

# Situated sounds of place in three songs by Wilhelm Stenhammar

Annika Lindskog

In September 2021, *Konserthuset* in Stockholm curated an anniversary programme of Wilhelm Stenhammar's solo songs with the title 'Romansafton - sångernas mästare' ('An evening of art song - the master of songs'), introducing it with the rationale that 'besides the chamber music, Stenhammar's songs are perhaps one of his most significant outputs.'<sup>1</sup> Building upon the significance of the songs in Stenhammar's oeuvre as a whole, this discussion will consider three songs from the anniversary programme to probe how they interpret and express a geo-cultural situatedness, and in their expressions articulate specific geographical relationships. It is the contention of this discussion that awareness of how cultural production contributes to place-making by representing place as experienced geography (Heith, 2022), can illuminate geographical and locational situatedness, and that understanding such cultural situatedness enhances the perception of the articulations and resonances of the cultural texts. The analyses of the songs will consider various aspects of both text and music and set out arguments for how they relate to concepts of place, place-making, and situated geographies.<sup>2</sup>

There are strong links, both historically and contemporaneously, as geographer Ray Hudson argues, between music and senses of place and identities, as music 'has the ability to conjure up powerful images of place [as well as] feelings of deep attachment to place' (2006, p. 626). Music further has the ability to contribute to our geographical imagination, as Kearney suggests, as it reflects and shapes geographical processes, and is also, in turn, itself shaped by those processes (2010, p. 47). If we consider that 'sound is a crucial element in the world we construct for ourselves, and the world that others construct and impose on us', then music becomes 'by nature geographical' (Connell and Gibson, 2003, p. 280). This kind of geographical representation should be understood,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Stenhammar 150 år - romansafton. Sångernas mästare med Miah Persson, Karl-Magnus Fredriksson och Magnus Svensson'. 21 September 2021, Konserthuset, Stockholm.

[www.konserthuset.se/play/stenhammar-150-ar-romansafton/](http://www.konserthuset.se/play/stenhammar-150-ar-romansafton/). See also F. K. Smith: 'Stenhammar's contributions to the Swedish art song repertoire are generally considered unsurpassed' (2002, p. 79).

<sup>2</sup> 'Place' and 'space' are recognisably highly complex terms in human geography. This article finds it helpful to consider the following qualities of place: 'A concept of "place" is one of the oldest tenets of geography, with numerous definitions and continuously debated meanings. Three key components of place can be discerned: location, locale, and a sense of place. Location is the (geographical) position, locale the physical setting for relationships between people, and a sense of the place the emotions someone attaches to an area based on their experiences. Place can be applied at any scale and is not fixed in time or space, but susceptible to change and reinterpretation(s).' (*National Geographic: https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/resource-library-concept-place/*, with Agnew and Duncan, 1989). See also Jakobsen et al, 2022, p. 3: "space" and "spatial" are difficult and contested concept for the discipline of geography, as well as related human-geographical keywords as place, landscape, and scale.'

cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove argues, as ‘active, constitutive elements in shaping social and spatial practices and the environments we occupy’ (2008, p. 15). These can in turn be ‘read’ through texts and images (and sounds) ‘as testimony of human agency’ (ibid.); music thus becomes as much an integral part of the geographical imagination and the identity of places and spatial locations, as an agent in the understanding of those locations as it sounds out aural interpretations of a geo-cultural situatedness.

In the online recording of the anniversary recital, a pre-recorded conversation around Stenhammar’s songs between the musicians and Tony Lundman (editor at *Konsert-huset*) is inserted into the interval. In this, the connectivity between Stenhammar’s songs and a sense of place is noted in several places, as well as a perceived ability to conjure up and enact placement in those settings, suggesting that the connection between songs and sites is tangible, alive, and a part of the aural and performative experience of the songs. The following discussion will attempt to unpack the ways in which they can be understood to connect and relate to specific places, and through closer reading of three individual songs draw out their site interpretations and chart their expressions of situated and sounding geographies.

## Textual geographies, geo-cultural sites, and situated experiences

Music might be understood to connect with locality and geography through engagement with place, geographies (or territories), landscapes (and topographies), cultural practices, narratives of place, and sonorities of places and spaces. In a recent volume aiming to problematise notions of ‘Nordicness’ in music, a list of (perceived) characteristics of ‘Nordic Cool’ highlights the local currency of the landscape, including, among others, a ‘sense of close harmony with nature’ and a ‘focus on intentional association with [certain] landscapes’ (Marstal, 2020, p. 92). The preponderance of landscape as a pregnant and favoured location can also be seen in many of the songs in the programme: titles which either spell out a specified situatedness (e.g., ‘I skogen/In the forest’; ‘Lutad mot gärdet/Leaning on the fence’<sup>3</sup>), or imply it in the narrative they tell (e.g., ‘Flickan knyter i Johannisnatten/The girl is binding on Midsummer Eve’). The connection with the landscape can also be implicated through a range of ‘props’, itemised landscape inventories that form part of a local geography: specific flora and fauna like birds, flowers, grass, stones, mosses, trees. The ‘Nordic cool’ list also includes ‘light as inspiration and aesthetic value’, and many songs are imbued with the locally specific sensation of light summer nights, the shimmer of moonlight and stars, and the changes in mood between the atmospheric environments to poetic and sonorous effect. These phenomena form part of a concrete, or concretised, local topography, but place relationships also occur in the narratives that are told around them. Place-making as a process ‘embraces the capacity to undertake and disseminate local histories and local geographies’ (Withers, 2009, p. 650) and is an inherently networked process ‘by which people iteratively create and recreate the[ir] experienced geographies’ (Heith, 2020,

