

## THE DEVELOPMENT AND PERIODS OF EDVARD GRIEG'S ORCHESTRAL STYLE

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**SUMMARY.** Edvard Grieg considered the orchestration of his compositions as a very important means of creative expression. In spite of its seemingly simple character, Grieg's orchestral style is colourful and versatile. It is based on full concordance of the orchestral means with the other elements of composer's music. Grieg began with the orchestral style based on firmly established traditions and later deviated towards more colourful and refined way of scoring which suited best for the specific musical images of his creations. The effectiveness of Grieg's orchestration lies first of all in properly chosen and proportionally distributed roles of the orchestral sections and individual timbres. The author of this article made an attempt to establish the approximate periods of Grieg's orchestration style and to introduce their main traits. Relying on the analysis carried out in this article, it was possible to discern four periods of Grieg's orchestration style development. The boundaries of these periods are approximate and based on their predominant orchestration features.

**Keywords:** Edvard Grieg, orchestra, orchestration, periods.

Music by Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) is widespread and popular worldwide. It might appear that his music has already been comprehensively examined, analysed and does not hide any unrevealed aspects. The works by Erling Dahl, Daniel M. Grimley, Bjarne Kortsen, Georgia Volioti and others elucidated various aspects of Grieg's music (traits of his melodies and harmony, specificity of the incidental music, influences by other composers on Grieg and Grieg's influence on later composers, the links of Grieg's works with Norwegian

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folk music, etc.)<sup>2</sup>. The monograph by Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe<sup>3</sup>, also the collections of Grieg's letters, diaries and publications edited by Finn Benestad and translated into English by William H. Halverson<sup>4</sup> are essential sources of information concerning the composer's life and creation. However orchestration is the element of Grieg's music which attracts less attention of the researchers than his harmony or thematic material. Meanwhile, in spite of its seemingly simple character, Grieg's orchestration is colourful, expressive and closely associated with his melodies, harmony, and texture. Therefore, it can be presumed that this subject deserves more attention of the researchers<sup>5</sup>.

Many direct remarks and allusions in Grieg's letters show that the composer regarded the orchestration as one of the most important elements of creative expression. These remarks disclose the composer's sensitivity to timbre, constant anxiety about the proper orchestral embodying of his creations, attention to the subtle details of performance, even doubts and lack of self-confidence in the orchestration knowledge. In the length of time the composer structured his own "timbre dictionary" which ultimately corresponds to the general character of his music. Grieg adapted the elements of this dictionary in different musical contexts ingeniously, yet he was not fond of outwardly spectacular orchestral effects. Therefore Adam Carse's statement that Grieg's orchestration is reminiscent of the work of "a child selecting colours from the paint box when colouring a given outline drawing"<sup>6</sup> claimed in *The History of Orchestration* (1925) seems not well-grounded.

Grieg's orchestral style changed as time passed, so it is impossible to speak about it as a solid, all-in-one phenomenon. Yet the analysis of

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, see publications by these authors: Dahl, Erling, *My Grieg. A Personal Introduction to His Life and Music*, Edvard Grieg Museum, Bergen, 2014; Grimley, Daniel M., *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2006; Kortsen, Bjarne. *Grieg's String Quartet and Robert Heckman*, in: *Music & Letters*, 49, no. 1, 1968, pp. 21-28; Volioti, Georgia, *Reinventing Grieg's Folk Modernism: An Empirical Investigation of the Performance of the Slåtter, Op. 72, No. 2*, in: *Journal of Musicological Research*, 31, no. 4, 2012, pp. 262-296.

<sup>3</sup> Benestad, Finn; Schjelderup-Ebbe, Dag, *Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Benestad, Finn; Halverson, William H. (ed.), *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, Peer Gynt Press, Columbus, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> The published conference presentation by Bjarte Engeset should be mentioned as a prominent attempt to investigate Grieg's orchestral style, see: Engeset, Bjarte, *Edvard Grieg's Orchestral Style, presentation at the Grieg Conference in Copenhagen August 13, 2011*, pp. 1-73.

<sup>6</sup> Carse, Adam, *The History of Orchestration*, Dover Publications, New York, 1964, p. 310.

Grieg's orchestral works reveals that several distinct periods of orchestration style can be distinguished within his creative biography. The aim of this article is to establish these periods and to reveal their main features.

### **Edvard Grieg's orchestral compositions**

In order to establish Grieg's orchestration style periods, the whole variety of his compositions for orchestra should be considered. The list of Grieg's compositions for orchestras of various types is presented in Table 1. It encompasses all orchestral works including purely instrumental creations, incidental music, and compositions for voices with orchestra.

Grieg's orchestral works can be divided into several categories. This division comes in useful to classify Grieg's compositions according to the specificity of their orchestral style.

The first category encompasses the **concert compositions for the symphony orchestra**. These works are written for the orchestra which usually contain double woodwind instruments section and full or reduced brass section. The compositions of this category are: *Symphony in C minor*, EG 119; *Overture In Autumn*, Op. 11; *Piano concerto in A minor*, Op. 16; *Old Norwegian Melody with Variations*, op. 51; *Symphonic Dances*, Op. 64; and *Lytic Suite* – four orchestrated *Lytic Pieces* from album V, Op. 54.

**Incidental music** works make up the second category. It contains music for Bjørnson's drama *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, Op. 22; Ibsen's drama *Peer Gynt*, Op. 23; and the scenes from the unfinished opera *Olav Trygvason*, Op. 50. Many movements of these creations include vocal parts.

The third category includes the **compositions for the string orchestra**: *Two Elegiac Melodies*; Op. 34; *Suite From Holberg's Time*, Op. 40; *Two Melodies* for string orchestra, Op. 53; *Two Nordic Melodies* for string orchestra, Op. 63; *Two Lyric Pieces* from album IX, Op. 68. The character of the compositions for the string orchestra is close to Grieg's vocal pieces (some of these creations are arrangements of earlier created songs). The orchestration of cantata *The Mountain Thrall*, Op. 32 for baritone, two horns and strings is related to this category.

