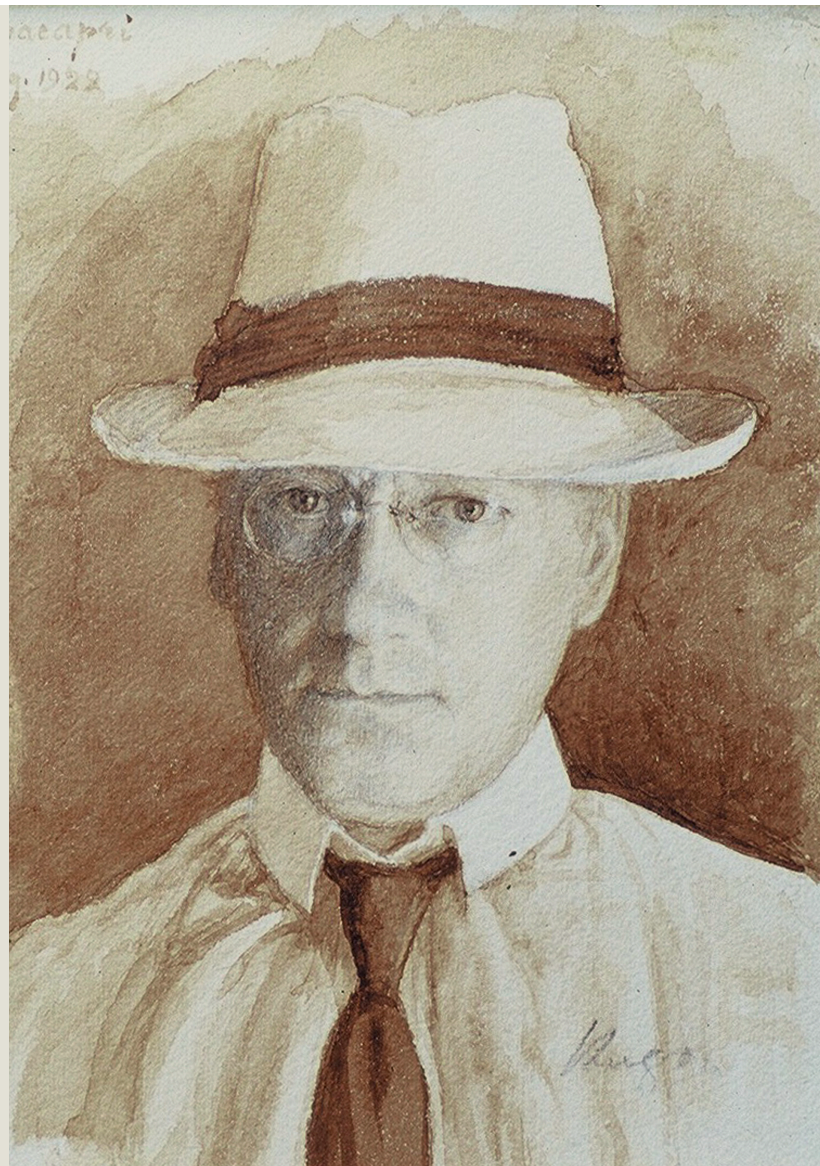


A few words about
Hugo Alfvén

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ALFVÉNGÅRDEN



**A few words about
Hugo Alfvén**

Gunnar Ternhag

**The Alfvén Home
Hugo Alfvén Foundation
at the Royal Swedish Academy of Music**

Published with support from Stiftelsen Längmanska
kulturfonden and Kungl. Patriotiska Sällskapet.

Alfvéngården, Pipargattu 21, Leksand
info@alfvengarden.se • www.alfvengarden.se/in-english/

Cover: *Self-portrait*, watercolor by Hugo Alfvén, painted on
Capri 1922. Property of the Hugo Alfvén Foundation.

