

# *The Scandinavian Folk Harp*

*by*

*Beth A. Kollé*

*Seventeen Songs and Dances from Scandinavia  
for the Lever Harp*

*Beginning to Upper Intermediate Level*

*Fourth Edition*

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## *The Author*



Beth Kollé has several favorite subjects, and two of them are Scandinavia and lever harps. Beth's long-term love affair with Scandinavia began when she discovered her Norwegian ancestry. After three years of Norwegian language and literature studies at the University of Washington where she was studying for her music degree, Beth had the opportunity to travel and work in Norway.

Since then, Beth has taught Scandinavian folkdance and singing for years and has returned to Scandinavia many times to learn more folkdances and songs. After taking up the lever harp, it was only natural to play these exquisite ballads, dances and airs on the harp. On her last two trips, Beth led groups of harpers from the U.S. and Canada on concert tours: the HARPA tours of 2006 and 2008.

Beth has produced five CDs of traditional music and nine books of arrangements for the lever harp. She performs with Harper Tasche as the Seattle Harp Duo and with Susan McLain in the flute-harp duo *Greensleeves*. She lives in Seattle, Washington, with her husband, Jack and enjoys traveling around the country to teach and perform on the harp.

Photo by Jack J. Kollé  
Harp by Dusty Strings (FH36 Bubinga)

## *The Harp in Scandinavia*

The fascinating traditions of Nordic vocal and instrumental music offer many dance tunes and songs adaptable to the lever harp. Fiddle tunes, flute tunes and songs gain fresh beauty when played on the harp. There is much more to Scandinavian music than polkas!

Harp was once a part of village life in parts of Scandinavia, but the tradition did not survive past the early 1800's. The ancient *krogharpe* or 'crook harp' of Norway was a common dance instrument in parts of Norway. 'Crook' may refer to the bray pins found on several harps, or to the way the harp might be tucked under the elbow when played, as surmised by Nancy Thym-Hochrein. The nine complete extant krogharper feature a unique second soundbox in the forepillar.

The beauty of Scandinavian music played on the harp is now being rediscovered, thanks to the efforts of several Scandinavian and American musicians. Nancy Thym-Hochrein, originally from the U.S. and now living in Germany, has made a personal quest of cataloging museum folk harps throughout Europe. During her travels in Scandinavia, she found an old krogharpe in a museum which intrigued her so much she had a replica made by Sverre Jensen in Oslo. Nancy performs with various harps throughout Europe and the U.S.

Tone Hulbækmo is a noted musician from Norway, and has produced several acclaimed CDs. She plays a lap harp which is a replica of one found near her home in Østerdal. Marie Länne Persson of Sweden performs and records on a leverless folk harp, integrating Swedish folk music with jazz and other influences. Marie's harp is interesting, as the string spacing is very wide and there are no red or blue strings.

Harper Tasche, of Seattle, Washington, has been teaching Norwegian tunes in his workshops, and performing and publishing arrangements of Nordic music for many years. Sue Richards performs Scandinavian dance tunes throughout the U.S. Her book, *Scandinavian Tunebook*, is published by Afghan Press.

Aryeh Frankfurter is a lever harper who performs Nordic-inspired music. In 1998 he produced a recording of Scandinavian dance tunes called *Harp Songs of the Midnight Sun* and in 2004, the exquisite *Aurora of the Northern Harp*. He clarifies that he is not attempting to carry on the traditions of Scandinavian music, but is instead creating his own music that is influenced by those traditions.

Whether played for dance music or purely for pleasure, Scandinavian music is intriguing and exciting, giving the harper a whole new realm of possibilities for performance.

## *Introduction*

The songs in this book are well-suited for solo performance, ensemble or background music. Another instrument can certainly double the melody. Flute or fiddle would give the most traditional sound.

Many of these tunes are dances and may be performed with other Scandinavian folk musicians for folkdancers. Whenever possible I have arranged the tunes in the keys in which they are most commonly played by dance musicians. I have kept fewer changes to a minimum.

While styling cannot be adequately written down but must be passed on aurally, these tunes are beautiful when played just as written. Details of ornamentation, emphasis and even the basic rhythm can be mastered if you are able to hear these tunes live or on a recording. Those who learn the dances themselves will excel in playing the tunes, for the music and dance grew up together.

