

Kulning – herding calls from Sweden

performed by

Susanne Rosenberg, singer
together with Sven Ahlbäck, fiddler

Abstract:

Kulning - Herding calls, is a special high-pitched vocal technique, a vocal means of expression, mainly used by women in the grazing pastures in Scandinavia. It has been used at least since the Middle Age and functions primarily as a means of communication between the shepherdess and the animal and can be heard many miles away. Today kulning – herding calls are used in many different forms and surroundings: In concerts, as an ingredient in new compositions, as a vocal technique and therefore it still lives even though the grazing pastures are not so common any longer.

Susanne Rosenberg, Swedish folk singer, artist and lecturer, presents a live performance of Kulning- herding calls with comments together with the fiddler Sven Ahlbäck.

This paper originates from notes used for a live presentation/ concert held at the “Istituto Svedese di Studi Classici a Roma” at the PECUS conference and wasn’t originally intended to be published as a paper. I have made some small changes in the manuscript, so that it should better fit in with the demand one should have on a written paper. But it still has the obvious characteristics of a live presentation. Hence, a good advice would be for the reader to listen to the recording of the music along with reading the paper to grasp the intension of the performance (<http://hem.passagen.se/susannerosenberg/>).

Herding calls

Vallåtar från Gammelboning

in tradition after Nynäs-Stina Sundman, Gästrikland, Sweden

Performed by Susanne Rosenberg, voice

Rikorpi låten

Traditional tune after the fiddler Gustaf Jernberg originating from Gästrikland, Sweden

Performed by Sven Ahlbäck, fiddle

We started off the concert with a traditional herding call from the middle of Sweden, often called “kulning”. And after that you heard a polska – a traditional fiddle tune – based on a herding call.

There is much to say about both the environment and of this music itself regarding this specific tradition. I will try to bring about some feeling of the music, how it sounds when sung and played and also to provide some explanation. The tradition of using “kulning” in its natural environment, the Swedish pastoral landscape, Anna Ivarsdotter will speak more about in her paper.

As you may have understood by listening, the herding call has no lyrics. You sing on the sounds that feels good and that helps you to get the message through! That doesn’t mean that it has no meaning, because it has. It is communication! The cows that I called for would understand that I wanted them to come home to be milked. They would understand the signal.

As you may have noticed there are no cows here, so probably there are none around! It’s a very loud way of singing and really not suitable for singing inside a room. If I stood outside I would easily have been heard for over 5 km in the woods or on a hill side, so if I went out in the Villa Borghese and did my herding call maybe somebody at the Basilica di San Pietro would be able to hear me (if it wasn’t for all that traffic!).

You need to be heard. You want to be heard. You want to communicate. You want to make music. So you need a specific voice technique to do it in the specific environment that the forest and the hillsides are.

The women shepherdess lived the whole summer, maybe from May to October far away from the village by themselves in the woods or up on the hillsides at the summer pastures, taking care of the animals. They were constantly confronted with different kinds of dangers and threats. They needed to have a useful way of communication.

“Kulning” or herding calls is by tradition female singing style. Therefore the technique is very much adjusted to and developed from the possibilities of female voice. Compared to classical singing techniques as soprano voice you use a different timbre which can be obtained by using the resonance room in different way. In “kulning” you place your voice in the front of the mouth and instead of lowering the larynx as is common in classic

singing you slightly raise it. The nasality of the sound and the way of starting every phrase and tone with a slight “pickup” also helps the sound to be straight and keep a clear direction of the voice. You often use the difference between the chest voice and the head voice to emphasize the originality of sounds. Especially when you do short, quick phrases often for small and quick animals like sheep and goat!

Grazing songs

But herding calls is not the only music used in the pastoral landscape. There is also other music that in one way or another is connected with the herding environment. Music that does not have that obvious function for communication but is just as important anyway. Songs that tells us a lot about the special working environment for the women in the forests. This music has got lyrics.

I will sing you four small songs that actually all of them tell the same story. The songs are from different parts of Sweden, from north to south, but they all come from areas where herding has been practiced and the tonality has the same features as in the music you heard before.

These songs comment on the dangerous and hard life that the women lived under during the summer, and tells us that there are a lot of things in the wood to beware of and to be afraid of: Thieves and robbers, wild animals as bears and wolves... There is a special phrase that always comes back in these songs and that is: “Twelve men in the wood” – and that could both actually mean “twelve men” that are around in the wood, maybe thieves and robbers, but it can also mean the dangerous bear that is said to have the strength of twelve men.

