

Emigrant Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres, Norway: their legacies at home and abroad

Laura Ellestad

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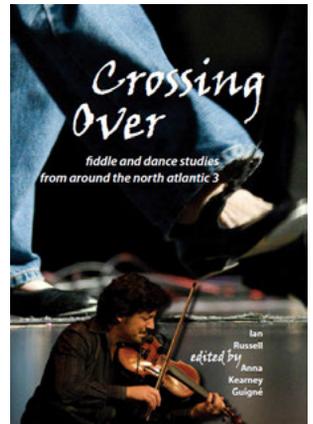
Crossing Over

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Emigrant Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres, Norway: their legacies at home and abroad

LAURA ELLESTAD

Between 1840 and 1956, approximately sixty Hardanger fiddle players emigrated to North America from the mountain valley district called Valdres, in South-Central Norway. Many left Norway with the hope of starting a better life for their families; some stayed only a number of years, later returning to their home country; some left for America intending to save up a large sum of money to bring back to Norway, but for various reasons did not return.

Two of the earliest documented Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres are Knut P. Ringestad (c. 1700–1790/1728–1810), from Vestre Slidre, and Torstein Knutsson Røyne (1765–1830), from Hegge in Øystre Slidre. According to tradition, Knut P. Ringestad was the first fiddle player to travel from Valdres to the Hardanger district (the birthplace of the Hardanger fiddle, and thereby the origin of the name of the instrument) and learn some of their fiddle tunes.¹ He then brought this music home to Valdres and added colours and characteristics from the already existing local folk music; thus began the development of a Hardanger fiddle tradition unique to the Valdres district.

In the century that followed – until the first Hardanger fiddler left Valdres for America in about 1840 – several of the most influential musicians in the history of the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres lived and continued to refine and develop the music. Jørn Nilsson Hilme (1778–1854) and Lars Mikkjelson Krøsshau (1785–1830) were two of the most important fiddlers during this period; Jørn Hilme is said to have had the greatest influence on the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres of any of Valdres's fiddlers, in that he rebuilt and composed a great number of tunes, and he developed a unique and very characteristic bow technique (*ristetak*, or several fast triplets played in succession) which to this day is identified with him and with the Valdres tradition. Lars M. Krøsshau, or 'Krøsshaugen', as he was often called, also left a strong mark on Valdres music; his expertise is said to have been in playing the old *lydarlåttar* ('listening tunes'), and he was also said to have been Jørn Hilme's equal in terms of ability. Knut Nordland (1794–1877), Arne Steinsrud (1799-?), Knut J. Ringestad (1815–1854), and the sons of both Jørn Hilme and Lars M. Krøsshau were

also important fiddlers during this period. There are others of equal significance, but it is not essential to name them all here.²

By the time Ola Strand left his farm in Volbu, Øystre Slidre, for the USA in the 1840s, a great deal of growth had occurred in the repertoire and style of the Hardanger fiddle music from Valdres, and in the century between 1840 and 1940, the Hardanger fiddle and its music had blossomed, not only in Valdres, but, generally speaking, in all of the Hardanger fiddle districts. Many more influential fiddlers lived during this time, and, in Valdres, a significant number of them chose to leave Valdres, either for a number of years or for good, to make their way to North America.

This is a greatly abbreviated description of the early history of the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres, but I hope that it will serve to introduce some of the main concerns this paper will address. A provocative question arises when the historical development of the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres and the onset of Norwegian emigration to North America are taken into account simultaneously: namely, what kind of influence did the emigration of Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres to North America have on the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres? And, in the same way, what kind of influence did these emigrant fiddlers have on the Hardanger fiddle milieu in North America?

The Norwegian emigration period dates roughly from 1825 to 1930. Hardanger fiddlers from all of the so-called 'Hardanger fiddle districts' emigrated from Norway to North America in great numbers throughout this period. I have chosen to focus on emigration from Valdres in order to narrow the investigation of this widespread phenomenon, and also because, as a Hardanger fiddle player, I have focused mainly on the music tradition from Valdres.³

Before examining in greater detail the emigration of Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres, I will begin with a brief discussion of the history of the Hardanger fiddle, as well as introducing some of the circumstances surrounding the phenomenon of emigration and the cultural significance of the Hardanger fiddle in Norway. In order to gain a clear understanding of the impact of the migration of Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres to North America, it is important that the reader be introduced to these contextual concerns.

Portraits of five emigrant fiddlers from Valdres will then serve to illuminate many of these background concerns and will provide examples of various ways fiddlers and fiddle music from Valdres made the journey to North America.

Origins and the traditional role of the Hardanger fiddle

The Hardanger fiddle is a uniquely Norwegian instrument. It belongs to the violin family, but it has several special features which distinguish it from the violin. The most recognizable of these features are the instrument's elaborate decoration (including ink 'rosing' on the front, back, and sides of the instrument; mother-of-pearl and bone inlay; and a carved lion's or dragon's head in place of the usual violin scroll), a flattened bridge (which allows the fiddler to play more easily on two strings

at once), and a set of sympathetic understrings (on modern Hardanger fiddles there are usually four or five of these).

