"We hear what we know" - On the power of concepts and how traditional fiddle music in contemporary society may benefit from folk music theory

Keynote Lecture at North Atlantic Fiddle Convention 2021, University of Limerick 24/6 2021

Why Folk Music theory?

- Isn't folk music theory an anomaly theory for a music that has developed without theory
- What is it about? Isn't music theory common for all musics?
- What do you need it for? You don't need theory to play folk music
- What is the basis of the concept?

Why do I care?

Gössa Anders Andersson (1878-1964), Orsa, Dalarna, Sweden with Orsa fiddlers team



"A portrait of Gössa Anders Andersson", Swedish Television 1963

Sven Ahlbäck, Royal College of Music, Stockholm

Something like this...

turns more and more into something like this...

What happens? *Intonation, Articulation, Vibrato, Accompaniment*

The power of concepts

We hear what we know!

Why bother? Music change, so what?

- .Jual potential

 If we take music expression seriously, we must care

 'n a multi-selistic music society, we need again again expression.

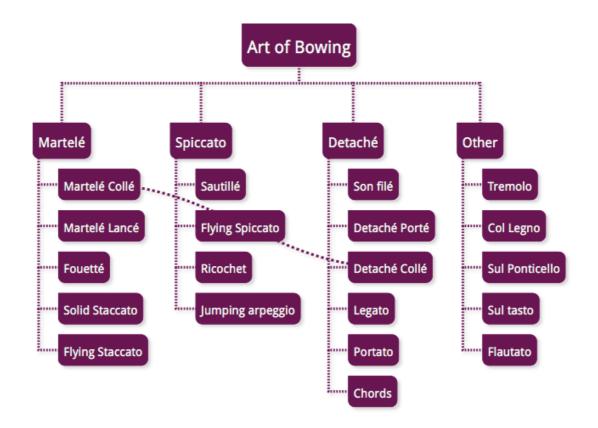
Why Folk Music Theory

- Concepts that serve development of musical practice
- Develop musical "language" skills
- Communication
- Sources & Musical literacy

- concepts can be transferred and translated, allowing for new ways of expression: improvise, interpret, compose, arrange
- systematic and formulated knowledge gives possibility for other means of expression; freedom of expression, new contexts, "language skills"
- concepts can be translated and which allows for communication by other means than the music itself
- To see structures can make it easier to learn and consciously change

A long time ago: Kungliga Musikhögskolan 1979 Fiddlers becoming violin teachers

Terminology is linked to style: Where are "roll bowing", "snake strokes", "diatt", "jiri-jiri" in the chart?



A long time ago Forslag till kursplan för MFom, fördjupningskurs. Kungliga Musik högskolar 1981 - Folk music theory traditionskunskap tra

Ensembleledning ensemblemetodik: folkmusik nr 5
Ensemble: Egen nivå Programverksamhet: folkmusik nr 6
Huvudinstrument Folkmusik/ Klassisk (enskild) nr 7
Gemensam med MlFM, i grupp
Praktik: Huvudinstrumentet barngrupp plus enskild nr 8
handledning
Sammanhängande praktik programverksamhet/ nr 9
kommunal musikskola

We needed a language/terminology

B AT COARCESCRIBE MOLITA MUSIC

nr 1: I/E-metodik :

3:an : 2,5 tim/v, 4:an : 4 tim/v

Den allmänna delen består nu av metodik för Ingvar Kullberg och

Ole Hjorth. För andra instrument förutsätts att motsvarande finns.

Folkmusiken tillgodoses nu genom samläsning med M1FM för Ole Hjorth.

För andra instrument förutsätts speciell metodik i samarbete med metodik-

lärare på musikhögskolan.

nr 2: Huvudackordinstrumentet:

3:an: 30 min/v,

Ett ämne som är bra att ha, för att kunskaperna ska overleva tills man lämnat skolan.

nr 3: a : Traditionskunskap :

3:an: 1,5 tim/v, 4:an: 1.5 tim/v

underrubriker: teoretiskt och praktiskt. Instrumental, vokal och dans.

mål.

- att känna till olika traditioner inom Svensk folkmusik idag.
- Att kunna spela/sjunga de viktigaste traditionerna hjälpligt.
- Att känna till traditioner i övriga Norden.
- Att känna till och ha provat på de vanligaste folkmusikinstrumenten.
- Att känna igen de flesta olika sång/låt/danstyper
- Att göra ett eget arbete, ex.vis kring sin "egen", tradition.

Problemet med detta ämne är handledare. KOntakt borde i första hand med Visarkivet, och Musikmuséet.

