

TSDL429

**RINGING STRINGS
FIDDLE MUSIC OF
NORWAY - SHETLAND**

Hauk Buen, Knut Buen,
Tom Anderson, Vidar Lande



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COMMENTARY BY L Y DALIOT

The selections on this record reflect a certain affinity between Norwegian and Shetland musical traditions: a kind of musical bridge over the North Sea. These are conventional recordings, without gimmicks, intended to deepen the appreciation of this unique fiddle music from Northern Europe. This fiddling style is rich in tone-colours, original sounds and lively rhythms. Listeners with a good will and a sense of exploration will come across many fascinating finds.

Some recordings appear partly as the result of a particularly happy musical collaboration between Tom Anderson, the great vigorous master of Shetland fiddle music, and the distinguished champions of the Harding fiddle, Hauk and Knut Buen, at the Edinburgh and Shetland Folk Festivals (1981-82), where they were on sparkling form. Tom received as a gift from the Buen family a very fine Harding fiddle, 'Viking-fela' (on which he plays, with Hauk and Knut, in the wedding march on Track 2). 'With these two brothers from Telemark,' Tom says, 'I have a true affinity. This has been my greatest dream, which has come true now. All my life - well, for the last 40 years - I have wanted to try this.'

Other recordings represent the original, lively older music of the Setesdal valley in southern Norway, masterfully played by the outstanding young fiddler and scholar Vidar Lande from the community of Bygland, home of many fine fiddlers. His playing evokes a mood of enchantment. The exciting traditional music of Setesdal is one of the oldest and most sophisticated in Scandinavia. The district was relatively unexplored until this century: an enclosed community that preserved its local folk culture. The Harding fiddle came there only towards the end of the 19th century; previously the ordinary fiddle had been very common. Some Norse roots of Shetland fiddle music - often described as the liveliest in Britain - can be heard in the almost hypnotic sounds of the Harding fiddle music of Setesdal. Genuine folk music, with its combination of simplicity and complexity, still flourishes on both sides of the North Sea - even in what are called highly modern industrial societies with prosperous life-styles. From that point of view, Norway and Shetland might be said to be super-powers in the world of traditional music.

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PERSONAL RECOLLECTION

If Norway were to show the world a single original example of folk art, expressing a true Norwegianness, the best choice would be the Harding fiddle and its *slatter*, or tunes. (These tunes include folk couple-dances the *springar* and *gangar* - 'walking dance', the solo dance *halling* for men, bridal marches and listening tunes.) This decorated type of fiddle, with its four or five sympathetic strings, was made, in its earliest form, in Hardanger Fjord, south of Bergen, about 300 years ago. It has been played ever since in the Western, Southern and Central regions of Norway. It is one of the most splendid folk instruments in the world; certainly much more than a mere tourist attraction.

The folk music of the Harding fiddle is often almost painfully beautiful. It becomes easier to appreciate the oftener it is heard. It requires its listener not to change his or her outlook, but rather to adopt a more flexible taste. The music consists of 'inner voices', movable drones, sound-colourings and daring harmonies born out of the polyphonies of various tunings. In such characteristics lies its wild beauty.

At first it may sound unfamiliar - but, as one old Telemark fiddler, a poet and musician, has observed:

'Yes, to be sure it is harsh-toned. But if it comes like that, what can one do? It is the same with some folk singing. This is a natural expression of Norwegian temperament, though there are many in Norway who know nothing of it. The aim of our fiddling was, and is, to brighten the miserable circumstances of daily existence. It gives people joy. With *slatter* it should always be fun. Inspiring performance is what counts, not mechanical perfection. You have to create a strong tradition, and then preserve it.' The Harding fiddle tradition will continue to grow as long as Norwegians love this music and feel a desire to express themselves in it.

NATIONAL INSTRUMENT

The main difference between the Harding fiddle and the European violin is that it has resonating strings (not touched by the player) below the fingerboard. The neck and fingerboard are short, as in some 17th-century violins. The bridge and fingerboard are flat, an original Norwegian characteristic. There is also, traditionally, rich ornamentation. The most common tuning is A d a e , with the five sympathetic strings tuned B d e f sharp a. Many other tunings are used, mainly in Setesdal.

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Information about the origin of the Harding fiddle is scanty and unreliable. Most scholars believe that it was developed from the ordinary violin and that the idea of sympathetic strings came from the East, by way of Scotland, to Western Norway. The instrument then became so popular in some regions of Norway that it has driven some other folk instruments virtually into obscurity. The quality of each instrument depends, naturally, upon its maker's skill and sensitivity. (All the fiddles heard on this record were made in Telemark.) The timbre is very typical, and may perhaps remind one of the keyed fiddle (*Nyckelharpa*) of Sweden, or of the hurdy-gurdy.

