

EDVARD GRIEG • THE VIOLIN SONATAS

audite



FRANZISKA PIETSCH  
DETLEV EISINGER



**Violin Sonata No. 2 , Op. 13** 22:53

- I. Lento doloroso – Allegro vivace 9:54
- II. Allegretto tranquillo 6:37
- III. Allegro animato – Presto 6:22

**Violin Sonata No. 1, Op. 8** 25:04

- I. Allegro con brio 9:45
- II. Allegretto quasi andantino 5:35
- III. Allegro molto vivace – Presto 9:44

**Violin Sonata No. 3, Op. 45** 25:50

- I. Allegro molto ed appassionato 10:11
- II. Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza 7:24
- III. Allegro animato – Prestissimo 8:15

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### Edvard Grieg: Violin Sonatas

Edvard Grieg lived in a period of national awakening which in Norway (then still under Danish rule) did not primarily manifest itself in the filigree of instrumental duets, trios or quartets. The form of the multi-movement sonata – the basis of the development of chamber music since the Classical era – was perceived by many as an emblem of a Central European, specifically Austro-German, culture from which they wanted to detach themselves. Vocal works and character pieces, deriving their material and inflections from folk traditions; symphonic poems and operas that used subject matters from myths and fairy tales: these were the genres favoured by those composers wishing to express their national emancipation. Grieg thought and operated differently. He did not write any symphonic poems (*In Autumn*, Op. 11, is a concert overture), nor operas, but instead music for plays by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Henrik Ibsen, poets of significance and influence across Europe. Grieg's contributions towards the combination of music and theatre were so substantial that his *Peer Gynt* suites are now better known than the drama for which they were written. Chamber music takes on a small but significant role within his oeuvre; he rated his three Violin Sonatas among his best works.

In a letter to Bjørnson he attributed them to his principal creative phases. He called the first one “naïve, rich in models; the second the national; and the third the one with the wide horizon”. It is revealing to see which other works Grieg composed alongside these sonatas – the first one was written immediately after his Piano Sonata in E minor, referring to Schumann's G minor Sonata but then forging its own path;

the second Violin Sonata came shortly before the A minor Piano Concerto which was to become one of his most popular works. During both phases, he devoted himself to the great Classical forms and the resources these offered to his own musical expression. The third, however, was conceived in markedly different surroundings: in between the *Lyric Suites* and the first *Peer Gynt* suite, it emerges as an icon of chamber music perfection. The next and last project in this sphere, the second String Quartet in F major, was to remain a fragment.

### Sonata in F major, Op. 8

Grieg composed the first sonata during the summer of 1865 at the age of twenty-two. At that time, he resided in Copenhagen, the musical capital of Northern Europe. There he met both Rikard Nordraak, a contemporary of his and an artist on whom the Norwegians centred their hopes regarding a national music style, and also the older Niels Wilhelm Gade, who had spent an extended period of time in Leipzig where he became, *inter alia*, Mendelssohn's successor at the helm of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. Forced to return to Copenhagen in 1848 due to the First Schleswig War, he became one of the main exponents of North European music, alongside his father-in-law, JPE Hartmann. Nordraak's influence on Grieg became obvious in later works. This sonata is much closer to Gade's style. Grieg himself had spent three years studying at the Leipzig Konservatorium, founded by Mendelssohn less than two decades previously. Even if later on he was highly critical of his Saxon apprenticeship, it had clearly equipped him with the essential foundations for his profession as pianist and composer.

The “rich models” for the F major Sonata were, first and foremost, the *spiritus rectores* of the Leipzig Konservatorium. In the first movement, Grieg opted for the swift 6/8 metre which Schumann had used programmatically for his piano piece, *Aufschwung*, and which Felix Mendelssohn had employed for particularly vigorous pieces such as the outer movements of his *Italian Symphony*. In the opening theme, the rhythm creates a sense of continually pushing forward; the transitional idea, with a canon between violin and piano bass, generates a circling motion which could be interpreted as a fly wheel or as a sense of dwelling observation of a gesture. If one opts for the latter interpretation, this passage also anticipates the second, song-like theme whose inner motivic repetitions create expressive emphasis: in a rapid tempo, they appear as a contemplative island. As is sometimes also the case with Schumann, the song character remains excluded from the undertow of the permanent transformations, creating dynamism within the sonata form: the first theme and the transitional idea are developed; the second theme is faded in briefly as a reminiscence, shortly before the recapitulation where it reappears in its entirety, untouched. The song – an immediate, human expression – remains unscathed and does not change.

