

# Nyckel Notes

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN NYCKELHARPA ASSOCIATION

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## Väsen comes to 1996 Nyckelharpa Stämman in Seattle on June 22

This year's Nyckelharpa Stämman will be held at the Nordic Heritage Museum in the Ballard district of Seattle on Saturday, 22 June. We're very happy to announce that Olov Johansson, Mikael Marin and Roger Tallroth (the group Väsen) will be there to teach the music of Uppland on nyckelharpa and fiddle.

See the Upcoming Events section on page 12 for more information on the Nyckelharpa Stämman and Väsen's US tour!

## Olov Johansson, nyckelharpa player extraordinaire

An interview by Bruce Sagan

On a cold but clear day in December, 1995, I made my way to Olov Johansson's apartment in Uppsala. There were a number of reasons for the trip. We had become friends a couple of years before and I was curious to see what he was currently doing.

Also, Olov is one third of the group Väsen which will be teaching at this summer's Scandinavian Week at Ramblewood (run by Judy Barlas and myself), and I wished to go over some camp arrangements with him. After playing a bit and having some wonderful dessert made by his girlfriend, Margareta, we settled down for an interview.



Olov and his kontrabasharpa

Photo: Bruce Sagan

**Bruce:** So let's begin at the beginning. When and how did you start to play nyckelharpa?

**Olov:** It must have been around 1980 when I was 13 or 14 years old. My maternal uncle played violin when I was young and then he took up nyckelharpa. So I got to borrow his 'harpa and try it out. My mother got interested and bought a nyckelharpa for herself from an acquaintance who builds them. And then I was able to use hers.

**Bruce:** So you started playing nyckelharpa and fiddle came afterwards. How much later?

**Olov:** I started fiddle about 1-1/2 years afterwards. My uncle had attended a course taught by Curt Tallroth and begun to play his tunes. Then I went to one of Curt's courses and saw that he played a lot of fiddle as well. Many tunes were easier to play on that instrument.

**Bruce:** Let's go back to the nyckelharpa. Who were your early influences?

**Olov:** First, of course, was Curt. Then I went to some of the Österbybruk courses [organized by Leif Alpsjö]. All the teachers there were fantastic: Sture Sahlström, Hasse Gille, and so forth. But those that I was most taken with and learned most from were Curt and Ivar Tallroth, and Eric Sahlström.

**Bruce:** When did you first meet Eric?

**Olov:** The first time I heard him was probably 1980 at the

Östevårastämman. It wasn't so far from Tärnsjö where I lived. Then I heard him at the first course in Österbybruk I attended.

**Bruce:** Did you also have lessons from him?

**Olov:** I wouldn't call them "lessons." When visiting with one of the older musicians people just played together. When they played a tune you didn't know, either you learned it on the spot or recorded it and learned it later.

**Bruce:** So even at that time you were using tape recorders.

**Olov:** Yes, from the outset. The first tunes I recorded were five or six from my uncle on a reel-to-reel machine.

**Bruce:** How did you start to play in Väsen?

**Olov:** Mikael [Marin, the violist] and I are old friends. We had played together since around '82 and put out a cassette in '85. We also knew Roger [Tallroth, the guitarist] who came from the same region, northwest Uppland. We were in Røros, Norway, staying in a rented house with a bunch of other people, including

Olle Paulsson. It was during the winter market in Røros when there is a lot of playing and dancing. So I asked Roger if he wanted to play nyckelharpa and guitar together since we'd never tried that. And he responded, "Naw, I'm going to go take a shower." But the shower was occupied, so he came back and we played and it sounded extremely good. We played and played for many hours while folk sat around and listened. Olle said it was the best music he'd heard and that he would start a company [Drone] to record and distribute it.

Olle wanted the first record to feature me, with "Väsen" being merely the name of the album. So Roger and I contacted Mikael, we began to rehearse, and finally did the recording. But then people started to call up to hire "Väsen" so we took it as the name of the band.

The word is related to the cover of the first album with the picture of a

gammalharpa which is like a mask. In Swedish "Väsen" can mean a lot of things: fuss or noise, essence or being. One can have a "skogsväsen" [skog = forest] which could be a troll or näck [water sprite]. And one can talk of an "andlig [sacred] väsen" such as an angel.



Photo: Bruce Sagan

**Bruce:** How did you and Mikael come to realize that the combination of viola and nyckelharpa was a good one?

**Olov:** Mikael and I originally played together on two fiddles or fiddle and nyckelharpa. But when we started to rehearse for the first album with fiddle, nyckelharpa and guitar it didn't work so well. It sounded much better with viola which lies in the middle of the texture under the nyckelharpa and gives more warmth and support than a fiddle. We liked it better.

**Bruce:** Have you traveled to other countries with your music?

**Olov:** Of course we play a lot here in Sweden, in fact every single day this past fall. We have also played festivals in Finland, Norway, and Denmark which are the countries whose folk music is close to ours. They can relate to our music easily. Last summer we had two tours in France. They like our music because it sounds exotic to them. We've even toured in Andorra and Slovenia.

Those were trips with Väsen. I was also in India with Groupa, Frifot, Björn Ståbi, and some dancers. Most of the people that came to our concerts were well-educated middle-class Indians from the big cities who were very polite and seemed to enjoy the music. I was in Libya with Kungs Levi, Alm Nils, and Anna Hjalmarsson playing under the auspices of the embassy. We even played for Quadafi! It was very exciting. And of course I've been to the US.

