



*Frigga and the Mistletoe* libretto by D. Ohlandt  
music by Barbara Schelstrate (2012)

D. OHLANDT, PH.D., librettist and stage director

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*Frigga,  
Loki, Balder,  
and Odin*



“The Feast  
of Thirteen  
(Feast of  
Twelve)”



## SYNOPSIS

Frigga sits at her loom on a cold, dark winter night, weaving the destinies of the world. Her people come to her, begging for some reassurance that the darkness and the winter will end (“**Gathering the Dark**”). In response to their pleas, Frigga gives birth to the sun, a boy named Balder. When Frigga returns to her loom, she is tempted to look for Balder’s destiny, (“**Afraid of the Dark**”) and when she does, she learns he will die when he comes of age. Although she believes she cannot change the fates she weaves, Frigga vows that she will do anything to change the end of her son’s story.

Frigga soothes the baby with a story about the sun from her weaving (“**Raven Steals the Sun**” – a Native American story). Then, with a lullaby (“**Three Kisses**”), she sings him to sleep. While he sleeps, Frigga begs her friends the Rose and the Dove to promise that they will not harm Balder (“**No Shadows Here I**”). They promise Balder’s safety on behalf of all their kind, but Loki the trickster points out that every promise has a loophole.

Time passes, and Balder is now a young and curious child. Together with Loki, Odin reminds Frigga that children need space and freedom in order to grow (“**Let Him Go / Let Him Grow**”). Frigga tells Balder another story about light from her weaving (“**Lord Krishna, Satyabhama, and the demon Narakasura**”) and about the Hindu festival of Diwali (“**Subham Karoti Kalyanam**”). After Balder goes to sleep, Frigga begs the Axe and the Wolf not to harm him (“**No Shadows Here II**”), and Loki again finds the loophole in the promises they make.

Time passes, and Balder is now about to turn thirteen, the age at which he will become a man. Loki, the “trickster-teacher” is concerned that Frigga’s overprotectiveness has prevented Balder from becoming his own person. Choosing not to be bound by destiny, Loki searches for a trick that will teach Frigga the lesson she needs to learn (“**All Things Beautiful**”). That night, Frigga tells Balder with another story about light (“**The Miracle of the Oil**”), and the Jewish festival of Hanukkah (“**Ner Li**”). Later, an ever-more frantic Frigga begs the Wind and the Sea for assurance that no harm will come to her son (“**No Shadows Here III**”), while Loki again points out that every promise has a loophole.

The following morning, Odin wakes the family with plans for a feast to mark Balder’s thirteenth birthday (“**Feast of Thirteen (Feast of Twelve)**”). The feast will have thirteen seats, but Frigga hopes that if she does not deliver Loki’s invitation, there will be only twelve guests and that, somehow, this will prevent Balder’s destiny from becoming real. Loki turns up at the feast anyway and notices the decorations made of mistletoe – which just happens to be in the loophole of all the promises made by Frigga’s friends. As the guests celebrate, Loki fashions an arrow from the mistletoe, loads it into her bow, and shoots Balder dead.

Frigga and the others keep vigil until Frigga realizes how her attempts to protect Balder from his destiny prevented her from seeing the young man he was growing up to be. In her grief she considers cursing the mistletoe, but instead she blesses it (“**Blessing of the Mistletoe**”), bestowing upon it the power to multiply love expressed in its presence.

*a video recording of “Blessing of the Mistletoe” is available at*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N\\_SwSMfGyQ&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N_SwSMfGyQ&feature=youtu.be)

*[Frigga and the Mistletoe]*

# [*Frigga and the Mistletoe*]

## DRAMATURGICAL BACKGROUND

Many religions and cultures around the world observe some kind of festival or holiday celebrating the idea of light triumphing over darkness. Many but not all of these traditions are rooted in the observance of the winter solstice, the day of the year with the fewest hours of daylight. The winter solstice marks the midpoint between the end of the autumn harvest and the spring planting, the point after which each day promises more daylight, the point at which half of the planet literally begins to move closer to the sun.

In Norse mythology, the story of Frigga and Balder is a version of the solstice story. In the dark of winter, Frigga (also “Frigg” and “Frige”), the wife of Odin, gives birth to “the sun,” in the form of a baby boy named Balder (also “Baldr”).

Balder and Frigga also feature in other myths that explain, among other things, why we consider Friday the thirteenth to be an unlucky day, and why we kiss under the mistletoe. The day “Friday” is named for Frigga, and one story goes that a feast was held at Valhalla for twelve gods. Loki crashed the feast uninvited as the thirteenth guest, and killed the beloved Balder— thus thirteen and Frigga’s day became associated with bad luck. (This story is just one of many myths from around the world labelling Friday the 13th as unlucky.)

Another story, found in a 13th century Norse text, asserts that the god Balder was killed by a weapon either made of mistletoe or named for it, as a result of Loki’s scheming. Previously, Balder had dreamed of his death, and his mother Frigga had gone to every living thing and inanimate object to get an oath that it would not play a part in his death. The mistletoe, however, is overlooked. Later embellishments and retellings of this story have added the idea of Frigga’s blessing – or curse – on the mistletoe as the reason for lovers to kiss underneath it. As the god of love, she gave the mistletoe the power to bestow fertility. Mistletoe is also believed in many cultures to have protective powers, and a sprig was often hung over or near a cradle to prevent the child’s being taken by fairies. All varieties of mistletoe are “hemi-parasitic,” which means they attach to, penetrate, and take nutrients from a host plant, rather than growing their own roots.

In other stories, Frigga is said to have the power of prophecy. Among the liberties taken in our retelling, Frigga’s power of prophecy has become her identity as the god of destiny, seated at a loom where the stories of fate are woven. The association of fate or destiny and weaving is borrowed from other mythic traditions, of which the Moirae of Greek mythology are probably most familiar.

The three stories Frigga sees in her weaving and tells Balder as bedtime stories are each adapted from a cultural or religious story about sun or light. The first story, “**Raven Steals the Sun**,” is inspired by Native American and First Nations myths about Raven. The version told here most closely resembles a version credited to tribes in the Pacific Northwest.

The second story, “**Lord Krishna, Satyabhama, and the demon Narakasura**” is adapted from Hindu mythology. The Diwali or Deepavali festival— the Hindu “festival of lights”— typically falls in mid-November, and each day of the five-day festival is associated with different stories, gods, and traditions. The defeat of Narakasura is celebrated on the second day of Diwali, and contributes to the overall sense of Diwali as a celebration of the victory of light over darkness.

The third story, “**The Miracle of the Oil**,” will be familiar to many as the origin of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. Although a minor holiday in traditional Jewish practice, its proximity in the calendar to Christmas, and its loose similarities to religious and secular Christmas traditions (including the importance of light and the exchange of gifts) have increased the attention paid to Hanukkah both inside and outside Judaism.





*storytellers: "Raven Steals the Sun"*



*storytellers: "Lord Krishna, Satyabhama, and the demon Narakasura"*



*storytellers: "The Miracle of the Oil"*



***[Frigga and the Mistletoe]***