

# 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

Hello to All —

I trust you have all made the most of the winter season and are anxiously waiting for the warm days of spring to arrive.

Many years ago when I first started playing the psalmodikon, we had a small group of psalmodikon enthusiasts on this side of town that got together for practice regularly. But due to health and other circumstances over the years, we no longer get together. I miss it very much.

And so I am always happy to hear the psalmodikon is alive and well in other areas of the country. I have written of several in this Newsletter.

I enjoy all the contacts with so many folks. Many have questions regarding music, etc., some are renewing their membership and others are joining for the first time. Thank you all for your support of the psalmodikon history!

Goran Carlström of Sweden informed me there is a possibility that their psalmodikon group will visit the USA next year.

Unfortunately we did not have our annual psalmodikon meeting in 2014. I trust that this year we will get started earlier with the planning. I ask for input and ideas from our readers and would love to see everyone.

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

## How Brightly Shines the Morning Star

Peter Ellertsen – Springfield, Illinois ([hogfiddle@gmail.com](mailto:hogfiddle@gmail.com))

Next month I'll lead a psalmodikon workshop at the Jenny Lind Chapel in Andover, Illinois. It's titled "Pastor Esbjorn's Singing School," and it's part of the 155th anniversary celebration of the old Augustana Lutheran Synod. Lars Paul Esbjorn was the pastor at Andover and a founder of the Augustana Synod.

In my workshop on April 25, I'll explain the Swedish system of *sifferskrift* and teach a couple of hymns from the 1819 *Svenska Psalmbok* that I found, in Esbjorn's handwriting, in the manuscript collection at Augustana College in Rock Island. I've had a replica of his psalmodikon made, and I plan to use it to teach the hymns as he might have in Andover.

Swedish psalmodikons were similar to the Norwegian instruments, but there are distinct differences. Instead of numbers on transposition sticks, the Swedes used a pattern of light- and dark-colored frets — similar to the white and black keys on a piano — to mark off the intervals of a diatonic scale. It sounds complicated, but it's as intuitive as the fretboard on a mountain dulcimer. To change keys, they retuned the melody string.

For example, compare the Christmas chorale "How Brightly Shines the Morning Star"

N:o 55.  
F+2+3+6+7.

1	5 3	1 5	6 6	5				
2	beljab,	stena	morgon-	stund,				
3	6 7	8 7	6 6	5				
4	Som	af Pro-	feters	belja	mun			
5	3	6 5	4 3	2	1			
6	4	of be-	håbab	wor-	den!			
7	5 3	1 5	6 6	5	5			
8	Du	stora	dag, du	fälla	dag,			
9	5	6 7	8 7	6 6	5			
10	gå	hwilken	himlens	wälbe-	dag			
11	3	6 5	4 3	2	1			
12	4	nu be-	sofer	jer-	den!			
13	5 3	0 0	5 3					
14	Unga		Öjunga					
15	3 3	2 2	3 3	2 2	3 3	2 1		
16	Med de	gamla;	Sig fer-	famla	Jordens	böner		
17	8 7	6 5	4 3	2 1				
18	Springben	höjre	af det	soner.				

This song, "How Brightly Shines the Morning Star" is written in Swedish Sifferskrift. The line F+2+3+6+7 at the top means it is played in F-major.

(No. 55 in the Swedish hymn book of 1819) to "Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn," (No. 77 in the *Nordic-American Sifferskrift* book). The line F+2+3+6+7 at the top means it was in F-major.

It's just different enough that I haven't been playing the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet's *sifferskrift* Songbook (except in the key of C). Instead, I found Johannes Dillner's *Melodierna till Svenska Kyrkans Psalmer, Noterade med Ziffor* (1830) in Google Books.

