

Sets versus Opuses: A Novel Approach to Programming Edvard Grieg's Piano Works

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Edvard Grieg, a composer best known for his incidental music the "Peer Gynt Suite" and the "Klaverkonsert i a-moll" ("Concerto in A minor"), composed over 300 works that are identified by 74 opuses and over 150 pieces of piano music that are without opus numbers. Of those with opus numbers, over 20 were written for the piano. When it comes to performing Grieg's piano works on stage, there are no standard staples. Leif Ove Andsnes, one of the most recorded Grieg artists, has set a good example of how to present Grieg's piano works by selecting individual piano pieces from "Lyriske stykker" ("Lyric Pieces") opuses 12, 38, 47, 54, 62, 65, 68 that represent 31 years of Grieg's compositional output. Grieg scholar and pianist, Einar Steen-Nøkleberg, recorded the complete piano works of Grieg by opuses, including pieces from his earliest to latest compositional periods. These two artists have certainly given us two very different approaches to performing Grieg's piano pieces.

As a concert pianist, Grieg toured Europe performing and promoting his own works. Historical documents from these concert tours reveal that he had a unique way of unraveling his piano opuses and regrouping the individual pieces, highlighting not only his favorite pieces but also his favorite sets of pieces that he performed as a group. His practice of grouping individual piano pieces into sets must have made it easier for him to showcase his keyboard works and communicate his musical language to his audience. Grieg's original concert programs indicate that he chose individual pieces from various opuses of his piano works and grouped them into sets more often than performing entire opuses. He continued to do so even when he had finished writing almost all of his piano pieces.

How can one find ways to present Grieg's miniatures in the vast concert landscape that is so crowded with lengthy opuses of his contemporaries? The promotion of Grieg's works might need to come from programming considerations. Grouping his miniatures into sets instead of by opuses could be more

musically convincing and appealing to audiences. Unlike some of his contemporaries, such as Robert Schumann, Grieg did not usually have a central poetic idea in mind when grouping his piano pieces into opuses.¹ The "Lyriske stykker" ("Lyric Pieces") with the exception of Op. 43, clearly demonstrate this tendency. Grieg entered into a general contract with C.F. Peters *Musikverlag* in 1889, giving the firm the exclusive right to publish all his future compositions.² The works that were published together by opus number were often written at different times and were quite independent of each other. One can only speculate that Grieg used his opuses very loosely for publication purposes, although many of them do represent a specific period of his compositional output. Kathleen Dale puts it well: "The lack of planning may possibly be considered as denoting the freshness and irresistibility of his inspiration, but it hinders the ready acceptance of these many sets of unrelated pieces."³

The purpose of this research is to examine the approach in which Grieg selected pieces from different opuses of his piano works and regrouped them into "sets" for his own performances.⁴ Using data from Grieg's concert programs, the research will analyze why this manner of grouping proved to be successful for the composer and also for other performers. The historical significance of how Grieg programmed his piano sets may reveal some of the more subtle musical ideas and nuances of his individual pieces, thus allowing for an appreciation for their relationships to each other within a larger context or set. In doing so, we hope to bring future pianists one step closer to performing sets of Grieg's piano works that are truly representative of his intentions and artistic values.

¹ Kathleen Dale, "Edvard Grieg's Pianoforte Music," *Music and Letters* 24 (1943): 194, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.rollins.edu:2048/stable/727023>.

² Edvard Grieg, *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Finn Benestad, trans. William H. Halverson, (Columbus: Peer Gynt Press, 2000), 2.

³ Dale, "Edvard Grieg's Pianoforte Music," 194.

⁴ Grieg used the word "sets" numerous times to refer to the grouping of his songs. This paper will adopt the term "sets" so as not to confuse them with Grieg's opuses. See *Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, May 2, 1906 concert in Amsterdam.

Methodology

Grieg rarely wrote narratives about his compositions, particularly his piano works, leaving some unanswered questions about his grouping of opuses. The few comments that he did make were about "Folkelivsbilder" ("Pictures from Folk-Life"), Op. 19 and "Slåtter" ("Norwegian Peasant Dances"), Op. 72, but gave no indication as to how he wanted them programmed with other piano works.

Hence, our research methodology relies primarily on data collected from historical sources, including the newly published *Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches* and *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends* by Finn Benestad and translated to English by William H. Halvorsen, as well as Grieg's original letters and concert programs, which are archived in the *Bergen Offentlige Bibliothek* and are available to the public via the *Bergen Offentlige Bibliothek* online collection. We examined the archived programs dating from Grieg's first public concert in Bergen on May 21, 1862 to his chamber concert in London on May 24, 1906. We restricted our research criteria to include only the programs in which Grieg performed his own piano works, which narrowed the data collection to 119 programs. These programs included Grieg's performances in Norway, Denmark, England, Scotland, Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and Italy. We went through each of these 119 programs to calculate the frequency of each individual piece, complete opus, and set that Grieg performed. These concert programs and Grieg's comments about his performances enabled us to identify a set of piano pieces that he regularly performed throughout his concert career. This set, referred to as the Signature Set in this research, consists of two staples, the "Humoreske" and the "Albumblad." From this set, Grieg often added or substituted pieces, which gave variety to his programs. Our research also identified other sets that he used less frequently, labeled subsets in this paper.

Research Results

The Signature Set

Sonnabend, den 30. November 1878, Abends 7 Uhr
im Saale des Gewandhauses zu Leipzig:

CONCERT
des
R. Heckmann'schen Quartetts
aus Köln

unter Mitwirkung der Concertsängerin Frä. *Mina Sciubro* aus Neapel
sowie des Componisten Herrn *Edvard Grieg* aus Christiania.

Gesang: Fräulein *Mina Sciubro*. Violine: *R. Heckmann* u. *Otto Forberg*.
Pianoforte: *Edvard Grieg*. Viola: *Theodor Allekotte*.
Violoncell: *Richard Bellmann*.

PROGRAMM.

