

Where highbrow taste met itinerant dance in eighteenth-century Scandinavia: The dance entrepreneur Martin Nürenbach

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Our spectacles smack of the most ugly barbarism that can be imagined for human beings by a human being. A boy from the western lands performs Holberg's *The Invisible*. A whore from Drammen acts as Prima Donna. A Swede and German, who neither speak Danish, German, nor Swedish, but a *lingua franca* that contaminates all the actors, perform *Harlequin*, and a wigmaker-boy acts as Leander. O! Imagine before Your eyes these scenes performed at the city council salon for people of *bon Sens*, who know the Dramatics. (Anonymous memorandum of October 1771)¹

In the summer of 1770, the German-Swedish dancer and acrobat, Martin Nürenbach arrived in Christiania, Norway (now Oslo).² Nürenbach, whose date of birth is unknown, worked in Norway for a while, before moving on to perform in Sweden and Finland. He died in Finnish Tavastland (Tavastia) in 1780. During his time in Norway, Nürenbach became the first artist to successfully obtain a royal privilege to stage 'comedies' (plays) in the Danish language. For reasons unknown, however, this enterprise did not keep him in Norway. After only a few performances, he left at some point in the early spring of 1772, to resume his itinerant performance career in the Swedish kingdom.

The epigraph at the start of this article is a translated version of a memorandum that accompanied Nürenbach's application for the royal privilege to perform Danish comedies in Christiania in 1771. A little more than a hundred years later, part of the memo was published by the theatre historian Henrik Jørgen Huitfeldt-Kaas in his *Christiania Theaterhistorie* (1876). Huitfeldt-Kaas took the wording at face value, citing it as proof of the artist's mediocrity.³ The same source has been quoted ever since as an authoritative evaluation of the performances of Nürenbach and his newly formed theatre ensemble. In fact, the quote is probably one of the most cited statements about early Norwegian professional theatre.

In this article, I want to challenge this harsh judgement. While he perhaps lacked the skills of a traditional actor, Nürenbach's career should be understood

in the light of the dancing practices of his day. He belonged to a group of artists we might label 'itinerant' today—that is, those who travelled extensively to perform.⁴ An experienced dancer, acrobat, and pantomime artist, he mastered the physical language of the comic and grotesque dancing styles. His performing skills were closely tied to the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, where pantomimes and acrobatics were much used.

Rope dancing, acrobatics, and pantomimes were highly popular with audiences of that time. These types of performance typically belonged to the repertoire of itinerant artists and can be labelled popular entertainment. The division between high and low culture, between art and entertainment, is one that was present 250 years ago and continues to be an issue even today. According to the dance scholar Sherill Dodds, popular forms of entertainment operate with different mechanisms in terms of what attracts audiences.⁵ Itinerant performances were popular with audiences all over eighteenth-century Europe, yet the artists themselves were not necessarily well respected, especially not among the upper classes. Similarly, in modern theatre and dance scholarship such forms of entertainment have often been belittled, and have thus received far less attention than the more highbrow dance forms such as classical ballet. Several of the travelling performers were nevertheless highly skilled in a variety of styles. They danced, acted, and did acrobatics. By investigating these practices, new light can be shed on historical repertoires and performance techniques.

Nürenbach is one such artist who had an impact on Nordic dance and theatre history. By examining Nürenbach's work and travels, we can obtain an insight into the type of repertoire that was typical of an itinerant dancer, acrobat, and equilibrist. Nürenbach stands out because he had higher aspirations than performing the popular forms of rope-dancing and acrobatics. He decided to create a theatre ensemble in Christiania, thus adding the spoken word and the staging of plays by, for example, Ludvig Holberg to his repertoire. Thanks to the documents preserved at the National Library of Norway in relation to his application, we can also learn something about attitudes towards itinerant artists among audiences as well as the authorities.

As far as I know, this is the first article to present Nürenbach's work to an international audience. I will begin with an account of the source material and the literature, followed by a short overview of the first part of Nürenbach's life, training and travels up to and including his stay in Christiania. Lastly, I will examine his application for a royal privilege and its contribution to our understanding of itinerant artistic practices, then and now.

Sources and previous research

My interest in eighteenth-century dance practice stems from my part in the Norwegian research project pArts ('Performing arts between dilettantism and professionalism, 1750–1820').⁶ One of the aims of the pArts project has been to research some of the travelling dancers who were active in the Nordic region, because this is a relatively underexplored topic, both nationally and internationally.⁷ My particular goal has been to patch over and then analyse some of the gaps that exist in Norwegian dance history.⁸ In order to assess Nürenbach's achievements, as well those of his contemporaries, I had to seek out Nordic archival material. Among my sources were printed and handwritten materials from the latter part of the eighteenth century, including posters, copies of applications and theatre records, and entries in church record books. My search for material on Nürenbach has been greatly aided by archivist and dance researcher Torkel Bråthen at the National Archives of Norway (Norges Riksarkiv). I am grateful to Bråthen for his aid in tracing and interpreting source material pertaining to Nürenbach. Bråthen has done extensive research on the various prohibitions and theatre laws in Denmark-Norway, as well as Sweden-Norway.

Much can be inferred about Nordic itinerant artists from notices and advertisements in Danish, Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian newspapers. During the time in question, around 1770, Norwegian papers included advertisements for travelling artists such as the above-mentioned artists. Regarding Nürenbach, however, the material is confined to the Christiania newspaper *Nordiske Intelligenz-Seddel* and minor Swedish newspapers such as *Göteborgska Nyheter* and *Hwad Nytt, Hwad Nytt*.⁹

Huitfeldt-Kaas's work has been central to the present article because of his documentation of Norwegian culture. His *Christiania Theaterhistorie* (1876) was the first historical overview of theatre and dance activity in Christiania.¹⁰ The Finnish theatre historian and librarian Sven Hirn is one of the few scholars who has examined Nürenbach's Nordic achievements; his 1967 article 'Martin Nürenbach—teaterpionjär?' includes a general outline of Nürenbach's activities and travels.¹¹ Hirn was a sound researcher who examined much original source material on Finnish dance performances in particular. Similarly, the theatre researcher Johan Flodmark's work *Stenborgska Skådebanorna* is compulsory reading on Nürenbach's work in Sweden, along with Birger Schöldström's *Hög och konstnärlig anda: Svenske Teaterbilder*.¹² However, some of the 'highbrow' views that are reflected in Huitfeldt-Kaas's work on itinerant artists also inform Hirn's writings, and (to a lesser degree) the works of Flodmark and Schöldström as well.

