

# “An Englishman in Denmark”

## What have I learned from Dansk Musikterapi?

*Af Tony Wigram*

### Introduction - Where was I professionally in 1992?

In 1992, I was the manager of a Department of Music Therapy in a large hospital, a District Officer of Paramedical Services, a Mental Health Officer, a research psychologist, clinical supervisor, and was heavily into music therapy politics in the UK and Europe. I was also an occasional (annual) teacher on fledgling music therapy courses in Italy and Spain, a church organist and choirmaster, and father of three small boys.

I was trained in 1974 by one of the pioneers of music therapy, Juliette Alvin, on a very short, one year post graduate course. The course involved a quite limited study of theory, therapy methods and psychology, together with continuous clinical practicums – we were assigned one day a week, 12 weeks practicums in each of the three semesters to three different clinical settings, throughout the course. The main strength of this

programme was that it required a high level of music skill – Diploma level (needed to get into conservatoires) before they would accept you. Over the years my travels around Europe have allowed me to see many different criteria for admitting students to MT courses, and the need to have well developed musical skills is by far the most important, in my opinion. We can teach theory, psychology, scientific and therapy knowledge and skills in a 2-5 years course quite easily, but it is impossible to teach someone to be a good enough musician – that is a training that starts back in childhood, unless someone has latent and very good talents. But this course in Denmark was already then 4 years long (becoming 5 in 1996) – WHAT A COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION – LUXURY!!!!

So there I was – content in my clinical, musical and political world with already enough to do, and many research projects actively going on, when suddenly out of the blue, an invitation came to join a small team in Denmark, in a town I had never heard of, for just a year...? How could I re-

sist !!!! – especially with the delights of the Danish winter! (See picture 1).

The year became two, then three... four ... five ... ten ... FIFTEEN!! I have now been here in Aalborg for 15 out of the 25 years that the course here has been running, and for the entire period of time that the Doctoral Research School has been developed. While my Danish language is merely functional, and pathetic at a social level – I feel very much part of the Danish situation, and am proud to wear the badge of Denmark on my breast at Conferences, Seminars and International meetings.

### Captured by the Danes!!

What did I come to Denmark with? ... Years of experience in the clinical field and years of experience of music therapy politics. In fact, that was how Denmark found me – I was building up the European Music Therapy Confederation, and also working on an unfortunately named music therapy internet communication system called DICS (Data Information and Communication System). Hanne Mette Kortegaard was, at the time, the Danish representative on the EMTC. I was actually ‘head-hunted’ to come and work in Denmark JUST for one year to start with, and then for a further year. I vividly remember my ‘interview’ at King’s College Cambridge during the European Conference of April 1992. Inge had dressed for the occasion, complete with fashionable and impressive make-up, and all three of them (Inge, Lars Ole and Hanne Mette) just looked at me and explained how WONDERFUL it was in Denmark and that I must come!! Any attempt by me to try and find out what I was supposed to do there, whether I had the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to teach music therapy or any other relevant facts about the job was almost completely avoided by these three lovely people, who simply wanted me to come here. It didn’t seem my worries about my competence to teach really



Picture 1: The delights of the Danish winter!

bothered them at all. In fact, when I arrived, I was told quite clearly by the Institute leader that Aalborg was hiring me for my research work – not teaching. Teaching was just a necessary by-product (I want to say I have never seen it that way, and nor do all my colleagues – we all count teaching students as very satisfying).

As I had very little teaching experience in music therapy, compared to my clinical and research experience, I was significantly more doubtful about this optimistic attitude, and when I actually arrived in Denmark in August 1992, clutching several thousand pounds in my hands to buy a house in Uggerhalne (near Vodskov), and with the best of intentions – I became quite uneasy at their expectations that I would teach subjects about which I had quite patchy knowledge!! Music Therapy in England was very short on theory, but long on musical and therapeutic skills. So the strong and extensive theoretical component of the Aalborg programme was actually quite new to me. Luckily, they put me on to teaching individual piano – which I did have SOME confidence about!! But theory of therapy, teräpöteettä sammenspil, psychology of music – well, these needed a lot of preparation and thought. I think my first students in 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> semester looked at me in a rather bemused way – perhaps even cross eyed, as I struggled in those first two years. All I can say is that then – and EVER SINCE, I have been so impressed by the respectfulness, kindness and tolerance of all the students I have taught. In fact, the decision not only to come and work in Denmark, but also to stay here, was one of the best ever decisions of my life (after marrying my wife!), and I feel absolutely privileged and lucky to have had this chance. This is not only because I have had so much fun teaching and researching, but also because of the wonderful colleagues I am working with here. They are simply the best, and the rest of the music therapy academic world is sometimes quite jealous of our team and the relationships within it.

