I CANNOT IMAGINE LIFE WITHOUT...MUSIC

Beatrice Hole

Think about this for a minute — How often throughout the day do you hear music? Quite a bit I would imagine. From listening to a radio, the television, a telephone, or an iPod. Even the birds sing. Music is something that is a large part of our everyday lives. The wonderful thing about music is that you don’t need to have an instrument to make it. You have your voice, your hands or your feet. This can be music in itself.

I could not imagine life without music because it is something that surrounds us every single day. It is something that you can always tune into and it will fit your mood. When you are feeling sad, you can turn on a happy song and just let go. You can start singing along, dancing, or just sit back and relax. I am sure your mood will get better.

Music is something that won’t ever leave you and will be there for the rest of our lives. Medical science tells us there is an area in our brain that is never damaged by infarction. We can be thankful for that.

As I write this I see a miracle on the TV. Country singer Randy Travis (57), a Grammy-winning baritone singer found his voice again three years after a life-threatening stroke. At the ceremony in Nashville, he was able to get up out of his wheelchair and sang “Amazing Grace” during his induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

On a sunny day in October, a few psalmodikon players gathered at the home of Beatrice Hole. We had a great time of visiting and playing all of our favorite songs. It was especially fun to play with Ruth Gibson and Betty Foslien after a long absence of attending our group sessions.

Here in Minnesota we’ve been given an extra month of summer weather. With plenty of rain and no frost, the flowers are still in bloom. As the beautiful colored leaves are slowly falling, I realize it is time to put together the Autumn Newsletter.

You may have noticed that the shipping cost of the Psalmodikon Songbook had to be raised due to increase in postage. Thanks to all for your support, the Newsletter budget still allows us to mail the Newsletter without a raise in membership dues.

I say “thank you” to all those who have been in contact with me this summer. It pleases me that there are still many folks who find the psalmodikon a fascinating instrument.

Thank you to Peter Ellertsen for contributing a report of his visit to Sweden when he attended the meeting of the psalmodikon players there in August.

I so enjoy keeping in touch with all you psalmodikon enthusiasts. And with this letter, I will wish you all an enjoyable holiday season surrounded by lots of beautiful music!

May you always have a song in your heart and music at your fingertips!
Various Instruments Similar to the Psalmodikon

— A Simple Montage

Left: Photo of an Estonian mollpill (or moldpill) player, taken several years ago at a Scandinavian Folk Festival in Washington, D.C. The mollpill instrument is modified after the Norwegian/Swedish Psalmodikon. Estonia, one of the Baltic countries, has many historic and cultural ties to Scandinavia. The mollpill was used primarily at religious services.

Right: The traditional music of Iceland is almost exclusively vocal. Often times they accompany themselves on a simple instrument called the fiðla. This instrument has two strings and it is played with the hand underneath the string in order to play the desired note.

Above (L): The erhu is a Chinese bowed string instrument sometimes referred to as a Chinese violin. It is played with a violin bow and fingers placed on the fret board much like the psalmodikon. It is very similar to an instrument originating in Egypt.

Above (R): This is the cutest little psalmodikon I have. A friend brought it back from the country of Jordan. It has one string and is played with a bow. The wood is decorated with hand carved figures and the box is covered with animal skin. —BH

Ed. Note: See rebab.

Left: This two-string instrument is a Latvian gīga. The gīga dates back to 1829 and is a descendent of the psalmodikon that was used for liturgical singing. As it was filtered down through the Latvian peasantry they added a second string for harmony. The bridge is located in the middle and it had two sheep-gut strings and played with a violin bow.

Right: These instruments are the various styles of the kantele, a Finnish folk harp, an instrument that is to Finland as the psalmodikon is to Norway and Sweden. I recently attended a concert by Diane Jarvi, singer, guitarist, and kantele player along with accordionist Dan Newton, both of the Minneapolis area. I enjoyed hearing how Diane dives deeply into her Finnish heritage with a beautiful, sometimes haunting result. It was interesting to see how Diane worked the simple little kantele into her program for the evening. The sound was entrancing as was Diane’s lovely and character-filled voice on songs about Finland, etc. —BH
‘PRETTY NERDY’ PSALMODIKONS MEET IN SWEDEN

Peter Ellertsen

First, the official business —

- In its 2016 annual meeting August 27 in Östervåla, Sweden, the Nordiska Psalmodikonförbundet (NPsF) asked me to convey its greetings and best wishes to the Nordic-American Psalmodikonförbundet and members.

