

Grieg's "Norwegian Bridal Procession"

A Master Lesson by PERCY GRAINGER

Analyzed and Edited for Study by the Distinguished Australian Composer-Pianist

[November 1920]

Musically speaking, the last half century has been remarkable for the compelling influence exerted by peasant music and primitive music upon great composers in many countries—upon such leaders of musical thought as Grieg, Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Brahms, Bartók, Dvořák, Sibelius, Julius Roentgen [1855-1932], Delius, Vaughan Williams, Charles Stanford [1852-1924], Howard Brockway [1870-1951], John Alden Carpenter [1876-1951], Debussy, Ravel, Albéniz, Granados, and many others.

To such an extent have most recent great composers fed upon peasant and popular music and the suggestions and atmosphere emanating therefrom that it is hardly too much to assert that the presence of vital musical geniuses has been increasingly noticeable in countries still possessing a well-preserved peasant culture and that, on the other hand, musical creativity and originality (personal as well as racial) has tended to languish in lands where peasant music is no longer a living art. Nor is this condition of things so surprising when we consider that peasant music is a storehouse of the rural creative life, not of one century but of several, if not innumerable, centuries.

In considering the peasant and primitive music of America and its results we should not forget those two superlatively fine volumes for voice and piano by Howard Brockway: *Lonesome Tunes* and *Kentucky Mountain Tunes*, which should be consulted by everyone interested either in modern music or in archaic song.

Grieg is one of the most striking examples of a great modern creative soul drinking draughts of inspiration at the ancient well of primitive music. Yet a portion only of the strange vitality and weird originality of his musical speech may be ascribed to this source, for the rare flavor of his muse is due primarily to the fact that he combines in great fullness two sides of his art rarely possessed equally by one and the same individual; strong national and local characteristics on the one hand and an unusually highly-developed degree of cosmopolitan musical culture on the other. In this respect he has much in common with Chopin. Both present distinctly national and local characteristics in their work, but they present these characteristics with a creative and technical resourcefulness born of wide experience of diverse schools of composition of various lands and times.

The presentation of national and racial traits alone, interesting though they usually are, would seldom raise the composer's output above being a curiosity. It is the infusion of deep personality and broad erudition into the task of voicing national and racial traits that entitles men such as Grieg, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Delius and Albéniz to the title of first-class geniuses.

It is the greatest possible mistake to regard Grieg as a "simple" composer in any sense. To the uninitiated, perhaps some of his work may sound simple enough; but to the ears of cultured musicians his music abounds with a unique richness of subtle intricacies. In particular his harmonies are strangely complex, and in this respect stand closer to those of Bach and Wagner than do most modern composers.

In the realm of harmony Grieg was a daring innovator (whose most iconoclastic flights in this direction can most profitably be studied in his amazing arrangements for piano of Norwegian folksongs and dances,

Opus 66 and Opus 72), so much so that it may safely be said that the later moderns of different countries, such as Debussy, MacDowell, Cyril Scott, Delius, John Alden Carpenter, Howard Brockway, Puccini, Albéniz, etc., owe more, harmonically, to the pregnant suggestions of Wagner's and Grieg's harmonic innovations than they do to the influence of any other two composers.

In mm. 56 and 57 of the composition before us we find a rare gem of Grieg's harmonic originality. The eerie "Northern" tang of this chordal shift does not grow stale with time, but is as fresh and as refreshing today as when it first was penned.

Viewing the composition as a whole, however, we must admit that it is the local Norwegian note struck in the *Bridal Procession*, rather than cosmopolitan complexities of workmanship, that constitute its chief characteristics and appeal. Nevertheless, there is here, as always when analyzing Grieg's music, the danger of attributing too much to national traits and too little to the originality and fertility of the composer's purely personal inventive power.

The more we examine Norwegian folk-music the more are we likely to become convinced that a great many of the most salient characteristics of Grieg's music (thoughtlessly dubbed "Norwegian" or "national" by those ignorant of the folksongs of his native land) are, in reality, Griegian and personal and not of racial or popular origin at all.

This point has been ably and repeatedly made by Henry T. Finck [1854-1926], whose book, *Grieg and His Music* [1909], was considered the finest of all the Grieg biographies (in any language) by Grieg himself.

