

# Listen to Norway

#1 2010

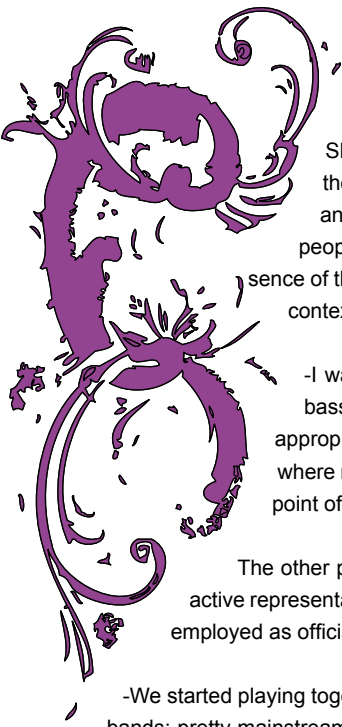


Showcase Scotland:  
Spotlight Norway



# Skáidi:

## Double bass magic me



Skáidi is a little place in Finmark; the northernmost part of the Norwegian mainland. It is also the name of a remarkable musical duo. Inga Juuso and Steinar Raknes have created a new and powerful framework for the Joik, which is the traditional vocal expression of the Sámi people that are indigenous to this region. Skáidi's music works as a catalyst for the true essence of the Joik one could say; it enopens this ancient tradition to the listener by creating a musical context that makes the Joik somehow *understandable*.

-I wanted to create something that was clear and to-the-bone, says Steinar Raknes, double bass maestro and the instrumental vehicle of Skáidi. -I had spent a lot of time learning and appropriating the Joik as a musical expression and trying to understand it. Finally I got to a point where my personal experience of the Joik became very clear and immediate. And that was my point of departure for Skáidi; I took hold of the Joik the way I heard it.

The other part of Skáidi is Inga Juuso, the world's only professional joiker and one of the great active representatives of this tradition. Juuso and Raknes met around then years ago, when both were employed as official public musicians in the county of Troms (just south of Finmark).

-We started playing together in different projects, says Raknes. But it was mostly in the format of bigger bands; pretty mainstream world-music with a lot of sound and Joik at the forefront, -but not as the constitutional element. That was what we eventually wanted to turn around with Skáidi. However, the years with these projects allowed me to get really well into the Joik because Inga and I had so much time to rehearse and play together. All along I have been acutely aware of the great privilege it is to be working with such a powerful exponent as she is.

Inga Juuso is a joiker, actor and teacher, truly one of the towering personalities of the Sami culture. Her repertoire is seemingly inexhaustible. Skáidi's eponymous debut from 2008 was based on a selection of traditional joiks from Inga's vast repertoire.

-We started preparing to make a record almost immediately, says Raknes, -that is how Skáidi started. It was a very intense period. Nothing was written down or composed, it was more a matter of the two of us finding out together how the Joik really sounded; extracting the music from it, so to speak, and reiterating that essence in a way that made the different joiks stand apart and become tunes. Inga is a very confident and strong joiker, meaning that she is very true to the form even though she does not relate to any fixed musical parameters, e.g. in terms of rhythm. My job was to try and expose the musical structures that are in fact there in the Joik and exhibit and enhance these instrumentally. I wrote most of the musical arrangements based on click-track recordings of the joiks played instrumentally. But in many cases we also improvised together and tried to develop ideas and elements that that we discovered along the way.

Even though the basis of Skáidi's music is constituted by Juuso's traditional joiks, there are many passages without vocals at all; instrumental stretches where the bass travels the landscape on its own.





# ets ancient Sami joik

[www.skaidi.org](http://www.skaidi.org) - Album: Skáidi  
(DAT)



-I think the bass and the Joik are pretty much equals in Skáidi, says Raknes. We are two powerful musical voices, I dear say, and our interplay also entails that the bass is sometimes alone and at the front. Playing in Skáidi is a very different mode to be in for me as a jazz bass player: the simplicity of the Joik in terms of harmonics makes it a challenge to create music around it, i.e. adding colour to the expression without disturbing the Joik itself. At the same time I find that the way we work together in Skáidi gives me an enormous sense of freedom. Musically Inga and I follow each other very intuitively and dynamically. This instinctive and very honest way of working is quite similar to playing in a jazz band where the musicians follow each other, improvising, and let the music unfold on that basis.

From the very start Skáidi have played around the whole world. From India to Argentina, in Europe and America, the response has been overwhelming relates Raknes.

-People react very differently, but positively. At first many express a sense of disbelief because the Joik is so strange to their ears. But pretty soon I think most people realise that they have in fact heard similar things before; different traditions of chanting and blues etc. Anyhow, the strength of Skáidi is that our music is very diverse within its parameters and that we display a lot of energy. Our concerts scope widely and I think the music comes across as composite and unpredictable, which people always appreciate.

Raknes makes a point of the fact that Skáidi do not try to invoke the spiritual and shamanistic aspects of the Sámi musical heritage. Their focus is always on personal presence and musical interaction. Now a new album is in the planning, due to be recorded in May.

-The main difference from the debut is that this time Inga has written some new joiks. However, the basis is still the same tradition that the joiks on the first record were taken from. Apart from that we haven't really decided what the new album will sound like.

As for Showcase Scotland, Raknes recognizes the huge privilege it is to be awarded a slot at such an important event. However, their minds are not in Scotland yet for Skáidi have many places to play before that.

-Our program for the winter is extremely packed, says Raknes. Before travelling to Scotland we are playing in Japan, Madrid and London. And later on in 2010 we are touring Poland, the Baltic States, the US, China and Argentina/Bolivia.

Take an ancient indigenous vocal expression, colour and arrange it with some double bass magic and the world is your playground. Skáidi is the proof.

# Unni Boksasp

## Stepping it Up, and Over

Jadedness is hardly a problem among the passionate and rooted souls that chose traditional music for a living. But even so, Unni Boksasp is likely to be a little more keyed-up than the rest of the lot at Celtic Connections, a debutant on the international scene as she is.

