



### Edvard Grieg: Complete Symphonic Works

aud 21.439

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Over a period of roughly five years from 2009 – 2014, Audite recorded five discs which they describe as "Edvard Grieg – Complete Symphonic Works" with Eivind Aadland conducting the WDR Sinfonieorchester. Now, in 2019, they have been brought together in a box – slightly lazily, the liner booklet from each of the volumes is retained, thereby duplicating all the orchestral and biographical detail but retaining the adapted Edvard Munch painting from the original release. There is some saving to be had by buying the box – roughly speaking, a five-for-the-price-of-four ratio in the UK.

The key for many collectors will rest on how complete is "complete". This set is one of four currently available professing varying degrees of totality. First up was Neeme Järvi on DG in Gothenburg recorded back between 1986 – 93. He needs six generously-filled discs. Then from Bergen on BIS came Ole Kristian Ruud in excellent SACD sound in 2002 – 08 needing eight discs (and winning a Diapason d'Or for his trouble). Lastly, Bjarte Engeset on Naxos, either in Malmo or with the RSN0 from 2003 – 13, also requiring eight discs. Rather entertainingly, none of these sets can agree on which works should constitute part of the complete orchestral canon or not. Clearly, the set under consideration has the fewest number of discs and the least number of works. The main work "missing" here but included in the other three sets is the complete incidental music to Peer Gynt. Aadland chooses to include just the two standard orchestral suites plus a couple of extra songs and excerpts, which I find a little arbitrary and odd. In the same way Aadland does include some vocal works – the Six Orchestral Songs and The Mountain Thrall but not Bergliot or Before a Southern Convent. If there is a logic to that it eludes me. Järvi and Aadland do not include the opera excerpts Olav Trygvason or the cantata Landkjenning which Engeset and Ruud do. Engeset uniquely adds some orchestrations of piano works by other composers which I enjoy a lot – the Slåtter and the Ballade. Of course, the 'core' works are present in all the sets and for many that may be more than enough. Personally, if the word complete is going to be bandied around I want it to be really complete.

So to consider the discs in order: certain characteristics are clear across the set. Audite provide a very dynamic, quite closely detailed recording. I listened to the stereo SACD layer – perhaps the surround sound tempers the degree of closeness. Certainly the playing of the WDR Sinfonieorchester can stand such forensic inspection. Aadland's style is founded on contrast and drama. This works well across all of Volume 1 which consists of the Four Symphonic Dances Op.64, the two Peer Gynt Suites and the Funeral March for Rikard Nordraak. The latter in Grieg's own



version for wind band – Järvi uses this version too, the other two sets preferring Halvorsen's orchestration.

The Symphonic Dances are thrilling. Aadland's approach makes them miniature tone poems with the wide dynamic range of the orchestra very well caught. Even this early into hearing the set, there is a sense that Aadland 'pushes' the music rarely letting it relax let alone smile. Make no mistake, this is a very exciting interpretation but one that never 'lilts'. This stylistic limitation becomes more of an issue in the reflective more sensuous movements of Peer Gynt. Neither Anitra's Dance nor the Arabian Dance has any degree of seductive sway. It is no surprise that In the Hall of the Mountain King and Peer Gynt's Homecoming both respond well to this approach, but conversely The death of Åse loses any kind of fragile or touching intimacy as Aadland seems determined to create saturated walls of symphonic string sound. Technically its very impressive – musically it seems misguided to me.

