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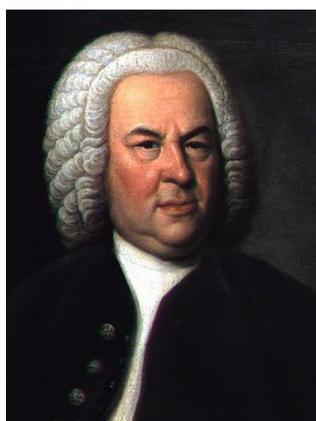


Programme Notes *13th March, 2020*



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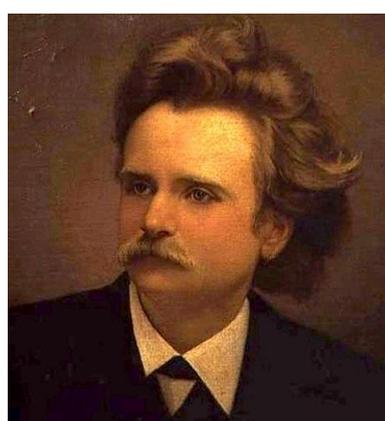
2020



Bach



Hamilton



Grieg

Beethoven –

an Annus Horribilis (part 1)

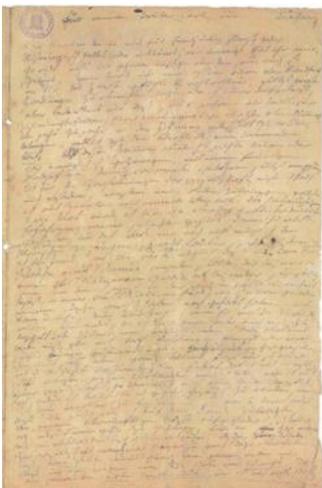
In the January/February 2020 edition of *Limelight Magazine*, Editor at Large, Clive Paget describes how Beethoven shouldered his fair share of emotional vicissitudes over a lifetime, but his last twelve months were among the most trying of all. Here is something of what he had to say:



Beethoven on his death bed.

“An artist’s final year can be an *annus mirabilis*. Take Mozart and Schubert, both of whom were at the height of their powers and musically prolific even as they passed over. But what of Beethoven? Certainly the late works show no slackening of his creative invention or any flagging in his enthusiasm to redefine Classical forms. Yet plagued by illness and family crises, and with his contemporaries struggling to comprehend the unknown regions into which his imagination was increasingly leading him, 1826 might well be described as Beethoven’s *annus horribilis*.

The auguries were a mix of good and bad. The year 1825 had seen Beethoven making international headway with the London premiere of the Ninth Symphony. The reception though was frosty, prompting the composer to remark to Carl Czerny that he intended to ditch the choral finale in favour of something orchestral (which mercifully he never did). His creative life, meanwhile, revolved around a series of late string quartets, three of which would fulfil a commission from the seemingly wealthy Russian Prince Nikolai Galitzin. As would become increasingly the case, however, Beethoven’s health decided to intervene.



The first page of
Beethoven’s
Heiligenstadt Testament
of 1802

Oddly enough, it wasn’t his by now almost total deafness that would be the bugbear of those final years. Conflicting reports make it difficult to know the exact extent of his hearing disability at any given time. In the Heiligenstadt Testament, the composer’s famous cry for help of 1802, Beethoven claimed his deafness had begun six years previously”.

The Heiligenstadt Testament is a letter written by Ludwig van Beethoven to his brothers Carl and Johann at Heiligenstadt (today part of Vienna) on 6 October 1802. It reflects his despair over his increasing deafness, even his contemplation of suicide, and his continued desire to overcome his physical and emotional ailments to complete his artistic destiny. Beethoven kept the document hidden among his private papers for the rest of his life, and probably never showed it to anyone. It was discovered in March 1827, after Beethoven’s death.



Ear trumpets used by Beethoven to compensate for his hearing loss.

Certainly by the famous marathon concert of 1808 that saw the premieres of the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Choral Fantasia he was not so hard of hearing that he couldn't detect an orchestral mistake. But after their notoriously awkward 1812 meeting, Goethe claimed that Beethoven could hear nothing, and by 1818 the composer was using notebooks in which servants and

visitors were required to write their half of presumably two-way conversations.

