

# **A view of the musical traditions of two countries: Sweden and Estonia.**



# **A result of a Travel Scholarship awarded by The Finzi Trust to Nigel Hildreth in 2005A view of the musical traditions of two countries: Sweden and Estonia.**

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## **Introduction**

I began my travels in Sweden and from there went to Estonia. In so many ways on the surface these countries have much in common, their climate, flora and fauna and even common musical instrument ancestry yet the differences in culture between these countries could not be more striking.

The use of the cowhorn, the fiddle music and the nearness of traditional folk music means that both Estonia and Sweden share much musically, but then the fates of history played a significant hand. The Soviet invasion in 1944 meant that a system of education was imposed which together with the curtailment of creative freedom and the hardships of imprisonment and banishment to Siberia led to a lost generation of Estonian composers and thinkers.

The attempts to curtail the National spirit and to create a “safe” Soviet environment meant that education in particular was tightly controlled and that activities such as music and sport were encouraged in the belief by Soviet masters that this was harmless. The so called singing revolution in 1991 proved them wrong and music is such an integral part of every Estonian’s life.

The Swedish had no such modern oppressors and their freedom from social control might have led to the disappearance of all traditional music and folklore into a modern industrial society. Here, however it was not to be as the population was so spread out in this country and the sense of community is still present in every village and small town.

To a certain extent the revival of folk music in Sweden, still continuing today means that the aural tradition of hearing the tunes and playing and or singing them is a prevalent today as ever before; most towns and villages, at least in the Dalarna area, have their own “spelmanslag” or fiddlers group (which might include instruments other than the violin) and each village has its own “take” or accent in interpreting tunes.

In contrast with Sweden the main emphasis in Estonian music was on notation and the use of the education system to encourage the use of musical notation through singing.

It is no coincidence that the Kodaly system from Hungary is widely taught and used in the school system. This has produced a rich seam of people who can sight sing and perform choral music to an exceptionally high level.

My journey began arriving in the Town of Mora in the area known as Dalarna, I travelled within the region, mostly around the huge lake Siljan (part of an ancient meteor strike), visiting villages and small towns to hear the music and also to be part of the experience. I was honoured to play along with Rättvik's Spelmanslag, with the young fiddlers from Leksand Musikskolan, with Boda Spelmasnslag and not least with members of the Mora Spelmanslag. My guide throughout this part of my journey was Anna Aronson who as well as being a superb musician was a kind generous and sympathetic person. My memory of the final concert I attended in Dalhalla, a converted quarry was one of sheer awe: at least a thousand people listened and sung in the pouring rain at temperatures not much above freezing for four hours. There can be only one conclusion in terms of the importance of the arts and music in particular to this nation.

My visit to Estonia was guided by two choral directors, Kadri Mägi and Kaie Tanner. The first of whom taught in one of the secondary schools in Tallinn and the other was General Secretary of the Estonian Choral Society. Their generosity of spirit meant that I was able to see much of the rehearsal process as well as attend concerts by a wide range of choirs. The in-depth knowledge I gained will last with me, not only about the musical traditions and thoroughness of the training given to young people which enables them to pursue a enjoyment of music throughout their lives but also of the background in which the teachers work now and in the past.

I hope my account of these travels is no less a musical experience for yourselves as it was for me. I include audio and video clips on this CD for your enjoyment.

Nigel Hildreth June 2005

## SWEDEN

### Background

The tradition of folk music goes back a long way in the Dalarna region of Sweden. A cow horn with four finger holes was found in a peat bog and has been dated from the year 900AD. This Viking instrument can be played and it turns out that the scale used by this primitive horn is the basis for much of the early church music and thus forms the basis of a folk music tradition that spans over a thousand years.

The cow horn is still played today: there are not a lot of performers but one of the ten best players, **Anna Aronson** performed on one of her collection of instruments in the forest just outside Färnus, not far from Mora. The vaguely minor scale is totally haunting.



