

# The original *Slåtter* used in Grieg's op. 72

(*Slåtter / Peasant Dances* for piano, 1902/03)

Håkon Asheim

The Hardanger fiddle player Knut Dahle (1834–1921) from Tinn, Telemark is known as the source of the seventeen *slåtter* (*slått*, pl. *slåtter* = instrumental folk music tune) in Edvard Grieg's opus 72. There are some fascinating historical facts underlying Grieg's opus, among them Dahle's many letters to Grieg over a period of thirteen years (1888–1901) asking him to come and write down his tunes, and then the solution Grieg found: to send travel money to Dahle so he could visit composer and violinist Johan Halvorsen in Kristiania and get the tunes transcribed. But all this is thoroughly documented in the literature, so this paper will concentrate on the folk music background and the light it sheds on the Grieg *Peasant Dances*. What do we know about the original *slåtter* as examples of Hardanger fiddle music, and how much of their essence shines through in Grieg's writing?

## Knut Dahle's musical heritage

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Telemark had a reputation as one of the richest Norwegian districts with respect to folk culture – partly because of large collections of folk songs that had been published, like Magnus B. Landstad's *Norske Folkeviser* (1853). Telemark is overrepresented in this volume, simply because Landstad lived there. But very little of Norwegian fiddle music – from Telemark or elsewhere – had been written down and collected before 1900 (the first volume of the series *Norsk Folkemusikk* was published in 1958). So Knut Dahle's request to Grieg was one of the first initiatives in this direction, in this case coming from a folk musician and not a scholar or classical musician. At one point, Grieg was on his way to visit Dahle, but was prevented from doing so (Buen: 78). What eventually happened – that Halvorsen wrote down the tunes – was for the best insofar as the transcriptions were done by a competent string player, but had the disadvantage that Grieg had to base his op. 72 arrangements on a secondary source.

Dahle's home municipality Tinn is situated in the mountainous northern part of Telemark, so he had to travel almost 200 kilometres to get to Halvorsen in the capital in 1901. Dahle was a farmer, but devoted much of his time to fiddle playing – he was a popular *spelemann* (a fiddler who plays for dances and celebrations), like several of his ancestors. From the age of sixteen, he had been playing in traditional weddings, which normally lasted three days or more. In Dahle's mature years after 1850, however, the old Hardanger fiddle music (in Telemark mainly music for the *springar*, *gangar* and *halling* dances and wedding marches represented in op. 72) was beginning to go out of fashion. The waltz, polka and similar dances that had been imported from central European countries for some decades were taking over, and the accordion was getting more and more popular at the expense of the fiddle. Moreover, religious movements that swept over Norway in this period had a restrictive attitude towards dancing and fiddle playing. And by the late 1880s, Knut Dahle had not had any promising fiddling apprentices, and none of his children had shown interest in learning to play. This is why he wrote to Grieg, asking him to do something to help save his musical heritage.

In light of subsequent events, it is striking how well Dahle succeeded after all in getting his repertoire saved for the future; not only did he succeed in persuading Grieg to have seventeen of his best tunes transcribed, later making them world famous through piano arrangements, he also did recordings of eight tunes for The Gramophone Company in 1910 (including nos. 1, 3, 4, 8, 13, 14 and 15 of the op. 72 tunes), and about a hundred phonograph recordings for the scholar Rikard Berge. In the last two decades of his life, he also experienced an increased interest in the old music locally; several young fiddlers eventually came and learned tunes from his large repertoire. And last, but not least, he got two grandsons who both became accomplished fiddlers: Johannes (1890–1980) and Gunnar Dahle (1902–88). Johannes learnt a big part of the repertoire of his grandfather directly from him, and in turn, the two Dahle brothers taught many other fiddlers in the 20th century these tunes, as did others who had learnt them directly from Knut Dahle. The fact that this repertoire – including the seventeen tunes of op. 72 – is so well preserved in living tradition today makes it highly interesting to compare the different versions of the tunes: the transcriptions by Halvorsen, Grieg's piano versions, the recordings of Knut Dahle, and versions played by later fiddlers. In addition, there are parallel lines of tradition: versions handed down from other fiddlers of Knut Dahle's generation, several of which can be found in the *Norsk Folkemusikk* series (Gurvin et al.).

