



John Wesley Strickler, *Music Director & Conductor*

THE MISADVENTURES OF PEER GYNT

2011 SCHOOL CONCERTS

Presented by

the

GULF COAST SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Listening Guide

by

Timothy James Bergman, D.M.A.

The 2011 School Concerts have been made possible through the generous support of
Mississippi Power
Gulf Coast Symphony Guild

This project is supported in part by funding from the Mississippi Arts Commission, a state agency, and, in part, from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

The Listener Guide may be downloaded on the Gulf Coast Symphony website at:
www.gulfcoastsymphony.net/School_Concerts/Index.html
Permission is granted for copying the Listener Guide and the companion compact disc.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
About the Compact Disc.....	5
Edvard Grieg and <i>Peer Gynt</i>	6
The Music of <i>Peer Gynt</i>	8
Prelude: At the Wedding.....	8
The Abduction of the Bride: Ingrid's Lament.....	9
In the Hall of the Mountain King.....	10
Dance of the Mountain King's Daughter.....	11
The Death of Åse.....	12
Morning Mood.....	12
Arabian Dance.....	13
Anitra's Dance.....	13
Peer Gynt's Homecoming: Stormy Evening At Sea.....	14
Shipwreck.....	15
Solveig's Song.....	16

The misadventures of **Peer Gynt**

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Listening Guide of the 2011 School Concerts, presented by the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra. GCSO welcomes the opportunity to educate and entertain young students in concert through the exploration of great music.

The music of *Peer Gynt* has exercised a continuing fascination for generations of music lovers. Edvard Grieg's rich melodies and grand orchestral color in service of Henrik Ibsen's play resulted in him bowing repeatedly during the first performance he attended in 1876. 135 years later, many of its selections, such as "In the Hall of the Mountain King," are recognized the world over through performances in concerts, recordings, and use in other media entertainment. Its appeal to children and the young-at-heart have been particularly telling.

As conductor and scriptwriter of the School Concerts, I've selected familiar and some rare musical selections to capture the narrative sweep of *Peer Gynt*. Ibsen's idiosyncratic poetry is tied to a tale of epic proportions, so humor will be used to point out salient features and avoid the darker and more troubling aspects of the central character. The music, however, has been preserved in all its glory to enthrall the audience and demonstrate active listening as a fulfilling activity.

Thank you for participating in the School Concerts and for encouraging your students to love music.

Timothy James Bergman is executive director of the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra. Since 2001, he has been music director of the Gulf Coast Symphony Youth Orchestra, an educational program of the GCSO. Previously, he was music director of the Greater Miami Youth Symphonies, the Louisiana Youth Orchestras, and assistant conductor of the Baton Rouge Symphony. He earned degrees from Stetson University, the University of Connecticut, and a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Miami. Dr. Bergman is an adjunct lecturer at Tulane University's School of Continuing Studies in Gulfport.

ABOUT THE COMPACT DISC

CD TRACKS

1. Prelude: At the Wedding 5:04
2. The Abduction of the Bride: Ingrid's Lament 4:09
3. In the Hall of the Mountain King 2:48
4. In the Hall of the Mountain King (original version w/chorus) 2:52
5. Dance of the Mountain King's Daughter 1:37
6. The Death of Åse 5:17
7. Morning Mood 4:19
8. Arabian Dance 4:46
9. Arabian Dance (original version w/chorus) 4:50
10. Anitra's Dance 3:26
11. Peer Gynt's Homecoming: Stormy Evening At Sea 2:20
12. Shipwreck 1:35
13. Solveig's Song 5:41
14. Solveig's Song (original version w/voice) 5:36

The companion compact disc is a compilation of selections from two CDs recorded by the San Francisco Symphony in June 1988, conducted by Herbert Blomstedt on the London label. One disc contained a generous selection of music from the play; the other the two orchestral suites Grieg derived from his music. The performances of the Gulf Coast Symphony at the School Concerts will not use voices, so vocal selections were substituted with instrumental versions found in the suites.

