

**EUROPEAN ROOTS
STRINGS OF THE DEVIL
Norway's Hardanger Fiddle**

10:00:00: **European Roots Titles**
10:00:08: NRK Logo (optional)
10:00:28: TITLE:

**STRINGS OF THE DEVIL
Norway's Hardanger Fiddle**

10:00:32:
(Hallvard T. Bjørgum)
This instrument is a medium.
It's a damn good medium!
It sure is!

10:00:43
(Sigrid Moldestad)
When the fiddle and I are on friendly terms,
it's worth all the tedious days of rehearsing.

10:00:55
Sigvald Rørlien
It's fascinating - a unique piece of handicraft.

10:01:04
(Hauk Buen)
It's almost become an obsession.
Every day I have to play a little, adjust it, and make sure the fiddle is okay.

10:01:15
(Annbjørg Lien)
It's small, fragile and weak, but has survived everything.
The relationship becomes so close that you forget you're actually playing the Hardanger fiddle.

10:01:39 **COMMENTARY 1**
The Hardanger fiddle is Norway's special violin. It's often a work of art in its own right with inlaid mother of pearl and intricate engravings. Like all violins it has four melody strings, but what makes it distinctive is a second set of strings which ring out in sympathy when the fiddle is played.

10:02:02 **In the old days, the Hardanger fiddle was blamed for immorality and wantonness. It was called the instrument of the Devil because superstition had it that you could only become a really great fiddler if you gave up your soul. (02.14)**

10:02:15
Haven't you heard that one?

10:02:22 **COMMENTARY 2**
The magical qualities of the instrument mean that Hardanger fiddlers can play a brandy glass across a table, or fiddle so demonically that the Devil himself turns up to dance with the prettiest girl. (02.34)

10:02:39
Great!
Yeah!

10:02:47 **COMMENTARY 3**
For generations, the music was part of a male-dominated, rural culture. But this has changed. An increasing number of women have taken up the Handanger fiddle. The two women who make up Spindel grew up in the countryside within the tradition, but now work as professional folk musicians in Bergen. Spindel bring a new glamour to the music and are one of Norway's most vibrant contemporary groups. (03.12)

10:04:16 Caption: **SIGRID MOLDESTAD**

We're always wondering what it was like in the old days. Since we've had the music passed down to us directly, in an unbroken chain, we know a bit about what it sounded like in the past. To go on stage and play this music, and experience its great power is really amazing. (04.40)

10:04:45 Caption:

LIV MERETE KROKEN

I come from a fiddler's family. Both my father and my brother are musicians, and from my childhood on I was taken to music contests and gatherings. To everything connected with folk music. (05.04)

10:05:31 **COMMENTARY 4**

The Buen farm is situated in the mountains of south Norway. It's where the fiddlers of the Buen family have always lived. They were first recorded on film in the 1920s.

10:05:48 **Today, Hauk Buen, aged 70, is one of the top fiddlers in Norway. Recently he received the Royal Order of Merit in Gold for his services to Norwegian folk music. He's both a fiddle player and a fiddle maker. The perfect combination.** (06.05)

10:06:06 Caption:

HAUK BUEN

My principle is to tune the plates to each other, so that they vibrate in unison. The best tool for this is your ear. You have to hear absolutely perfectly. I use these little planes to adjust them. Then I listen again.

(06.41) I have tuning forks made out of wooden splinters that I compare them with. When the plates have been tuned, and you start playing the fiddle, these plates vibrate together. Just like the strings work together when they're correctly tuned. If the plates are not tuned in the right proportion to each other, there will be false tones appearing. When you listen to the sound, it says: whoo-hoo-hoo! The plates don't sing together. I call it a "fiddle war." The plates don't go well together, and kill the intensity of the sound. (07.35)

10:07:48 **COMMENTARY 5**

The shimmering sound of the Hardanger fiddle comes from its sympathetic strings. The player only bows the four melody strings and their vibrations cause the four or five strings which run beneath them to resonate in sympathy.