Knut Dahle was getting old when the phonograph and gramophone recordings were made, so the compelling *hardingfele* sound heard in later recordings of his grandsons probably gives a better impression of what he may have sounded like in his best years. Sven Nyhus's publication *Griegslåttene* (The Grieg tunes) contains recordings of all the op. 72 tunes played by Johannes Dahle, as well as new transcriptions from his playing. This is an important potential source of knowledge for performers of op. 72. But before going into what living tradition can tell us about the *Slåtter*, let us have a look at the more general picture of the folk music which was sung and played in Knut Dahle's lifetime, and which Edvard Grieg had drawn upon for motifs and inspiration in many works before op. 72.

### Folk music genres represented among the melodies in Grieg's works

In Grieg's works before op. 72, we find folk song melodies of various types, as well as melodies borrowed from different folk instruments. The vocal melodies include: the *lokk* (animal call), found in op. 66 nos. 1, 6 and 8 for instance, as well as lullabies and children's songs, religious songs, medieval ballads, and newer *viser* (songs) that can have a variety of subjects and functions. In living tradition, in historical recordings, and also according to many written sources, the tonality and singing style is often markedly different from the classical style, with microtonal deviations from the common diatonic scales. A good example in a modern recording is the powerful cow call by Marit Jensen Lillebuen from Jondal, Buskerud county near Telemark (*Norsk Folkemusikk : Vokal folkemusikk III*. NRK/Talik 2009). It was probably singing of this kind Knut Dahle was referring to when he said the tonality of his fiddle teacher Håvard Gibøen reminded him of folk singing (see below). The Dahle tradition from Tinn is indeed one of the Hardanger fiddle repertoires where the old tonality is best preserved – more so than in the western Norwegian fiddling Grieg was used to hearing. One might ask: If Grieg had learnt Knut Dahle's tunes directly from his informant and not just from Halvorsen's transcriptions, where none of the deviations from the diatonic steps are marked – what would he then have felt about arranging them for piano, which he regarded as a "sin" anyway, and as a temptation he was unable to resist? (Buen: 88.)

As for folk instruments other than the fiddle, some of the oldest are the ones used at the *seter / støl* (summer dairy farm) – often for communication across long distances in the hills. Gjendine Slålien, whom Grieg met at such a summer farm on his mountain trip in 1891, not only sang the melodies Grieg used in the *Norwegian Folk Songs* op. 66 for piano; she also played a tune on the *bukkehorn* (ram's horn, often with three finger holes) which Grieg later included in his op. 57 no. 6. The Norwegian title of op. 73 no. 4, *Lualåt*, means a melody played on another *seter* instrument, the *lur* (long wooden trumpet) – but the minor mode of this piece indicates that the melody is not borrowed from folk tradition, since the *lur* melodies usually consist of signal-like motifs using the overtone series.

Overtones are also played on the *seljefløyte* (willow flute), but the technique of stopping the opening at the end of the flute with the right hand's finger produces another overtone series starting approximately an octave below the first, and thus greater melodic possibilities. Moreover, the instrument produces the raised fourth step of the lydian scale which Grieg also found in the *Slåtter*. Grieg mentioned this when writing to Johan Halvorsen after he received the transcriptions – remembering how this interval fascinated him 30 years earlier (Buen: 88). The interval is typical of much of the Hardanger fiddle repertoire, though hardly adopted from the *seljefløyte*, which was only played in spring/early summer when the bark used to make it was still fresh. And what Halvorsen wrote as an augmented fourth in the *Slåtter* is often played slightly lower on the fiddle, which is also true of some of the other scale steps (the seventh and sometimes the third or sixth). Indeed, Halvorsen must sometimes have judged it to be so low that he chose the chromatic step below instead (see the discussion of op. 72 no. 16 below).

The tonality of the original *Slåtter* is closer to that of the *sjøfløyte* ("sea flute"), which got its name because it was imported from countries overseas, mainly Germany. Little more than an ordinary baroque recorder, it was played in a way to produce the tonality still common in many rural areas of Norway in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *sjøfløyte* tradition was kept alive only in the valley of Numedal, close to Knut Dahle's home region, Tinn. (A contemporary recording of *seljefløyte/sjøfløyte*: Steinar Ofsdal: *Fjellfløyta – Vårfløyta*. Musikk & Mystikk Records 2009.)

