From Revival to Remix: Norwegian American Folk Music and Song

By

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For Thelma and Charlotte

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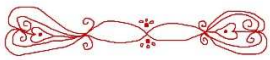
Abstract

This project examines Norwegian American folk music in the Upper Midwest from the folk music revival period in the 1960s and 70s to the present day. It considers the ways in which one ethnic tradition has continued in a multi-ethnic context and examines creolized, modernized, as well as historically reimagined forms of this music.

The mid-twentieth century folk music revival in American popular culture contributed to a set of conditions that made renewed interest in folk traditions among Norwegian Americans possible. The Norwegian American revitalization is distinctive not only because of its specific ethnic focus but because those individuals who took up the revitalization were themselves immersed in the ethnic community. Younger musicians who advanced the revitalization at this time were not merely performers but have become expert sources of this music in the Upper Midwest, also serving as archivists, self-taught folklorists, documentarians, and scholars in the field; in essence, curators of their own traditions.

This work also addresses how Norwegian American folk music has progressed since the revival period of the mid-twentieth century. It acknowledges the creative impulses still at work among musicians who not only preserve musical traditions but continue to experiment with them to keep them current and relevant. These musicians reflect a continued desire for an ethnic identity, providing a connection to cultural experiences that are not constrained by language-based art forms.

Preface



"Highlandville Waltz"

Refrain:
Come with me, dance with me, give me your hand
Hum to me softly an old tune
Tell me a story of when you were young
Dance to the song of this schoolroom.

Though years are between us come close to me now
Your wisdom and memory will lead the way
The music and dancing remind you somehow
Of friends who came courting on Saturday.

Refrain

And whisper of Grandpa so tall and so thin
A dancer with feet light as feathers
He'd refuse not a soul for a whirl or a spin
Waltzing in circles together.

Refrain

This is your last dance, let it last for a while
I know that someday I'll miss you
Watching the shadows for your calm, wistful smile
Stepping in time with your old shoes.

Refrain

— Eric Sessions and Greg Dale

As a child, every time my siblings or I would leave my house my father would call after us, "Don't forget who you are!" as we stepped out onto the front steps and shut the door behind us. For years I assumed it was his way of telling us to behave ourselves when we were outside of our parents' jurisdiction. And it may have been partly that. But much later, as he was dropping me off at college for the first time he left me with this: "Go discover who you are." I had to be reminded of that years later because I was in such an overwhelmed state that I failed to remember anything he said in particular. But I think of that sometimes and about how, when we are growing up we need instruction, we need rules, we need enculturation to tell us who we are and where we stand in the world. Then comes a time when many of us are sent away to discover ourselves for ourselves. What I realized was that I never needed to be found. The contrast of living in a new place helped underscore my identity, but finding out who I really was turned out to be a matter of remembering who I was back home. This is the state of mind I am in when I think about identity and ethnicity.

Scholars in the area of family folklore have long recognized the link between our personal family experiences and the interests we pursue later in life (Morgan 1981, Narayan 2007). In this work I am following this pattern, which is clearly reflected in my writing. At times I combine personal experience to lend support to my analysis, offer up alternative interpretations, or simply to echo thoughts or experiences my interviewees have shared with me. They are not intended to distract from the fieldwork and analysis I have done, but by including them I am speaking from my experience both as a participant in and observer of this community.

The experiences we accumulate by participating in and soaking up traditions, rituals, stories, etc. as young people help orient our paths as adults; help us navigate new situations and form relationships with people and places. Essentially this work is an attempt to articulate these

things: how tradition helps us navigate change while simultaneously adapting to it, how the important work of some individuals who take it upon themselves to preserve cultural expressions make it possible for us to continue negotiating new contexts, how the interplay between tradition and innovation is expressed through a broad spectrum of contemporary musicians, and how we can look ahead to the future of Norwegian American folk music through the creative work that is being done today throughout the Upper Midwest. In the words of folklorist Henry Glassie, "tradition is the creation of the future out of the past," and history "is an artful assembly of materials from the past, designed for usefulness in the future" (2003:176). Though it can be difficult to watch as cherished traditions change, it can also be a comfort to recognize that they often continue on in one form or another for others to enjoy in the future.

For years lovers of Norwegian American folk music have feared for its survival in a modern context. Unknown numbers of melodies from the Old Country that once entertained and brought families and neighbors together in pioneer homes have been lost. Young musicians are trained in classical styles on a wide variety of instruments in school and led away from steeping themselves in the old-time music of previous generations by classical, popular, or other commercialized forms of music. Local community dances and bands who carry on old-time music are few and far between, limiting the exposure young people have to the musical traditions of their families and ancestors. There are countless circumstances and forces working against the retention of Norwegian American folk music and other markers of ethnic identity and yet they still exist—though not without a great deal of effort and not always in the recognizable forms we expect to see.

Growing up in Decorah, Iowa, a hotbed of Norwegian American history and culture, and having visited Norway and gotten to know a few Norwegians, I was always aware of the difference between modern Norwegian and Norwegian American culture. The politics were different. Clothing was different. Demeanors were different. The humor was oftentimes very different. For many years I was borderline embarrassed by the fly-off-the-shelves Norwegian American kitsch that pervaded my hometown. Modern Norway was sleek, progressive, cutting-edge, and egalitarian. How could we presume to think Norwegian American culture was anything like Norwegian culture? Folklorist Jennifer Eastman Attebery's work on Swedish American culture and identity speaks to these points among others. "Understanding the incongruity between claimed and documentable heritage is important, … not just as a step in understanding the multiple sources for American culture. It is also a means through which we can better understand the ways in which cultural groups use labels strategically. Labeling oneself is a powerful act, especially when a label is compelling enough that one's audience accepts it" (Attebery 2001:13).

To me the differences appeared stark, yet there was an underlying kinship in spite of all the divides. Norwegians would come to Decorah and, looking beyond the "Pray for me, I'm married to a Norwegian" t-shirts, they would marvel at how many Norwegian names they recognized, how good the local lefse was, or how much rosemaling adorned the walls and shelves in our homes. Of course for us, these things were part and parcel of the same identity. As often as I would roll my eyes at the tacky, commercially produced rosemaled sweatshirts my grandmother used to wear, I reveled in the lutefisk jokes and stories that would fly across the dinner table around Christmas time. The Norwegian and American were inextricable. My early prejudices and misunderstandings have gradually dissipated the more I have come to recognize

the ways in which process, belief, and worldview blend with contemporary contexts and personal creativity to inform cultural productions. In this way I hope to illustrate how Norwegian American traditions continue in a modern context through the lens of folk music of the Upper Midwest.

My approach to Norwegian American folk music in relation to the Upper Midwest is quite different from previous studies on this topic. Most of the more comprehensive academic studies focusing specifically on Norwegian Americans and their musical traditions have concentrated on the period of immigration leading into the second generation. With some contextual focus on how music traditions existed in Norway prior to immigration, the primary point of departure in my research has been the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival, beginning in Decorah, Iowa in 1968. Norwegian American musician Julane Beetham's Master's thesis does the most to address contemporary musicians and future directions of Norwegian American music, but my work delves into this area with more attention to innovative approaches that individual musicians are employing.

Broadening our considerations of what might be considered Norwegian American folk music accomplishes a number of things. First, it welcomes into this discussion a variety of musicians who dabble in multiple iterations and interpretations of their musical heritage, who might not be strictly classified as tradition bearers, but who are clearly drawing on ethnic musical traditions in their own musicianship. Second, it acknowledges the broadening out and continued diversification of these traditions rather than restricting this style of music to one interpretation from one specific period in history. Third, it offers up a vision for how these traditions might continue on in the future, not focusing solely on the dwindling numbers of musicians focusing on one particular style (though these styles might find continued or renewed resonance in some

communities), but rather drawing attention to the ways in which innovators are suggesting fresh articulations of their musical heritage and ethnic identities. These are important issues to consider, not only because they belong in our conversation of Norwegian American folk music, but because they allow us to talk more accurately about the ways in which this music lives on in Norwegian American culture.

My work positions itself among scholars who have approached this topic from multiple angels and entry points. Several academic studies about Scandinavian American folk music in the Upper Midwest exist, including LeRoy Larson's 1975 dissertation in Ethnomusicology called *Scandinavian-American Folk Dance Music of the Norwegians in Minnesota* (University of Minnesota), which is one of the primary texts with which anyone interested in studying the musical traditions of Scandinavians in the Upper Midwest must begin. Larson's collection of tunes and his nuanced discussions of the social, economic, and historical factors contributing to the successful transplantation of this music in an American context is an important beginning. Other academic studies along the lines of Larson's work include Janet Kvam's 1986 MA thesis (also in Ethnomusicology) *Norwegian-American Dance Music in Minnesota and Its Roots in Norway: A Comparative Study* (University of Missouri), Kevin Hoeschen's 1989 MA thesis *The Hardanger Violin in the Upper Midwest: Documentation and Interpretation of an Immigrant Tradition* (University of Minnesota), Julane (née Beetham) Lund's 2005 thesis *Norwegian-American Old-Time Fiddling in the Heartland: Interpretation of a Creolized Tradition* (Institute of Folk Culture at Telemark University College, Norway), and my own 2009 Master's thesis *In the Party Circle: Norwegian-Americans and Their Fiddle* (University of Wisconsin-Madison). These studies all begin their examinations with folk dance music prior to immigration and only

one, Julane Beetham's thesis, questions in detail where these traditions are leading us in a contemporary setting.

Phil Martin's *Farmhouse Fiddlers: Music & Dance Traditions in the Rural Midwest* (1994) does not focus exclusively Norwegian or Scandinavian musicians but nonetheless touches on many topics of relevance to my study including transmission, social dances, cultural transformation due to technological advancement, and creolized music traditions. In addition to this, James P. Leary's 2006 book, *Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music*, is an invaluable resource for examining creolized music traditions in the Upper Midwest as well as illustrating how Norwegian American musicians have contributed to the multi-ethnic and popular music mix that has come to define American roots music in this region, and one which already has and will continue to influence how scholars discuss folk music in this region moving forward. So, while this has proven to be a crucial source of information, my work is more narrowly concerned with the traditions of a specific ethnic group and the efforts of the Norwegian American community to strengthen its identity by revitalizing its musical heritage.

Other scholars have described Norwegian and Scandinavian folk music traditions in brief terms for comprehensive volumes of music and folklore, including the reissue of Kip Lornell's *Exploring American Folk Music: Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* (2012), Phil Nusbaum's entry "Norwegian Traditional Music in Minnesota" in Titon and Carlin's *American Musical Traditions* (2002), and James P. Leary's "Norwegian Communities" in Simon Bronner's *Encyclopedia of American Folklife* (2006). These pieces all give broad but important historical perspectives on the Scandinavian American musical traditions and serve to concretize the fundamental expressions of folklife in this region and within this ethnic group.

My work on this project has come about as a consequence of previous endeavors, the most prominent being the Norwegian American Folk Music Project. Inspired by the suggestions of Bill Musser of Decorah, Iowa and brought about with the generous funding and initiative of Dr. James P. Leary and the National Endowment for the Arts, I worked as a Project Assistant to help identify and digitize institutionalized and private collections of Norwegian American folk music. That project resulted in the digitization of dozens of reel-to-reel tapes from Vesterheim Museum's collection, representing musical performances from several Norwegian-American Folk Music Festivals in Decorah, the reissuing of some of these older recordings, important groundwork being laid for the future accession of valuable and original private collections, and the launching of a website portal which anyone can use as a signpost for more information about and collections of materials about Scandinavian American, and particularly Norwegian American folk music.[1] These efforts and the efforts of others will, with luck, result in the repatriation of traditions to those who are interested in carrying them on. Already we have been able to reissue old recordings of the Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival recordings on compact disc which accompanied an issue of *Vesterheim* magazine entitled, "That Old Norwegian Song and Dance" (2009). In addition to these project collaborations, I have also endeavored to consult with my interviewees about what I have written about them and their work. This kind of reciprocal ethnography has been critical to my ability to tell their and the community's stories more accurately and without gross misrepresentation. I hope my final

[1] The Norwegian American Folk Music Portal can be found here: http://vanhise.lss.wisc.edu/nafmp/. It was launched with contributions from the following individuals: James P. Leary (Project Director), Anna Rue (Research Assistant and Collection Guide Creation), Carrie Roy (Website Design and Construction), Janet Gilmore and Karen Baumann (Collection Guide Creation).

product does justice to everyone who has generously shared in their time, thoughts, and personal experience to help me with this project.

It will become apparent in chapter 3 how musicians themselves become curators of their own collections, but with access to more unique collections it will become easier for scholars and musicians in this area to revive old traditions that may have been in danger of being forgotten altogether. Already I have had the honor of locating the name of an older Norwegian immigrant fiddler from Minnesota in a list of fiddle contest participants from 1926, a copy of which I received from Jim Leary.[2] The list was compiled by Guthrie T. Meade and represents newspaper accounts of the fiddle contests sponsored by Henry Ford which proliferated in the Upper Midwest that year. Musician Beth Hoven Rotto had been searching for information about a fiddler by the name of Ole Hendricks (1850–1947), a first generation Norwegian American and purportedly one of the best fiddlers in Minnesota in his day. She became the benefactor of this man's fiddle and old song books and was interested in knowing if anyone else had run across his name. The list compiled by Meade turns out to be the first known record of this fiddler in print and Beth is working with colleagues to transcribe one of Hendricks's old tune books for modern musicians with the possibility of developing more projects from this down the road. On occasion unique collections that find their way to institutional archives are able to give back to the community and it is because individual musicians have taken the responsibility of preservation so seriously that we are sometimes all able to benefit from their amazing collections.

[2] A copy of this list also exists in the Robert F. Andresen collection in Mills Music Library at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The very first chapter of my study introduces the various forms of Norwegian American folk music while also putting them into historical context. Varieties of music such as religious, dance, and folk songs will be discussed, with emphasis landing on dance (or old-time) music and folk songs. This chapter will also lay out the conditions that led to creolized or hybridized music forms in the multi-ethnic context of the New World and how Norwegian American artists contributed to the regional sounds of the Upper Midwest.

The second chapter will introduce readers to the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival, begun in Decorah, Iowa in 1968. The Folk Music Festival was initiated to help revitalize the tradition of old-time music that had been performed in homes and at house parties in Norwegian American communities since immigration. Primarily an aged generation of musicians from the area participated in these annual festival events, but festival organizers also invited well-known folk singers and musicians from Norway to perform for festival audiences. This chapter argues that these festival events were not a direct corollary of the broader mid-century folk music revival in America, but that it was a consequence of renewed national (and international) interest in what were perceived to be rapidly disappearing traditions. The festival was not only integral to the broadening of interest in and knowledge of Norwegian American music, but it also helped cultivate ties between musicians who would prove to be significant bearers of these old-time traditions.

The third chapter explores the contributions and impact of the musicians who inherited their repertoires from the generation of musicians known for performing at early house parties and barn dances in their communities. Musicians such as Bruce Bollerud of Madison, Wisconsin, LeRoy Larson from the Minneapolis, Minnesota area, and the late Robert Andresen of Duluth, Minnesota, were born into the musical traditions they advanced, but they also became scholars in

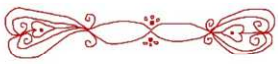
the areas of Scandinavian American and regional Upper Midwestern folk music. The case will be made that much of this musical tradition might have been lost had it not been for the dedication of a group of artists who not only possess an intimate knowledge of the traditions they maintain, but who have also consciously documented and preserved the music, stories, recordings, and other materials relating to Norwegian American music.

In the fourth chapter the focus shifts to several examples of contemporary musicians and groups who represent broadly different approaches to Norwegian and Scandinavian American music today. The first example, Foot-Notes of Decorah, Iowa, epitomizes a traditional approach to old-time music among Norwegian Americans in the Upper Midwest. Their repertoire is largely made up of tunes from a well-known fiddler from Spring Grove, Minnesota, Bill Sherburne. Foot-Notes have carried on in Sherburne's footsteps not only in terms of the tunes they play, but by continuing to perform at monthly community dances held in the same old, two-room schoolhouse in northeastern Iowa that Sherburne was known for beginning in the 1960s. A second band, Hütenänny from Northfield, Minnesota also demonstrates elements of traditional old-time music, but takes a rather loose stance on the cultivation of their sound. The third example is a group called Scandium, also from Northfield, which has recently disbanded, but which took a more unconventional path to preserving a Scandinavian sound to their music. Borrowing from more contemporary folk conventions such as a heavier emphasis on the rhythm section and more departures from traditional, Scandinavian style chord progressions, Scandium did not offer a severely radical departure from Scandinavian old-time music, but one which was certainly modernized and which drew from contemporary folk and world music sounds. The fourth example this chapter will discuss is a musician and folk artist named Kari Tauring, based out of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Tauring's work challenges established ideas of Norwegian

American folk music by bringing together reconstructed pre-Christian practices and belief systems brought to life by her creation of the *Völva Kona*, or staff carrying woman, with immigrant era song and dance traditions. These broad approaches to and interpretations of Norwegian American music are by no means mutually exclusive, nor are they exhaustive. They do, however, represent a modern-day and diverse set of examples of how Norwegian Americans are performing differential identities through music.

The concluding chapter will deal with issues of present-day involvement and interest in Norwegian American folk music such as: the role of folk music festivals in the vitality of the ethnic music community, the impact that technology has had on the cohesiveness or relationships among musicians and with the broader Norwegian American community, and the role that age plays in the long-term prospects of these musical traditions. This chapter will also address questions of how contemporary social undercurrents and attitudes toward an ever-increasing globalized economy, alienation from tradition in an era of technology, anxiety about the environment, and other related concerns are driving Americans to reinvest in their home communities and traditions. Finally, it will take up the matter of how existing musical groups are relating to and experiencing these societal shifts and what that means for the future of Norwegian American folk music.

Chapter 1: Norwegian American Folk Music: Beginnings



> On the east side of the new kitchen we even built a porch, where there were benches and chairs on which to sit and cool off on a hot day. Here in the summer evenings brother Ole would sit and play his violin by the hour, tune after tune of the Norwegian folk songs and dance music, without stopping in between. It would make the old folks sit and sigh for happy days in their Old-Country home. But we little ones would slip off with tingling feet to try some of the new American dances we caught glimpses of now and then.
>
> Erna Oleson Xan, *Wisconsin My Home* (45–6).

In Erna Oleson Xan's retelling of her mother Thurine Oleson's life story, just about every aspect of life after Norwegian immigration to America's Midwest is discussed. The level of detail and amount of information communicated in this short volume is remarkable and so it is no wonder that when the topic turns to music and dance, we have an opportunity to learn something of great value and interest. The passage above, for example, encapsulates an important shift in the story of Norwegian folk music in America. Here the attention turns from the immigrant generation listening with nostalgia and sadness to the songs and melodies of Norway while the younger generation, who did not grow up in the Old Country (but whose identities nonetheless are intimately tied to it), are off testing out new American dances. Thurine's story demonstrates that,

though deeply marked by their parents' migration, second generation immigrant stories also reveal how they mix and integrate heritage into a new context, situating themselves in a new time and space.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate how individual stories of Norwegian immigration and settlement in America—specifically the Upper Midwest—can in many ways serve as representative examples of the whole community. With special emphasis on how musical traditions fared during this transition and took root in the New World, we will see how immigrants struggled to maintain connections to their country of origin while also adapting to their dual identity in America. Broadly articulated, my study focuses on the particular type of dance music that became popular during the house party era in the Upper Midwest and its successors. In this history one can still recognize shades of the community-specific *bygdemusikk* that existed throughout Norway, the clear shapes of popular *gammaldans* music from when mass emigration from Norway took place, as well as the distinct outline of the pan-European and popular American musical influences that made their way into the community. All of these elements become transmuted, to greater or lesser degrees, by time, place, and individual artistic expression. This story begins with a migration.

Departure and Arrival

In the mid-nineteenth century Norwegian American immigrants, shaped by their home community traditions, met with a series of physical and cultural migrations before and after their journeys to the United States. Some were migrants within their homeland before setting off for

America, leaving the Romantic nationalized vision of Norway's countryside and home of the nation's *Volksseele*, or folk soul, in a movement towards industrialization and the largest urban centers of Oslo and Bergen. Others were too far from the city and, when faced with a decision to leave, felt a stronger pull across the Atlantic than to an urban area where their prospects for success may not have been any better (Lovoll 1984:16–7). Thurine Oleson's family was neither poor nor from an urban area, but by the time they emigrated in 1866, most of their extended family had already migrated, settling in Winchester, Wisconsin (in east central Wisconsin, Winnebago County). The pull to be close to family prevailed and they joined the ranks of nearly one million Norwegians who had or would leave their homes for the New World between the 1840s and 1930.

Emigration from Norway to America began in 1825 with the departure of the ship *Restauration* (the Restoration) from Stavanger, Norway to New York, starting a modest movement westward over the next forty years or so. However, Norwegians didn't really engage in a true wave of migration until the mid-1860s with the end of the American Civil War. As emigration gained momentum over time, ebbing and flowing as economic and political events emerged and dissipated, the departing population eventually involved approximately one fourth of the nation's people. Norway was second only to Ireland in the greatest percentage of its population to leave its shores for a new beginning in America.[3,4] Naturally, Norwegians were

[3] These immigrants, the majority of whom came from the Norwegian rural working class, were migrating in large part due to a population boom resulting from falling infant mortality rates, medical advancements and the introduction of the potato, a new and durable food source (for more detailed information about the circumstances leading to Norwegian emigration, see Semmingsen 1978:10–9, 32–40). These conditions resulted in overcrowding and lack of employment opportunities in Norway, but another chief reason for emigrating was the promise of land and good fortune in America. These push and pull factors worked in tandem to create the single largest period of emigration that Norway has ever seen.

[4] Although they are by no means works of non-fiction, Norwegian American immigrant novels characterize the push and pull factors involved in individuals' decisions to emigrate in remarkable and poignant ways. Ole E. Rölvaag's pioneer novel *Giants in the Earth* is perhaps the most well-known of this category, but others such as Johan Bojer's

sensitive to the economic and political circumstances surrounding emigration to America,[5] but when *Amerikabrev* (letters sent back to Norway from friends and relatives in America) arrived bearing good news, nearly whole villages would pack up and sail to the New World.[6] Working Norwegians brought with them their Old World traditions and used these customs, celebrations, skills, language, values, and knowledge to help them establish a new—though split—identity in America. Thurine, through her daughter Erna, reflected the lifelong impact that leaving Norway would have on many immigrants in America when, after describing the first reunion the Oleson family had with their relatives after arriving in Wisconsin, she observed, "And so it began, the lifelong talk about Norway that has never ended to this day" (Xan 1950:30).

Indeed, Thurine's own experience growing up on the American prairie in a family comprised mostly of members who had been born in Norway, was oriented by her family's displacement. She narrated a beginning chapter on the family's own situation in Norway before leaving for America, though she herself was not born until after they settled in Wisconsin. Simultaneously ever-present yet defined by absence, Thurine's vision of Norway would take shape over the years through the stories, customs, songs, food, and memories of her family and Norwegian neighbors. Her story is similar to that of Orabel Thortvedt, a third generation

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The Emigrants (and Vilhelm Moberg's series by the same name depicting Swedish emigration) are equally adept at depicting the complex combination of reasons individual immigrants had for migrating to America.

[5] For more information about the three waves of immigration and how they were impacted by economic and political events, see Lovoll 1983.

[6] Initial waves of immigrants settled in the east in New York and a few made their way south to Texas, but by the time the great masses of Norwegians were landing in America, "the West" had opened up and great numbers of land-hungry migrants set their sights on what is now regarded as the Upper Midwest. There, they would need their agricultural skills to break the prairie and make "improvements" to the land they would receive for free from the United States government. Patterns of chain-migration worked to establish clusters of Norwegian settlements throughout the region. Areas in south-central and western Wisconsin, northeastern Iowa, all over Minnesota, and the eastern reaches of North Dakota became popular places for Norwegians to settle.

Norwegian American who compiled a historical account of her family's life in Norway from collective memories she had heard all her life.[7]

Like the Oleson family, Thortvedt's family also happened to come from Telemark, though they settled in the Red River Valley of Minnesota by way of Houston County, MN (Bergland 2008:15). Born in 1896, Orabel never traveled back to Norway, but instead constructed a vivid depiction of it (shaped by various family members) in her mind, artwork, and writings, as Bergland suggests: "She drew upon the memories of others—oral histories, interviews, testimonies, photographs. Her memory work, then, is collective. Thus, in a sense, and perhaps most significantly, the work is distinguished by its construction as a collective history. Not simply the adventure of a single migrant, not the 'I' of a single self or the 'we' of a single family, this narrative, unlike most migration narratives, represents a communal memory" (17). One example of this communal memory relates to folk music performed at a wedding in Fyresdal, Telemark, where both sides of Orabel's family had lived.[8] She painted a watercolor depicting the wedding dance:

> In the center … is a fiddler, either Ola G. Napper or Petter Veum, both mentioned by Thortvedt and both well-known Fyresdal fiddlers. The music, of course, is accompanied by dancing and all wedding guests are said to participate. Clearly, the centrality of folk music in their lives is conveyed through the specific knowledge of specific Fyresdal fiddlers and her recognition of their importance in the community. … Although the dance is linked in Orabel's narrative with the sacrament of baptism, and the folk traditions of dance and secular music remained outside the church, this powerful tradition was nonetheless sustained into the twentieth century in rural Clay County [Minnesota]. (31)

[7] Thortvedt was also an accomplished artist and illustrated her accounts with wonderful original art work.
[8] Fyresdal happens to be a little over 65 miles from where Thurine's parents' farm had been in Hjartadal.

Both the Oleson and Thortvedt families were located in the midst of one of the most vibrant areas for folk music in all of Norway in the nineteenth century, so it is not surprising that folk music plays a role in their family stories. Sauherad, Telemark was the home to arguably the most famous Norwegian folk fiddler of all time, *Myllarguten* ("the Miller's Boy"), as Torgeir Augundson (1801–1872) was known, as well as one of the best-known Hardanger fiddlers to tour in America, Lars Fykerud (1860–1902).[9] Fykerud's concert tours in America in the 1890s were extremely successful and he made a fair amount of money in his travels, but he also spent a great deal, was swindled by those close to him, and returned to Norway no richer than he had left, suffering from a case of tuberculosis (Haugan 2008:48–9, Hoeschen 1989:37).

Dependent upon the memories and testimonials of others to complete their own stories, both Thurine and Orabel managed to piece together fragments, not only of their families' early experiences in America, but of the lives they left behind in Norway. The Old Country loomed large in their imaginations, but also in their daily actions and practices, indicating how well their Norwegian traditions were maintained in the second and even third generations. In essence, they had taken on some of the markers of the immigrant generation's experience of transnationalism.

Karen V. Hansen and Ken Chih-Yan Sun explore the expressions of transnationalism among Norwegians who immigrated to North Dakota through their retention of Norwegian traditions and language as well as their active participation in American citizenry. "Transnationalism can be defined as immigrants' incorporation of activities, routines, and institutions from their country of origin to shape their perception, desires, and practices in their

[9] Sauherad is just under twenty-five miles from Sauland, where the Oleson family lived, and nearly eighty-five miles from Fyresdal, where the Thortvedt family farmed. Myllargutten's relationship with the famed and classically trained violinist Ole Bull fueled the promotion of Telemark musical traditions in the Norwegian Romantic Nationalist movement.

new country" (2011:73). They discuss and agree with the Norwegian scholar of American literature and culture Øyvind Gulliksen's use of the term "twoness," which was originally used at the turn of the 20th century by the formative writer and scholar W.E.B. DuBois to describe the African American experience of a double consciousness, forever seeing oneself as (an) American and as (an) African American (DuBois 1903 [1995]:45). In his work, Gulliksen uses this term to frame the Norwegian immigrants' ability to "embrace their new country, while simultaneously believing that 'the old world was not to be discarded but would remain an inspiration and source of pride in the new'" (2004:9). The idea of twoness does not hinge on nations and national identities, but rather on the successful adoption of two cultures, a state of mind which is crucial in the day-to-day expression of transnationalism which Hansen and Sun explore in the context of Norwegian American immigrants in North Dakota.

These concepts of transnationalism and twoness extend beyond the immigrant generation, though to a lesser extent, since many of the ties and associations with the Old Country need to be constructed by multiple generations. "Unlike the immigrants themselves, the second generation had to visualize Norway through stories; Norwegian culture was not something they could taste and feel. The children of immigrants were born into America, where, shaped by their parents' attachment to ancestral history and culture, they learned English in schools but had to discover Norway through attending church, reading literature, and listening to their family lore" (Hansen and Sun 2011:81). I would argue that although the term "transnationalism" might be the wrong word for the different sense of "twoness" that second and third generations of Norwegian Americans experienced, the vividness with which Norwegian Americans like Thurine and Orabel were able to conjure images of Norway in their minds, combined with the very real traditions which they embraced from the first generation, summons up a stronger connection to a double

consciousness than many might expect. “Norway the country loomed large, and yet most would never visit—they were poor people and lacked sufficient economic resources to travel back to their homeland. So they had to imagine and interpret, in light of what they observed in their families and communities and through the lens of their American education” (81). Of course there were varying degrees to which individual families thought to, wanted to, and succeeded in preserving Old World traditions, language, and worldviews, but reducing cultural transmission to a function of imagination and interpretation ignores some of the very real practices and traditions which were retained for generations within Norwegian immigrant families.

Neighbors and Traditions

When one examines tradition and traditional practices, it is important to consider how one defines tradition and what are the standards by which an item or a performance is measured to determine its traditionality. In a study such as this, where precedent has been set by works focusing largely on immigrant era folk music (and, in some cases, comparing it to the folk music in the Old World prior to emigration), where does the traditional end and novelty begin? And what happens when novelty becomes traditional? Discussions of the terms “tradition” and “traditional culture” are advanced by folklorist Richard Handler’s and Jocelyn Linnekin’s argument that tradition should “be understood as a wholly symbolic construction” and “an ongoing interpretation of the past” (1984:273, 274). We should be mindful not to discuss traditions as distinct, “natural objects,” as Handler and Linnekin put it. If tradition is seen, in part, as the balance of continuity and change within a culture or practice, we must remember that

though continuity is not exact replication, the experience should not be considered any less real or authentic to those enacting a particular tradition. Indeed, there exists a complex interplay between documentation of events as they transpired in the past, personal memory, conscious and unconscious adaptation, the infiltration of hegemonic or popular culture into traditional practices, and more. Not all of these influences are controllable, noticed, consciously done, or deemed significant by those continuing a tradition, so we see how circumstances might affect the expressions of a tradition but not necessarily the perception or experience of it. Continuity is the momentary interpretation and performance of a practice as it exists in memory. It is remembrance enacted. Thurine and Orabel have constructed their family narratives by enacting their own and collective memories in their works.

As indicated above, in the somewhat isolated rural environments where ethnic enclaves of immigrants could be found all over the Upper Midwest, circumstances were conducive to maintaining traditions they brought with them to the New World.[10] Immigrants who came here from Telemark were no exception to this pattern. As Haugan asserts, "Upper Midwest settlers from Telemark often stayed together in new communities. The first small pockets of Telemark settlements were found in the vicinity of Muskego in Wisconsin, later in Houston County, Minnesota, and still later in the Red River Valley" (Haugan 2008:45–6). In some ways this new social structure was not entirely unlike the rural regions of Norway, which tended to be somewhat insular before the Industrial Revolution spread north in the mid-nineteenth century.

[10] Norwegians were encouraged to cluster together for different reasons when they settled in the Upper Midwest. Many chose to emigrate in groups, proceeding to settle together once they arrived in America, making it easier and less intimidating to have a ready-made community of people with whom they could speak and easily relate to (Lovoll 1984:36–7). Another powerful incentive was, of course, reuniting with family members as we see in the Oleson family story. Orabel Thortvedt's family decided to settle in the Red River Valley as a result of "the publication of a series of articles by Paul Hjelm Hansen in *Fadre-Landet* on the desirability of the Red River Valley for settlement, especially for Norwegians" (Bergland 2008:39n.11).

Norwegians in America needed to have some way of adapting to the force of this cultural change. Reuniting with Norwegians from the same area went a long way in building up the social networks upon which this ethnic group has historically relied and many of which have been maintained successfully over the years. Norwegian American scholar Odd Lovoll speaks to the importance of fostering community ties and traditions in order to stave off feelings of isolation in a completely new environment:

> The solution to the sense of alienation caused by moving away from the *bygd*,[11] regardless of distance, was to hearken back to an earlier period in life and to define oneself in accord with the familiar surroundings of the childhood home. To the immigrants, ethnicity therefore became a living and continuous tradition—a way of life. Their ability to recreate features of the ancestral *bygd* and to retain psychological ties with this region made the breach with the past less evident and eased the transition to the new-world society. (1975:48)

The opportunity to settle in clusters made it easy for Norwegian Americans to carry on—for quite some time—the Old World traditions they brought with them across the Atlantic.

Initially, recreating the conditions of the *bygd* succeeded in making areas of heavy Norwegian settlement relatively self-sufficient in America as well,[12] but no community could be completely cut off from neighbors of other ethnic backgrounds—or races—and the nature of their relationships were at times surprising. The Olesons, for example, forged a lifelong friendship with a neighboring Irish family, the Nesbitts, with whom they could not initially

[11] *Bygd* is the Norwegian term for rural community and in an American context would most accurately translate into "parish" or "township" in English. Many of these rural areas were so isolated because of the mountainous Norwegian landscape that villages no more than a few miles away from each other might develop distinct dialects and traditions.

[12] Regional differences between Norwegians were felt very strongly in America in the first years following immigration, partly because Norway did not become a sovereign nation until 1905, so there was little in the way of a cohesive national identity among the Norwegian rural class. The regional identities were strong, however; regional dialects were sometimes very distinctive, the same celebrations were conducted differently from region to region, traditional food varied from one area to another, etc.

communicate. Thurine Olesen recalls their unlikely friendship: “This Nesbitt family had come over from Ireland some time after our folks came from Norway, and their English was very broken. Our folks did not speak English at all, and you think that they could never have had anything to do with each other. Besides, we were staunch Lutherans, and they were Irish Catholics. Two greater barriers than speech and religion could not be imagined. But, it was not long before they were fast friends. I suppose it came from the mutual help they needed in those early days—sickness, trouble, harvesting, and just plain lonesomeness” (Oleson 1950:103).

In fact, a greater barrier than language and religion could be imagined and it would prove to be insurmountable to the Oleson family in terms of forging some friendships. The neighborly exchange of labor, assistance, and good will that we see between the Olesons and Nesbitts, for example, did not extend to the Native American community. Early contacts between the family and Native American peoples who lived in the area were fraught. Thurine Olseson recalls the anxiety in her family surrounding their encounters with Native Americans: “The third thing that scared Mother to death in this new land [after from not having enough money to feed themselves and the stature and health of her American-born children] was the Indians. She had never seen anything but a white face in all her life. The very thought of these savages turned the whole family pale. If the men were away at work, we were petrified for fear they would find us alone” (36). Although not all relations between Norwegian pioneer families and the Native community were this tense, in this case the Oleson family did not manage to communicate effectively with the Native American peoples who would pass by their settlement.[13]

[13] For examples of positive interactions between these two groups, particularly as they relate to exchanging information regarding healing and health, see Stokker 2007:245n.21. Also, in a recently published work, Karen V. Hansen explores the relationships between Scandinavian pioneer families and Dakota Indians in *Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

In spite of chain migration patterns which led to the formation of ethnic enclaves in the US, mixed ethnic neighborhoods were a large part of life in America. Contrary to the classic vision of this nation as a melting pot, immigrants of multiple origins did not give up their ethnic traditions or cultural worldviews in favor of adopting a purely American identity. Living among immigrants from other nations resulted in some cultural negotiation and transfer. For example, the Oleson family quickly learned to serve fish to the Nesbitts when they would join them for supper on Friday evenings. Cultural negotiations came as a result of living in an American context as well. Thurine describes the change in style of dress, which her mother never completely caught onto: "Mother never got the hang of making fashionable American clothes. The older [sisters] did all our sewing until we were old enough to do it ourselves" (65).[14]

These adjustments and negotiations, however, did not come at the expense of maintaining Norwegian traditions or identities. Cultural retention was perhaps especially strong among *Telemarkingar* who, prior to emigrating, were the focus of intense study and observation by scholars and collectors of folklore who "helped shape the identity of a Telemark folk culture that emigrants from this region took with them to the Midwest, a folk culture that continued to be part of their old-country consciousness" (Haugan 2008:45).[15] During the 1840s, for example, tale and ballad collectors were turning their attention to these areas which were considered the national strongholds of tradition. Jørgen Moe's collection of songs and poetry, *Samling af Sange,* was

[14] There are perhaps fewer examples of Thurine's parents displaying adaptations to conform to American culture, though there are several examples of Thurine and her siblings keeping one foot in each world, so to speak. One possible explanation for this might be that Thurine's depictions are highly selective and from her perspective, the immigrant generation symbolizes an untainted representation of Norway and Norwegian culture.

[15] For some, however, the older *bygdemusik* tradition was weakening in popularity compared to some of the newer musical trends that were sweeping through the rest of Europe at the time. "The newly imported *trekkspil* (accordion) had become immensely popular at dances in Telemark, Valdres, Hallingdal, Hardanger, and other rural areas. The instrument was especially suited to the newer dance tunes: the waltz, *reinlender* (schottische), and polka, which were gaining favor over the older *bygdedanser* (regional dances) which had been so closely associated with the hardingfele" (Hoeschen 1989:4).

published in 1840, and Olea Crøger traveled through Telemark recording ballads, which would later be included in the ground-breaking volume, *Norske Folkeviser,* in 1953 (Rossel 1982:7). Regardless of which county from which these Norwegians came, transnationalism provided immigrants with a way of coping with and adjusting to their new environs without being hostile towards it. As Hansen and Sun claim in their article about transnationalism among Norwegians who settled in North Dakota, "Maintaining tangible or affective cross-border ties … does not necessarily preclude immigrants' constructive engagement with American society. Rather, immigrants are prompted to sustain various cross-border connections to their hometowns and homelands in order to survive in the contexts that receive them" (Hansen and Sun 2011:93).

