

# Teaching Tradition

*by Mel Meer*

By the standards of most of us, Tim Rued is an old-timer in the nyckelharpa world. Indeed, in the book *Nyckelharpsfolket* published twenty years ago, there's an illustration of a record album cover featuring Tim's playing. So, as the saying goes, when Tim speaks, I listen. His article in *Nyckel Notes* #18 may be the first ever in the Scandi world with a mildly critical air about it. In it Tim ruminates about a lack of traditional tunes in the repertoire of American nyckelharpa players, and a lack of traditional styling in their playing.

As for knowing traditional tunes, well it makes sense that you would have to in order to apply traditional style. Also, players should know more traditional tunes so they can play with each other when they meet. I agree then with Tim that perhaps we need a more prescriptive American all-spel list rather than a descriptive one. But I came here to talk about style, or rather the teaching of it.

I think I know something about teaching and learning, professionally and through dancing. Though a relative newcomer to Swedish music making, I've been a Polska dancer and teacher of it for a long time. I've participated in some nyckelharpa workshops and have had the opportunity to audit a lot of fiddle classes. I know that there is a big difference between effective teaching in a traditional (or semi-traditional as it is with Polska dancing) environment, and back here in the States. Let me illustrate first with dance teaching, though I have seen the analogy in music teaching.

In Sweden those who want to dance Polska have a great deal of leisurely opportunity and many good models to

follow. I have been to classes there intended for locals and have often described the teaching methodology as, "See what I do? Now you do that." Let me tell you, if the teachers' dancing is sufficiently inspirational, and you can do it over and over for months and years it works. Isn't that how most of learned the popular dancing we know, that is, just by watching others?

Many Swedish dance teachers have come here and done the same thing, but without the same success. They dance beautifully. But often the only verbal description they offer is, "one two three, one two three...." Then they say, "Now you try it." In the lexicon of American recreational folk dancing, what they do not do is to break it down for us. I have seen good but less experienced dancers walk away impressed with the teachers' dancing, but disappointed with their own learning.

A few teachers have learned to break it down, that is, teach in a more descriptive and analytic manner, most notably Tommy and Ewa Englund. For that reason, and others, they have been extremely successful here. I believe that for effective learning in a relatively short allotted time of our workshops, that is what is required.

What has this got to do with nyckelharpa playing, you ask? Almost all music classes that I have seen and participated in here taught by Swedish masters have the strong emphasis on multiple tune learning, often by ear. Rarely has music been distributed in advance so that students can prepare. Then student atten-

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# ANA Announcements

## American wins Eric Sahlström Scholarship

Congratulations to ANA member Ben (Lagerberg) Teitelbaum of Castle Rock, CO, on winning the 2000 Eric Sahlström Scholarship! Ben is only the second American to win the scholarship, which is given annually to three young people between the ages of 12 and 18. The scholarship pays the tuition and fees for the annual week-long course at Ekebyholm, founded by Eric and at which he taught. This course is the most famous course in Sweden for nyckelharpa players, though it also accepts all but beginning fiddlers. Students receive one private lesson and one group lesson per day, with plenty of time off to prepare for the next lesson



and for jamming (which often goes on late into the night). We wish Ben well, and hope he has so much fun that he manages to avoid sleeping very much during the week!

*Ben Teitelbaum*

## ANA subsidies for local workshops

In an effort to help nyckelharpa players across North America take advantage of visiting Swedes, the ANA announces a standard policy of subsidies for workshops. We've already subsidized a few over the years, but we felt it was time to formalize and announce the program. To qualify, the workshop must meet the following criteria:

1. The teacher must be a visiting Swede, not a local.
2. The workshop must be open to the public, not solely for a private group or club.
3. The workshop should be the standard length, about 2½ to 3 hours.
4. The subject of the workshop must be primarily nyckelharpa, not any other instrument.

If the above conditions are met, the ANA will subsidize the workshop to bring the cost per person down to \$20, with a maximum contribution from the ANA of \$100. That means that if you have five nyckelharpa players in your area and a visiting Swede wants \$200 for the workshop, each of the locals will only have to pay \$20, not \$40, for the three-hour group session.

To apply for the subsidy, contact ANA President Bart Brashers at 919-969-9405 or [bart.brashers@nyckelharpa.org](mailto:bart.brashers@nyckelharpa.org).

## SPELA BÄTTRE!

*The Only Way to Improve Your Playing*

# The Infinity Bowing

*by Matt Fichtenbaum*

The "Nordic Nights" tour (Väsen, JPP, and Annbjørg Lien) came to Boston at the end of April, and we took advantage of Olov Johansson's presence. When I had first approached Olov about a workshop, I'd proposed "Sounding more Swedish" as one possible topic; after we'd warmed up with a couple of tunes, that's where we began.

## Slurring between strings

Olov fingered a D on the C string, left the A string

open, and played alternating As and Ds as slurred pairs. A-then-D on a down-bow, followed by A-then-D on an up-bow, and repeat. If you read music, it's in Example 1. Yes, each bow stroke starts on the A string and ends on the C string. The objectives are:

- Each note played with good tone.
- Smooth transitions between notes, no "square edges" on the sounds.

- Equal duration of the two notes on a slur.
- A bit of bow pressure at the start of each note, and then a light touch to sustain the note.

As you play, the frog of your bow follows a figure-eight pattern. It's in the "horizontal" plane, so it resembles  $\infty$ , the mathematical symbol for infinity, and the Swedes sometimes call it *evighetsstråken*, "the infinity bow."

