



LAWO
CLASSICS

Crossing Grieg

Opus 72 reimagined

Nils Henrik Asheim – piano
Håkon Asheim – Hardanger fiddle

Edvard Grieg was deeply fascinated by the Hardanger fiddle and its music. His urge to pass this on to a larger audience resulted in his 1903 collection of 17 pieces of music titled *Slåtter*.

Is it possible to get beneath the surface of Grieg's *slåtter* (fiddle tunes) and, through music, reveal where the ideas originate and the direction they take? To loosen up the music a little, making room for new choices? To allow the two instruments, each coming from its own sound world, to meet?

A profound sense of connection to the material, and a 25-year-long process, has led us to releasing the present album. We hope our listeners will join us on this journey.

In a series of letters from 1888 onwards, the folk musician Knut Dahle (1834–1921) of Tinn in Telemark, sought Grieg's assistance to preserve the *slåtter* tradition. Dahle feared that the old style of fiddle playing would be lost in favour of new trends. Grieg was familiar with Hardanger fiddle music, having listened to it during folk music contests in Bergen, but he had not heard Knut Dahle play, and he turned to violinist Johan Halvorsen for help. In November 1901, Dahle travelled to Kristiania, where over the course of two weeks Halvorsen transcribed 17 fiddle tunes, which he then sent to Grieg. In 1903, these transcriptions,

along with Grieg's newly composed piano versions, were published by Edition Peters.

The Hardanger fiddle is played on two strings that sound simultaneously, with the melody emerging from the upper and occasionally the lower string, and with plenty of ornamentation on both. Grieg chose to assign this entire structure to the pianist's right hand, leaving it largely unchanged. He then added a supplement of chords, bass notes and figurations for the left hand. This is how the *Grieg slåtter* were created, a genre unlike any other.

The collection consists of 17 fiddle tunes and showcases a fascinating feature of Norwegian folk fiddle music, especially the Hardanger fiddle: the use of scordatura (alternate tuning). The Grieg folk tunes feature a total of four distinct tunings. The most commonly used tuning is ADAE (the standard violin tuning is GDAE), and any alternative tunings are indicated in the table below. Each tuning provides its own distinctive harmony, enabling the folk musician to create variation during extended dance sessions.

What drew the most attention at the time was the way Grieg allowed the dissonances in the fiddle playing to emerge, highlighting them rather than concealing them. These dissonances – minor second,

tritone, and major seventh – are caused by the use of 'drone' notes on the fiddle (notes that sound continuously, often on open strings, while others change). They stand in contrast to the harmonies that the early 20th-century art music audience was still willing to accept. Younger composers and musicians, however, were more open to new ideas. In the Parisian circle, there was enthusiastic talk about 'le nouveau Grieg'. Béla Bartók also resided in Paris during this period. He likely became familiar with Grieg's Opus 72, and Grieg's approach to folk music must have resonated with him. He often referenced Grieg in his teachings and writings, and, during his travels to Norway in 1912, he acquired a Hardanger fiddle. Among the several performers who attempted Op. 72, it was the young Australian pianist and composer Percy Grainger who received the highest praise from Grieg.

Up to the present day, it has been Norwegian pianists who have been best placed to interpret Grieg's *slåtter*, since the folk fiddle music tradition continued to thrive here, contrary to Knut Dahle's fears. He had two grandsons, Johannes and Gunnar Dahle, who both became skilled fiddlers and learnt most of their grandfather's repertoire. Several others from the younger generation also had the privilege of learning folk tunes from him before his passing in 1921.

In preparing the fiddle playing for this release, it was important to gather as much information as possible from the source material: Halvorsen's transcriptions, recordings of Knut Dahle, his grandsons, and other fiddle players. Our intention has been to show that the *slåtter* belong to a living Hardanger fiddle tradition, with numerous related variants, which in some cases we have used instead of Dahle's. These derive from the Valdres tradition.

