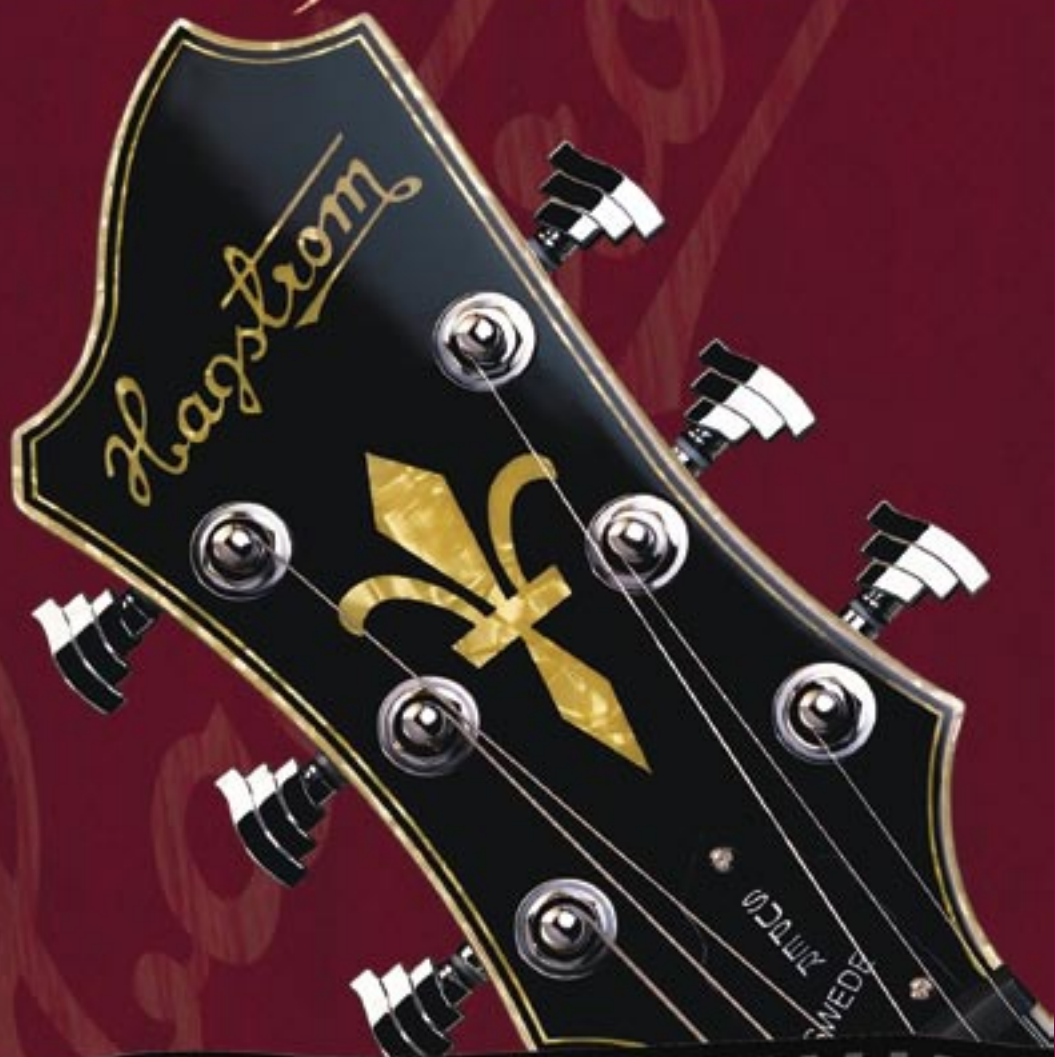


ENGLISH  
SUMMARY

Mikael Jansson

# MUSIK FÖR MILJONER



ENGINEERING  
SUMMERY



# "HAGSTRÖM – MUSIC FOR MILLIONS"

By Mikael Jansson

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This is a summary in English of the content of this book, intended to guide the non-Swedish speaking reader through the history of the Hagström music company, starting with founder Albin Hagström's birth in 1905 and to present day. There is also a complete set of translated captions. Thanks to Katarina Toborn for checking my translation.

Uppsala, Sweden, October 2006

*Mikael Jansson*

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*Albin Hagström in his 20s. The young entrepreneur ready to go into business.*



## 1905–1929

**A**lbin Hagström was born on May 25, 1905 in Orsa, Sweden. The following year, his family moved to the nearby Älvdalen village, where his father served as a forester. It seems that the young Albin was very interested in accordions even as a child. A farmhand at the family farm had a friend who was an able accordionist, and he taught Albin the basics of playing. At age 13, Albin managed to buy his first accordion, having saved SEK 20, a huge sum for a child at that time.

As a teenager, Albin made money playing at local dances and parties, and if he himself could not perform, he rented out his accordion. With the money he had saved, he made his first business at age 16, buying two accordions from Germany through an ad in a magazine. He kept one, and sold the other with a profit. After a year or so he did a similar transaction, and in 1923 he was approached by the same manufacturer who had been stood up by another Swedish importer and now had 25 accordeons stored in a Swedish warehouse. Albin managed to negotiate a credit, so that he could pay for the accordions as he sold them. When he had sold as many as he could locally, he spent SEK 30 on an ad in the weekly magazine *Triumf*, at the time very popular in Sweden. Thanks to that, he rapidly sold the rest of the stock.

On January 19, 1925 he registered his first business, while still not legally of age. His friends and family considered him crazy to believe he could make money from selling accordions.

**Albin Hagström** continued to explore the accordion business. In a nearby village a man had purchased a brand new Italian piano accordion, and Albin went thereto try it. He took note of the manufacturer's name and address, and ordered one for himself. This was a novelty in that it was not covered with wooden veneer but with glittery celluloid. He did not like the design, though, found it too clumsy and ordered himself

a batch in a more streamlined design that he had suggested himself. This was his first major success, and the accordions were sold faster than they could be delivered. His business expanded from a one man operation at home to bigger localities with a staff of six employees in 1928.

The young entrepreneur did not sell just accordions. He also sold kitchenware, bicycles, knives, whatever, just to stay in business.

Since he had only six years of schooling, he had to take correspondence courses to learn book keeping and foreign languages, as business expanded.

In 1928 he set up his first office abroad, in Norway. He first brought some of his finest accordeons, got himself a hotel room in Oslo and put an ad in the papers. The first visitors came the very next day – the police, since he did not have the necessary commerce permits. The following day, Albin visited the fruit vendor opposite the hotel, asking the lady owner if she could recommend a local person willing to take care of business for him. She recommended one Trygve Mjerskaug, who did not know much about musical instruments or retail. He apparently had a talent, though, since the small Hagström shop in Oslo sold 246 accordions in 1929 and close to 800 five years later. Mjerskaug stayed with the Hagström company until his death in the 1950s.

In 1928 Albin Hagström made his first big business trip abroad. He went to Leipzig to meet German accordion manufacturers at a trade show – where he also met an Italian manufacturer who invited him to Italy where he made even more contacts.

Albin Hagström’s success in the musical instrument business was nourished by an explosive growth of the entertainment industry. The Swedish Radio started regular transmissions in 1925, and an increasing number of households got radios themselves. The gramophone industry had converted from mechanical to electrical recording. Dancehalls popped up across the country. This of course lead to an increased demand for musical instruments, especially accordions. Hagström was the largest actor, but far from the only one. Small accordion factories and importers began setting up business.

The accordion had several advantages for live performances. Dance hall pianos were often out of tune and in a sad condition. The accordion, though, was brought by the player, who took the responsibility of having a playable instrument. Since you can play melody with the right hand and accompany with the left, an accordionist is a one man band, loud enough to fill a modest dance hall by itself.

By the end of the 1920s Albin Hagström issued catalogues regularly, not only selling Italian accordions, but also instruments such as banjos, guitars, drums and horns, and also gramophones. He also began using well-known endorsers from the Scandinavian accordion scene, among them the Swedish accordion king, Carl Jularbo.



*Carl Jularbo, the Swedish accordion king.*



## 1930–1939

**D**ue to the depression in the early 1930s, importing accordions from Germany and Italy suddenly became unprofitable, so Albin Hagström started toying with the idea of setting up a factory in Älvdalen. In 1932 he announced his plans, a rather bold concept since he had no experience of setting up and running a factory, neither had the work staff available. But he stuck to his credos: nothing is impossible and problems are to be solved.

He brought two Italian accordion builders to Sweden, Virgilio Verri and Orlando Gratti, who helped him organise production.

At this time, Älvdalen was just a small village, with mostly farmers and lumberjacks. The porphyry stone industry was well beyond its peak, although there were a few small mechanic shops and a scythe factory. Other than that, Älvdalen's claim to fame was the very hard to understand dialect, almost a language of its own.

The work force available may have had little experience of factories, but being farmers and lumberjacks, they had good skills in carpentry and elementary mechanics. And many of them started in their early teens as errand boys, to be promoted to leading positions later.

Sven Andersson was one of them. He remembers Albin Hagström as a man with a temper but a very straight forward person who kept a close look at the factory when he was not on his many business trips: "He walked through the factory giving each accordion a try to control the quality, and he almost always played the same song, *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles...*"

**During the first year of production**, only two accordions were built but within a couple of years, annual production was 5,000 units.

Albin Hagström also initiated a naming contest for the next accordion model, where the lucky winner could get SEK 50 for the best name. Hagström had a natural knack for using active communication, with customers as well as with his staff. Already in the 1940s, his company published magazines for its customers as well as for the employees.

The factory grew in size as production did, and Hagström also built gramophones, among other things.

At this time, Albin also got married to Agnes (1910-1998) and they had the children Karl Erik (b. 1932), Anna-Lenah (1933-1994), Kärstin (b. 1935) and Lars (b. 1937). Karl Erik was later to take leadership of the company in the 1960s. Kärstin and Lars also at times worked with the company. Kärstin helped running the OT store in Stockholm in the 1970s, and Lars was a company lawyer.

What separated Hagström from other accordion manufacturers – and there were a few in Sweden at the time – was his ability to see the whole chain: not only did he make accordions and sold them by mail order, he also set up a chain of retail shops all over Scandinavia from 1931 onwards. To that he added a music publishing company, a real estate company that owned housing for the staff, a finance company for those who bought instruments on monthly instalments etc.

