

# A New Face for the ANA

By Anna Abraham

There's a wonderful Swedish book (available in English) entitled "All Tradition is Change." This idea resonates deeply with folk musicians, and on some level, to all Americans. But the role we play as American nyckelharpa players is complex. It's really interesting, when you think about it in terms of historical perspective. Edwin Johnson, a fiddler (and later a nyckelharpa player) from Dalarna is a great example. He came to America in the early 1900s and brought with him the popular folk music tradition of Dalarna. Fifty years later, he was still enjoying, preserving, and teaching that tradition to many other Americans. However, he wasn't exposed to the same conditional elements as his fiddling friends back in Sweden. Researchers have since come back to study Edwin's musical style and his variations of popular tunes like "Rättvikarnas gånglåt." It is a rare chance to isolate a musical chapter in time. It's hard to say what did change in Edwin's music through the years; surely there was a minor influence from his own American surroundings. But as a whole, Edwin captured and preserved part of Swedish folk music history that had disappeared from its originating source. Wow!

But let's get real for a moment. Not many of us have a tradition bearer in our



neighborhood to learn from. So what are we to do? It is often difficult to get a real sense of what the 'tradition' is, though at the same time, we are encouraged to do things 'the right' way. In this context, the ANA is extremely valuable. In 1996, the ANA's presence on the Internet was in more ways than one, cutting edge. And now that everyone else has caught up, (!) we've seen a global community emerge. We can instantly access audio recordings, written music, articles, and video from anywhere in the world. That

makes the transfer of musical ideas (or preservation of) between continents instantaneous. Hmm, interesting, don't you think? We'll have to keep an eye on how that develops. Meanwhile, the ANA is a perfect go-between to catalog the nyckelharpa tradition as it evolves.

I am a web designer by trade, so I've analyzed web statistics and taken part in usability studies—both of which have been really helpful in tackling the new ANA web site. I decided that the organization ought to have a face of sorts—that is, a representation of our organization by artistic means (colors, layout, photos) to go along with this amazing quantity of information we have to present.

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**SPELA BÄTTRE!***Tips and ideas to develop your playing*

## Music as Conversation

*The energy in a tune comes from the story it tells**by Matt Fichtenbaum*

The great fiddler Björn Ståbi, leading a fiddle workshop, once observed that my playing was “mechanical,” too closely bound to the rhythmic grid. “A polska is a conversation,” he said, “it flows, it pauses, it breathes. It can be insistent, it can be thoughtful. It needs to follow the rhythm, but not so tightly that it stifles the expression.” He was telling me that there’s more to a tune than just the notes and the basic rhythm. The tune must have something to express and be able to say it.

That’s this month’s topic: what is it that puts the content and the expression and the excitement into the music you play. Some things to listen for when someone’s playing piques your interest, so that you might better understand what makes it interesting. Some parallels between music and other forms of expression, for illustration and to prompt you to think about your music in new ways.

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### Dalmarschen

*after August Bohlin*

*Dalmarschen* is thought to be a bridal march from Dalarna that was played by the Uppland fiddler Marstalla-Olle (1839-1906). August Bohlin added the third part. You can hear this tune on Ditte Andersson’s self-titled CD, available from the ANA. My version is from a mid-70s LP by the nyckelharpa big band Harpan Min. — *Matt Fichtenbaum*

## Layers

Imagine the notes of a tune as marchers in a procession, or dancers in a dance. You can stand on the floor amidst them as they pass by, seeing each one close up but not more than a few at a time. Or you can sit in the balcony looking down from a greater distance, farther from the details but able to discern the patterns, the flow, the big picture.

You can listen to a tune and hear it as a sequence of notes. Or you can hear the music on multiple levels, realize that there is a “big picture,” a structure, an additional dimension.

Most of the music we nyckelharpists play is dance music, and fundamental to good dance music is that we provide our dancers with a rhythm. That’s our first layer. It’s necessary, but it’s not itself very exciting. The music needs a “shape” as well: it has to lift the dancers or let them down again in step with the dance figures; it has to stir up their energy and then let them relax, along with the phrases. For the dancers, these two levels are sufficient and that’s all they hear, the rhythm and the energy.

But we’re a demanding lot, we musicians, and we want a melody besides. A tune we can hum to ourselves or hear in our minds, a basis for the harmonies that add so much to this music, a way of distinguishing one bondpolska from another. So we take the melody—our third layer—and drape it over our rhythm and shape.

On top there are all the ways we individualize our music. Ornaments melodic and rhythmic, double-stops, variations from one time through to the next, notes added or left out. There might be more to say on this topic later.