Several Norwegian pianists and Hardanger fiddle players have presented the 17 *slåtter* side by side, alternating between the piano and fiddle versions. Others have created their own arrangements, including Unni Boksasp and Ingfrid Breie Nyhus. For our part, we have created fusions between the fiddle tunes and Grieg's music. In *Crossing Grieg*, we assemble each *slått* by overlapping and alternating between both versions – some have been only slightly altered, while others have been fully recomposed.

In the interplay between piano and fiddle, a shift in our usual playing styles occurs. The fiddle, normally tuned to B, is tuned down to A to better harmonise with the piano. Part of Grieg's piano harmonisation is simplified to allow the sonority and (micro) tonality of the fiddle to come through. The rhythm from the fiddle influences the piano and reduces some of the Romantic rubato,

making room for a more dance-like character. Each *slått* establishes its own rules.

In concert context we have improvised transitions between pieces. These also help create a sketch-like quality. The improvisations (now written down) are based on elements we have found in the material, often a chord or figure in Grieg that we consider particularly original. In the overview below, we describe the specifics of what we have done in each *slått*, so that those who are interested can identify what is Grieg's work and what is Asheim's.

Notes on each piece.

The order of the *slåtter* follows the order we use in our concerts, differing from Grieg's order.

Note: *In certain places in the springar tunes, a change has been made to Grieg's rhythm: the rhythm is 'inverted' (the bar line has been moved one beat to the right or left), corresponding to the generally accepted understanding of rhythm in these tunes in the folk music tradition. This, along with similar adjustments in the other tunes, was also implemented in the 2001 Grieg edition by Geir Henning Braaten and Sven Nyhus. In these tunes, the piano also imitates the rhythm of the fiddle: the asymmetrical rhythm of the traditional springar from Tele-*

mark. Asymmetry (varying the length of the beats) is common in many Norwegian and Swedish folk dances in triple metre. In the Telemark springar, the pattern 'long-medium-short' is used.

Read more about the original tunes and the folk music tradition they belong to here: Håkon Asheim: "The original Slåtter used in Grieg's op. 72". Paper at the 2017 conference of the International Edvard Grieg Society.

<http://griegsociety.com/hakon-asheim-paper-2017/>

For more detailed information about the recording and sources, see: <https://nilshenrikasheim.no/articles/crossing-grieg-insights/>

1. *Bruremarsj etter Myllarguten*

Wedding March after Myllarguten

Tuning: AEAE

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Myllarguten (Torgeir Augundson, 1801–1872) was the most famous Hardanger fiddle player of the 19th century. He rose to fame after Ole Bull had him perform during a concert in Kristiania in 1849. This slått has never been used as a regular wedding march, as it was composed when his girlfriend betrayed him and married another man.

Piano / Grieg:

Original Grieg, with a few harmonic simplifications. New epilogue inspired by the chord at bar 50 (bar numbers refer to Grieg's original).

2. *Jon Vestafes springar*

Jon Vestafe's Springar

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Inverted rhythm (bars 1–14 and corresponding sections). Asymmetrical metre.

In Tinn, where Knut Dahle lived, the fiddler Jon Kjos (1754–1826) was referred to as Jon Vestafe ('from the west').

Piano / Grieg:

New introduction with gradual development leading to Grieg's bass figure. From there, mostly original Grieg.

3. *Knut Luråsens halling II*

Knut Luråsen's Halling II

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Fiddle version after Knut Dahle's grandson, Johannes Dahle.

Knut Lurås (1782–1843) was one of the most renowned Hardanger fiddle players of his generation. He was also from Tinn and the source of much of Knut Dahle's repertoire.

Piano / Grieg:

Mostly original Grieg. Some harmonic simplifications. For example, the bass note G is replaced with a D when the fiddle plays a Lydian G sharp, from bar 32. The section is then repeated without the fiddle.

