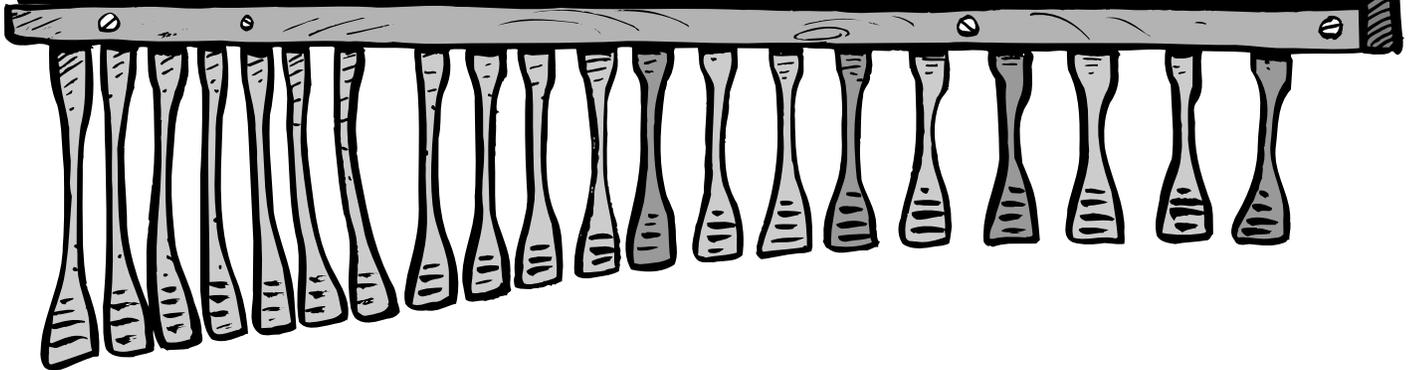


THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN NYCKELHARPA ASSOCIATION

NYCKELNOTES



Torbjörn Näsborn

An extraordinary, delightful musician

by Matt Fichtenbaum

Music just courses and flows from Torbjörn Näsborn when he is playing. This man is so musical that music even gently bubbles up from him when he is not playing. And during the first week of July, we nyckelharpa students were graced by his presence at Nordic Fiddles and Feet, the annual week of Swedish and Norwegian music and dance at Buffalo Gap Camp in West Virginia.

I asked him about his background, and these are his own words, as well as I can render them.

"I grew up immersed in music. Two older brothers who played and who later became professional musicians, and my father, music teacher Lars Näsborn. Mother, luckily, was 'normal' and kept the family on track. I started playing fiddle at the age of seven, and would visit such luminaries as Viksta-Lasse and Eric Sahlström, who became my great teachers of spelmanslåtar.

"After primary school I spent a year at Kapellsbergs music school in Härnösand, then five years at the Radio Sweden school of music, studying with violinists Endre Wolf and Lars Frydein. I finished my studies with two years at the Royal Music Conservatory in Brussels, and in 1984 joined the Umeå Symphony Orchestra.

"It was then that I started to play nyckelharpa, first under controlled conditions but then less and less so, so nowadays my use of the nyckelharpa can be considered 'provocative.' I've worked with builder Enar Magnusson, who built

the harpa I play, in developing and refining the instrument. I've also started to play classical music, which I think is very well suited to the nyckelharpa.

"I want to thank my wife heartily for her support of my nyckelharpa addiction. Three years ago I left my orchestra position, and I would like to continue to support myself as a nyckelharpist."

At Buffalo Gap we were about a dozen nyckelharpa players, divided into beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups. In past years the beginners' group has been led by an American player, but this year they, too, had the pleasure of working with Torbjörn. Within a few days they were playing a respectable Kyrkpolska, while the intermediate group played a worthy rendition of Hällnäsvalsen, another good Lars Näsborn tune. We in the third group received a rich collection of tunes, technique, ideas for interpretation—everything one could wish from a week of music.

Torbjörn has deep feelings that inspire his playing, and a jazz musician's spontaneity, freedom, and expression in bringing forth those feelings as music. He's a tunesmith of the first order, and he played and taught a number of his own tunes. He was often on stage for the evening dance parties, contributing playful harmony and rhythmic drive to Uppland music, Hälsingland music (for the featured Swedish dances), or whatever request dances were played.

Torbjörn played a solo half-hour dance set one evening, a set that included a slängpolska tune that he made up

Inside:

Spela Bättre	2
Nyckelharpa in New Orleans ...	6
Vägen Review	7
Tune-Catching	9
Nyckelharpa Workshop Vol. 2 ..	13
Harpa Building in English	14
Nyckelharpa Ballet	16

continued on page 4

SPELA BÄTTRE!*The Only Way to Improve Your Playing***Peter Hedlund's "Svärdsjövisan"***by Matt Fichtenbaum*

Volume 2 of Puma's *Nyckelharpa Workshop* is available, and your friendly columnist has seen a preview. Among its good tunes is Svärdsjövisan, a gentle, lyrical polska (visa means song). Peter has his version from the great Uppland fiddler Viksta-Lasse.

It's such a good tune that Peter includes it twice, once as one would expect, and once in an arrangement consisting almost completely of double-stops, so that, in Peter's words, "It's as if you are playing harmony with yourself." I set out to learn that arrangement, and stretched my own playing in the process. Peter has graciously agreed to share his arrangement with NN's readers.

Peter is an outstanding player who builds his impressive technique on a foundation of careful thought and planning. Working on his tune gave me some insight into how he approaches playing harpa.

Learning the melody

Peter taught the tune Svärdsjövisan at the ANA Stämman in October of 1999. But not all of you were there, so you'll have to learn it from the transcription.

The melody is the top line of the music. Work on a gentle eighth-note polska feel, like a laid-back version of Hårgalåten. Learn it with a fingering that is natural for you, and try for a tempo about 100 beats (quarter notes) per minute. When you know what the tune sounds like and are comfortable playing it, preferably without reading the music, then you're ready to add the double stops.

Playing the full version

I make fair use of double-stops in my normal playing, but they're mostly octaves or other rhythm-reinforcing notes. When I started on Svärdsjövisan, I felt thoroughly disoriented: What were those strange left-hand contortions? How was it possible to keep the melody going and make sense out of the other note at the same time?

