



Lionel Carley, *Edvard Grieg in England*
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Lionel Carley's name is closely associated with that of the English composer Frederick Delius (1862-1934), on behalf of whose music he has for some forty years been actively engaged as a member of the Delius Trust and about whom he has written several books.¹ Anyone familiar with the life of Delius will appreciate how natural it is that he should now turn his attention to Edvard Grieg – indeed, the transition was clearly indicated some years ago when he published *Grieg and Delius: A Chronicle of their Friendship in Letters* (London, 1993). Though in the Preface to the present book (p. xvii) Carley credits its origin to an invitation to participate in a Grieg project at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Oslo in 1998, we in Denmark were privileged to be offered an anticipation of it five years earlier when he read a paper 'Grieg and Musical Life in England' at a symposium arranged by the Institute for Musicology of the University of Copenhagen in 1993 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Grieg's birth.² In that interesting paper Carley showed that there was still a corner of the well-documented world of Edvard Grieg that had not been adequately illuminated. Grieg's connections with Germany are familiar,³ but in this paper Carley called attention to the importance that England had had for Grieg and that Grieg in turn had had for England. The breadth and depth of this relationship has, I venture to say, heretofore remained unsuspected and what Carley broached in 20 pages in 1993 has now grown to occupy more than 20 times that number!

Lionel Carley might well have called his book *Grieg and the English*, since it is by no means limited to the time Grieg spent in England (calculated at six months in all) but documents Grieg's association with Englishmen outside England as well as inside. He was, in fact, born into an environment with strong British associations, since the family had for generations been the British consular representatives (for the most part unpaid) in Bergen in Norway, no doubt as a consequence of the first of them, Grieg's great-grandfather, having been born in Scotland. Edvard's godmother, furthermore, was a Scottish woman named Mary Widderburne Stirling and one wonders if she might have been related to Jane Stirling, who at just this time (1843) was Chopin's Scottish pupil and subsequent benefactor. At the Leipzig Conservatory, where he was sent in 1858, the young Edvard was a contemporary of several young English students, including Arthur Sullivan, Francis Edward Barnett, Walter Bache, and Franklin Taylor, who were to make their marks in English musical life and whose later connections with Grieg are here recounted in detail for the first time.

1 His two-volume edition *Delius. A Life in Letters* (London, 1983, 1988) was reviewed by the present author in *Dansk Årbog for Musikforskning*, 18 (1987), 190–96.

2 The papers delivered at this symposium were published in *Musik & Forskning*, 19 (1993–94), the paper in question on pp. 73–92.

3 In the present book (pp. 173–74) Carley reports Grieg's embarrassment at having this association misrepresented in an interview printed in the London *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 March 1889, which he felt obliged to correct in a letter printed on 29 March under the heading 'Mr. Grieg and the Germans'. The misunderstanding was diplomatically serious enough at the time but it was quickly made good and when the end came the German Kaiser Wilhelm sent a representative to Grieg's funeral, who laid a wreath and expressed 'the deep sorrow of the Emperor and the German people' (p. 426).

Another fellow student who was to render important service to Grieg's music in England was technically an American when Grieg met him. This was Edward Dannreuther (1844–1905), who, though born in Strasbourg, had been taken as a child to Cincinnati in the USA. It was only on graduating from the Leipzig Conservatory in 1863 that he settled in London, where he became a leading pianist and teacher (of Hubert Parry, among others). It was Dannreuther who, unknown to the composer, gave the first, highly successful, performances in England of Grieg's Piano Concerto, which did so much to establish the young Norwegian's reputation as an important new voice in modern music.

Far from being 'das Land ohne Musik', as a German writer scornfully and misleadingly called it, England with its well-developed musical life was a Mecca for composers and performers from all over the world. After Händel, J.C. Bach and Haydn in the 18th century, such diverse composers as Ole Bull, Mendelssohn, Spohr, Liszt, Wagner, Gounod, Dvorak, Saint-Saens, and Fauré, to mention only a few, found enthusiastic audiences for their music in Victorian England and reaped considerable financial rewards. Encouraged by the reception of his Piano Concerto and 'urged by Wieniawski', as he said (chap. 3), Grieg began making plans in the late 1870s to visit England himself. However, apart from a visit made with his parents in 1862 after finishing his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory, an experience which seems to have had no musical consequence whatsoever, Grieg was not to visit England until 1888, by which time he was an acknowledged master.

