

# Glossing over rhythmic style and musical identity

## The case of Polish dance rhythms and western notation

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# The polska project

This article is a presentation of a practical experiment in ethnomusicology that was designed to investigate significant differences of style and interpretation of “Polish dances” in Sweden, Norway, and Poland. The authors collaboratively examined the local styles and playing techniques of three fiddlers and considered various issues arising from using standard Western notation as a medium of distribution and maintenance of traditional music.

We began the experiment by asking three musicians (each from a different local tradition) to play three “Polish dances” (each also from a different cultural origin), using scores in standard notation as the point of departure. The musicians came from the small town Hagfors in Wermland, Sweden, from Holtålen in South Trøndelag, Norway and from Warsaw, Poland. They are all skilled representatives of their respective local traditions. The performances were in the form of “blind tests” where the musicians did not know the geographical origin of the tunes they were asked to play. We instructed the musicians to play as if the tunes came from their own home village. Their performances and comments were recorded on audio tape and video and then analysed and compared from rhythmic and melodic perspectives. The experiment showed that the same musical text fixed in a score would be “read” and interpreted in different ways, depending on a fiddler’s own local culture. We were able to identify specific and patterned differences between the three fiddlers’ rhythmic, melodic and technical approaches to “Polish dances.” These clearly audible differences, which

mark the local identity of each performer, are systematically described for the first time in this article.

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## Introduction (DL)

A theme of folk music research has long been to study distribution patterns of musical languages and dialects. It is possible to talk about families of music languages that combine and distinguish different cultures' expressive forms. In the broadest perspective regarding music, such differences can concern modal structures or melody types. At a closer level of examination, these differences often involve subtle characteristics of local style that might be referred to as musical "dialects." The basic issue is why one type of folk music (or even the same tune) is played differently in different parts of the same culture area. Dialects could seem to have a reduced role in our modern, *mediaized* musical life. But that is not the case. If anything, the consciousness of local variation seems to have increased. In recent years, ethnomusicologists have dealt with processes like *localization*, *re-localization* and *de-mediaization* (Lundberg, Malm & Ronström, 2003)– that is, what happens when musical forms (and even specific tunes) spread through modern media to a global level and are then taken up in new local contexts. The local musical environment that absorbs the new genre (or tune) makes its imprint on the music and generates new meaning and colour by infusing it with local playing techniques, ornaments, instruments, and sense of place.

A related and recent example is Krister Malm's study of East African rap. In rap texts from Tanzania, Malm finds certain standardised poetic turns in traditional Swahili poetry that have been incorporated into the rap



lyrics. The texts often deal with African poverty and social problems—a vast difference from many American texts that actually makes East African rap a music form of its own (c.f. *ibid.* 189).

But localization is not a new phenomenon. Music has always crossed geographical borders. And musical development seems nourished by cultural encounters. In a historical perspective, one example of such a meeting occurred when the “Polish dances”<sup>1</sup> – as a dance and music fashion – reached the countries around the Baltic Sea in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The dance type came via the European court culture that grew in that period. The “Polish dances” became high fashion and gradually spread to all layers of society in the Scandinavian countries. Today there is a great variety of “Polish dances” in Scandinavia and in many places there are distinct regional genres. Nevertheless, it is clear that in many cases one can find common features between the regional genres that can be traced back to the earliest melodies that came from Poland. In other cases the differences between them are very clear and there are good reasons to believe that the regional styles have their origin in earlier local dances that have taken over the name – simply because there was such a craze for the new “Polish dances” when they arrived in Scandinavia.

The fact that we have a mutual heritage of melodies and dances that are called “Polish dances” in Scandinavia and Finland is interesting in itself. This is also one of the reasons for Ewa Dahlig-Turek’s – one of the collaborators in this project – research in this area during the last several years. This project was actually the outcome of dialogues between her and the American ethnomusicologist Rebecca Sager. After listening to a presentation of Dahlig-Turek’s research, Sager, with no personal experience of “Polish dances”, became curious about the significant differences in styles.

I have been listening with great interest to your presentations about the spread of *polska*. Of course, I was listening through the filter of my interest in the perception

<sup>1</sup> Please note, we are using the terms “Polish dances” and “Polish rhythms” (set off with quotation marks) to signify historical dances and rhythms that have been commonly referred to as “Polish” outside of Poland.

of musical time.... My curiosity was peaked when I thought about the Western notations or scores there are of polskas from different places. I wondered if the performances of polskas in Sweden, for example, sounded like polska from let's say, Warsaw? Wouldn't a person from Warsaw recognize that a certain performance of polska from Sweden was in fact foreign, and not Polish? (Sager, E-mail communication to Dahlig-Turek, March, 2003)

The idea of a project was born and two Scandinavian scholars – Bjørn Aksdal in Norway and Dan Lundberg in Sweden – were contacted. All four agreed on a model for the experiment.

Three tunes were picked out – a Swedish “polska,” a Norwegian “pols” and a Polish “mazurek” (all of which share a common history with “Polish dances” popular in 16<sup>th</sup> century, European courts). Three musicians, each strongly anchored in a local tradition, were invited to collaborate – one from each country. It was agreed that the musicians should get to see the written music thirty minutes before the recording and that they should be instructed to play as if the music came from their own local tradition. The recordings were carried out in May 2003 and sent to Rebecca Sager in the United States for rhythmic analysis.

The objectives of analysis were to discover the following:

- The relation between the recording and the notated version from each country; that is, how the Norwegian fiddler performs the notated Norwegian tune, Polish fiddler plays Polish tune, etc. In other words, exactly how the score is realized in performance.
- How the same tune is played by representatives of different traditions.

### **Background to historical “Polish dances” (BA & ED)**

In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, a new way of dancing emerged at the European courts, and this innovation probably first occurred in Italy. There, a newer, relatively slow, ceremonial, and somewhat dignified figure dance was combined with an older, lively and much faster dance, the “springing” dance.

The tradition reaches back to the medieval *basse danse* (Fr.) or *bassadanza* (It.). Depending on the part of Europe, such paired dances existed under different names, like *pavan-saltarello* (later *passamezzo-saltarello*) in Italy, *pavan-galliard* in North European (French, Flemish, English) sources, *Tanz-Nachtanz* (literally “dance-afterdance”; note the latter dance was also called *Hupfertanz*, *Spryngertanz*, *Proportz*) in Germany. Soon the combining of dances became an important trend in many countries.

Irrespective of differences, the general principle was similar: the first dance was in duple metre, often of processional (introductory) character. Although it was not a rule, often both dances used the same melodic material, but in the first dance of the pair, the melody was played in duple time (either 2/4 or 4/4) and in the second of the pair, the melody was transformed into triple time (3/4).

Choreotechnically, both parts were totally different, the first dance being slower and danced “close to earth”, and the second one vivid and “jumping”. In manuscripts and published sources from this period, we often find that only the dance melody in 2/4 is written down. The reason for this is that music of the subsequent dance in 3/4 was mostly improvised from the first melody according to generally known rules.<sup>2</sup> This was often described as “changing its proportions” into triple time “to create balance in the art.” Therefore, the second dance of the pair was often called “proportio” or “proportio tripla.” The “Polish proportio” was one alternative way of transforming duple into triple meter, using special rhythmic formulae.

Although characteristic rhythms can be found in Polish music already in

<sup>2</sup> For example Thomas Morley, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597), gives a “recipe” for how to transform the rhythm of pavan into galliard.

<sup>3</sup> Examples include the following: In 1544, Hans Newsidler wrote *Das Ander Buch*: ‘*Ein New künstlich Lautten Buch*, which contains “Der Polnisch Tanz.” In 1583, Nicolaus Ammerbach wrote *Orgel oder Instrument Tabulaturbuch*; this source contains “*Ein Polnischer Dantz/pator*” (see pages 201-203, dance no. 136). Christoph Löffelholztz’s organ book contains “*Ein gutter polnischer danncz*” (1585: 24). In 1591 and 1592, Matthaeus Weisselius published two organ books with numerous “*Polnische Tentze*.” August Nörmiger’s 1598 *Tabulaturbuch auff dem Instrumente*. Part 2 “*Weltliche Lieder und Tänze*” contains ten “Polish dances.”

the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the term “Polnischer Tanz” (*Polish dance*) appears first not in Poland, but in German organ books<sup>3</sup>. However, at least the earliest German examples do not show clearly any rhythmic specificity that could be called “Polish”. Therefore, we may expect that the name referred to dance movement rather than musical properties. Only sources from the 17<sup>th</sup> century let us distinguish between German and Polish ways of creating a proportio, which are described in the next section.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the proportio was more regularly written down, and the musical sources from this period show that the Polish type of proportio was increasingly favored in many countries. Beginning around 1620-30, we also see that a third part was frequently added to the composite “Polish dance.” This melodic appendix is generally called “serras” or “cheese and bread,” and like the proportio, the music was written in 3/4. Normally, these melodies had the same kind of rhythm as the Polish proportio. However, the serras or “cheese and bread” melody was normally a different tune and therefore would not have been developed or improvised from the melody of the preceding pair of dances. Probably the oldest example of a serra as an independent triple-metre dance is a tune from 1675.<sup>4</sup> As to the name, there are two interpretations. According to Swedish musicologist Tobias Norlind, “serra” (also “sara,” “zerra”) comes from Latin and means a saw.<sup>5</sup> A Polish author, Karol Hławiczka, finds an Italian origin more probable. He writes:

Der Name scheint nicht vom lateinischen Wort serra (Säge), sondern vom italienischen serra (Enge, Engpass) herzustammen, bedeutet also einen dem Vortanz im 4/4-Takt gegenüber rhythmisch verengten Nachtanz im 3/4-Takt.<sup>6</sup>

From the mid 1600s, dances and melodies in triple time were strongly favored in France, and this fashion spread from the French court in Versailles

<sup>4</sup> Sweden, Uppsala Universitetsbiblioteket, signature Instr.mus.hs.80:10.

<sup>5</sup> Tobias Norlind, *Studier i svensk folklöre*, Lund 1911, p. 373-374.

<sup>6</sup> Karol Hławiczka, *Grundriss einer Geschichte der Polonaise bis zum Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts*. *Svensk tidskrift för musikkforskning*, 50, Stockholm 1968, 51-124. Quotation from p. 74.

to many parts of Europe. This is probably the main reason why the *serras* and later even the Polish *proportio* melodies from around 1660 started to be performed on their own, no longer being paired to the dance in duple meter. Even the name was now inspired by the French language, and in music manuscripts and note books from the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries we find several tunes with names such as “*polonaise*,” “*polonese*” or “*polonessa*.”

