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# ”Livet är en festival”

Redaktörerna har ordet

Kära läsare! Varmt välkomna till ett nytt nummer av tidskriften *M&STE* - organ för konferensen Musik & Samhälle som arrangeras i samarbete mellan Institutionen för kulturvetenskaper vid Lunds universitet och ABF. De återkommande konferenserna har utvecklats till en viktig mötesplats. Här träffas folk från hela landet; forskare från universitet och högskolor, folkbildare från studieförbund och folkhögskolor, föreningsaktiva, folk som arbetar med massmedia; i musikbranschen och dess organisationer, samt kommunala, regionala och statliga aktörer. Här kan man utbyta erfarenheter, diskutera och inte minst knyta kontakter. Genom tidskriften *M&STE* vill vi tillgängliggöra en del av det som avhandlas på konferensen för en större publik, men också öppna upp för att synliggöra annat som är av intresse inom området.

I det här numret bjuder vi er på festival. Forskning om festivaler är ett växande akademiskt område. Och för alla musikälskare är mötet med band och artister live något av det mest värdefulla i ens musikliv. Artister själva påpekar också ofta hur viktigt det är att möta publiken. På just festivaler, musikfestivaler specifikt, sker detta i förhöjd form, då en mängd artister och musiker samlas och spelar, inför mängder av åskådare och åhörare som på olika sätt aktiverar sig och deltar i evenemangen.

Så detta nummer av *M&STE* har formats till ett temanummer om festivaler. Först ut är Jonas Bjälesjö, som redogör för festivalforskning som akademiskt område, och diskuterar, bland annat utifrån historiserande perspektiv, svenska musikfestivaler under perioden 1980 till idag. Här tydliggörs musikfestivalernas roll och de nätverk som varit avgörande för det som kallats ”det svenska musikundret”.

Henrik Brissman är idéhistoriker, men också musikälskare och verksam som musiker. I artikeln ”Tradition och förnyelse - Korröfestivalen i förändring med samtiden” tecknar han ett inkännande

porträtt av folkmusikfestivalen i småländska Korrö. Brissman har genom åren själv bevistat festivalen vid en mängd tillfällen, och för i sin artikel såväl musikhistoriska som idéhistoriskt präglade resonemang om Korröfestivalens anda och utveckling.

I sin artikel om "americana" tar Claire M. Anderson ett grepp om fenomenet bluegrassfestivaler i Sverige. Andersson kan visa att dessa, till skillnad från sina amerikanska kommersialiserade motsvarigheter, fungerar som ett sätt att demokratisera den musikaliska kunskapsbasen. Genom att olika musiker jammnar och gör musik tillsammans skapas en hållbar musikalisk gemenskap.

Johan Söderman har främst forskat om hiphop, lärande och samtida ungdomskulturer. I detta nummer av *M&STE* ger han sig emellertid i kast med en annan musikgenre: country. Här recenserar han en nyutkommen norsk doktorsavhandling om countryfestivaler som fenomen, med utgångspunkt i det norska musiklivet.

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PS. Notera och boka in redan nu: År 2018:s upplaga av konferensen Musik & samhälle äger rum den 18-19 oktober, på LUX vid Lunds universitet. Temat i år är Musik och hälsa. Håll utkik framöver för mer detaljerad information. DS.

*Johan A. Lundin  
Mikael Askander*

# **Americana in the Swedish Countryside**

The Purpose and Function of Bluegrass Festivals in Sweden

Claire M. Anderson

Across from the red white and blue of a Confederate battle flag flaps a banner that reads “Bluegrass” in blue letters on a yellow background. Together these two symbols of rural life and culture mark the entrance to the 40<sup>th</sup> annual Grenna Bluegrass Festival in Gränna, Sweden. Through the walkway and down a path, a sea of people settle into their folding chairs and picnic blankets for a day of music, many wearing American flag paraphernalia, cowboy hats, and even Native American costumes. Bluegrass and old time bands sing songs in English about Appalachian Mountains and the hills of Old Virginia, places thousands of miles away from our spot in the Swedish sunshine. From the stage, one of the members of the headlining band from the U.S. says “We might as well be back home in West Virginia!” and the crowd cheers. At night, at a nearby campground, jam sessions function as an expressive space for a community of musical misfits, allowing for a kind of imperfection and boastfulness that they feel is otherwise frowned upon in mainstream Swedish culture.