'Harmony' becomes 'tradition knowledge'

Why Folk Music Theory?

Music Theory is there either you want it or not

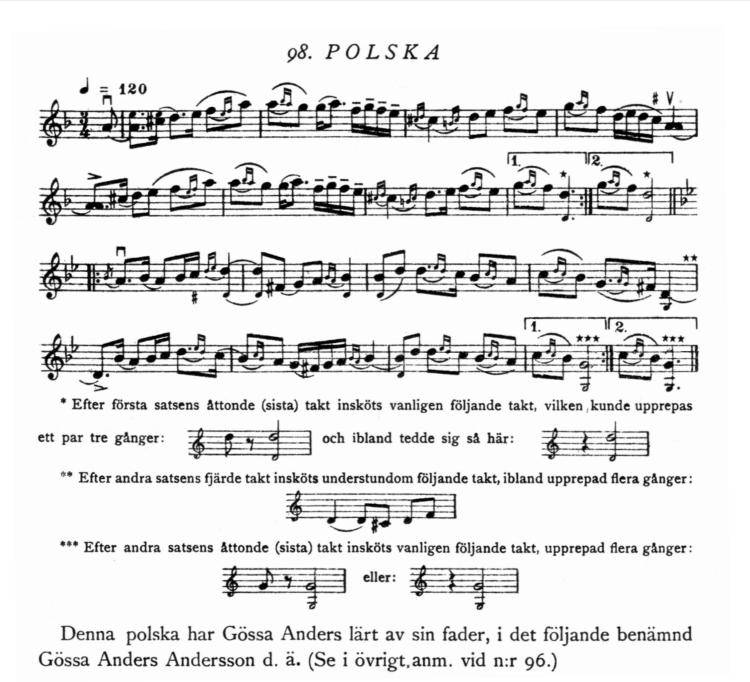
The quest

Develop theory that serves our musical practice

One tune, two examples

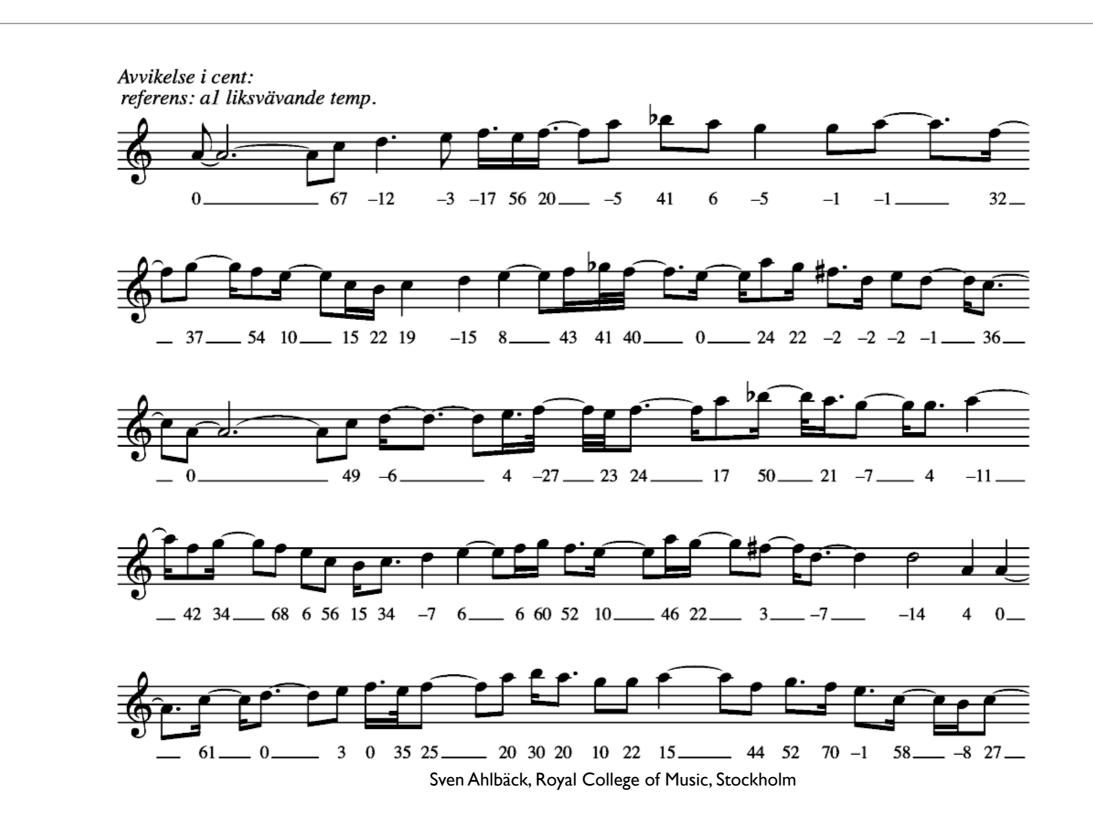
Tonality

Fiddle music: Vallåtspolskan played by Gössa Anders Andersson, Orsa (rec. 1949)