This instrument in the hands of a good musician conjures up the wild in a remarkable fashion. Traditionally this was the instrument of the women who were looking after the herds in the summer farms. The farmers of this area around the lake Siljan knew that the pastures were poor and in the summer the women and children went, with the herds, to the summer pastures. Sometimes these pastures were some way away up in the hills. The largest of these was Fryksås with up to 40 families living there during the summer. The cowhorn was used to call to each other: perhaps a member of the herd was missing or to summon the goats or cattle. These animals knew the sound of their keepers.

The musical scale used by these instruments was later used by the women singers who led in the churches and the tradition of “Folklinga koraler”.<sup>1</sup>

**Ack Hjartans ve** Mora

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Ack Hjartans ve' from Mora. It consists of two staves of music, both in treble clef and 3/4 time. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first staff is labeled 'Voice' and contains the lyrics: 'Ack, Hjar-tans ve - Att jag skall se uds e gen Son for sma das'. The second staff is also labeled 'Voice' and contains the lyrics: 'Och Guds vas sens be la te Uff der fot ter tra das!'. There are triplets and other musical notations throughout the score.

*Ack hjärtans ve, Att jag skall se. Guds egen Son försmädas Och Guds väsens beläte Under fötter trädas!*

Alongside the women the men players herders pipes which are wooden instruments not unlike recorders but without thumb holes and with 8 holes.

The other practical use of music was, of course in celebrations and festivities and here the main focus came later in the form of the violin. The fiddle was an instrument played by the men for all sort of occasions including dancing and the most famous dance from this region is the Polska.<sup>2</sup>

This is a tune usually in 3 time played slower than a waltz and with stresses in the bar that occur on the first and third beat rather than in the usual waltz **one** two three. The player usually taps his foot on these stress beats and those performers I have observed tap one foot the first bar then the other foot the next.

The Dalarna Polska has another distinction in that it is usually an “uneven” polska in that the quaver beats are played in a triplet feel not dissimilar to the Irish slip Jig.

*Sibelius file/ file from  
www.norbeck.nu/swedtrad/index.html*

## **The Music at Present**

<sup>1</sup> Folklinga Koraler från Dalarna Jörgen Dicander 1975

<sup>2</sup> Swedish Traditional Music 1998 [henrik@norbeck.nu](mailto:henrik@norbeck.nu)  
www.norbeck.nu/swedtrad/index.html

What makes all this history come to life is that the music is very much alive and is being performed and enjoyed alongside all other forms of music making and has a place in the musical education system in Sweden.

The group of fiddlers who perform the Polska and other traditional pieces is called a Spelmanslag and these exist in every town and also within the town music schools. In Leksand, in Mora and in Rätvik around the Siljan lake the music school, which offers instrumental and vocal lessons also gives youngsters, through its various ensembles, the opportunity to perform in groups and uniquely has a small but vibrant spelmanslag who train in the performance of traditional Swedish and Dalarna music.

I went along to Leksand Music School where the leader **Tommy Gjers** has arranged and printed out the large number of pieces that group will perform at midsummer celebrations in the town. By example and repetition the 12 young players learnt and began to memorise the pieces. He was thorough in his maintaining the phrases and ensuring the bowing matched these traditions. The youngsters focussed for an hour long rehearsal and were totally engaged working through established and new numbers. I felt privileged to be able to join in with the youngsters and to play alongside of them.



*Young Fiddlers in Leksand Music School*

The Town of Mora lies at the heart of this region. It is of world renown for the Vasaloppet, the annual cross country ski race and also as the home of the Zorn Museum. Andreas Zorn was a painter of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but was more important that just his wonderful paintings in that he was a very vital part of the movement which led to the revival of folk music traditions. He collected folk pieces and motivated musicians to perform by organising the first competition for the fiddlers in 1906.