The clarinet was common as a folk instrument in the first half of the 1800s, often accompanying the fiddle. A European clarinet was mostly used, though homemade folk clarinets were also developed some places. We know that Tomas Lurås, the brother of Hardanger fiddler Knut Lurås (1782–1843, referred to in the titles of op. 72 nos. 10–11, *Luråsens halling 1–2*), played the clarinet, and the two brothers were said to have played together so well that it sounded like one instrument. Judging from the tonality of Knut Lurås's tunes as kept alive in the Dahle tradition, it is an interesting question how they managed to do that: Did the clarinet adapt to the fiddle tonality, in a way similar to what *sjøfløyte* players did, or did Knut Lurås adjust his intonation to the standard diatonic one? Maybe the latter answer is most likely, since Knut Dahle also referred to the clarinet when describing the intonation of fiddlers further south in Telemark – as compared to the tonality in his teacher Håvard Gibøen's playing, which he said sounded more like folk singing (Buen: 53).

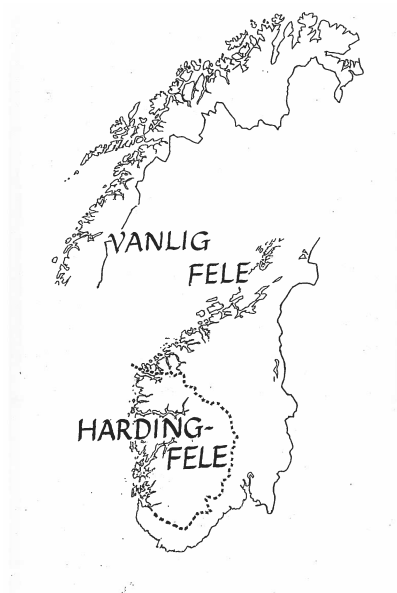
However, not a wind instrument but a stringed one has played an even bigger role in the discussion of the tonality of Norwegian folk music: the *langeleik*. The instrument, a fingerboard zither with one melody string and a varying number of drone strings, and often compared to instruments like the German *Scheitholt* or the French *épinette des Vosges*, is thought to have developed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century – the oldest existing specimen being dated 1524. The instrument was known all over Norway, but its popularity started to decline in the 1700s, and the tradition has been strong and continuous only in the valley of Valdres. However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Telemark was one of the areas that still had several *langeleik* players, and Knut Dahle's contemporary Ågot O. Einung (1831–1911) from Tinn was one of them. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, researchers Erik Eggen and Reidar Sevåg found that old instruments had many different scales, none of them consistent with standard diatonic scales: The half tone step seemed to have been avoided in all cases, as in much of the archaic singing (Sevåg: 342–376). In the 1870s, *langeleik* makers started to use the standard major scale. For the *Halling* recorded by Elisabeth Kværne on the CD *På Langeleik* (Heilo 1985/1994), however, an instrument with an old scale type is used. The tune was written down from the playing of Berit på Pynte (1812–99) from Valdres, whom we know Edvard Grieg met and listened to, so this may be very close to the *langeleik* sound Grieg actually heard.

### The Hardanger fiddle

Grieg must have been much more familiar with the *hardingfele* (Hardanger fiddle), though. He would have been used to seeing and hearing Hardanger fiddles of both old and modern vintage, and been well acquainted with fiddlers from different places in the part of southern Norway where the instrument was in use – though mainly from western Norway near his home city of Bergen. The instrument's main defining feature, which distinguishes it from the Italian violin, is the presence of understrings (sympathetic strings, resonance strings), usually 4 or 5 – the number varies more on the oldest fiddles. Other characteristics vary with age and provenance of the instrument – and although especially older ones can look and sound significantly different from a violin, the instrument could be described as a *violino d'amore*. Whereas the body shape of modern Hardanger fiddles can be very close to that of the violin, the oldest ones are smaller and often have a more angular contour and a thicker body. The part of the top located between the sound holes is much higher than the outer part on both sides, a design which to a more moderate extent is adhered to on many modern instruments as well, along with the flatter bridge and fingerboard well suited to the usual technique of playing on two strings simultaneously. The neck is still usually kept a couple of centimetres shorter than on the standard violin. Lavish decoration of the fingerboard and tailpiece with inlay and of the body with black floral drawings may be the most striking visual differences from an ordinary violin, but are hardly essential features of the instrument.

