

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT THE SCANDINAVIAN PIRATES?- Part 2- Radio Mercur

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In Part 1 I looked at Radio Nord. Let's see what the others were like, starting with the pioneer Radio Mercur. First, let's look at the name. In English we would pronounce it as '*Mer-cur*' (rhyming with 'fur'). However, the Danes said it as '*Rad-dee-oh Mer-coor*' (Rhyming with 'poor' though the last syllable was a bit clipped.) The trumpet sound or jingle which went with the station ID was appropriate as signifying the trumpet of Mercury, the Greek/Roman messenger god. And here was a radio bringing messages of music and information.

This article has taken nine months to research -not all the time obviously but a lot of it. It is made up of two things. First, I've listened to original recordings. Most shows are from Ingemar Lindqvist's website at <http://radiohistoria.jvnf.org/index.htm> then the 'Radio Mercur' section. With about 45 items to hear, often about 30 minutes long, I must admit that to save time I often jumped from the start to the end of a record. This site has Poul Foged aka Paul Dane's interesting talk on Radio Mercur at Zeezenders 20 in 1978: I was there but had forgotten most of the detail! The scandinavianoffshoreradio.com website provided over 100 adverts broadcast on Radio Mercur. Yes, I listened to every one! From these recordings I made my own comments about programmes and did an analysis of the adverts. Second, I used the text from the various websites to build up a picture of the station's history. As well as the two websites mentioned I used the radio-mercur.dk tribute website run by Henrik Nørgaard plus a site run by a lady called Pia Charlotte Schultz www.pia-charlotte.com/?page_id=285 which provided more of an insight: A lot of cross-referencing had to be done. For example, trying to find out what sort of people broadcast on Mercur and what subsequently happened to them led me to the danskefilm.dk site. Again I had to draw my own conclusions from the 'raw' data. In all of this online translators were essential. There was a great deal of copying and pasting into them to find out what the Danish text means. Ingemar checked and amended the original draft last summer and gave more information though since then I have found out even more. His help has been invaluable. Other research on the internet has given me some idea of the nature of some of the products advertised. Some information came from Hans Knot's "Soundscapes," particularly an article from the July 12th 1959 edition of the Dutch "TV" magazine. There is also some information about the ships from the offshorechos.de website. Useful photos and schedules were found on an open Facebook page on Radio Mercur, following a link from the mercur.dk website (click on 'Nyt' and scroll down). Just as I was finalising this article Hans Knot reprinted an article by W. Hijmans which appeared in the 'Supplement' to the Dutch daily paper "Algemeen Dagblad" on April 7th 1962 where the journalist had visited Mercur's headquarters. Henrik Nørgaard checked the final draft of this article, corrected a number of Danish spellings and provided some important 'new' information, including that from his book "Brask -The Life and Times of a Danish Tycoon." To all these people: Thank You.

In English publications the history of Mercur is sketchy. Paul Dane's talk was more detailed. Here, for the first time to my knowledge in English, is a more comprehensive look at this pioneer's history and an idea of what it sounded like. It was a station which Paul said was "to revolutionise the whole radio world." This was true of course for countries with a State monopoly in radio but not for commercial radio as such which was already operating in places like North America, Spain and Australia. Within Denmark, Henrik Nørgaard wrote to me, "Mercur has always had a certain aura around its name." His own fascination came from talking to those people who were young enthusiastic people who started the station led him to write a book in 2003 "Pirater i æteren" (Pirates of the Ether.)

First we need to think of Denmark's geography. The main peninsula coming north from Germany is Jylland (Jutland) with the large island of Nord Jylland just north of it. To the east are two of the larger of the 70 inhabited islands making up the country: Fyn (Funen) and Lolland. Further east across the straits called the Storebælt (Great Belt) is the largest island of Sjælland (Zealand) on the east coast of which is the capital København. Visible from there across the north-south channel called the Øresund is part of the Skåne (Scania) region of Sweden which was ruled by the Danes from around 800 -1658. On Skåne's coast are the city of Malmö and town of Landskrona. Just two areas of the Øresund were in international waters. The Øresund is nearly 40 miles long, is two miles wide at its narrowest but is typically five to seven miles wide.

For an article in "Soundscapes" Henrik Nørgaard wrote that in Denmark the State radio, Statsradiofonien, broadcast two channels with an aim to educate and entertain (rather like the BBC.)

Entertainment and modern music, like the BBC too, were allocated just several hours a week. In any case lots of parents in Denmark were aghast at the new rock and roll music and were worried at its effect on young peoples' morals. On good days Radio Luxembourg could be heard in Denmark with a fairly good signal.

It seems that 32 year old Peer Jansen was partly inspired to start Radio Mercur by the Voice of America radio station on the "Courier" off Rhodes broadcasting to Eastern Bloc countries. He found out about it when visiting southern Europe. It used frequencies not allocated by the ITU but that didn't seem to bother anyone except maybe Russia. Inspiration also came from AFN's broadcasts of entertainment and popular music in Germany and Radio Luxembourg's popular shows. There is a story that he mistakenly thought '208' came from the English Channel. Henrik Nørgaard found out that this was a story made up by someone who joined Mercur later on, certainly after the early planning stages. According to Peer's cousin and legal adviser, Børge Agerskov, he had not talked about radio broadcasting from the Channel. Anyway, Luxembourg circumvented British broadcasting laws. So he thought of a similar station broadcasting in the Øresund channel between Denmark and Sweden. Børge was in the last year of a university law course and was interested in Peer's ideas. He described his cousin as very adventurous and able to inspire people. He studied the Danish broadcasting legislation and realised Peer had come across a loophole. The laws had overlooked the possibility that transmitters could be put on a ship to circumvent the broadcasting monopoly in that country. So these two men can be thanked, with due deference to the VoA ship, as opening up the ways for many offshore radio stations over the next three decades or so. Peer Jansen needed backing and he approached his boss in a silverware firm, Ib Fogh, who duly invested. In fact, he was more than an investor as he was involved in the planning with Peer Jansen from an early stage.