I've been learning about the psalmodikon ever since I saw one 10 years ago in a museum



Maple fret board w/frets	30.00
Sitka spruce top material:	
small psalmodikon	17.00
tapered psalmodikon	22.00
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## ITEMS FOR SALE

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### PSALMODIKON COMPONENTS

Psalmodikon Pattern	\$10.00
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Send orders to:

Floyd Foslien

567 High Ridge Drive

Hudson, WI 54016

[www.ffoslien@sbcglobal.net](http://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.

I also sell a complete kit of parts to make a *psalmodikon* for \$130.00. This kit instrument is modelled after an antique Norwegian *salmodikon* (Norwegian spelling) similar to one used by Lars Roverud. He was the "Father" of the Norwegian *salmodikon* and is credited with using transposition sticks to allow playing in various keys without re-tuning so this kit includes a transposition stick. The parts are cut to size and need only to be glued together, sanded, and finished with varnish or lacquer.

## Letters from Readers

Hello,

I was wondering, please, if you're able to sell a psalmodikon which is already built, and if so, will it also come with accessories, and at what price? I live in the UK.

I am blind, so would prefer to buy an instrument which is already built and ready for playing.

Also, as I will be using it for teaching purposes, as well as for therapy practice, was wondering if you offer any special discount?

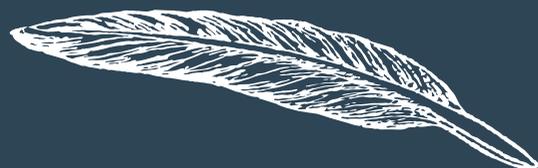
Thank you very much.

Angela Puril [www.purila.com](http://www.purila.com)

To hear samples of my music, visit:

[www.audioboo.com/angelapuril](http://www.audioboo.com/angelapuril)

*(I forwarded this request to Floyd Foslien, Hudson, Wisconsin. He recently shipped a psalmodikon to her, and we are anxiously waiting to hear how she is doing with her new psalmodikon.)*



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## Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet & Newsletter

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The Newsletter is published using PagePlus X7 ([www.serif.com](http://www.serif.com)) and is printed in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

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  
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# Sometimes at my simple box

## » Stundom vid min simpla låda «

I remember very well those evenings my father sat at his psalmodikon, took up the violin bow and played some hymns. Sometimes he sang to the music. Which songs or hymns it was, I have forgotten. I remember only the following:

*Sometimes with my simple box,  
do I know myself.*

*And it happens that we both  
meet each evening.*

Dad told me that it was *Värmlandskolportören*, “Lundgren med Lådan” who had this song on his repertoire when he, in the end of the century, walked around in Klarälvdalen and Fryksdalen and preached a religious message.

“Lådan” was what he called his instrument (a psalmodikon) and from the song collection, “Nöd och nåd”, he sang so that old men and women quickly moved from the earth’s sorrow to heaven’s glory.

Dad’s psalmodikon is an heirloom, as one of the forefathers of Kårbols in Värmlands Klarälvdal also owned it. Dad found his in an outbuilding, and it was in bad condition.

But he was a good repair man, and he glued together the different parts. Carefully was the work done and one would not know the disastrous condition of the instrument before.

Not many of such instruments exist in our days or do they recall the practical significance of “The Box” (*Lådan*). If somebody cares to preserve the instrument themselves, it depends if it has a curiosity value. With access we have to musical resources, it is difficult to think that a psalmodikon, that was so very popular, has become unfamiliar.

In the 1800’s it was widely used in schools and homes. It was the pastor in Funbo, Uppland, J. Dillner, who constructed the instrument, while trying to improve the spiritual song culture in the countryside.

Dillner was a Northerner born in 1785. While he studied in Uppsala, he was a friend with Erik Gustaf Geijer.

They were both members of the Götiska Society. The level of education among the peasantry was reasonably scant when Dillner came out to serve as pastor in the parish.

In the countryside, seldom was the organ played during hymn singing. The parish sang under leadership of a single untrained leader, that is the precursor (*klockaren*), and the melodies often became a bit of whatever. It is with this background that the church songs became better if you consider the work performed by Johan Dillner.

