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GRIEG

COMPLETE
LYRIC PIECES
PIANO MUSIC

Håkon Austbø

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Edvard Grieg 1843-1907**Complete Lyric Pieces · Piano Music**

CD1	55'40		CD2	56'36	CD3	57'10
Lyric Pieces		Book III Op.43	Book V Op.54		Book VIII Op.65	
Book I Op.12		17 Butterfly	1 Shepherd Boy	3'55	1 From Early Years	4'41
1 Arietta	1'31	18 Solitary Traveller	2 Norwegian March	3'27	2 Peasant's Song	1'33
2 Waltz	1'28	19 In My Native Country	3 March of the Dwarfs	2'53	3 Melancholy	3'27
3 Watchman's Song	2'47	20 Little Bird	4 Notturmo	3'01	4 Salon	2'18
4 Fairy Dance	0'54	21 Erotikon	5 Scherzo	3'13	5 Ballad	2'43
5 Folk Melody	1'23	22 To Spring	6 Bell-ringing	3'35	6 Wedding Day at Trolldhaugen	6'09
6 Norwegian Melody	0'55		Book VI Op.57		Book IX Op.68	
7 Albumleaf	1'19	Book IV Op.47	7 Vanished Days	4'44	7 Sailor's Song	1'55
8 National Song	1'22	23 Valse-Impromptu	8 Gade	3'53	8 Grandmother's Minuet	2'06
		24 Album Leaf	9 Illusion	3'03	9 At Your Feet	3'05
Book II Op.38		25 Melody	10 Secret	4'12	10 Evening in the Mountains	2'34
9 Berceuse	2'14	26 Norwegian Dance	11 She Dances	2'33	11 At the Cradle	2'22
10 Folk Melody	1'25	27 Melancholy	12 Homesickness	2'58	12 Valse mélancolique	3'46
11 Melody	1'41	28 Spring Dance			Book X Op.71	
12 Norwegian Dance	0'44	29 Elegy	Book VII Op.62		13 Once Upon a Time	3'53
13 Spring Dance	1'24		13 Sylph	1'31	14 Summer's Eve	2'21
14 Elegy	2'05		14 Gratitude	4'03	15 Puck	1'48
15 Waltz	0'57		15 French Serenade	2'16	16 Peace of the Woods	5'12
16 Canon	3'55		16 Little Brook	1'49	17 Norwegian Dance	3'07
			17 Phantom	2'32	18 Gone	1'56
			18 Homeward	2'48	19 Remembrances	1'53

CD4	72'07	CD5	75'39		
Piano Sonata in E minor Op.7		4 Album Leaves Op.28		Poetic Tone-Pictures Op.3	
1 I. Allegro moderato	4'19	1 No.1 Allegro con moto	2'03	11 No.1 Allegro, ma non troppo	1'31
2 II. Andante molto	3'52	2 No.2 Allegretto espressivo	2'35	12 No.2 Allegro cantabile	1'47
3 III. Alla Menuetto, ma poco più lento	3'06	3 No.3 Vivace	2'50	13 No.3 Con moto	1'51
4 IV. Finale: Molto allegro	7'09	4 No.4 Andantino serio – Allegro giocoso – Tempo I	3'02	14 No.4 Andante con sentimento	2'23
				15 No.5 Allegro moderato	1'23
				16 No.6 Allegro scherzando	1'00
Scenes from Folk Life Op.19		Improvisation on two Norwegian Folk Tunes Op.29		Humoresques Op.6	
5 In the Mountains	5'08	5 No.1 Andante – Presto leggiero – Tempo I	3'38	17 No.1 Tempo di valse	2'42
6 Bridal Procession	3'39	6 No.2 Allegretto con moto – Molto vivace – Tempo I	2'42	18 No.2 Tempo di menuetto ed energico	2'41
7 Carnival Scene	7'02			19 No.3 Allegretto con grazia	2'16
8 Ballade in G minor Op.24	18'16			20 No.4 Allegro alla burla	3'40
				Nordic Dances and Folk Tunes Op.17	
Suite 'From Holberg's Time'		4 Piano Pieces Op.1		21 No.1 Spring Dance	0'57
9 I. Praeludium	2'36	7 No.1 Allegro con leggerezza	1'30	22 No.2 The Young Man	0'41
10 II. Sarabande	3'26	8 No.2 Non allegro e molto espressivo	3'57	23 No.3 Spring Dance	0'50
11 III. Gavotte	3'06	9 No.3 Mazurka: Con grazia	3'07	24 No.4 Nils Tallefjorden	1'04
12 IV. Air	7'01	10 No.4 Allegretto con moto	3'04	25 No.5 Dance from Jølster	1'35
13 V. Rigaudon	3'23			26 No.6 Wedding Tune	1'16
				27 No.7 Halling	0'44
				28 No.8 The Pig	0'32
				29 No.9 Religious Song	1'33
				30 No.10 The Wooser's Song	0'58
				31 No.11 Heroic Ballad	0'47
				32 No.12 Solfager and the Snake King	1'16
				33 No.13 Wedding Recessional March	0'54
				34 No.14 Lament	0'51
				35 No.15 The Last Saturday Night	1'33
				36 No.16 I Know a Little Maiden	1'11
				37 No.17 The Gadfly and the Fly	1'05
				38 No.18 Humoristic Dance	1'55
				39 No.19 Hølje Dale	0'45
				40 No.20 Halling	0'32
				41 No.21 The Woman from Setesdal	0'48
				42 No.22 Cattle Call	0'52
				43 No.23 Peasant Song	1'08
				44 No.24 Wedding Tune	0'45
				45 No.25 The Raven's Wedding	1'04

