

Messiah and the cultural canon

Episode 7: “Poetic globetrotter with Simon Superti”

Messiah Hallberg

Last autumn, the Cultural canon was published. Ten of the works featured are pieces of music. Evert Taube has songs included in the list. You're here, Simon Superti

Simon Superti

Yes, thank you.

Messiah Hallberg

You're here to discuss Evert Taube.

Simon Superti

I will.

Messiah Hallberg

Great!

Messiah Hallberg

And you're here, too. You have to be here, don't you?

Mattias Lundberg

I have no choice, do I? [laughing]

[Music]

Messiah Hallberg

It really put you in a good mood, didn't it? Right? Yes. This was '*Calle Schewens vals*'. Who was Calle Schewen?

Mattias Lundberg

Carl von Schewen was Evert Taube's host on an occasion when he was invited to his country estate. He and his brother had a place out there in the Norrtälje archipelago. And it was his host who thanked him by featuring him as the main character in a song. So it isn't Evert who has an arm around his neck. It's Calle Schewen.

Speaker 4

'The scent and the song drift from the forest and the lake. Tonight you shall be my guest. Here, Calle Schewen's dancing with the maiden of Roslagen, and the sun sets in the northwest'.

Mattias Lundberg

Some people spoke of it as a new national anthem. So, from the 1930s onwards, this has truly been synonymous with the people's dream of summer.

Messiah Hallberg

You often hear it on I don't put it on myself very often at home. You hear it anyway and...

Mattias Lundberg

But when you're out in the garden? Perhaps not.

Messiah Hallberg

No, but I don't know, it feels as though someone's playing it.

Simon Superti

Do you think this is a hit from the 1930s? It feels like a big hit from back then.

Mattias Lundberg

Yes, definitely.

Simon Superti

But what year was that?

Mattias Lundberg

Well, I have this one from 1931, and there are several other recordings, including some by others. Sven Olof Sandberg also recorded it in 1934. But this is his own version. And then his son, Sven Bertil, is probably the one most people listen to.

Messiah Hallberg

But who was he, then?

Mattias Lundberg

Evert Taube was, of course, born into... It was a noble family, but that doesn't mean they had any money; it was just a 'posh' name. But then he grew up, among other places, in Vinga. His father was a lighthouse keeper, from a family of lighthouse keepers. So there was, as it were, the sea and the romance of the sea right from the start. Then he tried his hand at almost every art form, for example as a visual artist. He tried writing novels and eventually, as a sort of journalist, he wrote articles.

Messiah Hallberg

Was he any good at it?

Mattias Lundberg

Yes, he could manage. But then he also started writing songs that he published. And when a few others started recording them, he thought he might as well start doing it himself. One of the first was this one, '*Karl-Alfred and Ellinor*'. A real hit. Karl Alfred, Karl Alfred, was his name. You could say he was a genre composer.

Simon Superti

Rock, roll and all that sort of thing we think of as popular music. Back then, it was marches and waltzes that were the genres. It's easy to forget that.

Mattias Lundberg

Exactly, that really was mainstream popular music.

Simon Superti

Would you say Evert Taube was the rock star type?

Mattias Lundberg

Well, that's certainly how it turned out in the end. He became a showman. Just like the rock stars of later years, he knew how to build a story. He's told the story himself of how he wrote '*Calle Schewen's vals*'. It's a bit different every time, but that's it. That's the narrative.

Messiah Hallberg

He makes a few changes.

Mattias Lundberg

Yes, but basically it's like this: it's usually not whether it's true or not that's interesting, but the fact that he knows how to create this. It was back then that he was invited because he was to be elected to something called Pelarorden; there was Albert Engström and people like that. And there was a man called Carl von Schewen who had his estate out in the Norrtälje archipelago. And I think he turned up late, and then he'd written this when he arrived there. But in his own version, it's a sort of entrance exam to be allowed in. He was supposed to write a summer's waltz and that's what he did. So Kalle Schewen writes it down. Otherwise, he's got the same sort of thing as Bellman and Wennerberg and the like. People who appear frequently. Fritiof and Rönnerdahl and the like. But here it's Calle Schewen who Who really wanted to. Yes, exactly.