## An observation

Regarding a tune as if it’s built up of these layers helps to answer a bunch of questions. Why following a particular bowing pattern is of interest (because it forms rhythm and shape, regardless of the specific melody you play with it). What to do when you come to a too-challenging spot in the tune you’re playing (leave out some notes, but keep the rhythm because that’s what the dancers depend on). How some people effortlessly remember dozens of tunes (only the melody is unique; the rhythmic structure is common to “all” the tunes for that dance; listen more closely and you’ll even find that the same melodic phrases and snippets turn up in different tunes).

## The written word and the spoken word

Consider Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy. If you’ve ever seen the play, just the mention of it probably brings it to your mind, as clear as when you first heard it. Now imagine reading the play and seeing the soliloquy. Most likely, you’d read the text and once again hear that memorable performance. But suppose you’d never seen the play, never heard an actor present the text. Suppose the text were read by the same voice that announces the time on the telephone, or by synthesized speech from a computer; it would sound very different. The actor playing Hamlet clearly adds something to Shakespeare’s words. He con-

tributes the phrasing, the dynamics, the stressing of some syllables and the subduing of others, the melody, the emotional content.

It doesn’t take the drama of Hamlet to demonstrate this. When you speak, you don’t present each word with the same emphasis, the same pitch, the same articulation. You speak the words that matter, half-swallow the ones that don’t, emphasize the really important words. You give your speech a shape that conveys the emotion behind it.

As the player, you must similarly turn the notes of a tune into music—expressive, energetic, exciting music. You have the same tools as the actor: phrasing, accenting, dynamics, and variations and details that surprise and delight.

## The sung word

A song—music with words attached—is the clearest possible illustration of musical phrasing. The natural flow of the lyrics, the words that are emphasized, the pauses where one breathes all shape the way the tune is played. Consider the march “Skänk en slant åt spelman,” or the waltz “Allt vad du vill, så får du”—the lyrics give their shape to the tune.

## Rhythmic excitement

Much of the excitement in music, to my mind, is the subtle differences between what you expect and what you hear. The little rhythmic eccentricities that make notes come a little before or after they’re “scheduled,” the ornaments and other embellishments. For example,

- A figure of four sixteenth-notes is often played “slightly dotted,” with the first, or the first and third, notes lengthened (and maybe accented) at the expense of the notes that follow. This is common in schottis tunes, and also found in sixteenth-note polskas, especially on the first beat of a measure.
- The first note of a phrase sometimes “starts early,” i.e., begins on the last eighth- or sixteenth-note of the preceding measure and continues over the bar line. Sometimes there’s an extra accent or “push” on the downbeat.
- The articulation at the end of a phrase can bring the phrase to a stop, or it can leave a feeling of momentum that naturally leads into the next phrase.

A tune can be played “stately,” where the phrases and the sections within them starting and ending as written, or “leaning forward,” with notes starting early and with phrase endings leading the listener into the next phrase. And it can “swing.” I believe that the degree of “leaning forward” depends on how and when the notes on the beat are played; the “swing” depends on the offbeats, but this is speculative and subjective and your perceptions may differ.

### Three items of caution:

1. While the rhythmic feel of a tune comes from the timing of the notes, it's a mistake to focus on the precise timing as an end in itself. Carefully playing each note, one at a time, "just when it's supposed to happen" makes the music sound contrived, spliced together. Instead, use these ideas to understand what you're hearing when someone plays a tune, but focus on the feel of the music instead, and let your feelings guide how you play. "Easy for you to say," you might think, but give it time and practice and it will come.
2. When experimenting with rhythmic variations, don't forget the tempo. Lengthening or shortening a note without a compensating change in a later note will slow down or speed up your music. And if you're playing with others, don't focus so much on what you're doing that you don't notice you're no longer in step with the others.
3. Don't let local rhythmic variations obscure the rhythm of the tune as a whole. For example, in sixteenth-note polskas like Byggnan or other Byss-Kalle tunes, one should feel a smooth three-beat rhythm. This is achieved with a mild accent on the first sixteenth of each beat while the other notes are played smoothly enough so as not to intrude.

Enough theory. What can you do for your own music? You can only aim for the goals you know about. The first step is to listen to some music that excites you, and try to understand what's happening in that music that makes it interesting. For example,

- **The rhythmic shape.** Is it even? Is it asymmetric, and, if so, how? Does it swing?
- **The accents.** Are they on the beats? The offbeats? Both? As an exercise, you might play a march and accent the beats, then play it again, accenting the offbeats, and once more, accenting both the beats and the offbeats (but not the notes in between). Do these different styles inspire you to move in different ways, or to different degrees?
- **The articulation.** Do the notes start sharply, or do they start quiet and swell up? Do they end sharply, or do they fade away? Does the articulation vary throughout the tune, and does the variation follow a consistent pattern?
- **The layers.** Can you hear the basic rhythm below the melody? Can you divide the melody into "foreground" and "background," for example, in a fast tune with lots of notes, do the notes on the beat carry the melody, with the other notes mostly adding garnish?

