

At Home in Sweden

Most of what we learn about music history concerns music made in public spaces (theatres, churches, concert halls etc.). However, it is safe to assume that like today, most music made in centuries past was made in the domestic sphere. Not even here in the Boston area, where there are dozens of concerts each week, could public performances outnumber daily instances of a child banging on the piano, a roommate singing in the shower, or a neighbor whistling while walking their dog. With a focus on 17th-century Sweden, we aim to celebrate the history of equally meaningful music made just for the fun of it, far from public ear-shot.

“At Home in Sweden” builds on the research we conducted while curating our 2023 program *In Sweetest Sympathy*, which showcased the lyra viol, a type of viol that flourished in the mid to late 17th-century, particularly in England. Adjustments to the instrument, including a flatter bridge, a shorter string length, and the addition of sympathetic strings, make the lyra viol particularly well suited to playing chords. It is therefore unique as a stringed instrument equally equipped to function in a solo and accompanimental capacity.

Since the history of the lyra viol is so closely associated with England, we were surprised to learn that the small number of extant manuscripts with tablature notation for solo lyra viol includes the following five manuscripts from Sweden:

- 1) MS Tablatur No. 3
- 2) Wenster G.28
- 3) Wenster G.35
- 4) Finspång 9096.3
- 5) MS 21.068

We found that our colleagues were also largely unaware of these five manuscripts and that there is little published scholarship about them. We had stumbled upon a gap in our shared knowledge about notated music for the lyra viol and historical contexts for this instrument and its repertoire.

All five manuscripts are believed to have been compiled sometime between the late-17th and early-18th-centuries. While it is safe to say that we don’t know a great deal about any of them, the histories of some are more obscure than others. Compare for example, Finspång 9096.3, which belonged to the De Greer family of Norrköping (whose lavish home and library still stand today) to MS Tablatur No. 3, which was “bound in 1693 by or for one H.G.” (Ruden, *Music in tablature*).

Despite differences in provenance, the contents of all five manuscripts are remarkably similar. This isn’t so surprising. In a world without recording technology, if you wanted to hear music, someone had to play it. If you had the financial means to own a bound book of music, you could revisit your favorite songs again and again. Like yesterday’s mix tapes or today’s playlists, these 17th-century manuscripts were full of “greatest hits.” Several pieces even appear in multiple

manuscripts, like “Courante Dubut,” of which we found two different arrangements that call for two different lyra viol tunings.

Instrumental dances account for a large percentage of the manuscripts’ contents. This too is not so surprising. In the 17th-century, anyone who received a musical education would have also received some dance training, and formal or informal social gatherings that included music may just as well have included dance. Incorporating 17th-century choreography preserved in historical dance notation and original choreography crafted from her own lexicon of historical dance steps, baroque dancer Julia Bengtsson helps us represent this central component of any 17th-century social musical experience.

Although most pieces in these manuscripts lack titles or other attribution, a non-trivial number of pieces have been identified. These identifiable pieces evidence the practice of making musical adaptations to suit the home environment. Their existence outside of these bounded pages also merits consideration when preparing for performance. Take, for example, the chaconne from Lully’s opera *Acis et Galathée*, which was originally performed at the court of Louis XIV. When you open the Wenster G.28 manuscript, this piece originally scored with four instrumental lines plus basso continuo appears intabulated for just one viol. Today, we can put on a recording of Lully’s opera and hear the chaconne as Lully notated it. What was the owner of Wenster G.28’s relationship to Lully’s original? When we play, sing, and dance the chaconne on this program, how much should the original composition and its theatrical/courtly context weigh on our interpretation of this adapted version for a single lyra viol in the context of someone’s living room? Considering questions like these have made this program a lot of fun to prepare.

Beyond instrumentation, adaptations of music from French operas for the Swedish living room often included adapted texts. We found Swedish texts written to be sung to many of the French opera arias in Swedish lyra viol manuscripts. Jan Olaf Ruden estimates that roughly 1,000 songs were parodied by Swedish poets during the 17th and early 18th centuries. These include opera arias like Lully’s “La beauté la plus sévère” and “Aimable vainqueur.” Parody texts circulated in commercially sold song books and on broadsides, where they were printed without musical notation. Learning this history allowed us to make two critical inferences: first, that these melodies were accessible to people who did not have the financial means to own personalized manuscripts, and second, that some melodies were ubiquitous enough that people across strata of society could sing new parody texts to them without referencing sheet music.

As Ester Lebedinski writes in her article “Travels of a Tune,” the circulation of the same melodies amongst contemporaries of varied social classes in early modern Europe “calls into question the idea that ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ music were separate spheres.” Given the flexibility and social permeability of some vocal and dance melodies, nyckelharpa player Lindsey Clark joins us on pieces to which parody texts were published. In addition to the aforementioned French opera arias, these include “Sinclairvisan” (which is based on the popular *Folia di spagna*), “Courante Dubut,” and “Hwad är thal.” Hwad är thal was referenced by no less than 22 broadsides.

In his publication, *Nyckelharpan*, Jan Ling explains that in the early modern period, the nyckelharpa was likely primarily played by members of the lower social classes to accompany singing and dancing. Though today the nyckelharpa is celebrated as the national instrument of Sweden, very little is known about its early history. However, it was during the 17th-century that the nyckelharpa, like the lyra viol, underwent the transformative addition of sympathetic strings, which Ling believes was a development “probably influenced by viol or violin instruments. . . that were known in the same environment. . .”

The nyckelharpa was also played in 17th-century Swedish churches, particularly at weddings or on feast days. As such, Lindsey joins us for “Nun Danket alle Gott” and “Dagen ifrån oss skrider,” which appear in editions of the *Swedish Psalmbook* from the 1690’s as well as in contemporary manuscripts for solo lyra viol. It can often be impossible to determine whether melodies first appeared in popular culture and were then included in psalm books (true of Düben’s “Tröstesång,” for example) or vice versa. Regardless, the inclusion of these melodies in psalm books assures that they were known to people from all strata of society.

We may never know as much about the histories of domestic-sphere music-making as we do about music at courts, churches, and theaters, but investigating and celebrating little-known sources like these manuscripts helps us better understand the varied cultural and social contexts of historical music-making by a wide range of individuals. Through performance, we hope that audiences can connect their own at-home musical experiences to this centuries-old tradition of making music just for the fun of it.

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