

# “I saw it on the telly” – The history and revival of the Meråker clarinet

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## Introduction

One of the most popular TV-programmes in Norway over the last 40 years has been the weekly magazine “Norge Rundt” (Around Norway).<sup>1</sup> Each half-hour programme contains reports from different parts of Norway, made locally by the regional offices of NRK, the Norwegian state broadcasting company. In 1981, a report was presented from the parish of Meråker in the county of Nord-Trøndelag, where a 69-year old local fiddler by the name of Harald Gilland (1912–1992), played a whistle or flute-like instrument, which he had made himself. He called the instrument a “fløit” (flute, whistle), but it sounded more like a kind of home-made clarinet. When the instrument was pictured in close-up, it was possible to see that a single reed was fastened to the blown end (mouth-piece). This made me curious, because there was no information about any other corresponding instrument in living tradition in Norway. Shortly afterwards, I contacted Harald Gilland, and we arranged that I should come to Meråker a few days later and pay him a visit.

The parish of Meråker has around 2900 inhabitants and is situated ca. 80 km northeast of Trondheim, close to the Swedish border and the county of Jamtlandia. Harald Gilland was born in a place called Stordalen in the

1. The first programme in this series was sent on October 2nd 1976.



*Map of the Trondheim-Meråker region*

southeast corner of the parish. Even though many people were working as miners in Stordalen (1761–1920), farming and forestry have been the main industries up to now. The mountain dairy farming was also maintained well into the 20th century.<sup>2</sup>

Harald Gilland received me in a little house with a good view of Meråker. Generally, he appreciated visits, and especially now, because his wife died suddenly a few months ago. We sat down in the kitchen, as one often does in the countryside. Gilland began by telling me about musical life in Meråker when he was young in the 1920s and 1930s, and he dwelt particularly on the music traditions of the mountain dairy farms. On such farms, dairymaids and shepherds used various kinds of mountain calls, such as the “kulokk” (cow call). They also played the “lur”, a long wooden trumpet, as well as the “bukkehorn” (shepherd’s horn), which had finger holes and was normally made from the horn of a goat. In addition, there were different types of whistle flutes. Among the shepherds, there was a particular kind of instrument which was referred to as a flute, but which actually was

2. See Bjørn R. Krokstad: *Samhold og strid. Bygdebok for Meråker. Bd. 2. Meråker 1987.*

a simple folk clarinet. Gilland remembered that his father Hans Gilland (1878–1951) made such a “flute” for him when he was 6–7 years old. Later, his father told him that the use of such instruments was widespread among young people in his early childhood in the 1880s. But in Harald Gilland’s childhood around 1920, this simple clarinet had become almost obsolete. Harald made himself a few such instruments in his younger days, the last time being in 1930. This instrument is still kept in the local museum.

After having played some dance tunes for me on the clarinet, Gilland led me into the workshop in his tool-shed, where he fashioned his instruments. He told me that he had made several clarinets for relatives and young people in the parish since he resumed making instruments in the 1950s, but up until my visit no one had been interested in really learning to play the clarinet. As I stood and watched Harald Gilland making an instrument, I started to wonder about the history of this apparently unique clarinet tradition in Meråker.

In this article, I will try to figure out what could be the historical and organological background of this local tradition of making and playing folk clarinets in Meråker. Finally, I will describe the process that led to the revival of the Meråker clarinet in the 1950s.

I have interviewed Harald Gilland thoroughly, as well as other oral sources in the local community. Additionally, I have mapped and examined several old instruments, which still can be found in Meråker and in neighbouring districts. I have also been through a lot of written sources looking for information about clarinet traditions in Meråker as well as in other parts

*Harald Gilland playing his homemade clarinet. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*



of Norway. However, I will start by looking at the general history of clarinet instruments in Europe and then discuss what position clarinets have had in Norwegian traditional music.

## Idioglot and heteroglot clarinets

Today, the name clarinet is normally used to indicate wind instruments which in general have a single reed. These instruments can be cylindrical, like the European clarinet, or conical, like many types of folk clarinets. The single reed, which can also be called a tongue, may be one of two different types, and this divides the clarinets into two main groups: The heteroglot and the idioglot clarinets. When the reed is cut directly from a part of the

body of the instrument, the clarinet is described as idioglot. Heteroglot clarinets have a separate reed, which is fastened to the mouthpiece by a thread or a thin rope (Rice, 1992, p. 1). The European clarinet is the most well-known representative of the heteroglot clarinets, while the Sardinian launeddas is a good example of the idioglot type. The Meråker clarinet belongs to the heteroglot type.