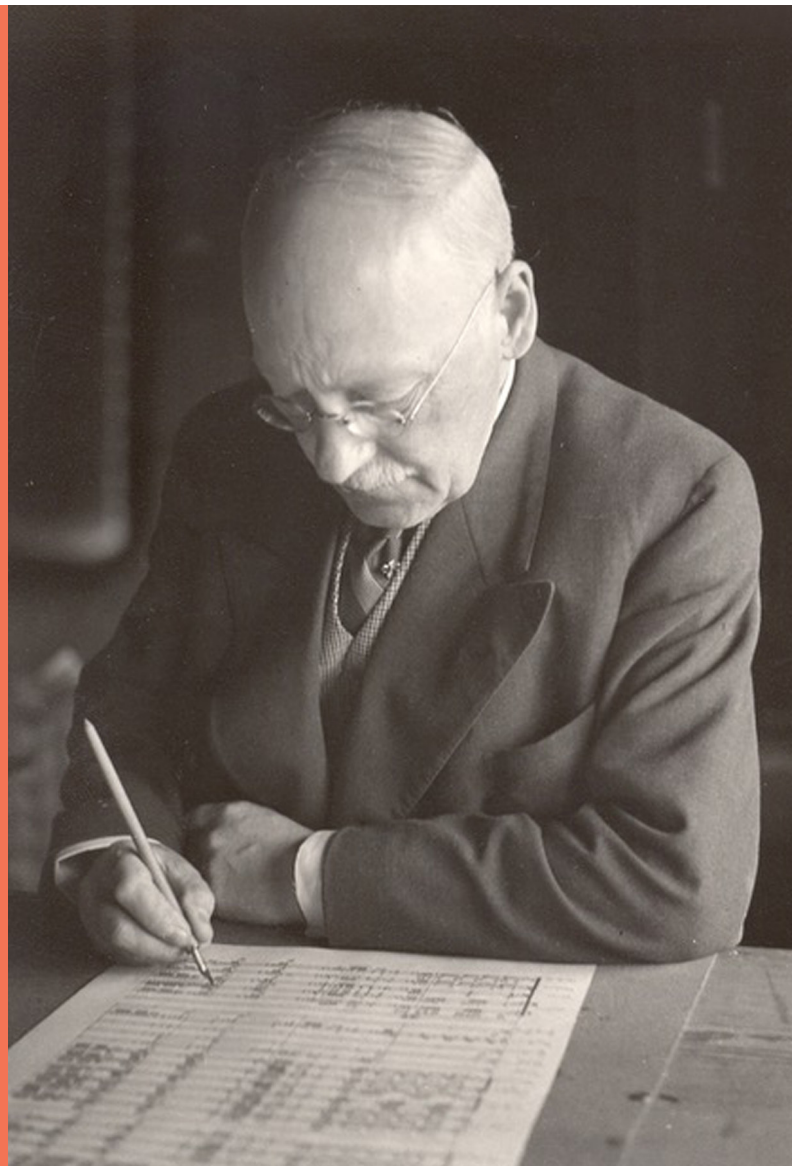
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English translation: Donald MacQueen

ISBN 978-91-89038-50-9

Graphic design: Andrén & Jungå / The Store

Layout: Lova Wallerö, Royal Swedish Academy of Music

Print: Taberg Media Group, Bromma, 2022



Breakthrough

On May 2, 1899, the Royal Court Orchestra presented a concert in the one-year-old Royal Opera House. At this time, the orchestra was Sweden's only professional symphonic ensemble, and it alternated between opera performances and symphony concerts. On the podium this evening was Wilhelm Stenhammar, a celebrated young pianist, conductor, and composer. The program featured the premiere of the 27-year-old Hugo Alfvén's Second Symphony in four movements.

The performance of the symphony was a great success. The music critics lavished consistent praise on the work and its creator. *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* wrote that the composition was "a musical work so uncommon and grand in its construction and execution that it immediately marks its young creator as a master" (May 3, 1899). "It has been some time since we heard such an estimable major composition by a Swede," opined *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* (May 3, 1899). The symphony was nothing short of Hugo Alfvén's breakthrough as a composer. Overnight he had become a name to be reckoned with, a maker of music of singular expressiveness and, not least, technical brilliance in orchestration.

This tremendous success prompted the editor of *Svensk musiktidning* (Swedish Music Journal) to turn to Hugo

Alfvén for a brief self-presentation. Clearly under the influence of all the pats on the back about the rewarding evening at the opera, Alfvén authored an idealized image of himself. He briefly mentions his musical education and his initial period as a composer, some of which he had spent abroad. But he soon paints a picture in words with many visual qualities:

However, I'm happiest in Sweden, especially out in the Stockholm archipelago, where I have written both of my symphonies. My best ideas have come to me during stormy nocturnal sailings; the wild autumns in particular have been my most glorious times of inspiration. Never is the forest thicket blacker, never a storm more severe, never does a clear sunny afternoon invoke a more poignant mood than in this season. (May 18, 1899)

There can be no doubt that Hugo Alfvén knew how he was supposed to present himself. Just how much this is a matter of conscious posing can be discussed, of course. But with the craze of the 1890s for all things Swedish and the bounties of the nation, Alfvén's romantic depictions of himself in Nature were right on the money.

Alfvén's Second Symphony had, and still has, indisputable qualities. But more underlay the critics' praise than the brilliance work of the work itself. At this time, the creation

Hugo Alfvén composing. Photo in Alfvén Foundation archive.



of a symphony was regarded as test of true mastery, a veritable Parnassus to be scaled only by the most interesting composers. If you wanted to arrive, it had to be via a symphony – so the ambitious Alfvén called it accurately. What's more, the notion that the symphony was the foremost instrument for making music also entailed the possibility of comparisons and rankings, not only in Sweden, but internationally. In other words, anyone who composed symphonies was juxtaposed to the greatest names in the genre and had to cope with falling short or, in the best case, matching the level of the masters.

