



Grieg

Lyric Pieces Vol. 2

Marian Lapšanský

Amadis

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Edvard Grieg (1843 - 1907)

Lyric Pieces (Lyriske Smaastykker) Vol. 2

Edvard Grieg, the most famous of Norwegian composers, was descended on his mother's side from a Norwegian provincial governor who had adopted the name Hagerup from his adoptive father, the Bishop of Trondheim. On his father's side he was of Scottish ancestry. His great-grandfather, Alexander Greig, had left Scotland after the battle of Culloden, with the final defeat of the Stuart army by the Hanoverian rulers of England. In Norway the Greigs became Griegs and during the nineteenth century established themselves comfortably in their new country, with the composer's grandfather and father both serving in turn as British consul in Bergen.

The Grieg household provided a musical background for a child. Musicians visited the family and these visitors included the distinguished violinist Ole Bull. It was he who persuaded the Griegs to send their son Edvard to the Conservatory in Leipzig, where the boy became a student at the age of fifteen, to undergo the rigours of a traditional German musical education.

In Leipzig not everything was to Grieg's liking. He objected to the dry nature of ordinary piano instruction, based on the work of Czerny and Clementi, and was able eventually to change to a teacher who was to instil in him a love of Schumann. He attended concerts by the famous Gewandhaus Orchestra that Mendelssohn had once directed and was present when Clara Schumann played her husband's piano concerto there, as well as at performances of Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*. At the same time he was able to meet other musicians, including the Irish composer, Arthur Sullivan, whose later fame, at least, was to depend on his operetta collaboration with W.S. Gilbert.

After a short period at home again in Norway, where he was unable to obtain a state pension, Grieg moved to Denmark. The capital, Copenhagen, was a cultural centre for both countries and here he had considerable encouragement from Niels Gade. The principal influence, however, came from a meeting with Rikard Nordraak, a young Norwegian, who fired him with ambition to seek inspiration in the folk-music of his own country.

Nordraak died tragically young, at the age of 24. Grieg, however, continued to prepare himself for employment in Norway, first of all taking a long holiday, which led him to Rome, where he met the great Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. It was a concert arranged by Grieg in Christiania (Oslo) and given by him with his cousin and future wife Nina Hagerup and the violinist Wilhelmine Norman-Neruda that secured him a position in Norway and provided support for the projected Norwegian Academy of Music, established in the following year, 1867.

The period that followed saw Grieg's struggle, with the backing of Liszt and the support of his friend, the dramatist and theatre-director Bjørnson, to establish some sort of national musical movement in Norway. He divided his time between concert activities, on tour as conductor and pianist, composition, and periods spent in the enjoyment of the Norwegian countryside.

Grieg's ambitions for Norwegian music were very largely realised. At home he came to occupy a position of honour, and his collaboration with Bjørnson and with Ibsen further identified him with the emerging national culture. He died in 1907, as he was about to undertake one more concert tour. For years he had suffered from lung trouble, the result of an illness in his student days. It was this that brought about his death at the age of 64.

Grieg wrote a large number of so-called *Lyrische Stücke*, Lyric Pieces, primarily for piano solo, although he arranged some of them for orchestra. The first set of eight short pieces was published as Opus 12 in Copenhagen in 1867. Other collections followed, with a second album, Opus 38, in 1884, and a third, Opus 43, two years later. The fourth collection of pieces, Opus 47, appeared in 1888, followed in 1891 by the six pieces that make up Opus 54. The sixth album, Opus 57, was published in 1893, with further collections until the appearance of the final, tenth series, Opus 71, in 1901. Short character pieces of this kind had a ready market, and suited well Grieg's particularly colourful handling of harmonic resources and the purely Norwegian elements that were part of his musical vocabulary.

By the time of his fifth collection of Lyric Pieces in 1891 Grieg found himself with a new lease of life, revived by a summer expedition in the Jotunheimen mountains with congenial friends. During the holiday he had met the nineteen-year-old milkmaid Gjendine Slaalien, whose singing and knowledge of traditional songs

deeply moved him. He dedicated the new volume of pieces to his friend Julius Röntgen, one of the summer party. The opening Herdboy breathes the air of the Norwegian mountains, followed by a traditionally inspired Norwegian March. The March of the Trolls brings to notice the legendary creatures of Norwegian folklore, whose kingdom had provided a notable scene in Ibsen's Peer Gynt. The mystery of night in Notturmo is dispelled by the dance of the Scherzo, while the whole set ends with an evocation of bellringing, its syncopated open fifths mingling, as the sustaining pedal imitates the resonance of the bells. Grieg later orchestrated four of these pieces to form an orchestral Lyric Suite.

After intermittent illness, some of it brought about by the dampness of Grieg's composer's hut at Trolldhaugen, Grieg, accompanied by his wife, travelled in the autumn of 1892 to Copenhagen, Leipzig and Berlin. After Christmas they took advantage of an invitation to them and to Sinding from Max Abraham, head of the publishing company of C. F. Peters, to spend a holiday with him in the South of France. At Menton, where they stayed, Grieg set to work on a further series of Lyric Pieces, two of them, *Entschwendene* (Vanished Days) and *Heimweh* (Home Sickness), nostalgic, the other pieces less distinctively Norwegian in character. Grieg played the pieces at a concert in Oslo in October, having returned to his own country after a short stay in the Italian Tyrol and the cancellation of a planned visit to England, where he had been invited for a series of London concerts and for a visit to Cambridge, where he was to receive a doctorate.

The next year, after another holiday in Menton and a visit to Paris, the Griegs travelled to England, in May receiving, in a ceremony that he found ridiculous, his Cambridge doctorate. He gave a concert in London in the same month and then returned thankfully to Norway, and after spa treatment, at the end of June to Trolldhaugen. In October, after four concerts in Bergen, he moved to Copenhagen, where he spent the next six months. He had planned visits to Germany, but was prevented from this by his health. In Copenhagen he wrote Two Nordic Melodies, for string orchestra, and a seventh series of Lyric Pieces. *Baekken* (Brooklet) and *Hjemad* (Homeward) retain a lively national element. The album starts with a less distinctive *Sylph*, followed by *Gratitude* and a graceful French *Serenade*, while *Phantom* lives up to its name.

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Lyric Pieces Vol. 2

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|-----------|---|--------|-----------|---|--------|
| 1 | Herdboy, Op. 54, No. 1 | (4:07) | 11 | She Dances, Op. 57, No. 5 | (2:39) |
| 2 | Norwegian March, Op. 54, No. 2 | (2:55) | 12 | Home Sickness, Op. 57, No. 6 | (4:45) |
| 3 | March of the Trolls, Op. 54, No. 3 | (2:44) | 13 | Sylphe, Op. 62, No. 1 | (1:42) |
| 4 | Notturmo Op. 54, No. 4 | (3:48) | 14 | Gratitude, Op. 62, No. 2 | (4:08) |
| 5 | Scherzo, Op. 54, No. 5 | (3:02) | 15 | French Serenade, Op. 62, No. 3 | (2:50) |
| 6 | Bell Ringing, Op. 54, No. 6 | (3:40) | 16 | Brooklet, Op. 62, No. 4 | (1:30) |
| 7 | Vanished Days, Op. 57, No. 1 | (5:37) | 17 | Phantom, Op. 62, No. 5 | (3:10) |
| 8 | Gade, Op. 57, No. 2 | (2:43) | 18 | Homeward, Op. 62, No. 6 | (2:41) |
| 9 | Illusion, Op. 57, No. 3 | (3:19) | | | |
| 10 | Secret, Op. 57, No. 4 | (4:27) | | | |

(Total: 61'06")

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