The Journal of the American Nyckelharpa Association
NYCKEL NOTES

Writing your own personal *Spela Bättre*

by Matt Fichtenbaum

In this ongoing series of *Spela Bättre* columns, I and others have discussed technique, repertoire, expression, ways of practicing, and a bunch of other topics. We've offered tunes that might stretch your playing, and ideas and viewpoints that might stretch your thinking. All with the goal of helping you make your playing "better."

But "playing better" is a subjective concept, meaning "I have an idea of how I'd like to play, but I'm not there yet." And that's a problem with the idea of this column: how can I tell you how to play "better," when "better" depends on what's important to you?

So, for a change, the task of choosing a goal and defining the path toward that goal is yours. My role this time is to help find a framework for this task, offer some ideas, identify some dimensions to expand and perfect your playing.

What constitutes "perfection?"

When you play, you probably have some idea about how your playing could be "better," or, at least, "different." It might be something very specific, or it might be general. Here are some examples.

Technique. There's a tune you play pretty well, but with the occasional fumble, or not smoothly enough, or not at full tempo. Or there are things you'd like to do with the bow that don't work yet.

Learning. There are tunes you've heard that you'd like to play, but you don't yet know them or they seem difficult.

Expression. You've heard some music on recordings or in concert and you find it irresistible, with rhythm that won't let you sit still, or gorgeous, sparkling, silver tone, or inventiveness and freedom of spirit, or expression so deep that it engulfs you and swallows you whole. And you want to be able to play like that.

These are all great motivators. You can probably think of many that aren't on my list. Each can be a focus for you to work on your playing.

Technique

I think that problems with technique get solved with focused, disciplined practice. For example,

- Take a tune you're working on and play it really slowly, maybe half of its expected tempo. Keep that tempo constant and resist all temptation to speed up. Then play it slower still. At this tempo there's time for that complicated figure or that problem string crossing, and they begin to work for you. Once you've conquered those challenging spots, more or less, you can speed up, but not before.
- Take a figure or phrase that's troublesome, and play it until you get it right. Then play it correctly lots more times.

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If you play it wrong six times and then right once, your fingers have just had much more practice playing it wrong, so don't stop the first time you succeed with it.

- Try alternative fingerings. The really good players—the ones who make everything look and sound easy—put a lot of thought into playing efficiently and rationally. If a passage has a risky jump or a troublesome stretch, stop and think about other ways to finger it. Maybe there's a way to play it with fewer position changes, or with changes that happen at less busy times.

Learning tunes

I don't claim to be an expert on ways to learn tunes, but these are some ideas that can be helpful.

- Don't cram a new tune, but let it work its way in naturally. Listen to it over a couple of weeks, try singing it. Find a "hook" in it that helps you remember it—maybe it starts like a tune you know, or has a rhythm you can remember. Work on one part at a time until you've learned that part.

- A tune is not just a sequence of notes, but a structure. It's built of scale fragments and arpeggios, it's organized as a repeating rhythmic pattern. All those scale bits and arpeggios and rhythms turn up in other tunes as well, so it's likely you've had practice in playing them. If you can recognize these higher-order elements and think in terms of them, you have a richer set of building blocks: they're easier to remember, and it takes fewer of them to make a tune.

photo by Elaine Gampp

Matt plays regularly at Scandinavian dance sessions in the Boston area. Here he rests on the stage edge between tunes.

- If playing by ear is a challenge, find a tune that you don't play, but know how it goes – you can hear it in your head or sing it. It needn't be a nyckelharpa tune, or even Swedish at all. Spend a little time trying to play it, but devote some time to thinking about it, finding the scale fragments and the arpeggios. Then take one of those scale phrases or arpeggio phrases, find its starting note on your harpa, and play the phrase. Repeat with another such phrase, until you have the whole tune.

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- Another good exercise is to take a tune you already play and transpose it to another key. This encourages you to find it as a *melody* rather than a sequence of string/finger pairs. (It's good for developing your familiarity with other keys, too.) Play Båtsman Däck in F, or Tierpspolskan in A, or the Byss-Kalle *skänklåt* Skålarna in A minor. When you sing a tune you have no qualms about moving it to fit into your vocal range; you can be equally unafraid to move it to a different key on harpa.

- If reading music is a skill you'd like to improve, there's no alternative to practice. Find a book of tunes you like and work your way through it, a tune or two at a time. One of my favorites, which I've used for my own sightreading practice, is Peter Barnes' book of English country dance tunes. It's called *The Barnes Book of English Country Dance Tunes.* Of course, *57 Låtar efter Byss-Kalle* and Gösta Sandström's book of Eric Sahlström tunes are fine choices too. They're available from the Eric Sahlström Institute and Upplands Spelmansförbund, respectively.

Expression

In keeping with the spirit of this column, it's you who get to define this dimension. Think of one of your favorite concert experiences or recordings, and try to identify what makes it memorable. Is it the energy? The rhythm that won't let you sit still? The sheer technical brilliance? The playfulness, or subtlety, or warmth that comes through?

Focus on one of these, and ask yourself what the player is doing to make it happen. Are there rhythmic accents that give energy? Melodic or rhythmic surprises that perk you up? Grace notes and ornaments? Dynamics that rise and fall, swell and fade, to caress the tune?

When you have an idea what it might be, take a tune you know and try to give it some of that same character. It's not necessarily easy: you have to think consciously about that one aspect of your playing, which probably gets in the way of playing the whole tune. But the more you work, the better you'll integrate the new stuff into your playing and the more natural it will be.

Listening to yourself

Alas, the best way to assess your playing and compare it to the music that inspires you is to record yourself. It takes practice to play naturally when there's a recorder running (and that's yet another skill you can work on!). But there's also a good chance that you'll hear things in your playing that you really like, and recording yourself can be a source of encouragement as well.

So you're home all alone, and you spend a session with your recording device, and then you take a deep breath and listen to the result. And you think, "What would I like to do differently?"

These were some of the answers when I asked myself that question.

- Get the notes right

- Clean start and stop to the notes, make the notes sound strong and definite for their whole duration, bow-and-fingers coordination

- Shape the start of the note; shape the duration of the note

- Play with enough energy that it carries to the faraway listener

You will find your own answers to that question, and each one can be the subject for some focused practice.

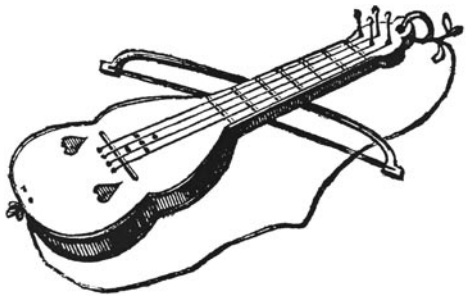
Get to work!

This is your music, and your choice about how you want to play it. Find some tunes that seem like worthy subjects, and apply yourself to playing them as you think they should be. Good luck with it!

P.S.: mp3 recorders

In today's technology the solid-state flash memory recorder seems to be the recording device of choice for concerts, workshops, practice, etc. They offer good audio quality, very long recording times, and satisfactory ease of use. There are quite a few on the market, with a range of capabilities and prices.

There's a nice set of reviews at www.transom.org/tools, and vendors such as Wingfield Audio (www.wingfieldaudio.com), Minidisco (www.minidisco.com), and The Sound Professionals (www.soundprofessionals.com) offer good information on the units they purvey. There were several different makes and models of mp3 recorder at the last set of workshops I attended, and the users all seemed satisfied with theirs. And I have been satisfied with mine. ■



Lars with some of his fellow students at a presentation at ESI.

A year at the Eric Sahlström Institute in Tobo

by Lars Lindkvist

Translated by Matt Fichtenbaum

Many of Nyckel Notes' readers know Lars Lindkvist as the organizer of the annual Ekebyholm nyckelharpa course that takes place during the week after Midsummer. In this article, which first appeared in Upplands Spelmansförbund's newsletter Upplandsspelmannen, Lars reports "from the other side" on life as a student during the school year 2007–2008.

It all started in 1978. I had been playing nyckelharpa only a few weeks when I attended a course at the Ekebyholm school in Rimbo, northeast of Uppsala. My teacher happened to be Eric Sahlström, so it was no wonder that I was inspired to continue. Neither he nor I realized then that someday there would be an Institute bearing his name, and that I would get to spend a full academic year there!

What's it like to study at ESI?

It's an evening near the end of October, and time for the first student concert. The audience grows to fill the room, and there is a tense and slightly nervous anticipation among the students. Then it begins—full speed ahead, wonderful spirit, great direction. Afterwards, joyful exhilaration and copious praise. Imagine—after only two months we students have already coalesced into a group that brought forth such a performance. We've obviously worked hard with technique, repertoire, and rehearsals to reach this point.

"What is there for you to learn at Tobo, you who've been playing so many years?" Yes, I've heard that question many times. But as in any other field, the more you learn, the more you understand how much is left to learn. And besides all the new material, this year offers me a chance to work seriously on aspects of my own playing that I haven't given enough attention over the years.

During the year at ESI, I became more and more impressed by how the course is organized and presented. Imagine several days each week with Sonia Sahlström, Ditte Andersson, and Olov Johansson as nyckelharpa teachers. Plus occasional special visits from a long line of other great players. But I knew all this about ESI even before things very suddenly fell into place and I became a student myself there last fall.

What I hadn't realized is that the course also includes a whole array of other useful and enjoyable subjects—folk music history, arranging, singing, music theory, ensemble playing. And, by no means least, physical exercise with Ingrid Frykmo. That alone gave me the stamina to play countless hours each day.

We nyckelharpa students regularly joined the dance students in their dance sessions with Andreas Berchtold. What fun! After the very first dance class I was totally worn out. I couldn't comprehend how I could be so tired, until I remembered that I'd played half the night before and had danced all morning without drinking any water to speak of. Then again, I'm also twice as old as most of the other students. This was one of the few times that I really knew that I'm not twenty or twenty-five like my classmates. On the other hand, most mornings I don't look as tired as they do.

A benefit of being at ESI is theoretical and practical

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Year at Tobo, continued ...

instruction from many of Sweden's foremost folk music experts and researchers. We've visited the Music Museum's instrument collection [in Stockholm] and seen nyckelharpas from as far back as the 1500s. We've met players from outside Sweden when they happened to be visiting the Institute, and we've been participants in the "Tobo Thursdays" when the Institute's "Great Hall" fills with players and dancers from all over Uppland. ESI has also been the scene of numerous concerts during the course of the year. There's a lot going on, and we Tobo-students get to be part of it!

Is there a down side to all this? If so, it would be that so much goes on at ESI that it can be hard to keep up with homework and practicing. It didn't help matters that I stayed involved and active with my regular folk music commitments "at home," and, being unemployed, was also on the lookout for a new job.

At the time I write this, it's not long until the students' final concerts and ESI's tenth anniversary celebration. This anniversary year is an exciting and fun time to be a student here. The few weeks that remain will be intense; afterwards, it will surely feel very strange and empty when the year is through and we all go our separate ways.

Fortunately, I'll see some of my classmates at the Ekebyholm course and at spelmansstämmor this summer. And some of my friends from home have enrolled in next year's ESI course, which gives me a reason to come back and visit.

In closing, let me remember Eric Sahlström once more, and all the wonderful things that have resulted from his good works. Thanks to *everyone* at ESI for a wonderful year!

