



AUDIOPHILE EDITION

GRIEG

Symphonic Dances
Lyric Suite • Sigurd Jorsalfar
Two Elegiac Melodies
Bridal Procession

Utah Symphony Orchestra • Maurice Abravanel



**Edvard
GRIEG**
(1843–1907)

	Symphonic Dances (Symfoniske danser), Op. 64 (1896–98)	26:59
1	I. Allegro moderato e marcato	6:27
2	II. Allegretto grazioso	5:00
3	III. Allegro giocoso	5:20
4	IV. Andante — Allegro molto e risoluto	10:13
5	Bridal Procession (Brudfølget drar forbi), from <i>Pictures from Folk Life (Folkelivsbilder)</i>, Op. 19, No. 2 (arr. J. Halvorsen for orchestra) (1869–71)	3:32
	Three Orchestral Pieces from <i>Sigurd Jorsalfar</i>, Op. 56 (1872, revised 1892)	15:20
6	I. Prelude (In the King's Hall)	3:51
7	II. Intermezzo (Borghild's Dream)	3:05
8	III. Homage March	8:23
	Two Elegiac Melodies (To elegiske melodier), Op. 34 (1880)	7:50
9	No. 1. The Wounded Heart (Hjertesår)	3:12
10	No. 2. The Last Spring (Våren)	4:38
	Lyric Suite (Lyrisk suite), Op. 54 (1904)	16:58
11	I. Shepherd Boy (Gjætergut)	5:03
12	II. Norwegian March (Gangar)	4:06
13	III. Nocturne (Notturmo)	4:09
14	IV. March of the Dwarfs (Trolldtog)	3:39

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)
Symphonic Dances, Op. 64
Bridal Procession, Op. 19, No. 2
Three Orchestral Pieces from *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, Op. 56
Two Elegiac Melodies, Op. 34
Lyric Suite, Op. 54

In the years preceding World War II it was fashionable to speak of Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) in a condescending and even very critical manner. Sometimes his music was even dismissed as being ‘hackneyed’. Yet in the first decades of the 20th century Grieg had enjoyed a tremendous vogue. The great pianists played his concerto, some of his more than 140 songs graced the programmes of the internationally recognised song recitalists, and his string quartet and the third violin sonata were played all over. The *Peer Gynt* suites and the *Lyric Suite, Op. 54*, were favourites in the repertory of popular symphony and Promenade concerts. They were considered indispensable for garden concerts and for what in Germany became stigmatised as ‘Grove and Meadow’ (*‘Wald und Wiesen Programm’*) offerings, in which appeared the overture to Hérold’s *Zampa*, the Strauss waltzes, the *Hungarian Rhapsodies Nos. 1 and 2* by Liszt, and a selection by Richard Wagner.

The Norwegian master was not a musical giant. Yet he was not a dwarf either. Music would be poorer indeed without the creations of the *petits maîtres*. Referred to as ‘minor’ or ‘*petit*’, they were, nevertheless, masters of their craft, thus enabling them to make valuable contributions. In countering the ‘hackneyed’ classification Gerald Abraham referred to Cécile Chaminade, the once enormously popular French composer of salon music, and had this to say: ‘Every schoolgirl knows the Grieg who approximates Chaminade; many a professional musician is ignorant of the Grieg who approximates Bartók.’ Strangely enough, this ‘hackneyed’ music proved itself lucrative in our own day in the cinema and on Broadway. Witness *Song of Norway*.

Technically, Grieg was a product of the Leipzig Conservatory where the Mendelssohn-Schumann tradition held sway during the 19th century. His output of sonatas, chamber and symphonic music is very small indeed, and his contribution to orchestral music in the sonata design amounts to only two works – the overture *In Autumn* and the *Piano Concerto* (he had withdrawn a symphony, composed in 1864). Thus Grieg made not much use of what he had learned in Leipzig. In one respect, however, in the field of harmony, he was completely free of tradition and projected his own individuality. He once said: ‘The realm of harmony was always my dream-world, and my harmonic sense was a mystery even to myself. I found that the sombre depth of our folk-music had its foundation in the unsuspected harmonic possibilities.’ Grieg’s harmony was not only the subject of comprehensive scholarly investigations but also recognised by 20th-century composers.