If Volume 1 could be considered a mixed interpretative bag, Volume 2 dedicated to the famous string works seems a complete failure. The fault for this is wholly Aadland's, who again seems to strive for the epic rather than the intimate. If this were Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings, I would applaud the style. That is a work that really needs a large symphonic-sized string section with muscular dynamic playing. These Grieg works do not require this approach. Last Spring epitomises for me the wrongness of Aadland's approach. He seems intent on building an epic Mahlerian tragedy with overly mannered phrasing and a fuller vibrato from the orchestra. Listen to Ruud who takes almost exactly the same amount of time but there is a version that breathes simplicity and unaffected beauty. Played in that manner, this is one of Grieg's most affecting and heart-stoppingly beautiful works – Aadland makes it into over-heated melodrama. The same is true of his Holberg Suite too. This music should bubble along with directness of utterance and lack of mannerisms. It really is one of the most joyful string pieces to play precisely because it is unaffected and simple. With Aadland it creaks under the weight of its alleged importance. Time and again he seems fixated on the heavy-handed pointing of an accent rather than letting them serve a function of rhythmic impetus. Interestingly, the liner makes repeated significance of Aadland's affinity with the music and the insights this affords. Before becoming a conductor, he was an international-calibre violinist and lived and worked near Grieg's birthplace in Bergen. The liner notes occasions where Aadland seeks a folklorish 'authenticity' by avoiding vibrato or marking off-beat accents. This is all true and no doubt carefully considered but it does seem that somewhere along the creative process the open-sky essence of this music has been lost. Here the Audite sound, so effective on the first disc, adds more burden of up-front dynamism and inflated sound. I am not sure when I have enjoyed this music less despite the easy excellence of the actual playing. Perhaps it is worth noting that although this is nominally Volume 2, it was the first disc to be recorded and the only volume to be recorded in the Klaus-von-Bismarck-Saal Cologne as opposed to the more generous (forgiving?) acoustic of the Philharmonie.

The 'house' style of sharp contrasts, dynamic performances with forceful accentuation allied to close and detailed recording continues into the third volume. Whereas in the string-dominated volume 2 this proved to be a mixed blessing, the return to the full orchestra brings better results. Indeed, in many ways the opening work In Autumn could have been written for just such an approach. Surgingly powerful, wide dynamic range, virtuosic playing all contribute to the impact of the work which on occasion can sound just a tad generic. As the piece continued – and indeed this disc – I did begin to wonder whether this approach was in the "sonic spectacular" school of performance/production which is certainly a label you would not expect to associate with Grieg. The Lyric Suite that follows is more of a mixed

bag again. It is important to remember that this suite consists of orchestrations of a small selection of the many Lyric Pieces that Grieg wrote for solo piano. This was music intended for the salon and I find Aadland's striving for maximum 'effect' too often undermines the brilliant simplicity of the music. So while No.1 Shepherd Boy starts beautifully – lovely lyrical [pardon the pun] string playing - Aadland then overplays the climax. Likewise, I still do not enjoy his penchant for strongly marked accents as in the second movement Norwegian Rustic March. That said the third movement Notturmo is delightful. The closing March of the Dwarves [Trolls] is played with all the energy and flair one could wish for – at almost exactly the identical tempo to Engeset in Malmo but here the effect is spoilt by the over-large soundscape from the Audite engineers. The percussion – never the subtlest or most imaginative part of Grieg's scoring – is allowed to dominate in a rather unappealing way. It was a good idea to include the elusive, distinctly impressionistic Bell-ringing as a quasi-appendix to the published work – all the other 'complete' sets do as well, although Engeset's is rather perversely a single track on a different disc.

The Old Norwegian Romance with Variations gets a strong performance with – no surprise – the variations well contrasted. Relatively speaking, I do not find this to be one of Grieg's most compelling works; it is lacking in the variety and evocation of colour that say Dvořák finds in his Symphonic Variations. Aadland's approach is to maximise contrast whereas Engeset or Ruud seek continuity with less sharply contrasted variations – Ruud is a full two and a half minutes slower as well. Certainly Ruud does not feel slow with Aadland in contrast seeming occasionally impatient. The disc ends with the 'standard' suite of three excerpts from Grieg's incidental to Sigurd Jorsalfar Contrary to developing expectations, Aadland conducts a beautifully reflective central Borghild's Dream although that is followed by as bombastic a Hommage March as you are ever likely to hear with bass drum and cymbals again overly prominent in Audite's vibrant mix. Aadland plays these three excerpts running to just shy of seventeen minutes. Järvi and Ruud provide an eight-movement synopsis which roughly doubles the amount of music to be heard and it is good Grieg to boot. Certainly it gives a greater range of mood and scene-painting than the three-movement standard work allows. Across the five-disc set there is room to include this music and its omission is serious in any set claiming "completeness".