Arrangements for proposed concerts were made in 1879, but these, as well as all the invitations to come to England that he received annually from 1883, he was unfortunately obliged to refuse or to cancel for reasons of health. When at last he was able to realize his wish to appear before the English public in May 1888, it was to be the first of only six visits that he was able to carry through: two in 1888, another in 1889, then again in 1894, 1897, and finally 1906. They were, however, visits that were to raise him to the absolute pinnacle of the musical hierarchy of the time.

Carley has, with a nod to musical form, organized his book with the visits in 1888–89, 1897, and 1906 as the main themes, preceded by and alternating with sections of English-related material from the periods when he was absent from England – seven sections, each consisting of several chapters (27 in all). Thus there is a 'Prelude', dealing with English contacts before coming to England; then the 'First Successes in England', which tells of the two triumphal visits to London and Birmingham respectively in 1888 and to London and Manchester in 1889. There follows an 'Interlude (1)' after he has left England and is 'staying in touch' with a view to a return visit. This section covers an interim of eight years and includes the story of his invitation to receive, in company with Tchaikovsky, Bruch, Boito, and Saint-Saens (Brahms and Verdi having declined), an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University in 1893. In the event he was unable to attend because of ill health and the conferring of his degree was postponed to the following year.

In the next main section, under the heading 'Grand Tour', we follow Grieg during the last three months of 1897 on his most extensive British concert tour, which included his only concert in Scotland (where much was made of his Scottish ancestry) at Edinburgh and a command performance before Queen Victoria (who spoke to him 'superbly' in German) at Windsor Castle. 'Interlude (2)' describes the years during which hopes of returning to England are repeatedly thwarted by ill health until in 1906 he makes his last trip to England to receive, under the professorship of Sir Hubert Parry, an honorary doctorate from Oxford University. Unlike the occasion of his Cambridge doctorate, this event, in connection with which he gave two concerts in London, is given separate – if brief – treatment in a section under the heading 'Final Curtain Calls'. Quite apart from the 'finality' of Grieg's return to

England after an absence of nine years – a sad prospect of which *The Musical World* appeared to be somehow prophetically informed when it wrote: ‘Edvard Grieg comes to this country to say farewell’ (p. 363) – historical events had given these concerts an unusually happy significance.

The first concert in 1906 was appointed to take place on 17 May, Norway’s National Day, and much had happened since the date of the concert had been agreed in the previous July. Events had moved rapidly: Norway had declared her independence of Sweden (7 June), the Swedish King Oskar II had finally abdicated (27 October) and the Danish Prince Carl had taken the oath to rule as King Haakon VII (27 November). That all this had happened with a minimum of acrimony. Grieg, who had feared armed conflict, was gratefully inclined to attribute to diplomatic assistance from England (p. 351) and he reported, ‘It was a glorious feeling to be allowed to represent Norway through my art on the first 17th May after our liberation’ (p. 373). During this visit he was once again summoned to appear at court, this time at Buckingham Palace before King Edward and Queen Alexandra, whose daughter Maud was now Queen of Norway. In London he also made the acquaintance of Percy Grainger, a young Australian pianist and composer who had written to him (in Danish) earlier in Norway but whom he met now for the first time. He came at once to hold him in high regard as friend and artist and Grieg was able to leave London on 31 May after an extremely busy three weeks asserting that ‘I shall always treasure the remembrance of these London days amongst my most happy memories’ (p. 394).

The remaining 15 months of Grieg’s life are accounted for in a section appropriately entitled ‘Closure’. The story ends, as it began, in Bergen, but with the added poignancy that when death incurred he had actually left Trolldhaugen, his home outside Bergen, on the first stage of yet another trip to England. *The Musical World’s* announcement of the previous year’s visit being his ‘farewell’ had apparently been unauthorized; no sooner had he arrived home in June 1906 than invitations to appear in England again began to come in, from which he accepted one to conduct at the Leeds Festival in October 1907, requesting that Percy Grainger be engaged to play his Piano Concerto. He got no further than Bergen, where he died on 4 September 1907. What may be called a ‘Coda’ to this section reports the aftermath in England, where his death was feelingly reported and the concerts which he should have conducted were given ‘In Memoriam’, as were many others in following months. The circle is closed when Nina Grieg, overcoming her reluctance to return to England without Edvard, finally accepted in 1912 an invitation to visit once more their old friends the Brodskys in Manchester.

