

The

Lute



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The Journal of the Lute Society

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: The Rev. Johan Nohrborg's lute, Västmanland County Museum

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THE REVEREND JOHAN NOHRBORG'S ELEVEN-COURSE LUTE

KENNETH SPARR

In the store rooms of the Västmanland County Museum (Hallstahammar, Westmanna Arvet) in Sweden lies an interesting lute dating from the late seventeenth or the early eighteenth century (inventory number 1040). Over the centuries it has been ill-used as well as clumsily repaired and is in the process of slow, but increasingly worrying deterioration. In spite of this deplorable condition the lute is in its original state and with all its important parts. Being one of the few eleven-course lutes from the period to have survived in its original state it is of great interest, particularly because of its small size. The instrument has lived a life of obscurity and no detailed examination has been undertaken, nor is there much in the way of documentation.¹



ILLUSTRATIONS 1 AND 2: Front and back views of the lute, photos: Susanne Granlund, Västmanlands läns museum.



ILLUSTRATIONS 3 AND 4: Side views of the lute, photos: Susanne Granlund, Västmanlands läns museum.

The lute came to the Västmanland County Museum in 1917 as a gift. The hand-written inventory card states that the lute originally belonged to:

prosten J. Norborg i Ramnäs (död 1786), broder till Anders Norborg. Förfärdigad av Christianus Vagener i Danzig. Förvaras i svart träfodral. Fodrat med röd sammet. Gåva från ägarens dotters sonson J. E. Dan:son Iverus. S.K. 30/3 1917.

(the Reverend J. Norborg in Ramnäs (dead 1786), a brother of Anders Norborg. Made by Christianus Vagener in Danzig. Kept in a black case, lined with red velvet. Gift from the owner's daughter's grandson J. E. Dan:son Iverus. S.K. 30 March 1917)

We can pinpoint the lute's origins further. The donor of the lute in 1917 was Johan Edvard (Jedvard) Iverus (1846–1922), known for his book *Beskrivning öfver Västmanlands*

fanerogamer och thallogamer (1877). He was the grandson of Johan Fredrik Iverus (1790–?) and Lovisa Agatha Nohrborg (1795–1848), daughter of the Reverend Johan Nohrborg (1731–86). Johan Nohrborg, was born in Norberg, studied at the University of Uppsala and in 1784 became vicar in Ramnäs and Sura in the rural deanery of Munktorp belonging to the diocese of Västerås.² Of particular note is that he was a popular vicar and a *god Musicus* (good musician). Furthermore, it is possible that he actually played on the lute.³ We may remember that David Kellner published his *XVI. auserlesene Lauten-Stücke, bestehend in Phantasien, Chaconnen, Rondeau, Giga, Pastorel, Passe pied, Campanella, Sarabande, Aria & Gavotte . . .* in 1747, and that the music, written for the eleven-course lute, would have been suitable for the instrument owned by the Reverend Nohrborg.⁴



ILLUSTRATION 5: A page from David Kellner's *XVI. auserlesene Lauten-Stücke, bestehend in Phantasien, Chaconnen, Rondeau, Giga, Pastorel, Passe pied, Campanella, Sarabande, Aria & Gavotte . . .* (1747), photo: Kenneth Sparr.

Johan Nohrborg probably knew Abraham Abrahamsson Hülphers (1734–98), famous in particular for his important book *Historisk Afhandling om Musik och Instrumenter . . .* (Västerås 1773).⁵ The lute is recorded in the estate inventory of Johan Nohrborg dated 1786, under the heading *Böcker och instrumenter* (Books and musical instruments):⁶

1 större Boksamling	27.37
1 st Bokhylla	24.-
Davids harpa	5.-
1 st Klaver	2.32
1 st vio:loncelle	1.16
1 st mindre viol	2.-
1 st Luta	2.-
1 st helt ny Swarwfstol med Jern m m och alla tillbehör	8.-
(1 large book collection	27.37
1 book shelf	24.-
David's harp	5.-
1 keyboard instrument	2.32
1 violoncello	1.16
1 smaller violin	2.-
1 lute	2.-
1 brand new lathe with turning tools etcetera and all accessories	8.-)

The diversity of musical instruments in Johan Nohrborg's estate inventory is an indication of his wide musical interests. Both plucked and bowed as well as keyboard instruments were found in his home. The keyboard instrument (*klaver*) mentioned was probably a clavichord, a common instrument with sextons, organists and clergymen. The David's harp may be a harp or a clavictherium. The lute is also mentioned in the estate inventory of Johan Nohrborg's wife, Anna Agatha Fjellström (1740–1815) where it is described as a *gammal luta, utan strängar* (an old lute without strings) and valued at 2 *riksdaler*—that is the same amount as in the estate inventory of 1786.⁷ After Anna Agatha's death the lute disappears from the archives. It is not mentioned in the 1848 estate inventory of Lovisa Agata Iverus (born Nohrborg) nor that of her husband Johann Daniel Iverus in 1851. The inventory of their son Johan Daniel Iverus' estate, taken in 1869, mentions only *1 st gl Violin* (one old violin) valued at three *riksdaler*.⁸ It is possible that, by then, the lute was in such a bad condition that it was no longer considered worth mentioning. At all events, its provenance seems to be clear: passing from Johan Nohrborg, to Anna Agatha Nohrborg, to Lovisa Agata Iverus, to Johan Daniel Iverus, to Johan Edvard Iverus, and finally to the Västmanlands County Museum.