Volume 4 contains just two works: the early Symphony and the ubiquitous Piano Concerto. The symphony was written when Grieg was just twenty-one and such were his concerns over its quality and value that he wrote "never to be performed" on the score by the time it came to be deposited in the Bergen City Archive. This sanction was obediently followed until 1980 when a photocopy, sent to the Soviet Union "for research purposes", was used to generate a set of parts and the work was performed. Since then the embargo has been lifted and this work features in every 'complete' survey of Grieg's music. The impetus for its composition came from the Danish composer Gade, who told Grieg to go home and "write something valuable". Grieg wrote the symphony at some speed but one can only imagine that on reflection he felt it lacked the value of being distinctively Nordic or Grieg-ish. For sure, the shadow of the German Conservatoires lies over the work and there is little of the characteristically folk-inflected idiom that Grieg was to make his own, but surely he was too harsh a self-critic. Not only as a marker of his development but in its own right this is a very enjoyable and substantial. Aadland gives it an excellent performance with his penchant for energy and brightly sprung tempi finding a perfect platform in this youthful work. Curiously – and it had me leafing through the liner – for this disc the Audite engineering is not quite as close or consciously wide in its dynamic range as the preceding three discs. Given that it is exactly the same technical team of producer and engineer I do not know why this should be. Suffice to say the music benefits substantially from this approach. On disc – once it became

known – this symphony has fared well. This is a well-crafted but not profound piece so it responds to a direct, unfussy approach and it is no surprise that this finds Neeme Järvi in good form – and in fact Järvi's timings are very close to Aadland. It has to be said that the Järvi set on DG still sounds very good and of course his Gothenburg Orchestra are very fine. Away from the 'complete' surveys, I rather enjoy Dmitri Kitajenko's performance with the Bergen PO which is a more measured, weightier affair. Indeed, the more one listens to this work the more its century of solitary confinement seems absurd.

The coupling of the Piano Concerto in A minor makes sense when you realise they are the only two extended, multi-movement orchestral works Grieg wrote. In his own lifetime, as much as the symphony was ignored the concerto became his calling card. Reviewing another performance, I wrote how this work's sheer ubiquity and popularity can easily mask just how unusual and sophisticated it is. The pianist here is Herbert Schuch and it must be said that this is a very impressive and intelligent performance. Schuch's is a considered and poetic account, favouring the lyrical and reflective over bombast or display. That said, he is technically in total control and is very well accompanied by Aadland and his Cologne orchestra. He phrases sensitively and effectively, allowing just the right amount of lyrical ebb and flow in the music without it falling into sentimentality or empty gesture. I would say this is one of the more wholly successful volumes in this series. That said, in a highly competitive field neither would supplant pre-existing favourites individually or as part of a series or set.

The fifth and final volume has something of a bitty, odds-and-ends feeling to it, pulling together pieces that did not quite fit onto earlier discs. This is evidenced by the range of recording dates which implies these works were put in the can at the same time as the other pieces they are linked to but then not included on earlier discs in the series. Possibly a little more careful planning of the repertoire could have avoided the frustration of having to swap discs to listen – say – to all of Aadland's Peer Gynt excerpts. Instead, you need to refer to volume 1 for the two standard suites and then swap to volume 5 here for another – slightly arbitrary – two, additional orchestral excerpts: At the Wedding and the sinuous Dance of the Mountain King's daughter. The liner note makes a case for this pair as being more 'modernist' than the simple lyricism of Morning Mood or Anitra's Dance. I would accept that as true – but rather than hearing 'just' these additional two excerpts surely that reinforces the case for the full incidental music which covers a very broad musical and theatrical canvas. Aadland is good in both these excerpts and the skill of his Cologne players is again never in doubt.