In Sweden, there are around 400 active participants in the American folk music scene (Frövik, personal interview). This includes musicians and hobbyists who play bluegrass, old time, and even Cajun music in bands, with friends, at jam sessions, and at annual festivals. Based on nine months of fieldwork including two active summers, this article is a brief exploration of the bluegrass festival scene in Sweden. Though labeled as “bluegrass” these festivals also include participation by many old time musicians both on stage and at after-hours jam sessions. In this article I will address specifically the history and purpose of these festivals in the

world of Swedish bluegrass music. After a brief examination of the history and analysis of bluegrass festivals in the United States I argue that, in Sweden, these festivals serve specifically as a way to democratize and share information and experiences about the music with other bluegrass enthusiasts through the intense and ephemeral experience of jam sessions.

Bluegrass is a type of neo-traditional string band music with roots in the Appalachian mountain region of the United States. Though bluegrass carries with it a legend of regional and cultural isolation from the rest of the world during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, much of the genre's success, style, musical cannon, and even name are directly attributable to the commercial efforts and success of Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys in the late 1930s and beyond. It's storied past and avid fan base have established bluegrass as essentially a living tradition, though with customs that are often frozen in the genre's glory days of the 1940s-1960s. In both its presentational and participatory forms, bluegrass musicians strive to emulate an authentic driving, high-lonesome, bluegrass sound. Typically, bluegrass bands are made up of a combination of acoustic instruments (including: banjo, fiddle, guitar, mandolin and string bass, and sometimes Dobro) and songs feature virtuosic solo breaks between stanzas of tight harmony signing. Most songs are based on two or three chords, either in a 12-bar blues or strophic format, and often are played at a breakneck pace of 115-330 beats per minute. Imagery in the lyrics draw heavily from topics of heartbreak, lonesomeness, itinerate lifestyles, and often carry references to both Christianity and geographic locations in the American South. Though bluegrass is firmly rooted in its Appalachian homeland, the genre is loved and performed all over the world, from Japan, to the Czech Republic, to Sweden.

### **Bluegrass festivals in the U.S.A**

In the United States, bluegrass festivals have functioned as both a vector for the proliferation of the music, and a conduit for the creation of music based community. The First bluegrass festival in the United States was held in Roanoke, Virginia, in 1965. Over the next seven years, the number

of annual bluegrass festivals in the U.S. grew to approximately 180 (Carney 1974). These festivals created vital income and performance opportunities for professional musicians who often traveled tens of thousands of miles per year. In 1972, for example, Bill Monroe and his band traveled to 29 festivals across 18 states in the American South and Midwest (Carney 1974). For Monroe, and many others, the proliferation of bluegrass festivals also provided a business opportunity, as he invested in multiple festivals across the U.S. (Carney 1974).

Geographer George O. Carney argued that the success of these festivals – which were often held in rural towns that could provide ample camping, parking, and seating space – was due in part to the “displaced rural population” that relocated to urban centers for economic reasons in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Carney 1974). Bluegrass music preserves its strong sense of place consciousness through the names of bands, the topics of songs, and even the perceived origins of the professional bluegrass musicians themselves (Carney 1974). Participating in bluegrass festivals allowed those who had been physically removed from their rural place of origin to feel a cultural connection to their roots before returning to their new urban homes. In a sense, these festivals created a temporary community that allowed participants to act out their part in the lore of the rural origins of bluegrass music.