### Sing the tune

The next step, in my opinion, is to learn a tune as an entirety, without concentrating on the note-by-note details. Listen to a recording over a couple of weeks' time; even

better, listen to different players' recordings of the same tune. Try singing the tune (it's OK; nobody's listening). You probably sing more naturally than you play an instrument, and you're not worrying about fingers and bow strokes. You can experiment with accenting and articulation, and the musicality and expression of the tune as you sing it might surprise you: in other words, you may understand its "soul" better than you consciously know.

### Play phrases, not notes

Now, finally, it's time to try playing the tune. But don't try to play it a note at a time. Take a phrase or a couple of phrases or a whole section and try to play it. Play as slowly as you need to, but play it so that it hangs together, flows, has the shape you want it to have. By now you know the tune, you can sing it or at least hear it in your mind. Take that tune and move it to your instrument without breaking it into too-small fragments. Learn that first phrase so that you're relaxed with it, then add the next and the one after, until you have the whole tune.

Learning tunes as phrases rather than individual notes has practical benefits, too. I think it's easier to remember a few phrases and their order than a whole bunch of separate notes. And it may be easier to solve the technical challenges—fingering, bowing, string crossings—by dividing the tune into phrases. Divide and conquer.

### Another observation

For the first phrase that you play, you have to learn the rhythm, the shape, and the notes of the melody; that's a lot. It gets easier after that: the rhythm and the shape apply to the whole tune, and so learning the later phrases becomes easier. Besides, phrases repeat, or reappear as variations, so the way gets less steep as you progress.

### Sculpting a sound with your bow

The articulation in your music comes from the bow. The bowing determines whether a note begins at full volume or starts quietly and grows, whether a note ends sharply or makes a smooth transition into the next note. The lift on the second beat of a bondpolska, the way the first beat of a Boda polska trails off into a period of quiet before the explosive start of the second beat, the difference between the smooth and the bouncy schottis tunes—the bow hand wields the power.

I have written before about bowing, about making the small movements and quick notes with the wrist, hand, and fingers ("as if you were writing with a pencil"), making the large movements and long notes with the shoulder and arm ("as if you were writing on a whiteboard"). And the notions of "brandishing" your bow for the sharp-edged notes, "caressing" the strings with it for the smooth phrases. What's relevant is the role that bowing plays in creating the shape and feel of your music. Listen for the articulation in the music you hear, and experiment with and develop your articulation as you work on other aspects of your playing.

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### A word about written music

Printed text specifies what is to be said, but it's the actor who determines how to say it, or the reader who hears it in his mind and supplies the emotional impact. I think it's appropriate to draw a parallel with written music: the music specifies the notes to be played, but not how to play them or what they are to say.

By all means, use written music to remember tunes or to learn new tunes. But complete your version of the tune in other ways: by listening to other players' versions, by knowing other tunes of the same style, by playing for dancers and asking for their feedback. This is an aural tradition, and transcriptions rarely tell you of the rhythmic

subtleties, the dynamics, the ornaments.

### Acknowledgment

Reader Chiara Bos wrote to me, after my previous column, with a suggestion that "The difference between playing notes and making music" would be a good topic. She observed that some players make music that inspires people to get up and dance, and was looking for insight about how this works. I have been wanting to address this area—style, interpretation, energy—for a while, as I develop my own playing and play with and coach others, and Chiara's request provided the spark. Thank you, and I hope this column helps answer some of the questions.

### New Face for the ANA

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It took a long time to get a design nailed down. Then it took a long time to make it work. Sprinkle in a few extra dozen hours because of a little friend I call perfectionism, and here we are, several months later. The new web site is just about ready to launch, and we'll send out an announcement once it's live.

I realize it's going to take awhile to get used to the new web site design, and I appreciate your patience. Some of the information is still out of date, and we'll continue to work to correct that. I've had a lot of fun putting this together, and have some very intriguing ideas for the near future. I hope that you will submit your own ideas to us, as well as any corrections, and new information you would like posted.

A screenshot of what the new site will look like is on page one.

