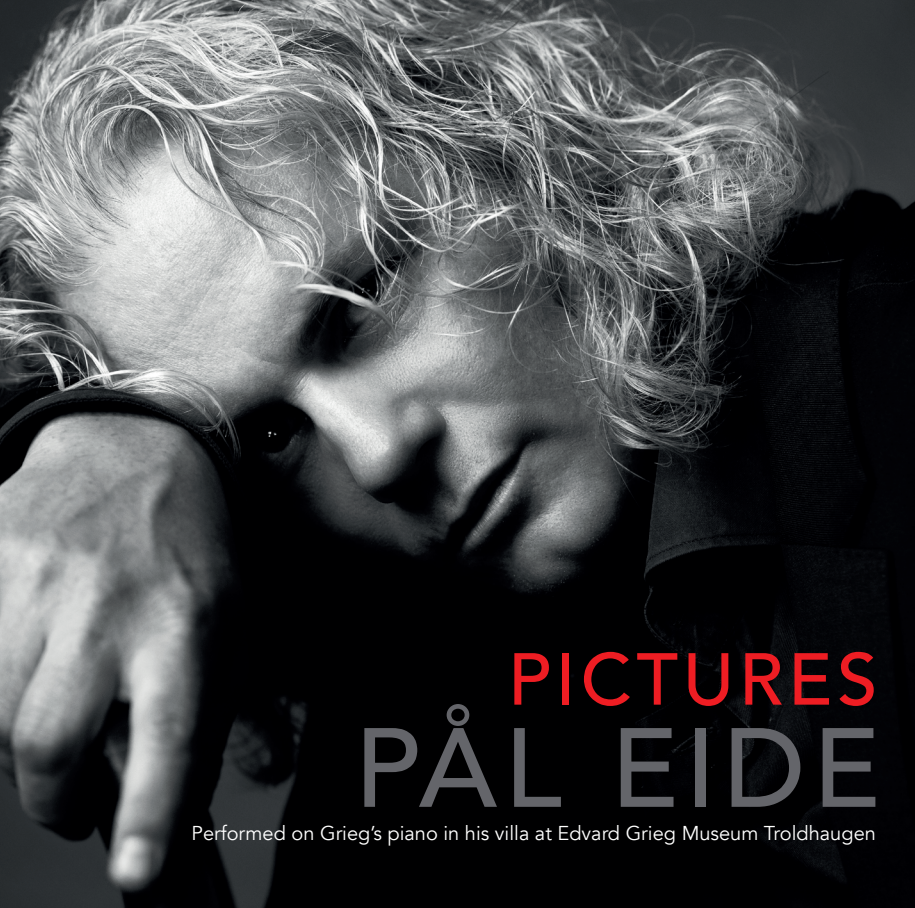


PICTURES
PÅL EIDE

Performed on Grieg's piano in his villa at Edvard Grieg Museum Trolldhaugen



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Recording on Grieg's Piano – by Pål Eide

An important moment

My album “Grey Clouds” featuring Liszt, Ravel, Debussy and Stravinsky had caught international attention, and I was invited to give a recital on Grieg’s piano at his home located at my birth town of Bergen. A winter storm was raging outside and the temperature was twelve degrees below zero. Grieg’s old house was creaking. I waited downstairs with blankets to keep warm, holding my fingers in hot water every 10th minute. Outside the audience was freezing, impatiently waiting to come inside. My first performance in Bergen for many years felt important, as I was performing for a Norwegian audience for the first time after an unusually late breakthrough. I knew it might have changed people’s way of listening, perhaps being more curious and open minded, and with greater expectations. It was my first time playing the great Norwegian composer’s instrument. Since my childhood, Grieg’s music has been particularly dear to me; no other music touch me like that, within seconds.

In Grieg’s living room the audience sits very close to the piano – there is not much space. It is really cold. You can feel the wind inside. I play the first five tones from “To Spring” extremely softly, as out of nothing. The optimistic sound of singing birds, and then, a beautiful melody. Grieg has a unique ability to bring back moods of a particular memory. He speaks directly to our hearts. Suddenly it does not feel cold anymore. The music fills our minds with pictures of springtime. At this moment I feel closer to Grieg than ever before.



