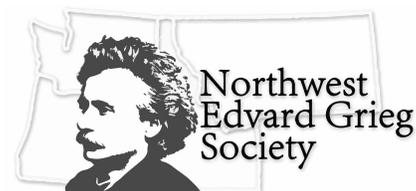


From Grieg to Gershwin
Part II: Beyond Borders, The Folk Identity

Friday, October 2, 2020



Program

String Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 27
III. Intermezzo

Edvard Grieg
(1843-1907)

British Folk-Music Settings
I. "Molly on the Shore" Irish Reel

Percy Grainger
(1882-1961)

Lullaby for String Quartet

George Gershwin
(1898-1937)

Strum

Jessie Montgomery
(b. 1981)

Program Notes

Program Notes by Laura Loge

We now move beyond our solitude and isolation and recognize we are all connected, and yet all individual in our identity and our traditions, folk-inspired and beyond. These works for string quartet bring us on an all-connected journey from the old country to the new world to today, along with each composer's chosen musical idioms. The composers and works have been chosen because they have a connection to each other and also to each of us, yet are able to stand alone on their own merit.

Edvard Grieg's *String Quartet* was composed in 1877-78 in Hardanger, as he was escaping the cacophony of the city, in solitude in a small composer's hut alongside the fjord and under a birch tree. It was there he found inspiration and focus. In February of 1878 Grieg wrote to Gottfred Matthison-Hansen, "I needed this bath in solitude and ... an opportunity to work without interruption, and I have gotten it—more, perhaps, than is good for me. I recently finished a *String Quartet* ... in G minor and [it] is not intended to deal in trivialities for petty minds. It aims at breadth, flight of imagination, and above all sonority for the instruments for which it is written." From that hut emerged the only completed four-movement work for string quartet in his output. The third movement, performed here, opens with the grandeur and boldness of many of Grieg's larger works, creating a much more lush sound than one would usually expect from just four stringed instruments, it's strongly syncopated opening measures evoking tension within the music. The middle section, however, highlights the truly Norwegian sound of the *halling* folk dance, surely inspired by his own surroundings in Hardanger. Grieg juxtaposes grand, musically-advanced compositional techniques (not appreciated by many critics of the time) with the folk sounds of his home country. In a letter to Aimar Grønvold he wrote, "In this work are specimens of the heart-blood of which the future hopefully will see more than just a few drops." The piece is dedicated to Robert Heckmann, who Grieg consulted extensively on revisions and edits and whose quartet premiered the work on October 29, 1878 in Cologne.

Percy Grainger's dedication of *Molly on the Shore*, “Lovingly and reverently dedicated to the memory of Edvard Grieg,” is a perfect description of the mutual admiration the two composers held for each other. Although he was in the last years of his life, when Grieg first encountered Grainger, who performed Grieg's Op. 72, *Norwegian Peasant Dances*, he wrote in his diary, “I have not met anyone who *understands* me as he does. And he is from Australia. There is no Norwegian pianist at the moment who can match him...” Australian born, Grainger spent 1901-14 in London, where he produced an immense output of arrangements of British folk songs. In his diary Grieg noted, “His work with the folk songs is of the greatest significance, as it unites musical superiority, expertise in comparative linguistics, historical and poetic vision, and colossal enthusiasm for the task of collecting the material. And not just enthusiasm, but, it appears, also the practical grasp of things.” Grainger performed and traveled through Europe, where he first encountered Grieg, and later he visited Trolldhaugen in the final months of Grieg's life. *Molly on the Shore*, an arrangement for strings of two different Irish reels, “Temple Hill” and “Molly on the Shore” comes from his time in England and is representative of Grainger's style, bringing the accompanying sonorities closer to those of the melody line and, in his own words in a letter to Frederick Fennell, “to avoid regular rhythmic domination... I prize discordant harmony, because of the emotion and compassionate sway it exerts.”

In 1914 Grainger immigrated to the United States where he would build a successful career in performing and composition. He developed many personal and professional friendships with American composers, including George Gershwin, leading him to arrange many of Gershwin's works for piano. Grainger himself often compared Gershwin's works to Grieg's, both because of their reliance on a national or folk music tradition while maintaining a cosmopolitan sophistication, and because many of Gershwin's melodic lines and motives mimic Grieg's. Gershwin's *Lullaby* for string quartet was composed in 1919 but was not performed publicly until 1967 and published until 1968, long after Gershwin had died. His brother, Ira, wrote of the work, “It may not be the Gershwin of *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Concerto in F*, and his other concert works, but I find it charming and kind.”

