

On Common Ground 3: John Playford and the English Dancing Master, 1651

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COUNTRY DANCES FROM A SWEDISH PERSPECTIVE (1760–1820s)

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INTRODUCTION

A couple of years ago Birgitta Möller Nilsson, Anders Nilsson and myself decided to make more of our combined interest in country dances. My friends, who are married (with three small children), run a dance company (called Sinkelipass), and Anders is a great computer enthusiast, which turned out to be a vital factor in our partnership, as we decided to find out how much the computer could help in the study of the Swedish country dances.

In 1979 there was published a report on country dances in Scandinavia: Rekkedanse – linjedanser; Slutrapport (Longways, Conclusive Report). From Swedish country dance sources were counted 559 country dances (114 of them longways and 445 squares). One of the propelling powers of the report was the folk dance archive (then headed by the enthusiastic and effective founder Henry Sjöberg) of the Dance Museum in Stockholm (the museum's founder and first director, from 1953 to 1990, was professor Bengt Häger), and at the archive was continued the collecting of source material, mainly in the form of copies. The material grew to such an extent that it proved difficult to get reasonable overviews.

A NEW LIST OF SWEDISH COUNTRY DANCE SOURCES

My friends and myself started to enter the available material into a database, constructed by Anders. From the very start of the project, we got generous and indispensable support from the Carina Ari Foundation in Stockholm. The sources we have been able to collect so far are included in the attached list. We did find some material not earlier considered, and there is even more material we have seen references to, or know about, but we have not yet been able to secure any copies.

The list, as chronological as we have been able to make it, includes domicile of the respective manuscripts and, in the two right hand columns, presence of Music (Mu) and amount of dance descriptions. The earliest manuscript dates from 1760, the latest from 1822. I have to make a comment about nr. 31. It is dated 1858–59, but the item is a notebook apparently used for many purposes by many persons, at what we assume to be different periods. Some of the dances described occur in other manuscripts from around 1800. Out of the 1119 descriptions in the list, over 800 are different.

THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS

The earliest Swedish country dance source is a manuscript written by Johan Jacob Anckarström, an officer who served also in France. The manuscript is dated 1760, and the date is an accurate one, as the introductory lines read: "Tours of dances which were danced, in winter 1760, at the town hall"... It is generally agreed that the town is Stockholm, even if the name is not actually given. So far, no facts about these events are known.

A most interesting fact is, that already here (as in the second source, by Lindhé, in 1764), the order for dancing country dances in square formation is the one advocated by de la Cuisse, (1762 and onwards), with each round of the dance preceded by eight different entries. This is a strong indication of a firm French connection. The Swedish word ("kontradanser") is closer to the French one than the English one. Here, though, I am using the English word "country dances", throughout.

A List of Swedish Country Dance Books and Manuscripts (March 2001)

| | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|
| 1. 1760: | Anckarström, Johan Jacob Tourer afv de Contre Dancer som wintren på Stadshuset ... | KB*, ms | Mu 15 |
| 2. 1764: | Lindhé, Johan P. Beskrifning på Contradanser för Högwälborne herr Baron Rålamb. | KB, ms | - 40 |
| 3. 1766: | Ericksson, Joh. (Holmiae die X sept 1766...) | ms# | Mu 25 |
| 4. 1782: | Walcke, Sven Henric Minnes-Bok uti Dans-Konsten, Nyköping | Book | - 14 |
| 5. 1783: | Konst, Johan Jacob Minnes-Bok uti Dans-Exercitien ..., Örebro | Book | - - |
| 6. 1783: | Walcke, Sven Henric Grunderne uti Dans-Kånsten ..., Göteborg | Book | - 133 |
| 7. 1783: | (Tryggdahl, Gabriel) Samling af Utwalda Swenska Tourer Til Nya Contra-Danser..., Stockholm | Book | - 94 |
| 8. 1784: | Tryggdahl, Gabriel Samling af de Wackraste Tourer ..., Stockholm 1784 | Book | - 35 |
| 9. 1785: | (Tryggdahl, Gabriel) Fruentimmers Almanack jemte Nya Contradans Tourer ... | Book | - 30 |
| 10. 1785: | Capriole, Joseph (pseud. for Koskull) En Kort, Men Ganska Tydlig Undervisning At Lära Dansa ... (re-edited in 1860 and 1874) | Book | - 4 |
| 11. 1785: | Baron Fredrik Åkerhielms Dansbok.. | ms+ | Mu 196 |
| 12. 1790s: | Dansbok 1. (Stat. Musiksaml. I 2330) | ms | Mu 26 |
| 13. 1790s: | Dansbok 2. (Stat. Musiksaml. I 2331) | ms | Mu 42 |
| 14. 1790s: | Dansbok 7. (Stat. Musiksaml. I 2335) | ms | Mu 48 |
| 15. 1790s: | Contradanser ... (KB, S 255) | ms | Mu 43 |
| 16. 1790s: | Notbok B Violino primo ... | ms | Mu 34 |
| 17. 1797: | A. C. Svedberg - Hellström. (St. Mus. 4509) | ms | - 50 |
| 18. 1797: | Tour-Bok; | ms | - 42 |
| 19. 1800 (?): | Trettio Contradanser...(Stat. Musiksaml.) | ms | Mu 15 |
| 20. 1800: | Tour Bok, (Gotlands Fornsal, C 5099.) | ms | - 21 |
| 21. 1800: | I. P. Åkerholms Tour Bok, (St. Mus. I 2337) | ms | - 45 |
| 22. ca 1800: | (Kontradansbok), (KB S 136a) | ms | Mu 32 |
| 23. 1802: | Tour Bok för M. C. Ekman, (KB S 256) | ms | - 16 |
| 24. 1800s, early: | För fiol. Danser med ... (Landsarkivet i Visby, I:12.) | ms | Mu 22 |
| 25. 1800-1820: | (Musikhist. Museet, M 145.) | ms+ | Mu 24 |
| 26. (no date): | Dansbok med turer; (Okat. Stat, Musiksaml.) | ms | Mu 5 |
| 27. (no date): | (no title; Stat. Musiksaml. 2777 b) | ms | Mu 1 |
| 28. (no date): | (no title; Stat. Musiksaml. I 3710) | ms | Mu 3 |
| 29. (1807 or later): | Angläser och kadriljer; 12 danser ... | ms+ | Mu 12 |
| 30. 1822: | Tullberg, Carl Gustaf: Notbok | ms | Mu 24 |
| 31. (1858-59): | (Rasmus Larsson; notebook, privately owned) | ms | - 28 |

Total number of dance descriptions: 1119

(Note: "Statens Musiksamlingar" = State Music Collections, in Stockholm.)

Finland: one book printed in Åbo in 1785 and one manuscript (being prepared for publication), 1806.

Norway: 1802: Walcke, S. H: Toure-Bok... Bergen Book - 54

Manuscripts by Walcke, 1801 and 1816.

* KB Royal Swedish Library

Privately owned

+ Plus new edition

EARLY WALTZING

Already in these manuscripts one meets with the word “waltzing”, which is generally interpreted (though with no substantial proof) as “dancing around”. The first Swedish description of waltzing is an early one, supplied by Joseph Capriole (pen-name for G. F. Koskull, a counsellor of war) in item 10 on our list, a benevolent satire on the importance of dancing and of the performing of dance. Among all witticisms and jokes in this very well worth reading pamphlet, the description of waltzing stands out:

After a remark that many dances have been imported to Sweden from abroad, the writer asserts that “this figure, though, we have learnt from our own peasants. Nobody, who has spent a part of Spring or Summer in our Countryside, could be unaware about the ways peasants, especially the young ones, amuse themselves. Preferably by a slope, they lie down on the grass, in pairs, one on top of the other, hold on to each other with the arms, throwing the legs about one another, and in this position they roll, or waltz, down the hill. This was earlier a game, before the present time, when the nobles have made it a serious matter, having introduced it into country dances, and it is now performed to Music. The figure is almost the same, as the performance of it. In dancing, though, it is performed in a standing position.” In another passage, the writer asserts that this new pastime is also called “dancing along the walls”.

SVEN HENRIC WALCKE: 1782 and 1783

The first printed book on country dance in Sweden was written by Sven Henric Walcke, in 1782 (Nr. 4 on the list). It contains many surprising items for a dance book, like 53 questions and answers in moral matters to young ladies and 52 to young gentlemen (plus recommended reading), a 7 page outline of history of many countries, a 4 page extract from a novel (Harvey’s “Tombs”, which seems to be a gloomy choice) and a 13 page list of French words translated to Swedish – but only 14 descriptions of country dances, in a book of 63 pages.

The 1783 edition (Nr. 6) is much more concise. This book counts 58 pages, some 40 of which contain 133 dance descriptions. The first book may, in fact, have caused criticism: in the 1783 introduction, Walcke is asking to be forgiven for the publication of the 1782 book which had “come out under his name and against his wish”, and he is asking the favour from his readers to be lenient towards the book and to consider it as “a casual entertainment and pastime for a sick man”. Now Walcke’s health seems not to have been that weak: later he moved to Norway, where there are preserved two manuscripts of his (dated 1801 and 1816) and one published book (1802), and he died only in 1825, in Norway, which was at that time a part of Sweden.

