



SOMMCD 0154

ADD

**EDVARD GRIEG** (1843-1907)

Slåtter (Norwegian Peasant Dances) Op 72

Stimmungen (Moods) Op 73

JOHN McCABE piano

**Stimmungen (Moods) Op 73**

- |     |                              |      |
|-----|------------------------------|------|
| [1] | 1. Resignation               | 1:35 |
| [2] | 2. Scherzo-Impromptu         | 3:00 |
| [3] | 3. Night Ride                | 5:20 |
| [4] | 4. Folk Tune from Valdres    | 2:28 |
| [5] | 5. Studie (Hommage à Chopin) | 1:57 |
| [6] | 6. Students' Serenade        | 2:31 |
| [7] | 7. The Mountaineer's Song    | 3:32 |

**Slåtter (Norwegian Peasant Dances) Op 72**

- |      |                                |      |
|------|--------------------------------|------|
| [8]  | 1. Gibøen's Bridal March       | 2:59 |
| [9]  | 2. John Vaestafae's Springdans | 2:11 |
| [10] | 3. Bridal March from Telemark  | 4:03 |
| [11] | 4. Tune from the Fairy Hill    | 3:45 |

- |      |  |      |
|------|--|------|
| [12] | 5. Tune for the Goat-horn              | 1:08 |
| [13] | 6. Gangar (after 'The Miller')         | 1:24 |
| [14] | 7. Halling from the Hallingdal         | 4:45 |
| [15] | 8. Bridal March (after 'The Miller')   | 3:25 |
| [16] | 9. Niels Rekke's Halling               | 1:01 |
| [17] | 10. Knut Luråsen's Halling I           | 1:22 |
| [18] | 11. Knut Luråsen's Halling II          | 2:31 |
| [19] | 12. Springdans (after 'The Miller')    | 1:27 |
| [20] | 13. Håvar Gibøen's Dream (Sprindans)   | 1:39 |
| [21] | 14. Bridal Procession of the Goblins   | 2:24 |
| [22] | 15. Skuldal's Bride (Gangar)           | 2:23 |
| [23] | 16. The Girls of Kivledal (Springdans) | 1:24 |
| [24] | 17. The Girls of Kivledal (Gangar)     | 1:43 |

**Total Duration 60:15**

Producer &amp; Sound Engineer: Robert Auger · Recorded on 13th November 1978 at St George-the-Martyr, London

Analogue master tape restoration &amp; transfer: Martin Nichols · CD mastering: Paul Arden-Taylor

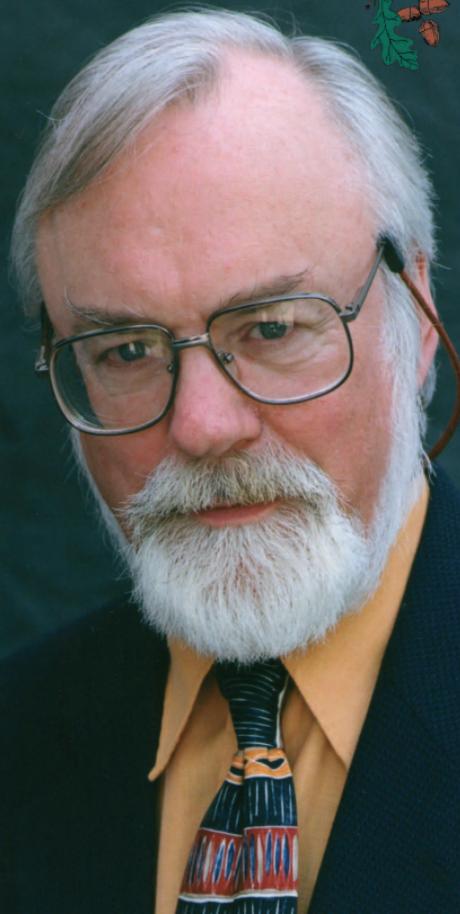
Executive Producer: Siva Oke · Consultants: Monica McCabe, Robert Matthew-Walker

