



## FIDDLERS' FORUM

### Swedish Fiddling Traditions and Resources

by Christine and Nelson Whyatt

*This is the first of a series of articles on folk fiddling traditions.*

Scandinavian fiddling traditions are among the world's musical treasures, though not well known outside the Nordic countries. Fortunately, they are well established in the upper Midwest, and there are resources available for those wanting to learn more about them. This article will emphasize Swedish fiddling; later articles will provide more information on other Scandinavian traditions.

While Swedish folk musicians play a wide range of instruments, the fiddle is central. As in most folk traditions, tunes tend to be tied to social activities — weddings, festivals, gatherings of all sorts, and above all, dances. Many Swedish dances, such as waltzes, schottisches, and polkas, are also popular in other parts of Europe. Others are unique to Scandinavia, the most distinctive being the polska. This is an old dance form in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, but unlike a waltz, the emphasis is on both the first and the third beats, and the rhythmic structure within a measure can be quite complex. Polskas are hard to render into standard musical notation; they must be heard to be understood; they can be challenging; and they are addictive.

Much Swedish fiddling is done in *spelmanslags* — local amateur fiddle groups that meet for practice every week or two. The music is usually played in two or three parts, sometimes with accordion or bass accompaniment. Another Swedish specialty is two fiddlers facing each other eye to eye, spinning out tight harmonies while dipping and swaying in a half-dance. Catch one of these performances if you can. Sweden also has many highly skilled folk musicians who tour internationally and regularly record CDs. Probably the best known of these locally is Väsen, which has performed in the Twin Cities on several occasions. Many of these new groups are “roots” performers, in the sense that their music is rooted in traditional tunes and forms but uses contemporary styling and freely experiments with new sounds and arrangements.

Minnesota, and especially the Twin Cities metro area, is one of the best places in the United States to encounter Swedish folk music. There are many good fiddlers in the area, and several performance groups. Listed below are some resources to get you started.

#### Fiddle collections with CDs:

For instructional purposes, a fiddle collection should include a tape or CD. Students will never play the pieces in the style unless they listen repeatedly to the recordings. Unfortunately, there are relatively few Swedish fiddle collections with CDs or tapes available. Two excellent books, however, can be ordered at the American Swedish Institute bookstore in Minneapolis or from Honeysuckle Music in St. Paul. They are:

*Låtbanken* — 65 graded Swedish tunes from different regions of the country compiled by Pelle Gustafsson, Jonas Holmen, Gunnel Johansson and Margaretha Mattsson. Nice format,

attractive illustrations, and a variety of tunes including polskas, wedding marches, waltzes and schottisches. Separate duet book (light blue) is available and highly recommended; most Swedish tunes are played with a second part, which is very important to the style. CD available.

*Andra Låtbanken* — 54 more advanced Swedish fiddle tunes compiled by Margaretha Mattson, a fiddler in Orsa, Sweden, who taught classes in Minneapolis and St. Paul in 2003. An excellent collection, similar to *Låtbanken*, but the tape that originally accompanied this volume is no longer available from the publisher. We have permission to copy the tape, and it will be available through Honeysuckle Music along with the music book and duet part. Be sure to request the companion duet book (pink).

#### Other collections:

*Scandinavian Old Time Music Book*, volumes I and II, by Leroy Larson. American immigrant tunes from Norway and Sweden. These tunes were popular in the early 1900s and many have been recorded by the Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble. There is no recording with this series.

*Favorite Swedish Fiddle Tunes* by Tom Gilland. A collection of tunes including wedding marches (brudsmarsch), walking tunes (gånglats), schottisches and waltzes. Some pieces have second parts added. No recording available. Beginning to intermediate difficulty. Available at the Homestead Pickin' Parlor.

#### Music and book stores to purchase music and recordings:

**The Homestead Pickin' Parlor**, 6625 Penn Avenue S., Minneapolis, 612-861-3308. Best source of fiddle collections and CDs in the area. Limited in Scandinavian music.

**Ingebretsens**, 1601 E. Lake St., Minneapolis, 612-729-9333. Many good recordings of Scandinavian folk music.

**Honeysuckle Music**, 1604 Portland Ave., St. Paul, 651-644-8545. Talk to Jean Olson about ordering Scandinavian music. <http://www.honeysucklemusic.com/>

**The American Swedish Institute Bookstore**, 2600 Park Avenue, Minneapolis, 612-871-0593. Good selection of Scandinavian music on CDs. Limited selection of printed music.

**Norsk, Ltd.** imports a variety of Scandinavian music materials. <http://ares.csd.net/~sodaling>

**Mel Bay publications** include scores of fiddle books and tutorials, though not particularly Scandinavian oriented. [www.melbay.com](http://www.melbay.com).

#### Opportunities to hear, dance to, and play Scandinavian music:

**Tapestry Folkdance Center**, 3748 Minnehaha Avenue, Minneapolis, 612-722-2914. First Friday Scandinavian Dance.

This dance takes place on the first Friday of every month. Various folk groups provide the music including the Friday Fiddle Club, a group of children from the Twin Cities.

**Good Templar Lodge**, 2922 Cedar Avenue S., Minneapolis, 612-722-8535. Sunday evening Scandinavian dances on the first and third Sundays of the month. Various local groups provide live music including nyckelharpa and hardanger fiddle players. For more information contact Char Bostrom at 651-778-9175.

