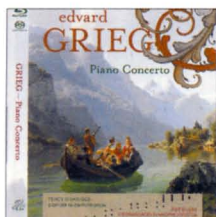


INTERNATIONAL PIANO

REVIEWS



Grieg Piano Concerto in A minor op.16*. *Wedding Day at Trolldhaugen*†. *Two Album Leaves* op.28†. *Erotikon* op.43 no.5†. *To Spring*, op.43/6‡. *Violin Sonata no.3 in C minor* op.45.

Percy Grainger (pf/piano roll)*; **Edvard Grieg** (piano roll)†; **Øyvind Bjørå** (vn); **Rex Lawson** (pianola); **Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra/Rolf Gupta***.

2L 60, 62 minutes

This is something of a curio. In fact, it verges on the bizarre, yet carries with it an irresistible fascination. The product includes a CD and a surround-sound Blu-ray disc of Grieg's concerto with modern orchestra and conductor accompanying a 1921 piano roll of Percy Grainger as soloist. Cutting-edge modern technology meets historic performances in a most fertile way.

Grainger's interpretation of the concerto is recorded on an Aeolian Company Duo-Art reproducing piano, powered by an electric pump and controlled via perforated rolls of paper. Grainger's rubato, dynamics and pedalling are all encoded. For the Grieg performances of the *Lyric Pieces*, a differ-

ent approach has been taken – a foot-pedal pianola played by Rex Lawson. Both instruments were fitted to a Steinway for this recording. For the Sonata, Lawson uses a roll with the notes punched on it, and supplies the interpretative nuances himself.

The meeting between Grainger and Grieg that took place in Trolldhaugen in July 1901 was a significant one, and one that had a profound effect on the Norwegian composer. Grainger signed a contract with Duo-Art in 1914; over the next 15 years or so he recorded a total of roughly 66 rolls. So it is that this roll (actually made in about 1921) offers a window in time back to Grainger and his individualistic take on the concerto. The first-movement cadenza is gripping in its cumulative effect; credit to all concerned that the central Adagio becomes a meaty statement; and the finale, too, carries real weight and aplomb.

Grieg's account (via a 1906 Phonola roll) of the famous *Wedding Day at Trolldhaugen* is a joy, particularly the purity of line in the slower section (the rubato here is Grieg's, while Lawson controls dynamics and pedalling), and the chromatic explorations of the *Album Leaf* op.28 no.2 are highly effective. Unfortunately, the performance of the Violin Sonata does not convey the scope of the piece. The recording here, also, is almost intimidatingly close.

As a bonus, one can download from the 2L website a few encores – two played by Artur de Greef and three by Grieg, available in mp3 format and no fewer than three types of FLAC.

COLIN CLARKE