3. MUSICAL ENVIRONMENTS AND REPERTOIRES

FOLK MUSICIANSHIP

Everyday musicianship for the vast majority of people changed with the changing society: land reforms led to the disintegration of villages and community life, while industrialisation not only drew people to the towns and cities but also transformed the old annual cycle of weekdays and weekends into one divided between working time and leisure time. Meanwhile, the state-dictated teaching of "singing and music" in compulsory education via the prescribed textbooks influenced the common man's song repertoire and served as a national standard; the revivalist movements introduced a new melodic repertoire with their translations of Anglican songbooks, which were widely disseminated via colportage. The mass production and distribution of sheet music from the latter decades of the 19th century – and in our own century the production of gramophone records – brought not only a new repertoire but also a new attitude towards music and musicians.

What sources are there that can demonstrate to us the diversity of folk musicianship in the country during the long, revolutionary period from 1810 to 1920? As we saw in the chapter 2, there is a great deal of extant recorded vocal and instrumental music, both published and unpublished, which, first and foremost, reveals what features of folk music the recorders considered valuable and interesting. And there can be no doubting that they thus, for both good and ill, created the idea of 19th century repertoire and musicianship that is still perceived as "Swedish folk music" and that has become its own genre in Swedish music today.

The recorders' passion for antiquity also, of course, made its stamp on what they selected – it was the oldest material, such as the mediaeval ballads or the ancient polskas, that interested them most. It was not until the publication of August Bondeson's *Visbok* in 1903 that the "entire multitude of the most commonly sung songs of provincial folk" was consigned to print. But these were songs from the last few decades of the 1800s.

In order to gain a reasonably just impression of the earlier folk repertoire, we must complement these sources with others, such as handwritten musical material (i.e. notebooks in which individuals wrote down song lyrics and folk music). But not even here can we be sure that it was this very repertoire that was actually sung and played. There are, for example, numerous oilcloth volumes in existence in which each song is rendered in different handwriting, suggesting that they could have been compiled in the same way as poetry albums, with family and friends adding their songs as a little keepsake for the book's owner. There are hints of this in the volumes written by mountain herd-girls, sailors and conscripts. As already intimated in the previous volume, we cannot be certain how much of the repertoire recorded in the folk music books was actually played. As folk music recorder Einar Övergaard noted with reference to Hälsingland folk musician Snickar Erik's songbook:

> "Note bene: *Notbok* not Snickar Erik's own songs. *None!* of these songs was played by Snickar Erik for me in the summer of 1899! They were simply not included in his repertoire!! Misleading!!" (after Ramsten 1982, p. 294).

So these so-called direct sources must also be used with a certain degree of discretion. When it comes to the songs, there is another important source that testifies to their popularity: the broadsheet. During the 1800s, this medium becomes an increasingly important channel for spreading music to the common man. Towards the end of the century, we find numerous large publishers specialising in broadsheets, such as *Svenska vis- och snack-förlaget* in Tomtebo, established by the Chronwall brothers, and *Malmö visförlag* (Nils Lindström). The most

popular songs were printed in enormous runs – the number 20,000 is mentioned by several publishers.

In the1800s there was a detectable change in the broadsheet repertoire – whereas during the first half of the century there was still a preponderance of lyrical love songs, the longer epic love songs and, above all, topical songs took over as the century came to a close and the new one began. New genres also appeared with social change: temperance songs, slapstick songs, cabaret and revue songs. While the broadsheets provide only the lyrics to the songs – by the mid-1800s there was some notation employing psalmodicon figuration – their melodic instructions ("sung to the tune of…") give us some idea of what melodies were popular at different times.

