The Journal of the American Nyckelharpa Association
NYCKEL NOTES

Interview with Nikolaj Marks

a Dutchman who builds nyckelharpas

by Chiara Bos

That's new! Where did you get the idea to build nyckelharpas?

That's a short question with a long answer ... playing and building instruments to me always came hand in hand. It started with the first instrument I bought, a bass guitar. A day after I had bought it, I removed all the strings and screws because I wanted to know how it was made. Removing screws is an abnormality I have since early childhood. My parents still haunt me with horrible stories about everything I have demolished. My mom's favorite is the story of the vacuum cleaner. I can't remember it myself because I was only six years old. One day she thought the vacuum cleaner was out of order and asked my dad to look at it. It turned out the complete motor was removed. They found it under my bed. This is just one of many examples about my ... let's call it congenital curiosity. Nothing was safe from me! Neither was the bass guitar. It didn't take long for me to decide to customize the instrument. It started with a new body. Subsequently, I replaced the hardware and quite soon the only remaining original part was the strap that came with it. This made me realize that buying only the wood and hardware would be a far more economic way to obtain instruments. In 1987 I joined a club of instrument builders here in Venlo where I live. We have built all kinds of musical instruments but have focused on acoustic traditional instruments with the emphasis on hurdy-gurdies. It's there where I learned about the nyckelharpa for the first time. None of us had ever seen a nyckelharpa in real life but we found some plans and put these on the big pile of plans we had collected over the years.

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Many years later, after the club had fallen apart, I met someone who was also infected with the building virus. He was mainly into stringed instruments and we have built various renaissance lutes and theorbos (big bass lutes). After a while I remembered the building plan of the nyckelharpa and we decided to give it a try. We still hadn't seen or heard a nyckelharpa for real so it is no surprise that the first

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one turned out quite disappointing. It was good enough though to catch our interest and to see the potential of this instrument. We tracked down more detailed information and adjusted, as it turned out, the very poor building plans we had. The third nyckelharpa we built was a very nice one! Knowing what I know now, I never would build like that again, but that doesn't take away that I have used that harpa with much pleasure and success over the years! The man I shared the workshop with developed some serious health problems which necessitated that we discontinue all projects. I stopped building too, not having enough money to start my own workshop.

After trying to earn a living as a musician I realized that's not where my heart is. So in 2004 I decided to put my savings in my very own workshop. I wanted to focus on the nyckelharpa.

More questions about that later! I saw your band's website. (www.travak.nl) I see that between the bass guitar and the nyckelharpa a few additional instruments also have caught your interest.

That's correct! I also play the hurdy-gurdy, musette béchonnet and cabrette (two French bagpipes of the 19th century), hammered dulcimer and renaissance lute. We play what we call Bal Folk music, traditional western European dance music. Because of the historical character of this music we also play at so called Brueghel Avonden, named after the famous painter. In the USA you might call it a Medieval Banquet. We also have done quite a few gigs for Dutch Radio and TV.

Can you tell us the difference between the Scottish bagpipe we are all familiar with and the cabrette and musette béchonnet?

The differences are enormous. The Scottish bagpipe, called piob mohr, or warpipes, is an instrument to be used in wars to scare off the enemy ... and by Jove, it still does the trick if you ask me! The cabrette and the musette béchonnet came from French culture and have a completely different usage. They are designed to make pleasant music. The volume is more friendly to your ears, and you can also play more refined tunes on them. The cabrette is a very odd and rare bagpipe though, very striking is the lack of drones, and the exchangeable chanter which comes in all keys you can think of. This was the bagpipe for dance music, playing solo or accompanied by an accordion, in Paris and the Auvergne region from 1880 to 1940. One of the achievements I am most proud of is that the Cabrette Society of Paris asked me to join their society, making me the first foreigner of that society since their origins in 1886. The musette béchonnet is another 19th century French bagpipe, used in central France. It is the predecessor of all modern bagpipes made in Europe today, because its design is just perfect.

Interesting! You've got so many instruments to choose from. Why have you decided to focus on the nyckelharpa?

After joining the German Bordun eV. Drone Society, I met a couple of nyckelharpa players in Germany. This gave me a great opportunity to study quite a few instruments made by various makers. And to be very frank about it; too many of the nyckelharpas I saw there where a big disappointment to look at and listen to. It's obviously difficult for Dutch and German people to obtain a quality instrument from a respectable builder. This, in combination with my personal interest in this instrument and a growing demand for this instrument, made it very interesting for me to focus on the nyckelharpa.