Culture Through Music

As indicated above, the story of the Oleson family is a veritable treasure trove of information about Norwegian traditions which would gradually begin to change and adapt over the course of several generations in America. Looking more closely at the development of music traditions in Norway leading up to immigration gives us a greater understanding of how traditional music had already been changing up to that point as well as the role that music played in the lives of the first generations of immigrants. At the time of mass emigration, Scandinavia was beginning to open up to industrialization. There was increasing interest in communication and travel within Europe and other countries were in need of the natural resources that Norway could provide (Lovoll 1984:4). Although many musical traditions in Norway were considered unique to individual communities, musical exchanges did occur as the region strengthened ties to

Continental Europe and were even supported by the state as early as the seventeenth and into the nineteenth century.[16] Locally-based musicians were trained and licensed to serve in particular areas throughout what would become the nation of Norway, and even into remote areas of the countryside. Musicians would sometimes have to travel great distances to play for events in order to piece together an adequate living, though they also supplemented their income by training and licensing other musicians. This system of licensed musicians contributed to the dissemination of music and different musical styles throughout the country, though this type of cultural exchange was occurring along informal channels as well. As Goertzen indicates, there were numerous ways in which local musicians, licensed or not, might have happened upon other regional styles, tunes that had come to Norway after spreading throughout the Continent, techniques that had developed out of art music traditions, etc.[17]

> The licensing system provided a channel from cities that had some connection to the Continent to transmit music and violin technique to the most remote areas. We cannot know how efficiently this worked overall or how the strength of these channels varied from one place to another or over time … Also, plenty of fiddling went on that was not for pay, and thus was not subject to regulation. Finally, certain venues were difficult or impossible to keep under official control; the regional markets, for example, were among the main places where fiddlers met and exchanged tunes. It is probable that the institution of licensing brought some art music performance techniques from town to countryside, offered musicians exposure to local styles other than their own, and encouraged the spread of tunes.

[16] It is true that musical exchanges certainly occurred much earlier than this as Norwegians were famous for operating very active ports and certainly had much contact with the rest of Europe through trade activities. The Vikings, for example, were interested not only in plundering new lands (such as the Scottish islands of Orkney and Shetland and elsewhere in the British Isles), but also colonizing them (Popperwell 1972:69). The city of Bergen was also a member of the Hanseatic League, an international trade-based association linking port cities of northern Europe from the 13th to the 17th centuries, which put Norwegians in contact with nations throughout Europe. As a result of these activities there are also strong relationships between the ballad traditions of the Nordic countries, the British Isles, France, and Germany, though it has been difficult to trace the precise historical movements and origins of these traditions (for more information about the Scandinavian ballad tradition, see Rossel 1982:1–14).

[17] The Hardanger fiddle itself could be another example of how far-flung influences have permeated and integrated themselves into the Norwegian folk music tradition. Recent investigations have called into question the assertion that it was a distinctly Norwegian innovation on the conventional violin and argued that other cultural influences may have contributed to its development. The debate regarding its origins continues as no conclusive evidence one way or the other has presented itself. For more on this debate, see Hoeschen 1989:2–3.

> Perhaps most important, this system must have contributed to the establishment of cadres of skilled musician in rural areas and to standards for their performance and behavior, even though these musicians almost always remained semiprofessional and part-time. (Goertzen 1997:14–5)

Emigrants who were about to leave Norway for America, therefore, had likely already benefitted from a rich history of musical transmission and exchanges which in all likelihood continued to infuse the area with lively traditions.[18] It is not surprising, then, that music played a vital role in the formation of *bygder* in the New World and in the social lives of Norwegians in the US after migration (Lovoll 1984:185).

From roughly the 1840s to the mid-1860s, in fact, concert fiddling—meaning performing mostly *bygdemusik* and some art music on the Hardanger violin—became quite popular, primarily in Norway but also in America. It served as one way for recent immigrants to preserve ties to their Old World traditions, but also as a new and lucrative method for Norwegian fiddlers to make a living, sometimes on both sides of the Atlantic. While Norwegian American audiences were eager for cultural contact from home, Norwegian audiences were in the midst of nation-building, focused in large part on using the traditions of rural areas in their efforts to construct a unified Norwegian identity.[19] As Haugan explains, successful promotion of folk traditions within

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[18] In fact, at the time of the first waves of mid-19th century emigration, Norwegians had already borne witness to a great flourishing of musical traditions. As Goertzen points out: "The richest period in the development of Norwegian instrumental folk music began in the late eighteenth century and extended through the middle of the nineteenth century" (1997:15). It should also be pointed out that although rural and more remote areas were exposed to new styles and sounds as a result of the musician licensing system, the music traditions of these areas would also likely have been spread out and beyond the borders of the *bygder*, as Goertzen suggests (1997:14–5).

[19] To appeal to urban concert goers, traditional fiddlers in Norway had to make adjustments in their style, the music they played, and even their appearance to ensure their success:

> The traditional fiddle player began imitating the violinist who placed the fiddle under his chin while playing. … Later fiddle players began to … modify their repertoire. In this way a new type of folk tunes, *lydarslåttar*, was developed. These folk music compositions … were commonly inspired by the natural environment and life on mountain farms. … These folk tunes were greatly admired by the new audiences. (Haugan 2008:47).

For more information on how performance style changed among Hardanger fiddlers in Norway in the late nineteenth century, see Hoeschen 1989:17–8.

an urban context depended upon developing the correct image: “The musician Lars Fylkerud printed posters of himself wearing a Norwegian national costume holding his fiddle high. Such tactics soon became standard procedure for folk musicians in general who sought to perform in concert halls” (Haugan 2008:47–8). The result was that both the Norwegians who stayed behind and those in the diaspora were able to enjoy folk music performed by fiddlers who made themselves available by embarking on concert tours.

Then during the late 1860s interest in folk traditions among the Norwegian urban elite began to wane to an extent, and demand for concert fiddling lagged somewhat, though a few fiddlers still managed to make a living through concert appearances. When a later wave of interest in the Hardanger violin and older forms of Norwegian folk music in Norway hit in the 1890s, a parallel interest sprang up in America as well. Norwegian American communities were better established at this point, more Norwegians had settled in urban areas, and Norwegian fiddlers were invited to tour in the States, performing at events that were highly publicized and well attended. A well-received musician could make several hundred dollars for one or two performances in an urban area at this time. Fiddler Ola Mosafinn from Voss, for example, succeeded in making enough money on tour in the States in the 1890s to buy a new house upon his return to Norway (Haugan 2008:48). These invited musicians would often come for a period of a year or two before making their way back to Norway, but some who moved to the States permanently were able to enjoy long performance careers in the Upper Midwest. An early example of active concert performers is Olav Person Isberg who emigrated from Hardanger, then settled first in Iowa before moving to the Red River Valley in Minnesota. Other fiddlers like John Fossum, originally from Telemark, performed for nearly twenty years for Norwegian

American audiences throughout the region.[20] Some researchers have even compiled lists of known Hardanger fiddlers who emigrated from particular counties in Norway.[21] Valdres, for example, produced at least fifty-nine Hardanger fiddlers who immigrated to the United States (Ellestad 2011:52).

Hardanger fiddlers, however, were not the only musicians who carried on Norwegian music traditions in America. Certainly there were many fiddlers who played conventional violin or who emigrated from various areas in Norway which were not necessarily steeped in the Hardanger violin tradition.[22] These were the folks who were more likely to be playing at house parties, bowery dances (neighborhood dances held outside in the warm months, generally on crudely constructed wooden platforms), and other neighborhood celebrations. As Philip Martin conveys of these events: "The dance party held in kitchen or parlor was perhaps the most frequent form of rural wintertime recreation from the early 1900s through the Great Depression. Called 'house parties' or 'kitchen sweats,' these country gatherings were an excuse for nearby families to get together to make music, dance, and just socialize" (1994:43). Party guests would all get to work moving furniture out of the house, rolling up the rugs, sometimes even hauling out the cookstove, and the "band" would start up. Often an assortment of neighbors who happened to bring their instruments along, house party bands were generally made up of any

[20] For more information on Hardanger fiddlers and their concert tours throughout the Upper Midwest, see Hoeschen 1989:36–8.
[21] See Hoeschen 1989, Appendix A for an annotated list of Spelemenn who settled in the Upper Midwest.
[22] Hardanger violins primarily took root in the counties of Hardanger, Telemark, Voss, and areas in Sogn og Fjordane and Valdres. In the later nineteenth century the popularity of the instrument would spread its use farther north and west. For a brief summary of the historical background of the Hardanger violin in Norway, see Hoeschen 1989:1–4. For an extended discussion of spelmenn who left Norway and remained active fiddlers in America, see Hoeschen 1989:29–36.

combination of fiddle, accordion, banjo, piano or pump organ and perhaps mandolin or guitar.[23] These were extremely common, popular events that forged and strengthened neighborhood ties.

Figure 1. Dancers forming a circle at a bowery dance, Black River Falls, WI. Used by permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society (image 56195).

Truly, almost no literary expression of the full Norwegian immigrant experience was complete without a fiddle tune, a house party, or a dance of some sort. Not all depictions of these traditions may have been favorable,[24] but they were rarely ignored, and they often expressed how ties were formed or reinforced within pioneer society. In a lively scene from *Giants in the Earth*

[23] For extended descriptions of house parties, see Larson (1975) and Martin (1994, 1998),

[24] The novel *The Saloonkeeper's Daughter* by Drude Krog Janson, for example, follows the life of a young immigrant woman, Astrid Holm, who lives with her father in Minneapolis above his saloon. Astrid has some difficulties finding herself in the novel, but by the end of the novel she finds happiness working as a Unitarian minister alongside a selfless female doctor. The only depiction of a dance in the novel involves Astrid, angered by her father's involvement in the liquor business, drinks and dances too much at the dance and is escorted home by an overbearing young man who offends her sensibilities and leaves in a temper (2002:52–5). In this chapter the dance is strongly associated with rowdy, uncouth, drunken behavior, which Astrid eventually rejects to pursue an independent, virtuous life as a minister.

Ole E. Rölvaag depicts the characters Per Hansa, Hans Olsa, and Tönseten dancing to a fiddler's tunes at a house party with a group of folks who immigrated from a different county in Norway. Per Hansa, hesitant to take part in the dance, is surprised by his friends Hans Olsa and Syvert Tönseten's keenness to dance with the neighbor women. Rölvaag describes the gathering:

> Remarkable how that fiddle sang! He had to admit that the man who played knew his business, even if he was a Trönder! … Another couple came rocking past—he ought to know that fellow, if he would only stop whirling around. By God! It was Tönseten, tossing along with an apple-round Trönder woman! …
>
> "Careful now, Syvert, old man! There are rocks and breakers ahead of you! What would you think [your wife] would—"
>
> "Shut your mouth, Per Hansa! What are you standing there moping about?" Tönseten's face was fiery red; the dance whirled him away before he had time to say anything more.
>
> Per Hansa began to breathe hard and fast; his eyes snapped with excitement, narrowing to little slits. Right in the midst of a flock of dancers a big head bobbed up and down, up and down, above all the others, like a buoy on a high sea. … Then poor Per Hansa completely forgot himself. "By all the frolicking seraphims, there's Hans Olsa dancing the schottische! Waves of spasmodic twitching passed over him, in time to the jigging tune; his eyes blinked rapidly. … He looked around for the Baarstads, saw them close at hand, and grasped Gurina's arm.
>
> "Come, show me how the Trönders dance that tune!" (1927:321–2).

These neighborhood parties were where musical traditions—old and new—were passed on within families and among friends for many years. Integrated neighborhoods incorporated new melodies and styles into Norwegian family homes, but the basic *gammaldans* tunes and dances were common enough throughout Europe at the time of emigration that these neighbors often had little trouble mixing, mingling, and enjoying each other's company at these neighborhood events.

Funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities Youth grant to explore the fiddling traditions among aging Norwegian American fiddlers, Philip Martin argues that music and other celebratory traditions acted not only as symbols of the Old World culture immigrants had left behind, but also as "active agent[s] helping to facilitate the transition to a completely new environment" (Martin n.d.). Celebratory events served to build relationships between immigrants of different ethnic origins as well as ease the transition into American culture and coming to terms with a new and complex identity. Martin explains, "Within Norwegian-American communities, it would reflect the classic dilemma, the struggle to adapt to a Yankee-dominated society yet somehow retain ties with the ethnic traditions of their forebears. In its adaptation to that duality, music reveals some of the paths taken in that acculturation process. It shows how traditions, born and specialized to fit one certain environment, change in response to new needs and new settings" (Martin n.d.). House parties were the environments in which immigrant families first and most commonly carried on these dance music and folk song traditions in America. The needs for community, pooled resources, reminders of home and those left behind, and fostering ties with their new environment were all supported through social events like house parties, work bees, barn raisings, etc. Events such as these were often improved by music and dancing.

As integral as music and dance have been to the story of Norwegian American settlement into the Upper Midwest, not everyone in the ethnic community approved of dance party traditions. There was a strong negative association with the violin and the devil which reaches back into Norwegian lore that continued to affect the perception of this instrument well into the 20th century, even if Norwegian Americans would not have admitted to believing that the fiddle

was the devil's instrument.[25] Thurine Oleson relates a tale which demonstrates this connection in vivid terms: "On our way to the big Winchester hill, Lena and I had another giggle. One of the Norwegians whose house we passed was a terrible drunkard. He was also possessed with a great desire to fiddle while he drank. One night when he was pretty full, and was fiddling for all he was worth, he saw the Devil come in the door and bend over him. The poor man flung the fiddle down right then and there and never took it up again" (Xan 1950:66). Stories that recount fiddlers trading their souls to the devil in exchange for extraordinary fiddling skills were not foreign to Norwegian ears, but as time marched into the 20th century the tales of explicit connections between the fiddle, the devil, and old-time music gradually gave room to more subtle beliefs.

The liner notes on Norwegian American accordionist Viola (Kjeldahl) Lee's album, *Old Time Dance Music From Norway and Minnesota*, hint at the association between old-time dance music and the church. "At a very early age she learned to chord on the organ, and then began playing the two-row button accordion when she was about five years old. Her husband, Harlan Lee, remembers her playing accordion in the Big Grove Lutheran Church when she was seven or eight years old. There was an unwritten Norwegian law that forbid anyone from playing old time dance music in church, but Viola was considered an exception because she was 'so little and cute'" (Lee, Rees, and Larson 1985). Uneasy feelings about types of music or certain instruments being inappropriate within the sacred space of the church were common, speaking to the tension that persisted between the religiously devout and the house party crowd. Thurine Oleson, for

[25] For an extended discussion of the relationship between the devil and the violin, see Larson (1975:29–49), Martin (1994:32–6), and Rue (2009:35–41).

example, described the fraught relationship between the local pastor and those in the community who enjoyed dancing:

> Another thing that made trouble was that [Pastor] Homme tried to make the young people stop their awful drinking and dancing. People held public dances in their homes. Not a week went by in winter without one somewhere, and they were well attended. The host did not charge any admission, but a collection was always taken up for the fiddler, at least a dollar and a half, or two. We were told that one time Homme passed a house at night, all lit up and full of people, and stopped his horse in the road to see what they were doing. What he saw was the subject of many and many a sermon and of a pamphlet, distributed widely … . He kept harping on this subject of dancing and drinking so much that the young people got down on him. (Xan 1950:74)

Though this dichotomy did not always exist within Norwegian American communities, there certainly were palpable traces of it in many areas.

Speaking from my own experience, these differences sometimes led to the discontinuation of musical traditions within a family. On the maternal side of my family, my great-grandfather Arne Opheim, himself an immigrant from Norfjord in Norway, played the fiddle as a young man. His siblings were also known as music lovers and keen dancers. As his young family expanded to include five girls, however, Arne and his wife Thale made the decision to get rid of the instrument. It was inappropriate, the reasoning was, to have a fiddle in a house full of girls who might be easily led astray. Although my grandmother and her four sisters grew up enjoying music, their exposure to it was largely through the church and not the type music their father might have played at home had he made the decision to keep his fiddle.

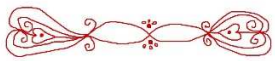
The paternal side of my family went through a similar fiddle purge in my grandparents' generation. My grandfather's family came from a long line of fiddlers and accomplished fiddle makers from Norway, and my great-grandfather, Oscar Rue, also played the instrument. When

my grandfather Orlean Rue married my grandmother Charlotte, who was raised in a pietistic home (they were members of the Hauge Synod of the Lutheran Church), she did not approve of fiddle music or dancing and the family fiddle was packed away. The church also became the primary channel of musical exposure on my father's side. Although the two families both veered away from the house party and dance music scene and into the realm of religious music, there were slight differences in their attitudes about dancing and old-time music in the Norwegian American community: my maternal great-grandparents were worried about their daughters' moral integrity in the context of community-wide dances while my paternal grandmother actively objected to the fiddle and dance music on religious grounds, opposing dances and dance music in all circumstances for all people. My own story is very different from theirs. The legacy of traditional music which had existed on both sides of my family was, in both cases, severed in the early 20th century. I grew up without this music in my home, only occasionally attending community old-time dances which were available to me as a young person, and without learning an instrument which would have adapted easily to these musical traditions. I have grown up with rich and interesting family stories, however, and they have helped inspire me to add to the story of those traditions which have been lost in my family.

The musicians introduced in the next chapters grew up in musical families and carried on the traditions they learned from parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and neighbors. Their interests in preserving this culture and their traditions, though expressed in different ways, are all a natural progression stemming from their musically rich childhoods. There are also times when the community itself recognizes the importance of drawing attention to traditions which may be in danger of passing unnoticed. The next chapter focuses on one such event, the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival, which not only called attention to music traditions in the

community which were losing a foothold in younger generations, but which also served to connect and inspire a few younger musicians, encouraging the preservation of this music in different ways.

Chapter 2: Norwegian American Folk Music Revived: Marion Nelson and Nordic Fest



In this story of how Norwegian Americans have contributed to the richness of their ethnic identity through musical expression there are many beginnings and endings. Not all beginnings work. Not all endings stick. People latch onto what resonates with them and what helps them creatively express where they have been, where they are, and where they would like to go. In moments of transition within a tradition these thoughts and concerns crystallize in the community and sometimes, if we are lucky, we find opportunities to honor a traditional form before it transitions into something else entirely. Nordic Fest's Norwegian American Folk Music Festival held in Decorah, Iowa in the late 1960s and throughout the '70s was one clear example of this.

Decorah, Luther, and Vesterheim

Nestled in a valley between the hills of Winneshiek County, Decorah became the destination of Norwegian immigrants who were beginning to move westward in the 1850s, across the Mississippi River into Iowa and Minnesota. After establishing successful communities

throughout southern and central Wisconsin new arrivals were setting off to claim land in the less populated areas across the river. The first Norwegian immigrants to move to Decorah arrived in 1850 and it was this city which would become the population center among Winneshiek, Allamakee, and Fayette counties. Odd Lovoll references George Flom, an early Norwegian-American scholar, who testified that Wisconsin was a popular location for pioneers from Voss, Telemark, Sogn, and Valdres to live temporarily for a few years before moving on to other settlements. In 1853 the Norwegian language newspaper, *Emigranten*, reported rapid growth of the Norwegian population in Decorah (Lovoll 1984:81). After the number of Norwegians in the area grew to a critical mass, three Lutheran Church congregations were established and, in 1853, the little town of Washington Prairie just north of Decorah secured the placement of a trained Lutheran pastor from Norway, Ulrik Vilhelm Koren,[26] to serve the surrounding rural communities. Decorah was also the publication location of the successful Norwegian language newspaper, *Decorah-Posten*, which ran for nearly a century, from 1874 to 1972. Today, Decorah is the home of Luther College (established in 1861 as the first Norwegian American Lutheran College[27]), Vesterheim Norwegian American Museum, and the seat for the popular Norwegian American heritage festival, Nordic Fest. Because of all these successful, mutually reinforcing institutions, Decorah has long been established as a major cultural and historical location for the Norwegian American community in the Upper Midwest.

Vesterheim Museum, one of the crown jewels of Decorah, began at Luther College in 1877 as a small collection. Beginning with objects collected by students from the natural world,

[26] Koren's young wife, Elisabeth, wrote an extensive and detailed diary recounting their journey to America from Larvik, Norway, as well as the first years of their life in Washington Prairie. See: Koren, Elisabeth. 1997. *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren, 1853–1855*, trans. and ed. David T. Nelson. Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association.

[27] Though the college was established in 1861 it was originally located in Halfway Creek, Wisconsin, and did not move to Decorah until the following year. (Luther Profile, History; http://www.luther.edu/about/profile/history/)

it gradually expanded to include artifacts collected by missionaries and brought back to the Midwest as well as objects preserved from the immigrant generation in America.[28] The collection was initiated as a means to enhance students' educational experience, but by 1895 the college decided it should focus exclusively on aspects of the immigration experience and appointed Haldor Hanson its first curator. The collection was ahead of its time in an American context, preserving objects that would not otherwise have been deemed collectable, such as ordinary handmade and household items which were brought to America from Norway. "The museum became a pioneer in the preservation and promotion of America's cultural diversity. … The first historic building was added to the grounds in 1913, starting the Open Air Division. No other museum in the United States was collecting buildings, though this was already taking place in Scandinavia" (Gilbertson 2012:7).

After the Open Air Division was established the new curator, Knut Gjerset, continued in the same vein as Hanson, but also began taking an interest in objects that were made here in America by Norwegian immigrants. The collection continued to grow under Gjerset's leadership with the help of substantial gifts and contributions and in 1933 the collection was moved from Luther College to Arlington House in downtown Decorah, a former hotel and publishing house purchased by the college in 1931. Subsequent curators continued to add to the collections, but resources became limited and World War II served to slow down the mission of the museum for several years.

In 1964 the museum became an independent institution after formally separating from Luther College, at which point it adopted the name Vesterheim in honor of the word

[28] The natural history objects which were a part of the original collection at Luther were eventually returned to the college in 1972 (Vesterheim Is 125 Years Old and Never Been Better! 2002).

vesterheimen, or "western home," which had been the Norwegians' term for referencing their new home, America, in letters back to Norway. Dr. Marion J. Nelson, then Professor of Art History at the University of Minnesota, where he also received his bachelor's degree (1947), his master's degree (1950) and his doctorate (1960), was appointed the new director by the new board. Nelson had spent the previous summer cataloging the museum's collection and in his new role as director of Vesterheim was able to contribute his expertise in folk, decorative, and fine arts, particularly among Scandinavian Americans. In spite of the fact that he was still a full-time resident of Minneapolis and never moved to Decorah, Nelson's influence was formative. As director, Nelson brought an academic focus to the museum, increasing and expanding the collection of artifacts and implementing museum standards in terms of collection, preservation, and classification. As a result, Vesterheim became the largest single collection of material culture of any ethnic group in the United States. During his tenure as director, which lasted until 1991, Nelson also introduced several exciting initiatives aimed at building ties among the museum, the Norwegian American community, and Norway, such as cultural tours to Norway, instructional folk art classes, and public programming.

Thanks in large part to Marion Nelson's interest in developing educational opportunities and supporting new artists through these programs, Vesterheim has become famous for its commitment to offering handcraft and folk art courses. "The 1960s ushered in a new interest in cultural diversity and ethnic heritage. As second- and third-generation Norwegian Americans began to revive traditional crafts, many looked to Vesterheim's collections for examples of the folk arts they wanted to create. Vesterheim became a leader in the folk-art revival by organizing classes in specific techniques. This American revival in turn sparked a new interest among Norwegians in their own folk arts and was instrumental in the resurgence of folk art in that

country" (Vesterheim Is 125 Years Old and Never Been Better! 2002). The renewed interest in traditional crafts during the 1960s was not isolated to the Norwegian American community, but echoed throughout ethnic groups all over the country. The revival "grew out of the psychological needs of displaced peoples. … The rapid advance of mass culture and the naïve application of the melting pot theory had brought many Americans to an identity crisis. They sought an opportunity to investigate personal origins and acquire better understanding of their individual positions in the evolving society" (Moore 1989:37). This desire to reconnect with a traditional ethnic past extended beyond folk arts and crafts into the music sphere and was encouraged within the context of Nordic Fest by the initiation of the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival under Nelson's direction.

Nordic Fest

"Nordic Fest Polka"

I.
Come to Decorah.
Again to the Nordic Fest
We'll have a get together
Will all have a real good time.
Will all say Hello-Hello.
Didn't we meet before.
We all clap our hands
and yell some more.

At the Nordic Fest

II.

Spel op du spelmand.

Vi tager os ensving.

Ler og har et moro.

Kamarater vi ser igjen.

Vi skal donse Polka.

Drikke öl og vin og kaffe;

Med kaker jeg seger det smaker

Her paa den Norske Fest.

(Strike up (the music) fiddler.

We'll take a swing.

Laughing and having a good time.

Friends we see again.

We will dance the Polka.

Drink beer and wine and coffee;

With cakes I savor tastes

Here at the Nordic Fest.)

— Arthur Mickelson[29]

The Nordic Fest celebration in Decorah, Iowa originated in 1966, not long after Marion Nelson took the reins as director of Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum. The Museum has been a

[29] The text of this song was found in the program for the 1971 Nordic Fest in the Arnold Munkel Collection (yet unprocessed), Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Translation of verse two by the author.

key supporter of the event from the start. Prior to the festival being formed, the Luther College Women's Club had been known for hosting an annual *Syttende Mai* (Seventeenth of May, Norwegian Independence Day) dinner at the college. When they decided they would like to pass the event along to another organizer, they tapped the local United States Junior Chamber to step in and plan a similar event to honor the local Norwegian heritage. Nordic Fest was the result. In the program of the first Nordic Fest organizers included a brief history of Winneshiek County, emphasizing the role of its Scandinavian residents in building community, as well as the following statement of purpose: "The people of Decorah have combined the efforts of many of their yearly celebrations into this first Nordic Fest. The purpose of the Fest is to extend to all people an opportunity to share Decorah's Scandinavian heritage. The Fest is sponsored by a nonprofit corporation founded by Decorah people and is cultural rather than commercial in nature."[30] These days the fest is run by a volunteer board of directors and depends on a dedicated group of volunteers each year, many of whom are employed by or are in some way connected to Vesterheim. The festival includes a parade, music events, folk art and craft demonstrations, folk dance troupe performances, community street dances, traditional Norwegian food and treats, a *bunad* fashion show to display regional folk costumes from all over Norway, and a plethora of playful competitions and children's activities.[31]

Beginning in 1968, Marion Nelson worked to organize a Folk Music Festival that took place over all three days of the celebration (Friday to Sunday), which was one of the few ethnic folk music festivals to be held in the Upper Midwest at the time.[32] For about three hours each

[30] An impressive collection of Nordic Fest schedules and programs for the Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival exists in an unprocessed collection of materials donated by the Arnold Munkel family to Mills Music Library at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A copy of this 1967 program was found there.
[31] See the Nordic Fest website for more information about this annual event (http://www.nordicfest.com/).
[32] Though this was the first organized Folk Music Fest, the first two Nordic Fest celebrations that preceded it included several musical elements. Namely, "strolling musicians," old-time street dances in the evenings, a "Norse

afternoon during the fest, people would retreat and take cover from the blazing late July sun, filing into the aisles of the downtown Viking movie theatre or the local Junior High auditorium to hear dozens of musicians perform. Many of the performers were from the area, but many also came from throughout the Upper Midwest or farther. In addition, some musicians were invited to appear as special guests from Scandinavia. Audiences were treated to traditional Norwegian folk music, Scandinavian American dance music, American folk and popular music—sometimes played with a Norwegian American "swing"—religious hymns, and even some Irish jigs and reels that were occasionally thrown into the mix. It was a remarkable event for such a small town nestled in the rolling hills of northeastern Iowa. It was here, among the festival's fine and folk art exhibits, rosemaling, carving, and weaving demonstrations, traditional Norwegian food booths, and abundant displays of Norwegian American kitsch, that the music was presented for everyone's enjoyment, appreciation, and edification.

Marion Nelson was the primary (and for many years sole) organizer of the fest's music festival in its early stages.[33] He recruited musicians of whom he became aware through word-of-mouth (drawing primarily from northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota) to play at the festival, sketching out a rough schedule of musicians over the three days of performances. These schedules were never set in stone, however, and it was not uncommon for local musicians to simply turn up with instrument in hand, expecting to receive a block of time on stage to perform. A festival program from 1975 warns, "Surprise appearances by other performers and alterations

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Folk Music Program" in which Jon Embretsen (an employee of the Norwegian Embassy) discussed Norwegian musical instruments and played the Hardanger fiddle, Norwegian folk dancing and square dancing exhibits, band concerts, and various male choral performances.

[33] In later years he relied on help from local musicians, such as Arlene Young, to find performers for the Festival and to spread the word in the music community that performers were being sought. Young would eventually take over the organization of the Music Festival from Marion in 1983 after it became too much for him in addition to all his other organizing duties during Nordic Fest.

in the program are regular at the festival."[34] Records and accounts indicate that performances were kept fairly brief—preferably three to four songs or tunes per musician or group.[35]

Many of the performers returned year after year to take the stage at the Folk Music Festival in Decorah. Because so many of the musicians were local they did not have long distances to travel. Regular performers at the festival included a contingent of musicians from Decorah: Curt Moen (accordion), Hans Aschim (accordion), and Ellen Blegen (vocals and piano). There was also a steady stream of folks coming south from Spring Grove, MN, including Bill Sherburne (violin), Hazel Aamodt (piano), Leonard Tollefsrud (violin), and Rinaldo Ellestad (violin). Still more would come longer distances for the festival, however. LeRoy Larson and Mel Brenden (banjo, guitar) would drive down from Minneapolis; Leonard Finseth (violin) from Mondovi, Wisconsin; Archie Teigen (violin) from Brainerd, Minnesota; Bob Andresen (guitar) from Barnum, Minnesota; and Hardanger fiddler Anund Roheim[36] from Black Eagle, Montana, who performed at the festival in 1968 and 1969.[37] There were many other performers who came for just a single year here or there (for example, Viola Kjeldahl Lee, who performed on her accordion in 1976 and 1978), but many—especially those living closest—made the trip year after year. Most of these performers were also of an older generation. LeRoy Larson, Mel Brenden, and Bob Andresen were easily the youngest of those musicians listed above.

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[34] Munkel collection, Box 1 of 4, Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Further quotations from the Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival programs were derived from copies found in Munkel's collection.
[35] Beginning in 1977 the programs from the music festival included notes about how many numbers each group or individual could play. From the 1977 program, printed at the bottom of the first page in all capital letters: "Each appearance of any one soloist will be limited to four numbers except for soloists who have come from a great distance and can be present only one day. Six will be the maximum even for these people unless overwhelming applause demands that the rule be broken. Repeat appearances will be possible when time allows."
[36] Anund Roheim was born in Norway and already played *bygdemusikk* there before he came to the States in 1950 from Telemark, but moved back to Norway in 1994 after his wife, Anna, passed away (Beetham 2005:34, 73). See Beetham (2005:180–6) for more information about Roheim.
[37] Musicians Anund Roheim, Hans Aschim, Leonard Tollefsrud, and Rinaldo Ellestad even performed pieces which were selected for the 1968 *Folk Music of Norwegians in America* LP produced by Vesterheim:.

In addition to organizing the performances and orchestrating the recordings of several of the festivals, Marion Nelson served as the Master of Ceremonies. He announced all the performers and, in the interests of educating the audience at the same time as entertaining them, he would at times interview musicians about where they had learned their songs and what they could tell the audience about them, what instrument(s) they were playing, etc., providing a taste of historical or cultural background to help contextualize the performances.

In Defense of the Folk at the Festival

Stepping back slightly from the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival, it is worth spending some time examining Marion Nelson's approach to his position as Vesterheim Museum's director and his vision for the Folk Music Festival in particular. Nelson specialized in Scandinavian fine art and design academically, but also became a leading expert on Norwegian American folk art. The author of several books on the material culture and art of Norwegian Americans, Nelson is perhaps best known for his survey of Vesterheim's folk art collection, *Norwegian Folk Art: The Migration of a Tradition*, which was written in conjunction with the popular folk art exhibition by the same name. Nelson's work with the fine and folk arts of Norwegians living in the Upper Midwest was not limited, however, and his interests reached out broadly, encompassing all aspects of Norwegian American culture from the migration period through the late twentieth century.

What made Marion Nelson's vision and work at Vesterheim remarkable was his consistent and firm insistence on acquiring the most beautiful and highest quality examples of

Norwegian American culture for the museum's collection. As a scholar and connoisseur of art he of course had a talent for recognizing good art, and Nelson's expertise and high aesthetic standards served the museum well as a guiding principle in the expansion of the collection in Decorah. Although Marion Nelson took great interest and care in developing the fine art collection at the museum during his tenure as director, he also had the capacity to see the value and uniqueness behind those objects which would never be considered fine art (or sometimes even great examples of folk art). Norwegian scholar Øyvind T. Gulliksen said the late director "had the wonderful ability to look at and to describe the most amateurish painting by a Norwegian-American as if it was an Edward Hopper. He really did. He was fun to listen to" (personal communication, November 17, 2013). As we shall see in Nelson's evaluation of some local Norwegian American musicians at the festival, he sought a balance between honoring the tradition as it existed in the community (and in the northeastern Iowa-southern Minnesota area in particular) and acknowledging the shortcomings of some of the performances when it came to exhibiting Norwegian American folk music to a larger audience.

Born in 1924 to Norwegian immigrants Albert and Hilda (Bergerson) Nelson in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, Nelson was exposed to music a great deal in his home and relished finding it wherever he could.[38] His widow, Lila Nelson, describes the significant role that music played to a young Marion:

> The Nelson family was a very music-oriented one. … But when Marion was growing up that music came from through the church, the little country church that they went to. But I think he loved music from the beginning so that when he

[38] Fergus Falls, Minnesota, happens to be only about fifty miles southeast of the Buffalo River in Clay County, where Orabel Thortvedt's family settled. This portion of the state of Minnesota was heavily populated with Norwegian families who often moved there after first living in Wisconsin or eastern portions of Minnesota.

> went to the farm school [boarding school] … he studied music and he played the organ and whenever he got a chance he would thumb rides down here to the city to go to any opera, any music thing he could get to at the University. … It always was a big part of his life and his family. (Interview, October 2, 2010)

Though religion was clearly a key channel through which Marion was exposed to music early on, as an adult he was set firmly against institutional religion.[39] Music, however, continued to influence his life and Marion was able to find a remarkable outlet for this interest at Vesterheim, despite the fact that the museum was strongly committed to collections of material culture.

Indeed, Marion Nelson's refined tastes extended to his views of music as well as art and material culture. Lila Nelson recounts his fondness for great music: "Marion loved it all. … He loved rock, he loved hot, hard rock. … We loved Presley. …We were the oldest people in the group when we went to hear The Doors. … Or we'd go to a bar and it could be just anything, but it had to be good and he knew when it was good. But there wasn't any kind of music that he didn't appreciate for itself." This description exemplifies many of the accounts I have heard of Nelson's approach to building Vesterheim's collection. He strove to represent folk art and culture with the finest specimens available, no matter the type of object.

Marion Nelson's important championship of Vesterheim's mission as a museum of ethnic folk culture extended to his work with Nordic Fest and the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival. Lila Nelson, Marion's fellow Nordic Fest facilitator, recounted differences of opinion and occasional tension among both Norwegian Americans and Norwegians when it came to the focus of the Folk Music Festival. In addressing a question about how Marion vetted musicians

[39] Interestingly, Otter Tail County, where Marion Nelson's hometown of Fergus Falls is located, was once a place of distinction when it came to churches. "Otter Tail County stands highest with respect to the number of Norwegian churches. As many as forty-eight, are not found in any other county in America" (Ulvestad, et. al 2010:106).

for the stage, Lila's thoughts quickly turned to how Marion was forced to defend the focus of the festival from his critics:

> Lila: I think that there had to be a skill and a feeling for what was truly traditional. I think that was important. The thing that he had to struggle with was high criticism … There were two sisters who taught in high school here and there were other Norwegian Americans, very strong Norwegian Americans who were in the music field, and they would criticize him and say to him, "Marion, … you understand the beauties of Grieg—why are you (unintelligible) this folk stuff?" … And he would have to say, "Our museum is a museum of the folk. This is a museum of people who didn't listen to Grieg, but this is—was their music and this is what we are supposed—this is what the museum was all about. … If you want a museum about the upper class then you have another museum and you bring in the people, but they don't belong with the Norwegian American museum." And … some of them wouldn't quite accept that, but that was his answer.
>
> Anna: So he ran into some resistance …
>
> Lila: Oh *yes*.
>
> Anna: … from people in town.
>
> Lila: Well, in fact, even … up to the last days before we retired the representative from Norway would say, "You know, modern Norway is really 'with it,' … why aren't you bringing in some of this modern Norway [to] have some of that," … and he would have to say to them, "Because we can't do everything. Have another museum you could do that. We have our hands full with what our focus is and we can't spread out more."
>
> Anna: So they were talking about modern interpretations of Norwegian folk music?
>
> Lila: No, they felt it should be upper class music. They felt the folk stuff was lower class.

Marion Nelson never lost sight of Vesterheim's identity and mission, even when he was actively looking for the highest quality performances available, inviting famous and highly skilled folk musicians from Norway to perform at the festival, and using his role as festival organizer to memorialize these folk music performances. Nelson may have been responsible for applying a

heavy dose of his fine art training and tastes to his work as the museum's director from time to time, but it did not follow that he held a condescending view of folk art and material culture. On the contrary, much of his life's work was devoted to promoting, understanding, and appreciating these often underappreciated art forms.

Revivals and Revitalizations

So how does a folk music festival of this type relate to a broader category of folk music festivals? In most ways, in the 1960s and '70s, a festival on this level and that of, say, the Newport Folk Festival were radically different from each other.[40] Bruce Jackson articulates this difference between the music festivals of the revival movement and those of local, ethnic communities: "I do not include in the revival most ethnic or regional folklore celebrations or performances that went on within the communities of regions that were the source of the materials. It is not, in my view, a revival when a group of Arkansas musicians in Arkansas sings Arkansas songs for fellow Arkansans—not unless these songs are self-consciously learned in order to put on such a performance" (1993:73–4). The distinction is an important one. The larger, popular American folk music revival movement generally involved audiences that were largely disconnected from the traditional music they craved, such as young college students or politically-minded people across the nation. Many of the performers who came to represent the

[40] The Newport Folk Festival, held in Newport, Rhode Island since 1959 (though not continuously), was an outgrowth of the previously established jazz festival held in the same town. The festival itself grew to be a mix of nationally famous folk revivalists and relatively unknown traditional musicians under the leadership of folk musician/scholars like Pete Seeger and Peter Yarrow. Known in its early years for launching the careers of folk singer/songwriters Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, the Newport Folk Festival has, over the years, expanded the musical variety of its events, including blues, country, indie country, acoustic rock, and more (Weissman 2005:119–200).

revival had learned to play folk music by traditional means, but many others came to the movement through more academic, political, and self-conscious channels. Decorah's folk music festival was made up largely of local musicians with many coming from farther reaches of the Upper Midwest (Minnesota and Wisconsin) and the Plains (North and South Dakota). Although they were not all strictly considered locals, these musicians came out of related communities with very similar musical traditions. Young idealists with little to no connection to Norwegian American folk culture were not flooding the streets of Decorah in the hopes of saving this musical form from extinction.

