

# Polska efter Blank Anders

A Swedish polska in a Mixolydian mode with dramatic rhetoric.

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## Polska efter Blank Anders

Rättvik

Efter Kungs Levi Nilsson 5/1996

Giga GLP 17

Printed by Karen Myers

*Polska efter Blank Anders*  
(Kungs Levi Nilsson)

*Polska efter Blank Anders*  
(Per Gudmundson)

*Illustration 1: Learned from a recording by Kungs Levi Nilsson.*

*The first recording is the basis for the transcription (Kungs Levi Nilsson from the recording of the same name, from Giga Records (<http://www.giga.w.se/eng/index.html>) GCD-17).*

*For comparison, the 2nd recording is of a rather different version performed by Per Gudmundson from his recording of the same name, also from Giga Records GCD-20.*

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This polska is from Rättvik, in Dalarna. Many tunes from Blank Anders' repertoire are dramatic, and Kungs Levi Nilsson takes full advantage of the possibilities. Like all traditional tunes, it exists in numerous variants, of which the written music and recorded music referenced here are but snapshots. I will focus on the Kungs Levi version for this discussion of modes and harmony, but notice that the Per Gudmundson version follows the same harmonic structure despite the melodic differences (with the exception of the ending of the B part,

where G# is used instead of G) demonstrating an underlying consistency in the skeleton of the tune.

The tune is in A mixolydian. Mixolydian is a scale mode which is identical to "major" except for the 7th note (referred to as the subtonic), which is a whole step below the tonic/8th note instead of a half-step. (See [Mode Overview](http://www.onelang.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Musical_mode) ([http://www.onelang.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Musical\\_mode](http://www.onelang.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Musical_mode)) for a general discussion of modes and [Scale Overview](http://www.onelang.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Scale_(music)) ([http://www.onelang.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Scale\\_\(music\)](http://www.onelang.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Scale_(music))) for a general discussion of scale terminology).

Note: modern musical notation systems generally accommodate only major (Ionian) and minor modes. Since there is no G# in A mixolydian, one could write this in a key signature with 2 sharps, but that would be misleadingly interpreted as D major by most people. In choosing between precision of notation (2-sharp key signature) and ordinary musical literacy expectations (tunes in A should have a key signature of 3 sharps), I am using the classical conventional notation. This means that there will be accidentals in the scale to contradict the key signature.



*Illustration 2: Major (also known as Ionian) and Mixolydian scales differ only in the 7th note.*

The modal structure of a scale has a fundamental impact on the melodic structure of a tune. The typical cadence for a tune in A major would be the closely related E major (the chord based on the dominant or 5th note of the A major scale). One can speak of the 5th note in cadence position as a typical hinge for the melody, the place where it will tend to change harmonic direction.

But since an E major scale incorporates G# as part of its root triad, it is a much more remote key for A mixolydian. Mixolydian tunes tend to emphasize cadences on the 7th note of the scale, in this case G major. So the subtonic or 7th note becomes a typical hinge for mixolydian tunes. For this tune, notice the emphasis on the low and high G naturals wherever they occur, such as the cadence at the end of the 4th bar of A, or the melodic emphasis in bars 1, 3, and 5 of the B part where it is much more than a leading note.

Another tendency for mixolydian tunes is to emphasize the close nature of mixolydian and dorian modes as equivalents for major and minor modes. Just as minor differs from major by a lowered 3rd note, so does dorian differ from mixolydian.

The contrast comes with the relationship to the "hinges" of the tune. A tune in major may, for example, emphasize the relationship between the root major and the dominant (5th) or between the root major and the root minor, each of which differ from the root major by one note in the scale. But the dominant major and root minor are not themselves very closely related; in this example, E major and A minor are relatively remote from each other, differing by two scale notes. This is different for the mixolydian and dorian harmonic environment, where A dorian and G major are much more closely related, sharing all scale notes.

The illustration consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp). The first staff shows the A Major scale (root) with a red arrow pointing to the G note (subtonic) in the 4th measure. The second staff shows the A Major scale (root) and the A Minor scale (root) with a blue arrow pointing to the G note in the 4th measure. The third staff shows the A Mixolydian scale (root) and the G Major scale (subtonic) with a red arrow pointing to the G note in the 4th measure. The fourth staff shows the A Mixolydian scale (root) and the A Dorian scale (root) with a red arrow pointing to the G note in the 4th measure.

*Illustration 3: Red marks the different notes between A Major or A Mixolydian scales and two of their closely related scales. Blue marks the different notes between the related scales.*

One psychological effect of these different scale relationships is to add ambiguity to the harmonic underpinnings of the melody. For example, this tune could be either A major or A mixolydian all the way until the last note of the 4th measure in the A part, the first time the subtonic note (G) appears, at a prominent hinge point of the tune. That heightens the surprise and sets up measure 5, a subdued echo of measure 1, in something of a harmonic vacuum before returning to the original theme.

Another effect is the concentration on the fundamental A. A major is often used for "brilliant" tunes on the fiddle. In an older style, it is also valued for ease of drones and open-string resonance, especially with an A-bass (G string tuned up to A). This tune takes advantage of both the relentlessness of the constant A mixolydian / A dorian presence and of the drama of the big A arpeggios.

There are several prominent phrase ending points, not just the the endings of the A & B parts or the mid-point of A, but also every 2-bar phrase in the B part. Notice that all of them (except the mid-point of A discussed above) are either A or E (tonic or dominant). If this were a major mode tune, one would expect the dominant ending accompanied by either the dominant chord (E major) or less commonly the minor chord (A minor). In this mixolydian environment, where the dominant chord becomes unavailable, the effect is to heighten the A mixolydian / A dorian relationship as the primary chord choices. Even the occasional D major harmonies (5th, 7th, 9th bars of B) provide little change from the underlying "A" foundation.

Mixolydian tunes aren't all like this; typical Scottish tunes go back and forth between the tonic and the subtonic, as Ionian (major) tunes go back and forth between tonic, dominant, and subdominant (4th) chords. But in this tune, the concentration on a static harmonic environment (A mixolydian / A dorian) adds to the impression of age, a reference to a time when drones were more important than modulation.