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Introduction

Anyone can at any time become a member of Räfven.
No one should play an instrument they have command of.
No one should play an instrument that drowns out any other.
Räfven should never rehearse.
No one is ever allowed to play from sheet music.
Räfven should never be paid for a gig except in travel expenses and red wine.
Räfven will never record an album. (Räfven 2006) [[181/182](#)]

Räfven’s manifesto is featured in the liner notes to their first album, in direct violation of its own final point. In fact, as those same liner notes reveal, by the album’s release in 2006 Räfven had already abandoned all seven points of their then three-year-old manifesto, although they ‘do their best to abide by it when the opportunity arises’ (Räfven 2006).¹

This list of rules had been a product of the band’s first summer of existence, during which they busked their way across the Swedish countryside with a small repertoire of folk and klezmer tunes, dedicated to the proposition of playing music for the joy of it. An attempt to capture the spirit of those beginnings, the manifesto reveals a lot about the ideals to which Räfven aspired: egalitarianism (points one, two and three), amateurism (points one through seven), togetherness (points three and five), liveness (points three, four and seven), anti-commercialism (points six and seven) and the value of revelling in the present (points four, six and seven). Over the course of that first summer, this carefree ideology became codified for the band—socially and sonically—in the archetypal Gypsy figure of European myth.

The violation of the manifesto, on the other hand, corresponds to the return home and the end of summer. Over the years Räfven gained an audience and a following, as well as three additional members, all quite competent on their instruments. The band’s willingness to break their own rules—to rehearse, to record albums, to accept payment for gigs—has allowed them to turn the enjoyments of a summer vacation into a sustainable project and a viable source of income. This is not, however, the story of a group that ‘sells out’ in any conventional sense. Räfven have managed to become an extremely popular live band while remaining unsigned, retaining full creative control over their music. If anything, they have become more politically focused in their dedication to the principles of egalitarianism that inspired their manifesto. Their success has granted them a bully pulpit from which to proclaim the rights of all people to move freely, and to denounce the tyranny of national borders.

Of significance here is not Räfven’s violation of their manifesto, but rather their refusal to abandon or revise it. Although they do not follow its anti-commercial edicts, they have retained it as a symbol of what they stand for. This identifiable fissure in Räfven’s lived versus projected identity is symptomatic of a deeper schism between the benefits they enjoy as white ethnic Swedes within a socio-economic system that privileges them, and their critique of that system levelled not only on behalf of, but also accented in the imagined voice of its disenfranchised.

That imagined voice is the subject of this issue as a whole, what we its authors are calling

¹ All translations are by the author, except where otherwise noted in the reference list.

the New Old Europe Sound. Musically, it amounts to the general revival among northwestern Europeans of klezmer, Romani, and Balkan musics and their fusions. Räfven's use of (primarily) Jewish musical sounds to represent a fantastical Gypsiness is characteristic of New Old Europe's typical blurring of ethnic specificity, a dissipation of proprietorship that facilitates the band's own claims, as white ethnic Swedes, on the entire conflated complex. This claim becomes a valuable tool in [182/183] Räfven's overtly progressive anti-racist, pro-immigration agenda. The multicultural capital to which the New Old Europe Sound grants Räfven (and their ethnically Swedish audience members) access helps them self-identify as equal subjects, alongside their immigrant neighbours, of a culturally pluralist society.

This re-imagination of Swedish ethnic identity is a potentially powerful intervention, picking up some of the slack in Swedish immigration policy. While the state has dedicated ample resources to teaching immigrants how to acclimate to Swedish life, it has done little to encourage ethnic Swedes to adapt to their new neighbours (Arnstberg 2008: 53–4; Daun 1996: 153–6; Rojas 1996: 258–61). The underlying assumption—that ethnic Swedes are already progressively enlightened and need no re-education—has been counter-indicated by the persistence of social segregation via workplace and housing discrimination (Öberg 1996; Ahmed and Hammarstedt 2008). One common explanation for the unwillingness of ethnic Swedes to relax their boundaries has been that they lack a strong sense of cultural identity, and can thus feel threatened by the perceived weightiness of immigrant cultural traditions (Kaminsky 2011: 93–5). While some Swedes have turned to pre-industrial Swedish folk culture as a recourse, that source has been so publicly mined by the racist–nationalist right in recent years that it has become problematic as an integrationist tool (Kaminsky 2012). The injection into Swedish identity of Jewish and Romani cultural capital, on the other hand, might be a more workable solution. With their perceived weight, multicultural valence, and capacity to mark distance from both Nazism and (in the case of Jewishness) Islam, these elements have the potential to lessen the resultant anxieties greatly.

The dark irony behind these practices is that both the attractiveness and the accessibility of much of their cultural source material are a direct result of the persecution and genocide of the people who originally produced it. The appeal of Jewish and Romani cultural capital grows directly from the oppression of those two groups. To identify with victims of any kind is to adopt the perceived romance and nobility of that status, and to self-absolve guilt born of privilege in an unjust society. The landless status for which Jews and Roma specifically are lauded as icons of postnationalism is similarly a direct result of their history of persecution—those who romanticise this status typically having confused 'free to move about' with 'unwelcome to stay' (Trumpener 1992: 862–4; Steiman 1998; see also Bohlman 2011: 159–65). That history of persecution is also what grants Europeans access to said cultural capital. Jewish and Romani territorial and cultural dispossessions are inextricably linked by the Herderian logic—foundational for European nationalisms—that defines culture as a result of the interaction between a people and their land. This logic powers the narrative of parasitism that results in the Holocaust, and then allows Jewish and Romani cultural activities to be reclaimed by their European 'host' cultures once those groups have been mass-murdered into abstraction. The all-encompassing nature of this conceptual and literal genocide is fundamental to the appropriability of these identities, which by a fortuitous confluence of European nationalist and postmodern [183/184] logics have so thoroughly been generalised away from the people to whom they once belonged.

The introduction to this issue engages with the mechanisms and history of this phenomenon, by which Europe's internal Others have, over the past quarter century, become symbolic markers of a new multicultural European identity. I reference them here primarily to

indicate the extent to which the historical and present-day injustices that have enabled Räfven to speak so intelligibly in their chosen voice raise the stakes for the efficacy of their political message. However, while that history and those mechanisms certainly undergird and facilitate Räfven's claim, this article engages with the specific discursive processes via which that band in particular take ownership of Jewish and Romani cultural capital.

First and foremost among these processes is Räfven's displacement of their claim into a realm of fantasy. They manage this displacement via magic realist aesthetics, the persistent inclusion of totemic animals in text and imagery, and exploitation of a Swedish tradition of associating klezmer and similar musics with non-realist theatre. Second, and common to the New Old Europe phenomenon writ large, is a blurring of the music's source traditions. Räfven tend to use a generalising 'Eastern European' label to describe their performance of hyperbolic quasi-Gypsy personae via mostly klezmer-inspired music. Third is the use they make of a traditional Swedish self-perception of inner worldliness, according to which some exotic essence already lies waiting to be revealed at the core of Swedish identity. As I will demonstrate, all three of these processes are at play in Räfven's words and imagery, as well as in their music and the associated dancing.

