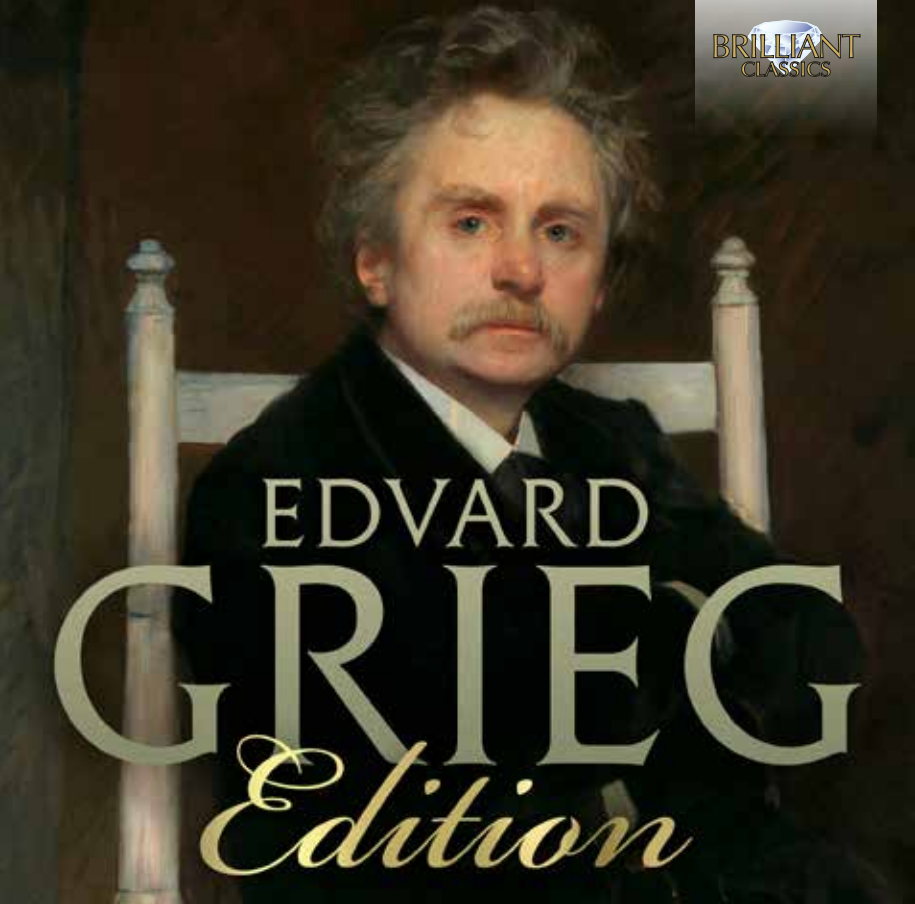


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BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

A portrait of Edvard Grieg, an elderly man with grey hair and a mustache, wearing a dark suit and white shirt. He is seated in a wooden chair with decorative posts. The background is dark and textured.

EDVARD
GRIEG
Edition

Edvard Grieg, the fourth of five children, was born in Bergen on 15 June 1843. The family name, formerly Greig pre-1779, was of Scottish origin, Edvard's great-grandfather having emigrated to Norway some time after the Battle of Culloden (16 April 1746), possibly because of the resulting economic depression. Grieg's father, Alexander Grieg, was British vice-consul in Bergen, while Edvard's Norwegian mother also came from a distinguished background.

Aged six, Grieg began piano lessons with his mother, who had studied in Hamburg. She also wrote plays and poems, passing on to Edvard literary appreciation as well as musical. From his earliest studies Edvard was attracted to the expressive power of harmony. As he told his American biographer Henry Theophilus Finck, 'The realm of harmonies always was my dream-world, and the relationship between my harmonic sensibility and Norwegian folk music was a mystery even to myself.' His native folk music had become a predominant influence, associating him with the Nationalist movement which flourished in the latter half of the 19th century. At the age of 15 Grieg met with the famous violinist Ole Bull – 'almost a folk hero, a symbol of the new Norway...', in the words of biographer John Horton. Bull recognised the young man's talent and urged his parents, who were entirely acquiescent, to send him to study at the Leipzig Conservatory, the leading musical institution in Europe. Its piano department was directed by Ignaz Moscheles. Although Grieg was instinctively averse to rules and regulations, he did gain the necessary foundations of technique in both piano and composition. His criticism of Leipzig Conservatory's teaching – much later in his career – should be understood in the light of his own development away from its Germanic basis and towards self-fulfilment of a Nationalist flavour.

