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Writing Composer Biographies in the Project *Swedish Musical Heritage*

Why take interest in forgotten music? And why take interest in the forgotten composers who wrote this now silent music?

Swedish Musical Heritage is the name of a six year long project whose purpose is to make music that is rarely played more accessible, so that it might gain a new audience. The project is funded by the Swedish Royal Academy of Music. Biographical texts on nearly 300 Swedish composers, mainly unknown even for specialists in Swedish music history, provide a background for musical works. The writing of these biographical texts, parallel to and outside of the narrow selection covered in music history books, is the topic of this article.

The article's authors are involved in a variety of ways in the work on these biographies and write from their own respective roles. As a whole, the article seeks less to present the project itself than to motivate and discuss the work of writing biographies on Swedish composers, many of whom are unknown even to specialists. The biographical perspective is, of course, an older method of writing history, but is very much relevant for this project. What are the ramifications of once again implementing this perspective and, on top of that, applying it to composers who have never been a part of music history's canon? And what do the authors of these biographies think of the national frame that so obviously surrounds this project?

Gunnar Ternhag is the project manager and is responsible for the introduction. Erik Wallrup is the chief editor and reflects on the biographical genre. As head of translation, Elin Hermansson writes about the role that English texts on Swedish composers may play. Ingela Tägil and Karin Hallgren are both music historians. In their contributions they reflect on the relationship between research and writing history.

1. Introduction – Gunnar Ternhag

The main purpose of the project *Swedish Musical Heritage* is to make musical works from Swedish art music history easily available and for them to then be examined, performed and listened to. The ultimate goal is to make this music a living component of the modern concert repertoire – in Sweden, but hopefully also outside its

borders. This goal also includes a desire to expand research about the composers, about their musical works and about Swedish music history in general. The time period stretches back to the 16th century and, in the modern era, includes those composers who, when considering them for inclusion in the project, have been dead for more than 70 years and whose works are therefore in the public domain; the project explicitly works with copyright-free music.

The most important part of the project is the publication of editions of musical works for free downloading from the project's website. The musical works to be edited are not the ones that we believe are historically most interesting. Instead, we choose works that have a chance to reach concert stages, recording studios and music schools. In short, we focus upon "good" and attractive music. The reason for this selection is found in the purpose of the project, namely to present interesting but forgotten music to today's performers and scholars. We especially try to present interesting works from lesser-known composers and also try to spread the editions over several genres and several instruments and ensembles. In other words, our intention is to challenge the canon with regards to Swedish art music in today's concert programmes. We will actually expand the canon, make it more diversified and hopefully more attractive. This is certainly a high goal, but a stimulating one too.

All texts on the website are in Swedish and English, mirroring our effort to spread the music and knowledge about the project also to non-Swedish readers.

Even if immediately playable editions are published for free downloading, the aim of placing these musical works in concert programmes will not be reached simply by their being made easily accessible. More is needed, especially as one cannot expect that the performers have substantial knowledge about Swedish music history and, more specifically, about the composers and their musical production. Therefore, the project includes an ambitious sub-project that is the focus of the rest of the article.

The biographical sub-project

This sub-project has its own goal that is to publish biographies of nearly 300 Swedish composers from the period in question. There are a little more than 400 composers known by name and we are consequently trying to capture the lives and musical production of the vast majority of them. Moreover, every biography is followed by a bibliography and a catalogue of musical works.

Fellow musicologists specialized in music history are writing the texts. More than 60 colleagues have so far been involved in the sub-project – from doctoral candidates to senior researchers. Most of the authors are Swedes, of course, but there are also some non-Swedish specialists writing texts for us.

With the ambitious goal of profiling nearly 300 Swedish composers from historical times, it quickly becomes clear that only a limited number of them are to be found in modern scholarly literature or even in music encyclopaedias. Probably less than 20 names are described in scholarly literature that is 25 years old or more. For a vast majority of the composers, research is needed before a biographical presentation can be

written. The research includes reviewing the composer's musical works, a time-consuming activity that usually has to be done in the archives.

The national frame of the project

It is impossible to deny that the *Swedish Musical Heritage* project and its sub-project about writing composers' biographies have a national frame. It is a Swedish project that presents and promotes Swedish music – whatever "Swedish" may mean here.¹ Described in this way the project seems very old-fashioned, continuing to treat music history nation-wise, like our predecessors did in the 19th century. We would in this case, if you like, be nothing but a technologically updated version of a very established way of writing music history.

On the other hand: we don't write music history like most of our predecessors did. We are not writing these biographical texts from a nationalistic perspective, trying to highlight a few particular Swedish composers in order to place them alongside the most iconic names in music history. Instead, our main concern is to broaden the literature on music history, giving attention to lots of music creators who have never found their way into music history handbooks or even music encyclopaedias. Many of the composers were not even respected names during their lifetimes. Also, we give special attention to female composers, since their contribution to music history in Sweden is neglected.² Indeed, many female composers' lives and works are presented here for the first time. From our inventory we know that 12–15 percent of all known composers in Sweden during the 19th century were women.



In *Swedish Musical Heritage*, special emphasis is placed on writing biographies on female composers, in order to increase gender balance in musical -historical overviews and concert programmes, and to remedy the scant attention they have previously been given. In many cases, this means that the person's compositional activities are described for the first time.. – Helena Munktell (1852–1919) was first trained as a singer and pianist, but chose to focus on composition. She first studied in Stockholm, then continued her education in Paris, by, among other things, taking lessons with Vincent d'Indy. Although she lived in Sweden, she returned regularly to Paris, where many of her compositions were performed with great success.

