

# *The living process of traditional singing*

*Nordic studies of stability and change, repetition and variation*

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## *(Tradisjonell sang som levende prosess*

*Nordiske studier i stabilitet og forandring, gjentakelse og variasjon*

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*Ingrid Åkesson:*

## **Variation as a leitmotif – an outline**

This article gives the reader a sketch of what we usually conceive of as Nordic or Scandinavian traditional music and also a short introductory discussion of the concepts of oral/aural and literary, stable and variable in traditional or vernacular music-making. These are issues that recur throughout the book. Furthermore, the article provides an outline of the different texts presented in this anthology, aiming to interweave the themes and lines of thought that reappear in the different articles regardless of the authors' material and discipline. Variation of text and music show many common traits, and in the same way different vocal genres share several common characteristics.

The Nordic countries have much of their history in common, which implicates that many of the same cultural expressions exist in several countries and linguistic areas. Ever since the Middle Ages people have brought musical genres, dances, instruments and individual melodies to the Nordic region from the continent, the Slavic areas and the British Isles. This European cultural heritage has been reinterpreted in different ways and given diverse and local expressions across the Nordic region.

Singing and other music-making will often take place within several tension fields or continua, for example between literacy/mediation – oral/aural (Ong 1990). Is a song, or a piece of music, regarded as mainly a work of art or mainly as an ongoing process? Within the fields of both art music and popular music the predominant creative ideal is that of innovation, connected to some form of literacy and to the notion of music as the product of a specific composer. In the case of orally/aurally dominated genres – and most clearly evidenced during epochs of the past – the ideals and practices are significantly closer to the oral/aural end of the continuum. When the creative process is based on formulas, models and melodic types, higher value is placed on variation, repetition and recognition than on innovation: what matters is the momentary and unique manifestation of something that is already more or less familiar.

As a field of research, verbal culture/oral tradition – or perhaps we should call it "traditional" or "vernacular" creativity – has primarily been studied by scholars of folklore and by specialists from the academic fields of linguistics and literature. Emphasis has been laid on fairy-tales and other kinds of storytelling as well as on the epic singing traditions of different cultural regions. Along with Olav Solberg's and Velle Espeland's texts, this article

presents an outline of Nordic research on orality/aurality and variation within the different sub-categories of traditional music, in particular over the last twenty years.

Also, taking my point of departure in the concepts of *memorizing* and *formulaic composition* respectively, as well as *variation* and *combination* – applied to both words and melody – I present a model of “traditional creativity” which operates in a continuum between memorizing and improvisation, between oral/aural and literary, and between stability and variation. Lastly I comment on the probable connection between some of the distinctive features of traditional variation described in this anthology and a horizontal, modal tonality, non-hierarchical and characterized by reference tones rather than by a functional harmonic structure.

The fact that several problematizations and notions recur in the different articles, notwithstanding the dissimilar background of the authors, points to the importance of transcending boundaries when studying traditional and vernacular music-making. It has proven very fruitful to keep a wider perspective in mind when studying different sub-genres, further, to study both textual and musical elements and problems simultaneously as they might prove mutually enlightening, and in general to combine different perspectives and points of departure. A lot of the subject matter and possible problematization of vocal traditional music will also be relevant for the study of instrumental traditional music, and vice versa.

*Velle Espeland:*

### **“Our Lord he has an old Ford” – How song lyrics change**

Song lyrics that are passed down orally will necessarily vary. The variation is not necessarily great, but it is in the nature of oral lyrics that they cannot be preserved accurately over time. Rhythm and rhyme ensure that song lyrics vary less than prose texts such as fairy-tales and stories, but even with songs there is deviation. For this reason scholars of folklore have acknowledged the existence of varieties as an indication that the material has been passed down orally. This is also the reason why these studies document even minimal variations.

In songs the nature of the variation ranges from minor, memory-aiding details to active co-creation and improvisation. Young children will habitually learn songs as simple strings of words, whose meaning they do not necessarily understand. Therefore the kind of variation they make use of will often amount to simply exchanging difficult words with others they are

familiar with. At the same time children can be very creative, and they will often toy around with the lyrics of well-known children's songs.

