

*Engelska* as understood by Swedish  
researchers and re-constructionists

*Karin Eriksson*

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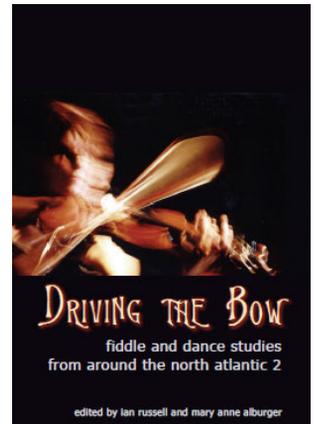
**Driving the Bow**

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 2

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## *Engelska* as understood by Swedish researchers and re-constructionists<sup>1</sup>

KARIN ERIKSSON

As part of Sweden's traditional folk dance and music repertoire, the *engelska*<sup>2</sup> has been discussed many times. As is often the case in descriptions of traditional music and dance, the *engelska* is usually presented in specific contexts within specific ideological frameworks. However, compared with other traditional Swedish dances and musical forms – especially the *polska*<sup>3</sup> – the *engelska* is often unfairly treated, particularly regarding how it is described.

This paper is not about the *engelska* as a dance or musical form. The emphasis here is on locating and describing occurrences where the *engelska* is discussed by researchers and by amateurs interested in investigating traditional dance and music. The main purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of how and in what contexts the *engelska* is described, as well as studying examples of how the history of a specific traditional dance and its music is formed within the tradition. It is important to recognise that the process of forming a 'history' of traditional dance and music is always changing and evolving, which is, of course, also the case in describing cultural heritages in general. More importantly, the history formed is also 'forming' the researchers, musicians, and dancers, etc. in their work with the material. It is therefore important to study not only dance and music from an empirical point of view, but also the different kinds of texts in which the formation of their history takes place. This study is an attempt to do this.

The source materials examined in this paper include different texts and a radio series about the *engelska* as a dance and/or a musical form. The sources have been studied from the viewpoint of, for example, who is writing; in what contexts is the *engelska* presented; what history of the *engelska* is described, and so on. The selection of sources used in this study is based on an inventory of several books about Swedish folk music and folk dance, although those that have ignored the *engelska* have been excluded. Surprisingly, many texts on Swedish folk music do not include the *engelska* at all. Several surveys come no closer to describing the *engelska* than as a part of descriptions of traditional contra dances, otherwise mostly exemplified by quadrilles and minuets. Furthermore when the *engelska* is mentioned as an example of a contra dance in descriptions of traditional music, it is described as a dance, and not as a musical form.

The sources used in this study can be divided into three main groups:

1. Academic texts, often historical surveys or introductions to Swedish folk music and dance
2. Instructional books, mainly aimed at dancers
3. A series of three radio programmes about the *engelska* music broadcast in the autumn of 2005 by Swedish Radio

A closer examination of the specific texts used in this study reveals an uneven distribution within the field of music and dance, where the latter is much better represented. It is also evident that the texts are produced by researchers as well as 'amateurs'. The amateurs, in this case, are people who do not have formal positions at an academic institution or have a higher academic education. Some of them are, however, doing research about the *engelska* on the same level as the professional researchers. Such amateurs have also had an important impact on the studies done in the fields of Swedish folk dance and music research in general, especially with regard to folk dance investigations. However, unlike the professional researcher, they often have an explicit, practical goal for their investigations, that is, to reconstruct a dance and/or musical tradition of some kind. These people will henceforth be referred to as 're-constructionists', in contrast to researchers, even if this division produces a very simplified picture of the individuals concerned.

A re-constructionist can thus be loosely described as an informed person doing research in the field of folk music and/or dance, with the aim of reconstructing traditional music or dance, or a repertoire often connected to a specific geographical area. The aim is not to investigate the music or dance form as such, but to use the results of the investigations to bring it back into a 'living tradition', or to strengthen their current place in the tradition.

