

# The Eclipse Effects of Stardom: Edvard Grieg as a Challenge to National Musicology

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## ABSTRACT

Taking Norwegian musicology as a case study, this article explores scholarly forgetting at the intersection between academic music historiography and public music history. More specifically, it takes the national historiography about Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) as a starting point to explore how national stardom, based on ritualized commemoration, can paradoxically result in scholarly forgetting. In order to establish musicology as an academic discipline, the first generation of Norwegian music scholars had a delicate mission to fulfil. These scholars had to both consolidate Edvard Grieg's significance as a national artist and legitimize his reputation as an internationally recognized genius. Still, from its beginnings in the 1950s up to the early 1990s, the scope of Norwegian musicology was very much nationally oriented. By making Grieg a star of national culture, there was much less room for more critical approaches to his legacy, going beyond the level of historical anecdote and popular myth.

This article examines how this specific style of creating national stardom for Grieg in music historiography has contributed to forgetting processes both within and beyond Grieg studies, that is both in scholarship and in national memory culture. Additionally, it will demonstrate how a more critical historiography of Grieg studies might open up forgotten knowledge and thus 'interrupt' the continuous process of recycling and repetition of memories and anecdotes that is central to the Norwegian 'Grieg cult'. This is a balancing act, since musicology should, on the one hand, observe its contract with the audiences and readers without, on the other, continuously reify Grieg's stardom in a way which eclipses aspects of the man and his work that are not in compliance with the national myth. In this way, I will argue, scholarship can be both a catalyst of and an antidote to forgetting.

**Keywords:** scholarly forgetting; forgetting potential; Edvard Grieg; stardom; musicology; memory, culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Contributing to a broader, interdisciplinary theory of 'scholarly forgetting', the present article will critically approach a certain area of music historiography within a specific, national context. It claims that 'scholarly forgetting' to a certain extent is immanent to national music history. 'National music history', as understood here, is a dynamic interplay between 'academic music historiography' on the one hand, and 'public history' and national memory culture on the other. According to leading nineteenth century German critics, philosophers, and theorists such as Eduard Hanslick, Arthur Schopenhauer, or Adolf Bernhard Marx, nineteenth-century art music should be considered an autonomous, non-referential artform. Hence, the main object of academic music historiography has been the musical works themselves. From this perspective, a musical work is related to its (historical) setting through its creator, the 'genius composer'. As a consequence, the task of the music historian and interpreter is to reveal the intentions of the author, as they are rendered in the work's score, its form and structure. This ethical norm, called *Werktreue* (fidelity to the text) in German, is firmly established in

the social status of composers as the protagonists of music history, and has had a tremendous impact on both academic music historiography and the public reception of music. Unsurprisingly, as a relatively young discipline in Norway with long-standing relations to German musical life and aesthetic thought, historical musicology has from its beginnings been closely interlocked with the designation of a historical hero: Edvard Grieg (1843–1907). Having played a vital role both in music historical scholarship and in the construction of the young nation’s cultural identity during the twentieth century, Grieg’s biography as a historiographical genre still has a considerable impact on the present. This article will examine the dynamics of forgetting and remembering within a specific institutional and national context, with Grieg as an important nexus point of critical scholarship and popular forms of music historiography in Norway.

### NEGOTIATING COMMEMORATIVE VALUE

Before discussing scholarly forgetting in terms of a topos in historical narration (the anecdote), I shall give a survey of the conventions of music historiography in Norway and how they contributed to scholarly forgetting with regard to the discipline’s historical trajectory as a whole. At the beginning of the Romantic period, the writing of artist biographies as a genre underwent some major changes. The subjects of biographies were now seen as autonomous individuals, whose spiritual, emotional, and moral development guided the bourgeois *Bildungsideal*. Moreover, artists tended to be idealized as exceptional personalities, with the genius of Beethoven, who succeeded in overcoming the most severe of obstacles, being one of the most well-known examples.<sup>1</sup> The history of the ‘genius composer’ and his ‘masterworks’ has therefore been one of the hallmarks of music historiography since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The decision of whom to recognize as worthy of portrayal in an artist biography or lexicon is closely tied to the workings of contemporary cultural values. The commemorative value of a certain artist may fade or increase during any historical period, depending on the need for a historical hero, as a source of inspiration for the ‘new generations’.<sup>2</sup> At least from Beethoven onwards, virtues of the artists’ character are seen to be mirrored in their work, as well as the other way around. Moreover, in the case that the artist’s individual characteristics could be related to a collective, cultural, social or political quest, this

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<sup>1</sup> See Melanie Unseld, *Biographie und Musikgeschichte. Wandlungen biographischer Konzepte in Musikkultur und Musikhistoriographie* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 164ff.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of ‘monumental history’ draws on the ‘monumentalist’, ‘antiquarian’ and ‘critical’ functions comprised as a historiographical figure coined by Nietzsche in his *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen. Zweites Stück: Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* of 1874. This book can be read as a critique of academicism, the ideal of objectivity, and a rationalistic worldview within (historical) science, which makes scholarly knowledge of the past irrelevant to the ‘vital life’ in the present. Hence, the vital function of ‘monumentalist history’, as opposed to the defunct scientific historiography, corresponds to the need for myths and heroic deeds, which can inspire the creative characteristics of new generations, which he, as an antidote to a Hegelian historical fatalism, sees as necessary in order to revive faith in the power of the individual to change the future.

would strengthen his—the representatives chosen were almost exclusively male—commemorative value considerably.