The oldest existing Hardanger fiddle may be the famed Jaastad fiddle from Hardanger, dated 1651 (in the University Museum of Bergen). The reason why the instrument is called a *hardingfele* (Hardanger fiddle) is probably that the fiddle makers in Hardanger in the 1700s were particularly good and prolific craftsmen. The most famous of these, Trond Botnen (1713–72), sold instruments in great quantities across a wide swath of southwestern Norway. We don't know the details about how the instrument spread before the early 1900s, when it reached Nordfjord, but it had certainly reached Telemark before 1800, as some instruments made there in the late 1700s are preserved. In Setesdal, the southernmost part of the "hardingfele area", the instrument was known before 1800, but little used between 1800 and 1860.

The drone style generally used in folk music for ordinary violin nearly everywhere (the violin was known all over Norway in the 1600s) probably made this music easy to transfer to the Hardanger fiddle. Music may also partly have spread together with the instrument; the southwestern parts of Norway that adopted the Hardanger fiddle as their main folk instrument show a certain uniformity of musical style, the majority of tunes being in motivic form (short motifs repeated, chained and varied). Contrastingly, in the large eastern and northern part of the country that made use of the *vanlig fele* (regular violin), most tunes are in binary form – typically with two strains of eight bars each, both repeated. It is not surprising then that the motivic form predominates in the *Slåtter* op. 72, with some notable exceptions (nos. 1, 3, 5).



The central "hardingfele area" and "ordinary fiddle area" around 1910.

The hardingfele spread gradually from the region around Hardanger and Bergen from the 1700s on – and in the early 1900s to the northern part of the area indicated here, and even further beyond it.



1. "Vanleg stille",  
"oppstilt bass"



7. "Systerslåttstille", "Blinde-Rasmus-stille", "Fantestille"



2. "Låg bass", "nedstilt bass" (= fiolinstemming)



8. "Oppstilt ters (tenor)", "forstemt", "halvt forstemt", "halvgråing"



3. "Nedstilt kvint og bass", "Ijøsblått", "huldastille"



9. "Låg kvart", "Tomasklokke-stille", "trollstilt", "Gjermund-stille"



4. "Trollstille", "huldre-stille", "nøringstille", "grålysingstille"



10. "Det grønne stillet"



5. "Nedstilt bass og ters", "forkjert", "forstemt"



11. "Laus bas"



6. "Gorrlaus bas", "Tjorhælstille"

Some scordaturas in Norwegian fiddle music. Nos. 5 and 10 are used only on the Hardanger fiddle, no. 11 only on the normal fiddle. The tunes in op. 72 are based on tunings 1, 2 and 7.

Since there was lively trading contact between western Norway and Great Britain in the 1600s, it has been guessed that the resonance strings of the *hardingfele* were inspired by British instruments. This may also be true of another feature of Norwegian fiddle music: the numerous scordaturas. The British lyra viol, for instance (sometimes fitted with resonance strings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century), also had a great number of scordaturas. In Norwegian fiddle music, the scordatura technique is closely linked to the use of drones, most often with open strings (a drone may also be stopped, with the first finger or occasionally another finger). Notably in Hardanger fiddle playing, but also in much of the ordinary fiddle playing, there can be drones almost throughout the tune, on different strings. Thus, changing the tuning and thereby the drones will cause a significant change in the way the music sounds, and fiddlers have used this as an important way to vary their playing. Some tunings (such as nos. 3, 4 and 10 above) were reserved for playing late at night when the dance party had lasted a long time and some marked change in the music was welcome.

Edvard Grieg imitates this playing style occasionally in some of his string pieces, like the violin sonata no. 1, 2nd movement, where the drone can be heard partly below and partly above the melody, just as in folk fiddling:



and no. 2, 1st mvt.:



or the viola solo in the *Peer Gynt* suite. But the work in which he imitates the drone style most avidly is *not* for strings but for piano: *Slåtter / Peasant dances* op. 72.!

