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# NORDIC SONGS FOR STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONAL SINGERS: PREPARATION, RESOURCES, AND REPERTOIRE

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## **Nordic Songs for Students and Professional Singers: Preparation, Resources, and Repertoire**

The Nordic countries present a wealth of music that is not well-known to non-natives. My research has led to a treasure trove of songs suitable for students and professional singers. This paper and list of references focus on sources for music, selected composers, history and culture of song repertoire, and resources for pronouncing the languages. It is designed to give readers a foundation to teach and perform Nordic songs.

### **Nordic Songs for Students and Professional Singers: Preparation, Resources, and Repertoire**

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#### **Introduction**

The Nordic countries present a wealth of music that is not well-known to non-natives. My research in recent years has led to a treasure trove of songs, suitable for both students and professional singers. My goal is to promote accessibility to this beautiful repertoire through resources for music, pronunciation, and translations, and add a much-needed connection to a significant body of music.

My grandparents were immigrants from Finland and Sweden; as was typical for that time, they did not teach Finnish or Swedish to my mother. A decade ago, a musician friend with Swedish background gave me some folk song arrangements by Gustav Hägg, and these met with the warmest possible reception from audiences. I also served on the board of the Kilpinen Society, which hosted a competition focused on Nordic songs, and was struck by the huge stumbling block singers encountered in finding copies of songs and pronunciation guidance. My growing interest was also due to our family's desire to reconnect with relatives in Finland and Sweden. We found them through the internet, and visited in 2007. After years of professional singing and teaching at the university level, I became aware that American singers are not trained in Nordic repertoire, and that these rich and vibrant musical traditions hold an invaluable dimension for us as singers, teachers, and musicians. Learning these beautiful songs has been a journey for me, and I hope to inspire other American singers to include songs from the Land of the Midnight Sun in their performances.

My initial research was in Finland and Sweden and at Seattle's Nordic Heritage Museum. I continued at the libraries of St. Olaf College and the University of Minnesota, and returned to Finland and Sweden for research and coaching. This provided an overview of repertoire and a springboard for lecture-recitals and my CD, "Voyage Home: Songs of Finland, Sweden and Norway", with pianists Bruce Bengtson and Rhonda Kline (Centaur Records, 2013).

It has been unbelievably rewarding to discover other singers' interest in this repertoire.

American singers are trained in French, German and Italian, and there are standard anthologies with phonetics for these languages. However, American singers are given little background in

Nordic languages, even for songs of Grieg or Sibelius, and we have a very limited awareness of this repertoire. I am editing an anthology of Nordic songs (Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish), to include the music, International Phonetic Alphabet, word-by-word translations, a brief guide to Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian singing diction, and a recording of the spoken texts. This collection is designed for college-level and professional singers. Subito Music (Stephen Culbertson, editor) is publishing this anthology, which will offer singers, teachers, and libraries their first opportunity to own the music combined with the tools needed to perform and teach these songs. There currently does not exist a collection that presents Nordic songs with these accompanying resources. My anthology will allow singers to become acquainted with an important body of musical literature. It has been an extraordinary privilege to look through piles of scores, seeking out songs to introduce students and singers to this vast body of music, and it has been a labor of love to research copyright issues and seek reprint licenses.

In 2014, I will host a residency at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on Finnish song repertoire by Eija Järvelä, Aulikki Eerola, and Pertti Eerola, faculty members at the Sibelius Academy. This residency will include master classes and workshops designed for students to coach Nordic repertoire. My long-term goal is to host a festival of Nordic songs, similar to the Kilpinen Competition. I have been fortunate to be supported with grants from the American-Scandinavian Foundation, the Finlandia Foundation, the Swedish Women's Educational Association (San Francisco), and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School.