During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Norwegian historiography was closely intertwined with the issue of nation state building. From 1814 onwards, Norway possessed a semi-independent status, since the Kingdom of Denmark was forced to hand over its former territory to the Kingdom of Sweden after having supported Napoleon. Norwegians were, therefore, collectively struggling for political independence and constructing a cultural identity. As a result, the need for narratives determining a distinctive national culture dominated the premises of historiography. Music, as an autonomous, non-semantic artform, which is not specifically prone to the communication of political messages, became drawn into the task of nation state building with the dissemination of Herder's ideas of the 'folk song' understood as an expression of the 'national spirit'. By merging Romantic song with folkloristic features closely associated with national images and values, music could assume a central role in the nationalist movement.<sup>3</sup> Through Edvard Grieg, following in the footsteps of his Norwegian mentors such as Ole Bull, Halfdan Kjerulf and Richard Nordraak, and collaborating with Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson—a literary and intellectual protagonist of the national movement on the path towards establishing a 'national style'—Romantic art music in Norway became the cultural expression of nationhood, an idea which is still alive today. After 1905, when Norway finally succeeded in obtaining political independence, Grieg continued to occupy a central place in national history, firmly embedded in national memory culture.<sup>4</sup> One should expect that Grieg was of pivotal significance in the institutionalization of historical musicology in Norway. Instead, given that he was firmly established in national memory, Norwegian 'pioneer musicologists' such as Ole M. Sandvik (1875–1976) were concerned with retrieving and examining the national composers in the 'shadow' of Grieg's and with folk music studies. An overview of early scholarly publications shows how national historiography circumvented Grieg until the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> With Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe's appointment as professor of the recently founded music department at the University of Oslo, 'Grieg became the centre of Norwegian Grieg-research'.<sup>6</sup> Schjelderup-Ebbe published the first doctoral thesis on Grieg in 1964.<sup>7</sup> When Nils Grinde, teaching music history as a lecturer and later on as professor at the same institution as Schjelderup-Ebbe introduced Grieg as Norway's 'without comparison most important composer' in

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<sup>3</sup> See Philip Bolman, *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> See Arnulf Mattes, "No Escape from Politics? On Grieg's 'Nachleben' in Norwegian Memory Culture," in *The Nordic Ingredient. European Nationalisms in Norway's Music Since 1905*, ed. Michael Custodis and Arnulf Mattes (Münster, New York: Waxmann, 2019), 115–28.

<sup>5</sup> See Finn Benestad et al. (eds.), *Festskrift til Olav Gurvin. 1893–1968* (Drammen and Oslo: Lyche, 1968), 24ff.

<sup>6</sup> Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, "Edvard Grieg in Perspective," *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* 19 (1993), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg. With Special Reference to the Evolution of his Harmonic Style* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964). The doctoral thesis is based on his earlier studies on Grieg's harmony, published in 1953: *A study of Grieg's harmony: with special reference to his contributions to musical impressionism* (Oslo: Tanum, 1953).

his book *A History of Norwegian Music from Antiquity to the Present*, published in 1971 and reissued three times after that, the situation obviously had changed in Grieg's favour.<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, from the 1970s on, facing the precarious state of Grieg's collected papers at the Bergen Public Library,<sup>9</sup> Norwegian musicology turned towards the systematic study of Grieg's manuscripts of both his published and unpublished works, as well as his drafts and sketches. This required a thorough examination of the works' genealogy and genesis, documented by means of a critical edition of his complete oeuvre. This monumental endeavour—the *Gesamtausgabe* of Grieg's works—became a joint project for Norwegian musicology, which lasted for decades.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the *Gesamtausgabe* became a 'material' monument of national cultural heritage. Moreover, the scholarly reputation and academic prestige of the *Gesamtausgabe*, which was published by Peters Verlag—Grieg's own internationally renowned publishing house—contributed to the further canonization of his music. Eternalized by a monumental edition, Grieg was now on an equal standing with the great masters of Western classical music, such as Beethoven or Brahms. This major project of national music history was accompanied by intensified biographical studies, based on the immense collection of archival sources retrieved during the editorial process.<sup>11</sup>

Another lasting and influential result of the critical edition of Grieg's collected works was the 1980 biography entitled *Edvard Grieg: mennesket og kunstneren* (*Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist*) by Finn Benestad (1929–2012) and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe (1926–2013).<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the biography was part of a series of artist monographs published by the prestigious Aschehoug publishing house in Oslo, which meant that Grieg's biography was published alongside that of the painter Edvard Munch (1977), the playwright Henrik Ibsen (1981), and the sculptor Gustav Vigeland (1983). This magistral biography has been regarded as a reference work in national music curricula up to the present day and has served as the main introduction to Grieg's music for several generations of students since its publication.

Meanwhile, with the increasing impact of ethnomusicological and sociological methodologies within musicology in the 1970s, and the whole discipline's turn towards cultural studies from the 1980s on

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<sup>8</sup> Nils Grinde, *Norges musikkhistorie. Hovedlinjer i norsk musikkliv gjennom 1000 år* (Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1971), 167.

<sup>9</sup> Grieg's papers were given to the Bergen Public Library by Edvard Grieg and his wife Nina, which they regarded as a leading cultural *Bildungs*-institution, both regionally and nationally. In the 1960s, the director of the library Johannes Bygstad took the initiative to raise funds for the "retrieval, transmission, and commemoration of Grieg's music to posterity", see Trine Flaten Kolderup, "Griegsamlingen i Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek", *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* 25 (1999), 45–58.

<sup>10</sup> Among the Norwegian musicologists who joined the Grieg committee besides Schjelderup-Ebbe were Olav Gurvin (1893–1974), the founder of the Department of music at the University of Oslo (UiO), Finn Benestad and Nils Grinde from Oslo, and Hampus Huldt Nyström (1917–1995), professor in Trondheim. Their activities lasted for many years to come and resulted in the twenty volumes of the Grieg edition, issued between 1977 and 1995: *Edvard Grieg. Samlede Verker – Gesamtausgabe – Complete Works*, 20 volumes, Edvard Grieg Committee (Frankfurt: C.F. Peters, 1977–1995).

<sup>11</sup> See Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, "Refleksjoner omkring en Grieg-biografi," in *Din Grieg. Den nasjonale jubileumsutstillingen i Vestlandske Kunstindustrimuseum* (Bergen: Grieg jubileet, 1993), 108.

<sup>12</sup> Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg. Mennesket og kunstneren* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1980).