We took turns doing this exercise - Olov played two measures, then I, then Brian, and we'd repeat. After a while, our playing began to sound less unlike Olov's, so there was progress.

### Rhythmic variations

"Now I want you to emphasize the notes that are on the beat," Olov said. In other words, emphasize the A's (Example 2). And so we did, again taking turns with the master and trying to make our playing sound like his. Even with the emphasized notes, the overall effect should be smooth and controlled.

Then we tried emphasizing:

- Only the notes on the first beat of each measure (Example 3).
- Those in the first and third beats of each measure — this is *polska*, after all (Example 4).
- The offbeats — the notes that fall between the beats (Example 5).

### Onward to the G string

The same figure on the C and G strings, as in Example 6, presents its own challenges. The G string needs more bow force than the C string, and you must apply the appropriate force to each string while still keeping the transitions smooth.

Once you get comfortable with this bowing, you find

lots of tunes in which it fits. "Hellstedts gamla brudmarsch," for example, and "Flodens död." You can find both on Väsen's third CD, "Essence," available from Amazon.com and CDnow.com, among others.

And you can use the figure-eight bowing on a single string, too, to keep a pulse going during single longer notes. This is a good way to make a tune "swing" a little. It is a common bowing in Bingsjö style.

### Working the bow

Olov next coached us on tone. As we've noted before, there's a definite bow pressure at the beginning of each note, to start the string moving, and sustained light pressure for that singing tone typical of Swedish playing. It is the fingers that shape the bow pressure.

There's an exercise that goes with this. Sit down, with your harpa in a comfortable playing position. Apply the bow to the A string as if you're about to play. Now reach your left hand over the top of the harpa and grab your right wrist (yes, really!). Holding your wrist so that it can't move, use your right hand and fingers to make the bow play the open string. Repeat this with the C string. The finger flexibility it takes to do this gives you the bow pressure control you need.

### And a tune...

Olov ended our workshop by teaching us a *Byss-Kalle slängpolska*. It's mildly unusual in structure: there are four measures in the A part, six in the B. Note that the two A parts and the two B parts are written out fully, so the tune should be played as shown, without repeats. Use the figure-eight bowing to give a "pulse" to the quarter-notes in measure #5. Play this even three-beat rhythm smoothly, possibly with gentle emphasis on the first beat of each measure, and give some thought to the fingerings to make the phrases run smoothly.

Example 1: The basic bowing



Example 2: Emphasize the notes on the beat



Example 3: Emphasize the first beat



Example 4: Emphasize beats 1 & 3



Example 5: Emphasize the offbeats



Example 6: On the G and C strings



## Polska efter Byss-Kalle

From Olov Johansson, April 2000

transcr. Matt Fichtenbaum 5/00

### NYCKELHARPA CARE

# Experimenting with Strings

by Rob Krapfl

When Puma was here last fall, I noticed that he had an unusual string he was using for his C(4). I talked to him, and it turned out to be a Helicore (by D'Addario) cello string. He said that he had gotten the whole set of these strings, but that he wasn't able to tune all of his tangents with the new strings, which was a shame because they were the best strings he had ever tried. He let me play his instrument and I was impressed with how nicely that string played.

Since then I have done a lot of experimenting with Helicore strings. I wanted to share the results because I love the sound of these strings. Loose Helicores are much more wiggly, far less rigid, than the Prim strings I am familiar with. They have a very clean and pleasant sound which everyone I ask seems to prefer. I have also noticed that they tune more easily and seem to excite other frequencies less than the Prim. On my instrument, a strongly bowed C(4)

from Prim in particular would cause all of the sympathetic strings to start resonating. The Helicore only starts the C strings resonating.

The set that I decided sounds and plays best consists of medium Helicore strings for the C(4), G(3), and C(2), along with a soft Prim A(1) string. The A(1) string from Helicore did not work at all on my instrument (made by Sören Åhker). When it was brought to pitch, it completely damped the entire instrument so that none of the strings sounded good -- the tension was too great. I chose the soft Prim A(1) because it best matched the feel and tone when crossing from the A to C strings. I have not tried any solid A(1) strings with these, as I have always preferred wound strings.

The ability to tune the tangents with these strings is another issue which may or may not be a problem. After installing these strings, I currently have one tangent which

can only be tuned to within 10 cents of correct, and there are a couple of others which can only be tuned to within 1 or 2 cents. These are on the G(3) string, and I suspect that others will find some difficulty tuning these tangents as well. Still, I feel these strings are worth it and I have begun carving a new tangent for the note that is 10 cents off. The Helicores have a very soft feel to them -- they may have too soft a feel for some people. I believe they are actually much easier to play and will play louder than the Prims, but they do take some getting used to. One experiment that has not been done yet is to use a set of heavy Helicores with a medium Prim A(1). I did try a heavy G(3), wondering if it made any difference in the position of the tangents. It did not make any difference in tuning, but it did make the string crossings feel strange.

I spoke with a local physicist who happens to build and play Kanteles. He has been studying strings for that instrument and he has been looking at the properties of different materials and how they affect the sound. I told him about my new strings, and asked why a string tuned to a particular frequency and having a fixed length would need to have the tangents at different points. He explained that in theory the tangent positions would be fixed, and it shouldn't matter changing from one string to another. But he also said that near the ends of the string, where it meets the nut and the bridge, it actually behaves more like a rod than a string. How close this transition point is to the nut/bridge will affect the remaining (center) length of string. I found this particularly interesting in relation to the G(3) string because many nyckelharpor, including mine, have a little notch cut out of the nut to slightly lengthen that string. Since the Helicores are substantially more flexible than the Prim or Jörpeland strings, his explanation would predict that the Helicore would need to be slightly shorter. It makes me think...