One of the first men to write down and collect Norwegian instrumental folk music was Ludvig M. Lindeman (1812–87). He published mostly folk songs, but also many fiddle and langeleik tunes in *Earlier and More Recent Norwegian Mountain Melodies* (1853–), arranging them for piano without noting down details for fiddle playing. This is the source of most of the folk melodies cited in Grieg's works (Nagelhus: 78). Later collectors, notably Johan Halvorsen in the *Slåtter*, have endeavoured to render more of the details of ornamentation, harmony and rhythm in the fiddle music. This also includes the technique of scordatura and the fingering in connection with that. The method generally adopted after Lindeman for writing music in this way was the scordatura notation already used by baroque composers such as Heinrich F. I. Biber; each "wrongly tuned" string is treated as a transposing instrument, the notes played on it being transposed down when it is tuned up from normal tuning, and vice versa. This simplifies the reading for the instrumentalist, since it means that a given note played in first position always can be played by the same finger, regardless of tuning (higher positions must be indicated with fingering numbers, but are rarely used in traditional Hardanger fiddle playing). Halvorsen used this notation, but for the two tunes that have the rarest tuning – the two last ones in the collection – he also provided Grieg with *in natura* transcriptions.

*Scordatura notation. With normal tuning in fifths, indicated to the left, the music is written as it sounds:*



*With other tunings, the notes played on the strings that have a changed tuning are transposed:*



## Myllarguten and other fiddlers besides Dahle

When writing to Grieg, Knut Dahle mentioned that he was one of the last remaining of those who had learned to play from the great Myllarguten ('The Miller's Boy' / Torgeir Augundson, 1801–72 – referred to in the titles of op. 72 nos. 6, 8 and 12). Famous as a *spelemann* in Telemark and in Hardanger, Myllarguten did indeed meet and fascinate violin virtuoso Ole Bull, who arranged a concert in Kristiania (Oslo) in 1849 where Myllarguten played some of his *slåtter* – a great success in a period which is considered the peak of national romanticism in Norway. Myllarguten went on several concert tours after this – in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. This new way of performing folk music became common some decades later, and Knut Dahle himself played many concerts in Telemark, and from 1896 to 1900 even in America where he was visiting together with his son. Norwegian folk music was well received in the large communities of Scandinavian immigrants, especially in the Midwestern states, so quite a few Hardanger fiddlers eventually saw this as an opportunity to find an audience in America in the decades around 1900.

The reason why Knut Dahle mentioned Myllarguten to Grieg was probably the exceptional fame achieved by this fiddler in the years following the 1849 concert, when he became a kind of national symbol. Actually, Dahle learned a much bigger part of his repertoire from another Telemark fiddler, Håvard Gibøen (1809–73) – referred to cursorily in the titles of nos. 1 and 13, but undoubtedly Dahle's main source for most of the 17 *slåtter*. Locally, Gibøen was recognized as an almost equally skilled player as Myllarguten, but with a quite different playing style – softer, with a strain of melancholy, and even more of the old tonality.

The concert playing of many well-known Hardanger fiddlers can be seen to have been a way of saving the music from oblivion, which was also Knut Dahle's objective in contacting Grieg. The same can be said about the arranging of competitions. The first big competition for Hardanger fiddlers was arranged in Bø in Telemark the very same year as Dahle's first letter to Grieg in 1888. This was to become an extremely important way for Norwegian folk musicians to reach a bigger audience, strengthen their personal ties, and thereby the folk music tradition itself. The second big competition, and the first one to gather musicians from a larger area, was held in Bergen in 1896, the year Knut Dahle left for America. Several similar competitions followed during the next few years, so that when Dahle returned home in 1900, the situation for the old fiddle music and dance genres may have seemed better to him than when he left. Nevertheless, he luckily wrote to Grieg once more, and got the response he hoped for this time.

