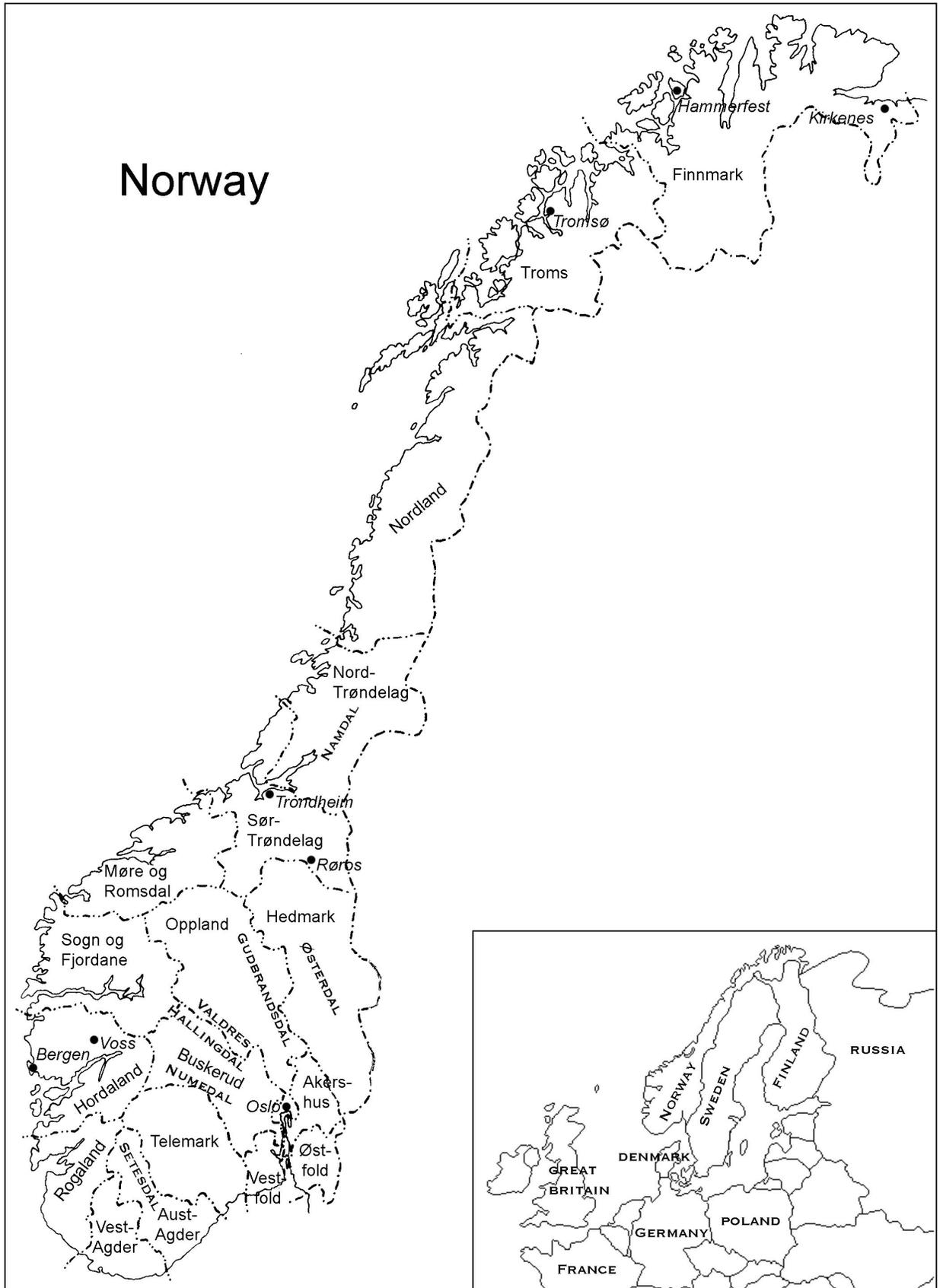


# Norway



## SURVEY OF NORWEGIAN DANCE

Norwegian dances, along with other Scandinavian dances, are primarily social in nature rather than religious or ritualistic. They were danced for fun at festive occasions such as weddings, midsummer, Christmas, and just plain parties. When we say Norwegian dances, we usually refer to the dances from the central and southern parts of Norway. We generally put Lapp culture, found in northern Norway, in a separate category. Today, Norwegian dances are customarily divided into the categories below.

### **Bygdedans** (Regional Dance)

These are the oldest known and documented dances, coming to Norway in the period 1600-1800. The first dances arrived together with the fiddle. There are five main categories of bygdedans: springar (springdans, springleik, gamalt), gangar (bonde, jølstring), pols (polsdans, rundom), rull (vossarull, rudl, rullar), and halling (laus, lausdans). Each type is widely used and known over a large area, although it varies considerably from district to district. The dances also vary from individual to individual in the same district. This creates a complex geographical pattern with gradual transitions in tradition from one region to the next.