In some aspects the two types of researchers are very similar. For example, they are both committed to investigate and describe the history of the *engelska*, although the researchers often do this as a part of a larger project, such as a historical overview. Furthermore, they often seem to use the same source materials, as, for example, fiddlers' books and ethnological open-ended enquiries through fieldwork. It should also be mentioned that some people are almost impossible to define as either a researcher or a re-constructionist, and in these cases I have looked at the specific examples in order to define its type.

### **Who writes and what do they write?**

It is obvious from the available material, including leaflets and articles, that the people interested in dance research, dance researchers, and dance re-constructionists alike, have put more effort into investigating and writing about the *engelska* than their musical counterparts. However, for studies concerning the *engelska* as a musical form, only music researchers are represented in this study. The reason for this is that I have not been able to locate any texts from any music re-constructionists.

However it is possible that the work of musical re-constructionists can be found on commercial recordings, since this is one of the most common methods of spreading a music repertoire to a larger public and to other folk musicians. The first step in expanding this study, should therefore be to investigate the presence of *engelskas* on CDs, audio cassettes, and LPs over an extended time period.

Most of the dance researchers studying and writing about the *engelska*, work in the fields of ethnology or folklore. The dance re-constructionists, however, are often deeply involved in the folk dance movement in Sweden. This is especially true for texts produced during the folk music and dance revival in the 1970s. One of the dance re-constructionists is Henry Sjöberg, whose publications are important sources for this paper since he has in many ways presented the *engelska* in a wider perspective. I include in this study a text about the *engelska* that he published, together with other parts of his research, as well as a handbook of dance instruction.<sup>4</sup> The few music researchers cited in this material are often close to, or within, the wider field of ethnomusicology.

The *engelska* is, however, treated differently by people mainly interested in it in their roles as researchers rather than re-constructionists. The former, as mentioned above, often write about the *engelska* as part of a larger historical perspective, while the latter often describe the *engelska* in more detail. This means that texts by researchers tend to create the impression that the *engelska* constitutes a rather small part of the repertoire, and the *polska*, for example, receives much more attention.<sup>5</sup> This is not the case for dance re-constructionists.

The small amount of space reserved for the *engelska* by researchers in both the dance and music fields, is, however, a reflection of the lack of larger research projects in this area, and a theoretical framework comparable to that of the *polskas*, is, in my opinion, absent today.<sup>6</sup> Even the well-known dance and music researcher Tobias Norlind writes about the *engelskas* only in a short section sandwiched between two longer sections on the history of the *polska*.<sup>7</sup> A later example of this type of treatment is in the introduction to a general study of Swedish folk music, *Folkmusik i Sverige (Folk Music in Sweden)* by the ethnomusicologists Dan Lundberg and Gunnar Ternhag.<sup>8</sup> They describe the *engelska* as a contra dance form, stating only that:

The *engelska* has in the Swedish popular culture mainly been danced in the southern coastal counties. Quadrilles have been danced all over the country, but have survived for the longest time in south of Sweden.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to dance researchers, dance re-constructionists often describe the *engelska* from an historical perspective, sometimes providing several, named dance examples, as well as directions for the dancers. These examples usually include music notation, and frequently provide information about the tempi and the musical style of the *engelska*. Thus, paradoxically, some of the best sources of information about the *engelska* as a musical form, may be found in the texts about the *engelska* as a dance form, written by some of the dance re-constructionists. A good example of this is the

book *Gamla dansar i Skåne: Engelskor (Old Dances in Skåne. Engelskas)* by the dance re-constructionist Börje Wallin.<sup>10</sup> Here, Wallin provides instructions on how to dance the different variations and how to play the dance, including transcriptions of the melodies, indications of tempo, and so on.<sup>11</sup> An explanation for this paradox could be that dance re-constructionists often work closely with musicians, generating the need for suitable music for the dance.