When possible I have included the provenance of each tune. The designations '*etter*' or '*efter*' both mean 'after' and refer to the musician whose styling is reflected in this version of the traditional piece. Because pronunciation of the original titles may be difficult for those who do not speak a Scandinavian language, I have re-named some of the pieces and included the actual title below.

Sweden and, even more so, Norway were largely isolated from the rest of Europe for many generations; Denmark less so. Travel between communities was sometimes arduous due to intervening mountains or bodies of water. The isolation of these communities played an important role in the development of regional styles in music, as well as in art, dress and language dialects. As a result, very strong regional differences with unique modes and styling developed and are easily identified even today.

Because of its location and flatter terrain, Denmark has had more communication and trade with the Continent. The Danish tradition of folk music springs largely from the court dances of the Baroque period, and shows a strong European influence. I have included only one Danish piece for that reason. The music just sounds too normal to me, and I seek the unusual, haunting modes and rhythms found further north.

Iceland has a strong musical tradition carried down to modern times. While the language and culture are related to those of Norway, the isolation of Iceland by the Norwegian Sea has allowed the music to grow in a different direction. I have included an Icelandic piece which is well-loved by every Icelander I've met.

You will notice differences in Scandinavian music from traditional music you may be accustomed to as you play through this book. There are unusual lever settings, such as C-sharps only, G-sharps only, or C-sharps plus B-flat. This is because different modes are used in this ancient folk music than the ones we are accustomed to. Many songs are based on the tonic's second inversion, creating a strong dominant feel to the music. Leading tones, which in more familiar folk music resolve up to the next note in the scale, in Nordic music sometimes resolve downward to the dominant note instead.

In many parts of Scandinavia, the 'natur-skale', or natural scale, is used, resulting in a melody that hovers between major and minor. The natural scale is an old, untempered scale that utilizes the tones at the upper end of the harmonic series. Several instruments are played today that are designed for this scale only: some of these are the *seljefløyte*, the *lur*, the *gjallarhorn* in Norway, and the *säckpipa*, *spelåpipa* and *kohorn* in Sweden. Folk fiddlers often play in this scale, which is characterized by three-quarter tone intervals in places, and one might be tempted to think they are playing out of tune. Singing in this scale is a challenge, if you haven't been raised hearing it.

Here is an overview of the types of folk music from Scandinavia you will find in this book:

Songs: includes ballads, songs and lullabies

*Songdansar*, or 'song-dances': ancient or newer songs, sung while dancing in a ring or line

Dance music: *Gamaldans* or 'old-fashioned dance' (polka, schottis or reinlendar, waltz), *turdans* or 'figure dance' (couple dances or set dances with figures), *bygdedans* or 'village dance' (solo or couple dances specific to a village or area). Instruments include: fiddle, Hardanger fiddle, various flutes and recorder-type instruments, button and piano accordion, *nyckelharpa*, as well as the occasional classical instrument, such as clarinet or flute.

Other types of Scandinavian folk music include airs for solo instruments, work songs, children's play songs, church hymns (ornamented plain-chant), repartee, and...cow- and goat-calls (yes, really, and they're truly amazing to hear!).

It is my pleasure to share Scandinavia's rich musical tradition with you.

*Beth Kollé*





## *The Willow Flute Song*

*Seljefløytelåten*

*Traditional Norwegian*

The willow flute or *seljefløyte* is a modal instrument, sometimes made of a willow branch which is cut at a certain time of year and hollowed out. It is found in Norway and Sweden. If made traditionally, this type of flute only lasts until it dries out, and then you must wait a year to make another one.

These days you can buy one made out of PVC pipe, wrapped with birch-bark and fitted with a wooden mouthpiece, that lasts for a long time. It is played by holding the flute horizontally off to your right side and blowing into a small opening at the mouthpiece. Using changes in the force of the breath and the right index finger opening and closing off the end of the pipe, parts of several harmonic overtone series may be played.

The seljefløyte has a light, soft, wispy tone that is truly exquisite to hear. Because it uses the natural scale, the seljefløyte is used as a solo instrument. It may be played for dance music as long as the dancers keep their feet really quiet.

This tune is in Lydian mode and was introduced to me by Harper Tasche.

# The Willow Flute Song

'Seljefloytelåten'

Traditional Norwegian

♩ = 152 Walking pace

A

B

Arrangement © 2002 Beth A. Kollé