The dances are quite free in structure, so that many dancers vary them from one execution to the next. There is, nevertheless, a fixed framework within which improvisation occurs. Both steps and figures may be varied. Some Norwegian dancers, especially older dancers, feel that bygdedans from more than one region should not be attempted because the styles tend to blend, losing the unique regional styling.

Springar and gangar are not in principle different, except for the meter. In areas having both dances, they closely parallel each other. Springar and gangar are found in the south and west. They often have three parts, in this order: vending (turning or curving, rich in motifs and variations), lausdans (solo, not attached to partner), and samdans (some sort of rotation with partner). Pols is found in the north and east. It is difficult to say much about its structure in general, except that it usually has elements of the same three parts as the springar, but not necessarily in the order given above. It generally has fewer vending motifs and very little lausdans; the samdans is very important. Just before 1900, almost every community had either springar or pols, but no community had both.

Halling is a solo men's dance known primarily as a competition and performing number. It has no fixed form. Two main types of motifs are used: sporting and acrobatic motifs, and turns and steps found in other bygdedans forms.

Rull is quite simple in form and is probably the newest of the bygdedans types, dating from 1800 at the earliest. It is found only in a relatively small area and varies little from place to place. In fact, rull would be classified as a gammeldans if we looked only at the dance – however, the music played definitely belongs to the older bygdedans category.

Today, musical accompaniment is nearly always a solo instrument, usually ordinary fiddle or Hardanger fiddle depending on the region. There are many melodies for each regional dance. Fiddlers often pursue music only from their own regions; for example, a fiddler from Telemark plays springar and gangar tunes from Telemark only.

Bygdedans is still a living tradition in some parts of Norway. In some places, versions of the dances suitable for the teaching environment have emerged.

### **Gammeldans** or Gamaldans (Old-Time Dance)

Gammeldans had its roots in German and Austrian couple dances. The dances became popular in the courts at the end of the 1700s, were introduced in ballrooms in Paris in the early 1800s, and spread from there throughout Europe. They became very popular in Norway, and were the social dance of the 1800s. They are usually grouped into four main categories: vals (waltz), reinlender (schottische), polka (including hamborgar, galopp, and pariserpolka), and masurka (springpolka, polkamasurka). These dances go under different names in different communities, e.g. polka may be called hamborgar, galopp, skotsk, hoppvals, polkett, or tripper. In a few places the dance names may even be exchanged (such as calling a polka "reinlender"), creating a very confusing situation.

Many of the dances are found in every region in Norway. In many places, they were the only dances in use

after dances of the bygdedans type had been forgotten. The dances vary little from place to place and the essential characteristics are the same both within Norway and in large portions of the western world. Turning together with a partner is typical; gammeldans is basically a collection of dances based on a single turning technique (face to face with right foot between partner's feet). The dances normally have a simple pattern that may be embellished or varied, but the scope of variations is usually quite limited.

Gammeldans may be done to any tune of the appropriate type. Today, musical accompaniment is most often a modern orchestra, including instruments such as fiddle, accordion, guitar and bass (perhaps electric).

At the beginning of the 20th century, gammeldans was done extensively in traditional settings. The dances are still done today in a few places but they are often mixed with, or have given way almost entirely to, more modern dances such as foxtrot and swing. In the 1970s, there was a revival of interest in gammeldans. In recent years, however, the number of places to dance gammeldans has been dropping precipitously.

### **Turdans (Figure Dance)**

Turdans is a grab-bag category, and contains all the dances that don't fit anywhere else. Most of the dances have a fixed structure. The figures come in a fixed order, have a fixed length, and are bound to specific parts of the music. Many of the dances are done in group formations, requiring considerable organization. These dances were popular in towns and among the well-to-do in less mountainous areas and, for the most part, have not been a strong factor in Norwegian tradition. However, they are extensively used in organized folk dance in Norway and are the type most easily included in the American folk dance repertoire.

Turdans is a very diverse group of dances having different historical backgrounds. Three of the main types are: contra, ril and single couple dances. The contras originally came from the English, arriving in Norway at the end of the 1700s via the French court. The English form, progressive longways, is more popular in Norway than the French form (quadrille). The ril appears to have been a folk dance of the lower classes only. There are two basic types of ril: for three people and for several couples. The 3-person ril appears to be strongly related to the Scottish reel and is found in various places along most of the coast of Norway. The form for several couples seems to have no Scottish parallels and may be a Norwegian development. The single couple dances are usually done to a specific melody and often have sung verses. They usually have gammeldans motifs plus a few additional motifs. Many of the dances and melodies are found in countless variations throughout northern Europe.

Today, turdans is done primarily by organized folk dance groups where participants learn dances very much as folk dancers in the U.S. learn dances. Although the dances come from particular regions or towns in Norway, they are now widely taught and danced all over the country. At parties, the musical accompaniment is often an orchestra, although a solo fiddle may also be used if no orchestra is available. A solo fiddle or accordion is the usual accompaniment in the weekly meetings for learning and dancing.

