

LAWQ
CLASSICS

Nordic *Unrest*

Oda Voltersvik
Piano

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The programme “**Nordic Unrest**” focuses on piano works by Edvard Grieg (1867–1905) and Atli Heimir Sveinsson (1938–2019). In the chosen pieces, elements within the nordic nature are captured or tales and characters originating from folklore are described. The programme also includes music reflecting an inner unrest.

The selection by **Edvard Grieg** opens with one of his earlier piano pieces published after his lifetime, “**Agitato**” EG 106. This piece was written while Grieg was still a student in Leipzig. We know that Grieg did not think too highly of the pieces written during his study years. He expressed “*I came back even more stupid than*

when I left”. I imagine this piece is slightly rebellious as it captures his will to create a personal expression while learning different styles of composing.

The “25 Norwegian Folk Songs and Dances” Op.17, dedicated to Norway’s great violinist of the time Ole Bull, are based on the renown collection of folk tunes by Ludvig Lindeman, “Old and New Mountaintunes” (“Ældre og nyere norske Fjeldmelodier”). The opus was published in 1869, an eventful year in Grieg’s life. He experienced a succesfull premiere of his Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.16, and spent time with great artists abroad. The same year he lost his only child Alexandra. These contrasting events can relate to both cheerful and gloomy characters in this opus.

“**Solfager and the Snake King**” is an old ballad with roots from Russia and King Novgorod. In this tale we hear about the engagement of Solfager and David. Not before

long, the Snake King schemes a plan to take Solfager into his property. He gives her a drink which makes everyone believe she is dead. But when she wakes up in her grave, the Snake King forces her to make a choice to either die or follow him. In this music, we can hear Solfager in despair while in captivity. After all, the story ends happily when David kills the Snake King and rescues Solfager.

Next up, a “**Lullaby**” from “19 Norwegian Folk Songs” Op. 66, is included. These folk tunes were sung by maids and peasants in Sogn and Jotunheimen and were collected by his closest friend, Frants Beyer. Grieg wrote in a letter:

“I have realised that the dark deepness in our folk music relates to its unknown harmonic possibilities. With Op.66 I aim to express what I believe to be the hidden harmonies in our folk tunes.” The underlying mystical mood makes this piece unrestful despite being a lullaby.

Edvard Grieg once said about his songs: “*I do not compose songs to create music, but to do justice to the poets most secret intentions*”. This can relate to many of his lyric pieces with a poetic intention behind them. In other lyric pieces, Grieg aimed to imitate nature elements like a “Little Brook” or a “**Little Bird**”, or to describe characters from folklore, as in the “**March of the Dwarfs**”. In total, he wrote ten books of lyric pieces, most of them after he had moved into his newly built home at Troldhaugen (1885).

“**To Spring**” from Op.43, a piece perhaps representing hope, brings forth the excitement for the coming Spring season. While hearing the dramatic developments, one can start wondering when the ice and snow will start melting into waterfalls? A passage of relief and majestic beauty finally ends the piece.

Lyric Pieces Op. 68 was written in 1898 during Grieg and Nina's stay in Denmark. In the piece “**Evening**

in the Mountains" we imagine the majestic mountains in the darkening hours. Grieg made an even more dramatic orchestral version of this piece with great success on its performance in Copenhagen. In this music one could sense the effect of echoes through the valley ending phrases and a grand gesture reflecting the tall mountain ending the piece.

After Grieg's composer cabin was built at Trolldhaugen, he finally found the peace he was longing for. From the cabin he could view the hill where the "Hall of the Trolls" stands today. "**March of the Dwarfs**" from Op. 54 was one of the first pieces he wrote in the cabin. Grieg expressed that this piece describes the medium sized trolls and "*they can be just all right, providing they get what they want!*"

Although we are not aware of the direct inspiration for the piece "**Tempest Clouds**" EG 110 from 1891, this particular title can relate to titles used by the renowned piano

virtuoso and composer at the time, Franz Liszt. While in Rome in 1870, Liszt said the following to Grieg after sight reading the Piano Concerto in A minor: "Keep boldly on. I tell you. You have the ability and – don't let them get you down!". Grieg on the other hand was captivated by Liszt's virtuosic playing.

