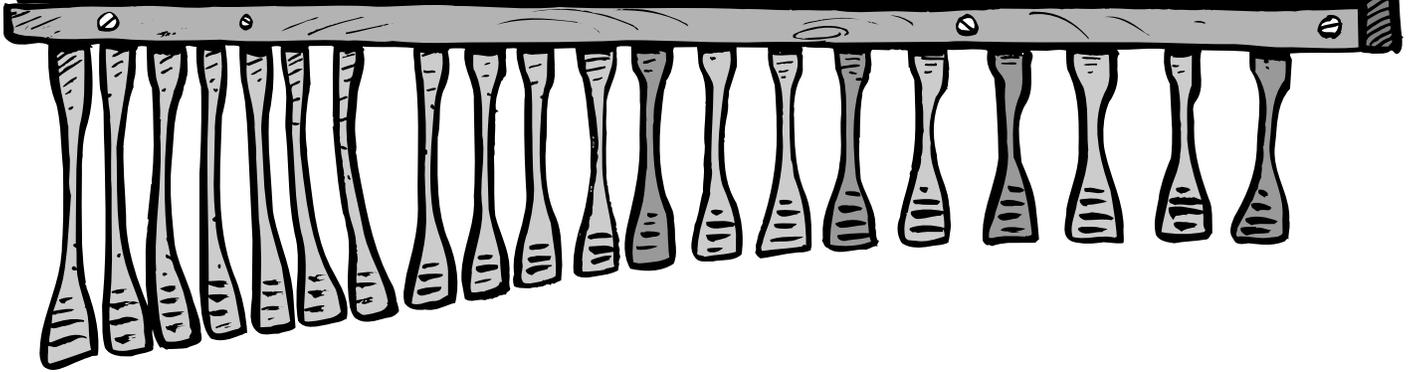


THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN NYCKELHARPA ASSOCIATION

NYCKELNOTES



1998 Nyckelharpa Stämman to Be Held in New York City

The 1998 American Nyckelharpa Stämman is moving to the east coast for the first time. To be held in Manhattan on July 10-12, the weekend of workshops, Saturday night dance and Sunday concert will feature Ditte Andersson as inspiring instructor and performer.

Ditte, a riksspelman from Uppland, is well-known as nyckelharpa player, fiddler and singer. Her repertoire stems from the Uppland tradition, though includes styles from across Sweden. She recorded an album "Upplandsgitar" a number of years ago and has played with the groups Harpan Min (My Harpa), Kapten Krok (Captain Hook), Uncovered, Tresmak (Three Tastes).

Ditte is known to be a wonderful teacher and speaks excellent English.

The base camp, so to speak, for the Stämman will be the Music ARChive at 54 White Street (tel 212-226-6967). A library of one of the world's most extensive collections of music, the ARChive will be the location for the workshops and concert on Sunday.

The Stämman will begin Friday night with an informal workshop and jam session. It's tentatively



Ditte Andersson

scheduled at the ARChive, but may change if I can find a pleasant restaurant/pub with a room we can have dinner and play.

Saturday will be a marathon workshop in two sessions; a morning session from 10:00am to 1:00pm, and an afternoon session from 2:30 to 5:30. With great places to eat abounding, people can choose from a wealth of restaurants and delis for lunch and dinner.

A dance is planned for Saturday night. Scandia New York's usual dance hall isn't available, so the location will be announced when it's firmed up.

There will be another workshop on Sunday from 12:30 to 3:30, followed by a concert at 4:30, both at the ARChive.

Costs for the weekend: \$15 for each 3-hour workshop session, \$8 for the dance, and \$5 for the concert.

For more information, please contact Tim Newcomb, 802-229-4604 (home), 802-229-4907 (work) or by e-mail: TNewcomb@aol.com

I'd also appreciate a note if you're thinking about coming to help with planning.

Hope to see you there!

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Musician of Note

by Trella Hastings

Bart really is a musician of note, of many notes, in fact. He has been living in Seattle since 1991 working on his doctorate in atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington. He chose Seattle because of the concentration of Swedes living here, but also discovered to his pleasant surprise that the University of Washington has one of the very best atmospheric sciences departments in the nation. Seattle was also gaining a young, talented, enthusiastic musician who would put the Swedish nyckelharpa on its map.

Bart Alan Brashers was born in Danderyd, Sweden on May 2, 1965 where his father was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Stockholm. However, they returned to the United States when he was only ten weeks old. Most of his childhood years were in San Diego.

