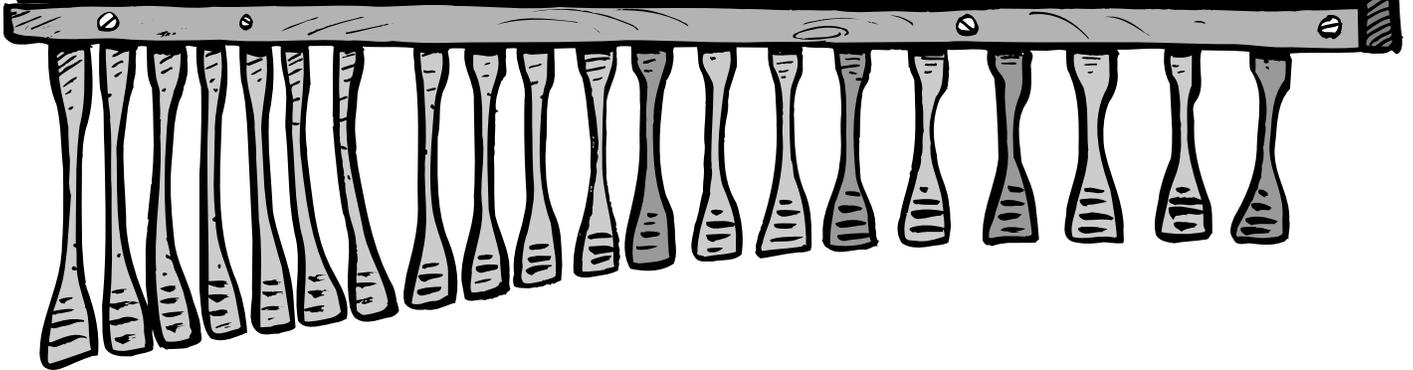


THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN NYCKELHARPA ASSOCIATION

# NYCKELNOTES



## 1998 Stämman Review

By Tim Newcomb

Where in the middle of New York City would one go to hear a herd of harpas but to... Chinatown?

The 1998 annual ANA Stämman came off in a lot of heat, but without a hitch on the weekend of July 10-12. After a fretful organizing period during which I was made aware that a large percentage of the nyckelharpa players and Scandi New York dancers would be in Scandinavia in July, it was a great relief to see Ditte Andersson surrounded by up to ten musicians at the workshops.

The Stämman couldn't have happened without the incredible help of ANA member Patrice George of New York, who spent untold hours helping me (who lives in Vermont) find dance and rehearsal space, and lobbying potential attendees through phone calls and mailings. Her partner Bob generously allowed us to use space in his business, The ARChive of Contemporary Music, for the Saturday and Sunday workshops as well as the concert Sunday afternoon.

The ARChive is a non-profit archive of over 600,000 recordings



Ditte Andersson at Buffalo Gap.

of world music, and its towering shelves of albums provided a great backdrop to Ditte's classes.

Players came from California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Long Island, and Vermont.

Ditte came from West Virginia where she had been the nyckelharpa teacher and, with Marie Länne Persson, voice instructor at Buffalo Gap's Scandinavian Week. When the week was over, Becky Weis, in spite of a looming wedding, offered to take Ditte on a tour of the east coast until we all met up on Friday afternoon in Manhattan.

After Americanizing Ditte with burgers and Elvis at a 50s-style diner on the upper east side, we traveled south to Chinatown, where Friday evening's

workshop was held at the Soundance Repertory Company's rehearsal space on Broadway. We warmed up by each starting a tune of our choice and being joined by the rest of the group. Ditte then launched into teaching "Polkett efter Gössa Anders."

Rather than plowing through many tunes superficially, Ditte chose to concentrate on basic technique during the weekend. We worked on fewer tunes than we did during the 1997 Stämman, but I think everyone left playing the tunes we learned strongly, with correct bowing and a good sense of rhythm.

Saturday's workshop was at the

photo courtesy of Tom Shields

### Correction!

The musical examples referred to in last issue's *Spela Bättre!* article were inadvertently omitted. They appear now, *bättre* late than never, on page 11. My apologies!

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# Ekebyholm — Class of '98

by Rita Leydon

My nyckelharpa and I have been acquainted about a year and a half. In February the two of us signed up for the annual nyckelharpa course held at Ekebyholm castle the week after midsummer in Uppland, Sweden. Pinch those nostrils and jump into the deep end! There are three requirements for attendance: nyckelharpa passion (fiddles are ok), passable Swedish language skills, and the transfer of certain funds.

Ekebyholm sits on a lake; a stately rectangular structure at the end of a long, hedge-lined lane with two attendant dormitories. Owned by the Seventh Day Adventists, Ekebyholm is now a private boarding school. The grounds have been known as Ekebyholm since 1328, and the present castle was built between 1624 and 1632.

Sunday. I'm nervous, so many new faces. My roommate is Sheila Morris from Colorado. Gail Halverson from California is here as well as Anna MacFarland, a Swede living in Canada. At an orientation meeting our teachers introduce themselves by playing musical marvels. What a group! Cajsa Ekstav, Peter Hedlund, Esbjörn Hogmark, Peder Källman, Anders Mattsson, Sven-Olof Sundell, Olov Johansson, Tore Lindqvist (fiddle), Eva Tjörnebo (song), Sonia Sahlström (daughter of Eric), Anders Liljefors, Torbjörn Näsbom, and Leif Åhlund.

I am in Group #13 and our first teacher is Sven-Olof Sundell, a gentle soul with a crew cut and checkered flannel shirt. He works on basics: how to hold everything, and polska bowing. I am bored and think I need a higher level, until I realize how excruciatingly difficult it is to play super slow and still remember the bowing and fingering. He talks about the importance of a slight breath between measures in a polska to impart airiness. "Båtsman Däck" is the practice tune. I don't know it yet, but this lovely little tune will tor-

ment virtually everyone this week. Yet we all continue to love it.

Next, a group lesson with Sonia, a superb teacher who works with me on "Furubom's Polska." I figure out the notation back at the room with Sheila. After dinner Anders Mattsson and his regular partners — a fiddler and an accordionist/bassist — treat us to a fabulous concert. Then dancing. At times there are more musicians than dancers. A dozen masters sawing blissfully away.