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<sup>3</sup> The English translations here are the ones used in the *Konsert-huset* recording.

p. 18). This suggests that place-making, as Heith also underlines, is intimately connected with cultural identity and functions as a narrated geography that shapes collective meaning around its sites, relational to the inhabitants (or claimants) of these spaces. These narrations might focus on events that take place in specific locations or environments (for example in songs like ‘Flickan kom ifrån sin älsklings möte/The girl came from meeting her lover’ and ‘Kväll i Klara/Evening in Clara’) and become articulations of the experiences of being in these sites or geographies. They can, however, also encompass and contain understandings of relationships to sites or spaces which are more layered. Such narrations concern engagements with the geographical spatiality where the interaction is defined around a re-narration of inherited sensitivities and experiences: e.g., a continuously negotiated tension between nature and culture, or the historicity of cityscapes and their traceable layers of temporality. Understanding the situatedness that plays out in the musical texts requires a sensitivity to these functions of the place-relationship, and the understanding that they take part in a mapping of the geography out of which they grow. As Grimley (2018) sets out in his book, *Delius and the sound of place*, in much of the musicological literature up to now, place ‘has frequently been conceived in a manner that is overly reductive, indicating a direct link between a musical work [...] and the specific site or location where that work was first created or performed’ (p. 12), understanding some properties of the musical work as having been ‘significantly shaped by the character or quality of a particular place’, and allowing ‘essential aspects of that place to be read immanently through analyses of that work’ (ibid). This reductive approach, however, misses what Grimley calls the dialectic nature of either the particular work in question, or the notion of place as an ‘ontological category’; that is, as a site of experience. That the relationship between music and place is more complex than such ‘two-way mapping’ is the essential tenet of this discussion, which instead wants to set out approaches to a more nuanced understanding of how music can interact with place as narrated experiences lived out in highly contextualised geographies.

The three songs selected for this discussion demonstrate different kinds of site interactions and articulations of site-relationships. The first song, ‘I skogen/In the forest’, to text by Albert Theodor Gellerstedt, is part of a very large contingent of Swedish songs (and poems) which are set in the forest-scape and which grow out of a deeply embedded understanding of the forest as a collectively particularly resonant site. A very early song of Stenhammar’s, it was composed before the more significant expansion in Swedish poetry in the 1890s, and the choice of text engagement might be seen as indicative of common artistic topicality of the time. The second song, ‘Mellan broarna/Between the bridges’, explores the less often poetically besung urban landscape of Stockholm. Setting text by Bo Bergman, it is part of a set of four songs that engage with different aspects of and interactions with the city as a multifaceted site encompassing aspects of spatiality, temporality and historicity. ‘Mellan broarna’, referring to the island of the Old Town in the centre of Stockholm (historically its epicentre and site of its earliest developments), is situated in the early twentieth century but plays with site-specific memories of late eighteenth century engagements – already immortalised in an earlier troubadour

tradition and further expanded in the current song's imitative re-enactments of both site and sound. The final song, 'Jungfru Blond och jungfru Brunett/ Maiden Blond and Maiden Brunette', also to text by Bo Bergman, relates not to a specific place or site, but to the experience of negotiating interrelationships between landscape and society, and interrogates the validity of the collective narratives situated in the local landscape in an evolving urban vs. non-urban dichotomy. As the two maidens, of happy, innocent disposition with their flushed cheeks and flying plaits, see the landscape turn on them as dusk settles, and flee from the previously safe space of forests and fields, the song destabilises notions of the landscape as benevolent and a place of benign mutuality, and goes beyond those 'reductive readings' to offer more complex interpretations of site relationships.

As we listen to these songs, they 'auralise' the sites with which they engage and sound them out as experienced geographies. The following discussion will attempt to draw out the way in which they articulate their different place-relationships, and allow place to both sound and be heard.

## The place of landscape:

### 'I skogen' (In the forest, 1887) and Swedish nature

Nature in late nineteenth century Sweden has many meanings. It is, and will in the early twentieth century become even more so, a local cultural currency of almost unparalleled value, deeply embedded as a practical, poetic, philosophical, and political asset. It is in part, Sverker Sörlin argues, a conception or idea, rendered as 'naturesentimentalitet' (nature sentimentality) which has become established in a collective history and consciousness (2006, p. 35). A literary tradition also brings a 'highly developed nature lyricism' to the table, in part sustained by an interest in nature itself in the middle class sections of society ('en borgerlig naturlära', Daun, 2006, p. 57). There are ready parallels being sustained between artistic inspiration and nature – as in Richard Bergh's (painter and art critic, 1858–1919) declamation (1900) that 'our art shall be ... like our nature!' (in Löfgren, 1979, p. 57)<sup>4</sup> – and between the people, their nature and their art: 'the most deeply embedded characteristic of the Swedish people [is] the intense love for nature. It is this sincere devotion [...] which has given us our lyrical bards, our wonderful folk melodies, and the Swedish song' (Gustav Sundbärg [1910], in Löfgren, 1979, p.45).<sup>5</sup> It is not, however, the nineteenth-century sublime, dramatic nature which is the focus here, but what ethnologist Orvar Löfgren describes as 'the sensitive and melancholic Swedish nature, the softly sighing fir tree forest, the starlit winter night, the birch grove and the slope of white anemones' (1979, p. 57).<sup>6</sup> In this way, certain types of nature become

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<sup>4</sup> 'Vår konst skall ... bli lik vår natur!'