Sämmtliche Compositionen von *Edvard Grieg*.

1. Sonate in G-moll Op. 13 für Pianoforte und Violine.
 - a. *Lento doloroso — Allegro vivace.*
 - b. *Allegretto tranquillo.*
 - c. *Allegro animato.*
2. Lieder:
 - a. *Die Prinzessin.*
 - b. *Dein Rath ist wohl gut.*
3. Clavierstücke:
 - a. *Auf den Bergen* (aus Op. 19).
 - b. *Albumblatt* (aus Op. 28).
 - c. *Humoreske* (aus Op. 6).
 - d. *Norwegischer Brautzug im Vorüberziehen* (a. Op. 19).
4. Lieder:
 - a. *Ich liebe dich.*
 - b. *Mutterschmerz.*
 - c. *Waldwanderung.*
5. Streichquartett in G-moll (Manuscript).
 - a. *Un poco Andante — Allegro agitato.*
 - b. *Romanze, Andantino.*
 - c. *Intermezzo. Allegro molto marcato.*
 - d. *Lento — Presto al Saltarello.*

Text der Lieder umstehend.

Figure 1. Program for Grieg's concert on November 30, 1878 in Leipzig.

In examining the archived programs in the *Bergen Offentlige Bibliothek*, it was quite evident that Grieg performed this set with very few deviations throughout his lifetime.

This set includes the following:

“Fjeldslåt” (“On the Mountains”), from Op. 19, No. 1

“Humoreske,” from Op. 6

“Albumblad,” from Op. 28

“Brudfølget drar forbi” (“Norwegian Bridal Procession Passing By”), from Op. 19, No. 2

It is important to note that Grieg used two pieces from Opus 19 in his signature set, “Fjeldslåt” (“On the Mountains”) to start the set and bookend it with “Brudfølget drar forbi” (“Norwegian Bridal Procession Passing By”). Using this “bookend” approach from Opus 19 must have given him the mood he needed. One can only speculate that the atmosphere of “On the Mountains” that starts with a low unison in pianissimo is quite fitting as the curtains slowly raises and the “Bridal Procession” as a celebration to end the set.

Grieg performed this set for the first time in Leipzig on November 30, 1878. The primary works in the Signature Set are "Humoreske," from Op. 6 and "Albumblad," from Op. 28 with the second piece from both opuses most frequently performed. In order to vary his programs, Grieg would also program other pieces including selections from "25 Norske Folkeviser og Danser" ("25 Norwegian Folksongs and Dances"), Op. 17; and "Lyriske stykker," Opp. 38 & 54. Below are samples of slight variations to the Signature Set with performance dates and locations. The primary works have been underlined for easy reference.

1. "Fjeldslåt," from Op. 19
"Humoreske," from Op. 6
"Albumblad," from Op. 28
"Brudfølget drar forbi" ("The Bridal Procession passes by"), from Op. 19
3.15.1884, Rome
2. "Humoreske," No. 2, Op. 6
"Albumblad," No. 2, Op. 28
"Fjeldslåt" ("On the Mountains"), from Op. 19
10.17.1885, Kristiania
3. "Humoreske," No. 2, Op. 6
"Albumblad," No. 2, Op. 28
"Stabbe-Låten" ("Peasant Dance"), from Op. 17
3.11.1886, Alborg
3.12.1886, Randers
3.18.1886, Veile Theater
3.19.1886, Aarhus
3.23.1886, Ribe
4. "Vuggevise" ("Cradle Song") from Op. 38
"Humoreske," from Op. 6
"Brudfølget drar forbi," from Op. 19
3.20.1889, London
5. "Humoreske," from Op. 6
"Albumblad," from Op. 28
"Brudfølget drar forbi," from Op. 19
1.4.1890, Paris
6. "Vuggevise," from Op. 38
"Humoreske," No. 2
"Albumblad," from Op. 28
"Fjeldslåt," from Op. 19
"Brudfølget drar forbi," from Op. 19
2.20.1897, Amsterdam
3.8.1897, Arnhem
7. "Humoreske," from Op. 6
"Vuggevise," from Op. 38
"Brudfølget drar forbi," from Op. 19
12.6.1897, Windsor
8. "Humoreske," No. 2
"Albumblad," No. 2
"Bryllupsdag på Trolldaugen," from Op. 65
10.24.1902, Bergen
10.26.1902, Bergen
12.05.1902, Kristiania
9. "Gangar," from Op. 54
"Humoreske," from Op. 6
"Albumblad," from Op. 28
"Bryllupsdag på Trolldaugen," from Op. 65
3.2.1904, Göteborg
3.7.1904, Stockholm
3.12.1904, Upsala
10. "Humoreske," No. 2
"Vuggevise," from Op. 38
"Bryllupsdag på Trolldaugen," from Op. 65
3.21.1906, Kristiania
3.27.1906, Kristiania

Grieg's Programmatic Selections

Because of the lack of narratives to explain his groupings, again one can only speculate that his selections must have been based on musical and personal reasons. This is especially true with the two signature pieces: "Humoresker," Op. 6 and "Albumblad", Op. 28.

"Humoresker," Op. 6 is one of Grieg's most youthful works. Grieg often called his "Folkelivsbilder" ("Pictures from Folk Life"), Op. 19 "humoreskes." It therefore follows that Grieg may have envisioned his "Humoresker," Op. 6 to be representative of "pictures from folk life," as he

used the two names “humoreskes” and “pictures” interchangeably.⁵ Grieg’s national style first found full expression in the “Humoresker.”⁶ This opus also indicates a significant departure from the Liszt-Mendelssohn stylistic connections.

