

'Folk songs are now also part of the city tradition'

The language of music is what Unni Lovlid, of Norway's Hornindal valley, speaks best. Lovlid pioneered the revival of Norway's traditional music, driven by a passion to introduce the world to it. In the capital to sing the poetry of Norwegian poet Olav H Hauge on his birth centenary celebrations, she spoke to Shreya Roy Chowdhury:

■ What makes Norwegian folk music special?

Folk music is an oral tradition. A traditional folk song represents all ages, being passed from one generation to the next. They tell stories and legends, but the poets and composers are anonymous. Their identities are never known. With time, the songs change in the same way the message changes in a game of Chinese whispers. It can take a lifetime to learn the songs because you have to learn an



entire tradition. Primarily peasant music, it's connected to daily life. But now there aren't that many farmers left so the tradition will also change.

Now folk songs are also part of the city tradition, and follow day-to-day city activities as well. The main instruments were the Hardanger fiddle, Norway's

national instrument, the normal fiddle and flutes.

■ How are you taking your music to the world?

We have travelled six countries on this tour. From Tanzania, where some poetry was sung in Swahili, we went to South Korea where we worked in Korean. We've also been to China, Nepal, Sri Lanka and now, India. It is our fifth trip to India, which has been the most difficult country to visit as a musician.

The good thing was we performed for the victims of the gas leak right opposite Union Carbide in Bhopal. Since it was a street concert, people stopped by and the audience kept growing.

■ Why choose Hauge's poetry?

Hauge writes about small details in one moment and in the next, questions life. He travelled in his mind. He never went to China, yet in his poetry he has

dialogues with Chinese poets who lived 1,000 years ago. We have two written languages — Bokmal, based on Danish and there is New Norwegian or Nynorsk, which was created by Ivar Aasen and is based on all the dialects in Norway. Hauge writes in Nynorsk, which interests me because of the verbs as that makes it more active.

■ Is folk music popular in Norway?

Those between the ages of 20 and 40 are showing interest. Today, we also have a lot of arranged folk music that draw from other varieties including contemporary music. Folk music is offered as a course at three academies. But Norwegian society has to do more to protect children's music. There is a range of children's songs including lullabies, songs based on children and how to count on fingers. That is the most important part of the oral tradition.