The songs usually have a poetic touch. And it’s quite hard to translate as you can imagine. The lyrics is often sung with alliterations and rhymes and in dialect, so the translation below is just a very brief word by word translation, together with the Swedish lyric for you to get a hint of what the songs are about.

Stor’n stejn (The big stone)

Grazing song from Jämtland, Sweden

Performed by Susanne Rosenberg, voice

Ja klettre opp på’n stor’n stejn, lure så de hörles allt heim:	I climbed up on a big stone blow my birch-bark horn so they could hear it all the way home
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Till tilleri torom, tolv männer i skogom, tolv kära våra dom.	till tilleri torom twelve men in the forest Twelve men they are
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Småhunnan hängde dom, gehl’nbarna skrämde dom, storoxen dängde dom.	They hang the small dogs They frighten the small goats They hit the big ox
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Allt sen je höusle a Gullros mi gaule	And at the same time I heard (my cow) Gullros (Golden rose) mooing
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långt, långt, långt långt sönnä Därfjälle.	far, far, far, far away South of the Fools mountain
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Ling, linge logen

Grazing song after Lena Larsson, Bohuslän, Sweden

Performed by Susanne Rosenberg, voice

Ling linge logen Tolfta man i skogen Bjällekoe bunne’ Fy hundar hänge Locka mig långt uti Därefjället gör de Där varken vatten eller vete	Ling, linge logen Twelve men in the forest The bell-cow they tie The dogs they hang And they lure/entice me into the Fools mountain Where there is neither water nor wheat
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Där gror löken, där gal göken	There the onion grows, and the cookoo call
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Där är bättre än här Där är gossar att leka med	There is better than here There are boys to play with
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Ti tu le lu le lu

Grazing song after Eva Eriksson, Gästrikland, Sweden

Performed by Susanne Rosenberg, voice

Ti tu le lu le lu Högt uppi berge’ Vad vill du? Jag vill låna stora kitteln uta’ dej	Ti tu le lu le lu High up in the mountain What do you want? I want to borrow the big stew-pan from you
Vad skå du me’ den? Jag ska koka stora lassen till lördä’ kväll	What do you want with that? I shall cook for Saturday night

Vallhund’ hängande Skällkon bindande Stor Oxen stingande Folk kom å hjälp mej nu! Ja’ sitter ibland tolv skälmar här.	The shepherd’s dog they hang The bell-cow they bind The big Ox they stab People please come and help me! I sit among twelve robbers here
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Stora Oxen/ The big ox

Grazing song after Anna-Britta Moberg, Gästrikland, Sweden

Performed by Susanne Rosenberg, voice

Stora Oxen ha de slagi’ Röda kon ha di tagi’ Å mej hänga de’ å mej hänga de’ å mej hänga de opp! Skynden, skynden, skynden ’å! Skynden, skynden, skynden ’å! För rövarna i skogen gå Kom nu!	The big ox they have hit The red cow they have taken And they hang me up Hurry up! The robbers are in the forest Please come at once
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But then there are also songs that put a more humorous view to the life of the summer pastures. You can understand by the lyrics to this next song that this is in the tradition of herding. The lyrics doesn’t really mean anything, it’s mostly just good words to sing on. But anyway there is a lot of goats and cheese and “stuff” that is clearly connected with the summer pastoral way of living. This is really some fine lyrics and great poetry, isn’t it, especially the last verse!

Lillgubben

Grazing song after Eva Eriksson, Gästrikland, Sweden

Performed by Susanne Rosenberg, voice

Lillgubben uppå tallbacken, två döttrar hade han.	The little man on the pine slope He had two daughters
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Sålde bort sina skinnbyxor å köfte stintorna gullband.	He sold away his leather trousers And bought gold ribbons to the girls
Getlycka, löppsôcka, min get å ja' me'.	Goat happiness, flee stockings My goat and myself
Mine getter går i skogen å gnaver barsken 'tå trä.	My goats walks in the woods And gnaw off the bark from the trees
Östnola på Gångbra berget, där växer ett killingabet. Då vi ska ut å geta då ska vi fara dit.	East on the mountain of good walk- ing There grows good kid grazing When we go out with the goats Then we will go there
Lillguben uppå tallbacken Sot Olle speleman Pannkaka slô tebaka sötosten kom fram.	Little man on the pine slope Soot Olle, fiddler Pancake hit back The sweet cheese is coming
Hej hyfsa på killinga byfsa	Hallo, put order to your goat trousers
tre kilo te luvo En rö en å en blå en å en mitt uppå kullo.	three kilo for a knitted cap one red and one blue And one right on the top of the head.
Mine getter skiter böner, granngårdsstinten plöck upp, kokar sig en bönvälling, å så säger dom att de e' gott!	My goats shit beans The neighbours' girls pick them up Make themselves a bean porridge And say that it tastes good!

