

**GRIEG IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT
BERLIN 13-16.MAY 2009**

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Intimacy versus Intensity
The impact of the microphone on the interpretation of songs by Grieg.

The title says “songs by Grieg” but I am sorry to say that I have not been able to study different recordings of several Grieg songs. On the other hand, a new listening to my 210 recordings of “Jeg elsker Dig!” exposed some very interesting contextual facts that I would like to share with you today.

These recordings made between 1899-2005 made me conscious, the impact on the interpretation of Grieg from the microphone and other recording technologies. It seems that the traditional concert singer’s attitude is different from those singers where the use of microphone was essential to their career as singers. And there has been a change in the expression of intimacy in the performance of this song on records.

In this case study I split the overall listening impression in two categories of soundscape; the concert hall sound and the studio sound. In addition I decide if the sound elements are unified (singer and accompaniment in one room/the same acoustics) or divided (the acoustics of the singer’s voice seems to be different from that of the accompaniment). While recordings with concert hall sound might be either unified or divided, the typical studio sound is always divided.

My choice opens up for a categorisation of singers in the classical concert hall tradition to produce recordings where the sound elements are unified or divided, and that makes it possible to register when these kinds of singers started using the opportunities in the recording studio. The optimal recording with a unified concert hall sound is described by Walter Legge: “I want to make records which will sound in the public’s home exactly like they would hear in the best seat in an acoustically perfect hall.”¹

Three important changes in musical performances are related to the use of the microphone.

1. The microphone made it possible to design an artificial balance between the instruments and singers, far beyond the possibilities of a concert hall/opera.

¹ Quoted in M. Chanan (1995): Repeated takes. p.133-34

This made way for the crooner, the microphone amplified singer who could be balanced with a big band even if he just whispered the text.

2. The microphone made it possible to catch close-up sounds from the instrument or singer, giving the performance a new kind of intimacy and individuality.

This opened up to a new kind of artist that could take advantage of the affinity to close up sounds from their singing, developing new expressive sounds/elements in the performance and interpretation of a musical work.

3. The microphone amplified singer could make performances at any venue including outdoor arrangements.

This made it possible for the artist (and the gramophone company) to meet a wider audience than those connected to opera or the concert hall.

The gramophone records dissemination of different musical genres gave listeners access to musical expressions and repertoires, without the need for the listener calling on the venues for musical performances in those genres. The result was a growing public who became attached to music through the record and not from being present at live music events. Today this development has gone so far that even the concert hall audience uses their CD-recordings as their basis of assessment² on a concert performance.

Now let us turn to Grieg's opus 5 no.3. Intimacy and afterthought are two main characteristics in the lied-tradition, but intensity is more appropriate to be indicated in the score. For the moment we will skip the afterthought and concentrate on intensity and intimacy. I have selected a small section of the song (bar 10-16), and analysed the singer's choice of dynamics, rhythm, text, orchestration, sound and soundscape, and their use of intensity or intimacy. I define intensity as a quality where the potentiality of the expression is linked with general, congeneric elements in music (signs, symbols, gestures) often indicated in the score. Intimacy is defined as quality where the actuality of the expression is linked with the performer and the moment of performance.

In making the comparison intimacy versus intensity I have classified and made operational some expression elements in this way:

Elements of expression	Intensity	Intimacy
Dynamics	Sempre crescendo	Subito piano
Rhythm	Accelerando (equal meta structures/phrases)	Parlando (unequal meta structures/phrases)
Harmony	Grieg's own	Enlarging single chords
Text	H. C. Andersen/Grieg	Song of Norway/Bronner

² T. Day (2000): A Century of Recorded Music pp.156-159

Orchestration	Max Bruch (1914)	Soloists or obligatos
Sound	Unified / Homogeneous	Divided / Heterogeneous
Soundscape	Concert Hall / stable	Studio/ dynamic/variable

Grieg's manuscript indicates the need for both intensity and intimacy in this song. Both his extension of Andersen's text, adding "Jeg elsker Dig!" several times in the section I chose and some peculiarities in the manuscript points towards a strong need for underlining both dimensions in this piece.

Due to the limited time for this presentation I will now skip my considerations on how to connect different performance elements to either intensity or intimacy and jump directly to some of the results and comment them and even play some examples as well.

The results show that the classical concert hall singer did not change his/her way of singing from the acoustical to the electrical era of recording technology. I had three singers making recordings of Ich liebe dich in both acoustical and electrical era; Emmy Bettendorf, Karin Branzell and Richard Tauber. Listening to their recordings they seem to ignore the difference between the acoustical horn and the electrical microphone and perform as if they were in a concert hall.

However with the microphone a new kind of singer emerged: the gramophone artist with a beautiful voice in the studio, but with no strength or radiance of the voice in a concert hall. One characteristic for these singers were the use of microphone as their main expression tool resulting in intimacy, mostly by the use of *parlando* (performing regular text rhythms in irregular way). A typical example is the recording with the Swedish baritone Sven d'Ailly, recorded in September 1930 accompanied by Georg Enders Salon-orchestra. Instead of making the crescendo written in Grieg's manuscript in the bars 10-16, he uses the microphone to enhance the intimacy of his singing without raising his voice. (*Ex 1 Parlando, whispering and divided sound*)

In my sample 41 recordings were classified as having the studio sound with divided sound elements as their aim of the soundscape. These recordings appear from the beginning of the electrical era (i.e.1926-). The most characteristic element in these performances is the use of *parlando* in my chosen part of this song. The microphone's possibilities to catch expressive qualities in a voice that uses very little energy, demands another singing technique than the classical concert singer's. Most of the 41 recordings are with singers known in musicals and entertainment, like Helena Bliss, Nelson Eddy (Song of Norway) and Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra. They often used other arrangement for orchestra than Max Bruch's. Even the text is sometimes changed to a more body-related language of intimacy (like in Song of Norway-recordings).

