

## Gade Models for Grieg's Symphony and Piano Sonata

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In April of 1863 Edvard Grieg, having completed his four-year Leipzig Conservatory training, arrived in Copenhagen for what was to be two years. He was twenty years old and came in hope of shaking off the conservative academicism of Leipzig. Specifically, he wanted to explore the fresh Nordic sounds produced by Niels W. Gade, the composer Schumann had praised so highly, saying, »his imagination kindles the Northern lights.«<sup>1</sup>

The compositions Grieg produced during those two years in Denmark include German and Danish songs, small piano pieces, a symphony, a piano sonata, a violin sonata, and the famous song »Jeg elsker dig«, written at the time of his betrothal to his cousin, Nina Hagerup. Most of these compositions were taken to Gade, and Grieg has told of Gade's comments to them in various letters to friends. The sonata for piano, Op. 7, is dedicated to Gade, and Grieg himself acknowledged the influence of Gade on his violin sonata, Op. 8.

The Grieg symphony has aroused considerable attention recently, since it was only in 1981 that the Bergen Public Library decided to allow this early work to be recorded, despite Grieg's note on the score, »Must never be performed.« Sometimes nicknamed the »Forbidden« symphony, its recorded performance came as a surprise to most of the musical world, as few people had known of its existence.

Several writers on Grieg – namely John Horton, William S. Newman, and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, the chief editor of the complete Grieg edition now in progress – have suggested that the influence of Gade's musical style may be seen in Grieg's Copenhagen works, in similar formal structures, choice of keys, number of movements, tempos, and in related themes.

Although Grieg claimed he was never a student of Gade's, his letters more than establish an informal relationship of student and advisor between them. His first meeting with Gade was an accidental encounter on the street. Upon being introduced by a mutual acquaintance, Gade asked Grieg if he had any compositions to show him. When Grieg modestly replied in the negative, Gade suggested that he go home and write a symphony. Gade was evidently unaware that Grieg, who had by that time composed piano pieces, songs, an assigned string quartet, and an incomplete orchestral overture, had had very little experience with symphonic forms and orchestral writing.

The influence of Gade's musical style on Grieg may be profitably explored in a

1. Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, trans. by Paul Rosenfeld, ed. by Konrad Wolff (New York, 1946), 245.

comparison of each composer's first symphony, both works in C minor, and each composer's only piano sonata, both works in E minor. A close examination of these works reveals many structural parallels, as though Grieg, the novice, continually glanced over at the Gade works for solutions to compositional problems.

Gade's work show the influence of Scotch and Danish folksongs, of Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Wagner. The »Ossian« overture, based on the atmosphere of Scotland found in the poems of that title written by McPherson, war probably influenced by Mendelssohn's »Fingal's Cave« overture. His first symphony is based on one of his own songs and the text of four Danish folksongs, one for each movement.

His piano sonata of 1840 shows the influence of Schumann, with a touch of Liszt in a cyclical motive which was probably added later, in his 1854 revision, when he dedicated the work to Liszt. Gade met Wagner in 1846 and his influence can be seen almost immediately afterwards, in an operatic fragment from 1847 entitled »Siegfried og Brünhilde«, and later in »Baldurs drøm«, a cantata for soloists, choir and orchestra (1858). His most popular, truly Danish work, was the cantata »Elverskud« of 1853. However, most critics agree that the works produced after his return to Copenhagen tended to be less original and distinctive, and were mostly pale copies of the Leipzig school. Turning away from his earlier nationalism, he claimed that the use of folk tunes in art music was too artificial and produced awkward results, both in rhythm and in harmony.

Upon close examination, it can be seen that the Gade First Symphony constructs each movement with only a few, but significant, themes. The first movement begins with a slow introduction in 6/4 meter on Gade's song, »På Sjølund's fagre sletter« (see Example 1). The primary theme of the following Allegro is associated with the Danish folksong »De vare syv og syvsindstve« (see Example 2). The »Sjølund« song provides material for the secondary theme, for most of the development, for a varied return of the introduction before the recapitulation, and for most of the coda.

