

**NORDIC-AMERICAN
PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET**



MUSIC-ON-A-STRING
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NORDIC-AMERICAN PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET

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

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Notes from
MUSIC-ON-A-STRING
Beatrice Hole

I've always enjoyed winter season as it is a good time to rest, lay back and reflect. The snow is so pure and the sun shines so warmly even if the days are shorter. Now it is time to look for signs of spring.

Postage rates increased at the end of January but that will not affect the Psalmodikon Newsletter fund, for we purchased a year's supply of stamps before the increase occurred. Your membership fee is used for postage and printing and the fund is in fine shape. I thank everyone for their continued interest in the psalmodikon and membership.

You will notice the Newsletter has a different look this time. Reason being that editor, Kristen Akre, is very busy this month with family, work and a computer upgrade.

Soon our thoughts will be of planning the Psalmodikon meeting for summer 2014. We welcome suggestions and ideas from you folks. There is nothing in writing that states when or where it is held. Jean Akre has given us an invitation to meet again on the west coast but that is somewhat of an inconvenience for most of us. Although we sure had a fun time when we were there in 2004!

I am waiting to hear from you!

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

PAUL B. KNIVSLAND PASSES

Paul was born on Christmas Eve, 1925 and passed away on December 10, 2013. He is survived by his loving wife, Betty, their five children and their families. Paul was a friendly and gentle spoken man, not only to his family but to his many friends as well. He loved working with wood and made over 40 psalmodikons, many which are still being played today. Paul and Betty were Charter Members of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet when it was organized in 1997.

The Knivsland's lived in North St. Paul, MN and were neighbors to Grace and Harlis Anderson. It was back in 1991, when I became acquainted with the psalmodikon, that I first met Paul and Betty. Paul and Harlis made many psalmodikons together, some of them I have in my collection of psalmodikons.

It was at this period in time that the psalmodikon was nearly a forgotten instrument. I do not know where the psalmodikon would be today if Harlis Anderson had not found an old psalmodikon in his Grandparent's attic. Credit must be given to Paul and Harlis who were instrumental in creating a duplicate pattern of this old psalmodikon and went on to make many more psalmodikons for anyone that wanted one of their own. They also made folks aware of the psalmodikon and many were bringing them in for repair or ordering one of their very own.

God of our Fathers

Tune: George W. Warren 1892
Text: Daniel C. Roberts 1876
Sifferskrift: K. Pedersen 2013

I remember returning from a Psalmodikon meeting in Sweden in 1995 and was all excited about a new style of psalmodikon that I had seen. I wanted Paul to make one for me. It was a "tandem" psalmodikon that could be played by two musicians standing face to face. Later in time, Paul made me another unique psalmodikon that had two strings side by side and I could play the two strings, tuned alike, at the same time.

In the summer of 1999, I met Knut Djupedal, Director of the Norwegian Emigrant Museum and Research Center in Ottestad, Norway. Knut was gathering items from America for their new Museum. He was very impressed with the psalmodikon and its history and asked if we would be willing to donate one of our psalmodikons to the Norwegian Emigrant Museum for their collection.

Paul Knivsland volunteered to build a psalmodikon and I painted the rosemailing on it. About the time we were concerned about how to package it well enough for shipping, along came Ruth Gibson of White Bear Lake, MN. She was about to leave for a trip to Norway and volunteered to hand-carry the instrument to Knut Djupedal at the Museum for us.

Blessed be his memory!



MUSIC HEALS THE HEART

I have been reading the results of several studies that have been done to find out the benefits of aging. It has been said that music heals the heart. But can it provide healthy aging as well? It was found that music improved the quality of life among older choir members; they had fewer falls, fewer doctor visits and less loneliness.

Music allows folks "to use their bodies and minds while creating something beautiful".

I am sure we can find that a truism among psalmodikon players as well.

YOUTH AND THE PSALMODIKON

Over the years I have felt it is important to make children aware of the psalmodikon. After all they are the ones who will be left to carry on the psalmodikon history. The psalmodikon and I often visit the schools and the children are very fascinated with the instrument. It is an easy instrument for them to play and they enjoy it very much. But with their busy schedules and the limitations of the psalmodikon, it is hard to keep them involved.

I did have a fun afternoon recently when I played the psalmodikon at a private Christian school. There I was allowed to give the church background involving the instrument and all hands went up when I asked if they wanted to sing "Children of the Heavenly Father" with the psalmodikon!

I recently visited with Lydia Droegemueller who is now living in Chile and was home for a visit. Lydia started playing the psalmodikon at the age of 10 and was the youngest member of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet when it was

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our	grate-ful			songs	be-		fore	thy	throne	a-		rise.		
<u>5-5</u>	4*	(4)		<u>3-3-3</u>	6+		6	5	5	4		<u>3-3-3-3</u>		
<u>3-3</u>	3*	(3)		<u>1-1-1</u>	1+		2	(3)-(4)	5	5		<u>1-1-1-1</u>		

windows are mainly abstract representations of the four seasons, touched only briefly by a few starkly modern representations of humans: a boy flying a kite in the spring, a farmer on a tractor in the fall.

