

## Knut Erik Jensen

Gamle Kirkevei 16  
N-7043 Trondheim

T +4795210443  
E knuterik@knuterikjensen.com



## The Project

This project started in 2007 when we celebrated the 100th anniversary of Edvard Grieg, the most important composer Norway has ever fostered. During that year, Knut Erik Jensen did a long tour to the USA and Canada during the fall to present Grieg's life and music for the Scandinavian community. He did close to 40 concerts all in all, including performances for the Norwegian Consulates in San Francisco and Houston, being a soloist with the Minot Symphony Orchestra in Griegs Concerto in a-minor and doing a number of performances at the Norsk Høstfest, amongst others for school children to teach them about Norwegian culture and folklore.

Norway didn't have much of a musical culture and history before Grieg's days. At least not when we talk about so called classical music or art music. But we did have a rich folk music culture, and it was this music that inspired Edvard Grieg and later other Norwegian composers when they created their music. By doing this, they managed to create a music that the Norwegian people could identify with. It is considered "typical Norwegian music." What made Grieg so important was also that he brought this music outside of the country, placing Norway on the map internationally. Music is also a wonderful tool to unify people, and this was important in those days when we struggled to find our own national identity after several years under Danish and Swedish rule.

After Grieg we have a lot of Norwegian composers following his footsteps, and despite all the individual differences and changing trends in the musical landscape, there is one thing unifying them: the basis in Norwegian Folk Music. The main purpose of the 2009 tour to the USA, is to present some of these composers to the Norwegian community.

To be able to present this project in the best possible way from the stage, an important part of the performance will be to talk about the music and what it means. This has turned out to be one of the biggest successes from the previous tour, because it adds another dimension to it. It shows that the music has a background, a reason and an importance beyond the fact that it is nice to listen to. For instance how Grieg can describe the fairy-tradition through a piece of music, or how he can grasp the es-



sence of the Norwegian nature, or how Harald Sæverud firmly stamps his foot to the ground and makes a loud protest against the 2. world war by writing his “Ballad of Revolt.”

The composers that will be presented, are Geirr Tveitt, Harald Sæverud, David Monrad Johansen and ofcourse Edvard Grieg. Full biographies can be found below. This is truly a culturally unique project because not only are these composers born and raised in Norway. But they also played an active part in bringing forth and preserving the traditional Norwegian folk music by unifying the past traditions and the present classical music. The pianist Knut Erik Jensen is also born and raised in Norway, and got all his musical education there. He has for a long time showed interest in the music coming from his country, both the genuine folk music and the classical music. Both the previous tour in 2007 and the upcoming tour in 2009 are a cooperation with the largest community for Norwegian-Americans in the USA (and Canada), the Sons of Norway, founded in 1895. The first president of the organisation, Bersvend Draxten emigrated from the town Selbu in Norway - the same town which Knut Erik Jensen was raised in. He therefore represents an ideal bond between the origins of this vast organisation and the Norwegian-American community in the USA today. Knut Erik also works closely with the Norwegian Embassy and the General Consulates throughout the country as well as the Norwegian Seaman’s Churches. The goal is to reach out to the Norwegian community and show them the Norwegian musical and cultural development and influence throughout the times.

## The Composers

[http://classical-composers.suite101.com/article.cfm/edvard\\_grieg\\_life\\_and\\_works](http://classical-composers.suite101.com/article.cfm/edvard_grieg_life_and_works)

Edvard Grieg - Life and Works

### **Norway's Greatest Composer is Famous for His Peer Gynt Suite**

© [Tel Asiado](#)

*Feb 7, 2008*



Brief biography of composer and pianist Edvard Grieg. The greatest composer of Norway, he is famous for Peer Gynt Suite.

Edvard Grieg, Norway's greatest composer, is best known for his incidental music *Peer Gynt Suite* adapted for the Ibsen play *Peer Gynt*. His major works include *Holberg Suite*, Concert in A minor, and *Lyric Pieces* of piano.

The first Scandinavian composer recognized internationally, he was sometimes called “Chopin of the North” and [Dvorak's](#) Scandinavian equivalent who worked outside the mainstream of European symphonic tradition.