In this connection it is, perhaps, worth remarking that many of the rhythms and melodic lines of the *Bridal Procession* bear quite as close a resemblance to certain Scotch Strathspeys (such as *Tullochgorum*, for instance) as they do to Norwegian dance tunes. Throughout Grieg's music may be found many striking likenesses to certain characteristics of Scottish song, which is the more interesting when we recall that Grieg's parental great-grandfather, Alexander Grieg, was a Scotchman who migrated from Scotland to Norway after the battle of Colloden (1746).

Grieg composed the *Norwegian Bridal Procession* at the age of twenty-six, at an unusually happy period of his life, two years after his marriage to Nina Hagerup, his cousin, and shortly after the birth of their only child, a daughter, whose death, soon to ensue, cast a shadow over the rest of their lives. That Grieg at this juncture was fired with the wish to voice in cultured musical forms the local characteristics of Norway, and of the Norwegian peasants in particular, is borne out in the following excerpt of a letter recently written to me by Madame Nina Grieg, the widow of the composer, and here translated from the Norwegian of the original:

" 'The Bridal Procession Passes By' was written in 1889 at 'Landaas,' Grieg's childhood home near Bergen (Norway). Landaas was a lovely property, close under 'Ulrikken,' one of Bergen's seven mountains. It had belonged to Governor (Stiftamtmand) Hagerup, who was Grieg's grandfather as well as mine, and he had presented it to Grieg's mother. She had

prepared in the 'stabor' (rural storehouse) a musical workroom with a piano in it for her beloved son, and here it was that he composed, in addition to the 'Bridal Procession,' songs such as 'The First Meeting,' 'Good Morning,' 'Woodland Wandering' and many others. He worked there with such joy and freshness when we first arrived, but later was stricken with the sorrow of the death of our little daughter, and, as far as I remember, never composed there again.

Grieg was, as you know, Norwegian through and through, and at that period of his life was highly enthusiastic about the Norwegian peasants and all that pertained to them. Later on this enthusiasm lessened, yet the strong influence of his native land and its local color never left him—fortunately."

Though Grieg, later in life, experienced the disillusionment with regard to the Norwegian peasants alluded to in the above letter, yet as a musician he ever remained their loyal interpreter, as is evident in the piano volumes, Opus 66 and Opus 72, already alluded to, no less than in his incomparable songs to poems written in the peasant tongue by the poets Vinje, Arne Garborg and others, such as *On the Journey Home*, *The Wounded Heart* and the exquisite cycle, *The Mountain Maid* ("Haugtussa").

The title *Norwegian Bridal Procession Passes By* was frequently used by Grieg for this piece, and it, more clearly than the more familiar title *Norwegian Bridal Procession*, reveals the exact nature of the effect to be striven for in rendering it; the impression of a peasant bridal march, played at the head of a bridal procession on its way to church for the wedding ceremony, first heard faintly from afar (mm. 1–24), then gradually drawing nearer (mm. 25–67), passing the listener close by in a turmoil of clamor and color (mm. 68–101), and finally gradually becoming distant once more until at last its strains are well nigh inaudible (mm. 102–129).

Throughout the composition the clanging of church bells is heard blended with the sounds of the bridal march music. This is particularly manifest in the section embracing mm. 80–93, while it is not improbable that the introduction (mm. 1–4) and the repetitions of this section throughout, were likewise intended by Grieg to portray a suggestion of distant church chimes.

Throughout the section beginning at m. 25 the pianist should strive to imitate, in the persistent rhythms of the left hand, the monotonous "sawing" of the peasant fiddler.

In order to convey the impression of the wedding party proceeding to the church to the strains of peasant march music, the pianist should play the piece in metronomically strict time throughout. Any momentary or more protracted alteration of speed in such a composition can only act as a blemish and as a frustration of the obvious intention of the composer. The work should be conceived and rendered as *march music* from first to last; as a solemn, sturdy, *processional* march, with the feet of the marching bridal party falling upon the quarter-notes, twice in every measure.

Most students will derive much benefit from practicing mainly with the metronome, oftenest at slow speed (say M. M. 108 to the eighth-notes) and sometimes, but less often, with the metronome at the full speed indicated in my edition.

