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DISPLAYING DIVERSITY ON STAGE:

THE ROLE OF FOLKMUSIC AND DANCE IN BLANDSVERIGE[1]

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All societies create their own history, and in the same way they create their primitives (Karl Marx)

Introduction.

In ethnomusicology , one of the main objects of investigation has been traditional music and dance, seen as cultural expressions of groups of some kind. There is a long history of such studies from the 1600 century and on, describing the musical cultures of groups made up of “savages", "primitives", "folk", “peasants", "working class", "ethnic groups", “immigrants" and so on. A serious problem for ethnomusicology is that this idea of music and dance as collective expressions of cultural identity has all too easily been taken for granted, which has led to a strong tendency over the years to search for musical forms that can be described as pure, authentic, or true expressions of a group. Forms of mixed or uncertain origin have been neglected, or pejoratively described as hybrid, bastard, creole, acculturated or Westernized (Kartomi 1981) .

[1] This article is a revised version of a paper written for and read at theAnglo-Swedish conference on Ethnomusicology, held in Cambridge, August 5-10 1989.

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In recent years there have been attempts to find concepts and methods for a rather different type of studies, dealing with how music is used in a multicultural situation, the processes of musical contact and interchange, the interplay between musics of different kinds, the constant reinterpretation of music as symbol etc. etc. For example, in her article from 1981 Margaret Kartomi has outlined some basic processes of musical culture contact, such as rejection, transfer, pluralistic coexistence, abandoment and impoverishment (Kartomi 1981). Her discussion centers around the musics of southeast Asia and Australia, but much of the described processes seems to cover also the European musical scene. More recently Mark Slobin has tried to identify some general processes of musical interchange in the USA, which he calls domestication, ethnic convergance, replacement and reinterpretation (Slobin & Ronström 1989). Also of interest here are the studies by Bob Klymasz of the Ukrainians in Canada (Klymasz 1972, 1973). These attempts seem to show the way to a rich and promising field for ethnomusicological research.

Also in anthropology and ethnology there has been a radical questioning of what could be called the “culturalism" of many older studies: from recorded actual behaviour by a small number of people in specific situations is deducted an abstract system of values or beliefs, which is then attributed to a much bigger number of people and used to explain their behaviour also in radically different types of situations. The main underlying idea of this kind of "culturalism” is that culture is to be understood as "collective consciousness", a coherent system distributed equally among the members of a distinctive unit of people (a group of some kind). But, as Clifford Geertz has pointed out:

> coherence cannot be the major test of validity for a cultural description. Cultural systerns must have a minimal degree of coherence , else we would not call them systerns (...) But there is nothing so coherent as a paranoid' s delusions or a swindler's story (Geertz 1973:171)

While many older studies have been dealing mainly with the culture of a given group, there is now a tendency among ethnologists and anthropologists to start asking questions about how such groups come into being, what forms they use to express themselves as different from others, how they are categorized, how groups constantly interplay and mix with each other, and so on. Blandsverige is a new research project of this latter type, at the Institutet för folklivsforskning (Department of Ethnology) in Stockholm. Bland, "blend” or "mixture”, is meant to indicate the main object, social and cultural diversity. Sverige, indicates the main

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unit of observation and analysis. Stated somewhat more theoretically, the focus of the study is upon social and cultural organisation of diversity (cf Hannerz 1989).

How is it at all possible to describe social and cultural diversity? One possibility is to see it as a mix of fluids, such as in a long drink, where it is no longer possible to identify the original ingredients. Another possibility is to see it as a mosaic, made from many differently coloured stones. Each stone is an easily distinguished unit and only on a higher level of abstraction the pattern becomes visible. It seems clear that in Sweden today both these types exist. Some forms of expression and types of behaviour mix like fluids in a drink, and the result is something entirely new. Other forms may continue to exist basicly unaffected by the others, like the stones in a mosaic. A third variation, described by Fredrik Barth from Sohar in Oman, is when people uphold their separate cultural systerns, and at the same time develope a type of metaculture for specifically mu1ticultural situations, a praxis based on a few overarching principles that everbody can adhere to (Barth 1983). It is possible that such a “metaculture" is slowly developing in Sweden today. Whatever metaphors that are used, it is important not to presuppose that interaction between peoples of different kinds can be described according to some kind of standard formulas. Very much research on interethnic relations seems to have done just that, the most common formulas being ethnic isolation, gradual acculturation and straightline assimilation.

A brief outline of the research project Blandsverige

“Sweden was formerly an exceptionally homogenous society." "During the last twenty years Sweden has become a multi-cultural society.” These are two very common statements about Sweden, which I have found in a vast number of sociological, ethnological and anthropological texts on contemporary life in Sweden. The statements are used as a rhetoric device, to establish a borderline which will help to organize the text in two parts - before and after. The same kind of statements can be found also in newspapers, booklets, heard in Tv programs and in everday speech (Ronström 1989a).