**Bruce:** Tell me about your time in America.

**Olov:** Some of the Leksand Spelmän, Jobs Lasse, Saras Göte, Alm Nils, Kungs Levi and their families, were going to travel to Minneapolis. This was because they had been visited by some American musicians with their families and arranged a course for them here. The Leksand musicians wanted Anna Hjalmarsson and me along to be able to give a broader concert program. Then one of the sponsors backed out, making it no longer economically feasible for the whole group to go. But I had already arranged for two weeks off from work. So I called up Paul Hoglund and he talked with Fred Bialy and I was able to make the trip anyway. I went to the Mendocino camp and also gave a few concerts in San Francisco. Then I flew to Minneapolis and gave a course for the members of the Swedish Institute Spelmanslag. Paul and I also traveled to some of the small towns in Minnesota to play. Finally I went to New York just to be a tourist.

**Bruce:** How did you find teaching Americans as opposed to Swedes?

**Olov:** I don't think there's really such a great difference. There are many Swedes that have heard this music previously, but there are also Swedes who have never listened to folk music. To teach the latter group is not so different from teaching Americans. It can be a little difficult if one wants to verbally explain something delicate.

**Bruce:** Do you think that Americans learn more verbally rather than aurally?

**Olov:** I use all possible methods when teaching.

**Bruce:** Yes, I've seen you do that when you've taught courses. In which other countries do you know of nyckelharpa players?

**Olov:** In the USA, France, Germany, England, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and even in Australia!

**Bruce:** Where else have you taught nyckelharpa?

**Olov:** I have had two or three workshops in France. There are about 50 or 60 'harpa players there and at least two very good builders. Jean-Claude Condi made my bow and is in fact a professional bow maker. Marcel Lasson is the other one and he also builds violins, mandolas and other string instruments. France has the most nyckelharpa players in Europe outside of Scandinavia.

**Bruce:** Do they use nyckelharpa to play French folk music? The instrument is rather like the hurdy-gurdy which is a typical French folk instrument.

**Olov:** Yes, and they also use it to play early music. I have a recording of a fellow in Germany who plays Baroque music on 'harpa and is quite good. Here in Sweden there are also people who use nyckelharpa for this type of music. There's a woman up in Falun, Kersti Maclean, who plays a lot of Baroque music and I've played a bit of it as well.

**Bruce:** On the other side of the coin, how did Väsen start to play with Nordman [A Swedish rock band]?

**Olov:** I knew Mats Wester, he plays nyckelharpa and composes for Nordman. He had a studio in Stockholm where he was experimenting musically. Mats, Mikael and I experimented with some heavy modern music based on folk motifs. But Mikael and I had too many commitments with Väsen and weren't able to be in the studio often, so Mats continued on his own. Then Håkan Hemlin, a singer, came to the studio. Mats wrote a test tune for Håkan with Väsen helping out to give it a more acoustic feel. This song led to a record contract with Mats and Håkan as the duo Nordman. Väsen has also been included on their recordings and tours.

**Bruce:** How do you find playing in this milieu as opposed to the folk music world?

**Olov:** In the beginning it was very exciting to play for so many people, maybe 25,000 people a concert. But when one has done that a few times one begins to feel that playing in such a large band, with drum set and electric bass, is being just a tiny bit of a large whole.

**Bruce:** You can't do really delicate things.

**Olov:** Yes, one can. But they aren't heard! I think it's much more fun to play with Väsen. It's what I value the most: when we three are feeling good, everything fits together well, and there's only around 200 people in the audience who are sitting close by and listening intently. Then one is really in contact with them. Those are the greatest experiences in such situations.

**Bruce:** Talk a little about Väsen V.

**Olov:** On the first tour with Nordman, drummer André Ferrari and bassist Johan Granström were along. We had a couple of Väsen tunes in the program and they provided backup for them. We really enjoyed playing and being together, so we began to rehearse as a group and got a bunch of neat tunes together. Last summer we played at the Stockholm Water Festival and Falun Folk Festival, two great evenings with large crowds. We even made contact with a recording company. But now that the excitement and newness has worn off, we feel that in the long run it isn't so cool to play with drum set and electric bass. The conflict between the acoustic and electronic instruments is too great. So we want to find a way to play with drums and bass in an acoustic manner where everyone can play as fully as possible, yet everyone will still be heard. Of course, one can use amplification. I've built microphones into my 'harpas so that I can play as loud as I want. But it's no fun to play that loud; there are no nuances. We will rehearse a bit more and see what happens.

**Bruce:** Will you still be making a recording together?

**Olov:** That depends on whether we find a good way to present the music in this setting. But the trio has an album coming out in February [1996], *Väsen Live*. It's a concert we did last summer at Strömsholm Castle in Västmanland which the radio recorded. We had thought of doing a such an album because our music gains a lot in a live situation. One plays in a totally different manner when there's an audience. If people want copies they can contact Olle Paulsson at Drone Recording Co. (e-mail: [Olle.Paulsson@drone.se](mailto:Olle.Paulsson@drone.se)) [or you can buy them from the ANA: see article below]

**Bruce:** I don't have any more questions. Do you have anything more you want to say?

**Olov:** Folk music has become somewhat popular in Sweden these days. The original folk music wave was during the 60's and 70's. But when I started to play in the 80's it was on its way out. Now it's coming back again, however not as a political statement but rather because of the music itself. There are musicians coming from other musical styles, such as André and Johan in Väsen V, whose eyes have been opened to folk music. And I'm playing with Nordman and a jazz trio here in Uppsala called Trio Con X. I even play a bit of classical and other musics. But when one has done all that and gone back home to Curt [Tallroth] to play in a purely traditional manner on two instruments, that's the best. One feels as if everything fits together precisely with the same timing and ornamentation.