I also experimented with viola strings. D'Addario

makes a set of Helicore strings for a 400 mm vibration length, and at the correct pitches for a nyckelharpa! These strings worked well, but the character of the nyckelharpa was lost. It sounded much more like a viola, sounded too refined. I think the nyckelharpa needs some edge to its sound. They were also very thin and looked a little out of place, since we are used to the fat strings and sound out of the nyckelharpa.

John Farrow has tried Helicore strings and really likes them. He said that the Helicore A(1) works on his instrument (made by Harry Hedbom) although it must be played lightly. Bart Brashers has also tried the Helicores-plus-Prim-A(1) set. He really likes the way the C(4) and G(3) sound and feel, but found the C(2) a tad weak for his instrument (made by Åke Ahlstrand) and personal style. He really couldn't stand the soft Prim A(1), and decided that it was worth having a bit of mismatch in tone to get the character from the A(1) string he wants, and went with a medium Prim A(1) string. He has ordered a Helicore heavy gauge C(2), but as of this writing it hasn't arrived yet. He had no problems intonating his harpa, something he does each time he changes strings, but the notch for his G(3) string is only about 1 mm. It should be kept in mind that every instrument is different, and what works well on one instrument may not work well on another. The Helicores cost a bit more than Prims, about \$14, \$29 and \$35 for the C(2), G(3) and C(4) respectively, as opposed to about \$12, \$14 and \$16 for the Prims. That makes it a \$36 experiment to try the Helicores, which may not be so bad, in the scheme of things.

Helicore strings by D'Addario are available from standard music stores that serve classical instruments, as well as on-line at JustStrings.com, swstrings.com, and others. If you try these strings, or any others, please share your experience with the rest of us so we can all gain from individual successes and don't have to repeat individual failures!

## Teaching Tradition

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tion during the workshop could be devoted entirely to the finer points of style. Rarer still have the fine points of traditional styling been broken down verbally and analytically.

What I have observed is the expectation that by hearing the teacher play and taping that playing for later review, students will be able to replicate the traditional styling. "Hear what I do? Now you do that." In Sweden where time and exposure to great players are plentiful, this works just fine. But I understand Tim's entreaty to us to say that it's not working here. I agree. For after all, it's not that we play a tune, but how we play the tune that's important.

So this is a plea for ANA to seek out teachers who have

the ability and desire to approach our workshops with a view to teaching traditional style, not just demonstrating it. They should read and use written music; after all almost all of us do! The music should be distributed well in advance. That way we can prepare, all come up to some minimum level, and take more effective note of what's being taught. Yes, let them spend an hour or more to teach us to play even Båtsman Däck, or other Uppland allspel tunes, in a traditional manner. It may be tedious, certainly not as much fun as learning another great new tune. But it could be better in the long haul.

It may be that most of us do not yet require Sweden's most virtuosic players; we should want their finest teachers who will make the very difficult effort to meet our special needs.

# A Wetsuit Nyckelharpa Harness-vest

by Marilee Cowan

To a nyckelharpa player, back problems can be a frustrating distraction when you have tunes dancing in mind begging to be played. I have been learning to play the nyckelharpa for about 7 years, and it is almost ridiculous how many ways I have tried to carry the weight of 5 pounds of wood and metal.

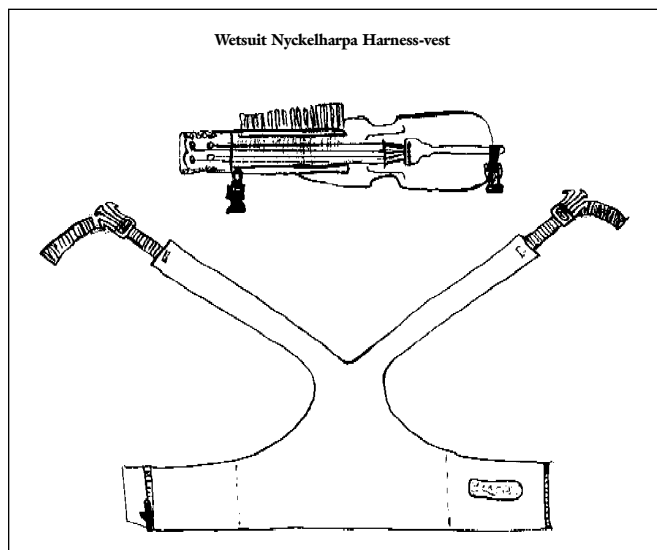
I bought a Wolf Guitar stand from Leif Alpsjö, but it was a total bust for me. I could never get it to fit or balance comfortably; reaching for the higher keys on the A string was awkward, and it didn't help when I needed to stand to play for a dance. My husband fashioned a scary-looking prop from a metal pole; he even made it adjustable for sitting or standing. But I tend to move around when I play, so that attempt was given up very quickly.

I have tried wider straps, a seat-belt fleece cushion, and a rifle-carrying strap used by hunters with quick-release clips at the ends and a padded leather piece in the middle. I have good memories of this one because of the curious and shocked looks from two huge burly hunter-type guys in the hunting department at the "Swains Has Everything" store in Port Angeles, Washington, 98362, where I bought it. Also, I imagined that I was doing my part to save a few deer. The back of the padded part was suede, which did not slip on clothing. So for a while I was wearing the strap not on my neck, but a few inches lower than the neck and across and around the upper left arm. It was easier on my neck, but both Bart Brashers at FolkLife 1999 in Seattle and Lotta Franzén at Buffalo Gap Scandinavian Week '99 were concerned about the way it restricted my left arm movement.