4. *Håvard Gibøens draum ved Oterholtsbrua*

Håvard Gibøen's Dream by the Oterholt Bridge

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Following an initial improvisation, the piece combines the version notated by Halvorsen with the one recorded by Johannes Dahle.

Inverted rhythm, asymmetrical metre.

Håvard Gibøen (1809–73) was considered as skilled a fiddler as Myllarguten but did not have the opportunity to become known beyond his local area. Knut Dahle learnt a lot from him.

Piano / Grieg:

The piano version is completely recomposed. Only three isolated elements from Grieg remain: a D chord with A in the bass, a minor second of D/D sharp in the bass, and an ascending scale.

5. *Prillaren frå Os*

Prillaren frå Os, springar

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Folk flutes, often referred to as 'prillar flutes' (made from bone, horn, or wood), may also have been used to play this tune besides the fiddle.

Piano / Grieg:

Mostly Grieg's original, lightly modified, bars 18–35. Prolonged coda.

6. *Springar etter Myllarguten*

Springar after Myllarguten

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Asymmetrical metre.

Piano / Grieg:

Recomposed. Original Grieg, bars 15–20. Grieg's dissonant bass chords are further developed.

7. *Røtnamsknut*

Røtnamsknut, halling

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

The fiddle's variant has been widely used from around 1900 onwards by Hardanger fiddle players from various regions, more as a concert piece than for dancing. (The slow section is Grieg's contribution and is not part of the traditional slått).

The title refers to Knut Rotneim (1809–1851), a famous folk dancer from Hallingdal. This is perhaps the Hardanger fiddle folk tune with the most variants across the country. One of these was included by Grieg in his Album for Male Voices (Op. 30:12), along with the text associated with the tune, which recounts the dancing skills and extraordinary powers of 'Røtnamsknut'.

Piano / Grieg:

New piano transition leading into the harmony of Grieg's minor section. Grieg's reprise of the A section is not included.

8. *Gangar etter Myllarguten*

Gangar after Myllarguten

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Both the fiddle and piano versions are recomposed. The fiddle has only an accompaniment figure.

Piano / Grieg:

Fragments of the slått are played by the piano as loops, often with a 5/8 structure against the 6/8 metre in the fiddle. Borrows some of Grieg's chromatic inflections and expansion of the harmony to triads, for example in bars 23 and 27.

9. *Skuldalsbruri*

The Bride from Skuldal, gangar

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Traditional form.

The title refers to a young girl from Skuldal who took her own life when she was forced to marry. She is said to have hummed this tune shortly before it happened.

Piano / Grieg:

The first half is recomposed. Grieg's bell-like bass fifths are made more complex, but follow Grieg's harmonic progression, slightly displaced in time.

Original Grieg from bar 44.

10. *Haugelått*

Hill Tune

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Traditional form, except for the slow minor section which is from Grieg.

The slått belongs to Knut Dahle's family tradition. His great-grandfather, the fiddler Brynjulv Olsson, had lost a bull and heard a hulder (a forest spirit) sing: 'Play this, Brynjulf Olsson, when you return home to your wife and children – and you shall find your bull beyond the mountain top'.

11. *Nils Rekves halling*

Nils Rekve's Halling

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

In certain sections, the roles are reversed: the piano plays the slått while the fiddle provides a pizzicato accompaniment, unlike in the traditional version.

Nils Rekve (1777–1846) from Voss was a renowned folk musician, and this tune may have travelled to Telemark via Knut Lurås.

Piano / Grieg:

Mostly original Grieg, where it works for the fiddle and piano to play largely the same, up to the middle of the minor section. Thereafter, the melody continues to unfold on the piano towards the figure introduced at the start of the next slått.

Piano / Grieg:

Largely original Grieg. From bar 39, Grieg's bass figure is further developed into an epilogue, with a nod to the style of Bartók.