The “Polish dance” seems to have reached the Nordic countries by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The dance is mentioned in Stockholm in 1595,<sup>7</sup> and a “*Polnische Tanz*” is included in a notebook for a keyboard instrument written in 1602 in Wittemberg (Saxony, Germany).<sup>8</sup> In the years 1606-08, a Danish student in Rostock (northern Germany), Petrus Fabricius, wrote down six “Polish dances” in his song and lute book before returning to Denmark where he had a career as a vicar in southern Jutland.

There are probably several reasons why the “Polish dance” spread so quickly to the Nordic countries. In this period, there were strong connections between Poland and Sweden, and the Danish court in Copenhagen very often brought in musicians from Poland. It seems that around 1600, it was not uncommon for Polish bagpipers and other musicians to be favored at the European courts.

Some of the Swedish sources indicate that it was not only at the court and among the aristocracy that the “Polish dance” was introduced.<sup>9</sup> Around 1650, the dance had probably spread even to the lower strata of the population, both as a combined dance pair and as separate dances and dance tunes in triple time, sometimes even dances in duple time. This happened presumably first in Sweden and Denmark, but it did not take long before the “Polish dance” also had settled among common people both in the urban areas and in the countryside of Norway and Finland.

<sup>7</sup> Sweden, Stockholm, Kungliga Musikaliska Akademiens bibliotek, signature Tyska kyrkans saml. 32.

<sup>8</sup> This manuscript is today in Uppsala, Sweden, Universitetsbiblioteket, signature Vok. mus. hs. 132.

<sup>9</sup> See Bo Nyberg's 1989 article “The Polska in Sweden,” in *Polskan i Norden*, a booklet and music cassette published by Svea fonogram (SVMC 2), Stockholm, page 29.

## Polish rhythms (ED)

The phenomenon of “Polish rhythms” has a long history in Poland. Such rhythmic figures can be found already in the sources from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>10</sup> but there is no evidence of how old they really are. In the folk music of some regions of Poland (especially in central and western parts), these rhythmic figures still dominate today. Probably they were so “natural” and obvious in Poland that there was no need to call them “Polish.” Instead, Polish dances were given names referring to their choreotechnic properties (e.g., candle dance, walking dance, the smith, great dance, etc.). When German musicians and theorists became better acquainted with Polish music, they noticed a basic difference between the two neighbouring traditions, and this is how the big “career” of “Polish dances” started.

In 1602, a German musician, Valentin Hausmann, wrote that learned musicians would be able to create a “Nachtanz” (literally, “after-dance,” i.e., the second dance of the pair) in two possible ways: the Polish way and the “usual” German way.<sup>11</sup>

Although the phenomenon of “Polish dances” was known in German organ and lute tablatures already from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, Hausmann was the first to mention the contrasting Polish and German principles. However, he still did not give an explanation of how both kinds of proportio were rhythmically constructed. Examples came a bit later, such as in Heinrich Albert’s aria, “An Doris,”<sup>12</sup> which had a proportio “nach Art der Pohlen” (literally, “after the Polish art”), published in 1640, and in the 1698 Swedish dissertation titled *Disputatio musica de tactu*.<sup>13</sup>

The dissertation’s author, Olaus Retzelius, presents an “ordinary” pro-

<sup>10</sup> 1537-47, organ tablature by Jan from Lublin.

<sup>11</sup> In the introduction to “Venusgarten” (1602), Valentin Hausmann wrote: “Erfahrne und inn der Music wol fundierte Instrumentisten werden entweder dem polnischen brauch in Nach Tantze folgen oder auff die Teutsche gemeine art den Nach-Tanz mit der Proportio geschicklich dass es der Melodie nicht hinderlich wissen zu finden.”

<sup>12</sup> “Arien oder Melodien,” Königsberg 1640, part 2 no. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Olaus Retzelius, *Disputatio musica de tactu, quam consensu ampliss. facult. philosophi-*

portio plebeiorum and a more estimated Polish proportio peritiorum demonstrating totally different principles of rhythmic transformation. Both mentioned sources finally prove what could be guessed from many musical examples, namely that the Polishness of a proportio was based upon specific rhythmic formulae within triple metre. In the contemporary musicological literature in Poland these structures are described by the term “Polish rhythms.”

Briefly, “Polish rhythms,” which even today are the essence of Polishness in music, are special “descending” structures within a triple-metre, meaning that the rhythm is more condensed at the beginning of the measure (on beat 1, or beats 1 and 2) than on beat 3:



Fig. 1. Example of “descending” rhythm in triple meter.

On the one hand, these rhythms are closely related to dance movement patterns, and on the other, they reflect the specificity of the Polish language. Paroxytonic accent (i.e., on the second to last syllable), constituted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, proved to be a favorable base for “descending” rhythms, especially in combination with a preference for two, bisyllabic, trochaic feet, each accented on the first syllable, but with the second main stress providing the strongest accent of the whole structure:



Fig. 2. Preferred stress structure of two bisyllabic trochaic feet in 15<sup>th</sup> century Polish language.

*cae, in regia academia upsalsensi, sub praesidio viri amplissimi celeberrimique m. Haraldī Wallerīi... in auditorio Gust. Maj. ad. d. 10 decemb. anno 1698 ad publicum examen modeste defert Svae R. ae M. tis alumnus Olaus Retzelius ostrogothus. Uppsala 1698.*

European music knows “Polish rhythms” mostly from two dances that were developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from historical dances: the mazurka and the polonaise. Of the two, the mazurka is faster and more vivid while the polonaise is slower and dignified. The most striking difference between them, apart from the tempo, is the degree of rhythmic condensation, which is much higher in the polonaise. In both dances however, rhythms are “descending,” that is, more condensed in the beginning than at the end of a measure.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mazurka and polonaise became very popular among Polish gentry and aristocracy as musical symbols of their stateless nation,<sup>14</sup> gaining the status of national dances. As popular songs, salon dances, and concert pieces, they were widely composed by all who had to do with music, professionals and amateurs alike. Rhythmically, the “national” mazurka was marked by the frequent use of dotted rhythms, specifically:



*Fig. 3. “National” mazurka’s characteristic dotted rhythm.*

The undotted figure would be more common in folk repertoire. The first known notations of folk tunes published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century show that mazurka and polonaise were present in folk culture both as songs “borrowed” from the gentry with apparent features of “national” dances, as well as being typical, simple folk tunes. Even today, dance tunes with “Polish rhythms” are very popular in most regions of Poland. They can be found everywhere except for the very south and very north of the country, appearing in a family of dances of different tempi: “oberek” (the fastest one), “mazurek” (*mazurka*), “kujawiak” (*from Kujawy region*), and “chodzony” (a “walking” dance; the slowest one).

<sup>14</sup> In 1772, 1793 and 1795 the territory of Poland was gradually partitioned between three neighboring countries: Russia, Prussia and Austria.



As already explained, during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, “Polish rhythms” were commonly used in the second of the two paired dances in Western Europe (especially in Germany, but also in Scandinavia, and particularly in Sweden). Due to close political and family links between the Polish and Swedish royal courts, “Polish dances” were imported as an upper-class repertoire then adopted into local popular traditions, thereby creating a repertoire known even today as “polska” or “pols.”

Beginning in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, “Polish dances” in Norway and Sweden were very well documented and there is a huge quantity of notated material to study. According to strict morphological analyses, notations of Norwegian, Polish, and Swedish tunes show much similarity in rhythm. A closer look at the scores reveals different strata in this repertoire: from most simple mazurka-like rhythms, through polonaise-type, to rich Baroque figurations that result in an extreme rhythmic condensation. The general impression is that Scandinavian polska-pols traditions have absolutely the same roots as some Polish music. However, there is a discrepancy between what a score means to a scholar and to a musician. For a researcher, written music is a fixed structure that can be analysed and classified. But what looks similar in the score, differs a lot in live performances, because for the performer a score is only a departing point, a text that needs to be understood and interpreted. Our basic assumption upon beginning the present experiment was that the same musical text, when “read” and interpreted in different local cultural contexts, will have different meanings and therefore different realizations. The collective repertoire based on “Polish rhythms,” which looks to share much rhythmically, seemed to be a perfect material to study this problem—all the more so since, theoretically, Swedish, Norwegian and Polish tunes have much in common.

## **Presentation of the local traditions in respective country – today and before**

### *Local traditions in Poland (ED)*

It is important to stress that folk tradition in Poland is most typically orally transmitted, both in singing and playing; therefore, all written sources, either old or new, come from ethnographers or ethnomusicologists, not from folk musicians themselves. This contrasts greatly with the Scandinavian situation.

In Polish folk culture, dances based on “Polish rhythms” exist in different tempi and under many local names. (Very often, the terminology is so confusing that it becomes useless for systematic classification.) Musical, especially rhythmical, differences between the local dances correspond to different choreotechnic structures. Generally, the slower and more walking the dance is, the higher the rhythmic condensation at the beginning of each measure.

Dance tunes often have vocal originals, which are sometimes still in use, other times already forgotten. Such vocal originals are relatively stable, while their instrumental derivatives exist in as many versions as there are performances. Even if performers do not know the tune, they easily recognize whether it has vocal roots or not. The song-derived dances are called “*śpiewane*” (*sung tunes*), as opposed to the purely instrumental melodies called “*grane*” (*played tunes*), “*techniczne*” (*technical tunes*) or “*koncertowe*” (*concert tunes*). This purely instrumental group is marked by higher rhythmic density and is more difficult to perform, in spite of general rhythmic features common to both groups (e.g., triple metre, rhythmic descendability).

The basic unit of the tune is a repeated four-bar phrase, in some regions called “*kolano*” (*a knee*). Usually songs and dances consist of two “knees” of which the first one is played twice, and the second one *ad libitum*. Several single tunes can be strung together one after the other, thus making up a cycle of dances.

The longer musicians repeat a tune, the more they enrich their performance. In this music, creativity and improvisation are of the highest value. A good player must be able to change, decorate and embellish the tune, so each performance, even by the same fiddler, is different. Changes can be either superficial, restricted to ornamentation, or very deep, affecting both melody and rhythm. In the latter case, it becomes obvious that vocal patterns are being conceived rather abstractly as a general principle of arranging the musical material and as the point of departure for free improvisation.

The most striking performance manner of this repertoire is *tempo rubato*, that is, a free shifting of rhythmic values (shortening or prolonging the notes) in the frame of a stable measure length. This manner is closely connected to improvisation in dance and music and for this reason, the frequency of its use intensifies along with an increase in improvisation.