The window there that invites the world most abruptly into the church is the winter window which shows two snowmobiles.



Snowmobiles in church! What would Haldo Einarsen Grotte have thought?

Well, this much is true: Grotte's unaccompanied singers have passed their way, but his simple instrument endures. There is also this: Grotte, like the rest of us, would have conceded it: that God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.



BRANDEN SWEET

Jean Akre, Kalama, WA has organized a group of psalmodikon players on the West Coast. Photos show two of the newest members. Branden Sweet built his

own psalmodikon. Molly has a psalmodikon built by Floyd Foslien.



MOLLY BEININGEN

ITEMS FOR SALE

PSALMODIKON SONGBOOK

Written in Sifferskrift and 4-part harmony for psalmodikons. **\$19.00 pp**

PSALMODIKON QUARTET CD

\$15.00 pp

Send orders to:

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P.O. Box 87
Hendricks, MN 56136

PSALMODIKON COMPONENTS

Psalmodikon Pattern	\$10.00
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String	1.25
Fine Tuner w/tailpiece	17.75
Maple fret board w/frets	30.00
Sitka spruce top material	
Small psalmodikon	17.00
Tapered psalmodikon	22.00
Cherrywood violin bow	28.00
Rosin	5.00

Send orders to: Floyd Foslien
567 High Ridge Drive
Hudson, WI 54016

www.ffoslien@sbcglobal.net

organized in 1997. She often gave programs with me. During our visit Lydia opened up a "time capsule" that she had put together in seventh grade. I was surprised (and pleased) to see that one of the items was the psalmodikon newsletter and the photo of her performing with the psalmodikon built by her grandfather! It just goes to show that sometimes those little seeds make a difference!



Beatrice Hole & Lydia Droegemueller
at the Vesterheim Brunch - 1996

ROCK AND ROLL LEGEND PASSES

I read with sadness that one of my early favorite stars of music, Phil Everly, of the Everly Brothers, passed away recently at the age of 74. He was the other half of the record-setting sibling duo who sang in the late fifties. Oh how I loved to listen to the Everly Brothers singing on my radio (no TV in those days) playing their acoustic guitars and close harmony singing. This was part of my early exposure to music.

I was just a young girl growing up in northwestern Minnesota and I remember how thrilled my friends and I were when the Everly Brothers came and performed at the Maple Lake Pavilion. This was not a fancy place as it was mostly used for roller skating

and dancing and I am sure they had not yet "hit the charts" at that time.

The Everly Brothers had a profound influence with their style of music as it was very unique. They were pioneers of Rock & Roll with their style of singing and unmistakable vocal harmonies that influenced a generation of musicians in the fifties and sixties.

There was something in their voices of close harmony singing that created a sound not possible with singers who are not siblings. One reason being that Don and Phil Everly were raised using the same accent. The accent of the language that you sing in, affects phrasing and intonation. Not only did they have that genetic match but also their voices were such that one was seated high and the other was seated low. Those chances were as likely as lightning striking twice in the same place. You just don't hear that very often.

As we listened to them sing, "Bye Bye Love," "Wake up Little Susie," and "All I Do Is Dream," it sometimes seemed as if there were more than two voices singing.

Those were the "good old days!"

YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS DUE IF 2014 IS NOT WRITTEN ON THE MAILING LABEL.

PSALMODIKON HISTORY

Over the years as I searched for history of the psalmodikon, I have collected many different stories such as the following one. This is from a publication in Windom, MN. Writer and date unknown.

FROM THE SALMODICON TO THE SNOWMOBILE: how fashions change

WINDOM - I have a portrait of Haldo Einarsen Grotte here.



He looks like a small man. Perhaps it is only his thick and ill-fitting jacket that makes him seem small. The jacket, which concedes nothing to style, must be of a long-wearing and heavy grade of wool. Grotte does not look like the kind of man who squandered his money in more jackets than he needed.

Underneath there is a thick wool waistcoat, and under that a shirt starched until it is almost as unyielding as the attached cellophane collar. He is probably wearing a union suit as well. Perhaps the union suit is of cotton, and the wool does not, therefore, scratch as much as it might. Still, the lights in the photography studio are very bright and very hot, and Grotte must be sweltering.

He holds his meticulously trimmed head high and the gaze of his bright, clear eyes is forthright. Still, there seems something shy about his eyes. The little beard under his chin hangs like a necklace. It gives him an ecclesiastical air.

