

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 12 January 2025
7.30pm

Leif Ove Andsnes piano

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Piano Sonata in E minor Op. 7 (1865)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Andante molto •
III. Alla menuetto, ma poco più lento • IV. Finale.
Molto allegro*

Geirr Tveitt (1908-1981)

Piano Sonata No. 29 'Sonata Etere' Op. 129

Interval

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

24 Preludes Op. 28 (1838-9)

*No. 1 in C • No. 2 in A • No. 3 in G • No. 4 in E •
No. 5 in D • No. 6 in B • No. 7 in A • No. 8 in F •
No. 9 in E • No. 10 in C • No. 11 in B • No. 12 in G •
No. 13 in F • No. 14 in E • No. 15 in D • No. 16 in B •
No. 17 in A • No. 18 in C • No. 19 in E • No. 20 in C •
No. 21 in B • No. 22 in G • No. 23 in F • No. 24 in D*

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a loop to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Koch Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Leaving Norway to study in Leipzig prompted **Edvard Grieg** to become newly invested in the music of his homeland, and the Piano Sonata is an early work from this time, composed over 15 days in the summer of 1865 when he was just 22 years old.

The first movement has a tempestuous opening, with the clever use of his initials in the notes of the opening theme (E-H-G, with H being the German lettering for the note of B natural). The second movement is a Cantabile in C Major, with a liquid beauty and a thrilling climax at its centre, the melody is a clear predecessor to the slow movement of the piano concerto. The dark Menuetto is followed by a grand Finale movement that shifts quickly between frantic gallop, a skittish spinning song, and chordal passages that throughout maintain a brilliant virtuosity and inventiveness. This compressed gem of a sonata shows all the elements that would make the young Grieg one of the most popular composers of his time.

Geirr Tveitt, despite his similar biography, is a name unknown even to most music lovers. Born in 1908 near Bergen, Tveitt spent much of his childhood summers farming on his parents land on the scenic Hardangerfjord. Geographic isolation meant the area had developed a distinctive folk voice (Grieg visited to transcribe the local music), and Tveitt grew up totally immersed in this sound world.

In 1928, he also moved to Leipzig and then Paris to study, similarly realising that the music of his childhood was the way forward for him compositionally. Here he built a style that mixed folk material with the glittering textures of impressionist French music as well as the driving rhythms of Stravinsky and particularly Bartók. Tours of his piano works throughout Europe brought him growing acclaim, but after the political upheaval of the Second World War, his nationalist music was no longer in fashion, and Tveitt withdrew back to the family farm in Hardanger where he composed mostly in isolation.

The Piano Sonata No. 29 'Sonata Etere' (Italian for ether) was premièred in Paris in 1947. The whole work is built out of two themes introduced in the first seconds of the first movement: the lilting right hand cell which he labelled *In Cera Di...* ('In search of'), and soon after it, the pungent left-hand theme, *Tono Etero* ('Ethereal Tune'), which collides harmonically into the first. The opening movement plays with both of these themes against each other, constantly changing the tonality and the variation of rhythmical shifts.

The second movement is a set of variations on the Etero theme. Its first iteration is played with the left hand silently holding open the strings of the lower register, while the right hand pecks out the notes of the theme. Most unusually, radio technology is requested to swell the resonance created by the vibrating lower strings, a crescendo that would normally be impossible on the piano. From there we go through 19 variations, most of them short, very distinctive and with an emphasis on the

beauty and ethereal possibilities of the theme which build towards the end into a final recapitulation of the first, unusual texture that began the movement. The third is a wild and virtuosic dance that also submits to the otherworldly texture of the second movement.

The numbering of this sonata is a misnomer now; a fire in the 1970s at Tveitt's family farm destroyed much of the house, including the wooden boxes that stored his manuscripts. Roughly two-thirds of his entire output was destroyed, and much of the rest of his life was spent traveling to piece together any copies that might have survived elsewhere. This was the only remaining solo piano sonata, having been published in Paris in the 1950s. In recent years it has re-emerged as a major work in the Norwegian piano repertoire.

Composed in 1838, **Frederic Chopin's** preludes were completed on the island of Mallorca, where he had gone with his lover, the writer George Sand to recuperate his ill health. George herself was one of the most individual figures of the time; her name was adapted to get her writing accepted, she wore trousers, she smoked, and she was divorced. As word got around Mallorca, these habits began to turn the locals hostile against her and Chopin, in fact most things turned against them over the winter of 1838-1839.

The warm weather and turquoise skies that Chopin wrote home about turned to relentless rain and cold, his pulmonary problems to full-blown tuberculosis. Their landlord evicted them in fear, and they eventually found lodging in a cold and draughty Carthusian monastery in the mountains. Sand nursed and prepared food for the severely ill Chopin, whose spirits and health only slowly recovered over the next months. On the journey back, their boat hit stormy seas and Chopin spent the voyage in his cabin coughing up bowlfuls of blood (the upper deck was reserved for a shipment of pigs who had to be chased around the top deck to prevent them becoming sea-sick).

Despite their disastrous gestation, the preludes are full of light and brilliance. They contain a huge variety of moods and styles: Scherzos, Hymns, Ballads, Elegies, Nocturnes, and Etudes. Many last under a minute and some are incredibly simple. No. 7 is just several lines, No. 20 is a chorale of great dynamic range and power, No. 15 is underpinned by a constantly repeated *ostinato* pulse of A-flats which caused George Sand to dub it the 'raindrop prelude' (a name Chopin hated).

On the other hand, there is the virtuosic whiplash of No. 16, the relentless and pessimistic No. 24 (one of the few conceived solely on Mallorca and perhaps reflecting the mood of those months). There is also the singing style of No. 21, the intensely distilled and tragic No. 4, and the beginning surge of the first prelude in C major.

© Mark Rogers 2025

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.