Håkon Austbø *piano*

Edvard Grieg

From the middle of the 19th and into the 20th century, far away though they may have been from the melting pot of Central European culture, the Scandinavian countries saw the emergence of a group of artists of world class. Figures such as Edvard Munch in painting, Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg in drama and Carl Nielsen, Jean Sibelius and Edvard Grieg in music created a new pride in the world of northern culture. While Sibelius and Nielsen established the symphonic form in Finland and Denmark respectively, the miniaturist genius of Grieg placed Norway firmly on the musical map of Europe.

Although his best-known compositions remain the A minor Piano Concerto and the incidental music composed for Ibsen's fantastical play *Peer Gynt*, Grieg's main achievement remains the shorter pieces he wrote both for piano solo and for orchestra, together with a large quantity of lyrical songs that show a remarkable balance between singer and piano accompaniment and some of which have found a firm hold in the Lieder singer's repertoire.

Born in Bergen on 15 June 1843, Grieg received his early musical training from his mother until the folksong collector and violinist Ole Bull heard him playing the piano and suggested to his parents that the budding musician should be sent for further training to the Leipzig Conservatory in Germany – a place he was to come to dislike intensely but which gave him the opportunity to meet up with and hear the music of composers and musicians such as Clara Schumann, Wagner and Mendelssohn. Encouraged now by the folkmusic specialist Rikard Nordraak (composer of the Norwegian National Anthem) and the Hungarian virtuoso and composer Franz Liszt, Grieg set about establishing himself a career as concert pianist and conductor. In 1863 he moved to Copenhagen to study under Denmark's leading composer of the day, Niels Gade who was to persuade his pupil to write the one and only symphony of his life, a marginal failure which to today's audience is proof of Grieg's unsuitability as a composer of large-scale works.

Matters changed rapidly when Grieg took up with his cousin, the singer Nina Hagerup, the inspiration of many of his later songs and after a year-long courtship, the two became engaged. Grieg returned to Norway and found lodgings with his old teacher Ole Bull. Grieg was now back home and his interests returned to the founding of a Norwegian national style of music. By 1867, he had married his cousin and was becoming recognised as a composer, setting up his home meanwhile in Oslo and taking on the dual jobs of teacher and conductor.

Grieg's restlessness and the limitations of local fame in a small country soon found the family moving to Denmark and then on to Italy. Grieg's fame had spread so that the Norwegian Government gave him an annual income in 1874 and two years later, the country's foremost playwright, Henrik Ibsen, commissioned him to write incidental music for *Peer Gynt*. Although the play is hardly seen now with all of Grieg's somewhat complex vocal and orchestral score, the two Suites of purely orchestral pieces are still regular features of concert programmes to this day. Something of an international figure by now, Grieg was invited to England to give recitals both on his own and with his wife and he was awarded honorary degrees by both Universities at Oxford and Cambridge. By now and for the remainder of his life, Grieg had become a well-known figure of the musical establishment and he would continue to compose songs and short pieces for the remaining years of his fruitful life. Perhaps it is fair to say that while his genius was mainly confined to shorter pieces, this limitation in itself allowed him to set standards which were to be influential on contemporaries and later composers far from his own native shores. It is not unreasonable to see Grieg's influence on the emergent nationalist schools that produced composers such as Bartók or the newly emerging impressionist styles of Debussy and Ravel in France as well as Grieg's friend and admirer Frederick Delius. He is a composer of note for the transition from 19th- to 20th-century style.

