

**Siska Ingeborg:**

**The music reception of works by E. H. Grieg with an accent on music environment of Bratislava.**

The fact that Grieg's music was continuously accepted by the music public in Slovakia, particularly in Bratislava has connection with two frame conditions: first – that until 1918 romantic style in music continued to be actual in Slovakia; second – his works were frequented by Hungarian and German socially prestigious groups of citizens.

Until 1919 Bratislava was a provincial type of middle-size city. Although it was a multinational town with inhabitants of Hungarian, German, Czech, Slovak, Jewish, Bulgarian and other nationalities (which might add it some kind of "Hellenic flavour") the fact is that Slovakia was under political rule of Hungarian minority since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ending up in enacting of the Hungarian language for official language which continued until 1919.

The music reception environment in which Grieg's music was presented was from the petty – bourgeois to bourgeois type where the prior interest was focused on interpretation. The first public presentation of Grieg's *Violin Sonata No. 1 in F major* Opus 8 took place on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1890. The review pointed out the interpretation qualities of the violinist Ch. Foerster from Vienna and considered the pianist J. Kopetzky to be an excellent concert pianist.

Two parts of the *String Quartet in G minor* Opus 27 were on program of Hellmesberger Quartet in Bratislava on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1893. The entire piece was played for the first time by Ševčík Quartet on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1907. The critic of "Westungarischer Grenzbote" pointed out: "...beside other things the orchestral effects, hard dissonant chords and extended lyricism which are characteristics of this composer were remarkable...".

The Prussian royal court pianist A. Grünfeld started performing Grieg's piano pieces in 1905. He was annually a regular guest in Bratislava until 1927. This by the audience highly appreciated pianist put Grieg's pieces into the second half of his recitals playing mostly a selection of *Lyric Pieces* Opus 43 or a selection of *Transcriptions of Original Songs I* Opus 41.

The *Ballad in G minor* Opus 24 was performed by E. von Dohnányi in 1908. In the same year W. Backhaus played the *Holberg Suite* Opus 40, which was at the same time the only performance of this piece in Bratislava. Grieg's *Piano Sonata in E minor* Opus 7 was performed by F. Schmiedt – a local teacher in Bratislava in 1910.

Since 1906 – 1907 Grieg's music was performed in terms of the Municipal Music School (founded by the Pressburger Kirchenmusikverein and existed until 1945). The student's concerts

were regularly announced in daily press; very popular were selections of songs and *Lyric Pieces* Opus 43 and since 1926 the *Ballad in G minor* as well. The choice of demanding pieces had to do with the development of educational system. In 1941 the original Academy of Music and Drama was transformed to the State Conservatory which enabled Grieg's Music to penetrate into further reception area enriched by the interpretation of the *Piano Concerto in A minor* Opus 16.

The first performance of Grieg's songs was registered in 1904. The most frequented songs until 1955 were: *Solveig's Song* Opus 23 No. 19, *A Swan* Opus 25 No. 2, *I Love But Thee* Opus 5 No. 3, *On The Water* Opus 60 No. 3 and *Zur Rosenzeit (The Time of Roses)* Opus 48 No. 5. The first vocal recital in Bratislava (with soloist P. Schmedes) took place on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1890. This was also the only time when these songs were interpreted in Norwegian language in Slovakia.

The first concert where Grieg's orchestral piece – the *Peer Gynt Suite No. 2* Opus 55 was played, took place on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1900 in the interpretation of the royal military band together with the Pressburger Kirchenmusikverein Orchestra (founded in 1833 by St. Martin's Cathedral in Bratislava and abolished in 1950 for political reasons which influenced ideologically the culture policy in Slovakia.).

The artistic co-operation between Kirchenmusikverein and Singverein led to the presentation of No. 1 from *Album for Male Voices* Opus 30 in 1895 and *Land Sighting* Opus 31 in 1907, reviewed also in "Westungarischer Grenzboten". This artistic association was completed by the chorus "Liedertafel" which used to present Grieg's works since 1904 regularly until 1912. The Kirchenmusikverein presented also some other pieces: *Two Elegiac Melodies* Opus 34 were presented in 1920. *Ave Maris Stella* (work without Opus number) and the song *I But Love Thee* could be heard only once at an occasional concert. The *Piano Concerto* was conducted by Kosow in 1914 with the soloist Luise Apfelbeck whose excellent interpretation of the slow movement and the balance between recital and technique were appreciated.

The year 1919 means the constitution of Czechoslovak Republic and suitable conditions for general and cultural development in Slovakia. Bratislava became the capital of Slovakia. Pedagogues and musicians from Czech republic had significant position in raising the professional progress of culture. The first generation of Slovak professional musicians, pedagogues and editors was raised. At the same time the new goal in music culture was set – to prefer original Slovak and Czech compositions.

Besides the Kirchenmusikverein the Czechoslovak Radio Symphony Orchestra was founded which forecast new possibilities of music mediation.

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The average frequency of Grieg's music in radio broadcasting is as follows: the *Cello Sonata in A minor* Opus 36 was played probably only once. Until 1960 the *Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major* Opus 13, the *Violin Sonata in C minor No. 3* Opus 45, the *Piano Sonata in E minor* Opus 7, *Homage March for Sigurd Jorsalfar* Opus 22, *Symphonic Dances* Opus 64, *Two Melodies for String Orchestra* Opus 53, *Lyric Suite* Opus 54 were frequented until 1960. More often played were the *Holberg Suite*, the *Lyric Pieces* Opuses 54, 65, 68 and 71, and the *Piano Concerto*. The most often presented piece was the *Peer Gynt Suite No. 2*.

The qualitative improvement of the attitude towards Grieg's music was connected with the development of educational system after 1945. The accent was put on popularisation of music through education. Important step was the foundation of the Academy of Music and Drama in 1949 where the *Lyric Pieces* became part of obligatory study plans for students. The constant ideological pressure (orientation on Slovak, Czech and Russian contemporary music) brought the consequence that Grieg was neglected till 1960. Still it was not possible to forbid an individual effort of interprets who kept including Grieg's compositions to their repertory.

In the period between 1958 – 1991 we notice fast retreat of Grieg's song compositions in the broadcasting as well as in concert production – of 30 active pianists six of them have the piano concerto in their repertory and one pianist has the complete cycle of *Lyric Pieces*. The *Holberg Suite* is a part of standard repertory of the Slovak Chamber Orchestra.

So far there has not been a single scientific work concerning Grieg published in Slovakia – the only exception is the portrait of Grieg in the book "Musicmakers" by the Š. Hoza, 1943. The situation is completely different in Czech Republic. Ladislav Reznicek published his work "E. H. Grieg and Czech Music", Praha-Oslo 1993. The only source saturating the information need in Slovakia was the monograph "E. H. Grieg" by J. Bachtík published in Czech language in 1957.

The major music reception of Grieg in Slovakia was going on in the first half of the century. Political, social and culture changes happening in Slovakia enable us to divide this reception into three development phases:

1<sup>st</sup> development phase / 1890 -1919

2<sup>nd</sup> development phase / 1919 –1945

3<sup>rd</sup> development phase / 1945 – present time

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