(‘New musicology’), deconstructing the ‘major narratives’ of ‘euro-centric’ music history, the ‘man and his work’ model remained undisputed in the public realm, as did the ‘stardom of Grieg’ in Norway. Thus, projects such as the Grieg biography and the Grieg critical edition could contribute further to the strong position of musicology focusing on the protagonists of the national musical tradition and the ‘history of musical works’.<sup>13</sup> For the time being, criticism of the biographical method by influential adversaries of work-centered music historiography such as Carl Dahlhaus had limited impact.<sup>14</sup> However, from the 1990s onward, after a historical culmination on the occasion of Grieg’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1993,<sup>15</sup> the decline of work- and author-centered music historiography had a marked effect on national music scholarship, too. This tendency is also indicated in the decreasing rate of vacant academic positions and research projects dedicated to national music history, and the shrinking number of scholarly publications, such as published doctoral theses dealing with Norwegian music.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the decreasing focus on national music history within the ‘ivory tower’ of Norwegian musicology, Grieg’s stardom seems unaffected in public memory. During the first decade of the third millennium, the anniversaries of Ibsen, Wergeland, Hamsun and Bjørnson were marked by huge, national celebrations in Norway.<sup>17</sup> Grieg, too, was celebrated both in 2007 and 2018. On 15 June 2018, the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Grieg’s birth, the Norwegian national broadcasting company (NRK) produced a unique 30-hour programme exclusively featuring Grieg’s works: *Grieg Minute by Minute*. These were performed by the ‘who’s who’ of Norwegian musicians and ensembles, involving around 600 professionals and amateurs.<sup>18</sup> This event was initiated by the musicians and brought performances of Grieg’s works into the centre of attention. Academic contributions in the form of research seminars or

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<sup>13</sup> The editions of Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s Grieg biography from 1980, reissued in 1990 and 2007, and translated into English, German, and Russian, might indicate the unbroken popularity of this publication format.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the Dahlhaus critique of biographical methodology in musicology, see “Wider das Triviale. Carl Dahlhaus Polemik von 1975 und ihre Folgen,” in Unseld, *Biographie und Musikgeschichte*, 407–418. Further, James Hepokoski provides a scholarly-historical context for the impact of sociology on work-centered historical musicology (see James Hepokoski, “The Dahlhaus Project and Its Extra-Musicological Sources,” *19th-Century Music* 14, no. 3 (1991): 221–246). Kevin Korsyn addresses the dissolution of musicological disciplines by developing a framework for interpretation in dialogue with a number of poststructuralist writers in *Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> The official report of the centenary in 1993 contains a comprehensive list of publications (articles, monographs), over five pages long, related to the event, see Einar Solbu et al (eds.), *Tilbakeblikk på Grieg-Jubiléet 1993: rapport om jubiléets aktiviteter og begivenheter* ([Bergen]: Grieg-jubiléet 1993).

<sup>16</sup> As an effort to counteract the general tendencies, the project *Norges musikkhistorie* (Norwegian Music history) was initiated in 1996 by Arvid Vollsnes, professor at the Department of Music, University of Oslo. Its aim was to turn the focus from (male) protagonists and their output to forgotten agents of music history such as female composers. Its aim was further ‘to understand the preconditions of musical life’, and to shed light on the historical development from sociological and cultural perspectives. Written for both scholars and a broader public, this publication stands solidly in the tradition of Norwegian music historiography, committed to historical *Bildung*, public impact and public outreach. At the same time, as it was an attempt to bring national historiography closer to the more recent methodological trends and topics, See: Arvid Vollsnes et al. (eds.), *Norges musikkhistorie*, Vol. 1–5 (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1999–2001).

<sup>17</sup> Frode Lerum Boasson, “I nasjonens tjeneste? Norske forfatterjubileer 2006–2010,” *Edda. Nordisk tidsskrift for litteraturforskning* 104, no. 4 (2017): 317–37.

<sup>18</sup> NRK.no: *Grieg minutt-for-minutt*. See the official website of the event: [www.griegminuttforminutt.no](http://www.griegminuttforminutt.no). Last access: 29 March 2019.

related scholarly publications were notably absent, in contrast to the previous Grieg celebrations in 1993 and 2007.<sup>19</sup>



Screenshot from NRK.no: *Grieg Minutt for minutt*, <https://tv.nrk.no/serie/grieg-minutt-for-minutt/>

The lasting popularity of Grieg shows how firmly musical heritage is still embedded in national memory culture, thus pointing to a growing gap between the world of academic musicology and the public Grieg cult. Even current projects such as ‘Norwegian Musical Heritage’, aiming at the retrieval and performance of ‘forgotten’ Norwegian composers, could not narrow this gap.<sup>20</sup> Mainly supported by public funds such as the Arts Council of Norway, this project, concerned with the recovery and restoration of historical works, was designed to be challenged by an equally ambitious historiographic reassessment of the national musical canon. However, this never happened.

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<sup>19</sup> In 1993, the Grieg 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary’s musical events were accompanied by a series of academic Grieg-seminars and symposia involving several venues both in Norway and abroad (see Solbu, 1993). On the occasion of the next major Grieg anniversary in 2007, there were arranged several seminars arranged in Bergen and Oslo under the anniversary’s motto ‘Grieg the humanist’ (see the final report: Ragna Sofie Grung Moe et al. (eds.) *Død eller levende? Grieg07 oppsummerer* (Bergen: Grieg 07, 2007). Strikingly, among the scholars contributing to the published conference proceedings, none had a background as specialist on the field of historical musicology. See Tom Solomon (ed.), *Music and Identity in Norway and Beyond. Essays Commemorating Edvard Grieg the Humanist*, Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2011.

<sup>20</sup>The national music edition project *Norsk musikkarv* (Norwegian musical heritage) was established in 2010, supported by major institutions such as the Norway’s composers’ society, the National library, the national philharmonic orchestras, and the music departments at Norwegian universities. See the report by Svein Bjørkås et al., *Musikkarvprosjektet: Vern og publisering av den klassiske norske musikkarven. Redaksjonsgruppen, nedsatt av MIC Norsk musikkinformasjon, Norsk komponistforening og Nasjonalbiblioteket* (Oslo: MIC, 2008). The report is available online: [www.mic.no/download/Musikkarven.pdf](http://www.mic.no/download/Musikkarven.pdf). Last access: 10 January 2019.