Sweden was brimming with nationalistic feelings in 1899. The manifest background was a growing movement in Norway to break away from that country's union with Sweden. Their sister nation's desire to dissolve the Union fed nationalistic feelings among Swedes as well. When a young composer presented a convincing symphony – and also declared himself to be one with Swedish Nature – he became something of a unifying figure in this moment of national pathos. Hugo Alfvén became a *Swedish* composer, even though his musical language was far from domestic. And he would bear this stamp of Swedishness throughout his life.

But, after this introduction, let's tell the story of Hugo Alfvén from the beginning.

Hugo Alfvén's Life

Hugo Alfvén was born in Stockholm in 1872, the fourth of eventually six siblings. His father, Anders Alfvén, was a master tailor; his mother, Lotten, was from the Axelsson Puke family. His parents were members of a Baptist congregation. His father was also the choir director of *Betelkapellet* (Bethel Chapel).

His father died in 1881. To provide for the family, Lotten Alfvén started a grocery shop. To Hugo, spending his teenage years without a father led him to forge very strong bonds with his mother, a circumstance that he often brought up later in life.

He began playing the piano at the age of eleven, but soon switched to the violin. In 1887, at the age of 15, he was accepted as a student at the Music Conservatory, where he also acquired his training in music theory. That same year, he started studying painting. Hugo Alfvén's first attempts at composing were made in 1888: two minor works for violin and piano.

He nursed the notion of a career as a visual artist, but these thoughts tapered off when he was hired by the Royal Court Orchestra to play in the second violin section in the autumn of 1890. His time with that orchestra – in 1891–92 he was the assistant concertmaster – proved to

Calling card photo of Hugo Alfvén from 1893—he is 23 years old. As a young man, Alfvén took many such photos, practical for handing over to confirm a relation to a new acquaintance. Photo in Alfvén Foundation archive.

be important to him in many ways. He became familiar with the orchestral organism from within; he became acquainted with the repertoire; and he was able to study conductors up close.

In the following years, Hugo Alfvén continued his music studies – in violin under Lars Zetterqvist, in counterpoint and composition under Johan Lindegren. He performed more and more often as a violinist and definitively abandoned his plans to become a painter. At the same time, he devoted himself to composition. His first published work was *Visa* (Song) for voice and piano (1893).

In 1896 he wrote his First Symphony, which was performed the following year at the Royal Opera. With this work, Hugo Alfvén demonstrated the seriousness of his plans to be a composer. The symphony was well received, but it has nevertheless not been performed very frequently. Orchestras and conductors have preferred his Second Symphony and later orchestral works in other forms – a not uncommon fate for debutant symphonies.

With the help of a state grant for composers, in 1897 Alfvén undertook a trip to Berlin, Paris, Brussels, where his violin studies under Cesar Thomson in the latter city were especially rewarding. The journey was the start of a period of trips abroad for Hugo Alfvén. Studies on the continent had long been a self-evident path for anyone wishing to improve themselves, not only in the field of

music. Tertiary level education was poorly developed in Sweden, and furthermore the ancient model of apprenticeship travels was still thriving. For budding musicians, conductors, and composers there was a special reason to study outside Sweden. Before phonographs were common, attending concerts and operas was indispensable for anyone wishing to get to know the repertoire.

Growing up, Hugo was used to spending time in the Stockholm Archipelago. He continued to do so as a young adult. He wrote most of his Second Symphony during a stay in the Archipelago in the summer of 1898. The success of that work led to his being asked to write a composition for an event at the Royal Opera in connection with the turn of the new century. This became *Sekelskifteskantaten* (The New-Century Cantata), the first of a long line of festival cantatas from the hand of Alfvén.

Grant money funded trips to Germany, Austria, Italy, and Spain. On these journeys, he composed *Herrans bön* (The Lord's Prayer) (op. 15), and later *Skärgårdsbilder* (Skerry Sketches) (op. 17) for piano.

When Hugo Alfvén sojourned in Sicily in 1902, he met the Danish artist *Marie Krøyer* (1867–1940), wife of P[eder] S[everin] Krøyer, a celebrated painter. Marie and P S Krøyer had a seven-year-old daughter, Vibeke. Their meeting was the beginning of a relationship that was both fabulous and eventually problematic.

Hugo Alfvén usually composed at his Steinway grand. Photographer: Ing-Marie Aronsson-Litsgård.





Hugo Alfvén in front of the music cabin at Tällberg. Photo in Alfvén Foundation archive.

Hugo spent the summer of 1903 at the artist colony in Skagen at the tip of Jutland, where Marie and P S Krøyer were members. Happy to be close to his beloved Marie, Alfvén composed his first Swedish Rhapsody *Midsommarvaka* (Midsummer Vigil) (op. 19), which would become one of his most frequently played orchestra works. The summer at Skagen sealed their relationship. And Marie became Maria, a minor change that was important to Hugo.

Hugo visited Leksand in 1902, but became attached to the area only in 1904, when he had the opportunity to direct Leksand's Church and Homestead Choir in three of his own compositions. This was the origin not only of his lifelong ties to Leksand but also to *Siljanskören* (the Lake Siljan Choir), the large choir that became associated with him and for which he wrote many compositions.

