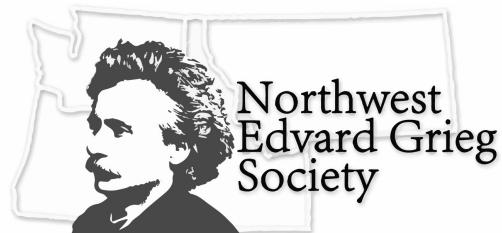


Jul: A Christmas Journey



Program

Sang til juletræet, Op. 61, No. 2

Edvard Grieg
(1843-1907)

Sne

Sigurd Lie
(1871-1904)

Jul, Op. 15, No. 2

Eyvind Alnæs
(1872-1932)

Herrens Moder, høje, milde, Op. 50, No. 11
Vuggesang i mørketiden, Op. 130, No. 5

Christian Sinding
(1856-1941)

Ave, maris stella, EG 150

Grieg

Børnenes Jul, Op. 36

1. Jule-Klokkerne
2. Barn Jesus i en Krybbe laa
3. Juletræet
 - a. Indgangs-Marsch
 - b. Drengenes Runddands
 - c. Smaapigernes Dands
4. Godnat!

Niels Gade
(1817-1890)

Lullaby for a modern baby

Frederick Delius
(1862-1934)

Arctic Night, Op. 64, No. 1

Amy Beach
(1867-1944)

Dyb sne, Op. 5, No. 1

Theodora Cormontan
(1840-1922)

Lullaby on Christmas Eve

F. Melius Christiansen, arr. Steven Luksan
(1871-1955) (b. 1988)

Jul: A Christmas Journey

Program Notes

By Laura Loge, President NWEGS

So many of our beloved Christmas traditions that have been passed down through generations are strongly tied to our Norwegian roots, brought over by ancestors who immigrated from Norway to the United States over the last century and a half. Along with cookies, breads, decorations, and meals are musical traditions, often associated with carols, hymns, and church services, but also encompassing the coldness, snow, and the contrast of darkness with a myriad of lights of the season.

In honor of that musical tradition, we offer this special holiday virtual concert, *Jul: A Christmas Journey*, which celebrates the musical traditions originating in Norway and passed down to us. We dedicate it to those forebears who made the long journey and, subsequently, bring us together through those traditions.

This production was filmed in Seattle's beautiful and historic Ballard First Lutheran Church, built by Norwegian immigrants in 1928. Continuing a life-long passion of sharing Nordic song repertoire with audiences, soprano Laura Loge, sang the rarely-heard songs, nearly all in Norwegian. Collaborating with her and performing solo works on the piano was Steven Luksan, equally versed in obscure Nordic repertoire. To round out the trio, NWEGS favorite Aleida Gehrels joined on her viola and Lori Ann Reinhall narrated the event.

The concert opens with seasonal songs from Norway, including a couple of Grieg's charming songs, "Sang til juletræet" (Song to the Christmas Tree) from his Opus 61, *Seven Children's Songs*, and "Ave, maris stella" (Hail, Star of the Sea), EG 150, composed in 1893 as a Danish adaptation of a Latin hymn with numerous distinctive Grieg-specific sonorities and musical idioms. Although not a particularly religious man, Grieg later arranged it for mixed chorus and it has subsequently become one of his more frequently performed choral works, perhaps because it can be sung in Latin.

We explore several songs by Grieg's contemporary composers and those who followed just after him. Sigurd Lie's "Sne" (Snow), his most well-known song, evokes the sound-absorbing effect and seemingly timelessness created by gently falling snow while exploring shifting modalities in the legato vocal line. Often considered the successor to Grieg, Eyvind Alnæs in "Jul" (Christmas) contrasts the weight of the world and cruelty of humanity around us with the story of the coming of Christ at Christmas and the hope of the season with distinctive musical variations outlining those two elements.

Christian Sinding's music resembles a Nordic version of Richard Strauss with sweeping, orchestral-like lines and rich, complex chords. His two songs represented today are in stark contrast with each other but both distinctively Sinding. "Herrens Moder, høje, milde" (The Lord's Mother, High, Mild) brings forth a simple, pious prayer to the virgin Mary, filled with legato lines reaching up to her, combined with weeping in the vocal line while asking for her help. "Vuggesang i mørketiden" (Lullaby in the Dark of Winter) gives us an earthy, human picture of life in the north during the darkest time of the year. The weight of the season is inescapable, but light, love, and joy persist in the presence of a newborn baby as it peacefully slumbers.