Standard Disclaimer: I almost hate to bring this up, but I think it's important to open this dialogue from the start. My main goal in web design is to make information accessible to everyone that tries to view it. That having

been said ... there's one potential downside of the new site that I would like to warn you about. It may look a little out-of-whack with very old computer equipment. I hope that this won't affect anyone, but since there's a chance, I'd like to tell you how to fix it. In most cases, the solution is easy; download the (free) updates to your Internet browser. The new web site is made with techniques that are standard in today's Internet. So if you are using a browser like Internet Explorer that hasn't been updated in two years or more, I encourage you to download the updates! If you need additional support, or see something that doesn't look right—please e-mail [webmaster@nyckelharpa.org](mailto:webmaster@nyckelharpa.org). This is a new site, and there are bound to be minor things that will need fixing along the way.

For those of you interested in technical specs, the site works in IE 5+ and Netscape 6+ in addition to Safari, Firefox, Mozilla, etc.

### Stay Tuned!

Check for the new site design later this month. Or, if you want us to send you a notification, send your e-mail address to [webmaster@nyckelharpa.org](mailto:webmaster@nyckelharpa.org) and I'll add you to the list of recipients.



**Carol Bell and Rob Krapfl wedding, Kenilworth, IL, Sept. 26, 2004** Carol and Rob are 4th and 5th from the left in the front. Carol writes: "We had quite a festive time at our wedding. Swedish music and dancing—and dance we did! Family and friends came from as far as Sweden, MN, AZ, ... Paul Høglund and his family came from Rättvik. He tailored Rob's vest and pants to match the period my great aunt's skirt was made over 100 years ago."

# The Strange Story of Maria Johansdotter

by Sheila Morris

While browsing through my copy of *Uppländske spelmän under 4 århundraden* (Uppland Musicians Through 400 Years), by Lars Erik Larsson, I found to my great delight a long article about a *female* fiddler and harper, which is a real rarity. Women were expected to be too busy doing housework and caring for the kids to have time for anything so frivolous as making music. Even odder, Maria Johansdotter was born in 1683, when gender-roles were very specific. But that's only the beginning:

She served as assistant parish clerk and choir leader in Lovö for a short time in the early 1700s. She accomplished this by passing herself off as a man, dressing like a sailor and going by the name Magnus Johansson. Most of what we know about her comes from court records, when she was arraigned for falsifying information for her identification papers.

Maria was born in the village of Sanda on Åland in 1683. Her father was a farmer, who died when she was 15 or 16. Her mother remarried, and when Maria was 19 she had travelled to Stockholm with her step-father. It was late autumn, and the ship became ice-bound in the harbor. Her step-father left, but Maria decided to remain in Stockholm. She managed to feed herself by "serving good people and playing the nyckelharpa in pubs."

She spent the spring working as a maid at various homes in Österåker, but then returned to her nyckelharpa and the more entertaining work in the pubs of Stockholm. By this time she had also taught herself to play fiddle. Apparently, some of her patrons in the pub convinced her that she would earn more money as a man, doing man's work, than she ever could as a woman. She dressed herself as a man, "erased from her heart any tendency to fall in love with any man," and began working as a farmhand for the friend of one of her patrons. She worked on this farm for ten weeks for four öre a day.

By the end of this time, "Magnus" had been recommended to the parish chaplain as having an excellent singing voice. Since his choir leader had just died, and she had such good references, he hired her. She returned to the farm and handed in her notice, but when she got back to the church the chaplain he had changed his mind and only offered her

a trial period. At his suggestion, "Magnus" apprenticed herself to a shoemaker, travelling around the parish and learning to mend shoes. Meanwhile, she filled in with the choir. But after a few weeks, several of the young ladies fell in love with the charming assistant director ... and her deception was unmasked.

During the short time she had been in the parish, Maria had managed to spread great unease among the unmarried women, who all truly believed she was a man. "Magnus" was a popular

companion, being so adept at playing, singing, and dancing. One of the parish maids, Maria Andersdotter, was so in love with the assistant choir master that she wanted to marry "him".

Though not convinced it was a good match, her mother took the two young people to talk with the pastor. This worthy began by berating "Magnus" for the havoc "he" was wreaking with the hearts of the local girls. Then he asked if "Magnus" wished to marry Maria Andersdotter—if so, he would be happy to perform the ceremony. "Magnus" shuffled his feet and said "he" had no such intentions.

"Why not?" asked Maria. "You could certainly find a worse wife than me!" "I want nothing to do with you; you had better keep to yourself, and I to myself." Maria considered taking her own life when she learned that she would never be able to marry the "young man" who had so enchanted her.

When the court asked her how she had obtained her false papers, she told them that she could not write, and therefore one of the men who admired her playing at the pub Brädekrogen in Stockholm had made the papers for her, using the name of her old parish priest and some other men who she might have mentioned as references. She said that she never really intended to deceive anyone, but only wanted to earn more money than she could as a young woman.