So, following Lotta's enthusiasm for her electric guitar "stretchy strap" that she had just purchased in Washington DC, I sent for one when I got home. It certainly was an improvement in comfort, but not enough of an improvement for me. However, I did like the way the neoprene gave it flexibility, and the width--2½ inches--distributed the weight a little better. (I paid \$19.95 plus shipping to Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center, 11151 Viers Mill Rd, Wheaton MD 20902. Phone: 301-946-8808. See NN Number 17 November 1999 for the article "Stretchy Strap Helps Nyckelharapist's Neck" by Matt Fichtenbaum and Bart Brashers.)

That article mentioned tall people like Johan Hedin in Sweden with back problems who were using an "X" strap, and I determined to try to make one that was "stretchy". My husband is a wind surfer, so I knew that I could buy some neoprene fabric at the local diving shop.

But they only sold material that was 1/8" thick, and I was pretty sure that would be too stretchy. The person helping me mentioned that there was a used wetsuit that



someone had put a \$50 price tag on, but she knew that he would take \$25. Apparently wetsuits wear out most at the knees and elbows, so the middle part, the part we want, is usually in good condition. I thought that I could cut some straps from the long sleeves, and have plenty left over for friends who might want to try the "X".

I had only gotten as far as cutting off the sleeves when I went to Jonny Soling and Kalle Almlöf's fiddle workshop in Seattle, March 2000. I was talking about the project with Janet Gabites and Lynn Erickson from British Columbia, and Janet suggested that I leave the body of the wetsuit intact and simply cut away the part of the X that was not needed. I drove home to Portland ready to approach the wetsuit again, but I have to admit, I was daunted a bit by the complications of getting into it "over and under", as described in the article.

As I started to make marks on the wetsuit with a sliver of soap, it occurred to me that I could probably take the long zipper out, cut away the bottom part of the suit at the waist, and re-attach the zipper, and have a kind of back and rib brace to make the harness even more supportive. This worked very well, since the suit was a pretty close fit. Mine is about 5" high in front, but this would be a little different depending on your preference and gender.

I cut a little bit (less than 1½" square) of the left-over ⅝" thick neoprene flap that ran the length of the zipper and hand sewed it over the teeth at the ends where I cut through the zipper to shorten it to fit. This keeps the zipper

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pull from escaping. The bottom of the zipper is detachable, like you have seen on sleeping bags and heavy parkas. You can purchase these zippers at large fabric stores. Mine is marked YKK 10V.

I found that even though the neoprene is 1/4" thick, my sturdy little antique Singer Featherweight sewing machine had no problem with it.

In the back, I cut out a continuous vest/shoulder strap shape that looks not unlike a spelman's vest. I continued the 2 1/2" wide strap part over the shoulder and all the way to where I cut the top of the front. I found my old rifle strap and cut the two sections of nylon strap away from the leather pad, which had quick-release attachments on the ends. These clips are made by ITW Nexus of Woodale, IL, 60191 and they call them FASTEX #SRI. I think a person might find these kind of clips at mountain climbing equipment suppliers. I attached the nylon loop of the female part of the clip with the leather lacing that is threaded through a hole in the neck of the nyckelharpa, and at the tail end, I found it was more comfortable for my right elbow to use a longer 1" X 6 1/2" leather strip, sewed together in a loop (finished length 3 1/4") that attaches to the female clip.

I safety-pinned the nylon straps with the male end of the clip to the neoprene straps and tried it out for a few days, making adjustments, until I felt like it was right before I cut. The length of the finished neoprene part is about 7 1/4" from the top of my shoulder on the right strap and about

8 3/4" from my left shoulder. But this would vary depending on the length of your arms and how you like your harpa to hang. Of course, the nylon strap is adjustable at the clips, so there is still room for fine tuning after you cut and sew.

I love it!

I like the way the neoprene is a bit cushy where the instrument usually leans between a couple right front ribs, but I found it slipped a bit, so I cut an oval shape of leather (about 6" X 2") and sewed it on with the rough side out, and this works very well.

I have been very pleased with the snug comfort from back and rib support that the vest affords. The weight of the instrument is carried by the entire back and shoulders, instead of the neck. It is also a pretty nice chair back cushion for those times I'm sitting! The heavy-duty zipper and quick-release clips makes it very quick to get in and out of. The whole thing fits in my soft carrying case, even adding a little more protection to the harpa. The only drawback I can foresee is that a wetsuit is meant to keep divers warm, and in the summer this might become a problem, but here in the Pacific Northwest I see it as an advantage most of the year, since dancers typically want to open doors even when the weather is in the 60s.

If you decide to try to make a wetsuit harness and have any questions, or if you would like to try the Wolf Guitar stand, you can email Marilee Cowan at [cowanma@bsd-co-fc.beavton.k12.or.us](mailto:cowanma@bsd-co-fc.beavton.k12.or.us) or call (503) 259 2393.

## Some Words from Puma...

*Translated and compiled by Sheila Morris*

**I** belong to several e-mail discussion groups concerning Scandinavian folk music and dance ([scand@egroups.com](mailto:scand@egroups.com), [nyckelharpa@egroups.com](mailto:nyckelharpa@egroups.com)). One of them was started by Olle Paulsson of Drone Records and is conducted in Swedish. A while back there arose a rather heated discussion, prompted by Ransäterstämman's decision to charge entry fees to anyone coming to the stämman. This is a huge break with tradition—musicians have always gotten in for free. (Which I myself found odd—how does the stämman make any money if they let the largest portion of their attendees in free?) The largest part of this discussion is a bit too esoteric for us over here, but in the course of about two months' worth of e-mails, Puma weighed in with what some of us felt were interesting musings on the nature of folk-music and stämmor.