Traditions, musical and otherwise, are not free from influence. We delve into Grieg's musical connections through "Børnenes Jul" (Children's Christmas), a multi-movement piano work by one of Grieg's early teachers, Danish composer Niels Gade, which includes a hymn setting of a Christmas carol, "Barn Jesus in en Krybbe laa" (Baby Jesus Lay in the Manger), sung in Danish. Similarly, Grieg influenced others who followed him, in particular, British composer Frederick Delius, whose "Lullaby for a modern baby" performed with piano and the rich tones of a muted viola elicits what Jesus might have heard had he been born nearly two millennia later.

As our ancestors left Norway for the United States they carried Christmas customs and music with them. During his life, and still today, Grieg's music was well-known and frequently performed, whether as orchestral music from *Peer Gynt* or his *Piano Concerto in A Minor*, or his lyric pieces for piano. It would have been impossible for any musician to escape his influence, even in the New World.

We also present several American composers who explore northern roots. Published in 1907, the year of Grieg's death, "Arctic Night" for piano by Amy Beach, one of the most prominent female American composers of her era, explores traditional winter songs of the Inuit people of the northern-most regions of the American continent. Their winters likely paralleled those our ancestors experienced in Norway.

Theodora Cormontan, a Norwegian-American immigrant, contemporary of Grieg, and a prolific composer, performer, music publisher, and music teacher, composed music in the traditions of the Lutheran church that surrounded her. Unfortunately most of her compositions were entirely unknown for decades until the unpublished manuscripts were donated to Michael and Bonnie Jorgensen, professors of music at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. We have included her duet with a deeply religious text entitled, "Dyb sne" (Deep Snow), originally scored for soprano and alto, but in our program the viola takes the part of the alto.

As we know, Theodora Cormontan was not the only prolific composer and musician to make the journey to our shores, bringing along their Norwegian musical customs. One of those traditions, which is still shared and cherished today, is the Norwegian Lutheran choral tradition, with its epicenter at St. Olaf College. F. Melius Christiansen founded the St. Olaf Choir in 1901, and his influence continues through that organization and the many other stellar ensembles, large and small, still performing today at St. Olaf College. He was also an avid composer of choral music, and as any alum knows, arranged elaborate versions of beloved Lutheran hymns. We close the program with one of his sweet Christmas works, "Lullaby of Christmas Eve." Though usually performed by a chorus with a soloist, we are lucky to have our very own Composer-in-Residence, Steven Luksan, arrange it for our trio of piano, soprano, and viola.

In this program Norwegian musical traditions, historical and evolved, continue to be handed down, allowing us to feel connected to our ancestors, the Old World, as well as with each other as we make new traditions, never fully escaping the influence of those who brought us here long ago.

Artist Bios

Soprano **Laura Loge** has been hailed for her "luminous stage presence" and "characterful and versatile voice." Opera roles include Violetta, Musetta, Micaëla, Mother, Ännchen, Lisa, La Fée, Lucy, Rosalinda and others. She has been the soprano soloist in Mozart's *Requiem*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and *Incidental Music to Egmont*, Fauré's *Requiem*, Grieg's *Songs for Soprano and Orchestra*, Nielsen's *Third Symphony*, Schumann's *Mass and Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah*, and Verdi's *Requiem*. Laura specializes in Nordic art song and chamber music which she performs frequently. She has two albums of Nordic song, including *Breaking the Language Barrier* and *Songs and Piano Music of Edvard Grieg, Op. 33 & 66*. Laura is the Artistic Director of the Mostly Nordic Chamber Music Series at the National Nordic Museum and Founder and President of the Northwest Edvard Grieg Society.

Composer and pianist **Steven Luksanis** is a music educator and collaborative pianist making music in Seattle, WA. He is an accompanist at Seattle Opera, the pianist for the French Choir at Alliance Française de Seattle, and is Composer-in-Residence and performs frequently with the Northwest Edvard Grieg Society. Steven is a piano instructor and the staff accompanist at Music Center of the Northwest. Steven's original compositions have been performed throughout the USA, as well as in Canada, Europe, and Asia. Steven received a Master's Degree in Music Composition from the University of British Columbia and degrees in Music and Norwegian Language from the University of Washington.

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.

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

The Northwest Edvard Grieg Society
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Lori Ann Reinhall
Laura Loge

***This concert is dedicated to our parents, grandparents,
and forebears who emigrated from Norway.***