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# GRIEG

## SOLO PIANO MUSIC

**VOL 1**

Lyric Pieces • Sonata • Humoresques  
Scenes From Folk Life • Funeral March

Isabel Mourao • Piano



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“Artists like Bach and Beethoven have built churches and temples on the neigns. I would like, as Ibsen expresses it in his drama, to build dwelling places for my fellow men in which they can feel themselves at home and be happy. In other words: I have recorded my country’s folk music. In style and form I am a German romantic of the Schumann school, but at the same time I have drawn from my country’s rich treasure of folk tunes, and from this hitherto unexplored wellspring of the Norwegian national soul I have tried to create a national art.” Written when he was close to sixty years old, Edvard Grieg’s comment should provide the most advantageous point of departure for an appreciation of his music. Many of the professional musicians and critics from Grieg’s day to ours have seen him relative only to the “churches and temples” and to his German romantic style and form. That perspective is misleading, for then one can only compare Grieg with composers who handled the German forms and style better than he did, and consequently critical judgment is obscured by starting with the weakness rather than with the strength.

Norway and its indigenous music is the strength of Grieg — consciously and unconsciously. The folk music of Norway had remained relatively unaffected by the changes in European civilization that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The “Hardanger fiddle” still sounded the country tunes as it had for hundreds of years, the spring dances and hallings (flings) were still performed, and the lore and legends of Northern antiquity were still a real part of peasant life. It is significant that the first nationalistic musician to come out of Norway was a violinist. Ole Bull was a militant champion of his country and its music. He performed the native tunes, particularly those wonderful fiddle tunes, for the rest of the world with concert tours in Europe and America. Of importance to this discussion is the effect of Ole Bull’s militancy on Edvard Grieg. Bull encouraged Grieg to go for further study in Leipzig, preaching to Grieg in the strongest terms the importance of Norwegian nationalistic art, and he spent much of the summer of 1864 with Grieg walking the mountains and performing violin and piano music with him. Rikard Nordraak reinforced the direction toward Norwegian nationalism that Grieg was to follow. Nordraak is known as the composer of Norway’s beautiful national anthem, but his influence on Grieg and on the cause of Norwegian national art should not be minimized. He died in 1866 at twenty-four years of age, but from all reports he must have possessed a radiant personality and been totally dedicated to Norwegian music. He and Grieg were good friends and formed in 1864 in Copenhagen a Euterpe Society for the promotion of

Northern composers.

The craft of piano playing and of composing was acquired by Grieg from Germany. His mother had received her pianistic schooling in Hamburg and Grieg's own formal study took place in Leipzig. He himself belittled the training he received there but that training, plus his work with Gade, provided him with the "style and form" that he used throughout his life. Still, it was not the craftsmanship that endeared the music of Grieg to worldwide audiences, but the content — the "dwelling places for his fellow men." David Monrad-Johansen, in his admirable book on Grieg, says: "He was not only a musician, an artist, an individualist, he was before all a servant of the people, a servant of that 'half wild land, heavy with substance,' as he loved to call Norway. And he . . . intuitively sensed in Norwegian musical art, possibilities so enormous that his own work appeared to him merely as a glimpse into the promised land. It is because of this that Edvard Grieg has today such an arousing influence; to this his own work owes its unparalleled freshness and youthfulness. On this account his work involves great obligations, since it waits upon a posterity that will complete what he has begun. And for this reason the banner of the future waves over his life's work."

In 1862 Grieg finished the prescribed courses at the Leipzig Conservatory and headed home. The following year was not productive musically. At least the nineteen-year-old composed hardly anything and performed only one important concert. But he seemed, throughout his life, to need occasional periods of personal study and thought — to "regroup his forces" so to speak — to decide on what was to come next. This proved to be a three year sojourn in Copenhagen, a time of composition; work with the most renowned of the Northern musicians, Niels Gade; contact with other Scandinavian artists (notably Hans Christian Andersen and Nordrakk); and courtship of Nina Hagerup, his first cousin.

The Sonata, Op. 7, dates from 1865 and was composed in a week and a half. It was one of the few compositions that pleased Gade — understandably, as Gade was steeped in the tradition of Mendelssohn and the Leipzig Germans. The piece is a traditional four-movement work and, while Grieg's temperament favored the short and the lyric, his discipline and formal understanding proved equal to the larger sonata form. The second-movement *Andante* allows Grieg more opportunity for free expression, as it did to the classical composers, and it becomes more representative of his later works.