Four decades after Carney’s analysis of bluegrass festivals in the United States, sociologist Robert Owen Gardner found that the imaginings of Appalachia still hold a prominent place in the hearts and minds of bluegrass festival goers in the Rocky Mountain region (Gardner 2004). Gardner argues that people who attend the bluegrass festival circuit in the Central-Western United States – spending almost every summer weekend travelling to a new festival – form a kind of “portable community” which, for participants, is built upon nostalgia for a kind of mythical Appalachian homeland. In his ethnography, many of the people he spoke to were transplants from the Appalachian region, and became involved in the bluegrass festival scene because it allowed them to temporarily live a life based on a romanticized version of their former homeland (Garner 2004). According to Gardner: “Bluegrass expresses a romantic reaction against



modernity, portraying mountain life as a place of interpersonal warmth in comparison to the impersonal relations of urban living” (Gardner 2004). This dichotomy between urban and rural life, and the role playing of rural life by people who now live exclusively in an urban setting, is what bound these “portable communities” together, year after year.

### **Swedish bluegrass festivals**

Currently, there are three multi-day bluegrass festivals that take place annually in Sweden: the Grenna Bluegrass Festival in Gränna, the Torsåker Bluegrass Festival in Torsåker, and the Nääsville Bluegrass Festival in Ätran. Each festival has its own character, draws an overlapping but unique community of participants from different regions within Sweden, and provides a much needed gathering place for a temporary community of bluegrass and old time music enthusiasts. All three of these festivals share a similar formula that mixes camping, tradition, and staged performances, with communal music making. Though being a musician is not a requirement to attend, many who choose to stay overnight at these events are musicians themselves and come prepared and excited to participate in the (sonically inescapable) all-night jam sessions.

Bluegrass made its way to Sweden in the early 1960s, through musical recordings, television, and radio. Early Swedish bluegrass musicians tended to find each other by chance or serendipitous circumstance: friends convincing friends to switch instruments after they fell in love with a bluegrass recording; brothers joining together to form a band; or a handwritten note slipped in to the case of a recently purchased Gibson Mastertone banjo – a model specific to the bluegrass style – by an employee of a music shop asking if the owner of the new banjo might want to get together and jam sometime (Gustafsson, personal interview). But with Sweden’s first bluegrass festival, that all began to change.

The first bluegrass and old time music festival in Sweden was the Grenna Bluegrass Festival in 1977. Bo Gustafsson, at the time the banjo player for the band Country Grass, spearheaded the event and was also the

person responsible for getting the word out to potential attendees. He said that, at the time, the best method was a kind of “jungle telegraph”, where he phoned someone, and then they phoned someone else, who knew of another person to invite. All in all, they managed to corral about 20 participants from across Sweden for that first festival. Over the 40 years that the festival has been operating, attendance has risen to hundreds, and on this anniversary year may have approached almost a thousand.

Though Grenna features one full Saturday of staged performances at two separate locations in town, the real highlight is the jamming. Pickers (a term used to describe those who play string instruments in the bluegrass or old time styles) arrive from all over Sweden and neighboring countries as early as Wednesday or Thursday and often stay until Monday morning, just for the chance to jam. At the massive campground, which is populated not just by festival attendees but by regular summertime visitors to the area, bluegrass and old time music can be heard coming from a dozen different campsites, campers, and cabins. Because of the late nights and excitement over the once-a-year chance to make music with this specific group of people, many actually miss out on the staged performances in favor of a little sleep and a lot more jamming.

Music festivals are nothing new in Sweden. Swedish folk music began its transition towards a festival model over a century ago with the first fiddle competition in Dalarna in 1906, and have grown in popularity in response to the Woodstock model of festivals in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Ronström et. al 2001). Ronström, Malm, and Lundberg argue that the festivalization of Swedish folk music has served to dramatically shift the cultural power dynamic between the “doers” (musicians, or those who engage actively in music making), “knowers” (academic and amateur researchers, those who engage with music and materials in archives or at desks), and “makers” (producers and festival organizers, those who market and sell musical products). According to Ronström, Malm, and Lundberg, “festivals are instruments for control of musical and cultural resources, as well as the aesthetics, ethics, values, symbols, representations etc of the presented musics” (Ronstrom et. al, 2001). This means that, in the concentrated musical and cultural space that is a

festival, those who are organizing and executing the event – choosing the performers, location, and food, for example – hold a disproportionate amount of power over political and ideological components of what constitutes an appropriate expression or experience of the music scene. While festival attendees and participating musicians must instead fit into the mold created by the festival organizers.

