



Sons of Norway  
**HERITAGE PROGRAMS**



**IdeaBank51**

## **ABOUT NORWAY'S NATIONAL ANTHEM**

Submitted by: Anne Marie Nelson

**June 1996**

# About “Ja, vi elsker” Norway’s National Anthem

## A Drama

**CHARACTERS:** Narrator  
King Harald Fairhair (Viking costume and long wig)  
Olav the Holy (Viking costume, preferably with a cross on his shield or a cross necklace)  
King Sverre (costume with crown)

**PROPS:** Costumes (as described above)  
Picture of Bjørnson  
Poster of Danish Flag  
Blue cross to place on Danish Flag to make it a Norwegian flag  
Copies of “Ja, vi elsker” to give to each audience member

\* \* \* \* \*

(sing or recite verse 1)

**Person holding up poster with Bjørnson’s profile or caricature**

### **Narrator:**

Bjørnstjern Bjørnson was an outspoken patriot who wrote many poems that could have qualified as the national song of Norway. His life spanned the most exciting and productive years of the national-romantic era. He was a much sought-after speaker, outgoing, gregarious and inspiring. Bjørnson traveled much, and he spent years abroad, always writing about the Norwegian farmer, history, or some other national subject. On his travels he met Norwegians everywhere, and he saw the need for Norwegians to stay in contact with each other and with their fellow countrymen at home.

His influence was so great that a group of immigrants gave his name to their own Norwegian-American organization in 1895—the name was later changed to a more pronounceable “Sons of Norway.” In 1907 he started the organization, Nordmanns Forbundet, or the Norsemen’s Federation. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for literature in 1903.

Bjørnson originally wrote, “Ja, vi elsker” in 1864 for the observance of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the constitution in 1814 at Eidsvoll. The tune to “Ja, vi elsker” was composed by Bjørnson’s cousin, Rikard Nordrak, a promising young composer. In the years to follow it became Norway’s designated national anthem. Unlike many other national

songs, it was free of sentimental, bragging elements of patriotism. Bjørnson describes Norwegian history and the many wars and struggles Norway had faced, pointing out how love for home and family is the source of all true patriotism that gives courage to fight for freedom and independence. He professes a deep faith that God's guidance and protection would help to gain victory.

Today we will hear from three men of the past (described in verse two of "Ja, vi elsker") whose heroic deeds shaped the country. But first we will look at some of the references to other important events Bjørnson writes about in this song.

The opening lines were inspired by the first sight of the Norwegian coastline from the ship that carried Bjørnson back from spending the winter in Denmark. Seeing the mountains rise above the ocean filled his heart with love for his "fatherland" and all the people in it. He remembered the "Saga Night" which signifies the long period of 434 years when Norway was ruled by the Danish King.

In battles against the Swedish army (verse three) women and farmers joined forces with the enlisted men led by Norwegian-born Tordenskjold, which means "thundershield," a fearless military leader.

The burning land in verse four refers to the 330 homes in Halden that were set on fire so that the Swedes would turn around and go home. And there, at Fort Frederikshald, the powerful Swedish King Charles the 12th was killed in 1718.

Later (verse six), the three Scandinavian countries were standing together as three brothers against the enemy to the south.

Giving thanks and tribute to God, Bjørnson ends the song with the resolve that the Norwegian people will always be ready to sacrifice and fight for freedom and peace. This they had ample opportunity to prove in the two world wars of this century, and Bjørnson would have been proud!

The second verse of "Ja, vi elsker" tells of three Viking kings instrumental in Norway's history.

**(sing or recite verse 2)**

Now, let's listen as these Vikings speak for themselves.

# King Harald Fairhair

(in Viking costume and long wig)

My name is Harald Hårfagre, or Harald Fairhair. I was one of the fiercest Vikings sailing the seas with my men, fighting other Viking chieftains. We each had our territories around Norway, and after each Viking voyage, I came home with treasures I had traded or plundered.

As Norwegians, we already felt ourselves to be a people different from the Svea and the Danes. We spoke Old-Norse, a strange language to our neighbors, and we had our trade and travel routes. I wanted to be the ONE AND ONLY KING over all of Norway, so I formed an alliance with the powerful Earl of Lade, near Trondheim, and we fought many battles. We won them all, and the last and biggest one was at Hafrsfjord near Haugesund. I was now King Harald the First, circa 890.

I was called Fairhair because I promised not to cut—or wash—my hair until the whole country was united under one king—ME! The historians question that tale, but it is a good one, don't you think?