- 1 Swedishness in music is discussed in *Svenskhet i musiken*, ed. Holger Larsen (Stockholm: Stockholm university, Dept. of Musicology, 1993).
- 2 Eva Öhrström, *Borgerliga kvinnors musicerande i 1800-talets Sverige* (PhD diss., Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 1987) is still the best overview on female composers in Sweden during the 19th century.

Consequently, our struggle is to cover music composing in a much broader sense than our predecessors have done, producing many small stories, instead of a dominating big one. Further, although this work is carried out within a national frame, it is not nationalistic.

Centre-periphery within Sweden

This broad coverage has an impact on the understanding of the relationship between centre and periphery within Sweden – the same problem but on a European level is discussed below by Karin Hallgren. Usually Stockholm is regarded as the obvious centre – there was the royal court, the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, and for a long time the only opera and the only professional orchestra were based there.³ But with the many composers and many musical milieus described, Stockholm with all its assets does not stand out as the only centre for musical development in Sweden. In fact, the rich descriptions produced reveal several interesting regional scenes that would be worth examining in depth; all innovations and all new trends certainly did not start in the capital of the country.

Another aspect of the national frame of the project is that similar projects exist in the other Nordic countries – the Danish Centre for Music Editing, Norwegian Musical Heritage and Finnish Musical Heritage – even though none of them write composer biographies on this scale. There is in fact a close connection between these projects and even an informal organisation that arranges conferences once a year: the Nordic Musical Heritage Network. Our Swedish project is therefore part of a bigger struggle to renew music history and to present musical works from the past in modern editions. I would not be surprised if there are parallel projects in other European countries – the Nordic initiatives are probably part of an even wider trend. To conclude this aspect, the writing of biographies for so many Swedish composers contributes to a richer and more complex European music history. We contribute to this enlarged history with almost 300 Swedish cases – or combined, one huge Swedish case.

Are they all Swedish composers?

Upon closer inspection of many of the biographies already written, one discovers that numerous composers did not spend their whole lives in Sweden. So, can they really be considered as Swedish? A number of them were in fact born outside today's Sweden, but had a substantial part of their careers within what is today Sweden. Joseph Martin Kraus (1756–1792), Hermann Berens (1826–1880) and Eduard Du Puy (c.1770–1822) belong to that category. Others were born in Sweden, but spent years abroad, mostly for educational purposes – for example Johan Agrell (1701–1765) Amanda Maier-Röntgen (1853–1894), not to mention those who were educat-

3 The musical resources in Stockholm during the 19th century are described in Karin Hallgren, "Musiklivet i Stockholm", in *Franz Berwald – belysningar och reflektioner*, ed. Gunnar Ternhag (Hedemora: Gidlunds, 2016). See also Anne Reese Willén, *I huvudstaden, musiklivets härd: Den strukturella omvandlingen av Stockholms offentliga konstmusikliv ca 1840-1890* (PhD diss., Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2014).

ed and trained by teachers that originally came from other countries. So what about their Swedishness?

Honestly, it is neither possible nor fruitful to look upon the history of music composing in Sweden within a strictly national frame. The history of music-making in Sweden is closely linked to the music history of neighbouring countries, as it is also linked to musical developments in Europe as a whole. This statement is most certainly a truism in the eyes of fellow music historians, but must be said to provide a background for the national frame of the sub-project of writing composer biographies for *Swedish Musical Heritage*.

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The four sections below are each written by researchers contributing biographies to the project; they detail particular approaches and reflect upon the scope of the remit each has and thus illustrate particular aspects of biography writing that, together, contribute to the aims and objectives of the project. Erik Wallrup argues for the relevance of writing composer biographies, although many music historians of today are more interested in structural issues. Elin Hermansson discusses the meaning of presenting biographies about minor Swedish composers in English to non-Swedish readers. How to write biographies on composing singers is the subject of Ingela Tägil, herself both a singer and a scholar. Even if the singing composers in this specific project should be described as composers, their careers as singers must have influenced them as composers. Finally, Karin Hallgren reflects on the long term values of writing composer biographies in the actual project. What will the individual scholar gain? And what will benefit music history writing in general or at least for other scholars with interests in Swedish music history?

2. *What a biography can say today* – Erik Wallrup

It may be that most books on classical music sold today are biographical, but that is not tantamount to having a prominent position in the genre of musicological writing. Of course, we find academic works on Beethoven and Berwald, on Nono and Nørsgaard, on Shostakovich and Sibelius, but they most often treat works, works, works. In the last decade we have seen important Swedish studies on the relationship between Sweden and Germany during the 1930s and the Second World War, and here biographical aspects are sometimes brought to the fore.⁴ But in the study of the lead-

4 Among the works published, we find Henrik Karlsson's *Det fruktade märket: Wilhelm Peterson-Berger, antisemitismen, antinazismen* (Malmö: Sekel, 2005) and Henrik Rosengren, *Judarnas Wagner: Moses Pergament och den kulturella identifikationens dilemma 1920–1950* (Malmö: Sekel, 2008). The authors have continued on the biographical route, Karlsson with a biography on Peterson-Berger (Skellefteå: Norma, 2013) and the historian Rosengren with a research project within the musical field where he uses a biographical method, *Från tysk höst till tysk vår: fem musikpersonligheter i svensk exil i skuggan av nazismen och kalla kriget* (Lund: Nordic academic press, 2013). Both authors have written articles for *Swedish Musical Heritage*.

ing force of Swedish music of those days, Kurt Atterberg, his correspondence and notebooks were treated with critical discourse analysis.⁵

Theoretically minded musicologists regard biographies with distrust, and many biographies indeed have an ambiguous status, hovering between *belles lettres* and scholarly literature. Roland Barthes famously proclaimed the death of the author in 1967,⁶ but to many a musicologist writing in those days, the composer had been dead for much longer. Musical analysis has never taken much notice of the intentions of the composer – it is supposed to be all there, in the score. Sociologically influenced studies of music distrust the individual.