Accordingly, ‘scholarly forgetting’ in terms of the eclipse of national music historiography as an academic discipline in Norway does not need to be concomitant with a loss of public interest in national musical heritage, nor with a diminished relevance of historical music in national culture. This situation might only change, if it is not accepted as an inevitable consequence of a more general turn within musicology away from music history as a ‘history of musical geniuses and their works’. As Grieg’s reception, historically, has moved beyond the walls of the concert hall, and been transmitted to popular culture, and time and again revived as a political symbol in times of national crisis, the impact of his music has achieved a much broader significance. This should ensure him being revisited and reassessed. Thus, music historiography, understood as a critical interrogation of established national narratives and mythologies, should reemerge from oblivion as academic discipline, providing plausible reasons why knowledge of the past is relevant to the present discourse of ‘national values’ in Norwegian culture and politics.

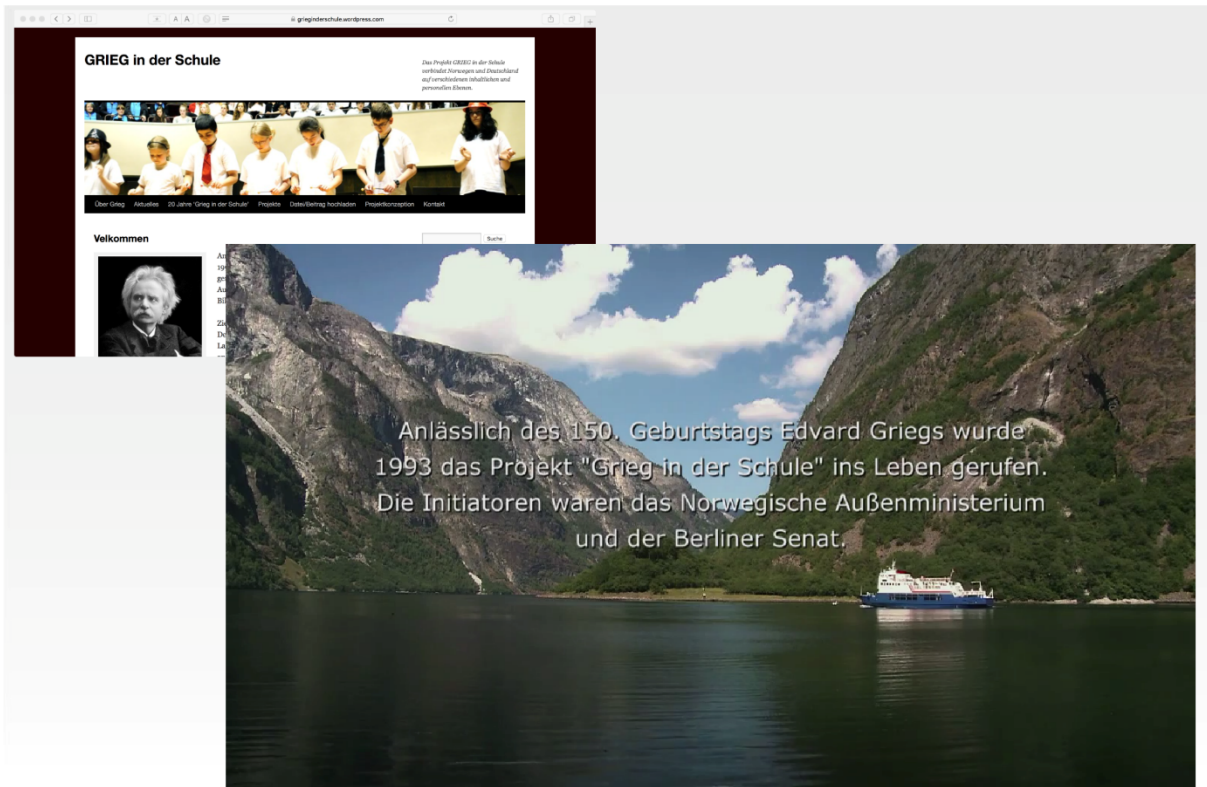
### ON THE POWER OF ANECDOTES

Edvard Grieg had been so closely connected with Norway’s history as an independent nation state since the end of the nineteenth century and with the Scandinavian model of a democratic society that questioning his status as a national icon was simply out of the question. As part of the national quest for identity, Norwegian musicologists were expected to fulfil their tacit national mission by academically legitimizing Grieg’s significance as a national artist and as a genius composer of international standing. An example from the 150<sup>th</sup> Grieg anniversary in 1993 may illustrate the power of public, historical myth-making, driven by the ambition to disseminate knowledge about Grieg and Norway internationally, while at the same time supporting a political agenda: the agenda of cultural diplomacy. The project *Grieg in der Schule* (*Grieg at School*), was initiated by a group of Norwegian educators and carried out in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Berlin Senate.<sup>21</sup> Listening to German children in the promotional video telling their story about Norway with Grieg’s music as a kind of nostalgic soundtrack, one might interpret this as a well-intentioned attempt at ‘educational branding’, affirming, instead of challenging, the popular tourist stereotypes of Norway as the country of fjords and trolls into the minds of new generations.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> From its beginning in 1993 in Berlin to its end in 2016, the project expanded to a large number of schools in both West Germany and former East Germany. See the official website: <[grieginderschule.wordpress.com](http://grieginderschule.wordpress.com)>. Last access: 21 March 2019. See also Grete Lächert (ed.), *Grieg in der Schule. Norwegen-Berlin-Meckleburg/Vorpommern-Hamburg-Sachsen-Bremen-Schleswig/Holstein-Schweiz 1999–2000. Handreichung für den Unterricht im Rahmen des norwegisch-deutschen Projekts Grieg in der Schule*, 6th edition, (Oslo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Some years later, in a report commissioned by the Norwegian Foreign ministry, this continuum of stereotypes, supported by recurring celebrations of ‘artists of the past’, is addressed critically in the context of new strategies for cultural branding. See: Mette Lending, *Oppbrudd og fornyelse. Norsk utenrikskulturell politikk 2001–2005* (Oslo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000), .