Lastly, it is important to mention that Polish fiddlers never play solo, unless they have to. The typical music band consists of fiddle and frame-drum, or fiddle and bass. Both drum and bass play a rhythmic role, providing the basic pulse of the dance. Less proficient drum-players just beat out the metre, but more skilful ones apply complicated rhythmic patterns. Because a good drummer can inspire the fiddler, it is very important to have a good partner.

### *Local traditions in Norway (BA)*

In Norwegian, the “Polish dance” is normally called “pols,” “polsdans” or even “polsk.” There are quite a few older Norwegian sources that describe paired “Polish dances,” which consisted of the first dance in duple time followed by a second dance in triple time. Since the early 19th century, this pairing of duple and triple meter “Polish dances” was kept alive mainly as a special wedding dance. However, some of the duple meter dance melodies and many of the triple meter dance tunes have survived as stand alone dance tunes. A good number of the dance melodies in 3/4 probably started to be performed in Norway on their own (i.e., without the first dance in

2/4) as early as the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, the melodic appendices, the serras or “cheese and bread,” also appeared with ever greater frequency as stand alone tunes.

With regard to the dance, there is a significant difference between the Norwegian pols and the older Norwegian “springar” (*springing dance*), which is also in triple time (3/4). However, this distinction is not always reflected in the local name of the dance. There is also a similar problem related to dance music as played on two different fiddle types: the ordinary violin and the Hardinger fiddle.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand we can speak about a typical Hardanger fiddle springar, most likely with its roots in western Norway, and on the other, a typical pols or ordinary fiddle springar with its origins in eastern Norway, though there exist many exceptions to this rule. The structure of the Hardanger fiddle springar is normally based on a few two- or three-bar motives that are repeated and varied in a relatively free way. The pols and the ordinary fiddle springar are, on the other hand, constructed from a far more fixed pattern, consisting normally of two longer repeated periods, each of eight measures that can be divided into two four-bar motives. In other words, there is no general and basic distinction between dance tunes named “pols” and many of the tunes played on the ordinary fiddle named “springar”. In many cases, the same tune is called “pols” in central Norway and “springar” in western Norway.<sup>16</sup> The distinctions in musical dialect between these districts are, therefore, more about different local and individual stylistic features in the performance than about distinctions in the repertoire. There are probably several reasons

<sup>15</sup> For description of the Hardanger fiddle, please see Bjørn Aksdal’s “The development of the modern Hardanger fiddle: Some reflections on the role of the fiddle maker Erik J. Helland,” *Studia Instrumentorum Musicae Popularis*, XV, Stockholm, 2005. Also see Aksdal’s “The early history of the Hardanger fiddle: A Norwegian registration, dating and research project,” *Studia Instrumentorum Musicae Popularis*, XIII, Leipzig, forthcoming 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Note that the same tune could be called “springar” in western Norway, “pols” or “springelek” in central Norway, and “rundo” in some places in eastern Norway. These local names refer both to the dance types performed to the tune as well as to the traditional names of tunes with a specific rhythm used by fiddlers in a certain district.

for this mixture. Many dance tunes have been spread around by travelling fiddlers and then assimilated into a local repertory under the local dance name. There are also sources from some districts that indicate both the pols and the springar circulated in the same areas, but at different periods of time.

As we have seen, there were two main interpretations of triple meters by the time "Polish dances" spread to the Nordic countries. One was the Polish interpretation, which has been connected to the Polish mazurka rhythm. As discussed above, typical features of melodies with this kind of rhythm include shorter notes on the first beats of the measure and longer tones at the end. These melodies also often begin without an upbeat and have a cadence on a weak beat. In contrast, we have the German interpretation of triple time, which we get if we moved the bar line one beat to the right. Here, the longest notes are found at the beginning of the measure, there is usually an upbeat, and the melody cadences on a strong beat.

These two types of rhythms represent the two main types of the Norwegian pols and springar measures. The German rhythm is found in an area of southern Norway, with Oslo and Kongsberg as probable key centers for its introduction. The Polish rhythm dominates in the northern parts of southern Norway, and in most of central Norway. Here, the mining town of Røros appears as a natural center for the dissemination of this type of measure. It is also interesting that in many Norwegian districts, the Polish rhythm appears in pols and springar tunes together with a certain asymmetrical measure type, which has an extra short first beat, a longer second, and an approximately normal third beat. By contrast, in many areas, there is a strong relation between the German rhythm and springar tunes in triple time; these tunes exhibit a longer first beat, an approximately normal second, and shorter third beat.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the pols dance could be found in northern Norway, and in most districts in the central and eastern parts of the country. Generally, pols tunes and springar tunes of the ordinary fiddle type are typical of the whole of this area, but are also numerous in

the northern parts of western Norway. In addition, we find a few of these tunes in the Hardanger fiddle districts of southern Norway and in most of the coastal areas.

The distinctions between the tunes found in these areas are primarily a question of the relative durations of beats within the measure, the tempo, and the playing style. Whilst the tunes of western, northern and parts of central Norway have three even beats, a shorter first beat has been the decided trend in most eastern and some central districts. In some areas of northern Norway, there is a tradition of playing pols tunes with one or two extra beats especially in the last measure of the repeated parts. Here, the pols is played with three even beats per bar, all equally accentuated, and when a fourth or a fifth beat is added, the dancers still continue to dance as before. This phenomenon seems to have originated as a kind of improvisation performed by the fiddlers.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the Røros district became in many ways the central area of pols dancing and playing. People from the whole of Norway as well as other Scandinavian countries come to Røros to dance, play and have great fun at the annual winter market in February. The Røros pols dancing is also spreading to new areas and today it can be learned at dance courses in the United States, Sweden and Denmark, as well as several places in Norway.

### *Local traditions in Sweden (DL)*

If you would ask someone involved in folk music and dance in Sweden about what could be called the national dance, the answer would probably be “polska.” But at the same time, polska is a heterogeneous dance type (as regards both dance and music) and it is not easy to label the different forms as one type. Despite the variety, there are nevertheless some general traits common to all the different forms.

As a dance, polska is often a couple's dance and it is mostly danced to music with three beats per metrical unit (often 3/4), but not always. A polska usually consists of two parts – “promenade” and “omdansning” (*promenade*

and a *rotation*). These dance step motifs can be executed “on the spot” or while “travelling” around the room. There are many names for local forms of this dance type in Sweden: e.g., “slängpolska,” “hamburska,” “bleking,” “travare,” “senpolska,” “bondpolska,” “slunga,” to name but a few.

Just like the dance, there is great variety when it comes to polska as a music form. The “Polish dances” that came to Scandinavia and other parts of northern Europe during the Renaissance are pointed to as precursors to the modern polska. And probably these paired dances with the first dance in duple meter and the second dance in triple meter are *one* of the sources of the polska dances of today. It seems that the polska became a fashion both in the aristocracy and among ordinary people. It is also possible that the older, already extant dances were sometimes “modernized” through renaming. Giving an old dance the new name, “polska,” could perhaps have freshened it up and revitalized it again. This could be one explanation for the great variety of polskas throughout the country. But they also share common traits which they share, such as that so-called “polska” melodies are almost always in triple meter.

There are also important regional differences between the metrical structures of polskas. In a rough classification, one could say that polskas from the southern parts of Sweden are influenced by northern European folk music and tend toward major tonality. In this region, music from districts on the Baltic Sea coast show influences of contemporary 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century art music, and is often called “bondbarock” (*peasants baroque*) or “galanta stilen” (*gallant style*). From a rhythmic perspective, symmetric meters dominate<sup>17</sup> and the melodies typically move in sixteenth notes. In the older layers of folk music in the same area, we find polskas with melodies based on eighth note movement; these have survived longest in the central areas of southern Sweden.

In central and western Sweden, there are layers of older melody types, often with modal structures or at least melodic movements that reveal

<sup>17</sup> Here the term “symmetric meters” refers to a stable rhythmic scheme in which all beats within the measure are of relatively equal duration.

an older modal organization of the music. From the region around Lake Mälaren in central Sweden, as well as in the North (with the exception of some areas on the east coast), there is a majority of polskas with melodies built on eighth notes – often with an asymmetric beat distribution. In the western landscapes bordering Norway, melodies built on triplets are common. In the western and central parts of Sweden there are often asymmetrical rhythms in the polskas.

In the northern parts of Sweden, much of the folk music repertoire is more “modern,” probably as a result of the late Swedish colonization of these parts of the Sami territory in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Polka, “polkett,” waltz, and other more modern melody types (i.e., containing elements that indicate functional harmony) constitute a larger part of the folk music repertoire in this region than in other parts of Sweden. Polskas from the areas around the Gulf of Bothnia often have a symmetric metrical structure, i.e., all beats are of relatively equal duration. Close proximity to Finland can also be traced in the folk music of north-eastern Sweden.

Considerable changes have taken place in folk music education in Sweden during the last few decades. Well-qualified teachers who also have a reputation as skilled performers have become involved in systematic activities designed to attract young folk musicians and give them practical knowledge of style, technique, and repertoire. This role of professional advisor is a new, institutionalised function in Sweden’s folk music world. Consequently, many of today’s folk musicians have knowledge of traditions other than their own. This is an important difference compared to earlier generations of musicians.

During the last twenty years, folk music has gained ground within music education and training programs at many universities and academies of music in the Nordic countries. One result of this is the development of “new” folk music theory. To be able to discuss and teach various principles of rhythms, interval structures and modes relevant to folk music, it has been necessary to develop terminology specifically suited to discussing folk music and dance. It was necessary for this terminology to accommodate



both the practical exigencies of cultural education as well as the verbal description of musical structures. Consequently, it must be asked if the increased insights into folk music theory have had any direct bearing on how instruments and songs are being played today? This issue is perhaps more complex than one initially thinks. Increased knowledge of different modal structures and rhythms naturally enables musicians to emphasize typical characteristics, which can result in performances that mark the different, regional musical dialects even more distinctly than before. At the same time, dialects become accessible to non-indigenous musicians, much in the way genres have always been accessible. You no longer have to be “born” into a musical style to be able to master it; today, you can master a dialect by taking a course at the conservatory.

### **Short presentation of the tunes chosen for the project**

#### *Polish tune (ED)*

The idea of the experiment was to compare three fiddlers playing the same three tunes. Each is a typical instrumentalist of a particular, local tradition in Sweden, Norway, and Poland. Each of the authors selected one tune from each country representing, respectively, a typical “polska,” “pols,” and “mazurek.”