At the Winter Assizes of 1706, Maria Johansdotter was sentenced to fourteen days in prison, on bread and water. It is not known what became of her, but surely she continued to play her nyckelharpa and fiddle in pubs around the country. Possibly dressed as a man ...



# 55 and Counting

by Rita Leydon

## PART ONE

Christmas Eve at our house has always been about birthdays. It used to be mine alone until my first son chose the same day, so now we share. We've had 28 years to perfect this sharing business. We like it to be a simple day with just the right amount of fussing, not too much, and certainly not too little. A few days after our most recent birthday, I wrote an e-mail to my friend Tim up in Vermont about the nice gift my husband Chris had bestowed upon me. Tim fired back: "WHAT????!!!! Good grief!! That's unbelievable! That's got to be the first one owned by an American, isn't it? I've been in shock all day about it ... I can't imagine how you feel!"

On that day I became the custodian of a nyckelharpa built by Eric Sahlström himself the year before he passed away. ... deep breath ... Oh, my! ... If you sneak a peek inside, through one of the f-holes, you can see where the maker, pencil in hand, carefully inscribed his mark: "Eric Sahlström Tobo 1985."

"Wow, yes!," I wrote back to Tim in breezy shorthand, "You're right on the mark. I'm stunned. Honored. Humbled. Fascinated. I tuned it up and played, thinking ... Eric made this ... Eric played this ... Eric's energy is in this instrument. I could see he was a little hasty when he assembled the instrument for he left a telltale palm print in the not quite dry shellac of the tailpiece. I love that! I put some new strings on—a mish-mash of extras I had on hand. What a difference! This is a masculine instrument, demanding firmness and focused determination, you can't be timid or shy when you play. It's a bugger to tune though, with lots more wooden tuning pegs than I'm used to and the resonance strings' ascending scale jumps hither and yon all over the place. Compared to my Sören harpa, it's rather crudely built ... I feel a little bit terrible for saying so ... but, truth is ... that just makes it all the more beautiful in my eyes ... and, oh, can it sing!"

I looked at Chris with question marks splattered all over my face, totally and completely thunderstruck. Chris is a very sneaky man. He has a long history of sneaky deeds. But why? How on earth? He shrugged his shoulders innocently, rolled his eyes, turned his palms up empty, and stated simply that he'd be hard pressed to think of anyone who deserved it more or who would appreciate it better—as if this was the most natural and logical gift choice in the world. Apparently he and Sören Åhker had been cooking this up for some time. I redi-

rected my frazzled focus and inspected my gift as one inspects a new babe, counting fingers and toes, turning it this way and that, inspecting every curve and crevice, inside and out. This was a familiar object. It was lovely in all ways, a real individual, a one of a kind handmade creation, a little crooked here, a little skewed there. I was thoroughly charmed. This was a friend I just hadn't met before. A sense of warm embrace and welcome welled through me.

One of the very first things I learned years ago—right after hanging my first nyckelharpa around my neck and shifting it from side to side while agonizing over how it was supposed to be situated, and thinking that maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all—was that there had lived, in Sweden, a quiet and unassuming person named Eric Sahlström, and that he was the one, who just about single handedly saved our exotic and magical instrument from extinction not all that long ago. Eric's name is pretty much synonymous with all things nyckelharpa—and for good reason. It's because of his efforts that there are now thousands upon thousands of people playing nyckelharpa all over the world. He was a builder and an innovator, responsible in large measure for guiding the nyckelharpa's evolution from the older silverbas variety to the modern chromatic most of us play today. He was a highly regarded, widely respected, and legendary player of extraordinary range, a not-to-be-believed master of technique and interpretation. And just to round things out and complete the picture, he was a natural born genius when it came to making tunes of amazing beauty and complexity. Eric wasn't afraid to make waves, shake things up, and leave his mark upon the world. I bet he really enjoyed himself. Eric Sahlström lived and breathed nyckelharpas. Thank you, Eric, from the bottom of my heart!

And ... thank you, Christopher!

## PART TWO

I don't know how many of you have seen a Sahlström harpa in the flesh, but I remember how excited I was the first time I chanced upon one. I was visiting Leif Alpsjö at home in Viksta, maybe seven or eight years ago. Don't laugh, but I felt as if I was in the presence of a holy relic when I saw it. I really did. And maybe I wasn't so far off. I was new to the nyckelharpa world, but I knew who Eric Sahlström was, and I had a very clear sense of the respect and devotion afforded this man. Leif was sensitive enough to allow me time alone with the instrument, which was for sale. I remember saying to him that it should stay in

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## 55 and Counting

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Sweden. It just didn't seem right that it be allowed out of the country.

