



LAWQ  
CLASSICS

ODD  
GRÜNER-HEGGE

THE PIANO  
TRIOS  
1919 & 1968

TOR ESPEN ASPAAS-PIANO  
BERIT CARDAS-VIOLIN  
BJØRG LEWIS-CELLO

# ODD GRÜNER-HEGGE: COMPOSER, CONDUCTOR, OPERA DIRECTOR.

Odd Grüner-Hegge is regarded as one of the most important figures in Norwegian music life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is primarily associated with the Oslo Philharmonic (then known as Filharmonisk Selskaps Orkester, the Philharmonic Society Orchestra), where he made his conducting debut in 1927 and served as chief conductor from 1945 to 1962. Grüner-Hegge also worked as a music critic for *Dagbladet* from 1925 to 1931. In the 1930s, he worked at the National Theatre in Oslo, where he conducted the Norwegian premiere of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* in 1932, marking Kirsten Flagstad's debut as Isolde. He took over from Kirsten Flagstad as director of the Norwegian National Opera in 1960, and led the young institution through a number of important years until 1969. For many years, Grüner-Hegge served as a member of the board of the Norwegian Society of Composers, including during the 1920s, when the rights organisation TONO was planned and established.

The Piano Trio in B minor stands as the central work in Odd Grüner-Hegge's career as a composer. However, it represents two distinct chapters in his life: the first relates to the original version, first performed and published in 1919, which he himself took part in performing on several occasions.

The second concerns the revised version, first performed on NRK television to mark his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1969. By then, he was widely recognised as one of the country's leading conductors and as the outgoing director of the Norwegian National Opera. This version was released on record in 1971.

Odd Grüner-Hegge was born on 23 September 1899 in Kristiania, the son of Olga and Christian Thorberg Grüner-Hegge. His father was a bank clerk. The family's financial situation was at times strained, and they moved between five different addresses in Kristiania during Odd's childhood. His three brothers were all older than Odd

and left home before he did. The same eventually applied to Finn, the second youngest, who was to have a long career as a violinist in the Philharmonic Society Orchestra. In 1914, when Odd was 15, the family moved to Geitmyrsveien 48, one of the houses in the so-called 'Frølichbyen' between St Hanshaugen and Adamstuen.

Odd's work as a composer largely dates from his childhood and teenage years. He proved to be a child prodigy at the piano, writing small compositions already in pre-school years and beginning piano lessons at the age of six. In the summer of 1906, Olga wrote to Edvard Grieg about her musical child. She received helpful replies, and little Odd was allowed to visit Norway's most famous composer at the Hotel Westminster in Kristiania and accompany him to concerts.

In the summer of 1912, Odd was seriously injured in an accident while visiting relatives on holiday at Knive Farm in Skoger, near

Drammen. His right foot was caught in a horse engine. It was a matter of life and death, and the accident led to a convalescence that lasted two years. He escaped amputation, but his foot could not be fully repaired. After coming home from hospital, Odd received strong support to continue his piano lessons and music studies. He became a first-class pianist, studying first with Nils Larsen and later with Fridtjof Backer Grøndahl. He made his debut on 19 September 1918 as soloist in Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor at a popular concert given by the National Theatre Orchestra, conducted by leader Gustav Lange.

And in the small house in Frølichbyen, an exciting and remarkable musical environment emerged, which would go on to be significant for Norwegian music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finn was a classmate of Ludvig Irgens-Jensen at Vestheim School, and they found common ground in their interest in music. The group also included the some-

what older Elling Bang and Jens Arbo, both amateur musicians, on violin and cello respectively. They found 'civil professions' in the state and municipal administration, while also becoming prominent music critics in Kristiania's daily press. Bang worked for *Dagbladet* and *Verdens Gang*, while Arbo wrote for *Tidens Tegn* and *Nationen*, before spending many years at *Morgenbladet*.

Finn and Ludvig were four to five years older than Odd, but Odd made up for the age difference with his talent. He had an early understanding of music theory and composition. In his own words, this was a 'difference we hardly noticed in our music-making or exchange of ideas — indeed, not even at the beginning, when I was only 15 and the others were adults, did they make me aware of any age difference ... I absorbed knowledge, it was like the best form of schooling, and I was soon brave enough to give my point of view.' Composers, both past and contemporary,

were studied. Ludvig came from a wealthy family, and was therefore able to buy scores in bulk. Odd has said: 'We had very similar tastes. We shared the same understanding of musical values. And we influenced one another.' The friendship between Odd Grüner-Hegge and Ludvig Irgens-Jensen grew close and lasted a lifetime.

