

Geirr
TVEITT

Sinfonia di Soffiatori • Sinfonietta di Soffiatori

Selections from A Hundred Hardanger Tunes

The Royal Norwegian Navy Band • Bjarte Engeset



Geirr Tveitt

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TVEITT
(1908-1981)

Music for Wind Instruments

Sinfonia di Soffiatori		16:01	Hundrad Hardingtonar	
① I. Moderato		4:43	(A Hundred Hardanger Tunes),	
② II. Alla marcia		3:56	Op. 151	
③ III. Andante		7:22	(transcriptions by Stig Nordhagen)	
④ Prinds Christian Frederiks			Suite No. 2: Femtan Fjelltonar	
Honnørmark			(15 Mountain Songs)	5:45
(Prince Christian Fredrick's			⑫ No. 20: Med sterkt Øl te Fjells	
March of Honour)		3:19	(Bringing strong Ale into the Mountains)	1:23
			⑬ No. 23: Rjupo pao Folgafodne	
			(The Song of the Snow Grouse	
			on the Folgafodne Glacier)	3:04
⑤ Det gamle Kvernhuset			⑭ No. 29: Fjedlmansjento upp i Lid	
(The Old Mill on the Brook),			(The Mountain Girl skiing Downhill)	1:18
Op. 204		3:03		
⑥ Hymne til Fridomen			Suite No. 4: Brudlaupssuiten	
(Hymn to Freedom)		3:05	(Wedding Suite)	6:30
			⑮ No. 47: Friarføter (Going a-wooing)	1:32
Sinfonietta di Soffiatori, Op. 203		12:40	⑯ No. 52: Graot og Laott aot ain Baot	
			(Tears and Laughter for a Boat)	1:37
⑦ I. Intonazione d'autunno: Lento –			⑰ No. 60: Haringøl (Hardanger Ale)	3:20
Poco più mosso – Tempo I		4:00		
⑧ II. Ricordi d'estate: Tempo moderato			Suite No. 5: Trolltonar (Troll Tunes)	9:54
di springar		2:13	⑱ No. 70: Garsvoren dansar	
⑨ III. Fanfara funebre: Andante, deciso		3:24	(The Brownie dancing)	2:11
⑩ IV. Allegria alpestre: Mosso moderato		3:03	⑲ No. 72: Tussmyrke (Twilight)	1:46
⑪ V. Canto di congedo: Tranquillo –			⑳ No. 75: Domedag (Doomsday)	5:56
Poco più mosso – Tempo I –				
Poco più mosso – Tempo I – Grave		4:57		

Geirr Tveitt (1908-1981)

Tveitt in Europe

Spain, 1951. Touring virtuoso Geirr Tveitt, the Norwegian composer-pianist, broadcasts live across Europe, playing, from memory, music by his most famous forebear, Edvard Grieg. The radio announcer introduces the next piece; suddenly Tveitt's mind goes blank! His brain races... all he can remember is roughly how long it should last. He improvises a piece of "Grieg" on the spot. No-one seems to notice....

Grieg's shadow looms large in Tveitt's life. Inescapably so, for a Norwegian, and specifically west Norwegian, gifted as a pianist and as a composer, born in Grieg's native city of Bergen, just a year after the great man's death. Tveitt, however, came to terms with this eminence grise, earning his place, as one of today's leading Norwegian musicians, the pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, suggests, "among the century's greatest composer-pianists, alongside Bartók, Britten, Prokofiev and Rachmaninov".

As an adolescent Tveitt already had a mind of his own to animate his natural ear. Away from home at high school with no piano to practice on, he drew a keyboard on cardboard and used that. The local cinema needed a pianist to accompany silent films, but Tveitt's compositional fantasy sometimes seduced him far from the screen action, and hammering away during the love scenes did not go down too well with the public. When the high school music teacher rubbished everything he wrote, Grieg copied out a Grieg piece and slipped it in with his: to his glee, the teacher could not tell the difference.

