

Geirr Tveitt (1908-1981)

A Hundred Hardanger Tunes, Op. 151: Suites Nos. 1 and 4

Suite 1, Op.151

1	No. 1: Vélkomne med æra (Welcome with honour)	3:38
2	No. 2: Flyteljod (Flute air)	0:39
3	No. 3: Fagraste viso pao Joræ (The most beautiful song on earth)	2:41
4	No. 4: Moltor og myrabær (Cloudberries and moorberries)	1:29
5	No. 5: Stavkyrkjeste (Stave church song)	1:29
6	No. 6: Å naoc meg no fø mi tusta (Alas, my girl)	0:57
7	No. 7: Uppskoka (Consecration of the new beer)	2:34
8	No. 8: Syrgjeleg song um ein tom brennevinsdunk (Lament for an empty brandy keg)	1:49
9	No. 9: Langeleiklåt (Langeleik tune)	1:48
10	No. 10: Stølstone (Echo from the Summer hillfarm)	2:32
11	No. 11: Hastverksbrudlaup (Hasty wedding)	1:10
12	No. 12: Guds Godhet og Guds Storhet (God's goodness and greatness)	2:48
13	No. 13: Vise folks folkevisa um visse folk (Wise folks gossip about certain people)	1:46
14	No. 14: Storskrytarstev (Braggart's ballad)	2:14
15	No. 15: Siste Farvel (The last farewell)	4:05

Suite 4, Op.151 "Brudlaups-suiten" (Wedding Suite)

16	No. 46: Du... (You...)	2:19
17	No. 47: Friar-føter (Going a-wooing)	1:43
18	No. 48: Eit gamalt sel fortel (Tale from the old mountain hut)	2:33
19	No. 49: Belaresveinen (The matchmaker)	2:14
20	No. 50: Pao veg te Brudlaupsgaren (Off to the country wedding)	1:41
21	No. 51: Krune-brure (Bridal crown)	2:10
22	No. 52: Graot og laott aot ain baot (Tears and laughter for a boat)	1:38
23	No. 53: "So stillt dei ror på glitre-fjord" - Brudlaups-båtfærd ("How silently they row on the glittering fjord" - Bridal voyage)	2:53
24	No. 54: Kjømestær-visa (Toastmaster's song)	1:12
25	No. 55: "Når kvite skaut i sumarbrisen bylgjer" - Song til skautakono "When white scarves wave in the Summer breeze - Song to the wife"	1:34
26	No. 56: Rikje Ragna med jarnhendene (Rich Ragna with the iron hands)	1:27
27	No. 57: "Skottrærar" ("Guisers")	1:13
28	No. 58: Brura-drammane (The bride's drink)	1:47
29	No. 59: Fylle-snakk - hommage à l'atonalitet (Drunken talk - homage to atonality)	1:01
30	No. 60: Haring-øl (Hardanger ale)	3:30

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Geirr TVEITT

A Hundred Hardanger Tunes Suites Nos. 1 and 4

Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Bjarte Engeset



Geirr Tveitt (1908-1981)

A Hundred Hardanger Tunes, Op. 151: Suites Nos. 1 and 4

Hundrad Hardingtonar: the title has a real ring to it: *A Hundred Hardanger Tunes*. But with the Norwegian composer Geirr Tveitt, nothing is as simple as it sounds. There are not, and maybe never were, a hundred. Four suites of fifteen tunes, numbered 1, 2, 4 and 5, survive; fifteen into a hundred does not go. Some pieces, including the incomplete Suite No. 3 and sketches for Nos. 6 and beyond, perished in the fire of 1970 that destroyed Tveitt's home on his ancestral farmstead in the Hardanger region of western Norway, and with it most of his music. Others may have existed in Tveitt's mind but not on paper. And what exactly are "Hardanger Tunes", "Hardingtonar"? Even to Norwegians, that sounds like an authentic dialect word; actually Tveitt invented it himself. He often called the tunes "folk-tunes", and published piano arrangements as "Fifty Folk-tunes from Hardanger" (Marco Polo 8.225055-56); but did he invent them too? An even hard[an]ger question.

Folk-song played a complex rôle in twentieth century composition, begging many vexed questions. What is folk-song? How is it transmitted? How does it evolve? What is the least bad way of "collecting" it, by recording or hand notation? Have collectors distorted their findings to meet their preconceived notions of what folk-song "ought" to be? What is its relationship to "art" music? Some composers have seemed content simply to arrange folk-tunes for concert performance, or slot folk themes into classical forms. The greatest composers inspired by folk-song, Bartók in Hungary, Vaughan Williams in England, soon transcended that, synthesizing the characteristic

rhythms, harmonies and melodic turns of phrase of folk-music into an individual style, and creating, from a kind of distilled essence of folk-music, their own themes and forms very far from the vernacular.