<sup>5</sup> 'Det i svenska folkets lynne djupast nedlagda draget ... den starka kärleken till naturen. Det är denna varma hängivenhet ... som skänkt oss våra lyriska skalder, våra härliga folkmelodier, och den svenska sången.'

<sup>6</sup> '... det känslösamma och svärmodiga svenska, den susande granskogen, den stjärnklara vinternatten, björkdungen och vitsippebacken.'

## *Situated sounds of place in three songs by Wilhelm Stenhammar*

‘canonised’, while other aspects are marginalised, and a specific place in the landscape might stand in for ‘nature’ in general (Sörlin, 2006, p. 35). By this process nature becomes what cultural anthropologist Åke Daun calls ‘readable’ in the cultural collective – if you know how (or what) to read: that is, if you are sensitive to the local meanings embedded not just in the landscape itself, but in its uses and evaluations (Daun, 2006, p. 58).

‘I skogen/In the forest’, Stenhammar’s arguably most loved and most often performed art song, written at the age of only 16, engages very competently with such parsing of the local landscape and its ‘readability’. The poem is ‘place-making’ the forest through location, canonised props, and its narrator-nature relationship. The encounter with first the ‘nattviol’ (lesser butterfly orchid; *Platanthera bifolia*) and then the ‘trast’ (thrush; fam. *Turdidae* – not a nightingale as assumed in many translations), are building a narrative around landscape features which have long and traceable resonances in Swedish nature poetry, not least in the philosophical use of nature (as the narrator asks both flower and bird to aid them in understanding life better), and the particular flora and fauna become local agents for that reflection.

The lesser butterfly orchid has special protection as a designated ‘inviolable specie’ in Sweden, but it is not threatened with extinction there as it is in other places. It grows on forest paths, flowers in the most sensual summer months, and releases a scent in the evening. This last characteristic is specific for this plant and central to its poetical description (which sees it as emanating from its ‘innermost being’), and is further highlighted in Stenhammar’s setting: the textual reference to its scent (‘din doft’, bb. 8–9), is set high in the vocal line, and in a moment of stillness aurally drawing particular attention to the central characteristic of this flower. Equally, the encounter with the song thrush leads the vocal line higher up (into the subdominant Cb-major), supported by the piano (the first time this happens overtly) and in harmonising thirds and slightly quicker phrases (marked *gioioso*), twice ‘singing’ its trill as the poem rejoices in the physio-aural experience of hearing the thrush at the top of the fir trees. As the song moves into its third and final part, the musical phrases of both the flower and the bird, their auralisations in the song, follow them and re-assert their presences. Everything in the characterisation of these landscape features then becomes highly localised: the (forest) setting, the specie type, their individual characteristics and behaviour, as well as the response from the narrator in encountering this landscape, and the way the song interprets them as a locally known environment.

In the interval discussion of the Konserthuset recital recording, Karl-Magnus Fredriksson (bass) describes ‘I skogen’ as ‘just so “skoglig” (‘foresty’)’, ‘the accompaniment is so full of bushes and sighing trees’<sup>7</sup>. The sighing forest Fredriksson refers to are the continuous quaver movements, mostly broken chords, which shift the mood between major and minor, simultaneously colouring the poetic focus (e.g., to minor for the sigh of the flower, bar 7) and creating a sense of the shifting sensory

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<sup>7</sup> ‘... kompet är ju så väldigt mycket buskar och susande skog’. Konserthuset recording, pre-recorded interval discussion with musicians and Tony Lundman, editor at Konserthuset at 46:25.

atmospheres of the forest. In addition, the repeated falling Bb to Ab at the top of the piano part in the opening bars (and again before the final section) imbues the setting with a mood of wistful, but sweet, melancholy: a mood often evoked in Nordic nature settings in all arts, and while not geographically specified, a locally recognisable atmospheric feature of the landscape.

The use of the (forest) landscape in ‘I skogen’, as well as in many other of Stenhammar’s songs and songs of many other contemporary composers, can be understood as an approach which employs it as a pre-defined spatial existence, inhabited by expected props whose meanings are known (or ‘readable’, to speak with Daun), and in which experiences of learning and emotional explorations can be contained and reflected upon. The forest-scape holds a significant position in the Swedish cultural collective, born out of the physicality and topography of the geographical territory itself, and of the historical longevity of the interaction with such a landscape, for both practical and aesthetic purposes<sup>8</sup>, and it is this collective resonance of the forest which informs the song both textually and musically. This is a locally *known* landscape and the perception of the spatial reality is rooted in that local context.

The interpretation of the landscape in the song therefore also speaks to a culturally contingent relationship to the landscape as a series of collectively resonating sites. Despite encounters with the landscape in artistic narratives most often being enacted as solitary, private experiences (in this highly Lutheranised society), the individual experience nevertheless gains its currency by being part of a collective narrative around the relationship between man (or society) and the landscape (or nature). Songs which engage in such private-collective communications with the landscape both interpret those behaviours and shape them further.