The decision to use the new FM band when most radios were just on medium wave was said to help with the transmitter aerial design. However, FM was chosen to obtain a better sound quality. Peer's brother in law was a radio enthusiast who knew another amateur radio enthusiast, William Pedersen. The latter's occupation was repairing cycles but was very skilled at making radio transmitters. He built one for Radio Mercur. Though power was 1.5 kW the directional antenna and gain of 6dB gave an ERP of 25 kW so that it could be received in most of the province of Sjælland from its anchorage in the Øresund. The "Cheeta" had been fitted out for its new role in Stege south of København. This former German fishing vessel was very small, as its tonnage of 107 shows. The first tests were on July 11th. Radio engineer Ib Hansen talked from the deck of the ship between records. Really he was the first true offshore radio voice. Two records on the audio clip I heard were by Danish men, one sounding like the "Londonderry Air" tune. On the ship there was not really a studio but a 'playback room' with two Phillips Major four-track tape recorders combined with a small mixer. At first the vessel was anchored in the northern of the two sections of international waters- that being north of Saltholm island and south of Ven island which was more between København and Landskrona. It was some 10 km/six miles from Danish territory and outside their four mile limit. The anchorage was moved south to a location midway between København and Malmö to improve reception in those two cities.

On land work had been going on since the summer of 1957, the Mercur tribute website tells us. The first studios in the villa on Maltegårdsvej in the wealthy, leafy Gentofte suburb of København were ready. It had been the Argentine Embassy. This would house the 30 programme and administration staff. They used the cellar, hall and library with the studios on the first floor. One photo shows the sound engineer's room full of equipment including reel to reel tapes while another shows the announcer sitting at a small table covered with a cloth (near the window to the engineer's room) with a spare chair, microphone and table lamp in what appears to be the corner of a larger room. The villa's dining room was converted into a concert hall. Mercur had decided to have their own band, as State radio stations did. The popular bandleader Ib Glindemann was brought along to set up a 16 -piece band but had to keep quiet about it. The band recorded a stock of tapes of dance music for later transmission. This makes Radio Mercur different from later pirates which relied 100% on playing records. Glindemann composed the Radio Mercur jingle with the three trumpets and a voiceover by Pedro Biker, "Du lytter til Radio Mercur" (You're listening to Radio Mercur.) Though Jansen and Fogh founded the station Production Manager Benny Knudsen ran it on a day to day basis. He too had been involved in the planning from the early stages.

They had several tribulations before the official start, with several announced dates in July missed. In fact, a newspaper in June leaked the coming of the station with a report of the ship being fitted out in Stege. A start date early in July was then given. On July 15th there was massive coverage in the newspapers of the station's coming, with the 19th given as the opening date. However, the anchor was

lost on July 17th -18th as the ship drifted in a storm. The ship "Cheeta" ran aground on the Swedish coast just off Malmö with the mast damaged and the aerial falling into the sea. The tug "Charles" took it off on the 24th but as there had been so much damage to the hull that it took in water it was towed to a shipyard in Stege for repairs. With work completed the "Cheeta" returned to its position on the 25th ready to start full transmissions. Tests restarted on July 31st with the signal loud and clear in greater København and the south of Sjælland. It was the Danish press which referred to Radio Mercur as "pirate radio" -a popular term used universally since for offshore radio stations.

Some idea of the first day, Saturday August 2nd 1958, can be gained. Opening was at 6 pm. A recording of the first five minutes shows that after the chimes a male (Pedro Biker) announced Radio Mercur followed by the trumpets. Both female and male announcers spoke about the station, one male talking for about a minute. Then the female and male gave brief announcements of the types of music to be heard e.g. melody as they played clips of: orchestral music, big band/swing, a clarinet instrumental, soft orchestral then a softly-singing female vocalist. It seems that these first broadcasts were taped in primitive conditions in the loft of the villa. By 6.35 it was "Guldbarrer Ombord" (Gold Bars Onboard) This seemed to be recorded in front of an audience, featuring a Danish lady singing two melodies then a male on behalf of Radio Mercur 'phoning' another man as part of the show with some laughter from the audience. After applause the orchestral music came up as a man read out the credits for those taking part. The opening announcements at 6.45 for "Musik til Opvasken" (Music for Dishwashing!) included an advertisement for an anti-bacterial product, Flink (Quick), from Barnängen. This Swedish company was noted for its hard soap. Flink was a washing powder for cleaning clothes. The music started with a jaunty male singer singing in Danish, Nat King Cole with "Dance Ballerina Dance" with a swing/big band backing, an orchestral piece, the ad for Flink again, some male and female singers in Danish in a MoR style, an orchestral piece with sounds that seemed like tap or Cossack dancing (which probably got the dishes washed quicker!) then a slower, tuneful saxophone piece. Some of the songs were quite catchy and typical of a 1950s style. In fact it was quite pleasant to hear in 2011. There were no announcements between the records, just a few seconds of dead air. A third ad for Flink completed the show. At 7 pm the Danish announcer said that Max Factor Hollywood presents "Aktuelt Pladevarter" (Current Records Corner). It featured records by American singer Jimmy Rogers -"Honeycomb" (a hit in 1957) and "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine" (a 1958 hit) with the announcer's links being straightforward and quiet in style. A lady and a man did a Max Factor ad. Back to Jimmie Rogers again for three songs without interruption: "Waterboy", "Tell Us More" and "The Long Hot Summer." A credit for the programme title and sponsor completed it at 7.15. The next known show was "Kabaret Mercur" at 8.15. The half hour of non-stop music from 9 pm is what I imagine a night club at the time might have sounded like: very easy listening with predominately female vocalists in Danish and English, a few jazz-type instrumentals though a mixed vocal duo did a Danish song. At 9.30 was "Succes Gennem Tiderne" (Success Through the Ages) sponsored by Galle & Jessen who made Succes chocolate. This had its own advertising jingles sung by females. The programme consisted of vocalists on record from America, France, Germany and Denmark. Some of these sounded quite old from their style. The announcer was restrained and kept referring to 'success.' At 10 pm was the "Ib Glindemanns Orkester". In "Den Halvtolvte Time" between 11 -12 Freddy Ahlbeck played a mix of MoR vocals in English or Danish plus orchestral/big band instrumentals. Problems with the weather and the new FM technology meant reception was almost nil in some areas; it was on one third power and the winds meant that the antenna was pointing more to the sky and sea than land. Next day things worked much better. In time listeners were rushing out to buy the special 'Mercur antenna.' It was not only music programmes on Mercur; by November 1958 they had a 20 minute weekly thriller on Mondays at 10.30 pm read by the Danish film actor Axel Strøbye and Freddy Ahlbeck.