His family lived in Sweden for two other periods, when Bart was in the second and fifth grades. His father built a nyckelharpa through an adult education course when they were living in Sweden when he was in the fifth grade. Upon returning to San Diego, Bart started playing the nyckelharpa. The sixth graders had an opportunity to train one day a week at the local junior high school for orchestra the following year. Bart took his nyckelharpa and showed the instructor, but he had never seen one before.

After Bart explained the instrument to him, how it was tuned and how it worked, he thought it would be all right. So he trained on his nyckelharpa with the usual beginners music the others had to play. But the next year he took up the mandolin, playing bluegrass music with his brother Erik.

In high school a rock band, Guy Goode and the Decent Tones, was his main musical outlet. He also played sax, drums, and baritone in the marching band, as well as trombone in orchestra.

During high school and college, his music was most-

ly limited to rock, bluegrass, and choir. He only played nyckelharpa once in a while, usually during Swedish Christmas celebrations. It took him eleven years to learn ten tunes on the nyckelharpa since he was not really into it yet!

After getting his degree in Engineering-Physics from the University of California at Berkeley in 1987, Bart returned to Sweden for a year, living with his grandmother and working at the Volvo plant. It was this trip that shaped his serious venture as a nyckelharpa player.

That year he started to get serious about nyckelharpa and increased his repertoire to about 75 tunes, started dancing Swedish folk dances, and sewed his own folk costume.

Upon returning to San Diego in 1988, he got a job as an environmental engineer and got into the local dance scene. The two musicians who played each week for the local Scandinavian dance class invited him to join them. He didn't know many of their tunes at first, so he just chorded along with them. Years later the dance instructor told him that one of the dancers had come up to her after his first time playing for the class and said, "Who IS that guy with the nyckelharpa? You have to get rid of him. He's awful!" Thankfully, the dance instructor gave him a chance and let him

develop.

Margaret Sigalove came into Bart's life about 18 months later and they've been together ever since. They just became engaged this last Christmas.

In spite of Bart's highly successful and talented musicianship, he recalls a very humbling time in Sweden. He took a kulning (cow calling) course, thinking it would be a snap for him. It was extremely hot at the time and it was a very difficult course. That brought him down to reality and he didn't play music for 10 weeks after that!



It was just before moving to Seattle that he started to play fiddle, so he would be able to play a broader base of tunes. The music of Dalarna, with its blue notes and odd rhythms, was calling to him. In Seattle, he would get together with Elizabeth Foster at every opportunity. She taught him fiddle and he taught her nyckelharpa. He has recently become the proud owner of a rare kontra-basharpa made by the well-known harpa builder Hasse Gille. It is especially valuable for playing the really old tunes and has some keys for blue notes, which are notes that fall between standard notes.

Bart also plays spelipipa and cowhorn, and even makes his own horns. He has written some fifteen tunes

and was featured in one of the Composers' Concerts last year at the Nordic Heritage Museum sponsored by the Skandia Music Foundation.

The American Nyckelharpa Association was started in 1995 at the urging of Leif Alpsj , a well-known Swedish nyckelharpa player who has been to the United States many times teaching workshops. He has also written books and made tapes on learning the nyckelharpa.

Elizabeth Foster initially started the early planning stages, but the materialization of her job in Norway shifted the job to Bart. He has done a remarkable job of getting it off the ground and creating a web site for it, as well as helping plan the first two ANA Nyckelharpa

Successful Nyckelharpa Workshop

by Trella Hastings

Seattle had its last nyckelharpa workshop with Bart Brashers, at least for a while. The April workshop was a bittersweet time, as he will be leaving the Pacific Northwest in early June for North Carolina to be with his fianc e, Margaret. However, it was a wonderful gathering of fellow nyckelharpists. They came from as far south as Portland (two) to as far north as Vancouver, Canada (also two). The Seattle area was represented by two nyckelharpa players and one recorder player! The workshop was very productive, taking place from 10:30 a.m. to 4:00p.m.

Tunes taught by Bart were *Hambo av Gert Olsson*, *Polska ef Gammelgren ef Olav Johansson*,

 rpoliskan av Olav Johansson, and *Grespolskan*, a sl ngpolska fr V sterland ef Hans Kennemark.

During the lunch break, Bart was presented with a carrot cake decorated with a nyckelharpa in the frosting by June Andersson Evanoff, grandmother of one of our players, Anna Abraham. Anna was one of two teenagers at the workshop. The other was Chelsea Morris.

