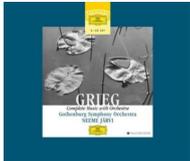


Edvard Grieg - Complete Music with Orchestra CD5 (2001)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 02 October 2017 12:39 -

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Symphony in C minor 1.1. *Allegro molto* 12:30 2.2. *Adagio espressivo* 7:16 3.3. *Intermezzo. Allegro emergico* 4:32 4.4. *Finale. Allegro molto vivace* 7:49 5. *Land-Sighting, op.31* 6:50

Olav Trygvason, op.50

6.1. *Szene* 7:47 7.2. *Szene* 15:26 8.3. *Szene* 11:43

Randi Stene (mezzo-soprano) Anne Gjevang (contralto) Håkan Hagegård (baritone)
Gothenburg Symphony Neeme Järvi - conductor

In 1863 Grieg went to Copenhagen to study with Niels Gade, then the leading Scandinavian composer. For some reason Gade found it rather reprehensible that Grieg had not written a symphony yet and urged him to do so. The result, completed the following year, received a few performances and was then withdrawn by Grieg, perhaps because by then Svendsen's first symphony, with its much more natural feeling for symphonic form, had appeared (I recently had the two Svendsen symphonies to review on Chandos CHAN 9932) and Grieg hoped that Svendsen would develop the art of the symphony in Norway, leaving him free to explore the more poetical forms congenial to him. He arranged the two middle movements for piano duet a few years later but he labelled the manuscript of the symphony "must never be performed", a wish that was respected until 1981. The reputation of a composer with the public has a way of standing or falling by his symphony if he happened to write one, so it as well that for long years this work remained hidden from view; heaven forbid that Grieg's reputation should have depended on a piece so uncharacteristic both in its themes and with regard to what his life's work was aimed at doing.

That said, the first movement is not unattractive. If it doesn't sound like Grieg, it sounds at least as Nordic as Gade ever did and the contemporary listener who heard both this and the Svendsen might have found hints that this was the composer of the two who would later move and inspire his public. It was written and orchestrated in 14 days and perhaps this accounts for the sense of youthful enthusiasm which, more than any symphonic skill, holds it together. Unfortunately the two middle movements are very watery and characterless indeed. The finale

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may be a conscious effort to avoid Gade's habit of spoiling an otherwise good symphony by lapsing into four-square jubilation, but this stop-go construction is no solution to the problem. Järvi does what he can.

At under seven minutes, Land-sighting is nonetheless a work of real stature, its broad hymn-like themes growing in intensity to reach an inspiring conclusion. As it is short it perhaps does not belie Grieg's reputation as a miniaturist, but in another sense it is a revelation since it is an epic statement in miniature. Anyone who enjoys Elgar in patriotic vein will thrill to this Norwegian equivalent.

Sigurd Jorsalfar and Landsighting were collaborations with Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, with Ibsen the leading Norwegian poet of the day. Bjørnson was thrilled by the results and proposed the creation of a large-scale dramatic work which would be the Norwegian national opera. Unfortunately, after three scenes Bjørnson left Norway for Austria and Italy and did not return for many years. Grieg, feeling he had been left in the lurch, became estranged from him and fifteen years passed before a rapprochement came about and Grieg conducted the three completed scenes of Olav Trygvason. The music was enthusiastically received but nothing further was written.

Could Grieg have measured up to a large-scale heroic national opera? The evidence of these 35 minutes is that he probably could. It would have been a tableau opera, rather like Boris Godunov, but that need be no bad thing and he lacks neither breadth nor heroic tone. The third scene, with its choral dances, is quite thrilling. Apart from an unlovely contralto the performance is superb, but we needed the words, which were present when the CD was first issued separately. ---Christopher Howell, musicweb-international.com

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