The Six songs with Orchestra were drawn together by Grieg to showcase his considerable skill as a songwriter. There is no particular continuity through the six, with the first two again excerpted from Peer Gynt. Soprano Camilla Tilling has a suitably attractive light soprano but with enough heft to make the most of the latter songs in the set which are more overtly dramatic. Possibly Marita Solberg for Ruud and Barbara Bonney for Järvi find an even greater degree of simple radiance but in its own right Tilling's approach is very beautiful. I still find Aadland's over-heated approach to the sung version of Last Spring to undermine the essential directness of the song as it did in the string transcription. But the final song in the set – Henrik Wergeland – responds to this almost operatic approach, which makes the omission of Landkjenning or Olav Trygvasson all the more baffling. Another head-scratcher is why no texts are included in the booklet. Generally across the whole set the German/English liner notes are very well written and full of useful information. The absence of texts of songs sung in Norwegian is an error. A couple more orchestrated Lyric Pieces – characterful wind playing again – and another vocal piece, the

six-minute Mountain Thral add to the piece-meal feel of this disc. The latter is sung by baritone Tom Erik Lie. He has a lighter voice than Palle Knudsen for Engeset and is less overtly dramatic than the great Håkan Hagegård for Ruud. Again, in isolation, Lie is perfectly good but with luxury of choice, his would not be a first one.

The set closes as it opened, with a suite of orchestral dances; here it's the Norwegian Dances Op.35. As with the Symphonic Dances, this music very much plays to Aadland's strengths of strong contrasts in dynamics and tempi as well as showcasing the brilliance of the Cologne orchestra. This is a strong performance of a delightful set of four contrasting dances, three of which were interpolated into the complete Peer Gynt score for some editions of the work. Again, I do not quite follow the logic of this set since – for all the delights of this music – the orchestrations are not Grieg's own, thereby contradicting Audite's own description of the music included on the five discs.

So, this set proves to be something of a mixed bag. The playing is uniformly very good indeed, with the exception of the string orchestra disc, the performances are all good and some better than that. However, not a single performance I would not prefer above any other. The final nail in the coffin for me has to be the omission of so much music of real substance, interest and quality. For those in the market for a single purchase of Grieg's orchestral music including the operatic excerpts, the complete Peer Gynt plus other vocal works all recorded in SACD sound and idiomatically performed by Grieg's "own" orchestra in Bergen there really is no need to look further than the set on BIS. This is currently available in the UK where you can get this 8-disc survey for around £10 cheaper than the 5-disc Audite set under consideration here. If the SACD format is not a priority but cost is, I would still choose either Engeset – £15.00 cheaper, or Järvi – a full £25.00 cheaper over Aadland.

**Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)**  
**Complete Symphonic Works**  
 Herbert Schuch (conductor)  
 Camilla Tilling (soprano)  
 Tom Erik Løv (baritone)  
 WDR Sinfonieorchester/Eivind Aadland  
 rec. 2009-14, Philharmonie & Kultur- und Bismarck-Saal,  
 Cologne

**AUDITE 11.439 SACD** [5 discs: 327:16]  
 Over a period of roughly five years from 2009 - 2014, Audite recorded five discs which they describe as "Edvard Grieg - Complete Symphonic Works" with Eivind Aadland conducting the WDR Sinfonieorchester. Now, in 2020, they have been brought together in a box set - slightly lazily, the liner booklet from each of the individual releases thereby duplicating all the orchestral and biographical detail but retaining the adapted Grand March pairing from the original releases. There is some saving to be had by buying the box - roughly speaking, a five-disc price for one set in the UK.

