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romanser

25 SWEDISH SONGS

with Guide to Swedish Lyric Diction



GEHRMANS
MUSIKFÖRLAG

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Romanser

The Art Song of Sweden

Scandinavian song has lately caught the imagination and interest of singers looking to add interesting new repertoire in non-standard languages to their recitals. Swedish song, or *romanser* as they are known in Scandinavia, offers a wealth of extraordinarily beautiful repertoire choices for English-speaking singers. The sounds of the Swedish language should not be problematic for singers already familiar with the challenges of singing in German, French, Italian and Russian, and who are accustomed to using dictionaries and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in their song preparation. New scholarly editions of songs by Scandinavian composers such as Norwegian Edvard Grieg and Finnish Jean Sibelius are already available here in the United States, but, until recently, the songs of Swedish composers have not been as readily available. For singers wanting to embark on a rewarding exploration of this beautiful repertoire, there has never been a better time. Recordings are plentiful, and, while it is still not an easy task to locate the sheet music, more options are becoming available as publishers move to offer their music on-line. To complete this unique anthology of Sweden's most beloved art songs, the song texts are also available as on-line audio recordings, read by a native Swedish speaker.

But where to begin? There are many Swedish composers of the last century whose songs are featured on the recordings of the most well known singers of the genre. Anne Sofie von Otter, Karita Mattila, Birgit Nilsson, Elizabeth Söderström, Håkan Hagegård, to name only a few, have all recorded songs in various Scandinavian languages, including Swedish. But for singers and teachers wishing to begin an exploration of the Swedish song repertoire, some of the giants of the *romanser* genre represented in this anthology provide an excellent starting point. Singers will be richly rewarded by beginning with the songs of these thirteen composers, who represent the evolution of *romanser* from the flowering of late romantic art song in Sweden to the late 20th century. These songs contain the most common themes in Swedish poetry: the forest, the sea, the longing for summer and light after the short dark days of winter and the holidays that are a fusion of pagan and Christian ritual. The IPA transcriptions and guide to Swedish diction contained here have been created to provide an introduction to the language for singers, voice teachers and collaborative pianists. I have chosen to limit the songs included in this anthology to settings of Swedish poetry only, although Swedish composers have composed song settings of English, Dutch, Norwegian and Finnish texts. Swedish songs by non-Swedish composers are also not included. In the interest of creating an introduction to Swedish song, I have chosen only Swedish composers and Swedish texts for this anthology.

The evolution of the Swedish *romans* began with the court of Gustavus III, the unfortunate king whose assassination was the subject of Verdi's opera *Un Ballo in Maschera*. Gustavus III (1746–1792) was a great supporter of the arts in Sweden. He

Hugo Alfvén (1872–1960)

Skogen sover

No. 6 from *Sju Dikter av Ernest Thiel* [Seven Poems by Ernest Thiel] Op. 28 (1908)

Pioner

No. 2 from *Tre Österlingssånger* [Three Österling-songs] Op. 22 (1905)

Hugo Alfvén was one of the most important figures in the music of Swedish romantic nationalism, and made his mark in many genres, including choral, symphonic and song. He lived long enough to be considered a reactionary at the end of his career, yet in the beginning was considered quite progressive. *Skogen sover* is from a group of Alfvén's earlier songs, written at the beginning of the 20th century. The poet, Ernest Thiel (1859–1947), was a Swedish financier and art collector whose villa in Stockholm, Thielska Galleriet, on the island of Djurgården, houses one of the most important collection of Scandinavian art in the world today. *Skogen sover* paints a beautiful picture of the Swedish forest at the time of *midsommar* (midsummer), still one of the most important holidays of the Swedish calendar. *Pioner*, from the poet Anders Österling's (1884–1981) *Grinden åt havet* (The gate to the sea), is a strong and abrasive song, which portrays the fragile peonies of the title unable to stand against the brutal forces of the earth.

Suggestions for further study:

- › *Jag längtar dig* (Sju Dikter Op. 28:5)
- › *Saa tag mit hjerte*

Skogen sover

'sku:gən 'so:vər

The forest sleeps

*The forest sleeps, a ray of sunlight
flickers in the firmament.*

Day stands guard through the June night.