In broad biographical outline the story of Grieg’s life, including his successful concerts in England, is well known, above all through the biography by Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe (1980) and the several editions of his letters and diaries listed in the bibliography of this book. What Lionel Carley has done here, however, is to reveal to us in detail the full extent of Grieg’s contacts and correspondence with England, ranging from pedestrian matters such as travel preparations, business arrangements, concert fees, daily expenses, and dealings with admirers, autograph hunters, and souvenir seekers, to the thoughtful self-revelation of diary entries and letters in which he expresses his feelings as an artist and warm appreciation of personal kindnesses. In addition, Carley has winnowed newspapers, musical journals, biographies, memoirs, and assorted unsuspected sources for references to Grieg and reviews of his music, all of which he has pieced together with consummate skill into a compelling narrative that tells the story, happy despite chronic ill-health, of Grieg’s experience of England and England’s equally happy reception of Grieg and his music.

When Grieg entered the hall to conduct the Philharmonic Society for his first appearance in England on 3 May 1888 he was greeted by such an ovation – ‘I think for more than three minutes!’ – that he confessed he didn’t know what to do: ‘... it just wouldn’t stop. Isn’t that

astonishing? In a foreign country' (p. 87). This is, of course, the essence of the book and contemporary sources offer two different explanations of Grieg's reception: according to the review of the concert in *The Musical Times*, 'Grieg, though personally a stranger, seemed intimately known to the audience ... no doubt due to the charm of the songs and pianoforte pieces which long since made his name a household word' (pp. 86–87). This familiarity was to a large extent due to the issuing in the 1870s of inexpensive editions of his music in the new Peters Edition series, published in London by Peters' English agent Augener & Co. (p. 29). The public thus learned to know his music, not in the concert hall alone, but by playing and singing it at home and he acquired the reputation for being 'the most popular musician in the home life of England since Mendelssohn' (p. 286). Grieg himself, however, when reporting the concert to his friend Frants Beyer, was inclined to see in the overwhelming greeting a tribute to something greater than himself: 'I really believe that the appreciation of the English for my art must come from their appreciation of Norway, for I can't explain yesterday's ovation in any other way' (p. 87).

It is certainly true that in the latter part of the 19th century English tourists, so disapproved in the novels of Knut Hamsun, had discovered Scandinavia and Norway – 'Norway is becoming more the rage every year!' (p. 198). Other travellers, such as William Archer and Edmund Gosse, became distinguished interpreters of Scandinavian literature.⁴ F. Cowen and F. Cliffe wrote 'Scandinavian' symphonies (1879 and 1889 respectively) and it is intriguing to encounter letters written by enthusiasts who had troubled to learn a Scandinavian language. Carley's vignette of one such letter-writer (p. 346) seems to contain in a few short sentences material for a whole novel! Most surprising, however, is the discovery that the well-known musician with the Dickensian name Ebenezer Prout, known to generations of music students for numerous textbooks on musical subjects and to singers for the standard edition of Handel's *Messiah* before it was superseded in 1947 by the edition of J.M. Coopersmith, was able to write to Grieg in Norwegian (p. 234).

From the cultural-historical point of view this latter explanation has great interest and could bear to be further developed, in which case the role of the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in promoting in England an interest in Scandinavia deserves mention. Longfellow, who has escaped Lionel Carley's attention, became interested in Scandinavia in Copenhagen in 1835.⁵ He was for many years a professor at Harvard University and his poems, several with Scandinavian themes, were read and loved throughout the English-speaking world. It was from his *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863) that Edward Elgar adapted the text of his important choral work *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* (1896). Like Grieg, he received honorary doctorates from both Oxford and Cambridge (1868) and after his death in 1882, though an American, he was honoured with a memorial in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey in London. Seen in this light, perhaps Grieg's 'first and most unlikely [honour from British institutions] ... his appointment in 1884 as a member of the Council of Welcome to the American People' (p. xi) was not so inappropriate after all.

Lionel Carley has written a fascinating book about a great composer in an interesting cultural situation at a dynamic period in British history.

John Bergsagel

4 Cf. Edmund Gosse, *Two Visits to Denmark: 1872, 1874* (London, 1911; translated into Danish by Valdemar Rørdam, Copenhagen, 1912; reissued with a foreword by Kristian Hvidt, Copenhagen, 2001).

5 See Andrew Hilen, *Longfellow and Scandinavia, A Study of the Poet's Relationship with the Northern Languages and Literature* (New Haven, 1947).