The second movement is a programmatic scherzo in 6/8 meter. The C major scherzo alternates several times with a fairy-light trio in A minor with which Mendelssohn was especially pleased. The folksong »Hr. Oluf han rider så vide« (see Example 3) is applied to the scherzo theme. The folksong tells of Oluf's ride on the eve of his wedding and encounter with a circle of dancing fairies. When he refuses an invitation to stay and dance, the elfking's daughter curses him with death in the morning. He gallops home in fright, arriving home at dawn, only to fall dead at his mother's feet. Gade returned this subject matter in his cantata »Elverskud« in 1853.

The dialogue between Lord Oluf and the fairies is indicated in the alternation between the scherzo and trio. A slow coda presents Lord Oluf's theme in a mournful A minor, the fairies' key. In the last measures, the horse's galloping triplets reappear in C major, representing Oluf's escape.

The third movement, in F major, is a lyrical fantasy over another folksong-text, »Jeg gik mig ud en sommerdag« (see Example 4), in a five-part form. The finale is the longest movement and is coupled with the folksong »Da nu min hjertens kærest var funden« (see Example 5). The development recalls the »Sjølund« song from the first movement and adds a long fugato on the finale's opening theme. The instrumentation of this work shows the influence of Schumann in its use of three trombones and bass tuba or contra-bassoon in addition to pairs of winds, and a similar orchestration in the blending of choirs and colors.

Before examining the Grieg symphony, a quick look at Grieg's prior training and compositions offers insights, and a history of this symphony from its genesis to its being set aside by Grieg is necessary.

Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe has studied Grieg's student compositions in depth and made the following comments concerning the twenty-four piano pieces composed from 1858-1860: »It cannot be denied that their musical value is limited, particularly in melodic content; but not a few of them contain sections of harmonic interest... chromatic inner voices... extensive use of altered chords and of chromatic progressions of chords.«<sup>3</sup> Of Grieg's Four Pieces for Piano, Op. 1, composed at Leipzig in 1861, Schjelderup-Ebbe wrote: »Evidence of what was to come can be seen in diatonic quasi-folklike melodies with touches of modality and frequent shifting of tonal centers; use of the so-called 'Grieg motive' (a descending melodic figure using the eighth, seventh, and fifth degrees of the scale) derived from Norwegian folk music; Phrygian cadences; and an independent treatment of dissonant chords such as dominant ninths.«<sup>4</sup> Among Grieg's exercises in fugues there is a four-part fugue on G-A-D-E, dated March 5, 1861. An assigned string quartet (now lost) forced him to examine many Classical quartets for procedures, and an orchestral overture assignment was impatiently abandoned in exasperation at his own lack of preparation for orchestral writing.

The Grieg symphony was begun in 1863 on the suggestion of Gade, as already mentioned. The first movement was rapidly written, as Grieg returned to Gade with a fully orchestrated first movement within fourteen days. Gade was pleased with this effort and urged him to continue. The remainder of the symphony took longer, and the work was completed nearly a year later and dated May 2, 1864, on the score.

The symphony received five performances in the next three years, in Copenhagen, Bergen, and Christiania. At some point in 1867, Grieg put the score away with the instruction »Must never be performed«. The reasons for his dissatisfaction with it lay in his own change to a more nationalistic style under the influence of Rikard Nordraak (1842-1866), and in his admiration for the witty counterpoint, admirable construction, and nationalistic themes of the

3. Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg 1858-1867, with Special Reference to the Evolution of his Harmonic Style* (Oslo and London, 1972), 23.

4. *Ibid.*, 70.

Norwegian composer Johan Svendsen's First Symphony of 1867. The two inner movements of Grieg's symphony were later salvaged and arranged for piano duet as Op. 14.

The first movement begins with a fanfare introduction with full contrapuntally expanding chords, a less sophisticated forerunner of the introduction to Brahms' First Symphony of 1876, also in C minor. Typically for Grieg, each of the following theme groups has two or three small melodic ideas. The first theme in the primary group includes a characteristic triplet figure and bears a marked resemblance to the Gade first movement allegro theme (compare Grieg's theme in Example 6a with Example 2). Like Gade, Grieg accents the tonic on the second beat, and later adds a similar dominant prefix on the theme's restatement in the transition to the second key area (see Example 6b). Grieg closes his primary theme group with a two-note cadential figure (see Example 7) which is an inversion of Gade's closing theme (see Example 8). A second transition phrase is important for its use of the »Grieg motive«, mentioned earlier, played first in parallel sixths, and then in parallel 6/3 chords (see Example 9). After the contrasting ideas of the secondary key of E-flat, the triplet figure of the primary theme opens the closing theme group, in a standard post-Beethoven procedure. Within the closing theme group is an *espressivo* melody for oboe in E-flat minor (see Example 10). This brief detour into the minor mode may have been influenced by Gade's finale in C major which has an E minor ballad-like melody as a closing theme (see Example 5).