Monday. My day starts at 10:30 with a private lesson with Esbjörn Hogmark. "Polkett from Lövstabruk #1" is the subject. The bowing pattern — three longs, two shorts, three longs, two shorts — is the task. "Gånglåt from Äppelbo" is the next subject. The bowing for that is a long, two shorts, a long, two shorts. There should be two slurs in part A, and they are not where I have them now.

At 2:00 I have Anders Mattsson all to myself. We play "Adam och Evas Brudmarsch" and he says my skeletal rendition is largely fine. Very positive. "Kanon!" He shows me a couple "free" double stops to spruce up "Båtsman Däck." I am utterly exhausted by three.

At 4:00 I join my group and Peter "Puma" Hedlund. Never heard of the guy before. Looks like a mischievous 50s hot rodder with an unruly cowlick. Musical wisdoms and tricks of the trade trickle out as he adjusts our maltuned harps. Several Harry Hedbom harpas are in attendance and the Puma purrs that they are indeed fine. He tunes with only an A fork. I ask about the -2, +4, +2, +4 tuning. His opinion is low. This Puma produces the most beautiful sound I've heard yet.

"Tårta på tårta" (cake on top of cake) is a Swedish expression that suggests sweet excess. It can aptly be applied to the Ekebyholm experience. Witness Nisse Nordström and Ann-Christin Granfors; an old man and his younger protegee. He is wonderful! Full of laughter and mirth. His



Left to right: Sheila Morris, Gail Halverson, Anna MacFarlane, and Rita Leydon.

whole body moves with staccato gusto, head bobbing, bow flying like a brush spattering paint, quick and high. Speaks candidly about getting old — fingers can't feel, ears can't hear, head can't remember. He introduces a tune, turns to Ann-Christin asking, "How does it go?" She is calm and quiet, very studious to his wild gesturing. The audience adores him.

Tuesday. I sleep like a log. Have filmjölök and muesli for breakfast, and feel happy and clean. Olov Johansson asks what I am all about so early in the morning. We delve into the subject of breakfast and how it can make or break your day. His favorite jump start is two "mackor" (open faced sandwiches) dressed in liverwurst and sliced cucumber plus coffee.

The "allspel låtar" to be played at the Rimbo Church concert Thursday night are posted today. I never heard of any of them.

I am anxious about my lesson with Esbjörn. I practice bowing with an old sock wrapped around the strings to kill the sound and singing "Lövtastbruk" in order to repattern my brain. It's starting to click. The lesson goes well. I demonstrate the sock and the singing. He is pleased and amused. He wants me to slow it down by half, but neither hand is able to function at half speed. This is such a humbling hobby. We play together at tempo. Relax. Concentrate. He asks about polskas. "I'm so tired of Batman Däck," I say. "Good, then take that one." I play solo and he approves. "What else?" I play "Vendelpolskan." It needs work, so he plays it for me. He gives me "Urpolskan" as homework.

Anders and I go over the trills from yesterday which mess up my timing. I play my double stops slowly and methodically, allowing myself time to think. Anders raises his eyebrows and beams, declaring my bowing pattern "KANON!" I gather that slow and precise is important. I ask his opinion of the -2, +4, +2, +4 tuning philosophy. He is solidly behind it and tells me to stick with it. We move on to "Anna-Stinas Pojkar," a schottis. Longer strokes, please.

At the afternoon group class Anders teaches "Schottis i Nattskjortan", a tune he brought to Buffalo Gap last summer. I had nibbled at it enough this winter to decide it was too hard for me. Today I learn all the notes and 80% of the fingering in two hours! . Amazing what a difference it makes to have a teacher break a tune into bite-size pieces.

Evening program. Sture Sahlström and the Trollrikespelmän. Big anticipation, buzzing, extra people and jockeying for good seats. A most incredible concert of electrifying Uppland tunes. I can't stand still; my whole body is in motion and my cheeks ache from non-stop smiling. Bosse Larsson, the son of Viksta-Lasse's brother Sven, arrives late and joins in an emotional grand finale of "Spelmans Glädje." I am reduced to tears, hopelessly lost in transcendence.

Sture and his Spelmän stay and play for dancing. The room is energized with spirit. Stomping, yelling, twirling, pulsing. Sture twinkling; long, bushy eyebrows and white hair bouncing up and down with the beat. Musicians

responsive to the dancers, each feeding the other.

It is a tough act to follow, but Anders Mattsson, Bosse and Robert Larsson (father and son) step right up to bat at 11:00. The American ladies are on the floor constantly with the Swedish men who are adept at the older dances. The Swedish ladies stick mainly to gammaldans, this being a nyckelharpa course, not dance week.

Wednesday. My practice spot is the hallway just beyond Puma's classroom. Today he pokes his head out as I play "Andakten" and flashes me two thumbs up. I get so distracted I fall off.

I practice "Urpolskan." I'm in a perplexing place, needing to get out of my own way. The hands fare better, I notice, when the brain doesn't meddle in the soup.

My teacher seems pleased with the A part of "Urpolskan." Phew. "Now let's move on to B." Esbjörn plays and it sounds hauntingly beautiful and terrifyingly complex, starting with a triplet. Panic. He feeds it to me phrase by phrase. At the end of the lesson, the whole thing is mine! Astonishing! I go directly to my practice place, listen to my tape and play, totally absorbed.

Lunch is pizza with pineapple pieces baked in with the pepperoni. Full stomachs climb the hill to Esbjörn's outdoor class on tweaking a harpa to perfection. He arrives with a fistful of pliers and tongs, and a big smile on his face. I put my harpa in the shade, far away.

Anders and I continue with yesterday's schottis. He is enthusiastic and encouraging. We play "Andakten" for fun. It's lumpy and gruesome; an hour earlier it wasn't half bad. Still, he is encouraging.

Today's group class is with Cajsa Ekstäv, an exotically beautiful 22-year veteran of the harpa. She goes over basics and the importance of scale exercises. We play the C major scale as a round. She plays the four "allspel" tunes that will be played in the Rimbo Church. We easily learn a waltz. She plays piano as accompaniment to our nyckelharpas. We sound pretty good.