12. *Bruremarsj frå Telemark*

Wedding March from Telemark

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

The fiddle gradually improvises into the slått. Compared to Grieg's version, the melody of the middle section has been transposed up one octave, as notated by Halvorsen and traditionally played on the fiddle.

Piano / Grieg:

The piano gradually moves into Grieg's original, reaching it by bar 10. It is then simplified but retains the rhythmic character. The bass progression from bar 15 is continuously shifted up and down in octaves, allowing more space around the folk tune. Original Grieg in bars 24–31 and 41 to the end.

13. *Gibøens bruremarsj*

Gibøen's Wedding March

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

A combination of the versions of Halvorsen and Johannes/Gunnar Dahle.

Piano / Grieg:

A recomposed version, drawing on Grieg's use of fifths and fourths on the afterbeats and his melodic fragmentation.

14. *Luråsens halling I*

Luråsen's Halling I

Tuning: GDAE

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Opens with a version from Valdres, 'Gamle Guro' ('Old Guro').

Piano / Grieg:

Largely original Grieg, with slight rhythmic modifications and a more restrained use of the bass. Bars 15–18 have been cut. A half reprise, and towards the end of this, Grieg's chords are expanded and frozen.

15. Tussebrureferda på Vossevangen

The Goblins' Bridal March at Vossevangen

Tuning: GDAE

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

The prelude is partly based on the prelude notated by Halvorsen and included by Grieg in Op. 72, and partly on 'Fyrispel after Knut Dahle', as played by Johannes Dahle, which is an expanded version of this (see recordings on Håvardspel, Talik Records 2009, and Rjukanfossen, Etnisk Musikkklubb 2020). The fiddle's intonation is similar to that heard on recordings of Tussebrureferda by both Johannes and his grandfather Knut, as well as in recordings of the next two slåtter, Kivlemøyane I and II by Johannes, among others.

The postlude is a variant from Valdres, the lydar slått (a slått meant for listening, not dancing) 'Søtebroke åt Nertrøste', created by Ivar Ringestad.

Piano / Grieg:

An elusive introduction that gradually moves toward A minor, followed by the conclusion of Grieg's introduction. From there, it is mostly original Grieg, often with the fiddle providing accompanying notes. When the fiddle carries the melody, the piano omits a few thirds.

16. Kivlemøyane (gangar)

The Maidens from Kivle (gangar)

Tuning: FCAE

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

This is played in the tradition of Knut Dahle with B natural instead of B flat. Dahle himself likely played either B natural or a note between B flat and B natural, though Halvorsen transcribed B flat. In this tradition, the high F is also often intonated higher than notated, somewhere between F and F sharp. The fiddle uses this intonation here.

Two different series of slåtter are connected to the legend of the three sisters from Kivle, who disrupted the mass with their bukkehorn (ram's horn) playing and were turned into stone by the priest. Knut Dahle learnt the gangar and springar tunes from Håvard Gibøen and later added a third tune to the series.

Piano / Grieg:

Largely recomposed to preserve the Lydian tonality of the fiddle tune. Some of Grieg's harmonies are gradually allowed to shine through, especially with the bass note B flat in bar 27.

Original Grieg only in bars 31–38.

17. Kivlemøyane (springar)

The Maidens from Kivle (springar)

Tuning: FCAE

Fiddle / Folk Tune:

Intonation: like the previous *slått*. Inverted rhythm (bar line shifts one beat to the left from bar 7), asymmetrical metre.

Piano / Grieg:

The piano plays Grieg's original after the fiddle has played once through as a solo, but drops Grieg's concluding section near the end to join the fiddle.

Håkon Asheim

Håkon Asheim (b. 1962, Oslo) is one of the foremost Norwegian folk musicians on the Hardanger fiddle. He graduated from Oslo University in 1995, with the concert tradition of the Hardanger fiddle as the subject of his master's thesis and final examination concert. In 2003, after several years of freelance activity as a musician and work at different music archives, he was appointed associate professor and study coordinator at the Ole Bull Academy in Voss, where he still works.

