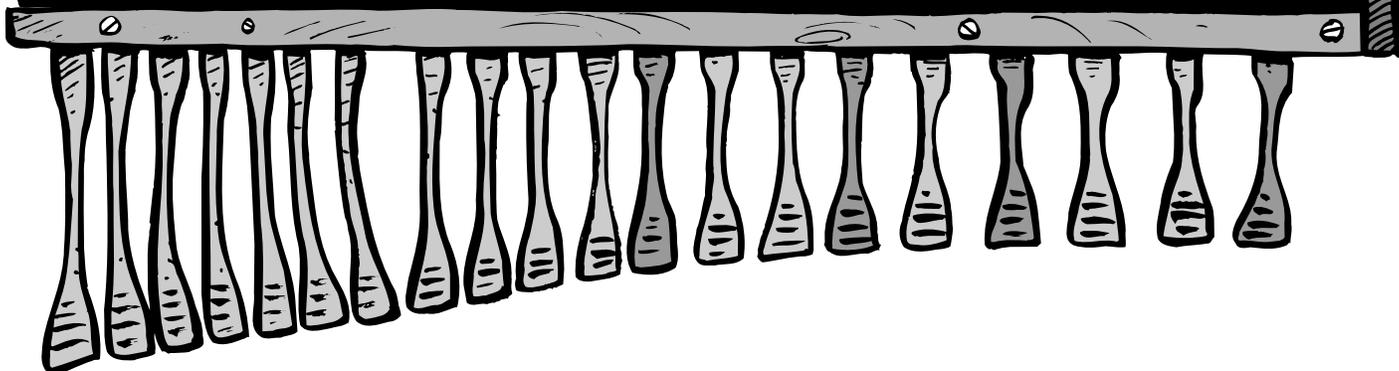


THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN NYCKELHARPA ASSOCIATION

NYCKELNOTES



Helan och Halvan

by Rita Leydon

A couple of years ago when I was just a freshly hatched nyckelharpa tadpole, I betook myself to the pond of my birth in order to learn more about my instrument. A one week submersion course. Sink or swim. I worked very hard cultivating responsive fingers and some semblance of rhythm in a strictly visually aligned body. I was totally titillated. Minus moderation. Derring-do and gung-ho.

I did gaze around now and then. Noticed who was about. Chatted a bit at meal times and so forth. I remember asking another similarly focused and mature female student who a certain attractive male teacher might be. I was absorbed, yes, but I wasn't walking around with blinders on. She was incredulous at my lack of orientation. What planet did I come from, she seemed to wonder. She patiently explained to me that when the king needs a nyckelharpa player at an event, he calls on the object of my gaze. "Oh," said I and feasted my eyes some more. I live in America and I'm easily impressed by kings.

The name of the royal servant was Peter and we two found common ground a few days later in the area of ratty and exotic old cars. The ice broken, one thing led to another over a period of time as we simply became part of each

other's families. Visits back and forth across the great Atlantic ensued. In the relaxed atmosphere of good friendship, dreams were divulged, visions verbalized,

possibilities pondered, and improbables imagined.

A year ago, I listened politely and with half an ear as Peter warbled on and on about his desire to produce a series of nyckelharpa lessons in DVD format. They would be interactive, he said. You could listen in Swedish or English. You could select to look at and study Peter demonstrating a tune or just his left hand close up. You could instantly jump from tune to tune at will. There would be a text too. It seemed an admirable and ambitious foggy haze at the time. I had no notion what DVD was, other than something new and big and expensive probably. Dream on, Peter Boy, thought I.

Some months passed. A freebie CD landed on my desk

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VOTE FOR BOARD MEMBERS

Two of the seats on the ANA board, currently held by Bart Brashers and Tim Newcomb, were up at the end of December 2000. The following have been nominated to serve for the next term, Jan 2001 to Dec 2002. Please vote for two and return ballot to: Matt Fichtenbaum, 46 Sleight Rd., Chelmsford, MA 01824

- Bart Brashers, Seattle WA (soon)
- Chris Leydon, Lahaska PA
- Tim Newcomb, Worcester VT
- Virginia Thompson, Port Townsend WA

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

Tunes From Puma

by Matt Fichtenbaum

November 2000's ANA Stämman East again featured Peter "Puma" Hedlund, who shared with us a bunch of fine tunes and a good start on the "path of enlightenment" toward playing them well. This issue's column presents two of Puma's own tunes, and I try to convey some of the associated wisdom he gave us. I follow that with some thoughts and words on bowing to produce good tone.

Iste Kornbodsmarsch

Iste, a small village in Hälsingland, is where Puma makes his home. It's an area with a history of successful farming, and it's been known as "Hälsingland's granary - Hälsinglands kornbod." One year, the women of Iste formed a women's group (a syjunta, or sewing circle, he explained); the men, not to be left behind, formed a men's group. Puma thought the group needed a theme tune, and so Iste Kornbodsmarsch heard the sound of day.

