

“Such a beautiful dream!” An exploration of Carl Jularbo’s “Drömmen om Elin” and “Flickan från Finnskogarna” as sentimental *gammeldans* and *schlager* songs

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Carl Jularbo was a virtuoso accordionist and one of the most famous Swedish musicians of the 20th century. This article examines how two of his melodies, “Drömmen om Elin” and “Flickan från Finnskogarna” express sentimentality in different ways, through melody and harmony, phonotext, and the production of the recordings as “works of phonography”. The female figures Elin and Aino appear as projection surfaces for sentimental dreams of past youth and a different past Sweden. Jularbo’s biography is used to show how the melodies and their message are both connected to his own life in mythologized form and to the development of contemporary Sweden from a poor to a rich country, where sentimental representations of the past gained importance in the present. The article also tells about the emergence of Swedish popular music, where the accordion was of great importance, before it achieved significant international success and the sentimentality of music gained a new meaning.

Introduction

In Sweden, one of the best-known and most influential musicians during the first half of the twentieth century was the virtuoso accordionist, composer, and artist Karl Karlsson (1893–1966), better known by his adopted artist name, Carl “Calle” Jularbo. He made his mark on Swedish popular music as an arranger and populariser of melodies by other composers, a band leader, and accompanist – and a highly public figure. His music represented the mainstream of Swedish popular music until at least 1960: incredibly melodic, danceable, accordion-based, and situated somewhere between folk and popular music. For all but composers of high-cultural orchestral music – who looked down on the low-status accordion – Jularbo’s melodies were difficult to resist. His extraordinary recorded output constitutes the foundation of Swedish modern popular music (Edström 1999; Norlén 2005: 9), or “topographically” to use Richard Middleton’s (1990: 7) term. That is to say, it was developed from local and European traditions; it was recorded, manufactured, and disseminated by the music industry; it was melodic, danceable, and liked by many or most. In addition to being performed live before huge dancing and listening audiences in Scandinavia, it was also mediated on a massive scale on the radio and in sheets, records, and films (Björnberg and Bossius 2017: 3). Jularbo became a popular culture icon during his long career and is used here as a lens (Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström 2003: 15–17)¹ to study sentiment in early twentieth-century Swedish popular music – specifically, accordion-based music with added lyrics and vocals.

¹ Inspired by the metaphor “keyhole”.

Popular culture and popular music in Sweden during the interwar period exhibited a distinct turn towards the *sentimental*, a nostalgic, excessive emotionality. Sentimentality found expression in poetic lyrics that addressed themes such as the old homeplace and the many faces of the Swedish landscape; the love of one’s life, “the girl back home”; or the long-lost childhood home with father, mother, grandparents, and the old clock hanging on the wall (Edström 1989; Strand 2003: 51–59). A number of these sentimental themes can be traced back to nineteenth-century chapbook songs and other sentimental compositions (Key 1995; Strand 2003; Taylor 2009). While sentimentality in music was not new, in the interwar years, it assumed a form shaped by modernity and, in no small part, by modern media such as records and the radio. The strong sentimental undercurrent in Swedish popular music and songs from the 1920s onwards was principally a reaction to urbanisation and industrialisation (Strand 2003). In this sense, it can be seen as the fulfilment of a need for escapist entertainment for a large and growing audience of music consumers during this turbulent period. For the many Swedes whose life circumstances had improved, it was too painful or uninteresting to look back on a miserable history of famine, oppression, and mass emigration.² Sweden’s rapid and at times painful development from one of Europe’s poorest and least developed autocratic kingdoms in the mid-nineteenth century to one of the world’s most industrialised, organised, and wealthy democratic welfare states in the twentieth century was a dramatic but mainly peaceful transformation that took place over the course of several decades (Steinmo 2012: 30–87; Schön 2012: 1–21). Sometimes, however, it was rather pleasant to think of the past, if only to gain a brief glimpse of a world filled with other, more “genuine” values that had been forgotten in modernising processes (Strand 2003: 145–186). As this article will illustrate through an analysis of two of his sentimental songs, Jularbo’s music formed an integral part of this period and Sweden’s transition to modernity. In his study on Jularbo and modernity, Owe Ronström calls this era “the time of innocence”: “It marks a boundary in time; it is Sweden before the oil crisis, labour immigration, the Palme assassination, the Internet, and terrorist threats” (Ronström 2021: 95).

In this article, I examine two sentimental songs by Jularbo and his collaborators and the sometimes intricate and complicated compositional processes that lay behind them. I consider processes of composition and arranging, recordings, content and sentimentality, production, and mediatisation. Of the two songs, one is quite famous, the other less so: “Drömmen om Elin” and “Flickan från Finnskogarna”. Both songs are, as the article will show, expressly sentimental in their musical and lyrical structure, and the case studies explore how they communicate these qualities. I analyse these two songs as extended processes of the production and mediatisation of musical material that has its origins in folk music practice, but, through recordings and film, is also affected by, and works with, a phonotext. The concept of phonotext is borrowed from Karin Strand’s (2003:14) study of sentimental Swedish *schlager* and refers to the sung – not read – lyrics of popular music that cannot be reduced to poetry, but rather become meaningful in a musical context through qualities such as intonation, singing style, and so forth.

In brief, the questions for this article are: How does the production of the songs, in the broadest sense of the term, enhance both the musical material and the phonotext to communicate sentimentality? How is sentiment communicated in the recordings? In what ways are they an expression of their time and culture? I examine these questions through a music historical exposition of the songs’ origins, conception, and processes of change in which I show how musical components interact with subsequently added lyrical content to create a sentimental message that is communicated in recordings.

2 “Den glömda utvandringen,” https://emigranternashus.se/?page_id=1515, accessed 14 January 2024.

In the following, I begin by presenting the multiple processes of mediatisation in operation: how Jularbo's career is connected to the era when popular music was shaped through recording and publishing into a distinct genre to folk music. The second section examines theories of sentimentality in music and how this is communicated in Jularbo's sentimental songs. The third section explores the relationship between *gammeldans* and (sentimental) *schlager* music. I then turn to the case studies of the two sentimental songs. The conclusion synthesises the key observations, contextualising the sentimentality in the songs.