### **Overview**

The roots of Nordic music are found in folk music. After centuries of political turbulence, music was a key element in forging strong national identities for Finland, Sweden and Norway during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Songs allowed music-lovers to enjoy music in their homes, and strengthen ties created by poetry and music that reflected national sensibilities. Thus songs illuminate the hard-won cultural, language, and political identities for these countries. In Finland, the Kalevala (a book and epic poem set to music) helped inspire the national awakening that led to Finland's independence from Russia in 1917. Sibelius's "Finlandia" (1899) played a role in the drive for independence as well. From around 1200 until 1809 Finland was a part of Sweden, and the Swedish language has retained an important position in Finland. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Finnish was recognized as the official language in Finland and the Finnish-language secondary-school system was founded. Today Swedish remains the second official language of Finland.

Norwegian reflects the same vicissitudes of history. Danish was the official written language in Norway from 1450 to 1900. Wencke Ophaug in the *Journal of Singing* writes: "... the written language was changed to become more Norwegian, and two versions arose, bokmål and nynorsk. Norwegian song texts from the Grieg period are written either in Danish or in Danish-Norwegian or nynorsk. We still do not have any real pronunciation standard for any of them". (1) A Norwegian native told me (with pride) that if he rows across the fjord, he experiences difficulty understanding the Norwegian of the next village, and one can hear Norwegian singers making choices to color the texts based on their own regional influences, interpretations and sensibilities. Ms. Ophaug strongly urges determining a consistent way of pronouncing Norwegian texts so that non-Norwegian singers have a standard way to approach the language.

Nordic music strongly reflects the seasons, as life is shaped by the long winter and the longing for spring. Quiet, loneliness, and isolation are frequent themes. Music is also shaped by history and wars, during which traditions, land and even languages are taken over by other countries. With the comprehensive music education and community involvement in music-making throughout these countries, the boundaries between classical and popular music are much more porous than in the United States. For example, the beloved Swedish hymn, *Sommarpsalm*, dating from 1675 and set for chorus by Waldemar Åhlén in 1933, is an integral part of community and choral events, and is regularly sung at weddings and group concerts. Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden chose the hymn for her wedding in 2010. In 2002 it reached the Swedish pop music charts in a recording by The Real Group.

### **Finland, Norway, and Sweden**

A keystone to Finnish culture and identity is the Kalevala, a book and epic poem compiled in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Elias Lönnrot from Finnish and Karelian folklore. Held to be the national epic of Finland, it consists of 22,795 verses. It was usually sung to tunes built on 5 notes, with lines consisting of 5 beats. Despite the vast geographical distances separating the individual singers, the poetry was always sung in the same meter, with 8 syllables per line (Kalevala meter). The most famous example of the Kalevala's influence upon another author is J.R.R. Tolkien, who claimed the Kalevala as a source for writings which became the *Silmarillion*, the background for his better-known tales. It has inspired musicians from Sibelius to Finnish rock and metal bands. Twelve of Sibelius' best known works refer to the Kalevala, including "Kullervo", a symphony

for soloists, chorus, and orchestra. Rautavaara composed three operas based on the Kalevala. Longfellow's epic poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*, uses the meter of the Kalevala as he found it in a German translation.

Finnish music often refers to the lost land of Karelia, both as a poetic-mythical touchstone for true Finnish culture as well as a political turning point. Much of the province of Karelia was ceded to the Soviet Union after the Winter War, and is a continuing source of national sense of sorrow and loss. The traditional music of Karelia is regarded as the purest expression of Finnish music, less influenced by other cultures.

In contemporary Finland, there are strong traditions of historically significant music as well as rock music and the tango. In fact, Finland is divided between the north (devoted to the tango) and south (producing numerous rock bands). Hundreds of music and song festivals take place throughout the country, especially during the summer, when well-attended concerts take place in churches and other venues, from the smallest village to the largest cities. The Finnish music education system is an entrenched part of growing up, and leads to musicians such as Esa Pekka Sallinen and Karita Mattila. There is no separation between life and music; it's all part of the fabric of existence.

A key figure in the emergence of Finnish classical song is Fredrik Pacius. Known as the "Father of Finnish Music", he wrote the song that became Finland's national anthem. As one of the pioneering Romantics of the nineteenth century, he laid the foundation for the Finnish National Romantic movement.