Does the biographical project within *Swedish Musical Heritage* proclaim the resurrection of the composer and, consequently, the Composer with a capital C? Gunnar Ternhag has already pointed out that we do not try to focus on the few composers that belong to this small canon of ours (a canon that in any case is perishing since Swedish orchestras seldom perform Swedish works). Further, we do not have a grand narrative of Swedish music in mind when trying to map Swedish music up to the 1940s. I must make mention of the fact that there has never been a grand narrative of Swedish music, even if Bo Wallner came quite close to writing such a history from Wilhelm Stenhammar to Hilding Rosenberg and members of the “Monday Group”, *Måndagsgruppen*, such as Karl-Birger Blomdahl and Ingvar Lidholm. His was a history of modernity and professionalism instead of traditionalism and amateurism.

No, writing biographical articles on Swedish composers leads to another kind of history, or actually small histories, and these histories are almost always local, sometimes even individual. Here, I would like to present a small selection of such histories.

Women as composers, musical men in uniform

What can be seen as the most up-to-date aspect of the biography project is the fact that, for the first time, the stories of many female composers are being told by musicologists. This aspect touches on composers who belonged to the nobility where music-making was a social activity of great importance, a tendency that is central to Swedish musical life during the whole 19th century. Later in that century we find the first women with a thorough education in composition. The reason for this is not just that women were for a long time not accepted as students, but also that experiences from abroad – and here Leipzig is crucial – were needed for a technically accurate education to be introduced at the Royal Conservatory, which happened with Ludvig Norman (1831–1885).

Among his students we find Elfrida Andrée (1841–1929). Her story has already been told by Eva Öhrström,⁷ who has also written the article on Andrée in *Swedish Musical Heritage*. Andrée was the first woman to graduate as an organist in 1860 and the first to become a cathedral organist, while at the same time being a pioneer

5 Cf. Petra Gaberding's thorough and interesting study *Musik och politik i skuggan av nazismen: Kurt Atterberg och de svensk-tyska musikrelationerna* (Malmö: Sekel, 2007).

6 Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, *Aspen Magazine*, no. 5/6, 1967.

7 Cf. Eva Öhrström, *Elfrida Andrée: Ett levnadsöde* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1999).

among female composers. She focused on orchestral and chamber works, but we find an opera, too.

Andrée may be the first woman, but she was not the only one. During the years 2014–15, two compositions by female composers from the second half of the 19th century have been performed by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra with orchestral material taken from *Swedish Musical Heritage*. The “symphonic image” *Bränningar* or *Breaking Waves* by Helena Munktell (1852–1919) can already during the 2010s be expected to become a part of the standard Swedish orchestral repertoire. The other success is Amanda Maier Röntgen’s (1853–1894) *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* in one movement; one Swedish critic wished that the work would find a worldwide audience.⁸ Munktell, who never married, continued to compose her whole life – although she received little attention in Sweden, she was more fortunate in Paris. Amanda Maier, on the other hand, married the composer and pianist Julius Röntgen, leading to a halt for her double career as a violinist and a composer. We find other similar examples of that sad story.

However, we do not have an ideological agenda for *Swedish Musical Heritage* (which does not mean that the project cannot be discussed in such terms). Another interesting theme found deep down in our biographical material – again almost uncharted territory – concerns composers in uniform. I do not intend to say something about all compositions for military orchestras, nor even compositions by all music directors for regiments in existence. What I want to highlight is the surprisingly great number of composers who also had a military career.

The first example is Arvid Niclas von Höpken (1710–1778) who ended up as Senior Commandant of the Stralsund fortress but who, during his military career, was able to compose two operas to Metastasio’s libretti *Il re Pastore* and *Catone in Utica* in 1752 and 1753 respectively. Later on we find Thomas Byström (1772–1839) who started his military career in Russia, volunteered for Swedish military service and went to war against Russia only to go back to the Russian army again before returning to Stockholm. Despite his unruly life, he was able to compose three sonatas for piano and violin that were printed in 1801 by no less a publisher than Breitkopf und Härtel. His son, Oscar Byström (1821–1909), followed in his father’s footsteps, both as a composer and a soldier. Fortunately, the last war to be fought by a Swedish army had ended in 1809. He composed one of the most interesting symphonies of the generations between Berwald and Norman; it was of such quality that he was accused of having purloined the score from the manuscripts that Berwald had left behind after his death.

One explanation for this odd combination is that music-making had both been a part of the aristocratic education and the education at military academies. Music was taught at the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences at Karlberg in Stockholm, which also offered a basic education for young boys up until the mid-19th century. The vocal composer Erik Arrhén von Kapfelman (1790–1851) became music teacher there in the

8 Cf. Johanna Paulsson, *Dagens Nyheter*, May 29, 2015.

1820s. Karin Hallgren wrote the article on Kapfelman and found, in the process, a previously almost unknown musical milieu.

