



**SEMNO PALLA MANDER -
RALF NOVAK-ROSENGREN**

Music and song traditions of the Romani People of Scandinavia

In spite of politics and national borders, the Romani People [Swedish: Resanderomska, English: Gypsies/Travellers] in Scandinavia have had close contact with each other since the Middle Ages. This is reflected in the music and song traditions they have in common. Songs have traveled with the Romanies and spread from family to family, from country to country. The Romani People of Sweden and Norway have been especially close. Swedish Romanies sing many songs that contain Norwegian words and are said to have come from Norway. Likewise, Norwegian Romani songs contain Swedish words and are said to have come from Sweden. Finland was part of Sweden from the 1200's until 1809, when it was taken over by Russia. Independence in 1917 was followed by periods of war and conflict involving first, a civil war in 1918 and later, World War II. The latter actually involved a war against Russia 1939–1944 and a war against Germany in the winter of 1944–1945. During such times of conflict, the Romani People of Finland, called Roma or Kaale, were isolated from their Nordic cousins. This shows clearly in their music and song traditions. Some songs have survived from the time when Finland and Sweden were one country. One of these, a medieval ballad called "Kaksi kuninkaan lasta" [De två konunga barnen | The Two Royal Children], is still very much alive in tradition. The repertoire presented on this CD includes songs from Finland and Norway that are a natural part of the Swedish Romani culture, and songs in Swedish, Romani and Swedish-Romani.

About the songs and ballads

Traditional Romani songs can be sorted into several categories: Medieval ballads (most often heroic ballads), Broadside ballads, Love songs, Prison Songs, Romani folk songs (in the Romani language or in Swedish-Romani), Traveling Songs, Religious songs

About Ralf Novak-Rosengren

Ralf represents the "Resanderomska" [Swedish Romani] musical tradition, and is an active songwriter and collector. He grew up in southern Sweden in the early 1970's and

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descends from musicians on both his mother's and his father's side. Ralf's maternal grandfather was a well-known accordion-ist in his community. His paternal grandfather was a professional musician, and played on ships to America during the 1950's. Most members of his family sing or play some kind of instrument. Ralf has collected and transcribed songs of his people since the late 1980's. During the past 20 years he has been featured in a number of radio and television programs, both recorded and live. Since 2006, in collaboration with Marie Länne-Persson, a Swedish researcher, folk musician and ballad singer, Ralf has explored the music and song of Nordic Romanies and non-Roma-nies [in Romani called "Buros", "Gadjes"] that have existed side by side over the centuries. In autumn 2009, SVT [Swedish Television] produced a documentary film about Ralf and the work he has done collecting the songs of his people. The program was well received and has thus far been shown in Sweden, Norway and Finland.

A word from Ralf

When I was little, the music was alive in a completely different way. We used to meet, we sang and played, did business with each other around the kitchen table or outside, where we were camped. This was true within the family or when relatives came to visit. Music has rescued me many times when life has been tough. In times of crisis, singing our old songs and playing my guitar have helped me find strength in my grief. The older Romanies always sang. They dramatized heroic ballads with gestures as they sang, and they sang melancholic songs about loneliness, longing and lost love with great empathy, often a bit "pilo" [Romani for 'drunk']. The tears and pain filled their entire existence. Today, everything feels so far away, as most old folks are gone, and their songs now live only in our memory. This is why I think it's very important for us all, to make use of the huge musical treasure we still have left. If we don't, it won't take many generations before all is forgotten and the last singers of the Romani People have disappeared. The CD you hold in your hand is indeed historic in two ways. First of all, "our songs", that have lived within the Romani group, have never before been shared with the Swedish public. Secondly, several songs included here have never before been recorded or released anywhere. It is with a happy heart and mind that I share some of our songs and myself with you.

Production and promo enquiries: Etnisk Musikkklubb, Masovngata 18, NO-3616 Kongsberg, Norway
Tel/Fax +47 32 73 56 60/61 E-mail info@emcd, www.emcd.no,
Net Shop: <http://shop.etniskmusikkklubb.no/>