Geirr Tveitt was different again. Unlike Bartók and Vaughan Williams, but like Bartok's compatriot and colleague Kodály, Tveitt had roots in a living folk tradition. On childhood holidays in Hardanger he heard folk-tunes, sung or played on animal horns, flutes, *langeleik* (the Norwegian dulcimer) or the decorative Hardanger fiddle (with its extra resonating strings and multitude of different tunings). The Hardanger tradition was even more private and personal than most: "You should hear me play when I'm on my own and nobody can hear me!" one man told Tveitt. The region's difficult terrain limited intercommunication between scattered communities; some songs were unique to a single locality, even a single family, including Tveitt's own. Hardanger people sang of everyday life; not for them the epic ballads sung elsewhere in southern Norway. New words were written to old tunes. Some songs were wordless because the texts were forgotten, others because the singer was brilliantly mimicking a flute or fiddle.

Few Hardanger folk-tunes used major or minor scales; from the first, modal scales formed the basis of Tveitt's own compositions, indeed in his twenties of a whole rigorous theory of music. (He rarely stuck to it, but the *Hardingtonar* come close.) But as for actual folk-tunes in his early works, the *Variations on a Folk-Song from Hardanger* for two pianos and orchestra, first performed in 1939, were exception

rather than rule. And Hardanger folk-songs were dying out. In 1942 Tveitt settled permanently on his family farmstead above Vikøy, near Norheimsund, on the Hardangerfjord, and deliberately immersed himself in the tradition, staying and working with the local people, often at their "summer hill-farms" on the high mountain pastures. In time they felt his empathy and opened up to him; he scribbled down over a thousand of their songs, sometimes just fragments of words or music. Sadly, almost none survived the 1970 fire.

Tveitt's notebook, however, also tells how a melody was inspired by a few poetic lines he found on the wall of an empty mountain-hut; how, lying in the grass by a mountain burn, a melody suddenly came to him - "probably", he decided, a folk-tune sent by the hill-dwellers. Romanticised? Perhaps. But people have always been hard-put to tell Tveitt's tunes from genuine folk melodies.

The *Hardingtonar* include folk-tunes from Hardanger, always songs, in fact, and he credited the singers, and Tveitt-tunes from Hardanger, and most often a mixture: he likened it to finding a fragment of a picture, which he then finished, or made his own picture around. This begs more questions, but their musical quality is not in doubt: coloured by Tveitt's harmony, counterpoint and orchestration, the tunes are vivid gleams in a unified whole. Influences and affinities abound, especially with Tveitt's beloved French and Russian music, often strongest with the Frenchman Charles Koechlin, in the clarity and integrity of Tveitt's habitually two- or three-part layered textures. Intensifying the melodies' essence, harmony and polyphony grow from their home modes, or from other modes to suggest microtones: two related modes, one including B and one B flat,

imply something in between. Ostinatos evoke an accompanying *langeleik*, or fermenting beer, horses' hoof-beats, the whisper of summer breezes or the sun glittering on the waters of the fjord.

Welcome with honour, opening *Suite No.1*, is a traditional Tveitt family song, a ceremonial greeting to neighbours arriving for harvest festival. Tveitt learnt *Flute air* from Anna Skeie of nearby Byrkjeland, whose singing sounded "remarkably like a flute". "If I could, I would sing you the most beautiful song on earth," sighs the third tune, "but my poor song will not suffice". Promising *Cloudberry and moorberries*, a girl entices a shepherd boy to her summer hill-farm. *Stave church song* memorialises the long-destroyed wooden church at Vikøy: its bells, Tveitt said, echo "in the unusual intervals and precise rhythm" of the fragment of ancient, probably secular, song: "medieval churches often used folk-tunes". An age-old trouble follows: *Alas, my girl, they say she is with child*; while *Consecration of the new beer*, "one of Norway's oldest folk-tunes", is a solemn rather than celebratory ritual: a visitor's song of gratitude after a hard journey over the snow mountains. *Now our brandy keg is empty we'll have to do some work* laments the next song; the woodblocks in Tveitt's orchestra suggest to his daughter Gyri the sad, hollow sound of a small, old (and empty) brandy keg in their Hardanger home. After *Langeleik tune* comes one the Tveitt family always sung when travelling up to their summer hill-farm - listen for the gunshot they fired to awake the echo from Husaleit crag. *Hasty wedding* is of course a shotgun one: father is angry; his stupid son has got his girl pregnant; scandal; all the preparations will delay the harvest; and how can they lay everything out in a barn which is already half-full of hay? The noble religious tune *God's goodness and*

greatness contrasts with an anti-authoritarian dig at the taxman, with untranslatable wordplay in the Norwegian title, and a braggart boasting of being the best dancer at the wedding... and getting his come-uppance falling downstairs. Is *The last farewell* “the most beautiful song on earth”? Tveitt, surely wrongly, feared he had “failed to bring out in the harmony the mighty spirit of this folk-tune”: “Now alone I sing the song we sang. Farewell, yes farewell in the last sunset. Tomorrow when the sun comes gently in, it will never again colour your beautiful hair golden.”