Songs by Sibelius, Pyllkänen, and Merikanto are exemplars of the National Romantic period. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a golden age for Finnish vocal music. Depictions of nature offered a free and fresh mode of expression for national feelings, and the universal Romantic theme of love found a distinctly Finnish character, tinged with poignancy and melancholy. The national dimension is also evident in the influence from the rich body of folk songs.

Considered Finland's most distinguished composer, Sibelius grew up in a Swedish-speaking family; with the rise of Romantic Nationalism, his family sent him to a Finnish language school. The majority of his songs are set in Swedish, although rhythms of Finnish poetry and speech influenced Sibelius' vocal and instrumental writing. Romantic Nationalism was to become a crucial element in Sibelius's artistic output and politics. While the core of Sibelius's compositions are his seven symphonies, he had three periods of extensive song-writing, ending during the last years of World War I, long before his death.

Other important song composers of the Finnish National Romantic period include Madetoja, Järnefelt, Melartin, Palmgren, Kuula, and Kilpinen. More contemporary composers include Saariaho, Sallinen, Rautavaara, Borg, and others who have added significantly to the body of Finnish song repertoire.

Grieg is renowned for drawing inspiration from Norwegian folk music. His goal was to create a national form of music, giving the Norwegian people an identity. He was a strong supporter of the Nationalist Movement in Norway, and an advocate of the language Landsmaal, a Norwegian



alternative to the Danish commonly used at that time, and which evolved into nynorsk. Grieg became the first Nordic composer to achieve international recognition. Ole Bull was primarily known as one of the greatest violin virtuosos of his time. He promoted the folk music and culture of Norway, and exerted a strong influence on Grieg and other creative artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to reflect Norwegian culture and identity in their works. Agathe Backer Grøndahl is considered to be Norway's foremost female composer. She wrote numerous works for piano and voice, and was encouraged by Grieg. Other important Norwegian song composers include Christian Sinding, Egil Hovland, Eyvind Alnæs and Halfdan Kjerulf.

Thousands of Swedes sing in choruses, are familiar with traditional songs, and enjoy hymns as part of their cultural as well as religious identity. Their strong musical traditions have led to a rich body of songs from composers including Wilhelm Stenhammar, Hugo Alfvén, Lars-Erik Larsson, and Gunnar de Frumerie, Ture Rangström, Bo Linde, Emil Sjögren, and Wilhelm Peterson-Berger. A colorful early figure in Swedish culture was Carl Michael Bellman. Bellman was an artist of many dimensions: a poet, composer, and popular figure. Like Goethe and Hugo, he is a continuing touchstone for his national culture. His song, "Fjäriln vingad", describes the delights of King Gustav III's favorite summer residence outside Stockholm. It was written three years before the king was murdered at the notorious masked ball in 1792, familiar to opera lovers from Verdi's "Un ballo in maschera", and appears regularly in popular song albums. And we must end our visit to Sweden by mentioning the great song, "Til havs" by Nordqvist, made famous by Jussi Björling—that rare Nordic song that is unabashedly extroverted!

### **Summary**

My goal is to give singers resources to pursue performing and teaching Nordic songs. This repertoire has a place in universities and on concert stages, and I look forward to continuing my

work to accomplish this. I hope the resources listed with this article prove helpful to other musicians. It is a privilege to honor my family heritage and leave a legacy of beauty for new generations of singers.