Benestad & Schjelderup-Ebbe described “Humoresker,” Op. 6 as ‘epoch making’ because it marked the beginning of a memorable friendship between Grieg and Richard Nordraak, a composer who sparked Grieg’s interest in Norwegian folk music.⁷ “This meeting (between Grieg and Nordraak) was of the utmost importance to Grieg, for it changed his whole musical outlook, and from that time onwards he lost no opportunity of utilizing this treasury of native melody and rhythm.”⁸ In a letter to Holter in 1897, Grieg wrote, “Nordraak’s importance for me is not exaggerated. It really is so: through him and only through him was I truly awakened... Suddenly it was as if the fog disappeared, and I knew what I wanted. It was not precisely what Nordraak wanted, but I think the road that led to me went first through him.”⁹

The “Humoresker” were some of Grieg’s favorite pieces to perform; after performing the opus on March 24, 1866, Grieg wrote in his diary, “I loved them and felt happy with them.”¹⁰ They were highly popular with the public and the score sold out in music stores.¹¹ Grieg sometimes performed only “Humoreske,” No. 2 in his sets. The theme of this “Tempo di Menuetto ed energico” came from the folk song “Alle mann hadde fota” (“All men had legs”). Grieg shows a predilection for No. 2 very early in his concert career. On August 22, 1870 in Bergen, Grieg performed “Humoreske (a-moll).” The second “Humoreske” was originally in G-sharp minor; however, Horneman & Erslev published a Danish edition of the piece in A-minor.¹² Therefore, it can be inferred that the second “Humoreske”

⁵ Einar Steen-Nøkleberg, *Onstage with Grieg: Interpreting His Piano Music*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 25.

⁶ Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist*, trans. William H. Halverson and Leland B. Sateren (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸ Dale, “*Pianoforte Music*,” 196.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65

¹⁰ Edvard Grieg and Finn Benestad, *Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, trans. William H. Halverson (Columbus: Peer Gynt Press, 2001), 42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 54

¹² Steen-Nøkleberg, *Onstage*, 28.

was the most often performed piece from Op. 6. Grieg continued to perform the second piece from this opus through his 1906 concerts in Kristiania and Prague. He also recorded this piece on May 2, 1903 in the Gramophone and Typewriter Company studio in Paris.¹³

It only made sense that Grieg would sometimes start his set with one of the pieces from the "Humoresker" to mark the beginning of his creative career. This "Menuetto," No. 2 is unlike the traditional minuet. It is energetic and carefully crafted to represent a *springar*-like rhythm. The left hand octaves ascend and descend with a forward momentum. The middle section introduces a major tonality with dotted rhythms that suggest the beginning of a *springar*. Since this piece represents Grieg's youthful style, it serves as an ideal opening for this Signature Set.

The four pieces in "Albumblad," Op. 28 were published between 1864 and 1878. Grieg's programs indicate that he sometimes performed "Albumblad" in its entirety (in 1884, 1890, 1897, and 1904), and at other times he would only play No. 2 from this opus (in 1885, 1886 and 1902). Since "Albumblad" was written over such an extended time span, scholars have always viewed these four pieces as separate entities rather than as a cohesive whole, with No. 4 being "one of his most successful piano compositions incorporating a stylized Norwegian flavor."¹⁴ Furthermore, Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe regard the first three, written in 1864, 1874, and 1876 respectively, to be salon-like compositions that are not on the same musical level as No. 4.¹⁵ We can only speculate that these works serve as a type of diary, chronicling Grieg's transition from a youthful to a mature composer, during which he had some very challenging experiences. David Monrad Johansen, who was quoted in Beryl Foster's *The Songs of Edvard Grieg*, felt that this difficult period "shows the most intimate connection between Grieg's life and his art, and that 'hand in hand with the artistic crises he is going through at this time, are also personal experiences, which seem to have a great bearing on the whole of his

¹³ Lionel Carley, *Edvard Grieg in England*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 336.

¹⁴ Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, 232.

¹⁵ Ibid.

destiny.”¹⁶

In 1874, Grieg composed “Albumblad,” No. 2. At the same time, he also wrote the second setting of “Den blonde Pige” [EG 138] (“The Fair-Haired Maid”). According to Beryl Foster, this is a different song, with a more nostalgic quality than the first. The vocal line is very chromatic and unusually wide-ranging and is doubled almost throughout in the accompaniment.”¹⁷ It seems that Grieg originally composed “Den blonde Pige” for his beloved wife Nina to perform, for he stated in his letter to Finck that all songs were “written for her.” However, given the extreme chromaticism and daring harmonies, he might have realized that the concert audience in Kristiania would not have truly comprehended the meaning of the song.¹⁸ Therefore, he transcribed it for piano and performed it throughout his concert career. This may explain why Grieg chose this piece from Op. 28 to perform most often: it was an emblem of his love for Nina. The melodic line, as in “Den blonde Pige,” is quite chromatic. The right hand starts a quiet conversation between two people that becomes more dramatic with the widening of the chords. The lyricism in this piece gives a moment of repose to the Signature Set.

More Common Works that Occur in the Signature Set:

“Vuggeviser” (“Cradle Song”) No. 1, Op. 38

Op. 38, the second book of the “Lyriske stykker,” was published 16 years after the first book of “Lyriske stykker,” Op. 12. The opening piece in Op. 38 is “Vuggeviser,” which is a charming cradlesong and has a hint of the *halling* in the middle section. Steen-Nøkleberg remarked, “One is tempted to say that it is more like a little story about the *halling* and its character rather than an example of one.”¹⁹

Grieg often frequently used the title “Vuggesang” (“Cradle Song”) for his songs. He wrote a “Vuggesang” on April 5th, 1866 as part of a group of songs published as Op. 9. In this opus, Grieg used

¹⁶ Beryl Foster, *The Songs of Edvard Grieg*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 118.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸ Edvard Grieg, *Letters*, 236.

¹⁹ Steen-Nøkleberg, *Onstage*, 244.

poems by Andreas Munch, a well-known Norwegian poet at the time. The poem “Sorgo og trøst” (“Sorrow and Consolation”) depicts a father speaking to his motherless infant son.²⁰ This is no doubt related to the death of Munch’s wife in 1850, shortly after she gave birth to their twin boys.²¹ Grieg regarded this “Vuggesang” to be among his best songs and even transcribed it for piano solo, which can be found in his "Piano Pieces," Op. 41 in 1884.

