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Hi everyone, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast that helps families explore the wonderful world of music together. I'm Carly Seifert, creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I am so glad you're here with me today.

We are two stops into our summer world tour, and I have to say — this is one of my favorite things we do all year on this podcast. If you missed our first stop two weeks ago, we traveled to Puerto Rico and explored the vibrant folk traditions of bomba, plena, and música jíbara. It was such a rich episode, and if you haven't heard it yet, I'd love for you to go back and listen — you can find it at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/177.

Today we are stamping our passports with stop number two, and we are heading somewhere very different from the warm, sun-soaked Caribbean. We're trading tropical rhythms for misty mountains, deep fjords, and the hauntingly beautiful sound of a very unusual violin.

Welcome to Norway.

Norway is a long, narrow country in northern Europe, stretching so far north that parts of it sit above the Arctic Circle, where the sun doesn't set at all during the summer months — something called the midnight sun. It's a country of dramatic landscapes: steep mountain valleys called fjords carved by ancient glaciers, thick pine forests, and coastlines that twist and wind for thousands of miles along the North Atlantic.

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It's the kind of place where the landscape feels almost mythological, and honestly, when you hear Norwegian folk music, that feeling makes complete sense.

Before we explore the music, though, I want to take a moment for a little history — because understanding where Norway came from helps us understand why its folk music sounds the way it does.

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People have lived in Norway for thousands of years. The Norse people — the ancestors of modern Norwegians — were farmers, fishermen, and seafarers who built some of the most impressive ships of the ancient world. You may have heard of the Vikings, the Norse explorers and warriors who sailed across the North Atlantic between roughly 800 and 1100 AD, reaching Iceland, Greenland, and even North America long before Columbus. The Norse people had a rich storytelling tradition, with elaborate myths about gods like Odin and Thor, giants, sea serpents, and hidden forest spirits called huldrefolk — creatures who were said to live just out of sight in the mountains and forests.

And folk music was woven into all of it. Songs and music were how the Norse people passed down their history, celebrated their seasons, and stayed connected to the landscape and the spirit world they believed surrounded them. It's worth noting that when we talk about Vikings today, images from movies and popular culture have given us a pretty dramatic picture that doesn't always match the full historical reality. The Norse people were also farmers, craftspeople, poets, and musicians — and that quieter side of their culture is where so much of Norway's folk tradition is rooted.

Now, as Norway moved through the medieval period and into the modern era, it spent long stretches of time under the rule of its neighbors — first Denmark, for nearly 400 years, and then a period of union with Sweden. Norwegian culture and language were deeply suppressed during parts of this time, and ordinary Norwegian people held tightly to their folk music, their local dialects, and their regional traditions as a way of preserving their identity. Folk music in Norway wasn't just entertainment — it was an act of cultural survival.

This is why, when Norway began to reclaim its national identity in the 1800s, folk music became such a powerful symbol of what it meant to be Norwegian. And it's also why one particular instrument became the heart and soul of Norwegian folk tradition.

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That instrument is the Hardanger fiddle, (har-danger) and I want to spend some real time with it because it is genuinely unlike almost anything else you will encounter in the world of folk music.

The Hardanger fiddle looks something like a regular violin at first glance — it has four strings on top that the player bows and fingers in the usual way. But underneath those four strings, running inside the body of the instrument, are four or five additional strings called sympathetic strings or understrings. The player never touches these strings directly. Instead, when the bow moves across the top strings and the instrument vibrates, the understrings vibrate along in sympathy — resonating and humming in response to whatever notes are being played above them.

The effect is extraordinary. The Hardanger fiddle doesn't just play a melody — it seems to fill the air around it with sound, like the music is coming from somewhere inside the room itself rather than just from the instrument. Many people describe the sound as haunting, or ancient, or like hearing something that belongs to a place rather than a person. When you listen to it, it's not hard to imagine those huldrefolk — those hidden forest spirits — slipping between the trees nearby.

The Hardanger fiddle takes its name from the Hardanger region of western Norway, a spectacular area of fjords and mountains where the instrument was developed, probably in the 1600s. For centuries it was the instrument of rural Norwegian communities — played at weddings, dances, festivals, and gatherings. The musicians who played it were called fiddlers, and the most famous among them became almost legendary figures in Norwegian culture.

The music played on the Hardanger fiddle is often in a dance form called the springar or the halling. The halling is a particularly fascinating dance — it's a solo dance performed by men, involving acrobatic kicks and jumps, sometimes trying to knock a hat off a stick held high in the air. It's athletic and joyful and a little bit competitive,

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and the fiddle music that accompanies it has a lively, propulsive energy that practically pulls you to your feet.