(1) “Troubleshooting Norwegian Pronunciation in Classical Singing”, Wencke Ophaug, Journal of Singing, September/October 2012, Volume 69, No 1, pp 49-56

**Suggested repertoire for college and professional singers from forthcoming anthology,**

**2014, Subito Music, edited by Mimmi Fulmer**

FINNISH SONGS

Minä metsän polkuja kuljen	Erkki Melartin (1875-1937)
Balladi (Kaarle-kuninkaan metsästys)	Fredrik Pacius (1809-1891)
*Tuomi on virran reunalla	folk song, arr. Einari Marvia
*Kukapa sen saunan	folk song, arr. Väinö Hannikainen
Pastorale	Tauno Pyykkänen (1918-1980)
Soi vienosti murheeni soitto	Oskar Merikanto (1868-1924)
Kullan murunen	
Oravan pesä	P.J. Hannikainen (1854-1924)
Tule, tule kultani Hilu, hilu Minun kultani kaunis on	arr. Ralf Gothóni (b. 1946)
Flickan kom ifrån sin älsklings möte (1901)	Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)
Säv, säv, susa (1900)	
Souda, souda, sinisorsa	

Im Feld ein Mädchen singt (Op. 50)

Die stille Stadt (Op. 50)

Du

Armas Järnefelt (1869-1958)

Anmutiger Vertrag

Yrjö Kilpinen (1892-1959)

#### NORWEGIAN SONGS

Med en vandlilje

Edward Grieg (1843-1907)

Jeg elsker Dig

Det første møte

Ein Traum (En drøm ) (originally in German)

Solveigs Sang

En svane

Prinsessen

Våren

Zur Rosenzeit

Lykken mellem to mennesker

Eyvind Alnæs (1872-1932)

De hundrede violiner

Sæterjentens Søndag with violin obligato written by Tyrone Greive     Ole Bull (1810-1880)

Sildig

Agathe Backer-Grøndahl (1847-1907)

Mot kveld

Kløvereng

Rav

Christian Sinding (1856-1941)

Pinselilje

#### SWEDISH SONGS

Den enda stunden (1917)	Ture Rangström (1884-1947)
Intet är som väntanstider	Wilhelm Peterson-Berger (1867-1942)
Skogen sover	Hugo Alfvén (1872-1960)
Flickan kom ifrån sin älsklings möte (1893)	Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871-1927)
Det kom ett brev	Gunnar de Frumerie (1908-1987)
Till havs	Gustaf Nordqvist (1886-1949)
Fjäriln vingad	C.M. Bellman (1740-1795)
Min själ, du måste	Swedish folk hymn, arr. David Dies
Sommarpsalm	Waldemar Åhlén (1894-1982)
Ack, Värmeland, du sköna Som stjärnan uppå himmelen så klar Folk song	Arr. Gustav Hägg (1867-1925)
Neckens polska Vårvindar friska, leka och hviska	
Vem kan segla(folk song)	arr. David Dies

#### DANISH SONGS

Sommersang	Nielsen (1865-1931)
Silde ved nat hin kolde	P.E. Lange-Müller (1850-1926)

**Resources for singing in Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish**

## **General resources and references**

Opera News, May 2009, issue focuses on Scandinavian music, including overview of musical events and article by Steven Blier on specific songs and recordings

Ostinato Sheet Music Shop, Helsinki [www.ostinato.fi](http://www.ostinato.fi)

The Academy of Finnish Art Song <http://www.artsong.fi/english.htm>

Fuga Classical Music, Helsinki [www.fuga.fi](http://www.fuga.fi)

Aulos Music, Stockholm [www.aulosmusik.se](http://www.aulosmusik.se)

The Aksel Schiøtz Anthology of Nordic Solo Songs, edited by Gerd Schiøtz, Edition Egtved  
Denmark

Five volumes of songs for piano and voice, including translations and commentary, no IPA  
Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Iceland-Faroe Islands

M1619 A38 vols. 1-5

## **Finnish**

Sing it in Finnish: a practical pronunciation guide for singers and choral conductors

Jaakko Mäntyjärvi

Sulasol 1997 Fredrikinkatu 51-53 B FIN-00100 Helsinki Finland

[sulasol@co.inet.fi](mailto:sulasol@co.inet.fi)

Singing in Finnish: a manual for singers and vocal coaches

Eugene Holman with Gustav Djupsöbacka and Donald Adamson

75 Finnish songs phonetically transcribed with translations

Includes guidelines on singing in Finnish and pronunciation

The Academy of Finnish Art Song, ISBN 952-99224-1-8

Available at Ostinato Oy, [ostinato@ostinato.fi](mailto:ostinato@ostinato.fi), [www.ostinato.fi](http://www.ostinato.fi)