Processes of mediatisation: Jularbo between folk music and popular music

In the following section, I use elements of Jularbo's biography, given his status as a *musician extraordinaire* (Nahlbom 1973–1975; Norlén 2005: 167), as a lens to examine and open up new perspectives on how the boundaries between musical genres developed and shifted in Sweden's musical society under the influence of publishing, recording, and copyright during the twentieth century – all of which are relevant to my research questions.

Carl Jularbo was born Karl Karlsson in Jularbo, Avesta Municipality, Dalarna County, Sweden, as one of eleven siblings. He was the son of the merchant Alfred Karlsson and Selma Meijer, who were both Swedish Romani, known as *Resande*. This fact was well known to friends of the family but under-communicated throughout Jularbo's career, which was undoubtedly due to the general discrimination towards this ethnic group in Sweden during his lifetime.³ Some of Jularbo's early musical influences, such as Gustav Pettersson Rask, and his family's generally positive attitudes towards becoming a touring musician, certainly stem from this background, where working as an entertainer was seen as a decent way to earn a living (Jularbo 1946; Novak-Rosengren and Persson 2012: 81–83). Jularbo, however, later publicly portrayed himself first and foremost as a modern Swede and in particular as a modern musician, with correspondingly modern habits (Jularbo 1946; Norlén 2005: 128–131, 172–173).⁴

Jularbo began his career as a child prodigy at the age of five and composed his first piece of music in 1900 at the age of seven.⁵ During early tours, he established himself as both an adept professional musician and a virtuoso, and also as an accompanist. By his early twenties, he was a versatile performer and part of the rapidly emerging networks of the evolving music industry. Jularbo was first and foremost a performing musician. Copyrighted works by other composers could become “Jularbo-fied” through his playing into dance music, transforming them into Jularbo melodies in the public's eyes and ears.⁶ An essential feature of his instrumental style was a rhythmic shift between treble/melody and bass/harmony on the accordion, which provided a perfect basis for dancing. Eventually, Jularbo amalgamated all his influences into a unique personal style whose ultimate form was shaped by the music industry and its needs for productivity and profit.

During this period of transition to modernity, the difference between popular and folk was often blurry (Björnberg and Bossius 2017: 2–3). Gradually, however, popular and folk emerged as distinct, discrete genres as a result of the influence of both copyright laws and music recording and publishing (Volgsten 2012: 171–187; Volgsten 2013: 136–139). In the burgeoning field of popular music, the accordion tunes by Jularbo and his musical peers were dubbed “old-time”, or *gam-*

3 Romani people were excluded from Swedish society until 1959, not allowed to attend school, or vote in otherwise democratic elections. “Romernas historia i Sverige,” <https://www.isof.se/nationella-minoritetsprak/romska/lar-dig-mer-om-romska-spraket-och-kulturen/romernas-historia>, accessed 14 January 2024, 28 June 2026.

4 In the later stages of his career, he drove to his concerts in big American cars, which were otherwise more readily associated with rock 'n' roll music.

5 Entitled “Min första composition” (My First Composition).

6 The tune “Fjällbruden” (The Mountain Bride) is a famous example.

meldans, to distinguish them from the “new” American dance music styles that reached Sweden at approximately the same time: ragtime, foxtrot, lindy hop, and so forth (Edström 1999; Björnberg 2019: 136–140). Jularbo seems to have been instrumental in popularising the genre *gammeldans* for a broader audience. This was even true in Germany, the homeland of the accordion, where his first recordings, produced by Anker-Rekord in Berlin in 1913, sold very well (Jularbo 1946: 113). Between 1913 and 1925 alone, he made an incredible 729 recordings in Berlin and London, and his final tally, made between 1913 and 1966 (also including recordings in Stockholm) amounted to 1,577 recordings in multiple collaborations and from an enormous repertoire (Jularbo 1946; Björnberg 2019: 136–140; Englund 1992; Burlin, Fredriksson, and Mattsson 2024). In the process, Jularbo became the first “gramophone star” – closely followed by singer Sven-Olof Sandberg – in Sweden, and interestingly, in terms of numbers of recordings, he has never been surpassed (Englund 1992; Björnberg 2019: 136–140).

Like many other popular music composers, Jularbo did not read written scores but worked “by ear”. In accordance with folk music practice, he certainly also borrowed themes and melodies from other musicians, and rearranged and recomposed them, making them his own (Norlén 2005: 251–252; Burlin, Fredriksson, and Mattsson 2024).⁷ These recorded works are best described by the musicological concept of a “work of phonography” (Brown 2000). This concept entails that recordings, especially in popular music, must be perceived as the primary form of representation, rather than scores (Moore 1993; Burlin 2008).⁸ But it is important to note that the idea of one primary recorded master version of a song first emerged in the era of electromagnetic tape recording, which began in the 1950s. This somewhat Platonic idea had not yet been established during the periods of early acoustic, later acoustic, and early electric recording. Instead, at the time of Jularbo’s early career, it was common practice to record and release many different interpretations and versions of the same melodies (Bårdsen 2019: 98–164).⁹ This was not for aesthetic reasons but rather because, before electromagnetic recording with its master recordings, the matrices became worn out (Jularbo 1946: 114–115). In the recordings, as “works of phonography”, we can trace Jularbo’s development as a musician – and the development of his songs.

His music was also published by several music publishers and copyrighted, although he was not always the author of the melodies. Professional arrangers working for his music publishers transcribed and arranged his melodies for different settings, such as for piano and orchestra. These arrangements gave Jularbo’s music a “serious” framing; they were envisioned for a bourgeois, sheet music-consuming audience, as a means to sell music to the home market. The processes of transcribing, arranging, and recording naturally affected the musical material, both as notated “works” and as recorded media products, “works of phonography”, due to the time limits of the 78-rpm record. When a melody is published as sheet music and also recorded, played on the radio, and used in film, mediatisation occurs on several levels: that is to say, the music is shaped and changed by the various media and their specific features (Bolter and Gruisin 2000). Some of Jularbo’s melodies – both tunes that he composed and tunes that he popularised – even influenced international popular music. For example, for the US market, “Livet i Finnskogarna” was likely rewritten by Vaughn Horton with English lyrics as “Mockin’ Bird Hill”.¹⁰ The lines between use, arrangement, inspiration, and composition were not always clear at the time, and practice was in flux (Volgsten 2012; Volgsten 2013; Ronström 2021).

