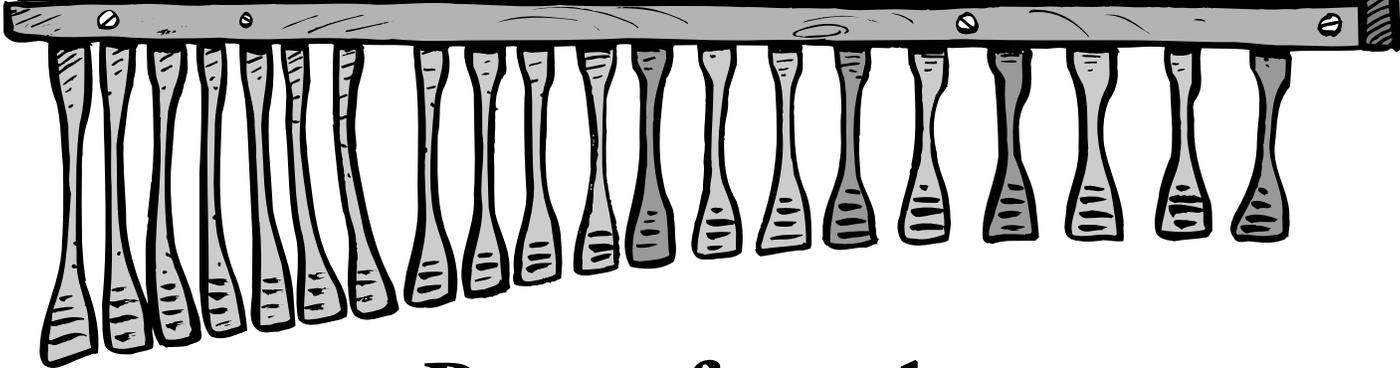


THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN NYCKELHARPA ASSOCIATION

NYCKELNOTES



Report from the 1999 ANA Stämman East

by Matt Fichtenbaum

Chris and Rita Leydon's farm-homestead-workshop in Lahaska, PA. A handful of eager, congenial ANA members. Rita's exquisite banquets-for-forty. And Peter "Puma" Hedlund as teacher, inspiration, and entertainer. It was evident from the beginning that this weekend would be a rousing success.

We began to gather on Friday afternoon - nyckelharpa players from Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, plus Puma who had arrived from Sweden forty hours earlier. An afternoon of meeting (several of us already knew each other), getting settled, and hanging out in the early October sunshine. On the Leydons' farm, besides their house and Chris' workshop in which he and his crew restore antique and exotic automobiles, is another house that was, conveniently, between tenants, and so it happened that we Stämman participants enjoyed the luxury of individual rooms.

Dinnertime brought an indication that the Stämman registration form's phrase "includes six meals" had been only the barest hint of what was to come. It was the first of Rita Leydon's gourmet Scandinavian-theme meals,

Hang a sign and harpa players will appear: Puma in Lahaska.



with herring and cheese and knäckebröd and salads and delicious entrees and... What luck that our nyckelharpa straps were adjustable and could be enlarged!

Friday evening and a chance to play tunes together. Puma as coach and moderator, leading us and helping us find tunes and filling the spaces between tunes with stories and humor.

Saturday morning. Breakfast - another example of

Rita's gastronomic splendor. Then the first music session. We gathered in Chris Leydon's workshop, where Puma felt that he could be in his element, surrounded by car parts and machine tools. Once Chris had switched off the heater, and the other heater, and the air compressor, we could hear ourselves tune.

We were seven harpa players with differing levels of experience, but with

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Tips on Buying a Used Nyckelharpa

by Matt Fichtenbaum and Bart Brashers

Occasionally a used nyckelharpa appears on the market. To someone who is contemplating starting to play, or perhaps trading up to a better instrument, a used harpa can be tempting. It's already on this side of the Atlantic, it has had time to settle in, and it may cost less than a new instrument.

We know people who play instruments they bought used and are happy with them. But we've also seen nyckelharpas offered for sale at prices beyond what seems reasonable. How can the prospective buyer make an informed decision?

Successfully purchasing a used instrument requires two things:

- A good assessment of the quality of the harpa as an instrument.
- Knowledge of the market for new nyckelharpas, to know what you can buy new for a given amount of money.

Assessing an instrument

Some of the dimensions by which one judges an instrument are:

- **Playability.** The keys should slide easily and fall back of their own weight, but without excess free play or wobble. There should not be springs or foam installed to help the keys fall back from the strings, as these make the harpa harder to play and often cover up deeper problems. The "action" - the distance the key travels before its tangent touches the string - should be consistent on all the keys. The key heads should form a smooth contour, and their size and shape should feel comfortable to your hand.
- **Tone.** A satisfying sound in low, middle and high ranges, pleasingly mellow and pleasingly bright. The sound should be even over the full range, with no notes that give unpleasant sounds or are unwilling to play. The instrument should "speak" from its innards, not just from the top.
- **Craftsmanship.** Nicely made details, smooth edges, tuning pegs and fine tuners that work well, a general

appearance of being made by someone who cares.

- **Structural integrity.** The top should not show any signs of caving in, and the bass bar should be well attached. The sound post should be in the right place (about 1 cm to the tailpiece side of the right foot of the bridge) and be made with quality. The tailpiece should show no signs of cracking, and it should be reinforced with extra wood (a dowel or slab) near the 'corner' to provide extra strength. The bridge should not curve towards the pegbox or let any of the strings sit too low; if it does, it needs replacing and the cost of that should be taken off the price of the harpa. The harpa should not be excessively heavy — good harpas weigh about 2 kg (4.5 pounds).

If you already have a harpa and have some experience playing, you're in a good position to look for a new instrument and these points might help you organize your search. If you're just starting out, a more experienced player can really help, both in judging instruments and in defining the "ideal" harpa you seek. In fact, having another player along is a good idea anyway: instruments sound different from a few feet away, and another person's observations can't hurt. If you don't know any nyckelharpa players, check the ANA's Membership Roster to see if one lives close to you.

