

SONG OF NORWAY

The Story of the Play

The story, based on the life of the great Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg, opens on Midsummer Eve, 1860, when Edvard, his friend Rikard Nordraak, a poet, and Nina, whom they both love, meet again at the Troll's Hill outside their native Bergen after Nina's absence in Copenhagen. Together they plan to make Norway great in song and story. It soon becomes clear that Edvard is the one Nina loves, and their betrothal is confirmed at the traditional Name Cakes ceremony that evening. As so often happens, their romance does not run smoothly; Father Grieg does not recognise his son's latent genius and tries to force him into his family fish business. Mother Grieg knows better, and when the famous prima donna, Louisa Giovanni, after hearing Edvard play his compositions, wants him to become her accompanist and song writer, Mother plays into her hands, and Edvard leaves his friends, and sweetheart, to tour the capitals of Europe. Rikard's great poem has to be put aside until, with Grieg's music, it can become the Song of Norway.

One year later, Edvard's friends and family visit him in Copenhagen, where they find him successful under the patronage of Louisa Giovannia and her husband, Count Peppi. The great Henrik Ibsen is so impressed with his genius that he invites him to write music for *Peer Gym*. The possessive Louisa shows an interest in more than Edvard's music and, jealous of Nina, puts every obstacle in the way of their marriage. Mother Grieg, believing that her son can only be inspired in his native land, manoeuvres his marriage to Nina, but still this does not break his association with Louisa. The unhappy trail through the capitals continues for another year, and all the while the turbulent collaboration with Ibsen goes on, with the great Song of Norway still not yet begun.

Then, in Rome, the shattering news of Rikard's death is brought to Edvard. Grief stricken, he realises he has failed not only his friend but Nina too, and at last he knows he must return to Norway to make amends. We leave him with Nina at Christmas time and the traditional festival of Kris Kringle. At home, happy and elated in the throes of composition, the first majestic chords of the Piano Concerto are struck.