The more I played, though, the more it all made sense. Peter's arrangement depends on consistent use of particular double-stops, and as I learned those double-stops and got to where I could depend on them, it became easier and more logical. And more efficient, too: this arrangement moves the left hand as little as possible to get the notes it uses.

Proceed, then, with an open mind and a willingness to

learn a few new "chords," and we'll get through this just fine.

Let us begin at the beginning

Measure 1 starts with a D and a B-flat (I'll write B-flat as Bb henceforth). Many of you know Bb as the first key on the A-string, but, alas, that option isn't open to us. Reach your fourth finger up to Bb on the C string. If you don't know where that note is, you can find it by matching pitch against Bb on the A string. If you need to, practice finding Bb with the fourth finger so that it's there when you need it.

Use the fourth and first fingers to play that Bb together with D above it. Savor how it feels to play those two notes. Try to use the bow to produce good tone on both strings. You might find that it helps to adjust the bow-hair tension.

Do the two notes together give a pleasing sound? If not, check your tuning and make sure the C and A strings are in tune with each other. If that doesn't help, reread some of Bart Brashers' excellent articles on nyckelharpa tuning and intonation from previous issues of NN.

But back to the tune. Play the Bb and D, then add the second finger for the Eb, but keep the first finger down because you'll need it again next.

For the third beat of Measure 1, move the whole hand down from D/ Bb to C/A. But note that the first finger moves down a whole step—two keys—while the fourth finger moves down a half step—just one key. For me, it feels as if I stretch my first finger down a little more to reach the C, while the hand follows the fourth finger down to the A.

You continue to the first beat of Measure 2 by moving the hand down once more, a whole step on each string, from C/A to Bb /G. There! First hurdle surmounted.

I think that playing those first one-and-a-third measures is an accomplishment. Practice just that phrase until you're comfortable with it, so the fingers find their positions simultaneously, and the bow brings out good tone from both strings. And play it a bunch of times, so you can begin to depend on it when you need it.

The rest of Measure 2 is straightforward. Keep the Bb and G keys down, but dip the bow down to play the G and the open G string an octave below. Then back to Bb and G for the third beat. Practice that much of the tune so that it begins to feel natural.

Measures 3 and 4

In the first two measures you applied a particular sequence of double-stops. The next two measures use another sequence, to be learned in its own right.

From the Bb/G, proceed on to the A/F#. Then, the melody drops down to D, with the first finger on the C-string; the double-stop is the A below it, also with the first finger. That's a common interval, with the first finger on those two keys. Practice it if it's new for you.

What follows is a mini-phrase worth noting. There's D/A, then F#/C, then G/Bb, with the fingering as shown. I found it difficult at first, but with practice it became natural. Give it a try, and perfect the whole first phrase, from the beginning through the first note of Measure 4.

Measures 5 through 8

You finished the first phrase with first and fourth fingers on Bb/G. For the pickup into the next phrase, switch from fourth finger to third on F, and reach with your middle finger to D on the A string for the next note.

Measure 5 ends with the second and third fingers in use. These give way to the first and fourth at the start of Measure 6, a nicely symmetrical transition.

Measure 7 starts with the third and fourth fingers on Eb/G, so the fourth finger is one key higher, and one string lower, than the third. That double-stop should come in a single easy motion. Then, C/G with first and fourth

fingers, and—a switch from 1 & 4 to 2 & 3. Notice how the hand stays in one place for that switch. More efficient than that is hard.

The "B" part—Measures 9 through 12

Start with another third/fourth finger double-stop, on G/Bb. But this time the fingers are both on the same (tenth) keys on their respective strings, so your hand is twisted around more than on Eb/G in Measure 7. If it helps, you can reach for F#/Bb with fingers 2 & 3, and then add the fourth finger on G.

Measure 10 starts with second and third fingers on A/F#, The whole hand moves from D/A to Bb/F. Then—Measures 7 and 8 all over again, giving you another chance to use the fingering you just learned. But note the switch from D/F#, with 2 and 3, to C/A, with 1 and 4.

There's nothing particularly hard about Measures 13 and 14, and 15 and 16 are a repeat of Measures 3 and 4. And that's the whole tune!

The rewards

As I worked on this tune, the double-stops came more and more naturally and my left hand learned some new tricks. And, remarkably, a couple of other Puma tunes that I've been working on became easier. May you be so fortunate as to have the same experience!

Svärdsjövisan

Peter Hedlund's version with double-stops

The musical score for "Svärdsjövisan" is presented in four staves. Each staff contains a sequence of notes and rests, with double-stops indicated by vertical lines connecting notes on different strings. Fingering numbers are placed above the notes to indicate which fingers to use. The first staff has 12 measures, the second has 12, the third has 12, and the fourth has 12. The key signature is one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 3/4. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Torbjörn Näsborn

continued from page 1

as he went along (your correspondent was subsequently able to present him with a recording of that tune, so it persists). Another evening he gave a concert/presentation, with tunes by Byss-Calle, Eric Sahlström, and Johan Sebastian Bach, as well as several of his own. And for the staff concert, he played what he called “American folk music” on fiddle. Imagine music reminiscent of the banjo bands of the 1890s, played on all four strings of the fiddle at once. This involves detaching the bow frog from the stick, and playing with the hair passing over the strings but the stick behind the back of the fiddle. “I borrow Bruce’s violin, because I don’t want to do this with my own.” It was a masterful performance, absolutely in tune.

A little technique

Torbjörn strives for a playing position that’s as natural as possible. He had us hold our left hands out, with the fingers in an unstressed, gently curved position. That becomes his basic left-hand playing position: the fingers have less of a curve than some other players use, and the thumb, parallel to the neck, rests without force on the back of the neck rather than lying along the edge. When he moves his hand to play on the lower strings, he rotates the whole hand downward and thus keeps the fingers’ same relative position. This is not something I can apply immediately, but it’s there to work on. He also keeps his strap relatively long, so that



Rick Savard

Torbjörn (left) and Matt Fichtenbaum provided a delightful and inspiring half hour of music before dinner one evening at Nordic Fiddles and Feet.

the head of the nyckelharpa hangs low and his arm is extended rather than tightly bent.