What we today call folk music (*spelmansmusik*) is nothing other than 19th century folk dance and ceremonial music. Many of the different dance types, such as the minuet, that we find in 18th century folk musician books disappear; others such as the polonaise (or polska) and to some extent the quadrille, on the other hand, take root and branch out into many local varieties. Over the course of the 1800s, the polska evolves as *the* dance and tune style of the country's provinces, offering as it does rich formal opportunities for individual musical expression, especially for fiddle players. There is no doubt that by the mid-1800s it is the polska that has been developed idiomatically for the fiddle. When another repertoire associated with new fashionable instruments – such as the accordion or the brass ensemble – takes over at the end of the 1800s, the polska, owing to its musical qualities, becomes the preferred style of the various custodians of folk-music traditions and revival movements from the turn of the century onwards. New dance trends (waltz, "hamburska", polka, schottische) bring with them a new melodic, rhythmic and harmonic repertoire.

Judging from the available sources, it seems that the fiddle was by far the most common instrument, and there is evidence from different parts of the country that by the end of the 1800s there was a fiddle on every farm. The clarinet and, in Uppland the nyckelharpa were also common folk instruments. The folk musicians who rose above the average and made names for themselves for their proficiency far beyond their own parishes often left their own mark on the local repertoires and playing styles for many generations. Under the glow of the romantic era's cult of the genius, posterity, especially, has avowed the greatness of these individuals. We will be meeting some of them shortly.

But can an overall picture of the country's folk musicianship in the 1800s be sketched? After all, the local variations are endless. One way of getting closer to grasping the diversity is to "touch down" in the era's different musical environments and get to know, one by one, their repertoires and performance techniques.

Some traditional environments

In the military and marine circles of 1840s Vikbolandet (in the east of Sweden), we find Mrs Egg and Mrs Qvarsbom. They live – as do a great many of the country's population at this time – on the verge of destitution. Mr Egg was a Life Grenadier, but was dishonourably discharged for theft. When his wife died he was left with five young children as well as a foster-daughter in a spinning-house. Anna Ericsdotter was a maid on different farms before marrying boatswain Qvarsbom, and at the time of her death was living in a poor-house, where she was described as "infirm and unable to work".

So what do we *know* about their musical environment? From the priest and folk song aficionado Levin Christian Wiede, who served East Husby and East Stenby at the time, we learn that both these women were good and popular folk singers. He recorded no fewer than, respectively, 17 and 19 mediaeval ballads from these women's performances as well as a couple of broadsheet songs. Wiede was one of the antiquarian recorders, and as such was most interested in the oldest songs – the ballads. The popular contemporary songs sold by

broadsheet peddlers at markets, exercise places and so forth, he called "baseness and drivel" and nothing worth saving for posterity. And the little everyday songs were doubtlessly far too common for the recorders to waste time and paper on. Only a very few passed muster.

We can therefore assume that both these women sung not only ballads but also lullabies, doggerels, dance songs, spiritual songs and the more modern love songs. At the same time, their numerous ballads with motifs from chivalrous times intimate that the songs provided a means of escape from the rigmarole of daily life for the "singing maids, farmhands, day-labourers, soldiers and soldier-wives, beggars, paupers and sextonesses and artisans, as well as one or other clergyman's daughter and aristocratic officer's family" (Ling 1965, p. 80) whom we encounter in the Östgöta countryside in the mid-19th century.

In his 1961 study of Wiede's recorded provincial material – one of the few studies ever done on folk tunes in the country – Jan Ling demonstrates the presence of different stylistic layers in the music. An older, typological layer consists of formula-bound or recitative-like melodies without a distinct tonal centre and often with a narrow ambitus, meaning that their melodic lines flow along only a handful of notes. Such melodies often belong to older lyrics, such as ballads, jocular songs and nursery rhymes. Distinctly minor-key melodies, on the other hand, are often associated with contemporary broadsheet texts – often lyrical ones – and are thought to be influenced by the German chorale.