Hill of the Trolls

This experience made me dream of recording my next album, *"Pictures"*, on Grieg's 1892 Steinway. Trolldhaugen has always been one of my favourite places – the atmosphere is rare. Grieg had the house built in 1885 on a wooden hill by a lake and called it Trolldhaugen or, "Hill of the Trolls." He lived there with his Danish-Norwegian wife Nina for the last 22 summers of their life. The house is Norwegian, with elements of Swiss style and has a certain eccentricity to it, with ornaments and a tower. He built it thinking more about acoustics than keeping warm. Grieg's furniture is kept in his living room, full of personal items and pictures and drawings, some of them gifts to

the famous composer. Into the hill a bigger Concert Hall, "Troltsalen", was built in the 1980s. I gave some recitals there in my younger years, the first at the 1998 Bergen International Festival. From the audience you can see the lake, and in the foreground, a little red composer cottage where Grieg could work undisturbed. He was easily distracted; a boat sailing on the lake could break his concentration. Outside the concert hall is a full size statue of him. He was a great man of a short stature, only 152 cm of height. The ashes of Edvard and Nina are kept in a little mountain crypt down by the lake. They were among the first people in Norway to be cremated. Grieg was a modern man, and this influenced his music.

Getting closer

My sound producer Helmut Burk arrived from Hamburg with his equipment the day before. He uses a glass connection to project the sound, and this had to go all the way from the living room and upstairs to Grieg's old bedroom, where Helmut could set up his equipment, making a recording booth. We had to be extra careful not to damage things, and the cable had to be stuck to the wall using a special tape, keeping it completely still and not leaving marks. If you bend this wire too much, it will break. If there is not enough space and you close a door, a slight movement in the night, and the alarm will go off.

I met my sound producer at a concert at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark many years ago. Later, he recorded my first album "Listen!" and "Grey Clouds", both in Friedrich-Ebert-Halle, Hamburg. Helmut is a calm and modest man who has won two Grammy awards and has been working for Deutsche Grammophon, recording many of the great pianists like Krystian Zimerman, Claudio Arrau and Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli.

Recording on Grieg's piano

Grieg's piano is a Steinway bought in Hamburg in 1892, given to him by friends. They managed to get it into his house without his knowledge, which cannot have been an easy task. It is kept in superb condition and has a unique and beautiful sound that has more of a wooden mellow, less metallic quality than newer instruments. You can hear it is old, but in a positive way; the upper register has a bell-like sound with a nostalgic touch. Grieg himself played and practiced on these keys. Any musician has a strong connection to their instrument, our door into the world of music. After all, we tend to spend more time with our instrument than with the people in our life. Grieg was a great pianist often touring Europe, playing his own and other composers' music, but was always longing for the Norwegian nature and for Trolldhaugen. He called it "my best opus so far."

The next day we began recording. Grieg's Steinway is sensitive. The touch of the keys does not require much weight, making it possible to play extremely softly. This is important to me. The mechanisms work well, but are also sensitive to small changes, making it more difficult to control than a new instrument. At the same time, the possibilities of expression are wide.

From the first note I am caught by the beautiful sound. I feel a deep connection to the music through this instrument and immerse in it, sometimes unaware of the outside world.

Background noises

But as always when recording, there are disturbing sounds. The chair, a shoe, the floor, humming (I personally enjoy Glen Gould's), ventilators, a lamp, birds, a barking dog, people outside – the sounds are everywhere. Sometimes you start to notice

noise that normally would not be a problem. But Helmuth's microphones are very sensitive. And people are going to listen with headphones, which make every detail audible. In the control room it can be difficult to decide what is acceptable, because you sometimes don't know if what you hear is on the recorded sound or from outside. There was road construction work by the lake involving heavy stones. If you listen carefully to the record, you might notice one small beep from a car in reversal, but it is hard to hear, as it is in the right key.

The first day there was quite a loud wood-knocking sound from the pedal. This noise was there each time I was slowly lifting the weight on the right pedal, and we had to try to get rid of it. Luckily, we had the piano technician Richard Brekne to help us. He is responsible for maintaining the instrument, and was tuning it twice a day. We made him come and examine the pedal. He was going back and forth to another recording on a historical piano from the 1830s with Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. So, in this case, Grieg's instrument was the modern one.

Richard was on his back under the instrument doing his best, and after a while the sound from the pedal was hardly audible. With a 127-years-old handmade instrument mostly made of wood, you have to deal with what you have. Richard told me the instrument's sound changes with the weather. In the museum opening hours, tourists come into the house every hour of the year, and it is not possible to avoid temperature and humidity changes. With this in mind, the instrument is in a fantastic condition. According to Richard, the sound of the instrument was particularly beautiful on the days of our recording.