Like Grieg, Tveitt studied at the Leipzig Conservatory. Like Grieg, he found it stultifying, if technically impeccable. This did not stop him saying some rebelliously rude things about Grieg; not to mention composing freely, and having works snapped up for performance and publication, including his first three piano concertos (*No. 1* is recorded on Naxos 8.555077). Tveitt found spiritual freedom in France,

where he took lessons with the likes of Honegger and Villa-Lobos. Paris became a favourite stop on tour, and it was here that he gave the first performance of his *Fourth Piano Concerto* in 1947. A few hours after Kirsten Flagstad had sung music by Grieg, Tveitt enthusiastically echoed Grieg's feeling that "the French spirit was the salvation of Nordic music". By then Tveitt was married to his second wife Tullemor, grand-niece of Grieg's best friend Frants Beyer. Twenty years later Tveitt, now clearly at ease with his Griegian inheritance, even set to music four of Grieg's fascinating, highly personal, letters to Beyer.

Contrasts: The stars of the Sahara sky and the sky of Northern Lights

Stars always inspired Tveitt. *The Starry Saharan Sky*, pitch-black and sparkling, ends a suite evoking places he toured to in Southern Europe and North Africa, with his piano in the latter carried between two camels. Tveitt painted the living-room ceiling of his home (Bjødnaarakane) deep blue, covered with golden-yellow constellations. His daughter Gyri recalls how she and her younger brother Haoko lay outside on mattresses under the stars as their father talked about them. In winter, wrapped in eiderdowns, they watched in wonder the amazing "ballet performances, ever-dancing spears" and bright sheets of light that inspired his night-sky masterpiece, the *Fourth Piano Concerto* (recorded on Naxos 8.555761).

The still-mysterious *aurora borealis*, the Northern Lights, bright white, with green, yellow and red, are sometimes static, sometimes dramatic, shooting and flashing, beautiful, moving, even terrifying. So too Tveitt's glittering music, piercing pyrotechnics kindled by piano and orchestra in partnership, not ignited by battle between them. Indeed, the *Fourth Concerto* was first performed in a two-keyboard form, when Tveitt was joined by the French pianist Geneviève Joy, in a triumphant Paris concert of the composer playing his

own works. Nadia Boulanger, no less, acclaimed his “originality rooted in tradition... a breath of fresh Norwegian air”. The audience, Tullemor recalled, “raised the roof”.

Hardanger Tunes

What exactly are “Hardanger Tunes”, “Hardingtonar”? Even to Norwegians, that sounds like an authentic dialect word; actually Tveitt invented it himself.

Folksong played a complex role in twentieth century composition, begging many vexed questions. What is folksong? How is it transmitted? How does it evolve? What’s the least bad way of “collecting” it, by recording or hand notation? Have collectors distorted their findings to meet their preconceived notions of what folksong “ought” to be? What’s its relationship to “art” music? Some composers have seemed content simply to arrange folk tunes for concert performance, or slot folk themes into classical forms. The greatest composers inspired by folksong, Bartók in Hungary, Vaughan Williams in England, soon transcended that, synthesising the characteristic rhythms, harmonies and melodic turns of phrase of folk-music into an individual style, and creating, from a kind of distilled essence of folk music, their own themes and forms very far from the vernacular.

Geirr Tveitt was different again. Unlike Bartók and Vaughan Williams, but like Bartók’s compatriot and colleague Kodály, Tveitt had roots in a living folk tradition. On childhood holidays in Hardanger he heard folk tunes, sung or played on animal horns, flutes, *langeleik* (the Norwegian dulcimer) or the decorative Hardanger fiddle (with its extra resonating strings and multitude of different tunings). The Hardanger tradition was even more private and personal than most: “you should hear me play when I’m on my own and nobody can hear me!” one man told Tveitt. The region’s difficult terrain limited intercommunication between

scattered communities; some songs were unique to a single locality, even a single family, including Tveitt’s own. Hardanger people sang of everyday life; not for them the epic ballads sung elsewhere in southern Norway. New words were written to old tunes. Some songs were wordless because the texts were forgotten, others because the singer was brilliantly mimicking a flute or fiddle. None survived the 1970 fire.

But Tveitt’s notebook also tells how a melody was inspired by a few poetic lines he found on the wall of an empty mountain hut; how, lying in the grass by a mountain burn, a melody suddenly came to him – “probably”, he decided, a folk tune sent by the hill-dwellers. Romanticised? Perhaps. But people have always been hard-put to tell Tveitt’s tunes from genuine folk melodies.