The central *Allegretto*, partly calm and *cantabile*, partly a stylised dance, comes closest to the “Nordic” tone which, in the *Lyric Pieces* and the *Peer Gynt* suites, was to make Grieg famous. The violin passages, to some extent, are reminiscent of the folk music practice of fiddle playing, as cultivated in Norway and Sweden until well into the twentieth century. The energetic opening of the finale is a direct reference to

Robert Schumann. It releases the violin’s virtuosity as well as its wide melodic arches. The second theme, by way of an almost declamatory, delicately structured imaginary vocal line, transports us into a different sphere. Momentum and pausing, two elements which already appeared in the first movement, now grow into defining principles. In keeping with German Romanticism, its nostalgia for Italy and Northern Europe, Edvard Grieg developed his own musical idiom; studying Classical traditions and their reinterpretation by Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann sharpened his appreciation of form.

### **Sonata in G major, Op. 13**

Ole Bull proved to be an important influence on the young Grieg’s musical development. One generation older, he also hailed from Bergen and, after initial difficulties, rapidly embarked on an international career as a violinist, performing across Europe and in the USA, and was, thanks to his enormous virtuosity, labelled as the “Paganini of the North”. In his programmes, he included fantasias on Norwegian folk dances: renowned virtuosos were expected to include improvisations in their performances. In Paris, he attracted attention for also playing the Hardanger fiddle, the instrument inextricably linked to popular music in the region between Oslo and Bergen. It is very similar to a violin; however, the body, fingerboard and bridge have a flatter design and, as well as the four playing strings, it features sympathetic strings. The fingerboard is shorter, the pegbox longer, and the body and fingerboard were often highly ornate. The flatter stringing facilitated polyphonic playing for which Bull was to become famous (he also had his



standard violin converted accordingly). After extensive touring abroad, the 47-year-old returned to his home city in 1857, visiting the Grieg family in 1858 and inspecting, and listening to, the first compositions of the 15-year-old Edvard. He advised the parents to send their son to Leipzig to study: in 1859, the young Grieg began his academic training. But it was also Ole Bull who, according to the 60-year-old Grieg, “opened my senses towards the beauty and originality of Norwegian music. From him I learnt many forgotten folk tunes and, above all, my own nature.”

It seems as though Grieg attempted to combine both aspects of Ole Bull’s significance in his Second Violin Sonata: urbanity and Norwegian patriotism. He completed the work in July 1867, almost exactly two years after the F major Sonata. Since writing the latter, he had also lost his friend and creative colleague Rikard Nordraak; Bjørnson’s cousin had died in Berlin, three months short of his twenty-fourth birthday, in March 1866. Grieg had opened his First Sonata with a miniature introduction: two chords, suggesting an entirely different key, precede the F major entry of the violin. The Second Sonata, however, begins with an elaborate, slow introduction, featuring the work’s two basic trends. Virtuoso decorations and passages refer to folk traditions and their inherent improvisatory facet. At the same time, both approaches reveal the core of the principal theme in the fast section. It leaps out from the introduction – musically speaking with a breakthrough, theatrically speaking with a resolute entrance. In the relationship between the opening and the main section, Classical compositional virtues take effect. The sonata, which Grieg dedicated to his colleague Johan Svendsen,

immediately proved popular in Norway. The principal themes of the outer movements are conceived and fashioned following the example of a leaping dance. The opening movement contrasts the initial idea with a melancholy, song-like passage which is brightened up shortly afterwards. Unlike the configuration of the First Sonata, this secondary theme is emphasised in the middle section, which mainly plays with the contrasting moods. The second movement, divided into three sections, uses a calmer metre to explore the emotional range of that secondary theme, its central section adding further, contrasting colours to the basic character of the *Allegretto*. In the finale, Grieg returns to the leaping dance, augmenting the atmosphere of the first movement’s principal theme with energetic momentum.

### **Sonata in C minor, Op. 45**

When Niels Gade, after the première of the Second Sonata, turned to its composer and commented “No, Grieg, you mustn’t make the next sonata so Norwegian!”, the younger musician answered confidently: “On the contrary, Professor, the next one will be even worse!” It was to turn out differently. The next one was long in coming. Nearly twenty years would pass, during which period Grieg composed not only several volumes of *Lyric Pieces* and numerous songs, but also the works – apart from his Piano Concerto – for which he has remained most famous: the suites for Bjørnson’s *Sigurd Jorsalfar* and Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, as well as the retrospective suite *From Holberg’s Time*. The C minor Sonata was also Grieg’s final work in the great Classical form. The fact that he called it “the extensive one” has to do with its construction and the

unfolding of its themes. Although these tend to originate in small motivic cells (in this aspect, he is close to Schumann and Brahms), the rotation and variation of their elements transforms them into spacious, coherent progressions. Subjects are stated and developed immediately afterwards, in seamless transitions: boundaries dissolve, making redundant a development as a separate formal section. Instead, the respective section of the first movement could, more appropriately, be characterised as reminiscent and retrospective: in the finale, it is missing entirely. However, breadth is also suggested by the relationship between the themes in their succession. The melodic movement becomes increasingly calm and gradually extends – certainly in the first movement – into time: the listener is presented with an expanding perspective.