Grieg’s formative years were affected by his Danish and Norwegian backgrounds. Norway was under Danish rule until 1814 and its capital Christiania (now Oslo) bore the name of a Danish king. Danish influences were still strong in the middle of the 19th century. Grieg’s wife Nina was the daughter of a Danish actress. He occasionally sought the advice of the Danish composer Niels W. Gade, who commanded great respect in the Scandinavian countries. He set words of Danish poets, Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) in particular, to music, and had many Danish friends. Thus one spoke of his ‘Danish period’.

A decisive turn in his artistic outlook occurred after he had made the acquaintance of Rikard Nordraak (1842–1866), the composer of the Norwegian National Anthem. Nordraak, though Berlin-trained, aimed at the creation of a distinct Norwegian national music, and directed Grieg's attention to the riches of Norwegian folk music. It was a revelation to Grieg and the immediate result was the composition of four piano pieces (1865) which were published under the title *Humoresker*, because he did not dare to use the heading *Norwegian Dances*. Yet this was only a minor foray into the Norwegian sphere. He fully freed himself of Danish and German elements after he had become acquainted with the nearly 600 *Older and Newer Norwegian Mountain Melodies*, a three-volume anthology (1853–67) compiled by Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (1812–1887), the founder of the Christiania Conservatory. Grieg used this collection as a melodic source for many a composition, instrumental as well as vocal.

In several instances Grieg's music is a signal, a prediction of things to come. Take for example *Klokke klang* (Bell-Ringing), *Op. 54 No. 6*, composed in 1891. In listening to this little piano piece one recalls Debussy's *La Cathédrale engloutie*, composed 19 years later (1910). Another Debussyan trait is found in the piano piece *Procession of Gnomes*, where one observes a succession of chords in root position, descending from the top of the keyboard to the bottom. Because of the harmonic innovations, Grieg's *Norwegian Peasant Dances*, *Op. 72* (1902), were hailed by the young French composers as significant of *le nouveau Grieg*. Ravel stated on a visit to Norway that he had scarcely written anything that was not influenced by Grieg. Even if we interpret that as diplomatic flattery, the fact that Ravel said it indicates that he recognised features of Grieg's music which served as inspirations for him.

We find traces of Grieg in Delius. According to Sir Thomas Beecham, Delius relied less and less on any source of inspiration after 'he had got [Florida and] Norway out of his head'. In this connection it is not beside the point to recall an interesting episode that Grieg told in his essay *in memoriam* of Verdi, published in Copenhagen in 1901. Attending performances of Verdi's *Otello* in Italy, he noticed that he had become the centre of attention during the prelude to Act IV. People were looking at him. When he inquired about this strange behaviour, he was told that it was felt that this particular passage was more Norwegian than Italian. Verdi may or may not have been acquainted with compositions by Grieg, whose works up to *Op. 41* had appeared before *Otello* was created; and this pertinent passage in Verdi's score shows some affinity to certain elements of Grieg's music.

At any event Grieg's music can stand on its own and does not need the support of composers of historic consequence. Quite a few of his compositions have successfully withstood the ravages of time. They are eloquent proof against the 'hackneyed' detraction, and testify to the fact that the Norwegian master had something significant to convey to his audience.

Leaving aside Grieg's contributions to stage music, his output of orchestral compositions conceived as such boils down to the overture *In Autumn* and the *Piano Concerto*. A symphony was withdrawn; its middle movements were salvaged in an arrangement for piano duet. All other contributions to the orchestral literature were transcriptions of piano pieces and songs. The case of the *Symphonic Dances*, *Op. 64*, is in doubt.

Symphonic Dances, Op. 64

The *Symphonic Dances, Op. 64*, of 1898 represent an ambitious project for orchestra. They are dedicated to the Belgian pianist, Arthur de Greef, who was noted for his interpretation of Grieg's *Piano Concerto* and much praised for it by the composer.