More problems followed. The Danish government got Panama to remove the ship's registration on August 29th. In November the ship sailed under its own power into port as its antenna came down and was off air for two days. Next money problems came. Advertisers seemed wary as there had been no listenership survey. From the start staff waited a long time for their wages. Technician Birger Svan said those with families got paid before the others, which had some sense in it. It was said that there was a near mutiny among the staff. Help came from banker Alex Brask Thomsen in February 1959 who provided a loan from the small bank Finansbanken (set up two months earlier) and wages were paid. The company was on a better financial footing and improved advertising income helped this further. By August 1959 the station was able to pay the loan back. Thomsen had advertised his bank through radio advertisements which was unusual for the time. He later admitted that this was not the way to publicise a bank but it had brought a lot of attention to Finansbanken.

Mercur moved its base on land several times. Programmes were taped ashore. There was though at least one example of a live broadcast from the ship with Hans Vangkilde and his favourite technician Preben Ploug when Preben pushed Hans into the sea and then had to take over as announcer! The first studio was built in a villa at Maltegårdsvej 24 in Gentofte but they moved to Adolfsvej 61. In the "TV" article of 1959 Pedro Biker said the announcers used a smaller studio the most in preference to the larger one downstairs. In 1961 Mercur bought the Nørrebro Teater (theatre) built in 1886 in Ravnsborggade in central København which they called 'Radio Mercur City.' The announcers' studio was two and a half metres square. Programme secretary Olav Bennike said that every Thursday evening a show was performed in the theatre and this was broadcast on Radio Mercur 10 days later. Advertising was sold from a room in Rømersgade 9 in København called 'Mercur Reklame' Later they moved to Sortedams Dosserring 55. The tapes were pictured being put into sacks and taken to the ship by fishermen from the port of Skovshoved north of the capital. One photo seems to show a small motor boat instead as the tender. For a while a plane was used on occasions when they were in a rush to get the tapes to the ship.

The station opened on '93.120 MHz' . This was a good move to 'catch' listeners as it was placed between Statsradiofonien (later known as Danmarks Radio) P1 and P2 on the dial. It changed frequencies several times in its life after complaints by the Danish authorities. Gerry Bishop's book "Offshore Radio" says that after a few weeks Mercur moved to 89.55 after complaints of interference to a Swedish station. Another frequency used was '88.00 MHz' apparently from when the "Cheeta II" was used.

About 100 people worked for Radio Mercur in its history. In Gerry Bishop's "Offshore Radio" book you'll see only 14 on-air staff mentioned; I've found 31 mainly from programme schedules, Ingemar's website and the scandinavianoffshoreradio.com website. Among them were Peter Abrahms, Freddy Ahlbeck, Pedro Biker, Anders Dahlerup, Ib Glindermanns who introduced his orchestra, Niels Heilmann -also Programme Director, Bjarne Hoyer, Vagn Jensen, Jerry Katz, Georg Kringelback, Kjeld Erik Larsen, Poul Reinau (also Advertising Manager), Bjarne Rostvold, John Steenberg who was also in charge of Commercials Production, Preben Uglebjerg, Hans Vangkilde (Programme Director) and Per Wiking who presented under the name 'Peder Syv' (=Peter Seven) because he was also working for the State radio and didn't want to use his real name. Presenting "Copenhagen Today" at first were an American, Phil Urwin, then Neville Powley or Charles Richards. This programme was recorded in Mercur's studios. Preben Ploug remembers them as "Phil -big man =big voice, Charles -little man =big voice!". There were more females than usual on radio for that time, Hannah Bjørnhof, Lea Dalby -a senior announcer, Birgit David, Tove Grundtvig, Gitte Muller, Kate Mundt, Hannah Rahlff, Helle Schmidt, Nete Shreiner, Inge Stauss, and Jytte Weiss. Added to these 31 were two technicians -Ib Hansen and Preben Ploug- who as described above did a brief spell of announcing each

The tapes had to be played on board by 'technicians' or 'console operators.' On board was a crew of three; the technicians on board were paid about 50% more than their counterparts on Danmarks Radio. Among those employed were Ib Hansen and William Pedersen on "Cheeta", Verner Hansen plus later on the "Lucky Star." Erik Lindhardt, Leif Knudsen and Tage Røppke.

