

NORDIC-AMERICAN PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET

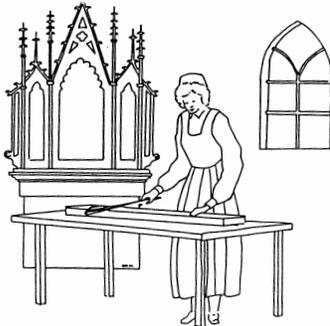
“A Society dedicated to the education and preservation of the Psalmodikon and Sifferskrift Music”

SPRING 2009

Volume 12, Issue 1

NOTES FROM MUSIC-ON-A-STRING

By Beatrice Hole



It has been a long quiet winter for the psalmodikon and me. Now we are hearing the spring sounds of the song birds and know that warmer weather is just around the corner!

I want to thank all of you for your support and keeping your membership dues current. I look forward to hearing from each of you and especially enjoy reading the little personal notes you send along with the monies. Unfortunately, I cannot answer each one personally and so I send along my greetings to each of you through this newsletter.

Rob Graber has volunteered to be our website manager and I am so pleased to have found someone that can do this for us

The sales of the psalmodikon CD are going well. We have received many favorable comments. Ruth G. of White Bear Lake, MN enjoyed the recording and said, “The psalmodikons have never sounded better”. She decided to order ten CD’s and give them away as Christmas gifts! The CD’s are also being sold at Ingebretsen’s Gift Shop in Minneapolis, Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, IA and Folk Music Center in Sigdal Norway.

I’m excited about the upcoming Psalmodikon building class at the Vesterheim Museum. Many folks have inquired about building their own psalmodikon and this will be a perfect time to do so.

My friend in Norway saw an interesting article in a Swedish publication about Rodney Sjøberg making gut strings. Tusen Takk to Alf for the translation of the article to share with our readers.

Often times I hear from folks who are just learning to play the psalmodikon. They request a few songs with only the melody line for easier reading. The song I have chosen for this issue is one of them.

It is time to start planning our summer get-together.

Please send me your suggestions as to where and when we shall have our annual meeting of 2009.

