

Norway's Melodies

In 1874 Grieg was commissioned by a Danish publisher to make a collection of easy arrangements of *Norway's Melodies*. Grieg regarded this purely as hack work, and agreed to do it only on the strict condition that he remain anonymous. (Later, when an attempt was made to induce him to lift the veil—he was offered a generous fee merely to supply a few signed lines of preface—he refused, threatening a lawsuit should his name be disclosed.) He had, nevertheless, from the first credited himself as arranger of six of the individual folk-tunes, since “the harmonies were such that it might have been suspected that it was I who had written them.” Indeed it might!

Five years before, as his Op. 17, Grieg had set twenty-five Norwegian folksongs for the piano, and he was eventually to set nineteen more as his Op. 66. These succinct little pieces—introspective, pianistically spare, and harmonically bold—hardly court a large public, but they are passionately admired by serious Griegophiles. Their utterly distinctive harmonic language stems from Grieg's ability to discern in each melody what he called its “hidden harmonies” and to realize these implications in his setting. (In this respect, they remind one of Bartok's volumes of simple but inventive folksong arrangements, *For Children*, and to those who know Grieg's folkloric music, Bartok's expressed admiration for the Norwegian composer will not seem surprising.)

The six acknowledged folksong settings in *Norway's Melodies* differ from those in Opuses 17 and 66 only in their easier keyboard style. Grieg was not content to let them be buried in the despised collection, and republished them a decade later as

Six Norwegian Mountain Melodies. Peters, his principal publisher, did not include these in their original three-volume “collected” piano works—perhaps they were unable to secure copyright at the time, and as a result, the *Mountain Melodies* have languished in

obscurity. (Such an arbitrary circumstance can affect what is regarded as a composer's “canon” — a piece is only played by those who know it exists!) We may be grateful that the new Grieg edition has made them more widely available. “Sjugurd and the Troll-Bride” may be brief, but every one of its ten bars is thoroughly Griegian—the third, with its unexpected chord emphasized by a sudden *dolce* and arpeggiation, and its descending third in the melody—quintessentially so! Of particular interest is Grieg's response to the flatted

third in the melody—each of its three appearances elicits a different melting harmonic response.

In 1890, Grieg used “Sjugurd and the Troll-Bride” in almost the same setting as the theme for his duopiano *Old Norwegian Melody with Variations*, Op. 51. Even partisan Griegophiles express a distinctly tempered enthusiasm for this work. The great *Ballade* for piano solo proves that Grieg could produce a masterpiece in variation form, and one must wonder why Op. 51 is so much less successful. Much of the problem, I suspect, lies in the choice of the theme itself. What is magical about “Sjugurd” is its local, specific harmonies, rather than features which can be readily paraphrased—bass line, overall tonal shape, or motif. Heard once in the *Mountain Melodies* setting, these harmonies produce an effect of surprise and freshness; repeated through variation after variation in Op. 51, of monotony.



Grieg and his wife in a painting by P.S. Krøyer

Sjugurd And The Troll-Bride

Edvard Hagerup Grieg
(1843-1907)

Adagio

dolce

The first system of music is in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It features a treble and bass clef. The melody in the treble clef consists of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass clef provides a simple accompaniment of quarter notes. A *dolce* marking is present in the final measure of the system.

f *dim.*

The second system continues the piece. It includes a *f* (forte) marking in the middle of the system and a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking towards the end. The bass clef part features a long, sustained note in the final measure, indicated by a horizontal line.

p

The third system concludes the piece. It begins with a *p* (piano) marking. The treble clef part has a melodic line with some chromaticism, while the bass clef part has a more rhythmic accompaniment. The system ends with a double bar line.