



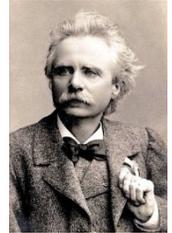
The Death of Aase (Åses Død)

from *Peer Gynt Suite No. I*, Op. 46 (1888)

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

arr. Erik Hellerstedt –

<http://www3.cpd.org/wiki/images/sheet/grieg-aas.pdf>



ANALYSIS

Broad Description/Type Incidental music to Henrik Ibsen's play premiered along with the play on February 24th, 1876 in Oslo, Norway.

Background Information

Henrik Ibsen's extraordinary five-act verse-drama *Peer Gynt* is part folk-tale, part satire, part comedy, and part philosophical meditation. It was written in 1867 as a dramatic poem, without any thought of the theatre. Only some years after its completion did Ibsen set about arranging it for the stage; and for this project he sought collaboration from fellow countryman Edvard Grieg, already Norway's leading composer in his early thirties. Originally, Grieg wrote 26 items of incidental music (over 90 minutes worth). Later, he formed eight of these, in a revised and orchestrated version, into two concert suites (Op. 46 in 1888 and Op. 55 in 1891).

Peer Gynt is a five act play about the title character's struggle with procrastination and immaturity. Ibsen begins the play by introducing Peer, who has a wild imagination. He spoils his chances for marriage with a local girl, Solveig, later attending her wedding and finding another woman, Ingrid. Solveig refuses Peer's advances and he runs off with Ingrid to the mountains. He then deserts her and is seduced by the daughter of the troll Mountain King, who offers Peer his daughter and his kingdom, providing he turns into an everlasting troll. Peer refuses and escapes, pursued by the trolls. Later, we find Peer in the pine forests, where Solveig has come to live with him. The daughter of the Mountain King suddenly appears and confronts Peer with her baby, the fruit of their relationship. Peer is frightened and deserts Solveig, returning home to be with his dying mother, Aase. Peer arrives to comfort her by taking her on an imaginary journey into Heaven. Throughout the third and fourth acts, Peer becomes an outlaw and then a businessman. He wanders through life without purpose. By the final act, Peer is an old man; he auctions all of his possessions. Ibsen ends *Peer Gynt* with a character full of despair, believing that he has forfeited his life.

ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

Melody

The melody occurs consistently in the uppermost voice throughout the work. Other lines, though harmonic in function, still retain an inherent melodic quality (ie. they're instrumental lines, but very "singable"). The A section melody is completely melodic (e minor) and diatonic, save for the initial fourth leap and is quite "sticky" to the ear; with the B section's melody imitating, mirroring, and extending the A material, closing with a tritone leap downward and a "ti do" resolution. Somewhat contrasting is the melodic material of the C and D sections, which is almost entirely chromatic, and is reminiscent of the falling "sigh" motif of Dowland, Bach, and countless prior composers.

The uncomplicated, stepwise melodic material possesses great depth, however. The lines are inherently intuitive for emotive phrasing, and evoke the grief and sorrow present after the death of a loved one. The melody is simple enough to hear once and remember, yet deep enough to be repeated at length.

Form

Outwardly quite simple – consistent 4 bar phrases and clear delineations between formal sections. This gives the listener ample time to contemplate the gravity of the music and its circumstance. Although formal sections are often repeated, the evolution of the initial melody/form doesn't feel stale; in fact, the listener hears pain, hope, despair, mourning, and peace with each subsequent section.

