

LEIF ERIKSSON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL PRESENTS
THE GREGORIAN SINGERS
UTENDØRS ≈ INNENDØRS
OUTDOORS AND INDOORS: MUSIC OF THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Vallåtar från Gammelboning

Kulning, Northern Sweden (Arr. Susanne Rosenberg)

Mine getter går i skogen

Swedish Folk Melody

Piae Cantiones

Turku, Finland, 1582/1625

Jesu dulcis memoria

Divinum mysterium

Ramus virens olivarum

Zachaeus arboris ascendit

Puer natus in Bethlehem

Jim Bowen, Dominic Bulger, Jonathan Posthuma

Predicasti dei care

Sequence, Mass for St. Olav, 11th c.

Ah, think not the Lord delayeth

St. Olav's Sequence, *Songs of Praise* (1931)

Music for Hardanger Fiddle

Traditional Norwegian

Bruremarsj frå Seljord

Okkos kaetur på dikkos jord

Tussedans I Harptjønnerget

Rachel Jensen, Hardanger Fiddle

Kulokk

Traditional Norwegian

Har du nokon sett kydna mina? – Have you seen my cows?

Sterjente's Sondag – Herding Girl's Sunday, Ole Bull

Peggy Larson, Rachel Jensen

Three Norwegian Folk Songs

Sons of Norway Songbook, arr. Monte Mason

Alle karfolk har så my' å si

Jeg lagde mig så sildig

Hør det kaller, hør det lokker

≈ PAUSE ≈

Kulokk – Stølslokk

Traditional Norwegian

Peggy Larson

Three Madrigals

Queste labra

Ite caldi

Lucretia mia

Hans Brachrogge

Truid Aagesen

Truid Aagesen

Mary Larew, Katie Eakright, Jonathan Posthuma

The Willow Flute

Traditional Norwegian

Fløytelåt

Min pipa

Ansja loen

E ska naa sulle

Arna Rennan, Seljefløyte

Fløytelåt

Geirr Tveitt, arr. Monte Mason

Paul Stever

Suomen Laulun (Finnish Songs)

Selim Palmgren

Poppelit

Suru

Yökehräjä

Takamailla

Heyr þú oss himnum á

Anna Þorvaldsdóttir

Jólakötturinn

Ingibjörg Þorbergs, arr. Skarphéðinn Þór Hjartarson

Jim Bowen, James Hevell, Jonathan Posthuma

NOTES AND TRANSLATIONS

This program has two themes: The first is *Outdoors and Indoors* – that is, music to be performed outdoors, and music to be performed indoors. The “outdoors” music is generally categorized as folk music, music that has no identified composer and was not, at least at first, written down. The Scandinavian tradition of musical herding calls – called *kulokk* in Norway, *kulning* in Sweden – originated in the Middle Ages and were sung to call livestock from mountain grazing pastures and forests. Other “outdoor” music in this concert includes tunes for the willow flute and the Hardanger fiddle.

“Indoor” music, at least for our purposes, is obviously that which is intended to be performed indoors. This would include music composed for the church or for concert performances – sometimes called art music – but it might also include some folk music. And even our outdoor music is being performed indoors today. The distinction between folk music and art music is often blurry anyhow. We are performing a variety of “indoor” pieces – 11th century Gregorian chant, madrigals, secular part songs, folk song arrangements, old tunes that became Christmas carols, some contemporary works, and one that defies categorization. All have in common their origin or their inspiration in the Nordic countries.

This leads to our second theme. In keeping with the spirit of the Leif Eriksson International Festival, we include music that shows how Nordic composers and musicians both influenced and were influenced by the cultures and styles that existed *outside* Scandinavia. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, European musicians who desired lucrative careers would necessarily have had to find sponsors, which would be either noble families or the clergy of major churches or cathedrals. And almost all the desirable work was found in the Netherlands and especially in Italy and Germany. Because Scandinavia lacked major church centers or extremely wealthy royalty, it was something of a musical backwater with respect to opportunities to compose for the church or for secular performances of masques and operas, so Scandinavian performers and composers found it necessary to seek work outside their home countries. And then they brought home what they learned in greater Europe.