By the time the piano trio came into being, the young composer Odd Grüner-Hegge had already been in the spotlight for some time. Odd made his 'debut as a composer' when his violin sonata, mostly written in 1914, was performed by Nils Larsen and Odd's brother Finn in the University of Oslo's Aula on 21 March 1917. However, the sonata's actual premiere took place in Horten on 11 March by the two, and was later played a couple of times on tour.

The Piano Suite in F minor was premiered on 18 February 1918 in the University's Aula, at a recital given by Fridtjof Backer Grøndahl. The Piano Suite was written for Backer Grøndahl, who became Odd's piano teacher after Nils Larsen left for the United States. Hjalmar Borgstrøm wrote approvingly in *Aftenposten*: 'Grüner-Hegge has taken pains to master technique... One notices melodic, harmonic and contrapuntal beauty.' Borgstrøm was 'very curious to see how this rich talent would develop.'

Just before this, Odd's father died suddenly on 3 January 1918, two weeks before his 58th birthday.

Odd recalls: 'I was soon left alone to care for my mother and to keep the household going. Then I took on pupils, a great many piano students, at first about twenty, later twice that number.' At the same time, he started working 'in his spare evenings on a trio for violin, cello and piano.' According to Odd's diary, it was mainly written in 1918, and the entry for 25 February 1919 states: 'Trio completed.' Odd wrote out the parts and invited Finn, Ludvig, Elling and Jens to see it.

At the same time, Ludvig Irgens-Jensen had been composing songs at a rapid pace. Odd persuaded his friend to make clean copies of some of them, including settings of texts taken from Hans Bethge's German adaptations of *Japanese poetry* (Gustav Mahler had made use of Bethge's translations of Chinese poems in *Das Lied von der Erde*). Ludvig called the cycle *Japanischer Frühling*, and it was among the works submitted to Oluf Bye's publishing house at the same time as Odd's trio.

Odd wrote to the Danish cellist Paulus Bache, whom he had met and greatly respected. Paulus Bache had lived in Kristiania for several years. He had played in Arve Arvesen's string quartet and had also performed in Norway as a soloist. Bache immediately agreed to take part in the premiere of the trio. Odd recalls that: 'he would not hear of any fee, it was simply extraordinary!' His brother Finn was the obvious choice for the violin part.

The trio was premiered on Wednesday 9 April 1919 at the Gamle Logen. The occasion was Odd's first composition recital, and the programme included the violin sonata, the piano suite in F minor, three piano pieces from the suite *From the Diary*, and, as a finale, the trio. In *Aftenposten*, Hjalmar Borgstrøm wrote: 'The impression was quite magnificent. A powerful talent was expressed here.

Particularly, it was a true pleasure to hear the evening's most substantial work, a Trio in B minor. It is serious and melancholy. Yet how vividly does youth speak through this work, which is also technically well crafted! This young man has something to communicate to the world. His music is profound, deeply personal, original, and entirely free of banality. There are no dull moments in the long Trio, and interest is kept up throughout. And the instruments play an equal and effective role in the musical development.' The reviewer in *Tidens Tegn* was, incidentally, none other than Jens Arbo, who unsurprisingly stated: 'The concert was indeed a true occasion.'

Odd later reworked one of the pieces from *From the Diary* into *Elegiac Melody*, and conducted its premiere himself with the Philharmonic Society Orchestra at the Aula on 1 April 1943. This string work became his most frequently performed piece.

At the Quartet Association on 13 April 1920, the trio was performed

for a second time, this time with Arbo on cello. The Quartet Association was an amateur society that had served as a meeting place for both amateurs and professionals since the turn of the century. The performance was clearly part of Ludvig Irgens-Jensen's friends' celebration of his 26th birthday. Odd later wrote: 'It was far from a perfect performance, but enthusiasm was sky-high, perhaps also thanks to the generous refreshments...'

Over the next few years, the piano trio was performed several times with the composer at the piano. On 29 November 1923, it was performed at a Philharmonic Society chamber concert in the Gamle Logen, together with Christian Sinding's Piano Quintet. The performers now included the orchestra's leader Hugo Kolberg and principal cellist Alexander Schuster, with Odd at the piano in both works. On 31 January 1924, it was performed in Bergen for the first time, again with the composer at the piano, and now with the leader of the Harmonien Society Orchestra, Victor Schuster, and the cellist Alfred Schattschneider. They received an invitation – probably thanks to Paulus Bache – from Young Danish Composers in Copenhagen. This led to performances of the piano trio at the Odd Fellows Mansion on 5 and 7 October 1926. The music publisher Wilhelm Hansen was in attendance; he took on the work and had it published in Denmark.

On 17 February 1930, the trio was broadcast on radio. This time, two musicians from the Philharmonic Society were involved – the violinist Oscar Holst and the cellist Karl Andersen – alongside the composer. On 12 September 1930, Odd performed the trio again in Copenhagen. The latter occasion appears to have been the last time he himself participated in a performance of it.