Håkon Asheim is featured on the solo album *Ulrik* (Heilo, 1992) as well as a number of other recordings, among others (together with Hilde H. Sveen and Einar Røttingen) in Hvoslef's «Hardingtrio» on *Ketil Hvoslef – Chamber Works No. VI* (LAWO Classics, 2019), the first recording of this work. He contributed more than 100 folk music transcriptions to vol. V of the collection of Norwegian fiddle tunes, *Norsk folkemusikk: Slåtter for vanlig fele* (Novus, 2012), and, together with Gunnar Stubseid, wrote the book *Ole Bull og folkemusikken* ('Ole Bull and folk music'; Vigmestad & Bjørke, 2010).





Nils Henrik Asheim

Nils Henrik Asheim (b.1960, Oslo, brother of Håkon Asheim), studied at the Norwegian Academy of Music under Harald Herresthal (organ), Geir Henning Braaten (piano) and Olav Anton Thommessen (composition). He is a prolific composer and organist, in addition to being an active pianist, organizer and curator. Asheim has written chamber music, orchestral works, pieces for organ, choir and many other instruments and ensembles. He has also worked with electronics, with stage- and multimedia art, as well as a variety of site-specific projects. Improvisation is often integrated in his compositional and performative methods. He has since 2013 been the resident organist of Stanger Concert Hall and is widely recognized for his personal style of improvising on the organ.

In 2018 Asheim was awarded the prestigious Nordic Council Music Prize for his work *Muhta – Language of Snow*. He is also a recipient of the Arne Nordheim prize, the Edvard prize and the Lindeman prize, and has twice been awarded a Spellemannspris (Norwegian “Grammy”). Selected albums on LAWO Classics include: *Mazurka – Remaking Chopin* and *Mazurka – Researching Chopin* (LWC1016, 2010, LWC1049, 2012), *Edvard Grieg – Ballade / Geirr Tveitt – Hundrad Hardingtonar* (LWC1151, 2018), *The Book of Psalms* (LWC1232, 2022).



- 1 Bruremarsj etter Myllarguten 05:27
Wedding March after Myllarguten
- 2 Jon Vestafes springar 03:27
Jon Vestafe's Springar
- 3 Knut Luråsens halling II 03:14
Knut Luråsen's Halling II
- 4 Håvard Gibøens draum ved Oterholtsbrua 03:39
Håvard Gibøen's Dream by the Oterholt Bridge
- 5 Prillaren frå Os 01:42
Prillaren frå Os, springar
- 6 Springar etter Myllarguten 02:15
Springar after Myllarguten
- 7 Røtnamsknut 05:13
Røtnamsknut, halling
- 8 Gangar etter Myllarguten 02:06
Gangar after Myllarguten
- 9 Skuldalsbruri 03:13
The Bride from Skuldal, gangar
- 10 Haugelått 03:49
Hill Tune
- 11 Nils Rekves halling 02:16
Nils Rekve's Halling
- 12 Bruremarsj frå Telemark 03:33
Wedding March from Telemark
- 13 Gibøens bruremarsj 02:50
Gibøen's Wedding March
- 14 Luråsens halling I 03:22
Luråsen's Halling I
- 15 Tussebrureferda på Vossevangen 05:17
The Goblins' Bridal March at Vossevangen
- 16 Kivlemøyane (gangar) 01:55
The Maidens from Kivle (gangar)
- 17 Kivlemøyane (springar) 03:06
The Maidens from Kivle (springar)

The Hardanger fiddles used for the recording:

To the right: Hardanger fiddle by John G. Heliand (1920), 'The Heliand Cannon'. Previously owned by Sigbjørn Bernhoft Osa, on loan from the Ole Bull Academy. Used on tracks 1–15.

To the left: Hardanger fiddle by Torleiv Bolstad (1977). On loan from Valdres Folk Museum. Used on tracks 16–17

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