

Fanfare Magazine, 2020 March/April Issue Review by Peter Burwasser



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*

The Norwegian pianist Pål Eide wrote a fascinating article for *Fanfare* 40:6 in which he described his artistic and specific pianistic philosophies. One quote in particular seems especially appropriate for this new recital; “I try to make every tone sound beautiful, no matter how softly or strongly it is played. The technical secret to do this is very simple—the maximum amount of relaxation in and between the attack of the keyboard.” Eide certainly draws a beautiful tone out of this keyboard, which happens to be a very special instrument, the 1892 Hamburg Steinway owned by Grieg. This is essentially a modern piano, but the color palette is especially rich, and the tonality is subtly layered. Interestingly, the Danacord engineers have opted to record Eide with an unusual abundance of acoustical space, as if one were sitting towards the back of a small hall. It is lovely effect, especially when the volume is tweaked upward, and a refreshing antidote to over-miked, up close piano recordings that make the instrument sound ten feet tall.

Of course there is a healthy dose of delicately rendered Grieg here, as well as lesser known (albeit quite engrossing) music from his younger compatriots Harald Sæverud and David Monrad Johansen, both writing in the Grieg tradition of folk-inspired lyricism. Contemporary Danish composer Jesper Koch wrote his Hans Christian Anderson-inspired piece *The Mirror of the Mind* expressly for Eide.

This album of musical “pictures” concludes with the most celebrated work with that theme. This is a remarkable and singular reading of Mussorgsky’s magnificent stroll through an art gallery. The fluidity of his phrasing is remarkable, resulting from a synergy, it seems, of his technical skills and this remarkable piano. Eide does not storm the heavens in the “Great Gate of Kiev” finale, but mines greater details in the score, favoring beauty over bluster. And yet he does a wonderful job of drawing broad dramatic strokes to represent the clumsy oxcart in “Bydło” or the chattering exchange of “Samuel Goldberg and Schmuyle,” to cite two examples.

Pål Eide is a unique artist, an extremely refreshing voice in a musical environment that seems to crank out perfectly formed, but not especially distinctive voices by the day. This well assembled recital is an ideal showcase for his special talents. **Peter Burwasser**