

Edvard Grieg's

“Lost” Concert

RYTIS URNIEŽIUS

Šiauliai University, Lithuania

Email: rytisur@gmail.com

This publication has been financed from the funds of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

Open Access. © 2018 Rytis Urniežius, published by Sciendo.  This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License.

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), like many composers who were his contemporaries, spent a lot of time in concert tours as a pianist and conductor in various European countries. In the context of that era, this activity seems fairly typical; however, if we take into account composer's poor health (especially in the late period of his life), then his determination to wear himself down in difficult journeys will seem extraordinary. In his letters, the composer often describes periods of illness which prevented him from going on concert tours to one or another country or town. Nevertheless, the number of concerts and the geography of visited places during Grieg's career are impressive. Grieg usually arranged his tours in the autumn, winter or spring, while the summers he spent from 1885 in his Trolldhaugen residence, enjoying the revitalising nature.

PROBLEMS, SOURCES AND RESEARCH

The monograph *Edvard Grieg* by Olga Levashova¹ remains one of the most comprehensive works on Grieg's music in the Russian language. In the chronology section at the end of this book, there is a record that Grieg gave concerts in Riga in April 1902 (see Figure 1 with the scanned text). The same statement can be found in the *Russian Music Encyclopaedia's* entry written by the same author². Affirmations that such concerts really took place can also be found in numerous Russian-language-based web sites devoted to Grieg³. The claim that Grieg travelled to Riga is also repeated in Volume I of the *Lithuanian Music Encyclopaedia*⁴.

Edvard Grieg's concert on the territory of one of the contemporary Baltic States seems to be an interesting research subject. Since there are no indications that Grieg

1902

Январь — в Трельхаугене. Февраль, март — в Копенгагене. Очерк «С Бьернсоном в былые дни». 22 апреля — концерт в Варшаве при участии Т. Карреньо и норвежской певицы Л. Виборг. Концерты в Риге. С мая до ноября — в Трельхаугене (август — лечение в бергенской больнице). 24 и 26 октября — концерты в Бергене с Ниной Григ (первое исполнение «Лирических пьес» op. 71). С ноября до конца года — в Кристиании. Концерты 23 ноября, 5 и 16 декабря. Изучение народной скрипичной музыки. Работа над «Норвежскими крестьянскими танцами» op. 72.

Figure 1. Scanned excerpt from the chronology section of the book *Edvard Grieg* by Olga Levashova⁵.

ever held a concert in Lithuania, the next topical question for the author of this article concerns the circumstances of the concert in the capital of the neighbouring Latvia. The programme of the concert, reception of the music and performance by the audience, as well as other elements should be considered in such research. The question what Grieg's travel route to Riga was also appears interesting. If Grieg came to Riga from Warsaw after his concert on the 22nd of May, he very likely travelled across the lands of contemporary Lithuania (possibly he left some records concerning his impressions from this journey?). Also, a secondary question emerges. The present territory of Latvia was in Grieg's time a part of the Russian Empire; therefore, the concerts in Riga should be regarded as Grieg's performances on the territory of the Russian state. Nevertheless, numerous research publications claim that Grieg never visited Russia.

Surprisingly, references to the concert (or concerts) in Riga can be found almost exclusively in Russian sources. The Western sources do not contain any information concerning this concert at all: it is not mentioned in the works of famous researchers of Grieg's music (Finn

1 Olga Levashova, *Эдвард Григ* [Edvard Grieg] (Moskva: Muzyka, 1975). First edition in 1962.

2 O. Levashova, "Григ," [Grieg] in *Muzikalnaya entsiklopediya* (Moskva: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya / Sovetsky kompozitor, 1974), 63.

3 For instance: <http://www.junior.ru/students/chubukova/dati.htm>, last accessed 10th June 2018.

4 J. Klimas, "Grieg Edvard Hagerup," in *Muzikos enciklopedija*, ed. Juozas Antanavičius, vol. I (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas, 2000), 476. Most likely, the author of the entry in the *Lithuanian Encyclopaedia* relied upon Russian sources as well.

