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**Genre Syncretism and Nationalism in Norwegian Jazz, 1970-
Present: The Influence of Folk and Contemporary European Art
Music**

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the influence of Norwegian folk and contemporary European art music on the Norwegian jazz scene, cross-referencing historical trends since 1970 with contemporary jazz performances in Oslo. I investigate the role of nationalism and Norwegian national musical identity in the face of globalizing jazz influences and how notions of local musical character blend and conflict with conceptions of international European identity. I provide historical context by examining the role of Edvard Grieg in defining Norwegian national musical character and reflect on the current political and cultural position of Norway. Through important records including Torgrim Sollid's 1975 *Østerdalsmusikk*, and Jan Garbarek's 1972 *Triptykon*, the music on the ECM (Edition of Contemporary Music) record label, and the music performed at contemporary jazz festivals including Ultima, Punkt, and Dølajazz, I explore how notions of Norwegian identity manifest in contemporary compositional and improvisational approaches and reflect ideas about Norwegianness in the face of globalization.

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Genre Syncretism and Nationalism in Norwegian Jazz, 1970-Present: The Influence of Folk and Contemporary European Art Music

In the back room of the Borgund Stave Church Museum nestled in a valley in the Lærdal Region on Norway's west coast, visitors can listen to the quiet jazz saxophone of Jan Garbarek. The piece playing is "In Praise of Dreams," from the namesake ECM (Edition of Contemporary Music) album, a collaboration with American violist Kim Kashkashian, whose viola stylings recall fiddle music. The piece's modal roots evoke rural medieval scenes reflecting the exhibit, which spotlights artifacts found in and around the neighboring 12th-century stave church featuring pagan architectural touches. The music does not explicitly quote Norwegian folk melodies, although the lilting rhythms project a similar feeling. Garbarek's ornamented, reverberated Dorian improvisations, shimmering pads, and accompanying subdued drum machine track connect a modern jazz sensibility with an idealized version of folk music and medieval music. It has a sleek, cosmopolitan style blended with a vision of rustic, ancient music specific to the region. The aesthetic aura associated with this music is found all over the different styles of Norwegian jazz from 1970 to the present. The music, as with much Norwegian jazz, embraces a version of regional folk traditions and blends it with more multicultural, cross-genre, international influences from mainstream European contemporary classical music and modern jazz. It is a unique, albeit stereotyped, brand of artistic expression that presents an imagined version of the past and future that captures a progressive national musical essence. This essence is connected to nature, landscape, and regional history and reflects a tradition that goes back to the time of Edvard Grieg. Norwegian jazz's cosmopolitan, cross-cultural, and idiosyncratic local qualities provide a backdrop to showcase the tension between regional musical tendencies and global influences in Norwegian music.

Historical Context: The Origins of Nationalism and Folk Music Influence in Norwegian Music

Throughout the history of Norway's music, composers wrestled with the idea of a unique Nordic identity separate from the mainstream discourses in European music. Much of this struggle arose from Norway's status as a peripheral, subjugated nation. Norway was subject to the Danish crown for four hundred years before Denmark ceded the country to Sweden in 1814. Norway finally declared independence in 1905, but still was seen by the world as a rural backwater country. In the 19th century, more than half of the Norwegian population emigrated to the United States, a massive loss in the work force that led to economic upheaval¹. Norwegians organically responded to this phenomenon in both progressive and conservative ways. Artists and writers stressed "a return to the folk" to reconnect with a distinctive Norwegian identity, something that had been thought to be lost over the years. But folk culture was not just reactionary—it helped develop a new national identity that embraced modernist principles and allowed Norway to function as a strong independent nation in the modern world². Print media, poets, and visual artists collectively contributed to presenting a new version of Norway that could function in the shifting political landscape of the world, elevating folk material to "high art." This version included depictions of nature and rural life, and therefore folk music, as essential to Norwegian modernity³. As David Grimley claims in *Grieg: Landscape and Musical Identity*, Norwegian musical nationalism, as with other musical nationalisms in Europe and elsewhere, was primarily an *invented* or *imagined* phenomenon, one designed with a sense of

¹ Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. "Being Norwegian in a Shrinking World: Reflections on Norwegian Identity" in *Continuity and Change: Aspects of Modern Norway*. (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1993), 3-5.

² Benestad, Finn. "Nationalistic Trends in 19th Century Norwegian Music." *History of European Ideas* 16, no. 4-6 (1993): 667

³ Grimley, Daniel M. *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity*. (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer Limited, 2006), 36-37.

collectivity and a need for progress and national self-determination in mind, but one that also has its roots in a narrativized historical reality⁴. Most artists and writers at the time went to folk music for inspiration, as it was one of the more distinct Norwegian cultural traditions.

The folk music of Norway was a fertile source of inspiration for composers, painters, and writers alike, and the nationalist movement in the 19th century disseminated it into public culture. Given Norway's unique geographical isolation, the fjords and mountains that slice secluded valleys into its countryside, and the often-conservative quality of oral transmission, the folk music of Norway is quite distinguished from other European folk traditions, even those of adjacent nations Denmark and Sweden. Every district, and in some instances every valley, has musical idiosyncrasies that define the music of the region, with traditions going back for decades and centuries⁵. The roots of Norwegian folk music stem from rural life, including cattle calls, lullabies, folk ballads, and religious music. Unique instruments in the tradition include the *langeleik* (an archaic string instrument), *lur* (a goat's horn), jaw harp, a variety of wooden flutes, and of course, the national instrument of Norway, the Hardanger fiddle. The Hardanger fiddle dates back to the 17th century and is distinguished by its sympathetically resonating strings and detailed artistic inlays on the fingerboard and body of the instrument⁶.

Particularly distinctive elements of Norwegian folk music include a sense of uneven rhythmic pulses, just-intoned harmonies, and sharpened fourths. The rhythmic traits of much Norwegian folk music have their roots in regional dance. The *slåtter*, a triple-time rhythm feel, differs according to each region—in Hardanger and Telemark, the term *springar* is used and

⁴ Grimley, *Grieg*, 31.

⁵ Grinde, Nils. *A History of Norwegian Music*. Translated by William H. Halverson and Leland B. Sateren. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 74.

⁶ Grinde, *Norwegian Music*, 93.

refers to triple feel with a long first beat, whilst in Gudbrandsdalen, it is called a *springleik*. In Møre og Romsdal, it is called a *pols* and typically features a longer middle beat⁷. The duple rhythmic feels include *halling* and *bruremarsj* and accompany rhythmic dances and weddings, respectively⁸. In the folk music, instruments are tuned to or fingered with “natural” third between the major and minor third, and a sharpened fourth with intonation closer to the overtone series. The melodic nature of the music approximates Lydian, Lydian dominant, or mixolydian modalities, but with the microtonal and non-functional elements, it sounds apart from common-practice European music⁹.

Prior to the 19th century, Norwegian folk music did not have any specific national significance and typically accompanied rituals or routines in rural daily life. In response to the economic and social upheaval of the 19th century, musicians deliberately built an ideal image of Norwegian folk culture, using elements of the rural culture passed down from generation to generation and codifying them through written music. The first complete musical attempt to depict Norwegian national culture through folk music was the opera *Fjeldeventyret* (A Mountain Adventure) by Waldemar Thrane, which was composed in 1825 and featured the *lur* folk horn, a *kulokk* cow-herding song, and a loose Lydian modality¹⁰. In the following decades, poet Henrik Wergeland wrote about the connection between the rural medieval kingdom of Norway and a new Norwegian state, claiming that the Danish period of Norwegian subjugation was “impure.” Adolph Tindeman and Hans Gude’s 1849 painting “Bridal Procession on the Hardangerfjord”

⁷ Johansson, Mats. “Rhythm into Style: Studying Asymmetrical Grooves in Norwegian Folk Music.” PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2010, Research Gate, 3-7.

⁸ Grinde *Norwegian Music*, 98-99.

⁹ Johansson, Mats. “Contemporary Norwegian Folk Music.” *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, (11, 2017), 2-3.

¹⁰ Grimley, *Grieg*, 27.

depicted a traditional wedding, complete with a Hardanger fiddle player and stave church, framed by a mythic fjord landscape¹¹. Critical to this national image were depictions of rural life and the enchanting, mystical beauty of the mountainous landscape.

