



Edvard Grieg: Complete Symphonic Works Vol. II

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International Record Review (Robert Matthew-Walker - 2011.11.01)

RECORD REVIEW
This new complete series of Grieg's orchestral music is building into a really excellent one. In the past, although there has been only one integral recording of Grieg's concert music by a Norwegian orchestra – the Bergen Philharmonic under Ole Kristian Ruud for BIS; and a really fine one it is, too (although I should confess I was responsible for its concept) – it is rare to hear this composer's music from a German orchestra. In this instance, Eivind Aadland is proving himself to be a major interpreter of his countryman's music.

Here, on Volume 2 of this projected five-disc set (I reviewed the first volume in the July/August issue), we have Grieg's complete music for string orchestra, with the exception of 'The Death of Åse' (from Peer Gynt), which has already appeared on Volume 1 (in the first Suite taken from the play's incidental music). As has become something of the norm in relatively recent years, it is encouraging to hear this music played by full string strength, rather than the chamber-musical number of players which so often used to be the case in recordings made from about 1970-2000.

Any doubts that might remain as to the 'authenticity' of the performances in the choice of a German orchestra are set at nought under Aadland's direction: as with Volume 1, he has clearly gone from first principles, and the results are enormously impressive. Indeed, in some respects they are rather more than that, for in the second of the utterly delightful Two Nordic Melodies, Op. 63 (the 'Cowkeeper's Tune and Country Dance', as they were once known in English-speaking countries), Aadland gets the opening gesture of the 'Country Dance' to be played without vibrato, imitating the natural sound of the Norwegian folk instrument, the Hardanger fiddle, as if tuning-up prior to the Dance itself. The result is utterly entrancing, a small but by no means insignificant aspect of this conductor's love for and desire to communicate this totally original music. We may hear a similar effect in the 'Norwegian' melody, the first of two from Op. 53; if anyone questions the 'rightness' of this, one may reply that Grieg, in the early 1890s and about the time of his fiftieth birthday, went by horse and cart around Norway collecting folk songs, a full ten years before the English folk-song movement began in this country, and at a time in Grieg's life when – an international figure – he had no need to do so.

By such modern interpretative means as we have noted, Aadland reveals the heart of this music in a completely new yet totally convincing manner. Another of his qualities is his insistence on giving each note its full length, which, in Grieg's slow string music, adds greatly to the expressive nature of these interpretations. Aadland is at all times unerring in adhering to the composer's demands in matters of phrasing and of internal string tone: the result is a most admirable recording, with the very familiar Holberg Suite being particularly pleasing; the conductor's tempos are excellent and all repeats are correctly observed.

The accompanying notes are also good and the recording quality is first-class, but it is odd to see a booklet in which the composer's dates are nowhere to be found. Nonetheless, this is a most impressive disc.