Can you hear how the rhythm of that music seems to push forward, like it's daring someone to keep up with it? The halling was a way for young men to show off their strength and agility, and the fiddle player and the dancer had a real conversation going — the music responding to the dancer and the dancer responding to the music, not unlike the relationship we talked about in Puerto Rico between the bomba drummer and the dancer. It's a reminder that across very different cultures, music and movement have always found each other.

Another important piece of Norwegian folk music tradition is the stev — a form of short, improvised sung poetry, similar in spirit (though much shorter and less structured) to the Puerto Rican décima we discussed last episode. A stev is typically just four lines long, following a specific rhythmic pattern, and skilled singers could improvise new verses on the spot in response to a situation, a person, or a mood. There were even stev competitions, where two singers would trade verses back and forth, each trying to outdo the other with wit and wordplay.

The stev reminds us of something important: folk music has almost always had an improvised, conversational dimension to it. Whether you're in a mountain village in Norway or a plaza in Puerto Rico, the tradition of making something up in the moment — of turning the events of daily life into song — seems to be something deeply human.

Now, I promised you a more developed look at the connection between Norwegian folk music and a composer you may already know — and if you've been listening to this podcast for a long time, his name might ring a bell.

Edvard Grieg was actually the very first composer we ever featured on *Busy Kids Love Music*, all the way back in Episode 2. And if you've listened to that episode, you already know that Grieg was Norwegian, born in Bergen in 1843, and that his music is deeply rooted in the

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landscape and spirit of his homeland. But what we didn't spend as much time on in that early episode is just how deliberately and specifically Grieg drew from Norwegian folk music traditions — including the Hardanger fiddle.

Grieg grew up at a time when Norway was in the middle of a powerful national awakening. After centuries of Danish and then Swedish rule, Norwegians were fiercely reclaiming their own language, their own literature, their own art, and their own music. Grieg felt this deeply. He collected Norwegian folk melodies, studied the rhythms and scales of traditional folk music, and made a conscious decision to put that sound at the heart of his composing.

You can hear it very clearly in pieces like his Norwegian Dances — the rhythms are directly borrowed from folk dance forms like the springar and the halling. The harmonies are unusual by the standards of classical music at the time, with a modal quality that sounds ancient and a little mysterious, because that's exactly what Norwegian folk music sounds like. Grieg wasn't just inspired by his country's folk tradition in a vague, general way. He was doing something very intentional: taking music that belonged to ordinary Norwegian farmers and mountain communities and carrying it into concert halls around the world.

His Peer Gynt Suite, which we explored in Episode 2, draws heavily from Norwegian mythology and folklore — the same world of trolls and mountain spirits and wild natural forces that shaped the Hardanger fiddle repertoire for centuries. In a way, Grieg's classical compositions are the folk music of Norway translated into a new language, preserving its spirit and sharing it with people who might never have heard a Hardanger fiddle otherwise.

That's a really beautiful thing to think about — the idea that a folk tradition can travel. That music born in a remote mountain valley can eventually reach a concert hall in Vienna or a podcast listener in Georgia (or wherever you're listening from today).

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Norway's folk music traditions are very much alive today. The Hardanger fiddle in particular has seen a revival over the past several decades, with younger musicians finding fresh and creative ways to bring it into contemporary music. There's also a wonderful annual folk music festival in Norway that draws fiddlers, singers, and dancers from all over the country to celebrate exactly the traditions we've been talking about today.

Today we stamped our passport with stop number two on this summer's world tour — Norway, with its ancient Norse roots, the haunting resonance of the Hardanger fiddle, the athletic joy of the halling dance, and the improvised poetry of the stev. And we connected it all to a composer who has been part of this podcast since the very beginning. Be sure to print your stamp in the show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/178 so you can add it to your passport.

If you want to keep exploring after this episode, I've put together a curated listening playlist in the show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/178 — including some beautiful Hardanger fiddle performances and a few Grieg pieces that will sound brand new to you now that you know more about where they came from.

And if you're enjoying the summer tour, would you take just a couple of minutes to rate and review *Busy Kids Love Music* wherever you listen to podcasts? Reviews genuinely make such a difference in helping new families find the show, and every single one helps us reach more kids with this music. I would be so grateful.

Three more passport stamps to go this summer — I'll see you back here in two weeks for our next destination. Until then, keep listening, keep learning, and keep making music. Thanks so much for being here!