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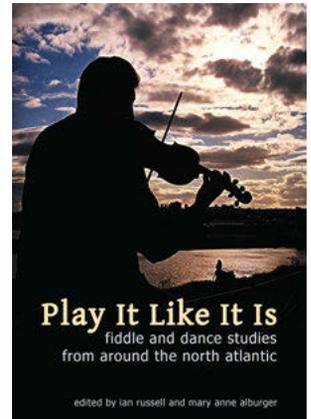
Play It Like It Is

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About the author:

Karin Eriksson, PhD, is at present connected to the Department of Culture, Aesthetics and Media at Gothenburg University, Sweden. Her research in ethnomusicology led to her thesis on the Fiddlers' Association of Halland and the Swedish fiddlers' movement. She has also published papers on music festivals, music journalism, and music and dance research (together with Mats Nilsson). In September 2006, she will join an interdisciplinary project, 'Intermediality and the Medieval Ballads' at Växjö University.

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The growth of the organized 'Fiddlers' Movement' in Halland, Sweden, during the twentieth century¹

KARIN ERIKSSON

Swedish folk music and dance altered greatly during the first decades of the twentieth century. The innovations created new venues for such activities, in parallel with a conscious redefinition of the music, and alterations to performance practice. These changes occurred as part of the development of the Fiddlers' Movement, *spelmansrörelsen*, an umbrella-like term encompassing the organisation of Swedish fiddlers and folk dancers.

The ideological side encompasses what the Swedish ethnomusicologist Gunnar Ternhag describes as an almost paradoxical connection between the need to keep and save the old heritage of pre-industrial music, and the need to provide musicologists and national composers with new material.² His development of Swedish folk music has affected both the practice of folk music, and the research into it. The music is used in new ways, for example, as concert music, rather than as music for dancing; and as music for amateurs to play, rather than 'professionals'.

The 'county' music has also developed into a generic – rather than a general – term, and is seen as comparable to classical music, or to any other mainstream musical genre. This is probably the most striking change, and an accurate description of how the music is now perceived.

This introduction to the Fiddlers' Movement can only touch on the diverse activities and ideologies centred around, and developed from, the movement. The twentieth century changes were multi-faceted, beginning with the introduction of fiddlers' competitions and ending with a musical milieu that includes amateurs as well as professionals; hardcore traditionalists and experimentalists; old-fashioned fiddlers and up-to-date saxophonists and drummers; fiddlers' meetings and folk music festivals.

Amongst this diversity, what has happened to the music? The answer to this question is central to my research. I focused my investigation on one of the organisations that represents a more traditional view: Hallands *spelmansförbund*, the Halland Fiddlers' Association. I then narrowed my research to investigating two central concepts. The first being the concept of folk music; the second being the concept of regional areas, in this case, the county of Halland.

My research considered the ways in which both are perceived, and looked at any guidelines for the practice of the required skills, for example, what repertoire should be promoted, and what instruments would be regarded as genuine, as folk instruments. These are useful tools for investigating the effect the movement has had on the music, and, perhaps more precisely, on how the guidelines have functioned in the development of repertoire and performance practice in the movement as a whole and in the Association in particular.

Since this situation might seem unusual to those unfamiliar with the role of the county as perceived by those involved with Swedish folk arts, some background information might be helpful. Historically, the Swedish government has been structured around counties, which are the historical regions used as legal administrative units during the Middle Ages.³ 'Instead of trying', as Benedict Andersson wrote, 'to create imagined communities with the nation as the model', Swedish folklore research centred on the county from as early as the 1880s.⁴

Since then, the county has also been an integral part of the educational system, with each county being thought of as homogeneous. This view, common to the Fiddlers' Movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, was inherited by the Fiddlers' Associations, begun in the early 1930s. The county, as a research area, was also an integral part of folklore study, and the centrality of the county is used both for organising archives, and as part of the presentation of the Swedish nation at international exhibitions. 'County', as a region, is also used by different organisations, many connected to folk traditions (folk music, folk dance, and so on), and thus reinforces the county as a significant entity, ensuring each area is perceived as unique.

The concept of folk music, as used by the individuals in the Halland Fiddlers' Association, is closely connected to the view of folk music provided by researchers, and also to the concept of the county as an important factor in forming, and defining, the specific folk music of the area.

Folk music from Halland: a short introduction

Halland is one of the smallest counties in Sweden, situated on the Swedish west coast, south of Gothenburg. This rather long and narrow region is divided into a coastal section with sandy beaches, and a forested area along the border of the interior lands of southern Sweden.