The **Ballade in G minor**, Op.24 reflects Grieg's inner unrest due to the loss of his parents in 1875 and growing tensions in his marriage to Nina Grieg. The main theme is a folk tune from Valdres selected from Ludvig Lindeman's collection "Old and New Mountaintunes" ("Ældre og nyere norske Fjeldmelodier") named "The Northern Peasantry" ("Den nord-lanske bondestand"). Although the theme is treated in variation form, this work contains different characters reflective of his lyric pieces. But first and foremost, we are going on a journey through several inner struggles. After the final majestic climax (or perhaps highest mountaintop!), the mountain tune is recalled in its simple

manner, now affected by the turmoils which have been played out. Due to centuries of isolation, the Icelandic people have mostly been descendants of the first Norse and Gaelic settlers, preserving a language close to old Norse language.

Musically speaking, Iceland had primarily a well-developed vocal tradition until the 19th century due to insufficient access to larger musical instruments. While pipe –organs, harmoniums and pianos were first brought to the island in the 19th century, composers went to the European continent to study.

Encouraged by Johan Svendsen, the composer **Sveinbjørn Sveinbjørnsson** (1847–1947) went to study both in Copenhagen and in Leipzig, producing songs and chamber music in Mendelssohn's spirit. **Jón Leifs** (1899–1968) studied piano at the Leipzig Conservatory, before having conducting and composing lessons with Ferruccio

Busoni. He is mostly known for his orchestral works based on natural phenomenon on Iceland like "Geysir" and "Dettifoss" or pieces based on Icelandic texts, like "Saga Symphony" and "Edda".

Atli Heimir Sveinsson (1938– 2019) told to "Icelandic Music Export" that unlike Jón Leifs he "*never wanted to emphasise the folklore of Iceland, more the spirit, which can't be so easily explained.*" For Sveinsson this spirit was a "*sense of dark and light, of colour, distances and forms.*" Sveinsson explained in the same interview: "*It felt strange to come from a country with no real musical culture. I had to find my own way and not imitate the music that was happening on the continent.*" Sveinsson was the first Icelandic composer to win the Nordic Council's Award for his flute concerto written in 1976. His works list includes four symphonies, nine solo concertos, five operas, a musical, music for theatre and a large number of chamber music pieces. In 2004,

he was appointed “Composer-in-Residence” for the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, and he lectured at many universities in Scandinavia, Germany and the US.

Sveinsson made significant contributions to Icelandic musical life. After studies in Cologne, with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Gottfried König among others, Sveinsson founded the first composition class at Reykjavik College of Music. He organised the “Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music” in 1973 and “Nordic Music Days” three years later. As a chairman of the Society of Icelandic Composers from 1972–1983, he established “The dark music days”. Sveinsson also presented a popular music programme on Icelandic radio.

“The Song of the Stone” (“Óður steinsins”) from 1983, is based on a 30-verse epic with the same name by Kristján frá Djúpalæk from 1977. After reading this religious poetry,

the incomprehensible greatness of nature in Iceland and the impact it has on the human being’s sense of feeling small, is perhaps recognised. Fantasies and old tales about dwarves and magical life inside the stones is also described.

The Poetry by Kristján frá Djúpalæk corresponding with movement titles by Atli Heimir Sveinsson:

1. A wondering guest
I enter the world
of enchantment
yet it has existed
in all its splendor
behind my eyes
since the first day

Maestoso

4. The first words
let there be light
kindled the sun and the stars
and touched the tinder of atom
they blaze darkness is merely
a sad memory
of things created

Amoroso E Cantabile

5. The stone was to us
but frozen darkness
lifeless weight
soulless hardness
it has been freed
from its spell

Con anima (Nocturno)

7. We knew the elfin maid and the dwarf
abiding in the dark
by the dream of the fairy castle
we found it infinitely
beautiful
but how could our fantasy
approach such magnificent
reality