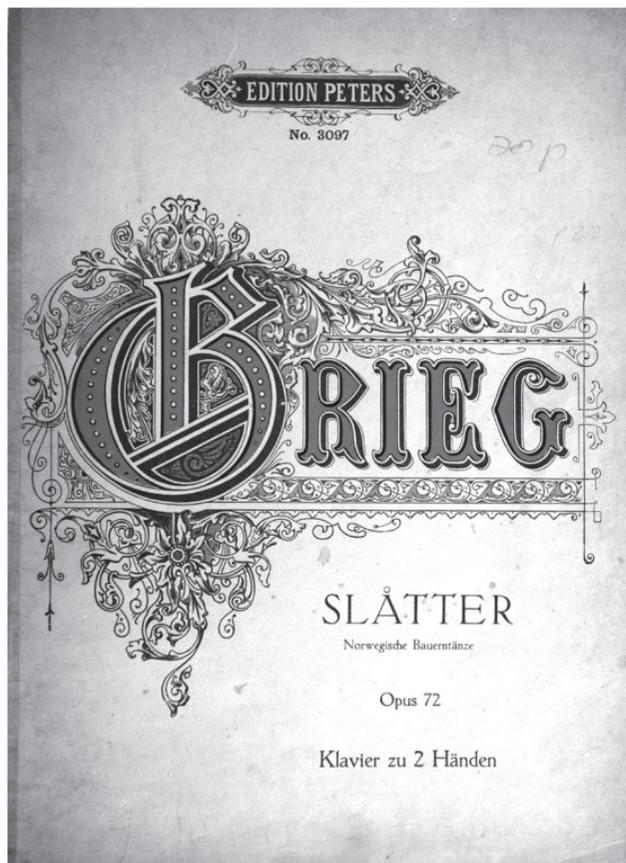
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**EDVARD  
GRIEG**Slåtter  
Op 72Stimmungen  
Op 73JOHN McCABE  
piano



John McCabe's copy of Grieg's *Slåtter*, as used for this recording.

## Grieg's *Slåtter* Op. 72 and John McCabe

To say that my husband John McCabe was especially fond of Scandinavian music would be somewhat of an over-simplification. When I first knew him he was a specialist reviewer in Russian repertoire for the sadly defunct *Records and Recording* magazine. He was equally knowledgeable about British and American music and of course mainstream Western European classical music in general, and well as other, lesser-known branches of the art. Indeed it may be said that he lived for music, not only his own composing, and all in a spirit of generous enthusiasm. But he did indeed have an abiding love and feeling for Scandinavian music, and he cared for the piano music of Grieg, at a time when it was the general critical view that Grieg was the purveyor of charming drawing-room trifles of little consequence. I particularly remember that he was most anxious to record the *Slåtter*, which he regarded as outstandingly interesting, and he had tried, over a period of time, to obtain the music, even contacting the Norwegian publishers. However, it seemed to be in vain, and that the music, for some reason, was apparently unavailable.

Then, sometime in the mid-1970s, we were in the Birmingham area, and being put up by the current girl-friend of one of my brothers. It was she whose 'little white sports car' is commemorated, under that name in one of John's piano pieces for the young, *Afternoons and Afterwards*. In order to entertain us, on a Saturday afternoon, she drove us to Lichfield (not in the afore-mentioned sports car, I don't think). After we had looked around the cathedral, John in his usual fashion scented a second-hand bookshop, and there, while leafing through a bin of second-hand music, he found a copy of the *Slåtter*, somewhat

tattered, but elegantly printed, for 20p! He was later able to buy an Urtext Edition, but it was from his 20p second-hand copy that this recording was made, and all his fingerings remain pencilled in it.

I am so grateful to Siva Oke of SOMM for re-issuing John's Grieg recording, and to Paul Arden-Taylor and Martin Nichols for the invaluable work they carried out in rescuing these tapes, which were almost at the end of their lives.