The development deals with the primary and secondary themes and concludes with a transition suggesting the chromatic motion of the introduction. At the comparable point, Gade had created a distinct retransition section by changing the meter back from the *alla breve* to the 6/4 of his introduction, and teasing the listener with bits of the »Sjølund« song and related material in C minor and other keys, while actually continuing the A-flat tonality from the end of the development.

Grieg's recapitulation simply restates the material of the exposition, even retaining the same orchestration for the most part. His most important thematic material is usually given to a wind instrument, such as clarinet or French horn, doubled by viola at the unison or octave, or clarinet doubled by bassoon. String and wind choirs are contrasted in repetitions, and generally, low registers are preferred. Later, in the scherzo and finale movements, Grieg added three trombones. These play no independent role but serve only to reinforce. In this first movement, previews of what was to come in Grieg's later output can already be seen in the multitude of melodic bits, some chromatic harmony, and in the use of the »Grieg motive.«

Grieg's second movement, *Adagio espressivo*, opens with a diatonic folklike melody which outlines a tonic triad (see Example 11). Gade's slow movement also has a diatonic simple melody (see Example 4), is in the same meter of 2/4, and has the same five-part form, ABABA, though Grieg's is ABACA.

The *Intermezzo-scherzo* employs the constant dotted rhythms of Norwegian



folk dance with a melodic stress on the augmented fourth, another folksong trait (see Example 12). The form of this scherzo follows that of the Classical period, AABA Trio with repeat of the Scherzo, in which B is somewhat developmental. The B section shows a delightful change of accentual stress. The Norwegian *springdans*, an animated triple meter dance, has just this type of unexpected accent shift.

The Trio quotes an actual Norwegian folk tune, »Astri mi Astri,« and wavers between A minor and C major (see Example 13). It has a twice repeated four-chord introduction, like a folk musician's cadence to establish the key. Compared to Gade's scherzo, one sees immediately the same key relationship between the scherzo in C major and the trio in A minor. Grieg was attracted to the nationalistic styles of the day, but as yet did not know how to deal with folk materials. The triple meter of the scherzo appeared to be a suitable place for Norwegian dance elements, and the Trio a possible place for an actual folksong in a simpler style.

Both composers use a similar structural device at the beginning of the Trio. Gade's fairy-like Trio is announced by an eight measure preparation stressing a folk-like open fifth drone and a grace note figure anticipating the fairies' theme. It is scored for solo clarinets, bassoons, and French horn (see Example 14). Grieg also has an eight measure preparation scored for clarinets, bassoons, and French horn: it is a twice repeated sequence of four chords with an anticipation of the folksong in the fifth measure (see Example 15).

Grieg's finale, like Gade's, is the longest movement. Besides the multitude of ideas, two in each theme group, it has a new chorale in the development. At the comparable point, Gade brought back a cyclic recall from the first movement, his »Sjølund« song, and added a fugato.

Within Grieg's secondary theme group appears another »Grieg motive« melody (see Example 16), which Schelderup-Ebbe claims resembles »Oleana,« a melody by the Norwegian violin virtuoso Ole Bull.<sup>5</sup>

Of special interest is the march-like closing theme group. Its second idea resembles Gade's »Sjølund« song (see Example 17). One may speculate whether Grieg knowingly put in this four-measure snatch in a playful moment, or if it was unconsciously done as a direct outcome of the opening melody in the closing group. For anyone familiar with the innumerable repeats of this motive in the Gade First Symphony, it fairly shouts for attention.