My first house in Denmark, affectionately known as the 'Villa Tasteless' became a little symbol of the growing internationalisation of the programme. We had a constant stream of internationally famous guest teachers,



Picture 2: A regular lodger (Inge) setting out for work.

including Clive and Carol Robbins, Ken Bruscia, Henk Smeijsters, David Aldridge, Lisa Summer, Even Ruud, Cheryl Dileo, and many many others. Most of them spent time at 'Villa Tasteless' and signed their names on the famous Wall (at one end of the living room was a wall with brick design wallpaper – it became covered in signatures of guests, staff and students). A regular visitor (lodger) and supporter at this time was the lovely Inge Nygaard Pedersen – seen here (picture 2) preparing to set out for work in the depths of the Danish winter.

### What did I find?

The education in music therapy in Denmark was, in 1992, relatively unknown in both Europe and the World. Yet many elements of this education, which my colleagues here took for granted as quite natural and completely essential, were for me extraordinary and unexpected. Since then, and also since the music therapy programme at Aalborg became a 5 years, full time, Bachelor/Masters education to cand.mag level, I have basked in the reflected glory and fame of such a comprehensive and extensive training – watching with delight the wonder and envy on the faces of many colleagues in Europe, USA and Australia. For example, the music part of the training in many other education I have had contact with do not

specialise on the specific needs of music therapists – whereas in Denmark I found music training that equipped the students with more appropriate skills. There was a significantly more comprehensive component on theory, scientific thinking, therapy concepts and psychology than I was aware of elsewhere in Europe.

The 'jewel in the crown', and the most important element in the training was how much self-experience was included throughout. The individual and group therapy, group leading, inter-therapy, KGMF (Clinical Group Music Therapy Skills) and group dynamics formed a comprehensive and continuous part of the programme, and really helps the students begin their professional work with a strong grounding in themselves. This was quite unusual even for European trainings and, at the time, unheard of in the USA. In fact, in a conference in the USA in 1997, I took part in a discussion of music therapy educators about self-experience. I explained the Aalborg Model, and in response to a proposal that student therapists in the US would benefit from personal therapy, an educator commented that they were too young and immature to be able to go into that. This was an interesting comment, and I pointed out that these 'young' students were actually being trained to 'do' therapy to others, so how could they be too young for therapy themselves. The

answer to this was that in the US they were trained only to do activity therapy, not insight based therapy (although I am sure that is not now the case across all trainings). So I found that Aalborg was very much leading the way in this area of training. Trainings in the UK require individual therapy, but not necessarily music therapy (and interestingly, most students choose verbal psychotherapy). Aalborg ensures students have experience in individual and group music therapy.

Perhaps the weakest area in the Danish training was practicum experiences. When I came, students went on an observational placement for 4 weeks in the 2nd semester, and then next experience with clients did not come until the 7th semester with the long, 6 month practicum. So there were three years of study without almost any contact with the clients. This was something I was able to find a way of changing when the programme became a five years study, including observation practicums in the 5th and 7th semester, and experience of working with patients in the 6th and 8th semesters. This has all been further developed since.

### The early years

Learning to teach was a challenge and a pleasure. Danish students are respected all over the world – and I know this from the great feedback I have had from all the guest teachers who have visited and taught. They are mature, enquiring, argumentative, reflective and reflexive. In fact, these years of the 1990's, together with all my experience from clinical work and research, proved a very maturing experience for me. I could have left in 1994 – gone back to my job in England. So why didn't I??

Well first, England had stopped being so attractive since Mrs Thatcher – the 'Iron Lady' imposed her beliefs and practices on us – particularly in the National Health Service where I worked. It became a market – buying and selling, with armies of managers, administrators, accountants, and major changes occurring almost every year. It has not been better under Blair – so with hindsight I made an excellent decision to continue my work and development in Denmark. Second, I was blessed with two of the most remarkable and like-minded

colleagues anyone could wish to work with during those early years – Inge and Lars Ole. Third, Denmark really invested in universities at this time, and our brilliant Dekan – Ole Prehn, invested in Music Therapy (even though he was often heard complaining about how expensive we are!!).

