National Nordic Museum

Music and Dance of Norway Lecture/Demo
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[background conversations]

Marianne: This is unusual and you should hear the background of this. Our performers tonight did not know that they were doing it until about a week ago. As you know, we have planned a lecture series in connection with the Norwegian folk art and one of our lecturers could not make it.

I was in a great quandary one Sunday, 10 days ago, when I suddenly saw Mary Mohler, Gina Boyd, and Thomas Schulberg in the van outside in the parking lot. I looked very worried and I said, "What can I do?" They thought for a while and then they said, "Well, we might have an idea." It's really thanks to Mary Mohler, Thomas Schulberg and Gina Boyd that they came up with this idea.

They got very busy and contacted their musicians and dancer friends. Here you have a fantastic program. It is going to be much better than the program that we had initially had.

[laughter]

Marianne: We are very, very grateful. Without any further ado, I want to say, "Thank you," to our performers who are on the stage and thank you to Larry Reinert who is going to be the MC. Let's give them a big applause.

[applause]

[music begins 2:25]

[music ends 2:52]

[applause]

Larry Reinert: On switch?

Marianne: Is it on?

Larry: I could yell. I don't know if other people can. [laughs]

Marianne: I guess they didn't have the technology.

Larry: I'll just go ahead and start here. We are Leikarringen and we just performed a song dance. As one of the traditions in Norwegian song and our music and dance, it's one of the oldest and the newest.

[background sounds only]

Larry: I think I can hear myself in the echo. [laughs] Song dances were a tradition that had died out in Norway many hundreds of years ago.

Around the beginning of this century, a lady by the name of Klara Semb, along with a friend, Hulda Garborg, as part of the growth nationalism in Norway, wanted to do something about making sure that whatever traditions in Norwegian music and dance there were at that time continued.

At some point, Klara saw a performance by Faroese Islanders of song dances, which as you saw us do are songs to which you dance. Like I said, "This was an old tradition." The Faroe Islands were, back in the Viking Age, a part of the Norwegian empire. For them, it was an unbroken tradition.

Klara decided that this was a good way to keep some of the old folk songs that were dying out because of the industrialization in Norway. There just weren't the opportunities to get together and sing the songs as there had been when Norway was much more of a rural community.

Klara decided, "One way to keep these songs going is to give people a reason to sing them and one way of doing that is to revive the dancing to go along with them." Her idea wasn't so much to reconstruct dances that had died out 600 years earlier, but just to revive the tradition.

In that sense, it's very much a living tradition because she encouraged that new dances be put to newly composed songs, of course, as long as they were in the Norwegian nationalistic idiom. That's my introduction to song dances. Now, a general welcome. [laughs]

Those of us here in some places around the audience here, we're going to touch on just a few of the many aspects of Norwegian music and dance as they relate to the traditions both in Norway and in this country. We are, obviously, a part of Norwegian tradition, simply because here we are Norwegians in some form. Some of us are real Norwegians, some of us are pretend Norwegians...

[laughter]

Larry: ...but we all think Norwegian. Here we are in this country, not only maintaining, in the sense of just doing music and dance as our grandparents did, but keeping it alive. There are in fact pieces of music and some dances that have died out in Norway that were rediscovered in this country and thereafter reintroduced into Norway.

I won't go through a big long introduction to exactly what we'll be doing. We'll have a number of people up here doing just little brief examples of the kinds of things that are done now. I'm going to start off with one of our well-known musicians here in the Seattle area. This is Bill Boyd. He's going to talk a little bit about the hardingfele tradition both in the music and the dance. Here is Bill.

[applause]

Bill Boyd: This is the hardingfele, an instrument of mine. This is often referred to in Norway as "the national instrument." I'm not sure whether there was some government law passed, but this is commonly referred to as Norway's national instrument. However, it is an important part of many traditions of Norway.

