

VIRUS

Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin

21

Schwerpunkt: Musik und Medizin

Herausgegeben von Maria Heidegger, Marina Hilber,
Milijana Pavlović



Leipziger Universitätsverlag 2022

Karin Hallgren

Music at Sanatoriums in Sweden 1890–1960. A report from an ongoing project

Summary

This report is on a recently started research project on cultural activities in sanatoriums for the treatment of tuberculosis in Sweden 1890–1960. The project has a multidisciplinary focus, with participation from researchers within art studies, musicology, ethnology, and the history of medicine respectively. The main questions of the project are what music and other cultural activities meant to patients and staff at the sanatoriums and how it affected their well-being and quality of life. The chosen period is 1890–1960, starting when sanatoriums with a special focus on tuberculosis began to be established, and ending at a time when many sanatoriums were closed down, as the need for this type of healthcare institution no longer existed. Tuberculosis is a disease with a long history. It became widespread in Sweden as well as in many other European countries from the mid 19th century onward, partly due to the industrialization and its consequences such as cramped living conditions in overcrowded cities.¹ Gradually, many sanatoriums were established throughout the country, with a total of more than 100, in varying sizes, run by private companies as well as by the state.

Der Bericht befasst sich mit einem kürzlich begonnenen Forschungsprojekt über kulturelle Aktivitäten in Sanatorien zur Behandlung von Tuberkulose in Schweden von 1890 bis 1960. Das multidisziplinäre Projekt umfasst Forschungszugänge aus der Kunstwissenschaft, der Musikwissenschaft, Ethnologie und Medizingeschichte. Im Zentrum steht die Frage nach der Bedeutung von Musik und anderen kulturellen Aktivitäten für die Patient*innen und das Personal in Heilanstalten. Wie wirkten sie sich auf ihr Wohlbefinden und ihre Lebensqualität aus? Der Untersuchungszeitraum beginnt um 1890 zum Zeitpunkt, an dem Sanatorien mit dem Schwerpunkt Tuberkulose eingerichtet wurden, und reicht bis in die 1960er Jahre, viele dieser Sanatorien aufgrund des mangelnden Bedarfs geschlossen wurden. Die Tuberkulose war in Schweden wie auch in vielen anderen europäischen Ländern ab Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts weit verbreitet, was zum Teil auf die Industrialisierung und ihre Folgen zurückzuführen war. Im ganzen Land wurden insgesamt mehr als 100 Sanatorien in unterschiedlicher Größe eingerichtet, die sowohl von privaten Unternehmen als auch vom Staat betrieben wurden.

1 Bi PURANEN, Tuberkulos. En sjukdoms förekomst och dess orsaker i Sverige 1750–1980 (Umeå 1984).
Article accepted for publication after internal review by the journal editors.

Keywords

Sanatoriums, public health, tuberculosis, music, quality of life, Sweden, 19th–20th century

Introduction

The project aims to contribute to the research area regarding the relation between culture and medicine in a social perspective. This is an expanding research field, both in national and international contexts.² Theories on well-being and the concept of “quality of life” are important perspectives in the project, inspired by the importance of these aspects in medical practice today. We also want to highlight the sanatoriums as arenas for cultural activities. In recent times the historical perspective has become more common within the field of music and health research.³ In research regarding Swedish conditions though, this is still an underutilized perspective. Therefore, for my part of the study it has been necessary to start with fundamental research and describe musical activities at three selected sanatoriums. Results from this preliminary investigation will be disclosed in this report. Musical events at three different sanatoriums in Sweden during the first half of the 20th century will be described and discussed relating to the overarching questions of the study. The sanatoriums are the ones of Ryd and Lugnet in the southern part of Sweden and the sanatorium of Österåsen in the northern part of the country.

These three sanatoriums are chosen to lend the study variety and thereby give as many approaches as possible for the continuing work of the project. The sanatoriums are of different sizes and scopes, founded at different times, run by different owners, and were aimed at slightly different groups of patients. The musical examples are from concerts and other live performances. From 1925 onward, the radio had an important role in creating music experiences, as well as the gramophone somewhat later on. However, these forms of distribution are not included in the project at the moment.