To get people in support of songs, he constructed a primitive instrument, which he later called psalmodikon. He also worked out a certain numbering system to enable one to play a hymn directly “from the sheet”. The psalmodikon soon became an outstanding accompaniment.

It not only became popular in churches and schools, it became also a home instrument of rank. Anyone with self-respect should have a psalmodikon to play.

The instrument was also quite simple and anyone with carpentry skills could make it. The string was also homemade of sheep bowels. The hairs on the bow were retrieved from the horse with the finest tail in the stable.

As earlier mentioned, Dillner worked out a number system, the help of which one could play “at first sight”. Dillner’s system was considered by many as too difficult, and it continued to be improved.

Over 100 years ago Abraham Mankell published “The Simplified Psalmodikon”. Mankell suggested a number series from 1-15. Intermediate halftones marked with stars.

The simplified number system popularized hymns further, and it was lively playing and singing in the district. But the name of what Dillner invented was considered by many to be too fancy. “Play Box” (*Spellåda*) became the common name.

A vicar in the northern Ny parish in Värmland once made a visit to Kårbols in the same parish. He asked if there existed any psalmodikons in the village. No such thing was known of. Then the pastor showed his own instrument he had with him. Soon an old woman clapped her hands together and exclaimed, “Oh my, we all play the *spellåda* well!”

When the spiritual revival movement came over the country, the psalmodikon came to good use. The one who made the instrument most well-known in the villages was the Värmlands tailor and *kolportör*, Carl Lundgren. After he was converted and baptized, he soon became known as “Lundgren with the Låda”. He went by this name until his death.

The psalmodikons were played until the end of 1800’s. The time had come for violins, guitars, accordion, and organs to play music of the new times. The simple tones of the *spellåda* could no longer make it appealing. But for the old reader it was a blessing to have sung to the humble string of the *lådan*. 

*The following two poems were found with the old Swedish psalmodikon. Poetry loses some of its meaning and beauty when translated, and so I have included them in their original form. — B.H.*

The poet Anders Österling had written a poem entitled, “Psalmodikon”:

*En torpare spelar psalmodikon  
i stugan vid spiselhällen  
och toner om Salem och Libanon  
förljuva den fattiga kvällen.  
I rutans och glödens blandade ljus*

## Psalmodikon

*Det dallrar en ton av sabbatsro,  
när den gamle kyrkvården spelar.  
Det är trygghet att äga en barnslig tro,  
en regnbågsbro,  
som himmelska hävor delar.*

*Det sjunger en kör till lådans ljud,  
när lördagskvällen är inne.  
Det är fyra flickor, som prisa Gud  
i högtidskrud,  
med samma barnsliga sinne.*

*Ett gammalt psalmodikon är den skatt,  
som helgd och högtid dem skänker,  
som helgar hemmet och minner att  
i denna natt  
Gud fader på barnen tänker.*

*Det ljuder en aftonpsalm så klar,  
hör, kyrkvårdens flickor sjunga.  
Och psalmen stiger så underbar,  
och kyrkvårdsfar,  
han spelar för flickor unga.*

*Om flickorna vet jag bestämt besked,  
att allt gick dem väl i händer.  
Och psalmen den ljöd genom många led,  
ty Gud var med,  
och han välsignelser sänder.*

Georg Granberg

## Letters from Readers

Dear Beatrice:

I am sending a picture of my Great-Great-Grandmother and also of her psalmodika. Her name was Beata Bengtsdotter. Lysell was her maiden name. (1849-1932)



She was a teacher in Halland, Sweden. She would go to the homes of families and teach the children and would bring her psalmodikon and they would sing together.

This instrument has been in my childhood home – in Sweden – as long as I can remember, sitting in a corner of a room. My mother would always proudly speak of her maternal grandmother and tell the story about her.