In some ways these statements are of course true. During the last twenty years television and radio has greatly expanded our views of the world. The ever growing tourist industry has brought millions of Swedes in close contact with ways of living in foreign countries. The

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great wave of immigration of the 1960's brought people of many different kinds to Sweden. Today there are more than 100 nationalities only in Stockholm.

But, even if the number of ethnic groups has increased and even if we have got a greater variation in lifestyles, worldviews and ways of thinking today than before, Sweden was formerly not a homogenous society. Since very long Sweden has been a country of immigration (Arnstberg & Ehn 1976). People have constantly brought objects, values, beliefs and ways of living back and forth over its borders. Ethnological research has convincingly showed great variation in lifestyles and ways of thinking in Sweden many centuries back.[2] A point of departure for the project is that what has changed during the last 20 years is not only the Swedish society itself, but the commonly accepted concepts, pictures and programs that are used to describe Sweden with, and at a higher level of abstraction, sofie basic elernents in the systerns of social and cultural classification and categorization.

It is these concepts, pictures and programs of and for Sweden as a qualitatively new and mixed society that we are going to stody in our project. What are the systerns for categorizing and organizing social and cultural differences? How do these systems work and under what circumstances do they become relevant? Very fast new ideas about Sweden as a multicultural and mixed society have become socially meaningful. In everyday interaction, courses, conferences, television programs, books, specialised magazines etc etc, the "new heterogenous and multi-cultural Sweden", the mixed Sweden, Blandsverige, is spelled out and given form and substance. All this will provide material for our studies.

There are three especially important questions here:
(l) How are the ideas about and programs for Sweden as a multicultaral society being created?
(2) How and along which channels are they spread?
(3) How are they used in different situations and how dothey get socially effective and meaningful?

[2] The ethnologist Sigurd Erixons grand project Atlas över svensk folkkultur is a good example. Among more recent works, see for example Frykman & Löfgren 1979, 1985.

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The project has three parts. The first deals on the one hand with the official programs for a multicultural society, and on the other with praxis, the forms of social life which are marked by cultural complexity.The focus is upon studies of everday interaction in such arenas where people with different social and cultural backgrounds come together .

The second part deals with social categorizations of diversity, how such concepts as "culture" and "ethnicity" become meaningful as tools for recognizing differences among people.The "field" is a small industrial town in western Sweden were workers from many countries have been living together since the beginning of this century .In this study we will look especially into which principles for social categorization that have been used, and what forms they have been given, during the last 60 years. Here it will be possible to see what happens when the ideas about and programs for organisation of diversity changes over time.

The third part deals with the expressive forms that people use to dramatise cultural complexity .When people with many different backgrounds live together and, as recently in Sweden, ethnicity becomes a major organizing principle, very often people turn to non-verbal expressive forms appealing to ears, eyes and the stomach when they want to give a picture of themselves as a special kind of people (Slobin & Ronström 1989, Klein 1988). Clothes, food, dances and music become among the most important expressions of ethnic identity and recognized expressive specialists, especially musicians and dancers, become important as bearers of symbolic forms wbich are central to the different ethnic groups. Music and dance seems to be among the most powerful symbols for establisbing and maintaining feelings of af finity , but also of difference. We may only think of how such groups as "punkers", "rockers", "breakers", "hip-hoppers" make use of music and dance to create a border between "us" and "them".

Folk music and folk dance on stage: An expressive form of diversity.

One of the most used and socially effective genres for publicly expressing national and ethnic affinities and differences is "folklore" performances.[3] Such performances normally include folk dance, folk music, folk costumes, sometimes also food of a "folk" type, and a large

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number of other visual and audial symbols (cf Dubinskas 1981, Dahlig 1987, Ronström 1986). Folklore performances is an international genre of art, where music and dance is organized according to well established conventional patterns. In the rhetorics of the genre, words like "traditional", "authentic" and "original" are often used, emphasizing the local, regional or national origin of the music and dance. Nevertheless, like many other modern genres of stage performances, it has a very international character. In fact the "folklore" genre is probably the most widespread of all which presents music and dance on stage. A study of such folklore performances therefore seems to allow for comparisons between the use of folklore performances in Sweden and in other countries. Also, it seems that such a study may provide a possibility to get insights into the intricate interplay between the messages people want to express and the conventional fonns they use.

The invandrare

The research project Blandsverige aims at answering general questions about the organisation of diversity in Sweden. But since so much of today's important questions about "we" and "them" seem to focus upon the many immigrants that have come to Sweden during the last 25 years, we necessarily have to take questions about ethnicity and ethnic relations into special consideration.