Composing in small forms

If the standard composer was not a woman, and not in uniform, did he write orchestral music, chamber music and opera, like all the great composers in Europe? From 1983 we have the impressive study *Den svenska symfonin* written by Lennart Hedwall⁹ and Bo Wallner has written about parts of the history of the Swedish string quartet.¹⁰ But the question is whether these genres say that much about Swedish composing during the period 1750–1950. I have come to know that Hedwall is now in 2016 writing a book on Swedish songs and, if you take into account the huge number of songs listed in *Swedish Musical Heritage*, there is reason to say that this book of Hedwall's could say much more than his earlier work about what Swedish music has been all about. But then one should also add the following genres: piano music, as well as works for choir and other vocal ensembles.

Music history has traditionally been the history of the symphony, the opera and chamber music, but in taking the biographical route we can clearly see that these genres are not those that are central to the Swedish scene, certainly not in terms of quantity and perhaps not in terms of quality. Different kinds of sociological investigations may thus say much more than biographical studies but, even if such perspectives are of the greatest interest with regards to the musical past, the combination of biographies and electronically published works by all these composers can make the past present in another way: as perceived music brought to life.

What is obvious from these songs, bearing witness to something that seems to be almost exotic nowadays, is that Swedish composers read the poetry of Norwegian and Danish poets in a way that tells us that Scandinavian literature was their own literature. There is a lot of songs composed on texts by J.P. Jacobsen, Sigbjørn Obstfelder, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Holger Drachmann, Thor Lange, Vilhelm Krag among others and the lovely thing is that they were composed to the original poem that only occasionally came with a Swedish translation. So, the lives of our composers say something important about another era, when we were able to speak to each other not in an international language – in those days German – but in the Scandinavian languages.

3. *Swedish Musical Heritage in English* – Elin Hermansson

The huge task of translating these Swedish composer biographies and all other texts produced within *Swedish Musical Heritage* to English is one that has not yet been undertaken in Swedish music research or any other institutional or public music enterprise before. This might be with the exception of a number of ambitious Wikipedia articles, yet *Swedish Musical Heritage* is much more than a free-content encyclopaedia

9 Lennart Hedwall, *Den svenska symfonin* (Stockholm: AWE/Gebers, 1983).

10 Bo Wallner, *Den svenska stråkkvartetten: en sammanställning* (Stockholm: Kungl. Musikaliska akademien, 1979).

– although it does have free access. The people involved in the biography project are experienced music researchers, who have spent a large part of their professional lives working in archives and writing about music in one way or another, and our translators all have a background in various musical areas. Suffice to say that we have gathered the most competent people within this field in Sweden to participate in the project.

Why translate a Swedish project?

When arguing in favour of the translation work, one vital question arises: since *Swedish Musical Heritage* is only focused on the music produced within Sweden, why bother translating not only the composer biographies but also the entire website, with registered works and musical editions included, into English? The main reason is of course the hope that people outside of Sweden will find our music history and the music produced within this country of interest. The aspiration is also to make available as much music (and music of high quality) to as many people possible. However, there are more reasons that are as well-founded as this.

As Gunnar Ternhag mentioned above, many composers we have researched are not, in fact, native Swedes yet have still had a great impact on Swedish musical life. On the English side of things, that is to our advantage, as people abroad might find our website useful if they have an interest in composers such as, for example, Joseph Martin Kraus, born in Miltenberg am Main and active in Stockholm, and whose life and work is often likened to that of Mozart, or Ingeborg von Bronsart, born of Swedish parents in Saint Petersburg but mostly active in Germany and known as a concert pianist, composer and female pioneer in German opera. Then, of course, we have Johann Gottlieb Naumann, Laura Netzel, Bernhard Crusell, Francesco Uttini and so forth – the list goes on. Names like these are what connect Sweden to the continent and beyond, which makes our translation work both justifiable and essential. As much as we are trying to reach out to international readers and musicians, we hope the biography project will make available parts of Swedish music history for people abroad, enabling them to reach into the musical stories in Sweden that together have created a rich cultural life over the centuries.

An ideal thought is that making Swedish music available, both through our biographies and the amended and critical editions we publish for free on the website, will inspire musicians to play and enjoy the music in other countries than our own. Furthermore, and perhaps most relevant in relation to the biographies, is that international music researchers now are able to get access to a part of music history previously unexplored in English, which might inspire completely new areas of research. The possible interest in composers such as those mentioned above, who have had influential international relations, might just act as an entrance into new research subjects for scholars outside of Sweden. There are as yet unknown amounts of material to be discovered, and it would be an honour if *Swedish Musical Heritage* would inspire innovative research abroad. However, the website could and should be used by non-scholars as well, such as by those who might find music there that they want to play and who are curious for more information or younger students or other music lovers looking to learn a bit more about Swedish music history.

Swedish Musical Heritage across the globe

Only in the most recent decades has it become natural to use English as a second language in Europe and beyond. Sweden has an earlier history of being in a close cultural relationship with Germany, and for a long time German has been the language of use in Swedish music research when writing on both national and beyond-national matters. The names mentioned above prove this relationship well. However, as the world has changed and grown into a global society, German has been phased out in favour of English, and not exclusively in Sweden. Thus, it is self-evident that the language of choice should be that that is most commonly used in music research internationally today.

Last but not least, to make the translation work worthwhile, we also need to make sure the project reaches out to the audience we have in mind. Social media and the Internet in general will surely ease this process, but direct contact with orchestras, music societies and musicological departments would also help. In fact, there are already examples of *Swedish Musical Heritage* spreading across the globe: Helena Munktell's orchestral work *Breaking Waves* was played by the Astana Symphony Orchestra in Kazakhstan; the piano music of Elfrida Andrée was toured around Jamaica with pianist Oskar Ekberg; and both the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the National Orchestra of Wales have played works by Wilhelm Stenhammar and Ludvig Norman respectively. Perhaps a few members of these orchestras or listeners from the audiences will become more curious about the music they play and hear and, through a simple search on the Internet, will end up on our website. That is a good way to start.