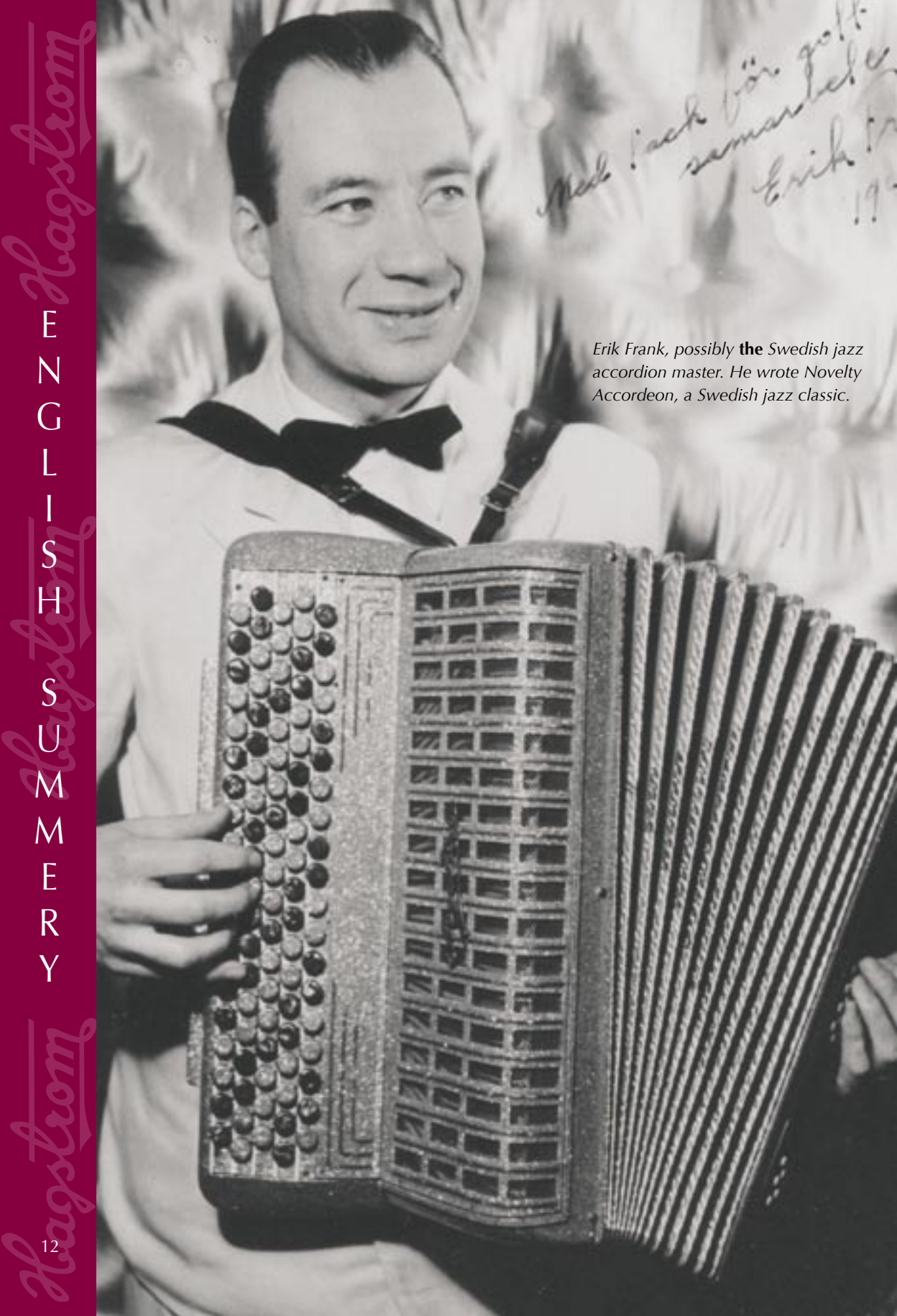
In 1933, Hagström opened a shop in Copenhagen, Denmark. Due to Danish restrictions, exporting accordions from Sweden was almost impossible, so Hagström set up another accordion factory outside Copenhagen. Hagström also made a brief attempt to set up a Finnish factory, but due to WW2 the operation never really took off as expected and was closed in the late 1940s. The company also set up an export office in New York's Rockefeller Center, but the war caused problems there, too. Albin Hagström could not go to the US to oversee the business, and once the war was over, the operation had ceased to exist.

But Albin Hagström had other problems as well. His father who had helped him with the book keeping at the start of the company had made an attempt to get money by tampering with the books, and it all ended in a legal process where Albin finally won. However, his relation to the father was badly hurt from then on.

*Carl Jularbo (1893–1966)*

*Eberhardt "Ebbe" Jularbo (1915–1991)*

Carl Jularbo is perhaps the most famous Swedish accordionist. He and his son Eberhardt "Ebbe" Jularbo, who toured with his father for almost a quarter of a century, had a long standing relationship with the Hagström company, from circa 1930 and until the death of the respective players. Carl Jularbo also ran a music shop in Stockholm in the early 1930s, which Hagström bought as the first in his chain of retail shops.



Med tack för gott  
samarbete  
Erik Frank  
1945

Erik Frank, possibly **the** Swedish jazz accordion master. He wrote *Novelty Accordeon*, a Swedish jazz classic.

## 1940–1949

**B**y the early 1940s Hagström was a large company, with hundreds of employees in factories and shops. Albin Hagström is rumoured to have been an honest but shrewd employer. Every other Friday, he had the custom of inviting some of his staff over for drinks after work. Albin himself – close to a tea-totaller – stuck to his lemonade, but as the men got into their second helpings, Albin soon learned about what was really the talk on the factory floor!

Many came to seek work, often dressed in rags, and they were sent to the local shop to get dressed – of course money was deducted from the next pay check, but at least skilled workers could get a second chance, even though they'd had a brief spell of bad luck.

Albin Hagström himself had a major interest in life: accordions. But he also liked watching films when he was travelling, often seeing one film for the first show and another for the second. He also liked to see a soccer game, and when he spent time with the family they often went to their house in the mountains or the summer house by the sea in the south of Sweden. He also built a large villa for his family next to the factory.

But he also had to take some critic from the cultural elite as well as from the men of cloth, since accordion music and dancing were considered signs of the sins that lured the young off the straight and narrow path.

**Hagström's right hand man**, Roland Beronius, made sure the retail chain expanded, somewhat to Albin's doubts since his heart still was in the mail order operation.

In the early 1940s, the classic Hagström logotype was launched. It was drawn by a young man, Gröt Ragnar Johansson, who worked in the package department. His drawing skills came to Albin's knowledge,

and he asked Ragnar to give it a try. And so it became the logotype that is still used!

At this time, Hagström also began setting up distribution agreements with overseas and European instrument manufacturers, among them the guitar maker Gibson.

For a while Hagström also ran small accordion factories in Jamestown, New York State, USA, and in Darlington, England. These operations were active for only a few years, though.

### *Hagström's Music School Educated 70,000 Swedes*

If you've bought an accordeon you also have to learn to play it. That is why Hagström started its music school in 1946. Inspiration came from Roland Beronius' tenure with the Remington company, who taught typing through group education. Sven Magnusson, manager of the Hagström shop in Växjö, was appointed "dean" of the music school, and he wrote most of the tutorial books. Between 1946 and 1982, some 70,000 Swedes learned how to play a musical instrument thanks to Hagström. There were similar schools in Denmark and Norway.

Before that, music tuition was mostly a matter for the upper classes who could afford to send their children to a "piano lady". Young boys could enlist with a military music corps, learning to play the snare drum and trumpet. Some learned with the help of older, more experienced friends. But musical education in schools was still very much in its infancy.

Hagström's idea was to learn people to play for the sheer joy of it, as opposed to the institutional education which aimed to make orchestra musicians of their pupils. When you enlisted in the Hagström school, you could also hire-purchase an instrument. If you gave in you just returned it, if you went through with it, you could paid it in full and keep it. This concept gave everybody a chance to learn to play music.

Of course there were commercial motives behind; the better people played, the more instruments you sold.

A vital idea was that you should learn to play at least one simple melody right away, to make the classes fun for the participants. At first there were only accordion classes, later other instruments were added: guitar, electric organ, horn and wind instruments.

The school also had ambulatory services. In towns, classes were held in connection to the shops, but the music school also travelled to rural villages so that the people there could learn to play, too.

Albin Hagström even had plans to start music education in the Swedish immigrant districts of the US, although they were never realised.

But the music school was controversial. Some of the cultural elite despised the fact that the Hagström music school taught popular music instead of classical, and also that the main instrument was the accordion. In the early 1960s there was a high-strung debate for a while, one that Hagström finally won, though.

The Swedish jazz saxophonist Lennart Åberg believes that the accordion developed the many fine Swedish jazz musicians in the 1950s and 1960s.

“Many of us began as accordionists. The accordion is very easy to understand, with the melody keys and the bass keys, and accordion notes almost always have the chords written on top. So it is easy to understand the harmonies behind the melody, which also makes it easy to grip once you begin to improvise.”

Many internationally renowned Swedish players are also accordionists: the saxophonists Lennart Åberg and Bernt Rosengren, the pianist Bengt Hallberg, the trumpet players Bertil Löfgren, Jan Allan, Bosse Broberg and Arnold Johansson, the pianist/organist Kjell Öhman and, last but not least, the baritone saxophonist Lars Gullin.

## *Dalecarlia – an Accordeon Maker's Province*

The first accordion-type instrument was patented by one Cyrill Demian in Vienna in 1829. Accordeons came to Sweden in the mid-1800s, and the first accordeon maker was a Carl Fridberg who already in 1873 built accordeons by hand.

The Hagström Company spawned a number of offshoots in or near Älvdalen, some founded by ex-employees setting up their own business, others by entrepreneurs taking advantage of the supply of skilled workers at the Hagström factory.

Among these makers are **Gunnar Orre & C:o** who already in 1930 made accordeons under the Necco brand, inspired by the Ranco accordeons that Hagström imported. As the Hagström factory began production, Orre stopped his own and started to work for Hagström.

**Joles** i the Särna village was perhaps the best known competitor. It was set up in 1945 by an industrious entrepreneur, Joles Pelle Olsson, who got much of his staff from Hagström. Joles had the reputation of being a quality brand. Production ceased in 1954.

**Lumshedens Instrumentfabrik** was founded in 1947 by Emil Blomström, a carpenter at the Hagström factory. Production stopped in the mid 1950s.

**Nordisk Dragspelstjänst** was set up in 1936 by Valentin Juhlin, another former Hagström employee. Production numbers were small and the instruments were considered to be of low quality. The shop burned down in 1954.