There are, in fact, few useful descriptions of Halland folk music. One reason is that it is actually difficult, if not impossible, to talk about one particular style of Halland folk music. Another explanation might be that researchers and collectors of folk music in Sweden in the early twentieth century undertook their most important work in other areas, searching for folk tunes often older than most of the tunes found in Halland. Nevertheless, there have been a few attempts to describe the music, as, for example, in the work of Gunnar Ermedahl who, in 1973, used theories of cultural change, to try to describe the Halland fiddlers' traditions,⁵ while Filip Pärson, thirty years earlier, wrote that:

Regarding the fiddlers from Halland, they were, as far as it is known, well-behaved men, dedicated to their art, but nonetheless – or perhaps because of that, by way of living honourable men.⁶

The connections and similarities with neighbouring counties are clear, and comparing Halland folk music with that from surrounding areas is very fruitful. For example, the music from the northern parts of Halland resembles that of Västergötland, and to some extent that of the music of Bohuslän, north of Gothenburg. In contrast, southern Halland music shares similarities with that of Småland and Skåne; the first is east, the latter is south of Halland. Halland's traditional folk instrument is first and foremost the fiddle, but the melodeon and the clarinet are also found.

The traditional dance the *polska* became central to collectors working at the beginning of the last century since it was, and partly still is, regarded as the Swedish National Dance. The *polska* is a folk dance in triple time, and in Halland there are two major types: even *polskas* and uneven *polskas*. The first have even accents on all three beats, while the uneven *polskas* have accents on the first and third beats. The even *polskas* are more common in the southern parts of Halland, although they are found, to a lesser degree, in the north as well. The uneven *polskas* are found all over the county, with a somewhat larger concentration in the north, where different names are given to different types of uneven *polskas*, as, for example, the *norsker*.



Figure 1 An even *polska* from Halland called 'Gammel-polska' ('The Old Polska') after Otto Johansson, Våxtorp



Figure 2 An uneven *polska* from Halland called 'Honungspolskan' ('The Honey Polska') after Albert Drakenberg, Lindome

Similar divisions are also found in the distribution of the *engelska* and *kadrilj*, the former being more common in the north of Halland, the latter in the south. In reality, it is hard to find any clear musical divisions between southern and northern Halland, perhaps in part because the music is similar in tonality, as most of the tunes are in major keys. The most common type of tune is the waltz, although marches, polkas, mazurkas, and *schottis* are also found.

The Halland Fiddlers' Association

The Halland Fiddlers' Association is one of the oldest in Sweden, having celebrated its seventieth anniversary in 2001. It was created not only by fiddlers, but by scholars, teachers, and others interested in the history and traditions of their county. The Association initially functioned more as a gathering place for playing together rather than as an organisation for the local fiddlers. But, during the 1940s and 1950s a new way of performing folk music began, the *spelmanslaget*, the 'fiddlers' club', and the Association gradually changed into an umbrella-organisation for these groups.

According to minutes from a meeting in 1931, the aim of starting the Halland Fiddlers' Association was 'to support each other in the work to create and maintain the interest for old folk music from Halland.'⁷ The idea of promoting Halland folk music has been the main purpose from 1931 to the present. Tunes from Halland have been published and recorded on LPs, fiddlers' meetings (*spelmansstämmor*) organized, public concerts held, and so on, as well as, naturally, teaching the fiddlers in Halland to play tunes from Halland. This all rests on the idea that Halland folk music is distinctive and unique. In fact, using the concept of Halland, as a county, as the reason for choosing particular tunes is both exclusive and inclusive: exclusive in that it regulates what a fiddler from Halland should play (and not play), but also inclusive, in a more positive sense, since there are opportunities for fiddlers to choose what they play.

The determination of the leading figures in the Association to promote Halland folk music resulted in a common, mainstream, repertoire of specific tunes. This was probably not originally foreseen or expected, but may have been the result of lack of time, money, and opportunities. However, it has resulted in a different, and more homogeneous, picture of Halland folk music than that found in sources such as fiddlers' notebooks, field recordings, and printed music.

In the archive material connected with the Association, it is often possible to see that they attempted to make the fiddlers play 'tunes from the areas south of Gothenburg', attempting to control the fiddlers, and ensure that Halland fiddlers played music from Halland. The fact that the Association made these kinds of statements, or diktats, clearly indicates that what the fiddlers actually played was not always in accordance with the aims of the Association. This leads to the question of whether the message that the Association wanted to deliver, reached its members. Significant research material from the early 1970s actually shows that the repertoire in the fiddlers' clubs at this time had a common basic repertoire containing tunes from Halland, tunes from the nearest neighbouring counties, and tunes from the rest of Sweden as well.