Interestingly, Edvard Grieg had been among the listeners at the first national fiddle competition in Bergen in 1896 as well as at several of the following ones, and his friend Frants Beyer was one of the judges. Olav Moe and Sjur Helgeland, two of the most famous "concert fiddlers", won the competitions on several occasions, and they were both among Grieg's favourite fiddlers. So if Dahle had not written to him, perhaps there would have been a Grieg opus based on one of these fiddlers' tunes instead? Indeed, when sending the transcriptions, Halvorsen wrote to Grieg: "I should have gotten hold of Sjur Helgeland, Ole Moe and all the others, now that I have started on this"! (Buen: 87)

## Fiddling genres represented in op. 72

Apart from the *seter* music, which has roots far back in the mists of history and perhaps prehistoric times, instrumental folk music in Norway can be divided into two main historical layers: The *bygdedans* music, which is traced roughly back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the *runddans/gamaldans* music, which was introduced gradually from the 1790s on. The term *bygdedans* signifies that these dances belong to a certain district or are danced and played differently in different districts (*bygd* = rural district/community). The main *bygdedans* types are *gangar*, *halling*, *rull* (all in 2/4 or 6/8, sometimes written 1/4 or 3/8 to avoid metre changes as in op. 72 nos. 11 and 15) and *springar* (most often in 3/4 and called *pols* in most of the regular violin area). These are exactly the dances we find in op. 72, except for *rull*, which is a western Norwegian dance and thus not on Knut Dahle's repertoire – even if its music is similar to the *gangar* and *halling*, and variants of nos. 10 and 14 are played as *rull* in western Norway. The reason why *runddans/gamaldans* music – with the main types *vals* (waltz), *polka*, *masurka* and *reinlender* – is not represented in op. 72 is probably that these dances were highly popular in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and also played on the accordion, so Knut Dahle was hardly worried about the survival of this music. Moreover, these dances were so new in Norway – notably the *reinlender*, which was introduced in the 1850s/60s! –

that they were still far from being fully recognized as folk or national dances, so neither Dahle nor Grieg would have thought of prioritizing such tunes in a collection of folk music.

The last type of tune represented in op. 72, the *bruremarsj* (wedding march), can be placed in either of the two historical layers, depending on the tune; some wedding marches are in the old style, and some in a more modern one. The same is true of the categories *lydar slått* (listening tune) and *turdans* (variants of English country dances, French *contredances*, reels etc.). Indeed, Myllarguten composed the first half of his wedding march, no. 8 of the *Slåtter*, in the old form with short motifs, whereas the two other marches in the opus, nos. 1 and 2, are examples of the type which was introduced in all of Norway around 1800, often with military marches as points of departure (a wedding march with many variants is called “Napoleon’s march”!).

### **Halling and gangar rhythms**

Halvorsen’s metronome markings for the *halling* and *gangar* tunes (76–84) reflect the traditional tempo of the dances, although both of them, especially the acrobatic *halling*, can be played somewhat faster – but still slower than *springar* (*gangar* = walking dance, *springar* = almost running). In 2/4 *halling* and *gangar* tunes, syncopated rhythms are typical, especially in the form of the pattern: eighth note – quarter note – eighth note. The syncopation can appear in the melody rhythm, but even more frequently in the bowings. In the *Slåtter*, there are many good examples: *Nils Rekve’s Halling* (no. 9) starts with this rhythm, and repeats it in every second bar. In Grieg’s arrangement, the left hand accentuates the main beats, which would be demarcated by the fiddler’s foot throughout the tune – keeping the steady pulse needed by the dancers, in counterpoint to the syncopations. In *Haugelåt* (no. 4), where the syncopation in the right hand mostly appears in the phrasing bows derived from the fiddle bowings, Grieg uses it all the more in the left hand accompaniment. In *Røtnamsknut* (no. 7), he even starts with the left hand alone playing *only* off-beat notes, so that the beat comes as a surprise with the right hand melody.