4. *The singer as composer: Some reflections from an author's perspective* – Ingela Tägil

I have written three biographies for *Swedish Musical Heritage*, about Isidor Dannström (1812–1897), Henriette Nissen-Saloman (1819–1879) and Christina Nilsson (1843–1921) – three singers who also composed musical works. They were important music personalities, and they were all elected as members of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. In this section, I will explain how I have worked by using examples from the biographies I have written.

In my own research I have used a gender perspective on historical voices and singers who were active before the introduction of the recording technique in the late 19th century. My doctoral dissertation *Jenny Lind: The impact of her voice on media identity*¹¹ investigates, as the title suggests, how Jenny Lind's (1820–1887) voice affected her "virgin Mary-like" media image. Here, I elaborated with a method based on my own practical vocal knowledge and experience, which I combined with gender analysis¹²

11 Ingela Tägil, *Jenny Lind: Röstens betydelse för hennes mediala identitet, en studie av hennes konstnärskap 1838–49*, (PhD diss., Örebro: Örebro University, 2013).

12 The gender analysis is based on discussions with Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, second edition (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002/1991) and Judith Butler, *Genustrubbel. Feminism och identitetens subversion*, trans. Suzanne Almqvist (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2007/1990).

of contemporary reviews. Of course, I have not used the practice-based parts of this method for this project, but my vocal knowledge has been most useful when writing the articles, since singers are the subjects of the biographies I've written.

Portraits of the singers

Dannström, Nissen-Saloman and Nilsson were all most famous as opera singers during their lifetimes but, since their passing, they have been seen differently. Nilsson is remembered as one of the foremost Swedish-born international opera prima donnas in the 19th century. She worked as an opera and concert singer from 1864 to 1888 and she was among the first generation of sopranos to interpret the role Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin*. Nilsson's career was launched early as a miserably poor young fiddler from Småland whose life turned into a Cinderella story. This image probably helped her career. Dannström was, alongside Jenny Lind, one of the lead singers at the Royal Opera in the years 1841–44. While Lind was being called "the Swedish nightingale", Nissen-Saloman received the pet name "the Swedish lark".¹³ Though both Dannström and Nissen-Saloman were considered just as successful as Lind in the middle of the 19th century, they are nowadays not remembered as singers.

Isidor Dannström is remembered in posterity mainly as a composer. He composed frequently and he had great success with his songs, such as works for solo singers, duets and small ensembles. One of his song collections was awarded a prize by the Swedish Art Music Society in 1876. Dannström also wrote several comic operas and operettas, such as *Skomakaren och hans fru* (1847) and *Doktor Tartaglia* (1851). However, Dannström had little success with his music-theatrical works. He himself wrote: "For the stage I have left but a few insignificant works".¹⁴

Dannström was also valued as a vocal pedagogue. His book *Sång-metod* (published in 1848, revised in 1876) drew considerable attention.¹⁵ Dannström's teaching was mainly based on the ideas of the internationally renowned vocal pedagogue Manuel Garcia (1805–1906). However, of the three musicians I describe here, the one who is remembered today as a vocal pedagogue is Henriette Nissen-Saloman. After her opera career, Nissen-Saloman worked as a singing teacher at the conservatory in Saint Petersburg 1859–73. She became popular and was made an honorary member in several of the city's musical societies. Like Dannström, Nissen-Saloman created her own vocal school. Her elaborate work *Škola pėnija. L'ėtude du chant. Das Studium des Gesanges* (1880) was published posthumously in three languages and edited by her husband.¹⁶ She was, like Dannström, a pupil of Garcia and she modelled her vocal training after his vocal ideas, although Nissen-Saloman provided many more variations in her exercises.

13 "Den svenska lärkan", in *Idun*, December 29, 1929, 1448–1449.

14 "För scenen har jag äfven lemnat några mindre betydande arbeten." (author's trans.). Isidor Dannström, *Några blad ur Isidor Dannströms minnesanteckningar* (Stockholm: Centraltryckeriet 1896), 80.

15 Isidor Dannström, *Sång-Metod. Omarbetad och tillökt upplaga* (Stockholm: Abr. Lundquist, 1848, rev. 1876).

16 Henriette Nissen-Saloman, *Skola Penja L'ėtude du chant Das Studium des Gesanges par H. Nissen-Saloman*, (Saint Petersburg: Bessel, 1880).

The composing singer

In writing these biographical articles, I had the opportunity to not only maintain my own research, but also to expand my area of interest and write about musical works. I found that it is evident in both Dannström's and Nilsson's compositions that they were singers. Dannström has a good feel for vocal phrasing, both in text and melody. On high notes he principally uses the vowels *a*, *ä*, and *ö* which are relatively easy to sing high without going sharp. Dannström leaned towards the Swedish song tradition of his time that was inspired by the German Lied tradition. His works also show the influence of the Italian *bel canto* tradition. His harmonic language is likewise typical of his time: the expressive melodies with small harmonic deviations, where dissonances often comprise passing accidentals and chromaticisms, are also found in operatic works of the early 19th century, as are broken chords in the accompaniments, which are typical of Bellini's operas. Vocally, several of his songs require a comparatively large range and the tessitura is considered relatively high. Dannström was able to apply simple means to make a song appear virtuosic. He used large leaps, small cadences and turns, and his melodies build up towards a high point with the upper tones sounding at the end. Several of Dannström's songs are miniature dramas, as with other vocal music of the era. Operatic works and salon music are often intimately connected in 19th century vocal music and, in this, Dannström is typical of his time.