In the Swedish bluegrass community, the people that Ronström, Malm, and Lundberg categorize as the doers, knowers and makers, are often one in the same. Those who first collected bluegrass recordings to develop their knowledge base, soon also became musicians. By spending hours listening closely to banjo rolls and guitar picking styles, the early knowledge bearers taught themselves how to play music like the American bluegrass masters. When playing and learning alone or in small groups was no longer satisfying these Swedish musicians' craving for more bluegrass, knowledge bearers/instrumentalists worked together to organize and execute festivals. The effort to organize festivals was, in a sense, a deliberate attempt to democratize the knowledge base for bluegrass musicians and aficionados in Sweden. Festivals provided a space for musicians to gather together, bringing with them a related, but separate, understanding of American folk music and its history. Everyone who arrived carried with them knowledge gained through listening to different collections of recordings, having traveled down slightly different paths of knowledge building. The three major annual Swedish bluegrass festivals are organized and executed by people who are musicians themselves, and who are looking to experience that once-a-year magic of playing the music they love with someone new. The festivals cater to those who are both far along in their quest for understanding and fluency in bluegrass, as well as those who have just begun their journey. Though the festivals also serve as an important performance opportunity for many bands—and the organizers are open to related music genres, often including Americana, Cajun, or even country music groups alongside bluegrass and old time bands—the perennial festival experience is one of collective learning. More than anything else, the diehards come to jam.

### **The Jam Session as the Heart of Bluegrass**

After an evening of staged performances of bluegrass and old time music on an indoor stage, excited musicians who had traveled to the 2017 Torsåker Bluegrass Festival for the weekend rushed back to the campsite, pumped from the energy of the stage and ready to start jamming. Within a few minutes, three separate jam sessions were going at different points around the U-shaped campsite, next to the tents that had been set up around the outside edge of a sports field. It was late June, which meant the darkness of night never quite set in where we sat in the countryside north of Stockholm. After a few hours I headed back to my tent by the light of the early dawn, my hands aching from the cold and fingertips raw from gripping my guitar strings, but filled with joy after a night of music making, amazed that the same camaraderie and musical-cultural rules embedded in the bluegrass I had learned in the United States had remained intact when it was transported halfway around the world alongside the music.

Bluegrass festivals, within the broader context of the festival-to-festival “portable communities” described by Gardner, also contain within them the potential for an ephemeral musical experience: the jam session. The specific flow of a bluegrass jam session depends in large part on who is participating, but there are general rules and social cues that are followed almost universally. Participation requires some previous knowledge of these cues (when it is appropriate to solo, when is the right time to join in on the singing, when it is your turn to call the next tune) and how they work, but the overall benefit can be huge. Jams are a chance to connect with people, to reach a special state of musical bliss (Cedermark, personal interview). Unlike preparations for a staged performance, which may take long hours of rehearsal to get each song to sound *exactly* right, jam sessions thrive by the rules and revel in the spontaneity of controlled chaos. Bluegrass festivals, especially in Sweden, provide a once-a-year chance to connect with people, musicians who otherwise are out of reach, and play the music that you practice alone at home, in preparation for these brief and fleeting moments of glory.