Research on itinerant dance and theatre activity

Nürenbach's travels and overall career were actually far from unique. During the eighteenth century, several dance artists even arrived from beyond the Nordic countries to try their luck. They belonged to a well-established tradition of travelling artists, whether in smaller or larger groups; a tradition that has been common since the birth of theatre itself. Throughout the early modern period, musicians, singers, acrobats, actors, and dancers travelled across Europe, often seeking employment at princely courts or asking for permission to perform publicly in market squares or other rented locations.¹³

Itinerant performance, however, has not been a major theme in the work of Nordic scholars, who have been generally more interested in theatre as an institution. Among the exceptions is the Swedish theatre researcher Gunilla Dahlberg, who has done extensive research on travelling artists in seventeenth-century Stockholm, as well as in later periods. She has written about various theatre and dance activities that were connected to the Swedish court.¹⁴ Of special interest to this article is the link to German travellers she has identified, and the way in which they influenced the Swedish itinerant tradition—Nürenbach being, to the best of my knowledge, of German origin.¹⁵ Hirn also offers insight into some of the types of performance offered by itinerant artists. He was an avid collector of theatre posters. In his *Den Gastronomiska Hesten* he published some of the many posters he collected on travelling artists. Through comments on performers and types of practices he has created a picture of the sheer variety of itinerant activity seen the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He was fascinated by itinerant circus artists, as well as dancers and acrobats, but also pointed out what he thought were their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, Hirn laid bare many of the gaps in our knowledge of the numerous travelling artists who toured the Nordic countries.¹⁶ Many sources testify to the activity of itinerant artists outside of larger cities. Claes Rosenqvist and Dag Nordmark's *At resa var nödvändig*, for example, examines Swedish rural theatre. Among other things, they discuss the itinerant artist's social and artistic place in society.¹⁷ Their research offers a more balanced perspective on high versus low theatre culture, emphasising the range of itinerant practices and the ways in which they met the social and cultural needs of spectators from a variety of social classes. Their more inclusive views on theatre and dance have influenced my own research here.

Privileges, permissions and prohibitions

Travelling performers were common not only in Europe but also in the Nordic countries. Itinerant activity in Sweden during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was dominated by German theatre troupes. Several such troupes stayed and made Sweden their base of operations, including one of Nürenbach's predecessors, the tightrope dancer Karl Friedrich von Eggenberg, as well as the theatre director Carl Gottfried Seuerling (1727–1795).¹⁸ According to Norwegian historian and conservator Vidar Parmer, source material from around 1600 onwards gives evidence of various itinerant troupes visiting Bergen, Christiania, Fredrikshald (Halden), Christiansand (Kristiansand), Stavanger, and Tronhiem (Trondheim). These ensembles, many of which were German, generally travelled inland via Sweden or came by boat from Denmark.¹⁹ Many artists travelled because of the difficulty of obtaining performance privileges in other European countries. The British dance historian Marian Hanna Winter, describing the period between 1700 and 1830 in particular, notes that those official theatres that had obtained privileges from the king and/or state were few and highly competitive:

Out on the continent, the theatre companies that enjoyed 'official patronage' jealously watched their smaller rivals, even down to the eeriest company of marionettes. The patented or government-sponsored theatres might also be called the 'over-privileged', and all others the 'under-privileged'. The former were allocated complete rights for exploitation of certain types of entertainment and prosecuted infringements mercilessly.²⁰

Travelling artists such as Nürenbach, according to Winter, would be categorised as underprivileged, because it was difficult, if not impossible, for them to be accepted into the privileged theatres. Established European theatres would seldom hire artists who were not within their closed circuit, and consequently, many ensembles had to move regularly in order to find work. Some probably preferred this, but others likely went in search of some safer or more stable work environment, and this may be what motivated Nürenbach's Christiania venture.

If we look at the Nordic situation in the second half of the eighteenth century, the privileged theatres in Copenhagen and Stockholm were almost exclusively connected to, or part of, the royal courts. For instance, the Stenborg and Seuerling theatre companies, as Dahlberg notes, had obtained privileges from the Swedish king to perform in Swedish (including Finnish) towns at various times between 1760 and 1780.²¹ Itinerant artists who wanted to perform in the Nordic

countries had to observe the laws of each country, as well as any applicable local rules. At this time, Norway was under Danish rule, and shared a king and central administration in Copenhagen. Privileges allowing performances were granted by the king, who enforced various prohibitions as well—a variety of laws that prohibited practices such as the staging of plays, wire-dancing, and acrobatics were passed in Denmark-Norway from 1738 onwards.²² Local issues were dealt with by Norwegian authorities in each town, rather than by the Danish king. Nürenbach, like his itinerant peers, should be viewed in the light of these conditions, which imposed a variety of restrictions on the artists, even in terms of their choice of repertoire. For example, in 1772, a newer and stricter version of the existing 1738 Theatre Act was introduced in Denmark-Norway.²³ This may be one of the reasons why Nürenbach left Norway that same year, only few months after obtaining royal permission to perform theatre in Christiania.

Legislation on theatre performances was variously applied and enforced during the eighteenth century in all of the Nordic counties, including Denmark and Norway. Laws restricting theatre activity were introduced in the Swedish realm as well, which at this time included Finland.²⁴ The extent of the local restrictions on travelling artists varied, but they all made life more difficult for the itinerant performers. The local authorities did have a little bit of power, and it was up to them whether one would be allowed to perform or not. A major argument underpinning these restrictions was that money should not be paid to foreigners and taken out of the country. Of course, most of the time these artists were barely getting by, and the little income they had would be spent on food and housing in the country in which they were performing. Still, the perception that money was leaving with these performers remained strong and informed the decisions of local authorities.²⁵

Nürenbach as an itinerant artist

While Nürenbach's life and career remain elusive, some facts are known. Before he went to Norway in 1770, he worked in Sweden. Most likely, it was Swedish-German theatre director Carl Gottfried Seuerling who had brought him there. According to the Swedish theatre researchers Birger Schöldström and Dag Nordmark, Seuerling was born in 1727 in the German town of Oederan, close to Dresden. He came to Sweden in around 1759, and Nürenbach was at that time part of Seuerling's ensemble.²⁶ Nürenbach also identified himself as the stepson of Seuerling in the newspaper *Göteborgska Nyheter* in 1769.²⁷ The *Seuerlingske Co-*

moedie-trupp, directed by Seuerling, travelled extensively and performed in towns in present-day Sweden and Finland between 1760 and 1795.²⁸

Very little is known of Nürenbach's early family background apart from the link to Seuerling. His place and date of birth remain unknown. Presumably, he was relatively young when he arrived in Sweden, possibly a teenager or even a child. It is not known what happened to Nürenbach's mother and biological father, or any siblings.²⁹ Nürenbach did rope- and wire-dancing and acrobatics for Seuerling. Little is known about *where* he learned those skills, though it was quite common for children to be trained as acrobats, tumblers, and rope- or wire-dancers at an early age in the eighteenth century, particularly when brought up in itinerant families.³⁰ Interestingly, Nürenbach stated in an advertisement offering dance instruction in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddeler* (18 July 1770) that he had proven himself as a skilled dancer in Denmark and elsewhere, possibly indicating some kind of education beyond the skills that were transmitted from one generation to the next. Perhaps he studied with a Danish dancing master, though no trace has been found of this in the Danish sources.