**Älvdalens Instrumentverkstad** was founded in 1947 by Gum Einar Ohlsson. In 1951 he introduced the Accordeon King brand, which had a very good reputation. Production ceased in 1958.

**Beronius & C:o** made accordeons between 1952 and 1958.



**AB Dragspelstjänst** in Stockholm was founded by Algot Bengtsson from Älvdalen who had worked for Gunnar Orre. He first worked for the Sundquist factory in Stockholm in the 1930s, then for the Hagström repair shop in Stockholm until he set up his own business in 1940, making the Bengts brand accordions.

**Svenska Dragspelsfabriken** outside Stockholm was founded in 1946 by former Hagström workers Sten Bergman and Tage Larsson. Their brands were Cora and Corona, and production ceased in the mid-1950s.

Beside these Dalecarlian enterprises, Sweden had a number of other accordion manufacturers, among them Viktor Dise in Gothenburg, He ran the Skandia factory, which made accordions for Hagström's Skandia subsidiary. He later made accordions under the Dise brand name, while Skandia became a model in the Hagström catalogue.

*The 1950s – end of the accordion era,  
beginning of the guitar era!*

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Hagstrom

## 1950–1959

**A**lbin Hagström entered the 1950s as a successful man, happily unaware of the tragedy awaiting him. Accordeon sales boomed, the chain of shops grew, the music school had so many students that its biggest problem was to find teachers. In the early 1950s, accordion production peaked, with some 15,000 units produced annually. Not only the popular Swedish accordionists played Hagströms, acclaimed concert virtuosos such as Dane Mogens Ellegaard and Norwegians Toralf Tolleisen and Arnstein Johansen played custom made Hagström accordions.

Accordion production was not just a matter for the blue and white collar people in the factory and office buildings. Many people in the nearby villages worked in their homes, assembling parts for accordeons. About 100 persons worked in that way.

Prior to a business trip in 1950, Albin Hagström took a shot against small pox. The doctor used vaccine that had passed its best-by date, causing blood poisoning. Albin survived this thanks to the recently discovered penicillin, but his heart valves got infected, and this slowly killed him. He died on April 3, 1952, at the Red Cross hospital in Stockholm.

He and his family had moved to Stockholm already in the late 1940s, since his children were sent to school there, and during his last years, Albin ran much of the business by phone from his sickbed, with the able help of among others the accountant Erik Wisén and Roland Beronius, head of the retail shop chain.

After Albin's death, Wisén became MD and pretty much ran the company like the founder would have wanted it to. With Beronius at the helm, the chain of shops grew to over 40 across Scandinavia.

**Accordions were still the backbone** of the business, even though swing and jazz music began to influence Swedish dance music. The accordion

factory in Stockholm had to close, and the attempts to start production in Finland, England and the US had also gone awry, but since Hagström also sold string, brass and wind instruments, notes and amplification, its dominance was unthreatened.

The eldest son Karl Erik was still too young to run business after his father's death, but after he finished his education and his military service, he joined the company in 1955. In 1958 he was sent to the US to learn the business. He only got the tickets there and back, and about a dozen accordions to sell, which was how he was supposed to make a living in the US. He bought an old Plymouth car and travelled to all the continental states, but found it almost impossible to sell accordions – “I almost starved to death”. Once back in Sweden, he could report to the management that the accordion glory days were over, and that the future was in electric guitars.

Chief designer Holger Berglund and his assistant Arne Hårdén designed the first guitars after having disassembled a few Gibson guitars (Hagström was the Swedish Gibson distributor). As a result of the general idea of being careful with company money, accordion material was used in these guitars, like the Plexiglas for the fingerboards and the celluloid for covering. Adjusters for accordion straps was used for volume controls. The push-button control layout was very much influenced by the register buttons on accordions.

**One important detail** was the H-profile aluminium truss rod, originally a part used to stabilise wings in Saab's military attack jet J-35 ! “We gave a ten-year warranty to the original owner, and only one damaged neck came back”, Karl Erik Hagström proudly declares.

Another detail was the additional whammy bar, the Tremar unit, which was also sold to a number of other guitar manufacturers, including Guild.

The fingerboards were “scalloped”, a quarter of a century before Ritchie Blackmore, John McLaughlin and Yngwie Malmsteen made this popular.

To be perfectly honest, the first Hagström guitars were not the most playable, especially when compared to the American brands. But they looked hotter than, for instance, the German competitors, and appealed

more to the young. And today these guitars have become collectors' items. Thanks to their distinctive look they have also become popular props for record sleeves, for instance Roxy Music's *For Your Pleasure*, ABC's *That Was Then But This Is Now*, April Wine's *Electric Jewels*, Aerosmith's *Honkin' On Bobo* and Blondie's *Sight and Sound*.

In 1959 Hagström made a distribution deal with the US importer Hershman, who sold these guitars under the Goya brand name. Hershman already owned that name and did not wish to introduce a new brand name. The Goya name was also used on acoustic guitars made by Sweden's Levin Guitar Company (Julie Andrews plays one in *Sound of Music*).

The pickups to these guitars came in dismountable chassis, so that you could sell the guitars as "acoustic" and the pickups as electronics components, thus lowering the customs charges.

Now, this was actually not the first Hagström attempt to make electric guitars. The Falun factory made perhaps 20 electric lap steel guitars sometime between 1948 and 1952. The Falun factory also made a handful of lutes. And Hagström ran a guitar factory in Norway between 1947 and the early 1960s. It built mostly acoustic guitars and some mandolins, but also economy-class archtop guitars with German made pickup assemblies. The Norwegian factory was set up due to the fact that exporting to Norway after the war was too cumbersome. However, it seems that neither the lap steel nor the Norwegian guitars had any influence on the production in the Älvdalen factory.

### *Albin Hagström, the Entrepreneur*

Albin Hagström was a classic Swedish 20th century entrepreneur. His son Karl Erik notes: "Father had only three interests: accordions, accordions, accordions..." Slightly exaggerating, perhaps. Albin was also very interested in films, liked to watch a soccer game and also developed an interest in modern art. But his true passion was accordions and music.

The fact that he at age 13 managed to save enough money to buy an accordion proves his determination. He also wrote to a department store, offering to pay for an accordion with woodwork objects he had made. The store declined...

Playing at dances and parties gave him a chance to build a starting capital.

He started out small, but was prepared to take calculated risks, such as when he was offered to buy 25 German accordions and managed to deal himself into paying for them as he sold them, which he did by having his first ad printed in a popular magazine. And which is probably when he saw the power of customer communication.

He had his first office in a shack on his father's farm, but later rented space in a local diversity shop. And he expanded his localities as his business expanded.

Having just six years of education, he had to learn book keeping and foreign languages by correspondence. And in the beginning, the company sold not only music items, but cookware and bicycles as well.

His **determination led him**, at age 23, to travel to Germany to make contacts with suppliers, a trip that also took him to Italy. He also set up business in Norway.

His son Karl Erik testifies that his father was constantly travelling, to make contacts, to do business, and to learn of new trends. He regularly visited his stores to keep an eye on books and inventory. He usually stayed in cheap hotels and ate at cheap restaurants. If he spent money, it was often for the good of his family. His children were sent to private schools. When Albin didn't travel he spent much time in the factory, checking out the production.

He apparently had an eye for trusty workers, and seems to have had confidence in many a young man. A lot of the workers began as errand boys at the age of 14-15 and were given a chance to work their way up to being foremen or even to management level. By then they had of course learned the business inside out and had a strong loyalty.

What today is known as business intelligence was an important part of the Hagström operation. Early on, Albin made a lot of effort in finding suppliers abroad, even by trying to decipher damaged address labels... The Hagström archives are full of competitors' annual catalogues and brochures. The Hagström Company also published magazines for customers as well as for the staff.

And the entire music school operation is a testimony to Hagström's wish to educate and communicate with the customers.

Of course business structure today is different, but the story behind the logotype says a lot about Hagström. It was designed by a young man, Gröt Ragnar Johansson, working in the package department. Ragnar was still in his early 20s when Albin learned that he had artist skills. Albin asked him to draw a logotype, and that is the very one still used, some 60 years later!

Albin seems to have stayed out of debt as much as possible. Expansion was achieved with money earned, not money lent. After the war, protectionism was a problem for many an exporting company. Hagström solved the problem by setting up factories in these countries.

He was also not afraid to stand up and fight for his creation. He had some feuds with national as well as local authorities, and even had to pay fines for having set up new buildings (thus offering more men work) against government regulations. Of course the sad legal process against his father is evidence, too, of the extent to which he was prepared to defend his company.

## *Swedish Electric Guitar History*

When Hagström started making electric guitars in 1958, the company was by no means a pioneer, neither nationally nor internationally.

The first electric guitar experiments were made by designer Lloyd Loar, with the Gibson Company. He was too much ahead of times, though. In 1931 the Rickenbacker Company introduced the first really useable electric guitar, a lap steel. Yet a handful of makers continued experimenting, but the market was far from stunned. One must remember that amps were equally primitive.

A breakthrough came in 1936 when Gibson launched an electric archtop guitar. It found its way to jazz guitarists such as Eddie Durham of Jimmie Lunceford's band and most of all Charlie Christian of the Benny Goodman band. Christian turned the guitar from a rhythm to a lead instrument. Unfortunately he died too soon, aged 26, in 1942, but he still made a huge mark in jazz history.

A follower of Christian's was guitarist Kurt Wårngren in Uppsala, Sweden, who with his instrument making, bass playing friend Sten Anderson began winding guitar pickups in his kitchen in the early 1940s. They were first sold under the Solist brand name, later changed to Wingtone. They were sold as optional for Levin archtop guitars. In the 1950s the Kjell pickup came, designed by Swedish jazz guitarist Kjell Sjölund. These too, were optional for Levins.

In the early days factory made amps were rare, so many musicians had their amps made by local radio repair shops. Not until after WW2 could you really find factory made amps in Sweden. Most were all-purpose, which meant that double bassists were often disappointed since amps could not handle low notes. Amps also had to run on both AC and DC.



The first solid guitar attempts were offered during the 1930s and 1940s, but not until Leo Fender's Telecaster guitar from 1950 were they beginning to catch the players' ears. Two years later Gibson launched the Les Paul model, and solidbody guitars began replacing the archtops, a fact that Karl Erik Hagström noted on his trips to the US. Competitor/partner Levin hade made a few solidbody guitars in 1957, as used by Swedish instrumental group The Spotnicks, so Hagström wasn't even the first in Sweden.

