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Lost and Found

A musical journey to 18th-century Tórshavn



SVABONIO

Angelika Nielsen – violin

Daniel Rye – clarinet, bass clarinet

Fiona Parker – French horn, natural horn

Ólavur Jakobsen – guitar

Arrangements: Daniel Rye

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Layout & Design: Uni Árting

Booklet texts: Ólavur Jakobsen & Daniel Rye

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1. The Crown Prince's March/James's Maggot/
La Nouvelle Allemande [3:01]
 2. Minuet in A [1:42]
 3. Cotillion [2:12]
 4. Minuet & Trio in D [2:32]
 5. Masquerade/The Topp [2:16]
 6. Le Tambourin/Minuet in G minor [3:23]
 7. The Cavalier [1:14]
 8. I Went Alone [1:10]
 9. Dessau March/Contredanse [2:30]
 10. Spanish Dance [2:54]
 11. Minuet in G [1:31]
 12. Polonaise & Minuet [1:49]
 13. Two English Dances [3:24]
 14. Minuet in G [1:44]
 15. La Favorite du Comte [1:32]
 16. Minuet in D minor/My Heart Smiles [4:01]
 17. Dragoon March/Pancake Dance [2:58]
 18. Contredanse [2:26]
 19. The Dreamer/English Dance [1:55]
 20. Two Minuets in G [3:27]
 21. The Little Beauty [3:03]
 22. Polonaise/The Little Capricious One/Minuet [2:46]
 23. Minuet in G minor/The Honest Old Man [4:23]
 24. March in D [1:17]
 25. Ambraie Rigo [2:58]
 26. Tramp Dance/Jig [2:14]



A MUSICAL SKETCHBOOK

Jens Christian Svabo (1746-1824) was a man of insatiable curiosity and multiple intellectual and artistic talents. On the title page of his music notebook (dated 1775) he styled himself 'Svabonio' – the name we have adopted for our group. This Italianisation of his name was perhaps a tongue-in-cheek recognition that Italian musicians were the stars of the age, both as performers, and as composers. Some non-Italian composers did indeed change their names to Italian forms in an attempt to be taken more seriously. The name also connects with the Latinised form of his clergyman father's name - Svabonius. Both names encapsulate the cosmopolitan outlook of these

newly enlightened times – an era when Great Britain had a king of German origin, and with a sister as Queen of Denmark (until arrested after a masked ball, followed by exile, and her untimely death in 1775), and when revolutionary ideas from France were either feared or welcomed, depending on one's point of view. The Faroe Islands were also opening out to the world, with trading ships and foreign sailors arriving in the harbour of Tórshavn.

European musicians in the late 18th century not only travelled across borders, but their music was also a sort of Grand Tour, encompassing different national styles. At a time when wealthy families

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would employ a French dancing master, dances of the time brought the music of Europe – French minuets, English jigs, German allemandes, Spanish sarabandes – into the home, the tavern and the concert hall. This mixture of styles from around Europe eventually led to a common repertoire of tunes that became popular in many countries.

Even in the Faroes, European dances were so popular that Svabo himself was concerned that they might replace the traditional Faroese chain dance: 'At notable weddings and celebrations, especially in Tórshavn, the Faroese dance is very much starting to fall out of fashion, and in

its place, minuets, Polish, English, Scottish dances, reels and contradances, are being introduced.' [*Reports from Travels in the Faroe Islands, 1781 and 1782*]

In the 18th century, ideas of national music were starting to develop, but there was no distinction in the modern sense between 'classical' and 'folk' music. Everyday music was functional – usually for dance or song – with not too much concern about who had composed it (not a single composer is named in Svabo's book). The style in which music was played might vary according to context, but the same melody could just as much have been heard in the

ballroom of a noble house as in a street tavern.

Svabo collected melodies of many kinds in his notebook, though most are dance tunes, including a large number of minuets. As the book progresses, the handwriting becomes less neat, suggesting that he might have added tunes to the book in later years, possibly including his own compositions. Svabo was clearly an accomplished violinist and must have carried his pocket-sized book around with him in Copenhagen. Whether he played just for friends or managed to earn a few coins by playing for more formal dances is not known.


There are well over 200 fiddle tunes in Svabo's book and nearly all of them are unaccompanied, with just a handful having a part for second violin. I have been very free in my arrangements: rather than aiming for historical reconstruction, I have allowed each tune to take a different direction. Sometimes this leads to an echo of Classical 18th-century composition, and at other times the tunes take a journey towards more modern harmonies. I hope that they convey the spirit of the times in all their diversity, from urban sophistication to rustic jollity, bringing to life in the imagination all the sights and sounds that Svabo might have encountered, from the refinement of noble

drawing rooms, to the rough and tumble of country dances, with the bright flashes of military uniforms (reflected in musical form in marches) reminding us that these were also unstable times in Northern Europe.