Screenshots, Project *Grieg in der Schule*, website and video.

What is forgotten is that such national, or in this case transnational, educational projects also serve the strategies of political agents, who have the power to influence public history, what people remember, what they forget, and when, how, and where they are told their stories.

Furthermore, projects like this illustrate how Grieg is used to promote, for each new generation to come, the virtues and values of ‘Norwegianness’ such as resilience, independence, community, equality, and ecological awareness. Grieg had become a national monument in his lifetime already and has since symbolized the perfect amalgamation of national values with international fame and success, effectively counterbalancing the deeply ingrained sense of ‘periphery’ and marginalization of a historically poor, ‘small’ nation at the edges of the European continent. Grieg owes his special status in Norwegian society to the recognition he enjoyed across all partisan and ideological divides: he was celebrated as the great unifier of urban and rural culture, popular culture and ‘high art’, West and East, old and young, rich and poor. Music historians who dare to deface this monument are therefore in dangerous territory. It is safe to say that bringing new knowledge and critical awareness into the public discourse might prove to be a challenging task.

In connection with this, I would highlight that the popularized image of Grieg’s life is predominantly based on anecdotal forms of historical knowledge. Nevertheless, in uncovering any ‘inconvenient truths’, researchers risk scarring Grieg’s ‘sacred’ status and damaging his stardom.



The following two examples of such key anecdotes embedded in the public narrative on Grieg might illustrate how the transformational process from academic historiography to collective memory functions. Both anecdotes have been disseminated by the dominant genre in Grieg literature: the artist's biography. Anecdotes belong to the core 'formulae' in biographical writing.<sup>23</sup> They facilitate the popularization of history by presenting it as a story of an autonomous subject, the individual artist genius required in popular Romantic notions of art, and the numerous unrelated events and encounters that, put together, depict his life narrative. The anecdote's rhetorical function makes it an effective tool for constructing a coherent and compelling narrative of pivotal events in the artist's life and the relationship of these events to his major works. Its rhetorical power overrides 'historical fact', which can be verified by other supporting evidence as for example a collection of historical documents proving the reliability and consistency of the narrative.

One of these key anecdotes, which appears in Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe's biography of Grieg is the story of Grieg's encounter with Ole Bull, the famous Norwegian virtuoso.<sup>24</sup> Typically, the encounter with Bull is told through a quotation from the composer's own text, the retrospective essay 'My First Success', written in 1903 for a music journal.<sup>25</sup> In his dream-like description of the event, Bull appears as an aristocratic, almost divine person, riding on an Arab horse, touching the right hand of Grieg, a moment which electrifies the 15-year-old adolescent. After listening to Grieg playing some tunes of his own composition on the piano, Bull uttered the performative command: 'You shall leave for Leipzig and become an artist' (Leipzig was the most renowned music academy at the time). Thus, Bull overcame any remaining resistance on the side of Grieg's parents against his desire to become a composer.

A factual investigation of the course of events could easily have revealed that this encounter at Landås (Grieg's family's summer estate), dated to the summer of 1858, could not have taken place. Bull was absent from Norway at that time, and did not return from his concert tour in Europe until Autumn 1858.<sup>26</sup> To Grieg, this anecdote certainly served the purpose of his self-stylization as a national composer, emphasizing the support of a highly regarded mentor, and not least his status as a *Wunderkind*, whose only possible fate was to become a composer, worthy of being educated at a world-famous institution. To Grieg, who was not an academic historian, but an artist, free to invent his own life narrative, the fictional nature of this event was not the issue: to him, it was a way of identifying Ole

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<sup>23</sup> See Melanie Unseld, *Biographie und Musikgeschichte*, 117ff.; ead. "Eine Frage des Charakters? Biographiewürdigkeit von Musikern im Spiegel von Anekdotik und Musikgeschichtsschreibung," in Melanie Unseld and Christian von Zimmermann, eds., *Anekdote - Biographie - Kanon. Zur Geschichtsschreibung in den schönen Künsten* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2013), 3–18.

<sup>24</sup> Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Grieg's autobiographical essay was published in 1905 in *Contemporary Review*, the original manuscript is kept at the archives of the Bergen Public Library. See Øystein Gaukstad, ed., *Edvard Grieg. Artikler og taler* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1957), 7ff.

<sup>26</sup> See Harald Herresthal, *Ole Bull. Teaterdirektør, kolonialherre og norskdomsmann, 1848–1862* (Oslo: Unipub, 2009), 282ff.

Bull as one of the great sources of inspiration which made him choose his path as a national composer. The question remains as to why his biographers did not disclose the fictitious nature of this event, thus opening up the possibility of a critical assessment of Grieg's biographical self-representation, instead of simply accepting his point of view. This mode of biographic narration is legitimate, in that it is one of the 'tricks of the trade', the generic formulae of the genre. In this case, the description of a formative event in the young composer's life, the Bull-Grieg encounter, evokes a vivid image of the transitional moment, when the *Wunderkind* leaves, sets out on its path to social and artistic ascension and commences the next phase of its life, studying at the centre of musical education, Leipzig. For Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, there was no reason to question this narrative formula in their biography. Perhaps because it fitted so perfectly into the generic model of biographical narration as a succinct description of the moment when the talent first found a way of overcoming obstacles (the alleged reluctance of his parents to send him away for a musical education).