Even so, Czerny reported that Beethoven could still hear with the aid of an ear trumpet and he was extemporising on the piano as late as 1826. No, it was Beethoven's abdominal problems – an assortment of unpleasant intestinal conditions that had afflicted him since his early 20s – that would conspire to bring him down.

The spring of 1825 saw the composer complaining of inflamed bowels and bleeding from mouth and nose. Taking with him the manuscript for the Op. 132 String Quartet, he retired to Baden where he passed the time berating his elderly servant (a woman who “200 years ago would certainly have been burned”) and his attentive publisher Schott who he dismissively nicknamed “Herr Shitting”. His physician prescribed syringes of warm milk and a diet of creamed rice and cereals, and over time Beethoven recuperated sufficiently to christen the quartet's slow movement “Heiliger Dankgesang” or Holy Song of Thanksgiving.

Back in Vienna, Beethoven moved into his final lodgings, the Schwarzspanierhaus, where he completed his Op. 130 String Quartet with its original Grosse Fuge finale.

Reminiscences from that time suggest life had its sunnier moments. Beethoven is reported leading a hiking party to explore ruined castles, while a rumbustious visit from the Danish composer Friedrich Kuhlau got sufficiently immoderate that several pages had to be torn out of the conversation books. Clouds, however, were gathering, and this time it was to be domestic disputes that would impact his increasingly constrained musical output.



Another building today stands on the site of the place where Beethoven died. A plaque outside features a relief of Beethoven and the words: The house that stood on this site until 1904 was once home to Ludwig van Beethoven, who died an edifying death here on March 26th, 1827. Erected with the agreement of the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz by the Rossauer Male Choral Association on November



Kaspar van Beethoven

For Beethoven, blood was always thicker than water. The eldest of his parents' three surviving sons, relationships with his brothers were tempestuous. Four years younger than Ludwig, the volatile Kaspar van Beethoven followed his brother from Bonn to Vienna in 1794 where he doubled as a government clerk and the composer's unofficial secretary. His clumsy chicanery in business matters got him into dozens of scrapes before he finally settled down, marrying Johanna Reiß, an upholsterer's daughter, who was already six months pregnant with their son, Karl.

Ludwig and Johanna never got on, especially after she was sentenced to a year's imprisonment for faking a burglary in her own home, falsely blaming it on her maid, and effectively embezzling a pearl necklace. When Kaspar died of tuberculosis in 1815, Ludwig insisted his brother's body was tested for poison before entering into a lengthy and rancorous lawsuit to win custody of his nephew from the woman he referred to as "The Queen of the Night".

After winning the battle, Ludwig forbade Karl to even see Johanna, an edict that saw the boy regularly running away to be with her. In one instance Beethoven went so far as to have the police return him by force. Unhappy, and what was worse in Beethoven's eyes unmusical, Karl went to study philology at the University of Vienna in 1824, but when he told his uncle he wanted to become a soldier, Beethoven went ballistic. On one occasion he alleged that his nephew was sleeping with an elderly servant and on another he accused him of patronising prostitutes procured for him by his mother. The conversation books suggest their rows sometimes turned violent.

Trying to keep the peace was brother number two. Johann van Beethoven had trained as a pharmacist and followed his brothers to Austria..

Opening a chemist's shop in Linz, against Ludwig's advice he married his housekeeper Thérèse Obermeyer in 1812. Johann thrived, and in 1819 he bought Schloss Wasserhof, a modest estate in the village of Gneixendorf 50 miles northwest of Vienna.

Throughout his brother's custody disputes, Johann regularly invited Ludwig and Karl to come and stay with him, but Ludwig's stubborn aversion to Thérèse, whose only crime appears to be that she had an illegitimate daughter, seems to have kept them apart. In a typically passive aggressive letter to Johann in 1822 Ludwig refers to his sister-in-law as "that loutish fat woman" and accuses her of being "a former and still active whore" who "has full control of your money.



Therese Obermeyer

(.....to be continued).

TODAY'S MUSIC

Beethoven - Piano Trio in C minor Opus 1 No.3



Beethoven's trios are amongst the finest works in the world of chamber music. Taking the form created by Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven developed it over time into a genre of symphonic proportions – the final one lasting for some 40 minutes. He also built on the form (Haydn's and Mozart's trios were of three movements) by adding a fourth (usually a scherzo) after the fashion of a string quartet or symphony. In another departure from the form of the earlier masters where prominence was accorded to the piano, Beethoven sought to give more equal emphasis to the role of the other two instruments.