The art is to play in such a way that sets them ringing. That's the Hardanger magic. (08.10)

10:09:10

If you manage that one, you can have the whole bottle!

10:09:15

Try that one out, if you dare!

10:10:06 **COMMENTARY 6**

The Historical Museum at the University of Bergen houses some of the treasures of Hardanger music. It's a place of pilgrimage for all Hardanger fiddle players. The instrument takes its name from the Hardanger Fjord region of Western Norway which is where the oldest instruments came from. Most of them date from the 18th century, but the oldest-known instrument dates from 1651. It was built by Ole Jonson Jaastad and popularly known as the 'Jaastad Fiddle'. (10.32)

10:10:32

(Sigrid Moldestad/Liv Merete Kroken)

There it is!

The Jaastad fiddle!

-How small it is.

-Yes. Incredible.

-It's got only two sympathetic strings.

-I feel humble here.

From 1651.

The oldest Hardanger fiddle in the world.

10:11:04 Caption:

VIDAR LANDE

Fiddler and Professor of Traditional Art

The fiddle from 1651 is not particularly beautiful. But the appearance doesn't matter that much. It's got just two sympathetic strings. The stringing is much more simple. The sympathetic strings are not so important. Two sympathetic strings won't have much of an effect. It's much smaller, and built in a different style to a regular violin. The question is whether it developed from the violin, or is the product of a distinct Norwegian development. I believe both theories are correct. Medieval instruments have had an influence and the violin as well. It's a combination.

10:11:36

Sigrid/Liv Merete

- It has changed quite a bit.
- It was a little smaller back then.

10:11:40 COMMENTARY 7

The Jaastad fiddle has been restored to playing condition and, like a Baroque violin for example, sounds softer and more mellow than later instruments. (11.50)

10:12:20 COMMENTARY 8

Scientific research into the Hardanger fiddle only started a decade ago with an Arts Council of Norway-funded project. Instrument maker Sigvald Rørlien has been involved since the beginning. The project has excited popular interest and people bring instruments and instrument cases to his workshop in Voss for examination. (12.40)

10:12:50

Jostein Meland/Sigvald Rørlien

- This is the nice old box I was talking about.
- It looks really interesting.

I'll turn it around, so that you can see it from this side.

It's the era of the Black Death. 1512!

The oldest fiddle box we know about.

Jostein Meland

This was a fiddle box, that's for sure. It's easy to see. There's an old wreck inside. It was made and used as a fiddle box by one of the older fiddlers in our village.

Sigvald Rørlien

It looks like the fiddles have grown in size as time has passed. This one has been expanded.

Jostein Meland

That's typical for old boxes. They dug it out here a little, to provide more space. And here they have lengthened it a bit, as the fiddle became a little longer.

10:13:46

Caption at 13.52

SIGVALD RØRLIEN Fiddle Maker

I examined the Jaastad fiddle during the Hardanger Fiddle Project. It's incredibly well made. They must have had excellent tools. We measured the back under a micrometer. It was like pulling a sheet of paper through. The needle didn't stir at all. It's very precise work.

So they had tools, and they knew how to use them. Back in 1651! It's fantastic. It's a good fiddle, with a powerful sound when you play it.

Fiddlemaker Anders Åsen once said that old fiddles had a "cuckoo sound." "Look at the cuckoo," he said. "It hasn't got a very big beak. But it sure is loud." He's right, it doesn't take much to make a lot of sound.

The old folks often talked about the "cuckoo sound" of the old fiddles.

We are lacking fiddles from the time of the Jaastad fiddle and fiddles made by Isak Botnen's which are reliably dated to the 1750s. So there's a dark hole of around 100 years that we would like to fill.

