

Folk Music Instruments



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***Hardingfele* – Hardanger fiddle**

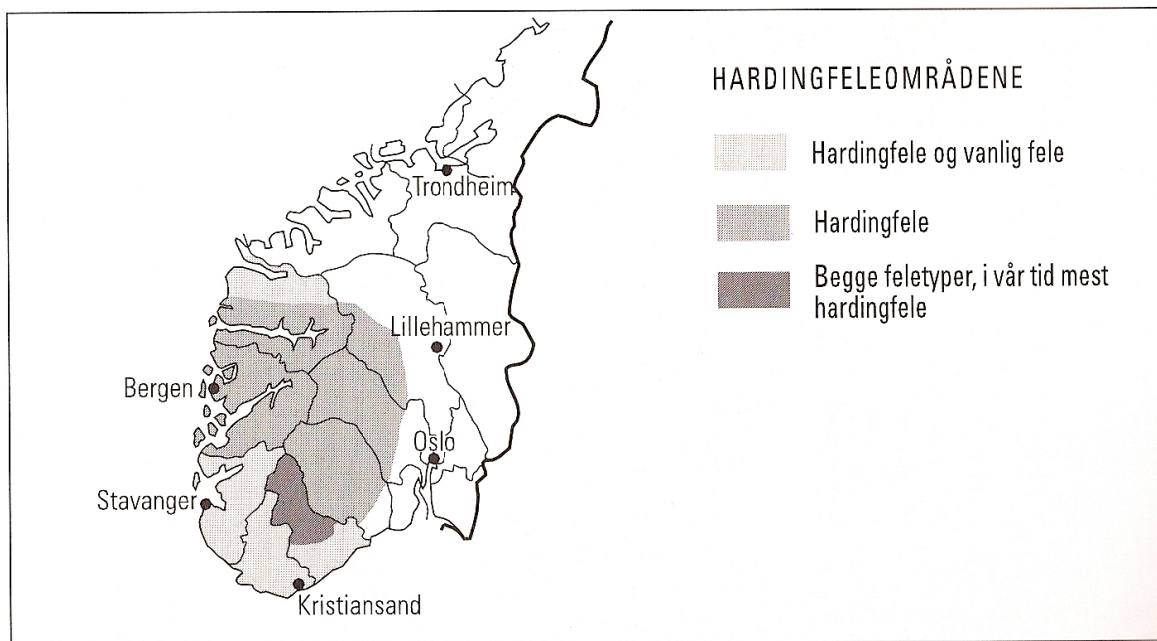
The Hardanger fiddle takes its name from Hardanger. The first fiddle makers who made such instruments lived around this beautiful fjord. Ole Jonson Jaastad has signed the oldest surviving fiddle, dated as 1651. (There prevails, however, uncertainty about the accuracy of this date.) After the Jaastad fiddle, the next Hardanger fiddles first appear in the 1750s, made by Isak Botnen (1669-1759), also from Hardanger. His son, Trond Botnen (1713–1772), made over a thousand fiddles, which were sold far and wide around the country, and many are still in playable condition. There were also other fiddle makers around this time, who all furthered old traditions.



Hardingfele, made in 1756 by Trond Botnen

Since then, the Hardanger fiddle has developed and the area it is associated with has also expanded. The first instruments had two or three under-strings and less decoration. But the first fiddles we know of already had beautifully decorated, mother-of-pearl fingerboards. The old Hardanger fiddle areas were Vestlandet, from Sogn and Sunnfjord in the North, to Sunnhordland in the South, Voss and Hardanger, Valdres, Hallingdal, Numedal and Telemark. In Setesdal, the 'normal' fiddle was first replaced by the Hardanger

fiddle around 1880, but old findings show that Hardanger fiddle was played there in the valley until the end of the 1700s. After a while, in Rogaland and Agder counties, the Hardanger fiddle came into use alongside the 'normal' fiddle. In Nordfjord, the Hardanger fiddle was also used side by side with the 'normal' fiddle from circa 1900. In addition, the Hardanger fiddle has, for periods, been played in several other areas in southern Norway.



Just like the violin (the 'normal' fiddle), the Hardanger fiddle has four strings, which are bowed. But, in addition, the Hardanger fiddle has four or five under-strings, which resonate in sympathy with and ring alongside the bowed strings. They "answer" the melody notes, and form a base of notes which create the special Hardanger fiddle sound. To achieve this, the under-strings (resonating strings) must be tuned extremely accurately in relation to the playing strings.

The most common way to tune the Hardanger fiddle is as follows:



Often the Hardanger fiddle is tuned a tone higher than notated here.

We know of under-strings from several instruments around the world. The Indian sitar has a number of such resonating strings, which give the instrument a rich sound. In Europe in the 1600-1700s, there was an instrument called Viola d'Amore (violin of love) with seven playing strings and as many under-strings. Perhaps the Viola d'Amore has been one of the sources of inspiration for the Hardanger fiddle?



Sigbjørn Bernhoft Osa combined the concert violin with the Hardanger fiddle and was perhaps the one in the 1900s who did most for the acceptance of the Hardanger fiddle.

The Hardanger fiddle differs from the violin in several ways. The bridge, which the strings go over, is quite flat. The reason is that, as a rule, two, and now and again, three strings are played at a time. The fiddler can alternate between playing a single, 'ringing' string (drone note) alongside the melody string – or using double stops. The bridge also has an opening through which the under-strings pass. Given that there are eight or nine strings, the Hardanger fiddle has as many tuning pegs. The number of pegs, together the characteristic dragon head at the top of the instrument, make the Hardanger fiddle easily recognisable. The front and back of the Hardanger fiddle are often beautifully decorated in a style related to the Norwegian *rosemaling* (decorative folk art painting). This drawing and painting tradition is international, and acanthus vines go back in the painting traditions of many countries in Europe. Both the fingerboard and the tail-piece are highly decorated with small pieces of bone and mother-of-pearl and, on some fiddles, mother-of-pearl decoration can also be found around the edges of the whole of the front. The Hardanger fiddle's decorations have similarities with those of the baroque instruments further South in Europe. Decorations, carvings, and inlay of ebony, ivory and tortoiseshell were quite common.

The characteristic of playing the Hardanger fiddle is that the bow sinks into the strings, without the lifting of the bow, or other techniques, which are customary in classical music. The bowing is very important (which notes are slurred together in one bowstroke) is extremely important. It helps to bring out the distinctive rhythms in the tunes.



Benedichte Maurseth plays the Jaastad fiddle, from 1651.