Ryd’s sanatorium, Tingsryd

The first example comes from Ryds sanatorium, a small village situated in southern Sweden. It was run by a private company and was active from 1892 to 1944. It was one of the first sanatoriums in Sweden and was located in the countryside, surrounded by large forests and lakes. At the time, forest air was thought to have important health benefits, however, seaside or mountain locations were later thought to be more beneficial for tuberculosis patients. The recently established railway in southern Sweden also played an important role in enabling a sanatorium to be located in Ryd. In 1874 a line between nearby towns had been established, and an additional line was opened in 1900.⁴

2 Daisy FANCOURT / Saoirse FINN, *What Is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-being? A Scoping Review* (Copenhagen 2019).

3 Penelope GOUK / Helen HILLS, eds., *Representing Emotions. New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine* (Aldershot 2005).

4 Leif KINDBLOM, *Ryds brunn – en barrskogsdoftande inlandskurort*, in: Motzi Eklöf, ed., *Naturen, kuren & samhället. Vård på sanatorier och kurorter ca 1870–2010* (Stockholm 2011), 82–109.

The sanatorium was only operating during the summer, from 1 June to 15 September. Before being established as a sanatorium in 1892, it had functioned as a “summer spa” for several years. Despite being turned into a sanatorium in 1892, it was still possible to visit as a guest, without being registered as a patient. The stay would then function more as a place for summer vacation. These summer guests mainly consisted of better-off people. In the following decades the number of summer guests decreased and regular patients became the norm. In the years around the beginning of the 20th century around 500 patients would visit Ryd each summer. The number of patients increased during the following years up to around 1,000 patients every summer. There were many different diagnoses, one of them being “chest-illness”.⁵ Gradually other spa towns would compete with Ryd’s sanatorium. The fact that Ryd could only be open in the summer limited its potential operations. Due to a combination of an economic recession and the ongoing World War II Ryd’s sanatorium was closed in 1944.⁶

The sanatorium at Ryd had a clear connection to the spa tradition. In Sweden this tradition goes back all the way to the 17th century. Music played an important role at these spas and many military musicians combined their work in the military with playing in different ensembles at spas around the country during the summer.⁷ Music functioned both as entertainment and as ceremonial music at different occasions. Like the music at the spa’s, the musical events at the sanatorium of Ryd functioned as entertainment. This is evidenced by advertisements giving information about musical events in the daily press during the early years of the sanatorium’s operations. The advertising for the first two seasons emphasizes the medical treatment, but the existence of a “new and good piano” in the sitting room is also highlighted in the advertisements.⁸ From this one can conclude that the management thought it was important for guests to have the opportunity to hear some music during their stay at Ryd. The Swedish tradition of celebrating Midsummer with dance and music was firmly established at Ryd’s sanatorium and patients, staff and locals all partook in these celebrations.⁹

There is also evidence of concerts being given at the assembly hall at Ryd. On one such occasion musicians and well known singers from the Royal Opera in Stockholm performed, according to an advertisement: “A concert will be given at Ryds Sanatorium by the concert-singer Miss Anny Ålenius, with assistance of the cellist Fredrik Trobäck and director Otto Trobäck Thursday 19 July at 8.30 p.m. Entré 1:50.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, no information is given on the repertoire performed. It is notable that these concerts were available not only for the sanatorium’s patients and staff, but also for the general public from the surrounding community. The assembly hall at the sanatorium seems to have been used as a public meeting room for many years. It seems that in this case the need for isolation was not as relevant for all patients as commonly believed. The close connection between the sanatorium and the surrounding society was an important aspect of the Sanatorium in Ryd.

5 Ibid., 92–93.

6 Ibid., 108.

7 For a thorough description of music at Swedish spas in a historic perspective see Ann-Marie NILSSON, *Musik till vatten och punsch. Kring svenska blåsoktetter vid brunnar, bad och beväringmöten* (Stockholm 2017).

8 *Smålandsposten* (12 April 1893).

9 *Smålandsposten* (30 June 1900).

10 *Smålandsposten* (18 July 1900). Swedish original: “Konsert gifves vid Ryds sanatorium af konsertsångerskan fröken Anny Ålenius med biträde af cellisten Fredrik Trobäck och direktör Otto Trobäck torsdagen d.19 juli kl. 8.30 e.m. Entré 1:50.”