The Jåstad fiddle, dated 1651, is the oldest known Hardanger fiddle. It was probably made by Ole Jonsen Jaastad (1621–1694), a sheriff from Ullensvang in Hardanger.⁴ But the earliest fiddle makers to make a significant impact on the development of the instrument – the music too – were Isak (1663–1759) and Trond Botnen (1713–1772), father and son from Kvam in Hardanger. Trond's work was prolific; he is said to have produced around 1000 fiddles in his lifetime, many of which were sold at markets in Lærdal and Kongsberg. Farmers and fiddlers would come from various districts to these markets to buy, sell and exchange goods, as well as exchanging tunes and competing with each other on the fiddle, and it is largely in this way that instruments and music spread from Hardanger to other parts of the country.

Hardanger fiddlers played a crucial role in traditional Norwegian rural societies. During wedding ceremonies, which would often take place over several days, a Hardanger fiddler was hired to welcome and entertain guests, to lead the wedding procession to and from the church, and, among other things, to wake the bride, groom, and guests after the first night of celebrations. Fiddlers also played at christenings, burials, and during holidays and seasonal celebrations. Perhaps most importantly, Hardanger fiddle music was a fixture at local gatherings and parties, and neighbours would often visit a fiddler's home to listen to him play.

Norwegian migration to North America

According to historical records, the first Norwegian emigrants left for America on the sloop *Restauration* on 4 July 1825.⁵ There were fifty-two persons on board, and several of them were Quaker sympathizers; most likely they were compelled to emigrate because of religious restrictions enforced by the Norwegian state church. Reasons for emigrating were many and diverse; some of the most common were poverty, economic depression, restrictive social and religious barriers, and curiosity. Of all the nationalities to emigrate to North America, Norwegians emigrated at a rate topped only by Ireland;⁶ during the first century of Norwegian emigration, about 800,000 Norwegians emigrated to America.⁷

The pace of Norwegian emigration did not pick up until around 1840. Awareness of the possibilities available in the New World gradually reached the rural valleys with the arrival of news and letters from America, and 'in the first periods of migration, and to a lesser extent also during the later periods, the majority of Norwegian emigrants came from the inner rural districts of Norway, including Hallingdal, Valdres, Telemark, Numedal, and Setesdal'.⁸

The inland valley districts named above are all 'Hardanger fiddle districts'; this term designates the mountain and valley districts west of Gudbrandsdalen and the districts in Vestlandet south of Nordfjord. Hallingdal, Numedal, Setesdal, Telemark, Valdres, and Vestlandet (including Hardanger, Voss, Indre Sogn, and Sunnfjord) are all included in this designation.

Norwegian migration to North America can be divided into five 'waves', between which significant economic or political events caused a marked decline in the rate of migration. Each period has distinct features which characterize the settlement and activities of its emigrants in America.

During the first wave of emigration, which began in 1825 with the voyage of the *Restauration* and ended at the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, Norwegian emigrants settled mainly in homogeneous groups in Illinois and eastern Wisconsin. The promise of free land which came with the Homestead Act of 1862 marked the beginning of the second wave of emigration; the Panic of 1873, a widespread economic crisis, caused a decline in emigration and is regarded as the end of the second wave. During this period, Norwegian migration expanded into Iowa and Minnesota, largely due to the development of the railway.

In these early years, Norwegian settlers maintained many of the traditions they had brought with them from Norway. Norwegian settlements at this time were isolated, and emigrants from the same rural area often travelled and settled together; these conditions would have easily allowed for the continuation of traditional Norwegian rural culture. Early emigrant Hardanger fiddle players remained an important part of these societies and in many ways retained their traditional roles. They played at weddings and other celebrations, gave concerts, played for dancers, and played on board passenger ships during the long journey across the Atlantic.

A third wave of emigration began in the 1870s and saw many Norwegian emigrants settle in Minnesota and North and South Dakota. Emigration to Canada had become more common, and several thousand Norwegians homesteaded during this period on the Canadian prairies. At this time a great number of Norwegians also established homes in metropolitan areas such as Chicago and Minneapolis. Norwegian emigration was at its peak; in 1883, a record 28,000 emigrated.⁹

Economic recession in the 1890s caused another decline in emigration, and the fourth wave began at the turn of the century, only to be curtailed by the outbreak of the First World War. Norwegian migration had by this point reached Montana, Idaho, and the coastal states of Washington and Oregon, as well as Western Canada.

The period between the First and Second World Wars is regarded as the fifth and final wave of emigration. The rate of Norwegian migration to the USA significantly diminished during these years, largely due to the passing of the National Origins Act in 1924, which limited emigration to a yearly quota. Conversely, Norwegian emigration to Canada increased during this period, reaching its climax in 1927, when 5,103 Norwegian settlers entered the country.¹⁰

Instability and survival of the Hardanger fiddle tradition during the migration period

Just as a manifold of new impulses and developments in both Norway and North America led to variable rates, causes, and destinations for emigration over the course of the Norwegian migration period, the Hardanger fiddle tradition simultaneously experienced a period of instability and change. In fact, several elements which contributed to both the instability and the survival of the Hardanger fiddle tradition

throughout this period are one and the same as certain factors which motivated the emigration of Norwegians to North America.