The thematic material of the *Symphonic Dances* is drawn almost entirely from Lindeman's collection of national folk tunes, as Grieg acknowledged by adding to the title, 'after Norwegian motives'. He does not develop the melodies symphonically in terms of traditional form but rather as free fantasias.

The first dance, *Allegro moderato e marcato*, in G major and 2/4 time, is based on a *halling*. The *halling* is a Norwegian mountain dance resembling the reel, and it has been said that it is of Scottish origin. It is typical of the *halling* to begin rather casually and then work up to a hypnotic intensity, and Grieg reflects this in the first dance. The second dance, another *halling* (A major, 2/2 time) is gentler in character and bears the marking *Allegretto grazioso*. The main theme is introduced by an oboe accompanied by harp and pizzicato strings. In the trio, marked *Più mosso*, a solo piccolo creates a jaunty effect. An *Allegro giocoso* in D major and 3/4 time forms the third movement. The melodic material is based on a spring dance from the region of Åmot. The finale is the most ambitious in scope of all the dances. After an *Andante* introduction, the main theme is stated, *Allegro molto e risoluto*, A minor, 2/4 time. It is a striking march that reminds one of the main subject of Sibelius's *En Saga*, composed in 1893 in Helsinki. The source is an old mountain ballad. The trio, *Più tranquillo* in A major, based on a wedding song of Valdres, offers effective contrast. In the brilliant conclusion, the march melody is repeated several times in succession in higher registers, suggesting a tone of heroic achievement.

Bridal Procession, Op. 19, No. 2

This piece originally formed the second item of a group of three piano pieces, *Pictures from Folk Life*, published as *Op. 19*. Written in 1872, the year which saw the production of *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, the triptych was later arranged for piano duet. Grieg had included three bridal marches in the *Norwegian Dances and Songs, Op. 17*, before (1870) and five in the album of *Norwegian Peasant Dances, Op. 72*, later (1902).

The orchestral version of our *Bridal Procession* (E major, 2/4, 129 measures) was the achievement of Johan Halvorsen (1864–1935), violinist, composer, and conductor, who was very close to Grieg, and whose niece he married. He was associated with the theatre in Bergen, Grieg's hometown, and was later conductor of the National Theatre in Christiania (Oslo), where he frequently conducted Grieg's incidental music to *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, and *Peer Gynt*.

The sensitive piano writing of the *Bridal Procession* was captured successfully in Halvorsen's orchestration, Grieg saw his intentions fulfilled, and inserted the orchestral version as number two in the music to *Peer Gynt*. The piece is scored for pairs of woodwinds – the second flute interchangeable with piccolo – four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, cymbals, triangle, and kettledrums. The title *The Bridal Procession Passes By* precisely indicates the guiding idea and its realisation. The music is first heard coming from the distance and as it draws nearer grows more and more in sound and then gradually fades away.

It is not a solemnly-moving procession. The villagers are gaily passing by and the music is propelled by a very rhythmical phrase which dominates throughout until the nearly imperceptible end (*ppp*), while the tonic (E) is maintained persistently for 36 measures.



Three Orchestral Pieces from *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, Op. 56

The most ambitious of Grieg's early works inspired by a national subject is the incidental music to Björnson's drama *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, first produced in 1872. Before this time Grieg had set to music several songs, choral pieces, and cantatas with texts by Björnson. About his composition of the music for *Sigurd Jorsalfar* Grieg wrote, 'The play was to be produced at the Christiania Theatre after such a short preparation that I was allowed only eight days to write and orchestrate the music. But I had the elasticity of youth, and the work was accomplished.' Actually, Grieg may have had more time to spend on the work, since he mentions considering it several months before. The five numbers consisted of an introduction to Act II, two instrumental pieces, and two songs for baritone and men's chorus. The play, based on material from Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, deals with the adventures and deeds of a 12th-century king of Norway. The music contributed substantially to the success of Björnson's drama. The immediate result of this was collaboration on an opera with a similar subject, *Olav Trygvason* (1873), but the work was never completed, and the fragment was orchestrated and published in 1889.