In what ways do you work on improving the instrument?

You will note the great care I take in selecting high quality woods (e.g. for the tops I use AAA quality Swiss mountain spruce) and the overall finish of the instrument. Like many builders, I work with Sören Åhker's building plans, but I have made quite a few changes to his plans based on my experiences. This results in a well balanced powerful harpa with a rich sound, going from sweet basses to a crispy treble. About the finish it is interesting to mention that I don't use a spray gun as some people think. My instruments are always hand polished with a lacquer I brew myself after a 19th century recipe. It takes usually ten to twelve layers to finish the instrument. In between every layer I completely sand the instrument. I believe this lacquer improves the sound and appearance of the instruments. For my keyboards I keep the fast players in mind, with a very low, almost critical action, making it easy to play all kinds of decorations and grace notes.

How about the bows? Do you buy bows or have you made your own?

Lots of harpa players regard a bow as a stick with hair which you need to play the instruments. That's too bad, because a good nyckelharpa can't do without a good bow. After experimenting a lot I designed a bow that, in my opinion, is the best choice to play my harpas with.

What makes your bows different from the ones other people make?

It is often a struggle to make a bow do what you want it to do. I try to make bows that follow your thoughts, a natural feeling extension of your fingers and creativity. For that I changed the design of the traditional bow into a slim well balanced bow, made out of fernambuco, ebony and Mongolian horsehair. But again, there is nothing more personal than a bow. The ultimate bow for me might be kind of a luxury coat hanger for you. I must mention that I only sell bows to customers who purchase my nyckelharpas, for the simple reason that I just can't find the time to make them in greater numbers. ■

Note: Nikolaj's website is: www.nyckelharpa.nl

President's message:

by Tim Rued

Hello Everyone! This is my first official greeting to the membership since being named President of the ANA, so I should start by extending my thanks to all who have entrusted me with the responsibility. I will endeavor to keep our organization strong, and try to find ways of expanding our efforts to increase "nyckelharpa awareness" in our country.

What a great idea, having a Nyckelharpa Association! Back when I started to play, in 1974, the number of players in the United States was generously estimated at twelve. Matt Fichtenbaum, Meg Thorburn, and I were perhaps the best known American players then, but there were a few scattered here and there in California, Washington state, and elsewhere. (If I have slighted anybody, please send me a letter or email—it will be great reading for the next edition of Nyckel Notes.) Bart Brashers, with the great help of Sweden's Leif Alpsjö, brought the idea of an American organization to fruition as the instrument started to spread in the US, and it has remained ever since a connection for all of us members. We can see where other players live, what they are doing, and are aware of nyckelharpa activity within our reach. The ANA also connects us to Sweden, letting us know of some of the developments there, and letting us know where we can go over there to enrich our playing. The ANA is a resource for recordings, as well, and tune books, and strings. Before the ANA was established, each American player was on his own for these items. Not the least important, the ANA has overseen concerts, workshops, and nyckelharpa gatherings here in this country, with accomplished Swedish players coming to share their skills with us.

We have grown from these beginnings, and now have more than two hundred members. There are many more than that on the rolls, but a number are inactive right now—make sure you pay your dues! There are at least five times as many nyckelharpa players in the United States now as there were in all of Sweden fifty years ago. We have the potential to blossom in the public eye. In the 1970s, I kept a sign in my nyckelharpa case, telling people what it was. Now, I meet people who instead ask, "Say, that's a nyckelharpa, isn't it?"

I would like to see the ANA starting to promote the nyckelharpa a little more for the general public, rather than just keeping to ourselves. If people have ideas, please make suggestions. We can do a lot if we try! Here are some ideas I have: Besides having our own music festivals, how about "invading" existing ones? There are fine traditional music festivals all over the country, and you may find groups of Appalachian style fiddlers, Cajun fiddlers, Celtic fiddlers, and others scattered around jamming. Let's pick a few regional American festivals and try to get our nyckelharpa players to attend! The Strawberry festival in California, for example, has one or two nyckelharpa players in attendance sometimes, but what if ten showed up and played together? Literally hundreds of musicians would take instant interest in our instrument and music, and we could easily be on our way to getting new players and new members. We could have a "nyckelharpa tent" with information and recordings available, a signup sheet for new members, and jamming all day. Any volunteers?