11 of the 26 movements from the original score have been selected. The selections permit a chronological representation of Peer's most colorful escapades, the one exception being "Solveig's Song." It's actually "Solveig's Cradle Song" that concludes *Peer Gynt*, but there is no orchestral version of that selection. "Solveig's Song" concludes the Second Suite assembled by Grieg, so it was logical to do the same for this presentation. The original version of "Solveig's Song" with voice has been added to the CD. The original versions of "In the Hall of Mountain King" and "Arabian Dance" have also been included since these are rarely performed.

EDVARD GRIEG and *PEER GYNT*

Edvard Grieg

b. June 15, 1843; Bergen, Norway

d. September 4, 1907; “Troidhaugen” (family home), south of Bergen

In January 1874, Edvard Grieg, Norway’s greatest composer, received a request from Henrik Ibsen, Norway’s most celebrated writer, to compose music for his play *Peer Gynt*. Ibsen adapted his own dramatic poem of 1867 into 40 scenes, a kaleidoscope of time, space, folklore, realism, dreams, and social criticism. This mammoth work took five hours to perform when it was premiered in 1876.

In a letter to his publisher, Ibsen explained that *Peer Gynt* was a real person who lived around 1800 whose exploits were recorded in a collection of Norwegian folk tales. Ibsen’s highly individual style of poetry captured the imagination of audiences and evoked the national spirit of Norway through a rich blend of folk-tale elements and Norwegian backdrop.

Grieg considered the play “most unmusical,” but wrote music for the project nonetheless. He rejected Ibsen’s musical suggestions, steering his own course and composing “out of his own head.” About 90 minutes of music were written for the original production. Later productions used additional music by Grieg that were adapted by other composers.

Grieg matched Ibsen’s folklore sources with music infused with the melodic and rhythmic inflections of folk music. Even the music selections in *Peer Gynt* that reflect more exotic backgrounds (such as the “Arabian Dance” and “Anitra’s Dance”) never lose their essential character as music written by a Norwegian composer.

Grieg was unsatisfied with the music he wrote for *Peer Gynt*. He believed he made too many compromises to his ideals by writing music “to emphasize crowd-pleasing stage effects” and cited “In the Hall of the Mountain King” as a particular disappointment. He elected not to attend the world premiere. Ibsen himself wasn’t pleased by Grieg’s music because it blunted the play’s often dark view of life and morality.

Audiences, however, were enthralled. When Grieg attended his first performance nine months later, he reported to have “had the honor of being rapturously acclaimed.” He would eventually compile eight music selections into two orchestral suites that would become his most frequently performed works after his famous Piano Concerto.

Since 1928, the Peer Gynt Festival has been held at Vinstra in Gudbrandsdalen (where the Peer Gynt folk tales originated). The highlight of the festival is a staging of *Peer Gynt* next to Lake Gålå, with professional actors, nearly 100 amateur actors, and symphony orchestra. The production attracts more than 17,000 people every summer.

THE MUSIC of *PEER GYNT*

Composed: 1874-1875; revised for an 1886 production; Suite No. 1 (four movements) for orchestra arranged in 1888; Suite No. 2 (four movements) for orchestra arranged in 1891

Premiere (as play): February 24, 1876 in Christiania (now Oslo), Norway

For: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons; 4 French horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba; timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, xylophone); harp; strings (1st & 2nd violins, violas, cellos, basses)

Duration: Individual movements range approx. 1 ½ - 5 minutes in length

ACT I

Peer Gynt, a young man of 20, is a liar and braggart. His actions are impulsive; his only concern his own well-being. Blinded by selfishness, he follows the motto “to thyself be true” by holding fast to his destructive behavior. His father had squandered the family fortune and left Peer and his mother, Åse, alone in a small village. Åse had hopes that Peer would restore the lost fortune, but he has proven to be unreliable and undisciplined.

Track 1 (5:04)

Prelude: At the Wedding

(0:00) Before the curtain rises, the orchestra performs the “Prelude.” The music begins with an energetic, scurrying theme that’s associated with Peer. The theme is brash, but with an attractive derring-do appropriate for a young man.

We catch a view of Peer’s humble village represented by:

(0:38) “Solveig’s Song” (in shortened form), then a:

(1:45) *Halling*, a high-kicking dance for men, performed by solo viola in imitation of a Norwegian folk fiddle; “Solveig’s Song” briefly returns, then:

(2:22) *Springar*, a round dance for men and women also performed by solo viola. “Solveig’s Song” closes this section with even greater passion.