The portrait was made at a studio on Cedar Avenue in Minneapolis. He would have been visiting there, in what was then the heart of the Norwegian immigrant ghetto. Cedar Avenue was the ghetto's main street. You could go to a photography studio there, or to shops where the merchants spoke Norwegian, or buy a Norwegian language newspaper there, or go to a music hall and hear the songs of the Old Country, although Grotte would have had nothing to do with public entertainments.

The street was called, both affectionately and derisively, Snoose Boulevard after the weakness of the Scandinavian men for a good chew. It is not clear from this portrait that Grotte had such weaknesses.

Grotte farmed north of Windom. He came from Selbu, Norway in 1887 in the company of his brother and his brother's family.

It was a tightly knit family. When Brother Ole's daughter Marit got married, everybody, mother, father, Uncle Haldo, went off to live with her and her new husband. Uncle Haldo brought with him his most precious possession, his *Salmodicon*. He had carried the instrument all the way from Norway. He had made it there. It was the symbol of his art and of his religion, and it marked his place in each.

Grotte was one of the Pietists, a splinter group of Lutherans whose beliefs were both democratic and severe. The group argued for the place of the laity in the government of the church. It despised the bitter attacks of some preachers on unbelievers, urging instead that they should be treated with sympathy and kindness. It called believers to a life of devotion and moral uprightness. On the other hand, the group rejected public amusements. There should be no theater, no dancing, no public games. There should not be fancy rhetoric from the pulpit. There should not, even, be musical instruments in the church.

The Pietists did sing hymns, but they did so *a capella* under the leadership of a *klokker*, an honored laymen with a strong voice who knew the melodies. Grotte was a *klokker*. His *Salmodicon* was his rehearsal instrument, the thing which made his music compatible with his faith. He used it to refresh his memory of the melodies before he went off to lead the local congregation in worship.

It is a very simple instrument, a hollowed rectangular beam without ornament of any kind, across which a single cat gut string was sounded with a horse hair bow. A pair of hand-hewn pegs hold the string taut; there was a simple bridge of some kind, now lost; there is a set of frets made from metal staples alone a raised piece of wood. The bottom of the box slides out so that a set of scales marked on what look like rulers can be carried there.

To the extent that the craftsmanship of the thing is remarkable, it is in the job of hollowing the beam to make the sounding box. The corners of the box are remarkably square and its walls are remarkable thin and smooth. It must have been a painstaking job to get them that way without making a hole somewhere, and the beam itself would have to have been expertly chosen.

Grotte's instrument was given to the Rev. Joseph Nystuen of the American Lutheran Church here in 1976. Nystuen has fitted it with a cello A-string and a violin bridge, and has been teaching himself to play it. He gave us a couple of measures of "Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee," on it the other day. A low pitched, raspy, and primitive, but surprisingly strong, sound came forth. Nystuen paused in his dolorous melody. "They'd really whoop it up with a number like this," he said wryly.

The Zion Society was meeting in the basement of the church the day Nystuen brought out the *Salmodicon*. He went down to show it to the members.

The Zion Society itself is a reminder of the past. The women who belong to it are almost all gray haired, and their missionary group is one of the last of its kind. Many of its members would, as children, have been brought up in the Pietist tradition, but they

were singing a hymn to the slow and deliberate accompaniment of a piano as Nystuen entered.

He told them all something about the instrument he was carrying and asked if they would sing a hymn with him as he played it. There was some groping for a suitable piece, something both Nystuen and the singers knew. They settled, it would seem inevitably, on a tune Grotte himself might have led, a Norwegian hymn with a strong folk melody.

There were two or three false starts, over which everybody could laugh and then the *Salmodicon* caught the tune and buzzed and scratched it out. The sweet voices of the women caught too and rose in spirited celebration of earlier times, when you were of the New Land during the week, but on Sunday, in the presence of God, the Old Country, and the old language, the old ways came comfotringly back.

Fashions in public adornment come and go. There may be a day again when the *klokker* leads the plain singing.

On our way out of town we stopped for a moment to admire the stone carvings on the front of the Windom power plant. They are quintessentially in the Depression style, classical, spare-lined, the men nude and muscular, the women demurely clad and beautiful. They were built with federal funds under the WPA at a time when so little else was clear that we turned again to the basic arts to find ourselves. Now two of the three carvings are so overgrown with vines that they can't really be seen.

We drove a little farther on and stopped at the St. Francis Xavier Catholic church, which is as contemporary in its attitudes toward adornment as Grotte's *Salmodicon* is out of date. The church is made of the simplest materials, concrete block, steel beams, and is decorated in the plainest way, dark wood furnishings, white walls.

The whole is carried out of the ordinary by the shock of vivid blue carpet at the altar and by a series of long, narrow stained glass windows along the long walls of the sanctuary at the roof line. You have to look heavenward to see them. When you do, what you see is not conventionally religious at all. The