Up until the early- to mid-1800s, the Hardanger fiddle retained its traditional role in rural Norwegian societies. At this point, a Pietistic or Lay religious movement, led by Hans Nielsen Hauge, spread into the rural districts. Followers of this movement determined that the Hardanger fiddle and its music were sinful, and they strongly opposed fiddle playing, to the extent that many fiddlers stopped playing altogether, some were shunned by friends and neighbours, and a great number of instruments were destroyed. In some districts, such as upper Numedal, the effect of the Pietists' opposition to the Hardanger fiddle was so profound that the local Hardanger fiddle tradition essentially died out.¹¹ The Pietists' stance arose from the indirect association Hardanger fiddle music often had with drinking and other 'immoral' behaviour; thus, the Hardanger fiddle came to be known as the 'devil's instrument'.¹²

During the nineteenth century, local Hardanger fiddle traditions were also 'threatened' by the development and improvement of railways and roads. Norway's inland valley districts had fostered distinct Hardanger fiddle traditions which had clear regional ties, largely because communication and transportation between neighbouring valley districts was limited by the severity of the landscape. As roads were improved and the railroad expanded its reach, inhabitants of these valleys could more easily travel to other districts. The effects of this increased mobility on local Hardanger fiddle traditions were multifaceted: musical impulses from neighbouring districts, from urban centres, and from other European countries could more easily penetrate the once isolated valleys, and these impulses contributed to both the development and the instability of local Hardanger fiddle traditions. *Runddans*, *turdans*, and *gammaldans* music, which had originated in continental Europe, gained popularity in this way; the Polish *masurka* arrived in Norway around 1800, the *vals* came from Vienna in the 1820s, and, some years later, the *polka* and *reinlender* also appeared, all threatening to take the place of the older dances, *springar*, *gangar*, and *halling*. Hardanger fiddlers had to adapt to the demand for these newer dance forms, and many learned a repertoire of *runddans* music in addition to the traditional *springar*, *gangar*, and *halling* tunes.

Emigration was another consequence of increased mobility which had significant repercussions for the stability of the Hardanger fiddle tradition. Thanks to the improvements in transportation infrastructure, by the time the news of America had reached the inland valleys, those who were compelled to emigrate could more easily reach the port cities of Oslo, Bergen, and Stavanger. Emigration was in turn spurred on by a long period of economic depression; a large tenant farmer class had developed due to a combination of population growth and land shortage, and these people were particularly susceptible to America's promise of free land and prosperity, especially because of the difficult financial circumstances in Norway.

Many Hardanger fiddlers were quite poor, and many were tenant farmers. With their livelihood threatened by the gradual decline of traditional rural customs,

and with the prospect of land ownership bleak, it is no wonder that a great number left Norway for North America. But just what effect did the emigration of Hardanger fiddlers have on the stability of the Hardanger fiddle tradition? This is a question with only speculative answers. Without doubt, the fact that Hardanger fiddlers emigrated to North America in large numbers made an impact on the progress of the tradition.

At the same time that the rise of Pietism, the popularity of *runddans* music, and widespread emigration contributed to the instability of the Hardanger fiddle tradition during the Norwegian migration period, several other factors bolstered its survival. Perhaps the most important of these was the cultural movement known as Romantic Nationalism, which took place between 1840 and 1867. Inspired by the German National Romantic Movement, and motivated by Norway's desire to assert a national identity after having been governed by both Denmark and Sweden, Norwegian Romantic Nationalism awoke new interest and respect for folk traditions and culture. Hardanger fiddle music and its accompanying dance traditions came to be called 'national music' and 'national dance', and the Hardanger fiddle was recognized as Norway's 'national instrument'. Folk music collectors, many of them scholars with an interest in preserving the Norwegian folk music traditions, travelled to many of the rural districts and transcribed Hardanger fiddle tunes. Important cultural figures such as composer Edvard Grieg and violinist Ole Bull also worked to preserve and bring recognition to Norwegian folk music, and it was Ole Bull who initiated the first formal Hardanger fiddle concert with fiddler Torgeir Augundson, better known as 'Myllarguten', one of the most important fiddlers from the Telemark district. This concert took place on 15 January 1849 in Kristiania, and it was soon followed by many more solo Hardanger fiddle concerts in the cities.¹³

The interest of scholars in Romantic Nationalism waned after 1860, but around 1890 the ideals of the movement were revived during a Neo-Romantic period. Hardanger fiddlers continued to give concert performances throughout the course of these fluctuations; concert touring became a new and often lucrative source of income for fiddlers. A great number of 'concert pieces' for Hardanger fiddle, often containing sections in which the fiddle mimicked bird calls and other natural sounds, were made or developed from older tunes by concert fiddlers from all of the Hardanger fiddle districts.

Romantic Nationalism's interest in Norwegian folk music most likely also had some influence on the creation of the *kappleik*, a judged folk music competition. The first *kappleik* to focus on Hardanger fiddle music was held in Bø, Telemark in 1888; in 1896, Vestmannalaget organized the first of many *kappleikar* (plural) in Bergen, and several of the best fiddlers from districts in western Norway competed. The *kappleik* system allowed both fiddlers and spectators to gain a deeper awareness of the cultural value and complexity of Hardanger fiddle music by providing a grassroots venue for the appreciation and cultivation of the tradition. The tradition of holding both local and national *kappleikar* has survived in Norway to the present day and remains an important fixture in the folk music milieu.

ELLESTAD *Emigrant Hardanger Fiddlers*

Around the same time as the establishment of the *kappleik*, local fiddlers' associations began to appear. A national fiddlers' association, called *Landslaget for Spelemenn*, was formed in 1923, and it served, among other things, to organize the annual national *kappleik*, and to connect the network of local associations and individual fiddlers which constituted its membership.

