



# 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

Into a new year we go! It is the start of a new decade and it's also a Leap Year!

Hopefully big things await us all.

As always at the beginning of a new year, we have thoughts of how we can do better or what changes can make a difference in our lives. I have spent many decades with my “psalmodikon hobby” and have written an article sharing my thoughts and concerns for the future.

**Thank you!** Everything I do happens because of you who care. All you psalmodikon enthusiasts and your interest in keeping in touch with me have helped to tell the important story and preserve living traditions of our Scandinavian heritage for future generations. You have helped me bring Scandinavian culture to life and have used it to inspire and enrich the lives of all people who experience it. This could not have been done without your support.

I write articles for the Newsletter whenever an interesting topic appears. This time I start with a cute little Christmas happening.

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

## Two Psalmodikons in Window of Oslo Shop

Alf Bjørnar Luneborg

In my way early in November 2019 through Storgaten in Oslo, I was passing by Hornaas Music Shop and noticed two old psalmodikons in the window. On one of them hang a small paper as told they were from 1850. My curiosity arose and I went into the shop and ask the owner, Harald Beckstrøm, if I could look at them and if he knew anything about the story behind them.

He was telling me that he had bought them on a flea market on Oslo Circuit Prison – but that they had come from another prison, Bredtveit Woman's Prison in Oslo as part of many things that was surplus after cleaning the attic. But a look into the history of Bredtveit Woman's Prison<sup>1</sup> on the internet shows that the prison was built in 1918 and put in use in 1923. So it is debatable how the psalmodikon could have found its way to Bredtveit Woman's Prison sometime between 1918 and 1923. The psalmodikon had already then been an instrument in decline in Norway since around 1850 – or from about the time the owner of the shop estimated them to be from. They can, of course, probably have come to Bredtveit with a prison minister as part of the community song in devotions and the year's feast.

On the other hand, the area of Bredtveit has some interesting historical references; the prison was built on Bredtveit Gårds åkerland (*Bredtveit farm's arable land*).<sup>2</sup> The farm's written history starts in 1662 when it was mentioned as “crown land”. And

later between 1817 and 1824 the farm was home to Hans Nilsen Hauge.<sup>3</sup> It was the year after Hans Nilsen Hauge died and in 1825 that Lars Roverud for the first time became known with the Danish psalmodikon.<sup>4</sup> From 1835 he was traveling around the country (Norway) and teaching schoolteachers

in church song and psalmodikon playing. From 1841 with financial support from the state, the psalmodikon was fast in use on schools around the country. Lars Roverud died in 1850, the same year as the two psalmodikons are supposed to be from.<sup>5</sup> And it's from the second half of this century and forward the instrument's decline started. I do not know if Lars Roverud at any time had anything to do with Bredtveit farm, but it's not impossible. In 1929 the municipality was buying the Bredtveit Farm and the houses were later torn down.<sup>6</sup> And on the earlier farmland the Bredtveit church was built in 1977 – An obelisk with a commemorative plaque over Hans Nilsen Hauge is placed in the church garden.



*Thanks to Harald Beckstrøm*

<sup>1</sup> Bredtveit Kvinnefengsel (Bredtveit Woman's Prison), Wikipedia.

<sup>2</sup> Bredtveit, [Lokalhistoriewiki.no](http://Lokalhistoriewiki.no).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lars Roverud, [Lokalhistoriewiki.no](http://Lokalhistoriewiki.no).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bredtveit Kvinnefengsel (Bredtveit Woman's Prison), Wikipedia.

## Psalmodikon Display in St. Paul

If you have not had a chance to visit the Nordic String Instrument Exhibit at the Schubert Club Music Museum located in the Landmark Center Building in St. Paul, you should make an effort to do so. The instruments, including the psalmodikon, will be on display until May of 2020. This is a very educational display of historic Scandinavian instruments and we are grateful that the Schubert Club invited these folk instruments to be exhibited in their Museum.

We have just learned that the Schubert Club has expressed an interest in purchasing the “hands-on” part of the psalmodikon display for future use as they have been so well received!



## So Sweet!

What a pleasure it is to discover that you can make your own music even though you are only 17 months old! Gunnar received this book for Christmas and has found that by putting his little finger on the button, he can play “Jingle Bells”. You can see the excitement in Gunnar’s little face!

Oh, the joy of this accomplishment at this very young age!

Reminds me that this is no different than when many of us older folks found the pleasure of making music in our own little way with the psalmodikon and one string!

## Can a Hobby “Retire”?

Beatrice Hole

In one of the Newsletters last year, I wrote an article, “The Psalmodikon – Legacy and Heirloom”. Recently I have been thinking of what I will do when the time comes for me to “downsize” or health fails.

Over the years, my psalmodikon hobby has become nearly a full-time occupation. I have accumulated more psalmodikon “stuff” than I care to admit. Fortunately, I still live in a large home that has lots of space to store and display my huge collection of psalmodikons; books and photos; research information on psalmodikon history and

music; personal files of my experiences with everyone I have been in contact with; and a large inventory of Psalmodikon Songbooks and CDs. I maybe have a larger collection of psalmodikon information than any museum in Minnesota or even all of the USA!

I often think of Rodney Sjöberg whom I visited with in Trollhättan, Sweden in 1995. He had a huge collection of psalmodikons and historical information that he’d acquired over the years in his “life with the psalmodikon”. Rodney was able to find a small house to place his collection, and it became a mu-

seum for all to enjoy and to care for.

