

The Vocal Traditions

We generally use the word *synge* ('sing') when we speak about vocal folk music, but we often also come across the word *kveding*. The term has probably been most common in Telemark and Setesdal, but these days it is also used by performers from other parts of the country. The expression does not suit all vocal music. It has long been said that "*man synger en Psalme, kvæder en Vise, og tulle en Slaatt*", in other words that the word 'synge' is used when speaking about psalms, 'kvæde' is used when speaking about folk songs and 'tulle' is used when speaking about diddling a tune. And it is just in connection with *stev* and *viser* that the word *kveding* is used to mean 'singing'. The word comes from Old Norwegian – *å framsi et kvad*, meaning to recite a song or poem. Today's use of the word is connected to folk songs, where the text has the most significance. The text, and the communication thereof, is particularly important in folk singing. If the length of the text varies from verse to verse, it is the melody that must adapt. The rhythm can be quite free, and often difficult to notate.

To *kvede* is a technically specific way of singing. The character of the voice is closer to natural speaking than in 'normal' song. Compared with trained song, the tone is often sharper, and the voice is more compressed. Norwegian traditional song has this in common with vocal traditions from all throughout the world. In folk singing, it is also customary to emphasise the consonants n, m, ng, l. The note may well have a quick glissando from below, that is to say that it slides up onto the note – or it can start with a little *krull* (trill) or a *likring* (trill from below).

'Intonation' means to place the pitch accurately. What is accurate and what is "correct" are a little different in older folk music and other Western music we hear from day to day (pop, rock, jazz, classical, etc). Our Western ears are used to one way of tuning the instruments, which divides the scale into 12 equal tones (the tempered scale). The old scales in folk music build upon the harmonic series, which results in certain intervals being different from those in the tempered scale, something which occurs in folk music around the world. It can therefore often be unusual for a "tempered ear" to listen to folk music. The ear accustomed to the tempered scale can find it strange or even wrong, but the old scale types are actually quite natural for us.

There are few terms for the ornamentation (melodic decoration) used in folk music. One name is '*trille*' (trill), which is a usual musical expression. But, in several places, the word '*krull*' is used (curl). It quite simply means to make 'curls' or 'rolls' in the melody. The use of ornamentation is obviously influenced by local traditions, but can also be different from performer to performer. Some use a lot of *krull*, others a little, but the use of ornamentation helps to create the vocal music's character.