But even adults relate to song lyrics in this way. Lyrics that are hard to memorize will often be simplified. Lyrics featuring innovative expressions are more difficult to remember than lyrics full of well-known formulas and clichés. When a cliché comes to supplant an original poetic idiom, the literary value is diminished. However, from the perspective of easy memorization this will count as an improvement.

The Norwegian Folk- and Popular Song Archives has in its possession many handwritten songbooks. I have selected one of the songs about the shipwreck of the Titanic and compared some lines from the original broadside ballad with the corresponding lines in six handwritten songbooks. Only one of the books has a text that must have been copied directly from the broadsheet, all the others show signs that the words have been memorized. Most of the alterations are minor, but in a particular stanza, which is hard to understand, major changes have been made. In some cases attempts have been made to improve the language, while in other cases the original words have simply been replaced by others that are phonetically similar to the original, rendering the text somewhat meaningless.

Much greater variation can be found in our oldest folk songs, which we normally refer to as medieval ballads. It is evident that generations of co-writers have been at work in these, and the variations can sometimes be so great as to make one wonder if they are really variants of the same song. The Scandinavian ballads have a highly stylized form and they are characterised by widespread use of compositional formulas. Albert Lord's book *The Singer of Tales* (1960), about formula-based composition in Serbian epic poems, instigated a lively discussion on the subject of formulaic composition even in the ballads. However, the difference between ballads and Serbian epics is so great that Lord's theory is not directly transferable, even if the formulas play a role in the long Faroese ballads similar to that in the Serbian epics.

Yet it is in functional or purpose-based songs that we find the greatest range of variation. The shanties were work songs, used on the sailing ships to direct the rhythm and pace of different tasks and work processes. This kind of song worked as a practical tool and the lyrics were completely subordinate to the pulse/metre. Thus the Shanty-man could improvise freely, often departing from both rhymes and lyrical rhythm as long as the heaves and hauls of the work were accentuated. We find something similar in lullabies. When infants are to be lulled to sleep, the song has to be rhythmically tranquil and enduring until the baby

falls asleep. Within such a song tradition the lyrical content of the songs may be completely altered without departing from the tradition.

*Anne Murstad:*

### **Herding calls as a method of variation and emotional communication**

In pre-industrial agriculture the human voice was an important work-tool. Summer mountain pastures were common to regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland and they led to the development of both vocal and instrumental means of communication between humans and animals. Among these the “cattle calls” are distinguished by being generally more melodic and elaborate than the other kinds of calls. It is also the kind of call that is best documented. This article deals with some aspects of the cattle calls, in particular the aspect of variation. The calls are developed through interaction and communication with the farm animals, with distinct elements of additive formula-composition. The singing is characterised by variation on several levels. This article will compare the recordings of five different singers from the same geographical area in eastern Telemark in order to shed light on common melodic traits (common melodic formulas) in the song material.

One of these five singers displays a distinctive form of variation in her way of repeating a motif over and over, yet every time changing it slightly. This kind of variation has its parallels in other vocal and instrumental expressions, such as lullabies and parts of the traditional repertoire for the Hardanger fiddle. Concepts borrowed from research into funk music (Anne Danielsen 2006) may shed light on the variation technique in question. In funk, as in cattle calls, the temporality is non-linear, and the repetition of a rhythmic or melodic motif will at the same time be a revision of this motif. The article also discusses how the cattle calls are characterised by intuitive and spontaneous communication and how they are partly based on feelings of empathy and togetherness with the herd of animals. Another significant aspect of the cattle calls – in their original practical context – is their interplay with the acoustic qualities of the landscape. In many ways the cattle calls can be characterised by intertextual traits, such as references to other musical genres and animal sounds.

Cattle calls are included in the concert repertoire of many contemporary folk singers who tend to deliver them according to a stricter structure, with less variation, than has been documented from source singers. The explanation of this probably has just as much to do with different aspects of the actual performing context as with conscious choices by the singer.