In 1905 Hugo Alfvén and Maria Krøyer had a daughter, Margita. Alfvén continued his travels abroad. He spent long periods of subsequent years in Denmark. Compositions flowed from his pen: *Marias sånger* (Maria's Songs) (op. 21) for voice and piano, the tone poem *En skärgårds-sägen* (A Legend of the Skerries) (op. 20), and his Third Symphony (op. 23).

By this time, Hugo Alfvén was well known and respected as a composer. This meant that he regularly received commissions to write music. These commissions were

important to composers of the time. Before copyright legislation was established, composers received no monetary compensation for performances of their works. Most of their income came from selling sheet music. Commissions thus brought in welcome remuneration for their composition work.

Hugo Alfvén's long list of commissioned works includes his numerous cantatas, many of which were performed only once: *Kantat vid Baltiska utställningens öppnande* (Cantata for the Inauguration of the Baltic Exhibition) (op. 33), *Kantat vid Reformationsfesten i Uppsala* (Cantata for the Reformation Festival in Uppsala) (op. 36), *Kantat vid Sveriges riksdags 500-års minnesfest* (Cantata for the Quincentenary of the Swedish Parliament), *Kantat vid Världspostunionens halvsekeljubileum* (Cantata for the Semicentenary of the Universal Postal Union) (op. 41), etc.

But there were other kinds of commissions. When the new Royal Dramatic Theater was to be inaugurated in 1908, Alfvén was commissioned to write festival music, which became the repertoire perennial *Festspel* (Festival) (op. 25). For the first celebration of Swedish Flag Day, which took place at Stockholm Stadium in 1916, he composed the choir piece *Sverges flagga* "Flamma stolt mot dunkla skyar" (Sweden's Flag—"Blazing proudly against dark clouds"). And when the tercentenary of the death of King Gustavus Adolphus was to be commemorated with Ludvig Nordström's drama *Vi* (We) at the Royal



Hugo Alfvén in front of Orphei Drängar in the early 1930s. Photo in Alfvén Foundation archive.

Opera in 1932, Alfvén was asked to compose the music. The list of examples could be considerably longer. Suffice it to say that for decades Hugo Alfvén was the go-to supplier of festival music, so much so that presence of his music as such signaled the importance of each festival.

Another consequence of the financial insecurity of composers in that day was that many of them worked with other assignments alongside their composing. The most common complement was conducting – most of them had a solid musical education including training as a conductor. But in the days before copyright laws there were several colleagues who also had duties outside the realm of music. In 1910, Hugo Alfvén's appointment to the post of *director musices* at Uppsala University was a welcome relief in his efforts to provide for his small family.

As *director musices* he was to lead the venerable *Akademiska kapellet* (Royal Academy Orchestra); he was to provide music, sometimes newly written works of his own, for academic festivities; and he was to deliver lectures on the history of music. This latter duty was not particularly suited to Hugo Alfvén, who had a stammer, so he soon received a pass. Hugo Alfvén also took it upon himself to direct the male-voice choir *Orphei Drängar*, which would prove to be one of his most important instruments. He also acquired some of his closest friends from the choir. The family moved into the official residence at the *Linneanum* in what are now the Linnaean Gardens. After

years of complaining about the historic but unpractical housing, they were able to move to the newly built *Musicum* on *Kyrkogårdsgatan* (Churchyard Street).

With his appointment in Uppsala Hugo Alfvén could live a more ordered life – there were no more lengthy sojourns abroad, at least not on his own. On the other hand, he did regularly tour with *Orphei Drängar*, both in Sweden and abroad. He also had better opportunities to compose, sometimes as part of his duties, sometimes during leaves of absence, during which commissions replaced his salary. He was also in a position to accept invitations to conduct, which also entailed traveling abroad.

The appointment also included time off between academic semesters. As early as 1909 the Alfvéns began construction of a house in Tällberg that would be the family's summer residence for many years. One inspiration for this home was Emma and Anders Zorn's magnificent home in Mora. The interior of the Alfvén home was decorated by Maria, who had a sure sense of style.

Although Hugo, Maria, and their daughter Margita lived together, they were not married, because Maria's divorce from P S Krøyer had not been finalized. In 1912 they finally had their wedding, but unfortunately their relationship soon began to unravel. They remained married but lived in separate places. They were not formally divorced until 1936.

The 1910s were nevertheless a productive decade for Alfvén. Commissions alternated with initiatives of his own. Late in the decade he worked on his Fourth Symphony, *I havsbandet* (In the Outer Skerries), which, in 1921, was twice performed in Vienna, with the composer conducting. This was soon followed by another major work, *Bergakungen* (The Mountain King), which was premiered in 1923. The original inspiration for the work came from the painter John Bauer, who however died before the ballet was staged. (*Vallflickans dans* (The Dance of the Shepherdess) from this work has become the most frequently played encore for Swedish orchestras.) In this context it might be mentioned that in 1920 *Midsommara-vaka* was staged as a ballet in Paris and London by the Swedish Ballet, with choreography by Jean Börlin.