Table 1.

## Compositions for orchestra by Edvard Grieg

The list does not contain *Norwegian Dances*, Op. 35 orchestrated by Hans Sitt<sup>7</sup> and *Funeral March for Rikard Nordraak* composed for piano in 1866 and scored for the wind band the next year (sources: Benestad 2000; Benestad 2001; Dahl 2007).

Name of the composition	Created	Orchestrated <sup>8</sup>	Other versions and editions
Symphony in C minor, EG 119	1864		
Overture <i>In Autumn</i> , Op. 11	1866	1887	The initial orchestration of 1866 did not survive.
Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16	1868		Orchestration was edited several times, the last version in 1907
<i>At the Southern Convent</i> , Op. 20	1871		
<i>Sigurd Jorsalfar</i> , Op. 22. Incidental music to Bjørnson's drama	1872		Incidental music edited in 1903. Suite (3 movements), Op. 56, 1892
<i>Peer Gynt</i> , Op. 23. Incidental music to Ibsen's drama	1875		New orchestral edition in 1885. Last time edited in 1907. 1 <sup>st</sup> suite for orchestra, Op. 46, 1888. 2 <sup>nd</sup> suite for orchestra, Op. 55, 1892
<i>Land Sighting</i> , Op. 31 for baritone, male chorus and orchestra	Brass ensemble used in the last episode, 1872		The overall accompaniment with symphony orchestra version, 1881

<sup>7</sup> *Norwegian Dances* were orchestrated also by Robert Henriques, however the version later created by Hans Sitt is performed most often.

<sup>8</sup> The dates in the third column are indicated when the original work was initially composed not for orchestra and orchestrated later. The dates of the works orchestrated immediately after the creating of piano version coincide with the date of their creation (second column).

## THE DEVELOPMENT AND PERIODS OF EDVARD GRIEG'S ORCHESTRAL STYLE

Name of the composition	Created	Orchestrated <sup>8</sup>	Other versions and editions
<i>The Mountain Thrall</i> , Op. 32 for baritone, strings and two horns	1878		
<i>Two Elegiac Melodies</i> , Op. 34. for string orchestra	1880* <sup>9</sup>		
<i>From Holberg's Time</i> , Op. 40	1884	String orchestra, 1885	
<i>Bergliot</i> , Op. 42, Melodrama	1871	1885	
Scenes from unfinished opera <i>Olaf Trygvason</i> , Op. 50	1873	1888	
<i>Old Norwegian Melody with Variations</i> , Op. 51	1890 (two pianos)	Final version 1905 <sup>10</sup>	
<i>Two Melodies</i> for string orchestra, Op. 53	1890*		
<i>Six Songs with Orchestra</i> , EG 177	1894–1895*		
<i>Two Nordic Melodies</i> , Op. 63 for string orchestra	1895*		
<i>Symphonic Dances</i> , Op. 64	1898		
<i>Two Lyric Pieces</i> for string orchestra from Op. 68	<i>Lyric Pieces</i> IX, 1898–1899	1899	
<i>Lyric Suite</i>	<i>Lyric Pieces</i> V, Op. 54, 1891	Anton Seidl, 1894	New orchestration by Grieg, 1904–1905 <sup>11</sup> .

<sup>9</sup> The asterisk marks the date when the orchestral cycle was created: the predecessors of these cycles (piano pieces or songs from various opuses) were composed earlier in different periods.

<sup>10</sup> The date 1905 is doubtful because in a letter to Gerhard Schjelderup (the 11th of May, 1904) Grieg wrote that "The orchestral score now exists in manuscript and was performed as an orchestral piece ... this winter. Hopefully it will soon be published" (Benestad; Halverson, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 610). If this information is correct then *Variations* were finished in 1904. Probably 1905 is the date of its publishing.

<sup>11</sup> The new version of the *Suite* was completed in 1904 and contained *Gangar*, *Notturmo*, *March of Trolls* and *Bell Ringing*. In 1905 the piece *The Sound of the Bells* was replaced with the *Shepherd's Boy*.

Grieg's **Cantatas** with orchestra *At the Southern Convent*, Op. 20; *Land Sighting*, Op. 31; *The Mountain Thrall*, Op. 32; and (conditionally) melodrama *Bergliot*, Op. 42 could be separated into discrete category, although a relationship to other categories can be observed: from the point of orchestration Op. 32 could be attributed to the category of compositions for the string orchestra, meanwhile Opp. 20, 31 and especially Op. 42 contain features typical of Grieg's incidental music.

The cycle *Six Songs with Orchestra*, EG 177 cannot be attributed to one particular category as a whole, because accompaniments of these songs are scored for different instrumentations. Popular and frequently performed symphonic suites of music from *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, Op. 56 and *Peer Gynt*, Opp. 46 and 55 could be conditionally attributed to the first category, however their obvious programmatic content and pictorial musical images are closely connected with their initial destination, therefore they are closer to the incidental music category.

### **The main features of Grieg's orchestra and its sections**

The instrumentation of Grieg's orchestra was obviously influenced by Leipzig school representatives (Mendelssohn, Schumann, Gade). Laura Tunbridge observed that "throughout his career, Schumann wrote for a standard classical orchestra with paired woodwinds, paired horns and trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and five part strings. The bass end was sometimes bolstered by ophicleide <...> or its descendant the tuba <...>. Extra instruments—piccolo, harp or triangle—were included for particular illustrative effects"<sup>12</sup>. Schumann had a significant influence upon Grieg in many aspects, and the structure of the orchestra in both composers' scores is also very similar with several minor differences. The same moderate attitude towards orchestral resources – "attachment to German Romanticism, in particular his allegiance to figures such as Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann"<sup>13</sup> – is found in the scores of Danish composer Niels Wilhelm Gade (1817–1890), who was Grieg's tutor during his staying in Copenhagen after graduating Leipzig conservatoire.