7 Research project *Calle Jularbo and the Gammeldans: Music, Networks, Mediatisation* funded by the Swedish Research Council from 2022 to 2025.

8 This is the case for most recorded twentieth-century popular music, even if much of it also existed in scores and textual forms, see for example Burlin 2008, Burlin 2012, Burlin 2019.

9 We therefore should, as Thomas Bårdsen has pointed out, use the term “work of phonography” with care before the electromagnetic era (Bårdsen 2019: 109–117, 300–311).

Even if Jularbo's music was principally shaped by dance practice, it was also shaped in important ways by record production. He began his recording career during the acoustic era (Morton 2006: 31–42) and then followed the recording industry's technological development. In Sweden, the shift to electric recording began in August 1927 – following the introduction of public service radio in 1925 – with the first recordings by Odeon and Parlophon in Stockholm (Englund 1992; Björnberg 1998; Morton 2006: 81–90).¹¹ Jularbo was among the musicians who were recorded in Stockholm at the time. Electric recording, and radio, changed production completely, for example, by making the sound of the accordion richer, and established the intimate crooning vocal style. This style spread rapidly in Western countries and was introduced in Sweden by Sven-Olof Sandberg in 1927 with his distinctly sentimental song “Lyssnar du till mig ikväll lilla mor?” (Are You Listening to Me Tonight, Little Mother?; Strand 2003). Jularbo recorded with both Sandberg and luxury revue and gramophone star Ernst Rolf, as well as with other less distinctive male singers. The crooning vocal style also became the main singing style used in Jularbo's sentimental songs.

His first big hit, or *schlager* (*slagdänga* in Swedish, meaning roughly “hit tune”), was “Livet i Finnskogarna” (Life in the Finn Forests) in 1918. He later made several more recordings of the same melody, and together they sold in huge numbers (Björnberg 2019:136–140).¹² In 1946, Jularbo (if we believe him) wrote that altogether, the recordings of “Livet i Finnskogarna” had sold three million copies, which must be considered an enormous, enduring success (Jularbo 1946: 115). In 1947, the song was used as the main theme for the film *Livet i Finnskogarna*, which is based loosely on Jularbo's portrayal of the song's origins in the “Finn forests” in the Värmland of his youth – an important period of his life.¹³ The film shows Jularbo himself, and the composition, release, and launch of the sentimental song, which I discuss in greater detail below. We shall now turn to the concept of sentimentality itself – as it is expressed in the songs based on Jularbo's melodies.

The theory of sentimentality, kitsch, and nostalgia in music

What is “sentimentality”, and why is it so often understood as utterly problematic when it comes to art or music? A rich discourse exists on sentimentality in art, and especially in music (see, for example, Callen 1982; Jefferson 1983; Solomon 1990; Solomon 1991; Key 1995; Taylor 2009; Nuss-

10 The melodies are strikingly similar. Later recorded by artists such as Les Paul and Mary Ford and Patti Page, it became a true standard of American popular music. This was a period marked by changing practices and the establishment of new copyright laws outside classical music, and Jularbo himself was later to become involved in several copyright disputes. He was accused of having “stolen” melodies fifty years earlier – but the melodies he composed himself may in turn have been “stolen” by other musicians, as in the case of “Mockin’ Bird Hill”. The origin of its melody is controversial. Swedish Wikipedia identifies its “real composer” (citing no firm evidence) as Frans Erikson from Hässjåberg in the locality of Los: https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livet_i_finnskogarna#cite_note-Dödbok_9-3, accessed 13 February 2025. Other composers have also asserted their rights to the song, and it has similarities with melodies from Ireland and Tyrol, among other regions (this topic will be addressed in greater depth in a forthcoming article by Hållbus Totte Mattsson: “Från Finnskogen till Rosenhill: en valsmelodi berättar,” in *Carl Jularbo och dragspelet: Aktuella forskningsperspektiv på instrument, dans och musik*, provisionally scheduled for publication in 2026).

11 The profound impact of radio broadcasting and its new norms of taste and speech – not least on linguistic standards, musical and other tastes, national identity, etc. – is well established (Björnberg 1998; Volgstén 2019).

12 The first recording sold about 32,000 copies, out of a total of about 300,000 records sold in Sweden that year; the song therefore accounted for one in ten records sold in Sweden in 1918.

13 The “Finn forests” are a vaguely defined geographical and ethnic concept in Sweden, an umbrella term for several large forested tracts of Sweden, located between Tiveden in the south and Lappland in the north, and mainly situated in the provinces of Värmland and Dalarna. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sweden saw a large migration of slash-and-burn farmers from the then-easternmost part of the country (present-day Finland) into large areas of present-day Sweden, as well as from the northernmost provinces southward. The farmers had been invited by the Swedish government to farm these vast unpopulated tracts of forest. These eastern Finnish populations retained their culture and language for many generations – in some areas, up until the twentieth century (Wedin 2001). The last Finnish-speaking areas in Sweden were found in the province of Värmland: for example, the areas of Norra Finnskoga and Södra Finnskoga. It is here that the story in *Livet i Finnskogarna* is set.

baum 2010; Nink and Heesch 2023). Early Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schiller described his own writing as “sentimental”, but during the course of the nineteenth century, the meaning of the word changed quite dramatically. Schiller used it to refer to something along the lines of a “cultivated fineness and intelligence of feeling” (Solomon 1991: 2; Jefferson 1983), but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the word assumed more strongly negative connotations (Jefferson 1983). Many writers have focused on sentimentality and its relationship to kitsch (a word of probable German origin) and what can be regarded as its compositional shallowness (Solomon 1991: 4), as well as its connection to the emotion of *nostalgia* (Key 1995: 154). For example, Benedict Taylor discusses how certain aesthetic judgements of musical works – his example is Arthur Sullivan’s “The Lost Chord” (1877) – may be rationally based on their perceived “depth” or “shallowness”, with the latter often being understood as approaching the phenomenon of kitsch (Taylor 2009). Many people agree that what defines kitsch is not a “lack of form or aesthetic merit”, but rather the presence of certain “provocative emotional content”, namely a pronounced *sentimentality* (Solomon 1991: 4).