So much for the vocal tradition. But there was, naturally, instrumental music, both for everyday use and for the year's festivities and ceremonies. There were doubtlessly also folk musicians of varying degrees of skill in Mrs Egg and Qvarsbom's neighbourhood that were engaged to play at everything from the grandest of weddings to the most basic of Saturday dances. But most of them have fallen into obscurity. One of the fiddlers in Vikbolandet – cobbler and folk musician Pelle Fors (full name Peter Magnus Johansson Fors) – enjoyed, however, such widespread fame that his name still lives on amongst modern folk musicians. In around 1840 he moved from his native tracts on the border between Småland and Östergötland to Vikbolandet, settling with his wife Ann-Sofi in a cottage named Gröndal in Rönö; he was still playing at the age of 93, as his appearance at a folk musician competition in Söderköping in 1908 testifies.

By assembling different parts of the puzzle, we can start to glean details of his playing in Vikbolandet and tease out a phonic image of him when he played at local dances or when he taught his young protégés in the kitchen. Six tunes were recorded directly from his instrument in Rönö in 1888 by Ragnvald Leonard Rääf, son of Ydredrotten, although they need complementing with recordings from other Östgöta folk musicians. Four of Pelle Fors's students are represented in Swedish songs (Östergötland), in part with the same repertoire as recorded by Rääf. Most of the Pelle Fors tunes played in Östergötland and Småland today were, however, originally transmitted by twins Allan and Anselm Hellström from Vikbolandet, sons of one of Pelle Fors's students. The Hellströms' repertoire has been documented on both tape and paper.

As regards the repertoire, it is clear from the notes that Pelle Fors played many so-called semiquaver polskas – Rääf's recordings consist exclusively of polskas – while latter day recordings show that he also played tunes like bridal marches, waltzes, polketts and "gubbstöt" (the hambo polkett). Interviews conducted in the 1920s with the more elderly archipelago residents (the Dialect and Folk Memory Archives in Uppsala, ULMA) confirm that people danced the polska, waltz, polkett, peasant quadrille and "gubbstöt".

We can obtain some idea of the vocal and instrumental folk repertoire at Vikbolandet in the mid-19th century with the aid of certain sources – namely recorded tunes and lyrics and interviews. *How* Mrs Egg and Qvarsbom sang we will never know, however, as Wiede's

notes say little about singing style apart from a few details about tempo and rhythm. On the other hand, we can drawn some conclusions about Pelle Fors's playing style from comments left by his disciples, from which we learn that his bow stroke was light, that he played his polskas rather fast and that he used different tunings, such as c-sharp^2 – a^1–e^1–a.

Just like in other forms of art, folk music has its germinal practitioners. Maybe Pelle Fors can be counted amongst them.

Lapp-Nils, who was active in west Jämtland in the middle of the century, is another folk musician to have lent his name to a rich repertoire of tunes, and one might well claim that Lapp-Nils polskas are a concept in their own right in modern folk music Sweden – even though there is not a single tune was recorded direct from him. Just as with Pelle Fors, it is thanks to his disciples that future generations have been able to play and listen to his tunes. As is the case with most folk music, the tradition was an aural one in which tunes were transmitted from player to player without being pinned down in note form.

For many decades around the mid-19th century, Lapp-Nils was the most sought-after wedding folk musician in his province, and he was forever on the road with his trusty fiddle. Although he was said to have composed a substantial number of songs, it does not mean that he was the creator of all the tunes that bear his moniker. It is probably more accurate to talk about a Jämtland repertoire upon which he made his mark through the force of his musical personality. The Lapp-Nils polskas are of the triplet kind, a type of polska that was common in western Sweden from Bohuslän in the south to southern Lappland in the north. They are often played in keys in which the tightening of the G string to an A makes open-string playing easier. Many of the polskas require a relatively advanced playing technique able to cope, for example, with frequent harmonics. Lapp-Nils was also said to have mastered the art of making very special lower accompanying parts (simèl) for the polskas.