\* \* \* \* \*

# Olav the Holy

(in Viking costume, preferably with a cross on his shield or a cross necklace)

I am Olav Haraldsson. Harald Hårfagre (Fairhair) was my great-grandfather. I was in Denmark in the year 1015 when I heard that Norway was again divided and in chaos. I had made many Viking trips even as far south as France, and had come home with great riches that could buy me loyal warriors. The country needed ME!

Two other kings before me, Håkon the Good and Olav Trygvason, had converted to Christianity while they lived in England, and they tried to Christianize Norway. The Norwegians did not want to give up their Old Norse gods. They put up so much resistance that these Viking kings had to give it up. But I knew how important the Christian Church had become all over Europe, and I knew what my mission was: TO RULE OVER A UNITED, CHRISTIAN NORWAY!

While the Danish king was busy elsewhere, I conquered most of the land and the people agreed to being baptized. Sometimes I threatened them with death if they did not obey! One by one I tore down the old “hov” where they had sacrificed animals to Tor and Odin, and destroyed the idols. I built churches in their stead, and appointed clergymen to lead the people.

Then some of the wealthy chieftains betrayed me and called on the Danish Knut the Great to help fight battles against me. The last battle—for me—took place at Stiklestad in July 1030, where I was killed.

## Narrator:

It would appear that the Hårfagre clan had lost its struggle for the throne of Norway. However, in his death King Olav was strangely victorious. Soon rumors circulated that miracles had been happening near the king’s grave at Nidaros. A year after his death his body was exhumed in the presence of the most prominent men in the country. According to legend, Olav was as handsome as the day he was buried, and his beard and hair had continued to grow. He was declared a saint, and the word spread far and wide. The pilgrims came from all parts of Norway, Scandinavia, England, and the Continent, seeking comfort and healing at the grave of the saintly king. Saint Olav now became a gathering symbol for a war-torn country, which could finally move forward toward times of peace and growth.

\* \* \* \* \*

# King Sverre

(in costume with crown)

My name is Sverre. I became King of all Norway with the help of a roaming band of men who were so poor that instead of regular shoes, they wore footwear made of birch bark. That is why they were called the BIRKEBEINER or “birch legs.”

I was raised on the Faroe Islands to become a priest. Then my mother told me that I was the son of a Norwegian king, Sigurd Munn. So I sailed to Norway to claim the throne. It took many battles to get it. The church was against me, and the archbishop refused to crown me in the cathedral because I was an illegitimate child.

For a while I ruled as a king anyway. Since I needed money to keep up my army, I started to tax or confiscate land and goods that belonged to the church and the monasteries. I appointed my own bishops and got one of them to crown me. The archbishop finally left the country. He persuaded the Pope in Rome to excommunicate me, but I didn't care. I was king for 18 years, and I made the Kingdom of Norway stronger than ever.

## Narrator:

These visitors have given us an inside glimpse into the Viking history of Norway as described in verse two of the national anthem. Many changes took place in Norway following the Viking era. Bjørnson describes some of them in subsequent verses.

(sing or recite verses 3, 4 & 5)

\* \* \* \* \*

# The Flag

## Person holding the Danish flag on a poster

### Narrator:

At last I want to show you what the “blue eyed” freedom in verse five means. The “hard times” refer to the crisis of 1814 when the hope for independence was crushed and Norway was passed on from Denmark to Sweden like a piece of property.

In the signing of the constitution that year was sown the seed of freedom and self-rule. The Danish flag, with the white cross on red background, had represented Norway for so many years—434 to be exact.

*(The Danish flag poster is held up)*

The Swedish Union flag was never accepted by the Norwegians. As resistance against the Swedish rule grew, it became more obvious that the union with Sweden would soon be dissolved. Norwegians made their own flag by adding a blue cross inside the white cross of the Danish flag.

*(A blue cross is placed on top of the white on the poster)*

One story claims that this design was actually proposed by 12-year-old Gerhard Meltzer, son of Consul Frederik Meltzer of Bergen. The color blue symbolizes freedom as demonstrated in the Tricolor, the French flag and the United States flag. So also in the Norwegian flag, the blue cross signified freedom and independence, as well as the Christian heritage that started with the Viking kings.

After it was passed by the Norwegian Storting—then vetoed by the Swedish king **twice**, on the third try, **overriding** the King’s veto, this became the official Norwegian flag in 1898—seven years before Norway finally became an independent nation.