The Pacific Northwest has been lucky to have Bart here for the past six years and he will be greatly missed. But it is hoped that he and Margaret will return here in the near future. In the meantime the best of luck is extended to them on their new life in North Carolina.



Above: You can't have your cake and play it, too! Bart carves into a one-of-a-kind harpa. At left, the Seattle workshop participants.

Stämmas (gathering of nyckelharpa players), even bringing Väsen to Seattle from Sweden to teach and play in 1996 at the second stämma. The first was also in Seattle, in 1995, with Sture Hogmark as guest instructor. The third annual Nyckelharpa Stämma was in Minnesota in 1997. In 1998 it will be in New York City, returning to the west coast in 1999. Each stämma brings over a noted nyckelharpa player from Sweden to teach extensive workshops.

Bart's band "Pang" is a trio inspired by Väsen, a popular group in Sweden which consists of a nyckelharpa, viola, guitar, and more recently, a fantastic drummer. Väsen plays everything from the old, traditional style, to an innovative modernization of old tunes, as well many of their own compositions.

Pang uses nyckelharpa, fiddle, mandolin, jews harp, and guitar, playing very much in Väsen's style and sound.

Bart will be moving to North Carolina in the early summer of 1998 after his Ph.D. thesis is complete. He will be joining Margaret who moved there last year to begin work on her Ph.D. in Early Childhood Special Education. In the meantime Northwest nyckelharpa players inspired by Bart continue to take advantage of occasional workshops he is willing to teach in Seattle. There will be a big void when he moves away, but he and Margaret like Seattle and hope jobs will be waiting for them here after they've finished their education.

Bart has truly enriched and enhanced the Scandinavian music scene in the Northwest.

Trio Patrekatt Coming to the U.S. This Fall

Sweden's Trio Patrekatt is planning a late fall/early winter tour of the U.S. this year. The group, founded in 1995, is made up of Markus Svensson, Johan Hedin, nyckelharpas, and Annika Wijnbladh, cello. Their intense ensemble playing features traditional music as well as their own compositions.

The ensemble is considered one of the most innovative folk ensembles in Sweden.

Their first album, *Adam* (available through the ANA) was released a year ago and has been well received by both audience and critics. Dirty Linen Magazine

commented that "...their youth, energy and masterful musicianship form a powerful combination... *Adam* is an excellent first album from an excellent folk trio."

"The somewhat unorthodox use of the cello, and the quirky harmony second parts paint an unusual picture, full of unexpected turns" Folk on Tap, -97

Trio Patrekatt is available for concerts, workshops, and dances. For bookings and inquiries, contact Annika Wijnbladh: Tel +46 19 57 99 27, or +46 70 695 90 51. E-mail: annika.wijnbladh@ebox.tninet.se

Upcoming Swedish Nyckelharpa Events

21-25 Jun 1998: Ekebyholm

Course the week following midsommar every year, from Sunday to Thursday, at Ekebyholm castle, just north of Rimbo, Uppland. Teaching the course will be ten of the leading nyckelharpa players from Uppland, with Sonia Sahlström as organizer. For information, contact:

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

1-4 July 1988: Zornmärkeuppspelning (Play for the Zornmärke)

Each year, musicians play for a jury and seek the Zorn medal, named after Anders Zorn who organized the first spelmansstämma in 1906. About 1/3 of those who play are awarded one of the following grades: Bronze Diploma, Bronze Medal, Silver Diploma, and Silver Medal. Those who have received the Silver Medal have the honor of calling themselves Riksspelman. Some years the Zorn medal in Gold is given out to a spelman for life-long achievement and commitment to Swedish traditional music.

This year, the event will precede the Riksspellemanssamma in Delsbo. Contact Svenska Ungdomsringen at bygdekul@algonet.se for more info.

Spela Bättre!

The Only Way to Improve Your Playing

The Personal Touch

by Matt Fichtenbaum

This installment's main topic is what I'll call "expression" - the fine details that make one's playing personal and give life and excitement to it. Unlike technique, expression is very subjective, and there are no "right answers." Your goal isn't to slur these two notes, or emphasize that one, it's to awaken a certain excitement or stir up a certain feeling in your listener. So instead of telling you what to do and how to play, I suggest some things to think about when you play, and some things to listen for in others' playing.

After that, we'll consider an old standard, "Hellstedts gamla brudmarsch," and look at how we might put a little life and energy into it.

It's in the details

Think of some player whose music really excites you. For me, Olov Johansson's playing with Väsen comes to mind. Now put on a recording of your favorite player, and listen intently. Find the moments that make you sit up and take notice, and try to understand what makes them special.