Another way in which the local ethnic music festivals differed significantly from the larger revival movement was in the fears and anxieties which, to some extent, characterized the folk music revival. As Jackson points out regarding the larger, national folk music festival craze, "Many writers and festival fans claimed the revival provided an opportunity for millions of modern Americans to better understand their country's musical roots, as well as an opportunity to honor the musicians who still represented those traditions. Others—often disparagingly referred to as 'purists'—were certain the revival and its attendant commercialism would provide the death stroke for whatever fragile rural and ethnic traditions still survived" (1993:73). Jackson goes on to argue that these fears were predominantly overreactions and that the revival didn't really compromise the integrity of American folk music after all. "On the whole, the movement was benign. I think the revival can be fairly characterized as romantic, naïve, nostalgic, and idealistic; it was also, in part, venal, opportunistic, and colonialistic" (73).

Decorah's folk music festival was certainly promoted as a way of maintaining aging cultural traditions which were declining in popularity. The festival program from 1969 reads, "The Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival originated in 1968 as an attempt to record some

of what remains of a once lively tradition in oldtime and popular music among the Norwegian immigrants and to encourage the continuation of this tradition." This festival was a conscious and deliberate attempt to bring attention to and promote old-time music in the Norwegian American community, but it also presented and contextualized a variety of performances over the years. The festival integrated *bygdemusikk*, *gammaldans*, Scandinavian American old-time, popular American, and contemporary folk music, presenting them as part of the same back-and-forth story of Norwegian and Norwegian American folk music. This served to honor the musical traditions as they had existed in the community for generations, but also to appreciate the ways in which innovation has played a part in the progression of these traditions and how it continues to provide the community with possibilities for cultural persistence. In this way I believe Decorah's festival is better classified as a revitalization. It was initiated by the Norwegian American community, the performers were predominantly from the community performing for other Norwegian Americans, and the intention was to inspire the continued practice and advancement of this traditional music.

In spite of the distinctions between the national folk music revival and smaller ethnic music revitalizations, there are some similarities between the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival and a revival-type festival. I think Jackson is principally right in making a distinction between revivals and ethnic music festivals, but one can find shades of revivalism in festivals such as this one. While the audience was comprised of and entertained by Norwegian Americans performing Norwegian American music, there were some folks who performed traditional music that would have been more unusual to people in the largely local audience. Bringing attention to these forms of music would not have revived a tradition which was in danger of being lost in the

community, but would rather have brought attention to traditions which had already died out or which had never taken hold within the community.

For example, in the very first Norwegian American Folk Music Festival, Marion Nelson introduced two *stev* singers, Mrs. Joraand Ronne of Fosston, Minnesota, and Knute Sorenson of Grand Forks, North Dakota. Stev was not a type of singing that was particularly common in the Decorah area. In the *Folk Music of the Norwegians in America* album liner notes Nelson wrote: "The singing of 'stev,' songs in the minor mode with short stanzas and often with improvised texts, appears to have continued only in North Dakota and northern Minnesota. The tradition came into Norway around 1100 and has undergone comparatively little change. Setesdal and Telemark are among the few places where it is still found in Europe, and it is from these areas that the immigrant 'stev' singers come. Joraand Ronne emigrated from Setesdal in 1924, while Knute Sorenson is a third generation immigrant from the valley."[41] As a tradition that did not take root in the Decorah area, these stev songs would have sounded rather out of place or foreign to a largely local audience. In this respect, though the tradition had been maintained or renewed in some Norwegian American communities, it could be interpreted as an element of revivalism amidst the larger revitalization.

Another element of revivalism at the 1968 folk festival could be seen in the performances of Rev. George Ulvilden of Decorah and Henry Storhoff of Lanesboro, Minnesota. Ulvilden's performance featured an instrument called the *lur*, a long, thin wooden horn with a fluted end, variations of which date back to the Viking Age in Scandinavia and are mentioned in the

[41] Einar Haugen described the stev tradition as "a verse type consisting of four lines, with four beats each, rhymed in couplets, the first couplet having a feminine and the second a masculine rhyme. The ability to compose stanzas of this form was a social accomplishment in Telemark and Setesdal. In these valleys it frequently took the form of poetic debates, in which two persons composed (or recited) alternate stanzas. Such a debate was called a 'stevleik'" (Haugen 1938:72).

Icelandic sagas.[42] The wooden *lur* was traditionally used in Norway by shepherds to call livestock. By the nineteenth century, Marion Nelson notes, it "had already then acquired romantic associations. It was undoubtedly more of a symbol of the homeland than the shepherd's horn used by immigrants."[43] Although Nelson references a wooden *lur* made in Decorah dating back to about 1890, the instrument itself seems to have functioned primarily as a symbol in this country as opposed to an instrument widely used to carry on a musical tradition in the Norwegian American community. There are many instances of the *lur* being used to convene members of *bygdelag stevne*, but not many indications that the *lur* was regularly used outside of these types of ceremonial occasions. Rev. Ulvilden's interest in playing the *lur* originated from knowing that his mother, a first-generation Norwegian American, used the *lur* as a shepherdess in Norway and was known for her skill with the instrument.[44]

Henry Storhoff's relationship to the psalmodikon,[45] a one-stringed instrument played with a bow, resembled Rev. Ulvilden's to the *lur*. Both men were reviving uncommon musical traditions that had recently died out in their families. The psalmodikon became popular throughout Norway and Sweden in the mid-nineteenth century as a portable, inexpensive, easily built, straightforward instrument for religious choral accompaniment. Hymnals were published using a simple numbering system called *sifferskrift*, which, by design, did not require great skill

[42] Although I am discussing wooden shepherd *lurs* here, another type of *lur* made of bronze also has a history throughout Scandinavia (The *lurs* of the Bronze Age: http://natmus.dk/en/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-bronze-age/the-lurs-of-the-bronze-age/).
[43] Liner notes, "Folk Music of Norwegians in America" (1968). Goertzen notes that the *lur* had achieved somewhat of a romantic status back in Norway as well and were used to attract tourist attention to musical antiquities: "the first formal folk music contest in Norway, organized in 1881 … was for the lur … and other folk music instruments that had fallen almost entirely out of use" (1997:25).
[44] Liner notes, *Folk Music of the Norwegians in America* 1968. It is still the practice today, in fact, that a member of the Ulvilden family plays the *lur* during the opening ceremonies for Nordic Fest each summer in Decorah.
[45] The name "psalmodikon" is derived from the Greek words *psalmos* and *ode* (psalm and song) and is the Scandinavian incarnation of the ancient one-stringed instrument, the monochord, used to measure pitch in music. See Beatrice Hole, "What is a Psalmodikon?" (http://www.psalmodikon.com/articles/what_is_a_psalmodikon.htm).

to master. The psalmodikon tradition successfully transplanted in America following Norwegian and Swedish immigration for the same reasons it gained popularity in Scandinavia a century earlier. Young congregations were often too poor to afford pianos or organs, and the psalmodikon, known in Scandinavia as a church-endorsed instrument, was infinitely preferable to its cousin, the fiddle, which was known as the instrument of the Devil (Hoeschen 1989:9).

After enjoying this early and relatively successful resettlement in America, however, the psalmodikon began to sink in popularity as congregations gravitated to pianos and organs and as pianos became status symbols in people's homes. By the 1940s the psalmodikon tradition had mostly died out in the Norwegian American community. As Henry Storhoff's story goes, his grandparents gave him a psalmodikon that had been in the family since the mid-1800s.[46] Henry, also a fiddle player, taught himself to play the instrument using a violin bow and a tune book from Norway, though he was also able to play by ear. At the folk music festival in Decorah Storhoff was known for playing hymns such as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "Now Thank We All Our God" as the audience sang along. While some in the audience may have had recollections of stumbling onto a psalmodikon in a family attic, by the late 1960s the presence of this instrument at the festival well and truly represented a revival. Although singing stev and playing the *lur* and the psalmodikon represent elements one could point to that fall in line with a revival of Norwegian American folk music traditions, the music festival itself represented a revitalization of traditions from the beginning and clearly promoted itself as such to the community. The roots of this revitalization can be seen in the history of ethnic festivals in the Upper Midwest.

[46] See Ardith K. Melloh, "Grandfather's Songbook, or the Psalmodikon in America."

Folk music festivals—even ethnic folk music festivals—were certainly not a new phenomenon in the Upper Midwest in the late 1960s. New Glarus, Wisconsin, for example, has been celebrating its Swiss culture with their William Tell Festival since 1938 and before this held several anniversary celebrations commemorating the founding of the town as well as its Swiss identity.[47]

Like the celebrations of Swiss heritage in New Glarus, WI, Norwegian Americans held ethnic festivals and gatherings for many years to affirm their ethnic identities publicly as well as privately. They celebrated everything from the hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the *Restaurationen*,[48] to Norway's independence day (Syttende Mai, or the Seventeenth of May), to old world community ties through the *bygdelag* organizations. In early years larger events were sometimes used as platforms to discuss the importance of maintaining Norwegian ethnic identity and how it could and should be done in a sometimes nativistic and hostile American context.[49] Speaking specifically about the 1925 centennial celebration of Norwegian immigration to America in Minneapolis, MN, Marion Nelson called this early consciousness of ethnic identity "a head start on what in the late 1950s would mature as the new ethnicity" (Nelson 1989:36).

By the time Nordic Fest was established in Decorah, the enthusiasm for rediscovering ethnic heritage and traditional culture was sweeping the United States. Fuelled by the energy of

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[47] For more information on New Glarus's ethnic heritage celebrations, see Hoelscher 1998 and Leary 1991:18–20.
[48] For more information on the largest celebration of the arrival of the *Restaurationen*, held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1925, see April R. Schultz's *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American through Celebration*. 1994. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
[49] Indeed, maintaining their ethnic identity was a concern to which Norwegians in America devoted a great deal of energy. Fapso contends that "Norwegians are one of the most ethnocentric immigrant groups in America, mainly because the Church and the ethnic press effectively struggled to preserve the Norwegian heritage" (Fapso 2001:34). Norwegian Americans were also inspired by these initiatives to establish other organizations and societies, which not only celebrated Norwegian heritage in America, but promoted the retention of this ethnic identity in America. Alongside all the energy dedicated to creating and maintaining social networks and institutions, Norwegian Americans unceremoniously and enthusiastically carried on with their music.

the Civil Rights movement and an identity crisis, white Americans were motivated to seek out cultural distinctiveness. One result of this search for ethnic identity was mass participation in the arts and crafts revival. Nelson explains the various ways in which Americans sought to revive lost handcraft traditions: “Many of the people involved had no background in the traditional arts and crafts that they were reclaiming as their own. They acquired their knowledge through books, study abroad, teachers from abroad, or, in isolated cases, from older members of the group who had acquired knowledge of the crafts through direct tradition” (Nelson 1989:37). After Marion Nelson was named museum director and began offering courses in traditional Norwegian handcrafts, Vesterheim became a vital force in the revival of Norwegian folk art in America.

Norwegian American folk music, however, had not been neglected to the same extent as traditional crafts. Interest among younger Norwegian Americans to take up this music had clearly been in decline, prompting Marion Nelson’s efforts to draw attention to it by establishing the festival. There was, however, a critical mass of musicians who still practiced the distinctive style of Norwegian American old-time music from which interested musicians could learn. The folk music festival sought to bring these people together, creating an environment for musical exchange and unrestricted expression. So, although there may have been undercurrents of revivalism associated with the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival, the event itself and the circumstances surrounding it helped to stave off the conditions which would have driven this tradition into the same category as Norwegian handcrafts in the mid-twentieth century.

Still, in spite of the fundamental differences between folk music revivals and revitalizations as expressed through music festivals, it would be incorrect to deny any relationship between a regional ethnic folk music festival like Decorah’s and the broadly popular

folk music revival in America. The national folk music revival in the States, for example, reverberated across the Atlantic and was felt in Norway in interesting ways, which did not escape the attention of Norwegian Americans at the folk music festival. Chris Goertzen argues in *Fiddling for Norway* that Norway experienced increased awareness of and interest in its own folk music traditions in part as a result of the national referendums on whether or not Norway should join the European Union.[50] The national discourse surrounding this political and economic decision took on a decidedly nationalistic tone, with many Norwegians expressing concerns that their national identity would be compromised and weakened by joining the EU. At this time, Goertzen writes, the American folk music revival in some ways fed into a distinctive brand of revival that Norway was experiencing in that many Norwegians defined their revival in opposition to the American folk music boom.

> [American] Star folksingers … did resurrect old styles, but often expressed their alienation [from the previous generation and its mismanagement of the world] by expending more energy writing new songs with personal or political texts. Norway experienced a parallel urban-based revival, based on its own forms of the counterculture. But, for whatever reasons, this remained less important than the ongoing nativistic revival centered on the National Fiddlers' Association. In one respect, since one of the parents' generation's primary sins was in absorbing too much American culture, aping the American revival would not have been appropriate. Urban-nurtured folk music enthusiasts remained a minority in Norway's healthy nativistic revival. (Goertzen 1997:43)

Norway's distinct reaction to the folk music revival going on in America adds an interesting dimension to the musical exchanges that went on at the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival in Decorah at the time. Marion Nelson was clearly aware of the folk music

[50] Two national referendums were held in Norway, one in 1972 and the second in 1994. Norwegians voted not to join the EU by a narrow margin both times (53.5 % to 46.5% and 52% to 48%, respectively). Norway does, however, take part in economic agreements with the EU that have helped it maintain trade relations with the rest of Europe.

revival going on in Norway in the late ’60s and early ’70s, not least because he was familiar with some key players and great performers central to the revival itself. For example, in 1971 Torleiv Bolstad, a Hardanger fiddler from Valdres, was invited to perform at the festival in Decorah. Bolstad was a four-time winner of Norway’s National Fiddlers Contest for Hardanger fiddlers—1946, 1957, 1970 and 1971, the same year he performed for audiences at Nordic Fest in Decorah. Back in Norway, Bolstad was considered a leader in the folk music revival not only because of his personal accomplishments as a fiddler, but also due to his position at the *Laget for Folkemusikk* (Club for Folk Music) after World War II. Along with well-known fiddlers Kjetil Løndal and Ola Bøe, Bolstad helped lead the group of Hardanger fiddlers within the club. Known for his clean musical style, Bolstad was also recognized for understanding the relationship between fiddler and folk dancer. In fact, his wife’s folk dance group also accompanied his performances during his 1971 performances at Nordic Fest. In short, Bolstad’s accomplishments as a fiddler and prominence within the folk music revival cemented him as a well-respected tradition bearer in Norway at a time when many viewed tradition as a comfort to a small but proudly independent nation in a rapidly globalizing world.

So how well did these Norwegian musicians, who were part of a movement aimed at digging deep into Norwegian musical history, fare in front of an audience whose families might have emigrated to the US over a century earlier? Unsurprisingly, music traditions in Norway and in Norwegian America continued to evolve between the periods of mass emigration and the mid-twentieth century. The Norwegian folk music revival, Goertzen argues, partly defined itself in opposition to the American folk music revival. The Norwegian American folk music tradition was influenced by proximity to other ethnic music traditions and exposure to American popular

and other regional American music traditions.[51] What musical common ground could these communities have found after more than a century of existing independently of each other? A brief look at the history of the Hardanger fiddle among Norwegians in America suggests an answer.

The Hardanger fiddle has had an unsteady history in Norwegian American folk music tradition. Because the conditions surrounding emigration from Norway to America in the nineteenth century were favorable for the migration of *spelemenn*, or fiddlers,[52] many of whom brought this particular musical tradition to America. In early, isolated rural communities heavily populated by Norwegians, Hardanger fiddlers continued the music and dance traditions of the Old Country (Hoeschen 1989:32–6). *Spelemenn* played for weddings, social gatherings, and *bygdelag stevne*, the dances which were culturally specific to Norway and the Hardanger fiddle, such as the *halling*, *springar* and *gangar*. As the nineteenth century came to a close and second generation Norwegian Americans showed preference for pan-European dances such as waltzes, polkas and schottisches, Hardanger fiddle music and dance traditions became harder to maintain. An attempt was made to revive Hardanger fiddle music and bygdedans when a group of concerned Norwegian Americans established the *Hardanger Violinist Forbundet af Amerika* in 1915, which went on to organize *kappleik*, or fiddle contests until 1952. Initially the *kappleik* were extremely popular events. By the time the contests ended, however, the Hardanger fiddle tradition declined to the point where it had effectively ended in America as a living tradition, though performances were still organized at *bygdelag stevne* (Ellestad 2011:68). The Hardanger

[51] See Beetham (2005), Larson (1975), Leary (1984, 2006b), Martin (1994, 1998), and Nusbaum (1989).
[52] Two factors leading to favorable conditions for *spelemenn* emigration were initial heavy migration from areas that were home to many *spelemenn* (Telemark, Setesdal, Valdres, etc.), and the heavy migration of *husmenn* (tenant farmers), a common social class of Norwegian *spelemenn* (Hoeschen 1989:29–30).

fiddle community has since experienced a modest revival with the founding of the Hardanger Fiddle Association of America in 1983.[53]

Norwegian Americans attending the folk music festivals in Decorah in the late 1960s and throughout the ’70s, whether they were musicians themselves or simply music enthusiasts, would have had some knowledge of the Hardanger fiddle, the culturally specific dances associated with it, and the symbolic importance of the instrument back in Norway. Older audience members may have had memories of hearing first or second generation musicians playing the Hardanger fiddle or perhaps seen touring *spelemenn* perform throughout the Upper Midwest as was common in the early twentieth century (Hoeschen 1989:36–8; Ellestad 2011). Furthermore, musicians like Leonard Finseth[54] sometimes adapted tunes traditionally limited to the Hardanger fiddle to the conventional fiddle, making the tunes familiar to Norwegian American audiences even if Hardanger fiddles and fiddlers were in short supply. In short, the tradition had not died out so completely and so long before the folk music festival for the Hardanger fiddle tradition to be unknown to audiences there. Moreover, the festival regularly featured Norwegian American Hardanger fiddlers such as Anund Roheim of Black Eagle, Montana, Nils Lee of Minneapolis, Minnesota and Gunnar Odden of Canby, Minnesota. Over a century and a quarter after immigration, Norwegian and Norwegian American folk musicians were still able to find

[53] See the Hardanger Fiddle Association of America’s website for more information on their history and activities: https://sites.google.com/a/hfaa.org/hfaa-test/. The HFAA also publishes a quarterly journal called *Sound Post*, which includes articles about the history and culture of Hardanger fiddling and dance as well as practical information for musicians regarding fiddling styles, instrument upkeep, interviews with renowned fiddlers, and more. Several article samples can be found on their website, http://www.hfaa.org/Home/sound-post (accessed November 19, 2013).

[54] An inventory of sound recordings in the Leonard Finseth Collection at Mills Music Library includes recordings of him playing *springar* and *gangar* tunes in addition to more typical *gammaldans*, old-time, and popular American tunes as well as hymns. Guide to the Leonard Finseth Collection, 1942–1979: http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi/f/findaid/findaididx?c=wiarchives;view=reslist;subview=standard;didno=uw-csumc-csumc0020cg;focusrgn=C01;cc=wiarchives;byte=7262273.

common musical ground at the folk music festival. One might argue that this connection was even encouraged—if indirectly—by the popular American folk music revival.

Although, as Goertzen argues, the American-style, urban-born, singer-songwriter-based folk music revival in Norway may have been less significant than the native Norwegian folk music revival, talented and influential Norwegian musicians did participate in this movement as well. For example, Alf Cranner, legendary Norwegian folksinger, lyricist, writer, and painter, is regarded as one of the country's founders of the singer-songwriter group in the 1960s. Cranner was born in Olso in 1936, began playing the violin at the age of seven and switched to guitar at thirteen. From a young age he showed an interest in classical, jazz, and folk music and in 1963 he released his first album of eighteen Norwegian folksongs entitled, *Fiine antiquiteter*, featuring his own adaptations of the songs and with only guitar accompaniment. Cranner's work ushered in the burgeoning careers of a group of Norwegian singer-songwriters such as Lillebjørn Nilsen (who would become known as the Norwegian Pete Seeger), Lars Klevstrand, and Kari Svendsen, among others. These musicians would become known as Norway's *Visebølgen* (the Norwegian folk music wave).

In 1970 Cranner began a twelve year collaboration with the Norwegian writer Odd Børretzen in which Cranner would sing and provide accompaniment and commentary to Børretzen's original monologues. The content of their performances was both humorous and satirical and their collaboration resulted in two LPs recorded from live concerts. It was during the early years of this collaboration, in 1973, that Marion Nelson invited Alf Cranner to Decorah to perform at the Nordic Fest Norwegian American Folk Music Festival. Although the roots of Cranner's career lay in Norwegian folksong traditions, his contemporary interpretations and creative musical collaborations were in some ways an odd fit for the festival in Decorah.

Looking back on this time as a newcomer to Decorah in his late 20s, Harley Refsal recalls seeing Cranner perform: "I also remember that one year Nordic Fest included performances by a (then) young Norwegian folk singer [Alf Cranner], I thrilled at seeing and hearing him sing at Nordic Fest that one time … it was a pretty informal performance, and if I [recall] correctly, he had had great plenty to drink before his performance, and he was a bit too racy for some … but young protester myself at that stage, I savored every minute."[55]

Cranner's presence and performance at Nordic Fest in the 1970s presents an interesting confluence of cultural movements. Cranner's career path, catapulted to Norwegian national prominence with his debut album of folksongs in 1963, was influenced by the American-dominated folk music revival. Simultaneously, arguably related to but in no way derivative of this revival movement, the Norwegian American folk music scene in Decorah, orchestrated by Marion Nelson, was quietly celebrating itself. In modest ways it was reviving a connection to ethnic Norwegian folk music by inviting prominent figures of the Norwegian folk music revival to perform for festival audiences. Alf Cranner, representative of the Scandinavian branch of the folk music revival movement, was an interesting choice in that he represented a direct connection to the Norwegian folk music scene, but in many ways had more in common with the corresponding revival in the States than with the folk music of largely rural Norwegian Americans. His performance in the US at a Norwegian American folk music festival in a strange way was still regarded as a musical anomaly, as if he were performing at a *landskappleik* (national folk music and dance competition) in the middle of the Norwegian countryside. As Refsal noted above, the festival audience in Decorah was in some ways ill-fitted to a young, folk singer-songwriter who appealed to a socially conscious and politically engaged fan base. Still,

[55] Harley Refsal, email correspondence with author, February 22, 2013.

we can see from this example that even though the spirit of the folk music festival in Decorah may have been less in line with the larger, popular folk music revival movement than the Norwegian folk music revitalization, effects of this popular revival were felt in Norway and at times penetrated the performance line-up at Nordic Fest.

Nevertheless, it should not be considered a fluke or anomalous that performances like Cranner's made it to Decorah, in light of the fact that they may not have been entirely representative of the majority of the people in the audience. The fact is that some young Norwegian Americans, like Harley Refsal, did attend and enjoy these performances, which not only may have appealed to their political leanings, but most likely resonated with the contemporary folk music sounds and styles they were immersed in and familiar with. Marion Nelson's awareness of the diversity of musical offerings, not only in the localized folk music scene, but in the realms of American popular music and contemporary Norwegian music contributed to the broad scope of the Folk Music Festival. He put a great deal of effort and thought into drawing out the music traditions of the oldest generations of Norwegian Americans, but he also figuratively tipped his hat to the ways in which an emergent generation of young people was choosing to articulate its identity and carry traditions forth into a new cultural context. In doing this, younger generations of Norwegian Americans could see themselves reflected in the traditions of their community and ethnic heritage.

The legacy of the folk revival movement is certainly debatable, and many scholars and musicians have continued to weigh its objectives as well as it effects. What is absolutely clear, however, is that the larger popular American folk music revival and Decorah's folk music festival are linked. They are related not only because of the context of the period and the renewed interest in traditional folk music, but because of the ways in which a younger generation

was struggling to articulate its place in a rapidly changing world. Musicians like LeRoy Larson and Bob Andresen were, perhaps, drawn to the revival for obvious reasons, but they balanced them by using their expertise and backgrounds to preserve and promote the music of their ethnic heritage. The work that Marion Nelson put into organizing the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival not only honored a generation of musicians who had something to teach a younger generation, but it also reflected the unique styles and emerging identities of the younger generation itself. It would be up to those younger musicians to decide what to do with the sounds of their past and their present lives to contribute to a vision for the future of Norwegian American folk music and identities.

Enduring Effects of the Festival

In addition to featuring different forms of Norwegian folk music as they continued in an American context, Marion Nelson made several tape recordings during the 1968 Folk Music Festival and the following year produced the LP *Folk Music of Norwegians in America* as a fundraiser for Vesterheim. The album is divided up into eight sections, paying homage to distinctive instruments including the *lur*, the psalmodikon, and the Hardanger violin, as well as more familiar instruments such as the accordion, traditional fiddle, and piano.

More recordings were made at Nordic Fest Folk Music Festivals in addition to this event in 1968, but the last known serious attempt by the museum to document the festival was made in 1978 when Nelson recorded fourteen reels of performances, which he clearly intended to use as

material for a follow-up recording, building on the LP released by the Museum in 1968.[56] In an effort to select suitable performances for the anticipated record, Nelson took detailed notes of each song, monologue, and joke performance at the Festival that summer, which Vesterheim fortunately retained. He got as far as hand-picking all the songs for the LP, cutting them into tracks and creating four master reels, which were meant for production. This trifecta of documentation—the original festival recordings, Nelson's extensive performance notes, and the resulting Silver Reel Series masters—not only preserves a very unique historical moment (the festival itself), but it also allows us the rare opportunity to go back and in a way, reconstruct a fragmented history. By this I mean that while Nelson went about carefully selecting performances that he felt would be the most appropriate for the second Vesterheim LP, we can use all three sources to go back and examine his notes to see which performances he selected over others and in some cases, why. The performance notes include such commentary as, "Poor delivery, especially at beginning. Seems to forget the tune early in the song," directly addressing the quality of the musicianship, which in some cases comes down to purely subjective assessment. In other cases we find instances of Nelson making decisions about the nature of the music based on biases he may have had about what constituted *ekte* or genuine Norwegian American folk music. For example, on one performance from July 28, 1978, he writes: "The poor delivery heard in these tunes prohibits their use in recording. The performers also play popular tunes, not traditional Norwegian music."[57] In these moments we catch a glimpse of the shaping influences at work in determining what did and did not constitute Norwegian American

[56] In a letter to Robert Andresen dated June 18, 1974, Nelson writes, "Our earlier record from the Festival is sold out, and many of the fine performers who are now regulars at the Festival were not on it. I would like to consider a second volume with only the best of the people who were not on the first" (Robert F. Andresen Collection, Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison).

[57] The songs Nelson was referring to in this note were "Yankee Doodle" and "Good Old Summertime."

folk music (at least folk music which was representative of that generation), even though the music was performed by Norwegian Americans, very likely in a Norwegian American style, at a Norwegian American ethnic music festival.

By comparison, Nelson comments on a performance by Leonard Finseth, a notable Norwegian American fiddler from Mondovi, Wisconsin: "These tunes are very good and useful for recording. The last two are especially useable as they are free of error. I think that these could have a broad popular appeal and should be given first priority for the record." In calling attention to Nelson's performance notes I do not mean to call into question his work as organizer of the Music Festival, malign the skilled performances of musicians like Finseth, or exaggerate the value of a weak performance. It is important, however, to consider the ways in which our perceptions of Norwegian American folk music may have been shaped by intervening attitudes about what is a laudable performance and what is not. Recordings such as these not only preserved performances, good and bad, but they were also meant (whether they were actually produced or not) to serve as representative examples of this event's musical tradition.

What we see through the *Folk Music of the Norwegians in America* album and the notes and selected performances from the never-produced follow-up LP is the way in which Nelson worked to construct a small representation of Norwegian American folk music as it had been passed down through the years, with some roots extending all the way back to medieval Norway. We also see how these traditions had come to be integrated with musical influences from a new American context. We see examples of later generations of Norwegian Americans who turned their attention back to Scandinavia in search of traditions that predate *gammaldans*, as George Ulvilden did with the *lur*. It is a wide representation of a diverse and dynamic category of music

which is continuing to inform our perceptions of what constitutes Norwegian American folk music, even in a contemporary context.

In my conversations with musicians who regularly attended the festivals, they recalled only imprecise memories that something about the festival had shifted and it stopped holding a strong interest for them. Beginning in 1983 Arlene Young assumed responsibilities for organizing the folk music festival from Marion Nelson. Dedicated Nordic Fest attendee, Arnold Munkel from Spring Grove, kept all the programs for both the Nordic Fest events as well as the Folk Music Festival events, which included more specific information about which performers would be playing that weekend and when, as well as who would be available for accompaniment if a need arose. In the collection of materials Munkel donated to Mills Music Library in Madison, Wisconsin, the group of festival programs ends after 1980 and the last general Nordic Fest program he collected was in 1984. This is not to say that the programs were not issued past the early ’80s (general programs, in fact, have always been printed for Nordic Fest), but it does indicate a possible decline or marked change in the music festival as a whole.[58]

Still, although the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival was a great force for many years in drawing attention to a tradition in decline, and while it may have changed to some extent under new direction, it was only one of several events and initiatives which have contributed to the promotion of this music over the years. The annual Snoose Boulevard performances in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis, MN, which ran from 1972 to 1977, three

[58] Ostensibly, however, the general Nordic Fest program lists the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival in the same way that other years’ programs did. It announces the Seventeenth Folk Music Festival on July 27 and 28, 1984 from 1 pm to 4:30 pm and the 29th from 1 pm to 4 pm. The exact date of the last official Folk Music Festival is not known, as retention of the programs is uneven and both organizers of the event, Marion Nelson and Arlene Young, have passed away.

resulting recordings, and the related Olle i Skratthult Project (named after the Swedish American vaudeville star, Hjalmar Peterson's character "Olle i Skratthult" or "Olle from Laughtersville") are examples of similar initiatives. Snoose Boulevard, as Minneapolis's West Bank was once called, was an area known for its heavy Scandinavian population around the turn of the twentieth century. It was the site of many Scandinavian owned businesses and cultural centers before the neighborhood's entertainment offerings began to decline after prohibition and increasingly affluent Scandinavian families began to move out (Collins 2008). In the early 1970s, musician and folklorist Maury Berstein enlisted the help of Swedish American Anne-Charlotte Harvey to put on the series of Snoose Boulevard Festivals in the neighborhood featuring musicians of Scandinavian background performing well-known tunes from the area's heyday as a hub of Scandinavian American culture and activity. Bernstein also produced three albums featuring Harvey and other Scandinavian American musicians commemorating this music, *Memories of Snoose Boulevard, Return to Snoose Boulevard,* and *Scandinavian in the New Land*.

Other productions which have drawn attention to Scandinavian American folk music include the various works and contributions of Philip Martin. Martin conducted a research project on Norwegian American fiddlers in the Upper Midwest from 1978 to 1981, resulting in eleven interviews with fiddlers, transcriptions of songs, and a research essay, all of which are housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. This work paved the way for several subsequent publications and recordings, including two albums which he produced, *Across the Fields* (1982) and *Tunes from the Amerika Trunk* (1984), the book *Farmhouse Fiddlers: Music and Dance Traditions in the Rural Midwest* (1994), and a number of popular and academic articles. So, even though the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival was beginning the slow

process of transformation and eventual decline, there were other productions and events which championed the persistence of Norwegian American folk music in the region and beyond.

In spite of its eventual decline, the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival in Decorah was a unique event for its time and it accomplished many remarkable things. The production of the album *Folk Music of Norwegians in America* using festival recordings was a unique contribution to the recorded history of Norwegian Americans, featuring local musicians who, for the most part, would not have been known to audiences outside their home communities. It also highlighted the diversity of instruments and musical styles that persist or at one time were actively used in Norwegian American culture. The recordings made for this and for the never-produced follow-up album (not to mention all the ancillary documentation relating to festival events) leave us with a unique collection of materials that not only document the live performances themselves, but offer glimpses into the transmission, background, context, and personal stories through Marion Nelson's short interviews with the performers.

Another way in which the festival encouraged the endurance of Norwegian American folk music was simply bringing musicians together. In the preface of LeRoy Larson's dissertation he writes, "My acquaintance with Dr. Marion Nelson, professor of Art History at the University of Minnesota, and director of the Norwegian Museum in Decorah, Iowa, led me to the annual Nordic Fest in Decorah, and to Houston County, Minnesota, where I uncovered a wealth of materials" (1975:vii). Larson lists among his fieldwork recordings selected performances from the 1972 folk music festival in Decorah. He also interviewed 12 musicians from Houston County who then contributed 24 melodies which Larson transposed in his study on Scandinavian American dance music.

Other examples of musicians coming into contact with one another through the festival include Robert Andresen, a musician and self-taught folklorist who hosted a radio program from Duluth, Minnesota, called Northland Hoedown, and Bill Sherburne. After Sherburne's death Andresen wrote a rich and detailed obituary describing Sherburne's musical history, influences and style. Closing the piece, Andresen situated himself in relation to Bill and his legacy: "Bob Andresen of Duluth is a graphic designer, old-time music enthusiast and a guitarist who looked forward to playing with Bill Sherburne each year at the Nordic Fest in Decorah."[59] Friendships were forged between musicians of different generations at the folk music festival over the years, which not only encouraged the transmission of traditions among individuals, but also succeeded in inspiring a younger generation of musical scholars to document and preserve the traditions they encountered.

[59] Robert Andresen Collection, Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Figure 2. Bill Sherburne playing violin (seated), Truman Sorenson playing guitar (middle), and Bob Andresen in the background playing guitar (left) at Nordic Fest's Norwegian American Folk Music Festival in Decorah (n.d.). Robert Andresen Collection, Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin.

This free exchange of stories, information, and music, and coming together of multiple generations of musicians is perhaps the greatest enduring legacy of the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival and one which Marion Nelson fostered through these events. The nature of the performances, which were made up of non-professional, largely local musicians, served as the source material from which Nelson compiled the Vesterheim recordings. Though he did put a great deal of effort into selecting the best renderings of songs and tunes performed at the festivals for production, he was committed to making sure the folk traditions as they genuinely existed in the community—rustic though they may have been—were represented. It is eminently clear that Marion Nelson had excellent taste in all artistic categories. This did not mean, however, that he equated high art with high quality. It also did not mean that he failed to recognize the value of a piece of art which was inherently valuable from a cultural standpoint even though it may not have been executed very well.

The cumulative effect of Marion Nelson's training, philosophy, and work as the organizer of the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival is manifold. Nelson was able to provide the vision needed to initiate such a unique event at such a crucial time, the foresight to document the event with the intention of releasing selected performances (thereby diversifying the representation of ethnic folk music performances on record), and the truly exceptional opportunity for young musicians like LeRoy Larson and Bob Andresen to come together and connect with a generation of musicians who had so much to impart but so few opportunities to be heard outside their families or social circles. Marion Nelson brought all these elements together

and the impact of these folk music festivals can be heard in the work that has been continued by those young musicians, who took it upon themselves to ensure that the traditions and knowledge of this older generation of Norwegian Americans would not be lost.

At the same time, these musicians are artists in their own rights and exist in a different time and cultural context than this older generation of musicians. As any modern-day scholar of folk ways must recognize, tradition is not static. Nelson himself was always open to new art, new influences, new ideas, new ways of looking at the world; it would be naïve to imagine that he did not recognize (perhaps he even hoped) that the festival recordings and the connections made between generations of musicians would result in new articulations of Norwegian American folk music and identity. At the very least he would have known that organizing these folk music festivals would result in the musical traditions of Norwegian Americans being carried forth, leaving open the possibility for reinterpretation, reincarnation, and revitalization of traditions for future generations.

Chapter 3: Curating Traditions: Bob Andresen, LeRoy Larson, and Bruce Bollerud

After examining the significance of the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival and the ways in which it recognized the importance of and supported the continuation of these musical traditions, we now turn to the invaluable efforts individuals have made to the perpetuation of Norwegian American folk music. In addition to profiling the careers, contributions, and collections of three individual musicians, I will also demonstrate how each of their experiences reflect larger stories within the Norwegian American experience which have also contributed to the musical heritage of this ethnic group. These strains are woven into each section and represent the presence and importance of regional music contests, humor, and occupational folklore (specifically the logging industry) to the development and enrichment of Norwegian American folk music.

The musicians profiled in this section, Robert ("Bob") Andresen, LeRoy Larson, and Bruce Bollerud, represent the experience of a generation of musicians and cultural scholars who have served as the crucial link from the first and second generations of Norwegian American folk musicians to the present. Their work has spanned nearly seventy years, beginning in 1945, when Bruce Bollerud first began playing at dances at the age of 12, and leading up to today. They have borne witness to the experiences and passage of earlier musicians, marked by

migration, whose feet were planted in two worlds distinguished by distinct languages, cultures and traditions. Their lives, in other words, mirror the spirit of Thurine Oleson's and Orabel Thortvedt's experiences in their intimacy with both Norwegian and American cultures, and the "twoness" of which Gulliksen writes regarding the Norwegian American experience (2004:1–20). Andresen, Larson, and Bollerud internalized their elders' stories, learned their melodies, watched as their experiences were affected by the cultural shifts and ethnic mix of the region, and personally participated in the continual evolution of the music and worldview of the Upper Midwest.

Yet these three musicians have gone well beyond picking up an instrument and learning a melody or two from a grandparent. They were born into this ethnic musical ether—learning from family, friends, neighbors, laborers, professional musicians and more—and have worked in concrete, mindful, and multi-faceted ways to encourage its continuation. For as closely as they learned and listened to their elders in the Scandinavian old-time tradition, however, each of these three men reached beyond the scope of their predecessors, gaining access to larger platforms and reaching wider audiences through their work on the radio, extensive performance schedules over the years, the release of multiple albums, publication of tune books, and through their participation in high-profile bands. All three men are representatives of their traditional musical heritage in a way that the previous generations were not able to be, but they also have taken seriously the task of preserving the traditions they love by assuming the role of curator of their own collections of unique material—sources of information which many individuals have carefully preserved over the years in the hopes of counteracting the cultural erosion they saw was endangering this musical tradition.

