EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)
Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16
Piano Concerto No. 2 in B minor – sketches
sketches arranged and orchestrated by Robert Matthew-Walker
sketches arranged for solo piano by Robert Matthew-Walker

FREDERICK DELIUS (1862-1934)
Piano Concerto in C minor (1907)
Three Preludes for piano (1921)
On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring (1913)
(transcribed for piano duet by Peter Warlock)

Mark Bebbington, piano
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Jan Latham-Koenig, conductor

GRIEG – Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16 (32:53)
1. Allegro molto moderato 14:21
2. II. Adagio 7:15
3. III. Allegro moderato molto e marcato 11:17

DELIUS – Piano Concerto in C minor (1907) 24:21

GRIEG – Piano Concerto No. 2 in B minor – sketches 3:48
(piano and orchestra)
GRIEG – Piano Concerto No. 2 in B minor – sketches (solo piano) 3:58

DELIUS – Three Preludes
1. I. Scherzando 2:09
2. II. Quick 1:12
3. III. Con Moto 1:25

DELIUS – On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring (Mark Bebbington, Irene Loh) 5:11

Total duration 74:59
Early in 1868, the 24-year-old Edvard Grieg could face the future with confidence. He had married his younger cousin Nina Hagerup the previous June and, now pregnant, on April 10, she gave birth to a daughter, christened Alexandra. Nina’s confinement and Edvard’s workload as the newly-appointed conductor of the Christiana (now Oslo) Philharmonic Society, demanded they both take a holiday. They spent some time in Denmark, Grieg needing not relaxation but peace and solitude in which to work, whilst Nina was keen to show her parents in Copenhagen her new daughter.

Grieg remained in Zealand, where ideas for a larger work than any he had attempted recently began to coalesce in his mind. He was with two friends, one of whom was Norway’s leading pianist, Edmund Neupert. During those few weeks in the summer of 1868, Grieg began composing the Piano Concerto in A minor, his Opus 16, one of the masterpieces of Scandinavian art and one of the finest and most enduringly popular piano concertos ever written.

However, other commitments prevented Grieg from completely finishing the score. It was not until April 1869 in Copenhagen that the Concerto was heard for the first time, played by Neupert, the work’s dedicatee. In the audience was the legendary Anton Rubinstein, then on a concert tour of Denmark, sitting alongside royalty and other notable musicians. But the audience did not include the composer, pressure of work at home obliging him to miss hearing and witnessing what was, by all accounts, an outstanding premiere.

The never-waning popularity of Grieg’s Concerto in A minor is due to a number of factors: the themes are distinctive and beautifully wrought; the solo part is dramatic and poetical and outstandingly well written for the instrument; the orchestration is, in its own way, masterly – and throughout, the Concerto is, in a phrase, an inspired work. Although some commentators appear anxious to claim Schumann’s Concerto as the model for Grieg’s – he had heard Clara Schumann play her husband’s work during his studies at the Leipzig Conservatoire – they overlook the originality and formal innovations of Grieg’s Concerto, not least its concluding double coups de théâtre: the alteration – by a semitone – of the G sharp in the finale’s second theme (which so excited Liszt) is, literally, astonishing. But the work exhibits one unique formal device which is never mentioned: it is the first piano concerto ever written to end slowly.

Despite the Concerto’s success at its first performances, Grieg did not immediately find a publisher for it. He and Nina were soon visited by deep tragedy when Alexandra succumbed to viral meningitis in the month following the premiere, the shock of the child’s death also causing Nina to lose the second baby she was carrying. They had no further children.

During the decade following the Concerto’s premiere and eventual first publication in 1870, Grieg’s reputation grew until, in 1881, at the age of 38, he entered into an exclusive contract with Max Abraham, director of Edition Peters in Leipzig. Abraham was pleased to have secured Grieg’s music as he had originally turned down the A minor Concerto, then becoming one of the most frequently-played concertos of the day.

That same year, Abraham wrote to Grieg, asking him to consider writing several new works, including a new piano concerto and chamber music, mentioning a piano trio. Grieg replied broadly in the affirmative, but this was a fractious time for the composer, his
muse distracted by personal worries which were, eventually, resolved. The Concerto remained in fragmentary form, with just one movement of the Trio, *Andante con moto*, completed.

So Grieg's Second Piano Concerto remained unfinished, its thematic and harmonic fragments – amounting to around 150 bars – largely unknown until being published towards the end of the 20th century. Since then, several composers have written full-scale works based upon Grieg's material, with some performed and recorded, although none is a 'completion' of the Concerto in the sense of Deryck Cooke's performing version of Mahler's Tenth Symphony or Anthony Payne's elaboration of what Elgar left of his Third Symphony.