Piano Works

Grieg was quite a considerably talented pianist in his own right and it is not an overstatement to say that many of his works, even the orchestral ones, were initially conceived for piano. Most of these pieces are suitably short and melodic, drawing on Grieg's natural talent as a miniaturist. Initially though, he attempted a full-scale piano sonata (1865), struggling against the dictates of form which he was always to find so troublesome. His major piano works that overcame these problems to some extent include the Concerto in A minor and the G minor Ballade for solo piano (Op.24). The Ballade is Grieg's most notable full-scale piano work. It was written in 1875–6 and is based on the melody 'The Northland Peasantry', consisting of a theme and set of variations – nine of them character variations followed by a further five which take the piece into darker, more tragic and dramatic regions.

Grieg's other piano works concentrate on lyrical miniatures or ever-increasing

transcriptions of folk songs and dances including the Op.72 Peasant Dances (known as *Slatter*) where Grieg seems to pre-echo the folksong world of the Hungarian Bartók. Also significant is the original version of the Suite ‘from Holberg’s Time’ where Grieg playfully takes the old forms of Prelude, Sarabande, Gavotte, Air and Rigaudon in a popular reworking of earlier styles. Composed in 1884 for the writer and philosopher Ludvig Holberg’s bicentenary, it is one of Grieg’s most popular works.

The vast number of peasant and folk dances and tunes can seem overwhelming but Grieg’s finest collection of shorter pieces appear under the title of Lyric Pieces, 66 short works written between 1867 and 1901, divided as they are into 10 books. The pieces are usually short and fairly simple and make a great contribution to the repertoire suitable for amateur pianists.

The Book I (Opus 12) consists of particularly easy pieces technically, basically written in ternary (A–B–A) form, and it first appeared in December 1867 in Copenhagen. Much of the music is based on folk song – particularly the Norwegian Melody and the Folk Melody.

Book II (Opus 38) appeared in Leipzig in 1884, most of the pieces having been written in Bergen the previous year. These pieces are technically more difficult than those of Book I and as well as the folk pieces, they contain more Romantic works such as the Melody and Elegy and the polyphonic Canon.

Book III (Opus 43), published in 1887, probably dates from the previous year and contains some of the finest of the Lyric Pieces such as the programmatic *Butterfly*, *Little Bird* and *To Spring* (some of Grieg’s best-known melodies). There is also a patriotic *In My Native Country* and a love song for Grieg’s wife Nina in *Erotikon*.

Book IV (Opus 47) dates from around 1886–8 and was published in 1888. Again, Norwegian folk dances appear in *Halling* and the *Spring Dance*, which are contrasted with the more subtle shades of the Album Leaf, Melancholy and the Elegy.

It is in Book V that Grieg finds his most sustained inspiration. Composed between 1889 and 1891, this selection was first published in 1891 and contains the poetry of *Shepherd Boy* and the Notturmo in contrast to the lively nationalistic Norwegian March and March of the Dwarfs as well as the extraordinary impressionistic tone poem *Bell-ringing*. The following Book (Opus 57) comes from the period 1890–93 and much of it was written while Grieg was on holiday in Menton on the French/Italian Riviera. Something of a disappointment after the previous set, Grieg seems to have been missing his homeland as

can be heard in one of the more successful pieces, *Homesickness*.

The pieces that comprise Op.62 make up Book VII of the Lyric Pieces. This selection was published in 1895 and was probably written in that year. By now, the composer was in his early fifties and had reached a maturity which allowed him to compose not only in the national style, but also to attempt more European styles of music such as the *French Serenade*, *Phantom* and the waltz *Sylph*. Still, the Norwegian aspect and folksy type of composition can be heard here in *Gratitude* and the particularly successful portrayals of *Little Brook* and *Homeward*. Here again, Grieg, like his contemporary Dvorák, was praising his own homeland.