Let's strive for the publication of nyckelharpa books for both ourselves and the public. Swedes have the luxury of a culture of folk music that includes the nyckelharpa. There are some notable books about the instrument, the players, and the music, too, that are available to them. Right now, one must understand Swedish to get the benefit of these books. The ANA may be able to publish some translations ourselves, but we can also try to get translations published by existing publishers, both academic and commercial—it just takes a little push.

Right now we have a website that presents many tunes for learning, and we carry a broad selection of CDs for sale to members and non-members, but it might be a good thing to put together some professional quality recordings under our own label also. We could have an "American Nyckelharpa Orchestra," for example, or a sampler of "American Nyckelharpa players from East to West." I want our membership to know that we do not have to rely entirely on Sweden to provide good examples of authentic and original playing. Sweden is the cultural Mother of our instrument and music, but we are growing enough to start leaving the nest, perhaps.

The various members of our Board of Directors will be consulting on these and other ideas in the coming months. We would all like your input and enthusiasm. We are an organization of musicians working together, and we can accomplish great things! ■

Stämma in Richboro

by Rita Leydon

The weekend that fell on April 20–22 was a real treat for me. I got to attend an ANA stämma as a paying guest. Didn't have to lift a finger ... just had to show up. Wow! I was psyched! We here on the east coast had read all about the wonderful events on the west coast last year when Edward Anderzon and Elin Skoglund came and taught workshops and shared their infectious enthusiasm and joy of life. When the same duo had reason to visit the USA again they offered their services to the ANA and after a bit of scrambling Doug Oines stepped forth and said he would be happy to arrange everything. And the rest is history! ■

photo by Rita Leydon

Edward and Elin with Doug Oines.

photo by Doug Oines

Edward brought a big oktav harpa ... delicious deep tones.

photo by Doug Oines

Here we take a moment to come up for air. Zig-zagging left to right we have Elin Skoglund (Sweden); Sonia White (MD); Doug Oines (PA); Rob Lindauer (CT); Chris Leydon (PA); Karen Myers (VA); Rita Leydon (PA); Jill Myers (CA); Janet Gage (MA); Richard Jones-Bamman (CT); SUe Richards (MD); and Edward Anderzon (Sweden).

Galgvretspolskan

Hambo by Niklas Willén, Enköping 5/2004
After Edward Anderzon 4/2007
Transcription by Karen Myers (#2910)

Being good students of the nyckelharpa, we all came to the stämma prepared with our various articles of recording equipment and as we set about untangling our wires, Karen's booming voice declared, "Don't worry, I've got it covered!" And so she did. Firmly planted at her command post surrounded by her necessities, she dutifully captured all sounds and scribbled notations on her pad, advising us that it would all be posted on her website in short order. The transcription numbers are part of Karen's cataloging system on her website and is explained there. (www.bluerose.karenlmyers.org) ■

photo by Doug Oines

Gubbelubb

Schottis from Otto Andersson's book:
Finlands svenska folkdiktning—Bröllopsmusik
After Edward Anderzon 4/2007
Transcription by Karen Myers (#2909)

Örhängen

Erika Lindgren & Cecilia Österholm

by Bronwyn Bird

As a definite fan of Erika and Cecilia's first CD, I was thrilled to hear that there was now a new one. With eager anticipation I rushed home and popped it into the CD player the minute I stepped through the door. Needless to say, I was not the slightest bit disappointed. This CD not only lives up to the first one, but in my opinion, goes even beyond.

You may be wondering, what exactly is it about this CD that catches my attention? What is it that makes me want to stop whatever I am doing, close my eyes, and simply listen? Well, I will tell you. For me, playing music is about making a connection. Whether that connection is with another individual, or within oneself, music is the pathway and it is powerful. What makes this CD special is that I can hear the connection that is being made. The harmonies flow and intertwine with ease, and the fiddle and nyckelharpa seem to be carrying out a conversation. The same is true of the vocal songs. Cecelia's voice is higher, with a lightness to it, and Erika's deeper voice fills out the sound. Their singing is unaccompanied, and gives a pure, raw, sound that is seldom found.

