GRIEG IN AMERICA

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It is common knowledge that Grieg never visited America. It is equally common knowledge that the main reason he never did so was his great propensity to sea-sickness. He regularly traveled between Bergen and Oslo by horse and carriage to avoid the sea voyage, which in other respects would have been a much more comfortable way to make the journey. He dreaded crossing the English Channel, though he did so many times in order to perform in England.

He was frequently invited to come to America, however, and he occasionally went so far as to at least *consider* making the trip. In 1893, for example, Harry Randall, a Norwegian-born impresario living in America, encouraged him to come to Chicago to conduct some concerts of his own music. Grieg replied in a letter dated February 9, 1893: " . . . It is true that the exposition committee in Chicago has asked me to conduct some concerts this summer, but no contract has been signed yet, and unfortunately it is very uncertain whether my health will allow me to undertake the long sea voyage. In any case, I will not come before the beginning of September, so unfortunately I will not be there for the song festival to which you refer."[1] In the end, however, he turned down the invitation. He was once offered 100 English pounds each for a series of 30 concerts to be given in America, but once again he declined. Indeed, his fear of sea-sickness was so great that on one occasion he reportedly said, "I would not go to America even if I were offered a million dollars!"

Though Grieg never set foot on American soil, however, he had many contacts with America during his career. My purpose today is to identify those contacts and to summarize what is known about each of them.

Grieg's Music in America

Grieg's most important contact with America was undoubtedly through his music. In American concert halls, he was known principally through the *Peer Gynt* suites and the *Piano Concerto in A Minor,* though other works were performed from time to time. More importantly, however, his *Lyric Pieces* and other short works for piano were very popular at a time when the piano was the principal source of music in private homes.

It is impossible to overstate Grieg's popularity as a composer in America as the nineteenth century came to a close. American composer Edward MacDowell wrote in a letter to Grieg dated October 10, 1899, "The name of Grieg is adored from one end of this country to the other."[2] In 1903, on the occasion of Grieg's sixtieth birthday, the New York *Musical Courier* ran a long article that stated in part:

> Posterity will fix [Grieg's] worth as a composer—even though some of our contemporaries have hurriedly tried to forestall posterity. It is not always safe to deny a composer greatness simply because he is 'popular'.' If Grieg is but for the day he is certainly enjoying a very long day. There are no perceptible signs of Grieg's waning. The publishers are doing as good a business as ever with the "Humoresques," the violin sonatas, the cello sonata, the wedding marches, the piano concerto, the songs [*Jeg elsker deg, Mens jeg venter, En svane* and *Solveigs sang* are then listed by their German titles], the 'Peer Gynt' music, the 'Holberg' Suite, the piano sonata, the 'Ballade' and the albums of 'Lyric Pieces.'[3]

Although Grieg was understandably pleased to know that his music was often performed and much loved in America, his pleasure was greatly diminished by the fact that he received no financial compensation for the use of his music. The United States was not a signatory to the Bern Convention – amazingly enough, it did not become one until as recently as 1988 – with the result that anyone in this country could legally publish music and literature published in other countries

[1] See Benestad, Finn and William H. Halverson, *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends* (hereafter EGLCAF). Columbus, 200, p. 574.

[2] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 483.

[3] Liebling, Leonard, quoted in Finck, Henry T., *Grieg and His Music.* New York, 1909.

without the permission of and without compensating the creator or the publisher of the original work. With respect to copyright protection, the United States was the China of the 19th and much of the 20th century.

Grieg complained bitterly about this state of affairs in a number of letters written to people that he hoped might be able to do something about it.

In 1898 he attempted to enlist the help of no less a personage than Henrik Ibsen in tackling the problem. In a letter dated December 25, 1898, Grieg wrote[4]:

> Dear Henrik Ibsen:
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> I recently received from C. F. Peters, my German publisher in Leipzig, a recommendation that I, in collaboration with you, try to get enacted in Norway a system that would make it impossible for the works of Norwegian authors and composers to be abandoned in America to whoever produces the first and best reprinting in that country . . . I immediately referred the assignment I had received to my Danish publisher, Wilhelm Hansen, who was in the process of taking an initiative in the same matter. Since I happen to be staying in Denmark just now, he . . . sent me the enclosure with a request that I pass it along to you.
>
> As you will see, the issue in question is of the greatest significance for the existence of Norwegian writers and composers. A request from *you* to our national parliament or our government to bring the matter up as quickly as possible on the basis of the enclosed document is . . . the only way to move quickly toward the goal. The form that your request will take naturally is left . . . to your discretion. But you will surely agree with me and the publishers that something should be done here without delay . . .