Also important in the 19th century were the collections of Norwegian folk tunes by urban scholars and musicians in Christiania (now Oslo) and Bergen. Musicians including Ludvig Mathias Lindeman, Ole Bull, Jørgen Moe, and Olea Crøger wrote down folk tunes and collected them in books for commercial distribution¹². Edvard Grieg used these transcriptions to compose much of his music, including *Slåtter*, *Haugtussa*, and *25 norske Folkeviser og Danser* (25 Norwegian Folk Songs and Dances)¹³. These folk tune transcription collections were essential to the material side of Norwegian musical nationalism—by capturing and cataloging these tunes, the transcriptionists were codifying aspects of Norwegian oral culture to be shared with audiences attuned to “high art” concert performances or informal commercial distribution for home performance.

Edvard Grieg by far is the best-known figure in Norwegian nationalism. Grieg synthesized diatonic folk music and 19th-century Germanic chromaticism, simultaneously reflecting on an idealized past and projecting a vision of cosmopolitan Norwegian music for the future. Much of Grieg’s music is inspired by nature, and the music is replete with open fifths, bell-like sounds (“klokkeklang”) depicting space and time, stark triads, rhythmic quirks from *halling* and *springar* music, diatonic fragments, incomplete cadences, and modal inflections, contrasting against sophisticated harmonic development¹⁴. This music fits into a wider movement

¹¹ Mattes, Arnulf and Michael Custodis (ed.) *The Nordic Ingredient*, Kornwestheim: Waxmann, 2019, 256-57.

¹² Grimley, *Grieg*, 36.

¹³ Grimley, *Grieg*, 109.

¹⁴ Grinde *Norwegian Music*, 200-205.

in European nationalism and a broader sense of musical foreignness entering into classical music, which paradoxically began in Germanic countries at the perceived center of European music. Both by engaging in the idea of national self-determination and composing with mainstream European stylistic elements, Grieg responded to and interacted with cosmopolitan, internationalist tendencies, but in a Norwegian fashion. Grimley claims that this seemingly irreconcilable conflict is a precursor for 20th-century modernism, with its fraught relationship to the past¹⁵. The nationalism in Grieg's music foreshadowed the developments of unique Nordic traditions in other genres of music, including jazz.

Norwegian Cultural and Musical Identity in the Era of Globalization

The sense of nationalism and national identity in Norway continued well into the 20th century and resurfaced strongly during the modern era of globalization. While in the 19th century, Norway was primarily concerned with differentiating itself culturally from central Europe, in the 20th and 21st centuries Norway had the challenge of cementing (or re-establishing) its national identity in the context of the entire world. In the years following World War II, Norway generally fell on the side of supporting Western democracy and international cooperation. The country joined NATO in 1949, is an active participant in the United Nations, and hosted the Olympics in Lillehammer in 1994¹⁶. Norway quickly became a leader in technology, oil, research, and healthcare, and, as a “neutral” nation, participated in the 1995 Oslo Accords, or peace talks between Israel and Palestine. Oslo is also home to the Nobel Peace Prize

¹⁵ Grimley, *Grieg*, 101.

¹⁶ Kvidal, Trine. "Tensions of Consumer Individualism: Norwegian Identity in the Context of Globalization", *Nordicom Review* 32, 2 (2011), 111-115.

ceremony, an international annual event overseen by the King and Queen of Norway¹⁷. Despite these more international, globalist tendencies, there are still elements of isolationism and exclusionary qualities in Norwegian culture, manifested in a variety of ways. Norway outwardly continues to celebrate its folk culture through folk museums, music and dance competitions, and curricula that teach national literature, folklore, legends, and sagas. Norway is not part of the European Union, voted against joining the European Economic Community (EEC), remains in some ways more independent than its neighbors Sweden or Denmark, and was (and still is) host to a strong white nationalist movement, as well as a generally homogenous population¹⁸. Although overt romantic nationalism generally fell out of favor in the public eye, it remained in cultural life.

To many contemporary Norwegians, ethnicity and culture—whiteness—are central to Norwegian national identity. It is comprehensible that a person of African or Middle Eastern descent could be a citizen of Norway, but they are not *Norwegian* in the racialized sense. An anti-immigration movement in Norway, spearheaded by the reactionary Progress Party, has strong footing in the country today. On the 22nd of July 2011, white nationalist Anders Behring Breivik murdered 77 young progressives on Utøya Island near Oslo¹⁹. Many Norwegian reactionaries see the influence of globalization and foreign influence a negative phenomenon, in contrast to “pure” Norwegian culture. These events are indicative of the fact that while Norway may present itself as a welcoming, progressive nation, it still is fraught with racial issues and

¹⁷ Oystein, Fasting and Mathilde Sorenson. *Norwegian Exception? Norway's Liberal Democracy since 1814*. C Hurst & Co Pub Ltd, 2021, 59-62.

¹⁸ Chan, Wai Cheng Damon. “Norwegian Identity in Music: Norwegianness is the New Loud: Awakening Norwegian Musical Identity in a Globalised Era.” Master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 2012, 14

¹⁹ Muller Myrdahl, Eileen. “Recuperating Whiteness in the Injured Nation: Norwegian Identity in the Response to 22 July.” *Social Identities*, vol. 20, no. 6, 2014, 492-498.

tensions involving national and cultural identity, in particular, the refugee crisis and latent racism toward Somali, Syrian, and Iraqi immigrant populations²⁰.

In Norway, the tensions between the idealized past and globalized future are felt strongly in its music, most notably in heavy metal. The right-wing Norwegian black metal movement of the 1990's echoed throughout the world and traces of it are still felt in Norwegian culture today. The most prominent figure in this scene was Varg Vikernes of the The Norse Heathen Front. Vikernes advocated for a kind of pagan neo-Nazi nationalism and wrote music stripped African influences in the music to create a purely European-style heavy metal, sourcing pagan folk tunes and indigenous Norwegian instruments²¹. To varying degrees, much heavy metal music in the 90's and early 2000's is rooted in medieval paganism and ancient ritual, depicting pan-Scandinavian notions of landscape, history, and culture. In *Norwegian Native Art*, Imke von Helden notes that bands Mayhem, Darkthrone, Burzum, Helheim, Satyricon, and Enslaved evoked Viking imagery through lyrical depictions of nature, landscape, Norse gods, mythical pagan objects, and battles, though most of the bands deny any right-wing nationalist associations²². Von Helden claims that these musicians are subconsciously “performing culture,” and even though they may not explicitly support right-wing causes, they reflect a larger conception of Norwegian identity rooted in history, race, and gender²³.

But as David Grimley and Carl Dahlhaus posit in *Grieg*, nationalism is not only confined

²⁰ Fadnes, Peter, Fornäs, Johan, et. al. McEachrane, M., ed. “The Midnight Sun Never Sets: An Email Conversation About Jazz, Race and National Identity in Denmark, Norway and Sweden” in *Afro-Nordic Landscapes: Equality and Race in Northern Europe*, 1st. ed. New York: Routledge, 2014, 76-77.

²¹ Thompson, Christopher. “Sons of Northern Darkness!: Reflections of National Identity in Norway through Black Metal.” Master’s thesis, Uppsala University, 2012, 24-26.

²² Helden, Imke von. *Norwegian Native Art: Cultural Identity in Norwegian Metal Music*. (Zürich: Lit, 2017), 42-63.

²³ Helden, *Norwegian Native Art*, 24.

to reactionary right-wing politics²⁴. It can also reflect an attempt to build a tolerant, welcoming internationalist identity in an increasingly global world. Described by composer Ole Henrik Moe as “Europe’s folk museum and laboratory for the future,”²⁵ Norway has built its international reputation as the happiest country in the world for several years in a row, and advertises its generous welfare, social support, government funding for the arts, beautiful outdoors, athletics, oil money, knit sweaters, and polite, cultured introverts to the world. There is, in some ways, an inherently constructed “Norwegianess,” or “whiteness” to this idea as well—it is an idealized view of the past and future that does not reflect the realities of racial tension in Norwegian society, conveying a sense of neutrality that positions itself “above” the quarrels of other nations.

In their own way, modern Norwegian jazz musicians support this international impression with pride through their music. Unlike the heavy metal musicians of the 1990’s, Norwegian jazz musicians today tend to embrace a more globalized, internationalist sensibility, engaging Norwegian folk material in a dialogue with the wider contemporary world rather than exclusively tied to white Norwegian identity. Norwegian jazz musicians actively attempt to build an image of Norway as an open-minded place welcoming multiple musical traditions, cultures, and nationalities. Instead of confining the definition of Norwegian identity to whiteness, Norwegian jazz musicians attempt to create a culturally inclusive environment that still embraces the Norwegian folk traditions of the past but pushes them into the future. Again, as in Grieg’s progressive 19th-century vision and the racialized vision of 90’s metal artists, this is an *invented* form of musical nationalism that avoids addressing the political conflict and racial strife present in the country today. While most 20th-century uses of Norwegian folk music in jazz take a

²⁴ Grimley, *Grieg*, 23-26.

