

Letter of intent

Wiebke Lüders

Since January 2016 I have been working as part-time conservator of musical instruments, with focus on Hardanger fiddles and other bowed string instruments, at the Hardanger fiddle workshop of the Ole Bull Academy in Voss (50 % position). In teamwork with the fiddle maker Sigvald Rørlien I am responsible for the maintenance of Hardanger fiddles and violins in the Academy's collection as well as the repair and conservation of musical instruments in private ownership.

Besides conservation and repair I have a great personal interest in Hardanger fiddle making and have therefore decided to build Hardanger fiddles in my spare time. With consent and support of the Ole Bull Academy's director Jo Asgeir Lie and fiddle maker Sigvald Rørlien I intend to build Hardanger fiddles at work as well, if time permits. I have started to make a copy of a Hardanger fiddle by Trond Botnen from around 1750 for the Ole Bull Academy a few weeks ago. From former trainings at workshops of musical instrument makers and from my previous work as conservator of wooden musical instruments I have gained experience in wood working and violin/fiddle making.

To preserve and promote the tradition of Hardanger fiddle music and dance a vivid tradition of Hardanger fiddle making is essential. For some years there has been a decrease in the practice of Hardanger fiddle making. The fiddle maker Sigvald Rørlien in Voss will most likely retire in a few years and only a handful of younger Hardanger fiddle makers will be left to keep up this valuable tradition.

One of the projects that the Hardingfela.no project of the Ole Bull Akademiet and the Hardanger og Voss Museum comprises is called "Framtids-Felemakeriet". Main focus of this project is the development of new technologies to economise Hardanger fiddle making. By usage of modern machines, such as computer-controlled shapers, Hardanger fiddle making shall become faster and more effective and, as a consequence, Hardanger fiddles more affordable for children and beginners. More affordable instruments will in the long run very likely promote folk music played on Hardanger fiddles.

On the other hand, Hardanger fiddle making needs to be considered as a tradition of high cultural value, worthy of preservation. It is not only a craft but also a form of artistic expression and should be preserved as such. By using increasingly computer-controlled machines the individuality of the instruments and their high cultural value as a symbol of extraordinary Norwegian craftsmanship might get lost. But is it not one of the most significant features of Hardanger fiddles, that each of them is unique?

Therefore it is very important to strengthen and support a parallel development of top-quality handmade Hardanger fiddles, based on traditional building techniques. These two different developments of the Hardanger fiddle making tradition do not exclude each other and it is fascinating to see them side by side at the workshop of the Ole Bull Academy.

The stipend would give me, as a future Hardanger fiddle maker, the opportunity to immerse myself in the field of Hardanger fiddle making beside my work at the Academy, to deepen my skills in producing well-sounding instruments and to find a new creative approach to this ancient tradition. I would like to use the "Folkemusikkstipend" in the

coming months to do research on the historical approach to fiddle making as well as to experiment with different materials, shapes and designs, while making Hardanger fiddles “in the traditional way”. As it was in the early days of Hardanger fiddle making, the traditional Norwegian patterns and carvings would be my inspiration for creating new and inventive fiddle designs.

This will eventually allow me to find my own unique style and Hardanger fiddle sound, which in the future could be an enrichment for the Hardanger fiddle world.



A Hardanger fiddle that I am working on in my spare time



Head, fingerboard and tailpiece of a Hardanger fiddle, which I made in a traditional design (after Gunnar Røstad)