

WOJCIECH STEPIEŃ

Edvard Grieg's *Drei Phantasiestücke* for piano Op. 1

Vier Stücke Op. 1 [Four Pieces] was the first publication of Grieg's music. It was published by Edition Peters in Leipzig in 1863–64 at the same time as *Vier Lieder für eine Altstimme* Op. 2 [Four Songs for Alto Voice]. It is worth noting that these two opuses were composed in the same year 1861, although *Mazurka* No. 3 in op. 1 was composed two years later in 1863 in Bergen. Grieg gave the three piano pieces from Op. 1 (No. 1, 2, 4) title *Drei Phantasiestücke* [Three Fantasy Pieces] and played them at the public conservatory examination in the Concert Hall of Gewandhaus in Leipzig on 12th April 1862.

It was Easter time, 1862, just before I left the Conservatory, when I enjoyed the singular honour of being among the chosen few selected to appear at the public examination concert in the large auditorium of the Gewandhaus. I played some of my own piano compositions. God knows they were the fumbling products of a green Conservatory student, and I still blush to think that they were printed and figure as my Opus 1. But it is a fact that I scored a formidable triumph with them, and I had to make several curtain calls – so I did finally have an undisputed success in the usual sense of the word, no doubt about that. Yet, to me it meant nothing at all. Moreover, the audience consisted of invited people - friends and relatives of professors and students. Under these circumstances, it was the easiest thing in the world for a fair-haired young man from the far north to score a triumph.¹

Op. 1 is dedicated to Ernst Wenzel – Schumann's friend, a pianist, Grieg's teacher of piano in the Leipzig Conservatory. "Schumann's highly intellectual friend, who soon became my favorite [...] he was a master at imparting to me his understanding of the music".² Grieg also recalled Wenzel in his essay about Schumann which he wrote in 1893 for the American journal *The Century Monthly Illustrated Magazine*. He described Wenzel as a teacher "with whom I often talked about Schumann".³

Probably during piano lessons with Wenzel Grieg studied some of Schumann's pieces so in 1861 he was able to give a first public concert in Karlshamn in Sweden where he played from Schumann's *Kreisleriana* No. 1 and No. 2. One year later he also performed Schumann's piano quartet, Op. 47 as the pianist during his first Norwegian concert on 21st May 1862 in Bergen. At this concert he also played his *Drei Phantasiestücke* [Three Fantasy Pieces]. Grieg himself admitted in an interview in Dannebrog from 26th December 1893 that after he completed his music education in Leipzig: "I was stuffed full of Chopin, Schumann,

¹ Edvard Grieg, *My First Success*, in: *Edvard Grieg. Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, ed. Finn Benestad and William H. Halverson, Columbus 2001, p. 89.

² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³ Edvard Grieg, *Robert Schumann*, in: *Edvard Grieg. Diaries, Articles, Speeches*, p. 260.

Mendelssohn, and Wagner”.⁴ So, Schumann’s music had a great impact on him that time. Rikard Nordraak’s opinion could be the best proof of it. After the first meeting with Grieg during his visit to Copenhagen in 1863 Nordraak wrote “there are his one-sided opinions, his exclusive preference for Schumann”.⁵ Grieg had to be absolutely a fan of Schumann’s music for which, together with Chopin, he had the highest admiration. I think that it had a profound influence on his music written in the 1860s. It is a reason that I start analysing *Drei Phantasiestücke* in the analogy to Schumann’s music.⁶

The title *Drei Phantasiestücke* [Three Fantasy Pieces] refers to Schumann’s piano works particularly *Phantasiestücke* Op. 12 (1837) or *Drei Phantasiestücke* Op. 111 (1851).⁷ However, there are no analogies between them and Op. 111 which was composed only 10 years earlier than Grieg’s *Drei Phantasiestücke*. One can find more similarities with Grieg’s pieces in Op. 12. In particular Op. 12 No. 1 *Des Abends* (ex. 1) has a very similar type of accompaniment to Grieg’s first piano piece (ex. 2), although the key signatures are different: Schumann gave D flat major, Grieg D major and also the rhythmic structure. In particular the melody going up on the major scale’s steps in bars 4–6 is comparable to Grieg’s first three bars. Kathleen Dale in her chapter about Grieg’s piano music in Gerald Abraham’s volume observed that Grieg’s first piece is also similar to Schumann’s *Novellette* in D major Op. 21 No. 2 with the same key signature and the analogous compound melodic structure in the right hand (ex. 3).⁸



Ex. 1. R. Schumann, *Phantasiestücke* Op. 12 No. 1, b. 1–6.

⁴ Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg. The Man and the Artist*, Lincoln and London 1988, p. 43.

⁵ Rikard Nordraak in the letter to Louis Hornbeck, 24th May 1864, in: Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg. The Man and the Artist*, p. 46.

