

SCANDIMOOT



April 20-23 2012 Scandinavian music and dance – in Yorkshire

If you wanted to learn from the very best performers and teachers of traditional Scandinavian music and dance, you might book a flight to Oslo or Stockholm. Perhaps you wouldn't think of coming to the picturesque North Yorkshire town of Settle in springtime.

You might be surprised to know that for nearly 20 years now, in late April or early May, towns and villages in the Yorkshire Dales have been host to some of the most outstanding talent of Norway and Sweden. **Scandimoot** means three days of intensive fiddle music and dance workshops, song, music for 'other instruments', concerts, evening dances, collective eating, socialising and generally living together. It brings talents together and nurtures the expertise in traditional Swedish and Norwegian music and dance that is rapidly growing amongst folk musicians in the UK and the rest of Europe.

The story began, as stories often do, with the enthusiasm of one person. Felicity Paterson, a classical violinist who taught violin through the Suzuki method, visited Sweden in the early 80s and was captivated by the folk music there.

Sweden's folk music includes a remarkably rich dance music tradition with the fiddle as the main instrument and with a particularly important rhythm; the 'polska,' which is quite unlike anything in the fiddle playing repertoire of Britain and Ireland. The opportunity to play and dance the polska in Sweden helped Felicity to

gain some understanding of the complex rhythms and melodies and the improvised harmonies. She went on to study fiddle music on Kalle Almlöf's courses at the Malung folk high school, an adult education centre which offers advanced courses in folk traditions.

Back in England in the 80s, Felicity found only a handful of people who knew anything about Scandinavian folk music and dance. She tried to get some Swedish fiddle music going at Irish sessions but met with little response, partly because people found the rhythms much more difficult to pick up. Feeling isolated and frustrated by her wish to play Swedish music she started dance workshops, thinking that an understanding of the dance would help with the music, but it was always a struggle to keep these going.

Then in 1988 a Swedish folk band, Filarfolket, hitherto unknown in this country, toured the UK and played some electrifying gigs which set alight an explosion of interest in Scandinavian music. Filarfolket not only understood Swedish traditional fiddle music but incorporated other influences including jazz and Brazilian percussion. Their forward looking approach gave the music an accessibility and an impact which left every one who heard them wanting to know more about the Scandinavian roots of this compelling music.

Around this time, a number of people from

Yorkshire and other parts of the country were also gaining experience of Swedish folk music and dance as a result of exchange visits between English Morris sides and Swedish dance groups. Two participants in these exchange visits were Geoff & Liz Bowen (founder members of Yorkshire Dales Workshops in Folk Arts). As a fiddler interested in the different style and character of regional fiddle playing traditions, Geoff had some familiarity with recordings of Scandinavian fiddle music. He was fascinated with the combination of haunting melodies and exotic, asymmetric rhythms, but he had no experience of the way these related to the dances or of the particular bowing patterns and techniques used to impart life and rhythm into the music. The Swedish tradition has been described as "living baroque" and the strong evidence of 18th century baroque characteristics in the music was another feature inviting exploration. The Filarfolket visit to Ilkley in 1988 gave Geoff the inspiration and the opportunity to discover other interested musicians and to look for ways of developing this interest. It also inspired Felicity Paterson to attempt more workshops in Lancaster and York at which Geoff was an eager participant. He found Felicity's aural teaching and accurate transcriptions of tunes very helpful in grasping the intricacies of rhythm, ornamentation, phrasing and bowing.

In York, Felicity decided to organise a Scandinavian event of workshops in music and



dance. In Lancaster too people were developing events and running the occasional concert and dance. Geoff and Liz attended some of these events and workshops and invited Felicity to contribute to what had now become Yorkshire Dales Workshops. YDW focus was the provision in North Yorkshire of in-depth workshops and course of traditional music, dance and song, mainly from Britain and Europe. In 1992 a young Swedish fiddler, Åsa Hansson, came to a week of workshops in British folk traditions and was invited to return to work alongside Felicity at a residential weekend of Scandinavian music workshops. This proved to be a forerunner of the annual Scandinavian Festival in which Felicity was to be a regular tutor as well as a valuable source of Swedish music and dance teachers and performers.

For the next 15 years, Geoff and Liz Bowen developed YDW with the help and enthusiasm of a growing number of people. First hand contact with musicians and dancers in Sweden and Norway has resulted in the discovery of outstanding tutors and performers willing to come to workshops in the Yorkshire Dales. The list is huge; such people as Matts Eden, Annbjørg Lien, Hanna Tibell, Louise Schultz, Arne Sølvsberg and his family, Håxornas Brygd and Groupa, Kalle, Anders and Lisa Almlöf, Jan-Olof Johansson, Matts Berglund, Aslak Brimi, Berit Bertilsdotter, Ragnhild Furebotten and Gjermund Larsen (then both members of Majorstuen, recently at Womad), Bosse Larsson (nephew of Viksta Lasse), Lasse Sörlin, Sturla Eide and the champion halling dancer Ulf-Arne Johannessen.

In 2007 the YDW team, suffering from a shortage of funding, decided to wind-up the organisation. Immediately Scandimoot arose from the ashes – a result of the ground swell of enthusiasm and delight in Scandinavian music and dance fostered and warmed by a group initiated by YDW called 'Friends of Scandi'. Now in its 5th year, Scandimoot proudly claims to offer 'one of the best opportunities you will find in the

UK to learn tunes and dances from Scandinavian teachers. Each year we pick exceptional music and dance teachers from Norway and Sweden to come to this small, intimate event in Yorkshire. With such intensive work the standard of both your music and your dancing rapidly improves. And we have fantastic breakfasts'.

Maybe that gives some sense of the event. Music and dance workshops start about 9.30 am, at Dalesbridge and Austwick near Settle, and finish with concerts and dances, either at Victoria Hall Settle or at Austwick village Hall on the edge of the National Park with its view of green hills, newborn lambs and spring flowers through the open door. Visitors come from England, Germany, Shetland, Belgium, France. They camp or stay at Dalesbridge, dance, eat, talk, walk, and play music together,

This year the artists invited are of the usual outstanding ability. Katinka Kundler and Petter Johanssen are two hugely talented dancers

who are not only steeped in the traditions of Dalarna in Central Sweden, but understand how to teach dynamic movement and the rotation so important in polskor. Jon Holmén, a well known and respected Rättvik fiddler, will play for workshops.

The circle is almost completed by the fact that Ellika Frisell is able to come this year as a fiddle tutor. Ellika; fiddle, viola, is a central figure in Swedish folk music and is currently working as a teacher at the Institute for folk music, at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. She plays Swedish folk music in the Bingsjö and Orsa traditions given her by such masters as Nils Agenmark and Gustav Päckos, but also studies South Indian classical music with K. Shivakumar in Bombay. Ellika has played with many folk music groups such as Den Fule and Rosenbergs Sju and, of course, the much loved and hugely influential Filarfolket.

When YDW started it was very difficult to find good tutoring in folk traditions - instrumental or dance. Now there are hundreds of structured workshop weeks and weekends all over England, Scotland and Ireland. Scandinavian workshops are still thin on the ground but are growing as people become more familiar with the tunes, the rhythms and the dances. This kind of music and dancing can at first experience seem a little tricky, but it is highly infectious and addictive. Try it and see! You'll have a warm welcome, whether you already have some experience or are a newcomer to the style. And you really don't have to travel far – it's all here in Yorkshire, in April.

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Thanks to Geoff Bowen for the use of excerpts from his article on the YDW Scandinavian Festival written for Visiting Arts magazine

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