

Edvard Grieg - Piano Concerto In A Minor, Op.16 (1977)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Allegro Molto Moderato* 2. *Adagio* 3. *Allegro Moderato Molto E Marcato* Sviatoslav Richter - piano Philharmonic Orchestra Moscow Kirill Kondrashin - conductor

Grieg was born on Norway's fjord-coast in the same year that Leipzig's storied Konservatorium opened under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn. By the time Ole Bull, the Norse Paganini, persuaded Grieg's parents to send their gifted 15-year old there for instruction, Mendelssohn was already dead 11 years. His successors were solid, German-schooled academicians whom Edvard hated, and against whom he rebelled. Ever after, he made five years in Leipzig sound like a prison sentence. That he learned so much from allegedly hidebound and uncaring teachers validates the soundness of their instruction. Most notably, Grieg absorbed the salient stylistic traits of Mendelssohn and Schumann (who taught there briefly before moving to Dresden). Indeed, his Piano Concerto could be called Schumannesque (likewise in A minor) without invalidating its Scandinavian character or Lisztian flourishes. Despite posthumous scorn for Grieg's large solo oeuvre during much of the twentieth century, his natural habitat was the keyboard. Grieg composed this music in 1868 for himself to play; however, Edmund Neupert played the first public performance in Copenhagen on April 3, 1869.

A government grant enabled Grieg to visit Italy in 1869, where he showed the work to Liszt at his residence near Rome. The kindly Abbé played it at sight with unconcealed pleasure (brilliantly, too, although for Grieg "rather too quickly" during the opening part). Liszt encouraged him to "go on, and don't let anything scare you," but tastelessly suggested that the second subject of the first movement be played by a trumpet instead of cellos. Grieg didn't restore it to the strings until his revision of 1905-1906.

The concerto opens with a drum-roll and solo flourish, after which the winds play a simple, unsophisticated main theme that the piano preempts, and embroiders at length, *Allegro, molto*

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moderato. The cello subject (più lento -- a little slower) is contrastingly "soulful." Trumpets usher in the development, and later on the reprise. A solo cadenza comes just before the end. In the second movement, the key shifts from A minor to D flat major. This structurally uncomplicated Adagio in 3/8 time begins introspectively with muted strings. The piano rhapsodizes until a dramatically angular version of the main theme shatters the mood.

Eventually, calm is restored, and a quiet ending leads without pause to the third movement another quick-but-not-too-quick movement in A minor, additionally marked marcato, whose structure combines sonata and rondo. The piano introduces a main theme based on the 2/4 rhythm of a Norwegian folk dance, the halling. The second subject is quirkier and more elaborate but no less folk-like. The solo flute initiates a tranquil episode, after which the main theme returns for extended development. A short solo cadenza precedes Grieg's long-delayed transition from minor to major for yet another dance, this one in 3/4 time at an accelerated tempo. During a final cadenza, Lisztian bravura blows away any lingering traces of Schumann. --- Roger Dettmer, Rovi

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