The Harding fiddle demands a great deal of skill and experience to do it justice. It is by nature a solo instrument, and sounds best on its own. Commonly, it was used in the past as an instrument for dance music, but today both the Harding fiddle and the Shetland fiddle are coming to be played more for the listener than the dancer.

No written music or system of notation can give an accurate idea of a Harding fiddle piece, and most Norwegian fiddlers in fact do not read music. But even those who can read music pick up their tunes by ear and learn from each other in that way. The *slatter* music is essentially a rural folk art, independent of

conventional classical music and popular music.

THE SHETLAND CONNECTION

Shetland is almost as close to Western Norway as it is to Scotland, and a mere 500 years ago it was part of the kingdom of Norway. Shetlanders are very proud of their Viking ancestry and Norse heritage, and that legacy, still fresh in their minds and inspiring their imaginations, is reflected in many aspects of local life. Reminders of a Scandinavian past may be seen and heard in place-names, in the local dialect, in the great January fire festival of Up-Helly-Aa.

Since the 18th century the violin has been the favourite instrument in Shetland, and it is well loved to this day. At one time the music of Shetland, no less than the entire culture of the region, would have been almost wholly Scandinavian. The old Shetland fiddling style owes something to Harding fiddle music - probably more than to Scots or Irish fiddling, though there are clear similarities with the latter. The playing of two or more strings at one time, with the open strings ringing, and the bowing technique of one note down and three up, lends the music a special sound. Shetland fiddle music may be divided broadly into dances, listening tunes and bridal marches. These wedding marches have counter-parts in Norway and are similar in form and

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character as well as function. According to Tom Anderson, 'You can play Shetland tunes on our violins and play the Harding fiddle along with them and they are so close together, it's amazing. In such combinations the ordinary fiddle and the melody strings of the Harding fiddle have to be tuned the same.' (Examples may be heard on tracks 6 and 14)

SOUNDS AND COLOURS

Tom Anderson said recently: 'Well, every folk music, I suppose, has its own environment. I see colours in our music and I see colours in the Harding fiddle music. Most beautiful colours. I think it's there because of all these mighty fjords and valleys, rocky mountains, waterfalls, springtime blossoms, and sun that refuses to turn in till the early hours....

1) *HAUGELATTEN* - many *slatter* are associated with legends. This dance-tune transports us instantly into fairyland. The fiddler Brynjev Olson had lost his bull. After searching in the mountain for several days he fell asleep and dreamed that a beautiful maiden appeared to him and told him that on his return home to his wife and child he should play this sparkling tune, whereupon he would find the bull far away 'where the fairy hills disappear'.

2) *SELJORD BRIDAL MARCH* is a common and very well-loved tune that originated in Seljord with the fiddler Hans Flatland. It is sometimes called the Telemark Wedding March. According to tradition the fiddler (or fiddlers) leads the wedding procession to the church and to the bride's home. Such festive and solemn pieces are also played in Shetland and Sweden. Hauk and Knut Buen play together with Tom Anderson on Harding fiddles.

3) *GRAVBAKKEN (The Grave Yard)* is a highly original piece, known in various versions in Bygland and Rysstad in the heart of the Setesdal district. It is a mysterious tune, full of witchcraft and magic. The melody strings are tuned in normal violin fashion. Vidar Lande's adaptation is based on the playing of fiddlers Eivind Aakhus and Tor O Sandnes.

4) *FILLE-VERN* - this happy *setesdalgangar* (walking dance) is believed to be named after a young fiddler, Vern Auvorsson, who probably used to walk around in ragged clothes and thus acquired the nickname of Fille (Ragged) Vern.

5) *SORDALEN* - this *slatt* (a typical *gangar*) is the first piece that Vidar Lange learned as a boy from his uncle Gunnar Lande. It is connected with a historic event, a crime at Sordalen (a farm in Setesdal). Sigurd

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Eivindsson had seduced a girl from Austad farmstead. One evening, during a dance feast at Sordal, Sigurd lured the girl - who was by now with child - out into a barn, where he killed her. For this he was executed at Sordalen.

6) *MAGGIE O'HAM* is a lively dance-tune, one of the oldest and best-known in Shetland folk music. This is a combined performance by Harding fiddle (Knut Buen) and Shetland fiddles, played by Tom Anderson with two of his young pupils. Catriona MacDonald and Debbie Scott are members of 'Shetland's Young Heritage', a society formed to preserve and perform Shetland tunes rooted in old Norse melodies. The ordinary fiddles are tuned AEAE, a tuning employed by older Shetland players and quite common today in Harding fiddle music.

7) *PRESTEGANGAREN (The Parson's Dance)* is one of the oldest *gangar* tunes from Telemark, with a rich two-part character. Hauk Buen learned it from his father Anders Buen at their farmhouse in Jondalen. This *slatt* is played in many versions in Telemark; the one recorded here is after Olav Evju.