Countrywide, it's not the traditional dance music instrument in all of the areas of Norway. Principally, it's pretty much south of Nordfjord down the west coast of Norway in the valleys of Valdres, Hallingdal, Gudbrandsdalen, Telemark and the long river valley Setesdal that goes down in the south.

All these areas do have a strong and living tradition playing hardingfele as part of their traditional music and for their traditional dancing. Before I get into the hardingfele, I'd like to start actually not [inaudible 8:34] the song-dance era, but I have here a flute, a seljeflÃ¸yte. The reason I have this here is not because I know how to play it.

[laughter]

Bill: It's simply that I want to demonstrate pitches that you don't hear on a piano. You don't hear these in the Italian operas. You don't hear them in classical music.

[music begins 8:54]

[music ends 9:05]

Bill: These kinds of instruments were made by the people up in the hills. Say in the springtime when the willow bark was at the right point where you could hollow it out and make a seljeflÃ¸yte and use it for a couple of weeks before it went bad. Nowadays they make them out of plastic and then put this fake bark around the outside.

[laughter]

Bill: The reason I bring that up is that fiddle players likewise don't necessarily hear the pitches on account of they're not necessarily classically trained. They have in their heads older pitches, older scales.

Hardingfele is an example of an instrument that has been brought to quite a great level of accomplishment and expertise in the construction and design, but it does not come from the cities. It does not come from a violin shop in Italy or any great makers in Italy.

It's basically an instrument designed by, played by farmers in Norway. It's an example of people everywhere reaching great heights when they're inspired. I could talk a lot about more things about the fiddle. It has new strings that resonate. You have some differences between this and a standard violin.

It's lighter weight. It resonates at higher pitches, so you don't always tune it using an A. With our [inaudible 10:29] and ask him later, if you have any questions about playing beyond this.

What I will do next is bring on three or four dancers. Don Meyers, Kathi Ploeger. Then [inaudible 10:46] . What we're going to see is a demonstration of one of several forms of traditional dance that has strong connection to the hardingfele tradition in Norway.

This is a telespringar. It has a rhythm. It's a dance from Telemark. It's one of several dances in Norway that has particular rhythms and styles of keeping to the music. Telespringar.

[music begins 11:16]

[music ends 12:51]

[applause]

Larry: If I don't have my notes I know I'll forget something I wish I hadn't. There were other kinds of fiddles across Norway called vanlig fele or flatfele. We have imported a couple of guys from Norway to demonstrate a little bit about that to the other kinds of music. We have...Excuse me, I'm out of breath.

[laughter]

Larry: ... [inaudible 13:33] , if they'll come on here. We just spent a weekend with them.

[applause]

Larry: They're going to play a little and [inaudible 13:49] is going to talk a little bit about two kinds of dances that in some ways look like telespringar but are also quite different.

[music begins 14:02]

[music ends 16:59]

[applause]

Fiddler 1: We started with a wedding march, bruremarsj, which folk figure from Lom has composed. His name is Hans

W. Brimi. I suppose maybe he has been to the Seattle area, because I know he's been touring the US some years ago. Folk music has been used in many different occasions, in weddings, as this was, but mostly it has been used for the dance.

In the churches, especially, the fiddle hasn't been really accepted, but now it's more common to be used in the churches for both weddings and ceremonies. We'll continue with our kind of springar, springleik from Gudbrandsdalen. We're also lucky we have some people who is really interested to do our kinds of folk music and folk dances. We have brought with us some vocal Americans...

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: ...to show you a springleik.

[music begins 18:56]

[music ends 20:49]

[applause]

Fiddler 2: We were joined by Judy Patterson and Jerry Walsh.

[laughter]

[applause]

Fiddler 1: Thank you. I think that what Larry was telling you about the springars or springleiks, they're all from up to 1600 century, most of these dances. Now we'll continue with another sort of dance who mostly has been used for a male dance. This is called "halling."