String section is undoubtedly the most important section in Grieg's scores. The importance of string instruments is clearly manifested by his works for the string orchestra and predominance of strings in the symphonic creations. The composer lacked self-confidence in writing for the strings (especially

<sup>12</sup> Tunbridge, Laura, *Schumann's Orchestration for Das Paradies Und Die Peri and the Szenen Aus Goethe's Faust*, in: *American Choral Directors Association Journal*, 51, 2010, p.7.

<sup>13</sup> Celenza, Anna Harwell, *Niels W. Gade: The Cosmopolitan Dane*, in: *Organists' Review*, XCIV.1, 2008, p. 33.

violin) for many years and did his best to fill this gap<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, namely string parts in Grieg's scores most obviously show the progress of his instrumental technique.

The fundamental contrast of timbres in Grieg's orchestral works is usually achieved by juxtaposing of string and woodwind instruments sections. The ingenious and colourful exploitation of different woodwind instruments is another peculiar feature of Grieg's style. Grieg used only the main representatives of the double woodwind instruments section (piccolo flute is the only one exception). In several cases the quantity of woodwinds is diminished (e. g. *Solveig's Song* from *Peer Gynt*, accompaniment for the song *A Swan*). Woodwind instruments are used in various ways. In early period Grieg used woodwinds mostly as a group (full or partial). In later period themes and their fragments are often exposed alternately by different woodwind instruments or their combinations (e. g. the introduction of the overture *In Autumn*, middle episode of *At the Matching game* from *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, numerous passages in *Symphonic Dances*, *Lyric Suite*). Often one of these instruments is treated as predominant and becomes a conveyer of "anonymous personification": a timbre which is recognized by listener as anonymous though already acquainted character on the stage of musical action. In numerous "conversations" of woodwinds the theme begins in a part of a particular instrument, then it is passed to another woodwind instrument (or instruments), but at the end the first instrument appears to be predominant and the most important person of the action (e. g. the *Symphonic Dance* No 3). Such predominant role is often commissioned to the oboe, Grieg's most beloved woodwind instrument. Dialogs and polylogues of the woodwinds are often generalized in a massive sound of strings by passing the theme to violins (e. g. central episode beginning with the rehearsal mark A in *Notturmo* from the *Lyric Suite*). Such dialogic dramaturgy is most common in Grieg's later creative period. Lengthy monologues of woodwinds also occur (of course, an oboe is their frequent implementer).

The role of the brass instruments in Grieg's compositions is much more temperate. The composer exploits them cautiously but ingeniously and in most cases purposefully. The usage of the horns is the most extensive

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<sup>14</sup> Surprisingly, woodwind and brass instruments are mentioned very seldom in Grieg's letters and other literary legacy sources. On numerous occasions Grieg regretted that he could not learn the orchestration in Leipzig conservatoire; he especially complained that he cannot play violin (see: Benestad; Halverson, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 371). It shows that Grieg clearly understood the importance of cognition of this instrument and the string section of the orchestra in general. However Grieg never complained that he was unfamiliar with woodwind or with brass instruments. For the meantime we can only guess if Grieg considered wind instruments less worth to notice in comparison with strings, or he believed that his knowledge in this field is sufficient.

and versatile, however all ways of their employment are traditional and without any extreme effects. In some non-standard instrumentation cases horns are the only representatives of brass: *The Mountain Thrall* is written for the string orchestra and two horns; the score of the introduction to the 3<sup>rd</sup> act of *Peer Gynt* include string orchestra and four horns. The orchestration of *A Swan* accompaniment also includes two horns alongside with strings, oboe, bassoon and harp. Grieg used valve horns and trumpets, but their treatment in a natural manner is frequent even in his last compositions. It is strange to see one and the same instrument used as natural and several bars later as undoubtedly chromatic. The treatment of horns as natural instruments is peculiar to background elements (at times their role is confined only to tonic and subdominant sounds), meanwhile horns are used as chromatic instruments both in accompaniment as full chords (isolated or in conjunction with other instruments) and in melodic passages. The solution of the dissonant chord of horns into a consonant chord of strings is found at the end of the *Morning Mood* from *Peer Gynt*. Stopped horns are almost always used as a peculiar colour; their sound often becomes a conjunction between different episodes of the piece (e. g. *Ingrid's Lament* from *Peer Gynt*, the *Symphonic Dances* No 2 and 4). Mysterious sound of the stopped horns here creates impression of suspense and haunted expectation of the further musical action<sup>15</sup>.

Comparing with horns, trumpets are used more reservedly: the role of trumpets is mostly limited to the background, except for several cases when they perform important melodic material (e. g. the middle section of the *Symphonic Dance* No. 1). Such economy for the "heavy brass" was most likely implanted during Grieg's studies in Leipzig. Trumpets more often than horns are treated in an emphatically natural style: such parts are restricted with unisons, fifths, octaves and sometimes other intervals of the natural scale. Even in *tutti* chords trumpets are often treated as natural instruments while trombones and horns compound full harmony (the way in which the first *tutti* chord of the Piano Concerto is compounded). The episodes of trumpets fanfares and signals of brilliant, heroic, festive character are more peculiar to Grieg's early period. Such episodes are typical of the incidental music written in collaboration with Bjørnson. The most conspicuous example of such kind of music is the popular Homage March from *Sigurd Jorsalfar*.

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<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to compare the usage of horns in Grieg's scores with the scores by his contemporary composers. For example, Brahms also wrote parts of the horns in a manner of natural instruments, but he usually burdened them during the whole movement of the work and used for doubling one or another voice or layer of the texture. Often these parts are distributed disconnectedly, their voice-leading is sometimes weird, disorderly chromatic parts are followed by "empty" intervals in a natural style. Meanwhile the role of horns in Grieg's scores is clearly defined in most cases.



Grieg used horns and trumpets in several transposing keys, mostly in F and in E; trumpets are sometimes in C. Although short trumpets (in B, A, C) were already common at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many composers still used to write other kinds of transposing keys as well, so the shifts of the transpositions in Grieg's works should be treated as rather typical of that period.