The tunes were written in standard Western notation and the scores gave no indication of where they came from or of how they should be performed. The three scores were presented to each fiddler separately. Each was given half an hour to practice each melody before recording. They were asked to play in a way they felt was typical of their home tradition (or rather of their personal performance style within their tradition). In addition to playing, the fiddlers commented on the tunes and these comments were no less important than the performances in this experiment.

The Polish tune chosen for the experiment is a mazurek (*mazurka*) from the region of Kujawy (slightly northwards from the very center of Poland;

## Mazurek



*Fig. 4. Polish mazurek.*

this is the area where the teenage Chopin spent his summer holidays). It is a transcription of a tune recorded in 1952 from the fiddler Szczepan Siedlewski (b. 1901).<sup>18</sup> Melodically, rhythmically, and in terms of playing technique, this mazurka is a typical representative of the repertoire popular in a majority of Polish ethno-regions. However, it is important to stress that it belongs to the “played” (concert, or technical) category, therefore it is regarded as being a bit more difficult.

<sup>18</sup> Transcription comes from: Barbara Krzyżaniak, Aleksander Pawlak, Jarosław Lisakowski: *Kujawy, part 2 Melodies*. Kraków 1975, p. 241.

## Bringsen-polsdans



Fig. 5.  
Norwegian pols.

### Norwegian tune (BA)

The Norwegian tune is a transcription made in 1967 by the fiddler and local folk music collector Ole M. Bjørken, who lived in Verdal, 100 km northeast of Trondheim. In his manuscript, he calls the tune “Bringsen-polsdans,” named after the old fiddler Per Brings from Kolvereid in the parish of Nærøy. Kolvereid is situated 220 kms from Verdal in the north-western corner of the county of North Trøndelag. The tune was published in the late 1990s by Ole M. Bjørken’s grandson Ove Bjørken, who is also a fiddler and a violinist. (In his book, Ove Bjørken presents 216 transcriptions taken from his grandfather’s collections.)

The chosen melody is not typical of one specific region but could easily be found in different districts of Norway. Therefore, it would be difficult for the fiddler to know where the tune came from and how it was traditionally played. This anonymity was intended and one of the main reasons for selecting this pols tune.

In fact, we do not know much about the old fiddling traditions in Kolvereid where there are few fiddlers recorded and only a couple of local tune collections. By contrast, Verdal is probably the best documented fiddle district in North Trøndelag. Here, the pols tunes are normally played with three beats of equal length and all the beats are accentuated the same way. However, younger players tend to put an accent on the first or sometimes

the second beat. The tempo also seems to have been slowed down a bit from the older fiddlers to the fiddlers of today. Normally, the fiddler taps his foot on the first and third beats.

### *Swedish tune (DL)*

The Swedish tune is taken from a fiddler's note book dated 1807. The book belonged to the fiddler Petter Dufva (1756-1836) from Werckelbäck, in the district of Småland in southern Sweden. The note book includes 201 melodies and was passed on to other fiddlers after Dufva's death. A hand written copy is in the collection of folk musicians' note books at Svenskt visarkiv (The Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research).

Petter Dufva was born 1756 and combined music making with his work as a miller. Note books were usually a way of keeping a large repertoire alive and were used by many folk fiddlers as well as musicians of other genres. Dufva's note book contains mostly polskas. There are both "modern" melodies in the "gallant style" with influences from art music of the time as well as older melodies exhibiting modal structures. There are also several melodies that bear traits from popular minuets and polonaises of



the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Dufva seems to have used the same ending on many of his tunes, including the polska selected for this study (see Figure 6). This ending was perhaps a way of giving his music a personal mark.

*Fig. 6. Trademark cadence of Petter Dufva.*

The polska selected for this project from Petter Dufva's repertoire is not a typical melody for the region, but rather could be found in different traditions. The Swedish folk musician and researcher Magnus Gustafsson

has found variants of the melody in many different parts of Sweden (unpublished material from Gustafsson's future dissertation).

One interesting detail is that the melody does not seem to belong to either of the categories described above. It is not a typical "gallant" polska with a lot of movement in sixteenth notes, nor is it a typically modal melody. Still, the polska bears some traits from art music, but of an older kind. The melody is probably a surviving example of a "serra" that might have come to Sweden as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The features pointing in this direction include the short three bar motif that is used in a sequence and transposed up a fourth at bar four of the first section. The slow melodic movement based on eighth notes in three-bar motifs, combined with the sequences, and the cadenza-like cadences of the main motif are characteristics that suggest dance games and older paired dances of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The melody seems to have been popular for a long time and

## Polska

Efter Petter Dufva, Werckelbäck



*Fig. 7. Swedish polska.*

Magnus Gustafsson establishes that a version was used in a play at the Royal Opera in Stockholm as late as 1843.

The reason for choosing this particular polska was first of all, that it could pass as being from Poland. It was also important that the polska could not be tightly linked to any particular local tradition. The rhythmic freedom of the slower movement in eighth notes ought to have made the polska

modifiable and easy to adjust to different styles, which of course was a necessary quality for all the tunes selected for this study.

## **Short presentation of the musicians**

### *Polish musician (ED)*

The Polish fiddler, Bartosz Niedźwiecki, is a self-taught musician in his twenties without any formal educational background in music. He can read notes; however, he tries to avoid doing so as much as possible, preferring to follow the traditional way of learning repertoire orally (e.g., by listening, repeating, and customizing a tune).

He is very active in the circle of young enthusiasts of Polish folklore gathered around the aptly named “Dom tańca” (*House of the Dance*) in Warsaw. Inspired by Hungarian experiences, this group insists very much on reactivating traditional folk musicianship of older generations as well as on involving young people in such musical activities. The circle organizes summer schools where youngsters learn traditional fiddling, singing, dancing, weaving, and so on. Niedźwiecki has been giving fiddling courses for beginners since 2003. Observing his workshops, I could see that he uses exactly the same teaching procedures that I know from my field-interviews with the oldest musicians twenty years ago. Niedźwiecki is very sensitive to all the details of traditional playing and also very conservative (in the best sense of the word) in his performances. Being at the same time open to new ideas, he seemed to be an ideal candidate for the experiment, which in fact he enjoyed a lot.

### *Norwegian musician (BA)*

At the time of this study, the Norwegian fiddler was 24 years old. He was born in Holtålen; a parish situated 120 km southeast of Trondheim and 35 km north of the mining town of Røros. His name is John Ole Morken, and he has played the fiddle since he was a child. He learned

to play from older fiddlers in his home district, and later on, he visited most of the fiddlers in Holtålen to learn their traditional tunes. He has also made a lot of recordings and done documentation work for the folk music archives in Holtålen and the Norwegian Center for Traditional Music and Dance. For the time being, Morken is a student of musicology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim. He also teaches fiddle and guitar playing in the music school, conducts a choir and a brass band, and is the musical leader of a young fiddlers' group in Holtålen. Being only in his early twenties, he has already received grants and prizes for his fiddle playing and his comprehensive cultural activities. Morken is a highly respected fiddler.

In his home district, the "Polish dance" in 3/4, generally called "pols," is the dominant dance type. It is normally played in an asymmetrical way with a somewhat shortened first beat, a corresponding longer second beat and a regular third beat. However, this asymmetrical metre could be practised differently from fiddler to fiddler and from tune to tune. Most of the fiddlers in these districts play the pols with an accent on the second beat. They normally tap their foot at the first and the third beat, but some fiddlers tap on all three beats.

The fiddling style in Holtålen is normally quite different from the way they play the fiddle in Verdal and Kolvereid where the Norwegian tune comes from, and this tune is not known in the fiddling repertory in the Holtålen and Røros region.

### *Swedish musician (DL)*

Sophia Eriksson was the Swedish musician in the experiment. She plays fiddle as well as viola d'amore in various constellations on the folk music scene in Sweden. She finished her education at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm 2001.

Eriksson has her musical background in the district of Wermland in western Sweden. She was born 1978 in Hagfors a small town in the

northern part of the county. She started to take violin lessons at the age of nine. From the very beginning, she concentrated on folk music, which was possible at the municipal music school in Hagfors.

Beside her institutional education, she has often played together with Mats Berglund, a highly esteemed fiddler from Wermland. In the autumn of 2003, Sophia moved to Odense in Denmark to continue her music education. In the last few years, Eriksson has been greatly appreciated on the Swedish folk music scene. Her work with the folk music and dance group *Klacklek* has attained a lot of attention from Swedish media. She has also been engaged as a music teacher and theatre musician.

Eriksson expresses a very strong local identity in her music. She deliberately uses the local dialect of Hagfors to create a personal style that is easy to apprehend even when she plays other kinds of music.

The rhythmic patterns of the polskas from Wermland vary, but the asymmetrical types are most characteristic. Many melodies use a short first and a longer second beat corresponding to the traditions on the other side of the Norwegian border. Polskas that use a long first beat can also be found. As with many of the asymmetrical divisions of polska rhythms, the perceived rhythm can differ from fiddler to fiddler and also internally within the tunes. From a metrical perspective, the polska styles in Wermland are connected to other west Swedish styles as well as to Norwegian fiddling. Foot tapping occurs normally on the first and the third beats.

## **The recordings**

### *Polish recordings (ED)*

Bartosz Niedźwiecki was informed about the idea of the experiment and he found it an honor to be invited to participate. Even without any indication of origin on the scores, he easily recognized tunes of foreign origin. In spite of that, he accepted the Norwegian pols quite naturally and played it in a way that would be fully suitable as dance accompani-



ment in his tradition. This was possible thanks to rhythmic and melodic properties of the tune, which were not so far from the Polish tradition. The fiddler decided however to transpose the melody one fifth higher. What was notated to be performed on D and A strings, he played on A and E strings, following a common tendency in Polish fiddling of playing on the two highest strings.

The Swedish tune, with its more condensed rhythm, sounded more like polonaise to Niedźwiecki, which in Poland today is considered a historical dance and is not present in folk practice. Therefore, in his performance, he was reducing (simplifying) the rhythm to adapt the melody into an acceptable dance.

Common stylistic features of Niedźwiecki's playing are a relatively fast tempo and almost equal beats. One possible explanation of the irregular beat distribution that Sager's analysis helped to reveal in Niedźwiecki's recording (see Figure 14) may be the result of technical problems with playing new tunes in a tempo fast enough to be suitable for dancing. (It is my perception as an insider, that the irregular beat distribution is not so audible.)

Niedźwiecki's performance is very much improvised, and he condenses the rhythms where it is possible (as in the Norwegian tune) or reduces rhythms that were originally too condensed (as in the Swedish tune). However, in spite of many changes in melody and rhythm, the fiddler does not change the rhythm at the cadences, which are crucial points in the rhythmic structure of the dance tune.