The tune is straightforward and not difficult. As I

remember, and as it sounds on my recording, Puma played it with all (or almost all) separate bows. When I play it, I am likely to use an up-bow for the pickup notes, but that's personal style rather than fundamental "must do this."

Puma emphasized two points as he taught this tune:

- Find a fingering that lets you have fingers where you need them. Use that fingering consistently, and get your fingers to where they're needed before they're needed.
- Play it slowly and practice playing it cleanly and articulating each note. When he played it very slowly, he would even stop the bow after each sixteenth-note in order to practice keeping the sound short and distinct.

In advance of his visit, Puma sent along a transcription of this tune which is posted on the ANA web site. My transcription differs in two places from the one Puma sent, and mine is consistent with what Puma played when I recorded him. If there's a lesson in this, it is that people change their

Iste Kornbodsmarsch

 = 100

Peter "Puma" Hedlund



Transcribed by Matt Fichtenbaum, Nov. 2000

interpretations of a tune over time, and the concept of “the right way to play it” must be understood accordingly.

Polska on the Spot

Puma was once playing for a dance and the dancers requested a slängpolska, but no tune came to mind that he hadn't already played. So he made a tune, then and there, and played it, to the dancers' delight. Afterwards, of course, the musicians requested that he play it again so they could record it, but it was gone.

So he made a second slängpolska tune, for them to record, and it stayed around and found acceptance. In slängpolska, the dancers stay in one place rather than progressing around the room, and the dance is sometimes called fläckpolska - “spot polska” for this. So the name “Polska on the Spot” reflects both the nature of the dance and the tune's just-in-time creation.

The melody starts up high on the A string. If that's unfamiliar territory, take some time to find the notes, play some scale fragments up there, and anything else that helps you and your fingers get comfortable. Puma points out that the tune uses “only the yellow keys,” i.e., the notes found on the white keys of the piano.

Once you have the notes, work on the tune. You can leave out the ornaments and the double-stops while you're learning the melody; even then, they're a matter of personal style: what's notated is only the way Puma played the tune that time, and he may well vary the way he plays it.

In this tune, too, there's opportunity to work on playing cleanly. Experiment with bow pressure and speed on the high notes, to achieve a sound that pleases you. Work

on the slurred string-crossings in the B part. If you play the double stops, be aware of the balance between the two notes, and work on playing so the two notes are heard as you'd like them to be.

Slängpolska often has an ongoing, “inexorable” beat. I tend to play the quarter-notes so that there's a barely discernable “pulse” in the middle. Imagine two eighth-notes slurred together, and then take it one small step in that direction.

Tone production and bowing

Puma's playing draws a lot of sound out of his instrument. Listen to his playing, or Olov Johansson's or other really good players', and you glimpse the instrument's potential. If you're like me, you also think “why does my own playing sound different from what I'm hearing?”

It's all in the bowing. The complex interaction between bow and string makes the difference between deep, speak-with-the-whole-instrument sound and thin, surface sound. Between smooth mellowness and choked scratchiness. Between notes whose sculpted contours swell and grow, and square-edged notes that start and end abruptly.

Quite a few variables come into play, including:

- The tension, or tightness, of the bow hair
- The force with which you apply the bow to the string
- The angle that you lean the bow, which affects the amount of hair in contact with the string
- The speed with which you move the bow

continued on next page

Fläckpolskan "Polska on the spot"

by Peter "Puma" Hedlund

♩ = 144

The musical score is presented in four staves. The first two staves contain a melodic line in treble clef, featuring a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as 144. The melody is characterized by slurs and ornaments, particularly in the first two staves. The third and fourth staves contain a bass line, also in treble clef, which includes double stops and slurs, providing harmonic support to the melody.

Tunes from Puma

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- The tension in your fingers, hand, and arm as you hold the bow

At a time that you feel inclined to work on tone production, take your instrument, choose a string, and play some slow scale fragments. Try to play to achieve the nicest, most satisfying tone in these long notes. Experiment with different bow-hair tensions and try to hear the difference they make. To my ear, too loose a bow damps the string and keeps it from singing (I believe it wraps too much hair around the string); too tight a bow makes it hard to make the string sound without pressing too hard.

Experiment, too, with different amounts of force on the bow - too little "sounds like the bow is just moving above the string," a teacher once told me; too much makes scratchy sounds rather than music.

It's a complex issue, using the bow to apply force to the string. It's not that you hold the bow tightly and then force your arm against the instrument. Instead, your hand and arm stay relaxed, holding the bow in a manner that brings the word "supple" to mind. Then, with your index finger against the bow stick, and the hold of your hand, and the muscles in your fingers, you somehow focus the tension so

that it is all at the point where the hair touches the string.