These techniques work in tandem with those pre-existing discourses whereby Jewish and Romani cultural capital can be claimed on behalf of Europe as a whole (Kaminsky 2015; see also Gruber 2002; Markovic 2009: 115). Combined with these discourses they are effective in revising white ethnic Swedish identity as convincingly multicultural. In so doing, they act to dissipate the discomforts associated with both the presence of immigrants and—potentially—any sense of complicity in the system that continues to relegate those immigrants to second-class status. Significantly, these techniques allow all of this to happen whether the audience is mixed or (like the band) made up entirely of white ethnic Swedes. Räfven's performances neither demand nor dissuade either the presence or empowerment of any disenfranchised groups. The secure sense of multicultural self that Räfven provide to white ethnic Swedes thus opens two possible doors. By dissipating discomfort it can encourage complacency, allowing utopian art to substitute for a more egalitarian reality. Alternatively, it can inspire people to pursue anti-racist agendas and so strive for the realisation of that utopia.

Räfven

Räfven's story begins in March 2003, in a Gothenburg row house shared by several recent graduates of a local school for singer/songwriters. Several of the future band [184/185] members started playing music together on instruments that were either new to them or that they had not played since they were children. Around this same time, two of them wound up at a protest rally against the newly-initiated Iraq war, singing 1970s-era anti-war songs for the crowd. When the organisation that had planned the protest put together a fundraiser, the two of them were asked to play again. This time, however, they brought reinforcements, for the first public performance by the original five members of the band. During the summer after that first gig, the group decided to continue playing together as a deliberately fun, anti-professional side project from their various individual music careers. They piled into a beaten-up Volvo and drove south, stopping in small towns just long enough to busk for food and petrol money before moving on.

Already by their first performance at the fundraiser, some curious things were happening with genre. According to one band member, the band's intention from the outset was to play

music in the 1970s-era protest music tradition that Swedes call *progg*.² The choice seems logical, given the group's anti-war origins and the singer/songwriter credentials of most of its members. The group was also drawn, however, to the klezmer tunes that one of the band members was being assigned in his music lessons. About one-half of their repertoire that first summer was klezmer—partly drawn from those lessons, and partly from a sheet music binder the group had chanced upon in a practice room at the Gothenburg School of Music.

The band's musical shift away from *progg* can be traced in part to a gravitation toward instrumental music during that first informal summer tour.³ On a practical level, they were playing without amplification. On an aesthetic level, they were distancing themselves from the texted music of their professional careers. Most frequently acknowledged by the band members, however, was the fact that Eastern European sounds indexed an imagined lifestyle they were enthusiastic about emulating. One band member described the transition:

We slipped into klezmer, and then given that we were travelling around with a broken-down Volvo and no money, we also felt this connection to Roma. And so the Romani music became—there's a romantic lustre to that too—so it was easy to assimilate. So just after a few years we wound up being a folk music band rather than a *progg* band, and primarily our repertoire is klezmer and Eastern European-sounding music.

He suggested that their overall performance aesthetic owed a great deal to Emir Kusturica, whose movies were popular in Sweden at the time. When I asked him for [185/186] clarification about the connection between Jewish music and the romanticised Gypsy lifestyle he was describing, he continued:

I think a lot of people would probably mix that up in Sweden. Every other person who comments about what we play—some say it's Russian, some say it's Eastern European, some say it's Romani, some say it's klezmer, so somehow it's all mixed together. Which I think is very delightful, because I think it's really nice that the music almost gets to have its own ethnicity. We don't belong to a particular ethnicity in Råfven, and neither does our music, but the music can travel freely, and it's landed with us, and now it lives—now it's our music.

When ethnic specificity is made irrelevant, the musical accessibility of klezmer can reinforce the imagined social accessibility of Gypsy identity. This erasure of boundaries thus helps to free valued cultural material from all of its dead originators, so that it may 'live' and be possessed by Swedish musicians in the present day.

At the time of my fieldwork, Råfven were thus insistent on refusing a definitive label for their genre. Their press releases listed a surfeit of cheekily hybrid invented terms: folk punk, fat Balkan, animal *progg*, crash klezmer, and humpa bumpa. One band member actually found it upsetting and embarrassing when the band was advertised specifically as playing klezmer, Romani, or Balkan music (as outside arrangers would often do), interpreting this as a kind 'false

² The band members, all eight of whom I interviewed during the summer of 2010, have asked that they not be identified individually by name in this article. All quotations from band members are from interviews, unless otherwise noted.

³ In some sense, Råfven's instrumental folk music also situates them within the Swedish *progg* tradition, since the protest music movement of the 1970s had close ties to the folk revival of that period. One prominent 1970s Swedish *progg* band, Orientexpressen, even played Balkan and Balkan-inspired music, although the members of Råfven do not cite them as an influence in interviews or publicity material. Råfven do also still have a few songs in their repertoire (originals and covers) that fall more neatly into the *progg* genre.

advertising'. Today, Räfven's English-language website has settled on the label of 'gypsy punk', although again their repertoire remains mostly within a klezmer idiom.

New members joined the band in 2004 and 2005, but since that time the roster has remained stable at eight. This article is based on fieldwork and interviews I conducted with all eight band members in 2010, as part of a broader ethnographic project on klezmer in Sweden. For an outside perspective I have also included quotations from other local New Old Europe musicians, most extensively from fiddler Elin Andersson. Still in her teens at the time of her interview, Elin had experience playing in a number of bands influenced and inspired at least in part by Räfven.

Animal Progg

The band graciously invited me to stay with them at the 2010 Krokstrand festival, where they had initially broken through in 2006 and were now returning as a headlining act. On sale at the festival was the group's newly released third album, *Welcome to Räfven Village* [*Välkommen till Räfbygd*]. The front and back covers of the CD case together depict a lush and intricate panorama of the imagined village, an inviting fantasy-land of cliff faces Swiss-cheesed by a network of roads, caves, staircases, and rope bridges, overlooking a conglomeration of colourful tents on a lakeside beach in the middle of a verdant valley floor. The village is populated by groups of intermingling people and animals of multiple races and species, variously at play and at rest. The band are there too, playing music in a multi-story tree house. Curiously, they are the only ones depicted as both animal and human, with men's bodies and horses' heads. [186/187]

The inclusion of animals in the imagery here is not an isolated occurrence. Räfven have song and tune titles that reference dogs, snakes, hens, foxes, flamingos, lions, ermines, voles, and crows. The name Räfven itself means 'The Fox'. Moreover, other klezmer/East European fusion bands in the Gothenburg area tend to identify with animals in similar ways; for example, Kaja [Magpie] and Flocken [The Flock]. For Flocken especially, animals are a central theme, a frequent subject of onstage patter and tune naming. They, like Räfven, represent their band members as animals in their iconography. Räfven's 'animal *progg*' genre categorisation is thus far from arbitrary.