Grieg wrote another “Vuggesang” in 1868. The birth of his daughter, Alexandra, at that time was surely a great inspiration for Grieg, for he composed “Margretes Vuggesang” (“Margaret’s Cradle Song,” later designated as Op. 15/1) based on his setting of a poem by Ibsen.²² Ibsen's 1863 drama "Kongsemnerne" ("The Pretenders") tells of the struggle for sovereignty during the 13th century between King Håkon Håkonsson and Earl Skule, Margrete’s father.²³ The music of this cradlesong matches the simplicity and sincerity of the verse in Grieg’s straightforward setting.²⁴ Beryl Foster points out that the descending augmented second, which occurs twice in the melody here, adds poignancy to the words, as if “the composer envied the baby its chance to glimpse heaven, a chance denied the parent.”²⁵ In the “Vuggeviser” of "Lyriske stykker," Op. 38, Grieg also placed repeated emphasis on an augmented 2nd (F# to Eb) for four measures in anticipation of the return to the tonic. Perhaps Grieg had the same image in mind when he composed his “Vuggeviser” for the piano.

Wedding Marches

The wedding marches from Opp. 17, 19 and 65 occupied a special place in Grieg’s programs, as they appeared as the last piece in his Signature Set. As early as 1869, Grieg displayed a tendency to end his sets with a piece that is thematically related to weddings. Daniel Grimley affirms this recurrence of the wedding theme in Grieg’s piano pieces: “It is possible to recontextualize Grieg’s creative

²⁰ Foster, *Songs*, 55.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 61.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

response to the folk wedding.”²⁶ In his early concerts, Grieg almost always ended his sets with “Stabbe-Låten,” No. 18 from “25 Norske Danser og Viser,” Op. 17 or “Brudfølget drar forbi,” No. 2 from “Folkelivsbilder,” Op. 19. This manner of programming became even more personal for Grieg after his 25th wedding anniversary, when he replaced “Brudfølget drar forbi” with “Bryllupsdag på Troidhaugen” in concert programs after 1897. Although “Bryllupsdag på Troidhaugen” was published in 1896 as the sixth and final piece in “Lyriske stykker,” Op. 65, Grieg composed this piece much earlier in 1892 to celebrate his silver wedding anniversary with Nina.

Grieg’s manner of concluding his Signature Set with wedding pieces remained consistent even in his less common sets. In his March 23, 1901 concert in Copenhagen, Grieg performed six pieces from “19 Norske folkeviser,” Op. 66. The last piece he performed from this opus was “Morgo ska du få gifte deg” No. 10 (“Tomorrow you marry”). He then followed the Op. 66 set with “Bryllupsdag på Troidhaugen.” Also, when he performed “Slåtter,” Op. 72 in two concerts in 1906, he ended the sets with “Bruremarsj fra Telemark” (“Bridal March from Telemark”), No. 3 (March 21, 1906) and “Tussebrurefæra på Vossevangen” (“The Goblins’ Bridal Procession at Vossevangen”), No. 14 (March 27, 1906).

Grieg’s wedding pieces are reminiscent of Norwegian folk dances, such as the *halling*. The upbeat, march-like quality generates the celebratory and folk-like nature of the pieces. It is easy to understand why Grieg concluded his Signature Set and all its variations with wedding pieces throughout his concert career, as they provide a jubilant finale.

Most Significant Works from the Subsets

The following sets, designated as Subsets I through IV in this research, were not performed as often as the Signature Set. However, they proved to be very well received, especially among British audiences.

²⁶ Daniel Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 68.

sets. It was a common practice among performers during Grieg's time to play a single movement of a classical form, such as a sonata. Our data shows that Grieg performed his sonata only five times in its entirety; he would occasionally perform only three movements (out of four) from his sonata. The piano sonata represents a young Grieg who was still trying to conform to the classical structure. He adhered to the sonata form in his first and fourth movements but took more liberties in the treatment of his themes. The second movement seems to incorporate more Norwegian characteristics with its modal melodies and dance rhythms. The third movement, *Alla Menuetto*, gave Grieg the license to return to his Norwegian dances.

***Alla Menuetto* from "Sonate for piano i e-moll," Op. 7**

Alla Menuetto, ma poco più lento, as the tempo suggests, is a slow dance. Einar Steen-Nøkleberg characterized it as an "Old Norse," speculating that Grieg used a slow dance to recreate an ancient drama.²⁷ This movement of the sonata must have been one of Grieg's favorites, for he played it as an encore in his March 21, 1906 concert in Kristiania that featured only his piano music. Ten days later, he played it again at a student party with a sore finger.²⁸ There is a certain dignity to this *Menuetto* that reminds one of a very majestic march.

The London papers gave Grieg very flattering reviews of Subset I. *The Monthly Musical Record* noted that the program consisted of "a rich selection from his compositions for pianoforte alone. These pieces were played as they certainly have never been played in this country before... To dwell upon their musical charm is superfluous, since they are included among the special favourites of every amateur able to appreciate true poetry in music."²⁹ *The Daily News* echoed these praises by stating that it was "a genuine treat to hear so refined a pianist as Herr Grieg play some of the national dances (with truly awful names), bridal and other "folk-songs" of his native land."³⁰ Therefore, it is not surprising

²⁷ Steen-Nøkleberg, *Onstage*, 53.

²⁸ Grieg and Benestad, *Diaries*, 114.

²⁹ Carley, *Grieg in England*, 97-98.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

that Grieg selected the third movement of his sonata, which has a commonly known dance title, to open Subset I.

