

LJOS – The fundamental tone that connects us

My family roots on my mother's side have their origins in Ottadalen, in the village of Lundagrenden in Bismo, to be precise. My great-grandfather Ivar Huuse Randen was a driver who transported timber and goods by horse and cart in the Ottadal and Gudbrandsdal valleys. Love would have it that my grandfather Otto Randen met a girl from Stryn, Elianna Skåre, at the Ofossen mill in Bismo. Otto moved with her across the mountains to the west coast, to the villages of Oppstryn and Stryn. Many years later I came into the world and would see and experience the valleys that lay beyond the Strynefjell mountains to the east.

Even today I still get the same exotic feeling I had as a child driving between towering banks of snow along the old Strynefjell road, heading inland and eastwards via Grotli, Pollfoss, Lom, Vågå, and Otta. The myth I had been led to believe that the village of Skjåk was as deprived of rain as the Sahara was something I moderated over time; the notion that Otta had a train station that linked it with Trondheim and the very capital of Norway, Oslo, was almost impossible to grasp for a young lad from picturesque Stryn.

I cannot count the number of times I have travelled through the Ottadal and Gudbrandsdal valleys during my life, and on those journeys I have always experienced a sense of wonderment for this region. Nature, culture, architecture and dialect are unique to the area and all of this is embedded in my family history.

With such a backdrop it has been a very exciting process composing this musical journey, and a particular pleasure to work with poems by Tor Jonsson. Distilled poetry with a fundamental tone that really touches us deeply. I had been thinking about composing music to Jonsson's poems for several years, and then I received this wonderful invitation. My goal has been to alternate between the various moods I see and recognize in the landscape. Changes in colour and topography, a form of time-travel, perhaps, absorbing external textures, sounds and influences. Common to my experience of the valleys in the region is a fascination with the rivers that run through them. The many nuances in the colour of the water. Most often a heavy, dark blue-green, a strong force, as if representing an undertone, a fundamental tone in the landscape. Ever-moving towards lower terrain, yet ever-present, a vibrant fundamental tone that is ours and which connects us. Towards the end of the work we hear the distant bells of Nidaros cathedral summoning us north towards the mighty Rondane mountains. For me, the bells call me on a journey through time that does not terminate in Trøndelag, but takes me much further – to my Kven family roots on my father's side in the north of Norway.

During the process of making the music my thoughts went to a visit I made to Rudi farm in the summer, where I met a family of four hiking a pilgrim trail from Germany to Trondheim. It was a powerful encounter and a reminder of what it means to choose a conventional mode of journeying in our modern, digitalized world, and that we need to be open to inspiration and knowledge from people from other countries. The family I met were hiking the old pilgrim route through the valley heading north; in the distance they would eventually be able to hear the sound of the bells, a fundamental note that to many is a symbol of love and death in a quieter world.

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