The implicit association of Jews, Roma, and East Europeans with animals operates not so much as dehumanisation in the sense proposed by Fanon, but rather as a kind of Aesopification (Fanon 1963: 41–2). The fantasy of these sonic and visual images constitutes a heightened reality, a community based on ideal selves manifested as animal archetypes. The fox and magpie are not less than, but rather more than human. The prized elements of Jewish and Romani cultural capital are distilled into these boundary-violating, thieving trickster animals. In that process those elements are alienated from ethnic specificity and attached to animals that are both native to Sweden and have a worldwide spread. This ostensibly simple anthropomorphism thus does triple work. First, it fabulises the postnational possibilities of Jewish and Romani identity. Second, it allows Swedish artists to claim the resultant fable for themselves. Third, its animal conflation of the native and international resolves any potential cognitive dissonance by naturalising the possibility of a boundless utopia inhabited first and foremost by Swedes.

The heightened reality effect established by Räfven's music and imagery is further reinforced by a 20-some-year-old Swedish tradition of using the New Old Europe Sound in non-realist theatre and children's storytelling music.⁴ Accordionist Sara Fridholm (not of Räfven)

⁴ Quite by coincidence, when Räfven travelled south on their first informal summer tour they ended up in

discusses using klezmer as a generalised theatre genre:

It works very well in theatre contexts. Klezmer music is so evocative somehow—people can experience it as very emotional. It was fun because we staged *The Story of the Little Old Man*, which is a Swedish children’s story by Barbro Lindgren. It’s about a lonely old man who’s excluded by all the other old men, they’re always tripping him, and the dogs growl, and he just wants a friend. And at the end a dog comes to him. And the music fit so incredibly well. It was nice that it wasn’t so typically Swedish either, only it could have been an old man from anywhere in the world, really.

I will return to the question of how a Swedish audience might hear klezmer as signifying ‘anywhere in the world’ in the next section. [\[187/188\]](#)

Fiddler Elin Andersson reflects that her conscious entry into Eastern European music came via Räfven, whom she identifies as the most popular live band in Gothenburg during her musically formative high school years. Her unconscious introduction came much earlier, however, at the age of seven or so, from a brief klezmer-inspired composition in a children’s radio play recorded by local theatre troupe Markatta in 1994:

I listened a lot to that children’s story when I was little, I remember I really liked that tune. And then in the band Hilda had also heard that children’s story and also liked that tune a lot, so we played it. And that’s how we realised we’d been listening to klezmer. (Interview, 2010)

In the context of the Markatta production, as in *The Story of the Little Old Man*, the klezmer-inspired tune lacks any overt Jewish or East European signification. If the two productions have a common denominator, then once again it is the presence of animals. In the first case, the old man is befriended by a dog. In the second, the spoken dialogue over the tune describes the emergence of a tiny adorable kraken from a box.

Theatricality is also essential to Räfven’s persona as a band. Their animal guises are only one example of their larger-than-life self-dramatisations. Each band member also has a grandly archetypal title: ‘the Baker’, ‘The Butcher’, ‘the Baron’, ‘the Youth’, ‘the Rogue’, ‘the Judge’, ‘the Pastor’, and ‘the Sultan’. The band’s two official music videos are quite different but for their common use of multiple zoom-in reveals that confuse the spaces between real life, stage, and fantasy—the first of which, in both cases, happens through the opening of a crimson curtain. The prose of their liner notes is consistently purple with evocations of circus and adventure.

Inner Worldliness

The liner notes to *Welcome to Räfven Village* end with the following description of the band’s recording process:

The grand piano was brought out, the harmonium started pumping, a horn snuck in, some handclapping was captured, evil cackles from the angst-lion Ryeblood, mumbling choirs, a wobbly

Tokalynga, home base for Theatre Albatross, whose aesthetic sensibilities at the time stemmed largely from a similarly mythic image of Eastern Europe. One of the leading performers in that theatre group was accordionist Cristoffer Svård, also a central figure in the local New Old Europe scene, having played a mix of Romani, klezmer, and Balkan music in the Gothenburg area since the mid-1990s. Svård was one of several of my consultants to mention playing klezmer in theatre productions, although notably he was the only one to do so for a play with specifically Jewish themes.

elephant, shouts in foreign languages we don't understand ourselves, sea lions with small brightly-coloured balls on their noses, the singing dog Stella (who was rewarded with two hearty pork chops for her extraordinary input). All this and more made up the soundscape, together with the instruments we normally play in Räfven. Adventure, freedom, a completely off-the-rails circus, and a realm of its own are the result. (Räfven 2009)

All of the theatricality and fascination with animals is manifest here in the surreal circus language. What interests me here, however, is how exactly all this chaos can result in 'a realm of its own' [*ett eget rike*]. There is an aspect of this Swedish turn of phrase that cannot quite be translated into English. The 'its' in my translation is not present in the original because Swedish allows the adjective 'own' to be modified by an indefinite article instead of a possessive pronoun. The exact but ungrammatical [188/189] translation would be 'an own realm'. Whether this realm belongs to Räfven specifically or is simply independent of the quotidian real world is thus unclear from the language and context. This fortuitous ambiguity allows Räfven to propose an alternative plane of existence, and to stake a claim on it without seeming to. Concealed in the folds of grammar is the persistent dilemma of all romantic utopian fantasy realms—the question of who rules and has access to that space.

If they do not rule the place, Räfven are certainly privileged agents in the village that bears their name. The title *Welcome to Räfven Village* definitely implies that the band are natives and the listeners are guests. In even more concrete terms, Räfven play the music on the album, they wrote it, and they own the copyright. Iconographically, they occupy the centre of the album cover image. Various items associated with the group—their banner, their mascot, their iconic pink van—make appearances throughout the village. With their human bodies and horse heads they are also centred (centaured) in the transitional space between human and animal, and so the most at home in a village filled with both. The fantastical and zoomorphic elements that centre Räfven within the space also function to elide the question that the album's sounds might make obvious were the iconography more grounded—how can eight Swedes claim ownership of a world constituted sonically by mythic constructions of a Gypsified Eastern Europe?

Ethnologist Orvar Löfgren has argued that the nineteenth-century establishment of distinct times for work and leisure was key to the development of modern Swedish cultural identity (1979: 13–41). Work time is about what a person does, and is marked by hierarchy, stiffness and formality, sterility, and emotional chilliness. Leisure time is about who a person is, and is marked by egalitarianism, relaxation and informality, embodiment, and emotional warmth (Löfgren 1979: 64–8; see also Austin 1968: 20–9). Conventionally, these two halves of Swedish identity are conceptualised as 'outer' and 'inner' worlds. The archetypal Swede is cold on the outside and warm on the inside.