Subset II

Subset II includes the following:

“Folk Song,” from Op. 66 (specific piece is not indicated in the program)

“Ballad tone,” from Op. 65

“Bryllupsdag på Troldhaugen,” from Op. 65

Subset II comprises of three different pieces from Grieg's "Lyriske stykker." Grieg composed 66 "Lyriske stykker," which he published in 10 opuses. Although Grieg gave each piece a title, there was no description of each opus. They were all simply called "Lyriske stykker." In his letter to Henri Hinrichsen, director of C.F. Peters Music Publishing company, on 10 August 1901, Grieg said, “The pieces are entitled "Lyriske stykker," *10th and final book*. And that is how it must stay. It is not a fixed idea. This model must no longer be repeated.”³¹ Again in a letter dated 13 December 1901 to Hinrichsen, he said, “The 10 books of "Lyriske stykker" represent parts of an intimate life history.”³²

It is likely that Grieg looked to the short, independent lyric pieces of Felix Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words" as his inspiration and model for his own "Lyriske stykker." Grieg worshipped Mendelssohn and probably read Fanny Mendelssohn's comment on Felix's "Songs without Words" that said, “These early pieces, which seem to have been brief, light, occasional compositions, have not reached us; but they were very successful and were imitated among his acquaintances.”³³

In describing "Songs without Words," Mendelssohn explained “he did not wish to affix words to his music, because in his opinion words are open to different interpretations while these pieces carry definite and direct messages.”³⁴ This might also represent Grieg's sentiment about his "Lyriske stykker." Mendelssohn used his "Songs without Words" as sketches for his other compositions; Grieg

³¹ Edvard Grieg, *Briefwechsel mit dem Musikverlag C. F. Peters 1863-1907*, ed. Finn Benestad and Hella Broch, (Frankfurt: Peters, 1997), 470.

³² Edvard Grieg, *Briefwechsel*, 474.

³³ Hans and Louise H. Tischler, "Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*," *The Musical Quarterly* 33 (1947): 7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/739432>.

³⁴ Tischler, "Mendelssohn's *Songs*," 9.

also did the same with his "Lyriske stykker," as many of his themes or even entire opuses manifest themselves as transcriptions for orchestra.

Grieg's "Lyriske stykker," like Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words," reveal the composer's innermost thoughts at different points of his life. Grieg's choice of "Lyriske stykker" for his own performances certainly reflected this sentiment. A performance order that the composer chooses results in a more genuine interpretation of his music. Rather than performing these opuses in their entirety, Grieg would select individual pieces from different books of "Lyriske stykker" to perform in a set, such as Subsets II and III identified in this paper.

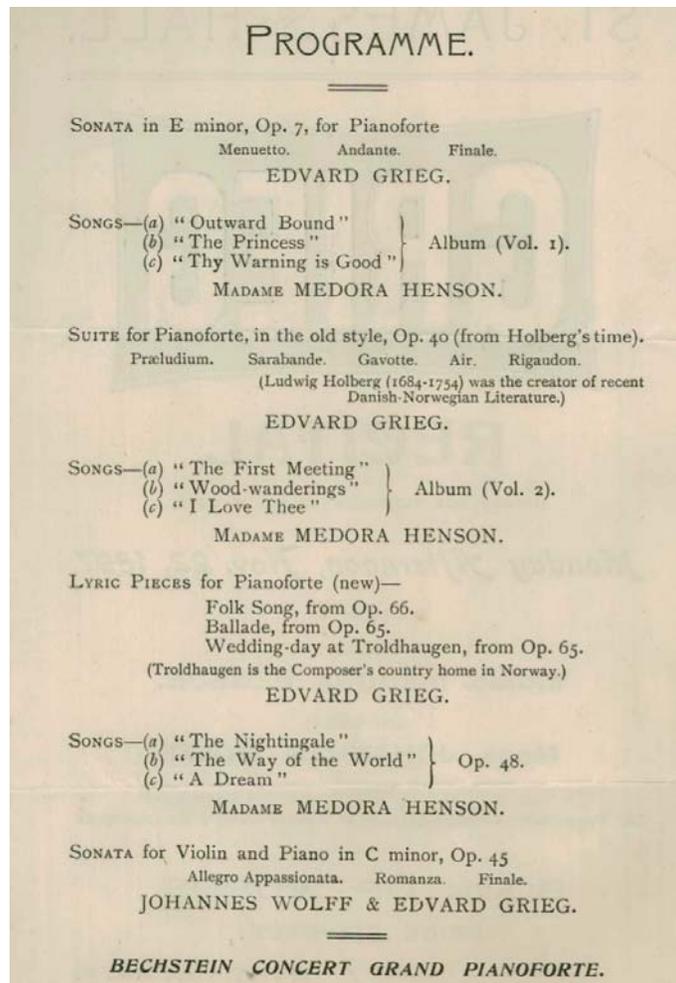


Figure 3. Program of Grieg's concert on November 22, 1897 in London.

Grieg performed Subset II in St. James Hall of London on November 22, 1897 during his England tour. This was the first concert in London during the tour, and Grieg showcased more of his solo compositions by replacing the pieces from Op. 19 with two "Lyriske stykker" and an unidentified folk song from Op. 66.³⁵ Grieg was highly popular with the English public, and the concert hall was overflowing with eager listeners:

As always, St James's Hall was packed for the Norwegian composer, with several hundred people having to be turned away from its doors and those inside occupying the gangways as well as filling the seats. *The London Musical Courier* was sorry for all those who had been left outside, 'since they missed something more than the sight of a celebrated musician – they missed an object-lesson on purity and charm in pianoforte playing, which could hardly have failed to do them a world of good.'³⁶

Grieg received numerous acclaims such as this from British critics. *Brighton Society* stated that the concert was "a remarkable scene" and the enthusiasm was "almost overwhelming." The reviewer also noted the attendance of the Royal Family, including the Duchess of Connaught, and a preponderance of "enthusiastic ladies in the balcony."³⁷ Grieg's "Lyriske stykker" were highly popular among the English, particularly the young ladies, and they also were regularly performed in middle class homes.³⁸ It is therefore easy to surmise why Grieg included some "Lyriske stykker" in the latter part of this set.