<u>Sec.</u>	<u>mm</u>	<u>Chord Prog.</u>	<u>Cadence</u>	<u>Dyn.</u>	<u>Tess</u>	<u>Description</u>
A	1-4	e min – B maj	B maj (dom)	p	low	Gently rising, falling motion, sets the tone, simple enough statement to further layer upon and develop
B	5-8	e min – CR*	e min (ton)	pp	low	Backing away, reflective, CR=intriguing, moving us forward, completes 8 bar larger statement ending on tonic
A ^I	9- 12	b min – F# maj	F# maj (dom)	mf<	mid	New=tonal center, register, dynamic. More declamatory, soaring, thicker texture in vocal arrangement
B ^I	13- 16	b min – CR*	b min (ton)	p < x3	mid	Again reflective, but seemingly restrained; Repeated p< create tension. p – sfz on cadence propels listener forward
A ^{II}	17- 20	e min – B maj	B maj (dom)	f	high	More declamatory, soars even higher; same material, yet feels new; thicker texture (doubling in alto/bass); emotional (agony/freedom?)
B ^{II}	21- 24	e min – CR*	e min (ton)	ff	high	Fits pattern (ABABAB, 4 bars, & cadence) but doesn't: loud, soft, loud, soft, loud, LOUDER, w/accents, & doubling = emotional apex
C	25- 28	C add#6 – B maj	B maj (dom)	p>pp	high	Considerable contrast, texture thins out, new melodic material, "sigh" motif-like motion & chromatic movement prominent
C ^I	29- 32	F add#6 – e min	e min (ton)	p>pp	mid	Both fulfills & defies expectations: same chord prog, ends in tonic e minor, but doesn't feel final b/c tessitura is mid-range (transitory)
C ^{II}	33- 36	C add#6 – B maj	B maj (dom)	<i>più</i> p	low	Increasingly mournful, texture thickens back to 5 lines, music pattern is familiar, yet doesn't feel stale; feels necessary
C ^{III}	37- 40	F add#6 – e min	e min (ton)	<i>più</i> p	mid	Cycle coming to completion; a grief-laden fulfillment of expectation; ends in low register on tonic chord (feeling of finality)
Coda	41- 45	B7 – e min	e min (ton)	> pp	low	Unexpected, yet feels inevitable/unavoidable; augmented rhythms, time/space between last 3 chords; mourning & "being at peace" & closure - simultaneously

*CR = "crunchy" chord = root, major 3rd, "5, dim7 (in any position)

Rhythm

The quarter-quarter-half note rhythmic motif is ever-present, appearing in every phrase, save the final four bar coda (which is a rhythmic augmentation: half-half-whole). This stable, heartbeat like consistency acts as a necessary anchor amidst the other changing elements (dynamics, tonal center, tessitura, etc). At the tempo marking of "Andate doloroso," (quarter=50 for strings, adapted by Hellerstedt to quarter=80 for voices) nothing feels rushed or hurried; every musical event comes in its due time.

Occasionally, passing eighth notes add interest and forward drive toward cadence points. However, the reserved use of eighth-note motion (only one time, in only one line are there more than two eighth notes in succession) creates a deliberate and melancholy atmosphere, which allows the listener time and space to grieve and process emotion.

Harmony

Grieg uses contrasting tonal centers of e minor and b minor (in m. 1-24) throughout sections A and B. The chord progressions are exactly identical, and once heard, instantly become part of the musical pattern of expectation and fulfillment that the listener comes to expect. The addition of the CR chord in each B section (see Form) is just out of place enough in each "key" (the top note of the melody remains unchanged, while the underlying harmonies change) to give the listener a slightly unsettling feeling before returning to the comfort of a tonal center.

The transition from B^{II} to C embodies the interplay between fulfilled and diverted expectations. Grieg introduces a new section (diverts from the pattern), keeps the same register (fulfills the expectation), adds a never-before-heard harmony, the V7/III chord (diverts from the pattern), yet manages to retain the “e” in the melody, from the previous e minor (fulfills the expectation).

In subsequent C and prime sections, Grieg again creates a (new) chord progression (alternately ending on the dominant, then tonic of e minor, respectively) as the tessitura of each section slowly decreases. Because of the relatively slow-moving and repetitive (though again in different tonal centers) nature of the harmonic rhythm, the listener is left with a strong feeling of harmonic inevitability, as if each section must end the way it eventually does. The sections ending in major chords create hope and expectancy in the ear, while those ending in minor leave give the listener a plaintive feeling, yet somehow a feeling also at peace.

Texture

Almost entirely constant in the sea of change, the texture is completely homophonic throughout the entire work, which allows the performers to phrase everything exactly together; there is no mistaking the intention of the music by muddying the waters with different textures. We all mourn...hope...live together. For voicing/register reasons, Hellerstedt removes a voice for m.1-8, then adds it back in at m. 9-24. Grieg’s removal of one voice from m.25-32 makes the contrast between B^{II} and C that much more evident. It is no mistake that the texture becomes thickest (with all 5 lines, plus octave doubling in the Alto/Bass lines) at the climax – m.17-24 – and adds to the increasing drama of that section.