Another storm

During the daytime groups of tourists came to visit. A few of them had a startled moment when, entering the living room, they found a middle-aged man with long grey hair at the piano. They soon realized that it could not be Edvard, though. There was no mustache.

We had a few hours after closing time to make longer sessions. I always prefer to record long passages, sometimes the whole program in one long take to really get into the music, as if in a concert. Modern recordings are sometimes made of hundreds of small cuts. It may sound perfect, but there remains a sense that something is missing.

A strong wind makes me worry. The house is old and not well insulated. The wind may be heard easily and will most likely be picked up by a sensitive microphone. But it might also give the recording an extra dimension. After all, I am in Grieg's house, playing his piano like he did himself in many cold and windy evenings. If you turn the volume up, you may be able to hear the sound of the wind.

Edvard Grieg – The pioneer

Liszt was mostly known for his virtuosity, and with *"Grey Clouds"* I focused on Liszt's influence on the impressionists Debussy and Ravel, and modern composers like Stravinsky. *"Pictures"* will emphasize Grieg's impact also on modern music. He was far ahead of his time; a side of him not always recognized. Grieg used harmonies as colors, and not always in theoretical relation to each other. His harmonic style was a direct inspiration for the impressionists Debussy and Ravel and may later have influenced jazz music. His most extreme work was *"Bell Ringing"* (1891). It is easy to recognize the parallel to Debussy's, *"The Submerged Cathedral"* composed almost 20 years later, but it goes even further. The highly original structure based on parallel fifths and an absence of harmonic functional meaning has been an important inspiration to modern composers.



The strong direct expression of Grieg's music may be the most important explanation of why it is so popular. He was closely connected to the nature of Norway, loved to walk in the mountains and could express pictures in music, like very few other composers. When he wandered around in the countryside, he studied folk culture. He listened to the melodies, harmonies, and rhythms and almost instinctively and in an original way integrated them into his works. He wanted to prove the universal meaning of folk music. Grieg combined steady rhythms, simple harmonies from folk music with extreme energy in classical music, and this may have inspired later popular music and rock. When you closely experience a performance where a classical musician "gives everything," it can be highly powerful.

I understand Grieg's close relationship to nature; from an early age I used to walk in the mountains and woods of Norway with my parents and later with my Danish wife and our daughters, like Norwegians often do. I grew up listening to folk music. My father's family were farmers from a small village in the western part of Norway, and has played folk music for several generations. My mother's family, Lindtner, in Bergen, is a family of several actors and singers.

Pictures

I have selected musical pictures by Grieg, Sæverud and Johansen, and Jesper Koch's "The Mirror of the Mind" written for me, and put them together with one of the most important works of piano literature, Pictures at an Exhibition, written by Mussorgsky shortly after Grieg's Pictures from Folk Life.

I try to find a musical and historical connection between the pieces, and look for harmonic, melodic or rhythmic similarities. Even when there is a change from one composer to the next, I look for a natural "flow," but also seek contrasts, like a

composer often trying to create a work with contrasting movements. Hopefully, you may experience the album as a whole. In concerts, I have sometimes asked the audience not to applaud between pieces. In this way you don't break the flow of the music. By putting composers together in a non-traditional way, I hope to enable the listener to hear the music with a fresh view. I want to give the listener a sense of how the composers influence each other, and by developing their own personal style, create innovation.

Music film and documentary

The last two days of recording, film photographer and director Per Dreyer from Denmark participated, filming from different angles. We plan a music film and documentary on the recording and Grieg's influence on modern music. Per Dreyer has produced numerous films including the award-winning "Father" (2012), and music videos with rock musicians. He recently made his debut as a writer with the trilogy "Murderer – Lover – Son" that is scheduled for release on the publisher Griffle.

Suddenly the cameras are changing the situation. I have played on television before, but to make a recording for many hours on camera is new to me. At first, I am aware of the cameras and conscious of my movements. I can't completely relax, a situation that makes it more difficult to concentrate. But Per has been a great inspiration to me; "Grieg's spirit is in the room, and he is happy – I can feel it," he says with a big smile, meaning it. Not much later, I forget about the cameras and get back into Grieg.

Mussorgsky and Grieg

The Norwegian composer Arne Norheim's only piece for solo piano was the title track on my album "Listen!". Sometimes in history artists get the same thoughts and ideas almost simultaneously, without knowledge of each other's work.