In this subjective area there are no absolutes. But I contend it's the fine details of rhythm and accenting that matter. When a note comes just a little bit early, or late, or is struck just a little harder or more sharply, it comes as a surprise to your brain's music receptors, and you sit up and take notice. You can think of the music's acquiring a "texture" and becoming more than just a flat series of notes.

Now we're into something open-ended. I can't tell you how to build "good music" from the ground up - which notes to play early or late or which to accent. You have to know how you want your music to sound, be aware of what "tools" you have available to achieve that sound, and have the playing technique to support those tools. But I can offer some examples and make some suggestions for orientation and a starting point.

Listening

Here's a potentially controversial topic. I'm speaking of the merits of listening - refraining from playing while instead listening to the music that others make,

absorbing, consciously and sub, what it is that makes their playing interesting. In a group setting, find a good balance of when to be a player, when to be a keen observer.

I have written before about Väsen's presence at Scandinavian Week in 1996. I learned much from hanging around them while they played, matching what I saw with what I heard and generally absorbing the mood and feel of their music. Then I worked on my own to incorporate all I learned into my own playing. When I then had the chance to work one-on-one with Olov the following summer at Ekebyholm, I was better equipped to absorb what he taught me.

What do I listen for?

Here are some of the dimensions in which you can adjust your playing to communicate your feelings through your music:

- Articulation - the way you play notes individually or run together; the way you "shape" the beginning and end of each note, beginning it sharply or gently, ending it abruptly or letting it fade off. All done with the bow.
- Phrasing - which notes combine to make a phrase; where the tune pauses to "breathe."
- Rhythmic variation - when some notes come just a little earlier or later than one would expect; or when, for example, a bit of triplet rhythm shows up in music mostly phrased in two. Or how much "swing" feel there is.
- Accenting and emphasis - Which notes, if any, are accented by playing them more loudly or more sharply; how much "offbeat" feel there is.
- Ornamentation and melodic variation.
- Double stops and drones - when, and how much.
- Dynamics - how varying the loudness changes the feel of the music.
- All the dimensions one can explore when one plays with others - dialogue, harmony, accompaniment. A worthy subject for its own article.
- Variation in general - differences between the way you play a tune or phrase one time and the next. A

good way to add interest when playing a tune several times, as one does for a dance.

I could discourse interminably on these, but it's better to illustrate a few points in the context of a tune, leaving the larger topic as a framework for your own exploration.

Hellstedts gamla brudmarsch

Per Hellstedt, 1771-1850, was the great-grandfather of August Bohlin. Hellstedt was a respected fiddler who often played for weddings; he played often with Byss-Kalle. To him is ascribed the polska Åkerbystålet and numerous other tunes, including this one, "Hellstedt's old bridal march."

It's hard to understand the magic in a tune you've not heard, so if you're unfamiliar with this one I advise finding a recording. Väsen has recorded it on *Essence*, their third album, or find someone who knows it and have her play it for you.

Incidentally, if you check the liner notes to *Essence*, you'll learn that Hellstedt played this tune in the early 1700's (if you read the English notes), or at the beginning of the 17th century (if you read the notes in French). Don't believe a word of it.

The "A" part has an uneven structure, and is usually written with some measures in 2/4 and some in 3/4. I have transcribed it with one 3/4 measure, which captures the feel of the way I play it.

The transcription also shows the double-stops that I tend to use. They're only suggestions - you are free to leave them out, especially while learning the tune, or to change them.

Getting started

If I'm playing just the melody, I don't shift my hand upwards until measure 5, taking the D with finger 2. In the B part, I shift for measure 12, using finger 3 on the G. Finger 3 is also recommended for the first E in measure 14.

With the double stops, I take almost all the octaves with fingers 1 and 3. For the G-to-G at the end of measure 3, you have a choice of fingers 1-3 or 2-4. Later on, you'll need to do this with 1 and 3, but it's up to you. Measures 5-7, for example, use finger 4 for some melody work while holding the octave with 1 and 3.

Remember that the double stops are extra. Play the melody clearly and definitely; be gentle with the double stops and use them sparingly.

Variation

What's written is only one expression of this tune. It suggests how I play it, but can't contain all the details nor the way it changes and evolves. You will doubtless

play it differently. As an aid in achieving that goal, here are some ideas for variation. The numbers refer to the examples on the accompanying page.