Grieg's close ties with the Bergen Philharmonic led to his appointment as Music Director (1880–82). In 1885 he moved to Trolldhaugen, a villa built the previous year in a beautiful situation near Bergen, overlooking Lake Norddås. By the late 1880s Grieg was receiving an increasing number of international invitations to play and conduct – in Madrid, St Petersburg, Vienna, etc.

On 4 September 1907 Grieg died in Bergen from heart failure, after a long illness. His wife Nina outlived him by nearly 30 years.

The appreciation of Grieg's music in England (he also made two brief trips to Scotland) was stimulated by seven visits (1862–1906), amounting to six months of his life. His reputation grew phenomenally, so that in the 1880s he became for the British public the most popular living composer, just as Mendelssohn had been 50 years earlier. To the British of that time, Norway represented a remote, little-known corner of northern Europe, so Grieg's celebrity status is a fine reminder of how far-reaching music's influence can be.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC & ORCHESTRATIONS

Grieg composed the concert-overture *In Autumn* Op.11 in 1865, basing the work on a song he had written the previous year – 'The Autumn Storm' – while also using (according to his own note) a traditional Reapers' Song. He subsequently arranged the overture for piano duet before re-orchestrating it in 1887.

Grieg composed his Piano Concerto in the summer of 1868, while on holiday near Copenhagen with Nina, whom he had married the previous year. Surprisingly, although the concerto is his most popular work, it is also his earliest composition of any importance. Nothing he had written previously gave any hint that he would soon produce such an outstandingly successful work. Although Grieg adopted certain structural features of Schumann's Piano Concerto, his own melodic material is completely original. The slow movement is deeply poetic, whereas the finale begins with a theme derived from the *halling*, a strongly accented Norwegian dance.

The Symphonic Dances Op.64 appeared almost simultaneously in 1898 in versions for piano duet and for orchestra, but Grieg made clear that his original conception was orchestral. It was only when he planned a visit to Denmark with Nina and needed a new piano duet to perform with her that he wrote down this keyboard transcription, before returning to the orchestral version.

Grieg's collection of 17 *Slåtter* (Norwegian Peasant Dances) Op.72 contains some of his most forward-looking compositions, anticipating Bartók's creation of bold new harmonies from scales peculiar to folk music. The pianist and composer Øistein Sommerfeldt orchestrated Nos. 8, 4 and 2.

In 1881 Grieg composed his set of four Norwegian Dances Op.35 for piano duet. The now-familiar orchestral version was arranged by Hans Sitt, viola-player of the Brodsky Quartet.

The *Funeral March in memory of Rikard Nordraak* (1866 in its original piano version) conveys the composer's profound grief at his compatriot's death at the age of 23. Nordraak who composed the Norwegian national anthem, had met Grieg in Copenhagen in 1863. He was a charismatic man who had studied in Germany before becoming convinced that Norwegian music of the future should directly stem from its national folk music. Grieg was already enthusiastic about musical Nationalism, but admitted that Nordraak's own passion greatly influenced him. Johan Halvorsen arranged the Funeral March for orchestra. The Ballade Op.24 (arranged by Geirr Tveitt from the original piano piece) is a virtuoso, characterful work from 1875, comprising a theme and 14 variations.

The Symphony in C minor is Grieg's earliest surviving orchestral composition and his only work in this form. The Danish composer Niels Gade had urged the 20-year-old Grieg to 'go home and write a symphony'. He finished the work in May 1864, but his dissatisfaction led him to withdraw the piece after only a few performances. At his death the manuscript was found, inscribed 'never to be performed', but in the early 1980s, after much discussion, the symphony was played in Russia, then in Bergen.

In 1900 Grieg orchestrated his Old Norwegian Melody with Variations Op.51, originally written nine years earlier for two pianos. The neglect of this attractive piece is regrettable.

The Incidental Music to *Sigurd Jorsalfar* Op.22 (often translated as Sigurd the Crusader), dates from 1872. The play, by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, a very influential poet, playwright and patriot, is based on an episode from the *Heimskringla Saga*. Grieg's music is typically memorable, especially the Homage March, introduced softly by four cellos.