And if you, too, want to experience genuine *spelmansglädje*: do what I did—treat yourself to a year at the Eric Sahlström Institute. ■

Left to right: John Blunk, Brian Wood, David Elliker-Vågsberg, Kurt Elliker & Claire Elliker-Vågsberg.

Fossegrimen Releases CD

submitted by David Elliker-Vågsberg

In December of 2007, the dance orchestra *Fossegrimen* released their debut CD called "Vals til Claire." *Fossegrimen* plays folk dance music from Norway and Sweden.

The group, which was founded by David and Claire Elliker-Vågsberg in 1999, plays for monthly dances in Salem, Oregon, and occasionally in Portland and Seattle. David leads the group and performs on fiddle, hardanger fiddle and nyckelharpa. Claire plays fiddle and nyckelharpa. Other members are fiddler Kurt Elliker, Brian Wood playing guitar and nyckelharpa, and John Blunk on bass. Fossegrimen play gammaldans and bygdedans music as well as runddansere or turdans and various "mixers." The group members wear Norwegian bunader for special occasions.

The title tune, "Vals til Claire" was written by David for his wife, Claire, during a drive home from a nyckelharpa workshop in Seattle. Another tune, "Truklrak" is dedicated to David's two sons, Karl and Kurt.

Most of the tracks on the recording come from the rote tradition of fiddlers from Norway and Sweden. A few of the tunes are more recent, having been written during the 20th century, but most are from the 1800s and some from the 1700s. Some of the music can be traced to old musicians' notebooks, such as the tune called "Slängpolska efter Magnus Theorin." Magnus Theorin lived in Växjö, Sweden, and wrote down the music in 1792.

Many of *Fossegrimen*'s tunes feature the nyckelharpa, and two of the tracks have solo hardingfele. One of the tunes, "Lugumleik i hallingtakt," features the sound of the "*munnharpe.*"

Three of the five musicians in the group are members of the ANA. Excerpts of some of the tunes can be heard at CDBaby. The CD is can be purchased from Norsk Ltd. at: www.csd.net/~sodaling or from CDBaby at: cdbaby.com/cd/fossegrimen.

David adds a personal note: I am not promoting our CD because of a desire to make money. I think that it is a good CD and would like to increase our exposure. We have spent over $8,000 producing it and are hoping to recoup some of our expenses through sales. It appears that sales of Scandinavian folk dance music is not the most popular in today's music markets. We made the recording because we are often asked at dances: "When is your CD coming out?" We started recording about year ago and finished all of the editing, mixing and mastering late in November 2007 after racking up over 93 hours of studio time in one of the best studios in Oregon. This has been a real learning experience for us. ■

Väsen & Me

by Ryan Koons

When computer use caused tendinitis and carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) in both of my arms last August, there was a very real fear I would never again be able to play a musical instrument. This was a great and very depressing realization: I breathe, sleep, eat, study, and live music, and I intend it to be my livelihood. The fact that it might be necessary to come up with an alternative did not bear thinking about. Needless to say, I was more than relieved when my physical therapist told me that playing instruments would actually speed my recovery!

So, I started the long round of learning ultra-healthy techniques for the instruments I play—a process which is far from complete—to further my recovery. With the fiddle/violin, I had the aid of a supportive professor; with the piano, the aid of a kind former teacher; with the psaltery, the aid of a wonderful colleague. However, I knew no one who played nyckelharpa, let alone someone with the knowledge to help me correct a painful technique.

The nyckelharpa was first introduced to me on Christmas day, 2005. My mother had gifted my father and me each with a Väsen CD. As we listened to Olov Johansson on the first track of "Trio," my dad and I turned to each other. "I want to play that!" I said, and he said, "I want to build that!" The deal was struck. We obtained Sören Åhker's constuction manual from Rita Leydon and Dad spent the ensuing year building a nyckelharpa.

The following Christmas Eve, I sat down and began teaching myself how to play it. I had already taken many years of piano and violin/fiddle lessons, and I attempted to apply the two techniques to my study of the nyckelharpa. Since I was able to perform on it within a month, and since my technique looked like the techniques I had seen on YouTube—which was the closest I had been able to get to a real nyckelharpa player—I assumed I was playing it correctly. But, after coming down with tendinitis and CTS, I was constantly experiencing pain in my left forearm when I played.

One day this past March, I was wasting time on the Internet when I ran across a bulletin from the Susquehanna Folk Music Society announcing a concert and lecture/demo to be given by Väsen! I bought three tickets and put the date on my calendar, all the while screaming (literally) with joy. Väsen had not strayed from the West Coast the last few times they toured the US, so I was determined to take advantage of as much of this as I could. I initiated an e-mail conversation with Olov Johansson, Väsen's astounding nyckelharpa player, to ask him if he would be willing to correct my technique. Olov, who was very accessible and supportive of my endeavors, agreed. (After having the self-centered natures of some celebrities exposed to me by the media, I am always pleasantly surprised by the kindness, support, and down-to-earth-nature of the majority of the folk/traditional music community.)

On April 19, my parents and I attended the lecture/demo. It was fascinating and filled to the brim with fast-paced, exciting music and information (for example, I highly suggest you check out www.smus.se/earkiv/fmk for access to a large Swedish music database). Afterwards, I played "Polonaise i C-moll" for Olov to critique.

He corrected several parts of my technique: he moved my left thumb from supporting the neck to supporting the bottom row of keys; he moved the strap from under my right arm to over and in front of my right arm; he wrapped the strap around the tailpiece and positioned my right arm to lay over the tailpiece and support the instrument; he also tilted the neck down further so the harpa "fell" to the left a bit more. Perhaps even more usefully, Olov critiqued the instrument itself: he suggested we adjust the sound post and remove the pain-causing foam from inside the key box to allow gravity to return the keys after using them. Now, two months later, the harpa sounds richer with a fuller sound and I can play without pain!

I spent the rest of the day in a stimulating musical haze. My parents and I had a quick meal and went to the concert. If ever you get the chance to experience Väsen live, you should not allow yourself to miss it. The group produces superlative CDs , but their live performances are like nothing a CD can ever be. Väsen is one of the most musically tight ensembles I've ever heard; during their performances, it is very obvious that they love creating music together. Their musicality and passion combine to leave a breathless audience requesting as many encores as Väsen will give!

However, despite (or perhaps because of) my wonderful encounter with Väsen, one of the most important things I have learned has come from my own experience. Nyckelharpas are infinitely healthier than computers, so put down that mouse and pick up a nyckelharpa! ■

Ryan Koons studies musicology at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania. He grew up listening to his parents perform in the traditional Celtic and Nordic music ensemble, Wherligig (www.wherligig.com), and is now part of the group himself.

Birth of the Nyckelharpa Store

by Celeste Johnson

My t-shirt declares: "I play the nyckelharpa." Needless to say, it gets some attention. "Umm …what's a nyckelharpa?" We're all familiar with the question, and I imagine we all probably have a spiel all but memorized to try to describe it. But it is *such* a difficult thing to describe. My spiel goes something like this: "Well, it's like a fiddle because you bow it, except you hold it on your lap like a guitar, except it has these keys to fret it instead of using your fingers." It's the best I can do. How did I end up with such a funky instrument that needs so much describing?

Up until six months ago I was singing classical music and not playing any instrument. I've been singing, mostly classical music, since I was seven and it used to really fit who I was. But as I got older I started feeling less and less comfortable with it. I discovered that I hated having to perform within the classical setting—the further you go with it, the greater the pressure for recitals, competitions, and such. Six months ago I got fed up and walked away. But that left me trying to decide where to go next with my music studies. As it happened, around that same time, I began investigating my Swedish heritage. I decided to see what the Swedes had for music ... and up popped the nyckelharpa. Where would we be without Google? I was intrigued and decided I just *had* to try it. But how ever does one get started in finding a harpa and an instructor? Google saved the day again. I found a teacher, had my first lesson, and I was hooked.

Since then, I've been living and breathing nyckelharpa and, like a true American, I wanted to broadcast my passion to the world. What better way to do that than with a t-shirt? So off I went again to Google. But this time Google was of no help. I could not find a nyckelharpa t-shirt. Neither could I find a hat. Or a mug. Or a mouse pad or the myriad of other things we all like to surround ourselves with. Other musicians have "stuff" available to them; violinists, flutists, guitarists, etc. can easily find all sorts of items on which to display their beloved instrument. But we poor nyckelharpa players have nothing readily available to us. The solution? Do it myself!

I designed a logo and had it printed on a t-shirt to satisfy my immediate need. But there still was nothing out there for others to order. I decided to see what I could do to fill the void. Thus, via an online marketplace called Café Press, the *Nyckelharpa Store* was born. I created bumper stickers, mugs, shirts, home décor—you name it—all portraying our wonderful instrument. My nyckelharpa tote bag accompanies me to my lessons holding my music, notebook, and other supplies. I proudly display a "Play more harpa" bumper sticker on my family's car. And of course, I have my favorite t-shirt which holds a place of honor in my closet—except that I wear it so much it is rarely there!

And now for the shameless promo spot—after all, I am a recent high school grad trying to save up money for my first trip to Sweden and the Eric Sahlstrom Institute! I have recently spent weeks working on new slogans and designs, *updating and improving my online nyckelharpa store.* Now everyone else who wants to publicize their love of all things nyckelharpa to the world can simply click their way to my online store and buy an already designed item, instead of having to create one for themselves. And that leaves more time for playing! ■

Visit Celeste's store at: www.cafepress.com/nyckelharpa

Jenn's Vision

by Jenn Beebe

This story needs a bit of explanation—I received an e-mail from Jenn inquiring about purchasing Peter Hedlund's DVDs for she was intersted in learing how to play. As I often do, I asked her how she became interested in the nyckelharpa in the first place. Her reply was so personal, heartfelt, and sincere, not to mention unusual, that I asked her permission to share it with the readers of Nyckel Notes. I also asked her if she'd consider painting her vision for us. She agreed to give it a try, and when it arrived I could only smile at the beauty of her work.

—Rita Leydon, Editor

I know it is curious, about the nyckelharpa and me, so I will tell you the story, although you might find it a little bit strange.

I am thirty-two, a mother of two boys, ages five and nine. I married my high school sweet-heart and we have been happily married for fifteen years. We are quite normal. I played the violin growing up and my great grandparents were old time fiddle players, whose parents settled in the west in Washington and Oregon. I loved my fiddle, but I'm by no means a concert violinist. I can play the piano, and I am terrible at the guitar. But in my heart I longed for a creative expression, I felt there was music deep inside me that I could not communicate. This feeling stayed with me for many years.

Then last year I went to a Supernatural School of Worship in Redding CA. At this school we studied all different aspects of music, lots about sound, from how it affects matter to how it can help heal people's bodies. Music is such a spiritually powerful thing! I believe in the demonstration of God's love, and that it sometimes takes the form of music.

So there I am, at this conference, struggling with not feeling good enough and frustrated that there is music inside me I just cannot express. Then on the last day of the conference a man named Dan McCollum came to speak. He runs a ministry about music of the nations. He's incredible. He prayed for the students for freedom of musical expression; that no judgment, religion, or anything else would stop us from the expression. That's when I had, what you might call, a supernatural experience.