Another interesting thing is that I'm currently teaching at the Music Academy [in Stockholm]. For a long time one has been able to specialize in folk music, but the concentration was on teaching. But a few years ago they started a department with director Sven Ahlbäck for people who want to play folk music professionally. So this specialty has gained a lot more dignity and is given more respect. There are around 10--15 people studying it now: singers, fiddlers and three nyckelharpa players. They get lessons on their instruments (Per Gudmundson, Ole Hjorth and I are responsible for fiddle and nyckelharpa, Susanne Rosenberg is teaching the singers) and also take courses on such things as the role of music in society. They even take a courses in both folk and classical music theory.

**Bruce:** What's the difference?

**Olov:** Classical theory is built around chord analysis and so on. Sven is working on a theory of Swedish folk music which is more related to modality and different scales, microintervals and quartertones, as well as ways to harmonize and notate traditional music. It is a tremendously important step to be able to study such things at the Academy. I saw a sheet where Sven had worked out formulas for vallåtsmusik [shepherding tunes]! The students also play in ensembles coached by Sven, Mikael Marin and Roger Tallroth. [Roger will be teaching ensemble playing at Ramblewood.] So some groups may coalesce from this as has happened from the Finnish Sibelius Academy with Värttinä, Troka and many other fine bands.

**Bruce:** Do you have private students as well as teaching at the Academy?

**Olov:** There's one girl, but I've said "no" to many people because I don't have time. There must be a balance between playing and teaching.

**Bruce:** Which do you prefer, or do you like both?

**Olov:** Earlier I taught a lot. Now I have excellent highly-motivated students at the Academy that I meet every Monday. I also taught one course in Hovra last year. And this year I will be teaching one in the USA!

## Spela Bättre!

### *The Only Way to Improve Your Playing*

by Matt Fichtenbaum

#### **Double Stops**

I started learning to play nyckelharpa in Sweden, but continued back home in the U.S. where there were few other nyckelharpas to play with. As a result I came to appreciate the nyckelharpa's qualities as a solo instrument. High among these are its double stops, two notes played on two separate strings at the same time. Double stops are a traditional nyckelharpa technique, a way of bringing out a tune's rhythm for the dancers, or suggesting a tune's harmony even when one plays solo. Playing double stops involves the left hand, the right hand, and the mind. Double-stop technique overlaps what it takes to play some other melodic figures, too, so we'll discuss them as well.

Playing two notes at once demands that the left hand press the correct keys while the bow plays two adjacent strings with appropriate pressure on both. It's a consolation that the individual pitches are determined by the keys' pegs' placement and so the intervals are likely to be in tune. Because the harpa's bridge is curved and the bow hair is stretched tight, it's impractical to play more than two strings at once, but we'll get back to this later.

#### **Octaves**

An octave consists of two notes that have the same name, eight scale positions apart. For example, C (key #3) on the A string sounded with the open C string. Play these two notes, first alternately to hear the sound, then together. It may be easier to get a good sound on an up-bow. Experiment with bow pressure and bow motion to get a good sound, and try varying the pressure on the two strings to make each string's sound more prominent.

Other good octaves to play are:

- D on A (key #5) with D on C (2). I use third and first fingers for these.
- E on A (7) with E on C (4). Use the same fingers, or fourth and second.
- F (A8) with F (C5).
- G (A10) with G (C7).

You can even try playing the C scale, C up to G and back, in octaves. I use 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> fingers for all except C (A3) with C (C0), and just move my hand. The C and A strings' interval is a sixth, relatively wide, which makes the octave grip an easy reach.

Octaves aren't restricted to the high two strings. Here are two more to try.

- G (C7) with G (G0)
- C (G5) with the C bass string

#### **What do I do with these octaves?**

When you play two notes together you get a stronger, richer sound. You can use this to bring out the rhythm of a tune, adding energy to the music and helping the dancers to find the beat. For example, on the first beat, or first and third beats, of an eighth-note polska measure. Or on the first beat of a schottis measure. In general, double-stops work well on the important beats of the measure, or on notes you want to give specific emphasis.

#### **Other intervals**

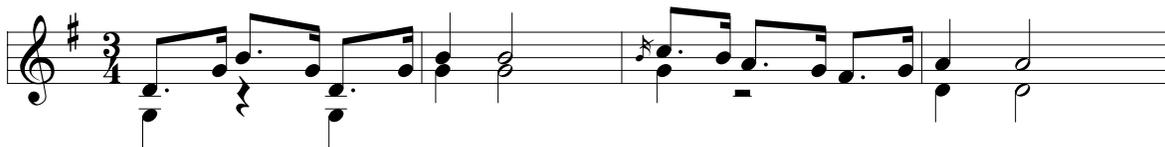
Double stops aren't restricted to octaves. Thirds, fourths, fifths are common. On the A and C strings, respectively, try

- B (A2) with G (C7)
- A (0) with F (5)
- C (3) with E (4)
- C (3) with F (5)

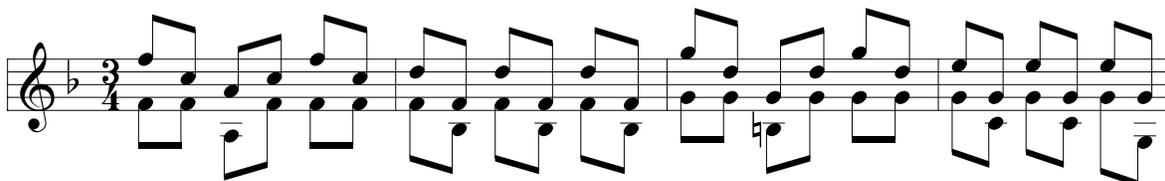
and on the C and G strings, respectively,

- F (C5) with A (G2)
- E (4) with C (5)
- D (2) with G (0)
- D (2) with B (4)
- C (0) with C (5) - this is the same note, called unison, played on two strings. Hear the effect.