Now my parents are both gone and we are starting to empty out the house. I really wanted the instrument to give to my son who is very musical and plays a lot of instruments but basically is a bass guitar player. So for his birthday I gave it to him along with the membership to your organization. He was very happy.

I was just in Sweden in September and then brought it to our home here in Michigan. I came to this country in 1967.

I'm wondering if this one had 2 strings. The bottom part of the string up to the knot is actually the old original gut string. Hard to believe.

I am now trying to find a place where I can buy new gut strings but will definitely save the old one. It's most likely over 100 years old.

My mother also had the articles and the song that I am sending you a copy of. They were tucked in with the instrument. I believe it came from the weekly magazine she used to get called, "KvallsPosten".

Any information you can give me would be very much appreciated.

Christina Grennan, Waterford, Michigan

## PSALMODIKONS PERFORM AT JULESANGFEST

For several years now, the Psalmodikon group on the West Coast, led by Jean Akre, has been performing for the Norwegian Julesangfest which takes place in December. December 2014, was the 33rd year for the Julesangfest.

Jean says the past two years they have changed the format of the Julesangfest to entice more people to come to the service. They have had more music and two to three people who were born in Norway to speak regarding their remembrances of the Christmas traditions while growing up in Norway. It has been said by the guests that the music was wonderful. The Scandinavian Mixed Choir performed a few songs. Also, Dr. Joan Paddock played her lure at the Julesangfest, which she has done for several years. For several years, she has also played her lure at the openings of all of the special performances at Høstfest in Minot, North Dakota. Dr. Paddock also played the trumpet while being accompanied by the organist/pianist, Karl Jurisons.

Jackie Paegenhem Mullaney was the vocalist.

She got the idea of a video from listening to a recording of the St. Olaf Choir performing in Trondheim, Norway at the Nidaros Cathedral in 2013. They were performing in conjunction with the Nidaros Cathedral Girls' choir. The two choirs performed "Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming" and "The Rose".

Karl Jurisons was excited about this possibility and ordered the sheet music. Molly Beiningen wrote the music for the psalmodikons to play "Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming" and Jackie Paegenhem Mullaney sang "The Rose". The Psalmodikon Ensemble from left to right: Brandon Swett and Jim Dalrymple on alto, Rick Swee and Molly Beiningen on soprano, Jean Akre on alto, and Linda Dalrymple on bass.

Please check out their YouTube video and hope you enjoy it. I am sure Jean would be happy to hear what you think.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0oG89r6WoQ&feature=youtu.be>

### How Brightly, From P. 1

at Bishop Hill, Illinois, when I was visiting my wife's family there. (I'm in one of those mixed marriages — I'm Norwegian, and she's Swedish, which makes for a lot of corny humor at family gatherings and several levels of irony as a Norskie gets heavily involved with Swedish immigrant history.) This strange instrument was so much like a dulcimer, which I play, that I got interested. In 2010 I joined the Nordic-American Forbundet and drove up to the Twin Cities for the annual meeting. Last year things came full circle when I demonstrated the psalmodikon in a workshop at Bishop Hill.

Since I retired in 2012, I've had more time to devote to the psalmodikon. Since Illinois was a hotbed of Swedish immigration, that means reading up on the Augustana Synod

and getting replicas made of the psalmodikons in museums in Andover and Bishop Hill.

It's an unusual hobby, and an acquired taste — like Swedish *bondost*, potato baloney and pickled herring. But it's put me in touch with some very nice people in Illinois and the Twin Cities, and some lovely chorale melodies. After the Jenny Lind workshop, I want to figure out how to play Swedish *sifferskrift* on a Norwegian-style instrument, and vice versa. I'm already experimenting with making transposition sticks out of paint stirrers from the hardware store.



Peter Ellertsen with a Swedish style psalmodikon showing the dark and light frets.

More details on Augustana Founders Day, April 25-26 in Andover, are available at [jennylinchapel.org](http://jennylinchapel.org). 



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