"I was already an adult when I started with traditional music," says Boksasp, one of the newest bright voices on the Norwegian traditional circuit. "My interest in the field grew forth as a combination of a love of local history and ethnography and some seminal record purchases: I bought some CDs with traditional music that I fell for instantly. And so, in due time, I enrolled at the folk music program at Rauland in Telemark. It was there that I discovered the recordings of Magnhild Havdal Almhjell. It was a very special experience to realize that she was actually from my home place! I had no idea that there was such an important voice of traditional music hailing from the same little corner of the country as I come from."

Boksasp's debut CD came in 2007, entitled *Songar frå Havdal*. The record is dedicated to Magnhild Havdal Almhjell in its entirety, meaning that the songs are all songs from Almhjell's repertoire based on the ethnographic recordings that were made with the singer many years ago.

"I never got the chance to hear her sing live," says Boksasp, "as she suffered a stroke before I was even born. But the local connection made my first record project very clear to me: I wanted to record her songs and make a record that also mirrored the things I had learned underway, especially in Stockholm."

Between her studies at Rauland and her debut record, Unni first spent a couple of years working as a pedagogue in Norway and then moved to Stockholm to attend the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, a result of her decision to become a full time musician.



photo Kari Loevaas

# D: erseas



[www.boksasp.no](http://www.boksasp.no) - Album: Songar frå Havdal

(ta:lik)

“I was already well acquainted with the Norwegian tradition and the educational methods used in Norway, so I wanted the difference in perspective that studies in Stockholm entail,” Boksasp elaborates. “They have a very different approach to working with traditional expressions. It is more liberal, I guess you can say, and more focused on arrangements. They have developed a special method for arranging traditional music, something we lack in Norway.”

Her insight into arrangements has been a very important tool for Unni in creating her own unique interpretation of the traditional sources she draws upon. Even more so on her new upcoming record, upon which she is currently working.

“*Keramello*, as it will be called, is more arranged and broader than my debut, which was an oddity in many ways, albeit consciously so,” Boksasp explains. “Now the format is a little more fixed, with bass and drums throughout. And the new record is definitely more light-hearted – even party-like – which is a bit of an achievement I think, bearing in mind that most of the repertoire that I draw on is very melancholic in nature.”

Apart from the format and arrangements, the major difference is that the new record draws from many different sources.

“A big part of being a traditional musician is learning from sources first hand,” says Boksasp. It is simply all-important to learn by ear instead of through written material. For that reason, I have spent a lot of time studying recordings and also making recordings with old people. Especially in my district, where there are very few still-active old singers and musicians, it is decisive to travel around to meet them and record their music.”

However, *Keramello*, which takes its name from an old goat herder’s calling-tune, also features songs written by Boksasp herself, including lyrics.

“The interplay between traditional songs and sources, and new arrangements and compositions is at the heart of folk music,” says Boksasp. “We find and create music as we go along, and often it is a matter of coincidence what ends up on a record and how long it takes to make a record. In my position, where I do everything myself –including the business part of it all – there is a certain limit to how much time you can spend on every project. Being a musician is a lot of work, especially as a singer, since it is mostly a question of your own projects and ideas rather than filling a role in a band.”

Unni Boksasp travels to Showcase Scotland with the band from her debut record.

“It is my first major international appearance,” says Boksasp, “so naturally I am very excited about it. For a newcomer on the international scene a convention like Showcase Scotland is really the optimal launch pad.”

*Keramello* will be recorded in February. By the time of its release, Boksasp will probably have extended the market for her music considerably. For things are happening in quick succession now; it is breakthrough time for another unique voice of Norwegian traditional music!

# Valkyrien Allstars

## All the Young Dudes

Sometimes music instigates fairytales. Valkyrien Allstars is one such: Three young Norwegian fiddlers see themselves trotting the world, called upon to energize audiences – from Japan to Holland, America to Russia – with the flammable musical brew that is their unique trademark. A blend of Norwegian traditional tunes and popular music in its every guise: Rock, blues, jazz and just about everything else that comes into a young person's ears. In January they travel to Celtic Connections to demonstrate how the gunpowder works, but before that a tour of Japan is on the rostrum.

"We were offered to do three different tours there, before even having set foot in the place," relates Valkyrien Allstar Ola Hilmen. "It all has to do with Folkelarm (the now blooming Norwegian folk music convention); the Japanese representatives there must have really liked what they heard from us, because the offers were not long in coming."

A natural question to ask is what exactly the Japanese found so captivating about the Norwegian fiddleworks; is a matter of the extremely exotic or is the answer rather to be found in the fact that Valkyrien Allstars incorporates so many musical traits in its brew that it comes across as global?

"First of all, it remains to be seen how we will fare over there," says Ola. "But I think it has to do with a combination of the uniquely Norwegian, which is exotic of course, and the way we draw on many different musical sources that are known everywhere. However, most of all, I think it is the energy that we display that people find arresting."

In Norway Valkyrien Allstars earned the epithet "explosive" the very instant they entered the music scene for real. The band's eponymous debut from 2007 became something of a byword for whatever is vital and fresh. The amalgam of many genres and emotions was one thing, the youthful energy with which it was all done something else.

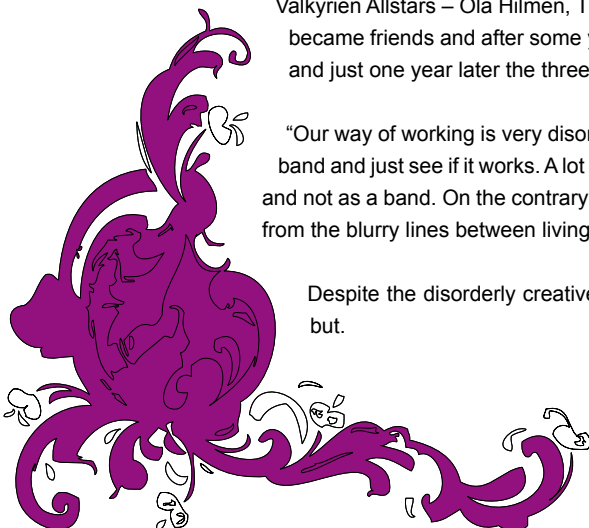
"The full frontal approach is always close to our hearts, and if there is one key word that describes the band I guess it must be energy and a love of "letting loose," Ola explains. "We make use of all that we can bring to bear as individuals in terms of personalities and inspiration – which is often very differentiated – but we have found a formula that ignites the interplay in such a way that the energy we create has become a kind of leitmotif. I think that has a lot to do with the fact that we were friends before we became a band, and not the other way around. Valkyrien Allstars is based on a deep sense of openness and honesty between us, which makes it a lot easier to just let the music happen, as it will."