²⁵ Skjellstad, Kjell, ed. Trans. Sandra Hamilton. *25 Years of Contemporary Music: Themes, Trends, and Talents*. Oslo: Norwegian Society of Composers, 1992, 28-29.

subtler, less overtly nationalistic approach than Edvard Greig or Waldemar Thrane, they still fall within David Grimley's view of folk music as a way to suspend time and to create a spatio-temporal sense of ancient homeland in a modern context, building a regional identity through culturally specific musical traits.

Jazz and National Identity

How can jazz, a music imported from America, reflect a regional European national context? Some argue that as an African American art form, jazz can never be truly Norwegian, or even European. In a 2007 interview with jazz pianist Ethan Iverson, the jazz critic Stanley Crouch has said “jazz doesn't need European music—or Balkan music, or Indian, or whatever non-American music – to improve itself.”²⁶ Crouch was one of the main spokespeople of mainstream American jazz from the late 80's to the early 2000's, along with Wynton Marsalis, whose philosophies were canonized in Ken Burns' *Jazz* documentary series. Black Nationalist authors including Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) have commented on the differences between “White jazz” and “Black jazz.” For Baraka, Black music emerges from the specific circumstances of the Black American's socioeconomic position from the time of slavery, and white musicians can never authentically replicate this, creating only a pale imitation or counterculture statement²⁷. Crouch and Baraka's polemical statements on what “real” jazz is are increasingly seen by musicians as out-of-date, but they have a point that the blues roots of jazz are a unique African American situation, and that jazz could not have originated out of any other context. These musicians and cultural critics helped build the story of a new American canon,

²⁶ Iverson, Ethan. “Interview with Stanley Crouch.” DO THE M@TH, May 2, 2016. <https://ethaniverson.com/interviews/interview-with-stanley-crouch/>.

²⁷ Baraka, Amiri. *Blues People*. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1974, 16.

one that traces the jazz roots back to Congo Square and the New Orleans blues up through Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Ornette Coleman. European musicians, aside from outliers like Django Reinhardt, are generally excluded from this American narrative and hold a peripheral status²⁸. In a way, this sidelining of European jazz musicians from the American canon is similar to the way that Grieg was sidelined by the Austro-Germanic canon.

One might argue that there is a nationalistic tone to this discourse and that jazz itself can hold American nationalist functions as a purely African-American art form. But the international spread of jazz from the 1920's onward was arguably inevitable, and the dynamics of global jazz deal with a compelling interplay between race, nationality, and identity. Capitalism, globalist expansion, exploitive entertainment, war, and racism all play a role in its international identity. As E. Taylor Atkins argues in *Jazz Planet*, jazz has become a symbol for cosmopolitanism and sophisticated international city culture rather than a provincial American music as it was in the early 20th century²⁹. In *Europas Jazz*, scholar Ekkehard Jost claims that as with nationalist European classical music in the 19th century, jazz musicians in Europe differentiated themselves by using regional folk traditions in their music³⁰. Because of its rapid dissemination and adaptations within local contexts—for example, as in Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, or Asia—it is possible for jazz to be European, and inherently Norwegian, as it is international music adapted to regional circumstances. Just as Grieg adapted a central European musical style in a peripheral Norwegian context, so did Norwegian musicians with jazz.

²⁸ Gioia, Ted. *The History of Jazz*. Oxford University Press, 2021, 380-381.

²⁹ Atkins, E. Taylor. "Toward a Global History of Jazz" in *Jazz Planet*. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), xx.

³⁰ Jost, Ekkehard. "On the 'European' in European Jazz." *Jazz in Europa: Darmstadt Studies in Jazz Research*, (Vol. 3 Ed. Wolfgang Knauer. Darmstadt: Darmstadt Jazz Institute, 1993.), 2-5.

As an improvised art form, jazz can be a vehicle for self-expression that allows for regional idiosyncrasies—a blank slate for cultural fusions. From its onset, jazz has always absorbed new musical forms and innovations from musicians. A melting pot itself, it often finds the shared musical DNA with other adjacent musical cultures that share their roots in North Africa and provides a platform for accepting and presenting cross-cultural musical situations as in Norway. In Norway, jazz music similarly acts as a platform for cross-cultural and cross-genre interaction that unveils the inherent tensions present in Norwegian musical culture.

Jazz and Folk Music in Norway

From the arrival of jazz in Europe in the early 20th century, musicians blended the jazz tradition with their regional cultural and musical idiosyncrasies, especially during the 1960's, when regional folk revivals were popular³¹. In the 1950's in Norway, the National Fiddler's Association was growing, and people were exposed to folk music through regional schools, competitions, and folk museums in the economic boom after World War II³². Throughout Scandinavia, many jazz musicians came into contact with regional folk music, drawn to its rhythmic vitality and unique timbres. Some initial prototypes in Scandinavia included *Jazz På Svenska* by Swedish jazz pianist Jan Johansson in 1964, which became the best-selling Swedish jazz record of all time³³. This set the stage for the development of jazz-folk fusions in Norway.

The use of folk music in Norwegian jazz arguably begins with the aforementioned saxophonist Jan Garbarek, the best-known figure in the Norwegian jazz scene respected

³¹ Martinelli, Francesco, ed. *The History of European Jazz: The Music, Musicians, and Audience in Context*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2018, 22-25.

³² Goertzen, Chris. *Fiddling for Norway: Revival and Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 31-36.

³³ Gagatsis, Alexander. (2020). Typologies of the North: Mediating 'Northernness' in *Jazz in Scandinavia*. Nordlit. 46, 273.

internationally for his distinctive saxophone tone. *Triptykon* (1972) was the first recording on which Garbarek used a Norwegian folk song in his compositions, a direction in which he had been encouraged by American trumpeter Don Cherry and the music theorist and pianist George Russell, whose Lydian Chromatic Concept conceived of music in terms of resolving modes rather than vertical harmonic progressions³⁴. As John Dickinson claims in his *Grieg to Garbarek: Jazz and Norwegian Identity*, this resonated with Garbarek's knowledge of Norwegian folk modalities, including the Lydian mode³⁵. Garbarek was also influenced by Albert Ayler, who adapted a Swedish folk tune "Torparvisan" in his free composition "Ghosts" in 1961³⁶. Garbarek's tone is reminiscent of Ayler on *Tryptykon*, in a melodic style unrestrained by the typical harmonic underpinnings of jazz in favor of an open melodic modality. He directly quotes a folk tune in "Bruremarsj" ("Wedding March").

"Bruremarsj" features bassist Arild Andersen playing arco in a stratospheric range, doubling Garbarek's saxophone line heterophonically, recalling the timbral quality of a Hardanger fiddle. They repeat the melody in different orchestrations and ornamentations, improvising on and around it. This interaction, supplemented by Edward Vesala's skittering drums, gives a feeling of a collective folk improvisation using the tune as a rough guideline. In a way, this is not far from the typical conception of a jazz standard, or a "head" in jazz lingo, but instead of using Broadway showtunes, the musicians use folk material as the melodic basis. Again, here Garbarek is indebted to Albert Ayler's 1961 approach, or the free jazz approach of Ornette Coleman, albeit in a "cooler" style, closer to the West Coast saxophonists. This isolated

³⁴ Vitali, Luca. *The Sound of the North: Norway and the European Jazz Scene*. Edited by Fiona Talkington and Melinda Mele. Auditorium, 2016, 15-21.

³⁵ Dickenson, James W. *From Grieg to Garbarek: Norwegian Jazz and National Identity*. Knippa, 2011, 32-33.

³⁶ Dickenson, *From Grieg to Garbarek*, 139.

folk tune is surrounded by otherwise standard modern jazz compositions, making it somewhat of an oddity. While embracing local folk traditions, Garbarek was simultaneously participating in a wider international discourse of European avant-garde classical music and modern jazz.