### Narrating and performing place:

#### ‘Mellan broarna/Between the bridges’ and *Fyra Stockholmsdikter* (Four Stockholm Poems, 1918), Op. 38

Stenhammar is often considered, more than other (Swedish) composers, as a composer who pays particular attention to the text itself in his song settings (reiterated frequently in Wallner’s assessments; also highlighted by pianist Magnus Svensson in the interval discussion), and textual sensitivity and locational relativity are also evident in Stenhammar’s Opus 38, *Fyra Stockholmsdikter* (Four Stockholm Poems), composed in 1918 to Bo Bergman’s poems published in the collection *Elden* (The Fire, 1917). Stenhammar’s songs often feel very specifically located (‘platsbestämnda’), says Fredriksson in the interval discussion and suggests that in *Four Stockholm Poems* we move from Stockholm, to the forest, to the sea – between clearly defined places which avoid generically and vaguely conceived place-relationships.<sup>9</sup>

The four settings in Opus 38 engage with various geographies of Stockholm: the area in central Stockholm around St. Clara Church, a slope at the edge of a nearby forest, the

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<sup>8</sup> See Frykman and Löfgren, 1979, and also Thurfjell, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Konserthuset recording, 48:30–49:25.

old town ‘between the bridges’, and a final song about the nature of sailors – the shipping and sailing trade an integral part of the demographic of a city built on and around water. To Wallner, a love for Stockholm is a central concern for these settings. He qualifies this, however, by suggesting it is not Stockholm as a place of contemporary relevance that is articulated, rather its ‘memories and the surrounding nature’ (‘minnena och ... naturen runtomkring’; Wallner, vol. 3, p. 306). These aspects are, however, integral constituents of place-making also in the present: an idea of place, and our relationship with it, a conglomerate of geography, spatiality, and fluctuating temporal dimensions. In this sense the songs connect very intimately with Stockholm also as a geo-spatial (current) reality, as they relate to its mapping, topography, and historicity.

This can be unpacked to great effect in no. 3, ‘Mellan broarna/Between the bridges’. Here both poem and music make overt references to the expressive style of Carl Michael Bellman (1740–1795; Stockholm troubadour still of contemporary relevance) as well as to some of his most often referenced subject matter. Bergman’s text opens with an evocation that directly connects the twentieth-century poem with its eighteenth-century ancestors: ‘Rosy poetry, how your old myth inhabits so fully all these spaces!’ (‘Rosiga dikt, hur din gamla myt fyller varena vinkel!’). In the next line, Bellman’s familiar characters – Ulla, Mollberg, Movitz – are named as eternal presences in the specific urban geography the song inhabits: ‘allting är kvar i gränden här / under vindruvsskylten’ (‘everything is still here in these alleyways / under the sign of the grapes’). This places the narration in an historically recognisable environment, while the present tense indicators (är-kvar-här/is-still-here) align this with the experience of the narrative (and performative) moment. The only explicit place name in this narrative is of an ‘other’ which highlights a relational geography: ‘trött på det dumma Östermalm längtar jag hit’ (tired of the stupid Östermalm,<sup>10</sup> I long for here). The ‘here’ is not named but known from within the song, while the connection between the narrative experience and the location is explicitly underlined: ‘Here is my heart, here is my hymn, and here are places of nurture’ (‘Här är mitt hjärta, här är min psalm, här finns det näringsställen’). In the concluding sentence, Bellman’s overt presence draws a line between historical temporality, location and experience, as he gazes down benevolently on the present-day interaction with the site-specific narrative: ‘Från sin olymp ser Bellman ner, nickar milt och lystrar’ (From his Olympus, Bellman looks down, nods gently and listens).

The text then relates to its location by narrative interaction, but also poetically. Bergman ‘imitates’ Bellman’s language both stylistically and lexically, creating an imprint of Bellman’s way of describing and commenting on life in Stockholm through linguistic choices and the way in which situated everyday life is approached and endured: the

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<sup>10</sup> Östermalm is an area of central Stockholm, north of the Old Town, and contemporarily known for a high proportion of wealthy inhabitants. The change of architecture and demographic leading to the current character only occurred in the late 1800s, however, as did the concomitant name change (from Ladugårdslandet) in 1885 – meaning of course that Bergman’s reference here is, when scrutinised, in fact geographically *dis*-engaged from the Bellman connection. See also Illustration 1 for a map of Stockholm with locations featuring in Bellman’s narratives marked out.

poetry is ‘rosy’ against the roaring shadows and cursing darkness, the day is grey, but the relief is in the company – ‘dear brothers and sisters’ (in itself a recognisably Bellmanesque greeting) – and in the ‘places of nurture’. The stark contrasts of light and dark, dreaming and reality, endurance and entertainment that the narrator experiences, and the quick switches between them in the narrative, epitomise Bellman’s poetry (and songs), and Bergman’s text realises this historical experience of place and plays it out in its own present.