*Idioglot clarinet. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*



*Heteroglot clarinet. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

## An historic-organological approach

The name clarinet came into existence early in the 18th century because of the overblown register of the European clarinet, which was called clarinetto. However, the principle of using single reeds had already been known for a long time. The Egyptians used single reeds on their instruments as early as the 3rd century BC. Similar instruments still exist in the Middle East as duple clarinets (arghul, zummarah) or as the Sardinian triple clarinet launeddas.



*Arghul, Arabian duple clarinet. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

In Europe we also find different types of clarinets being used in the Medieval Ages and in the Renaissance. But most of these clarinets were in all probability of the idioglot type (Rendall 1954, p. 62ff). There is little information about heteroglot clarinets before around 1700, when an instrument called the chalumeau, which used a separate reed, first appears.

There is reason for believing that the name chalumeau and the instrument with the same name are two different things. To begin with, the name, which is derived from the Greek kalamos (reed) via the Latin word calamus, represents the French form of the instrument name shawm (eng.) or Schalmey (ger.). At the same time the name chalumeau also seems to be



*Clarinet horn from Solør, Norway, dated 1714. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

used as a general term in French for small reed instruments used in folk traditions. Many written sources exist that indicate that only idioglot clarinets were favoured in many parts of Europe. But in art music these clarinets were indeed absent. Some organologists have claimed that because the use of instruments with a single reed was so widespread in many folk music traditions, there is a reasonable possibility that the heteroglot clarinets first developed in traditional music, and later spread to European art music (Lawson, 1981, p. 1ff).

Unfortunately, there was till now very little evidence for such a theory, but some years ago an old playing horn was found in Vågå in Gudbrandsdalen, Norway. The horn was of the heteroglot clarinet type and was dated 1693 (Løchen, 2000, p. 40ff)<sup>3</sup>. We have also found other similar playing

3. The horn dated 1693 is today part of the collections of Maihaugen folk museum in Lillehammer, Norway.

horns in Norway with datings from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Lien Jenssen 2010, p. 22). Among these is a playing horn from Solør in Hedmark with a separate reed and the year 1714 inscribed. It seems therefore that playing horns of the heteroglot clarinet type was well established in parts of Norway by the early 1700s.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to this, a bone clarinet with 4+1 fingerholes was excavated as an isolated find in Västergötland in Sweden during the period 1910-1930. This clarinet, which has a length of 13.1 centimetres, is clearly of the heteroglot type. Ernst Emsheimer and Cajsa Lund write in their article discussing this find that “perhaps the find represents a fusion of pre-existing folk instruments and orchestral clarinet. In this case the find cannot be dated before 1800. Some circumstances, however, indicate that it could have been encountered much earlier. The function and the repertoire of the bone clarinet seems to have been the same as that of the bone flutes in this region of the country, serving the shepherds both to provide musical diversion and as signal instrument for the control of their flocks and to frighten off wild animals” (Emsheimer and Lund, 1982, p. 16).



*Copy of Swedish bone clarinet, made by Magnar Storbækken, Tolga. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

Furthermore, we know about an old 13.8 centimeters long, but unfortunately undated, bone clarinet from the Verdal-Levanger district in North

4. The history, distribution, repertory, use, and practical making of Norwegian playing horns of the clarinet type are discussed by Atle Lien Jenssen in his Masters thesis: *Tungehornet i Norge* (The Clarinet Horn in Norway). Telemark University College, 2010.

Trøndelag. Even this instrument is of the heteroglot type with a separate single reed. However, this clarinet differs from the Swedish bone clarinet, especially in two ways: The Norwegian clarinet has only three fingerholes and no thumbhole, and the reed is fastened to the left side of the blown end seen from the players perspective. On the Swedish clarinet the reed is placed on the upper side of the blown end, just like the chalumeau and the early European clarinets. We also find a similar variation in the older Norwegian clarinet horn material. Here, we can see horns with the reed fastened on both the upper and the lower side of the blown end, as well as on the left and right side.



*Norwegian bone clarinet from North Trøndelag. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

We can not tell for sure how old these two bone clarinets really are. However, there is a certain possibility that they go back to the time before the European clarinet was introduced into the Scandinavian countries. Consequently, these bone clarinets as well as the old clarinet horns may support the theory that the use of heteroglot reeds first developed in traditional music and later spread to European art music.