- After the meeting, we laid bouquets at the graves of Johannes Dillner and Lars Paul Esbjörn, co-editors of an important early book on the psalmodikon. Esbjörn later immigrated to Illinois, where he founded the Swedish-American Augustana Lutheran Synod before returning to Östervåla in 1863.

Fifteen musicians from all parts of Sweden attended the meeting in Östervåla, a lovely town of 1,500 some 50 kilometers north of Uppsala — the only community I’ve ever seen with a statue of a chair instead of a local dignitary in its city park.

Cultural Pilgrimage

“To gather in Östervåla is a bit like coming to holy ground for us,” Göran Carlström, president of the Nordiska Psalmodikonförbundet, told a reporter for the UNT (Uppsala Nya Tidning) media group.

“One call myself ‘pretty nerdy’ when it comes to the fascination for this instrument,” Carlström added. “What motivates us in the Förbundet is primarily to preserve our cultural heritage.”

(If you’ve ever wondered how to say “pretty nerdy” in Swedish, by the way, it’s “ganska nördig”.)

In the 1830s, Dillner was the senior pastor in Östervåla, and Esbjörn was his assistant. Later he spent 15 years in America and succeeded Dillner as pastor at Östervåla for several years before his death in 1870. According to local clergyman Kiell Tofters, Östervåla was a center for furniture production. Hence the statue of the chair in the town park. So there were plenty of skilled craftspeople there who could turn out psalmodikons, and it is estimated as many as 10,000 were made in the area.

Tofters, who is writing a biography of Esbjörn, also took us through a psalmodikon museum behind the churchyard. It displays several dozen psalmodikons and related zithers in wooden cabinets. From Östervåla, Dillner’s psalmodikon spread out across Sweden and into the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland and Estonia. In the early days of Swedish immigration to America, it was an icon of old-country heritage here as well.

So the NPsF’s meeting at Östervåla was a bit of a pilgrimage. It was like a pilgrimage for the visitors from America, too, since I’m doing historical research on Esbjörn, and Debi’s ancestors were members of his Augustana Synod parish church in Illinois.

It was also a lot of fun!

Food and Music

The meeting lasted from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. We stayed at a church retreat next to a pre-Reformation chapel dedicated to St. Birgitta outside of town, went into Östervåla for pizza and stocked up on bread, cheese, cold cuts and a tube of Kalles’ caviar (a more recent Swedish icon) for breakfast. Saturday night we feasted on Thai carry-out, followed by singing and an impromptu jam session with two Swedish keyed fiddles called nyckelharpor, a couple of ukuleles, a chromatic harmonica and a psalmodikon playing arpeggiated back-up chords. It was an eye-opener for a visitor from America that the Swedes knew all the words to all the songs, and harmony parts as well.

Church Service

Sunday we performed for the service at Östervåla church. The NPsF folks played several Swedish hymns, and Debi and I were invited to join them singing a verse each of “Amazing Grace” and “Children of the Heavenly Father” in English. NPsF members led the congregation in singing both hymns in Swedish, as well as Din klara sol, Morgen mellan fjällen, Hör hur tempelsången, Vem kan segla och Bliv kvar hos mig (“Abide With Me”). Also played were instrumentals Dona nobis pacem and a Nocturne by contemporary Swedish composer Evert Taube.

Ganska nördig?

— Count me in.

Next year’s annual meeting will be in Hälsingland, in east-central Sweden, north of Stockholm, and the 2018 meeting will be in southern Småland.
Lars Roverud


Roverud var elev ved katedralskolen i Christiania, ble dimittert til examen artium 1794 og studerte deretter en tid musikk i København. Conradine Dunker hevdet i sine erindringer at faren gjorde ham arveløs fordi han ikke ville studere teologi. Det kan være en konklusjon på hvorfor Roverud valgte musikken som levevei på et tidspunkt da dette langt fra var vanlig i hans kretser. 1801 står han oppført i mann-tallet som fullmektig hos Peder Anker, og 1806 omtales han som “Litteratur og Musikerlærer”.

Roverud grunnla Norges første musikkhandel 1809 og det første notetrykkeri 1811. Han studerte i det dramatiske Selskab og av grunnleggerne av Det musikalske Lyceum i København 1810. 1815 utgav han skriften Et Blik paa Musikens Tilstand i Norge. Skriften skildret musikkens skrøelige tilstand i den hensikt å få de offentlige myndigheter til å opprette et musikkinstitutt i Christiania.