Though greatly affected by cultural, economic and political change, Hardanger fiddle music managed to survive in Norway, largely with thanks to the efforts of enthusiasts who dedicated time and resources to preserving and fostering the tradition. Its role and cultural significance had shifted dramatically, and it was no longer possible to return the tradition to its original place in rural culture. But, to turn our focus once again to Norwegian migration, what happened to the Hardanger fiddle tradition which was brought with Norwegian emigrants to North America, and was it able to survive?

Many of the same factors which threatened or reinforced the continuation of the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Norway were also at work in North America. For instance, the newer types of music and dance were equally popular among Norwegian emigrants, and, perhaps, more so because of their more frequent interaction with other cultures. Emigrant Hardanger fiddlers learned repertoires of these new tunes both in Norway and in North America, and they also traded tunes with musicians of other nationalities (in this way, a unique Norwegian-American fiddle tradition developed, most often played on the ordinary fiddle).

Many emigrants were followers of the Lay religious movement, as the movement's break with traditional Norwegian society and the State church became a strong motivator for emigration. Therefore, emigrant fiddlers were not freed from the influence of the movement's followers and their powerful opposition to the Hardanger fiddle.

The spirit of Norwegian Romantic Nationalism influenced the survival of Hardanger fiddle music in America, too. Many of the same fiddlers who toured Norway playing concerts during this period also tried their luck in America, and written records show that there was great success to be had by holding concerts in the 'Norwegian colonies' in the American Midwest. In some cases, thousands showed up to listen to the likes of Lars Fykerud (Telemark), Ola Mosafinn (Voss), and Olav Moe (Valdres) play. Concerts such as these would often consist of a mixture of traditional Hardanger fiddle tunes and the concert pieces mentioned earlier. The appeal of these performances to Norwegian emigrants must have been enormous: the opportunity to relive sounds and stories from their homeland, and, for some of the audience members, from their home district, would have been of great interest to any emigrant who longed for a taste of far-off Norway. Coupled with the interest in folk traditions awakened by Romantic Nationalism and Neo-Romanticism, it is no surprise that these concerts had such success.

In line with similar developments in the Hardanger fiddle milieu in Norway, emigrant Hardanger fiddlers began to organize *kappleikar* of their own at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first American *kappleik* was held just

two years before the establishment of an American national Hardanger fiddlers' association, the *Hardanger Violinists Forbundet af Amerika*, which was formed in 1914 at Ellsworth, Wisconsin. The 1912 *kappleik* was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of 'Telelaget i Amerika', a *bygdelag*, or organization centred on an association with a particular region in Norway, in this case Telemark.

A number of factors which were unique to the conditions of life in North America also had an impact on the survival of the emigrant Hardanger fiddle tradition. One such factor was the great distance that now separated fiddlers. The effects of this physical distance were particularly consequential during the latter half of the Norwegian migration period, when Norwegian emigrants were spread over a much larger area of the continent, and when the compulsion to integrate into American society was much stronger, resulting in the gradual disintegration of homogeneous Norwegian settlements. It thus became increasingly difficult for fiddlers to gather together; meetings between fiddlers provided an occasion to exchange and discuss music, and would also have been an important opportunity for mutual support. A lack of such interaction probably made it more difficult for many fiddlers to maintain a satisfactory level of musical development and personal engagement with the music, both of which are important elements for the cultivation of a musical tradition.

The compulsion to integrate into American society also played a significant role in de-stabilizing the emigrant Hardanger fiddle tradition. As mentioned, this impulse became increasingly powerful during the last decades of the Norwegian migration period, and it was particularly strong during the years preceding and during both the First and Second World Wars. In many cases, Norwegian emigrants were eager to adopt American customs and participate in an American culture; for a time, the Hardanger fiddle and its music and dance was regarded by some as 'un-American', and a great number of first- and second-generation Norwegian emigrants focused their attention elsewhere. This in turn had the effect that an increasingly dwindling number of emigrants were able to dance traditional *bydgedans*, the local versions of *springar*, *gangar*, and *halling* which accompanied Hardanger fiddle music. With fewer and fewer dancers to play for, Hardanger fiddlers in North America lost a large part of their cultural significance.

Valdres to North America

Of all the rural Norwegian districts to see a portion of their inhabitants depart for the New World, the highest rate of emigration occurred in the Valdres district.¹⁴ Although no exact figures exist, it has been estimated that about 12,000 left Valdres for North America between 1865 and 1905;¹⁵ in 1900, the total population of the Valdres district was 17,000.¹⁶ The rate of emigration from Valdres was high for a number of reasons. First, the natural landscape, a combination of medium-altitude mountains and long fjords, provides only a very small amount of arable land, and as the local population expanded during the 1800s, many already small farms were

divided and subdivided to make room for the next generation and their families, until the plots were not large enough to sustain the inhabitants.

In addition to this, the climate in Valdres made for short, often cool and wet growing seasons. Crop failures were not uncommon, and farmers had particularly bad luck due to poor weather for several seasons during the first half of the nineteenth century. As a result, many were severely malnourished, often to the point of starvation.

Partly due to the shortage of farmland, a large *husmann* or tenant farmer class arose during this period; these farmers were allowed to inhabit a modest home and to cultivate a small tract of land in exchange for helping their landlords with various other types of farm work. For a tenant farmer, land ownership in his home district was a distant hope, and the opportunities for inexpensive or free land in North America were incredible in comparison.

