

Analysis of a Swedish Waltz

by [Karen Myers](#)

Isakas-Karl-Hindrikas Vals

A simple waltz with a twist in its tail.

Isakas-Karl-Hindrikas Vals

Närpes, Österbotten
Efter Jvar Broman 1993

Printed by Karen Myers

[MIDI: Isakas-Karl-Hindrikas Vals](#)

Illustration 1: Learned from the Fairfield Scandinavian Club Fiddlers, a Connecticut group I played with for several years. Most of the band members were from Närpes, on the Swedish-speaking west coast of Finland.

This Swedish-style waltz comes from Österbotten, Finland. I have only encountered it in the traditional repertoire of fiddlers from Närpes, but I would imagine there must be variants in that region.

At first glance this looks like a simple sweet conventional waltz that hardly merits a second look. The only unusual thing about it is the "extra" measure in the B part which refuses to be pinned down.

The conventional dance tune structure of the last century or two is an A and B part (and sometimes a C part) of 2 repeats of 8 (sometimes 16) bars each, especially for the more recent layer of tunes such as waltzes. In the Scandinavian repertoire, this conventional structure is only a statistical preponderance; there are a great many exceptions, and many dances do not require a strictly conventional structure, thus imposing no barrier to alternative structures for their associated tunes.

Even within the exceptions, there are discernible common groupings. For example, a 6-bar part frequently breaks down as a 2-bar phrase, a repeat or variation of the 2-bar phrase, and a 2-bar tag ending (2+2+2). A 9-bar part is frequently a normal 8-bar part extended with an extra bar for one or more endings (8+1), and so forth.

This waltz has a B part which breaks down as 4+1+4. It is unusual to find an "extra" measure inserted into the middle of a simple tune like this. The 4th and 5th bars share the same harmony, so the effect of the 5th bar is to extend the 4th bar, almost as if it were an unusually long ornament. On the other hand, it also makes a nice rolling entrance to bar 6. I find it difficult to decide whether to hear the B part as 5+4 or as 4+5, and in fact I go back and forth between them as if this were a [figure-and-ground perception test](http://encarta.msn.com/media_461547617/Figure_and_Ground.html) (http://encarta.msn.com/media_461547617/Figure_and_Ground.html) where the two images swap back and forth.

The B part didn't have to be this way. There are various conventional forms it might have taken. Bar 5 could have been omitted, though that would have left an awkward transition after bar 4.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a waltz in 3/4 time, key of D major. The first system shows the original B part structure: four bars of music followed by a single bar (bar 5) that shares the same harmony as the fourth bar, and then four more bars. The second system shows an alternate B part structure: four bars of music, followed by a double bar line, then two endings. The first ending (marked '1.') leads back to the beginning of the four-bar phrase, and the second ending (marked '2.') leads to a final cadence. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature.

Illustration 2: Possible B part, eliminating bar 5. [MIDI: Isakas-Karl-Hindrikas Vals - Alternate B \(1\)](#).

Or Bar 5 could have been kept and the remainder simplified (and shortened), but then it wouldn't have matched the ending of the A part.



Illustration 3: Possible B part, simplifying and shortening bars 6-9. [MIDI: Isakas-Karl-Hindrikas Vals - Alternate B \(2\)](#).

The tune as it is actually played is an improvement on either of these choices, keeping both the dual-purpose ornament measure and the echo of the A part ending.

Even a simple tune like this can have a subtle surprise, an extra measure that acts like the brief plateau on the top of the roller coaster ride: a place to reflect on where you've come from, and where you're about to go.

Karen Myers bio

A singer of folk and classical music all her life, Karen became fascinated by the instrumental folk music of Sweden and Norway as an outgrowth of her interest in the folk music of the British Isles and Appalachia. She has played extensively with spelmanslags (fiddler groups) in Boston, New York, Chicago, and the Bay Area, and founded the Nutmeg Spelmanslag in Connecticut. Currently she plays solo and with various groups and fiddlers in the Bay Area.

You can find out more at: <http://www.KarenLMyers.org>