Lapp-Nils and Pelle Fors will serve to represent the many famous and trendsetting folk musicians that we encounter in the recorded material of the 19th century and that are kept alive and in a state of high regard through revivals. In the 1970s and 80s, Lapp-Nils polskas were recorded for gramophone in a wide range of performance styles, from lilting to mouth organ and melodeon. Here, many more great folk musicians could be named – Peckos Per and Hjort Anders in Bingsjö, Lomjansgutten in Värmland, Byss-Kalle and Gås-Anders in Uppland and Hultkläppen in Hälsningland, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, interested readers are referred to the many books that have been written on the more famous of the great folk musicians.

We get a hint of how songs were circulated in August Bondeson's recordings from Adolf Olsson from Vallda in the northern province of Halland. In the closing decades of the 19th century, Doctor August Bondeson, famous ethnographer, recorded numerous songs from west Sweden, particularly Halland (printed in *Visbok* 1903). What makes Bondeson's work so interesting is that, unlike most other song recorders, he documented all manner of songs, including the "most commonly sung", giving us a reasonably fair picture of the singers' repertoires, with the volume as a whole revealing the most ordinary and most sung folk songs of the 1880s and 90s.

Adolf Olsson, a former sailor and a well-known folk musician who played the villages under the nickname "Spelianus or "Spelarn", was one of Bondeson's most important sources. A hundred or so songs were written down that Adolf Olsson had learnt "at sea", "in Gothenburg", "in Chicago", "on a small cargo boat from Arendal, Norway," and so forth. Bondeson's provenance notes demonstrate how songs roam and circulate and how an individual's repertoire is filled throughout his life in the various environments he inhabits. What goes unsaid, but what we might infer, is that most of Adolf Olsson's songs were sung to pass the time not only at home, amongst friends, in the ship's forecastle, etc. but also at work as sea shanties, for instance. According to Bondeson's notes, they were sung to a prominent

rhythm, evidence that they were genuinely sung by working sailors while hoisting the sails or whatever.

Much of Adolf Olsson's repertoire comprises lyrical love songs with minor-key or modal melodies, a type of song common amongst the broadsheets of first half of the 19th century. The songs were sung by Olsson's mother in Vallda and were more part of her generation's repertoire. The music recorded from Olsson also includes a number of bawdy songs and polska tunes, which Bondeson chose not to publish.

Techniques of folk singing and playing

Through Bondeson's recordings we can thus glimpse an individual repertoire, both lyrics and tunes, and learn, to a certain extent at least, how songs were sustained and transmitted in different environments. On the other hand, however, they say nothing about *how* anyone sang. Like Wiede, he gives us only the lyrics and the melodies. In the era of the tape recorder, we are spoilt in being able to register an overall phonic event; the early recorders of music, however, were often too busy noting down the lyrics and tunes, even though the odd attempt was made to note down unusual singing or playing styles.

As an example of the latter, we may turn to recordings taken down in some of the parishes around lake Bolmen in west Småland, which is not so far from Bondeson's own stomping ground. These parishes were visited in 1874 by music and gymnastics director Carl Erik Södling, whose notes reveal a good deal about the singing style. As regards his informants in west Småland, he often carefully reproduced embellishments and mordents in the form of grace notes and trills. Since other melodic notations in his hand lack such additional elements, one might venture that many of the songs were actually sung with such ornamentation and that in the 1870s this singing style was not uncommon amongst an older generation (e.g. widow Lovisa Rask). The maid Lena in Klockaregården, on the other hand, had a newer, more "contemporary" repertoire and apparently a different singing technique, if the notes are anything to go by.