The enclosure to which Grieg refers was a letter dated December 22, 1898, from two Danish publishing companies (Gyldendal and Wilhelm Hansen). The letter was addressed to both Grieg and Ibsen and reads as follows:

> Earlier, the United States . . . granted copyright protection for new literary and musical works when the country in which the work in question was published was a signatory to the Bern Convention. Recently, however, a report was received from the copyright office in Washington that this decision has been modified in such a way that henceforth the right to registration for copyright protection will depend on whether the country of which the author or composer of the work in question is a citizen has concluded a special agreement on copyright protection, whereas the countries that – like Norway, for example – have only signed the Bern Convention without also having concluded the special agreement will be excluded.
>
> Since the undersigned publishers have the honor of having published Norway's most significant literary and musical works, and since Norwegian works will, because of the lacking special agreement, be cut off from the market in America, which in many ways is significant, we request that you gentlemen appeal to the Norwegian government to enter into a special copyright agreement with the United States as soon as possible, for the effects of a failure to do so will be just as serious for the Norwegian authors and composers as for their Scandinavian and foreign publishers.[5]

Nothing came of this initiative, but two years later Grieg made a second attempt in a letter addressed to American banker and politician Lyman Judson Gage. The letter was written in rather clumsy English – as is well known, Grieg never mastered the English language – so I will take the liberty of doing some light editing. In my slightly edited version of the letter, Grieg wrote as follows[6]:

> Mr. O. W. Meysenburg of Chicago . . . has informed me of your position regarding the American copyright bill. He also told me that you take great interest in music, and therefore I am so bold as to direct your attention to the present arrangement between America and Norway regarding literary and musical works published in

[4] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, pp. 448-449.
[5] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 448.
[6] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 253.

Norway. The present arrangement is that such works can be pirated and then printed in America on a large scale in spite of Norway having joined the [Bern Convention].

The result for me personally is that it is *only* the American publishers who reap the material advantage of the popularity that my name has the honor of enjoying in America. This seems to me a barbarity. I therefore take this opportunity respectfully to appeal to your interest in music and to your sense of justice to try to secure an alteration in these unfortunate circumstances. If you will do my country and me the favor of engaging personally in this matter, I have no doubt that better conditions will be the result.

This initiative, like the previous one, went nowhere.

In 1902, Grieg once again touched on the copyright issue in some correspondence with American musicologist Henry T. Finck. Finck had been invited by the Oliver Ditson Company of Boston to select what he considered Grieg's 50 best songs for publication in their Musicians' Library. He had responded that he would do so only on condition that the composer be paid a royalty on every copy sold. The Ditson Company accepted this condition and also authorized Finck to offer Grieg in their name $1,000 for a dozen new songs and piano pieces. Note that because of the Byzantine state of American copyright law at that time, it would have been perfectly legal for Finck to do what he had been invited to do without so much as consulting Grieg on the matter, much less stipulating that Grieg must receive royalties.

Grieg was immensely pleased with Finck's handling of the matter, but unfortunately was unable to accept the offer. In a letter dated September 30, 1902, he wrote to Finck as follows:[7]

> It is indeed most kind of you to take my part in America, and that, too, in a purely business matter. [However], my relations to the Peters firm are such that . . . I cannot entertain the offer made by Mr. Ditson. It will be different if Mr. Ditson makes an arrangement directly with Peters. Then it would perhaps be possible to have my works appear legitimately in America too. But if he is not willing to do this, things will have to remain as they are: the clever pirates will reprint [the works they have stolen] and enrich themselves without considering the composer.

The sad irony continued to the end of Grieg's life: he was one of the most popular composers in America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but that popularity did not produce a dime in royalties. His only income from America, so far as we know, came in the form of honoraria for articles written for publication in this country.

Articles Written for an American Audience

Three important essays by Grieg owed their existence to his fame as a composer in America.