The tunes on this CD consist of many from the greats, such as Viksta-Lasse, Eric Sahlström, and Gås Anders. The majority of the tunes are polskas, however, there are a few waltzes and songs mixed in. When I close my eyes it is quite easy to envision Erika and Cecelia standing in the middle of a circle of dancers, the many colored skirts swirling away as they play. Their polskas have an energy and drive to them that makes the listener eager to get up and dance. Whether you are familiar with Swedish music or not, I think you will find it difficult to keep your toes from tapping. It is my opinion this is a CD well worth adding to the collection. ■

photo by Göran Lindgren / promomotion image from www.erikaochcecilia.com

Letter from Sundsvall

by Lars-Gunnar Åström

I have read all the *Nyckel Notes* and I must say I'm impressed. I have learned much about the nyckelharpa through the ANA website. I like to read in English rather than Swedish, it is more exciting and more spontaneously written. I have learned much of my English while reading on the internet and I'm very glad for that. I'm 57 years old and my name is Lars-Gunnar Åström from Sundsvall, Sweden, a city with 90,000 inhabitants.

I myself can never learn to play any instrument because I lost a little of my hearing when I was four and a half years old and at thirteen I lost all my hearing when I was sleeping during the night and become deaf. Before that I used to sing for all who were willing listen. But this fact never took away my interest for music and instruments. I remember how a violin, trumpet, drum, piano and so on sound. I remember many sounds. Sometimes I have music in my brain and it is as a little orchestra. It happens sometimes, not every day. I'm very interested in musical instrumens and read about them on the internet

I found ANA's website through the American Swedish Historical Museum and began immediately to click on various links when I discovered there was a journal named *Nyckel Notes.* I was like a newborn baby and read all issues except the ones for members only. It was so exiting and the photos made it even better. There are Swedish websites too but I prefer the ANA's because it is so spontaneous and delightful reading. Especially various members' experience of learning in Sweden and Rita's reports are very good reading. She wrote about a thirteen year old girl (Bronwyn Bird) that when she first saw the nyckelharpa she said it was the most beautifully instrument she have ever seen. I read it and was moved. I can't play any instrument because I cannot hear, but thinking of how a violin sounds, I try to imagine how beautiful a nyckelharpa sounds. I can only imagine the rich and various tunes it can play. But reading *Nyckel Notes* gave me a deeper insight of this instrument.

Let me end by saying I'm proud of you all for you are saving and spreading the culture of the Swedish nyckelharpa. It isn't always easy, but you are playing your instruments rather than hanging them up on the wall. I think you nyckelharpa players are doing your very best. If you are having difficulties or are lacking inspiration, you can take out your nyckelharpa, play a tune from your heart and perhaps your day will be a happy one. My thumbs up for you all! ■

photo by Peter Blue

Nyckelharpa

by Emmett Dienstag

A peaceful instrument
Just as peaceful as the river flows
Strumming every string
Playing every chord
So many keys
Bring pressed so the sound
Cannot be broken
I hear you,
Oh great instrument,
As you play the elegant music
Flowing through the air
As I strum you,
You bring me peace
And then I lay you down
And time stops
I am done.

Emmett is a fifth grader at Manhattan Country School in New York City. His favorite subjects are math, science and reading. In his free time, Emmett likes to listen to music, surf the internet and write poetry.

I met Emmett at the Manhattan Country School Farm in Roxbury, NY, where I do a folk music program in Catskill traditional music and dance. During lunch I took out my nyckelharpa; Emmett appeared, having left a baseball game, with his glove still on. He sat a long time, then showed me the poem he had written and tried on my nyckelharpa for size. He learned to play Itsy Bitsy Spider.

—Peter Blue

Building a Nyckelharpa ... Part Two ...

Part One appeared in the Spring 2007 Nyckel Notes

by Lars Silen (Finland)
translation fine tuned by Matt Fichtenbaum

The keybox

I ordered the material for the keybox, the keys and the tangents from Leif Alpsjö. The side pieces were pre-routed for the keys. Owning a good band saw today means that making these components myself would be easy. The DVD shows how the band saw with a simple extra backing can be used as a very good router. The precision of the components was good enough but the cut outs were slightly misaligned in the vertical direction. Sören's method of temporarily gluing small bits of wood to the sides to help alignment when drilling worked very well. Using a very small drop of cyanoacrylate glue allows one to remove the extra supports afterwards without any damage. Assembling the sides and sanding them together with a belt sander gave a perfect result.

The keys

It was surprisingly easy and fast to make the keys. The length of the keys was set using a paper template copied from the drawings. Sören's method of attaching the keys in place on the nyckelharpa and holding them in place with tape worked very well. The final shaping of the individual keys was done with a knife. The holes for the tangents of the first and second key rows were cut with a small oscillatory saw purchased for this purpose. Having to make the keys gave a good reason to buy a new tool!