In the same essay 'My First Success', Grieg presents another famous anecdote from his time at the Leipzig conservatory, positing that he 'left the conservatory as stupid as I entered it.'<sup>27</sup> This time, Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe clearly distance themselves from their source, adding critical comments to the composer's tale.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, they yet again take Grieg's anecdote as the point of departure for their assessment of the educational period of the composer's life, thus indirectly respecting his point of view. The question as to how Grieg's education did (or did not) leave its mark on his artistic trajectory has been a *topos* in the public narrative about Grieg ever since: to Grieg, it might have been a way of expressing once again the originality of his genius, which could not be restrained by an academic institution. Moreover, as Leipzig was in many ways a major institution of German musical tradition, Grieg might have wanted to retrospectively emphasize his emancipated attitude towards German cultural supremacy by diminishing the impact of his educators, who embodied German academic traditions. Yet, many years later, when Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe refrained from further contextualizing their source, which was Grieg's retrospective essay, the biographers also participated in historical myth-making, appealing to the expectations of public history, while, in some cases at least, neglecting the role of the academic historian.

A second major *topos* based on anecdotal evidence is the story behind the only symphony Grieg composed. Written at the instigation of Niels W. Gade just a few years after finishing his education in Leipzig, this work in C minor (EG 119) was deliberately kept locked up in the basement of the Bergen library, thus falling victim to a voluntary act of forgetting. By adding the prescription 'Must never be performed!' to the autographed manuscript,<sup>29</sup> Grieg himself contributed to dooming this work to

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<sup>27</sup> Grieg cit. in Gaukstad/Grieg, *Artikler og taler*, 28f.: ... "jeg holder det for given at det først og fremst var min egen naturell, som lot mig gå ut av konservatoriet omtrent lige dum, som jeg vart komme derind." ("I take it as a given that this was due to my character, which made me leave the conservatory as stupid as I entered it.") Author's translation.

<sup>28</sup> Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, 46.

<sup>29</sup> In the Norwegian original: "Må aldrig opføres", see Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, 61.

historical oblivion. The fact that it never found an editor meant that it could not be performed either. However, there exists no source that could shed light on the nature of Grieg's decision. Nonetheless, the manuscript was kept away from performers by the Bergen Public Library, in deference to the author's intentions. Musicologists, too, respected the composer's will, occasionally analyzing the work's features for answers to the conundrum of why Grieg considered his only symphonic work unworthy of publication and performance.

The consensus narrative that emerged in Grieg historiography implies a value judgement in accordance with the composer's intentions: the symphony was regarded as premature in relation to the high artistic standards of the genre, which Grieg felt he did not measure up to at the time, when comparing this work to that of other composers. Again, the anecdotal source for this assumption is Grieg himself, who, after a few performances of his symphony in Denmark and Norway, was attending a rehearsal of Johan Svendsen's D major symphony, and considered his own work of inferior quality compared to Svendsen's.<sup>30</sup> The reason he gave was that he considered the work too closely aligned with the Schumannian model, a style Grieg himself rejected as an outdated 'early style' in his shift towards a more nationalistic style. Thus, Grieg apparently regarded the symphony's style as out of place: the work did not fit into the ideal of the artist's biography, as it did not conform to the ideal of artistic development from a formative, early period to a mature period. This narrative also downplays stylistic features which might support a competing interpretation of the symphony as an immanent critique of dogmatic concepts of symphonic 'grand form', based on analytical observations of 'national' elements in the work, both in terms of formal design, allusions to folk melodies, and motivic and rhythmic elements.<sup>31</sup>

As late as 1981, more than a hundred years after its creation in 1864, the symphony was finally released for public performance. It might, therefore, be interesting to examine to what extent Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe modified their assessment in the second edition of their biography of Grieg (published in 1990). Apart from some minor amendments, their judgement remains the same. Still, the biographers construct a narrative, based on assumptions and anecdotal evidence, that seems to be in agreement with the composer's own views. At this point, the biographers could have invited a meta-perspective on this issue, identifying the 'conundrum' of Grieg's withdrawal of his symphony as a challenge to the conflation of generic, biographical methodology with scholarly historiography. The

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<sup>30</sup> Despite the lack of evidence for the exact date when Grieg added the notorious comment to his autograph, Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe conclude that it must have been added immediately after Grieg attended a rehearsal of Svendsen's symphony, quoting a letter from the composer dated 8 oktober 1867, see Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg*, 61f.

<sup>31</sup> Ironically, it is one of the biographers, Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, who, in an analysis of the symphony in his dissertation, points out several features that make reference to folk music which are omitted from the 1980 biography, such as the non sequitur episode within the 'turbulent development', where 'there suddenly appears a section in a quiet mood, played by the woodwinds, with a diatonic folk-song like melody harmonized by triads with modal touches.' See: Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg 1858–1867 with Special Reference to the Evolution of his Harmonic Style* (Oslo & London: Universitetsforlaget, Allen and Unwin, 1964), 192.

question of why they did not take this opportunity points to an aspect of ‘scholarly forgetting’ (described earlier in this article), which has been immanent throughout Grieg’s historiography: the obvious success and impact of the biographical method made it difficult, and risky, to undermine the genre’s authority by making its tacit premises and narrative lacunae.

Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s biography was a major success. It put Grieg on the map for the broader public, it forged an image of the composer for generations to come, and it situated him firmly within the major well-established narratives of the ‘genius artist’. Many of the features that were typical of biography were also applied to Grieg, from the ‘discovery of the *Wunderkind*’s talent’, through ‘overcoming social obstacles’ and ‘autodidactic emancipation from conventional education’, to acknowledgement as a ‘famous virtuoso’ in competition with artist peers (the Grieg-Svendsen-relationship)—all of them constructing a constellation of images which supported the artist biography’s ‘man and his work’ principle.<sup>32</sup>