The first of these was an article on Robert Schumann published in 1894.[8] In March, 1893, Grieg received a letter from Robert U. Johnson, associate editor of the American journal *The Century Monthly Illustrated Magazine*. Johnson wrote: "I doubt very much if you have any idea to what an extent your compositions are performed in this country. Within the last five years they have become a part of the musical literature of America, and hardly a concert is considered complete that does not contain something of yours. (…) The *Century Magazine* . . . is now engaged in publishing a series of papers on musical subjects. The list as arranged will include articles by Messrs. Massenet, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Reyer, Paderewsky, Dvořák and others. I send you herewith a copy of the magazine containing Saint-Saëns's article on Liszt. . . We should be very glad to know whether you would write for this series . . . an article of reminiscence and appreciation of Schumann, with whom, if we mistake not, you associated during the last years of the master's life in Leipzig. We should like to have this article present a graphic picture of Schumann, to give anecdotes and incidents connected with your friendship with him, and also to give your critical opinion of his value and characteristics as a composer." The honorarium offered was one thousand francs.

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[7] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, pp. 240-241.

[8] The article is presented in its entirety in an English translation in Benestad, Finn and William H. Halverson, *Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches* (hereafter EGDAS). Columbus, 2001, pp. 255-274.

Grieg replied that Schumann had died two years before he himself came to Leipzig, but he gladly accepted the invitation and wrote the article during a stay at Grefsen Baths in Christiania. The article was accepted and was published in the January 1894 issue of *The Century Monthly llustrated Magazine*.

Grieg's essay is much too long and complex for me to summarize here, but it may be read in its entirety in the book, *Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches,* co-edited by Finn Benestad and myself and published in 2001. It is an impressively erudite work, one that reveals a deep familiarity with not only the principal works of Schumann but also with those of his most important predecessors and contemporaries: Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Liszt, Chopin, Wagner and others. Grieg balances a warm appreciation of what he considers Schumann's best works with informed criticism of others, especially Schumann's later works. He defends his great predecessor against the charges of dilettante-ism and lack of originality leveled by the so-called "Wagnerites" – the fanatical disciples of the master of Bayreuth – without denying the greatness of Wagner's music.

Let me quote just a few excerpts to whet your appetite for a reading of the complete essay.

Concerning Schumann's great piano concerto – which, as is well known, was one of the principal models for Grieg's own piano concerto – he writes: "Schumann's famous piano concerto occupies a unique place in his production. Inspired from beginning to end, it stands unparalleled in music literature and astonishes us as much by its originality as by its noble disdaining of an 'extravert, virtuoso style'. It is beloved by all, played by many, played well by few, and comprehended in accordance with its basic ideas by still fewer—indeed, perhaps by just one person: his wife."

Grieg then goes on to make insightful comments about Schumann's piano music, chamber music, orchestral music, choral music, and his Opera, *Genoveva*. He reserves some of his highest praise for Schumann's songs, about which he writes: "If there is anything that Schumann has created that has become, and has deserved to become, world literature, it is his songs. All civilized nations have made them their own. And there is probably in our own day no young person interested in music to whom they are not, in one way or another, interwoven with his most intimate ideals. Schumann is the *poet* in contrast to his greatest successor, Brahms, who is primarily a *musician*, even in his songs."

If Grieg had written nothing else in his life, this essay alone provides convincing evidence of his considerable skill as a music critic and a writer.

The editors of *The Century Monthly Illustrated Magazine* were very pleased with the essay on Schumann. Shortly after its publication Grieg received a letter from Mr. Johnson: "The treatment of the Schumann article," he wrote, "was exactly right. In this respect it was the most satisfactory paper in the series. We should like you to make a similar critique of Mozart, considering among other things how his music stands the wear and tear of the modern schools. As before, you will be good enough to remember that this is written for an untechnical audience, although our audience includes a large proportion of the amateur and professional musical people of America." As before he was offered an honorarium of 1,000 francs.

Grieg at first declined the invitation on grounds of ill health, but later changed his mind and wrote the article. It was published in the November, 1897, issue of the magazine.[9]

The Mozart article is much shorter and less detailed in its analysis than the one on Schumann – perhaps owing in large part to the fact that it was written while Grieg was vacationing at a small tourist cabin in Hardanger. Thus he did not have access to either scores or books, but was entirely dependent on what was stored in his memory.

Of the 26 paragraphs comprising the essay, no less than five could be described as panegyrics on the incomparable brilliance of Mozart. Grieg struggles to find words to express his unbounded admiration for his great predecessor. "Speaking of Mozart is like speaking of a god," he writes. "Where he is greatest, he embraces all times." He is the "unattainable master." "[He] is the unattainable one even when he is compared with [Bach, Beethoven and Wagner]. In Bach, Beethoven and Wagner we admire above all the depth and energy of the human spirit; in Mozart, the

[9] The complete essay appears in English translation in Benestad and Halverson, EGDAS, pp. 226-239.

divine instinct." And like all of us, Grieg is astonished at the sheer quantity of incomparably beautiful music that Mozart was able to create during his tragically short life.

