

EDVARD GRIEG.



EDVARD HAGERUP GRIEG —he omits the middle name in his published compositions, and in his private correspondence —was born at Bergen, Norway, June 15, 1843. His grandfather was a Scotchman, and his father was Consul Hagerup of Bergen. His first musical training was from his mother, a woman of great accomplishments, and a fine musician and pianist. He began his musical studies at the age of six, and composed his first piece when nine years old. It is related that he carried this for examination to the teacher who at that time had charge of his studies. This man must have been of a non-progressive and pedantic disposition, for he had nothing but fault to find with the boy's work, and emphatically advised him not to waste his time on "such trash." By the advice of Ole Bull, Grieg was sent in 1858 to the Leipzig Conservatory, where he received instruction in composition, orchestration, and pianoforte playing from Moscheles, Hauptmann, Richter, Reinecke, and Wenzel. Moscheles, at that time somewhat advanced in years, was very conservative, and held tenaciously to old ideas. He was deservedly one of the most celebrated pianists of his day, and was especially admirable in his Bach playing, although he held exclusively to the old up-and-down, hammer-like finger-stroke, and stiff, rigid-wrist style of playing. He was distrustful of modern tendencies and innovations, and especially did he look with disfavor on the compositions of Chopin, which he regarded as bizarre, affected, and anomalous, and his advice to his pupils was to let such music severely alone, lest they might be led away from the path of musical rectitude. He would not permit the playing of Chopin's music by members of his family; but after a while one of his daughters married and removed to London, where she could play the works of her favorite author to her heart's content. In this she was perhaps unwittingly following the example which her father had given her some forty years before, when he was a lad of about fourteen, studying in Prague under the direction of Dionys Weber, the well-known theoretician, composer, and music-teacher. This was about the year 1810, at which time Beethoven was actively engaged in composing, and new and fresh works of his were being published from time to time. Dionys Weber seems

to have resembled Moscheles in his tendency to consider novel and fresh notions as unwarrantable innovations, inasmuch as, regarding Beethoven's compositions as wholly unorthodox, he forbade his pupils, Moscheles among the number, to play them; but Moscheles—who, by the way, was fond of telling this story—avowed in a spirited way that his fondness for Beethoven's music was so great that whenever he could get a chance, he played nothing else.

It is easy to conceive that Grieg did not sympathize with the unprogressive views of his Leipzig teacher, and doubtless he too devoted a large part of his time to the music of Schumann and Chopin. The antiquated and old-fogy atmosphere of Leipzig was distasteful to him, and he became depressed and discouraged. He was graduated from the conservatory in 1862, and the following year he went to Copenhagen, and began his studies under Gade, who was more congenial to him, and who was not without influence in his further development. While in Copenhagen, however, he became acquainted with Rikard Nordraak, a young, enthusiastic, and genial Norwegian composer, and this event exercised the strongest influence in bringing out his personality and revealing to him his true nature. The two young men met, talked of patriotism, of folklore, and swore an oath of fealty to Norwegian art. Grieg says: "It was as though scales fell from my eyes; for the first time I learned through him the northern folk-songs and to understand my own nature. We abjured the Gade-Mendelssohn insipid and diluted Scandinavianism, and bound ourselves with enthusiasm to the new path which the northern school is now following." In this way Grieg became the exponent of the musical side of Norwegian art.

While original and spontaneous, his music is imbued with the old Norse melodies and folk-songs, which are distinguished from those of other Scandinavian nations by a certain robustness, ruggedness, and abruptness in harmonic changes, that are for the most part in the minor key, and abound in peculiar rhythms so irregular as to be almost without periodicity, or, in other words, almost without rhythm. Some of the older melodies are crude, harsh, and barbarous. Many of them present such a succession of rough and abrupt rhythms, without appreciable melody, as almost to prevent

faithful and accurate notation. Grieg is always true to the Norwegian coloring, and the freedom of gesture and motion characteristic of peasant life is in his music. The strong contrast produced by marked emphasis and rhythm combined with syncopation, the constant recurring effects of light and shade through proper attention to dynamics, are very marked. He is, however, always within the bounds of good taste, and is never excessive or extravagant.

Grieg has been likened to Chopin—indeed, he has been called the “Chopin of the North”; but if this designation is intended to suggest the idea that he is in any sense an imitator, the comparison is unjust. Both composers belong in general to the same type and genius, and both have written exclusively in the smaller art-forms; but the individuality and personality of each is as distinct as his nationality. As writers for the pianoforte pure and simple, who thoroughly understand the nature and the possibilities of the instrument, and invariably conform to its idiomatic requirements, they both, with Schumann, stand at the head; but Grieg, like Schumann, is more than a pianist-composer, and is far ahead of Chopin in the matter of instrumentation for the orchestra. He understands the art of musical polyphony, and thus his treatment of the orchestra is euphonic and harmonious, as well in accompaniments for pianoforte pieces as in compositions exclusively for the orchestra. In this respect the work of most pianist-composers is unsatisfactory and disappointing—so much so that it is the opinion of many musicians that the concertos of Chopin and Henselt, for example, are more euphonic and satisfying with a second piano accompaniment than with that of an orchestra. For this reason, doubtless, as well as for the purpose of shortening the long and tiresome orchestral *tutti*s, Tausig was influenced to reinstrument the accompaniments of Chopin's E minor Concerto. Arthur Friedheim has just completed a similar service for the Henselt Concerto in F minor.