⁶ Compare with Hans Joachim Köhler, “Robert Schumann und Edvard Grieg. Affinitäten und Analogien”, in: *Edvard Grieg – Weltbild und Werk. Kongressbericht 5. Deutscher Edvard Grieg-Kongress in Leipzig, 24. bis 26.9.2004*, ed. Hella Brock, Altenmedingen 2005, pp. 157–167.

⁷ John Horton notices: “Written in his student days, they are clearly influenced by admiration for Schumann; indeed, the three pieces of the set which the composer played at his final Leipzig examination originally bore the Schumannesque title of *Drei Phantasiestücke*”. John Horton, *Grieg*, London 1974, pp. 136–137.

⁸ Kathleen Dale, *The Piano Music*, in: *Grieg. A Symposium*, ed. Gerald Abraham, London 1948, p. 47.

Allegro con leggerezza

p sempre legato *cresc.* *f*

Ex. 2. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 1 [*Phantasiestücke* No. 1], b. 1–3.

(*Allegro* e con bravura.)
Äusserst rasch und mit Bravour. $\text{♩} = 92$ (72).

2.

ff *sotto* *sopra* *sotto* *sopra*

Ex. 3. R. Schumann, *Novelletten* Op. 21 No. 2, b. 1–5.

During examination of Schumann's Op. 12 I found some typical harmonic and melodic progressions which anticipated some of Grieg's pieces. For example Schumann's Op. 12 No. 1 (ex. 4) anticipates a melodic structure of Grieg's *Butterfly* Op. 43 No. 1 (ex. 5) by the use of sixths together with chromatic writing. In Schumann's Op. 12 No. 5 *In der Nacht* (ex. 6) there is a melodic line in the middle of the piece which is almost the same as the main phrase of Grieg's song *The Poet's Heart* Op. 5 No. 2 (ex. 7). Is it a quotation from Schumann which can here represent the title poet's heart? Certainly, there could be an affinity, as this passage sounds very Schumanesque.

Ex. 4. R. Schumann, *Phantasiestücke* Op. 12 No. 1, b. 14–16.

Ex. 5. E. Grieg, *Butterfly* No. 43 No. 1, b. 5–6.

Ex. 6. R. Schumann, *Phantasiestücke* Op. 12 No. 5, b. 26–35.

Ex. 7. E. Grieg, “The Poet’s Heart” Op. 5 No. 2, b. 3–4.

It seems that Grieg had to know Schumann’s *Phantasiestücke* Op. 12 or had listened to it and it could have had an impact on the later development of his piano music. Probably the Norwegian composer was aware of this affinity with Schumann’s pieces so he added to his *Drei Phantasiestücke Mazurka* two years later

and changed the title into *Vier Stücke* [Four Pieces]. It was a time when he was searching for his original language from what Nordraak reported in his letter to Louis Hornbeck: “When he stops this incessant searching for originality, then perhaps he will find it.”⁹ To prove Nordraak insights I need to mention Grieg's letter to his publisher dr Max Abraham, 25th February 1877:

With respect to Opus 1, I would absolutely have been happiest if the work had not been published [...] but instead had been left in total oblivion. The pieces are such that not only do they lack independence and inspiration, but all things considered they are nothing more than student exercises.¹⁰

Although Grieg didn't pay any attention to *Drei Phantasiestücke*, all his important biographers – Kathleen Dale, Finn Benestad, Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, John Horton – agreed that these three pieces were the most important compositions for the further development of Grieg's style.

Phantasiestücke No. 1 – *Allegro con leggerezza*

No. 1 has a perpetuum mobile accompaniment which I emphasised as a very Schumanesque feature. Very interesting is the passage from bars 5–9 which shows the inner chromatic voice leading together with a harmonic pattern based on the cycle of fifths (ex. 8). What it is more surprising Grieg adds to the chords sevenths, reminiscent of his later very popular technique. The first embodiment of it one can also notice in *Scherzo* from EG 104 from *Småstykker* [Short pieces] (ex. 9). Moreover chords with sevenths in the cycle of fifths one can also find in Grieg's song Op. 5 No 2 “The Poet's heart” which I cited earlier as very Schumanesque (ex. 10).

Ex. 8. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 1 [*Phantasiestücke* No. 1], b. 4–10.

⁹ Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg. The Man and the Artist*, p. 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

Allegro assai, quasi Presto.

7
B⁷ E⁷ A G⁷ C⁷ F^{7c}

Ex. 9. E. Grieg, Scherzo from EG 104, b. 1–13.

ritard.

Fø - lel - sen dybt i Blom - stens Duft, Sol - ly - sets Flam - me mod

ritard.