5 See Levashova, *Edvard Grieg*, 589. Translated by the author: "January – in Trolldhaugen. February, March – in Copenhagen. Essay 'With Bjornson in Years Gone By'. 22nd of April – Concert in Warsaw, T. Carreño and Norwegian singer L. Wiborg participate. [The author indicates the first letter of the singer's name by the Cyrillic character 'Л' adequate to Latin 'L', however, in the advertisement of the concert the singer's name is Elisa Wiborg, thus, the character 'Э' should be used in this case]. Concerts in Riga [underlined by the author of this article; NB: the word 'concerts' is in plural]. From May to November – in Trolldhaugen (August – treatment in Bergen hospital). 24th and 26th of October – concerts in Bergen with Nina Grieg (first performance of *Lyric Pieces* Op. 71). From November till the end of the year – in Christiania. Concerts on 23rd of November, 5th and 16th of December. Studying of folk violin music. Work on *Norwegian Peasant Dances*, Op. 72."

Benestad, Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe⁶, Erling Dahl⁷ and others) and on the web sites devoted to Grieg. The author of the present article has not been able to find any traces of the visit to Riga in Grieg's letters translated by William Halverson,⁸ as well as on the pages containing Grieg's letters⁹ and concert programmes¹⁰ available from the website of Bergen Public Library, The Grieg Archives. The Latvian musicologist Dr Baiba Jaunslaviete kindly provided with the link to the website of the digital catalogue¹¹ of Latvian National Library and rendered immense assistance in looking through the newspapers published in 1902, but no relevant information was found. As Dr Jaunslaviete wrote in her e-mail to the author of the present article, "music criticism (especially in the German newspapers of Riga) was quite advanced at that time, and I think a concert by Grieg would have been mentioned in the newspapers if it had taken place". Thus, the numerous documents from 1902 and contemporary research works on Grieg have not provided any information which would confirm the claim that Grieg gave a concert in Riga in 1902.

The text presented in Figure 1 implies that this hypothetical concert could most likely take place in April. Therefore, the author of this article decided to follow Grieg's travel routes and their dates in the early 1902. According to the composer's letters,¹² the winter of 1901–1902 was severe and badly affected Grieg's state of health. He stayed in Trolldhaugen until December and then moved to Bergen, where he spent approximately a month. At the end of January, the composer left Bergen

and came to Christiania. At the beginning of February, he arrived in Copenhagen and apparently stayed there for the whole of March. Grieg felt better at the beginning of April; therefore, he decided to keep his promise and give a concert in Warsaw. Grieg left Copenhagen on 16th April.¹³ The concert in Warsaw was held on 22nd April. On 27th April Grieg returned to Copenhagen. Several days later Grieg went to Trolldhaugen via Christiania. He reached Trolldhaugen on 11th May.

Thus, the preliminary and very general timeline of events around April 1902 could be delineated:

Time	Place
The beginning of 1902	Bergen
The end of January – the beginning of February	Copenhagen via Christiania
16 th April	Leaving Copenhagen for Warsaw
22 nd April	Concert in Warsaw
27 th April	Again in Copenhagen
Several days after	Trip to Trolldhaugen via Christiania
11 th May	Trolldhaugen

It is unlikely that Grieg's biographers, who meticulously documented every place of the composer's concert tours would have missed a journey to such a remote place as Riga. However, if they (presumably) missed it, then when could this visit take place, if we assume that, as the Russian sources testify, the concert was held in April?

It seems impossible that such a trip could be undertaken before the end of the month because Grieg decided to go directly to Warsaw from Copenhagen only when his health allowed it. Grieg certainly stayed in Warsaw not only for the one day of the concert (22nd April). He would have taken a rest after such a journey and at least one rehearsal was held with the orchestra before the concert. The letter written on the 29th of October, 1902 to Czech impresario Mojmir Urbánek confirms this assumption: "It was the same way in Warsaw last winter: I declined all invitations and spent all evenings in the hotel or at most at the theatre or a concert".¹⁴ So he must have stayed in Warsaw for at least five days. Levashova

6 Finn Benestad, Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

7 Erling Dahl, *My Grieg. A Personal Introduction to His Life and Music* (Trolldhaugen: Edvard Grieg Museum, 2014).

8 *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Finn Benestad, transl. William H. Halverson (Columbus, Ohio: Peer Gynt Press, 2000).