I have chosen to write about these particular individuals for several reasons. First, all are (and were) musicians in their own rights, both participating in and pushing the boundaries of traditional Norwegian American folk music. Second, each of them went above and beyond performing their own music to become curators of their own collections of recordings and documents, which they considered important to the story and legacy of Norwegian American folk music. Third, they each offer up a fascinating perspective on the ways in which Norwegian American folk music transitioned from house party and barn dance music to a modernized musical form that still holds relevance to the Norwegian American community.

Bob Andresen's career in radio, for example, is a testament to how the early influence of radio continued to sustain an interest in regional music. In addition, Andresen's own scholarship in the area of Norwegian American music in the Upper Midwest has left a rich account of how this ethnic music tradition mixed with other traditions as well as popular American music in the early twentieth century. LeRoy Larson was also a natural choice to include in this chapter due to his vast recording and performance experience combined with his own impressive background and research into early iterations Norwegian American folk music. Larson's personal and academic perspectives on how the tradition has continued to change since the immigrant era are, like Andresen's, invaluable. Futhermore, Larson represents a strong connection between the effect of the Norwegian American Folk Music Festival and the preservation of this ethnic music tradition. Finally, Bruce Bollerud's substantial experience as a performer and innovator in the area of Norwegian American folk music are only matched by his thorough documentation and vivid recollections of the tail-end of the house party era in rural southern Wisconsin. Bollerud's engaging stories and descriptions of his musical childhood join with a lifetime of experience performing regionally-inspired music on stage to create a truly unique testament to the ways in

which Norwegian American folk music has both maintained its form and combined with other ethnic and popular music forms to express the unique regional sound of the Upper Midwest.

In addition to all the reasons for profiling these individual musicians, Andresen, Larson, and Bollerud also happen to characterize their generation of Norwegian American musicians in terms of their gender. As was typical during the house party and barn dance era, men were more likely to have been featured musicians at neighborhood gatherings while women, if playing an instrument at all, were generally known for accompanying fiddlers, guitarists, or accordionists by "chording" on the piano. As Philip Martin attests, "Women fiddlers were rare in rural communities in the early 1900s. By and large, the fiddle was considered an instrument to be played by men. Girls generally grew up playing the piano, while their brothers 'fooled around' with the violin. As one person described house parties in his neighborhood, 'It seemed like all the boys could play the fiddle, and all the girls knew how to chord on the piano'" (Martin 1994:78). This pattern was maintained for several reasons, one being the persistent association of the violin with the devil, another being the traditional division of labor in rural settings (men operated in the public sphere while women were more limited to the private), still another reason for the gender divide in musical instruments was the free time men had to practice their music during the winter months while their chores were fewer yet women still maintained a full work load (Martin 1994:78). Though there certainly were exceptions to this generalization, the pattern remained fairly clear in Andresen, Larson, and Bollerud's generation and therefore it is not entirely coincidental that the musicians I have selected to profile in this section are all men.

Robert F. Andresen

Born in 1937 in Minneapolis but raised on a farm near Outing in Cass County situated in northern Minnesota, Bob Andresen was a third generation Norwegian American. As is often the case with those who have done so much to preserve Norwegian American musical traditions, Andresen was born into a musical family. His immigrant grandfather, Thorvald, was a noted singer and fiddler from Mandal in southern Norway, located in Vest-Agder, a county known for its retention of traditional music and song. Andresen's grandmother would accompany Thorvald on guitar. His father, Bjarne, moved to the Outing, Minnesota area in 1927 and played accordion for house parties and barn dances. A young Andresen followed in his predecessors' footsteps by picking up the guitar and accordion. His early exposure to music included a mix of Norwegian songs and hymns favored by his grandfather; popular Norwegian, American and Norwegian American tunes contributed by his father; repertoires of traveling performers; and country gospel music found in the churches of the area. Growing up, Andresen was also a keen listener of radio programs such as "Barn Dance" on WLS out of Chicago and "Grand Ole Opry" on WSM in Nashville in addition to several more local stations from the Upper Midwest such as WDAY in Fargo, KDAL in Duluth, and WEAU in Eau Claire (Leary 2006b:6). Through these programs he became fond of performers more representative of the region, such as the Co-op Shoppers from Fargo who featured a mix of accordion, fiddle, piano and clarinet; Famous Tim Lashua, a French-Canadian guitarist and singer; and Ernest Iverson, better known as "Slim Jim," who specialized in comedic dialect songs and who often performed with his brother Clarence, also known as "The Vagabond Kid" (Leary 2006b:6–7).

At the age of seventeen Andresen moved to Minneapolis to pursue work and an education. Landing a series of office and factory jobs, he eventually attended art school, apprenticed as a sign painter, and settled into a career as a graphic artist. In the meantime he also continued to advance his musical interests by picking up the steel guitar, mandolin, and the banjo while playing with an eclectic mix of musicians, including Finnish-Americans, similarly displaced rural Minnesotans, and métis fiddlers.

Andresen continued to participate in the musical traditions of his own heritage, chiefly through playing religious music, which was also a part of the Norwegian American musical experience. In an interview with Jim Leary, which aired on Leary and Richard March's popular Wisconsin Public Radio program *Down Home Dairyland,* Andresen recounts playing religious music for neighborhood women while living in Minneapolis: "I've played [Protestant hymns] on electric guitar since I've been pretty young. I lived in … a little rooming house in Minneapolis at one time and there were some old ladies that would sit on the front porch and I would take my guitar down there and play those for them" ("Andresen Show" *Down Home Dairyland* 1994). For Norwegian Americans who were outside the old-time music "party circle" for one reason or another, or who may have held moral objections to attending house parties and barn dances, religious music provided some common musical ground within the community. Andresen's ability and willingness to play for these ladies at the boarding house reflects a versatility and a kind of cultural bridge-building that was not always attributed to folks who were fond of old-time dance music.

After Andresen married JoAnne Alberg in 1964 and the couple moved to Duluth the following year, a new level of complexity and excitement emerged in Bob Andresen's musical sphere of experience. Early recordings of Bob and JoAnne's newly-formed music group, the

Wildwoods, reflect the unrestricted and playful repertoire of an area and a region that brought together the musical traditions of immigrant Finns, Swedes, Norwegians, French-Canadians, Ojibwes, Poles, Croatians, Slovenians and more, mixing them with popular American, country western, and rockabilly music. In a special live broadcast of his radio program, *Northland Hoedown*, Andresen succinctly described the development of the unique variety of folk or roots music in the Upper Midwest from the early waves of European immigration to the mid-twentieth century: “In the Upper Midwest the various immigrant groups who brought their music from Europe began to exchange songs and tunes. The music of one ethnic group would often be picked up by other ethnic groups. And all of this music began to mix with American popular music and with American country music. When we had live radio shows in such places as Duluth, Fargo, and Minneapolis, the programs featured a mix of old time ethnic music and regional country music” (from *Northland Hoedown* 1984, quoted in Leary 2006b:4).

Figure 3. Bob Andresen (right) and Truman Sorenson (left) seen accompanying other musicians at Decorah's Folk Music Festival in Decorah, Iowa (n.d.). Used with permission from the Robert Andresen Collection, Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin.

At the same time as the Wildwoods were playing taverns in the Duluth area, Bob Andresen became increasingly interested in researching the history of the folk music of the region. He began contacting and playing with older musicians, most notably Otto Rindlisbacher (1895–1975) and Leonard Finseth (1911–1993). Rindlisbacher, a second-generation Swiss American hailing from Rice Lake, Wisconsin, was an adept button and piano accordionist, fiddler, Hardanger fiddle maker, and owner of the Buckhorn Bar and Café, a popular hangout for old-time musicians in the area. He collected and restored instruments, taking the time to learn how to play each one, and at one time his collection reportedly included 500 pieces (Andresen 1978:10). Rindlisbacher made a name for himself in his youth by playing with Thorstein Skarning, Norwegian American accordionist and leader of the band Skarning and His Norwegian Hillbillies (previously known as Skarning's Entertainers). Though he was raised by Swiss musician parents and was immersed in the ethnic music of his parentage, he also went on to master many of the most-loved ethnic melodies of the region, including métis fiddle, French, and Anglo-Celtic lumberjack tunes, in addition to Norwegian and other Scandinavian melodies. Rindlisbacher's astounding repertoire was an early model of Andresen's own broadening musical range and strongly representative of the type of musical creolization that Andresen recognized as being characteristic of the Upper Midwest.

Leonard Finseth of Mondovi, Wisconsin, was also a frequent collaborator of Andresen's. Bob Andresen produced and performed on several of Finseth's LPs and backed him on rhythm guitar at events ranging from Vesterheim's Norwegian American Folk Music Festival and the

"Snoose Boulevard" festivals held in Minneapolis to the Festival of American Folklife in Washington D.C., sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution. Finseth was a second generation Norwegian American (third generation on his mother's side) whose father had worked as a lumberjack in northern Wisconsin after emigrating from the Trondheim area in Norway as a teenager. His repertoire was estimated to include, according to Andresen, hundreds of melodies and songs,[60] some of which he would exchange with Otto Rindlisbacher at the Buckhorn, with whom he became acquainted in the 1950s.

Andresen's sophisticated understanding of old world, regional, and personal styles put Finseth's musical contributions into context and help explain the role that each can play in the formation of one individual's distinctive sound. "His fiddle style," Andresen wrote of Finseth, "which is a rolling, highly-ornamented one, has been identified as typical of Gudbrandsdalen in Norway" (Andresen 1978:11).[61]

> Although he is American-born, Leonard Finseth plays his tunes in a more authentic "old country" manner than did the fiddlers who influenced him. It is almost as though some type of musical genetic memory is at work within his system. Most of the many old-time dance tunes he plays are either of Norwegian origin or indigenous to the Upper Midwest. They are, however, constructed in the style of Norwegian prototypes. In a broader sense, Leonard's music is actually a distinctly personal music because, regardless of the origin of his tunes, he imposes his mark upon them and molds them into his own. (Andresen, liner notes, *Leonard Finseth: Folk Fiddler from Wisconsin*)

[60] In a presentation about Leonard Finseth at the American Folklore Society's annual conference in 1982, Bob reported that the majority of Finseth's repertoire consisted of Norwegian waltzes, the most popular dance in Norway after 1840 (Andresen collection, Box 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison's Mills Music Library).

[61] Andresen's 1982 presentation on Leonard Finseth's fiddling goes into vivid detail about his bowing techniques, which contributed to his distinctive style (Andresen collection, Box 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison's Mills Music Library).

Finseth may have absorbed this “old country” sound through a neighbor fiddler, Ingvald Syverson, whose father had been a fiddler from Gudbrandsdalen, but he also tried to emulate the style of his uncle, Edwin Quall, and considered Otto Rindlisbacher to be a considerable musical influence on him. The borrowing and mixing of different melodies and styles from these musicians combined with Finseth’s personal execution of the music worked in concert to produce a sound that, as Andresen put it, “probably best exemplifies the Norwegian-American fiddle style in the Upper Midwest today” (Andresen 1982).

Figure 4. Leonard Finseth (n.d.). Used with permission from the Robert Andresen Collection, Mills Music Library Collection, University of Wisconsin.

During the 1970s, while Bob Andresen was immersing himself in the old-time traditions of the Upper Midwest, the country was going through a second wave of interest in old-time fiddling contests. The first wave hit in the 1920s and was bolstered by Henry Ford's 1926 series of old-time fiddle contests held at Ford dealerships across the country. The series culminated in a competition among all the regional contest winners in New York. Ford's interest in and promotion of old-time music and its romanticized Anglo-American roots stemmed from his own deep-seated racism and anti-Semitism. He feared the rising popularity and commercialization of jazz and popular music and saw the marketing of old-time music as an antidote to what he viewed as a threat to America's more wholesome, agrarian lifestyle—whose existence many urban-based Americans saw as vanishing. Ford had found his social purpose: "With his financial wherewithal along with his own passion and determination to 'reintroduce' to Americans a better and simpler way of life, Henry Ford was on a mission to promote, to the extent of propagandizing, American folk dance and music" (Warnock 2009:80). Ford's fiddling contests were received with great enthusiasm in the Upper Midwest and many Scandinavian fiddlers competed in places like Mankato, Minneapolis, Austin, Rochester, St. Cloud, Duluth, Brainerd, and Albert Lea in Minnesota, and Milwaukee, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Madison, Kenosha, Racine, and Oshkosh in Wisconsin. A multitude of Scandinavian names appear in the newspaper announcements regarding these contests such as Ollafe Hansen of Johnsburg, Minnesota, A.G. Nelson of Twin Lakes, Minnesota, and John Kjos of St. Cloud who played "Norwegian dance tunes."[62] In some cases the Scandinavian American competitors fared well, like Sivert Berge who traveled 20 miles over the border from Flandreau, South Dakota to Pipestone, Minnesota to win second place in that town's fiddling contest on February 23, 1926. Additionally, F.A.

[62] "Norwegian Dance Tunes to be Feature of Old Time Fiddling Bee." *St. Cloud Journal-Press*, February 10, 1926, p. 7.

Peterson from Albert Lea won first place in that city's contest on March 2, 1926 by playing the popular fiddle standards "Turkey in the Straw," "Irish Washerwoman," and "The Old Red Barn."

As popular as these fiddle contests were, however, Henry Ford was not entirely happy with the results of his series. He became aware that many of the participating musicians proved too fond of drink and gambling for his tastes. He hired a publicist to fix what he saw as an image problem and rein in some fiddlers from cashing in on their success by signing vaudeville contracts, but in the end Ford decided to put an end to sponsoring fiddling contests in 1927 (Warnock 2009:90). Old-time enthusiasts and musicians in the Upper Midwest, however, were unfazed by Ford's change of heart and old-time music continued unabated in the region.[63]

By the mid-1970s Bob Andresen's knowledge of Upper Midwestern old-time music made him a natural choice for participating in the organization of a second wave of old-time fiddle contests. The renewed popular enthusiasm for folk music in the 1950s and 60s created a desire for locally-sourced, "authentic" folk music from rural America. In some areas these festivals were becoming so popular, in fact, that the small communities hosting them began to worry about their abilities to effectively accommodate and control the crowds. A piece ran in the Minneapolis Tribune on April 9, 1972 about the town of Union Grove in northwestern North Carolina, which was experiencing a culture clash as a result of its local festivals. Two brothers with two different visions for old-time fiddling competitions had each been organizing their own festivals in the area (their father, H.P. Van Hoy, had previously organized an old-time fiddling event as a fundraiser for the local school beginning in 1924). Before the brothers split company,

[63] Technology, however, would affect the ways in which old-time music would endure in the region. The popularization and affordability of automobiles and the radio in Upper Midwestern households would, in time, have a large impact on the house party culture by promoting barn dances and touring musical acts, requiring audiences to travel longer distances for entertainment.

the community held one single festival for decades, until the "counterculture" of the 1950s and 60s discovered these homegrown music events and began flocking to them. The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* published the following description of festival-goers in the days following the event: "What had been the two polar ends of American culture suddenly found themselves wrapped together in a full circle, sitting side-by-side on the wooden benches, oddly alike in their rough dress and full beards, sometimes distinguishable from each other only because the real country folk kept time to the music by stomping their heels while the outsiders did it with their toes."[64] In addition to the worry about being subjected to a relatively sudden increase in festival goers, Union Grove residents expressed concerns about issues of public drunkenness, prostitution (which the author of the article posits may simply have been a case of co-ed camping), and drug possession on a scale they had never encountered before. The result was that one brother, Harper Van Hoy, began organizing a deliberately family friendly festival and garnered support from old-time and bluegrass luminaries such as Doc Watson, while the other brother, J. Pierce Van Hoy, held an intentionally small festival with looser behavioral restrictions. For many years these two events were held at the same time on Easter weekend until newspapers began confusing the two festivals in their reports of drug use and unsavory behavior. At that point Harper Van Hoy moved his festival to Memorial Day weekend to dissociate his event from his brother's.[65]

The issues that communities like Union Grove encountered regarding large numbers of "outsiders" descending upon their small town festivals and challenging their codes of conduct,

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[64] New York Times Service. Town Worries as Fiddle Festivals Grow. *Minneapolis Tribune* (April 9, 1972), 14A.
[65] The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill maintains a special collection of materials relating to these festivals entitled "Fiddler's Grove Collection, 1968-2000," which includes an online finding aid (http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/f/Fiddlers_Grove.html). In addition, there is an online exhibit of materials from the Fiddler's Grove events available at: http://www2.lib.unc.edu/wilson/sfc/fiddlers/FiddlersGrove.htm. Accessed November 10, 2013.

were generally seen as a result of the popularization of and intense national concentration on southern old-time music during the folk music revival. Nordic Fest's Norwegian American Folk Music Festival was one Upper Midwestern counterpart to the old-time contests and festivals of the South and although the 1970s and '80s ushered in more old-time events and contests throughout the country, these Upper Midwestern festivals seem to have been predominantly for the enjoyment of folks from the region and did not result from (or in) a nation-wide popularization of ethnic or Upper Midwestern old-time.

Andresen's participation in second-wave fiddling contests began with his role as a judge in the Swayed Pines Fiddle Contest at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota in the mid-1970s. This contest was uniquely organized in comparison to most old-time fiddle contests, which have traditionally been judged by age group and, if other instruments are admitted, by the type of instruments played (such as the South Dakota Fiddling Contest in Yankton, South Dakota, which admits button and piano accordions in addition to fiddles). At the time Bob Andresen judged the event, Swayed Pines included four categories of competition:

1) Fiddling Fiddlers
   This category is for beginning and intermediate fiddlers, playing in any style.
2) Master Fiddlers / Northern Style
   This is the type of old-time fiddle music that has been historically associated with our own area. It is made up of music played by farmers and lumberjacks of the Upper Midwest. Included are Irish, French, Scandinavian, German, Polish, Czech and other European American styles; the styles brought here from New England; the various Canadian styles and the styles that developed among the Chippeaw [*sic*] people.
3) Master Fiddlers / Southern Style
   This category consists of styles that were developed mainly in the Southeastern and Southwestern United States, and popularized here by means of radio, television and phonograph records. Included are the Appalachian styles, Texas and Western swing styles, bluegrass, Louisiana Cajun, jazz, ragtime and country-rock styles.
4) Senior Fiddlers

> This category is for fiddlers of age 60 and over playing in any style, who would rather not join any of the above categories. (Andresen collection, Box 3, University of Wisconsin-Madison's Mills Music Library)

The inclusion of Northern, or Upper Midwestern, and Southern fiddling styles in addition to general and senior fiddler categories was a unique innovation in these old-time fiddling competitions. In much the same way that a noncompetitive regional folk music festival (like Decorah's) was able to do, it acknowledged the historical, ethnic and commercial influences that took part in creating these two distinctive forms of old-time music and judged them separately in these two categories.

In June 1985, Bob Andresen and his second wife, Gale Perry Andresen, organized the first Lake Superior Old Time Fiddle Contest in Duluth. Over the next several years this contest would become one of the most popular community events in the state of Minnesota at the time. In the first three years of its running it attracted contestants "from seventeen states, three Canadian provinces, and [drew] capacity audiences."[66] It was well-received, with Philip Nusbaum, the Minnesota State Arts Board folklorist at the time, writing to the Duluth News-Tribune that, "It was the best fiddle contest I have ever attended," and touting it as "one of the great cultural events in the Upper Midwest."[67] Unfortunately the festival only lasted a few years and ceased after Gale passed away from cancer in May 1989 and Bob himself suffered a heart attack a few months later.

Andresen's work as a scholar of regional Upper Midwestern folk music, his publicly accessible work as the host of the radio show "Northland Hoedown," and his active promotion of and work in organizing the musical traditions of the Scandinavian community at events like

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[66] Fourth Annual Lake Superior Old Time Fiddle Contest. 1988. *The Duluth News-Tribune*, June 23, 1988, 1D.
[67] Nusbaum, Philip. 1987. Fiddle Contest a Top Event. *The Duluth News-Tribune*, July 23, 1987, 10D.

Decorah's Folk Music Festival, Minneapolis's "Snoose Boulevard" festivals, and old-time fiddle contests, were all remarkable undertakings. His work as a musician in his own right, however, is also notable and worthy of our attention. Like some musicians in the Norwegian American community have been known to do,[68] Andresen developed a style of playing what some purists might view as a non-traditional Scandinavian instrument—the guitar—which was reminiscent of the instrument considered to be the most traditional in the Scandinavian community—the fiddle. As a practitioner of the "flat-picking" style, Andresen began to experiment with a sound he would later call the "Jack Pine style," also known as the "Hardanger guitar," which imitated the resonant tones and prominent role of the Hardanger fiddle.

> It just seemed so natural to try to pick out some of these tunes in a lead manner on guitar. So, I'd been doing this around home for quite a while and my sons had kind of picked up on that. My son Gary plays guitar and my other son, Tim, plays string bass. Gary and I sometimes play harmony. Sometimes we just play lines back and forth, and Penny Perry [Andresen's sister-in-law] plays rhythm guitar … mostly Scandinavian tunes, but also some old Midwest lumberjack tunes and a couple of Slovenian tunes. Things like that. (Andresen, quoted in Leary 2006b:8)

Bob Andresen's innovation with the conventional Norwegian American folk music sound not only demonstrates how versatile this (already creolized) ethnic music form is, but it also exemplifies the sentiment he once expressed about Leonard Finseth: "Finseth's music is, at the same time, purely Scandinavian and purely American in character. He does not play in a fixed 'preserved' style. His playing, rather, represents a living personal music that is changing and

[68] One other such example being Viola (Kjeldahl) Lee. Viola played the accordion, but learned a great deal of songs from her father who was a fiddler. As a result of his influence, Viola developed a unique method of playing the accordion that stylistically mimics the fiddle. LeRoy Larson performed on an album of Viola playing old-time on the accordion entitled, *Old Time Dance Music From Norway and Wisconsin*. Lee includes a number of embellishments in her versions of these songs that are reminiscent of fiddlers' styles, such as prolonging notes and pauses like a fiddler would in "Skunk Lake Waltz" (which is one song that was recognized by Kvam's Norwegian interviewees, though they had a different name for it), "Hallingen," and "Peter Keifer's Waltz."

evolving" (Andresen 1982). Andresen's own music and scholarship embodied both the commitment to an ethnic music form as well as the creative forces that have long contributed to the unique cultural environment of the Upper Midwest. Beyond these noteworthy contributions, though, Andresen's collection of recordings, documents, photographs, and more, now housed at Mills Music Library at the University of Wisconsin, make it possible for future generations to benefit from this rare body of information.[69]

LeRoy Larson

> My pre-college years, prior to 1957, were lived in a rather isolated rural Norwegian community north of Leonard, Minnesota, in Clearwater County, where the Norwegian traditions were maintained by my family, and therefore, transmitted to me. The performance of Scandinavian folk dance music (as well as many other types of music) in our home was our main form of entertainment; consequently, I acquired that style, and learned much of the repertory, developing a very fond interest for this traditional folk music. (Larson 1975:v)

Growing up a third generation Norwegian American in northern Minnesota in the late 1940s and 1950s, LeRoy Larson was surrounded by a musical family. His father played the fiddle, bugle, mandolin, and chorded on the piano. His uncles were accomplished musicians as well, one of whom led a large swing band in the area. Larson was raised immersed in these musical traditions in the days of family and neighbor visiting, which set the stage for the exchange and ultimate familiarity with the collective local repertoire. As Larson recalls: "People visited, I remember,

[69] It should also be noted that scholars like James P. Leary, in recognizing the importance and rarity of these collections, have also done a great deal to promote the preservation of these traditions by encouraging musicians and collectors to donate their materials to institutions like the Mills Music Library. Not only do they contribute to our collective understanding of Upper Midwestern cultures through their own insights and research in these areas, but they are helping to make it possible for future scholars to do the same.

before television came. … You didn't need an invitation, you could just come to the door, you know. There were some people who were known to come just before supper, too. … So whenever they visited the people that had instruments, they'd have a jam session" (interview August 25, 2012). Larson recalls a great deal of tune-sharing and exchanging going on during these visits and at house parties and learned the old-time dance tunes from the musicians who played at these impromptu gatherings. Many of the tunes Larson learned appear in his 1975 dissertation on Scandinavian American dance music in Minnesota.

Larson's early musical immersion led to a life-long career and investment in the preservation of this regional music. After receiving a Bachelor of Science in instrumental and vocal performance he worked as a choir director for seven years in western and southern Minnesota (Houston County). He received his Master of Science in Music Education in 1967 from Indiana University during his summers while he worked as a choir director. Several years later, Larson started his band The Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble with Mel Brenden and Helge Lamo[70] in 1973 after an appearance on Garrison Keillor's early morning radio show, shortly before Keillor's successful Saturday evening show *A Prairie Home Companion* began.

Though LeRoy Larson's musical roots were grounded in Scandinavian old-time and he moved on to a classical musical education in terms of his career, he was also compelled to diversify his repertoire to accommodate audience favorites when playing in bands at dance halls. Larson remembers the early days of his performance career: "When Mel and I first started it was Mel's band and we were playing in some of these dives—you had to play and sing country western tunes because people, they wanted two-steps, foxtrots, and they obviously wanted their

[70] Lamo immigrated to Minnesota from Norway in the 1950s. He and Larson hosted "The Scandinavian Cultural Hour" together for nearly twenty years on KFAI-FM radio in Minneapolis.

waltzes. We played in Polish bars in northeast Minneapolis. … Mel was playing all of that. So we always played the polkas—Polish polkas. We weren't so much into the German. And that was obviously a big influence on the airwaves—Whoopee John and those kind of groups" (interview August 25, 2012). After growing up in a Scandinavian-dominated, rather remote section of the Upper Midwest that had managed to retain a relatively large share of its Scandinavian musical and cultural traditions, Larson's repertoire increasingly reflected the ethnic diversity of the region as he moved throughout the state.

To a certain extent some pan-European musical cross-over was possible, but in Larson's experience musicians playing dance halls at this time also had to be familiar with the American popular music landscape:

> If you're playing polka people will polka whether it's German or Norwegian or Swedish or Polish, but we had to keep up with—people want what they're hearing, you know. Hank Williams tunes, the old country western tunes that were on the hit parades always, stuff they heard on the barn dance shows, kind of now they're starting to call some of that bluegrass and I guess it was—five-string banjo—[Bob] Wills. He had a lot of big hits, "San Antonio Rose." … If you went out years ago when Mel and I started—and we had played for barn dances, even—… you had to play current things and *definitely* two-steps. People wanted to dance close and … it's easy to do the two-step. So you had to be current. So you see we're influenced by all of that, which didn't mean we were going to quit playing old-time. (Interview August 25, 2012)

Here again we see the fascinating and complicated relationship between ethnic, regional, and popular music that James P. Leary discusses so thoroughly in *Polkabilly*. Throughout his musical career, Larson has been compelled to master all of the necessary elements of Polkabilly to satisfy his audiences, but also to create the musical sound he loves and has done so much to preserve.

In addition to being able to cross over between musical styles, humor also figures in Larson's performances. Peppering his shows with familiar Ole and Lena jokes, beloved throughout the Upper Midwest and especially among Norwegian Americans, he also demonstrates the well-established connection between old-time music and ethnic and immigrant humor. As he explains: "We call ourselves a show band, too, because we do a lot of humor. We do dialect songs and I tell a lot of Ole and Lena jokes and one-liners and people laugh, and laugh and laugh and laugh and people think we're funny. We were playing a park concert once in Roseville outside and I just told a couple of Ole and Lena jokes, you know, it's a park concert, and someone says, 'Cut out the cornball stuff and let's get on with the music!'—someone hollered out. So you see, we're flexible" (interview August 25, 2012). Though Ole and Lena jokes may not be everyone's cup of tea, they do play a critical role in narrating the story of the Norwegian American community from immigration to the present day.

Ole and Lena have long been staples in Norwegian American jokes and can be considered in the same category as other hyphenated ethnic American stock characters such as the Irish "Pat" and "Mike," the Italian "Tony," or the Finnish characters "Eino," "Toivo," and "Helvi." Ole is most commonly depicted as a Norwegian—occasionally Swedish—country bumpkin, hanging around with friends Sven and Lars, and navigating a romantic relationship with Lena, who is at times depicted as an earthy woman of the world and at others an upstanding Lutheran wife. As James P. Leary discusses the place of Scandinavian folk humor in the Upper Midwest in his book, *So Ole Says to Lena*:

> Long before humorist Garrison Keillor popularized "Norwegian bachelor farmers," Minnesota's Twin Cities were home to barnstorming Scandinavian vaudeville comics, radio personalities commenting on daily events in a thick

> "Yah, Sure" dialect, and scores of Scandinavian jokes. Swedes and Norwegians, the dominant ethnic groups in Minneapolis and St. Paul, are found abundantly throughout Minnesota, in western and northern Wisconsin, and in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. And Scandinavian folk humor is the most vibrant of any ethnic group in the Upper Midwest. …
>
> Scandinavian jokes have not diminished over a century of telling. Such ongoing delight in joke telling on an everyday folk level had been complemented by the regional production and purchase of an array of joke books, recordings by dialect comedians, and jocular paraphernalia (buttons, bumperstickers, comic artifacts, mock documents) that have updated old tales and introduced new ones situating Ole and Lena in the late twentieth century. (Leary 2001:61)

As Leary indicates, old jokes rooted in the newcomer experience have been updated to reflect the realities of a modern world, keeping the jokes relevant even as they reflect the immigrant past. It is not uncommon for musicians to continue to mix joke telling in with their performances as LeRoy Larson and his bandmates from the Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble do, creating a house party-like atmosphere at their events.

Early Ole and Lena jokes, however, were not the only ways in which the Norwegian American community was able to laugh at itself and the cultural and linguistic scrapes that were common to newly arrived ethnic groups. Second-generation Norwegian sisters Ethel and Eleonora Olson were counted among the most beloved comedic performers in the Scandinavian American community. Both were notable singers and although Eleonora was the only one to receive some classical training, she could not afford to continue her vocal education for very long. In the late 1910s and early '20s Ethel and Eleonora recorded vocal performances (popular Norwegian and American songs, Norwegian hymns and a couple of lullabies) for several record labels including Victor, Edison, and Columbia. The sisters were also adept comediennes, however, popularizing several original comedic monologues such as "The Old Sogning

Woman," "A Norwegian Woman at the Telephone," and "Mabel's Wedding" as recordings, but also on stage as they toured extensively together across the country. The monologues were based on the sisters' reality growing up in an immigrant household in Chicago leading up to the turn of the 20th century and they doubtless drew upon their own memories and experiences as fodder to develop their popular dialect humor. Mixing the humorous monologues on stage with popular American songs, Norwegian folk songs, and art songs, the sisters put forth a versatile repertoire with their performances, but were always best known for their dialect stories (Olson and Olson 1979). The history of mixing humor and music in the Norwegian American tradition is old and treasured and one which LeRoy Larson has honored throughout his career as a professional musician (even if it is to the dismay of some audience members).

Figure 5. Postcard from the Olson Sisters Concert Company, 1920.

Scandinavian dialect songs have also played a critical role in chronicling the challenges, frustrations, absurdities and comedy inherent in the American immigrant experience in the late

19th and early 20th centuries. One of the most original musical and comic Norwegian American artists was Harry Stewart. Born Harry Edward Skarbo in Tacoma, Washington in 1908 to Norwegian immigrant parents, he was later adopted into the Stewart family after his mother died in childbirth, leaving a grief-stricken husband unable to care for their young children.[71] After working various jobs as a teenager in Washington state he showed an early interest in radio and at the age of 19 was hired by radio station KVI, proceeding to work there for several years. In 1931 Stewart moved to Los Angeles hoping to land a similar gig performing on the radio. It was there, in the interests of standing out among the competition, Stewart was inspired to combine the image of the notable Mahatma Ghandi with that of a Swedish rube based on a man by the name of Ivar Haglund, a locally-renowned owner of a clam shop in Seattle. Stewart developed a whole comic act around "Yogi Yorgesson the Swedish Swami" first for radio and later on stage, just one of several personalities he created for his performances. In addition to his comedy acts, Stewart recorded a number of Scandinavian American classics in his signature exaggerated Scandihoovian accent, such as "I Yust Go Nuts at Christmas" (Capitol Records, 1949, 1950, 1957), "Yingle Bells" (Capitol Records, 1949, 1950, 1954, 1957), "Real Gone Galoot" (Capitol Records, 1950), and "Mrs. Yonson Turn Me Loose" (Capitol Records 1950). Over the years these songs and more have been covered by numerous Scandinavian American artists including Larson, who released an album called *Mrs. Yonson Turn Me Loose!* with the Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble in 2006. Perhaps the most dedicated Yorgeson admirer, however, has been Stan Boreson of Everett, Washington.

[71] For a fuller biography of Harry Stewart, see the "Harry Stewart Biography" online at http://www.yogiyorgesson.com/bio.html. Accessed September 15, 2013.

Stewart's particular brand of musical comedy provided significant inspiration for Stan Boreson, a second generation Norwegian American who has carried on the essence of Stewart's Scandihoovian dialect songs through his long and prolific career. In the sixty years Boreson has been performing on television, radio, and stage he has made over a dozen albums and covered many "Yorgesson" tunes, even dedicating an album in his honor entitled, *Yust Tinkin' of Yogi*. One of his specialties has been converting popular American songs into Scandinavian dialect tunes by applying the recognizable Scandihoovian dialect that Stewart made famous and which Boreson has carried forth into the twenty-first century. Boreson got his start at the age of sixteen playing with various orchestras in the Everett, Washington area. "We didn't go for rock 'n' roll. We played schottisches, polkas, Swedish waltzes, fox trots, plain good old waltzes" (interview with Jens Lund, July 23, 2003).[72] During World War II he toured abroad entertaining troops with Arthur Tracy, The Street Singer. Stan would position himself behind a curtain and play the accordion as Tracy mimed playing a reedless accordion in front of audiences. He went on to host a children's television show, King's Club House, on Seattle's KING station for twelve years.

Boreson got this start writing parody songs in Norwegian and Scandihoovian dialect in high school as he was taking Norwegian language courses. Writing with his musical partner, Doug Setterberg (who hosted a show called "Scandia Barndance" on station KOMO), he went on to record many of those tunes for Kapp Records before Doug was struck with throat cancer and was no longer able to perform. Boreson then moved to a different record label and continued to play in bands and produce albums while hosting the King's Club House and long after, is still producing original music, as recently as 2008 with a song that accompanies a YouTube video

[72] This interview was conducted by Jens Lund in Seattle, Washington on July 23, 2003 and transcribed by James P. Leary in 2009. Used with permission.

called, “I Just Don’t Look Good Naked Anymore.”[73] Stan Boreson has been so prolific and successful in his music career and promotion of Norwegian American humor and culture that King Harald V of Norway bestowed him with the St. Olav’s Medal in 2005, which honors work done in the name of strengthening bonds between Norway and Norwegian Americans.

Mixing the self-depreciating humor at which Norwegian Americans excel (and in which they revel) with the musical traditions they hold dear has been a long-standing recipe for success in this ethnic community. When performing for large groups of Scandinavians, Larson and the Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble know their crowd:

> There’s a number of *torsk* clubs you can call them and … we’ve been playing those parties where they’ll have 650 people and monitors—big, huge TV screen monitors around the banquet center. Really big time. Professional sound system, we’ll come on, that’s a show. A real show. Twenty or twenty-five minutes. Boom-boom. Jokes, funny songs, real pretty songs. That’s a show. We do those if we’re playing for a specific Scandinavian group because we know the humor, the one-liners that they’ll really enjoy and bring them out of their shells a little bit and laugh—laugh out loud! [Laughs]
>
> A: Heaven forbid! Yeah, I think some of those Norwegian groups need to be warmed up a little bit.
>
> L: Well, that’s what we do. … I always have a little bait—to throw out a few to see what’s gonna work and we adjust as we go. (Interview August 25, 2012)

Performers like Stan Boreson and LeRoy Larson are keenly aware of the positive effect of this style of performance within the Norwegian American community as well as the comedic lineage they are carrying forth with roots stemming from the genius of the Olson Sisters and Harry

[73] The video for this song was uploaded to YouTube in 2008: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_6I50oXAVM. Accessed November 10, 2013.

Stewart as well as the collective contributions that make up the ever-expanding canon of Ole and Lena jokes.

LeRoy Larson has amassed a treasure trove of recordings featuring Scandinavian American old-time musicians from all over the Upper Midwest, including Bill Sherburne, Bob Andresen and Leonard Finseth. Like others who have performed Scandinavian American music for many years, and with the help of fellow musicians, he has digitized a number of his old reel-to-reel tapes in an effort to mine them for older melodies that are not commonly played today. In a conversation about a well-known Spring Grove area fiddler, Gust Ellingson, Larson mentions several old reel-to-reels recorded in the late 1960s the Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble has used to develop its repertoire: "So [Al Bjorngjeld] digitized those tapes so I have discs of all of that, which we gave to our fiddler Art [Bjorngjeld] and he has picked out a couple things and Mel has picked out a waltz—a gorgeous waltz I've never heard anywhere—and we're regularly programming that sort of thing now" (interview, August 25, 2012). After four decades of playing together as a group, it is no wonder Larson and his bandmates are interested in working up some new material. To achieve this they are scouring old 78rpms and original recordings Larson made years ago or which were given to him by other musicians to bring this material back to life. Speaking about his experiences attending Nordic Fest's Folk Music Festivals back in the 1960s and '70s and how the material is continuing to feed his repertory, Larson muses,

> You know in many ways I was more of a tune detective looking for new tunes, new repertory. So what a better place to go to hear the old timers and record them [than Nordic Fest]? That became a natural dissertation topic because no one had done it. And that allowed me, then, to revive what I saw [as] some really good repertory. And if I didn't have these tapes from the '60s, you see, some of these tunes would have been gone forever. So we've revived a lot of things that way

> and when we went to the Houston County Fair [in southeastern Minnesota] we played some tunes from Houston County including Gust Ellingson—couple of his tunes just from those old tapes. So what that means is its been preserved and it's accessible to those who are looking for it, but you're not going to hear it on the airwaves, but it's there. (Interview, August 25, 2012)

LeRoy Larson is providing a valuable service to the community by concentrating on searching through his old recordings, preserving and digitizing them to the best of his abilities, and working up old material that has probably not been played since the performers he recorded passed away. Beyond this, he and the Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble are also taking opportunities to use their performances to repatriate some of these old tunes to the communities that produced them.

