries and various fundraising efforts. In these 'assignments' they ran parallel to the other staff bands around the world in this same period. Interestingly, these staff bandmen frequently doubled on string and fretted

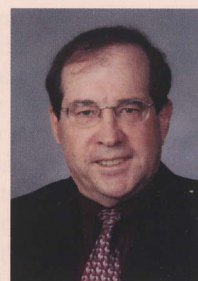
instruments, providing another musical dimensions when travelling around their country.

The Danish Staff Band would never fully resemble a full scale British-style brass band, but it gradually grew in size to a maximum, in its final years, of 15 players. The band also gradually shifted to British instrumentation, though like most of Scandinavian brass ensembles and even orchestras, was still using valve trombones in the early 1930s (Silfverberg relates good information on what instruments the band used in different periods of time, including what they purchased from the SA's instrument factory in St. Albans, England. For a companion discussion of Swedish brass bands and their gradual change to full-sized British brass band instrumentation, see Torgny Hanson's chapter on Sweden

in Volume I of my *Brass Bands of The Salvation Army: Their Music and Mission*).

Silfverberg narrates the band's history in a broadly chronological sequence, providing helpful footnotes when appropriate, but he does not make the book a dry 'scholarly' read. The story of the hardships faced, the incredibly dedicated, essentially full-time but voluntary service taken on by primarily young men in their late teens and early twenties is daunting to consider as we learn about their campaigns throughout Denmark, many of them under harsh conditions. We also learn of the small DSB going to the SA's International Congress of 1904, where they served in smaller venues but took in the major musical festivals, as a result inspired by that experience to improve their own musical skills. They returned to the 1914 International Congress, now at 15 members, yet still the smallest of the over 50 bands invited to perform in London that summer.

Their peak came right at the end of their history, first with a 1928 trip to Germany, including a joint performance with the German Staff Band (established 1910) in Berlin. They followed this with a successful, acclaimed 1932 tour of England and their 'swan song' or final appearance at the Danish National Congress, August 1932. As Silfverberg puts it: "The reason for the disbanding is not known." He does, however, provide a few speculations!



Danish Staff Band, 1891.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Danish Staff Band's history and legacy is that two famous brass band composers played in the group as young men and gained their formative brass band experience, their first brass aural concept, within the DSB: Erik Leidzén and Emil Söderström. Leidzén related that he played E Flat Flugelhorn (or bugle type soprano) in the first few years of the 20th century, before moving to Sweden, though schooling kept him from travelling with the group to the 1904 Congress in London. Söderström joined in 1917, playing cornet until he emigrated to the USA in the early 1920s. Interestingly, Emil's father, Ernst Söderström, led the DSB for ten years, providing long-term stability and effective leadership. There was even another key musician in the group, Peter Leidzén, who was not related to Erik, but also eventually ended up in the USA!

In absorbing Silfverberg's study of the band's gradual shift in instrumentation,



Danish Staff Band, 1930.

and in their use and adaptation of the SA's British brass band journals, I found much food for thought. I speculate that the early experiences of playing in and arranging for Scandinavian combinations had a profound influence on an approach to scoring taken by both Erik Leidzén and Emil Söderström. Also, I found it fascinating that this band would take the latest *Festival Series* pieces of the late 1920s-early 1930s, adapt them for their smaller combination and present them with great success, and daringly so, as they toured England in 1932.

While not allowed to continue beyond 1932, the band's legacy is an important one. The author tells of his father, the gifted SA composer and arranger Erik Silfverberg, who has provided so much excellent accessible music for, in particular, smaller SA bands worldwide, who was nurtured in the tradition of the Danish Staff Band. Niels himself continues that legacy and has joined his father in writing quality music for the SA. That is just one brief insight into the band's lasting impact.

This is a commendable book that will be of great interest to all who love to learn about the history of brass instruments, brass bands, and Salvation Army music and ministry. I enjoyed it thoroughly. The book can be obtained in the UK from Amazon.co.uk (£23.90), in Canada from Amazon.ca (\$31.36) and in the US from Amazon.com (\$ 31.65). Additional information can be found on <http://danishstaffband.jimdo.com>

Ronald W. Holz

CD REVIEW

Soprano Legends

Kevin Crockford

Peter Roberts

Alan Wycherley

Doyen CD298

Over the years the United Kingdom has produced some outstanding Soprano Cornet players. Names such as Charlie Cook of Foden's, David Barnes and Emllyn Bryant of Munn & Felton's and of course the great Brian Evans of CWS (Manchester), Fairey and Brighthouse trip off the tongue. These great soprano players tended to come one in every generation; that was up until the 1970s and then three extraordinary soprano cornet players with God given talents came along all in the same generation. They are of course Kevin Crockford, Peter Roberts and Alan Wycherley.

For almost five decades there has been great debate as to who is the better player - is it Kevin, Peter or Alan? This has consumed many an hour in the bars around London's Royal Albert Hall and the King's Hall and Free Trade Hall in Manchester. The answer, I think, is

quite simple: they are all phenomenally talented players and in many ways the debate can't go anywhere because each one over the years has maintained such a high standard. They are there to be enjoyed. If they had chosen to play the violin or piano, they would each have been multi millionaires!

They played with the very finest bands in the land: Black Dyke, Fairey, Grimethorpe, Yorkshire Building Society, Foden's, Leyland and more. In addition they were - and still are - in huge demand as guest soloists and they have a medal and trophy cabinet that is the envy of many. They are brilliant exponents of artistry, and I use this term advisedly because their musicianship and skill set is vast and wonderful. True artists, they have entertained huge number of concert and contest goers in this country and world-

wide and when one adds up all the years these players have been at the top, one can make the count to almost a century.

The CD is absolutely fabulous. Eighteen tracks with each artist performing six solos and the playing is of the finest

imaginable. The tracks have been taken from other recordings, so one can get a perspective of the careers (to date) of these virtuosos. The musical content includes such classics as *Lark in the Clear Air*, *Trumpet Voluntary*, *The Queen of the Nights Aria*, *O Holy Night* and *Rhapsody for Soprano Cornet*.



This CD has been impeccably produced by Doyen and is a must for any music aficionado. I would advise that this is a must purchase CD from three of the finest brass players the UK has ever produced.

Philip Biggs