Grieg then goes on to discuss a few of Mozart's compositions – those, presumably, with which he was most intimately acquainted. He makes brief comments about four operas: *The Abduction from the Seraglio, Figaro, Don Giovanni* and *The Magic flute*. Of his symphonies, Grieg comments only on the last three, i.e., nos. 39 – 41, all of which, Grieg says, "show us the master at the zenith of his powers." He then goes on to make insightful comments about each of them, thus making it clear that he was intimately familiar with them. Of Mozart's chamber compositions he singles out as "especially admirable" the *String Quartet in G Minor* (he mistakenly calls it a quintet), the *Piano Quintet in E-flat Major*, and the *Piano Quartet in G Minor*. Of the string quartets he says only that "the so-called 'six famous ones' are rightly admired." Of the piano concertos he says only that "the one in D minor is the most famous and most beautiful." He devotes just one sentence to Mozart's piano trios and one sentence to his violin and piano sonatas. He concludes his essay, however, with a quite detailed analysis of the *Requiem*.

The third essay by Grieg written for an American audience was first published in this country in 1905, though it was supposed to have been published much earlier. I'm speaking about Grieg's famous essay, "My First Success."[10] In spring 1903, German book dealer and author Albert Langen, who was a son-in-law of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, transmitted to Grieg an invitation from the American *McClure's Magazine* to write an autobiographical article of ca. 8,000 words. On October 20 Grieg wrote to Langen saying that he would write an article of 7,000 words on the condition that he would receive an honorarium of 500 dollars. He added: 'If [7,000 words] is not enough, I will add the three articles of the Apostles' Creed at the end. That certainly will suffice to fill up the space."

Grieg wrote the article in November–December, 1903. But then something totally unexpected occurred: After receiving the manuscript, the editor of *McClure's Magazine* decided not to print it. Grieg was furious and demanded that the article be returned to him immediately. He then asked Langen to do his best to get it placed in another American journal, possibly in *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, where he had previously published the articles on Schumann and Mozart. Nothing came of this idea, however, and on March 9, 1905, Grieg wrote to Langen: "It is almost fifteen months since you received the article 'My First Success', which I wrote at your request. . . There comes a time when my patience is exhausted. This time has now been reached."[11]

"My First Success" was first published in the distinguished American journal *The Independent* in June 1905. It has since been published in both authorized and unauthorized versions in England, Norway, Denmark and Germany. Modesty prevents me from saying that the canonical English version appears in a new translation in *Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches.*

Though questions have been raised about the accuracy of some of the recollections reported in this delightful memoir, it is the best source we have for information about Grieg's early life. The tone of the essay is jocular – Grieg obviously takes great delight in remembering his early childhood, his school days, his arrival in Leipzig at the tender age of 15, his experiences at the conservatory, and his early struggles to find his voice as a composer. His concluding paragraph, however, is serious in tone and deeply moving. Grieg asks, "Where, in all that has here been related, is the first success to be found?" And he answers: "In the husk of [the experiences that I have related] is concealed the essence of the answer to the question: that I had within myself the power to later shake off . . . all the superfluous ballast that had distorted my nature through the education that I received both at home and abroad – that was my salvation, my good fortune. When I became conscious of this power, when I understood myself, then I experienced something that I will call my first, my greatest, my only success, for that success became decisive for my whole life. All the joys and

[10] An English translation is given in Benestad and Halverson, EGDAS, pp. 67-89.
[11] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 469.

sorrows, the triumphs and disappointments of my childhood and early student years, have contributed to this single great success. Indeed, without them it would never have become a reality."

Grieg and MacDowell

Grieg corresponded with two important American men of music during his later years, one a composer and the other a musicologist and author. I have already alluded to both of them.