Grieg conceived the second movement in his favourite form, ABA'. The intimately *cantabile* main section and its significantly altered return frame an enforced fast section. One could almost think that the composer had injected a scherzo into the lyrical mood. But the overall dramatic course of the movement reminds us that the *Romanza*, in the Spanish tradition, was a narrative song. Robert Schumann used this title and form with the same meaning in mind. The finale alternates two character pieces: on the one hand a rhythmically accentuated one whose theme acts as call and response, and on the other hand a *cantabile* one whose second appearance is combined with harp-like accompaniment; the ballad-like tone of the second movement returns once again. A good portion of the *Peer Gynt* atmosphere made it into this movement, even if the memory of the national tone mostly serves the musical colour.

As soon as it was published, the C minor Sonata was celebrated as Grieg's masterwork of chamber music. Before long, the publisher sold 2000 copies of the printed edition: an amazing number for chamber music. Until well into the twentieth century, this sonata remained one of the pieces with which violinists and pianists could demonstrate their musicianship and technical prowess. Thomas Mann, a talented violinist, not only played it himself, but also immortalised it in his novel *Doktor Faustus*, describing the assiduously cultured salon scene in Munich shortly before the First World War. The technical means, methods and strategies used by Grieg in his opus 45 are already in evidence in the two works of the 1860s. In relation to their sister-work in C minor, they are what Beethoven's Sonatas Op. 12 are to his *Kreutzer* Sonata: the later work does not diminish the position of the earlier pieces. It is fortunate that this insight is also beginning to establish itself with regard to Grieg's chamber music.

Habakuk Traber

Translation: Viola Scheffel



A portrait of Franziska Pietsch, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a black, sleeveless, floor-length gown. She is sitting on a dark wooden floor with a herringbone pattern, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a dark, textured wall.

**FRANZISKA PIETSCH** – Born in East Berlin, she received her first violin lessons from her father at the age of five. She gave her debut at the Komische Oper Berlin aged eleven, after which she regularly performed as a soloist alongside renowned orchestras of the GDR. She entered the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler as a junior student, where she studied with Werner Scholz. As an emerging talent, she enjoyed special state support until her father escaped to the West in 1984. Two years of reprisals by the regime followed until she was able to leave the country in 1986. She continued her studies with Ulf Hoelscher (Karlsruhe), Jens Ellermann (Hannover) and Dorothy Delay at the Juilliard School in New York. Masterclasses with renowned musicians including Wanda Wilkomirska, Ruggiero Ricci and Herman Krebbers rounded off her musical training.

Franziska Pietsch has won numerous competitions, including the Bach-Wettbewerb Leipzig, Concertino Praga and Concours Maria Canals in Barcelona. As a soloist, she has appeared in many European countries as well as in America and Asia. From 1998 until 2002 she was First Concertmaster of the Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal, and from 2006 until 2010 she was Deuxième Soliste of the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg.

Franziska Pietsch is particularly passionate about chamber music. She is a founding member of the Trio Testore and played with the ensemble until summer 2015. Alongside the busy performing schedule, she also arranged the trio's annual chamber music festival, "Mai Klassik". She has performed many concerts since 2012 with her piano partner Detlev Eisinger. The Duo Pietsch-Eisinger have already presented one recording, and a further CD is planned to follow the debut album for audite of Grieg Violin Sonatas.

In 2014, she founded the String Trio Lirico together with Sophia Reuter (viola) and Johannes Krebs (cello).





**DETLEV EISINGER**, born in Munich, began playing the piano at the age of seven and gave his first piano recital, as well as performances with orchestra, at the age of thirteen. He studied with Walter Krafft and later with Professor Erik Then-Bergh at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich, where he graduated in 1980 with distinction. In 1986, he won a scholarship to attend the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris.

After graduating, Detlev Eisinger embarked on a busy career as a performer in Germany and abroad, an exceptional initial project being the complete performance of JS Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* in Munich, Vienna, Graz, Salzburg and Klagenfurt. He was also invited to give concerts in Menton, Paris and Montpellier, at the *Kissinger Sommer*, the *Richard-Strauss-Tage* in Garmisch and at the *Kodály Festival* in Hungary. He has given piano recitals and played concertos in major European cities (including at the Philharmonie Berlin and *Münchner Klaviersommer*) as well as in Canada and the USA. He has also toured South Africa several times. Radio and CD recordings followed.

Alongside his career as a soloist, Detlev Eisinger also performs chamber music and appears as an accompanist, having worked with singers such as Hermann Prey and Kieth Engen. Since 2012 he has appeared regularly with the violinist Franziska Pietsch, resulting in the foundation of the Duo Pietsch-Eisinger, giving concerts and making recordings.

Detlev Eisinger's lecture recitals have proved popular with audiences. A further facet of his versatile career are his introductions to the dramatic works of Richard Wagner: from 2002 until 2008, he introduced the complete Wagner operas at the Bayreuther Festspiele in the form of piano matinees, resulting in further invitations from opera houses and festivals in Germany and abroad.



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