Drilling the holes for the tangents was easy with a drill press available. Doing the same drilling operation by hand without the proper tools is another matter: I know because I did it that way when building the first one. The holes were drilled approximately 0.1 mm undersized to ensure a very tight fit.

The tailpiece

The tailpiece was made from birch taken from our own woods. The design is essentially the same as Sören's. For the next nyckelharpa I'll design the tailpiece to give an exact 100 mm distance between tailpiece and bridge; this will then give an extra resonance two octaves above the basic tone of the string. It will require some kind of distinct nut to be added on the underside of the tailpiece to establish the distance to the bridge. The cello fine tuners used for the main strings will then have to move backwards into the tailpiece to set the distance at 100 mm, requiring some redesign of the tailpiece.

The bridge

The bridge is made from maple. I bought the wood from Leif. The basic form comes from Sören's drawings. The sympathetic strings lie in cutouts rather than deep grooves. Using cutouts means that more mass can be removed from the bridge causing less damping and hopefully a louder sound. Tage Larsson also uses this type of bridge.

The f-holes

I made templates for the f-holes based on Sören's drawings. I initially made the holes slightly smaller than indicated to allow trimming later. My guess is that I could have used Sören's template as it is, he clearly knows what he is doing!

Adjustments

With the sound post in place the instrument received its strings. I measured the length of the sound post at its edge and used the drawings to estimate how much extra length was needed to accommodate the curvature of the top. The first sound post was a failure, and I made another one using the first one as a basic template.

The first playing round showed a very screechy A-string and very weak bass. Enlarging the f-holes' end circles by 0.5 to 1 mm greatly improved the bass, and cutting out more material at the center of the f-holes improved the situation further. The next step was to find the correct position of the sound post. The general rule is that the location of the sound post is 0.5 to 1 cm toward the tailpiece from

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the bridge. In the side-to-side direction the initial position is roughly under the center of the bridge's right. Moving the sound post toward the tailpiece softens the sound and makes it weaker; moving the sound post sideways to the left strengthens the bass strings and weakens the A-string. The adjustment area is small, about +/- 3 mm in all directions around the position marked in the drawings. In principle, the strings should be loosened before moving the sound post; being lazy, I used a fairly heavy screwdriver to tap the sound post in the desired direction, alternating the taps between the top and bottom of the sound post. I have made a center hole in the sound post allowing it to be turned in the correct direction after these movements, this seemed to work well. It is important that there be a tight fit between the ends of the sound post and the plates. It is difficult to objectively hear the results of moving the sound post because the player hears a different mix of sounds than the listeners in front of the instrument. In the future, I plan to record the sound of the instrument with different sound post locations so as to get a more objective understanding of the results.

Conclusions

Building the nyckelharpa indicates that an amateur is able to build a nyckelharpa that sounds good. The result was better than I had imagined for a "first real nyckelharpa." The instrument body is larger than that of my Tage Larsson harpa. Bigger physical volume improves the sound giving it more depth. The inner bottom edge is irritating when I play for a long time, and the next nyckelharpa will have slanting sides for this reason. It would have been a good idea to shave off more material from the neck on the right hand side; this would have provided better access to keys in the high register. The body should be finished before the top and bottom are attached because the edges of the plates make sanding the body difficult.

When forming the keys high up on the third row where the half tones are bent down to row two I didn't use the extra width available for the key heads. Two of the keys are actually too narrow, resulting in some problems when playing fast melodies: it is simply possible to miss the keys because the opening between the keys is too wide. These keys will be replaced in the future.

Possible improvements

Sören Åhker's plans and instructions are very well done. The only small detail I was missing was a sketch of the fiber (grain) directions of the wood in the nyckelharpa's different parts. Sören provides good instructions regarding the top, bottom, bridge and saddle. He could simply go slightly further in the description regarding this detail. There are some components where the fiber directions don't matter and the direction is selected for appearance; a comment about this would also be welcome.

Sources

The most critical part of a nyckelharpa is the top. It must be essentially perfect, well seasoned spruce. The other parts are less critical, but visible knots and other defects should be avoided. There are several builders who sell wood suitable for nyckelharpa building. Search the internet for Sören Åhker, Leif Alpsjö, Björn Björn and others. The cost of the raw wood for an instrument is very low compared to the value of the completed instrument. I think that buying essentially all quality wood for the first instrument is a good investment. The tuners for the sympathetic strings were difficult to find locally (I didn't find them!). I believe that the tuners to use are those from a 12-string acoustic guitar. The sources above also sell these parts.