We lack evidence for the use of Svabo's music book in Tórshavn after his return to the Faroes, but if he came across fellow musicians on other instruments – maybe even a clarinet, horn or guitar – surely he would have opened his violin case and some of these tunes might have wafted in the air between the turf-roofed houses in the narrow lanes of old Tórshavn, bringing the music of continental Europe to his homeland.

NOTE: Many of the tunes in Svabo's book do not have titles. Of those that do, some are difficult to decipher and are in a mixture of languages. For this CD we have decided to use English versions of Svabo's titles in most cases (sometimes involving informed guesswork), while leaving a few ambiguous titles as they are originally written.

Daniel Rye





THE SWALLOW THAT NEVER HAD A SUMMER

The life and work of Faroese polymath Jens Christian Svabo can be likened to a swallow that never gets to experience a summer. This striking image by the scholar Reidar Djupedal sums up the sad story of Svabo's time on earth.

Svabo collected and wrote down thousands of Faroese words, before the language had an agreed written form, laying the foundations for a Faroese dictionary; he rescued the Faroe Islands' precious cultural treasure – the old ballads – from oblivion; he wrote an outstanding ethnographic account of the Faroes; he investigated many different economic and cultural phenomena; and he came

up with practical solutions to improve the lot of the Faroese population. But almost nothing of this work was printed during Svabo's lifetime. Hardly any of his advice was followed, and he received virtually no payment or even thanks for all his efforts.

In the spring of the year 1800, after 35 years of exile in Copenhagen, Svabo's life hit rock bottom. This is what he wrote to the Danish Treasury, pleading for help to return to the Faroes:

'Now I don't know which corner of the earth to turn to to pray for help and a consoling answer. I would like to travel back to my homeland and, in quiet moments, try to forget my

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hopes and leave the thoughts of any bright prospects to fate. And worry myself to death there. To come home and have fingers pointing towards me: "there he is!" That is almost worse than death!

But his entreaty worked: the Treasury granted Svabo his travel expenses and sent people into town to buy some new clothes for him. However, he could not collect the rest of his expenses until he was in Tórshavn.

Svabo arrived in the Faroese capital in July 1800 on the ship *Catherine Margrethe*, and joined the household of his sister, Armgarð Maria (wife of the bailiff Hammershaimb),

in Nýggjastova in Gongin, Tórshavn's main street. He later moved to a rented room in Pætursastova in Bringsnagøta. These houses still exist today.

So he had returned home at the age of 54, without having completed his education, with no employment in prospect and with no likely job offers. In effect he had been sent home to the Faroes like a destitute vagrant, and with help from the poor relief fund, to spend his last years in obscurity.

In the eyes of Faroese society, however, Svabo was from good stock. He was born in 1746 in Miðvágur, the son of a priest. His mother was from one of the most powerful families in the

Faroese, whose line included two prime ministers – both learned men, who carried the torch for Enlightenment ideas in the archipelago. Together with Nicolai Mohr, his fellow pupil from the Latin School in Tórshavn, Svabo moved to Copenhagen in 1762 to study Natural Sciences and Economics.

These were turbulent times in Copenhagen. King Frederick VII suffered from a mental disorder and had, in effect, lost authority. Struensee, the royal physician and second in command, ran the country. There was much opposition from the nobility and the church, as power was taken out of their hands, and yet freedom of speech and of

the press were introduced in the Danish Kingdom at this time.

At first things looked bright for Svabo in Copenhagen: he was supported by people of power and influence; he was a tutor for well-to-do families for a while, had work as a clerk, and started his dictionary. He even travelled to London in 1775, although we know very little about this trip. His intellectual curiosity and perseverance led to him being sent to the Faroes to write a report on the life and economy of the islands for the Danish authorities and he returned to Copenhagen in 1782.

Yet almost nothing of Svabo's work was published (his *Reports from Travels in the*

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Faroe Islands did not appear in print until 1959) and he found himself with neither a job nor a regular income on his return to the Danish capital, ending up lodging with a family in Skidenstræde, in one of the least desirable neighbourhoods of the city. His final years of exile were marked by illness and debt. How he survived this period is unknown, but scholars have speculated that he might have earned his daily bread at this time by working as a musician in Copenhagen.

Svabo's music notebook, which is dated 1775 on the cover, must have come home with him in 1800. At some point it was put in a chest in the loft of Nýggjustova, and did not see

the light of day again until it was discovered in 1928.

So our album title, *Lost and Found*, can be said to be a description both of Svabo's life and of his work. His achievements were not particularly recognised during his lifetime, but the work that he left behind laid the foundations for scholarly research in Faroese culture, language, society and history.

Ólavur Jakobsen



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