In Sweden immigrants are called *invandrare*. This is a rather new social category, established only in the late 1960's. The word is old, but around 1965 it was launched by people in the state bureaucracy on the grounds that it was more "friendly" and less pejorative than the older *utlänning*, foreigner.[4] In very short time *invandrare* became the officially accepted term. Around it a huge new bureaucracy evolved, with many new professions specially designed to work with and for the *invandrare*, in the social security system, the libraries, schools, television and radio etc. New subjects appeared in our schools, such as *hemspråk* ("home language", mothertongue) and *invandrarkunskap* (knowledge about immigrants). A lot of

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[3] In American folkloristics both 'folklore' and 'performance' have been given radically different meanings than those intended here. My use of the words in this article refers to folk music and folk dance shows on stage.
[4] An important source seems to have been the novelist Wilhelm Moberg, who used the word 'invandrare' for Swedish emigrants to the USA in the last century .The book Invandrarna was a bestseller in the late 50's and the early 60's. Another important source and also a model for later descriptions of the invandrare was a social study published 1964, 222 Stockholmspojkar by Anna Lisa Kälvesten and Gustav Jonsson. In this study invandrare is used for any kind of people from the countryside moving to Stockholm.

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other new concepts and words were created, among them *invandrarmusik* (immigrant music) *invandrarmat* (immigrant food) (Ronström 1989a).

In only about 20 years *invandrare* has become a powerful concept. The *invandrare* today is a special social category with many specific characteristics, of which music and dance are not among the least important. .Officially *invandrare* is anybody that has moved to Sweden with an intention to stay more than 6 months. However, it seems clear that the core of the concept in everyday language refers to the peasants and workers of southeast Europe who came to Sweden in the late 1960's and early 1970's.[5] Along with the shaping of this new category also the Swedes themselves more. and more have become cast as an ethnic group among the others. "Swedishness" has become a popular subject for heated discussions among common people, and also an object for academic studies (cf Daun 1989).

One way to explain this recent development in Sweden that seems fruitful, is to see immigrants and ethnic groups as consequences of a system of categorization. Rather than the cause of this system (cf Lihtman 1981:199). If so, there must have been an important change in the system of categorization and organisation of diversity in Sweden, beginning in the 1960's, when older class-based concepts gradually were replaced by new, based on an ethnic ideology.[6] An important hypothesis is that it would not have been possible to establish the new category invandrare so easily and quickly, where it not for the existence of other and older social categories which the 'invandrare' could be modelled upon.

The "folk"as a model for the invandrare.

One of these important predecessors in the role as the "primitive", or "other", in society is "the folk".[7] From ethnological research we know a great deal about when, where and how the

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[5] A parallell is the English 'immigrant', which according to the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz means especially Caribbeans and Blacks (Hannerz 1981:129).

[6] I am following Dan R. Aronson. who argues that ethnicity is a particular kind of ideology "of and for value dissenus and disengagement from an inclusive sociopolitical arena, that is, for pursuing major values deemed not shared by others in the arena. I distinguish ethnic ideologies first from class ideologies which assume or call for value consensus and scarce goods deemed shared by the total arena" (Aronson 1976: 12!). According to the class ideology justice and equality is tobe treated in the same way as everybody else. In principle all citizens share the same rights and obligations. According to the ethnic ideology justice and equality is to be treated unequally, since there are basic racial, cultural, social or other differences between groups to be recognized in the society.

[7] Another obvious model which I will not discuss here is "the worker".

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concept "folk" was created and spread. The word is old, but it was given a new role in the 18th century. With support from French philosophers, German intellectuals made "folk" into one of the most important concepts in our time.

In the 1600th and 1700th centuries colonization of new land overseas had brought the ruling classes in Europe in direct contact with a great variety of customs and beliefs. Fascinated by the new discoveries, scientists began to develope ways of examining and describing the primitive peoples of Africa, Australia, Westindies etc. Towards the end of the 18th century this interest for the primitive and strange in far away countries included also the primitive among the own population. The English historian Peter Burke writes:

> From studies ofcustoms in Tahiti oramong the Iroquese it was only a small step for the French intellectuals to the study of their own peasants, who in their opinion were scarcely less distant in beliefs or ways of living (Burke 1983 :29, my translation from Swedish).

Politicians, philosophers, scientists took part in the making of the 'folk' as a new social category .What is important here is that when the folk was to be described and analyzed, there were already established conventional forms and genres to make use of. The folk was cast in much the same form as the foreign primitives, the 'savages', and that is an important reason why in pictures and texts these categories came to share so many attributes.