Mordents or melodic ornamentation is a form of musical expression found in many folk cultures around the world. In Sweden it appears in different kinds of vocal and instrumental folk tradition. In some tradition-bearers' hands, the folk variants of the chorale had an almost extreme abundance of ornamentation in the 1800s. A well-known description of this singing style is provided by Nils Andersson in *Svenska Låtar*, in which he describes a visit to Finn Karin (real name Pers Karin Andersdotter) in the Dalecarlian town of Mora:

"A few moments' search for the right tone and then came the psalm, at first in a soft, trembling voice but soon rich in tone, pure and clear….The words of the psalm seemed at first to play an altogether subordinate role, the tune appearing to be the main thing. So interwoven and enveloped by notes did the lyrics become that syllables and even the words themselves lost contact with each other. At first, I couldn't make out the lyrics at all, but lost myself in rapture at the delightful tune that I took to be genuine folk music with hints of pure shepherd and folk song. But I soon learned to hear the lyrics and then it struck me how the melody nurtured, served and gave relief to the words and how everything blended together into a whole of compelling effect." (N. Andersson, *Svenska Låtar*, *Dalarna I*, p. 129.)

Further examples of the rich ornamentation of the instrumental music can be found in the tracts around lake Siljan, as written and audio recordings from the turn of the century onwards frequently testify. Other aspects of folk performance practice are "heterogenous rhythms", beat-marking bow strokes, floating intervals and drone effects (on string instruments with harmonised loose strings), stylistic properties that in this context can only be inferred.

Forms of interplay

When encountering folk music these days, we often find it performed by organised groups of amateur fiddlers (and, later, nyckelharpists) known as *spelmanslag*. The idea is a relatively

new one in folk music Sweden and only really caught on in the 1940s, although this is not to say, of course, that musicians did not play together beforehand. Indeed, we can often see such pairings as fiddle and clarinet, fiddle and accordion or, as is generally the case, two fiddles in the photo archives. We know from sources such as interviews and audio recordings that there were different kinds of fiddle interplay, the most common having apparently been unison playing or parallel third harmonisation with chordal accentuation. Octave parallels, known as *grovt och grant* (rough and polished) – a simple yet effective way of reinforcing the melodic line – was a feature of interplay in many parts of the country and was revived by young folk musicians in the 1970s.

The melody line, however, could also be enhanced with chordal accompaniment, a style that became particularly common with the introduction of the accordion in the 1860s and 70s. The factory-made chord-zithers and guitars became generally affordable to the common man at the end of the 19th century and became much cherished domestic instruments. They were used mainly to accompany the repertoire of spiritual songs that spread with the growth of the era's religious revival movements.

The musical traditions of the mountain pastures

As we have already seen, the folk music collectors of the 1800s discovered ancient music traditions that had been used for centuries for shepherding and other kinds of mountain pasture labour. The special vocal technique used for herding cattle and the shepherd's tunes blown on animal horns had, over the generations, been adapted to the forest and mountain environment, where extensive livestock husbandry was an economic necessity. Over the short summer months that the cattle grazed in these upland pastures, it was usually women who were in charge of the work and the animals and who therefore also used such herding songs – the voice and the horn became, quite simply, the tools of their trade.

In this century, it has been possible to record the musical traditions of the mountain pastures using audio media, allowing not least the form, function and techniques of the herding songs to be studied (Moberg 1955; Anna Johnson 1972 and 1986). Researchers have, accordingly, been able to establish that their form and structure are linked to their function. Sharp cries consisting of brief phrases are needed to call back strays and are replaced by parlando-like phrases when "chatting" to the animals while herding them. Such herding cries are therefore, unlike the formally closed pastoral songs, flexible and variable, and herders could chain together phrases or formulae of different lengths and structures to create rhythmically free melodic figures.

The highly distinctive call technique, which is nothing at all like normal song, is also functionally designed to be heard over great distances (up to 5 km), and combines a raised larynx and tightly compressed vocal cords with a powerful vocal attack to create a high, penetrating tone (Johnson 1986). This form of call has many dialectical names: *kula*, *kuja*, *hoja*, *kauke*, *köke*, etc.

The vocal call has chiefly served as a means of human-animal or human-human communication over great distances. It could also be executed on the animal horns (cow or buck) or lurs, instruments that were also blown to deter predators.