We do have to be careful though with assuming that a name on Mercur's programme schedules was an announcer. When we see Nina Simone listed we assume that it was an announcer playing her records. So several people, some of whom have been listed as djs elsewhere, might have presented their own programme or quite probably it was a Mercur announcer playing their records. Clara Pontoppidan was a Danish actress who has been listed recently as a dj. Was it just a programme showcasing her acting? Similarly, Lise Reinau was a singer who performed with her husband, Poul Reinau who was also a musician and Mercur announcer while Lilly Broberg was a singer and actress. Maybe they recorded shows or performances for the station; maybe Mercur just played their records.

Another pitfall is to assume that programme schedules, mentioning announcers, are Radio Mercur's even if they print the station name. I was caught out by this. If the frequency shows 89.55 or 89.6 then these are the schedules of the Swedish language Skånes Radio Mercur (in effect, a different radio station established by the Swede Nils -Erik Svensson who rented airtime from Radio Mercur) which often dropped the 'Skånes' word in the schedules.

So who were these broadcasters? From the information on several of them, some gained from the dansefilm.dk website, it seems they were in their 20s and 30s. Programme Manager Hans Vangkilde was born in 1924 and so was 34 when Mercur started broadcasting. He had been a freelance music consultant for Danmarks Radio. A year older was Nete (short for Agnete) Schreiner who was a soloist and a member of a singing trio. They had made a number of records in Danish and made a number of appearances on Danmarks Radio. Niels Heilmann was the same age as Hans. He was an entertainer, playing the clarinet,

and accompanied Danish singers. He was a producer at Radio Mercur then also presented programmes. Advertising manager Poul Reinau was a musician who was born in 1923 and was married to the singer Lise Reinau. Pedro Biker, a singer in Ib Glindemann's orchestra and the 'voice' of Radio Mercur was born in Portugal in 1925 as Max Petersen de Andrade Corvo Barraso Judice. Born in 1927 Georg Kringelbach was a journalist in his 30s when he went to Mercur. Hannah Bjarnhof (born 1928) was an actress who was letters editor on Mercur. Those in their 20s included Anders Dahlerup (29 when it opened) who had broadcast on Danmarks Radio since the age of 20. Per Wiking who served throughout from 1958 -1962 was a 27 year old actor when he first took to the air. Hannah Rahlff born in 1930 trained at RADA in London and appeared in a play in Denmark with Per Wiking in 1957. Jerry Katz heard of the forthcoming Radio Mercur from a friend and joined them. When he heard they needed more staff he contacted a friend, Preben Ploug (23 in 1958, whom he had met through Civil Defence activities. From 1957 they worked as technicians and studio engineers building up a stock of audio tapes. Preben Uglebjerg at one point had a Sunday morning programme with his then wife Kate Mundt. While she was an actress he was an actor who also took up singing, being credited as Denmark's first Rock n' Roll singer. Kjeld Erik Larsen was a 14 year old who wrote in offering to work unpaid. He was given practical jobs but when it was clear he had a talent for editing and then producing shows he was given his own fortnightly show "Teenage Kvarteret" (Teenage Quarter). He visited venues recording and interviewing musicians/groups. Later it became the weekly "Teenagematiné."

The structure of Radio Mercur to get round Danish laws was copied by subsequent offshore stations for Sweden, Holland and Britain. A holding company, Internationale Mercur Radio Anstalt, was set up in Liechtenstein by a Swiss lawyer, Hr. Flachsmann. This company hired the Panama-registered ship "Cheeta." The production of programmes and advertisements plus advertising sales were run by a company, Mercur Reklame, in Denmark.

The sales company was set up by Vagn Jensen. On the radio-mercur.dk website Hans Dencker wrote in with his memoirs. As a new 'advertising consultant' he found that the others didn't want to share customers with him. So he asked Jensen for the card file of companies who had *not* shown interest on advertising on Mercur while he worked there. For De Danske Spritfabrikker (Danish Distillers) he decided to commission two versions of a song for them to choose even though it was normal to do so *after* agreement to advertise had been made. The unsuspecting production department did one version with Palle Huld (a Dane born in 1912 who was involved in acting and theatre production) and another by Gunnar Lauring, a Danish actor born in 1905 who had over 30 years in the theatre, on film and in radio plays. The Distillers' advertising manager heard the recordings then immediately contacted the Chief Executives who chose the Gunnar Lauring version. Next he went to a new travel firm Spies Rejser which had a limited budget. Dencker was successful in proposing that Spies share promotion with existing advertiser the Freddy Hansen radio chain where the winner in Hansen's promotion got a trip with Spies.

From the start Mercur did not operate throughout the day; breaks around lunchtime and early afternoon were soon hired out to Skånes Radio Mercur. By New Year 1959 hours were 7.30 -9.30 am (Skånes Radio Mercur 11 am -2 pm) and 5 pm until midnight. A "typical schedule" for 1960 from the pia-charlotte website seems to show hours were 6 -9 am and 4 pm -12 midnight. It went: 6 am "Morgenmusik" (Morning Music), 7.05 "Go Morgen", 7.15 "Morgenmusik", 8 "Grøntorvstips", 8.30 "Copenhagen Today", 4 pm Inger Marie, 4.30 Non -stop, 5 "Melodi og Rytme" (Melody or Rhythm), 5.40 "Byens aften og programoversigten" (Town Tonight and Programme Guide), 6 "Pladenyt" (New Records), 6.15 "Lyt og slap af" (Listen and Relax), 6.45 "Information", 7 "Traditionel Jazz", 7.15 "Gamle træffere" (Old Hits), 7.30 "En stemme i mængden" (A Voice in the Crowd), 7.45 "Kendte vokalister" (Famous Vocalists), 8 "Pedro og (and) gramfonen", 9.30 "En håndfuld melodier", 11 "Musik til midnat."