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: We also have couples halling, parhalling, both from Gudbrandsdalen that's in the western part of Norway. Now we have...

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: ... [inaudible 22:10] to show us how to kick the hat.

[music begins 22:09]

[music ends 23:59]

[laughter]

[applause]

Fiddler 1: As you can see, George is in good shape.

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: I was asked to tell a little bit about halling. Why the name has to show up like this? I think you will probably know it by yourself...

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: ...so I don't have to explain that.

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: We have some few young ladies who also dance halling back in Norway now. In Norway, we have competitions in folk music and dance. Recently, I've seen a couple young ladies that's been dancing halling. The judges who judged the dance, they were very strictly with that they had to dance with their [inaudible 25:21] .

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: They had to do it properly. As you know, it's very hard to look at.

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: During the 1800 century, we got more integrated with music from Europe. We got more into the turning dance, or "gammaldans" we call it, different kinds of it. I recently was in the Midwest visiting some of my relatives together with I have some concerts around and was playing a springleik from [inaudible 26:20] . It goes like this.

[music begins 26:21]

[music ends 27:00]

[applause]

Fiddler 1: That was just an example. I met an old fiddler from Minnesota and he played this springleik just the same as I played it, but he it played it as a mazurka. The springar beat was gone when we came to the US.

I know that my mother's cousin, who lives in Fargo, she talked about when she was young they went to dances around North Dakota, dancing gammaldans and square dances together with that, but the springleik dance had disappeared.

[background conversations]

Fiddler 1: Maybe we have some more that we can play.

Larry: What Bill were playing and [inaudible 28:06] , the dances they were playing for us are called bygdedans, which means "village dance." Many areas in Norway had their own particular ways of doing dances that were quite different from each other.

Of course, if you grew up in an area, you did the dance that your grandparents did and your parents did in the local area. That's about all you did. I suppose if you went to a dance on a Saturday evening, you would just do telespringars all night, or telegangars, a very related dance you did with a slightly different kind of music.

Around the middle of the 19th century, other kinds of dance started coming in. These are now known as gammaldans, "old-fashioned dance." These include dances such as the waltz, schottische, or, in Norway, it's called "rhinelander," or "reinlender." Many different ways of spelling it, probably just as many ways of pronouncing it. [laughs]

Let's see, waltz, reinlender, polka, and probably some other things that I'm not thinking of. In a sense, you might not consider them traditional, but because they were adopted by the people and done along with the other dances that they had been doing previously, in fact, they overtook the other dances.

The springars and bygdedans, came pretty close to dying out by the end of the 19th century, having been overtaken by these gammaldans.

By now, the gammaldans had been done so much that they had a very legitimate claim to be called folk dance, which they indeed are because they're not done the same way as they would've been taught by the dancing masters in Austria, or Paris, or wherever they might have originally come from.

They were done as, let's say, "Interpreted by the local people." There are many waltzes, different ways of doing a waltz, many different ways of doing a polka, different ways of doing a reinlender found all over the country.

They're similar in a sense that if you came from different parts of Norway and you went to a kappleik or something like that where people from all over Norway were meeting and doing dances and different musicians were playing, you could do your own local variation of the waltz, or the reinlender, or whatever and you wouldn't be impeding anybody else's flow on the floor.

You may very well be doing something that looks quite different from what other people were doing. We're going to give some examples of these kinds of tunes. This is an experiment. We have not had a chance to rehearse here. We have in the notes here that we're going to have...You know what? I skipped something in the notes here.

[laughter]

Larry: We'll get back to the gammaldans. [laughs] There's another important influence in Norwegian folk music and dance and that was the church. We have, visiting here from Sweden, he's going to be here for several months, he's doing research here at the Gordon Tracie Library, who is an expert on music in Scandinavia in general.

There he is out there. [laughs] Tommy [inaudible 31:23] is going to come over here and give a little talk about the church influence on music.