This is not an easy phenomenon to describe, and it may not lend itself to rational description. I imagine that people who play racquet sports know how to extend their feelings out to the point where the racquet touches the ball. And if you're used to driving in snow, and know, from the way the steering wheel feels when the front wheels are about to lose traction, that's probably related as well.

Explore the different things you can do in bowing your instrument, and the effects on the sound that result. Try keeping your arm/wrist/hand/fingers loose, while still being able to control your bow (yes, it's permitted to pick up your bow when you drop it). Remember that those cleanly-articulated short notes in Puma's playing require small, fine motions in the finger muscles, and keep the fingers loose enough to be able to do this.

And if you're a string player with formal training, and you already know how to work a bow and how to teach others to work a bow, then by all means write something on the topic and send it in to *Nyckel Notes*. You will earn the eternal gratitude of your fellow nyckelharpa players!

There's another whole dimension to bowing, namely, what happens at the start and end of each note. To my ear, it's that dimension that determines whether someone's playing sounds "Swedish." I shall leave that topic for a future column.

Puma introduced this polska, noting "I had a young student, about 13 or 14, and it was his birthday. So I made him this tune. And he hated it! Eventually he got to like it, but at first..."

Hennings Födelsedagspolska "Henning's Birthday Polska"

By Peter "Puma" Hedlund

Taught by Puma at the ANA Stämman East, Nov. 2000

Transcribed by Matt Fichtenbaum, Nov. 2000

Helan och Halvan*continued from page 1*

and vied for my attention. One blustery winter evening, I innocently stuffed the CD into my computer drive and browsed its contents. Demo software mostly. Propaganda. Promises and glitter. Inane games and useless stuff. Film editing ... hmm ... let's have a look at that. Interesting. Oh, wow! Midnight oil illumined my cautious look-see. Intriguing. Fascinating in fact. Another world. A place I

never ever dreamed of going. I probed deeper and deeper and got keener and keener. By the time I dragged off to bed, I was as good as hooked. Couldn't sleep. Fireworks exploded in my head, disturbing my slumber. Eyes darted to and fro as brain calculated myriad possibilities lurking beyond this new thought. I was a live wire!

By morning, everything was crystal clear. I can do that! I fired off an e-mail to Peter. "Stop! Hold it! Don't do anything! I'll be your partner in this crazy dream of yours.

continued on next page

Swedish Music at Augusta Heritage Center

Leif Alpsjö, nyckelharpa, and Andrea Larson, fiddle, were co-teachers.

In 1997 Leif held a class at Augusta and he had five students, among them Mary Beth and myself. In 2000 there were 10. It was a beginner class, for that was the level of most of the students.

In 1997 I was brand new myself and only signed up to keep the class from being cancelled and to help Leif out. Mary Beth was there too, but with a violin (she was a violin teacher, not "fiddle.") Mary Beth was of Swedish stock and the daughter of a past president of the college that hosts Augusta (in West Virginia). Leif and I were invited for dinner at her parents' mountain top home during the week and they shared their thrill at finally being able to have Swedish music as part of the Augusta offerings. Mary Beth became enchanted with the nyckelharpa and dreamed of getting one. Flash forward to summer 2000. When Chris and I checked in at Augusta, there was Mary Beth helping out. We both squealed with glee and hugged. First thing she said was,

"Do you think Leif has a nyckelharpa for sale with him?" I knew he did. During the first couple of days, the "for sale" harpa traveled around various hands while Chris loaned his harpa exclusively to Mary Beth so she could get a good dose of harpa bonding. Wednesday morning Mary Beth arrived, beaming, and announced that she had bought herself a nyckelharpa. She was beside herself with happiness, and totally submerged herself with her new instrument for the rest of the week. She was one of those "naturals" that I keep bumping into. The week ended and we all went home.

In the fall, it was decided that the ANA stämman would be held at our home in Lahaska and we wanted to let Mary Beth know about it. It took a few days for her phone to be answered, and when it was, it wasn't Mary Beth on the other end, but her sister. The sister advised us that Mary Beth had died just two weeks earlier. We were stunned. The sister told us that Mary Beth had

shared how much she had enjoyed befriending us and embarking on her all too brief rendezvous with the nyckelharpa. Mary Beth was only 56.

Life is precious, as is each of its moments.

—Rita Leydon



Standing: (L to R) Andrea Larson, Virginia Thompson, Sandra Marchman, Vicki Dibbern, John Trexler, Chris Leydon, Mary Beth Hermanson. on floor: (L to R) Leif Alpsjö, Rita Leydon, Amy Parker, Bronwyn Bird, Susann Andersson.

Helan och Halvan

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OK?”