Every effort should be made to make the impression of distance, gradual approach, closeness, gradual passing by, distance as vivid and sensational as possible and to this end the pianist should not scruple to employ an exaggerated degree of *pianissimo* at the opening and at the close of the composition, and should strive to work up to a clanging riotous *fortissimo* at the climax (mm. 68–101).

Pianists in general are too chary of utilizing the extremes of *pianissimo* of which the piano is capable. With practice, the very softest tones can

be controlled almost as easily as louder sounds, the more so if the student will avoid attacking *pp* and *ppp* notes too close to the keys. We should remember that the piano is more naturally adapted to the production of extremely soft sounds than most other instruments, as its very softest tones do not deteriorate in quality of tone or in pitch as equally soft tones are apt to do with most wind and string instruments. The only danger, in attempting to produce an extreme *pp* upon the piano, is that some of the notes may not sound at all. Students must not be afraid to "take a chance" in such cases, for an occasional silent note is preferable to the failure to attain an extreme *pianissimo*, particularly in a dynamically sensational composition such as the *Norwegian Bridal Procession*.

Hints for Study

The student's attention is especially called to two salient points of modern pianism: (1) the sustaining pedal, (2) non-stretch fingering.

The growing realization of the advantages to be derived from the liberal use of the sustaining (or "sostenuto" or "middle") pedal has, during recent years, developed, extended and perfected piano playing more than any other single factor; so much so that in the near future a pianist not availing himself of the advantages of this truly wonderful American invention will be as much out of date as the dodo—as much of an anachronism as is today a pianist making no use of the damper pedal.

Students, in buying a piano or selecting one for practice, should be careful to see that the instrument is equipped with sustaining pedal action throughout the entire length of the damper system (about 5 1/2 octaves, beginning with the lowest note of the instrument), and should make sure that the sustaining pedal functions correctly.

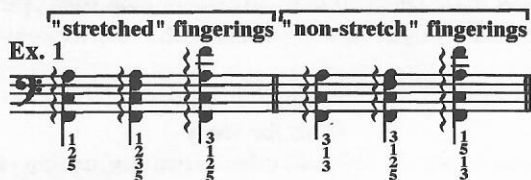
A properly functioning sustaining pedal will, as long as it is pressed down, clearly sustain any note or notes (within the aforesaid damper system), the keys of which were pressed down prior to the depressing of the sustaining pedal, and *will not* (as will the damper pedal) sustain any note or notes played *after* the depression of the sustaining pedal, provided the following three rules are faithfully carried out:

- (1) The note or notes to be sustained by the sustaining pedal must be pressed down *before* the sustaining pedal is depressed, otherwise the sustaining pedal will not take effect upon that note or notes.
- (2) The note or notes to be sustained by the sustaining pedal must be held down by the fingers until the sustaining pedal is *fully depressed*, otherwise the sustaining pedal will not take effect upon that note or notes.
- (3) The damper pedal must *always* be *fully raised* at the moment of pressing down the sustaining pedal, otherwise the sustaining pedal, as long as it is held down, will "sustain" the entire damper system and a complete blur will result, thus defeating the whole object of the sustaining pedal. Immediately the sustaining pedal is *fully depressed*, however, and at any time during its retention, the damper pedal may be freely used and delightful new effects produced by the cooperation of these two pedals.

The object of a lavish use of the sustaining pedal is the attainment of greater tonal clarity, and the result of this clarification is a strong influence in the direction of greater refinement and subtlety of performance, purging the student's playing of "banging" no less than of "blurring," if rightly understood and applied.

Enlightened pianists employ the sustaining pedal almost as extensively as they do the damper pedal, and I would strongly advise all pianists hitherto unfamiliar with its technic to acquire the "sustaining pedal habit" as soon as possible, to which end the indications of sustaining pedaling in this edition may serve as a modest beginning.