The key for many collectors will rest on how complete is "complete". This set is one of four currently available professing varying degrees of totality. First up was Neeme Järvi on Decca in Götterburg recorded back between 1986 - 89. He needs no generally-flashed dates. Then from Bergen on BIS came Ole Kristian Ruud in excellent SACD sound in 2002-08 needing eight discs (and winning a Diapason d'Or for his trouble). Lastly, Sigurd Fennest on Naxos, either in Milano or with the SDOO from 2009 - 2014, also requiring eight discs. Rather entertainingly, none of these sets can agree on which works should constitute part of the complete orchestral canon or not. Clearly, the set under consideration has the fewest number of discs and the least number of works. The main work "missing" here but included in the other three sets is the complete incidental music for Peer Gynt. Aadland chooses to include just the two standard orchestral suites plus a couple of extra songs and excerpts, which I find a little arbitrary and odd. In the same way Aadland's disc includes some vocal works - the Six Orchestral Songs and The Mountain Thrill but not Bergliot or Before a Southern Convent. If there is a logic to that it eludes me. Järvi and Aadland do not include the opera excerpts (Grieg's Oratorio or the cantata Landspionning) which Engeset and Ruud do. Engeset uniquely adds some orchestrations of piano works by other composers which I enjoy a lot - the Idyller and the Ballade. Of course, the vocal works are present in all the sets and for many that may be more than enough. Parenthetically, if the word complete is going to be bandied around I want it to be really complete.

So to consider the discs in order: certain characteristics are clear across the set. Audite provide a very dynamic, quite closely detailed recording. I listened to the stereo SACD layer - perhaps the surround sound tempers the degree of closeness. Certainly the playing of the WDR Sinfonieorchester can stand such forensic inspection. Aadland's style is founded on contrast and drama. This works well across all of volume 1 which consists of the Four Symphonic Danes Op.47, the two Peer Gynt Suites and the Funeral March for Rikard Nordraak. The latter is Grieg's own version for wind band - Järvi uses this version too, the other two sets preferring Halvorsen's orchestration.

The Symphonic Danes are thrilling. Aadland's approach makes them miniature tone poems with the wide dynamic range of the orchestra very well caught. Even this early into hearing the set, there is a sense that Aadland pushes the music really setting it near to alone smile. Make no mistake, this is a very exciting interpretation but one that never "lives". This stylistic limitation becomes more of an issue in the reflective more sensitive movements of Peer Gynt. Neither Antea's Dance nor the Arabian Dance has any degree of seductive sway. It is no surprise that in the Hall of the Mountain King and Peer Gynt's nomenclature both respond well to this approach. The dearth of *leg legg* any kind of frugal or touching intimacy as Aadland seems determined to create saturated walls of symphonic string sound. Technically it is very impressive - musically it seems misguided to me.

If Volume 1 could be considered a mixed interpretation bag, Volume 2 dedicated to the famous string movements seems a complete failure. The fault for this is initially Aadland's, who again seems to strive for the epic rather than the intimate. If this were Theodor Kuller's *Sarabade for Strings*, I would applaud the style. That is a work that really does need a large symphony-sized string section with individual dynamic playing. These Grieg works do not require this approach. Last Spring epiphany for me the wondrousness of Aadland's approach is his ability to create a sense of grandeur through his overly measured phrasing and a fuller vibrato from the orchestra. Listen to Ruud who takes almost exactly the same amount of time but has a version that breaks simplicity and unaffected beauty. Played in this manner this is one of Grieg's most affecting and heart-stoppingly beautiful works - Aadland makes it into an over-heated melodrama. The precision of tone of his violins in this music does not make up for the directness of utterance and lack of mannerisms. It really is one of the most joyful string pieces to play precisely because it is unaffected and simple. With Aadland it creates under the weight of his played importance. Time and again he seems flustered on the heavily-handled pointing of an accent rather than letting them serve a function of rhythmic impetus. Interestingly the dynamic markings need significant Aadland's affinity with the music and the insights this affords. Before becoming a conductor, he was an international-circuit violinist and lived and worked near Grieg's birthplace in Bergen. The liner notes occasions where Aadland seeks a flourish "authenticity" by avoiding vibrato or marking off-beat accents. This is all true and no doubt sincerely considered but it does not serve what I have enjoyed the creative process the open-sky essence of the music has been lost. Here the Audite sound, so effective on the first disc, adds more burden of uniform grandeur and inflated sound. I am not sure what I have enjoyed the music less despite the airy excellence of the actual playing. Perhaps it is worth noting that although this is nominally Volume 2, it was the first disc to be recorded. The only volume to be recorded in the Klauw-on-Bismarck-Saal Cologne as opposed to the more generous (forgiving?) acoustic of the Philharmonie.