Dancer and equilibrist

Nürenbach advertised himself as an equilibrist as well as a dancer and an acrobat. He also taught dance and, as was common, he announced his services as a so-called 'dancing master' in Sweden, Finland and Norway. His teaching career will not be discussed in this article; suffice it to say that teaching dance was an important source of income for him, and that in this matter he faced competition from several other dancing masters who lived in Christiania around 1770.³¹

An equilibrist at this time was expected to be an expert in balancing, often on a slack or tight wire or rope. Source materials indicate that Nürenbach performed what was known as the *comic* and *grotesque* dancing styles, both of which incorporated acrobatics as well as rope- or wire-dancing, lively tumbling, and pantomime. According to a textbook on dance from 1762, these technically demanding styles were designed to entertain the audience.³² The grotesque differed from the comic in that the grotesque dancer used more extreme exaggerations and contortions, along the lines of an acrobat.³³

From what can be gathered from the source material, Nürenbach's speciality was tightrope- and wire-dancing, as well as a variety of acrobatic tricks. Hirn points out that Nürenbach's skills as a dancer and acrobat were of a better quality

than those as an actor. According to Hirn, he was the star attraction in the city of Viborg (now Vyborg in Russia) when he performed there, thanks to his very decent rope- and wire-dancing technique. Nürenbach could thus compensate for some of the rustier elements that were obvious in his dramatic performances. These ‘dramatic’ elements presumably included the linguistic problems he had with the theatrical repertoire.³⁴

Part of what was considered dance in the latter part of the eighteenth century would not be considered such today, including the tradition of dancing on a rope or wire. This skill had emerged from a long tradition of mixing what we might now classify as circus skills with features of dance. The art of keeping one’s balance was, of course, a core feature of this art form, which could be done with either a tight or a slack rope or wire, the difference being in the balancing point.³⁵ In tightrope walking, at which Nürenbach excelled, the performer walked, danced, and performed acrobatics along a thin wire or rope that was tightly tied between two points some height above the ground.³⁶

Balance was maintained by using the body or a balancing tool, such as an umbrella, a fan, or a balancing pole, as seen in the illustration from a performance given in Trondheim in 1751 by an ensemble called *De Kinesiske kunstnere* (The Chinese artists) (Fig. 1). Most likely, Nürenbach’s setup was similar to that picture, and he would perform what today might be called acrobatics, described in the source material as ‘full swings’ and ‘whole and half bodily turns’. Wire-dancing was considered technically difficult; the aim was to thrill the audience with a display of virtuosity and mastery of the body.³⁷

A couple of sources describe what Nürenbach’s performances looked like. In September and October 1773, he was engaged at Humlegården, a pleasure gardens in Stockholm, and attracted such crowds that the stage area had to be expanded. According to the newspaper *Hvad Nytt, Hvad Nytt*, he did equilibrist tricks and acrobatic stunts while balancing on a narrow steel tightrope.³⁸ Another of Nürenbach’s specialities was his dance with a ladder, which stood perpendicular as he walked up it, before worming his way back down, headfirst, through all of its rungs.³⁹ Ladder tricks were part of the slapstick antics of the so-called *lazzi*, which was derived from the *commedia dell’arte* and figured prominently in dances in both the comic and grotesque styles.⁴⁰ Different types of *lazzi* were used by dancers during the eighteenth century and were also seen in the Nordic countries. Michael Stuart, styled a ‘world-famous’ equilibrist, performed ladder dancing in Tronhiem in the summer of 1769, for example.⁴¹ Comic and grotesque dancers additionally made extensive use of gesture and mime alongside the more artful *port de bras* of pure dance, and Nürenbach was no exception.⁴²

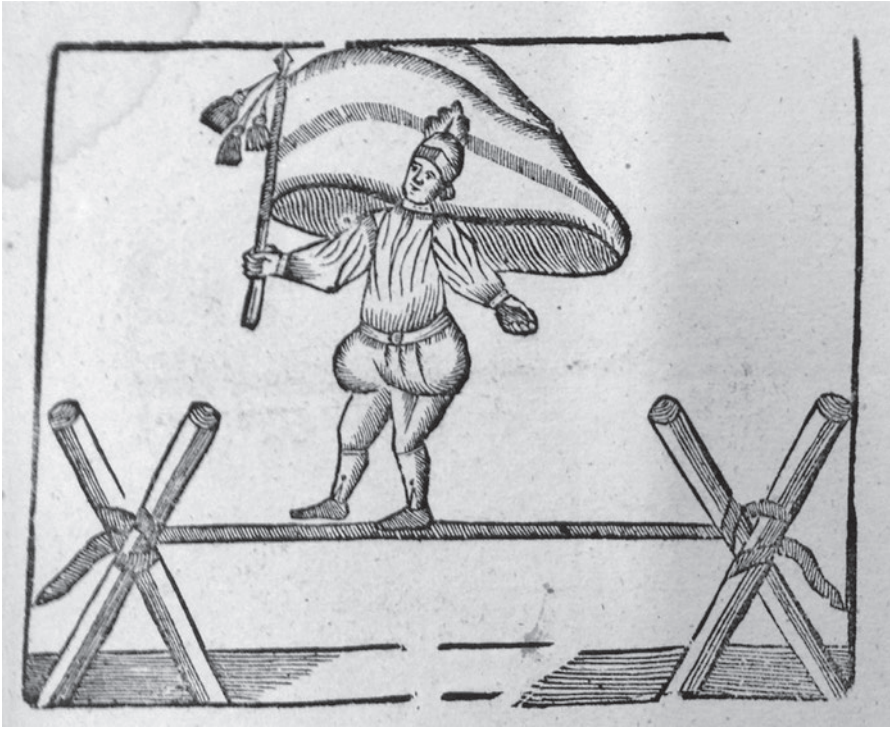


Figure 1 Tightrope walking or wire-dancing with a balancing prop in Trondheim. Detail from a poster by *De kinesiske kunstnere* (The Chinese Artists), 1751.⁴³

