



Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet

“ A Society dedicated to the education and preservation of the Psalmodikon and Sifferskrift Music. ”



Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet | Tel: +1 952-934-4535 | E-mail: enstrengb@gmail.com | Web: www.psalmodikon.com

Notes from MUSIC-ON-A-STRING

Beatrice Hole

Greetings to all!

My thoughts are with you and your loved ones during this stressful time. I hope the best for all of you during these days of COVID-19 altering our lifestyle. The days pass along swiftly and yet it seems like an eternity since we were assembling the previous Psalmodikon Newsletter.

Thank you for your letters and tidbits of information. I appreciated the information I received from Ed Hopt and listened to the Melancholy Black Metal Band, Griff, from Västra Götland, Sweden. I do not have an interest in that type of music, but found it fascinating to actually “hear” the psalmodikon’s part in the band! It is a good indication that the psalmodikon is alive and doing well in the land of musical instruments.

During these days of stay-at-home orders, I have noticed an increase in correspondence and interest in the psalmodikon. With extra time on our hands, people are seeking more information regarding the psalmodikon and some are even seeking advice on how to build their own psalmodikon. Music is always a great substitute for idleness.

Enjoy the beautiful days of Summer!

May you always have a song in your heart and music at your fingertips!

Musical Instrument Museum

Scottsdale, Arizona

Music is the Language of the Soul

As winter was drawing to a close and I had a bit of “cabin fever”, we decided to make a trip to Arizona. One of the places on my “to do” list during our vacation, was to visit the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) located in Phoenix. I had heard so many good comments from others who had visited the museum.

Our small group of visitors had an excellent tour of the museum. I noticed that in each collection of musical instruments, from the individual countries, was a one-string instrument of some sort or other. I then decided to retrace my steps of the tour and began taking photos of every one-stringer I saw! These instruments were created from wood, tin, cardboard, or bones with an assortment of different types of string. One of the most unique was the [endingidi](#) (bowed lute) of the [Ganda people](#), made of wood, fiber, animal skin and a cow’s tail.



The one-string instrument featured in the South Africa display, dates back thousands of

years. (So that proves the psalmodikon is not unique in its design nor was it newly “invented” by the Scandinavians.) Each country had a different name for their homemade monochord instruments. Often in the displays, they were listed as a form of the lure, lute, Apache fiddle, or bowed zither.

The MIM displays a diversity of musical instruments from at least 200 countries of the world. They opened in April 2010. Since then they have collected more than 15,000 instruments and artifacts and rotate them so that there are nearly 7,000 on display at any one time on the two levels of the museum.

The Scandinavian countries are well represented, each with their own display of instruments. I recognized two different styles of the nyckelharpa in the Sweden display. One was an historic model of the nyckelharpa, and the other was a “revival” model made by the well-known [Eric Sahlström](#) of Sweden.

There was not always a description found on many displays, but I was pleased to see how the Museum had special cards next to the Psalmodikon display describing the instruments: “Found throughout Scandinavia and the Baltics. Often played to accompany choral singing in churches and schools.”

In touring this facility, I took a special interest as to how the instruments were displayed and in the descriptions of each. It gave me a proud feeling that we had done an equally informative display of our Scandinavian instrument exhibit at the Schubert Museum in St. Paul, Minnesota.

MIM creates an appreciation of the diverse cultures from around the world showing that we all innovate, adapt, and learn from each other to create music, the language of the soul.

If you are interested in learning more of the museum, I suggest you take a virtual tour of MIM online at: www.mim.org

Nordic Fest 2020

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Nordic Fest in Decorah, Iowa that was scheduled for July 24–25 has been cancelled.

Little did we think, when the invitations were sent to all demonstrators in January, that the annual gathering of the Nordic Fest would be called off. This would have been the 29th year that the psalmodikon and I have participated in the Nordic Fest and will miss visiting with all our friends and psalmodikon enthusiasts. Hopefully, everything will be back to normal in 2021.

Pythagoras

We have always known that the Scandinavian psalmodikon was not invented in Norway or Sweden but that it was an instrument modified after an ancient Greek [monochord](#) instrument used by [Pythagoras](#) (570 – c. 495 BC) to study the numerical ratios which determine the concordant intervals of the musical scale.