The composer was Edward Macdowell, who lived from 1860 to 1908. MacDowell was the most prominent American composer of his generation and one of the first composers from the New World to achieve international stature. MacDowell initiated the correspondence on October 10, 1899, when he wrote to Grieg requesting permission to dedicate his piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 57 (the so-called "Norse" Sonata) to him. "Your music lies closer to my heart than I can well say," MacDowell wrote. "I have dedicated much to you in my thoughts, and this will be my excuse for sending you some of my music. If I do not receive your permission for the dedication, I will at least have told you of my love for and loyalty to Edvard Grieg."[12] In a letter written in "bad English," to use Grieg's own description, Grieg graciously accepted the dedication.[13] Some months later, upon receiving a copy of the score, Grieg wrote a second letter to MacDowell in which he complimented his American colleague on his fine composition. . "In the handling of your Nordic material," he wrote, "you are only partly under Wagner's influence. And that is good. . . . Not infrequently in the sonata, your imagination was in the far north. Higher praise I could not give."[14]

MacDowell also dedicated his *Piano Sonata No. 4*—the "Keltic" Sonata, Op. 59—to Grieg, and the story of how he happened to do so is rather amusing. According to Mrs. MacDowell, who published a small book about her husband in 1950,[15] the composer had intended to dedicate this composition to an author by the name of Fiona McLeod, whose writings had largely inspired the work. The composer wrote to McLeod requesting permission to do so, but receiving no answer he decided instead to dedicate it to Grieg. Some years later Mrs. MacDowell learned that "Fiona McLeod" was a pseudonym for a writer by the name of William Sharpe. She further learned that Sharpe had in fact received the request while traveling in Italy, and had written to MacDowell giving his enthusiastic approval for the dedication. Sharpe had given the letter and money for postage to an Italian boy, who apparently pocketed the money and destroyed the letter; in any case MacDowell never received it. Fortunately, Grieg was unaware of the circumstances that led to his being "accidentally" honored by MacDowell for a second time!

Judging from his letter acknowledging the dedication, Grieg appears to have been somewhat ambivalent about this composition. He writes, "It is difficult for me to express my opinion of your beautiful work in the form of a letter. Most of all, I would have liked to have you interpret the sonata for me on the piano, and thereafter I could have formed my impressions in words. I don't hesitate to tell you, however, that I find your composition significant. It is very powerful, often daring – yes, thank goodness, even reckless. But it should have been scored for orchestra, for an orchestral spirit lurks within it. However, with respect to piano technique you have done many interesting things to make the piece exciting for the performing artist."

In 1905, upon hearing that Macdowell was gravely ill, Grieg sent a touching letter to Mrs. McDowell filled with expressions of concern and wishes for the speedy recovery of his esteemed American colleague. Grieg is certainly drawing upon his own painful experience when he writes, "[Your husband] is a man of integrity, with an unusually sensitive and compassionate nervous system. However, for a personality such as his the possession of such a nervous system is a mixed blessing. For every time that it exalts him to the highest transports of joy, there might be ten times when it is the source of his deepest, most inexpressible suffering. Herein lies the unfathomable riddle. An artist with ideals as high as MacDowell's must ask himself: 'For what purpose have I received from nature this delicately strung lyre,

[12] See Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 483
[13] Op. cit., loc. cit.
[14] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 484.
[15] MacDowell, Marian, *Random Notes on Edward McDowell and His Music, p. 19.* Boston, Arthur P. Schmidt, 1950.

when I would have been better off without it?' Life is so unmerciful that every true artist must ask himself this question. . . If it can give MacDowell a moment's cheer, tell him that in far-off Norway he has a warm and understanding friend who is concerned about him and who wishes from his heart that better times will soon come again both for him and for you!"[16]

The second American man of music with whom Grieg corresponded was the well-known music critic and historian Henry T. Finck (1854 – 1926), to whom he wrote no less than 15 letters during the years 1900 – 1905. In addition to corresponding with Grieg, Finck and his wife visited Edvard and Nina at Troldhaugen in the summer of 1901. A delightful account of this visit is given in Finck's 1906 biography of Grieg.[17]

Finck was an enthusiastic admirer of Grieg's music and wrote extensively about it. His first letter to Grieg was, in fact, a request for information that he might use in a book that he was writing.[18] Grieg's reply – the long letter written in July, 1900, that is such a valuable resource regarding Grieg's songs – arrived too late for Finck to use the information in the 1900 book, but he later made good use of it in two books devoted entirely to Grieg and his music: *Edvard Grieg,* published in 1906,[19] and *Grieg and His Music,* published in 1909.[20]