Between 1760 and 1780, Nürenbach travelled and performed extensively, using his skills in rope-dancing and acrobatics outlined above. He was a member of Swedish troupes such as the Seuerling and Stenborg companies, both of which travelled extensively in Sweden, including Finland. Since applications for passports to travel, as well as permission to perform, had to be submitted at each city visited, there is a paper trail that offers some clues as to where Nürenbach worked.⁴⁴ For example, both Flodmark and Hirn note that a passport to travel to Uppsala on 30 May 1767 was requested by the Stenborg theatre company, which included Nürenbach and his future wife, Anna Katarina Rancke.⁴⁵ Nürenbach also operated on his own or as the leader of an ensemble, as when he worked in Christiania between 1770 and 1772, and later in Finland, where he tried to set up a Finnish theatre.⁴⁶

Performing in Christiania

After travelling between Swedish and Finnish towns, Nürenbach and Rancke arrived in Norway, where they worked for about eighteen months before moving back to Sweden in the early spring of 1772.⁴⁷ When Nürenbach arrived in Christiania, one may assume that he was in his early twenties, still young enough to master his performance skills perfectly. He was travelling with his wife, but Rancke is almost invisible in the Norwegian source material.⁴⁸ It might seem curious that Nürenbach, with his relatively stable popularity in Sweden, should try his luck in Christiania. He might have wanted to settle down and find a permanent home for himself, his wife and their future children. Perhaps he was hoping to work in a place that offered less competition than the Swedish towns. Christiania, with its 5,000 inhabitants, was at this time a provincial city just large enough to offer a decent audience as well as customers for his dance classes.

Nürenbach first announced himself as a dance teacher in July 1770, but thereafter nothing appeared in the Christiania paper *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddel* for almost a year—not until the following spring did he again announce his presence in the city. In May 1771 Nürenbach placed a notice indicating that he would perform as well as teach dance (Fig. 2): he announced that on Friday 24 May, he intended to perform several equilibrist exercises and artistic tricks—‘seen ones, as well as unseen ones’—to entertain his audience. There was no information as to where the performance would take place; this kind of information was often advertised using posters, according to theatre researcher Anders Enevig. In Christiania, indoor performances often took place at the city hall (Raadhus-Salen),

**Fredagen den 24. May agter Konfr. Martin
 Nürenbach at fremviise adbillige Equilibriske
 Exercitier og Konststykker, saavel seete som usete,
 hvorved Han attraaer at divertere Tilskuerne.**
NB. De som have Lust at lade sig informere
 af Ham i Daudse Kunst, tilbyder
 Han og sin Tieneste.

Figure 2 An advertisement in *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddel*, 22 May 1771.

outdoor performances in public spaces with room for spectators to gather, such as marketplaces.⁴⁹

The fact that Nürenbach did not advertise does not mean that he did not perform. His performances could have been promoted by word of mouth or using large banners, posters, or sandwich boards—several notices in *Nordske Intel-ligens-Seddele*, in fact, indicate that more information about a given performance would be available from such portable posters. According to Enevig, ensembles and performers often paraded through a city to publicize their shows. Frequently, the city drummer was hired to announce the time and place of performances, or someone would copy out the necessary details onto handbills, which members of the ensemble, or locals who knew the area, would carry around, displaying the information as they went. High-quality printed posters could be glued to wooden surfaces, but this was a more expensive option, while newspaper announcements were obviously the most expensive of all.⁵⁰ What this means, then, is that even though Nürenbach did not advertise frequently in the local paper, he (and possibly his wife) could very well have been busy performing as well as teaching dance during their first year in Christiania.

Joining forces with Madame Stuart

To my knowledge, there was only one other itinerant performer in Christiania at this time: Madame Stuart. Christina Doreothea Stuart was the widow of the famous—some would say notorious—dancer and acrobat Michael Stuart, who died in Christiania in June 1770.⁵¹ During the time of Nürenbach's stay in 1770 and the first two months of 1771, she advertised several different types of performances as a singer, musician, and equilibrist.⁵² Thus, for a time, both Madame Stuart and Nürenbach probably competed for audiences, but they had different strengths and repertoires. Madame Stuart had the advantage of being a musician as well, whereas Nürenbach never advertised any musical skills of his own. The extent of their competition remains unclear, however: material in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddele* reveals that Madame Stuart held her last solo performances in February 1771. In the autumn of 1771, she performed again, this time in collaboration with Nürenbach.⁵³

By October 1771, in other words, Nürenbach joined had forces with Madame Stuart. Their joint venture is known from newspaper advertisements as well as a poster. When writing his theatre history in 1876, Huitfeldt-Kaas had access to a poster for a performance on 7 October 1771. The poster is now

lost, or perhaps simply misplaced, but it is cited in its entirety in Huitfeldt-Kaas's *Christiania Theaterhistorie*.⁵⁴ The wording gives a good sense of the nature of the event. It began with (typical) praise of the authorities, stating that with the permission of the authorities, on Monday 7 October 1771, Madame Stuart and Monsieur Nürenbach would, for the first time, have the honour of showing their artistic numbers and exercises together. The acts were then specified. First, the two were to demonstrate different kinds of positions and balancing. Then they were to perform equilibrist feats. Nürenbach was to *voltigerer* his body into different shapes and forms with great deftness and deliberation for the pleasure of the audience; Madame Stuart was to balance a peacock feather both horizontally and vertically, lose it, catch it again, and then play an enjoyable minuet, probably on a lute, which was one of her instruments. Next, the poster stated that Nürenbach would perform an equilibrist masterpiece with a ladder (known from earlier advertisements). Finally, a play called the *Jealous Harlequin* would be performed, whereby Harlequin and the 'Liebhabers' (spectators) would be most thoroughly entertained.⁵⁵

From the poster we know that Nürenbach's 'ladder dance' continued to be one of his specialities, and that Nürenbach and Madame Stuart had expanded their repertoire to include pantomimes. Their collaboration grew even further with the addition of a play. Soon afterwards, in fact, their collaboration would expand to include a small company of performers, among whom Stuart and Nürenbach were probably the only experienced members.

Applying for royal privilege

Nürenbach, having established this small ensemble, took the enterprise one step further by applying to the Danish king for a privilege to stage Danish plays with Norwegian actors. This was likely done in the interests of stability for the ensemble—such a privilege would, if granted, protect them from competition. It was Nürenbach who applied for the privilege; Madame Stuart is not mentioned at all. Nürenbach is humble and reassuring in his good intentions in the application (Fig. 3).