I ordered the reamer needed to make the conical holes for the main strings' pegs from International Luthiers Co. in the U.S. It was delivered less than a week after I placed the order.

Finally

After final adjustment the instrument has a very beautiful and full sound. Because the instrument sounds better than my present nyckelharpa I decided, on Sören's advice, to give it to my daughter and her husband, who live in the northern part of Stockholm. So this nyckelharpa will emigrate to the nyckelharpa heartland, not bad for number three! I hope the next one will be even better because I will miss the sound of this instrument after having played if for only ten or so hours. ■

"This is a practice session of our music club. My brother Johan, left, plays violin, two friends in the middle, and I'm on the right side with my nyckelharpa."

photo by Carrie Hogan

Wandering Minstrels in Longwood Gardens

by Rita Leydon

Longwood Gardens in eastern Pennsylvania is one of the world's great masterpiece gardens—originally a private estate belonging to the DuPont family, it is now open to the public. Recently they wanted to observe the 300th birthday of Carolus Linnaeus, the great Swedish naturalist who founded modern biology. We were asked to perform and wow the expected guests with some nyckelharpa playing. Mind you, Chris and I were not asked because we are so very skilled, it was more a matter of the fact that there are no other nyckelharpa players anywhere nearby. Luckily for us Bronwyn Bird was home on break from school in Boston and could join us. We three charmed our way through the crowds that swarmed around us like bees around ripe blossoms and had so much fun we didn't even notice that our allotted two hours just whizzed by and soon it was time to exchange nyckelharpas for dance shoes to lead a workshop in Swedish dance.

Longwood is an honorable establishment and as such they wanted to pay us real money for services rendered ... I, however, couldn't bring myself to ask for a proper fee because then we'd have to act all professional like and not make our normal mistakes or misbehave and have as much fun as we do when there's no pressure ... so mulling it over for a second or two I suggested instead a nominal sum to cover gas and a spiffy meal afterwards. This worked out just fine for all concerned and we blew our entire earnings at a nice tavern on the way home. ■

"Breathless"* in Boston

by Bronwyn Bird

NEFFA (New England Folk Festival) went really well, although I almost didn't even make it there. My plans for renting a car fell through, and then I lined up other plans and they fell through too. So I finally decided to take the commuter rail as a last resort. I checked the schedule one last time before going to bed the night before, and realized that I had been looking at the weekday schedule. Uh, oh! The first train wasn't leaving until noon and I was supposed to be playing with Matt Fichtenbaum at eleven! So at two in the morning I was calling most of the people on my phone list trying to find a ride without any luck. At seven I called Matt, and he agreed to pick me up from one of the subway stops. Phew! What an adventure! The actual event turned out great. In fact, the room was so packed that people were waiting to get in. We played a bunch of Swedish tunes together, and then they wanted me to play something different. So I got somebody to lend my friend Justin a guitar and we did a "Doc Watson and David Grisman" tune. Super fun. We all got a chance to play outside together with several other fiddlers as well. I got in a few dances with Justin, including a waltz, and I bought him some good dance shoes as an early birthday present. We walked back to the Mansfield train station because we couldn't find anyone who would give us a ride, but it was a beautiful day so we enjoyed the hike. ■

**Editor's note: "Breathless" is Chris' and my nickname for Bronwyn because, well, she often is.*

photo by Justin Nawn

Matt Fichtenbaum, Lydia Ievins and Bronwyn Bird making music at NEFFA.

They're doing it again!
Oregon Buskspel Stämma

We all had such a great nyckelharpa stämma last year! Come join us once again, June 29 to July 1, 2007 for the second Nyckelharpa Buskspel Stämma in the beautiful Columbia River Gorge located between Hood River and The Dalles. The event is hosted by Marilee & Michael Cowan at 1114 Canyon Way, The Dalles, OR 97058. To help our planning, please RSVP to:

marilee.cowan@nyckelharpa.org

The music is the easy part! Please let us know your sleeping and eating plans as soon as possible. Email early if you need beds (or facsimile), linens and blankets. There is room for camping on the property, or check the web for B&Bs in Hood River or The Dalles. Check out Lewis & Clark history, Mount Hood, waterfalls, hiking, bicycling, windsurfing, fishing, bicycling. We are also three hours from Oregon beaches. Besides your instrument, you might want to bring: recording gear, suit and towel for hot tub, sleeping bag, tent, camper, walking shoes, cash contribution for food, or food for four or five meals, sunscreen, insect repellent, ... etc. ■