Stenhammar’s setting of ‘Mellan broarna’ enhances this spatial and temporal interconnectivity further. The song opens with two broken or ‘strummed’ chords, overtly imitative of a lute or guitar accompaniment (repeated in bb. 13–14 and again in 19–20; see Illustration 2), and in bars 6 and 8 some embellishments in the form of decorative arpeggios (as well as word emphasis) further establish an intimate connection with the piano accompaniment in the present, and the bardic style of accompaniment of the troubadour repertoire of Bellman.<sup>11</sup> The accompaniment throughout enacts two clearly recognisable roles: following, shadowing and supporting the vocal line, and adding its own expressive characteristics, word painting and adornments. It generally provides chordal accompaniment, which follows or tucks in behind and around the vocal line, but in addition it decorates, provides cross rhythms, embellishes the harmonisation, and conducts a little reflective coda at the end of some of the vocal phrases. A recurring triplet figure in the accompaniment – also frequent in the vocal line but there notated as quavers in 6/8 – creates a gently ‘lilting’ effect, and the song remains ‘simple’ in style throughout: both in the vocal line and in the effect of the accompaniment. This is essential to this style, and Bellman’s style, of song: the song must be what Wallner calls ‘ständigt skön’ (always beautiful, lovely, appealing; Wallner, vol. 3, p. 307), regardless of how grimy its topic or content, and the expression and performance of the musicians is what should give heft to the lyrics. Stenhammar’s setting allows for both the overall effect of a simple, sweetly nostalgic song, and the performative opportunity to express moods and bring out emphases within it. It shifts very markedly to minor (G minor) in its second ‘verse’ (it is not regularly set as verses, but some phrasings repeat), and also abruptly, as in many other Bellman songs and eighteenth-century classicist music generally. The lyrics here are of the ‘tiredness’ the narrator feels for Östermalm, and the setting thus allows for an emphatic expression of this particular sentiment, thereby setting the geographical other even further apart. It does not, however, linger in its minor mood long and gradually grows sunnier: as the text considers the ‘grey day’, the music has already started to become cheerful again, in anticipation of the text’s joy of the camaraderie, which it accompanies broadly and expansively. For the final line of the poem, the gaze and approval of Bellman himself, it grows light and delicate, gazing heavenwards to the marking *armonioso* (harmonious), before the very final four bars return to the already established verse ending, bringing the song back down to earth again and concluding it in a simple, matter-of-fact manner.

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<sup>11</sup> The songs also exist with, and were first performed to, orchestra accompaniment in Gothenburg in 1919. See, e.g., Hedwall, 2018, p. 430.



## *Situated sounds of place in three songs by Wilhelm Stenhammar*

In 1918, at the time of composition of the four Stockholm songs, Stenhammar was living in Gothenburg. Wallner suggests an evening spent in Uppsala in 1917 listening to a student singing Bellman as potential inspiration for the settings – and their style (vol. 3, p. 306). But he also notes a contemporary literary interest in Bellman which may have made this historical heritage feel particularly present at that time. Bellman was ‘the bridge over which imagination leads to the past’, Wallner quotes the poet Oscar Levertin (1862–1906) as stating (p. 307), which highlights an understanding of historical continuity of place contained in language, music and narration. Bellman is then the connection between a past Stockholm and the present one, and in ‘Mellan broarna’ that connectivity to Bellman (a central element or the second ‘core motif’ to Wallner; pp. 306–308) also functions as sounding references in the stylistics of both language and music.

But Bellman is not just a poetically articulated narrative of place(s), he also represents a collectively shared cultural heritage. As the capital, and thereby a national concern, Stockholm is as much an abstract (remote) concept as a concretely real place, and the Bellman narratives are part of this conceptualisation. There are then layers of relationships to the location that are also bound up in the songs: the national, collective understanding of Stockholm as a communal commodity, Stenhammar’s own relationship to site (manifest in personal experience as well as artistically in relatable compositions, e.g., for the Stockholm exhibition in 1897 (Rotter-Broman, 2019), to the narrative and poetic ‘I’ whose engagement with and experiences of Stockholm are determined by their situatedness. The named urban geography is at the same time both concrete – tangible, mapped, experienced – and generalised as a conceptual representation.

‘My absolute favourite in all categories is “Kväll i Klara” (Evening in Clara)’, says Fredriksson, ‘it really feels as if you are walking through the area and hear the church ... the whole sense of being “in place”.’ ‘I walked through Clara churchyard yesterday’, Svensson adds, ‘and it’s true, I heard the wind blowing. It must be the same wind that he heard.’<sup>12</sup> The wind whispers and murmurs in the opening of ‘Kväll i Klara’, as the narrator as a grown man goes in search of the places where he played as a child. The temporal layers form part of the construction of sites, and in how we relate to them. Fredriksson’s and Svensson’s sensitivity to the contemporary present of the site informs their interpretation of the early twentieth-century evocation, itself reaching back to eighteenth-century experiences of that site. As we reach ‘Mellan broarna’ in the set, the marking *con abbondanza* – with abundance – seems nothing but highly apt for the exploration of a place with such multiple layers of resonances.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> (Fredriksson:) ‘En av mina absoluta favoriter i alla kategorier är ju “Kväll i Klara”...där kan jag verkligen känna att man går i Klara och hör Klara kyrka, hela den känslan, just det där med att vi är “på plats”’. (Svensson:) ‘Och jag gick i går över kyrkogården i Klara, och – det stämmer! Jag hör vindsuset, och jag tror nästan det är samma vind som han hörde’. Konserthus recording, 51:54–52:20.