Eric made lots of nyckelharpas. My friend Peter's first nyckelharpa was built by Eric. Peter was a youngster at the time and he pestered Eric incessantly until Eric got it done. Peter went on to win his first world championship on that harpa in 1992. And now, out of the blue, all of a sudden, I find myself the owner of a well loved and much played beauty of an instrument built by Eric. So, in spite of what I said before, she now lives in America with me. Never in my wildest dreams ...

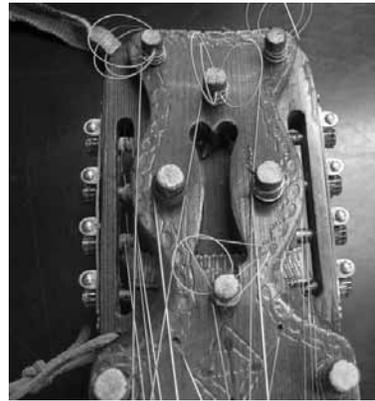
I think of my harpa as feminine, which—to me—makes sense because to get her to really sing requires masculine decisiveness, a take charge attitude, as well as a firm hand. It also requires paying careful attention, sensitive listening and gentle caresses. No beating around the bush here, this is seductive stuff.

Enough of my dithering. Let me show you:

Here she is. Looks pretty much like all other regular nyckelharpas, doesn't she? That's because pretty much all other nyckelharpas are based on Eric's model and patterns. His basic design has been the standard for decades.



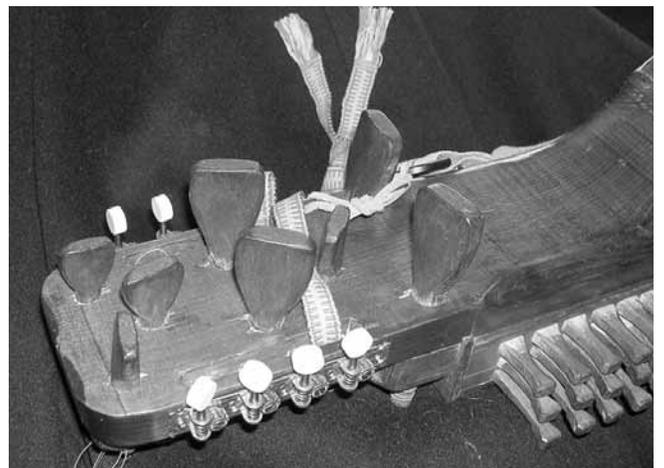
Eric carved his name into the top of the keybox so there would be no mistake about its origin. He also signed the inside.

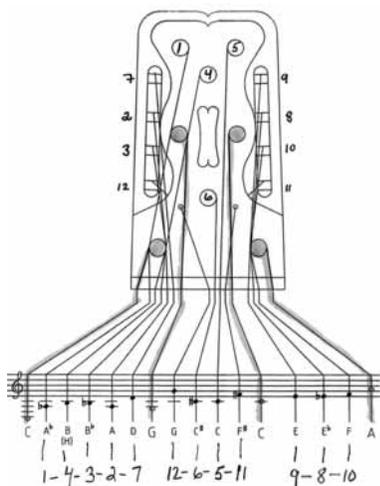
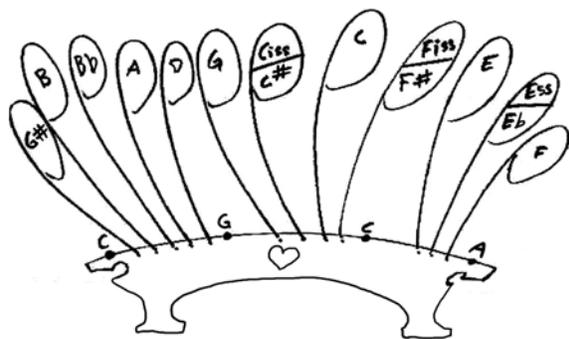


Here follows a selection of detail shots so you can get a sense of the harpa's physical characteristics. I love the slightly askew decorative elements! I find it delicious to savor the details, perhaps you will agree.

The harpa has acquired a few age spots. She obviously had no fine tuners from the start, but as we know these little mechanical dodads do simplify things greatly. These remind me of sturdy construction girders (see the holes punched in the contracting arms in the other picture), so I might exchange them for more discreet black ones. You might wonder why I've strung a pile of washers at the origin of each string. It's because the distance from the bridge to the fine tuners is short. The washers serve as quick and dirty spacers. The strings' color windings would otherwise end up resting on the bridge—which you don't want. This was not a problem when there were no fine tuners. I might remove

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the fine tuners all together and fill in the holes, returning the instrument to its intended configuration. I have to think about it.