His deep love of the beautiful landscape and the vibrant folk lore of his homeland Norway is much reflected in his music. Aged 24, he married his cousin Nina Hagerup, a gifted concert singer and inspiration to him. They often performed together in joint recitals.

### **Early Years of Grieg**

Edvard Grieg Hagerup, (1843-1907), was born on June 15, 1843, in Bergen, Norway's coast. He got his first piano lessons from his mother at the age of 6, and entered Leipzig Conservatory nine years later. He also studied in Copenhagen. After his studies, he visited Italy where he worked on his first compositions.

### **Grieg's Compositions**

Much of his music is small-scale, particularly his songs, chamber music, dances, sonatas and piano works, again, strongly identifying with Norwegian folk music. Among his orchestral works are the Piano Concerto in A Minor and the incidental music for Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* which was commissioned by [Henrik Ibsen](#) and the Norwegian government, *Holberg Suite*, Symphonic Dances for orchestra and Lyric Suite for orchestra.

His major works follow:

- Lyric Pieces for piano, Book 1, 1867
- Piano Concerto in a minor, 1868



- Incidental music to the play Peer Gynt, 1875
- Ballade in G minor, 1876
- Norwegian Dances for piano duet, 1881
- Holberg Suite, 1884
- "Butterfly" and "To the Spring" from Lyric Pieces, Book 3, 1884
- Symphonic Dances for orchestra, 1897
- Lyric Pieces, Book 9, including "Wedding Day at Troldhaugen", 1897
- Lyric Suite for orchestra, 1904
- Songs, numerous

### **The Musical Director and Organizer**

He was a director of the Oslo Christiana Philharmonic Society in 1866, and also involved in the formation of the Norwegian Academy of Music.

<http://www.mic.no/mic.nsf/doc/art2002101118262024886701>

## **David Monrad Johansen - Biography**

11.10.2002



David Monrad Johansen (1888-1974) occupied a central position in Norwegian music in the 1920's and 30's. During this period music was strongly influenced by nationalism, and Monrad Johansen was a leading personality within this movement. A strong emphasis on the national aspect of music can easily lead to stagnation, but thanks to an exploring and curious artistic mind, Johansen managed to unite contemporary currents with the "genuine Norwegian".

David Monrad Johansen was constantly striving to expand his musical horizons, and his career as a composer can fittingly be described as a melting pot. He started his studies at Oslo Music Conservatory, and his first pieces are clearly based on the Norwegian Late Romantic tradition.



In 1915 he applied to the Berlin Conservatory and studied there with, among others, E. Humperdinck. Later, after spending a few years in Norway studying the French Impressionists, which his works reflect, he left in 1920 on a grant for Paris. There for the first time he heard the ballet music of Igor Stravinskij which made a powerful impression on him. Stravinskij's search in early Russian history clearly inspired him, because upon his return to Norway Johansen immersed himself in Norwegian folk songs. These fascinated him and led him much further back in time than the Norwegian national romantic music he had been so familiar with: "...these verses took me further back, back to the distant past, to medieval times. There was something fantastic about them, not the least because of the mythical character of the language in which they were presented, which implied more than it actually said". Using texts from both medieval times and antiquity he composed several works during the 1920's. The most well known are: "Draumkvædet" (based on a medieval visionary ballad) for male choir, and "Voluspå" (prophecy of the seeress, based on a poem from the old Nordic mythological epic Edda) for soloists, choir and orchestra.

During another period of study in Paris in 1928 his interest for Honegger was awakened. Of even greater significance was his acquaintance with the Norwegian composer Fartein Valen, who inspired him to study atonal counterpoint. He incorporated this technique in his personal style as well, most prominently expressed in the university cantata "Ignis Ardens".

Johansen felt a persistent need for further education and arranged for thorough studies in classical counterpoint with Herman Grabner in Leipzig. Afterwards, he developed his own personal expression in a more Neo-Classical direction while retaining traces of earlier sources of inspiration. An example of this is perhaps his most frequently performed work "Pan", written for the 80th anniversary of the author Knut Hamsun in 1939. In this piece Neo-Classicism is united with both Impressionism and current polyphony.