So: the “Hardingtonar” include “Folk tunes from Hardanger”, always songs, in fact, and he credited the singers, and Tveitt-tunes from Hardanger, and most often a mixture: he likened it to finding a fragment of a picture, which he then finished, or made his own picture around. Which begs more vexed questions. But their musical quality isn’t in doubt: coloured by Tveitt’s harmony, counterpoint and orchestration, the tunes are vivid gleams in a unified whole. Influences and affinities abound, especially with Tveitt’s beloved French and Russian music, often strongest with the Frenchman Charles Koechlin, in the clarity and integrity of Tveitt’s habitually two- or three-part layered textures. Intensifying the melodies’ essence, harmony and polyphony grow from their home modes, or from other modes to suggest microtones: two related modes, one including B and one B flat, imply something in between. Ostinatos evoke an accompanying *langeleik*, or fermenting beer, horses’ hoofbeats, the whisper of summer breezes or the sun glittering on the waters of the fjord.

David Gallagher

A note on the front cover painting

The watercolour *Hymn to Freedom* is a detail from a larger painting of mine, inspired by many of our father's musical works and his own way of painting. The mountain silhouette with remaining snow and the pine and juniper trees, is an almost direct copy of our father's painting covering the whole wall in the grand living-room in our home Bjødnaarakane, situated several hundred metres above sea level, which overlooks the fjord. Bjødnaarakane translates as "The Home of the Bears and the Juniper trees", a fantastic place to grow up for my brother Haako and myself. This home, built by our father and friends, was crushed into rubble several years later by heavy snow.

The bear is standing beside a "bearpole", actually a pole taken from our parents' home-made bed, which our father decorated with symbols of freedom. The bed was made during the occupation of Norway, and its main

symbol was "H 7" (a forbidden symbol during the war), the initials of King Haakon VII who, from 1940 to 1945, ruled Norway while exiled in London.

The last bear known in the area was said to have his hiding place and freedom up here.

The handwritten score covering the mountain reproduced on the booklet cover, is taken from the manuscript of an early work called *Prillar*, a large-scale symphonic ode to nature and freedom. It was written in 1932 in Leipzig when, as a young student, he was longing for the natural landscapes of his homeland.

I consider this painting to be the most suitable image to symbolize the freedom of expression our father felt when writing his music, be they small or large scale works – the freedom of being part of the world without suppression.

Gyri Tveitt





Bjodnabrakane
Photo © Gyri and Haako Tveitt



Geirr Tveitt in the 1950s
Photo © Gyri and Haako Tveitt

Music for Wind Instruments

Geirr Tveitt's most monumental composition for wind instruments, *Sinfonia di Soffiatori No. 3*, was first performed during the Bergen International Festival in 1974, by St Olaf College Concert Band, conducted by Miles H. Johnson. The concert band had commissioned this piece for their European tour that year. (It is not known why Geirr Tveitt numbered this work as No. 3.) The piece features important extra sound-colours with the inclusion of double-basses and harp. The movements have a precise and simple format, starting with a lofty horn theme which transpires from a rising fifth. By contrast, this is followed by brass motives with small melodic intervals and a *staccato* rhythm. Thirdly, there is a singing woodwind melody with harp arpeggios. These three sections (ABC) are repeated, to create ABCABCA. The second movement incorporates rhythms from the Halling dance and has a simpler form – ABA, while the last movement alternates between an expressive melody in 6/8 and an extremely powerful rhythmical section. The composition could appear to be intricately linked to some kind of mantra, as if the music is engendered by Mother Nature, constantly resonant. Similar repetitive rhythms are a common feature of Tveitt's works, also typified by *Fanfara funebre* from *Sinfonietta di Soffiatori* (1962).

A brass band named Krapfoss from Moss commissioned *Prinds Christian Frederiks Hønnørsmarch*. On the manuscript, Tveitt wrote: "To the conductor Torbjørn Gravningsmyhr with compliments to him and his band 13/8/70". Gravningsmyhr was a horn-player with the Royal Norwegian Navy Band throughout his entire professional career. The *Hønnørsmarch* is a simple, little march, with introductory bars, a main section, a trio section and a powerful coda. The successor to the Danish-Norwegian throne, Christian Frederik, was at the forefront of the declaration of Norwegian independence in 1814, but had to renounce any claim to the Norwegian throne after a brief war with Sweden and the subsequent "Moss convention" dated 14th August 1814. It was this

convention which formed the foundations for the union between Sweden and Norway.