In order to attain reliability of performance we should avoid, as far as possible, all fingerings that demand big stretches of the hand. The more we indulge in stretched positions, the more numb and cramped the hand feels, the less conscious of its exact space-relation to the keys about to be played, and, consequently, the poorer our control and mastery of the passage in hand. Therefore the experienced pianist substitutes *frequent small groupings* or divisions of fingering for *less frequent larger groupings* or divisions of fingering, wherever feasible. For instance, extended chords, such as:



can be played with *greater reliability* with the fingerings marked "non-stretch" [during figurations that are linearized] than with the fingerings marked "stretched," once we have somewhat familiarized ourselves with the non-stretch system.

The student will find numerous instances of the non-stretch modern method of fingering if he will [study] my fingerings in the present edition, notably in the following measures: 41 (right hand), 63, 64, 79–80 (broken chord in left hand), 80 (right hand), 83–84 (broken chord in left hand), 84 (right hand), 94, 95, 98, 99, 111, 115.

Grainger Edition

Considered in Detail for Keyboard Practice

Measure 1. Play the two bass notes E, B, *before* taking the sustaining pedal with the left foot and be sure to hold these notes down with the fingers until the sustaining pedal has *really taken effect* upon them. Take care not to press down the damper pedal while pressing down the sustaining pedal.

In the following measures (2–24, inclusive) the bass notes E, B, on the first beat of each measure, should be played extra soft, being sustained as they are in the sustaining pedal, and therefore likely to "boom" on objectionably if inadvertently struck too loudly. The relative dynamic values obtaining in m. 1, and wherever this figure occurs are indicated:



Measure 2. See that the damper pedal is raised *together* with the striking of the eighth-note chord G \sharp , E in the right hand, so that the staccato nature of this chord is fully realized. Note that throughout the entire composition, wherever this rhythmic chordal figure occurs (mm. 1–2, 4–11, 13–14, 16–23, 96–97–100–101, 104–105–108–109, 112–113, 116–125, 127) my damper pedaling is planned to permit the second eighth-note of the measure to be sounded staccato. The hands must cooperate with the damper pedal in producing this staccato effect, and care should be taken to maintain, throughout, relative dynamic values similar to those indicated in Example 2. Thus, in m. 96 the actual dynamic values should be as shown:



Measure 5. Be careful to subdue the tone of the left hand so that the listener's chief attention may be directed to the melody of the right hand. Almost all students, and many mature pianists as well, play their accompaniments too loud for their melodies and forget, in particular, how *much louder* high treble notes need to be played in order to make them ring out prominently above the far greater natural sonority of low bass notes. The same precaution should be taken with all similar passages, such as those beginning at mm. 25, 56, 70, 110.

Measure 5. Be scrupulous to preserve the exact rhythmic relationship between the dotted sixteenth-notes and the thirty-second notes, Too often this passage is played with the sound of triplets:



This tendency can be corrected by practicing the passage as indicated:



Count four to every eighth-note, and be sure that the thirty-second-notes are not played before "four" is counted. Inexperienced musicians are apt to cut the duration of the dotted notes *too short* in cases such as these. This error can also be corrected by practicing the passage with a metronome ticking four times in each measure, and playing the thirty-second notes like very quick grace notes:



Measure 6. The accent on the G \sharp of the right hand seen in the original (Grieg) edition is probably an error, as no similar accent occurs on the corresponding notes in mm. 5, 9 and 10.

Measure 13. The soft pedal (una corda) has to be taken by the left foot *without releasing the sustaining pedal* (likewise negotiated by the left foot). In order to accomplish this the sustaining pedal should be held down *by the tip* of the left shoe, while the heel is raised upwards and outward (the left knee turning inward towards the right knee) until the ball of the left foot is able to rise above the soft pedal and press it down. When both the soft and the sustaining pedals are thus held down by the left foot the position of that foot will be nearly at right angles to the position of the right foot (which retains its usual position), with the toes of the left foot turned in towards the right foot and the heel turned outwards towards the bass end of the piano. Though this position seems very awkward at first, it can readily be acquired and effortlessly controlled with a few weeks practice. This branch of technic should not be neglected by the student, since the simultaneous use of the soft and the sustaining pedals by the left foot is a constant necessity in modern music and an indispensable adjunct to mature pianism.

Measures 13–24 should sound like a kind of echo of mm. 1–12, and should, therefore be played just as softly as possible.