The *engelska* as a musical form, was, however, thoroughly investigated in the three radio programmes produced by the music researcher, archivist, and folk musician Magnus Gustafsson and broadcast in the autumn of 2005.<sup>12</sup> His programmes discussed the early history of the *engelska* melodies, the changes they went through in Sweden, and, finally, the developments during the past thirty years. Gustafsson is the only person presented here, who discusses and presents a history of the *engelska* as a musical form. All other music researchers in the references discussed here treat the *engelska* as a dance form rather than a musical form.

One of the things Gustafsson and the dance reconstructionists have in common, is their great interest in the fact that several versions of 'The Soldiers Joy' are used all over Sweden. The texts often create the impression that this tune is the only *engelska* tune used by fiddlers. This is not the case, although it is one of the most common *engelska* tunes in Sweden.

That most work in the field of the *engelska* has been undertaken and performed by dance researchers and dance re-constructionists might be the result of the important function of the *engelska* in the folk dance revival during the 1970s. Gustafsson states that the *engelska* was then seen as a social and pedagogical complement to the more complex couple dance, the *polska*.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the most important folk dance re-constructionist in my material, Henry Sjöberg, was also important in that revival, especially in the southern parts of Sweden.

### **The history of the *engelska* as told in the documentation**

As mentioned above, sources of information about the *engelska* are found in the different historical accounts, and it seems that the *engelska* as a part of Swedish folk dance history is a required topic, yet it is not found in historical overviews of Swedish folk music. The historical view of dances in Sweden is closely connected to the development of dances in general. The *engelska* is presented as a part of an evolutionary dance history. It is, so to speak, presented as a step on the way. In some of the dance literature, this is illustrated with a dance tree (see Figure 1). These trees, even though they simplify dance history, in general, are good illustrations of how most writers present the history of the *engelska* since they show the authors' ideas of a dance history in which the simplest dances have evolved and developed into more complex ones.

The actual history of the *engelska*, as presented in various scholarly texts, is more or less the same regardless of the author. Furthermore, it is almost exclusively the early history of the *engelska* which states that during the middle of the seventeenth century stylistic English folk dances from the English court were promoted in



traits, characteristic of the *engelska* music, and traces four historical phases during which melodies and stylistic modes influenced the folk music repertoire in Sweden. These are:

1. Seventeenth century – jig melodies and a few other named tune types, often connected to the English Playford (*Dancing Master*) tradition.
2. Mid-eighteenth century – the French passion for British dance forms (country dances, longways, and, later, quadrilles), often set to French melodies.
3. 1760–1770 – reel melodies, directly from Scotland to Sweden, often straight from Scottish or English originals. Also some hornpipes.
4. First half of the nineteenth century – second wave of French melodies, stylistic, longways, in the shape of the *anglaise* and the *ecossaise*.

Gustafsson treats aspects of the development and change of the *engelska* music when it came in contact with other local music forms. He also devoted one programme to the developments from the 1970s to the present day with regard to the *engelska* as a form of music.<sup>16</sup> Besides Gustafsson and Sjöberg, however, no other authors describe the history of the *engelska* dance and/or music after it began its diffusion from the Swedish court. The establishment of the *engelska* as a part of the folk repertoire is thus largely a silent history, even though the authors' main interests are Swedish traditional folk music and dance.

### **Diffusionist theories and the geographical approaches**

In general, Swedish folk music and folk dance research can be viewed from at least two aspects: how certain features are spread, and where the feature has been documented. This means that diffusionist views of the folk music and dance are connected and intermingled with strong geographical approaches to the empirical material. The two aspects are present in texts about the *engelska* as well, regardless of author. The geographical approach is, however, most evident in texts by the dance re-constructionists.