For musicians who have rich collections of recordings like LeRoy Larson's, the decision to work up older material comes partly from an impulse to preserve forgotten material, but there are other practical considerations that weigh in as well. In a letter from 1977 to Bob Andresen, Larson articulates the difficulties involved in writing original old-time melodies, particularly those involved in trying to work within the conventions of the old-time sound while simultaneously contributing something new and interesting to listeners, demonstrating how intimately one needs to know the forms and motifs of old-time music in order to add an original composition to the canon:

> I have tried to write old time only a few times before, and find it not easy to do. The style is so simple—technically speaking—that it is difficult to stay away from clichés and basic "school book" formulae. The problem is to find uniqueness, it may be a melodic element, a harmonic element, or a rhythmic element (also phrasing). It is easy to establish a method for "writing old time," however, there must exist something different, new, and unique. That is the big problem. One must examine the rhythm of each measure and be careful that the same rhythm is not repeated too much (for example sequences). One must be careful not to

> overuse arpeggios, which come so easy when composing at the keyboard. … Also overuse of certain chord progression; and key relationships between sections.
>
> I am always cautious about a melody that comes too easily, because it may sound too much like "something else," and may be unexciting. One needs to search for melodic elements and rhythmic elements that are exciting, and/or unique, but yet stay somewhat within the style of the prototype. As I tell myself, you should not hesitate to rework and rework these tunes. It should be a tune that one remembers easily, and finds oneself humming. "Catchy." When does one consider a tune to be in its final form? (Letter dated May 7, 1977 to Bob Andresen, Mills Music Library Collection, University of Wisconsin)

For whatever combination of reasons, LeRoy Larson and musicians like him appear more interested in preserving those lost tunes and melodies that reside buried in their extensive and original collections, than they are with exclusively composing on their own. It is to everyone's benefit when musicians who are so familiar with the styles and forms of this musical tradition bring these melodies out from their boxes, learn them, play them, record them for the world to hear, or even perform them live in the communities that once enjoyed them. By doing this, much like the "six degrees of separation" game (or "six degrees of Kevin Bacon" if you prefer), we are one fewer connection away from the generations of musicians who played and composed these melodies at the height of the house party era.

Bruce Bollerud

Born in 1934 to a farming family outside the hamlet of Hollandale in southwestern Wisconsin, Bruce Bollerud was surrounded by the tradition of Norwegian American old-time dance music from the beginning. Bollerud's maternal grandfather as well as an uncle had been old-time

fiddlers; and the women in his mother's family, his mother included, played mandolin, guitar, or chorded on the piano. At an early age he was exposed to the old-time music at house parties and admired the musicians playing in those impromptu living room bands. Bollerud was interested in making music as a child and at the suggestion of his mother he picked up the bandonion, a relative to the German concertina and button accordion. He recalls first starting out with Norwegian waltzes, beginning with the old Scandinavian favorite, "Life in the Finnish Woods" (*Livet I Finnskogen*). In his early teens he would even get together to play with several other bandonion players in southern Wisconsin from time to time. Later he followed up on his success with the bandonion by learning to play the piano, and later still he took a liking to the trombone and piano accordion in his high school years. Already at the age of twelve Bollerud accompanied local fiddler Herman Erickson on bandonion at old-time dances throughout southern Wisconsin and he later played piano and trombone for the Rhythm Ramblers, known for their Dutchman polka style approach to old-time music. Bollerud went on to work with other area bands such as Emil Simpson's Night Hawks, The Polka Jacks, and Feller's Swiss Band. He was adding several new styles and melodies to his solid house party dance music background, combining the lively beats of Frankie Yankovic's Slovenian style polka music with rockabilly and rock ballads, and throwing into the mix samplings of German, Swiss, and Czech styles, reflecting the ethnic diversity and musical creolization that characterized the region.[74]

After two years in the Air Force, Bruce Bollerud settled in Madison in 1958, earned both bachelor and master degrees from the University of Wisconsin, and became a special education teacher. He started playing with a succession of musicians in town, finally settling down with a

[74] For a more detailed and contextualized description of Bollerud's musical career and his involvement in the Madison-based band, The Goose Island Ramblers, see James P. Leary's *Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music* (2006, Oxford University Press).

group in 1961. Bollerud, Wendell "Windy" Whitford, and George Gilbertson called themselves the Goose Island Ramblers.[75] At the time they hit Madison's music scene their repertoire defied categorization, mixing hillbilly and old country western music with old-time waltzes, "Scandihoovian" novelty and dialect songs and even some Irish music. In addition to the Ramblers, Bollerud also played with The Good Time Band, whose repertoire mixed polkas, waltzes, fox trots and country western tunes, performing three to four nights a week at several of Madison's popular hangouts including the German restaurant and undergraduate student haunt, the Essenhaus. Today Bollerud continues to entertain audiences, though these days he appears mostly at nursing homes and schools, performing old favorites like the "Stegen Waltz" and the popular "No Norwegians in Dickeyville," an old Norwegian waltz which he and Windy Whitford turned into a comic dialect song, expressing the confusion resulting from how a Norwegian waltz ever came to be named after the largely Cornish and Welsh town of Dickeyville, Wisconsin.

[75] The name "Goose Island" is an English distortion of the Norwegian phrase *god land*, meaning "good land," used to describe the rich farmland near the area where Windy Whitford, grew up in Dane County.

Figure 6. Bruce Bollerud playing the piano accordion. Courtesy of Bruce Bollerud.

Bruce Bollerud's long and active career in music has left an impressive trail, consisting **of** recordings, newspaper clippings, playbills, academic articles and papers, photographs, correspondence, copyright papers, grant applications, performance contracts, personal reminiscences, and more. His collection of music, memorabilia and documents is not the result of historical accident or happenstance. It is a very self-conscious work, made up of information that he himself does not want to forget as well as information he imagines may become useful in the future. He is, in effect, curator of his own museum of music, which speaks to Norwegian Americans' predilection for preserving and remembering their past for future generations.

In a manner that old-time music practitioners, documentarians and enthusiasts are all too familiar with, Bruce Bollerud's collection of over fifty cassette tapes featuring live performances of old-time musicians are populated with titles such as "waltz" and "schottische."[76] Bollerud is particularly interested in the old fiddle tunes that appear on these tapes and, like LeRoy Larson, has been focusing his energy on learning the older, unfamiliar tunes he has not yet committed to memory, not only because they represent uncharted musical territory, but because the range of these fiddle tunes is large and particularly well-suited to the accordion. Additionally, in Bollerud's view, these older fiddle tunes fell by the wayside for some time because as larger bands with prominent brass instruments became popular, they eventually overshadowed and took over from the fiddle players. Brass instruments, however, couldn't reproduce the musical range

[76] Many of the tapes were given to Bruce Bollerud by musicians or families of musicians, a common practice among known tradition bearers like Bruce, LeRoy Larson, Beth Rotto and others.

of the fiddle and as a consequence, the melodies popularized by fiddlers were not played as often as they once were. He likens this transition to the end of a fad:

> Of course music is that way—it changes. You know, when the accordion came into Norwegian music and other musics it changed how that was done and the violin is the national instrument of Norway, but when the accordion came in it took a big chunk of music and they developed accordion music. … The Cajuns did that. Their music was violin music, violin-driven …. The button accordion came in and all of a sudden that [became] the identifying instrument …. Every instrument has its limitations and its strong points, but the music then is tailored to fit that instrument, so the music changed. (Interview April 19, 2010)

Because the piano accordion has an appropriately large musical range, Bollerud has been able to adapt these older fiddle tunes more easily to his instrument, making it that much easier for a person of his musical expertise and background to preserve these rare melodies.

Bollerud feels a strong sense of obligation about preserving these lesser-known fiddle tunes for the future. He describes sifting through old recordings in search of valuable material:

> As far as the old-time fiddler stuff in [my collection] I thought there were a lot of songs that if I didn't get them recorded, written down, or preserved in some manner, they would just be gone when these people died. And so I mentioned, I think … that I had gotten a whole bunch of tapes from Selmer Oren's daughter—about 130 tapes actually—which I went through and picked out what I thought was good to save. Because he had stuff like, oh, "Missouri Waltz" or "Four Leaf Clover" and things like that on there, too, which is fine, but I mean it's not historically important to me. So that was one of the things—to get some of the stuff down that was gonna be lost if somebody doesn't put it down. (Interview, April 15, 2010)[77]

[77] Selmer Oren was an old-time fiddler from the Stoughton, Wisconsin area, who passed away in 1996. Bruce Bollerud includes a tune attributed to Selmer in his tune book, *Uff Da! Let's Dance!* (2009) called "Sally's Hoppwaltz" ("Sally" was Selmer Oren's nickname). In a paper for James P. Leary's Scandinavian American Folklore course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2003, then student Jim Miksche wrote about Selmer Oren (1909–1996). Miksche's emphasis was on fiddling traditions in the Norwegian American community, how they fit into an Upper Midwestern context and how they contributed to fiddling traditions in the US in general. To complete this project Miksche interviewed Selmer's daughter, Ruth, who was also responsible for giving her father's tapes over to Bruce Bollerud. Both the academic paper and a transcription of Miksche's interview with Ruth Oren are housed in the Mills Music Library's Wisconsin Music Archives at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

This is the same impulse that drives old-time musicians like LeRoy Larson to comb through their collections in search of forgotten gems. Concerns about the rapidly aging formats of these recordings combined with the feeling that interest and knowledge of old-time music is dwindling to a point of eventual obscurity have motivated these individuals to work diligently to preserve what traditions they can. In the process, they are becoming curators of their own original and irreplaceable collections and, in the cases of Bruce Bollerud and Bob Andresen before him, have taken concrete steps to preserve their collections at academic institutions for future musicians and scholars to learn from. It can be a daunting task. "Some of the tapes that people gave me," says Bollerud, "were wonderfully confused and mixed up," adding to the already challenging task of supplying identifying information for some of the recordings that have inadvertently made their way into collections like his (interview April 15, 2010). So, while not everything has been or can be recorded and preserved for posterity, these musicians have taken on the vital role of doing what they can to slow the erosion of old-time music from Norwegian American culture.

This type of undertaking struggles to mitigate the cumulative effects of over a half-century worth of gradual shifts away from public interest in regional music. As Paul Tyler says of fiddling:

> Fiddling was ubiquitous in North America, and local traditions, especially those connected with social dancing, were strong in the Midwest in the early twentieth century. But as old-time fiddling's place in the spotlight faded, and as mass-mediated country music became more professionalized, the public face of fiddling acquired a southern hue. In eastern and central portions of the Midwest, most professional and semiprofessional fiddlers embraced such new commercial styles as bluegrass and western swing. Only western radio stations continued to broadcast the older traditional tunes—breakdowns, hornpipes, and quadrilles for square dancing; waltzes and schottisches for round dancing. … Midwestern fiddlers with roots deep in local and family traditions did most of their playing for

> community dances, for informal musical gatherings, or simply for personal pleasure. (Tyler 2006:385)

While the three men profiled in this chapter spent their lifetimes challenging this pattern, these areas of the Upper Midwest that did a better job of preserving their local music traditions were not entirely immune to the encroaching influence of the commercial styles that claimed other sections of the Midwest. The responsibility Bollerud and Larson have charged themselves with is sifting through their recordings and disregarding those popular bluegrass and country western tunes in favor of the regionally and locally distinctive melodies.

Interestingly, Bollerud sees the commercial success of bluegrass as a potential vehicle for aiding in the preservation of these regional tunes. He holds out hope that the old fiddle melodies that he has worked to preserve would do well revived as bluegrass tunes. “It crossed my mind—I thought, some of this stuff would fit in a bluegrass type of band. I might have mentioned that this “Jenny Lind Polka”—Bill Monroe plays that. And I don’t know the history of that, where he got it or whatever, but I thought, gee, it sounded great, I thought. It fit right in because it’s a fiddle tune. … It just fit right in with his sound and I thought, well, that would be kind of neat if they would pick up some of this stuff. Especially the instrumentals” (interview April 15, 2010). Remaking old-time Norwegian American fiddle tunes in a bluegrass style might not be the most obvious use for these old recordings, but appealing to the widespread popularity of this musical style serves the more basic purpose of preservation and providing musical inspiration for current and future artists.

Bruce Bollerud’s recordings are made even more vivid by the many reminiscences he has preserved about his own life. Carefully written out on yellow legal pads and blue pieces of paper, he has organized numerous short vignettes, which he has used to relate the experiences of his

youth to others. In his 2009 book of old-time music for accordion, *Accordion Uff Da! Let's Dance!*, Bollerud recounts his earliest memories of neighborhood house parties:

> The House Party was a rural neighborhood affair with fifteen or twenty people in attendance. People brought food, "a dish to pass," and the musicians were local folks, mostly farmers. The parlor rug was rolled back, the musicians, two or three, played accordion, fiddle and guitar or banjo. The musicians sat in a corner or sometimes in a doorway between the kitchen and the parlor so the music, which was not amplified, could be heard in both rooms. Later in the evening the musicians would take a break and lunch would be served—then more music.
>
> The party could last all night. Party goers would pass the hat and take up a collection for the musicians. The last song of the night was often "Home Sweet Home." (Bollerud 2009:4)

This familiar description of house parties of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helps document a tradition that would not survive in most places beyond Bruce Bollerud's generation. Echoing LeRoy Larson's recollections of neighbors going visiting before television became the primary source of home entertainment, Bollerud muses about the house party social circle of his youth: "It was a close-knit group of neighbors and relatives, very warm, like a big family gathering. There were people from every age group, all sharing lots of food and conversation. I think this is something we have lost in today's busy life with everybody going their own separate way, doing their own thing. When I hear House Party music, it brings back memories of a simpler time when neighbors got together and visited and had fun" (Bollerud 2009:4). Though I will go on to argue that this form of entertainment is not entirely extinct and I include examples of intergenerational groups of neighbors coming together to enjoy dancing and good music, no one could rightly claim that the house party era has continued with the same fervor and regularity as it did when Bruce Bollerud was a boy.

As a young person Bollerud learned more than old-time waltzes and schottisches from his family, friends and neighbors. He vividly recalls a hired man on his family's farm teaching him how to yodel, worked hard to memorize the Scandinavian dialect songs he heard the hired men sing, and studied their thick Norwegian "newcomer" brogues: "When I do these Norwegian dialect songs it's very easy for me to do that [accent] because it's just natural. … I can remember all these people who spoke that way when I was a kid" (interview April 19, 2010). Bollerud's father, Orville, typically hired two men every winter to do chores around the farm, providing seasonal employment for men in the region, and Bruce was understandably interested in the men who worked for his family. They brought their own music to the house, demonstrated great humor and they both worked and lived hard. Bruce remembers the time one of the hired men mistook a bottle of turpentine for whiskey.

> Hired man Leonard Erickson liked to have a drink now and then as did many of our hired men. One day he found a whiskey bottle on top of a beam by the hog slop barrels. He must have thought my Dad [had] stashed a bottle there and he took a big slug and to his sorrow because it was turpentine in the bottle which my dad would use in the hog slop to de-worm the pigs. Leonard became very sick and rolled on the ground but he wouldn't let my dad take him to the Doctor. After a couple of days he recovered. Leonard was one of the toughest men I ever knew. (Bruce Bollerud's personal papers)

Bollerud recalls Leonard's great efficiency and capacity for hard work, noting that although he may not have been fast, he seemed to get more work done that others and "never seemed to waste a step or a motion."

Another time, hired man Orton Kellesvig, who was known for dumping whiskey into the chicken mash ("They seemed to like it and they got drunk, staggering, leaning to one side and

falling down"), ran a needle and thread through a kernel of corn, which he then tossed out in front of a chicken. "When the chicken swallowed the corn, Orton would jerk on the string and pull the kernel of corn out of the chicken. The chicken looked very surprised" (Bruce Bollerud's personal papers).

This dimension of hired men working on the Bollerud family farm is in some ways reminiscent of the humor and culture that existed in late nineteenth and early twentieth century lumber camps in northern Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. Lumber camps were remarkable settings for ethnic mixing in the late nineteenth century. Though the lumber industry in the northwoods technically began as early as the 1830s, harvesting really prospered in the years between 1870 and 1900. This explosion of activity and employment coincided with an increased wave of European immigration to the States which attracted a diverse group of laborers to the area. Irish, Finns, Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, French-Canadians, Scotch-Canadians, Native Americans and more worked through the winter months in the snowy climes of the northern Upper Midwest, sharing their music, jokes, games, tales and more. Philip Martin describes the seasonal, gendered, economic, and cultural role that the lumber camp played in many pioneer families' lives:

> Many immigrant farmers had to leave their homesteads in their wives' care for the winter to journey to a logging camp to seek work. The money they would bring back in the springtime was sorely needed on a pioneer homestead to pay off the mortgage and buy equipment, seed and livestock. During the long winters, cooped up in a bunkhouse with a crowd of French-Canadians, Yankees, Irish, and Finns, the Norwegians were exposed to many different styles of music and dance. In the spring young Ole might come home not only with a pocket full of cash but with a few new tunes whistled on his lips. (Martin 1982b:149)

The same time of year that the folks who stayed put in farming country were holding their wintertime "kitchen sweats," or house parties, the young men and farmers who journeyed north to line their pockets with some much-needed cash were also polishing up their dancing and music skills at camp.

Saturday nights and Sundays were usually set aside as time for entertainment at the camps. Martin continues: "Sundays especially were spent playing cards, trading tales, singing ballads, and holding impromptu quadrille dances with a fiddler and caller. Half the men donned red handkerchieves on their sleeves to signify their role as 'women' in the set, and off they went! The camp fiddlers might trade off on a resident violin—in some cases no more than a cigar-box strung with baling wire, yet which served to fill the bunkhouse with the infectious buzzing of a French-Canadian reel or gig" (Martin 1982:7–8). Musical instruments at the camp came in many forms; oftentimes fiddles would be fashioned from the aforementioned cigar-box, and cracker-boxes functioned as bodies for the "lumberjack cello" when attached to pitchforks or broom handles. The "Viking cello," a variation of the lumberjack cello, mimicked the single-stringed psalmodikon popular to rural Norwegian and Norwegian American churches,[78] but professionally-made instruments such as conventional and Hardanger violins, accordions, dulcimers, guitars, and more could also be found in the lumber camps (Andresen 1978:10). The levels of musicianship in the camps varied about as much as the quality of instruments they played and a good musician could prove to be a real asset at the camp. "Crusty old foremen were known to hire a good singer or fiddler even if he was not much of a logger" (MacKay 1998:240). Other accounts are not as generous in singing the praises of lumbercamp fiddlers. Malcolm

[78] In his review of the reissue of Helene Stratman-Thomas's recording "Folk Music From Wisconsin" produced by Bob Carlin, James P. Leary also links this "cello" to "the *boomba* associated with festive pre-Lenten and tavern revelries of regions surrounding the Baltic Sea" (Leary 2007:77).

Rosholt recounts a story of lumber camp leisure activities told him by Ola Johnson of Wisconsin Rapids: “While the lumberjacks spent most of their leisure time singing, card playing and dancing, that was not all. There was also violin playing and dancing, as there were no less than four fiddlers in the crew. Real musicians though were lacking, but in the logging camp we were not particular about the quality of music” (1985:270).

Figure 7. Picture of a logging camp crew taken outside in the snow in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, ca. 1875. One lumberman stands with a fiddle and bow to the left in the front row while two men strike a boxing pose in the background. Melvin Diemer Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society (image 4177).

Like the mythical cowboy of the west, lumberjacks in these camps in the latter half of the nineteenth century were synonymous with hard and dangerous work, drinking, carousing,

brawling, and singing. Again, Rosholt's account from Ola Johnson depicts the dancing and partying that went on in the "grub hall," which was a building not generally occupied in the beginning of winter, creating a space for town dances: "Here the boys and girls, men and women, gathered to dance the waltz and French-Four far into the night. … They often brought whisky which they treated or secretly sold. Disturbances were frequent in the lumber camps and in the 'grub hall.' People drank, danced, swore and fought so that on the following morning the hall looked like the worst kind of pig house. Some people acted worse than heathens, the only difference: the lumberjacks did not eat those they knocked down" (1985:270). Lumberjacks immortalized their work and exploits in songs which were expertly composed and often set to borrowed tunes, which reflected the rich tradition of balladry and song stemming from the early influence of Anglo-Irish lumbermen of New England and descendants of French-Canadian Voyageurs (though they also produced humorous songs and poetry in addition to playing the instrumental house party music so popular in the day).

Fieldwork conducted among lumberjacks and those who carried on the music of the northern lumber camps began early with scholars like Franz Lee Rickaby, who collected 55 songs and ballads in his collection *Ballads and Songs of the Shanty Boy* (1926) and hundreds more besides. The collection of lumberjack songs was advanced in the mid-1930s by music collectors Sidney Robertson (before she went on to become Sidney Robertson Cowell) and Alan Lomax. She in 1937 and he in 1938, recorded musicians throughout the northern reaches of the Upper Midwest, reaching broad swaths of the remarkably diverse population they found there. Lugging with them enormous and heavy battery powered recording equipment as they went, Robertson traversed the state of Wisconsin recording Norwegian-American psalmodikon players, Finnish-American kantele players, and Kaintuck singers and storytellers (lumberjacks who had

made their way north to work in Wisconsin from Kentucky during the height of the logging industry), while Lomax documented all manner of ethnic songs and tunes from Michigan's lower and upper peninsulas, recording Finnish-Americans, French-Canadians, Polish-Americans, German-Americans, indigenous Ojibwes, and more.[79] Documenting live performances of lumberjacks' musical traditions in the region was a new and exciting endeavor, but one which came at the tail end of the lumber industry's boom in the Upper Midwest. Robertson's and Lomax's collections, however, reflect the intensity of the ethnic mix in the region, which was fostered, in part, by natural resource industries including logging.

Aside from preserving his original music recordings and having documented his childhood memories of his early musical experiences and life on the family farm, Bruce Bollerud has taken steps to give us a more complete understanding of the persistence of Norwegian American music in the Upper Midwest. Perhaps one of the more unique aspects of Norwegian American folk music collections anywhere, Bollerud has saved an assortment of business and financial documents from his long career in music. While serving as band leader for the Ramblers and the Good Time Band he saved most of the performance contracts that they signed with various establishments for bar and restaurant gigs as well as for wedding and other private events. These contracts extend from 1960 to the present, representing hundreds of performances by these two popular local bands. The contract forms themselves were obtained from the American Federation of Musicians and the Madison Musicians Association. Bollerud was a member of the union for thirty-three years, beginning when he was sixteen years old and joining

[79] For a much more detailed description of Robertson's and Lomax's work in the Upper Midwest see Leary 2006b:172–81.

Gilbert Prestbroten's band, the Rhythm Ramblers, which Prestbroten was re-forming after it had disbanded due to the Second World War.[80] These contracts chronicle the financial story of the bands Bollerud has been involved in over the years as well as the vast majority of one musician's earnings during his most active performance period, evidence which is often neglected, tossed out or perhaps never existed in musicians' personal collections.[81]

In the earliest post-immigration years (pre-1880s) musicians' unions did not exist, and even when they did begin to emerge, the musicians working within this Norwegian American folk music tradition in rural areas rarely found themselves in a position to launch professional musical careers. In addition, musicians playing for local events, rural house parties, weddings, and community dances simply did not produce this type of paperwork. Information regarding the type of compensation musicians used to receive at the rural social gatherings that Bruce Bollerud fondly remembers from his childhood has had to come from personal testimony. Practices such as passing the hat for contributions for the band or playing for a midnight supper were the norm on these occasions. But by the time Bollerud was playing organized gigs with bands like The Goose Island Ramblers and The Good Time Band in Madison he began to make a concerted effort to retain the paperwork from his scheduled performances, giving us a glimpse into the economic realities and performance commitments Norwegian American musicians encountered working in urban areas of the Upper Midwest in the mid to late 20th century.

Bruce Bollerud affirms that his musical career provided an important boost to his family's household income, which he was also able to earn locally without having to leave home

[80] For more information about the Rhythm Ramblers and the music they played, see Leary 2006b:119–20.

[81] Another distinctive addition to Bruce Bollerud's personal music collection is the several copyright applications he submitted and was granted for original songs he wrote and co-wrote. In all he has saved six copyright applications, all dated 1960, for songs such as "Scratch Your Nose Polka," "All Night Long," and "The Christmas Polka."

for long periods of time to go on tour with a band. Bruce estimates that during the busiest years he played an average of three to four nights each week:[82] "I know when I went to school I was playing three and four nights a week and working twenty hours a week at the multimedia lab and carrying seventeen credits. And it just really was a lot of work. I don't know, it probably continued for eight or nine years, ten years maybe" (interview April 19, 2010). Bollerud was able to go back to school at the University of Wisconsin under the GI Bill, but even with that financial assistance he wasn't "floating in money." Still, he says, he probably would have kept roughly the same performance schedule had he not been in need of the extra income. "I love to play. I'd have played no matter what. … I like to be doing things. I get bored sitting around." Whether there was a personal motivation to play so consistently or not, the reality for Bruce and his family was that the need for extra money, along with the backing of his wife, Gloria, created the clear incentive to keep up with this intense performance schedule.

Looking a little closer at some of the figures culled from Bruce Bollerud's musical contracts, we begin to see the impact that his performance schedule made in terms of the family income. From records he saved dated 1974, Bollerud signed a total of sixteen performance contracts representing twenty-four individual performances (lasting roughly four hours each). The bands he played with were paid between $125 and $200 for each performance, earning a total of $3,500, or about $1,166.66 for one year of professional part-time musicianship.[83] Ten

[82] Based on his account of the frequency of performances, these contracts do not account for all of Bruce Bollerud's gigs in each of the years represented.

[83] According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics online inflation calculator (http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm), when the share of payment that Bruce Bollerud took home after these performances is adjusted for inflation, it would equal about $5,541 in 2013. A number of factors interfere with making this a precise depiction of Bollerud's musical earnings. First, this total is based on the contracts that Bollerud saved in his files; it is possible that more existed but were not preserved. Second, his share could have been based on the fixed number of bandmates in each of the bands with whom he performed. If one band member was unable to make it to a performance for some reason, the take-home pay may have been more or remained the same, depending on the circumstances. Third, it is possible that Bollerud may have received payment for a performance which did not involve a contract. In essence, a thorough examination of these performance contracts could be

years later in 1984, he played at least sixty individual performances and took in a total of $14,175 ($4,725 individually, the bands again making anywhere between $200 and $350 for each performance), according to the contracts he saved from that year.[84] In all, for a semi-professional musician living in an urban area of the Upper Midwest, it was possible to make a decent amount of money at this point in history, though it is questionable whether Bollerud would have been able to support his family solely on his music-related income.[85] Compared to rural Norwegian American musicians of his or previous generations, though, he was able to take advantage of the ethnically-infused regional folk music and translate that into a successful part-time professional music career.

Bruce Bollerud's papers, recordings, memorabilia, and photographs represent yet another unique collection of materials that reflect both the common elements of Norwegian American folk music traditions as well as the diversity of experience within that relatively specific category of musicians. The range of materials he has thought to preserve over the years gives us a wonderful, rich, and well-rounded perspective of a lifelong engagement with an ethnic musical tradition in the midst of an increasingly pervasive popular culture.

Bob Andresen, LeRoy Larson, and Bruce Bollerud each embody a deep connection to an earlier generation of Norwegian American musicians, and all have also demonstrated great foresight and dedication to preserving the art forms they themselves have contributed to all their lives. Not only have all three men made part- to full time careers out of their musical talents and

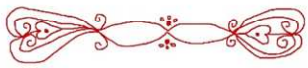
misleading because of all the potential inaccuracies, but these base numbers do give an indication of what a rough income estimate might have been for Bruce Bollerud in these years.

[84] Again, adjusted for inflation the share of Bruce Bollerud's income would be roughly $10,648 in 2013.

[85] As it was, Bollerud has noted that during this period he was booked to play with the Good Times Band or The Goose Island Ramblers just about every weekend night of the year.

experience, but they have taken it upon themselves to become collectors, scholars, and archivists of their craft. The combination of their own musical and cultural backgrounds, productive careers (resulting in albums, radio programs, books, photographs, countless performances, and more), and their enthusiasm for amassing rare and unique collections of recordings and materials, will continue to provide current and future generations of scholars the ability to look deeply and meaningfully at these traditions in an effort to learn more about the people of this region and the country.

Chapter 4: Beyond the Revival



The careers and work of Robert Andresen, LeRoy Larson and Bruce Bollerud demonstrate that Norwegian American folk music has never been a static category of music. The music has continued to be creatively adapted to the times in which it exists. In recent years artists and musicians have taken Norwegian American musical traditions in novel and interesting directions, continuing to reflect their modern-day contexts. These musicians are demonstrating how this ethnic music tradition continues to reflect familiar conventions and characteristics but is also adaptable to addressing the changing realities of the Norwegian American community.

Resulting from his work with Ukranian-Canadians, folklorist Robert Klymasz proposed three interrelated categories or layers of folklore change: traditional, transitional, and innovational. He argues these layers help define distinctions in practice, but that they are also in dialogue with one another: “Individually and collectively they bring into focus those contrastive trends and processes that in actual practice combine with one another in a continual state of dynamic interaction” (Klymasz 1973:132). The traditional layer, he proposes, is the most conservative in nature and is based on the desire to preserve an Old World tradition as much as possible. The second, transitional layer, presents an interesting combination of new elements and features which, taken together, might spell out the decline of the tradition, but which combine

with and work to support and strengthen some features of the tradition over others. The final, innovational layer of folklore change goes much further in introducing novelty to a tradition, as the title suggests. According to Klymasz, this layer "shows an attempt to reconstruct the tradition as selected retentions merge with new phenomena to produce a streamlined, modern-day version of the folklore legacy" (Klymasz 1973:132–3).

These three categories are helpful when viewed as a spectrum, or as a way to consider individual performances, but should, as Klymasz writes, be considered to be "in a continual state of dynamic interaction" with each other. If taken too literally or applied too rigidly the categories become restrictive, blocking from consideration the ways in which individual performers slide back and forth between categories or incorporate aspects of multiple categories in one performance. I offer these categories here, in part, to highlight the diversity of performances and the varying degrees to which individual bands and artists sometimes base their performances on more conventional or standard interpretations of Norwegian American folk music. I do not mean to imply that any category or label is in any way more authentic than another.

Scholars of folk art have developed similar ways of discussing the degrees to which artists' works resemble what the community recognizes as traditional art or what might be considered more innovative. Citing the work of anthropologist M. Estellie Smith and her argument that tradition and change might be considered in terms of continuity, Willard B. Moore introduces one way in which people have attempted to broaden the scope of what is considered traditional and increase the acceptability of innovation within a given tradition. Smith writes, "Continuity is that synthesis within which tradition is persistent viability through adaptation and change is the novel manifestation of a durable identity" (Smith 1982:135 quoted in Moore 1989:2). Moore also introduces folklorist Kay L. Cothran to his discussion in an effort to take the

emphasis off of the cultural product and place it on the process by which individuals draw upon their cultural traditions and knowledge to create a cultural product. “Participation goes on at a deep level; it is not adopted or abandoned quickly, and it does not necessarily entail approval of tradition” (Moore 1989:2). These discussions and definitions bring us closer to examining the experiences, knowledge, and intentions that a given artist brings to his or her work rather than the evaluation of it by the community or those who would presume to judge what constitutes traditional representation within a group.

Moore goes on to present another series of classifications that encompass these ideas, which he identifies as the circles of tradition. Visualizing these categories as concentric circles, Moore’s first category is called “Integrated Traditions,” which is the designation most identified by conservatism and is recognized as drawing most heavily upon the “forms, techniques, materials, and symbolic meanings that are most fully interwoven with the rest of community life” (Moore 1989:4). The second circle is called “Perceived Traditions,” in which the art forms practiced by individuals are, most importantly, perceived to be traditional and representative of a historical practice whether or not that tradition has actually remained the same or been altered in some way by the contexts of time and place. Similar to the definition of a legend, the important factor here is not the verifiable truth or authenticity of the text, but the presentation and perception of truth to the individual and the community. Thirdly, the circle for which Moore makes the case is most widely disregarded and not seen in connection with a particular community or tradition, is named “Celebrated Traditions.” Here Moore speaks specifically about Minnesotan folk artists, but the definition clearly applies beyond state borders:

> This circle contains the work of artists who, for personal and aesthetic reasons, choose to create objects not necessarily related to their own heritage or social roles. While these objects and the techniques required to make them are rooted in

> tradition, it is a tradition of other times, places, and social conditions. Through the celebrated traditions, Minnesotans have enriched the state's arts with revivals of traditions that their predecessors had little time to pursue. In some instances, artists have sought forms from other regions of the country … . Other people have experimented with historic genres and created fresh forms with new meanings … . In this circle, the emphasis is upon *form*. (Moore 1989:5, emphasis Moore's)

Both Moore and Klymasz present somewhat similar systems of classification, meant to define the oftentimes ambiguous (and at times contested) relationships between cultural conservatism and change. Both designate three levels of adherence to or distance from what a group might consider traditional form and representation. But while Klymasz discusses his three categories in terms of the persistence of ethnic identity over time as seen through cultural productions, Moore tries to shift our discussion of these processes from the cultural texts themselves to the relationship between the artist or individual and his or her culturally and environmentally specific knowledge of tradition. These classifications are helpful, not because they lay out a neat plan for how we can label any given artist or the work s/he produces, but because they help advance our understanding of the relationship between continuity and change by recognizing that definitions of tradition can be broad, encompassing diversity and affirming belonging equally across the spectrum.

As we will see musicians and artists themselves occasionally express discomfort with categorizing their music and performances. It can be tempting to ignore or discard ambiguity in this area in order to apply a rubric for clarity and classification, but doing so can lead to misunderstanding. In particular, I have found that the highest degree of reflection or hesitation has arisen out of conversations about whether a band's music should be considered "traditional music". This could be a consequence of the category of traditional folk music implying something akin to Old World music, or a category of music which does not generally allow

much room for creative interpretation but rather, more conventional renderings of tunes and repertoires. In speaking with musician Amy Boxrud about the two bands she played in, Hütenänny and Scandium, she had this to say about a preservationist approach to traditional music: “That’s how a lot of people feel about music and I appreciate it, too, but that’s not the kind of music that we do—in either group” (interview, May 8, 2010). Granted, discussing a preservationist attitude is not the same as creating a traditional rendition. Amy was careful not to attach the label “traditional” to the band Scandium, known for its more creative approach to northern European music, but more open to discussing Hütenänny’s “straight forward presentation” as traditional, though with some qualification.

In my discussions with musicians regarding the traditional or innovative nature of their work, we see some reflection of the issues folklorist Dan Ben-Amos has discussed regarding how folklorists have fallen into the trap of ardently applying scientific classification systems to cultural practices: “[folklorists] attempted to change folk-taxonomic systems which are cultural [*sic*] bound and vary according to the speakers’ cognitive systems into culture-free, analytical, unified, and objective models of folk literature” (Ben-Amos 1976:216). As Ben-Amos argues, categorization must be flexible and “combine the cognitive, expressive, and behavioral levels of genres in each culture” (Ben-Amos 1976:237). Classification, however, is important to our ability to discuss cultural and ethnic patterns, however, so I do rely on some amount of categorization in my discussion of Norwegian American folk music. I will periodically refer to the permeability of the categories I employ in my analysis and, for the sake of simplicity, will frame my examples in terms of Klymasz’s three layers: traditional, transitional, and innovational, highlighting the category or categories that each artist or group might best be described as. In

this sense, categorization is simply a way of bringing to the fore the diversity of ways in which an ethnic group can enjoy the continued process of articulating its identity.

Traditional Layer of Norwegian American Folk Music

As I discussed in chapter 1, the words “tradition” and “traditional” are at once useful and problematic when discussing folklore. Though the field has for some time recognized that “all tradition is change,” in the words of Swedish folklorists Barbro Klein and Mats Widbom (1994), common usage and understanding of these words sometimes contradicts this view. In its most misused, often colloquial moments the word tradition can be invoked as a synonym for words like “unchanging” or “old-fashioned,” but is perhaps more often used to describe a perceived core set of cultural practices or traits that have been handed down, which also serves to reinforce a false dichotomy between tradition and modernity or change. It bears repeating, then, that when describing examples of traditional Norwegian American folklore I do so while recognizing that traditional performances are continual reconstructions and interpretations of the past.

The band Foot-Notes of Decorah, Iowa is one of the clearest examples of active, traditional Norwegian American old-time music bands in the Upper Midwest. Best known for their largely locally-derived old-time dance music repertoire, the trio of Beth and Jon Rotto and Bill Musser have carried forth a local body of music from native Spring Grove, Minnesota

fiddler William Sherburne's days to today.[86] Bill, as he was called, was born in 1903 into a family of fiddlers and came to be one of the best-known old-time fiddlers in the state of Minnesota; he was even invited to play in Washington DC for the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in 1974 and again in 1976. Sherburne, of Norwegian, "Pennsylvania Dutch" and English parentage, began performing in the 1920s and played regularly at barn dances and house parties as a young man. However, as was common for old-time musicians in the rural setting of the Upper Midwest, he was compelled to take a break from his performance schedule in the late 1930s to concentrate on making a living as a farmer to support his growing family. He resumed playing the fiddle in the 1960s and was best known locally for holding regular public dances in the old two-room schoolhouse in the little hamlet of Highlandville, Iowa with his band, The Bill Sherburne Band, also affectionately known as the Spring Grove Symphony. Though Sherburne died in 1991, his musical successor, Beth Hoven Rotto and Foot-Notes, have produced four albums featuring local music (*First Steps* [1992] and *Highlandville Dance* [1993] were released on cassette and are out of print; *Decorah Waltz* [1996] and *My Father Was a Fiddler* [1998] were released on CD). Foot-Notes also still carry on the monthly dances in the same Highlandville schoolhouse in addition to playing for local and regional festivals, weddings, and other private dances.

[86] Mandolinist and vocalist Jim Skurdall also played with Foot-Notes until 2008, when he married a Norwegian woman and moved there with her.

Figure 8. Bill Sherburne, date unknown. Used with permission, Robert Andresen Collection, Mills Music Library, University of Wisconsin.

There are some ways in which Foot-Notes might be classified as contemporary in their approach to Norwegian American folk music rather than traditional. For instance, the gender component is a distinct departure from the established pattern of Norwegian American bands featuring male fiddlers. This chapter features three women musical artists in contrast to the three male musicians discussed in chapter 3, which serves to highlight a significant shift, not only in attitudes regarding the instruments men and women are encouraged to pick up, but also in terms of the ways in which musicians are reflecting contemporary gender roles and values. This cultural shift is demonstrated in an amusing anecdote from Beth Rotto about how her working relationship with Bill Sherburne got off to a rocky start.

