

## THE NORTH NORWAY FOLK MUSIC COLLECTION AT THE TROMSØ MUSEUM:

*the foremost Archive of Lapp Music*

Ola Graff (Collection Manager, Tromsø Museum)\*

Tromsø Museum, now part of the Tromsø University Museum, was opened in 1872 and given responsibility for research into both the cultural and natural history of North Norway. But not until eighty years later did the Museum create a folk music collection. Prior to that, although interested individuals in various parts of the country were writing down folk tunes, these writings were sent to an archive in the south of Norway. Collection of traditional music also occurred when researchers from southern Norway came to visit the north. In the long run this collecting activity remained sporadic and casual. People felt the need for a distinctive archive in the northern part of the country.

In 1949 the Nordnorsk folkemusikksamling [North Norway Folk Music Collection] was opened. This archive was to have responsibility for collection, research and dissemination of traditional music in the northern part of Norway. Its first administrator, Arnt Bakke, was a music teacher at the teachers' college in Tromsø. He did most of his work on the collection in his spare moments, but nonetheless built up a solid collection during his lifetime. In 1982 the University of Tromsø established a permanent curator's post in North Norwegian folk music. This post has been occupied without a break since 1986.

The Nordnorsk folkemusikksamling has responsibility for the whole of North Norway, which consists of the country's three northernmost counties.<sup>1</sup> Geographically it is an extensive and diverse area, with many scattered settlements. Three different language cultures have long existed side by side there—Norwegian, Lapp [samisk] and Finnish [kvensk].<sup>2</sup> The collection encompasses traditional music from all three cultures.

From the start there has been much interest in musical aspects of these cultures. We have collected old melodies, ballads, psalms, cradle songs, work songs, country dances, and so on. Most of the collection consists of recordings of songs, music scores and song texts. Over time, interest has grown concerning music's cultural aspects, how music is used, disseminated, understood, and so on. Nowadays, therefore, much emphasis is placed on interviews and on all forms of documentation. The collection also contains tape recordings, video recordings, gramophone records, photos, manuscripts, newspaper cuttings, literature and more. The tapes collection currently comprises almost 2,000 items, and there are *ca* 27,000 pages of documents in the manuscript collection. Many of these are original materials, but there are also copies of items from other archives, such as copies of Lappish

---

\* *Ola Graff has a Master's degree in musicology from Oslo University, and a doctorate for her work on the joik music tradition. She is currently Curator of North Norwegian Folk Music at the University Museum of the University of Tromsø.*

<sup>1</sup> *The three counties are Nordland, Troms and Finnmark.*

<sup>2</sup> *"Finnish" in this context refers to the language used in an area in the extreme north of Norway, not to the national language of Finland.*

*joikene* recordings from German archives. Long-term storage of the sound recordings is a problem. Even today, knowledge of digital storage media is limited. The most important storage medium for sound up to now has usually been reel-to-reel tape. In 2002 the Museum acquired a climate-controlled store, where all its tapes and photographs are now kept. The Museum is also fire- and theft-proof, so our storage facilities are now satisfactory.

The cataloguing of melodies was formerly usually done on A6-size file cards. Each melody was represented by a card. This was copied to make five exemplars, which were filed in different places according to title of melody; type of melody; performer; performer's place of residence; and running number. This model was borrowed from the Norsk folkemusikksamling in Oslo, and works well. Several thousand melodies are registered in this manual system, which continues to be used.

But work to register collections in digital databases is also progressing well. All purchased recordings (CD, LP, EP, cassette) are registered on their own recordings database. A separate literature database is under development. This is a research database, and is more comprehensive than the university library's catalogue of literature, since it also lists chapters in books that deal with traditional music of the northern region. Such music may for example be referred to in old travel books, or in books on other topics. A catalogue of the contents of the manuscript collection has also been started. The most important database is still the accessions catalogue: all material that comes into the collection is noted in this catalogue, and is provided with an accession number and a short description, along with information about its acquisition. This takes only a little time. All materials are now registered with an acquisition date as soon as they arrive, and are numbered and put on the shelf. In this way one avoids having archival material lying around awaiting more detailed cataloguing. Many archives have had, and still have, painful experiences when such material remains for a long time in an untidy pile. Once initial accessioning of material has taken place, more detailed cataloguing of its contents can be left until later.