Other recurring activities during the seasons were evening entertainments, jointly organized by staff and guests. Music numbers, songs and sketches were performed, and the purpose was often to raise money for what was called “poor sanatorium guests”, as this example shows:

“The bathing guests at Ryd’s sanatorium gave, as told to us, a soiré [sic] this Saturday at 5 p.m. in the assembly hall. The program was very rich and offered singing, music, recitation, national dances and a small-scale theater play. The performance seemed to be much appreciated by the audience, and a pleasant atmosphere prevailed in the salon. Later in the evening, an animated ball took place, which continued until around 11 p.m. The soirée, which was held for charity, brought around SEK 300.”¹¹

The sanatorium at Ryd is one of the earliest sanatoriums in Sweden, with a connection to the long spa tradition. One can assume, though, that this connection to the spa tradition soon disappeared. Tuberculosis is a serious illness, and the patients were often rather ill. In order to treat this illness, sanatoriums solely aimed at treating tuberculosis became necessary.

Lugnet’s sanatorium, Växjö

In the beginning of the 20th century Lugnet’s sanatorium was established in Växjö, a residential town in the southern part of Sweden with a cathedral and secondary school. The sanatorium was set up by the regional health service in 1914 and the idea was that the region’s tuberculosis patients would receive their health care there. Initially, about 180 patients were admitted, but this was not enough for the region’s needs. This is a sign of how widespread the disease was. The sanatorium was in operation until 1962. It was located on the outskirts of the town Växjö, and a small railway connected the sanatorium to the city. Preserved documents, as well as written memories from patients who stayed at the sanatorium, show that the patients’ days were strictly scheduled, with a number of events from morning to evening, possibly with fewer mandatory events on the weekends. But when a patient had slightly recovered, they would have a lot of free time which needed to be filled with various activities. The patient association therefore had an important task to fulfill. The association bought newspapers and books, gave movie performances and concerts and other musical events were arranged occasionally.¹²

Many local artists often visited Lugnet to perform. Usually this was combined with engagements in Växjö, since the journey to Växjö was short. The city could be reached by railway within 15 to 20 minutes and the cost for the journey was just half a crown, an affordable sum for most people. Even if the patients had to live in isolation at the sanatorium this indicates that

11 Smålandsposten (23 July 1902). Swedish original: “Badgästerna vid Ryds sanatorium gåfvo, skrifves till oss, soiré i lördags kl. 5 e.m. uti societetssalongen. Programmet var särdeles rikligt och bjöd på sång, musik, deklamation, nationaldanser samt en mindre teaterpjäs. Det framförda tycktes senteras lifligt af publiken, ty en angenäm stämning rådde hela tiden uti salongen. Senare på aftonen vidtog en animerad bal, som fortgick till inemot kl. 11. Soiréen, som gafs för välgörande ändamål, inbragte i rundt tal 300 kr.” All translation from Swedish made by the author.

12 Sture STAMMING, *Lungshotens historia – ett studieprojekt. I. Sanatorieminnen (Växjö 1985a)*; Sture STAMMING, *Lungshotens historia – ett studieprojekt. II. Kronobergs län (Växjö 1985b)*.

there was a lively connection between the city and the sanatorium. The importance of the railway is evident here as well as in the case of the sanatorium in Ryd. At the sanatorium, the artists usually performed indoors in the sitting room, the exception being the regiment's music corps, which lined up in the sanatorium park.¹³ The repertoire mainly consisted of popular music played on accordion and guitar, as well as songs and schlagers with guitar and piano accompaniment. Some artists, such as “the Björknert brothers”¹⁴, had a more local career, while others were well known nationally, such as Eberhardt Jularbo¹⁵ and the “Singing men from Småland”.¹⁶ According to written memories, these concerts functioned as music for entertainment, something that was highly appreciated by the patients.¹⁷ They were a break in the daily routines and a possibility to think of other matters than the disease.