In their short 1993 essay, ‘Reflections on a Grieg Biography’, Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe address the genesis of their biography, referring to another *opus magnum* of the genre, David Monrad-Johansen’s biography of Grieg published in 1934.<sup>33</sup> David Monrad Johansen’s book was celebrated unison as a ground-breaking artist biography and was among the most important ‘sources of inspiration’ for Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s biography, with a long standing effect in Grieg historiography, as is shown almost 50 years later.<sup>34</sup> In their article, Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe refrain from a more thorough discussion of historiographical methodology, which could have helped contextualize Monrad Johansen’s approach to the biographical method. Monrad Johansen’s biography was considered a reference work by Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, of which the influence and impact on the public image of Grieg in Norway (an English translation also appeared later) cannot be underestimated. It was promoted as a major, cultural event nationwide, and its reception was enthusiastic, at least when one considers the numerous reviews that appeared in Norwegian newspapers and journals. In the 1930s, David Monrad Johansen (1888–1974) was established as one of the most powerful and influential of the composers, critics, and cultural ideologists committed to the neo-nationalist movement in the arts. His biography was deeply influenced by his personal quest for a genuine, ‘native’ style as a composer, and portrayed Grieg through the lens of his nationalistic ideology.<sup>35</sup> Monrad Johansen explicated his

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<sup>32</sup> See Unseld, *Biographie und Musikgeschichte*, 123ff.

<sup>33</sup> David Monrad Johansen, *Edvard Grieg* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1934).

<sup>34</sup> See Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, “Refleksjoner omkring en Grieg-biografi,” 106: “Den viktigste boken om Grieg på norsk var utkommet i 1934 og ført i pennen av David Monrad Johansen. Han var en ledende komponist i sin genreasjon og hadde en dyp innsikt i Griegs kunst og evne til å uttrykke seg på en fascinerende måte. De fleste av hans skarpsindige vurderinger av Griegs verker har sin gyldighet også i dag, mens hans outrerte nasjonalistiske grunnsyn kom iblant til å farge hans fremstilling.” (“The most important book about Grieg in Norwegian was published in 1934 and written by David Monrad Johansen. He was a leading composer of his generation with deep insight into Grieg’s art and capable of expressing himself in an engaging way. Most of his perceptive assessments of Grieg’s works are still valid, although they are tainted to a certain extent by his eccentric nationalism.”) Author’s translation.

<sup>35</sup> See Ivar Roger Hansen, *Mot fedrenes fjell. David Monrad Johansen og hans samtid* (Oslo: Kolofon forlag, 2013), 316ff.

ideological stance in a series of essays published in July 1924 in the national newspaper *Aftenposten* under the title ‘National Values in Our Music’, and followed up with similar public statements parallel with the conception of the Grieg biography during the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>36</sup> Monrad Johansen’s Grieg book gained enormous attention, since it was the first biography of Grieg published in Norway. Moreover, he was the first biographer with access to Grieg’s papers, most of all his extensive correspondence, which Grieg’s widow Nina gave him permission to use.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Monrad Johansen’s new Grieg book overshadowed its predecessors, while at the same time following the genre’s established traditions: He succeeded the line of non-academic Grieg biographers, from the American music critic Henry T. Finck (1854–1926), who published his Grieg book in 1905,<sup>38</sup> to the composer Gerhard Schjelderup (1859–1933), who wrote his biography together with the influential music historian Walter Niemann (published by Grieg’s publisher C.F. Peters in Leipzig in 1908).<sup>39</sup> Both writers most of all saw their biographies mostly as a medium for promoting Grieg for international audiences, the German, in Schjelderup’s case, and the Anglo-American, in Finck’s. Thus, when Monrad Johansen conceived of his Grieg narrative, there did not exist any historical account of Grieg according to the current standards of objectivity, restraining the narrative strategies of academic writing. On the contrary, Monrad Johansen used his Grieg biography to promote his own artistic quest, and turned Grieg into a ‘martyr’, caught in a war between two cultures. Thus, he drew Grieg into the centre of contemporary discourse on ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘national’ currents in Norwegian culture. Monrad Johansen saw Grieg’s affinity for a ‘cosmopolitan’ musical style, reaching beyond its ‘national roots’, as a limitation of Grieg’s artistic development, even if this view opposed Grieg’s own aspirations, presented in his ‘cosmopolitan credo’ from 1889.<sup>40</sup> Works such as the *Six songs*, Op. 48, based on the German lyrics of Goethe and other German poets, Monrad Johansen met with contempt, regarding those as a regression in Grieg’s artistic trajectory towards originality and maturity, a degeneration to his early, pre-national style, where he still was subject to the predominant German Romantic style.<sup>41</sup>

Benestad and Schjelderup Ebbe, as modern academic music historians committed to the ‘objective’ enlightenment of their readers, could have used the opportunity to distance themselves from Monrad Johansen’s normative mode of writing, or at least indicate the more problematic aspects of his Grieg narrative. This could have been done by a reference to known primary sources, such as Reidar Mjøen’s

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<sup>36</sup> For a comprehensive collection of Monrad Johansen’s texts, see Bjarne Kortsen, *Musikkritikeren og skribenten David Monrad Johansen* (Bergen, 1973).

<sup>37</sup> Monrad Johansen, 1934, 449.

<sup>38</sup> Henry T. Finck, *Edvard Grieg* (London: John Lane, 1906).

<sup>39</sup> Gerhard Schjelderup and Walter Niemann, *Edvard Grieg. Biographie und Würdigung seiner Werke* (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1908).

<sup>40</sup> In response to a German criticism that accused him of being a nationalist composer, Grieg counters the allegation by emphasizing his quest for a “broader and more general view of my [artistic] individuality, which has been influenced by the great movements of the age—i.e. by the Cosmopolitan.” The short article entitled “Kosmoplitisk trosbekjennelse” was published 8 October 1889, in *Musikbladet*, Copenhagen. See Gaukstad/Grieg, *Artikler og taler*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Monrad Johansen, 1934, 326f.