This afternoon Puma offers a well-attended lesson on harmony. After a few words about the C major scale I am lost. I have had all I can handle with melody, tempo, and did-I-already-play-A-twice? Puma is passionate about his building blocks. "This takes a bit of work to comprehend at first, but serves you well forever," he promises.

After dinner Esbjörn joins me. I ask about the origins of "Urpolskan." Traditional, he learned it from Sture Sahlström. I gather he is very devoted to the Sahlström family and legacy. Esbjörn is an engineer who travels the world in business suits and shakes lots of hands. He's also a multi-dimensional athlete who won competitions in his youth. He also builds what some say are the planet's best nyckelharpas. His brother, Sture, is also a cracker-jack harpa player.

No serious music is wasted on talent night, hilarity rules. Our teachers are subject to various embarrassing skits that leave the rest of us gasping for breath. After a coffee and cake break, dancing begins. Noteworthy is a schottis full of intriguing variations with Per-Ulf Allmo of the Tongång recording label. He has rhythm, grace and lovely style.

Thursday. Last day, I'm so glad I came! I work extra hard on my polska so I'll be decent for Esbjörn. I give it my best shot but am only fair. He passes on a nice compliment from Per-Ulf about our one dance last night.

Anders is eager to play. I am all played out. We play "Adam och Evas Brudmarsch." It is wonderful, and I stay with him. He plays harmony the second time through with a few "sour" notes to see if he can throw me, but I stay on course. "KANON!"

Our group's last session is with Olov Johansson. I arrive first in the classroom and find Olov's kontrabasharpa on the floor in its case. I squat down and study it, fascinated. Olov arrives and offers to play it while the others drizzle in. He charms us all. In spite of general fatigue, Olov introduces us to a new tune, first singing words, while we listen. Afterward he plays on the harpa and breaks it down. Just the C major scale. No hand changes. He has us place our

fingers on the C string keys, bow on lap. We tap out the tune, then pluck it with the fleshy part of the thumb. Only after that did we pick up the bow. Worked like a charm. Sneaky.

Two days of sunshine has a profound effect on the courtyard: after dinner it explodes with lush blossoms of every imaginable variety of Swedish folk dress. Gay. Colorful. Distinctive. A verdant cornucopia of old-style finery. I'm sad that I won't be joining my friends in the concert, but simply don't know the tunes we are to play. I wish the tunes had been mailed in advance. We pack up and caravan to Rimbo Church. I feel deliriously happy and wink at my friends as they march in playing beautifully. The church is old and lovely, packed to the gills with expectant locals. Coffee with cakes is served afterwards and we all hug one last time. I promise to return, with my husband Chris and his harpa, in two years.

## Spela Bättre!

*The Only Way to Improve Your Playing*

# Tunes that Stretch and Inspire Your Playing

by Matt Fichtenbaum

This Spring I acquired Olov Johansson's solo recording Storsvarten, and was particularly captivated by "Bjernulfs brudpolska," a tune Olov made for the wedding of Rättvik fiddler Anders Bjernulf. It's a good tune, and there's exciting interplay, reminiscent of early Väsen, with Roger Tallroth's guitar. I set out to learn to play it.

The first two parts seemed like they'd yield to a little persistent practice. But in the third part, Olov plays some sixteenth-note figures that reach the high F, one note below the top, and adds some triplet ornaments while he's at it. My fingers hardly knew the territory up there, let alone having the precision and power to play the ornamented figures, and I knew I had some work ahead.

Over my ongoing process of learning to play nyckelharpa, I owe many "steps forward" to particular tunes. "Båtsman Däck" for polska bowing, "Trollrikespolkan" for the left-hand fingerings of its second-part arpeggios, "Spelmansglädje" and the other tunes that advanced the art of crossing strings while still sounding like music. The Väsen concert in Connecticut when Olov played the Baroque-sounding polska they call "Jätteliken" and I knew I couldn't rest until I'd learned to play it.

What's the lesson? There comes a time when you can play, more or less, all the tunes you know. Perhaps you

don't have a teacher close at hand, or a fellow player, and you're not sure what to do next. I suggest you listen to as much relevant music as you can - nyckelharpa recordings, fiddle recordings - until a tune or two jumps out at you and says "Learn me!" Somewhere in that tune there will be a challenge, and when you have worked it out your playing will be that much farther ahead. It won't be any less work, but you'll be so eager to get there that you won't notice how hard you're working. Good luck!

By the way, "Bjernulfs brudpolska" is still in development, but getting better.

## Trio Patrekatt Tour Cancelled

Disappointingly, Trio Patrekatt has cancelled their upcoming late fall tour. Annika Wijnbladh commented that "we haven't got enough gigs to make it, and our record company in LA is not so interested in us coming over as they were at the beginning."

Trio Patrekatt is comprised of Markus Svensson, Johan Hedin, nyckelharpas, with Annika on cello. Their beautifully played and produced CD "Adam" is available from the ANA.

# An Afternoon With Curt Tallroth

by Sheila Morris

On my trip to Sweden this year, I spent a few days with Leif Alpsjö (along with Andrea Larsson and Rita Leydon — poor Leif! A whole houseful of American women!) As part of his efforts to amuse us, on Sunday morning he said, “How would you like to visit Curt Tallroth? I’ll call and see if he’s home, shall I?” Nobody had any objections. As if we would! Leif made his phone call, and found that Curt was home and had no plans for the day.

“We’ll bring lunch!,” Leif said.

So, we piled fiddles, nyckelharpas, bags, and boxes into the back of the Volvo and off we went. It was about a forty-minute drive from Leif’s place in Viksta to Curt’s in Harbo, on the other side of Björklinge.

When we arrived, Curt had the table laid out with beautiful little porcelain cups and the ever-present coffee and bullar (cardamom rolls). So we sat and had “fika” (an important Swedish word meaning “coffee-break” — something that happens at every possible opportunity) and chatted for awhile. Curt told a charming story about his neighbor-lady from across the street, who stops in every few days to make sure he has enough home-baked bullar. If he has run out, she immediately goes home and bakes him some new ones.