Sentimentality is often seen as the fundamental problem and as something essentially false: not due to it being emotional, but rather due to it being too one-dimensional, too pure, and therefore “ethically one-sided” (Solomon 1991: 5). But it is also possible to defend sentimentality (Solomon 1990), even if it is clear that it is often associated with the cheap and the easy, with undisciplined emotion, and with bad taste and an incapacity for scepticism and irony, and thus ultimately with the uneducated as opposed to the well-educated (Solomon 1991). Without delving too far into the nature of musical sentimentality itself, we can distinguish between sentimentality in *the musical material* and *musical personas who act sentimentally* (as in musical drama; Nussbaum 2010: 39). The heterosexual male persona/protagonist in the sentimental Swedish *schlager* of the 1920s and 1930s is a variant of the latter type of sentimentality, whereby the persona in the phonotext acts, thinks, and sings sentimentally. Finally, (mostly heterosexual?) romantic love is a favourite topic of these songs, as it is in other kinds of popular music (cf. Nink and Heesch 2023).

***Gammeldans* and *schlager*: From danceable folk music to recorded vocal sentimental popular music**

The popular genre of *gammeldans* developed in Sweden between around 1900 and 1940. Jularbo was seminal, although not alone, in establishing the instrumental style and standard ensemble of accordion (sometimes two, playing melody and bass alternately), bass, drums, and guitar (and sometimes clarinet). *Gammeldans* evolved within a broader field of popular music movements in Sweden – for example, *schlager* and early American jazz (mainly as regards the band set-ups and, to some extent, improvisation). As noted by Olle Edström (1989; 1999), the development of early Swedish *schlager* (in the late nineteenth century) was in turn closely connected to German and Austrian popular music, hence the use of the German loanword in Swedish.¹⁴ The Swedish *schlager*’s development was inextricably connected to the music industry and began roughly before World War I. According to Edström (1989), the *schlager* genre, in all its diversity, had something of a “golden age” between 1910 and 1940. To a great extent, it was stimulated by the vocal artist, music publisher, and record company owner Ernst Rolf (Jularbo 1946; Edström 1989; Burlin, Fredriksson, and Mattsson 2024). Rolf stood at the epicentre of a burgeoning Swedish music industry and entertainment scene. Many of the most famous Swedish musicians and artists worked with him at some point, including Zarah Leander and Karl Gerhard – and Carl Jularbo.

¹⁴ It is worth noting the fundamental affinity between the words *schlager* and the subsequently adopted “hit”: both literally mean “striking” melodies.

Karin Strand (2003) has suggested that the Swedish sentimental *schlager* is a subgenre of the broader 1920s *schlager*, which was often very positive and up-tempo music. Strand studied three Swedish male vocalists who were influential in defining the sentimental style and sentimental perspective of the popular *schlager*: Sven-Olof Sandberg (nicknamed “S.O.S”), Bertil Boo (“the singing farmer”), and Gösta “Snoddas” Nordgren.¹⁵ Of these three, Sandberg was the first and most influential, both commercially and artistically. I would argue that Jularbo’s sentimental *schlager* melodies, as they developed with respect to their vocal style and phonotext, are closely connected to the style established by Sandberg.

A number of the dance melodies Jularbo composed proved, in recorded form, to work well with vocals and lyrics, and, in that process of remediation, became not just dance music but also *schlagers* (Bolter and Gruisin 2000). Many of the melodies had romantic titles in the tradition of the German *Lied*, connecting them to a tone-painting aesthetic and often with an air of nature poetry about them. Famous examples by Jularbo include “Drömmen om Elin” (My Dream of Elin), “Avestaforsens brus” (The Avesta Waterfall’s Roar), “Livet i Finnskogarna” (Life in the Finn Forests), and “Flickan från Finnskogarna” (The Girl from the Finn Forests). Jularbo probably came up with the titles, but he did not write the lyrics, nor did he partner with the writers. The lyrics were written afterwards on behalf of the publisher, some of them by Swedish lyricists such as Oleg Qvist (the pseudonym of Helge Roundquist, the owner of the record company Sonora). Sung in Swedish, the lyrics broadened the expression of the music and pushed the melodic qualities in a sentimental direction. The topics included romantic love, life in the countryside, the beauty and sensualism of nature, the short and beautiful Nordic summer, and last but not least, the brief and intense romantic passion during a single “bittersweet summer of love” – the latter being a distinct and long-lived Swedish cultural trope that has featured in multiple novels, films, and songs.¹⁶ This trope with its infinite melancholy, recalling The Great Love That Never Was, is at its core deeply sentimental and nostalgic and serves as a foundation for “Drömmen om Elin”.

Case studies: Two sentimental songs based on Jularbo melodies

In this section, I analyse mediated sentimentality in two songs composed by, played by, and associated with, Jularbo. The first is Jularbo’s perhaps most widely disseminated, beloved, and popular melody, “Drömmen om Elin”. The second is the original soundtrack song “Flickan från Finnskogarna”, which was part of Jularbo’s music for the film *Livet i Finnskogarna*. My analysis is built on closely reading and listening to the music – in the recordings and the film – and its associated phonotexts. In each case, I begin by presenting the historical context in order to shed light on the complex background to the melodies’ development.

“Drömmen om Elin”, “Traumwalzer”, “Drømmen om Elin”

The song and melody “Drömmen om Elin” (a waltz in three-four time, in the tonality of A major in the score below) have an unclear origin and an undeniably complicated history of conception, production, and reception. According to Jularbo himself, his composition was inspired by the loss of his young love, Elin Persson, to tuberculosis (Norlén 2005: 65). He met her in around 1913, and Persson passed away on 14 May 1917 at the age of just twenty (Norlén 2005: 65). Jularbo

¹⁵ Nordgren’s unusual nickname was an allusion to his father secretly selling condoms – *snodd* being a word for a rubber band.

