

## Friedrich Kuhlau's Operas and Theatre Music and their Performances at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen (1814-1830)

A mirror of European music drama and a glimpse of the Danish opera tradition.

By Gorm Busk

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Copenhagen was a city with a European reputation for musical culture. At the centre of this was the Royal Theatre, the city's most important and only true cultural institution, the meeting-place for Danish cultural life and beside the music societies (e.g. *Det Harmoniske Selskab* and *Det Musikalske Akademi*) also a forum for concert appearances by visiting artists.

The primary aim of this article is to present the operas (all of the *Singspiel* type) and theatre music of the composer Friedrich Kuhlau - German-born but active in Copenhagen from 1810 until his death - and to give an account of his method of composing them. But it also aims to give an impression of the reception his dramatic works had from the Copenhagen public at the Royal Theatre, where he and the other great Danish composer of the period, C.E.F. Weyse, completely dominated the repertoire of Danish operas. And finally, since Kuhlau was a very internationally oriented artist, the article will serve to demonstrate the strong dependence of his works on the opera music of his age.



Lithograph portrait of Kuhlau by Ludwig Fehr, senior. Royal Library.

*Friedrich Daniel Rudolph Kuhlau* was born in the North German town of Uelzen (between Hamburg and Hanover) on 11th September 1786, and belonged to a family of military musicians (oboists). His father's postings meant that he lived in various North German cities: Lüneburg (where Kuhlau lost his right eye because of a fall in the street in 1796), Altona, Brunswick and finally Hamburg (from 1802 until 1810). There he had his real musical apprenticeship, less as a pupil of the City Cantor C.F.G. Schwencke, who only gave him a sporadic introduction to the theory of harmony, than through a fruitful acquaintance with the various musical genres of the day in the concert and opera life of one of Europe's biggest musical metropolises, the centre of everything new in the musical culture of the period.

In October 1810 Kuhlau fled to Denmark, afraid of being pressed into the French army after the French occupation of the city. He settled down in Copenhagen, giving concerts, teaching, publishing minor piano and flute works and writing as a correspondent for the big Leipzig music periodical *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. In 1813 he took Danish citizenship and was appointed *Kammermusikus*, but without a salary until 1818. Straitened financial circumstances dominated Kuhlau's life in Denmark. As the breadwinner of a large family (which moved to Copenhagen in 1814) he had to eke out his regular wage of 300 *Rigsdaler* by composing a flood of easy-to-play, diverting music for flute and piano, the fashionable instruments of the time - a source of income that even stopped in the periods when, as a result of his paid appointment, he had to compose cantatas and especially operas for the Royal Theatre every year - but from 1821 only every second year. An appointment as professor in 1828 in connection with the successful performance of *Elverhøj* (The Elf Hill), meant a rise in salary to 600 Rdr, but his last years were full of sad events: his house burned to the ground in 1831 and he lost most of his possessions; this was followed by a period in hospital; and growing alcohol abuse on top of constantly ailing health led to his death of tuberculosis in Nyhavn in central Copenhagen on 12th March 1832.

Yet throughout this apparently joyless life there were many points of light: first and foremost the trips abroad which Kuhlau, as the true Bohemian he was, made when conditions at home and the Copenhagen musical scene became too provincial for him. He went on a few concert tours in Sweden and Norway, but most of his journeys were to Germany and Austria. In 1816 he conducted a successful performance of his first opera *Røverborgen* (The Robbers' Castle) in Hamburg. In 1821 he went on his longest journey to Germany and Austria, but did not get to Italy as planned. In 1825 he was again in Vienna, where he met Beethoven, and finally he was in Germany in 1829. He experienced great successes with many of his dramatic works - as well as fiascos - and both at home

and abroad was recognized as an important composer whose works were mentioned with respect in the music periodicals of the age; a respect which was not weakened by his rather isolated position in Danish musical life and his non-participation in the higher social life of Copenhagen.

Kuhlau was an industrious, fast-working composer, who with his 127 opus numbers and a similar number of minor works without opus numbers moved through almost all the musical categories of the time. Today he is best known for his many works for piano and flute (for one to four flutes), but "writing operas was his great passion",<sup>1</sup> as one of his pupils wrote, and we have his own word that the approximately six-month periods in which he composed them were exhausting, yet welcome oases in his often very workaday life.

His time in Hamburg, with the city's rich crop of operas in all the forms of the period, had given Kuhlau the best possible opportunity to learn about the nature of opera. The city's French and Italian opera houses played Italian *opera seria*, *opera buffa* and the very widespread hybrid form *opera semiseria* or *eroicomico*, and French *tragédie lyrique* in the solemn style; but most of all the *opéra comique* (with spoken dialogue) popular all over North Germany, and its German offspring the *Singspiel*. The core of the repertoire was Mozart's operas, then came the French *opéras comiques* and finally the German-Austrian *Singspiele*.



Kongens Nytorv. The projecting building on the right is the old Royal Theatre. The present building was sited to the left of it, where the oblong building, the cannon foundry Gjethuset, lay. The harbour basin to the left is Nyhavn, where Kuhlau died at No. 23 on the left side. After a drawing by H. G. F. Holm from the mid-nineteenth century. Teatermuseet.

From 1804 until 1810 Kuhlau appeared in six concerts in Hamburg, mostly as a pianist but also as a composer - at the first concert (3rd March 1804) with an "Overture aus der neuen Oper *Amors Triumph*".<sup>2</sup> Neither the overture nor the opera is preserved or mentioned in the contemporary sources, but it says much about his interest in the genre that he had already made his mark at the age of 17 or 18, probably with a small pastoral in the Italian-French style, which may have been performed in private circles, perhaps under the auspices of Schwencke. It was not until ten years after this youthful foray that Kuhlau had his real public debut with *Røverborgeren* at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen.

When Kuhlau came to Denmark in 1810, the opera house (built in 1748) on the square Kongens Nytorv, approximately in the same place where the present Royal Theatre (built in 1874) now lies (see illustration p. 95), was the setting for the performance of plays, ballets and operas. What is particularly striking in all genres is the *national orientation* which - after a period with the sentimental German bourgeois comedies (Kotzebue and Iffland) and the French *opéras comiques* - was expressed in the popular Singspiele (*Høstgildet*, *Peters Bryllup* and *Indtoget*) by the *kapelmester* of the Theatre from 1789 until 1795, J.A.P. Schulz; the operas and Singspiele (e.g. *Holger Danske*, 1789) by the *kapelmester* from 1795 until 1817, F.L.Æ. Kunzen; the tragedies of Oehlschläger and the ballets of Galeotti with music by Claus Schall, the *kapelmester* from 1817 until 1834. As for the opera as such, the repertoire in the decade before Kuhlau's arrival in Copenhagen had been on the old-fashioned side, despite Kunzen's strenuous efforts to strike a blow for Mozart's operas, which were still considered modern, romantic and relatively inaccessible, only succeeding with *Così fan tutte* (one performance in 1798), *Don Giovanni* (1807) and *Die Entführung* (1813). *Figaro* was first performed in 1821 and *The Magic Flute* in 1826.

The repertoire had many points in common with that of the Hamburg Opera, at least until about 1820, when composers like Rossini, Weber and Auber ushered in a new period in the Danish as well as the foreign repertoire, and European opera developed towards a more Romantic style.

Among the Danish operas, or rather Singspiele (for the dialogue was always spoken, there was no recitative and even in the Italian operas, for example Mozart's, this was replaced by spoken dialogue), Kunzen's led the field until 1820: these included *Vinhøsten*, *Hemmeligheden* and *Dragedukken*, but one could still hear the older Singspiele by Schulz and a few by Schall (*Kinafarerne*). The two most frequently performed Danish Singspiele were Edouard Dupuy's *Ungdom og Galskab* (Youth and Madness) (1807), which was so successful that the opera on which it was based, Méhul's *Une Folie*, played everywhere else in Europe, was never staged

at the Royal Theatre; and Weyse's *Sovedrikken* (The Sleeping Draught) (1809), with a libretto by Oehlenschläger and related in plot to Dittersdorf's *Doktor und Apotheker*:

Weyse's other Singspiele, *Faruk* (libretto by Oehlenschläger, 1812), *Ludlams Hule* (Oehlenschläger, 1815), *Floribella* (Boye, 1825), *Et Eventyr i Rosenborgs Have* (Heiberg, 1826) and *Festen paa Kenilworth* (H.C. Andersen, 1836, after Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*), all of which saw few performances, were composed in parallel with Kuhlau's, and the extent to which these two composers dominated the repertoire can be seen from the fact that in the period 1810-1832, only *two* Singspiele by other Danish composers (C. Braun and J.F. Frølich) were performed - and both were quickly taken off the bill again. On the other hand much music was composed for various plays, and with the exception of Weyse's music for *Macbeth* (1817) and Kuhlau's theatre music, is now quite forgotten. The main suppliers were Kunzen and Schall, and above all the singing-master of the Theatre, L. Zinck.

As mentioned above, the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen was the absolute centre of the cultural life of the city. This was where people met, expressed their opinions on this and that, and of course especially on the performances - often vociferously, probably as compensation for the inability to express political opinions in a society where King Frederik VI ruled absolutely and where his prohibitions, for example of the freedom of the press, firmly suppressed any tendency towards the democratic expression of opinion.