### Studieleder

I think it was Lars Ole's crazy idea that in 1995, I should take over from Inge (to give her a rest after an unbroken 13 years) as studieleder. It coincided with a decision by the Ministry of science to make an evaluation of two chosen programmes in Aalborg (one of them was music therapy) and also a decision that the course should convert from a 4 to a 5 year training. These two extensive projects took a lot of my time during this period (1995-1997), but creating the 5 years programme was a very exciting process. I was also distracted by becoming President of the World Federation of Music Therapy at this time. I am sure that the teaching team found it hard work at meetings to cope with all my odd ideas, my pigeon Danish, and my international commuting. Again, they were very tolerant and supportive, and I thank them all for that now.

The development of the programme into a five year training took two years, and it has been continually adapting ever since. We have also had a bunch of 20 former students, now experienced clinicians, who came back for the efteruddannelse 2001-03 – which was another incredibly worthwhile project. Everything seemed to be exploding from 1995 onwards, with a long and exciting period of development that is, in many aspects, still continuing now.

### The professor - research and writing

The period from 1997 to 2007 has been very productive, and also quite exhausting. I was incredibly honoured when both Lars Ole and Inge supported (even demanded of me) my appointment as Professor – and I was very grateful when Lars Ole took over as studieleder, leaving me clear to work hard on the Forskerskole. I think this is when the full impact of the 'Aalborg Effect' began to drive my work. The Faculty had offered us a generous opportunity to build a proper forskerskole, tap into the en-

thusiasm for research, and internationalise our research school, and we made VERY good use of the money. I encouraged many colleagues in Europe and farther a-field to register on the PhD programme, and a period of building the milieu resulted in what we have today. Alongside this, I began an intense period of writing, and have produced a book almost every year since 1995. The recent books on methods and techniques have come out of my strong conviction that we needed clear teaching and clinical practice tools to consolidate and complement the case study and theory books already on the market.

This period of publication productivity I defined as the 'Aalborg Effect', and the way this works is to give one the narcissistic and grandiose idea that all the people out there want to know what you do, think, theorise, practice ... with the result that writing becomes almost a compulsive exercise, a 'pathology' – as demonstrated by the figures below ...

	Before 92 (1975-1992)	After 92 (1992-2007)
Books	1	18
Articles	13	28
Chapters in books	3	73
Conference papers	12	119

Table 1: The Aalborg Effect.

There are now at least 50 times the books available now in music therapy as there were when I trained, and it becomes increasingly difficult to know what to recommend amongst the vast array of written resources. It shows how much more specialised we are becoming as a discipline and profession.

Perhaps my greatest satisfaction has been in the hard won rewards of a major piece of research. I have supervised over 15 Doctoral theses, and when we have the 'robing ceremony' at Aalborg, and I can see the pride and joy of a doctoral researcher after they have successfully defended their thesis, then I am really wanting to clap and applaud and cheer ... (see picture 3).



*Picture 3: The robing ceremony at Aalborg after a successful defence of a PhD thesis.*

### Postscript

The title of this article for the celebration of 25 years of Musikterapi in Aalborg was also "...what have I learned from Dansk Musikterapi". Well, to answer that would require another 10 pages. I have learned a lot, gained a lot and as a consequence achieved a lot. I think that the Denmark milieu – both the 5 year training programme and the Doctoral research school, is an inspiration. It has certainly inspired me, and many others who have come. Both of these educations are now internationally famous and respected. So my learning has been mostly about the depth and complexity that is possible in a music therapy training, the variety and stimulation that has come out of research, and the creativity and enthusiasm that emerges from working with a dy-

namic team that has grown to include Inge, Lars Ole, Ulla, Niels and Hanne Mette, and also includes all the loyal, experienced and excellent teaching staff of the programme.

Of course there is a seemingly never ending process of change going on. Sometimes I think we ought to make an agreement that we will work for two complete years without anyone coming up with a new idea, or anybody at a higher level requiring any change!! Resistance to change is, by the way, a sign of ageing!!! Denmark is a small, dynamic and exciting country, and as well as feeding my intellectual and practical needs, it has of course provided fun and games for my family who, when the boys were small, were visiting for holidays. So perhaps in the final part of this postscript I can reflect on one special

symbolic aspect of Danish culture – Lego.

Lego is about building and constructing. It appeals particularly to boys, as they are biochemically predisposed to play with structure, construction, systems etc. Latest research in Autism Spectrum Disorder shows raised Testosterone levels in the amniotic fluid of autistic babies – leading to this type of 'Extreme Male' behaviour! So my boys came here and enjoyed Lego, Legoland – a real Danish tradition (see picture 4). But for me this can also symbolise building something – and maybe that is one of the most important things I have gained and learned from being in the Danish Milieu – we have really built something here!!!



*Picture 4: Lego is about building and constructing. Robert, Michael and David Wigram.*