Hia hia

Traditional polska tune from Härjedalen, Sweden
Performed by *Sven Ahlbäck, fiddle*

After this great lyrics you heard again a polska that was inspired from the tonality and form of this very song. Or maybe it's the other way around. This is something that we really can't tell. This is music that you learn by the ear. You learn it from someone and it doesn't matter if there is any author back many hundred years ago, you really don't care. It's how you learnt it and especially who you learnt it from that is important.

A herding call is mostly improvised – you call for someone or something and you can never know in advance how long time you have to call. It's like a cradle songs, you have to sing until the baby goes asleep or in this case until the cow comes home.

When you create and improvise the music you use small traditional melodic themes that you vary all the time. Usually I improvise – but because I want to show you a little more of different styles You will hear what could be regarded as a fixed improvisation. An improvisation that is clearly inspired from different shepherdess and different types of calls .- for cows, goats, sheep... and maybe there is also some calling for a men in this to!

Hommage á Karin

Traditional herding calls from Scandinavia
Performed by *Susanne Rosenberg, voice*

Other music in the summer pastures

In this summer pasture there is not only the voice. There is also instruments as birch-bark horn, goat horn and



Fig. 1. Girl from Gästrikland, Sweden. Blowing the horn in the forest. Drawing by Richard Dybeck, from "brev från Dalarna och Norrland" 1847, letters to a colleague.

cow horn (Fig. 1). And melodies that are played on this instruments. Sven will play a beautiful cow horn melody on his fiddle and after that we will take a religious song that again has this special tonality that characterizes the herding music. The polska that is played after that is in it's turn inspired by the song. Or once again, maybe it's the opposite; maybe the polska has inspired the song and the herding tune?

The religious song has very nice lyrics which is about how you should rejoice the day that you were born. So this is a song that you could sing for your self to celebrate that happy occasion.

Vallåten efter Hjort Anders

In tradition after Ole Hjorth, Stockholm
Performed by *Sven Ahlbäck, fiddle*

Min födelsedag/ My birthday

Traditional religious song after Finn Jonas Jonsson, Dalarna
Performed by *Susanne Rosenberg, voice and Sven Ahlbäck, fiddle*

Min Födelsedag förtjänar att jag Ett tacksamhetsljud Till himmelen sänder att prisa min Gud	The day I was born deserves that I Send a sound of greatfulness to heaven to praise the lord
Som skapat mig väl Att jag av hans händer fått lemmar och själ	That He did create me well So that I from His hand got both body and soul

Av skaparen bygd I moderlivets skygd Jag fången än låg Med öron ej hörde med ögon ej såg	Created by the Lord in my mothers womb still captured I was Didn't hear with my ears and didn't see with my eyes
Min boning var trång Jag stundom mig rörde att slippa mitt tvång	I didn't have much room So I moved about to get out
Vid tidens förlopp bröts fångelse opp Gud förde mig ut På trängsel och mörker var lyckligen slut	As time went along, my prison was opened The Lord brought me out The darkness was ended
Då skådade jag Folk byar och kyrkor vid himmelens dag	And then I saw people, villages and churches at this heavenly day.

Gråtlåten/ the crying tune
Polska after Hjort-Anders, Dalarna
Performed by Sven Ahlbäck, fiddle

Herding calls today

Now we will end our concert with a new piece of music.
Today – as you might have understand already – this
herding music have found new ways to be heard. This
occasion or concert is proof of that!

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Music example 1-9 arranged by Susanne Rosenberg and Sven Ahlbäck,
Music example 10 composed by Sven Ahlbäck

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CD's with traditional herding call:

"Lockrop och vallåtar" / Caprice 21483 www.caprice.rikskonserter.se/

"Swedish Pastoral Music" / Hurv KRCD-28: www.hurv.com

Herding call or "kulning" is today used mostly outside the environment that it was created in and therefore it also has possibilities to survive while the natural environment has not. And for me it's a beautiful and powerful way of using the voice both for making music and to communicate.

I've used "kulning" in concerts in Tokyo and New York, with and without national costume, preventing getting assaulted in Stockholm and calling and founding lost friends in Helsinki. I've been using this technique both in new composed art music and with traditional folk music groups.

To sum up we will therefore end with a new tune that Sven wrote. This new herding call and polska he wrote last year for a concert in New York, were we performed it together with orchestra and folk soloist from all over the world.

Nya vallåten

Composed by Sven Ahlbäck, 2001

Performed by Susanne Rosenberg, voice and Sven Ahlbäck, fiddle

Susanne Rosenberg