Catalogue of Finnish Art Songs: compositions for solo voice by 160 composers, including chamber music

Includes publishers, contacts, index

The Academy of Finnish Art Songs, ISBN 952-99224-0-X

[musiclibrary@fimic.fi](mailto:musiclibrary@fimic.fi)

Available at Ostinato Oy, [ostinato@ostinato.fi](mailto:ostinato@ostinato.fi), [www.ostinato.fi](http://www.ostinato.fi)

Music Finland (formerly Finnish Music Information Centre), [www.musicfinland.fi](http://www.musicfinland.fi)

Lauttasarentie 1, FIN-00200 Helsinki

Phenomenally knowledgeable and helpful center; they will assist with research, and sometimes mail music and CDs free of charge; their library includes numerous scores and recordings

Sibelius-Academy Library, [sibakirjasto@siba.fi](mailto:sibakirjasto@siba.fi)

P.O. Box 86 (Töölönkatu 28)

00251 Helsinki

www.siba.fi

### **Norwegian**

45 Songs of Grieg, Bradley Ellingboe, Leyerle Publications, 1988

Includes the melody lines (piano acc. not included) ... with the international phonetic alphabet spelling and word-for-word translations of the Norwegian texts, English singing translations, a brief history of the evolving Norwegian language, and notes about the songs and the poets who wrote the song texts

M1620 G83 E39 1988

A Grieg song anthology / edited by Bradley Ellingboe and William D. Leyerle, Leyerle Publications, 2002

Includes the complete music for songs in the 45 Songs of Grieg book above

M1620 G83 E4 2002

Norwegian Music Information Center, [nmic@notam.uio.no](mailto:nmic@notam.uio.no)

“Troubleshooting Norwegian Pronunciation in Classical Singing”, Wencke Ophaug, Journal of Singing, September/October 2012, Volume 69, No 1, pp 49-56

Extremely helpful overview of Norwegian pronunciation(including historical perspective and practical guidelines on bokmål and nynorsk)

NorwegianMelodies.com, Ingrid Olsson

Information on Norwegian language, song translations, poets, composers

<http://www.norwegianmelodies.com/language.htm>

## **Swedish**

Thirty Songs of Wilhelm Stenhammar, Leyerle Publications, 1999 Editor: Annette Johansson

Includes IPA transcriptions, word-for-word translations, commentary, and comprehensive guide to Swedish lyric diction

Swedish Music Information Center, [swedmic@stim.se](mailto:swedmic@stim.se): concentrates on contemporary Swedish music

[www.SwedishSong.com](http://www.SwedishSong.com): ~ 1500 art songs, texts, translations, pronunciation tools, and recordings of texts

“An Introduction to Swedish Diction”, Anna Hersey, *Journal of Singing*, January/February 2012,

Volume 68, No. 3, pp. 301-312

Comprehensive overview of basics of Swedish diction, summary of högsvenska (high Swedish) versus talad svenska (modern spoken Swedish), and guidelines for transcribing Swedish into IPA

“Romancing the *Romanser*: Exploring the Art Song of Sweden”, Kathleen Roland-Silverstein,

*Journal of Singing*, November/December 2011, Volume 68, No. 2, pp. 211-217



Recommendations of Swedish art songs for American singers, list of resources for pronunciation, translations, sheet music, and recordings

Singing in Swedish: a manual for singers and vocal coaches

Carita Rosenberg-Wolff with Gustav Djupsöbacka

66 songs by Finnish composers in Swedish with phonetics and translations

Includes brief guidelines on singing in Swedish

The Academy of Finnish Art Song ISBN 978-952-99224-2-0

Available at Ostinato Oy, [ostinato@ostinato.fi](mailto:ostinato@ostinato.fi), [www.ostinato.fi](http://www.ostinato.fi)