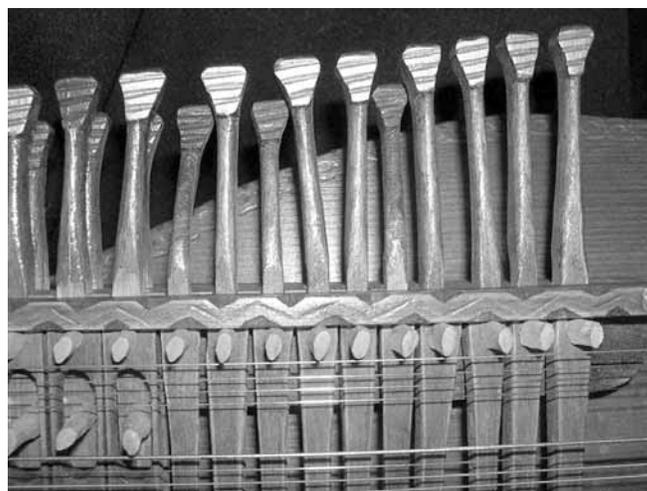
Here you see the major challenge of this instrument—tuning it. Even though most harpa builders changed over to twelve string guitar mechanisms during the 70s, Eric

stayed with the mandolin mechanisms he had always used. This meant that four of the resonance stings required wooden pegs—the smaller of the pegs you see in the picture. Esbjörn Hogmark suggests that Eric may have decided to keep this structural element as a nod of recognition and connection to the earlier silverbas instruments as well as out of respect for August Bohlin. (from the book “Eric Sahlström,” published by the Eric Sahlströms Minnesfond in 1992)

Thank goodness for Sören Åhker’s book on nyckelharpa building because that’s where I found the schematic for the resonance strings. Peter Hedlund drew me a “stämros” (tuning rose) explaining that Eric used to draw a similar rose when asked about tuning his instruments.



The bridge (pictured at the bottom of column 1) is a charmer with no cutouts other than a heart.



Eric’s choice of detailing is highly personal. Note that the symbol of Uppland, the golden orb, appears twice, once on the tailpiece and again on the side of the keybox. I think Eric was proud of his heritage as an “Uplänning” (native of Uppland).



# Nyckelharpa Strings for Sale

## *Please note!*

It has been very difficult to obtain a couple varieties of strings that have been on our web and newsletter order forms. Jörpeland strings have not been possible to get for a long time, and the Prim browns, while I hope to have them in later this year, have also been quite elusive.

The prices listed on the order form will continue to be valid until the current supply runs out. The next shipment from Prim will reflect the sorry state of the exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and the Euro. In other words, expect a significant price hike! If you anticipate needing strings, order them now!

There are still some of the soft Prim blue A strings left if anyone is curious to experiment with a more mellow-sounding string.

I have also just received a large shipment of sympathetic strings.

— Tim Newcomb

## Playing Strings

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.

## 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	\$_____
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>		<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$_____</b>

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

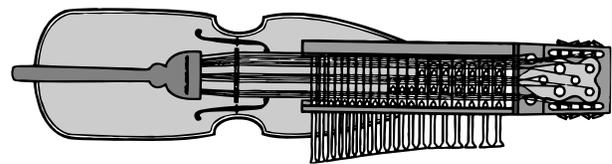
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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

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



## Puma's Summer Tour Schedule

Peter Puma Hedlund will spend several weeks in the US in July/August 2005. An early peek at his plans as of mid March reveals two festivals and our very own ANA's annual stämman. Mark your calendars!

### Jamestown Scandinavian Festival in Jamestown, NY. July 29-30-31, 2005.

This is their fourth annual effort, and the second invita-



tion for Peter to participate, both as a knock-their-socks-off performer and as a workshop teacher.

<http://www.scandinavianjamestown.org/3scand.htm>

### Champlain Valley Folk Festival in Ferrisburgh, Vermont. August 5-6-7, 2005.

This is the 22nd year for the festival and Peter's first time there. <http://www.cvfest.org/>

### ANA Stämman/ Workshop/Gathering Lahaska, PA. August 12-13-14, 2005.

Make the trek to Lahaska. Rub elbows and hobnob with your fellow ANA diehards and marinate for a couple of days in the incredible and inspirational seasonings that Peter has in his bag of tricks and skills. Peter is one of the greats of the nyckelharpa world—if this is news to you, you have probably either been asleep about a quarter century or you are a brand new fledgling harpa baby.

