

Edvard Grieg

Piano Quintet in B flat major, EG.118
(completed by Michael Finnissy)

Michael Finnissy

Grieg-Quintettsatz



Roderick Chadwick piano
Kreutzer Quartet

Edvard Grieg: Piano Quintet in B flat major (EG 118)

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Grieg wrote roughly 250 bars of a Piano Quintet in his 'Kladdebok' (sketchbook), immediately before the revisions that he made to 'Peer Gynt' for performances in 1892. This quintet 'torso' constitutes the exposition of a virtually monothematic structure, following Sonata principles similar to those found in Brahms or Franck. He also made some use here of earlier sketches for a second Piano Concerto (1883 - 87). The manuscript, held in the Bergen Public Library, has been published in Volume 20 of the *Grieg Gesamtausgabe* [C.F.Peters, Frankfurt], and in *Edvard Grieg: The Unfinished Chamber Music* [A-R Editions, Inc. Middleton, Wisconsin], neither edition attempting to extend the work.

My Southampton University colleague Paul Cox suggested that I tried to invent a completion. After some general research and experimentation with the material, I decided to fashion a one-movement Kammer-symphonie, in which the central 'development section' following on from Grieg's exposition, consists of a scherzo (a *Hailing*, with imitation of Hardanger fiddle music) and a ruminative slow movement (in the manner of the Poetic Tone-pictures' Op.3), which then proceeds to a recapitulation-finale in which some of the material previously assigned to the strings appears in the piano part, and vice versa.

This labour of love began in 2007 and produced two successive, but unsatisfactory, versions, both of which were performed in London. Final alterations and revisions were completed in the late Spring of 2012, approximately 120 years after Grieg laid down his pen, and - appropriately enough - received a definitive performance at the 2013 Bergen International Festival, by the Kreutzer String Quartet and Roderick Chadwick.

Michael Finnissy: Grieg Quintettsatz

As I had been asked to complete the Grieg Piano Quintet in B flat (EG118) as seamlessly, and as closely to the manner of Grieg, as possible, I thought – for fun – that I might shadow that ‘creative journey’ with one that was wholly my own, starting from a virtually identical point, but then diverging at the same moment that I had (in disguise) taken over from Grieg.

The exposition of this Quintet-movement, up to the break at bar 234, follows Grieg's Piano Quintet structure (and textural outlines) quite closely, drawing on sources and influences that were available to, even if not directly declared by, Grieg. The opening piano phrases, an initial rising octave stolen directly from Grieg, and the responses from the strings, are based on fragments of folk-tunes from Ludvig Mathias Lindeman's ‘Aeldre og nyere norske fjeldmelodier’. I then extended this pastoral material (bars 40 - 95) in a manner more suggestive of Wagnerian rhetoric (Grieg had been considerably inspired by his visit to Bayreuth), and based on The Valkyrie Act 2, scene 4.

The exposition closes with an extension of the first *Scherzo-Hailing* that I wrote for EG 118. After the exposition-repeat the *Quintettsatz* behaves rather differently to the B flat *Quintet*, and in ways suggested to me by Picasso's elaborations of Velasquez, Warhol's transcriptions of Leonardo, or Hockney's versions of Claude Lorraine's ‘Sermon on the Mount’.

I was also reminding myself of Grieg's influence on Grainger, on Debussy and Ravel, even as remembered by John Cage.

Memories persist: bidden or unbidden, crazy or clear-cut, uncomfortable or not.

Michael Finnissy, Sheringham, 2013

**“When you are telling a story,
You use different rhetoric,
You are constantly adjusting,
...according to where the story
is going.”**

Michael Finnissy in conversation, 2009

I have worked with Michael Finnissy for most of my professional life as a musician. The dialogue with Finnissy and his extraordinary music has been, and continues to be, one of the great joys of my musical adventure. It has been my experience, that to work closely, to talk, with a living composer is to enter into their various colloquies, and of course, the passions of and interests of any composer's interlocutor affect the nature and quality of the dialogue. So talking, working with Michael, much of the conversation has been about Haydn, Brahms, Bruckner, Bulgarian folk music, and in the case of the pieces under discussion here, Grieg.

Perhaps the most misunderstood and misrepresented area in the history of composition has been that of the 'overlap' between composers. Michael Finnissy's work on the two works recorded here offers an extraordinary window into both the compositional process, into Finnissy's dialogue with Grieg, and with their shared conversations with the French composers which they both love(d). Grieg's public success, which has continued, grown, unabated since his death, has obscured the enormous impact that he had on the composers of his time and ensuing generations. Stravinsky was very candid about what he had learnt from him.