Ethnomusicologist Michelle Kisliuk argues that “when it comes to bluegrass, many connoisseurs assert that recorded bluegrass is hardly bluegrass,” that the true beauty of the music is found in the jam session (Kisliuk 1988). According to Kisliuk, a jam session is a participatory music experience that falls between a staged performance and a private rehearsal, and often takes place in situations like a festival campground that blurs the line between audience and participant. Though each musician comes to a jam session prepared in some way – with instrumental skills that match the bluegrass style, a repertoire of learned tunes from the bluegrass cannon, and a willingness to learn (if not knowledge of) proper jam etiquette – there is much to be learned through the jam itself. Pickers get to hear new or unfamiliar songs alongside old standards, often accompanied by the story of how someone came to know a particular tune and where the song originates – stories that are both part a continuation of the long tradition of oral history in bluegrass, and part an attempt to give time for strings to be retuned as the night air cools. This is a large component of how the early Swedish bluegrass pioneers helped to democratize the bluegrass knowledge base within Sweden, through this cycle of jamming and collective music making and sharing.

### **Conclusion**

Bluegrass festivals in Sweden were created as a gathering place for musicians and enthusiasts who were few and far between. Bluegrass enthusiasts, who imported and listened to bluegrass records from the United States, taught themselves how to play the music. Those musicians were then inspired to create festivals that helped to unite a musical community that was spread far and wide across Sweden. In the terminology of Ronström, Malm, and Lundberg, within the Swedish bluegrass community, these doers, knowers, and makers were often one in the same. In comparison to the highly commercialized money-making ventures that are American bluegrass festivals, Swedish bluegrass festivals function as a way to democratize the knowledge base around the music through jamming and communal music making. Stepping in to a

Swedish bluegrass festival is like stepping into a unique world that exists between Sweden and the United States. A world that embodies the boastfulness and freedom inherent in bluegrass, alongside the true dedication of musicians who play for the sake of the music. It is a testament to the ability of a small group of musicians to create a strong and lasting community of music making.

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## **Författare i detta nummer**

**Claire M. Anderson** Claire M. Anderson is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology from the University of Washington in Seattle, USA. Her work explores the ways in which nationalist symbols and imagery are used outside of their country of origin to create music communities. Currently, she is conducting ethnographic fieldwork with the bluegrass, old time, and country music scenes in Sweden. Previously, she worked very closely with the Swedish-American community in Seattle as a part of their heritage choir and social club. Her dissertation will explore how these communities use borrowed imagery to create a localized communal space that steps outside the cultural mainstream.

**Jonas Bjälesjö** holds a PhD, and is the Head of the Music & Event Management Program and lecturer at the Linnaeus University School of Business & Economics, Kalmar & Hultsfred, Sweden. He teaches the subjects Music & Event Management with focus on cultural and social aspects of music and music industry. He has been a guest teacher and mentor at universities in the US, Germany, Finland and Norway. Bjälesjö's research is focused around popular music, youth culture, music festivals, local music life and music tourism with focus on the festival phenomena and the landscape of Scandinavian music festivals. His doctoral thesis *Rock'n'roll i Hultsfred - ungdomar, festival och lokal gemenskap* was published in 2013. He is also in the board of the *Swedish Rockarchives*. Currently Bjälesjö is involved in a research project outlined as "Efter Hultsfred - kulturella entreprenörer i spåren efter festivalen/After Hultsfred - cultural entrepreneurs in the aftermath of the festival". The project is funded by The Kamprad Family Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Research & Charity. For contact, use this e-mail address: [jonas.bjalesjo@lnu.se](mailto:jonas.bjalesjo@lnu.se).



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**Johan Söderman** är oavlönad docent i musikpedagogik vid konstnärliga fakulteten vid Lunds universitet och disputerade 2007 med avhandlingen *Rap(p) i kåften. Hip-hopmusikers konstnärliga och pedagogiska strategier*. Söderman är anställd som biträdande lektor i barn- och ungdomsvetenskap vid Institutionen för pedagogik, kommunikation och lärande vid Göteborgs universitet. Forskningsområden som intresserar Söderman är folkbildning, sociala rörelser/folkrörelser, musiksociologi, aspekter av icke-formellt lärande. Han spelar gitarr i bandet *Peking Punk* och är även styrelseledamot i Folkbildningsrådet.