



Micho Russell  
in Norway  
1978

Vol 2: Private sessions

1. The Ivy Leaf 00:52
2. Come Into Town, my Fair Lady 01:15
3. The Hill of the Smith 01:28
4. The Beauty Spot 01:34
5. The Fishers Hornpipe 01:36
6. The Wheels of the World 01:24
7. The FermoyLasses and Reel (no name) 02:18
8. Tinkers Reel 01:23
9. Reel (no name) and Boil the Breakfast Early 02:22
10. Kitty Jones and Reel (no name) 02:16
11. The Dark Haired Gypsy 00:59
12. The Steamroller and Lisdoonvarna polkas 02:26
13. The Blackbird 01:23

# Micho Russell in Norway 1978

## Vol 2: Private sessions

Som tittelen sier, er dette det andre albumet med opptak av Micho Russell, fra et opphold i Norge i 1978. Det første albumet ble gitt ut i 2018, og inneholder opptak fra en konsert på Vinstra.

Her er det opptak fra noen få private sessions. Micho var ikke bare generøs med å lære bort låtene sine - det virket som nettopp dette var en av hans viktigste samværsformer.

Det jeg har kalt 'private sessions' var i utgangspunktet ikke annet enn vanlig sosialt samvær, men, som vanlig når man traff Micho, tok han fort frem en fløyte fra innerlomma, og ville lære oss låter.

Slik det også fremgår av noen av sporene i dette albumet, spilte han gjerne igjennom låtene langsomt en gang eller to, for så å vise låten i normalt tempo.

Resten av denne booklet'en er stort sett identisk med den fra Vol 1.

As indicated in the title, this is the second album with recordings of Micho Russell, made on his trips to Norway in 1978. The first album released in 2018, was recorded during a concert in Vinstra.

This album contains recordings from a few private sessions. Micho was extremely generous with teaching his tunes to others, and this was obviously one of his favorite social activities.

What is termed 'private sessions' here, was actually ordinary come-togethers, that, as usual with Micho, soon was transformed into a session where we were taught as many tunes as we could manage during the time available. As you can hear on some of the tracks, when teaching tunes, Micho usually played through in slow tempo first, and then in normal tempo immediately after.

The remainder of this booklet is almost identical with the one from Vol 1.

# Micho Russell in Norway 1978

## Vol 2: Private sessions

I 1978 fikk jeg sjansen til å reise med, spille med, og gjøre opptak av den legendariske irske musikeren Micho Russell. Opptakene ble gjort på en liten kassettspiller, og var først og fremst ment til eget bruk for å lære låter. Men i dag - mer enn 40 år senere - vil jeg gjerne dele dem med Michos mange fans rundt i verden. Selv om opptakene ikke er opp til dagens tekniske standard, er innspillingene spennende, fordi de utfyller bildet av Micho som musikeren som alltid ga låtene en ny drakt. Dersom du kjenner låtene fra andre innspillinger, kan du oppdage variasjoner i frasering og melodi, av og til så omfattende at du undrer på om det virkelig er samme melodi.



## Vol 2: Private sessions

In 1978, I had the unique opportunity to travel with, play with, and record, the legendary Irish musician Micho Russell. The recordings were done on a small cassette tape recorder, and meant for reference for me personally while learning the tunes. Now, 40 years later, I'd like to share them with fans of Micho

around the world. Even if the recordings are not quite up to modern standards technically, the album adds to the picture of Micho as a musician who always gave his tunes a new twist, and thereby should be of great interest. If you know these tunes from other recordings, you will find variations in phrasing and melody, sometimes almost to the point where you wonder if it really is the same tune.

## Kassettene etter Micho

I arbeidsrommet mitt er det en kommode som stort sett inneholder slike ting som jeg ikke lenger har bruk for, men ikke har hatt hjerte til å kaste. Deriblant to skuffer fulle av kassetter fra 70- og 80-tallet, som har overlevd de senere teknologiske revolusjoner på musikkfronten: noen få er utgitte album, men de fleste inneholder egne opptak fra ulike anledninger. Det er låter jeg skulle lære meg; opptak fra øvelser med forskjellige grupper, mange opptak jeg gjorde av ulike folkemusikk-utøvere, de fleste av dem for lengst kopiert og arkivert i, Norsk folkemusikksamling.

Stort sett faller kassettene i gruppen “artig å ha”-ting, bortsett fra to som alltid har ligget helt øverst og fremst: opptak med Micho Russell fra en kort tur han hadde til Norge i 1978. De første to tiårene kassettene lå der, var tanken først og fremst at de var fulle av låter jeg hadde tenkt å lære meg, noe jeg etterhvert også gjorde med mange av dem. Men de siste par tiårene har de først og fremst vært en dårlig samvittighet: dette er opptak som er for verdifulle til bare å finnes i et enkelt eksemplar på et sårbart



medium som for lengst er på vei ut av historien. Det å få gitt ut disse opptakene, er derfor både en lettelse, og en glede over å kunne dele denne musikken med alle Michos fans.

