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May 1st, 2015

Sverker Åström Foundation Scholarship Report

I was honored to receive the Sverker Åström Foundation Scholarship for the second time in 2015 in order to continue the investigation of my initial research subject, that I started 6 months before that: “Swedish Folk Dancing: The Example of Traditional Music and dance Festivals”. During my first visit in July 2014 I was neither familiar with this phenomenon of Folk dancing events, nor with the Swedish Folk dancing itself. At that time my only goal was to try to embody the dancing and get a basic understanding of these occasions. However I felt that this mere «practical» immersion must be reinforced with a theoretical background.

The aim of the new trip was to delve deeper in the academical side of the question. The objectives were concentrated on establishing contacts with people involved in the dance research field and on compiling a relevant bibliography, which is unavailable in Russian or on-line libraries. The main methods that have been used during this trip were interviewing, participant observation, analysis of archive video materials and written sources that are available in English.

Mats Nilsson, Prof in Ethnology



University of Gothenburg

I started my trip with a visit to the University of Gothenburg to meet in person Mats Nilsson, Prof in Ethnology, whose research is mainly focused on folk dancing in a broad sense. However his significant interest is Swedish folk dancing, as he sees the country situated in the middle of all the cultural crossroads, where «many cultural influences must have interacted over the centuries» (Mats Nilsson 2008, p.100). In addition to everything, he gave an «insiders» view on the dancing issue. Especially he elucidated the specialized terminology by defining «folk» (created choreography inspired by the dancing of common people) and «folklig» (dancing that is closer to

how people used to execute it). The first group is more of a Presentational dancing, well rehearsed, not accessible for amateurs (e.g. quadrilles, contradances, and long dances), whereas the second is Participatory, easy to follow and open to everyone (e.g. vals, polka, hambo, mazurka, schottis) (Nahachewsky, 1995). Both types of dances are recorded in special Books. The first published edition dates from the beginning of 20th century.

Winter Festivals

During the next few weeks I took part in two music and dance festivals. First, in Örebro, a very small event only for the locals, and then the biggest winter festival in Umeo, up in the North.

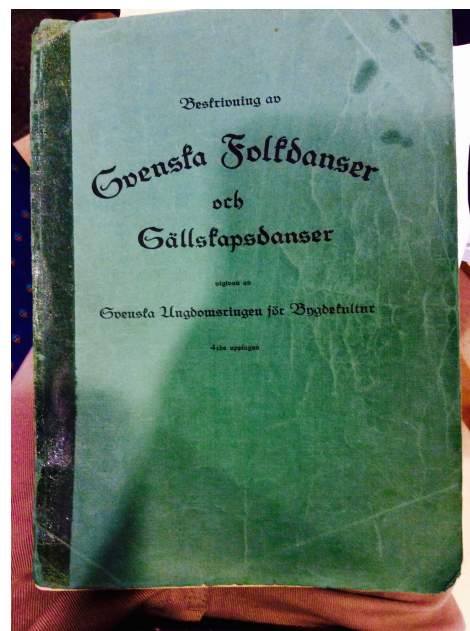
Umefolk Festival



The aim was to compare the dancing event in summer and in winter. The main distinctive feature is a less mass character of the winter occasions. It also becomes more of a concert type event, yet a lot of dancing is happening there.

Thus this format opens new ways for performers to experiment. A good example would be the performance of folk menuets. Some tunes descend from the 16th century, the choreography is quite traditional, yet has a huge contemporary influence. Even here there is a «romantic» story connecting Sweden and Russia: some of menuet tunes used in this performance were composed by a Swedish soldier who was captivated by Russians in the Great Northern War. In prison he started creating beautiful melodies about his homeland. According to the legend he was spared because of his music and sent back home.

The Green Book with Folk dances.



Folk Menuets performance in Umefolk



Archives

The last week of the one month research time I've spent in the Dansmuseet and the Svenskt Visarkiv — the two main locations where the dance related archive materials are kept. Anna

Anna Nyander from the Visarkiv



Nyander, the Research Archivist and, as it turned out, the granddaughter of one of the collectors for the Dance Books of the second «revival» in the 1970's, demonstrated the oldest and most precious videos. The earliest come from the 1920's. They were recorded for the Nordiska Museet. This gave me a great section of the performing styles, of types of dances and the changes in the folk dancing world.

Outcome of the research

The second research month gave me the opportunity to gather all the missing bibliographical data and to investigate the collections from the archives. This allows to gain a better understanding of the processes in the field of dance. I hope that the results of my investigations, observations and ideas will be accepted in a form of scientific paper for a publication in a Dance Research Journal, and then will be offered for consideration to the Foundation.

I wanted to take a moment to thank once again the board of the Foundation for all the help and support that they have kindly offered to me. It uncovered Sweden to me from a new and unknown side and laid foundation to many splendid acquaintances and connections.

Last dinner in Stockholm with Carl-Johan Westring