Twenty years later Grieg made a suite of the three orchestral pieces for *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, incorporating several revisions, including the trio for the *Triumphal March*. The new work was premiered under the composer's direction in the Leipzig Gewandhaus in February 1893.

The first movement of the suite, entitled *In the King's Hall*, is an *Allegretto*. It is based on a gavotte for violin and piano of 1867. The melody is introduced by woodwinds to a pizzicato accompaniment. The contrasting middle section serves as a kind of trio, after which the opening march is repeated. The second movement, known as *Borghild's Dream*, was originally an intermezzo in Act I which acted as a prelude to the second part of Act I. Björnson's stage directions for this moment read: 'Before the curtain rises, it depicts Borghild's restless sleep until it builds up to great terror.' In accord with this note, the music begins very quietly for strings. Gathering in intensity, it changes from *Andante* to *Allegro agitato*. A brief passage marked *Andante espressivo* restores the tranquil mood of the opening. The *Suite* is brought to a close by the *Homage March*, marked *Allegro molto*. A trumpet fanfare introduces the main theme, a stately melody first played softly by four cellos and then developed by the full orchestra. After a more tranquil trio, the march is repeated.

Two Elegiac Melodies, Op. 34

These pieces are based on songs set to verses by Aasmund Vinje (1818–1870), who is sometimes referred to as a peasant-poet. The son of a peasant, he became a teacher and journalist whose poetry made a deep impression on Grieg. 'I was all aflamed with enthusiasm when I became acquainted with Vinje's poems, which embody a deep philosophy of life.' They inspired him to 'some of his most intimate and deeply-felt music' (Astra Desmond), set forth in two albums, *Op. 33* (1877 and 1880).

Grieg selected numbers 2 (*The Last Spring*) and 3 (*The Wounded Heart*) for his adaptations for string orchestra, issued as *Op. 34* in 1881. The song *The Last Spring* expresses the emotions of a sick man who is aware of living through the last spring of his life. Grieg's reworkings of these songs were by no means mechanical transcriptions. They show a very refined handling of the string orchestra, in the treatment of which the music is projected in even a nine-part setting in certain passages.

Lyric Suite, Op. 54

The six-item album of *Lyrical Pieces* for piano, published as *Op. 54* in 1891, and the partial orchestral versions are separated by twelve years. In 1903 Grieg learned that Anton Seidl had orchestrated and performed several items of *Op. 54* in New York. Seidl, who had belonged to Wagner's inner circle in the days of the first Bayreuth festival in 1876, had later settled in New York as an opera and concert conductor. From 1891 until 1898 he led the most successful seasons of the Philharmonic Orchestra prior to the arrival of Gustav Mahler a decade later. He had presented the Grieg selections to the public as 'Norwegian Suite'.

Grieg heard about that five years after Seidl's death. He was very interested to see this orchestral version, particularly because it also included the sixth piece of the album, the *Klokkeklang* ('*Bell-Ringing*') which, pianistically conceived, Grieg deemed not apt for an orchestral setting. Thus he asked a friend, later to become his American biographer, Henry T. Finck, to be instrumental in making Seidl's score available to him. Finck succeeded. Having received the score and parts, Grieg instigated a performance in Oslo under the direction of Johan Halvorsen.

In a letter to Finck of 26 February 1903, Grieg acknowledged that he found in Seidl's work 'much that is excellent'. He also added 'that here and there my intentions have not been carried out and my question is, will the widow allow me to make the changes called for. Without them I cannot send the pieces to (my publisher) Peters, but with them I should be glad to do so... Please give my best greetings to Seidl's widow. She will understand, I trust, that I can esteem Seidl's work highly and yet desire to change some things in accordance with my intentions.' In another letter Grieg remarked: 'Seidl's orchestration was undeniably very good from his point of view, but too heavy for my intentions. The whole Wagnerian apparatus was used for my mood pictures, which did not suit me in all cases.' The last remark clearly indicates that the 'Wagnerian apparatus' was appropriate in certain cases. It is very significant that the piece which in Grieg's view precluded the application of this 'Wagnerian apparatus' and justly so, was the piece *Bell-Ringing*, which was eliminated by Grieg and replaced by *Shepherd's Boy*.