So far it has not been possible to discover where Johan Nohrborg acquired his lute. His father, Olof Nohrborg, was the son of a bellows-maker, but he had studied at the Uppsala University at the beginning of the 1720s. Johan's two better-known brothers Anders Nohrborg (1725–67) and Daniel Nohrborg (1739–1819) also studied there and worked in Stockholm.⁹ We know that Anders Nohrborg, at least, was interested in music and in his estate inventory 1767 *1 st. behållet Claver 90:- 1 st. fleuit 6:-* (one clavichord 90 *riksdaler*, one flute 6 *riksdaler*) are mentioned, but no lute.¹⁰ Concerning the father, Olof Nohrborg, no estate inventory is to be found, nor is there a mention

of the lute in the 1774 inventory of Johan Nohrborg's mother, Christina Barchaeus, so one may assume that Johan Nohrborg originally acquired it himself.¹¹

We have much evidence for the lute being played in Sweden during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, primarily among the nobility and the upper-middle classes. During the second half of the seventeenth century there was a rich musical life at Uppsala University, particularly supervised by Olaus Rudbeck the elder. During the course of his travels, a young nobleman Hans von Fersen spent time in Paris where, in 1699 he took lute lessons from '*l'illustre*' Charles Mouton, purchasing both a copy of the latter's printed lute book and a lute from him.¹² The lute in the famous painting and engraving of Mouton is of the same type as that in the Västmanland County Museum.



ILLUSTRATION 6: Charles Mouton, engraving c.1700 by Gerhard Edelinck after the painting by François de Troy, from the collection of Kenneth Sparr.

Musical instruments were certainly produced in Sweden during this period, but production was not extensive, and we have few traces of it. More than likely, the lute in Västmanland County Museum was made in continental Europe, but in any case was brought to Sweden no later than the 1780s.

The instrument is small (total length 750 mm, body width 295 mm, body length 443 mm, body depth 130 mm) and has a string length of only 635 mm. It is an eleven-course lute with two single strings and nine double courses, of a type common in the period 1670–1720. It serves as a reminder that variation of lute sizes was to be found during the seventeenth century; for comparison, lutes which we term ‘baroque lutes’ generally have a string length of between 670 mm and 720 mm.

The lute is constructed and built in a traditional way, its most interesting features being its size and state of preservation. It was made by a skilled lute maker. This is obvious from its back with its nine ribs which are arranged in a herringbone pattern, each consisting of alternating stripes of light (probably maple) and darker wood. The end clasp is made in the same manner. The resulting appearance is striking and unusual among lutes. The soundboard is made of spruce with a much later and indeed very clumsy repair between the fingerboard and the rose. The rose has suffered severe damage, but is of a traditional geometrical type in the form of a double hexagram (see Illustration 7) and a reconstruction is possible. As rose cutting was often the work of ‘subcontractors’, the patterns used can rarely be of use in establishing where and by whom an instrument was made. A similar, but not identical, rose can be found in a anonymous *angélique* in the Paris Music Museum (see Illustration 8).



ILLUSTRATION 7: The damaged rose, photo: Susanne Granlund, Västmanlands County Museum.



ILLUSTRATION 8: The rose of an anonymous *angélique* in Paris.¹³



ILLUSTRATION 9: The lute bridge, photo: Kenneth Sparr.

The bridge which is possibly original, is made of hardwood and stained black. It is elegantly designed but lacks its ivory or bone points. The bridge has twenty drilled holes for strings in accordance with the stringing of an eleven-course lute. The width of the bridge suggests that the lowest course was not on the fingerboard (something we see indeed in the engraving of Mouton, above.) This is also confirmed by the placement of string holes on the pegs for the lowest courses, as can be seen in Illustration 10 overleaf.

The joint between soundboard and back has a later, ugly, reinforcement in fabric. The neck may be original, but painted later. The fingerboard (not original) is made of two different woods: a wooden panel stained black, between ebony edges. The nut is glued and is not the original, which would have been wider in order to carry eleven courses. The pegbox, which has suffered minor damage, and most of the pegs (13 preserved of the original 20) seem to be original. The pegbox is of a simple but elegant design and shows clear traces of having had a treble rider.



ILLUSTRATION 10: Part of the pegbox showing the string holes for the lowest course.