Around 1700 an instrument with the name chalumeau emerges in European art music. It referred to a short, cylindrical wind instrument with a wide bore, a single reed and seven finger holes, and it was the first documented heteroglot wind instrument used in art music. However, the modern chalumeau was primarily important in military music, where it featured prominently for a short period.

After the instrument maker Johann Christoph Denner (1655–1707) in Nuremberg improved the chalumeau, it was also introduced into art





*Copy of Denner chalumeau ca. 1700, made by Brian Ackerman, London.  
Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

music. Shortly afterwards, Denner made still further improvements to the chalumeau and invented the European clarinet (Rice, 1992, p. 39ff). This new instrument was not a big success to begin with, and in orchestral music the chalumeau was still preferred both by composers and musicians. It was first around 1750 that this situation changed, much due to the French composer Jean-Philip Rameau (1683–1764), who included the clarinet in the two operas *Zoroastre* (1749) and *Acanthe et Céphise* (1751). An even more significant development was that the German composer Johann Stamitz (1717–1757) of the Mannheim school started to include the clarinet in his works, and in 1758 the clarinet was included in the prestigious and influential Mannheim-orchestra (Rendall, 1954, p. 77ff). But in its early years, the clarinet was actually played by oboists. Not before the 1760s do we find specialist clarinetists, and it was only in 1764<sup>5</sup> that the first textbook on playing the clarinet was published (Rice, 1992, p. 66f).

## Clarinets in Norway

Unfortunately, we have no evidence of the use of the modern chalumeau in Norway. But we know for certain that the European clarinet was established here in the 1750s (Aksdal 1982, p. 84f). It was first introduced in the cities, but very soon it spread to the countryside, where it became one

5. Valentin Roeser: *Essai d'instruction à l'usage de ceux qui composent pur la clarinette et le cor*. Paris 1764.

of the most favoured instruments as early as in the closing stages of the 18th century. The main reason behind this very rapid and extensive distribution of the clarinet is probably to be found within military music. Here, the clarinet had displaced the oboe around 1760. A great many of the military musicians came from the countryside, and for long periods they kept themselves in preparedness at home, waiting for mobilisation. To earn some extra money, they took on assignments as musicians at weddings and on other festive occasions.

In 1782, the privileged town musician (Norw. stadsmusikant) in Christiansand on the southern coast of Norway, Lorents Nicolaj Berg, (1742/3-1787) published a textbook in music titled “The first step for beginners in the art of music”<sup>6</sup>. In his book, Berg presents the clarinet in a separate chapter. He starts the chapter by telling about a memory from his younger days:

In earlier times there has existed a kind of such reed instruments with one key, which I once discovered among some old instruments in the Latin school in Odense, as remnants of their dead predecessors. At the time the shawm (“Scharmeyen”) was also frequently in use. The clarinets of this century were first made with the two upper keys (...) (Berg, 1782, p. 48, translated by the author).

There is reason to believe that the instrument Lorents Nicolaj Berg saw in Odense was the modern chalumeau. He also mentions the “scharmey”, a variation of the name “schalmey”, which probably was a kind of shawm, a double-reed instrument, which was the predecessor of the oboe. Berg continues:

The clarinets are loud-sounding instruments; they are used among other instruments, especially in the military field music. I have myself a few years ago, before I was employed in this pitiful position as a musician, taught the oboists of the second regiment in Eastern Norway here in Norway to play these and other wind instruments ... (Berg, 1782, p. 48ff, translated by the author).

6. The full title of the textbook in Norwegian is: *Den første Prøve for Begyndere udi Instrumental-Kunsten, Eller en kort og tydelig Underretning om de første Noder at lære, Til Lættelse ved Informationen paa adskillige Musicalske Instrumenter, I sær paa Claveer, Violin, Alt-Violoncel, Bas-Violoncel, Citar og en Deel blæsende Instrumenter. Samlet og ugiivet ved Lorents Nicolaj Berg, Kongl. Bestalter Instrumentist i Christiansand og dens Handels-District.*



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### De første Noder og Tall-Tabellen til Clarinetten.

§. 5.

