

¶ Birgit Goede, *Die Lyrischen Stücke von Edvard Grieg*. Frankfurt a.M: Peter Lang, 2003. Pp. 143. ISBN: 3-631-50662-7.

This is a 'Grieg Year', as it turns out. Edvard Grieg was born in Bergen in 1843 and, after considerable moving about, died there in 1907. As the author tells us, this is the first study devoted only to those of Grieg's piano pieces called the *Lyriske stykker*. These sixty-six pieces, which appeared in ten volumes published by Peters in Leipzig between 1867 and 1901, constitute a considerable portion of Grieg's music for solo piano. Though known today mostly for his deservedly popular piano concerto (1868) and a suite of incidental music for Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1874-75), Grieg left work in all musical genres except opera. He also left behind a mountain of fame that few of his successors have managed to climb.

This short book is not a 'Companion to Grieg' or even a commentary on each of the *Lyriske stykker*. Rather, it is an attempt to discern the larger patterns in the whole corpus of these pieces. Birgit Goede begins with a brief biography of Grieg and moves quickly to a comparison of his pieces with Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* (1829-45), placing them both in the mid-century genre of 'character-pieces'. This was a popular genre which took in countless *nocturnes*, *albumblätter*, *stimmungsstücken* and more than a few *études*, as well, and Goede calls it "the Romantic piano piece", (27) though there were plenty of forerunners, such as Rameau and Couperin. She sees the difference between Grieg's pieces, on the one hand, and Mendelssohn's and Schumann's, on the other, as the former's deriving from "personal experience (36)." Taking *Spring* as an example, she prints a letter from Grieg wherein the composer reminisces from Copenhagen to his Norwegian neighbor about his recollections of his homeland (37) and then gives us Grieg's *Til Foråret*, (op. 43:6) and Mendelssohn's *Frühlingslied* (op.

62:6). Alas, though she asserts the biographical content of Grieg's piece, she does not elaborate on how Grieg's music musically shows this nor how it differs thereby from Mendelssohn's piece with a similar name. Nonetheless, when all is said and done, we are dealing with "*Gelegenheitspoesie* (36)."

The following chapter on Norwegian folk-music and its chief musical instruments, the Hardanger-fele and the Langeleik, wanders perhaps a bit far afield, but something on this subject is probably unavoidable, given Grieg's interest in its melodies and rhythms.

The heart of the study comes in the next chapter, the analysis of the music. Having earlier pointed out (26) that, as a whole, the *Lyriske stykker* show little stylistic or technical development in the course of the thirty-four years of their production, she deals efficiently with their structural form (usually ABA, with minor variations) and melodic shapes (usually related to or, even, incorporating, known folk-melodies). It is in this chapter, too, that she adumbrates the most-interesting connection of Grieg generally and of these pieces particularly with the French Impressionists, especially Debussy (who denied any interest in Grieg) and Ravel (who openly acknowledged his debt to him). She takes up this thread in the final chapter.

In particular, she cites, and prints, *Klokkeklang* (op. 54:6). Save for ten measures in the coda, this remarkable piece from 1891 consists entirely of the theoretically-forbidden parallel fifths (c-g, for example). Goede shows how these work here and in other pieces by Grieg, but then demonstrates their affective simliarity with Debussy's *La cathédrale engloutie* from *Préludes I* (1910). She also skirts Ravel's *Bolero* (1928) and Duke Ellington's *Sophisticated Lady* (1933) in this connection but, particularly in the latter case, this is stretching the analogy too far.

The theme throughout this book, as in most books about Grieg, is Grieg's intimate nationalism. This is not a new idea, of course, nor does it only appear in these piano pieces. Goede's service in this study is to show us how this nationalism took certain

practical forms. That this nationalism was derived entirely from the narrow, rural, Romantic view of *folket* was part and parcel of the times. One might have wished this theme could have been developed within a larger frame of reference, say, of Czech music of the time or of the development of salon music. Indeed, it is the annexation of the country culture by the town salon, through arrangements and derivations such as Grieg's, that brings this music into being in the first place. Goede is not claiming to write socio-musicology, of course, but it is central to the nature of these pieces that they are, in the end, urban. In that sense, it might be useful to see Grieg as a musical transfer-point in this process.

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