Music is only part of the Kulturskolan Miranda: a Culture School which includes Dance, Drama, Media as well as Music. The teachers in Mora provide opportunities in the form of an orchestra, a wind band a jazz band choirs and of course a spelmanslag. This small group is led by **Tord Bengetsson** and the group of about a dozen girls are about 13 or 14 years old. Many of them play other instrument as well but learn the violin especially to play in this group and to perform this type of music. Tord told me that many beginner violinist specifically start to play just so they can play for the Midsummer festival: an occasion when everyone in Sweden gathers to the nearest village to celebrate with dancing and music and the raising of the huge “Maypole”. The piece that everyone plays on this occasion is Äppelbo Gånglåt (a processional song from a village in Dalarna). This is a piece that everyone in Sweden knows:

### Äppelbo Gånglåt

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Äppelbo Gånglåt". It consists of four staves of music, all in G major (one sharp). The first staff is labeled "Violin" and contains the first five measures. The second staff is labeled "Vln." and contains measures 6 through 10, ending with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third staff is labeled "Vln." and contains measures 11 through 14. The fourth staff is labeled "Vln." and contains measures 15 through 18, also ending with a double bar line and repeat dots. The music is written in a simple, folk-like style with a mix of eighth and quarter notes.

The small town of Rätvik is famous for its tradition of fiddle players and hosts summer music festivals that are famous across the world. It also hosts the Folkmusikens Hus: the Folk music Museum. This includes a display of instruments and archives of collections of music but also has regular performances of music. I was fortunate to hear such a recital which explored the tradition of the folk song in particular when used for military purpose. In this performance **Erik Köpmans** (violin) together with **Alf Tangnäs** (voice) and **Gunnar Turesson** (voice) illustrated the research done by Alf Tangnäs into the songs used by the army over the years including the adaptation of traditional tunes with words sometimes ballad like, sometimes verging on propaganda.



*In Rätvik's Folk Music Museum*

Whilst visiting the town I had the good fortune to discuss the current situation of folk music in the region with a top fiddle player **Per Gudmundson**, who not only records and performs around the world but also works at the Folkmusik hus: the museum of folk music and national archives. This archive is working towards a digital database of interviews recordings and articles on folk music.

Per gave me his overview in terms of the current scene: he said that the folk music scene only rose in popular terms from the 1970s and unlike the UK or American folk scene did not really include the singer/songwriter tradition. The rise in popularity meant that youngsters might actually aspire to being a good fiddle player even in same way as they might want to be a footballer. This means that the young players want to play folk fiddle and not classical violin.

I was taken around the excellent displays and the current exhibition of the “violin in art” which included a number of paintings and a stone violin sculpture. The displays have audio examples of the instruments on view and include the 900AD dated cow horn found in a peat bog.

We discussed the trend of crossing genres and the use of folk music in other types of pieces. The romantic use of Dalarna pieces in lush orchestral pieces and the treatment by electro acoustic composers of the traditional church music and the cow horn calls. Some contemporary composers have used this technique to telling effect.

The museum and its archive share an old school building with the Rättvik Music School. This means that there is continuity of use and effective use of facilities. The Kommun (Borough) pay for the building and provide a grant for its upkeep.

### **Folk Music in the Community**

On a Tuesday evening the Rättvik Spelmanslag rehearse at the Folkmuik Hus. This is a group of up to 40 fiddle players, old and young who prepare for performances in the area. They also have an accordion player and sometimes involve other instruments. They come from all walks of life and their obvious enjoyment in the playing of these traditional tunes is evident. I was made most welcome and allowed to play alongside these dedicated performers. I had notation for most of the tunes but I was alone in that respect; the rest played from memory. The pieces, consisting of a variety of dance tunes including polskas, waltzes and schottische were a challenge to follow: the notation provided only a guideline as apart from the rhythmic variations there were also decorations of the melody to follow. The leader played and it was most useful for me to be able to observe him at close hand to watch the fingering and the bowing.

The pieces being rehearsed were all from the village in which the group was due to perform and several members of that village were present at the rehearsal to perform alongside the group.

During a short break in the rehearsal five of the members got together to try out a new piece: using a goat horn to play a plaintive melody with two fiddlers and a viola player joined by an accordion.

One of the striking features of this visit has been the way in which people are inclined to break into song or in the case of my hosts for a meal one evening, **Melker and Katarina Brodin**, who, upon hearing that I might be visiting Boda to hear the Spelmannslag there, performed a Boda Polska on the herding pipes and singing.

On the Friday evening I drive to the small village of Boda, not too far from Rättvik and there I was welcomed by a small spelmanslag from the village consisting of 3 violins, a guitarist, an accordionist, a zither player and a harmonica player. They played through tunes which are special to them and when I played with them they showed me the way in which they might play the same tune as their Leksand or Rättvik colleagues perform but in a different “accent”.