photo by Twila Hastings

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photo by Bart Brashers

photo by Bart Brashers

DRIVING DIRECTIONS FROM PDX (PORTLAND INT AIRPORT): From NE AIRPORT WAY 1.9 miles from the airport, merge onto I-205 S toward I-84 / PORTLAND / SALEM. Merge onto I-84 E via EXIT 22 toward THE DALLES . Then follow directions going east on I-84.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS FROM PORTLAND, OR: (Allow 1 hour and 20 minutes from Portland.) Going east on I-84, go past the town of Hood River. Take the MOSIER exit (#69). Follow the Historic COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY 30 approximately seven miles. You will go through the village of Mosier, pop. 430, then through orchards and oak groves. Take a left at CANYON WAY. Our house is 1114 CANYON WAY in "Rowena Dell" neighborhood.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS FROM THE DALLES AND POINTS EAST: Going west on I-84, take Rowena/ Mayer Park exit to get on Historic COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY 30 going west. Follow sign to "Rowena Crest Overlook." You'll pass the Tom McCall Nature Preserve and the Rowena Crest Overlook. Then the road goes down the hill. Take a right at CANYON WAY. Our house is 1114 CANYON WAY.

There is still plenty of time to plan on going to this stämma ... or ... to plan one in your own neck of the woods!

Daring to Discover

I have the pleasure of interacting with lots of folks who are just starting to learn about the nyckelharpa. Whenever an email order for the instructional DVDs that Peter Hedlund and I produced arrives, I always write back and ask how the person chanced to arrive at my doorstep. Here is one such story.

—the Editor

by Kate Kramer

Well, it all started with a family trip to Sweden, which happens in June (next month!) I started looking for Swedish folk music, thinking mainly of the hardanger fiddle. WELL! I was soon set straight on THAT! It belongs next door in Norway I learned—and Sweden has the nyckelharpa! My Swedish grandpa was a fiddle player, and we are going to see where his parents came from. We don't know anyone, we've just always wanted to visit the land of our roots. I don't know if anyone in the family ever played nyckelharpa or not, but I got really curious. I sent in my ten bucks to join the nyckelharpa association (and have read some of your articles with great enjoyment) and then I found Gail Halverson in Los Angeles. I figured she was the closest nyckelharpa player to me so I emailed her. We exchanged a number of emails—I was just asking her about this instrument and how SHE found it (thru her Scandinavian folk dance group)—and then she offers to loan me her spare nyckelharpa! Talk about the kindness of strangers! It's generally what I've found in the music world, so I have a good feeling about this new endeavor. So now I have her nyckelharpa. I met her at her work, she gave me a few pointers and volume two of the *Spela Nyckelharpa* series with the tape, but I really needed more help. She recommended your DVDs and I had read about them and finally took the plunge yesterday to order. Gail's harpa was made by the guy who makes them for Lark-in-the-Morning. ... It pleases me to find the scale and be able to produce notes with the bow. If I get a chance to look at nyckelharpas in Sweden, it would be good to know how to play some simple tunes to see how the instruments sound. I've been playing recorder for the last eight years, so I can read music, but don't understand about the bowing techniques. I play mandolin (not well!) which is tuned like a fiddle—but the nyckelharpa is a brand new animal. Part of what I love about it is that you don't even have to worry about frets on the bridge—the keys are wonderful!! That gives me hope I can learn to play it at age forty-eight. Gail learned Swedish and has gone to festivals and classes in Sweden. I would learn, too, and maybe be able to go again to play with others. We'll see. The other part is that it really is an off-the-wall instrument here and I like that, too.

This is probably a lot more than you were asking for, but that's my story. Thank you for asking, and for sending the DVD. I look forward to learning lots more! ■

String Bazaar

The ANA is pleased to offer nyckelharpa strings for sale! We have playing strings and three versions of understring sets.

Order Form

Prices listed are for ANA members/non-members.
Price includes shipping to a US address.