B⁷ E⁷ A^{7c} D^{7c} gis dim.⁷ C^{#7}

Ex. 10. E. Grieg, “The Poet’s Heart” Op. 5 No. 2, b. 7–9.

There is a more elaborate harmonic progression in Op. 1 No. 1 (ex. 11) since there is a leading inner chromatic voice which we can find later in Grieg’s *Melody* op. 38 No. 3 (ex. 12). It is important to look at these two examples. In both pieces two middle voices are chromatic while the highest voices are descending and more diatonic. Both are based on the progression of chords in relation to the fifth. In the transition passage from Op. 1 No 1 in bars 34–35 (ex. 13) one can hear the chordal relationship which anticipated a fragment of Grieg’s *Melody* Op. 47 No. 3 from bars 17–20 (ex. 14). The bass and one inner voice are in the contrary chromatic motion while the highest voice together with one inner voice are suspended. Both these two fragments support further modulations.

A⁷ D^{7c} G^{7c} F^{#7} h.dim. E⁷ A

Ex. 11. E. Grieg, *Vier Stuecke* Op. 1 No. 1, b. 5–9, partial reduction.

Ex. 12. E. Grieg, *Melody* Op. 38 No. 3, b. 18–22.

Ex. 13. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 1, b. 34–35 and its rhythmic reduction.

Ex. 14. E. Grieg, *Lyric Pieces* Op. 47 No. 3, b. 17–20 and its rhythmic reduction.

Phantasiestücke No. 2 – *Non allegro e molto espressivo*

The second piece is the most interesting and advanced in its structure from this opus (ex. 15). Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe first noticed that one passage of this piece (b. 5–6) had a very song-like texture and anticipated the piano beginning of the famous Grieg song *Jeg elsker Dig* [I love you] Op. 5 No. 3 (ex. 16).¹¹ However, one can observe a similar passage earlier in *A Dream* from EG 103 No. 7 (ex. 17).

¹¹ Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg 1858-1867*, Oslo 1964, p. 69.

The melodic conception is almost the same in bars 11–13 and there is also chromatic writing before this phrase.

The most striking thing is that the structure of the second piece in Op. 1 is in ternary form ABA1 where A and A1 are in C major key and B section is in e minor key. Let's look closer at the A section. The main melody is diatonic while the accompaniment is based on chromatic writing so typical of Grieg's later style. However, we know that during his Leipzig period he very often used chromatic writing in the harmony exercises for Ernst Friedrich Richter and Robert Papperitz. Here the new element is a melody the structure of which is reminiscent of folk melodies since it based on the three repetitions of the short phrase. Three phrases in bars 1–4 are similar and there is a d^2 -note which links them together (elision). It reminds us of the technique which Grieg applied later in Op. 66: diatonic melody over the chromatic harmonization. The last six bars from *Ranveig* Op. 66 No. 12 are the best material for comparison (ex. 18). The third repetition of the phrase from Op. 1 No 2 is a little different since it is one bar longer. It could be treated as a kind of elaboration – expansion. This type of elaboration one can notice later in Grieg's music for example in *Ballade* Op. 24 in its middle section (ex. 19). The A1 section of Op. 1 No 1 reminds us of more dynamic sections of *Ballade* op. 24 because here Grieg uses full chords, a low register, full dynamic level and a sombre, dark character to emphasise the expressive quality of the music (ex. 20).

The image shows a musical score for E. Grieg's *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 2, b. 1–6. The score is in piano and consists of two systems. The first system is marked "Non Allegro e molto espressivo" and "p legato". It features a melody with three repetitions of a short phrase, with a d^2 -note linking them. The second system is marked "Un poco più vivo" and "pp fp". It features a melody with a "poco ritard." marking and a "pp" marking, followed by a "fp" marking. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation, and fingerings.

Ex. 15. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 2 [*Phantasiestücke* No. 2], b. 1–6.

Quasi Andante.



Ex. 16. E. Grieg, "I love you" Op. 5 No. 3, b. 1-2.



Ex. 17. E. Grieg, *A Dream* EG 103 No. 7, b. 11-12.



Ex. 18. E. Grieg, *Ranveig* Op. 66 No. 12, b. 6-12.

Un poco Andante



Ex. 19. E. Grieg, *Ballade* Op. 24, variation *Un poco Andante*.

Ex. 20. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 2 [*Phantasiestücke* No. 2], b. 49–59.

While section A is a little folk song-like the middle, section B is typically pianistic. It has the main feature which in Grieg's later music will be very important: parallelism. Grieg shifts the same phrase from e minor to a minor and next also to d minor (ex. 21). There is also parallelism of the ending motifs of the main phrase: from c minor to a minor and g minor. The first examples of Grieg's later parallelism one can find in *Humoresque* Op. 6 No. 4, so five opuses later.