According to Löfgren, the greatest socio-cultural manifestation of leisure time and its attendant associations is the summer vacation (1979: 64–75). The rural summer vacation establishes and reinforces the role of nature as the place where modern urban Swedes can go to rediscover their inner selves. Today, however, while the Swedish countryside and wilderness remain popular vacation destinations, increasingly the norm has become international travel (Karlsson 1994: 81; Wolf 2001: 21). Löfgren's discussion of the international tourist phenomenon suggests that the function he describes is consistent, even as the destination changes:

Behind the clichés are dreams of the land of Difference, a sense that you can become a different person by travelling south: more sensual, more relaxed, more corporeal. It's not just sexuality that's

‘down there’ but also a bunch of other things. The dream of the vacation to the South is therefore often a dream of being freed ... the possibility of un-Swedish behaviour, or rather the possibility of letting loose sides of Swedishness that social control, daily routines, and conventions held in check at home. (Löfgren 1989: 36; original emphasis) [189/190]

Tourist destinations like the Mediterranean and Thailand operate as informal realms of embodiment, casualness, relaxation, and warmth. Swedes can now get in touch with their inner selves by going on walkabout in the unsterilised world beyond their borders. The wider world thus becomes an essential aspect—in some sense, the most authentic aspect—of Swedish identity.

East Europe is not the most common actual tourist destination for travelling Swedes. Still, as an imagined space, it functions as an ideal location for this Swedish ‘inner’ identity. The Kusturica movies have reified an already-established conception of that space as lively and dirty, with a gritty authenticity. Yet the territory remains a part of Europe and can thus belong to Swedes inasmuch as they are European also. Similarly, it occupies a usefully liminal position with regard to race. By identifying with East European off-whiteness, white ethnic Swedes can dissolve any taint of Aryanness. This enables them to construct for themselves a marked racial identity that does not position them as oppressors. Räfven would not have access to this re-negotiation were they to play music inspired by West Africans, or South Asians, or Native Americans. Yet nothing prevents them from actually telling audiences they are from Eastern Europe, a practice one band member notes they have toyed with: ‘You can buy that, I mean a lot of us look a little weird’. The band can claim East European identity via their own Europeanness, and then claim global citizenship by virtue of the Otherness of their Eastern European identity. This same sequential structuring of imaginary identification is what allows Sara Fridholm to use klezmer to grant Barbro Lindgren’s eponymous Little Old Man international provenance. Here an iconic Swedish character gains global citizenship via that same sonic construction of an Eastern European transitional space.

This mediating function is understandable in light of the way many Swedes were coming to see both Swedish and Balkan nationalisms as suspect at the historical moment of the New Old Europe Sound’s initial formation in Sweden. Those increasingly xenophobic middle 1990s saw the ascendance of two highly successful musical genres—White Power music and Swedish folk rock—the lines between which were not always entirely clear to the listener (Kaminsky 2011: 97–8; Lilliestam 1997: 39–40). Simultaneously, the Yugoslav wars were reconfirming in the Swedish popular imagination the pathology of Balkan nationalist sentiment (Löfgren 1993: 29–30). Thus, in the very moments Swedish folk music was becoming tainted as possibly reactionary, the illegitimacy of Balkan nationalisms freed up Eastern European sounds for international use. From a certain perspective, associating those sounds with Swedish global citizenship was less problematic than allowing them to be tied to Serbian, Croatian, or Bosnian identity. Twenty years later, the New Old Europe Sound continues to index global citizenship so effectively that it can make Barbro Lindgren’s Little Old Man universal, sparing him the musical markers of Swedish cultural—or worse yet, racial—identity.

The erasure of boundaries between Sweden and the outside world is further reinforced by a popular Swedish sensibility of anti-nationalism. For politically mainstream and leftist Swedes, worldliness establishes distance from the radical right-wing nationalists who find value in Swedish ethnocultural myopia. Räfven [190/191] invoke this worldliness on their fourth album—which retains their trademark Eastern European sound—with the provocative title *Swedish Culture* [*Svensk kultur*]. To clarify the multicultural message, they depart from their

established pattern of writing their own extensive liner notes. Instead, they make space for a two-page English-language statement on the question of ‘what is Swedish’ by Daniel Poohl, editor-in-chief of Sweden’s premier anti-racist magazine. After a thorough critique of the radical right and their attempts to define Swedishness via racially pure folk music, Poohl concludes this statement: ‘Swedish is a bunch of white guys playing folk music that the extreme right wants to silence’ (2011).

The intentional discordance between the album’s sound and its title is an effectively pointed critique of cultural nationalism. However, the identity of the musicians cannot help but undermine any potential critiques of political or racial nationalism. If we are to take *Swedish Culture* as an expression of multicultural Swedishness, as Daniel Poohl does, then we must also accept his formulation that the representatives of that expression should be ‘a bunch of white guys’. The album validates Swedishness as a category, and implicitly allows it to be defined as a function of both multiculturalism and whiteness.

While this may not be Räfven’s intended message, I would argue that it strikes at the very essence of what makes them so successful. One band member suggests that the band members’ ethnicity is intimately tied to their acceptance as players of ‘this kind of’ music:

I think it’s easier to get money playing on the street if you’re Swedish. Because then you’re not a beggar in people’s eyes. You’re not someone who just comes here and tries to get money. Unfortunately, I think that’s how it is. That’s also why they implemented that prohibition against playing on the street here, because a bunch of Roma came one summer and sat down and started to play ... I mean in Sweden, I think that as a rule it’s easiest to play this kind of music and be accepted right away if you’re Swedish. Otherwise you have to be a very assimilated immigrant. Unfortunately. (Interview, 2010)

At the core of modern Swedish identity is a sense of enlightenment, progressivism, and egalitarianism. Since the immigration reforms of the 1970s, these ideals have demanded recognition of immigrants and their children as social equals. Yet in everyday casual discourse, Swedes remain an ethnic subset of whites. (In this band member’s formulation, for instance, ‘Swedish’ is a category to which even ‘a very assimilated immigrant’ does not belong.) Räfven reach their audience by resolving the dissonance of that untenable logic. They are Swedish and not. They claim and reject subaltern identities. They validate and rebel against the *status quo*. The key to all of this is their domestication of foreign sounds.

‘Franz’s Nightmare’

A central aspect of the New Old Europe Sound that makes it easy to claim is the vagueness of its make-up. Räfven can pick and choose the most useful aspects of its multiple constituent elements. If anyone asks for a label, ‘Eastern European’ is [191/192] general enough to counter in advance any potential repatriative arguments. For a projected identity, ‘Gypsiness’ is useful for its putative permeability as a lifestyle (Kaminsky 2015). The blurriness of New Old Europe allows Räfven to do all of this while never straying far from their musical roots in the klezmer tradition.

