

When I received this commission in 2016, it took me a while to find the way of approaching it, to find the point of entry. I was sitting in the South of France, all alone, staring out at the Mediterranean Sea, suddenly realizing how short it is to the coast of Algeria; to the coast of North Africa, and Asia, essentially the whole world. I thought about how much communication and cultural exchange must have taken place across the seaway and that led me to the essence of this work. Folk music itself is an organic whole, which has grown and developed for many years: What is Norwegian cultural heritage other than meetings between cultures? Please enjoy, Mathilde

Thanks to all the musicians in FriEnsemblet, for always being fantastic, curious and open minded. Thanks to Astrid Nora Ressem, editor of Norske Middelalderballader. The sound of the language itself and the textual variations have also inspired me. Thanks to Christian Kobizek, Hjørleifur Valsson, Unni Boksassp, Naïssam Jalal, and Hector Meriles for reading the text in their language. Thanks to European Cultural Heritage 2018, the National Library, Vossajazz (world premier), Kampenjazz (International Jazz Days), Hemnesjazz, Molde Jazz Festival, and Riksscenen. Thanks to my mum Randi Grooss Viddal for inspirational help with the medieval history. Thanks to my neighbour Lars Ulset for offering redemptive words, my beautiful family; Bjørn, Kaja, Tord, Tuva and Hermine, and last but not least, thanks to Tellef Kvifte for making this whole project a reality.

About the Norwegian ballads that were chosen for the commissioned work:

VALIVAN melody after unknown songs from Ørskog, Sunnmøre

A story about love, trust and joy. Stolt Margit (Proud Margit) gets the man she loves in the end; Valivan, a sea traveller (and the king's own son of England), but there is an advanced game of gender roles and power struggles before the story ends happily.

MARIA MAGDALENA melody after Ola J. Kolden from Nordmarka / Ringebu

An old story about condemnation and forgiveness. The woman is judged while the men go free. In return, she receives forgiveness and the promise of a place in heaven. FriEnsemblet (and the abbot) overpower the vocal (Maria), so her voice disappears and she travels out into the desert to atone for her sins – but ends up as a saint in the end.

HORPA melody after Gudrun G. Nordlund from Telemark, becomes Trollstemt (harpstrings) in my version

The oldest knowledge of harps is from ancient Mesopotamia, 5,000 years ago. The closest we get to a harp in the FriEnsemblet is the Hardanger fiddle (and santoor at the Kampenjazz concert). The Hardanger fiddle is a special Norwegian violin instrument with four upper strings and four or five resonant strings that run freely under the fingerboard. These "freely running strings", somewhat magical and supernatural and with its own will, is what I transferred onto wind instruments. They can hold the "strings" / tones forever – with the colours changing on my will / demand, while the fiddle runs freely.

DEI FREIARLAUSE MENN melody after Gunhild H. Haugen from Eggedal

A beautiful melody with a rather grotesque text about freezing and hunger, and what it can lead to. Dei Freiarlause Menn becomes Frearlaus (Outlaws) and is a combination of the same ballad in two different versions mixed together, one instrumental and one vocal. It merges directly into the composition Fastfrosen (Frozen Bounds).

KVINNEMORDEREN melody by L.M. Lindemann after Olea Crøger from Telemark

A *Ridder blåskjegg* (Knight Blue Beard) story. In addition to Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and some Icelandic fragments, there are versions from Germany, the Netherlands, England, Scotland, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Estonia – and other countries in Eastern Europe. It is also similar to the Middle Eastern *One Thousand And One Nights* story. Troubled times, betrayal, anxiety and desperation develop, but also cleverness, resourcefulness and courage.



Live music is an experience here and now. Mathilde Grooss Viddal's *Tri vendur blés ho i den høgaste sky* is a commissioned work, first performed at Vossajazz in 2018. The work, however, is in constant dialogue with the distant past and geographically distant areas. Viddal herself points out that the work is about dreams and fears, about longing for freedom, about loss and conflicts – as well as about love and courage today, and throughout history. The work also presents itself as a contemplation on cultural heritage and cultural encounters.

One of the elements opening the work to other dimensions is the basis of Norwegian medieval ballads and the tradition these ballads originated. This is a tradition primarily known within folk music environments. At the same time, the ballads are an integral part of folk beliefs, storytelling and legends, and a reservoir of earlier understandings of nature. As a second phenomenon, the Norwegian ballad tradition can be understood in a more global and globalized context. Some ballads seem to have travelled; versions exist in different languages and musical cultures.

