

ORIGIN OF SCANDINAVIAN INSTRUMENTS IS TRACED

Harp, National Instrument of Saxons and Norsemen, Believed to be Endowed with Supernatural Powers—Hardanger Fiddles Described—Other Curious Violins in Norway Crudely Fashioned by Peasants

[E. Van Der Straeten in the "Music Student" of London]

DURING their migrations in the Balkans, about the third century B. C., the Celts must have become acquainted with the harp, which the Greeks and Macedonians had received from Egypt, writes E. Van der Straeten in the *Music Student* of London. It became the instrument of their bards, who brought it to their northern home. From Ireland and Scotland the harp found its way to the Germanic races, and among these, first and foremost to the Saxons and the Norsemen.

The latter, although divided into various tribes, had one common language, the "Norråna," closely allied to the Saxon language, and in this were produced the finest of their historic songs and ballads, which considerably influenced the poetry of Scotland and England, where direct traces of Norse poetry are still to be found in ancient folk-songs. The close relation between the Saxon and the Norråna languages is clearly shown in the fact that when Alfred visited the Danish camp, disguised as a harper, he was easily understood by the Danes. The small portable harp similar to the ancient Irish harp became the national instrument of the Norse, and it was played by women and men of all classes.

The uniformity of language among the Scandinavian tribes which existed down to the twelfth century accounts for the fact that the ancient historical songs and ballads were common to all, and their knowledge was spread by Icelandic scalds engaged at the various courts of the Norse Kings. The brothers Olav and Sturla Thordarson lived at the court of Waldemar II. of Denmark, who died in 1241, and was the last king who kept Icelandic scalds or bards at his court. Thus we find still some of the oldest songs in all the three kingdoms, with but slight variations, whereas those which were composed during and after the development of different dialects (which began about the middle of the twelfth century) were sung only in the country that produced them.

The Power of the Harp

The harp was held in such high esteem that it was believed to be endowed with supernatural powers which it exercised in particular over sprites and fairies. The "Nix" or water-sprite was

dangerous to the haughty maiden cruel to her lover, while the daughters of the dwarf lured young gallants to their doom. A beautiful ancient ballad, "The Power of the Harp," tells how the Nix had lured two sisters of little Christel from the Bridge of Ringfalla, and it was prophesied that little Christel herself would share their fate on her wedding day. While she was riding that day over the fatal bridge by the side of Sir Peter, her bridegroom, her palfrey stumbled and threw her into the stream. Sir Peter quickly took his golden harp and began to play. At the first strain the Nix appeared sitting on the water mocking him; at the second strain he sat on the shore and cried; at the third strain the bird began to dance on the bough, the bark severed itself from the tree, a white arm cleaved the water, and little Christel sat on Sir Peter's knee, while the Nix came out of the water with one of her sisters on each arm.

Another ballad tells how Ulfwa, the dwarf's daughter, lures Sir Tynne to his doom by three strains of her golden harp. The only known specimen of a harp belonging to that time (the early thirteenth century) is O'Brien's harp, or "Clareesch," at Trinity College, Dublin. From the middle of the fifteenth century, the harp was gradually replaced by the lute and the "fele" (fiddle).

Devil Helps Make Fiddle

About the middle of the seventeenth century the violin made its first appearance in Norway. Lars Klark, a schoolmaster of Oesterjõ, about 1670, made a stringed instrument out of a hollowed piece of wood, mounted with gut strings. One of his pupils, Isak Nielson Botnen, became the originator of the instrument known as the Hardanger fiddle. His infernal majesty, who has often proved obliging in such matters, had given him his assistance (so the story goes) against the usual small consideration. When Isak was experimenting with a modification of the "Dusing fela," i. e., the "German fiddle" of the Stainer model, the Devil appeared to him in his sleep and presented him with a model entirely black in color. It was a deep model, somewhat smaller than the ordinary violin, short-necked, with a rather low bridge which facilitated the playing of shakes, and fitted with sympathetic strings running underneath the fingerboard as on the viola d'amour. This he began to copy forthwith, and the preacher Didrik Muns of Stordøen instructed him in the art of varnishing his instruments. His fiddles soon became known throughout the western parts of the country, and their fame spread to Telemarken, where they were held in high repute and found many imitators, of whom some rivalled Botnen for excellence of workmanship. Old Isak died at a very advanced age, about 1780. The Prince of Darkness, it is said, did not forget the redemption of his bond. He stole Isak's body from the coffin, for when he was buried that was found to be very light. His son, Trond Issaksen, who worked at Flatebø, and later on, at Aulvik in Kinsarvik, is looked upon as the author of the modern "Hardanger fela." Improving upon his father's model, he made his instruments more in accordance with the pattern of the modern violin.

Hardanger Fiddles

The art of fiddle-making began to be cultivated about 1750 in Telemarken, where several members of the Helland family, some living at Bøe and some at Vinje, acquired a high reputation. At the present day there are still many fiddle-makers in Norway, in Hardanger, Voss, Sogn, Orkedalen, Hallingdalen and other places.