### **Recordings/text recordings**

The Art Song Project: recordings and texts for songs of all languages, including selected Nordic repertoire [theartsongproject.com](http://theartsongproject.com)

### **General resources and references**

Opera News, May 2009, issue focuses on Scandinavian music, including overview of musical events and article by Steven Blier on specific songs and recordings

Ostinato Sheet Music Shop, Helsinki [www.ostinato.fi](http://www.ostinato.fi)

The Academy of Finnish Art Song <http://www.artsong.fi/english.htm>

Fuga Classical Music, Helsinki [www.fuga.fi](http://www.fuga.fi)

Aulos Music, Stockholm [www.aulosmusik.se](http://www.aulosmusik.se)

The Aksel Schiøtz Anthology of Nordic Solo Songs, edited by Gerd Schiøtz, Edition Egtved

Five volumes of songs for piano and voice, including translations and commentary, no IPA

Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Iceland-Faroe Islands

M1619 A38 vols. 1-5

### **Recordings**

**Barbara Bonney, Antonio Pappano**, Diamonds in the Snow, Decca

Songs of Grieg, Sibelius, Stenhammar, Alfvén, Sjöberg

**Tom Krause, Gustav Djupsjöbacka**, Finlandia

Songs of Sibelius

**Karita Mattila, Ilmo Ranta**, From the Heart of Finland, Ondine

Songs of Kuula, Merikanto, Melartin, Kilpinen, arr. Gothóni

**Karita Mattila, Ilmo Ranta**, Sibelius Songs, Ondine

**Jorma Hynninen, Ralf Gothóni**, The Most Beautiful Songs, Finlandia

Songs of Oskar Merikanto

**Jorma Hynninen**, Tampere Orchestra, Summer Moods, Ondine

Songs of Turunen, Oskar Merikanto, Kotilainen, Madetoja, Melartin, Hannakainen, Kuula,  
Palmgren, Ikonen, Luolajan-Mikkola, Kaski, Linnavuroi

**Anne Sofie Von Otter, Bengt Forsberg**, Wings in the Night (Swedish Songs), Deutsche  
Grammophon

Peterson-Berger, Von Koch, Stenhammar, Rangström, Alfvén, Sjögren

**Anne Sofie Von Otter, Bengt Forsberg**, Watercolors (Swedish Songs), Deutsche Grammophon  
Songs of Larsson, Alfvén, Nystroem, Rangström, Nordqvist, De Frumerie, Linde, Aulin

**Anne Sofie Von Otter, Bengt Forsberg**, Grieg: Songs, Deutsche Grammophon

25 songs by Grieg, including *Haugtussa*

**Anne Sofie von Otter and Håkan Hagegård**, 30 songs by Stenhammar, Musica Sveciae  
Wilhelm Stenhammar Sångers

**Soile Isokoski, Marita Viitasalo**, Finnish Songs, Ondine

Songs of Melartin, Sonninen, Hannakainen, Kaski, Pacius, Kilpinen, Oskar Merikanto,  
Hämäläinen

**Soile Isokoski**, Helsinki Philharmonic, Finnish Sacred Songs, Ondine

Songs of Kuusisto, Hannakainen, Madetoja, Oskar Merikanto, Maasalo, Pylkkänen, Klemetti,  
Kilpinen, Pesonen, Rautavaara, Krohn

**Soile Isokoski**, Helsinki Philharmonic, Ondine

Sibelius songs with orchestra

**Kirsten Flagstad**

Grieg's *Haugtussa* and the 1937 Victor recordings (opera scenes, "*Ah, Perfido!*"), Romophone

La voix du siècle: Kirsten Flagstad á Paris (songs of Brahms, Sinding, Alnæs, Wolf, Grieg,

Strauss) Harmonia Mundi, distribution [takra.com](http://takra.com)

Grieg & Dørumsgaard Song Recital, Testament

**Mimmi Fulmer, soprano, Bruce Bengtson and Rhonda Kline, pianists**

Voyage Home: Songs of Finland, Sweden and Norway, Centaur Records