Monica McCabe © 2015



## Grieg's *Slåtter* and *Stimmungen*

From his earliest piano works, Grieg demonstrated a marvellously spontaneous assimilation of folk-music elements into a concert style influenced perhaps most of all by Schumann, Mendelssohn and Chopin. As his large output of piano miniatures grew, his response to the folk elements, allied to his increasingly subtle individuality of harmony and timbre, deepened and became more pervasive, while the unique style that he fashioned achieved an international influence (on Delius, Debussy and Ravel, among others) surprising in a composer viewed nowadays with undue condescension. Of all his piano works, perhaps the most striking are the large-scale *Ballade* Opus 24, a fine set of variations on a lovely melody, and the *Slåtter* (Norwegian peasant Dances), Opus 72.

The *Slåtter* and the *Stimmungen* (Moods) were the two last sets of piano pieces Grieg completed. The latter, essentially an extra book of Lyric Pieces in manner, were written in 1905, two years before the composer's death, and they sum up many aspects of his pianistic art. There is the refined nostalgia of No 1, 'Resignation' and the light, dancing rhythm of No 2, 'Scherzo-Impromptu'. In No 3, 'Night Ride', full of Lisztian bravura and direct imagery, and No 5, an étude (Studie) subtitled 'Homage a Chopin', he pays tribute to two earlier masters without losing one iota of his own musical character. No 4 is a sensitive folk-song arrangement, while the set of seven pieces ends with a simple yet awe-inspiring evocation of the Norwegian vastness, 'The Mountaineer's Song'.

As early as 1888, the hardanger fiddle player Knut Dale, of Telemark, had written to Grieg suggesting that some of the traditional or improvised fiddle tunes should be noted down properly to save them for posterity. It was not until 1901 that Grieg followed up this lead, arranging for Johann Halvorsen to meet Dale and take the tunes down, promising to make piano transcriptions himself later. By the end of 1902 Grieg had finished his work, and the original edition published both Halvorsen's violin version of the tunes and Grieg's piano transcriptions.

The tuning of the hardanger-fiddle, slightly different to that of the concert violin, undoubtedly influenced the harmonic and melodic style of the music, and Grieg adopted several different approaches. In some places he has created a substantial concert piece, with a contrasting middle section based on a variation of the main theme. In others he has used extreme registers of the piano to create colouristic effects that enhance the nature of the melody itself. Above all, he has responded with unflinching sensitivity to the music's essential

fluidity of rhythm, decoration and harmony. His own preface to the first edition is worth quoting, both for its apt description of the style of the tunes and the light it sheds on his own approach to the task of transcription:

“Those who can appreciate this music will be delighted by the originality, the blending of fine, soft gracefulness with a sturdy, almost uncouth power.....This music – handed down to us from a time when the culture of the Norwegian peasant was isolated in lonely mountain valleys.....bears the stamp of an imagination as daring in its flight as it is individual.”

It is unnecessary to give notes on all 17 pieces, but a few further comments may be useful. In those pieces starting with a name, this refers to the fiddle player from whom the tune in question originated. The story behind No 4 (‘Halling from the Fairy Hill’) concerns one Brynjuw Olson, who had lost a bull. After searching in the mountains for several days, he fell asleep and dreamt that a beautiful maiden appeared to him and told him that, on his return to his wife and child, he should play the fiddle and he would find the bull ‘where the mountains disappear’.

The Goat-horn (or Pillarhorn) of No 5 was a wind instrument of cow- or goat-horn, with stops added. Nos 6, 8 and 12 refer to the most famous hardanger fiddle player of the mid-nineteenth century, who was known as ‘The Miller’ or ‘The Miller’s Boy’, and who had taught Knut Dale. The touchingly expressive Bridal March (No 8) was reputed to have been composed by ‘The Miller’ after having been jilted by one Kari. In Nos 16 and 17, Grieg used two of the three tunes connected with the maidens of the Kivletal valley. These were three

beautiful goat-herds, heathens who one day interrupted a church service and entranced the congregation by their playing on the goat-horn. The parson denounced them, whereupon they and their herds were turned into stone, and legend has it that to this day the stones can still be seen on the mountain-side.