When Kuhlau's opera *Røverborgen*, to a libretto by Oehlenschläger (after a novel by C.L. Heyne) was premiered on 26/5 1814, it meant not only a breakthrough for the composer, but also a renewal of traditional opera. It is hard to understand today, when we see the opera as an offshoot of the tradition of Mozart, Cherubini etc., and on the whole as a Classicist work; but at that time it was felt to be something new and was much discussed - this is evident from how frequently it is mentioned in the contemporary written sources. Oehlenschläger wrote:

At the time (1814) Weyse again wanted a Singspiel to compose, and the marvellous Kuhlau, who was as yet only known for his instrumental music, also asked me to write one for him. I considered what would be most suited to the spirit of each. Kuhlau seemed to me more brisk and effectful; in Weyse's music a certain deep, suggestive imagination had always delighted me with its sweet reveries. I wrote "Røverborgen" for the former and "Ludlams Hule" for the latter.<sup>3</sup>

After the premiere the actor H.C. Knudsen wrote in his diary: "In the evening, "Røverborgen" by Professor Oehlenschläger was played, the music by Mr. Kuhlau. There was a full house. The piece was well performed, and the music is excellent".<sup>1</sup> But there were also critical voices. The author Jens Baggesen wrote a scathing review of Oehlenschläger's text, which must in fact be described as decided hackwork, far below the standard of his great plays; he could only explain its success on stage as the result of Kuhlau's "enchanting music" and the "excellent acting" of the performers.<sup>2</sup> The opera was played at the Theatre almost every year of Kuhlau's life and with its total of 91 performances, the last in 1879, was his most frequently played piece after *Elverhøi*. It was also the only one of his dramatic works to be performed abroad, in no less than seven different places in Germany and Russia.<sup>3</sup>

The action takes place in France in the Middle Ages, and is a rather naive, maundering story of Sir Aimar, who is lured up to the castle of the robbers where a woman named Juliane is already held captive. With the aid of the kindly disposed robber Camillo, Sir Aimar survives several attempts at murder by the robbers' evil housekeeper, the Gypsy woman Birgitte, and in the end is united with his beloved Adelaide, who has been promised against her will by her father Bernhard to the nobleman Amalrik. At the end, the latter on the other hand recognizes in Juliane the wife he has believed dead.

In terms of genre *Røverborgen* is a version of the *rescue opera* type that was so popular before and around the turn of the century. Its most important plot feature is that the hero or heroine of the piece is held captive by an evil tyrant at his castle and after many complications is liberated by his or her spouse - the whole affair ending with a eulogy to marital fidelity. It is an opera type we only know today from Beethoven's *Fidelio*, but at that time it enjoyed a central position in the repertoire. Cherubini's *Lodoïska* (1791) and *Les deux journées (Der Wasserträger)* (1800), both of which had a strong influence on Beethoven's opera, are probably the other two most typical examples of the genre.

Stylistically, the opera is a hybrid of elements from Italian, French and German opera and a whole grab bag of the trends of the period, also including features from the Danish opera tradition - but all with a certain personal touch. Italian *opera seria* is suggested by Juliane's great bravura aria *Stærke Judith* ("Fearless Judith") (No. 8); the Neo-Neapolitan opera (Simon Mayr) by Adelaide's recitative and aria *St. Georg* (No. 6); and *opera buffa* by Birgitte's loquacious *parlando* melody in the original "Omelette Quartet" (No. 9) where, assisted by a robber, she tries to serve a poisoned omelette and wine to Aimar while the terrified Camillo watches. French opera is recalled by the many strophic songs such as Bernhard's ballad

(No. 4), the first robbers' song (No. 11) (Grétry) and Camillo's aria *Jeg giærne dør* ("Glad would I die") (No. 13) (Cherubini, see below); and there is inspiration from French Revolutionary opera with its ostinato motivic technique (Cherubini) in the duet of Aimar and Camillo (No. 2), the first part of which is based on a constantly repeated four-note motif: 

The connection with German opera is primarily evident from the Mozartean style that permeates the opera - and all of Kuhlau's operas - but also from the meticulously elaborated orchestral writing. The Danish opera tradition is clear in the romance *Kong Ludvig* (No. 3) with its 6/8 melody and dotted *siciliano* rhythm:

Andantino



Kong Lud - vig dra - ger med sin Hær, alt ly - ne tu - sind christ - ne Sværd,

Nor is the "stage prayer" so beloved of the Italian and French opera missing; here it is represented by a brief, homophonic three-part piece (No. 15).

A central feature of Kuhlau's operatic style is his special *parody* or *model* technique, using *musical borrowings from the works of other composers*. Mozart is the composer who furnishes him with most models, but otherwise Kuhlau draws particularly heavily on works by Cherubini, Paer, Beethoven, Weber, Rossini and a few other composers of his age. An important feature of this musical phenomenon, known throughout the history of music, is the retention (probably a relic of the Baroque "theory of the affects") of the key as an important aspect of the composition by which one is inspired, and to a lesser extent of the time signature and tempo. For Kuhlau this dependence on another's work - which is far from making him a plagiarist or eclecticist, since it is usually only a kind of springboard to a quite independent composition which may be a match for its model - is melodic/thematic, constructional or formal in nature. In a few cases the model forms the basis for the whole composition. A very tangible example of this is the then well-known water-carrier's aria from *Les deux journées* (on which he had shortly before written piano variations, op. 12):

Cheburini

Allegro



Micheli: Gui - de mes pas o pro - vi - den - ce, d' mon plan se - con - de le suc - ces

Kuhlau

Allegro non tanto



Camillo: Jeg giær - ne doer, skiant u - den Mod, et Mord mig paa mit Hier - te bræn - der

Another example where the model is a determinant of the whole composition, in this case less in the melody than in the form, is the trio, formed as a canon, which begins the finale of Act One, and which has the corresponding *Hoffnung, du trocknest wieder sanft die Augenlider* (No. 12) from Cherubini's rescue opera *Faniska* (premiered in 1806 in Vienna) as its equally clear model. Key, time signature and tempo are the same (B $\flat$  major, 2/4, Andantino in Cherubini and Andante quasi adagio in Kuhlau), and the part-writing and the distribution of the sections are quite identical. Both canons begin with a free - i.e. non-thematic - prelude for the woodwinds and low strings, Kuhlau's of four bars, Cherubini's of 18 bars. This is followed in both cases by five presentations of the theme (Kuhlau's has however only a faint resemblance to Cherubini's), eight bars for Kuhlau, 18 bars for Cherubini with identical voice entries: 1) Soprano I (Adelaide, *Faniska*); 2) Tenor (Richard, *Rasinski*); 3) Soprano II (Therese, *Moska*); 4) Soprano I; 5) Tenor; and finally a homophonic a cappella passage, Kuhlau's of five bars, Cherubini's of 19 bars. The concluding instrumental postlude by Kuhlau is rather longer than Cherubini's because of the modulation to the relative G minor, whose mid-cadence prepares the following G major *pastorale*. The accompanying orchestral passages and counterpoint to the voices too are very similar in the various passages, with a gradually livelier motion.

It is however rare (it happens in a total of six numbers in Kuhlau's dramatic music) that model and imitation are so similar. In more cases (a total of 17 numbers) it is the *beginning of another composition*, usually its first theme, which has worked as a catalyst for Kuhlau's composition, but otherwise he shapes it in his own way. On the other hand one does note striking thematic similarities - we have an example in the opening of the overture, whose theme with its hammering repeated notes is borrowed from the similar beginning of the overture to Paer's opera *I Fuorosciti* (*Die Wegelagerer, The Foresters*):

Paer:  
Allegro vivace



Kuhlau:  
Presto



VI.1

In most cases there is a parody of a *particular passage in someone else's composition*, and it takes the form of a thematic, rhythmic, modulatory or harmonic similarity. A good example is the relationship of the first robbers' song with the drinking

song with chorus *Que le sultan Saladin* (No. 8) in Grétry's rescue opera *Richard Cœur de Lion*: the tonal plan (minor-major), the beginning of the melody and not least the violin figures of the postlude.

Kuhlau's next opera, *Trylleharpen* (The Magic Harp), with a libretto by Baggesen, premiered 30th January 1817, aroused no less interest than *Røverbogen*, but in a quite different way that was very unfortunate for the composer. It was a bitter irony of fate that the man who had savaged the libretto of Kuhlau's first opera was the one who gave him the libretto for his next, which because of tragicomic misunderstandings during the writing - not its own inherent value - meant that it was as overwhelming a failure as the first was a brilliant success. *Trylleharpen* became not only the greatest theatre scandal of the age; it became a cause, a symbol of a literary feud and one of the most controversial librettos in the history of music.

Its origins went back forty years to a time when Baggesen had give Kunzen an incomplete libretto, *Arions Lyre*, which the latter had finished in German abroad with the help of another author, on the basis of Baggesen's draft - but without his knowledge. Kunzen composed an opera to it which was premiered in Vienna in 1800 with the title *Ossians Harfe*. Fifteen years later Baggesen himself completed his text, now renamed *Trylleharpen*, and got Kuhlau to set it to music after Kunzen and Weyse had refused. The real scandal began a few days before the premiere, when a theology student, Peder Hjort, a fanatical opponent of Baggesen and worshipper of Oehlenschläger, issued a pamphlet accusing Baggesen of stealing the plot of *Trylleharpen* from *Ossians Harfe*, which was in reality only a German translation of his own opera! The issue came to such a head that Kunzen died after a quarrel with Baggesen two days before the premiere. The premiere itself took place in an atmosphere of relative calm, since the King was present; but the second performance the next day triggered off a huge scandal, with formidable hissing and booing of the libretto, while every burst of applause was accompanied by the shout "For Kuhlau!". But the later was unable to prevent the opera being taken temporarily off the bill, and it was only revived two years later after Baggesen had in the meantime won his suit against Peder Hjort for accusing him of plagiarism. The third and last performance (24th February 1819) developed - even more than the previous one - into tumultuous scenes in the theatre that were only calmed down by the intervention of the military.