In 1888 Grieg compiled and re-orchestrated movements from his Incidental Music for Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* to form a concert suite. Including such popular numbers as 'Morning' and 'In the Hall of the Mountain King', this First Suite has always been the most frequently performed, but Suite No.2 (1891), including the haunting 'Solweig's Song', is equally representative of the quality of Grieg's score, which is among the finest incidental music ever composed.

Grieg's 12 Melodies Op.33 (1880) are settings of poems by Aasmund Olavsson Vinje. In 1881 he arranged two of them for string orchestra as Two Elegiac Melodies Op.34. The second song from the original set, titled 'Spring', became in its new incarnation the second of these Two Elegiac Melodies, retitled 'The Last Spring'. It is based on one of Grieg's most powerful melodies.

1884 was the bicentenary of the birth of the great Norwegian writer, philosopher and playwright Ludvig Holberg. For the national celebrations Grieg composed the so-called *Holberg Suite* Op.40, a captivating piece evoking the spirit of the French composers of harpsichord music contemporary with Holberg. Grieg's adoption of baroque dance forms such as the gavotte and sarabande underlines this link with the French Baroque. Grieg premiered the piano version on 7 December 1884 in Bergen. The string orchestra version dates from the following year.

Soon after the publication of his Lyric Pieces Book IX Op.68 for piano, Grieg orchestrated two of the finest – 'Evening in the Mountains' and 'At the Cradle'.

The wistful 'Cattle Call' and bracing 'Peasant Dance' originated as two piano pieces (Nos. 22 and 18) from 25 Norwegian Folk Songs and Dances Op.17, but Grieg joined the pair together to make the second of Two Nordic Songs Op.63 for string orchestra.

The Lyric Suite Op.54 began as an 1894 orchestration by Anton Seidl, then conductor of the New York Philharmonic, of four of the Lyric Pieces Book V, but Grieg was dissatisfied and substituted his own version.

MUSIC WITH VOICE & ORCHESTRA

Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* was first produced in February 1876. Grieg's complete score of incidental music comprises more than 30 numbers, some only about a minute, or even less, in duration. The extended labours of both playwright and composer were rewarded with great public acclaim. Later, in Germany (premiere 1913), *Peer Gynt* received 1000 performances in Berlin then further productions in more than 50 other theatres.

Composed around the same time as the *Peer Gynt* music, *Before a Southern Convent* Op.20 and *Bergliot* Op.42 both have texts by Bjørnson. Op.20 was conceived as an operatic scene, while Op.42 is for declamation (with piano 1871, orchestrated 1885).

Grieg made orchestral versions of a number of his songs. The first song from *The Fisher-Maiden* Op.21 – 'The First Meeting' – has one of his loveliest melodies. *The Mountain Thrall* (*Den Bergtekne*) Op.32 (1878) has the character of a ballad, powerful but economical. Scored for baritone, two horns and strings, this has some claim to being considered his greatest work, as Brian Schlotel has written.

The cantata *Landkjenning* (Land-Sighting) Op.31 is based on an episode in the life of Olav Trygvason, King of Norway at the end of the 10th century. As a Viking warrior he had threatened the coasts of England and France, before a hermit on the Scilly Isles converted him to Christianity.

The three scenes comprising *Olav Trygvason* Op.50 are all that was completed of a projected opera, a collaboration between Grieg and Bjørnson. The action continues from the end of the cantata *Landkjenning*, showing the impact of the returning Olav and the subsequent conversion of the Norwegians to Christianity.

CHAMBER MUSIC

Grieg completed only five chamber works, the most substantial being a string quartet. He especially valued his violin sonatas: ‘... these three works are among my very best and represent different stages in my development’. The Violin Sonata in F Op.8 (1865) is a youthful work of characteristic freshness. The Violin Sonata No.2 in G Op.13 (1867), dedicated to Johan Svendsen, was described by the composer as more ‘nationalist’ than its predecessor, and indeed there is much more influence of Norwegian folk-music here.

The Andante con moto, Grieg’s unfinished piano trio, dates from 1878. Left in manuscript form for 100 years, the piece was belatedly published in 1978. It was Grieg’s friend, the Dutch composer Julius Röntgen, who rediscovered the work. He wrote to Grieg’s widow Nina: ‘It is a beautiful piece... what a solemnity it conveys!’