In our class sessions he showed how we could vary the nyckelharpa’s tone quality and volume by moving the bow closer to or farther from the bridge. Like many players, I had found, and stayed with, “the spot that works,” so this simple tip gives me something good to explore.

Vals efter Bodin

Taught by Torbjörn Näsborn at NFF 2002

And a couple of tunes

Vals efter Bodin is a typical Uppland springvals. It should be played rapidly, about 150 beats (quarter-notes) per minute. There are a few fingering details worth noting. In Measures 3 and 7, the second finger plays both the C and the D that follows it; as Torbjörn plays it, one hears the B briefly as he moves his finger from C to D. (Yes, the B—he keeps his first finger down.) In Measures 8 through 10, he uses the first and third fingers, but in Measure 12, he uses the first and second fingers so as to leave enough fingers free for Measure 13.

Tyskens vals was made by a fiddler whose name was Tysk, so he was called Tysken. According to Torbjörn, “This Tysk, he played a lot of Irish music, maybe that’s why this tune sounds Irish.” Irish or not, it’s a good tune, and Torbjörn does fine things with it. I’ve tried to show the double-stops he played the time I recorded the tune.

Remember that these double-stops are ornaments—he plays them lightly, softer than the melody.

Closing words

Torbjörn made a fine impression on all who heard him, musicians and dancers alike. One of the dancers was moved to ask “Do you suppose he might be back? If I’d known what he’s like, I’d have taken beginning nyckelharpa.” I had a wonderful week as Torbjörn’s student and fellow musician—he’s one of the best teachers I’ve met—and I have new ideas and inspiration for my own playing.

Torbjörn promises that he’ll have a CD “eventually.” While there’s no recording yet of his nyckelharpa music, he plays fiddle on Eva Tjörnebo’s two CDs of ballads, both available from the ANA. And if you get a chance to hear Torbjörn Näsbom, or to take lessons from him, regard it as a rare opportunity!

Tyskens Vals

Taught by Torbjörn Näsbom at NFF 2002

The musical score for "Tyskens Vals" is presented in four staves. The first two staves contain the melody, featuring a mix of quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, with some rests. The last two staves contain the bass line, which includes double-stops and ornaments. The piece is in 3/4 time and G major. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

Nyckelharpa in New Orleans

by Faith Kaufmann

Little did I imagine on first falling under the spell of the nyckelharpa that it would lead me to travel to the distant, exotic land of ... New Orleans, Louisiana? It started when I sent an email to Hasse Gille to ask if he would make a kontrabasharpa for me. Back came the prompt and gracious reply: Of course!

In January, word arrived from Hasse that my instrument was nearly completed, and that he would bring it to New Orleans in April during his annual pilgrimage to the French Quarter Festival. It turns out that on top of his well-known accomplishments in Swedish traditional music, Hasse also plays cornet in a Dixieland jazz band.

So on April 12 I met Hasse Gille, the rest of the Canal Creepers, and my new harpa "Victoria" at a guest house a few blocks from the French Quarter. The musicians were in the kitchen drinking serious Swedish coffee (I diluted mine 50/50 with hot water), while I sat down to hear some great tunes and stories.

Hasse has been playing nyckelharpa since 1972 at the midsummer festival in Österby. "We had two key-fiddlers, Justus Gille—a distant cousin—and Viktor Vikman. They had played the midsummer fest for 37 years. I learned from them, so I keep the tradition alive."

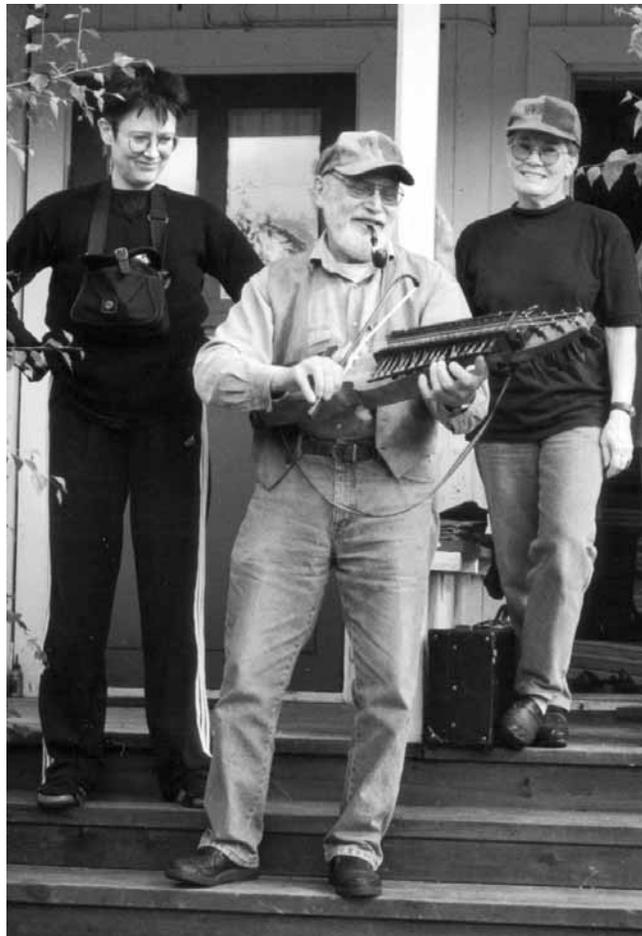
"Victoria" is the 233rd instrument he has made. The top is alpine spruce from Austria, the back is Swedish spruce, the sides are of laminated maple veneers, and the keys are white birch. Each of the tuning pegs for the two melody strings and the drone has a cross inscribed in the end of it, and there's another cross on the tailpiece. Hasse explained this arose from 18th-century superstitions: the crosses are "for the trolls ... so the evil spirit won't break your strings." The tailpiece is also decorated with two circles side by side. "OO" is how the letter Ö

used to be written, and it stands for Österbybruk; it's the symbol which was stamped on iron products made in the foundry there.

Hanging inside the heart-shaped hole just below the end of the keybox is the mysterious spirit bag. What's inside it? This was the question Hasse would not answer. "I take it to my grave," he told me. "You have to have some secrets."