- **Bowing.** As written, the tune starts pretty squarely. Look at #1, in which the bowing changes to slur into each beat from the beat before. It's immediately "swinging," with a different energy.
- Or look at #2. The notes used are the melody and double stops as written, but the bow rocks back and forth to play them alternately. You can experiment with rocking the bow for the different effects it gives. Try to get a smooth transition between strings so that the result sounds smooth instead of choppy.
- #3 shows some grace notes similar to what Olov plays on the recording. To my ear they give a "coaxing" feel, enticing the listener along.
- **Phrasing.** The tune's first phrase ends in measure 4, but just where is open to discussion. As written, it's on the first B; the tune takes a breath there and the rest is a pickup into the next phrase. In #4, the phrase continues to the next-to-last note, and only the last note is the pickup.
- **Swinging the rhythm.** Look at the first beat of measure 4: four 16th notes, with the first dotted - longer - and the second shortened to match. You can play four even notes instead, and see how the feel changes; you can do that many places in this tune. How long you hold the dotted note is up to you - experiment!
- **Accenting.** In this tune I give a little emphasis to the notes that fall on the beats. Just a bit of extra bow pressure or speed, nothing too pronounced. In a schottis I might mark the offbeat too, perhaps by playing it a little staccato (short, leaving some space afterwards).
- **Ornaments, trills, etc.** I show various grace notes, often played just before a beat. You can experiment with the notes used and where they fall. One example is #5, in which the few spare grace notes I show have become full triplets on most of the notes.
- **Melody variations.** It's common to play measures 16-17 as shown, but you can reduce them to their bare minimum as in #6. Or change them, as in #7. You can play one way, then change it on the repeat or the next time through the tune.
- **Variation in general.** You can vary any dimension - melody, dynamics, rhythm - as you evolve the tune. There's always something new you can offer the listeners (or dancers) to keep their interest. I think this is one of the great joys of playing solo - you're free to make changes and adjustments without first clearing them with your collaborators.

More examples

Example #8 is a couple of measures of a schottis tune, played with straight rhythm. #9 is the same phrase with the first two notes asymmetric; it gives it a different feel. For another variation, try it with both pairs of notes dotted. Then reread Sheila's and Bart's article on schottis style in NN #9.

Keep the style

Example #10 is two measures from the well-known Byss-Kalle tune Byggnan. It's a sixteenth-note polska, phrased three beats per measure, often four notes per beat. It's important to keep the sixteenths even and flowing so that the three beats sound like one phrase. Some players might mark the first beat of a measure by gently dotting only the first note.

#11 is, for a change, an illustration of something not to do. With the dotted notes each beat becomes its own phrase, and the "three" feel disappears beneath an old-timey reel or hornpipe flavor. Players not familiar with the style often do this, in schottis and gänglåt tunes as well as polskas. Don't try this at home!

Final comments

Nyckelharpa music has developed a lot of depth over several hundred years. I urge you again to do a lot of listening - to recordings, to others' playing - and take inspiration from what you hear. And to record your own playing and listen to that. You're likely to find some pleasant surprises!

We haven't talked much about technique this time. But the subtlety of expression requires fine control of

Hellstedts gamla brudmarsch

Per Hellstedt (1771-1850), Tobo, Uppland

transcr. Matt Fichtenbaum 1998

rhythm, articulation, and dynamics. And variation requires that you have more than one way to play a phrase or form a note or ornament. The more technique you develop, the richer your "bag of tricks" for playing. Play tunes you like, and in them, discover worthwhile exercises for developing your playing.

This is interactive material by nature. We ought to

be hanging out one-on-one, or I should be recording this discussion while playing the musical examples. But this is print journalism, and we'll make the most of it. I'd be pleased to discuss it further with any of you, or to read your further development - or rebuttal - of these ideas in NN.

Spela Sämre!

Easy steps that can change your playing

by Matt Fichtenbaum

It's probably happened to you, maybe more than once. You're playing in a public place, and people keep interrupting you, saying things like "Oh, that's beautiful! Tell me about your music, and your instrument." Or you're at home, alone, and you play something so beautiful that it moves you to tears and you can no longer see the sheet music. And you've thought, "If only I didn't play so well, none of this would happen." In this column, we discuss some things you can do to bring this about.

