

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

As I write articles for this Newsletter, I am so excited to share the experience Floyd and I had during the last week of January in Hancock, Michigan. Having accepted the invitation to be the “2017 Artists in Residence” of the Heikinpäivä Finnish-American Winter Festival, we conducted the Virsikannel/Psalmodikon Enrichment Classes, performed at various community events and participated in local radio, TV and newspaper interviews.

It was a proud moment when the students’ instruments were finished and we began to practice the music. I knew then that all our preparations and efforts in teaching had been accomplished and what I had dreamed of — a newly formed Virsikannel-Psalmodikon Orchestra playing, “Beautiful Savior” for the Heikinpäivä Festival had come true!

This visit was also a learning experience for me. I have been researching old folk instruments for the last 25 years and was not aware of the Virsikannel.

I’m usually among the Norwegians and Swedes in the Minneapolis area and so it was a fun experience for me in getting better acquainted with the people of Finnish heritage who are so dedicated to keeping their ancestral traditions alive. They are wonderful folks and made our visit so pleasant and meaningful. I hope somehow our roads may cross again sometime.

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

HEIKINPÄIVÄ

Floyd Foslien

Heikinpäivä is a yearly mid-winter celebration held in Copper Country. That’s in Hancock, Michigan (Upper Peninsula or U.P.). There are a lot of people of Finnish descent here because Finns came to the area in the late 1800s to work in copper mines. The mines are not presently operating and the communities of Hancock and Houghton, twin cities separated by a canal, survive at least partly because of Finlandia University in Hancock and Michigan Technical College in Houghton.

Floyd Foslien and Beatrice Hole were invited to join in this celebration by James Kurtti, Director of the Finnish-American Heritage Center at Finlandia University, to teach how to build and play the Finnish musical instrument, the Virsikannel. Wait, what? A Virsikannel? What’s that? This will begin to make more sense when I tell you that Virsikannel is the Finnish name for Psalmodikon. Finns have a historical musical tradition with this instrument as do Norwegians and Swedes. We were told that *virsi* in Finnish is equivalent to *hymn* in English and *kannel* means *musical instrument*.

We taught a class of seven students to build Virsikannels and then taught them to play as well. By the end of the second day the students were able to play “Beautiful Savior” quite well on their new instruments. The Virsikannel/Psal-

modikons were assembled from kits made by MusicMakers in Stillwater, Minnesota. With very few problems, the students made good looking and nice sounding musical instruments in two days of class. On the third day these students and several additional students learned to play more music. Two days later a total of eleven new Virsikannel players joined us to play at a hymn sing at Zion Lutheran Church! Fortunately, we had brought along extra psalmodikons and bows. Even though we successfully introduced students here to the Finnish Virsikannel, the national musical instrument of Finland is not the Virsikannel but rather the Kantele. It has been the most important part of their musical heritage for hundreds of years.

The Kantele is a multi-stringed harp or zither-like instrument which may be plucked with fingers of both hands. Similar to Psalmodikon music, Kantele music is also written in numbers but the music is not interchangeable. Modern Kanteles may have from 5 to 36 strings and in the hands of a talented player or group of players will produce hauntingly beautiful music. We were fortunate to be invited to play our two Psalmodikons along with 10 Kantele players during the Sunday hymn sing. The instruments complement each other nicely and the result was quite beautiful.

In addition to conducting classes, demonstrating the psalmodikon, and playing at the hymn sing, we were invited to play the Psalmodikons at several places around Hancock and Houghton, Michigan. We played for about 30 residents of the Bluffs, a senior living community in Houghton on Thursday, then for over 30 residents at a nursing home in Hancock on Friday, and were invited back for an encore performance at the Bluffs on Sunday morning! We were also interviewed by a reporter from the local daily paper, by a local TV reporter, and at a local radio station. As “Heikinpäivä 2017 Artists in Residence”, we were treated royally by everyone and stayed in a beautiful condominium next to the canal, courtesy of Finlandia University.



Above: Floyd Foslien and Beatrice Hole.