Foot-Notes' connection to Sherburne's legacy began when, after becoming interested in learning more about Norwegian American folk music from northeast Iowa, Beth Rotto received a grant from the Iowa Arts Council to apprentice with Sherburne and learn his repertoire. (In 1991

she formed Foot-Notes and since then they have been playing a mix of Sherburne's repertoire and Scandinavian folk tunes on local, regional, and national levels.) Though the Rotto-Sherburne apprenticeship was clearly successful and has resulted in a wonderful asset to the cultural continuity of the area, Beth recalls difficulties involved in getting Sherburne to take the project seriously. Initially, Rotto would arrive at Bill Sherburne's house to practice only to find him half paying attention to the lesson he was supposed to be giving her, keeping the television on in the living room, and generally not showing much enthusiasm for the project. After a while, Beth decided to invite her husband, Jon, a guitarist, along to one of the lessons, which proved to be the push Bill needed to take an interest in passing this music along. Whatever Bill Sherburne's initial thoughts were about working with a female apprentice, his attitude clearly changed once another man entered the equation. Though Beth Rotto's experience with Bill Sherburne represents a clear generational difference and clash of musical gender norms, the other women profiled in this chapter, Amy Boxrud and Kari Tauring, also represent the same cultural shift as Beth. Together they exemplify the progression our culture has made beyond the strongly defined gender roles carried over from the pioneering generation.

While Foot-Notes do represent a shift in the older conventions of Norwegian American folk musicians in terms of gender, the band's work is also clearly rooted in retaining the community bond and music of an earlier time. Foot-Notes do this by keeping Bill Sherburne's repertoire alive and well in the community in which it once thrived, and by continuing to perform this local music in the context of the Highlandville schoolhouse, a setting which recalls Bill Sherburne's own performances there as well as the community's history. In addition to maintaining the Sherburne repertoire, Foot-Notes have performed tunes from other local musicians of the past, such as Alfred Blegen, Genette Burgess, and Gust Ellingson. Many of

these tunes were passed on to Foot-Notes by daughters who used to accompany their fathers (Beth Rotto, email correspondence, November 25, 2013).

Foot-Notes have long been noted as traditional folk music representatives of the area as well as the Scandinavian immigrant community that settled in the state of Iowa. In 1996 they performed at the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife in Washington, DC (as Bill Sherburne had in the 1970s) as well as the Festival of Iowa Folklife. In 2008 they again journeyed to Washington DC to perform a concert as part of the "Masters of Tradition" series on the Millennium Stage at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and they have been featured in numerous radio programs and articles about the Norwegian and Upper Midwestern folk music traditions. Their reputation as a Norwegian American folk music band, in other words, has been well documented and clearly established, but within the Decorah area in particular they have proven to be valued leaders in cultural continuity through their regular performances, their album productions, and their participation in the musical and cultural life of the community.[87]

…

At his Presidential Invited Plenary Address to the American Folklore Society's Annual Meeting in 2009, Roger Welsch offered up the following thoughts on how to identify a folk music band that lives out the processes by which folklore is made:

[87] Individually and informally Foot-Notes, in cooperation with Vesterheim Museum, also participate in and occasionally help to organize workshops and community concerts featuring Scandinavian and Scandinavian American musicians who travel through the area. Bands such as Kaivama (a Finnish-American duo from Minneapolis), Kvarts (a Norwegian folk band), and Bjärv (a Swedish folk trio) have recently performed at the Museum and Foot-Notes are often involved with their visits in some capacity. In addition, for several years Beth Rotto and another Decorah fiddler Ann Streufert have led and taught workshops to a group of intergenerational fiddlers, who then perform the tunes they learn by heart at a fundraising holiday concert called Burning Bright. The ages range from about 8 to 80, according to Beth, and they always include Scandinavian tunes in the performance.

> When I worked with the Smithsonian's Festival on the Mall, Old Ways in the New World, to find typical, traditional German bands, I quickly developed a shorthand method for determining what I was looking for. I would ask the band to play what they had played at the last wedding they played for. If they said they didn't do weddings, just performances of strictly traditional, authentic folksongs, I moved on. That's not the way folklore works. I looked for the band that didn't quite understand or even resented the words *folk music*. And they would play "Der Hinkel und die Ginkel" for me—"The Rooster and the Hen," truly an old, traditional peasant dance song, and then "The Blue Skirt Waltz" á la Lawrence Welk, and then explain perhaps that they always ended the evening when the kegs were empty by closing with "Goodnight Irene." *That* is how folklore works. (Welsch 2011:21)

Though Foot-Notes have never been primarily a stage performance band, my vision of them certainly positioned them on the traditional end of the Klymasz spectrum. Recently, however, Beth Rotto offered a more nuanced view of their band in a brief discussion I had with her. Sitting outside Decorah's Oneota Food Co-Op where Beth works one sunny summer afternoon, I mentioned this spectrum of Norwegian American folk music and she offered the following thoughts on where she thinks Foot-Notes fall:

> Beth: Yes, we've been traditional and I've tried to channel Bill Sherburne a lot of the time, especially out at Highlandville, but more recently—especially without Jim [Skurdall, former mandolinist and vocalist] here—I've had a chance to play with different people who have been an inspiration—like workshops at Nisswa and stuff—I've found inspiration from some of the bands doing crazier stuff, so a lot of times as the night goes on we get a little crazier sometimes, and depending on the group, actually. … If everybody seems to be young and wild we might …
>
> Anna: [Chuckles] Shake it up a little?
>
> Beth: … yeah, rock it up a little bit. (Interview August 23, 2013)

"Rocking it up a little bit" might mean straying away from the Sherburne repertoire and into the realm of contemporary Scandinavian artists as she mentions, but it also means they adjust the

band's sound to reflect a more contemporary feel. In Beth's words, they begin to play "Heavier guitar, heavier bass. I play the … same old stuff—but usually Jon [Rotto, on guitar] and Bill [Musser, on bass] get a little more funky."

When Foot-Notes first began playing at Highlandville, however, long before their experimentation with a more youthful sound came about, Beth quickly recognized how the preferences of the dancers worked to shape the musical tradition she herself was trying to carry on. Beth came to her apprenticeship with Bill with strong ideas of the types of melodies she wanted to learn, though she recorded a full range of Bill's tunes and performances for the purposes of accurately learning his fiddling style. In essence, though Bill always began his Highlandville dances with a healthy number of two-steps, Beth was less interested in learning these tunes. "I didn't really want those at that time. That was not my thing, to learn two-steps. To me that wasn't Norwegian and I didn't really want that." She quickly learned, however, that the older dancers who frequented Bill Sherburne's performances at Highlandville had strong preferences of their own. "Then the very first dance we played out at Highlandville without Bill, just our band, there were some old people that sat the entire night and they didn't get up except for the one or two two-steps that we played that night and then they danced those and then they sat right back down and I thought, 'Ok, if I want any of these old people to come I've got to play two-steps or they're never going to come again.' … So I got that the very first time I played on my own." Of course Foot-Notes' set list has continued to change since they first began playing at

Highlandville,[88] they learned an early lesson about how influential the dancing audience can be in the shaping of a local musical tradition.[89]

Another way in which Foot-Notes differ from a more exact reproduction of traditional folk music events from the area (in other words, the way in which Bill Sherburne and his band performed) can be seen in the contextual features of their dances at Highlandville.

> Beth: When I would sit and play with [Bill's band] I didn't know [that] anything was happening. You'd just sit around and all of a sudden Bill would go, "G," and he'd start playing something and the band would like hop in and start playing. And then you were done with that one and then Bill would look around and he'd go, [whispers] "Sit down. Sit down." And what was he talking about? "Sit down." He was always talking under his breath and … he would often play three in a row which was the old-fashioned way, you know, three waltzes and then three of something else—so at the end of three he'd sit there and go, "sit down" and everyone was just standing around talking …
>
> A: He was talking to the dancers?
>
> B: Yeah, but under his breath. He was mumbling and then when they didn't—then finally, he'd sit there for a long time, … no one who was there knew what was going on. Obviously they're not going to sit down so eventually he'd switch to playing something else. But there was a lot of space between dances. Our pace is definitely to keep 'em comin' and then to take breaks. I don't remember them taking breaks exactly but they had long spaces between tunes so it was a slower event. But the music was similar.

The atmosphere at Foot-Notes dances today is still that of a casual dance, but with the pacing and feel of a contemporary musical performance with fixed sets rather than the slower pace of the earlier dances which Beth describes here. The expectation is back-to-back dances until the band

[88] Beth Rotto comments on the nature of their evolving repertoire: "Our set list has changed and expanded over the years to include many times the number of tunes that we played at first. Each season (year) we tend to add several new tunes, drop some we are tired of and revive some oldies" (Beth Rotto, email correspondence, November 25, 2013).

[89] In the next chapter I will discuss how current younger dancers continue to influence the character of Foot-Notes' dances, particularly at the Highlandville schoolhouse.

takes a longer intermission-like break before returning to play another set. Bill's style of playing short sets of three like dances at a time and then taking a short break before playing another set of three may very well have mirrored the house party gatherings of his youth, establishing a slower pace but more than likely lasting into the small hours of the morning.[90]

So, while at times Foot-Notes fall very clearly within the traditional folk music camp and at other times they veer toward a looser interpretation of old-time music depending on the nature of performance and the make-up of their audiences, there is a clear lineage of tradition based in the Decorah-area community. Other bands display a similar pattern of blurring the edges of traditional and transitional, such as the group Hütenänny from Northfield, Minnesota. A loosely-formed group, Hütenänny's membership arose out of the Northern Roots Session, a standing Nordic folk music jam night at the popular Northfield pub, The Contented Cow. Amy Boxrud, fiddler and member of the band, describes Hütenänny as a traditional Scandinavian folk music dance band. The group's website categorizes its music and approach in this way: "Start with a *hootenanny*, an old country word for a folk-music party. Add one part pickled herring, one part salt licorice, and a dash of good strong coffee. Pour over ice, shake well, and you've got Hütenänny—served up for your listening pleasure."[91] Invoking the Scandinavian and

[90] Beth Rotto offers another explanation for the short sets of three tunes: "I've heard another possibility. Apparently at some of the dance halls the actual dance floor was fenced off. You could sit and watch from outside the fence, but to dance you had to pay a nickel (or whatever it was). That bought you three dances of the same kind. Then you had to clear the floor. Then they took admission for the next set" (Beth Rotto, email correspondence, November 25, 2013).

[91] From Hütenänny's website: http://northernroots.org/hutenanny/. Accessed October 26, 2013.

Scandinavian American love for pickled fish, black licorice and strong coffee, Hütenänny clearly knows its target audience.[92]

Even the name of the band adds an interesting Scandinavian flavor by adding a couple of umlauts to the American "hootenanny," a term with its own unique history in American culture. The origins and original meaning(s) of hootenanny are unclear. In a piece written for *Western Folklore* in 1965, Peter Tamony chronicles the usage of this word in America, beginning with elements possibly taken from their English context ("*gallihootin', scallyhootin', skyhooting, skyhoodlin'*") (169). For some time hootenanny functioned as an all-purpose word akin to "doohickey," "thingamajig," and the like, generally meaning a small object for which a person has forgotten (or was never familiar with) the name. He discusses the various regional meanings for the word, such as "a small device which held a cross-cut saw in the woods" in the Pacific Northwest, an old, junk car or jalopy in Oklahoma, or "an impromptu party" in the Midwest, among others (168). Then in 1941, Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, members of the folk group The Almanac Singers, became aware of the word while performing and traveling in the Seattle area where it was used to describe the local gatherings there. After returning to New York they used hootenanny to refer to weekend gatherings for singing and music-making, charging admission to pay the rent. The popularity of these events grew over the years, occupying increasingly large spaces after World War II, finally ending up at Carnegie Hall, and securing the place of the term hootenanny in leftist American circles as meaning a "gathering of those interested in folk song at which several singers sing folk songs."[93]

[92] Northfield is about 45 miles south of the Twin Cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, and is home to the Norwegian American Lutheran college, St. Olaf.
[93] Definition from *New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1959) as quoted in Tamony 1965:166.

With meteoric rise of folk music in popular culture in the early 1960s came the introduction of a musical variety television show called *Hootenanny*, which enjoyed only a very short run of a year and a half on ABC starting in 1963. Filmed live on college campuses across the country, the program mixed humor, folk music, and the biting satire of the Civil Rights era, broadcasting directly into mainstream American homes. Though the show garnered a fair amount of popularity and helped launch the national careers of several little-known artists at the time such as Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, the arrival of the British Invasion in 1964 brought an abrupt end to the show. Other productions claimed the word hootenanny as a title, including two magazines; *Hootenanny: The National Folk Singing Magazine* begun in 1964, and *ABC-TV Hootenanny*, a magazine which profiled the singers and groups who performed on the television show, running for the duration of the program. The word hootenanny, then, connotes the homespun and spontaneous nature of a gathering of folk musicians, but it also embodies some of the elements of the folk music revival of mid-20th century popular American culture.

Somewhat fitting given the legacy of its name, then, the Northfield based band Hütenänny does not get together for formal practices. Rather, they convene at the Contented Cow each week and make appearances at local events they are asked to play for. I asked Amy if they experience a lot of fluctuation in the group. "We do," she replied:

> … and that's part of what makes it work. … One model that a lot of us are comfortable with is just the extremely unstructured model where you get what you pay for. We don't charge for our performances. We ask people to make a donation to the food shelf usually[94] … but we let people know this is a casual group and then we just sort of send out a note, you know, we've been asked to play here, on this day, how many of you can make it? We make sure we have

[94] Recent correspondence with Amy Boxrud has revealed that members of Hütenänny have not recently been in the practice of asking for food pantry donations in lieu of payment. Instead, if they are paid at all for their engagements, it is generally to defray the costs of transportation. Amy adds, "We also play some events at no charge, like a Sons of Norway fundraising breakfast, where we play in exchange for breakfast, and the Valley Grove Country Social, where we play for free" (email correspondence, December 16, 2013).

> enough melody players to cover the melody and then we have some rhythm players and we keep the arrangements simple enough that no one's gonna really be thrown. We do some very simple arrangements where we'll do a medley of two tunes and have a little transition, or we might have a particular intro that we all are expecting. But for the most part it's very manageable. And we don't really rehearse we just play in this public setting. (Interview May 8, 2010)

This loose and casual membership may well be seen as a modern reflection of gatherings of musicians who would come together for house parties, bowery dances or barn dances in the rural Upper Midwest from the time of immigration up into the late 1920s and early 1930s. Whoever played an instrument and wanted to perform would show up to the party and play with the other musicians. A hat might have been passed at these gatherings to compensate musicians, but they also commonly played for their dinner (a midnight supper) and drinks. In Hütenänny's case they at one time asked their audiences to make contributions to a local aid organization rather than to themselves, reflecting the mutual aid that has historically been associated with local and neighborhood dances. In *Farmhouse Fiddlers* Philip Martin notes the importance of "bees" (also known as "exchange work" or "neighboring") in rural Upper Midwestern communities. "Jobs too big or too boring for a single family seemed to fly by with many extra hands to pitch in and pass the time. These were social occasions as well, often followed by music and a dance when the work was done" (Martin 1994:47). This same closeness within the neighborhood was expressed when families went through times of need or loss as well (Martin 1994:50). In both the region's historic traditions and in the contemporary case of Hütenänny, no regular or formal practices are held, compensation is minimal, different combinations of musicians might be seen at each neighborhood celebration, and simpler arrangements of the tunes are favored over more complicated variations.

Amy describes Hütenänny's audience as "ready-made." "They want Hütenänny because, … of course you like vanilla ice cream because that's what you grew up eating … . I think there's a ready-made audience for Hütenänny because … it's what people expect when they think of Scandinavian folk music and it's danceable, it's toe tap-able and it's the same—it sounds like other groups" (interview May 8, 2010). The familiarity with the traditional Scandinavian folk music sound, the easy-to-dance-to rhythms, and the similarity of the group's repertoire to other Scandinavian folk music groups combine to make this a very popular and fairly well-known group not only in Northfield, but in Minneapolis where they also occasionally perform. These characteristics, danceable music that is familiar and similar to contemporaneous interpretations of the tradition also reflect an earlier movement of popular Norwegian American dance music bands and house parties towards a more "Americanized" sound. Philip Martin expresses this familiarity and recognition of an "ethnic" sound coupled with the natural results of musicians and audiences becoming exposed to popular music over time:

> To a modern-day native of Norway familiar with that country's extremely rich regional folk music traditions, the Norwegian American repertoire sounds thoroughly American. The percussive banjos and pianos plunk and pound away, the rhythms are heavily accented, the tunes seemingly simple. Paradoxically, to an American this music sounds Norwegian. The tunes are mostly unknown and have names like "Pete Peterson's Schottische" or "Iver Johnstad's Hoppwaltz." The Norwegian waltzes have a lightness unlike the American old-time waltz. Polkas have an unaccustomed bounciness. And so on.
>
> The music is, in fact, something in between. Its hybrid nature reflects the history, values and special needs of a particular group of people: the Norwegian Americans of the Upper Midwest. For these people, the music is just the right blend. It allows them to be Norwegian in the sense that they recognize through the ethnic elements of the music that they still belong in some way to a Scandinavian culture both ancestral and contemporary. Yet other elements embodied in the traditions of the music allow them to be American, too, with little sense of conflict of separateness. (Martin 1998:264)

As Martin does in the passage above, Amy notes that in some ways Hütenänny expands its traditional sound a bit by including a slightly more prominent rhythm section than a more traditional Scandinavian band would normally have. "[Hütenänny] has a real strong bass, and it has a real good rhythm section so I think people respond to it for that reason because they think we sound good, but really I think they like the rhythm section and there's some freshness to it." In both cases an appeal is made to the audience's sense of tradition and appreciation of the familiar, but Hütenänny—and other Norwegian American bands before them—also works to introduce a certain amount of originality to the traditional to reflect the current musical landscape in which their audiences are immersed; to keep them interested. They do this in such a way that, as Amy suggests could be the case, the audience is not even aware of what it is they are responding to.

Still, because of the group's casual approach to membership, rehearsals and arrangements, it does walk the line between the traditional and transitional camps. Amy reflects on the distinctions between the music that Hütenänny makes and that of groups that take a more traditionalist approach:

> I have a healthy respect for preservationism. … I know a lot of musicians who really do that well. Well, it's like that piece that we had rosemaled [gestures to a nearby buffet in the living room painted in a traditional Telemark rosemaling style]. When I sent it off I didn't want it to look anything but traditional when it came back. I wanted it to look like that. I didn't want [the painter] to take a lot of liberties and, you know, invent her own style of rosemaling. … You want it to come back as a piece of Telemark rosemaling. And that's how a lot of people feel about music and I appreciate it, too, but that's not the kind of music that we do. … We wouldn't fall into the preservationist camp. It's really interesting, though; a lot of the people that play in Hütenänny are not really Scandinavian and that is pretty interesting. I think that's unique. (Interview May 8, 2010)

So, one can see some amount of variation and ambiguity in what individuals consider "traditional" and "transitional"—not to mention "preservationist," which should not be conflated with the traditional. All this suggests that although these terms are helpful in describing general trends in the continuance of ethnic folk music post-immigration, they should be considered fluid and flexible descriptions rather than immutable categories. In addition, these examples demonstrate how even popularly regarded traditional folk music groups and musicians succeed in introducing some changes to the tradition in order to keep their sound current or conform to contemporary audiences' expectations.

Transitional Layer of Norwegian American Folk Music

Some musicians and groups working within an ethnic music tradition are driven to creatively interpret folk music more than a traditional representation might do in striving to preserve a particular style or sound. Klymasz describes the transitional layer as that which reifies certain traditional elements within a culture at the expense of others, though one occasionally finds instances when this effort may or may not reflect the same elements that the larger ethnic community collectively chooses to reify or cast off.

Of course innovation and experimentation with sound is nothing new among Norwegian American folk musicians. From the very beginning Norwegian immigrants were confronted with a multicultural environment in America, an integration that permeated their lives, including the music they made. For some time the changes made to the repertoires and styles of the first and second generation immigrants' music could be suitably described as transitional. "Rural

neighborhoods by the early 1900s were likely to contain at least some mix of ethnic groups … . The mingling was typical of the Midwest. With a need to be neighborly, the ethnic mixture encouraged attitudes of sharing, helping, joking, and just being friendly for which the region is renown. 'Oh, yes, the Germans used to come to our [Norwegian families'] house parties. And we went to theirs. We didn't speak the same language, but we all enjoyed the music and the mingling. Their music was a little different from ours, but we enjoyed it just the same'" (Martin 1994:47, quoting Jacob Varnes, fiddler). Having a common familiarity with some pan-European music and dances like the polka and the waltz between neighbors in a multiethnic community created a natural bias towards maintaining these melodies. Conversely, the extremely regionally and locally specific dances and melodies, by virtue of their uniqueness, were less likely to be maintained. Over time, although popular American music began to trickle into the old-time music sound of the Upper Midwest, certain traits of the tradition were maintained such as the repetition of melody sections, melodies played in a single key, and a melody range that is interchangeable between the violin and accordion.[95]

Some Norwegian American folk musicians today are following in this tradition of mixing the folk music of their heritage with contemporary styles and a mix of ethnic tunes, but there is still a strong inclination to hold onto what is considered traditional and authentic. The band Scandium from Northfield, Minnesota provides insight into how the transitional layer can be expressed through ethnic folk music. Amy Boxrud, also a member of Scandium, serves as a link between it and Hütenänny and offers up a unique perspective on how the differences in the

[95] See Larson (1975:58–79) for a specific musical analysis of Scandinavian–American folk dance music from the perspectives of form, rhythm, melody, and harmony.

bands' approaches fit within the ethnic folk music community while also challenging some conventions of a more traditional sound.

Borrowing its name from the chemical element, Scandium was made up of five members, two of whom claimed Scandinavian heritage.[96] They playfully described their music as "elemental music with Scandinavian and American roots" and expanded on this on their website: "Scandium often begins with a Nordic folk tune—sometimes old, sometimes new—but soon find themselves 'coloring outside the lines,' allowing other folk influences to infuse their arrangements."[97] Amy explains Scandium's approach to Scandinavian folk music in contrast to Hütenänny's: "The music that we play in Hütenänny is much more traditional and just more of a straight forward presentation of the music. … And Scandium has never really put much effort into a traditional presentation" (interview May 8, 2010). Scandium's sound, however, though it was certainly much more contemporary in nature, did not challenge a modern, more general definition of a folk music band. The approach to the mostly traditional tunes they played was admittedly more complicated, including artful arrangements as opposed to the simple, more accessible approaches of a folk dance band like Hütenänny, but most of Scandium's experimentation still came from variations on a traditionally Scandinavian folk music chord progression and an even more prominent rhythm section. They were still undeniably a folk music band that folks could still dance to—just not a strictly traditional Scandinavian folk music band.

[96] Amy played violin and provided vocals, Les LaCroix on guitar and vocals, Glenn Lee on accordion, Gordon Oschwald on bass, and Anna Lisa Rustad on violin.
[97] http://www.scandium-music.com/. Accessed on October 13, 2010 (website is no longer active).

Although Amy eventually made the decision to leave Scandium,[98] was never replaced, and the band is not currently actively performing, it joins the ranks of folk music bands that are oftentimes, but not necessarily, made up of Scandinavian Americans and who turn to Scandinavian sources of music rather than, or in addition to, Scandinavian American folk traditions.

In one sense the distinction between drawing from strictly Scandinavian American or Scandinavian traditions seems artificial because historically there has been a fair amount of overlap between the two categories. As Janet Kvam discovered in her thesis research at the University of Missouri, many of the tunes that scholar and musician LeRoy Larson collected from Norwegian Americans in Minnesota in the 1970s were recognizable in whole or in part by Norwegian musicians.[99] This is not to say, however, that these songs were necessarily Scandinavian in origin—in fact, many were identified as popular dance melodies dating from roughly 1880 to 1920, which most likely experienced some amount of inter-European dissemination.[100] Nevertheless, while Norwegian Americans view these old-time dance melodies as traditional and representative of their immigrant culture, Norwegian musicians and folk music lovers do not generally prize this popular *gammaldans* music as highly as the bygdemusikk from

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[98] Amy explained in an email that her decision to leave Scandium was based on having less time to devote to the ensemble, as well as higher pressure performances, which eventually outweighed the enjoyment she got from performing in the band.

[99] Out of all the melodies LeRoy Larson collected in his dissertation (some of which were duplicate melodies, had already been identified, or were known to have been written in the US), Kvam played recordings of 134 melodies to seven Norwegian musicians to determine how many tunes were familiar to them. "Seventy-one melodies, 53%, were recognized completely or in part by one or more of the informants. Ten were recognized by all the informants. Most of the melodies (22) were identified as being Norwegian in origin, but thirteen were identified as Swedish, two as German, and twelve as either from Norway or Sweden" (Kvam 1986:143).

[100] In Julane Beetham's 2005 thesis (49) and in Lornell (2012:240), the statistic is that roughly ten percent of the tunes Larson transcribed were Norwegian and another ten percent were Swedish. Larson's own dissertation estimated that, at the time (1975:xi), about thirteen percent could be identified as being Norwegian or Swedish in origin (eight and seven melodies, respectively). Several factors might count for the discrepancies found between these three results, including misidentification or similarity of melodies recognized by the Norwegian musicians in Kvam's research, overestimation of how many melodies were attributable to Scandinavian American sources by Larson, Beetham, and Lornell, reverse migration of Scandinavian American tunes to Scandinavia, etc.

particular regions and valleys (Kvam 1986:144). Still, from the diasporic perspective the most traditional repertoire of Norwegian Americans is also partially a shared repertoire with Norwegian folk musicians and the sounds of Norwegian or Scandinavian gammaldans are not so radically different than a Scandinavian American old-time tradition, particularly if played in a more modern folk music style with more ornamentation and a heavier emphasis on the rhythm section.[101]

In Scandium's case inspiration was gathered from contemporary Scandinavian folk music artists such as the Swedish bands Swåp, Väsen and Ranarim. Amy recalls there was no specific target when they went out in search of tunes they would like to incorporate into their repertoire; they simply incorporated tunes that they liked and from time to time they would even closely cover another band's arrangements of a song if they were really drawn to it.[102] Both Amy, personally, and Scandium as a group were drawn to contemporary Scandinavian interpretations of older folk music traditions, an approach that has not always been expressed so distinctly in traditional representations of Norwegian American folk music. For bands that have built strong reputations for consciously carrying on Norwegian American folk music traditions, such as Foot-Notes, adherence to a local ethnic music tradition or a particular repertoire, at times, precludes the inclusion of more diverse materials and melodies. When pressed to identify any other bands

[101] In addition, it is also possible that younger audiences, having not necessarily grown up surrounded by these old-time Scandinavian American repertoires but instead are perhaps more familiar and comfortable with contemporary folk music sounds, may not be as attuned to the differences between Scandinavian and Scandinavian American repertoires or stylistic traditions when they are played by bands or musicians who have a more modern sound. Increasingly, we even see Scandinavian musicians and bands such as Jukka Karjalainen (Finnish singer and songwriter), Arto Järvelä (Finnish fiddler) and Kvarts (Norwegian folk music quartet) making contact with and becoming interested in Scandinavian American folk music to varying degrees as well, which provides another level of complication and interest to the mix. This is one area I have not delved into in my research, but which would be interesting for scholars interested in the intersections of continually evolving ethnic identities in America and modern ethnic folk music sounds to pursue.

[102] Amy is personally fond of older Scandinavian ballads and Norwegian ballads in particular after studying Norwegian language as an undergraduate at St. Olaf College in Northfield.

in the area or the states that played with traditional sounds in a similar way to Scandium, Amy could not name any.[103] Scandium seemed to be forging a unique path in the ethnic music community of the Upper Midwest, drawing much of their inspiration from and modeling themselves after modern European interpretations of older traditional music from all over Northern Europe.

For a time, then, Amy was able to strike somewhat of a balance between a relatively traditional outlet for her music through Hütenänny and a more non-traditional or modern interpretation of Scandinavian folk music through Scandium. The bands' audiences also reflect(ed) these categorizations. While Amy described Hütenänny's audience as "ready-made" and comments on their fans' familiarization with the Scandinavian dance music they regularly play, she referred to Scandium's fledgling fan base as being less familiar with the old Scandinavian standards. "When we do play I see some of the same faces in the audience and they're not people who would have gone to this Nordic night, they're not interested in Nordic music necessarily. They're approaching it from a folk, or pop or just sort of … something they want to listen to." Whatever the audience members' motivations, Amy believes Scandinavian folk music bands are becoming more visible on the folk music scene, potentially attracting audiences who may not have a connection with or particular affinity for Scandinavian culture or music.

> I do [feel there's a growth in popularity]. I just feel like there's so many good bands—and I'm not talking about Scandium, I'm talking about the bands that are influencing us, those that are based in Scandinavia, I just feel like there's such a renaissance or a resurgence and there's so much talent and it's so appealing! And I feel like, well, of course I say that because I have a Scandinavian background,

[103] Indeed, in an email exchange with Amy in the spring of 2013, after Scandium disbanded, she mentioned that she was still not aware of any bands that reminded her of Scandium's sound.

> but … I really like Celtic music, too, you know. You don't have to be Celtic to appreciate it and I think you don't have to be Scandinavian to appreciate the appeal of it. (Interview May 8, 2010)

With increasing interest in Scandinavian cuisine, culture, literature, and society,[104] it seems natural that some interest spill over into broader cultural representations such as music. Indeed, ardent fans of folk music might hear of Scandinavian artists and read reviews of recent Scandinavian folk album releases on a regular basis through publications like *Sing Out!*,[105] and folks who have personal connections to, are partial to Scandinavian folk music, or who simply live in an area heavily populated by Scandinavian Americans may also be well versed in the offerings of contemporary Scandinavian folk artists who tour the US and put out regular albums. However, it should also be noted that no real folk music analog has made its way into American popular culture or gained a significant amount of media attention, which prevents a comparison of Scandinavian—let alone Norwegian—folk music to the prominence that Irish or English folk music has enjoyed in this country.

Amy Boxrud's experiences in Hütenänny and Scandium reflect the range with which Scandinavian American musicians today, who are both steeped in the traditions of their ethnic heritage and forward-looking in their approach to traditional music, are able to balance these creative impulses successfully. Other examples include Beth Hoven-Rotto and Bill Musser of

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[104] There are numerous and very current examples of Scandinavian culture gaining traction in American media and catching the interest of popular culture such as cuisine (for example, the North—Nordic Food Festival held in New York, http://honestcooking.com/category/north-festival/, accessed November 2, 2013), the success of the Stieg Larsson crime novels and movie adaptations among other Scandinavian authors, environmental and energy issues (for example, using garbage as an energy source: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/30/world/europe/oslo-copes-with-shortage-of-garbage-it-turns-into-energy.html, accessed November 2, 2013), and Scandinavian welfare states and universal healthcare systems (http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/29/why-cant-america-be-sweden/, accessed November 2, 2013).

[105] For examples of some recent reviews by *Sing Out!* of newly released Norwegian folk music albums, see http://singout.org/tag/norwegian/. Accessed November 2, 2013.

Foot-Notes, who also worked to form the band Tulla. Tulla plays mostly Scandinavian tunes, but, because it does not carry the same repertory expectations as Foot-Notes, the members (who are essentially Foot-Notes plus musical friends and family) are able to exercise more freedom to expand their repertoire and sound than they would as Foot-Notes. Their style is still traditional and very similar to the sound of Foot-Notes, but like Scandium they are turning to contemporary Scandinavian musicians and sources for inspiration and material.

Figure 9. Tulla members Bill Musser, Jon Rotto, Beth Rotto and Ann Streufert, in the Nisswa-stämman procession, June 12, 2009. Prohibited from carrying his bass in the procession due to its size, Bill delighted the crowd by improvising and playing the "air bass" as he made his way to the stage with all the other musicians. Beth Rotto recalls an occasion when Bill experimented with resting the bass on a wheel to make it mobile: "that was even harder than carrying it because it wanted to run away and he couldn't hold it back while trying to play!" (Beth Rotto, email correspondence, November 25, 2013). Photograph by Anna Rue.

The transitional layer of Norwegian American folk music demonstrates how contemporary sounds, styles, and influences make their way into this expression of folk music and ethnic heritage in America. The fluctuation of tradition, the position it holds between conservation and novelty, the desire to hold onto something familiar and make it new again, these are forces that are sustained in newer generations of Norwegian-American musicians like Amy Boxrud. The context in which these musicians are forging their way through these mazes, however, is new. Fresh inspiration from a wellspring of imaginative Scandinavian folk music is creating new styles and sounds here in the US. Audience attitudes about authenticity and experimentation could be influencing the success of innovative approaches, and although the local bands that engage in Scandinavian folk music here in America are pretty much staying local, it is possible they could be benefitting from an increased awareness of Scandinavian culture from outside the Scandinavian-American community. So, for as much reverence as Norwegian American musicians and the community have for traditional music and tunes which are clearly marked as being from the immigrant era, there is also great interest in reaching beyond these forms to incorporate new, contemporary interests into the traditional. Norwegian American artists from this region are articulating these combinations in multiple ways and to varying degrees and, as we will continue to see in the next section, demonstrate the continued importance of Norwegian ethnic identity expressed through music.

Innovational Layer of Norwegian American Folk Music

If Foot-Notes and Hütenänny generally fall in or near the traditional end of the Norwegian American folk music spectrum and bands like Scandium and Tulla venture toward the transitional category, then one might easily recognize artist Kari Tauring as representing the truly innovative end. A folk artist working out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, Kari developed in 2003 the practice of staving, or "the act of using the staff for rhythm in song, ceremony and to attain a *seidr* state"—a state of heightened consciousness (Tauring 2010:5). She is part of a community reclaiming the Old Norse word *völva*, staff or wand carrier, also known as a prophetess or sibyl. Kari describes her work in the pagan community this way: "I am a practicing *völva*, staff carrying woman, a holy woman carrying *forn sed* (ancient wisdom) of the Indo-European tap root. Elected through the Midwest Thing in 2010, I am the representative theologian of *forn sed* and the collective wisdom of our religion … . As a re-constructed religion, the Heathen/Asatru[106] community looks to me to provide authentic materials and training in music and dance appropriate for this religious path and that serves the broad ethnic community (so I must be careful not to be Norwegian-centric!)" (personal communication 2012). Kari's personal journey and her research relating to runes and pre-Christian Nordic traditions have brought her into a leadership role within the Heathen community and she is the author of two books which explore the Nordic roots of her pagan beliefs. The first, *The Runes: A Human Journey* (2007), integrates reading and interpreting Nordic runes with Kari's personal story and experiences, while also applying them to contemporary life. In 2010 she wrote the *Völva Stav Manual*, which also integrates Norse myth and folklore into a modern and personalized context. She has produced

[106] Ásatrú (or Asatru as it is often written in an American English context) is generally understood as a form of specifically Nordic Neo-paganism, though differences in practices can be found among various communities or in different countries. As Michael Strmiska notes, "All Ásatrú groups are united in attempting to reconstruct and reinterpret for modern times the myths, beliefs, and folklore of pre-Christian Scandinavia, but they differ widely in the types of knowledge and assumptions which they bring to this enterprise" (Strmiska 2000:108).

four music albums, ranging from folk rock, Pagan Yuletide music, *völva* songs, and a new album called *Nykken and Bear,* financed through the fan-funding platform, Kickstarter, including folksongs and several original poems. She has pursued these endeavors and her work as a *völva* in order to uncover what she calls her Deep Nordic Root. She writes, "Through these decades of deep scholarship, practice, and performance of the songs, dances, stories and traditions of my folk soul I have healed the broken tradition of the *Völva*, the staff carrier, for myself. *Völva Stav* is the living expression of this deep root. This manual is the beginning record of this tradition" (Tauring 7).

The *völva stav* is a recreated tradition and method Kari uses "to connect rhythmically to [her] *öorlog* ([Old Norse] physical, spiritual, cultural and environmental inheritance that created and resides within each person)" (personal communication 2012). In 2003 she took part in a Winter Solstice workshop and at the suggestion of a colleague Kari began to beat out the rhythm of her songs with a wooden staff. Before long she added a short cross stick to tap against the staff and this became the rhythmic activity she coined as "staving." Kari likens the *völva kona* to the character in the popular Norwegian folksong "Kjerringa med Staven." In fact, as she began to explore her personal connection to runes and pre-Christian beliefs, Kari experienced a strong connection to this song and her more recent immigrant past. "It was revealed to me that I could progress no further in the ancient ways until I integrated Immigrant Era songs and their dances. I also knew that I was being called to reconstruct the staff carrying woman's tradition at that Jul in 2003. When I looked for confirmation of my path, my mother gave me her copy of Mike and Elsie [*sic*] Sandvik's *Norwegian Song Book* [*sic*]. It opened to 'Kjerringa med Staven,' the honored lady with a staff … and my name was in the first verse."

"Kjærringa med Staven," or "The Old Woman with the Staff," is perhaps known primarily as a popular children's song in Norway. It is commonly played to a *slått*, or Norwegian bygdedans tune, and one of its earliest recordings of the text is attributed to Ludvig Mathias Lindeman from the middle of the nineteenth century.[107] The lyrics refer to an old woman with a staff who lives high up in the village of Hakadal, north of Oslo, makes butter from sour cream and coffee for her husband. The song was popular among Norwegian immigrants in America and in 1916 Columbia Records recorded the well-known Norwegian American tenor Carsten Woll performing the song on a 78 rpm record opposite another popular folksong, "Paal paa Haugje" ("Paul on the Hill"). James P. Leary also provided me with a photocopy of a poster advertising a performance by Thorstein Skarning and his band, featuring other performing artists such as the Rindlisbachers of Rice Lake, Wisconsin, and a woman named Berith Rokstad who was billed as the "Kjærringa med Staven," depicted as a woman with a scarf on her head and a shawl over her shoulders, hunched over a cane. Unfortunately no other information is known about this performance or the woman who played the kjærring, but it does represent a relatively early depiction of this character in America.

Even into the 1970s the song was performed at Decorah's Folk Music Festival[108] and was recorded on Anne-Charlotte Harvey's album, *Memories of Snoose Boulevard: Songs of the Scandinavian Americans* (1972) as part of the Olle i Skratthult Project. Depictions of the *kjærring* from this folk song also have parallels in the Scandinavian American folk humor of the region. In Leary's *So Ole Says to Lena*, the popular figure Lena is sometimes depicted as an earthy young woman, but is perhaps equally portrayed as a "prim Lutheran" and seemingly

[107] This finding is attributed to the *bygdebok* (local history book) from Nittedal and Hakedal (http://www.nittedalsporten.no/bygda/staven.htm). Illustrations of "Kjærring med Staven" are also found in Elling Holst's picture book for children, *Norsk Billedbog for Børn: Ny Samling* (1890, Christiania: Cammermeyer).
[108] Performed at the Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival in Decorah in 1978 by Jim Nelson.

matronly older woman (2001:63). Another similar character who might be compared to the kjærring is "Sogne Kjæring" ("The Old Sogning Woman"), a monologue about an unhappily married woman written and portrayed by Eleonora Olson and recorded by Victor Records in 1924 (Olson and Olson [1925] 1979).