Most of the databases are internal, except for the picture database. Following recent reorganisation, collections of photographs from all Tromsø Museum departments are in a single photo archive. This is accessible via the "fotoarkivet" option on the Tromsø Museum homepage, at [www.tmu.uit.no](http://www.tmu.uit.no). The Nordnorsk folkemusikksamling also has its own homepage, which gives details of its collections, within the Museum homepage. Here is to be found the Lapp part of the recordings catalogue. All published Lapp recordings are brought into our archive. This covers all kinds of Lapp artists, including non-Lapp artists who work with Lapp music material, regardless of which country the recording comes from. Consequently the Museum has almost all the Lapp music recordings that have been produced, which means that the Lapp recordings collection is quite large. The recordings collection presents a picture of modern Lapp artists in the context of their particular background and tradition.

Since 1988 the Nordnorsk folkemusikksamling has had a subscription to press cuttings about Lapp music in Norway and Sweden. This means that everything written about this subject in both those countries was cut out of newspapers and weeklies and sent to Tromsø. This provided an outstanding source of up-to-date material, but the service was gradually becoming more expensive, so it was wound up. Nowadays the Museum takes clippings primarily from north Norway newspapers only. While the clippings archive on Lapp music is therefore no longer complete, it still contains quite a lot of cuttings.

Norway has four universities. Each university has a folk music collection that covers its own part of the country. The Lapp part of the collection is the most distinguished of the collections at Tromsø. The Tromsø Museum has the largest and most comprehensive Lapp music collection in the country, and it is also the largest international collection dealing with the Lapp musical tradition. This is because collecting and researching in this field has gone on for many years. The recording and clippings collections are both examples of this.

This type of archive has a character that is in large measure defined by the material that is collected, and is shaped by an active collecting policy. Only a minor part of the collection comes from material delivered to the archive by visitors. The majority arrives as the result of an active collecting policy and on the initiative of the archive. The work of collection building that has been followed by the Nordnorsk folkemusikksamling can be seen as of this type. To some extent the work comprises a general collection of traditional music rather than something more specific: one wants to create an overview rather than a specialised or detailed study. This provides a breadth to the material, which has several advantages: for example, some of the requests to the archive deal with gaining an overview of the archive of traditional music in different ways. The difficulty is to do more than scratch the surface.

On the other hand, part of the collecting work is managed in such a way that materials are defined more specifically, and in this way one can get deeper into a particular subject area. Two of the largest research projects into folk music collecting have both been concerned with traditional Lapp culture. One is a collection of *joikene* from Lapp fishermen from the coast of Finnmark.<sup>3</sup> Along much of the coast of North Norway the old *joik* tradition has already died: but it has been possible to document some small remainder of the tradition in one specific region. This work has been in progress for the past decade. The results appear in a book to be published by Davvi Girji forlag, and available from Autumn 2003. The book is in Norwegian, but includes an extensive English summary. It is an original contribution to the dissemination of traditional musical material, as all the musical examples in it come from the Nordnorsk folkemusikksamling and are available on its home page. By accessing the home page one can listen to the various melodies that appear in the book.

The other large project is a collection of traditional Lapp songs from Kolahalvøya. This region covers parts of four countries—Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Of these, the music culture of the Russian part is the least investigated. Therefore the Nordnorsk folkemusikksamling took the initiative in the mid 1990s to begin an international research project, with participation from Norway, Finland, Estonia and Russia, to collect and closely examine that tradition. The result was the recording of many hundreds of songs. No funds from the Norwegian research council were available to complete the project, so for the time being the material remains in storage. But the Archive is working on a song book for Lapp children in Kolahalvøya based around the project material.

