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ELOQUENCE

GRIEG

Holberg Suite
Two Elegiac Melodies
Two Nordic Melodies
Lyric Pieces
Wedding Day at Troldhaugen

Willi Boskovsky
Stanley Black
Sir Charles Mackerras



EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)

Holberg Suite, Op. 40

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | I Präludium | 2'38 |
| 2 | II Sarabande (Andante) | 4'43 |
| 3 | III Gavotte (Allegretto) – Musette (poco più mosso) – Gavotte | 3'05 |
| 4 | IV Air (Andante religioso) | 6'18 |
| 5 | V Riguadon (Allegro con brio) | 3'39 |

Two Elegiac Melodies, Op. 34

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 6 | I Heart's wounds | 2'31 |
| 7 | II The last spring | 4'17 |

Two Nordic Melodies, Op. 63

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|---|---------------------------------------|------|
| 8 | I In the style of a folk song | 6'21 |
| 9 | II Cowkeeper's tune and country dance | 4'47 |

Peer Gynt, Op. 23

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|------|
| 10 | No. 12 The death of Aase | 3'30 |
|----|--------------------------|------|

Sigurd Jorsalfar, Op. 56

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|------|
| 11 | No. 4 Ceremonial March (Homage March) | 8'53 |
|----|---------------------------------------|------|

National Philharmonic Orchestra
Willi Boskovsky

Lyric Pieces, Op. 54

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|------|
| 12 | I Shepherd's Boy | 5'44 |
| 13 | II Norwegian Rustic March | 3'12 |
| 14 | III Notturmo | 4'22 |
| 15 | IV March of the Dwarfs | 3'39 |

London Symphony Orchestra
Stanley Black

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 16 | Wedding Day at Troldhaugen (arr. Huppertz) | 5'40 |
|----|---|------|

London Proms Symphony Orchestra
Sir Charles Mackerras

Total timing: 74'22

Edvard Grieg was most successful as a miniaturist. After tackling a symphony, a piano concerto, piano and violin sonatas, and a string quartet relatively early in his career, his increasing fascination with Norwegian folk music influenced him to turn his attention to smaller forms instead. There is no shame in that; as much the same could be said of Chopin, another great composer of the Romantic era. Rare is the amateur pianist who hasn't tackled at least one of Grieg's piano works, whose wide range of technical difficulty suggests their artistic appeal and merit are matched by their pedagogical usefulness.

Ludvig Holberg was an eighteenth-century Norwegian scholar and playwright who, like Grieg, was born in Bergen. The *Holberg Suite* (also known as *From Holberg's Time*) was written in 1884 in celebration of the bicentennial of the playwright's birth. (Grieg also wrote a cantata for men's voices for the occasion, but it has been all but forgotten.) The suite is a pastiche; Grieg imitated styles and genres of music that were current when Holberg was alive, but he gave them an attractive Romantic aftertaste. Apparently Grieg didn't rate this occasional work very highly – he referred to it as 'a peruke piece' – but he saw its

popular appeal. (He didn't think much of his incidental music for *Peer Gynt*, either.) Less than a year later, he arranged the suite for string orchestra. It is in this version that it is most familiar today. Indeed, it has been used literally as a 'textbook example' of how to orchestrate piano music effectively.

The *Two Elegiac Melodies* are arrangements for string orchestra as well, but this time they originated as works for voice and piano. Aasmund Olavsson Vinje was a journalist and poet who attempted to draw attention to the Norwegian dialect spoken by people living away from the country's urban centers. Vinje died in 1870, leaving behind misunderstanding and contempt for his work, but Grieg was impressed with it and in 1880 he set several of Vinje's poems to music. 'Våren' (Spring) and 'Den Sårede' (The Wounded Heart) are the second and third songs to be included in Grieg's final set of twelve. A year later, he arranged them for strings, and again, the arrangements' popularity has eclipsed that of the originals. In 1903, Grieg made a visit to Paris, where a concert of his orchestral music was being given. It was reviewed by none other than Claude Debussy. The *Two Elegiac Melodies* were included on the program. Of them, Debussy

famously wrote, 'L'on a dans la bouche le goût bizarre et charmant d'un bonbon rose qui serait fourré de neige' – essentially, that they had the unusual and charming taste of pink sweets filled with snow.

The *Two Nordic Melodies* date from 1894-95. This time, the order was reversed: Grieg wrote the versions for string orchestra first and arranged the pieces for piano later on. Fredrik Due was a Swedish-Norwegian diplomat living in Paris, where Grieg met him in 1894. Due gave Grieg a 16-bar melody, which the composer subsequently expanded into 'In the style of a folk song'. Norwegian composer and organist Ludwig Mathias Lindeman supplied the tunes for the 'Cowkeeper's tune and country dance' from his own collection of Norwegian folk music, which Grieg had drawn from on several occasions.

Although Grieg may have undervalued his aforementioned incidental music to Henrik Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*, it has been played (and even parodied) so often that it is familiar even to listeners who know next to nothing about classical music. 'The Death of Aase' introduces the play's third act, in which the feckless wastrel Peer, having deserted his mother, returns home

to find her on her deathbed. (For all his faults, this antihero loves his mother.) The music rises to an impassioned climax and then fades away. Commentators have compared this piece to the 'death' of the Scandinavian summer, and the heat of the ever more pallid sun being swallowed up by the lengthening and progressively colder nights.

A few years earlier, Grieg wrote incidental music to another play, *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, a historical drama by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. As only three orchestral numbers and two songs were required, this was much less stressful for the composer than *Peer Gynt* would later prove to be. The *Homage March*, by far the most familiar section, is the Norwegian cousin to Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* marches. It comes from the drama's final act, and heralds the reconciliation between two Norwegian rulers, the crusader king Sigurd and his rival Øystein.

Over a period of about three decades, Grieg wrote ten volumes of *Lyric Pieces* for solo piano. Each volume contains six to eight smaller pieces, most of them with descriptive titles such as 'Evening in the Mountains' and 'Butterfly'. Book 5, composed in 1891, is one of the most popular, and four of its six constituents

subsequently were orchestrated and published as the *Lyrical Suite*. Grieg himself orchestrated 'Shepherd Boy' and the other three were orchestrated by conductor Anton Seidl, although Grieg revised his work before publication, finding it too heavily scored. (Seidl also orchestrated a fifth piece from Book 5, 'Bell Ringing', but Grieg rejected it entirely, probably on the grounds that the piece's sonorities, so intriguing on the piano, cannot be replicated by a symphony orchestra.) The final 'March of the Dwarfs' (more a brisk jog than a real march!) confirms the composer's aptitude for the grotesque, already observed at several points in his music for *Peer Gynt*.

Speaking of the grotesque, Grieg's villa, not far from Bergen, was called 'Trolldaugen'. The literal translation of its name is 'Goblin Hill'. Goblins notwithstanding, it was, for the most part, a happy place for Grieg and his family, and it was immortalized in a piece from Book Eight of the *Lyrical Pieces*, 'Wedding Day at Trolldaugen'. Grieg himself played this happy showpiece, whose original title was 'The Well-Wishers are Coming', on several important occasions, including on his 25th wedding anniversary, and also when he was introduced to Germany's Kaiser William II in 1904. The

orchestration heard here is not Grieg's own, but one hopes that he would have been pleased to hear the original piano version's joyfulness amplified in this orchestral version.

Raymond Tuttle

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