**Peer Gynt: Suite No. 1**

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, strings.

Duration: 15 minutes in four movements.

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**THE COMPOSER** – EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907) – Grieg spent much of the 1870s collaborating with famous countrymen authors. With Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, the composer had hoped to mount a grand operatic history of King Olav Tryggvason but the two artists soon ran afoul of one another. A possible contributing factor was Grieg’s moonlighting project with Henrik Ibsen but, in truth, Bjørnson and the composer had been nursing hurt feelings for a while by the time the latter began to stray.

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**THE MUSIC** – As it turned out, Grieg’s back-up plan was more challenging than rewarding at first. He was to compose incidental music that expanded and stitched together the sections of Ibsen’s epic poem. This he did with delight, but soon found the restrictions of the theatrical setting more a burden than a help creatively. “In no case,” he claimed, “had I opportunity to write as I wanted” but the 1876 premiere was a huge success regardless. Grieg seized the chance to re-work some of the music and add new segments during the 1885 revival and did the same in 1902. The two suites he published in 1888 and 1893 likely represent his most ardent hopes for his part of the project and stand today as some of his most potently memorable work. Ibsen’s play depicted the globetrotting rise and fall of a highly symbolic Norwegian anti-hero and, in spite of all the aforementioned struggles, the author could not have chosen a better partner than Grieg to enhance the words with sound. The clean lines and clear direction of the music fit the narrative complexity of the action perfectly and, as time would tell, enabled the suites to thrive quite nicely on their own. Suite No. 1 includes four moments from the collaboration. “Morning Mood” opens with birds and gentle sunlight. “Aase’s Death” lays Peer Gynt’s mother to rest with a remarkable hushed reverence. “Anitra’s Dance” is pure seduction and guile. And “In the Hall of the Mountain King,” which needs no introduction here or anywhere, presents a truly alien world that resonates with witty freshness even today.

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**THE WORLD** – Custer’s Last Stand occurred at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. It was also the year of the most famous moment in telephonic history when Alexander Graham Bell said, “Mr. Watson, come here. I want to see you.”

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