Curt and Leif took out their fiddles and played a couple of tunes. I took out my tape recorder and laid it in as unobtrusive a spot as I could find.

They played some more. Then Leif said “Why don’t we all play?” So we broke out the nyckelharpas (and Andrea’s fiddle) and worked our way through a selection of basic harpa tunes. Rita has only been playing for about a year, so the choice of tunes was largely dictated by her repertoire — Polkett fr. Lövestabruk, Tierpsolska, Skälarna, Gåsvikarn, Äppelbo. Curt stuck to his fiddle; he says that the nyckelharpa hurts his neck nowadays. I got a “Welcome out!” from Leif — I have recently discovered that I can occasionally look at other people while I’m playing. This is a good thing! I used to find it too distracting, but now it works a lot of the time.

Leif and Andrea started assembling lunch, but when Rita and I realized that this wasn’t just sandwiches but rather pork cutlets and potatoes and green beans and... anyway, we offered

to take over in the kitchen, as long as Leif and Curt would entertain us. Everyone seemed happy with this arrangement, although cooking in an unfamiliar kitchen proved a bit of a challenge. Every time the music stopped someone would ask, “Where do you keep the knives?” or something of the sort. Then it was back to everything Curt ever learned from Viksta-Lasse. A lunch has seldom been prepared with such sublime music as encouragement!

Once lunch was ready, we took our seats again. Curt regaled us with stories from when Leif was his student, and told a couple about Olov Johansson, as well. I don’t remember them — I only remember the feeling of being there and listening to this charming gentleman talking about the ‘good old days’. He seemed to be truly delighted to have us all there, and this is one of the things that continually amazes me about the folk music experience. I mean, just imagine phoning, say, Yo Yo Ma and saying “I have some friends here who play cello, how about if I bring them over for lunch and a jam session?” It just wouldn’t happen! But it seems to be quite common in Sweden, to be able to meet, and play with, your idols.

After lunch, we did the dishes (over Curt’s strenuous objections!) to more lovely fiddle tunes. Then we had a look at the “music-room”, which held lots of memorabilia from Curt’s very musical family, and old photos of just about every well-known musician in Uppland.

The coffee-pot got fired up again, and we had a little dessert. Curt absolutely insisted that we leave these dishes, and so we did. And we drove away for a short tour of Uppland’s “tune-towns” (Vendel, Tobo, Tierp), highly inspired by an afternoon in such splendid company.



Leif Alpsjö (left) and Curt Tallroth

## Julottan av Mats Wallman

This tune continues the series of non-Uppland tunes to polska dances that play relatively easily on the nyckelharpa in their original keys.

Julottan is a lovely and fairly easy tune for the Polska från Södra Dalarna. It was written by the son of the famous dance fiddler Olle Wallman.

The biggest technical difficulty is in bars 9-11, the first three of the B part. I have suggested some fingering here.

The tune suggests a rhythmic freedom, not unlike a Polska från Orsa, but without the many other special Orsa characteristics.

It can start with a G or B bass, use the high G under the Ds in the second bar, and a C bass by bar 3, etc.

Please enjoy this one. I do very much, and give special thanks to Patrice George and Karen Myers for introducing it to me, even if only on fiddle.

— Mel Meer

Fiddler Olle Wallman, from southern Dalarna, came to Boston for a weekend music/dance workshop around 1993, and brought this tune together with its story.

“Ottan” is the earliest part of the day, and “Julottan” is the sunrise church service on Christmas day. In Olle and Mats Wallman’s town, there is a tradition that the service includes a fiddle tune. “Not every tune is suitable for a church service,” Olle related, “and we had used up most of the good ones.” He explained that his son, Mats Wallman, had declared “Next year I will have a new tune,” and the following year he did. “Julottan” is gentle, sweet, and affectionate, and should be played that way.

Rhythmically, the second beat comes a little early, or the first three notes in a measure are somewhat evenly spaced. While the tune looks as if it could be played like a hambo, it isn’t. The aspiring player should really learn it in “aural” tradition — hear it played by someone who knows it.

— Matt Fichtenbaum

## Julottan av Mats Wallman (Polska från Södra Dalarna)

Trella Hastings received permission from Agneta Wiberg-Hallstrom of Palung, Sweden to reprint a tune she wrote for the fiddle which is a favorite polska in Seattle.

Responding to Trella, Agneta added that "Fred's

polska was written for a close friend's 60th birthday. The title has a double meaning: fred in Swedish is also the word of peace, therefore, "Polska to Fred" means also polska for peace."

The tune, with a harmony part written out, follows:

## Polska till fred

I  
tämlichen långsamt

av Agneta Wiberg

The melody is written in treble clef, key of D major (one sharp), and 3/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first two staves contain the main melody with various ornaments (wavy lines) above notes. The second staff includes first and second endings. The third staff begins with a 'v' (accendo) marking and contains a series of sixteenth-note patterns. The fourth staff continues these patterns and ends with a double bar line.

II. Harmony

The harmony is written in treble clef, key of D major, and 3/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first two staves provide a harmonic accompaniment for the melody, with the second staff including first and second endings. The third and fourth staves continue the harmonic accompaniment with various rhythmic patterns and end with a double bar line.

# Christmas Revels

## *And what is it doing in Nyckel Notes?*

**C**hristmas Revels is a tradition, maybe even a movement, that began in Cambridge, Massachusetts some 27 years ago. Each year the Revels assemble a holiday pageant based on the seasonal traditions of a particular culture and/or time period, adding modern carols, a story line of some sort, possibly even Morris dancers and a mummies' play. Over the years, Revels productions have had themes from Medieval and Renaissance England, France, Russia, Appalachia, Brittany, and the Celtic countries and more.

In 1993 Revels set out to build a show on Nordic traditions. The Northern countries, with their long, dark winters, are rich in solstice legends and seemed like a good foundation for a show. Finland looked especially promising; the Kalevala, Finland's national epic, is rich in stories of the creation of the world and the heroes involved. The Kalevala is most associated with the region of Karelia, once the easternmost part of Finland but now the westernmost part of Russia. Members of the Karelian State Folklore Ensemble have an exchange program with a Vermont vocal group called Project Harmony, and had been to the U.S. the previous year.