Perhaps the first comprehensive setting of folk tunes in a jazz context is trumpeter Torgrim Sollid's *Østerdalsmusikk 1975*. The melodic material comes from Ole Mørk Sandvik's eponymous collection of folk tunes from the Østerdal region in Norway³⁷. The music uses the horns as a kind of analog to the fiddle or accordion, particularly the tenor and alto saxophone, playing in unisons or with drones. In the track "Halling etter Martinus Amundsen," the saxes play in stringent, straight-toned unison and drones against a rollicking rock fusion drum beat, thundering bass and trumpet counterlines. The absence of piano gives the music less a jazz-oriented harmonic grounding, instead relying on an open 5ths-oriented sound world associated with Norwegian folk music. The musicians preserve the entire folk melody, including its modal, rhythmic, and microtonal quirks. Other places on the album give specific genre connotations, in particular on "Kulokk fra Tolga etter Petronille Hulbækdal," the rhythm section evokes a 12/8 Latin feel, and Garbarek conjures a Coltrane-like approach in his solo. This piece is an example of the refraction of original folk material transcribed by Ole Mørk Sandvik into a multicultural jazz context. The blues and Latin elements—as the American narrative holds, the folk roots of jazz—blend and interact with Norwegian folk elements. The musicians seek out a common rhythmic impulse between acoustic jazz fusion and Nordic folk material and explore the pitch material at the heart of both musical genres, creating a natural bridge.

On other tracks, Sollid approaches the folk material as fragments for development through elegiac solo trumpet improvisations ("Pols etter Martinus Amundsen," "Gukko etter

³⁷ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 57-60.

Martinus Amundsen” and “Vår Gukko”) using reverb, delay, and natural piano resonance. The jazz ballad format is effective in presenting these folk tunes, either accompanied with rhythm section, in a chorale format, or through soft contrapuntal interaction between the horns (as heard on “Bånsull etter Gudlaug Bjøråneset,” “Kulokk etter Olav Hougen,” and “Kulokk etter Hanna Moren,”) Sollid uses the strident sound of Garbarek’s straight-toned soprano sax to convey a fiddle-like timbre.

As in Garbarek’s *Triptykon*, the original folk material in *Østerdalsmusikk 1975* is fodder for jazz improvisation; this is not unlike the way jazz musicians treat Broadway show tune melodies in jazz standards. The approach of taking preexisting melodies and treating them as frameworks for improvisation is not alien to jazz, so the use of the folk tunes feels natural. Included in the titles of some of the tunes are the original composers of the folk melodies, which respects their work and the work of transcriptionist, Ole Mørk Sandvik. Sollid went on to further explore the potential combinations of folk singing and big-band jazz with his cross-cultural band Søyrr and created a “reunion” of sorts for the *Østerdalsmusikk 1975* album in 2015, also titled *Østerdalsmusikk*³⁸. The reunion features a bigger band, with Guro Gravem Johansen and Margrete Nordmoen on vocals, Jørn Halbakken on Hardanger fiddle, Sigrun Eng on cello, Tom Steinar Lund on guitar, Birger Misteregeen on munnharpe (jaw harp)³⁹. Sollid revisits the same folk material from Ole Mørk Sandvik with new influences, more closely approaching polystylism than the original record—often Latin, swing, and ambient styles are cross-referenced within the folk-jazz context.

In the folk-jazz music by Sollid, Garbarek, and others, we hear the inherent

³⁸ Dickenson, James W. “The Impact of Norwegian Folk Music on Norwegian Jazz, 1945-1995.” PhD diss., University of Salford, 2003, 91-103.

³⁹ Dickenson, “The Impact of Norwegian Folk Music,” 106.

contradictions of musical nationalism that Grimley describes, perhaps in a more postmodern context. In much of the jazz that embraces Norwegian folk music, the cosmopolitan and cross-cultural often rub against the regional and local in a way that ultimately does not neatly resolve. Regardless, the music projects a strong sense of inclusion and open-mindedness, as jazz is a platform which includes multiple styles of music. These musicians use jazz—a fundamentally improvised framework—as a vehicle to innovate and drive music forward, but at its roots are pentatonic and modal melodicism, an inward sense of vocal line, organic expression, and a sense of something universal and ancient. Folk music fits into that balance of innovation and tradition.

The 70's was a fruitful time for blooming folk music and jazz combinations, as captured in the compilation record *Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair - Norwegian Folk Jazz 1971-1977*. Standout moments from this record include folk singer Anne Karine Tonset and jazz saxophonist Harald Gundhus's "Sautrall," where Tonset scats and improvises around fragments of a Norwegian folk melodies, but in a traditional Norwegian folk style. Many jazz vocalists followed in this tradition of blending scat singing with traditional Norwegian melodies, including Mari Kvien Brunsvoll, Sidsel Endressen, and Agnes Buen Garnås, who recorded a duet album of medieval folk tunes with Jan Garbarek in 1989, *Rosenfole*. Swedish-Norwegian drummer Egil "Bop" Johansen's *Samse Tak* (1976) blends extroverted traditional folk tunes with a jazz combo aesthetic, featuring guitarist Terje Rypdal, bassist Georg Riedel, and saxophonist Knut Riisneas. Referencing *Samse Tak* in a *Spectator* interview with British critic Stuart Nicholson, Johansen claimed that "Nordic tonality is in fact a sort of blues, Nordic blues, Scandinavian blues if you will. For us jazz musicians it is but a short leap to experience that melancholy as a companion to joy."⁴⁰ Musicians followed in the steps of Garbarek, Sollid, Johansen, and other artists of the

⁴⁰ Nicholson, Stuart. "Nordic Blues: The Spectator Archive." *The Spectator Archive*, November 1, 2003. <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/1st-november-2003/60/nordic-blues>.

1970's, blending different aesthetics of jazz from Dixieland to free jazz with folk music.

Norwegian musicians began using the Hardanger fiddle in improvised jazz contexts, more directly engaging in folk culture in jazz settings. The Hardanger fiddle itself in many ways represents that dichotomy between regional and international—often used by experimental improvisers in and outside of Norway as an instrument with immersive resonating timbres, but still used as the de facto folk instrument in Norwegian folk competitions and in serious study⁴¹. It holds a multiplicity of functions and associations beyond a solely Norwegian folk instrument—it can simultaneously evoke rural folk traditions and create a swirling, culturally-ambiguous sonic landscape in a free improvised context.

The Hardanger fiddle's distinctive sound and sympathetically resonating strings make it a popular choice for musicians looking for different colors in improvised music—in that sense, from a purely sonic standpoint, it is a unique instrument that can function in cross-cultural musical settings. The instruments can be tuned to different scordatura settings beyond the open-string sounds of the traditional music, allowing for the instrument to function in dissonant or poly-tonal settings. International musicians like Sara Caswell, Liz Knowles, Dan Trueman, Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh of The Gloaming, and Zosha Warpeha use Hardanger both in through-composed and improvised contexts⁴². This group of musicians also play a unique instrument called the “Hardanger d'amore,” a Hardanger fiddle with an extra lower string built by Norwegian fiddle maker Salve Håkedal. Ironically, most of the musicians that play this instrument are not Norwegian. Frequently these cross-cultural Hardanger fiddle players engage

⁴¹ Aksdal, Bjørn. “The Norwegian Hardanger Fiddle in Classical Music.” *ICTM Study Group on Folk Musical Instruments (Proceedings from the 16th International Meeting)*. Studia Instrumentorum Musicae Popularis: 2010, 5-6.

⁴² Håkedal, Salve. “Hardanger D'amore.” Salve Håkedal - Hardanger d'Amore, February 8, 2020. https://www.hardangerdamore.com/index.php/Salve_H%C3%A5kedal.

with other fiddle traditions, from Irish and Scottish fiddling to Appalachian traditions⁴³. But the fact that this instrument was a national folk symbol for decades in Norway is not necessarily relevant to these artists' creative practices⁴⁴. Instead, they see it as a useful cross-cultural musical instrument, a way to generate evocative timbres because of the resonating body of the instrument. They perhaps see the Norwegian instrument as a cross-cultural blank slate, and that it functions in "post-cultural" musical contexts, or global contexts where it can represent multiple folk cultures at once. The Norwegian instrument is "neutral" in that sense, a place where cultures can meet without danger or threat, but one where whiteness prevails as a perceived cultural arbiter. This sense of neutrality may not be present in another instrument from different cultures.