From this connection arises a music that is at the same time local and global. Viddal has chosen ballads that spoke to her, that have some relation to her own biography and family background, but also ballads that are good starting points for the musical work she is doing. Here is composition and improvisation in a balanced way, where different musical languages are in dialogue, in a multiplicity of voices that still feels like an intimate field. The liveness of the work seems to underscore that no matter how many different voices can be discerned, they still exist together, in a common space. The past and the distant are both drawn into a heightened awareness in the here and now. It is as if tradition itself sounds like the difference between some "old" style and the current re-interpretation, where the old style is a kind of shadow of what we hear. This shadow might not be entirely different from what is sometimes called soul.

The local dimension of the music is perhaps most easily heard in the Norwegian lyrics and singing style, further on to the Hardanger violin. At the same time, the work opens up an expanded sonic field, inspired by Andalusian music, Arabic *maqamat*, medieval and Middle Eastern music, Catholic folk beliefs, and past love stories. All these dimensions contribute to a work of musical generosity. Viddal's compositions are respectful towards the traditions involved, while together with her musicians letting the traditions speak to us today. The various local traditions come together in dialogues across history and geography. Maybe music is a way – a portal – to another time and space, a place where we can move between different times and spaces. I am not entirely willing to think so, but a part of me wants to believe.

Erik Steinskog, September 2024

Recorded 2018–2019 live on tour at Molde Jazz Festival and Riksscenen, Norway



TRI VENDUR BLÉS HO I DEN HØGASTE SKY
Three times she blows (the horn) in the highest sky is a stanza from one of the medieval ballads. The call is either a warning, or fanfare of victory. However, it can be both, celebrating courage and cleverness.



Mixed 2020–2024 by Martin Abrahamsen at Rainbow Studio, Oslo, Norway
Mastered June 2024 by Morten Lund at Lund's Lyd, Oslo, Norway
Produced by Mathilde Grooss Viddal, www.giraffa.no
Executive producer Odd Gjelsnes
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- PART I**
- 1 **SUBCONSCIOUSNESS** 2:13
 - 2 **VALIVAN** (THE PIONEER) 8:20
 - 3 **STOLT MARGJIT** (ON NE VOIT BIEN QU'AVEC LE CŒUR) 2:50
 - 4 **MARIA** (CURIE) 3:16
 - 5 **MARIA MAGDALENA** (HELD IN DISGRACE) 4:07
 - 6 **SVĀTĀ MÁRIA EGYPTSKÁ** (L'ESSENTIEL EST INVISIBLE POUR LES YEUX) 8:23
- PART II**
- 7 **TROLLSTEMT** (HARP STRINGS) 4:36
- PART III**
- 8 **FREARLAUSE** (OUTLAWS) 2:36
 - 9 **FASTFROSSEN** (FROZEN BOUNDS) 3:05
 - 10 **INVISIBLE CHANGES** 5:01
 - 11 **CHORAL OF THE SHELLFISH** (SELFIES) 2:37
 - 12 **KVINNEMORDEREN** (SCHEHERAZADE) 2:21
 - 13 **GULLBORGS FANFARE** (FEARLESS GIRL) 7:02

Total time 56:45

Commissioned work by Mathilde Grooss Viddal
I have made a selection from more than 1500 ballads collected by the National Library in Norway. The ballads that were chosen inform my work: either the text, the history, the story, the melody, where they originated, and where they travelled – and in different ways inspired me to compose the music.

- MATHILDE GROSS VIDDAL**
BANDLEADER, BASS CLARINET, SOPRANO & TENOR SAXOPHONES, Bb CLARINET (SOLOS 1/2/6)
- NAÏSSAM JALAL**
FLUTE & VOICE (SOLOS 2/13)
- UNNI BOKSASP**
VOCAL
- KRISTOFFER ALBERTS**
ALTO SAXOPHONE (SOLO 6)
- PER WILLY AASERUD**
TRUMPET, ELECTRONICS (SOLO 10)
- ØYVIND BRÆKKE**
TROMBONE (SOLO 3)
- BRITT PERNILLE FRØHOLM**
VIOLIN, HARDANGER FIDDLE (SOLO 10)

TELLEF KVIFTE
KEYBOARDS, ORGAN, Sjøfløyte (SEA FLUTE), LAPTOP (SOLO 13)

EGIL KALMAN
DOUBLE BASS (SOLO 6)

KNUT KVIFTE NESHEIM
DRUMS, VIBRAPHONE (SOLO 9)

Ellen Brekken (double bass) and Mirsaeed Hosseiny Panah (santoor) toured with this project in 2018



LOS 297-2

MATHILDE GROSS VIDDAL TRI VENDUR BLÉS HO I DEN HØGASTE SKY

Mathilde Grooss Viddal

TRI VENDUR BLÉS HO I DEN HØGASTE SKY



FRIENSEMBLET ft.
Naïssam Jalal
Kristoffer Alberts
Unni Boksassp



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