Trombones with tuba were included into the scores of the incidental works (*Olaf Trygvason*, some episodes of *Sigurd Jorsalfar* and *Peer Gynt*), *Landsighting*, Symphony in C minor (movements 3 and 4), Overture *In Autumn*; melodrama *Bergliot*; *Symphonic Dances* Nos 1, 3 and 4; two movements of *Lyric Suite* and accompaniment to the song *Henrik Wergeland*. Trombones without tuba are used in Piano Concerto. Trombones sometimes are treated in "German" manner – as three different tessitura (alto, tenor, bass) instruments, sometimes they are considered as homogenous group in close harmony, sometimes they perform melodic elements in unison or octaves. Trombones are common in forte passages; however the melodious subsidiary theme in the 1<sup>st</sup> movement of the Piano Concerto is scored for the cellos *piano* accompanied by trombones in full four-part harmony (the horn used as a first voice). It is a pity that this means of expression can be found too seldom in Grieg's scores (a two-bar episode from *The Old Norwegian Melody with Variations*, rehearsal mark 19 is another rare example). The treatment of tuba does not overstep the conventional role of bass.

Thus it can be concluded that the instrumentations of Grieg's orchestra are mostly standard. They do not differ from the orchestras used by most of his predecessors and contemporaries and little varied during his creative life. Non-standard instrumentations can be found mostly in Grieg's incidental music and in orchestrated accompaniments to the songs; such instrumentations were used when the artistic images of the compositions called for them. Large orchestras of Wagner and Richard Strauss type remained beyond the scope of Grieg's interests. Concerning the importance of the orchestral sections in Grieg's scores an obvious hierarchy of the orchestral groups can be observed. It is expedient to imagine a pyramid which base level is filled with the string section, the second level with the woodwinds section, and the top with the brass section.

### **Establishing the periods of Grieg's orchestral style**

The research of changes in Grieg's orchestration style is aggravated by the fact that many of Grieg's orchestral compositions were at least once revised, so it is problematic to trace which elements of the orchestration in these creations remained from the earlier periods and which were embedded

later (see Table 1). Thus it is difficult to relate the style of one or another work only with the year in which it was created. But in spite of these difficulties it appeared possible to distinguish separate periods of Grieg's creative life according to the traits peculiar to his orchestration style.

In order to set the boundaries of Grieg's orchestration periods, two aspects should be considered: a) the chronological order of the compositions, and b) the treatment of the orchestral resources. In Table 2 both aspects are presented. The timeline (horizontal aspect) shows the chronological sequence of the creations. Empty columns of the table indicate the year or several years interval during which no compositions for orchestra (or with orchestra) were created. All compositions are grouped into categories according to their genres and instrumentation type (vertical aspect). *Sigurd Jorsalfar* suite, Op. 56 (1892) and two *Peer Gynt* suites Op. 46 (1888) and Op. 55 (1892) are not included in the table: the changes of their orchestration are not significant enough to consider them as separate orchestral works grown away from their incidental music origin.

The timeline reveals that Grieg composed his works for orchestra (or with orchestra) consistently during all his life. Orchestral creations appeared even during his last years when the deteriorating health did not allow the composer to be as prolific as he was earlier. The attraction of the orchestral expression apparently inspired Grieg to spend his precious productive time in creating orchestral scores. After the first purely symphonic works for the standard concert symphony orchestra Grieg made a significant break. A shift to dramatic, heroic and pictorial type of music determined the different approach to orchestra in the incidental music written in collaboration with Bjørnson and Ibsen. Two cantatas Opp. 20 (1871) and 31 (final orchestration in 1881), also later orchestrated melodrama *Bergliot*, Op. 42 (1885) and scenes from *Olav Trygvason*, Op. 50 (1888) have much in common with Grieg's incidental music and should be largely attributed to the same artistic idiom. *The Mountain Thrall*, Op. 32 (1878) was a predecessor of the series of works for string orchestra – a specific and significant part of Grieg's oeuvre. These compositions were created in time when Grieg felt himself more confident in writing for strings than earlier. In the last period of his life Grieg returned to the works for the full symphony orchestra (*Symphonic Dances*, final orchestral version of *Old Norwegian Melody with Variations*), however their orchestration is different from the orchestration of the symphonic music created in earlier periods.

Four periods of Grieg's orchestral style were distinguished and presented in Table 2. The boundaries of these periods are approximate and based on their predominant orchestration features.



## General characteristics of Grieg's orchestration style periods

**Early symphonic period, 1864–1870.** This period is the initial stage of Grieg's orchestral style development. It includes Symphony in C minor, overture *In Autumn* (its initial orchestration did not remain), and Piano Concerto in A minor. Grieg began writing large orchestral compositions from the very beginning of his creative biography in spite of the lack of sufficient orchestration skills. Grieg regretted many times that he had acquired very little orchestration knowledge in Leipzig conservatoire<sup>16</sup>. Early orchestral compositions carry an obvious imprint of the orchestration style usually related to Leipzig conservatoire school stretching from Beethoven, developed by Mendelssohn, and partly by Schumann. This tradition also influenced early Romantic style (sometimes referred to as the Nordic style)<sup>17</sup> of the Danish composers Johan Peter Emilius Hartmann and Niels Wilhelm Gade. The latter in turn had an impact on early Grieg. Apart from the positive qualities of this school (such as praiseworthy moderation of instruments usage), its certain imperfections can be indicated: an intense doubling of instrumental parts make the overall sound dense but often monochromatic, lacking distinct contrasts and diversity of colours. The usage of the woodwinds was temperate, horns and trumpets were often employed in a manner of the natural instruments even in time when chromatic brass instruments had already been invented. Grieg also treated orchestral resources fairly conventionally during the first period; meanwhile his individuality in the sphere of orchestration did not reveal itself in a full strength.