The opera was never printed, and was therefore only known from its three performances, which prevented its contemporaries and posterity from judging it on its merits. While the theatre critic Thomas Overskou said that it was a "work of genius, full of delightful melodies, especially in the scenes of love and pathos",<sup>7</sup>

most of its contemporaries thought the music was “monotonous” and “tiring” and was no match for *Røverborgen*; and the judgement of posterity on a work it was far less able to evaluate seriously was even less qualified. For what do we have in this opera? A logically clear, well-wrought plot and music that may lack the many musical “hits” of *Røverborgen*, but which has so many far greater dramatic qualities.

It is about the princess Dione, who is attacked by a band of pirates, but is saved by the itinerant singer Terpander, whose singing and harping enchant the robbers. After the warrior Skopas has wooed her, her father promises her to the wooer who can prove his love through the greatest sacrifice. It is Terpander who, after he and Dione have been stranded on a desert island, shatters his harp in order to light a life-saving beacon.

Where *Trylleharpen* clearly differs from *Røverborgen* is in the fact that the music, on the French model, was composed to carry forward the action and *to* the text (with *Røverborgen* this was only true of a few large ensembles and the finale of Act One), not as in *Røverborgen* as interpolations in the form of independent song numbers which may well have been effective but which lacked true overall dramatic coherence. The close connection between drama and music is particularly evident from the unusual feature for a Singspiel of the period that several musical numbers are linked continuously in the first half of Act One (Nos. 1-3), and in the middle of Act Two, where Kuhlau was so carried away by the rush of the action that he forgot to number the pieces (harp prelude - duet - pirates' chorus) or perhaps perceived them as a whole, as suggested by the unity of key (F major, F major, F minor). The music is thus welded into spaciouly developed musical scenes which in some places, especially in Act One, give it a through-composed aspect. *Trylleharpen* is also the only Kuhlau opera to include ballet music, for example concluding each act, and a few instrumental numbers, which gives it a further French appearance.

An example of the linking of musical numbers is the above-mentioned introduction to Act One. It consists of a chorus of shepherdesses (Allegro, A major, 6/8), interrupted by a C major march when the King and Dione enter, a repetition of the second section of the chorus of shepherdesses (D major), a chorus of homage with dancing (Allegro, A major, 2/4), which is immediately linked with an instrumental dance (Allegretto, F# minor, 3/4), again followed by the second section of the chorus of shepherdesses. Then comes a lamenting aria from Dione (Andante con moto, G minor, 2/4), which in themes, tonality, sequence of modulation and overall structure (sonata form with incomplete recapitulation, i.e. without the beginning) uses Mozart's aria *Padre, germani* (No. 1) from *Idomeneo* as such a direct template that the similarity of the part-writing at certain points has

the effect of a photographic reproduction. Its expected final chord is replaced by a recitative as a dramatic build-up to the next grand solo and chorus allegro (D minor, D major, 4/4). To urgent ostinato rhythms in the orchestra, the pirates rush on stage, Dione and her confidante Myris offer them all sorts of treasures which they contemptuously dismiss, the robber chieftain whips up the tempo (shift to D major) and orders his men to seize the girls, and a huge orgiastic clash of robbers' threats (emphatic crotchets) and supplications from the women (minims) concludes with Terpander's singing accompanied by the harp (Larghetto, B $\flat$ , 4/4). On the model of *The Magic Flute* and many other operas of the age the harp enchants the pirates so that they release their prey and flee (Allegro non tanto, B $\flat$  minor - B $\flat$  major, 6/8, and between the two keys the second section of Terpander's song). Then this whole complex of numbers, Kuhlau's greatest dramatic feat so far, is concluded with a song of thanksgiving (Andante - Allegro, D major, 4/4).

The text Kuhlau was given for the work designated *Elisa eller Venskab og Kjærlighed* (Elisa or Friendship and Love), a debut drama by the literary parson and Oehlenschläger imitator C. J. Boye, was on the other hand as undramatic as one can imagine. It is a chivalric romance where the eponymous heroine, believing her beloved Albrecht to have died on a Crusade, feels obliged to marry the knight Sir Vilhelm, since her father's estate would otherwise pass to a greedy abbot. In the next act Albrecht of course returns on the very day of the wedding, but in the final act Vilhelm gallantly renounces Elisa after explaining the situation. This lightweight plot is unnecessarily drawn out by loquacious lyrical passages and secondary figures like Elisa's father and the abbot, who are only referred to but do not appear in the piece; while on the other hand Elisa's confidant, the monk Anton, is a superfluous, perpetually moralizing, deadly tedious character who takes up as much space as the main protagonists. More justified are Albrecht's friend Sir Volf and his men, inasmuch as in the beginning they explain the background of the story, contribute to the happy ending when they defeat the army of the abbot, and give the piece a sorely needed shot of vitality when they sing their spirited battle chorus. "This extremely lean plot", writes Overskou, "was furthermore given an extremely dry treatment; from it developed not a single interesting dramatic, far less musical situation", and he thought that Kuhlau had only set music to "such a completely unmusically treated text", because he was obliged by his terms of employment to do so, and that "in his music there was more vitality and imagination than one could believe such an uninteresting task could have inspired him to".<sup>8</sup> The premiere was on 17th April 1820, and the opera indeed failed after being played a total of four times.

The lyrical sections are scattered without inhibition throughout the opera in the form of arias and duets (six of each in the opera's total of 19 numbers) and the main flaw of the work is that among larger ensembles there is only a trio and a quartet, and there are no extended finales at all. Act One ends with the sad *monologue* (i.e. without music) of the monk Anton, and his subsequent E $\flat$  major aria *En yndig blomst* (A graceful flower) (modelled on Sarastro's *In diesen heil'gen Hallen* from *The Magic Flute*) has as far as one can ascertain only been added by Kuhlau to prevent Act One ending with no music at all, which would indeed have been a rarity in opera literature! Act Two ends *piano* with the slow bridal chorus and Act Three with a brief vaudeville-like finale.

On the other hand the share of the chorus is considerable, and an innovation compared with the first two operas, pointing forward to the last two, since it sings or participates in nine of the 19 numbers; that is, it either performs *independently* as in the framing choruses of Volf's warriors, or even more frequently as a sympathetic *commentator* on the arias and ensembles of the main characters. Both functions are a stylistic feature that became more and more common in the Romantic opera, especially the German "medieval" opera with its crowd scenes (e.g. Weber's *Euryanthe*).

It should also be mentioned that *Elisa* exhibits the first approaches to the Rossini-like features Kuhlau developed in his later operas. In this case it is a quotation from *La gazza ladra* (No. 11, *Aria con coro*) in the choral passage that follows Vilhelm's *Aria e coro* (No. 5) with a score appearance that corresponds very closely to Rossini's: a staccato choral passage accompanied by triplets in the orchestra; and the sequence of keys in Kuhlau's number (Aria, E major; Solo with chorus, C major - E minor - E major) similarly points to Italian operas by Paer and Rossini (for example *Tancredi*).

Kuhlau needed a success after the failures of the last two operas, and he achieved it in full measure with the great magical opera *Lulu*, his dramatic masterpiece, which was premiered on 29th October 1824. The libretto was by C.C.F. Güntelberg, one of the minor poets of the period, and was based on the tale *Lulu oder die Zauberflöte* (Lulu or the Magic Flute) by A.J. Liebeskind in C.M. Wieland's tale collection *Dschinnistan* (volume III, 1789). It was also the model for Mozart's and Schikaneder's *The Magic Flute*. The piece had been submitted to the Theatre as early as August 1822 and was immediately accepted because of its poetic qualities. The libretto was published in January 1823, and the Copenhageners had great expectations of the opera, nor least because since *Elisa* there had not been an original Danish Singspiel.

Kuhlau took the criticism of his two preceding operas to heart and now deter-

mined that *Lulu* had to be a success. A reviewer had for example stated after the premiere of *Elisa* that it was “more contrived than new . . . exhibited more intellect than feeling”, and concluded as follows:

One cannot refrain from apprising the talented composer that his productions would undoubtedly improve if he devoted himself more to the study of the excellent French and Italian composers than exclusively to the German; if he strove to combine Cherubini's profound feeling, Paer's fire, Nicolo's [Isouard's] lightness, Boieldieu's taste and Paisiello's grace with Beethoven's thoroughness, power and boldness.<sup>9</sup>

At the beginning of the new theatre season in September 1823 Kuhlau applied for free tickets to the productions of the theatre “in order, through closer acquaintance with the theatre and the singing abilities of its staff, to consolidate my art as a Danish composer”.<sup>10</sup> His effort to make his opera as scenic and dramatic as possible was particularly evident from his very close collaboration with Guntelberg, which was not without friction and which led to so much reworking of the text that it appeared in a new version shortly before the premiere. We also know that Kuhlau for “more than a year, with an almost unparalleled sacrifice of his time, applied the utmost effort to the opera”,<sup>11</sup> and that he “had gradually, during the work on *Lulu*, entered more and more into the life of the characters. He was particularly interested in Sidi, of whom he said ‘Such a woman I like, such a wife I wish I had’”,<sup>12</sup> alluding to a secret love for Marie E. Thomsen, later Mrs. Zinck, who like most of the artists of the theatre performed both as actress and singer.

