

*Harmonik* *Norrsk* *Andersväg* *A* *Blad*

# Klaus Östby

Skandinavisk musikpionjär



Sven Nilsson

# Klaus Östby -

## Scandinavian army music pioneer

(volume 1 in a planned series of publications documenting the music history of the Salvation Army in Sweden)

### Early Army History

Salvation Army activities in Sweden commenced on December 28, 1882. In the first meeting, in Stockholm, the Army numbered five, with Major Hanna Ouchterlony as commander. The only musical instrument was a guitar, played by Lieutenant Jenny Swenson. A talented singer, she was later put in charge of musical affairs at the small Swedish headquarters, a task that mainly consisted of editing and publishing songs.

In spite of early resistance and even persecution, the Army developed swiftly and strongly; in the words of sociologist E H Thörnberg it entered Swedish society "with new manners and new costumes". Christian faith appeared in more colourful nuances, not least by the use of new musical expressions.

Singing accompanied by guitars was prevalent at all new corps but soon other instruments were taken into use. In many industrial communities there were bands, all organized according to the German sextet model: Eb cornet, Bb cornet, Eb tenor horn, Bb tenor horn, Bb valve trombone and F bass. Many of the new salvationists were workers. Some played in factory bands and now helped starting Army bands using the same instrumentation.

No central coordination of music arrangements existed, so local musicians wrote their own settings. In 1888, however, a newly converted military bandman, Otto Lundahl, was promoted to Captain and charged with organizing a territorial Music Department, at the age of 21. He divided his time between office work, composing, arranging and the strenuous task as Staff Bandmaster. Due to failing health he had to retire early. Lundahl will be portrayed in a future volume in this series.

## A Norwegian in Sweden

In 1904, a Norwegian officer, Klaus Östby, was summoned to take charge of the Music Department in Stockholm. This was a courageous decision by the Army at a time when serious political tension had brought Sweden and Norway to the brink of war; the controversy, however, was brought to a peaceful solution in the following year. Östby became a great success in his new homeland, where he remained until his retirement in 1930.

Klaus Östby had also been a military musician. He was born in 1865 at Fredrikshald near the Swedish border in southern Norway where he joined the local regimental band. He was sent to Oslo, then called Christiania, to continue his musical training and was a pupil of such highly respected musicians as F A Reissiger and Ole Olsen. His studies aroused his interest in the works of the great masters, a fascination he retained for the rest of his life.

During his stay in the Norwegian capital, Östby met the Salvation Army in 1890. Through the devoted interest of the officers of the Christiania I corps (now Oslo Temple), he was guided to a personal Christian conviction and was soon engaged as a clarinet player in the corps band. After a short period at the primitive Training Garrison, he was commissioned as an officer and shortly afterwards became the head of the new Music Department and Bandmaster of the newly established Staff Band.

Very soon Klaus Östby began composing and arranging. On one of the Staff Band's tours in northern Norway's icy and stormy waters he wrote his famed Kabelvåg march, claimed to be the first march composed in the Salvation Army. From the very outset, he made it a habit to start each day by composing a tune, just as a practice. Most of them never survived his critical scrutiny, while some were revised several times before being published.

On his arrival in Sweden, Östby immediately took up the work began by Lundahl. One of his first tasks was to produce a standardized band journal. He worked fast. In only a few months he arranged 420 songs for six-part band. He read all the proofs himself and had it all printed in a durable leather-bound volume, which was released in early 1906.

Östby's band journal was welcomed with open arms and provided song accompaniment during half a century. Some arrangements have become classics and are still being used. Östby introduced several features that charmed bands-

men and listeners alike, such as countermelodies and embellishments, particularly in the Bb valve trombone/euphonium part, and optional bass-solos in martial tunes.

Very early, Östby initiated a series of festival music, Svensk Festmusik, containing marches, selections and song arrangements. Some of it was re-arranged from London-produced series, but most of it was local material, the chief contributor being Östby himself. Next followed the arranging of song-book tunes for piano/organ harmonium or four-part choir; it was published in 1907. Then came Favoritsånger, the Swedish counter-part of The Musical Salvationist (a periodical publishing vocal music for choirs, soloists, etc.). He also produced manuals for brass instruments and concertina. In addition, he composed and arranged material for the Staff Band and the Staff Songsters. His other duties included: extensive travelling to visit corps bands and string bands; arranging educational and inspirational councils for bandsmen and musical leaders; organizing musical activities and producing music for the annual congresses; and conducting choirs and bands at special meetings.

Östby accomplished all this alone. He had no assistant and very little help with the deskwork. He *was* the Music Department.

While Östby was a prolific contributor to Svensk Festmusik and other publications, a number of his pieces were also published in international editions, including the Kabelvåg march (GS 1109), The Jolly Salvationist march (GS 717), To the Land of Glory, festival march (FS 12), and Prince-thorpe (FS 2), one of the first meditations composed in the Salvation Army.

His style was truly Nordic and his music was very much different from anything else published by the Salvationist Publishing & Supplies in London. In his vocal music, too, Östby shunned the cheap and easily won effects. Some of his songs are full-fledged romanzas in a classical style, with a complicated piano accompaniment. It should be added that he was an accomplished piano player.

Klaus Östby was a close friend of Richard Slater's, the "Father of Salvation Army Music". Both were Wagner enthusiasts and exchanged views on this and various aspects of life and Army music through an extensive exchange of letters and personal contacts. Östby visited London several times, often staying in Slater's home. At the International Congress in 1914, he conducted the "Swedish Silver Band", a combination of 35 specially recruited members wearing tunics in the Swedish colours, blue and yellow. The band aroused much enthusiasm, partly because of its playing, partly because of the Sweden-produced instruments, which had a different sound compared with the British-made ones.

When Östby retired in 1930, he moved back to his native Norway, but he continued his musical activities and studies to the end of his life. In the 1930's he acted as musical adviser to the Territorial Headquarters in Oslo. When his country was invaded by foreign troops in April 1940, he quietly slipped back to Sweden. He spent his final years at the Army residence for retired officers, being the only male among 14 lady officers. They were all "on the marriage market", he wrote in a letter, but Östby was already married to Mrs Musica and remained a bachelor until his death.

Klaus Östby was a loner and considered to be of philosophical disposition. In music he put high demands for quality, both on himself and the performers. As an instructor and conductor he was very strict, and even stern, but not without humour. Musicians in Sweden regarded him with a mixture of awe and affectionate devotion.

He was also an avid reader. His daily routine included - apart from practices on piano, clarinet and flute - Bible readings in Norwegian, Swedish, English or German. He was well-read in both philosophy and music theory, and he followed musical developments in the world closely. He admired Chopin's, Bach's, Wagner's, Johan Svendsen's and Grieg's music; a contemporary favourite was Carl Nielsen.

Klaus Östby was promoted to Glory on April 27, 1945, less than two weeks before his beloved Norway was liberated. His funeral, with full battle honours, took place in Stockholm, in the presence of virtually all bandsmen in the region, but his ashes rest in Norwegian soil.

This biography-cum-CD is the first volume in a planned series of publications on Salvation Army music history in Sweden. The work is conducted by a research group under the auspices of the territorial Music Department in Stockholm. The biographical text has been written by Commissioner Sven Nilsson, while the musical analyses have been provided by Retired Bandmaster Sture Petersson, former head of the Music Department, and Bandmaster Torgny Hanson. Commissioner Haakon Dahlström, Oslo, an ardent Östby enthusiast and close friend of the composer, has contributed much information and has also scrutinized the manuscript.