Finck's admiration for Grieg's music was unbounded. He writes, for example, "From every point of view that interests the music-lover, Grieg is one of the most original geniuses in the musical world of the present or past. His songs are a mine of melody, surpassed in wealth only by Schubert's, and that only because there are more of Schubert's. In originality of harmony and modulation he has only six equals: Bach, Schubert, Chopin, Schumann, Wagner, and Liszt. In rhythmic invention and combination he is inexhaustible, and as an orchestrator he ranks among the most fascinating." (p. 78). Finck defends Grieg against the comments of the "wiseacres" who tell their readers that "Grieg made a very promising beginning at Leipsic in writing 'world music,' but after his return to his home he unfortunately turned consciously to Norwegian folk music, [which he] transplanted bodily into his academic flower-pots." Finck quotes with disdain another critic who sarcastically lamented that "Grieg got stuck in the fjord and never got out of it." Finck's view is that "Grieg in a fjord is much more picturesque and more interesting to the world than he would have been in the Elbe or the Spree."

Although Grieg was flattered by Finck's positive assessment of his music, he was more than a little embarrassed by its extravagance. He said as much in a letter to Finck, who had sent him proof sheets of the book shortly before its publication. "So far as your estimate of my works is concerned," Grieg wrote, "I must echo the words of our poet A. O. Vinje in his poem, 'Last Spring:' 'More I have gotten than I deserved – and everything must vanish'." Grieg continues: "There are certainly passages in which you have done yourself and me a questionable service by an excess of superlatives! But the many truths that you did not hesitate to express bluntly have gladdened my heart."[21]

Grieg sent a copy of the book to his friend Franz Beyer, and in an accompanying letter[22] he wrote: "The [book] is . . . fragmentary, to be sure, but it has a chapter that will become very significant for the correct appraisal of the undersigned when he is gone. This chapter is entitled 'Norwegian Folk Music – Grieg's Originality.' It is exceptionally well written and finally makes amends in a way for the unjust and obtuse criticism to which I have been subjected by a number of German and English-American journalists. These criticisms have now been repeated for so many years that they were on the verge of becoming the accepted view. So I owe Finck all the more thanks for his bold correction of the record—even though I think, unfortunately, that he can hurt me with his altogether too outspoken praise."

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[16] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, pp. 487-488.
[17] Finck, Henry T., *Edvard Grieg*. John Lane, London and New York, 1906, pp. 46-51.
[18] Finck, Henry T., *Songs and Songwriters.* New York, 1900.
[19] Finck, Henry T., *Edvard Grieg.*
[20] Finck, Henry T., *Grieg and His Music.* Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1909.
[21] Letter dated October 8, 1905. Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 246.
[22] Letter dated December 20, 1905. Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, pp. 100-101.

Finck's second book on Grieg, though it was printed by a different publisher, might be described as a greatly expanded second edition of the first one. It comprises no less than 317 pages vs. 130 in the earlier work. It contains, in addition to everything in the earlier work, lengthy quotations from Grieg's letters, a new chapter on Grieg's last years, death and funeral, one on Grieg's rank as a composer, and a concluding chapter consisting primarily of a long letter to Finck from Grieg's friend Frants Beyer.

Despite Grieg's complaint that his American friend was too generous with the superlatives in the 1906 biography, Finck retracts nothing in the later work. The passages that I cited earlier are retained verbatim and, as I said, he adds an entire new chapter on Grieg's rank as a composer. In this chapter he defends Grieg against what he calls the "four grievances" of Grieg's most outspoken critics, namely: 1) that there is a lack of "logical development" in his compositions, 2) that he could not write operas, oratorios, and symphonies, 3) that there was too much of the "Norwegian idiom" in his music, and 4) that he was too popular to be really great. After reminding his readers that he has been a professional music critic for nearly 30 years – in which role he has listened to music from two to even six or eight hours per day during the concert season – Finck sums up Grieg's rank as a composer as follows:

> A composer's rank is determined by the number of original ideas he has contributed; and from this point of view – the only one endorsed by the history of music – Grieg belongs in the first rank of composers. None of the great masters has contributed more unique and charming melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic ideas in the same number of pages; none has written more idiomatically for voices and instruments; and none has succeeded better in expressing his thoughts in the most fitting manner. I defy any musician to take one of Grieg's mature ideas and give it a more artistic setting than the one he gave it. His workmanship is as unique as his ideas, and as delightful. He is a master jeweler as well as a producer of diamonds, rubies, and pearls.[23]

Grieg's Attitude toward America and Americans

Against the background of these contacts with America let us now ask: What was Grieg's underlying view of America and Americans? He drops a few hints here and there in his letters that allow us to make an educated guess at the answer.