The application followed a standard format: the king is praised to the skies, Nürenbach's purpose is explained, promises are made to donate any surplus to the poor, and assurances are given that no income will be taken out of the country. As explained above, the latter point responded to a crucial concern in contemporary legislation: itinerant artists should not just show up, make money, and leave again.


præs. 10 Decemb. 1771. N^o 4. C^o A
No. 20.  Bre og Lyde Erklæring.
1771.
Christiania d. 22^{de} Novemb. 1771.
Martin Nürenbach
Allerhøjeste indbudning
I vort høje sig mig for
Eder Majestets Naade
at mig
allernaadigt maatte
forvise Privilegium paa
i Christiania i Norge
Anføgen Allernaadigt at Opføde Danske Comedier
som Eillærte, at plov-dier, med Danske indre
Comedier i Christiania faaet; I som er at
jeg paa Allernaadigt
mig anfætt og i kund-
skab og at jeg
for paa Øst og Vest
skud, forfætt, at for
kinnig, som er ganske
vilde, og at samt skal
vort høje; Et sige
kan mig sig Allernaadigt
naadigt vilje mig for
for dette der Opføde
Comedie, at forvege om
Recognition til de Danske
af den forkommer om
København, sin salte
13. ad Indic. N^o 830.
In. No. Dec. 1771 N^o 1385 cum a

Figure 3 Excerpt from the first page of Nürenbach's application, dated 22 November 1771.⁵⁶

Instead, Nürenbach promised to give a certain part of his troupe's income to the poor people of the city.

The magistrate's office supported Nürenbach's application, as did the County Governor Caspar Hermann von Storm. Storm based his recommendation on performances that had already taken place. Apparently, he had found enough positive elements there to support the application. The various documents were forwarded to the Danish authorities, and on 27 December 1771, a royal decision came back in favour of the 'Entrepreneur' Nürenbach. His privilege was granted, assuming that he met his obligation to pay any surplus to the poor, which was suggested would be two riksdaler for every evening or a certain percentage of the income.⁵⁷

As it turned out, Nürenbach would not use his royal privilege for long. After a series of performances in the late January and February of 1772, made up of theatrical pieces, pantomimes, dancing, and acrobatics, Nürenbach and his wife can no longer be traced in Norway.

Scrutinizing the contents of memo

More than any other documentation of Nürenbach's ensemble, it was the aforementioned memo that has shaped his subsequent reputation as a mediocre artist. The document is interesting because of the way it has been used to assess Nürenbach. Yet the Norwegian and Danish authorities did not pay much attention to it in 1771.

In it we can read that a person—'living in this place, sensible and very right-minded'—was merely expressing his concerns, being very upset by what 'Nyrenbach' and his company were performing (Fig. 4). The memo is clearly to be understood as an 'anti-recommendation', mercilessly criticising Nürenbach's enterprise. Ever since the verdict has been taken at face value, cited and handed on by several theatre researchers. The contents of the memo has come down to generations of theatre and dance scholars because this is the one part of the source material that Huitfeldt-Kaas chose to emphasize. As a result, Norwegian and Nordic theatre scholars have almost habitually deemed Nürenbach's performances to be mediocre. But should the memo have had the impact it has? And how certain is it that it was actually written by the supposed author?

Huitfeldt-Kaas states that there could be little doubt that the letter was written by 'Bernt Ancher', although he offers no further explanation.⁵⁸ Ancher (whose name today is spelled Anker) was a wealthy and powerful citizen of Christiania in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Perhaps because of Ancher's social

Pro Memoria

Blide indberetning af en Jern Martin Nygren.
-baca til det Kongl. Samfund indkomne
den 17de Junij om Ullaskilds et oprette en
Cantor skole i Christiania, indfineres i den
en der paa Huset Lønnings og magt ind-
-stribet skander forlangende skole og
Gennemseende forlættede Venner ind:

Deri Spectaculorum magr af det mine Jyg
geligste Barbarie, som nogen ind Lær
forstiller af skandinaviske for skandinavi-
-ske. En det skandinaviske skole og det
-bergs skole. En Dramens skole og
prima Donna. En skole og skole,
for skole skole skole, skole skole
skole, man skole lingua franca, som
skole alle acteurs, en skole.

Figure 4 Excerpt from the first page of the 1771 memorandum (undated, quoted in translation at the start of this article).⁵⁹

status, Huitfeldt-Kaas decided that his opinion was conclusive. Moreover, Huitfeldt-Kaas left out the first part of the memo, which includes important indications of the style and manner of the person who wrote it. The wording is frank, but lacks the grace one would expect of a high-ranking person such as Ancher, who, as a well-educated and prominent man, would also have known how to write for himself. The wording of the first part is in fact rather unsophisticated. Would Ancher have used such rough language?

Could it be that someone else wrote the memo? The fact that the letter was sealed but not signed might support this notion, and, as the archivist and researcher Torkel Bråthen observes, the seal does not resemble that of the Ancher family.⁶⁰ The point to be made here is that Ancher's supposed judgement would be valued as being informed by knowledge and taste, a person who would have been to the theatre in Copenhagen, and indeed in other European cities. On the other hand, if he it was not him passing judgement, then someone else did; someone whose standards were not met by the quality of what he/she saw.

If Ancher did indeed write the letter, the sarcasm could be understood in the light of his position as a wealthy and sophisticated citizen. This position was something he shared with other members of the upper classes, of course. A similarly negative assessment, for example, was given by the Swedish count Gustaf Johan Ehrensvärd about a performance by the Stenborg theatre company in the late 1760s. Ehrensvärd criticised the ensemble, but he still went to see them, as Dahlberg points out.⁶¹ Ancher would have been influenced by the 'expected' tastes of the upper classes, who would not (at least not publicly) approve of popular, itinerant performances. Ancher's criticism could also have derived from his close involvement with the private dramatic societies that were responsible for the more 'refined theatre' that was evolving in the upper-class homes of Christiania. These societies, however, were part of a dilettante culture and involved the upper-class citizens themselves as performers.⁶² The author of the 'anti-recommendation' may well have regarded Nürenbach's enterprise as competition.

Regardless of who wrote the memo, its contents are not mentioned in written statements by the Norwegian authorities. Instead, the Norske Cammer (Norwegian Chamber, a short-lived institution within the financial government of the kingdom under Struensee, in 1771/72) was positive and supportive of Nürenbach's enterprise in its written recommendation to the Danish king: Nürenbach should be allowed to stage comedies as long as he committed himself to remaining in Christiania and paid his surplus to the poor. The Chamber also assumed that he would be able to support himself. They could give assurances of his sincerity,

having met him personally and having received his assurance that he would pay a minimum of two riksdaler per performance to the poor. Should the performances bring in more money than expected, a certain percentage would, according to custom, be given to the poor, as the authorities saw fit. The conclusion was that Nürenbach's application should be recommended on the stated terms, and that further terms should be determined by the king.⁶³ In other words, the authorities were not concerned about lack of quality and found the enterprise to be small and harmless, but also worthy of support.