Those of my consultants who have identified differences between Romani, klezmer, and Balkan musics have generally marked klezmer as the most predictable and Western of the three. Some will express this difference in terms of scalar make-up. Others will contrast klezmer’s duple metres and balanced phrase structures against Balkan asymmetries and Romani

irregularities. Klezmer is thus the easiest to play, while remaining ‘just exotic enough’ to convince listeners that it demands special competence (cf. Kaminsky 2014). Here Elin Andersson describes a gig she played with two of her high school friends:

It’s funny, because people have listened very little to klezmer—they think you’re a lot better than you are. Last year me Jana and Hilda played at a wedding, and we hadn’t really rehearsed, so we were doing really simple arrangements. ‘We’ll play it five times and hope they dance’. And after we played several people came up independently and asked if we were from the School of Music. (Interview, 2010)

Räfven’s members have a wide range of technical abilities on their instruments, from professional to amateur. Klezmer’s capacity to sound more complicated than it is may be one reason why their original compositions still draw from that tradition primarily.

As an illustration of the contrast between Räfven’s Kusturica-inspired Gypsy personae and their klezmer-inspired music, consider the following story as they tell it first verbally, then musically on stage at the 2010 Krokstrand festival:

Once upon a time we played on the street in Hamburg, ladies and gentlemen, Hamburg, the big city to the south. Unfortunately we were playing at night and a group of constables came and said ‘sorry guys, you can’t play here. People are sleeping, even in Germany’. Bang! Then they shot us. No they didn’t, but we saw that we couldn’t stay there, so a restaurateur came and said ‘come in here and play’, so we went in to play there instead, but believe it or not, forty-five minutes later the same exact constables came and said to us: [in English] ‘Which word did you not understand? Next time we take your instruments!’ (Field recording)

In this story Räfven manifest their romanticised Gypsiness as wild, rambunctious outlaws, a threat to law and order. Nothing in this telling (and little in the band’s elaborate mythos) marks them as particularly Balkan or Jewish. However, when the band follow this story on stage with their musical response to those constables—written after the fact—they engage a casual shift in ethnic gears.

The song is ‘Franz’s Nightmare’ [*Franz mardröm*], also a featured track on the band’s second album, *Next Time We Take Your Instruments!* The original tune (henceforth the *mardröm* tune) is in simple binary form, with two contrasting sections. The A section begins in a common klezmer scale, variably known as *mi sheberach*, altered Dorian, or Ukrainian minor—effectively Dorian with a raised fourth and a variable sixth and seventh scale degree. As the A section progresses, [192/193] chromatic elements are interjected, and the tune vacillates between *mi sheberach* and natural minor (Figure 1).

The image displays a musical score for the song 'Franz's Nightmare'. It consists of two staves of music written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff begins in 4/4 time and contains the following chord symbols above the notes: Dm, A, Dm, Gm. The second staff continues the melody and includes the chord symbols: A, Dm, Gm, A, Dm. The piece concludes with a double bar line. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and accidentals.

Figure 1 ‘Franz’s Nightmare’, A section. Musical transcription by the author. [193]

We hear this melody twice at the beginning of the song; first tutti, then as a violin solo. This sort of variation at the repeat is a common klezmer arrangement device. Stylistically, the melody lands fairly solidly within a klezmer idiom as well, although the chromatic elements push the boundaries somewhat. The few moments of irregular metre are slightly more unusual for klezmer. For Swedish musicians they may function as a marker of Romani influence.⁵

The B section moves to the relative major, again with some chromatic elements (Figure 2). While this section remains within that klezmer idiom, it might also inspire associations with march or Dixieland music. This sort of combination of contrasting sections is quite common within klezmer as well. My Swedish consultants have frequently commented upon the phenomenon as evidence of the music’s eclectic nature. As one band member notes:

Klezmer music is built like that. Klezmerim travelled around in Europe and picked up tunes from different places and met other musicians. It’s a very mixed genre somehow, in the influences it’s taken. I mean sometimes you hear a C-section that’s a march, a German march, in major, that comes in the middle of a klezmer tune in minor.

In sum, for Swedes the music of these two sections in combination would suggest klezmer primarily, although it pushes the boundaries somewhat with its chromaticism. It might also index Romani influence as a function of the A section’s irregular metre and phrase structure.

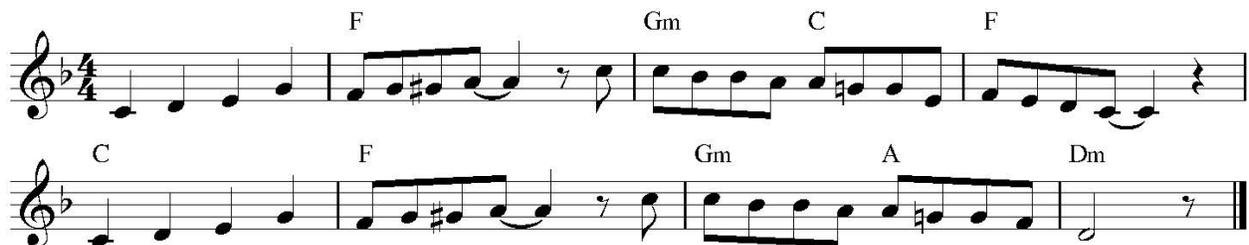


Figure 2 ‘Franz’s Nightmare’, B section. Musical transcription by the author. [194]

After the tune is presented in its entirety, the narrative begins in earnest. The band return to the A section in unison song, with lyrics in English:

You go ahead and take our instruments!
You go ahead and put us all in jail!
You go ahead and put us in chains, and tie us up from nose to tail!

⁵ Accordionist Cristoffer Svård describes the difference between Romani and klezmer music in metrical terms: ‘Klezmer and Romani music, it’s two different peoples, one with an oral tradition, and one that’s a very written and bookish tradition. And you can hear that in the music also—with all of these rules, it’s stiff and formal, at the same time as there’s a liveliness to it, there’s some kind of tension. Whereas Romani music is often very fluid, and you do what you want, you take away beats here and there, it can be very irregular, while klezmer is very periodic’ (interview, 2010).

You go ahead and do what you want, no matter what we will prevail! [193/194]

Here Räfven encode the klezmer-inspired melody as a message of rebellion, defiance, and freedom of movement. The band claim ownership over their quasi-Gypsy rebel identity by referencing their personal encounter with German authorities. They reinforce this claim by invoking their animal body parts, displacing the story into their mythical realm apart.