Other musicians use the fiddle to more directly reference and engage in a dialogue with Norwegian folk music. The trio Utla and the band Groupa were perhaps the first Nordic groups to combine Nordic percussion with Hardanger fiddle and improvised jazz material, often simply arranging Norwegian folk material in avant-garde jazz settings similar to Torgrim Sollid or Jan Garbarek but with original folk instruments⁴⁵. Utla consists of Hardanger fiddler Håkon Høgemo, percussionist Terje Isungset, and saxophonist Karl Seglem, often working closely with folk vocalist Berit Opheim Versto on their 2003 album *Song*. Groupa is a Swedish ensemble, known for their Pan-Nordic sensibility, integrating Swedish, Icelandic, and Danish. They also showcase percussionist Terje Isungset, whose use of a creative palate of percussion instruments gives the music a shifting, shimmering quality⁴⁶.

⁴³ Håkedal, Salve. "Hardanger D'amore."

⁴⁴ Johansson, Mats. "The Gendered Fiddle: On the Relationship between Expressive Coding and Artistic Identity in Norwegian Folk Music." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 44, no. 2 (2013), 363.

⁴⁵ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 59.

⁴⁶ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 113.

Contemporary Hardanger fiddlers and violinists Nils Økland, Håkon Høgemo, Ola Kvernberg, Selma French Bolstad, Ragnhild Furebotten, Gjermund Larsen, Olav Luskengård Mjelva, Helga Myhr, Anne Hytta, and Erlend Apneseth all walk the now-thin line between folk music, ambient music, and jazz, representing the Hardanger fiddle in modern cross-genre contexts. Erlend Apneseth joined accordionist Frode Haitli on his album *Avant Folk*, about which he was interviewed by Hubro Records, a Norwegian label dedicated to embracing non-traditional genre combinations. He said in the YouTube interview,

“It’s a really interesting time in Norway for music that blends genres. My impression is that there is now a shared platform where the music is in focus, without trying to profile any specific tradition. It’s great to be at a point where it’s really the music that’s in focus and not where it comes from.”⁴⁷

This attitude aligns generally with the more cosmopolitan, globalist ideas about jazz—the music crosses borders and could in reality come from anywhere. But the Norwegian folk music at the trio’s core still suggests in some ways that the music is indebted to Norwegian traditions. Their term “avant folk” to define this music also suggests its core roots. It is important to note that unlike city-dwellers Grieg or Garbarek, Apneseth is not from Oslo; he is from Jølster, a rural area of Norway known for its deep folk traditions. The typical association of modernist invention from “sophisticated” international city folk appropriating the rural past is somewhat disrupted in his example — as someone raised surrounded by rural folk tradition and before moving to Oslo, Apneseth brings some regional and local “authenticity” to the music⁴⁸. In addition to returning to his personal cultural roots, Apneseth also breathes innovation into folk music, suggesting that the folk strain itself is the source of the innovation, bringing the folk tradition forward rather than

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QJPWvaSyn4>

⁴⁸ Hammershaug, Bjørn. “Erlend Apneseth Trio - Det Andre Rommet.” Folkemusikk, April 28, 2016. <https://www.folkemusikk.no/erlend-apneseth-trio-det-andre-rommet/>.

just blending it with music from the jazz tradition.

On *Avant Folk*—and its follow-up album *Avant Folk II*, the music spans from jaunty, dance-like folk tunes with extended improvisation sections centered around a single drone pitch or tonality (“Hug” and “Doggerland”) to darker, longer, ambient explorations (“Gråtar’n,” “Trio,” and “I Østen som I Vesten (All Over the Place).” Bandleader and accordionist Frode Haltli brings together an eclectic ensemble of Hardanger fiddle, violin, saxophone, trumpet (doubling goat horn), Hammond organ/keyboards, electric guitar, vocals, bass, and drums/percussion, but the music is strongly rooted in Norwegian folk traditions, directly quoting melodies, rhythmic references, and microtonal inflections found in the folk music. Haltli’s accordion solos waver between traditional folk improvisations and contemporary jazz stylings similar to the Maria Schneider Orchestra’s accordionist Gary Versace. The track “Østen som I Vesten” compellingly uses quarter tones, joining elements of the folk music with avant-garde classical music, or perhaps even other folk traditions with microtonality, including melodies from the Middle East. Erlend Apneseth takes a Hardanger fiddle solo that alternates and blends musical cultures, including Qawali or Klezmer violin, but framed by a Nordic folk context⁴⁹. The distorted electric guitar solo and whale-like trumpet improvisations later in the piece take the piece out of the more firmly Nordic-folk sound world of the beginning into psychedelic jazz-rock in the vein of Medeski, Martin, and Wood.

Another example of the multitude of modalities the Hardanger fiddle can represent is the experimental big band Trondheim Jazz Orchestra’s 2019 collaboration with experimental Swedish-Ethiopian singer Sofia Jernberg and Norwegian Hardanger fiddler Olav Luskengård Mjelva. The music approaches some of the fiddle tunes as movable musical “found objects,”

⁴⁹ Hammershaug, Bjørn. “Erlend Apneseth Trio - Det Andre Rommet.”

fading them in and out of pointillistic improvised soundscapes reminiscent of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. In “Københavneren” (“The Copenhagener”), the soundscape opens up to diatonic fiddle fragments, complete with the uneven beat structure of a typical pols along with a quirky, through-composed orchestration of the tune. In other pieces, like “Den lunefulle / Den eldste / Langåkeren,” the music begins with Mjelva performing the fiddle tune alone. The ensemble departs from it with jazz-oriented grooves and returns with the full band integrated into the melodic fiddle tune, followed by an atonal breakdown of the melody and an open, ambient wash of fiddle texture. The music juxtaposes internationalist European avant-garde postmodernism, free improvisation, and traditional folk melodies. In these two examples, the Hardanger fiddle still acts as a blank slate for other musical elements to combine with it, however its identity in folk music is more pronounced than other international uses of the fiddle.

Ragnhild Furebotten, a Norwegian Hardanger fiddler and violinist born in Saltdal in Nordland, Norway, also dabbles in jazz collaborations. In 2011, Ragnhild Furebotten paired with jazz trombonist and arranger Helge Sunde for *Never on a Sunday*, leading to an unexpected but compelling combination of brass band tradition, jazz, avant-garde classical music, and folk music. Furebotten collected a variety of folk tunes from Nordland county near the city of Bodø and worked closely with Sunde and Geir Lysne to arrange the music⁵⁰.

The fiddle music, with its descending triplet figures and uneven beats, works in tandem with jazz-oriented brass arrangements and a modern harmonic sensibility. The brass and wind players employ extended techniques, including brass lip smacks and ghost notes for rhythmic groove, saxophone glissandi singing and playing to modify timbre, and multiple brass mutes. The brass players had to closely watch Furebotten’s bowings and follow her phrasing for the

⁵⁰ Lysvåg, Christian. “Ragnhild Furebotten and Modern Tradition.” *Listen to Norway*, June 27, 2008. <http://www.listento.no/mic.nsf/doc/art2008062512534718975967>.

uneven beats typical of this music, as some of those rhythmic variations could not be notated in the music. To simplify this process, the brass players memorized the music and avoided reading from sheet music so as to sync up as close as possible to Furebotten's rhythmic phrasing⁵¹. The rhythmic unevenness and quirks of the brass band writing, a product of arranging folk music for such an ensemble, recall the New Orleans brass band tradition when brass band musicians began incorporating blues at the beginning of the 20th century at the birth of early jazz. The influence of the early jazz brass band tradition is felt strongly in the folk arrangements on *Never on a Sunday*. The connections between the regional folk music and the rhythmic elements of jazz seem like a natural fit and evoke other cross-cultural and brass-based music traditions around the world—polka, Klezmer, and Balkan music, for instance.

Younger musicians coming out of the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo are now mixing jazz and folk music with indie pop music, creating a unique blend of accessible music. Groups like Masåva and Morgenrode embrace a more commercial sensibility in their compositions, creating original lyrics while referencing improvised folk textures and jazz improvisation. They also perform at a range of festivals, bringing traditional music to different audiences. Ta:lik, the label associated with these musicians, says on its website "...we want to state that traditional music belongs to the present as well as the past, and does not always have to be paired with so-called traditional aesthetics."⁵² This suggests that the label considers pop/jazz/folk fusions to be a part of the folk tradition, and that like in the cast of Erlend Apneseth or Frode Haltli, folk music is a living, breathing tradition open to change rather than a static relic of the past. While not every folk musician shares this view, this open-minded attitude toward the

⁵¹ Lysvåg, Christian. "Ragnhild Furebotten and Modern Tradition."