Valkyrien Allstars – Ola Hilmen, Tuva Livsdatter Syvertsen and Erik Sollid – first met at a fiddle course back in the late 90s. They became friends and after some years decided to move in together and create a 24-7 musical collective. This happened in 2003 and just one year later the three were making their first national appearances in Norway.

"Our way of working is very disorderly. We simply bring whatever we have a feel for, or new things we have discovered, into the band and just see if it works. A lot of our music is a matter of coincidence and we never really sit down to compose; not individually and not as a band. On the contrary we are always jamming and improvising. It is almost a pathological trait, something that comes from the blurry lines between living together and playing together."

Despite the disorderly creative process, Valkyrien's second record, 2009's *Two Moons*, is a little more pensive than the debut.

"It just turned out that way," says Ola. "We made one song at a time and didn't really reflect on the overall mood while we went along. So it became a littler more pensive and quiet all on its own I guess. But we did have much more time working on this record than we did on the





# stars:



photo Knut Strand

## [www.valkyrienallstars.com](http://www.valkyrienallstars.com) - Album: *Two Moons* (Grappa)

first, and it felt like a really good unrushed process, which also entailed that the songs were created as fuller arrangements from the start. On *Two Moons* drums and bass are a lot more integrated than on the debut.

The band is still a trio though, all the while it is the original three that write all the music. But drums and bass are now a constant part of their sound, giving the fiddles and vocals a wheeled vehicle to roll on.

Ola elaborates, saying, "The line-up we have now works incredibly well, and I dare say it's a keeper! Aslak Dørum, our producer, has really committed himself to Valkyrien Allstars and he has been important for condensing our vision and making it punch right where we want it to."

Valkyrien Allstars have the credo that no person should leave a concert unaffected.

"I don't know who came up with that," says Ola, "but it is a basic truth of course, of being performing artists. However, there is no such thing as a particular emotion or set of such that we want to convey, except perhaps for the experience of being energized. On *Two Moons* there are so many different strands of emotion in circulation, and naturally everyone is affected in different ways."

*Two Moons* features many elements that might be described profound in nature. The band has made use of lyrics from great writers such as Shakespeare, Ibsen, Olav. H Hauge and Halldis Moren Vesaas.

"Our vantage point as folk musicians is that we might contribute in conveying some of the great lyrics that exist, which most people are unaware of," says Ola. "Especially in terms of Norwegian writers, of course; that is an essential part of being a folk musician really – the interplay between conveying existing expressions and dealing in musical innovation. However, on the latest record we have also begun to write ourselves, or to be accurate, Tuva has begun to write lyrics, with our support. It is a new thing for us to work with our own lyrics. The whole modus becomes more personal, and in a way I think that is something we might want to explore further. But it is very difficult though, and quite different from our normal disorderly way of making music."

As for Celtic Connections and Showcase Scotland the Allstars are full of anticipation.

"We have heard of the special atmosphere and the packed houses at Celtic Connections," Ola explains. "It is a very promising context for us, I dare say, so naturally we are looking forward to it very much."

The rest of 2010 will see Valkyrien Allstars travelling to new distant destinations; the U.S., probably Mexico, Russia and most definitely more places to come.

"We are really very lucky to be able to travel like this and play our music," says Ola. "It is great to experience that there is a real market for our expression outside of Norway."

# Majorstuen

***With a much-anticipated album scheduled for release during Showcase Scotland, Majorstuen, one of the Norwegian folk music scene's most active outfits, gears up for a hectic season on the international circuit.***

The name Majorstuen has come to signify the revival of Norwegian traditional music and its newly-won popular image as a hugely dynamic and forward-looking musical expression. Already with its eponymous 2003 debut album this five-strong fiddle ensemble made it clear that things were changing in the sphere of Norwegian folk. Words like “explosive” and “groundbreaking” had not previously been associated with pure fiddle music, but that was before Majorstuen came along.

Majorstuen's much anticipated new album, titled *Skir* (translation: shimmering), will be officially launched at the band's appearance at Showcase Scotland. The album, which follows up on the domestically as well as internationally successful albums *Jorun Jogga* and *Juledrøm*, features the ensemble's trademark self-described “Hardcore-fiddle” sound, a mix of traditional and original compositions, as well as unorthodox arrangements.

MIC reached Majorstuen's Tove Persdøtter Dalbakk during a break in the hectic pre-album launch period. Talking about the upcoming album, Dalbakk describes the outing as a matured, coherent and distinct product, saying, “Our new album features primarily original compositions but also a couple of traditionals that have been part of our repertoire for years. Even if we've grown and developed as arrangers and composers, the new album will not necessarily represent a departure from our trademark sound. I feel that we've found our form of expression now; we feel confident in what we're doing and we can allow ourselves to relax a bit, let our hair down a little and do what we really want to do artistically.”

Trained at the Norwegian State Academy of Music, all Majorstuen members are highly-skilled as performers on their respective instruments. But in addition to their performance prowess, the Majorstuen members take turns penning the ensemble's repertoire. Says Dalbakk on the outfit's compositional processes, “Each band member contributes equally to the composition process; over time, we've developed our own individual thumbprint as composers. We seem to blend well as performers, composers and individuals and I feel that this is what produces a sound that's coherent and individual. Some of us are more energetic and extrovert; Andreas [Ljones], for example, is a veritable Energizer-bunny, while other band members are calmer and more into the reflective and lyrical stuff.