Being a most systematic person, and a great maker of lists, Walcke divides the art of dance into three parts:

1. the carriage of the body (posture guidelines for five parts of the body, plus foot positions, five of which he doesn’t name but we may guess, but also two walking positions, which he doesn’t give, but are more difficult to guess, and which we would certainly have liked to know).
2. the dance in itself.
3. the ceremony.

Walcke further subdivides the dance into three parts:

1. Minuet (9 types, with 4 rules for Minuet dancing).
2. Polska (explained in only three lines, which Swedish folk dancers find very annoying).
3. Contredanse, of which there are two types: Longways and Quadrilles.

For country dances, Walcke declares the following 17 steps to be the superior ones: (N.B. As everywhere, translations are mine, as close to the original as I have been able to make them.)

1. Quarré steps, forwards and back.
2. Chasses, forwards and back.
3. Setting steps.
4. Syncopated setting steps.
5. Chasses casting off.
6. Balancés, right and left.
7. Balancés casting off.
8. Rigaudon steps.
9. Balancé rigaudon steps.
10. Setting rigaudon steps.
11. Chasse rigaudon steps.
12. Chasses over and under.
13. Glissades.
14. Pirouettes, right and left.
15. Hopping steps, of several sorts.
16. Easily flowing steps (or perhaps: smoothly running steps).
17. Pousette steps.

After that follows an important observation: “One must not confuse or neglect the beat of the music, with unnecessary steps and hops.” Most of the time, Walcke is giving names only, without explanations. He is listing 13 types of figures, including 7 rondes, 8 chains, 7 promenades, 5 hays, and, among other things, the Crown.

After a list of 31 dances which Walcke choreographed himself, there follows a most important part: The Ceremony. There Walcke gives five bows and courtseys – in the five positions respectively, and a “Daily protocol” in 58 points. Here follows a selection of them:

1. Time of arrival is about three.
7. One immediately goes up to Mr. Walcke to make one’s bow or courtsey.
8. Every day there is a new greeting phrase for Mr. Walcke.
13. Fans are never to be left or put aside, but are permanently held in the hand.
14. Never forget to bring handkerchiefs, snuff boxes, fans, veiled headdresses or gloves.
15. Always change shoes before entering the dancing hall.
17. Gentlemen always bring walking sticks with ribbons on them.

Point 23 contains a long list of matters not to be forgotten in performing bows and courtseys:

2. Kissing of hands.
15. The manner of entering a room.
17. Kissing of petticoat hems to the right and to the (Note: It seems to have been a custom to kiss hems of noble or royal ladies.)
24. For gentlemen: 5 manners with one’s hat, with both hands.

25. For ladies 4 ways to keep their hands about the waist; for gentlemen 3 ways to keep their hands.
26. For gentlemen manners with a walking-stick.
28. For ladies 10 tempi (yes, Walcke is using that word) with the fan.
32. Not forgetting 11 rules in a neat minuet.
33. Not forgetting to behave decently and correctly in the dancing hall – neither laughing nor talking loudly.

And the last point is gives an important clue as to the composition of a dance programme:

35. A Longways is followed by a Quadrille and vice versa.

In the 1782 edition, Walcke elaborates on some of the points only listed later. Of the ten tempi of the fan, nr 9 is “Hiding the fan about oneself in country dances.” One of the rules for dancing minuet is “Follow your partner with your face”

Among the instructions given in the 1782 issue only, there are many items particularly interesting for a dancer, e. g. 40 questions for pupils to answer – but, alas, no answers, which ought to have been excellent reading: one of the questions is What should be observed in a perfect minuet – and in a country dance? There is also an outline for a pupils’ daily training schedule, where each movement should be performed ten or three times. In this list is included (point 40 at page 36) a system of finger signs to use when a person wishes to correct someone without the use of words. Right hand forefinger, then, marks mistakes in foot positions in walking, standing, sitting or dancing. Left hand pinkie marks mistakes made in dancing, both Minuets and Country dances. (A lady at the conference begged me to include the rest of the list – how could I not oblige? Right hand: thumb for marking mistakes in body carriage, middle finger for mistakes in bows and courtseys; ringfinger for mistakes in handling of fan, veiled headdress, coat, sword or hat; little finger for insufficient command of expressing compliments, asking questions or giving answers. Left hand: thumb for marking insufficient gentleness, forefinger for mistakes made introducing people or being introduced, longfinger for ungentleness in someone’s dress; the ringfinger for mistakes made in entering a room or leaving it, or in sitting down or rising. This finger is also used for marking mistakes during meals.)