Many of the Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres who emigrated to North America were *husmenn*, compelled to emigrate at least partly due to this abundance of farmland. The individual circumstances and personal background of each fiddler also had much to say for why and how he made the journey into the New World. In order to illustrate this point, we will now take a closer look at five of Valdres's most important emigrant Hardanger fiddlers.

Arne Steinsrud (1799–?)

Arne Steinsrud was one of the greatest fiddlers from Sør-Aurdal *kommune*, the southernmost municipality in Valdres. Sør-Aurdal and Etnedal have fostered the fewest Hardanger fiddlers of the six *kommuner* in Valdres, and this project has to date registered six emigrant fiddlers from Sør-Aurdal.

Steinsrud emigrated to America in 1852 at age 53.¹⁷ He and his wife and nine of their children were thus a part of the first wave of Norwegian emigration. Steinsrud had bought the farm nordre Steinsrud in Begnadalen in 1824, but he had to sell it in 1851; it was said that he had 'played himself from house and grounds'.¹⁸ Steinsrud was a master fiddler, and, in addition to his skill as a player, he was greatly inventive with the music. Much like his contemporary, Jørn Hilme, he elaborated the forms of many older tunes, and it is also said that he made a number of new ones, possibly including *Hengslelåtten*, a series of three *lydarlåttar* which tell the story of the tragic drowning of a wedding party in a lake at Valdreshengslet. Many other tunes are referred to as *Steinsrudlåttadn* because of the characteristic mark Arne Steinsrud left on them.

Steinsrud had several students, including Ellev Tollevsrud, Ola Lindelia, Amund Rustebakke, Ola Prestbråten, Anders Spangrud, and Ola Skreddarstugu. Of these, Amund Rustebakke and Ola Prestbråten also emigrated to America. Those who stayed behind in Valdres were able to pass on pieces of Steinsrud's playing tradition, but other pieces of the tradition have been lost. No records of students in America have been found, and it is likely that many tunes died with Arne Steinsrud in the Midwest.

In America, Arne Steinsrud and his family first settled in Springdale, Wisconsin, and later stayed for a time in the Valdres settlement called Blue Mounds. They established a permanent home in Vermont Township, Wisconsin. Steinsrud continued to play in America, and he soon became well known as a fiddler, playing often for weddings and parties. On one such occasion, one of his daughters died on the dance floor. After this, Steinsrud stopped playing, and reportedly 'smashed his violin'.¹⁹

Bendik i Nøen (1827–1882)

Bendik i Nøen was from Nord-Aurdal *kommune*, a municipality from which only three Hardanger fiddlers emigrated.²⁰ His proper name was Bendik Toresson Gausåk; he was given the nickname 'Bendik i Nøen' (Bendik in Destitution) because of the poverty which followed him his whole life. He was born out of wedlock and grew up with his mother in a small, crude hut south of Svanheld in Svenesbygda. He was fascinated by fiddle music from early boyhood, so much so that he carved himself a makeshift instrument which he played when he accompanied his mother as she worked.

Later, he travelled often to Aurdal, a town about 15 kilometres south of his home, and played for the many officials and other members of the upper-class who populated the town at that time. His playing was warmly welcomed and praised in Aurdal, and he was frequently rewarded with money and food.

Bendik i Nøen was one of the best students of Jørn Hilme; he also played and competed often with Jørn Hilme's sons. Nøen therefore played *hilmespel* (the Jørn Hilme tradition), but he added a rich personal creativity and expression to the music, thereby forming a distinct tradition of his own. He composed tunes too, and one of them, 'Sylkjegulen hass Bendik i Nøen', became well known not only in Valdres, but also in various forms in other Hardanger fiddle districts. His most important student was Ulrik i Jensestogun; Ulrik passed on the tradition he had learned from Bendik i Nøen to fiddler Ola Fystro, and in addition, some of Ulrik's repertoire was transcribed by Swede Einar Övergaard between 1892 and 1896.

Nøen married early and settled with his family on a tenant farm near Gausåker. Providing for the family proved difficult, and he and his wife depended on the help of friends and neighbours in order to get by. Poverty was likely one of the major reasons Bendik i Nøen and his family emigrated; another probable influence was the severed connection from many friends he experienced as a result of the effects of the Pietist movement in Valdres.

In approximately 1870, during the second wave of Norwegian emigration, Bendik i Nøen emigrated with his family to Lansing, Iowa. He took a job there working for a farmer, and in 1876, he left for Rushford, Minnesota. Before he left, he gave his best fiddle, a Trond Botnen fiddle called 'Børka', to the farmer's 8-year-old son. Jøger O. Quale, a Hardanger fiddle enthusiast who emigrated to St Paul, Minnesota from Vestre Slidre, Valdres in 1907, located and purchased the fiddle in the 1930s (in 1958, Quale presented it to the Valdres Folk Museum, along with

two other instruments which had once belonged to great Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres, and which had later been brought to America).

Little is known about Bendik i Nøen's life in America. A letter from Quale refers to one occasion when Nøen played at a wedding, and it is possible he played at others. No documentation has revealed any students in America. It is difficult to know what circumstances caused him to give away his best instrument, and it is uncertain whether he continued playing after this. Nøen lost contact with his family at some point, and some records suggest that he started another family in America.

