The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate how the song type *visa*, especially the so-called literary *visa*, has been presented on Swedish public stages from 1900 to 1970. More specifically it aims to: a) identify characteristic features for the performance of *visa*; b) ascertain in what ways performance practice has changed during the period; c) analyze and discuss the causes of change; by d) studying the performance of *visa* in its social and historical context.

The empirical data consists of recordings, reviews, newspaper articles, biographies and interviews. Three periods are treated with special attention: 1900–1925, 1930–1945, and 1962–1970. The first period takes place before the introduction of microphones and electronic amplification. The second and the third periods have often been described in terms of *visa* renaissance, by both writers and performers.

This study shows that even though the literary *visa* existed as a phenomenon over a long time it became a more easily distinguishable genre, attached to a certain performance style, during the 1930s and 1940s. A core repertoire began to emerge. One factor contributing to this process was the foundation of the association Visans vänner (Friends of the *Visa*) in 1936. Other factors were the introduction of the radio as a new mass medium, the beginnings of the welfare state, and the contemporary idea of national identity.

The performance of *visa* on the public stage has often been associated with informality, intimacy, and simplicity, all qualities usually more connected to the private sphere than the public one. The thesis also suggests that Visans vänner, in its initial phase, in some aspects can be regarded as a prolongation of the 19th-century bourgeois salon, a performance venue that also occupied a space somewhere between the private sphere and the public one.

During the 1960s, songs associated with a movement for social change were incorporated in the *visa* singers’ repertoire to a greater extent. While many of the previous performers had expressed a form of idealism – to sing for pleasure, rather than as a profession – the professionalism within the field now became more explicit. The study also shows that male performers, as well as male authors and composers, have been in the majority in *visa* presentations on the public stage during all three periods.

**Key words**: authenticity, folk music, guitar, lute, microphone, performance practice, poetry, process of change, repertoire, simplicity, singing style, singer-songwriter, Sweden, troubadour, *visa*, voice