<http://www.nyckelharpa.org/stamma2005/stamma2005.html>



**Nov. 24, 2004 Leif Alpsjö workshop in Seattle.** Left to right: Jim Myers, Bart Brashers, Leif Alpsjö, Janet Gabites, Dave Mullens, Lynne Erickson, Stew Pugh, David Elliker-Väsberg, Colleen McGaughey, Marilee Cowan, Virginia Thompson, Trella Hastings & Claire Elliker-Väsberg. In front: Karen Nelson

## Väsen: Keyed Up

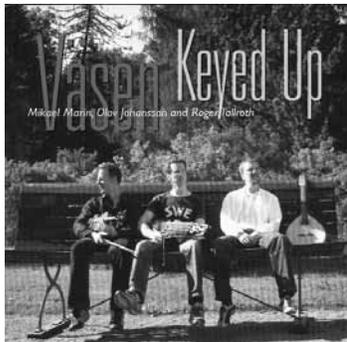
reviewed by Matt Fichtenbaum

I like this new Väsen Trio CD very much. Its sound and spirit have a lot in common with the early Väsen recordings, and although all of the tunes are original works, there's a good measure of traditional shape and energy.

Väsen's US concert tour last fall featured much of this music, and it was a delight to find so many of the good tunes on the CD.

My immediate favorites were *Bromanders 100-års polska*, a fine slängpolska that's Olov's gift to Mr. and Mrs. Bromander for their joint 50th birthday celebration, and *Lille Vilgot*, a polska Olov wrote for his son. Mikael Marin's *Björkbergspolskan* is another energetic slängpolska that can hold its own among traditional tunes. The whole collection of tunes fit well together, so the CD is just as suitable for listening straight through as a tune or two here and there.

In the liner notes, the guys explain that they do rehearse their music, but not so much that the spontaneity is gone. They decide the final arrangements immediately before recording the tunes, so the music is fresh and exciting for the CD.



### 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 in the ANA includes a subscription to this newsletter. Annual dues are \$10 for digital delivery OR \$15 for snail mail delivery. Send to the address below, and indicate if you play the nyckelharpa and if we can publish your name in our roster.

### ANA Web Page

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

### Nyckel Notes

Published quarterly. Send submissions to *Nyckel Notes* at the address below, or to: [nyckelnotes@nyckelharpa.org](mailto:nyckelnotes@nyckelharpa.org)

The American Nyckelharpa Association  
P.O. Box 661, Lahaska, PA 18931-0661

*Keyed Up* is a joy to hear and an inspiration to one's music-making. Add it to your collection, listen to it, learn some of the tunes. You won't regret it!

## Pärlor (Pearls)

Erika Lindgren & Cecilia Österholm

reviewed by Sheila Morris

Wow. Only moments after opening the astoundingly lime-green and violet cover to this CD, it moved right to the top of my personal hit-parade. This is exactly what I look for in a recording—lively playing, tight harmonies, and a real feeling that the musicians are having a great time. Erika (fiddle) and Cecilia (nyckelharpa) met at a spel-mansstämma a couple of years ago. Each found in the other a playing-partner who was completely in synch. They had the same views about the music; what it had been, was, and could be. Most of the tunes here are traditional tunes from Uppland, although both ladies have contributed a tune of their own. But the tunes don't sound old—there is a freshness in their playing that breathes new life into familiar pieces while always respecting the underlying traditions. And their singing is lovely, too. This is a must-have CD.

## Det låter som sommar (It Sounds Like Summer)

Ann-Mari & Sven Nordin

reviewed by Sheila Morris

It sure sounds like summer to me—nyckelharpa, cittra, harmonica, two-row accordion and (surprisingly) piano by turns. This is a sweet, light rendition of twenty-five tunes. Mostly traditional, with a few by Sven. Sven plays often with Henry Wallin, so there are several tunes from the

Wallin repertoire. He is a sure hand on the harpa, and I was delighted by the one tune played on a silverbas which Sven has restored himself—the instrument, which belonged to Wilhelm Tegenborg (1840–1921), had been unplayable for one hundred years. You'll know this tune by the clicking of the dry old keys! Ann-Mari plays the cittra like nobody else. I've heard several recordings where the mike was too close to the cittra, and the playing was heavy-handed, pounding out the rhythm until you could hardly hear the melody, even when played by multiple fiddles and harpas together. Not the case here! Her playing is light and melodic, and supports rather than drags down the melody. The two have been playing together for over twenty years, and it shows. The overall effect of this CD is very restful and refreshing—like a summer's day.