Again, Grieg's recapitulation restates nearly all the themes in the same order, with virtually the same orchestration, only making adjustments for a different succession of keys. The chorale in the development adds a long stable area in A-flat, while the recapitulation moves from C major to D minor and back to C major.

The number of measures in the outer movements of the Grieg and Gade symphonies is startlingly close: Gade's first movement has 413 measures,

5. Ibid., 196.

Grieg's first movement has 425; Gade's finale has 611 measures and Grieg's 615. What significance this may have had to Grieg is unknown, but one may surmise that in each case Grieg felt the length was exactly right.

It is well-known that Grieg found sonata-form movements especially difficult, and therefore, these are the ones for which he was most likely to use a model. Gerald Abraham has pointed out another such relationship in Grieg's output, that between the Schumann and Grieg piano concertos' first movements: »Even the details of the frame were to some extent copied from the first movement of the Schumann Concerto in the same key . . . an introductory chordal passage for the soloist descending from the high to the middle register . . . main theme stated by the winds and repeated exactly by the soloist . . . second subject in the relative major . . . both expositions conclude with an animato . . . both developments fall into two main sections in the first of which woodwind soli play with fragments over piano arpeggios, while the soloist comes to the fore in the second . . . cadenza followed by a coda quicker than the rest of the movement. There is no resemblance between the actual ideas; it was simply that Grieg, at the highest stage of his development as a composer in sonata form, still felt the need for a formal model.«<sup>6</sup> Actually, the themes of the first movements of the two concertos are not too different from each other; Schumann's descends a minor third and Grieg's ascends a minor third and returns.

In the Grieg and Gade symphonies it is not only the outer movements in sonata form which show relationships. The form, meter, and melodic style of the slow movements are alike or very close. The scherzos exhibit the alternation of the same two keys, and the same introduction device is found in the trios, employing exactly the same instrumentation.

As Abraham has pointed out, no one would ever mistake the Grieg concerto for the Schumann, but on close examination there is a strong structural resemblance between the first movements. The same relationship holds true for the Grieg and Gade symphonies. In 1863-64, Grieg probably had had his fill of Mendelssohn's »Scotch« and »Italian« symphonies so admired in Leipzig, and found Gade's »Danish« more stimulating. He probably dreamed of being the first to write a »Norwegian« symphony, but did not yet have sufficient experience to accomplish that goal with impressive results. From Grieg's glowing newspaper review of Svendsen's First Symphony, it is obvious that he felt the honor of this achievement belonged to Svendsen.<sup>7</sup>

Further interrelationships between Grieg and Gade emerge in their piano sonatas, both in E minor. Although Grieg was changing and moving away from Gade's style at the time, the summer of 1865, he depended on the Gade

6. Gerald Abraham, ed., *Grieg: A Symposium* (London, 1948), 27.

7. See B. Kortsén, ed., *Grieg the Writer, Essays and Articles* (Bergen, 1972), for this review.

work for structural ideas and even adapted Gade's main theme. With the respect that was certainly due Gade, Grieg dedicated the work to him. Gade's sonata, composed in 1840 and revised in 1854, has a motto theme which is used extensively in the first and last movements and also makes brief cadential appearances at the ends of the middle movements (see Example 18). Influences of Schumann and Mendelssohn can be seen in the many arpeggios in the accompaniment, the many repetitions of a rhythmic pattern once it is established, change of tempo with contrasting themes, little cadenza flourishes at main cadential points, the generally slow harmonic rhythm, and the song-without-words style of the slow movement. In the first movement Gade arranged bits of imitation and combined and overlapped themes in a symphonic development. The scherzo movement has an ABA form with a long cadential coda before the motto tag is added. The finale is a sonata form, with a constant triplet accompaniment. It features an improvisatory virtuosic cadenza in several sections, and then concludes with a fortissimo coda on the motto theme.

Grieg's sonata was completed in eleven days. Its four movements are arranged in the same sequence as Gade's and even have similar tempo markings: Gade's first movement is *Allegro con fuoco*, Grieg's is *Allegro moderato* and ends *Allegro molto*; Gade's second movement is an *Andante*, Grieg's is *Andante molto*; Gade's third movement is *Allegretto*, and Grieg's is *Alla Menuetto ma poco piu lento*; and both have finales marked *Allegro molto*. There is some similarity of meters and a similar liking for triplet motion. Gade's first movement is written in 4/4 but moves so fast it is felt as an *alla breve*. The accompaniment for the second theme has a triplet quarter-note motion, which sounds like a change to 6/8. Grieg's first movement is in 2/4, but makes a change to 6/8 for ten measures at the opening of the recapitulation to allow for a triplet accompaniment pattern, then returns to 2/4.