Unfortunately, I am unable to do this sort of thing with my psalmodikons, but I have been giving some thought as to what some of the options might be. One comment was made, “that since I cannot take it all with me, perhaps I could select one of my psalmodikons and use it as a cremation urn to place my ashes in for interment”. — Maybe that is an idea to ponder.

For those of you who have met Rodney Sjöberg, it is nice to hear that he is still in good health and still loves conversations on the topic of psalmodikon history.

## Sharing Tradition Through Music

At the [Hmong Cultural Center](#) in St. Paul recently was an event highlighting different instruments and songs that are common at [Hmong](#) funerals, weddings and courtships. The Center offers classes in singing and playing their music on a *qeej*.

The *qeej* — also known as *lusheng* — is a hand-crafted elaborate reed pipe. They also play an instrument like a two-string violin which is called a *Xim Xaus*.

It is always interesting to learn of homemade instruments from other cultures.

## More with Music

When you listen to music, the brain activates the motor system, which is why it is used for stroke survivors and those with Parkinson’s disease. By listening to tunes you’ve previously exercised to, you can tap into the same feelings of strength, energy or happiness.

## A “Psalmodikon” Used for Background Sounds?

Have you ever listened to an old radio show such as the *Prairie Home Companion* show, and wondered how all the weird sounds in the background came about? It is a very interesting topic!

There is usually a “sound man” that sits with a variety of odd items such as an old shoe to mimic someone walking or a pitcher of water to sound like rain falling and so forth. Another item used, which caught my eye, is a square box with a long neck and one metal string and by using various other metal objects, the wire is used to make weird sounds.

Who would have thought?



Above: Rodney Sjöberg and Beatrice Hole, 2005 Leaders of Psalmodikon Society.



## ITEMS FOR SALE

### PSALMODIKON SONGBOOK (revised edition)

Written in *Sifferskrift* and 4-part harmony for psalmodikons. Includes 95 easy-to-play tunes of hymns, folk songs, and Christmas favorites. \$15.00 ea. + shipping

Send orders to: Beatrice Hole

### CD of the PSALMODIKON QUARTET

\$15.00 pp

Featuring favorite hymns and folk tunes played on the psalmodikons of the Nordic-American Psalmodikon Quartet.

## PSALMODIKON KITS FOR SALE

Pre-cut psalmodikon kits, accessories, and read-made psalmodikons are available at Musicmakers in Stillwater, Minnesota.

Kit instructions, assembly videos, and "How to Play the Psalmodikon" can be found at:

<https://www.harpskit.com/blog/category/psalmodikon>

Kit description:

- 1 string
- 32" long x 3.5" wide x 2.25" deep sides
- Rosette included
- Solid Spruce Top
- Cherry sides and ply back
- 1.5 pounds

Price:

Psalmodikon finished	\$199.00
Psalmodikon - DIY Kit w/string	\$119.00
Violin Bow	\$55.00
Music for Psalmodikon Book	\$22.50

## *Greetings from Readers*

Hello,  
Thank you for the recent issue of the Psalmodikon Newsletter. I will read and put it on our Facebook and on Nordiska Psalmodikonforbundet. It's so fascinating that this old instrument is still played in USA. Thank you so much.

Greetings,  
Benn in Stockholm

Dear Beatrice,  
Sorry to be late with my membership renewal. My husband has been ill with cancer and passed away on 2 November 2019. I really miss him, and they say time helps and God is the strength. Your Newsletter is so colorful with lots of good news. Thanks for keeping that up!  
Hilsen,  
Lily in Boulder, Colorado

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The **\$8.00 membership fee** helps to cover the cost of printing and postage for the Newsletter and annual fee for the Psalmodikon Web Site.

Check the date on your mailing label which indicates if your dues are current.

Send membership dues to: Beatrice Hole  
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My little buddy, Ezra, likes to "make music" (that is the term I use) with the little squeaker mechanism in his stuffed animals. "Making music" is his special way of greeting guests or often he will "make music" just to please me or get my attention. In the photo (above), are three of his "music makers".

To my surprise one afternoon as I was "making music" on my psalmodikon, Ezra comes and lays at my feet with his stuffed animal and begins to "make music" along with the psalmodikon. I truly believe that dogs are much smarter than we realize, and this is a good example. It is amazing that Ezra knows the word "music" and that it can be played in different ways. Music makes us happy and now we also have made a video for proof! — BH

# Publishing Music on a String

Beatrice Hole

It has been nearly 30 years since Harlis Anderson introduced me to the psalmodikon. In looking back, we accomplished much in the few short years before his death. Pictured here is the jacket of the first recording we made of psalmodikon music. In those years all recordings were made on cassette tapes. The *Vesterheim Waltz* is included on that recording, which is a melody written by Harlis Anderson, and

I wrote the harmony and lyrics to the song. The Coda Co. put it into musical note format, and it was published with a 1994 copyright. Both the sheet of written music and the tape recording of psalmodikon music are now in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. *Vesterheim Waltz* is also on the current CD recording and in the Psalmodikon Songbook.

⌘ [Link](#) to Copyright Catalog search for *Vesterheim Waltz* at [cocatalog.loc.gov](http://cocatalog.loc.gov).



*A cartoon quote worth remembering:*

As Schroeder sits at his piano always practicing and Lucy, his admirer, asks, "What happens if you practice for 20 years and then end up not being rich and famous?"

Schroeder answers, "The joy is in the playing."  
— from *Peanuts* by Charles Schulz

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