What's out there?

A first question is, what's out there for new instruments, and what do these cost? Answers to these will help define the arena for purchasing a used harpa.

Leif Alpsjö is a purveyor of at least three different makers' harpas, and he is responsible for many of the instruments that have reached ANA territory. He also sells used harpas. Björn Björn is another seller of nyckelharpas - both modern and older style - and kits. ANA President Bart Brashers has helped place a number, by Åke Ahlstrand and other makers. Various ANA members have written articles for *Nyckel Notes* in which they describe how they met and acquired their current instruments. And people who have some nyckelharpa contacts in Sweden can usually find leads to reasonable instruments. Check the ANA web site for a listing of some of the more popular makers and their more-

or-less current prices. If you don't have web access, call or write one of the board members and we'll print the page and mail it to you.

We include a brief listing of some makers and their current approximate prices. This is not a full listing, since there are hundreds of makers in Sweden, and please note that we are not trying to promote any of these over any other. Use this simply for reference. Right now, the exchange rate is about 8.2 SEK/USD, and approximate prices in USD are given. Keep in mind that you'll have to pay for shipping and, in most instances, a case and bow as well.

Hard-Shell Case	\$150
Pretty good bow	\$100
Åke Ahlstrand (with bow and case)	18,500 SEK (\$2200)
Harry Hedbom	18,000 SEK (\$2200)
Tage Larsson	9,200 SEK (\$1120)
Björn Björn.	10,000 - 15,000 SEK (\$1220 - 1830)
Olle Plahn	12,000 SEK (\$1465)
Hasse Gille.	15,000 SEK (\$1830)
Sören Åhker	17,000 - 20,000 SEK (\$2075 - 2439)

But there's this used harpa for sale...

Circumstances have conspired to place an available instrument in your vicinity. A touring Swedish group has an instrument to sell, or someone places an ad in *Nyckel Notes* or brings a harpa to your neighborhood. For example, there were two instruments offered for sale at Scandinavian Week (at Buffalo Gap) this summer.

You need to answer two questions to your own satisfaction:

- Is this an instrument you would enjoy owning? If you are a beginner, is this an instrument you will continue to enjoy as your playing develops?
- Is it offered at a reasonable price?

"A reasonable price" really means "compared to what you might pay for another instrument of similar quality." These days, it's quite easy to find a new nyckelharpa to buy, and used instruments should be judged accordingly.

If the instrument for sale is by a known maker, find out what his or her new instruments cost. Builders develop their approaches and technique over time, and a harpa that's several years old may not measure up to the same builder's current art. Be sure that the asking price takes this into

consideration, and note that even a well-respected maker can have an "off day" and produce an instrument that isn't quite as good as his/her others. Nonetheless, it's always worthwhile looking closely at, and listening closely to, any instrument, used or new.

The art of building nyckelharpas has advanced greatly in the last 20 years, and significant design refinements have happened even in the last ten. There's been a strong effort in Sweden to improve the overall quality of nyckelharpa making, including short Master Courses and maker's competitions with specific feedback from the judges about improvements. The point is that used nyckelharpas may not reflect the last decade's advances in building technique.

On the other hand, a good instrument can be timeless. There's a nyckelharpa in Seattle that was built in the 1970s but is as good as the best ones being built today. Just remember when you're starting negotiations to start meaningfully below the new price of an equivalent instrument, unless the used instrument is itself almost new.

But the more important question is, "Will you enjoy owning this instrument?" If you play and can meet the instrument in person, it's easy. If you don't play, take along somebody who does. If the instrument is in another part of the country, try to find someone in its vicinity who plays, and impose on that person to go meet it and give you an opinion. If the seller is selling to upgrade to a better instrument, ask what it is about the first instrument that made him or her want something better.

It's not common, but it has happened that Swedes have taken advantage of the nyckelharpa's rarity in America and sold a harpa for much more money than it would be worth on the Swedish market. We Americans aren't likely to know what a given harpa is worth, and can't always compare it to others nearby. Just this year someone from Skåne approached Bart about selling his instruments and sent Bart one. It was the worst harpa he'd ever seen; yet the maker was asking 10,000 SEK (about \$1200) for it. It was worth maybe \$300, as an entry-level harpa that would need upgrading within 6 months. And beware of used harpas for under \$500. As they say in Sweden, if it costs less than about \$500 it's probably not worth \$10. We refer to these harpas as "väggharpor" – wall harpas. They are only good for hanging on the wall and looking at.

You can always e-mail or call one of the American Nyckelharpa Association board members and ask for an opinion. Among the bunch of us, we're likely to be familiar with the better-known makers and have some impressions or advice.

Good luck hunting!

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Puma we worked well as a group. Sometimes what he taught was relevant to all - fingerings, exercises, phrasing; sometimes he'd teach a tune and play so clearly that each of us could find something to focus on. It helped that we all were easygoing and adaptable, willing to put up with a moment's "irrelevance" or "digression" now and then.

Puma stated that he preferred, in his workshops, to teach technique and style rather than new tunes. So we played tunes we knew, learned some new tunes, recorded tunes that we could then learn on our own, and worked on exercises. Even so, we all emerged from the weekend with new tunes. And while I didn't record everything that Puma played, I collected eighteen selections, including:

- *"Linus på linjen,"* a bondpolska efter Bohlin, which accompanies this article on page 12.
- *Ringen*, a skänklåt Puma made for some friends when they opened a catering service. This fine tune appears on page 6.
- *Hardrevet*. We didn't actually learn this well-known, challenging Eric Sahlström tune, but we worked on its B part at slow tempo for its value as a fingering and bowing exercise, written out on page 5.