## Båtsman Däck, with double stops



## Trollrikespolska, B part, simplified

Music Excerpts for *Spela Bättre*

## Fingerings for Trollrikespolska

Measure	Chord	A string note/key (finger)	C string note/key (finger)	G string note/key (finger)
1	F	C/3 (middle) and F/8 (pinky)	F/5 (ring)	A/2 (index)
2	B <sup>b</sup>	D/5 (middle)	F/5 (ring)	B <sup>b</sup> /3 (index)
3	G	D/5 (middle) and G/10 (pinky)	G/7 (ring)	B/4 (index)
4	C	E/7 (middle)	G/7 (ring)	C/5 (index) and G/open

**Choosing which notes to play**

There's logic to this choice. It's based on the tune's key, and on the particular chord appropriate to the moment, and it has a lot in common with the logic behind playing harmony to a tune. But a discussion-in-print of music theory gets very dry very quickly, so we'll not follow that path.

Observe, instead, that tunes are built up from scale fragments and arpeggios (see my article in the first Nyckel Notes). Arpeggios are the notes of a chord played in sequence, for example, the first two measures of Båtsman Däck. In an arpeggio passage, any of the notes previously played, or the notes about to be played, are likely to be good choices for double stops. The first phrase of Båtsman Däck is shown here with some possible double-stop notes.

**Left hand technique**

When a double stop includes an open string you need finger only one note and there's no special left-hand challenge. The open strings - C, G, A - are

particularly important notes in the keys of C, F, and G; tunes in these keys are likely candidates for playing double stops.

When you play two notes at the same time and both are fingered, the left hand needs to be able to play both keys comfortably and the fingers need to find their target keys quickly and with certainty. In effect, you learn to play "chords" - consistent sets of two notes at a time - as well as single notes. This takes practice. The more you practice and experiment, the more natural it will feel. The same pairs of notes recur multiple times and in more than one tune; the object is to play them naturally, as a unit, without worrying about the details.

**Right hand technique**

Getting good tone from two strings is more difficult than playing one string. Making the bow play two strings with the right force on each takes practice. It's important to hold the bow with the right hand relaxed, so that the hand and fingers are free to make the minor adjustments needed. Playing tune fragments and whole tunes, slowly and methodically,

is good exercise as is playing scale fragments in octaves, sequences of double-stop intervals, and anything else you find to do.

### **Doppning**

This Swedish word means "dip," and describes the way the bow, playing a tune, makes a quick dip downward to sound a lower string briefly. In other words, when playing a double stop, the second note isn't sounded for the full duration. Instead, you sound it briefly, with the start of the melody note, and let the harpa's sustain continue the sound.

Doppning is part of traditional nyckelharpa style: if you listen to recordings of good players, you'll hear that the double-stop notes are quick and light. The sound is not as heavy as if both notes were played for the full duration; at the same time, the sharp attack on the lower note makes the rhythm very clear. Developing this technique is one way to make your harpa playing sound "Swedish."

### **Playing above the melody**

Traditionally the extra notes are below the melody, where they support it without competing with it. In my playing I follow this rule, with two exceptions: if the melody is on the G string and the C-bass isn't the appropriate note to add, I'll play a second note, quietly and gently, on the C string above. And if I'm playing a tune in D, usually a fiddle tune, I might touch the open A string, again gently, while the melody is down on the C string. Use this sparingly - it's also OK to forgo playing double stops now and then.

### **Three strings and other extensions**

You can't, with a taut bow, sound more than two strings. But you can play a quick sequence of notes over three or even four strings. The second part of Trollrikepolska is an excellent example: the arpeggios of the first four measures use all three melody strings and even use the bass C string. The bow plays a single note at a time, but the left hand fingers keys on as many as three strings simultaneously.

When you play Trollrikepolska at normal tempo there's no time for the left hand to find "first one key on the A string, then a key on the C string, then a key on the G string." Instead, you have to consider the three notes as a chord fingering, with the fingers in known relationship to each other and depressing their keys at the same time. To play this tune you have to learn the chord fingerings it uses.

The music excerpt above shows the skeleton of Trollrikespolskan. The fingering is constant through each measure, except for the A string (see table below music example).

### **Chords and accompaniment**

Since the harpa can play chords - two notes at once - one can play a chording, or "boom-chuck," accompaniment on it, even using a third note as a bass to alternate with the other two. Musically, the effect may leave something to be desired, but it's nonetheless a way to practice finding workable combinations of notes and to become facile in playing them.

### **Summary**

Double stops are part of basic harpa tradition, technique, and style. They add energy and interest to the music and they give you one more way to develop your playing. And your listening as well - the next time you hear a good recording, or a player whose music you enjoy, keep an ear out for those extra notes below the melody.

## **Odds and Ends**

***An occasional column devoted to cooperative self-help among geographically isolated nyckelharpa players.***

by Mel Meer

*We invite nyckelharpa players to share their solutions to the inevitable problems of tuning, fixing, sources for supplies, etc. Some of what works for other bowed instruments works for us; some does not. Send your ideas for sharing what has worked for you to*

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For many, the nyckelharpa will be the only bowed string instrument they have ever played. I count myself among that group and, given the challenge of the instrument, I'm continually astonished at how many additional instruments and styles others attempt. But if you're new to bowing, one of the early issues that you'll need to address is that of rosin. We all need rosin and you'll soon discover that there are dozens at your disposal. Getting information on the subject is not a simple matter. How does one

choose? I've done a bit of rosin research; here's what I've come up with.

