

**One and the Other, (*Speculative Polskas for Karin*)**

As beautifully described by Karin in her program note, this work explores aspects of her embodied knowledge of Swedish folk fiddle traditions and their intimate link to the *polska*, a dance in triple time. The dance rhythm: a heavy step on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> beats with a suspended, gliding step in-between, provided a template for musical and conceptual thinking. After the ‘One’, there is the ‘Other’: the ‘beat 2’ as a movement across ungrounded space evoked images of a liminal portal through which other presences could step forward; at the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> step is the travelling beat, it transports one across the space, suggestive of ways in which rituals carry us across gaps in myth-making and stories that don’t add up.

Various aspects of the Swedish dance form and its music are reflected in the solo work’s gestural patterns of stepping, lifting, sliding and turning, and in its elaborated trills, repetitions and interpolations. The music was composed by following the idiomatic grain of player-instrument arising from my observations of Karin’s physical and emotional relationship to her violin as a container of stories and memories. Faint traces of particular *polska* tunes are grafted on to the open 5<sup>th</sup> tuning of the violin’s upper strings with the deep ‘cello-like low-F string providing a counter-voice or ‘other body’ that partners the violin/ist in the dance.

The first two parts of the work provide templates for navigating and evolving a performance practice derived from Karin’s body of knowledge which we imagined as a figure 8 loop travelling between past, present and future. In each present moment, elements of the past have the potential to slip out and speak, carried by the body momentum generated by repeated motions and recurrences in form; whilst the future is also always threaded into the work through elements of indeterminacy that require the performer’s fantasy. This relation between possession by the past, and the futurity of invention is grounded in the violinist’s body which is the sliding ‘knot’ in the infinite twist of the music.

**Part III: Recall of *Näktergal polska***

Part 3 of the work comprises a sequence of suggestions for the player to recall aspects of the Swedish folk tradition in the form of one of the *Näktergal polskas* (handed down in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by fiddle-player ‘Nightingale’ Erik Ersson from the Dalarna region of Sweden). These were the first *polskas* that I heard Karin play. This act of recall is intended as a kind of ventriloquism of other voices, of patterns lodged in the body through practice and examined through a deconstruction of left- and right-hand movements. The various forms of ornamentation: finger trills, lateral bow glides and brushing movements, are amplifications of notions of desire; of the human desire to create ‘lures’ through demonstrations of skill, aesthetic beauty, and an artisan’s personalisation of given materials. Sliding back and forth, weaving threads of time, story, dance and song, the musician arrives at a trembling knot of presence.

For players outside of the Swedish fiddle tradition, it may not be relevant to perform this final part though I also invite interpretations that perhaps draw on other musical performance traditions (for instance, country music fiddling is also invoked in the music) and on bodies of knowing that may intersect with the suggestions offered.

**Karin Hellqvist: Heartbeats at the knot of presence**

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What you hear is the pulsating heartbeat of the *polska*. The heavy first beat opens the flow of melody. But soon, the second beat responds, expanding the pulse beyond regularity. This is an airy, elastic and light beat, but at the same time, it is the center of motion. After this thrilling moment of weightlessness comes the third beat. It injects renewed focus and direction into the pulse, drawing it back to a new first beat. And the melody continues to unfold.

In the region of Dalarna in Sweden where I grew up, the *polska* dance is at the core of the traditional music. In ceremonies and everyday life, it’s being danced by couples or played just for its own beauty. The identity of a specific *polska* depends on the local village it originates from, as well as the personalities of the fiddlers playing it, over generations of hearing-based transmission. And if the pulse is the heartbeat of the *polska*, its rich ornamentation could be considered the fiddler’s unique fingerprint. Over years of repetition and refinement, a musician’s trills, specific intonation and ornaments are being personalized. Engraved in the body as semi-automatized patterns, they are being improvised in the moment, yet drawing on knowledge acquired over decades. How I’d place the *polska*’s beats and how I’d ornament its melody as a fiddler, depends both on past, local traditions and my internalized patterns of sonic embroidery.

When playing *polskas* from my home region, I can feel the music moving inside my body. The first beat connects me to the ground, through feet lightly tapping the rhythm, in the left side of my body. The second beat swirls up, as if caught by a sudden wind. I inhale. Then, again the music lands in my feet, to the right. And the cycle repeats.

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**One and the Other** (*speculative polskas for Karin*) is the title of a composition by Liza Lim, created in collaboration with myself, violinist Karin Hellqvist. It provides a compositional structure from which I can access the embodied knowledge that developed over years of hosting traditional music within my body. It acts as a framework within which I can let internalized patterns speak and hybridize in unexpected ways. Through its temporal loops, nested repeat signs and pockets of materials to insert at will, it is a labyrinth of layers of embodied knowledge to navigate, framed through Liza’s careful instructions.

Already from the work’s opening bars, the dance floor of the *polska* is being drawn out over the violin’s finger board. With sweeping lateral bow strokes and percussive chops of friction, we can sense its heartbeats. The light and syncopated 2<sup>nd</sup> beat has a different structure, it opens a space for other kinds of materials to enter. Swirls of harmonics and fragile overtones suggest the ghostly presence of other bodies and time dimensions.

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By the end of the work, my hands and arms are trembling from the exhaustion of embodied materials set in motion and rubbed against each other. In the middle of the finger board, I end up in a tiny but intense shivering motion. In this trembling knot I have landed at, I experience how a polyphony of times exists. This *polska* is connecting the past and the present. Through the tradition of fiddlers before me, captured in my embodied knowledge, and the compositional path that our work suggests, I bring layers of time together from the knot of presence.