8) *FYKERUDEN* - a dance-tune (*springar*) dedicated to Lars Fykerud, one of the greatest and most gifted fiddlers who ever lived. He was born in Sauherad,

Telemark, and travelled to America for concert tours. Fykerud composed many pieces for Harding fiddle which are still much loved and performed today.

9) *MARKENSMANDAGEN* - one of Fykerud's best-known pieces (*springar*), which other fiddlers probably learned from him when they were together at the Kongsberg market. Playing in local marketplaces was a source of income, sometimes considerable income, for fiddlers. But, more importantly, it was an opportunity for folk musicians from different districts to meet and exchange *slatter* and 'to have much fun together', as Fykerud used to say. In East Norway the joyful Kongsberg market in Buskerud was the best meeting-place for fiddlers from Telemark, Numedal and Valdres.

10) *KNUT LURASEN I* - Actually the original name of this tune (a *gangar* from Telemark) is *Hjerki Haukeland*. It belongs to the tradition surrounding Knut Luras, 'grandfather of all fiddlers', who was born into a family, from Tinn, of many outstanding fiddlers and rose-painters. Knut Luras himself was a double master, of Harding fiddle and rose-painting. His brother Øystein was engaged to a maid from Bergen, Hjerki Haukeland, who liked rose-decorations and dancing. At the marriage entertainment Knut Luras played a new dance-tune which his brother had

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composed for the occasion, and the newly-married couple danced it with great spirit. The composer and conductor Johan Halvorsen wrote it dovim from Knut Dahle, who learned it from Haavard Gibøen, who heard it from Knut Luras. All these are famous names in Norwegian music.

11) *MARGIT HJUKSE* - a listening tune by Lars Fykerud. The melody strings are tuned G c a e. The tune was inspired by the mighty mountain ballad of the same name, from Telemark, which tells of a girl who is spirited away from her home in the valley by a mountain king, and taken to live in a mountain. The expressive pizzicato represents the ringing of church bells.

12) *SIRI RUKAREN* - a piece with a very special mood and tone colour. The story behind it is rather sad. The fiddler Ola Rukaren was sitting on a bridge and playing music, one midsummer night after a jolly feast on the farm. Suddenly his wife Siri came up and ordered him to go home. Ola became angry, stopped playing, jumped down from the bridge and broke his wife's back, shouting 'Return home to sleep, Siri Rukaren!' Afterwards he composed this lovely dance-tune and dedicated it to his devoted wife.

13) *BOKKOEN* - a *slatt* (*springar*) named after the

fiddler Øystein Bokko from Tinn. This piece, with its characteristic two-part playing, became best known through the great fiddlers Torkell Haugerud and Johannes Dahle. Hauk Buen learned it from his old friend and colleague, the distinguished fiddler Olav Løndal from Tuddal.

14) *UNST BRIDAL MARCH/DA BRIDE'S A BOANNIE TING* - The two wedding melodies from the island of Unst (collected by Patrick Shuldham Shaw) are here performed by the rare combination of Harding fiddle and Shetland violin with the sound of 'ringing strings'. The first tune was used to lead the wedding procession, the second to welcome the bride into the house. (The same pieces may be heard on Topic album, *The Silver Bow*, played by four Shetland fiddlers.)

15) *HOMSLIEN* is one of the finest so-called *tusseslatter* (goblins' tunes) from the tradition of Bygland, with a special tuning, B e a e. The fiddler Tallak Haslebakken had a wife called Kristi. One Sunday morning she heard in her dreams the goblins playing near the summer dairy in the mountains. When she hummed it to her husband he played the tune on his Harding fiddle. Kristi was from the farm Homsli, hence the tune's name. The rhythm is that of a *gangar*.

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16) *SKRUBBEN* in the local dialect means wolf. Vidar Lande learned this walking dance from neighbouring fiddlers at his home-place. Like most *setesdalslatter* it is a *gangar*.

17) *NORAFJELLS* is one of the most exciting and dramatic Harding fiddle pieces, a tune of hypnotic intensity that evokes a trance-like magic. There is a blaze of splendour and awe in what has been called the 'hottest of all loose-string *slatts*'. The tuning is called *Gorrolaus* (very loose): the bass string is lowered from A to F. This F d a e tuning is frequently used in Setesdal. It is not known why the *slatt* was given the name of *North of the Mountains*, or who made it first. One old fiddler is reported to have said: 'That devil of a *slatt*! Enough to make me jump out of my grave!' The piece is played in many versions in Setesdal and Telemark; Vidar Lande's is his own.

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A SINAR (OSLO) PRODUCTION

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Hauk Buen



Knut Buen



Vidar Lande

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Ringin'
Strings
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Knut Buen, Tom Anderson, Hauk Buen



Hauk Buen, Tom Anderson

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