After a few years Mercur wanted to increase broadcasting hours and the range of their broadcasts. They had also had trouble with the small ship in bad weather. So on January 31st 1961 they put the Norwegian ferry "Mosken" which they renamed "Cheeta II" into the "Cheeta"'s anchorage. This larger vessel had a red hull with white superstructure and 'Radio Mercur' painted on the deckhouse. It was more imposing with its two masts. The smaller ship went to a shipyard in Kristiansand, Norway for inspection. Paul Dane said that it was then leased to a Norwegian concern used to carry iron until the aerial was put back up that November. The 'new' ship had two new 10 kW transmitters built by Pedersen, one for 88 MHz and the other for 89.5. So now Mercur and Skånes Radio Mercur (which had taken the unused midday hours since 1959) could run separately all day. Mercur broadcast from 5.54 am -10 am/ 3.30 pm -midnight while Skånes Radio Mercur went out 7 am -8 pm and 11pm -midnight. Mercur was one of the first radio stations to broadcast in stereo. This went out from April 1st 1961 nightly (see below) sponsored

by advertisers Bang & Olufsen who supplied some of the necessary technical equipment. Listeners needed two radios though -one tuned into each frequency!

In 1959 there was even speculation about Mercur setting up a TV station. When asked about this by the "TV" magazine in 1959 programme secretary Jørgen Hansen replied that their executive board in Switzerland was considering it but to do it they would need a larger ship and bigger studios than the former Argentine embassy. Nothing came of this as far as Mercur was concerned.

Radio Mercur had its own logo which was on its publicity plus the superstructure of the "Cheeta II". It featured three concentric circles: the main one was red, then a smaller white one with the smallest being black on the far right. It looked like an eye.

The announcers had titles for their programmes, as did the other Scandinavian pirates, early Radio Veronica, the early English pirates and others since. The idea of naming the show after the dj seems to have started in the mid 1960s with some Top 40 or 50 stations. Here are some of the titles of Mercur announcers' regular shows with their meanings in English. Senior dj Lea Dalby had her Christian name in her show's title "Lea og Lyset" (Lea and Light). Birgit David presented "Fra top til tå -vi snakker nyt tøj" (From Head to Toe -We're Talking New Clothes). "Skønhed stips -vi snakker kosmetik" (Beauty Tips) was introduced by Tove Grundtvig. Hannah Rahlff did "Ved du hvad, Mor" (You Know What, Mam). Turning to male announcers, Pedro Biker introduced "Teenagetimen ved Pedro Biker". Others didn't have their names in the title: Programme Director Niels Heilmann did "Rockprofessoren" (Rock Professor) and "Den nysgerrige mikrofon." Bjarne Hoyer was on "Grammogodter", Georg Kringelbach presented "Natekpressen" (Night Express), Poul Reinau was on "Mandagsklubben" (Monday Club) and Bjarne Rostvold did "Jazz causeri." John Steenberg was heard on "Mosaik" and "Perspektivkassen" (Perspective Box), Peder Syv (Per Wiking) did "Snaktuelt" while Hans Vangkilde was on the popular "Vækkeuret" (Alarm Clocks) with Preben Ploug by January 1959, "Nu kan det være nok" (Now That's Enough) and "Ugens Top-Ti" (Weekly Top 10).

A later schedule from Radio Mercur on 88.0 MHz gives a weekday line up: 6 am "Musik for de morgenfriske", 7 Tirsdags spiloppen, 9 "Vi spiller -De ta'r fat" (We'll play, you take hold), 10 "Lyt - i Helsingør", 2 pm "Eftermiddagsrytmer" (Afternoon rhythms), 4 "Jazz-land", 4.45 "Byens aften", 5.10 "Gaffelmusik" (Fork Music), 6 pm "Lyt-og slap af", 7 "For he's a jolly good fellow, 7.15 "Ugens radioquiz", 7.30 "Den fantastiske Al Hirt", 7.45 "Nina Simone spiller og synger", 8 "Gramm." 9-9.30 "En håndfuld melodier", 11 "English by music", 11.30 "Stars on Wings." In addition there were regional programmes for Jylland and Fyn on Tuesdays and Fridays. Tuesdays had 9 am "Lyt -i (listen in) Silkeborg, 10 "Lyt -i dense", 11 "Lyt i Vejle". Fridays had an hour from 9 am each of "Lyt -i Århus/Odense/Svendborg."

There were specialist shows on the station. As early as December 1958 you could hear the story and songs from "My Fair Lady" -all in Danish! Later "Jazz-lands" were on during the week, at least on Tuesdays at 4 -4.45 pm. "Gaffelmusik" on Tuesdays and Fridays at least 5.10 -6 pm featured folk music which was in vogue around that time in the UK, USA and elsewhere. Each week there was a 15 minute quiz at 7.15 pm on Tuesdays.

In September 1961 Radio Mercur had acquired a near neighbour as DCR, set up by disillusioned Mercur staff, started broadcasting from the "Lucky Star." They wanted to make high quality programmes with a stricter policy on the commercial content. Mercur's response was to increase broadcasting hours to 6 -11 am and 2 pm until midnight.

Almost nationwide coverage was obtained when the "Cheeta" was anchored in the Elefantgrunden in the Storebælt on November 25th 1961 covering Fyn and most of Jylland to complement the "Cheeta II" in the Øresund. On "Cheeta" two directional aerials beamed programmes to Århus in east Jylland and Odense in northern Fyn. Mercur now covered the east and centre of the country reaching some of the western part in Jylland. There had even been plans for a third ship to give proper nationwide coverage. It was realised after a week that the smaller vessel was unsuitable for the seas. Its aerial broke in a storm there on December 14th and so the two ships swapped anchorages. With the less powerful "Cheeta" near Sweden in her old Øresund anchorage it was back to Mercur and Skånes Radio Mercur sharing airtime. "Cheeta II" now in the Storebælt broadcast the same programmes as its smaller sister except for two and a half hours daily local programmes for Jylland and Fyn. Two copies were made of each programme with one taken out to "Cheeta" and the other transported by car to west Sjælland then taken out on a tender to "Cheeta II."