The most characteristic feature of Niedźwiecki's style, however, is the *tempo rubato* that can be heard as playing four equal beats against triple metre. This belongs to most traditional performance manners connected to Polish rhythms (both in fiddling and in singing).

Due to the oral character of the folk music culture in Poland, Niedźwiecki seemed to be in the most difficult position in this experiment, since he is not accustomed to playing from notation. He can read notes, but he does not like to play from the score. In spite of his young age, he is just as

traditional as the oldest fiddlers who are still playing and, in traditional fiddling in Poland, reading notes is a rare ability.

Although so-called “nuciści” (sing. “nucista” – *a note-player*) are usually highly esteemed as more competent than other musicians, they in fact are often poorer instrumentalists. It seems that in a tradition that is basically oral, the visualisation of a score may strongly inhibit natural creativity, limiting a musician to playing what he sees on the page. Such a conclusion may be drawn from my field-research on fiddling in 1980s, and the recording session with the young fiddler now only confirms this rule. Bartosz Niedźwiecki reported that while using the notation, all his efforts were concentrated on playing “correctly,” that is, following the notation instead of concentrating on playing “well” from his point of view. He said, “I wish I could have much more time to learn [the] tunes by heart, so that I could forget about the score. When I have to look at the notation, it’s disturbing. Without notes, I could close my eyes and see the dance, then I could play well.”

And this is exactly the kind of visualisation that Polish fiddlers need: to see the *dance*. The best musicians always perform with closed eyes, playing each tune for a very long time with endless repetitions, varying it all the time, and behaving as if entranced. If we accept that playing from the score means contextualizing the text, then we should say that Polish folk musicians do not need to visualize the text, but rather the context, namely the dance.

### *Norwegian recordings (BA)*

The Norwegian fiddler, John Ole Morken, was asked to come to Dragvoll in Trondheim on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003 for a short recording session in our dancing hall, which we also use for sound and video recordings. The only information he was given about the music beforehand was that he would receive transcriptions of three dance tunes in triple time from three different places or traditions. He would be given one transcription at the time, and he had thirty minutes for preparation before recording each of the three

tunes. We had planned to record the whole session on tape to document not only the playing, but even his reactions and comments to the tunes during the whole recording session.

Morken started with the Norwegian transcription. After only fifteen minutes of practising, he was satisfied and said that he was ready to record the tune. He played the Norwegian tune in his usual pols tempo, and he played with an accent on the second beat. In addition to this, he used an asymmetrical metre with a shortened first beat, a corresponding longer second beat, and a normal third beat. This is true for most, but not all, of the tune due to the changing rhythmic patterns suggested by the melody, some of which suggest other distributions of the beat across the bar. He tapped his foot at the first and third beat, and in a few cases even on the second beat. Subdivided beats were played unequally: the first note was often the shortest, but sometimes even the last of the pair was the shortest. Also, the first note of the measure was often played as a pick up from the end of the third beat of the previous measure.

The next transcription Morken received was the Swedish tune. With this tune, he needed a bit more time for practising. He soon got the idea that this was probably a Swedish polska, and he also had an idea about from what part of Sweden the tune originated. He had some difficulties transforming the tune into his own, traditional style of playing; and when he recorded it after 25 minutes of practising, he was still not satisfied. The rhythmic patterns seemed to make it difficult for him to play the accents in his usual manner, and especially in the second section of the tune, the first beat became more or less too accentuated. Besides this, he also had problems performing the tune with his usual kind of asymmetrical meter. However, in some of the measures, and especially when the triplets were played on the first beat, the fiddler managed to establish an asymmetrical metre with a shortened first beat and a correspondingly longer and accentuated second beat.

He used his normal tapping pattern, tapping his foot on the first and third beats. Generally speaking, he changed the written quarter note into

two eighths, one shorter than the other, and in the last measure of each section, he played the second and third beats as a half note, instead of as two quarters, with the last one an octave lower. The tune is written in d-minor, which he was slightly uncomfortable with, since nearly all of his local tunes are played in the major mode.

Finally, Morken received the Polish tune. His first comment after playing the first line of the tune was: "This has to be a waltz." He added that this is not at all the kind of pols tune that he feels comfortable with, since it does not fit naturally with his fiddle style. He played the tune several times and tried to modify the rhythms and to some degree even the melodic line. "This is a kind of freedom that fiddlers should have, they always improvise," he said and continued: "If I found this tune in a local notebook, I would probably have characterized it as a tune of lesser quality."

When he recorded the tune, he felt that the result was much closer to a Norwegian mazurka than to a pols. The rhythm seemed to be a bit difficult to interpret and this led to the first beat being generally far more accentuated than in his home tradition. With a few exceptions, he played the tune with all three beats of equal length, rather than in his usual, asymmetrical way. The exceptions are found in measures that have a rhythmical pattern consisting of a quarter note on the first beat followed by two eighths on the second beat. If the third beat is played as a quarter note, the asymmetrical metre becomes even clearer. He also changed some of the rhythmic patterns; for example, he plays the third beat of the first and third measures as a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth, instead of a quarter note as it is written in the score.

But still, the rhythmic patterns of this tune are closer to the typical mazurka rhythm found in Norway. In mazurka, the measure typically starts with two eighths followed by a quarter note.<sup>19</sup> Parts of this tune are also

<sup>19</sup> In addition, note that in Norway mazurka meters are always performed symmetrically, that the mazurka is a relatively modern dance (probably entering Norway in the 1840s), and that there are no really significant regional or local variants of mazurka tunes.

closely related to the waltz rhythm, for example in measures 9, 25, 29, 33 and 35, where the measure starts with a half note or a dotted quarter on the first and second beats. In fact, parts of this tune do not have the characteristic descendability, i.e., they do not have a higher condensation of notes in the beginning of the measure than at the end that is so typical of “Polish rhythms.”

### *Swedish recordings (DL)*

Sophia Eriksson was asked in early April 2003 to take part in the experiment. She agreed without hesitation. We decided to make the recordings at Svenskt visarkiv in Stockholm on the same day as the Norwegian recordings were made in Trondheim – May 21<sup>st</sup>. Sophia had some previous experience with the Svenskt visarkiv, but she was not acquainted with me or anyone else on the staff. The rehearsals took place in the lecture hall and the tunes were recorded in the institutions’ studio. Both the rehearsals and the recordings were also documented on video.

The learning procedure was the same for all three tunes. The instruction to the musician was to perform the tunes as if they came from her native district in Hagfors in the province of Wermland. Eriksson knew that the tunes were not from Hagfors and that they originated from different traditions, but she did not know that they came from other countries. “Pretend that you have found three old note sheets in a drawer in the home of a famous deceased fiddler from Hagfors,” was the instruction. The tunes were presented to Eriksson one at the time and she had a maximum of thirty minutes rehearsal before she was brought to one of Svenskt visarkiv’s studios for a recording session. Each recording was made in one take.

The first tune to be introduced to Eriksson was the Norwegian one. The first couple of times she played it through, she had problems in catching the ending of the second part. The problems probably had to do with the fact that she did not fully understand the change of tonic between the two sections. She indicated several times with her body language that there had to be something wrong with the transcription. The reason was instead that

she missed the modulation. After playing through the tune a number of times, she suddenly understood its structure. This was very obvious when I studied the video recording of the rehearsal.

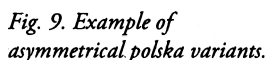
Eriksson did not need thirty minutes to get to know the tune well enough to record it and the rehearsal was ended on her request after around twenty minutes. She chose to play the melody with a common, western Swedish rhythmical pattern with a long and “early” second beat – which means that the first beat is relatively compressed. She taps her foot lightly on the first and third beats. The impression is that she feels comfortable with the tune and that she really manages to make it hers. It is very characteristic that she plays the note written on the first beat as a pick up from the measure before.

The second tune to be recorded was the Swedish polska. In this case, Eriksson had no problems with the melody. She understood and played the tune from the page immediately. But at the same time, she had greater difficulties to adjust this tune to the rhythmical pattern she wanted to use, compared to the previous polska. She took more time for experimenting and trying different patterns and seemed to look for different ways of adjusting the melody to the rhythm she finally chose. Once again, she decided to use the same rhythm as in the Norwegian polska. The conspi-



*Fig. 8. Example of empty first beat.*

To make a rest on the first beat is also a good way of re-distributing the tones to fit the uneven rhythm better. It is also worth noticing that this



Eriksson uses the same foot tapping pattern as in the first polska – tapping on one and three – but she taps quite gingerly this time too. It is unclear whether this owes to the situation or not. She usually taps harder when playing to dance.

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rhythm in this case. She reported after the recording that she found the tune very strange and said that this tune, from a melodic point of view, could not have been a polska in the Wermland tradition. She also said that she suspected the tune had been constructed by some of the scholars at our institute just to see her reaction.

She performed the tune as if it were a typical fiddler's waltz that can be found in many parts of Sweden. The tune is played with equal length of all three beats in each bar and with ritardandos at the end of the four bar motive, then accelerates in the first bar of the next part.

### **Comments on how the musicians played the tunes from other traditions**

#### *The Polish tune (ED)*

Sophia Eriksson's performance of Polish mazurek, although relatively slow, keeps up the rhythm of the Polish version. However, small ornaments and unequal tone intensity make it sound a bit in "exotic." Generally, however, this version sounds more familiar to the Polish ear than John Ole Morken's performance.

Morken used a lot of dotted rhythms, which do not appear at all in the notation of the Polish tune. As mentioned above, dotted rhythms play an important role in the so-called "national" mazurka, that is, a type of composition popular especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a patriotic manifestation of Polishness. Very common in art and salon music, such rhythms are almost absent in a pure folk tradition.

Additionally, sounding even stranger to the Polish listener, Morken regularly plays unequal beats. It seems that a change in pulsation is the

<sup>20</sup> In the late 1990s, I took part in an experiment that was aimed at showing links between Polish folk music and Chopin's mazurkas. We discovered that when one of the Chopin's pieces was played by a traditional ensemble in a traditional way, folk dancers had no problems to dance to it.



main obstacle to accept the dance tune as familiar. Let us not forget that the main function of this music is for dancing and not for listening, therefore an appropriate dance pulse is of crucial importance in identifying the genre<sup>20</sup>.