¹⁶ Here Swedish films such as Arne Mattsson’s *Hon dansade en sommar* (*One Summer of Happiness*, 1951) and Ingmar Bergman’s *Sommaren med Monika* (*Summer with Monika*, 1953) can be cited. At this time, the dominance of the Swedish language in Swedish popular songs was almost complete. Few Swedish singers recorded songs in other languages for the Swedish market; it was not necessary for commercial reasons. English was less used in Sweden than it is today, and there was less familiarity with English-speaking culture; at the time, educated Swedes were often more familiar with German language and culture than English, and had a strong appreciation for it.

described the loss as a deeply traumatic one (Norlén 2005: 61–69). But the timeline of this tragedy and its relation to Jularbo’s “Drömmen om Elin” is very uncertain for many reasons. Jularbo was notoriously vague about the actual compositional process. Some have argued that he may have been inspired by other contemporary tunes. And there are questions concerning Jularbo’s account of Elin’s true identity – there seem to have been two women named Elin (Norlén 2005: 246–250). However, the fertile and widely disseminated myths surrounding “Elin” may have been instrumental in the melody’s widespread reception over several decades and, by extension, in its success as a sentimental hit.

Several musicians have claimed to be either the composer of the melody or to have learned it themselves from other musicians in the early twentieth century. They include the contemporary accordionist and colleague of Jularbo’s Fritz Lundblad, who stated that he had learned the melody from a written-down chapbook tune from the province of Södermanland and later taught Jularbo the melody in around 1913 or 1914 (Gäfvert 2006: 92).

Accordionist historian Bo Gäfvert and ethnomusicologist Magnus Gustafsson have hypothesised that Jularbo’s immediate source was a 78-rpm recording of a song called “Borgholmsvals” in AABB form, by Uttringe-Gubbarne (a young quartet from the Swedish province of Öland), produced in 1907.¹⁷ Today, ethnomusicologists are confident that the original melody – or one very similar to it – was at least known in the Öland area in the early twentieth century. One possibility is that Jularbo may have learned the melody first-hand from the *spelman* (musician) Olaus Nilsson (1847–1921) in Öland in the 1910s (Gustafsson 2023). Öland is about 550 kilometres from Jularbo’s native Dalarna, but the existence of recordings means that he could have heard the melody anywhere. After all, he was a musician who travelled and collaborated widely. We cannot conclusively say whether “Drömmen om Elin” was actually inspired by the Öland tune. It is worth noting, however, that “Borgholmsvals” was recorded and released nine years *before* the first recording of “Drömmen om Elin” in 1916, which definitely suggests that it may have been an influence. Interestingly as well, both of Jularbo’s first two recordings bear some resemblance to “Borgholmsvals”, adopting a slow and not very distinct waltz tempo. As it is only the second B part (the second reprise in folk music terminology) of “Drömmen om Elin” that differs more from “Borgholmsvals”, it is likely that this part was recomposed by Jularbo and perhaps unconsciously transformed. It is probably safe to conclude that the melody is a traditional folk song and older than Jularbo.

“Karl Karlsson-Jularbo” recorded “Drömmen om Elin” in trio format with violinists Fritz Lundblad and Helge Eriksson in the autumn of 1916 for Odeon (Englund 1992: 5). That same autumn, on 24 November, the same musicians, now as the Jularbo trio, made another recording of the same melody, as “Afton på sätern” for Gramophone (Englund 1992: 6). In 1919, a recording was made in Mariestad with Konrad Magnusson (Englund 1992: 10). Some years later, performing under the pseudonym the “Budapester Original Zigeuner-Orchester”¹⁸, Jularbo and Eriksson also produced a recording called “Traumwalzer” in Berlin in October 1920 for the Polish company Syrena and for the Polish market. In addition to using a fictitious band name, the record also credited “Drömmen om Elin” to a fictitious composer: Archibald Joyce, who was in fact a real

17 Released on Gramophone Concert Record no. 89125 (Gäfvert 2006: 92). Magnus Gustafsson shared this information with Hållbus Totte Mattsson in 2023. Uttringe-Gubbarne were a youth folk music quartet that played at dances arranged by Svenska Folkdansens Vänner, a Swedish association for the advancement of folk dance. Their recordings are among the earliest of their kind in Sweden: folk music recordings before folk music emerged as a distinct genre, separate from popular and classical music. According to the discography of The Gramophone Company’s Scandinavian recordings, Uttringe-Gubbarne recorded 29 record sides in three sessions in April 1906, October 1907, and September 1909. Some of the recordings were released as single-sided 78s, others as double-sided 78s. Thanks to Tommy Sjöberg, who shared this information with me in personal communication (e-mail, 26 November 2024).

18 *Zigeuner* (“gypsy”) is a discriminatory term from today’s perspective, but common at the time.

person (Englund 1992: 12). Perhaps Jularbo chose the name Zigeuner-Orchester as a humorous nod to his *Resande* origins, which he was otherwise unable to speak openly about.¹⁹ The “Traumwalzer” recording (1920) of the song exhibits similarities with the other early recorded versions. Other recordings of “Drömmen om Elin” followed in 1921 (Stadium), 1927 (Jularbotrion: Carl C:sson Jularbo, Carl Gylling and Helge Eriksson, Odeon, unpublished; Englund 1992: 29), 1947 (Carl Jularbos Kvartett, Cupol; Englund 1992: 51), 1960 (Carl Jularbos Kapell, Cupol; Englund 1992: 70), and finally in 1961 (Carl & Eberhardt Jularbo, Giovanni Jaconelli, Erik Öst, Göte Löven & Gunnar Almstedt; Englund 1992: 71). Of the eight published recordings in total of the melody “Drömmen om Elin” made between 1916 and 1961, the first five were acoustic, and the last three electric (the final two being recorded on tape in mono and in stereo). The recordings, as “phonographic works”, encapsulate an extraordinary development in music technology that is reflected in a melody.²⁰ With each new recording, the melody and its performance changed subtly, with the rhythm becoming more and more pronounced and “rocking”; this, in turn, made it ideally suited to sentimental vocals. And the title was already in place, ready to be developed into a song about the mythical “Elin”. At the time when the lyrics were added, the melody was already famous, having become a standard in what one might call the Swedish songbook: the many songs and melodies (sometimes with Swedish lyrics) that were widely known and sung by several generations of Swedes in the twentieth century.