(3:26) Peer’s opening theme returns, but a dark, ominous tone reveals itself as the music is more fully developed and rushes to an abrupt finish.

The curtain rises with Peer and Åse quarreling about his latest disappearance. Although supposedly hunting, Peer has no results to show for it and lies of his exploits. Åse scolds him for his shiftless behavior and for losing the heart of Ingrid, the daughter of the richest farmer. Ingrid is to be married to another the next day. Defying his mother, Peer goes to Ingrid's wedding with the hope of winning her back.

At the wedding, Peer is taunted and ridiculed by the villagers who know of Peer's many faults. A new family has moved into the village and Peer meets the oldest daughter Solveig. They're attracted to each other, although Solveig is wary of Peer's reputation.

Peer discovers that Ingrid, the bride-to-be, has locked herself away from the bridegroom, perhaps having second-thoughts of her decision to wed. Peer seizes the opportunity and pretends to convince Ingrid to come out from hiding. He lifts Ingrid on his shoulder and runs off with her up the mountain. The villagers vow to exact punishment upon his capture, while Åse pleads with them to spare his life.

Track 2 (4:09)

The Abduction of the Bride: Ingrid's Lament

(0:00) Peer's musical theme, now clipped and furious, is heard twice, alternating with an empty, hushed conclusion. The morning after fleeing with Ingrid, Peer cruelly rejects her.

(0:23) A sorrowful lament emerges, beginning with strings and adding the entire orchestra as it builds. Ingrid thought that Peer's actions confirmed his love for her. Returning to the village without him would destroy her the honor of herself and her family.

(3:36) Ingrid's tremulous pleading becomes transformed by the timpani, leading to two more outbursts by Peer. Peer's selfish nature has only known the unconditional love of his mother and cannot believe in the words and feelings of another.

ACT II

Now without a home, Peer wanders through the mountains. He trips, strikes his head upon a rock, and is rendered unconscious. The remainder of ACT II takes place in Peer's dreams.

Peer is wooing the Woman in Green, daughter of the troll Mountain King. She tells him that in her kingdom everything is the opposite of what it appears to be. The king's palace is actually caverns within the mountain; the beautiful horse they are riding is actually a great pig. In the mountain hall, the king sits on his throne. Peer is confronted by a mob of trolls who are angered by his intent to wed the king's daughter. Peer is attacked.

Tracks 3 (2:48) & 4 (2:52 - original version)

In the Hall of the Mountain King

(0:00) A muted, menacing snarl by two French horns introduces a chant-like theme which repeats over and over, building in power as the trolls close in on Peer. It begins with the plucked strings (*pizzicato*) of cellos and basses, alternating with puckish bassoons. Pizzicato violins then join in, alternating with oboe and clarinet and the music picks up speed.

(2:02) The music pushes to a thunderous conclusion.

In the original version, the Chorus of Trolls sings with the orchestra: *Kill him! The Christian son has deceived the fairest daughter of our ruler!*

...and there is the following dialogue:

Young Troll: Let me cut off his fingers!

Chorus of Trolls: Kill him!

Another Young Troll: Let me tear out his hair!

Chorus of Trolls: Kill him!

Troll Maiden: Oooh-ah! Let me bite his bottom!

Trolls: Kill him!

Troll Witch: Shall he be broiled to a broth in brine?

Trolls: Kill him!

Another Witch: Spitted and roasted? Or stewed in a cauldron?

Chorus of Trolls: Kill him!

The Mountain King (commanding): Keep cool now — ice-cool!

The Mountain King stops the attack. He tells Peer that he must become a troll if he marries his daughter. He also poses the question of what is the difference between troll and man. The answer is that humans say "To thyself be true;" trolls say "Be true to your selfish-ness."

Track 5 (1:37)

Dance of the Mountain King's Daughter

The Woman in Green dances for Peer, but he sees her ugliness through the illusion. The music reflects her crude nature by simply repeating a theme three times and increasing in volume. The ending builds excitement by quickening the pace until the Woman in Green's final dance gesture. She obviously cannot hold her awkward pose before crashing at the end.