Jokingly, Dalbakk refers to this as the “boyband-approach” – each member has his or her own easily-defined role, both in terms of stage presence and composition.





photo Geir Dokken

Dalbakk also reveals that the ensemble is moving into a new phase as far as live shows are concerned, explaining, "We've actually enlisted the help of a choreographer who will help us develop our stage presence. The idea is to retain each band member's on-stage personality and refine it and make it clearer. We're not talking about actual dance moves here; it's more of a subtle refinement of our current set-up and a wee bit more lively presence."

In 2010 audiences in Canada, France and the U.K. will be able to take in Majorstuen's new choreographed stage show as the ensemble heads out on tours in said territories.

Judging by the numerous glowing reviews bestowed upon Majorstuen in later years, it would appear that the ensemble's secret is the way the six fiddlers have refined their widely-different musical dialects into a single characteristic and playful language. Many will also argue that just as important is the fact that they have allowed this folk idiom to be influenced and energized by urban and eclectic musical impulses, making their pure fiddle music zeitgeist-y and fresh. They are conservative about sound and instrumental line-up, but all the more open and playful when it comes to ways of reinterpreting and reinvigorating the fiddle heritage.

The result is music which is deeply-rooted in tradition and distinctively Norwegian, and at the same time it is something new. Majorstuen breaks down old barriers between rural and urban concepts by presenting fiery, energetic and clever music that seems just as appropriate in a city club as on a village stage. More than anything, it is the live spectacle that this band puts on that has earned a reputation.

The members of Majorstuen are still young and they continue to expand their musical horizons in all kinds of other projects. In this way these musicians have contributed to a new dynamic professionalism among traditional musicians: Highly-educated, musically versatile, involved in diverse musical projects and constantly travelling; Majorstuen's fiddlers represent the new folk musicians of the 21st century.

# Gjermund Larsen

***Vital fiddler and composer Gjermund Larsen fronts a trio that brings Norwegian folk music to places it has never been.***

Gjermund Larsen enjoys a position as one of the most respected and active performers and composers on the contemporary Norwegian folk music scene. The Norwegian State Academy-educated fiddler and composer is a member of ensembles Majorstuen, Frigg, Brødrene Larsen, the Ragnhild Furebotten Trio and the Christian Wallumrød Ensemble.

MIC talked to a busy Larsen in late December last year. “Last autumn was really hectic; I’ve toured with my own trio as well as with Majorstuen and jazz outfit the Christian Wallumrød Ensemble,” Larsen says. “I’m busy as ever composing new music, both for my own use as well as for commissions from festivals and ensembles. It’s hectic, but I won’t have it any other way; I like to roam wide and far, covering lots of styles, genres and settings as a composer, as well as a fiddler.”

Larsen’s proper debut as a composer came in the form of the work *Brytningstid*, which was commissioned by the Telemark Festival two years ago. The majority of the work draws inspiration from and is devoted to new, contemporary and original folk music from the local dance music traditions of the Verdal area in the Trøndelag region. Double bassist Sondre Meisfjord and pianist/organist Andreas Utne were featured at the premiere of *Brytningstid* and the three have continued the fruitful collaboration to date. The pieces featured in *Brytningstid* still constitute the base of the trio’s repertoire, a repertoire that has continued to grow in magnitude and diversity during the last two years. The three band members represent a wide range of genres ranging from classical and contemporary to jazz and pop, as well as traditional folk music – a diverse background that results in a highly-aesthetic and rewarding sonic landscape.

Says Larsen on his trio’s much-anticipated “Spotlight on Norway” showcase slot, “My main motivation for performing at Showcase Scotland/Celtic Connections is to reach out, gain new contacts and ultimately generate more appearances for my trio abroad. Last autumn we went on our first international tour as part of the “Norwegian Tapas” campaign that featured gigs together with Jorun Kvernberg and Bruvoll/Halvorsen in Belgium and Luxembourg. The audience feedback was fantastic; we sold out all of our albums and merchandise in record time and received offers for return visits. It was quite exciting to test out our repertoire, which is solidly rooted in Norwegian culture and folklore, for an audience that



photo Geir Dokken

# Larsen Trio

[www.gjermundlarsen.com](http://www.gjermundlarsen.com) - Album: *Ankomst*  
(Grappa)

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had no knowledge of or relation to the musical culture on display. We're really looking forward to recreating that experience in Scotland come January."

He continues, saying, "The interest for Scandinavian folk music in general seems to have picked up lately. Particularly the French and German audiences seem really receptive, but we've also received growing feedback from the U.K. scene, as well. The whole folk music scene in Norway has gone through a major transformation over the last decade; there's a new generation of Conservatory-trained performers, more professional artist managers, stronger organizations, more funding and a growing domestic audience. Currently, it's a really positive spirit on the folk music circuit with lots of drive and a bunch of people intent on establishing themselves on the international stage."

Following the successful release of its debut album *Ankomst* in 2008 (which won a Spellemann Award, the Norwegian equivalent to the Grammy), the Gjermund Larsen Trio returns with its sophomore album in 2010. Larson elaborates, saying, "We're currently working on the follow-up to the debut album which will see its release this spring. I've composed the main bulk of the repertoire, which will follow in the same vein as the material on *Ankomst*. The musical landscape is much the same; lyrical and melodic pieces – perhaps a bit more solemn and quiet than the tunes on our debut. I've also been exploring some new musical territories; baroque has become something of a fascination for me lately. I've also worked with music for children and I've received a commission for a work to be performed at a major domestic festival later this year. It's a real challenge to balance the role of the composer with the role of the performer, but I feel that I'm currently mastering the juggling act – it's really rewarding."

Critics call Larsen a uniquely poetic folk musician distinguished by the gentle warmth of his tone, the natural lure of his melodies and the broad range of his poetic sensibility, which range from catchy dance tunes to tranquil meditations. Even amidst the brilliant revival of Norwegian folk music, Larsen and his Trio stand out; their repertoire of songs so rich and diverse in emotion and so beautiful and well tempered in execution that the whole horizon of Norwegian folk music seems to have been broadened.