There is also another, non-rhythmic element in Morken's performance that sounds different: a very persistent drone playing. Actually Polish fiddlers use open strings as a drone quite frequently, unless they play with another melodic instrument like accordion. But to my ears, Morken's drone sounds seem more accidental than intended.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Norwegian tune (BA)*

The Swedish and Polish interpretations of the Norwegian transcription, which varied widely, indicate clearly significant differences in performance style. Sophia Eriksson performed the Norwegian tune in a way that is not very far removed from John Ole Morken's performance. Her performance might be characterized as the same regional style as Morken's from Holtålen, though it differs a bit from Morken's interpretation of the tune. Eriksson played slightly slower and the conception of an asymmetrical metre with a shortened first beat was even clearer than in Morken's version. But these differences in performance style are not so great that Eriksson's version could not have been played by a Norwegian fiddler. However, I will mention a few important differences that do distinguish her performance. First, Eriksson did not clearly accentuate the second beat; second, she improvised in the fourth measure of section B in a way that one would rarely hear in Norwegian fiddle music; and finally, she often played the second beat of the measure undivided and shortened, closer to a dotted eighth note followed by a short break, even though the score records it as two eighths. Because of these features, Eriksson's conception of rhythm

<sup>21</sup> This comment is intended only to communicate an impression of the author (ED). Morken's performance of simultaneous counter melodies and drones is in fact very characteristic of his manner of playing.

differed somewhat from what might properly be a Norwegian version.

Niedźwiecki (of central Poland) played the tune in a very different way than we are used to in Norway. His tempo was much faster than Morken's (of Holtalen, Norway), the meter was quite symmetrical and the tune also lacked the accentuation of the second beat that is typical of Morken's hometown region. Also, I could not hear any foot tapping in Niedźwiecki's recording, which would be characteristic of Norwegian fiddling. Because of Niedźwiecki's fast tempo, it is hard to hear exactly how the eighths and triplets are performed, but it seems that the notes are played equally, just as written in the score. Finally, Niedźwiecki's improvisations are quite different from Norwegian fiddling, and his final cadence sounds very strange to a Norwegian ear. Taken together, these features caused Niedźwiecki's recording to sound a bit exotic to a Norwegian ear. His performance style is clearly far removed from Norwegian fiddling traditions.

### *The Swedish tune (DL)*

It is important to reiterate that the Swedish tune does not come from the same local tradition as the Swedish fiddler, Sophia Eriksson, who comes from Wermland. This detail makes our experiment even more interesting. In the area where the polska tune originated, there are no asymmetrical rhythms used in the polskas – by contrast, in the area where Eriksson has her musical roots, the asymmetrical rhythms are important in many of the polska styles. Consequently, Eriksson uses an asymmetrical rhythm when playing the Swedish polska. Thus, from a strictly rhythmical point of view, the Swedish version of the Swedish polska is the most divergent of the three when compared to how this polska would be performed by fiddlers coming from the same region as the tune's composer.

John Ole Morken (from Holtalen, Norway) plays a rather heavy version of the polska. The rhythm is fairly even with a tinge of asymmetry in the end of the phrases. The general feeling is that the metrical pattern is not fully established and this results in an unsteady feeling. His tempo

is slightly slower than Eriksson's, but is quite normal for polskas from western Swedish areas.

My strong and immediate impression of Bartosz Niedźwiecki's version is that this is absolutely not a Swedish polska. The tempo is far too fast and the even rhythm with strong emphasis on the first beat points more to fast waltzes in the folk tradition than to polska. But the tempo is too fast even for the waltz genre. From a metrical point of view, it is of course possible to see the Polish version as closer to the traditions of south-eastern Sweden, but the fast tempo precludes any identification with a Swedish polska tradition.

### **Rhythmic Analysis: The perspective of the rhythm researcher (RS)**

Many of the observations of the "Polish dance" scholars are supported and elaborated by the findings of the rhythm analyst. The goal of the rhythm researcher was to find rhythmic schemes in the nine recorded performances that might serve to identify the performers' individual and culturally informed approaches to "Polish dance" rhythms. To this end, computer-aided transcription tools were used to identify and label recurrent patterns of physical motion and rhythmic gestures that are inherent in the recorded sound.<sup>22</sup> Such features include beat distribution, markers of accentuation, and the characteristic placement of melodic tones within the metric structure. The digitally aided transcriptions allowed a detailed comparison of the nine performances to the scores from which they were performed.

These investigations into musical sound were approached with the attitude that recordings are audible traces of musical thinking, musical

<sup>22</sup> Specifically, Sager used the software programs *Praat* and *Transcribe!* *Praat* is free software for acoustic analysis, by Paul Boersma of the University of Amsterdam (download at [www.praat.org](http://www.praat.org)). *Transcribe!* is a shareware software assistant for transcribing recorded music (download at [www.seventhstring.demon.co.uk/xscribe](http://www.seventhstring.demon.co.uk/xscribe)). A tutorial for using *Praat* from musical analysis has been written by Professor Wim van der Meer of the University of Amsterdam (download at [www.musicology.nl](http://www.musicology.nl), select "research" button to access the pdf file).

behaviour, and motion; never were the recordings thought of as abstracted entities disembodied from the performers who created them. Concerned primarily with musical meaning, the motivation for undertaking this relatively laborious analytical task was to determine to what extent an ethnomusicologist can identify in a very precise way what constitutes the cultural and personal identity of a music performer by studying the musical sounds generated through their performances. Such findings could be used to support, refute, and possibly improve promising ethnomusicological theories about the importance of music in socio-cultural and personal identity formation.

The resulting analytical data are presented here in two ways. One is an overview summary of timing features that characterize each of the performances, while the other is a detailed look at an analysis of a phrase of music played by each performer.<sup>23</sup> First, it should be said that one step in the characterization of rhythmic identity relies upon being able to establish consistent time relationships between the beats. However, knowing where “the beat” is, in precise terms, is difficult. Listeners rely upon subjective learning and cultural knowledge to interpret how they feel the beat in a given performance. From the very start, then, even a rather “objective” project of precisely measuring where musical events occur in time will inevitably rely upon rather subjective assessments. In this sense, analysis is itself a highly interpretive process.

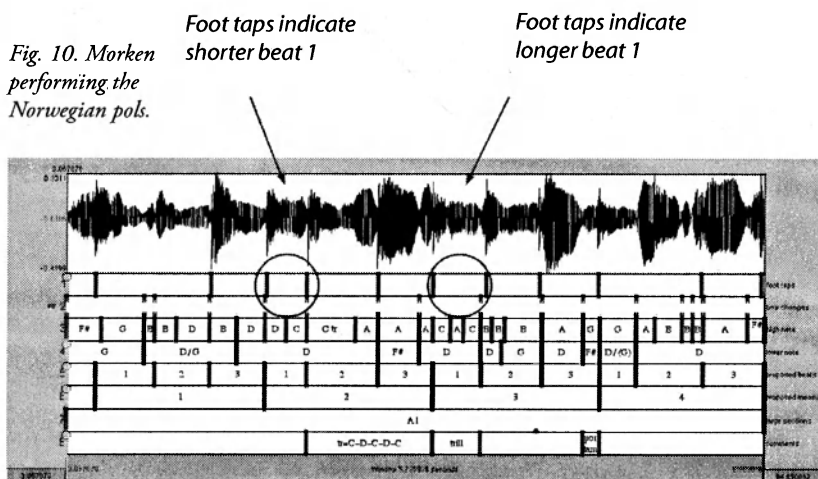
The analytical assessments Sager made are based partly upon her background knowledge of the limits of human perception and rhythmic precision, partly upon a studied evaluation of consistent rhythmic behaviors evident in the recorded performances, and even upon a small degree of inference from the recordings about the performer’s rhythmic sensibility

<sup>23</sup> It is not practical to publish lengthier transcriptions here particularly since they lack the corresponding sound. It is crucial to view the transcription while listening to the sound file in order to fully understand and evaluate the transcription. The transcription can also be viewed at varying degrees of resolution, which are relevant to different aspects of the analysis. The reader may request a complete set of Praat transcriptions from the author at [rsager@music.org](mailto:rsager@music.org).

and intent. Direct cultural knowledge of these traditions has not yet been brought to bear on the visual representations presented here. The author was greatly encouraged when our research team gathered together to discuss our results and found that her analyses coincided rather nicely with her colleagues' observations and extensive experiences with these traditions. Rather than going into detail of what was perhaps unexpected in Sager's analyses, the focus here is upon these points of coincidence.

I will begin with a brief discussion of each fiddler's performances to highlight those characteristics of their individual rhythmic style evident in the rhythm analysis. I will conclude by briefly comparing the overall characteristics of each performer's performances to the other performers.

John Ole Morken's performance reveals some of the general challenges encountered with interpreting rhythmic performances. Typically, Morken tapped his foot on beats one and three while playing the tune. In the opening phrases of his performance of the Norwegian tune, he also occasionally tapped his foot on beat two, and did so in two very different timings. Since this overt realization of the second beat occurred in two distinct ways, it suggests that there might be two different, yet potentially



interchangeable, interpretations for the beat distribution over the measure that are inherent within Morken's tradition. Suggestions that this might be the case were evident in all the performances by this fiddler, but this overt manifestation of the two measure types provided the clearest evidence.

The following illustration is a digital representation of the sound wave file of the musical phrase where Morken tapped his foot on the second beat. Timing boundaries are marked on a grid below the sound file. These boundaries are represented by vertical lines placed in each horizontal plane, or tier, which is numbered on the left hand side of the figure, and named on the right. Each horizontal plane represents a different level of rhythmic organization, descending from discrete notes (tiers 3 and 4)<sup>24</sup>, to beats (tier 5), to measures (tier 6), to phrases or larger sections (tier 7).<sup>25</sup> Tier one shows when foot taps are apparent, while tier two indicates discernable bowing gestures, such as changes in bowing direction or energy<sup>26</sup>.

When taken together, the first four tiers of rhythmic data can suggest where the beat might be felt by the performer (or a culturally competent listener). When not all timing points coincide (and often they do not), the analyst is obliged to consider all the available evidence in order to

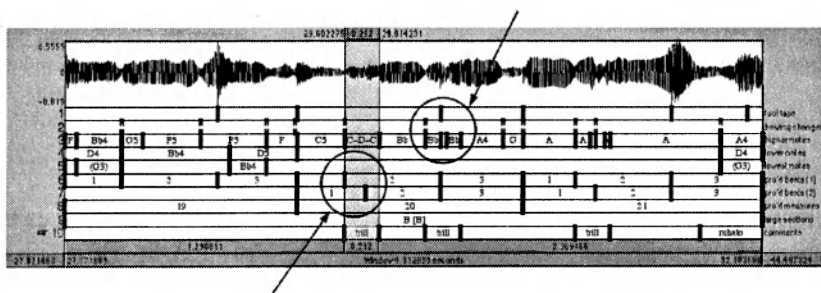
<sup>24</sup> Two tiers were needed to show the different tones created by frequent use of double-stops in Morken's performances. If more than two tones were evident, the lowest tone is shown last (e.g. if double stops on G3 and D4 both sounded, Tier 4 would read "D/G"). The upper Tier 3 represents higher pitch melodic or harmonic notes, while Tier 4 represents lower sounding harmonies and melodies. Spectrograms (digitally produced in the Transcribe! software program) were analyzed to help discern which fundamental tones were present and when. It is interesting to note that the lower tones are in a slower rhythmic motion than the higher notes; furthermore, the points in time marked by changes in the lower tones do not always coincide with the rhythm of the upper notes.