Promotion of traditional music is an important part of the activities of the archive. A series of enquiries from researchers, students, interested individuals and others arrives in the course of the year. For some years the archive has successfully combined collecting and dissemination activity. Under an agreement with Norsk rikskringkasting [the Norwegian

---

<sup>3</sup> *Finnmark is the most northern county of Norway. "Joikene" is the Norwegian plural of joik.*

Broadcasting Corporation] we have a regular slot in a regional radio programme that is transmitted to Norway's three northernmost counties. Here we present samples from the collections, for example a particular song. We ask for listeners' help in obtaining more information on the song, which in many cases results in contributions from people who have other versions of the melodies, know more verses of songs, know the songs' history, and so on. This initiative has been very successful and has resulted in much new archive material and in new knowledge. The project lasted two-and-a-half years, and a book is planned. Although the focus here is on Norwegian material, both Lapp and North Norwegian traditions are also included.

The archive is an open archive, available to all. Nevertheless, this causes some problems in relation to the Lapp material. Lapp songs, the so-called *joikene*, are songs sung by particular individuals. A melody stands as a representative symbol of a person, and functions as their musical signature. To such a melody (which all in the area usually recognise), one can set words. Words are usually improvised and describe the characteristics of the individual. All this makes *joikene* very personal. The duty of the Lapp music archive is, of course, to exercise discretion in permitting access to such material, and to assess which material should be placed on restricted access.

The Lapp (and the north Norwegian) music material raises other issues too. It is not unproblematic that material from a minority culture is in a Norwegian state institution. The relationship between Lapp and Norwegian culture has, historically, rarely been a relationship between cultures that were equally valued. The large Norwegian community has been dominant, and in many cases has actually suppressed the Lapps' culture and way of life. In this situation, issues have remained concerning how the archive of the larger community will take care of the documentation of, and facilitate research into, Lapp musical culture. It remains important that such an archive can function as a support for Lapp culture and Lapp values, and not simply be an expression of the choices of the larger community. The problem is not just a general ethno-political one, but also impacts directly on professional ethics. Many examples in the music collections are governed by the interests and ways of thinking of the majority group. We can see a concrete example of this in a collecting trip to Finnmark in 1960. The Norwegian collectors asked their Lapp informant if he knew a *joik* about moving the reindeer herds up to the coast during the Spring. No such *joik* existed. But the informant was, of course, polite, and sang a *joik*. He sang *joik* melodies to one of the people who was with the migration of the reindeer, and included some words about the activity. The Norwegian collectors did not realise this, and listed the melody as "a *joik* for migration". This happened partly because they could not speak the language, and partly because they had only a superficial understanding of what a *joik* was and how it was used. Such a misunderstanding would probably never have happened with a Lapp collector or researcher. Consideration of such issues is important for the archive in Tromsø, and we try to operate in such a way that the Lapp community will feel able to use the archive. Several Lapp artists certainly have used it, and several projects have been carried on with Lapp co-operation and support, including an offer to teach Lappish *joik* at the Nordnorsk musikkonservatorium in Tromsø.

The duties of the archive are many and varied, and range from collection and research to work in archiving and promotion. Unfortunately there is only one established post in the archive. In many respects this is far too little.

The Nordnorsk folkemusikksamling tries to be both a traditional archive that documents and preserves traditional musical culture, a research archive where new knowledge can

develop, and an archive with social relevance that works in the dissemination of tradition, and by that means also helps in the development of a local folk culture. In connection with this last aim, we at the archive are working to create a Nordnorsk folkemusikkfond [North Norway Folk Music Fund], by means of which artists and workers from all three cultures will be able to seek economic support for work on traditional music in these parts of the country.