

Västermarnspolskan efter Byss-Calle

A plaintive Swedish bridal tune for a lost love.

Västermarnspolskan

Efter Byss-Calle

Efter Leif Alpsjö & Dan Erixon 5/2005

"Tidlöst - Timeless", Tongång AWCD-49

Printed by Karen Myers

Chords: Gm D7 Gm Am Gm D7

6 1. Gm 2. Gm Gm F

Fine

10 Gm 1. Cm D7 2. Cm D7

Da capo al fine

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Illustration 1: From the recording "Tidlöst (Timeless)" by Leif Alpsjö and others on the Tongång (<http://www.tongang.se/index.html>) label (AWCD-49).

It is performed on the nyckelharpa.

This tune by Byss-Calle (1783-1847) is from the Uppland tradition. There are several stories in Sweden of prosperous farmers who chose to marry their daughters to other farmers rather than to improvident fiddlers. At the wedding celebration, they might end up hiring the disappointed suitors to entertain the guests. Many lovely and sad tunes are attributed to these circumstances, and this is one of them.

Even though this tune has a known composer, it exists like all traditional tunes in numerous variants, of which the written music and recorded music referenced here are but snapshots. The title refers to the "West Marsh" (in dialect, this is "Västanmadspolskan").

There are several details that make this tune appealing. To begin with, it has a short almost song-like structure (6 bars in the A part, 4 bars in the B part instead of the more common 8 each). The B part has the feel of a "chorus" to the A part's "verse". Combined with the two-bar phrasing throughout, you can almost hear the lament.

To add to the plaintive effect, this tune uses the technique of leaning on the note just above the target note and then resolving the tension downward. This is most clear in the ending of the A part, with the high A resolving to the tonic (root) G, and in the striking figure that begins measure 3 of the A part.

The third measure of the A part is ambiguous harmonically. I have indicated an A minor chord for this discussion, but it doesn't really fit well into conventional chord structures. I hear the E natural as an emphasis on the 6th note of the scale, and that emphasis is carried for the whole measure until it resolves to the D, the 5th note (dominant) of the G minor scale. Along the way, it rests on the 2nd note of the scale, which is a leading note wanting to resolve to the tonic G, adding to the feel of suspension and tension. (See Scale Overview ([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.)

Notice that the same melodic figure that begins measure 3 of the A part reappears at the end of measure 1 of the B part, where it has an entirely different role. In the A part, it increases the pull from the tonic, which we hear psychologically as a sigh which resolves. In the B part, it functions as an ornamental run to the stable related key of F. (The fundamental key is really G dorian (G minor with a lowered 7th), and it naturally modulates to the subtonic in F.) In this situation, the melodic figure is much less important, but it provides an echo of the A part which helps tie the two parts together.

Measure 3, part A

Measure 1-2 Part B

Illustration 2: The same 4-note phrase heightens tension or leads to resolution, depending on the context.

This tune would not be out of place in an Elizabethan viol consort, for all that it was composed two centuries later. If Byss-Calle played it for his sweetheart's wedding, as the story goes, let's hope it helped to ease the pain.