Kari's interpretation of this figure, however, is more complex than the story of an old woman who lives on a mountain or who has trouble adapting to life in the New World. Kari sees her as a *völva*. "In this Immigrant Era song the staff carrier lives outside of the community, creates porridge for birthing mothers, talks to a hare (a form of Frigg, goddess of child birth), and fights a mountain troll. In the end verse she finds an ally, a Karl (free man), to help her maintain the old ways. Norwegian children all over the world sing and dance to this little song, never guessing that it describes the *Völva*" (Tauring 2010:14). Reading into some of the different versions and verses of this song and offering up her own interpretation of its meanings, Kari is able to connect a folksong from her immigrant past to her Pagan identity and claim the *kjærring* as a *völva*.

Drawing on an immigrant past for inspiration is integral to Kari's work and identity, but something that also embodies a personal tension for her. Growing up in Minneapolis, Kari sang hymns in Norwegian and English at home with her family and in church, which "made me who I am. Norwegian and Lutheran at the core" (personal correspondence, November 20, 2012). As a child she "went native," traveling with her family south to Decorah, Iowa to attend Nordic Fest celebrations, posing with her sisters for tourists in the *bunads* her mother and grandmother made for them. "We identified Lutheranism and lefse as the expression of our Norwegian American folk soul" (2010:8). There were, however, aspects of Norwegian American culture from which Tauring felt somewhat disconnected. In discussing her trips to Nordic Fest she recalls, "when the

dancers performed, I was only a spectator. My mother's people were taught not to dance. Norwegian-ness was at my core and at the same time unreachable. It was the reflection of the surface of a well, too deep for me to reach …" (personal correspondence, November 20, 2012). She wrote, "Perhaps it was my brown hair and eyes in the middle of blonde haired and blue eyed sisters, perhaps it was my secret dislike for potato lefse, something I wouldn't admit until I was in my twenties. This is the mitochondrial strain of *öorlog*, the deepest part of women's heritage from their mothers mothers mothers…" (2010:8).

Kari's simultaneous identification with and distance from Norwegian American culture signaled an opportunity for her to explore ancient Nordic culture, which has provided a cultural link and a piece of her identity that she could only sense was there before. The connection she feels to a pre-Christian European heritage is not only expressed as an affinity or vague resonance; she explains the connection in biological terms. "A linguistics class … introduced me to the runes, the rune alphabet of my pre-Christian Scandinavian ancestors. This is what finally shook my Nordic *öorlog*, my DNA, genetic code, ancestor memory and changed my life path. No wonder I didn't like potato lefse, my ancestral connections pre-date Columbus!" (2010:10) Using a biological imperative to define the compelling connection she felt between her life path and her ancestry, Kari is able to explain the confusing and incongruent relationship she felt to her immigrant heritage in physical terms. Sabina Magliocco discusses the difficulties associated with blood-right in the neo-Pagan community in America, noting that, aside from the racist and essentialist implications, "Blood-right arguments are complicated by a general lack of understanding of cultural diffusion and polygenesis, and by essentialist notions of cultural purity rooted in nineteenth-century nationalism" (Magliocco 2004:234). Kari readily admits to her ethnic plurality, going so far as to not check the "white" box on surveys when asked her

racial/ethnic identity, preferring to check "other" and then list all her ethnic heritages instead. Her keen awareness of her own cultural plurality and the ethnic and cultural mixing in an American context proves she is under no illusions of personal cultural purity or that she is stuck in a nineteenth-century notion of nationalism. Rather, her biological explanations and connections to her Nordic heritage appear to come from a place of wanting to connect deeply and meaningfully with her cultural heritage and roots—a sentiment that echoes throughout the Norwegian American community.

Similar to the dichotomies that she has felt in her family and living her personal journey in the Upper Midwest, Kari has also recognizes oppositional forces in her family story back in Norway among the descendants of those family members who did not emigrate to America. As she explains here, these contrasts have come to characterize much of her work as an artist:

> In September 2011 I went to visit my relatives in Norway with my mother, and grandpa's people had all become Pentecostal over there in Norway. …And there was no folk dance left in that area and I think … a lot of it is that when the church tells you you can't express the movement of the spirit through your body then you squirt it out somewhere else. Becoming Pentecostal was the only way that people could get that piece, you know, movement of the spirit through the body. And then grandma's people had their Sogna springar, but no one knows about it because they refused to make it formulaic and fit in with the kappleiks and things so they were little, sort of, anarchist rebels over there saying, "We're not doing what you say to do!" … So it's kind of this strange extremity of attitudes that I think really … plays out in my work a lot. Especially in my new recording, I think that there's a lot of pushing and pulling between the pre-Christian and the Christian and between the water creatures and the humans and the—just all of these in-between states of trying to come together with these disparate pieces. (Interview June 21, 2013)

Kari's ability to reconcile these differences, to combine ideas that are considered to be as categorically distinct as oil and water, is what makes her work so compelling and unique.

Kari's latest album *Nykken and Bear*, is another example of how she brings pieces of her life, heritage and history together, representing the connection between family history, nature, and folk belief. The first half of the album title is inspired by the supernatural being the *nykken* or *nøkken*, well-known in Scandinavian countries and in Northern Europe. A shapeshifting water spirit (often taking the form of a beautiful horse), the nykken is generally known to attract mostly women and children to lakes and rivers with its lovely songs, sometimes with the intention of luring them into the water and drowning them. The nykken is known as an extraordinary fiddler or singer as well, which it uses to lure beautiful women into the water. Some tales of the nykken mirror those told of the devil granting great musicianship to a young man in exchange for his soul (Sivertsen 2000:291–6).

As Sabina Magliocco writes of the Neo-Pagan tradition, "use of vernacular magic ranges from attempted reenactments to the borrowing of narrative motifs, songs, rhymes, and elements from calendar customs and festivals. Yet far from being copies of the originals, Neo-Pagan forms are of necessity novel and hybridized" (Magliocco 2004:7). Kari lives out this tradition in her religious life, but one also sees the extension of this novelty and hybridity in her creative work through the connections she makes between her family tree, personal experiences, and fascination with certain aspects of nature and Norwegian folk belief and supernatural beings such as the nykken. Drawing on those stories and experiences which have caught her imagination and inspired her, she creates something that is at once unified and contradictory. Here Kari explains the origins of her ideas behind the album *Nykken and Bear*:

> So my grandma's last name—her maiden name was Nykreim. So she had that in her name and I always was very fascinated with that idea that we … had that in our name. When I was a girl I used to think about that quite a lot and wonder, you know, if there were any nykken people in our— … was there mysterious blood amongst us, you know? And then as I would read about the nykken and how … they would compel these kveding women into their—you know, lure them and how the women who were rune poets would get sucked in by the nykken and that kind of thing. So that was kind of this interesting tension that I found in the material that I also found in my life. … This sort of, how far do you go? How far into your connection and your integration with nature can you go before you are sucked in and lost to it? So that was a piece of that. And then the bear had always been symbolic for me. When I was young I had a series of dreams about having a bear chasing me and those kinds of things and I've had lots of bizarre encounters with bear[s] in the wilderness and when I was in my twenties I wrote a song called "Running From the Bear" where the bear really represents this deep knowledge piece and this willingness to go deep into hibernation for months at a time to gain that kind of knowledge and that I was feeling compelled to do that and at the same time like, "No way am I going there!" You know, seriously scared of that whole concept. And now I'm, you know, something happens in your 40s, I think, where you're just like, "Yeah, I could go there and do that." My kids are teenagers, if I get lost to the nykken I guess it's no big deal. They know how to make their own sandwiches. [Laughs] Yeah, so … and it also became—when I was in Norway filming *Alt for Norge* it was the first time I saw my home fjord and it was so powerful. It was so powerful and that energy that the bear connects to is *in* those mountains, that deep, ancient, hibernating energy just ready to stir, just ready to wake up, you know? And so … I was trying to figure out what to record next … and people have been like, "We need to buy a new CD from you. It's time." … So I thought well, this would be a good focus for that project and it's also a very ancestor-honoring project. (Interview June 21, 2013).

Early fascination with aspects of her family names as well as dreams she had as a young girl set the stage for picking up on stories, reading about supernatural beings in the Norwegian tradition, and eventually recognizing pieces of these ideas and images in nature. When she felt she had reached a point in her life when she was capable of revealing publicly how deeply she had been delving, she made the decision to create this conceptual album, combining folk songs, stories, and personal poetry to explore the symbolic meaning of the nykken and the bear.

Kari has been able to weave these seemingly disparate strains of her immigrant and Pagan heritage together in a series of workshops called Nordic Roots Dance along with Norwegian American folkdance instructor, Carol Sersland. In 2011, with funding from the Minnesota State Heritage Funds, Tauring and Sersland put together a series of interactive events and workshops geared toward audiences of all ages. These workshops explored the ancient roots of immigrant era songs and dances and how rune shapes manifest in the body postures and patterns of the dance.

The programming Kari offers to the community herself works to construct connections between disciplines and culture just as she unites distinct stories in her personal memorates and unites the pre-Christian and the immigrant eras in her workshops with Carol.[109] In a program she participated in after a week-long language and culture camp in Spring Grove, Minnesota, Kari introduced herself and her classes at the camp to the audience (consisting mostly of parents and grandparents) in this way:

> Well, *tusen takk skal du ha. Jeg heter Kari. Jer er völva kona*. [a thousand thanks. My name is Kari. I am a *völva kona*.] I am a staff carrying woman from the ancient of days and when I was invited to come I was very excited because I thought, ah, I love to talk about this stuff with kids. We started in the Bronze *alderen*—the Bronze Age. Well, first, actually, we went back all the way to the Ice Age. I say, "You know, what was the North Land during the Ice Age?" Well, there wasn't Norway and Sweden and Iceland. There wasn't England, there was a very small amount of Denmark because the ice covered it all. And we talked about how different migrations came through. And you know we couldn't have had *brunost, geitost*, the goat cheese, in Norway before the Bronze Age because in the Bronze Age they brought the sheep and goats up from northern Iran. So this idea that we all started as Norwegians and that's what we are forever isn't quite

[109] Although Kari Tauring continues to conduct one or two workshops with Carol Sersland each year she also offers a variety of different workshops in Minneapolis and throughout the region. See http://karitauring.com/ for more information regarding her various workshop offerings and events.

> right. I know my people make a lot of *brunost*, a lot of goat cheese, in [the] Sognefjord area and they've been doing that now for four thousand years. Do you think that that means that that's an indigenous tradition? Is that long enough? I don't know.

> The skirt that I'm wearing here is from the Bronze Age, well, it's a replica from the Bronze Age … . We'll see a few of the girls later in their *bunader* and so we'll talk more about costumes in a little bit. But after the Bronze Age then we quickly start to get into the Viking Era in the Iron Age and Viking Era and one of the things that I think was a lot of fun to do was to talk about the *völva kona*. What was is this staff carrying woman? These staff carriers, their grave sites for staff carriers went all the way back to the Bronze Age and they were these wandering women who were teachers and ceremonialists and prophets and the *Völuspá* is the first of all of the Eddas in the eddic poetry and it means "The Prophesy of the Staff Carrying Woman." So I'm going to sing some of those verses for you today.

Kari then sang a few verses of the Völuspá for the audience followed by an introduction to her original composition "Komme Alle," which she and the children in the program sang together while spelling out runic letters with their bodies. Kari's presentations, geared towards particular audiences, integrate these elements of history, archeology, rune descriptions, culture and traditions and more, serving to ignite audiences' imaginations and draw strong connections between ancient and modern identities and practices.

Historian Dag Blanck discusses the role that history plays in the construction of an ethnic Swedish American identity in his book about the Augustana Synod. "The historical authenticity of idealized versions of the ethnic past is not important; it is instead the way these elements of the past are used to construct the ethnic identity, or ethnic ideology as they also call it, that deserves attention" (Blanck 2006:14). In Kari's presentations to community groups and school children she points out the ways in which circumstances of history have come to hold such great symbolic value within the Norwegian and Norwegian American community. She suggests that

these things (brunost from goat milk, wool from sheep) have been chosen deliberately, as Blanck argues, because they fit in with a particular vision of Norwegianness. As an alternative vision of Scandinavian ethnic heritage, one that incorporates women as significant members of society, she draws her audience's attention to the often overlooked account of the *völva kona*, reminding them of the selective nature and ideological power of history.

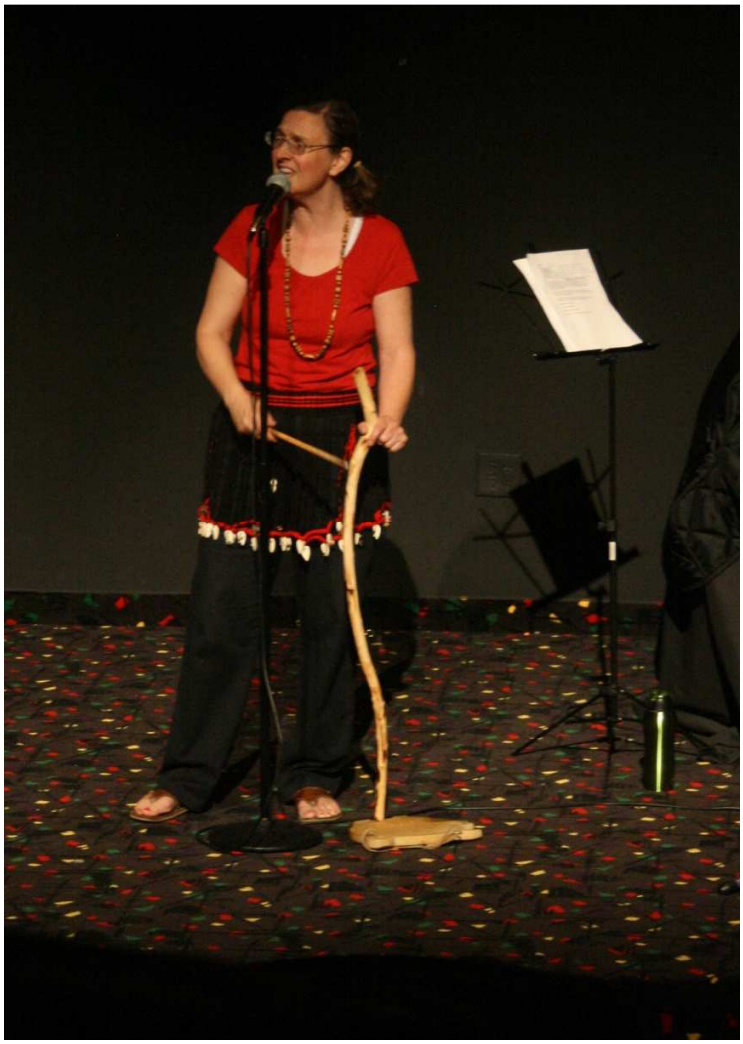

Figure 10. Kari Tauring performing at the final program of the Norwegian Ridge Language Camp in Spring Grove, Minnesota, June 21, 2013. Photograph by Anna Rue.

Being mindful not to forego the culture one was raised in but work to enhance it by recovering a heritage that one senses has been lost is a powerful message and one which resonates with many Norwegian Americans. When LeRoy Larson completed his dissertation on Scandinavian American folk dance music in Minnesota in 1975 he wrote, "the period of change and acculturation during the second and third decades of the 20th century distracted the Norwegian-Americans from their traditional folk arts and traditional lifestyles, focusing much of their attention and leisure time to activities and entertainment outside of the home and community. … Now, in the 1970s, the situation has reached a point where only a few musicians in the state are capable of remembering and performing Norwegian-American folk dance music. Unfortunately, they have transmitted this repertory to very few of the younger generation" (1975:52–3). If musicians in the Norwegian American folk music community were already worried about the weakening of these musical traditions nearly 40 years ago when an aged generation of musicians was still around to remember dance tunes of their youth, then where does the community stand now?

There are a number of Norwegian American musicians, LeRoy Larson among them, who can trace their repertoires back to the era of house parties and barn dances and we point to them as the bearers of Norwegian American folk music. Other musicians, like Amy Boxrud, are influenced by their interest in contemporary folk music and are also looking to folk music bands in Scandinavia as sources for music and inspiration. "I do [feel there's a growth in popularity of Nordic folk music]. … I just feel like there's such a renaissance or a resurgence and there's so much talent and it's so appealing!" (Interview August 6, 2007) Then there are folks like Kari Tauring who might not be considered a representative of this tradition in some circles because of the religious component to her work. The impetus for creating her music and art comes from the

same place as many younger musicians in this area, however, and it signals one approach that Norwegian Americans might take to honor their musical heritage. The appeal of the music, the desire to connect with one's ethnic and cultural heritage, the need to be authentic while incorporating creative impulses are all present in Amy and Kari's approaches to Nordic American music.

Kari certainly succeeds in merging new phenomena with persistent traditions of the Norwegian American community, and her particular innovation is interesting in that she makes the old (or rather, the ancient) new again. Her approach to pre-Christian beliefs and practices is re-constructive and a product of a modern-day context, drawing on a shared and ancient Nordic past to create her "version of the folklore legacy."

Besides knitting a pre-Christian past with an immigrant heritage, Tauring's appeal in the Norwegian American community might also be due in part to her participation in *Alt for Norge*, which has resulted in a celebrity-like status among Norwegian Americans familiar with the show. Asked if she has experienced any resistance or skepticism in the ethnic community towards her work she responds, "Not really. … Only once did I hear my work questioned in authenticity and that was in regards to a grant proposal … . A panel member … thought it sounded 'New Agey.' … This work is my personal journey but the immigrant identity crisis belongs to so many people. There is a natural affinity for what I do" (personal communication).

Kari's thoughts on the nuanced relationship between her work and tradition are clear. She writes, "I am a folk musician expressing the traditions of my Nordic heritage, not a tradition bearer per se, learning my craft from a master of the tradition. Rather I am expressing my

cultural traditions with insider authenticity and the depth of reconstructive scholarship. … It is in the moment of personal connection that the performance gains truth and the performer authenticity thus raising it to the level of universal human experience. … My performances are authentic to me as a Norwegian American artist and scholar, but I am not a tradition bearer" (personal communication 2013). Tauring readily acknowledges that she is forging new ground rather than providing conventional performances of longstanding traditions in the ethnic community. Because the new ground is personally authentic, drawn from a shared ethnic past, and linked to an immigrant heritage, however, her innovational approach has been well-received in a community that she has otherwise found to be cliquish and set in its ways.

In his introduction to *Transforming Tradition*, Neil Rosenberg chronicles the shifts in the definition of authenticity as applied to American folk music. From text to aural presentation to context and performance, our ideas of what an authentic representation of folk music should be based on have evolved to include more complex and diverse performances. In the Norwegian American community a definition of Norwegian American folk music is experiencing a similar shift in order to include the diversification of performances. Though the tradition of Norwegian American folk music still includes the tradition bearers Kari Tauring refers to, it is also broad and strong enough to include reconstructed traditions like Kari's. This is important not only because artists like her are continually influenced by their ethnic heritage, but because their interest in creating personally authentic performances that honor this heritage is motivated by their desire to perpetuate it. In Elaine Lawless's 2009 Presidential Address to the American Folklore Society, she discussed the importance of the mental maps we all make of the world and how folklore helps us navigate our lives:

> I know folklore resides in our cultural, communal, and familial maps. I know it shares space with music; with objects; with stones, water, and the earth. More than that, I know folklore is constitutive of those maps—by this I mean folklore constitutes the bones, the sinews, the joints, the muscles of our maps. Folklore holds the stories of the often hidden or forgotten places; folklore reminds us how love can survive even in the midst of harsh realities … . Folklore keeps us sane, when in reality we really ought to be, if not mildly dysfunctional, totally adrift in a confusing world that is changing fast and becoming flat. Folklore is our anchor. It pulls us back to forms and patterns that help organize our thinking and our actions through practice, performance, and memory. (Lawless 2011:144)

Kari Tauring's work does just this. It restores severed ties; it creates unity where we might not otherwise see it, and, when viewed as a whole, it reveals the transmission of tradition in "hidden or forgotten places" as she interprets these traditions in a novel and personal way.

Through a spectrum of musical variation, enhanced by the flexible categories of folklore change defined by Klymasz, the contemporary diversity of expressions of Norwegian American folk music can be seen in relation to one another and to preceding forms this music. Furthermore, variation exists not only between individual artists and bands, but within each of them as well as we have seen in the work of Foot-Notes and individual artists like Amy Boxrud. Though it may seem as though some articulations of music, such as Kari Tauring's, belong outside the description of Norwegian American folk music, Norwegian American ethnic identity contributes to these many musical forms in powerful and fundamental ways.

Chapter 5: The Present and Future of Norwegian American Folk Music

Many of the musicians I have had the pleasure of speaking to have not expressed great hope in the continuation of traditional Norwegian American folk music. They see themselves as a small cast of musicians who are preserving their own individual collections and repertoires of music here and there, sharing tunes and learning from others when they get together, but that the pool of young, interested, and invested musicians looking to preserve the old-time music of the Upper Midwest does not seem to be emerging to the degree they would like. This attitude is common among those who are intimately familiar with the music and its history. In a passage of Bruce Bollerud's book of Scandinavian tunes and house party music, *Accordion Uff Da! Let's Dance!*, Dix Bruce, who also produced the accompanying CD, interviews Bruce about the future of Scandinavian house party music.

> DB: What do you think the future is for these kinds of tunes?
>
> BB: Well, it's kind of bleak, I'm afraid. The old fiddlers that play these tunes are dying off. Some of the tunes are being picked up, but not very many, and most of them haven't been written down, that I know of. There's a fairly good body of these that are recorded. … So, there are some things that are taped and they won't be lost totally in that regard. The only thing is, unless these pieces get out where the public can hear them, and unless some younger musician[s] take them up, they become museum pieces. That's better than nothing, because someone can always go back and pull them out, but I don't know that anyone will.

> …
>
> DB: Most of this music is dance oriented. Probably what we need to do is keep people dancing and they'll continue to want this music.
>
> BB: Of course, people don't dance the way they used to. Even bluegrass is now a concert type of music. I suspect that they may have danced it earlier on because I don't think the tempos were quite as fast in the beginning …
>
> DB: What's the best thing that could happen to this music?
>
> BB: I'd like to see younger musicians come in, take up this music and play it. I think of Bluegrass, for example, which has been revived and carried forward by younger musicians. Musicians of national stature, like Rick Skaggs, have come in and given it a great big boost. I don't know that that would happen here, but it would be nice. At least it would be nice if local younger musicians would play some of it before it's gone like a puff of smoke. (Bollerud 2009:15)

The potential of losing these traditions as we have come to recognize them is certainly there. They have indeed dwindled since the house party era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but there are a number of bright spots on the horizon; small points of optimism that should assure us that we have not completely lost the supply of or the demand for this music, that there is still a place for it in our lives and it still serves an important function in our communities.

The Highlandville Dance

On a recent occasion, while I was in Decorah for a short visit, I had the rare opportunity to bring my two-and-a-half year old daughter to a Highlandville dance featuring Foot-Notes. Typical of late August evenings in Iowa, it was warm and muggy. My parents had company over for dinner that evening and I was hesitant to leave the air conditioned dining room and pleasant conversation following the meal, but after some hemming and hawing I scooped up my daughter and drove out to the old two-room schoolhouse. There I found a crowd of about twenty young,

energetic dancers twirling across the dance floor or lining the back wall engaged in smiling conversations. Aside from myself and my daughter, only about a half-dozen middle aged dancers were there, or one might have mistaken it for a high school dance. It is not often that I am able to attend Highlandville dances these days and even less often do I go when they don't coincide with a holiday or Nordic Fest, when one is guaranteed of finding a small reunion of Decorah expatriates to catch up with. On a night like this, though, my dance card is filled with waltzes and schottisches with my toddler. After plopping down on the floor to peel off her shoes and socks she insisted on dancing herself rather than in my arms, and I tried my best to steer her away from the circling couples flowing across the floor. The dances here run from about 8 to 11pm; we arrived early, at 7:30, and left close to 8:30 when Foot-Notes had taken a short break and made initial movements to begin another set. By then several more young people had arrived and a handful more adults, filling up the two large rooms a little more than when we arrived.

Initially I was surprised by how few dancers there were at the schoolhouse that night as my experience has always been that the dances range from close to overcrowded. The night was rather uncomfortable, though, perhaps preventing some older dancers from venturing out and most Luther College students had not yet flocked back to campus, so it was not entirely surprising that the numbers were lower than usual. It gave me an opportunity to observe first-hand how many high school and college students were there, while on another night they might have been more balanced by an older audience. Still, many of them were very skilled dancers, clad in summery skirts and dresses, t-shirts, shorts and wearing either sandals or no shoes at all, taking a page from my daughter's book and kicking them off to the edges of the room, under the folding chairs lining the walls. These young people were comfortable there, communicating a

familiarity with the event and an affinity for dancing, which they displayed with grace and energy.[110]

What is it about a multi-generational community dance, featuring old-time music set in a two-room schoolhouse, built just over a century ago, that attracts these young people, holds their attention, and has them coming back for more? What makes this a form of compelling entertainment in an age of smart phones, on-demand movies, the Internet, extreme sports and more? The answer might be because these dances are, in some ways, radically different from the forms of entertainment that are constantly vying for young people's attention, and it provides a very real connection to the community that is not easily found in other popular entertainment.[111] Bill Musser, who works as a librarian at Seed Savers Exchange (a not-for-profit heirloom seed repository in Northeast Iowa), has this to say about the connection between the rising interest in local culture and Foot-Notes dances:

> I do think that the resurgence in focus on local economies and culture has made an impact on the "Foot-Notes phenomenon." Many of my Seed Savers Exchange colleagues who are far younger and new to the whole dance scene have embraced the Highlandville dances wholeheartedly, partly for the fact that they are such a unique, idiomatic and idiosyncratic piece of Decorah. Most have never witnessed anything like it anywhere else, much less participated in it. For the same reasons the younger people like to come to the dances, young adults do, too. It is just pure, unadulterated (and I do not use that word lightly) FUN. (Email correspondence, October 22, 2013)

[110] To be clear, I do not mean this as a backhanded compliment. I have observed in the past, however, that on Highlandville dance nights when there are generous numbers of young students, the dancing can be rowdy and athletic, characterized by dancers covering a great deal of ground with each step and using exaggerated vertical movements compared to the older, more seasoned dancers in the crowd.

[111] That said, at a recent panel on cultural sustainability at the 2013 meeting for the American Folklore Society, I saw scholar Christopher Goertzen present a paper about fiddle contests in Texas. At the end of his talk a member of the audience asked about whether the goals of cultural sustainability and environmental or resource sustainability were really in alignment. Goertzen's answer seemed to suggest not (or at least not necessarily). This is a timely topic that deserves deeper investigation than these brief anecdotal comments and one which I hope researchers will pick up in the future.

In a small community like Decorah's, there seems to be a great deal of overlap of interests among folks who gravitate to more community and environmentally sustainable organizations and events.

Bill's sentiments are echoed in a local list-serve email entitled "Why go to Highlandville this Saturday" sent out by Liz Rog, married to Beth Rotto's brother-in-law, she writes the following:

> As the cobbler's children go barefoot, as the professional chef eats from a box at home, there are Decorah area people of all ages who haven't been to a Foot-Notes dance at Highlandville. They're missing something really beautiful and accessible, probably because it's just so close and easy.
> There's a dance this Saturday.
> In my opinion—and I know hundreds of people who share it—attending one of these dances is one of the most simple and significant ways … one can know oneself to our specific local culture. These dances tie the present with the past in a way that you just can't touch through the best book or film about the area.
> It doesn't matter if you "can't dance." Then don't. Or do. No one cares if you dance. Just the music and setting and people make it worth the—what?—15 minute drive.
> Highlandville Dances are simply some of the best local fun to be found. (Email, August 22, 2013)

Here Rog articulates the importance of connecting to one another, plugging into the community, and becoming familiar with the history and culture of one's home. It is an appeal that has echoed through the region in the past. This could easily have been an advertisement for house parties at the time when regional barn dances and the radio began to draw young people away from the parlors of their neighborhood homes. This is not to say that the plea is irrelevant or an overreaction, targeting young people who may need encouragement to attend events like these.

In another email she wrote in 2005 to a group of Luther College students Liz Rog argued for taking advantage of this unique event while it remains available to the community:

> Well, you guys are juniors now … and it's high time you experienced one of the greatest things Decorah has to offer; something especially unique to this place;

> something that, when you tell people you went to school in Decorah, they will indubitably ask you about; something that you will tell your grandchildren about: The Highlandville Dance.
> I could write you a book about this dance—its roots, history and evolution, and why it is important. I could write 3 of the chapters just about [my daughter] and her history there, beginning when she was in utero and then about 175 times since. But I'll save the story of the violin, the death, [the] saw, the old-timers, and the schoolhouse for some other day when I'm in my better element (than typing). Meanwhile, get thyselves over to the dance … . The dance is usually held on a Saturday night, but due to changes in the lives of two of the band members …, they have had a heck of a time finding a date for a dance this fall. Usually they play a dance each month, and here we haven't had one since July or so. What I'm trying to convey is, things might be changing for the band. You might be part of the end of the era. You might just squeak in as part of the lucky 15-year Luther population that got to have Highlandville Dances as part of their cultural lexicon. I promise you, if you miss it there WILL be a day in your life when you finally realize that you missed something invaluable. You can't let that happen! (Email correspondence, November 27, 2013)

Though Foot-Notes' Highlandville dances continue regularly in the warm months, eight years after Liz sent this email, her message speaks to the familiar fear that our treasured cultural events are in danger of disappearing at any point. In spite of the longevity of the fear over losing local music traditions, however, the desire to hear the music live and to dance to it in a communal setting still seems to exist.[112] And not just among older generations who might look on this music with nostalgia. Young people also want to dance.

In some ways, Foot-Notes have begun to appeal to younger generations even more strongly than to some older, more experienced dancers. The opportunity to dance together in couples and small groups, it seems, provides young folks with a social outlet they might not have access to otherwise. Beth Rotto has said, "I think young people are thrilled with the chance to dance and to touch, like be in the ballroom position and to move together" (interview August 23,

[112] This continued, and indeed rising, popularity of these dances with teens and young adults could also be due in part to the promotional efforts of Liz and other Highlandville supporters.

2013). Bill Musser echoes this sentiment when reflecting on the appeal of Foot-Notes dances to a younger crowd:

> It has been interesting to see Foot-Notes gaining in popularity among a younger crowd. The whole phenomenon of social dance "ballroom-style" is so foreign to modern American popular culture and especially teenage pop culture today. I think the enthusiasm of younger people for this kind of dancing grows out of a genuine deep desire to have fun in a wholesome way without having to be hokey OR acting overtly sexual. Those extremes are both tension-creators for youth. I see Foot-Notes' older audience fading out of the picture more, partly due to our trying to save money by avoiding newspaper ads and rather using social media to announce dances … . But then, many of the people who I grew up with and who I danced with as a high school kid at Highlandville are now deceased. I miss the intergenerational element a lot in our dances now. When I was dancing at Highlandville in the late '70s, I chose a lot of elderly women for partners, women from the Highland community that I knew. And older men would invite younger women to dance with them—not in a lascivious way but as a gentlemanly thing. We younger folks learned to lead and follow with the "pros" in those days—long-time ballroom dancers who exhibited the utmost grace and vitality. (Email correspondence, October 22, 2013)

We see here that the appeal to younger folks and the use of social media to publicize dances has been so successful that the intergenerational aspect of Foot-Notes dances could be skewing away from the older generations of dancers, which in turn impacts the nature of the dances themselves out at the Highlandville schoolhouse.

A product of the changing demographic of Foot-Notes dances at Highlandville can be seen in the transformation of some of the dances through the element of sheer athleticism characteristic of some younger dancers.[113] One clear example of how the dances themselves have changed, at times to favor younger crowds, is the Butterfly dance.[114] The Butterfly is generally

[113] Personally, I am able to recall dancing a polka with an old classmate at a Highlandville dance, many years ago now, which was so frenetic in nature that I was completely winded after one dance. Compared to the more moderate dancers who took shorter steps and did not jump so high in the air as we did, we were positively flying across the floor. Although I would say that this experience was not typical of the partners I've danced with, I have noted that some of the younger men, especially, tend to take much larger steps and extend themselves vertically much more than the older generations of dancers.

[114] Here I am indebted to Bill Musser's thoughts on the evolution of the Butterfly as it is danced at Foot-Notes performances. Having grown up in Spring Grove, Minnesota and attended Bill Sherburne's Highlandville dances as a young man, Bill has a unique perspective on how the dances have evolved over the years.

danced in 2/4 time to two distinct tempos, beginning with a slower section (typically lasting eight measures) to which dancers, in groups of three, lift or kick out alternating feet as they walk hand-in-hand to the music. The next section is danced at a faster tempo and involves the middle dancer skipping to one partner, swinging around once with interlocking arms before skipping across to the other partner and interlocking arms for another swing. As it used to be danced, the slower measures called for a light lifting of the foot as partners strolled along to the music. Bill Musser recalls this dance being played by Bill Sherburne and his band at earlier Highlandville dances, combining, as he recalls, "'My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean' or some other very American tune" for the slower section (email correspondence, October 23, 2013) with a different (also very likely popular American) tune for the fast sections. In recent years with Foot-Notes, Beth Rotto has played a Norwegian schottische for this dance (playing the first part slow and the second part fast) and the light lifting of the foot has evolved into an exaggerated kick followed by a loud stomp. The faster measures begin moderately enough, but as the dance progresses Foot-Notes will occasionally speed these sections up to tire out the middle dancers, at times tricking them by playing two sets of fast segments in a row rather than alternating with the slower tempo.[115] In addition, dancers might challenge themselves during the slower measures by dropping their bodies into a full squat on the down beat (marked by the stomp) and hop back up in time for next alternating leg kick. The result is a sound and aesthetic that more closely resembles an eastern European dance than a Scandinavian American one, but it is also extremely popular among

This dance is referred to as the Butterfly Dance by the Foot-Notes and certainly it is known by that name in some Canadian and American communities. Several other dances with exhibit similar forms to the Butterfly, for example, the Flying Dutchman Polka or Studenten Polka, though these are obviously danced as polkas with a 3/4 rhythm.

[115] Foot-Notes might trick dancers by playing two slower sections back-to-back as well.

younger dancers perhaps for its novelty (in terms of the loud, percussive stomping), the wild swinging, and the physical endurance required to make it to the end of the tune.[116]

Although the age demographics at Foot-Notes Highlandville dances in recent years reflect a younger crowd compared to dances held in Bill Sherburne's days,[117] and the dances might be executed or even materially altered by the youthful energy of some of the more ardent and regular dancers, the salient features of an old-time music dance are still present. Indeed, one of the wonderful things that has always characterized Highlandville dances, regardless of whether Foot-Notes or Bill Sherburne's band was playing, is how multi-purposed these events have been. In a booklet he wrote to accompany the 1989 LP, *Norwegian-American Music from Minnesota: Old-Time and Traditional Favorites*, Philip Nusbaum described the scene at a Highlandville dance in the 1980s:

> Old-time music need not be the only focus of an event, even at a dance. At the one held monthly during warm weather in Highlandville, Iowa, for example, for which the Bill Sherburne Band of Spring Grove plays, dancing is only one social activity. Some people listen intently but do not dance. Others use the music and social activity as a backdrop for conversation. Some may interact with band members directly by requesting a number or even sitting in to play with them. People sit or stand along the sides in the old schoolhouse where the dance takes place. Some bring their children, who might play with other children. There is a refrigerator in the kitchen for cold drinks. On the porch, in the area of cut grass immediately in front of the schoolhouse door, and around their cars, groups of people gather and talk. All of these spots are separate environments where different activities take place. Participants move freely from one area to another, encountering different people at each location. (Nusbaum 1989)

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[116] Bill Musser also notes that this dance is often requested by young people at Foot-Notes dances (email correspondence, October 23, 2013).

[117] Beth Rotto relayed her thoughts on the changing demographics of Highlandville dances in a recent correspondence: In "Bill Sherburne's day' the generational mix at Highlandville dances was not always so diverse, and usually the opposite of what it is now. I remember going to dances with Jon when we were in our 20s and we were sometimes among the only younger dancers there. As [it is] now, each dance is totally different, sometimes there's [*sic*] more students, but sometimes, in the summer for example, it can be more families, at least until the last set when it ends up being mostly students and 20-somethings" (Beth Rotto, email correspondence, November 25, 2013).

Functionally, not much has changed at these dances in the last twenty-five years or more (other than the substitution of the Foot-Notes for the Bill Sherburne Band) and this description still rings true today.

The purposes of a community dance like this are manifold and, as Nusbaum goes on to argue, are most likely the result of a music event that incorporates dancing (even though some dance-goers never dance at all). "If, on some evening, dancing were not a central feature, the event would probably not be considered successful. However, it is not only the music and dancing, but the fact that people may participate in many activities that makes the Highlandville dance a success" (Nusbaum 1989). This multifaceted element to a community event is exactly what Liz Rog was publicizing in her email to the Decorah-based listserv: "It doesn't matter if you 'can't dance.' Then don't. Or do. No one cares if you dance. Just the music and setting and people make it worth the—what?—15 minute drive" (email, August 22, 2013). This perspective is echoed by Anna Spencer-Berg, a current high school student and regular at Foot-Notes dances. "I'm out there dancing for at least half of the songs but sometimes I go on walks with friends, go outside to cool down, or just sit and chat with all my wallflowers friends. My one rule is I can't miss dancing to the Springtime two-step and the Highlandville Waltz!" (Email correspondence, October 23, 2013) In settings like the Highlandville dance where full participation in the community—in whatever ways one feels comfortable—is accommodated and encouraged, bonds are strengthened and identities affirmed.[118]

[118] Though I have not encountered any evidence that Foot-Notes dances have inspired the formation of other local bands or musicians to take up the old-time music traditions of the area, there is some support for the likelihood of these dances engendering a love of Scandinavian, Scandinavian-American, and old-time music in the young people who attend the dances. Again, Anna Spencer-Berg writes, "I have most of Foot-Notes music on my i-pod and I listen to them often. I have lots of Nordic choir music and old Scandinavian folk songs and stories that I listen to while I study. I'm really always in the mood to listen to Foot-Notes!" (Email correspondence, October 23, 2013)

It is important to add that the community bonds fostered by a Foot-Notes dance extend beyond ethnic boundaries as well, and although there are elements of pride in the Scandinavian-derived music repertoires and a largely shared heritage, Highlandville dances have always transcended ethnic distinctions. In a piece of prose written after my own wedding, family friend and former long-time resident of Decorah, Conrad Røyksund, expressed how the diverse community united in dance and conversation during the reception and in gathering together throughout the wedding weekend.