Most recordings in my sample (169 of 210) had the concert hall sound as their soundscape, and 132 of them had also a unified sound of singer and accompaniment in accordance with Legge's ideal.

A main prospect of this study was to explore if classical concert singers have been influenced by the expressive elements in studio productions. One indicator would be to find these kinds of singers, keeping their concert hall soundscape but allowing the use of divided sound. In 37 recordings I could find this combination, the first one being Hans Hotter's recording 6. September 1950. This indicates a delay of 20-25 years compared to the optimal use of the microphone. (*Ex 2 divided sound between singer and piano*)

Most classical singers using standard editions for song and piano kept close to the literacy of this song. That means that they took care of most of the intensity-dimensions. There is however one big exception: in rhythm there has been a very interesting development during the century. In the acoustical era the use of *parlando* was dominant in the performing of this song. This performing practice was in accordance with Grieg, at least with Nina, if we believe Herman Klein in his reviews of other singer's recordings comparing them with Nina's practice.³

Robert Philip⁴ points out that there has been a tidying up of performances during the century; ensemble became more tightly disciplined; pianists played chords more strictly together, and abandoned the old practice of dislocating melody from accompaniment; the interpretation of note-values became more literal, and the nature of *rubato* changed, becoming more regular and even. In my doctoral thesis I have shown that this tidying up did not reduce the variance of tempo in performing this song, but as soon as the singer had chosen a tempo, tempo variations between the different sections became less extensive. In my paper to CHARM I demonstrated that there was a turning point in this development in the 1960ies.

In Grieg's manuscript and in the Scandinavian editions there is a *poco accelerando* in bar 13.⁵ Based on my definition of intensity and intimacy a more literate interpretation (that is performing bar 12-16 with an *accelerando*) will be an enhancement of the intensity of the performance. If the interpret split up the rhythmical phrases by stressing and stretching single words (or phonemes) the result will be a *parlando* that supports the intimacy dimension.

³ W.R. Moran (1990): Herman Klein and the Gramophone.

⁴ R. Philip (2004): *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*

⁵ This is not printed in any of Peters editions. As it also is a difference in the chord progression in bar 13 I can identify whether the pianist is playing from Wilhelm Hansen or Peters edition. The choice of editions does not affect the singer's use of *parlando* or *accelerando*

The results of my classification listening to the recordings of singers having the concert hall as their ideal soundscape started as expected: The relative amount of recordings using *parlando* was very high in the acoustical era, and then began a decline as the more literate *accelerando* took over the market.⁶ This is in accordance with Philips allegation.

However, in the three last decades, from 1976, the *parlando* suddenly reappears as a very characteristic expression in recording this song. I know that my selection of recordings is a small one compared to all lied-recitals recorded after 1950, but on the other hand, it seems very strange if such a dramatic turn should be restricted to the interpretation of *Jeg elsker Dig* alone.

In an article submitted to *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* (vol.35) I have taken on four perspectives in explaining this new situation; the development in recording technology, tutoring of singers and how they build up their reference of sound qualities, changes in the performance practice in music, and the new identity of a musical work in a multi media society.

Today I will just play and comment some recordings addressing the new situation.

Ex. 3 Barbara Hendricks (parlando “jeg” intimacy)

Ex. 4 Kari Løvaas (dynamic panning; close up to long distance)

Ex. 5 Karl-Magnus Fredriksson (parlando, whispering, divided sound)

To sum up: This survey indicates that the interpretation of Grieg's *Jeg elsker Dig!* has changed in the European context and that the introduction of the microphone opened up new expressive possibilities. These were first used by other artists than the classical concert hall singers, but in the last 25 years there has been a change towards more intimacy in the interpretation of this song among classical concert hall singers by using elements of expression cultivated through the microphone in the studio.

⁶ There is a small deviation from this development for the period around 2. World War, maybe the need for (operational) intimacy was more urgent.

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Handout

Recordings

- 1 Sven d'Ailly and Georg Enders Salon Orchestra
Ultraphone A 45 101 *rec. 01.09.1930*
- 2 Hans Hotter and Michael Raucheisen piano
Columbia (D) LW 45 (LV 135) *rec. 06.09.1950*
- 3 Barbara Hendricks and Roland Pöntinen piano
EMI Classics 7243 5568842 *rec.12.01.2002*
- 4 Kari Løvaas and Justus Frantz piano
Eurodisc 200 606-250 *rec.01.01.1979*
- 5 Karl-Martin Fredriksson and Stefan Nymark piano
Vanguard Classics 99132 *rec. 04.05.1995*

References

Chanan, Michael. 1995: *Repeated Takes. A History of Recording and its Effects on Music*. (London) (The quotation of Walter Legge)

Dahl, Per. 2006: *Jeg elsker Dig! Lytterens argument. Grammofoninnspillinger av Edvard Griegs opus 5 nr.3*. (Stavanger)

Dahl, Per. 2007: Tidying up tempo variations in Grieg's opus 5 no. 3.
<http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/content/events/s4Dahl.pdf>

Moran, William R. 1990: *Herman Klein and the Gramophone*. (Portland, Oregon) (Taking Nina's interpretation as background for comparison of new recordings)

Philip, Robert. 2004: *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*. (New Haven)