Three of Tveitt's original compositions for wind instruments were created for a competition announced by the Norwegian Band Federation and music-house Tonika, in 1962. Tveitt won all three prizes. He received first prize for his *Sinfonietta di Soffiatori*, described by the jury as the greatest, most important and most innovative composition to date in Norwegian wind band music. The second prize went to his *Det gamle Kvernhuset* (The Old Mill on the Brook) and third prize to *Hymne til Fridomen* (Hymn to Freedom). All three works had their premières during an NRK radio programme, performed by the Ulriken band, conducted by the jury foreman, Valter Aamodt. While attending the performance in the studio, Tveitt self-critically, in his typical ironic way, described himself as practically an amateur in this genre: "No, I believe I have somewhat better knowledge of symphony orchestras". The three compositions were published by Tonika music-house, and *Det gamle Kvernhuset* in particular was frequently performed in subsequent years. At times the orchestration of these compositions was "slimmed down", but we have chosen to retain all of Tveitt's original instrumentation. It has a special fullness, portraying nature in rich colours, with grass, water, stone, forest and the darkness of traditional Norwegian timber.

Hymne til Fridomen is a short march composition, with a singing central section, accompanied by a percussion rhythm reminiscent of swing. *Sinfonietta di Soffiatori* has a more particular and original musical language. The chords are quite compact and have relatively many dissonances, with full and colourful instrumentation. The five Italian titles can be interpreted as a collection of autumn moods, and are therefore not so distant from the character pieces from the *Hundred Hardanger* suites. Tveitt wrote "*campane*" into the instrumentation, but allowed the musicians to decide whether this should be the glockenspiel, vibraphone or chimes. He also allowed individual movements to be performed, but with Norwegian titles.

Today, four orchestral suites featuring *A Hundred Hardanger Tunes* exist by Geirr Tveitt: *Suites 1, 2, 4* and *5*. Each suite has fifteen movements. We have included nine tunes, transcribed by Stig Nordhagen. *Med sterkt Øl te Fjells*, from *Suite 2* (Mountain tunes), boasts a typical Tveitt self-confidence. The subsequent *Rjupo pao Folgafodne* was one of the *Hundred Hardanger Tunes* most often played or sung by Tveitt himself (and was entirely his own composition). With its solo for English horn, this is a kind of Norwegian parallel to Sibelius' *Swan of Tuonela*. *Fjedlmansjento* features the following rhyming lyrics: "The mountain man's girl up the mountainside; she skis, falls, and scrapes her backside". This is a very short stanza, so Tveitt included 8-9 *burlesque* variations in this minute-long mini-portrait.

The fourth suite, the *Wedding Suite*, has the most stringent format. It takes us chronologically through events, from the very first infatuation and through the various phases of the wedding festivities, while retaining a symmetrical form. According to Tveitt himself, *Friarføter* portrays boys "creeping around" the girls' sleeping quarters. In one section of this work, Tveitt has used very high violin harmonics. In the wind instrument version these have been replaced by an energetic whistling by the musicians. In the days when a suitor had to row over the fjord to his loved one, it was not uncommon for rivals to hide or sink a man's boat so that he had to walk around the entire fjord or get a lift over. *Graot og Laott aot ain Baot* is a song for a humorous wedding procession, where the bridegroom is reminded of how his boat was sunk. Perhaps the very last beat on the cymbal is to portray the boat going down? *Haringøl* was one of the piano works where Tveitt used his humorous imagination when performing this composition. In this piece, the repetitive rhythms depict the fermentation of strong beer. The intensity rises, pulsating through one's head, culminating in what sounds like glasses being thrown against a wall. In these last bars the pianist has to throw himself, with elbows first, over all the white and black keys alternately. The lyrics tell us that we do not just drink "because we are

thirsty, but because it tastes so good!" This piece is said to be the Norwegian pendant to Ravel's *Bolero*. It could as easily be modelled, however, on "*rameslåttar*", a special type of fiddle-tune from Norwegian folklore, where the musicians relentlessly play themselves into rapture.