John McCabe © 1978



As Monica McCabe writes in her brief memoir, her husband John’s interest in and championship of Grieg’s music ran counter to the then popular reputation of the Norwegian master, which was widely, but erroneously, considered to rest upon his Piano Concerto, the *Peer Gynt* Suites and the ten Books of short *Lyric Pieces* for solo piano, yet to those who – like John McCabe – bothered to investigate further, Grieg was a far more significant figure than, even today, he is perceived to be.

For instance, his Piano Concerto, among the most consistently and justly popular Concertos ever written, possesses one quite remarkable formal innovation that is never remarked upon: it is the first piano concerto ever written that ends slowly, and although Debussy, for example, was scathing in his dismissal of Grieg, Professor Gerald Abraham demonstrated almost seventy years ago now, that Debussy’s String Quartet is based almost entirely on that by Grieg – and not merely in choice of key, but also in structure and inner thematic and harmonic working.

Nor is it widely understood that the first commission Diaghilev handed Stravinsky in 1909 was to orchestrate several of Grieg's solo piano pieces for the Ballets Russes: although it is known the commission was fulfilled, the score of this greatly significant orchestral suite is lost, and the contemporaneous admiration Bartók and Kodály had for Grieg's folk-song collecting – the Norwegian being the first great composer, in the late 1880s and 1890s to travel around his homeland collecting folk tunes from the rural population – was also genuine and inspirational.

For John McCabe, as his original note for these recordings makes clear, Grieg was a far more significant figure than popular appreciation would suggest, and these recordings of the composer's final solo piano works came as quite revelatory in the early 1980s to wider audiences outside of the inner circle of specialists in Norwegian music.

It is always fascinating, and often highly illuminating, to hear a composer's music interpreted by another – especially of music, which, in this case, the pianist-composer has specifically sought out. There is an almost intangible, but none the less perceptible, element of recreative understanding, borne in these recordings through McCabe's fine technique, which was not that of a virtuoso pianist as such (though he would often play Concertos in public, and not always the better-known) but that of a finished artist, whose own understanding of a fellow-composer's work invariably produced performances of considerable insight and communication.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2015

## JOHN McCABE

John McCabe's distinguished career as both composer and pianist established him as one of Britain's leading classical musicians, with an international reputation in both fields. His set of the complete Haydn Piano Sonatas, recorded in the 1970s, still stands as a landmark. Widely praised at the time, the set, now on 12 CDs, continues to sell across the world. McCabe's love for the music of Nielsen was also deep, and his set of what was then regarded as the complete Nielsen piano music was recorded around the same time as the Haydn. His devotion to music led McCabe to explore and perform the work of composers of many different kinds – Bax, Grieg, Schubert, Hindemith, Howells, Copland and Schumann are among those whose work he recorded. He was deeply interested in contemporary music also, and performed and promoted with great generosity the work of his fellow composers, and in due course of time, that of younger composers. He also made outstanding recordings of his own piano music.

As a composer he ranks among the foremost in Britain, with seven symphonies, two full-evening ballets – *Edward II* (Stuttgart, 1995) and *Arthur* (Birmingham Royal Ballet 1999/2001), *The Chagall Windows* and *Notturmi ed Alba* among his leading works, together with much chamber, keyboard and vocal music. *Cloudcatcher Fells* is a classic of the brass band repertoire. Among his recent works have been *Symphony on a Pavane* (LPO), *Symphony Labyrinth* (RLPO), and his Cello Concerto *Songlines*, written for Truls Mørk and the Hallé Orchestra. *Joybox* was written for the Proms 2012, and most



John and Monica McCabe in Norway.

Photograph © Gillian McCabe

recently *Christ's Nativity* for double choir/organ, was premiered by the Hallé Choir (December 2014)

John McCabe was appointed CBE for services to British music in 1985, and in 2006 the Incorporated Society of Musicians honoured him with their Distinguished Musician Award. In May 2014 he was the recipient of the British Academy of Songwriters and Authors IVOR Award, while the Iles Medal was awarded to him in September 2014 for services to the brass band movement.

Monica McCabe © 2015

John McCabe was born in Huyton, Liverpool on April 21, 1939 and died in Kent on February 13, 2015 aged 75.

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