I'm not sure what other religions call it, but the Christian supernatural culture I am in, we would call it an open eyed vision. With my eyes open, I saw the room I was in. I saw the people, and all of the musicians up on the stage. I also saw something else. I saw myself float down from the ceiling in a long blue flowing dress. In my right hand I held a short bow, like a cello bow, in front of my body was a twelve string instrument. I was bowing the

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Adventure, continued ...

strings and pushing pegs with my fingers, and I sang at the same time. What is even stranger is that I could hear the sound that I was making. It was like the sound of a piano after you hit the keys, and a fiddle—a harmonic I couldn't recognize—and a guitar all rolled into one. I just stared at it. Every last detail was imprinted on my mind. I'm an artist, so I could easily draw a picture of it. Then I heard the voice of God! He said that I was made to resonate spiritually, like

a string, and something Heavenly is going to happen when I play this instrument that I have been longing for. Then I saw a river flow out of the instrument and out of me. It began to flow over people and they were getting healed. I saw very sick and mentally ill people being healed, cases that were hopeless were being freed by the music.

Afterwards, I turned to my friend in class, and said that something strange and amazing just happened to me, and that I am now on a quest to find this instrument ... or, if I can't find it, to build it. I did a lot of research, but even with the help of instrument making friends, I could not figure out what kind of instrument it was. I exhausted most of my contacts on the West Coast and felt frustrated.

Then one Saturday, I went shopping at the local mall and in the center of the mall was an International Music Day event in full swing. As I got closer, I began to hear a sound similar to what I had heard in my open eyed vision. Then I saw my instrument! The exact details and sound that I had seen and heard in my vision! It was a nyckelharpa. There are apparently just a handful of nyckelharpa players on the West Coast and I happen to run into one! I just started crying. Needless to say, at this point, my searching got some solid traction. I knew in my heart that my own nyckelharpa needed to come from Sweden. My search next led me to nyckelharpa builder Sören Åhker, whom I promptly commissioned to make an instrument just for me. I felt intuitively that Sören was the right maker. I hope to travel to Sweden and pick up my harpa in person when it is finished and to see a bit the country.

In my dreams, I'm playing my nyckelharpa. I've heard of, and met people, who were given the ability to play something. I'm not sure if it's miraculous, or just God redeeming our minds to how He made them in the first place—with complete capacity. Either way, whether it proves to be easy or difficult for me to learn to play, every moment will be glorious, I'm sure of it! I'm very excited.

I found a wonderful woman, who lives about four hours away from me, who is willing to meet with me and give me some lessons. I also want to get the Peter Hedlund DVDs because I think if I feed all of the available information into my mind, it will be easier for the music to flow as freely in reality as it does in my dreams. Blessings to you, Rita Leydon, and thank you for making the DVDs so people like me who are far away from the Swedish culture can learn.

Well, that's the story, so far. I am on the lookout for a loaner instrument, but have had no luck so far. If anyone has one I could borrow, please contact me via e-mail:

jenn.beebe@gmail.com.

Thank you so much. ■

fig. 4

Reconstruction of a Medieval Nyckelharpa

by Olov Gibson

My friend Styrbjörn Bergelt, who unfortunately passed away a couple of years ago, built a small nyckelharpa inspired by a 15th-century church painting in Sweden which is shown in Jan Ling's book "Nyckelharpan." That is the only reconstruction of a medieval nyckelharpa that I have seen, with the exeption of those I have built myself.

I have, since the end of the 1960s, reconstructed, built, and in different contexts, played musical instruments mostly from the viking, medieval and baroque periods. For example lyre, organistrum, lira da braccio, shawm, recorder, fiddle, viol, baroque oboe, etc. I moved to Visby, on the Baltic island of Gotland, in 1985 and found many historical traces from musical activities on this marvelous island. For example, viking bridges of amber and of bronze probably made for lyres (fig. 2), 14th–15th century organs från Sundre and Norrlanda, etc. Of special interest is the portal of the church of Källunge from about 1380, that has a lime-stone relief carving showing two musicians with bowed string instruments. One of them seems to play a fiddle and the other

fig. 1

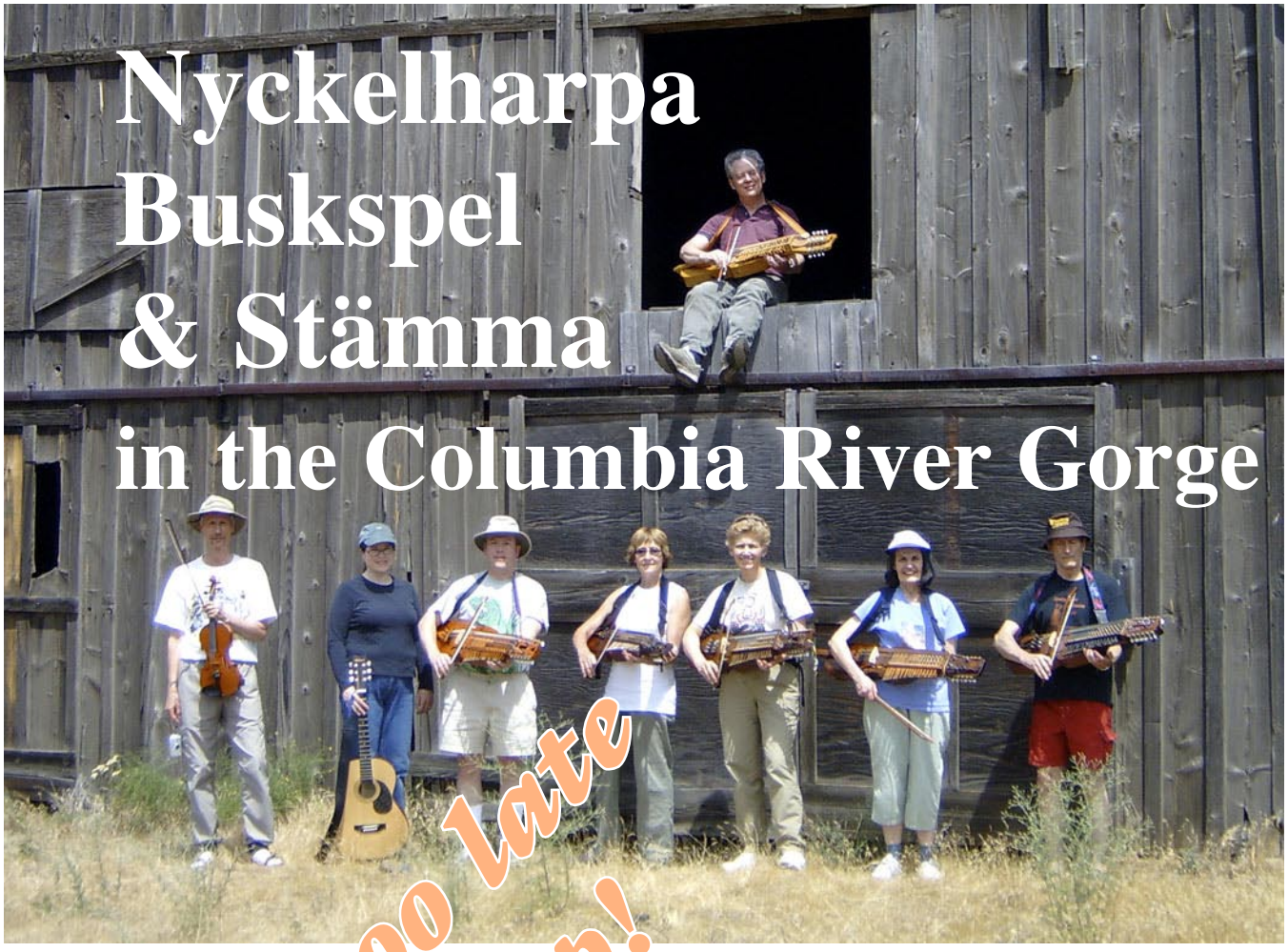
fig. 2

fig. 3

has something that can be interpreted as the same type of nyckelharpa that was later painted on walls in Swedish and Danish 15th-century churches. (fig. 1 and fig. 3)

With support from these sources and from literature such as Jan Ling's book "Nyckelharpan," among others, I have reconstructed three different versions of the nyckelharpa from Källunge which might be the oldest image in the world of a nyckelharpa. The photo of version three (fig. 4) however does not show that the top of this instrument neither has a bass bar nor a soundpost, that the top continues over the hollowed neck, and that the body and the neck is carved out of a massive piece of maple. Because the top is slightly bowed at the side, and even a little along the neck, the top has some upward strength, so that it can resist the pressure of the strings on the bridge. My solution with this construction is of course not scientifically assured, but an effort to start from the medieval fiddle, an instrument that I have made in several variations. This third effort became a nyckelharpa which sounds nice and which functions well for medieval music.

With Greetings from Gotland! ■



Nyckelharpa Buskspel & Stämma in the Columbia River Gorge

it's not too late to sign up!

They're at it again!

September 19, 20 & 21, 2008
Hosted by Marilee & Michael Cowan
1114 Canyon Way
The Dalles, Oregon 97058

phone: 541-478 0187
email: marilee.cowan@nyckelharpa.org

Accomodation possibilities include floor space (bring own sleeping bag), RV or tent camping, or local hotels. Contact Marilee for further info. Plan on bringing instruments, recording devices, walking shoes, suit/towel for the hot tub, sunscreen, insect repellant.

Vicki might be new to the nyckelharpa, but she's not letting that stop her from incorporating it into her professional performances.

My First Face-to-Face Lesson

by Vicki Swan

I've been playing the nyckelharpa now for just over a year and I felt that I'd reached a plateau. There was something not quite right about my bowing hand. I started having self doubts. Maybe I was totally on the wrong track! How often should I change my strings? Aggh! So I wrote to Rita Leydon. She told me to contact Peter Hedlund—which I did. I happened to drop into the conversation with Peter that I was thinking of doing the distance course at Tobo in the autumn, but that I wasn't sure if I wanted to go to learn nyckelharpa, or if I just wanted to go to Sweden to practice my Swedish. Peter's advice was, "*If you want to practice your Swedish and play some nyckelharpa, do the course, but if you want to learn lots of nyckelharpa, then come for a lesson with me.*" I thought about it for about three seconds before deciding to fly over for a lesson, much to Peter's surprise.

I arrived in Sweden, had dinner with my sister in Stockholm, picked up the hire car and drove north for five hours. After arriving at Peter's house it wasn't long before the nyckelharpas came out and I felt very inadequate. I had been learning solely from Peter's Nyckelharpskola DVDs with no contact with any other nyckelharpa players, so I had developed some bad habits and I could see him taking in every single one of them. Luckily, Peter wasn't one for holding back and he was going to tell me about them all. Our first job in the morning, though, was to change my strings and move the bridge. This meant loosening all the strings using a lovely little winding gadget. My husband has one of these little gadgets for his guitar (he changes his strings all the time), I really need to get one. When I had my sound post moved the other week it took us an hour to loosen all the strings and tighten them up again. Normal guitar ones don't seem to work on the nyckelharpa as the big tuning pegs get in the way, so you need a slim line one. Once the nyckelharpa was ready, it was onto playing.

Peter was happy to see that I was running my thumb along the back of the keys and not on the back of the neck.

continued on next page ...