Leo Fender also designed the bass guitar as we know it, but there had been earlier attempts. Among the Gibson prototypes from 1924 was an electric double bass. In the 1930s Rickenbacker made a few electric double basses, which even found their way into the bands of Jimmie Lunceford, Stan Kenton and Lionel Hampton. Musician/luthier Paul Tutmarc of Seattle made a few electric bass guitars around 1935, but they never caught on. Fender's bass from 1951 did, though, and during the 1950s and 1960s it gradually replaced the double bass in popular music. Hagström's first electric bass came in 1961.

## Owe Thörnqvist

**Swedish singer/songwriter** Owe Thörnqvist has a long relation with the Hagström company. He received his first accordeon from Hagström in 1956 following his first gramophone hit, “Anders och Brita”. But he had played Hagström accordeons prior to that, while touring US Army bases in Germany in the early 1950s.

He is usually cited as the artist who brought rock’n’roll to Sweden, working as a sailor in the early 1950s, he visited both the United States and the Caribbeans, where he picked up several musical influences, ranging from bebop and R&B to country music and calypso.

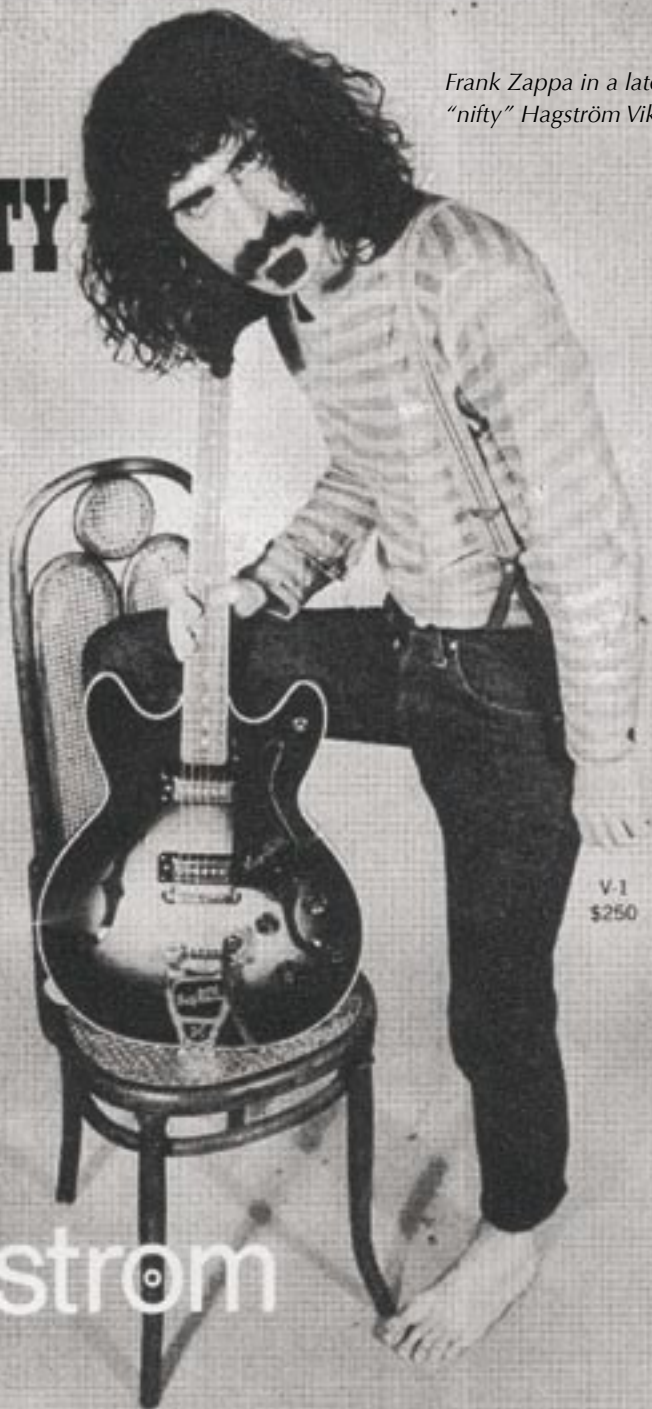
Thörnqvist wrote a tribute song, *Wilma*, to Fred Flintstone’s wife. However, he was threatened with lawsuits by the producers, a skirmish that surprisingly ended with Thörnqvist singing the song in English in a *Flintstones* episode!

He was also given a couple of celluloid covered guitars in the late 1950s, instruments that appeared on record sleeves as well as in films. He still has a couple of Hagström accordeons, plus a Super Swede and a Jimmy guitar that he occasionally uses for shows and tours. At the time of writing, he still performs regularly and releases records at the age of 77.

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**NIFTY**

Frank Zappa in a late 1960s ad for the "nifty" Hagström Viking guitar.



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## 1960–1969

**F**or more than three decades accordions had been the foundation of the Hagström conglomerate, but as the company entered the 1960s, a new era began. Karl Erik Hagström had learned from his trips to the US that accordions were being replaced by electric guitars, and the management in Älvdalen got the drift. Making an electric guitar also took less staff than making an accordion.

Hagström in Älvdalen never made acoustic guitars, although you sometimes see such instruments with a Hagström decal. They all came from the Bjärton factory in the South of Sweden, founded by Sigvard Nilsson, and initially a maker of double basses. Around 1960 Bjärton, too, made some electric guitars, fitted with Hagström pickup chassies as found on the DeLuxe and Standard models. Hagström had an export deal with Bjärton for these guitars, which were mostly sold in Sweden as Bjärtons. Some Bjärton acoustics were also sold through Hagström to Fender as Tarregas, and by US importer Buegeleisen & Jacobsen as España guitars. Just to confuse things; Finnish Landola guitars were also sold in the US as Españas. That is a sign of the strong demand for guitars in the early 1960s, in the wake of the folk and rock waves. You could sell almost anything with strings, and many importers, so called jobbers, sold as much as they could but rarely cared about the after market service.

And in the light of this, Hagström found a position as a maker of guitars that perhaps did not compete quality-wise with the big American brands – Gibson, Fender, Rickenbacker, Gretsch – but on the other hand cost less and still had a good-enough quality, especially compared to many of the Italian and Japanese budget brands.

Hagström also introduced cheap but playable guitars first sold with the Kent decal, a brand name used in the US on other cheap import guitars as well. They had laminate solid bodies covered in red or blue

vinyl, and plastic fronts. Karl Erik Hagström says that the reason they were sold as Kent, not as Hagström, was because he feared that the plastic tops could crack and thus tarnish the Hagström name. But the tops did not, and over 20,000 such basses and guitars were sold. In the UK they were sold as Futurama. In the US, Guild sold them briefly under the Cromwell name. Hagström also imported some cheap Japanese semi-hollow guitars sold as Kent. Brand name confusion was all around in the 1960s.

Hagström's Kent instruments sold like crazy and production had a hard time keeping up with orders, sometimes there was a one-year waiting list. On top of that the factory was partially destroyed in a fire in 1965. But miraculously, production was up to full scale within a few weeks.

Later designs became more and more futuristic, with models such as the Impala and the Corvette – names that had to be replaced in the US since they were used by GM on Chevy cars, but also because Gretsch already had a Corvette guitar model.

Hagström stepped up the quality ladder. The old accordion makers had learned how to build guitars, and the factory hired almost every village youngster that knocked on the door.

In 1965 the first hollowbody models came, the Viking guitars and Concord basses. And that meant new quality demands in production.

**Creativity seems to have been** very much allowed among the factory workers. Chief designer Holger Berglund contributed with his share of ideas that kept the tool shop busy making new production machines. An idea of Berglund's was the hydraulic press that made the sides for the Viking guitars, affectionately called "Sputnik". But it seems that anyone who had an idea could have it tried and tested.

Or as guitar designer Arne Hårdén says: "There were no two days the same!" Designers Berglund and Hårdén were both veterans. Berglund (1916-1978) started in 1930 and quit in 1969. Hårdén started at the age of 16 in 1942 and remained until production ceased in 1983. Both were more or less self-taught even though Hårdén had learned construction drawing at a tech school in Gothenburg. Not only did he draw the guitars, but also the special tools designed in-house.

This was the decade when Hagström started making amps. The inside of the first amps was built by the Philips company, and cabinet-making and assembling was done in Älvdalen. Karl Erik Hagström jokingly says “our first guitars weren’t really that good, but the amps were even worse...”, and compared to what is available today, he is probably right. But soon Berglund began developing new models. His sound ideal seems to have been closer to jazz and distortion-free pop than a dirty rock sound, but he still made some classics, such as the small 210 bass amp, now a collector’s item.

The music amp industry, in Sweden as well as abroad, was in its infancy, many an experiment was made and the general R&D idea seems to have been “trial and error”

“We didn’t have a clue about measuring and curves, we had to use our ears. If it sounded good, it was good. The ears decided”, says Bengt Eriksson, another Hagström veteran. He started at the age of 14 in the repair shop in 1955 and eventually advanced to being a factory foreman. He stayed until the end and then set up a PA electronics company, Amtech.

**An example of the philosophy** is “the great speaker cabinet test” of the early 1960s, when Holger Berglund and Bengt Eriksson set up a number of speaker cabinets on one side of the river that divides the village. They then turned up the amps, and Arne Hårdén rode his bicycle across the bridge to the other side of the river, to listen to the sound and ride back to give a report!

In the mid-1960s Per-Åke Olsson joined Hagström, first as a repair man in the Helsingborg office, but later he moved to Älvdalen. He was to become Berglund’s successor and represented a new approach. If Berglund was a self-taught mechanical genius, Olsson was a self-taught electronics genius. Olsson died in 1999.

Olsson’s first major design was the PA-200 system, and it was an argument concerning the development of PA systems that lead to Berglund quitting the company in 1969. He set up his own enterprise, making electronic organs.

The fact that Hagström distributed Gibson and Fender was a major advantage as rock bands exploded in the 1960s. Hagström also sold

Trixon, Sonor, Pearl and Ludwig drums, Farfisa and Lowrey organs, Selmer amps, and horn and reed instruments from a number of makers.