When DCR failed with low listener and advertiser response merger talks began in December. The two people blamed for the alleged decline in Mercur's standards, the main backer Ib Fogh and founder Peer Jansen, were forced out in January by those who had broken away to set up DCR. Heading the new

combined station were Benny Knudsen, Børge Agerskov and the banker Alex Brask Thomsen. For all their dissatisfaction you might have expected changes in the station but it seems that Radio Mercur continued with the same style and programme structure as it had had since opening in 1958. Programme secretary Olav Bennike said that an official survey showed that Radio Mercur had 57% of all the listeners in the land. With such figures, outlawing the station would be undemocratic. When the "Cheeta" ran aground during a gale in the Øresund on February 12th 1962 Mercur replaced it by the ex-DCR ship "Lucky Star". "Cheeta" had sent out a distress call and was towed in by a tug to the capital where it was impounded. Radio Mercur then sold it to Britt Wadner who had run the Skånes Radio Mercur side of the operation for Sweden. "Lucky Star" had an orange-red hull and a red wheelhouse.

Using the recording on the various websites I found 110 different advertisers. Several of these also had different versions of their ads, presumably renewed at different periods. The adverts on Radio Mercur were quite short. A lot were within 30 seconds, though the shortest was for Esso at just six seconds. Both Gajol Halspastiller (throat pastilles) and Det Gyldne Mel (The Golden Flour) were nine seconds each. Some 70% of ads fell into roughly equally into the 11 -20, 21 -30 and 31 -40 seconds timings. A number were for about 15 or 20 seconds. While there were some for 40 to 50 seconds these were less frequent. A few lasted more than a minute, one of the longest being Dansk Ejendoms Service at 1 minute 20 seconds. One feature is that most had a male and a female, sometimes in a dialogue but often saying different parts of the ad. In fact 57% of ads had this combination with 26% voiced by one male, 8% each for a female voicing it on her own or two men doing the ad; there was also an ad with two female voices. Sometimes there would be a song sung by male(s) and female(s) -18% were made this way. A musical background or introduction was found in 12% of ads, these usually being big band or other instrumental/orchestral though there were several guitar backings, a clarinet, a piano and bells. There were a handful of sound effects such as a car horn, a cat, applause, an echo and the sound of the wind.

Most advertisers seemed to be Danish. The only multinational companies I found were Coca Cola, Esso, Ford, Gulf, Max Factor and Shell. In 1959 Programme Director Niels Heilmann told "TV" the costs of advertising. Spot adverts were 200 Krone for 15 seconds (I have seen 270 Krone mentioned -presumably this was in later years) and 500 Krone for 30 seconds. He said that these sounded expensive but were cheaper than newspaper advertising. A 15 minute sponsored show cost 1,000 Krone, double for 30 minutes but there was a 25% discount when TV programmes were on -presumably in the evening. The goods advertised covered a wide range. For the household there were Edet kitchen rolls, Flink detergent, Bolighuset household goods possibly selling furniture, Bosch Køleskabe (refrigerators), Valo washing powder and Det Minut Kartoffelmos (The Minute Mashed Potatoes). Useful items were Contex Regnemaskiner (calculators), Gajol throat pastilles and Schaeffer fountain pens. Services advertised were Express Renseriet (dry cleaning), Finansbanken, Danehof Sølvsmiede (silversmiths), Deres guldsmed (goldsmiths) and Ford dealers such as the one in Århus. Handy to have were service engineers at Bjørns Radio. For a snack there was Succes Chokolade from Galle & Jessen who were Denmark's oldest chocolate factory, Toms Chokolade -a Danish chocolate manufacturer or Oxford Kiks biscuits. Shops included Salling in Århus who had a department store but opened a new type of shop -a supermarket -in 1960 and Maibom Sko in the same town who sold shoes. Just to show that people were slowly getting more affluent were adverts for travel firms like Aerolloyd with their three adverts, a general one then one each for Majorca and Malaga. Arena Rejser also mentioned Majorca in their ad. Newly-formed Danish airline Nordair advertised on Mercur; their flights were mainly to the Mediterranean, especially Majorca

What about the station style? Throughout its time the station continued playing general easy-listening music with some other types featured. Often between programmes or between adverts there could be eight notes on the xylophone. As well as playing records the station invited young Danish bands/pop groups to their studios to make recordings which would later be broadcast. The number of programmes featuring a particular artiste seems to have increased by 1961. Throughout Mercur's life the announcers seemed to keep the same quiet style. This was not the time of the chatty dj; in fact, Radio Luxembourg's English djs of the time probably seemed more lively and talkative! Keeping to the same style over four years is not too common with offshore stations; most change format like the easy-listening Caroline and Atlanta to become the Top 50 -orientated Caroline North and South. A feature I noticed is the non-stop music shows, one being on the opening day. In the 42 minutes taped from "Onsdagspiloppen" on January 17th 1962 the only announcements were several recorded adverts. Music was mainly instrumental -with seven of various styles and tempos plus four vocal records. A couple of hours later the 16 minutes taped from 9.30 of "Vi spiller De ta'r fat" had a jazz piece starting a non-stop run of five instrumentals and two vocals, punctuated by a recorded advert. Whereas we think non -stop music is a recent phenomenon to

save money on commercial stations it was not uncommon years ago. I remember continental 'official' stations playing 'non-stop' in the 1960s/70s and we had the same in "Music While You Work" 50 years ago. In his regular show "Mosaik" on April 9th 1961 John Steenberg played instrumental music for half an hour including orchestral and film music. As was common at the station an announcer of the opposite sex gave the opening and closing announcements about the programme and its presenter. One Christmas Eve Hans Vangkilde played relaxed music but had quite a lot of talk with another male. On December 31st 1961 Radio Mercur broadcast an hour long talent show recorded before an audience at Radio Mercur City. The male and female announcer announced a range of performers: vocals often of several songs, a comic turn and a young person giving a monologue of over five minutes. Here the station was providing more of a variety show. Both announcers gave a good introduction to each performer but still in the station style; certainly not the excitable manner used in American, and now, British TV shows. At the end of the day a taped closedown 'Good night, good morning' (in Danish) announcement said by a male announcer was played.