As Grieg's Second Concerto is unperformable as he left it, it seemed to me that rather than let the music remain on the printed page, it should be possible to present his sketches in such a manner that they can be heard as close to his sound-world as we can get. When placed together in sequence the sketches make a broadly coherent movement, although Grieg undoubtedly intended a full-scale, three-movement work. However, in hearing those sketches one after another, the listener is able to hear what was in Grieg's mind at the time.

Several sketches are quite extensive and not solely for keyboard. Occasionally, a third or fourth stave indicates orchestral parts alongside the piano, often with orchestration indicated.

In realising Grieg's sketches for his Second Piano Concerto, I have added no more than two or three bars to make a beginning (acknowledging the A minor Concerto) and a final bar alongside several passages of accompaniment to the solo part, in addition to where Grieg indicated orchestration. There are two longer passages of unaccompanied solo music, which I have left alone, as Grieg wrote 'Solo' before one begins; in such instances I thought it better to obey his instructions rather than attempting to add something of my own.

There is one other point: very early on, in the B major first *Allegro non troppo* (my tempo indication) section, Grieg writes a connecting bar with the memo: 'Ork, E-Dür,' implying an orchestral repetition of that theme in E major (he also writes the first four notes in that key). Such repetition is so often encountered in his works that it seemed perverse not to obey it. Grieg's writing for the orchestra was always functional, and I have attempted to recreate the orchestral parts in a manner suited to his personal and invariably practical approach.

So, what we have here is everything Grieg left of his Second Concerto. His ideas are heard in sequence with the absolute minimum of additional music to ensure a seamless exposition.

One hopes the result is a means through which we can hear, by way of a commercial recording, as near as possible what was in Grieg's mind when he began to fulfil Max Abraham's request over 130 years ago. The tempo indications are mine, dictated by the nature of the music. On this disc, Mark Bebbington additionally plays the sketches as a solo movement.

In the years following Alexandra's death, Edvard and Nina Grieg's marriage did not always run smoothly, but their new home 'Troldhaugen', built just outside Bergen to their own requirements in 1884-85, brought stability. By 1887 they would travel together frequently for the increasing number of foreign engagements Grieg's growing reputation now demanded.

At the end of that year they were in Leipzig, initially for the premiere of Grieg's C minor Violin Sonata and a performance of the Concerto, where
they met up with their friend, the composer Christian Sinding. Leipzig held mixed memories for Grieg: his years (1858-62) at the city’s Conservatoire of Music were not without difficulties. But 20 years later, with such memories behind him, Edvard and Nina could contemplate a stay in Leipzig of six months.

In 1886, a 24-year-old Englishman, Frederick Delius (Bradford-born to German parents) had enrolled at the Leipzig Conservatoire, having persuaded his father, after several years travelling across Europe and Scandinavia in the family wool business (during which trips Delius learned fluent Norwegian), and managing an orange plantation in Florida, that it was music to which he should devote his life. In Leipzig, Delius befriended Sinding, who introduced him to the Griegs. The meeting proved a turning point in Delius’s life, the beginning of a lifelong friendship between the established Norwegian master, his wife, and the young Englishman, cemented almost at once by their nightly dining together throughout the Griegs’ stay. Delius was to become the closest of all Grieg’s English friends, and later wrote: “I was very proud of having made [Grieg’s] acquaintance, for since I was a little boy I had loved his music… when I first heard Grieg it was as if a breath of mountain air had come to me”.

Their friendship was broken only by Grieg’s death in Bergen on September 4, 1907 – seven weeks before Delius’s Piano Concerto was to receive its first performance in a Henry Wood Promenade Concert in London’s Queen’s Hall – the programme including two works by Grieg in memoriam.

Within days of their first meeting, Grieg had presented Delius with a score of his piano concerto. It is surely not fanciful to feel that, on receiving the music, Delius imagined writing a similar work. But it was not until 10 years later, in 1897, that he completed a one-movement Fantasy for piano and orchestra, in C minor. This work remained unheard in its original form, although we know Delius played it through with Busoni (who had been a fellow-pupil in Leipzig) on two pianos. It was doubtless this play-through which immediately led Delius to recast the material as a three-movement Concerto, first performed in Germany at Elberfeld by Julius Buths. Busoni apparently wished to premiere the new version in Berlin in 1902, but that performance did not take place.

However, Delius was still not satisfied, and in 1906, following several apparently successful performances of the three-movement version, he substantially recast the Concerto, replacing the finale with a reprise of the first movement’s material and restoring the 1897 structure of a single, large-scale composition in three parts. Delius sought the advice of the Hungarian pianist Theodor Szántó (himself a pupil of Busoni) regarding the effectiveness and detail of the solo part; it was this final version that was premiered on October 22, 1907, by Szántó and Henry Wood, since when the work was taken up by several notable pianists and conductors of the day – notably in the latter instance by Sir Thomas Beecham, who first conducted it in 1910 and whose edition of the score, published in 1951, is used in this recording.