FINNISH RESIDENTS IN HANCOCK

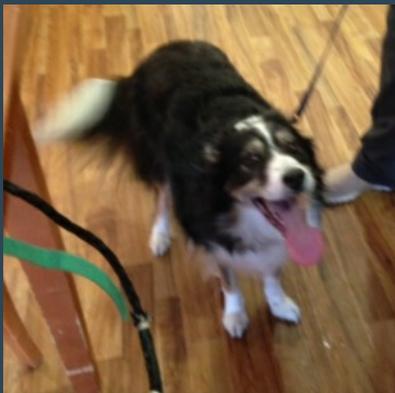
By 1873, more than 1,000 Finns had settled in Michigan's Copper County. Today the five northwestern most counties of Michigan's Upper Peninsula are the only counties in the USA in which Finns are the largest ethnic group, with approximately 35% of the residents claiming Finnish heritage.

The Finnish flag is proudly displayed in many places and even the street sign names are written in both English and Finnish (see picture above).

It was no coincidence that the beginnings of what became the great migration of Finns would involve Norwegians. Early Finnish migration to the New World has been inextricably connected to Norway and on some levels, still is today. In fact, the first Finns did not migrate from the Republic of Finland, which did not yet exist, but from Finnmark, which is Norway's most northern county (*fylke*).

How nice it was for a couple of Norwegian psalmodikon players (Floyd and Beatrice) to be invited to Hancock to teach them about the *virsi* and *psalmodikon*. 🎵

CANINE ENJOYS MUSIC TOO



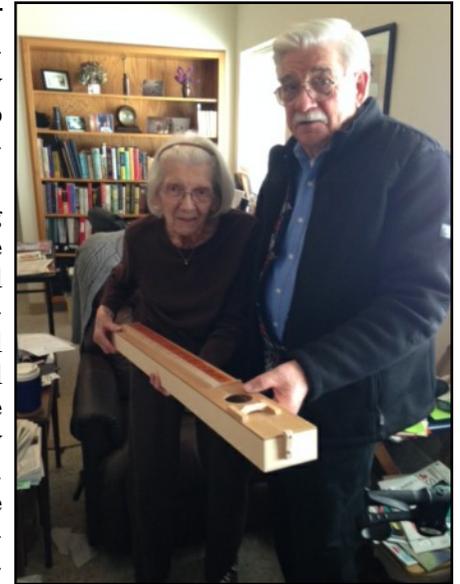
When Beatrice and Floyd performed at a care facility in Hancock, Michigan, there was also a happy little dog in attendance. This is the first time they have entertained a member of the canine family who also entertained us by "singing" along.

AN ENCORE PERFORMANCE

Beatrice Hole

When Floyd and I were not conducting classes during our stay in Hancock, Michigan we were invited to perform at various venues in the community with our psalmodikons.

The folks at The Bluffs Senior Living Center were such a delightful audience to entertain and they must have enjoyed our program as much as we enjoyed performing. A day later we received a call that they would like us to come back and do a repeat performance, which we were able to fit in on Sunday morning, the day before we were scheduled to leave town. To our surprise, a 91-year-old lady in the audience fell in love with the psalmodikon and she made arrangements to purchase one of her very own! 🎵



ILON KAIJU KANTELE ENSEMBLE

Beatrice Hole

During our stay in Hancock, we not only had the opportunity to become more familiar with the Kantele, Finland's national instrument, but we also learned to play one of their songs. We give our thanks to Kay Seppala, director of the Ilon Kaiju Kantele group, who rewrote the music for "Church Bells of Konevitsa" so that we could accompany the Kantele group on our psalmodikons. It was an honor to play our psalmodikons with the Kantele group at the Sunday afternoon Hymn Sing at Zion Lutheran Church in Hancock. — Perhaps a first for the Kantele and the Psalmodikon! (See photograph above.) 🎵

The following is the Finnish version of one of our favorite hymns.

JONK' ON TURVA JUMALASSA

(Children of the Heavenly Father)

*Jonk' on turva Jumalassa,
Turvassa on paremassa
://:Kuin on lintu pesasessaan.
Taivaan tahti killellessaan://*

HISTORY OF THE KANTELE

Beatrice Hole

You may recall in the last issue of the Psalmodikon Newsletter, I wrote a brief description of the Finnish Kantele. Now after having had the opportunity to learn more about the instrument, at the Finnish American Heritage Center in Hancock, Michigan, I will share some more facts.

