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The **säckpipa** (bagpipe) is a reed instrument that was in use in Sweden at least as early as the middle 1500's, and enjoyed popularity longest in Dalarna, where the last tradition-bearer passed away in the 1940's. The Swedish säckpipa usually had three pipes: one to blow air into the bag, one with finger holes to play a melody, and one drone.

Swedish **pipor** are end-blown flutes like recorders and tin whistles. Pipor, with the lur and kohorn, are associated with fäbod culture, but while the latter were most used to convey messages over distance, pipor were used to make music. Pipor were of many different regional forms and names; for instance: spilåpipa (*spilå* - Elfdalian for *to play*), låtpipa (*låt* can mean *song*), offerdalspipa (a pipe from Offerdal, Jämtland), and härjedalspipa (from the landskap Härjedalen).



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What about the **dragspel** (accordion)? Jan Ling (1934-2013, a Swedish music scholar) says this:

“...Considerably larger changes (to traditional folkmusik) occurred due to the accordion finding widespread acceptance among the common people after 1850. It did not fit at all with the older melodies that were often in a minor key, and a change in repertoire took place that was not kindly looked upon by the folkmusik collectors of the time.”

The above quote is translated from *Svensk folkmusik: Bondens musik i helg och söcken* by Jan Ling, which is also the primary source of information used in this brochure.

For playlists of Swedish folk music and recordings of many of these instruments, visit [thestorystugan.com/music](http://thestorystugan.com/music).

# A Selection of Swedish Folk Instruments



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The **nyckelharpa** (keyed violin) is a bowed instrument like a violin with two main exceptions: the strings are shortened with keys rather than directly with the fingertips, and the nyckelharpa has sympathetic or resonance strings that are not directly played at all, but rather sound in resonance with the main strings. Older, more traditional nyckelharpor also have a drone string, which is played by the bow but not shortened with keys – that is, it plays but one note, and that most all the time.

By the 1600's it was already considered an old instrument, an instrument of the people. Over time it gave way to the more familiar (to us today) fiddle, and itself has changed to fit shifting values in folkmusik: the earliest evidence points to nyckelharpor having a range of 10 to 12 notes, while most modern nyckelharpor are chromatic with 30 to 40 possible notes.





Träskofiol  
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Statens musikverk  
Photographer: Mikael Bodner

The **fiol** (violin) probably came to Sweden in the middle of the 1600's, and was widespread among the common people within 100 years.

A curious variant of the fiddle is the **träskofiol**, a type of fiddle found in northern Skåne. Using a wooden shoe for the resonance box, it could be considered a "poor man's fiddle," and is probably not the result of an older tradition.

Many people are aware of the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle, which is like a violin with the addition of 4 or 5 sympathetic strings, but Sweden has its own tradition of resonating fiddles, today called **dubbeldäckare**.



Dubbeldäckare  
(CC BY-SA 4.0)  
I99jonma

Like the nyckelharpa, the **hjulgiga** (hurdy-gurdy) has a key mechanism and drone strings, but it requires no bow. Instead, the strings are played by a crank-driven wooden disc whose circumference is coated with resin and possibly horse hair. By the end of the 1800's, use of the hurdy-gurdy had died out.



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Photographer: Hans Skoglund

The **hummel** (drone zither) is an instrument with one melody string placed over a fingerboard with frets and several further strings that are strummed (not bowed), but not shortened. The earliest evidence for its use in Sweden is from the late 1600's, and by the end of the 1800's it was nearly completely out of use.



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Photographer: Mikael Bodner

The **stråkharpa** or **tagelharpa** is an older form of bowed harp that persisted into the 1900's only in Swedish areas outside the national borders, namely in Estonia and Finland. Very similar to the Finnish jouhikko, the string(s) were played by pressing the fingers against the melodi string, with at least one drone string.



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Based on a Danish model, Swedish pastor Johan Dillner popularized the **psalmodikon** as an inexpensive alternative to the organ. Usually made with one melody string and several drone strings, it had a stepped fingerboard and was played with a bow. The psalmodikon quickly became popular with poorer congregations and traveling preachers, for home worship services and for musical instruction.