

Edvard Grieg's three violin sonatas form one of the most personal and revealing strands of his output, spanning more than twenty years of creative life and charting a clear arc of artistic development. Written in 1865, 1867 and 1887 respectively, they are works to which Grieg attached unusual importance, later observing that each sonata reflected a distinct stage in his own musical growth: youthful abundance of ideas, an awakening national voice, and finally a broader, more inward-looking maturity.

The Violin Sonata No. 1 in F major, Op. 8, composed when Grieg was just twenty-two, is a strikingly assured work. Although its formal outlines reflect the German Romantic tradition in which he had been trained, the musical language is already recognisably individual. The opening movement combines rhythmic buoyancy with melodic generosity, the violin singing freely over an alert and characterful piano part. A lightly sprung Allegretto follows, its central episode hinting at the dance idioms that would become central to Grieg's style, before a high-spirited finale rounds off the work with youthful confidence. Far from being apprentice music, the First Sonata announces a distinctive voice with remarkable clarity.

The Second Sonata in G major, Op. 13, written only two years later, marks a decisive step forward. Often nicknamed the "Dance Sonata", it brings Grieg's Norwegian identity into sharper focus, not through direct quotation but through the assimilation of folk rhythm and gesture into a refined chamber-music language. The opening movement unfolds with rhapsodic sweep and greater structural ambition than before, while the slow movement offers a long-breathed melody of touching simplicity. The finale, driven by energetic dance rhythms, confirms the growing equality of violin and piano, whose partnership here is fully integrated and dramatically purposeful.

With the Third Sonata in C minor, Op. 45, composed in 1887, Grieg reaches a level of expressive concentration and emotional depth unmatched in his earlier works. Darker in tone and more tightly argued, it belongs unmistakably to his mature period and was the last chamber work he completed. The opening movement is taut and intense, its thematic material closely worked, while the second movement, marked *Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza*, is among Grieg's most inspired creations. Here the violin sings with an almost vocal intimacy over harmonies of subtle richness, creating a mood of restrained tenderness that lingers long after the music has faded. The finale draws once again on dance rhythms, but with an underlying gravity that prevents easy resolution, giving the work a cumulative emotional power of rare distinction.

Taken together, the three sonatas offer a remarkably complete portrait of Grieg as a chamber composer. They balance lyricism with rhythmic vitality, national colour with cosmopolitan craftsmanship, and intimate expression with formal clarity. While they may lack the overt drama of the piano concerto or the pictorial immediacy of the *Lyric Pieces*, they reward close listening with a depth and sincerity that place them among the most compelling violin sonatas of the Romantic era.

These performances were recorded in stereo at Abbey Road's Studio 3 in October 1957 by Yehudi Menuhin and Robert Levin, though they were initially released in mono. Some later reissues appeared in stereo, but the sound has often remained muted by generational loss and conservative transfers. Heard today through XR remastering, the surviving stereo sources reveal a vivid soundstage, natural instrumental balance and an immediacy that belies the recordings' age. Inner detail emerges with striking clarity, allowing Grieg's finely wrought textures to speak with renewed freshness.

Menuhin's playing is marked by a super-sweet tone, finely graded nuance and an instinctive lyrical generosity that suits this music perfectly. His phrasing brings out the vocal quality at the heart of Grieg's writing, while Levin provides a sensitive and responsive partnership, shaping the piano's often complex textures with rhythmic poise and tonal clarity. Together they offer interpretations of warmth, honesty and deep musical understanding, restoring these sonatas to their rightful place as major statements within Grieg's chamber music.



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GRIEG VIOLIN SONATAS
YEHUDI MENUHIN & ROBERT LEVIN

menuhin

plays grieg sonatas

GRIEG Violin Sonata No. 1 in F major, Op. 8
1. 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (7:55)
2. 2nd mvt. - Allegretto quasi andantino (4:59)
3. 3rd mvt. - Allegro molto vivace (7:04)
Recorded 9 October 1957

GRIEG Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major, Op. 13
4. 1st mvt. - Lento doloroso - Allegro vivace (8:38)
5. 2nd mvt. - Allegretto tranquillo (5:43)
6. 3rd mvt. - Allegro animato (5:32)
Recorded 10 October 1957

GRIEG Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor, Op. 45
7. 1st mvt. - Allegro molto ed appassionato (9:54)
8. 2nd mvt. - Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza (6:36)
9. 3rd mvt. - Allegro animato (7:19)
Recorded 10 & 11 October 1957

Yehudi Menuhin, violin
Robert Levin, piano

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph
of Yehudi Menuhin

Recorded at
EMI Abbey Road Studio 3,
London

Total duration: 63:40

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GRIG VIOLIN SONATAS
YEHUDI MENUHIN & ROBERT LEVIN

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