Folk music formalised

As we approach the turn of the 19th century, we start to see local traditions gradually disintegrate. The folk song repertoire becomes topped up with cabaret, revue and slapstick material – scenic songs, in other words, that spread like wildfire via broadsheets, mass-produced sheet music and, eventually, the gramophone record. The same happens to dance music. The local fiddlers fall out of fashion as audiences and dance pavilions demand louder instruments like accordions or ensembles – including brass players. And with these

instruments comes another repertoire, and the polska is out-competed by the hambo, mazurka, polka and schottische, and later the Boston waltz and one-step.

In a sawmill community like Holmsund in Västerbotten, folk musicianship becomes increasingly formalised in the closing years of the 1800s. At the more informal dances, private parties and the like, the music could be supplied by a fiddle-accordion duo, and that meant "old-time dance". But at grander occasions, bazaars, public meetings, boat trips to the archipelago and so forth, the local wind orchestra, which, like the local string orchestra, included amateurs, was enlisted to play. The repertoire comprised "light entertainment music of a classical music style" (Arvidsson 1990). There was unison singing at the meetings of the various societies, associations and folk movements, and choral singing was cultivated in Good Templar temples and churches.

We can trace a similar development in Leksand, a town that is associated with rich folk music traditions, and where the break between the old and the new stands out clearly over the years from 1890 to 1920. In 1892, Artur Hazelius engaged the then 25-year old Leksand folk musician Skölds Anders Hedblom in order that the denizens of the capital could meet a genuine folk musician. For the next few years, Skölds Anders would play at Skansen in its dance pavilions and lodges. At the same time, the young mason Mann Mats Persson returned to Leksand from his work in Hälsningland and founded Västansvik's string orchestra in 1892, inspired by the Ljusne-Ala string orchestra in which he had played for the German music director August Waidele. Carl Gudmundsson has described the origins of the ensemble, and how Mann Mats and two other local villagers met in Saras Anders's carpentry shed to play together:

"Mann Mats played fiddle, Sara's Anders had a little harmonium and Gudmund's Carl, as I was known then, had been lent a piccolo by Mann Mats…. We played from sheet music and under Mann Mats's supervision." (Gudmunsson 1949).

Within a couple of years, the band comprised two violins, cello, double bass, flute and trumpet and played a mixed repertoire of marches, overtures, potpourris and the odd arranged folk song. It mainly performed locally in what were effectively organised public performances.

The orchestra disbanded in the early years of the new century, its members moving into other constellations: the Leksand string orchestra and the *Planteringssällskapets* wind orchestra, founded by the local ironmonger in 1910. This latter ensemble provided the music at the annual midsummer dances on the jetty with a repertoire that included arranged folk songs. Here we can see how the musically active Leksanders are drawn into different ensembles and how music ascends the stage, while the local songs and tunes are clothed in the raiment of the art music ideal. The impetus is fuelled from the outside. Two of the active musicians in the Västanvik string orchestra, brothers Carl and Olof Gudmundsson, were visitors to Stockholm in 1903-1908 as the leading musicians of the *Dalaföreningen* (Dalecarlian society) orchestra Dalecarlia, the repertoire of which consisted of Viennese waltzes and operetta tunes as well as music from their native province. Back home in Leksand, the pair were instrumental in the formation of the Leksand Orchestral Society.

Naturally, the folk music and local songs of old were still being performed at home and at work. The mountain pastures were still fully active at this time, but with the gradual modernisation of farming techniques herding songs and shepherd's tunes lost their natural function. Karl Sporr's notations of the songs of Siljansnäs evince a rich local folk tradition lasting well into the 1920s, and recordings from the end of the 1940s onwards constitute phonic documentation of a local folk song tradition deeply entrenched in Leksand's various villages – recordings made of a generation that very much represents the turn-of-the-century traditions. It is these remnant village traditions that the strongman of folk music, Leksand-son

Knis Karl Aronsson, later takes up and promulgates as part of the ancient folk culture that characterises the Leksand villages and that he passes down to a younger generation in forms befitting its ideals.

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