<sup>13</sup> A recording of ‘Mellan broarna’ can today be found in a public online archive run by the Stockholm City Museum, validating and embedding it further as an aural interpretation of the city with continuous

## Sounding place and narrating spatiality:

‘Jungfru Blond och jungfru Brunett/Maiden Blond and Maiden Brunette’, 1908), Op. 26, No. 4

At the end of the anniversary programme are songs from the collection *Visor och stämningar* (Songs and moods, Op. 26, 1908). This collection is regarded as one of the most complex and varied sets of songs in the Swedish song repertoire (see, e.g., Wallner, 1991, vol. 2, pp. 249–301, and also the recital interval discussion). Stenhammar uses texts from five different poets, selecting texts that curiously no one else has set (before or since), making the set to Wallner on the whole ‘more personal, more unique’ (ibid., p. 249). The collection is not strictly a song cycle, and not necessarily intended to be performed all in one by the same singer (at the Konserthuset recital, Persson and Fredriksson share the songs between them), and there is great variation in the songs in range, expression, style and mood.

Two of the songs in the collection are some of Stenhammar’s longest and most through-composed, and, with their epic narrative styles, might be considered ballads. Wallner suggests that they represent highlights within the collection, one at the end (‘Prins Aladdin av lampan/Aladin of the lamp’), and one as ‘first highlight’ at number four: ‘Jungfru Blond och jungfru Brunett/Maiden Blond and Maiden Brunette’, a poem by Bo Bergman, from *Marionetterna* [1903] (ibid.). Wallner has a very neat summary of the story the song tells (resonating in no small measure with the tone of the poem itself):

Two little girls dance in the field. The sun is shining and the air is clear and light [high]. But it is autumn. The trees stand naked, the sky above them is cold, soon it will grow dark, and when the wind picks up, the surrounding bushes and trees teem with noises and laughter. They become frightened, and with their plaits drumming against their backs, they flee back to their mother, ‘the only one in the world’. But outside the darkness circles stealthily, threatening, growing.<sup>14</sup> (1991, vol. 2., pp. 263–264)

Stenhammar’s setting responds to the changing moods and events of the narrative with great immediacy as well as interpretative colours and gestures, and both text and music are concerned not only to name those moods and settings but to describe them and interpret them. The song opens with a relatively simple melodic theme, relatable in style and expression to folk song, and rhythmically steady in a light *vivace*. This song motif is, however, elastic and mouldable. Only briefly into the second verse, it veers off abruptly when the presence of the night suddenly becomes tangible – ‘as the thief, it comes when no one watches’ (bb. 65–69) – and its dancelike lightness is abandoned for a slow upwards crawl, coloured by chromatic passages and tensely compacted in debilitating

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relevance and temporality. Ingvar Wixell, baritone; Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Johan Arnell. *Musica Sveciae*, 1990. <https://stockholmskallan.stockholm.se/post/24345>.

“ ‘Två små flickor dansar på ängen. Solen lyser och luften är klar och lätt. Med det är höst. Träden står nakna, rymden över dem är kall, snart mörknar det, och när vinden blåser upp visslar och skrattar det i ris och dungar. De grips av skräck, och med flätor som slår rusar de hem till mor, ”den enda i världen”. Men utanför smyger mörkret, hotande, växande.’ ”

## *Situated sounds of place in three songs by Wilhelm Stenhammar*

fear the whole way up from  $d^1$  to  $f\#^2$ , where the anguish of the night's darkening of ways and waters is acknowledged. As the accompaniment gathers some of that anguish up in a forceful repeat of the last phrase, the song attempts to restart with a second verse, in *accelerando* – as if to try and outrun the darkness. But it only gets a few bars in before the maidens – and with them the music – freeze in their dance, terrified. Bars 82 to 99 might be heard as a radically compacted version of the full opening verse, where the light, airy fifth which enticed us to watch them dance ('se på', b. 24) and took the song into a happy D major, has been replaced with a minor third as we note 'how terrifying' ('hur hemskt') the surroundings have become, and leading into hollow resonances of empty fifths (bb. 92–94). The slow upwards crawl then returns for a description of the wind's whistling noises, and things tiptoeing around in the bushes, laughing, but the miserable, terrified girls don't quite reach the full octave+third this time before they glide down again, their 'trembling like young birds' ('skälfva som fogelungar') aurally echoing in the piano long after they have themselves stopped moving. As the girls start running home, they do so to a potent re-interpretation of a phrase from the first section which transforms the earlier, relaxed 'light, light', 'light' ('lätt, lätt, lätt', bb. 13–15) to the accented, *crescendo* 'beat, beat, beat' ('slå, slå, slå', bb. 39–42) of their plaits as they run terrified towards home.

The interpretation of place is thus tangibly rendered in the setting, mediated through the girls' experience and emotional responses to it. The song communicates an immediacy of the landscape as the girls experience it, and their place in their local environment (or rather non-place, as their surroundings grow increasingly hostile and challenge their sense of belonging to them). As the girls flee from its perceived hostility, both they and the song play out a negotiation between conditions of place and our response to it. Stenhammar and Bergman's maidens gradually lose their assumed connection to the landscape and, in increased urgency, run away from it. Home, the private and domestic antithesis to the wild, out-of-control landscape, is, however, not entirely the safety anticipated. The girls are trying to reach the longed-for safety of the fireplace and the presence of the mother, to whom they want to entrust their hearts – or, literally translated, 'hide their heart' ('gömma sitt hjärta'), while the hours pass and the evening grows and the fire crackles. But the mother only stares silently into the fire, and to slowly descending chordal accompaniment the finale of the song reveals the continuous presence of the darkness outside, prowling as a 'troll', which promises, to a last, menacing octave leap, to wait the maidens out for a future encounter.