A few months in Italy early in 1866 satisfied the composer's wanderlust and he returned



home to Norway via Copenhagen. He saw the path he was to follow musically, he married, and with the exception of concert tours, he spent the rest of his life in Norway. It was in Christiania that the first volume of *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12, appeared.

Several of this set have become perennial teaching pieces — blessed with continued popularity and cursed by overexposure in the hands of the inexperienced. There is a freshness and naïveté in most of the short compositions by Grieg, however, that cannot be denied. The “Arietta” is reminiscent of Schumann’s *Scenes from Childhood*, a simple twice-repeated bit of nostalgia. The “Waltz” becomes more original and its nostalgia more personal, and the “Watchman’s Song” becomes gloomy. This short mood-painting was inspired directly by a performance of *Macbeth* and includes a most effective “Spirits of Night” Intermezzo remarkable for its economy of material. “The Elfin Dance,” “Folk Song,” and “Norwegian Melody” all point more directly to folk material, bringing this set of pieces back into the open air. The “Album-leaf” is pleasant enough but relatively undistinguished. The “Patriotic Song” is not included in this recording.

It was not until 1883 that the next set of *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 38, appeared. Grieg had already composed most of the larger works for which he is famous — the “Piano Concerto,” music for *Peer Gynt* and *Olav Trygvason*, and the *Ballad*. He had finished his residence in Norway’s capital with its responsibilities of conducting and performing, and had settled in Bergen and Lofthus. From 1878 till 1882 he composed very little — another period of self-study and thought. But the Op. 38 pieces, the Sonata for Piano and Cello, and *Waltz Caprices* for piano duet brought him out from the creative doldrums.

*Lyric Pieces*, Op. 38, as might be expected, show the result of the years of work and thought. The time spent living in the peasant country, fishing and absorbing the nature of Norway, bears fruit. The “Berceuse,” despite its middle section of agitation, never disturbs, and the “Folk Song” is given a straightforward account. (“Melodie” is not performed.) The “Halling” (Norwegian fling) and the “Spring Dance” sparkle with life — here his convictions and his background combine in “Music of the North.” In “Elegie,” Schumann comes to mind again, “Waltz” shows his love of Chopin, and in “Canon” Grieg displays an expressive control of strict form that any of the romantic composers might envy.

Again, a period of creative inactivity overcame the composer. His outer life was filled with events — strenuous concert-giving, both as pianist and conductor, plus the realization of the life-long dream of a home of his own overlooking the fjords, which he aptly named *Troldhaugen*

(House of the Trolls). His popularity was approaching legendary proportions. He wrote, "It is unbelievable, I cannot understand it. So many creative spirits far more important than I do not get the sympathy I meet everywhere. One thing is certain, I feel myself so wonderfully small with all this and could wish for a whole lifetime of work only to make myself worthy of all this appreciation."

The appearance of the *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 43, in 1886 broke another two year silence as a composer. The titles are: "Butterfly," "Solitary Wanderer," "At Home," "Little Bird," "Erotik," and "To Spring." Grieg in these pieces expresses personal impressions. The approach of Schumann in his numerous character pieces is still used but Grieg's harmonic language has become more unique — here Grieg begins to influence Norwegian music as well as be influenced by it. This set, Op. 43, is best when played as a group, keys and moods complementing each other and the F-sharp major of "To Spring" arriving as magically as the season itself.

Grieg was never to give up the role of concert performer and conductor. Frantic schedules were maintained. He and his wife, who was a most sympathetic performer of his songs, conquered London, Paris, and Berlin. While his fame rests on his composing, and he considered composing his life's purpose, the major part of his musical life was spent in other activities. Creative output appeared as bursts of energy, sometimes lasting for a year, sometimes for a month.

The *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 47, were the only works to appear in the next two-year period. They were finished in 1888. The formal plan of most all the *Lyric Pieces* is simple — a few phrases of thematic material, a contrasted section, and varied schemes of repetition. (It seems that the more interesting the thematic material, the less Grieg feels the need for repetition.) Folk music, however, is always able to withstand repetition, and consequently the "Halling," "Spring Dance," and "Melody" (certainly a folk-like tune) prove the most interesting of the seven pieces in Op. 47. These seven pieces are "Valse-Impromptu," "Album-leaf," "Melody," "Halling," "Melancholy," "Spring Dance," and "Elegy" (not performed).

