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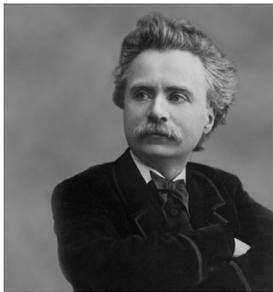
Preface

DECEMBER 2021
MASTERWORKS #3

MASTERWORKS #3:

TCHAIKOVSKY & GRIEG DECEMBER 3 - 5, 2021

Even the most devoted music lover might have difficulty naming more than the three most recognized compositions by our featured composer: *Peer Gynt Suites*, *Holberg Suites* and *Piano Concerto in A Minor*, which will be performed on our December Masterworks. Yet, the name Edvard Grieg is instantly recognizable and his importance as a composer cannot be understated. "Edvard Grieg is to Norway what Shakespeare is to England: his country's most celebrated son."ⁱ



Edvard Grieg

exemplified by our other featured composer, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Grieg was born on June 15, 1843 in Bergen, Norway, the fourth of five siblings.ⁱⁱⁱ His father, Alexander, was a successful merchant, and his mother, Gesine Judithe Hagerup, was an educated pianist.^{iv} He showed a strong early interest in music and at age six began piano lessons with his mother.^v He would sit at the piano for hours, exploring tunes and composing his own. Since he was not the oldest son, Edvard didn't need to pursue an education that would prepare him to take over the family business. That task was the obligation of his older brother, John, which left Edvard free to explore all the wonders of music without limitation.^{vi}

Edvard's marks in school were quite poor^{vii}. His classmates gave him the nickname "Mosak" because he was the only one who correctly answered a teacher's question about a Requiem composed by Mozart. The other students, who had never heard of Mozart, found it odd that this quiet young boy, who

contributed nothing in class, knew the answer.^{viii} Even in music, Edvard was not the most disciplined pupil. He preferred to improvise and explore the range of the piano, rather than play compulsory etudes.^{ix}

In the summer of 1858, the family was visited by Edvard's mother's brother-in-law, a famed virtuoso violinist, Ole Bull.^x Edvard was asked to play and included some of his own compositions. Grieg later recalled the meeting as the single most important event of his young life.^{xi} Ole Bull persuaded Edvard's parents to permit the youngster to leave Norway and enroll in studies at the Leipzig Conservatory, one of the most famous conservatories in Europe, founded in 1843 by Felix Mendelssohn.^{xii}



Leipzig Conservatory

Thanks to the encouragement of Ole Bull and financial support from his parents, Edvard left Norway at the age of 15 and began studies in Leipzig, a European metropolis with tall buildings, crowds of people and narrow streets, the polar opposite of the small town of Bergen.^{xiii} At first, Edvard experienced bouts of homesickness and had difficulty adjusting to a new language, but gradually, he began to feel at home.^{xiv} He studied the works of Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Wagner, among others. Edvard graduated from the

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Conservatory in 1862 with excellent grades, but while there, he had contracted a form of tuberculosis which collapsed his left lung.^{xv} He was left with a permanent bend in his back and reduced lung capacity that remained with him for the rest of his life.^{xvi}



Edvard Grieg and
Nina Hagerup

To expand his artistic environment, Grieg took up residence in Copenhagen, Denmark, the only Scandinavian city with rich international cultural influences.^{xvii} It was in Copenhagen that he performed his first concert which included his String

Quartet in D Minor, a work that has disappeared without a trace.^{xviii} Grieg was happy in Denmark, and it was there that he reconnected with his first cousin, Nina Hagerup, who had moved away from Bergen when she was just eight years old.^{xix} Nina was an excellent pianist and a gifted singer, and the two cousins fell in love.^{xx} They were secretly engaged in 1864, and neither of their parents were present at the couple's wedding on June 11, 1867.^{xxi}

In a flurry of joyful inspiration following the birth of his daughter, Alexandra, on April 10, 1868, Edvard composed his first and most enduring masterpiece, the *Piano Concerto in A Minor*.^{xxii} It was his breakout moment, and Grieg was immediately recognized as a composer of international significance.^{xxiii} On May 21, 1869, his joy was crushed when, on a visit with family in Bergen, their one-year old baby contracted meningitis and died.^{xxiv}

They never had another child, and Grieg never wrote another piano concerto, even though he continued to compose and perform.