Most rosin is relatively inexpensive, and comes in two flavors, chocolate and vanilla. That is, dark and light. The choice in the first instance seems to depend upon humidity. The dark is said to work better in dry conditions, the light in higher humidity. From all I've read and heard, until you get to the "metallics" one might just as well go for the least expensive rosins. Or you might go for a rosin packaged in a form you find convenient. Some come in small boxes, some attached to cloths, etc.

In any event, the rosins do affect your sound production. This is most noticeable when you switch over to a gold or silver rosin. Now, there is no gold or silver dust in these expensive little disks. Rather they contain various expensive salts, or compounds, of gold and silver. Hence their higher price. The gold rosins are often said to sound, well, "golden," and the silver, yes, "silvery."

On the advice of Leif Alpsjö, and of a Swedish luthier friend, I bought a cake of Liebenzeller-I gold rosin. There are other, and less expensive golds, but Liebenzeller seems to have the best reputation. While I don't think it will be everyone's cup of rosin, I like it a lot. For one thing, it's convenient in a way in that it doesn't wind up as a lot of dust; it kind of cakes onto the string and wipes off without squealing. It also seems less sensitive than some others to over-rosining, and makes the bow feel very smooth on the string. But the main thing it does, and here we get into a area where opinions may diverge, is that it seems to make the harpa sound somewhat smoother and sweeter, more like a violin.

The sound one wants from an instrument can be a very personal thing. Judging from recordings, I have come to the conclusion that Eric Sahlström was trying to achieve a sweet sound, much more towards that of a violin than that of a silver bass harpa, for example. His playing has a noticeable sweetness, as does that of Leif Alpsjö. Sahlström borrowed the bass bar and sound post from the fiddle and incorporated them into his harpas. They have been in many makers' harpas ever since. Others (makers, players) eschew this sound in favor of the more "traditional" sound of the older instrument forms. Their sound is more boisterous and wiry to my ears, in a way that many will hear as far more "folksy." There are various ways to achieve this in building the instrument, including the selection of woods.

All of which is to suggest, that if you want to achieve a "sweeter" sound with your harpa, one thing you can do is to try a gold rosin like Liebenzeller-I. If you want it, be prepared to pay the price. The least

expensive source I've found is Music City Strings at \$14.50. See below.

A good thing about rosin that makes the price easier to bear, is that it seems almost to last forever. Mostly people replace them when they dry out and break apart. Well, if you're using an expensive metallic, you can restore it, or any rosin, by heating in a double boiler arrangement keeping the rosin in a small container whose shape it will assume.

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After encouraging responses to mention of a mail order source for strings and supplies in the last issue, I've put together the following list. For the most part all the catalogs are worth having for one source may be better than others for particular items. Also, they sometimes run sales, especially on strings, so it's good to be on their lists:

- Concord Musical Supplies - 201-261-3871 or PO Box 916, Maywood, NJ 07607

(No 800 number but they'll send a postpaid envelope and order form with their catalog)

- Discount String Center - 800-348-5003

(Very comprehensive catalog, but no Liebenzeller)

- MAPA Strings - 800-724-3383
- Music City Strings - 800-336-1980
- Shar Products - 800-248-7427

(Nicest catalog of all; has parts for repair others don't; more expensive than the others)

- Southwest Strings - 800-523-3430

(Nice catalog)

## A Letter to the Editor concerning Ceylon Wallin's Nyckelharpas

from Sture Hogmark

Dear Editor and all other Nyckelharpa Friends,

First of all, I would like to thank all nice people I met during my visit to Seattle and Vancouver last August for your hospitality and kind interest in the Swedish nyckelharpa music that I tried to convey. I hope to be

able to give you something in return the day you come and visit me in Sweden. That's an invitation!

After having read the articles about Ceylon Wallin in NN1 and 2, I would like to add some information about the nyckelharpas that he used to play.

Ceylon played many years on a nyckelharpa made by Eric Sahlström in 1957. He liked it very much indeed, but one day in 1979 he approached Hasse Gille and asked if he could make him a copy of his Eric-harpa. He probably felt that he needed an extra instrument as a "back-up" and he wanted it to be identical to the old one. Instead of accepting this proposition, Hasse encouraged Ceylon to ask the same question directly to Eric.

The answer he got from Eric (according to Ceylon himself, later on when he explained why he had changed instruments) was a no, formulated: "But you already have a nyckelharpa!" He never gave any motivation for or interpretation of this answer. Birgitta Wallin is definitely right in her speculations that Eric had a long waiting list of people who he already had promised to supply with instruments. An additional reason might have been the fact that Eric made his harpas in a different way in 1979 as compared to in the late 50's. From around 1970 and on he made them with a kind of plywood sides, similar to the way conventional fiddles are made. However, as far as I know, Eric never made more than one instrument for any single person, so the reason can simply be contained in his straight answer.

I cannot think that this nyckelharpa bargain developed any hard feelings between the two "Maestros". On the contrary, I never heard either of them telling or insinuating anything negative about the other. None of them ever played any family tunes of the other, but that was certainly due to mutual respect for their respective styles and traditions. You should know that both Ceylon and Eric were very much concerned about what was right and wrong in their family tunes.