In the early 20th century Gershwin brought the American sound, steeped with blues and folk music, into the classical realm. Now, well into the 21st century, the brilliant African-American composer and violinist Jessie Montgomery expands on those sounds by melding elements of American folk music, improvisation, language, and social justice into the classical concert hall. She composed *Strum* for string quartet in 2006 and revised it in 2012, producing the work on this program. The composer writes of her quartet, “Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum* I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration.”

With *Strum* we return to the folk dance, with which we all, as humans, can connect—beyond our borders, yet still with a strong connection to our folk cultures. From Grieg's *halling* in the third movement of his string quartet, to the reels of Grainger's folk song arrangements, to Gershwin's gentle and charming lullaby, to Montgomery's nostalgic and celebratory *Strum* we can all find an element of ourselves, our community, all those who came before us, and our shared humanity.

Artist Bios

Violinist **Allion Salvador's** playing has been described as "fiery, seething with passionate fervor." Since graduating with degrees in Violin Performance and Neurobiology from the University of Washington, he has taken on the role of Assistant Concertmaster of the Yakima Symphony, Concertmaster of Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra, and is a member of Symphony Tacoma and the String Orchestra of the Rockies. He has served as concertmaster of the Seattle Philharmonic, Pierre Monteux Festival Orchestra, University of Washington Symphony, and Sammamish Symphony. He has founded and worked with several vibrant chamber music projects, including the piano trio Andromeda, the modern music-focused Inverted Space Ensemble, Sound Ensemble, and the Parnassus Project. Allion's interests also extend toward the podium. He is the founding music director of the Seattle Philharmonic Strings, a community orchestra promoting string repertoire of the highest quality. Devoted to education, Allion has coached the University of Washington Symphony, Roosevelt and Issaquah high schools, the Seattle Youth Symphony, and the UW Chamber Music Club.

Rachel Nesvig is an active freelance violinist and teacher in the Seattle area. She plays with Symphony Tacoma, Seattle Rock Orchestra, NOCCO, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra, Yakima Symphony, among others, both classical and non-classical. She also enjoys playing in the pit, having performed with 5th Ave Theater and Pacific Northwest Ballet Orchestra. Rachel's chamber music credits include Puget Sound Strings, Sonic Quartet, and Arcobaleno Strings. An active recording artist, Rachel plays for Seattle Music Inc., and records tracks for local bands, composers, international movies, and video games. Internationally she has performed classical, pop, and folk music in Norway, South Korea, China and Kenya. Rachel has built a career around her love of music, performance, teaching, and Scandinavian tradition. She has played the Hardanger Fiddle for almost 20 years, studying and performing both in Norway and the United States. She was the first St. Olaf student to receive Distinction in Hardanger Fiddle in 2007. One of her current projects is curating her YouTube Channel dedicated to Hardanger Fiddle! She also has recorded Hardanger Fiddle for video games including Minecraft Norse Mythology by Gareth Coker, Poda by Austin Wintory, and Rend by Neal Acree. Composing new fiddle pieces while fusing new and old traditions with Hardanger Fiddle continues to be one of Rachel's passions.

Violist **Aleida Gehrels** is a leading collaborator in cross-genre music, equally at home with a chamber ensemble in intimate performance as she is with a hip hop group in a sold out stadium. Her diverse musical interests stem from rigorous classical training. Aleida made her debut as a soloist at age 17 and completed her Masters in viola performance at the Chicago College of Performing Arts. After touring all seven continents with a string quartet on luxury cruise liners, she relocated permanently to Seattle in 2015. Since then, Aleida has performed live on KING FM and KEXP radio, toured with Macklemore, premiered new music with The Sound Ensemble and the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra, composed string arrangements for Pacific Northwest singer-songwriters, and frequently appeared with the Yakima and Federal Way symphonies.

Lauren McShane, cello, is a freelance cellist and teacher in Seattle. She performs regularly with Portland Cello Project, Seattle Rock Orchestra, and Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra. In addition to performing, Lauren is passionate about teaching. She believes that each student has a unique way of learning, that music pedagogy should complement and engage the student. She also believes music should be taught in a positive atmosphere, motivated by musical, emotional, and technical growth. She teaches a full private cello studio, at Holy Names Academy, Snoqualmie Strings, and is a faculty member at Icicle Creek Summer Symphony.

This program is made possible thanks to the following organizations and individuals:

The Northwest Edvard Grieg Society

The Seattle-Bergen Sister City Association

The National Nordic Museum

The Seattle Channel

The Seattle Office of Arts and Culture smART ventures Grant

The Norwegian American newspaper

Steinway & Sons

The Swedish Club

Leiren Designs & Norse Mask

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Lori Ann Reinhall