Early photos show small fishing boats doing the tendering from Skokshoved. The 1959 "TV" article referred to a high-speed boat as the tender. Each day the tapes left the studios at 4 pm and would take two hours to reach the ship. However, on the day of their visit they didn't leave harbour until about 5 pm. The boat's skipper managed to get them to "Cheeta" by 5.55; the first tape was due to be played five minutes later! Jørgen Hansen who accompanied the tapes handed them over to the crew on board. Once in stormy seas it took three hours for this boat to reach the ship. The Hijmans article in April 1962 seems to show a change in the way tapes were sent out. Now Mercur's own light plane took off daily at 2.10 pm from the small Skovlunde airport. This was 12 miles from the capital on the Øresund side. First it flew to the Øresund where the pilot dropped the yellow drum containing programme tapes. The practice was for the ship's crew to throw out a large ring of rope into the water each afternoon. A cable attached to the drum would engage with the rope and the crew would haul the whole lot in. Only once in three and a half years had this method failed. We think that Radio Nord off Sweden pioneered this novel drop by air but it seems that Mercur was the first. The light plane continued to the other ship in the Storebælt where it dropped the red drum containing tapes to be collected by the same method.

The same article indicated the station planned to continue despite forthcoming legislation. Just as the English pirates said five years later they would operate from offices in other countries Olav Bennike told the reporter they would move across the border into Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany. Adverts would be placed by Danish companies with foreign advertising agencies. Just as with Radios London and 270 these plans came to nought.

The Minister of Transport, Kai Lindberg, in Denmark's Social Democratic government introduced an anti-offshore radio law into the Danish Parliament. It was passed in June 1962 to become effective on August 1st. Mercur stopped transmissions from "Cheeta II" on July 10th leaving just "Lucky Star" on 88 MHz to serve København and the rest of Sjælland. "Cheetah II", according to Paul Dane, went to a German port where there were plans to send it out to broadcast off the coast of Greece but this project failed and the vessel was sold three years later to Britt Wadner of Sweden's Radio Syd. "Lucky Star" continued until 11.55 pm on July 31st. On the 29th there was a large auction of Mercur's record library. The most played and, therefore, the most scratched records, fetched the highest prices! The final day was full of memories from listeners and Radio Mercur staff. This was the line-up on that day: 9 am "Vi spiller, de ta'r fat", 12 noon "Frokost (Lunch) non-stop", 2 pm "Eftermiddagsrytmer" (Afternoon Rhythms), 4 pm "Jazz-land", 4.45 "Byens aften", 5.10 "Gaffelmusik", 6 pm "Lyt og slap af" (Listen and Relax), 7 "Sommerens stjerneshow" (This Summer's Star Show), 7.30 "Nu kan det være nok" (Now it May be Enough) -with two male announcers who ended the programme hoping for the introduction of commercial radio in Denmark, 8 pm "Pedro, Per og Anders sier farvel" (say goodbye), 9 "En håndful melodier" (A Handful of Tunes) -non-stop music and adverts, 10.13 "Journalist Henni Knauers tak", 10.15 "Stjerne (Star of) Grand Prix", 10.45 "Verden rundt med (Around the world with) Aerolloyd" -the announcer talking of foreign flights/holidays with them, 11.15 "Kate og Preben, Aftenens fromhed." 11.45 "Stå Aldrig Til Søs"(Never go to Sea) -Vagn Jensen og Per Wiking." The final record played a song with the same title as the programme; it was an ironic choice and a song from the Danish opera "Pinafore." After the last piece of music the trumpet fanfare was played -but without the Radio Mercur voiceover. The broadcast finished at five minutes to midnight so no-one could accuse Radio Mercur of any offence. Technician Erik Lindhardt switched off the transmitter.

The "Lucky Star" remained silent at her anchorage until August 13th when the Radio Mercur trumpet jingle/ID was heard again with old tapes played. Maybe there were inspired by Radio Syd a short distance