The notion of the 'folk' very fast became a weapon in the hands of the intellectuals and the bourgeoisie, a weapon that could be turned against the kings and the noble class. The German intellegentia had grown during the 18th century, but it was still completely without political power. The emperor Friedrich the Great and his court spoke French and saw themselves as civilized people in a country of barbarians, with an awkward language and barbarian customs (Elias 1978:12). Striving for political and economical power the intellectuals rejected the superticial fancy courtly manners and instead turned to the 'folk'. People like Goethe, Schiller, Herder and the Grimm brothers helped to shape the picture of the folk as a category more natural, true and rightueos than the noble classes. During the last years of the 18th century not only words like"folk songs""folk tales""folk culture" was invented and spread all over Europe, but also "folk power", "folk opinion" and "folk oppression"(Rehnberg 1976).
During the 19th century the bourgeoisie gradually took over the political and economical power in many Western European states. But in the end of the last century the growing

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working class began to aspire for power and their organizations slowly became a threat to the established centers of power. Again politicians, philosophers, artists and scientists among the bourgeoisie raised the 'folk' as a weapon, but this time against the workers and the fast spreading devastating influences of modern city life.

The center of the concept of the folk was clearly the "vulgus in populo", the peasantry of Northwestern Europe, but it was nevertheless used also as a synonym for all citizens, the whole population (except of course for the court and the king). Now the workers were to be excluded from the folk. For the bourgeoisie the peasantry became the true folk, the bearers of good moral, a sound life, traditional values, in short, the antipode of the working class, whose lifestyles had to be fought by all possible means. In Sweden, this struggle was often symbolically represented as a struggle between the violin, the traditional instrument of the Swedish peasants (and, of course, the upper class), and the accordeon, the new, factory made instrument of the working class youth in the cities.

It is during this period that the first folklore groups were created in Sweden, among students in Uppsala, and parallells can be found everywhere in Europe. Through performances of folk dances and folk music by the se new groups, the ideas about the folk as something especially valuable were effectively spread outside the narrow circles of the intellectuals. During the following decades folklore performances on stage became an established genre in its own right.

After the second world war many of the newly formed states in eastern Europe began to use folklore performances for new purposes. Now the folk was again taken to mean the population, the nation. One reason for this is obvious enough: in most Eastern European countries the peasants formed the overwhelming majority of the population, in some well over 90%. Another reason, and perhaps a more important one, is the fast spreading of ideas about the "folk", stemming from marxist-leninist rhetorics. In 1948 desicions were taken among the cultural ministers of the new folk republics to reject "cosmopolitism" and instead propagate a new kind of socialist popular. culture based on national folk customs. State folklore ensembles were created in the following years in the Soviet republics, in Poland, GDR, Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (Dahlig 1987, Ronström 1989d). These ensembles were intended to represent folk culture and national culture as one and the same

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thing, in front of audiences in the own country, and, very important here, audiences in foreign countries. Already in the late 19th century many national symbols had been made an integral part of folklore performances, but now they were foregrounded and given new meanings.

In Sweden today folklore perfonnances have became one of the more important ways for immigrants to display their "ethnic identity", as it is commonly expressed. They creatively make use of a genre which has been existing since at least a hundred years, for their new and own purposes. But my point is that whatever they intend to express by performing folk dances and folk music, the pictures of themselves and the messages they give will be heavily affected and marked by all the different layers of meaning invested into the concept of the folk and the genre of folklore perfonnances during the last two centuries.

By using folklore performances the *invandrare* will in some ways come to resemble the "savages", the "primitive" peoples of Africa and America. They also will come to resemble the folk, the peasantry of North Western Europe, as opposed to both the upper classes and the working class. Through the many connections between the folk and the nation, the immigrants cannot help to be seen as representatives not only of a foreign folk, but also of a foreign nation. The *invandrare* may be a new and special category of Swedish citizens, but they are also seen and treated as a kind of ambassador.s for their native country, and as such they are assumed to bear a special responsibility for what happens "back home", whether they like it or not.

From the way of thinking about social categories that has been briefly outlined above, it follows that ethnicity and national identity are to be seen as phenomena that to a very high degree rests upon the competence to perfonn certain kind of expressive behaviour in events that are framed in special ways. The question is not so much who are the Swedes, Kurds or Yugoslavs, but when, where and how do they perform as Kurds, Yugoslavs etc (Moerman 1965, Ronström 1988). And, as I have tried to show, one of the forms used to display ethnic identies publicly is folklore perfonnances, staged folk music and folk dance shows (see also Ronström 1989c). Musicians and dancers become bearers of important ethnic symbols. But musicians and dancers are not only reproducing, they are also active and creative artists, who constantly change and transfonn these same symbolic forms, whatever powers there may be striving to control them. Here is another intricate interplay to study carefully.

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The research project Blandsverige has a broad and very general approach, focusing upon social and cultural organisation of diversity. But among the more specific questions we might be able to throw some light upon through the project, are what kind of intercultural musical processes that can be found in Sweden today, and how music and dance is used to organize social and cultural diversity. We also hope to be able to clarify some points about the interplay between programs of and for reality, and last but not least, about the interplay between the messages people want to express and the forms of expression they use.

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