The opera takes place in an Oriental fairytale kingdom where Prince Lulu is told that Sidi, the daughter of the fairy Periferihme, has been abducted by the evil sorcerer Dulfeng. Equipped with a magic flute which when played enchants everyone, and a ring that can change him into various forms and when thrown away invokes the aid of the fairy, he sets off to save Sidi. In Dulfeng's underground cave his son, the dwarf Barca, has been left to guard Sidi, and the sorcerer attempts, with declarations of love and gifts, to lure her into marrying him, and finally threatens to call up a crowd of witches who will torture her until she collapses.

In Act Two Lulu, in the form of an old man, is invited into Dulfeng's cave; his playing is supposed to make Sidi amenable. He wins her confidence and, when he assumes his true form, also her love. Barca suspects something, but Dulfeng dismisses his suspicions, until finally, in a rage, he calls up his spirits and orders them to prepare the wedding feast, to which Sidi's friend Vela is also invited. Lulu

tries to slip away from Barca and the mischievous spirits, but only succeeds when he has enchanted them with his flute playing.

In Act Three Lulu urges Sidi to escape, but this is impossible as long as Dulfeng has a magic rosebud of power concealed at his breast. The wedding festivities begin with singing and dancing, but with his playing Lulu lulls everyone except Sidi to sleep and takes the rosebud from Dulfeng. Dulfeng awakes and conjures up a violent storm. Lulu tries to flee with Sidi, Barca intervenes but, struck by lightning, plunges into the abyss. Vela throws the ring, Dulfeng rushes off blinded by the light, and the fairy finally unites the two lovers.

*Lulu* got off to a rather unfortunate start because of poor directing and the instructions for the stage machinery, which because of the inexperience of Gntelberg exceeded what the theatre could manage, and this provoked laughter from the audience. At the second performance it was reported that "shouts of 'Bravo!' alternated with catcalls, and the *gong* had to be brought out".<sup>13</sup> The scandals surrounding *Trylleharpen* had led to the precaution that the audience was allowed to express its opinions for ten minutes - later reduced to five - and then the gong was sounded. But there was no real scandal as at the performances of *Trylleharpen*, and from the third performance a month after the premiere it was reported that *Lulu* was now "playing to a full house".<sup>14</sup> The singers were praised, and Barca in particular aroused hilarity by driving round, well padded, on a trolley of his own construction (see ill., p. 107). But given the Copenhageners' urge to express their opinions in the theatre, it was natural that there were also opponents. The recurring - and justified - complaint from the more expert commentators was that the libretto was far too long-winded, and the grand style of the music only aggravated this. The work was proclaimed a *Rossinade* and the opponents of Rossini and the recent trend in music rallied round the performances of Weyse's new opera *Floribella*, which was premiered shortly afterwards (29th January 1825). This was one of the many attempts to set the two greatest Danish composers of the period against each other, something that went against the grain for both of them. This time it ebbed out when *Floribella*, mostly because of Boye's boring libretto, was taken off the bill after nine performances, while *Lulu* saw 32 and is said only to have been taken out of the repertoire (1838) because the prima donna of the theatre, E. Zrza, gave up on the role of Sidi. Weyse himself wrote:

Kuhlau's opera *Lulu* has caused a sensation although everyone considers the piece tiresome and noisy, which is also my own opinion. There are many fine things in the music, but it would gain greatly by abridgement, to which the composer will not reconcile himself.<sup>15</sup>



Sidi



Barca



Periferimme



Dillfeng



Lulu



where the chorus sings “Rosy the glow deep in the holy bosom of the forest”, which in the reworked text comes *before* “Oh hear the call of the quail”, and then fully harmonized in the “And the murmuring brook” of the chorus, where it is accompanied by “murmuring” semiquavers in the bass - incidentally, and very consistently, a further development of the inverted trill of the preceding bars which followed the quail call motif as a pedal point. After a recitative and choral section where a shepherd rushes in and reports on Lulu’s battle with an attacking tiger - a passage that is unmistakably influenced by the D minor duet (No. 2) of Donna Anna and Don Ottavio from Act One of *Don Giovanni* - the chorus strikes up a song of jubilation where Kuhlau’s model technique takes a new and subtler form. For the theme turns out to be an artful rearrangement of the melody bars from the fast part of Agathe’s well known scene and aria (No. 8) in *Der Freischütz* - the theme that also appears as the second subject in the overture and which would have been familiar to most Copenhageners from the many performances of this opera at the Royal Theatre since the premiere in 1822 (one year after the world premiere in Berlin):

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is labeled 'Weber:' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Kuhlau:'. Both staves are in D minor (one flat) and 4/4 time. The Weber staff has a long melodic line starting with a trill marked 'X' in bar 'a', followed by bars 'b', 'c', and 'd'. The Kuhlau staff has a similar melodic line, but with an inverted trill marked 'X inverted' in bar 'c'. Both staves are marked 'p dolce'.

The influence of Weber is also evident from Vela’s C major cavatina in a polacca rhythm (cf. Ännchen’s arietta, No. 7) and in the middle section of Lulu’s great D major battle aria, which is sung antiphonally by Vela and Lulu with melodic, harmonic and instrumental parallels with Agathe’s cavatina (No. 12) and Ännchen’s G minor romance (No. 13). The duet of Vela and Lulu, on the other hand, has its model in Tamino’s aria *Dies Bildnis* (No. 3) from *The Magic Flute*, and at the end of Lulu’s above-mentioned battle aria, Kuhlau undisguisedly follows the example of Rossini by having a small three-note motif from the finale of Act One of *Otello*, , sung alternately by Lulu and the chorus - this is one of the more modest borrowings, since the two pieces are quite independently formed. The chorus plays a major role in all the numbers in Act One as a joint interpreter of events (apart from Lulu’s lyrical *bel canto* cavatina).

The musical high point of Act One, and perhaps of the whole opera, is the gigantic finale in Dillfeng’s underground grotto. It begins with Barca’s mocking song about matrimony *Naar Møen bliver Kone* (When maiden becomes wife), an original strophic song in which his malicious bursts of laughter are commented on

## Friedrich Kuhlau's Operas

by the orchestra, and which is used later in the opera in a larger dramatic context. Now comes a series of ensembles involving Sidi, Dildeng and Barca: first a duet in D major with the first two, where Dildeng tries to win her with fair words, then a lament from Sidi, which Barca comments on at the end by singing his mocking song - an original juxtaposition of the two melodies which shows us Kuhlau as an able contrapuntist, known in his day for his many complex riddling canons:

Larghetto non troppo

Sidi: tun - ge Pil. Mil - de Soel, hvor er din

Barca: Naar Mø - en bli - ver Ko - ne, ha, ha, ha!

Lu - e, ly - se Dag dit Søl - ver - smil?

ha, ha, ha! hun bær en Ro - sen - kro - ne,

In what follows the rich harmony and chromaticism are intensified - for example with abrupt key changes down a major second, characteristic of this opera compared with the preceding ones and to some extent the later ones. The chromatically moving middle parts in the orchestra symbolize, almost Leitmotif-like, the demonic underworld of the sorcerer. In the end he strikes his magic wand against the rock face - the unison knocking motif on the note F inevitably evokes associations with the knocking of the Stone Guest in the finale of Act Two of *Don Giovanni* - then a band of witches rushes forwards laughing maliciously. Musically, this is richly-faceted writing with chromatic passages which underscore the Gothic imagery of the text, with a pendulum-like motion in the strings describing the spinning-wheel making Sidi's bridal trousseau and then the obsequious Barca's parroting of his father's orders by repeating his melody in the next bar. The whole culminates in a great Rossini-like A minor presto where the hum of the spinning-wheel continues to the chanting warnings of the witches (on the tonic and fifth), and in the concluding stretta, with furious chromatically ascending and descending chord sequences between the a cappella passages of the soloists and chorus, until an emphatic minor plagal cadence rounds off the whole.

Act Two begins with a long instrumental-vocal introduction in B minor whose slow instrumental section depicts "wild fantastic nature" and in some respects, for example in its harmony and the instrumental solos, is a Danish counterpart of the Wolf's Glen scene in *Der Freischütz*, but transformed from German Gothic to a

more fairytale atmosphere. It takes on a quite Mendelssohnesque feel in the following section where elves and pixies sing a ballad-like text to waltz-like 3/8 music and, after Lulu has entered to the notes of a long flute solo (quoting his cavatina in Act One), in the concluding antiphonal singing. This is Kuhlau's most striking anticipation of the Danish National Romanticism that later came to full expression in J.P.E. Hartmann and N.W. Gade. The same fairytale atmosphere pervades the next number, the witches' spinning song *Slunken Ædderkop sidder paa Tue* (Hungry spider on tuffet sits), where the witches, in a romance-like melody in F# minor and 6/8 time, tell Sidi about the spider who gets the fine fly in its web; and Barca, who watches over them whip in hand and makes mocking remarks between the stanzas, joins in with the others in the last refrain with fragments of his mocking song and imitates the buzzing of the fly.

The next two numbers are built up on the grand scale as a composite of many musical elements. First a quartet where Sidi meets Lulu, whose constant flute solos in the lyrical-pastoral vein finally move into a powerful E $\flat$  major Allegro for the four main characters of the opera, Sidi, Lulu, Barca and Dillfeng - the main passage of the quartet, which like so many of the numbers in Kuhlau's operas is in sonata form (here with no development). This also applies to the virtuoso, rather robust final passage of the subsequent C major duet of Sidi and Lulu, in which he appears for her in his true form. Dillfeng conjures up his spirits in an E major Maestoso full of chromaticism, then they pay homage to him in a concluding diatonic allegro section. Sidi and Vela meet again in an A major duet, similarly in two sections: an Andante pastorale in 9/8 with a poetic atmosphere, and a virtuoso, coloratura-filled Allegro alla polacca. In the finale Lulu tries to escape from the spirits in a lively allegro section, and only succeeds after seizing the flute, which has a well-formed solo over the airy "chorus of spirits", the simple staccato motion of which points to the conceptually similar slaves' chorus in *The Magic Flute*.