The *Wedding Suite*, No.4, while emulating the variety of the first, marshals its fifteen tunes into a highly coherent structure, pivoting symmetrically around its central movement (No.53) to tell the story of a wedding. Ironically, after its première in 1958 it has hardly ever been heard as a unified whole, through a concatenation of circumstances: the 1970 fire; Tveitt’s many revisions, surviving full scores and orchestral parts often disagreed; perhaps even conductors’ nervousness about the more risqué movements. This first complete recording uses Bjarte Engeset’s recent edition, reconciling the differences. The seven-movement build-up to the wedding is launched by a total Tveitt-tune, *You...*, seemingly a homage to his wife Tullemor: they met and married in *Hardanger* in 1944. Harmony resolves and courtship begins: the boy’s *Going a-wooing*, on horseback by the sounds of things, to see his sweetheart at her family’s summer hill-farm, in the old hut. By local tradition a respected community figure acts as *Matchmaker*, addressing the girl’s parents on the boy’s behalf: twice he asks for her hand, twice they reply doubtfully, finally he beats his fist on the table. Success: in No. 50, guests are *Off to the country wedding*. The toastmaster leads a tribute to the bride,

her traditional costume and *Bridal crown*. The groom’s rowdy mates arrive, lugging his boat: they had sunk it (with a cymbal crash?) when he rowed across to visit his sweetheart at night, so he had to walk all the way round the fjord to get home. As their racket dies away, the silent rowing-boat comes carrying the bride on the glittering waters of the fjord, at the still centre of the whole suite and its emotional heart, representing the wedding itself (another of Tveitt’s own tunes?).¹ Then the *Toastmaster’s song* kicks off the party. No. 55 mirrors No. 51: now the *Hardanger girl* is married she exchanges her bridal crown for a *skaut*, a white kerchief [see photo rear page of booklet]. But Tveitt tempers this poetic veneration of the wife with the tale of the legendary strong woman Rich Ragna, who stranded her husband on a reef so he drowned when the tide came in; “Bright prospects for the bridegroom!” Tveitt wrote in the score. Dancing follows the wedding feast: in *Hardanger*, gatecrashers were welcome so long as they were silent and wore weird masks, disguised as supernatural creatures; it was no compliment to the bride and groom if no such “Guisers” turned up. Is it one of them - a rejected suitor? - who slips something into *The bride’s drink*? Bassoon trills belch out the laxative’s effect on the bride’s stomach; substituting the song’s unprintable words. A drunkard slips under the table, taking tablecloth and glasses with him, and sleeps, snoring; Tveitt seals his testimonial to atonal music by marking the tuba’s final note “Fis!” - Norwegian for F sharp, or “Fart!” *Hardanger ale* is a fizzy celebration of the local homebrew, drunk for quality (“it tastes so good!”) rather than quantity; wisely, if its strength was anything like Tveitt suggested by adding an oblique line to his usual heading (number: colon) - 60%.

Like many Tveitt tunes, *Hardanger ale* was a hit. Today some singers treat even his own like genuine folk-tunes - varied in the singing. So much for copyright; though Tveitt did not help himself by blurring the boundaries. But it is a kind of compliment. The Englishman Edward Elgar said “I write the folk-music of this country!” Tveitt, whose sympathy with genuine folk-song was immeasurably

deeper than Elgar’s, might have found more consolation than him in that thought.

David Gallagher

¹ This very scene is illustrated in *Bridal voyage on the Hardangerfjord* by Hans Gude and Adolph Tidemand, which is the cover of Naxos 8.550881, Grieg Piano Music Vol.1.

Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO)

Formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, in 1951 the ensemble, now full-time, took the name of the Scottish National Orchestra, later assuming the title Royal, a recognition of its importance in the musical life of Scotland. Distinguished conductors who have worked with the orchestra include Karl Rankl, Hans Swarowsky, Walter Susskind, Bryden Thomson and Sir Alexander Gibson, the last named becoming the first Scottish-born principal conductor in 1959. Neeme Järvi, who was conductor from 1984 to 1988, is now Conductor Laureate and Alexander Lazarev succeeded Walter Weller as Music Director in 1997. The orchestra has a busy schedule in Scotland, including regular seasons in its home-town of Glasgow, annual appearances at the Edinburgh Festival and regular performances in the BBC Promenade Concerts in London. In addition to concerts in England, the orchestra has travelled to other countries, with tours of North America, Japan, Austria and Switzerland. The wide repertoire of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra extends from the Baroque to the contemporary. There have been two recent awards from Gramophone and the orchestra has embarked on a collaboration with Naxos.

