

## *Griegian Fingerprints in the Music of Frederick Delius (1862–1934)*

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With the possible exception of Percy Grainger, there is hardly any other well-known foreign composer with such close ties to Norway as Frederick Delius. He visited Norway many times, often staying for months at a time; he made friends with a great number of Norwegians, including Edvard Munch and Edvard Grieg; and in 1921 he had a cottage build at Lesjaskog in the valley of Gudbrandsdalen. Delius also composed several works connected to Norway, in the sense that they are based on extramusical sources of Norwegian origin or that their titles are associated with this country. See *Ex. 1*. These works testify to Delius's deep involvement in Norwegian culture.

**Ex. 1:** Delius's "Norwegian" works, chronologically ordered:

"Norwegische Schlittenfahrt", piano piece (1887)

16 songs (voice and piano) set to poems by Bjørnson, Welhaven, J Paulsen, T Kjerulf, A Munch, Ibsen, Vinje, V Krag (1885-1891)

2 partsongs set to poems by Bjørnson and Ibsen (1887, 1891)

*Paa Vidderne* [On the Heights], after Ibsen's cycle of poems (1. version reciter and orch., 1888; 2. version as "concert overture" for orch., 1890-92).

Incidental music to Gunnar Heiberg's play *Folkeraadet* [The People's Parliament] (1897)

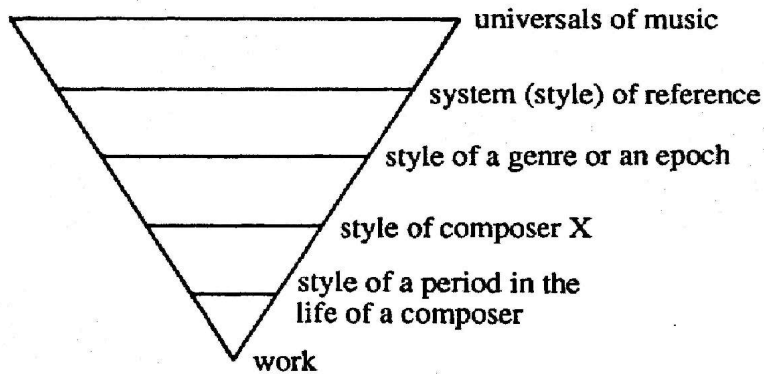
*The Song of the High Hills*, chorus and orch. (1911)

*On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*, for small orch. (1912)  
(quotes the Norwegian folk melody "In Ola-dalom")

*Eventyr (Once upon a time)*, after Asbjørnsen's folktales, for orch. (1917)

In this paper I shall focus on some aspects of stylistic similarities between the music of Grieg and the music of Delius. Of course, similarities between the two composers have been discussed earlier, but the subject has hardly been exhausted, especially when it comes to their harmonic and tonal thinking. Now, the very concept of musical influence raises some problems: If the music of younger composer A seems to resemble the music of older composer B, this does not necessarily imply that B exerted influence on A, as they may both have been influenced by composer C. Alternatively, the similarity may be due to both composers sharing the same stylistic norms. Specialists in the semiology of music have proposed to divide a piece of music into different *stylistic levels*, which may be illuminating. See *Ex. 2*.

Ex. 2 (from Nattiez 1990: 136)



From the tip of the pyramid, with traits unique to a given work, we ascend to gradually more general levels. Undoubtedly Grieg and Delius share the same “system (style) of reference”, and probably also share the same “style of [...] an epoch”, since the musical style of both composers may be termed (somewhat simplified) as Late Romantic with Impressionist elements. Thus, it may be difficult to distinguish the personal style of these composers from features common to the greater part of European art music from the late 19th Century.

While it is important to realize these problems concerning musical influence, there is little doubt that Grieg actually influenced Delius. Sometimes Delius’s music has a striking resemblance to Grieg’s personal style, and in addition we may point out an external indication: the close friendship between the two men and Delius’s well-documented admiration for Grieg’s music. But *how* is the influence of Grieg’s music reflected in the works of Delius? In my paper I shall try to illuminate this question by means of short examples from the music of both composers. I will confine myself to treating similarities between Grieg and the music from Delius’s *mature* period, beginning about 1900. Thus, I shall not discuss works from what may be termed Delius’s *apprentice years*, including the songs set to poems by Norwegian authors. For the sake of clarity I will quote the sheet music examples from Delius’s orchestral pieces as piano reductions, assuming that Delius was not particularly influenced by Grieg’s orchestration techniques.