Thus was formed the Revels production called

Northlands. Two episodes from the Kalevala formed the story line, with music and dance from Karelia, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and the Orkney Islands as well as the core Revels material. Three members of the Karelian ensemble graced the production with their music, dance, and exuberance, and two dancers from Norway added the acrobatic Halling dance. The Revels chorus – talented local folk for whom Revels is a highlight of the year – and local musicians, including ANA board member Matt Fichtenbaum on nyckelharpa and fiddle, filled out the company. Revels in Cambridge runs for 16 performances, and Northlands was well received. The same show was put on in Houston, Texas in 1995, and in Washington, D.C. in 1996.

In 1997, Northlands was presented by Revels-Northwest in Portland. ANA member Marilee Cowan played nyckelharpa, and sent along the following description of her experiences (see story below.)

Northlands will be presented in December 1998, in Hanover, New Hampshire and in New York City, again with visiting Karelians and Norwegians. A new recording, *To Drive the Dark Away*, with the Nordic and Russian Revels productions from Houston, is available from Revels.

## Nyckelharpas Help Drive the Winter Dark Away

by Marilee Cowan, Portland, Oregon

**I** first considered playing in the Portland Northlands Christmas Revels after receiving an e-mail message from Matt Fichtenbaum. Since Matt had played nyckelharpa for the Northlands Christmas Revels in Cambridge and Houston, the Revels group here called and asked for his assistance in locating a nyckelharpa player in Portland. He found me on the ANA web page, and once when he was in Portland on business, we got together for some tunes and (those of you who know Matt will not be surprised at this) laughs. I asked my nyckelharpa partner Darren Knittle if he would play also.

The Revels, conceived by Jack Langstaff, is a scripted pageant performed around the time of the Winter Solstice which includes pre-Christian "season of light" traditions. Scripts are based on traditions from Europe, Celtic and other regions. The Northlands script is based on the Kalevala, a great folkwork of Finland. The Kalevala sets the mood of

the show with its first paradoxical image of an old white-haired poet/hero emerging newborn from a giant egg. Songs, instrumental music, stories, dance, huge puppets, and a Viking ship were woven together to represent Norway, Finland, Sweden, and the northwest of England.

The members of the chorus and local dancers started rehearsing in October. Darren and I were to attend only the main rehearsals. We chose to play "Bison polska," written by Olov Johansson after his first visit to the US, and the traditional tune "Mungalåten." I got to play a harmony to the Orsa polska "Vallåts polska" with Bill Boyd on fiddle. And we all played in the string band accompaniment for many of the Karelians' tunes.

The most fun was playing music and becoming friends with the Norwegian Telespringar dancers, Karin Brennesvik and Tom Lövli, and the Karelians. Sasha Bykadorov, Igor Arkhipov, Arto Rinne, and dancer Raisa Kalinkina live in Karelia, the Finn-settled area of Russia. They have produced CDs and appear in major Scandinavian folk festivals. My favorite cut from their CD (*Myllarit: Eta Pravda*, MIPUCD 601) is the last tune. They used ancient Greek Orthodox church bells for this arrangement of a Karelian folk Christmas carol. Those ringing bells send shivers down my spine!

Bill Boyd, a fine Swedish fiddler and hardingfele player from Seattle, was luckily in Portland for the performances.

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# Föreningen Nyckelharpan: The Swedish Nyckelharpa Association

by Sheila P. Morris

On my recent trip to Sweden, I spent a week at the home of Ami Tärnström, who is the secretary of Föreningen Nyckelharpan. We had a conversation one evening about our respective organizations. They function in very different ways, as you can see here.

Föreningen Nyckelharpan was founded in 1985. Ami isn't certain exactly whose idea it was, but said that Sven Nordin brought out the first newsletter (*Nyckelposten*, now *Nyckelharpan*) in 1986, and felt that he had probably had great influence in starting the organization.

In the beginning, Föreningen Nyckelharpan hosted numerous 'study-circles'. This has long been a popular format in Sweden — evening classes focusing on a specific subject. In the 1970s there were many 'study-circles' for the building of nyckelharpas, followed, not surprisingly, by a need for classes on how to actually play the instruments that had been built. Föreningen Nyckelharpan's classes met once a week for 10-15 weeks, and were aimed mostly at beginners. The idea was to give some grounding in technique, and also to teach a body of tunes that everyone could play together (allspel) whenever they met other harpa players. At that time, the föreningen's classes were pretty much the only way to get live instruction. [Matt notes that there were study-circle courses in both building and playing, at various places all over Sweden, from the early 70s onwards, but Föreningen Nyckelharpan certainly concentrated the effort].

Nowadays, there are classes at folkhögskolor (sort of like specialized high-schools or junior colleges), week-long summer courses such as the one at Ekebyholm, and more people teach private lessons, so this aspect of Föreningen Nyckelharpan's original purpose has become less important. Most Swedish harpa players have at least a small group that they play with regularly, even if it is only one or two friends. (This sounds like luxury to me!)

These days the association provides not so much the basics, but a little something extra. There is the newsletter, which serves much the same purpose as ours in that it helps communicate among a rather wide-spread membership (400-some members throughout Sweden).

And there are the monthly meetings in Stockholm, with invited guests such as Peter 'Puma' Hedlund, Gösta Sandström, Niklas Roswall, Lena and Ingvar Jörpeland, and various members of the Sahlström family. The evening often begins with a little allspel, followed by a short, informal concert by the evening's 'guest artist', and maybe concludes with everybody learning a new tune or two. Meetings are usually attended by 15-20 players.

Sometimes Föreningen Nyckelharpan arranges excursions to places of interest such as the Musikmuseum or Svenska visarkivet (the Swedish Archives of Folk Song). And they occasionally organize a one-day course in the autumn, with teachers such as Johan Hedin, Henry Wallin, and this year's Sigurd Sahlström.