*Stämman*, pl. *stämmor*, is the Swedish word for the gathering of people for a common activity. It is used to describe everything from trade shows to religious meetings. In our case, *spelmansstämma* (or just *stämman* for short) refers to the

*gatherings of folk musicians (spelmän, pl. spelmän) for performances, jamming, and generally having a good time playing music. They have a tradition going back to just after the turn of the century in Sweden, and were originally competitions. Nowadays, there's hundreds of stämmor every year in Sweden, where folk musicians meet each other, listen to each other, and swap tunes.*

*Rita Leydon and I simultaneously got the idea to translate some of Puma's letters (with his permission), and the job ultimately fell to me. So, after a lot of translating and even more consolidating, here are some of Puma's thoughts on the nature of stämmor, the role of the folk-musician, and more.*

**A**fter having been involved in this discussion for a week or so, a lot of thoughts have popped up around this topic of stämman, festivals, whether to charge entry-fees or not, along with a few other things. These thoughts have probably been lying in the back of my head for a while, but have only now taken on a more stable

### Some Words From Puma

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form. Comments accepted willingly (I think ;-)).

It seems that I have to count myself as one of “the old folks.” It feels a bit odd, but if I look back I realize that I have in fact been here awhile. I began playing folk music on fiddle in school in 1966 and around 1970 I started playing nyckelharpa, which today I regard as my primary instrument. What struck me immediately about folk music was that “this music can be used!” Which was a bit unusual—even then most people were of course consumers of music, rather than producers (if you understand what I mean....). And the place where one used the music was at spelmansstämmor. There I met such people as Eric Sahlström, Viksta-Lasse, Bosse Larsson (Lasse’s nephew), Ceylon Wallin, Ragnar Berglund, folks from Dalarna, people from Skåne and Värmland, yes, all possible and impossible sorts of folk. All of these that I have just listed were people who welcomed us youngsters who wanted to play their “old tunes”. They thought it was just as much fun to play as we did and didn’t sit on any high horses, but, as I said, welcomed us into the group.

Eric became my playing companion and is still a great model, Lasse an unbelievable inspiration, Ragnar one of my truly good playing-buddies (I can continue for however long you like....). It was a blessed combination, we had (and have) an unbelievably good time together, learned a lot from each other and made friends for life. We formed different groups which took their own paths, earned a few hundred here and there while we continued to play and enjoy ourselves.

Now to the point: I don’t believe that this would have happened if we had met at festivals where those I listed, and more with them, would have stood on a stage and played for us and not with us. There is no avoiding the fact that the edge of the stage distances the audience from “the artist”. Where do you think today’s “folk-music artists” met their playing companions? At a festival? Sure, maybe, but I doubt that there are especially many who found each other there. Therefore I believe that they, for the most part, met, played, and got to know each other at various spelmansstämmor, where people actually play with one another, not only passively consume music. If we want to change to a state where music is only consumed, we will soon have no “folk-music artists” to hire for future festivals....

Here I have to make a little criticism of my colleagues, those who travel to stämmor and play from the stage, do their “job”, pack up the instrument, and hurry away! How will our upcoming “folk-music artists” get to play with their idols if they aren’t around, offering that which they were offered? Where are their manners? Have they become so big that they have forgotten where they come from, how they were introduced into the folk-music world, where everyone can play together and learn from each other? I see this happen all the time and it is not progress, it is a huge step backwards!

In this perspective I also think that this about paying entry to a spelmansstämma is a lot more serious than the 50 crowns (about \$6) or whatever it will cost to go in. Will one really have to pay in order to spread this music which we all at least ought to protect and promote? What it comes down to is whether the music in general will be able to continue to progress as a people’s music or if it will become some sort of stage-music reserved for a few in some sort of “folk-music elite!” See, I finally got to the topic of entry-fees after all...

For about the past 5-6 years I have made my living by playing. After 20 years in construction I can do what I have always desired, play my music and actually get by with that. It’s not exactly lucrative (a long way from the pay of a construction foreman), but I am thriving and getting by thanks to low housing expenses and low expenses in general. This is background information for what I write next:

I have absolutely no problem with playing for free, playing with beginners, playing just because I like the music and can meet playing-buddies. I travel willingly to a stämman without being hired, it is a way to get inspiration, freshen up old tunes and maybe learn some new ones besides. It is also nice to sometimes play without it being a “job”, no requirements, just have fun. This is one of the best things I know. I also think this is a way to show solidarity with the arrangers of the stämmor who also like what we do and in fact appreciate our presence.

At the same time, I also get gigs at stämmor, sometimes for quite tolerable pay, sometimes a little worse, but I like the stämmor, so I try to recoup whatever I “lose” at these “worse” paid jobs by taking occasional other jobs with large corporations, church services and so forth.

At the risk of never getting any job at any stämman that charges entry-fees, I can say that if they asked if I wished to play there, I should at least think about saying “No, thank you.” An arranger who treats his foremost ambassadors in this way, who would take payment from them (!), would not be someone I want to work for. And the money I would earn would be paid by my friends! It is conceivable that I could not afford to say “No, thank you”, but that the thought would even enter my mind is saddening. I could never before have imagined that this situation would come up, to refuse a paid performance at a large stämman...