### *James D'Aquisto (1935 –1995)*

James "Jimmy" D'Aquisto was born in Brooklyn, New York. As a teenager he took guitar lessons, inspired by the jazz guitar stars of the era: Tal Farlow, Jimmy Raney, Jim Hall. At the age of 17 he first came across an archtop guitar by master luthier John D'Angelico, and he started hanging around the master's shop enough to become an apprentice. After D'Angelico died in 1964, D'Aquisto took over the business and eventually became a luthier legend in his own right.

When Hagström wanted to move on up from making cheap solidbodies to making more advanced guitars, they turned to D'Aquisto, who in 1967 travelled to Älvdalen to supervise the process of making the first Jimmy model guitars. He returned in 1972, as the model was reintroduced. The very first prototypes were made by Bjärton, and they are now owned by collectors Ulf Zandhers and K E Hagström Jr.

"Solidbodies were selling slower, so it was decided that we should start making more advanced models", says designer Arne Hårdén who has been involved in the design of all Hagström guitars.

"Jimmy D'Aquisto came to Älvdalen, and he brought a guitar that he was to demonstrate. He put it on my desk, and then went into the office for a meeting with the management. So I started copying the design on paper, and when he came back from the meeting the blueprints were done."

According to the book *Acquired of the Angels* (Paul William Schmidt; Scarecrow Press, 1992), D'Aquisto was dissatisfied with the Hagström guitars, claiming the final result had nothing to do with his intentions, a statement that surprises Karl Erik Hagström,



since he has fond memories of a satisfying collaboration. He thinks that D'Aquisto's comments may be caused by problems with the US distributor paying D'Aquisto his royalties.

D'Aquisto's design of the headstock and machine heads was used in other Hagström guitar models as well.

### *Elvis Presley (1935–1977)*

After having made a number of Hollywood movies, none of them even close to an Academy Award, it was decided that "The King" should make a live comeback TV show. It was recorded by NBC TV in June 1968, aired on December 3 the same year as The Elvis 68 Comeback Show. In the opening scene, Elvis appears in a black leather dress against a black and dark red background.

There are a number of variations to this story, but the one told by drummer Hal Blaine, who played in the studio band, says that producer Bones Howe looked for some kind of prop for Elvis, for visual reasons. Al Casey, guitarist in the studio band, had a red Hagström Viking II guitar with gold plated hardware, and this guitar was hung on Elvis. The rest is the proverbial history. Neither Hagström nor the US distributor knew about this, so it was a surprise to both.

Since then, images with Elvis and the red Hagström guitar have become almost icons. They are among the most published photos of The King, and also made the cover for Elvis' next album, the 1969 *Elvis in Memphis*.

Karl Erik Hagström says that the US distributor telexed Hagström a day or two later to point out that the Viking was a bit neck-heavy, if you let go of the neck it would drop towards the floor! This problem must be fixed, they said. But yet another day later a new message arrived: "Don't change a thing!" Apparently the

kids wanted the guitar to hang like that, just like Elvis' guitar on TV!

Hagström used Elvis in their guitar ads until the Elvis organisation and "Colonel" Tom Parker said no. Al Casey, who poses with the Hagström guitar on the cover of his album *Cookin'*, is today a musician and guitar teacher in Arizona. He sold the Viking guitar in the mid 90s, reportedly to a casino owner in Illinois. The final price is unknown, but Casey asked for USD 50,000.

And when the Swedish singer Christer Sjögren cut a cd of Elvis songs, of course he posed with a red Hagström Viking guitar!

*Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970)*

*Noel Redding (1945-2003)*

The guitar legend Jimi Hendrix and the bassist in his group The Experience, Noel Redding, both played Hagström eight string basses. Jimi had two, bought from Manny's music store in New York. Noel's was given to him by Hagström in connection with a show in Gothenburg in 1967. The bass has four string courses, tuned like a regular bass, but with the pair of strings in each course tuned in octaves. Both used these basses for recording, Redding also used it live on a few occasions with The Experience.

Hendrix plays it on *Spanish Castle Magic*, from the *Axis: Bold as Love* album (1968), and Redding plays it on *You've Got Me Floating* and *Little Miss Lover*, from the same album. According to serial number tables, one of Hendrix's basses was the seventh made. He also played it on some of the recordings that he for reasons unclear made with his former employer, the rather mediocre singer Curtis Knight.

Redding's bass was sold by Sotheby's in 1993, and the following year one of Hendrix's basses was sold by Bonham's for GBP 13,000.

The eight string bass was also used by many US session players, such as Chuck Rainey, James Jamerson, Carol Kaye, and Joe Osborn, who reportedly played it on Richard Harris' million seller *McArthur Park* (1968). Other users are Lamar Williams (Allman Brothers Band), Jason Newsted (Metallica), and Mike Rutherford (Genesis). The idea behind the bass came from an American designer, who's name is now forgotten. Rickenbacker made a similar bass to custom order about six months earlier, but it never went into production.

When Hendrix played at Gröna Lund in Stockholm in 1967, Hagström supplied the PA, with Hagström designer/engineer P-Å Olsson at the helm. "I was invited to the after-party", Karl Erik Hagström recalls, "but being a married family man, I did not feel like staying out late, especially since I had a distinct feeling about how it was to end, with alcohol and whatnot, so I went home. Most of all, I felt sorry about all the guitars he smashed."

### *Björn Skifs*

"*Kenneth Windahl*, the guitarist in my band Slam Creepers, had a red De Luxe guitar.

We did not understand then that this was to become a collector's item, we thought it looked a bit corny with that red celluloid. We recorded a TV show in the Älvdalen factory in 1967, it was my first TV show ever. I remember that we sat on crates and played. I guess that show has been lost from the archives by now. Bands could buy equipment from the factory at reasonable prices. And that saved a lot of the bands back then, it was a way to afford

roadworthy quality gear. We probably didn't really understand how good the stuff really was, the amount of R&D that went into it. In the 1970s I toured Sweden with a band of US musicians, among them guitarist Arthur Barrow, who later played with Frank Zappa. He didn't know that Hagströms were made in Sweden, and he was really struck by the quality. This made us extra proud, especially me being from Dalarna myself. Both my parents played the accordion, by Hagström of course, and I also remember that Hagström toured the countryside villages giving accordion classes once a year or so. My sister attended one in my home village Vansbro, but I was too young – if not, who knows, I might as well have been an accordionist?

The Hagström people were visionaries who saw the opportunities in manufacturing, selling and educating, and they made cultural as well as educational contributions – although accordion music wasn't considered 'proper' culture back then."

Björn Skifs was born i Vansbro, Dalarna, some 100 km from Älvdalen. He has been one of Sweden's most popular performers since the late 1960s, having had a career in music as well as in film and theatre. In 1974 his group Blue Swede made the top of the US Billboard list with the song *Hooked on a Feeling*.

### *Ingvar Karlsson (Sven-Ingvars)*

"The Hagström shop was where you found the really cool gear, at least in my hometown Karlstad. They had the latest guitars from Fender and Gibson, and their own gear was good, too. Fenders and Gibsons were hard to find back then. And they had accordions, too. I guess I've worn out six or seven accordions over the years. I do have one left, in my summer house. I found an old agreement the other day, from the 1960s, for renting guitars for an indefinite period of time from Hagström. And for a long time I had a Hammond organ that P-Å Olsson had modified for me. Since I

don't play the piano, he put accordeon buttons on it. My summer house lies in Orsa, near Älvdalen, so I visit the museum from time to time. It's great looking at all those old instruments."

Ingvar Karlsson, guitarist and accordionist, is a founder of Sven-Ingvars, an institution in Swedish pop music. The band started in 1956 and had a string of domestic hits in the 1960s. During the 1970s the band toured mainly as a dance band, but for the last 15-20 years the band has mostly done stage shows and also performed at the Hultsfred Rock Festival in 1993.

### *Frank Zappa (1940–1993)*

Frank Zappa is one of the greatest names in rock, even though his music is far from "easy listening", being influenced by classical modernists such as Stockhausen and Varese. In 1966 Hagström's US distributor Merson/Unicord gave him an H-12 solidbody 12-string guitar, and Unicord also made Zappa appear in a series of ads where he provocatively looks down the guitar neck saying it's "long and slippery". He also made ads with a Viking guitar (which was "nifty") and the Bjärton-made H-33 acoustic ("folk rock is a drag"). In the 1970s he also sometimes used a custom lacquered Super Swede guitar with a motif made by a German artist – a real challenge for the skilful team at Hagström's lacquer shop. Zappa is also among those who tried the Patch 2000 synthesizer. Reportedly he made a film commercial with director Ed Seeman, who also was involved in Zappa productions such as *200 Motels and Burnt Weeny Sandwich*, as well as radio commercials for Hagström.

Frank's son Dweezil, himself a very talented guitarist, who tours with the Zappa Plays Zappa show, playing his dad's music, says that Hagström was the only brand that Zappa actively endorsed. He reportedly used the solidbody 12-string on the albums Lumpy

Gravy and *We're Only In It For The Money*, and Dweezil is sure of that.

“You can hear some 12-string guitar on the albums he made in the late 1960s, and I think that’s the guitar he uses. There are also some acoustic tracks which were surely made with the Hagström acoustic 12-string, since Frank hadn’t collected that many acoustics back then.

**Did Frank Zappa play Hagström guitars** because of the thin and fast necks? Dweezil says:

“The Hagström guitars I’ve played had a very fast action. On the other hand, the feel of the neck is a personal thing. Frank wanted his guitar necks to be extremely thin and often had them shaved down, or even had new necks made for his guitars. He also used the lightest gauge strings available, with a very low action, and he played with a very soft touch. He was very picky about his guitars and almost always had the electronics modified.

Dweezil remembers that his father experimented with guitar synthesizers, but has no distinct memories of the Patch 2000.

Today, the Zappa family takes care of both the musical rights and the Zappa trademark, but there are no Hagström guitars left.

“I don’t know what happened to them. In the late 1960s Frank lived in New York and he had a lot of guitars. Many were stolen, some he sold, and others he gave away.”

Hard Rock Café claims to have one of Frank Zappa’s guitars, and Dweezil says it’s possible.

“But there are a lot of bogus ‘Zappa ’ guitars out there, where people claim it belonged to Frank although it’s not true.”

The custom painted Super Swede guitar is gone, too.

Dweezil has also heard that Frank Zappa supposedly made a movie and some radio commercials for Hagström.

“I’ve heard about it, but I’ve yet to see or hear one. But there may be something in the vaults. We have found a lot of commercials that he made, although they are mostly for his own productions such as the film *200 Motels*. And wherever he went, he brought recording equipment, so it’s plausible.