As with Grieg’s Concerto, the most original aspects of Delius’s Concerto usually go unremarked. It is in one movement, in three parts, unified by the reprise of the initial material in the third part and made more inherently organic by the tonality of the central section – D-flat major, the flat supertonic of C minor. Thus, we have a fully tonal entity making Delius’s the largest, truly single-movement piano concerto written up to that time.
If Delius’s art is considered best revealed through his vocal, orchestral and chamber music, Szántó’s revision of the Concerto’s solo part implies that the composer was less certain in piano music. Delius may have been, but he was certainly a competent pianist who knew the keyboard well enough. He wrote little for solo piano, the most significant being three Preludes, composed in 1921 and published two years later. Relatively short in length they may be, but – again – their original aspect stares us in the face: none of them is slow in tempo. It is as though Delius presents us with his aphoristic thoughts, the opposite pole from his large-scale choral-orchestral masterpieces. Each is a gem, probably capable of larger development, which he did not countenance.

Delius’s music, prior to 1914, had enjoyed a remarkably wide appeal: his reputation was then at its highest, his music admired by younger musicians, one of whom – Peter Warlock (the pen-name of Philip Heseltine) – was to contribute much to the continuance of Delius’s reputation in the decade following the Armistice.

Warlock had first met Delius before the war, and in 1923 published the first book on the composer, in which he states that, following the first continental performance of Delius’s *Brigg Fair* at the Tonkünstlerfest in Zürich in 1910, “so great was its success that in that year alone it was played by thirty-six different orchestras in Germany”. Delius’s two pieces for small orchestra *On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring* and *Summer Night on the River* were premiered by Arthur Nikisch in Leipzig in 1913. That same year, the 19-year-old Warlock made his beautiful transcription of *On hearing the first cuckoo*... for piano duet, capturing through the medium of the keyboard the essence of this unique tone-poem in a manner that earned the composer’s profound gratitude.

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**MARK BEBBINGTON** is fast gaining a reputation as one of today’s most strikingly individual British pianists. His 30 discs of British music for SOMM have met with international acclaim and notably, his recent cycles of Frank Bridge, John Ireland and Vaughan Williams have attracted nine consecutive five-star reviews in *BBC Music* magazine.

Over recent seasons, Mark has toured extensively throughout Central and Northern Europe, the Far East and North America. He has also performed at major UK venues with the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras, and with the London Mozart Players. As a recitalist, he makes regular appearances at major UK
JAN LATHAM-KOENIG is Music Director of Moscow’s Novaya Opera and Chief Conductor of the Flanders Symphony Orchestra in Bruges, Belgium. Philharmonic and London Philharmonic Orchestras, with the Flanders, Buffalo and San Antonio Symphony Orchestras in the US, and tours with the Czech National Orchestra and Israel Camerata.

“Ironically born in England and studied at the Royal College of Music before winning a coveted Gulbenkian Fellowship and founding his own group, the Koenig Ensemble, in 1976. The first British-born conductor to hold a Music Directorship with a Russian opera company, he received Russia’s Golden Mask conductor’s award for Tristan und Isolde in 2014. In 2017, he conducted the Moscow premiere of Mieczyslaw Weinberg’s The Passenger and the world premiere of Konstantin Boyarsky’s Pushkin. This season, he will conduct Lucia di Lammermoor, Faust and Salome, take Prince Igor to Shanghai, Pushkin to Grange Park Opera and conduct La bohème in Dublin.

Previous Music Director positions include the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM, Mexico City, Teatro Massimo di Palermo, Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg and Opéra national du Rhin. Founder and Artistic Director of the Young Janáček Philharmonic, he has been Principal Guest Conductor at Teatro dell’Opera di Roma, Teatro Regio di Torino and Permanent Guest Conductor of the Wiener Staatsoper.

Recent guest conductor appearances include the New Japan Philharmonic and Beijing Symphony Orchestra. He has conducted the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and the Dresden Philharmonic. This season sees debuts with the Royal Orchestra of Seville, Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra and New York’s Orchestra Now.

With a discography of over 40 CDs, he is a renowned interpreter of Poulenc’s music, his first album with the Filarmonica del Teatro Regio voted Record of the Month by BBC Music. His DVD recording of Dialogues des Carmelites (Opéra national du Rhin) won a Diapason d’Or in 2001.

From French, Danish, Polish and Mauritian origins, Jan Latham-Koenig was born in England and studied at the Royal College of Music before winning a coveted Gulbenkian Fellowship and founding his own group, the Koenig Ensemble, in 1976.

IRENE LOH is one of a new generation of highly talented young Malaysian pianists. Having completed her piano studies at SEGi College in Kuala Lumpur, she is currently a piano scholar at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire completing her BMus Performance degree with Mark Bebbington.

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