10:15:18 COMMENTARY 9

In many countries, the relationship between folk music and the church has been turbulent. And that's the case with the Hardanger fiddle. While regular violins could be played in church, the Hardanger fiddle was forbidden. The instrument was often blamed for the wild goings on at wedding parties – and there was always that suspicion of demonic influences.

10:15:43

One devilish story tells of a young woman called Fanteladda, who's approached by a stranger at a dance. Before long, the stranger has driven both the fiddler and the girl into a frenzy. The

girl falls down dead onto the floor, and in the chaos, the stranger escapes. As he runs off, somebody catches a glimpse of his cloven hoof – proof that the Devil himself has been around. (16.10)

10:16:13 **Over the years the objections of the church eroded, but it wasn't until the end of the 1950s that churches opened their doors to the Hardanger fiddle. (16.21)**

10:16:23

Vidar Lande

Around 1820, the Church started to isolate itself from folk culture. It carried out a purge and playing music in church was no longer accepted. Folk music met with strong hostility during a puritanical period in the 1800s.

10:16:35 Caption at 16.40

ANNBJØRG LIEN

Annbjørg Lien

It was probably partly because of ignorance. Fear of something one doesn't understand. It goes back to old fairytales and legends. And the power of folk music, the accompanying trance, and the role of the fiddler.

10:17:20 COMMENTARY 10

Annbjørg Lien was an infant prodigy on the Hardanger fiddle. She made her debut in 1989 with a controversial CD of traditional tunes with jazz musicians. Today she is still one of the leading innovators on the instrument. (17.36)

10:17:37

Annbjørg Lien

Many times I have not been allowed to bring my instrument into the church, quite independently of the repertoire. It's not like I've not been allowed to play "The Devil's Tune" but that a hymn would be fine. Even if I was only going to play religious tunes, they said no.

10:18:02 Caption

HALLVARD T. BJØRGUM

Hallvard T. Bjørgum

The Church felt that its spiritual hegemony was threatened, because the music was full of spiritual power.

10:18:14

Hauk Buen

I remember very well when it was forbidden. Back in the old days, players only got as far as the wall surrounding the church. They had to leave the fiddle on the wall if they wanted to enter the church. They were not allowed to bring it inside.

10:21:50 COMMENTARY 11

The 19th century violinist Ole Bull from Bergen made an important link between rural music and the more refined classical scene in the towns. He was hugely inspired by the Hardanger fiddle and started collaborating with the fiddler Myllarguten. They gave many concerts together in the mid-19th century. One newspaper said that Myllarguten was "a revelation from the world of the mountains," while others claimed, of course, he'd learnt to play from the Devil, in exchange for one of his fingers. The two musicians gave concerts in Oslo, Copenhagen and Stockholm. Myllarguten left behind several fiddles and a beautiful fiddle case from 1856, big enough for three of his instruments.

00:22.51 **Today, Ole Bull's home at Lysøen near Bergen is a major tourist attraction, and the Spindel girls have come to play in the recital room. (23.01)**

10.23.04

Guide (in English)

Today, exclusively for you we have here some musicians and they're going to play a tune for you on the traditional Hardanger fiddle.

10:23:19 **COMMENTARY 12**

Hardanger fiddlers like to show off and do tricks. They certainly didn't miss their chance to perform on a world stage at the Winter Olympics in 1994. (23.32)

10.23.45:

(Chat in English with tour group)

- These four as a normal violin and then the five understrings are the resonance strings.

10.23.58

- Is it like a Stradivarius, you have a special person who makes them?

10:24.02

- You know bluegrass? It has that sound. A Tennessee sound.

10:24:40 **COMMENTARY 13**

In the Setesdal valley in southern Norway is the museum at Sylvartun. It houses the largest collection of Hardanger fiddles in the country, collected by Hallvard T. Bjørgum. Many are in playable condition including one which Myllarguten is said to have played himself. Hallvard is slowly discovering its secrets. (25.00)

10:25:12

Hallvard T. Bjørgum

Many people thought that this fiddle couldn't be played. Even the best fiddlers in the country in the early 1900s thought so. But I think the problem was that they just didn't dare to tune it right. They didn't dare to tune it up to C# or D, in which it is played these days. But then we heard the stories of Myllarguten; that he adjusted the strings to a high position and used his bow with a lot of force.