In 6/8, the hemiola rhythm is equally typical, again with excellent examples in op. 72: *Skuldalsbruri* (no. 15) starts with a hemiola in the first bar of a repeated 3-bar motif. Here Grieg lets the left hand play the beats like a fiddler’s vigorous foot stamp for a long time, until it suddenly starts to follow the melody rhythm with hemiolas and eighth notes (bar 16). A similar alternation between marking the beats and following the melody’s hemiolas is found in *Knut Luråsen’s Halling 1*, whereas the middle part of *Luråsen’s Halling 2* has a third solution: the left hand has hemiolas together with the melody (bars 18, 21), and continues to play them when they are abandoned in the melody (bars 19, 22). All these examples show that Grieg had a clear perception of the importance of hemiolas and syncopation in the *halling* and *gangar* genres, and that he enjoyed playing with the rhythmical counterpoint created by these *slått* rhythms. His arrangements even reflect the fact that accentuation of the afterbeats (every second eighth note in 2/4, every third in 6/8) is common in these fiddling genres, also where there are no syncopated rhythms or hemiolas.

### **The springar and asymmetrical rhythm**

The rhythm of the *springar* (and the *pols* for ordinary fiddle) varies according to geographical district. Older *springar* tunes in western Norway have no fixed metre, and all beats are equally important, so they could best be described as being in 1/4 time. 3/4 time, however, is the most common metre both in newer *springar* tunes from this area and in the rest of the country. But there are many variations of this metre; a large part of southern Norway (and Sweden with its corresponding *polska*) has so-called asymmetrical 3/4 time, which is divided into two main types: long-medium-short and short-long-medium (referring to the relative length of the three beats). The former dominates in the area on both sides of the Oslofjord which Telemark belongs to, and the latter in a bigger area to the north and east of this, including major parts of mid-Sweden.

Knut Dahle came from Tinn in Telemark, so the *springar* tunes in the op. 72 as traditionally played on the fiddle have the asymmetrical long-medium-short rhythm. Why then didn’t Halvorsen write anything about this in the publication of the fiddle tunes (1902)? Probably for the same reason that most transcribers, including Halvorsen himself, have chosen to write asymmetrical tunes in 3/4 time and not in some irregular metre; in actual practice, the degree of asymmetry varies a lot, and it can not be adequately represented by simple mathematical ratios. A good illustration of this has been provided by Sven Ahlbäck in a transcription of a *polska* tune played by Olmorts Olof Svensson in Särna, Sweden; Ahlbäck found that Svensson, in the course of the recorded performance, played

with varying degrees of asymmetry, from the extreme 16-50-34 to the moderate 29-42-30 (in percentage of length of the whole measure for each beat. Ahlbäck: 176). In the recordings of Knut Dahle, as well as other Norwegian fiddlers, we can hear similar variation, from distinct asymmetry to almost symmetrical rhythm.

### **Problematic points in Halvorsen's transcriptions – and solutions**

Whilst Grieg considered the arrangement of the *slåtter* for piano a sin too tempting to resist, posterity might conclude that the “sins” were not committed by Grieg, but by Halvorsen – when the latter transcribed parts of two tunes, and the whole of a third one with wrongly placed barlines. This is hardly surprising, since even folk musicians have been known to make similar mistakes on more than one occasion while transcribing tunes from local traditions other than their own – there are many possible misinterpretations of the rhythms for those not familiar with a given tradition. And since Grieg knew West Norwegian folk music far better than Telemark music, it could not reasonably have been expected that he would notice and correct these rhythmical mistakes in Halvorsen's transcriptions.

These excusable, but not unimportant mistakes are the subject of comments and revisions in the new edition of op. 72 by Geir Henning Braaten and Sven Nyhus (2001). A further, detailed comment on these revisions may be of interest in this context:

In the first 11 bars of no. 2 and the whole of no. 13, Johan Halvorsen wrote the barlines according to the short-long-medium rhythm, instead of the long-medium-short rhythm prevailing in Telemark. That is, what should be the third beat is written as the first one. In bar 11 of no. 2, as can be seen from the new transcription in Nyhus 1993, Halvorsen's transcription lacks the notes forming the first beat of the original tune's twelfth bar (Nyhus: bar 14), and consequently the rhythm gets “set right” from the next measure on. In the 2001 revised edition, the barlines up to that point are moved, and the missing beat is simply replaced by a rest, a solution which involves the least possible alteration of Grieg's arrangement. Halvorsen's mistake in these cases is easily explained by the fact that the upbeat starting the tunes tends to be accentuated by the fiddlers, and easily perceived as the first beat by those less familiar with the Telemark tradition. And to a certain extent, Grieg's arrangements had a mitigating effect; in the first bars of no. 2, the left hand has accents on the third beat, which should have been transcribed as the second one – but the second beat is indeed normally the heaviest one in the Telemark *springar*, so Grieg's accents work well here. And in bars 54–61 of no. 13, the left hand plays only the second and third (originally first and second) beats of each bar, which are exactly the two beats that most Telemark fiddlers demarcate with foot stamping. The same is seen several places in no. 16, but here the barline has been moved to the right instead of to the left – which makes this tune a different case altogether.