After hearing all of this, I have to admit I felt a little jealous—so many wonderful teachers right here close at hand! And the opportunity to meet and play with others is of course a large part of why I come over here, but I sure can't do it on a monthly basis!

Ami was equally amazed by our 'virtual Nyckelharpa Association' — the Board has its meetings on the Internet, and I for one can go for months without meeting another harpa player live and in person. Without NyckelNotes and e-mail, we wouldn't be able to have an Association at all. Which is why it's important for all of you out there to write to us occasionally. It's the only chance we have to get to know each other! So write up a quick blurb about yourself — why you play, what you play, what you'd like the ANA to do for you — that sort of thing, and send it in!

*Sheila and Ami met on the Internet in the fall of 1996. Ami had posted a question about Väsen's version of 'Hälsingemarschen', Sheila answered, and thus began a correspondence. This led to an invitation to spend Midsummer at Eva Tjörnebo's house, which you can read about in NN #8. Sheila repeated her visit, trip, and course in 1998, whence comes the above article. She reports that it rained on Midsummer.*

## Stolen Nyckelharpa

One of Ceylon Wallin's nyckelharpas was stolen from Birgitta Wallin's shop in Gamla Stan, Stockholm on August 24th. Ceylon was one of the most colorful and central figures in Uppland folk music, and was featured on the famous stamp from the 1970s.

The nyckelharpa was built in 1984 by Ceylon himself, has a light-colored finish, and has "Ceylon Wallin" scribed on the keybox cover. It has 17 strings, probably with chrome-plated fine-tuners rather than brass. Inside, on the bottom, is the text "Ceylon Wallin 1984". The strap is green and white.

No nyckelharpas by Ceylon have ever been sold; if you see one for sale, it must be this stolen one.

Keep a look-out for this nyckelharpa! If you hear of it or see it, contact either the police, Birgitta Wallin at +46-8-102500, or Bart Brashers at 919-969-9405 (brash@atmos.washington.edu). Spread the word!

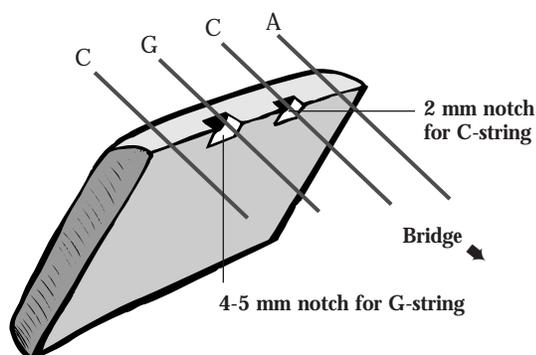
## Nyckelharpa Maintenance:

# What to Do When Your Keybox Won't Tune

by Matt Fichtenbaum

Once the harpa's open strings are in tune, the other notes depend on where the tangents touch the strings. And although the tangents' locations are carefully calculated and measured, and the holes accurately drilled in the keys, the notes they play don't always come out right. It seems that the physical bow/string/tangent/key system doesn't always match the theoretical model. Most builders make their instruments so that the tangents may be rotated to tune their notes by adjusting the point of contact with the string, but sometimes the range this gives isn't enough to bring the notes into tune. Most often, when there are problems, the A string is OK, the C string is OK or has some notes that are slightly flat, and the G string has notes that are severely flat.

### Notching the Nut to Raise the Pitch of the C- and G-string Keys



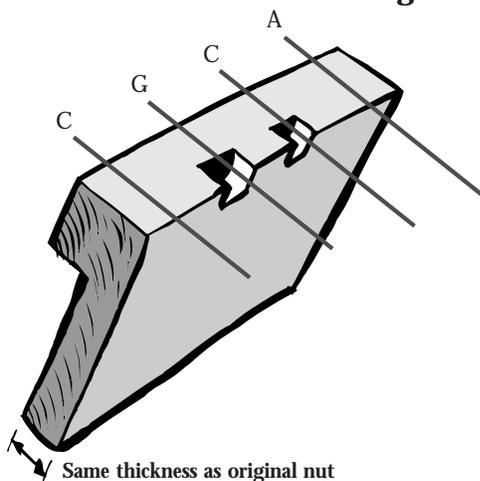
An instant assessment of the situation offers two solutions: (1) move the tangents farther up on the string, or (2) move the entire key box farther up on the neck of the instrument. I have seen both approaches used successfully, but they can be a lot of work.

There is a third solution, which I and others have used successfully: Instead of moving individual tangents or the entire key box toward the bridge and away from the nut, move the nut away from the keybox, toward the head of the instrument. The simplest way to do this is to notch the end of the nut, and only on the strings that need it. For one instrument, a 2-mm notch for the C string and a 4-mm notch for the G string was appropriate; my first nyckelharpa needed a little more.

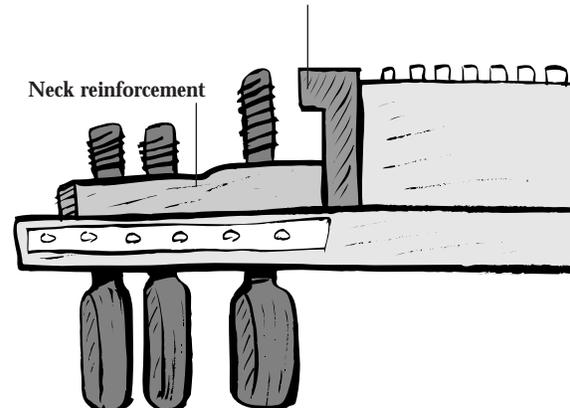
Judge the size of the notch by the amount your tangents deviate from "straight." Look at the worst-case deviation, and try half that much for a start. It's easier to take more material away than to try to put some back! The notch should be sharp-edged, falling away cleanly under the string so that the string won't rub on its edge as it vibrates.

Don't cut the nut too thin! I think the nut should be at least 5 mm thick under the G string, and that may not leave room to cut as big a notch as you need. I solved that problem on one instrument by making a new nut, twice as thick as the original, and cutting it thinner at the bottom to fit the space on the instrument. Under the strings there remained plenty of material despite the notch.

