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Review by Ken Meltzer



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*

Like Edvard Grieg, Norwegian pianist Pål Eide was born (1970) in Bergen. In the liner notes for his new Danacord CD, *Pictures*, Eide describes his lifelong admiration and affection for Grieg and his music. *Pictures* is a labor of love, and a dream come true for Eide. In this recording, Eide performs on Grieg's own piano, situated in the living room of the composer/pianist's home (now the Edvard Grieg Museum) in Trolldaugen. The piano is a Hamburg Steinway, purchased in 1892 by Grieg's friends. Grieg played this Steinway frequently during the final 15 years of his life.

The repertoire comprises programmatic works. It's no surprise that the music of Grieg predominates among the numerous miniatures included here. But Harald Saeverud's moving *The Ballad of Revolt*, a protest against the Nazi occupation of Norway, is a welcome addition, as are David Monrad Johansen's Impressionistic *Pictures from the North*, and Danish composer Jesper Koch's *The Mirror of the Mind*, the latter written for Eide. In all of these works, Eide demonstrates a patrician elegance and poetic sensibility. Eide takes advantage of the piano's capacity to reproduce tones in the softest manner, and to magical effect. The condition of Grieg's piano, as well as the intimate space in which this recording was made, certainly dictated Eide's approach, at least to a degree. But I never had the impression that Eide was compromising his views of the music to adjust to the conditions at hand.

In the context of the aforementioned works, and the circumstances under which this recording was made, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* might seem an odd choice. It is after all a work with the potential to be a barn-burner, and that is how it is most often played, especially in large concert halls. But Mussorgsky's *Pictures* is also a composition that gives the pianist marvelous opportunities to create musical portraits, even intimate ones. Eide embraces that potential to deliver one of the most beautiful and poetic accounts of this work I have ever heard. For all who believe that the writing for the piano in *Pictures at an Exhibition* is unidiomatic, even unattractive on occasion, I urge you to listen to this recording. Eide's tone is unfailingly gorgeous throughout, and once again the hushed dynamics are positively magical. I also love how Eide embraces the expressive and dramatic potential for moments of silence between various episodes. I want to emphasize that Eide lacks nothing in the required virtuoso technique to play this great work. But that virtuoso technique is at the service of an interpretation notable for its beauty, imaginative phrasing, and poetic sensibilities. I'll always return with gratitude to Sviatoslav Richter's hair-raising 1958 Sofia concert performance of this work (Philips), but Eide's rendition made me listen to Mussorgsky's *Pictures* in a new and unforgettable way. Eide's beautiful liner notes capture the wonder and joy he experienced making this recording (I would have liked a few more pictures of Grieg's piano!). A quite wonderful achievement. **Ken Meltzer**