Contemporary folk music displays tendencies towards less variation in general. One can argue that the amount of variation desired is a cultural-political question. However, awareness of variability can be seen as a way of opening up a musical material, both for performers and audience.

*Ingrid Gjertsen:*

## **“Home, sweet home”**

### **– Different performances in the Ragnar Vigdal tradition**

This article’s topic of discussion is: What causes variation? What is the reason for differences or similarities in performing? – Family, generation, environment and/or the performing situation?

The song “Home, sweet home” is well known and popular in many countries including Norway and Sweden. It exists in many translations and reinterpretations. In my material three generations of performers from Sogn in western Norway sing this song. They are from the same family, but still belong to slightly different local environments. In order to shed light on the primary question this article poses, their performances are analysed with special respect to the vocal expression and the relationship between words and melody. For comparative reasons the singing of two other performers who are not part of the family is also part of the study.

It is interesting to look at the notion of longing as a creative element of the folk song tradition. In particular there are a lot of songs about longing for heaven, longing for one’s true love, longing for beautiful nature or for one’s native village. The notion of longing has influenced vocal expressions and stimulated innovation in both words and music. The song “Home, sweet home”, which in its different versions expresses a longing for one’s childhood home, one’s native village and heaven, thus encompasses notions of past, present and future.

The analysis also deals with phrasing, i.e. in what way each lyrical phrase is sung to create melodic tension and release, the progression of the song and whether it is the words or the melody that propels it. In conjunction with this analysis, two main trends are delineated concerning performative progression: the linear (horizontal) and the functionally harmonic (vertical). The oldest performer, Ragnar Vigdal b. 1913, sings the phrases more or less as he would pronounce them in slowly speech. The phrasing puts more emphasis on the pronunciation of the words than on the melodic aspect, even if these two aspects are

intimately connected. The focus of the performance is linear (horizontal). At the same time his singing is clearly introspective; tension and release take place as short periods of intensity on a micro level and not on the level of the more general lines of the song. The youngest generation of performers (the group *Arv* (heritage)) use the guitar to accompany their singing, which is countryesque in style. Their singing is chord-based, functionally harmonic and vertical, i.e. propelled by melody more than words. It becomes apparent that in the linear way of singing the length of the phrases differs from one phrase to the next, while they are all of the same length in the chord-propelled style.

The article also investigates the relationship between singing and verbal pronunciation. There is a connection between singing on sonorants consonants, word-driven linear orientation and an introvert expression on the one hand, and conversely, between singing on vowels, based on melody and chords, and an extrovert expression on the other.

There is also a clear connection between song expression, the environmental context and the performing situation. Changes and variation are most easily detectable if we look from one milieu to the next, and as a trait of differentiated performing situations. This survey deals with three environments: The older and pious environment, newer and more extrovert evangelical circles and the folk music milieu. It also looks as if generation differences play a part. Personal style and the category of song matter as well. This study reveals that it is singers from the same family that display the greatest individual differences. The notion of a family tradition, entailing the supposition that members of the same family will have the most similar expression, is not accurate in this context. On the contrary, it appears that performers from the same family have a greater sense of liberty and innovation than do people outside the family. The folk music milieu, for instance, is more concerned with emulating mentors than are people within the same family.

*Lene Halskov Hansen:*

## **Seeing the songs**

### **A source for understanding the constancy and change of the wording of the songs**

“When I sing them, I feel that I can see it all before my eyes”, relates the traditional singer Anna Jørgensen, born in 1894. (Rossel 1971:180). The article discusses the ways that traditional singers relate to the wording of the songs, based on their ability to see the story enacted before their eyes in the form of real people, entities, places and events. I am not

claiming that all traditional singers experience the songs as inner images. However, for some the experiences of seeing the songs are so strong and distinct that I consider it a relevant perspective for understanding their relationship to the songs. In this article my topic of interest is not the variations as such, but whether the underlying inner experience of the songs may be a guiding factor regarding permanence or changes in the wording.

Are they singing words or images? Do they forget words or images? Since the subject matter here is an oral tradition, I have chosen to use the term “wording” instead of text, the latter being associated with print or writing. I make use of sources from both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, and I draw on my personal acquaintance with a number of traditional singers that I have heard perform in different contexts over the years.