“OK.” Was the stunned reply.

So it was settled.

I didn't have a clue what I was embarking on, but I was willing to scrub decks and endure the scorch of the equatorial sun just to be part and parcel of an unchartered journey to the edge of my known world. It's the daredevil in me. It surfaces intermittently, whenever things are calm and smooth. I like things in motion. Stirred up. Agitated. I commenced diligent study and probed the depths of the internet for facts. It disgorged piles and piles of data. DVD. Digital video. Gigabytes. I figured out pretty quick that this was going to cost me. None of my on-hand computer equipment would do of course. Not a chance. No, this required bigger guns.

Every few days I fired off a gee-wiz mail to Peter keeping him abreast of the education of Rita. I passed the point of no return with the purchase a digital video camera—a Canon GL1—and a \$400 microphone. “A \$400 microphone! Are you freaking out of your mind?” Thus equipped, I flew to Sweden last summer and filmed the nyckelharpa world championship competition at Österbybruk. Cut my teeth, you might say. By serendipitous design, Peter had the good grace of snatching the brass ring at the competition. World Champ once again: 1992 and 2000. This was very convenient considering the project we two were conspiring to conjure. Way to go, Peter!

After the competition, Peter and I had our requisite, nitty gritty, down and dirty, business discussion about who does what and when. My basic question was: Would my partner “put up” when it was time? Would he materialize in my Lahaska studio and follow my direction when it was time to film and record? He assured me that he would. One hundred percent. This was not small potatoes.

Back in the States, I set about methodically acquiring the equipment I needed: an additional G4 Macintosh with oodles of power, two large monitors, a DVCAM player-recorder, an NTSC studio monitor, and a blow-your-mind sound system. Final Cut Pro software for film editing. I taught myself editing by making a two and a half hour film about the nyckelharpa competition. Not too shoddy.

This fall, Peter made good on his promise to show up in America. We enjoyed three intense weeks of work and play. We took a break midstream to host a weekend American Nyckelharpa Association Stämman. I had also arranged some gigs for Peter. I felt he should be generously shared, a sprinkle here, a dollop there, maybe a slight dusting over there. People tend to smile a lot when they see and hear Peter play that funny instrument. The man is a tremendous ambassador for the music and culture of Sweden, oozing good will and charm.

So how was it to work with the Puma (as he is called)? It was wonderful and easy. Our two heads functioned as one creative mind. I was fully prepared for him. My studio was

set up with black backdrop, black stool, and umbrella lights. It actually looked like I knew what I was doing. I had practised filming with husband Chris as my subject to work out the initial kinks. Chris was a great stand in for Peter and a good sport in general. Peter had done his homework too, having sent me a mini disc with proposed music and narration so I knew where he wanted to go with the project. We were essentially on the same page when he arrived. I was impressed with his logic, progression and reasoning. I liked that I was dealing not just with a brilliant artist and musician, but with a clear thinker.

I had prepared not just the setting, but also the wardrobe of my artist. Draped on my loom were brand new black 501 Levis and an assortment of colored cotton shirts from L.L. Bean. Tan, yellow, green, blue, red, purple, and black. My notion was that we would produce several DVDs, a series, and on each one Peter would wear a different color shirt, starting with green and ending with black. “Black Diamond” is the meanest slope on the mountain. “Black Belt” is the most awesome rank in karate. “Black Harpa” will be the ultimate collection of killer tunes. I had suggested the colored shirt idea prior to Peter's landing, and fully expected him to scoff and tell me where to get off. He didn't.

When you listen to your world through a \$400 microphone, you find it is full of sounds you never noticed before. The quietest place is downright NOISY. All sorts of buzzings and hummings and faraway cars and airplanes and crickets invade the silence you imagined was there. This detail put me in panic mode shortly before my friend's arrival. Chris calmly suggested filming only very late at night. He would turn off everything electrical in the entire house. Chris also, at the eleventh hour, suggested, no, he insisted, that I get a second video camera to shoot the close ups with. It was the right thing. I just needed a well timed nudge.

In front of the camera, Peter was a true veteran professional. Poised. Composed. At ease. Sincere. Friendly. Personal. I think he surprised himself. I know he surprised me. One or two takes usually, an occasional third if some aspect of the digital technology glitzed when we scrutinized the rushes in the morning. When I said, “Do it over,” he did it over. No nonsense. No Prima Donna. He let me know right up front that in all matters related to the final artistic outcome of the project I was the boss. We jokingly referred to ourselves as “Helan och Halvan” (the Whole One and the Half One—what Swedes call Laurel and Hardy). In the wee early hours of the morning, after the night's filming, we'd unwind on the kitchen sofa with a couple of gourmet beers. Some laughs. Some talk. Some dreams.

