

KALMUS PIANO SERIES

9852

GRIEG

Selected Compositions

for
The Piano

Book One

Edvard Grieg: Forty-five Pieces for Piano

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EDVARD HAGERUP GRIEG is one of the most striking figures among those latter day composers who have worked zealously toward the ideal of nationalism in music. Before him came Chopin, Liszt, Gade and Smetana; and Dvorak and a host of lesser men have taken up the idea of embodying in their music the quality and color of the folk-tunes of their native lands. But none have more thoroughly identified themselves with the cultivation of the dialect of the common people, or transfused the spirit of popular music so undiluted into the sophisticated forms of art, as Grieg. None have succeeded in putting themselves so completely under the influence of that spirit, as he.

Grieg's training was gained in the severe school of Leipzig conservatism. Born at Bergen, Norway, in 1843, he was the son of a mother gifted and cultivated in music, who was his first teacher in the art. Ole Bull saw the boy, and recognized in him a musician's talent; and by his advice he was sent to the Leipzig Conservatory. He entered it in 1858; the traditions of Schumann and Mendelssohn had not yet disappeared there, but there was already a spirit of progress in the institution, a sympathy with new ideals in art that the ingrained conservatism of the place could not keep down. The chief influence that swayed Grieg's musical nature and turned him toward the Scandinavian spirit was the young Norwegian composer, Rikard Nordraak, whose premature death cut short a promising career. He it was who began the crusade as Grieg himself has written, directed against "the effeminate Mendelssohn-Gade Scandinavianism, turning with enthusiasm into the new well-defined path, along which the Northern School is now travelling." He it was who first opened Grieg's eyes to the possibilities of the folk-music of their native land, as the foundation for a new movement in music.

Grieg was but 19 years old when he left the Conservatory at Leipzig. He made further studies in Copenhagen, under Gade, and also came under Hartmann's influence. He visited Italy, the first of a number of artistic pilgrimages that he has made of service in spreading the knowledge of his compositions. But otherwise, his life has been quite uneventful, and has been spent chiefly in his native land as composer and conductor. In 1867 he founded a Musical Union in Christiania, which he conducted till 1880; and he has for some years been the conductor of the Philharmonic Concerts in that capital, though he has made his home in Bergen.

Grieg's earliest published compositions show little trace of his devotion to Scandinavian ideas; they are set of four little piano pieces "dedicated to the revered master, Wenzel," in which the paramount in-

fluence is plainly that of Schumann; though they are not without a certain venturesome spirit that gives them an individuality of their own. Several of his earliest songs, too, show little of the character that we now generally associate with Grieg. In the set of little pieces, op. 4, the Norwegian color is first disclosed, though still in a tentative way. These works are all dated before 1864. In the next publications that appeared from Grieg's pen, the "Humoresken," op. 6, we find the young composer fully launched upon his change of style. Henceforth he was to be a Norwegian first and then a musician, and to emblazon his nationality upon his work so clearly that it should be in no doubt. The "Humoresken" show, instead of the tender sentiment and mellifluous grace of Grieg's earliest pieces, a certain energy and grim vigor that at times verge on harshness. In these, and still more in many of the pieces that follow them, there is a tinge of intense melancholy; the sadness and the rough humor, by turns, of a people oppressed by the rigors of the north, confronted unceasingly with the gloom of mountain and fjord and deep forest. The boisterous "Hailing" and the Springtanz," the mournfulness of the peasant songs, reappear in these little piano pieces, and through them all runs the strange, harsh coloring of the Scandinavian music. There are certain melodic turns and intervals that we have learned to recognize as characteristically Scandinavian, and certain well-defined harmonic progressions that seem to be a necessary and logical basis for these melodies. Withal there is often an insinuating grace and a lyric charm of indescribable quality in much of Grieg's music, that take us to the sunny delights of breezy mountain pastures. But whatever its mood, Grieg's music is always unmistakably his own, and unmistakably Norse in its essence.

Grieg is essentially a worker in miniature. His genius finds its most characteristic and congenial expression in the smaller forms—in the song and in short lyric pieces for the pianoforte, to which he has given most of his attention. He has written more extensive compositions—a piano concerto, a piano sonata, a string quartet, a concert overture for orchestra, orchestral entr'acte music for Ibsen's play of "Peer Gynt," and several choral works. They have achieved a varied measure of success; but in general it may be said, that the limitations implied in the lyric quality of his genius are almost always in evidence in his efforts at more extended flights. He does not move freely or boldly in the larger forms; he lacks the broad sweep and the power of logical and conclusive development of his musical material needed for success in them. But in his own way he has created a new *genre* in art, and has added much to the resources of music that has won, as it seems, a permanent place in the affections of music lovers.

