



# 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.