Symphony in C minor, EG 119 (1864) was Grieg's first serious attempt to create a significant symphonic work. After the first performance Grieg was satisfied with his symphony, but later he forbade its performing ever after<sup>18</sup>. Overture *In Autumn*, Op. 11 (1866) was sternly criticised by Gade, and as a result the first version of its orchestration did not survive. In the same year Grieg arranged the piece for piano four hands. The overture was once more orchestrated in 1887 therefore now existing orchestral version does not belong to the early period. Grieg was fond of this composition and included it into his concert programs many times; but certain imperfections of the work (real or sometimes maybe just assumed) made up an opinion that neither version for piano four hands nor the later version for orchestra

<sup>16</sup> Benestad; Halverson, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 371; also: Grieg, Edvard, *My First Success*, in: *Edvard Grieg. Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, edited by Benestad, Finn; Halverson, William H., Peer Gynt Press, Columbus, 2001, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> See: Skyllstad, Kjell, *Nordic Symphony. Grieg at the Crossroads*, in: *Muzikološki zbornik/ Musicological Annual*, 39, No. 1-2, 2003, 213-219.

<sup>18</sup> Concerning the reasons of such act and the subsequent history of the Symphony performances see: Benestad; Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, pp. 54-57.

is "convincingly written"<sup>19</sup>. Thus *In Autumn* did not become a significant and well-timed landmark in the development of Grieg's orchestration.

The place of the Piano Concerto, Op. 16 (1868) among Grieg's orchestral works is ambiguous because of the score revisions. Thus, although Concerto is one of the earliest Grieg's creations for orchestra, its final version should be regarded as a result of the multiplex changes and improvements which were performed from time to time until the end of the composer's life<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand Grieg did not change the score to the extent which would allow attributing the overall orchestration style of the Concerto to one of the later periods.

In this context, the comparison of the piano concertos written by Schumann and Grieg appears indicatory. Schumann's Piano Concerto, Op. 54 (1845) is considered as a direct predecessor of Grieg's Concerto. Both compositions have many common features: the key of A minor, an immediate entrance of the soloist after a short *tutti* chord of the orchestra, the character of the themes, incessant passing (*attaca*) from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement, etc. The comparing of two orchestrations confirms this similarity: the strings section embodies the most of the music material (however the main theme is scored only for the woodwinds section); woodwinds are employed to perform melodic lines, while trumpets (in Grieg's work also trombones) are used mostly in *tutti forte*. The core of early Schumann-influenced orchestration remained in the final version of Grieg's concert even after afore-mentioned numerous improvements. Yet Grieg's orchestra is more colourful and diverse in comparison with Schumann's orchestra. Although in Grieg's Concerto woodwinds play mostly in octaves and in mixed groups, some episodes of woodwinds solo modestly predict the future treatment of these instruments in Grieg's later works.

It appears that Grieg's orchestral compositions of the first orchestration period are essentially unknown for the audience in their initial form: the Symphony, the only one creation which retained the original orchestration, is performed rather seldom (Grieg's ban on its performing became disregarded in the course of time), the initial orchestration of *In Autumn* did not survive, whereas the Concerto is performed in a version which has been modified due to the numerous amendments, even though it retained the core features of the Grieg's early style.

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<sup>19</sup> Benestad; Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> One of the early versions was influenced by Franz Liszt and contained many stylistic features of Liszt's orchestration. For instance, the subsidiary theme of the first movement which we know as played by cellos was assigned for trumpet (Benestad; Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 116). Later Grieg understood that such way of orchestration did not fit for the nature of his music.

**Incidental music period, 1871–1877.** During the short but very important incidental music period Grieg created music for dramas, two cantatas, melodrama, and scenes for the unfinished opera. The significance of this period was reinforced by its repercussions in later years when some of these works were orchestrated or re-orchestrated.

All Grieg's orchestral works of this period were created in collaboration with the dramatists Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Henrik Ibsen. The modest style of the earlier period which was shaped in Leipzig conservatoire and under the influence of Niels Gade was replaced with the fresh means of expression inspired by the uplifted patriotic Bjørnson's spirit and pictorial, sometimes even weird images of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. Most likely Grieg's orchestral style of this period was influenced by the acquaintance with the wider range of the orchestral scores by various composers. Music composed by Johan Svendsen impressed Grieg especially strongly. Most of the significant orchestral works by Svendsen had been created before the end of Grieg's incidental music period (in particular his Symphony No. 1 was composed in 1867, Symphony No. 2 in 1874). In the essay *Johan Svendsen's Concert* (1867) Grieg wrote: "His [Svendsen's – R.U.] orchestral writing invites comparison with that of Scandinavia's most eminent master of orchestration, Niels W. Gade, and it is interesting to observe how, with respect to the handling of the instruments, Svendsen's principles go in the very opposite direction. Gade tries so far as possible to combine the various timbres so they blend into one big whole. Svendsen, on the other hand, deliberately separates the various groups or instruments, which mutually echo one another. The result is the generally mellow tone colours of Gade's music and the sharp contrasts in Svendsen's. That Svendsen uses a great variety of resources results, of course, from the fact that he belongs to a newer age"<sup>21</sup>. Grieg here diplomatically avoided direct criticism of his tutor's orchestration: while looking at Gade's scores one can see that the predominant doubling of instruments should inevitably lead to monotony of the sound. Meanwhile bright colours and vivid contrasts of Svendsen's music appeared as the attributes of more advanced orchestration style.

Heroic or festive brass fanfares which were characteristic for Grieg's earlier orchestration period can be heard in his incidental music as well. For instance, the trumpet or horn signal which consists of a long note and subsequent fast triplet upbeat ( $\frac{4}{4}$  h.( e j j q | h ) can be found in the Symphony, Concerto, *Sigurd Jorsalfar* and *Olav Trygvason, Bergliot*. Such signals almost totally

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<sup>21</sup> Grieg, Edvard, *Johan Svendsen's Concert*, in: *Edvard Grieg. Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, edited by Benestad, Finn; Halverson, William H., Peer Gynt Press, Columbus, 2001, p. 282.

disappeared from Grieg's works of the later periods. On the other hand some typical features of Grieg's future orchestration emerged during the incidental music period: melodious passages of cellos, occasionally injected sounds of stopped horns, etc. Colourful dialogs of woodwind instruments which were modestly displayed already in the first period can be also seen in the second period. Yet in general woodwinds are still more often exploited as a group.