Beethoven composed four main sets of trios: Opus 1 composed in or around 1795, Opus 11 a couple of years later, Opus 38 somewhere round 1803-5 (it's in fact a rearrangement of his Septet of 1799), Opus 9 in 1808 and the famous (and lengthy) Op 97 in 1811.

In addition there is a couple of trios published posthumously, two set of variations for piano, violin and cello and a transcription of his second symphony for the same three instruments.

For the purpose of today's exercise we will focus on the 3rd of the Opus 1 set, said to be Beethoven's favourite of the three in the set. So highly did Beethoven regard this early work that more than twenty years later he returned to it and made from it an arrangement for string quintet, which he published in 1819 as Op.104.

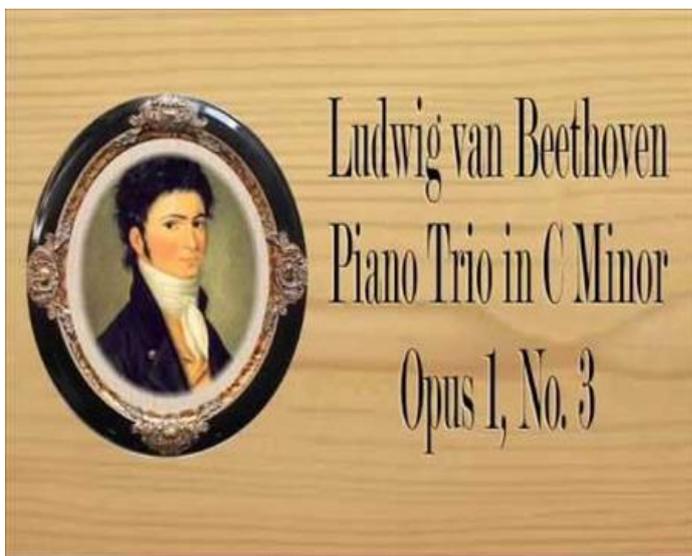
First up looking at this set we should not be deceived by the Opus 1 number. They are by no means Beethoven's first compositions. When Beethoven arrived in Vienna in 1792, he had already written many works under the supervision of his teachers in Bonn, including a piano concerto, an oboe concerto, a fragment of a violin concerto, a fragment of a symphony, and numerous chamber works. It's just that these have pretty-well been lost. His Opus 1 is simply his first published work.

Being anxious to get off to a good start from a publishing as well as a concert hall perspective, Beethoven performed and revised these works before they were handed to a publisher. In this he was fortunate to have in Vienna a Patron in a Prince Lichnowsky who underwrote the publishing costs, thus helping ensure the success of the work. A minor sticking point was his teacher – Haydn – who requested that Beethoven include the words “Pupil of Haydn” beneath his name on the Trios' title page. As was to become his nature, Beethoven flatly refused and is reported as having said to a friend:

“I never learned anything from him (Haydn) anyway”.



Beethoven Patron
Prince Lichnowsky



It is also claimed that Beethoven's flat refusal was fuelled by an earlier suggestion from Haydn that only the first two works in the set be published and hold back the Trio in C Minor, saying that he believed the Trio in C Minor to be too advanced for audiences. Beethoven, who believed the Trio in C Minor the best of the set, suspected jealousy on Haydn's part and is said to have borne the grudge for some time.

There's another claim to fame for this Trio and that is its key of C minor (of course Beethoven's first published work in that key). It was the key which ushered in many of his well-known later compositions - the Pathétique Sonata, the Fourth String Quartet, the Third Piano Concerto, the Funeral March of the Eroica, and the Fifth Symphony, to name only the best-known examples. This trio shares some of that same C-minor spirit.

Briefly, it opens with a brisk allegro with a theme played by all three instruments in unison is followed quickly by a second theme played on the piano. Both themes are then developed by the violin and the cello with the piano accompanying them.

The second movement 'andante cantabile' is a set of variations on the piano's opening theme with a brief coda attached.

The third movement is labelled 'Menuetto Quasi Allegro' suggesting that - in its rapid tempo - this minuet form is edging toward becoming a scherzo. This trio section belongs largely to the cello.