Playing strings:	**Qty**	**Price**	**Cost**
Prim Full Set	_____	$67/$75	$ _____
Prim A (1)	_____	$18/$20	$ _____
Prim C (2)	_____	$14/$16	$ _____
Prim G (3)	_____	$16/$18	$ _____
Prim C (4)	_____	$19/$21	$ _____
Resonance strings:			
6+6 resonance set	_____	$22/$27	$ _____
4+4+4 resonance set	_____	$22/$27	$ _____
12-step resonance se	_____	$22/$27	$ _____
		Total:	**$** _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

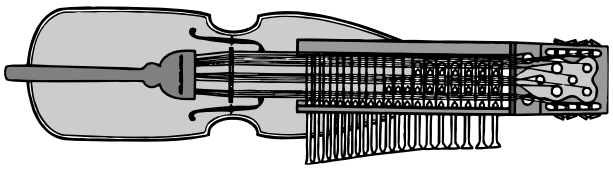
Phone _____

E-mail _____

e-mail for inquiries: strings@nyckelharpa.org

Send this form along with a check payable to American Nyckelharpa Association to:

Tim Newcomb
P.O. Box 51, Montpelier, VT 05602



With summer music camps and workshops about to start, you may want to consider restringing your faithful nyckelharpa. It always amazes me to hear the difference new strings make. With a a full selection of Prim's various nyckelharpa melody strings still in stock, it's a good time to experiment to try to get the best sound out of your instrument.

The elusive Prim brown strings for the C (2) and G (3) strings are still in stock. They are labeled "orchestra" and are the hardest of the three flavors of Prim strings, in theory giving a nyckelharpa with timid central melody string sound more get-up and go. I have six C (2) strings and four G (3) strings, which is all Prim had. We also have Prim blue strings, which are labeled "soft tone". These help tone down harpas with strings that tend to overwhelm the other melody strings. The blues are available for the A (1), G (3) and C (4) strings. Lastly, the good old Prim greens are well-stocked in all gauges.

Paying online using PayPal is most helpful, though checks made out to the ANA and sent to me are also just fine.

—Tim Newcomb

Playing Strings

The playing strings are the four largest strings, the ones that you actually touch with the bow. PRIM brand strings are made by an old Swedish string manufacturing company. Their fiddle strings are popular among folk musicians, and are available widely in the US. Their nyckelharpa strings are basically the same as their cello strings, except that they are the correct length for nyckelharpas instead of about a foot too long. All four strings are wound. The A-string is .020" (0.50 mm) in diameter.

Sympathetic Strings

We offer three versions of understrings, described more fully in the January 1998 edition of *Nyckel Notes.* Basically, the three sets can be called 6+6, 4+4+4, and 12-step. There's actually some logic here:

6+6 is

- 6 wound strings .021" (0.53 mm) in diameter
- 6 plain strings .014" (0.36 mm) in diameter

4+4+4 is

- 4 wound strings 0.24" (0.61 mm) in diameter
- 4 wound strings .021" (0.53 mm) in diameter
- 4 plain strings .014" (0.36 mm) in diameter

12-step is

- 12 strings, varying from .025" (0.64 mm) to .014" (0.36 mm), by steps of .001". The lower 6 are wound, the higher 6 are plain.

FUNNY PICTURE DEPARTMENT

Trella Hastings writes: "Here is a picture I took a few years ago when the Hogmarks were here. It was taken in Karen Nelson's home. When I took the picture, I didn't notice that the flowers in the background were centered just on top of Sture's head! Pretty funny! Flanking Sture are Åsa Södergren Hogmark and Esbjörn Hogmark."

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

ANA Membership dues are $10 per year, which includes a digital 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.

www.nyckelharpa.org
Source of information about the nyckelharpa, nyckelharpa players, a history of the instrument, nyckelharpa events and more!

Nyckel Notes
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The ANA's Nyckel Notes
c/o Rita Leydon
PO Box 127, Lahaska, PA 18931

Rita's Notes

In my calmer moments, when I pick up my nyckelharpa during the work-day and play some beautiful tune that I happen to be enamoured of at the moment—alone in my studio, sitting on my weaving bench, back to the loom, gazing across the valley—when the playing is more an act of listening for the melody come and surround me than actively participating in the playing of the tune ... in moments like that I feel that I am enveloped in prayerful meditation. It is wonderful! Restful. Centering. I am so thankful that I grabbed the chance to learn to play music in my mid-life crisis years. That I dared myself to peek in and explore this vast uncharted territory inside of me. The adventure has been, and continues to be, extraordinary.

—Rita Leydon
Editor