In the Third Violin Sonata in C minor Op.45 (1886–87), the most powerful of Grieg’s works in this form, he successfully adapts sonata form to his own essentially lyrical style.

The Cello Sonata in A minor Op.36, composed for Grieg’s cellist brother John, was completed in April 1883. If one wished to challenge Debussy’s dismissal of Grieg’s music, ‘a pink bon-bon stuffed with snow’, the opening movement of this sonata – big-boned and fiery, with an intensely lyrical second subject – would provide strong evidence.

In Grieg’s only completed string quartet (in G minor Op.27, dating from 1877–78) he employs a motto-theme borrowed from his song ‘Fiddlers’ Op.25/1. The quartet is a work of originality and passion. A second string quartet (1891) remained unfinished in two movements.

PIANO MUSIC

Grieg composed ten books of Lyric Pieces for piano, beginning with Op.12 in 1866–67 and ending with Op.71 in 1901. All ten volumes became best-sellers. This is a wonderful anthology, one of the largest of all collections of piano compositions. ‘Solitary Traveller’, No.2 from Book III Op.43 (1886), is a haunting piece, evoking pathos with the simplest of means. Book V Op.54 is arguably the finest group, as reflected in the selection orchestrated as the Lyric Suite. ‘Homesickness’ is the last of the six pieces comprising Book VI Op.57 (1893). With a dance-like middle section, this more extended piece is based on a sad melody which Grieg treats canonically.

From Book X, ‘Peace of the Woods’ is a meditative piece with striking harmony.

The Lyric Pieces contain diverse riches from which recitalists may draw groups of widely contrasting works. Grieg is often dismissed as no more than a miniaturist, a composer of drawing-room pieces. The Australian composer and pianist Percy Grainger met the ailing Grieg as late as 1906 and became an enthusiastic champion of his music. He wrote: ‘The contraction of emotion and thought into the very briefest of utterances is ... as valuable as the gorgeous expansiveness of German music. To be able to convey deep feeling, fragrance of mood, intense characterisation in two or three chords is a supreme achievement...’

The Piano Sonata in E minor Op.7 (composed in 11 days in 1865) is the longest of Grieg’s piano works, yet compact and appealingly fresh. The *Scenes of Country Life* Op.19 (1872) has an enchanting middle movement titled ‘The Bridal Procession Passes’. The glorious Holberg Suite is now more often performed by string orchestra (see above – Orchestral Music).

Grieg wrote many shorter compositions for piano apart from the Lyric Pieces – from Op.1, a group of four pieces, to *Moods* Op.73, composed two years before his death. In the group of four Humoresques Op.6, inspired by Norwegian folk music, Grieg makes a significant advance in developing his own voice. Some publications comprise a collection of miniatures, such as the Norwegian Folk Songs and Dances Op.17, a set of 25 pieces dating from 1870. The Album Leaves Op.28 were composed over a 14-year period, No.4 including a delightful mood-change for its middle section. Improvisations on two Norwegian Folk Songs Op.29 (1878) show the influence of Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.

The Norwegian Folk Songs Op.66 (19 pieces) show Grieg’s increasing freedom in his treatment of folk music. The beguiling melody of No.14 was also borrowed by Delius (who loved visiting Norway) for his *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*.

In the 17 *Slåtter* (Norwegian Peasant Dances) Op.72 Grieg anticipates Bartók’s percussive, abrasive use of the piano and his pungent harmonic innovations derived from folk music scales. This rugged quality is an essential aspect of Grieg’s musical language, but it tends to be overlooked in favour of those features which more readily fit the stereotypical view of the composer. The folk dances from which the *Slåtter* are derived were originally played on the Hardanger fiddle. In 1888 Knut Dale, the last surviving pupil of the famous Torgeir Augundsson (who played the Hardanger

fiddle under the pseudonym ‘The Miller Boy’), asked Grieg if he could help preserve Augundsson’s store of tunes, because on his own death they may well be lost for ever. Not being a violinist, Grieg arranged for Dale to meet the composer/violinist Johan Halvorsen, who then transcribed his tunes.

Moods Op.73 is a wide-ranging group of seven pieces from 1905, including the introspective ‘Resignation’, the ‘Hommage à Chopin’ and the vivid ‘Mountaineer’s Song’.