There is a handwritten label affixed to the inside of the back of the lute which is visible through the damaged rose. It reads: *Christianus Wagener Dantzig Ano*. No musical instrument maker by the name Wagener from Gdansk is known from the period when the lute was made, Georg Fleming being the only known lute maker from that town. A lute made by him and dated 1650 was destroyed during the Second World War. Possibly Wagener merely repaired the lute in the Västmanland County Museum; however, he may well have been the original maker, for indeed it is not so uncommon for the names of previously unknown lute makers to come to light from time to time. Handwritten texts in Latin can be clearly seen on strips of old parchment used to reinforce repairs made to the back of the instrument. The inventory card of the museum states that the lute is 'kept in a black case, lined with red velvet' with a later note saying that it has been 'deponerad i Musikmuseet i Stockholm'. So the lute with its case was kept in Stockholm Music Museum for a period of time, after which the instrument was returned to the Västmanland County Museum. The

case, which is still in the storerooms of the Music and Theatre Museum in Stockholm, could well be contemporary with the lute and built for this particular instrument. It has simple hinges of iron wire. Even though the case is damaged and lacking some parts, it is of historical interest and therefore should be kept with the lute, especially as it is most uncommon for both a lute and its case to have survived.



ILLUSTRATION 11: The front of the lute case, photo: Kenneth Sparr.



ILLUSTRATION 12: The back of the lute case, photo: Kenneth Sparr.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, both the lute and its case are slowly disintegrating. It is recommended that the lute should be carefully restored, reconstructing missing parts and stabilising it. These measures would include replacing the ugly repair to the soundboard with something more in keeping with the rest of the soundboard, adding missing areas to the damaged rose and affixing a treble rider. A restoration

could also provide the opportunity to examine the inside of the lute, which, in turn, could provide valuable information about the original maker and later repairs. X-ray photographs and dendrochronology could also supply further information concerning the soundboard barring, and dating of the wood used in the making of the instrument.

Notes

Note that all the photographs here can be seen in colour, and enlarged for detailed examination, in the PDF version of this journal, which can be found at the url on the title page. This article is an extended English version of my article in Swedish, 'Prosten Nohrborgs luta', published in *Spaning* 20–21 (2013), pp. 62–65. I am indebted to Anthony Bailes for his thoughts and suggestions concerning this English version.

- 1 The lute is mentioned and depicted in Johansson, Karin, 'Riksinventering vill ha hjälp av läsarna', *Tonfallet* no. 13, (19 August 1977), pp. 7–8, in connection with an article concerning the then ongoing inventory of musical instruments in Sweden. I measured and photographically documented the lute during a visit to the museum store in 2010. Susanne Granlund at the museum has supplied more photos.
- 2 *Västerås stifts herdaminne. Stiftshistoriskt och stiftsbiografiskt uppslagsverk*. II:2 1700-talet. (Västerås, 1990), pp. 670–1
- 3 *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, band 20, (Stockholm, 1973–5), pp. 59–60. Muncktell, Johan Fredrik, *Westerås stifts herdaminne*, Första delen, (Uppsala, 1843), p. 266.
- 4 One of the few preserved copies of this lute book is kept in the Uppsala University library (Uimtr 111). Its provenance is not known. Sparr, Kenneth, 'David Kellner a Biographical Survey', *The Lute* 29 (1989), pp. 3–36. Also Sparr, Kenneth, 'David Kellner—a Biographical Survey', *Balticum—a Coherent Musical Landscape in 16th and 18th Centuries*, ed. Irma Vierimaa. *Studia musicologica universitatis helsingiensis* VI. (Helsinki 1994), pp. 63–90. An updated version can be found at <http://www.tabulatura.com/davidkellner.pdf>
- 5 Johan Nohrborg and Hülphers were almost of the same age, but no correspondence between them seems to be preserved. On the other hand Hülphers corresponded with Nohrborg's brothers, Anders and Daniel. Hülphers also produced a genealogy of the family Nohrborg. *Västerås stadsbibliotek*, Hülphers genealogier, Volym 2, 134a, <http://hosting.devo.se/genealogi/frame.jsp;jsessionid=80D5CDA05C8BBB9866CE0630B3894D6F>, consulted 5 September 2013.
- 6 The Regional State Archive, Uppsala, Snevrings häradsrätt FII:6 (1780–1789), 532.
- 7 The Regional State Archive, Uppsala, Siende häradsrätt FII:11 (1815–1818), 140.
- 8 The Regional State Archive, Uppsala, Snevrings häradsrätt FII:32 (1867–1869), 663.

- 9 Anders Nohrborg, <http://www.nad.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/8153>, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon (art av Ingmar Brohed), consulted 26 July 2013.
- 10 Uppsala University Library, Handskrifts- och musikenheten, X 241 [Nohrborg].
- 11 The Regional State Archive, Uppsala, Folkare tingslags häradsrätt FII:6 (1771–1777).
- 12 Hammarlund, Anders, 'Monsieur Mouton, lutan och civilisationsprocessen', *Svensk tidskrift för musikkforskning*, 88 (2005), pp. 27–44.
- 13 This angélique is dated c.1680 and is described in *Les luths (Occident) catalogue des collections du Musée de la musique* (vol. 1) (Paris, 2006), pp. 94–5.