Pythagoras' last words upon dying were: "Study the Monochord".

Knivsland Psalmodikon Has New Home

Last autumn, I visited with the Akres, formerly from Washington, in their new home in South Dakota. I took along several of my psalmodikons and enjoyed playing with other family members. Thea enjoyed playing the psalmodikon so much, that on her 10th birthday she received a psalmodikon from Grandma (*farmor*) Akre.

This is a very special psalmodikon because it was made by the late Paul Knivsland who lived in North St. Paul, Minnesota. He built several psalmodikons during the 1990s and a unique characteristic of Knivsland's psalmodikons was a sound hole in the shape of a cross.

This psalmodikon was owned by Clare Gilbertson in California, who used to play psalmodikon with the Dalrymples of Portland, Oregon. She contacted me because of her wish to sell it.

It is nice to know that this old psalmodikon has a new home and will continue making music.



Above: Thea Åkre, holding her Knivsland psalmodikon.

Psalmodikon Display in St. Paul

Because of the coronavirus, and the closure of all museums, stores, theaters, etc., the Scandinavian instrument display is still at the [Schubert Club Museum](#).

Just before the Schubert Club Museum was forced to close, they told us that they were interested in purchasing the "hands-on" part of the psalmodikon display for future use, as the psalmodikons have been so well received! We accepted that as a nice compliment from the Schubert Club.

The Monochord in Germany

Wilfried Ulrich of Norden, Germany has been building musical instruments for over 30 years. In 2005 he made his master examination as an instrument maker in Markneukirchen. Ulrich has become an expert in the knowledge and building of the [Hummel](#), a folk instrument.

We started corresponding in 2017 when he was teaching at a Nordic-Harp Meeting in Copenhagen. It was there Ulrich heard the music of the psalmodikon for the first time.

While doing more research on the psalmodikon, Ulrich came upon several articles featuring Gottlieb Wilhelm Bade, an organist in Germany, who had built a monochord instrument. The connection of Bade's Monochord to the psalmodikon is very interesting.

Musician Bade had built pianos before he became an organist, so he had knowledge about building stringed instruments. In 1820 Gottlieb Bade from Leussow built a Monochord instrument in Meck-

lenburg to "leash" the church tones for the students. Bade's idea was sponsored by the Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg and by the administration of the Prussian King in Potsdam. In 1823 Bade wrote a music book for the Monochord using the numbering system and a revised edition in 1826. It was decided that each school should have a book and a Monochord. For a long time, the instrument and the instructions on how to play were forgotten.

In 1823, Jens Worm Bruun in Denmark had seen an article in [Hannoversche Allgemeine](#) (newspaper) where a lawyer wrote about Bade's instruments. He wrote about the most simple instrument and then about others with a "sound bottom". With this, Bruun had the idea his instruments were much better because he thought of just a plank of wood instead of a sound case!

Bruun had written only half a page about how to play the psalmodikon compared to Bade, who had a

complete book with 26 pages of how to play the Monochord, and then he added 180 melodies in Zifferschrift, which was very common in Germany at that time.

Lars Roverud in Christiania (Oslo) had seen the instrument made by Jens Bruun and had the idea that it was not good because of lack of a fret board. Bruun made a very simple box without a fret board, and Roverud decided to add a very thin fret board. With this there was not enough pressure of the bridge on the top, so he added two "rails". Because Bade had knowledge about instrument building, he made the fret board wedge-shaped from 5 to 15 mm. With this the pressure on the top by the higher bridge was good.

About 10 years later, Johan Dillner in Sweden had a similar idea. During this time period quite a lot of psalmodikons were built but over time the instruments were nearly forgotten.

Thank you to Wilfried Ulrich for sharing your research on the Monochord and the Psalmodikon. — B.H.



I now have these three books in my Psalmodikon History collection: The 1823 *Songbook for Monochord* by Gottlieb Wilhelm Bade; the 1826 book of Bade's, *Melodien für Monochord*; and the third book, *Das Monochord*, is the history of the Monochord, plus music, photos, and drawings, as compiled by [Wilfried Ulrich](#) in 2020. — B.H.