Høifølgende Tall-Table kommer meget overens med Flauto- og Hoboe-Ørebene i Discant-Oktaven, derimod i Secund og Bass-Oktaven er den overensstemmende med Ørebene paa Dulcianen. Hvorledes den fortales, kan Fingre-Figurer, som staar anført ved §. 4. om Dulcianen, give Oplysning om; thi naar en Discipel gier sig hver

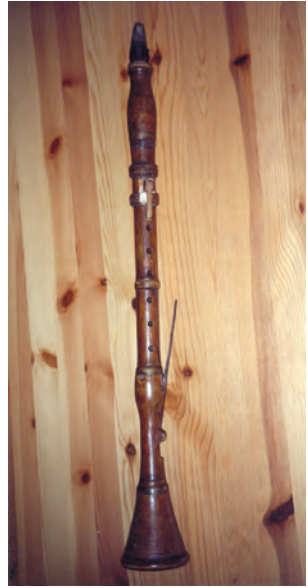
Fingre

*Lorents N. Berg's textbook in music, Christiansand 1782.*

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a very rich period for the clarinet in Norway, and clarinet playing is referred to in written sources deriving from most parts of the

country. Important folk music collectors like Ole M. Sandvik<sup>7</sup> and Catharinus Elling<sup>8</sup> mention that the clarinet was a common instrument in traditional music. Additionally, quite a few late 18<sup>th</sup> century chests and cabinets from central Norway have been preserved with paintings showing clarinets, often together with a cylindrical drum or a fiddle. Some of these chests and cabinets come from the neighbouring parishes of Meråker. From both these and many other regions we also know about old wedding traditions, where a clarinet player and a fiddler played wedding marches and other tunes on the way to the church and back again. These two musicians were often even supplemented by a drummer.

Quite a few European clarinets from central Norway have been preserved, and most of them are connected with the folk music tradition. In Meråker, I have found four such instruments, and they have all been used to accompany folk dancing. These clarinets have 3–5 silver keys, of which one is an octave key. We also know the names of the musicians who played on these instruments, and three of them in particular were much sought-after clarinet players who performed at weddings and dance festivities. One of them also made clarinets themselves. In addition, we know the names of four other folk clarinetists in Meråker in the late 19th and early 20th century (Aksdal, 1992, p. 9) – and in Jamtlandia in Sweden, which is geographically and culturally very close to Meråker, we also find clarinet players from this period. The last one was Eric Nilsson in Mattmar. He died in 1973, at an age of nearly 90 years, and was active as a clarinet player up to his last years.



*“The Volla clarinet”, 3-keyed clarinet made in Opdalen, Norway ca. 1800.  
Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

7. Ole M. Sandvik: *Folke-Musik i Gudbraandsdalen*, Oslo 1919, p. 8.

8. Catharinus Elling: *Vore slaatter*, Kristiania 1915, p. 5.

## Wooden folk clarinets

It was not too long after the European clarinet came to Norway that people started to make their own clarinets. As early as in the 1790s, written sources tell us about clarinet making in the county of Oppland<sup>9</sup>, and many clarinets dating from central Norway in the 19th century have been preserved.

Almost all of the preserved instruments are homemade variants of the European clarinet, and only a very few clarinets seem to have been imported. What then might have been the reason for there also being a tradition in Meråker of making very simple clarinets, which in many ways look more like a wooden whistle flute?

As we already have shown, the European clarinet had a very strong position in Meråker. There is reason for supposing that this might have been one important reason why people started to make their own instruments. Some individuals, like the clarinet player Martin Haugtrø (Aksdal 1992, p. 12), tried to make copies, which were as close as possible to the European clarinet, while others made the far simpler shepherd's clarinet. In addition, elderly people in Meråker that I have interviewed said that if they thought about making a wind instrument in their early days, it was always supposed to have a (single) reed.

They also tell us that among the shepherds, especially in Stordalen, the goat's horn was much in use, and that it was always provided with a heteroglot single reed constructed from juniper, and that it usually had 3-4 finger holes. The shepherds often played so-called nasty tunes, with which to frighten away dangerous, wild animals. According to Harald Gilland wooden lurs (trumpets) were often made with a single reed. So the principle of using a heteroglot single reed was strongly favoured in Meråker, and its usage was thus not confined to the clarinet.