As mentioned above, there is little interest in describing the 'life' of the *engelska* in the history as presented. The focus lies instead on describing how the English dances spread from court to court, finally reaching the Swedish court. Sjöberg's description of how the *engelska* dance moved from the Swedish court to the people, is also a classical illustration of 'das gesunkenes Kulturschaft';<sup>17</sup> in other words, the *engelska* as a dance form spread 'down' to the common class of people, where it became simpler, with fewer difficult movements.

Gustafsson's radio series was based on the idea of describing how the *engelska* music became a part of the Swedish folk repertoire, illustrated in the title of the series, *Rular, rilar och jiggår – brittisk musik på vandring österut* ('Ruls, rils and jigs – British music travelling east').<sup>18</sup> Both Sjöberg and Gustafsson mention a second possible route for the *engelska* dance and music, specifically by direct contacts between the British Isles and Sweden through their coastal shipping.

Another feature of the *engelska* is its geographical placement, important in at least two ways. Firstly, the geographical positioning of the *engelska* in the coastal areas and/or in the southern parts of Sweden. Secondly, the geographical backgrounds of the authors. The geographical view is most evident in the dance re-constructionists, who often focus on a specific region of Sweden, most frequently the one they come from themselves. The researchers, however, place the *engelska* as a dance or a music form within the Swedish national borders. For the researchers, the *engelska* is a part of a national traditional repertoire, while the dance re-constructionists present the *engelska* as a part of a local and/ or regional traditional repertoire.

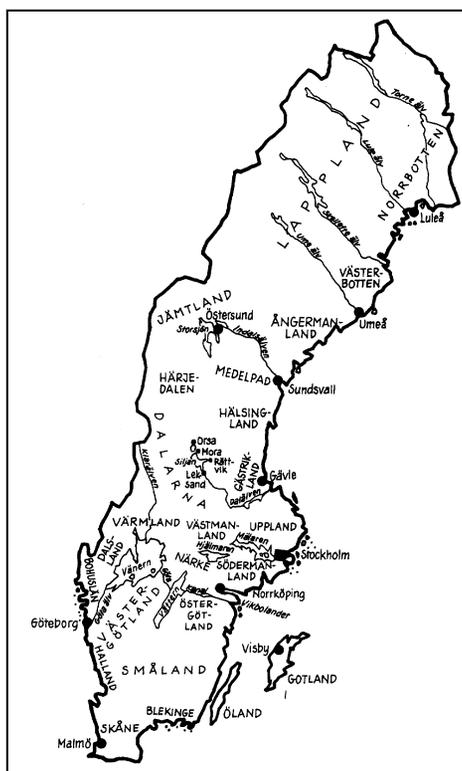


Figure 2 Swedish counties (from Dagmar Hellstam)<sup>19</sup>

The geographical placement of the *engelska* dance in the Swedish coastal areas is exemplified by the three areas with documented *engelska* dances that Sjöberg presented. He states that the *engelska* as a dance form is primarily found in the counties of Bohuslän, Skåne, and Södermanland (see Figure 2). His explanation, which I find very plausible, is the presence of interested dance collectors in these areas. He also suggested that the spread of the *engelska* in earlier times probably differs from the view created through the documentations produced by these collectors. He continues with the fact that there are also documentations of *engelska*

dances from the counties of Blekinge, Småland, and Norrbotten, and, furthermore, in the collected memories of people from Halland and Östergötland, where the *engelska* has been practised at dance occasions.<sup>20</sup>

The personal backgrounds of the authors also influence their texts. This is most obvious in regards to the choice of dance and music examples in the texts of the dance re-constructionists. However, even the radio series, which aspires to describe the *engelska* music in a national sense, is influenced in this way in the choice of music examples played in the programmes. In the three programmes, several of the examples played, originate from and/or are performed by groups and musicians from the southern parts of Sweden, with other examples from Norway.<sup>21</sup>

It should also be noted that both Gustafsson and several of the more influential dance re-constructionists are from the southern parts of Sweden. A person without prior knowledge of the Swedish traditional music and dance repertoire will therefore be exposed to *engelska* examples from these parts, especially from Småland, Södermanland, and Skåne. This is most obvious with regard to the dance descriptions. Since recordings are not included in this study, the regional dissemination of *engelskas* cannot be shown, although several such recordings exist, from Bohuslän, for example. Consequently, if such recordings were investigated thoroughly, the emphasis on southern Sweden found in texts would most likely be somewhat diminished.