He used a lot of bow and tuned the strings high. This made the music go straight through the walls. They wrote that "the tones were distilled, and pure as silver".

10:26:24 **COMMENTARY 14**

Around 1900, Knut Dahle, a fiddler from Telemark, contacted the composer Edvard Grieg. He was worried that his aural traditions would die with him, and hoped the composer could save the tunes he'd learnt from his family and great masters like Myllarguten by writing them down. Grieg worked these tunes into his 'Norwegian Peasant Dances' Opus 72. One of them, Myllargutun's Bridal March is played on Greig's own Steinway at his house at Trollhaugen outside Bergen. (26.57)

10:28:41

Caption

GEIR BOTNEN

Pianist

That was Myllarguten's Bridal March, which Grieg arranged in such a wonderful way. He took it from the Hardanger Fiddle, and adapted it to the piano, his own instrument. It's obvious that Grieg had great respect for the Hardanger fiddle in the way he carried out this work. It was one of the last pieces that he composed, at the turn of the century. Actually, he was fascinated by folk tunes before that time. But in his later years, he spent a lot of time immersing himself in them. His wife Nina was bewildered. She didn't understand the music. But Grieg was fascinated. The tune we just heard, was a melancholy one. The reason is that Myllarguten's girlfriend broke up with him and married someone else. Here's the music, and you can see why it was written like this. Here he has used Kari, his girlfriend, as an image.

We can hear her name in the notes here.

"Kari, Kari!"

It's a way in for those of us not so familiar with folk music and the Hardanger fiddle. We can see how connected this music is to people's lives, with their joys and sorrows.

This is a very tender and delicate tune. Perhaps the most beautiful of all the folk tunes Grieg arranged for the piano.

10:30:30 **COMMENTARY 15**

Hardanger fiddle tunes vary in style from region to region. The music from the Setesdal valley is particularly intense and noted for its rhythmic energy. Compared to the lyrical music of West Norway, it is powerful trance-inducing stuff. (30.47)

10:31:08

Hallvard T. Bjørgum

This kind of trance is a condition brought about by the music and the occasion. After making music and partying for a long time, you can find yourself in a spiritual cosmos in which the music consumes everything. It's a continuous energy field which neither the musician nor the listener is able to get out of.

(31.50) The result was that one had to take the instrument away from the fiddler by force. In the old days, they thought Old Nick himself was playing.

10:32:22

Hallvard T. Bjørgum

Sometimes, if one joins music contests lasting several days, that one reaches a mood that closely resembles this trance-like state.

10:32:39

Annbjørg Lien

At times, you can have the feeling of being carried away, not conscious, when you're on stage. You can forget your instrument, yourself, your surroundings and everything. If you are lucky enough have experienced this for just a microsecond, you will always want to get back to it.

10:32:59

Hallvard T. Bjørgum

I have had this experience.

Yes, I have.

10:33:12 (on car radio)

And now, over to the Hardanger fiddle! We report from the national folk music contest.

10:33:17

Vidar Lande

The first folk music contests were a kind of moral reparation, designed to show that folk music is equal to artistic music. They dressed up immaculately, and wore medals. Almost like Russian presidents or rifle clubs. But instead of carrying guns, they sit there with their Hardanger fiddles.

10:33:46 COMMENTARY 16

Since the first contest in 1888, the Landskappleik folk music competition has become the important showcase for young, aspiring musicians. (33.58)

10:34:13: **Winners are chosen in every category from ram's horn to vocal and instrumental music – including, of course, Hardanger fiddle.**

10:34:39

Vidar Lande

I have been a judge for 30 years. It's not always easy to evaluate the music. It can be very subjective. It's important to remember the judging criteria and to use one's insight. This insight is built up through a lifetime's experience.