Nürenbach's entrepreneurship

It is interesting how history is shaped by the selection and highlighting of certain sources to the detriment of others. Huitfeldt-Kaas chose to highlight the negative content of the memo. Since he assumed it to be written by Ancher, he deemed the assessment to be proof of a lack of quality. At the same time, however, Huitfeldt-Kaas did point out that a notice in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddel* from March 1772 mentions the ensemble in a positive manner, and that this could indicate a certain degree of success.⁶⁴ Thus, he tried to balance his assessment.

Huitfeldt-Kaas's work on early Norwegian theatre and dance history was based on very solid research and it remains an invaluable source; however, his work was also typical of his generation of nineteenth-century theatre scholars. As one who specialised in theatre, he would have been less familiar with the practices of pantomime and dance or acrobatics that so many travelling artists cultivated. When reassessing this today, it can be useful to look at Huitfeldt-Kaas's assumptions in light of what is now known about itinerant dance and theatre practices in the eighteenth century.

Artists like Nürenbach were not only welcomed and appreciated; they were skilled and versatile. They offered entertainment that the government considered a welcome ingredient in their subjects' hard lives. This was popular entertainment for all, and thus differed from the court and privileged theatres. Associated with the comic and grotesque styles, acrobatics and wire-dancing were not regarded as high art, not even among the professional dancers:

As to the grotesque stile of dance, the effect of it chiefly depends on the leaps and height of the springs. There is more of bodily strength required in it than even of agility and flight. It is more calculated to surprize the eye, then to entertain it. It has something of the tumbler's, or wire dancer's merit of difficulty and danger, rather than of art.⁶⁵

Such were the thoughts of the Anglo-Italian dancing master Andrea Gallini, who lived and worked around the same time as Nürenbach. Gallini's opinions were typical of highbrow thinking in terms of value judgement.⁶⁶

Another fact that was downplayed by Huitfeldt-Kaas was that the Norwegian source material indicates that Nürenbach himself was well aware of his strengths and weaknesses. He aimed to improve the acting, as his advertisement shows (Fig. 5). The announcement shows that Nürenbach understood that his ensemble was a little rough around the edges. Placed in the newspaper before Nürenbach was granted his performance privileges, the advertisement states that Nürenbach would be performing comedies on 12 December at the city hall and that *De Usynlige* ('The invisible'), by Baron von Holberg, would be performed better than last time, due to a change of actors. Moreover, the advertisement also stated that instead of a concluding 'Comoedie', Nürenbach, as requested by several spectators, would himself show 'several beautiful equilibrist pieces, to the amusement of the audience.'⁶⁷ Nürenbach was thus beefing up the weaker parts of his act by adding dance numbers where he could display his skills. He was acknowledging the weak acting skills of his ensemble, and promising improvement. This indicates

NB. Paa Torsdag den 12. December bliver paa Raadstue: Sæhlen opført Comoedien, kaldet: De Usynlige, udi 3 Acter, af Baron von Holbergs, som ved Forandring af Acteurs skal blive bedre opført end sidste Gang; I stæden for Efter: Comoedie vil Monsr: Nyrenbach efter Manges Forlangende, fremvise adskillige smukke Equilibristiske Kunstter, til Tilskuerne's Fornøielse.

Og meldes til Efterretning, at Skuepladsen ei meere end en Gang til denne bliver aabnet; Ligesaa at Monsr: Nyrenbach i næste Uge agter at begynde med Information i Dandskunsten; Thi ombedes De, som maatte have lyst at lade sig informere, id for jo heller at melde sig.

Figure 5 An advertisement in Nordske Intelligenz-Seddeler, 11 December 1771.

an eagerness to please and thus to continue to attract spectators. Such versatility was typical of the itinerant tradition. Above all, the quotation shows that popular art forms did not imply that 'anything goes'. Spectators, whether upper or lower class, would expect quality, even if their tastes and preferences might differ. Nürenbach realized that lack of skills could not be hidden, nor technique faked. He took action to make improvements in response to criticism. My guess is that he knew of the memo that accompanied his application. Spectators would have also expressed their dissatisfaction directly to him.

Summarizing the itinerant artist Martin Nürenbach

Any assessment of performances carried out more than 250 years ago is, of course, difficult. Nürenbach's performing was by nature aimed at a large spectrum of spectators, and his initial success in dancing and acrobatics contributed directly to his application for a royal privilege in Christiania.⁶⁸ We cannot know for sure what the performances were really like or what their strengths and weaknesses were. In this article, I have pointed out what can be inferred from the source material: Nürenbach and his itinerant colleagues' skills and performance style were popular, but also a bit 'rough around the edges'.

Nürenbach's practice must be framed specifically within the travelling performance tradition, because the type of repertoire at which he excelled fell outside the boundaries of institutionalised (and more permanent) highbrow theatre. The tradition of itinerant performances was upheld by artists who were highly specialised, their techniques and skills perfected to cater to an audience decidedly unlike that associated with the theatre of the privileged social groups. These artists were technically able without seeking refinement. They sought to make audiences gasp in awe and surprise. They would often be in a no-win situation: they attracted popular attention and made people excited and thrilled, but they had to struggle to maintain the respect of their audiences. Interestingly, even if predisposed to dismiss this type of work, upper-class audiences still wanted to see the itinerant shows.⁶⁹ During the eighteenth century, then, we find that itinerant artists could be admired for their skills, but not necessarily respected for their art.

Nürenbach's application was most likely a purely pragmatic and 'self-preserving' act—that is, a means of securing performance rights and a steadier income. He nevertheless used the privilege for only a few months. Perhaps he realized that his acting talents were not sufficient to create something sustainable. Perhaps the ensemble as a whole was lacking refinement and technique to the degree that spec-

tators failed to turn out. Perhaps resistance towards his performances proved too tough; certainly, the oft-quoted memo that accompanied Nürenbach's application appears to indicate as much. Even if many details remain unknown, what is certain is that Nürenbach's skills as dancer and acrobat were adequate, and Nordic source material has shown that he was appreciated in that capacity.

Throughout this article, I have maintained that even if Nürenbach was not successful in his theatrical efforts, he deserves to be reassessed in terms of his work as dancer and equilibrist. Some of the source material tells us about what types of dancing and acrobatics that he performed—for instance, his 'ladder dance'. Itinerant performing has, as mentioned, been little explored in the international literature, and Nürenbach's performances in Norway, as in Sweden and Finland, attest to a skilled performer who was highly appreciated. At the same time, like any itinerant dancer, he had to manoeuvre his way around the many cultural prejudices and legal restrictions that existed in his day. In this respect as well, Nürenbach may in fact have been more talented than previous scholarship has suggested.