Employing parallel readings, Wallner sees connections between the stories of the dancing maidens scared by nature as darkness falls, and Goethe's – or rather Schubert's – 'Erlkönig' (1991, vol. 2, p. 272). As the father rides through the landscape with his son, the boy relates a conversation with the Erlkönig who attempts to lure him across. The father at first calmly parses the boy's visions as imaginative interpretations of the nature around them, but gradually his fear grows too, and he gallops the last stretch – only to find his child dead in his arms on arrival. Stenhammar's and Schubert's settings contain parallels in how they respond to the poems as tales about the landscape, and auralise moods, emotions and the narrator's relationship to the surroundings as

experiences of that landscape. Haglund (2019) sees stronger parallels with ‘Der Lindenbaum’, also a Schubert setting but with text by Wilhelm Müller, and similar as a semi-strophic structure where the setting both follows the narration closely and aurally interprets moods and surroundings (p. 88). Here, of course, the situated experience in those surroundings is not a child’s but a grown man’s. Yet as he, in the context of the song cycle, wanders alone through unfamiliar landscapes, displacing himself in their alienness, trying and very nearly failing to understand his relationship with them, he acts out an unsettledness between man and nature that is also at the core of both ‘Erlkönig’ and the maidens in the Bergman/Stenhammar song.

These narrations, both textual and aural, relate a porous relationship to the landscape with which they interact. The fluidity between the maidens’ happy dance in the field and the terror with which they try to escape from the same landscape moments later, is suggestive of the landscape as a liminal space with an unstable demarcation between benign and malign interaction. As Wallner points out, the thematic the maidens enact is not new, also not in Swedish narrations (1991, vol. 2, p. 264). The landscape in a Nordic setting has always held characteristics, and characters, that can cause harm and destruction (seen e.g. in folklore and fairy tales), and from which a duality emerges: the landscape as a simultaneously benevolent place for experience and nurture, and a site in which our deepest fears and anxieties threaten to overpower and destroy us. Pär Lagerkvist’s slightly later short story *Far och jag* (My father and I) from 1924, is a helpful parallel example for illuminating the inherent tension in this duality in an increasingly modernised society that is growing more pronouncedly apart from the forces and conditions of the landscape around it. Here it is played out as the boy is transitioning from an innocent, trusting child to the adult state of knowing fear and the parental inability of providing safety. As in the Bergman/Stenhammar song, the day starts happy in a sunny, safe landscape, teeming with life as the boy and the father set out on their Sunday stroll – purely for the pleasure of being out in nature and being together. By the end of the story, however, the same landscape has suddenly become threatening, in much the same way as Bergman’s landscape turns against the maidens, and as the unscheduled train that is the main protagonist of the story rushes past – black, violent, aggressive – and the father cannot explain its presence or meaning, the boy understands his aloneness and vulnerability in this landscape, just as the maidens’ mother fails to reassure the girls against the crawling darkness outside. These stories then explore a transgression of place: where the boundaries are unstable and the relationship continually re-negotiated, and where the interaction with the historically inherited landscape requires re-assessment in the context of a continually developing modernity. Both Bergman’s narration and Stenhammar’s setting are situated in a narrated geography derived from localised meanings which explore the experience of being-in-place, while Stenhammar’s word paintings, rhythmical sensitivity to the text, and emotional musical expressivity auralise the maidens’ experience of landscape as a transgressive, fluid site of experience.

## Relational localities – landscape, geography, place

The tenet that ‘there is a geography to all geographical knowledge’<sup>15</sup> emphasises that all geographical ‘knowledge’ relates to a concrete, physical geography, and is therefore also ‘situated knowledge’ (Jakobsen et al., 2022, p. 2); that is, an understanding of sites and spaces borne out of interaction with those spaces. The strong relationship to place in the songs by Stenhammar analysed here, comes through in a direct interaction with places and sites, an ability to conjure up a sense of place by various means, and aural interpretations of specific place-relationships. The discussion here has attempted to probe the embedded ‘place-ness’ of these songs, and to draw out their articulation of locality and site as part of their integral expression.

In the first decades of the 1900s, Swedish art songs (*romanser*) were composed and performed in Swedish cultural life to an extent that have few parallels at any other time. Nordenfors points out that concert programmes as well as music-making at home (‘konsertmiljön’ and ‘hemmiljön’), were dominated by vocal music (1992, p. 12), and in his study, he gives the figure of at least 2,500 *romanser* composed in the period 1900–1950 (ibid., p. 15). Although no complete register or records exist, that number nevertheless indicates a significant presence of and interest in art songs during this period.

As the ‘milieu’ in which these songs were composed is part of their relational situatedness, their preoccupations and expressions also relate to a wider cultural relativity. The art song might be understood to be an essentially private, individual and intimate moment of reflection – in contrast to, say, the simpler song form, ‘visa’, which is more often seen to be communally accessible, or even suited to collective group singing<sup>16</sup> – but as a performative act it also retains a purpose of collective resonance. It is in these communal understandings that the songs enact relationships to place, and both re/sound interpretations of those places and contribute to the place-making itself.