I believe that most people who come to a stämman come in order to listen to the jamming, where those of us who play this music are (have been?) freed from the commercialism which lies behind so much else in today’s society. We play because we truly enjoy what we do and that can be both seen and heard.

I believe also that the arrangers are cutting off their own noses when they take payment from their best PR-folk. There will surely be a large audience despite this, but I am not sure that it will be the audience which they would prefer to have. What will be left if no “crazies” attend to jam in the bushes, who ask nothing more than to play? What will be left when there are “only” stage-performances? How many people are there who actually sneak in? Are there a

lot, or could they be easily absorbed? Is it worth the trouble to upset large sections of folk-music-Sweden for this?

For me, the choice is simple; I will not go to such a stämman. I would rather meet my playing-buddies at some little stämman in Roslagen, in Hälsingland, in Dalarna, or someplace else, at some stämman nobody has ever heard of. There people will be glad that people come who want to play and show how cool it is to be able to make music together.

But if I had to pay an entrance fee so that others can stand and listen when my friends and I play (it has happened more than once that the arranger has asked me to go up on the stage and play a little, though without my having paid on these occasions), then I would feel that I was just being

used. I would feel that they don't perceive those of us who come and play as being worth a little good-will gesture such as free-entry. Incidentally, it isn't really a free-entry, since I insist that I am doing a job which is useful to the arrangers (horrible thought!).

Musicians do their part! Just by playing. It is in fact a job! Isn't it true, that one might be working even though one enjoys what one does? Even if I am not hired, it is still a job for me. I improve my playing, increase my repertoire, make contacts, and people listen to my playing just as much as to the paid artists. All this benefits those who later may hire me at another stämman or other music situation.

*Peter 'Puma' Hedlund*

## Nyckelharpa Etiquette

*("Spela snällare") — playing with beginners*

*by Sheila Morris*

When I first started playing nyckelharpa, I was all alone with my instrument for the first year. When I finally encountered other players, something happened that I have seen and heard about repeatedly in the years since. Because this seems to be a fairly common occurrence, I thought I'd offer some suggestions.

A much more experienced player suggested that we spend some time playing together. I was thrilled at the chance to play with somebody else, and looking forward to getting a few tips. However, the session turned out to be extremely frustrating for me, and possibly for the other person as well. Not only did he keep proposing tunes I didn't know, he continually expressed surprise that I didn't play them. "Really??? But that's so basic!" Well, as I mentioned, I'd been alone with my harpa for that first year, and learned tunes I liked, or tunes I could figure out how to play, or tunes that my dance group asked for. I didn't have a clue as to what was basic repertoire. A lot of the time we spent together, I spent listening to him play tunes he thought I ought to learn. But since I wasn't viewing this session as a lesson, I didn't have a tape recorder with me (now, I know better, and always have it around). As one of my first encounters with a nyckelharpa player other than Bart, it wasn't terribly successful from my point of view. It seemed to me even at the time that, since I knew maybe fifteen or twenty tunes, as compared to his 200 or so, that maybe I should be the one to suggest what to play.

That's my first suggestion. Let the less-experienced player pick the tunes. This may, at first, cause them a certain amount of anxiety, but chances are that you will know most of the tunes in their repertoire, while they will know only a few of yours. Be patient—let them think for a bit before

choosing a tune. Their mind probably went blank when you said, "What would you like to play?" Mine always did. If they really can't come up with anything, pick something they are likely to know... Båtsman Däck or Äppelbo gånglåt. OK, so you're sick to death of playing them. But you have never played that tune with this person before—make what you can of the experience.

I have, however, encountered beginning players who play only tunes I do not know. They got their start from different teachers, who use a different set of "basic" tunes. In this case, I usually say, "OK, teach me that one." I've been playing long enough now to be able to pick up a beginner-level tune pretty quickly, even if I've never heard it before. If you know how to accompany or harmonize, you can try that, though it may confuse some people. The point here is, don't just sit there and fret over not knowing anything in common. With a little creativity and flexibility, you can both still have a good time, and maybe both of you will learn something.

Let the less-experienced player set the tempo. It will probably be slower than you're used to—live with it. It's only for a few minutes. If their tempo is really ragged, do your best to hold it steady, but don't rush things. Tempo is often a problem with beginners, especially if they didn't start out as dancers before they took up music. Maybe you can share whatever tricks you use to keep a steady beat.

Don't be surprised if they say they know a tune, and then can't play it very well—if they've been playing by themselves most of the time, hearing another harpa can be disorienting at first, especially if you normally put in a lot of double-stops and trills. Tone it down a bit. Play the tune four or five times, to give them time to get back on track. Or stop and let them work through the trouble spots, and then try it again. Once it's working better, start to put the

## Nyckelharpa Etiquette

*continued from page 9*

ornaments back in.

OK—so this can be a little boring. But remember, it's not about *you!* It's about giving someone else a new experience, about boosting their confidence. You can go off and play all the Eric Sahlström tunes at breakneck speed later. Right *now* you're doing something else. To make it more interesting, try paying more attention. Find something that the new player does well, even if it's only a single phrase of the tune or some little ornament. Compliment them on it. Suggest something that will make things easier. Don't say things like "You really need to learn to play it with the double-stops." They probably know that already, but can't quite get the fingers coordinated to actually *do* it. Yet. Maybe you can show them a couple of simple ones for the tune you're working on—open strings, if possible.