Notes

1. Norges Riksarkiv, Oslo (National Archives of Norway) (NRA), Rentekammeret, Resolusjon, 1770–74, no. 106 'Pro Memoria'. All translations are by the author unless otherwise stated.
2. In 1770, Christiania was called 'Stiftstad' and had approximately 5,000 inhabitants. Norwegian cities have often changed names or spellings. Today's capital, Oslo, was known as Christiania until 1877, when it became Kristiania, thanks to a spelling reform. In 1925, the city reinstated its original medieval name, Oslo. Throughout this article, I use the name and spellings of places that were common around 1770.
3. Henrik Jørgen Huitfeldt-Kaas, *Christiania Theaterhistorie* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1876), 83.
4. Various sources indicate that Nürenbach was also known, then and now, as Nyrenbach, Nyrenbeck, Nornbach, Niirnbach, and other variations on the name. See, for example, Sven Hirn, 'Martin Nürenbach—teaterpionjär?', *Nordisk Tidskrift*, 90 (1967), 261–8.
5. Sherill Dodds, *Dancing on the Canon: Embodiments of Value in Popular Dance* (London: Palgrave, 2011), 11–28 and 45–65.
6. This interdisciplinary project made much of the present research possible, and several of my project colleagues, including Ellen Gjervan, Elizabeth Svarstad, and Svein Gladsø, have also taken an interest in the itinerant artists who were connected to and performed in Norway.

7. Unlike theatrical dance, the history and practice of Norwegian folkdance has been thoroughly documented and analysed, first and foremost by Emeritus Professor Egil Bakka at NTNU, for example in his *Norske Dansetradisjonar* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1978).
8. My research has resulted in several articles on itinerant dancers and dancing masters who were active in Norway. See, for example, Anne Margrete Fiskvik, 'Information uti Dands i Christiania, 1769–1773', in Randi M. Selvik, Ellen Karoline Gjervan and Svein Gladsø (eds.), *Lidenskap eller levebrød: Utøvende kunst i endring rundt 1800* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2015), 287–314.
9. Because this article is based in part upon Norwegian newspaper material, it must be pointed out that Norway was relatively late in establishing newspapers compared to its neighbours—the *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddeler* of Christiania began only in 1763; it lasted a few more years until newspapers came to other towns such as Bergen and Trondheim (*Bergens Adressecontours Efterretninger* and *Trondbiems Adresse-Contours Efterretninger* respectively). Nürenbach advertised only in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddeler*.
10. See Huitfeldt-Kaas 1876, 83.
11. Hirn 1967. Hirn also refers to Nürenbach as an artist and dancing master in his book *Teater i Viborg 1743–1870* (Helsinki: Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1970), 23.
12. Johan Flodmark, *Stenborgska skådebanorna: Bidrag till Stockholms teaterhistoria* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1893), 54; Birger Schöldström, *Hög och konstnärlig anda: Svenske Teaterbilder* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1892).
13. See Marian Hanna Winter, *The Pre-Romantic Ballet* (London: Pitman, 1974), 7–18. Winter notes the strong link between the performance traditions of the *Commedia dell'arte* and the development of ballet.
14. Dahlberg, *Komediantteatern i 1600-talets Stockholm* (Stockholm: Kommittén för Stockholmsforskning, 1992), 14.
15. Dahlberg 1992, 14.
16. Sven Hirn, *Den gastronomiska bästen: Gamla nordiska artistaffischer* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2002), 2–3.
17. For an overview of the Stenborg and Seuerling theatre companies, see Claes Rosenqvist and Dag Nordmark (eds.), *Att resa var nödvändigt: Äldre svensk landsortsteater* (Gideå: Vildros, 1990), especially chapters 1–3.
18. Dahlberg 1992, 14.
19. See Parmer, *Teater, pantomime, linedans, ekvilibristikk, menasjeri, vokskabinett, kosmorama etc. på Fredrikshald* (Halden: Halden kommune, 1965).
20. See Winter 1974, 30.
21. See Gunilla Dahlberg, 'Till E.K.Maj:ts Aflägsnare undrsåtares nöje', in Rosenqvist and Nordmark 1990, 18–48.
22. It might be added that, like dancers and acrobats, travelling musicians also struggled to perform publicly. For more on the different theatre prohibitions in Denmark-Norway,

see Svein Gladsø, *Teater mellom jus og politikk: Studier i norsk teater fra 1700-tallet til 1940* (Oslo: Unipub, 2005), 8–16.

23. This stricter legislation came in the aftermath of the fall of Struensee. Over the next few years, little itinerant activity was seen in Denmark and Norway.

24. For Swedish theatre legislation, see Dag Nordmark, 'Med Kongl.Maj:ts allernådigste tilstånd', in Rosenqvist and Nordmark 1990, 49–83.

25. Many other restrictions could apply. Typically, permission was granted, but in return the ensemble was obliged to donate the income of the last performance in a given city to the poor there.

26. Schöldström 1892, 58. Schöldström based his biographical information about Nürenbach on church records from Ånsta and Örebro, but did not specify the years quoted. See also Dag Nordmark, 'Carl Gottfried Seuerling', in *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, <http://sok.rik-sarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/5881>, accessed 15 April 2016.

27. *Gotheborgska Nyheter*, 9 September 1769.

28. For more information on Seuerling, his wife, and their theatre company, see Ester-Margaret von Frenckell, *Comoedie directeuren Carl Gottfried Seuerling och dess hustru theater directeurskan Margaretha Seuerling* (Helsinki: Aktiebolaget, 1953).

29. Schöldström postulates that Seuerling was probably married to Nürenbach's mother for a time (Schöldström 1892, 58). It is known that Seuerling had married Maria Heidensköld by 1747, though she was much older than he was (she was born in 1702). Nürenbach might have been her son, if she gave birth to him in her late thirties or early forties, but this is not clear.

30. See Winter 1974, 34.

31. Nürenbach was active as dancing master between 1770 and 1772 in Christiania. My research has revealed that as many as seven dancing masters were active in Christiania at this time—five men and two women appear to have offered their services during these two years, which was a big group for a relatively small town (Fiskvik 2015).

32. Giovanni-Andrea Gallini. *A Treatise on the Art of Dancing* (London: R. Dodsley, 1762), 84–6.

33. Edmund Fairfax, *The Styles of Eighteenth-Century Ballet* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 124.

34. Hirn 1970, 23: 'Martin Nürenbach, som tack vare skickling lindans kunde kompensera den dramatiska konstutövningens eventuella och sannolika förluster'.