Karl Erik Hagström, who remembers Frank Zappa as a very special and intellectual person, “especially for being a rock musician”, has no recollection of these commercials. The Zappa advertising campaigns was run by the US distributor, Merson/Unicord.

You dreamed it  
would come someday.

# THE PATCH 2000



*The Patch 2000 came out a beautiful butterfly,  
but most players found it a turkey...*



## 1970–1983

**T**he Hagström Company entered the 1970s as a major player in the Swedish music gear business. There were problems in conquering the Greater Stockholm area, but the rest of Sweden was Hagströmland. In the mid 1970s Hagström still had 28 shops all over Sweden. Many who worked there have testified that there was a strong “Hagström spirit” among the employees. The up-and-coming employees were well taken care of and educated in the various shops.

The accordion era had come to an end. The last couple of hundred accordions made in Sweden were dumped at a building site in the middle of Älvdalen. The tools and machines were sold to Yugoslavia. Hagström accordions were still sold, but they were all made in Italy.

The Hagström Company suffered from an image problem, too. Being an old business full of traditions wasn't necessarily an advantage among the young and hip musicians. Especially since the roots were in accordions. And, possibly worse than anything else during these progressive times – ABBA used Hagström equipment.

Not only that, Hagström gear was very popular with the touring dance bands of Sweden. Bands such as Vikingarna, Jan Öjlers, Max Fenders, Thorleifs...

To be honest, these were the bands that charged the R&D process. The progressive rock bands didn't get enough well-paid gigs to afford the hottest stuff. The dance and show bands giggered three or four nights a week, eleven months a year, doing their own roadie work, driving their own vans and buses. Their gear had to be industry-grade, had to sound good, and yet be easy to handle.

And it was for these bands that Hagström designed and built PA systems. The PA-2000 system was ahead of its time; eight inputs all in stereo, a stereo echo unit, powerful slave amps and cabinets of various sizes, all with the best speaker elements. And all in a design that pro-

bably offended some, especially the progressive rockers: black tolex, red paint and brushed aluminium were un-hip in an era that called for homemade speaker cabinets with tie-and-dye cloth fronts.

In 1970 Hagström launched the Swede, their most successful guitar. It, too, was designed by P-Å Olsson in collaboration with guitarist Egil Strazdovskis, who also briefly was a Hagström employee. It became a hit not only in Sweden, but all over the world: Kerry Livgren of Kansas played one, as did Canadians Domenic Troiano (Guess Who) and Ralph Cole (Lighthouse), Joe Walsh (The Eagles) and of course Frank Zappa. Denny Laine, with Paul McCartney and Wings, had one for the video to *Mull of Kintyre*. Jazzers such as Larry Coryell and Philip Catherine also played Swedes.

The 1970s was the decade when Hagström guitars reached their peak quality-wise. The finish was on par with the competitors', creative solutions were in abundance. The lacquer shop, run by Nils Larsson, achieved a glossy finish that made competitors such as Fender try to get hold of the secret. Before he died, Larsson wrote down his "testament" by hand, which is still in the Hagström office safe. Larsson was yet another Hagström veteran, who started in 1937, aged 18, and remained until 1983.

During the 1960s the first synthesizers appeared. The first were all hard-wired modules, but soon keyboards better adapted to life on the road were developed. Hagström became distributors for Korg and Crumar.

In The US and Canada, Ampeg had become distributors for Hagström, and Ampeg also entered the guitar synth battle, as various manufacturers started making synths that could be driven not only by keyboards, but by string and wind instruments as well.

The Ampeg guitar synth was invented by one Willie Avant. Every note was generated in a contact in the frets. Every fret had six contacts, and every neck 22 frets, so there had to be a lot of wiring under the fingerboard.

The competitors, Roland and ARP, used a hexaphonic pickup for picking up string vibrations that were converted to voltage. Less complicated than the Ampeg system, but difficult enough for the players.

Advertising for the Ampeg made a lot of hoopla about stars using the synth. Bob Welsh and John McVie (Fleetwood Mac), Frank Zappa, Bill Nelson (Bebop Deluxe), Darryl Stuermer (Genesis), Richard Sinclair (Camel), Larry Coryell... In truth – Ok, they all tried it, but found it awkward to use. Bob Welsh reportedly used one for a solo album, but that’s about it. Guitar synths were just too complicated. Roland had the money muscles to survive but ARP fell along the wayside. Ampeg and Hagström also made it quite unruffled.

Karl Erik Hagström comments: “Nothing we ever manufactured gave us so much publicity. The Patch synthesizer was the talk of the town at The Frankfurt Messe in 1977. And none of our products sold that bad...”

By the mid 1970s, Hagström still had a large net of distributors abroad. There were subsidiaries in Denmark and Norway, and distributors in Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, France, Hongkong, Iraq, Iran, Iceland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Canada (and also the US), Malaysia, Mauritius, The Netherlands (also the rest of the Benelux), Switzerland, Singapore, UK (and Ireland), Thailand, West Germany and Austria.

PA systems sold well and head designer P-Å Olsson (or, as he preferred to call himself abroad, “Pete Olsen”), continued R&D, developing the large HSPL systems with 16 or 24 channel desks, 1kW power amps and huge horn speaker systems. In the mid 1970s there was still a lot of live music in Scandinavia, with many bands in various genres constantly touring. In 1976, Hagström opened a new shop directed to the touring pros, OT, just outside Stockholm. The idea was great, the timing was lousy. At about that time, disco killed the live music. In a year or two, only the major acts survived. You couldn’t sell a second hand PA system, less a new one.

The international music instrument industry went through a major restructuring as well. Japanese instruments were a laughing stock in the 1960s, but the Japanese came, studied and learned. The R&D efforts paid off, and Japanese labour was relatively cheap. Guitar manufacturers such as Ibanez and Aria gave Fender, Gibson and Gretsch – and Hagström – a kick in the knees. Drum makers Pearl and Tama hit hard

at Ludwig, Rogers and Slingerland. Roland and Korg keyboards killed Moog and Oberheim, who had developed the technology but couldn't mass produce. Yamaha was a major player in every segment of the market, and bought drum maker Premier. Korg took over Marshall amps, Suzuki purchased The Hammond Organ Co. And so on, and on and on. (Today, qualified mass production takes place in South Korea, even China, while the budget manufacturing is done in China, but rapidly moving to countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam.)

Possibly, a *sense of fatigue* hit the Hagström organisation, too. Foreign competition was fierce, and what once was a 90% export share dropped like a lead balloon. The small Scandinavian market was hardly a cornerstone. By 1980, only a dozen employees remained in the Älvdalen factory. The chain of shops was permanently stabbed by new competitors, and the Hagström model of running the shops may have become slightly obsolete. What had worked in the 1960s didn't any more. The customers were better educated and more mobile.

The distance between Älvdalen, site for production and also for President Karl Erik Hagström, and the Malmö office, site for Managing Directors, sales and marketing, couldn't have made things easier. This was in the era before computers and even fax-machines, so all communication was by phone or mail.

The Hagström music schools had to compete with the constantly developing public music schools. The march was all uphill and the backpack heavier by the day. Around 1980 shutdown was in preparation. Production in Älvdalen ceased, distributorships for various brands were sold to others, including cash cows such as Fender and Gibson. The shops were all sold out.

Karl Erik Hagström says: "If we made a mistake, it was that we kept on too long".

A couple of offshoots started, Musitech, which had a few distributor deals, and Amtech, who continued to make PA systems.

By 1983, the last guitar was made. End of business. Or...?

## *From 15 to 1,500,000 Watts*

Onstage amplification has come a long way in the past half of a century. It all really started right after WW2. Before that, unplugged was the norm.

The first PA systems had an amp with one or two inputs, a 15-20 watts effect and one or two small speaker cabinets.

Not until the early 1960s there were PA systems dedicated to amplifying vocals. When The Beatles did their first tours, they had a couple of 100 watt Vox PA amps and a few column speakers. No miking of drums or backline amps. No wonder they gave up touring – how could they be heard over thousands of screaming teenage girls? Things were slightly better in the US, since many of the venues – theatres or cinemas – had permanently installed big horn speakers systems.

A Swede is among the PA pioneers of the 1960s. Gerard Dieke, Stockholm, developed the Ackuset systems, very popular in Europe. He was possibly the first at the time to offer modular systems, with separate mixers, echo units, power amps and speaker cabinets (with separate elements for bass and mid/high). Many of the British bands who toured Scandinavia in the 1960s bought Ackuset equipment on their way home: The Hollies, The Tremeloes, The Who, BeeGees, Traffic. In the late 1960s, Hagström offered a similar system, PA-200. By the early 1970s, Ackuset and Hagström totally dominated the Scandinavian PA market.

*As the big rock festivals emerged, PA systems grew to be bigger and better. A British pioneer was Charlie Watkins, like Albin Hagström originally an accordion dealer. His WEM systems appeared on most British festivals in the late 1960s and early 1970s: The Rolling Stones' Hyde Park concert, the Isle of Wight festivals, etcetera. WEM systems were purchased by major acts such as The Who, Fleetwood Mac, Pink Floyd and The Move. Watkins*

also made the small Copicat echo units, sold by Hagström under the Kent name.

The US festivals used specially designed systems, too. Woodstock had one with large theatre horn speakers powered by a total of 3,500 watts valve amplification for the 500,000 visitors. It was designed by Bill Hanley who had supplied sound for The Beatles' last US concerts at Shea Stadium.

In the US, Grateful Dead had a custom designed system known as The Wall, using near-studio quality desks, huge hifi power amps delivering thousands of watts, and speakers from only the best, such as Lansing and Altec.

When Hagström delivered the sound system for ABBA's first tour after their breakthrough with *Waterloo* in 1974, it was the biggest in Sweden at the time, with some 40 speakers pushed by 10,000 watts of amplification. For comparison: For the 2006 tour, The Rolling Stones used 1,5 million watts.

### *ABBA and Hagström*

*For their first Swedish and European tours* after the success with *Waterloo* in the Eurovision Song Contest, ABBA used the biggest PA system made so far in Sweden, built by Hagström.

Lennart Johnsson, in 1974 working as a technician for Hagström, demo'ed PA systems in Scandinavia. One day in the spring of 1974, he was in a Stockholm theatre trying out the system. Some of the ABBA people entered the room, among them ABBA's live sound engineer to be, Claes af Geijerstam, and they were all so impressed that ABBA settled for a Hagström system.