To begin with I point out that invoking inner images is not something exclusive to traditional singing. Afterwards, I also discuss the fact that both singer and listener may create other kinds of images than the ones growing out of the actual narrative of the song. Later on, I examine accounts by traditional singers from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and move backwards from there to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a special focus on ballads. As an extension of this study, I examine two sisters’ version of the same ballad – “Sivard Snarensvend” (TSB E 49, Death of Sivard Snarensvend) – written down in 1869. From the 20<sup>th</sup> century we have explicit accounts from singers who relate that they follow the course of events from verse to verse with their inner eye. For some this can be related to an experience of the songs being true or to a personal understanding of the content of the songs. The experience of inner imagery can also be connected with the singer’s particular phrasing. We have more implicit accounts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that suggest equally powerful experiences of the events and persons of the songs. In one example a singer was told that someone had *seen* Agnete from the ballad “Agnete og Havmanden” (TSB A 47, Agnete and the merman), standing on the shore because she regretted that she had not gone back to her children.

The inner images that the wording may conjure up carry several layers of meaning that the song has “soaked up”. Therefore it is no wonder that the singers are often very particular about the wording being *right*, by which they mean the way *they* sing the song here and now; the way they (claim that they) first learned the song themselves. They have little or no interest in the notion that different versions may have equal value (Cf. Holzapfel 2005:116). If the words disturb the inner images and the layers of meaning related to these, the words are misconceived. Conversely, we know that the singers will actually change the wording if they have forgotten parts, if they want to add something or make changes for some other reason. By examining two sisters’ versions of the same ballad I look into the possibility that inner

imagery is the cause of changes in the wording. The course of events is very similar in the two versions; however a few disparate words make one version dramatic while the other one is mournful. The ballads *are* images, and they are characterised by the fact that the words do not refer to an individual story as much as to a course of events that embodies lasting ‘truth’ and touches us. (Holzapfel 2005:115). The article demonstrates that these concrete and objective narratives in a paradoxical way allow the individual singer to experience the ballad as an individual story of something that actually happened; at a well known place, with certain people, animals and other beings involved, i.e. as real events that we can envision.

*Olav Solberg:*

### **The text in the tradition**

In the article I analyse a certain kind of document from the late Middle Ages (around 1300-1500), so-called murder letters or evidence letters. The evidence letter is a legal document that was written in conjunction with the investigation of murder cases. When a murder had been committed witnesses were summoned and whatever they had to relate was recorded in the protocols by the investigator, i.e. the local governor (sheriff) or his ombudsman. Normally, legal language is highly formalized with little apparent affinity to oral language and oral genres. However, in the section of the murder letter where the witness is allowed to speak we find a completely different language. This idiom can be characterised as oral-literary and tale-like and it is clear how the oral story-telling tradition wins through in this context to supplant the legal idiom. The oral-literary idiom includes expressions, formulas and characterisations shared by oral genres such as ballads, myths and proverbs.

The first of the evidence letters that I discuss was written around 1340. Among other things it includes the killer’s tale-like commentary of the murder he has committed. The second evidence letter that I look at is from the 1420s. It deals with an enduring conflict between two farmers. The disagreement is about an elk; who has the right to claim the felled animal! In the letter the conflict between the two farmers is described as a little three act drama containing brash lines and mounting tension about the outcome. The result is that one slays the other, as expected. The third murder letter takes us back to the 1350s. The exciting and vivid narrative lets us witness how a priest from Telemark lands his axe on the head of the farmer Tore Rolvsson, who dies from the strike.

The Norwegian murder letter allows us to study how the oral narrative tradition shines through in printed language. In some cases we can see the converse phenomenon taking place; that oral narratives emerge from written documents. In order to examine this question more thoroughly I make use of an old Middle Age ballad – the song of Margrete “the false” (TSB C 22). It is an historical ballad that has passed down in the tradition of the Faroe Islands and partially in the Norwegian tradition. It has its roots in the very oldest form of ballad composition, from around 1300.