Harald Gilland explained that the procedure for making the shepherd's clarinet was the following: First, they found a good and suitable piece of wood. This should preferably be from one of the harder types of wood, i.e. birch. When they had split the wood and hollowed out the two pieces with a knife, they took a thin rope, birch bark, or a long and thin root from a

9. Christian Sommerfelt writes in 1795 that "...Clarinets are made in Christian's county" (Sommerfelt 1795, p. 118). Christian's county is an elderly name of Oppland county.

tree and lashed the two pieces together. Early in the 20th century they started to use a steel wire for this. Then the instrument was made tight by putting it in water for a while. Afterwards, the finger holes were burnt out of the wood and a kind of mouthpiece was made. Finally a splinter of juniper was cut and formed into a single reed, which was then fastened to the clarinet.

Was this phenomenon and the method of making simple shepherds clarinets an isolated one, characteristic of only Meråker? There are three other written sources from central Norway, which mention similar folk clarinet traditions. In a book about the people living in the parish of Inderøy, 100 km north of Trondheim, and their habits, we can read that homemade clarinets in earlier times were popular among people living in the mountain dairy farms. The instrument was made from loose wood, i.e. alder, which they split into equal parts and then hollowed out (Ystad and Sakshaug 1973, p. 14).

In Røros, the well-known author Johan Falkberget published an article in one of the local newspapers about “The music of the mountain people from the earliest times up to today.” Written in 1934, it states:

A wind instrument with the name clarinet, a kind of flute, was in use. It was usually made of wood and the reed and the finger holes were whittled out. Its tones resembled the instrument the professional musicians call flageolet. Our ancestors often played the clarinet, or the pocket flute. (translated by the author)<sup>10</sup>

In the 1830s, a Scottish traveller, Samuel Laing (1780-1868), spent two winters in Levanger and Verdal in North Trøndelag.” In 1836, he published a diary based on his stay in Norway, and in it provides a great deal of valuable information about daily life, history, social conditions, religion and politics, both among the common people and the upper classes. Laing mentions music and dance several times in his book, and he also tells us about the music of the shepherds:

The herdboy is, ex officio, the musician on every farm. When he is attending the cattle in the summer at the seater, or distant hill pastures, he must make a noise occasionally to keep off the wolf; and that of the clarionet is as good as any. It seems the favourite instrument, and is generally played well enough for the servant girls to dance waltzes and gallopades to it (Laing 1851, p. 118f).

10. The newspaper *Fjell-Ljom*, December 21th, 1934.

Laing refers to the instrument used by the shepherds as a “clarionet”. This is an older English name for the European clarinet, as opposed to the modern “clarinet” (Sachs 1913, p. 86). The term clarionet can also mean an early, now extinct type of the clarinet (Marcuse 1964, p. 109). It is difficult to tell whether it is the European clarinet or a simpler homemade clarinet that Samuel Laing refers to here. It would be unusual if the shepherd boys in Innherrad in North Trøndelag were playing the European clarinet on a regular basis. On the other hand, he mentions that they played both the waltz and the gallopade, a polka type, on the clarinet. This would indicate that the instrument in question was more sophisticated than the old single reed instruments we find among the shepherds. And because Laing is knowledgeable about music and dance, we would not expect him to mention simple homemade clarinets without giving any further explanation. No matter which of these theories one subscribes to, Laing represents an important source because he establishes a strong connection between the music of the shepherds and the clarinet as a type of instrument.

In addition to this, early in the 1990s a peculiar wind instrument was found in Glomdalsmuseet in Elverum in southeastern Norway. In the museum files, there is the briefest of explanations about its origins – just three words saying “probably from Østerdalen”. Østerdalen (The Eastern Valley) is one of the Norwegian regions where mountain dairy farming has been most widespread, continuing well into the 20th century. The instrument is 50 cm long, has a conical bore and is lashed together with birch bark. It



*Copy of the Østerdal clarinet, made by Magnar Storbækken, Tolga. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

has seven finger holes, all of them on the upper side, as well as an oblique mouthpiece, which seems to have had a single reed lashed to the instrument by thread. This is undoubtedly a homemade clarinet, which very strongly resembles Harald Gilland's descriptions of the old Meråker clarinets. Because of this, some people refer to the instrument as the Østerdal clarinet.

What is the actual background for the Meråker clarinet and the other homemade shepherd's clarinets? There is good reason to believe that these clarinets could represent a combination of two or probably three different instrument traditions: The wooden whistle flute, possibly the lur, and the heteroglot clarinet. The shape of the instrument, the name and the finger holes were already established with the whistle flutes; parts of the production technique were taken from the lur; and the European clarinet entered the musical life of the Norwegian countryside in the end of the 18th century. Additionally, there is a reasonable possibility that heteroglot folk clarinets were in use in Norway already before the European clarinet came to Norway.