Dramatic and epic colouring is peculiar already to the first composition of this period (it is also the first common work with Bjørnson) *At the Southern Convent*, Op. 20 (1871). The most prominent result of the collaboration with Bjørnson was music for drama *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, Op. 22 (1872)<sup>22</sup>. Heroic and epic character of this music is emphasized with the help of quite extensively employed brass instruments, whereas in Grieg's earlier and even later scores the role of brass is more temperate. Vocal parts are sometimes doubled with orchestral instruments. In some cases such doublings are excessive, as, for instance, in *King's Song* where voice is doubled by octave of cellos and horn. Instrumental doubling of solo vocal parts almost disappeared in Grieg's later scores. The scenes from the unfinished opera *Olav Trygvason* (1873), also based on text by Bjørnson, was the last composition of this epic and heroic layer of Grieg's orchestration. Although these scenes were orchestrated much later (in 1888), their style is grounded on the similar dramatic and epic idiom.

Conspicuous changes in Grieg's orchestral style occurred in his music for Ibsen's drama *Peer Gynt*, Op. 23 (1875). The character of *Peer Gynt* text significantly differs from the heroic texts of dramas and epic poems by Bjørnson, consequently the style of the music for this drama had to be different from the style of the previous compositions by Grieg (*At the Southern Convent*, *Land Sighting*, *Sigurd Jorsalfar*). Complicated psychology of the *Peer Gynt* characters, frequent changes of different places and circumstances, fantastic episodes determined the tone of Grieg's music and the way of its orchestration. Specific theatrical effects which are inseparable from the action on the stage are numerous. Most often such style is peculiar to the movements which contain vocal parts. In his letter to Henry T. Finck (July 30, 1905) Grieg states that the character of music to *Peer Gynt* is emphatically theatrical and should be conceived in the context of action on the stage: "If you had an opportunity to attend one of these representations [theatre performances – R. U.] you would discover that it requires the stage performance to clearly bring out the musical intentions"<sup>23</sup>. Bjarte Engeset wrote that "[...] in the music for Peer

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<sup>22</sup> In later version of *Sigurd* Grieg supplemented the score with three extra movements, however they (except the 1<sup>st</sup> Interlude) were based on the previous musical material and only several episodes were re-orchestrated.

<sup>23</sup> Benestad; Halverson, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 244.

Gynt Grieg tended towards a quite bizarre, parodic and extreme style, described by himself as “non-music”. He thought of this as real theatre music needing to be connected to the text and the acting, asking performers to have a lot of courage in the characterizations. Grieg’s response to Ibsen’s poignant text is not at all only poetic. It’s creative, inventive and sometimes shocking”<sup>24</sup>.

The orchestration of *Peer Gynt* was amended several times during the subsequent years. Grieg even added new episodes in later productions of the play. For instance, the music for the premier in Copenhagen (1886) included the *Norwegian Dances* Op. 35 orchestrated by Robert Henriques.

It should be noted that two later composed suites of music to *Peer Gynt* contain less specific, not emphatically theatrical episodes. However, these works could be attributed to purely symphonic sphere only conditionally and reservedly: their artistic images and strong programmatic character is associated with Ibsen’s play and keep these suites close to their incidental parentage. “In the original version this music was carefully linked to the drama on the stage. When this music is removed from the theatrical setting and performed in the concert hall, however—as in the *Peer Gynt* suites—it obviously retains a programmatic flavour that is sometimes very strong”<sup>25</sup>.

The pictorial imagery of the incidental music determined the specific means of the orchestration. Grieg inventively handled these means thus creating an atmosphere which likely changed the concept of the plays in minds of the spectators forever. On the other hand his incidental music did not have direct follows-up. A succeeding development of Grieg’s orchestral music revealed that *Peer Gynt* crested a short but very prominent period; yet it did not become a direct source of Grieg’s subsequent orchestral style. Only the orchestration of *Bergliot* in 1885 and *Olav Trygvason* scenes in 1888 might be conditionally considered as complements to this style branch.

During a short gap from 1876 to 1877 Grieg produced no orchestral output except some amendments to *Peer Gynt* for the premier in Copenhagen (1876), so the year 1877 should be considered as the approximate end of his incidental music period.

**String orchestra period, 1878–1895.** The new period begins with the cantata *The Mountain Thrall* (1878) and ends with *Two Nordic Melodies* (1895). Works for the string orchestra dominate in this period; however the sub-title “Period of revision of the earlier works” could be added: Grieg orchestrated and revised some of his earlier created symphonic and incidental music pieces during this period. *Peer Gynt* and *Sigurd Jorsalfar* suites were created in the same period.

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<sup>24</sup> Engeset, Bjarte, *Edvard Grieg’s Orchestral Style*, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Benestad; Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 399.



The inception of this period goes back to 1877 when Grieg began to compose his String quartet in G minor Op. 27 which was completed in 1878. This composition, although not orchestral, is closely connected with the forthcoming string orchestra period. Grieg's interest in string instruments and desire to use them in the best possible way was reflected in composer's correspondence with German violinist Robert Heckmann. In his letters Grieg asked Heckmann for advice in many aspects of string technique<sup>26</sup>. The composing of the quartet presumably increased Grieg's self-confidence in handling of string instruments and allowed to achieve an idiomatic way of writing for them. This in turn induced him to create compositions for the larger string ensemble.