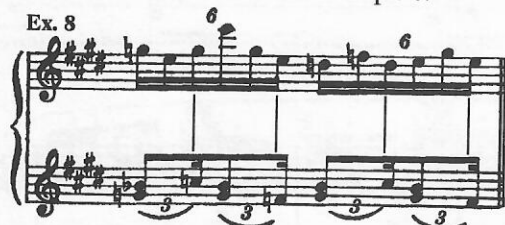
Measure 25. What was remarked regarding the rhythm of m. 5 applies with particular force to the continuous figure of dotted sixteenth-notes and thirty-second-notes that are found throughout the following measures: 25–59, 62–72, 74–76, 78, 80–89. Take care not to let this degenerate into the triplet rhythm shown in Example 7.



In order to guard against this tendency think of each thirty-second-note as belonging to the *following* (not to the *preceding*) dotted sixteenth-note, and practice the passage along the lines indicated in Ex. 5 and 6.

Measure 26. Before taking the sustaining pedal at the beginning of this measure be sure that the damper pedal (held down until the end of the preceding measure) is *fully raised*. The same care should be exercised at mm. 28, 34, 36, etc., wherever the sustaining pedal follows immediately after the use of the damper pedal.

Measures 49–50–51. Play the thirty-second-note in the left hand *well after* the third note of the right hand triplet. In particular avoid the slovenly performance of m. 51 shown in Example 8.



Measures 54, 55. "Half-pedaling" means *partially* raising the damper pedal, so that the dampers *only partially* damp the vibrations of the strings—not wholly, as is the case when the damper pedal is completely raised. By half-pedaling at m. 54 we cut off part of the large volume of sound that has been accumulating in the damper pedal since the beginning of m. 52. By half pedaling again at m. 55 we still further reduce this resonance. The result of such half-pedaling, if correctly carried out, produces a kind of echo-sensation.

Measures 69–71. Here is a typical use of the sustaining pedal. The bass notes E, B, E, B, secured by the sustaining pedal on the second beat of m. 69 (be sure you hold these notes down with the fingers until the sustaining pedal has taken effect upon them) are thus safely sustained until the beginning of m. 72, while the damper pedal is used to add a short gush of resonance to the four accented notes in each measure. This is an instance of the clarifying effect of the sustaining pedal. Without it we would have to swamp the greater part of the passage in a damper pedal blur in order to retain the drone effect of the bass notes E, B (so obviously intended to be heard ringing on until the end of m. 71), or we would have to forego the drone effect, at least partially, in the interests of tonal cleanliness. By using the sustaining pedal and the damper pedal in conjunction we are able to combine complete clarity with a fully carried out drone effect.

Measures 70, 71, 74, 75. Use either the fingering above or the fingering below the notes of the left hand. The upper fingering is the more powerful vehicle. It is carried out as follows: In the case of white keys the tips of the first, second and third fingers are held tightly bunched together, the key being struck by the third finger. In the case of black keys, the fourth finger is added to the other three, all four are held tightly bunched together, and the key is struck by the fourth finger. This method of fingering, so widely used concert pianists in martellato passages, can be practiced in both hands as shown in Example 9.



Measure 73. The sustaining pedal should not be pressed down until the right hand has been raised at the sixteenth note rest. Care should be taken that the bass notes E, B, E in the left hand are held down by the fingers (*after* the right hand has been raised) until the sustaining pedal has taken effect upon them. The same applies to the use of the damper

pedal in mm. 77 and 79.

Measure 79. Be sure the last two notes of this measure (C \sharp and A \sharp in the left hand) are sounded loudly and held down until the sustaining pedal has been fully depressed. The whole effect of the ensuing section (mm. 80–83) demands a very resonant retention of these bass notes C \sharp , A \sharp in the sustaining pedal. The same vigor and care should be exercised in establishing and securing in the sustaining pedal the bass notes B, A occurring at the end of m. 83, for similar reasons.

Measure 80. Here, for the first time in the composition, the melody is in the left hand, and that hand should be played very considerably louder than the right hand throughout the whole of this section (mm. 80–89). Indeed, the left hand should play with great roughness—but with a *controlled* roughness, of course; emphasizing the accented notes well above the rest. The remarks about "bunched" fingering attached to m. 70 apply here with equal force.