> The Footnotes played live music—
> none of that ear-splitting drive-the-mice-out music—
> but fiddling and foot-tapping music direct from
> the Highlandville School, Mabel Symphony,
> schottische and polka school of folk music.
>
> A generation of young people trained at the Highlandville School dances
> tied the generations together doing better than their parents ever had,
> bringing folk-choreography to life, while the fiddle played real music,
> and we talked real talk with real friends with real minds, promising
> to meet again because there is joy in friends with conversation.
> In the morning,
> on the side of a hill, next to a prairie, there was a buffet reminiscent
> of what half the attendees counted as their Scandinavian heritage,
> and we talked some more, not because we had to, but wanted to.
>
> Charlie and his friends and family from Pittsburgh and Boston
> think they have seen the American Midwest, and they have,
> but only one of the patches on the quilt that we are, and have been.
> Some of the Scandinavians were Thai, or Vietnamese.
> Some had been adopted by the college, or by the town;
> by the hills and the river, or by their own marriages on such a day.
> ("Crazy Quilt" by Conrad Røyksund)

I include this, not to glorify my own wedding, but to demonstrate the clear consciousness that Upper Midwesterners have of both their own ethnic heritages, but also of the continued diversity of rural communities. Foot-Notes and Highlandville dances show that, in spite of how old-fashioned they may seem in a contemporary context, coming together and bonding at an old-time

dance is a way of celebrating both an ethnic heritage and the diversity of a community united by shared experience and love of place.

Figure 11. The Foot-Notes play a group dance at the author's wedding. Author's collection.

In spite of the continuities that Highlandville dances still embody, it is important to keep in mind the changing historical context whenever traditions are performed. Any given tradition represents another (and new) interpretation of the past and encompasses new meanings because of its changed context, so in order to understand the continued importance of a tradition attention should be paid to the point in time in which the tradition takes place. As Felicia Fae McMahon writes in her study of Sudanese boy refugees in America, "because historical periods can never be replicated, even if outward expression appears unchanged, the meanings of traditions have changed" (McMahon 200:354). Although the functions of old-time dances out at the Highlandville schoolhouse might be remarkably similar today as they were in the 1960s, we do look at them differently, discussing them as bordering on idiosyncratic or as vestiges of the past.

One pertinent question that can be connected to the survival of ethnic and regional music is whether today's context of a globalized market, instantly available information, preoccupation

with immediate gratification and youth culture, and constant, seemingly limitless technological advancements is creating any sort of backlash, or renewed interest in local economies and cultures. Is this music experiencing renewed interest as a result of the rising popularity of rural culture, locally-sourced food and cuisine, support of local businesses, and so on? The answer seems to be more complicated than simply riding on the coattails of current interest in local economies and culture. Although the audiences at Foot-Notes Highlandville dances are well-attended and appeal to all ages within the community, when it comes to whether this interest is inspiring others to pick up the mantle to preserve and practice this music, Beth Rotto's experience with the Foot-Notes gives her some pause. "I think some [interest in local culture] is easier to hang onto than others. Music is a little trickier because people don't live in ethnic communities necessarily and so your ethnic music doesn't—you don't have a shared repertoire, really, so you find your community when you come to Nisswa or you come together unless you have somebody who's willing to take it on and become a leader and share it" (interview August 23, 2013). Although Beth did not grow up with old-time music herself, her interest in it developed in her college years after hearing old-time on the Wisconsin Public Radio program, *Simply Folk*. The irony here is that although all types of music are arguably more readily available online and through digital sources, there may be even less attention paid to it due to the sheer competition for any given audience's attention. Old-time music is not a prominent sound on the radio or television, and although this music clearly sustains a fan base and is still being produced here and there it is not necessarily inspiring the same master-apprentice relationships that Bill Sherburne and Beth Rotto had, resulting in a rather seamless continuation of the local old-time music tradition.[119]

[119] Of course there are exceptions to this, one being Julane Beetham Lund who, though her interests are broader and not limited to one community's repertory traditions, has worked with many renowned musicians in this area to

Beth is right when she explains how most folks need to seek Scandinavian American old-time music out on their own, attending specialized folk music festivals, or perhaps a community might be lucky enough to be able to take advantage of a dedicated and popular local or regional band carrying on these traditions like the Foot-Notes or Hütenanny. Still, there are wonderful events and people within this devoted community who are carrying on with the work and music they love, sometimes in new and exciting ways, in an effort to connect meaningfully with others, spread their knowledge, and learn from each other. For the lucky folks in and around the Decorah area, Highlandville dances provide one such nexus of inspiration and community building. Truly avid musicians, music lovers, and dancers, however, set their sights on festivals and music workshops like the Nisswa-stämman, where they can enjoy an expansive and diverse exchange of Scandinavian and Scandinavian American folk music in the Upper Midwest.

Nisswa-stämman

Since 1999 Paul Wilson and Mary Abendroth (of Brainerd, Minnesota) have put on a Scandinavian music festival in Nisswa, Minnesota, based on the Swedish model of fiddler gatherings, or *stämma*. Musicians both, Paul plays the two-row button accordion, fiddle, guitar and pump organ while Mary sings, plays guitar and pump organ. They both participate in the Brainerd area bands Ole Olsson's Oldtime Orkestra, Skålmusik, and Skål Klub, and have released several albums through their own record label, Timmerhus Productions. In addition to their band commitments they offer school and adult programming about Scandinavian music, have run music workshops at Vesterheim and elsewhere, and Paul also takes time to make

record and promote Norwegian-American folk music. Lund has worked with both Foot-Notes and LeRoy Larson, among others, on performing, recording, and researching the traditions of Scandinavian American old-time music. Her work has resulted in a CD entitled *Looking Back at Norwegian-American Old-Time Fiddling in the Heartland* (2006), a master's thesis (Beetham 2005), and two articles on Norwegian American fiddlers (Lund 2008, 2009).

violins in a particular style called the Drone Fiddle, which approximates the Hardanger fiddle with its resonant strings. Paul and Mary first became inspired to initiate a festival of this type in the States after spending a summer traveling through Scandinavia attending music festivals and it has grown in popularity ever since they began.

Over one weekend each year in the second week of June performers in the Scandinavian and Scandinavian American traditions gather in this small town in north-central Minnesota, just north of Brainerd, to listen, share, learn and soak in each other's music. The weekend starts off with a series of music and dance workshops led by masters of various musical traditions and transitions into a larger festival, kicking off with a more formal "sampler" concert of many musicians on Friday night. On Saturday morning musicians gather for a musical procession, playing songs for gathered crowds and leading attendees into the Nisswa Pioneer Village grounds where several stations, including historic log buildings, function as designated performance locations throughout the weekend. Several features and events contribute to the cozy and collegial atmosphere of the festival, such as ethnic food tents serving staples like coffee, lefse, and *vaffler* (waffles), a children's tent with songs and activities, a wooden platform for dancers to kick up their heels beside the main stage (*Allspel* stage), a traditional Scandinavian *smörgåsbord*, wandering musicians, impromptu jam sessions held outside on the lawns, and dances on Friday and Saturday nights. Musicians are both Scandinavian and American, playing the full range of traditional folk musics from Scandinavia and Scandinavia America.

Figure 12. Musicians perform on the main Allspel Stage at the tenth anniversary of Nisswa-stämman in 2009. Photograph by Anna Rue.

Musicians who attend Nisswa-stämman and the workshops have expressed thoughts about its importance which have echoed some of the same purposes (or results) of Nordic Fest's Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival at an earlier time. Simply having a place for specialized, like-minded musicians to gather, share repertoires, learn from others, and swap stories is critical to the perpetuation of this music, not to mention the fact that it provides an aspect of inspiration and cross-fertilization necessary for the continued evolution of musicians' music. Bob Andresen and LeRoy Larson both benefitted from the opportunity to play with, learn from, and make contact with older musicians from an earlier house party generation at Nordic

Fest, the effects of which have greatly benefitted people working and playing music in this area. Likewise, connections made between musicians up at Nisswa will continue to impact the music, experiences, and knowledge gained by those involved.

Even hosting a more formal festival that involves a smaller and more limited performance line-up than an event like Nisswa offers can be an important resource to regional musicians who are drawn to and are inspired by Nordic music. Amy Boxrud, for example, cited the influence of the Nordic Roots Festival, which ran from 1999 to 2008 and was held at the Cedar Cultural Center in Minneapolis. "That was really a huge influence in my life to see these really amazing Nordic bands in my own backyard, basically. It would have taken years to hear that many bands by going to Scandinavia, or you would have never heard them. I was so sad when that festival folded because it's been now a couple years since they've done it, but … we used to go every year … . So I would say that played as much of a part of, you know as far as influences and inspirations as anything" (interview May 8, 2010). The Nordic Roots festival invited roughly half a dozen, primarily Scandinavian musicians and bands over to the States to perform a series of concerts at the Cedar at the end of September each year, such as Sámi joik singers Wimme Saari and Mari Boine, Swedish bands Väsen, Hoven Droven, and Swåp, Finnish-Norwegian folk band Frigg, and Norwegian Hardanger fiddler Annbjørg Lien. Unfortunately its limited scope did not appear sustainable beyond the ten-year run they enjoyed. In 2009 the Nordic Roots Festival transformed into the Global Roots Festival, in part to take advantage of a broader selection of international artists who were already making the rounds at other music festivals in the region (Hobbes 2008).

Similarly, in a recent conversation I had with Beth Rotto about the benefits of attending Nisswa, she related a story from this past summer which I had not heard. It involved me

directing a touring musician friend to get in touch with Vesterheim in order to arrange a last-minute performance during his tour of the Midwest. He contacted the museum just a few days before he hoped to arrive and the museum talked with Beth about whether she knew anything about the band. Having not heard of them she was not interested in trying to set something up as she was readying herself to travel north for Nisswa. As luck would have it, the band was also performing at Nisswa that weekend. Beth saw one of their performances, was greatly impressed, and immediately called Vesterheim to make sure they could arrange a concert in Decorah with the group. In instances like this, even though the world of Scandinavian folk music is relatively small, festivals such as Nisswa really work to connect musicians, inspire new ideas, and expand audiences and awareness through new associations.

Indeed, Nisswa is considered one of, if not the best, Scandinavian music festival in the US. The Nisswa-stämman website boasts a number of testimonials, one of which was written by Carl Rahkonen, Music Librarian and Ethnomusicologist at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. In 2006 he wrote, "There are many Scandinavian festivals, featuring food, dance and music, but in my opinion the Nisswa-stämman is the best Scandinavian *music* festival. It brought together the largest concentration of Scandinavian musicians I had ever seen in North America."[120] The pure focus on music and some concentration on dance set this festival apart from general heritage celebrations like Nordic Fest—a weekend devoted to the commemoration of an entire ethnic heritage rather than one aspect of it. The Folk Music Festival organized by Marion Nelson provided one early example of the potential an ethnic music festival has to bring musicians together, forge friendships, and perpetuate a tradition.

[120] 2006 "Testimonials." http://www.nisswastamman.org/stamma/testimonials.html. Accessed November 15, 2013.

One specific way in which Nisswa expresses its identity as a music festival is the casual, spontaneous gatherings of musicians scattered around the Pioneer Village grounds throughout the weekend. Small groups of musicians will materialize under the shade of a tree to talk or, more commonly, exchange and learn tunes from each other. The multiple venues for individual band performances, ample outdoor accommodation, and casual, park-like atmosphere contribute to this practice, making it even easier for musicians to make connections throughout the weekend.[121] Events like this are crucial for musicians of a specific ethnic heritage to keep their music bound to the tradition. It is a space for tradition bearers to gather when other forms of communication prove themselves inadequate, and it has the potential to foster unforeseen connections as well as future productions or preservation efforts as we saw with Nordic Fest's Norwegian-American Folk Music Festival.

Kari Grønningsæter, a Norwegian living and teaching Norwegian at Luther College in 2005 wrote about her experiences attending Nisswa-stämman that summer.

> A participant from Norway, I was transported back to the 1970s in my own country, when we used to dance *gammeldans*, or old-time dances, in the cities as well as in the countryside. We used to sign up for big Saturday dances, or *leikfester* as we called them, as we wore our bunads and ate traditional food like *spekemat* and *rømmegrøt*. … While dancing at the Senior Center in Nisswa, Minnesota, I asked myself why I seldom go to dances in Norway anymore. I realized how much I missed it, and I noticed the informal way in which people would join the dance here, much as we used to in Norway. Young and old out there, in all kinds of clothing. You may know how to do the telespringar or the gangar, but if you do not, it does not really matter. In Norway now, I find myself most often inactive, listening to or watching professional dancers. Not so at Nisswa. … So, ironically, at the 2005 *Nisswa-stämman*, … I had to ask myself if I now have come to the Midwest to find the real thing! (2)

[121] Audiences might even catch a glimpse of a wandering musician or two mingling with the crowds in between sets or stages. This was a feature of many of the earlier Nordic Fest celebrations as well. "Strolling musicians" as they were called, were included in the Nordic Fest programs and spent about three hours each day of the fest meandering the streets of Decorah's business district entertaining the crowds.

Although musicians are routinely venturing out to Nisswa each summer to learn new tunes and to find new inspiration, wearing whatever clothing they want, dancing in whatever way they choose, there are elements of the gathering that speak to longstanding traditions of communities gathering together to enjoy good music and maybe take a turn or two around the dance floor.

Kari Tauring, Creative Memory, and Tradition

Kari Tauring's work, though it has less to do with the perpetuation of what we think of as standard Norwegian American folk dance music, is compelling because of her beliefs regarding the dysfunctions she sees in the Norwegian American community. Her work tries to rectify some of that dysfunction and restore those cultural elements she sees as having been lost while promoting Norwegian American culture in a novel way. Through the prism of Inherited Cultural Grief,[122] Kari reveals her powerful understanding of how current ethnic or cultural traits represent moments of trauma or deep dysfunctions that have built up and become engrained in a culture over time. Uncovering one's deep roots and recognizing the dysfunctions which have taken hold within oneself and one's culture, she asserts, are essential steps toward healing deep cultural traumas of the past, which we have all inherited.

Part of Kari's ability to connect her ancient pre-Christian European heritage with her post-immigration ethnic American identity is intimately tied to her beliefs in inherited cultural grief. She has carefully analyzed aspects of her ethnic identity over time in order to fully

[122] Also known as Historical Cultural Trauma, Ancestor Grief, or Unresolved Historical Grief (from http://www.karitauring.com/teach-inheritedgrief.html). Accessed October 5, 2013.

understand for herself and recover a broken and disconnected ancient Nordic past and identity. Inherited Cultural Grief (IHG), "is the phenomenon of passing unhealed trauma from one generation to the next. IHG presents as dysfunctional behaviors sometimes so mild that we think they are natural to the culture such as passive aggressive behavior or self depreciation. Sometimes the behaviors are extreme such as addiction, abuse, and suicide" (Tauring, "Healing Inherited Cultural Grief").

One example of a cultural dysfunction in the Norwegian American community that Kari speaks emphatically about is the Scandinavian idea of *Janteloven* ("The Law of Jante"). Janteloven refers to a set of ten "commandments" that everyone should live by, which were originally introduced in the 1933 novel, *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks). Written by Aksel Sandemose, who was born in Denmark to a Norwegian mother and eventually made Norway his home, the novel is set in the fictitious Danish town of Jante, and begins with the following rules, or laws, which govern the attitudes and behaviors of the town's residents:

1. Du skal ikke tru at du er noe
2. Du skal ikke tru at du er like så meget som oss
3. Du skal ikke tru at du er klokere enn oss
4. Du skal ikke innbille deg du er bedre enn oss
5. Du skal ikke tro du vet mere enn oss
6. Du skal ikke tro du er mere enn oss
7. Du skal ikke tro at du duger til noe
8. Du skal ikke le av oss
9. Du skal ikke tro at noen bryr seg om deg
10. Du skal ikke tro at du kan lære oss noe

1. Don’t let yourself think that you are anybody special
2. Don’t let yourself think that you are worth as much as us
3. Don’t let yourself think that you are smarter than us
4. Don’t fool yourself into believing that you are better than us
5. Don’t let yourself think that you know more than us
6. Don’t let yourself think that you are more important than us
7. Don’t let yourself think that you are good at anything
8. Don’t laugh at us
9. Don’t let yourself think that anyone likes you
10. Don’t let yourself think that you can teach us anything

(Translation from Levisen 2012:148)

To back up a bit, Scandinavian countries have long been known worldwide for their commitment to building egalitarian societies. In Norway specifically, historical events led to the effective elimination of an aristocratic class, which did a great deal to impact the future social structure of that nation. “The Black Plague of the mid-fourteenth century reduced the population of Norway by more than one-third, effectively destroyed the Norwegian nobility, and left Norway a nation of subsistence farmers who struggled for more than two centuries to restore farms abandoned during the Plague. It is not surprising that the unique circumstances of Norwegian history might produce an egalitarian and cohesive society” (Avant and Knutsen 1993:4–5).[123] Scandinavians are continually striving for equality. Although becoming an increasingly racially, ethnically, religiously diverse region in recent years has challenged Scandinavians’ views of themselves as

[123] A summary of the work of historian T.K. Derry (1968, *A Short History of Norway*, London: Allen and Unwin, pp. 10–73).

progressive and broad-minded, the steps they have taken in the name of gender equality are generally considered to be the most forward-thinking in the world.

The opposing view of this cultural commitment to egalitarianism, however, holds that striving to be essentially equal and to conform to the cultural standard can have the detrimental effect of stunting creativity, achievement, and individualism. This is where Janteloven applies. "Don't let yourself think that you are anybody special." Sandmose's argument was that in a community of oppressive conformity the individual is inferior to the group and that all achievement above the norm is looked upon with suspicion and contempt.

Traditional woodcarver and retired professor of Norwegian language and Scandinavian fine handcraft at Luther College, Harley Refsal, links this cultural modesty to language and a largely rural environment within Norway, a tradition which carried over to America with immigration.

> Norwegian has countless ways of expressing thanks … But there is rather a dearth of ways to express a simple "you're welcome" to some of those expressions of thanks.
>
> My mother, upon being complimented on, or thanked for her food, would typically respond with something like "oh, it's nothing, … I don't know what happened … it doesn't taste anything like it's supposed to … I must have left it in the oven too long," etc. etc. That's a window into a culture. People in a society that was historically rural—in which most people knew each other—didn't need to trumpet their own accomplishments—they didn't need to engage in self promotion. Everyone in that corner of the world *knew* of Clara's excellent turkey and dressing, Ellen's excellent singing voice, Halvor's artistry as a knifemaker, Karen's expertise as a rosemaler … . They didn't *need* to blow their own horns. In fact, custom dictated—and language phrases reinforced—the downplaying of one's expertise, one's skill. That was simply good form, the custom, and responding to "that was a great dessert" by saying simply "Thank you," instead of beginning with the "oh no, it was just …" routine, came off as bragging. (Refsal 2010:28, emphasis his).

So, even though Janteloven was not published until 1933, well after the great waves of Norwegian emigration had already left, the cultural patterns were already well-entrenched enough to have migrated to the US a generation or two before. What's more, clear parallels to these behaviors and codes within the Norwegian American community have persisted in subsequent generations. Garrison Keillor, the great chronicler of Scandinavian Minnesotans' lives, wrote about the negative impact that this cultural code of Janteloven had on his community growing up in a short story entitled "Who Do You Think You Are?":

> Minnesota was a repressive place to grow up in and there's a lot I'd change, even as I think about the sunny bygone days in Lake Wobegone. The fear of being different paralyzed every kid I knew, and there was so little room for affection, so much space for cruelty. People didn't have enough fun. Above all, we learned to repress the urge to achieve and be recognized, because the punishment for being different was so heavy. It might be postponed for a while, but when it fell on you, it fell hard, as when I wrote a book about Minnesota called *Lake Wobegone Days*, and the local newspaper put me in my place but good. They marked my front yard with orange rinds and nailed a dead cat to the porch. I started to nourish the thought of leaving for some place like Australia, the farthest away you can go and still speak English, and I longed to be a sweet-tempered marsupial man who'd hang by his tail and cry out ecstatically whenever he felt like it, to hell with the newspaper.[124]

Norwegian American humorist and author Art Lee makes extensive comments about the reverberations of Janteloven in the Norwegian American psyche. In a section of his book *Scandinavians Are Very Modest People*, Lee describes one of the major virtues taught to children growing up in a Scandinavian American environment is modesty. "Modesty, self effacement, avoiding forwardness and loudness and any disposition to call attention to yourself were values

[124] Garrison Keillor. 1989. *We Are Still Married*. London: Faber and Faber, p. 127. Quoted in Avant and Knutsen (1993:10).

insisted upon. It's all right to be good, but not too good as that presents problems" (Lee 2004:134).

These cultural conventions fly in the face of what Barre Toelken has described as a European American worldview built on the notions "that the individual is the basic unit of society, … that competition is an indispensable and praiseworthy means to confront the problems of life" (1996:267–8). Other scholars have noted the ways in which Scandinavian characteristics have historically harmonized with American values. As early as 1911 Kendric Charles Babcock wrote of Scandinavians who had migrated to America:

> They are racially akin to the best in America; they are mentally and temperamentally detached from Old World dogmas, castes, and animosities; they are educated, hard-working, ambitious, and law-abiding, and permanently quickened by the conditions of American life. Their contributions to the social structure of the commonwealth will be strength and stability rather than beauty and the delicate refinements of culture. They are not likely to furnish great leaders, but they will be in the front rank of those who follow men of light and of spiritual force. They will be builders and contributors, not destroyers; their greatest and most enduring services will be as a subtle, steadying influence, reinforcing those high qualities which are sometimes called Puritan, sometimes American, but which in any case make for local and national peace, prosperity, enlightenment, and righteousness. (Babcock 1911:309–10)

High praise, indeed, but it speaks to the attitudes of the hegemonic Anglo-Saxon "acceptance" of the Scandinavian immigrant as highly assimilable into American culture. Still, over fifty years later, in 1967, notable Norwegian American linguist Einar Haugen echoed some of Babcock's words to a surprising degree: "Norwegians and the descendants of Norwegians have given of their talents and energies to the building of America, without being among the most spectacular or glamorous groups. Their achievements have been more solid than dramatic, but even they do have a number of famous names to their credit" (Haugan 1967:31). The view of the

Scandinavian American as a stable, hard-working, compatible element in late nineteenth and twentieth century American society and culture has been a long-standing and accepted one.

Still, a Scandinavian American variety of Janteloven persists in spite of the pressures of hegemonic American culture to achieve, stand out, and somehow distinguish oneself from the group. The worry that these extreme egalitarian pressures will somehow stifle individual achievement and creativity, however, is not the reason Kari objects to the basic ideas behind Janteloven. Her concern lies with the loss of ritualized acknowledgement of one's achievements and contributions to the group.

> Kari: This whole idea that is perpetuated about how we are "supposed to be" as Norwegian Americans—this whole Janteloven thing—that is false. It's false. It's political propaganda to keep us in our place. … So this is how we're supposed to behave to keep us in our place and it isn't right. It isn't true. We lost our rituals around telling people the best things we've done. This idea of not bragging, you know. There's an actual part of a *blot*[125] where everybody takes that horn and says, "Here's the best stuff I've done," you know, Beowulf did it. "I swam across the fjord and I killed this many giants," you know. You have to tell everybody what you've done or those good deeds don't get layered into the *öorlog* and your luck doesn't grow. Luck is this tangible part of your soul piece, and it won't grow and it won't flourish and you can't pass it onto your children unless it's known. Unless you speak it over a horn. So it's this loss of these ancient ways of doing it and then the distortion of what that would have been.
>
> Anna: Well, picking on Janteloven, that's combatting a lot.
>
> Kari: It seems so beloved, you know?
>
> Anna: It's powerful.
>
> Kari: Yeah. It is and it's one of the most damaging pieces of work I think I've ever seen. … This is damaging. This is how you keep Norwegians feeling like damaged goods. I have nothing good to say about Janteloven. [laughs]

[125] A *blot* in Old Norse translates as a sacrifice to heathen gods, though in this case the ritualized sacrifice is of alcohol.

> Anna: Yeah, … I've always thought of it as being bred in the bone—
>
> Kari: No, I think it's been beaten into the bone. Not that we should go around bragging about ourselves. That's not it. But that there should be an outlet for us, a ritualized outlet for us to lay those words in the well for the whole community to hear what we've done.

Kari's exploration of her deep cultural and ethnic roots gave her a framework for understanding those aspects of Norwegian American culture which she feels are destructive. Furthermore, by incorporating into her performances certain aspects of a pre-Christian Nordic tradition which have been lost, resulting in cultural trauma and dysfunction, she feels she has received a positive response from the Norwegian American community.

> When I first started going out with this work I was just very nervous because I didn't want to be ridden out of town on the rail for being some kind of witch or anything. The reaction that I got from these women in the church basement ladies—they would come up to me afterwards and they would say, "I knew there was something more for us women. I knew that our deep root had strong, important women in it. I just needed to know that piece." It's almost as though I'm confirming for them something. The whole idea of this church basement lady pecking order thing—I believe—started when it was no longer safe for the *völur* [plural of *völva*] to go traveling. When Christianity started coming in and the late Viking era got extremely patrifocal and women weren't respected anymore then the *völur* would seek refuge in *ingaard* with chieftains and they would outrank the chieftain's wife. That's not okay. That was not a good set-up. And that's when … I think it started. A lot of this competivism. (Interview June 21, 2013)

Many of the missing pieces Kari is incorporating into her performances revolve around the role of the *völur* in pre-Christian Scandinavia. She integrates cultural and physical anthropology, history, and folklore into her performances, giving her audiences both a connection to a myth-filled past as well as an affirmation of an immigrant history in the process.

Years after her initial investigation into her deep roots and inherited cultural grief in a Norwegian American context, Kari turned her attention to Norway, hoping to learn how mass emigration and other significant historical events affected the Norwegian psyche. Her opportunity came in 2008 when a call was sent out for a new reality television show to be aired in Norway called *Alt for Norge* ("All for Norway"):

> That was the first time I'd been there, which was on TV. [Laughs] Which was super cognitive dissonance, I know. … What was fascinating for me about the whole *Alt for Norge* experience was really how it all came about. I'd been writing all sorts of grants to try and get there to study this inherited cultural grief aspect. Ok. I know what … dysfunctions live in my Norwegian American heritage. What dysfunctions are there in Norway from having all those people leave and from also, historically having been severed from your roots? First with the coming of Christianity, second with the coming of the Reformation, I mean that was really hard on the Norwegians, and then the whole plague and then Danes and the 400 Year Night, … so what happened there? And … I was pouring out a horn to Freya—Freya has been the goddess, entity that has really been present in my life since the early '80s when I started to wonder about my deep roots. She's sort of … been [an] ever-present figure for me and I just kind of threw up my hands and I said, "I don't know how I'm going to get to Norway and do this work. How was this going to happen?" And so as soon as my sister … brought the Star Tribune ad, "Wanted," you know, "for a reality show," I thought, "Thank you, Freya!" I know that was my ancestors and my *dísir*,[126] Freya—it was like, how better to study the inherited cultural grief than the dysfunction of reality television? It just was a perfect experience. (Interview June 21, 2013)

Through her experience on the show Kari became familiar with practices and traditions that have becoming entrenched in contemporary Norwegian culture and which she feels are unhealthy, such as alcoholism. These customs and attitudes—like those stemming from Janteloven—

[126] According to Anthony Faulkes's *A New Introduction to Old Norse, 2nd ed., Glossary and Index of Names*, dísir is defined as "lady; goddess, valkyrie or norn (perhaps a guardian spirit?)" (Faulkes 2002:24). In the sense that Kari uses the term it seems to take on more of a guardian spirit meaning.

originate from painful or difficult historical moments that she works to resolve through her work and in educating the community.

This path toward healing deep cultural injuries is not always easy, however. Kari has been able to forge a personal connection between a pre-Christian heritage and an immigrant tradition, which has enjoyed a largely positive and enthusiastic reception among the broader Scandinavian American community, but in Kari's view the community has not yet made great strides towards healing its cultural dysfunctions. Scandinavian Americans remain deeply invested in those behaviors, beliefs, and practices that not only perpetuate harmful patterns, but prevent the community from evolving in more positive, inclusive directions. "An inability to open up to change and new ideas is stunting the growth of this community. It points to dysfunction in the *öorlog* of the Scandinavian American. … Culture cliques and Queen Bee Church Basement Ladies[127] combined with rigid adherence to 'how we were taught' makes for an unwelcoming and unyielding community that is, at this moment, struggling for existence" (personal correspondence, November 20, 2012).

Tauring's answer to this is to not abandon the community or its traditions, but to dig deeper, beyond the immigrant past and explore an ancient heritage that has been obscured by history and historical cultural trauma. "Language, songs and dances lead us back to our

[127] The character, sometimes caricature, of the Church Basement Lady is based on the history of highly organized (bordering on micromanaging) women members of the Lutheran Church in America. Members of the Ladies' Aid Societies, these women spent a great deal of time and effort forming committees, making sure the social aspects of the church community ran smoothly, contributed a great deal of money and aid for the needy, oftentimes held the purse-strings of the congregation, and gathered to enjoy each other's company, visit, plan events, etc. Norwegian Lutheran authors Janet Letnes Martin and Suzann (Johnson) Nelson write about the church basement ladies as the driving force behind the church in their book, *Growing up Lutheran*: "God knew that if there were going to be growing, self-sustaining, active Lutheran Churches in America, he would have to create a special species of people, so He created the Lutheran Church Basement Women" (1997:129). For as much sway as the church basement ladies held in the church and for as much charitable work they have been known to give, they are also characterized as cliquish, gossipy, and occasionally caddy groups of women who can make it difficult for anyone wishing to operate outside the "norm," which is the perspective that Kari is invoking here.

indigenous tap root and connect us to something deep and powerful; our identity, our unique humanity. I also remind people, both Lutheran and Asatru, that … my deep root is an extension of or deepening of my Norwegian Lutheran American identity. My Norwegian Lutheranism did not unravel as I pulled the ancient tapestry threads up. I mended them into who I was raised to be and am now weaving the threads of who I am in a whole, healed way" (personal correspondence, November 20, 2012). Using Norwegian American folk music and dance as a way of connecting to one's ethnic heritage can heal the dysfunctions of the community and strengthen the positive, affirming aspects of one's shared heritage. In this way Kari's perspective, though embedded in a worldview that embraces a religious connection to an ancient Nordic past, is remarkably similar to those who feel passionately about preserving and promoting Norwegian American folk music and dance.

Beyond turning to music and dance as an important method to connect to one's heritage, Kari also demonstrates through her personal stories how, in the event that cultural traditions become broken, we can recover pieces of our past—at times creatively—to serve our present identities and ultimately transmit culture. This is a sentiment expressed in Elaine Lawless's 2009 Presidential Address to the American Folklore Society. She expresses the act of drawing stories together as creating a new landscape or map of the world. This, she asserts, is a new theory of "landscape folklore—a visual and mental graphic of the landscapes that shaped us far earlier than we can even remember. … It is a failure in *our imagination* not to be able to pull out significant threads that offer sustenance rather than rejection; I would argue that these threads of folklore are often tenuous at best because all aspects of folklore *reside in our memory and/or in the act of narrative performance*" (Lawless 2011:128, emphasis hers). In her address Lawless goes on to discuss memory as the dynamic force in the twin laws of folklore and that we all take broken

pieces of our own family histories and reconstruct them into mosaics,[128] healing fissures, difficult moments, and painful associations in the process of creating something new and meaningful. Kari's narratives beautifully illustrate the creative and dynamic power of assembling relevant memories into a cohesive narrative that guides the interpretation of events or circumstances and imbues them with significance.

Over and over again Kari illustrates how personal and family-related experiences serve to guide and shape her beliefs and actions, provide her with strength, and solidify her connection to nature and her heritage. Her description of how her album *Nykken and Bear* came about is one example of how thoughtful collections of memories and experiences influence personal identity and cultural bonds. Kari artistically integrates memories to create a meaningful experience when describing events in Norway during the filming of *Alt for Norge* as well. In this telling Kari credits feeling the presence of her grandmother and great-grandmother with helping her through a very difficult moment during her time on the show. The difficulty culminated in a competition in which the cast participated in a rowing race while visiting a Viking reenactment camp in the town of Gudvangen:[129]

> I was so alone, you know, this whole time I had no one who understood anything about where I was coming from and what I was feeling as I was going through all of these different things over the three weeks that we were filming. It was hard. It was really hard. But there it went. … So like I said, my grandparents had a unique relationship with nature even though they were strictly Lutherans. One time … when I was talking to [my grandmother], I said "You know, I have a really hard time praying in church because I just want to sing and sometimes I feel like crying and—" and she's going, "Yee." You know, all this feeling, girl. And so she would say, "You go out and you pray in nature. That's where Jesus would go and do his most difficult times of prayer, the times where he really needed to pray

[128] Lawless borrows the analogy of the "mosaic" from the poet Terry Tempest Williams's 2009 book, *Finding Beauty in a Broken World* (New York: Vintage).
[129] Kari Tauring's great-grandmother on her maternal side emigrated to the US from this area and had been baptized in the local Bakka Church, which figures into her story.

> hard he went into the Garden of Gethsemane, he went up in the mountain, he went out in nature and you can do that, too." So as a girl I was always going out into the woods and doing my praying there and just because nature answered back I didn't bat an eyelash at that. … So I had developed this thing and she showed me the picture of Jesus praying at Gethsemane that she always had in her living room … so there I am in Gudvangen having just done this crazy thing of rowing under the Bakka Church and finally the next morning they say "Oh, well we want to film you in this church," because they wouldn't let me go in there the whole time. I'm like, "This is where my great-grandmother was baptized. I'm going in there." And they're like, "We're going to save it for a special time. … We're going to film it." So, the last episode … they had me walking on the shore and they had me going to the different graves even though I knew none of my close relatives were buried there or anything. But then I walked into the Bakka Church and there, above the altar is a painting of Jesus at Gethsemane and I just thought, "Oh!" I just felt my grandmother and my great-grandmother, I felt them both. They had my back. They were true dísir, you know, come to guide me through this troublesome time and yeah, it was really powerful. (Interview June 21, 2013)

Experiences such as this draw power and meaning from past experiences and memories in a creative, though not arbitrary way. The act of weaving significant memories together is shaped by the transmission of tradition, in this case it comes in the form of spirituality, nature, and prayer, though ultimately Kari interprets this connection through the lens of her neo-Pagan religious beliefs. Lawless quotes artist Terry Tempest Williams: "Part of the nature of (hu)mans is to recompose a unity that has been broken. Mosaic is a way to organize your life. Making mosaics is a way of thinking about the world. Mosaics are created out of community" (Lawless 2011:142–3, quoting Williams 2009:31). Kari Tauring's stories shape and organize. They restore severed ties, create unity where we might not otherwise see it, and, when viewed as a whole, her narratives celebrate her traditions, even if she interprets them in a novel and personal way.

Thoughts on Authenticity and Survival

Several years ago I took a course on the diverse cultures of the Upper Midwest and one of our assignments that semester was to think about why bluegrass had come to ride great waves of popularity in American popular culture whereas polka music had not. The answer I gave was rather vacuous, probably boiling down to some reference to the hit Cohen Brothers movie and resulting soundtrack, *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), and a sweeping comment like, "People just think bluegrass is cooler than polka music." My thoughts have returned to that assignment from time to time, gradually recognizing that the answer is much more complex than I once suggested, that there are forces other than the movie industry that have been at work for generations to contribute to this disparity in representation on the national level. We gain a wonderfully nuanced understanding of the bias towards southern American roots music in American culture in James P. Leary's *Polkabilly,* and scholars and musicians working in the roots music field outside of that region are only too familiar with the overwhelming favoritism shown to southern roots music in America. It strikes me as important, then, to emphasize how the musicians profiled here are providing a powerful antidote to the spread of an American roots music monoculture.

Interest in local culture is gaining traction on all fronts. People are showing appreciation for the aspects of life that connect them back to home and place; that affirm belonging and identity. Though we are living in a world of unprecedented technological innovation and seemingly limitless access to information and entertainment, people still find joy in community, in honoring traditions that once helped to orient them in the world. We still look to those things

that remind us of who we are, though we can also deeply appreciate things that fall outside of our experience.

Authenticity is bound by tradition and shaped by the community, but it is also a personal commitment that honors individual vision and creativity. Below, Amy Boxrud eloquently expressed her relationship with the pressures artists feel to conform to some other measure of authenticity or definition of tradition. Her thoughts reveal a great deal about the formative impact of folklore in our lives, placing her in the company of Thurine Oleson and Orabel Thortvedt, whose personal stories and family stories were so closely intertwined that historical fact and objectively accurate portrayals of their lives were deemed inadequate. As Kari Tauring said to me, "when the church tells you you can't express the movement of the spirit through your body then you squirt it out somewhere else." If personal authenticity is honored and achieved, the forces of tradition and personal expression will find a way to move forward, in whatever form they will take.

> I used to feel almost funny about my strong interest in Nordic folk music … 'cuz I felt like, why? … I'm an American, so why do I have this strong interest in Nordic folk and I felt … like I was sort of geeky in a way. Or why not have—you know there's such a strong bluegrass scene in the US and Country and Alt-country … and I really enjoy it but I don't have the same connection to that that I do as Nordic music and for a while I was like why is that? But I realized that … it really is my folk music, too. My background is 100% Scandinavian and I don't come from a bluegrass tradition and I don't come from a gospel tradition or a country—you know that's not where my family heritage is. … I literally grew up with my grandparents playing these records. My grandpa was old when I was young and he would sit in the afternoons and would put on these Finnish dance LPs and he would sit and listen to them so this really was the folk music of my childhood. And I think I just had to kinda realize that it's legitimate. And I don't know if it was just part of stumbling into that Twin Cities scene where everybody had their lineage and if you hadn't studied in Scandinavia then maybe the music you were making wasn't as legitimate or whatever, but I just had to kinda make my peace with it that this really is my music … however it comes out. However

it’s expressed it’s a legitimate expression of my influences. (Interview, May 8, 2010)

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