Simon Superti

He wanted to be part of it. But it's... As someone who works quite a bit with hip hop, this is the first time I've wanted to be part of a track.

Mattias Lundberg

No, it's quite sad. You could say that this one standing behind us.

Simon Superti

Who wants to be in the song.

Mattias Lundberg

Yes, exactly. He was 'composed into the song', thus a part of the story. Otherwise, perhaps not many people know that he—

Simon Superti

Yes, a good investment.

Messiah Hallberg

Featuring 'Calle Schewen'. How did you feel when you heard that?

Simon Superti

It's quite funny. He's drinking coffee, sitting on a bench, enjoying the sun. From my point of view, I think it's more about what he was feeling. And then it's become a Swedish waltz that symbolises Sweden. It felt like Evert was sitting on a bench and really doing this, letting it all out a bit. And the best songs and ballads are the ones with those lyrics, I'd say.

Mattias Lundberg

This, of course, goes on to influence how he helps to promote the archipelago as an idyllic setting. Before, it was all about Dalarna. People didn't want to live in open landscapes like Lundell, but rather in forests and hills. That was the 19th century, after all. But from here on, it suddenly became the case that I know loads of people who have no connection to the archipelago but who want an archipelago theme for their weddings. Just as you say, that's what you can do on a holiday. You can sit and drink coffee, have a bit of a laugh at the seagulls, go fishing and so on. But because he's sung about it and everyone's heard it, it somehow becomes almost a must-do on holiday. No, we haven't gone through them all.

Simon Superti

That's a good rating for a song.

[Music]**Messiah Hallberg**

'*Calle Schewen's vals*' is one song, but Taube actually has not just one, but two songs in the canon. He's also in...

Mattias Lundberg

He also features in '*Möte i monsunen*', the second main track. Perhaps, if you were to paint a very broad picture of his lyrics, it's all about adventure on a global scale. In that case, you don't stay in that idyll for long.

Messiah Hallberg

You've left it behind.

Mattias Lundberg

You're all over the world, facing storms, wild animals, robberies and ransoms.

Messiah Hallberg

Two very different worlds.

Mattias Lundberg

Yes, you could say that.

[Singer]

Mattias Lundberg

A typical song set all over the world. It takes place in Siam, India, Shanghai, Cape of Good Hope and Hamburg. It's brilliant.

Simon Superti

It was really interesting when I listened to it on my way here. You've heard these songs before. But it's not as if people have really listened to exactly what he's saying. I mean, it's a row involving gorillas all banging on a mast. He's got a vivid imagination – unless it actually happened. You never know.

Mattias Lundberg

And he grasps it, captures the essence of it in music. It must come from the consul himself.

Messiah Hallberg

It's quite interesting when you consider that people think early music is dull in terms of its themes. It is certainly not.

Mattias Lundberg

It really is a competition. It's the opposite of what you said in Calle Schewen. When he's sitting on an island drinking coffee and schnapps and so on. This being out in the world. And Evert Taube didn't like when others who hadn't been at sea were singing such songs. So he had a sort of authenticity in mind. You've got to have a lighter touch.

Simon Superti

A rapper. I can't help but say it. Sweden's first rapper.

Mattias Lundberg

I believe, for example, that Ernst Rolf recorded this '*Karl-Alfred and Ellinor*' early on. And he means that... What does he know about it? He shouldn't be so smug. That's quite something, because it's a song within a song, too. It starts with them meeting in this tropical monsoon, two ships coming together. And then there's a bit of nostalgia for this full-rigged ship. I know nothing about sailing, I've never sailed. All I know about sailing, I've learnt it from Evert Taube. I've understood that he's reliable when it comes to those details. But with full-rigged ships like these heading out, there was a bit of nostalgia in that in itself – a huge vessel with loads of sails on every mast. And then two of them meet there, a Finn and a Swede. And then Fritiof Andersson tells the whole story. So the song begins with a narrator's voice, but then he meets Fritiof, who takes over and tells his story within the song.