The challenge for the experienced player is to be as adaptable as possible. Can you play the tune in a different way, or are you usually on automatic pilot? If you're on automatic pilot, is that true musicianship? Personally, I think it takes a lot more skill, or a different kind of skill, to be able to match what someone else is doing than it does just to charge blindly ahead regardless of what's going on

around you. So use this as an opportunity to enhance your own skills.

Maybe this all sounds a lot like you'll be giving a lesson. Well, in some ways, you are. Beginners are usually eager to pick up a few pointers, as long as you don't act like they're stupid for not knowing something they haven't had time to learn. And just think about all the people who helped you get started, way back when, and how much you appreciated whatever they could tell you.

Finally, if this sort of thing really isn't your cup of tea—don't invite beginners to play with you! There may be times when you can't politely avoid it, when you will have to play "below your level", but again, keep a flexible attitude and make the best of it. Everyone involved will have a better time if you do.

## CLASSIFIED AD

### Nyckelharpa for Sale

I have a nyckelharpa I would like to sell before I go to Sweden in June 2000. It is built by Ragnar Olsson in 1991 and is in good shape. I want to sell it for \$1200. Sofie Jonsson, 66 Trudell Dr., San Antonio TX 78213, 210-349-4979, Sj\_2000@hotmail.com.



*Participants of a recent workshop with Olov Johansson in Portland, Oregon. Left to right: Darren Knittle, Marilee Cowan, Olov (who didn't really need to stand on the step), Claire Elliker-Vågsberg, Gernot Blume and David Elliker-Vågsberg. See page 2 for an important announcement about ANA subsidies for local workshops with visiting Swedes.*

# Upcoming Nyckelharpa Events

*Check the ANA's web page for the most current scheduling information*

## **Fri-Fri 9-16 Jun 2000: Nyckelharpa teaching at Scandia Camp Mendocino**

Scandia Camp Mendocino takes place in the lovely red-wood forests about 11 miles inland from the town of Mendocino, California. Our days are filled with dance, music, and culture sessions, evenings are party time. We live in rustic wooden cabins in the forest and dine on gourmet food. Plan now to join us in June!

Teaching the music and dance (Slängpolska) of Småland, Sweden: Magnus Gustafsson, Ulrika Gunnarsson, Toste Länne, Anders Svensson and Marie Länne-Persson. Teaching the music and dance

(Springleik) from Vågå, Norway: Ivar Odnes, Nobi Kurotori, and Roo Lester. Other music staff will include: Fred Bialy (Music Director), Loretta Kelley (Hardingfele), Bruce Sagan (Nyckelharpa), and Peter Michaelson (leading allspel).

For more information and to get on our mailing list, write to: Scandia Camp Mendocino, 393 Gravatt Drive, Berkeley CA 94705 members.aol.com/DancingRoo/scandiamendo.html or Roo Lester: DancingRoo@aol.com 630-920-0159 (Central time zone)

Be sure to register early. The size of the dance space and number of cabins limit us. We attempt to balance the number of men, women and couples in the dance program.

## **Fri-Sun 1-8 Jul 2000: Cajsa Ekstav at Scandinavian Week at Buffalo Gap VA**

For its final year, "Scweek" will bring a nyckelharpa teacher from Sweden, in addition to their beginning nyckelharpa class taught this year by Bart Brashers. For BG2K, they are very pleased that Cajsa Ekstav will be joining the faculty. Cajsa is a Riksspelman and is well-known for her nyckelharpa playing, her singing, and her fiddle playing.

Other teachers this year include a contingent from Föllinge, Jämtland, Sweden: Beret Bertilsdotter and Jan-Gunnar (Palle) Paglert teaching dance, and Ulf and Mats Andersson teaching fiddle, playing for dance class, and playing at the evening parties. Also, from Valdres, Norway, dancers Anne Kjellfrid Nøbben and Ole Aastad Bråten, and hardingfele player Tore Bolstad.

For more information, see [www.math.msu.edu/~sagan/Folk/campcur.html](http://www.math.msu.edu/~sagan/Folk/campcur.html) and [www.buffalogapcamp.com](http://www.buffalogapcamp.com), or contact Judy Barlas, MFAC, PO Box 2354, Silver Spring MD 20915-2354, 301-649-6921 or [jbarlas@erols.com](mailto:jbarlas@erols.com)

## **Sun-Fri 30 Jul - 4 Aug 2000: Leif Alpsjö in Elkins WV**

In 1997 Leif Alpsjö held a course in music (fiddle and

nyckelharpa) and gammaldans (schottis, vals, polka, hambo, etc.) at the Augusta Heritage Center in Elkins, West Virginia. He will repeat that course during Augusta's "Summer Week 4" this year. Campus housing offers the convenience of a room close to classes and activities, at a reasonable rate. Motels, bed-and-breakfasts, and campgrounds are also available nearby. For more information, contact: Augusta Heritage Center, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins WV 26241, Phone: 304.637.1209, Fax: 304.637.1317. E-mail: [augusta@augustaheritage.com](mailto:augusta@augustaheritage.com) Web: [www.augustaheritage.com](http://www.augustaheritage.com), or: Leif Alpsjö, Rångsta, Viksta, S-740 30 Björklinge, Sweden. Tel/fax: +46-18-37 23 00, or e-mail: [alpsjo@algonet.se](mailto:alpsjo@algonet.se)

## **Events in Sweden**

### **16-18 Jun 2000: Österbybruk Nyckelharpstämman and Nyckelharpa World Championships**

This year, the Nyckelharpa World Championships (VM = Världsmästare) will be held during the annual Nyckelharpstämman at Österbybruk. This is one of the biggest gatherings of nyckelharpa players each year — always the weekend before midsummer. In addition to lots of playing (both on the stage and just jamming) there is a show and competition for nyckelharpa makers with feedback from the world's best.