Act Three begins with no less than two big arias for Sidi, both recycling music from Kuhlau's lyrical-dramatic piece *Eurydice in Tartarus* of 1816. The first is a reworking of a passionate D minor passage, the second is almost identical to the concluding D major bravura aria, truly a *Reitpferd*, as the above-mentioned reviewer called it,<sup>18</sup> and only included, as Kuhlau put it, to give Miss Zrza "was zu gurgeln".<sup>19</sup> On the whole most of the numbers in the last two acts must be described as being of considerable musical substance, but too long and action-inhibiting in what is already a slow plot development (from the middle of Act Two to the end of Act Three practically nothing happens). The subsequent march with a chorus of sylphs (its beginning taken almost unchanged from an aria in Paer's

opera *Griselda*) was described for example by a reviewer as follows: “In the third act the winged spirits come floating in to as massive and military a march as has ever passed through Gothersgade [a main street opposite the Royal Theatre]”.<sup>20</sup> One number, however, brightens up the last act as the really big “hit” of the opera and one of the composer’s most personal compositions - Barca’s drinking song with chorus *Kloden maatte styrte sammen* (Let the Earth collapse around us). The chorus repeats the appealing melody:



The music shifts abruptly to E $\flat$  major when Dillfeng himself sings a strophe, with as overwhelming a tonal effect as when it is again wrenched back to G major and the chorus strikes up the last strophe and continues with a coda which, with its enharmonic spurts and starkly modulating sequences, gives the number great drive. Its popularity is most evident from the fact that it was used later in several of Heiberg’s then so fashionable vaudevilles, small comic situation sketches from the everyday life of Copenhagen.

The long finale begins with Lulu lulling everyone to sleep in a differentiated vocal structure: Sidi and Vela at the top in parallel thirds, Barca below with the above-mentioned commentary *staccato melody* (cf. pp. 104, 111), here imitated in the next bar by the chorus, and finally Dillfeng at the bottom with broad melodic motion. In a *melodrama* Lulu takes the rosebud of power from Dillfeng’s breast, the lovers have an ecstatic, very Rossini-like C major polacca which, when Dillfeng wakes, moves into a starkly modulating recitative-choral ensemble passage with storm music in C minor culminating *forte fortissimo* on a diminished seventh chord. The music changes to E $\flat$  with the change of scene to the grove of Periferihme where the fairy (who only has a speaking role) recites over a long-held E $\flat$  chord in the strings, followed by a final chorus and ballet; all of course inspired by the final scene of *The Magic Flute*, to which Kuhlau’s opera must be called a Danish counterpart.

Kuhlau’s next work for the stage was the music for Boye’s “romantic drama” in four acts, *William Shakespeare* (premiered on 28th March 1826).

Shakespeare’s plays saw a number of premieres in Copenhagen in these years, including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Romeo and Juliet* - the last three translated by Boye, who like other Danish poets of the Golden Age was inspired by Shakespeare in his own plays (e.g. the libretto for Kuhlau’s last opera *Hugo og Adelheid*). *William Shakespeare* is one of

Boye's more acceptable works, based on a legend of Shakespeare's youth about his poaching and rivalry with the local squire. It is scattered with figures and allusions to various Shakespeare plays, among whom Oberon, Titania and the fairies from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* play a central role by acting as his protectors and good genii, and intervene in the action.

Kuhlau's music has joined the large body of - unfortunately often forgotten - theatre music of the age, which was "only" an atmospheric and strictly speaking dispensable element in the theatrical productions, in the form of an overture, strophic songs, choral passages and instrumental numbers including ballet music, but which unlike operas and Singspiele does not include arias, ensembles, introductions or finales. The *William Shakespeare* music consists of six fairy choruses and a song, but is only known today for its grand symphonic C major overture, which is however one of Kuhlau's most frequently played works. It is very much in the Beethoven vein, probably commemorating his visit to the maestro the previous year. A long maestoso introduction opens surprisingly on E major, the dominant of the relative minor, and is followed by solos for cello and flute. There are resemblances to Beethoven's symphonies, then relatively unknown in Copenhagen (see article by N. Krabbe) in the four identical chord beats, inspired by the six in the first movement of the *Eroica* symphony (bb. 128-131, 531-534), and in the staccato scale runs and the parallel sixth chords over a pedal point as in the slow introduction to the Seventh Symphony, while the long horn solos in the middle establish a more lyrical, romantic tone. The fast presto section in 6/8 time begins with a string fugato whose light fairylike mood inevitably recalls Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture, composed at the same time, and one thinks too of Weber (the melodic suspensions of the second subject) and of N.W. Gade (the bridge to the second subject).<sup>21</sup> Yet the whole still has the stamp of Kuhlau's personality, not least in the recurrent  rhythm which culminates in the dramatic development section. The recapitulation begins, as is common in Kuhlau's overtures, with the tutti that followed the first subject in the exposition (i.e. an incomplete recapitulation, here without the introductory fugato).

The vocal music for the play is more subdued, and after the chromaticism of *Lulu* mainly diatonic. The chorus which introduces Act One operates with echo effects, first between the winds and the choir, then between two choirs, when the fairies invoke Oberon and Titania, and the music strongly resembles the introductory chorus to Act One (also in F major) of Weber's *Oberon*, composed in London at the same time! The next chorus, accompanied by the winds alone, on the other hand demonstrates the influence of Mozart (wind serenades) and especially of *The Magic Flute*, which is characteristic of many numbers in *William Shakespeare*.

However, at the same time it is a harbinger of Danish national Romanticism, especially Gade - for example in the third chorus, where the fairies exult over having driven William's rival, the evil squire, to flight - a D major, 6/8 hunting chorus with fanfares and solos for horns and woodwind - and in the ballad-like 6/8 romance *Sankt Hubert*, which stands out with its lightly modal melody and harmony.

Of the last three fairy choruses, the first evokes the three boys of *The Magic Flute* and ends with the same echo music as the first chorus. Particularly beautiful is the chorus *Syng nu, Bæk* (Sing now, brook) with its gliding parallel thirds in the singing parts and clarinets and small sound-paintings (the west wind, the quivering aspen and the song of the nightingale). With this chorus the fairies lull William to sleep and when he awakes perform a mime of the main scenes of *Macbeth*, and then, convinced of his vocation as a poet, he goes off to London with his sweetheart. The fairies sing a fast final chorus whose concluding "Hail, Shakespeare!" was changed to "Hail, King of Denmark" in honour of King Frederik VI, who was present at all premieres in the Theatre. *William Shakespeare* was a great success and was performed a total of 27 times, the last time in 1859.

The last opera Kuhlau wrote, *Hugo og Adelheid*, premiered on 29th September 1827, was again to a libretto by Boye.

The story is set in a Hanseatic city where hostility between the nobility and the burghers has led the latter to decide that no merchant may marry his daughter to a knight; and that if such a liaison is discovered, she will be considered to have been dishonoured; a decision about which the rich merchant Gerhold is particularly adamant, unaware that his daughter Adelheid loves and is loved by the knight Hugo. The lovers arrange a meeting in the garden of her father's house, where two thieves decide to break in, since Gerhold's journeymen will be away at a planned fight with the knights' squires.

In Act Two the two thieves are surprised by the night watch of the city, but escape from them and slip into Gerhold's house. At the same time the lovers and Adelheid's confidante Therese are meeting in the garden. Then the journeymen, returning from the fight, climb over the wall and, with the watch and Gerhold, who has hurried to the spot, seize Hugo, who in order to save Adelheid's honour allows himself to be arrested for the now-discovered theft and taken to prison.

In Act Three Adelheid reveals her relationship with Hugo to her father who, when Hugo is led into the city square, give his consent to the union of the lovers.

The opera is a strange hybrid, something between an idylized Romeo and Juliet love drama and a vaudeville. Or one can see it as a piece which works on two levels: the main plot is a sentimental, long-winded, stereotyped love story typical of Boye; but woven into this are several considerably more interesting, realistic

secondary episodes with a rich gallery of characters: the two thieves, the night watch, the squires and journeymen, the prison guard and the prisoners, whose actions interact with one another's and the main plot, and are all that make the piece tolerable. They certainly inspired Kuhlau to write the best music. The dramatic and musical high point of the opera is therefore Act Two, from the point where the thieves plan the burglary, with the garden scene as the pivot of the plot, and the prison scene (finale of Act Two), where the shouting prisoners stick their heads out through the bars as the emotional climax. Contrary to the intentions of the composer, however, this scene made an offensive impression on the audience, since it showed a scene from everyday life that they did not care to see. One may perhaps wonder why the comic numbers in Act Two could not ensure it a more lasting place in the repertoire: the two duets with chorus between the thieves and the night watch, and the intervening amusing dialogue with its bizarre situation comedy full of Danish humour, and in general the opera's many other musical qualities, which were also appreciated. The explanation is probably a strong reaction from the Court, which disapproved of seeing a knight represented as a thief, and opposed further performances than the five the piece achieved.

One reviewer thought that "this subject is no better than those of most other operas", but after pointing out the inadequacies of the libretto he praised the music in almost exaggeratedly positive tones:

What the poet had only faintly suggested - childlike, naive yet constant love struggling against passionate prejudice - the composer has depicted with impressive truth.