### **Music in Schools**

As well as talking to the musicians who teach their instruments in the schools I also had the opportunity to meet Headteachers at their weekly meeting at the Kommun Huset (town hall). I learnt that music was guaranteed on the National Curriculum for a 40 min lesson per week up to the age of 16 and that some provision had been made for instruments within the classroom. The provision in Primary schools was more patchy with only a few specialist teachers and the allocation of the normal class teacher to deliver the music “goals”.

Students who want to learn an instrument have to pay for this opportunity: there is no formal system of remission to families on low incomes in this region although other areas of the country may even provide free tuition.

The schools endeavoured to present at least one and sometimes more concerts each year and there was a monthly singing session for the whole school. There seemed to be a good supply of appropriate staff available to the schools but the budget available to hire them was always under attack.

Drama was not included in the National Curriculum and Dance was part of the PE provision but these art forms were frequently combined with music for performances. There had been a National Dance Programme which allowed professionals to visit the schools. No such provision had been made for music.

Like in many countries and regions the amount of music and creative work in the school was largely dependent upon the interests of the Head or the individual teacher.

### **Music in the community**

An element of traditional music pervades the amateur music scene in the region. It was not surprising when attending the rehearsal of three church choirs preparing for the Swedish National Day on June 6<sup>th</sup> that I heard “Sverige” and “Svegige flagga” (Sweden and Sweden’s flag) which although early twentieth century in terms of date of composition contain some of the folk elements and combine with the protestant church traditions of hymn writing.

On my final day I attended a concert in Dalhalla, a converted quarry to which I, along with hundreds of others flocked. This concert entitled “Dalarna sings” was to involve the audience and I had been prepared with copies of the pieces. I was not, however,

prepared for the weather, for despite having full waterproofs after four hours of downpour I was colder and wetter than ever before yet the enthusiasm and support of the audience did not once diminish. The audience joined in the items in four part harmony.

The age range of participants in all forms of music making was a salutary message.

## **Estonia**

### **Background**

Clearly this new member of the EU is also a former Soviet Republic and much of the current musical scene has a great deal to do with the past organisation of this state. There is a chequered past historically with invaders and rulers from Russia, Sweden and Germany. Yet, despite this, the language and the inherent culture is still very Estonian. Being a non European language makes the setting of the words very poignant; yet, from the recent past as a Soviet controlled State also made the setting of words very convenient in the interpretation of music and censorship.

### **History**

Prior to the twentieth century Estonia was part of other countries: in the 1280s it was part of the German Hanseatic League, by the start of the sixteenth century battles raged for the territory between Ivan the Terrible of Russia, Poland and Sweden. The period of the seventeenth century marked one of enlightened rule from Sweden but in 1710 Russia gained control of the area and during this period Peter the Great built a palace in Tallinn for his wife. Although the nineteenth century saw a rise in national identity and culture this was stifled by Alexander III in 1881.

The state of Estonia was created in 1920 when a republic was formed after the new Soviet state signed a Tartu Peace Treaty. This Republic only lasted until 1941 when the Soviet Army invaded, who were in turn pushed out by the Germans who occupied for three years. The Soviets regain control in 1944 and it is only in 1991 that modern Estonia gained independence.



*A view of Tallinn with the Opera and Concert Halls in the foreground.*

The tension that exists today is heightened by the attempts of control in the 60s and 70s when a large percentage (nearly a third) of the population were “imported” from Russia, given flats to live in and still live in the country, some of them preferring not to speak Estonian.

The legacy of the Soviet era also extends to the school system which is very formal and still emphasises the areas of sports, music and languages. This is, of course changing rapidly and some of the changes bring what is perceived as a downward trend in terms of quality of output as equality of opportunity extends across the Estonian system.

It is vital to remember the role of song and singing in focussing the resistance of the Estonian people against the Soviet rule and a quarter of the population turned out to sing as part of the “singing revolution” in the Tallinn singing field. Every four years a massive song festival is held at the grounds in Tallinn where thousands of singers join together to celebrate in song their love of music. In between there are festivals for young people and also of specific groups such as church choirs, male voice choirs and choirs that perform sacred music.



