

Grieg

CONCERTO IN A MINOR

Played by
WILHELM BACHAUS
and the
NEW SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
under the direction of
JOHN BARBIROLI



Musical Masterpiece Series
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Edvard Grieg

(1843-1907)

EDVARD GRIEG was born at Bergen, Norway, the great-grandson of a Scotch merchant who, nearly a century before, had fled, with so many other Scots, from his native heath to the hospitable shores of the Scandinavian peninsula. Driven from Scotland after the disastrous rout of the forces of Charles Edward Stuart by the Duke of Cumberland at Culloden, the Highlanders mingled with their Norwegian neighbors, and a century later, we find in Edvard Grieg a man whose very name had become more Scandinavian than Scotch, and whose character scarcely showed the presence of one-eighth Scottish blood.

Grieg's father was a man of broad culture, but not a musician. It was from the distaff side that Edvard inherited his musical genius.

Grieg's career was devoid of the miseries that have marked the lives of so many composers. Though never affluent, his modest needs were always adequately matched by his circumstances. What trials he had came, rather, from within; trials of the spirit, and the struggle, almost life-long, against ill health.

Grieg died in his beloved Norway. He was laid in a wild spot which he himself had long before chosen as his last resting-place . . . a grotto half-way up a steep cliff, overlooking one of the lovely Norwegian fjords . . . a place from which his own home can be seen in the distance. After his ashes had been deposited here, the grotto was sealed, marked with the name EDVARD GRIEG, and made forever inaccessible to the world. Thus Grieg lies in the bosom of the country he loved so deeply . . . and so he had always wished.

FIRST MOVEMENT

A LONG and ominous roll upon the kettle drums . . . a mighty chord in full orchestra . . . a furious descending passage for the solo instrument, and without

further introduction we are brought to the first movement proper . . . and to the presentation, in the wood-wind, of the most important theme of the movement.

And it is a curious, memory-penetrating theme; simple in rhythm and melody, but, once heard, impossible to forget or to dissociate from this great work. . . . In a moment we hear it given voice in the crystalline tones of the piano, to be succeeded by a momentary ebullition of a further melodic thought . . . a gay, almost grotesque rhythm that contrasts sharply with the previous utterance.

The second record surface begins with still more thematic material . . . an exquisitely flowing melody, purely lyric in character, yet containing within itself elements that are to be developed into a furious outburst of passion. We hear this song first in the restrained voices of the orchestra . . . then it is given, with its elaborations and development, to the piano, which seizes upon it and makes it the medium for the most powerful and dramatic utterance of the music so far. Toward the end of the record the formal "working-out" section of the movement takes form, and it continues vigorously through the next record surface. Novelties of rhythm, as well as unforeseen melodic development of thematic material, grow swiftly and surely out of the masses of tone that surge upward from both orchestra and solo instrument. Crashing chords from the piano, and emphatic statement of the first theme in the full might of the orchestra's concerted voices, bring us to the *cadenza*, or display-passage for the piano. But it is more than a display-passage merely; it is rather a sublimation of what has gone before, presented with the last iota of power and brilliance which a great performer can call forth from that noble instrument. Underneath its glitter and its mighty chords lies the solid basis of the themes of the movement . . . and instead of distracting from the thought of the music, the *cadenza* glorifies and clarifies it in a burst of brilliant light.

SECOND MOVEMENT

THE somber feeling that is so often a characteristic of Northern genius is the underlying motive of this movement. But you will not confuse it with the abject melancholy of the Slav . . . for it is vital and moving; there

is sadness perhaps, but not the deadly hopelessness that we sometimes find, for example, in Tschaikowsky.

The melody is of simple lyric character, given to the piano after a somewhat lengthy introduction by the orchestra. There is a distinct feeling of climax, yet not departure from the somber, almost elegiac character of the movement. With a very brief pause, the

THIRD MOVEMENT

begins after the dying away of the melodious conclusion of the second. In a moment the entire complexion of the music is altered. A bold passage on the piano ushers in a rhythm of almost violent force, and quaint dancing figures which at times suggest the *grotesquerie* of "The Hall of the Mountain Kings." A climax of terrific intensity is reached . . . the piano ever revealing new influxes of power, new brilliancies . . . new and vivid colorings. And then, once more, come pale Northern harmonies, and a gentle reiteration of the pensive theme of the preceding movement.

Orchestra and solo instrument presently join again in a mad revel, the occasional dissonances (Liszt loved them!) adding spice and piquancy to the music. Mighty descending passages, in octaves, for the piano, introduce a light and dance-like figure which presently involves, one by one, the various sections of the orchestra, and leads to the majestic finale, built not only of the themes of the present movement, but embodying, too, in heroic form, the once-lyric song of the second section of the Concerto. Mighty chords for piano and full orchestra bring us to the majestic close.

THE ARTISTS

WILHELM BACHAUS, a native of Leipzig, entered the Conservatory there at the age of ten. He made his debut when sixteen in a program of Beethoven, Chopin, and Liszt, which was a sensational success for one so young. Subsequent concerts established his rank among the foremost European pianists, and American tours have won him a host of admirers in this country. Herr Bachaus lives in Europe. John Barbirolli, who conducts the accompanying orchestra, is one of England's favorite young leaders.

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