Events after Jularbo’s death in 1966 probably contributed to the evolving evergreen status of “Drömmen om Elin”, as the song was rediscovered and reinvented in 1969 for a new generation of popular music listeners. Musical ideals in the late 1960s were changing rapidly. Accordion-based *gammeldans* had represented the mainstream of popular music in Sweden until about 1960, but it was now superseded by electric guitar-based rock and pop that could be quite heavy and distorted, and had English lyrics.²¹ At the same time, however, young pop musicians (including Benny Andersson of Hep Stars) still maintained a close relationship to the older style. And there remained a market for popular music for a more “adult” Swedish audience (who were less proficient in English). Moreover, the time may also have been right for a little nostalgic reaction against modern music. At any rate, the vocal version of “Drömmen om Elin”, with new lyrics by Peter Himmelstrand,²² drew on the melody’s long tradition in Sweden. The lyrics, written in the old sentimental style of about forty years earlier, laid the foundation for a new version of the song. “Drömmen om Elin” became a significant hit for the young singer Tommy Körberg in 1969 and 1970. In early 1970, it appeared on the radio on the *Svensktoppen* music chart show for eight weeks.²³ In this version with Lars Samuelsons orkester, the instrumental arrangement is orchestral and resembles the style of the German arranger James Last rather than Jularbo’s style – although Eberhardt “Ebbe” Jularbo, Carl’s famous son, in fact plays on this recording (Handeland 2000). The waltz rhythm also tends more towards a central European polka than to a Jularbo waltz. The B part is also slightly different and played only once as an accordion solo part. Aside from this, the accordion does not feature prominently in the arrangement. The reduced importance of the B part is one element that makes the song version quite different from Jularbo’s older instrumental versions.

19 Thanks to Sebastian Casinge, who made me aware of this unique record by Jularbo and the circumstances surrounding it (e-mails, 23 December 2024–16 January 2025), and also for clarifying Romani and *Resande* terminology (e-mails 27 December 2025).

20 Thanks to Håkan Pettersson, who helped with the selection of recordings in 2022.

21 Sweden had a number of bands that closely followed the UK pop scene. Groups such as Tages and Hep Stars had several hits that featured a quite original but heavily British-inspired style.

22 Music journalist, composer, and lyricist Peter Himmelstrand (1936–1999).

23 Sveriges Radio <https://www.sverigesradio.se/Diverse/AppData/Isidor/files/2023/3468.txt>, accessed 20 June 2026.

In 1973, “Drømmen om Elin”, also became a hit in Norway for vocalist and accordionist Freddy Kristoffersen. It appeared on an LP with the indisputably sentimental title of *Gamle gode glade minner* (Good Old Happy Memories). The lyrics in Kristoffersen’s version are a translation of Himmelstrand’s Swedish text, and the vocal style is inspired by Körberg’s soft, 1960s-style crooning. Kristoffersen made “Drømmen om Elin” (the Norwegian spelling) his signature song. Overall, this Norwegian take is more in line with Jularbo’s style, with a more accordion-influenced, waltz-styled arrangement. Kristoffersen himself was an accordion player (*trekkspiller* in Norwegian) as well as an artist in the *gammaldans* genre,²⁴ and he also collaborated with Swedish musicians such as Bröderna Lindqvist.

Although Körberg’s and Kristoffersen’s versions differ with regard to their use of the accordion and the waltz, they also have much in common. They are both definitely sentimental in a twofold way. First, they connect with nostalgia: they are conservative in style, imitating (more or less) the *gammeldans* music from the early decades of the twentieth century, which by then had started to sound both old-timey and typically Swedish (or Norwegian, as the case may be) to general audiences. The lyrics fit the music and, stylistically speaking, could easily – more or less – have been written before 1950. Second, the lyrics as articulated phonotexts have a sentimental style strongly reminiscent of 1920s and 30s *schlager*, particularly in the way that they look back on bittersweet memories of a lost love or a romance that never materialised in the days of the singer’s (or protagonist’s) youth and in the way that they adopt a heterosexual male perspective on – or in other words a “heteromasculine articulation” of (Nink and Heesch 2023: 5) – the longing for (perhaps ecstatic or romantic) love. The lyrics depict a bittersweet recollection of the protagonist’s “summer of love” in his youth, a topic that most of us can no doubt relate to:

We were never lovers,
But I still dream my dream:
My dream of Elin
And a summer long ago.

As sung phonotexts, vocalised by Körberg and Kristoffersen and articulated by their exceptionally smooth young male voices, the lyrics significantly strengthen the sentimental perspective, making the *schlager* song simultaneously something new and something old, something bitter-sweet: a perfect sentimental feedback loop.

²⁴ The genre is called *gammaldans* in Norway, but there are subtle differences between the Norwegian and the Swedish genres. See Hoksnes 1988.

Drömmen om Elin

TEXT Peter Himmelstrand
MUSIK Carl Julabo
♯ 515

Vad jag drömt om dej, lil-la E-lin,
mjuk som som-marns vind. Söt som soc-ker
strut, med brun och fju-nig kind.
Un-der al-la år har jag bu-rit
med mej dröm-men, dröm-men om E-lin,
le-en-de un-der en lind.

2. Vad min dröm är skön:
där är du – så ung och varm och ljus.
Solen i ditt hår,
ett avsked vid ditt hus.
I min ensamhet
vänder jag tillbaks till drömmen –
drömmen om Elin,
barbent i tunn sommarblus.

3. Elin, i min dröm
går ditt skratt mot skyn som en ballong.
Du får i min famn
och vinden drar en sång.
Det blev aldrig vi,
men jag drömmer ändå drömmen:
drömmen om Elin,
och om en sommar en gång.

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ANDERSSON MUSIK
i Malmö AB

Figure 1. Sheet music: “Drömmen om Elin” with Himmelstrand’s lyrics. © 1969, Andersson musik, Malmö.

My dream of Elin

How I’ve dreamed of you,
Little Elin, soft as a summer breeze.
Sweet as a caramel
With brown and downy cheek.
All these years
I’ve carried that dream,
My dream of Elin
Smiling beneath the linden blooms.
Such a beautiful dream!
I see you so young and warm and bright.
The sun in your hair,
A farewell at your house.
Alone, I turn again to my dream –
My dream of Elin,
Bare-legged in a thin summer blouse.
Elin, in my dream
Your laugh ascends like a balloon.
You fall into my arms
And the wind sings a song.
We were never lovers,
But I still dream my dream:
My dream of Elin
And a summer long ago.

English lyrics (translated from the Swedish by the author).



Figure 2. Cinema poster for the film *Livet i Finnskogarna* (1947) announcing the film and the location of the screening, Mörbylånga. The film is “barnförbj”, meaning children not allowed. Property of the author.