In Nilsson's case it is obvious from her work "Ofelias klagan", for song, piano and violin, that she also had a background as a violinist. The song is expressive and the violin part has a relatively large ambitus. Nilsson has only written a few other musical pieces, the song "Jag hade en vän," as well as arrangements of the folk songs "Om dagen vid mitt arbete" and "Spring and Autumn" (an English reworking of "Fjorton år tror jag visst att jag var"). "Jag hade en vän" for song and piano has the feeling of a Swedish folk song in a relatively quick triple metre. All the songs combine the style of Swedish folk song with a bit of vocal virtuosity.

I found it interesting to involve contemporary sources in the biographies, as a voice of judgement from the composers' own times. Frans Huss writes in his obituary of Dannström in *Svensk Musiktidning* in November 1897: "As a singer himself, his work as a composer principally leaned towards songs".¹⁷ About Nissen-Saloman a journalist in *Freja* wrote in 1843: "Nissen is a master of *fioritura* and flourishes and such, whatever they may be called".¹⁸ Arvid Ahnfeldt wrote about Nilsson in 1887: "Chr. N. has at her disposal a voice that does not dazzle with impressive strength, does not set fire with passion's glowing coals, but draws one in through her gentle, tender beauty".¹⁹ In those instances where the composers have expressed any opinions, I have included

17 "Sjelf sångare har hans arbete som tonsättare hufvudsakligen rigtats åt sången" (author's trans.). Frans Huss, "Nekrolog över Isidor Dannström", in *Svensk Musiktidning* (1 Nov. 1897), 130.

18 "Nissen är mästarinna i 'fioriturer', och krumelurer och allt hvad det heter" (author's trans.). "Jenny Lind och Henriette Nissen", in *Nyaste Freja* (11 Aug. 1843).

19 "Chr. N. eger till sitt förfogande en stämma som icke bländar med imponerande styrka, icke tänder med glödens passion, men intager genom sin blida skära fågring." (author's trans.). Arvid Ahnfeldt, "Christina Nilsson", in *Europas konstnärer. Alfabetiskt ordnade biografier öfver vårt århundrades förnämsta artister* (Stockholm: Oscar L. Lamms förlag, 1887), 398–409.

that with the biography. For example, Dannström himself observed in his memoirs that “the human voice is the most perfect of all musical instruments”,²⁰ and Nilsson herself described how she early on cultivated her high notes because, as a child, the people she sang for found it impressive.²¹

It seems natural to relate these composers’ musical works to their voices. I have therefore included short descriptions of their voices in the biographies. Sofia Bergfors in 1877 emphasised that, among Nilsson’s contemporaries, there were many female singers with larger voices but none more beautiful. Her vocal register stretched from low B natural to F above high C. She had an impressive high range, but somewhat weaker low and middle range. Nilsson’s timbre is described as special. Phrases such as “crystal-clear”, “like a bell” and “flute-like” are oft-repeated descriptions. Nissen-Saloman had a powerfully sounding mezzo-soprano voice in the lower registers, while the higher notes were thin with less colour. She easily sang with coloratura and embellishments.

It is important to me, beyond the compositions, to also give a picture of the composers’ musicianship. Hopefully, I can contribute with a “musician’s eye” to *Swedish Musical Heritage* in this research area.

5. Writing experiences and thoughts on historiography – Karin Hallgren

Questions about the status of biographies have been debated vigorously in recent years, particularly in the humanities, while the biographical genre at the same time has attracted many writers.²² In the project *Swedish Musical Heritage* I have written biographies of about twenty composers, especially from the 19th century. In this article, I describe my experiences in biography writing and put forward a few ideas regarding historiography that this work has elicited.

Experiences from writing biographies

There have been certain specified conditions on the writing: the biographies are to be focused on the person’s activities as a composer; the scope of the individual biographies has been determined based on the extent and importance of the composer’s work; and the texts must be focused and informative and hopefully tempt further reading. An important point of departure for the whole project with the articles is that they should contain personal evaluations only if the evaluations contribute to an essential understanding of the composers and their works. I regard this opinion as a clear stand against many biographies written in Swedish music history in the earlier part of the

20 “[M]änniskorösten är det fullkomligaste af tonverktyg” (author’s trans.). Isidor Dannström, *Några blad ur Isidor Dannströms minnesanteckningar* (Stockholm: Centraltryckeriet 1896), 77.

21 “Christina Nilsson”, in *Ny Illustrerad tidning*, 33 (Stockholm: 12 Aug. 1876), 295–296.

22 See for example Henrik Karlsson, “Härliga ego! Reflexioner om tonsättarbiografier,” in *Svensk tidskrift för musikforskning* 81 (1999), Henrik Rosengren and Johan Östling, eds., *Med livet som insats: Biografin som humanistisk genre* (Lund: Sekel, 2011), Gunnar Ternhag, “I fyra år levde jag tillsammans med en annan man. Några tankar kring konsten att skriva om enstaka musiker,” in *Svensk tidskrift för musikforskning*, 81 (1999), Melanie Unseld, *Biographie und Musikgeschichte: Wandlungen biographischer Konzepte in Musikkultur und Musikhistoriographie* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014).

20th century. The basis of the biographies in this project will consist of previous research and secondary literature. If necessary, primary materials will also be used.

My work in the project has been interesting, amusing and, at times, difficult. The composers have only inspired previous research to a minor degree, which means that the availability of secondary literature has varied a lot. The need to review the primary material has therefore been immense. Within the project, however, there have only been opportunities to go through a certain part of primary material, where printed music and contemporary press have been the main sources.