And that's how it went. Phase One of our collaboration is now “in the can,” as they say. I'll be busy with editing for the next couple of months. Peter is back home in Sweden. Tentative plans call for another similar session sometime in the spring and a publication/release date of around mid-summer 2001 for Volume One.

Stämman 2000

by Sheila Morris

I just got back from the Fall ANA stämman with Peter “Puma” Hedlund and, as usual after one of these events, my head is buzzing. Stuffed full of new tunes and more information than I can really absorb. So, I thought I’d sit down and write up my impressions while they’re still fresh.

Bart and John picked me up at the airport in DC, and we drove up to Pennsylvania. MapQuest suggested it would be a three-and-a-half hour drive, but we hit heavy traffic outside Baltimore. We passed the time talking about—nyckelharpa! Various things were discussed—philosophies of teaching, practice techniques, favorite players... all to the sound of nyckelharpa music on the CD player in Bart’s Volvo. It’s always great to get together with people who share your greatest interest!

When we finally arrived at the Leydons’ farm in Pennsylvania (two hours late), we were greeted with the sound of nyckelharpas. We walked into the spacious

kitchen/living room to find a pretty mixed bunch gathered around the fireplace. Several new faces, and some old friends. There was a wide range of skills, from the two or three people who started a couple of months ago on up through the “old hands” who have been playing for twenty-plus years. I don’t know which is the best part of these gatherings—meeting new people or seeing folks you haven’t seen for years... I don’t remember the last time we had a quorum of the Board in one location! In fact, Matt and I had never before met on U.S. soil... only in Sweden!

Or maybe the best part, at least of this stämman, was Rita’s cooking. Everyone had waited for us for dinner (playing to ease the hunger pangs...), so as soon as we had brought in all our stuff from the car, we dug into roast chicken, salad, and freshly baked rolls. There was a lot of trading places, as everybody tried to meet the new folks and

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Labaska 2000: Back row, from left: Matt Fichtenbaum, Sheila Morris, Puma, John Farrow, Bart Brashers. Second row, sitting: Beverly Woods, Bronwyn Bird, Rita and Chris Leydon. Front: Nancy Brown

Upcoming Nyckelharpa Events

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

4 - 6 May 2001: Hasse Gille in Seattle WA

Cancelled due to health reasons (Cataracts). Stay tuned for more information, we may still have an event near the 1st weekend of May...

8 - 9 Jun 2001: Nisswa-Stämman, Nisswa MN

The Nisswa Pioneer Village will be the site for the second annual Nisswastämman, on June 8 - 9, 2001. Nisswastämman 2000 was a very successful first-time event, with over 50 folk musicians participating in celebrating the Scandinavian musical heritage of the upper midwest. This year even more musicians are expected including a trio from Uppsala, Sweden: Cajsa Ekstav, Bosse Larsson and Örjan Englund. Nisswastämman will focus on dancing, offering two evening dances and all day long dancing opportunities next to the main stage on Saturday, with possible dance workshops planned as well.

Friday, June 8: concert of selected Stämman musicians at 7 pm at the Lutheran Church of the Cross, followed by a gammal/bygde dance at the Legion Club in Nisswa.

Saturday, June 9: activities start at 10 am at the Pioneer Village in Nisswa, with ongoing folk music presentations on three stages, children's activities, lots of jamming and dancing all day long, a 5 pm smörgåsbord at the Nisswa Community Center and a late-into-the-night gammal/bygde dance at the Pequot Lakes Seniors Center.

For more information, contact stämman organizer: Paul Wilson, 218-764-2994, pwilson@brainerd.net www.brainerd.net/~pwilson/nisswastamman

For general information and specific information about housing call the Nisswa Chamber at 800-950-9610.

15 - 22 Jun 2001: Bruce Sagan Teaches Nyckelharpa at Mendocino

This year will feature the music and dance from eastern Telemark, in Norway. Hauk Buen and Anne Hytte will teach Hardanger fiddle and play for dancing. Arnhild Brennesvik and Ole Kristian Torjussen will work with us on dancing telespringar and gangar.

From Sweden we welcome Anders Almlöf and Jonny Soling, teaching the music from Dalarna, Sweden. Nobi Kurotori and Roo Lester will teach dances from Dalarna, Sweden. Bruce Sagan will teach Nyckelharpa, Sarah Kirton will assist the Hardanger fiddle students, Peter Michaelsen will lead the allspel and all will play for dance parties.

Camp this year will be June 15-22, a week later than it has been in the last few years. Registrations will be accepted

any time after December 5th. Sign up soon as camp is expected to fill quickly this year. If you would like to be added to our mailing list, send us your information and we will send you a flyer.