Some of Grieg's compositions for the string orchestra are the arrangements of his own piano pieces or songs. Grieg obviously was fond of merging them together into two-part cycles, thus we know them "in pairs": *Two Elegiac Melodies*, Op. 34 (1880); *Two Melodies* for String Orchestra, Op. 53 (1890); *Two Nordic Melodies*, Op. 63 (1895); *Two Lyric Pieces* from Op. 68 (1899). Apart from these four mini-cycles, *The Mountain Thrall*, Op. 32 (small cantata for strings, baritone solo and two horns, 1878) and two out of *Six Songs with Orchestra*, EG 177 (1895) should be mentioned. The largest scale composition for the string orchestra, the suite *From Holberg's Time (Holberg Suite)*, appeared almost in the middle of this period. It was composed for piano in 1884 and orchestrated instantly after in 1885. String orchestra episodes from *Peer Gynt (Anitra's Dance and The Death of Åse)* also could be conditionally regarded as early manifestations of string orchestra period works however the programmatic nature and connection with the stage action make their style different from the general string orchestra period music style.

String orchestra (and the string section of the symphony orchestra) was Grieg's favourite tool of orchestral expression. It is likely that Grieg regarded string orchestra as a cardinally transformed piano with an extended techniques: not constricted with two hands of a pianist and able to produce continuous and melodious sound. His skill in employing string orchestra grew continuously year after year, thus the progress of Grieg's mastery in writing for strings during his creative biography is conspicuous.

As time passed, Grieg acquired deep knowledge of strings technique and was careful in all details of its application. While preparing for his concert in Paris in 1903, the composer knew that he would have only one rehearsal with orchestra, therefore he wrote to French conductor Édouard Colonne: "I would

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<sup>26</sup> See: Benestad; Halverson, *Edvard Grieg*, pp. 369-378; also: Kortsen, Bjarne, *Grieg's String Quartet and Robert Heckman*, pp. 21-28.

be very grateful if you would arrange to have my bowings marked in the orchestral parts and used in the preliminary rehearsals”<sup>27</sup>. The variety and expressive usage of strings articulation in Grieg’s later compositions leaves no doubt that desperate, deep-drawn complaint “Just think if I had been able to play the violin *a little!!!*”<sup>28</sup>, which was poured out in 1878 letter for Robert Heckman eventually lost its relevance.

Grieg’s compositions are intended for the large mass of strings. According to Bjarte Engeset, “His string works were conceived for a large group of musicians, around 60, with the special fullness, fusion, power and depth of sound this brings”<sup>29</sup>. The preference of a large size orchestra is reflected in Grieg’s correspondence with the director of the Warsaw Philharmonic, Alexander Rajchmann, concerning *Two Elegiac Melodies*: “their discussion turned to the makeup of the string orchestra for the 22 April concert, which according to Rajchmann included fourteen violins I, ten violins II, eight violas, seven cellos, and seven contrabasses. Evidently, Grieg preferred a different distribution, for in his response on 20 March he added two each additional violin I, violin II, and viola, as well as one each additional cello and bass”<sup>30</sup>. Obviously, Grieg treated the string orchestra alike a string group of a large symphony orchestra. The 20<sup>th</sup> century “chamber” orchestra would not be the right medium to perform Grieg’s compositions for strings.

The multiple dividing of parts is an especially peculiar trait of Grieg’s orchestration for strings. In most of his works (especially of the later period) the composer created many-storeyed *divisi* of voices, often doubled in octaves and filled musical vertical with the compound, lush, dense texture. The distribution of the music material is very diverse: from numerous intense *tutti* to fine and transparent episodes where only violins are divided into several parts (e.g. rehearsal mark B in *The Last Spring* from *Two Elegiac Melodies*). In many of his works Grieg used four separate staves for violins – two for the 1<sup>st</sup> and two for the 2<sup>nd</sup> part. If any part becomes unison, the composer often does not change over to the notation in one staff. It means that *divisi* there is a rule rather than a temporary deviation from the standard distribution of parts. Grieg did not divide strings in such a refined way as for instance Wagner did in his Prelude to *Lohengrin*. His aim was to reach an intense (or, on the contrary, transparent) many-voiced multi-layer of homogenous, moderately polyphonic and essentially mono-timbre texture.

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<sup>27</sup> Benestad; Halverson, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 202.

<sup>28</sup> Benestad; Halverson, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 371.

<sup>29</sup> Engeset, *Edvard Grieg’s Orchestral Style*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted from: Kijas, Anna E., ‘A Suitable Soloist for My Piano Concerto’: Teresa Carreño as a Promoter of Edvard Grieg’s Music, in: *Notes*, 70, No. 1, 2013, p. 57.

Other artistic devices are numerous. *Sul ponticello* eight-bar episode in the score of *The Last Spring* highly fits to convey the Nordic mood and “gives association of cool, spring light, more than the usual diabolic and dramatic associations”<sup>31</sup>. Duet of solo cellos in Sarabande is one the most expressive episodes of *Holberg Suite*. In the 4<sup>th</sup> movement (Air) of the same suite cellos perform a dramatic theme *forte* while other instruments accompany *pianissimo* thus reaching an extreme contrast between the layers of the texture. On the other hand *tremolo*, which is frequently used in dramatic and monumental symphonic episodes, is quite rare in the pure string music pieces (short passages in accompanying parts of *The Mountain Thrall* and *Norwegian* from *Two Melodies*).

The later repercussions of the string orchestra period are the orchestration of *Two Lyric Pieces* from Op. 68 (1899) and the *Shepherd's Boy*, the first movement of the *Lyric Suite*.