Knut Sjøheim (1849–1908)

Knut Sjøheim emigrated to America in approximately 1870, at that point a young man just over twenty years old.²¹ He had already been recognized as one of Valdres's greatest fiddlers, and several tunes had been named after him in honour of the special mark he had left on them.

Sjøheimen (as he was often called) was the illegitimate son of a *husmann's* daughter from Sjøheim, in Røn in Vestre Slidre *kommune*. He grew up to be an unusually small and frail man and was never suited for farm work. Instead, he spent most of his days playing the fiddle, and while he was still in Norway, he travelled often, both east and west of the Valdres valley, to play and learn tunes. He had no one master teacher, but had learned a little from his uncles and from Trond and Ola Hilme, two of Jørn Hilme's sons. He played *hilmespel*, made unique by the combination of power and refinement in his playing.

Upon arriving in America, he spent his first few years in Manitowoc, Wisconsin; in the years that followed, he and his family lived in Door County, Wisconsin; Fisher, Minnesota; Bemidji, Minnesota; Yorkton, Saskatchewan; and finally in Arlington, Washington. Though he occasionally took other work, it was on the proceeds of fiddling that Sjøheimen lived. One story has it that Sjøheimen sat on a haystack and played for a threshing crew during the harvest and was paid the same wage as the workers.

Sjøheimen also played at local and private gatherings, including parties held by the Sons of Norway organization, and he occasionally gave concerts in the city. Records indicate that he met and played with many other Hardanger fiddlers: Eivind D. Aakhus, a fiddler who had emigrated from Setesdal, and Sam Sorenson, a second-generation Norwegian immigrant, learned many tunes from Sjøheimen, and some of these tunes have been preserved, both by being transcribed and by being passed on to visiting Norwegian fiddlers who brought the music back to Norway. Sjøheimen's son Bennet learned the fiddle from his father, but his interest in playing was more casual.

According to another story, Sjøheimen once played for Ole Bull during one of Bull's trips to America. After hearing him play, Ole Bull gave Sjøheimen \$100 and said that he was one of the best players he had heard. Lars Fykerud, a great fiddler from Telemark who was exceedingly harsh in his judgment of other fiddlers' playing, said, after returning from a concert tour in America, 'I haven't met more

than one Norwegian fiddler I would take my hat off for. That was a Valdres man over in the North-West [USA] called Knut Sjøheim. He *could play – u hui!*²²

The following comment aptly illustrates the significance of Sjøheimen's musicianship and the loss that Valdres experienced when he left for America:

That Sjøheimen was a master fiddler one can perceive in the tunes which are still considered to be after him. There aren't as many as there likely were, as he was so young when he left, but the ones we have distinguish themselves completely in favour and power from other normal dance tunes.²³

It is clear, however, that his activities as a fiddler in America made a significant impact on the American Hardanger fiddle milieu, both by fulfilling a more traditional fiddler's role in the new Norwegian-American society, and by participating in and helping to develop a network of emigrant Hardanger fiddlers.

Trond Eltun (1823–1899)

Trond Eltun was one of the best fiddlers from Valdres's northernmost *kommune*, Vang.²⁴ He had learned to play from several great fiddlers, including Ola i Hamris-Brøto, Knut Nordland, Andris Skogstad, Ola Søyne, and the itinerant fiddler Karl Palm. In 1859, he bought the farm søre Øye and began to work as a farmer; though skilful in his work, he was plagued by a heavy debt, and even when he supplemented his income by working as a mail carrier, he was unable to pay off what he owed. It is probable that he was influenced by news of the profitable concert tours undertaken by other Hardanger fiddlers in America. Eltun decided to try his luck with the same, and left for the USA in 1875 with his son Johannes.

While still in Norway, Eltun had held concerts in Lillehammer and Oslo, and he had played for Ole Bull and the composer and folk music collector L. M. Lindeman, among others.²⁵ When he arrived in America, he began by performing in concert halls in the Midwestern cities; later, he also held concerts in country schoolhouses, close to where emigrants from Valdres and other Norwegians lived. Eltun gave concerts throughout the upper Midwest, including the states of Minnesota, the Dakotas, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Though he did earn a lot of money from his performances, a combination of bad luck and a lack of business skills had the result that he was never able to save up enough to bring back to Valdres. Bad luck struck after a concert in Walcott, North Dakota, when he was robbed of \$500.

Eltun played *lydarlåttar* masterfully, and his playing style was warm, friendly, and fine. He could also mimic birdcalls with great skill. In Norway, he had taught tunes to his son Johan-Henrik Eltun på Kvam, as well as Ola Strand på Søyne, several fiddlers in the neighbouring valley of Årdal, including Sjur I. Eldegard, and to the great fiddler Ola Mosafinn from Voss.

Eltun was never to return to Valdres; instead, he spent the rest of his life travelling the Midwest playing concerts. During his travels, he often stayed with

friends and relatives, as he never had a permanent home in America. He died during a concert tour in Minnesota at the age of 76, when he choked on a piece of meat.

This project has registered fourteen emigrant Hardanger fiddlers from Vang *kommune*; Eltun made his journey to America during the third wave of migration, and through his dedication to his vocation as concert fiddler, achieved a great deal for the promotion and appreciation of Norwegian folk music on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ola Reishagen (1884–1943)

Ola Reishagen was better known by the name Oscar Hamry in America. He was gifted as both a fiddler and a fiddle maker, and at least one of his instruments can be found in Valdres today.²⁶ Reishagen was raised on the Hambro farm, on Midtre Hande in Vestre Slidre *kommune*. Like Vang, many Hardanger fiddlers had emigrated from Vestre Slidre (this project knows of fourteen); of these, Reishagen was one of the later emigrants, as he left Valdres in 1910, during the fourth wave of emigration.