### Using a Thicker Nut to Allow Notching



Nut extends over neck reinforcement



**Revels***continued from page 8*

He speaks Russian, which made our jaunts out for dinner and other fun times translatable.

The most bizarre outing was to a strange place in downtown Portland called "The 24 Hour Church of Elvis." Arto, Bill and I took the tour of the tiny place stuffed with unbelievable mementos that, in the proprietor's eyes, are related to Elvis Presley. Her "24 Hour Church of Elvis" was for many years a travelling "shrine" and people could get fake marriage licenses by depositing quarters. The proprietor talked so fast that Bill and I could hardly understand her at times; poor Arto was pretty bewildered when she directed her questions at him.

The Portland Revels were professionally run and the people fun-loving and hard-working. It was very satisfying to bridge the language barriers of Russian, English, Finnish and Norwegian with the musical language we share. It was an interesting challenge to find tunes we could play at the cast party. I'll never forget Sasha's brilliant pale blue eyes at the end of the party, as he tried out some English: "Fun, very fun." Putting the show together was a good experience for me, and the six performances were almost all sold out. With a total of 3,000 attending, it was a good way to expose Portlanders to some of the music and traditions of the Northlands, and to the nyckelharpa.

So if you are approached by Revels people in your area and asked to play your nyckelharpa in the Northlands Revels, I would recommend that you consider it.

## Musical examples for the April 1998 *Spela Bättre!* article

1. Measures 1-3, Variation 1

2. Measures 1-3, Variation 2

3. Measures 1-3, Olov's grace notes

4. Measure 4, Phrasing variation

5. Measure 15, with triplets

6. Measures 16-17, Variation 1

7. Measures 16-17, Variation 2

8. Schottis example, even rhythm

9. Schottis example, dotted rhythm

10. Byggnan, measures 3-4

11. Byggnan, played to sound not at all Swedish

photos courtesy of Janet Gage



*Happy with their harpas (and fiddles), Stämman attendees pose in front of a portion of the ARChive's vast collection of recordings. From left to right are, top row: Miye and Kay Bromberg, Gail Halverson, Ethan James, Janet Gage, and Mel Meer. In front are Tim Newcomb, Becky Weis, Ditte Andersson, and Joel Remde.*

ARChive, continuing the work on bowing patterns and dynamics. After several hours of intense work we took advantage of Chinatown's proximity and had a wonderful lunch around a large round table at an excellent Malaysian restaurant.

The dance Saturday night was held at the Battery Dance Company's studio a half block away. The ANA was kindly allowed to use the space at no cost. In appreciation we bought a floor fan to help cool the 25 people who danced to not only Ditte's playing, but a wonderful set by

Becky Weis on nyckelharpa, fiddle and hardingfele (thus keeping the telespringar dancers happy who had come out to support the ANA's



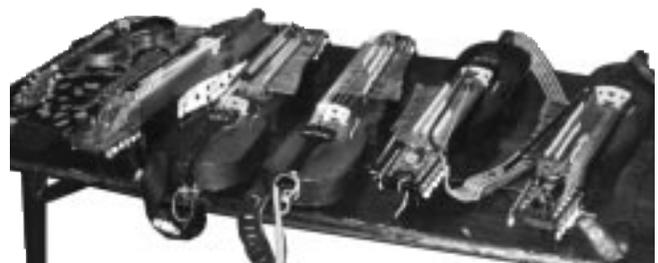
*Ditte keeps the dancers hopping at Saturday night's dance.*

event!) All of the musicians joined in for the evening's last set.

Patrice George did an incredible job of getting people out to the dance. We calculated that, after subtracting the large number of dancers and musicians who were overseas that weekend, there was only one known Scandinavian dancer who didn't make it to the dance. Patrice mailed out postcards and made phone calls to everyone in the area. Her efforts went a long way toward making the weekend run smoothly and successfully, and, as the organizer, I am very, very grateful to her.

The largest number of players attended the Sunday workshop. We played Friday's and Saturday's tunes, tackled a couple Byss Kalle compositions, and ran our tape recorders while Ditte ran through the repertoire she taught at Buffalo Gap the week before. The workshop time evaporated quickly and before we knew it, Ditte was setting up for the final concert. The ARChive filled with an appreciative audience, and Ditte entertained the troops with tunes, songs, and her great humor.

I'd like to thank personally all the people who helped so much to make the Stämman happen, and Ditte for being so patient, instructive, and fun to be with. I look forward to her next visit!



*Maintaining a dignified presence on the western edge, a hardingfele compares notes with a large population of Swedes.*

**P**ublisher Mary Larsen and teacher/columnist Jack Tuttle of *Fiddler Magazine* have graciously permitted *Nyckel Notes* to reprint Jack's column, "The Practicing Fiddler," from the Summer 1998 issue. It seems equally relevant to nyckelharpa players.

If you don't know *Fiddler*, you'll find it well worth a look, with articles on all kinds of fiddle music, fiddle people, playing technique (often relevant to nyckelharpa as well), and more. You can find it on your newsstand, at P.O. Box 125, Los Altos, CA 94023, or on the World Wide Web at [www.fiddle.com](http://www.fiddle.com).

The forthcoming Winter '98 issue will have a feature about Olov Johansson.