Ceylon now turned to Hasse Gille again (a recommendation from Eric?) and in agreement with Eric Hasse made a new "Model 57". Once Hasse had delivered his instrument, Ceylon hardly ever played the old '57, at least not in public. Most probably because he liked its sound more than that of the '57, or may be he cared more about The '57, and didn't want to put it at risk during frequent travels to spelmansstämmas and other performances. Also, Ceylon played rather often together with Hasse those days, and it could possibly be in appreciation to him to use his harpa. I also know that some of the intonation pegs on the '57 were difficult to adjust properly. This combined with the fact that Ceylon

was very particular about the tuning could be another reason. These are my own speculations.

However, I don't think that I offend Hasse by saying that I liked the old '57 better. It had a very characteristic or "genuine" sound which I have not experienced with any other nyckelharpa. To me, the fact that some of the notes were on the edge of being false just contributed to the image of Ceylon Wallin and the old sound of his nyckelharpa tunes.

Perhaps I can take the opportunity to give some more information about the Ceylon Wallin nyckelharpas. Ceylon actually bought two nyckelharpas made by Hasse Gille. The one discussed above was "my number 86", as Hasse puts it, meaning that it was the 86<sup>th</sup> nyckelharpa made by him. In total he made four copies of the old '57, including one for himself (his no. 89), a second one for Ceylon (no. 90), and one which he made for Curt Södergren in 1980 (no. 93).

These five model '57 nyckelharpas look almost identical to the eye. They are all stained in a color named "yellow birch" and equipped with roughly the same sets of strings and keys that we find on most of today's chromatic nyckelharpas. However, five of the resonance strings (13 all together) are positioned below the keys and supported by the under side of the bridge. They are tightened by wooden pegs, some of which are located in front of the nut. This is a common solution for the old time instruments of Kontrabas or Silverbas models. (I will try to encourage my brother Esbjörn to tell you more about the differences between the various types of nyckelharpas.) The body of the model '57 harpas are actually made by separate, sawed-out sides glued to the bottom, and not by the hollow-out technique.

Right now, Hasse is finishing his nyckelharpa no. 200. It is aimed for the Musical Academy in Stockholm. This instrument has a body resembling a Silverbas harpa with "ox eyes" instead of f-holes. It has an anvil bridge, but a fully chromatic set of keys, including keys for four quarter notes.

In contrast to the conventional fiddle, the nyckelharpa is constantly being subjected to development, and its historical evolution is as fascinating as its tunes.

Let me end with a "story" of Ceylon performing on his new Hasse Gille-Harpa.

It was at the annual October stämman in Uppsala around 1980. At that time the interest for folk music and spelmansstämmas was at its peak level in Sweden, at least as to the number of musicians and listeners, and several hundreds of people had come to the main University Hall to listen. Ceylon came on stage to play a couple of his wonderful pieces. Once

he got started he noticed that his A-string was way out of tune. So he stopped. He looked out in the audience and said instantly (with a big smile): "Is Hasse present? He has given me a total life-time guarantee for this instrument!" (Hasse was there, and of course fulfilled his promise).

Uppsala, March 1996

Best regards to all folk music lovers,

Sture Hogmark

## Nyckelharpa Care

by Bart Brashers

Just as I was putting out the last issue, I heard about the new strings made specifically for nyckelharpa by Prim, including a wound A-string. The nyckelharpa I borrowed while in Sweden had one of the new wound A-strings on it, and I thought it sounded wonderful. In fact, the nyckelharpa sounded so good, I decided I wanted to keep it for myself and sell my old one as used (which I did).

It turns out that Leif Alpsjö had talked with Prim about nyckelharpa strings a few times many years ago, but had nothing to do with Prim deciding to offer them now, so I don't know who was the driving force behind this turn of events....

I talked with Esbjörn Hogmark (who is considered by many to be one of the best, if not *the* best, nyckelharpa makers) about the new wound A-string, and he didn't like it. He said that if you have a nyckelharpa whose A-string stands out too much in comparison to the other strings, then you could use one of those wound ones to tone it down, but otherwise he thought they was worse than using a plain string.

The other 3 playing strings are the same as Prim's cello strings, only the correct length for a nyckelharpa, which makes them much easier to put on. Many of the good players I know use Prim cello strings, so these new ones come highly recommended.

Since Prim makes these new strings, you *should* be able to order them through your local supplier. Go ahead and ask, since that's the only way the importer will know we want them. If not, perhaps the combined numbers of the ANA can get them from a supplier. Let me know if you can't get them!

## Recordings for Sale from the ANA

We are very pleased to announce the availability of the following recordings, directly imported from Sweden. Cost is \$15 per CD for ANA members, \$17 for non-members (price includes shipping). To order, fill out the form below and enclose a check for the appropriate amount made out to the American Nyckelharpa Association.

### Nyckelharpa Recordings

- DROCD001 **Väsen**, a milepost in Swedish music history! Olov (the first world champion - in both modern and old harpa) Mikael and Roger.
- DROCD004 **Vilda Väsen** (Wild Väsen), Väsen's second recording. Very high energy, very wild.
- DROCD006 **Till Eric** (A Tribute to Eric Sahlström),. Six young nyckelharpa virtuosi, including Olov, play Eric's compositions
- DROCD009 **Levande Väsen** (Väsen Live). Sweden's best live band? From a radio broadcast, includes talking (Swedish).
- AWCD-1 **Silverbasharpa Anno 1992**, Lena and Ingvar Jörpeland play the older style on turn-of-the-century instruments.
- AWCD-2 **Puma**, Peter "Puma" Hedlund plays modern nyckelharpa. World champ, '93
- AWCD-4 **Hogmarkarna**, Esbjörn, Göran and Sture Hogmark. Very traditional playing by the twins and Esbjörn's son.
- AWCD-7 **Hulling**, Dan Sjöberg, Jens Engelbrecht and Ola Hertzberg. Hot young group plays traditional tunes.
- AWCD-8 **Välsmidet** (Well Forged), various famous Uppland Spelmän in the Jernberg tradition.
- AWCD-9 **Ur-Uppländskt** (totally Uppland), with Nils Nordström and Ann-Christine Granfors on chromatic- and gammel- (old) harpa in the older tradition.