In Valdres, Reishagen had been taught by Ola Neste and Ivar Ringestad. When he arrived in America, he settled first in St Paul, Minnesota, and later lived in Northfield and then in Faribault, Minnesota. He was one of the only emigrant Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres to participate in an American *kappleik*, and he participated in several; the first *kappleik* he competed in was held in Fargo, North Dakota in 1929, and he was awarded first prize for his playing.

In addition to participating in *kappleikar*, Reishagen also met and exchanged tunes with the brothers Eilev, Harald and Gunnleik Smedal, who had emigrated to the Midwest from Telemark. He also spent a good deal of time with Jøger O. Quale, and in 1940, Quale took the initiative to make a recording of Reishagen. Quale managed to record between twenty and thirty tunes during their first session; he had intended to record Reishagen's entire repertoire, but Reishagen died shortly after the first recording was made. The result, which is a collection of tunes from both Valdres and Telemark, is one of the only recordings made of an emigrant Hardanger fiddler from Valdres.

Reishagen had given concerts in America with mixed success; however, he was very often asked to play for meetings of 'Valdres Samband', a *bygdelag* uniting emigrants from Valdres and their descendents. It is said that he played true *slidrespel*, a style of playing local to Vestre Slidre *kommune*; his playing also disclosed the unmistakable influence of Jørn Hilme. It is clear from Quale's recordings that Reishagen was a master fiddler.

When a copy of Quale's recordings arrived in Valdres in 1978 (see Figure 1), many of the day's fiddlers were thrilled to have a chance to hear it.²⁷ One fine tune, now often called 'Springar etter Ola Reishagen' (Springar after Ola Reishagen), made its return into the modern repertoire of Hardanger fiddle music from Valdres with thanks to this recording; the tune had been forgotten in Valdres until it made its appearance on Quale's tape.

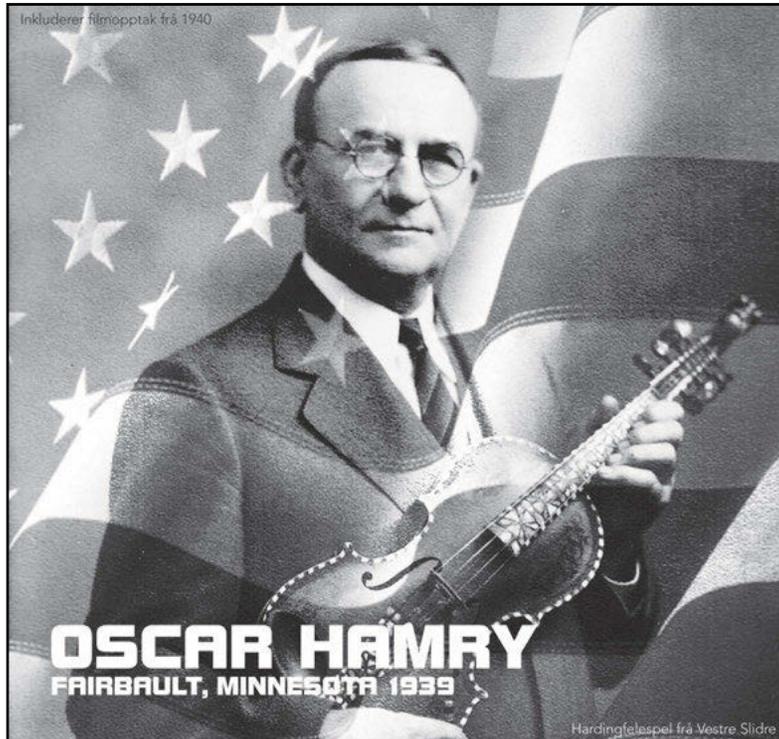


Figure 1 *Oscar Hamry: Fairbault, Minnesota 1939*, CD cover.
By permission of Frode Rolandsgard

These five men represent a great number of other Hardanger fiddlers who emigrated from Valdres to North America. These others were active to widely varying degrees in the North American Hardanger fiddle milieu, and many of them were more or less modest in their ambitions as players. But, whether considered individually or as a group, the significance of the emigration of these fiddlers was great. Valdres is a small district which gave birth to a complex and fascinating Hardanger fiddle tradition, and it was and continues to be dependent on the care, effort, and spirit of its musicians to take its music forward.

There is no doubt that the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres would have developed differently had the phenomenon of emigration not taken effect in Norway. A master fiddler such as Knut Sjøheim would have probably made a much larger impact on the evolution of *slidrespel*, for example, and we may have had many more of his tunes in the repertoire of Hardanger fiddle music from Valdres. But, dictated by circumstance on many levels, it was inevitable that so many chose to emigrate to North America; the Hardanger fiddle's fluctuating status in Norwegian and North American societies is equally inevitable.

Notes

¹ Arne Bjørndal and Brynjulf Alver, *Og fela ho let*, 2nd edn (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1985), p. 39.