Sometime during the weekend we moved from Chris Leydon's workshop out to a space that was, in effect, a covered porch (actually, a room in a part of the house that was under construction, but that's not important right now). And a half dozen fiddlers joined our ranks, learning tunes along with us, or disappearing to play fiddle tunes while we worked on harpa fingerings. The fiddlers, good souls all,



At the Hyllningsfest in Lindsborg, Kansas, were, from left: Sheila Morris, Rita Leydon, Puma (sitting) Karin Arneson, Chris Leydon and Ben Teitelbaum. Peter gave five performances at the festival. The Leydons and Peter drove cross-country and played gigs along the route at Hershey, Pennsylvania, Wooster, Ohio, St. Louis, Missouri and Lindsborg, Kansas.

added to our group's spirit and fortified our ranks as we attacked Rita's meals.

The Leydons live near Peddler's Village, a complex of shops that includes a stone barn with a nice wood floor. Saturday night we all went down to a dance there, joined by local Scandi dancers and a contingent down from New York. Puma played a solo set, to the dancers' delight, and many of the harpa and fiddle players contributed to the night's music.

Sunday began with another enormous breakfast and a Puma workshop. After lunch, a bunch of us went back to Peddler's Village and played music on the green, a way of



Puma teaching at the Stamma in Labaska. From left: Rick Savadow, Patrice George, Matt Fichtenbaum, Lotta Norlín, Janet Gage and Andrea Larson.



thanking the establishment folk for letting us use the barn the previous night. Puma played with us when we started, but he soon assumed the role of listener, blending in with the crowd and taking quiet amusement from watching his students find their own way.

Puma's schedule included a Sunday evening concert at the Historical Society museum in the nearby town of Doylestown. Puma had expressed doubt as to whether he'd have anything to say in between tunes, but he'd evidently been just teasing us. The concert went extremely well, and Puma's presentation of his music and his instrument were easygoing and inspired. I believe the audience - the room was full - will remember "There was this very warm, personable young fellow. And he played so well, too!"

Sunday night was the official end of the Stamma. Puma taught a couple of one-on-one lessons Monday morning,

then played a concert Monday evening at the Swedish Museum in Philadelphia. He and the Leydons headed off for a major classic car show and convention in Hershey, PA, and thence westward. By the time this is printed, the Stamma-West will have taken place and Puma will be back home after a successful trip.

Puma's tunes

"*Linus på linjen*" is the name of a children's program whose theme this traditional bondpolska resembles. (The tune appears on page 12.) Puma pointed out that we could equally well call it "Woody Woodpecker." The "A" part uses standard 8th-note polska bowing throughout, although the triplet on the first beat is unusual.

Puma played with some variation in the timing of the

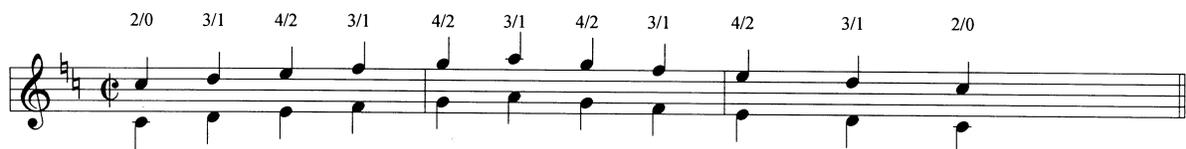
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Puma's Stamma Workshop Exercises

D scale. Repeat for keys of C, F, G, E, Eb, etc.



Octave exercises: A/C string fingers



Hardrevet. Play the separate 16ths cleanly



1999 Stamma

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"A" part's second beat - sometimes it sounded as I show in the transcription, sometimes it sounded more like a sixteenth followed by a dotted eighth. This is a good excuse to point out that the written music can only be an approximation to the real tune.

Ringen is a tune Puma made. Two of his students, tired of their work-within-the-system professions, were about to start their own business, a catering service ("en servering"). They told Puma they couldn't start without a skänklåt — a tune played when the food is served, and he gave them this fine tune. Play it not too fast and with dignity, and take the opportunity to elicit good tone from your instrument.

How *Ringen* got its name is best explained by Puma himself.

"This tune is called Ringen - The Ring. You're supposed to ask 'Which ring?'"

"OK, which ring?"

"The catering (Serveringen)."

Puma's exercises

Scales. Puma had us play scales in any possible keys - we started in C, then G, then D, then Eb and E, and whatever else. The transcription shows as much of the D scale as we played.

Octave double-stops. A left-hand exercise intended to get the fingers used to playing octaves and to switching between notes while playing octaves.

"Hardrevet" bowing. Puma had us play very slowly, and insisted that we play the "two slurred, two separate" bowing cleanly and precisely. Articulating the last two sixteenths of each beat is important; at slow tempo, this requires stopping the bow, which is a challenge to do cleanly.

Controlling your fingers. This left-hand exercise is done without an instrument, and leaves you feeling that whoever's fingers those are on your hand, they're not yours! Do the following:

1. Hold your left arm horizontal, with your fingers loosely bent so they point downward. Rest the fingers on a flat surface such as a table, without applying much force.
2. Lift one finger at a time. Just lift it, don't apply additional force with the other fingers.
3. Starting with all four fingers in contact with the table, lift the index and ring fingers, leaving the other two in contact with the table.
4. Starting with all four fingers in contact with the table, lift the middle finger and pinky.

Repeat these, try them in different order, use other variations.

Ringen

Skänklåt av Peter "Puma" Hedlund

from Peter Hedlund at ANA Stämman East '99

transcr. Matt Fichtenbaum '99

Stretchy Strap Helps Nyckelharpist's Neck

by Matt Fichtenbaum and Bart Brashers

At Scandinavian Week this summer, nyckelharpa teacher Lotta Franzén enthusiastically demonstrated her newest possession, a nyckelharpa strap with an elastic section. She attested to how the stretchiness made her harpa less of a burden on her neck, and invited me to try it. I liked the effect, and decided to get such a strap for my own harpa. Lotta had found hers masquerading as a guitar strap at a music store in Washington DC; I resolved to look for one in the Boston area.