Face to Face, continued ...

So far so good. This helps to give flexibility when reaching up for the higher notes. If you have your thumb on the back of the neck you just can't reach.

As a double bass player my bow hold hadn't quite transferred across the different instruments and this was one of the large, but yet subtle alterations to be made. I was holding the bow at a slight angle towards the heel of the instrument, I should instead angle it in the other direction so that the hair rested against my thumb slightly, the wood of the bow angling towards key end of the instrument. This was a major revelation! Although it felt strange, I knew that this felt right and was going to fix the slight feeling of 'beginner bow' that had been plaguing me in the previous months—even if it would take a bit of getting used to. Of course, now I getting used to my new bow hold and have no idea how I used to be able to play like that before!

Too fast! That's too fast!

I was trying to play everything too fast. Slow down. I suppose I'd thought that Peter had recorded the tunes at a beginner speed, but apparently not, I really needed to slow all my polskas down and to play along with him on his CDs more.

Play legato.

I was lifting my bow too much. Keep the bow on the string. Play smoothly.

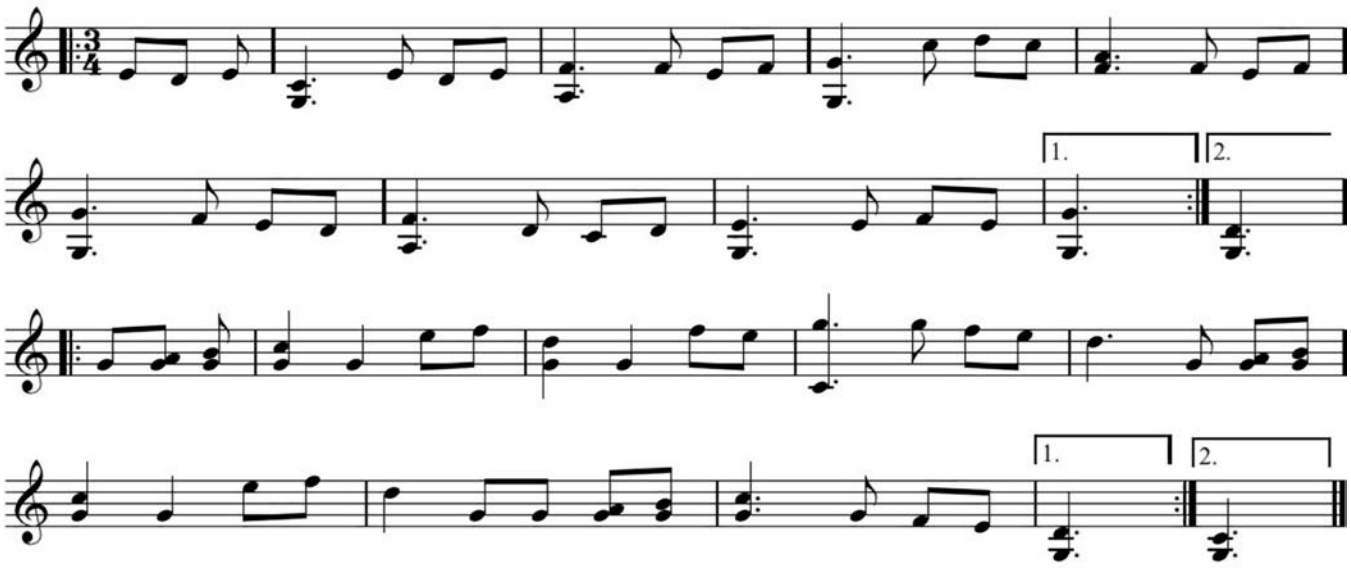
Keep your fingers down.

On the piano, you lift your fingers up when you're done playing a note. On the nyckelharpa, if you keep your fingers down, the embellishments can happen much more easily and you can play harmony notes much more easily and you can play faster with less clatter. This preferred technique was and still is hard for me. My fingers seem to like flapping around in the wind and changing is going to take a long time.

This was a lot to take in and so it was time for fika—coffee break. After fika we started on some tunes. My brain was full of "keep-your-fingers-down, thumb-against-the-bow, don't-be-nervous, and it's-fine." As a classically trained musician, I can read music. Peter, however, teaches everything by ear. I took the challenge and he taught me a couple of tunes. In my quest to pay as little money to Ryanair [airline] as possible, I'd packed all my clothes into my nyckelharpa bag and hadn't taken any manuscript paper. The only recording device I had was my mobile phone. Surprisingly the phone recorded Peter's playing well enough for me to be able to go home and transcribe the audio into written manuscript, which I then sent to Peter—hoping he wouldn't mind that I had written out the music. Peter played very clearly so that every nuance and detail came across in the recording. Taking this home with me was very important. Although I can hear music and make a good start on learning by ear, I really do struggle with it, but writing the music out by ear really helps me learn the piece. Maybe one day I'll not need to do this, but that day has not come.

Since I've been home I've been trying to practice my scales, my bow hold and be conscious of my fingers. It's hard, but then it's a hard instrument to learn! I put most of my time into writing a couple of tunes that incorporated the things we'd done in the lesson. Here is the first tune that I wrote. It's called Fikavalsen and was written to practice keeping certain fingers down for double stopping. You can hear the tune on our website, www.smallpiper.co.uk. You have to navigate a bit to get to it. Click the "about us" tab, then click "nyckelharpa diary" in the right hand column, then scroll all the way to the bottom of that page. The very last words instruct you to "click here." You've got it! The tune is not too hard to play, but to do the double stopping, especially in the second part, your thumb does need to be on the back of the neck or you won't reach. Enjoy! ■

Fikavalsen

by Vicki Swan

President's Message

Dear fellow ANA members:

The ANA is all of us, and we are at a crossroads. There are several important choices facing us—choices that affect the future of our organizatrion. That means that the opportunities I bring to the table below need to be considered and taken personally by each and every ANA member.

Ask yourself, What can I do to help the situation? Can I buy a few CDs? Maybe I could give them away as gifts if I already own them. Maybe I could take on the newsletter. Can't be that hard to learn a bit of basic layout. Maybe I could commit to a year, that's only four issues. Well, geez, being a Board member can't be all that time consuming. I love promoting the nyckelharpa out in the trenches and sharing and talking it up. Sure, I can do that. Where do I sign up? Put me on that ballot!

CD sale

If you haven't already heard, the ANA is having a 50% off clearance sale of its CD inventory. Many titles are already sold out, so if you have an interest in expanding your personal music library at a discount, get your order in soon. Details can be found on pp. 24–25 in this issue of *Nyckel Notes.*

It wasn't an easy decision to get out of the CD business; however, increasing availability of world music through many web based outlets has caused our sales to diminish to very low volumes. While the sale of CDs used to be a substantial revenue source for the ANA, it no longer is. The ANA will continue to provide our members with a list of sources for CDs and will negotiate discounts for our membership with some of the key suppliers.

We need volunteers!

The ANA is a relatively small group, but we have big ambitions. We need volunteers for some of the ANA's key responsibilities. These include:

Webmaster. Anna Abraham, our current webmaster, needs to step down from her responsibilities managing our website. She has done a great job with the site, and has helped to develop it into a respected international resource. We need a talented webmaster to continue to help keep our site the ultimate resource for all things nyckelharpa.

Newsletter editor. Rita Leydon, our *Nyckel Notes* editor, is also retiring from her editor/publisher responsibilities. She as done a wonderful job in securing articles and publishing a high quality newsletter that is referenced by the nyckelharpa community worldwide. After a year of trying to recruit a replacement, no one has stepped up to take on this very important responsibility. As of the first of January 2009, we will not have a newsletter if we can't find someone to accept this responsibility.

Board of Directors. The elections for ANA Board of Directors will be held in December. Two of the five current directors have terms ending this year so we will be electing two new members for a two year term on the Board. If you are interested in serving as a director please contact the Secretary of the ANA, Karen Myers.

E-mail: Karen.L.Myers@usa.net

Snail mail: Karen Myers
17345 Raven Rocks Road.
Bluemont, VA 20135

We need passionate and talented individuals to fill each of these important functions. Please consider volunteering if you have the skills and enthusiasm to fill any of these positions. Please contact me, or any other board member, if you have any questions.

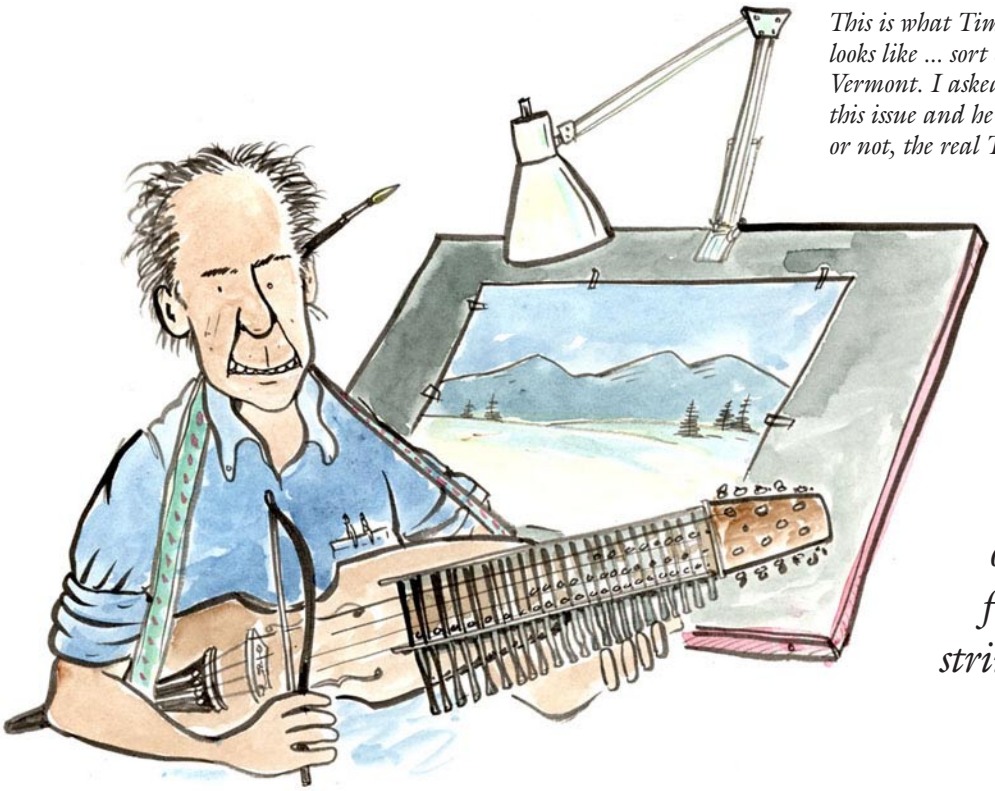
Annual Dues

Finally, please check your current membership status on the ANA website. If the date after your name is 2008.3 or earlier, then it is time to pay your dues.

The ANA will continue to provide world-class resources for our membership and for the world, if you continue to support us both financially and with your talents.

Tack så mycket,

—Doug Oines
ANA President



This is what Tim Newcomb, the ANA's able string man, looks like ... sort of. Tim runs a graphic design studio in Vermont. I asked him for a nice face shot of himself for this issue and he sent this self-portrait instead. Believe it or not, the real Tim is actually very handsome!