The Finnish Kantele is the traditional folk-music instrument of Finland. Its rise in stature from peasant artifact to national treasure was due in part to its link with the National Romantic Movement in Finland during the 1800s. The Kantele, in all its forms, has come to represent an important part of Finnish national identity.

When Finnish immigrants began arriving in North America they brought with them the cultural and social values of their time and homeland. Some brought the five-string “box” Kantele instruments with them — Not only as personal possessions but also as symbolic reminders of the land they left behind.

The Kantele tradition almost died out but in recent decades, this folk heritage enjoys rejuvenation and rekindled interest. It belongs to the zither family of instruments; also called a table or lap harp. During the past two or three



Above: The various styles of the Kantele. On the right is the simple version of the 5-string Kantele. The 5 steel strings are normally tuned to D-Major Scale. D E F# G A

centuries the original 5-string Kantele has evolved into an instrument of 10, 24, 36, and even 42 strings.

The smaller Kantele is played by holding it on your lap while the larger ones are placed on a table to be played.

The Kantele has limited playing capabilities as a diatonic instrument but may be re-tuned to play melodies in more than one key signature. The Kantele is plucked or strummed with the fingers using both hands to play melodies or chords. 

CLARE ZURAW AND THE JOUHIKKO

Beatrice Hole

The Jouhikko is a traditional 3-stringed bowed lyre from Finland and dates back to the 1500s. It was played mostly for dances or to accompany songs and is probably the oldest bowed instrument in European history. The playing of the Jouhikko nearly died out in the 20th century for lack of interest or perhaps if it is not played well, it would not be a pleasant sounding instrument. The music sounds somewhat like a viola with a drone sound.

The strings traditionally were made of horsehair, but now since its revival where folks are making their own Jouhikko, they are using strings of nylon, gut or metal. The Jouhikko has three strings that are tuned to G D A. The music is played, with the hand inserted through a hole in the flat wooden board and are stopped by touching them with the back of the fingers, as there is no fingerboard to press the strings against.



Clare Zuraw played the Jouhikko along with the Kantele players at the Sunday afternoon Hymn Sing. It sounded very nice.

It was a pleasure to meet Clare and to hear the music of the Jouhikko and become more familiar with another unique Finnish instrument.

WINTER SCENE IN HANCOCK



Picture is a winter view of downtown Houghton, Michigan and the Portage Lake Lift Bridge. The Portage Lake Canal/River divides the cities of Hancock (pop. 4500) and Houghton (pop. 7500) and drains into Lake Superior. The winters here are long and snowy. They already had received 180 inches of snow before we arrived at the end of January. It is said that they have two seasons, “winter

is here and winter is coming”.

I heard no one complaining about the weather — they seem to embrace winter and accept whatever comes. It appeared that everyone in town owns a snowmobile as they were everywhere. One time I saw four snowmobiles lined up at the Holiday gasoline station! The Portage Lake Lift Bridge even has a lower deck just for snowmobiles to cross. It looked like fun.



Heikinpäivä, From P. 1

We had a successful week during Heikinpäivä and were happy to bring the Virsikannel/Psalmodikon to a new community of people. We think the new players are going to enjoy their instruments and will continue to practice and play. We hope they will continue to play along with Kantele players. 🎵

Beatrice Hole, Eden Prairie, Minnesota, is founder and President of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet, a non-profit organization dedicated to the education and preservation of the Psalmodikon and Siferskrift music. A self-taught player, she was invited to Sweden in 1995 to share her skills.

Floyd Foslien, Hudson, Wisconsin, is the Vice-President of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet. He not only plays the instrument, but also uses his woodworking skills to build them as well. Floyd and Beatrice form half of the Nordic-American Psalmodikon Quartet.



We made the local Sunday paper!

HOW TO BUILD A VIRSIKANNEL



Below (I): Students playing "Beautiful Saviour".

VIRSIKANNEL OF FINLAND



Pictured (left) are two Finnish Virsikannel instruments that are located in the Archives of the Finnish American Heritage Center in Hancock, Michigan.

The Virsikannel is a one-stringed instrument native to Finland and was played to accompany hymn singing (hence the name *virsi* meaning *hymn*, and *kannel* for *musical instrument*). They were especially popular during the "Awakenist Movement" of the 1860s.