Measures 90–93. In attacking these *fortissimo* chords the inner fingers (2d, 3d and 4th fingers) of both hands should be used quite as forcibly as the outer fingers (1st and 5th fingers). In most cases the failure to sound the middle notes of loud chords as strongly as the outer notes is due to not advancing the inner fingers (entrusted with the inner notes) far enough *forward* (towards the keys) in relation to the position of the outer fingers, or to the inability of the player to hold the fingers rigid at the moment of striking the keys.

Measure 92. In this case "sostenuto" means "slower."

Measure 94. Distinguish clearly, rhythmically, between the dotted sixteenth-notes and thirty-second-notes on the one hand and the triplets on the other. Do not let it sound as shown in Example 10.



Hold the dotted notes for their full duration and make the thirty-second-notes as short as possible. The same holds good with regard to mm. 95, 98, 99, 102, 103, 106, 107.

Measures 96, 97, 100, 101. The proper dynamic treatment has already been shown in Example 3. The second eighth note in all these measures should be played as short as possible *without, however, playing the next chord (the accented quarter-note) in the very least before its time*. It is a common error, with many players, to cut short the beat value of staccato notes. This is the more unfortunate (apart from the matter of destroying rhythmic accuracy) in that the staccato impression of a note is enhanced by a long, rather than a short, silence between it and the succeeding note.

Measures 104, 105, 108, 109, etc., should dynamically resemble measures 96, 97, 100, 101, but on a smaller, and increasingly diminishing, dynamic scale.

Measure 110. As the music gets softer and softer, from m. 110 to the end of the piece, care should be taken to preserve the dynamic contrasts (between accented and unaccented notes) and durative contrasts (between staccato notes and sustained notes) with due sharpness and vividness. The peasant bridal march music, played at the head of the bridal procession, is not supposed to be being played with decreased vigor. It is merely supposed to be heard by the listener from an ever greater and greater distance, and the performance of the music should, therefore, retain its rhythmic and dynamic physiognomy up to the very last chord.

Dedicated to J. P. E. Hartman

NORWEGIAN BRIDAL PROCESSION

Also published by Grieg with the following title:
"NORWEGIAN BRIDAL PROCESSION PASSES BY"

No 2 from "SKETCHES OF NORWEGIAN LIFE"

EDVARD GRIEG, Op. 40, No 2

Alla Marcia M.M. ♩ = about 152

As edited by
Percy Grainger
for study and
concert
performance

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

13 14 15 16 17 18

19 20 21 22 23 24

25 26 27 28 29

30 31 32 33 34

pp *ppp* *mp* *sf* *fz*

S.P. (sustaining pedal) [middle pedal]

una corde

(soft pedal)

tre corde

molto leggiero e marcato.

R.H. below L.H. R.H. above Left

Musical notation for measures 35-39. Includes performance markings: *S.P.*

Musical notation for measures 40-44. Includes performance markings: *cresc.*, *mp*

Musical notation for measures 45-49. Includes performance markings: *(no pedal)*, *fz*, *mp*

Musical notation for measures 50-54. Includes performance markings: *fz*, *mp*, *dim.*, *(half pedal)*

Musical notation for measures 55-59. Includes performance markings: *pp*, *pppp*, *(half pedal) una corda*, *(full pedal)*

Musical notation for measures 60-64. Includes performance markings: *cresc. poco a poco*, *tre corde*

65 66 67 68 69 70

più f *ff marcato* *bunched*

S.P. *

71 72 73 74 75 76

[Use either the fingering above or below] *
S.P. *

77 78 79 80 81 82

ff bunched

S.P. *

83 84 85 86 87 88

ff *sempre più f*

S.P. *

89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96

ff *sosten.* *a tempo*

S.P. *

97 98 99 100 101 102

mf dim.

S.P. *

Musical notation for measures 103-110. Includes markings: *dim. sempre*, *p*, *più p*, and *S.P.*

Musical notation for measures 111-118. Includes markings: *pp*, *chord*, *una corda (soft pedal)*, *S.P.*, and *più pp*

Musical notation for measures 119-129. Includes markings: *pp*, *morendo*, and *pp*