Calls to several local music shops weren't promising. Most had never heard of it; one salesman admitted to having one on his own guitar but didn't know where I could find one. Another approach was clearly needed. With the help of my detective friend Al Tavista, I searched for "stretchy strap" and soon found success. It's an "Ultra II Guitar Strap," made by Legacy in western PA. After a brief e-mail dialog with Legacy's proprietor Garry Merola, I ordered one by mail.

After a month of ownership I think I like it. It has a wide neoprene pad over my neck, to distribute the instrument's weight, and an elastic section on the side toward the instrument's neck. That stretches as I move, and seems to make the instrument feel lighter.

My Ultra II strap cost \$19.95, plus \$2.00 for postage. Legacy is at:

1488 Green Avenue
Glenshaw PA 15116
800-487 4198 or 412-487 4199
www3.pgh.net/~legacy

Marilee Cowan bought one for \$19.95 plus shipping from:

Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center
11151 Viers Mill Rd
Wheaton MD 20902
301-946-8808

Olov Johansson, of the super-group Väsen, also uses a stretchy strap.

More advanced systems

Johan Hedin, who suffers from the tall person's propensity to back problems (and also plays a whole lot) has devised a more advanced method of strapping his nyckelharpa in place. He also plays his "tenor harpa," tuned an octave lower and noticeably larger than the usual nyckelharpa.

He uses two accordion straps, sewn together in an 'X' such that they go diagonally across the back. One goes over the right shoulder and under the left arm, the other over the left shoulder and under the right arm. To each of the four ends he has attached a strong nylon cord. The right-hand ends of these (as seen from the player's point of view) attach to the tailpiece in the same way a conventional strap is attached, except that there are two of them. On the left side, the upper cord is tied to a hole Johan made in the neck, closest to the body of the harpa. The lower cord is attached to the upper cord via a clip, pulling it down somewhat. This pulls the strap out of the way of the bow, so he can play all four strings without ever touching the strap with the bow, something that the conventional neck strap is prone to.

This method distributes the weight of the nyckelharpa evenly across the back, rather than on the neck. It's a little harder to pick up your harpa and play quickly, since you have to put your right arm through the 'hole' between the two straps (since their attached to each other in the middle of the back, and at the tailpiece) as you put the strap over your head, then reach back and attach the 'bottom-left' strap to the 'top-left' strap via the clip. But if you are having neck or back problems holding your harpa the traditional way, consider trying something like this. I'd suggest attaching the two straps to your harpa first and fiddling with them for a while before you sew the two of them together. I think that sewing them together is important for distributing the weight evenly over your back, so perhaps you could temporarily clip them together during the experimentation process.

Let me know if you try this method, and describe your results!

SPELA BÄTTRE!*The Only Way to Improve Your Playing*

Wield! Brandish! Caress! Bowling with Attitude

by Matt Fichtenbaum

There's energy in good music, and it's your bow that puts it there. This month's topic is bowing - in particular, how the mindset you bring to bowing can help you play well. But first, a few words about the style.

Playing with a Swedish accent

At this summer's Scandinavian Week, Lotta Franzén taught both nyckelharpa and singing. In her singing class she asked that we put the energy into the consonants more than the vowels, articulating the rhythm and not being overbearing with the sound. Listen to Swedish, sung or spoken by a native speaker, and you'll recognize this shape and balance.

I think that the "Swedish nyckelharpa (and fiddle) sound" is exactly this, the instrumental realization of the voice Lotta described. It seems natural that the Swedes would have evolved their playing the way they speak. So when, in past columns, I've described the style as "neither wimpy nor heavy, with notes articulated definitely and cleanly but not choppy, and sustained with light bow force and even bow motion to give a light, singing tone," I have meant "play like a Swede sings."

Talk with conviction

Let us suppose that your own playing has reached this stage, light and articulated and rhythmic. Waxing figurative, one might say that your playing "speaks in a well-modulated, nuanced fashion."

Now imagine yourself talking with conviction, saying things you really believe in and speaking to make a point. You put extra emphasis and energy into the syllables that matter, you shape your sounds to convey their emotional content. I contend that you want to do the same with your music - play as if you "mean what you're saying" and want it to get through to the listener.

Dividing the work

You bow with your arm, your wrist, your hand, your fingers. I have written before of using the arm for the large motions and the wrist and hand for the small motions. Now, thinking of using the arm for the sustained sounds - the "vowels" - and the hand and fingers for the "conso-

nants," I want to talk about the tools for putting expression and emotion into your playing.

The mindset

Don't just "move" the bow when you play. Instead, do something with the bow that matches what you're expressing. "Wield" it, because you have an active part in making a tune into music. "Brandish" it, because the rhythm in your music is important and needs to come forth. And "caress" the strings with the bow, to sculpt the edges of your notes, to modulate those of longer duration, to speak your notes "earnestly" and with conviction.

When you play, just as when you speak, you're making a presentation to your audience and trying to convince them of what you're saying. Play as if you mean it, and use all the tools available to you.

Throwing the bow at the strings

I don't know how to say it better than that. I use my hand and fingers in a way that feels as if I am throwing the bow at the string at the beginning of the note. It's more pronounced for the "important" notes - those on the beat, for example; less pronounced on the other notes. And not there at all on the notes that flow smoothly from those before, like the second and later sixteenths of a group of four.

This is not to say that you play by actually throwing the bow at the strings. But there are many fine motions involved in bowing, and to be able to do it, you need to know how it feels. I think that "it feels like throwing the bow at the strings" is a good starting point.

But not choppy...

There's a problem. If you really come crashing down onto the string at the start of a note, it sounds harsh and square-edged, and not Swedish. I believe that, at the time you "throw" the bow, it is already in contact with the string and the bow is already moving. So

- The articulation/emphasis comes just after, not at, the start of the note
- The "throwing" motion doesn't bring the bow to the

string; it's already there. Instead, it moves the bow "into" the string to draw out the sound.