Following this section, Räfven introduce the state authority against which their rebellion is directed. A cymbal crash over a held-out V/III chord signals an abrupt shift in feel. The move to the relative major is familiar from the established transition to the B section, and the first four notes of that transition are also the same. Almost every other aspect of the music, however, changes in some unexpected way. Fast becomes slow, loud becomes soft, dense becomes sparse, defiant becomes comical. The trombone plays a lazy ascent into the interlude and then supplies a half-hearted, flatulent bass line as the accordion squeezes out concise and economical backbeats. With this backing, the saxophone plays the opening (sans fanfare) of Schubert's military march, in a slow, deliberate, and highly unmarch-like manner.⁶

In the context of the story, the Schubert interlude represents the interruption by the constables. The borrowing makes this connection on two levels. Most obvious to the international listener would be the tune's identity as a German military march, representing the German constables' authoritarian discipline. For most Swedes, the immediate connection would probably be to the 1932 Disney animated short 'Santa's Workshop', which most of the country has watched religiously each Christmas since 1959. In this cartoon, the Schubert accompanies a sequence of wind-up toys marching into Santa's sack. Among these are a fat, pigeon-necked policeman waving a giant billy club in pursuit of a nervous-looking Charlie Chaplin doll.⁷ The melody thus also suggests potential violence by police, while simultaneously undermining that threat as a safely comical one.

If the wind-up policeman reference is somewhat oblique, the ridicule it invokes is confirmed by the tentativeness with which Räfven play the Schubert theme. They are setting up the march to be completely overpowered by the rebellious abandon of the [194/195] New Old Europe Sound. At first the klezmer-inspired *mardröm* tune does screech to a halt, allowing the Schubert march to impose itself and assert its identity. Very quickly, however, the authority of that identity is compromised. Räfven play the second section of the Schubert march in a fast klezmer style, which enables a sudden shift back into the B section of the *mardröm* tune with no change in any musical parameters other than a slight increase in tempo. The *mardröm* tune further asserts its power over the Schubert by coming in early. Using hypermetrical chicanery, it steals the final bar of the military march for its triumphant return (Figure 3). In a word, Räfven introduce, parody, and then gleefully sneak up on, klezmerise, and consume Schubert's military march theme. What gives the *mardröm* tune the ability to assimilate the Schubert is its own march-like B section, which was already a demonstration of klezmer's capacity to absorb foreign musical styles. Also mobilised is the *mardröm* tune's Romani-inspired metrical irregularity, which at that point of transition undermines the Schubert's balanced hypermeter and thus its very

⁶ On the album, this solo is played on Bulgarian tambura. In the live music video version, the tambura player is not present so the solo is played on guitar. Neither the guitarist nor the tambura player was present at Krokstrand, so there it became a saxophone solo.

⁷ Because of its strong cultural associations with this animated short, most Swedes actually call the Schubert march 'Tomtarnas vaktparad' ['Parade of the Elves'], which is actually the title of an entirely different piece of music by Kurt Noack.

identity as a march. In this way the music underscores Räfven’s implied message to the German constables and all who would silence them: You can try to discipline us, but our infectious music will win in the end—it might even free you too.



Figure 3 ‘Franz’s Nightmare’, Schubert interlude transitioning into the B section. Musical transcription by the author. [195]

Most Swedish audiences would certainly recognise the Schubert theme instantly. The second musical borrowing, however, is never musically marked off as a quotation and would probably not be obvious to them. The band members will generally not acknowledge it unless asked about it directly. The A section of the *mardröm* tune is based on the A section of ‘*Chosen Kale Mazel Tov*’ [‘Congratulations to the Bride and Groom’], the song traditionally played after the glass is crushed at a Jewish wedding. This song is actually in Räfven’s repertoire as well, recorded on their first album. The *mardröm* tune’s A section is essentially an adaptive transformation of that older Jewish tune to the needs of a more extensive text. The original Yiddish song is in two balanced couplets, while the newly-written English lyrics are longer and freer in structure (Figure 4).⁸

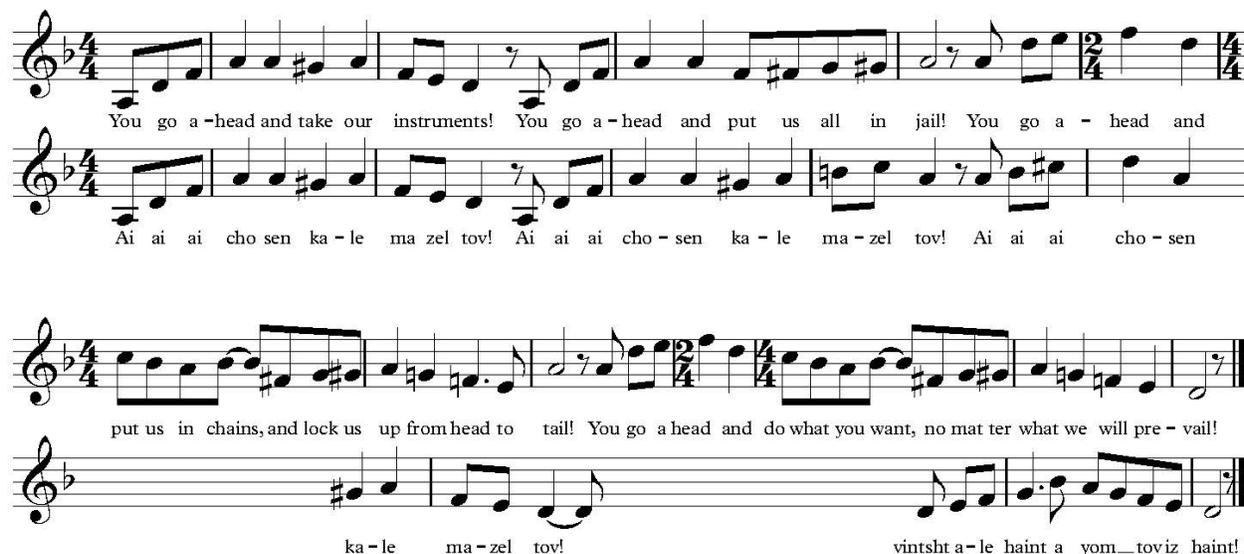


Figure 4 ‘Franz’s Nightmare’ compared with Räfven’s version of ‘*Chosen Kale Mazel Tov*’ (with the latter transposed to D). Musical transcription by the author. [196]

⁸ Four types of transformation are in effect here. The first is the addition of musical material to match the longer text. The second is durational adjustment to adapt to the change in scansion. The third is alteration of the melody in places such that it harmonises with the original. The fourth is transposition, from E (in Räfven’s rendition of ‘*Chosen Kale Mazel Tov*’) down to D (in ‘Franz’s Nightmare’).

Both of the older pieces embedded in ‘Franz’s Nightmare’ are adapted and transformed to serve the new text. With Schubert’s military march, the quotation and the transformation are both overt, acting to reinforce the song lyrics. The *mardröm* tune’s musical cannibalisation of the German march is what brings the lyrical [195/196] message home—today the state may have the power to control our movement and our voices, but tomorrow we the borderless shall overcome. Yet the mechanism that puts Räfven in a position to make that claim lies with the other tune and the covertness of its appropriation.