Scandia Camp (Mendocino)
Roo Lester, 1320 Harleyford Road, Woodridge IL 60517;
630-985-7192; DancingRoo@aol.com
<http://members.aol.com/DancingRoo/scandiamendo.html>

EVENTS IN SWEDEN

24 - 28 June 2001: Ekebyholm

Residence course the week following midsommar every year, from Sunday to Thursday, at Ekebyholm castle, just north of Rimbo, Uppland. This course was started by Eric Sahlström, and is the most well-known course for learning Uppland music. Most participants are nyckelharpa players, but it's open to fiddle players as well.

The course is for nyckelharpa players at all levels, and all but beginning fiddle players. Cost for 2000 was 3300 SEK, which includes tuition, room and board, lessons and evening programs. The application period is about 20 March to 15 April 2001. Don't send any money yet, as only 75 students will be accepted.

Nyckelharpa teachers may include Ditte Andersson, Lotta Franzén, Johan Hedin, Peter Hedlund, Peder Källman, Sture Sahlström, Sven-Olof Sundell, Esbjörn Hogmark, Sonia Sahlström and Leif Åhlund.

For more information, contact Lars Lindkvist, Aprilvägen 43, 177 61 Järfälla, Sweden.
Tel. +46-8-58 03 16 21 or: lars.lindkvist@jarfalla.se

Aug 2000 - May 2001:

Year-long Nyckelharpa Course at ESI

For the third year in a row, the Eric Sahlström Institute (ESI) is offering a course in nyckelharpa, in Tobo, Uppland, Sweden. This course is presented in conjunction with Väddö Folkhögskola, so college credit is possible. Head teachers will be Olov Johansson, Ditte Andersson and Sonia Sahlström but you will meet other teachers — Niklas Roswall, Gunnar Ahlbäck, Andreas Berchtold, Curt Tallroth, Hasse Gille, Johan Hedin and Esbjörn Hogmark among others.

Course content is concentrated on nyckelharpa, but will also cover music theory, transcription, arrangements, folk music history, nyckelharpa history, folk singing, folk dance, playing for dancing, instrument knowledge and maintenance, playing on stage, etc.

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Making the Most of Your Practice Time

by Sheila Morris

Warm up first! You wouldn't go out running without stretching, so don't expect your fingers to do it! Scales and exercises are good for this—play at a comfortable pace, concentrating on producing a clear, even tone across the whole duration of a note. Play softly. Play louder. Play as loud as you can. Hint—this is not done so much with bow pressure as it is with bow speed. The faster you move your bow, the louder the sound. Too much pressure only causes the tone to become scratchy.

Make up your own exercises, from the tunes you're working on. Find a passage that's a little tricky, figure out what the problem really is—fingering? bowing? string crossing? rhythm?—then develop an exercise that works on that problem. This is often something like taking one or two bars out of a tune and playing them over and over, in different keys. Play the pattern a few times, then move up a step and play the same pattern. Play it most in the key you need for the tune, but by playing it in different keys, you'll learn something about the pattern itself, which may be helpful for another tune. I find this especially helpful for endings—there are a lot of two- to four-bar phrase ending-patterns, that come up over and over again. The more familiar your fingers become with them, the easier it will be to learn new tunes by ear...you only have to learn, say, six new measures and then add a 'tag' that you already know.

You hate doing exercises? Well, sorry, but it's really the most effective way to practice. Puma does them. Olov does them. Bart does them. You should do them, too. They work! Plus, they get your fingers warmed up and ready to go before you plunge into Eric Sahlström or Byss-Calle.

The harder it is to do, the more you need to do it. If, when playing a tune, you find that you make the exact same mistake over and over again ("WHY do I always do that?"), stop right then and there and work that section. The reason you always do "that" is that you have been practicing doing that, and letting yourself get away with it. Now you have to re-train yourself, which can be really time-consuming.

Play the difficult part, and try to analyze what's going wrong. Often, the problem is in the measure before—you may not be setting up your fingers in the best way possible. Try different fingerings. Try a different bowing—often what seems to be a fingering problem is really caused by an awkward or inconsistent bowing. Once you have the problem identified, play the phrase or partial phrase slowly. Play

it until you can play it perfectly five times in a row. Play it a little faster. Add the section leading into it. Every time you make a mistake, break it down again, or slow it down, until you get it right five times. Play the entire section of the tune that contains the problem, the whole A part, for example, slowly. Play it several times, then go on to the B part. Play the whole tune, slowly. Gradually pick up the tempo, until it's where you want it. This entire process can take a long time. Days. Weeks. It all depends on how much you practice. I've been working on 'Byggnan' for two years. I'll get it to a certain point, then it starts to sound mushy, so I have to slow it down again and clean it up.