Roverud gjorde flere forsøk på å få Stortinget til å bevilge penger til musikkutdanning. 1834 ble det opprettet en “Læreanstalt for Kirke-sangere og Almueskolerere” i Asker, også kjent som Asker Seminarium. Her underviste Roverud i psalmodikonspill. Han var også lærer i kirke- og kirkemusikk ved det praktisk-teologiske seminar ved universitetet.

Da Ole Andreas Lindemans koralbok ble autorisert til bruk i kirkene 1835, fikk Roverud offentlig støtte til å reise rundt i landet og utbre nye melodiformene i landets skoler og kyrkje. Som pedagogisk helsemiddel benyttet han psalmodikon, et enstrinsegitter som kunne spilles etter et siffersystem. Instrumentet var lansert av J. W. Bruun i København 1823, men ble etter hvert tatt i bruk i alle de nordiske land. Roverud forbedret den danske modellen og utviklet en egen siffernoteskrift. Instrumentet var så enkelt i konstruksjonen at det kunne lages av enhver snekkerkyndig. Psalmodikontiet, som fantes i flere stemmeleier (sopran, alt, tenor, bass), ble i løpet av 1830-årene det viktigste sangpedagogiske hjelpemiddelet i skole, kirke og hjem.


Roverud var ingen komponist, men laget arrangementer og tilpasset andres musikk. Det gjaldt for eksempel Henrik Wergelands kantate i anledning Gutenberg-jubileet 1840.

Lars Roverud døde [26. feb.] 1850 etter å ha blitt påkjørt av en vogn.
ITEMS FOR SALE

PSALMODIKON SONGBOOK (revised edition)
written in Sifferskrift and 4-part harmony for psalmodikons
$15.00 ea. + $6.50 pstg
Send orders to: Beatrice Hole

PSALMODIKON QUARTET CD
$15.00 pp
Send orders to: Singsaas Lutheran Church
Attn: Music CDs
P. O. Box 87, Hendricks, MN 56136
http://www.countrychurchmusic.com/

PSALMODIKON COMPONENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psalmodikon Pattern</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuning Peg</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>String</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine tuner w/tailpiece</td>
<td>17.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple fret board w/frets</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitka spruce top material:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small psalmodikon</td>
<td>17.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tapered psalmodikon</td>
<td>22.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherrywood violin bow</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosin</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Send orders to: Floyd Foslien
567 High Ridge Drive, Hudson, WI 54016
www.ffoslien@sbcglobal.net

Notes from Floyd: These are usually the most difficult components for builders to obtain. I can, however, provide all of the other component parts required to make psalmodikons, if the builder is unable to make them or find them locally. You may contact me for prices.

In September, I had a pleasant phone call (8:00 AM our time) from Douglas Plumb of Canton, New York. He comes from a family of musicians and is excited in learning more of the psalmodikon through membership and conversation. —BH

Jim Kirke of Hancock, Michigan inquired about the psalmodikon, the music and history. Their Finnish Society is interested in adding the psalmodikon to their repertoire of instruments and learning how to make and play it.

After a long absence, Dr. Donald Seymore of Newberry, South Carolina renewed his membership.

Cindy Skoe of Kelliher, Minnesota requested a Songbook because she was getting together in Minnesota to play with her brother in Oregon and Sandy Aune of East Moline, Illinois. —Small world!

Anne-Karin Tveide of Birkeland, Norway sent an order for a Songbook as a birthday gift for her husband.

Enclosed is my membership renewal and an extra donation to the psalmikon organization. I enjoy the Newsletter and thank you for all your hard work. —Nancy Simonson, San Dimas, California

Enclosed is money for the Psalmodikon Songbook. Thanks so much. Now I will have to practice! —Karenalice Jones, Lake Oswego, Oregon

Kirsten Hendrickson, Lake Stevens, Washington is a new member of N/A Psalmodikonforbundet.

Greetings from Readers

The Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet Newsletter is published in the Spring, Summer, and Autumn. We are always looking for newsworthy items and photos that you want to share with other readers.

The $8.00 membership fee helps to cover the cost of printing and postage for the Newsletter, annual fee for the Psalmodikon Web Site, and annual meeting expenses.

Check the date on your mailing label which indicates if your dues are current.

Send membership dues to: Beatrice Hole
6560 Leesborough Ave
Eden Prairie, MN 55346
“Life seems to go on without effort when I am filled with music.”
— George Eliot
The Mill on the Floss (1860)