Each separate fiddlers' club also had a more specific repertoire, mostly dependent on individual players in the group. Being a member of a Halland Fiddlers' Club and part of the folk music scene in Halland myself, since the 1980s, my own experience shows that this is still very much the case. As a fiddler you need to know tunes in common, so that you are able to play with 'strangers', but you also are able to build up your own repertoire. This is how the fiddlers' clubs work as well, having both a common and a more specific repertoire.

These common tunes, known and played by everybody, are used during the fiddlers' meetings, often as a part of a stage programme. The Swedish word for these tunes – *allspelslåtar*, common tunes – indicates that they are to be played by everybody. The pre-fix all- is also used in other contexts, indicating something that everybody is able to do, for example, *allsång*, a song for everyone. The tradition of playing these tunes at the fiddlers' meetings is one of the new elements that are a part of the Fiddlers' Movement, and was introduced at fiddlers' competitions during the first decades of twentieth century.⁸

When the Association wanted to increase the number of Halland tunes in the local fiddlers' repertoires, the tunes were introduced as common tunes. For example, the material from the 1970s indicates that the repertoire of club players declined, becoming much more limited, and changed from a more general Swedish repertoire to a more specifically Halland one. Many of these changes were due to a single driving force in the clubs – the individuals in the Association who were usually the most enthusiastic. One single individual in a group can more or less shape the group's directions regarding both what to play, and how to play it.

'Bruastregen' – a common tune from Halland

I will take a wedding-march from Halland called '*Bruastregen*', as an example of a common tune that has been used in several different ways. '*Bruastregen*' can easily be regarded as one of the most important common tunes from Halland, used today both at fiddlers' meetings and at weddings, and played by almost every fiddler in Halland. It is in two parts, usually played in G major, and can be regarded as a typical Swedish wedding-march.



Figure 3 '*Bruastregen*' as played by August Ysenius on Swedish Radio, 1941

One of the earliest recordings of this tune is by a fiddler and collector named August Ysenius (1877-1959), who is best known for his large collection of folk tunes and songs, mainly from southern Halland. Ysenius recorded 'Bruastregen' for a radio program in 1941, and his version differs greatly from how it is usually played today, both in the melody and in his military, march-like, playing (see Figure 3).⁹

Another collector in Halland, Filip Pärson (1873-1943), also wrote down a version of this tune from Knäred in the southern parts of Halland, but in a slightly different way, and this version is the one most commonly heard in Halland, the version 'that everybody plays'. Pärson was a contemporary of Ysenius, and both participated in the early activities of the Association, and often gave popular lectures about folk music and folk traditions. Why Pärson's version became the standard version can partly be explained by his high standing as a fiddler and collector in the Association, through which he had the opportunity to circulate his transcriptions to all the Association's fiddlers. His version is also published in both of the Halland folk music booklets (edited by the Association), as well as in other printed works.

The image shows a musical score for the tune 'Bruastregen'. It is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The score consists of 14 measures, divided into four systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The first system (measures 1-4) begins with a triplet of eighth notes in both hands. The second system (measures 5-8) includes a first ending (marked '1.') and a second ending (marked '2.'). The third system (measures 9-12) features a quintuplet of eighth notes in the bass line. The fourth system (measures 13-14) concludes with another first and second ending. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and repeat signs.

Figure 4 'Bruastregen', as transcribed by Filip Pärson and arranged by John Helge Johansson

The Association recorded this version in 1976, performed by the fiddlers' club *Sibbarps spelmanslag* (see Figure 4).¹⁰ The tempo differs significantly from that of Ysenius's performance, 76 beats per minute (bpm) compared with Ysenius's 104 bpm, and they also interpreted the tune in a more polished way than Ysenius's much rougher playing. Today, Pärsons' transcription, arranged by Johansson, is the usual version heard in the fiddlers' clubs, and the same is true of several other tunes that he transcribed, which were published by the Association.