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

~~~~~

## **MAKE YOUR OWN PSALMODIKON**

Floyd Foslien will be leading a psalmodikon making class at the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, IA. Students in this class will glue pre-cut wooden pieces together, then file and sand them smooth. The psalmodikon will be able to be played by the end of the course and instructions in playing will be given. Musical materials for the psalmodikon will be available as a kit for purchase. Experience in woodworking is useful but not necessary.

June 5-7 \$190 members / \$210 non-members

Contact: Vesterheim Museum, 523 W. Water St.,  
Decorah, IA 52101. 563-382-9681

The Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet Newsletter is published in the Spring, Summer and Fall. We are always looking for news worthy 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. 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

## NEW WEBSITE MANAGER

Rob Graber of Hudson, WI has volunteered to be the Manager of the Psalmodikon website. We have been working together to bring the site up to date plus adding some extra features and information. Statistics show that we have many hits on our website each month and it is so important that we keep it interesting and informative to all visitors. Rob is doing a great job on this. I suggest you visit the web site and we will welcome your suggestions as to how we can make the web site look even better!

[www.psalmodikon.com](http://www.psalmodikon.com)  
[www.psalmodikon.org](http://www.psalmodikon.org)

## LETTERS FROM MEMBERS

Dear Beatrice and Floyd,

We hope you remember the Swedish fiddlers from Virestad Folkdanslag, who met you at the Vesterheim Museum in the summer of 2007.

We have continued to build and play psalmodikon and in our neighborhood we now have approximately 25 new psalmodikons. Rodney Sjøberg has had two weekend courses in building and playing.

We have formed a group of 8 members, called PSALMODIKONISTERNA, who practice once a month and most of the time perform at churches.

Vidar and Ingegerd Lundbeck, Hallaryd Sweden

Dear Beatrice,  
Tusen Takk for the Psalmodikon CD. I have been listening to the CD again and again. It's moving! There were some tears on my cheek when listening to "Softly and Tenderly" and "Hils fra Meg der Hjemme"! I know every melody on the CD, except for the first one, "Breathe on Me". Most of them are no longer on the agenda in the everyday life or in an ordinary service or Christian meeting, but I know them very well from my childhood. And you can still find most of them in Norwegian songbooks. At least six or seven of the songs have I been singing as choir song. Can you believe I was touched?

John L. Orkanger Norway

## Letters continued

Dear Beatrice,  
The psalmodikon CD is wonderful! I started playing it in the car on the way home from the meeting and I was singing along with every song as I drove. The CD was still playing when I parked in my garage so I just sat there in the car listening to the very end. Well done! Herb N. Lake Elmo, MN

## PSALMODIKON STUDY IN NORWAY

I received a letter from Erich Knapp, who was attending the University of Oslo Norway (July 2008) for six weeks. He is working on his graduate study independent research.

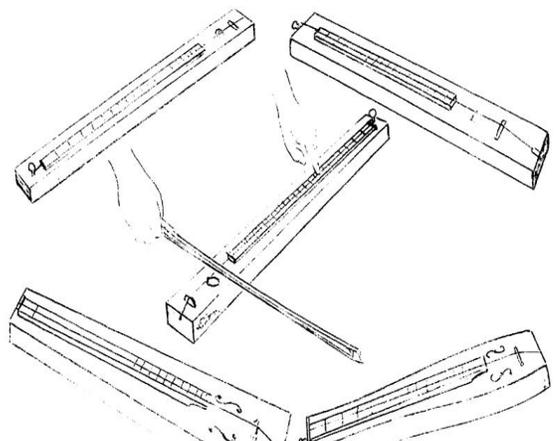
Erich writes: "Last week after church services I was visiting with the organist – and as I spoke of psalmodikons and Lars Roverud, he became very interested. As we talked, I told him of a book of Norwegian Music History that I had checked out from the Oslo Conservatory of Music and was commenting on the chapter about Lars Roverud, to which the organist replied, "I wrote that book!"

He brought me to the Oslo Conservatory Museum to see a psalmodikon from the 1800's and some music in numerical script. His grandmother, he told me, learned how to play the psalmodikon in the 1920's as part of her elementary schooling!

I will meet with him at least one more time before leaving next week. The Oslo National Library has a fair amount of psalmodikon music and I hope to get back there tomorrow." (Erich copied over 100 pages of psalmodikon information as well as for his graduate studies!)

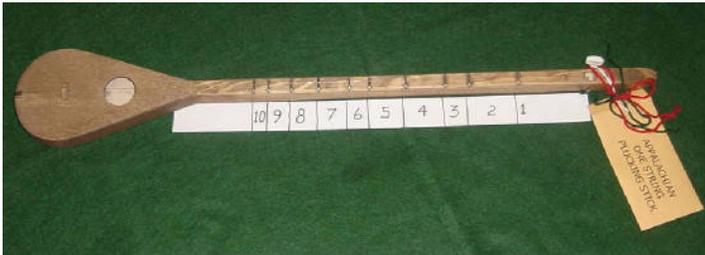
Erich Knapp resides in northern Minnesota and is a graduate student studying for a doctorate in Choral Conducting at NDSU – Fargo, ND

I am looking forward to reading Erich's thesis!



**NOT A PSALMODIKON!**

Bob O'Neil, of Stillwater, MN showed me an interesting little instrument that he had purchased recently. It was an *Appalachian One String Plucking Stick*. It resembles a psalmodikon, but I would guess that it came into being long after the psalmodikon.



You can learn more about the Appalachian One String Plucking Stick on their website.  
[www.pluckingstick.com](http://www.pluckingstick.com).  
 The instrument sells for \$39.00.  
 There are four different songbooks at \$2.00 each.

**ITEMS FOR SALE**

PSALMODIKON SONGBOOK written in Sifferskrift and 4-part harmony for psalmodikons.  
**\$19.00 pp**

VIDEO "HOW TO PLAY THE PSALMODIKON"  
 Instructions on how to tune and play the psalmodikon. Sifferskrift music is included to play along with the video. The video also gives psalmodikon history and makes good program material for a presentation about psalmodikons.  
**\$15.00 pp**

Send orders to: Beatrice Hole  
 6560 Leesborough Av., Eden Prairie, MN 55346

CD – PSALMODIKON QUARTET **\$15.00 pp**

Send orders to:  
 Singsaas Lutheran Church  
 Attn: Music CD's  