Subset III

Subset III includes the following:

"Notturmo," from Op. 54

"Fransk Serenade," from Op. 62

"Hjemve," from Op. 57

"Hun danser," from Op. 57

³⁵ Carley, *Grieg in England*, 266.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

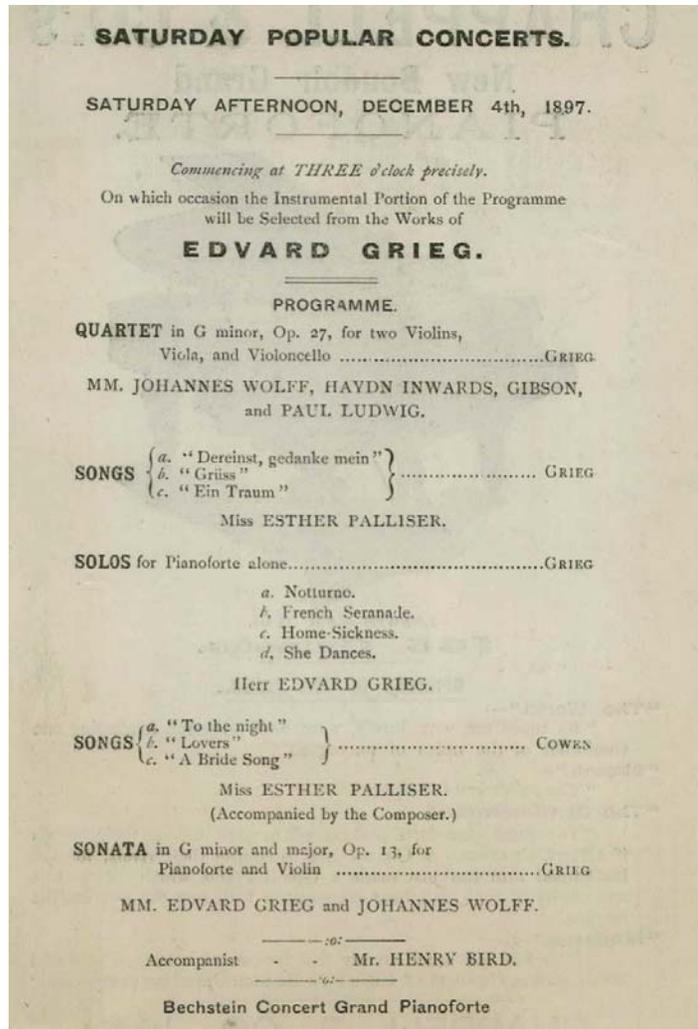


Figure 4. Program from Grieg's concert on December 4, 1897 in London

Grieg performed this set in the Saturday Popular Concert series in London on December 4, 1897. Numerous English journals, including *The Musical Standard*, *The Musical Times*, and *Musical News*, deemed Grieg's appearance as a "gala" and "great event"; as with previous concert reviews, journalists highlighted Grieg's "extraordinary" popularity in England.³⁹ The *Musical News* review of the concert notes the immense size of the crowd and suggests the attendance of a number of musically uneducated:

The music of Grieg, and, above all, the presence of Grieg, last Saturday, attracted a large audience...Grieg's simple and unaffected method of introducing full closes in the middle of

³⁹ Carley, *Grieg in England*, 279.

his movements proved on several occasions inconvenient, and applause out-of-place was frequent from the musically uneducated, or the inattentive. Grieg, in the capacity of soloist, contributed four of his lyric pieces, to which as an encore he good-naturedly added another of his characteristic productions.⁴⁰

Subset III - “Notturmo” (“Nocturne”), from Op. 54

Some Grieg scholars consider "Lyriske stykker," Op. 54 to be the best of the ten volumes because of its expressiveness, freshness, and rich development.⁴¹ Grieg's trip to the Jotunheimen Mountains in 1891 and his meeting with Gjendine Slålien appear to have renewed his desire to compose, resulting in Op. 54.⁴² Grieg appeared to be fond of “Notturmo” from this opus, for he played it on November 1, 1891 and November 24, 1892 along with “Scherzo,” “Gjetergut” (“Shepherd Boy”), and “Gangar” from the same opus. “Notturmo” is also the fourth piece in Grieg’s "Lyrisk suite" (Lyric Suite), which consists of four pieces from Op. 54 that Grieg transcribed for orchestra in 1905.⁴³ The colorful extended chords and abrupt harmonic changes create a mystical atmosphere, thus highlighting Grieg's impressionistic characteristics that foreshadowed the writing of French composers, such as Debussy and Ravel.

Subset III - “Fransk serenade” (“French Serenade”), from Op. 62

Grieg wrote Op. 62 in 1895 while also working on his songs (Op. 67 and EG 152), which were based on Arne Garborg’s poems. One can see a strong connection between these songs and Op. 62, for he used the figuration of “Bækken” No. 4, Op. 62 as an accompaniment to “Ved Gjøttele-Bekken” in Op. 67.⁴⁴ The “Fransk serenade” is not a typical serenade like that of Schubert’s. Although the tempo is *andantino grazioso*, this piece is somewhat dance-like. The skipping figure found in measure 14, is similar to that in the upbeat “Killingsdans” (“Kids’ Dance”), the text of which is “Å hipp og hoppe” (“Oh, hip and hop”) from the song cycle "Haugtussa," Op. 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, 317.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 318.

⁴⁴ Foster, *Songs*, 194.

Subset III - "Hjemve" ("Home-Sickness") and "Hun dances" ("She Dances"), from Op. 57

Grieg may have composed the entire "Lyriske stykker," Op. 57 during a rejuvenating trip to the city of Menton on the French Riviera.⁴⁵ Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe surmise that four of these six pieces showcase Grieg's cosmopolitan style.⁴⁶ One such piece is "Hun dances," a charming waltz with a lilt. In "Hjemve," we rediscover Grieg's characteristic Norwegian style in the folk-like melodies and *springar* rhythms, which appear in the middle of the piece.⁴⁷

Subset IV

This subset, which represents Grieg's most ambitious undertaking as a pianist, was featured in his solo piano concert at Kristiania on March 21, 1906. Grieg wrote in his diary that he "tried to act like [Anton] Rubinstein...by playing, for the first time, a complete concert program."⁴⁸ Portions of this program were performed again a week later in the Mission House on Calmeyer Street in Kristiania with an audience of nearly 3,000 people.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, 321.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 322.