Flebile

8. As long as we train our mind
to the whiz of the sickle
in the mower's hand
we shall not discern
the symphony of life
in the grain of seed

Appassionato

9. The winter flowers
of my childhood window
have blossomed
in a play of color
the frost roses have begun
to emit fragrance

Amoroso

10. O creator of the harp and the tone
grant us hearing to discern
the surf of sound in life's symphony
the harmony of eternity
break down the wall of silence
between the globes

Brillante

11. Do not curse the pebble
that wounds your sole
o walker
beneath its rugged brow
it may hide what you seek
it may be
the wishing stone itself

Quieto

12. What is light darkness
a symphony, a sea of colors
but the ocean of your thoughts
o lord
we were but blind fish
in the deep

Excessive rubato

13. When I was a boy
I blew the soapy water
through a narrow pipe
how beautiful the suns
I created
and burst
the stars are your soap bubbles
o lord

Rigorouso

14. You put the rainbow
in the clouds
a bridge of rays
between us
and you
today we have crossed it

Agitato

English translation:
Hallberg Hallmundsson.



Oda Voltersvik

Oda Voltersvik “(...) *an artist with the talent to make a serious name for herself*” (Calum Petrie on Grieg Piano Concerto, Scottish Press and Journal), has performed at international festivals and venues such as Carnegie Weill Recital Hall, Victor Borge Hall, Wigmore Hall, St Martin in the Fields, Norwegian Opera House, Bergen International Festival and Palermo Classica International Festival. She has appeared as soloist with orchestras internationally and as solo- and chamber musician for important concert societies in Europe and in the Unites States. For ten years, Voltersvik has been invited as artist-in-residence for a week at the Edvard Grieg Museum in Bergen,

among other recital engagements at KODE composer’s homes. Her recordings “Neo” (solo), “Firebird” (solo) and “Khoreia” (piano duo) have received critical acclaim for their well-thought-out programme choices, technical skill and artistic expression. She won first prize of the Bradshaw&Buono International Competition in 2017 and the honourable work grant from the Norwegian Arts Council in 2021–2022. Voltersvik received her Master in Performance Degree from the Royal College of Music London, and afterwards an Artist Diploma from Trinity Laban London with distinction from the Intercollegiate Jury. Since then, she has been managing solo projects and concert series for her Volt&Potenza duo, Volt Ensemble and more. Currently, Oda is continuously touring and appearing with orchestras in the US with a visa for “Individuals with extraordinary ability in the arts”.





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Edvard Grieg (1843–907)

1. EG 106: Agitato ^{03:53}
2. 25 Norwegian Folk Songs and Dances, Op. 17, No. 12: Solfager and the Snake King ^{01:37}
3. 19 Norwegian Folk Songs, Op. 66, No. 17: Lullaby ^{02:28}
4. Lyric Pieces, Op. 43, No. 4: Little Bird ^{01:36}
5. Lyric Pieces, Op. 43, No. 6: To Spring ^{03:38}
6. Lyric Pieces, Op. 68, No. 4: Evening in the Mountains ^{03:13}
7. Lyric Pieces, Op. 54, No. 3: March of the Dwarfs ^{03:09}
8. EG 110: Tempest Clouds ^{05:03}

Atli Heimir Sveinsson (1938–2019)

“Óður steinsins” (“The song of the stone”)

9. Maestoso, No. I ^{03:41}
10. Amoroso E Cantabile, No. IV. ^{03:39}
11. Con Anima (Nocturno), No. V. ^{01:25}
12. Flebile, No. VII. ^{02:48}
13. Appassionato. No. VIII. ^{02:23}
14. Amoroso, No. IX. ^{01:28}
15. Brilliante, No. X. ^{01:03}
16. Quietto, No. XI. ^{01:08}
17. Excessive Rubato, No. XII. ^{02:33}
18. Rigoroso, No. XIII. ^{01:59}
19. Agitato, No. XIV. ^{02:49}

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

20. Ballade in G minor, Op. 24 ^{22:41}