The music prominently features the brittle color of a xylophone. A solo oboe plays a sadly-inflected solo for the daughter's dance pose.

The grotesque Woman in Green and the conditions of living in the Mountain King's realm repulses Peer. He barely escapes for his life from the angry trolls mob. The kingdom collapses behind him as he emerges from the mountain.

He suddenly encounters a shapeless, invisible troll called the Boyg. When asked "Who are you?" the Boyg answers, "Myself." The Boyg gives him the motto "go around" which Peer also takes to the extreme, always avoiding facing himself or the truth.

Peer wakes from his dreams and meets Helga, Solveig's sister. He hears that Solveig has been searching for him, concerned for his safety. Peer has Helga deliver a silver button to Solveig and asks that she not forget him.

ACT III

Living the life of an outlaw, Peer builds a cottage in the hills. Solveig finds him and declares that she will stay with him to end his solitude. Peer is impressed by her sincerity. Solveig enters the cottage and Peer is confronted outside by the Woman in Green with a limping boy at her side. She tells him that the boy is his son and makes him remember his guilty past. Bewildered, Peer is unable to face Solveig and runs away.

Track 6 (5:17)

The Death of Åse

Peer hears that his mother is dying and sneaks back to the village. Åse is on her death-bed and she and Peer relive one of the pretend games they used to play when Peer was a boy. The music is performed by strings and is played in the background during this scene.

(0:00) A melancholy theme is played three times, rising in passion with each statement.

(2:34) A long, descending phrase winds its way to a quiet conclusion.

After Åse dies, Peer puts as much distance as possible from his home by going overseas.

ACT IV

The years pass and Peer takes on many occupations. As a business man on the coast of Morocco, he explains to some associates that he has sold Bibles as a missionary, served as a slave-trader, sold idols to the Chinese, transported rum, and many other things. He takes advantage of situations to accumulate his wealth, disregarding other people's needs and sufferings.

Track 7 (4:19)

Morning Mood

Solo flute and solo oboe introduce a sunrise on the North African desert. The full orchestra soon joins in this rapturous music. We also hear solo French horn and, at the serene conclusion, solo bassoon. This beautiful nature scene contrasts sharply with Peer's cynical view of life.

Peer's associates rob him and leave him on the shore. He unknowingly scares off some thieves and stumbles upon stolen Bedouin gear and riches. He puts on the clothing and is hailed as a prophet by a local Arab tribe. He encourages the deceit and enjoys the honors that are bestowed upon him.

Tracks 8 (4:46) & 9 (4:50 - original version)

Arabian Dance

(0:00) The Arab shiek entertains Peer with girls who dance and sing for him. Anitra, the chief's daughter, catches his eye.

(1:26) Anitra has a solo dance (and sings in the original version). The entire group resumes their dance, then slowly and quietly make their exit. Triangle and tambourine add an exotic touch in this selection.

In the original version, the chorus of girls sing:

The Prophet is come!

Sound the flute and the drum!

The Prophet, the Lord, the All-Wise One!

To us is he come, riding over the sandy sea.

Anitra sings [partial text]:

His charger is white as milk

that flows in the rivers of Paradise.

Bend every knee, bow every head!

His eyes are stars benignly gleaming:

no child of earth would dare to meet

the flashing rays those stars shine forth.

Track 10 (3:36)

Anitra's Dance

Anitra now dances alone for Peer. Her beguiling charms and grace are captured in delicate music written for strings and triangle. The music is a *mazurka*, a dance form from Poland, which adds to Anitra's mystery.

The strings are performed with mutes, a small device attached to the instruments that dampen their sound for a veiled effect. The music begins and ends with a sustained, shimmering chord played by violins, violas, and rolling triangle.

Peer boasts of his accomplishments to Anitra and proclaims his love for her. He leads her into the desert on horseback, ready to begin a new life together. However, Anitra sees him as a fool and suddenly rides off with most of his gear and remaining wealth.

Peer re-fashions himself as a historian and wanders to Egypt. He visits the Colossi of Memnon (twin statues of Pharaoh Amenhotep III) and the Sphinx at Giza. The Sphinx seems to “speak” to him and, at first, he believes the Boyg has returned. Instead, the voice belongs to the keeper of the local madhouse. He believes Peer is the bringer of supreme wisdom. At the madhouse, the patients hail him as the emperor of the “self.” Horrified, Peer flees to save his sanity.