This trend began as early as the 11th century, as Scandinavia became Christianized. Included in this program is an example of a chant for the Mass for St. Olav. Also included in the program are three madrigals in Italian. You may be wondering why we included Italian madrigals – but these are significant because they were composed by Danes who were studying with Giovanni Gabrieli. Even so, not all the musical action in those days was taking place in Italy; A collection of late medieval songs used in the cathedral school at Turku, Finland, was compiled and published in 1582 as *Piae Cantiones*. About half of the songs originated in Finland and Sweden; others came from various locations elsewhere in Europe. During the nineteenth century many of the songs were arranged and translated and became now-well-known Christmas carols set to English texts.

By the nineteenth century, the era of “national romanticism,” Nordic composers were able to represent their own musical traditions from within their homelands. Although most nineteenth-century composers studied in Germany and elsewhere in Europe and absorbed the styles of Beethoven and Brahms, at the same time they promoted their countries’ folk music by incorporating it into their compositions. Norway also developed a strong choral tradition in its Lutheran churches in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries that eventually found its way to the United States, and to Minnesota in particular. Almost any choral singer trained in a Minnesota college will be familiar with that tradition due to the enormous influence of F. Melius Christiansen. The governments of the Scandinavian countries currently offer talented performers and composers grants and other financial support to help further their careers, ensuring that these countries will offer first-rate contemporary music to the rest of the world. And here in Minnesota the Nordic musical tradition continues to be promoted by organizations like LEIF, to which we are grateful for its support of this program.

THE MUSIC

Vallåtar från Gammelboning – Herding Songs from The Old Home Place

Kulning is the old northern Swedish way of herding livestock and of communication between young girl herders on mountains, and between them and the home places down in the valley. This was also a way of calling for help, telling the family that an animal had gone missing, or crying for the herding women to come home. This is an arrangement of some of these calls by folksinger Susanne Rosenberg and fiddler Sven Ahlbäck. Along with the *kulning* calls, the arrangement includes a nonsensical folk song about goats, suggesting that these calls were originally intended to call goats from the forest:

My goats walk in the forest, gnawing the bark from trees.
Our maids and our servants sit knees against knees.
My goats walk in the forest, sitting knees against knees.
Our maids and our servants gnaw the bark from trees.

Songs from *Piae Cantiones* (1582/1625)

A lesser-known fact about this well-known collection of late-medieval songs, whose complete name is *Piae Cantiones ecclesiasticae et scholasticae veterum episcoporum* (*Pious ecclesiastical and school songs of the ancient bishops*), is that it originated in Finland. In 1582, Jaakko Suomalainen, a Protestant clergyman and the headmaster of the cathedral school at Turku, collected 74 Latin and Swedish/Latin songs that were being sung at the school, and sent the collection to Germany for publication. Thirteen more songs were added in the 1625 edition.

These songs were regularly sung in Finnish schools until into the 19th century. In 1853 John Mason Neale acquired a copy of *Piae Cantiones*, translated some of the texts into English, and wrote new texts for other songs. Twelve of the tunes were published under the title *Carols for Christmastide*, and the following year twelve more were published as *Carols for Eastertide*. The

best-known songs include *Christ was born on Christmas Day (Resonant in laudibus)*, *Good Christian men, rejoice (In dulci jubilo)*, *Good King Wenceslas (Tempus adest floridum)*, and *Let the song be begun (Personent hodie)*. Lutherans may recognize the *Puer natus* tune as *Ein Kind geboren zu Bethlehem*. The collection also includes the well-known *Gaudete, gaudete*, popularized by The King's Singers. You can't get through Christmas without running into *Piae Cantiones*.

Jesu dulcis memoria (Jesus, Sweet Remembrance) is one of only two four-voice songs in the 1582 collection. The text is attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

Jesus, sweet remembrance,
Giving true joys to the heart,
Jesus, sweetness of hearts,
Fount of life, light of minds,
Exceeding all joy.

But above honey and all things
His sweet presence,
Nothing more pleasing is sung,
Nothing gladder is heard,
Than Jesus, son of God.

Divinum mysterium (The Divine Secret), a meditation on the Eucharist, is one of the oldest songs in the collection, dating to the 10th century. It was first developed as a trope - additional text and music - on the Sanctus of the Mass.

Holy, holy, holy!
The divine secret is now revealed.
The unfaithful are detestable,
While the strong hope of the faithful
Strengthens their belief.

And the wine also, when it is blessed,
Is truly the blood of Christ.
We all believe together
That this is truth, not falsehood.