Gade's *Andante* is in 9/8 meter. Grieg's moves from 4/4 to 12/8.

Gade's *Allegretto* is in 3/4. Grieg's moves from a 3/4 *Menuetto* to a 9/8 *Trio* and back again.

Gade's finale is in 4/4 but the constant triplet motion makes it actually in 12/8. Grieg's finale is in 6/8.

The main theme of Grieg's first movement (which has some seven recognizable melodic ideas) is a close parallel to Gade's motto theme; it descends through a triad for an octave and a half (see Example 19). This theme appears in an imitative entry as did Gade's. Both composers overlap thematic statements in the development. Grieg's rapid cadential arpeggio in the eighth measure of the first movement, which covers two octaves, is extended in the recapitulation to cover three octaves. It recalls similar Gade passages.

Grieg takes more liberties with his recapitulation in this first movement, as did Gade, who reversed the order of themes. Grieg's primary theme has a varied return in a new 6/8 meter. The closing theme has a new accompaniment, placing all the material in the treble register, and employs a faster

tempo, Allegro molto, as well. The primary theme returns in the coda in a fortissimo restatement, as does the motto theme in Gade's work.

Grieg's middle movements are filled with Norwegian folk elements such as diatonic or modal melodies, *springdans* rhythms, Phrygian cadences, dominant chords superimposed to tonic chords, a sound originating from the sympathetic strings of the Hardanger fiddle, and open fifth pedals, all of these reflecting the influence of his friendship with the enthusiastic Norwegian nationalist composer, Rikard Nordraak.

The third movement of the piano sonata bears resemblance to »The Viking Woman's Dream,« an 1864 piano piece by J. P. E. Hartmann.<sup>8</sup> This Danish composer, a contemporary of Gade's, was known for a nationalistic modal style of melody and for occasional audacious harmonic ideas, in his preferred genres of stage music and ballet.<sup>9</sup>

The finale, a fast 6/8 sonata form, has other colorful bits of nationalistic material. Its diatonic folklike second theme, and the closing passage based on it, seem to be a recall of the second movement's opening theme, both in C major; though if Grieg had a cyclical return in mind, it is nowhere near as obvious as in Gade's sonata.

Thus, the Gade and Grieg works have many features in common, primarily of structure and plan. This is a curious phenomenon in a century that valued originality. Probably Grieg would not have wished to have these parallelisms made widely known. But for us, in a century of historical awareness of Renaissance and Baroque »borrowings,« and having enjoyed Stravinsky's many reinterpretations of other composers' styles, it does not imply any lack of creative powers. Many other composers have been inspired by admired models, or a program, or a borrowed theme for variations, or a whole polyphonic work to parody. It is the response to the stimulus which we appraise. Like many another nineteenth-century composer, Grieg had a wealth of inspiration in melodies and colorful harmonies, which by the nature of their lyricism did not function easily in sonata form. That he should have needed to look at sonata forms and symphonies for suggestions as to how to organize his ideas is natural enough; but that the traces of a particular work should still show through as a model is unusual.

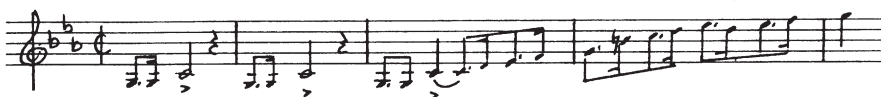
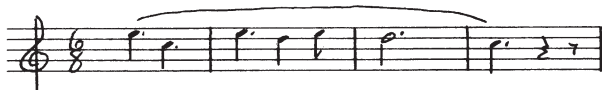
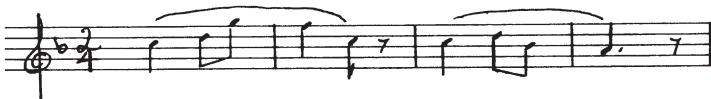
Are these Grieg works diminished by recognizing their models? Definitely not. The Grieg piano sonata will always be a greater work than Gade's, though the latter is also an admirable work, well-crafted and brimming with energy and drive. Gade's First Symphony proves to be a delightful surprise from a composer sometimes accused of pedantry, a veritable repository of Danish gems. The Grieg symphony presents us with a new portrait of a well-known face. We recognize the contours, despite the absence of deep character lines. The middle movements, as Grieg perceived himself, have more of his later personality, but