⁴⁸ Grieg and Benestad, *Diaries*, 113.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 114.

BRØDRENE HALS'S KONCERTBUREAU

PROGRAM:

1. **Stemninger** (af Op. 73).
Resignation — Folketone fra Valdres — Hommage a Chopin —
Studenternes Serenade — Lualaat.
2. **Fra Holbergs Tid.** Suite i gammel Stil (Op. 40).
Prælude — Sarabande — Gavotte — Air — Rigaudon.
3. **Albumblade** (Op. 28).
Allegro con moto — Allegretto espressivo — Vivace — Andante
serioso.
4. **Romancer.**
Udfarten. — Ragnhild. — Prinsessen. — Et Haab.
5. **Slaatter**¹⁾ (af Op. 72).
a. Gangar²⁾. — b. Brurmarsch³⁾. — c. Haugelaat. — d. Kivle-
moyerne⁴⁾. — e. Prillaren⁵⁾. — f. Tussebrurefera paa Vossevangen⁶⁾.
6. a. Humoreske Gis-moll (af Op. 6).
b. Berceuse (af Op. 38).
c. Bryllupsdag kaa Trolldaugen⁷⁾ (af Op. 65).

Samtlige Musikstykker komponeret eller bearbejdet
af *Edvard Grieg*.

Sang: **Frøken Borghild Bryhn.**
Piano: **Edvard Grieg.**

Flygel fra Brødrene Hals's Fabrik.

- ¹⁾ Efter en gammel Spillemand i Telemarken, nedskrevet for Hardangerfele af Johan Halvorsen. Fri Bearbejdelse for Piano af Edvard Grieg.
- ²⁾ Efter Møllargutten.
- ³⁾ Komponeret af Møllargutten, da hans Kjæreste, Kari, sveg ham for at gifte sig med en anden.
- ⁴⁾ Springdans og Gangar fra Selljord.
- ⁵⁾ Springdans fra Os Prestegjeld.
- ⁶⁾ Gangar.
- ⁷⁾ Komponistens Villa nær Bergen.

Figure 5. Program for Grieg's Concert on March 21, 1906 in Kristiania

The grouping for Subset IV is as follows:

1) From "Stemninger," Op. 73:

“Resignation,” No. 1

“Folketone” (“Folk Song”), No. 4

“Studie (Hommage á Chopin),” No. 5

“Studenternes Serenade,” No. 6

“Lualåt” (“The Mountaineer's Song”), No. 7

2) "Fra Holbergs tid," Op. 40

3) "Albumblad," Op. 28

4) Songs, sung by Miss Borghild Bryhn

5) "Slåtter," Op. 72

 "Bruremarsch (efter Møllarguten)" ("Myllarguten's Bridal March"), No. 8

 "Bruremarsch fra Telemarken" ("Bridal March from Telemark"), No. 3

 "Haugelåt" ("Hailing from the Hills"), No. 4

 "Kivlemøyerne" ("The Girls from Kivledal"), No. 16

 "Prillaren fra Os Præstegjeld" ("Prillar from the Parish of Os"), No. 5

 "Tussebrurefæra på Vossevangen" ("The Goblin's Bridal Procession at Vossevangen"), No. 14

6) a. "Humoreske," No. 2, from Op. 6

 b. "Vuggeviser," from Op. 38

 c. "Bryllupsdag på Trolldhaugen," from Op. 65

There are many "firsts" to this set. This was the first time that Grieg played such a long solo program for the piano, featuring both "Fra Holbergs tid" ("From Holberg's Time") and "Albumblad" together in their entirety. It was also the first time that Grieg programmed pieces from Opp. 72 and 73, the last two opuses of his piano works, together with some of his more frequently performed pieces. He later repeated selections from Opp. 72 and 73 in his May 24, 1906 concert in London:

 "Bruremarsch (efter Møllarguten)," No. 6, Op. 72

 "Folketone," No. 4, Op. 73

 "Lualåt," No. 7, Op. 73

 "Bryllupsdag på Trolldhaugen," No. 6, from Op. 65

Grieg gave a detailed account of his reception at this Kristiania concert in his diaries. He was proud of his performance and moved by the warm reception of "the many women waving their handkerchiefs."⁵⁰ Grieg enthusiastically responded by playing a series of encores: first "Jølstring" ("Dance from Jølster"), No. 5; then "Solfager og Ormekongen" ("Solfager and the Snake King"), No. 12, both from Op. 17; and finally the *Menuetto* from the piano sonata.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Subset IV - "Slåtter," Op. 72

"Slåtter," Op. 72 are the most progressive and elaborate of Grieg's nationalistic piano works. The melodies come directly from Halvorsen's transcriptions of Hardanger fiddle tunes as played by Knut Dale, "who had written to [Grieg] in 1901 requesting his assistance in the preservation of this unique heritage of folk music."⁵¹ These complex pieces incorporate Hardanger fiddle elements, such as heavy ornamentation, drone basses, and cross-rhythms, as Grieg no doubt was aiming to reproduce "every possible feature of the uncouth wildness of the dances and of the rustic quality of the native instrument."⁵² Grieg provided descriptive narratives of some of the "Slåtter," including Nos. 4, 8, and 16.⁵³ The "Slåtter," unlike the "Lyriske stykker," did have a central theme and may benefit from some narratives or program notes.

Although the pieces from Op. 72 were not well received on March 21st, 1906, Grieg was grateful for the attentiveness and understanding of his audience of 3,000 on March 27th, 1906, who "cheered the "Slåtter" that had achieved only a *succes d'estime* the previous time."⁵⁴ This success must have encouraged Grieg to program "Bruremarsch (efter Møllarguten)" from the "Slåtter" for his last concert in England on May 24, 1906, where he anticipated an enthusiastic and receptive audience.