The Norwegians had their national fiddlers, like the Scotch (Patie Burney, Niel Gow, etc.), who played at their festivals, dances, fairs and similar occasions. They partook, however, more of

the bards than the Scotch fiddlers, for they used to relate historical events and legends of their country which at intervals they illustrated by free improvisation.

The old Hardanger fiddles are very primitive in appearance. The workmanship is crude; the varnish of a hard brownish brick-red. Belly, back and ribs are generally decorated with various designs in black and gold, or flower designs in color, strongly reminiscent of those on a cottager's favorite tea-cup. Fingerboard and tailpiece are covered with geometrical ornamentations inlaid with bone and walnut, or ebony and mother-of-pearl. Peg-box and scroll often show specimens of crude carving, the scroll being replaced by a head. The clumsy cut *f*'s are sometimes wanting the middle line. The fiddles are mounted with four gut strings similar to those of the violin, and sometimes two, but generally four, sympathetic wire strings running underneath the fingerboard.

The modern Hardanger fiddles, although retaining all the characteristic traits of the old instruments, are of elegant shape and superior workmanship and varnish.

"Langleik" and "Langspel"

Apart from the Hardanger fiddle, a primitive instrument known as "Langleik" in Norway and "Langspel" in Iceland was in use down to the latter part of the eighteenth century. It is a development of the monochord and similar to the "Scheitholt," described already in "Praetorius Organographia" (1619), but of much more ancient origin. Edm. van der Straeten of Brussels published a monographie of this instrument, at Ypres, in 1868.

It consists of a shallow and very narrow oblong wooden box, the sides of which have a slight outward curvature. The bridge stands close to the lower end of the instrument which has sound-holes of various shape. A Langleik in the *Musée instrumentale* of the Brussels Conservatoire has two angular sound-holes placed—and a small heart-shaped sound-hole in the lower part. Langleik and Scheitholt were the prototype of the zither, and, like this, mounted with metal strings varying in number from three to eight (according to specimens in the Brussels Museum). It was tuned in the chord of F major, and the first two strings have movable frets for the adjustment of tones and semi-tones. They were plucked by the right thumb with a plectrum, the other strings which were open being plucked by the fingers of that hand as on the zither.

The Icelandic Langspel in the Brussels Museum has only three brass strings. According to Mr. A. Hammerich, director of Copenhagen Museum of old instruments, the melody string of this instrument was played with a bow.

"Psalmodicon" and "Kantele"

A somewhat similar instrument, used in Norway and Sweden to accompany the singing of children in churches and school, is the Psalmodicon. It was in-

vented by John Dillner (1785-1862), and consists of a rectangular box about a yard long, three and one-half inches wide, and two inches high. A single melody string of gut runs from near the upper left to near the lower right hand corner (this is played with a bow). On either side of the string are placed four sympathetic strings of metal, according to Dr. George Kinsky, in unison with the former. The fretted fingerboard is divided into thirty-one partitions marking the tones (painted yellow) and semitones (black). Along the fingerboard runs a scale giving the note produced by each fret in staff notation, and with a number to each note. These numbers serve to write down the melodies. The tone is described as loud but somewhat snarling. To the same class of instruments belongs the Finlandic Kantele, which is more of the psaltry (dulcimer) shape. Some Kanteles are plucked by the fingers, others played with the bow. The former have twenty-five strings, tuned diatonically. The latter, invented by General Neovius, of Helsingfors, to replace the Norwegian Psalmodicon, has two strings played by two players, each with a bow, placed at opposite ends of the instrument.

"Nyckelharpan" in Sweden

An instrument once very popular in some parts of Scandinavia, especially in the mining districts of Upland (Sweden), is the Nyckelharpan, a crude fiddle with a key arrangement like the hurdy-gurdy, but played with a bow. The latter was tightened by placing the thumb between the hair and the stick, as was the custom with the most primitive mediæval bows.

The Nyckelharpan had two melody strings, three bourdons, and a varying number of sympathetic metal strings, running partly over, partly under, the bridge. The very elongated body has three sound-holes, two of oval shape, in the lower part of the belly, and one, generally heart-shaped, underneath the fingerboard. As these instruments were only made by peasants and miners, and not by professional instrument makers, they are somewhat crude in appearance. The once very popular Nyckelharpan has all but died out; the concertina has taken its place and it is much to be feared, as Dr. G. Kinsky points out in his admirable catalogue of the William Heyer Museum, that many traditional folk-tunes which were played on it may fall into oblivion with the instrument.

The pupils of Carrie J. Marsh gave their annual piano recital on June 21 in Newark, N. J. Pieces by classical and romantic masters were played by Ruth Murkland, Ivy Memmott, Eleanor Schroeder, Dorothy Courter, Ruth Trivett, Ethel Trivett, Gladys Vose, Dorothy Weidmann, Elizabeth Bolles, Alma Gordon, Clara Grobe, Marie Rummell, Chester Grant, Wilson Haines, William Archibald, Harry Murkland, Russell Elsener and Donald Hamilton. The assisting soloists were Mrs. Jessie B. Marsh, soprano, and Ethel Lacey, dramatic reader.

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