⁵² "Ta:Lik." WOMEX. Accessed March 20, 2022. <https://www.womex.com/virtual/talik>.

folk tradition is fairly common among Norwegian jazz musicians engaging in folk music.

These musical examples are part of a long-standing tradition in Norwegian music to search for a regional and local musical identity, either consciously or subconsciously, while also seeking to participate in the wider world of music through jazz, classical music, and other folk music. As in Grieg, they stress a “return to the folk,” either through post-modern reference, organic musical blends in search of a shared musical DNA, or mere incorporation of the folk instruments and embracing the regional associations they bring. The elision of the Hardanger fiddle and folk tunes with other forms of “world music” led to another parallel trend in Norwegian music, one that often less directly references folk music traditions—the music of the ECM record label. This music also reflects the tensions between national and international tendencies.

ECM, European Cosmopolitanism, “World Music,” and Contemporary Classical Music

Stemming the attempts to blend folk music and jazz is the stereotyped “Nordic tone” developed in tandem with the ECM (Edition of Contemporary Music) record label. Jan Garbarek’s quartet, playing as a subgroup within George Russell’s sextet, met Manfred Eicher, the founder and head producer at ECM at the Bologna International Jazz Festival. ECM’s sound was a major phenomenon in Europe already at that time, and it was associated with an open, ambient, modal aesthetic of jazz music and known for using extensive post-processing effects and electronics⁵³. After recording several records with ECM, Garbarek’s music, and later much of Norwegian jazz, quickly became associated with this style. As jazz critic Luca Vitali notes in *The Sound of the North*, the “Norwegian jazz sound,” was quickly stereotyped by critics, who

⁵³ Bares, William. “Sounds of Silence: The Politics and Poetics of Norwegian Jazz” *American Music Review* 41, no. 1 (2011): 50-58.

connected the music with a vision of Norway as an exotic, welcoming land filled with icy fjords and introspective, quiet artists⁵⁴. Here, as in Grieg's versions of folk tunes, the folk music became "essentialized" or broken down into a simple, ambient aesthetic that was wildly popular with international audiences.

Bjørn Alterhaug, the bassist who performed on *Østerdalsmusikk*, notes that "for the time being, I think most [Nordic] jazz is influenced by... digital-sounding music, and less from national aesthetics."⁵⁵ This effectively sums up the attitude of many of the artists on the ECM label. Many of these jazz artists followed in Jan Garbarek's footsteps, writing ambient music that did not specifically reference folk tunes or folk instruments as in the early experiments mixing jazz and folk music. Examples include Nils Petter Molvær, Arve Henriksen, Mathias Eick, Eyolf Dale, and many "Nu jazz" artists including Bugge Wesseltoft and Jan Bang, who blended electronic and acoustic elements. Engineers Jan Erik Kongshaug and Sven Persson close mic'ed every small sound from the instruments, creating a landscape of detail and texture⁵⁶. Although the music does not often directly reference Norwegian folk tunes or instruments, it is distinctly Norwegian, or Nordic. The music depicts idealized versions of nature, with iconic impressionistic album covers and short and vague track names. These musicians maintained their separation from mainstream, American jazz discourse, claiming that they are distant from the blues tradition and instead rooting themselves in the aesthetics of Norwegian landscape and climate. Again, this echoes the sentiments of Grieg and nationalist Norwegian composers from the 19th century.

⁵⁴ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 117, 199.

⁵⁵ Email conversation, 2022.

⁵⁶ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 51-56.

The “ECM aesthetic” creates a feeling of suspended time through ambient drones, open sonorities, and folk-like textures, often referencing medieval themes. Similar to Grimley’s metaphor of “frozen time” in reference to Edvard Grieg’s use of bells and open 5ths in his music, percussionist Terje Isungset plays with literal ice crystals to evoke a primitive landscape of icy fjords⁵⁷. Saxophonist Karl Seglem performs on a bukkehorn, an ancient goat horn, over ambient grooves and driving folk-oriented beats, evoking both nature and the mythologized, ancient past. Seglem’s track “Nye Nord” (New North) on his 2006 album *Urbs* mixes Hardanger fiddle and primitive percussion with sleek modern saxophone, suggesting a hopeful new Norwegian music for the future through looking at the past⁵⁸. Saxophonist Trygve Seim improvises around plainchant and works with early music vocalists, as in *The Magical Forest* collaboration with Trio Mediæval. Jan Garbarek recorded *Offertorium* with the Hilliard Ensemble, an American early music vocal group, weaving threads of improvised saxophone against traditional plainchant melodies⁵⁹. Garbarek and folk singer Agnes Garnås’s previously-mentioned duet album *Rosenfole* loosely sources medieval melodies. Much of this music that engages with medieval traditions often does so in a fantastical or mystical fashion, blending images of ancient nature with idealized, mythical characters rather than any kind of direct quotation of Norwegian medieval music or adherence to early music performance practice.

As a way to engage with a broader European musical community, many Norwegian jazz musicians associated with the ECM label and beyond began directly interacting with through-composed traditions in European classical music, which in the late 20th-century had been

⁵⁷ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 113.

⁵⁸ Dybo, Tor. “Globalizing Perspectives on Norwegian Jazz History.” *8th Nordic Jazz Conference*, 150–160. Aalborg: Aalborg University, 2009, 157.

⁵⁹ Tucker, Michael. *Jan Garbarek: Deep Song*. Hull, UK: Eastnote, 1998, 131-132.

embracing post-modern, cross-disciplinary, and cross-cultural tendencies already. In European composition, the avant-garde modernist trends of the mid-20th-century were fading in favor of more welcoming, aesthetically broad approaches, which was reflected in the contemporary Norwegian composition scene⁶⁰. Norwegian musicians in the grey area between jazz and “art” music began mining the potential combinations of these international traditions.

One of the pioneers in this area of cross-genre exploration is guitarist Terje Rypdal, who worked closely with Jan Garbarek and conductor Christian Eggen, who commissioned cross-genre works for the NRK (Norwegian National Radio Orchestra) in the 1970’s. Rypdal’s music, especially on the record *Q.E.D.*, reflects avant-garde musical practices from Penderecki to John Zorn, blended with jazz guitar improvisations⁶¹. Following in his footsteps were concert composer Rolf Wallin and big band arranger Erlend Skomsvoll, who both balanced their artistic energies between the jazz and contemporary classical worlds. Another example in this idiom is bandleader, pianist, and composer Christian Wallumrød, whose ensemble performs in collective improvisation styles reminiscent of the European avant-garde as well as the ECM tradition, blending detailed timbral explorations and stark minimalism with raucous improvisation⁶². On the opposite aesthetic end is pianist Ketil Bjornstad, a classically-trained musician whose solo piano improvisations and trio albums resemble an accessible blend of modern classical and jazz sensibilities. In another, more literal example, saxophonist Håkon Kornstad sings opera arias interspersed with jazz tenor sax solos⁶³.

More recently, Norwegian musicians have built upon and embraced this fusion of

⁶⁰ Christensen, Jean and John White. *New Music of the Nordic Countries*. Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2002, 411.

⁶¹ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 119-120.

⁶² Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 231-234.

⁶³ Dickinson, *Grieg to Garbarek*, 143.

contemporary classical and jazz forms, embracing a variety of aesthetics and instrumentations. Saxophonist Marius Neset is known for creating through-composed works for orchestra around which he improvises extended saxophone solos, for example on the album *Snowmelt*. Fiddle duo Vilde&Inga perform in an avant-garde improvised style, referencing only briefly Nordic folk traditions. Pianist Jonas Cambien delves deep into unconventional piano timbres with his percussion, piano, and saxophone trio. Upon listening to this music, audiences may be inclined to classify the music entirely in the avant-garde classical genre, but the musicians' central focus on extended improvisation and ensemble interaction perhaps place the music in proximity to the music of Anthony Braxton or those in the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians). In America as well, the tendency of avant-garde jazz to overlap with tendencies in European modernism is noted by George Lewis, who comments on the elision of Afrological and Eurological musical dispositions⁶⁴. The engagement with European avant-garde traditions positions many Norwegian musicians in a larger, Pan-European context, creating internationalist and regionalist tensions as were created in Grieg's time. By combining European, American, and uniquely Norwegian musical elements, these musicians assert their cosmopolitan musical identity and participate in wider European culture.

This art music-oriented aesthetic also widely influenced trends in European jazz, in particular in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, creating a trans-national sensibility. An example of this trans-national jazz movement is found in ECM musician Nik Bärtsch, a Swiss pianist influenced by the minimalist composers and American Maverick composers like John Cage, as well as the music of Jan Garbarek and other ECM artists. On Bärtsch's website, he writes:

⁶⁴ Lewis, George E. "Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives." *Black Music Research Journal*, 16(1), 91. 1996.