 P. O. Box 87, Hendricks, MN 56136  
[www.countrychurchmusic.com](http://www.countrychurchmusic.com)

|                           |              |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Psalmodikon Pattern       | <b>10.00</b> |
| Fret Wire                 | <b>3.00</b>  |
| Tuning Peg                | <b>3.75</b>  |
| String                    | <b>1.25</b>  |
| Fine tuner w/tailpiece    | <b>10.00</b> |
| Maple fret board w/frets  | <b>25.00</b> |
| Sitka spruce top material | <b>12.00</b> |
| Cherrywood violin bow     | <b>25.00</b> |
| Rosin                     | <b>3.50</b>  |

Send orders to: Floyd Foslien  
 567 High Ridge Drive, Hudson, WI 54016  
[www.ffoslien@sbcglobal.net](http://www.ffoslien@sbcglobal.net)

**VIRSI KANTELE FOR SALE**

A Kantele is of Finnish origin. The instrument is in good playing condition and is played with a bow, although I suppose it could be plucked like an American dulcimer. I am sure it can be tuned to any key. Or one string could be tuned as a drone or both strings tuned the same to give "color" to the sound. It may need new strings and the bow may need rosin and tightening, but these are minor issues. It comes with its own foldable steel legs and hard case. It is played while standing or possibly sitting on a high stool. It somewhat resembles a Nowegian Langeleik or Icelandic Langspil. I'm offering the item for \$100.00 cash or Money Order. Delivery may be arranged depending on your location, otherwise shipping would be at buyer's expense.

Paul Nisula, Abington, MA (21 miles so. of Boston)  
 Contact: [nisu1941@yahoo.com](mailto:nisu1941@yahoo.com)



## HEMSLÖJDEN

(A Swedish Folk News Publication)

January 2009

### Music From The Heart and Bowels

Text: Jonatan Malm

Translation: A. B. Luneborg

*In this story is a grandfather as convert after a bushy life, an old man as fore the one who answered right on certain questions could tell how his mummy made strings of sheep bowels and an obstinate psalmodikon as was used as foodboard to hens.*

*Rodney Sjøberg is the only one in Sweden who makes strings in this ancient way. His strings give the distinguished warm sound as the folk musicians have started to rediscover. The bowel sound, a unique sound.*

Music shall come out of the heart, it says. And of course, it is true but we cannot renounce that the tone tools have a final part.

Though looking back and see how they played, can we learn as much about our previous sound world. We can remake a distinct impression, as today can contribute to the artistic diversity and touch humans. One example is the strings. If we compare strings of different materials we hear they sound differently. Over the years the dominating metal strings have not been unusual, but were expensive for the common man. It says surely that the middle age lyre could have strings of bronze, but between farmers and ordinary folks have they played their melodies on strings of silk or twisted horsehair. Above all have it been played on bowel strings. So if we seriously mould the middle age or the 18<sup>th</sup> century sound, it is quite clear wrong with metal strings.

Between those who play classic early music it is not unusual with bowels strings. It is that however in the contemporary musician music.

One as obstinate is the now legendary Anders Rosen. Under the end of the 60.....did he start his hunt on the Swedish blues. By study older musicians instruments and techniques in detail was he finding a sound world as was quite unlike our own time ideal. Bowel strings become a favorite before Anders, but not first of all of musical reasons. He explains: Listen to the early recordings with Hjort Anders. The fiddle screaming, he plays groovy. The sound is unique; it is the bowel string sound. It gets a harshness as never can be made

with metal strings. With metal strings it is getting too bright and they ring too long. Now plays Anders self quite peerlessly. Though his music is perhaps the most old-fashioned music we have in Sweden today, it feels electric and extreme swinging. The strings contribute with their particular sound. It would not of course sounded bad with metal strings, but different.

In connection with a Nordic meeting around folk music instruments did I meet Benedicte Maurseth. She is a professional hardingfiddle musician, 25 years old and one of two Norwegian musicians as have taken up the folk tradition with bowel strings. It was through the baroque music Benedicte for the first time heard the difference. "I was literally quite spell-bound, the tone was so warm and near. It did not go to hold it away; it was only to receive it. My whole tone ideal changed. Since then is bowel strings an important part of her own musical expression. It is not difficult to understand why. When she plays it's not feeling like single melodies should be able to be born out of metal strings. The music is so poetic that it end in the middle of the tune on the one who listen. It has not at all with national romantic to do. Only clean, timeless aesthetics. The strings need to be tuned little more often is something as easy is forgiven then. But there is also one occasion to not using them; if you are moving between sweaty pub playings and dry hotel rooms, the strings react.