# Synnøve S. Bjørset

***Solo Hardanger fiddle – traditional Norwegian folk music doesn't get any purer than this. Synnøve S. Bjørset is one of the style's most vital voices.***

Mention traditional Norwegian folk music and it's very likely that the first instrument many associate with this genre is the Hardanger fiddle. In the hands of a master, it lends a unique tonal character to the folk tradition. And a master is just what Synnøve S. Bjørset is. Her technical skills and her dynamic control, coupled with an innovative sense of expression, is an indication that the future of traditional Norwegian folk music is in good hands, indeed.

Bjørset is not confined to performing solely for a domestic audience; over the last eight years she has toured extensively around the world. Says Bjørset, "2009 was really positive for me – I ended up with more activity than I had planned for. I've been touring as a solo performer, as well as with Majorstuen. In hindsight, France and Canada stand out as real 2009 tour highlights."

Says Bjørset about working on a repertoire and with a performance style that has a clear framework rooted in a rich musical tradition: "I feel comfortable working within the frames of traditional, solo Hardanger fiddle music. In many ways, working with traditional repertoire is a matter of preparation; making the tunes available for new listeners. I feel that I have a role in which I am carefully pointing at the music, making the listener aware of the subtle nuances and variations of the tunes. In a broader picture, I feel that I play an important role as a conveyor of age-old stories. In many ways, my job is to ease the interpretation process for new listeners; I try to give them some knowledge to go



photo Vegard Fimland

# ørset

photo Jorun Marie Kvernberg

[www.myspace.com/bjorset](http://www.myspace.com/bjorset) - Album: 'Slåttar'  
(ta:lik)

along with [the music]; I tell them the underlying rich and exciting themes and stories that accompany the tunes.” Says Bjørset on the appeal of the Hardanger fiddle, “What often triggers the interest of new listeners is the unique timbre of the fiddle. The resonating strings in the fiddle’s body create a unique sonic palette that sounds like nothing else out there. Once you break some of the genre’s codes, learn what a ‘slått’ [dance tune] is or identify some of the repertoire’s main tunes such as ‘Fanitullen,’ for example, you’ll see a whole new universe opening up. Once you learn to appreciate the subtle nuances of the various playing styles and really listen, it can be a really rewarding experience.”

Bjørset has studied at the Norwegian State Academy of Music and drawn inspiration from some of the best-known and most outstanding fiddlers in the country, such as Håkon Høgemo. By working with and specializing in historical archive recordings, she has developed a distinctive repertoire based on a minimalistic melodic material. March 2009 saw the release of Bjørset’s latest solo outing, *Slåttar* – a tasteful, melodious collection of little-known tunes and reinterpretations of familiar standards. The traditional tunes are rooted in the fjord and mountain regions of Sunnfjord, Sogn and Valdres; areas where dance tunes and airs go hand-in-hand. Many of the tunes are based on simple melodic structures, which Bjørset attacks with her own brand of ferocious Hardanger fiddle minimalism.

It is with a realistic approach that Bjørset readies herself for the upcoming Showcase Scotland gig. “Over the years I’ve done quite a lot of showcases at festivals and music industry trade fairs such as this,” she explains. “I know that things don’t happen overnight, but I hope that being a solo performer, playing an instrument that no one else plays, might give me a slight advantage. Interest in Scandinavian folk music has blossomed, and with Norwegian music being such a distinct style, it feels as though we’re at the right place at the right time.”

A view shared by many is that the Norwegian folk music scene has undergone a transformation in recent years; performers, ensembles and the folk music industry appear more professional and have a clear international focus. Bjørset agrees, saying, “As a response to increased interest, the domestic scene has become much more professional over the last few years. We now have a couple of hard working artists that are really pushing it, and they’re backed by new companies such as [artist management companies] Solid! and Cumulus Nordic. The scene is really diverse; the spectrum includes crossover successes such as Valkyrien Allstars, as well as solo Hardanger fiddle players such as myself. It is vital that the scene now manages to produce some internationally successful door-openers; it will act as a trigger for a whole new wave of strong players.”



***In conjunction with the Norwegian focus at Showcase Scotland, we take the opportunity to present a “state-of-the-scene” outline of Norwegian folk. We spoke with two of the field’s key people, Silje Førland Erdal of the Norwegian Traditional Music Agency and Hilde Bjørkum of the Førde Folk Music Festival.***

“It would be an exaggeration to say that Norwegian traditional music is an easy commodity to sell,” says Silje Førland Erdal. “However, it is very evident that international awareness and demand is in the ascendant. Some of our key performers have been able to establish an excellent reputation for Norwegian folk music internationally and by now there is a notion that the quality of Norwegian acts is guaranteed.”

Erdal thinks there are a number of reasons for the upsurge of Norwegian traditional music as a borderless artistic commodity.

“One thing is the fact that bands such as Valkyrien Allstars and Majorstuen, and dancers such as Frikar exhibit very professional and arresting performances which generate a general impression that Norwegian folk culture is a true quality product. Another factor is the set of ‘ambassadors’ we have working for us; i.e., the international industry representatives and media that have experienced the most important festivals and conventions in Norway. They return home to their respective countries and markets with a message that Norwegian folk music is something to go for.”

Førde Folk Music Festival and Folkelarm are the two most important festivals in this respect. Førde has been a driving force in opening up Norwegian folk culture to the world for many years, while Folkelarm is a more recent success. In both cases, the strategy has been to create international meeting places and give international representatives a well-guided and persuasive “tour” of the Norwegian scene.

“The feedback we have been getting is extremely positive,” says Erdal. “Our success with these conventions testifies to the increasing professionalism of the whole field of traditional music in Norway, which has in many ways transformed completely over the course of the past ten to fifteen years.”