Seidl's widow acceded to Grieg's request to make certain changes in the score for publication, and he forwarded to her the fee of 1,000 marks paid to him by the publisher. He was not legally bound to do so. By assigning this fee to Seidl's widow, Grieg acknowledged that Seidl's orchestration served him as a working basis. Yet these facts contradict

the publisher's statement inserted into the printed score: 'This suite owes its existence to the late Anton Seidl, the Wagner conductor (!) who was the first to orchestrate the numbers 2, 3, and 4. This orchestration was, however, subsequently completely changed and done over by the composer.' Obviously, without a comparison of Seidl's and Grieg's scores, it would be impossible to assess how much is Seidl and how much is Grieg. And it is irrelevant for the enjoyment of the work.

The music hardly needs any particular commentary. *Shepherd's Boy* (*Andante espressivo* G minor, 6/8) set in pastoral meter and scored for strings and harp only, displays Wagnerian chromaticism. One wonders how old this boy, beset by melancholic feelings, may be. The ensuing *Norwegian March* (*Allegretto marcato*, C major, 6/8) is richer, orchestrated with sparse use of the trombones and tuba. It is in every respect a companion piece to the *Bridal Procession, Op. 19*, monothematic with a persistently recurring rhythm slowly fading away. The dreamy *Notturmo* (*Andante*, C major, 9/8), in which the trombones and tuba are silenced, reveals Wagnerian traits. The peaceful mood of the *Notturmo* is effectively contrasted with the motoric quality of the *March of the Dwarfs* (*Allegretto moderato*, D minor, 2/4), in which what Grieg calls the Wagnerian apparatus with piccolo, trombones, and tuba is called into play. The dwarfs come, arrive, stop for awhile, move on, and disappear. Yet there is a surprising *fortissimo* stroke at the end.

Joseph Braunstein

Booklet notes reprinted from the original LP release

Maurice Abravanel

The Utah Symphony's reputation as one of America's high ranking orchestras is the result of the dedicated work of Maurice Abravanel, who was its conductor and musical director from 1947 to 1979. Under his baton, the orchestra received ovations throughout the United States and in the music capitals of Europe for its concerts, and critical acclaim throughout the world for its impressive list of recordings on several labels including Vox.

An American citizen of Spanish-Portuguese ancestry, Abravanel was born in Salonika, Greece in 1903, and raised in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he first conducted at the age of 16. He studied in Berlin with Kurt Weill and received his first professional experience in Neustrelitz, Altenburg and Kassel, while serving as guest conductor of the Berlin Opera. Following his 1932 symphonic debut in Paris, he became guest conductor of the Paris National Opera and musical director of the Balanchine Ballet Company in both Paris and London. A three-month engagement as guest conductor in Sydney and Melbourne was extended to two years, a time during which he led many first Australian performances in opera and concert.

When the Metropolitan Opera engaged Abravanel in 1936, he was the youngest conductor to ever step to its podium. He was also the most controversial – both praised to the skies for bringing a much needed 'new spirit' into that august establishment, and criticised for the same reason. In addition, he was the busiest – at one time conducting seven performances of five different operas in nine days.

After two years he left to conduct several works of Kurt Weill in New York and on tour, and conducted many leading orchestras as well as the Chicago Civic Opera, the Mexico National Opera and another season of concerts in Sydney, Australia.