The bow hold, yet again

It helps to have some flexibility in your bow hold. Relax your fingers as you guide the bow with them, support the bow with your thumb and balance it with your index finger for pressure, your other fingers for counterbalance and guidance. But if the bow tends to fall from your hand onto the floor, you're probably too relaxed.

Finding a tune to try

I find that a walking tune — a gånglåt or brudmarsch — with its straightforward 2/4 rhythm and orderly phrases, is good for trying these techniques. You probably have your favorite walking tunes, and some good ones have appeared in *Nyckel Notes*. Among these are "Gånglåt efter Harpar-Klas" in #9, "Björklingelåten" in #11. And here's one more.

"Svenskens Brudmarsch," efter Karl Svensk (1873-1937, Österby bruk) is a straightforward tune with a good feeling of forward motion. It is lively and purposeful rather than solemn and stately. Your arpeggio practice will serve you well here, and once you have the first part, you have much of the second part as well. I learned it from the record "Låtar på nyckelharpa från Österby bruk," published in 1975, and newly reissued (see page 13).

Hints for practice

Play melodic phrases on the G and C strings as well as the A string, and work on playing cleanly, with each note clear and well defined. The heavier strings need a more forceful touch, and when you can articulate notes on all strings you'll have developed a lot of bow technique.

Practice playing softly as well as loudly, but keep the same lightness and clarity. The more control you have of your bow, the more subtle and expressive you'll be able to make your music.

Listen to players you admire, on recordings or in person, and keep an image in your mind of what you like about their music. Then you'll have a more defined goal for your own playing.

A closing word

I should really be telling you this material in person, demonstrating the techniques and motions, illustrating the subjective notions of "feeling" and "expression," listening to your playing and offering suggestions. Trying to express this very physical activity with the written word seems strange indeed.

I would be delighted to hear from you as to whether any of this makes sense and whether you find it helpful. And if you have topics you'd like to see discussed in this column, feel free to pass them along to me in care of the *Nyckel Notes* address.

Svenskens Brudmarsch

efter Karl Svensk, Österbybruk

transcr. Matt Fichtenbaum '99

The Jitters

by Rita Leydon

A couple of months ago I good-naturedly offered myself and Chris as ambiance musicians at an upcoming "Big Do" at the Swedish Museum in Philadelphia. The annual "Sillbord" is a dressup affair for well behaved adults. That sounded delicious but boring, so I inquired if they might like two charming characters in folk costume playing that traditional Swedish instrument, the nyckelharpa, during the nibbling hour.

The landscape around here is very sparse of nyckelharpa players, in fact, Chris and I are the only ones I know of and we have only played for a couple of years, so it was perhaps a bit presumptuous of me to offer, but the words just fell out of my mouth and into the receptive ears of the museum's curator, and she in turn conferred with whoever needed to be consulted and thus the wheels were set in motion.

I committed the date on our calendar and proceeded to pack up and head west on a 4500 mile journey to Colorado to visit my Dad.

I took the harpa along on the road and played passionately every day. Chris and I agreed on a new tune to learn while apart and then play it at the Sillbord event when I got back. No worries. I have not yet identified any logic to account for when one's playing goes well versus when it doesn't. It appears to be a matter of the stars' alignment in the heavens on any given day, so basically, I just take it as it comes. Enjoy and bask when it is wonderful and fuss and pout when it isn't.

This lack of predictability contributes in large measure to my general insecurity regarding all things musical. The thing is that it can be SO MUCH FUN to make music and occasionally be rewarded with the heady feeling of really riding that needle in the groove. No skipping or scratching, just solid contact and fine sound. Creating the moment and being carried away with it.

Does anyone remember LP records? Of course that doesn't explain what prompted me to set us up for possibly laying a big egg in front of a couple hundred well-dressed and mannered people. I'm generally too oblivious to see the obvious, while Chris is a daredevil who'll try anything once just for the thrill of it. Truth is, we didn't really stop and think it through carefully. Pure folly.

The week before, we were vaguely aware of time passing and discussed briefly what tunes to play. The night before, we jammed for two hours with the rule that each piece was to be played in the standard AA-BB format three times, no starting over, just go with it once started. We had a great time and played well. Neither one of us felt the least bit of trepidation. Went to bed with a full deck of confidence.

Sill Day dawned with a persistent sense of imminent doom. Gradual suffocation. Panic rising incrementally. By noontime my normally ultra regular bowels had relieved themselves three times and I was starting to feel quite ill. Couldn't make solid contact with my world. A persistent monotone pinged inside my head and I had a sensation of crawly things setting up camp under my skin. Maggots. If Chris was nervous, he wasn't saying.

In this unstable condition we decided to play a few tunes. Bad move. The playing went from awful to downright miserable. Full of dread we soberly packed up our instruments and went through the motions of dressing in our lovely Swedish costumes, brushing hair and teeth and generally aligning our physical selves with the reality that we had to get into a car and drive the hour south to the Museum.

Had to show up and make good our offer. My bowels rumbled to life again. I told Chris I felt like a sheep being led to slaughter and wished emphatically for a hefty dose of morphine to put me out of my misery. Chris, who is usually not at a loss for soothing and calming words, remained silent.

The Swedish Museum is housed in a magnificent mansion set like a precious jewel in a lush park at the southern edge of the city. One enters through tall double brass portals into a large two story hall dominated by a broad grand staircase which pauses in a landing and then splits, right and left, and proceeds up to the balcony that circles the upper reaches. The vaulted ceiling is a masterpiece of murals depicting tense moments between the early Swedes and the local Indians. Very civilized, very elegant.

We arrived in good time. A final trip to the Ladies (that's five). Tuned up, assumed our positions on the landing, looked at each other, inhaled deeply, closed our eyes and willed the terror to be gone.