away continuing. Those previously involved denied any responsibility. One report came that the ship was owned by a West German while another said it was a gentleman in Guatemala. As the ship flew a Lebanese flag it could not be boarded -until someone spotted that it was a fake. The raid on the 16th from Customs boats involved 21 people to take on the crew of four which seems excessive. However, the four -the captain, an engineer, radio engineer, cook - had been reported earlier as walking on deck carrying wooden replicas of rifles and machine guns painted black to look like real weapons. The raid took place at 4 am on a misty morning with customs officers, 21 uniformed officers and some in plain clothes. They had guns, batons and handcuffs. A small naval vessel stood off but took no part. On the radio-mercur.dk website is a link to the recollections of Leif Myrhøj, a policeman. All the police were armed with guns though a few had machine guns he thinks. Arresting a foreign vessel off Denmark had not been done in living memory and so all precautions had to be taken. His job was to supervise two men from Danmarks Radio who found the transmitter room, removed the crystal and silenced Mercur forever. The arrest of the ship's crew was peaceful with no resistance though the captain protested verbally. (A report in the "Glasgow Herald" said that the crew refused to give the names of the vessel's owners.) Soon the rest of the crew sat in the galley and made coffee for the raiders. The tug arrived soon after, the ships tied together, the anchor was lifted and the ship towed into Danish waters and into Tuborg Havn. On the way several smaller boats put their flags at half mast in sympathy. The "Lucky Star" reached Tuborg at 9 am where it was chained up away from public access and where reporters who had followed events in a boat could not reach. At Tuborg Havn was a brewery whose workers blocked the police vehicles in for a while in sympathy with the offshore station. The captain and others were taken away for police questioning. Transmitting equipment was cut up then the ship left chained up until January 1963 while the ownership structure was investigated. Legal proceedings lasted until 1963 and resulted in fines. Alex Brask Thomsen was also fined 20, 000 Danish Krone but this was overturned on appeal when it could not be proved that he had any responsibility for the "illegal broadcasts." In fact, Paul Dane said that it was never really discovered who was behind the resumption of broadcasts. However, over 40 years later it was found out that it had been some of the pioneering 'pirates' from Mercur like Benny Knudsen and Børge Agerskov as they revealed to Henrik Nørgaard in his book "Pirater i æteren" in 2003.

Radio Mercur had lasted four years, longer than stations like Radio London or Radio City -not bad for the first proper offshore venture. As with most stations which followed it until Radio London in December 1964 it was primarily MoR. The nearest UK equivalent was Radio 390 in terms of sound and relaxed, quiet style. It showed that it was technically and organisationally possible to run an offshore radio station. It was also the first to have more than one ship, beating Caroline North and South by several years. Not many others went through three ships in their time. It also led the State radio, Danmarks Radio, to set up a new channel, P3 in 1963 just as Sweden had earlier set up Melodiradio while the Netherlands would create Hilversum 3 and Britain set up Radio 1 in the years to come -all because the offshore stations had provided what many listeners really wanted to hear -popular music *throughout* the day

What happened to the staff after Mercur closed? A number went to Danmarks Radio, just as a number from the British offshore stations joined the BBC. P3 started on January 1st 1963 aimed at a younger audience with similar programmes to Mercur but without adverts. Paul Dane regarded this all as the "biggest tribute" to Radio Mercur. Those going to DR P3 included Hans Vangkilde, Pedro Biker and Per Wiking. From 1967 Pedro moved to TV news. Per's work at DR was first a freelance radio play director and translator before moving to TV entertainment from where he retired in 2000. Anders Dahlerup returned to his former employer at first on the radio then TV where he often translated and dubbed foreign films into Danish. Nette Schreiner was a DR programme secretary and radio announcer until 1993. Four years later she moved to Norway. Kjeld Erik Larsen worked for P3 in 1963 -64 with a show called "Etiquette." After presenting 53 shows for Radio Mercur Hannah Rahlff became a programme director for DR radio and TV from 1963 to 1969. She also moved to Norway to teach ballet and drama and also gives lectures on satisfaction at work and in private life. Niels Heilemann became a video producer. Georg Kringelback had a few years with P3 then onto TV and back to newspaper journalism. Hannah Bjarnhof appeared on Danish radio and continued acting. Poul Reinou continued in advertising then started a record import company and ran his own record and film shop in København for 25 years. Preben Ploug moved into theatrical production. John Steenberg even ran a Radio Mercur community station in the Frederiksberg part of København from 1987. He also ran community stations like Classic Radio until 1994. He is now on community station Radio Kattegat in the late mornings. He is also a trained hypnotherapist and is still working in his 70s. The technician who switched off the transmitters before the new law came into force, Erik Lindhardt, moved to Australia where he became an aircraft engineer.

As well as John Steenberg's Radio Mercur there were two more operations named after the station. The journalist Erik Haaest signed an agreement with Peer Jansen to use the Mercur name and theme tune on stations in Mallorca (1969 -70) and the Costa del Sol (1982 -84) . More recently, in 1998 a Danish local station in Kolding called itself Radio Mercur Gold.

Several of the Mercur staff died young. Preben Uglebjerg was just 37 when he died in 1968, the same year founder Peer Jansen died aged 38, Pedro Biker was 48 when he died in 1973; Georg Kringelback died aged 51 in 1979 with Anders Dahlerup being 52 when he passed away in 1981. Several died in recent years: Hannah Bjarnhof in 2002 (73), Poul Reinau in 2003 (81), Kate Mundt (74), Børge Agerskov in 2005 and Per Wiking in 2007 (75). The backer Alex Brask Thomsen went on to make his bank one of the major ones over 22 years before selling it. He moved to Montreux and Monaco. He lived a spartan lifestyle in his large house surrounded by twentieth century Danish art. When he died aged 85 in 2005 his fortune was said to be £1 billion.

Thomsen disposed of the most of equipment after Mercur's second forced closure. Some of the unsold radio equipment he gave to his teenage son Anker who had fun setting up a radio transmitter at his boarding school and recording pop or rock music on the tape recorders from Radio Mercur. Some of the former Mercur sound equipment was exhibited at Brandt's museum in Odense in 2003 at an exhibition on the Danish offshore stations which opened on the same day as the "Pirater i æteren" was published. These included reel -to -reel tape recorders.

What happened to the buildings used by Mercur? The original villa in Maltegårdsvej 24 is shown on an internet search as used by a sound processing company but clicking on their website shows they are (now) elsewhere. However, the address is also that of the Danish Society of Composers, Authors and Editors. The Nørrebro Teater continues in its role, concentrating on stand -up acts and musicals. Of the three buildings used at different times by the sales side, Rømersgade 9 houses an expensive clothes shop while Sortedams Dossering 55 is home to a wi-fi and phone company.

In future articles I'll look at DCR then Skånes Radio Mercur/Radio Syd.