

### **Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)**

Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg was born into a well-to-do family in Bergen, Norway on June 15, 1843. He was started on piano at age six by his mother, an accomplished pianist much in demand in Bergen musical life. His home was filled with music and musicians from early childhood as his parents hosted many musical evenings for the cultural and musical elite of Bergen.

At the urging of famed Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, Grieg was sent off to the Leipzig Conservatory at age 15. He eventually came to study piano under E.F. Wenzel, a close friend of Robert Schumann, who developed in him a life-long appreciation of the famous composer's music. Although Grieg was never happy at the conservatory, he gained a broad understanding of musical composition through hearing the many concerts in the community of Leipzig by the continual stream of world famous performers who came to play at the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

He moved to Copenhagen, the cultural and musical center of Scandinavian life, where he was encouraged and mentored by Nils Gade, then one of the leading musical figures in Copenhagen. Gade pushed him to compose a symphony, which Grieg never liked and directed never to be performed. It was in Copenhagen that he met his future wife, singer Nina Hagerup who was a cousin on his Father's side. They married in 1867 and had one daughter.

Again under the influence of Ole Bull, with whom he spent the summer of 1864, Grieg developed an appreciation of Norwegian nationalism and folkways, which he had never before encountered in the Copenhagen-centric world of his youth. Many of his nationalistic compositions stem from the influences of that summer. From 1868 on he also got much encouragement and support from Franz Liszt, whom he visited in Italy. Grieg was a diversified composer, and produced chamber music, violin, cello and piano sonatas, symphonic works, but the majority of his compositions were for vocal and choral performances, in which his highly talented wife was frequently featured.

He was regarded as the pre-eminent vocal composer of his time. His ultimately most famous works, however, are not choral, but include "The Peer Gynt Suite", inspired by the stories by Hendrik Ibsen; the "Holberg Suite", originally for piano, later transcribed for orchestra; and his one and only Piano Concerto in A minor. Always in poor health due to pulmonary problems Grieg died in Bergen at age 64, on September 4, 1907, one day before his scheduled departure for another concert tour of England. His funeral was a day of national mourning.