



Singing & Music in the Viking Age

27th September 2019

Music in the Viking Age

Singing and playing music were important to the Vikings, both in everyday life and for **festive occasions**. They sang songs when they were happy and when they were sad. They danced, sang songs and played their instruments when they had celebrations of some kind. They had songs to accompany them when working, making the work easier. They sang love songs, and **lullabies** for their children. We can be fairly certain of this as we know of no **cultures** where music has not been important.



A Viking bard singing heroic tales to Northmen.

What songs did they sing?

What kind of tunes did they play?

Why do we know so little about Viking Age Music?

When the last note of a song is sung it is gone forever, unless someone remembers it or writes it down in some way, to be performed again later. The Vikings, like the rest of the people in Europe at the time, didn't know anything about musical notation, and their culture gradually became a part of the Christian European culture. The oldest songs we know from Scandinavia today are all part of the common European **heritage**. The voices of the Vikings are gone forever.

However, we do know about some of the instruments they played. Archaeologists have excavated their musical instruments...



The Recorder

Here is a replica of a recorder, made from shin bone of a sheep. The original instrument from the early part of the 13th century, was found during excavations in Århus, Denmark, but this type of recorder is also known from other excavations from earlier periods.



The Cow or Goat Horn

Replica of a horn from Västerby in Sweden. It is made from horn of cattle and has four finger holes. Similar instruments have been in use until recently in Scandinavia. The original horn is now in Dalarnas museum, Falun, Sweden.

On the Bayeux tapestry one can see a horn blower, apparently sounding the signal to 'come and eat'. The tapestry was made around 1070, shortly after William of Normandy had landed and conquered England.



Drums

The drum is one of the oldest musical instruments, and it was of course also known in Scandinavia, however, no instruments have been found. It is speculated that the drums the Vikings used were something similar to either the Irish bodhran drum or the skin-headed drums used by the Sami people in northern Scandinavia.



'I Dreamed A Dream'

Not long after the end of the Viking Age a system for writing down music was developed. On a small piece of wood, for us to read, are carved the first bars of the song "I Dreamed a Dream".



Play along with the Melody using Percussion



Here it is translated into modern musical notation.

DRØMTE MIG EN DRØM



If I Had A Heart

Fever Ray



5

Tempo: ♩ = 80

Voice: More give me more give me more

Violoncello: *mp*

Marimba

Concert Bass Drum

5

This will nev - er end 'cause I want more

mp

7

More give me more give me more If I had a heart I could

10

love you If I had a voice I would sing

13

Aft - er the night when I wake up I'll see what to - mor - row

mp

16

brings