Short Biography on Jørn Simen Øverli

Jørn Simen Øverli picked up a guitar as a boy and hasn’t put it down since. Heralded as one of the most expressive folk singers in Scandinavia, he plays and sings all the great traditional folk songs and ballads of Norway, with a special emphasis on the great Alf Prøysen. The nuanced interpretation he brings to his music adds new dimensions to the experience of the listener. Like many other great talents, he also excels at the art of improvisation. Never a victim of trends, never commercial in his approach, Jørn has always blazed his own trail.

It is by journeying beyond the borders of Norway and Scandinavia that we can truly gain insight into the musician and his art, for he is much more than a Norwegian folk singer, even though that would have been more than enough.

During the 1980s Øverli went to witness the great drama unfolding in Poland: the Solidarity (*Solidarność*) movement led by Lech Wałęsa and the ensuing battle with the communist government and the implementation of martial law by the Polish head of State, General Jarulzelski. Jørn immersed himself in the people and the contemporary songs of Poland. Jørn was particularly drawn to the music that grew around the Solidarity movement. It was this music that led him to the music and life of Vladimir Vysotsky, the legendary Russian folk singer and actor whose work was the inspiration for much of the music of the freedom movements in Poland during the conflict. Øverli’s translations, performances, and recordings of Vysotsky’s music have been highly praised by both the public and the top Russia experts in Norway and experts in Russia and Poland.

Øverli maintained his connections to Poland has since worked with many Polish contemporary singers and songwriters and in 2011 founded a Polish-Norwegian band, Karuzela. This group sings Jørns’s retellings of great contemporary Polish songs, especially those written by Agnieszka Osiecka. The group frequently tours in Poland and Norway.

In most books published about Vysotsky or Osiecka in Russia or Poland today, there is usually a section about the significance of Jørn Simen’s work and how he has been able to make the work of these important songwriters available in foreign countries.

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