- 1. Tuning.** All those tuning pegs at the top of your instrument, and all the time it takes to tune them. Be efficient. Each time you play, tune only half of them. Or, if you usually play with another person, don't both tune for the same session but take turns instead.
- 2. Instrument care.** Each week, apply a little Vaseline to your strings. You might have to experiment to find the best location, but about halfway between the bridge and the keybox is a good place to start. As a side benefit, it minimizes the rosin buildup.
- 3. Hand position.** Playing nyckelharpa can be a strain on the left hand. Try not to use all the fingers when you play, but save some for the next playing session. Vary your choice of fingers so they all get some time to rest.
- 4. Balance.** If you play with other instruments, try to include some that will it harder for people to hear you. Bagpipes are good, as are pipe organs. And accordions, especially in states that don't impose a seven-day waiting period for their purchase.
- 5. Harmony.** Playing a harmony part - a stämma - for a tune can be hard work. And if you want to play both harmony and melody, it's like having to learn twice as many tunes. Instead, just retune your nyckelharpa down a decent interval - a minor second is always a good choice - and finger it as for the melody.

The effect you achieve will be truly impressive.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but it's a good beginning and the techniques it suggests will serve you well. Future columns will discuss more opportunities to alter your playing, also some ways to sell your nyckelharpa if for some reason you tire of it.

Tunes Published in NN

This list includes all the tunes included in the issues of Nyckel Notes up to now.

- NN #4 (July 1996)
Elins Vals
Rullande Gubben, slängpolska
Stures Schottis
- NN #5 (October 1996)
Slängpolska (#25) efter Byss-Calle
Masbo-Polketten
Polska från Hallnäs (Bondpolska from Överhärde)
- NN #6 (January 1997)
Polska efter Sven Gräf (Orsapolska)
Furuboms Polska (Bodapolska or hambo)
- NN #7 (April 1997)
"Gladare än du tror," polkett efter August Bohlin
Ur-polskan (bondpolska from Viksta)
Dans på Kolbotten (Polska från Åmot)
- NN #8 (July 1997)
Polska efter Johan Hansson, Skucku
(gammalvänster from Oviken)
Tierpspolskan (Bondpolska from Viksta)
Lilla Schottis
- NN #9 (October 1997)
Polska Between Friends
Första Polskan (Bondpolska from Överhärde)
Polska efter Börjes Olle (Rättvikspolska)
Harpar-Klas Gånglåt
- NN #10 (January 1998)
Eklundapolska nr. 2 (Slängpolska from Uppland)
Polska från Kumla (Bondpolska from Överhärde)
Polska efter Skomakare Viger (Hambo med vals from Järvsö)
- NN #11 (April 1998)
Hellstedts Gamla Brudmarsch
Bergmans Polska (Orsapolska)
Björklingelåten

Bergmans polska is a typical minor Orsa polska, free and bluesy. You really ought to hear it played by someone who knows it, though the transcription gives a good approximation. Björklingelåten is a traditional-

harpa tune; I was reminded of it by seeing it on the list of allspel tunes for the nyckelharpa stämman to be held at Skansen in Stockholm on May 30.

This version is from John Olsson in Björklinge.

Bergmans Polska

Orsapolska efter Gössa Anders

Freely

(Timing notated more-or-less as it sounds)

transcr. Matt Fichtenbaum, 1998

Björklingelåten

Gånglåt efter Anders Petterson

Version from John Olsson, Björklinge

Nyckelharpa Care:

The Sound Post

Normally the sound post remains quietly and inconspicuously in its place, performing its important function without calling any attention to itself. Occasionally a sound post causes problems, and then it can be helpful to have a little knowledge ready. Hence this month's topic.

Passing over the bridge, the strings exert considerable force on the instrument's top and onto two internal parts. One is the bass bar, a brace, glued to the underside of the top, positioned under the bass end of the bridge. The other is the sound post, standing between the top and back of the instrument and located near the bridge foot on the treble side.

The sound post is normally positioned in line with the bridge foot but toward the tailpiece by a short distance, normally three-eighths to a half inch. It is free-standing, held in place by the force the top exerts on it. Its position affects the instrument's sound: moving it closer to the bridge emphasizes the higher pitches and makes the sound brighter; moving it away from the bridge makes the instrument mellower.

Builders adjust the sound post's position as one means of getting the sound they seek. But most of us first encounter the sound post under less opportune circumstances, when it causes problems.

The sound post is, after all, held in place by being wedged between the top and the back. The string force pushes the top downward and holds the sound post more tightly. But changes in temperature and humidity affect the instrument's dimensions, and if you remove or loosen the strings and thus reduce the string force, the sound post may become loose enough to fall over.

Oops! This is a problem, but not a calamity; it only becomes a calamity if you restring the instrument without the sound post and thereby collapse the top. So don't do that. Instead, replace it in its proper position. There are two good ways to do this:

1. Take it to your local string instrument repairman and ask for help. Violins, etc., have sound posts, so he or she won't be too surprised. It's not a difficult task.
2. Replace it yourself. This can be frustrating the first couple of times, but it's possible.