Timbre

Grieg has created a wonderful dramatic arc through the slowly rising, then falling tessitura of each formal section, which perfectly captures the emotional journey evoked in the title. Every eight bars, the tonal center rises a fourth/fifth; slowly, the tension mounts as the voices (instruments) push the top/bottom boundaries of their range at the exact musical climax of the drama. Hellerstedt’s addition of certain vowels to give a darker color to the more somber sections and a brighter color to the climax is a welcome assist to the singer performing an instrumental transcription.

Expression

Musical expression is perhaps the most significant element throughout this work. The degree to which performers can 1) execute subtle dynamic changes, accents, sforzandos, crescendos/decrescendos, etc. and 2) make intuitive micro-phrases, where no expressive markings are present will determine how powerful the performance will be. Even with all the dynamic changes and cresc./delesc., Grieg has constructed such simple phrases so as to force the performer to determine phrases-within-phrases and moments of subtle swelling, etc. This written and “hidden” musical expression helps to perfectly capture the roller coaster of emotions that surrounds a death.

Heart Statement

The heart of "Aase's Death" is found in the ingenious way Grieg either fulfills or diverts the expectations he creates for the listener. By weaving subtle and overt expressive markings over a repetitive melodic line and formal structure, Grieg captures the spectrum of emotions experienced when grieving a loved one.

MUSIC SELECTION

The music of Edvard Grieg, often inspired by Norwegian folklore and mythology, has a charming directness which has worldwide appeal. Though Norway’s most famous and influential composer, Grieg is somewhat overlooked when discussing great composers, usually for his lack of larger scale works. His beautiful smaller scale works make up most of his output; their simple, folk-like gracefulness and lack of grand dramatic ideas are famous hallmarks of Grieg's style.

The Death of Aase is one of Grieg’s most performed works, and for good reason: the strategic repetition of key musical elements (melody, phrasing, tonality) combined with the deliberate changing of other elements (dynamics, timbre, harmony) create uniquely memorable work, that upon hearing, feels both familiar, and yet remarkable. Grieg slowly unfolds phrase after phrase, creating musical expectations of resolution, harmony, tessitura, and expression, to which the listener takes subconscious satisfaction in both predicting what will happen next and being surprised when Grieg diverts from the pattern.

SKILL OUTCOME

Students will sing accurate intervals amid changing tonal centers.

STRATEGIES

1. Warmups
 - a. Do re me fa sol le te do (up & down) & pattern of half/whole – discuss changes from Major scale
 - b. Do, do re do, do re me re do, etc. (up & down) with variants: change me→mi, or le→la, or te→ti
 - c. Do ri do re do me do mi, etc. (up to sol) and sol fi sol fa sol mi (etc.) down to do
 - i. Variation: 1 section sing only “do” or “sol,” other section moves (& switch)
 - d. Half step, half step, whole step whole step, etc. (C C# C# C – C D D C, etc. and G F# F# G – G F F G, etc.)
 - i. With steps on hand – see & feel the intervals
 - e. “2 handed solfege” & audiate before singing – m2, M2 P4, TT both up and down
 - f. “Wipe out” Do – sing the melody in e minor on hand signs – wipe out do – then sing in B minor
 - i. Assessment: do a different part ATB each day and have kids guess which part
 - g. Paper Keyboard (on cardstock) – “play” the actual interval when singing it, see the difference
2. **Part Book** – rehearse using only their part – like an instrumentalist –
 - a. I write in Tonal Center, they fill in solfege
 - b. Space to write in half/whole steps
3. Part Circles (islands of pitch) – stop at cadences & difficult chords
 - a. Use virtual piano - http://www.bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/resources_ftp/client_ftp/ks2/music/piano/ from chromebook/phone & play the pitch to help tune
4. “On/Off Switch” (closer to concert, once most parts are learned)
 - a. All parts sing vocal line on solfege, then “switch” to neutral syllable, then “switch” back (internalize solfege)
 - b. Alternate: every other person sing neutral syllable and solfege syllable

ASSESSMENTS

1. Record Individual Perf. – listen to self, specific passages, what was wrong & how can I fix it? What was right & why?
2. Quiz – your vocal line’s solfege in two key centers (in Part Book)
3. Sonic Fit – e minor Scale Degree ET and Interval Notation – Worksheets (30 correct for each)

KNOWLEDGE OUTCOME

Students will characterize and distinguish between moments of musical expression, both written (composer’s markings) and implied (musical intuition).