As citizens of a nation-state themselves, Räfven have to undergo some kind of transformation to make themselves into borderless future-prevailers. Their strategy has been to stake musical claims on already-established stateless identities—the Jewish and the Romani. Consider, for example, how they domesticate ‘*Chosen Kale Mazel Tov*’ even on their first album, by entitling it ‘*Kalle Mazeltov*’. Kalle is a common Swedish man’s name, and *Mazel Tov* is contracted into a single word as if it was a surname. When Räfven covertly transform ‘*Kalle Mazeltov*’ into the *mardröm* tune, they are taking advantage of appropriation work they have already done. They do not have to acknowledge origins because that music, unlike the Schubert theme, is already theirs. Here is the musical reification of Räfven’s implicit claim to a multiculturalism that somehow transcends their decidedly non-diverse make-up. I now turn to the question of how this music can convey the same sense of multicultural ownership to a similarly constituted audience.

The New Old Europe Dance

At the end of my interview with Elin Andersson, I ask her whether there is anything she would like to add. After a moment’s thought she brings up the subject of dance:

Andersson: I’ve really noticed what I see as a Swedish thing, that music you can dance to is [seen as] so exotic. You can really change the mood, people have learned that to this kind of music you can dance a ring dance, that it’s a completely distinct dance style.

Kaminsky: What kinds of dances do people do? [196/197]

Andersson: It’s usually not so much a dance as it is that you just put your hands on each others’ shoulders and run around the room a little. I think it’s very exciting, it feels like we’ve been given our own music/dance culture, probably very much constructed by Räfven, as I’ve understood it.

Kaminsky: But isn’t it in some way related to running around the Christmas tree?

Andersson: No, I wouldn’t—[five second pause]—I don’t think anyone makes that connection, really. As I see it, the dance people do when we play is more reminiscent of dancing around the Christmas tree than it is any traditional East European folk dance or ring dance. Usually people have a hard time with that whole ‘two steps to the right, one step to the left’ thing, it doesn’t usually stick, so they just wind up running around a little.

Kaminsky: So it’s like people make that [connection] with their feet, but not with their heads.

Andersson: Yeah.

Kaminsky: Okay.

Andersson: We played at some birthday party where the friends were all spread out, they were standing in really small groups and talking to each other and not moving outside them. And the venue was much too big, so when we were going to start playing we thought it was going to be a terrible gig, that nobody would want to dance with anyone. But I’ve

never seen one of those ring dances form quicker, it was the sickest thing I'd ever seen—all of a sudden it was like 'YES!' We've actually gotten the comment fairly often that we were the high point of the party, and I think it's that people really want to dance, but they don't know [how]—but klezmer/Balkan just seems to draw out [that] energy. (Interview, 2010)

This exchange suggests that the dance works to extend the musicians' auto-exoticism into the audience. If the music is about allowing Swedes to access their inner extroverts via identification with a hot-blooded foreign Other, then for an audience the dance might be the primary channel for that access. Elin describes a venue with an excess of Scandinavian personal space, full of people who are unable to connect. Like magic, when the music begins, they transform into a joyous, dancing community.

The first thing Elin mentions about the appeal of this music/dance complex is its exoticism. Yet she also marks it as local, 'our own music/dance culture'. Both aspects are necessary for Elin's audience to go through the metamorphosis she describes. The ice can only break when the domestic aspect grants access to the exuberance of the foreign. The historical accident that allows the chain dance to be both of these things at once is its international spread. These sorts of dances are some of the oldest Eurasian forms extant, with variants still practised from the Middle East all the way through Northern Europe.

This is the point that I bring up in our conversation, and Elin (taking five seconds to think about it) acknowledges. The dance she describes is already familiar to the vast majority of Swedes, from their childhood experiences dancing it at Christmas and midsummer. What makes it exotic is the music. The driving backbeat and augmented seconds inject a wildness inspired by images of East European chain [197/198] dances, or perhaps of Jewish weddings familiar from American film. These exotic markers are apparently enough, however, to divorce the dance from their childhood memories of it. Clearly Elin had not made the connection before I suggested it to her. My own observations and conversations with my other consultants generally confirm her supposition that few others have connected the dots.

To illustrate this point, consider the dancing at a concert by Flocken at the 2013 Backa festival. Here Ida Gillner, the band's frontwoman, introduces their final number:

We'd like to conclude with a nice festive klezmer hit, a bulgar. And it might wind up happening that at some point in the middle of this tune I'll take off my saxophone and run down to you, maybe grab you or somebody else, and at that point you shouldn't dance solo together, only I'll take a hand, and the next person will grab on to the next so—you know—a ring dance. (Field recording)

As the band begins to play, people start forming small chain dances, even before Ida descends into the crowd. When she does enter the fray, she starts her own chain. She runs it in and out of the concert tent and loops it through itself by threading herself under people's arms. Everyone holds hands—not shoulders, as in Elin's description. Most simply run rather than attempting any elaborate footwork, although a few people grapevine here and there.⁹

While chain dances do exist traditionally in both East Europe and in Sweden, there are certain formal distinctions between the two culture areas. Almost everything Ida and the audience do here belongs to the Swedish 'long dance' tradition. Hands are held down, rather than up or on a neighbour's shoulders, thus maximising personal space. The chain moves out of the

⁹ The 'grapevine' is a move common to multiple dance genres, consisting of a forward step, a side step, a back step, and a side step, all in the same direction.

tent, almost beyond the range of the band, rather than crowding around the musicians as would be typical in most East European contexts.¹⁰ The fact that most of the dancers run rather than doing any kind of elaborate footwork is also typical of the Swedish tradition but not East European ones. So is Ida's technique of threading the chain through itself. Even the fact that Ida calls this chain dance a 'ring dance' is indicative of the Swedish tradition. In Sweden, ring and chain dances are culturally proximate, both being associated with holiday festivities. Ring dances are actually far less common in East Europe.

Nevertheless, Ida marks the dance as foreign by giving the audience instructions on how to do it (and by not calling it a long dance). This despite the fact that almost all of the crowd will probably have done it before, albeit to different music. Usually at live music events the dance is not even taught, which is also part of the charm. When this sort of dancing arises spontaneously at a Råfven concert, it reinforces a sense of ownership. The dance springs from within rather than being imparted from without. [198/199]

The dancing does also occasionally include elements that are not typically associated with the Swedish long dance. I have heard of—although never seen—cases in which audience members dance traditional Balkan dances they have learned elsewhere. More often, certain exotically marked moves and gestures will simply be interjected into the Swedish form. As I have mentioned, some parts of the chain might do a grapevine. As Elin mentioned, sometimes people will put their hands on each others' shoulders in the style of a Jewish *khosidl*. Here, once again, the blurriness of New Old Europe grants accessibility. Because the goal need not be to reproduce a specific cultural tradition, people can simply do the dance that is already in their feet, then add a sprinkling of 'foreign' elements to help disremember where they learned it in the first place.¹¹

This disremembering is probably also aided by the fact that the average Råfven concert-goer may not have danced an overtly Swedish long or ring dance in quite some time. While Råfven have a wide appeal, their primary audience are fairly young. When Elin Andersson was in high school, they were the band 'everybody listened to' (interview, 2010). The chain and ring dances that Swedes do at midsummer and Christmas are primarily danced by young children and their parents. Råfven's core audience are neither young nor old enough to fall into that demographic. It would not be unreasonable, therefore, to project on the average audience member an unconsciously nostalgic relationship to this kind of dancing. It belongs to an earlier, more innocent phase of their development, when make-believe was an acceptable and encouraged activity. It belongs to the childlike wonderments of Christmas and Midsummer.