9 Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek, The Grieg Archives website. "Korrespondanse," accessed 10th June 2018, <https://bergenbibliotek.no/grieg/griegsamlingen/korrespondanse>.

10 Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek, The Grieg Archives website. "Konsertprogram," accessed 10th June 2018, <https://bergenbibliotek.no/grieg/griegsamlingen/grieg-samlingen-konsertprogram>.

11 Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka. LNB digitālā bibliotēka, accessed 10th June 2018, <http://www.periodika.lv/#advancedSearch>.

12 See for instance Grieg's letter to Gerhard Schjelderup written in Bergen, 13th January 1902 (*Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 601).

13 Jorunn Eckhoff Færden, an officer of Edvard Grieg Archives at Bergen Public Library in her e-mail kindly indicated this date, which she found in a Norwegian source: Eivind A.C. Eikenes, *Edvard Grieg fra dag til dag* (Stavanger: E.A.C. Eikenes forl., 2007).

14 *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 665.

mentions concerts (plural again!) in Riga after the concert in Warsaw. Consequently, the concert(s) could only take place approximately between 24th April and the beginning of May. But, if Grieg was in Copenhagen again on 27th April and later left for Trolldhaugen via Christiania, then it seems that the only period during which concerts in Riga could be held might be the short time gap between the 24th and the 26th of April. However, this period seems too short for a concert tour, especially considering Grieg's fragile health and probable exhaustion after the difficult although highly successful Warsaw tour.

The aforementioned data suggest that Grieg's concert in Riga did not happen in April at all. The ultimate proof for this conclusion was provided by Prof. Dr Patrick Dinslage, whose help by correspondence was extremely useful and comprehensive; the meticulously recorded data from Grieg's housekeeping books kindly presented by Prof. Dinslage include travelling tickets, exchange of currency, stays in hotels, dinner on the train, coffee in Copenhagen and many other details of expenses. It becomes clear that Grieg stayed in Warsaw from 17th till 23rd April and afterwards went to Berlin. He left Berlin for Copenhagen¹⁵ on 25th April and stayed there¹⁶ until his departure for Christiania on 5th May.

Thus, the complete timeline of Grieg's tours in April 1902 is as follows:

Time	Place
The beginning of 1902	Bergen
The end of January – the beginning of February	Copenhagen via Christiania
16 th April	Leaving Copenhagen
17 th April	Coming to Warsaw
22 nd April	Concert in Warsaw
23 rd April	Leaving Warsaw for Berlin
25 th April	Leaving Berlin for Copenhagen
26 th April – 4 th May	Stay in Copenhagen
5 th May	Trip to Christiania
11 th May.	Trolldhaugen

Such detailed information about Grieg's schedule from 15th April till 5th May allows us to deduce that the

composer definitely did not visit Riga in April 1902. The fact of visiting Berlin after Warsaw was the final proof which allowed this conclusion.

Although Levashova claims that Grieg's concert in Riga took place in April, it could be presumed that it was organised in some other month of the year 1902. However, the chronology section included in Grieg's collection¹⁷ of articles, diaries, and speeches leaves no room for this. The source indicates that Grieg came to Trolldhaugen on 11th May, took a trip to the mountains in July and wrote the article *With Bjørnson in Years Gone By* in September.¹⁸ In a letter written to Iver Holter on 15th September from Trolldhaugen, Grieg wrote: "I, for reasons of health, have had to decline an invitation to conduct on October 7 and 8 at music festival in Bristol."¹⁹ And it was only on 24th October that Grieg gave a chamber music concert in Bergen – the first concert that autumn. On 8th November, Grieg went to Christiania and spent a week in hospital. According to the chronology tables, the composer spent the rest of the year in Christiania. Clearly the year 1902 was typical of Grieg's later period: in summer time the concert activities stopped in order to restore his strength in the picturesque neighbourhood of Trolldhaugen, and resumed only in the autumn.