"That felt great since Hagström PAs were mostly associated with dance and show bands, so we hit from below", says Lennart Johnsson.

The system consisted of five 8-channel stereo mixers all hooked up, a stereo echo unit, 10,000 watts of power amplification and 40 or so cabinets of different shapes and sizes. Not much by today's standards, but huge at the time. Johnsson also modified the system, so that the vocalists could have their own separate monitor speakers, a novelty at the time.

The backline also consisted of Hagström amps only. Björn Ulvaeus requested that the amps should look all the same. ABBA were backed by a Swedish dance band, Boris & Beatmakers, with the addition of session guitarist Lasse Wellander. Using the clean sounding Hagström BT-100 transistor amps for bass and keyboards was not a problem, but Wellander usually played a Marshall stack. So P-Å Olsson modified a BT-100 amp for maximum overdrive.

For the first gigs, ABBA's recording engineer Michael B Tretow ran the desk, but Claes af Geijerstam soon took over. Lennart Johnsson says he also got that offer, but work and family chores forced him to decline. He remembers that when that tour ended, Ulvaeus asked him for a new Hagström PA system for the next trip, although with more of a "rock'n'roll look" in black and metal.

"I submitted his request to the Marketing department, but apparently nothing happened. I don't know why."

Karl Erik Hagström says he never learned about this until it was too late: "Obviously no one dared to ask me. For heaven's sake, it might have cost us SEK 250,000 but would have given us publicity worth a lot more!"

ABBA also used other Hagström products. Björn Ulvaeus occasionally played a Swede guitar, for instance at the Swedish Royal Wedding in 1976. Rutger Gunnarsson, ABBA's main recording and road bassist, sometimes played a Super Swede bass, an instrument that he also helped develop.

## *Claes af Geijerstam*

"My first memories of Hagström are from 1961, when I went to Dalarna with my friend Tue Stiby and his dad during spring break. The father was in insurances and had to see a customer, this accordion factory. They had just started making electric guitars and we tried one each, black ones with a plastic fingerboard and a glittery celluloid finish, and got hooked! We insisted we wanted to have them, so Tue's dad had to call my mom for an OK. I recall the price was SEK 475 each. We were totally in awe! That same night we took into a hotel, and in a guest room there was an old radio gramophone, into which we plugged our guitars, playing the night away. We actually started a band, Two Boys, and even did a TV show in 1962.

When I travelled with ABBA as their sound engineer in 1974, we had a Hagström PA system. We had a setup with five of their 8-channel mixers hooked up. There were no multicore snakes back then, so we made our own from regular coaxial household wire. I set up two separate systems, one for vocals and backup, and another for backline and drums. Quite a successful experiment, actually. There was a lot of experimenting going on, but the Hagström people were always very helpful. For the German tour, we all travelled in Mercedes vans. Boris & Beatmakers, the dance band, opened the set, then changed dresses and became the backup band for ABBA, with the addition of Lasse Wellander on guitar."

Claes af Geijerstam, aka "Clabbe", became a pro as guitarist in Ola & The Janglers, the first Swedish band on the Billboard list with their version of "Let's Dance", in 1965. He has scored for several films, a.o. by directors Bo Widerberg and Jan Halldoff. He is also a well known radio and TV personality, and was one half of the duo Nova that represented Sweden in the Eurovision Song Contest in 1973 – having beaten ABBA in the Swedish final! He toured with ABBA as their live sound engineer from 1974 to 1980.



## Rutger Gunnarsson (ABBA a.o.)

“Gun Bergbring from Hagström’s Malmö office asked for my opinion when the Super Swede Bass was to be launched in 1979. They sent me a prototype – I still have it, plus another one, a factory version. I tried the prototype on the road and for sessions and had a few ideas on how to improve it. Mostly minor stuff, like getting rid of a thumb rest that didn’t work well, in my opinion. I used the Super Swede on several ABBA tours, and I don’t know if it was because of me, but many bassists got themselves one, especially in show and dance bands. It’s still a great bass, nice to play and good sounding.”

Rutger Gunnarsson played bass in several bands in his hometown Linköping before studying classical guitar at the Stockholm conservatory. One of his teachers tipped him about an audition for a summer tour with The Hootenanny Singers, Bjorn Ulvaeus’ old group. And so started a long relationship. Rutger plays bass on all ABBA albums and took part of most of their tours, including the Australian tour documented in *ABBA The Movie*. He also wrote string arrangements for many ABBA songs and has also played in later shows such as *Chess* and *Mamma Mia*. Rutger has also played with, arranged for and/or produced a great number of Swedish and international artists, including Westlife and Celine Dion.

*Nick McCarthy (R) of Franz Ferdinand plays an old, red Hagström Deluxe guitar.*



ENGLISH  
SUMMERY

## 1984–2005

**T**hus, the Hagström era ended in 1983, after almost 60 years in business? Not at all. Few trademarks have survived that long after business has ceased. Well, the company didn't really go bankrupt, only the music part was shut down. Karl Erik Hagström continued with some real estate management, mostly of warehouses etcetera still owned by the company.

But as years went by, a public interest in the old products increased. Guitar collecting became a hobby for middle-aged reasonably wealthy men who perhaps wished to live out the dreams of their teenage days. At first, Fender and Gibson guitars were the most desirable, but as prices rocketed sky high, collectors took an interest in affordable quality instruments like Hagström's. In Sweden there may have been some local patriotism in there, but the look of Hagström guitars, especially the first "glitter" models added value, as did the connection to "name" artists such as Elvis, ABBA, Zappa and Hendrix.

Guitar collectors' shows were arranged, such has been held in Sweden since the early 1990s, many with special Hagström shows. The local museum in Älvdalen added a Hagström Room, in what once was a part of the old factory building. Albin Hagström himself is now a statue in the middle of the village. Dalarnas Museum in province capital Falun also has a fine collection of Hagström guitars and accordions.

A new generation of rock musicians have been attracted by the Hagström "retro cool" look – Mudhoney, The Secret Machines and Rancid in the US, The Kills and Razorlight in the UK, Sloan in Canada, Scotland's Franz Ferdinand and of course Sweden's The Cardigans and Mando Diao. Pat Smear, guitarist with Germs and a later version of Nirvana, is a Hagström fan to the extent that he tried to purchase the brand name.

Albin's daughters Anna-Lenah Hagström and Kärstin Heikkinen Hagström gave a substantial sum of money for a scholarship fund for

young and talented accordionists and guitarists, and also for an annual Hagström Award for guitarists or accordionists. Among the awarded are guitarists Rune Gustafsson (1997), Janne Schaffer (1999), Georg Wadenius (2001), and Lasse Wellander (2005).

In Älvdalen there has been an annual Hagström event since 1990, also giving awards and prizes mostly to accordionists. The arranger, Bälgdraget, is an association of former Hagström employees.

Hagström is also a subject of stamps and postcards issued by the Swedish Mail office in 2004. One stamp shows Maria Andersson, guitarist of the group Sahara Hotnights, with a Swede guitar.

And in 2005, the Hagström brand name was reintroduced on a new series of guitars. The company American Music & Sound got the Hagström family's permission to use the name on a series of new models, designed by American David Lee. Many of them are updated replicas of classic models such as Swede, Jimmy and Viking, or new designs inspired by older models. Most are manufactured in China, but Lee also offers a small number of handmade guitars from his New York shop.

Karl Erik Hagström has always been careful not to give the brand name away to products that he considered to be of poor quality. In the 1980s, a Japanese manufacturer wished to use the name on a series of guitars and basses, but after scrutinizing the instruments, Karl Erik Hagström declined the offer. A handful of prototypes exist, one of them on display at the Älvdalen museum. And as a proof of the power in the Hagström name, a local electronics company worked on an amplifier prototype in 2006, the exterior inspired by the old Hagström designs. The spirit lives on!

# CAPTIONS

- p.12 Albin Hagström in his 20s. The young entrepreneur ready to go into business.
- p.14 Albin Hagström's first ad for which he paid SEK 30 and managed to sell a dozen and a half German import accordions.
- p.15 Hagström's first promotional print – more were to come!
- p.16 Hagström also sold bicycles in the 1920s and 1930s.
- p.17 The first Norwegian flyer.
- p.18 The first Hagström catalogue, dated 1926. The motif is very Dalecarlian!
- p.19 The 1927 catalogue, still with Dalecarlian motifs.
- p.21 The Hagström 1928 jazz instrument catalogue. Hagström had realised that accordionists had band mates. What could be jazzier than a banjo in 1928?
- p.22 Carl Jularbo, the Swedish accordion king.
- p.23 The first accordions that Carl Jularbo purchased from Hagström were made by Ranco in Italy.
- p.24 In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Hagström also manufactured gramophones.
- p.25 In 1933 Hagström issued a naming contest for their new accordion model. The winner received SEK 50.
- p.27 Already in 1937 Albin Hagström made full page ads. Why buy foreign, now that you can buy Swedish accordions, copy asks. Hagström also displayed cross country skier Elis Wiklund, gold medalist in the 1936 Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.
- p.29 Hagström – “with the times!”, according to ad copy. Thus the electric train and the racing car.
- p.30 Due to import restrictions it was hard to sell accordions to Denmark... (Danish 1930s catalogue)
- p.31 ...so Hagström set up a new factory outside Copenhagen. (Danish 1939 catalogue)
- p.33 Father and son Jularbo in the early 1930s. They toured together for almost a quarter of a century.
- p.34 Carl Jularbo posing for the photographer.

- p.35 Ebbe Jularbo had a collaboration with Hagström for almost 60 years, from the first tours with his father and until the year he died, 1991.
- p.36 Erik Frank, possibly **the** Swedish jazz accordion master. He wrote *Novelty Accordeon*, a Swedish jazz classic.
- p.37 Childrens' Day in Älvdalen in the early 1940s. Of course Hagström had a part in the procession.
- p.38 Albin Hagström teaches sons Lars and Karl Erik the secrets of accordion playing.
- p.39 Albin Hagström built this house for his family in the early 1940s. It was torn down in 1993.
- p.40-41 Part of the Hagström accordion catalogue of 1946.
- p.42 The Malmö shop window display, mid 1940s. (upper photo)  
Electric shop sign. (lower photo)
- p.43 All the great show names in Sweden played Hagströms. L to R, accordionist Erik Frank, vocalist Alice Babs, bandleader Sigurd Ågren.
- p.44 Ragnar Johansson designed the classic Hagström logotype.
- p.45 Swing and jazz could be played on accordions, too. Hagström advertising used jazz accordionist Nisse Lind and vocalist Alice Babs.
- p.46 The Hagström music publishing company issued many Swedish accordion classics. (upper)  
The factory was in permanent need of workers. Here is an ad for young folks to give it a try. Many began working for Hagström in their teens and stayed for decades. (lower)
- p.47 This poem, dedicated to Albin Hagström, was published in Sweden's largest newspaper, Dagens Nyheter in 1943.
- p.48 Sven Magnusson, one of the men behind the music school, shows the proper accordion stance.
- p.49 Most of the tutorials were written by Sven Magnusson.
- p.50 Ad for the music school. Finding pupils was easy, finding teachers was harder.
- p.51 And upon graduation day, you could get a pin.
- p.52 Graduation day in the town Borlänge, Sweden.
- p.53 The youngest pupil, Nils Sylvén, aged 5. And what became of him? Today, some 50plus years later, "Nippe" Sylvén is one of Sweden's finest jazz keyboardists.