And it was. Carried magically away by the first several notes of our harpas. Gone. No pinging. No maggots. No doom. Fear and anxiety? POOF! We smiled. We grooved. We had fun. The assembled guests nibbled, sipped and glanced at us now and then. Wistful smiles and tapping feet. We were with the music in another place.

After an hour and a half the dinner bell rang, signaling the end. We attempted a hug, but the harpas got in the way so we slapped high fives and snuzzled noses instead. Cranking up one last tune-Gånglåt från Äppelbo-we moved the crowd toward the Sill. Our purpose was to create a festive mood, and this we achieved.

A dozen kinds of marinated raw herring awaited us. During and after dinner all sorts of folks migrated in our

direction and shared harpa thoughts. Several spoke of something in their soul responding to the music and voice of the instrument. Did we understand what they meant? Yes, we know how that is.

One bright-eyed, white-haired fellow declared that he started building a harpa twelve years ago and lost his way, encountering us renewed his enthusiasm he said. We directed him to ANA's website. One of our table companions was quite involved with the Kalmar Nyckel (a tall ship replica) in Delaware and said his organization had been given an old nyckelharpa and asked if we'd have a look at it for him. Yes,

of course.

A perfectly sincere youth asked where he could get a copy of our CD. We confessed in all honesty that the thought of recording had truly not entered our minds. A woman asked how often and at what sorts of events we "perform." I explained that we only play at events where we can be reasonably certain that no one is actually listening to us.

We survived, but oh, the suffering! Mildly akin to childbirth. You think you'll never EVER do THAT again, but you probably will.

Upcoming Nyckelharpa Events

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

Sat 15 Jan 2000: Väsen has been invited to return to the Public Radio International program "A Prairie Home Companion" on January 15, 2000. The program will be broadcast live from the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul, Minnesota. There will also be a separate concert later that evening at the Fitzgerald by Väsen. The band will be flying in to the U.S. specifically for this event. They return for a national tour with JPP and Annbjørg Lien in April.

Nordic Nights 2000 Tour

Väsen, along with Finish fiddle masters JPP and the hardingfele-based Annbjørg Lien band will be taking their "Nordic Nights 2000" tour to the US this spring:

Sat 16 April 2000: Medford OR, Craterian Theatre

Sun 17 April 2000: Ashland OR, Ashland High School (demo/workshop)

Thu-Sun 20-23 April 2000: Minneapolis MN, Nordic Roots Festival

Mon-Tue 24-25 April 2000: Fergus Falls MN, Arts Center

Fri 28 April 2000: Somerville MA, Somerville Theater

To schedule a concert in your area, contact: Paul Kaln, Concerted Efforts, 617-969-0810, concerted@concertedefforts.com

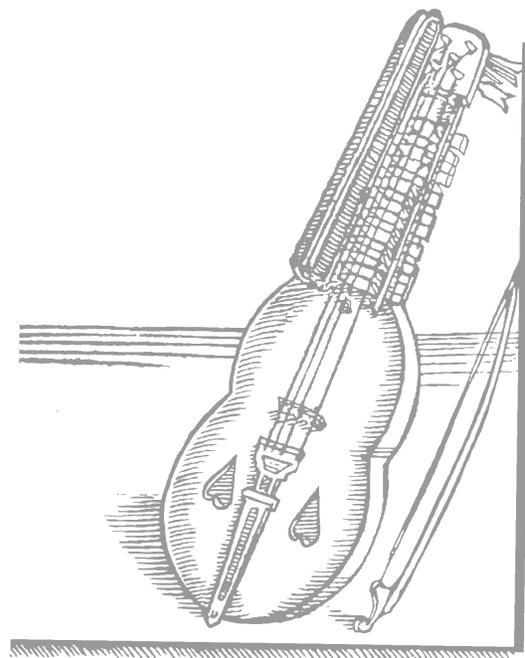
Wed-Sun 19-23 April 2000: Väsen at NorthSide's Nordic Roots Festival in Minneapolis MN. Last year's festival was quite a success, and this year's promises to be equally good. Already scheduled to appear are Väsen, JPP, Loitma, Annbjørg Lien Band, Rosenberg 7, and Boot with Virvla. For more information, see

Web: <http://www.noside.com/festival/>

E-mail: chill@noside.com

Phone: 612-375-0233

Fax: 612-359-9580



NYCKELHARPA CARE

Cutting New Notches on the Bridge

by Bart Brashers

A nyckelharpa player writes: "I need to cut the grooves for some of my understrings a bit deeper — my bridge leaves the 6-set high enough that I can catch them ALL when I really go for the C-drone. Sounds... truly awful! Any suggestions as to the best way to approach this? Knife? Little saw? Razor blades?"

I had that problem with my harpa, too. Mostly when I really 'go for it' and ask for some good oomph from the harpa. I dig deeper, and it pushes the playing strings down more which lets the bow touch the understrings.

A little saw is definitely the way to go. I went to a hobby store (or was it a hardware store?) and purchased a few thin blades, but they turned out to be too thin. I think I just use a standard coping saw blade. The notch should be just barely wider than the string, and the strings are between 0.014 and 0.024 inches in diameter. So buying a saw blade that cuts a slot about 0.030 inches wide would be optimal.

To cut the notch, loosen the string a little and pick it up out of its groove. You can rest it on the bridge to one side, or drop it in another slot. Don't use a handle (e.g. the coping saw handle — remove the blade) just hold it in your hands.

I sometimes wear leather work gloves when I'm cutting

a brand new slot, but you seldom need them when you're just cutting an existing slot deeper. Check first to see that the blade you picked cuts the same width as the existing slot — it should not be skinnier. Hold the blade so it leans back (away from the keybox) just slightly. If it leans forward, then the string will rest only on the back end of the slot (the end closest to the tailpiece) and may buzz against the forward edge of the slot. You want it to be supported by the front edge of the slot, the edge of the bridge that does not face the tailpiece. I find it's easier to hold the blade 'backwards' so the teeth cut when I pull rather than when I push. (This is the case for the carpenter's tool 'the Japanese saw' — a smart idea.)

