

EDVARD GRIEG

Born June 15, 1843 in Bergen, Norway; died there on September 4, 1907.

Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16 (1868)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Copenhagen, April 3, 1869

Holger Simon Paulli, conductor

Edmund Neupert, soloist

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 30 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: pairs of woodwinds, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings

Grieg completed his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory in 1863. Rather than heading directly home to Norway, however, he settled in Copenhagen to study privately with Niels Gade, at that time Denmark's most prominent musician and generally regarded as the founder of the Scandinavian school of composition. Back in Norway, Grieg's creative work was concentrated on the large forms advocated by his Leipzig teachers and by Gade. By 1867, he had produced the Piano Sonata, the first two Violin and Piano Sonatas, a Symphony (long unpublished and made available only as recently as 1981) and the concert overture *In Autumn*. He also carried on his work to promote native music, and gave an unprecedented concert exclusively of Norwegian compositions in 1866. Grieg arranged to have the summer of 1868 free of duties, and he returned to Denmark for an extended vacation at a secluded retreat at Sölleröd, where he began his Piano Concerto. He thoroughly enjoyed that summer, sleeping late, taking long walks, eating well, and tipping a glass in the evenings with friends at the local inn. The sylvan setting spurred his creative energies, and the new Concerto was largely completed by the time he returned to Norway in the fall.

The Concerto's first movement opens with a bold summons by the soloist. The main theme is given by the woodwinds and taken over almost immediately by the piano. A flashing transition, filled with skipping rhythms, leads to the second theme, a tender cello melody wrapped in the warm harmonies of the trombones. An episodic development section, launched by the full orchestra playing the movement's opening motive, is largely based on the main theme in dialogue. The recapitulation returns the earlier themes, after which the piano displays a tightly woven cadenza. The stern introductory measures are recalled to close the movement. The *Adagio* begins with a song filled with sentiment and nostalgia played by the strings and rounded off by touching phrases in the solo horn. The soloist weaves elaborate musical filigree above the simple accompaniment before the lovely song returns in an enriched setting. The themes of the finale's outer sections are constructed in the rhythms of a popular Norwegian dance, the *halling*. The movement's central portion presents a wonderful melodic inspiration, introduced by the solo flute, that derives from the dreamy atmosphere of the preceding movement.