### **Songleik (Song Games)**

The only accompaniment to songleik is singing, usually of rhymes. The dance is often a simple and stylized dramatization of the text. Songleik has very old roots; some of the texts can be traced back to the Middle Ages. However, it probably did not come to Norway until the end of the 1800s, arriving via Sweden and Denmark. Songleik has been much used in places where dance was/is forbidden for religious reasons; it is not considered to be dance as long as it starts in a circle and has no musical accompaniment. It is not usually used together with other dance forms.

There are often many songleik games in places with a strong tradition; 20-30 is not unusual. Country and city traditions were quite different; one difference is that people of all ages did songleik in the country while in the city it was done primarily by young girls. Today, the city tradition is still strong, but the country tradition is quite weak. Songleik is also used in organized folk dance, primarily in children's groups.

### **Songdans (Song Dance)**

Songdans is performed to vocal accompaniment only. The songs are sung in unison, without harmony. The usual formation is a circle of couples; if it is crowded, there may be several concentric circles.

Songdans is not found in Norwegian folk traditions. It is mainly the work of Hulda Garborg in the period 1900-1910. She wanted to bring into use songs that had probably been danced to at one time. The Faroe

Islands have a living tradition of singing long ballads while dancing a simple, six-count basic step (of the *pravo* or *hora* type). Hulda Garborg based her songdans on this tradition, and the two basic steps (*attersteg*, *kvilesteg*) are stylizations of the Faroe Islands step. Songdans became popular in organized folk dance in 1910-1920, and today it is often viewed as one of the trademarks of Norwegian dance. Even today, new dances are choreographed using appropriate songs: ballads, well known country songs, and sometimes more recently written popular songs.

Most of the dances use one of the basic steps, plus a part that is different, the *brigde*. The *brigde* often has movements that are related to the lyrics. Generally, the dance repeats for each verse and songs having only one verse are done twice.

### The 20th century

There are two important organizations in Norway today dealing with folk dance: Noregs Ungdomslag (NU, Norwegian Youth Organization), and FolkOrg, a merger of the old Landslaget for Spelemenn (LFS, The National Fiddlers' Organization) and Norsk Folkemusikk- og Dansarlag (NFD, Norwegian Folk Music and Dance Organization).

FolkOrg is the sponsor of the music and dance competitions, including Landskappleiken and Landsfestivalen. It also includes support for both professional and amateur musicians. Its main dance interest has traditionally been *bygdedans*, although in recent years it has shown more interest in *gammeldans*. As an organization, it has become stronger in recent years. It has also been heavily involved in establishing a national stage for folk events, called *Riksscenen*, in Oslo. *Riksscenen* has a huge number of concerts each year, as well as a few dance events.

Noregs Ungdomslag is a large organization with a variety of interests, and folk dance has traditionally been viewed as a means of encouraging members rather than as an end in itself. Today, the organization sponsors parties and festivals, as well as the bulk of teacher training in Norwegian dance. The main areas of dance interest are *turdans*, *songdans*, and, more recently, *gammeldans*. Klara Semb, involved in the organization for many years, wrote four books called *Norske Folkedansar*. In the 1980s, the books were revised by committee and condensed into two larger volumes - the "Blue Book" for song dances, and the "Red Book" for *turdans*. Many dances and songs were significantly changed, and quite a few groups still use the older versions. The books are widely used as instruction manuals today.

The 1970s revival of interest in *gammeldans* produced numerous community organizations, often going under the name *Gammeldansens Venner* (Friends of *Gammeldans*). Their repertoires often include such dances as *swing* and *foxtrot*, as well as what we have defined to be *gammeldans*. In the 1980s, there was a surge of interest in *swing*. There are many local Norwegian forms of the dance. *Swing* is also taught widely in courses. There are also huge festivals mainly for *swing*.

Most recently, the national romantic and nation-building ideological underpinnings of Noregs Ungdomslag have been going out of fashion. There are fewer young people entering the organization, although there are still many children's groups. The pendulum of interest has swung more toward *bygdedans* and FolkOrg, and away from *turdans* and *songdans*.

In general, dance is becoming more of a specialty for interested individuals, and less a part of the fabric of society. A process of professionalization is occurring. Schooling in Norwegian dance is now offered at the university level. At the same time, *gammeldans* in the traditional setting, common only 20-30 years ago, has practically disappeared from the Norwegian countryside.

Egil Bakka is one of the foremost authorities on Norwegian dance today. He has written extensively and organized university level courses. *Danse Danse Lett Ut På Foten* contains *turdans*, *songleik* and *songdans*, and is used as an instruction manual. His book, *Norske Dansetradisjonar*, analyzes Norwegian dances and gives extensive background information. Much of the material in this survey has been translated and extracted from his writings.

Much Norwegian music is now available for purchase as unprotected mp3 on the internet. Go to <http://musiconline.no> (or <http://www.grappa.no>) and look under "Traditional folk" or "Traditional dance". The pages can be viewed in English. Music is also available on other services such as iTunes and Spotify.

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