The six pieces of Op. 54 are "music of the mountains," "Shepherd-boy," "Norwegian Peasants March," "March of the Dwarfs" (one of Grieg's most famous pieces), "Nocturne," "Scherzo," and "Ringing Bells." This last is built entirely on open fifths and is unique for Grieg, whose normal harmonic language is much more functional. Many authorities make much of the impressionistic effects of Grieg and his influence on the French Impressionists. While "Ringing

Bells” is obvious tone painting, and the lyric pieces abound with colorful mood descriptions, the approach of French Impressionists was really quite opposed to that of Grieg — although French composers were well acquainted with his work.

The six pieces in Op. 57 date from 1893 and perhaps reflect the illness that had bothered Grieg the winter of 1892–1893, and the depression into which the rigors of constant touring had thrown him. They are: “Vanished Days,” “Gade” (composed after the death of the Danish composer), “Illusion” (not performed), “The Secret,” “She Dances,” and “Longing for Home.”

Op. 62 came in 1895 and includes “Sylphe,” “Gratitude,” “French Serenade,” “The Brook,” “Phantom,” and “Homeward.”

The *Humoresques*, Op. 6, are dedicated to his friend, Rikard Nordraak. They were written the year following Grieg’s intimate contact with Ole Bull. While Grieg was yet as relatively unfamiliar with the source material of Norwegian folk music, he managed in these pieces to reflect the forces of that “well spring.” The four *Humoresques* are, of course, couched in the forms in which he was trained, but throughout the pieces appear the alternate triplet and duplet, the accents of the “spring dances,” the drone of the country fiddle. No wonder Nordraak, the archnationalist, was delighted.

There are six pieces in the *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 65 (1896): “From Early Years,” “Peasant’s Song,” “Melancholy,” “Salon,” “In Ballad Vein,” and “Wedding Day at Troidhaugen.”

The Op. 68 pieces appear next on this recording. Having cultivated the genre throughout his life, the writing of lyric pieces became the easiest, or most comfortable, for Grieg. Besides, they were enormously profitable — appearing on piano desks throughout the music-loving world. The pieces in Op. 68 are among the most interesting of all nevertheless: the “Sailor’s Song” (not performed) is a good sturdy nationalistic march, and the delicacy of the “Grandmother’s Minuet” provides a perfect contrast to it. “At Thy Feet” is extremely serious for a “lyric piece” — its harmonic treatment is bold, and the trait of literal repetition is not present. This and the following “Evening in the Mountains” are high points for Grieg. His use of mysterious introduction, the lengthy solo voice followed by harmonic treatment, and the final repose of the last measures make for a satisfaction only a great artist can give. The set closes with “By the Cradle” and a “Melancholy Waltz.”

The titles of *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 71, dated 1901, are “Once Upon a Time,” “Summer Evening,” “Puck,” “Peace of the Woods,” “Halling,” “Gone” (not performed), and “Remembrances.”

In 1872, the *Scenes from Peasant Life*, Op. 19, were performed for the first time. The three pieces are more extended than most of the other short piano works. The first, "On the Mountains," opens with the mystery and excitement of a pianissimo march in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, but suffers from constant repetition. "Norwegian Bridal Procession" — appearing, passing, and disappearing in the distance — is one of Grieg's masterpieces, filled with costume, laughter, and movement. The last piece of the set, "From the Carnival," seems to stall in the tonality of A, despite a rather interesting and lengthy (for Grieg) coda.

LEONARD SEEBER

*Isabel Mourao was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and began her piano studies at age five with Professor Kliass and later Magda Tagliaferro in Brazil, and Eduard Steuermann in the United States. Her general music studies were with Koellreutter in Brazil and Georges Dandelot in Paris. She performed frequently as a young girl in Brazil, her international career finally launched with a prize at the Marguerite Long International Competition in Paris. Since that time she has performed all over the world, in U.S. cities such as New York, Washington, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia; in Europe — Germany, England, France, Portugal, Italy, Holland, Austria; and in South America — Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay, along with her native Brazil. At her debut in the U.S., she was heralded by the press in the following way: "Brazil, which has produced Guiomar Novaes, has done it again in Isabel Mourao."*

*Ms. Mourao is in fact related to the great Brazilian pianist Guiomar Novaes, as well as to the Brazilian composer Camargo Guarnieri, whose preludes she has recorded. Mme. Novaes was very encouraging of her young compatriot, and took her under her wing, fostering her career tremendously in Europe and the U.S. It was at her recommendation that Vox commissioned Ms. Mourao to record these volumes of Grieg's solo piano music.*

*Ms. Mourao continues to be active on the concert scene in Brazil, giving masters classes at Brasilia's University, and at the International Summer Courses in Terezopolis. In addition, she has served on the juries of several of the most important piano competitions in Brazil.*