Kassettene inneholder opptak fra tre ulike anledninger. På det første albumet er det opptak fra en konsert på Vinstra; på dette albumet er det opptak fra en sesjon i leiligheten til Morten Thomte, og i tillegg en sesjon med opptak Ånon Egeland gjorde ved en tredje anledning.

## The Micho Cassettes

In my working room, I have several drawers filled with objects I no longer use, but have not yet had the heart to throw away. Among them, two drawers filled with music cassettes; survivors of the later technological revolutions of DATs, CDs and computer formats. A few of them are published albums of various artists, but mostly private recordings of tunes I'd like to learn, sketches from rehearsals with different bands, a lot of field recordings of





## Micho som musiker

Alle som er opptatt av irsk tradisjonsmusikk, vil kjenne Micho Russell som en særpreget utøver på tin-whistle og fløyte, og, ikke minst, som sanger og forteller.

Om man først blir kjent med Michos spill etter å ha hørt mye på dagens virtuose utøvere, virker spillet hans enkelt i sammenligning, men etterhvert oppdager man Michos nyanserte fraserings og, ikke minst, hans utrolige evne til å variere. Låtene blir som nye hver gang han spiller dem, med melodiske og fraseringsmessige variasjoner. Derfor er det alltid spennende å høre nye opptak av låter man har hørt ham spille før.

Da jeg traff Micho i 1978, holdt jeg på å fullføre en magistergradsoppgave om variasjon i framføring av hardingfeleslåtter, og var vel spesielt oppmerksom på nettopp dette. Jeg så klare paralleller til hvordan min læremester på hardingfele, Salve Austenå, varierte slåttene når han spilte, og hvordan Micho fremførte sine låter.

Men det var en parallell til som var slående. Den handler om en unik tilstedeværelse i selve framføringen: en evne til å gå helt og fullt inn i

folk music I did for the Norwegian Collection of Folk Music at the University of Oslo, but long time ago transferred to other formats.

So, mostly, the cassettes belong to the category “nice to have, but never used”, except two that always have been placed at the top: recordings of Micho Russell from a short trip he had to Norway in 1978.

At first, the cassettes represented tunes I wanted to learn at some point, but after a while, they gave me bad conscience, being valuable

recording that should not exist only in one copy on a vulnerable medium. To publish these recordings therefore gives me, not only the pleasure of sharing, but also quite a relief.

The cassettes contain recordings from three different occasions. The previous album covers a concert in Vinstra; here are some tunes recorded in Morten Thomte’s flat, as well as some recorded by Ånon Egeland.

musikken, og dele gleden over den med et publikum, enten det består av en enkelt tilhører eller en fullsatt konsertsal.

Michos entusiasme for musikken kom også til uttrykk ved at han alltid var ivrig på å lære bort låtene. Alltid når jeg møtte Micho, tok han snart fram en fløyte og begynte å spille en låt han hadde lyst til å lære bort; først langsomt, og etterhvert i større tempo.

Det er mange utgivelser med Michos musikk, mest i form av lyd, men også noe på noter. En fin oversikt finnes på en nettside hos [Clare County Library](#).



## Micho - the musician

All fans of Irish music know Micho Russell as a unique performer of tin whistle and flute, and, not least, as a great story-teller and singer.

If you, like me, got to know Micho after listening to more virtuoso modern performers, his playing sounds simple in comparison, but after a while, one gets to know the many nuances in his phrasing and, not least, his incredible ability to always produce new melodic variations. Therefore, it is always inspiring to hear new recordings of tunes you already know. When I met Micho in 1978, I was in the process of finalizing a thesis on variation in the performance of hardanger fiddle tunes, and I was probably more aware of Michos variations than an average listener. I perceived similarities in how Micho and my Hardanger fiddle teacher, Salve Austenå, varied their tunes when playing.

But there was another similarity I found striking: both Micho and Salve have a unique presence in their playing, and ability to be to-



tally here-and-now, in the joy of sharing their music with an audience, whether it was one single person or a full concert hall.

Michos was also eager to teach his tunes, and when we met, it was never long before he got his flute or whistle out, and started to play a tune he would like me to learn; first at slow tempo, then increasing the speed gradually.

There are many fine sources of Micho's music, mostly recordings, but also music notation. A fine overview is found at [Clare County Library](#).



# Micho Russell (1915-1994) – a true musician.

*By Morten Thomte*



*«My mother you see, God have mercy in her, never wanted us to play too much. She wanted us to live different lives, but...»*

(Micho Russell 1976)

I first heard Micho in Ireland in 1976. It was a casual occasion, not a pub, not a concert, more a private setting as I recall. He was wearing an off-white Aran sweater, thick trousers and solid shoes. He wasn't chic or posh and looked as if he'd just walked off the bog with a sleán<sup>1</sup> after a hard day's work cutting turf for a long winter.