Most of the biographies are comparatively short. In some cases, this is due to the fact, simply put, that it has been difficult to find information; in other cases it is because the composer was of minor importance. But the total number of biographies has made it possible to discern some patterns. The biography work has confirmed existing opinions and knowledge of musical life in 19th century Sweden, such as the importance of family traditions for choice of profession and the dependence of studies abroad for those who wanted an education in music.

The work has also expanded knowledge in already known areas, such as the importance of opera and theatre for the musical life and the importance of resourceful people with initiative and extensive networks. New themes have also been highlighted, such as music as a part of military training. In addition, the reviews of these composers' repertoires have given much evidence and examples of how much music was in fact written for different occasions. This music is, for the most part, unknown to us today. But in its own time it was important and in many cases spread widely and was used widely.



Many of the composers, whose life and work is described in Swedish Musical Heritage, are unknown music creators even for to Swedish music historians. The sphere of Swedish composers is thus expanding gradually. The most well-known composers are now in the company of an incomprehensible number of colleagues, which has resulted in the role of the composer transforming into a much more ordinary activity— August Elfåker (1851–1914) is one of those whose calling was to create new music, first in Sweden, then in the United States, and, towards the end of his life, in Sweden again. He wrote songs, piano music and two symphonies. Studio portrait of August Elfåker in his younger years.

The need for interpretation of the material has become very clear during work on the biographies. Although one may intuitively think that conditions during the 19th century are comparatively close to us in time, this work has brought many examples of situations and phenomena that are unfamiliar to us today. It can for example be difficult to imagine what it was like to have no civil rights, no opportunity to study or to earn one's own income. But those were conditions that applied not only to the women of 19th century society but also for many men. There were also strong, seemingly obvious, opinions, for example, that young men would follow their fathers in terms of career. And, in addition, when considering the practicalities of living in a society without electricity, the limited transport options and a musical life where there were only live performances, the differences to our own times appear very large. The need for detailed studies and a hermeneutical approach is therefore necessary.

The composers who have emerged through the work on the biographies all contributed to the establishment of the musical life in Sweden during the 19th century. These include musician families such as Berwald and Söderman, theatre musicians such as August Säfström (1813–1888), Petter Conrad Boman (1804–1861) and Jacob Niclas Ahlström (1805–1857), as well as several members of the royal family, such as the princesses Eugénie (1830–1889) and Thérèse (1836–1914). While working on the biographies, I have often found reason to feel great respect for these people and the difficult work they performed, a work that became the foundation upon which others could build.

Knowledge of the individuals and their activities serves to fill the many gaps in Swedish 19th century music history that still exist.²³ But despite this contribution, much research on musical life is still missing; for example, on important institutions such as the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and its conservatory, on choral associations and music in the church and, to some extent, even music at the Royal Opera and the music at the many private theatres. Musical life in Sweden during the 19th century has also previously been described within a limited frame, and Nordic or European comparisons are sparse. Textbooks from the early 20th century are still to this day in many cases the only secondary literature available. These textbooks are often person-oriented and full of anecdotes with unclear connections to real events. In many cases, the textbooks and the early biographies go back to the same source, whose value is often difficult to determine from a source critical perspective. For today's biography writing, it is important not to redistribute these anecdotes and uncertain data. Careful reviews of musical and archival material increase the chances of a better knowledge of past musical life.

Ideas on historiography

The result of writing these biographies provides an opportunity to highlight and problematize wider issues of historiography. The individual biographies give an opportunity to access a larger context. I would like to mention two areas where I think the biography writing has provided a basis for thinking and perhaps re-evaluations: questions on structures and the importance of the individual; and questions on centre and periphery.

Structure or individual

Whether it is strong individuals who drive development forward or if an underlying structure is crucial to development has been discussed in previous research.²⁴ How important is the individual? My material includes, among others, Edouard Du Puy

23 *Musiken i Sverige 3: Den nationella identiteten 1810-1920*, eds. Leif Jonsson & Martin Tegen, (Stockholm: Fischer, 1992) is an important exception, but since this handbook is of general character, the composers relevant for my work in most cases are only mentioned briefly. Among later research on music history in Sweden in the 1800s, see Anne Reese Willén, *I huvudstaden, musiklivets härd: Den strukturella omvandlingen av Stockholms offentliga konstmusikliv ca 1840-1890* (PhD diss., Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2014).

24 See, for example, Volker R. Berghahn, "Structuralism and Biography. Some concluding Thoughts on the Uncertainties of a Historiographical Genre", in *Biography between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, eds. Volker R. Berghahn & Simone Lässig (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008) for a discussion on issues concerning structure contra individual for the period 1945 and onward.

(1770–1822), who was of great importance for the development of the quality of the musicians in the Royal Court Orchestra in the 1810s. Without Du Puy, musicians like the brothers Franz (1796–1868) and August (1798–1869) Berwald and their cousin Johan Fredrik (1787–1861) would probably not have received a qualified teaching in violin and composition. Today, we can only speculate about what that would have meant for their musical careers.

Among my biographies are also several members from the royal court. Their willingness to provide funding, but also their personal interest in music and networking, were essential for music practice in larger circles of society during most of the 19th century. While King Charles XIV John with some reluctance supported the Royal Opera, conditions changed when Crown Prince Oscar and Crown Princess Josephine in the 1820s showed greater interest than the king in music performances both at the opera and in the music associations. It meant an expansion of the musical scene, especially for the opera, but in many ways also for musical life as a whole. Both Du Puy and those members of the royal family are examples of individuals who have been important for the development of musical life.