Such suggestions are, of course, excellent food for thought and imagination. Some years ago a revered teacher shouted “No – right hand, you silly idiots!!” to a class I attended. I have found myself waking up in the middle of the night, wondering how that would have looked, expressed with finger signs.

A rare quadrille

An extremely long and complex country dance is Walcke’s own “The Dance of the Protecting Goddess”, given already in the 1782 edition, where the dance needs 32 lines of description for the quick music part – and then follows a Minuet, which needs another 18 lines of description, all in all 50 lines!. And it is a Quadrille, so in principle it should be repeated 8 times. One can’t help wondering if the dance ever made it to the ballroom.

The instructions for the first part of this dance include a 3rd sort of Pas de Rigaudon (no explanations) and a 1/4 part of a dos à dos. A rare figure is “men take left women with right hand and their partners with left hand and make a pirouette”. The minuet part includes, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, swinging, chasse, balancé and waltzing, and 2nd sort of Pas de Rigaudon, and also in minuet time, ladies are instructed perform “a cross under a star”.

ÅKERHIELM 1785

The most comprehensive Swedish country dance source contains 196 dances, with tunes, plus extra minuet music. It is a manuscript written by Baron Fredrik Åkerhielm, and it bears the date 1785. (Nr 11 on our list, it is available in a simple facsimile, with a supplement in which the hand-written instructions are deciphered.)

There are 148 quadrilles and 47 longways, plus a solitaire for nine, called Polygamie, where every lady has two partners. The dance is basically a ninesome reel, and is one of the three dances in this collection that have survived, in the repertoire of folk dance teams.

The manuscript contains no instruction part, but a closer look at the dance descriptions gives useful information about the steps used: Chasses, including forwards and back, Pas de Rigaudons, including travelling ones, Balances, Figurés, Pirouettes, tournés, contre temps, but, sadly no explanations of that step. And poussette still seem to be a step: “All couples poussette inwards, then back” (Nr 94); “Poussette towards each other” (105); “Man and 2 We advance and back with poussette” (131).

Dance types include Minuette, Polska, Masurka (which seems early), Waltz and Allemande. Dance names include Galoppade, Cottilion, Allemande Suisse, Die Lange Quadrille (which seems to be the first German title) and Masur Quadrille. That last dance, Nr 54, is particularly interesting, as a comment to it gives a good hard evidence that the Quadrille order advocated by de la Cuisse was still, at that time, valid.

CONCLUSION What is Swedish in the Swedish Country Dances?

Many dances in the Swedish country dance sources are named after Swedish persons, places, premises or other matters. Melodies popular in Sweden have often been used for dancing, Swedish dancing-masters have choreographed dances. Sven Henric Walcke is a unique Swedish dance writer and analyst, who shows the importance of dancing in Swedish society, and the utter importance of dancing and behaving correctly.

Swedish political affairs are also reflected in these dances. From the middle ages Finland was a part of Sweden. After a war, Finland was surrendered to Russia in 1809, and only in the 19th century a Finnish nationalism was rising. Finnish was recognized as a literary language only in the middle of the century, and only even later, Finnish was accepted as an administrative language with rights equal to Swedish. It is in that context Finnish names of country dances have to be viewed: they are more than only evidence of Finnish connections.

To my great surprise, I found out that literature written in Swedish but published (even before 1809) in Finland, is not listed in the Swedish national bibliographies. One country dance book was published in Åbo (Turku) in 1785 – we have not seen it yet – and there is a manuscript, dated 1806, which is currently being prepared for edition, by a Finnish scholar, Petri Hoppu, who last year successfully defended his thesis on the Minuet in Finnish Ostrobothnia.

There is more to be said about the political context of the Swedish country dances. A title like “La prise de la Bastille” gives not only a date limit. The Swedish king, Gustav III, was terrified of the French revolution, and made every effort to suppress all official informations about it. One may draw the conclusion, then, that the king would not have been amused to know about a dance with this title. There was a strong political opposition against the king, and parts of it were ready to go to extremes, which is also what happened: at a masqued ball at the Stockholm Opera, the king was murdered, in 1792.

My argument is then, in a few words, that country dances in Sweden, during the some sixty year period when sources are available, were firmly rooted in Swedish society and in daily life.