



JA, VI ELSKER

*The Norwegian
National Anthem*

Yes, we love with fond devotion



NORSK MUSIKFORLAG A/S - OSLO.



THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF *JA, VI ELSKER* was written by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in 1859. It was not the first Norwegian national anthem. Even before the dissolution of the Union with Denmark in 1814 Norwegian students in Copenhagen had a song *For Norge, Kjæmpers Fødeland* of such a challenging nature that it was banned by the authorities. Despite that, enthusiastic students continued to sing it at their meetings. After 1814, a competition was arranged for the best national anthem, and the prize-winning song, *Sønner af Norge* by H. A. Bjerregaard, was Norway's national anthem throughout the first fifty years of her new independence.

Both *For Norge* and *Sønner af Norge* were coloured by the somewhat naïve nationalism which is characteristic of Norwegian poetry immediately before and immediately after the severance of the link with Denmark. Bjørnson wanted to strike another note. *Ja, vi elsker* is in content essentially historical, though there is also some description of the Norwegian landscape. In its modest sincerity and simplicity of style it reminds one of the Finnish national anthem written by the poet Runeberg whose work Bjørnson had been studying at the time. *Ja, vi elsker* is also coloured by Bjørnson's great eloquence, his marvellous faculty for rousing the enthusiasm of the masses with a few striking words. He wrote it when he was beginning to embark on that career as a public speaker for which he is renowned in Norwegian history. Typical of Bjørnson too is his daring to begin a poem with the little, everyday word "Ja" ("Yes").

Ja, vi elsker did not acquire its final form till 1863 (the few alterations made in 1869 are quite unimportant). By that time Bjørnson had visited Italy and during his stay there had learned much from Italian art, particularly its concentration and striking composition. This is reflected in the new





version of *Ja, vi elsker*. In this 1863 version one stanza was deleted and three new ones were added. The last of these new stanzas begins with a repetition of the first four lines of the magnificent opening stanza of the poem, then continues, in four new lines, with a powerful forward-looking pledge to follow the example of those forebears who fought victoriously for Norway in times of distress (the English translation does not render the meaning of the original accurately on this point). Thus Bjørnson has combined in one song devotion and enthusiasm, modesty and strength. Bjørnson put it this way: "Our National Anthem is that of a small, peace-loving nation, but if it is sung in the hour of danger, determination clad in armour speaks from every line".

Ja, vi elsker became Norway's National Anthem on May 17, 1864, the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution which the people of Norway gave to themselves. It was sung for the first time on that day at Eidsvoll; Bjørnson was a guest at the solemn ceremony along with the Norwegian Government and Parliament.

In its fullest form *Ja, vi elsker* consists of eight stanzas. The three stanzas printed below and translated into English by G. M. Gathorne-Hardy are the first stanza and the last two of the poem.





Ja, vi elsker

Ja, vi elsker dette landet
som det stiger frem
furet, værbitt over vannet
med de tusen hjem.
Elsker, elsker det og tenker
på vår far og mor
:/: og den saganatt som senker
drømme på vår jord :/:

Norske mann i hus og hytte
takk din store Gud.
Landet ville han beskytte
skjønt det mørkt så ut.
Alt hva fedrene har kjempet,
mødrene har grætt,
:/: har den Herre stille lempet
så vi vant vår rett :/:

Ja, vi elsker dette landet
som det stiger frem
furet, værbitt 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 :/:



Yes, we love with fond devotion...

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

MODERATO

Rikard Nordraak

Song. *mf*

Yes we love with fond de - vo - tion this our land that looms rug - ged, storm-scarred
Norseman what-so - 'er thy sta - tion thank thy God whose power willed and wrought the
Yes we love with fond de - vo - tion this our land that looms rug - ged, storm-scarred

Piano. *mf*



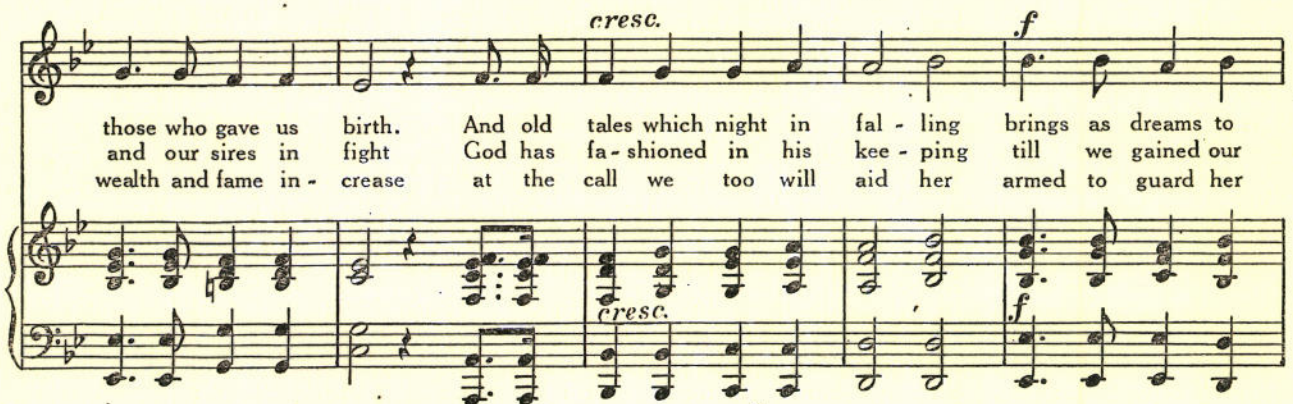
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o'er the o - cean, with her thou - sand homes. Love her in our love re - cal - ling
land's sal - va - tion in her dar - kest hour. All our mo - thers sought in wee - ping
o'er the o - cean, with her thou - sand homes. And as war - rior sires have made her



cresc. *f*


those who gave us birth. And old tales which night in fal - ling brings as dreams to
and our sires in fight God has fa - shioned in his kee - ping till we gained our
wealth and fame in - crease at the call we too will aid her armed to guard her



cresc. *mf* *cresc.*

earth, and old tales which night in fal - ling brings as dreams as dreams to earth.
right, God has fa - shioned in his kee - ping till we gained we gained our right.
peace, at the call we too will aid her armed to guard to guard her peace.





Ja, vi elsker certainly owes much of its popularity to the tune composed by the young Norwegian Rikard Nordraak in 1863. Nordraak and Bjørnson had much in common — they were in fact cousins. — and the solemnity and gentleness of Bjørnson's poetry are admirably reflected in Nordraak's settings. Nordraak did not realise that *Ja, vi elsker* was to be *the* National Anthem and so arranged it for a quartet of male voices (in the key of E). Nordraak died in 1866 at the early age of twenty-four. In him Norway lost one of her most promising sons. Naturally he did not leave behind him a great body of music but he will always be remembered for his fine songs and, of course, above all for his setting of *Ja, vi elsker*.

In a speech in which he compares Nordraak's setting of his own poem with other national anthems Bjørnson said: “. . . either they make a melancholy impression or else they breathe insurrection, or, alternatively, they are pure idylls. But this national anthem of ours is free and open as the day, it soars upwards without a threat, it shows determination unmarred by boasting.” And Grieg, the man in whom we see Nordraak's work carried on, said of his friend: “. . . he lived and died with a firm faith in Norway's future. This faith he instils into us even today — through his national music.”



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