² Two articles in *Valdres Bygdebok*, vol. VI have served as primary sources of information about the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres. These are: Knut Hermundstad and Olav Moe, 'Folkemusikarar i Valdres', in *Valdres Bygdebok*, ed. by Knut Hermundstad, 8 vols (Leira, Valdres: Valdres Bygdeboks Forlag, 1968), VI, 247–371; and Arne Bjørndal, 'Slått musikken i Valdres', in *Valdres Bygdebok*, ed. by Knut Hermundstad, VI, 372–405.

³ The project which forms the basis for this paper began as independent research in 2007. My interest in investigating the emigration of Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres was sparked while spending the winter of 2006–2007 studying the Hardanger fiddle in Norway. That winter, I had the opportunity to play with Valdres fiddler Trygve Bolstad, and during our lesson he told me a bit about master fiddler Arne Steinsrud, who had migrated to America in 1852. Among other things, Bolstad mentioned that Valdres had lost several of its greatest fiddlers during the Norwegian migration period, and that this had undoubtedly influenced the development of the tradition. A curiosity about the level of impact emigration has had on the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres is what motivated me to begin researching and collecting materials. The paper presented at NAFCo in 2008 was prepared expressly for the conference. I have since continued work on the project, both independently and in conjunction with my studies at the Ole Bull Academy.

⁴ Bjørndal and Alver, *Og fela ho let*, pp. 17–19; Bjørn Aksdal and Sven Nyhus, eds, *Fanitullen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1993), p. 21.

⁵ Ingrid Semmingsen, *Norway to America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 10.

⁶ Einar Haugen, *The Norwegians in America* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967), p. 4.

⁷ Odd Sverre Lovoll, *A Folk Epic: The Bygdelaag in America* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1975), p. 10.

⁸ Kevin Hoeschen, 'The Norwegian Hardanger Fiddle in the Upper Midwest: Documentation and Interpretation of an Immigrant Music Tradition' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Minnesota, 1989), p. 29.

⁹ Haugen, p. 4.

¹⁰ Gulbrand Loken, *From Fjord to Frontier: A History of the Norwegians in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1980), pp. 96–97.

¹¹ Aksdal and Nyhus, p. 298.

¹² See Mary Elizabeth Neal, 'Devil's Instrument, National Instrument: The Hardanger Fiddle as Metaphor of Experience in the Creation and Negotiation of Cultural Identity in Norway' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Anthropology, 1991), p. 327.

¹³ Bjørndal and Alver, *Og fela ho let*, p. 48; Aksdal and Nyhus, p. 246.

¹⁴ Carl and Amy Narvestad, *Valdres Samband 1899–1974* (Granite Falls, MN: Valdres Samband, 1974), p. 23.

¹⁵ A. M. Sundheim, ed., *Valdreser i Amerika: Aarbok 1922* (Minneapolis, MN: Valdres Samband, 1922), p. 23.

¹⁶ Narvestad, p. 23.

¹⁷ Information about Arne Steinsrud is taken from: Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 247–48; Olav Moe, 'Gamle Valdres-spelmenn V: Folkemusikken i Sør-Valdres', *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1940), 139–41.

¹⁸ Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, p. 247.

¹⁹ Vermont Bicentennial Committee, *Vermont* (Vermont, WI: Vermont Bicentennial Committee, 1977), p. 229.

²⁰ Information about Bendik i Nøen is taken from: Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 267–69; Olav Moe, ‘Gamle Valdres-spelmenn VI: Bendik i Nø’n’, *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1941), 220–23; Knut Hermundstad, ‘Bendik Toresson Gausåk eller Bendik i Nø’n’, *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1959), 105–24.

²¹ Information about Knut Sjøheim is taken from: Knut Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok VI* (Leira, Valdres: Valdres Bygdeboks Forlag, 1968), pp. 293–96; Olav Moe, ‘Gamle Valdres-spelmenn VIII: Sjøheimguten’, *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1944), 214–17; ‘Sjøheim Brothers Bring Fiddling to the Midwest’, *Sound Post*, 2, no. 1 (1985), 6–7, and 25; Nils Hovi, ‘Eit og anna om Sjøheimsguten’, *Spelemannsbladet*, nos 11–12 (1958), 20–21.

²² Moe, ‘Gamle Valdres-spelmenn’, pp. 214–17 (p. 216).

²³ Moe, ‘Gamle Valdres-spelmenn’, p. 217.

²⁴ Information about Trond Eltun is taken from: Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 332–37; Knut Hermundstad, ‘Bonde, spelman og postfører Trond Ivarson Eltun’, *Spelemannsbladet*, nos 1–2 (1958), 6–7.

²⁵ Hermundstad, *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 333–34.

²⁶ Information about Ola Reishagen (Oscar Hamry) is taken from: Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 310–13; O. K. Granheim, ‘Ein utvandra Vestre-Slidring – Valdreskulen Oscar Hambrey’, *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1959), 155–56; ‘Oscar Hamrey Tunes Taped, To Be Aired May 8’, *Sound Post*, 5, no. 2 (1988), 18–19. For the recording of Oscar Hamry made by Jøger O. Quale in 1939, see *Oscar Hamry, Fairbault, Minnesota 1939*, ta:lik[label], TA43CD, Norway, 2007.

²⁷ Ola Hjelle, ‘Ola O. Reishagen’, in CD booklet, *Oscar Hamry: Fairbault, Minnesota 1939*, ta:lik[label], TA43CD, Norway, 2007.