10:35:23 COMMENTARY 17

Aside from the competition and showing off the instruments, people come to these events simply to have a good time. (35.29)

10:35:33 **The Landskappleik migrates round Norway, moving its location each year. Attracting thousands of people, performers and fans alike, it's the focal event of a strong, communal tradition where people come to play, listen, dance and sing through the long summer evenings. (35.50)**

10:36:05 **One of the most popular events is the Halling dance – a bizarre way for young men to demonstrate their athleticism and virility. And these days women get in on the act too. (36:14)**

10:36:57

Vidar Lande

I remember a folk music contest in Valle. They had no idea what to do because of all the drunkenness. But the police had a large van. They loaded it up with as many drunk people as they could, and took them to Bygland, 60km away. There they let them out on the road. It took them a long time to get back. They were hitch hiking along the road, trying to get back as quickly as possible.

10:37:237 COMMENTARY 18

If we're to believe the folk poems and folk songs, women were always been attracted to the fiddlers. One mythical figure, celebrated in song, was Kjetil Torsson. Wherever he travelled, he left broken hearts. (37.41)

- Song (37.45) *Kjetil Torsson, let your fiddle soar
Soon you must return to Gonil and Tor*
- (37.55) *Kjetil Torsson, finish your tune
Then return to your bed, your table and chair*
- (38.06) *Kjetil Torsson, can you recall Signe?
Signe, Sigrid and I, are we still on your mind?*
- (38.17) *Kjetil Torsson, you played with us all
Played and courted us, then left us behind*
- (38.37) *Kjetil Torsson, then you won Goni's heart
This had to be the reward on your part*

(38.57) *Kjetil Torsson, now you sit there so grey
Do you regret that it happened this way?*

(39.00) *Kjetil Torsson, here Signe is dancing
Here we are dancing, Signe, me, Sigrid too*

(39.10) *Kjetil Torsson, you got all you wanted
Now it's the end of this tune for you*

10:39:30

Sigbjørn Bernhoft Osa!

10:39:45 COMMENTARY 19

1973 – the Ragnarock rock festival. Any living tradition has got to be open to experimentation. Violinist Sigbjørn Bernhoft Osa playing with a rock band had an electrifying effect on Norwegian Folk Music.
(40.00)

10:40:05 Caption

**SIGBJØRN BERNHOFT OSA
(Speaking in 1985)**

Sigbjørn Bernhoft Osa

Some people were worried in folk music circles. But I knew the music had such a solid foundation that it would take more than an experiment like this to knock out folk music.

10:41:08 COMMENTARY 20

Certainly, this 350 year-old instrument has survived the transition into the modern musical world. It's used in traditional acoustic contexts but it's also become electric. (41.20)

10:41:38

Annbjørg Lien

This fiddle is a pretty weak instrument, even the Hardanger fiddle. With a complete band and tapes on stage, loud monitors, drumkits and so on, it's an impossible task to make it audible.

It also has to do with style. You have to make compromises if you choose to play with a large band. You'll get much more expression, playing solo. If you use just two strings at a time you get fewer tones. Not as many double chords and rich harmonies as when you play solo. And a little less ornamentation. A more clear and simple language. That's the compromise you make.

10:43:00 COMMENTARY 21

Kristiane Lund was one of the few female players in the early 20th century. She broke down prejudice to become one of the most important fiddlers of her day. Annbjørg Lien now plays one of her instruments.
(43.15)

10:43:18

Annbjørg Lien

It's a special honour to play on Kristiane's fiddle from her youth. I feel that there's a lot of energy in the wood. The wood is alive. And this fiddle has witnessed a lot of history. Even if we're mostly writing new tunes, we are inspired by the old, traditional music. To use an instrument that's a century old - so it has been through quite a bit - and then amplify it with samples and keyboards, with a modern sound... It creates an incredibly powerful encounter with both the past and the future.