String Bazaar

The ANA is pleased to offer nyckelharpa strings for sale! We have playing strings and three versions of understring sets.

Order Form

Prices listed are for ANA members/non-members.
Price includes shipping to a US address.

Playing strings:	**Qty**	**Price**	**Cost**
Prim Full Set	_____	$77/$87	$ _____
Prim A (1)	_____	$15/$17	$ _____
Prim C (2)	_____	$18/$20	$ _____
Prim G (3)	_____	$20/$23	$ _____
Prim C (4)	_____	$24/$27	$ _____
Resonance strings:			
6+6 resonance set	_____	$22/$27	$ _____
4+4+4 resonance set	_____	$22/$27	$ _____
12-step resonance se	_____	$22/$27	$ _____
		Total:	**$** _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

e-mail for inquiries: strings@nyckelharpa.org
Send this form along with a check payable to American Nyckelharpa Association to:
Tim Newcomb
P.O. Box 51, Montpelier, VT 05602

Playing Strings

The playing strings are the four largest strings, the ones that you actually touch with the bow. 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

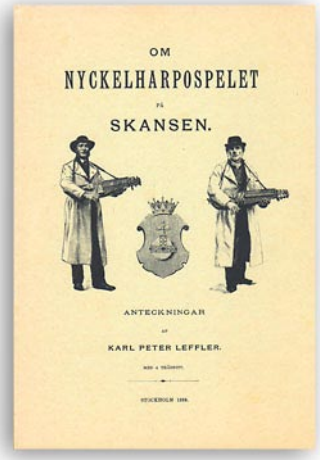
- 6 wound strings .021" (0.53 mm) in diameter
- 6 plain strings .014" (0.36 mm) in diameter

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.



About the Nyckelharpa playing at Skansen

by Karl Peter Leffler, 1899

Re-issued 1978 by Förlaget Emma
Translated by Sheila P. Morris, 2008

Part Two. (**Part One** appeared in *Nyckel Notes #42.*)

Translator's note: Please be aware that the descriptions herein refer to the silverbasharpa, and not today's chromatic nyckelharpa, that the descriptions of playing style refer to common techniques of the late 1990s, and that the passages about the age of the nyckelharpa refer only to sources available in 1899.

Chapter Two: The Nyckelharpa

There is little of value to be found about the nyckelharpa in either foreign or domestic literature. One finds merely casual references to the instrument, some of which contradict one another and others which are simply wrong, and an attempt to research the nyckelharpa's older history would appear, at least for the time being, to give only a negative result; namely, that certain prevalent opinions about the age of the nyckelharpa ought to be largely modified. If this sort of work can actually lead to the discovery of facts of which this author, despite persistent searching, has not found a hint, that would be a wonderful thing. Until then, we must content ourselves with the negative results and with a presentation of the positive knowledge which can be deduced from the instrument's former shape, construction and character as a musical instrument.

The nyckelharpa is often confused with its close relative, the *lira [hurdy-gurd—tr.]*, and this confusion naturally gives rise to mistakes. Sometimes the instruments are regarded as identical, as when A. Strindberg in S*venska Folket i helg och söken [sic] [The Swedish People at work and play]* says: "The lira, or nyckelharpa, cannot be shown to have been used in Sweden during the Middle Ages...", etc. There are significant differences between the two, which ought to make any chance of confusing them impossible.

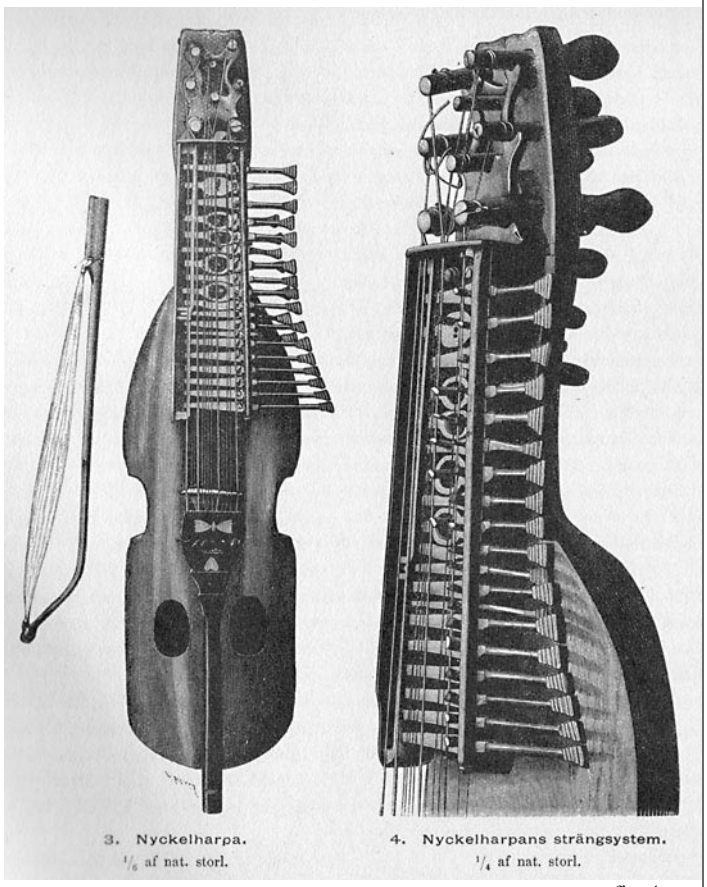


fig.3 *fig.4*

The Nyckelharpa's Construction (fig. 3) is as follows:

The *body* or *framework*, which in size and shape is rather like an ordinary fiddle-case, a bit shorter and curving out a bit before narrowing to the point, always consists of a hollowed-out spruce trunk or branch, the heavier the better, with a flat bottom and with a bulging top, also of spruce, glued on. In the middle of the sides are a pair of inward curves, about the size of those on a viola. The top has two larger holes in its bottom part and usually one (or two) farther up toward the neck. There is a sound-post between the top and bottom.

The neck. The body narrows down to a short and wide neck, which itself widens out to have a large, flat head. Several large wooden pegs are stuck through this from the bottom, and most of the strings are wound around these—larger pegs for the thicker strings, which are intended to be stroked by the bow, smaller for the fine metal strings which run alongside the former. A smaller number of small pegs are stuck through the neck itself, where it meets the

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Skansen, continued ...

flat head, and these are intended for another group of thin strings which are farther down along the top. All the strings on a nyckelharpa are tuned by turning them from under the neck, not from the side of the neck as on our ordinary stringed instruments. At a right-angle to the neck, and through the side of a long, box-like wooden framework which is fastened to the neck and extends a bit down over the body, sit the rows of so-called keys, high enough over the neck that the above-mentioned, latter group of thin strings can run underneath them.

String-system (fig. 4). Farthest down below the body's thickest part there is a string-holder, just as on a fiddle. This is an approximately two decimeter long, narrow piece of wood which widens and flattens out at one end, which has a number of holes drilled through it. *All* the strings are threaded through these holes and fastened in place with knots and wooden pins that can't fit through the holes. A short distance—three or four centimeters-—in front of this is the bridge. The thick strings, which are for playing on, and which I will call playing strings, run from the holes over the bridge—just like on a fiddle—through the key-box above the keys and up around their individual tuning pegs on the head.

All the fine metal strings are not supposed to be played on, but to strengthen the sound through sympathetic vibration, and therefore they could be called resonance strings. In some areas, for example in Roslagen, these are called "*jum-strings*" *[possibly 'humming-strings'?—tr.].* They are divided in two groups. One group runs over the bridge, alongside and between the playing strings, but in deeper cuts in the bridge, so that they can't be touched, other than possibly very lightly, by the bow; then follow the playing strings *over* the keys and are wrapped around the small pegs on the head. The other group runs below the first at the sides of the bridge, follow the top in pairs about 1/2 to 1 cm apart, and run *under* the keys and wrap around the previously mentioned small pegs which stick up under the top of the key-box at the edge of the head.

Keyboard. From the edge of the head, along the edges of the neck and down over the body for about a quarter of its length, there run two solid, 3 or 4 cm high parallel wooden panels, which are bound together at the head end with an equally high cross piece, which has holes to allow those strings to pass through, which have their tuning pegs up on the head. These parallel panels do not touch the top of the body, but are instead fastened to the edges of the neck, (footnote: The neck is not precisely on the same plane as the body, but is a bit bowed; though so un-noticeably that the plates farthest out on the body are only raised two or three millimeters above the top.) and with the neck as bottom, they make up a sort of long, narrow box without a top, and with only one cross panel at the top, and through this box, all the strings run lengthwise and all the "keys" cross-wise.

The side of the box which is next to the highest ringing playing string and which thus hangs *downward* when the harpa is in playing position, that is to say, hanging around the spelman's neck, is broken by two rows of small square holes, the upper row has many, the lower row has few.

Through these holes pass long wooden ribs, the upper row with long shafts, the lower row with short shafts. They go *under* the playing-strings and the upper resonance strings, but *over* the under resonance strings, and into corresponding holes in another wooden panel which is fastened a bit inside the opposite panel or side of the box, and attached to it with small cross pieces, so it makes up a sort of partition in the bigger box.

These wooden ribs, the so-called 'nycklarna' or 'keys', carry between the highest string and its nearest wall, the wall the keys enter through, small wooden pegs that stick up, and which on the one side keep the keys from falling out by contacting the wall, and on the other side, by touching the string, keep them from being pushed too far in and bumping into the opposite wall.

These small pegs serve on the harpa as the left hand's fingers do on a violin: when the spelman pushes in the key, its peg presses against the string and divides it into a certain length, though not by a push from above against an underpiece, but from the side.

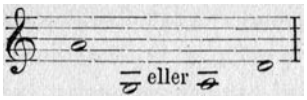
From this it is obvious, that the number of keys must be fairly large, since every tone must have its own peg, and also that the distance between keys must be carefully considered with the harpa's construction, so that the scale will be pure.

The nyckelharpa is stroked right above the bridge with a short bow, somewhat arched and looking like a smaller kontrabas bow. It has wide, loose fitting horsehair. The bow is of hazel or juniper, the tuning pegs, keys, and often other small pieces are of birch.

From the above basic form, which covers all the more recent—and even for the most part the older—harpa variations all together, the hurdy-gurdy differs, although it also has a key-box, in that its sound is not brought out with a bow, but rather by means of a wheel which sits a bit up in the body under the strings, its edge coated with rosin, and which rubs against the strings from below, as the player turns a crank at the bottom of the instrument. This instrument, which in the past was much more widely used than was the case with the nyckelharpa, nowadays is only sporadically to be found in southern France. The hurdy-gurdy is the German *Bauernleir* or *Bettlerleier,* while the nyckelharpa is called *Schlüsselfiedel.*

Different types of harpa. Two main types of the nyckelharpa are definitely known, an older one that has died out and a newer one, now in use in Uppland.

The older type was called *kontrabasharpa*. It had only *three* playing-strings (footnote: In *Uppfinningarnes bok—The Book of Inventions*, published in the 1870s—, the older, full-length edition, it says that the nyckelharpa had only two strings, and perhaps this was the oldest type here in Sweden), tuned A, low G or A, D (above middle C):



The second of these has probably most often been tuned to G, so that it would make a bass chord together with

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Skansen, continued ...

