

# The Mærsk Opera

Side A

**Prologue – at a Stonemason's workshop**

Side B

**Act One – where the Architect loses his voice**

## The Mærsk Opera

*By Adrian Hughes, tv and radio presenter, DR (Danish Broadcasting Corporation)*

When completed in October 2004, the drama behind the building of the Copenhagen Opera House was enthusiastically included amongst the fascinating tales of the landmarks of the Danish Capital. Right across the harbour from the Opera you find Saly's equestrian statue, which took 19 years to erect and costed more than all of Amalienborg's four palaces. Further down the same axis thrives the Marble Church, which rested as a grass tufted romantic ruin for 130 years, until a finance tycoon bought the plot for one Danish crown and completed it.

The Opera was the octogenarian shipping magnate Mærsk McKinney-Møller's last and most spectacular bid at creating an awe-inspiring monument over his and his father's entrepreneurial legacy. He was accustomed to unhindered access to the varying Danish prime ministers, and having secured the government's acceptance of his donation he expected the people's representatives to stand back and let him get on with the job. After 35 years as the CEO of what under his guidance had become the world's largest shipping company Mr. Møller found it appropriate to display this might by presenting a gift to the people of Denmark in materials that would last for centuries. Glass was not included in such materials.

Likewise, the edifice was the septuagenarian architect Henning Larsen's final opportunity for erecting a convincing example of his ephemeral vision of humanistic, translucent and all-inviting architecture in the Danish capital. Mr. Larsen's first sketch for the opera was a glass house encapsulating a glowing warm nucleus of acorn wood symbolising the music box inside it.

The public only had vague inklings of the tremendous clash between Mr. Møller's penchant for marble and bricks and Mr. Larsen's transparent vision of glass. The conflict became obvious when

Side C

**Act Two – where the Minister takes the stairs**

Side D

**Act Three – where the People say thank you**

**Epilogue – at a Stonemason's workshop**

Mr. Møller called a press conference presenting the compromise facade of steel ribbons without the presence of Mr. Larsen.

Mr. Larsen had teetered on the edge of leaving the project entirely, only staying on facing a devastating law suit otherwise. Mr. Larsen later told his story including many unimaginable historicisms, which has so far prompted a book, a stage play and now an opera.

The relations between the two shockingly steadfast geriatrics deteriorated beyond belief. At the final meeting Mr. Larsen read out a letter from himself to Mr. Møller to have it included in the minutes. This letter was evidently more a message in a bottle to eternity than an exchange between a builder and his architect. The shipping magnate's knuckles were white with rage, and Mr. Larsen quotes him for the rant: "I gave you everything! I gave you an unnecessary roof, I gave you extravagant canals, I gave you costly bridges! You should say 'Thank You!'"

Mr. Møller was born in 1913, and architectural inclinations have since developed considerably. Unfortunately, Mr. Møller's contributions to the design of the Opera has made his gift to the Danish people more an example of the might of money than proof of the aesthetics of art. Which is sad, as it still represents one of the most vastly generous donations to Danish society ... since Saly's equestrian statue and the Marble Church.

Mr. Larsen denounced his own architectural achievement with a brief summary of the process: "All in all I'm very satisfied with the result, if you disregard the façade."

An opera in three acts by SUPERFLEX  
in collaboration with

Anders Monrad and Nikolaj Heltoft

Composer: Anders Monrad  
Librettists: Nikolaj Heltoft & SUPERFLEX  
Producer: Jesper Lützholt  
Conductor: Jesper Nordin  
Sound technician: Måkel Winmand  
Sound mix: Rasmus Wythor & Anders Monrad  
Vinyl mastering: Flemming Hansson

## SINGERS

Nina Bojs Lundgren  
Sophie Thing Simonsen  
Rebecca Forsberg  
Emil Lykke  
Adam Riss  
Simon Duus  
Morten Staugaard  
Bo Nandfred  
Morten Lassenius Kramp

## MUSICIANS

Christian Westergaard, piano  
Rikke Sandberg, piano  
Tanja Zapotnik, piano & Hammond  
Manuel Esperilla, synth  
Anders Monrad, synth overdubbing  
Rune Hojmark, pedal steel guitar

## EKKOZONE

Mathias Roumer, percussion  
David Hildebrandt, percussion  
Mathias Seibæk, percussion  
Mads Hebsgaard Andersen, percussion  
Alexander Skjold, percussion

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**DANISH ARTS FOUNDATION**



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