**(Close by singing or reciting verses 6, 7 & 8)**

\* \* \* \* \*

# Norwegian National Anthem

## Yes, We Love This The Land

- 1** Yes, we love this land that towers  
Where the ocean foams;  
Rugged, storm-swept, it embowers  
Many thousand homes.  
Love it, love it, of you thinking,  
Father, mother dear,  
[And that night of saga (sinking  
Dreamful to us here.)]
- 2** This the land that Harald guarded  
With his hero-throng,  
This land that Haakon warded,  
Hailed by Eyvind's song,  
Olaf here the cross erected,  
While his blood he shed;  
[Sverre's word this land protected  
(‘Gainst the Roman dread.)]
- 3** Peasants whetted axes carried,  
Broke th' invader's blow;  
Tordenskjold flashed forth and  
Harried, lighted home the foe,  
Women oft to arms were leaping,  
Manlike in their deed;  
[Others lot was naught but weeping,  
(Tears that brought their meed.)]
- 4** Many truly were we never,  
But we did suffice,  
When in times of testing ever  
Worthy was the prize  
For we would the land see burning,  
Rather than its fall;  
[Memory our thoughts is (turning  
Down to Fredrikshald!)]
- 5** Harder times we bore that tried us  
Were cast off in scorn;  
In that crisis was beside us  
Blue-eyed freedom born.  
That gave father-strength for  
Bearing famine-need and sword,  
[Honor death itself outwearing,  
(And it gave accord.)]
- 6** Far our foe his weapons flinging  
Up his visor raised;  
We in wonder to him springing  
On our brother gazed.  
Both by wholesome shame incited  
Southward made our way;  
[Brothers three, in heart united,  
(We shall stand for aye!)]
- 7** Men of Norway, high or lowly,  
Give to God the praise!  
He our land's Defender Holy  
In its darkest days!  
All our fathers here have stricken  
And our mothers wept,  
[Hath the Lord His guidance given,  
(So our right we kept.)]
- 8** Yes, we love this land that towers  
Where the ocean foams;  
Rugged, storm-swept, it embowers  
Many thousand homes.  
As our fathers' conflict gave it  
Vict'ry at the end,  
[Also we, when time shall crave it.  
(Will its peace defend.)]



# Norwegian National Anthem

## Ja, vi elsker dette landet

**1** Ja, vi elsker dette landet,  
som det stiger frem,  
furet, værbit over vannet,  
med de tusen hjem.  
Elsker, elsker det of tenker  
på vår far og mor  
[og den saganatt som (senker  
drømme på vår jord.)]

**Ya, vee el-scare det-teh lahn-det,  
Sum deh steeger frem,  
Foo-ret vejr-bit oh-vejr von-net  
Meh dee too-sen yem.  
El-scare, el-scare deh oh tenk-eh  
Poh vor far oh moor  
Oh den sah-ga-not sum senk-air  
Drem-meh poh vor yohr  
Oh den sah-ga-not sum senk-air  
Senk-air drem-meh poh vor yohr**

**2** Dette landet Harald berget  
med sin kjemperad,  
dette landet Håkon verget,  
medens Øyvind kvad;  
Olav på det land har malet  
korset med sitt blod,  
[fra dets høye Sverre (talet  
Roma midt imod.)]

**3** Bønder sine ønsker brynte  
hvor en hær dro frem;  
Tordenskiold langs kysten lynte,  
så den lystes hjem.  
Kvinner selv sto opp og strede  
som de vare menn;  
[andre kunne bare (grede  
men det kom igjen!)]

**4** Visstnok var vi ikke mange;  
men vi strakk dog til,  
da vi prøvdes noen gange,  
og det sto på spill;

ti vi heller landet brente  
enn det kom til fall;  
[husker bare hva som (hendte  
ned på Fredrikshald!)]

**5** Hårde tider har vi døyet,  
ble til sist forstøtt;  
men i verste nød blåøyet  
frihet ble oss født.  
Det ga faderkraft å bære  
hungersnød og krig,  
[det ga døden selv sin (ære-  
og det ga forlig.)]

**6** Fienden sitt våpen kastet,  
opp visiret fór,  
vi med undren mot ham hastet;  
ti han var vår bror.  
Drevne frem på stand av skammen  
gikk vi søderpå;  
[nå vi står tre brødre (sammen,  
(og skal sådan stå!)]

**7** Norske mann i hus og hytte,  
takk din store Gud!  
Landet ville han beskytte,  
skjønt det mørkt så ud.  
Alt hva fedrene har kjempet,  
mødrene har grett,  
[har den Herre stille (lempet,  
(så vi vant vår rett.)]

**8** Ja, vi elsker dette landet,  
som det stiger frem,  
furet, værbit over vannet,  
med de tusen hjem.  
Og som fedres kamp har hevet  
det av nød til seir  
[også vi, når det blir (krevet,  
(for dets fred slår leir.)]