Then he singles out various numbers, and is particularly enthusiastic about the choruses,

on which the composer seems to have expended all his power and in which he has most happily used all the bizarre juxtapositions of the poet for highly interesting situations [probably the above-mentioned numbers in Act Two].<sup>22</sup>

The overture, like almost all Kuhlau's overtures, has passages related in varying degrees to the opera, as well as direct quotations from its music: the tight rhythms in the E major introduction for the squires, the pulsating quavers in the E minor main section (ascending stepwise in sequences from a beginning in C major (!) through a variant of the first subject from Beethoven's *Prometheus* overture), perhaps for the journeymen; emphatically struck chords and a particular turning motif at the end of the development section for the prison scene, and the flute's

subsequent quotation from the slow section of Hugo's aria in Act One for the love of the main characters.

Among the numbers of the opera, many of which have some of Kuhlau's most personal music, the following should be singled out: Adelheid is introduced in an F major romance in 6/8 time which with its coloratura and wide melodic compass has a more operatic effect than the other romances in Kuhlau's dramatic works, and the melody also has a strong, but quite accidental similarity to Norma's famous *Casta diva* cavatina from Bellini's opera (1831)! In the following duet, where Therese brings Hugo a letter from Adelheid, the first allegro section begins in B $\flat$  major like the trio of Pamina, Tamino and Sarastro in Act Two of *The Magic Flute*, and is followed by an F major Andante in which Hugo, to an elaborate melody, reads out Adelheid's letter. Therese adds her comments in a new melody, and then they sing their melodies together (cf. the duet of Sidi and Barca). The allegro is repeated and expanded with a long coda whose exaggerated coloratura seems to be a dramatically unfortunate compensation for the lack of a love duet for Hugo and Adelheid in the opera.

Act Two is the central act of the opera, and decidedly the most interesting one both dramatically and musically. It begins with an E $\flat$  major trio of Adelheid, Therese and Gerhold, formed as a kind of modulating rondo, since Adelheid's theme is taken over by the others and also functions as a orchestral interlude. It is a fine ensemble piece with individual characterization, especially in a grand stretta where the theme is sung closely, as if supplicatingly, by the girls against Gerhold's implacably stamping crotchets in the bass. Later come the above-mentioned two duets with chorus for the thieves and the night watch, showing Kuhlau as a master of a buffo vein with situation description and characterization that is unique in his output and which one would have liked to hear more of in some comic operas - but these were not fashionable in Danish opera at the time. Launched by the horn signals of the watch, the thieves are presented in the first duet with *parlando* melody, and the tired-out night watch with a humorous yawning motif:

Allegro  
Corno I-II

Second Thief:

Seer du, nær-me-re de kom-me, vi i Ti-de bort maae

First Thief:

vi-ge. Rust-ne Spyd og Hier-ner tom-me mig ei brin-ge til at vi-ge, mig ei brin-ge til at vi-ge.

Chorus of the Night Watch:

*f p* Al drig *smorz.* kan man so-ve trygt!

The thieves coax the instruction book from the night watchman, who cannot read himself, and naturally interpret the text to mean that they are allowed to go wherever they want, and the first thief intones the even wittier text of the second duet in a chanting style on one note against several Mozartean melodies from the orchestra.

In the garden, the lovers and Therese have launched into the praise of nature and love in a broad, richly-textured *Allegro* which is repeated after an *allegro* section. They awaken from their ecstasies in a recitative where the shout of the night watch is heard in the distance and repeated in the concluding *Allegro* as the lovers take their leave of each other. In the following duet with chorus, which finishes the scene in the garden, the journeymen and the night watch prowl around one another in the dark, and Kuhlau depicts the tense uncertainty of all with a sure sense of the oddness of the situation, with brief, quiet choral sections separated by long pauses. When Hugo is eventually found and caught, though, the music changes from *pianissimo* to a *fortissimo* chorus where all utter short, agitated phrases to Hugo's long *bel canto* tenor song. There is even more expressive power in the grand finale, in which Hugo is confronted with the prisoners whose mocking shouts in 12/8 time are set against his own 4/4 melody. Several different sections follow, all with the shouts of the chorus in the background, and finally there is a warlike song in which he takes heart, and which ends the act in a mighty Rossini-like *stretta*.

With his music to Johan Ludvig Heiberg's play *Elverhøj* (The Elf Hill), Kuhlau achieved a success which, in the eyes of posterity, far exceeded that of *Røverborgeren* and *Lulu* and ensured him the highest position in the history of Danish music. The *Elverhøj* music was Kuhlau's crowning achievement and remains what is most popularly associated with his name.

The occasion for this gala play was the royal wedding of the youngest daughter of Frederik VI, Vilhelmine, and Prince Frederik (later Frederik VII). In May 1828 the management of the Royal Theatre was urged by the King to think of a piece "of appropriate splendour, but without direct allusion to the ceremony"<sup>23</sup> and asked Oehlenschläger, Heiberg and Boye to send drafts. Heiberg won the day with his *Elverhøj* which, at the urging of the Theatre Director Jonas Collin, was based on old legends and ballads. Heiberg himself wrote that

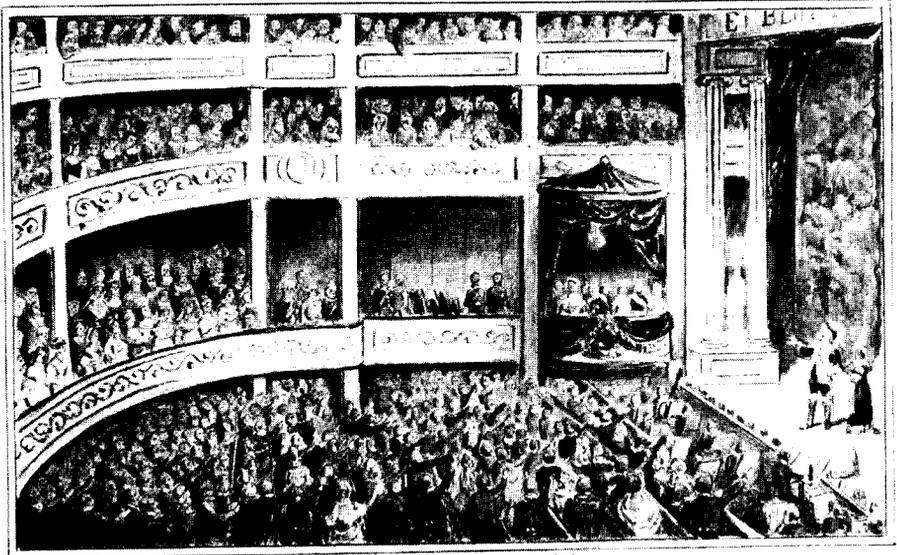
he felt how much it [the national character of the piece] would be enhanced not only by the use of music in general, but especially by a selection of some of the most beautiful old folk tunes from the middle ages. It pleased him to find himself in agreement in this with the

composer of the piece . . . with whom he easily came to an agreement about the selection. Thus the singing numbers in this piece - only excepting the Hunting Chorus and the Final Chorus - are all old melodies, mostly unknown to the present generation - used in some cases unchanged, in others with varying degrees of transformation by the brilliant composer, who has perhaps never proved more inventive than when restrained by these very bonds he imposed upon himself. The melodies composed by himself - in the overture, in the melodrama in Act One, in the dance music (the dance in Act Five also includes a few old themes), and the above-mentioned Hunting Chorus - are so far from clashing with the old melodies that on the contrary they harmonize beautifully with them.<sup>21</sup>

The plot, which is partly based on historical facts and local legends, takes place in the reign of the popular Danish King Christian IV (1588-1648), and the idea of the piece is to contrast the King with the legendary Elf King at Stevns in southern Zealand. The legend says that the King of Denmark does not dare cross the boundary rivulet Tryggevælde Å into the domain of the Elf King. Christian IV visits the area on the day on which there is to be a marriage, appointed by himself, between his goddaughter Elisabeth Munk and his Lord Lieutenant Albert Ebbesen at the manor of Høistrup in Stevns, belonging to the girl's guardian Erik Walkendorff. But Ebbesen loves and is loved by Agnete, who was brought up by the peasant woman Karen; and Elisabeth has the same relationship with Poul Flemming, a courtier in the retinue of the King. In the course of the play it emerges that Agnete is the real Elisabeth Munk, stolen as a child by the elves, and "Elisabeth" is a distant relative of Walkendorff, who he has pretended is his ward. In the central Act Four the King crosses Tryggevælde Å and at the elf hill meets Agnete, who now has an identifying ring that has been buried in the meantime. The King sees that the ring is his christening gift to Elisabeth, and immediately takes Agnete up to the manor. There, in Act Five, the festivities are already under way, and after the confusion has been resolved the two loving couples can be united, quite in accordance with the King's resolution; and all ends in a tribute to the just father of his country: on the stage Christian IV, but in the Theatre - equally importantly - King Frederik VI. This is a brief outline which hardly does justice to the poetry and the atmosphere of romance that pervades this play, so famous in Danish cultural life, and the best literary text Kuhlau composed music for.

As the Royal Wedding approached, the celebratory atmosphere rose in Copenhagen; a huge apparatus was set in motion and there was excitement in the

Hörste Iphorelle af Elverhøj



Hønnen  
 Alts neget Sørg hjuget paa det Kjødet  
 O det neget Gæstebudet i den Døden  
 Som naar sig til den Døden for hvidt Skjort  
 Og her er stødte! Alts den Sørg den bløde  
 Og hvidt Skjort den det Kjødet den Døden  
 Sættelst det det stødte Skjort i Døden  
 Og her er Hønnen: Sørg den det bløde!