## Jack Tuttle's Top Ten Ways to Become a Better Fiddler

1. **Practice.** Okay, this is an easy one. The real question is how much. I have students ask me this all the time and I usually tell them at least a half hour every day. The key here is at least. The truth is, if you want to become a really good fiddler, just 30 minutes will probably not suffice. I'm from the camp that believes the more practice the better, especially if done wisely.
2. **Practice wisely.** This one is a bit harder. By wisely, I mean that you understand exactly what your weaknesses are and how to deal with them. As a full time teacher for nineteen years, I would say that most people are not very good at understanding exactly what they're having trouble with. I've seen students countless times tell me they're struggling with the bowing on a particular passage, when on close examination, their left hand fingers are tripping over themselves (or vice versa). Take the time to accurately identify any problems so you can attack them head on.
3. **Isolate problem areas.** Ideally a student would correctly identify problem areas within pieces and practice them over and over again. Highlight any especially difficult passage, maybe a particular double stop or a fourth finger movement and play it 25 times out of context of the piece. This will allow for many more repetitions of the areas that need the most work.
4. **Listen to yourself.** Part of understanding your weaknesses is knowing exactly how you sound as you play. But most beginners cannot play and listen accurately at the same time. Try using a tape recorder and listening back. Make it your goal to eliminate the difference between how you think you sound as you're playing, and how you actually sound to yourself on tape.
5. **Listen to others.** Music is an aural art. It's just not possible to be a successful musician from a book or sheet of music alone. You must immerse yourself in the music you're trying to play. You should spend at least some listening time very focused on the music, making the listening an exercise in itself. This is most important if you're trying to play a style that you didn't grow up around.
6. **Play slowly and clearly.** It's important to play at a speed that will allow for accuracy so that you are training good habits. It's much easier to hear and correct poor intonation, weak notes and bowing problems at a slow pace.
7. **Play fast.** Playing slowly and clearly is great, but my experience with students is that if they only do this, they will never get fast enough to play with others. Even if the fingers and bow have trouble keeping up, by trying to play fast, you're teaching your mind to think faster. Eventually the hope is that your fingers and bow will catch up.
8. **Sing in your mind.** Whatever you're trying to play should be heard in your inner ear. Most musicians do this so naturally, they would wonder why I bring it up, but I have found some beginners don't know how to do this. Make sure you are mentally singing your pieces. As a teacher, I can't always tell if my students are doing this, so to check, I sometimes have them sing the piece out loud.
9. **Jam.** My experience is that people who go out and get involved in local jams reach a higher level much more quickly than those who stay at home. Playing with others is like developing a support group for your addiction (fiddling). It is also very good at making one play at real world tempos (see #7) and learning to play through mistakes.
10. **Find inspirations.** The key to success in the long run is to keep the passion for fiddling. Often hearing the right player, whether it's live or from a recording, can give a shot in the arm that will make practicing come easier. Don't overlook books or films about the culture or history of the music you're trying to play.

Several tunes Ditte Andersson taught at the 1998 ANA Stämman are reprinted on pages 14 and 15.

## Polkett efter Gås Anders

1

5

9

13

18



*Bruce Sagan gives harpa tips (in French!) to a beginning player from Montreal.*

### Scandinavian Week at Buffalo Gap, 1998

Due to a large number of dancers and musicians participating in events in Scandinavia this summer, attendance at Scandinavian week was much smaller than usual. The down side to that was the financial worry for directors Bruce Sagan and Judy Barlas. The up side, especially for the musicians, was generally small class size and more individual attention from the teachers.

Bruce's class of beginning nyckelharpa players was large and enthusiastic enough that it was a daily organizational feat to keep the harpas in camp circulating so that everybody had one for class and to practice on.

In spite of fewer musicians, there was enough demand for nyckelharpa instruction that I hope the tradition of importing a Swedish teacher will continue!

### Nya G-Dur

*Polska efter Byss-Kalle*

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5  
9  
13  
2

### Masbopolkett

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13  
v  
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1

## Results from the ANA Questionnaire

The last issue of Nyckel Notes included "the ANA Members' Questionnaire," and your responses have been pouring in. Well, not exactly. But every now and then, one pours in, and I now have twenty. Judging by your responses, the ANA is filling a need and doing a reasonable job of it. Here are some of the highlights.

Of the 20 responses, seven consider themselves to be beginning players, seven intermediate, four advanced, and two don't play but appreciate the ANA anyway. Those who do play have been playing nyckelharpa for six months to twenty-five years.

ANA members are a musically literate group - many read music fluently, and many appreciate the tunes published in NN. "Networking" and "contact with what's happening" ranked high, as did articles on playing technique and instrument maintenance. The ANA stämman was valued highly. Not surprisingly, "A tune book" was high on the "It would be nice" list.

The responses have been overwhelmingly positive, and can be summarized in two categories -

"I like everything," and "I like everything, but some topics are more relevant than others." We of NN and the ANA Board feel encouraged and motivated by your support - thank you! - and sense a mandate to continue what we've been doing rather than changing direction radically.

*Matt Fichtenbaum*

### 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.

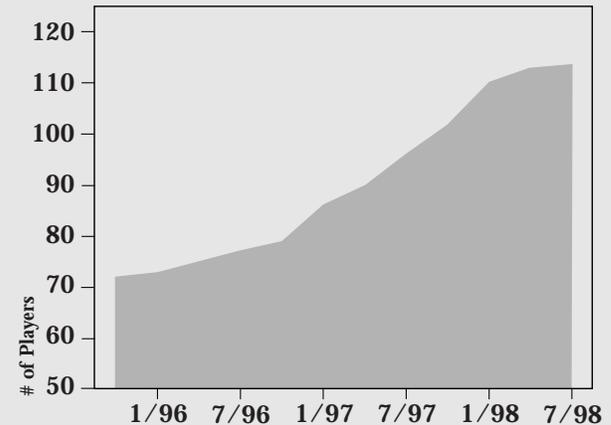
### ANA Web Page

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

Published quarterly, edited by Bart Brashers and Matt Fichtenbaum. Send submissions to Nyckel Notes at the address at right, or to:  
[bart@hpcc.epa.gov](mailto:bart@hpcc.epa.gov)

### Nyckelharpa Players in North America



### New ANA Address

Bart Brashers has moved from Seattle to North Carolina, and has a new mailing address for the ANA. While he hopes to eventually return to Seattle, the address below will be good for at least two years:

American Nyckelharpa Association  
P.O. Box 2291  
Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2291

### Wall Harpa Sought

I am interested in buying a nyckelharpa, mainly for a conversation piece and as a decoration for my home. I thought there might be one somewhere that is reasonably priced. I was born a Nyckel, and married a Harper...

Patricia Nyckel-Harper  
5643 Garden Lakes Palm, Bradenton FL 34203  
941-798-8713 (Husband Phil's work number)  
[ppharper@worldnet.att.net](mailto:ppharper@worldnet.att.net)

### The American Nyckelharpa Association

PO Box 2291  
Chapel Hill NC 27515-2291