

Joik – the Sami people’s song

The joik has been the Sami people’s artistic form of expression since time immemorial, but there are few or no instruments in the Sami people’s folk music. Admittedly, the old Sami drum used to exist, the *runebomma*, but no one knows exactly how it was originally used. It vanished from use early on, and today there are only three complete copies remaining in Norway. They can be seen in the museum in Tromsø, Trondheim and in Oslo.

The joik has also been under strong pressure from religious quarters, but has today gained renewed status through use in many contexts.

In the Sami language, to joik is called *juoigat*, an expression which is used in all three Sami areas. The joik melody has different names. Northern Samis call the joik *luohiti*, in Southern Sami, it is called *vuolle*, whilst the Skolt Sami people call their melodies *le’udd*.

Hymn singing has also gained a significant place in the Sami people’s society over the last few centuries, and their way of singing has been influenced by the joik. The Christian hymns have been sung in the oral tradition for several hundred years. They are perceived by many as an old Sami tradition, and they can justifiably be called traditional music.

When one joiks, one sings with a compressed vocal sound, tight larynx and the mouth almost closed. The ideal sound is related to ways of singing in folk song from many countries. As a rule, the tonality is not tempered, and bears witness to old traditional scales. (See the chapter about tonality on page 60.) The pitch may well rise as the melody progresses as the joiker gets into it. A joik can come to a sudden, abrupt stop in the middle. This can be in order to catch one’s breath, or to say some words. When he continues, the joiker may well repeat the last few notes from before he broke off.

The joik can be without lyrics, in which case syllables such as *lo, na, go, de* or *he* can be used. There are seldom fixed words, but an exception is *Sámi siidat* (the joik about the Sami people’s places). In a *personjoik* (see the next page) there are often words which have stuck and are common to use. The name of the person is generally mentioned first in the joik. Otherwise, it may contain key words and references to specific characteristics or actions, or a quote from something the person has said. Good joik lyrics often contain striking descriptions, with eloquent metaphors, often with exaggeration. The melody is seldom improvised, although improvisation does occur, but the performer has a certain amount of freedom. The joik likely has ancient roots, but we do not know how old it is. The first lyrics were written down in the 1600s and the first melodies in the 1700s. In the early 1900s, the first sound recordings were made, and in 1908 a large collection of 800 melodies from Norway and Finland was released.

The old joik traditions can be split into three forms:

1. ritual joiks
2. narrative joiks
3. personified joiks: person joik, animal joik, nature joik

Ritual joiks

Old sources give an indication as to how joik and drumming were used in pre-Christian times. They tell us about use in connection with religious ceremonies. Through joik, *noaiden* (the shaman) could come into contact with the spiritual world. In the old Sami religion, it was thought that nature had a soul, and there were many gods and spiritual beings. At these ceremonies, the shaman used a ceremonial drum which, in Norwegian, is called a *runebomme*. The drum's skin was painted with a variety of figures. To strike the drum, a hammer made from reindeer horn was used, which was often beautifully carved. A brass ring could be added to the drum skin during the ceremony, and it moved around the skin during the drumming. If the ring stopped on a figure even if the beating continued, it was interpreted as a sign of luck in hunting, or a sign of what kind of sacrifice the gods wanted to have.

One other way to use the drum was, according to old sources, to joik or play oneself into a trance. The shaman could also perform a dance. In the trance, he could liberate the soul and enter the world of spirits whilst his body was left behind, unconscious. The others who were present had to joik the whole time in order that his soul could find its way back to his body. When he woke up, he could tell about what he had experienced. Such joiking is no longer found, and very few such joiks have been preserved.

Narrative joiks

In 1670, two beautiful love poems were written, and these are the oldest preserved joik lyrics. The melodies were not written down. In 1820, a Finnish priest wrote down around 40 joik lyrics, also without melody. These told about great shamen, prehistoric times, particular animals and much else. Almost none of these joiks is in use any more. We therefore know little about how they were joiked in the past.

Person-joik

Person joiks are still found to a large degree and are in living use. These are joiks which are made for a person or an animal. It is not the composer or the person who wrote the lyrics who owns the joik, but rather the one for whom the joik was made. It is not said that one joiks *about* someone, but that one *joiks* someone. A joik can therefore be connected to a person in the same way as a name is. New person-joiks are constantly being made, and it is an honour to have such a joik melody.



CD 1 – 23 Mattis Mathiesen Gaup: *Káre-Niillas* (personjoik)



CD 1 – 24 Ingor Ántte Áilo Gaup: *Ingor Ántte Ánte Mihkkal* (personjoik)



Ingor Ántte Áilo Gaup, Kautokeino

Animal joiks

There are many joiks for animals. Hares, reindeer, wolves and bears all have their own joiks. They also have a number of species of birds. In earlier times, bear hunting was important, and since the bear was a sacred animal, which in

addition understood the Sami language, it was important that one showed his respect. The bear was joiked out of hibernation, and the men joiked to tell the women about a good hunt. During the skinning, one had to honour the bear with a joik, and when the meat was carried in to the women, it was joiked that "... here come men from Sweden, Poland, England and France...". That was in order that the bear did not realise that it was Sami people who had killed him. During the meal, and for several days afterwards, they joiked to the bear's honour in order to secure a good result from the next hunt.

Earlier, wolves were a threat against the reindeer business, and wolf joiks were often used. Today, the wolf is as good as extinct, as is the living tradition of wolf joik.



CD 1 – 25 Per Hætta: *Gumpe*, (ulvejoik), *Gárja*, kråkejoik)



Per Hætta, Karasjok

Areas where the joik is used

The joik is often a spontaneous reaction from the performer, and it can express friendship, hatred, love and sorrow. One can joik someone who is close, or someone one bears a grudge against. One can joik one's children, or someone one is in love with, or quite maliciously joik a rival.

When one drives reindeer, it is not uncommon to joik, or when one wants to remember a particular place or a beautiful area in nature. These days, one also joiks when one drives a snow scooter or a motorboat. The rumble of the motor functions as a drone and creates a suggestive mood.

There are some things that, in accordance with tradition, should not be joiked. It is viewed as self-praise to joik oneself. Neither should one joik the Northern Lights, as one can then be hit by its wrath.

Ellen Hætta Bueng, born in 1907, knew the devil's joik, which she learnt from her father. She said:

"Our late father used to - when we children did not obey him all the time - joik this joik. Then we became terrified and were so diligent and obeyed everything. Yes, we jumped to do what he asked as soon as he joiked the devil's joik."

Here is a notation of Ánte Mihkkal Gaup's joik. He is an active joiker and tradition-bearer from Kautokeino. This is his personal melody.