The bread is first divided
and consecrated
Then the body of Christ is offered
And eaten in the form of bread.
How this is accomplished,
Christ will make it happen.

Father, Son and the Spirit, our consolation,
Kindly give us our nourishment,
So that we may sing with
The people of Heaven. Amen.

Ramus virens olivarum (The Green Branch of an Olive Tree) is a historical song celebrating the conversion of the people of Finland to Christianity. Beginning with the metaphor of Noah's Ark, the Englishman Bishop Henry arrives in Finland on his way to Uppsala. Henry and King Eric of Sweden battle demons, but Henry is martyred.

The green branch of an olive tree
Brought by the dove,
Twofold kind of living things
Is held in Noah's ark.

Rejoice in this gift,
Because you are made Catholic,
By the sound of God's word.

(Refrain) Therefore, Finnish people,

Mountain tops are hidden,
The force of the sea then withdrawn,

The cloud of sin is dispersed,
A sign of God's grace. (Refrain)

Just so is shown to Finland
By our teacher,
That the faith of Christ is established,
Leaving the land of England. (Refrain)

The charge of Uppsala
He ruled in the kingdom of Sweden,
Raised through Eric
In the worship of faith. (Refrain)

Joyful they seek to reach

Zachaeus arboris ascendit (Zachaeus Climbed a Tree) is a roundelay in which two equal voices exchange the melody from phrase to phrase. It is in a much older style than the four-part songs in the collection, and it may have been intended as an instructional model for improvised polyphony for the students at the Turku cathedral school.

Zachaeus climbed a tree
To see Jesus, the Lord of Heaven.
Zachaeus invited Jesus into his home
And served him lovingly.

He examined his heart:
"If I have gained something by deceit,
I shall repay it fourfold.

The land of the Finns,
They repel the worship of demons,
They found the palm tree. (Refrain)

King Eric to the region
Of his homeland turning,
This holy bishop Henry
Was a companion of his exile. (Refrain)

May Christ pray the Father on our behalf
And preserve peace in our fatherland.
May he be praised among a multitude
Of worshippers strong in the faith. (Refrain)

I shall give the poor half of my property
Gifts like that appease God."

We also rejoice in such a convocation
And wish to praise the Lord of Lords.
Christ, we wish to thank you forever,
You who even now do nourish us.

Puer natus in Bethlehem is a strophic hymn from the 13th century based on the Introit for Christmas Day. Before the tune found its way into *Piae Cantiones*, German composers, including Michael Praetorius, had already adapted it as *Ein Kind geboren in Bethlehem*. The version in the original 1582 edition is for two voices; we are performing the four-voice version from the 1625 edition of the collection.

A child is born in Bethlehem,
Exult, rejoice, Jerusalem!
Alleluia.

The Son of God the Father
In the highest has taken flesh,
Alleluia.

The Angel Gabriel announced
The Virgin has conceived the Son.
Alleluia.

We rejoice in this birth
And bless the Lord.
Alleluia.

We praise the Holy Trinity
And give thanks to God.
Alleluia.

Sequence - *Predicasti Dei care*

A sequence is a hymn sung during the Mass before the Gospel. During the Middle Ages the custom was to prolong the last syllable of the *Alleluia* while the priest was proceeding from the altar to chant the Gospel; this became called the *sequence* because it followed the *Alleluia*. Words were set to these melismas, and eventually they became rhyming hymns with a couplet structure. By the time Christianity came to Norway at the end of the 10th Century, the Catholic Church had long since set down the rules for music in religious services, and national contributions to the Gregorian choral tradition were permitted only with respect to the veneration of local saints; Norwegian-composed or altered liturgical music was therefore allowed in masses for St. Olav. The *Predicasti* sequence probably dates from the late 12th or early 13th century and was sung at Wednesday masses for St. Olav at Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim. The Archbishop of Nidaros, Eystein Erlendsson (1120?-1188), was educated in Paris, and many elements of the Office of St. Olav, created during the second half of the 12th century, were strongly influenced by the musical practices of the French church.

You, God's beloved, announced The age of salvation, We ask you to hear our prayer, The age which is the age of mercy,	We serve you with praise on every third weekday, We celebrate the memory of your passion
And blissful martyr's death. Purify us through your holy intercession from wrath Over our transgressions and from all uncleanness.	Christ's martyr, give a place among the citizens of heaven To this multitude for whom you died.