### **The sources used**

A closer investigation of the kind of sources used by researchers and re-constructionists shows that they use both primary and secondary sources. The sources, and to what extent they are used by either group, is very difficult to deduce, since the primary references are almost always omitted. From the similarity of the different historical overviews, it is, however, probably fairly safe to conclude that most, if not all, researchers use the same one or two sources. This is indicated in several cases by the use of the same phrases by different authors, although references to earlier texts are not included. Presumably, one of these sources is *Dansens historia: Med särskild hänsyn till Sverige (History of the Dance: With Special Consideration to the Dance in Sweden)*, written by Tobias Norlind and published in 1941.<sup>22</sup>

The primary sources consist of two main groups. The first is contemporary documentations of occasions when the *engelska* dance (but seldom the music) has been performed. The second is older field recordings, often with the aim of documenting a cultural heritage from the 'people', and usually in written form. It is the dance re-constructionists, rather than researchers, who include such primary sources. Dance re-constructionists also tend to cite their references at a higher level than researchers. A possible explanation for this difference between dance researchers and dance re-constructionists, is that those references indicate two important features of traditional material: the geographical origin and the performer. Thus, the primary source becomes a part of placing the *engelska* dance or music documentation within a folk music and dance tradition. It could be argued, that, by providing information

about the sources used, the dance re-constructionists are able to motivate the use and revival of a specific *engelska* dance variation in the context of people interested in saving an older traditional repertoire from falling into oblivion.

### **Some concluding remarks**

Three main conclusions may be drawn from this study. The first is the observation that the *engelska* as a musical form has had trouble asserting itself against the symbolically stronger couple dance, the *polska*. This is most apparent in the texts written by the music researchers. This is unsurprising since the same phenomenon applies to other (often more modern) musical forms, such as polkas, mazurkas, etc. The second conclusion is that it seems as though the *engelska* as a dance form has a stronger position than the *engelska* as a musical form. This might be related to the position that the *engelska* has occupied, particularly with respect to the folk dance revival of the 1970s. Even though recordings are not included in this study, in my own experience, *engelska* tunes are generally not recorded to the same extent as other types of tunes. The third conclusion is that there is generally a greater emphasis on the early history of the *engelska* than on the recent developments.

This study of texts about the *engelska* as a dance and music provide a first step towards learning more about the pioneer folk dance and music scholars in this field. What have they reconstructed? What are their sources, and how have they been used? Are there any distortions regarding their presentation of the *engelska* history? Are they reliable and critical in their research, or is it necessary to be cautious and critical when using them as an introduction to the subject?

The credibility of the *engelska* texts is very hard to evaluate, particularly regarding the history. The material studied here, for instance, includes only two examples, by Gustafsson and by Sjöberg, of a critical discussion conducted about the *engelska* as a dance and/or music form. The other texts used here regard the history of the *engelska* as a given fact without any indication of a critical view towards their unreferenced sources. Consequently, since there is no information about the sources, it is extremely difficult to estimate their reliability or to know if the sources were correctly understood by the authors. Thus it is most important to approach any texts on the *engelska* with a very critical eye, especially where descriptions of the history of the dance/music are concerned.