The extracts from *Suite No. 5* (Troll Tunes) start with a portrayal of a very special pixie performing a strange, ecstatic dance in *Garsvoren dansar*. The *Troll Tunes Suite* has two variants of *Tussmyrke*, and we have chosen what is thought to be the more recent of the two. *Tussmyrke* means twilight – the transition between night and day – when ghosts and goblins come out to play, according to popular belief. This suite concludes with the gigantic *Domedag*, requiring great strength and stamina from musicians. The tonality practically disintegrates at the end, while the church bells are chiming loudly.

Critics have at times described Tveitt's orchestration as overburdened, thick and muddy. I personally believe that it was often necessary for Tveitt to compose in this way. The art of classical orchestration is most often a cultivation of tone. A good distribution of chord notes is required to liberate and balance the sound, and the instrument resources must be exploited economically. Extreme accents or sonorities should not create unbalance. Geirr Tveitt, however, often has a different agenda. He sets out to create an orchestral portrayal of nature, popular beliefs and moods. One essential element of his works is often the tension between the melody and the orchestration, where the melody basically has to battle with the natural tone. In the *Hundred Hardanger Tunes*, such as *Å! Høyre du Songjen i Fossaduren* and *Med Ulvar og Rein i Uvér pao Viddæ* (Naxos 8.555770; *A Hundred Hardanger Tunes, Suites Nos. 2 and 5*), the sound of the waterfall and the storm are so powerful you can hardly hear the melody. In *Domedag*, six kettledrums thunder while the melody is played *mezzo-forte* only. Human beings and their experience of and feelings for nature are not at the forefront here. We are as tiny and insignificant as a grouse, compared to the powerful Folgefonna glacier (*Rjupo pao Folgafodne*).

In the fourth movement of the *Sinfonietta di Soffiatori*, and in several of the *Hundred Hardanger Tunes*, Tveitt explicitly depicts the echo and the sound of nature. But he also seeks, at times, to portray a more mystical, mythical sound:

"According to the old legends, one can almost conclude ... that they convey ... a certain philosophy ... that mankind has only ever had a superficial comprehension of the world of sounds and music as a virtuoso preoccupation and as a pastime. However, beyond all human comprehension and capacity, deep down from the subconscious, symbolized by the music of the underground, comes the real music, the sounds of truth, and moods which are entirely different from those humans are accustomed to." (from a radio interview about the *Troll Tunes Suite*.)

The characteristic combination of natural realism and natural mysticism creates a divide from the national romantic philosophy, which tends to focus on individual feelings and "humanises" nature. In Tveitt's world mysticism is born from realism. The fundamental emotion of being so small in the huge context of nature is based on a mythology dating back over millennia, rather than being based on central European philosophical traditions. An intense perception of life, "straight to the point" is manifest in Tveitt's works, in colourful and accurate inspiration. Even the slower and more poetic works by Tveitt have certain features of great force and dynamics, with wide bass tones or compact brass chords. In such cases, the theme is often the mountain plain and the wide view. The Tveitt farm was built high on the mountainside, with breathtaking views of the fjord, glacier and mountains. A number of movements also have an open end which expresses wonderment, often preceded by a powerful section of music. Take, for example, the quiet and attentive end to the second movement in *Sinfonia di Soffiatori*. We can also find examples of this wonderment over the unmentionable in the works of authors known to Tveitt:

Jakob Sande, Aslaug Vaa, Tarjei Vesaas and Olav H. Hauge.