Hymn - *Ah, think not the Lord delayeth*

This is one of The Gregorian Singers' signature pieces, which we have performed many times during our annual Advent Procession. This hymn appears in a 1931 English hymnal, *Songs of Praise*, edited and contributed to by liturgist Percy Dearmer and composers Ralph Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw. Dearmer wrote the hymn's text for an Advent service, but the melody was identified only as *St. Olav's Sequence*, and was sourced to a Norwegian hymnal, *Koralbok for den Norske Kirke* (1926). On acquiring a copy of that hymnal, we discovered that the melody is exactly *Predicasti Dei care*. The accompanying Norwegian text, *Ljoset yver landet dagna*, is a translation of a different sequence, *Lux illuxit*, from the High Mass for St. Olav. However, the harmonization is the same as in *Songs of Praise* and may have been the work of one of the hymnal's compilers, Ludvig Lindeman, who was best-known for collecting and arranging a vast number of Norwegian folk songs.

Ah, think not the Lord delayeth: "I am with you," still he sayeth,	"Do you yet not understand?" Look not back, the past regretting;
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On the dawn your hearts be setting;
Rise and join the Lord's command.

For e'en now the reign of heaven
Spreads throughout the world like
leaven,
Unobserved and very near,
Like the seed when no man knoweth,
Like the sheltering tree that groweth,

Comes the life eternal here.
Not for us to find the reasons,
Or to know the times and seasons,
Comes the Lord when strikes the hour;
Ours to bear the faithful witness
Which can shape the world to fitness,
Thine, O God, to give the power.

Music for Hardanger Fiddle

The Hardanger fiddle is similar to the violin, but it has eight or nine strings instead of four and is made of thinner wood and is often elaborately decorated. Four of the strings are strung and played like a violin, while the others, called the understrings, provide resonance. It is a transposing instrument, specifically a D instrument, and the understrings are tuned to vibrate according to the main tuning. The most common tuning is A-D-A-E, but the normal violin tuning of G-D-A-E is sometimes used, and more than 20 different tunings have been documented in Norway. "Troll tuning" (A-E-A-C#) is used for so-called *fanitullen* or devil's tunes. Other music using troll tuning is associated with the *hulderfolk*, the "hidden people," which are a sort of malign wood nymph. The Hardanger fiddle is traditionally used to accompany dancing and to lead a bridal procession into a church. Rachel Jensen will play three traditional fiddle tunes: *Bruremarsj frå Seljord* (Wedding march from Seljord), *Okkos kaetur på dikkos jord* ("Cattle are trespassing" from Telemark), and *Tussedans I Harptjønnerget* by Sven Haugetrål (1905 – 1996).

Kulokk

Har Du Nokon Sett Kydna Mina? (Have You Seen My Cows?) is a call and answer song from Voss in Western Norway. The first *seterjenta* (herding girl) calls, "Have you seen my cows?" and is answered, "Yes, I have!" "Where are they?" "Far, far away on the Blue Mountain!" The *jenta* calls them by name: "Gesetna, Kyrekoll, Dyrspena, Skakareik, Stubbemos!" Finally, she calls her "dearest of dears," Liaros (probably a calf).

Seterjenta's Sondag (Herding Girl's Sunday) is a well-known song written by the famous composer Ole Bull in 1872, in which a herding girl sings of her longing to be at her home church singing with her friends and family, instead of staying alone on the mountain top. She hears the bells in the distance and wishes for summer to be over so she can join her community again.

Three Norwegian Folk Songs – Arr. Monte Mason

These are arrangements of Norwegian songs the composer found in the Sons of Norway Song Book. The Sons of Norway is a well-known and venerable organization, first formed in Minneapolis in 1895 for "males of Norwegian descent between the ages of 20 and 50 who were capable of giving proof of being morally upright, in good health, and capable of supporting a family." Chapters were formed coast to coast, and with membership now open to anyone with

an interest in Norwegian culture, there are currently almost 65,000 members. In 1926 the society, finding a need for music suitable for community singing, published a collection of Norwegian songs entitled *Sønner af Norge Sangbog*. In 1946, a second edition was published that included English translations, and the 1967 edition added a few arrangements for mixed chorus. The three songs we are performing today were arranged for this concert by our music director, Monte Mason. The first is entitled *Akkedas millom mand å kjærring*, “a domestic argument.” It consists of many alternating verses sung by the women and the men in dialect, arguing over who is better, menfolk or womenfolk, tossing insults in both directions. The song ends with the assurance that the two will live together in peace tonight.