10:44:42 COMMENTARY 22

The trio Utle started out in 1993. Their fiddler Håkon Høgemo is a prize-winning traditional player, noted for his pure, refined sound.

10:44:58 So why, in Utle, does he feed his instrument through an amplifier that rips out the tonal quality that's his hallmark? 45.08)

10:45:08 Caption

HÅKON HØGEMO

Håkon Høgemo

The instrument claims greater space in the sound picture that way, because the sound level is turned up. There can be problems with the fiddle in ensemble with other instruments. It becomes too weak. It's difficult to get a nice sound when it's amplified. It's easier to make an ugly sound, to distort it, than to get a pleasant sound.

10:46:35

Håkon Høgemo

I distort the signals through an overdrive-box before I send them into the amplifier. That's all there is to it. Just like with a guitar. I do it to create a different sound. So it gets uglier and rougher. I think I get a better effect.

10:47:26

Håkon Høgemo

These are totally different instruments to the ones the music is normally played on. First and foremost, we have used fiddle tunes. It adds another dimension to the music, and we create a different sound picture. I think many of the tunes have been enriched this way. But it takes a lot of time. It's a long process. And it's not over. It changes all the time, the way we do it.

10:48:17 COMMENTARY 23

In the early 20th century, Norwegian composers, like Grieg, used folk tunes and textures as a basis for their compositions. These days it's much less common, with composers preferring folk-derived elements like microtones. The Ultima festival in Oslo has forged a different relationship between composers and tradition by commissioning new music for the Hardanger fiddle. (48.45)

10:48:51

Liv Merete Kroken

They will have to twist their brains if it's going to suit me musically. At the same time, it's a challenge for me. I suppose it will also contain a number of new elements which I've not used so far in regular Hardanger fiddle music.

10:50:20

Liv Merete Kroken

I'm sure this will demonstrate completely new uses for the Hardanger fiddle that we haven't heard before. And it may point out new directions for composing Hardanger fiddle tunes.

10:51:26 COMMENTARY 24

The new developments are groundbreaking, but more often than not the old tunes are still played in the traditional way. And in Setesdal, many musicians have moved to the valley because of its music! It's these newcomers who are the most active in the fiddlers' group Knut Heddis Minne. That fresh blood is revitalising the tradition and the group is currently one of the most successful in Norway. (51.52)

10:53:47

Vidar Lande

The younger players don't care where the music comes from. They are just interested in the music per se. They are also really good at arranging music. They pick music from various places and arrange it in new ways. And I think that's what it's all about now. Music isn't necessarily attached to a locality. This has happened only in the course of the last five years. It's a completely new development.

10:54:14

Annbjørg Lien

We've not yet reached the point where this is the music of the people. But we're well on the way. We have got a lot of good stages, and folk musicians are travelling around much more, giving concerts and communicating. But we're still a long way away from the goal that this is the preferred music of the average Norwegian. And the media hasn't taken up the music, to play it sufficiently on the radio. This would help it become part of the normal sound picture. People would get used to it, and relate to folk music in all its varieties, from completely traditional to arranged folk music.

10:54:58

Hallvard T. Bjørgum

The Hardanger fiddle... A Czech music professor Plitzka said: "Norway should be happy to possess the greatest folk music instrument in the world, and the greatest folk music." It's this last factor which is most important to me; the music. It's a treasure which seems to be bottomless.

10:56:34 COMMENTARY 25

There are probably more good fiddlers today than there have ever been and the music is clearly in good hands. The Hardanger fiddlers' devilish pact between tradition and modernity seems to have ensured its survival. (56.50)

10:57:20 Run Credits (see next page)

10:57:47 Credits End

Final images

10.58.10: Final Caption

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