



# Edvard GRIEG

## *Symphony in C minor*

**Edvard Hagerup Grieg** (15 June 1843 – 4 September 1907) was a Norwegian composer and pianist. He is widely considered one of the main Romantic era composers, and his music is part of the standard classical repertoire worldwide. His use and development of Norwegian folk music in his own compositions brought the music of Norway to international consciousness, as well as helping to develop a national identity, much as Jean Sibelius did in Finland and Bedřich Smetana in Bohemia. Grieg is the most celebrated person from the city of Bergen, with numerous statues which depict his image, and many cultural entities named after him: the city's largest concert building (Grieg Hall), its most advanced music school (Grieg Academy) and its professional choir (Edvard Grieg Kor). The Edvard Grieg Museum at Grieg's former home Trolldhaugen is dedicated to his legacy. Edvard Hagerup Grieg was born in Bergen, Norway (then part of Sweden–Norway). His parents were Alexander Grieg (1806–1875), a merchant and the British Vice-Consul in Bergen; and Gesine Judithe Hagerup (1814–1875), a music teacher and daughter of solicitor and politician Edvard Hagerup. The family name, originally spelled Greig, is associated with the Scottish Clann Ghriogair (Clan Gregor). After the Battle of Culloden in Scotland in 1746, Grieg's great-grandfather, Alexander Greig (1739-1803), originally of Aberdeenshire, travelled widely before settling in Norway about 1770 and establishing business interests in Bergen. Grieg's paternal great-great-grandparents, John (1702-1774) and Anne (1704-1784), are buried in the churchyard of the abandoned Church of St Ethernan in Rathen, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Grieg's first cousin, twice removed, was Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, whose mother was a Grieg. Edvard Grieg was raised in a musical family. His mother was his first piano teacher and taught him to play at the age of six. Grieg studied in several schools, including Tanks Upper Secondary School. During the summer of 1858, Grieg met the eminent Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, who was a family friend; Bull's brother was married to Grieg's aunt. Bull recognized the 15-year-old boy's talent and persuaded his parents to send him to the Leipzig Conservatory, the piano department of which was directed by Ignaz Moscheles. Grieg enrolled in the conservatory, concentrating on piano, and enjoyed the many concerts and recitals given in Leipzig. He disliked the discipline of the conservatory course of study. An exception was the organ, which was mandatory for piano students. About his study in the conservatory, he wrote to his biographer, Aimar Grønvold, in 1881: "I must admit, unlike Svendsen, that I left Leipzig Conservatory just as stupid as I entered it. Naturally, I did learn something there, but my individuality was still a closed book to me." During the spring of 1860, he survived two life-threatening lung diseases, pleurisy and tuberculosis. Throughout his life, Grieg's health was impaired by a destroyed left lung and considerable deformity of his thoracic spine. He suffered from numerous respiratory infections, and ultimately developed combined lung and heart failure. Grieg was admitted many times to spas and sanatoria both in Norway and abroad. Several of his doctors became his friends.

No symphony has been hedged about with so many reservations as the twenty-year-old Edvard Grieg's 'forbidden' ***Symphony in C minor***. Grieg said that he was challenged to compose the *Symphony* by the Danish composer Niels Gade (1817–90), when they met by chance just outside Copenhagen in 1863. The challenge may also have implied, indirectly: 'Write something of real worth'. After finishing his studies in Leipzig, Grieg had spent a year back in his native city of Bergen without finding any particular impetus, and at this point he had gone in search of wider experience to the Nordic metropolis of Copenhagen, the native city of the distinguished Dane Gade himself. The *Symphony*'s first movement was finished in two weeks, and the rest within a year, on 2 May 1864. Parts of the work were performed five times in the following years: in Copenhagen in 1864 and 1865, in Christiania (now Oslo) in 1867 and in Bergen in 1865 and 1867, but none of these performances included all four movements. Grieg himself was the conductor only in Copenhagen in 1865 and in Christiania two years later. We do not know exactly when it was that Grieg famously wrote on the cover of the manuscript score: 'må aldrig opføres. E.G.' – 'must never be performed.' Probably it was in the autumn of 1867, or later.

A few more of Grieg's statements about the *Symphony* have come down to us: 'The *Symphony* was complete and the middle two movements had already been performed by *Euterpe*. But it never satisfied me and I therefore did not allow it to be published in its entirety or performed. The two inner movements can be found as Op. 14, for piano, four hands.' And: 'I did indeed orchestrate Op. 14, yes, I heard them too (the two middle movements of the *Symphony*) many years ago in Copenhagen. They sounded OK; but under no circumstances will I publish the score now, because that work belongs to a bygone Schumann-period in my life'. The fact that Grieg published the two middle movements as *Two Symphonic Pieces* (Op. 14, for piano duet) shows, however, that he cannot have been entirely dissatisfied with his *Symphony*.