As to the overall form of entire works or movements, Delius's mature works do not seem to be influenced by Grieg, perhaps with the exception of a few works in variation form. While Grieg often likes exact repetitions of longer segments in the musical discourse, Delius usually prefers developing the music like links in a chain of associations, avoiding "da capos". Nor is Delius particularly influenced by the most pronounced folk music elements in Grieg's music. Rather Grieg's influence on Delius is expressed in other ways, which I will demonstrate in the following.

Frequently there is a *kinship of character* in the music of the two composers. The concept of character in music may be traced back to the end of the 18th Century, when it was first used by German theorists. I define a musical *character* as a complex category including language as well as sensory experiences – what metaphor theorists term "a conceptual domain". The *heroic*, the *elegiac* and the *pastoral* are instances of such wide character categories frequently described by music historians and other writers on music. Some of Delius's most typical music possesses a mixture of an *elegiac* and a *tranquil* character, strongly reminiscent of, for example, the character of Grieg's song "Våren" [Last Spring] in the version for string orchestra [Op. 34 No. 2, 1880]. With reference to Nattiez' pyramid of stylistic levels (*Ex. 2*), it may be argued that the presence of this kind of character in the music of Grieg and Delius is due to the two composers sharing the style of the same epoch; it does not necessarily imply that Delius was influenced by Grieg in this respect. However, in Delius's "tranquil-elegiac" works or movements we also frequently come across specific melodic and harmonic turns which are particularly associated with Grieg, creating a stronger connection between the two composers. In *Ex 3a*, imbued with a distinctive Delian tranquillity, the so-called Grieg motifs are abundant; moreover, the regular segmentation of the melody and the sequential treatment of parts of it in bars 9-12 are also suggestive of Grieg. Delius seems to have a predilection for using the Grieg motif in modal form, constituting a part of a pentatonic melodic structure, as in the first four bars of *Ex. 3a*. Similar pentatonic turns may also be found in Grieg (*Ex. 3b, 3c*). Seemingly, both composers especially employ this kind of pentatonic turns in music representing the mysticism of nature or man contemplating nature.

**Ex. 3 a**Delius: *Fennimore and Gerda* (1908-10), Tenth picture b. 1-12.

**Very quietly, not dragging**

Fl. Ob. Fl.

*p*

VI. 1

e VI. 2

*mp*

Vcl. pizz.

Vla.

7 Ob. VI. 1 div. VI. 2 div. p Vcl. e Vla

**Ex. 3b.**Grieg: *Den Bergtekne* [The Mountain Thrall], Op. 32 (1877-78), b. 13-14.

*p*

**Ex. 3c.**

Grieg: "Vond dag" [Hurtful Day], Op. 67 No. 7 (1895), b. 25-26.

*f* *poco dim. e rit.* *p*

No — må ho døy; ho mi - ste Gu - ten sin.

Piano

*f* *dim. e rit.* *p*

Another striking turn sometimes found in Grieg is the unexpected resolving of a dominant chord in root position into a subdominant chord in root position with the first step of the scale in the upper voice, a kind of “deceptive” cadenza (*Ex. 4a, 4b*). This feature is also employed by Delius (*Ex. 4c*).

**Ex. 4a.**

Grieg: “Blåbær-Li” [Blueberry Slope], Op. 67 No. 3 (1895), b. 13-16.

godt her er då til - fjells — No vil eg e - ta meg mett;

*poco rit.* *f* *a tempo*

Piano

(F) D<sup>7</sup> S

**Ex. 4b.**

Grieg: “Lys Nat” [Summer Night], Op. 70 No. 3 (1900), b. 2-4.

Var det ej ny - lig. So - len sank ned bag Sko - ve - ne

*poco rit.* *f*

(E) D<sup>7</sup> S

**Ex. 4c.**

Delius: “The Walk to the Paradise Garden” from *A Village Romeo and Juliet* (1899-1901), b. 72-75.

*pp* *f*

(E) D<sup>13</sup> S

These progressions from dominant to subdominant give a Lydian colour. Lydian elements are pronounced in the first bars of *On Hearing the first Cuckoo in Spring*, probably the best known work by Delius among Norwegians (Ex. 5). The Lydian turns in Grieg's works are commonly regarded as a Norwegian characteristic. Now, the concept itself of a distinctive Norwegian musical style in art music is problematic. Carl Dahlhaus (1989: 305ff) argues that in the 19th century composers all through Europe invariably depicted musical folklorism with similar technical devices. To a certain extent he is right. For example, there are also several Lydian turns in Chopin's mazurkas. However, in certain contexts we easily accept the Lydian element both as "Norwegian" and as typical of Grieg. And probably because *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* makes use of a Norwegian folk melody, treated by Grieg in his Op. 66 No. 14, we are apt to connect the opening bars of the piece, with their Lydian colour and Grieg motifs, to Norway and to Grieg.