[applause]

Tommy: Thank you. I brought it up with me to show you. This is an instrument that was used in church for church use. I'm going to talk a little bit about this. This instrument actually belongs to the museum. You can see it in the upstairs exhibition from Norway. We use it all over Scandinavia and Sweden, Denmark, and across Norway.

It was used as a tool actually, a tool to teach people how to best praise God. It's quite a simple instrument, sort of a cigar box, square, hollow, quite lovely to see, and only one string.

[music begins 32:21]

[music ends 32:23]

Tommy: Like that. It's got a fret board, but not with frets. You played it with a bow. If I could play it, I'd show you, but I haven't got a bow, so I won't show you.

[laughter]

Tommy: Maybe someone else does.

[laughter]

Tommy: I just wanted to show you what I'm talking about. This one string here, since it's just this one string, you can't tune it to a key or rather, you tune to a key, and then you play that key. If you want to change key, you just [inaudible 33:01] and change it.

[laughter]

Tommy: It's a fairly durable instrument actually, because this box is quite sturdy. You'd place it on the table in front of

you, like this. Saw the bow back and forth and move your finger along the frets.

Now, why would they use such an instrument exactly? It makes no beautiful music and it's [inaudible 33:27] . The church wanted this as a tool, as I mentioned, because the sound singing, the hymns in the churches had become, by that time, more and more elaborate.

The tunes were embroidered and worked out with garlands and embroidering, all that. The melody sort of disappeared among all this. Most importantly, the words disappeared too. The church wanted the words to be heard very, very clearly. They decreed that the new music in church must be just one note per word, per syllable, that is.

They set this in motion, this reform to clear up this horrid jungle of [inaudible 34:28] to sing. The melodies played on this one were quite, shall we say, basic, because all the notes had to be the same length, only at different heights on this fret.

[pause]

Tommy: I'm going to give an example of how it could sound before this instrument was actually employed. Now, I'm not Norwegian, as I said, so I had to take an example from Sweden. I hope you don't mind. I'm just going to show you the way things have changed, before and after.

I'm going to use an old hymn from Scandinavia. I think it's Danish to begin with, from the 16th century at least. This tune was written down at the turn of the century in Dalarna. It's an old medieval tune in the oldest [inaudible 35:37] from the 1500s or something. It goes a bit like this.

[music begins 35:39]

[music ends 36:29]

[applause]

Tommy: Now after this reform thing, this song melody went something like this.

[music begins 36:47]

[music ends 36:57]

Tommy: More just boom, boom, boom, like walking.

[laughter]

Tommy: All of this elaborate stuff were weeded out and it survived in a few places up till the beginning of the 20th century. It has just been salvaged, luckily for us because they're very pretty melodies. They could be different melodies, as well. The church, of course, influenced all sorts of things having to do with music because the church didn't approve of all this dancing, singing and fun.

[laughter]

Tommy: That was actually one [inaudible 37:39] forcing many people from Scandinavia going to America instead because it was quite a freer church here in America. They founded several new churches both in Scandinavia and in Denmark which has influenced the music in the church.

The vocal music, of course, isn't just in church. They have several different kinds of vocal music in Norway, which is not religious. They sing songs for dancing to. They sing songs just for listening. I'm going to finish my part of this with singing a short [inaudible 38:21] , a short stev. It's a four-liner, only four lines. I'm going to sing it. It goes like this.

[music begins 38:33]

[music ends 38:57]

[applause]

Larry: We have another singer here, Beth KollÃ©. She's going to give further examples of, I need to be careful how I say this, un-churched music.

[laughter]

Larry: After all, you could destroy the instruments that music was played with but you couldn't destroy the singers or the songs. Here's Beth KollÃ©.

[applause]

Beth KollÃ©: Thank you very much.

[background sounds]

Beth: Do you like it?

[laughter]

Beth: There's lots of different kinds of styles of singing that don't directly have much to do with the church. I found out something really interesting when I was looking up things in my book for this evening. I think I had, what, a day? [laughs] I found out about this yesterday.