Johansen maintained his artistic search and renewal throughout his life, as evidenced in his last two chamber works from 1967 and 1969.

David Monrad Johansen maintained his artistic search and renewal throughout his life, as evidenced in his last two chamber works from 1967 and 1969.

Monrad Johansen also maintained a strong profile as both musicologist and writer. For many years he was a member of the Aftenposten staff (Norwegian newspaper), and was considered a respected music critic. He also wrote a series of articles reflecting upon music in his contemporary time, both for Aftenposten and other publications. His most significant written opus is the biography of Edvard Grieg, which for many decades was considered the authoritative work about this composer.



<http://www.mic.no/mic.nsf/doc/art2002100719240618765850>

## Geirr Tveitt - Biography

07.10.2002



The name Geirr Tveitt is inextricably linked with the orchestral works "One Hundred Folk Songs". Alluding to his roots in Hardanger and the rich folk music tradition found there, he says: "If a leaf grows on a birch tree, it necessarily becomes a birch leaf".

Geirr Tveitt (1908-1981) was born in Bergen where his father was a teacher. He spent his early school years in Drammen, where he also received piano training. Holidays, however, were spent at the family farm in Hardanger. By the age of seventeen Tveitt had already begun notation of folk music; a task that he concentrated on more seriously after moving to the farm in 1942.

Geirr Tveitt received his musical education abroad at the State Academy in Leipzig. Upon completion of four years of study in composition, theory and piano, he studied French music and traveled to Paris. His meeting with French Impressionism was to play a significant role in his further development as a composer, and his natural talent for timbre and color was unfolded. The French influence can be heard in the orchestral suites "A Hundred Folk Tunes". These pieces, as well as his arrangements for piano, can be viewed as practical applications of his work within music theory published as "Tonalitätstheorie des parallelen Leittonsystems" (1937). By virtue of his intimate knowledge of tonality in Norwegian folk music, coupled with his art of instrumentation, Tveitt has been able to raise the simple folk melody to the concert hall podium - without losing the inherent characteristics of the art of this folk music.

Unfortunately, all of the authentic folk music notations recorded by Tveitt



were destroyed in a tragic fire at the farm in 1970. The greater part of the manuscripts for his compositions was also lost. This catastrophe is represented in the fact that only a few of his more than 300 compositions have been published to date. Extensive efforts have been made since the composer's death to assemble copies of his works from private sources and institutions. It has also been possible to reconstruct some of the works, so that there are now approximately 90 works available.

[http://www.naxos.com/composerinfo/Harald\\_Saeverud/20947.htm](http://www.naxos.com/composerinfo/Harald_Saeverud/20947.htm)

## Harald Saeverud, Biography

(1897 - 1992)



Harald Saeverud was born in Bergen, Norway, on April 17 1897. He began composing music at an extraordinarily early age. He studied piano and harmony at the Musical Academy in Bergen, and published his first piece in 1919. In 1920, he attended the Berlin Hochschule für Musik where he studied under F.E. Koch and Clemens Kraus, after which he returned to Bergen and earned his living playing the piano and teaching. The works that he composed at this time showed the influence of Brahms and Bruckner, but by 1926, when he composed Symphony in B flat minor, his third symphony, he had begun to experiment with other musical styles. That same year, he also composed a piano suite and a cello concerto, delving further into his musical experimentations.



In 1933 he received a grant that enabled him to direct his attentions solely to composition. His 1934 work, *Canto Ostinato*, was presented at the fourth International Festival at Baden-Baden and was received warmly. This moment marked the beginning of his popularity outside of Norway. After the Nazi invasion of Norway, Saeverud was driven to begin composing music that was characteristically Norwegian, with works such as *Shepherd's Tune Variations*, *Festa Campestre* and *Sinfonia Dolorosa*.

Saeveruds focus on the Norwegian style of music earned him great praise. In 1952, he was made a member of the Swedish Musical Society, and by the 1950s he was receiving yearly grants from the Norwegian government in recognition of his role as a champion of Norwegian music. In 1957, he was granted knighthood in the order of Saint Olaf, first-class.