

A Short History of the Grieg Reception in Japan

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Introduction

When did the work of Grieg first come to be played in Japan? Probably small works such as vocal music, piano music or chamber music were played from an early time. However, in the case of large scale pieces such as orchestral music, it was first necessary that groups existed that were capable of performing them. And therefore Grieg's orchestral works demanded a certain degree of artistic and technical maturity on the part of both performers and Japanese audiences.

I would like to discuss how Grieg himself and his works have been absorbed by Japanese people through the media of his biographies, published critiques of his music, published musical scores, through concert and studio recordings and through music appreciation curricula in Japanese schools.

Biographies and Critical Reviews

It seems that it was Hiroshi Koizumi who first introduced Grieg to Japan in the form of a book which was published in 1925, 18 years after Grieg's death. The title of the book is "Grieg's personality and his music" (Hakubi Publishers Ltd., 1925. 250 pages). It consists of two biographical chapters on Grieg (133 pages) and a discussion of his music (66 pages). Koizumi comments in the afterword that he referred in the course of his research to the following books: 1) Schjelderup, Gerhard und Walter Niemann, „Edvard Grieg“, [1909] Peters, Leipzig. 2) Fink, "Grieg and his Music", 1922, Dodd, Meade & Company, N. Y. 3) R. H. Stein, „Grieg“, Berlin. 4) La Mara, "Edvard Grieg", 1898, Leipzig. 5) Lee, "Grieg", London, 1908. At the same time, he said that it was still difficult during this period in Japan to pursue real research on Grieg.

Koizumi's writing style is interesting, and seems old-fashioned to readers today. His way of describing things has a literary color sometimes, but we also feel that he has written carefully and not twisted his facts. I have not been able to trace in detail the career of Koizumi, but was able to confirm that he wrote many books such as "ARS Great Composer Series 'Chopin'" (1930), "Chopin, his life and works" (1949), "A Music Dictionary". From those books, we can deduce that he was a very active person in the field of criticism and various writings on music in those days.

Following Koizumi, no full-scale research book on Grieg was published until Hirokazu Sugano wrote "Grieg: his life and work" (Ongaku no Tomo Sha Corp., 1984. body text 262 pages, data 52 pages). By the time Sugano's book was published, the music of Grieg had come to be loved widely by Japanese people and many reference works on Grieg were in circulation. Aided by these advantages, Sugano's book is the first real research book on Grieg in Japan. Since Sugano, no book-length reference work on Grieg by a Japanese writer has been published up to the present day. Critical works translated into Japanese and published in Japan include Wendy

Thompson's "Edvard Grieg" (Exley Publications Ltd., 1994., translated by Tomoko Arai, Kaiseisha Co., Ltd., Tokyo, 1999).

Publication of Musical Scores

I could not confirm for this investigation which work of Grieg's was published first in Japan. Judging from the circumstances of musical publication in the early 20th century, it would surely have been a small work such as a piano piece or song. In fact, two of Grieg's songs are found in the Senowo Sheet Music Series.

One of them is "Solvejg's Song", published in 1924, and another is "A Swan", published in 1929. Senowo Music was established by Koyo Senowo with the aim of spreading European music within Japan. Senowo Music was famous for its beautifully designed covers and the publisher issued more than 1000 pieces between 1915 and 1929.

The publication of a collection of Grieg's songs was unexpectedly late, with the first confirmed publication in 1940. Although we are able to confirm the publication of Volume I, there is no evidence that a Volume 2 was ever published. Perhaps the publication of European musical scores became difficult to continue with the outbreak of World War II.

In the case of piano music, it is certain that single solo works were published considerably early. But I could scarcely confirm that "24 Piano Pieces" by Tokyo Ongaku Shoin was published in 1943, and then follows "Popular Piano Pieces vol.1, Grieg and other composers" by Ryugin Sha in 1953, and then the 1970's as a selection of "Lyric Pieces" by Zen-on Music Publishers. The Peters edition was published in its entirety in Japan beginning in the 1990's. Concerto was popular: pocket scores were available by Nihon Gakufu Publishers in 1940 and an edition for two pianos was published by Zen-on Music Publishers in 1958.

Recording Series

In the 1960's and 1970's, the major publishing companies followed one another in publishing complete works of Western classical music, including LP's. We know of more than 10 such series and Grieg was included in almost every one. This is an indication of his popularity in Japan.

Five of these collections are cited below.

1. World Music Collection (30 vol., 1967-70), Vol.22 "Grieg, Sibelius", Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 1969 (2 pieces of 17 cm LP attached).
2. World Great Music Collection (30 vol., 1968-72), Vol.19 "Grieg, Sibelius", Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 1970 (2 pieces of 30 cm LP attached).
3. Stereo World Music Collection (18 vol.), Vol.15 "Grieg, Sibelius", Kodansha, 1969 (2 pieces of 30 cm LP attached).
4. Fabbri "I Grandi Musicisti", (60 vol., 1970-73), Vol.56 "Grieg 1", Vol.57 "Grieg 2", Heibonsha Ltd. (25 cm LP attached).
5. Time-Life "Great Men of Music (30), [no Grieg] 1974-79 (4 pieces of 30 cm LP attached).

In collections 1 and 2, neither Mahler nor Bruckner was included. This suggests that in Japan at that time, neither of these two composers enjoyed general popularity. In collection 4, each 25 cm LP came with a 12-page analysis of the album. Within this 60-album set, two albums were of Grieg and perhaps this further demonstrates how popular Grieg was in Japan at that time. Collection 5 was originally issued in the United States and was subsequently translated into Japanese by Japan Time-Life Co. A special characteristic of this series is that the orchestras and conductors were all American. Perhaps it showed a national bias that Aaron Copeland was included in this series but Grieg was not.

Concert Recordings

Hidemaro Konoe (1898 – 1973) stands as one representative orchestra conductor during this period of genesis within Japan of European music. We find works by Grieg among recordings of his concerts. Of course, a strong possibility exists that orchestra works by Grieg were performed prior to the time of the recordings, but it is difficult to find contemporaneous accounts of such performances. Among Konoe's recordings, the first known work by Grieg was "The Peer Gynt Suite." The orchestra was The Japan Symphony Society and the date was June 13, 1926. The site was the Japan Youth Hall in Tokyo. The Japan Symphony Society subsequently changed its name to New Symphonic Orchestra and Konoe continued his work as a conductor there. The New Symphonic Orchestra's first subscription series commenced on February 20, 1927 at the Japan Youth Hall with a program of Mendelssohn, Mozart and Schubert. But in addition, Grieg's Two Elegiac Melodies was also performed in memory of Emperor Taisho who had just passed away two months earlier.

In 1928, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ibsen, a theater group called The Tsukiji Shogekijo performed Peer Gynt on four successive days from March 26 to March 30 in Tokyo's Imperial Theater, with music provided by New Symphonic Orchestra under the direction of Konoe.

School Education

With Japan's loss in the Second World War came large changes in the education curriculum. The first education policy in Japan following the departure of the Occupation Forces was issued in 1958. Within this policy were common curriculum materials for music appreciation. The use of these materials was compulsory in every school in Japan. Within this curriculum, works by Grieg appeared frequently and as a result, these works became familiar to the Japanese people. However, beginning in 1998, the common curriculum for music appreciation in elementary and middle school was changed as each school's or teacher's discretion.

Conclusion

As we research the ways in which the Japanese people have become familiar with the works of Grieg over the past 100 years, we are struck by the persistent affection demonstrated by the Japanese for his music even as other fads and tastes come and go. It is clear that this deep appreciation of Grieg's music continues to the present day and is likely to continue into the future.