

Remembering Toralf Tollefsen

Toralf Tollefsen was born at Fredrikstad, Norway, August 26, 1914. He grew up in a musical family, and eventually he became a world-class concert accordionist. In March of 1977, my wife Eva, my eleven-year-old daughter Astri, and myself were in Oslo, getting ready to fly back to Edmonton. We had some time on our hands, so I decided to phone Tollefsen and ask if it was all right to come and see him. He said it was, so we hired a taxi, and soon we were up in Ullernkammen where he lived. It was up on a hill, with a nice view of the Oslo fjord. We found his apartment and were greeted by Tollefsen himself. His wife Nona was still in bed; Tollefsen told us they had been up late the night before. He had his accordion sitting on the floor, and soon he picked it up and started to play. I had been a Tollefsen fan for many years, but only from records and the radio, and here he was playing for the three of us, live! But I could not think of the name of the piece he was playing. It turned out to be "Allegro Deciso" from the *Water Music Suite* by George Frederick Handel, and I will call that pretty highbrow music, but, then, we should not expect him to start with the "Kvesar Waltz" for an opening number. Then he announced that he was going to play a medley of Norwegian folk tunes, and the very first number he played was from Surnadal, where I was born! Then he started playing "Astri, My Astri." We used to sing that song in Norway, long, long ago. I tried to tell Astri, "He is playing your song. Do you recognize it?" But Astri just shook her head and said, "No." I knew I had played it for her many times, but maybe my accordion playing did not sound like Tollefsen's. "Astri, My Astri" is an old folk tune, and the man who wrote the lyrics died in 1837. Here is a translation of verse one:

Out of the past, now when shadows are falling,

Softly resound happy memories of you.

Often in dreams I can hear someone calling,

Whispering softly, "I love you, I do."

How well I remember those days long ago,

You were my sweetheart, and I was your beau.

I do hope those young people get back together again! Pretty soon the concert was over, and we had to get back to where we came from. Tollefsen had a brother, Svend; I have an extended-play recording of Norwegian folk tunes played by Toralf and Svend on accordions. I imagine it's hard to get hold of that recording now. Tollefsen was an excellent player; he was very popular, and he played for Eva, Astri, and me. Toralf Tollefsen died November 27, 1994.



—Olaf Sveen