- p.54 There were also gramophone courses. The family that plays together stays together!
- p.57 Lennart Åberg, one of Europe's leading jazz saxophonists.
- p.60 Erik Frank had a long relation with Hagström, although there was the occasional argument.
- p.61 Erik Frank wrote tutorials and also worked as a teacher for Hagström.
- p.62 The 1950s – end of the accordion era, beginning of the guitar era!
- p.63 Danish accordion virtuoso Mogens Ellegaard.
- p.64 Hagström advertising from 1952. (upper)  
The heart of the empire – the Hagström accordion factory in Älvdalen. (lower)
- p.65 “The accordion man”, a mainstay in Hagström advertising. (upper)  
Postcard from Älvdalen showing the sights: the accordion factory. (lower)
- p.66 A 1956 window display from Stockholm shop. (upper)  
Gösta Westerlund, Swedish accordion star. (lower)
- p.67 From the 1953 Hagström catalogue: The birth of an accordion.
- p.68 Swedish jazz saxophonist Arne Domnérus shows the new plastic Grafton alto sax.
- p.69 The very first Hagström guitar ad.
- p.70 The H-profile trussrod was originally a part of an airplane. (upper)  
Glitter, glamour... The Hagström DeLuxe in blue celluloid cover.
- p.72 Hagström “glitter guitars” have been used on several record sleeves. Top to bottom: *That Was Then But This Is Now*, by ABC, *La Chica del Auto Stop* by Los Atilas (a forgotten Spanish act), *Honkin' On Bobo*, by Aerosmith, Roxy Music's Bryan Ferry from the cover of *For Your Pleasure*.
- p.73 Hagström lap steel, ca 1950. (upper)  
Hagström archtop, made in Norway late 1950s. (lower)
- p.74 Albin Hagström in his teens.
- p.76 Albin Hagström posing with the office phone. Still a passionate accordionist, but also an entrepreneur with an eye for customer communication as well as for finding the right employees.
- p.79 A Hagström guitar collection to water your mouth, from the very first Standard models to the final Super Swedes.

- p.81 Owe Thörnqvist today, with his Hagström accordion and guitars.
- p.82 Owe in 1956, still with a Hagström accordion.
- p.83 Showing his Hagström guitar on a record sleeve circa 1959.
- p.84 Elvis and Hagström – an American King and a Swedish Viking.
- p.85 K E Hagström and Roland Beronius at the Frankfurt Messe, probably 1961. They hold a Bjärton electric guitar with Hagström pickups.
- p.86 A prominent visit to the factory: L to R guitarist Roffe Berg, Bengt Eriksson (factory foreman), vocalist Torbjörn Jonsson, pianist Charlie Norman, vocalist Lasse Lönndahl, and K E Hagström. The hand to the right belongs to bassist Hasse Burman.
- p.87 The mechanical shop in the Älvdalen plant. (upper)  
 The Kent guitar was aimed at young beginners such as these local heroes from Knivsta, north of Stockholm, Jack Daves (photo ca 1964-65), with Kent guitar and bass and a 210 bass amp. (lower)
- p.88 Nice, wholesome youngsters advertise Hagström guitars in the US. No nasty rockers allowed...
- p.89 The Hagström 26 portable amp, looking more like a beauty box, or something like that. It was also designed to appeal to women especially...
- p.90 “The Sputnik”, christened so by some wisecrack worker. An in-house designed machine that shaped the rims for the guitar bodies. (upper)  
 A stack of rims for Viking guitars. (lower)
- p.91 K E Hagström in his office chair. (upper)  
 “The guitar is Swedish too”. A not-so-PC (by today’s standards) view on Swedish girls. (lower)
- p.92 The famous loudspeaker test. In front of the stack of speakers are Roland Beronius, head designer Holger Berglund and his young assistant Bengt Eriksson. Designer Arne Hårdén is riding his bike, on his way across the bridge to do a soundcheck across the water!
- p.93 Swedish vocalist Lars Lönndahl posing with Hagström amps.
- p.94 A very early Jimmy prototype, made by Bjärton, not in the Älvdalen factory. The pickups are Gibsons. From the Ulf Zandhers collection.
- p.95 Brochure for the final 1970s version of the Jimmy. Note the misspelling of D’Aquisto’s name.
- p.96 The Elvis and Hagström photo also made the cover of the *Elvis in Memphis* album in 1969.



- p.97 The owner of the “Elvis guitar”, Al Casey also posed with it for the cover of his *Cookin’* album. (upper)  
A Swedish “Elvis wannabe” Christer Sjögren, but the real thing, guitar wise. (lower)
- p.98 Noel Redding’s eight string bass was a gift from the Hagström Co. God knows where he got those shoes...
- p.99 The idea behind the eight string bass came from an American designer, who’s name is now forgotten. Rickenbacker had toyed with a similar idea.
- p.100 Björn Skifs (R) and his band, Slam Creepers, recording a TV show in the Älvdalen factory in 1967.
- p.101 Björn Skifs today.
- p.102 Famous Swedish group Sven-Ingvars posing with Hagström guitars some time in the mid 1960s.
- p.103 Ingvar Karlsson on a visit to Älvdalen in 2005, trying out one of the new Hagström guitars while K E Hagström watches.
- p.105 Frank Zappa in a late 1960s ad for the “nifty” Hagström Viking guitar.
- p.106 The guitar to the left was custom finished by lacquer master Nils Larsson for Zappa, after a design made by a German artist. The chequered guitar to the right was done at the same time, and is now owned by Musitech’s Rolf Lindhamn.
- p.108 Mikael Wiehe, an icon of Swedish politically progressive rock of the 1970s.
- p.110 Hagström lacquer master Nils Larsson spraying the body of a Jimmy.
- p.111 The blue-and-yellow Hagström logo continued on the patriotic path entered by Albin Hagström. Note the umlaut dots over the letter ö.
- p.112 Fusion bassist Ralphe Armstrong tries a fretless Hagström Jazzbass and BT-100 amp.
- p.113 The Swede and Super Swede models were among Hagström’s greatest guitar hits.
- p.114-115 The Patch 2000 guitar synth was a PR success but a commercial failure.
- p.116 The Patch 2000 came out a beautiful butterfly, but most players found it a turkey...
- p.118 Hagström’s OT shop in Stockholm, aimed at the pros, was a great idea, only too late.
- p.121 Finnish vocalist Katri Helena posing on a Hagström PA-200 system, very advanced for its time (1968), and the first design by genius P-Å Olsson.

- p.122 Mulletts, platform shoes and collars the size of diner tables – how very 1970s... Swedish dance band Curt Haagers was often used as a demo band for the Hagström PA-2000 system.
- p.124 ABBA onstage for soundcheck in a Swedish folkpark, Skellefteå. L to R: Lasse Wellander (guitar), Caj Högberg (bass), Björn Ulvaeus, Agnetha Fältskog, behind her Roger Palm (drums), Annifrid Lyngstad, Boris Lindqvist (guitar), Wojtek Ernest (keyboards), Torsten Dannenberg (saxes), Peter Kott (trumpet), and Benny Andersson at the grand piano.
- p.125 Lasse Wellander's Hagström amp, modified for overdrive and distortion.
- p.126 Benny Andersson surrounded by Hagström gear. Behind him Wojtek Ernest, Torsten Dannenberg and Peter Kott.
- p.127 Claes af Geijerstam (L) at the desk for ABBA's 1974 outdoors show in Skellefteå.
- p.128 Claes af Geijerstam today.
- p.129 ABBA at the Dick Cavett Show: L to R: Lasse Wellander (guitar, obscured), Björn Ulvaeus, Ola Brunkert (drums), Agnetha Fältskog, Mats Ronander (guitar), Annifrid Lyngstad, Rutger Gunnarsson (with Hagström bass), Tomas Ledin, Birgitta Wollgård and Liza Öhman (backup vocals), Benny Andersson.
- p.130 Larry Coryell (middle), with Ralphe Armstrong (L) and Darryl Sturemer (R), all cuddling their Swedes.
- p.131 A colourful UK ad for Hagström guitars, as endorsed by Larry Coryell.
- p.132 Georg Wadenius in a 1970 TV show with his band Made in Sweden.
- p.133 Georg Wadenius.
- p.134 One of the Hagström postcards issued by Swedish Mail.
- p.135 Hagström collector Arne Johansson (R) shows some of his goodies to guitarist Janne Schaffer.
- p.136 Albin Hagström, since 1991 a statue in the middle of the Älvdalen village. The pink house is where his company had its first office, the blue building was the final office site.
- p.137 Many artists still ask for the Hagström quality. Top to bottom: Sloan, Mudhoney, Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, Pehr Le Mans of the Swedish band Le Mans, Pat Smear (Germans, Nirvana) who even tried to buy the brand name.
- p.138 The Hagström museum is located in what once was part of the old factory.
- p.139 The Hagström stamp from 2004, showing Maria Andersson, front person of Sahara Hotnights with her Hagström Swede.

- p.140 A collection of Japanese Hagström prototypes that didn't make it.
- p.141 Karl Erik Hagström shows a Hagström guitar made in USA at the launch of the new Hagström line of guitars.
- p.142 The Cardigans; guitarist Peter Svensson (bottom, left) and bassist Magnus Sveningsson (bottom, right) are both Hagström enthusiasts.
- p.143 Producer Tore Johansson (bottom right) and his band The Gospel are another bunch of Hagström enthusiasts.
- p.144 Nick McCarthy (R) of Franz Ferdinand plays an old, red Hagström Deluxe guitar.