### Other Recordings

- DROCD002 **Änglarnas Språk** (The Angels' Language), Tunes and songs from Southern Sweden

- DROCD003 **Högtryck** (High Intensity), Erik Pekkari, Riksspelman on durspel (two-row accordion).
- DROCD005 **Skärvor,** Sångskära's best songs (compilation).
- DROCD007 **HÖÖK!** Folk- and Baroque-music without distinct boundaries.
- DROCD008 **Härjedalspipan.** Unique flute music. Ale Möller with others.
- AWCD-3 **Å Längtat Haver Jag**, singer Eva Tjörnebo (nyckelharpa on some tunes).
- AWCD-6 **Svarta Jordens Sång** (Black Earth's Song), Styrbjörn Bergelt, Viking-age music, CD and 116-page book (incl. full translation to English)

**Please note that Väsen's 3rd CD, *Essence*, is available in many Tower Records stores.**

The ANA will be looking into other sources of recordings, including sources for cassettes. Contact Gail at the address below with any suggestions.

**The American Nyckelharpa Association  
MUSIC ORDER FORM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me the following recordings (write the number from the left-column, e.g. DROCD001)


Cost is

- \$15 per CD for ANA members
- \$17 per CD for non-members

Mail this form and a check made out to the American Nyckelharpa Association to:

Gail Halverson  
American Nyckelharpa Association  
P.O. Box 1394  
Venice CA 90294-1394

## Classifieds and Advertisements

*Intended to help our members buy and sell nyckelharpas, bows, cases, strings, music, etc.*

*Personal Ads: FREE.*

*Commercial Ads: \$5 per column-inch, \$15 per quarter page, \$25 per half-page, \$40 per full page.*

*Send Ads to the editor (see last page for address).*

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**WANTED: USED NYCKELHARPA**

I'm looking for a used nyckelharpa to help pass on some of my Scandinavian tradition to my daughter. Due to a fixed income, I can only afford about \$600. Please contact:

Harold Johnson  
3630 177th Place NE  
Arlington WA 98223

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**SPELSTUNDARNA**

Scandinavian Fiddle Music, Andrea Hoag & Bruce Sagan, with Larry Robinson

What the press is saying:

"... a recording for those who like their fiddling pure, both traditionally and instrumentally. Backed only by Larry Robinson's bouzouki, these two masters of Scandinavian fiddling give us twenty tunes of spare but haunting beauty." -- Fiddler Magazine

"On two of my favorite cuts Sagan showcases the nyckelharpa... [Here] the bouzouki, played without plectrum, gives a harp-like effect and makes a lovely open space for the eerie, gentle yet edgy sweetness of the nyckelharpa." -- SingOut!

"...förbluffande bra" (amazingly good)

-- Spelmannen (a Swedish folk music magazine)

SPELSTUNDARNA is available from Bruce and Andrea wherever they appear (including Scandinavian Week) or by mail order. Send \$15 per CD and \$10 per cassette, plus \$2 each for shipping and handling, to Spelstundarna, Judy Barlas, 425 Everett Drive, Lansing MI 48915 USA. (Checks in US funds only, made out to Bruce Sagan.)

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### ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF SPELA NYCKELHARPA VOL. 1

Leif Alpsjö's "Spela Nyckelharpa, Vol. 1" is available in an "authorized" (by Leif) English translation. The translation covers the text only and makes reference to the figures in the Swedish original, so you'll need that too. "Spela Nyckelharpa" is available directly from Leif Alpsjö; the English translation of Vol. 1 is available from

Matt Fichtenbaum  
46 Sleigh Road  
Chelmsford MA 01824

Cost is \$5, which is approximately the cost of copying and mailing.

## Upcoming Events

### EVENTS IN SWEDEN

#### 1 Jul - 5 Jul 1996: Österbybruk

Leif Alpsjö's 71<sup>st</sup> course! Teachers include Ditte Andersson, Hasse Gille, Anders Liljefors, Sture Sahlström, Curt Tallroth, and Leif Alpsjö. Five days of group-based instruction with evening concerts by the Masters. Be sure to stick around for the spelmansstämman the following weekend. Cost is 2900 SEK (includes food). For more info, contact

Leif Alpsjö  
Rångsta, VIKSTA  
740 30 Björklinge  
SWEDEN

Telephone +46-18-37 23 00

#### 23 Jun - 27 Jun 1996: Ekebyholm

Course from Sunday to Thursday at Ekebyholm castle. Teachers include Cajsa Ekstav, Leif Nygren, Anders Mattsson, Sigurd Sahlström, Peter "Puma" Hedlund, Sven-Olof Sundell, Esbjörn Hogmark, and Peder Kallman. Each day, you'll have a private lesson and a group lesson, with plenty of free time to practice, jam with friends, or sing with Eva Tjörnebo. Sign up by 17 May. Cost is 2900 SEK (full room and board). For information, contact

Lars Lindqvist  
Aprilvägen 43  
175 40 Järfälla  
SWEDEN  
Telephone +46-8-58 03 16 21