From the rise of the modern daily press, composers were often recruited as music critics. When *Dagbladet's* long-serving critic Reidar Mjøen moved to *Aftenposten* in 1925 (succeeding Hjalmar Borgstrøm), Odd was brought in as the paper's new music critic. In the 2 September 1925 issue, he was introduced in a two-column article on page 2: '*Dagbladet's* new music critic, the composer Odd Grüner-Hegge, belongs to the young, new direction in Norwegian music, and is one of its most talented representatives.' *Dagbladet* stated: 'Grüner-Hegge has thus far achieved his greatest success in his large Piano Trio in B minor, Op. 4.'

In the years that followed, he wrote 262 music reviews for *Dagbladet* – all noted in his diary and offering an interesting insight into his musical views. However, he would not constitute a significant chapter in the history of Norwegian music criticism. After periods of study in Berlin and Basel, he made his conducting debut in 1927 – and finally, Odd Grüner-Hegge had found his métier.



ODD GRÜNER HEGGE

The trio was performed again, both in private and in public, in the post-war years. Several musicians within the circle of friends played it, including the married couple Ernst and Kari Aarvold Glaser – Ernst was leader of the Phil-harmonic Society Orchestra – and once again, the cellist Karl Andersen. After Odd made some changes to the score, the trio was broadcast on NRK radio on 13 March 1959, performed by Ivar Johnsen, Stephan Barratt-Due and Arne Melsom.

The revised version was available in 1968. Odd explains: 'In later years, I felt inclined to make some changes, above all some cuts. I removed superfluous ideas. Originally, the first movement was far too rhapsodic in structure. It was reshaped into a strict sonata form. The third movement was also too long. Cuts and necessary adjustments had to be made, so that the work now lasts 25 minutes instead of the previous 35. Of the four movements of the trio, the second and final movements remain almost untouched in their original form.'

On his 70th birthday, 23 September 1969, NRK television aired a programme showing Odd in conversation with Kristian Lange. Odd said: 'I look forward now to hearing this youthful work performed by three distinguished artists: Arve Tellefsen, Erling Bløndal Bengtsson and Kjell Bækkelund.'

The television recording of the three was broadcast on NRK tele-

vision at 10 p.m. the following day. Kjell Bækkelund was the driving force behind a recording. This was produced by Norsk Phonogram A/S, the Norwegian branch of the Dutch Philips company, a major international player in gramophone recordings.

The Hungarian-born violinist Endre Wolf, who had found a new homeland and career in Sweden, took over the violin part, and on 28–29 August 1970 the piano trio was recorded at Roger Arnhoff Lydstudio in St Olavs gate, Oslo, with Wolf, Bløndal Bengtsson and Bækkelund. The well-known producer Håkon Tveten was responsible for the recording. The LP was released in 1971. It was aired on NRK radio on 6 October 1971. It was the last time Odd Grüner-Hegge heard the trio performed in public. After just under four years of retirement, he died on 11 May 1973.

Trond Olav Svendsen

## THE TRIOS

It was with growing astonishment that we, as an ensemble, began our study of Odd Grüner-Hegge's Piano Trio in B minor from 1919. Suddenly we found ourselves holding a major work of Norwegian chamber music from the inter-war period – a magnum opus we hadn't known existed! We were overwhelmed by the quality and complexity of the original trio, and by its monumental movements, which demonstrate the young composer's fully internalised relationship to masterworks within the piano trio genre: Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Ravel, to name a few of the more obvious ones. Most striking, however, is a distinctive, precocious voice which, amid Grüner-Hegge's eclectic amalgam of Romanticism and Impressionism, is perceived as 'Norwegian', for want of a better word. Significant elements of modality may partly account for this impression, yet his stylistic idiom is nonetheless perceived as individual and markedly different from that of Ludvig Irgens-Jensen, Geirr Tveitt, Olav Kielland and other contemporaries with whom it is natural to draw comparisons.

After working with the original version, we were no less astonished by the revised trio: the 1968 version is far more than we had expected, considering the composer's own description, *edizione rivista*. It is not simply a revised version, but a comprehensive recomposition of the 1919 material.

The composer, of course, knows best when he remarks that 'of the four movements [...] the second and last movements remain almost untouched in their original form'. As performers, however, we also experience these movements as transformations of the originals, owing to changes in instrumentation, greater transparency, and new counter-melodies that illuminate the 1919 score in surprising ways. Impulses from French neoclassicism reached Norway relatively late, but in Grüner-Hegge's trio *rivista* the ideals and ideas of the movement are likely expressed, but with a distinct Norwegian accent.

The two Piano Trios therefore share opus number 4, but in practice they are independent works, each of them of significant interest in its own right. Considered together, however, these twin trios become mirrors reflecting not only Odd Grüner-Hegge's own development and aesthetic evolution over 49 years, but also half a century of Norwegian music history.