extensive review of Monrad Johansen's biography published in *Aftenposten* of 17 December 1934. Mjøen (1871–1953), a prolific, outspoken critic at this time, reads this text as a highly intriguing, yet political essay, rather than as a typical example of an artist biography.<sup>42</sup> Mjøen's review highlights the extent to which extend Monrad Johansen's Grieg narrative is entangled in the national, cultural war of the late 1920s and early 1930s. The absence of any such historiographic implications of the reception of their 'main source of inspiration' might simply be explained by Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe's desire to keep their biography's narrative flow unhindered by critical, historiographical subtext. However, they neither used the occasion of the revised edition of their book in 1993, nor their 'reflections on the biography' at the Grieg centenary seminar the same year, to 'fill' the lacunae of the public Grieg narrative. However, one has to call into mind that scholars such as Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe found themselves in a situation which made it difficult to undermine the very foundations of their narrative. With the Grieg centenary in 1993, Grieg once more was made the hero of a nationwide, commemorative event, the aim of which was to celebrate and highlight Grieg as a beacon of national, cultural heritage.<sup>43</sup> In this historical situation, the pressure of 'scholarly forgetting' within academic historiography might have been even more difficult to overcome, especially by Norwegian scholars. Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe found themselves caught between a unique opportunity for the national revival and international popularization of their own, national music tradition, and their commitment to (self-)reflective, academic criticism of those narrative topoi established so successful by their predecessors. Moreover, in 1993 Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe's cautiousness might also be interpreted as a self-obliged restriction of music scholars at this time to address one of the major taboo topics in Norway's post-war political historiography: The collaboration of leading Norwegian artists, composers, and writers (such as the writer Knut Hamsun) with the Nazi-regime established during the occupation from 1940 to 45. David Monrad Johansen's involvement in the Germans' cultural administration and propaganda in different roles and positions, and his widespread activities during the years of occupation from 1940 to 45 were very well known after the war. Yet, he became reinstated as member of the Norwegian composer's league already in 1949 and rehabilitated as a public figure from the 1950s on.<sup>44</sup> The conflicted relationship of art and morale entailed an ongoing debate on 'artistic honour' in Norway after the war, which discussion would by far extend the limits of this article. It also implies another major faculty of public forgetting, which is forgiveness for the sake of national reconciliation.<sup>45</sup> Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe belonged to the first generation of post-war academics, who adopted the post-war cultural-political consensus of national reconciliation. As musicologists, they understood

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<sup>42</sup> Reidar Mjøen, "Boken om Grieg," *Aftenposten*, 17 December 1934. Mjøen (1871–1953) was one of a small number of professional music critics in Norway, affiliated with the national newspapers *Dagbladet* and *Aftenposten* from 1907 to 1945.

<sup>43</sup> See Mattes, "No Escape from Politics", 2019.

<sup>44</sup> See Dag Solhjell and Hans Fredrik Dahl, *Men viktigst er æren. Oppjøret blant kunstnerne etter 1945* (Oslo: Pax forlag, 2013), 72ff. See also Hansen, *Mot fedrenes fjell.*, 548ff.

<sup>45</sup> See Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 155ff..



their role as unpolitical. With this in mind, it seems even understandable, why Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe might have ignored the conflicted ideological premises of David Monrad Johansen's Grieg biography. Addressing those premises could have stirred up a hornet's nest in both collective, historical memory and academic history, which at the same time would have undermined the clear-cut division of music from politics, embraced by all parts after 1945.<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The question of the extent to which scholarly forgetting, understood as a lack of 'critical' historiography, has contributed to the dissolution of historical musicology as an academic discipline within the national musicological institution, is not necessarily easy to answer.<sup>47</sup> However, if music historiography not only revisits the gaps and lacunae of eminent predecessors, but contributes new material and new, critical perspectives, relating Grieg's legacy to current issues challenging cultural consensus, academic music historiography can, and will, be very relevant. Biographies such as those of Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe and Monrad Johansen played a crucial role in establishing the public image and reception of Grieg beyond the inner circles of music performers and *Liebhaber* of classical music. In Norway, Grieg's musical and artistic persona represents the key social, cultural, and political values of a modern democracy, including equality, tolerance, individual freedom, resilience, and creativity. In this regard, a 'monumentalist' history, as sustained by the biographical narratives of historical 'heroes', seemed indispensable for the historical foundation of societal coherence and a collective, cultural memory underlying modern notions of nationhood in Norway. At the same time, this puts the academic historian in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, there is the demand and expectation from the public that historical narratives should serve to construct a cultural memory, which makes history, even music history, relevant to the present social, cultural, and political life. This implies a certain choice of mode of public communication. The genre of the artist biography has proven to be one of the most effective and authoritative tools for granting academic historians' successful public outreach, despite the outspoken methodological criticism of 'biographism' in the realm of internal, scholarly discourse. As shown in the case of Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe's biography of Grieg, the application of anecdotal formulae, an indispensable rhetorical feature in a successful biography intended to attract the attention of a broader range of readers, almost inevitably implies 'scholarly forgetting', in terms of the demise of a self-reflective mode of narration that reflects on which parts of the story were 'forgotten' or 'remembered', why, and when. Such a 'self-aware' biography, which both acknowledges the power of anecdotes and examines the historiographic lacunae these anecdotes so effectively fill, has

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<sup>46</sup> Besides a few early accounts for the problematic aspects of music involved in politics during the German occupation, such as Hans Jørgen Hurum's *Musikken under okkupasjonen 1940–45* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1946), the instrumentalization of 'unpolitical music' for political purposes during and after World War II has until recently remained unaddressed in Norwegian music historiography. See Custodis and Mattes, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> This issue was raised by Erlend Hovland in his article "The Decline of Music History: A Case Study of the Grieg Research," *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* 43 (2017): 31–57.

not yet been written in the case of Grieg. Moreover, now is the time to revive a national historiography of music apparently in ‘decline’ through a ‘polyphonic’ project, collecting diverse voices that address Grieg’s position(s) in ‘national music history’ from the perspective of current discourses in their respective contexts. One can see this tendency in more recent, scholarly historiography. At the same time, engaging monographs based on biographical stories remain among the most popular genres of historical writing, with a public outreach far beyond the scope of scholarly historiography. Certainly, a fruitful dynamic between scholarly historiography of music and public history of music, inspiring bold new approaches as alternatives to the ‘monumental’ major narrative, is necessary in order to keep national music history relevant today.

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