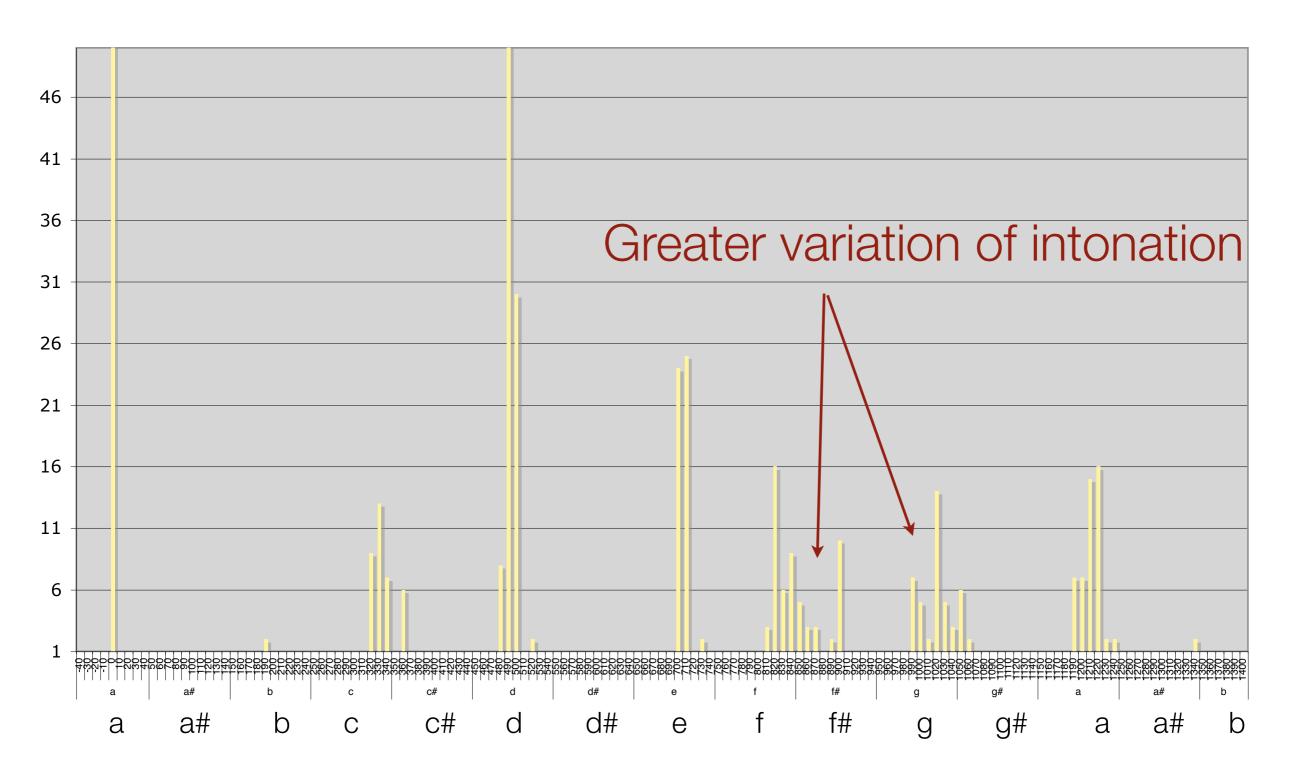
From collection: Svenska Låtar 1921

Vallåtspolskan audio-to-midi conversion note-by-note

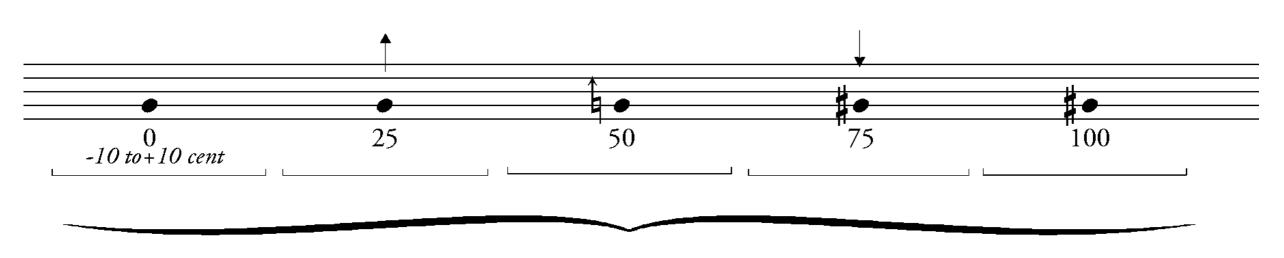


Pitch set - according to audio analysis

duration av respektive tonhöjd (skala om 10 cent) för Vallåtspolska spelad av Gössa Anders