The Finale: 'Prestissimo' rushes along with the opening theme passed from violin to piano to cello, seemingly in preparation for a big finish. But Beethoven has a surprise up his sleeve: the end itself is not what any listener is likely to expect. A change of key down a tone sees the work close quietly.

The presentation we listen to is by Eugene Istomin, piano; Isaac Stern, violin; and Leonard Rose, cello, given at a concert in Paris in 1970. The link to YouTube is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eochThotlxQ&t=58s>

Why are we watching this particular video? Simply, I guess because of the history of the performing trio.

Writing for the music site: allmusic.com, artist biographer, Robert Cummings, has this to say:



The Istomin - Stern - Rose Trio was a unique threesome of musicians whose names had been well established on the concert stage as distinguished soloists when they decided to unite in 1961 for the purpose of exploring the staples of the piano/string trio repertory.)

The three gave many memorable concerts, appeared on television and radio broadcasts, and made numerous

recordings, many of which are still available.

Since each of the three maintained active, highly successful careers as soloists during their trio years (1961-1984), their chamber performance schedule was limited. For that reason and because of their lofty reputations, each concert drew major notice; each recording attracted impressive sales. During 23 years of activity, the group became especially well known for performances of the trio repertory of Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Brahms. The trio performed not only chamber works but orchestral compositions, as well (the Beethoven Triple Concerto was a favourite), with conductors like Eugene Ormandy and Bruno Walter. It recorded exclusively for Columbia/CBS, much of whose catalogue is available on Sony Classical.

The three first came together in the 1950s and privately performed much of the trio repertory for their own enjoyment. After they officially established their ensemble, they toured regularly, giving many highly acclaimed concerts. One of them was a 1965 televised concert over the CBC, in which they performed the Beethoven Trio in C minor, Op. 1/3, and the Brahms Trio in C major, Op. 87. In 2005 Video Artists International issued a DVD of this concert.

In 1970 the three recorded all the Beethoven trios and the following year received a Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance. Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s the group continued to give numerous highly successful concerts and made many further acclaimed recordings, but in 1984 its association ended with the death of Rose”.

Bach – *Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D – BWV 1068*

Of Bach's four *Orchestral Suites* the third is the best known, mainly because of its second movement, commonly known as the "Air on a G String"). It was written somewhere around 1731, that is, in the latter period of his life (Bach died in 1750).



But are there only four? Some say "No"! There could be as many as ten, who knows? – the argument being that the so-called 'Four' are not related to each other. Their numbering is not accurate either. No 1 seems to be the first of them – composed about 1723, while No 4 came into being around Christmas 1725, and the 2nd not until 1738-39. Bach, it is claimed, simply wrote presentable occasional festive music for the wealthy courts of Weimar and Cöthen. Much of this has been lost and these four are only ones to survive.

The title "Orchestral" given to Suite 3 may not be entirely accurate either as there is scholarly opinion that Bach originally composed it for stringed instruments only, in which case it is Bach's only known work for four-part strings. That gives it a certain uniqueness in the Bach compilation.

So while the suite has been handed down arranged for wind instruments and timpani, it is suspected by some that Bach added these some time after the original composition. This is certainly the opinion of the Music Director of the Netherlands Bach Society, Lars Ulrik Mortensen, whose recording we will listen to. He dispenses with the label "Orchestral" and reduces the instrumentation to violins, violas, cellos double bass and harpsichord – 12 players in all. Mortensen claims this gives the work a certain transparency.

My own opinion is that it makes sense that if these "suites" were composed to embellish the court festivities of the day, the playing of them would possess a natural lightness. Having listened to "orchestral" versions, there is a lightness to Mortensen's interpretation which, to my thinking, better fits the four dances which follow on from the Overture.

THE MUSIC

There are five movements:

Overture (deliberate spelling meaning "opening piece", to which the king could make his entrance). The opening is somewhat slow and grand then develops fugue-like into a faster paced section before reverting to the earlier slower material to close the movement.

This leads into the “Air” – with its walking bass line, long, lamenting melody, and haunting counterpoint. A beautiful and equally graceful melody, often played as a stand-alone concert piece commonly known as the “Air on a G string”, it is one of the most famous movements in all of Bach . The title was not Bach’s ascription, however, but that of a later musician who demonstrated that by transposing the melody down an octave and into the C major key, it was possible to play it on only one string (the G string – the violin’s lowest string). And the name has stuck.