*Tallinn: the Singing Field*

### **Music in Schools**

Students start school at 7 years of age and generally stay at their school until they are 18 or 19. Some leave at 16. Many schools, whilst not specialising in music select the musical pupils and stream them so that specialist music classes are formed. In the

same way specialist language and specialist mathematics classes are made. The whole school will not generally exceed a total of 700 students or so, therefore classes are not large and year groups small.

All classes receive two lessons of music in the first stage of education and this curriculum consists of singing and background history of music including listening and learning tonic sol fah. The theory of music taught is quite thorough and by year four (9 to 10 years old) the students will have learnt simple key signatures, scales and intervals as well as the length of notes and rests, all of course from notation. From the special music classes students are drawn into various choirs with especial attention to boys and girls only choirs. They then have extra time for rehearsals included in the student timetable and may have up to three hours of rehearsal in a week.

In the School I visited, School 21, the boys choir also formed the backbone of the Tallinn Boys Choir. Youngsters were selected on musical ability and had their theory as well as choral lessons together. They then had extra rehearsals sometimes after school when preparing for tours and competitions.

I watched a small group of boys in rehearsal learning pieces for their planned tour to Thailand. They were learning some of the joint choir items to be performed in a festival in Bangkok, which were in English. The youngest of the choir members was 12 and so his knowledge of the English language was fairly rudimentary but the youngsters first learned the piece by using Kodaly signs and tonic sol fah. Once the melodic lines were firmly established with the intervals and the notation clearly learned the words were taught by rote: with myself as the guest English speaker.



*Tallinn boys choir in School 21*

The students in School 21, a recently renovated school with a high academic profile and reputation, has an excellent boys choir as well as girls choirs and mixed groups. In fact at a recent concert held in the Estonian Concert Hall in Tallinn there were no less than seven choirs from this one school; with very young groups acting out and singing what were little more than nursery songs to sophisticated avant garde pieces which would tax the more advanced adult choir. There was also room for a more relaxed form of music making in that some of the older students performed a mixed choral piece including guitars in a pop style. Movement was combined with the use of percussion instruments to give a vital dynamism to the performance.

## Repertoire

It is an interesting point to note that the eclectic nature of repertoire was very clear: in all the young choirs I visited the repertoire extended from the classical/traditional to the avant garde performance of contemporary composers such as **Arvo Pärt** and **Veljo Tormis**. Added to this were popular music pieces, some from the thirties era and European jazz and others from the more contemporary pop scene.

Veljo Tormis has written a huge repertoire for choirs and his work in collecting folk material and then developing it into what can be identified as clearly Estonian music is very important. Composers such as Arvo Pärt found their voice by at first experimenting with serialism (especially after the death of Stalin in 1953) but also turned to plainchant and religious music. To a certain extent the freedom granted to composers in Estonia was greater than in Moscow.

I heard two specific works in rehearsal that seem to me to be typical of the repertoire of the TV girls choir and also of Estonian music. The first was "Peace upon you, Jerusalem" by Arvo Pärt which is a setting of the Psalm 122 using a tonal framework but adding cluster chords and chromatic lines. The second was "Winter Patterns" by Veljo Tormis which uses the Estonian language effectively and employs an element of aleatoric technique and note clusters to create a soundscape which is programmatic.

I attended a concert, the last of the term, for the younger Estonian TV girls choirs. There are five choirs in total and I saw the middle two in performance. The singers ranged from about 10 years to 14 years of age. These choirs had pure tone and clarity of pitch control that extended from quite traditional songs to complex aleatoric works and those of a highly chromatic flavour. Just like their counterparts in the School 21 Concert movement was combined with their singing giving at times a complex choreography to their performance. Towards the second half of the performances both groups performed medleys of popular pieces which went down particularly well with the large audience in the "Blackheads Guild Hall" ( Mustpeade Maja) which consisted of families and friends.