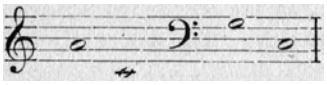
the third string. On this older type there has most usually only been found one row of keys, for the outermost string: though on the occasional harpa these keys have had a second wooden peg farther in on the 'rib,' which would act on the farthest string (footnote: I will mention here, once and for all, that I name off all the strings, even the resonance strings, in the order they have from the lower to the upper edge of the neck when the harpa is hanging in playing position, in other words, *from* the highest sounding playing string, which has the most tones of the scale). Thus, for example, in Nordiska Museet's instrument collection there is a nyckelharpa from Börstil in Roslagen, which has keys 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 equipped with these pegs. Besides this, keys 6, 11, and 13 are shorter than the others, although they are in the same row; the scale is chromatic. A harpa from Norrtälje has keys 1–7 equipped with inner pegs, though all are the same length.

Of the older type's three playing strings, the first was of silk and called "silke," the other two were both home made gut strings and were called "brummen" *["growler" or "drone"]* and "basen" *["the bass"]*. The resonance-strings were, as is also the case on the new harpa type, different in number and tuning on different harpas.

This older type was altered about 100 years ago, according to Jonas Skoglund's story of Sergeant Söderstedt; this story has been corroborated by other harpa players from central Uppland, when they were asked the question. Söderstedt seems to have lived at Ullfors bruk in Tierp.

The alteration consisted of raising the number of playing strings to four and making them of different materials.

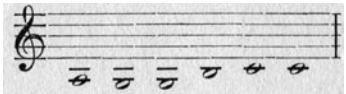
The new type is called *silverbasharpa*. Silverbasharpas are tuned in the following system: A, middle C, low A, low C.



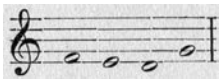
Of these strings, the first three are gut strings, the fourth of spun silver or a silk string wrapped with silver wire. The strings are named after the tone they give: "a-string" and so forth: the last is often called, instead of heavy c-string, "the bass"; the second c' is sometimes improperly called "kvinten" *["fifth", as in the musical interval]*.—To these strings, Johan Edlund had added a fifth one, farthest out, a gut string tuned to d′. This addition would seem to depend, as Jonas stated, on "some memory of the old sort of harpa.". I have not found anything like it on any other harpa.

As far as the resonance-strings goes, the number and tuning seems to be up to the spelman, each of whom has his own theory: I haven't found any two who are in agreement.

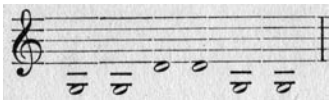
Jonas Skoglund had this tuning:
upper group: A, G, G, B, C′, C′



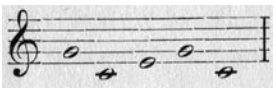
lower group: F′, E′, D′, G′



Johan Edlund had this tuning:
upper group: G, G, D′, D′, G, G

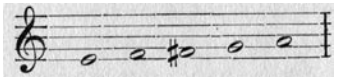


lower group: G′, C′, E′, G′, C′

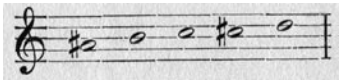


The scale. In this reporting of the scale, I am using Jonas Skoglund's harpa. Some harpas have a different number of keys, and/or a different tuning scheme for the resonance-strings.

The keys in the lower row on the newer type have their pegs sticking up between the first and second strings, so that when pushed they press on the second, or c-string. There are five of these keys and they give the tones: E′, F′, F#′, G′, A′.



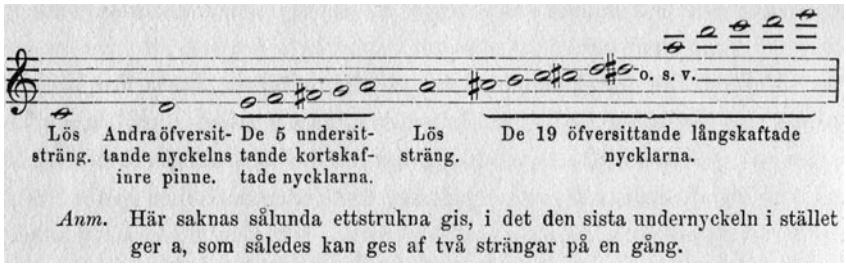
The upper, long-shafted row, press against the first, or a-string. There are nineteen of these and they give the tones: A#′, B′, C′′, C#′′, D′′



and so on, chromatically up to and including C′′′ and then on to D′′′, E′′′, F′′′, G′′′.

This scale is missing a note, D′, which ought to be there. It is obtained by pushing the second key in the upper row, the one that gives B′ on the a-string, which has a second peg farther in on the rib, which presses against the c-string, and so naturally gives the D′, or a sixth below the tone it gives on the a-string.

The scale's appearance and the appropriate key:



Key to Swedish caption above: Loose string / Second key of upper row / The 5 short-shafted keys of the lower

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row / Loose string / The 19 long-shafted keys of the upper row

Commentary: the G´ is missing, so that the last key of the lower row gives A´ instead, which therefore can be given by two strings at the same time.

The nyckelharpa as musical instrument. One might be tempted to believe, that this apparently complicated apparatus for creating a scale would make the nyckelharpa a difficult instrument to play. As far as difficulty forming the tones, however, she is anything but; on the contrary, an accomplished spelman can draw out of her a dizzying flock of sixteenth notes, even adding in ornamentations such as grace notes, mordents, and grouplets. But against this, it sometimes happens that a harpa-player makes now one tone, now another, unclear, and the melody becomes a bit choppy. This is caused, when one is nearby, by the clatter of the keys, but even more so by the constant presence of the lower tones, which sound along whether they make a harmony with the melody tone or not.

A harpa-player can seldom avoid dragging his loose bow hair across all the strings at once, and seems to think he *ought* to do this, to strengthen the effect. One can easily imagine how this might sound, when a piece in F-major has a constant background of bass-chords in C and G, or when the bass C-string is always following along to a melody in G-major! The role which similar chords once played in the history of music does nothing to lessen their unpleasantness to the ear.

The keys which are used on the nyckelharpa are C-major and G-major, sometimes F-major. Keys with more sharps or flats are seldom used, possibly because the dissonance with the bass-chords would then be *all too* strong, but probably also due to tradition. One should note, that the nyckelharpa used to commonly play together with the C-clarinet, and that therefore a large part of her repertoire has come to be played in C-major and the most closely-related keys, and the pieces have since then naturally enough inherited the keys in which they have been played from the start. A nyckelharpa player seems to be even more lost than other spelmän, if he happens to "take up" a tune in some other key than the one in which he usually plays it.

Minor melodies almost never appear on harpa. This is probably based on the fact that local *dance* tunes in minor keys are uncommon in most parts of Uppland. According to what Jonas Skoglund stated he had heard from older spelmän, "minor tunes haven't existed in Uppland for at least the past 70 years". There used to be minor melodies in polskas, but a minor-key polska was always called a dalpolska or sometimes a hälsingepolska. Many minor-key polskas, which Upplanders had learned from Hälsingland, were incorrectly called dalpolskas. A lot of Hälsingland tunes may also have come from Dalarna through the young women who used to go the the Järvsö area from Dalarna in order to card and spin wool for the Hälsinglanders, who themselves had plenty to do with their linen. "That was an old custom in Hälsingland, which continued at least up into the 1860s". Jonas had never heard of any dance tune in minor that was considered to be from Uppland.

I don't dare comment on whether this applies to all of Uppland, but feel that it holds for many areas of the province. The explanation for many areas having such a limited repertoire of dance tunes must be left at that, until such time as this subject undergoes further research.

As regards what has been said above about the scale, it should be added that the change in sound given by flageolette tones and playing in different positions—this does not happen on nyckelharpa. Each string has its previously determined pegs, and that's it. The harpa player is also missing other means of variation, although here the instrument is blameless. For example, the player never uses pizzicato, nor even legato. Even the fastest sixteenth notes are played without slurs, with an untiring scraping up and down. Slurs may happen occasionally by themselves, but seldom on purpose. Where they have once or twice been met regularly in a piece, they have been noted down in the collection. It has not be possible to discover an explanation for these exceptions.

If one is forced to admit that the nyckelharpa is dissonance-rich, tone-poor, and graceless, one must on the other hand not forget that she stands high above that instrument which currently is engaged in ruining our people's musical gifts, namely the accordion, that German import which, due to its lack of notes, is forcing the spelman to change minor to major and that instead of a simple modulation, which cannot be done on this instrument, brings forth the flattest and most painful turnings. And besides, one ought to think about the fact, that the nyckelharpa, in the communities where she has predominated, has acted as the preserver of melody-treasures, which in many cases are just as worthy as the violin repertoire out in the villages. And for this very reason, that she has most recently been, so to say, more exclusive and restricted than other instruments, both in its occurrence and therefore also its repertoire, she has most likely preserved her melodies in a more basic, unaltered form than is the case, at least in many areas, for the much more readily encountered violin. Although she has preserved the old with great piety, this has not kept her from allowing herself one and another new thing, even though this must be seen to smack of thoughtless "newness for the sake of newness" and therefore must show up as a hint of wanton contempt for that time from which she had her best memories.

The nyckelharpas age has, as far as I could discover, never been the subject for any sort of detailed research, and not even the great amount of foreign musical literature seems to accord her any more than at most a passing reference. To describe here all the work I went to, comparing and collating the information from foreign works in an attempt to narrow down the time and circumstances of her development, would make this part of my text swell out of all proportion. I must therefore content myself with a completely compressed presentation of this research.

Of the old bardic plucked instruments, the German harp and the Celtic **crwth** (*chrotta*, later called *rota*), the latter, which consisted of a four-sided *flat sound-box* with a *cross-piece* ("Zargen") and three strings, turned itself into a

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Skansen, continued ...

bowed instrument, after the bow was invented in the 700s, and later made up one of the basic types for the variations that came during the Middle Ages. Another sort of basic type came in through contact with the Arabic instrument *rebab*, in Europe called **rubebe** or **rebek**, consisting of a rectangular *wooden frame* over a *bulging bottom* and covered with parchment or animal hide and spanned by one or two strings. As a third basic type came the lira, first called **organistrum**, with a keyboard, *crank*, and *flat bottom.*

The organistrum, which in the beginning was so big that it had to be played by two people—one, who cranked the wheel, and one, who fingered the keys—grew smaller in the beginning of the 1200s and acquired the name *symphonie* (chifonie).

In Germany, all bowed instruments were gathered together fairly early, under the name *Fi(e)del*, which first appears in the Niebelungenlied, where both *Videlbogen* and *Videlaern* (fiddle player) are mentioned. But this name soon came to refer only to instruments with flat bottoms and sidewalls, while other bowed instruments were called *Giege* after the 1100s. Both names appear in the older Scandinavian literature: Islandic *fiðla*, Early Swedish *fidhla*; Islandic *gígja*, Early Swedish *giigha*. While these name's German counterparts represent known fiddle-like types of instruments, this comes to nothing as far as regarding them, as has sometimes happened, as describing the nyckelharpa, but rather they refer to fiddle-like instruments, which Scandinavians, like their mythology, have together with their German relatives.