Norheim once demonstrated this kind of influence to me. He had made a recorded tape with three orchestral works played at the same time. Norheim and Dane Per Nørgård had composed two of them in the same period, but without any contact. The third piece Dane Rued Langgaard composed several decades earlier, but it was not known to Norheim and Nørgård at the time of their own compositions. Played simultaneously on tape, the three pieces sounded like one.

I don't know whether Mussorgsky and Grieg had listened to each others music, but I know that artists from the Nordic countries and Russia have inspired each other. There are similarities between them: They were both masters in describing moods and pictures in music. They both tried to integrate national music and develop their own style, and influenced modern composers.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-81) belonged to a group of five Russian composers, known as "The Five," composing national romantic music. He was not educated as a composer, but his gifts made him the most significant Russian classical song composer. He was a rebel, had a hard life, and suffered from alcoholism.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) was born in Bergen. His mother, an educated pianist and singer, noticed Edvard's musical gifts early and made him take piano lessons. At 15 he went to Leipzig to study, and completed his education there. He later went to Copenhagen where he married the Norwegian/Danish singer and pianist Nina, his cousin. One of his friends was the Norwegian composer Richard Nordraak who encouraged him to integrate folk music style into his music. In Copenhagen he wrote his piano concerto in A Minor Op. 16 (1868), which even today is one of the most performed piano concertos in the world. Early on Grieg became famous in Europe both as a composer and as a pianist.



Among his friends in Copenhagen, with my wife's great grandfather of the Melchior family. At this original stereo photo, he is playing the piano in their home with Nina listening.

The music and the composers

"Pictures from Folk Life" Op. 19 (1871) is among Grieg's best piano works, in a clear folk-music style. **"Mountain Dance"** has typical folk-music dance rhythms. The changes in character give it a powerful expression. **"Bridal Procession"** depicts a wedding procession in a Norwegian village, and **"From the Carnival"** is a romantic picture describing a carnival in Rome, a city Grieg often visited. The 10 volumes of **"Lyric Pieces"** give a wide perspective on Grieg's lifework and gave him his main income. **"Butterfly"** and **"To Spring"** from Op. 43 (1886) and **"March of the Trolls"** from Op. 54 (1891) are among his most popular pieces. **"Bell Ringing"** (Op. 54) is one of his most significant works, with elements pointing into the future. It consists of fifths with a tonality that sets the harmonic functional meaning aside, and gives an impression of hearing bell ringing.

Harald Sæverud (1897-1992) was one of Norway's most original composers creating his own style, like Grieg with folk music elements. This can be heard in the fifths of the beginning of his most famous piece **"Kjempeviseslått"**/The Ballad of Revolt (1943) from **"Tunes and Dances from Siljustøl"** Op. 22, dedicated to the resistance movement and composed in anger of the German occupation. In Norway every-

body knows the piece, but when I perform it abroad, the audience is struck by its emotional power.

David Monrad Johansen (1888-1974) was educated in Norway, Germany, and France. His **"Pictures from the North"** Op. 5 (1919) is clearly inspired by Norwegian folk music, but also by French impressionism. **"Profile of a Woman"** describes the temperament of a woman he met, and in **"The Little Stone God"** we are attending a pray meeting in the far rural north of Norway. Seeing a reindeer herd run over the steps inspired him to compose **"Reindeer"**, while **"Towards the Mountains of my Forefathers"** describes the feeling of looking down at a farm from a high mountain top.

Danish composer Jesper Koch (b. 1967) has written numerous works for Danish symphony orchestras. His piano piece **"Images of Lorca"** (1996) is recorded on my album **"Listen!"**. **"The Mirror of the Mind"** (2007), written for me, reflects a fairytale, **"The Snow Queen"** by Danish writer H.C. Andersen.

Mussorgsky's genius is shining in his grand piano piece **"Pictures at an Exhibition"** (1874). There is a famous orchestral version by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). When Mussorgsky's friend, artist and architect Victor Hartmann passed away, Mussorgsky went to an exhibition of his drawings and paintings. This inspired him to write one of the most original works of the entire repertoire of piano music. Walking between the pictures, the music describes his changes of mood in the different **"Promenades"**. Some of the pictures require a short description: **"Tuilleries"** is a picture of children playing in the Tuilleries, a park in Paris and **"Limoges"** a market place in Limoges. In **"Catacombs"** we are in the grave chambers under Paris and **"The Hut on Chicken Feet"** is a picture of a hut of the Russian fable witch Baba-Yaga.