Jeg lagde mig så sildig is a lament for a dead lover. The tune is a bit reminiscent of *Solveig’s Song* from Grieg’s *Peer Gynt Suite*, and considering Grieg’s frequent use of folk music, perhaps they are based on the same, older tune.

I laid down to rest late in the evening,
I knew with overwhelming anxiety,
When word came to me from my
sweetheart
That I must come to her.
No one has been loved as much as her.

I stroked her white cheeks
That were once so rosy.
Ah, Lord God, heal me, your poor young friend
Here I found my darling dead.
No one has been loved as much as her.

Hør det kaller, hør det lokker, in dramatic contrast, is a simple celebration of the beginning of summer. The Norwegian text is by clergyman/poet P.A. Jensen (1812–1867).

Hear it calling, hear it beckoning,
Hear the gentle summer’s offering.
With the salmon weaving in the waterfall,
With the wild herd on the mountains,
We dive in the river depths, we run in the hills.

Books away now, feet are bare,
Now it’s off to the woods.

Kulokk - Stølslokk

Stølslokk is an adaptation of a recorded performance by Berit Opheim from Norway. *Støl* is *nynorsk* (the language spoken in Western Norway) for summer farm. A summer farm girl (*seterjente*) might sit on the side of the hill at night singing for herself or other girls around the mountains, for an evenings’ entertainment, or just to sing out her feelings. They would often sing melodies on vocables or nonsense syllables, which is how this piece is performed.

Three Madrigals

These madrigals were written by the Danish composers Hans Brachrogge (ca. 1590 – ca. 1638) and Truid Aagesen (? –1625), both of whom traveled to Venice to study with Giovanni Gabrieli. Reflecting that experience, the madrigals are in the Venetian style.

Not much is known about Brachrogge's life before he went to Italy in 1599-1600. As a singer, he was one of the Danish musicians at the 1611 marriage in London of James I to Anne of Denmark, the sister of King Christian IV. His madrigal *Queste labra* is from his 1619 publication, *Madrigaletti a III voci, første bind*. This collection, dedicated to Christian IV, is Brachrogge's only surviving work.

Truid Aagesen was appointed organist of the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen in 1593, and, like Brachrogge (whom he probably knew), he studied in Venice with Gabrieli from 1599 to 1600. In 1613, King Christian IV published a notice ordering that all Catholic men were to leave Denmark. Aagesen had been suspected of being on the Pope's payroll as early as 1604, and because of his alleged Catholic sympathies he was sacked from his organist position. In 1608 he published *Cantiones trium vocum* under the name Theodorico Sistino; this collection of madrigals in Italian is his only surviving published work. We are performing two of them in this program, *Ite caldi* and *Lucretia mia*.

The Willow Flute

The *seljefløyte* was traditionally constructed in the Spring from green willow bark and could be used for only a few weeks until the bark dried out.¹ It is a kind of overtone flute that is played by varying the force of the air blown into the mouthpiece, with the end of the tube either covered by a finger or left open. The tones the flute produces are based on the overtone series. Playing it with the end of the tube covered produces one fundamental and its overtones; playing it with the end of the tube left open produces another fundamental and series of overtones. Arna Rennan will play four traditional Norwegian tunes, *Floytelåt*, *Min pipa*, *Ansja loen* and *E ska naa sulle*.

Fløytelåt (Flute Song) - Geirr Tveitt, arr. Monte Mason

The melody was written in a folk style by the Norwegian composer, pianist and music critic Geirr Tveitt (1908-1981). Tveitt was a prolific composer of piano and orchestral music, and he also compiled and arranged a large amount of traditional music from the Hardanger district. Unfortunately, a considerable number of his finished manuscripts were lost in a house fire in 1970; after that disaster he was left unable to compose and gradually succumbed to alcoholism. The text of the piece is a poem by Jakob Sande (1906 – 1967), who wrote only in Nynorsk, the less commonly-used of the two official Norwegian written languages. The poem describes how on a spring day a willow branch is ready for use as a flute for a little boy's hands. The distance sound of a flute is heard, and "the riddle of life lies hidden in it." A child in the garden laughs, wondering what it is, while an old man remembers the time when he too ran barefoot in the

¹ <https://ofsdal.com/resources/06%20-%20seljefl%C3%B8yte.pdf>

mountains. “The tones play in his mind; his eyes look far away with a dimly-veiled shine against the pale memory of childhood.”