ACT V

Peer is now an old man. He sails home, the only passenger on a Norwegian cargo ship. A storm begins to blow and a previously unseen Strange Passenger speaks to him. He tells him that should Peer’s life be lost in a shipwreck, the Strange Passenger wants to examine Peer’s body to find where dreams come from. Peer is doubly frightened when he discovers that the crew have not seen the Strange Passenger. The storm builds to a frenzy and the ship seems headed toward catastrophe.

Track 11 (2:20)

Peer Gynt’s Homecoming: Stormy Evening at Sea

(0:00) The music depicts the tossing waves and driving wind of a great tempest.

(0:48—0:52) A brief melodic reference to “Morning Mood” seems to underscore that nature itself has turned against Peer and the crew.

(1:22) The storm builds to a peak, with crash cymbals and bass drum adding to the clamor. The storm loses intensity and the ship appears to have made it safely.

Track 12 (1:35)

Shipwreck

(0:00) The ship has drifted too close to the coastal rocks and wrecks. It sinks like a stone.

(0:24) Through the mist, two men are seen on a dinghy.

(0:48) The dinghy makes its way between the rocks. A huge wave capsizes the little boat and someone screams. Peer suddenly appears, clinging to the keel of the upturned dinghy. He shouts, "Help! Send a lifeboat!"

The Strange Passenger suddenly appears and also holds on to the keel. Peer is terrified: he knows the boat won't support two people and the Strange Passenger speaks of Peer's imminent death. Peer demands that he let go of the keel. The Strange Passenger obliges and disappears beneath the waves.

Reaching the shore, Peer journeys home, penniless and bitter. He cannot face Solveig just yet, still living in the cottage he had built. He stumbles upon a peasant funeral and is confronted by all the things he didn't do: unsung songs, unmade works, unwept tears, and questions never asked. His mother, Åse, appears and says she has never rested in death because of his aimless wanderings. He stumbles upon the Mountain King who tells him that he has led life more as a troll than as a man.

He encounters the Button-Moulder (one who makes metal buttons), who proclaims, "I have been sent for you...you are to go into my ladle...I must melt you up." He tells Peer that his motto "To thyself be true" has made him unworthy of Heaven or Hell, that he has been a non-entity fit only for oblivion.

Peer protests losing his identity and being reduced to nothingness "You have been selfish, but not yourself." Peer asks, "What is it, to be one's self?" and the Button-Moulder answers, "To be one's self is to deny one's self."

Desperate to preserve his soul, Peer tries to prove he has been sinful enough for even Hell to accept him. He finds Solveig at his old cottage and pleads for her to acknowledge his sins. Instead, Solveig tells him that he "has made all my life as a beautiful song."

Peer asks, "But who am I? And where have I been?" Solveig replies, "You are my beloved. You have been ever in my faith, in my hope, in my heart." Peer collapses in her lap and Solveig sings him to sleep.

The Button-Moulder still waits for proof from Peer, but there is hope that Peer will be renewed to start his life over.

Tracks 13 (5:41) & 14 (5:36) - original version)

Solveig's Song

In the play, this selection is featured before "Peer's Homecoming."

(0:00) Solveig is outside the cottage on a summer's day. She sits, spinning cloth in the sunshine. Violins and violas (performed muted throughout this selection) give a brief introduction, closing with cellos, then basses, as Solveig becomes lost in thought.

(0:40 & 2:45) Strumming harp sets up a tune played by first violins. In the original version, Solveig sings the following lyrics:

The winter and spring both may come, and pass by,
And summer days may fade, and the year may die;
But surely you will come back one day to me,
And I shall be waiting, as once I vowed to be.

(2:07 & 4:07) The violins continue with a lilting, waltz-like section.

Solveig's lyrics continue:

God guard you, where e'er you may stray by sea or land,
God comfort you, if now at His footstool you may stand;
Here, until you come, I shall be waiting alone,
And if you wait on high, I shall meet you there, my own.

Both sections are repeated with violins playing an octave higher than previously. The song ends with a variation of the introduction.