#### 29 Jul - 9 Aug 1996: Wiks Folkhögskola

5-day weeks, full room and board, at a medieval castle on the shore of lake Mälaren, 25 km west of Uppsala. Teachers: Anders "Grosse" Grothérus and Leif Alpsjö. Private lessons are possible. All melody instruments such as fiddle, nyckelharpa, clarinet, accordion, etc., are welcome. Cost is 4500 SEK for a double room 6600 SEK for a room alone. Contact

Leif Alpsjö  
Rångsta, VIKSTA  
740 30 Björklinge  
SWEDEN  
Telephone +46-18-37 23 00



Väsen Photo: Olle Par

### EVENTS IN NORTH AMERICA

#### 19 Jun 96: Väsen in Middletown

Come to Väsen's only appearance in the Northeast (prior to Scandinavian Week at camp Ramblewood) at The Buttonwood Tree, Middletown CT, 8:00 PM, \$5.00 donation.

#### 22 Jun 1996: ANA Nyckelharpa Stämman

This year's Nyckelharpa Stämman will be held in Seattle again, at the Nordic Heritage Museum (3014 NW 67th Street, Seattle) from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm. Cost is \$25.

Olov Johansson and the rest of Väsen will be there, to jam with and to teach traditional tunes from their native Uppland. There will be teaching on both fiddle and nyckelharpa (and maybe guitar), as well as time set aside for jamming and getting to know people. See the enclosed flier for more info!

Other Väsen events in Seattle:

- Fri 21 Jun, 8:30 - 11:30: Skandia's Third Friday Dance at the Cedar Valley Grange (20526 52nd

Ave West, Lynnwood) \$8 skandia members/\$10 non-members. There will be a short *Allspel*, so bring your harpa. For more info, contact Skandia at P.O. Box 17123, Seattle, WA 98107 or (206) 784-7470

- Sat 22 Jun, 9:00 pm: Concert at Madison's Cafe & Music House (3803 Delridge Way SW, West Seattle) together with duo Hank Bradley and Cathie Whitesides, \$6.
- Sun 23 Jun, 11:00 to 6:00: Skandia's Midsommarfest celebration (Frank Raab Park, Poulsbo) \$5 general/\$4 seniors/kids under 12 free. Performances by many groups, including two by Väsen. See above for Skandia contact info.

### **25 - 26 Jun 1996: Väsen in the Bay Area**

Two events are scheduled:

- Tue 25 Jun: Concert/Dance 8:00-10:30 p.m., First United Methodist Church (2915 Broadway, Redwood City) \$8.
- Wed 26 Jun: Concert/Dance 8:00-10:30 p.m., Scandinavian Cultural Center (1240 Plymouth, Santa Cruz) \$8.

For more Info, contact Fred Bialy at 510-215-5974 or FredBialy@aol.com.

### **30 Jun - 7 Jul 1996: Scandinavian Week**

Scandinavian Week's 10th Anniversary Camp is of special interest, as it features the Swedish band Väsen. All 3 will be part of the teaching staff for the most complete Scandinavian music program this side of the Atlantic, along with Andrea Hoag (gammaldans band, level-1 Swedish fiddle), Loretta Kelley (level-1 hardingfele), Hilde Kirkeboen (hardingfele), and Bruce Sagan (music director, level-1 nyckelharpa).

From Norway, we have Olav Stave, May Jorun Leksengard, and Håkon Tveito; 3 young, energetic and accomplished dancers skilled in Hallingspringar. Hilde Kirkeboen comes with them to play and teach hardingfele. The 2-row accordion is traditional to the region, and both Olav and Håkon play and teach. Our Swedish dance instructors are the highly respected Bo Peterzon and his worthy partner Ing-Britt Dahlström. They will present an assortment of Swedish dances (at least some of the material will be from Uppland). Roo Lester will be back with her famous Scandinavian Dance Basics class, along with partner Larry Harding. Musicians are welcome to attend dance as well as music workshops.

Camp Ramblewood is located in northeastern Maryland, and is convenient to BWI airport. Cabins have indoor plumbing, electricity, and real beds with boxsprings. Food is tasty and healthy. There's a spacious dance hall with a sprung wooden floor

Total cost of the 7-day program is \$495 per adult. A deposit of \$150 (made out to MFAC) is due May 1. The price goes up to \$525 for applications postmarked after May 1, and the whole amount must be sent. Reduced rates are available for children and a limited number of kitchen scholarships. For more information, contact

Judy Barlas  
MFAC  
PO BOX 15085  
Lansing, MI 48901-5085

(517) 484-3619

jbarlas@pilot.msu.edu

(Note: the office will be closed April 28 - May 14.)

## **Editor's Note**

It's been a busy couple of months, both for school and for the ANA. What with the Nyckelharpa Stämman, the budding CD import business, my quick trip to Sweden for my Grandmother's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday (I did get in a few days in Uppland, chock-full of music), and giving a Seminar on the state of my work in progress at school, I've been feeling very busy. I'm looking forward to a calm summer.

Not many of you have sent me a picture of yourself with your nyckelharpa! If you do, I'll scan it and put it on the Internet (on our Web pages) and put it in a photo album. That way, both those who surf the 'net and those who come to events can see who we are and what we're about. I've even had some nyckelharpa players from Sweden send in their pictures. I've also gotten lot of e-mail from different parts of the world thanking me for putting the pictures on the Web. It's an easy way to increase the contact between us, so send in those pics!

I still have plans to make a directory of nyckelharpa players in North America, and make copies available to all our members. I'll get to it soon, I promise, and make it available to our members.

Varma Hälsningar,

- Bart