The rest of the weekend was spent soaking up classic jazz, blues, and cajun music, admiring New Orleans architecture, watching fireworks over the Mississippi, marveling at crowds of people behaving in ways you just don't see in rural New England, and learning Byss-Calle tunes in between. The Canal Creepers played nightly at a tiny pub on Bourbon Street, as well as on one of the outdoor stages, and they were definitely a high point of the festival. *The Times-Picayune* thought so too: Hasse's photograph with cornet in hand graced the front of the entertainment section.

After an intriguing encounter with some airport security guards, we made it home intact. "Victoria" debuted a few weeks later at the May Day festivities in Montague, Massachusetts, where she was undoubtedly the first kontrabasharpa to participate. Which just goes to show, you never know where you'll end up.



Hasse Gille plays one of his kontrabasharpas.

Vägen

Peter Hedlund, nyckelharpa

22 tunes (nine original compositions); Tongång AllWin AWCD-48; available online at www.ritaleydon.com

Appeared as “En väg—en nyckelharpa” by Göran Andersson, reprinted from newspaper *Nya Åland*, July 4th, 2002

Translated by Bill Layher

The moosehunters of the Åland Islands have their own traditions and their own tunes, but I wouldn't be surprised if one of the hunting clubs there quickly adopts Peter “Puma” Hedlund's tune ‘Bogårdens älgmarsch’ as its own. (älgmarsch = moose march)

For here in this tune we get a sense the brisk sea air, of the prickly feeling that a wild creature is lurking nearby, and then ... a vibrant, manly pulse as the steaming body of the wild moose lumbers up and over the roadway ...

Who knows—Peter may even have the power to charm an elk with this tune!

In this age of experimental genre-mixing in the folk music scene—where instruments, styles, techniques and repertoire are mixed at will—Peter Hedlund's solo CD feels like a breath of fresh air. As he writes in the CD booklet: “This is a nyckelharpa. Just a nyckelharpa. No other instruments. Which is unusual in a recording today. Nowadays the nyckelharpa usually appears in some kind of group. Either several nyckelharpas in an ensemble, or as one nyckelharpa together with other instruments. I think that's fine. The sound of the nyckelharpa goes well with other instruments.”

I saw and heard Puma for the first time almost twenty years ago. (In my camera lens, he was almost the spitting image of Nick Nolte.) In 1975—seven years before that meeting—Puma had attained the rank of “riksspelman” on nyckelharpa, after just three years on the instrument and five years as a violin student. Ten years ago, he was named World Champion of the nyckelharpa, a distinction he earned again in the year 2000. Peter Hedlund was born in 1957 and grew up in Kungsängen, near Stockholm. His nickname “Puma” was given to him by his playmates many years ago because he was the best of all of them at creeping silently (like a predatory cat). He is a true “spelman” in more than one sense: he creates and performs wonderful music with his instrument while at the same time he is a multifaceted carrier of the tradition. Recently he moved to Hälsingland—more precisely to the small town of Iste—where it was easy for him to melt into the woods of that beautiful province.

It is easy to find a favorite tune on most recordings—or more than one. But on this CD there are fourteen tunes that I consider my favorites! Polskas—which usually don't appeal to me—appear here in three superlative examples. Peter composed the first of them, “Polska på fläcken,” a dance because he couldn't come up with any more polska tunes to play and the dancers were waiting. It is blessed with a distinctive melodic line, which is highlighted against an accentuated reprise in a minor key; and those who are familiar

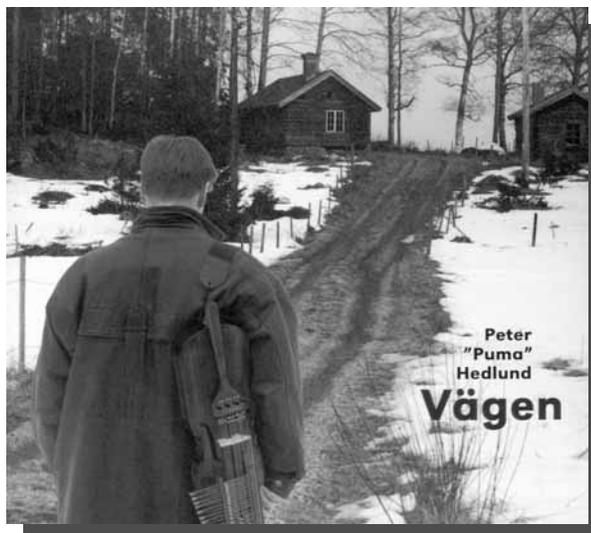
with the subtle and intricate dance steps of the “slängpolska” will find a great deal to enjoy here. Luckily, Peter says, “Polska på fläcken” was recorded on audiotape that evening at the dance, so that he had the chance to “learn” it later from the tape. The traditional polska after Wilhelm Gelotte glows with an air of classicism, and the “Polska mot trötthet”, after Vikstas-Lasse, is truly a pick-me-up tune of the highest order!

Peter enjoys waltzes of every variety. But he doesn't perform them in a dime-a-dozen way, even if the ubiquitous

tune “Ingers brudvals” is on this recording. A special treat is Ebbe Jularbo's “Vals i lekstugan”, which Peter has transposed into the “impossible keys” of E-flat and A-flat. His careful attention to this tune gives it a unique character. “Knäppgöken” by Ragnar Berglund of Möklinta is truly a challenge for the left hand—it would be terrific to see this tune performed on accordion as well. “Vals från Karlholm” by the late Tore Zetterström, which was performed on silverbasharpa and broadcast live on Sveriges Radio in 1934, survives today thanks to an audio recording of that broadcast. Peter put a lot of effort into studying the tape and learning the tune from the recording, and the result is a brilliant tribute to one of Sweden's greatest players. This waltz is a fantastic piece, which Peter performs with a kind of “kökarsgung” bowing technique that is characteristic of the fiddle traditions from Åland. Occasionally it sounds as if Peter were playing duets with himself.

This review started by mentioning Puma's “Älgmarsch”

continued on page 16



Nyckelharpa Strings for Sale

The American Nyckelharpa Association is pleased to announce the availability of strings for the nyckelharpa! We have five different products for you — two brands of playing strings and three versions of understring sets.