Wedding Day at Troldhaugen is one of Grieg’s best-known piano pieces and it forms the conclusion to the Book VIII. It is a piece that seems unusually long in the general context of these pieces. Many of the earlier titles had lasted around a minute or so, some even less, but now Grieg was writing a confident national piece of some seven minutes. The set contains three other Norwegian-style pieces in *From Early Years*, *Peasant’s Song* and the Ballad, but then has some other pieces in less than inspired mood. The set was written in 1896 and printed, again in Leipzig, the following year.

The penultimate Book of the Lyric Pieces (Opus 68) dates from the years 1897–99 and was published in 1899. The highlights of this set are the Norwegian-inspired *Evening in the Mountains* and to a lesser extent *At the Cradle*. The simple *Sailor’s Song* and *Grandmother’s Minuet* are similarly charming and melodious but the *Valse mélancolique* remains in the realm of salon music, a far cry from Sibelius’s similarly named *Valse triste*. Finally, Book X (Opus 71) dates from 1901 and was written early in that year at Troldhaugen. This is a fitting conclusion to the series where the short tone poems of *Summer’s Eve* and *Peace of the Woods* show Grieg as a natural bucolic composer whereas *Little Dwarf* or Puck and *Norwegian Dance* show the composer again at his best following the inspiration of the Norwegian folk song. The other pieces are more nostalgic and by a return to the Opus 12 *Arietta* of Book I, Grieg concludes the whole series of these charming and often memorable pieces with *Remembrances*, a glimpse back to the beginning of the project that had taken up so much of his life and added so much to the literature of simple but rewarding piano repertoire for listener and player alike. The Lyric Pieces are a reason for celebrating the small-scale genius of an inspired miniaturist.

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Håkon Austbø has been active as a pianist for over 50 years. His first performance with an orchestra in Bergen in 1963, and his first recital in Oslo in 1964, earned him much acclaim at an early age.

In 1974 the Daily Telegraph, London, characterised Håkon Austbø as the “possessor of towering talent worthy of international recognition”. Since then critics from the Carnegie Hall, New York, to the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, have given him rave reviews. Due to his unusual versatility and the originality of his repertoire, Håkon Austbø has held a coveted position in the world of music.

He is particularly renowned for his work on Messiaen’s music. His personal contact with the composer made him one of the bearers of an authentic tradition, confirmed by the first prize in the Messiaen competition at Royan in 1971, and by several other prizes for his Messiaen performances, such as the Edison prize, Amsterdam 1998.

Another focus of Austbø’s work has been the music of Skryabin. By coincidence, both these composers have combined colours and sounds, and Austbø has made this an important part of his work and studies. He realised the first authentic performance of the colour part of Skryabin’s *Prométhée* in the Netherlands in the 90s, and, more recently, visualisations of the colours in several of Messiaen’s works.

The latter was the subject of a research project at the Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo, in 2013, the results of which have been published recently. Austbø has later been engaged in another project, *The reflective musician*, aiming at the unveiling of forces which lead to genuine and personal interpretations of classical and contemporary works. This implies looking with fresh eyes at well-known repertoire, free from the ballast of tradition. Austbø has always cherished this attitude and challenged the conformity of the music business, crossing borders well before this became mainstream. He has worked with poets, actors, choreographers, artists and jazz musicians and included unusual repertoire in his creative programming.

Håkon Austbø spent most of his life outside his native Norway. Studies brought him to Paris, New York and Munich, before he settled in the Netherlands in 1974. In 2005 Austbø returned to Oslo when he is currently residing. Here he continues to tour the world with concerts and master classes, while he pursues his recording activities, resulting so far in about 45 CD’s as well as several LP’s, with repertoire ranging from Schumann to Rolf Wallin. His next release will be of works by Chopin.

Beside the Messiaen prize, Håkon Austbø was the first non-French national to win the “Concours National de la Guilde Française des Artistes Solistes” in Paris (1970). He was prize winner of the inter-national Munich competition (in piano duo with Marina Horak, 1974), of the Ravel Competition in Paris (1975), and, as a member of Trio du Nord, of the UNESCO International Rostrum, Bratislava (1975). He received the prize of the Norwegian music critics in 1989 and was chosen “Performer of the Year” in Norway in 1992. In 2003 he received the prestigious Grieg prize, and was nominated for the prize of the Nordic Council in 2013. He bears the French title of “Chevalier de la Légion des Arts et des Lettres”.

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