


Fanfare Magazine, 2020 March/April Issue Review by David DeBoor Canfield

 **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*

Well, I have Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exposition* performed on innumerable makes of pianos, including a manufacturer that Mussorgsky himself knew and played on, but now I also have a recording of the work on a piano formerly belonging to Edvard Grieg. I will have to get busy and look for recordings of the work on pianos once belonging to Stockhausen and Cage to have a really good overview of instruments. The recording has interest beyond the fact that it was recorded on Grieg's 1892 Hamburg Steinway, as Pål Eide has a very personal approach to the works—both well- and un-known—he has chosen to present here.

It is quite appropriate, of course, that Eide would open (and close) his recital with several of Grieg's own pieces (and he is hardly the first pianist to record Grieg's music on his own piano: among others, Leif Ove Andsnes has done so). Eide's approach often seems rather gentle and refined; for instance, he downplays the accents on the second beats of the opening "Mountain Dance" from the *Pictures from Folk Life*, op. 19, although he does work up to an impressive climax at the end of its first section. The same observation can be made of the accents at the beginning of the second piece in the set as well. An individual touch comes at the beginning of "Mountain"'s second section in A Major, where Eide sounds as if he's playing the alto voice as a diad instead of Grieg's notated dotted eighth-16th-note figures. It's quite a charming effect. Another distinctive to Eide's Grieg is his use of pedal, which is employed more than other pianists I've heard in these works. Most of the time this approach works well, but in a few spots, such as the passage beginning at 5:14 in the third movement, I would have preferred less. Here, the rests in the syncopated rhythms in the right hand are obscured, such that the passage comes off sounding as though Grieg had written a series of dotted 16th notes followed by 32nds. Nevertheless, his playing of these miniature masterworks is exquisite, and he very capably captures the capricious spirit that Grieg wrote into these works, especially including "Papillons," the first of his opus 43 *Lyric Pieces*, and one of his best-known works for solo piano. Incidentally, the "Bell Ringing" movement of the opus 54 *Lyric Pieces*, even though I've heard it previously, reminded me that like Mussorgsky, Grieg was sometimes quite ahead of his time. The work is built upon a strikingly dissonant (for that era) series of parallel fifths.

Mussorgsky's *Pictures*, the major work in the recital, is quite "mainstream" in its approach to this warhorse of warhorses. There is nothing too far away from the performance tradition of the work, in fact, except Eide's use of pedal, which he, as in the other pieces, applies generously. In many places, this works well in Mussorgsky, too—certainly in "Gnomus," "Catacombs," "Great Gate," and other places, but I find it less attractive in "Bydło" where the cattle are straining to be sure, but also sound as though they're trying to pull their carts through mud, and in "Baba-Yaga" where the quickly moving bass lines in its outer sections also become too muddy. But Eide does a good job in playing musically, making superb phrasing in the First Promenade, which many pianists just plough through since it's not one of the *pictures*, after all. I especially like the way he hesitates between the repeated phrases in the "Schmuyle" section of "Goldenberg," as if to suggest timidity in the begging of the former. His skill in bringing out the melody in "Tuileries" from amongst all the notes is admirable. Eide also has some other individual touches to note. In the repeated section of "Gnomus" (beginning at m. 19), he makes the first chord in the right hand almost a grace note. Many pianists shorten this chord, but none that I can recall to this extent; I did find it effective. Also, I like Eide's pause before he plunges into the Fifth Promenade, effectively creating a palate cleanser before he begins the last large section which that Promenade introduces. (The omission of the piece by some pianists, imitating Ravel, obliterates Mussorgsky's formal balance in the work.) So, while this reading won't make it into my top 10 of the work (which I haven't even tried to identify), it is worth hearing, along with the other works covered in the recital.

The disc is filled out by works by three much less well-known composers, all Scandinavian, and all very talented. The best-known of these lesser-knowns is Harald Sæverud (1897–1992), who tried to update Grieg by writing his own incidental music to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. *The Ballad of Revolt*, if I recall correctly, also exists in an orchestral version, and I believe this is the first time I've heard the piano version, although it is one of Sæverud's best-known pieces. The piece begins with a simple solo folk-like line (akin to *Pictures*, in fact!) from which point the composer builds interest and excitement over a repeated D. David Monrad Johansen (1888–1974) received musical training in Norway, Germany, and France.

His *Pictures from the North* comprises four movements, and forms an interesting synthesis of Norwegian folk music and French Impressionism. The work is an impressive portrayal of scenes from Norwegian life, including those of reindeer (perhaps the Norwegian equivalent of Mussorgsky's "Ballet of Unhatched Chicks"), mountain views, and worship in the far North. The one composer new to me is the Dane Jesper Koch (b. 1967); his *The Mirror of the Mind* was written in 2007 for Eide, providing a nice contrast in the recital with its more contemporary stylistic leanings.

Even if you are saturated with recordings of Mussorgsky's masterpiece, this generously filled CD is well worth picking up for the other works contained in it, to all of which Eide brings a sure pianistic approach that will offer many rewards. Recommended all around. **David DeBoor Canfield**