Playing Strings

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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.

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4+4+4 Resonance Strings	_____	\$20/\$25	\$ _____
12-step Resonance Strings	_____	\$20/\$25	\$ _____
<i>(Make checks out to “ANA”)</i>		Total:	\$ _____

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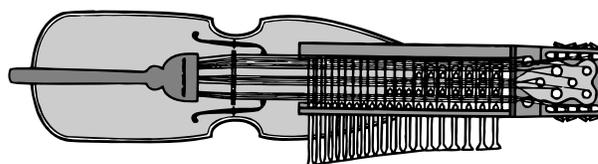
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Send this form, with a check made out to the American Nyckelharpa Association, to:

Tim Newcomb
P.O. Box 51, Montpelier, VT 05602



Tune-Catching From Recordings

An email conversation

by Marilee Cowan and Matt Fichtenbaum

Marilee Cowan: How does an isolated nyckelharpa player learn new tunes? Finding a live spelman to share a tune is a rare experience. I think there are advantages to learning a new tune from a recording. The tune is endlessly repeatable; you can listen to little bits of it until you get difficult passages; if you listen carefully, you can get lots of information, even bowing. Best of all, you get the spirit and subtle rhythmic nuances of the tune much better than from transcriptions. But there are challenges as well. I'll tell you how I approach the task, and see if Matt has some ideas.

Matt Fichtenbaum: I'd be delighted to be part of a "how does one learn a tune from a recording" forum. It's my favorite way of learning tunes—far better than reading it from a paper. You've addressed a topic that I think will be of interest to a fair number of readers, especially those who aren't natural by-ear players. In particular, people who are used to reading music as they play find that recordings tend not to come with transcriptions.

Marilee: First, *tune selection*. I think it's excellent to have passion for the tune. Depending on the complexity of the tune, you may be making a fairly long-term commitment in time and mental attention. You may literally be taking this tune to bed with you. I don't necessarily choose tunes played on the nyckelharpa. Many fiddle tunes from all over Sweden are a nice fit on the nyckelharpa.

Matt: I agree fully here. A gut feeling that "I really want to play that tune" is the strongest possible motivation. For me, there are still some tunes that are strictly uphill to learn. I think they "just don't make sense." I've learned a couple of those for dance workshops, and they've worked, but I can't claim I "know" them, and they don't stick. So it's very important to invest your energy in tunes that you really want to play.

Marilee: Another reason for selection might be that you are requested to play a tune for a certain dance style. Once when our group Fladdermus was scheduled to play in Canada, they asked us to play music for "Gothenberg Mazurka." I phoned Peter Michaelson in Seattle, and he returned my call with a recording on my answering machine. With vocal recordings and tunes played on wind instruments, remember to allow for how the musi-

cian taking a breath can make subtle alterations to the rhythm. Also, if the tune is presented primarily for listening and you want a new tune to play for dancers, you may have to tighten up the rhythm a bit. "Blue notes" or quarter tones pose a special problem if a nyckelharpa player is learning a tune from a recording played by a fiddler. I have either used grace notes, simply selected the key for the pitch that comes the closest, or, as I've seen some harpa players do, push the key a little harder. The tangent presses into the string more forcefully, so that it "bends" the string and alters the pitch. You could also retune your tangent with a pair of needle-nose pliers, if the "blue note" is consistent. Just remember to tune it back afterward!

I listen to the recording many many times, until I can sing the tune. Sometimes I keep the tape or CD in my car and listen every time I drive anywhere. Once I had to wait for someone for a long time in my car. I heard and sang a tune so many times, making bowing motions in the air, that by the time I got home, I immediately played a new Gammalvånster från Oviken without a mistake. With more complex three—or more—part tunes, I might chop it down to manageable sections, or even phrases. I don't have that fancy equipment that slows down a recording without making it go out of tune, but Bart Brashers did show me that even on my old "boom box" I can program CDs to repeat the track endlessly. This beats trying to punch buttons with my toe, or the end of my bow.

Matt: Yep. A week at least, until you know how it goes and where it's going.

Marilee: *Get information*. If you have liner notes, that can tell you many important things, like the type of dance the tune is for, or the region it comes from. It might include the key it's in, the maker of the tune, and so on. Ask dance specialists about the styling; learn to dance the dance.

Matt: Why not. Especially the style, or the dance that goes with it, so that you can relate it to other tunes you already know. Think: "I've played all those notes before, just not in that order."

Marilee: *Get a feel for the rhythm.* First, determine if your tune is moving in sets of two or three beats. If you are a dancer, see what kind of dance you would do. Or watch other dancers. I think it's a very good thing to learn the dance yourself. That way lots of information is stored in your neural memory.

Matt: Important.

Marilee: *Play along with the recording to get the key.* Keep in mind that the sections might be in different keys. Listen for ending notes. Play the scale to see if the third note of the scale uses a lowered (minor, or three half-steps) or major third (which is four half-steps from the first note of the scale). Of course, often there is a mix so that you need to determine when to use the lowered or raised note. The same goes for the seventh tone of the scale, which might be different depending on whether the melody is ascending or descending.

Matt: Helpful, once you know the tune and if it's not too much trouble to tune your instrument to the recording or vice versa. It's a good idea to use the scale to sort the likely notes from the unlikely ones, learn to hear intervals, and memorize the common phrases, so that you can "plug in" larger tune fragments in one "swell foop."

Marilee: *Pause the recording and play as much as you can slowly.* There is no substitute for woodshedding. When you feel confident, try playing with the recording (if it is in the key you are playing it in!)

Matt: "Pause and play slowly," as you mention, is a really good idea. Learn how much of a tune you can keep in your mind at once, and work with phrases of that size. If you have a multi-speed tape recorder, that's a fine way to slow a tune down to where you can hear the notes. If you're a computer person, there's public domain software available (free!) that can slow down a sound file while keeping the pitch. I've written about that in past ANA newsletters.

