Edvard Grieg: Complete Symphonic Works Vol. I

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Fanfare (Peter Burwasser - 01.11.2011)

The wonderful regional orchestras of Germany, from Bavaria, Dresden, and in the present case Cologne, broadcast a richness and intensity of expression that is sometimes skirted by the slicker high-voltage bands in Berlin, Vienna, and London. You can certainly hear it here, in these passionate and gutsy performances. It helps that the Cologne forces are led by the charismatic young Norwegian conductor Eivind Aadland, who was a violinist, and one of the last student of Menuhin, before turning his attention to the podium. This is Volume 1 of Audite's projected set of five CDs of the complete orchestral music of Grieg, with these same forces, all derived from live broadcasts. I can't say that there are any revelations in these readings, but they are immensely enjoyable, and the recorded sound is excellent, full-bodied, very even across the frequency spectrum, and very natural. The many solo appearances in the scores allow for demonstrations of the depth of the orchestra's musicianship in a vivid way. The only times the performances seem lacking vis-à-vis the big boys is in the most virtuosic passages, most notably in the crescendo and accelerando of "Hall of the Mountain King," but even here I prefer the earthiness of this reading to the slickness of Karajan, Ormandy, et. al. This is my new go-to album for these sturdy warhorses.

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