**Ex. 5.**

Delius: *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* (1912), b. 1-4.

The musical score for the first four bars of 'On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring' by Delius is presented in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The tempo is marked 'Slow'. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The first bar begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The second bar contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The third bar is marked mezzo-forte (*mf*). The fourth bar continues the melodic and harmonic progression.

Such Griegian melodic and harmonic turns sporadically emerge in Delius's works, which undoubtedly are also influenced by several other musical styles. However, when it comes to Grieg's and Delius's harmonic and tonal thinking there is also a more basic similarity, permeating the whole musical discourse: As Christopher Palmer (1976: 48ff) has pointed out, both composers have a predilection for combining diatonicism and chromaticism. Using the terminology of Polish-American musicologist Joseph Yasser (1951/52: 21), Grieg's chromaticism may be described as *intra-tonal*, i.e. the chromaticism unfolds within one single key, while f.ex. Wagner's Tristan chromaticism is *inter-tonal*, i.e. with key changes throughout. Although Delius's key centers appear to change more rapidly than Grieg's, their music is nevertheless similar in this respect. More

specifically, in both composers *diatonic* melodies in the upper voice acquire a heightened expressivity by being accompanied by *chromatic* movements in the lower voices. In my opinion this kind of harmony in Grieg's music may be categorized into two basic patterns: 1) A pedal point or central axis along with two voices moving chromatically downwards in parallel motion – frequently major or minor thirds moving towards the tonic. 2) A diatonic upper voice accompanied by dominant seventh chords in root position moving chromatically downwards (more infrequently upwards) in the lower voices. Let us first look at two instances of the first type – one by Grieg and one by Delius. In the excerpt from Grieg's cello sonata (*Ex. 6a*) C acts as a central axis in the upper voice, while the bass and the lower voice of the right hand constitute chromatically falling minor thirds. In the excerpt from Delius's violin concerto (*Ex. 6b*) the tonic note D recurs in different voices, the upper voice of the piano/orchestral part moving diatonically within this key. At the same time two other voices are moving chromatically downwards, major thirds in the first two bars and major sixths in the third and fourth bars.

**Ex. 6a.**

Grieg: Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op. 36 (1883), second movement b. 5-7.

The musical score for Ex. 6a shows a piano accompaniment in 3/4 time. The upper voice (treble clef) has a central axis of C, with a melodic line that is mostly diatonic but includes chromatic descents. The lower voice (bass clef) and the lower part of the right hand (inner staves) move chromatically downwards in parallel motion, primarily in minor thirds. A piano dynamic marking 'p' is present. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' in the upper voice.

**Ex. 6b.**

Delius: Violin Concerto (1916), rehearsal number 19 b. 8-13.

The musical score for Ex. 6b shows a violin and piano accompaniment in 3/4 time. The violin part (upper voice) has a diatonic melody with a central axis of D. The piano accompaniment (lower voices) features chromatic descents in the lower voice and inner staves. The first two bars show major thirds moving downwards, and the third and fourth bars show major sixths moving downwards. A 'ten.' (tension) marking is present above the violin staff. The piano part includes a dynamic marking 'p'.

Now to the second category of intra-tonal chromaticism in Grieg, with dominant seventh chords moving chromatically. First a short example from the Third violin sonata (*Ex. 7a*). Here the three lower voices constitute five chords with dominant seventh structure, moving chromatically downwards from G flat to D within the key of C minor. Delius knew this work intimately, playing it in 1889 with the Norwegian violinist Arve Arvesen (Carley 1993: 76).

**Ex. 7a.**

Grieg: Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano, op. 45 (1886-87), first movement b. 424-427.

And then – probably the most striking and most frequently discussed example of this kind of harmony in Grieg: The last eighth bars of Grieg’s piano arrangement of the Norwegian folk song “Siri Dale-visen” [The Siri Dale Song], Op. 66 No. 4 (*Ex. 7b*).