*Ragnhild Furholt:*

### **Making the song your own**

Making the song your own – creating personal variations – is a decisive factor when passing things on orally. The article gives examples of how some older traditional folk singers have varied their melodies of ballads and folk verses as *gamlestev* (“old *stev*”; one-stanzas with the same poetical metre as the ballads with four lines.).

In the small village of Lognabygda in Åseral in western Agder the Liestøl family has produced a number of ballad singers. Several generations of singers from this family are well documented through sound recordings and written material. In addition, one of the sources, Jens Røynlid, has shared his craft first hand with the author of this article. Despite the fact that the singers are closely related and grew up as neighbours learning from each other through generations, none of them deliver the same ballad in the same way. Still, it is clearly the same melody that constitutes the basis. The singers that grew up in Lognabygda must have heard the songs performed by different singers many times, yet for the most part they will refer to one specific source as the one who “taught” them the ballad. In other words, they are conscious of who they have inherited the tune from, even though they might sing it in a different way.

The legendary ballad singer Svein Hovden from Setesdal is a well-documented source; his work has been preserved in the form of written text, note sheets and wax cylinder recordings. Having studied the melodies of a number of his ballads and the *gamlestev*, I am in a position to show that a lot of the melodic substance is based upon the same motifs. However, due to the richness of variation it takes some time to discover this. In a remarkable way, Hovden demonstrates his ability to transform and adapt a fairly limited number of melodies to different kinds of ballads and *gamlestev*.

Most of the people documenting Hovden have been content with taking down just one stanza or verse from each ballad text or melody. One of the few exceptions is O.M Sandvik's documentation of the ballad "Unge Svegder" (TSB A 45, Young Sveidal), which includes six melodic stanzas. However, the transcriptions do not show the detail of the variations that actually make up a live performance, i.e. the details of phrasing, tonality, tempo and rhythm. Still, it provides a good picture of the degree of variation and of how it is possible to avoid making a long ballad boring and monotonous. In a review of Hovden's ballad melodies Sandvik writes: "...but the tiny alteration is sufficient to keep up the atmosphere and avoid uniformity". (Sandvik 1952:16)

The present author, who is also a folk singer, has spent a lot of time retrieving and reissuing old ballads. I draw the conclusion that variation is necessary both regarding the dissemination of the material on and in terms of making the melody and words fit together. Bringing a sheet of music to life is a challenge, especially delivering a ballad in a way that comes across as credible both according to the tradition and to one's own personality. The article also includes some thoughts about variation in this day and age, when the material to a large degree is documented in print and sound. How does one relate to the tradition, note sheets and old sound recordings when one wants to learn and appropriate this genre? Where should the emphasis be put to create variation in the ongoing processes of passing things on orally? The challenges are great since people of today for the most do not possess the codes for understanding neither the words nor the melody.

*Astrid Nora Ressem:*

### **"And he was amused by his own performance"**

#### **The singer Bendik Sveigdalen, variability and documentation from the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

Descriptions of Bendik Sveigdalen (1780-1865) portray him as a singer who amused both himself and his audience when he performed his songs. At a first glance the written documentation of Sveigdalen's words and music does not appear to give much of an idea of his vibrant performances. Is it still possible on the basis of such written evidence to say something about a singer's variability and the kind of framework he expressed himself within? By close reading of these records I try to undertake an examination of the relationship between variation and consistency, and between co-creation and memorization. My sources are written records by Ludvig Mathias Lindeman, Jørgen Moe, Magnus Brostrup Landstad

and Sophus Bugge. In addition I make use of texts from Peder Syv's "Kjempevisesbok". All the records are ballads. (Cf. Child Ballads).