It exist a little division of music in Sweden where bowel strings stay without competition - - psalmodikon circles. Psalmodikon is a box formed string instrument as we very often find in community center, but it was original not a folk instrument. In connection with publishing of the new hymn book in 1819, come the clergyman, Johan Dillner, on the idea to launch an instrument as was easy to make and play. With the starting point in older string instruments used in monastery life, launched the psalmodikon with a system of siffer notes was made, that even children was able to play. The goal was to help on, after his opinion, the bad hymn song in the town churches. It was simply the old folkway to sing hymns that he not wanted, where quarter tones was equal as curlings and voices. Instead did he mean, should the hymns be sung slowly and worthy, unisonous and in tempered scale, therefore with whole and half tonesteps and nothing there between.

But by the years have even the psalmodikon being a seldom experience harsh and on a whole peeled way beauty, palpable remindful about the ecclesiastical farmer Society.

One who has really contributed to spread the knowledge and the music around of the Psalmodikon is Rodney Sjøberg from Trollhättan, now a pensioned woodwork teacher. In over fifty years has he build and play the psalmodikon, and even kept many. As a child he lived in Uppland, neighboring to Eric Sahlström, a hurdy-gurdy legend. In the summers his family would visit Väst-Götaland and there become he known with an uncle who played psalmodikon. I sit and listen on him so often and at the end he said – “I make you one box”.

Rodney is also the only one in the country as make bowel strings. It started in 1949 when he knocked on the door of an old house where an older man lived. After have been near examined about what the clergyman had spoken in the church last Sunday, he answered well, and was welcomed in. On the table lie one psalmodikon and a siffer hymnbook. The old man was over 80 years, so he had played a lot. The man was, Nils Bernhard Bengtsson, who played on his psalmodikon and sung some old hymns. The atmosphere in the cottage became so strong that the time stopped. Nils Bernhard started to tell about the psalmodikon in the rural community. After a while he was telling about his mother, as had given the whole community psalmodikon strings. At that time there was a psalmodikon in every home. Thanks to that Rodney showed so big interest was he getting a detailed explanation on how she made her strings. Rodney sat idle to listen, as she told how she attached together the end of the bowel and blowed so it turned inside out. She scraped it clean and stretched it up between a fast and one moveable hook on the barn wall. When it was nice weather she would go outside and turn bowels. It must be turned very slowly, so the water is able to come out. Rodney is into repairing psalmodikons from the 18th century and there is not any bad quality in the strings. This was the origin to his activity.

The bowels, from Nils Bernhard Bengtson's mother, came from the farms who owned sheeps and Rodney underlines that bowels to strings must come from sheeps as have gone on thin soil.

If they are too fat will it be too tough to clean the bowel, and the string gets brittle. It is also not good if they have eaten too much twigs and brushwood.

Rodney buys sausage skin as have been worked up to sausage production. When Rodney makes strings he takes this skin, in variable numbers, depending on the string thickness he wants, and tightens them up in what he calls a stringchair. Fore to accelerate the process to force the water out and to make the string stronger have he get the idea to twist in a thin nylon line. The wet skin is fastened between a fast and one moveable hook in the stringchair. When the moveable hook moves around, he twists the string and the water is pressed out. When the string is turned enough in peace and quiet, he leaves it to dry.

The day after it is polished with a wet polish paper impregnated with almond oil. This is to make it some softer. Originally, was the string instead impregnated with a whole almond and later with a wad of unwashed wool. These strings get a little harder sound, but also considerable higher wear resistance. Rodney have not only sold strings for psalmodikons, but also to hurdy-gurdy, vävlira (old stringed instruments) fiddles, cello, bass and even to a lute. Many museums in all of Nordic countries also order strings as a compliment to old instruments, or for reconstruction.

In the thirties Rodney's father build a mission house near Koberg in Väster-Götland as a result of a religious conversion after a disorderly life. In this building now hangs a psalmodikon Rodney saved from a henhouse, where it was used a foodboard. He cleaned it, and now it is playable. Rodney sits down and plays “Morning between the Mountains”. The bowel string sounds dry and warm, the voice have a careful and longsome vibrato, as seldom is to hear in town today. It's undeniable devout, and it's a musical aesthetic with potential. From the heart and bowels.

Footnote: Rodney Sjøberg is Chairman of the Nordisk Psalmodikonförbundet. Sjøberg has written the book “Psalmodikon and Siffernotes to Honour Again” (1987)

# I LOOK NOT BACK

Oskar Ahnfelt

2 2 1 7  
I look not back;

7 7 1 2 3 2 1 6  
God knows the fruit-less ef - forts,

6 6 5 4+  
The wast - ed hours,

3 2 1 7 3 2  
the sin - ning, the re - grets.

4+ 4+ 5 6 5 4+  
I leave them all with Him

3 2 1 1 7  
who blots the rec - ord,

5 2 7 6 6 3  
And gra - cious - ly for - gives,

2 1 6 5  
and then for - gets.

Written in Sifferskrift for Psalmodikon  
av Beatrice Hole - 1996

## NORDIC-AMERICAN PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET



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

Address label