



**Sons of Norway**  
**HERITAGE PROGRAMS**



## MiniPresentation#35

**OLE BULL**

## OLE BULL

When Norway became independent in 1814, Danish influence was very prevalent. Norway did not have its own literature, music or arts. Copenhagen was the center of Scandinavian culture; Norway merely a country cousin. The violinist Ole Bull helped change this. From Egypt to Italy to the United States, he traveled throughout the world, giving concerts and carrying abroad pride for his native land. As Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson ('Biuhrn'styar'neh 'Biuhrn'son) spoke at his grave in 1880: "Ole Bull became the first and greatest festival in this people's life: he gave us self-respect, the greatest gift possible at the time..."

In 1815, at the age of five, **Ole Bull's** uncle gave him a little violin. He had already shown a love for music and singing and astonished his uncle by playing simple tunes within minutes after receiving the gift. The young boy enjoyed playing his violin alone in the forest. People would often hear his magical notes and think the forest was full of trolls.

Ole's father, **Johan Bull**, wished to make a student of his first son and never encouraged the study of music. Nevertheless, Ole's desire drove him to play and compose. He loved Norway's scenes, and in his music he tried to express the beauty and grandeur of this land.

When Ole was 17, his father decided that he should begin studies as a pastor at the University of Oslo. Despite promises to his father that he would concentrate on his studies, Ole found that music was more rewarding than studies. He performed with the Oslo orchestra and totally failed his examinations.

Ole left Norway to begin a serious study of music. After unfulfilling periods in Germany and Paris, he went to Italy where he met with great success. The enthusiasm of the Italians inspired him and he returned to Paris, where he was invited to appear as a solo performer with the **Paris Opera House**—one of the most distinguished opera houses of the world. From there he toured Europe and also the United States.

Wherever he went, he brought with him an air of celebration. His playing was full of energy, charm, and emotion and he loved to astonish the audience with showy effects, moving his bow with lightning swiftness and playing all four strings at the same time. He was a great virtuoso and was said to be the equal of the legendary Italian violinist, **Paganini**. In addition to being a dazzling performer, he was also probably the best-looking man on any stage at that time. This, combined with a colorful personality and a strong sense of drama, made him a formidable performer and a very attractive and exciting person.

Ole Bull fulfilled a lifelong dream when he founded a Norwegian national theater in Bergen. From humble beginnings in an old, repainted theater building, Norwegian drama and music were cultivated and pride in the ability of Norwegian artists grew.

Another of Bull's dreams was not so successful. In 1852, he bought land in Pennsylvania and founded the colony of "**Oleana**" for Norwegian-Americans. Unfortunately, the colony failed just a year later. The idealistic Bull had no business sense and paid for a fraudulent deed. The Oleana colonists on their part relied a bit too much on Bull's generosity, the soil was poor and the wooded, hilly land hard to clear.

The Ole Bull State Park in Potter County, Pennsylvania was established at the site in 1920, and the Ole Bull Museum containing family heirlooms, musical instruments and costumes, is located near the park. It is open from July to September each year. In addition to this memorial there is also a statue of Ole Bull in Loring Park in Minneapolis.