Marilee: *Bowing.* Bart Brashers showed me a good "rule of thumb" for polska bowing. While sitting in a chair, I tap my foot on the first and third beat. I hold my hand and bow above my knee as if they were connected by an invisible string. This sets the "DOWN/UP/down-up" basic bowing pattern for the polska. If you listen very carefully, you will be able to pick up exceptions. Listen for air spaces, slurs, and you may even be able to tell if an up-bow or down-bow is being played.

Matt: I think bowing is not so important at first, more so once you have the notes down solid and are learning to make the tune powerful and expressive. On the other hand, it's better to start out close to "right." If one has any brain cells left over while learning the melody and

fingering, bowing is a good place to invest them.

Marilee: *Details.* Listen carefully for trills, grace notes, double stops, variations of the tune on repetitions. If you are lucky enough to have a playing partner, you may be able to get some ideas for a harmony. Pay attention to the "spirit" and energy of the tune. This is so much easier with a good recording than starting with a transcription.

Matt: Certainly part of the tune. I think it's good to learn the basic tune first, then apply ornamentation as you choose. This goes with "separating out the tune from the ornaments."

Marilee: *Memory work.* Relating a new tune to tunes you already know, will help you remember the melody. For example, the "A" part sounds like "Twinkle Twinkle." I want to learn that polska "that begins like 'Jesus Christ Superstar'." ("Vallåtspolska efter Jones Olle" as recorded by Pers Hans on his CD "Låtar inifrån.") Sometimes I remember rhythmic passages by making up memorable or silly words that remind me of the rhythm. The phrase "lingonberry" works well for the "slu-ur stroke-stroke" bowing pattern found in so many 16th note passages.

Marilee: *Make a transcription.* I don't play from transcriptions with the nyckelharpa—I don't like the limiting way my brain has become wired to play other instruments visually through reading the music—but I do sometimes transcribe as a way of zoning in on how it goes in order to write it down as closely as possible. With a complex tune, I find that it helps me remember what I've heard. There are good computer-assisted music writing programs out there that help make your finished transcription clear and professional looking. [Editor's note: one free program which seems to work well is *Finale "Notepad"*, available at www.codamusic.com]

Matt: If it's a tune of some complexity, and I want to accelerate the learning process and get the details right, I'll transcribe the tune phrase by phrase. Usually I'm thinking that I'll have the transcription to play from when I need it, but often the act of transcribing helps me learn the tune in enough detail that I only need it for "Now, what comes next?"

Marilee: Right, also I make tiny copy-machine reductions and paste them on a business card and keep tunes I've learned on a ring, so I won't forget that I know them.

Marilee: *Arrangement.* Once the tune is yours, think about how you want to present it. You might want to start simply and add double stops and variations in repetitions of the tune. Sometimes playing in different octaves is a way to add interest. You might want to modulate to a different key. If you play with other musicians, deciding on the arrangement of your tune is great fun.

A Puzzling Tune

Matt & Marilee test-drive their tune-learning skills

Marilee: Recently I had a devil of a time trying to learn a tune from a ten-year-old tape, which was dubbed from a dubbed tape given to me by a friend who had been to Sweden and made some random tape recordings. Luckily, I knew that the players were a group called "Burträsk'ara." But the tape was distorted, and out of tune. But I loved the tune's driving soulful energy and was inspired to learn it. I later found the name of the tune: Polska efter Jon Mås.

Sometimes, getting the rhythm off a recording is simple, but this tune stumped me for weeks. It was in three parts but I couldn't figure out for the life of me where the "down-beat" was for sure. I could sing the A and B parts tapping my foot on one and three, but then the C part was not in sync. The confounding thing was that I could sing and tap the tune with different notes being the first beat of the measure.

I consulted with Bart via email, and he said that Burträsk'ara probably were playing around with the rhythm to be "cool." I discovered I could sing the

whole tune with the down-beat in different places. I tapped it out dozens, maybe more times, I woke up in the night trying out different permutations of the beat. But by that time, I had gone to the recording again. (Sometimes giving it a rest and listening again makes a fresh impression.) I listened to the tune many more times, danced a path around the house and was absolutely convinced that I finally knew how it went. Then, I thought I was in great luck to find that I had a transcription of the tune! But it was not the way I had settled on. Either the person who made that transcription made a mistake, or I'm wrong, so I sent the transcription I found, my transcription, and a tape of the tune to Matt. Here's his reply:

Matt: The question is, where does the downbeat (beat one) occur? We did an official listening experiment involving your tape. Judy, my wife, let herself dance to the music, and I listened. And the results were: Judy heard the bar lines where you do [as notated below], not in agreement with the "official" transcription [in which "one" comes a beat earlier, and the pick-up measure in the music is really beat one]. I could let myself synchronize to the A and B parts in either orientation, but the C part is, however, unquestionably their way, and once I heard it, I was

Jon Mas polska Efter Sören Danielsson, Bäsksele, Vilhelmina

as played by Burträskar'a

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 3/4 time signature. It consists of six staves of music. The first staff shows the beginning of the piece. The second staff includes a trill (tr) and a first ending (1.) leading to a second ending (2.). The third staff continues the melody with another trill. The fourth staff features a trill and first/second endings. The fifth staff continues the melody with a trill. The sixth staff concludes with a trill and first/second endings. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

solidly in their phase the next time through the tune. I think the third part starts its measures with a dotted-eighth/sixteenth figure, which makes me recognize it as “one.” And while some of the measures in the A part’s music are written that way, that’s not how they’re playing it. Their A part almost sounds like they’re putting strong emphasis on “two.”

The moral of the story? I don’t know if there is one. Maybe it’s to figure out how the tune sounds to you, and then find a fiddler who plays it that way from whom you can transcribe it! :-) All this reminds me of an Ore

polska efter Timas Hans, in A minor, that I have a lot of trouble hearing its correct rhythmic division. Even with practice I can’t depend on being able to play it for a dance.

Marilee: I checked with Irene Myers from Seattle. She agrees with your final decision, and I have made another transcription and can actually feel it that way rather comfortably, and least for the “B” and certainly the “C” sections. This is part of the mysterious attraction of Swedish folk music ...

Cricket Schottis

by Marilee Cowan

This tune came to me as I was driving over the Fremont Bridge in Portland on the way to rehearsal. Trying to work out the tune, I took a wrong turn and found myself headed toward Seattle. The octave jump at the beginning reminded me of a cricket. On our CD, (Fladdermus : First Flight, available from the ANA) we imported some cricket sounds, and trained them to chirp in tune and in tempo for the introduction.