Traditional music used to be a matter of soloists performing in very specific styles and in very limited contexts, meaning that folk culture was largely a local phenomenon without any real possibility of gaining access to the general music market. Now the situation is quite different. Folk music has become a genre with a much wider scope, catering to a broad audience both domestically and internationally.





folk

# music scene

**The new national folk music venue in Oslo**

3D Eide and Haslestad, photo and manipulation Paal Ritter Schjerven

“I think one of the most important milestones in this development was the incorporation of folk music into higher music education in Norway, which happened about ten years ago,” says Erdal. The significant change was that traditional musicians stepped out of the specific folk niche and began to interact with all kinds of music and musicians, meaning that folk music opened up into a much wider landscape. Now traditional musicians will habitually be playing and performing in an array of different contexts and constellations, without, crucially, having turned their back on the specific traditional expression that is their basis. And naturally, it is the wider scope that allows traditional musicians of today to actually make a living as professional musicians.”

However, these changes have also created new challenges, for compared to the mainstream genres of popular music, the commercial apparatus dealing specifically with traditional music is still underdeveloped and undersized.

“The lack of agents and management services has been a big problem for the commercial viability of traditional music,” says Erdal. “But now we are seeing the appearance of the first dedicated management agencies. However, the work that has been laid down in terms of drawing international attention to Norwegian folk needs to be further underscored by the development of a tailored commercial infrastructure, because as a full-time musician, there is no way you can be your own manager and agent.”

One important step towards professionalising and streamlining this infrastructure was the recent union of the two major organisations for traditional music and dance in Norway. Following a schism back in the 80s the field has been divided. With the new unified organisation, the impact of its work will increase, hopes Erdal. “What is important is facilitating the new composite nature of folk music, coordinating goals and efforts and creating momentum.”

For some additional comments on the blooming professionalism of the Norwegian traditional scene, we spoke with another of the protagonists of the field: Hilde Bjørkum, Director of the Førde Folk Music Festival.

“I think we have been suffering from a certain lack of self-confidence,” says Bjørkum. “If we in Norway don’t believe that our traditional music has international potential, then who else will? But fortunately there has been a change of mentality in recent years. At Førde we have been very conscious about encouraging Norwegian agencies and helping anyone interested to start building up the auxiliary infrastructure. The festival has a huge international network, and part of our job as an advocate of Norwegian traditional culture is to introduce Norwegian agents, managers, festivals, etc., – as well as the actual performers – to the international circuit, and to make them see the potential.”



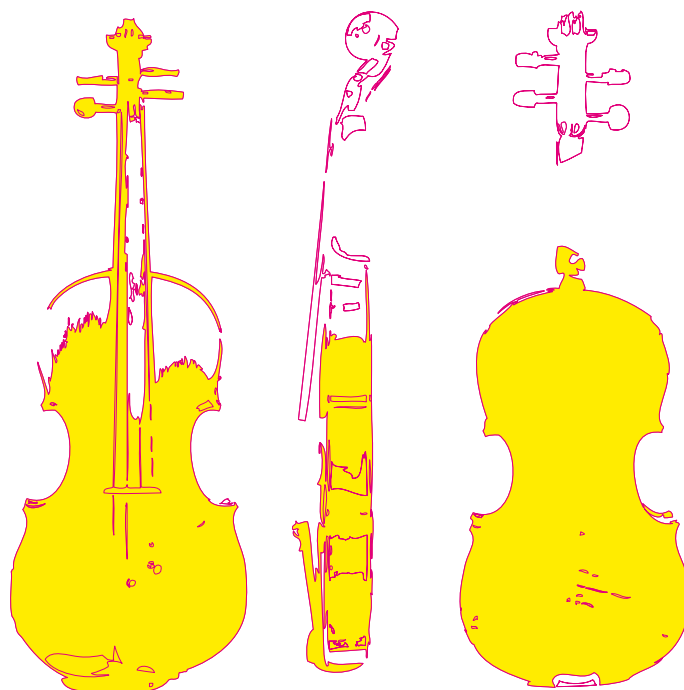
Photo fordefestival.no

Bjørkum believes Norwegian folk could well achieve the same level of international success as Irish and Scottish music.

"Unique musical expressions will always be in demand; the market is potentially enormous," he explains. "And Norwegian folk music is very distinctive, so it all depends on our ability to establish a truly professional infrastructure like they have in Scotland with Celtic Connections, etc. It is also a matter of political support, of course; we need the politicians to back up our efforts, and in that respect the recent consolidation of the musician's organisations is very positive. Streamlining the entire apparatus and agreeing on some common goals will definitely give Norwegian traditional music more thrust internationally."

The general feeling in Norway is that that our folk music is on the verge of some kind of international breakthrough. Suffice it to say at some of the bands that are currently travelling the world with what, until recently, were very local musical expressions. The Norwegian focus at Showcase Scotland is a case in point. Silje Erdal relates that there was no shortage of strong candidates for the coveted gigs.

"98 acts applied for a slot at the Showcase," says Erdal. So we had to set up a jury narrowing it down to a shortlist of twenty before we could present them to the artistic committee at Celtic Connections, which is the festival that hosts the Showcase program. They were supposed to choose five acts, but couldn't decide, so the number is six. That in itself is a good indication of the quality of Norwegian Folk music, and how it is now appraised internationally."



### Key festivals:

Førde Folk Music Festival

Norway's biggest international folk music festival, established in 1990

[www.fordefestivalen.no](http://www.fordefestivalen.no)

Folkelarm

Showcase festival and convention in Oslo, established 2005

[www.folkelarm.no](http://www.folkelarm.no)

Oslo World Music Festival

Established in 1994

[www.world-music.no](http://www.world-music.no)

### Organisations

New body created when the two major organisations Lfs and NFD joined forces in November 2009. (New name to be announced.)