First, I think it is clear from the lofty and respectful tone of his letters to Henry Finck and Edward MacDowell that Grieg had a very high opinion of these two professional colleagues – one almost wants to say, *despite* the fact that they were Americans. It is equally clear, however, that he did not regard them as truly representative of American culture. Indeed, in one of his letters to MacDowell he writes, "I hope that in America people have reached the point where they will give a man with such a serious will and masterful ability as yours the recognition you deserve. Your songs and piano pieces, which contain so much poetry and beauty, should be the bridge that the American public must cross in order to reach an understanding of a work such as your sonata."[24] The image is unmistakable: MacDowell is a voice crying in the wilderness, a pioneer whose simpler works – the songs and piano pieces – the American public must first learn to appreciate before they can hope to understand and appreciate his "Norse" sonata – and, by implication, other works of similar musical sophistication.

That Grieg regarded America and Americans as culturally rather shallow is further evident in a letter written to his friend Frants Beyer on March 16, 1884. Grieg was in Rome at the time and had just given a concert of Norwegian music at the home of the German ambassador. As a matter of fact, on this occasion he managed to tar the Americans and the British with the same brush. He wrote:

> "As you will see from the program, it was just Nina and I who
> performed. . . *You* will of course see at a glance that the program could not have any artistic interest for me personally. It was a program for Englishmen and Americans—and it was correctly planned, for it was exclusively

[23] Finck, Henry T. *Grieg and His Music,* p. 237.
[24] Letter dated June 30, 1900. Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 484.

"vox populi" that "rang the bell" best. What interested me was the uniqueness of the situation—and the money for the trip to Naples."[25]

There is a sentence in a letter to Grieg's Danish friend Niels Ravnkilde that reflects the same sentiment in a way that I find quite amusing. Edmund Neupert, the Norwegian pianist who had given the world premiere performance of Grieg's *Piano Concerto* in Copenhagen in 1869, had moved to New York City in 1883. Neupert died there in 1888, and upon hearing of his death Grieg wrote to Ravnkilde: "And what do you say about Neupert, who had to die in New York!"

The reason I find that amusing is that without saying so explicitly, Grieg seems to be saying regarding Neupert's death, "It's bad enough that the poor fellow had to die, but it's even worse that he had to die in New York!"

It is time to conclude.

It is a pity that Grieg did not visit America during his lifetime, for had he come here he would have been warmly and enthusiastically welcomed by concert audiences all over the country.

That popularity has continued to the present day. His piano concerto is performed more frequently here than any other piano concerto in the world. Here as elsewhere, classical music stations play Grieg almost daily. In Minneapolis, where I live, Grieg is played almost as frequently as Mozart. Finck may or may not be right in ranking him as one of the best composers of the 19th century, but there is no doubt that in this country he is the most beloved composer of the 19th century.

If Grieg were to visit America today, he would certainly be pleased at his popularity. He might also be appalled, however, at the extent to which some of his music has entered into popular culture. He would find, for example, jazz versions of some of the "Peer Gynt" music by Duke Ellington and Hugo Montenegro. He would find "In the Hall of the Mountain King" used in film and TV, video games, and advertising. Extracts from "Aase's Death" are played in The Simpsons episode "Coming to Homerica;" in that episode the poor Norwegian workers are forced to leave their poverty-stricken country and emigrate to Springfield, where the Simpsons live. Indeed, Grieg seems to be one of The Simpsons favorite composers: strains from "Morning Mood" appear in no less than three episodes, and they even find a way to include a passage from the piano Concerto in another episode. "Morning Mood" also appears in several Hollywood movies and many advertisements. "Anitra's Dance" supplies the background music for several video games.

In view of the popularity of his music in concert halls, on the air, in the repertoires of piano students, and in popular culture, I think we can confidently assert that Grieg has come to America to stay. His propensity for seasickness may have prevented him from coming here in person, but his music has found its way into our hearts. Among us, he is one of the immortals. He could not have wished for more.

(This article is derived from a lecture given by the author at an Edvard Grieg Conference and Competition in Sarasota, Florida, in January 2015. Dr. Halverson has written, translated and/or edited many books and articles on Grieg.)

[25] Benestad and Halverson, EGLCAF, p. 41.