Phantasiestücke No. 3 – *Allegretto con moto*

The last piece is close to No. 2 and is also in ternary form ABA1. The A sections are written in four, five voices while section B is more pianistic. Here most striking is the harmonic oddity of some passages. Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe has paid attention to bar 8 which has an alternate chord built on the seventh step of the scale.¹² If one can interpret the chord one bar earlier as an A major ninth chord without prime the second chord is hard to explain. For me it is a Lydian major chord, and it introduces a Lydian fourth step which later will be frequently used

¹² Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg 1858–1867*, p. 75.

Allegro capriccioso

17 *p leggiero*

21 *pp*

44 *pp* *poco a poco più lento*

Ex. 21. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 2 – parallelism, b. 17–18, 21–22, 42–43, 44–46.

by Grieg (here the appearance of the Lydian scale is so typical of Norwegian folk music). In general for the first time the structure of Grieg's music is not like a 4bar square but it avoids the regular 4+4 construction and introduces irregularity 4+6 and different tonal centres (bars 1–8 e minor, bars 9–10 G major) (see ex. 22).

Allegretto con moto

7 *mf p* *pp* *mf dim.* *p* *pp* *fp* *fp sempre cre*

Ex. 22. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 4 [*Phantasiestücke* No. 3], b. 1–13, formal extension, using of Lydian major seventh chord

92 *ritard.* *a tempo*
p *cre - scen - do*
un poco rit.

Detailed description: This musical score shows two systems. The first system (measures 92-96) features a piano accompaniment with a treble clef and a bass clef. The piano part has a complex texture with many sixteenth notes and rests. The vocal line is in the bass clef, with lyrics 'cre - scen - do' and a melodic line. The tempo is marked 'a tempo' and 'ritard.' (ritardando). The second system (measures 97-101) continues the piano accompaniment and vocal line. The piano part has a more rhythmic texture with eighth notes. The vocal line continues with 'do'. The tempo is marked 'un poco rit.' (un poco ritardando).

Ex. 25. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 4 [*Phantasiestücke* No. 3], b. 92–101, string quartet/quintet texture.

61 *a tempo*
a tempo
a tempo
a tempo
fz
fz
fz
fz

Detailed description: This musical score shows a string quartet texture with four staves. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom three are in bass clef. The tempo is marked 'a tempo'. The music is in a major key. The texture is homophonic, with each instrument playing a similar rhythmic pattern. The dynamics range from piano to fortissimo (fz).

Ex. 26. E. Grieg, *String Quartet No. 1* Op. 27, b. 61–68.

107 *dimin.* *pp* *pp*

Detailed description: This musical score shows a piano accompaniment with a treble clef and a bass clef. The tempo is marked 'a tempo'. The music is in a major key. The texture is homophonic, with the piano playing a rhythmic pattern. The dynamics range from piano (p) to pianissimo (pp). The score ends with a double bar line and a fermata.

Ex. 27. E. Grieg, *Vier Stücke* Op. 1 No. 4 [*Phantasiestücke* No. 3], b. 107–112.

Allegretto semplice (M.M. ♩ = 116)

Ex. 28. E. Grieg, *Solitary Traveller* Op. 43 No. 2, b. 1–2 and
Piano Sonata E minor Op. 7, mvt. 3, b. 1–2.

Next eleven years later he changes his mind and surprisingly observed:

The tendencies that point toward his later development, the sparks of genius in the harmony and also elements of this later melodic style. In their nonstereotyped youthfulness these pieces (particularly nos. 1,2 and 4) come out very well in a comparison with some of the weaker compositions of his later periods, and there is no reason for Grieg to be ashamed of their publication as his op. 1, or to regard them as the work of a ‘fumbling pupil’.¹⁵

Ten years later John Horton claimed:

The outstanding feature of most of these early compositions is their harmonic adventurousness, though the Op. 1 pieces have, despite the composer’s poor opinion of them, many points of rhythmic and melodic interest and show a well-developed sense of texture and form.¹⁶

Finally Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe concluded:

It is true that the pieces lack the striking melodies that distinguish most of his later works. They do, however, have a definite harmonic sophistication, and his mastery of piano technique and his confident ability to structure the music raise them above mediocrity.¹⁷

The lack of developed melodies is the weakest aspect of *Drei Phantasiestücke* but there are many interesting harmonic aspects which prefigure as typical of Grieg’s personal style: diatonic melody, contrary harmonic writing, parallelism, chords with sevenths, “hair raising” chords, linear thinking. I mention that this cycle must have been very popular in Poland since in 1911 Polish publisher Idzikowski published Op. 1 No. 1 [*Phantasiestücke* No. 1] as a separate publication.

¹⁵ Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg 1858-1867*, pp. 68–69.

¹⁶ Horton, *Grieg*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Benestad, Schjelderup-Ebbe, *The Man and the Artist*, p. 37.