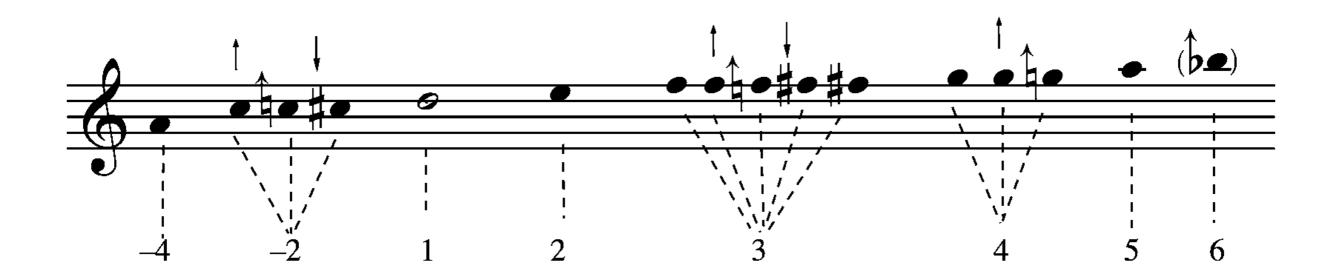
Intonation categories



max semitone interval ca 120 cent

With intermediate notes 15-20 cents needed to categorise

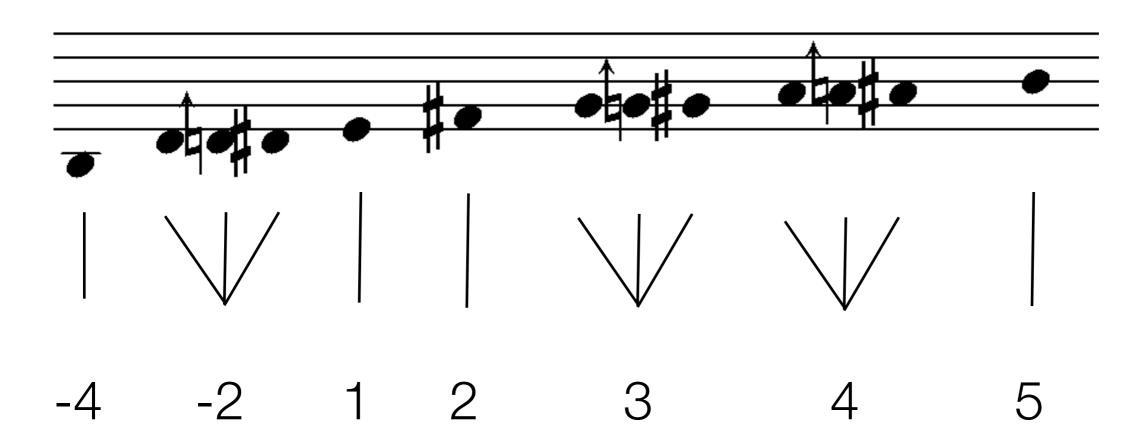
"Herding tune mode" in "Vallåtspolskan"



Major or Minor? - Mode categorization in terms of variable and

- Mode categorization in terms of variable and stable 'scale degrees' rather than major/minor scale

The "herding tune" mode - basic description



- variable 3rd, 4th and -2, most often all three
- ca 57% of vocal folk music in a large collection "Svenska låtar, Dalarna", very frequent in herding tunes
- When a sixth is added it is usually high or variable
- When a seventh is added it is usually variable, in-between or low Sven Ahlbäck, Royal College of Music, Stockholm

