

Valborgsmässoafton – Valpurgis night

In Sweden we celebrate Valborgsmässoafton (vaal-borgs-maeso-afton) on April 30th. St. Valborg was the daughter of an English king that left home to become a nun in Germany around the 8th century. She was declared the saint of fertility, and in the old catholic church she was honored on May 1, but the festivities that tie into old pre-christian spring-fertility rites always started on the eve before. In old agricultural days, this was the time that the cattle would be sent to their summer grazing grounds, and to chase away predators people lit big bonfires and made lots of noise. This would also take care of any lingering evil sprits that were hanging around the farm.

These old traditions have nowadays mutated into a tradition of gathering around a big bonfire, lighting some firecrackers and singing traditional songs of spring (very loudly).

The local university students always make a big deal of it, gathering their glee clubs, and putting on a show in their traditional white student caps.

Old alumni break out their caps also, and join in. Everybody knows the songs, (mostly learned in school), that are always about the fading of winter and the coming delights of spring and summer. In the big cities, people gather in every part of town to put a fire together with the late winter prunings from trees and shrubs. Right now it coincides nicely with King Carl Gustafs birthday and is therefore a national flag day.

The next day has always been a traditional picnic day. Sunstarved Swedes will still go out with a basket of food and a blanket, even if it is freezing!

Any excuse to be outside is good. If the weather does not comply, oh well!

Spring is here, come hell or high water!

Of course May 1st is also the big day for the labour unions, to which most Swedes are attached, when they will march with their banners and gather to here their leaders speak.

A sure sign of spring has also, for many years, been school children selling “may flower pins” to raise funds for needy children.

The top selling child will get a prize from the queen. One of her favorite assignments.

The Swedes are really quite serious about their spring celebrations, as you can see, but then after such a long winter who can blame them?