

 **PICTURES** • Pål Eide (pn) • DANACORD 847 (78:11)

GRIEG *Mountain Dance*, op. 19/1. *Wedding Procession*, op. 19/2. *From the Carnival*, op. 19/3. *Lyric Pieces: Butterfly*, op. 43/1; *To Spring*, op. 43/6; *March of the Trolls*, op. 54/3; *Bell Ringing*, op. 54/6. **NORWEGIAN FOLK SONGS AND DANCES**, op. 17/2: *Cattle Call*. **SÆVERUD** *The Ballad of Revolt*, op. 27/5. **DAVID MONRAD JOHANSEN** *Pictures from the North: Profile of a Woman*, op. 5/1; *The Little Stone God*, op. 5/2; *Reindeer*, op. 5/3 *Towards the Mountain of my Forefathers*, op. 5/4. **KOCH** *The Mirror of the Mind*. **MUSSORGSKY** *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Pål Eide is a Norwegian-born pianist living in Denmark. The present recording is in part a tribute to Norway's greatest composer, Edvard Grieg, as it is played on Grieg's 1892 Steinway in his home. This is a rather different instrument than the modern Steinway. The sound is more woody than ringing, with great variation in touch and sonority. Eide has played this piano previously in recital, and his identification with its attributes is complete. Eide is a marvelous writer. I have read his haunting and inspired program notes twice. Mostly the notes are devoted to describing the very special atmosphere of Grieg's home at Troldhaugen. Although the main work on the album is Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Eide is an exceptionally persuasive advocate for the works by Norwegian composers, including Grieg, on this disc.

What kind of pianist is Eide? He can do many things well. The technical ability is all there, with virtuoso moments like Mussorgsky's "The Great Gate of Kiev" and Grieg's "March of the Trolls" receiving thrilling expositions in size and sonority. But Eide also is a highly sensitive player. In Grieg's "Bell Ringing," Eide finds just the right atmosphere to let the sounds float in the air, illustrating the exceptionally avant-garde characteristics of a work that influenced Debussy and others. The one quality Eide has that means the most to me is his consciousness of the gritty humanity behind all this music. Particularly in the Mussorgsky, Eide grapples with the thorny aspects of human existence, creating a dramatic context which inspires me to feel that the music possesses a Shakespearean dimension.

I should mention that Eide prefers to record in long takes, sometimes of even the entire program at once. He feels that this gives the recording a dramatic lucidity, absent from sliced together albums. I agree with him. *Pictures at an Exhibition* in particular gains from a sense of ebb and flow along with dramatic contrast that I've rarely experienced from a pianist on records. I have heard three Russian pianists give excellent accounts of the Mussorgsky in concert: Lazar Berman, Alexander Toradze, and Mark Zeltser. I would place Eide's version in their league. The only downside to recording this CD in Grieg's home is that the acoustic is not as favorable as a concert hall might have been. When Thomas Frost recorded Vladimir Horowitz's final CD in Horowitz's home, he placed open umbrellas all along the ceiling to give liveliness to the sound. I wish something like this could have been done at Troldhaugen, although the image of Grieg's piano on the recording is full and natural, just somewhat dim. I would like to note a few of the compositions that moved me. Grieg's "From the Carnival" is a recollection of the carnivals in Rome, a city the composer visited frequently. Eide gives it a truly Latin feeling, although perhaps it's not my imagination that a Norwegian character bursts through at times. You could say that this is Grieg's version of Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, except it is a Norwegian in Rome. I am pleased that Eide has provided an encore after the Mussorgsky, namely Grieg's "Cattle Call." The music simply appears out of nothingness and then fades away, an encapsulation of the dreamlike atmosphere of the entire recital. Another magical moment is David Monrad Johansen's "Reindeer," where you can hear the reindeer leaving its tracks in the snow with little flicks of its hooves. Pål Eide has delivered an enchanting recording that engages the mind as well as the ear. Highly recommended. **Dave Saemann**