



E. Grieg: Lyric Pieces

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Grieg's amazing set of "Lyric Pieces", comprising ten volumes of piano miniatures written over the period of time from 1867 to 1901 is rather unique in the catalog. The first ones, Op. 12, are easy enough to have become familiar to almost every piano student who has attempted to learn the instrument. But as the opus numbers increase, so do the difficulties, and only the finest virtuosos are able to negotiate the considerable technical and musical demands of the last volumes.

Rarely do we hear these complete, though several labels like Naxos and BIS are offering the complete piano music of the composer, and RCA has reissued its complete Grieg on seven CDs with Gerhard Oppitz for only \$28, surely a bargain of tremendous proportions. But strangely enough, it is when the acknowledged masters turn to this music that the results are the most gratifying.

I am not sure that Hideyo Harada can be placed in that category just yet, though she is by no means a pianist to be dismissed easily, and her Griegian credentials are put on full display in this recital. She has attempted to arrange the pieces, selected from all of the books, in a dramatic order, taking into consideration both form and transitions into the selected mix. Does this work? I suppose, to a point, though I would not belabor it. Any other mix might really have worked as well, but she is generous enough to give us a full third of the pieces, and her SACD is fairly spectacular in its realism, making full use of the surround speakers to envelop us with the sound.

Interpretatively, what are we to make of this? I did a comparison with a favorite number, the Scherzo Op. 54, No. 5, using Leif Ave Andsnes (Virgin) and Emil Gilels (DGG) as benchmarks, partly because these two recordings are rightly acknowledged as primer inter pares among aficionados. I think Harada equals the efforts of Andsnes—the Virgin Classics sound is somewhat bass-light, and though Andsnes eschews a more gossamer, fairy-like nuance to his playing, Harada is cleaner and more articulate. Gilels is a different story; long regarded as perhaps the greatest interpreter of this music (and due only to his rather short DGG disc), one can still perceive rather easily what sets him apart. The articulation and thought that goes into this reading is deeper and more complex; he thinks about every note and every phrase, and makes slight changes from phrase to phrase in order to enliven his interpretation. It is evident that he really cares about this music, and that is what comes across.

But I cannot short change Harada for her effort in excellent sound, as there is always room for a fine interpretation. If you don't know this music, Gilels is mandatory first and foremost; if you want a second opinion in surround sound, Harada is certainly your gal.