The powerful musical climaxes in Tveitt's works not only express a veneration for the wonderful vastness of nature. They are just as much a presentation of the burlesque and naked power which we often call barbarism. Inspiration from other European composers such as Bartók and Stravinsky, is clearly evident. We can find examples of the grotesque in the romantic European music traditions, such as Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. There we meet an individual's fears, anxieties and discomfort, and the main character's negative feelings around alienation. With Tveitt, the grotesque is born from an ancient, positive and popular culture focusing on the comical. It celebrates the organic cycle of life and is an expression of the force of life. It may at times seem that Tveitt had an ambition to impress his audience with his very loud *tutis* and his many imaginative inventions. It is equally true, however, that Tveitt held this ambition on the behalf of Norwegian nature and people. The pride of the mountains and the fjord thunders into fine concert halls. This folk energy can also sometimes be self-ironic. Tveitt quite often wrote very technical, difficult sections in order to produce the sound of musicians fighting a hopeless battle to "get it right". He often uses wild melismas and appoggiaturas in front of each melody note, in order to generate a special, burlesque character. Examples of this can be found in *Haringø*. Such an almost grotesque musical style could easily become uniform and bombastic, expressed as it is in capital letters. Tveitt, however, is successful in greatly varying his powerful style. He encompasses the forces of both good and evil. The question of how much symphonic music and how much folk music lives in Tveitt is both open and interesting. I experience a suspense between lyrical refinement and powerful primitivism in his music which makes it particularly challenging and rewarding both to perform and to listen to.

Bjarte Engeset

The Royal Norwegian Navy Band



Photo: Lars Igesund / RNNB

The Royal Norwegian Navy Band is a modern ensemble, firmly rooted in military tradition and strongly committed to its local community. Since 1820 the band has been an important cultural institution for the local community and the military. The band strives to preserve these musical traditions, while at the same time establishing new ones. The band currently consists of 29 highly skilled professional musicians, all of them with four to six years of higher education in their field. The band releases several recordings every year, and is regularly invited to music festivals both at home and abroad.

Bjarte Engeset



Photo: Ulf Palm

When Norwegian conductor Bjarte Engeset graduated in conducting from the Sibelius Academy in 1989, he did so with flair. With the highest possible score from the panel of jurors, he was acclaimed as one of the Academy's best students of all time. Several years later he was invited to the eminent Conductor's Seminar at the Tanglewood Music Center, Boston University, renowned as one of the world's leading centres for higher education in music. Bjarte Engeset can boast many successes. His début with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London in 1997 was very well received, and his recordings of Norwegian orchestral music by Grieg and Tveitt have placed him high up Naxos's sales charts. He has been chief conductor and artistic director for the Tromsø Symphony Orchestra, and artistic director for the Northern Light Festival and Opera Nord. He has directed orchestras in most European countries, conducted opera and made guest appearances at orchestra houses in Mexico, the United States and Japan. He has also been guest conductor for the Flemish Radio Orchestra. In 2006 he was guest conductor of the Moscow Radio Orchestra at the prestigious Würthersee Classics Festival in Klagenfurt, Austria. Since 2007 Bjarte Engeset has been artistic director of DalaSinfonietta symphony orchestra in Sweden. As the regional orchestra of Dalarna county it is a common sight around the region, giving concerts at Dalhalla and at the Music at Lake Siljan festival each summer.



Tulleemor and Geirr Tveitt's marriage in 1944
Photo © Gyri and Haoko Tveitt



Geirr Tveitt on camel, Sahara Desert, 1953
Photo © Gyri and Haako Tveitt



Playing
Time:
65:14

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Music for Wind Instruments

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|--------------|---|--------------|
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| 4 | Prinds Christian Frederiks
Honnørsmarch | 3:19 |
| 5 | Det gamle Kvernhuset, Op. 204 | 3:03 |
| 6 | Hymne til Fridomen | 3:05 |
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| 12-14 | Suite No. 2: Femtan Fjelltonar | 5:45 |
| 15-17 | Suite No. 4: Brudlaupssuiten | 6:30 |
| 18-20 | Suite No. 5: Trolltonar | 9:54 |

The Royal Norwegian Navy Band Bjarte Engeset

A complete track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet
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Norwegian Cultural Council

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Transcriptions © Stig Nordhagen (tracks 12-20)
Cover painting: *Hymn to Freedom* by Gyri Tveitt



This album celebrates the centenary of the birth of Geirr Tveitt, an important figure in Norwegian music, many of whose scores perished when his house burned to the ground in 1970. A student of Nadia Boulanger, and influenced by Bartók, Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky, Tveitt drew deeply from Norwegian folk music, particularly from the Hardanger district, to develop a refined and lyrical personal style that gained favour both internationally and in his homeland. This first complete edition of Tveitt's compositions for wind instruments also includes Stig Nordhagen's transcription of nine movements from the suites *A Hundred Hardanger Tunes*.

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