Berit Cardas,  
Björg Lewis and  
Tor Espen Aspaas





## BERIT CARDAS.

Berit Cardas started playing the violin at the age of 8. She studied at the music conservatoire in Oslo, at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hanover, Germany, and at the University of Minnesota, USA. She plays both the violin and the viola and appears regularly as a soloist on both instruments. In her quartet, the Vertavo String Quartet, she has played both 1st and 2nd violin and the viola. Founded in 1984, the ensemble has won the Grieg Prize, the Nordic Chamber Music Competition and the 1st prize, the Audience Prize and the Radio listeners' Prize at the 2nd Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition in 1995.

Berit Cardas is on the artistic committee of the Oslo Quartet Series and she runs twinned chamber music festivals in Norway. She is an active chamber music teacher and leads popular workshops combining her backgrounds in theater improvisation and chamber music.

Orchestral conducting is the latest addition to Cardas' career. She has conducted the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic orchestra, Arctic Philharmonic and the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Stavanger Symphony orchestra and The Royal Norwegian Navy Band. She is the chief conductor of the Norwegian Youth Symphony Orchestra.

Berit Cardas is grateful to be able to play a Lorenzo Storioni violin (1770) lent to her by the Norwegian Dextra Musica foundation.



## BJØRG LEWIS.

Björg Lewis is one of Norway's most sought-after and admired cellists. She has been a soloist with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra with Mariss Jansons conducting, as well as performing with orchestras throughout Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Baltics. She has collaborated with musicians such as Leif Ove Andsnes, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Elisabeth Batiashvili, Truls Mørk, Steven Isserlis, Martin Fröst and the Nash Ensemble.

Björg is a founding member of the Vertavo String Quartet, an internationally acclaimed ensemble that has received numerous awards, including Norway's prestigious Grieg Prize in 2005, and made numerous highly acclaimed recordings.

A busy performance schedule takes Björg throughout Europe, North America and Japan. In the UK she has performed at several festivals, including The BBC Proms, Edinburgh, Bath and Aldeburgh, and she performs regularly in the Wigmore Hall. From 2001 to 2015 she was Artistic Director of the Elverum Festival in Norway, and in 2009, together with Paul Lewis, she started Midsummer Music, an annual chamber music festival held in the Chilterns. The Vertavo Quartet started its own festival in Norway, which launched in September 2016.

Björg Lewis plays a Gennaro Gagliano cello of 1748 — previously played by Martin Lovett of the Amadeus Quartet — generously loaned to her by the Dextra Musica foundation.

## TOR ESPEN ASPAAS.

Tor Espen Aspaas is one of Norway's leading pianists, chamber musicians and musical communicators. In 2016 he was made Knight 1st Class of the Royal Norwegian Order of St Olav, recognising his significant contribution to Norwegian musical life.

Aspaas earned his postgraduate soloist diploma at the Norwegian Academy of Music in 1996 and made his acclaimed Oslo debut the following year. He has since appeared with major Norwegian and international orchestras, beginning with the Oslo Philharmonic in 2000 and 2002, performing Mozart's C minor Concerto and Ravel's G major Concerto. His collaborations include conductors such as Frans Brüggen, Michel Plasson and Krzysztof Urbanski, and he has premiered several piano concertos, notably works by Olav A. Thommessen and Terje Bjørklund.

At the age of 34, Aspaas became a tenured professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music, later serving as Vice Principal. His research has focused on Beethoven's improvisational practice, particularly in the 32 piano sonatas, which he performs complete. After a period as a full time freelance artist, he returned to academia in 2025 as professor at the music faculty of The Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim.

A co-founder and several times artistic director of Vinterfestspill i Bergstaden in Røros, Aspaas appears regularly at festivals worldwide. His discography includes 16 titles,

among them acclaimed recordings of Beethoven, Schönberg, Berg, Webern, and the complete piano works of Paul Dukas, named historic reference recording by Diapason magazine in 2025.



## CREDITS.

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ODD GRÜNER-HEGGE 1899—1973

PIANO TRIO IN B MINOR, OP. 4 (1919)

- 01. ALLEGRO ENERGICO 13:03
- 02. ANDANTINO, MOLTO TRANQUILLO 06:42
- 03. ALLEGRO GIOCO SO 10:28
- 04. ANDANTE—LUGUBRE MAESTOSO 07:24

PIANO TRIO IN B MINOR, OP. 4  
(EDIZIONE RIVISTA 1968)

- 05. ALLEGRO MA NON TROPPO 08:15
- 06. ANDANTE CANTABILE 06:24
- 07. ALLEGRO GIOCO SO 07:24
- 08. ANDANTE. QUASI UN EPILOGO 06:47