“My thinking and music are based on the tradition of urban space. They are not distilled from a national or stylistic tradition but from the universal sound of cities. The city in its roaring diversity requires an ability to focus and concentrate on the essential: to measure one’s actions, to remain silent at the right place. This music draws its energy from the tension between compositional precision and the self-circumvention of improvisation.”⁶⁵

This attitude espouses a kind of universal futuristic city, a vision of a post-cultural future that is similar to the aesthetics and philosophies associated with much Norwegian jazz on the ECM label. The past and future—nature and technology—are welled up together in this depiction, one that smooths out potential difficulties or interpersonal conflicts. Again, the word “essential” comes up—that it is possible to distill the diverse echoes of the city into one unified voice through a kind of transcendental meditation. There is a unique kind of “whiteness,” or Pan-European-ness, to this idea, as it presumes that it is possible to erase national or stylistic traditions in favor of the definitive sound of the city. That imagined city, while potentially incorporating some multi-cultural elements, is certainly European in its image. This description recalls the international use of the Hardanger fiddle as a kind of blank slate, or the political position of Norway as a cross-cultural political arbiter, as in the Oslo Accords.

Beyond taking influence from the European contemporary classical canon, other ECM musicians embrace a more “world music”-oriented aesthetic, in a way that also embraces a sense of ancient musical connection between disparate cultures. Instead of presenting a post-cultural world, this music suggests a reality in which all cultures are equal and blend together into one universal experience reflecting the disparate elements of those cultures. Bassist Arlid Andersen, who played on Garbarek’s “Bruremarsj” went off in his own direction after working with Garbarek, injecting folk music into jazz in the early 1990’s with *Sagn*, with plenty of “world” percussion including surdo, a variety of Latin and African percussion, synth pads, and funky

⁶⁵ Dyroff, Denny. “On Stage: With Nik Bärtsch, Less Can Be More.” *The Unionville Times*, May 8, 2018.

distorted guitars. “Gardsjenta” opens with a nod to Jaco Pastorius’s “Okonkole y trompa” with a folk tune put on top sung by folk singer Kirsten Bråten Berg⁶⁶. This album aligns with the “new age” conception of folk music, one that arises out of commercial postmodernism, where all forms of music can be juxtaposed next to each other in a globalist, cross-cultural mash-up.

Amongst many ECM artists, these internationally-aware musical trends persist. In addition to evoking this long-distant past with his bukkehorn, Karl Seglem often uses elements from “world music” cultures, including African or Hindustani drumming or Balkan music, depicting an internationalist environment. Tubist Daniel Herskedal improvises over ambient textures with tabla and other “ethnic” percussion. Multi-instrumentalist Stian Cartensen combines a distinct Nordic sense with elements from Baroque music, Balkan mixed meter, and jazz. Jon Balke’s Magnetic North Project invites musicians from around the world to participate in a cross-cultural mashup. The band E’Olen juxtaposes and compares Gambian drumming and Nordic folk music⁶⁷. At a certain point, one could reasonably argue that this music is no longer jazz and falls into other genre categorizations, as the previously mentioned “new age,” “improvised music,” “adult contemporary,” “creative music,” or simply “avant-garde.” While the aesthetic considerations of all these musicians and categorizations are widely different, the tendency to bring contrasting musical ideas and cultures together is shared among them.

Aforementioned vocalist Kirsten Bråten Berg is a particularly strong example of the kind of multicultural ensemble with her band Ferd. Their tellingly titled *Music Without Borders* is an almost schizophrenic combination of Irish music, African drumming, Sami *joiks*, and other

⁶⁶ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 211-212.

⁶⁷ Dybo, Tor. “Globalizing Perspectives on Norwegian Jazz History.” *8th Nordic Jazz Conference*, 150–160. Aalborg: Aalborg University, 2009, 158.

musical references, framed by folk music from the Setesdal region of Norway⁶⁸. Although the musical results of such a collaboration can seem jarring or disjointed, the general attitude behind this music is one of acceptance, cooperation, and listening to other perspectives. The album is Norway's musical offering to international cooperation, a kind of musical Oslo Accords.

Some musicians attempt to directly engage with or respond to political issues through their music. Pianist Tord Gustavsen's 2016 album "What was Said" showcases Norwegian Lutheran tunes set in Pashto, a language spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The album was released during a time of intense political strife in Afghanistan, and in a way is a response to troubling xenophobic attitudes in Norway⁶⁹. Gustavsen uses jazz as a platform to combine both Lutheran melodies and Pashto, a "neutral" platform to join contrasting cultures and histories, while subtextually supporting cultural collaboration and cooperation between peoples of Europe and the Middle East.

This cross-cultural relativism is certainly in opposition to the radical reactionary Norwegian metal of the 90's. However, in some ways this post-modern or post-cultural musical creation is just as problematic with the white nationalist metal movement or the 19th-century nationalist artistic movements. Problematic notions of cultural appropriation aside, in creating a cocktail of cultural influences, the musicians depict a musical fantasy of sorts. They attempt to depict Norwegian musicians as unapologetically part of an international musical community brought about by globalization, in a kind of "kumbaya" fashion that disregards actual political issues in Norway. Norway's relative isolation and sheltering from important political turmoil—

⁶⁸ Hirt, Ashley. "Mountain Sound: Norway's Jazz Identity." PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2019. KU Scholar Works (3955), 141.

⁶⁹ Grillo, Tyran. "Tord Gustavsen: What Was Said (ECM 2465)." *Between Sound and Space: ECM Records and Beyond*, March 19, 2019. <https://ecmreviews.com/2019/03/19/what-was-said/>.

the refugee crises, rising authoritarianism in Europe, etc.—keeps it protected, which allows for a self-image of neutrality and acceptance. By presuming to be arbiters in international conflict, Norway only reinforces its inherent whiteness by keeping itself removed, perhaps above, from said conflict. The cross-cultural trends in Norwegian jazz reflect this general attitude, and suggest a downside to the progressive, inclusive qualities of the music.

The Progressive Norwegian Musical Attitude: Pedagogy, Music Festivals, and Funding

Norwegian jazz musicians still embrace an overlap of culture and lack of genre boundaries, and many consider themselves free of tradition or only loosely bound to it. They have asserted this open-mindedness with pride, to the point where they have an international reputation in the jazz community for being cosmopolitan, individualist, and flexible. This closely aligns with modern international impressions of Norwegian culture, but do not necessarily reflect the reality of Norwegian society, which struggles with ongoing racism, immigration restrictions, and high cost of entry into musical institutions.

The more open-minded Norwegian musical attitudes have much to do with cultural conditioning and education. Institutions like Trondheim Conservatory and the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo act as open-minded training grounds for generations of musicians, contributing to young Norwegian musicians' palate of multicultural influences. Stuart Nicholson, in *Is Jazz Dead, Or Has It Moved to a New Address?* notes that jazz educators in Norway do not equate bebop and tradition with jazz improvisation, instead offering a more well-rounded, open-minded approach that avoids canonizing singular ways of thinking⁷⁰.

In Trondheim at the Norwegian Institute of Technology (NTNU), student jazz musicians

⁷⁰ Nicholson, Stuart. *Is Jazz Dead?: (or Has It Moved to a New Address)*. London: Routledge, 2014, 126.

often approach group improvisation and free settings more in line with contemporary classical music composition⁷¹. Young musicians coming out of conservatories in Norway grow up in an environment in which musical boundaries are porous. Folk musicians are encouraged to improvise and explore contemporary music and are equipped to read complex notation and chord changes as well as embody traditional Norwegian music through dances, festivals, and performances. At the Norwegian Academy of Music, aforementioned fiddler Håkon Høgemo (of the trio Utla) runs the Hardanger fiddle program, and as a musician involved in jazz improvisation, he encourages his students to take courses in jazz and contemporary classical improvisation. The head of the folk music program, flautist Steinar Ofsdal, teaches courses in traditional flute practices from Norway as well as jazz flute. His office is full of flutes from a variety of world music traditions, including African and Asian flutes⁷². Students are encouraged to release their own albums and develop creative projects rather than focus exclusively on traditional curricula, standards, or rigorous ear training courses, and the school is a great meeting place for likeminded musicians to share musical ideas and blend genres. Other programs, including those in Stavanger, Tromsø, and Bergen, offer similar open curricula. These jazz programs extensively advertise internationally, and some programs offer exchange between countries to foster international awareness. For example, the Norwegian Academy of Music offers a program called the NoCoM, or the Nordic Master: The Composing Musician, where musicians spend a semester each in Oslo, Gothenburg, and Copenhagen exchanging ideas as a performer-composer in European jazz⁷³. Similar programs exist across Scandinavia, including

⁷¹ Nicholson, *Is Jazz Dead?*, 125.