Concentrate on guiding the saw blade along a straight line, so it cuts a straight slot. It usually only takes a few pulls to cut down deep enough. Remember, it's far easier to stop early and have to cut away a little bit extra than to try to put some back!

And remember to blow away the sawdust before it gets into the body of your harpa. Sawdust absorbs a small amount of sound, and is simply unnecessary. Makes your harpa look sloppy (notice how many people who really know instruments will look inside the body within the first minute of inspection?).

"Linus på Linjen" Bondpolska

from Peter Hedlund at ANA Stämman East '99

The musical score is written for a single melodic line on a nyckelharpa. It consists of four staves of music. The first two staves feature a repeating triplet pattern of eighth notes. The third and fourth staves show a more complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some grace notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

New CDs Available from the ANA

NSD6041 GRÖNT, *by Väsen.*

Gront is dark and brooding yet suffused with unforgettable melodies and surprising arrangements. Väsen is Olov Johansson on the nyckelharpa, Mikael Marin on viola, Roger Tallroth on guitar, and André Ferrari on an array of exotic percussion. The quartet's music has a telepathic intensity. Together they create more electricity on their acoustic instruments than most rock bands can generate with their amps turned all the way up. More than one rock critic has proclaimed them "the best band in the world" (but it's safer just to say they are the tallest, and leave it at that.) Traditional music with a modern attitude. Tremendous individual musicians taking ensemble playing to new heights. Acoustic instruments with power and emotion. This is Väsen.

AWCD31 Ö.R.A., *by Anders Matsson, Robert Larsson and Örjan Englund.*

"Öra" is the Swedish word for "ear", and is made up of the first initials of the band's members. Most of what they play is from the Viksta-Lasse tradition — Robert is Viksta Lasse's grand-nephew and Örjan lives with Viksta-Lasse's granddaughter. Ö.R.A. play with a lot of bounce and drive and are technically very accomplished — both Robert (fiddle) and Anders (nyckelharpa) are Riksspelmän, and Örjan's accordion lends a nice support and contributes greatly to the liveliness of this CD. Their ensemble playing is very good, with Robert and Anders swapping the lead, but this is not a recording that showcases the nyckelharpa. Rather, it shows how well it can fit in with other instruments.

AWCD32 PÅ HUGGET! EN VANDRING I SAHLSTRÖMSKOGEN, *by Trollrike spelmän.*

At last it's here: the much-requested CD number two from the Trollrike Spelmän. For this recording we have selected 23 pearls from the rich flora of tunes in the Sahlströms hiding places. And there is plenty to choose from, a great variety of old polskas, waltzes and marches passed down from generation to generation in the Sahlström family.

AWCD36 LÅTAR PÅ NYCKELHARPA FRÅN ÖSTERBYBRUK, *with Justus Gille, Viktor Vikman, Eric Sahlström, Hasse Gille, Per-Oskar Hellgren, Per Jernberg, and the Österbybruk Spelmanslag.*

A long overdue reissue of the classical nyckelharpa LP from 1975. Justus Gille and Viktor Vikman, both born in 1896, play on an older type of the nyckelharpa, the kontrabasharpa med dubbellek. Justus' nyckelharpa was built about 1860 by the famous Österbybruk fiddler Klas

Harpare. Hasse Gille plays on both silverbasharpa and chromatic nyckelharpa, and the rest play only on chromatic harpa. A classic!

AWCD33 ÅTERFÖDD, *by Sparf Anders.*

Sparf Anders was born in 1915 in Backa, Rättvik. His tunes are from his father Svensk Olof Olsson, born 1885 in Boda, from his maternal grandfather Sparf far, born 1839, and from various other fiddlers in the Rättvik area. This is a documentation of Sparf Anders and a re-birth (återfödd) of the music of a by-gone era.

ANACD99-01 PUMA, *by Peter "Puma" Hedlund.*

Peter "Puma" Hedlund, 1992 World champion, plays in the tradition following Eric Sahlström. Very crisp and elegant, with a strong sense of Uppland style. He was the featured teacher at last summer's Nyckelharpa Stämman, and was very well received as both a teacher and as a player. The ANA, through Rita Leydon, has reprinted the original Tongång release.

NSD6037 ÅNON, *by Ånon Egeland.*

New traditional music from the South of Norway. He is first and foremost a Hardanger fiddler but he also plays Jew's harp and two kinds of Norwegian flute. As a bonus, the citar (a Norwegian variant of the acoustic guitar) is featured on one track. Accompanying Ånon on 12 of these 24 tracks are Mikael Marin of Väsen on viola, and Leiv Solberg on mandola and guitar. Leiv has been playing with Ånon for over 20 years, so their work together is nearly telepathic. Ånon learned these rare tunes directly from traditional players who passed away some 10 to 15 years ago. Until now most of these tunes were kept alive by Ånon alone; now they can circulate among today's and tomorrow's players to live again in the folk tradition.

NSD6030 LAVALEK, *by Groupa.*

Groupa return with a renewed energy and a new member. As veterans of the Swedish folk revival, Groupa has been a name long associated with innovation and leadership. Lavalek assumes the mantle with strong, high-energy performances of original compositions in the traditional style. This time, rounding out the Groupa sound is singer Sofia Karlsson, yet another extraordinary Swedish female voice fresh on the scene. Her addition to the band brings another ingredient to an already potent mix of fiddle, keyboards, flutes and percussion. This is Groupa's most vibrant recording in their long career.

NSD6032 THE STONE CHAIR, by *Bukkene Bruse*.

