

EDVARD GRIEG Symphonic Dances, Op. 64

BORN: June 15, 1843, in Bergen, Norway (then part of Sweden)

DIED: September 4, 1907, in Bergen

WORK COMPOSED: 1896-98

WORLD PREMIERE: 1898 at the Inaugural Bergen Festival, Johan Svendsen conducting

Grieg found the inspiration for his Symphonic Dances from a collection of folk songs assembled by Norwegian composer Ludvig M. Lindemann (1812-1887). A more appropriate title would have been *Norwegian Folk Dances* and he did append the title with the phrase *after Norwegian Themes*. Although it may be thought of as a symphonic work, the treatment of the melodies is more akin to a *fantasia* or even programmatic in its scope. Originally written for piano four hands, that version offers no comparison to all the colors and power of a full orchestra.

The opening dance (Allegretto moderato e marcato) has a celebratory and lively character in the outer sections with a middle section that is more subdued and exotic. It evokes the vigorous *Halling*, a Norwegian country dance for couples where the men do a lot of leaping, kicking and other acrobatic stunts to show off for their partners. The second dance (Allegretto grazioso) is also a *Halling* but is relaxed and serene with a confident and joyful atmosphere. A spring dance melody from the Åmot region in Hedmark County is the basis for the third dance (Allegro giocoso). The initial subdued manner turns festive and vigorous before entering into a relaxed middle section. The final movement's opening march is similar to Sibelius' tone poem *En Saga* (purely coincidental), and the middle section features the melody from a wedding song of the Valdres region.

There is a quality in Grieg's music that touches us in a more familiar manner than that of other composers. Perhaps it is because he expresses the feelings we all easily recognize, or that it simply is comfortable and we can trust that he will lift our spirits at the end. Tchaikovsky wrote in his *Autobiographical Description of a Trip Abroad in 1888* after meeting Grieg:

It is possible that Grieg's genius is considerably less than Brahms' ... In return, he is closer to us, he is more understandable for us, more kindred, precisely because he is deeply human. When we listen to Grieg, we instinctively recognize that this music has been written by a person driven by an irresistible pull, by using music, to express a deeply poetical flow from nature of emotions and moods ... how unfalteringly stimulating, new, original!

With this setting of dances Grieg depicts the values of human fellowship. In his words, "When alone, one cannot enjoy nature past a certain dimension without melancholy knocking at your door, but in fellowship with a friend, it is infinite, without limits."

— Vincent Osborn © 2018

History:

There have been no previous DSSO Masterworks Series performances of this work.

Instrumentation:

Two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, harp and strings.