<sup>1</sup>A shovel-like implement used to cut slices of wet peat.

I grew up with jazz, classical and contemporary music, modern theatre, modern art, and was thus used to 'unconventional appearances' and consequently open to extreme expressions.

So I assumed this was a man in a costume about to use his sleán as a musical instrument. But he didn't. He wasn't wearing a costume and had a tiny tin whistle in his hand. The big man put it to his mouth and performed the gentlest tune as if he was caressing his newborn son. I was mesmerized. It was so innocent, so sincere, and so unpretentious.

In the late seventies director Jan Horne and I were making a six-part television series on traditional music in Ireland and Norway for our national broadcaster NRK (in those days public broadcasters apparently found that a good idea) called 'Slaatter&Reels' (Dances & Reels) and were looking for Irish musicians who could take part. Some episodes would be about keeping and nurturing existing musical traditions and others about transforming those



traditions into modern, musical styles. RTE presenter and music collector Ciarán Mac Mathúna helped us put together a group of Irish musicians meeting our criteria. He suggested individual musicians representing different styles and areas (a band formed specially for the series) and called them 'The Golden Harp'. Then they were to meet their Norwegian counterparts – not being a band either and with no name at all, in a concert at the then famous Club 7 in Oslo as the starting point for the series. And they were excellent musicians too; uilleann piper Liam O'Flynn,

fiddler Donal O'Connor, harpist, dancer and singer Deirdre O'Brien, and concertina player Denis Doody; all experienced and well-travelled musicians.

With the crew we went around western Ireland for weeks doing research and recording some amazing sessions with some of the great musicians of the period. And among them was Micho. We filmed him in Doolin 'where the next stop is America' and recorded, as far as I know, the only footage in colour with the three brothers Gussie, Packie and Micho. Packie passed away the next year, so we were there just in time. Micho showed us 'the bogs', the area where he grew up and let me into his musical tradition. He grew up in a musical family (also with two sisters) with a mother who played the concertina and a father who was a singer. His first language was Gaelic; English was his second. That's why he spoke English in such a colourful way and it took me a while to appreciate and understand that. After all I was a young man from Norway with little experience in Irish culture. But I soon learned to appreciate it.

He told me they had a cow living in his house when he grew up. They had to go through the

kitchen to access the room and let the cow out the same way, but one winter the cow was pregnant and too big for the door. So it had to stay in there for the rest of the winter!

Micho turned out not only to be a tin whistle player, a flute player and a singer ('a lilter') but a storyteller and performer from another dimension. There was always something very 'earthy' about him, something you never encounter these days. He was clearly the real deal.

A year or so after our filming in Co. Clare and in Oslo, a friend and I decided to invite Micho to Norway. We didn't have a budget, but my friend knew someone who ran a hotel in Vinstra in the middle of nowhere and thought it would be a great idea to run a concert there. Micho accepted the somewhat loose circumstances and appeared at the airport.

He was once invited to Germany for a gig and responded: Where am I staying? Who's playing and who's paying? So he apparently fitted our project. We had bargained a meagre deal with NRK for a recording session and also had this gig at the small venue up in Vinstra. But there was no major interest in a flute player from the West of Ireland in Norway at the time,

so money was scarce and a hotel in Oslo was out of the question. I therefore rigged the big man up on a couch in my apartment and he didn't complain.

The next day we headed for Vinstra. Included in the entourage was also the producer and publisher of these tapes, Tellef Kvifte, himself an accomplished musician and later a music professor at the University of Oslo. It has to be said that Vinstra is 'in the mountains', but not on the top of Mount Blanc. You pass mountains on your way looking out of the window, but you're still on a very smooth and straight road. Micho didn't feel that way and insisted on lying down on the floor of my car for most of the ride – which is somewhat less than four hours. A 'mountain experience' was clearly too much for a man from Co. Clare.

He eventually arrived in one piece and we entered the venue. A dance band from Eastern Europe was rehearsing for that night's gig. I asked them when they had their break? – Break? Yes, so we can have a sound check before the concert that evening. – Concert? It turned out that nothing was prepared and I had to negotiate a one-hour intermission with them at 8 p.m.



We tried to leave posters on every tree or pole in the area with 'Famous Irish musician. Known from TV' and a picture of Micho. Three people showed up: a young girl who had been to Ireland, and her parents. I was rather embarrassed by that turnout, but Micho gave them his all – the true musician he was. Tellef also played some tunes, but by the end of the set the parents suggested we all move to their house and the evening continued in a looser and more private setting. That turned out to be a much more appropriate venue for the music and for Micho – the big man who became a musician despite his mother's wish.

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Photos 1978, sound restoration 2018, and liner notes (except «Micho - a True Musician) by Tellef Kvifte. Sound recording 1978 by Ånon Egeland and Tellef Kvifte

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