Bukkene Bruse are Annbjørg Lien on Hardanger fiddle, nyckelharpa and vocals; Arve Moen Bergset on vocals and Hardanger fiddle; Steinar Ofsdal on flutes, Jew's harp and vocals; and Bjørn Ole Rasch on keyboards. Their repertory consists of a wide and exciting range of Norwegian traditional music, and also of their own compositions. Bukkene Bruse (their name is taken from the folk tale of the three Billy Goats Gruff, who outsmarted and destroyed a big troll on their way to summer pastures) make their own arrangements, elaborating and emphasising the special style of folk music.

NSD6025 KARELIA VISA, by *Hedningarna*.

The original "Nordic Supergroup" have returned to the studio with Finnish vocalists Sanna Kurki-Suonio and Anita Lehtola and crafted their most powerful album yet. Karelia Visa is inspired by their travels to the former Finnish Karelia (now part of Russia) in search of ancient culture. The story of the exiled Finns who remained in Karelia, their historic hardships and recent impoverishment (with the collapse of the Russian economy) give Karelia Visa an intense emotional energy that can be heard and felt in the music, and seen in the many color photographs which are part of the CD's deluxe 24-page book. While the music focuses on the songs and vocal tradition, Hedningarna once again infuse a contemporary approach and modern production with the ancient. The joining of antiquated Finnish "runesongs" and

traditional Swedish instrumentation still somehow nets Hedningarna a curiously modern result.

NSD6024 SUMMERSONG, by *Frifot*.

Frifot brings together three of the most colorful characters in the Swedish traditional music scene, all with deep roots in the tradition. Together they are a powerful force who bring tremendous energy to beautiful tunes with skillful playing. Ale Möller is a talented multi-instrumentalist, Per Gudmundson is one of Sweden's most beloved fiddlers who has also made crucial contributions to the revival of the Swedish bagpipe tradition. And Lena Willemark is a world-class singer known as much for her jazz work as her folk music accomplishments. SummerSong compiles their two Swedish releases on the Caprice label, with 20 tracks at over 60 minutes.

CDs are \$15 for ANA members, \$17 for non-members, postage paid (checks made out to ANA). Mail your order to:

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

"Made in '39" was crafted by Puma in honor of ANA member Virginia Thompson's birthday this year.

Made in '39
(Virginia's Tune)

Peter "Puma" Hedlund

♩ = 144

New Nyckelharpa Players

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boyo35@aol.com

David Niebuhr

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Gloucester Point VA 23062
niebuhr@vims.edu

ANA Board Election Ballot

Your name: _____ (to verify you are a member in good standing)

The following ANA members have been nominated for the Board:

- Gail Halverson**, Los Angeles CA, gail@rand.org
- Matt Fichtenbaum**, Chelmsford MA, mattf@ultranet.com
- Sheila Morris**, Denver CO, spmorris@ecentral.com
- Lynn Erickson**, Vancouver BC, lyneri@ballard.com

Please vote for three (3) of the above to serve as board members for the 2000-2001 term.

Mail your ballot by 31 Jan 2000 to:

ANA, PO Box 2291, Chapel Hill NC 27515-2291

CLASSIFIEDS

Nyckelharpa for Sale

Purchased through Bart Brashers in June 1999. Still in new condition. Pretty tone and includes case and bow. \$1100, plus shipping. Laurel Uhlig, 425-823-6313 (afternoons and evenings) luhlig@nwlinc.com.

Nyckelharpa for Sale

Kromatisk nyckelharpa of the highest quality, still in new condition. Built circa 1996 by Olle Plahn of Falun, Sweden who has won the highest marks at the annual judging of nyckelharpas associated with the Nyckelharpa Stämman at Osterbybruk. Price, including bow and folk-style painted case, \$1500. Contact Robert L Johnson Sr 6880 FM 621 Martindale TX 78655 512-357-2121 awjan@corridon.net

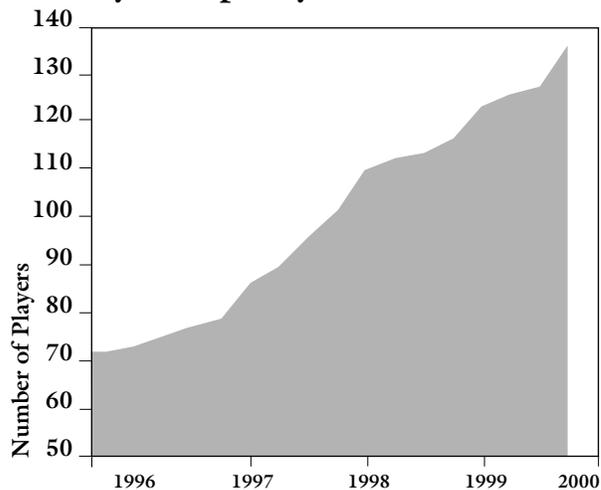
Nyckelharpa for Sale

Slightly damaged in shipping, with a small crack on the top under the bridge and another small crack on the headstock. Both cracks have been repaired by the maker in Sweden. Good sounding, with little more than cosmetic lasting damages. \$1050, including a case, bow and shipping to your door. If you are looking for a cheap alternative nyckelharpa, this may be for you. Bart Brashers, 222 Old Fayetteville Rd., Apt E106, Carrboro NC 27510-5507. Home: 919-969-9405. Work: 919-541-3417. Fax: 603-676-4884. bart@hpcc.epa.gov

Nyckelharpa Videotape

Nyckelharpa Videotape, with eight of Sweden's best players recorded in 1990, in Sweden, showing examples of old and new nyckelharpas, including the Moraharpa at the Zorn Museum. Produced by Tim Rued, who has a few copies left. \$28 postage paid. Tim Rued, POB 30456, Stockton CA 95213. 209-825-2669

Nyckelharpa Players in North America



The American Nyckelharpa Association

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

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

ANA Web Page

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

Nyckel Notes

Published quarterly, edited by Bart Brashers and Matt Fichtenbaum. Send submissions to *Nyckel Notes* at the address below, or to: bart@hpcc.epa.gov

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