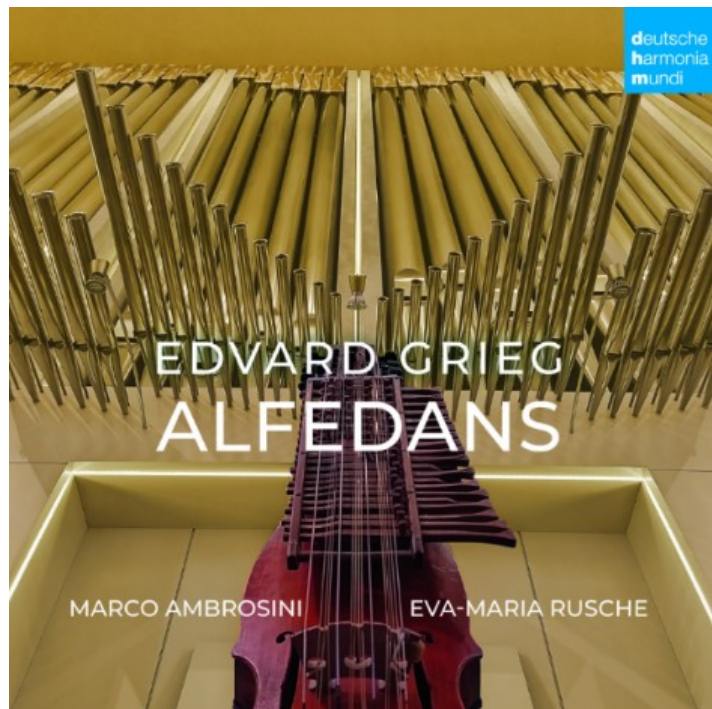


ALFEDANS (Elves' Dance) originates in an unusual and yet extraordinarily compelling symbiosis of two instruments: nyckelharpa and symphonic organ. The nyckelharpa emerged in Sweden during the Renaissance and continues to be played today, even beyond Sweden's borders where it has become an essential element of Scandinavian music culture. The instrument's many resonance strings allow it to unfurl its fascinating sound - an iridescent range of harmonic overtones perfused by a wonderfully warm and smoky depth. Accompanied by the rich



palette of colours of the symphonic organ, we would like to follow the footsteps of Edvard Grieg and take the listener on a Nordic-inspired journey of sounds, passing impressionistic landscapes, evocative romanticism, all the while surrounded by the rousing, captivating melodies of Scandinavian folk music.

In light of the many Nordic folk songs and dances that Edvard Grieg has used both explicitly and implicitly in this music, he is all too easily referred to as “the” Norwegian composer. However this does him an injustice. He apparently felt misunderstood by his admirers, wanting to be known for his cosmopolitanism. Throughout his life he was drawn again and again to Europe’s cultural centres: to Leipzig, Copenhagen or Italy. He enjoyed the musical inspiration of his predecessors such as Schumann or Wagner and personal discourse with colleagues, Liszt and Brahms. He took the typically German-Romantic style and made it his own by always searching for the direct path to immediate emotional expression.

He regularly immersed himself in the solitude of nature and the overwhelming countryside of Norway, which helped him overcome both personal and artistic crises; extensive walks in the mountains stabilized his mental and physical health. It was during the summer months, which he would spend in Lofthus, Hardangerfjord (and later in his house in Troldhaugen near Bergen), that he wrote major parts of his most important compositions, such as **Norwegian Dances, op. 35**. These were written in 1880, originally for piano duet, and were later rearranged for a single player. He was generally open to rearrangements of his compositions. One year after the original version was published, Robert Henriques set it for orchestra, which Grieg liked. Some years later, Hans Sitt rearranged it for Peters Publishing House.

It was particularly with his **Lyric Pieces** that Grieg was able to score points with his Leipzig publisher: The 66 pieces, which were written throughout his creative period almost in diary form, sold like “hot cakes” according to his publisher, causing him to be encouraged to continue the series under this self-penned title. The collection

ultimately encompassed ten volumes, in which his deepest and most personal feelings are expressed in an easily accessible manner for a wider audience.

It was not just as a composer but also as a concert musician that he became known throughout Europe, where he performed together with his wife and cousin, Nina Hagerup, a sought-after singer. Most of the **Lieder** developed with her or for her. “Jeg elsker dig” (“I love you”) is surely one of the most well known.



Norway’s gradually growing confidence as an independent state during the 19th century is reflected in the flourishing and increased interest in traditional and cultural traditions – the tales, dances, songs, and folk art. As in other regions of Europe, collections of transcribed songs were produced, previously only passed on by way of mouth, such as *Ældre og nyere Fjeldmelodier* (1853-1867) by Ludvig Mathias Lindeman, which Grieg used frequently as a source of inspiration, as can be seen in the **Ballade op. 24** for piano (very well known in Norway). He wrote it during the winter of 1875/76 when both his parents died and gave the composition a very untypical form of variations. The autograph is titled *Capriccio (Ballade) / over en norsk fjeldmelodi / i form af variation*. When asked by his friend, and pianist, Percy Grainger, why he didn’t specify the actual origin of the melody (the roots of which can be traced back to the 16th century) in a footnote to his composition, he replied that the mood of the old “drinking song” differed too greatly from his ballad. His interaction with this folk song is – as he is supposed to have said of himself – not that of a music historian but that of a romantic. When the melody is first presented, the listener is taken into an entirely own world by the subject-giving chromatic bass line - an emotional, musical tale narrated through the variations that ensue.

The use of folk melodies by Grieg is never an end in itself: as a modern artist he tells us he was striving towards the universal by describing the individual, which, inevitably, also resulted in the national. The folk music elements are not only apparent in terms of rhythm or melody; the composer uses them far more for their harmonic inspiration. A very specific characteristic harmonic develops that goes beyond pure functional harmony, to serve more than simple structural cohesion but give colour and mood. In this sense: impressionistic.

Grieg’s music seems almost to ask to be set to different arrangements. In this recording, the combination of nyckelharpa and the Winterhalter organ in Konstanz is very new: the seemingly infinite combinations offered by the stops of this organ with its innovative disposition enable Grieg’s piano works to shine in quite a different light. A comparison of the transcriptions with the original editions for piano would be an interesting task; even though the specific pianistic aspect of the composition is moved into the background, the music gains by the new orchestral dimension.

The orchestral effect of the symphonic organ and its considerable range of sound inspired us to choose the nyckelharpa to complement the organ on this journey, rather

than the Hardanger fiddle – the Norwegian violin, which also has resonance strings. This was not just because of the nyckelharpa’s specific sound but because of its greater range. The string of the nyckelharpa, with its rich harmonic overtones, melds with the organ to create a great symphonic overall sound, which, thanks to the duo composition also offers the flexibility we know from chamber music and a freer, rubato style of play.

Comprehensive work on the transcription and arrangement (as well as playing the music in diverse concerts) was necessary to adapt Grieg’s works for these two instruments. As a result,

an unusual, novel sound is created, and, similarly an interpretation that sets itself apart not just from the original version but from those that have followed.

We hope that our work will inspire all admirers of Grieg’s music just as we have been. Let this be a tribute to the composer and the immortal music that motivated this recording.



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