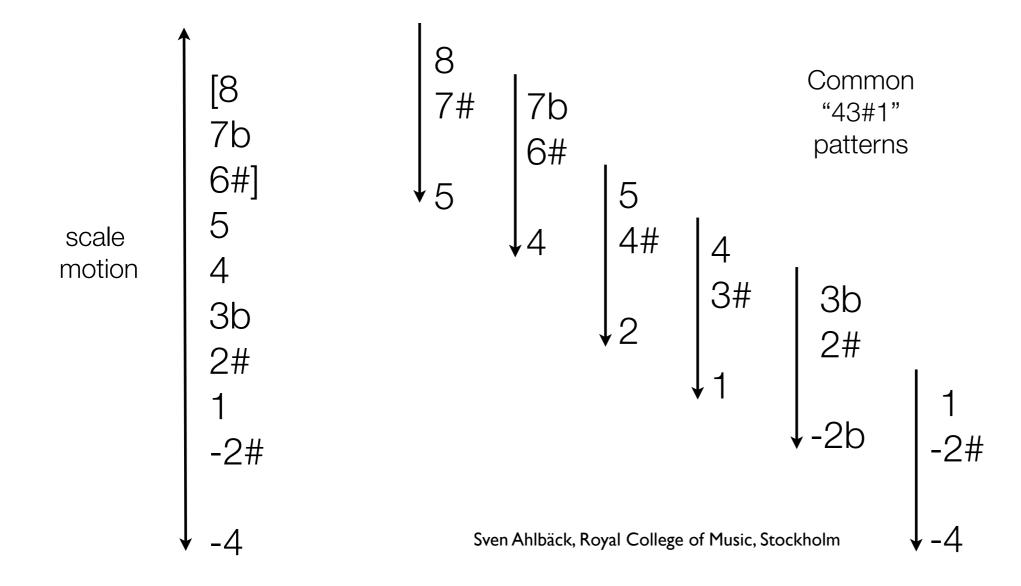
Is the variation of intonation arbitrary?

Intonation consistency: Vallåtspolskan played by Gössa Anders Andersson, Orsa, Dalarna



The "43#1" pattern

 A falling second plus third is tuned towards minor 2nd - major 3rd, even if the intonation of variable scale degrees has to be altered in relation to stepwise motion



'Assimilation' of Intonation in Gössa Anders music in the 20th century



Gössa Anders Andersson d. ä. (Se i övrigt, anm. vid n:r 96.)

Younger local fiddlers (1970s)

Gössa

'Assimilation' of Gössa Anders music



One tune, two examples

Meter & Rhythm

an example of a analytical-pedagogical approach:

What determines what and how we dance in Swedish folk music?

There are many melodies for the same dance: not primarily the notes...

That thing with the time:

Do we dance in time or in rhythm? - meter and rhythm

"Rhythm"

the cognition of temporal structure in music

"Rhythm" gestalt/grouping

figure, phrase, motif melody rhythm...

a gesture - singular

speech

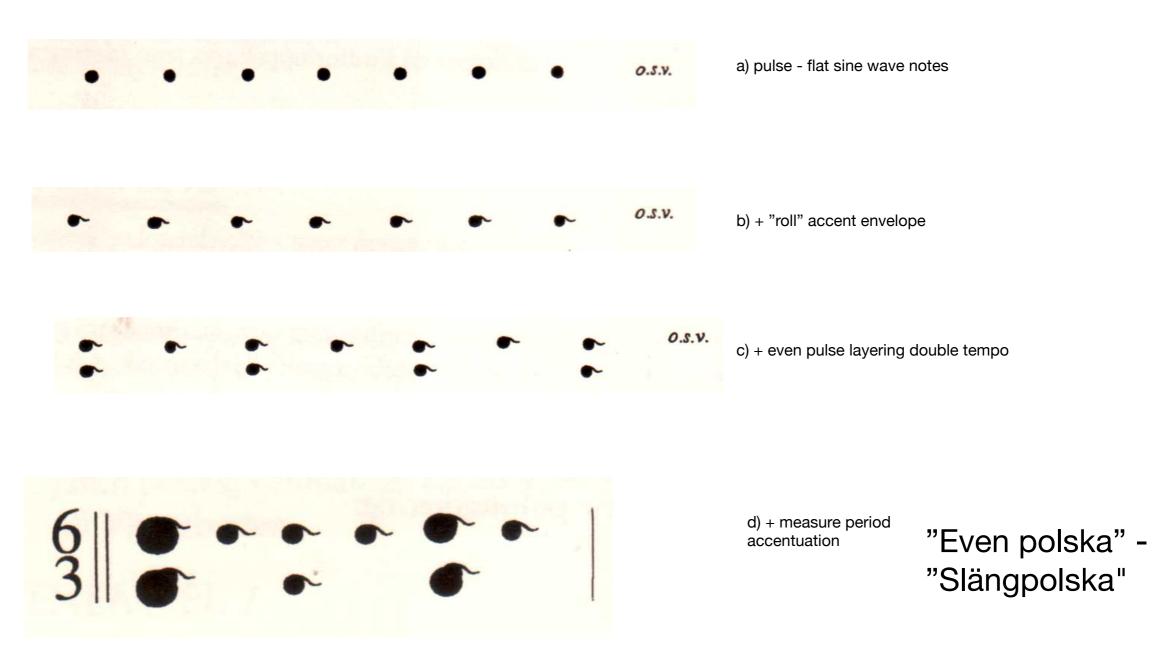
birds

Connects basically music and dance in Swedish fiddle music "Meter" periodicity pulse, time, period... continuous - plural walking, running the watch