Under the baton of Maurice Abravanel, the Utah Symphony Orchestra became one of America's most respected orchestras. Abravanel taught conducting at Tanglewood and was the recipient of many honours including the Gold Baton of the American Symphony Orchestra League. He died on 22 September 1993 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Utah Symphony Orchestra

Founded in 1940, the Utah Symphony is one of America's major symphony orchestras, known internationally for its distinctive performances and recording legacy. A leading cultural organisation in the Intermountain West, the Utah Symphony has a rich history of international and domestic tours, award-winning recordings, and in-depth educational programmes. Today, the orchestra's 85 full-time professional musicians perform over 175 concerts each season.

The Utah Symphony became recognised as a leading American ensemble largely through the efforts of Maurice Abravanel, its music director from 1947 to 1979. During his tenure, the orchestra undertook four international tours, released over 100 recordings and developed an extensive music education programme. Abravanel's tenure was followed by Varujan Kojian (1979–83), Joseph Silverstein (1983–98), Keith Lockhart (1998–2009) and Thierry Fischer (2009–23).

The orchestra has been nominated for GRAMMY Awards for recordings with both Maurice Abravanel: Honegger *Le Roi David* (1963), Bloch *Sacred Service* (1979), Stravinsky *Symphony of Psalms* (1980), and with Michael Tilson Thomas: Copland *Old American Songs* (1988). The Utah Symphony has recorded extensively for Albany, Angel (EMI), CBS Masterworks (Sony), Dorian, Harmonia Mundi, Hyperion, London (Decca), CRI/ New World Records, Nonesuch, Pro Arte, RCA Red Seal (BMG), Reference, Telarc, Vanguard (Philips), Varèse Sarabande, Vox and Westminster (DG).

For over three decades, the Utah Symphony performed at the Mormon Tabernacle in the heart of Salt Lake City. The orchestra moved to its current home at Abravanel Hall in the fall of 1979. By the 1970s, the Utah Symphony's summer season had grown to include concerts held at ski venues and at local and national parks across the state. The orchestra's season grew to a 52-week schedule in 1980, and since 2003, its permanent summer home is the Deer Valley® Music Festival in Park City, Utah.

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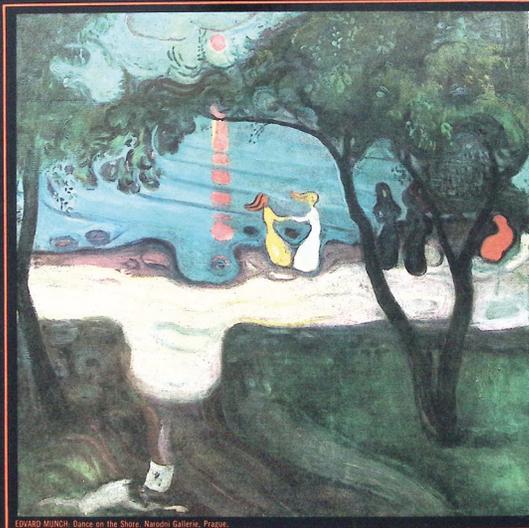
GRIEG

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MAURICE ABRAVANEL conducts the UTAH SYMPHONY



EDVARD MUNCH: Dance on the Shore. Narodni Gallerie, Prague.

QUADRAPHONIC STEREO COMPATIBLE

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A native of Bergen, Edvard Grieg almost single-handedly brought the riches of Norwegian national style to worldwide attention during the 19th century with the use of folk music in his compositions. The ambitiously scaled *Symphonic Dances* features a compelling selection of regional melodies and jaunty rhythms to brilliant effect. Music from the eloquent drama *Sigurd Jorsalfar* and the *Two Elegiac Melodies* are also included along with the *Bridal Procession* and the ever-popular *Lyric Suite*. These classic Vox recordings by Maurice Abravanel and the Utah Symphony Orchestra were originally issued in 1976 and have been newly remastered from the original tapes.

The Elite Recordings for Vox by legendary producers Marc Aubort and Joanna Nickrenz are considered by audiophiles to be amongst the finest sounding examples of orchestral recordings

**Edvard
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Utah Symphony Orchestra
Maurice Abravanel

New 192 kHz / 24-bit high definition transfers of the original Elite Recordings analogue master tapes

A detailed tracklist can be found inside the booklet.

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