<sup>25</sup> Other comments about the execution of musical details are noted in the lowest horizontal tier, for example the order of notes played in a trill, portamento, timbres, etc.

<sup>26</sup> Changes in bowing direction can often be seen in the sound file as points of very low amplitude. However, other parts of the performance, such as a loud tap with the foot that causes a peak in amplitude, can mask a bowing change that would otherwise appear as a low amplitude point. This might be what occurs at the beginning of bar 4 in Figure 10 (see text above). At this point, even though a change in bowing is not apparent (it is neither heard nor seen), a change in pitch in the lower notes coincides with the foot tap and suggests the beginning of beat 1 in bar 4.

The performance of phrase A<sup>1</sup> (diagrammed in Figure 10 above) indicates that there are two potential motor or rhythmic schemes underlying how the performer distributes beats across the measure. One of these measure types is represented by bar two, where foot tapping reveals a short first beat, and a longer second beat. The other type of distribution is seen in bar three, where the foot taps later on beat two, revealing beats one and two to be more equal in duration. (See second beats of measures two and three, circled in Figure 10 above.)

*The fiddler often trills over beat boundaries. This is easy to see where the beat is clearly articulated by foot tapping.*



*Fig. 11. Morken performing the Swedish polska.*





more details on average beat distributions.) Indeed, Lundberg reports that modern transcribers of polskas in this performer's tradition have chosen to notate their tunes using an additive rhythm of 2+4+3 sixteenth notes per bar (rather than the time signature of 3/8). In the following illustration, we can see the approximate 2:4:3 ratio of beat distribution characteristic of this performer, followed by a syncopation at the cadence of the section. Figure 7 shows how the first two bars might look in standard Western notation using an additive time signature.

Whereas Morken and Eriksson tended to make the first beat the shortest and the second beat the longest, Bartosz Niedźwiecki from Warsaw tended



Fig. 13.

*Standard Western notation of bars 5 & 6 using the additive time signature might look like this above. Compare these two bars with the same two bars transcribed in Figure 12 above*

*Eriksson's performance transcribed in standard notation with the additive time signature.*

to make the first beat the longest while beats two and three are equal in length.<sup>27</sup> A good part of the time, however, Niedźwiecki distributed the beats evenly across the measure.<sup>28</sup> (Please see the matrix in Figure 17 below for more detailed comparison of these performers.)

One feature of Niedźwiecki's rhythmic style is, according to Dahlig-Turek, a typical rhythmic variation in the Polish tradition of playing dance rhythms. In Niedźwiecki's performance of the Polish tune, we hear four notes – which are notated as two eighths followed by two quarter notes – played rather as four equal beats across the triple meter bar. This rhythmic variation is evident when comparing the two four-measure selections from the performance shown in Figure 14 on the next page.

<sup>27</sup> In Niedźwiecki's performances of the Norwegian and Swedish *pols/polska* tunes, 66% of the time, the first beats were from 19 to 23% longer than beats two or three.

<sup>28</sup> In Niedźwiecki's performance of the Polish tune, there was no regularly recurring pattern to how the measures were subdivided.



	Niedzwiecki from Warsaw, (central) Poland	Eriksson from Hagfors Wernland, Sweden	Morken from Holtålen, Norway
NORWEGIAN TUNE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•beat 1 is longest (66%)<sup>1</sup> .39 .30 .32</li> <li>•beat 2 is longest (33%) [2<sup>nd</sup> bar of phrase] .31 .38 .31</li> <li>•beat 3 can be quite short</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•short beat 1, beat 2 is longest: .21 .46 .33</li> <li>•last bar, section A/B (best described as in 3/4) .35 .45 .19</li> <li>•tr. often on 2<sup>nd</sup> beat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•short beat 1 (33/56%)<sup>2</sup> .25 .41 .33</li> <li>•even beat distribution (66/44%) .34 .34 .33</li> <li>•tr. on 2<sup>nd</sup> beat (esp. if short b1)</li> <li>•tr. carries over beat markers/bar lines</li> <li>•delay of melodic tones</li> </ul>
POLISH TUNE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•regular occurrence of —4—equal beats</li> <li>•inconsistent beat distribution</li> <li>•beat 3 can be quite short</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•even beat distribution (3/4 meter) .32. .34 .34</li> <li>•“folk waltz”<sup>3</sup></li> <li>•delay of notated melodic tones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•relatively even beat distribution<sup>4</sup> b3 slightly longer (.345) b1 shortest beat (57%)</li> <li>•tr. carries over beat/measure boundaries (esp. btw b1-2)</li> <li>•delay of notated melodic tones</li> <li>•bowing anticipates downbeat</li> </ul>
SWEDISH TUNE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•beat 1 is longest .38 .31 .31</li> <li>•1<sup>st</sup> bar of six measure phrase has equal distribution: .34 .34 .32</li> <li>•every 3<sup>rd</sup> bar is shorter than rest</li> <li>•dotted rhythms &amp; triplets played as equal eighths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•beat 2 is longest (52%) .21 .44 .35</li> <li>•3/4 meter, beat 2 is longer .31 .37 .32</li> <li>•short beat 1, but beats 2 &amp; 3 equal (24%) .24 .39 .37</li> <li>•the 1<sup>st</sup> bar of each 3-bar group is shorter than rest</li> <li>•tr. on beat 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•shorter beat 1 (1<sup>st</sup> bar of every 3-bar phrase) .24 .36 .40</li> <li>•more equal beat distribution .29 .35 .36</li> <li>•tr. carries over beat/measure boundaries (esp btw b1-2)</li> <li>•delay of notated melodic tones</li> <li>•bowing anticipates beat</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Beat one is longest 66% of the time, whereas beat two is longest 33% of the time, beat two is longest typically in the second bar of a four measure phrase.

<sup>2</sup> Two percentages are given because there were two different and viable interpretations for beat distribution. Ethnographic study is needed to determine which interpretation is more likely perceived by Norwegian *polska* musicians and dancers.

<sup>3</sup> Upon seeing the score for this tune during rehearsal, the Swedish fiddler referred to this tune as a “folk waltz”, a different dance genre than *polska*. The performer did not play this tune in the same rhythmic style as she did the other two tunes.

<sup>4</sup> The Norwegian fiddler did not play this tune in the same rhythmic style as he did the other two tunes.

Fig. 17 Matrix comparing 3 performances of 3 “Polish dance” tunes.

[Note: in the matrix, beat distribution is given as a division of the whole measure (i.e., “.39” = 39% of a measure). Numbers given as percentages indicate the percentage of measures within the total performance for which the given statistic is true. Abbreviations include: “b” and “m”, which stand for “bar” and “measure” respectively, “tr.” for trill, “esp.” for especially, “btw” for between.]

In most cases, the differences between the beat durations (indicated in the matrix above as a percentage of the bar) are cognitively significant. For example, in Morken's and Eriksson's performance of the Norwegian pols tune (which they both performed at the same approximate tempo), the difference in the lengths of their second beats is about fifty milliseconds. This is well within the human's normal ability to assess and interpret a difference in timing. Likewise, Niedźwiecki's long first beats in his performance of the Norwegian pols tune can be as much as sixty milliseconds longer than his second beats.

Furthermore, while the figures shown in the matrix are averaged, there were clear and systematic patterns of beat distribution appearing throughout the performance and even between performances (in those cases when the fiddler found that more than one tune fit well enough within their tradition of playing). This suggests that the differences in relative length of the shorter first beats and longer second beats in Morken and Eriksson's performances are indicative of distinct rhythmic styles. Note that co-authors Lundberg and Aksdal also notice and comment upon this difference; while they interpret it as a potentially distinguishing feature between these two particular performances, they believe the difference is not so great that it could not be found within the range of variation acceptable within the performers' respective local tradition. The consistency between performances, however, leads me to hypothesize that these particular beat distributions are probably characteristic of the particular performer, even if other fiddlers in their local traditions might render the rhythm a little differently.

The timing data contained in the matrix offers a precise description of

the significant differences in how each of the performers' realizes "Polish dance rhythms." These differences in rhythmic approach are largely glossed over in the scores by what look like equal quarter and eighth notes. Given the ability of digital sound analysis to enhance the degree of resolution of timing, researchers now stand a far greater chance of understanding how and which rhythmic processes can mark the specific identity of performers and their local traditions.

## Summary

### *Identity of "Polish rhythms" (ED)*

The title question of rhythmic identity needs to be explained in two ways: first, there is the identity of "Polish rhythms" as the common base of the compared tunes, and then there is the local, cultural identity of a particular performance.

As to "Polish rhythms," they are easy to distinguish if three factors co-exist:

1. triple metre
2. clear disposition of rhythmic groups in 3 equal beats
3. descendability of rhythm

Using these criteria, a quick glance is sufficient to see whether the notated music contains "Polish rhythms" or not. In a live performance, equal beat distribution and fast tempo are additional indicators of Polish music, although they are more important to identify Polish style than "Polish rhythms" as such.

Even if the Scandinavian performances recorded for the experiment cannot be taken for Polish, "Polish rhythms" are recognizable thanks to two factors: triple metre (although sometimes questionable) and rhythmic descendability. The only exception is the Swedish *polska* played by Eriksson of Wermland, Sweden. In her version, none of the three above mentioned conditions seem to be met: the triple metre is unclear, and beat distribution and rhythmic descendability are hard to perceive (i.e., from the perspective

of Polish music tradition). Altogether, the performance does not confirm the message of Polishness conveyed by the score alone. As a result, the presence of “Polish rhythms” is entirely questionable.

This leads to the second issue, which is the specific cultural identity of a particular performance. All the fiddlers in our experiment interpreted the same musical texts. Even if a melodic line sounds unfamiliar to a musician, tunes based on shared principles, namely “Polish rhythms” with their triple meter and descendability, will allow fiddlers to “domesticate” the new repertoire by applying musical techniques and manners that help in adapting “strange” tunes to local traditions. We will discuss this issue further in the conclusion below.