Several of the features concerning the texts about the *engelska* described above are common to other fields of study within Swedish folk music and dance research. One feature is the emphasis on geography – where the local and/or the regional level is often more important than the national. In my own experience of studying Swedish folk music and dance, there is a general interest in describing how the dances and musical forms have spread. As encountered in the sources to this study of the *engelska*, many texts on Swedish folk music and dance contain an underlying urge to, in some way, discuss music and dance from the basis of diffusionist theories. This is the case regardless of whether the author is a researcher or a re-constructionist, although it is seldom mentioned by the authors themselves and seems to be taken

for granted as an obvious part of the research into almost all kinds of folk music and dance, as well as folk traditions.

Another outcome of this study of *engelska* texts has been to acknowledge the importance of the individual role of the researcher or re-constructionist. Knowledge of the author's identity, background, aims, and so forth, is important to our understanding both of the texts studied and their contents. I would suggest that this is also the case for other areas of folklore studies. It is my experience, however, that it is easier to see this connection between personal background and field of study with re-constructionists than with researchers.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Tobias Larsson for reading and commenting on this text.

<sup>2</sup> *Engelska* – 'the English' – is a dance form that is performed by at least three people, often more, and includes figures of different kinds. The *engelska* music is often played rather quickly, and many of the tunes are variations of tunes that have spread throughout Europe, for example, 'The Soldiers Joy'.

<sup>3</sup> *Polska* is a triple-metre folk dance and music form regarded by many as the Swedish national dance.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Sjöberg, *Dans i lustgården: Folklig dans under fyra århundraden* (Nyköping: Sörmlands museums förlag, 2005), pp. 59–72; and Henry Sjöberg, *Folkets danser* (Stockholm: Brevskolan, 1980), pp. 109–116.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Dan Lundberg and Gunnar Ternhag, *Folkmusik i Sverige* (Hedemora: Gidlunds förlag, 2005), p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> For further studies of the *polska*, see Märta Ramsten (ed.), *The Polish Dance in Scandinavia and Poland: Ethnomusicological Studies* (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv), 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Tobias Norlind, *Svensk folkmusik och folkdans* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1930), pp. 132, 133.

<sup>8</sup> Lundberg and Ternhag, *Folkmusik i Sverige*.

<sup>9</sup> Lundberg and Ternhag, *Folkmusik i Sverige*, p. 107. My translation; original text: 'I den svenska folkkulturen har engelskor dansats främst i de södra kustlandskapen. Kadriljer har dansats i hela landet, men har levt kvar längst i södra Sverige.'

<sup>10</sup> Börje Wallin, *Gamla dansar i Skåne: Engelskor* (Helsingborg: Sonja and Börje Wallin, 1976). Skåne is the southernmost area of Sweden.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example Wallin (1976), p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> *Rular, rilar och jiggas – brittisk musik på vandring österut* (Swedish Radio, P2, 20051110, 20051117, 20051124).

<sup>13</sup> *Rular, rilar och jiggas – brittisk musik på vandring österut* (Swedish Radio, P2, 20051124).

<sup>14</sup> Dagmar Hellstam (ed.), *Folkdanser. 1 Norden* (Göteborg: Leif Stegeland Förlag AB, 1981), p. 11, used with permission.

<sup>15</sup> Sjöberg (2005), p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Rular, rilar och jiggas – brittisk musik på vandring österut* (Swedish Radio, P2, 20051110, 20051117, 20051124).

<sup>17</sup> Hans Naumann, cited in Philip V. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> *Rular, rilar och jiggas – brittisk musik på vandring österut* (Swedish Radio, P2, 20051110, 20051117, 20051124).

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<sup>19</sup> Hellstam (ed.), *Folkdanser*, p. 123, used with permission.

<sup>20</sup> Sjöberg (2005), p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> Radio programme: *Rular, rilar och jigggar – brittisk musik på vandring österut* (Swedish Radio, P2, 20051110, 20051117, 20051124).

<sup>22</sup> Tobias Norlind, *Dansens historia: Med särskild hänsyn till Sverige (History of the Dance: With Special Consideration to the Dance in Sweden)* (Stockholm: Nordisk rotogravyr, 1941), pp. 72, 73.