Is it any wonder that they look so much alike? History suggests that both the virsikannel and the Norwegian-Swedish psalmodikon were modified after a similar instrument in Denmark and were intended to keep the pitch in hymn singing during worship services.

No music has been found for the Virsikannel, and so we were pleased that we could share the Psalmodikon Siferskrift music with them. 🎵



ITEMS FOR SALE

PSALMODIKON SONGBOOK (revised edition)

written in Sifferskrift and 4-part harmony for psalmodikons

\$15.00 ea. + \$6.50 pstg

Send orders to: **Beatrice Hole**

PSALMODIKON QUARTET CD

\$15.00 pp

Send orders to: **Singsaas Lutheran Church**

Attn: Music CDs

P. O. Box 87, Hendricks, MN 56136

<http://www.countrychurchmusic.com/>

Greetings from Readers

Dear Beatrice,

I think of you so often. All the fun times we had with that little box my grand-parents had years ago. Then when Fyllis and I were sent by Floyd to play and meet you in Decorah, IA. Well, we did it and what fun it was. Great memories! I love getting my Newsletters. They are great!

—Shirley Sorenson, Zimmerman, MN

“God Jul”

Along with a check for membership, thank you for doing such good work! It is a colorful & informative newsletter!

—Lily Tofteland Hartmann, Boulder, CO

Hello from Germany –

In October 2016, I was teacher for the instrument Hummel at Nordic-Harp Meeting near Copenhagen. There I could listen first time to a psalmodikon. Great! I thought I will have to build one. Today I glued the bottom under the box and some more days will be needed to finish this instrument. At the web site I saw you have a Psalmodikon Songbook.

I am the very special man for the Hummel in Germany and have written the story. This is the older cousin of the Psalmodicon from medieval times to 20th century. In 2011, I was able to organize an exhibition of many historical instruments in the Museum Cloppenburg. Peter Ellertsen came to this exhibition on his tour.

—Wilfried Ulrich - Markneukirchen

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PSALMODIKON COMPONENTS

Psalmodikon Pattern	\$10.00
Tuning Peg	3.75
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.fffoslien@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.

Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet & Newsletter

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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**
6560 Leesborough Ave
Eden Prairie, MN 55346

Dear Beatrice –

Thank you for all you do. Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

—Lee & Helen Lunos, Roseau, MN

Dear Beatrice,

I have been a couple of times in California with my Nyckelharpa Group. Once I met Ginny Lee, who just visited me here in northern Sweden and told me about the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet. We have had a project to try to make people build and learn how to play the handmade musical instruments that were used hundreds of years ago, in other words to keep the traditions alive. The instruments are nyckelharpa, kantele and psalmodikon. These last 10 years we have visited more than 200 school classes. Please add my name to your Psalmodikon Newsletter.

—Ille Olofsson, Sweden

Dear Mr. Foslien –

I heard your beautiful CD “Psalmodikons Return to the Old Country Church”. We live in Holland. Is it possible to send me this particular CD? I myself have also a psalmodikon and besides that: My grandfather was a Finnish Lutheran priest in America in 1920. So this CD feels as if I was listening to the kind of music he must have known. Hope to hear from you.

Greetings, Maisa van der Kolk, Netherlands

—We have learned that Maisa has received her CD and has enjoyed playing along with her psalmodikon.—



FROM THE PRESIDENT

I have also received checks in the mail from many remembering to renew to their membership to the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet for 2017.

May I take this opportunity to thank all of the “psalmodikon enthusiasts” for your support and continued interest in the psalmodikon. We maintain about 75 names on the mailing list!

I want to send a great big thank you to Paul Gjenvick, Atlanta, Georgia and Rob Graber, Woodbury, Minnesota who in the past few months have worked diligently to secure the best server for the Psalmodikon Website. (This technical part is something I know nothing about.) They have arrived at a very favorable solution and the website will continue on as before with the help of monies coming from the Membership Fund. I want to thank everyone who has touched my life in some way or another in carrying on the tradition of the psalmodikon. This would not happen if it were not for the support of all the psalmodikon enthusiasts that assist in some way or another.

Thanks to all of you!

— Beatrice Hole



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