Fløytelåt has been arranged and recorded many times, but as far as we know this is its only choral version. I acquired a copy of the melody and poem during a Norwegian class in Mindekirken’s language program and passed it on to Monte Mason – who liked it so much that he wrote the arrangement for this concert.

Suomen Laulun (Finnish Songs) – Selim Palmgren

Selim Palmgren (1878–1951) was a composer, pianist and conductor considered to have been the foremost Finnish composer after Jean Sibelius. Like Sibelius he was part of the Finnish national music movement, but he also wanted his music to appeal to international audiences. In a 1921 interview he said “I’m interested in all folk music, because I have used quite a good deal of that of my own country, though my work is less characteristic of the real Finnish music than that of Sibelius. They told me in Paris when I was there recently that the French conductors found Sibelius’s orchestral works difficult to conduct but that mine were easier. I suppose that means that my music is less local in character.”² His compositional style is generally late-Romantic, merging into impressionism - along with some surprisingly modernist material, notable in these four choral works. Palmgren’s and Sibelius’ music share some parallel characteristics which contribute to a sort of “Finnish sound.”

In Finland Palmgren regularly conducted choral and orchestral societies and toured throughout Finland and Scandinavia both as a pianist and a conductor. In 1921 he traveled to the United States to teach composition at the Eastman School of Music. Although his piano works were performed by the great pianists of the early 20th century, his music is now seldom performed outside Finland. “Part of the problem is that Palmgren himself did little to promote his works, there’s no complete catalogue of his works, and many of his works are undated and still remain in manuscript. Rather than taking Palmgren’s own self-description of himself merely as ‘a musician,’ we should consider him a composer of ‘international significance who simply lacked time to write a bigger number of works.’”³ We hope our performance of these excellent songs for choir might inspire listeners to seek out more of Palmgren’s music.

Poppelit (Poplars) - V.A. Koskenniemi

Poplars, cry in the night!
The dusk is settling along the shores.
The sphere of the sun is darkening:
Phaeton, your brother, is dead.
Poplars, cry in the night, oh, cry!

Phaeton is dead, the son of the sun is dead!
The flaming heart is extinguished in the cold
waves! Who is now riding the roads in the sky?
The dusk is covering the world. Tears, tears,
Poplars cry in the night, oh, cry!

² <https://fmq.fi/articles/selim-palmgren-a-finnish-cosmopolite>

³ <https://interlude.hk/song-from-a-forgotten-finnish-composer-selim-palmgren-aria/>

Once the flaming heart embraced,
Embraced the skies, earth and sea,
Measured in his sun chariot
The eternity and time of earth.
In the midst of the noble open spaces
He listened to the passage of stars.

Suru (Sorrow) - Selim Sorthan, Finnish transl. Eino Leino

Cold wind of the night, please come and
Wipe away the tear from my cheek.
The little bird of the earth, of the dim earth,
do sing, oh, my mind is anguished by sorrows.
The glimmer of water so gentle, sway, oh,
Calm the departed joys in peace.

Yökehräjä (Night Spinner) - Eino Leino

As I sat alone in the evening,
I heard a humming in my heart.
What is constantly humming there?
A maiden is pedaling the spinning
wheel.

As I sat in the evening deep in thought,
I heard singing at my side.

Who is always singing there?
Death is calling for the maiden.

As I sat alone in the evening
I hear crying in my heart.
Who is always crying there?
The maiden is crying for her freedom.

Takamailla (In the Hinterlands) - Larin-Kyösti

I sit longingly many nights,
The sun colors the woods with red.
A thought flies on the wings of hope
across the greenish forest.
There beyond the hills
the veins of the world bubble,
Distant shapes of villages, churches,
form,

In the valleys brooks are flowing.
I comfort my baby to sleep on my knee,
Shall the frost get my pure dove!
A thought arises, flies
beyond the greenish forest.