I was trying to find totally secular music and what I found was that the lullabies, mother to child, those were secular. They had nothing in them. Some of them had Jesus in there, "Jesus protect the child," but there were lot of them that didn't.

Some of the stev, especially the ones where they're "reparteeing" back and forth, or cutting each other down in [inaudible 40:29] particularly they have all these writing stev, which are just insults back and forth. Lots of fun to listen to.

Then I found the old ballads that mostly stem from the medieval that if they don't mention the church or Christianity or Jesus, they mention it on the sly in the way that they present the other-worldly creatures as being evil, and that the hero as being the hero of strong character who's fighting for good versus evil.

You get a strong Christian message even though they don't really come right out and say it. Some of them would come right to the very end of the song and then mention an angel.

[laughter]

Beth: You can see this influence is starting to really push its way into the secular music itself, but nevertheless there remain some really beautiful totally secular pieces.

[background conversation]

[laughter]

Beth: This one is a [inaudible 41:30] it's called " [inaudible 41:31." It's like a warning call. Someone is calling using

their head voice to project out over the farm and warning of a bear that's coming, but they can't say, "Bear," because if you say, "Bear," it attracts the bear to you. You say, "12-man strong," because a bear was that strong. That's what this one's about.

[music begins 41:57]

[music ends 42:33]

[applause]

Beth: The other-world figures in the secular music, and you can see why. That was the folk belief before Christianity hit the countries of Scandinavia. People thought in terms of uncontrolled nature. They couldn't understand how nature had all these moods and they really had no control over it.

They personified it. They'd make personalities out of the things that they saw around them. Especially, like the mountains had trolls living in them, and the trolls developed into wonderful characters that had all these features that people could predict, "Maybe it's like this," "Maybe we can understand the forces of nature by putting characters to it."

This one that I'd like to sing is called " [inaudible 43:24] ." It comes up in many countries in the north. This particular one is from right around Telemark. It's the story of [inaudible 43:34], who's very strong, brave, and honorable. He is volunteered by his king to go and save the king's daughter who was taken by the trolls into Trollboken.

Trollboken, it turns out, it's an actual place in the mind of the Norse back then. It was the upper side Norway. They thought that land went like this, up Norway and down through Iceland and then up through Greenland and down. They didn't realize there was just an ocean up there.

That was Trollboken. They didn't know what was up there, but the sun didn't shine, they knew that. He's going to go save this young daughter of the king.

[music begins 44:18]

[music ends 45:40]

Beth: About 50 more verses than that.

[applause]

Larry: I skipped over a little bit of our program here. I want to get back to it. [inaudible 45:59] has a psalm tune, a church tune. Just to disprove, or to get an exception to the rules that church music was always boring.

[laughter]

[music begins 46:13]

[music ends 47:34]

[applause]

Larry: Now, we're going to move up into more modern days. As I said a few minutes ago about gammaldans music, we're just going to show you a brief example of what it might look like in a dance hall or bar or wherever a dance might be held in the communities today, or even a hundred years ago.

[inaudible 48:10] are going to play a little bit of several tunes and they've invited several couples to come up here. They're going to tell us what kind of tune they're going to play and you can hear the music and see what was done to

that kind of music. Can we get a few couples up here?

[background sounds only]

Fiddler 1: The couples get up on stage. I know there's a few or maybe some of you here starting to play the [inaudible 48:49] . The little one told me we should let them show here with someone with the company. It's called " [inaudible 49:01]." Similarly the fiddle was known as the "devil's instrument." In our area, they say that the harp is the instrument that sounds the longest way to heaven.

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: [inaudible 49:27] . We start with a waltz as we use when we play for dance in Gudbrandsdalen. We start with a waltz. We say, "It's today's choice." This waltz we have been learned by [inaudible 49:49] who moved to the Midwest and moved back and brought with it in this [inaudible 50:02] who called the waltz, "American Waltz."

