



Edvard Grieg: Complete Symphonic Works, Vol. IV

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Edvard Grieg would prefer that we did not know his Symphony in C minor. But his cover was broken in the late days of the LP when Decca issued a digital recording by Karsten Andersen and the Bergen Philharmonic. The work has not been hidden since, although it is hardly a staple of the repertoire, and is unlikely ever to be. One may well understand the composer's reluctance to have the music played, yet there are some attractive ideas in a symphony that is concise, confident and lyrical, and certainly with numerous trademarks of the Norwegian's style. It's a warm-hearted score, and not a little evocative in places, cast in the traditional four movements and playing for just over half an hour. So it doesn't outstay its welcome; and, anyway, Grieg wasn't about putting on a big show. Rather he invented some pleasing melodies, developed and orchestrated them well if modestly, and his dynamic palette is wide, which Eivind Aadland ensures we appreciate; furthermore, when needed, the composer invests moments of drama to keep the listener engaged and the music on a clear-cut journey.

There is something of a chivalrous fee I to the first movement. If the slow one is a relative disappointment, it's because the very opening is quite lovely but then the music doesn't quite bloom as the initial promise suggests it might. It's tenderly played here, though, as part of a sympathetic and well-prepared reading that continues with a robust, dancing scherzo, itself contrasted with a pastoral trio. The finale drives along with a sense of purpose and direction and also with a sense of emotional urgency, and lightly trips, too, in a very attractive way. The cited stylistic likenesses that are made in Audite's annotation to composers such as Niels Gade, Mendelssohn and Schumann are justified, if applicable more to the former than the two Germans. Yet, ultimately, Grieg is characteristically Grieg in this work, not quite fully formed, doubting himself, but leaving us a work that can be much enjoyed.

The excellent music-making and recorded sound is carried into a piece at the polar extreme of Grieg's popularity, the Piano Concerto. Eric Morecambe may have made hay with it more than 40 years ago, with André Previn his willing and brilliant accomplice. Herbert Schuch, with the full support of the orchestra and conductor, gives a fresh and flowing, feisty even, account of music easy to take for granted. There is much that is gentle and tender, too, and the slow movement is especially soulful, beautifully brought off, and the finale has an invigorating impetuosity as well as idyllic romance and final triumph. Throughout, a positive collaboration informs this honest outing for such a familiar concerto. (The earlier volumes in this series were reviewed in July / August 2011 and September 2013).