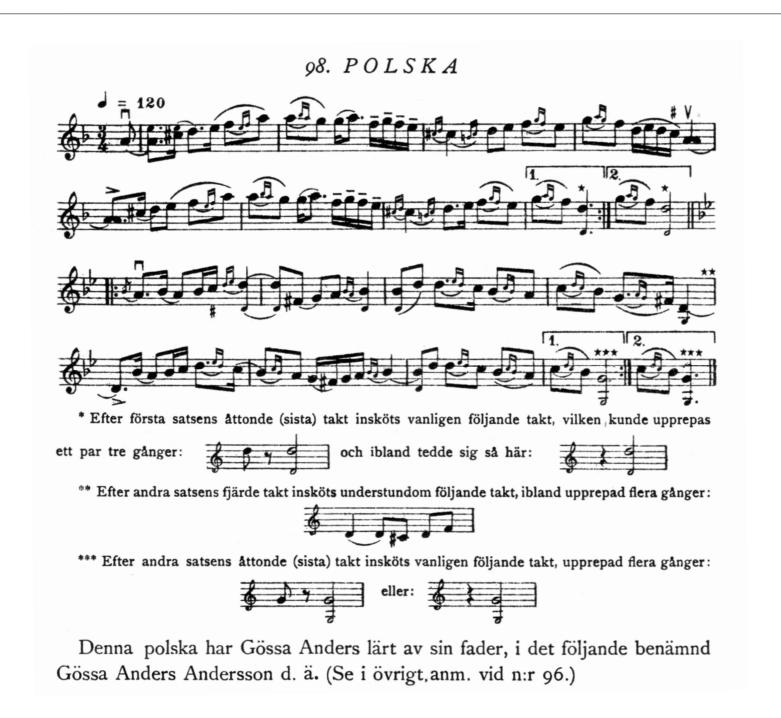
Exists perceptually separately and jointly

What is absolutely minimum for dancers and fiddlers to identify a tune type?