I view the variables as part of the performing process itself and consider the relationship between the changeable and the constant as a key aspect in upholding the tradition that Sveigdalen represents. In his *On the Variability in the Performance of Hardingfele Tunes* Tellef Kvifte writes: "To describe the phenomenon that a piece of music may be played in different ways on different occasions, and still be perceived as the same piece of music, I use the term *variability*. (Kvifte 2007: 40) Studying variability, it is of equal interest to look at stability and variation. Variability can be viewed as a process that leads to change, but based on the findings presented in this article, I would rather claim that the changeability is part of preserving and upholding a style. We cannot know Sveigdalen's own thoughts about his singing, but it appears that he made use of a melodic template, or a set of melodic outlines, as the basis for his performances. In Lindeman's records around half of the melodies begin in nearly the same way and on the same note. The melodies then run parallel for a little while before they take different courses onwards. Looking at this material, we also see a lot of what we may call musical formulas, or short motifs that are combined in different sequences to prolong the melody to make it fit the lyrics. Some melodies are more or less identical all the way to the refrain. In these cases the melodies revolve around some central notes without really making use of them, and it looks like Sveigdalen shaped the rhythm, accent, phrasing and pitch around these key tonal parts.

The records of both lyrics and melody illustrates that Bendik Sveigdalen performed ballads within a framework that presupposes a good memory and a thorough understanding of both textual and musical structure. His method of variation requires deep knowledge and understanding of the music and the tradition it is part of. In this tradition the singer must have a more comprehensive overview than simply knowing the sequence of notes, words, phrases, lines and stanzas. One part of the picture is the fixed framework: the basic notion of melody and narrative, more or less memorized text and the repetitions of melodic formulas and motifs (incremental repetition). The other part of the picture is the variation of single words and lines, the exclusion or inclusion of single stanzas without altering the course of the narrative, and the flexible moulding of the melody around tonal centres instead of utilizing the same notes each time. This range of possibilities is the basis of variability. It is not a question of improvisation understood as major variations on a given theme, but rather variation on a micro level where accent and phrasing can significantly alter the way a melody is perceived and understood – and where minor changes of single words can make the story appear just as

lively and spontaneous in every performance. This type of technique, and insight, contributes to maintaining a style, not change it. Bendik Sveigdalen had a range of options to express himself personally according to mood, creativity and response, while still remaining true to the basic form.

*Susanne Rosenberg:*

### **Variation – a way of thinking?**

#### **On some singers' use of variation, and methods of analysis to examine this**

Many scholars (Kvideland, Ond, Lönnroth, Parry and others) have observed that variation is a given constituent of oral tradition – a way of thinking. Applied to traditional vocal music, this conception entails that there is no such thing as an original or correct version of a song. The essence of the notion is that the “work of art” comes into being the moment it is sung, which means that the existence of the song depends on our singing it. But if we create a song anew every time we sing it, and this is its only existence, where then does this thing we call the song begin and end – what is constant and what is variable?

In an attempt to shed some light on the phenomenon of variability, the present author has chosen to examine a set of songs as performed by seven different singers (born between 1860 and 1970). The study of variation is carried out by means of different methods of analysis, some of which are well proven and some are new in relation to the twin objective of both looking at variation in itself and assessing the applicability of the different methods.

The article examines how the method of analysis influences the result. Methods such as western notation system, melodic pitch category analysis, melodic graph analysis, melodic skeleton analysis, syllable analysis, music-metric syllable raster, and sound analysis/acoustic analysis produce a degree of discrepant results or emphasise different parameters: tonal variation can be detected by using the western system of note writing, variation of form or variation of the melody-lines between different stanzas is best detected using melodic graphs, music metric syllable raster reveals variation in the number and placing of syllables in the phrases, sound analysis based on layered sound files yields information about tempo, phrasing and dynamics.

The different singers' delivery of the songs all features variation, albeit in dissimilar ways. Different types and forms of songs create different conditions for the variable. In the herding songs, e.g., the characteristic fifth interval is stable and the melodic variation appears

to occur mostly at the end of the stanzas. In the lyrical song included in this case-study the melodic variation takes place in the middle of the song, while the ending phrase remains unchanged every time. Even in cases where the melodic variation is minor or non-existent, variation may occur in the correlation between text syllables and metric emphasis and by means of phrasing, accentuation and rhythm.

