

July 14, 2014, Hillside Theater at Taliesin, 7:30 pm

Songs of Norway

Michael Keller, Piano ♦ Mimmi Fulmer, Soprano
Stephen Bjella, Violin

Tuoll' on mun kultani (soprano) Traditional Finnish song

Lyric Pieces (piano) Edvard Grieg

Arietta, Op. 12 No. 1 In My Native Country, Op. 43 no. 3

Solitary Traveller, Op. 43 No. 2 Halling, Op. 47 no. 4

Butterfly, Op. 43 No. 1 Notturmo, Op. 57 No. 4

Elegie, Op. 47 no. 7 Vision, Op. 62 No. 5

Halling, Op. 38 No. 4 Puck, Op. 71 No.

Mot kveld (soprano & piano) Agathe Backer Grondahl

Med en vandlilje (soprano & piano) Edvard Grieg

Elsk

Jeg elsker Dig

Og jeg vil ha

Intermission

Soprano & piano selections

De hundrede violiner Eyvind Alnaes

Sildig Agathe Backer Grondahl

Synnoves Sang Halfdan Kjerulf

I graneholtet

Naar sola Christian Sinding

Rav

Sonata in G major Op. 13 for violin and piano Edvard Grieg

Lento doloroso - Allegro vivace

Allegretto tranquillo

Allegro animato

The Composers

Edvard Grieg is Norway's most famous composer. After Ole Bull (see below) "discovered" him, he was sent abroad to study. Grieg became one of the foremost composers of Nationalistic music of the Romantic Era. He was also an accomplished pianist. Grieg married his cousin, Nina. She was a singer, and their relationship was often stormy, but Grieg said of Nina, "She is the only true interpreter of my songs."

Grieg was a strong supporter of the Nationalist Movement in Norway, and an advocate of the language, Landsmaal. He set numerous poems written in Landsmaal by A. O. Vinje and Arne Garborg to music. These are his songs which most strongly show the influence of Norwegian folk music. He left a great legacy of orchestral, piano, and vocal music. Six of these musical gems are on "Norges Melodier." His famous "Piano Concerto in A Minor" was strongly influenced by Norwegian folk music.

Agathe Backer Grøndahl is thought by many to be Norway's foremost female composer. A contemporary and close friend of Edvard Grieg, she was the first Norwegian woman composer to ever get a stipend from the Norwegian government. Agathe Backer Grøndahl was an accomplished pianist, as well as a composer. She is considered to be one of the most talented classical pianists that Norway has ever produced. After her marriage, she settled in Oslo and raised a family. She became a very influential teacher, and continued to compose and perform in Norway. She produced numerous works for piano and for voice.

Eyvind Alnæs was a composer, pianist, organist and choir director. His songs draw upon Nordic poetry for inspiration, and rely less on folk music than those of many other composers of the time.

One of **Halvdan Kjerulf**'s students was Agathe Backer Grøndahl. Kjerulf was the first composer to use the folk music of Norway in his compositions, and he is best known for his songs. He also left a legacy of choral and piano music. He strongly influenced Rikard Nordraak and Edvard Grieg.

Remembered by ambitious amateur pianists for his *Rustle of Spring*, **Christian Sinding** was a more important figure in the music of his native Norway than this might suggest; there, in his time, he was second only to Grieg. Trained in Leipzig, he fell under the influence of Liszt and Wagner, producing a large quantity of music that enjoyed contemporary popularity.

Ole Bull was primarily known as one of the greatest violin virtuosos of his time, playing for both the King of England and the Russian Czar. He was a child prodigy, largely self-taught on the violin. When King Frederik VII of Denmark asked him who had taught him to play the violin, he is reputed to have replied, "The mountains of Norway." He performed throughout Europe, gaining acclaim for his brilliant improvisations and the rich tone of his playing. He modified his violin, using the Norwegian Hardanger Fiddle as a model. The almost flat bridge on this modified violin enabled him to play four note chords. He also toured the United States, Canada, and Cuba.