1. Johan Edlund.
Efter fotografi.

In France, most instruments of the giga shape gradually acquired the name *vièle* or *vielle*, which from the beginning (according to Grove) was the name of a troubadour instrument. In the early 1400s (according to Reissman) or the 1500s (according to Fleischer), the name changed to symphoien, and so it remained in France, while in Germany these later became known as Bauernleier. The name vièle cleared the way for the Italian *viola*, which later became the general name for bowed instruments in every country.

Out of this name chaos in which medieval instruments had been caught comes no expression which might be understood as the name of a lira with a bow. Mendel-Reissman, b. 11, p. 84, however, contains a statement that vièle, in the 13th and 14th centuries in France, was no longer caused to sing by means of a wheel, but by means of a violin bow. Thus ought *the nyckelharpa's form been shaped*! Though the notice comes in a context that shows it not to have come from older "musical writers" but from one or other of the main supports for research offered by "the art of balladeers and their growing artistic works". But if one holds fast to the idea, that bowed instruments of the giga form were called vielle in France, and that this name later changed to chifonien (the lira), then one can easily see how a confusion or blending of the different types could have happened with the bards and painters, whose depictions, when it comes to the details of musical instrument, can hardly be seen as having been terribly trustworthy at that time.

Nor is any name given to the new type of instrument, although the article otherwise richly describes the names of other instruments. Along with this, the article in the same work which deals with the *lira itself*, the article Vielle, does not mention anything about her alteration, nor is this mentioned in any of the articles about the instruments which have taken their names either from vièle or viola. Neither in Fleischer's essay in Pauls Grundriss nor in Grove's Dictionary nor in W. J. v. Wasielewski's Geschichte der Instrumentalmusik im XVI Jahrhundert nor in any major or minor reference book, has there been any hint of a similar transfer from lira to nyckelharpa at such an early period. According to a message from Dr. Adolf Lindgren, no nyckelharpa is mentioned in Fétis' great work Histoire général de la Musique, and such an instrument has no name in the French language. It ought also be noted, that a word corresponding to Schlüsselfiedel cannot be found in Middle High German.

The priest from Basel, Sebastian Virdung, is the first in more recent years to leave an account of extant instruments. In his work Musica getutscht 1511, he divides the instruments into string instruments, wind-instruments, and percussion. String-instruments are divided into "key or tangent instruments" and so forth, in four sections. Within the section on key instruments there is listed, among others, the lira, but *no nyckelharpa*. Even though Wasielewski notes in his above named music history, p.18, that Virdung did not, from his distaste (for the vulgar or common instruments), keep from "mentioning everything that in general gives off a tone." W. further notes, that the *descriptions*, which Virdung gave of such instruments, which he did not closely describe, offer points of support for knowledge of that period's musical tools; but among these descriptions there is no sort of nyckelharpa. The lira is, on the other hand, depicted.

But within a few years, a different viewpoint emerges. In Martin Agricola's Musica Instrumentalis deudsch, Wittenberg 1529, there is a depiction of a true nyckelharpa, with the name Schlüsselfiedel. She is shaped like a giga without a bridge, but with a key-box. "So it is", notes Wasielewski, "with the nyckelharpa a question of a combining of the old giga and the farmer's lira. That it could not have had any sort of importance for the tonal arts is unmistakable from the picture given here, and requires therefore

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Skansen, continued ...

no further explanation." With this, W. has dismissed the instrument. Prætorius, Syntagma Musicum, contents itself with a bare depiction.

The new type of instrument appears, therefore, to have been created between 1511 and 1529, or, if it was created *before* 1511, at least in this year to have been so new that it had not managed to spread itself enough to be known by an author who otherwise "mentions everything that in general gives off a tone." It is really too bad, that the music historians from 1529 were too important to take any closer notice of the simple peasant instrument.

If one now goes over to the Swedish literature with a mild hope of having the result, which one believes oneself to have attained, strengthened in some way, one feels distinctly confused, when one opens Abr. Mankell's comprehensive Musikens historia and in part II, p. 204, is informed that the nyckelharpa, together with the lur, trumpet and bagpipe, was in use as a *war instrument by our forefathers as far back as heathen times!*

The surprising assertion is not supported by any proof—it sits there completely calmly by itself. There is no other place in Mankell where one can find any support.—But in thinking back, one reminds oneself that Mankell sometimes comes out with a statement, based on something more or less parenthetical or not carefully thought-out from Hülphers.

And in Hülphers' Historisk Afhandling om musik och instrumenter, Vesterås 1773, it says on pp. 92–93: "The sagas tell sometimes of blowing for Hirdstämmor, for Retreat, to take Ship, for Meetings, for Battle, et al., on the common instruments Ludra, Krumhorn, Trumpet, Bambu, Drums, Bomme [a large drum], Fiddles, Nyckelgigas and Sotharpas". This passage refers further to a note, in which it says: "It is told of such instruments in Nordlands Chrönika pp. 76, 385, 434 and Hervarasagan pp. 136, 171 et al. One gave a yell, beat on one's shield and so forth." If one now examines the aforementioned places in Nordlands Chrönika, one finds the following expression, referring to musical occurrences: p. 76: ..."blow to Hirdstämma"; p. 385 ..."blow so that all the Warriors should go up to the Village"; and p. 433 (not 434) ..."had let it be blown for the Meeting the day before". The citations given from Hervarasagan do not accord with any of the three editions of the saga which I was able to examine. I therefore read the entire saga and only found the following two places which say anything about any sort of music: Chap. 13 ... "forth rushed his folk ..., carried his war banner and war horn and blew loudly to attack"; and Chap. 19 ..."called the swain, that carried the war horn, and bade him blow together the people".

From this it should be obvious that Hülphers' use of these citations does not provide even a hint of likliness to his statement that the *nyckelharpa* was mentioned in the old sagas. He mentions the instrument only in one other place, p. 96, where it says: "Among the Peasantry, the Bagpipes, Nyckelgigas and Sot-Harpas, Long- and Knaverharpas have already been in use then." "Then" in this case means Erik XIV's time [*1533-1577*]; and the word "already" seems to be fairly unmotivated, as far as the nyckelharpa is concerned, if she was in use as early as the arrival of Christianity [*in Sweden*]!

Any other author, who left any information about the nyckelharpa's existence so long ago, is unknown to me.

One ought to be even more hesitant with regards to such places in the old literature, where the psaltery and harpa are named together, such as in Saga Sigurdar Jórsalafara (Fornm. Sögur, Copenhagen 1825–35. VII 97) when it talks of "peaceful song-færi: organ, sinfon and salterium, hörpur and gigjur". Since the old Germanic harpa got the Latin name psaltery, and the nyckelharpa was called quite simply harpa, it seems that the placing together of "salterium, hörpur" could be interpreted as "harpa and nyckelharpas". However, there is no rationale for this interpretation, when the existence of the nyckelharpa at this time cannot be otherwise proven; how much less, as it ought not be provable, that the salterium here is the same thing as the old harpa, and when there were several types of harps, besides.

In K. F. Södervall's Ordbok öfver svenska medeltidsspråket *[Dictionary of Swedish Medieval Language],* there is no expression for nyckelharpa or nyckelgiga, even though other older instruments are mentioned. If the nyckelharpa existed at the time of Christianity's coming to Sweden, she must have disappeared during the entire Late Middle Ages—because she is not known in that time's vocabulary—and later popped up again. Where she might have been hiding herself during this long period is difficult to understand or even imagine.

From Svenska Akademien's dictionary committee in Lund, I have obtained notes on the evidence which has so far been collected for the words nyckelharpa and nyckelgiga. These are all from later times, the oldest from Stiernhielm; though I was told that the section H-Ö is not yet completely excerpted, especially not in the area of the musical literature.

In any case, it may be seen by all the above that there are strong reasons to take the viewpoint, that the nyckelharpa even in Sweden dates from more recent times.

There remains the question of whether the instrument was imported from Germany to Sweden or the other way around, or if it arose by itself in both countries simultaneously. The latter would be a very singular occurrence, but it is still a possibility. It is more likely, though, that during the lively interchange with Germany, which began during the reign of Gustaf I *[1523–1560]* and reached its high-point under Gustaf II Adolf *[1611–1632]*, the instrument was brought over to us from Germany, where it already existed by 1529 (at the latest). A supposition which has been put forward, that it came in with the Walloons, would require that it had first wandered westward from Germany; but in such a case it would seem that it should have acquired

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Skansen, continued ...

a name among Belgium's French-speaking population, and in this way have found some expression in the French language. [*Not necessarily— the Walloons themselves would have spoken a French-derived dialect with Latin and German overtones. This would in no way have affected mainstream French or Belgian French.*] This argument takes much of its weight from the fact that the harpa is particularly found in Uppland, where the Walloons collected in the area around Dannemora's mines and foundries; but on the other side, she has never achieved residency in the Finspong area, where the Walloons also settled in large groups.

In the 1700s, meanwhile, the nyckelharpa seems to have had a wider range than now.

A notice in Runa *[a magazine for antiquarians and poets]* from 1842, the first volume, from Indals parish in Medelpad mentions a harpa, although it is not clear if it actually refers to a nyckelharpa. In Beskrifning öfver Provinsen Dalarna, ed. af Arosenius, III, Falun 1864, p. 29, it is much more clearly stated: "After the marriage ceremony at the end of the service, the procession returns in the same order to the music of fiddle (called *harpa*) and sometimes even bagpipes (*the sack*)..."

Fiddle, which was called harpa, was apparently a nyckelharpa, which is of course very like a fiddle. To call an ordinary fiddle harpa would scarcely have occurred to anyone, since the fiddle was sufficiently well-known under its correct name. The author seems not to have looked very closely at the instrument, or else took it for some sort of uncommon type of fiddle.

The description is from Nås parish in Västerdalarna county, and the harpa's appearance so far up would seem to indicate that she had a rather wide range. How she came to be restricted to Uppland seems impossible to clarify. (footnote, p.26: list of all the nyckelharpas in Nordiska Museét listing them individually from each province—Uppland 13, Dalarna 2, Östergötland 2, Hälsingland 1, and Norway 1)

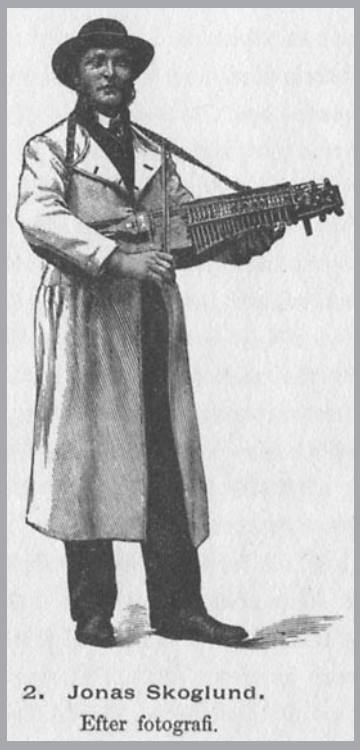
The most I can say in regards to the questions I have touched on here, is that one must be extremely careful in accepting all the notices and statements which are unsupported by other sources or, at the very least, by strong likelihood. Since I have, without being able to present any *facts*, laid out different possibilities with arguments for and against, it is in order to awaken the reader's interest and hopefully call forth some information. It could be that greater clarity in these questions will come once the Academy's dictionary committee has finally finished excerpting every word.