For more information on the nyckelharpstämman, see [nyckelharpa.just.nu](http://nyckelharpa.just.nu).

For more information on the Nyckelharpa World Championships, see [home4.swipnet.se/~w-45963/](http://home4.swipnet.se/~w-45963/) or send e-mail to Gunnar Fredelius.

### **July 2000: Various Summer Courses at ESI**

Several courses offered this year by the Eric Sahlström Institute are of interest to nyckelharpa players and builders:

(Dates TBD): 3-day course in beginning nyckelharpa. No previous experience required. Teachers: Lotta Franzén, Anders Liljefors and Henrik Eriksson.

17 - 21 July: Advanced course in nyckelharpa. Technically and musically advanced tunes, ensemble playing, styling and expression. Teacher: Johan Hedin.

24 - 28 July: Course in ensemble playing. Ensemble playing, arranging with different instruments, and ideas and inspirations. Teacher: Jens Comén (from Hoven Drogen).

Application deadline was 15 May 2000. To apply, or for

more information: Eric Sahlström-Institutet, Bruksgatan 3, S-748 50 Tobo, Sweden. Tel +46-295-342 93. Fax +46-295-342 99. E-mail: jonas.hjalmarsson@swipnet.se or esitobo@algonet.se. Web: www.esitobo.org

### Aug 2000 - May 2001: Year-long Nyckelharpa Course at ESI

For the third year in a row, the Eric Sahlström Institute (ESI) is offering a course in nyckelharpa, in Tobo, Uppland, Sweden. This course is presented in conjunction with Vaddö Folkhögskola, so college credit is possible. Head teachers will be Olov Johansson, Ditte Andersson and Sonia Sahlström but you will meet other teachers, Niklas Roswall, Gunnar Ahlbäck, Andreas Berchtold, Curt Tallroth, Hasse Gille, Johan Hedin and Esbjörn Hogmark among others.

Course content is concentrated on nyckelharpa, but will also cover music theory, transcription, arrangements, folk music history, nyckelharpa history, folk singing, folk dance, playing for dancing, instrument knowledge and maintenance, playing on stage, etc., etc.

Students live in the Institute's modern annex, adjacent to the lecture hall. The cost is 3100 SEK/month for a double room, 3800 SEK/month for a single room. That includes the monthly rent, breakfast, lunch, dinner and coffee (of course - it's Sweden) on weekdays. You buy your own food for the weekends. Teaching is free, but you must pay for your own paper, pens and you might have to buy a few books, and other incidentals such as small trips.

The first semester starts the last Monday in August and ends the 3rd Friday in December. The next semester starts 2nd Monday of January and ends the last Friday of May.

#### The American Nyckelharpa Association

The ANA is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering the nyckelharpa, its music and its dance in North America. We sponsor and produce music and dance workshops across the country featuring the traditions of the nyckelharpa.

Membership dues in the ANA are \$10/year, which includes a subscription to this newsletter. Send to the address below, and please indicate if you play the nyckelharpa and if we can publish your name in our roster.

#### ANA Web Page

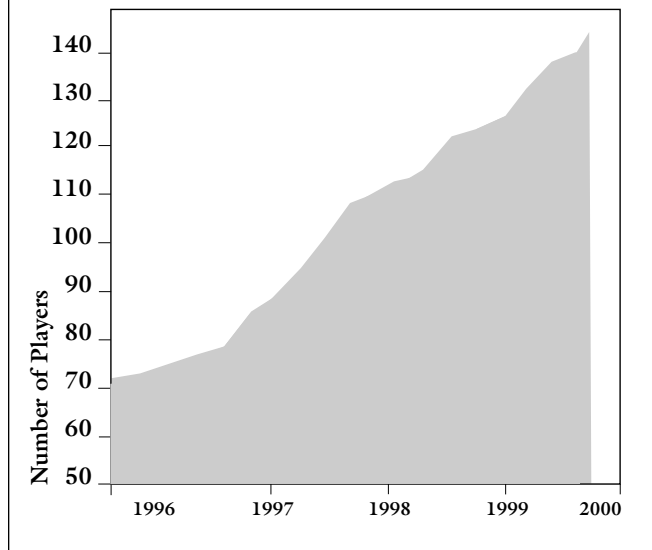
Source of information about the nyckelharpa, nyckelharpa players, a history of the instrument, nyckelharpa events and more! The URL is: <http://www.nyckelharpa.org>

#### Nyckel Notes

Published quarterly, edited by Bart Brashers and Matt Fichtenbaum. Send submissions to *Nyckel Notes* at the address below, or to: [nyckel.notes@nyckelharpa.org](mailto:nyckel.notes@nyckelharpa.org)

The American Nyckelharpa Association  
PO Box 2291, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2291

### Nyckelharpa Players in North America



There are some weeks of holidays (one in November, one in February and one in April). For more information, contact Jonas (Jalle) Hjalmarsson, Eric Sahlström-Institutet, Bruksgatan 3, S-748 50 Tobo, Sweden. Tel +46-295-342 93. Fax +46-295-342 99. E-mail: [jonas.hjalmarsson@swipnet.se](mailto:jonas.hjalmarsson@swipnet.se) or [esitobo@algonet.se](mailto:esitobo@algonet.se). Web: [www.esitobo.org](http://www.esitobo.org)

## New ANA Members

#### Ted Heinonen

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*Moraharpa built  
by Björn Björn.*