[www.folkmusic.no](http://www.folkmusic.no)

### Concert presenters:

Den norske folkemusikksцена

A national network of local folk music venues

[www.folkemusikksцена.no](http://www.folkemusikksцена.no)

Rikskonsertene

The Norwegian national concerts organisation

[www.rikskonsertene.no](http://www.rikskonsertene.no)

Riksscenen

New national venue for folk music and dance

[www.riksscenen.no](http://www.riksscenen.no)

### Agencies:

Cumulus Nordic

[www.cumulusnordic.no](http://www.cumulusnordic.no)

Solid Musikk

[www.myspace.com/solidmusikk](http://www.myspace.com/solidmusikk)

### Labels:

EMCD: [www.emcd.no](http://www.emcd.no)

Grappa/Heilo: [www.grappa.no](http://www.grappa.no)

Kvarts: [www.kvarts.no](http://www.kvarts.no)

NORCD: [www.norcd.no](http://www.norcd.no)

Ta:lik: [www.talik.no](http://www.talik.no)

# Spotlight Norway

## THURSDAY 28th January 2010

Late Night Session in The Exhibition Hall 10 pm

Unni Boksasp

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## FRIDAY 29th January 2010

St Andrews in the Square 7:30 pm

Synnøve S. Bjørset

The Tron Theatre 8 pm

Unni Boksasp Ensemble

Late Night Session in The Exhibition Hall 10 pm

Valkyrien Allstars

Festival Club at The Art School 10:30 pm

Synnøve S Bjørset

Majorstuen

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## SATURDAY 30th January 2010

Spotlight Norway Seminar Buchanan Suite 4 pm

w/Synnøve S Bjørset

Spotlight Norway reception Clyde Foyer 5 pm

w/Majorstuen and Unni Boksasp Ensemble

St Andrew's in the Square 7.30 pm

Skaidi

ABC 7.30 pm

Valkyrien Allstars

Strathclyde Suite 8 pm

Majorstuen

Festival Club at The Art School 10:30 pm

Gjermund Larsen Trio

Unni Boksasp

Skaidi

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## SUNDAY 31st January 2010

Lomond Foyer at the Concert Hall 2 pm

Grappa Album Launch

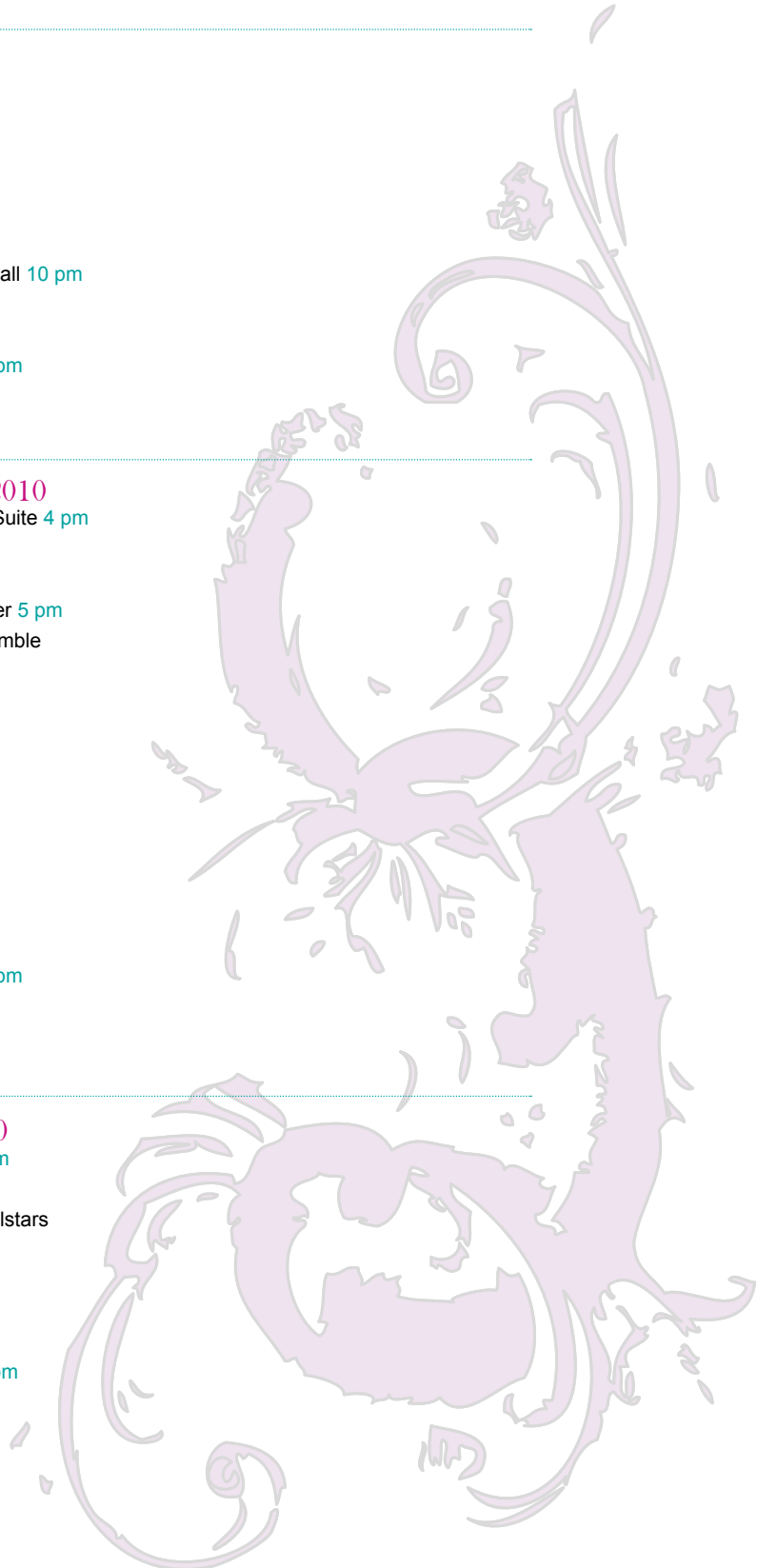
Gjermund Larsen Trio and Valkyrien Allstars

The Old Fruitmarket 8 pm

Gjermund Larsen Trio

Festival club at The Art School 10:30 pm

Valkyrien Allstars





# Norway at Show

In addition to a cast of fantastic performers, a strong delegation of company execs and organisation reps representing Norway's blossoming folk music scene will also be present during the 'Spotlight Norway' festivities.