This in many ways mixed background of the instrument goes some way towards explaining the special shape of both the older and the modern Meråker clarinet. With the exception of the reed, the instrument very much resembles a wooden whistle flute. The Meråker clarinet has 8+1 finger holes, which we also find on whistle flutes from other parts of southern Norway, e.g. Agder. However, this is not the most usual number of finger holes on these flutes. In Sweden also we could find flutes ("spelpipa") with 8 finger holes, there sometimes even being a hole provided for the thumb. These instruments are most common in Dalarne, and are called "spilåpipa" in the local dialect. In Sweden, several heteroglot clarinets have also been preserved which are formed in much the same way as the old Meråker clarinets, using what is known as the lur-making technique: two halves which are hollowed out are then lashed together with birch bark. The instrument is subsequently fitted with finger holes and a wooden mouthpiece, where a single reed made of thin, elastic wood is attached and fastened (Kjellström, 1980, p. 188).

According to Finnish ethnomusicologists, there were several types of idioglot clarinets in Finland as early as in the Middle Ages. After the technique of using heteroglot reeds was introduced to Germany, the Finns soon



learnt about instruments like the chalumeau and the European clarinet. They started to make a local clarinet-type called “mänkeri”, and around 1750 they began to use a heteroglot reed on the goat’s horn, which had been introduced from Sweden towards the end of the 16th century. In the second half of the 1700s quite a few lurs (long wooden trumpets) were also fitted with a separate reed.<sup>11</sup>



*Finnish mänkeri, made by Rauno Nieminen, Vippulo. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

Some mention should also be made of the Danish “skalmej”, of which there were two main types, either a clarinet or an oboe. When it is a clarinet, the skalmej is of the idioglot type. It is made from pinewood, and the two halves are lashed together with metal strings or thin roots from a tree. The clarinet-version of the skalmej has 3-6 finger holes and exists in different sizes from 10 up to 40 cm in length.<sup>12</sup>

## The revival of the Meråker clarinet

In the first decades of the 20th century, both the shepherd’s clarinet and the other single reed instruments in Meråker fell more and more out of use. This development was undoubtedly due to the rapid decline of moun-

11. The mänkeri and other traditional Finnish instruments are presented in the exhibition Catalogue *Ancient Finnish Musical Instruments: Kansanmusiikki-instituutin julkaisuja 18*. Kaustinen 1985.

12. You can read about the Danish skalmej in Mette Müller (ed.): *From bone pipe and cattle horn to fiddle and psaltery*. Exhibition Catalogue. Musikhistorisk Museum. København 1972.

tain dairy farming. It was especially among the shepherds and the dairy-maids that these instruments had a natural and strong position. But in the mid-1950s, something happened in Meråker, which led to a revival of interest in the archaic shepherd's clarinet. A local historian, whose father worked together with Harald Gilland controlling one of the melting furnaces in Kopperå in 1954-55, writes about this in a letter:

(...) On the night shift, when the bosses were far away, the workers often were engaged in private activities between filling in and draining out the furnaces. It was here, a man called Ola Løkken began to make the Meråker clarinet or flute (...) Soon thereafter, Harald Gilland and Peder Bremseth also started to make their own clarinets. But Harald Gilland was the only musician of these, who also could play the clarinet. On the night shifts he held small concerts, and all the men on the shift were the audience. While he played the clarinet he was also making fun, and even on the shift bus from Kopperå and down to Meråker he kept on (...).

Thus, it was people who still remembered the local clarinet tradition from their childhood days in Meråker who brought about the renewal of interest in the shepherds clarinet during the 1950s. Harald Gilland was the only person who brought this tradition a step further, because he also happened to be a very good musician. The other two individuals mentioned, Løkken and Bremseth, made only a handful of instruments. So Harald Gilland, in his 40s, revitalised the tradition he had learnt from his father, of making and playing the old local clarinet. But gradually, he changed his method of production, and in this way, one can say that he brought the instrument up-to-date, in keeping with the methods and knowledge of our time.