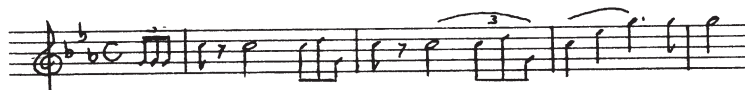
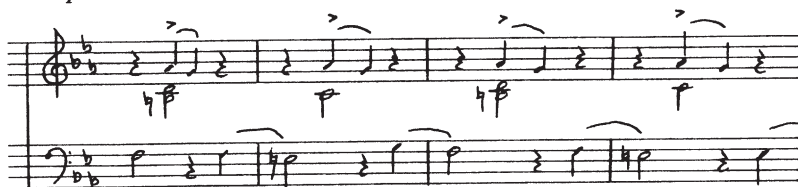
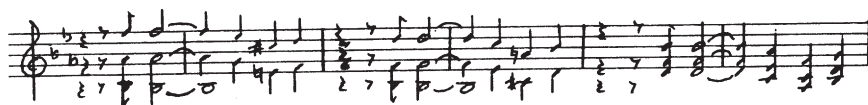
8. Schjelderup-Ebbe, 240.

9. Ibid., 162.



the outer movements are full of melodic charm. Those who cherished the older man will welcome an opportunity to meet the twenty-one-year-old youth. Now that Svendsen is no longer a serious competitor, though his First Symphony well deserves a revival, we are free to enjoy Grieg's symphony as it is and not concern ourselves with what he wished it might have been.

*Example 1**Example 2**Example 3**Example 4**Example 5*

*Example 6a**Example 6b**Example 7**Example 8**Example 9**Example 10*

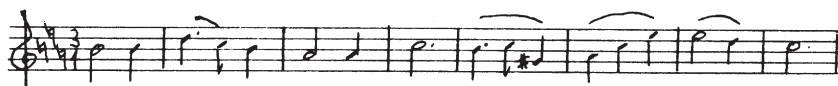
*Example 11*



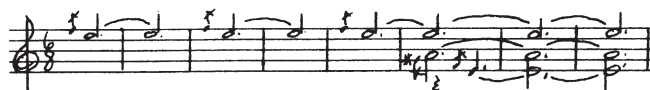
*Example 12*



*Example 13*



*Example 14*



*Example 15*



*Example 16*



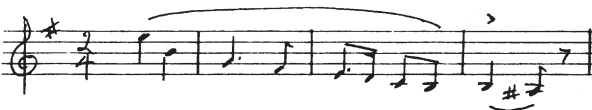
### Example 17



### Example 18



### Example 19



### Scores

Gade, Niels W. Piano Sonata, Op. 28. In *Three Pieces for Piano Solo* by Niels W. Gade. Kalmus Piano Library 9898. Belwin Mills Publishing Corp., Melville, N.Y., 11747.

Gade, Niels W. Sinfornia, Op. 5. Atelier Elektra, Copenhagen, 1967.

Grieg, Edvard. Piano Sonata, Op. 7. G. Schirmer, New York.

Grieg, Edvard. Sinfonie für Orchester in C moll. Xerox of manuscript, Bergen Public Library.

### Recordings

Gade, Niels W. Sonata in E Minor, Op. 28, for piano, performed by Arne Skjold Rasmussen. Dansk Musik Antologi, DMA 013.

Gade, Niels W. Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 5, performed by the Royal Danish Orchestra, conducted by Johan Hye-Knudsen. Turnabout stereophonic recording, TV 4052/TV 34052S.

Grieg, Edvard. Symphony, performed by the Bergen Symphony, conducted by Karsten Andersen. London Digital recording, LDR 71037.