Ole Bull always promoted the folk music and culture of Norway. It was Ole Bull who "discovered" Edvard Grieg, encouraging Grieg's parents to send their son abroad to study. Ole Bull established the first Norwegian National Theater in Bergen, and employed both Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. It is said that Ibsen's character of Peer Gynt is based partly on the remarkable life of Ole Bull. He spent the last ten years of his life living in the United States, where he had founded a utopian community, Oleana, in Pennsylvania. In 1868 Bull met Sara Chapman Thorp, the daughter of a prosperous lumber merchant, after a concert in Madison, Wisconsin. Despite their age difference (he was 60, she was 20), Bull began a courtship, and the couple was secretly married in Norway in June 1870, with a formal wedding in Madison later that year. Ole Bull exerted a strong influence on Grieg and other creative artists of the 19th century to reflect Norwegian culture and identity in their works.

The Performers

STEVEN BJELLA

Steve Bjella has performed throughout the United States, appearing both as soloist and in a variety of chamber ensembles. He holds degrees in performance and music education from the University of Iowa, where he studied with Leopold LaFosse and the Stradivari Quartet. He has also studied with the Vermeer, Fine Arts and New Hungarian Quartets.

Before moving to Stevens Point he lived in Chicago and was on the faculty of Valparaiso University and Saint Xavier College, a member of the Governor's State University String Quartet, and a member of the contemporary music ensembles, Chicago Camerata and Loop Group. Mr. Bjella had an active free-lance career as well, performing on numerous commercial recordings and was concertmaster of the Chicago Chamber Orchestra and Chicago Light Opera Orchestra.

Steve joined the music faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in 1991 and holds the positions of Artist/Teacher of Violin and Professor of Music. An active performer and teacher, he has written two books on violin technique, *Beginning Repertoire for the Advanced Violinist* and *Scales and Arpeggios, Block Fingering Exercises for the Advanced Violinist*, and given master-classes at colleges and high-schools across the country. He also enjoys making music with his colleagues in the Central Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra and is concertmaster of the orchestra.

MIMMI FULMER

Mimmi Fulmer performs repertoire ranging from early music to premieres of works written for her. She has appeared as featured soloist at festivals including Aspen and Bang on a Can, and in concerts at the Kennedy Center, CAMI Hall, and the Walker Art Center. She has recorded with the Centaur, Albany, Innova, and CRI labels. Her solo CD, "About Time" was called "a gratifying testimony to...composers in America" by Opera News online, and "American Vistas" was described as "superb" by American Record Guide. She has premiered dozens of works, including nine roles in eight operas. Early music has been a significant part of her career, and she performs regularly with fortepiano and early music ensembles. The granddaughter of immigrants from Finland and Sweden, she is presenting lecture-recitals of Nordic music throughout the US. Her CD of Nordic songs, "Voyage Home: Songs of Finland, Sweden and Norway", was released on Centaur Records in 2013, and she is editing a two-volume anthology of Nordic songs (including phonetics) to be published by Subito Music. She was recently named to the Fulbright Specialists Roster in American music. Ms. Fulmer is Professor of Voice and Opera at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

MICHAEL KELLER

Pianist Michael Keller has degrees from Indiana State University and the University of Illinois. His teachers have included Howard Karp and French pianist Marylene Dosse. As pianist for Donald Peck, former principal flutist of the Chicago Symphony, he performed recitals throughout the United States and recorded for WFMT Chicago. He was also a member of the Lydian Trio formed by Mr. Peck with former cellist of the Pro Arte Quartet, Lowell Creitz. As a soloist he has appeared on such series as Sunday Afternoon Live from the Chazen, the Dame Myra Hess Series and St. Martin in the Fields in London, England. Mr. Keller was a member of the piano faculty at UW Stevens Point until retirement in 2009. He now resides in Madison and maintains an active schedule as soloist, accompanist and clinician.