At first, he looked for a well-suited piece of wood, and hard birch wood was recognised as being the best material. When the piece was cut to the suitable length, he hollowed it out with a drill and removed the core from both ends. Then he whittled out the piece with a knife and placed it in a lathe. When the turning was finished, he burned out the waste inside the piece and polished it on both sides. Now, it was time for burning out the finger holes. To find the right places for the holes, he used one of his older instruments as a model. It took some years before he managed to develop a model, which he judged to be satisfactory.

The next operation was to make an oblique cut at the end. Then he made a small curved piece of wood, which was glued to the end. Finally, the instrument was laquered with plastic laquer, and the reed was fastened to the mouthpiece with a copper thread. Earlier, he had used a clamp instead of the thread, but was never satisfied with this. He had also used different types of laquer before he found the one, which gave the best result. In later years, Harald Gilland also exchanged the traditional juniper reed with an ordinary B-clarinet reed, which he prepared himself and adapted by making it both shorter and thinner. In his opinion, this reed produced a steadier tone than the reed made of juniper.



*Modern Meråker clarinet made by Harald Gilland ca. 1980. Photo: Bjørn Aksdal*

While the old shepherds clarinets, in Meråker had a randomly assigned tonic, Gilland made instruments with the A note, or sometimes even B flat, as a tonic. This was done because he wanted to use the clarinet in ensemble playing together with the fiddle, the accordion and the guitar.

## The repertory

After the revival in the 1950s, Harald Gilland's repertory on the Meråker clarinet consisted mainly of old traditional fiddle tunes. In addition to his clarinet playing, Gilland was also a very rich source for and interesting bearer of traditional fiddle music in Meråker. He transformed many of the old dance tunes to suit the Meråker clarinet, which has a far more limited ambitus. The only tune in Harald Gilland's repertory that he remembered

his father was also playing on the clarinet was a short polka-tune. In earlier days, according to his father, they mostly played simple melodies and types of melodies without any connection with the dancing.

The shepherd's clarinet in Meråker has not only been a solo instrument. In the 1970s and the early 1980s Harald Gilland played frequently with the excellent fiddler Svend Gravåsen (1911–1985) and the guitar player Olaf Tidemann (1911–2009). The ensemble generally played a mixture of arranged parts and free improvisations. Gilland usually performed the melody on the clarinet, while Gravåsen improvised a second on the violin. After the death of Gravåsen in 1985, ensemble performances, which included the Meråker clarinet decreased dramatically. However, from time to time one could meet Gilland and his clarinet, playing together with the guitarist Tidemann and an accordionist, as entertainers in local meetings and other arrangements.

The scale of the Meråker clarinet can vary a great deal from instrument to instrument, depending on how clever, or sometimes lucky, Gilland was with his making, and especially the position of the finger holes. The scale is always heptatonic, and the fifth note is usually a perfect fifth. Compared to the major scale, the second note and the sixth note sound often a bit too low, the fourth note sounds too high, and the third and the seventh note sound like quartertones. This scale is very similar to that we find on many folk recorders.

When Harald Gilland played the Meråker clarinet, he never used the technique of cross-fingering. He always raised one finger at a time when he played the scale upwards. Regardless of the scale of his instrument, he used his intonation technique to get as close as possible to a tempered major or minor scale. On most tunes, he played with the note D as tonic, achieved by raising the three lowest fingerholes. These tunes sounded very close to D minor. However, on some tunes he even played with an A tonic, keeping all the fingerholes closed. Here he intonated the third a bit higher by the help of his breath and his lips, and the tune sounded more like A major.

In my opinion, this shows that Harald Gilland in fact used two different basic scales, one when he made the instrument, and a second, and sometimes even a third scale, when he played tunes on the clarinet. However, one could easily get the impression of an elderly non-tempered scale.

The main reason for playing a more modern scale was probably that for several years he had been playing together with other musicians who used instruments like the fiddle, the accordion and the guitar.

## Entering the national music scene

I was not the only person who, filled with curiosity, travelled up to Meråker in the early 1980's to visit Harald Gilland. The folk music department of the Norwegian state radio (NRK) also came to Meråker and produced a radio programme on Harald Gilland and the fiddler Svend Gravåsen. Soon the Meråker clarinet became well known throughout Norway, and Gilland received several letters and phone calls from other musicians who were interested in old traditional wind instruments, and who placed orders for a shepherd's clarinet from him. During the 1980s, Gilland produced more than 200 clarinets for sale<sup>13</sup>, and he also received many orders from outside Norway. Ringve museum in Trondheim, which is Norway's national music museum, also showed great interest in the Meråker clarinet and entered into an agreement with Gilland concerning the delivery of instruments for sale. In addition to this, and in co-operation with Ringve museum, I made a music cassette for public release in 1988, presenting old, traditional and new recordings of the Meråker clarinet, played both solo and in ensembles. The museum even sent one of its employees to Meråker to learn the techniques of making clarinets under the guidance of Harald Gilland, so that Ringve museum could provide both continuity in the production and even produce their own clarinets for sale.