Only the music, with its hectic tempos, energetic backbeats, and exotic scales, displaces that conscious memory into the unconscious. It overlays its nostalgia for another land of make-believe and wonderment—the magical realist Eastern Europe of Emir Kusturica and his ilk. The music allows the dancers to imagine they are dancing a traditional dance of that fantastical culture. Their capacity to possess and be a part of that exotic tradition is validated by the unconscious memory of the Swedish long dance, and the resulting sense of *déjà vu*. Thus can an audience use the dance to partake of all the work that the New Old Europe Sound does for musicians.

¹⁰ I thank Carol Silverman for educating me on East European dance practices. The practice of moving into multiple spaces makes more sense in the Swedish 'long dance' tradition, where the music is often supplied by the unison singing of the dancers themselves, and thus never out of range.

¹¹ These kinds of pastiches of East European and Jewish dancing are not exclusive to Sweden, but also quite common at, for example, American klezmer concerts. I thank Carol Silverman for this insight.

Conclusion

The practice of using ethnically marked music to eke out a utopian multicultural fantasy space-out-of-time goes beyond Råfven, and beyond the New Old Europe Sound in general. A strong case could be made for this exercise being the primary discursive agenda of world music in its celebratory phase writ large (Feld 2000: 151–4). Remove the word ‘multicultural’ and the practice goes back further still, to the very origins of folk music as a Romantic nationalist project, in its fantastical projection of bourgeois objectives onto an idealised peasantry. The tradition of using folk music to [199/200] construct fantastical spaces has been kept alive by traditions in science fiction and fantasy film and television scoring, Renaissance festivals (or in Sweden, Gotland’s annual ‘Middle Ages Week’), and live action role-playing and film music.

Both ‘folk music’ and ‘world music’ are categories invented by white Europeans, and the historically white subjectivity of these fantasies is well entrenched. Certainly there are non-whites playing and innovating with ethnically marked music both in and outside Europe, but music marketed under both the ‘folk’ and ‘world’ rubrics has consistently maintained white people as its primary audiences and mediators, if not always as its musicians. In Sweden, the world music scene also happens to be dominated by groups comprised of or at least fronted by white ethnic Swedes. Bands made up of and/or led by non-white immigrants and their children exist but tend to work more within their own immigrant communities than along the world music circuit.

The point here is thus not so much the newness of Råfven’s attempts to construct multicultural utopia through world music, nor their uniqueness as a world music band made up entirely of white Swedes. What interests me is how they—as exemplars of the New Old Europe Sound—have been able to construct for themselves a convincingly multicultural fantasy space where other kinds of projects have been less successful in negotiating the status of whiteness within the world music complex.

As one obvious counterexample, consider Howard Shore’s mixing and matching of narrative film scoring with Celtic and Nordic ethnomusical markers to represent the good races and peoples of Middle Earth in Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Here the racialist underpinnings of Tolkien’s narrative, in turn echoing those of Wagner’s Ring cycle, are granted an uncomfortable resonance via white nationalists’ claims on those same musical markers. A Swedish analogy would be the aggressive ‘drone rock’ of the 1990s, whose romanticisation of deep Nordic past during a period of increasingly public racist discourse was also unsettling to many (Kaminsky 2011: 97–100; Lilliestam 1997; see also Lundberg, Malm and Ronström 2003: 153–6 and 236). On the opposite end of the spectrum, northern Sweden’s Urkult festival typically begins with a ritualistic ‘fire night’ in which a pre-historical past is evoked with a medley of local and visiting musicians, consistently—at least in the years I have visited—framed with grooves and drones supplied by djembe and didgeridoo. The aural conflation of the African and aboriginal does blurring work similar to that of the New Old Europe Sound, but distinct in the extremity of its Otherness relative to the mostly white patrons and dancing performers, the latter of whom may also be called upon to colour their bodies and faces with mud or paint to complete the picture.¹²

¹² A posting to Urkult’s Facebook page by a rare non-white visitor to this year’s festival, objecting to (among other things) a half-naked drummer covered in black body paint at the ritual fire night opening, resulted in ‘hundreds of racist comments and threatening emails’ (Lind 2014) as well as a flurry of online debate on the subject of racism

Both positive and critical reactions to the multicultural utopianism of world music fusion tend to emphasise the fusion itself as its primary ideological signifier (e.g., [200/201] Hutnyk 2000; Lipsitz 1997). But the racial awkwardness of the abovementioned fantasy spaces—Middle Earth, ur-Nordic past, and ancient fire ritual—suggests that the elements being fused are of no little significance. If the ethnocultural markers are too white, then the flirtation with white pride becomes too real; if they are too black, the problem becomes one of appropriation and minstrelsy. A mixture of both kinds of markers is one possible solution, as exemplified by the recently revived Afro-Celt Sound System, or the long-standing duo of Swedish fiddler Ellika Frisell and Senegalese kora player Solo Cissoko. But these projects are typically more about cultural meetings than they are about cultural fusions. At least in the case of Ellika and Solo, the stubborn maintenance of distinct music-cultural identities in the face of that meeting is often what Swedish listeners praise most (Kaminsky 2011: 62–4).

What Räfven and the New Old Europe Sound bring to the table, then, is not only the possibility of white northwestern Europeans overcoming their privilege to join the racial Other in multicultural harmony. This fantasy Ellika and Solo, too, can offer. Rather, it is the possibility of allowing white northwestern Europeans to actually become the Other, and so reject their privilege altogether. The New Old Europe Sound creates this possibility by colonising the racially and culturally porous edges of whiteness and of Europe, represented geographically by the continent's east—the only direction not bordered by ice or water—and demographically by its Jews and Roma.

The question is whether or not the mostly white northwestern European purveyors and consumers of this music, working amongst themselves with their appropriated cultural materials, can challenge the systemic hierarchy atop which they were placed at birth. To paraphrase Audre Lorde (2007), can the master dismantle his own house, using his own tools? From an empirical standpoint, this question remains difficult to answer. Räfven and their audience certainly celebrate their vision of egalitarian multiculturalism with enthusiasm. The ethnically homogeneous reality via which this multicultural fantasy world is envisioned could be the easiest possible first step toward the realisation of that fantasy, or it could simply be a self-justifying end in itself. Räfven's audience is given both possibilities and it remains for them to decide.

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