Thus, the data obtained from the analysis of numerous documents and research works excludes the possibility of Grieg's visit to Riga in 1902.

DISCUSSION

The possibility that Grieg came to Riga not in 1902 but in some other year should also be considered. In this regard, an invitation by Finnish impresario Edvard Fazer is noteworthy. Fazer invited Grieg to come to Helsinki to deliver concerts in September 1904.²⁰ He also mentioned that he could organise a concert in Riga several days before the concerts in Helsinki. However, there is no proof that these concerts were held in Riga

¹⁷ Edvard Grieg: *Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, ed. and transl. by Finn Benestad and William H. Halverson (Columbis, Ohio: Peer Gynt Press, 2011), 418.

¹⁸ This statement contradicts Levashova's statement that the article about Bjørnson was written in February–March 1902 (Figure 1).

¹⁹ Edvard Grieg: *Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 426.

²⁰ Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek, The Grieg Archives website, accessed 10th June 2018, <http://www.bergen.folkebibl.no/cgi-bin/websok-grieg?tnr=238950&kolonner=brev>.

or in Helsinki in 1904 or in the subsequent years, either. Possibly some still unrevealed documents which could confirm the fact of Grieg's concert in Riga will be found in the future; therefore, the possibility that such concert really took place should not be unconditionally rejected. Meanwhile, the claim that Grieg never visited Riga seems indisputable.

The question still remains in what way the allegation of Grieg's concert(s) in Riga first appeared in the Russian sources. To date the author's efforts to find appropriate information from Russian musicologists were unsuccessful. Hopefully in the future Russian researchers will explain the fact how and when such information could appear in texts written by musicologists of that country. Meanwhile, only some conjectures could be made.

In this context, one secondary question should be dealt with at least briefly. Did Grieg visit Russia or not? Grieg was fond of Russian music and was on friendly terms with Russian musicians (Piotr Tchaikovsky, Adolf Brodsky, Alexander Siloti). Initially he was eager to go to Russia. Nevertheless, he never visited that country. Grieg received invitations in 1903, 1904, 1905, and 1907 from Alexander Siloti, as well as from the Music Teachers' Association in Saint Petersburg, but none of these concert tour plans was implemented. Grieg's poor health was definitely one of the reasons why he postponed the journey to Russia. However, some of Grieg's letters reveal that at least from 1904 he deliberately rejected the possibility of such a tour. In letters to Adolf Brodsky (26th April 1905)²¹ and Alexander Siloti (12th February and 29th October 1904; 16th August 1907)²² Grieg explicitly stated that the predatory policies of the Russian government, which most clearly manifested themselves in the war with Japan (1904–1905) and the cruel suppression of the 1905 revolution²³, were the most important reason for him not to visit Russia. A noble and humane composer could not put up with such brutalities and a concert in a suffering country ruled by a tyrant was unacceptable to him.²⁴

Naturally, it is likely that the indication concerning the concert in Riga appeared in Soviet musicology as an occasional mistake. But it should be taken into account that Russians made much of Grieg's music in all times, including the Soviet period—at least such a claim can be found in numerous Russian sources.²⁵ Therefore, there is a possibility that because of the desire to make Grieg's personality closer to Russian music culture, his presumed concert in Riga was generated as a soft and almost indiscernibly deliberate counterfeit. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Riga was a *de jure* part of the Russian Empire and even became the third largest Russian city after Moscow and Saint Petersburg in terms of the degree of industrial development. So, if Grieg had had a concert in Riga, this fact would have been interpreted as a concert in Russia.

Thus, if it is firmly proved that Grieg never came to Riga, it can be stated that he did not visit Russia in general. But this seemingly simple and obvious conclusion appears more questionable if we remember that he did visit Poland several times. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Poland was also a *de jure* territory of the Russian Empire. However, despite this fact, all sources (including Grieg's letters) refer to Grieg's concerts in Warsaw as concerts in Poland but not in Russia.²⁶ The long and rich history of Poland and its significance as a part of the European sub-continent were too important to conceal the identity of this country behind the magnitude of the Russian Empire. Grieg apparently realised that Poland had a separate historical and cultural identity. This should be regarded as a conscious and high-minded political and cultural attitude.²⁷

proposal to go to Russia: "Moreover, I could finally be killed by the Russians! And I much prefer a natural death!" (Edvard Grieg: *Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 634).

