

Review of:

Noreg i dans og spel, Norway in dance and music, instruction video with accompanying booklet, published in 2002 by the Council for Folk Music and Folk Dance in Trondheim.

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The video presents 36 examples of folk dance and instrumental folk music, ordered geographically from south to north, with a final example from Oslo. The production is rather amateuristic. A silent still picture, indicating the name of the performers, the dance or music and its place of origin, introduces all the examples. The following video shots are documentary, simply and straightforwardly presenting the dancers and musicians. No fancy camera work, no professional editing, a product far from televised kitschy folklore shows. Instead a product intended for pedagogical use in Norwegian schools. Whether the non-professionalism is intended as a part of the pedagogical ideas is unclear, but after a while it nevertheless helps to keep focus on the performances, rather than on the mode of presentation itself.

The dances are mostly variations of couple dances in $\frac{3}{4}$, such as springleik, springdans and pols, and some in $\frac{2}{4}$, such as gangar. Some of the couple dances are even by three persons. The instrumental music are dance tunes as well as listening tunes, "lyarslått", played on fiddle or hardingfiddle, and an occasional accordion or Jew's harp. Most of the performers are young, in their twenties to their forties, wearing richly elaborated folk costumes. Their level of performance is high, sometimes even extraordinary. There are also a few old people, performing in "ordinary" clothes, and at a somewhat lower level of technical competence.

In the booklet we are given information about the performers and their repertoire, with an emphasis on the place of origin of the dances and tunes, and the line of transmission of the repertoire from the old days to today. Most of the footage is from annual national competitions, "kappleik", from the 1980's to the 1990's, but there is little or no information about these events, the audiences, or of the jury that in quite a few examples are seen seated on stage next to the dancers.

From this it should be clear that the title is misleading - this is not a comprehensive survey of dance and music in Norway. What is shown is a staged representation of a Norwegian "folk" in "the old days", living in geographically bounded and distinctly different parts ("bygd"). To each of these parts belong their own variations of a common Norwegian expressive culture, neatly arranged geographically. The keyword or 'leit-motif' of the production is "living tradition", a term used in the commentary to explain why and how these dances and tunes have survived up to our times. The message is that even if the presented expressive forms are old, don't you think that they are dead! But that they are living in schools, courses, festivals and at competitions is not commented upon at all, neither that a large part of this "living tradition" is intended for and indeed takes place on stages where competition, audiences, and juries are prominent features.

"Tradition" is an important word, in the Scandinavian context it is about handing over materials and skills from generation to generation, preferably in unbroken succession. In this video it is the young generations that appear as "the tradition bearers", upholders of a long unbroken "living tradition". They are the expert dancers and musicians, wearing the old folk costumes, performing at an ever-higher level of competence. Old people are present only in a

few examples, appearing in their ordinary clothes and not performing as well as the young ones. The living old of today are presented as something of a lost generation: it is not to them, but to the old of former generations, long since dead, that the young look for inspiration and repertoire.

“Noreg in dance and music” can be seen as an example of a process often described as significant of our times: through medialisatation and mediaization a local micromusic is dis-embedded, uncoupled from its origins and made available over large parts of time-space. The result is that today you don’t have to be Norwegian or live in Norway to become competent in one of the most Norwegian of Norwegian genres – you may learn it from this or other similar productions. However, a careful reading of the comments reveals that much of the presented repertoire is already a result of such disembedding processes: it is from studies of old recordings and transcriptions stored in archives of museums or folk music and folk dance organisations in Norway that many of the performers have learnt their repertoires. As a whole this production is a representation of an understanding of “tradition” common all over Scandinavia: “Living tradition”, in this context, does not mean the actual live dancing and music making of old people, but the ritualised performance of a codified repertoire of recordings and transcriptions preserved in archives.