

# Kåre Nordstoga

12 organ preludes on Norwegian religious folk tunes

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Many of us love the religious folk tunes that have been passed down through generations of oral tradition in the form of simple melody lines without accompaniment or written notation. These folk tunes are closely related to spoken language, and bring to mind the Gregorian chants of the Roman Catholic Church as they reflect the intonation and sentence structure of the language. They are thus connected with the rich poetry found in hymn lyrics, which are often pietistic and focus on heaven. It was not until the 1900s that folk tunes were authorised to be used in ecclesiastical settings. They had, from time immemorial, expressed the religious yearnings of the common man, providing a framework for an everyday life that was far from a bed of roses.

The idea behind these 12 folk tune preludes has been to illustrate the greatness of this tradition, as “hymns without words”, through the multitude of nuances and playing methods that a large church organ permits. Not least, the magnificent sound of the main organ in the Oslo Cathedral has served as an inspiration to form a new alliance of folk tunes and the organ-playing tradition.

The organ in the Oslo Cathedral, voiced by Jan Ryde in 1997-98, has a vocal, flexible and even human sound, with a sensitivity that can be reminiscent of folk tunes. There are still passages in the preludes that I cannot play without hearing my father’s voice. He was a sexton and cantor at Heddal Stave Church when I was growing up, and often sang these hymns when at church and as a schoolteacher. The Oslo Cathedral’s organ often evokes such associations, not because it sounds like singing, but because the sound is experienced as sharing qualities with the human voice and articulation.

This work was commissioned by the director of the Oslo International Church Music Festival, Bente Johnsrud, in March, 2020. Its performance was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, which made it possible to revise the work during the period up to its streamed premiere in March, 2021. The sheet music was published by Lyche Musikkforlag in 2021.

1. *“Med Jesus vil eg fara”* begins with imagined dialogues where the organ’s principals play against each other in different directions, from the Great, Choir, Swell and pedal. Following a powerful central passage where the hymn is played in

the bass, the final verse is presented in the Choir’s trumpet stop with gentler counter melodies towards the end.

2. In *“Min sjel nu lover Herren”*, the first verse is structured like a “Plein Jeux à 5 en taille” in the style of French baroque masters such as Couperin and Grigny: a 5-voice movement with the melody in the tenor, played with the pedal. The second verse features an independent bass voice, while the melody continues to lie in the middle voice, but with bold passages in the upper voice.

3. The beginning of *“Hellig ånd, o himmel-lue”* is formed as a hesitant prayer, a dialogue between soft bass voices and the Swell’s oboe, and then becomes a hopeful verse with a flute providing a counter melody, before a crescendo signals a transition to a chaotic, spiritual ringing, like a “French toccata” on the full organ.

4. *“Korset vil jeg aldri sviike”*, with a melody from Lesja, is enclosed within imaginative arpeggios on the Swell. Emerging from this is the first verse, played on the Great’s principal with a counter melody on the flute 4’, almost like a willow flute, on the Swell. The second verse is marked by tranquil

improvisation for trumpet on the Great, while the high point arrives in the third verse, where an expansive folkloristic tune does not quite fit together with the hymn stanzas in the bass.

5. “*Jeg ser deg, o Guds lam, å stå*” is structured like a classic organ chorale, a trio where the melody is played by the Cromorne on the pedal, while the two counter melodies are played with flute voices on the Great and the Swell, with rhythms of 3 and 4 beats per bar respectively.

6. “*Det er det ny’ som på jorderik skjedde*” was inspired by the colourful hymn lyrics by poet-priest Petter Dass (1647-1707). It is found among his catechism songs, which praise the Christmas gospel profusely. Its structural similarity to the French organ piece “*Litanies*”, by Jehan Alain (1911-1940), is not a coincidence.

7. “*Eg veit i himmerik ei borg*” begins with a flute solo that leads into a fugue. When the lonely flute voice returns, the hymn melody emerges slowly from the distance with the Swell’s Voix Celeste, which means “celestial voice”. This is followed by two verses: one with four voices in B minor, and one with five voices in D major. Finally, an uninhibited fugue passage with the hymn in the bass segues into a powerful final verse in D major on full organ.

8. “*Jesus din søte forening og smake*” is based on two different folk tunes. The one

in a 3-beat pattern, from Rogaland, forms a repeating passacaglia theme, while the other, a folk tune from Gudbrandsdalen, appears as a descant at specific high points. This hymn is often associated with lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824). It presents a serious message about the sinful nature of man, and played a key role in the pietistic revival movement of the 1800s.

9. “*Den store hvite flokk å se*” begins as a traditional choral prelude featuring a motif from the Hardanger fiddle tune “*Førnesbrunnen*” as a recurrent counter melody. The melody of the hymn originates from Heddal, and was transcribed by Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (1812-1887) in 1851, with Inger Laurine Flood, a vicar’s wife, serving as the source. The title “*Førnesbrunnen*” is after a horse by that name, and refers to a legend from Rauland in the days of the Black Death, in which this unusual horse carried the dead from the remote parish of Møsstrand to the cemetery in Rauland. And it continued to do so, over the long path along the Falkeriset ridge, even after nobody was left to ride the horse. The horse’s whinnying during its own death throes can supposedly be heard in the tune. The organ piece itself does offer a moment of high drama where the fiddle tune collides powerfully with the otherwise serene hymn that describes images from the *Book of Revelation*.