Evaluating analysis-by-synthesis
 The "polska" metronome: Tune type generation

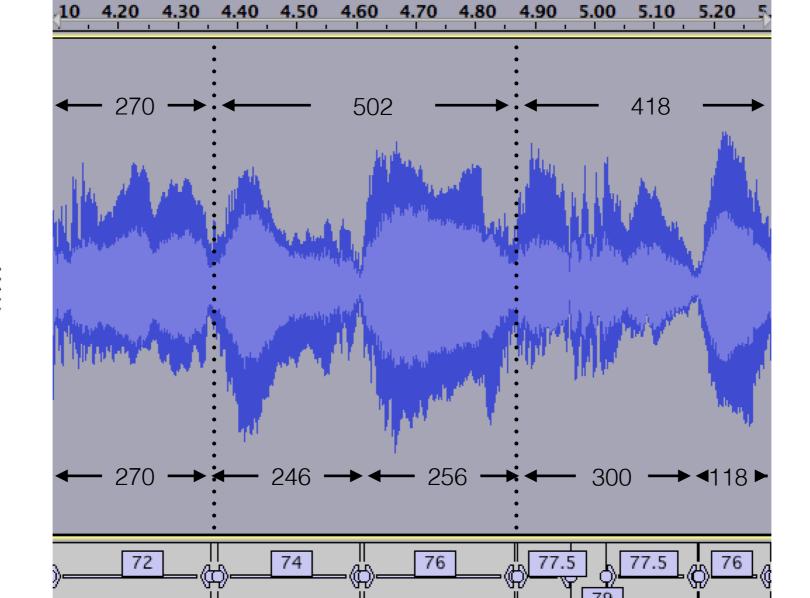


Vallåtspolskan played by Gössa Anders Andersson, Orsa



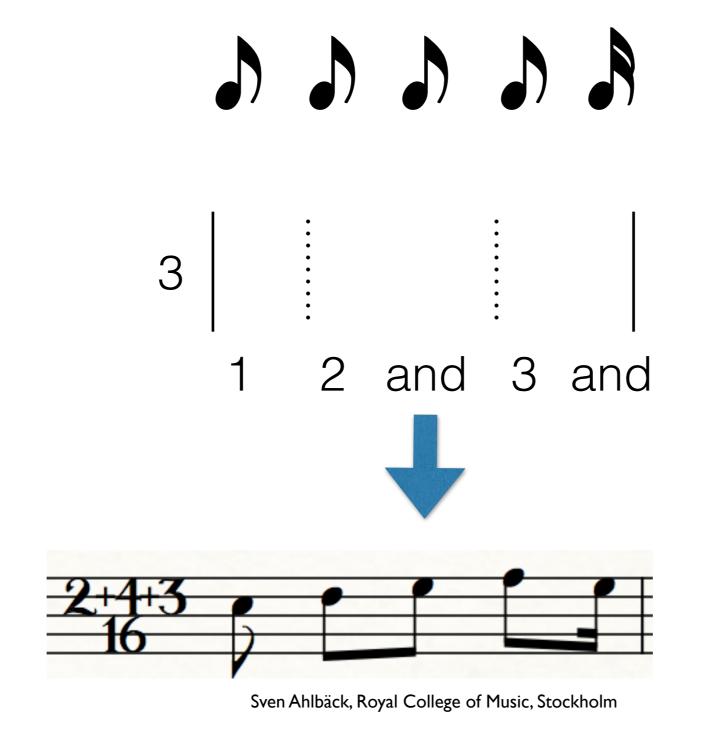
from Svenska Låtar N. Andersson (1921)