The Alfvéns spent the summer of 1922 on Capri. He resumed his painting on the island, and he would sustain that regained interest more or less for the rest of his life. It was not immaterial that his artworks could command good money – Hugo Alfvén had chronic difficulties in matching his expenditures with his varying income.

In 1931, his faltering finances forced Alfvén to sell the property at Tällberg, which was later acquired by Margita. But he continued to spend his summers in Leksand.

When 'talkies' were introduced and a demand arose for film music, there were no special movie-score writers, so existing composers were approached to write for the new medium. Hugo Alfvén was one of them, and he was moreover used to taking on commissions. As early as 1934 he wrote the music for the Norwegian/Swedish production *Synnöve Solbakken*, based on Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's novel. Ten years later he composed the score for *Mans kvinna* (Man's Woman), which built on a novel by Vilhelm Moberg. A truly major commitment was the French/Swedish movie *Singoalla* (1949), made from the book by Viktor Rydberg. When Alfvén wrote film scores, he often recycled morsels from his earlier compositions.

With time, Hugo Alfvén's efforts to compose major works waned. But he did continue to produce choral music. Both the Lake Siljan Choir and *Orphei Drängar* were in constant need of new pieces. Largely every choral work was written for both mixed and male-voice choir. In that way his creations could be more widely disseminated. In the late 1930s he started writing a series of arrangements of folk tunes, several of which have become classics: *Och jungfrun hon går i ringen*, *Tjuv och tjuv*, among others. The background to this production was crass: he needed money to buy an expensive car! Hugo Alfvén was a great connoisseur of automobiles.

Hugo and Carin Alfvén at Musicum in 1939, just before they moved out of the residence following Hugo Alfvén's retirement. The photo is arranged: the ironing creases are visible in the newly deployed tablecloth. Note the Dalecarlia horse on the table – the couple were going to reside in Leksand. Photo in Alfvén Foundation archive.





Hugo Alfvén at the piano in the Knorring house in Leksand. A score in the making on the sheet music rack. He was remarkably often photographed as if caught in the act of composing. Photo in Alfvén Foundation archive.

A short time after his formal divorce from Maria, Hugo married the 20-years-younger *Carin Adolphson* (née Wessberg, 1891–1956) whom he had met in 1926.

In 1937 he retired from his post as *director musices*, though he continued to hold that position until 1939. However, he directed *Orphei Drängar* up to 1947, and the Lake Siljan Choir all the way to 1957. From 1939, Hugo and Carin Alfvén resided permanently in the *Sömskar house* in the village of Tibble near Leksand.

For Hugo Alfvén's 70th birthday in 1942, a nationwide collection was taken up to build a house for him in Leksand. The house in Tibble was completed three years later. He continued to compose, although not as intensively. Two pieces from that period are the solo song *Saa tag mit Hjerter* (So Take My Heart,) which he composed for Carin's nameday in 1946, and the ballet *Den förlorade sonen* (The Prodigal Son) which was premiered at the Royal Opera in 1957. Hugo Alfvén devoted most of his energy to writing his memoirs in four volumes: *Första satsen* (The First Movement) (1946), *Tempo furioso – Vandringsår* (Wander Years) (1948), *I dur och moll – Från Uppsalaåren* (In Major and Minor – From the Uppsala Years) (1949), and *Final* (1952).

After Carin's passing in 1956, he lived alone in the house on the bank of the Österdal River. In 1959, at the age of 87, he entered his third marriage, this time with the Mora

resident *Anna Lund* (1891–1990), who had sung in the Lake Siljan Choir. But the marriage was a short one. On May 8, 1960, Hugo Alfvén died. He was interred in Leksand Cemetery on a slope overlooking Lake Siljan. A portrait of the composer by his friend Carl Milles adorns the grave.

The Composer

Hugo Alfvén's music belongs to an époque that is usually referred to as one of romantic nationalism: based on the composer's inner or on external sense impressions, musically complex with advanced harmonies, though still tonal. The 'nationalist' epithet can aptly be replaced by the adjective 'late,' as the long romantic era in musical composition largely ended with Alfvén's generation. But in the case of Alfvén, the romantic nationalism label is nevertheless appropriate, for two reasons. He himself was a devotee of things Swedish: Swedish history and Swedish nature. Even though he was very well traveled and possessed excellent language skills, he was fundamentally a Swedish composer, notwithstanding the fact that his stylistic tools were international.

The second reason is that his music – early on and up to the present – has been used to create nationalistic moods. The choral song *Sverges flagga* is still sung on Swedish Flag Day; his "Elegy" from the incidental music to the drama *Vi* (We) has long been played in times of national mourning; and the magnificent *Festspel* is heard

at major celebrations. When Nobel Prizes are conferred, the orchestra strikes up his “Festmarsch till drottningen av Saba” (Festival March to the Queen of Sheba) from his ballet *Den förlorade sonen* (The Prodigal Son).