As a childless couple, Edvard and Nina's lifestyle became one of touring and performing artists, traveling throughout Europe, but never putting down roots.^{xxv}

On his journeys, Grieg became friends with

many other composers who achieved international recognition, including Tchaikovsky, Johannes Brahms, Franz Liszt, Camille Saint-Saens and countless others.^{xxvi} His unique style and harmonies also influenced other composers that followed in his



Edvard Grieg and Family

footsteps, including Bela Bartok, Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy.^{xxvii} Between 1874 and 1876, at the request of the famed playwright, Henrik Ibsen, Grieg set to work composing incidental music for Ibsen's play, *Peer Gynt*, a play about a Norwegian folk hero.^{xxviii} The music became so popular that Grieg later created two fifteen-minute *Peer Gynt Suites* for concert performances.^{xxix} The music of *Peer Gynt* references Scandinavian folk melodies and creates powerful imagery in the listener's mind, making it suitable for countless film scores and video games.^{xxx} The opening movement, *Morning Mood*, as well as *In the Hall of the Mountain King* are likely recognizable even to those with no connection to western classical music.

In 1872, Grieg was made a member of the Royal Music Society in Stockholm.^{xxxi} In 1874, after



Grieg's Home -
Trolldhaugen

being awarded the state's annual grant of 1600 kronen from the Norwegian Storting (the supreme legislature of Norway, located in Oslo), Grieg quit teaching and settled into a routine of composing and concertizing.^{xxxii} From 1878 to 1880, Grieg embarked on a two-year journey,

performing in most of the major cities of Europe.^{xxxiii} It is remarkable to consider the stamina demanded of Grieg while on tour, given that he had only one working lung.^{xxxiv} Likely as a consequence of their hectic touring schedule, Edvard and Nina did not create a true home of their own until 1885, when they settled into a villa at Trolldhaugen, just outside of Grieg's home town of Bergen.^{xxxv} Grieg was a frequent traveler to England, and in 1894 he was given an honorary degree by Cambridge University.^{xxxvi} Elated, he rushed to the post office following the ceremony and sent a letter to a friend, signing his telegram "Dr. Grieg."^{xxxvii} In 1907, at the age of 64, Grieg was about to embark on yet another concert tour to England. While awaiting the boat that would take the couple to England, Grieg suffered a massive heart attack and died in the hospital on September 4, 1907.^{xxxviii}

Much adored during his lifetime, Grieg is credited with creating a Norwegian "national" sound. Without question, he fulfilled his stated goal to "create a national form of music, which could give the Norwegian people an identity."^{xxxix}

INTERESTED IN HEARING MUSIC BY GRIEG?

Enjoy the hauntingly beautiful Holberg Suite, performed by the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1wQ8ZMZq60&t=9s>

A popular cartoon, Line Rider, has created two animations, using the music from *Peer Gynt*:

Morning Mood:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AASdLFFHX24>

In the Hall of the Mountain King:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq6-daicWh8>



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC WILL SOUND?

Try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Please enjoy the popular music of *Peer Gynt*, in *Peer Gynt Suite No. 1 and No. 2*, along with sheet music that you can follow:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aLF-1tJgJw>

Enjoy this performance of Grieg's Piano Concerto in A Minor, performed by legendary pianist Arthur Rubenstein:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1Yoyz6_Los&t=1448s

Hear – and watch – the full ballet of *The Nutcracker* by Tchaikovsky, performed by the Russian State Ballet:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hJ9t28D4EI



Casey's Classics

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? **Coleman Casey**, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* is of course one of this composer's greatest works, and the best complete performance is from Vladimir Ashkenazy conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (DECCA).

Grieg's beloved *Piano Concerto in A Minor* has been recorded by every great pianist, but never better than with the Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Antonio Pappano (WARNER).

Grieg's marvelous *Peer Gynt* has been recorded countless times, but Sir Thomas Beech's recording of the complete incidental music with the Royal Philharmonic has never been surpassed (WARNER).



References

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