Neither Chopin nor Grieg has written any large grand dramatic work in symphonic form. The nearest approach to this in Grieg's case is perhaps the Peer Gynt Suite, and the Pianoforte Concerto Op. 16, in which the composer shows an originality which is especially attractive because it is unconscious, natural, and

spontaneous. This composition is justly entitled to a place among the seven or eight representative and most celebrated concertos written by pianist-composers, as, for instance, those of Chopin, Schumann, Rubinstein, Henselt, Saint-Saëns, and latterly Paderewski. The concertos of Beethoven are not here included because they are more in the nature of symphonies in conception, design, and treatment than in the nature of pianoforte solos with accompaniment. Chopin recognized the fact that the pianoforte is an instrument which lacks the power of tone-prolongation, and so constructed a series of charming sequences, arabesques, and dainty musical embroideries on a basis of scales and arpeggios, the effects of which are charming and delightful in the extreme. Grieg, on the other hand, while conforming equally to the nature of the instrument, is fonder of polyphony and part-writing, and so gets his effects in a different, but just as legitimate, way.

It used to be said of Chopin that he always seemed to be listening to the wind blowing over the strings of an Æolian harp, and that he constantly endeavored to produce similar effects in his music by means of the prolonged and, indeed, almost never-ending dominant, or minor seventh chord, characteristic of that instrument.¹ There is some color of reason in this assertion, as will be seen on reference to his *Berceuse*, Op. 57, and the *Nocturne*, Op. 62, No. 1, near the close of both compositions, the passages in each case being in the nature of an organ point.² In one instance Chopin closes a prelude, Op. 28, No. 23, with an unresolved dominant seventh chord, leaving the hearer in the expectation of something yet to come, viz.:



The composer has indicated a special emphasis on the minor seventh, E flat.

While Chopin is so partial to the effect produced by a long-delayed resolution of the dominant seventh chord,³ Grieg is no less fond

¹ "Dominant, the fifth tone in the modern scales or modes, so called because of its importance in relation to the key-note, or tonic."—CENTURY DICTIONARY.

² Organ-point, *i. e.*, organ-note: a single tone sustained by one part in the harmony, while the other parts progress freely without reference to it except at the beginning and end of the passage. It is usually sustained by a pedal in organ playing, and hence called "pedal-point." Its use has sometimes been traced to the drone of a bagpipe. The bagpipe in France is

known as the *cornemuse*, or the *musette*. Pianists will recall the "musette" which forms the second number of the gavotte—usually written over an organ-point.—EDITOR.

³ The following incident related in Ferdinand Hiller's "Mendelssohn" illustrates the force of the unresolved seventh: "A large number of friends had been invited to hear Mendelssohn, Clara Schumann among them. He played Beethoven's great F minor Sonata ("Appassionata"); at the end of the andante he let

of some of the old ecclesiastical modes, in which the leading tone, characteristic of our modern scale, is lacking, and its place supplied by a minor instead of a major seventh. He frequently uses harmonic and melodic progressions based upon the tones of the mixolydian and hypodorian forms,⁴ viz.:



The hypodorian mode conforms note for note to the descending series of tones of our modern so-called melodic minor scale.

The following examples from Grieg's works, taken offhand as they occur to the writer, afford good illustrations.

From the Concerto Op. 16, last movement:



This passage, as it occurs in the concerto, produces, in contrast with what has preceded it, a somewhat vague and dreamy effect, which is extremely beautiful, and suggestive of perfect repose. If the harmonies upon which it is constructed are presented in their simplest form, together with the chord progressions, the effect is harsh indeed, viz.:

the final chord of the diminished seventh ring on for a long time as if he wanted to impress it very forcibly on all present; then he quietly got up, and, turning to Madame Schumann, said, 'You must play the finale.' She strongly protested. Meanwhile all were awaiting the issue with the utmost tension, the chord of the diminished seventh hovering over our heads all the time like the sword of Damocles. I think it was chiefly the nervous, uncomfortable feeling of this unresolved discord which at last moved Madame Schumann to yield to Mendelssohn's entreaties and give us the finale."—EDITOR.

⁴ These names are inherited from Greek music. Each of its several modes, like the major and minor of modern music, possessed its own peculiar emotional character. For example, the Spartans directed that their



The consecutive fifths, occurring in the outer voices of the last two chords, are bald in the extreme.