Hugo Alfvén’s production as a composer is immense. He was industrious and also lived a long life. Its range is striking: from works for very large orchestra, such as *Bergakungen* (The Mountain King), to solo songs, many of which – like *Du är stilla ro* (You Are Calm Tranquility), *Skogen sover* (The Forest Sleeps), and not least *Saa tag mit Hjerter* (So Take My Heart) – are part of the repertoire of virtually every Swedish singer. Much of his comprehensive production can be attributed to his never-ending work to create choral pieces. Most of them were to be immediately performed by *Orphei Drängar* or Siljan Lake Choir. Among the most frequently performed pieces are no doubt his arrangements of folk tunes, but also scrupulously crafted works like *Gryning vid havet* (Dawn by the Sea) and *Julsång* (“Se, julens stjärna strålar klar”) (Christmas Song “Look, the Christmas star shines brilliantly”).

It was the grand forms that brought Alfvén prestige – for example, his breakthrough with his Second Symphony. He toiled all his life to add to his series of symphonies. His Fifth Symphony was never fully completed, despite all the work he put into it. The magnificent *Bergakungen* (The Mountain King), which Alfvén composed at the zenith of

his creative energies must nevertheless be counted among his major compositions. On the other hand, Alfvén could count among his accomplishments the success he had with single-movement orchestral works: first and foremost his Swedish Rhapsody No. 1, *Midsommarvaka* (Midsummer Vigil), but also his tone poem *En skärgårdssägen* (A Legend from the Skerries), regarded as a preparatory study for his Fourth Symphony.

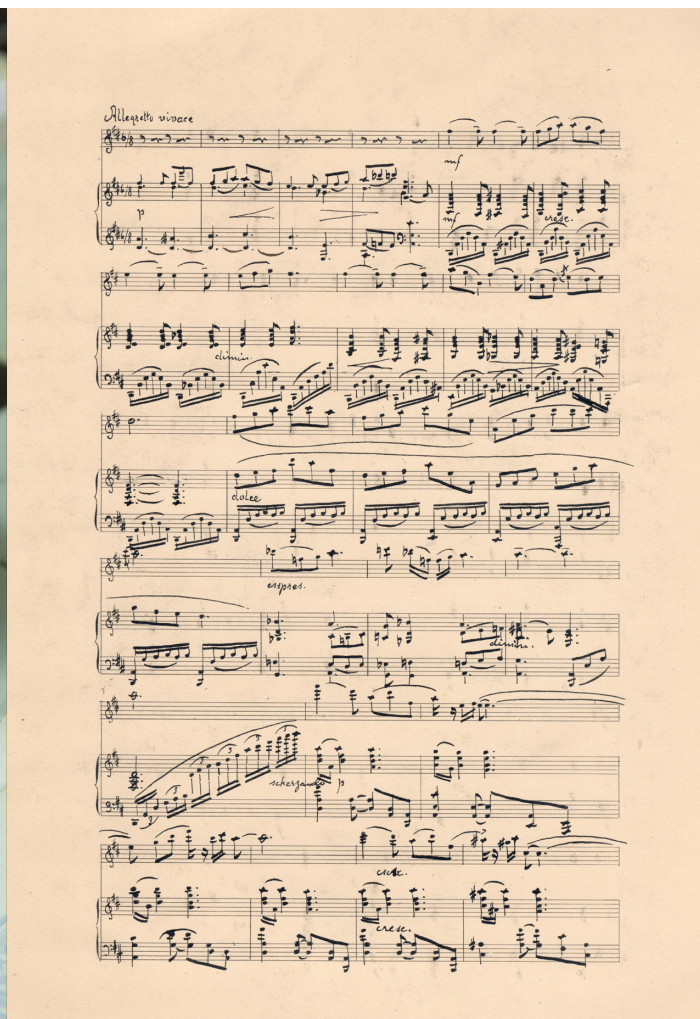
In this connection it is equally interesting to point out what the productive Hugo Alfvén *did not* compose. To start with, he never wrote an opera, something that should have been in his wheelhouse: with his experience from the Royal Court Orchestra, from composing ballets and many solo songs, it is reasonable to infer that opera music would suit him. He did talk about ideas for operas on a few occasions, but he never made an attempt.

Nor did Alfvén ever write any chamber music – with the exception of a seldom performed violin sonata. As a young violinist, he played a great deal of chamber music, but was never interested in the genre as a composer.

The Conductor

Today Hugo Alfvén is talked about exclusively as a composer, which is completely understandable with the growing distance from his lifetime. But his professional life was dominated not by composing but rather of his

Hugo Alfvén is known for his elegant notation. Here the beginning of the composition ‘To Mamma—Christmas 1891’ for violin and piano. Autograph in possession of the Alfvén Foundation.



work as a conductor of orchestras and choirs. In his day, he was in fact famous precisely as a choir and orchestra conductor.