Her merry laughter has just fallen silent.

Already she is asleep.

I sat down silent at her side.

Love watches over its treasure,

love watches in the June night.

© Ernest Thiel

'sku:gən	'so:vər	'strim:an	po:	'fès:tət	'fləm:tar	mat:
Skogen	sover,	strimman	på	fästet	flämtar	mat.
The forest	sleeps,	the ray	on the	firmament	flickers	feebly.

'dø:gən	'vø:kar	i	'jæ:ni_nat:
Dagen	vakar	i	juninatt.
The day	watches	in	June night.

'tys:tnat	hø:r	nys:	'hèn:əs	'mèn:tra	skrat:	'rè:dan	høn:	'so:vər
Tystnat	har	nyss	hennes	muntra	skratt,	redan	hon	sover.
Silenced	has	just	her	merry	laughter,	already	she	sleeps.

Skogen sover

Ernest Thiel

Hugo Alfvén

Andantino *pp*

Sko - - - gen

so - ver. Strim - man på fäs - tet fläm - tar matt.

sempre poco arpeggio *poco*

Da - gen va - kar i ju - - ni - natt.

Gunnar de Frumerie (1908–1987)

Du är min Afrodite

No. 5 from *Hjärtats sånger* [Songs of the Heart] Op. 27 (1942)

När du sluter mina ögon

No. 1 from *Hjärtats sånger* [Songs of the Heart] Op. 27 (1942)

Som en våg

No. 6 from *Hjärtats sånger* [Songs of the Heart] Op. 27 (1942)

These three songs from the six of Frumerie's 1942 song cycle are, in turn, sweeping and passionate, quietly joy-filled, and meditative. The composer's choice of poetic images reflects the typical Nordic obsession with the sea. In addition to being one of Sweden's foremost composers, Frumerie enjoyed a multi-faceted career as pianist and teacher. Stylistically, his music runs the gamut from Baroque and classical inspirations to that of the traditional folk music of Sweden. He is considered one of the country's most important composers of 20th century *romanser*. The influence of impressionism on Frumerie's music (he was strongly affected by the music of Debussy while studying in Paris) is especially obvious here in these settings of the poems of Swedish poet Pär Lagerkvist (1891–1974). Lagerkvist is considered one of the first modernists among Swedish poets, whose early work was tied to Expressionism and Cubism in art. In *Hjärtats sånger*, Lagerkvist returned to an archaic, rhyming verse style which perfectly expressed the lifelong tension between his early religious upbringing and his existential despair. From the urgency and dramatic flair of *Du är min Afrodite*, to the simple declarative vocal line of *När du sluter mina ögon* and the murmuring dream-like recitative of *Som en våg*, one can see examples of the exceptional sensitivity to text displayed by Frumerie in all of his *romanser*. Singers studying this particular set of songs should be mindful of Frumerie's desire that they be sung with the most elegant *högsvenska* diction.

Suggestions for further study:

- › *Det är vackrast när det skymmer* (Två romanser Op. 24:1)
- › *Det kom ett brev* (Två romanser Op. 24:2)

Du är min Afrodite

dʉ: æ:r mɪn: af:ru'di:tɛ

You are my Aphrodite

*You are my Aphrodite, born out of the sea,
as light as the wave's foam of ocean spray
lifted in the sunlight.
And you are my deep dark sea,
my life, my dark grave,
my heart's unrest, a heavy peace,
all that has never been allowed
to live in the sun.*

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dʉ	æ:r	mɪn:	af:ru'di:tɛ	dɛn	ʉ:r	'hɔ:vət	'føed:a
Du	är	min	Afrodite,	den	ur	havet	födda,
You	are	my	Aphrodite,	the one	out of	the sea	born,

Du är min Afrodite

Pär Lagerkvist

Gunnar de Frumerie

Allegro appassionato

f
Du är min Af - ro -

mf
di - - te, den ur ha - vet

föd - da, så ljus som vå - gens

dri - va av skum i

cresc.