⁷² “Steinar Ofsdal Homepage 阿福.” Steinar Ofsdal 阿福, 2015. <https://ofsdal.com/>.

⁷³ Liemohn, Edwin. “Jazz in Norwegian Education.” *Music Journal* 20 (1962), 64.

NoMazz (Nordic Jazz Master) in Denmark, and another Nordic Master's in Helsinki, Finland at the Sibelius Academy⁷⁴. The programs foster a Pan-Scandinavian jazz sensibility and approach jazz from a similar progressive, open-minded aesthetic. By connecting musicians and facilitating networking between Nordic musicians, these institutions communicate that international cooperation between musicians is something to be encouraged.

On a professional level, musicians are often granted generous state grants and funding from the government, allowing experimental cross-genre music to flourish. Norwegians have built their own reputation in the jazz world as being particular supporters of innovative jazz. Norwegian arts organizations—both non-profit and public—including Cultiva, the Norwegian Jazz Launch, Norsk Jazzforum (Norwegian Jazz Forum), Cultural Council, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provide generous grants which fund music festivals, international tours, and ambitious recording projects⁷⁵. The national support for the music suggests that the development of jazz music is considered important to the Norwegian government and the Norwegian public. The public face of Norwegian jazz is one of inclusiveness, and it makes sense that the Norwegian government would be funding strategic initiatives which project a progressive, diverse vision of the music in the country. The cross-cultural spirit of the music and its simultaneous sense of tradition and innovation presents Norwegian culture as sophisticated and able to function in a changing globalized world. Once again, this is comparable to the nationalist artistic movements of the 19th century, when there was a deliberate effort by press and national organizations to promote Norwegian national music so as to ensure Norway's place in the

⁷⁴ "Nordic Master in Jazz (Nomazz)." Study in Denmark, February 23, 2015. <https://studyindenmark.dk/portal/the-royal-academy-of-music-aarhus-aalborg/aarhus-departement/nordic-master-in-jazz-nomazz>.

⁷⁵ Mercer, Michelle. "How Norway Funds a Thriving Jazz Scene." NPR, April 6, 2013. <https://www.npr.org/sections/ablogsupreme/2013/03/26/175415645/how-norway-funds-a-thriving-jazz-scene>.

shifting political landscape of Europe.

Jazz festivals also embrace this open-minded, genre-blended focus, and these festivals are advertised internationally, in keeping with Norway's musical image of inclusiveness. The contemporary music festival Ultima, which occurs every fall in a variety of venues in Oslo, features both jazz and contemporary classical music from around Europe, reflecting larger trends in contemporary composition. These include immersive installations, interactive theatre pieces, music with electronics, and of course, fusions between jazz and experimental classical music. The experimental electroacoustic band Supersilent, led by jazz trumpeter Arve Henricksen, performed at the festival for multiple years in a row, packing a hall in Oslo's downtown filled with classical and jazz lovers alike. In the 2017 festival, guitarist Stian Westerhus led the Norwegian Wind Ensemble in a busy set of music featuring through-composed contemporary music under a fully-improvised guitar lead line⁷⁶. The audiences and critics attending this festival generally absorb and appreciate these styles brought together and come from all over Europe to see the latest trends in the contemporary music world.

The Punkt Festival in Kristiansand, Norway, also embraces a cross-genre aesthetic, bringing together several of the musical traditions discussed here—electroacoustic jazz, medieval music, classical chamber music, and folk music. The festival is run by electro-jazz artists Jan Bang and Erik Honoré, and it has had its hand on the pulse of the most exciting developments in the cross-genre arena, commissioning composers and musicians for larger, cross-disciplinary projects⁷⁷. Recently, the festival has hosted artists including Kirsten Bråten Berg, Nils Økland, Maja Ratkje, Nils Petter Molvær, Frode Haltli, Erlend Apneseth, Vilde&Inga,

⁷⁶ <https://www.ultima.no/en>

⁷⁷ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 235.

and others. Punkt also extensively funds overseas tours of the musicians associated with it, receiving important grants to fund their musicians. A similar festival is Dølajazz in Lillehammer, which programs Nils Petter Molvær, The Trondheim Jazz Orchestra, Mats Eilertson, and other younger musicians on the scene⁷⁸.

Havresekken (Bag of Oats) is a festival in which musicians put on pop-up concerts at a variety of events in Oslo, including the infamous Blå club on the Akerselva river in Oslo. Similar popup concerts suggest an attitude of spontaneity in the programming attitude of a lot of these festivals⁷⁹. These festivals do talent scouting in many of the jazz venues in Oslo, including Victoria Jazzscene, Herr Nilsen, and Chateau Neuf, and their priority is working with younger musicians who are innovating in their original music⁸⁰. Festivals like MoldeJazz attract large audiences and thus big-name international acts, opening the international public's eye to Norwegian music. Governmental funding for these festivals again emphasizes the need for Norwegians to assert national identity through excellence in their presentation of new jazz music.

Norwegian audiences and musicians are willing to go to extremes to enjoy jazz in harsh natural environments, almost to the point of absurdity. Norwegian jazz fans, for instance, are willing to travel to the world's northernmost jazz festival, *Polarjazz*, which was founded in Longyearbyen on the arctic island of Svalbard in 2010. Cross-cultural pianist Jon Balke organized a multimedia paragliding event with jazz called *Ekstremjazz*, connecting nature and music through extreme outdoorsmanship, also in 2010⁸¹. This music and these festivals reinforce the stereotype of Norwegians as outdoor-loving people, recalling the fjord backgrounds of

⁷⁸ <https://punktfestival.no/>

⁷⁹ Mercer, Michelle. "How Norway Funds a Thriving Jazz Scene."

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Vitali, *The Sound of the North*, 116.

Tindeman and Gude's nationalist romantic paintings in the National Gallery or Grieg's bell-like piano sounds ringing through the fjords. A lot of Norwegian jazz musicians appreciate the thrill of the outdoors and what it brings to music, perhaps playing into a stereotype of their own culture for wider international audiences.

The outstanding jazz education, institutional support, and festival culture in Norway helps build a coherent image of Norway as a welcoming place for jazz music. It creates a supportive atmosphere and a kind of laboratory for the creative cross-genre music for which Norway has become known. This cultural infrastructure suggests that the general public and government are on-board with these artistic developments, creating commercial viability for challenging music.

Conclusion

The various strands of Norwegian jazz—the incorporation of folk music, the combinations with electronic music and contemporary classical music, and the fusion of a variety of world music traditions—often stem from an artistic need to express something uniquely Norwegian. This music is cut from a similar cloth, one in which individual cultural identity that goes back for centuries is placed in a modern globalist context. The tensions and challenges present in the music—its presumed role as artistic arbiter between multiple musical cultures, its relative blindness towards social, racial, and political issues in Norway, the assertion of unique Norwegianess vs. the participation in wider European or cross-continental discourses, and its connection of tradition and innovation—are part of its artistic beauty and complexity. By placing Nordic folk music within jazz, a genre which inherently embraces globalism and multiculturalism, Norwegian jazz musicians participate in the global musical world and assert their

own musical identity—a kind of nationalism affirmed through participation in a pluralistic musical environment.

While there is no collective effort on the part of Norwegian jazz musicians to paint a nationalist picture as there was in the 19th century with Grieg and other artists, there is a general ethos among jazz musicians to promote a progressive, cross-genre and cross-cultural vision for Norwegian music, a platform which embraces multiple world cultures and artistic practices while asserting regional identity. Although the artists are often creating music based on personal expression, they are also, as Imke von Helden claims, “performing culture,” and their music reflects the broader cultural trends in Norwegian society. Many of these musicians are not actively trying to play into Norwegian stereotypes, but they exhibit common cultural traits and a similar sensibility. Their music supports David Grimley’s claim that musical nationalism is an invented, imagined phenomenon. It suggests that these musicians reflect and project their cultural identities and values, strengthening a progressive notion of a uniquely Norwegian music for the future.

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