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Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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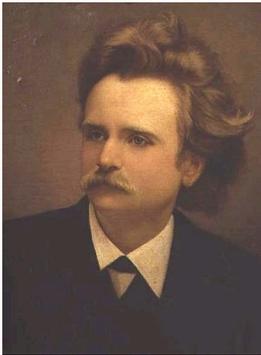
Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, April 6th, 2013, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907). [*Two Norwegian Airs*](#) (1869). Malmo Symphony Orchestra, Bjarte Engeset. Naxos 572403, Tr 12-14. 11:07

Grieg. [*Old Norwegian Romance*](#) (1891, orch. 1900). Iceland State Symphony Orchestra, Petri Sakari. Chandos 9028, Tr 6-20. 24:23

Grieg. [*Peer Gynt, Suite No. 2*](#) (1874-5/rev. 91/92). New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein. CBS/Sony 36718, Tr 5-7. 17:27



“Edvard Grieg,” they were saying in Germany and in Denmark. It was the name of that young pianist/composer from Norway they were noticing, for he was starting to become somebody. But then something odd happened. He discovered Norway.

He hadn't thought much about his own country, not when he was growing up. It had been Denmark-Norway for an eon until thirty years before his birth. Then Sweden invaded and ruled, along with the farmer-dominated Norwegian Parliament. So, Norway's own personality—the unlettered, bucolic center that is the soul of every national culture—was of little interest to upper- and middle-class Norwegians. The urbanites had no time for farmers but instead wrapped themselves in civil, traditional, Danish society. They even spoke Danish.

Many Norwegian musicians of the 19th century went to Germany for schooling, as did their American counterparts. After learning piano from his mother (an excellent pianist), Grieg studied at the Leipzig Conservatory, and then settled in Denmark, in Copenhagen. But in 1864 his life changed.

That summer he stayed with Ole Bull, a family friend and international star, at his house on an island near the Griegs' Bergen home. Bull was a violin soloist with a trans-Atlantic career, and had earlier encouraged Grieg's parents to send Edvard to the German conservatory. But Ole Bull was also an exponent of true Norwegian culture, in those first stirrings of Norway's break from Sweden (independence would come in 1905). Grieg picked up Bull's enthusiasm for Norwegian folk music that summer.

He returned to Copenhagen, but his circle of friends now included Rikard Nordraak. This was a composer who in a year would die from tuberculosis, but he had already written a song that was to become the Norwegian national anthem. He fired Grieg with the mission to create music based on folk melody. Thus in the capital of Denmark did the 22-year-old Nordraak pass the torch of Norwegian music to the 21-year-old Grieg.

This nationalism took time to develop, but within a few years Grieg composed *Two Norwegian Airs*, which included the decidedly rustic “Cow-keeper's Tune and Peasant Dance.” Like many of Grieg's orchestral works, it was composed first for piano, and later orchestrated. After Grieg was established he would write the *Old Norwegian Romance* for two pianos, and orchestrate that as well. It's a set of variations on the tune “Sjugur and the Troll-bride,” from the collection of folk tunes by Ludvig Mathias Lindeman, a composer and organist a generation older than Grieg.

In between came the incidental music to Henrik Ibsen's modernist and surreal play on the folk tale *Peer Gynt*, a project taking much longer than Grieg at first thought. The two Suites from it contain some of Grieg's most popular music. The play and the music both exemplify, in a more refined way, the national realization of the Norwegian soul. Grieg's music to *Peer Gynt*, along with other great works, made him an international composer. But to become that, he had to discover Norway first. Only then did he become universal. Only then did he become “Edvard Grieg.”

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), former Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).