The tune has also changed more recently, in that it has now appeared in a new and different context. In 1999, the fiddler Hans Kennemark (together with the Swedish troubadour Alf Hambe) composed a folk music Mass for choir, fiddlers, double bass, and other instruments.¹¹ The Mass contains both newly-composed music, and traditional tunes from the Swedish west coast, particularly from Halland, one of which was '*Bruastregen*'. In the Mass, the music was used as the setting for a liturgical text written by Hambe, and the music is the same as the version transcribed by Filip Pärson, although, in fact, it is presented as 'a march after Pärson'. The lyrics are 'Blessed is he who came in the name of the Lord', used in the part of the mass that recounts the story of the prodigal son, and the tempo is now even slower (54 bpm). In this semi-classical arrangement, in a liturgical context, the tune becomes material for new music, even if the basic form and melody are kept almost unchanged.



Figure 5 An excerpt from the Mass, with part of the '*Bruastregen*' melody. The text reads 'Blessed is he who came in the name of the Lord'.

What can we gain from this brief comparison of three versions of the same tune, whose original role was, and partly still is, as a march, played for weddings. One is that a single tune, or more correctly, different versions of the same tune, can be used in quite different ways, in this case:

- 1 As a part of a radio programme
- 2 As part of a recording that presents – and represents – Halland folk music
- 3 As material for a new composition used in a new context: the Lutheran church

The same musical material, then, depending on the context and its use in that context, can stand for, and signal, entirely disparate musical roles, and functions. These three examples also represent three different phases in twentieth-century Swedish folk music history:

- 1 The use of folk music in new media, such as the radio, and recordings
- 2 The development of the fiddlers' clubs and their repertoire
- 3 The use of folk music by professional folk musicians in new venues such as the church

'Bruastregen' is not only a common Halland tune with an important part in the repertoire, promoted by the Association. It is also part of the larger and far-reaching developments that were taking place in Swedish folk music during the last century. This expansion includes an increasing number of professional folk musicians; new ensembles, using the music in both inventive and more traditional ways, and the innovations of borrowing musical ideas from other genres such as, jazz, rock, and world music. These three examples illustrate, on a local level, some of the changes that have taken place in, and affected, Swedish folk music in general, during the last sixty years. The one-time wedding march, 'Bruastregen', is a useful model for how the local and the regional reflect and affect each other, in a continuous dialogue, in exchanging ideas, ideologies, and musical influences.

Notes

- ¹ Thanks to Mats D. Hermansson for reading and commenting on the text.
- ² Gunnar Ternhag, 'Om sambandet mellan folkmusikinsamling och tonsättning av folkmusikbaserade verk – med utgångspunkt i samarbetet mellan Karl Tirén och Wilhelm Peterson-Berger', *Svensk tidskrift för musikforskning*, 82 (Gothenburg: Svenska samfundet för musikforskning, 2000), 57-78 (pp. 60-61).
- ³ Mats Rehnberg, 'Folkloristiska inslag i olika tidevarvs idéströmningar kring det egna landet', in *Folklore och nationsbyggande i Norden*, ed. Lauri Honko (Åbo/Turku: Nordiska institutet för folklivsforskning, 1980), pp. 17-32 (p. 30). See also Peter Aronsson, *Regionernas roll i Sveriges historia* (Stockholm: Fritze, 1995).
- ⁴ Benedict Andersson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen: Reflexioner kring nationalismens ursprung och spridning*, 2nd revd edn (Gothenburg: Daidalos, 1993).
- ⁵ Gunnar Ermedahl, 'Studier i halländska spelmanstraditioner', *Varbergs museum Årsbok 1981* (Varberg: Stiftelsen Hallands Länsmuseum, 1981), pp. 29-83.
- ⁶ Filip Pärson, 'Två gamla melodier; Spelmansminnen', *Vår bygd 1943; Hallands hembygdsförbunds årsskrift* (Kungsbacka: Nordhallands hembygdsförening, 1943), pp. 40-46 (p. 40). My translation; original text: 'Vad särskilt de halländska spelmännen beträffar voro dessa, så vitt känt är, skötsamma män, hängivna sin konst men icke desto minder – eller kanske just därför, i levnadssätt och vandel hedersmän.'
- ⁷ My translation; original text: 'att stödja varandra i arbetet för väckandet och vidmakthållandet av intresset för gammal halländsk folkmusik.'
- ⁸ Dan Lundberg and Gunnar Ternhag, *Folkmusik i Sverige* (Hedemora: Gidlund, 1996), p. 80.
- ⁹ August Ysenius, *En gammeldags bondjul i Halland*, Swedish Radio Broadcast, 1941.
- ¹⁰ *Folkmusik från Halland*, LP, HSF 761010.
- ¹¹ *I välsignan och fröjd; En folkmusikmässa av Alf Hambe och Hans Kennemark*, CD, ARCD 1008.