The "house" style of sharp contrasts, dynamic performances with forceful accentuation allied to close and detailed recording continues into the third volume. Whereas in the string-dominated volume 2 this proved to be a mixed blessing, the return to the full orchestra brings better results. Indeed, in many ways the opening work in Autumn could have been written for just such an approach. Surprisingly powerful, wide dynamic range, virtuosic playing all contribute to the impact of the work which on occasion can sound just a tad generic. As the piece continues - and indeed this disc - I did begin to wonder whether this approach was in the "basic aesthetic" school of performance/practice is certainly a label you would not expect to associate with Grieg. The lyric suite that follows is more of a mixed bag again. It is important to remember that this suite consists of orchestrations of a small selection of some of his lyrics. That Grieg wrote for solo piano. This was music intended for the salon and I find Aadland's striving for maximum effect too often undermines the brilliant simplicity of the music. So, while his *Zigzagging Rye* starts beautifully - lovely lyrical (parade the gun) string playing - Aadland then overplays the climax. Likewise, I still do not enjoy his penchant for strongly marked accents as in the second movement Norwegian Ruler March. That said the third movement *Northern* is delightful. The closing March of the *Overture (Trill)* is played with all the energy and fire one could wish for - at almost exactly the tempo taken to Engeset in Milano but here the effect is spelt by the aural landscape from the Audite engineers. The percussion - never the subtlest or most imaginative part of Grieg's scoring - is allowed to dominate in a rather unappealing way. It was a good idea to include the elusive, distinctly impressionistic *Ballad* as a quasi-postscript to the published work - all the other composers do so as well, although Engeset is rather perversely a single track on a different disc.

The Old Norwegian Romance with Variations offers a string performance with no surprise - the variations well contrasted. Relatively speaking, I do not find this to be one of Grieg's most compelling works - it is lacking in time rarely, and execution of colour that say Brahms finds in his symphonic dramatic. Aadland's approach is to maximize contrast whereas Engeset or Ruud seem continually with less sharply contrasted sound - Ruud is a lot less and a lot more alive as well. Certainly Ruud does not deal with Aadland in contrast seeming occasionally impatient. The disc ends with the standard suite of three excerpts from Grieg's incidental *Signe* - *Signe's Song* - *Contrast* for developing expectations. Aadland conducts a beautifully reflective central *Signe's Dream* although that is followed by as bombastic a nonimage march as you are ever likely to hear with bass drum and cymbals again very prominent. Aadland vibrato mix. Aadland plays these three excerpts running to just shy of seventeen minutes. Järvi and Ruud provide an eight-movement symphony which roughly doubles the amount of music to be heard and it is good Grieg to boot. Certainly it gives a greater range of mood and scene-painting than the three-movement standard work allows. Across the five-disc set, there is room to include the music and its omission is serious in any set claiming "completeness".