During his Uppsala years, he led the Royal Academic Orchestra, *Orphei Drängar*, and for some periods some other choir in weekly rehearsals. On the other hand, he constantly had to alternate between orchestra and choir conducting, which was no doubt helped him develop. He was regularly asked to lead orchestra concerts in Sweden and abroad. And as the long-serving national director of the Swedish Choral Society, he led many major choral gatherings.

What was special about Hugo Alfvén as an orchestra conductor – and unique to him in Sweden – was that he led no fewer than fifty Alfvén concerts, that is, programs exclusively featuring his own compositions. These were arranged in connection with his milestone birthdays, of course, but they were by no means limited to such festivities or to Sweden. Alfvén concerts virtually became a concept, and at the same time they created a performance tradition for his orchestral compositions.

Hugo Alfvén studied orchestra conducting in Dresden 1901–1902 under the orchestra director Hermann Ludvig Kutschbach. Kutschbach taught him to be economical in his gestures, to convey only what was absolutely necessary for the musicians, and to use minimal means. “Count-

less times he impressed upon me that the key to baton technique lay not in the elbow or the shoulder but in the wrist,” Alfvén writes in his memoirs. Even though he received a good grounding in Dresden, his model was the Hungarian-born Arthur Nikisch, whom he saw many times at the helm of the Berlin Philharmonic.

Hugo Alfvén was a highly skilled and moreover exceptionally experienced conductor. We can all verify this by listening to his recordings of his own orchestral works. This facility is attributable not only to his solid training but also to his experience as a musician in the Royal Court Orchestra, as well as his familiarity with the potential of various instruments attained from his composing. When Alfvén stood on the podium, the orchestra was alive to his every discreet signal regarding dynamics and tempo.

There was no proper training in choir direction in Sweden when Alfvén was a student. Choral singing was not widely prevalent, and any need for direction was normally satisfied by someone from the ranks, or by church cantors. His father Anders Alfvén, who directed the choir of the Baptist congregation, is a good illustration. Hugo can hardly have learned anything about leading a choir from his father, as he was so young when his father died. On the other hand, he carried with him an understanding of choral singing. When Hugo Alfvén took over the post of *director musices* in Uppsala in 1910, he was expected to be able to direct a choir, which he indeed was. He was

soon just as prominent in front of choirs as he was in front of orchestras of varying sizes. As a choir director, he primarily performed with *Orphei Drängar*, moreover touring with them both in Sweden and abroad year after year. It should be noted, however, that the ideals of choral singing were different than in our day. Above all, very large choirs were *de rigueur*, which is not the case today.

The Painter

Composers who paint are not very common, but there are in fact more of them besides Hugo Alfvén. Among Swedish composers, mention can be made of Gösta Nystroem. No doubt the best-known example outside Sweden is Arnold Schönberg.

The question that asks itself, of course, is whether there is some connection between the two modes of expression. Could painting composers exploit their tonal creativity when they stood at their easels? Or something from their painting when they penned their music? Or was it simply that painting offered them relaxation from the long hours working on a score? In the case of Alfvén, it was clearly the latter.

He took lessons with the Dalsland painter Otto Hesselbom in 1887, and in 1888–1890 with Oscar Törnå, who was the first of the Swedish painters who settled in Grez-sur-Loing. None of them are among the great names of the era, although this tells us nothing of their

capabilities as teachers. Both of his teachers focused on landscape painting, and their student Hugo followed suit. Alfvén thus wavered between music and visual art when he faced his career decision. He chose music early on, and in retrospect this stands out as the right choice. He then put aside his painting, but, as mentioned, he took it up again on Capri in 1922, when he was 50 years old. Two years later he and Maria visited Capri again, where Hugo continued to paint watercolors with motifs from the island. In the spring of 1925, he even exhibited his work at a gallery in Uppsala.

It's difficult to get an overview of Hugo Alfvén as a visual artist, because he regularly sold his works. Nevertheless, it can be established that he retained the style he acquired in his youth. He apparently did not actively stay abreast of the art scene to the point where his means of expression would have developed. After all, there was a very great deal of change in the art world during the thirty years that Alfvén was away from his brushes.

As an artist, Hugo Alfvén found his motifs along his way in life – the Capri works are typical in this sense. He painted some images of Uppsala, but most of his known works are from Leksand. They include subjects from the Alfvén home in Tällberg, although most are linked to his years in Tibble. Besides his numerous landscapes, Alfvén also painted several watercolor portraits.



The Writer

Hugo Alfvén's daily life was varied, with him being at the mercy of commissions and deadlines, but it nevertheless entailed recurring responsibility: writing letters. With the success he had attained early in life, his correspondence soon swelled to very considerable dimensions. Anyone wishing to corroborate this can go Uppsala University Library. The archive contains letters from no fewer than 784 private senders. On top of this, there are all sorts of organizations – publishers, empresarios, orchestras, choirs, concert halls, etc. – that he corresponded with professionally. Yet the archive does not have most of the correspondence from his traveling years as a student. What's more, it should be factored in that the telephone became commonplace during Alfvén's life, so many matters were therefore addressed in a conversation.