Debussy, whilst insulting him in the guise of 'M.Croche the *dilettante* hater', famously called his *Two Elegiac Melodies* "a sugary sweet stuffed with snow", knowing full well that his own *String Quartet*

simply could not have happened without Grieg's solitary completed quartet. This influence continues. According to Finnissy:

“When I was a youngster I just loved Grieg's music for itself, but when I became more ‘sophisticated’ in my musical tastes, I came to realize what an enormous influence he had been on French composers, on Debussy, Ravel, Chausson and Reynaldo Hahn – some whom acknowledged it and some of whom acknowledged it in a backhanded way by insulting him ... which of course, is always a sign (for a composer) that they are stealing as much as they can and then using it! I was wanting to remind myself of the debt that so many French composers owe to Grieg.”

In a ‘pre-concert talk’ given at Bergen premiere these pieces at the 2013 ‘Festspillerne’, Finnissy spoke of the problem of scale which be-devilled Grieg as his popularity grew. The more Grieg was acclaimed for highly-coloured piano miniatures or brilliant orchestral fireworks, the more he felt shut off from exploring symphonic-scale structures. In a conversation recorded whilst preparing the London premiere of his first version of the completed *Piano Quintet movement*, Finnissy noted:

“The trouble clearly was that Grieg found himself with much too much material ... much of which is quite ‘Brucknerian’ and needs that kind of pace. And Grieg's music is not Brucknerian ... most of his music is constructed in 4-bar phrases.”

Finnissy was not hemmed-in by any such expectations of scale. After all, he has written a 5-hour cycle for solo piano! When he ‘unrolled’ Grieg's quintet-torso, an ‘almost-complete’ exposition section of a first movement, a 30-minute first movement resulted. Grieg wrestled with a similar issue with the *String Quartet, Op 29*. This also has a substantial first movement; the composer solved the ensuing scale problem by using an abbreviated A-B-A ‘romance’ form for the second movement, which kept it quite short. However, even if Grieg had tried this strategy with the Piano Quintet, this would have resulted in a giant work, most likely well over 60 minutes long (Schumann, Brahms, and Dvorak's piano quintets are not very large-scale works). Of course, the reason that Grieg did not finish, might simply have been because, as Finnissy reminds us, ‘The Piano Quintet is a very difficult medium’.

Working closely with Finnissy, as he, quite literally ‘mined’ Grieg’s material, offered a ring-side seat as one of the great musical minds of our time worked in the creative space of his forbear. Because Finnissy also wrote his own ‘mirror’ of the material, he was able to follow other paths from those taken by the Grieg himself. He has said that perhaps Grieg was overwhelmed by his own material, which almost defeated Finnissy’s own efforts to ‘contain it’. But he found common ground with Grieg, in a mutual tendency to develop material as soon it appears. As he puts it, they both work(ed) by, “... gathering together a small amount of material and exploring it ... both [our] expositions contain the element of development.”

Michael noted that the almost ‘organic’ compositional method, which the two composers share, watching Grieg work, and ‘being him’, felt like extemporization.

“I love Grieg’s sense of spontaneity ... it’s as if he was just improvising it!”

Both composers enjoy(ed) the similarity between gardening and composing. Grieg’s composing huts, one of which survives at ‘Trolldhaugen’, his beautiful house near Bergen, were called ‘Composten’ (The Compost). Finnissy again; ‘...you just put a lot of raw vegetables in your head and it turns to compost ... you get very hot indeed’

One strategy which Finnissy used, both completing the unfinished quintet, and composing his own response to the material, was to draw links to the music which Grieg himself loved:

“Grieg’s ‘rising octave’ [the first subject] generates an enormous amount of material. Where Grieg goes into his impassioned second subject, I managed to build on the material and based in on the harmony from one of the encounters between Siegfried and Brunnhilde from *Die Walküre*, which Grieg had seen round about the time that he was working on this quintet, so it was probably in his mind.”

Sometimes Finnissy followed quixotic paths, hinted at by Grieg's exposition. In a rehearsal, our cellist Neil Heyde pointed out that his response to Grieg's 'folk material' is a 'three-legged folk dance. Michael was delighted!

"One sees possibilities in material that one just can't resist! It's the reason that I love folk music."

Finnissy has noted the liberation in being able to follow his own path with Grieg's material, in contrast to the effort needed in walking the road which Grieg had begun to take:

"When you start the material from scratch, it just rolls..."

The Kreutzer Quartet and Roderick Chadwick have been able to be with the composer at various stages as this piece emerged. The more that we work with him, the more that we are faced with a paradox, however candid Finnissy is about his working methods, decision-making processes and where he perceives that he 'fails'. Those of us who are privileged to work closely with him, share a sense of utter bewilderment, about the results. Put bluntly, none of us know how he does it? The only response, watching him at work, is Schumann's salute to Chopin: 'Hats off Gentlemen – A Genius!'