This brings me to my favorite tool—the metronome. I hear a lot of people say they can't play with a metronome, that it throws them off. Well, if you find it hard to play along with the steady beat of the metronome, then it's very likely that you have trouble staying in time with other players. You're probably off the beat a lot, and may not even be aware of it. And playing with others is a big part of why we do this! Another part is playing for dance, and in this case, it is absolutely critical that you learn to keep a steady tempo.

If, when you try to play with a metronome, you feel that the tune is dragging part of the time and is going too fast part of the time, that's a sure sign that you've gotten used to playing one part faster than the other. Keeping a steady beat FEELS slow where you've been playing fast, and FEELS fast where you've been playing slow.

The way I use my metronome is this—first I play through the tune, then I set the metronome at about the speed I've been playing the tune. I try it again. Places I mess up are places I've probably been off the beat. Then I set the metronome a couple of notches slower, and try again. I keep setting it slower until I can get through the whole tune smoothly (five times...), then I notch it up one and try again. I notch it up until I start making mistakes, then take it down one or two. I practice the tune at that speed for a few days, then start moving it faster, one or two notches at a time. I practice at the new setting for two or three days (or sessions, if you don't play every day), then move it again. I do this until I can play the tune a skosh faster than I really want to, for extra security.

To assist in this overall process, I've gone back to the pre-digital age, and keep a card file of my tunes. Every tune

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Making the Most of Your Practice Time

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has its own card, with the name of the tune, its key, when and from whom I learned it, what kind of dance it's good for. I have them arranged in groups, based on what kind of shape the tune is in. From tunes that are really solid, which I practice maybe once a month, to new tunes that I practice daily, with three categories in between. Every day, I take one card from the first group, two from the second group, etc. This way, the tunes that need the most work, get the most work, but I don't completely lose older tunes through never playing them. Every time I practice a tune, I make a note on the card about how it went. Did I ace it? Did I hold the tempo but mess up on the notes (OK for a dance tune....), or did I get all the notes but drop the rhythm (NOT OK for a dance tune, or any tune!)? I also make notes about what I'm working with on the tune—double stops, trills, bowing problems. An extra advantage is that the Group One tunes serve as a continuation of my warm-up. Just don't always leave the ones that need the most work for last, or you'll consistently be too tired to really work on them! Of course, sometimes I get bored with this system, and then I do something else for a while, like play through my whole tune list in the order I learned them, or in groups according to type of tune—all the waltzes one day, all the bondpolskas another day. This method lets me really work on the styling for a given type.

And don't forget, expression has to be practiced, too! It's all about bowing technique. I can no longer just sit

here and play through tunes, now I have to WORK on them, make them sound the way I want them to. For me, this means I have to record myself, and listen, really listen, to what I sound like. I hate this—I've gotten a couple of unpleasant surprises! "Gee, I thought I played that tune really well!" It's odd, but your brain somehow 'fills in' with what it's supposed to sound like while you're playing, but it can't do that when you're listening, because you're not as directly involved in the process.

Now, I know that some of you are thinking "Oh, this just sounds like entirely too much work!" Well, that's up to you. And I'm not saying you have to follow exactly this method of practicing—everyone is going to have their own, based on how much time they have to give it, what they want to accomplish with their playing, and how they learn best. But I truly believe that if you want to improve, you have to have some sort of organized approach to your practicing, or you're just sort of flailing around. You will improve a little every time you play, no matter what your approach, but you will improve faster if you implement a consistent plan, and, of course, practice regularly.

Don't forget to play for fun too! Just sit and play tunes you like, at random. Sight-read a bunch of tunes you don't know. Play along with your favorite CD. Get together with friends and jam, even if you don't all play the same type of music. I was recently at a great party, where everyone brought a couple of tunes written out, and we spent four hours playing everything from C&W to klezmer. It was a blast! The nyckelharpa lends itself very well to English country dance tunes! (Though not so well to C&W...)

Polska efter Algot Jorlin efter Nisse Nordström

from Peter "Puma" Hedlund, Nov. 2000

Taught by Puma at the ANA Stämman East, Nov. 2000

Transcribed by Matt Fichtenbaum, Nov. 2000

Nyckelharpa Strings for Sale

The American Nyckelharpa Association is pleased to announce the availability of strings for the nyckelharpa! ANA member Robert Krapfl has volunteered to handle string sales. We have five different products for you — two brands of playing strings and three versions of understring sets.

Playing Strings

The “playing strings” are the four largest strings, the ones that you actually touch with the bow. We have two brands to choose from, both manufactured in Sweden:

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

JÖRPELAND brand strings are made by a gammalharpa player and artist named Ingvar Jörpeland. He makes strings for the gammalharpa too, but the ANA carries only strings for the modern 3-row nyckelharpa. The set is called “Jerker Special”, which admittedly doesn’t sound so good in English. The man who first taught Ingvar to spin strings (Nils Eriksson) was nicknamed Jerker (YERKer), and the strings are named after him. The A-string is plain, and the rest are wound.