Translations by Elina Kala

Heyr þú oss himnum á - Anna Sigríður Þorvaldsdóttir

Anna Sigríður Þorvaldsdóttir is one of Iceland's best-known contemporary composers. She studied composition at Iceland Academy of the Arts and was awarded her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of California, San Diego. Her music is frequently performed in

Europe and the United States, and she has received commissions for instrumental works from major orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, the New York Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Þorvaldsdóttir wrote *Heyr þú oss himnum á* for a concert series in August of 2005. The Crossing, a chamber choir specializing in new music, described the piece in its notes for its 2015 recording:

This one is special: an Icelandic hymn that, in the compositional hands of Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, becomes a deeply rooted meditation - a study in the way in which harmony can affect us profoundly, can invite us to turn inward, quiet our brain and make sense of the chaos, if only for the brief moment as it passes into the past. ... It's odd that we love to sing this; all voices are written in lower registers and, unusually, they stay there. We'd expect it to be tiring. No. Instead, it's entrancing. There's something dark and solid - earthbound and sparse - about the colors that Anna's writing produces; it is satisfying, communal, inspiring to work together to produce this unique palette.⁴

The text is from a poem by the priest Olafur á Söndum (1560–1627), one of the leading poets of the early 17th century in Iceland.

Hear us in Heaven,
Loving Father, as we your small children
Ask for the fortune
To receive eternal life.

We shall not stray from your path.
May we help your kingdom
To grow here on Earth.
Following your guidance,
We gather around in your name,
And gladly celebrate.

We cannot make a joyful song
Unless we are moved by love.
So let us sing our gentle praise
To you, Lord God in Heaven,
As the truly faithful have done.

When our poor souls
Pass away from this world,
Take us, God, to you,
Into your everlasting glory.
Amen, amen, may this be done.

Jóla kötturinn (The Yule Cat)

Ingibjörg Þorbergs, arr. Skarphéðinn Þór Hjartarson

The Yule Cat, one of the many interesting folkloric denizens of Iceland, is an enormous cat who prowls through towns and villages on Christmas eve looking for people who didn't receive gifts of new clothes for Christmas. If he finds such people, he eats their Christmas dinners and then he eats the people. The origin of the possibly medieval legend of the Yule Cat is unknown, and the legend was not written down until the nineteenth century, but it became internationally famous due to the eponymous poem, and the text of this song, by the author and poet

⁴ <https://www.crossingchoir.org/rising-thorvaldsdottir-heyrr>

Jóhannes úr Kötlum (1899–1972). The Yule Cat is the pet of Grýla, a troll-woman who is the mother of the thirteen Yule Lads, trolls who play mean tricks on people. On Christmas Eve the Yule Lads leave candy in the shoes of good children and rotting potatoes in the shoes of naughty children. This, of course, is not as bad as being eaten by a giant cat. One Icelandic journalist, Haukur Magnússon, wrote: “This is the kind of message Icelanders like to send out in their folklore. If you do not have the money or means of acquiring new items of clothing before the festival of lights, you will be eaten by a gigantic cat.”⁵ The underlying reason for the legend may have been to goad people who spun wool and made clothing to finish their work before Christmas, for children to do their chores, and to encourage charity. And it might be the reason that Icelanders put in more overtime at their jobs than most other Europeans.

While the melody sounds like it could be a folk tune, it is not. It was written in the ‘80s by Ingibjörg Þorbergs (1927-2019), a composer of children’s songs who was also the program director of the National Broadcasting Service of Iceland. After the singer Björk recorded the song it went more or less viral and has since become very well-known and popular in Iceland. On YouTube you will find a number of performances of the song, including a heavy metal version and a performance with all the trappings of a Las Vegas nightclub show. It is probably not as well-known outside Iceland, however, because the Icelandic poem is a major tongue-twister for those who did not grow up speaking Icelandic. But we are giving it our best effort.

You’ve heard about the Yule Cat,
 He really was immense;
 Nobody knew where he came from,
 Nobody knew where he went.
 His whiskers sharp as meat-hooks,
 His back was arched up high,
 And the claws upon his shaggy paws
 Were dreadful to espy.
 He’d shake his mighty tail,
 He’d leap, he’d scratch and puff,
 Sometimes down in the valley,
 Sometimes up on the bluff.
 Hungry, wild and grim he roamed
 Through bitter winter snow,
 Gave everyone the shivers
 Wherever he might go.

If you heard a dismal yowl outside
 Your luck had just run out;
 It was men, not mice he hunted –
 Of that there was no doubt.
 He preyed upon the poor folk
 Who got no gifts for Yule
 Who struggled to keep going,

Whose life was hard and cruel.