What is peculiar about no. 16 is that the original *springar* tune has an uncommon beginning; the main theme (bar 5) starts on the second beat. This beat being the heaviest one in the Telemark *springar*, it is no wonder that Halvorsen in this case perceived it as the *first* one – except for the first four bars, which Knut Dahle apparently treated as a kind of prelude ending with a long note. Here Halvorsen wrote the “right” barlines; he apparently didn't think of these bars as the same motif as the similar one in bars 6–8, 10–12, 30–32 and 34–36, where the melody line is the same as in bars 2–4, only with the barline one beat later in his transcription. Unfortunately, in the revised edition the transition between the “prelude” and the rest of the tune (which could be seen as a kind of fermate) has not been corrected, so there the situation is the opposite: the barlines are wrong in the first four bars, and correct in the rest of the tune. Aside from this, the new edition is definitely a step in the right direction for suggesting phrasing and articulation closer to the original; as in nos. 2, 13 and several other of the *Slåtter*, many bows have been changed, added or omitted, some in accordance with Johannes Dahle's bowing and some following Halvorsen's transcription. Rhythmical subdivisions are changed in many places – equal divisions into punctuated or dactylic ones, for example.

The relatively big changes in the new edition of no. 16 are not surprising, since this is one of the *Slåtter* where the general difference between the original and Grieg's version is most striking. Grieg has made it into a soft and romantic piece, while the original as played by Johannes Dahle is powerful and archaic in its style and expression, with the old tonality contributing strongly to this effect. Dahle's way of playing makes sense if one takes into account the old legend surrounding both of the last numbers of op. 72: the three maidens from Kivle (*Kivlemøyane*) played on horns



outside the church during a mass, and were turned into stone statues by the priest because they had drawn people out of the church to listen. The different mood in Grieg's version is partly due to Halvorsen's choice of b flat to transcribe the fourth step of the scale, instead of the Lydian b which probably would have given an effect closer to what Dahle played (Nyhus's transcription from Johannes Dahle's playing has a slightly lowered b). Again, one might wonder what the result would have been if Grieg had heard Dahle's playing himself – it would probably have been different, but maybe not as beautiful as the delicate op. 72 no. 16!

### **The *Slåtter* in modern performance**

The new edition offers a possibility for modern pianists to come closer to the original folk tunes in their performances of op. 72. In addition to adopting the «corrections» outlined above, some Norwegian pianists have wanted to incorporate even more of the Hardanger fiddle style into their interpretations of the *Slåtter*. The most radical attempts at this have led to performances that cannot be described as mere interpretations of Grieg's work:

The most radical project, Ingfrid Breie Nyhus's *Slåttepiano*, is better described as a new interpretation and piano adaptation of the original Dahle *slåtter*. Grieg's idea of imitating the fiddle harmony and ornamentation in the right hand is developed further, and harmonic or other additions are either totally missing or done in a more modern, improvisational way. An asymmetrical *springar* beat is also adopted.

Composer and pianist Nils Henrik Asheim's work-in-progress, *Crossing Grieg*, contains some well-nigh conventional performances of op. 72 tunes, following the new edition closely, but adding asymmetrical rhythm occasionally, but some of the tunes get a radical new interpretation, similar to what Ingfrid Nyhus has done – as well as freely improvised transitions. And importantly here, the Hardanger fiddle joins the piano – they play together and alternate. The latent conflict between the integrity of the original tradition and Grieg's free arrangements is addressed by letting the two meet in creative interplay.

These and other new interpretations show the unique values contained in Dahle's and Grieg's *Slåtter* and their power to inspire new music making – a power I am convinced they will retain as long as classical, folk or other musicians are aware of them.

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