**Ex. 7b.**

Grieg: “Siri Dale-visen” [The Siri Dale Song], Op. 66 No. 4 (1896), b. 15-22.



dim. p attacca

Several musicologists have commented on the harmony of this small piece, from Ernst Kurth, in his famous book *Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners «Tristan»* from 1923 (Kurth 1923: 367), to Ekkehard Kreft in his book on Grieg's harmony from 2000 (Kreft 2000: 220), and Daniel Grimley in his 2006-book *Grieg. Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity* (Grimley 2006: 98ff.). In the excerpt reproduced in *Ex. 7b* the three lower voices constitute a chain of dominant seventh chords, the diatonic upper voice creating additional dissonances. Although all the chord structures may be said to belong to the vocabulary of 19th century harmony, the long chain of unresolved dissonances and the striking combination of diatonic and chromatic elements undoubtedly sounded fresh and original when the piece was published in 1897. Moreover, it represented a highly original amalgamation of the diatonic simplicity of the folk song and Late Romantic chromatic harmony. To my knowledge, the first to make a detailed interpretation of the harmony of this section was the Danish composer and musicologist Jørgen Jersild, in his book on Romantic harmony and César Franck from 1970. I have reproduced his harmonic analysis in *Ex. 8*.

### Ex. 8.

Jørgen Jersild's (1970: 56) harmonic analysis of the last eight bars of Grieg's "Siri Dalevisen", Op. 66 No. 4.

Piano cresc. p

(c) D  $D^{alt}$   $D^9$   $D^{alt\#5}$   $D^{\#5}$   $D^{alt}$   $D^{alt}$

(f) D  $T^{\#5}$   $D^{alt}$  fr. D

c     $\overline{\overline{\text{D}}^{\#5}}$      $\overline{\overline{\text{D}}^{\#5\text{alt}}}$      $\overline{\text{D}}$      $\text{D}^{\text{alt}}$      $\text{D}_4^6$     D

alt=Tritone substitution

$\overline{\text{D}}$ = V of V

$\overline{\overline{\text{D}}}$ = V of V of V

etc.

Jersild emphasized what seems relevant and to the point – at least in a historic perspective: that this is a “camouflaged” circle of fifths, every second chord being tritone substituted. However, I shall not dwell on Jersild’s interpretation here, but return to Delius. Listening to Delius’s music, one gets the impression that he was spellbound by this kind of harmony in Grieg, repeatedly utilising it. Unfortunately, we have too little information on which works by Grieg Delius actually knew. Leading Delius specialist Dr. Lionel Carley informs me that all of the scores that Delius owned were dispersed or sold on his death, and in writing he referred only to four works by Grieg, the *Nineteen Norwegian Folk-Songs*, Op. 66 not included. But since he used the melody of No. 14 in *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*, it is highly probable that he also knew No. 4, “Siri Dale-visen”.

I give two short examples of this combining of diatonic melody and chromatic progressions with dominant seventh structures in Delius’s music (*Ex. 9a* and *9b*). Despite the presence of “scotch snap” in bars two and three of the violin part, *Ex. 9b* sounds strikingly like Grieg.

**Ex. 9a.**

Delius: Incidental music to the drama *Hassan* (1920-23): “Serenade”, b. 10-12.

**Ex 9b.**

Delius: Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano (1930), second movement b. 41-47.

It is time to conclude. In my paper I have tried to substantiate that Delius was influenced by Grieg's music in the following ways: 1) The mixture of an *elegiac* and a *tranquil* character frequently found in Delius's music seems to have been inspired by certain works by Grieg in a similar vein. 2) Delius seems to have adopted some of Grieg's typical melodic and harmonic turns, such as pentatonic melodic structures involving the Grieg motif in its modal form, Lydian colouring, and distinctive cadential formulas. And 3), probably most important, there is a predilection for blending diatonicism and chromaticism, both composers combining *diatonic* melodies in the upper voice with *chromatic* movements in the lower voices. I have by no means studied all music written by Delius, but my impression is that he rarely used specific works by Grieg as concrete models. Rather he adopted more general traits of Grieg's personal style. All these Griegian fingerprints were stored in his memory, and when composing he incorporated

them in the new work, even though he may frequently have been doing this unconsciously.

Lionel Carley assumes that “modern scholars [...] have seen that the debt [to Grieg] is finite, and by the time *Appalachia* was composed, in 1902, Delius had worked Grieg out of his system” (1993: 15). In my opinion some of my examples, for instance the last one (9b) from the Third violin sonata written in 1930, demonstrate that at least in the matter of harmony and tonal thinking Delius was indebted to Grieg throughout his creative life.

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