Another special activity were the shows that were arranged regularly for a number of years.¹⁸ These shows were performances consisting of songs, music numbers and sketches. New lyrics were written to old, well-known melodies. The texts depicted life in the sanatorium and the writer would take the opportunity to make jokes and criticize various people, especially within the staff. The expression of such opinions can be seen as an interesting contrast to the structured way of living, with its clear hierarchy between doctors and patients, which was common in the daily life of the sanatorium. One can assume that the disciplining strategy, which was obvious in many respects, was challenged a bit in these songs. It seems likely that music could play a disciplinary role while simultaneously being an arena for critique and jokes.

The importance of the patient associations' activities is well demonstrated with the example of Lugnet's sanatorium. Since many patients stayed for a long time at the Sanatorium the social aspect was important. Many patients were young and there are many stories of lifelong friendships being formed at the sanatorium, for example through patient associations. In the same way, the staff became close to many patients. Over the decades, several hundred patients were treated at Lugnet's sanatorium, many of them returning multiple times. Most of the patients came from simple, poor conditions. Fundraisers were arranged annually, for example at Christmas, and the income from these events was used mainly to support the poor patients.

Österåsens sanatorium, Sollefteå

In 1897, a national rally was held to celebrate the 25th anniversary of King Oscar II's reign. It was decided that the funds raised should be used to set up sanatoriums for the treatment of tuberculosis, especially for the less wealthy population. In total, three such “jubilee sanatoriums” were established.¹⁹ They were to be located throughout the country, in order to make health care more equally accessible.²⁰ This was an ideological and political position, increasingly

13 Ibid.

14 www.digitaltmuseum.se/kulturparkensmåländ/bröderna_björknert (last accessed: 22.06.2020).

15 www.discogs.com/eberhardt_jularbo (last accessed: 22.06.2020).

16 www.digitaltmuseum.se/kulturparkensmåländ/de_sjungande_smålänningarna (last accessed: 22.06.2020).

17 STAMMING, Lungsotens, 1985b.

18 Ibid.

19 LARS ANDÉR / BI PURANEN, *Konung Oscar II:s jubileumsfond och tuberkuloskampen* (Stockholm 1994).

20 ANDERS ÅMAN, *Om den offentliga vården* (Stockholm 1976).

advocated at the turn of the 20th century, i. e. the possibility to live on equal terms in the whole country and the right for everyone to have access to healthcare, regardless of class. It is also a sign of how fast tuberculosis was spreading and how much it affected Swedish society as a whole. The need for healthcare for the working classes was of interest to the whole society. The sanatorium in the northern part of Sweden was located in a place outside the city of Sollefteå called Österåsen. It opened in 1901 and closed in 1960. As for the other two sanatoriums, the railway was also important in establishing Österåsen. A new line opened in 1902, and the following year another railway, heading up in the very north of the country opened and was inaugurated by the King. As part of the inauguration a stop was made at Österåsen railway station, including a performance by the military music corps. The King even paid a visit to the sanatorium, where patients and staff welcomed him in the courtyard.²¹

Österåsen is rather well-known to this day, not least because of the important role cultural activities played there.²² For many years the head of the sanatorium collected art, and encouraged patients to paint and write. There are several examples of patients, who became writers and artists during their stay at Österåsen. The sanatoriums are often mentioned as “the university for poor people”. Many people got a chance to study, a chance they would not have had outside the sanatoriums. More is yet to learn about the music in daily life at Österåsen. In this report a few examples will be given, focusing on concerts by travelling musicians and the importance of personal contacts for these musical events to take place.

An article in the press in 1903 reports that Österåsen had been visited by the famous Swedish singer Sven Scholander. He was part of the movement for performing music from older times on authentic instruments and was very famous at the beginning of the 20th century.²³ The report states:

“At Saturday’s dinner, Mr Scholander gave a concert for the patients and many strangers to a number of about 150 people. The concert was held in the assembly hall and was tastefully decorated with flowers and Swedish flags. This event, which was unexpectedly happy for the chest-sick people there, had its cause in that Mr. S. at this moment has his little 11-year-old daughter accommodated within the main physician’s family. Scholander’s little daughter sang several pieces, accompanied by her father.”²⁴

The programme included songs by several Swedish poets. According to the paper the programme was saluted with “storming applause and dacapo numbers.”

21 Varbergsposten (15 July 1902).

22 Yngve NÄSLUND, Österåsen. Sanatorium och konstmetropol (Härnösand 1995).

23 Madeleine MODIN, Museala och musikaliska föreställningar om historiska musikinstrument. En studie av Musikhistoriska museets verksamhet 1899–1918 (Stockholm 2018).