The sound post should have one end flat, to rest against the back, and one end curved to match the inside

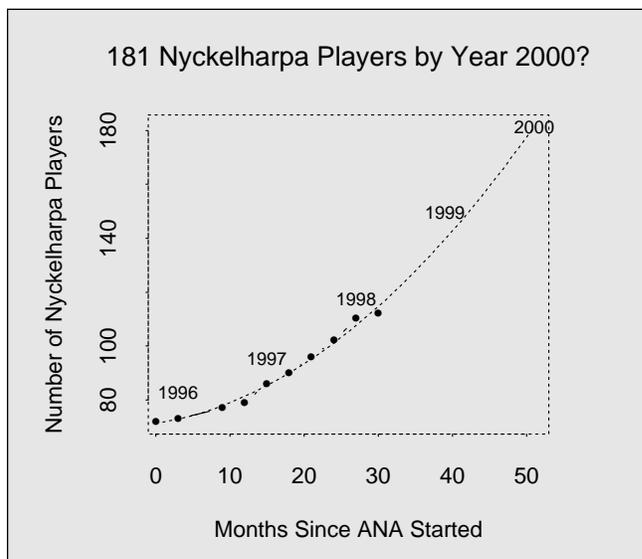
curve of the top. Its grain should run parallel to the bridge, crosswise to the grain of the top. You should be able to tell which end is up and get the correct left-right orientation (the curved end is asymmetric, with the shorter side toward the edge of the instrument).

The builder usually impales the sound post on the end of a sharp tool and then inserts it through one of the f-holes. You might notice the resulting small hole in the side of the sound post. Some people buy a tool called a sound post setter, intended for this purpose; its other end is shaped to help nudge the ends of the sound post into position. Others use the sharpened end of a coat hanger.

Once it is standing in place between the instrument's top and back, you need to move it into the correct position (see above). It is customary for the sound post to fall over during this process. Don't give up! And remember, your local violin repair person has knowledge and tools for this job if it doesn't work.

So, when changing or otherwise loosening your strings, be aware of the sound post and the possibility of its falling over. It's best to change main strings one at a time, or otherwise not remove all the strings at once, and to keep some string tension on the bridge at all times.

Finally, you who haven't had sound post problems, take a minute and look at your instrument's sound post and note its position. You never know when this awareness might come in handy.



The Great Swedish Nyckelharpa Building Revival

by Matt Fichtenbaum

Your correspondent lived in Sweden in 1976-77, teaching electrical engineering at the University of Linköping and generally enjoying life in the Swedish environment. The 1970's were a time of great interest in reviving older traditions - "Everything our grandparents did that our parents rejected as 'not modern'," it was explained to me, - and the nyckelharpa benefited from this movement.

We know that the nyckelharpa was common in Sweden through the later 1800's, that Sweden's transition to an industrial- and city-based society brought a change in musical tastes and a favoring of factory-made instruments such as the accordion, and that the nyckelharpa declined during the 1900's to the extent that only a handful of active players remained. Eric Sahlström's interest in the nyckelharpa, beginning in the 1940's, and his development of its construction and its music, are credited as the most important factor in reversing its decline. In the late 1960's a group of Uppland folk, with Eric Sahlström as the leader, gathered in what was the first organized program in building nyckelharpa. A few more such courses, locally arranged and informally organized, followed.

I should mention that the notion of the adult education course is well-developed in Sweden, and was in the 1970's. It has been posited that the improved standard of living following World War II gave people time to pursue recreational studies, or that the relatively late development of higher education left a ready market for adult studies, or that the long winter evenings called for some organized structure to get people out of their homes and into a group with others. In any event, just about any political party, workers' organization, or other movement had an associated adult education program, and there were several independent adult-ed organizations as well, offering a full assortment of courses of all types.

In Sweden, everybody grows up familiar with woodworking (this may be different now, as computer skills and other new developments replace the practical arts of previous eras, but it was certainly true in the 70's). It's called slöjd, handicrafts, or träslöjd, woodcraft; the British have a word sloyd with the same meaning. So the general population was well prepared for woodworking projects, much better than, say, for musical studies, and there was general interest in the old traditions. What better opportunity to

offer courses in nyckelharpa construction?