Volume 4 contains just two works: the early *Symphony* and the ubiquitous *Piano Concerto*. The *Symphony* was written when Grieg was just twenty-one and such was his concern over its quality and value that he wrote "never to be performed" on the score by the time it came to be deposited in the Bergen City Archives. The anecdote was obediently followed until 1980 when a photograph sent to the Soviet Union "for research purposes" was used to generate a set of parts and the work was performed. Since then the embargo has been lifted and the work features in many "complete" editions of Grieg's music. The impetus for its composition came from the Danish composer Gade, who told Grieg to go home and "write something valuable". Grieg wrote the symphony at some speed but one can only imagine that on reflection he felt it lacked the value of being distinctively Nordic or Grieg-like. For sure, the shadow of the German Conservators lies over the work and there is a kind of characteristically bifurcated idiom that Grieg uses to make his own, but surely he was too hard a self-critic. Not only as a marker of development but in its own right this is a very enjoyable and substantial. Aadland gives it an excellent performance with his penchant for energy and brightly sprung tempo finding a perfect form in this youthful work. *Contrasto* - and I had me twirling through the liner - for this disc the Audite engineering is not quite as close or conspicuously wide in its dynamic range as the preceding three discs. Given that it is exactly the same technical team of producer and engineer I do not know why this should be. Suffice to say the music benefits substantially from this approach. On disc - once it became known - this *Symphony* has found itself. This is a well-orchestrated but not profound piece so it responds to a direct, unadorned approach and it is a surprise that this finds Neeme Järvi in good form - and in fact Järvi's timings are very close to Aadland. It has to be said that the Järvi set on Decca adds sounds very good and of course his Götterburg Orchestra are very fine. Away from the complete surveys, rather enjoy Dmitri Kitajev's performance with the Bergen PO which is a more measured, respectful affair. Indeed, the more one listens to the work the more its century of solitary confinement seems absurd.

The coupling of the *Piano Concerto* in A minor makes sense when you realize they are the only two extended, multi-movement orchestral works Grieg wrote. In his own lifetime, as much as the symphony would the concerto became his calling card. Reviewing another performance, I wrote how this work's sheer obscurity and popularity can easily mask just how unusual and sophisticated it is. The pianist here is Herbert Schuch and he is said that this is a very impressive and intelligent performance. Schuch is a considered and poetic account, favouring the lyric and reflective over bombast or display. That said, he is technically in total control and very well accompanied by Aadland and his Cologne orchestra. It is a shame aesthetically and effectively allowing just the right amount of lyrical ease and flow in the music without it falling into sentimentality or empty quality. I would say that it is one of the more wholly successful volumes in this series. That said, in a highly competitive field there is only so much support pre-existing favourites individually or as part of a series or set.

The title and final volume has something of a busy, odd and ends feeling to it, pulling together pieces that did not quite fit one another's disc. This is evidenced by the range of recording dates which implies these works were put in the case at the same time as the other pieces they are mixed but they are not included on earlier discs in the series. Possibly a little more careful planning of the repertoire could have avoided the frustration of having to skip discs to listen - say - all of Aadland's Peer Gynt excerpts. Instead, you need to refer to volume 1 for the two standard suites and then skip to volume 3 here for another slightly arbitrary - this additional orchestral excerpt: all the *Wedding* and the *Amorous Dance of the Mountain King's daughter*. The liner note makes a case for this pair as being more "incidental" than the simple lyrics of *Wedding* and *Antea's Dance*. I would accept that as true - but rather than hearing just these additional two excerpts surely that reinforces the case for the full incidental music which covers a very broad musical and emotional canvas. Aadland is good in both these excerpts and the skill of his Cologne players is again never in doubt.