L.L. Heiberg

Coloured drawing by Peter Klæstrup of the premiere of *Elverhøj*. The text below is a famous passage addressed by Christian IV to Agnete, alluding to the King's - i.e. Frederik VI's - responsiveness to complaints from the common people, and expresses faith in the continued existence of the monarchy. Absolutism was however abolished in 1849 with the passing of the Constitution and the establishment of the constitutional monarchy.

air. Houses were decorated with evergreen, banners were set up and flags waved from all the ships. The celebrations lasted about ten days, and a newsletter appeared stating the events that would take place day by day. On 17th October *Elverhøj* and its cast were announced. All public buildings bore inscriptions, blessings sounded from the churches, houses were illuminated, there were fireworks and torchlight processions etc. The Royal Wedding took place on 1st November, and at the centre of the festivities was the production at the Royal Theatre, where the impatiently anticipated premiere was finally held on 6th November. The facade of the theatre had been transformed into a temple with inscriptions by Oehlenschläger, a thousand lamps were lit and a band played from the

balustrades; the square Kongens Nytorv was black with people. Inside the Theatre the members of the Orchestra were dressed in fine new uniforms. A prologue by Boye was recited, the overture began and the curtains opened on the piece which, with its more than 1000 performances, was to become the most frequently performed production and the greatest success of the Royal Theatre. In addition there have been innumerable undocumented performances in the regional and amateur theatres etc. of the country, amounting to several thousand, which - particularly during the Occupation of Denmark during World War II - made *Elverhøj* a national rallying-point. At the premiere the roles were filled by the leading actors and actresses of the Theatre - for example Agnete was played by Johanne Luise Pätges, later Heiberg's wife, and the most famous Danish actress of the last century.

The music consists of thirteen numbers besides the overture, most of which are based on folk song material - consisting of eleven melodies (including the present national anthem *Kong Christian*): five solo romances, three choruses, a song with chorus, two melodies in the ballet music of the last act; and many of them appear in the overture. Kuhlau's own melodies, as mentioned by Heiberg, are, besides the overture, most of the ballet music in Acts Four and Five, the introductory melodrama of Act One and (as the only vocal number), the hunting chorus *Herligt, en Sommernat* in Act Three.

The overture, Kuhlau's greatest, and so well known that it became a concept in Danish musical culture, is a decided potpourri overture. The impressive D major maestoso introduction with its tight dotted notes and trumpet fanfares (with inspiration from several Cherubini overtures) refers to Christian IV, but the descending minor melody of the oboe, accompanied by the pizzicato of the bass strings, set him against the other king, the Elf King. The subsequent Andante with its delicate string sounds points to Agnete, the most important figure of the play beside Christian IV, since it is taken directly from the ballet music *Agnetes Drøm* (Agnete's Dream) of Act Four. The fast exposition in D minor begins with a lively triplet motion in the strings, which seems to describe the elf-maidens, and after the first great tutti come some of the many melodies from the play: Elisabeth's romance *Nu Løvsalen skygger* (The leafy hall shading) (second subject), and a variant of *Herligt, en Sommernat* (Glorious summer night) as a bridge to the drinking song *Bægeret blinker* (Sparkling Goblet) (the epilogue theme). The development uses the triplets of the first subject, and the recapitulation begins with the first tutti (cf. p. 113) and repeats the above melodies. Then the most famous piece of the play, *Kong Christian stod ved høien Mast* (King Christian by the high mast stood), concludes the overture.

After the *melodrama* which opens Act One, a pastoral 6/8 Allegretto in G major, we have the series of folk song adaptations where Kuhlau, as was common at the time, has replaced the most conspicuously modal elements with more rounded major/minor cadences, especially at the end of the melody, and for dramatic purposes has often tightened up the melodic curves, expanded phrases, harmonized simply and tastefully and added atmospheric introductions and closes which set the old songs in relief. Six of these are from the then famous collection *Udvalgte danske Viser fra Middelalderen . . .* (Selected Danish Folk Songs from the Middle Ages) published by Abrahamson, Nyerup and Rahbek, I-V, Copenhagen 1812-14 (Vol.V with the melodies); two from *Alle schwedische Volks-Melodien gesammelt von E.G. Geijer und A.A. Afzelius . . . harmonisch bearbeitet von P. Grønland*, Copenhagen 1818; one from the Swedish periodical *Iduna* I, 3, Stockholm 1816; and the remainder from one printed and one unprinted source. The use of Swedish melodies in a Danish national piece is defended by Heiberg in his preface, which cites all the sources of the melodies, by saying that the old melodies were common to the whole of Scandinavia.

To give an impression of these melodies in Kuhlau's adaptation, some of them are reproduced below (the romance No. 5, compared with its model from *Udvalgte danske Viser*):

Romance nr. 2

Andantino

Karen: Jeg gik mig i Lun - den en sil - dig Som - mer - qvel, og tom - te ruig et Bæ - ger af  
sprud - len - de Væld. Men vogt dig, vogt dig, o min Pi - ge, for El - ver - kon - gen seer dig!

Romance nr. 5

Andantino quasi Allegretto

Elisabeth: Nu Lov - sa - len skyg - ger, og Da - gen er lang; hver Smaa - fugl nu byg - ger i  
Folksong (org. A-majør)  
blom - stren - de Vang, hver Smaa - fugl nu byg - ger i blom - stren - de Vang.

## Friedrich Kuhlau's Operas

### Romance med Dands nr. 8

Tempo di Polacca

Karen: Dybt i Ha - vet, som med stør - ke Bøl - ger skum - mer mod Ste -  
 der en Hav - fru sig paa Bun - den dol - ger i det blaa, kjo -

Karen:  
 vens hvi - de Fjeld Mogens:  
 lig fris - ke Væld. Men naar Maa - nen blank paa speil - klar Fla - de staae.

Karen:  
 hæ - ver hun sig op, og sag - te Har - pen slaer. Tys! tys! tys! hvil - ken lif - lig Klang!

Karen, Mogens:  
 Fjernt o - ver Bøl - gen ly - der Hav - fru - sang, fjernt o - ver Bøl - gen ly - der Hav - fru - sang.

### Jæger-Chor nr. 10

Allegro con molto fuoco

T I-II: ten.  
 B I-II: ten.  
 4 corni

Her - ligt, en Som - mer - nat dra - ge til El - ver - krat, hvi - le ved Kil - den den sva - le!

Lu - na sit Sol - ver - baand snoer om En - dy - mi - on, spei - der i Busk og i Dva - le.

### Menuetto nr. 12, Ballet

### Chor nr. 13

Allegro non tanto

Kong Chris - tian stod ved hø - jen Mast i Røg og damp.

The romance *Dybt i Havet* (Deep in ocean) (No. 8), is a majestic polonaise of Swedish origin with a remarkable melodic structure: four thirds piled on top of one another and in bb. 3-4 the tied upbeat motif that is also heard in the first tutti of the overture.

The melody of the hunting chorus *Herligt, en Sommernat* has been included to show how surely Kuhlau's own melody evokes the folk music tone. It seems to have been inspired by the similar hunting choruses (for four-part male choir with

orchestral accompaniment dominated by four horns and a bass trombone) in both Weber's *Der Freischütz* (the parallel chords in bb. 9-10 = Weber bb. 17-18) and his *Euryanthe* (the same key, accompanied only by the above wind instruments).

The famous minuet is the first of a set of dances at the festivities at Høstrup in Act Five, some of which are based on folk songs; but most are by Kuhlau himself and take the form of social dances from his own age such as the *contredanse*, *polonaise* and *écossaise*. The Swedish folk song on which the minuet is based is called *Malcolm Sinclair* and, as can be seen, is a descendant of the old southern European dance *La Folia*.

At least as well known in Danish musical history is the melody of the final chorus (No. 13) *Kong Christian stod ved høien Mast*. It is a "floating melody" from about the middle of the eighteenth century, which had been used for several generations in this country both in and outside the theatre. With *Elverhøj* it became the "Royal anthem" of Denmark, used today alongside the official national anthem *Der er et yndigt Land*. Kuhlau did very little to the *Kong Christian* melody, but did dress it up in a very impressive setting both in the overture and in the final chorus.

After *Elverhøj*, as a professor, Kuhlau felt that he could refuse several new pieces for which the Theatre management asked him to compose music, including Hans Christian Andersen's *Ravnen* (The Raven) (after a tale by Gozzi). He thought the subject had already been used much, and that the opera *Der Rabe* (Hamburg 1794) by the then well known North German composer Andreas Romberg, whom he admired greatly and knew personally, had proved unfortunate. This gave him a rather tense relationship with the Theatre management, but Kuhlau did later agree to write music for Oehlenschläger's comedy *Trillingbrødrene fra Damask* (The Triplets of Damascus), which was chosen to start off the new season and was premiered on 1st September 1830.