But many of the composers during the period in question lived under similar conditions. They worked in the theatre or the church and they were music teachers. Their compositions were useful at different occasions in musical life without having any special, individual touch. In this case, it is harder to argue that development would be driven forward only by the actions of individuals. What would have happened if Erik Arrhén von Kapfelman (1791–1851) had not worked as a music teacher at the War Academy in Karlberg in the first half of the 19th century? It would probably only mean that someone else would have done the work. And had not Adolph Mecklin (1761–1803) worked as an organist in Linköping in the early 19th century, someone else would have filled the space. From these examples, it is reasonable to say that the structure is more important than the individual.

An emphasis of structure is also given from a gender perspective. That musical life in the 19th century made different claims on, and provided varying opportunities for, women and men is obvious and is part of the structural conditions that prevailed. Based on my research material one sees examples of this in the choice of performance venues as well as in the choice of genres for compositions. One can also wonder whether compositions by women and men were judged by the same standards. One example is Princess Thérèse and she is commented on rather patronizingly, for example, in contemporary biographies by people close to her, while her piano compositions meet all relevant technical requirements and are similar to many other contemporary works.

A reasonable conclusion is that individual and structure interact in an intricate way. Research combining the interest in the individual with a desire to put this individual in a social context can help to increase knowledge of musical life in times past.

Centre and periphery

The traditional way to regard European music history in the 19th century is to locate a few European cities and countries (France and Germany; Paris, Berlin, Leipzig and

Vienna) as “centre” and other countries and cities as “periphery”. The selection is also determined from the viewpoint that it is composers and their compositions that are most important. A city like London will therefore not find a place in such a traditional music history, even though it was one of the most important and most developed cities in terms of public musical life throughout the 19th century.

Even though cities such as Paris and Berlin have long art music traditions and a high number of music institutions and successful composers, it is not relevant in all contexts to assume that these cities are centres. I would like to problematize the definition of “centre” and, as a consequence, conclude by briefly touching upon the issue of the importance of national borders in writing music history.

“Centre” in the music scene in the 19th century is not something absolute. That Leipzig was the centre for several young Swedish men and women who wanted an education in music is clear. Similarly, Paris was the centre for composers from different countries with ambitions to make a career in the mid-19th century as opera composers. But in other contexts it is not obvious that a few major cities are considered “centres”. If the research is directed towards the musical life in a particular city or region, then of course this city or region must be the centre for the research, although comparisons with other cities can also be made. In such cases it is also possible that cities other than the largest offer more interesting material for comparison. For example, cities like Stockholm, Copenhagen, Kassel and Hanover, to name just a few, can be interesting from a comparative perspective.

During the 19th century, musicians’ migrations within Europe increased. Research that focuses on musicians’ movements shows that the trips could go between smaller towns without any connections to the big cities at all. As an example, one can mention August Söderman (1832–1876) who, in his work as a theatre musician in the 1850s, during a couple of summers toured from Stockholm to Turku (Åbo), Porvoo (Borgå), Helsinki, Viborg and back – a route that, for decades, had been used by many musicians and theatre companies. Individual musicians could also travel between cities, such as the German composer and conductor Ignaz Lachner (1807–1895) who travelled from Hamburg to Stockholm, to serve as conductor at the Royal Opera for a few years, and then returned to Frankfurt am Main. The largest cities were not interesting in this context and national borders were probably of less concern than the possibility of getting a paid job.

Therefore, research focus has crucial importance for how concepts of centre and periphery are perceived. But even in contexts where it is relevant to talk about the centre and the periphery, it can be worthwhile to pay particular attention to the relational aspect.

As previously mentioned, for most of the 19th century it was necessary to go abroad to get a music education. The brothers Fritz (1838–1883) and August Söderman both travelled from Stockholm to the Conservatory in Leipzig to study instrumental playing and composition in the 1850s. The experiences gained from their studies have been recognized but the contact between the countries has rarely been discussed. Instead, one has generally quite unreflectively made the assumption that the relationship has been in one direction only, from the foreign conservatory to the Swedish students. But

“relationship” has direction in two ways. For a music historiography that puts musical life in focus, questions about relationships between musicians, institutions, and the public will be of central interest. The spread of music and the movement of musicians become central. To view relationships and movement as central to the development of the musical life, the perspective needs to be lifted up over the national music horizon. Instead of the traditional national music history, one can look at larger regions as kind of “common marketplaces”, in which composers, musicians and singers move between places both within a country and across national borders.

Final remarks

Writing music history of the 19th century with an emphasis on musical life and its development means that individual composers and their compositions are still of great importance, but they must be seen in a wider context. This conclusion has once again been highlighted by the work of *Swedish Musical Heritage*. This work has indeed given a detailed knowledge of many fascinating music personalities, but more than this it has demonstrated the importance of describing structural and material conditions for musical life, of describing the history of music from a broad perspective and not just from a narrow perspective that focuses only on a few chosen composers.

Abstract

Swedish Musical Heritage is a six-year-long project whose purpose is to make music, that is rarely played, more accessible so that it might gain a new audience. The project is funded by the Swedish Royal Academy of Music. Biographical texts on more than 300 Swedish composers, mainly unknown even for specialists in Swedish music history, provide a background for the use of the musical works, whether for performance or for research. The writing of these biographical texts is the topic of this article – the subject of which more precisely contains discussions around this rather old-fashioned task. The authors of this article are involved in this work in various ways and write from their respective starting points. The conclusion we have reached collectively is that the writing of biographies is of great value; the image of Swedish music history is deepened, female composers have become more visible, the musical life outside of Stockholm is described, and the great variety of roles a composer could have becomes clear.