“Flickan från Finnskogarna” (The Girl from the Finn Forests)

The song and melody “Flickan från Finnskogarna” is another kind of sentimental composition. The melody “Livet i Finnskogarna” was first recored and released in 1915 and became a huge hit in 1918 (Björnberg 2019: 136–140).²⁵ On 23 August 1947, the drama *Livet i Finnskogarna*, directed by Ivar Johansson and filmed between August and October 1946, was released in Swedish cinemas.²⁶ The film’s title and plot were loosely inspired by the now-classic melody “Livet i Finnskogarna”, one of Jularbo’s most famous tunes, and the narrative that Jularbo himself shared about the Finn forests in his autobiography (Jularbo 1946: 115–119).

Jularbo appears as himself composing a melody in the introductory section of the film. The two melodies he contributed to the film were the old “Livet i Finnskogarna” and the new “Flickan från Finnskogarna”. The latter was written for the film as a theme song, but it is strongly connected, at least conceptually, to “Livet i Finnskogarna”. “Flickan från Finnskogarna” was first recorded for inclusion in the film soundtrack as instrumental and orchestral music.²⁷ Somewhat later, it was recorded and released on a 78-rpm record (recorded 3 June 1948 in Stockholm) as a *schlager* song as part of the film merchandise and marketing, but not used in the film (Englund

25 Thanks to Håkan Pettersson, Jularbomuseet [Jularbo Museum] in Rasten, Uppland, who contributed this information to the project in 2022. It was later rerecorded for multiple record companies (in 1919, 1920, 1921, 1923, 1927, 1930, 1934, 1944, 1953, 1957, and a final recording in 1961 [Englund 1992]).

26 Svensk filmdatabas, <https://www.svenskfilmdatabas.se/sv/item/?type=film&itemid=4190#technical-specifications>, accessed 8 January 2025.

27 The main soundtrack was composed by Gunnar Johansson.

“Flickan från Finnskogarna” (lyrics: Oleg Quist)

1. Se Finnskogsflickan hon dansar mörkögd smidig och grann. Ingen har fångat henens hjärta, ej hon bundits vid någon man. Hon gäckas med alla pojkar, sätter sinnen i brand. Men efter dansen flyr hon undan och går ensam mot skogens rand.
 2. Hon går dit myrarna dofta av pors och hjortron i blom. Skogen sjunger, bäcken porlar och från tjärnen lockar en lom. Hon vandrar lätt över stigen som ej har något namn tills hon är hemma i sin stuga uti finnskogens djupa famn.
1. See the girl from the Finn forests – how she dances, so beautiful, dark-eyed, and lithe. No one has ever captured her heart; she has never been tied to any man. She flirts with all the boys, inflames their senses. But when the dancing is done, she escapes and walks alone towards the forest’s edge.
 2. She goes to marshes perfumed with bayberry and cloudberry in bloom, where the forest sings, the stream burbles, a loon beckons from the pond. Lightly, she treads the nameless path until she comes home at last to her cabin in the deep arms of the Finnish forest.

English lyrics (translated from the Swedish by the author).



Figure 4. From the orchestral arrangement score “from the film”: sheet music cover and clarinet part. © 1948: Schlager-Förlaget, Stockholm.

The film centres on conflicts between “Swedes” and “Finns” in the Swedish province of Värmland in 1906 and takes a “pro-Finn” perspective. Carl Jularbo appears in the opening part of the film playing himself as he composes the melody “Livet i Finnskogarna”. The scene is significant to the film as it introduces the plot and its key themes: nostalgically recalling past conflicts. This background is important for understanding the song.

The phonotext of the recorded song has multiple layers of meaning, and here we can sketch a few of them. The melody, as well as the production of the voice, is what gives it its communicative strength. It features a (possibly) male protagonist, probably the main character from the film, Heikki, praising – sweetly and a little wistfully – a girl, a child of nature, a daughter of the Finn forest, probably inspired by the character Aino in the film.²⁸ This girl or young woman in the song is very free; in fact, she has total freedom, holding the world in the palm of her hand – in the film, Aino is more complex and something of a loner. In the song, she can choose whomever she wants from among the boys (who seem to be very turned on by her). But she chooses none of them; she wants to be alone in the midst of nature, which is in turn described in a way that is quite sensual, full of smells and sounds.

In this sense, the song is a heightened version of the common Swedish cultural trope of simply being alone amid the wonders of nature. That is what brings true happiness and freedom, and it is simply the best thing for all of us to do. In the phonotext, this idea is strengthened by the image of a free woman who lives at one with the forest. However, in the film, the phonotext is understated and does not dominate. Instead, parts of the two songs “Livet i Finnskogarna” and “Flickan från Finnskogarna” are used and combined in orchestral arrangements in both the introduction and the conclusion of the film.

Discussion and conclusions: The sentimental musical material and phonotext in relation to composition, production, and mediatisation

In Jularbo’s “Drömmen om Elin” and “Flickan från Finnskogarna”, sentimentality is communicated on different levels of musical production, each of which is linked to their time and culture. Here I synthesise my observations by relating them to three categories: (1) composition, arrangement, recording, and production, (2) phonotext and sentimentality, and (3) mediatisation and legacy.

Composition, arrangement, recording, and production. Jularbo created melodies with harmonisations that were perceived as having evergreen qualities and were still well known in the 1960s, when the lyrics for “Drömmen om Elin” were written (by Himmelstrand). It is fair to say that some melodies attributed to Jularbo probably as “Drömmen om Elin” were his own reworkings of other musicians’ tunes, a common practice in traditional folk music and jazz. “Flickan från Finnskogarna” was composed by at least three authors (Jularbo, Sylvain, and Quist) and arranged for orchestra by Ringstrand. The melodies, along with the rhythmic pregnancy of Jularbo’s playing, are what gives character to the songs; moreover, it is the melodies that “frame” the phonotexts. In the case of “Drömmen om Elin”, there are many recordings – most of them recorded performances. The recordings of the melodies at once document and enhance the structure of the compositions, both musically and lyrically. As works of phonography, the several recordings by Jularbo show the development of sentiment in the songs. The songs’ production uses the best technology available in each period, and through amplifying, reverberating, and mixing, it noticeably affects their sentimental messages – in particular through the articulation of the crooning male vocals – and the result, the sung phonotext.