35. Rope performers used dance steps and included the manipulation of objects such as clubs, rings, hats or canes in their routines. Virtuoso rope-dancers even used wheelbarrows with passengers, ladders, and animals in their acts.

36. Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ropedancer>, accessed 3 April 2015.

37. Gallini 1762, 84–6.

38. *Hvad Nytt? Hvad Nytt?*, 6 November 1773.

39. Flodmark, *Stenborgska Skådebanorna*, 54. Flodmark does not identify his source here; from the wording of his text, it could be a poster or perhaps a newspaper advertisement.
40. Fairfax 2003, 111–12.
41. The information about Stuart's ladder-dancing is found in a series of posters held at Statsarkivet i Trondheim (Regional State Archives in Trondheim), Magistraten B, bd 3, Offentlige skuespill & forestillinger.
42. Fairfax 2003, 109.
43. Statsarkivet i Trondheim, Magistraten B, bd 3, Offentlige skuespill & forestillinger, plakat (poster).
44. The mode of travel would have changed with the seasons and available infrastructure. Travel by sea was preferred, especially during the winter months.
45. Flodmark 1893, 13; Hirn 1967, 261.
46. Hirn 1967, 261.
47. It is possible that Nürenbach also performed in Denmark and even Russia or some of the Baltic countries, but this has not been documented as yet.
48. Rancke's presence was in fact limited to a single notice in the newspaper *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddel* that stated that she would teach dance while her husband was away. The couple stayed in Christiania until the early winter of 1772, and their activities can be tracked, to some degree, through the announcements placed in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddel*. The first appeared on 18 July 1770; the last, 29 January 1772. It is possible that Nürenbach and his wife stayed in Christiania and even gave performances without advertising them in the newspaper. They may also have stayed on for a while to teach dance, but there was no announcement to that effect either.
49. Anders Enevig, *Circus og gögl i Odense, 1640–1825* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1995), 14, writing about Odense, points out that handbills were used to spread information.
50. Enevig, 1995, 14. According to Enevig, itinerant artists were a welcome distraction; word about the performances spread quickly.
51. Michael Stuart was well known all over Europe for his wire-dancing skills, but he was also given to heavy drinking and fist fights (Huitfeldt-Kaas 1876, 89). For Stuart, see Statsarkivet i Trondheim, Magistraten B, bd 3, Offentlige skuespill & forestillinger.
52. While Stuart's death removed an important rival of Nürenbach's, the situation was grim for Madame Stuart, who was left with several children to support. She remained in Christiania, selling different types of goods and clothing, along with beer. By 1774, she had left to perform in Sweden. Judging from advertisements in *Göteborgska Nyheter*, she performed in Gothenburg in April 1774. Most likely, she also travelled to other Swedish towns, but this has not been documented so far.
53. Announcements in *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddel*, September 1770–December 1771.
54. The layout of the poster is typical of the day and resembles several others that survive (see Statsarkivet i Trondheim, Magistraten B, bd 3, Offentlige skuespill & forestillinger).

Such posters indicated first that the performers had been granted permission, then named the performers, explaining the content of the pieces to be performed, and specifying, at the end, the performance venue. They often had drawings, but even the texts alone give a fairly good impression of what the performance would have looked like.

55. Huitfeldt-Kaas 1876, 82 quotes the poster in its totality.

56. NRA, Rentekammeret, Kongelige Resolusjoner, Søndenfjeldske Kontor, 1771, nr. 1–20.

57. NRA, Rentekammeret, Resolusjon, 1770–74, no. 106.

58. Huitfeldt-Kaas 1876, 89.

59. NRA, Rentekammeret, Resolusjon, 1770–74, no. 106.

60. The NRA archivist Torkel Bråthen is very knowledgeable about family seals. When examining the seal with me (21 January 2015), he remarked that the person who actually wrote the harsh words was not necessarily the person who thought them. For one thing, the opening was a rhetorical introduction typical of formal complaints at the time. It is thus possible that the source of the unhappiness could not write and thus went to a clergyman for help.

61. Dahlberg 1992, 17.

62. For an account of the dramatic societies in Norway, see Kai Østberg, 'Dilettantisme, demokrati og nasjonal selvstendighet: Bernt Anker og Christiania-elitens teaterpidenskap—og ønsket om å gi Norge en plass på verdensscenen', in Marie-Theres Federhofer and Hanna Hodacs (eds.), *Mellom pasjon og profesjonalisme: Dilettankulturer i skandinavisk kunst og vitenskap* (Trondheim: Tapir akademisk, 2011), 229–52. See also Sven Gladsø, 'Dilettantismen på teatret—privat mani eller kulturell mulighet', in ead. 2011, 205–227.

63. NRA, Rentekammeret, Resolusjon, 1770–74, no. 106.

64. Huitfeldt-Kaas 1876, p.91.

65. Gallini 1762, 84.

66. In contrast, the noble and *demi-caractère* styles were more commonly used to portray the refined dancing that resembled what we today classify as classical ballet.

67. *Nordske Intelligenz-Seddel*, 11 December 1771.

68. See Huitfeldt-Kaas 1876, 81–9.

69. Flodmark 1893, 9.

Summary:

*Where highbrow taste met itinerant dance in eighteenth-century Scandinavia:
The dance entrepreneur Martin Nürenbach*

In 1770, the German-Swedish dancer and acrobat Martin Nürenbach (d.1780) arrived in Christiania (Oslo), Norway, where he successfully applied for a royal

privilege to perform Danish comedies. Nürenbach had previously been part of an itinerant ensemble operating in Sweden, led by Carl Gottfried Seuerling. Nürenbach quit Norway in 1772 and returned to Sweden, where he resumed his former career as an itinerant artist until he died in Finnish Tavastland (Tavastia), in 1780. In the field of Nordic dance Nürenbach's efforts have generally been belittled or else ignored. Although credited for his attempt to establish a more stable theatrical culture in Christiania, he has also been dismissed for lacking skill as an actor and a theatre director. However, the repertoire in which he excelled was not the highbrow theatre of the era. This article emphasises the need to investigate Nürenbach and his like in the light of itinerant performance traditions. In doing so, it recasts his achievements as a dancer and acrobat. As part of this reassessment, the article revisits a notorious 'anti-recommendation' that followed Nürenbach's application for royal performance privileges in 1771. The anonymous memorandum in question has repeatedly been cited as proof of the alleged inferiority of Nürenbach and his ensemble.

Keywords: dance; Christiania; 1770s; itinerant performance practice; highbrow theatre; popular culture; equilibrist; theatrical ensemble; comic and grotesque dance styles