ITEMS FOR SALE

PSALMODIKON SONGBOOK (revised edition)

Written in Sifferskrift and 4-part harmony for psalmodikons. Includes 95 easy-to-play tunes of hymns, folk songs, and Christmas favorites. \$15.00 ea. + shipping

Send orders to: Beatrice Hole

CD of the PSALMODIKON QUARTET \$15.00 pp

Featuring favorite hymns and folk tunes played on the psalmodikons of the Nordic-American Psalmodikon Quartet.

Send orders to: Beatrice Hole

PSALMODIKON KITS FOR SALE

Pre-cut psalmodikon kits, accessories, and read-made psalmodikons are available at Musicmakers in Stillwater, Minnesota.

Kit instructions, assembly videos, and "How to Play the Psalmodikon" can be found at:

<https://www.harokit.com/blog/category/psalmodikon>

Kit description:

- 1 string
- 32" long x 3.5" wide x 2.25" deep sides
- Rosette included
- Solid Spruce Top
- Cherry sides and ply back
- 1.5 pounds

Price:

Psalmodikon finished	\$199.00
Psalmodikon - DIY Kit w/string	\$119.00
Violin Bow	\$55.00
Music for Psalmodikon Book	\$22.50



The only CD of recorded psalmodikon music in the USA and perhaps in the world.

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President

Beatrice Hole
Eden Prairie, Minnesota
+1 952-934-4535
enstrengb@gmail.com

Vice-President

Floyd Foslien
Hudson, Wisconsin
ffoslien@sbcglobal.net

Treasurer

Joan Saathoff
Hudson, Wisconsin
har.jo.saathoff@att.net

Editor

Kristen Åkre
Jefferson, South Dakota
+1 253-341-8430
krisakre@gmail.com

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

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

Greetings from Readers



Thank you so much. Very interesting to read. Best wishes on your musical journey.
— Mary Booth

Hello to you!
Everything is under control. Thank you, always interesting to read. I will put it on our Facebook, as usual!

— Benn Roos

That might be the best newsletter yet! A great story about the prison psalmodikons!

— Jay Nelson

Hello Beatrice,

You might already know this, but there is a heavy metal (folk metal) CD with the Psalmodikon. The group is Grift and the CD is called "Arvet". You may find it listed on YouTube: Grift-Arvet 2017.

There is also a YouTube video from the album that features the Psalmodikon. It came out in 2017.

Being a Christian, I am not excited about a heavy metal band using the Psalmodikon. I thought it is still interesting showing the influence of the Psalmodikon.

Thanks for your recent issue.

— Ed Hopf, Timonium, Maryland

Building Psalmodikons

After learning about the psalmodikon, Wilfried Ulrich wanted to build one but had some difficulties in obtaining a pattern. At first, he thought the instruments might be very simple to make and built two rectangular boxes.

Sometime later Ulrich got an illustration of an instrument of 1935, a wedge shaped trapezoidal, this was the instrument! But there were no measurements!

A month later, he found an article about a musician who was advertising about Bade's instruments in Rostock but without photos or measurements! Then Ulrich received an article about this musician because of the 80th anniversary of his death — with a picture of Bade's instrument — but without measurements. A month later Ulrich got a dissertation about Folk schools in Mecklenburg. Here was a description and the measurements for the construction of three instruments!

So, after four months of research, Ulrich built three Psalmodikons of different sizes and also a replica of the Monochord instrument played by Gottlieb Bade! The photos are on Ulrich's [web page](#). Nice Work!

- Bade had no problems to invent the instrument as "Monochord" and played in the church.
- The Scandinavians had to prove that this instrument is not from the devil — so they gave it the religious name *Psalm & Ode* (singing psalms) and they got permission to use in church.
- In Sweden violins were burnt in those times, and in some German regions it was said, "Where people sing, dance and jump — there is the devil."

I am glad those times are history. —
Wilfried Ulrich

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Beatrice Hole
6560 Leesborough Ave.
Eden Prairie, MN 55346-2823



Psalmodikon website: <http://www.psalmodikon.com/>