It is not surprising that the first of the "Slåtter" that Grieg performed was "Bruremarsch (efter Møllarguten)" No. 6, as he did so in each of the three concerts that include Op. 72. It is also worth noting that the last of the "Slåtter" that Grieg performed in his program was "Tussebrurefæra på Vossevangen," which once again confirmed his penchant for ending with a wedding piece. If Grieg had lived longer to perform these pieces, one would have no doubt that his "Slåtter" would have been just as well received as his earlier pieces.

⁵¹ Dale, "Pianoforte Music," 204.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Grieg and Benestad, *Diaries*, 371.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 114.

"Stemninger," Op. 73

"Stemninger," Op. 73 is the last of Grieg's opuses for solo piano. The first and last pieces he performed from this opus, "Folketone," No. 4 and "Lualåt," No. 7, may have reminded him of his beloved homeland. "Folketone," consists of "a genuine folk tune from the Valdres region of Norway, set with extreme simplicity and beautiful aptness above a gently rocking accompaniment."⁵⁵ "Lualåt," is representative of Grieg's impressionist style and provides "a last idealized picture of his native scene."⁵⁶ These two pieces must have been very well received in the concert, because he repeated them in his last concert in England a few months later.

The Complete Opuses - Exceptions to the Sets

Grieg always programmed and performed "Fra Holbergs tid," ("From Holberg's Time") Op. 40 and "Lyriske stykker," ("Lyric Pieces"), Op. 43 in their entirety. Very rarely did he play one movement from either opus for an encore. These two works are the only exceptions to Grieg's method of programming as examined in this paper.

Possible Links to Vocal influences

Grieg first played the "Vuggeviser" from Op. 38 at a chamber concert in London on March 20th, 1889. On the same program, his wife Nina sang "Margretes Vuggesang." It is quite possible that the couple was thinking of their own daughter Alexandra, especially as it would have been around the time of her 20th birthday celebration. In fact, one would not be surprised that Grieg used "Vuggeviser" as a musical tribute to his daughter, since he rarely mentioned her in his articles or diaries. This could also account for the frequency of this piece being performed on stage, especially during Grieg's 1897 concert tours.

⁵⁵ Dale, "*Pianoforte Music*," 200-201.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

Conclusion

This research has examined the rationale behind Grieg's practice of selecting individual piano pieces from various opuses and grouping them into sets for his own performances. One would suspect that Grieg wanted to highlight the unique quality of his work in a way that was fundamental to his musical language. In his earlier years, he did not have extensive piano pieces to build his "sets." Yet, some of these early works remained permanent features in his later concert programs. As Grieg performed his works more often in public, one can only speculate that he began to realize which piece(s) from his opuses best represented his musical language. The concert tours that he gave in his later years therefore may represent the quintessence of his programming intentions.

By "unraveling" his opuses for programming purposes, Grieg has opened the door for future performers to do likewise. Using the "set" format, our recent Edvard Grieg Pre-College Piano Competition attracted many participants with a repertoire of three sets in which they could choose from. In the junior division (for students ages 9-13), the three sets were:

Set I

Album Leaf (*Albumblad*), Op. 28, No. 3

Elegy (*Elegie*) Op. 47, No. 7

Berceuse (*Vuggevisse*) Op. 38, No. 1

Set II

Little Bird (*Liden Fugl*) Op. 43, No. 4

Watchman's Song (*Vaegtersang*) Op. 12, No. 3

Berceuse (*Vuggevisse*) Op. 38, No. 1

Set III

Poetical Tone-Pictures (*Poetiske Tonebilder*) Op. 3, No. 6

Humoresque (*Humoresken*), Op. 6, No. 3

Berceuse (*Vuggevisse*) Op. 38, No. 1

In this division, eight contestants picked set 1 and six contestants picked set 2. None of the contestants picked set 3. Set 3 was an experimental set that did not use Grieg's 'set' format.

In the senior division (for students ages 14-18), the three sets were:

Set I

The Brook (*Bækken*) Op. 62, No. 4

Valse mélancolique Op. 68, No. 6

Wedding day at Troidhaugen Op. 65, No. 6

Set II

Studie (Hommage a Chopin) Op. 73, No. 5

Illusion Op 57, No. 3

Wedding day at Troidhaugen Op. 65, No. 6

Set III

Praeludium from Holberg's Time (*Aus Holbergs Zeit*) Op. 40, No. 1

Sonata, Op. 7 – Andante Molto (second movement)

Wedding day at Troidhaugen Op. 65, No. 6

In this division, four contestants picked set 1 and four contestants picked set 2. Only one contestant picked set 3. Again set 3 was an experimental set because it did not follow Grieg's "set" format. Historical account showed that Grieg rarely performed just the first movement of the Holberg's Suite and he favored playing only the Minuet instead of the Andante Molto of his Sonata.

The contestants' choice of sets further confirmed our belief that the composer's performance practice made his piano works much more approachable and appealing especially to our younger pianists. We hope that students, teachers, and performers alike will consider Grieg's "set" format as presented in this research in their own concert programs. In addition, we recommend the use of Grieg's diaries and letters as guidelines for customizing new sets of his piano works. It appears as though Grieg was always aware of his audiences. His favorite pieces, which were also crowd pleasers, appeared most often in his sets and sometimes as encores. We encourage performers to likewise consider their target audience and to formulate sets of Grieg's works that are musically cohesive and attractive for such listeners. We also suggest that performers appreciate the distinct unifying characteristics of the pieces in "Lyriske stykker," Op. 43 and "Fra Holbergs tid" and consider performing them in their entirety. It

is our hope that by programming Grieg's piano works in a manner similar to his, audiences will develop a greater appreciation for miniature masterworks and understand how his intentions effectuate a more genuine interpretation of his works.

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