We get a glimpse of Kuhlau's not very favourable working conditions and his own very reasonable requirements in the following letter to the Theatre from April 1830, where he says:

. . . daß es mir ganz unmöglich ist in so sehr kurzer Zeit dieses Stück in Musik zu setzen, und glaube auch nicht daß irgend ein anderer, noch so geübter Componist es im Stande wäre. Mit Vergnügen würde ich übrigens diese Arbeit unternehmen, müsste mir aber wenigstens 3 bis 4 Monathe Zeit dazu erbitten [which he was in fact given], denn eine Ouverture müsste ja auch dazu componirt werden; auch müsste ich dann nothwendig das ganze Stück haben, denn blos aus dem Musiktext kann der Componist unmöglich auf den Charakter der singenden

Personen und auf das was auf den Theatereffect etc. anbetrifft, schliessen.<sup>25</sup>

The piece was a fiasco and only played three times. It is however a quite amusing comedy about the complications arising from the complete resemblance of the three brothers. The music, which consists of an overture, three songs, music for harmony orchestra and three choruses (with dancing), could however only seem rather pale by comparison with *Elverhøj*, and its major interest today is that it is the composer's contribution to the then popular "Turkish plays", fairytale operas in an Oriental setting with their roots in the French *opéra comique*, like Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail*, Boieldieu's *Le calife de Bagdad*, Weber's *Abu Hassan* and Beethoven's theatre music for *Die Ruinen von Athen*. Pieces like this included music with varying elements - in Kuhlau very restrained - of Orientalism in the melody and instrumentation, less in the rhythm and harmony, but especially the "Janissary" effects with the bass drum, cymbals and triangle as accompaniment to the choruses.

The overture, probably the best of the music, is based even more than the *Elverhøj* overture on the music from the play (probably because of the shortage of time - cf. the letter) - for example almost all the music before the second subject of the fast section. The slow major-key introduction (which is of the same character as the corresponding one in the overture to *Le calife de Bagdad*) is from a duet interpolation for two sopranos in the first chorus, while the fast section (in the parallel D minor), apart from the two-part string introduction, is from the 6/8 conclusion of the second chorus. In the vocal music a quite remarkable song for all three brothers (No. 3) is worth singling out. It is a kind of conjuration song with several Orientalisms: the melody, which is presented at various pitches by the brothers in turn, moves in a monotone chant over very few notes and is accompanied by an ostinato drumming rhythm  played pianissimo, but by the *full* orchestra including the percussion. In the final chorus Kuhlau shows that he is the modern composer right to the end, since the middle section with its dancing, supply rhythmic theme, is modelled on the recent French *opéra comique* as he knew it from the work of the new rising star D.F.E. Auber, whose music he is said to have appreciated.

If we are to place Kuhlau's dramatic works in the perspective of music history, and point out certain overall tendencies, one approach could be to try to define them in terms of style-historical, national and generic characteristics and affinities. Before doing so we must keep two things in mind: Kuhlau's own view of art and the cultural climate of the Copenhagen of the day. Despite his great responsive-

ness to the currents from abroad, and recent trends in music, Kuhlau's music was firmly rooted stylistically and ideologically in Vienna Classicism and its view of the role of the artist in society. His first two operas, *Røverborgen* and *Trylleharpen*, are clearly written in the classical Vienna style, the most important preconditions of which were Italian and French opera, and especially Mozart's - both his Italian operas and the German Singspiele. *Røverborgen* and *Trylleharpen* are generically both descended from the rescue opera - the first from the original type described above, where the struggle against the tyrant (here the robber chieftain) is as good as eliminated from Oehlenschläger's multi-layered text with its mixture of love story, capture and escape attempt. But with the stranding of the characters on the desert island, *Trylleharpen* comes closer to the later type of rescue opera that flourished in France at the end of the eighteenth century, in which natural disasters played the major role. For these reasons *Røverborgen* appears to be an Italian-French-German opera, while *Trylleharpen* is more purely French, an impression strengthened by the often through-composed music to a clear, well constructed libretto, as well as the instrumental music and ballet numbers.

*Elisa* is decidedly a transitional, hybrid work. In musical style it moves between Classical and Romantic - the latter because of broader melody lines, extended harmony, incipient Rossini-like features and above all the dominant role of the chorus. Nationally and generically it almost belongs with the German *Ritteroper*.

After this categorization it seems natural to call Kuhlau's last two operas, *Lulu* and *Hugo og Adelheid*, his Romantic works, understood within the framework of the *jungromantisch* style of the 1820s. This is particularly true of *Lulu* with its advanced harmony, the broad lines of its melodies and its overall disposition. Its status as a fairytale opera does not itself make it Romantic, as such operas were far more common in an earlier period; but on the other hand the music at the Weber-inspired points has a certain fantastic feel which, combined with the major role of the choruses, brings it much closer to the German "medieval" opera. To this type, too, if only for its plot and - again - the major role of the chorus, we must ascribe *Hugo og Adelheid*, although its secondary episodes have strong elements of Italian, French and Mozartean opera style. On the whole, the mixture of stylistic features we find in Kuhlau's operas is very much due to the librettos, where the authors in a small country like Denmark often imitated various national forms and genres.

We find a clearer picture of National-Romantic stylistic features, pointing forward to Danish High Romanticism (which it also influenced) in the theatre music Kuhlau wrote in the 1820s. *William Shakespeare* was popular in its day, but today stands - rather unfairly - in the shadow of *Elverhøj*, the first true Romantic dramatic work in Danish music. An atypical work is *Trillingbrødrene fra Damask*,

where the subject and the setting generated music more in the tradition of Vienna Classicism.

All in all, Kuhlau's operas must be described stylistically and generically as Vienna-Classical, Pre-Romantic works, most closely related to the German-Austrian operatic tradition, which in this very period was typified by a mixture of the national features and genres of other countries. One should also view his "model technique" in this light. This can be summed up and clarified here by asking three questions: *from where* did Kuhlau take his models; *how* did he treat them; and *why* did he use this technique more than others?

The first question has already been answered in the review of his works: Mozart was the composer who furnished him with the great majority of his models; but otherwise he mainly drew on Cherubini, Paer, Beethoven, Weber and Rossini as sources and on Danish composers like Kunzen and Weyse, and a few Frenchmen - in other words, a broad range of contemporary opera music.

As for how he handled this technique, certain more detailed examples have been given in those cases where he followed someone else's composition from start to finish; but as mentioned there, in most cases he simply imitates particular themes, chord sequences etc. from the work of others, but otherwise forms his own quite independent compositions.

This brings us to the last question: why did Kuhlau do this? I have no deeper understanding or explanation of this, but can only think that it is not a matter of musical theft by copying down someone else's work to repeat its success; rather an indirect tribute to a composer he admires. One can also take the point of view that his nature was simply such that he often actually needed other music or parts of it as a kind of starter motor to launch his own. He may have done it more or less consciously, well informed as he was about the music of the age, and is unlikely to have felt it to be anything unnatural or suspect; it was not uncommon in his time, and had never been so. In a few cases the explanation may have been a shortage of time (e.g. in Act Three of *Lulu*), but then he also drew on his own earlier works.

When Kuhlau is inspired by other people's works it is sometimes a pale imitation, but more usually he allows someone else's idea to appear in a new light where it is a match for its model. *Inventiveness in dependence* is a phrase that has been applied to this side of his creative process, and it can be studied in all the categories of his works, but perhaps particularly clearly in his operas and theatre music. Of these, *Lulu* and *Elverhøj* have been recorded as lasting testimony to the Danish - and with some reservations one could also say to the foreign - music of his age, and to the greatest dramatic talent of the first half of the nineteenth century - indeed probably of the whole century - in Danish music.

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**NOTES**

1. Carl Thrane: J.C. Gebauers Meddelelser, Materiale og Breve vedr. Fr. Kuhlau. Royal Library, NKS 1789, 4°.
2. Comödienzettel 1/4/1803 - 31/3/1804 in Graupner 1930, 60.
3. Oehlenschläger, 1850, III, 44. The year given, 1814, is a slip of the memory for 1813.
4. Robert Neijendam: Skuespiller og Patriot (extracts from H.C. Knudsen's diaries), 1925, 71.
5. Dannora 30/9, 7/10, 14/10/1814 and Jens Baggesens danske Værker, XII, 1847, 1-41.
6. Røverborgen was performed in Hamburg on 22/3/1816 (a total of ten times until 1817); in Rostock in 1819; in Kassel on 28/7/1819 and in August 1820; in Leipzig on 4/9 and 11/9/1822; in St. Petersburg in 1822; in Riga in September 1822; and in Breslau on 26/2/1823.
7. Overskou 1854/64, IV, 461.
8. *Ibid.*, 613 f.
9. Dagen, 25/4 1820.
10. Letter to the theatre management of 9/9 1823 in Busk 1990, 98.
11. Letter from Güntelberg to the theatre management of 11/2 1824. Teatrets indkomne breve 1822-23. Rigsarkivet.
12. Reports from Ludvig Bødtcher, Thrane's material, Royal Library.
13. Nyeste Skilderie af Kjøbenhavn, 9/11 1824.
14. *Ibid.*, 14/12 1824.
15. Letter to M.F. v. Irgens-Berg of 22/12 1824, Lunn - Reitzel-Nielsen 1964, I, 75.
16. Conversationsblad, 11/11 1824.
17. Kuhlau later wrote variations for piano duo (op. 75, 1826) on Beethoven's song. The motif also begins Schubert's song to the same text (op. 68, D.742, 1822).
18. Conversationsblad, 11/11 1824.
19. Notitser om Fr. D. R. Kuhlau samlede. . . af G.S. Bricka, 1873. Royal Library, NKS 2464, 2°.
20. Kjøbenhavns Morgenblad, 28/1 1826.
21. Gade's copy of the overture is dated 19/8 1837. Royal Library.
22. Theaterblad, 9/11 1827.
23. Royal ordinance to theatre management of 31/5 1828. Rigsarkivet.
24. Preface to Elverhøi. Skucspil i fem Acter af Johan Ludvig Heiberg, 1828, IX-X
25. Letter to C.F. v. Holstein of 3/4 1830 in Busk 1990, 158. In a letter to Oehlenschläger of 23/4 Kuhlau asks him to send him the whole text as quickly as possible (*ibid.*, 160).