



Polska Travels part 4: Tales from Norway



- Ernst Josephson, *Strömkarlen* (1884) -

11.5.2021

Organo, Musiikkitalo, h. 19:00

Live streaming by Uniarts TV

Vegar Vårdal, String Quartet Meta4

Krishna Nagaraja (1975)

A Norwegian suite (2019) - premiere

- I. *Lyarslått*
- II. *Nøkkenslått*
- III. *Huldreslått*
- IV. *Vandreslått*

Stringar (2020) - premiere

- I. *Udelt takt*
- II. *Telespringar*
- III. *Valdresspringar*

Vegar Vårdal, Hardanger fiddle
(recorded live in Tanum church,
Bærum, Norway)

String quartet Meta4

Programme notes

Krishna Nagaraja's last doctoral concert features two compositions inspired by the unique folk tradition for the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle. This highly decorated violin is equipped with resonance strings which enrich the sound with a suggestive halo and contribute to its emblematic voice. Its roots plunge into both history and legend, as does the distinct repertoire that forms the basis of the pieces heard tonight.

The *Norwegian suite* draws from the music of Setesdal, a secluded valley where dialect and music have remained isolated for many centuries.

A *Lyarslått* is a melody that is played more for the sake of listening than dancing; it can therefore display elaborate and irregular features, here illustrated in a form that resembles a Toccata, or Fantasia, or even an Indian improvisatory *Alap*. A medieval religious hymn from the Orkney Islands emerges in the piece, as it is thought to belong to the ancestry of Setesdal music.

The *Nøkken* is a shape-shifting water spirit described in Norwegian folklore, who lures victims with the sound of the violin or under the disguise as a wealthy, distinguished man. The deceived person generally ends up being drowned to death. Here, the legend is paired with the *rammeslått* tune type, which is believed to possess magical, trance-like properties.

A *Huldreslått* is a melody from the underground realm of the Norwegian forest fairies. Also a tune type with a rather old and layered history, it opens a window into an enchanted world that in the present piece takes the form of two voices closely chasing each other, eventually leading to a final, otherworldly conclusion.

Vandreslått describes a tune which is “wandering”: the title is not a traditional term, but suggests a musical roaming through the territories of the Norwegian *springar*, *gangar* and *halling* tunes.

The *springar*, Norwegian cousin of the Swedish *polska*, lends three of its several local variants to the string quartet *Stringar*.

Springars with *udelt takt* or “undivided beat” display no duple or triple beat pattern, but only a pulse rhythm that goes 1,1,1,... Irregular groupings of 2, 3, 5 beats or bars frequently occur and are used here in connection to other genres where odd time signatures are largely featured, such as progressive rock and metal. The amazing art of *konnakol*, the Southern Indian vocal percussion, offers intricate wizardries that add up to the rhythmic vitality of *Udelt takt*.

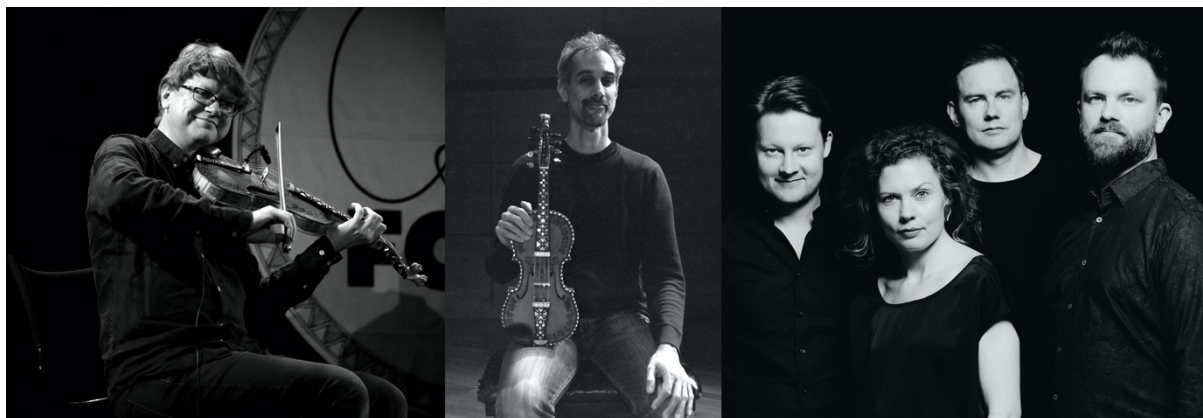
Telespringar focuses on the asymmetrical metre of springars from Telemark, where the beats in the triple-time measure have unequal length: the first is long, the second is medium and the third is short. This peculiarity provides the ground for an unconventional, semi-improvised treatment of rhythm and temporality: motifs and grooves are shrunk, stretched or bent with a high degree of flexibility, with patterns going in and out of phase between each other.