Sympathetic Strings

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

6+6 is

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

4+4+4 is

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

12-step is

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

Order Form

Prices are listed for ANA members/non-members.

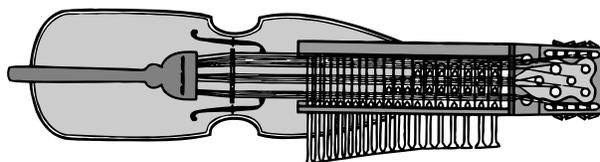
Price includes shipping in the US.

Add an appropriate extra amount for international orders.

String Set	Qty	Price	Cost
Prim Playing Strings	_____	\$53/\$60	\$_____
Jörpeland Playing Strings	_____	\$43/\$50	\$_____
6+6 Resonance Strings	_____	\$20/\$25	\$_____
4+4+4 Resonance Strings	_____	\$20/\$25	\$_____
12-step Resonance Strings	_____	\$20/\$25	\$_____
<i>(Make checks out to “ANA”)</i>		Total:	\$_____
Name	_____		
Street	_____		
City	_____		
State	_____	Zip	_____
Phone	_____		
E-mail	_____		

Send this form, with a check made out to the American Nyckelharpa Association, to:

Robert Krapfl
4651 N Wolcott, Apt. 1, Chicago IL 60640
rpk@signalinteractive.com



Stämman 2000

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reconnect with old friends sort of simultaneously. Then, there was more jamming and talking, until we all collapsed at about midnight.

After breakfast the next morning (ugnspannkaka - oven-baked "pancake", served with lingon), we gathered to learn tunes. And got technique, too! "Iste kornbods-marschen", by some guy named Peter Hedlund, introduced the concept of "crawling" up and down the keyboard one finger at a time. "Kristina's sommarvisa" was in part about how and when to make a jump. "Polska efter Algot Jorlin efter Nisse Nordström (efter Peter Hedlund...)" had some tricky trills—the kind that come after the note and lead into the next note ("efterslag").

Then there was lunch—lentil soup and salad, I believe. Then more tunes—"Polska på fläck," also one of Puma's, had some interesting double-stops and more trills. Then we got a lecture on trills, and how to create exercises to work on them (like playing scales, trilling before every note, or after every note), and the importance of playing scales and doing exercises. Then there was Eric Sahlström's variation on "Mungalåten," followed by "Hennings Födelsedagspolskan" (av P. Hedlund). Or maybe that was on Sunday... things were starting to get fuzzy by this time.

We walked into town along a narrow country road, toting candle-lanterns, and ate dinner at a restaurant. When we got back, we were treated to the premiere of Rita's film of the VM-competition at Österbybruk last summer. It was

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

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great! Even after the walk and a big dinner, the film kept everyone awake and attentive. We got to see 21 different players, on both gammel- and modern-harp, playing two tunes each, and Rita focussed mainly on their hands, so we got to compare techniques. "Look, how quiet and calm her hands are!" "Have you ever seen that kind of bow-hold?" "Wow, what a nice way to work that drone string!" "He's playing that WAY too fast!" "That's weird, he's playing Dalarna-style trills in an Uppland tune...."

After the film, Matt and Bart played for a while, while the rest of us tottered off to our sleeping bags. There's nothing better than a nyckelharpa lullaby—it reminded me of Ekebyholm, the year I had a room in the main part of the castle.

Sunday morning there was a tour of Chris' workshop, where he restores historic automobiles. The final session was mostly review, and some "ornamenting" of tunes we'd learned, with more intensive work on "Hennings...", since it came late the day before, when we were tired. Then there was lunch, and goodbyes, and a few private lessons, and more goodbyes... and Stämman 2000 was over.

Upcoming Nyckelharpa Events

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Students live in the Institute's modern annex, adjacent to the lecture hall. The cost is 3100 SEK/month for a double room, 3800 SEK/month for a single room. That includes the monthly rent, breakfast, lunch, dinner and coffee (of course — it's Sweden) on weekdays. You buy your own food for the weekends. Teaching is free, but you must pay for your own paper, pens and you might have to buy a few books, and other incidentals such as small trips.

The first semester starts the last Monday in August and ends the third Friday in December. The next semester starts second Monday of January and ends the last Friday of May. There are some weeks of holidays (one in November, one in February and one in April). For more information, contact Jonas (Jalle) Hjalmarsson, Eric Sahlström-Institutet, Bruksgatan 3, S-748 50 Tobo, Sweden. Tel +46-295-342 93. Fax +46-295-342 99. E-mail: jonas.hjalmarsson@swip-net.se or esitobo@algonet.se. Web: www.esitobo.org

Note: The small amount of material received resulted in our combining the Nov. 00/Feb. 01 issues.