Alfvén often complains about the constant letter writing. "In the last few years, my correspondence has gotten completely out of hand, and I can't afford to hire a secretary. I've had to write an average of three letters a day," he sighed to his friend Olallo Morales in 1929. On the other hand, with all the correspondence, Alfvén acquired an ever-greater facility in expressing himself in writing. Many letters are truly worth reading, also in terms of style.

Now and again he would be approached about writing articles. Normally the subject matter would involve memories of individuals he had known or trips he had taken. In these types of texts as well, we note that Alfvén was able to express himself with great precision and that he seemed to enjoy writing.

We should also take note of what Hugo Alfvén *did not* write: music criticism. Many of his fellow composers in fact did so – and this combination often poisoned relations between professional colleagues, which can be seen in many places in Alfvén's correspondence.

The truly major endeavor as a writer was undertaken by Hugo Alfvén when he became an emeritus and he and his wife Carin could settle in at the Alfvén home in Tibble. He mustered the energy to write his memoirs. Originally the idea was for the autobiography to comprise a single book, "but I was apparently far too loquacious; one memory led to another that needed to be brought to light," he writes in a letter by way of apology. One explanation for the vastness of his memoirs is that Alfvén made liberal use of inserting long quotations from letters in the book text.

Linneanum, watercolor by Hugo Alfvén from 1930. The family had just left the residence and moved into the newly built Musicum.



The Alfvén Home (Alfvéngården)

Hugo Alfvén's final residence lies on the edge of the village of Tibble, on a property that slopes down to the bank of the Österdal River. The 73-year-old composer and his wife moved here in 1945. However, the funds taken in as a collection in honor of his 70th birthday in 1942 were not sufficient. In full accordance with Hugo Alfvén's habits, the construction turned out to be considerably more expensive. The house was inspired by the artist Bror Hjorth's home in Uppsala, now also a museum.

With Hugo Alfvén's passing in 1960, the intentions he stated in his will were honored. A foundation was established to assume ownership of the home. The successor to this foundation is the Hugo Alfvén Foundation, which is part of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. The Foundation owns the copyright for all of Alfvén's works, though only until 2030, when the copyright expires. Most of its funding consists of income from performances of Hugo Alfvén's compositions. The Foundation's program also covers more than the maintenance of the Alfvén Home. The Hugo Alfvén Foundation initiates and sponsors new editions of Alfvén's music and awards scholarships to students at the Conservatory of Music in Falun.

The Alfvén Home is shown to the general public during summer. Occasionally concerts are arranged in the house. In early July, Alfvén Day is arranged, with scholarship awards, fiddle music, and choral singing in the garden.

More to read about Hugo Alfvén (in Swedish)

Jan Olof Rudén's meticulously assembled *Hugo Alfvéns kompositioner – käll- och verkförteckning* (Hugo Alfvén's Compositions – Registry of Sources and Works) (1972) contains detailed information about all of Alfvén's musical works.

The standard biography of Hugo Alfvén is still Lennart Hedwall's *Hugo Alfvén – en svensk tonsättares liv och verk* (Hugo Alfvén – A Swedish Composer's Life and Works) (1973).

Anyone interested in delving further into Alfvén's works can read *Hugo Alfvén – en vägvisare* (A Companion to Hugo Alfvén) (2003). A number of letters from Alfvén are found in the books *Hugo Alfvén – brev om musik* (Hugo Alfvén – Letters about Music) (1998) and *Hugo Alfvén – Med hälsning och handslag* (Hugo Alfvén – With Greetings and a Handshake) (2001).

Hugo Alfvén – liv och verk i ny belysning (Hugo Alfvén – Life and Works in New Light) (2012) is an anthology of studies about Alfvén's works.

In his biography *Speltoken – Hugo Alfvén och rosens klang* (The Fiddler Fool: Hugo Alfvén and the Sound of the Rose) (2022), musicologist Tobias Lund analyses some of Alfvén's works from his most productive years.

Hugo Alfvénsällskapet (The Hugo Alfvén Society) publishes the journal *Alfvéniana*, which contains both brief and lengthy contributions about its subject.

Friends of Alfvéngården

The friends association *Alfvéngårdens Vänner* (Friends of Alfvéngården) was created in 2021 to support arts programs at The Alfvén Home as well as renovations etc. Join us at: www.alfvengardensvanner.se



This folder briefly depicts *Hugo Alfvén* (1872–1960), his rich life and his many musical works. But it also presents him as a conductor of orchestras and choirs, as a painter, and a writer.

The author is the Alfvén expert *Gunnar Ternhag*, Professor Emeritus of Musicology and Member of the Royal Academy of Music. Former Chairman of the Hugo Alfvén Foundation.

ISBN 978-91-89038-50-9

Hugo Alfvén
ALFVÉNGÅRDEN