[laughter]

[music begins 50:09]

[music ends 51:24]

[applause]

Fiddler 1: Often when the dance were over, the couple could move around, go around on the floor waiting for the next dance. Slow. Often, could the ladies have to go around for themselves because the men or their husbands were outside of the building.

[laughter]

Fiddler 1: The next dance is a reinlender.

[music begins 52:10]

[music ends 53:03]

[applause]

Fiddler 1: The next dance would then be a mazurka. Somebody who also when they played mazurka, it's so related to the pols they announce in the [inaudible 53:30] that they also could dance pols to mazurka. The pols is the springar of the eastern part Norway.

[music begins 53:38]

[music ends 54:24]

[applause]

Fiddler 1: The next [inaudible 54:39] or [inaudible 54:41] we also say.

[music begins 54:49]

[music ends 56:00]

[applause]

Larry: The last kind of dance we're going to talk about briefly is turdans. In Norway, there are three general categories of dance, bygdedans, the village dances, songdans, song dances, and turdans. Klara Semb collected turdanses also, but she had a little problem with them. The question was, "Are they Norwegian?"

The reason for the question is because they didn't grow up in Norway. They were introduced by dancing teachers, by the people in [inaudible56:42] , the main farm in the area, who may have gone off on a continental tour and brought back these dances.

Klara finally decided that, yes, they really are Norwegian because they had been around long enough that they had been adopted and adapted by the local folk, and done in their own ways. In the sense of a living tradition, they were very much Norwegian because they had been regionalized.

To where you could often see [laughs] dance researchers nowadays, can recognize the same original dance done in different ways in Norway. Each region may have taken one dance or two dances and made it quite different from the same dances found the next valley over, or a couple of hundred miles away.

She had no trouble at all eventually deciding that, yes, you should do research on these because these, after all, are really Norwegian dances. They're not familiar to people on the Continent anymore, even though that's where they, originally, had come. These are dances that are done by groups of people who won't know what's coming up.

Like the polonaises and the big ballroom dances that you've all seen in the movies where everybody seems to be walking back and forth and chatting with their neighbor or their partner. Those were just formalized rituals. That's what turdanses are, but taken down to the folk level. We're going to end up...I'd like to end up here, I think, yes.

[laughter]

Larry: We're going to do a turdans, which is a polka variation. Polka was one of the kinds of music that came from the Continent. The last two that [inaudible 58:33] played was a polka, and you saw several different ways of doing it there. Those are by individual couples. This is a formalized dance where, like I said, everybody knows what's coming up. This is [laughs] turdans now.

[music begins 58:49]

[music ends 59:48]

[applause]

Larry: That was your brief introduction and overview to Norwegian music and dance and its heritage. I want to just remind you that we here in America are doing very much the same things as is being done in Norway, in the sense that we're keeping these dances and these tunes going. They are indeed a living tradition. We're not a museum piece.

[laughter]

Larry: There are efforts, of course, to make sure that some of the dances, or many of the dances, like the springars, gammaldans, etc., are done as authentically as possible. Even those dances, there was some latitude for freedom, of individual expression, because that was how they were originally done. We're not soldiers all doing exactly the same dance in exactly the same way.

I'll finish off by, I wanted to thank Marianne for helping us organize this event. I'm particularly glad, because of being Norwegian myself [laughs] because I'm very interested in this sort of stuff. I want to encourage as many people as possible to take an interest in it, and even participate in it if you like.

There's lots of opportunities for Scandinavian dancing in general, and Norwegian dancing in particular, also.

[background conversation]

Larry: If you want to learn more about it, we'll both probably be hanging around here for a little while longer. If you have any questions of any of us, ask about what we're doing, what you saw here today. I want to thank you all for coming. Thank you.

[applause]

Larry: Sorry, I didn't end on the hour.

[laughter]

[silence]