10. “*Nu solen går ned*”, an evening hymn, begins surrounded by gentle movement from the Swell, before the next verse forms

a canon with itself in a variety of timbres and pitches. The last part is built around a 10-tone-long descending bass ostinato that merges into the hymn, leading towards the conclusion, when the final stanzas resound as a canon in the outer voices.

11. “*Overmåte fullt av nåde*” is constructed as a simple choral prelude in a traditional form, in which the folk tune from Oppdal is played stanza by stanza with the oboe in the pedal. The stanzas from a melody variant from Sunndal, as sung by Ingeborg Ottem, appear one after another as interludes. The regularly repeated movements of the Great’s flute tie the entire piece together.

12. “*Dagens auga sloknar ut*”, like no. 10, is based on an evening hymn, this one from Tuddal as sung by Anne Tjønn. In the first two verses the hymn’s melody is presented in a 5-voice movement, the second time as a canon between the principals of the Great and the pedal. After a powerful and more fluid third verse, where the hymn appears in the bass, the piece gradually tapers off towards the last verse, where everything dissolves, and at the very end the three manuals are all used at the same time.

**KÅRE NORDSTOGA** was born in Komnes in 1954. He grew up in Heddal, studied in Oslo and London, and has been the principal organist at Oslo Cathedral since 1984. He is also an organ instructor at the Norwegian Academy of Music. Since his debut concert in 1978 he has engaged in extensive concert activities both as a soloist and in ensembles with other musicians, singers, choirs and orchestras. In this connection he has collaborated with folk musicians such as Agnes and Knut Buen, Arve Moen Bergset, Ellen Nordstoga, Per Sæmund Bjørkum, Halvor Håkanes and Sinikka Langeland.



Main organ in Oslo Cathedral, Ryde & Berg 1998.  
 53 stops. Voicer: Jan Ryde. Prospect: Lambert Daniel Kastens 1727

Great	Choir	Swell	Pedal
<i>Principal 16</i>	<i>Principal 8</i>	<i>Bordun 16</i>	<i>Grand Bourdon 32</i>
<i>Bordun 16</i>	<i>Gedakt 8</i>	<i>Flûte Harm. 8</i>	<i>Principal 16</i>
<i>Principal 8</i>	<i>Vox Candida 8</i>	<i>Bordun 8</i>	<i>Fløytebass 16</i>
<i>Gamba 8</i>	<i>Oktav 4</i>	<i>Fugara 8</i>	<i>Subbass 16</i>
<i>Spissfløyte 8</i>	<i>Rørfløyte 4</i>	<i>Voce Celeste 8</i>	<i>Oktav 8</i>
<i>Oktav 4</i>	<i>Kvint 2 2/3</i>	<i>Principal 4</i>	<i>Gedakt 8</i>
<i>Gedaktfløyte 4</i>	<i>Oktav 2</i>	<i>Italienskfløyte 4</i>	<i>Oktav 4</i>
<i>Kvint 2 2/3</i>	<i>Terz 1 3/5</i>	<i>Nasard 2 2/3</i>	<i>Mixtur V</i>
<i>Oktav 2</i>	<i>Kvint 1 1/3</i>	<i>Waldfløyte 2</i>	<i>Basun 32</i>
<i>Mixtur VII</i>	<i>Mixtur III</i>	<i>Terz 1 3/5</i>	<i>Basun 16</i>
<i>Mixtur III</i>	<i>Trompet 8</i>	<i>Mixtur VI</i>	<i>Trompet 8</i>
<i>Cornet V</i>	<i>Krumhorn 8</i>	<i>Bombarde 16</i>	<i>Trompet 4</i>
<i>Trompet 16</i>		<i>Trompet Harm. 8</i>	
<i>Trompet 8</i>		<i>Obo 8</i>	
		<i>Clairone 4</i>	

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1. *Med Jesus vil eg fara* (Sunnmøre) ————— 6:27
2. *Min sjel nu lover Herren* (Nordmøre) ————— 4:04
3. *Hellig Ånd, o himmel-lue* (Rogaland) ————— 4:23
4. *Korset vil jeg aldri svike* (Lesja) ————— 5:53
5. *Jeg ser deg, o Guds lam, å stå* (Lom) ————— 3:57
6. *Det er det ny' som på jorderik skjedde* (Åseral) ————— 4:41
7. *Eg veit i himmerik ei borg* (Hallingdal) ————— 7:15
8. *Jesus din søte forening å smake* (Ryfylke/Gudbrandsdalen) ————— 5:57
9. *Den store hvite flokk* (Heddal) ————— 5:07
10. *Nu solen går ned* (Tuddal) ————— 5:13
11. *Overmåte fullt av nåde* (Oppdal/Sunndal) ————— 2:58
12. *Dagens auge sloknar ut* (Tuddal) ————— 7:38

Recorded by Geir Inge Lotsberg 16th  
and 18th May 2021

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