Grieg made a dozen piano transcriptions of his own songs – six published as Op.41 and the remainder as Op.52. The moods range from the inward pathos of ‘A Mother’s Grief’ to the turbulence of ‘The Poet’s Heart’ – originally the second of four settings of Hans Christian Andersen titled *Melodies of the Heart*. Some of Grieg’s piano music was published only posthumously. The 3 Pieces EG110–112 were composed in the last years of the century, the third completed by Julius Röntgen.

SONGS

Grieg’s wife Nina had (in his words) ‘a golden voice and splendid delivery’, enhanced by an outstanding interpretative sense. It is no surprise, therefore, that song-writing comprises a significant proportion of Grieg’s output. He composed about 180 songs, from Op.2 (1861) to Op.70 (1900) and finally those, posthumously published, dating from the early years of the 20th century. The attractive 6 Poems Op.49 (1887, texts by Holger Drachmann) reveal the influence of Denmark and its poetry upon Grieg, while the five Poems Op.60 (1894, texts by Wilhelm Krag) are among the finest of his Norwegian settings.

Melodies of the Heart (words by Hans Christian Andersen) Op.5 are four songs dating from 1864. One of these, ‘I love but Thee’, is among the great love songs – all the more powerful for its restraint and conciseness. The other songs from Op.5 are all treasurable, but have been overshadowed.

The 12 Melodies Op.33 (1873–80, poems by A.O. Vinje) include ‘The Wounded Heart’ and ‘Spring’, two gems which Grieg arranged for strings as Two Elegiac Melodies. In ‘Spring’ the poet marvels at nature’s annual rebirth but senses his own imminent death and reflects that this may indeed be his own last spring. The six Elegiac Poems Op.59 (1894, words by Grieg’s close friend John Paulsen) are of high quality.

The seven Children’s Songs Op.61, settings of words written or selected by Nordahl Rolfsen, a Norwegian schoolmaster and influential publisher of children’s books, perfectly capture the child’s world and deserve to be sung in schools everywhere. (There are excellent English translations.)

Many of Grieg’s most outstanding compositions are to be found among his songs. He believed *Haugtussa* (The Mountain Maid) to be his finest example of song-writing. When he read Arne Garborg’s verse-novel in May 1895 he overflowed with enthusiasm and by the middle of June he had composed a dozen songs, with two more following soon afterwards. When published in 1898 the set was reduced to eight. The ‘Mountain Maid’, a herd-girl from the wilds of south-western Norway, possesses a hallucinatory sixth sense which enables her to experience images, sounds and supernatural visions. The piano parts of Grieg’s songs generally are idiomatic and rewarding, but the accompaniment of *Haugtussa* is especially delightful. This masterpiece of the song repertoire is sadly overlooked, probably because of the unfamiliarity of the Norwegian language.

Grieg’s numerous groups of songs – settings of poets including Ibsen, Hans Christian Andersen, Bjørnson, John Paulsen and Otto Benzon – span his entire career and contain numerous gems.

The 4 Poems Op.21 show how superbly Grieg responded to texts by Bjørnson.

The six songs of *Reminiscences from Mountain and Fjord* Op.44 are settings of Danish poetry, that of Holger Drachmann, to whom Grieg returned in his Op.49. Grieg’s 6 Songs Op.48 (1888) are among his most attractive.

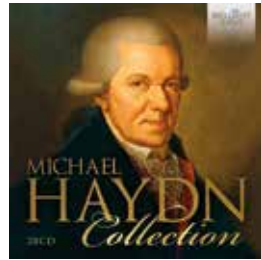
The 6 Poems Op.25 (1876, texts by Ibsen) include ‘The Swan’, one of Grieg’s loveliest and most famous songs. The Romances Op.39 (1870) begin with the relatively extended ‘From Monte Pincio’ (words by Bjørnson), a vivid tribute to this famous location in Rome, almost a symphonic poem in character. In 1900 more Danish poetry inspired Grieg in 5 Poems Op.69 and 5 Poems Op.70 – all settings of Otto Benzon.

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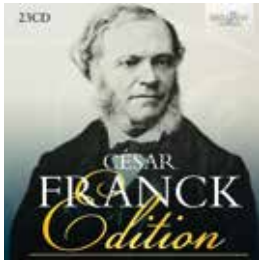
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