I was able to meet up with the conductor of the main Estonian TV Girls Choir **Aarne Saluveer** (who is also the President of the Estonian Choral Society) and to attend a rehearsal of one of the best girls choirs in the world. They were renewing their acquaintance with three pieces by contemporary composers; “Bow down thine ear. O LORD (Psalm 86 ) by the Norwedian composer Egil Hovland , Peace upon you, Jerusalem (Psalm 122) by Arvo Pärt and “Winter Patterns” by Veljo Tormis. Although this was not the main rehearsal and the girls were taking turns to go for voice training exercises, the concentration level was truly inspiring and the way in which the details of the music were developed filled me with admiration.



*Estonian TV girls choir rehearsal*

### **Why is singing such a strong tradition?**

There is no doubt that part of the reason for the strength of the choral tradition in Estonia lies in the Soviet past. The legacy of songs and singing may well be older but the need for control by the Soviets meant that they wanted to emphasise “harmless” pursuits such as sport, languages and music. There was no money for instruments for normal schooling so the emphasis was on singing. I spoke to **Ene Kangron** at the Estonian Academy of Music. She was one of the influential educators who developed the curriculum for music in the 1960s. She was in turn influenced by those who brought in the Kodaly method of teaching singing and this then formed the basis for the teaching of music across the country. **Heino Kaljuste** introduced the Kodaly methods into Estonia and started a childrens choir in Tallinn. This choir made up of “Pioneers” was allowed to tour the Eastern Block countries and the Soviet Union

putting on concerts and workshops to show off the level of musical skills attained by this group. The choir was renamed the Ellerhein childrens choir and was influential in persuading composers to write for this kind of group. The teaching of theory and history of music was integrated with the performance of music and students would sing examples of music as well as study them. This was in itself a bold step and went against the Soviet system of the time: the educators were strongly supported by Minister for Education in Estonia (**Ferdinand Eisen**) who then established a curriculum for this country.

The training of teachers in the Academy meant that they were able to go out into schools and deliver the music curriculum through choral work and means that every child by the end of their third or fourth year of school (10 or 11 years of age) will be able to read music and will have sung in a choir. This is further reinforced by the regulations that state that every Kindergarten must have a music teacher and that the children should have music two or three times a week. It should be noted that these teachers are ones who specialise in choral training and not in instrumental work.

To emphasise the intellectual and academic status of the subject a Music Olympiad system was introduced. This, in parallel with those for other subjects such as languages and mathematics, means that a National competition is organised with school pupils competing first on a regional basis, and then in a National final. Questions are asked on theory of music and for the older pupils at least sight singing exercises are set. This system helps to ward off the idea that music is “just entertainment” and raises the profile of music within the schools (and particularly in the eyes of the Headteacher).

It is of course ironic that the Soviet legacy of thinking that music was “not dangerous” led to the singing revolution.



A teenage singer in the Estonian TV Girls Choir.

There are problems for the Estonian system, however, in that there is now a shortage of teachers able and willing to be trained. There is also a problem of quality control in that many new Universities are springing up within Estonia and there is no real guarantee of the quality of these courses.

The other main problem lies in the transition of the student within the curriculum in that the adolescent is now becoming less inclined to be involved in choral work and despite the separation into boys only and girls only choirs a new way forward in terms of curriculum will need to be developed. It is not surprising that those music educators I spoke to were very interested in how we in the UK tackled this problem.

### **A school Concert**

I was privileged to be able to attend the School Concert for School 21 in Tallinn. This in many respects is an average Estonian school in that although it has some specialisation in Music, Languages and Media it caters for a broad range of children and does not totally specialise in any discipline. This school has been recently completely renovated with European Union money and boasts well equipped classrooms, library and even a swimming pool. There are just over 1300 pupils with 4 music teachers employed.



The interior courtyard of School 21

The youngsters have been set on their ability in a range of subjects including music and these special music classes progress at a faster rate (just as the special sets in Maths or English do). This results in a number of choirs being formed. Some, like the Tallinn Boys Choir who are drawn from the school have extra timetabled rehearsals and are given a number of privileges including tours abroad to compete in prestigious festivals, other choirs are formed by the music teachers by combining classes and rehearsing parts within lessons. The net result in choral terms is staggering. A total of seven choirs performed together with some soloists and a small violin group. The level of participation alone is impressive, and the standard of performance is outstanding.