**Late symphonic period, 1896–1907**<sup>32</sup>. During the last period of his life Grieg wrote just few orchestral works of a large scale. One of the reasons of such decrease of productivity undoubtedly was his weakening health. Percy Grainger remembered that “Later in life his invalidism prevented him from composing in large forms. “One cannot write symphonies and operas if one is limited to four hours of work a day”, he remarked sadly”<sup>33</sup>. In one of his last letters to Frants Beyer Grieg openly spoke about his “lack of productivity in recent years, which is a consequence of my physical misery”<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless namely in his late period Grieg finally firmed up his attitude towards the usage of the orchestral resources and returned to the music for the full concert symphony orchestra. In 1895 he began to compose a piano four hands version of his most important symphonic creation – the *Symphonic Dances*, Op. 64 (1898). Their orchestration was completed in 1898. Also in 1895 the composer's subtle genius revealed itself in finely scored *Six Songs with Orchestra*, EG 177 (1895), where different types of orchestras (string orchestra, full symphony orchestra, and intermediate non-standard

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<sup>31</sup> Engeset, *Edvard Grieg's Orchestral Style*, p. 26. In the orchestrated accompaniment to the song (*Six Songs for Orchestra*, 1894–1895) Grieg did not indicate *sul ponticello* in this episode. Apparently the vocal part was responsible for the reflection of all nuances of the melody and lyrics.

<sup>32</sup> The word *Late* here does not emphasize composer's older age but should be understood as the opposite of the *Earlier* symphonic period. In both cases the word *Symphonic* does not imply the genre of symphony (which Grieg did not write in his *Late* period) but an inclination of composing orchestral music for the full symphony orchestra rather than for string orchestra or theatre stage.

<sup>33</sup> Grainger, Percy, *Edvard Grieg: A Tribute*, in: *The Musical Times*, 98, No. 1375, 1957, p. 482.

<sup>34</sup> Benestad and Halverson, *Edvard Grieg*, p. 107.

instrumentations) were used. It should be noted that except the *Symphonic Dances* all creations orchestrated in this period had been composed in earlier years. Thus the year 1895 was a transitional year between the previous period and the last orchestration period during which the new symphonic creations were conceived and embodied.

The *Symphonic Dances* is a four movement composition in which Grieg's orchestral style reached its climax. The orchestral resources in this work are exploited in a very colourful and flexible way. All orchestral *tutti* are powerful and bright. Orchestral sections and individual instruments are used according to the principles which Grieg elaborated during his creative biography. The interchanging of the woodwind instruments playing melody create colourful dialogs or polylogues of different instruments-characters which supplement each other and simultaneously create subtle contrasts. This individuality and versatility of pure timbres makes Grieg's orchestration different from the style of his predecessors and contemporaries, for instance Brahms, who used woodwind instruments more often in pairs moving in parallel octaves, thirds or sixths. The outer sections (A) of the ternary A-B-A form of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Dance* accumulate all the lyricism of oboe solos which depict nature idyll in many of Grieg's earlier works. In the middle section of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Dance* polyphonically combined melodies are embodied in subtle, soft but contrasting colours.

The importance of brass instruments in the *Symphonic Dances* is increased; however the manner of their usage remains quite temperate: horns and especially trumpets in many episodes are still treated as natural instruments performing octaves and fifths. On the other hand the impressive mix of two unison trumpets, violins and piccolo flute in the stormy middle section of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement, impressive ascending triads of brass in the middle section of the 4<sup>th</sup> movement and some other episodes seem fresh, vivid, and pictorial. In the 4<sup>th</sup> movement trombones powerfully expose melody in the climatic episode. String section is treated especially diversely as a result of Grieg's long experience of writing for the string orchestra. In general, the orchestration of the *Symphonic Dances* shows full maturity of the composer's style in spite of some remained old-fashioned elements<sup>35</sup>.

In 1905 Grieg completed orchestral versions of his earlier piano works: *Old Norwegian melody with Variations*, Op. 51 and *Lyric Suite* (four pieces from Op. 54, 1891). The orchestral style of the *Old Norwegian melody* is close to the *Symphonic Dances* and contains interesting and successful passages; however this work remains in the shade of other creations by Grieg for many years.

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<sup>35</sup> The peculiarities of the *Symphonic Dances* are analysed in more detail by the author of the current article in his publication: Urniežius, Rytis, *Edvard Grieg's Symphonic Dances: The Symphonism of the 'Drawing and Colour'*, in: *Hudební Věda*, 54 / 3, 2017, pp. 289-318.

Four out of six movements of the *Lyric Suite* were orchestrated by Anton Seidl (1850–1898) in 1895. In 1904–1905 Grieg revised the score significantly changing Seidl's conception<sup>36</sup>. The colourful orchestration of the *Suite* reflects its programmatic content. The *Shepherd's Boy* (which Grieg included into the suite instead of initially chosen *The Bell Ringing*) was scored for strings and harp directly from the piano original without any influence of Seidl's scoring. Generally, the *Lyric Suite* could be regarded as a concentration of the progressive features of Grieg's orchestration style.

### Generalisation

The general survey of Grieg's orchestration shows that he began with the style based on firmly established traditions and later deviated towards more colourful and refined way of scoring which suited best for the specific musical images of his creations. The means of orchestration used by Grieg do not include any substantially original, newly-established inventions in comparison with some of orchestral innovators. Yet numerous examples of fine orchestration in the works created by Grieg's predecessors and contemporaries broadened his understanding of this art and induced to elaborate his own orchestration style avoiding any extremities. Each composition by Grieg is provided with the necessary constitution of the orchestra according to its artistic conception. It can be stated that certain originality can be found in seemingly unoriginal orchestration of Grieg's music. This originality lies in properly chosen and proportionally distributed roles of the orchestral sections; each of the sections occupies its predestined place in the "pyramid" of hierarchy of functions and fully corresponds to the specificity of Grieg's music. This "pyramid" consists of the string section as almost universal basis of the orchestral expression, the woodwinds section as an implementer of the colourful variety, and moderately exploited brass.

Relying on the analysis carried out in this article, it was possible to discern four periods of Grieg's orchestration style development: 1) the early symphonic period, 1864–1870; 2) the incidental music period, 1871–1877; 3) the string orchestra period (1878–1895); and 4) the late symphonic period, 1896–1907. This periodization is of course approximate and cannot encompass the whole variety of Grieg's orchestral style. Nevertheless it can be treated as a generalisation of this important side of composer's creative legacy.

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<sup>36</sup> Engeset, *Edvard Grieg's Orchestral Style*, p. 29-35.

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