Finally, it could be of interest to know that although foreign authors mentioned the nyckelharpa merely with a belittling comment, here at home she has been honored by being mentioned in an academic disputation!

In a Latin dissertation, titled "Exercitioum academicum. Instrumenta musica leviter delineans...Sub præsidio Johannis Vallerii. Olavus O. Bergrot MDCCXVII," the author divides the instruments in divisions with under-divisions, and names, among others, the nyckelharpa with these words: "And though it is a custom of human nature to in most cases despise the simple and ordinary, and to give more worth to the unusual, when everything comes around so should the common nyckelharpa ("vulgarly called Nyckelgiga") not be divested of all artistic worth and rights of recognition. For if her keys are placed at the right distance from each other and the strings give no rise to dissonance, she will by many, who are otherwise used to dealing with the foremost instruments, not be seen as worthless. The instrument has, if nothing else, the greatest ability to enliven the senses of the peasantry."

To enliven the senses of the peasantry—yes, this has been the nyckelharpa's task.

At the wedding party's procession to the church and at the court's carrying out of the laden table, she has with her happy tones raised the festival atmosphere, but more than all she has—sometimes with the clarinet, sometimes with the fiddle, sometimes alone—at parties lured the young folk up to play and dance, by offering them the best she had of her old waltz and polska melody treasures. ■

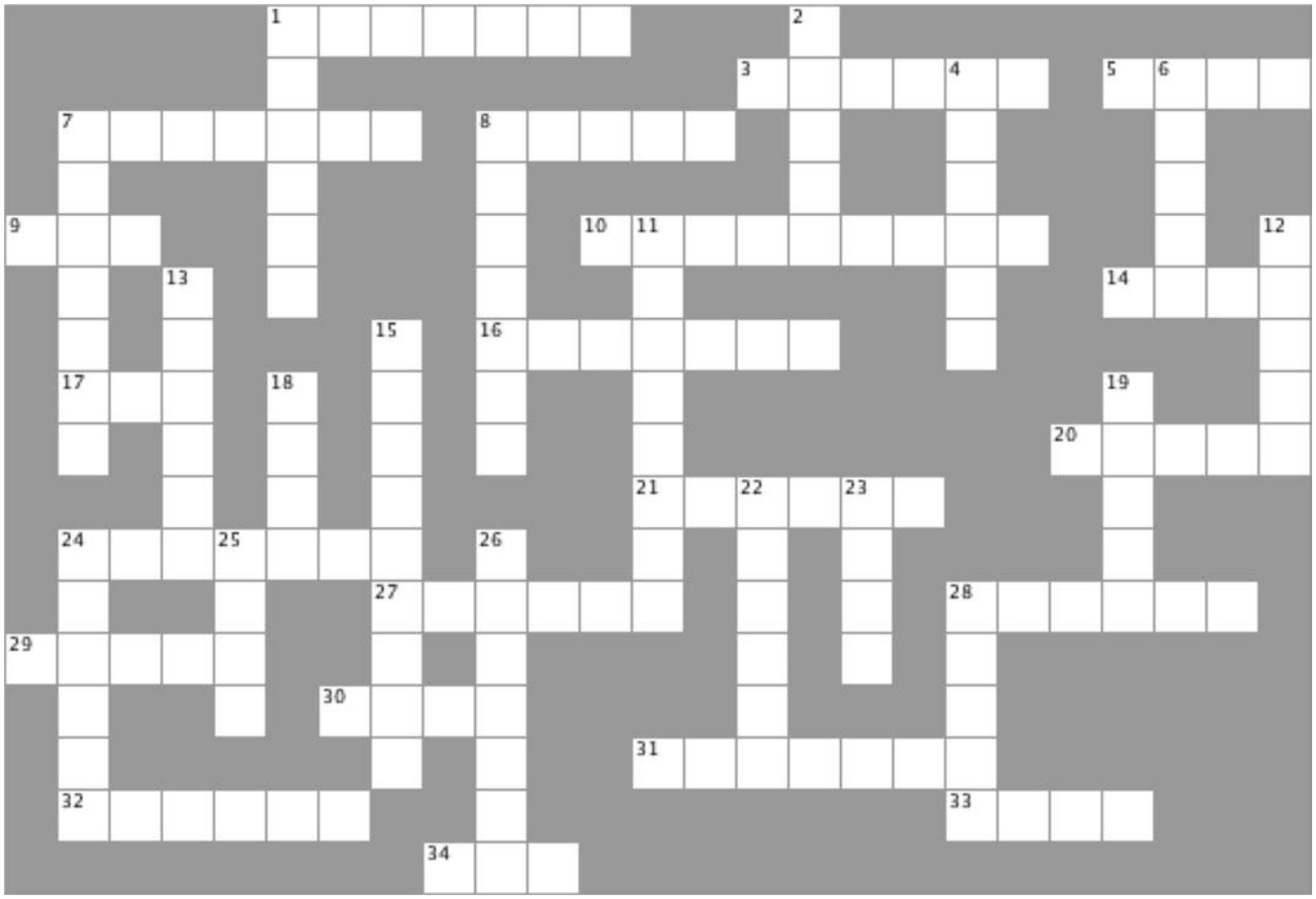


2. Jonas Skoglund.
Efter fotografi.

Sheila Morris' translation of *About the Nyckelharpa Playing at Skansen* will conclude in the next issue of *Nyckel Notes*.

Crossword Puzzle

by Chris Leydon



Across

1. What Upplanders commonly call the polka
3. Home of a well known bondpolska
5. Tension adjuster
7. Suitable varnish for wooden instruments
8. National dance of Sweden
9. A vital tool for any musician
10. Site of annual pilgrimage for some
14. Home of a wonderful institute
16. The nyckelharpa's province
17. Eric Sahlström Institute, abbr.
20. Builder and author of how-to book, first name
21. Swedish word for key
24. Folk musician
27. Wood of choice for nyckelharpas
28. First and only female VM winner, surname
29. Internationally known group
30. Where oldest dated harpa was found
31. Peg that contacts the strings
32. Early nyckelharpa players
33. Originator of first folk musician competitions which took place in Dalarna
34. Wings that fly you to Sweden

Down

1. Vast majority of traditional tunes are this variety
2. Denomination of currency depicting a nyckelharpa
4. Number of resonance strings on a nyckelharpa
6. Town where Ekebyholm is located
7. Stockholm's outdoor museum
8. Puma's surname
11. Church where historic stone portal can be found
12. Without this stuff your bow has no grab
13. Shoulder upon which all strings rest
15. Surname of first VM title holder
18. Brand name of nyckelharpa strings
19. Creature that grows the best bow hair
22. Bearded fellow honored with a postage stamp
23. Legendary harpa player Sahlström's first name
24. Gathering of musicians
25. Early researcher of all things nyckelharpa
26. Where visitors to Sweden probably first step foot on land
28. Common 3/4 time tune type

Note: *In answers that might correctly use the Swedish characters å, ä, or ö ... use plain old American a's and o's instead. Puzzle's solution is on the last page ... but don't you cheat!*

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a/o August 2008

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11	Ditte Andersson	Ditte Andersson
3	Elin & Edward: Låtar från Ost	Elin Skoglund and Edward Anderzon
3	ENE	Elin Skoglund, Edward Anderzon and Niklas Willén
7	Pärlor	Erika Lindgren & Cecilia Österholm
8	Orhangen	Erika Lindgren & Cecilia Österholm
2	Å längtat haver jag	Eva Tjörnebo
5	Klara Stjärnor	Eva Tjörnebo & Viskompaniet
2	I stöten	Falu Spelmanslag
6	Walkie Talkie	Fatang
6	Angel Archipelago	Hedin, Johan
3	Kaksi!	Hedningarna
3	Hedningarna	Hedningarna
6	Hippjokk	Hedningarna
2	Silverbasharpa Anno 1992	Ingvar & Lena Jörpeland
1	Slaktar Loberg, Janne i Kärven	Ingvar & Lena Jörpeland & Leif Suallqvist
4	Brittsommar	King Edwards Kvartett
5	Norrlåtar - sign of the raven	multiple
6	Gubbskivan	multiple
6	Välsmidet	multiple
2	Niklas Roswall	Niklas Roswall
1	Step on it!	Niklas Roswall / Ian Carr
7	Ur-Upplänskt	Nils Nordström, Ann-Christine Granfors
4	Med Pukor och Trumpeter	Norrtelje Elitkapell
5	Oskapliga låtar	Norrtelje Elitkapell
2	Byss Calle	Nyckelharpa Orchestra
6	Nyckeln till Folkmusik	Nyckelharpsfolket
2	Storsvarten	Olov Johansson
2	Ge rum vid roddartrappan	Peter Hedlund, Niklas Roswall, Bengt Nordfors & Mats Bergström
2	Låtar i Ladrike	Piteå Spelmanslag
3	Till the light of Day	Ranarim
5	Puls	Stockholm Spelmanslag
6	Det låter som sommar	Sven & Ann-Mari Nordin
6	From Castle and Cottage	Torbjorn Nasbom &Anderas Edlund
2	På hugget! En vandring i Sahlströmskogen	Trollrike spelmän
2	Vålje å vrake	Ulrika Bodén
1	Spirit	Väsen
1	Levande Väsen	Väsen
1	Vilda Väsen	Väsen
2	Grönt	Väsen
2	Whirled	Väsen
3	Trio	Väsen
2	Roslagslåtar	Wallin Family (Albin, Ceylon, & Henry)

Books

2	**Roslagslåtar: Albin, Ceylon och Henry Wallin** w/English translation	Publisher: Wallin family, 1993 - ***sale price $25!***

This is the front of a Swedish postcard from Doug Oines' collection. On the back it says "Nordiska Museet / Gillesdräkt / Hafverö socken, Uppland."

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

ANA Membership dues are $10 per year, which includes a digital 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.

www.nyckelharpa.org
Source of information about the nyckelharpa, nyckelharpa players, a history of the instrument, nyckelharpa events and more!

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

The ANA's Nyckel Notes
c/o Rita Leydon
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Rita's Notes:

Have you noticed what a rich and wonderful issue this turned out to be? I think it's the most pages we've ever had in *Nyckel Notes*, at least in recent memory. It can only mean one thing: nyckelharpa players are really turned on and cooking on all burners! Wouldn't you agree?

This is such a distracting hobby! I have an awfully hard time staying focused on my work because some little stray tune of the long ago forgotten variety sashays enticingly into my brain and ... whoops! ... there goes an hour out the window as my fingers search for the blasted tune. If I'm successful, I might actually even tune my harpa and then forget all else as I settle into enjoying the rediscovered tune. Like today. I was innocently walking home from the Lahaska post office with my mail basket on my arm. Chris rolls by in his big black truck. He's towing a car trailer with a client's Ferrari inside. He stops and I hop in. Gorgeous music is coming out of the CD player. It's Anna-Kristina Widell (one-time world champion) playing something or other. I don't notice when the truck stops. Chris says, "We're home, jump out." I don't budge. I'm inside the tune. Do you think I got any work done after that?

Any suggestions from our readers for managing this affliction? Abstinence is not an option.

Oh, and in case anyone is wondering how we are doing with finding a replacement person to wear the editor's hat that I've been wearing for a while now ... not so good. One more issue, and after that, well, it looks bleak.

—Rita Leydon
Editor