

## Song of the Sámi: Karl Tirén – The Yoik Collector

Gunnar Ternhag  
Förlag Gidlunds (140 pages)

★★★★★

*Shedding new light on the man who documented Sámi joiking*



I first became aware of the story of Karl Tirén when writing a dissertation on *joik* (also spelled *yoik*) back in 2011. A key figure in the recent history of

the Sámi people's vocal tradition, Tirén was a railway officer, artist and violin maker who travelled throughout the Swedish part of Sápmi (the Sámi homeland) between 1909 and 1919, collecting hundreds of joiks. His use of the phonograph from 1913 provides us with the oldest available recordings of the tradition.

Using diary entries, paintings, clues from Tirén's main book, maps and letters, author Gunnar Ternhag carefully retraces the collector's footsteps. *Song of the Sámi* has clearly been a labour of love – much like Tirén's own work, on which the book sheds important new light. The author explores, for example, the role played by Tirén's female assistant, Maja Wickbom, whose participation in the expeditions seems to have resulted in the substantial documentation of female joikers. Elsewhere, Tirén's diary bears powerful witness to how Laestadianism (a Lutheran revival movement started in the mid-19th century) turned joiking – associated with the old Sámi religion and world view – into a 'sinful' practice. On one occasion, the collector attempts to record a joik inside a house while Laestadians stand outside shouting 'they do the Devil's work there!'

Tirén's joik recordings have become a precious resource for many of today's Sámi joikers. Six digital volumes have recently been released

on all major music streaming sites, making this book a timely and welcome summary of his work.

MERLYN DRIVER

## To Be Nothing: Conversations with Knut Hamre, Hardanger Fiddle Master

Benedicte Maurseth  
The MIT Press (232 pages)

★★★★★

*Zen and the art of Norwegian Hardanger fiddle playing*



Let's compare this brief but valuable book with a tune played on the Hardanger fiddle, which was named after the fjordside

region in western Norway where it flourished historically and can still be heard and learned. This fiddle is distinguished by the four or five sympathetic strings that catch the vibrations of the four bowed or fingered strings overlying them. Like the alluring, keening, often free-metred sound of a Hardanger tune, Maurseth's book (translated from Norwegian to English by Bruce Thomson) resonates in several places at once, eluding familiar rules and canons. The subtitle refers to quoted exchanges between the 36-year-old Maurseth, herself a Hardanger performer and teacher, with her own principal teacher, the 67-year-old Knut Hamre, who lives at the northernmost reach of the Hardangerfjord.

The title refers to Hamre's perspective on the proper state of mind to be attained when composing, performing, and (in the tradition of his music) improvising. Maurseth, with vibrant prose and the craft of a storyteller, manages to intermix Hamre's sage pronouncements on philosophy, playing style and pedagogy, and his caveats about stage

fright, idolatry and rigid adherence to tradition, with biographical sketches of Hamre's own development and side trips into the lives of his masters and predecessors. For both the familiar and the unfamiliar, there's also the musicology of the Hardanger fiddle, and its cultural history and changing function and popularity. Even the music's link to poetry is explored, samples of which appear along with evocative historical and contemporary photos of place and players. With all this Benedicte Maurseth has brought us something we can apply to any instrument and any musical tradition, and to the way we live.

JEFF KALISS

## Vinyl Countdown

Graham Sharpe  
Old Castle Books (352 pages)

★★★★★

*A slight memoir on buying used rock CDs and LPs*



Graham Sharpe, formerly the pop correspondent on a regional newspaper and then a William Hill employee for 46 years, has been obsessed with

pop music since childhood. The now retired Sharpe visits shops that sell used vinyl/CDs not only across the UK but wherever he takes holidays – Australia, New Zealand, the US, Poland, Hungary, Germany etc. *Vinyl Countdown* is about those used record stores and what he found in them. Unfortunately, Graham Sharpe's only interest is in buying rock records from the classic rock years (mid-60s to early 80s) and his travels never lend to insights on local music or culture, just the endless trudge in hope of finding a rare psych-rock LP.

This book has no structure – it literally is a series of anecdotes of 'I went here, I went there': what might work as a blog becomes a dull, shapeless read. He's at his best when reflecting on the obsessive, perhaps autistic, personalities of record collectors – as someone who spends too much time/money doing such I recognise these qualities in myself (and other collectors) – and if he had developed this theme and managed to reflect on that or laugh at himself (for we are ridiculous) then there might be a decent memoir here. Instead, every page is a litany of how many used CDs he got for a tenner and how much was asked for an LP (and its condition). His long-suffering wife occasionally gets a mention but, beyond that, this is a book

about an obsessive from other obsessive documentary features. *The Sound of Trans* on collectors selling collections so to m *Countdown* posits t I should consider d GARTH CARTWRIGHT

## The Wild Tc

Bryan Wagner

Bloomsbury Academic (122 pag

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A young Knut Hamre, the Hardanger fiddler featured in *To Be Nothing*