Becoming part of Troidhaugen

When Sigurd Sverdrup Sandmo and Thomas Heimstad at Troidhaugen heard my album *"Grey Clouds"*, they invited me to give my first recital on Grieg's piano. The staff at EGMT has been wonderful. A unique experience was the event "Grieg-minute-by-minute" in 2018 when more than 600 musicians participated in live performances of all Grieg's opuses in a 30-hour direct transmission on Norwegian national television, celebrating his 175th birthday. The coordination of this event was impressive and the atmosphere euphoric. I had the honor of performing one of his most famous works, Op. 43 and Op. 9, with singer Astrid Nordstad. We later gave a recital in Troldsalen, and this summer I will give 25 solo recitals as "Pianist of the Week" before travel to Russia to play Grieg's piano concerto. During the days of our recording of *"Pictures"* we were welcomed under the best possible conditions. I am deeply grateful to have such a relation to Troidhaugen. Performing Grieg's music has become an important aspect of my life.

The wind is still raging, and the sound of the last note of Grieg's "Leik"/Cattle Call (1869) is fading. Grieg heard a young woman sing this song at one of his hikes in the countryside, and could never forget it. For me, it reminds me of my childhood, and I find it to be a calming encore, a perfect example of Grieg's genius on a small scale. The recording sessions in the home of one of my favorite composers are over. The piano and the house were welcoming hosts. When I entered the control room upstairs one day, the door opened by itself. You may think what you like about that, but some of the memorable moments of our days at Troidhaugen are now captured. I hope you will enjoy them.

Pål Eide, 2019



Pål Eide, born in Bergen, Norway, in 1970, is living in Denmark. His first international release "Grey Clouds" with Liszt, Ravel, Debussy and Stravinsky, received spectacular reviews.

Following studies at the Royal Danish Academy of Music and the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire, he made his debut in Copenhagen in 1997 and later studied with Jiri Hlinka in Norway. He has been given numerous recitals in Scandinavia and also recorded the album "Listen!" (2010) with Bach, Norheim, Koch and Rachmaninov.

"...tremendous, clear in terms of line yet hugely exciting." **International Piano**

"He has a way of getting inside the music to elucidate the extra-musical imagery behind the notes" **Fanfare**

"Pictures"

Recorded on Grieg's Steinway from 1892 at Edvard Grieg Museum Troidhaugen, 31.10-03.11 2018.

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EDVARD GRIEG: Pictures from Folk Life

- [1] Mountain Dance, Op. 19 No. 1 (5:25)
- [2] Wedding Procession, Op. 19 No. 2 (3:31)
- [3] From the Carnival, Op. 19 No. 3 (7:18)

EDVARD GRIEG: Selected Lyric Pieces:

- [4] Butterfly, Op. 43 No. 1 (1:57)
- [5] To Spring, Op. 43 No. 6 (3:05)
- [6] March of the Trolls, Op. 54 No. 3 (3:13)
- [7] Bell Ringing, Op. 54 No. 6 (4:31)
- [8] **HARALD SÆVERUD: The Ballad of Revolt**, Op. 22 No. 5 (3:34)

DAVID MONRAD JOHANSEN: Pictures from the North

- [9] Profile of a Woman, Op. 5 No. 1 (2:36)
- [10] The Little Stone God, Op. 5 No. 2 (3:46)
- [11] Reindeer, Op. 5 No. 3 (1:48)
- [12] Towards the Mountains of my Forefathers, Op. 5 No. 4 (1:51)
- [13] **JESPER KOCH: The Mirror of the Mind** (3:19)

MODEST MUSSORGSKY: Pictures at an Exhibition (30.53)

- [14] Promenade (1:23)
- [15] Gnome (2:14)
- [16] Promenade (0:46)
- [17] The Old Castle (4:17)
- [18] Promenade (0:26)
- [19] The Tuileries Garden (0:59)
- [20] The Ox Cart (2:31)
- [21] Promenade (0:44)
- [22] Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks (1:08)
- [23] Two Jews - one rich, one poor (2:05)
- [24] Promenade (1:21)
- [25] The Limoges Market (1:25)
- [26] The Catacombs (1:29)
- [27] With the Dead in a Dead Language (1:49)
- [28] The Hut on Fowl's Legs (3:32)
- [29] The Heroic Gate of Kiev (4:41)
- [30] **GRIEG: Cattle Call**, Op. 17 No. 22 (1:20)



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Total time: 78:11

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