Here, at least, the participation of the older students in the general choir was well managed with the combination of guitars and the use of a more popular style to encourage the older classes to be involved. The high standards of the boys only and the girls only choirs were not, perhaps reflected in this performance but the involvement and obvious enjoyment was clear from the clear and precise way in which this piece had been put together.

I also visited the new private school in Tallin known as RAM. Here, again the facilities were very good and the four music teachers delivered a programme including Orff percussion as well as Kodaly vocal training to the 700 pupils.

## Sacred Music

Early in my stay I had been able to attend a rehearsal of combined choirs who were rehearsing for a sacred song festival to be held in Tartu. This was but one of a series of regional rehearsals and the conductors, all of whom represented a range of choirs each rehearsed one item in preparation for the song festival. The interesting thing for me was to see the age range of participants: from young adults to old age pensioners with everything in between, all keenly participating in intensive musical rehearsals working with a range of conductor's styles.

This was, of course leading to a main performance, a festival lasting three days held in the University town of Tartu. I was able to attend one of those days and was overwhelmed by the scale of the event and the range of people clearly totally committed to the performances.

The event that day began with a procession from the middle of the town park to the singing field in Tartu. (At the same time I was told a similar festival was being held in Parnu for male voice choirs). This colourful procession wound its way through the town accompanied by some singing and a wind band of Scouts.



The start of the Procession in Tartu

It was only when we arrived at the Singing Field in Tartu that the true scale of activity was evident. There were up a thousand singers of all ages participating in this event.

An audience of several thousand watching and speeches to welcome us from the President of Estonia, the Mayor of Tartu (who also conducted one of the choir items) and the bishop of Estonia. This clear statement of status of the event was truly impressive.



Part of the speech by the President emphasised the importance of music to the Estonian people and how this event would not have been possible in the past as sacred music was not permitted under the Soviet regime. The first song festival was held in 1869 in Tartu and the tradition although suppressed has continued to this day.

I was reminded, however, that this event was a small scale event in comparison with the singers festival held in Tallinn when tens of thousands come together to sing and hundreds of thousands watch. The level of importance placed upon these events by the Estonians is testimony to the importance of music and culture within this society. It is relevant, in my opinion that the emphasis on learning notation is one associated with the pride in and the importance placed within Estonian Society upon education as a whole.

## **Some Conclusions and thoughts**

- Both Sweden and Estonia have a more inclusive musical tradition
- The levels of involvement in both seem higher and go across age groups
- The status of musical activity is much higher; it is valued at almost every level of society including at Government level.
- The rigorous system of teaching music and singing in Estonia leads to a very high level of participation; because everyone feels that they can participate due to their ability to read music.
- The aural tradition in Sweden means that non readers of music participate.
- There are problems in both countries in maintaining the traditions, in ensuring that young people embrace the traditions.
- There are advantages in both countries in being a smaller population and more of a sense of community. In Estonia this is emphasised by the coming together of festivals (yet is in stark contrast to the living conditions in high rise flats). In Sweden the smaller communities lead to a more traditional lifestyle with an emphasis upon seasonal festivities such as Midsummer.
- There is a problem that we all face in terms of keeping interest and motivating adolescents, of ensuring that goals are set and that the instant gratification of TV and media does not de-motivate young people.
- The strength of music in a school is still dependent upon the interests of the Headteacher and the individual music teacher.
- A thorough system of training for teachers particularly in the Primary sector is vital: without that foundation the work with adolescents is particularly difficult; students need the musical tools to be able to succeed.

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### **Estonia**

To Kadri Mägi and Kaie Tanner for arranging visits and meetings.

Nigel Hildreth June 2005



## **Appendix: Contents of CD-Rom**

1. Word document of complete report

### Video and Audio Examples

#### Video:

2. Sweden                      Windows Video
3. Estonia                      Windows Video

#### Audio

Horn	Anna Aronson	Wav file
Leksand young fiddlers		Wav file
Rättvik Spelmanslag		Wav file
Polska Melker and Katarina Brodin		Wav file
Boda Spelmanslag		Wav file

To play any of the above audio and video files. Insert disk into computer and select the relevant file. They should play in Windows Media Player.

Also two folders of photographs

Finzi Sweden  
Finzi Estonia