The courtly dances follow. First we hear a pair of strongly accented Gavottes, contrasting in their orchestral textures. We hear the first Gavotte, then the second, and then a reprise of the first. The gavotte was a duple-time (musical terminology for 2 beats to the bar) dance whose character could vary, though by general consensus it was of moderate tempo.

There follows a Bourrée, a dance in duple time, leading into (without a break) a gigue – a quick dance in 6/8 time in which Bach infuses a good-humoured geniality into this rollicking conclusion.

Our performance is by the Netherlands Bach Society with Lars Ulrik Mortensen conducting from the harpsichord. When his hands are occupied with the keyboard is he conducting with his head? The recording can be accessed on YouTube at:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqU4rF_ysQo

Should you wish to hear the work played with the addition of wind and percussion instruments, the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra using period instruments under the direction of Ton Koopman is recommended. It can be accessed on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuMtEof9MWs>



Gordon Hamilton – ‘Seven’ from “Far South”

Gordon Hamilton (born 1982) is an Australian composer and conductor. Since 2009, he has been the Artistic Director of The Australian Voices. He was born in Newcastle, lived and worked in Bremen, Germany for five years as a conductor and composer and he now lives in Brisbane.

In recent seasons Gordon has conducted the Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland Symphony Orchestras, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, WDR Funkhausorchester (Cologne), the St. Christofer Chamber Orchestra (Lithuania), Südwestdeutsche Philharmonie (Konstanz), Nürnberger Symphoniker and the Malaysian Philharmonic. In 2019 he conducted the premiere of Nico Muhly’s Unexpected News with Omega Ensemble.

As Artistic Director of The Australian Voices he has led the choir in its mission of commissioning innovative music by Australian composers. They have released albums with Warner Classics (2013) and ABC Classics (2016) as well as a songbook with Edition Peters (2013). Gordon's choral opera 'MOON' (2011) toured with TAV to Australia, Germany and to the Edinburgh Fringe and was named by The Herald Scotland as "one of the outstanding musical surprises of Fringe 2012." In 2014 TAV made international headlines with their set of videos of musicalisations by composer Rob Davidson of political speeches, including 'Not Now, Not Ever!' – based on former PM Julia Gillard's oft-quoted 'misogyny' speech.

Recently Gordon travelled to Antarctica to compose a symphony – to be premiered jointly by Tasmanian & Melbourne Symphony Orchestras and the London Mozart Players – in which field recordings of ice, ocean and whales interact with the orchestra.

He describes the venture this way:



"I wrote 'Far South' during and after a trip in December 2019 to Casey Station, Antarctica, onboard the icebreaker Aurora Australis – an Australian icon, nearing the end of her service. I was the lucky guest of the Australian Antarctic Division on an Aurora Legacy Fellowship. I spent a month aboard the icebreaker on a round trip undertaking an Aurora legacy project from the Australian Antarctic Division to compose an

extended work for Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and London Mozart Players.

The work I composed is called 'Far South' and is in six movements. Three of the movements incorporate recorded sounds, which I captured in the field around Casey Station. These include ice, wind, the sound of snow melting, and a Finback Whale in the Southern Ocean.

I encountered many wonderful and interesting sounds. The Zoom H6 stereo microphone is one of my favourite possessions! I used the H6 to record the sounds of the ship, of cargo groaning on deck in the wind, of the ship breaking the ice, of snow and ice on Antarctica melting, and wind brushing snow crystals on Reeve Hill. I edited these recordings into tracks which will play out of a speaker during the performance.

I really enjoy blending recorded sound with 'classical' ensembles – often it's hard to discern what is recorded and what is live.

I composed little sketches every day in my cute miniature Moleskine notation book. Then each afternoon I worked at realising the sketches into orchestral music. After five weeks, in all I composed about thirty-five minutes of music, though I only used twenty-four minutes for the completed symphony. Composing music is like exercising a muscle: ideas beget ideas, and the more one works at it, the easier it becomes. Some of the music I composed was a direct depiction of landscapes and colours; other parts are more abstract musical ideas I happened to think of while in Antarctica.



The second movement, 'Seven', is a hymn which strayed into my thoughts one day (there are no nights in December) while sailing past mighty icebergs. Seven verses, each of seven bars in 7/4 time, climax with an ecstatic passage of septuplets''.

