020310 A hall full of raw fish

Pickled Fish

Last weekend, Micah and I discovered a restaurant in Copenhagen that offers an all-you-can-eat pickled herring buffet. We have both become big fans of pickled herring and so we could not resist the idea of a buffet with dozen different kinds awaiting us. Now if someone had explained to me at the start of my stay in Scandinavia that pickled herring was raw, picked fish, I may not have been as eager to try it. But, now that I know that I enjoy eating it, I was definitely going up for seconds. The variety included herring in curry, dill, tomato and lots of other variations. The fish is eaten by piling it onto a piece of Danish rye bread along with capers and onions and the whole mess is picked up with a fork.

Mørdrup Kirke

For the past weeks, the professors for my Architectural Acoustics class have been reviewing concert halls dating from Roman times to the present. Concert halls are an area of great interest to me, so I have been reading through a lot of design literature as well. One question that people tend to ask is which halls are the best for listening to music. What we are learning in class is that what makes a hall acoustically "good" is so subjective, that it is difficult to quantify the reason. Some people listen for the clarity of the instruments, others want the music to be blended together and others listen for spaciousness in the hall. Furthermore, as the conductor Wilhelm Furtwangler once said, "The hall with the best acoustics is the hall with the best performance." That is, most any concert hall will sound good acoustically if the orchestra itself is outstanding. That being said, there are three halls that most everyone agrees are the best in the world. They are the Vienna Musikvereinssaal, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and Boston Symphony Hall.

Boston was built in 1900, just as people were beginning to understand some of the modern principals of acoustics. Thanks to Wallace Sabine who was a graduate student at Harvard when he became one of the pioneers in acoustics, Boston was the first hall to be designed based on acoustic principals. The hall has a rectangular shape which is traditionally a good shape for a hall. Amongst Sabine's suggestions were the height of the ceiling and the addition of the statues along the walls to scatter the reflections to help with the acoustics.

I am absolutely enjoying the class and learning a lot. Soon we will begin to work on projects where we will use the information that we have learned to improve the acoustics of proposed or existing structures. The original idea was that we would work with teams of architecture students from Copenhagen University as they finished their final projects. But then it was discovered that the architecture students are on a different school schedule than we are. We would not be able to get involved with their projects until the end of our semester which would mean a big push to complete all of the work before finals. The professor was trying to sell the idea to the class by explaining how beneficial

the projects would be to give us the experience of working with others who look at the buildings differently that an acoustician would. "And did I mention," the professor said coyly, "that these are female architecture students." After that he had no shortage of groups wanting to work with the architects. Male dominated engineering classes are the same the world over.

My group decided to work on an existing structure to give us more time to finish the project before the crunch of finals. We opted to work on a church called, Mørdrup Kirke which is near DTU. The project is one that they approached our professor with a few years ago and his consulting company made some recommendations which were implemented. We are to look at the church before the changes and to make our own recommendations based on the drawings. The project was alluring because we probably will not have the opportunity to work on churches very often in our careers, so this is a unique opportunity.

Something ominous in the wind

I am sure that you are probably not aware that Denmark had an election last fall for a new prime minister. The party that won ran on a platform of immigration reforms, riding on the growing fear in Denmark that foreigners, specifically foreigners from the middle east will soon outnumber Danes. The former ruling party refused to even address the issue of xenophobia and instead concentrated on other issues and lost. As if that were not ominous enough, the new government has now done something almost as depressing as placing tariffs on steel imports. They have cut all funding for wind turbines. All of the offshore wind farms that I wrote about last semester have been canceled. There is even talk of nuclear plants. What does in mean if the number one exporter of wind technology in the world suddenly abandons the technology? What makes it worse is that Denmark is chairing the EU in the 2nd half of 2002. Several renewable energy politicians and experts have expressed concern about the role of the new Danish government. It will be difficult for Europe to deliver arguments for a strong and credible action for sustainable solutions with a chairmanship that has just closed down its national programs.

On the other subject, commentators in the news here are amazed that the new tariffs that Bush has imposed on steel imports have not led to protests in the US. The tariffs will mean higher steel costs which will drive up the cost of consumer goods from motors to cars. What will this do to the economy which is only starting to show signs of recovery? It doesn't take a great leap to see that the tariffs are not as much about steel as they are about votes. Otherwise, why were the remains of the World Trade Center sold to an Asian steel company for scrap? But, the commentators have also conceded that most other world leaders would probably have initiated the same tariffs if presented with the same situation.

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