Peter Sheppard Skærved, Bergen, 2013

The Composer

Michael Finnissy was born on 17th March 1946, at roughly 2 a.m., at 77 Claverdale Road, Tulse Hill, London SW2. His parents were Rita Isolene (nee Parsonson) and George Norman Finnissy. At that time his father worked for the London County Council, assisting through his photographic documentation the assessment of damage to and re-building of London after the war.

Michael started to write music almost as soon as he could play the piano, aged about four and a half, and was tutored in both by his great aunt: Rose Louise Hopwood (Rosie). He attended Hawes Down Infant and Junior schools, Bromley Technical High, and Beckenham and Penge Grammar schools. Music was not taught in any formal or examinable way, though not discouraged either – his best subjects were graphic art, mathematics and English literature.

Michael received the William Yeats Hurlstone composition-prize at the Croydon Music Festival, a factor which assisted his parents' decision to let him apply to music college. He was awarded a Foundation Scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music, where his composition teachers were Bernard Stevens and Humphrey Searle, and was subsequently awarded an Octavia travelling scholarship to study in Italy with Roman Vlad.

He earned money for his studies by playing the piano for dance-classes: Russian-style classical ballet with Maria Zybina, John O'Brien and Kathleen Crofton and jazz with Matt Mattox. After his studies in Italy, and with no formal qualifications, he continued to work in dance, both freelancing, and at the London School of Contemporary Dance – where, with the encouragement of its course-director Pat Hutchinson, Michael founded a music department.

During these years he worked with the choreographers Jane Dudley and Anna Sokolow from the pioneering era of modern dance, and in more experimental work by Richard Alston, Siobhan Davies, Jackie Lansley and Fergus Early.

Michael's concert debut as a solo pianist was at the Galerie Schwarzes Kloster in Freiburg, playing a concert mostly of first performances – works by, Howard Skempton and Oliver Knussen as well as his

own. In the meantime he had started to perform in Europe, firstly at the Gaudeamus Music Week in 1969 and thereafter until 1973, at Royan Festival (1974-6) and Donaueschingen.

In many of these events he was twinned with Brian Ferneyhough, a friend since student days. His initial attempts at serious composition teaching, at Dartington Summer School in the mid-1970s, were also partnered by Ferneyhough.

In England his early work had received encouragement from Ian Lake, Colin Mason and Martin Dalby. Two pieces had been published by International Music Publishers (Ascherberg), some others by edition modern in Munich and two by Suvini Zerboni in Milan. With the support of Bill Colleran he signed a contract with Universal Edition (London) in 1978, and subsequently with United Music Publishers and (in 1988) with his now principal publisher Oxford University Press. Other works are available from Tre Media Verlag (Friederike Zimmermann) in Karlsruhe.

Michael had been a member of the ensemble Suoraan (founded by James Clarke and Richard Emsley) and then its artistic director since the early 1970s. He joined Ixion (founded and still directed by Andrew Toovey) in 1987 – in both of these groups he not only played the piano but also conducted concerts.

In the late 1980s Michael was invited by Justin Connolly to join the British section of the ISCM, and from 1990 until 1996 served as its President, travelling widely to Europe, Asia and Latin America. He had since been elected to Honorary Membership of the society.

The Musicians

Described by the *Sunday Times* as “possessor of devastating musicality and technique”, pianist **Roderick Chadwick** combines his wide-ranging activity on the concert platform with diverse teaching and research interests. He has performed at many of Britain’s most prominent venues, including the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, Wigmore Hall and Aldeburgh Festival, and made his London Southbank debut playing the Tippett Piano Concerto at the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

During the mid 1990s he performed the complete piano works of Olivier Messiaen, and continues to research Messiaen’s music and that of his students. In 2007 he was appointed Artistic Advisor to the Royal Academy of Music for its collaboration with the Southbank Centre in London’s year-long Messiaen Centenary Festival.

Roderick Chadwick has collaborated with artists such as Chloë Hanslip, Narimichi Kawabata, Peter Sheppard Skaerved and the Kreutzer Quartet, performing widely in Europe, the United States and Asia, including recitals at Seoul Arts Centre, Auditorium du Louvre, Schloss Elmau, Tokyo Opera City and Kioi Hall. He is a member of the ensembles CHROMA and Plus-Minus, making recent appearances at the Huddersfield, Ultima (Oslo) and TRANSIT (Leuven) Festivals. He broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 and has recorded on the Innova (US), Guild, and Victor (Japan) labels. He lives in London and teaches at the Royal Academy of Music.

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They are quartet in residence at Wilton’s Music Hall in London.



Recording the Quintets, July 2012

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**Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)
(completed by Michael Finnissy)**

① **Piano Quintet in B flat major, EG.118** 27.09

Michael Finnissy (b.1946)

② **Grieg Quintettsatz** 32.33

total duration: 59.44

Roderick Chadwick piano
Kreutzer Quartet