Mattias Lundberg

It's a bit unusual in a way.

Simon Superti

Yes, I've been thinking about it; it's almost as if I've written a film, because it keeps a lot of people in the dark, and then what? And then there's all that business with the animals. It's supposed to follow Fritiof's story – it's about what's happened to him.

Mattias Lundberg

It's actually quite good. There are lots of films where you get to know a character first, and then they start telling...

Messiah Hallberg

Their story.

Mattias Lundberg

Yes, exactly.

Evert Taube

Right, but here we have the balance Concertbolaget for 2,500 kronor. What is that to say? I could manage it if I had another 8,000. I need 8,000 kronor.

[Young boy]

But if you don't have any money, you can't make any trip.

[Singer]

Yes, that's why I have to make the trip, because I don't have any money.

Messiah Hallberg

Do you have any relation to Taube?

Simon Superti

No, nothing other than singing at school assemblies. But somehow that tune has stuck with me. I write them myself to be compared with many songwriters without really knowing what they've done. So when I listen to Evert now, it feels like I don't really know what I know myself. I suppose you just write whatever comes to mind. Sometimes you write from a first-person perspective that's actually about someone else. There's so much in a song that you can convey.

Mattias Lundberg

Do you agree then that you should write about things you can relate to or have experienced yourself?

Simon Superti

At the same time, I can write a song from a first-person perspective about something I haven't personally experienced either.

Mattias Lundberg

So it isn't autofiction?

Simon Superti

No, it depends on how you frame it. It might be that I meet a so-and-so and I came from here and there. But you might describe five different scenarios involving different people within a single character, because that's easier to take in. And I think that's what the song helps me with. It's almost like rap, really. It's the same basic idea. You want to convey something about the present day or about someone. Often destinies, personal destinies, human destinies. So I don't have a childhood connection to him. But I have to say that it's like a new treasure that grows for me every time I find new music that I like. It also explains why I can do what I do myself today.

[Music]

Mattias Lundberg

Do you have any relation to Taube?

Messiah Hallberg

It feels like you should have one. I've never really delved into Taube.

Mattias Lundberg

I would say that many people have this kind of relationship which can be difficult to explain in other European countries, for example. Why would you want, when you're off work, to be out and about and preferably not have a proper toilet or running water? To live a bit like in the old days. And I think Taube has meant a great deal in terms of how, in a broader sense, a day's outdoor life somehow belongs here, on the veranda of the summer cottage.

Simon Superti

Och också Roslagen – that's the whole Roslag sound, isn't it? The whole waltz. I've never really thought about it in those terms – that we have such an influence that people want to head out to the archipelago.

Messiah Hallberg

They're painting a picture of Sweden, and you're fully aware of that yourself. You come from there. The images you have.

Evert Taube

A message to our viewers. Right then, here we go – I'm off to Argentina so that we can see something you'll find interesting and informative.

Messiah Hallberg

The world he described wasn't quite as general. Today, I can't help but laugh when I watch it.

Simon Superti

Exactly.

Messiah Hallberg

We have that. Well, I've just done that.

Mattias Lundberg

Well, that's how it was. Instead of watching a documentary about how things work at places like that, you can just listen to '*Fritiof och Carmencita*' and find out how it all works. Lots of people are in the know.

Messiah Hallberg

That sounds exciting too. How was your time in Argentina? Yes, back then. Yes, back then. I'm sitting at home in Småland, moping.

Simon Superti

Oh, but if we listen to Fritiof, we'll have to listen to '*Fritiof och Carmencita*' more. Yes, I think so.

Mattias Lundberg

Yes, but it's exciting. Cheers! [drinking].

Messiah Hallberg

He would have liked this.