In springars from Valdres the asymmetrical beat ratio is inverted in short-long-medium, which grants them a characteristic suspension in the middle of the measure. *Valdresspringar* also quotes fiddle tunings that are common in that region, such as the “green tuning” and the “fairy tuning”. The whole narrative arch of the movement follows an evocative description of a late night farmhouse dancing by the Swedish folk tune collector Einar Övergaard (1871-1936):

“There is dancing in a farmhouse. The springar and halling dances have succeeded one another, and the hour is past midnight. The guests, their bodies tired and their stomachs full, are now drowsy, and many are fast asleep. Only a few tireless couples remain on the dance floor, but the dancing still has the same energy as when the night was younger.

Then, as the first light from the East announces the new day, the sound of the fiddler tuning his strings spreads through the hall. He strikes a chord and that fairy-like tuning known as the “green tuning” is heard. The tired guests shake off their sleepiness with a start: they recognise those tones, the “Dawn Tune” is coming. The fiddler begins to play; the strange melody electrifies everyone. Nobody can sit still, not the old, not the young, not the old wives and old men who have long since withdrawn from the dance floor: everyone must now come forward and join. Never has the dance had such life as now. The playing grows more and more intense. Suddenly, a loud cry of joy bursts forth from the Valdresian fiddler. He stamps his foot strongly on the floor. Dust clouds float towards the ceiling; through their veil and the tobacco smoke, in the half-dimmed light of a lamp, one can see the spirited silhouettes moving in a swirling dance.

The fiddler then falls silent. The wild, loud energy that had reigned earlier, summoned by the “Dawn Tune”, has now settled down. One after the other, the guests drag themselves home, and the dance is over.”



©Knut Utler, Grzegorz Domáński, Tero Ahonen

Krishna Nagaraja, compositions

Vegar Vårdal, Hardanger fiddle

String Quartet Meta4:

Antti Tikkanen, violin

Minna Pensola, violin

Atte Kilpeläinen, viola

Tomas Djuspsjöbacka, cello

Vegar Vårdal

An acknowledged fiddler, dancer, teacher, folk music prize-winner in his native Norway (Folk Musician of the Year 2020), Vegar is a well-known figure also outside the traditional music circles, having premiered several works by contemporary composers such as Martin Ødegaard. Vegar is a lecturer in Folk Dance at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo; he is also the co-founder of Kultivator AS, an association for the promotion of Norwegian culture and music.

Meta4

String quartet Meta4 is one of the most acclaimed Finnish quartets, both nationally and internationally. The panoply of their recognitions spans over their 20-year history and includes winnings at international competitions, awards from the Finnish Cultural Ministry and other foundations, YLE and Emma Record-of-the-year prizes. Equally impressive is their touring history and schedule, as well as their appointments as artistic directors or quartet in residence at various festivals.

Krishna Nagaraja

Violinist, violist, singer, composer, arranger, beatboxer, Krishna Nagaraja has always approached music from many different directions.

A dedicated baroque player, his passion for folk music has led him to the Nordic countries where he obtained a Global Music Masters and is now finishing an artistic PhD on *polska* music. Krishna composes and arranges music of various genres: he has written music for vocal groups, choirs, chamber orchestras, solo instruments, and his main brainchild, the cross-over musical project Brú.

Staff

Concert production: Hans Tinell; Uniarts TV streaming: Keijo Lahtinen; Lights: Jukka Kolimaa; Sound: Olli Ovaskainen; Norwegian movie: Thor Hauknes