In general, the variation will mostly occur a couple of phrases into the song or stanza; this goes for both melodic and other kinds of variation. If we think of melodies as having a structural core – a melodic skeleton – it is far from obvious that one first presents an “original” which is then varied. The space for variation increases if one repeats a phrase or stanza that has already been sung. In the material analysed the variation is greatest towards the end of the songs. This observation holds true regardless of genre, song or analytical tool. A specific sub-study examines some young singers’ appropriation of a traditional hymn. It shows that when one has learnt both the song and performance from a source singer, variation will appear over time.

Summing up, we can say that variation may occur on a minor scale, yet still be significant and create vibrancy. Variation often manifests itself as small but recognizable changes in the delivery. The form of the song, as well as the type of song, appears to have impact on at which point and how the variation takes place. The variable always relates to an imaginary framework. Variation discloses the framework, and the framework makes variation possible. Variation is a way of thinking.

*Margareta Jersild:*

### **The phrase as a formula – traces of an old technique of variation?**

Already in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century one spoke of “variants” of individual traditional song lyrics in Sweden. Later on, collectors started to record also melodic variants, organising these in categories termed melody types. Variants were defined as different melodic elaborations that could be listed under specific melody types. However, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century collectors recognized that there are also melodies based on formulas, especially within the ballad genre; a phenomenon that was already well known in text research. The condition for this kind of formulaic structure is that the formulas, short or long, are interchangeable.

Previously most attention has been given to the shorter kind of melodic formulas. This article

will examine two sound recordings of ballad melodies where the formulas instead seem to be made up of complete melodic phrases, corresponding in length to a line of verse.

The first example is a 1968 recording of the ballad “Den bortsålda” (TSB D 391, Child 95; The maid freed from the gallow) as sung by August Månsson (1884-1979). Månsson’s text comprises 21 stanzas, six of which are three lines long, the rest two lines. The melody he uses for this text is composed of a number of phrases that vary between the stanzas (stanzas 1-3 and 5 with the melody are included on p. 185). The distribution of the total of 16 phrases (A-P) across the 21 stanzas is illustrated in the table on p. 186. Certain phrase-combinations are more common than others, but in general it seems that the individual phrases can be chosen independently of the adjoining phrases and their position in the melody.

The other example is a 1957 recording of four stanzas from the jocular ballad “Bakvända världen” (*Mundus inversus*) as sung by Valborg Carlsson (1899–1972). (The melody is included on p.189-191). Her text has an irregular stanzaic composition with eight-, six- and four-line stanzas, all featuring a closing refrain. For this total of 30 verse lines the singer makes use of 15 different melodic phrases (A-O), distributed across the four stanzas according to the table on p.188. The most noteworthy thing is that the refrain (italics in the table) has a different form in the different stanzas, since it is otherwise the norm that the refrain in particular is fairly consistent. Therefore, musically speaking, the refrains need not indicate the end of the stanza.

Several questions arise from these recordings, for instance whether the performances were consistent from one time to the next and whether there occurred improvisations of the actual melodic structure based on the melody’s “reserve” of phrases. Perhaps the singers could even replace the documented phrase types with completely different ones of the same style? Unfortunately these questions must be left unanswered due to a lack of sources. We can, however, draw a couple of general conclusions: This way of building a melody – in which the different phrases may be viewed as formulas – is probably *a remnant of an older technique*, which presupposes an ability to work quite effortlessly with a number of phrases in a free manner. There are some interesting parallels to this phenomenon even outside the ballad genre. The fact that both singers have made use of complete phrases as formulas in “Bakvända världen” and “Den bortsålda” definitely has to do with the irregular and/or opaque stanzaic form of these textual variants. Most likely the singers have chosen to (consciously or not) *treat each song as an entirety, without any notion of stanzaic structure*. Valborg Carlsson chose a melodic shape that gave different final phrases in all four stanzas – despite the fact that the refrains clearly indicate the end of the stanza. Conceiving a song as an entirety,

without any stanzaic structure, is probably an old practice. It is therefore all the more noteworthy that Månsson combines this melodic structure with a modern major-key melody. This is a further example of something that can be seen in the ballad melodies: the fact that one or more parameters – even within the same performance – may have been altered and modernised, while others have maintained traits from much older layers of time.