Vallåtspolskan measure 3

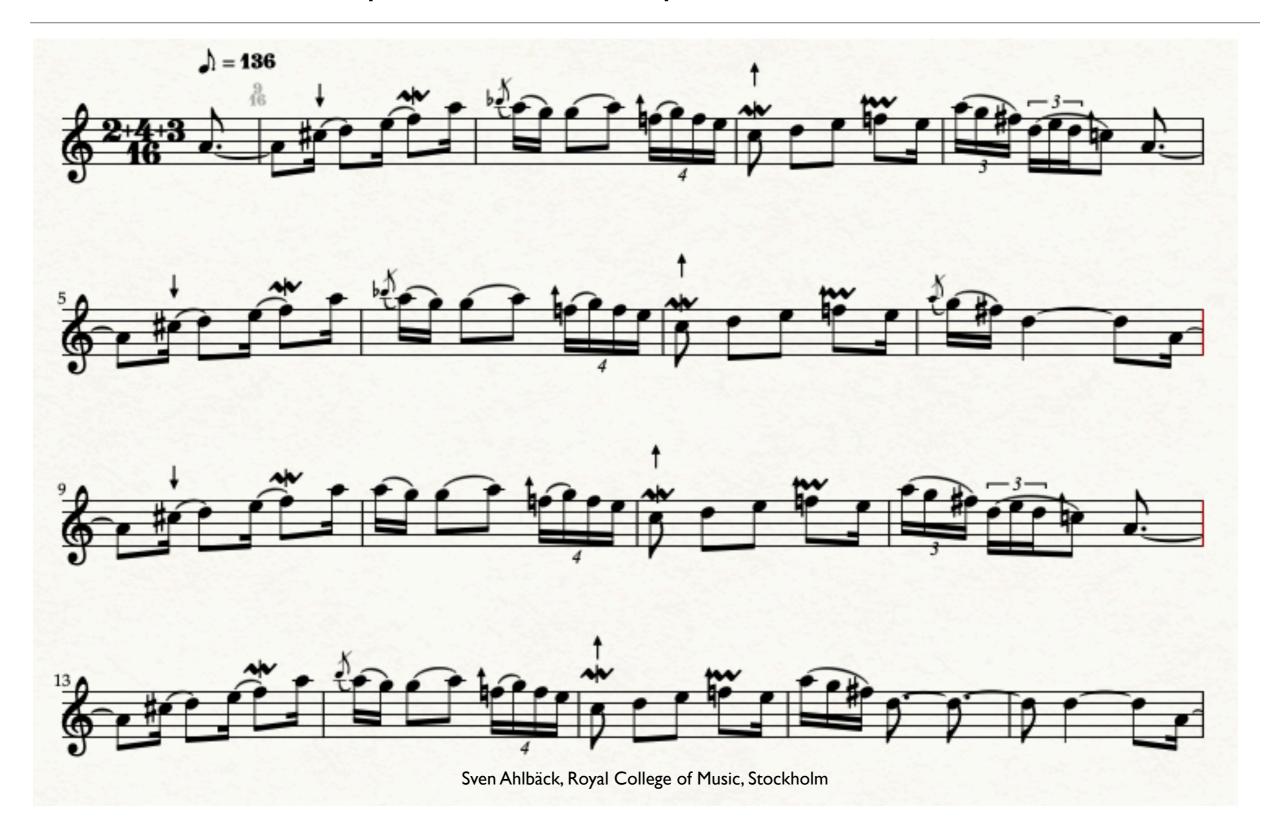




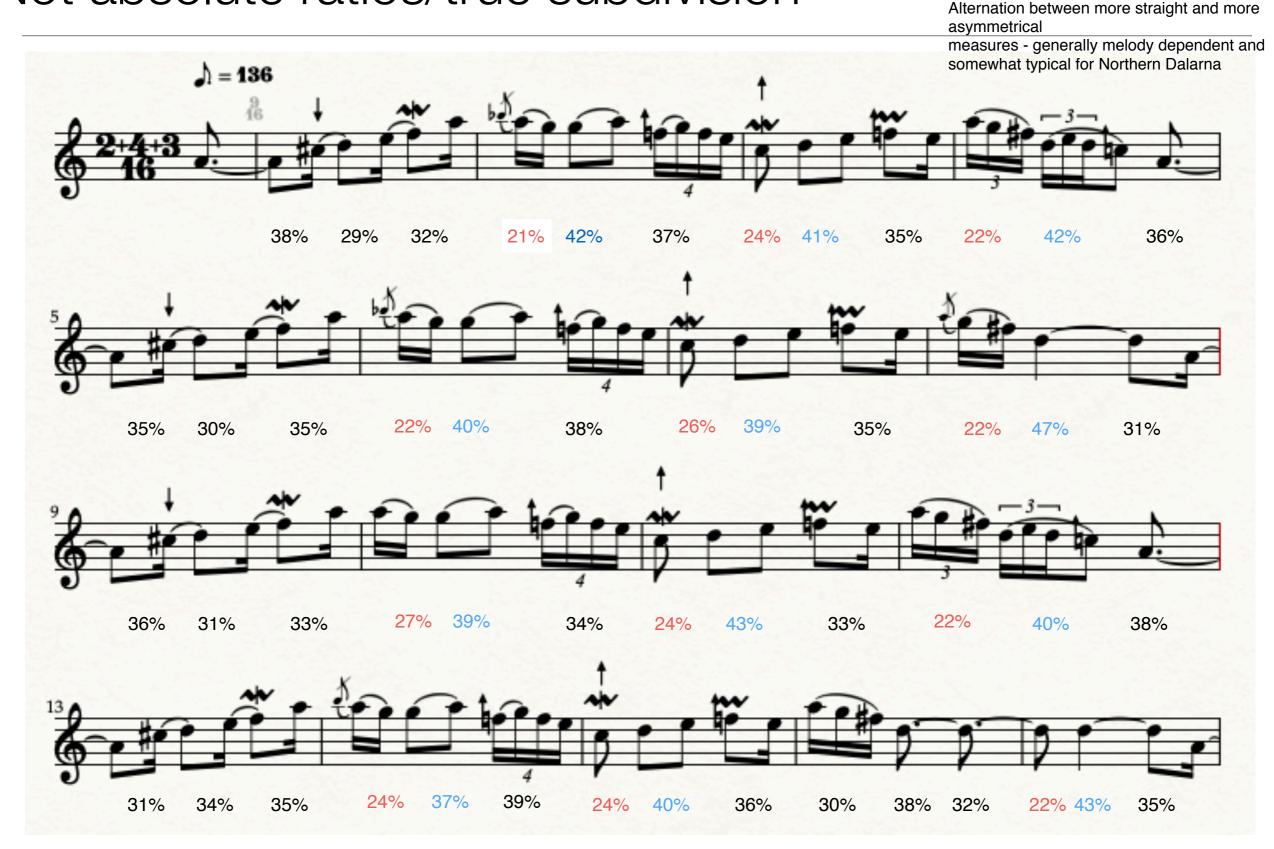
Rhythmical and metrical principal structure



Notated Asymmetrical Beat Gössa Anders spel av Vallåtspolskan



Asymmetrical beat notation - Notation of Model/Principle Not absolute ratios/true subdivision



Why bother?

- Expressional qualities
- Expressional potential
- Freedom & communication
- Tradition & change in a multi-stylistic society

The Power of Concepts: We hear and play what we know

Orsa tunes over 100 years...

Gössa 1970-tal Ellika (1997)

och vidare...

Väsen (1995)

The Power of Concepts: We hear and play what we know



Transforming style into new tunes, instruments and expressions

Thank you for listening! sven.ahback@kmh.se