(Down beat may be omitted on reps.)

The musical score for "Cricket Schottis" is written in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of six staves of music. The first staff begins with a dotted eighth/sixteenth figure. The second staff is marked with a "4*" above it. The third staff contains two endings, labeled "1." and "2.", with the word "Fine" written above the second ending. The fourth and fifth staves continue the main melody. The sixth staff includes a variation for measure 4, marked "Variation for Measure 4*", and ends with the instruction "D.C. al Fine".

Transcription 4/2002
Marilee Cowan

Peter Hedlund's Nyckelharpa Workshop, Vol. 2

reviewed by Matt Fichtenbaum

Peter Hedlund has released the second volume of his DVD-based video nyckelharpa course, and it's a significant contribution to the art of nyckelharpa instruction. It picks up where *Volume 1* ended, and takes the player through some good intermediate-level technique and a solid grounding in the underlying music theory. In following Peter's lessons, the student learns to play some very fine tunes indeed—mostly traditional tunes, eminently suitable for dancing or listening, plus a few of Peter's own well-crafted works. All are of a difficulty suitable for intermediate-level players; many are chosen to make particular instructional points.

It's worth repeating how well the medium of DVD video works for this kind of instruction. Peter plays each tune, first slowly and then in normal tempo, and the viewer has a choice of full view (you can see Peter's left hand, bow, and general playing posture) or left-hand closeup (which leaves no unanswered questions about the fingering). The

exercises, too, are presented visibly and clearly. DVD is the video equivalent of an audio CD, with the same ease of access and ability to skip around or to go back and watch a particular segment again and again. You can watch long stretches, to become familiar with the tunes or just for entertainment; you can focus in on a particular tune and see just what Peter does with his fingers or his bow, until your fingers and bow can mirror his exactly.

The DVD format supports both video and data. This disc complements the video instruction with comprehensive descriptive text and music transcriptions. These are in Adobe Acrobat (pdf) format; you'll need a computer with a DVD drive to view them or to print them out. Both text and music appear in English and Swedish versions. (In the interest of full disclosure, your reviewer admits to responsibility for the transcriptions.)

Volume 2 contains these tunes, traditional unless otherwise noted:

Hällnäs polketten (Peter Hedlund)
Sista Polskan
Åhkerschottis (Peter Hedlund)
Brännvinsmarschen
Slängpolska efter Byss-Calle
Vendelpolskan (Viksta-Lasse)
Svärdsjövisan
Tolftavalsen
Andakten (Eric Sahlström)
Gelotte's G-minor polska
Bogårdens Älgmarsch (Peter Hedlund)
Gårdinvalsen (Peter Hedlund)

Svärdsjövisan is presented in both single-voice melody and double-stop versions (the latter is the subject of this issue's *Spela Bättre* column), and *Gårdinvalsen* offers a simple harmony part to accompany the melody. For the dancers in your community, the repertoire includes schottis, bondpolska, slängpolska, polkett, and waltz.

In the best of all worlds, this reviewer prefers to learn in person, one-on-one with a live teacher. But this video approach comes very close: Peter's right there, and it's very clear what he's playing and what he wants you to do as you learn. You just have to plan to follow his lead — there's no possibility of arguing with the DVD. (In all fairness, Peter can be a pretty stubborn sort and there's sometimes no



Peter Hedlund's
Nyckelharpskola

DVD
VOLUME I

LEYDON GRAFIX

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INSTRUCTIONAL DVD
 Peter Hedlund's Nyckelharpskola, volumes 1 and 2. Twelve lessons per volume, slow and in tempo. Swedish or English audio. Two camera angles. PDF text and notes.
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VHS VIDEO
 Nyckelharpa world championship competition 2000. 2 1/2 hrs. Twenty-one musicians.
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CD
 Peter Puma Hedlund "Vägen," long awaited new recording by legendary two-time world champion.
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Materials produced for true nyckelharpa aficionados!
 PO BOX 127, LAHASKA, PA 18931

continued on page 16

Finally, a Building Book in English!

by Rita Leydon

Have you ever given any thought to the origins of your nyckelharpa? How it came to be? How it was made? What mysterious processes and procedures, each in orderly fashion, resulted in just your instrument? Perhaps you have a romantic notion of a wizened bespectacled craftsman, ankle deep in wood shavings, in his workshop, late at night, churning out harpas? The fact is, each and every nyckelharpa is a one of a kind, made to order, individual. That's why yours, mine and everybody else's is so very special, so very unique and so very different while at the same time sharing the basic configuration that makes it a nyckelharpa and not a piano. There just isn't a nyckelharpa out there that rolled down a conveyor belt alongside a hundred others just like it.

I imagine it is a bit hard to find yourself suddenly infatuated with this fandangled instrument and wanting one so badly you can taste it, and wanting it NOW, only to find there is a waiting period to be suffered through before yours is whittled. What do you mean, I can't just walk into a music store in Stockholm and BUY one? This is a rough landing for some. A rude awakening. No instant gratification here. Can't just throw money at it. And this after you've probably already spent a couple of months thinking about taking the plunge. Snarfing up CDs, prowling the internet, typing the N word so many times in Google's search window that your fingertips are tender and all the while wondering how you got yourself into this pickle in the first place.

What's an eager beaver to do? Build one?

Maybe. The Swedes have been building their own for centuries. It's a fairly normal and routine exercise. I've met lots of harpas over there built by its owner, or the owner's Morfar, Farbror Axel or cousin Hjalmar. Often it's a fanciful interpretation of an instrument borrowed from a friend or

acquaintance. Some beauties are capable of lovely sounds, and others are best suited to life as a wall hanging.

A clever woodworker can certainly study and precisely measure an existing harpa of merit and create a similar concoction and hope it will sound good. But there are secrets and nuances of creation that are not readily apparent to the naked untrained eye. Things, that if missed or glossed over, might render your effort unplayable. Such can be the fate of the fruit of the misguided harpa builder. Alas.