### *Morken's Holtålen identity (BA)*

Working from the three chosen tunes, we could identify five characteristic aspects of rhythm and meter in Morken's performance style:

- He tries to play the pols tunes with a shortened first beat and a longer second beat, especially in combination with specific rhythmic patterns.
- He plays with an accent on the second beat.
- He taps at the first and third beat, sometimes also on the second beat, and the tapping is an important part of his performance.
- Subdivided beats are played unequally.
- The first note of the measure is often played as a pick up from the end of the third beat of the previous measure.

In addition to this, his local style of playing is typified by several features: He often plays two strings simultaneously and changes between drone playing and double stopping; he plays the tunes with a limited number

<sup>29</sup> This occurs when the three tones of a triplet are not played with equal length. Normally, the first note is a bit longer than the second, which is correspondingly shorter.

<sup>30</sup> For example, the intonation of certain notes may fall between the intervals of the major or minor scales, and in these cases, we might even speak of quarter tones. For example, in C-major, he could play the fourth scale degree high (but not as high as F-sharp), or he could play a lowered seventh (but not as low as B-flat).

of set bowing patterns; he always adds ornamentation to the melody according to his local tradition; he generally plays the triplets dotted<sup>29</sup> and with only one bow stroke; he uses neutral intonation<sup>30</sup> when he feels that this is natural; and when he feels that the rhythm of the melody sounds slightly strange, he automatically transforms the rhythm.

Morken's performances gave three very different results: The Norwegian tune, though originating from a different fiddle tradition than Morken's, was nevertheless played in a way that would clearly be accepted as a good dancing tune in the fiddler's home district of Holtålen. The Swedish tune was more difficult to interpret, and even if the fiddler adapted the style to make it closer to his home tradition, and therefore more familiar, this tune would still not be accepted as a local pols, and probably not even as a Norwegian tune. This is mainly due to some of the rhythmic patterns, and because this polska is played in a minor scale. Finally, the character of the Polish tune is so far removed from the Norwegian pols tradition that it was impossible for the Norwegian fiddler to perform the tune in accordance with his local style of pols playing. However, he had no problem playing it as a waltz. In fact, he said he thought it is a really good waltz tune. After having encouraged him to try a bit harder to make this transcription sound like a pols tune, he managed to play the tune closer to the Norwegian mazurka, which actually is not very far from the pols.

### *Eriksson's "Wermlandish" identity (DL)*

In summary, we could say the following of Sophia Eriksson's performances:

- The preferred rhythm is close to 2 + 4 + 3. This was evident in her performances of both the Swedish and the Norwegian tunes. She also declared that she wanted to play the Polish tune in the same way.
- The rhythmic structure can sometimes be changed to become symmetrical. But, this happens only at the end of the phrases.
- The melodic structure of the Polish tune obstructed the performance of the 2 + 4 + 3 rhythm.

– The accent was placed on the first and third beat, with a modest foot tapping.

– The first note of a measure was sometimes omitted, resulting in an even stronger emphasis on the first beat.

It is very apparent that Eriksson had a clear idea about a typical “Werm-landish” performing style. She used a shortened first beat compensated for by a longer second one, which is an outspoken feature of the polskas of her home region. While it is also easy to see that she has many rhythmical traits in common with John Ole Morken from Holtålen, Norway, the rhythmic changes of the tune were even more clear in Eriksson’s versions of the Swedish and the Norwegian tunes. Thus, even in spite of strong similarities, Eriksson succeeded in distinguishing her playing style from Morken’s.

### **Concluding discussion (co-authored)**

This preliminary cross-cultural experiment into contemporary performance practices of “Polish dance rhythms” helped reveal culturally specific criteria for evaluating rhythmic differences between three historically related traditions of pols, polska, and mazurka. In addition, our collaboration allowed us the opportunity to closely re-examine the relation of a score to living musical traditions as well as the dynamic and creative interplay that inherently occurs between individual performers and living traditions.

This initial experiment was limited, and we hope that future research in this area will broaden in scope as a result of the lessons we have learned collectively by involving larger musical samples and more performers. First, one should consider that the selection of tunes from the three countries could have significantly influenced our results. For example, some of the alternative Polish tunes that might have been used had a rhythmic pattern much closer to the Norwegian pols tradition than the tune that was finally selected. Therefore, selecting a different tune could have given a somewhat different result. In addition, involving the fiddlers themselves



in the tune selection process from the outset of an experiment would provide a deeper understanding of what criteria performers use in evaluating the ability of a tune to represent or to be adapted to a particular tradition. Second, the rhythmic schemes identified by Sager's analysis are limited here to beat distribution, articulation patterns, and placement of meoldic tones within the metric structure. There are other important musical criteria for assessing rhythmic differences that may also be examined and described through similar digital analysis methods. Among the most important issues deserving such evaluation are: the rhythms implied by melodic contours, the well-learned motor schemes supporting repertoires of bowing patterns unique to each performer, and the relation of dance movements to the fiddler's performance. Further experiments exploring these issues are already underway by this research team.

This initial experiment, however, has been unique in employing standard Western notation as a basis for experimentation, not just to test the limits of different performers' styles of performing "Polish rhythms," but also to measure the limits of notation's capacity to evoke the rhythmic sensibilities of the performance tradition that the notation was intended to convey. The nine performances reveal the enormous discrepancies between the rhythms underlying very similar looking scores of the "Polish dance" tune genres, as well as the very different oral traditions the three performers brought to the interpretation of each score. The performances show that at times, the rhythmic identity of the culture represented in the score is glossed over to such an extent that the tune's original, local rhythmic identity may be virtually indiscernible. Yet our experiment has also provided evidence that the score can and does speak to the performer of a particular rhythmic identity. For example, it is interesting how Morken and Eriksson were immediately struck by how the Polish tune's notated melody and rhythmic stress implied other genres of dance tunes, such as a Swedish fiddler's waltz, or a mazurka in the Norwegian tradition, but it certainly did *not* suggest a pols or polska.

What does it mean then that there are visible similarities from a rhythmic

point of view between transcriptions of “Polish dances” from different parts of Scandinavia? In terms of performance practice today, do the similarities between these historically related genres only exist in the scores, which are itself the result of particular transcription practices? To what extent do the similarities suggest something more than a mutual origin?

First, it is apparent that the “Polish dance rhythm” as rhythmic and melodic pattern is very flexible and adaptable. At the same time, a limit to the “Polish rhythm’s” adaptability was exemplified by the vast problems both the fiddlers from Holtålen and Wermland had in performing the tune from Poland, regardless of the common historical origin. The rhythmic inconsistencies that were quite noticeable in the Praat transcriptions of their performances indicate that these highly accomplished fiddlers were not successful in applying the well-learned motor and rhythmic schemes typical of their pols or polska playing to the Polish tune.

Like other elements of a performance, the degree of freedom in rhythmic transformation allowed before a tune’s identity is considered to have changed is determined locally. Details such as whether beats are equal or not, or whether two eighths are played as dotted or not are in fact very important elements of local musical flavor that are capable of changing a listener’s perception of a tune’s identity. Ideally, we could design an experiment that would help us determine what is the maximum transformation allowable within the local culture without a tune losing its identity; and likewise, determine what is the bare minimum that would have to be retained for a listener to be able to accept the tune’s performance as familiar.

Here, we are approaching an ontological discussion: Where is the tune? Or perhaps the question might be: *When* is the tune? Consider that the transcription is a snap shot of the tune captured at a particular moment in time, and is itself originally the result of interpretation – deliberate or not – where some musical parameters are left out and some are accentuated. It is important to recall that the three scores used in this experiment represent three different types of transcription work. The Norwegian transcription by a folk musician and collector seems to be a sort of summary of how a

fiddler played a tune on a certain occasion. These kinds of transcriptions are often made in a process where the musician plays the tune many times, phrase by phrase, in order to facilitate the collector's work. The Swedish tune is taken from a fiddler's private note book where the fiddler kept his tunes as a memory aid. The transcriptions in such a book are often simple and naturally imply that the executor already knows the music. The Polish transcription is the only one made from a recording but here also, the level of detail seems to have been adjusted for playing and not for analysis. The crucial issues is that in each case, the transcriber has chosen a level of detail appropriate to the purpose of the transcription. Such decisions have a great impact upon the rhythmic impression a score gives its reader, and have therefore greatly impacted this very experiment.

While the act of transcription and the interpretation of written music constitutes one area of questioning that is elucidated in this project, another area is the interplay of the individual and his or her trans-national, national, regional, and local layers of cultural identification. From a national perspective, it is obviously difficult to talk about the "Swedish polska" or "Norwegian pols." And this could hardly be done on the basis of this limited experiment since numerous local variants of "Polish dance" rhythms exist within each nation-state.

In each of the three countries, there exist not only several styles of fiddle playing, but even different historical and regional types of tunes linked to the traditional "Polish dance" music.

For these reasons, it is important to reiterate that stylistic classification should be done on a regional level.

Keeping these facts in mind, this experiment has shown that the differences between some of the performances in this experiment are no greater than differences between local styles of polska playing *within* a particular country. For example, the rhythmical differences between Bartosz Niedźwiecki's and Sophia Eriksson's versions of the Swedish polska are immense. And at the same time, the Niedźwiecki's version with his fast, symmetrical rhythms in some respects resembles the playing style in

south-eastern Sweden, which is actually where the tune originated. The result is that Polish fiddler's performance was actually closer to the Swedish tune's original local style than was Eriksson's.

In fact, the outcome from this experiment is very much dependent upon the individual musicians that participated. Even though the authors selected fiddlers who are strongly rooted and respected within their local traditions, a much larger sample of fiddlers from the same locale would be required before we could discern which aspects of a performance are the result of individual idiosyncracies and which are idiomatic of the local tradition. What is clear is that the nine recordings exemplify the inherent interplay between individuals and their traditions, which is ultimately the basis for style formation and change.

Clearly this experiment has raised many more questions than it has answered. We are optimistic, though, that the basic methodology employed here shows promise for studying further the role of rhythmic identification in processes of localization or *de-mediaization* – regardless of whether the new tune comes to the local folk tradition from the next village over or from the other side of the world. In either case, a combination of musical sound analysis (including precise descriptions of local rhythmic practices), historical investigation, and ethnographic reporting will most fully reveal the nature of individual and local cultural processes and criteria of evaluation, acceptance, adaptation, or rejection.

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