Hedwall brings up, in the introduction to his very rich exploration of Swedish song from the late seventeenth century into the 1900s, the question of whether there is anything that can be understood as particularly ‘Swedish’ in the songs that belong to the national (culturally speaking) oeuvre. While *romanser*, he suggests, are often seen as a potent format through which to channel the ‘national’ (particularly through their close connections with Romantic expressions in both format and focus), he relates that there has not emerged any consensus on what, if anything, in their expression might be regarded as specifically ‘Swedish’ – apart from the occasional close affinity with folk songs and folk idioms (2018, p. 12). But as this discussion has tried to show, the relationship between music and its geographies needs to be approached from a different perspective: it is in how the songs relate to their specific geo-cultural actuality that they

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<sup>15</sup> Livingstone, 2019, p. 461; quoted in Jakobsen, Jönsson, and Larsen, eds., 2022, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Nordenfors (1992, p. 16): ‘Romansens intima och subjektiva karaktär är i själva verket dess grundläggande kännetecken’ (‘The intimate, subjective character of the art song is actually its fundamental hallmark’).

become expressions of place, intrinsically linked to their own geographical contextuality and situatedness.

Grimley points to the ‘different sites or topographies that shape [Delius’] work and which in turn are shaped by his creative place-making’ (2018, p. 19) and argues for Delius’ music to be understood as a ‘sophisticated configuration of materiality, locality, identity, temporality, and sites of experience’ (ibid.). Considering place as ‘sites of experience’ is to Edward Casey (with Jeff Malpas), to see it as a structure within which experiences are possible, and where we might not be concerned only with [the] place *per se*, but also how place *situates* what plays out in its midst: place understood as a situational medium (Casey in Malpas, 2018, p. xi), in which the experience itself is shaped. Place then becomes simultaneously a concrete topography or landscape, a geographically located site, and the inhabitation of spatial situatedness in which particular experiences are possible and negotiated. The specific places articulated through the musical expressions of the songs here have the ability to function, to borrow Grimley’s phrasing, as both ‘physical, concrete location[s]’ and ‘imaginary sites’. While the songs thus perform place and location, they also sound out locally derived and culturally determined relationships to these sites. Their contextual environments are articulated through their sounds and timbres, and interpret connections with place as experience, setting and sound.

## Situated sounds of place in three songs by Wilhelm Stenhammar



**Illustration 1.** Map of Carl Michael Bellman's Stockholm, places of interest for his *Fredman's Epistles* and *Fredman's Songs* overlaid on map from William Coxe's *Travels*, 1784. 1 Haga park; 2 Brunnsviken; 3 Första Torpet (Epistle 80); 4 Kungsholmen; 5 Hessingen (Ep. 48); 6 Lake Mälaren (Ep. 48); 7 Söder; 8 Urvädersgränd; 9 Lokatten (Lynx Tavern, Ep. 11); 10 Yxsmedsgränd (Ep. 28); 11 Skeppsholm Quay; 12 Årsta Castle; 13 Djurgården Park; 14 Gröna Lund pleasure gardens (Ep. 12, 62); 15 Bellman's birthplace; 16 Fiskartorpet (Ep. 71); 17 Lilla Sjötullen (Ep. 48); 18 Bensvarvars (Ep. 40); 19 Rostock tavern (Ep. 45). (Wikimedia: Public domain).

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_Bellman%27s\\_Stockholm\\_William\\_Coxe%27s\\_Travels\\_1784.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Bellman%27s_Stockholm_William_Coxe%27s_Travels_1784.jpg)

### Mellan broarna

Con abbondanza Wilhelm Stenhammar, Op. 38, Nr. 3

Ro - si - ga dikt, hur din gam - la myt fyl - ler var - en - da  
vin - kelt Ul - las tri - umf och Moll - bergs skryt.  
Mo - vitz' ho - sta och fin - kel.

**Illustration 2.** Opening page of Stenhammar's 'Mellan broarna/Between the bridges' from *Fyra Stockholmsdikter* (Op. 38, no. 3).

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### Abstract

Many art songs relate ideas of place as they express relationships to sites and interpret their meanings. The place-making they engage in might encompass physical geographies, narratives of place, or negotiations around experience of places and spaces, and explore aspects of spatiality, historicity and temporality. This article listens to three songs by Wilhelm Stenhammar and argues that their relationship – textually, musically, and performatively – to topographies, sites, and situated experiences of place makes them geographically connected. It suggests, with musical and cultural geographers Grimley, Hudson, Malpas a.o., that place is constructed from interactions, experiences and narratives, and attempts to demonstrate both how these place-relationships can be read in musical texts, and how those texts can be considered active agents in place-making and geo-cultural performativities.

**Keywords:** place, art songs, Stenhammar, musical geography, cultural geography, Nordic

### The author

Annika Lindskog is Lecturer in Swedish and Scandinavian Studies at University College London (UCL), where she teaches language and cultural history. She has previously written on Stenhammar and Peterson-Berger as well as Delius, Vaughan Williams and Brahms among others, and co-edited a recent volume on *Introduction to Nordic cultures*, to which she contributed texts in particular on Carl Linnaeus and the Kalevala. She has a first degree from Piteå School of Music and Umeå University, and an MA from the School of Music at Cardiff University in Music, Culture and Politics. She is a highly active singer in chamber and church choirs in London and beyond, and provides language coaching to professional singers and ensembles who wish to attempt the Nordic repertoire.