



Edvard Grieg: Complete Symphonic Works, Vol. IV

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EAN: 4022143926708



[Fanfare](#) (Jim Svejda - 2015.03.26)

For the fourth (and next-to-last) installment of its stunning series of the complete symphonic works of Edvard Grieg, Audite made the canny decision to combine the composer's least-known major work with the one performed with the most monotonous frequency. Incredibly enough, these two youthful half-hour works, written barely five years apart, hardly seem the work of the same composer.

Composed for Copenhagen at the suggestion of Niels Gade when Grieg was only 20, the Symphony in C Minor is an amiable, well-made stylistic hodge-podge that mixes Schumann, Mendelssohn and—for those with a very discerning ear—Gade himself. Finished in 1864, the symphony was not performed until 1980, when it was finally heard against the composer's wishes and instructions. The premiere was given—wouldn't you know it—in the Soviet Union, by the Russian conductor Vitali Katayev, who asked the Bergen city library for a photocopy for "research purposes only" and then performed it anyway. (One more reason not to lament the passing of The Evil Empire.)

The brilliant young Norwegian conductor Eivind Aadland treats the piece like the early work it is, wisely choosing never to overstate the case or try to turn it into the youthful masterpiece it clearly isn't. Still, everything is done with such loving care and meticulous attention to detail—listen especially to the incredibly refined and sensitive phrasing in the lovely Adagio espressivo—that it's difficult to imagine a stronger case ever being made for the piece.

The version of the piano concerto is as fresh-minted and spontaneous sounding as everything else in the series, with the WDR Symphony again playing in a way that suggests it's coming to the music for the very first time (in the best possible sense). The Romanian-born Herbert Schuch is a probing and imaginative soloist, often acting like the first among equals in a fine chamber music recital. The playing itself is lithe and endearingly capricious, especially in the concerto's cadenza, which for once sounds like cadenzas were meant to sound: as though someone were making it up on the spot. There's also plenty of fire and muscle when the music requires it, most notably in a finale which steps off at a pace that manages to seem both cracking and completely comfortable. Again, the orchestra performs countless little expressive miracles along the way. Try sampling the flute solo about two and a half minutes in: You can actually smell the chilly morning air.

As in the previous installments in the series, the recorded sound is as warm and natural as the performances themselves. Alas, the concluding Volume Five must now be anticipated with equal amounts of eagerness and regret: as in, what a pity Grieg didn't write more things for this bunch to record.