**The American Swedish Institute (ASI)**, 2600 Park Avenue, S., Minneapolis, 651-871-0593:

**The ASI Spelmanslag**, a group of 40–50 fiddlers of all ages who play traditional Swedish music together weekly at the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis. The group is open to anyone who enjoys playing Swedish music.

**The ASI Lilla Spelmanslag**, a Swedish fiddle group open to children of all ages. Meets every Thursday at the American Swedish Institute. For more information about the ASI Spelmanslag or the Lilla Spelmanslag contact Paul Dahlin, 612-822-7406.

**The Twin Cities Nyckelharpa Association**, a local group playing the Swedish nyckelharpa (keyed fiddle). Contact Wes Peterson, 612-721-2595.

**The Cedar Cultural Center**, 416 Cedar Avenue S., Minneapolis, 612-338-2674. The Cedar features various folk groups throughout the year, and provides an opportunity to hear some of the leading artists from many folk traditions. It publishes a monthly newsletter with a calendar of upcoming events. Often sponsors a Nordic Roots Festival in the fall.

### Regional festivals and workshops:

Most of the festivals are held outdoors (weather permitting) and feature ethnic food, performing and dance groups, and craftsmen.

**Gammelgården Museum, Scandia, MN** — Annual summer festivals including the Midsummer Festival in June. Contact Lynne Blomstrand Moratzka, 651-433-3430.

**American Swedish Institute Midsummer Festival** — Annual event in mid-June at the American Swedish Institute.

**The ASI Midwinter Folk Music Festival** — Annual event held the last week-end in February. Fiddle workshops for children and adults taught by guest fiddlers from Sweden.

**The July Fiddle Camp** — Annual 2-3 day fiddle camp for children with daily classes in fiddling, dance and crafts. Held at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in St. Paul. Contact Christine Whyatt, 612-728-1966. (There will be no July Fiddle Camp in 2005; check for its return in 2006.)

**Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival, Moorhead, MN** — Annual event with music, dancing, crafts, and food of Scandinavia, held in late June at the Moorhead Hjemkomst Center.

Contact 218-299-452, <http://www.scandinavianhjemkomstfestival.org>

**Nisswa Stämman** — Annual Scandinavian music festival held in June in Nisswa, MN. An outstanding event featuring many local performers and visiting musicians from Scandinavia. Contact Paul Wilson, [www.brainerd.net/~pwilson](http://www.brainerd.net/~pwilson)

### Radio programs:

KFAI radio — Scandinavian Cultural Hour with Dick Rees. Wednesday evenings 9:30-10:30.

### Recordings:

Here are a few good recordings of Swedish folk music. There are many many others available.

### Local artists:

**The American Swedish Institute Spelmanslag** has two good CDs out. *Äkta Spelmän* is another ASI CD featuring Paul Dahlin and a small group within the Spelmanslag. **The Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble** featuring Leroy Larson and other local folk musicians has recorded several CDs of American immigrant songs. Paul Wilson, of Brainerd, leads two local groups — *Skålmusik* and *Skål Klubben* — which have recorded several CDs of varied Scandinavian music (see [www.brainerd.net/~pwilson](http://www.brainerd.net/~pwilson)).

### Swedish groups:

*Årsringar* — Excellent 2-CD set that features different artists and groups from the folk revival in Sweden 1970–1990. May be hard to get, but possibly available via the Web.

Several Swedish *spelmanslags* have recorded CDs. They are fun to listen to and feature a variety of dance tunes, often from the region they represent. The Stockholm Spelmanslag has an excellent CD called *Puls*. The Falu Spelmanslag also has a great CD, called *i stöten*. The Rättvik and Orsa spelmanslags have both put out 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary CDs entitled, respectively, *Rättviks Spelmanslag 50 år* and *Orsa Spelmanslag 50 år*. A smaller group from Orsa has a wonderful CD called *Orsa Spelmän*.

For solo and two part fiddling, traditional fiddlers Kalle Almlöf and Jonny Soling have a CD called *Hopselt*. There are many similar recordings from several Swedish music companies. And the British company ARC Music has a nice disk called *Folk Music from Sweden – Kurbits* featuring many different fiddlers.

There are quite a few excellent Swedish instrumental groups that have recorded several CDs each. Typically their earliest recordings are the most traditional. Some recommended groups: **Väsen; Groupa; Åkerbypojkarna; Hulling; Frifot**. Local music company NorthSide ([www.noside.com](http://www.noside.com)) has put out three very inexpensive “sampler” disks of contemporary Nordic folk groups, *Nordic Roots* 1, 2, and 3. The first and third are the best.

### Information on Upcoming Events:

*Scandinavian Dance and Music Events* — an online newsletter produced by Mary Seim featuring information about upcoming events. It comes out about once a month with updates every now and then. To subscribe go to [www.catpin.com/mary](http://www.catpin.com/mary).

*Nelson Whyatt plays nyckelharpa and accordion with the Twin Cities Nyckelharpalag. Christine Whyatt teaches violin and fiddle in the Twin Cities. She leads the Friday Fiddle Club, a group of young fiddlers who play Scandinavian music in costume for special occasions. Christine and Nelson direct the July Fiddle Camp, which integrates dance and visual arts with fiddling. †*