## CumulusNordic - [cumulusnordic.no](http://cumulusnordic.no)

What: Artist management  
Artists: Torgeir Vassvik, LuckyLoop, Glima  
Representatives: Olaug Nesheim - [olaug@cumulusnordic.no](mailto:olaug@cumulusnordic.no)  
Britt Pernille Frøholm and Irene Tillung

## DAT - [dat.net](http://dat.net)

What: Independent record label with focus on Sami repertoire  
Artist: Skaidi  
Representatives: Per L. Boine - [dat@dat.net](mailto:dat@dat.net)  
and Kristina Utsi

## Folkemusikkscena - [folkemusikkscena.no](http://folkemusikkscena.no)

What: National network of local folk music venues  
Representative: Asgaut Bakken - [dnfs@folkemusikk.no](mailto:dnfs@folkemusikk.no)

## Folkelarm - [folkelarm.no](http://folkelarm.no)

What: Festival  
Representative: Elisabeth Vatn - [elisabeth.vatn@folkemusikk.no](mailto:elisabeth.vatn@folkemusikk.no)

## Førde Int. Folk Music Festival - [fordefestival.no](http://fordefestival.no)

What: Festival  
Representatives: Hilde Bjørkum - [hilde.bjorkum@fordefestival.no](mailto:hilde.bjorkum@fordefestival.no)  
and Sølvi Lien

## Grappa - [grappa.no](http://grappa.no)

What: Independent record label  
Artists: Valkyrien Allstars, Gjermund Larsen Trio  
Representative: Helge Westbye - [helge@grappa.no](mailto:helge@grappa.no)

## Music Export Norway - [musicexportnorway.no](http://musicexportnorway.no)

What: Organisation  
Representative: Jonas Vebner - [jonas@musicexportnorway.no](mailto:jonas@musicexportnorway.no)  
(see next page)

## Music Information Centre Norway - [mic.no](http://mic.no)

What: Organisation  
Representative: Aslak Oppebøen - [aslak@mic.no](mailto:aslak@mic.no)

## Norwegian Traditional Music Agency - [folkmusic.no](http://folkmusic.no)

What: Artist management  
Representative: Silje Førland Erdal - [nff@folkogdans.no](mailto:nff@folkogdans.no)

## Riksscenen - [riksscenen.no](http://riksscenen.no)

What: Venue  
Representative: Jan Lothe Eriksen - [dir@riksscenen.no](mailto:dir@riksscenen.no)

## Sogn og Fjordane fylkeskommune

Representatives: Øyvind Lyslo - [oivind@lyslo.net](mailto:oivind@lyslo.net)  
and Synnøve Bjørset

## Solid Musikk - [myspace.com/solidmusikk](http://myspace.com/solidmusikk)

What: Artist management  
Artists: Majorstuen, Gjermund Larsen, Skaidi  
Representatives: Lene Furuli - [lenefuruli@gmail.com](mailto:lenefuruli@gmail.com)  
and Ingrid Heieren

## Stand-In AS

What: Artist management  
Artist: Valkyrien Allstars  
Representative: Kjell Benjaminsen - [eskjeln@online.no](mailto:eskjeln@online.no)

## ta:Lik - [talik.no](http://talik.no)

What: Independent record label  
Artist: Synnøve Bjørset  
Representative: Niels Røine - [niels.roine@talik.no](mailto:niels.roine@talik.no)

## The new folk music organisation - [folkmusic.no](http://folkmusic.no)

Representative: Eivind Kaasin - [eivind@folkogdans.no](mailto:eivind@folkogdans.no)



# case Scotland

UK-based contacts:

## Music Export Norway UK office

Following the establishment of Music Export Norway's UK office in London in 2008, the Norwegian music industry has built up a strong platform on the British Isles. Led by Jonas Vebner, MEN's London office collaborates with Norwegian and British record companies, managements and musicians to promote Norwegian music through record releases, digital distribution, concerts, films, promotional events and a wide range of other projects and initiatives.

Music Export Norway | Hope House  
40 St Peters Road  
London W6 9BD  
[www.musicexportnorway.no](http://www.musicexportnorway.no)

Jonas Vebner (Head of UK Office) - [jonas@musicexportnorway.no](mailto:jonas@musicexportnorway.no)  
Mobile: +44 (0) 7504 131 450  
Office: +44 (0) 2085 633 935

## The Royal Norwegian Embassy in London

For years, The Norwegian Embassy in London has been an active partner for Norwegian ensembles and musicians performing in the UK. The embassy has supported tours and events for years and has put its information and promotion assets to good use for many an artist. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Eva Lous co-ordinates MFA assistance to folk music related projects.

The Royal Norwegian Embassy in London  
25 Belgrave Square , LONDON SW1X 8QD  
Tel: +44 (0) 020 7591 5500  
[www.norway.org.uk](http://www.norway.org.uk)

Eva Vasbotten Lous - [eva.vasbotten.lous@mfa.no](mailto:eva.vasbotten.lous@mfa.no)  
Stein Iversen - [sti@mfa.no](mailto:sti@mfa.no)

## The Royal Norwegian Consulate Edinburgh

12 Rutland Square  
EDINBURGH EH1 2BB  
Tel: +44 (0) 131 228 2444

Mona Røhne - [mona.rohne@mfa.no](mailto:mona.rohne@mfa.no)

# Music Information Centre Norway - mic.no

The publication you're now holding in your hand has been prepared by the Music Information Centre Norway. Funded primarily by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, MIC supports and promotes Norwegian music of all genres ranging from post-classical contemporary to black metal and virtually everything in between those extremes. The centre's domestically oriented ballade.no site is one of the nation's most important music news and debate sites while the English-language listento.no is one of the web's few sites solely dedicated to news updates and interviews with artists and players on the Norwegian music scene.

Representative at Showcase Scotland 2010:  
Aslak Oppebøen (Head of Information Dept.) - [aslak@mic.no](mailto:aslak@mic.no)  
Mobile: +47 9017 5338

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