The work is for strings, with any four solo instruments spread through (the pick of which is left to the players or leader). I also invite other instruments to band together – thus the ensemble might stretch from a small string group to a vast cast of sound-makers. For me the choice of a kernel of fiddles was straightforward: a landscape dominated



by one hue lends itself to an homogeneous body of sound. Four soloists break up the smoothness with airings of individuality.

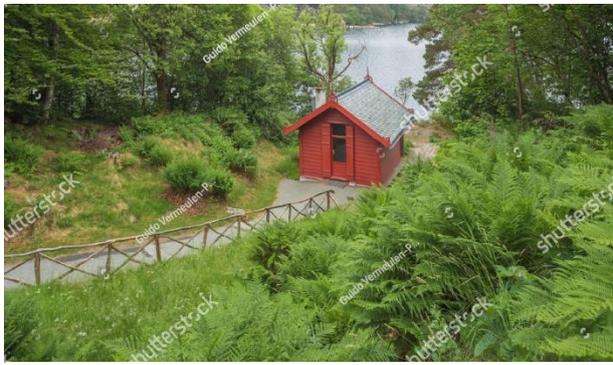
We listen to this movement performed by the Podium Strings at the Beethovenfest Bonn 2019 conducted by the composer. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7GNQkPmu2A>

Grieg – Piano Concerto in A minor Opus 16

Writing in the programme Notes for a performance of this concerto in July 2018 by the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra, Herbert Glass, Music Critic for the Los Angeles Times comments:

“The 150th birthday of Edvard Grieg, in 1993, was grandly celebrated in his native Norway, which had indeed never forgotten him. The anniversary was at least acknowledged elsewhere, the recording industry being particularly helpful in this respect. 1993 may well have been instrumental (hoary pun intended) in restoring to circulation and a goodly measure of respectability such treasures as that composer’s Peer Gynt score and Piano Concerto, his two most familiar large-scale works.



Grieg's cottage in the grounds of his house, where he composed in seclusion and silence.

The Piano Concerto was written during the summer of 1868 and reflects its 25-year-old composer's contentedness with his surroundings – a secluded cottage in the Danish countryside, and the companionship of his wife and newborn daughter.

The Concerto is launched by those familiar chords, the piano's octaves sweeping the keyboard from top to bottom, then ascending again in giant arpeggios. It's certainly an attention-grabbing opening, but also somewhat of a red herring (Nordic – waters pun unintentional), as is the case with another concerto everyone supposedly knows – Tchaikovsky's 1st.

Grieg's opening gives the mistaken impression that heaven-storming is to be the movement's preoccupation, when, in fact, a tender lyricism prevails, starting with the subsequent main theme (as in the Tchaikovsky, the opening passages are merely introductory material), announced by the woodwinds and taken up by the solo piano.

But the killer tune – a supreme example of the composer's melodic inventiveness – is the bittersweet second theme. Liszt, a strong supporter of the young Grieg, suggested that it be announced by solo trumpet, advice which Grieg eagerly accepted. And so it appeared in the first published edition (1872). Subsequently, however, Grieg, who knew from the start a thing or two about orchestration, changed it to the version now heard, the theme announced by the cellos. A mellow masterstroke, as it turned out.

Movement two begins with a gentle, folk-like melody sung by the muted strings, whereupon the piano enters with its own, separate theme. High register piano trills usher in, without pause, the finale which, after some grandstanding virtuoso brilliance, settles into the kind of theme Grieg did best: an exquisitely simple-seeming inspiration, purely Norwegian in its melodic cast, yet laid out for fingers on a piano by a hand that knew, and revered – Chopin".

For the 175th anniversary of Edvard Grieg's birth, on 15 June 2018, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, and other collaborators, produced the largest and longest Grieg concert ever performed, featuring all of his opuses, from 1-74 – a continuous round of performance in venues across Norway, over a period of 30 hours.

The performance we hear of his piano concerto (the only one he ever wrote) comes from that concert, featuring Norwegian pianist Håvard Gimse (right) with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by its principal conductor – Edward Gardner.



The YouTube link is:

<https://www.bergenphilive.no/video-konserter/2018/06/grieg-minute-by-minute-piano-concerto>