Harald Gilland died on January 7th, 1992, at the age of 79. Until his last years, and especially in the winter, Gilland spent much time in his workshop working on a clarinet, a wooden ale bowl, a corner cupboard or something else. When Gilland died, I was busy finishing a little book about the Meråker clarinet. Unfortunately, the book was published a few months too late for him.

13. Unfortunately, there is no information available about who bought Meråker clarinets from Harald Gilland in the 1980s.

Luckily, Harald Gilland had also taught two local craftsmen how to make such clarinets, and he hoped they could bring this tradition further in Meråker. Today, only one of them, Nils Underhaug, is still occasionally making a clarinet, and at Ringve museum there has been no clarinet production during the last 15-20 years. On the other hand, in Tolga in Østerdalen the experienced instrument maker Magnar Storbækken has developed his own model of the Meråker clarinet. He also makes copies of the original Østerdalen clarinet in Glomdalsmuseet, as well as other traditional Norwegian wind instruments.



*“The Meråker clarinet – in solo and ensemble playing”, CD made by Geir Egil Larsen and Bjørn Aksdal, Etnisk Musikklubb 2010.*

Today, there are a few young musicians in Meråker who regularly play this instrument. However, the playing of the shepherd's clarinet has in no way become a common part of the traditional music scene. On the other hand, occasionally one still comes across this instrument being played by folk musicians from other parts of Norway. This includes, among others, outstanding musicians such as Geir Egil Larsen, Ånon Egeland, Steinar Ofsdal and Hans Fredrik Jacobsen. And even the world famous Norwegian jazz musician Jan Garbarek occasionally plays the Meråker clarinet, for example on one of the tracks of his CD "Visible World", produced in 1996 by the German quality label ECM.

## Conclusion

In my introduction, I wrote that the objective with this article was to figure out what could be the historical and organological background of the local tradition of making and playing folk clarinets in Meråker. Additionally, I wanted to give a description of the process that led to the revival of the Meråker clarinet.

The history of the heteroglot Meråker clarinet can be traced back to the 1880s, but the instrument is probably much older. The Meråker clarinet seems to combine three different traditions of instrument making: Parts of the production technique were taken from the lur, the shape of the instrument, the finger holes and the name were influenced by the traditional whistle flutes, and the reed were probably taken from other old heteroglot clarinets and later from the European clarinet.

The Meråker clarinet was primarily an instrument favoured by shepherds and young people. My research has shown that similar clarinet traditions among shepherds seem to have existed also in other parts of Norway, especially in the Trøndelag region and probably in Østerdalen. These folk clarinets even have their close relatives in Sweden and in Finland. There have existed several types of heteroglot folk clarinets in Norway as well as in the other Scandinavian countries. In my article I have described bone clarinets, clarinet horns, clarinet lurs, and wooden shepherds clarinets, such as the Meråker clarinet. The Norwegian heteroglot clarinets go back at least to the

1690s, and this indicates that there is a reasonable possibility that heteroglot folk clarinets were used in Norway already before the European clarinet was introduced. Especially from an organological point of view, this would represent a quite new insight into the history of the clarinet in Europe.

In this article I have described how Harald Gilland and two of his colleagues in the 1950s caused a revival of the wooden shepherd's clarinet by making a modernised version of it. Over the next years, Gilland developed the clarinet even more. Originally a solo instrument, the clarinet could now also be used in ensemble playing. About the same time, people outside Meråker became aware of this instrument, first through a popular television program, which featured Harald Gilland and his clarinet. This led to the instrument eventually becoming known as the Meråker clarinet. Harald Gilland subsequently received letters and phone calls from different parts of Norway and even from abroad, ordering clarinets. In this way, the local shepherds clarinet was introduced to a new and larger audience. Today, the Meråker clarinet is played by musicians coming from many parts of Norway, and even by some jazz musicians.

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