25 For example: Nikolai Mokhov, "Grieg and Russia," *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* 19 (1993), 23–126.

26 The author of this article did not succeed in finding an English translation of Grieg's letter to Oscar Meyer written in Copenhagen (28th April 1902), but in the collection of Grieg's letters translated into Russian by Ukrainian musicologist Yelena Biteryakova (Эдвард Григ. Избранные письма [Edvard Grieg. *Izbrannye pisma*], vol. 2, Moskva: Impeto, 2013) the words "I was not in Russia but in Poland" (p. 98) can be found. In the copy of the page from Grieg's housekeeping book, the name of Oscar Meyer is mentioned on 28th April; thus, the letter to him was certainly written. Grieg treated Finland in the same way (see the letter to Edvard Neovius (17th January 1904) in *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 544).

27 His likely attitude toward Riga is also arguable. For many centuries Riga was ruled mostly by the Germans and Swedes (1581–1621 by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). Russia

21 Edvard Grieg: *Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 174.

22 *Ibid.*, 632–634.

23 It is also worth mentioning the occasional remark in a letter to Frantz Beyer (14th January 1906): "...critics' treatment of significant new works such as that [Grieg wrote about *Death and Transfiguration* by Richard Strauss] is almost like that of the Cossacks toward the poor Russian peasants. They fire away and don't care in the least whom they hit" (Edvard Grieg: *Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, 103).

24 It is not completely clear what Grieg meant in his letter to Alexander Siloti (16th August 1907) in which he again rejected the

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Finn Benestad, Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).
- Erling Dahl, *My Grieg. A Personal Introduction to His Life and Music* (Troidhaugen: Edvard Grieg Museum, 2014).
- Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Finn Benestad, transl. William H. Halverson (Columbus, Ohio: Peer Gynt Press, 2000).
- Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, ed. and transl. by Finn Benestad and William H. Halverson (Columbus, Ohio: Peer Gynt Press, 2001).
- Eivind A.C. Eikenes, *Edvard Grieg fra dag til dag* (Stavanger: E.A.C. Eikenes forl., 2007).
- J. Klimas, "Grieg Edvard Hagerup," in *Muzikos enciklopedija*, ed. Juozas Antanavičius, vol. I (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas), 476–477.
- Nikolai Mokhov, "Grieg and Russia," *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* 19 (1993), 123–126.
- Olga Levashova, "Григ," [Grieg] in *Muzykalnaya entsiklopediya*, ed. Yuri Keldysh, vol. 2 (Moskva: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya / Sovetsky kompozitor, 1974), 57–65.
- Olga Levashova, *Эдвард Григ* [Edvard Grieg] (Moskva: Muzyka, 1975).
- Эдвард Григ. Избранные письма*. [Edvard Grieg. *Izbrannye pisma*], transl. Yelena Biteryakova, vol. 2 (Moskva: Impeto, 2013).

SOURCES

- Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek, The Grieg Archives website, <http://www.bergen.folkebibl.no/cgi-bin/websok-grieg?tnr=238950&kolonner=brev> (last accessed 10th June 2018).
- Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek, The Grieg Archives website, "Korrespondanse," <https://bergenbibliotek.no/grieg/griegsamlingen/korrespondanse> Last accessed 10th June 2018).
- Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek, The Grieg Archives website, "Konsertprogram," <https://bergenbibliotek.no/grieg/griegsamlingen/grieg-samlingen-konsertprogram> (last accessed 10th June 2018).
- Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka. LNB digitālā bibliotēka website, <http://www.periodika.lv/#advancedSearch> (last accessed 10th June 2018).

occupied the city from 1710; however, even in the beginning of the twentieth century the German language was still significant. Thus, even if Grieg had had concerts in Riga, it is questionable whether they would have been considered as concerts in Russia (naturally, this is only a supposition).