Fear not! Assistance, guidance and hand holding is available. Master harpa builder Sören Åhker has a building instruction book with drawings for both a full-size harpa and a scaled-down version. Trouble was it only came in one flavor—Swedish. Swedish is not one of the flavors normally served up in the American school system and although we might readily acquire some fluency in Swedish dance and Swedish music, the language itself is a much larger mountain. Unless you are born on it.

Sören has eliminated this pesky language dilemma in one fell swoop with the recent publication of an English language version of his important book. There is

no longer any excuse for not getting yourself in gear and building the instrument of your dreams. The volume, although slender if measured by the pinch method, is well packed with everything one needs to know in order to arrive successfully at the desired destination. Materials list, dimensions, full scale drawings of everything, step by step guidance, tips and insights, even a history of the build-your-own movement in Sweden. The overall approach is folksy and friendly as it gently and firmly guides you along, steering you clear of some perhaps not so obvious pitfalls that might otherwise put a premature end to your journey. The worth-its-weight-in-gold component is, of course, Sören's



drawings, which are precise computer generated works of beauty and utility. Just transfer these to your own select chunks of tight grained spruce and you're ready to roll.

Nyckelharpa construction is not for the faint of heart, nor the impatient or ill-tempered. Sören himself is your basic easy going, good humored, iron willed perfectionist who is never fully dressed without his carving knife in its holster at his waist and the ever present *snus dosa* shoved into his left front pocket. His contributions to the nyckelharpa world and its lore are huge and immeasurable. Not only does he painstakingly produce some of the finest harpas out there, but he's also seen fit to share his knowledge with the rest of us so we can have a whack at it. He wants us to succeed, wants us to have the building experience and be buoyed and energized by it. This is very generous. Opening the portals to the inner chamber and letting in not just light and air, but also you and me. Sören is like that. Open and generous. This I know first hand.

I first met Sören after I had already had the harpa he made for me several months and was thoroughly besotted with it. Puma took me up to Ilsbo, Hälsingland, one cold and snowy January day several years ago. The visit was a pilgrimage of sorts to my harpa's roots and also homage to the man who made it. The process of creation mesmerizes me. ANY creation process. All the little minute steps that eventually bring the beginning home to the end. The making and shaping and doing. The mess. Sören's basement work-

shop, dressed in tools of all shapes and sizes and scented by a constantly refreshed crop of wood shavings made me delirious with delight. I yearned to be an itty bitty fly on the man's wall for a while.

No need to feel left out if you already have a soul mate of a harpa, for Sören's book is fascinating browsing even if you haven't ever entertained any conscious random thoughts of harpa building. It's great for simply learning about your instrument and its mechanics. Information is power, they say, and I guarantee, you'll feel empowered to deal with and probe your harpa's quirky depths more readily with this book at your side.

Chromatic Nyckelharpa, a Construction Manual, by Sören Åhker, is available now from the ANA. The price is \$65 delivered to your door (USA address). You can also buy it directly from Sören (www.sorenahker.com) for SEK500, but by the time you hassle with currency exchange and transfer fees plus postage, you are up at roughly \$65. Order your copy today. It's a no-brainer. Really.

Post script. Last summer, in a weak moment, Sören consented to tolerate a filmmaker underfoot for the time it took to make one nyckelharpa. I volunteered. It was my chance to be the fly. For three weeks the fly filmed everything, starting from standing tree all the way to making music. The huge footage trove is now in the editing pipeline and will be made available in due course. I'll keep you posted.

Polska

Eric Sahlström, efter fadern Anders

Nyckelharpa Ballet in NYC

A performance review sent by a friend of Nyckel Notes

Nyckelharpa is well suited to many varieties of dance—polska, waltz, schottish, hambro, ballet... Wait a minute - BALLET ??? Well, that's what Eliot Feld, one of the top modern ballet choreographers, figured.

Feld had already created ballets to Irish and Scottish folk music and has now done the same for our tunes. Of course ballet has always used folk material (think Nutcracker) but Feld's world is quite an extension from nineteenth century Russian and French ballet. And nyckelharpa was perfect for expressing his unique vision of dance.

The Feld Ballet (aka BalletTech) recently premiered the new ballet Skandia at the Joyce Theatre in New York featuring the Nyckelharpa Orchestra (recorded, not live, ballet economics being what they are) with additional singing, hardanger fiddle and flute.

The result was mesmerizing and memorable. Feld took the spirit, and sometimes a few of the traditional steps, of each in a series of folk dances, and transported them into the language of ballet, expanding and broadening their impact and beauty. Some of the Nyckelharpa Orchestra's tunes were somber, others were lyric and joyful, and the dances reflected that. The Nyckelharpa Orchestra's haunting treatment was perfect for the edginess of modern ballet. Most impressive.

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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The American Nyckelharpa Association
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Peter Hedlund's Nyckelharpa Workshop

continued from page 13

point in arguing with him in person, so maybe the DVD is a valid replica.) Peter is a very precise player with impeccable, well-thought-out technique, and what you learn from this video will serve you well in your own playing.

In all, *Peter Hedlund's Nyckelharpa Workshop* will give you as much nyckelharpa skill and technique as you choose to take from it, and you'll learn some good tunes in the process. For us North American players, far from the Swedish homeland and maybe without easy access to players of more experience, this little disc is a priceless resource.

Vägen

continued from page 7

and also ends with some of the tremendous marches on this CD—among them Eric Sahlström's "Karolinermarsch", August Bohlin's "Korntorkar'n" and the "Hälsingemarschen" after Tore Zetterström (with its four refrains!) which Tore played in his radio broadcast almost seventy years ago.

At the end of "Vägen" Peter performs his own "Iste kornbodsmarsch"—a musical tribute to his hometown. His melodies paint the scene, and the tune reflects the rugged beauty of Hälsingland in all of its large and small details. I would love to hear this march played in a vaulted church, for there is a kind of inner tranquility and strength of character in this piece that just begs for a bridal pair to walk down the aisle to it.

You may not use Puma's music for your wedding, but I am sure you will find a great deal here that is easy to fall in love with.

New CD available from the ANA

DITTE ANDERSSON

Twenty-four newly-recorded traditional and original songs and tunes from Uppland's Ditte Andersson.