STRATEGIES

1. “Musical Intuition: A Primer” – Students will sing famous melody lines as warm ups, individually adding expressive markings. Volunteers will give their markings to the group, which will sing it & evaluate for expressive effectiveness
 - a. Danny Boy, The Parting Glass, She Moved Through the Fair, Wild Rover, Wild Mountain Thyme
2. “Human Phrase Makers”
 - a. Kid #1: For Written dynamics: **create a tape line of pp**→ff and kid stands on marking, move along the line for each phrase
 - b. Kid #2: For Implied dynamics: hoberman sphere out/in, kinesthetic movement (class suggestions)
3. Characterize: metaphor for crescendo, picture of accents, sound of train approaching/leaving, approaching thunderstorm, little sister coming up the stairs-mad, etc. **need visuals!!!!**
4. Pencil shading → **basic lesson & practice**; Include: p<>, p sudden mf, p<fz, accent, >morendo
5. Pp-marble, p-golfball, mp-softball, mf-soccer ball, f-beach ff-beach **(need balls)**
 - a. Students arrange themselves from pp-ff a warm up, with a diff ball corresponding to each measure
 - i. Random & organized
 - b. Students arrange themselves according to Grieg’s dynamics and sing m. 1-24
 - i. Hoberman sphere in between

ASSESSMENTS

1. Quiz – Blank Score – fill in the correct dynamics.
2. Conducting quiz – We practice different styles (forte, piano, cresc, accent), then I conduct diff styles/dynamics & they watch: write down musically what happened
3. Read excerpt from, “Casals and the Art of Interpretation” by David Blum (p.15-18) & listen to three Mozart excerpts:
 - a. Solo - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=newIWMUqJTA>
 - b. Mediocre - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IpELRIK4g38>
 - c. Expressive - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CpA7tlVqN4> (11:50 mark)
 - d. Journal: Why does this level of detail matter? What does this kind of listening and performing say about you as a performer and about your audience?

AFFECTIVE OUTCOME

Students will explore how composers create expectations and propose musical and/or dramatic reasons why expectations may be altered, delayed, or fulfilled.

STRATEGIES

1. Quotes (to be printed on posters, hung around room)
 - a. We must rediscover the distinction between hope and expectation. – Ivan Illich
 - b. We love to expect, and when expectation is either disappointed or gratified, we want to be again expecting. – Samuel Johnson
 - c. Uncertainty and expectation are the joys of life. Security is an insipid thing. – William Congreve
 - d. Expectation is the root of all heartache. – Shakespeare
2. “The Setup” – Create **mini-lessons** (with visual and aural examples) on how expectations are created in music. Define the following terms: Prior Knowledge (pre-built expectations), Anticipation, Deduction, Directionality, Inertia, Tension/Resolution, Closure.
 - a. Twinkle Twinkle – Elliot & Evelyn singing (they fill in what I leave out)
 - b. I Need Thee Every Hour – original tune and hymn harmonization
 - c. I Need Thee O I Need Thee – Sam Robeson arrangement
3. “A Mechanic’s View” Worksheet – Students analyze different musical elements and participate in group and class discussions about how Grieg sets up expectations.
4. Article – The Science of Expectation: Using Humor to Understand Creativity (edited for content)
 - a. http://www.creativitypost.com/psychology/the_science_of_expectation_using_humor_to_understand_creativity2
 - b. Journal Question: Do you agree with the author when he states, “Audiences seek art that fulfills expectations; they’re pleased when this happens and disappointed when it doesn’t”? Explain, from your experience.
5. “That Doesn’t Seem So Hard...” Group Composition – set up an expectation & defy it (& my demo)
 - a. Limited only to instruments in the room (can use phone/laptop keyboard & effects)
 - b. Can manipulate: Rhythm, pitch, form, harmony, timbre, texture, expression
 - c. How to set up expectation (pattern, repetition, etc.)?

ASSESSMENTS

1. “iTunes Treasures” - Search the music you listen to. Find a song that creates musical expectations in the listener, then: list out those expectations, clearly delineate how composer/artist either 1) meets the expectation (ie. predictable, somewhat mediocre/boring), 2) defies expectations he/she has set up, or 3) meets them but in a new/interesting way.
 - a. My example: “You Really Got a Hold on Me” – Anne Lindsey
2. Journal response to “The Science of Expectation” article.
3. “Mechanic’s View” responses & discussion.