The *Six songs with Orchestra* were drawn together by Grieg to showcase his considerable skill as a songwriter. There is no particular continuity through the six, with the first two again excerpted from Peer Gynt. Soprano Camilla Tilling has a suitably attractive light soprano but with enough heft to make the most of the latter songs in the set which are more overtly dramatic. Possibly Maria Solberg for Ruud and Barbara Bonney for Järvi find an even greater degree of simple radiance but in its own right Tilling's approach is very beautiful. I still find Aadland's over-treated approach to the song version of *Landspionning* to undermine the essential directness of the song as it did in the string transcription. But the final song in the set - *Heim* (Interland) - responds to this most open approach, which makes the occasion of *Landspionning* or *Clav* (Trogvassan) all the more baffling. Another head-scratcher is why no texts are included in the booklet. Generally across the whole set the German/English liner notes are very well written and full of useful information. The absence of texts of songs sung in Norwegian is an error. A couple more orchestrated *Lyric pieces* - characteristically lyrical songs - and another vocal piece, the enormous *Mountain Thrill* add to the phenomenal feel of this disc. The latter is sung by baritone Tom Erik Løv. He has a lighter voice than Dale Knudsen for Engeset and is less overtly dramatic than the great Hilban Hagegård for Ruud. Again, in isolation, Løv is perfectly good but with luxury of choice, his would not be a first one.

The set closes as it opened, with a suite of orchestral dances: here it's the *Norwegian Dances Op.35*. As with the *Symphonic Danes*, this music very much plays to Aadland's strength of strong contrasts in dynamics and sense as well as showcasing the brilliance of the Cologne orchestra. This is a strong performance of a delightful set of four contrasting dances, three of which were interpolated into the complete Peer Gynt score for some editions of the work. Again, I do not quite follow the logic of this set since - for all the delights of this music - the orchestrations are not Grieg's own, thereby contradicting Aadland's own description of the music included on the five discs.

So, this set proves to be something of a mixed bag. The playing is uniformly very good indeed, with the exception of the strong orchestra disc: the performances are all good and some better than that. However, set a single performance I would not prefer above any other. The final nail in the coffin for me has to be the omission of so much music of real substance, interest and quality. For those in the market for a single purchase of Grieg's orchestral music including the operatic excerpts, the complete Peer Gynt excerpts and other vocal works all recorded in SACD sound and demarcated by Grieg's "own" orchestra in Bergen there really is no need to look further than the set on BIS. This is currently available in the new three-volume set on the BIS disc survey for around £10 cheaper than the Decca Audite set under consideration here. If the SACD format is not a priority, but cost cut, I would still choose either Engeset - £15.00 cheaper or Järvi - a full £25.00 cheaper over Aadland.

Nick Barnard

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**Volume 1**  
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 Peer Gynt - Suite No.1 Op.46 (1875/1888) [15:11]  
 Peer Gynt - Suite No.2 Op.35 (1875/1888) [17:00]  
 Funeral March on the Death of Rikard Nordraak (1866) [7:14]  
**Volume 2**  
 The Signe Variations Op.34 (1880) [9:45]  
 From Holbæk's Time - Suite in Olden Style Op.40 (1884) [20:58]  
 The Hebbel for String Orchestra Op.52 (1880) [9:00]  
 The Nordic Melodies Op.63 (1893) [12:00]  
**Volume 3**  
 In Autumn - Concert Overture Op.11 (1866) [11:04]  
 Lyric Suite Op.54 (1904) [14:35]  
 Ballad-ning Op.46 (1904) [10:03]  
 Old Norwegian Romance with Variations Op.51 (1890) [22:33]  
 Signe's Song Op.56 - 3 orchestral excerpts (1872) [14:35]  
**Volume 4**  
 Symphony in C minor Op.19 (1864) [32:25]  
 Piano Concerto in A minor Op.16 (1868) [20:04]  
**Volume 5**  
 Six Excerpts from Peer Gynt Op.23 (1875/1888) [7:00]  
 Six Songs with Orchestra (assembled 1894-5) [27:07]  
 Two Lyric Pieces Op.68 (1897) [8:04]  
 The Mountain Thrill Op.32 (1877) [6:04]  
 Norwegian Dances Op.35 (1881) [16:01]