He took all of their Yuletide food
 From the table and the shelf,
 He left them not a morsel,
 He ate it all himself.
 And so the women labored
 With spindle, reel and rock,
 To make a little colored patch
 Or just a single sock.
 Because he couldn’t come inside
 To catch the little ones,
 If you had given clothes
 To your daughters and your sons.

And when the candles were kindled
 When Yule Night was come,
 The children clutched their presents
 As the cat outside looked on.
 Some might get an apron,
 Some shoes or other stuff,
 As long as they’d got something,
 That would be enough.

⁵ <https://grapevine.is/icelandic-culture/art/2008/12/10/the-christmas-cat/>

Because Kitty couldn't eat them
If they had new clothes to put on;
He'd hiss and howl horribly
And then he would be gone.

Whether he's about still
I really couldn't tell,
But if everyone gets gifts for Yule,
Then all may yet be well.
Perhaps you will remember

to help with gifts yourself;
Perhaps there still are children
Who would get nothing else.
Maybe if you can help those w
Who need a little cheer,
It will bring you a Good Yule
And a Happy New Year!

- Tr. © Thor Ewing 2015

GUEST ARTISTS

Peggy Larson - Vocals and *kullok* coaching

Peggy Larson is a jazz and world music singer with special skills in improvisation and choral directing. She lived in Holland for many years, where she is well known as a leader in choral music and as a singer of contemporary jazz. She taught voice at the Rotterdam and Arnhem conservatories in Holland for many years and returned often to the Netherlands to teach and perform. She also taught at McNally-Smith College of Music in St. Paul from 2005 until she retired in 2015. Currently she leads the Earthtones, a world music choir for women, and the Portland Avenue United Methodist Sanctuary Choir in Bloomington, MN. Peggy also cantors twice a month at the Nordic and other lands and Celtic Meditative services at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in St. Paul. She has an MA degree in ethnomusicology from Bethel University. Peggy studied the vocal technique of Norwegian herding calls for her Master's thesis. In 2007 she traveled to Norway and interviewed singers and farmers, visited the folk archives and collected melodies and stories about *kulokk*. In 2016, she published a book on *kulokk*, "Sing 'til the Cows Come Home." She has given many workshops and concerts/lectures around the USA and in Holland. On October 18, she will participate in a musical about the Olson Sisters, two Norwegian women who sang Norwegian music around the USA in the '30's. The play is called "Yust For Fun" and will be presented at Chaska Community Center Theatre, 1661 Park Ridge Drive in Chaska at 7:30 PM.

Rachel Jensen - Hardanger Fiddle

Twin Cities native Rachel Ulvin Jensen has played violin since age four and hardanger fiddle since her teenage years. She is a leading player in the Twin Cities Hardingfelelag, a group that performs traditional Norwegian fiddle music for a variety of audiences and dances. Rachel has studied under a number of Norwegian master fiddlers both here in the US and in Norway. She was an adjunct Hardanger fiddle instructor at St. Olaf College in 2011-2012 and has taught at the Hardanger Fiddle Association of America's summer workshop in Dodgeville, WI. She appeared as a musician in the Guthrie Theatre's production of Peer Gynt (2008) and was a consultant on the Hardanger fiddle for the Guthrie's 2013 production of Nice Fish. She regularly freelances on both the classical violin and the Hardanger Fiddle and enjoys teaching private Hardanger fiddle lessons.

Arna Rennan – Willow Flute

Arna Rennan, who lives in Duluth, frequently performs Norwegian folk music at festivals, concerts, senior homes, and other venues. She first became interested in Scandinavian folk music while working summers at Røisheim Hotel in Boverdalen, Norway. During that summer

she often attended dances on her evenings off and listened to radio programs, featuring archival recordings and interviews with musicians. At the Institute of Folk Culture in Rauland, Norway, she immersed herself in *kveding*, a style of traditional folk music. Since then, she has performed extensively throughout the Midwest at folk festivals in connection with programs sponsored by the library systems in Minnesota, and also together with Loretta Kelley in the Washington DC area. Arna is also an artist, having studied at the National Art Academy in Oslo. She paints local landscapes and portraits, many of which can be seen at Waters of Superior in Duluth and Lizzards in Duluth.

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**Jonathan Posthuma, Clara Elisabeth Sanders,
Willow Skidmore, Paul Stever**

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ADVENT PROCESSION

November 27, 4:00 p.m.

**Sts. Luke and James Episcopal Church
4557 Colfax Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55419**

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