24 Aftonbladet (6 April 1903). Swedish original: “På lördagens middag gaf hr Scholander å Österåsens sanatorium i Västernorrlands län en konsert för patienterna och många främmande personer till ett antal af omkring 150 personer. Konserten hölls i samlingsalen och var denna smakfullt dekorerad med blommor och svenska flaggor. Denna för de bröstsjuka därstädes oväntadt glada tilldragelse hade sin orsak i, att hr S har sin lilla 11-åriga dotter inackorderad hos öfverläkaren på stället. Det tryckta programmet talade också om: ’den lilla vis-stunden som Eva bjöd Österås-vännerna på genom sin pappa lördagen den 4 april 1903.’ Hans lilla dotter sjöng flera små näpna bitar, ackompanjerad af sin far. Programmet upptog Sehlstedt, Jolin, Dahlgren, Fröding och Bellman. Stormande bifall och dacaponummer.”

Scholander belonged to the higher stratas of society and the personal relations between him and the head of the sanatorium obviously played an important role for this concert. It was probably more of a coincidence than anything else that the concert took place, since Scholander had personal reasons to visit Österåsen. His marriage to Lotten von Bahr also connected him to the important von Bahr family, including one of Lotten von Bahrs sisters, Julia von Bahr, who was a proponent of establishing a sanatorium in Romanäs in southern Sweden around 1900.²⁵ The personal contacts between individuals was probably of importance in the following example as well. The famous Swedish composer and pianist Wilhelm Stenhammar performed at Österåsen with a program in the 1910s. Wilhelm Stenhammar made extensive concert tours during these years and it is possible that the concert at Österåsen was part of such a tour. But there is also a personal connection, through Wilhelm Stenhammars brother Ernst Stenhammar. He was a successful architect at the time, specialising in planning buildings for hospitals and sanatoriums.²⁶ The brothers belonged to the same social groups and it is possible that this had an effect on Stenhammar's decision to include Österåsen on his tour.

Preliminary conclusions and continuing research

Practical reasons for the establishment of sanatoriums around the country must not be neglected. For most of the sanatoriums the expansion of the railway was necessary in order for them to be founded. The idea of isolation may therefore be problematized. Maybe it is more relevant to talk about isolation for separate groups of patients than for the sanatoriums as a whole. The possibility to get touring artists to the sanatoriums for concerts increased with the railway. This research area will be further studied in the project, and may contribute to the research on musical life in Sweden outside the big cities as well as to the knowledge on music at the sanatoriums. The importance of personal contacts in putting on concerts is a trail which will be investigated further as part of the project. In this context it is also necessary to mention the importance of military music for public concerts. This will probably be a separate study, but it is important to emphasize that the military music corps also played a major role in civil music society and was seen as an important factor when it came to spreading music throughout the country. In the source material used in the project some concerts given by military bands are mentioned and will be studied in more detail.

The concerts were appreciated by the people at the sanatoriums and the entertainment factor should not be underestimated. But music performed by the patients themselves was no less important and was beneficial for the patient's quality of life. These performances in particular highlight the research questions on how music "affected the well being and quality of life" for the patients. In the continuing research in the project this aspect will be of a central interest.

It is also possible that musical activities were connected to daily discipline, but the material treated in this report does not indicate this. The example with new texts being put to existing melodies, as the events at the sanatorium of Lugnet has shown, can be discussed as a kind of

25 Annie SVÄRD, *Romanäs sanatorium 1903–1940. En berättelse och en dokumentsamling* (Jönköping 2004).

26 Bo LUNDSTRÖM, article "Ernst W E Stenhammar", urn:sbl:20081, *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon* (last accessed: 28.06.2022).

“subversive disobedience”, a questioning of the current system of norms within limits acceptable to the administration of the sanatorium. The results so far show the importance of music as entertainment, with concerts of touring artists as well as musical events performed by the patients and staff themselves. To what extent music also occurred as treatment is still left for the project to investigate.

Information on the author

Karin Hallgren, Professor in musicology at the Department of Art and Music, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden, E-Mail: karin.hallgren@lnu.se