Bjarte Engeset

The Norwegian conductor Bjarte Engeset completed his training with Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki in 1989, gaining the highest possible jury score awarded by the Academy in its Diploma examinations. In 1990 he was a prize-winner in the Nordic Conducting Competition and since his participation in the 1991 Tanglewood Seminar he has conducted leading orchestras throughout Scandinavia, as well as in England, Germany, Belgium, Romania, Slovakia, Estonia and the Czech Republic. He made his London début with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1997, while at home continuing to play a leading part in festivals throughout Norway, working both in the concert-hall and in the opera-house. He has frequently conducted the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra and shared conducting duties with Mariss Jansons during the orchestra’s three-week tour of Asia. He is, since 1994, artistic director of Tromsø Symphony Orchestra, and from 2001 he is permanent guest conductor of the Flemish Radio Orchestra.

C'est oui : dans le n° 50, les invités se mettent *En route pour les noces campagnardes*. Le maître de cérémonie lève son verre à la mariée, à son costume traditionnel et à sa *Couronne nuptiale*. Les amis chahuteurs du marié arrivent alors, traînant son bateau : ils l'avaient sabordé (d'un coup de cymbales ?) lorsqu'il avait voulu aller retrouver sa petite amie une nuit, si bien qu'il avait dû faire tout le tour du fjord à pied pour rentrer chez lui. Leur tapage s'évanouit et la barque silencieuse emmène la mariée sur les eaux miroitantes du fjord, au centre de toute la suite, dont cette plage paisible est le cœur émotionnel et qui représente la cérémonie elle-même (une autre des mélodies originales de Tveitt ?).¹ Puis la *Chanson du maître de cérémonie* marque le début de la fête. Le n° 55 fait écho au n° 51 : la jeune fille de Hardanger est maintenant mariée et elle échange sa couronne nuptiale contre un « *skaut* », foulard blanc [c. f. photo au dos du livret]. Mais Tveitt tempère cette vénération poétique de l'épouse avec le récit de la légendaire femme forte Rich Ragna, qui abandonna son mari sur un récif pour qu'il se noie à la marée haute : « Le marié risque de s'amuser! » a écrit Tveitt sur la partition. Après la cérémonie, place à la danse : à Hardanger, les pique-assiette étaient les bienvenus tant qu'ils ne faisaient pas de bruit et portaient des masques bizarres, déguisés en créatures surnaturelles ; de fait, c'était presque une insulte envers les mariés si de tels « *Guisers* » ne se montraient pas à leurs noces. Est-ce l'un d'eux – ou un prétendant malchanceux ? – qui verse subrepticement quelque chose dans *Le verre de la mariée* ? Des trilles de basson érucitent l'effet du laxatif sur l'estomac de la mariée ; ils se substituent aux mots de la chanson « que la morale réproûve ». Un ivrogne

glisse sous la table, entraînant avec lui la nappe et des verres ; il s'endort et se met à ronfler ; Tveitt conclut par une recommandation tenant de la musique atonale en marquant la note finale du tuba « *Fis!* » – mot norvégien qui signifie fa dièse... ou « prout! » *La bière de Hardanger* est une pétillante célébration de la bière maison – que l'on boit plus pour sa qualité (« elle est si bonne ! ») que pour sa quantité ; et c'est plus sage, si elle était aussi forte que ce que Tveitt laisse à penser en ajoutant une ligne oblique à son en-tête habituel (nombre : colonne) - 60%.

Comme beaucoup de mélodies de Tveitt, *La bière de Hardanger* fut un succès. Aujourd'hui, certains chanteurs traitent même ses mélodies originales comme de véritables chansons populaires – variées dans leurs interprétations. Tant pis pour le copyright ; d'ailleurs, Tveitt ne s'est pas rendu service en brouillant les cartes. Mais cela tient plutôt du compliment. L'Anglais Edward Elgar déclara « J'écris la musique populaire de ce pays ! » Tveitt, dont la sympathie pour la véritable mélodie populaire était incommensurablement plus profonde que celle d'Elgar, aurait pu trouver plus de consolation que lui dans cette pensée.

David Gallagher

Traduction : David Ylla-Somers

¹ C'est justement cette scène qu'illustre la *Traversée de noces sur le Hardangerfjord* de Hans Gude et Adolph Tidemand, utilisée en couverture du disque Naxos 8.550881, Musique pour piano de Grieg, vol.1.



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