The following are illustrations of similar progressions. Observe that in examples from Op. 28, No. 4, and Op. 38, No. 1, Grieg has, for the sake of precaution, placed accidentals before certain notes, although they are not really necessary, because already indicated in the key signature.

Op. 28, No. 2.



Op. 28, No. 4.



Op. 38, No. 1. Berceuse.



Op. 43, No. 4.



youth should be educated exclusively in the use of the Doric (E to E), as the only one calculated to inspire self-respect and courage. The Phrygian, in which the familiar church tune "Windom" was originally written, was supposed to confer inspiration; while the Lydian, our major mode, was considered enervating and sensuous (*vide* Milton's reference in "L'Allegro" to "soft Lydian airs"). The ecclesiastical scales, the development of which, associated with the names of Ambrose and Gregory, was the work of the early Christian Church, do not correspond exactly to the Greek originals whose names they borrow, but possess characters equally energetic. Since harmony and modulation have displaced polyphony, many of them have dropped out of popular use, except in the service of the Church, where they survive in the chants.—EDITOR.



Grieg's works abound with such progressions, but these will suffice to illustrate.

Both Chopin and Grieg have written cradle songs, each characteristic of his individual style, and a comparison of the two is interesting. Chopin's *Berceuse*, Op. 57, suggests a blue-blood baby of aristocratic heredity and tendency, exceedingly well-bred and proper in behavior, who passes through her existence in a passive, ladylike way, without encountering any obstacle to her desires. She is an unruffled, quiet, peaceable, sweet-dispositioned baby, without a touch of restlessness. Her cradle is rocked in a conventional way throughout, and with an unvarying uniformity of rhythm. Grieg's baby,—*Berceuse*, Op. 38, No. 1,—a robust little fellow, with a touch of temper, and a pair of healthy lungs which he does not hesitate to use upon occasion, is evidently at home in the cottage of a peasant. He may or may not have a more lovely and unselfish spirit than the other baby, but is of rougher externals, and somewhat more subject to the vicissitudes of life. In the beginning his slumber is quiet enough, but presently there are signs of approaching disturbance, which gradually increase until they finally culminate in a nightmare, as evidenced by a shriek of pain from the baby, who, however, recovers himself in a very short time, ceases his misbehavior, and falls again into quiet and peaceful slumber. The cradle is rocked here in a different manner. Binary and ternary rhythms combined, and strong melodic and harmonic contrasts of sudden occurrence, bear the impress of Grieg's personality.

Grieg's revolt against German classicism was the healthy instinct of a man who has a message to deliver, and seeks for it the most natural means of expression. His esteem for the highest and best in German music was none the less, and he would doubtless be among the first to acknowledge how much he has profited by its influence; but his imagination and feeling were imbued with the legends, the traditions, the folk-songs, and poetry of the peasant, and the scenery

of Norway. He has expressed and translated these into music, and thus has directed the attention of the outside world to his native land, and brought its distinguishing characteristics more clearly into view. There are other Scandinavian composers of great talent and merit who have contributed to this result, but, as Norway is bolder and more rugged than Sweden and Denmark, so Grieg in his music discloses corresponding qualities to a greater degree than do his Scandinavian confrères. This is his special mission, and well has he accomplished it, or rather is in the process of accomplishing it, for he is yet in the prime of life, and, being still engaged in composing, there is reasonable expectation that the world may continue to be enriched by the productions of his genius.

On the afternoon of July 1, 1890, having received an invitation from Grieg, I made him a short visit at Villa Troldhøgen, his summer home, situated on the borders of the Nordsvand, a drive of about an hour and a half from Bergen. His house is of hard wood throughout, very substantial, and at the same time cozy and comfortable. The front door opens from the sitting- or music-room directly upon the lawn without any intermediate hallway. The grounds are beautiful, and in many places are thick with forest trees and shrubs, while here and there a clearing brings to view the waters of the fjord. The wild flowers, with their bright, rich colors, were especially attractive. Mrs. Grieg, a very charming woman of bright and cheerful disposition, entertains in a genial way. She is an excellent musician and singer, and has accompanied her husband on most of his concert tours. Her earnest and heartfelt singing, enhanced and supplemented by her husband's exquisite accompaniments on the pianoforte, has an effect of spontaneity as though improvised, and the result is in every way a genuine musical delight. Grieg himself is genial, cultured, and unaffected. He has a keen intelligence, and a cheerful disposition, which he retains notwithstanding the necessity of constant care of his health occasioned by a serious pulmonary affection contracted while studying at Leipzig. He is short in stature, and has a large and imposing head. His expression is serious, earnest, and artless, and he is by nature repugnant to anything like posing. He leads a very retired life, rarely going out, and then only on extraordinary occasions. He is patriotic and public-spirited, takes a constant interest in whatever affects the welfare of his country, and he has felt much concerned about the political changes now going on in Norway. His intense nationality, as well as his marked individuality, find constant expression in his music, the originality and style of which are unmistakable.

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ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

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