One adult-ed organization in Uppsala sponsored Lars Backström to develop an instrument for a nyckelharpa-building course. Backström worked with Eric Sahlström to develop a harpa with a top bent to shape and a flat back, like most instruments one sees today. There was a detailed construction drawing and a book that narrated the steps involved. Courses usually ran about six months; participants would meet in a school woodworking shop and do the heavy work under an instructor's guidance, pursuing the detail work at home between meetings. A standard kit of parts started everyone's harpa at a common point; usually the kit included precut parts for the keybox, circumventing one time-consuming, error-prone phase. Another adult-ed organization in Stockholm, working with instrument maker Herold Lundin, developed a nyckelharpa (the "Lundin harpa") with a carved top and back like those of a violin. Here, too, there was a book with detailed drawings and step-by-step descriptions as well as a kit of parts.

[Note: As far as we know, information on nyckelharpa construction is only available in Swedish.]

Now imagine a class of eight to twelve participants, all working on "just another woodworking project." By the time they deeply understand that what they're building is, in fact, a musical instrument, they're so familiar with it that there's no awe or fear involved. And there's an entire group, who've worked together for six months, each with a newly-made nyckelharpa and all ready to proceed, together, to the "beginning nyckelharpa" playing course. What better way to ease folks who don't think of themselves as musical into the traditional music and the joy of playing? I believe that's the underlying reason for nyckelharpa-building courses, and the reason they were so successful. People knowledgeable on the topic estimate that twelve thousand nyckelharpas were built from the 1970's onwards, and that at least half of them were actively played. Apparently the movement was a success.

Incidentally, your correspondent got his Swedish musical start in just such a course. A month into my stay in Sweden I saw a TV feature on a spelmansstämman and had the natural "What is that instrument?" reaction. Then there was an exhibition of the instruments built by the previous year's courses, and the concert by Uppland people imported for the purpose, and I was hooked. Fortunately, the instructor was competent and helpful, and despite my relative lack of woodworking experience, I too

ended the course with a playable nyckelharpa. And then went on to the beginners' playing class, and to Leif Alpsjö's summer week at Österbybruk, and have been playing ever since.

That spring and summer (1977) there was great interest in the nyckelharpa, and many people went to courses and built their own instruments, leading, naturally, to a serious demand for beginners' playing courses in the fall. There was also a shortage of instructors, and that is how your correspondent became "the visiting American who taught the Swedes about their traditional instrument." But that's another story.

New Recordings Available from the ANA

AWCD-24: Ge rum vid roddartrappan

Nyckelharpa players Niklas Roswall and Peter "Puma" Hedlund, with Mats Bergstrom (guitar) and Bengt Nordfors (nyckelharpa and song). The project started as two concert ideas, one with Italian classical music scored for nyckelharpa, guitar and voice, the other an adaptation of Carl Michael Bellman's songs and epistles from the late 18th century.

Opera singer and nyckelharpa — Bellman and Bel Canto — Naples and Stockholm.

NSD6012 Swåp

Swedish meets Celtic: Swedish fiddle players Ola Bäckström and Carina Normansson team up with Britain's Karen Tweed (accordion) and Ian Carr (guitar), swapping tunes and styles to create an intercultural sound.

NSD6015 Groupa: 15 Years

A retrospective of one of the most influential groups

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.

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.atmos.washington.edu/~brash/ana.html>

Nyckel Notes

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Attention, Nyckelharpa Builders:

The ANA has received inquiries from instrument builders who seek information about building nyckelharpas (all the published material we know about is in Swedish). If you are a builder willing to share your knowledge with others, let the ANA know. We'll forward your names to these aspiring builders or, if you'd prefer, we'll publish your names in Nyckel Notes as resources for those who want to build.

in the modern Swedish folk music scene. Mats Edén plays very traditionally, but chooses to include influences from around the globe to make a new kind of music. Not really rock, this isn't really true traditional music either, but is just plain great music.

NSD6017 Olov Johansson: Storsvarten

Olov Johansson's solo CD, with guest artists Claudia Mueller (recorder), Roger Tallroth (guitar, mandola and bosoki), Mikael Marin (viola), Mats Olofsson (cello), and Anders Bromander (organ and piano). Olov returns to the traditional tunes that have been with him for years, playing solo and in duets. Seven of his own compositions, all firmly within the tradition. A really great CD, I listened to it 3 times in the first 24 hours I had it!

XOUCD105 Norlätar: Ravn

Unfortunately, this CD is temporarily out of stock. We hope to have copies available in the fall.

Send orders to: Gail Halverson, ANA, PO Box 1394, Venice, CA 90294-1394

The American Nyckelharpa Association

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