Phonotext and sentimentality. The lyrics to Jularbo’s songs were written by other authors, who interpreted the feeling of the melodies and probably their titles in particular, with both the famous melodies and titles being linked to Jularbo’s youth and to women whom he met in the Finn forest area in the 1910s in a romantic context or otherwise. The lyrics, as phonotexts, were interpreted by male vocalists and hence mainly present the perspective of a male figure who

²⁸ *Livet i Finnskogarna*, film, 1947.

is (presumably) perceived as heterosexual and romantic, sensitive as well as “sentimental”. He yearns after and admires a free and beautiful woman, embodied in the figure of Elin or “the girl from the Finn forest”, Aino. Crucially, it is the crooning singing style used to convey the lyrics – combined with the melody and accompaniment with its sporadic minor chords punctuating an essentially major tonality – that truly gives the phonotext its meaning.

Both songs are sentimental and even nostalgic in their sad yearning for a long-lost youthful past. In “Drömmen om Elin” in particular, the lines “Such a beautiful dream! / I see you so young and warm and bright. / The sun in your hair, / A farewell at your house,” evoke a bittersweet memory of youth and love. Most importantly, the singer, the persona, acts sentimentally (Nussbaum 2010: 39) by remaining deeply attached to his dream of Elin. The longing lyrics, written in 1969, several decades after the melody’s initial composition in the early 1910s, fit the melody perfectly. Turning to “Flickan från Finnskogarna”, the lyrics about the girl wandering in the woods have a perfectly sentimental character that arises in part from the combination of the phonotext, the crooning vocal style, and the shifting major-minor tonality.

From a historical perspective, “Drömmen om Elin” also waxes sentimental about a time and a country that no longer exist, both today and back then: the Sweden of the early 1900s and its proto-*gammeldans* and accordion music. “Flickan från Finnskogarna” expresses a related yet different kind of sentimentality in its idyllic vision of life in the Finn forests. The film, too, is nostalgic in the way it looks back on early-twentieth-century ethnic conflicts – and, in no small part, their peaceful resolution – which fitted in perfectly with the overall national agenda of “togetherness” in the mid-1940s. The “emotional content” of the songs (Solomon 1991: 4) is poised between nostalgia and sentimentality (Key 1995: 154), but without going too far in the latter direction: their sentiment is situated in a more low-key, human emotional sphere. From today’s perspective, the songs are hardly kitsch (Solomon 1991), even if some elitist critics may have regarded them as such when they were first published as sheet music and released on records.

Mediatisation and legacy. Jularbo’s musical career spans different eras of mediatisation and various mediating processes: his music was performed live – like the dance music it essentially was – but he also had a tremendous recorded output, appeared on radio and television with his various groups, and appeared in the film *Livet i Finnskogarna*. The song from the film, “Flickan från Finnskogarna” is intimately connected to Jularbo’s public image as a composer and artist and his relationship to the “Finn forests”, which was an established narrative (presented, for example, in his autobiography; Jularbo 1946) at the time of the film’s release. In addition, another film portrays “the saga” of his life, but without featuring Jularbo himself.²⁹ Both his music and his public persona were thus heavily mediated. When Jularbo’s music became unfashionable in the 1960s, acclaimed Swedish accordion makers Hagström, which had used Jularbo as the face of its brand, switched to manufacturing electric guitars. But Jularbo’s music continued to influence generations of musicians in Sweden. One example is another melodic composer, Benny Andersson of ABBA fame, who is a devotee and admirer of Jularbo. His career began around the time that Körberg’s version of “Drömmen om Elin” was released, and his early output shows stylistic similarities with Jularbo’s work. Andersson has publicly praised the *gammeldans* tradition and the accordion, which was in fact the first instrument he played himself.³⁰ As one of Jularbo’s most outspoken followers, after working with ABBA and on his musicals, he composed and recorded a

29 Kalle Karlsson från Jularbo. Sandrews 1952.

30 “Svunnet Sverige: Älskade dragspel – utskäld av kultureliten” *Land*. Updated 28 January 2022 at 11:33 <https://www.land.se/livet-pa-landet/a/dragspelets-historik>, “Från världsstjärna till politisk aktivist” *Expressen*. 29 July 2013. “Benny spelar hellre dragspel än Abba”. *Uppsala Nya Tidning*. Published 23 June 2004. <https://www.unt.se/kultur/kultur-och-noje/artikel/benny-spelar-hellre-dragspel-an-abba/r21zn9xj> accessed 28 June 2026.

great deal of music in the *gammeldans* style with an openness towards the folksy, the sentimental and nostalgic.³¹

Over the course of his fertile nearly 70-year career, Jularbo played and recorded in many venues. He was seen as a musician's musician, who tirelessly toured, played, and recorded the accordion all his life. His cultural impact was monumental in this "time of innocence" (Ronström 2021). For a majority of Swedes, he essentially personified Swedish music, at least until the 1960s, when the general taste among younger audiences shifted heavily towards electric guitar-based pop and rock. But elements of his style and melodies lived on (Ronström 2021: 106–107). They can be traced in a number of his compositions – some of them sentimental – that remain evergreen in Sweden, and in his occasionally strong (albeit probably not obvious to non-Swedish listeners) influence on the internationally better-known Swedish popular music that came after him. Furthermore, Jularbo's sentimental melodies and songs formed part of Sweden's transformation into a modern society and, moreover, into a nation with an international impact on popular music.

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31 Benny Anderssons orkester (BAO), a band active since 2001. For those who listen for it, both ABBA's and Andersson's solo music are replete with *gammeldans* and Swedish folk music influences, concealed in the modern pop idiom of the 1970s. We can hear it in world-famous tunes such as "Arrival" and "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)" as well as in other songs by the band. And without any doubt, ABBA's lyrics are sometimes poised between sentimentality and kitsch.

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Toivo Burlin (b. 1972), is an associate professor of musicology at Stockholm University with a doctoral degree from the University of Gothenburg. His research deals in various ways with the relationship between music, technologies and media using ethnomusicological and music historical approaches. Studies have been conducted on different musical genres with critical perspectives on music historiography, canonization processes and conceptualizations of music. He is the project leader for the research project *Calle Jularbo and the Gammeldans: Music, Networks, Mediation* in 2022 - 2025.