*In summing up her artistry, the Manchester Guardian said, "In fine, there are pianists of such vivid personality and compelling talent that they hold us enthralled by new facets of beauty. To this choice company, Isabel Mourao already belongs."*



CD 1 — 72:53 Minutes

**Sonata in E Minor, Op. 7 (18:00)**

1. Allegro moderato — 4:26 • 2. Andante molto — 4:01  
3. Alla menuetto, ma poco più lento — 3:40 • 4. Finale: Molto allegro — 5:49

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 12 (11:31)**

5. Arietta — 1:32 • 6. Waltz — 2:02 • 7. Watchman's Song — 2:55  
8. The Elfin Dance — :48 • 9. Folk Song — 1:45 • 10. Norwegian Melody — :57  
11. Album-leaf — 1:28

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 38 (14:00)**

12. Berceuse — 2:51 • 13. Folk Song — 1:48 • 14. Halling — :47  
15. Spring Dance — 1:20 • 16. Elegie — 2:22 • 17. Waltz — 1:02  
18. Canon — 3:48

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 43 (15:59)**

19. Butterfly — 1:49 • 20. Solitary Wanderer — 2:03 • 21. At Home — 2:15  
22. Little Bird — 2:02 • 23. Erotik — 2:56 • 24. To Spring — 2:51

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 47 (14:53)**

25. Valse-Impromptu — 3:24 • 26. Album-leaf — 2:56 • 27. Melody — 3:22  
28. Halling — 1:09 • 29. Melancholy — 2:25 • 30. Spring Dance — 1:26

CD 2 — 68:20 Minutes

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 54 (21:25)**

1. Shepherd-boy — 4:24 • 2. Norwegian Peasants — 3:38 • 3. March of the Dwarfs — 3:06  
4. Nocturne — 4:25 • 5. Scherzo — 2:16 • 6. Ringing Bells — 3:33

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 57 (22:13)**

7. Vanished Days — 5:53 • 8. Gade — 4:06 • 9. The Secret — 5:09  
10. She Dances — 2:57 • 11. Longing for Home — 4:06

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 62 (15:34)**

12. Sylphe — 1:38 • 13. Gratitude — 3:51 • 14. French Serenade — 2:01  
15. The Brook — 1:52 • 16. Phantom — 3:20 • 17. Homeward — 2:48

**Humoresques, Op. 6 (8:45)**

18. No. 1 - Tempo di valse — 2:12 • 19. No. 2 - Tempo di menuetto — 3:15 • 20. No. 4 - Allegro alla burla — 3:17

CD 3 — 68:37 Minutes

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 65 (20:18)**

1. From Early Years — 4:31 • 2. Peasant's Song — 1:40 • 3. Melancholy — 3:27  
4. Salon — 2:15 • 5. In Ballad Vein — 3:14 • 6. Wedding Day at Troldhaugen — 5:08

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 68 (13:05)**

7. Grandmother's Minuet — 2:15 • 8. At Thy Feet — 2:57 • 9. Evening in the Mountains — 2:23  
10. By the Cradle — 2:56 • 11. Melancholy Waltz — 2:31

**Lyric Pieces, Op. 71 (15:22)**

12. Once Upon a Time — 3:14 • 13. Summer Evening — 2:17 • 14. Puck — 1:44  
15. Peace of the Woods — 4:42 • 16. Halling — 1:36 • 17. Remembrances — 1:46

**Scenes from Peasant Life, Op. 19 (15:25)**

18. On the Mountains — 4:15 • 19. Norwegian Bridal Procession — 3:35  
20. From the Carnival — 5:33 • 21. Funeral March in Memory of Richard Nordraak — 5:59

**EDVARD GRIEG: Solo Piano Music, Volume 1****ISABEL MOURAO, Piano**

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ADD

CD 1 — 72:53 Minutes

Sonata in E Minor, Op. 7 (18.00)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 12 (11.5)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 38 (14.00)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 43 (13.50)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 47 (14.5)

CD 2 — 68:20 Minutes

Lyric Pieces, Op. 54 (21.25)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 57 (22.15)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 62 (15.34)

Humoresques, Op. 6 (8.15)

CD 3 — 68:37 Minutes

Lyric Pieces, Op. 65 (20.18)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 68 (13.05)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 71 (15.22)

Scenes from Peasant Life, Op. 19 (13.25)

**COMPLETE PROGRAM NOTES INCLUDED**  
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