Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, and the Adventures of *Peer Gynt* in America

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In 1960 Duke Ellington and his Orchestra recorded an album for the Columbia label titled *Swinging Suites by Edward E. and Edward G.*¹ (See Figure 1.) This album paired two multi-movement compositions created collaboratively by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn: *The Peer Gynt Suites*, which was an arrangement of five movements from Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suites I & II*, and *Suite Thursday*, a set of original compositions inspired by the similarly titled novel by John Steinbeck.² Until now, scholars interested in discussing "side one" of the *Swingin' Suites* album have focused on two topics: Who actually composed *The Peer Gynt Suites*: Ellington, Strayhorn or both? And how was the suite received by listeners when it was released in 1960?³

With respect to the first topic, it appears that Ellington and Strayhorn composed their arrangement collaboratively, with Strayhorn serving as the lead creative force, a process that I will explain in more detail later in the article. As to the second topic—the work's reception—a straightforward assessment of this subject appears in an article by Mervyn Cooke titled "Jazz among the Classics, and the Case of Duke Ellington" in the *Cambridge Companion to Jazz*.⁴ As Cooke explains, the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites* met with vehement protest from the Grieg Foundation in Norway and was consequently banned from public distribution via record sales, media broadcasts, and public concerts throughout Scandinavia for nearly a decade (figure 2).⁵ The Grieg Foundation in Norway viewed the recording as an offensive attack on Grieg's musical reputation. In a debate published in the *Oslo Aftenposten* in 1964, the president of the Grieg Foundation called Ellington's *Peer Gynt* "ugly" and "uninspired," he even went so far as to say that "in Solveig's song" Ellington had made the Norwegian maiden "bray like a sow."⁶ In the United States, the

An earlier draft of this article was presented on 5 November 2010 as part of a session titled "Duke Ellington's Late, Extended Works: Some New Critical Perspectives" at the American Musicological Society's 76th Annual Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. As I noted at that time, this project could have never progressed without the groundbreaking work of David Hajdu and Walter van de Leur. I thank the latter, especially, for his descriptions of the manuscript sources currently held in the Billy Strayhorn Collection in Pittsburgh, PA, since I was unable to gain access to these sources during my research on this project.

¹ Columbia (CI 1597). In England, the album was released as a Philips LP (BBL 7470). The personnel performing on the *Peer Gynt* tracks were: Johnny Hodges, Harry Carney, Jimmy Hamilton, Paul Gonsalves, Russell Procope, saxophone; Ray Nance, Willie Cook, Andres Meringuito, Eddie Mullins, trumpets; Lawrence Brown, "Booty" Wood, Britt Woodman, trombones; Sam Woodyard, drums; Aaron Bell, Bass; and Duke Ellington, piano.

² For a study of *Suite Thursday* see: Theodore R. Hudson, "Duke Ellington's Literary Sources," *American Music* 9 (1991): 20-42.

³ David Hajdu, *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996); Walter van de Leur, *Something to Live For: The Music of Billy Strayhorn* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002); Walter Lindenbaum, "Peer Gynt goes Hollywood: Ellington spielt Grieg," in *Edvard Grieg I Kulturbyen*, ed. Monica Jangaard (Bergen, Norway: Museé Edvard Grieg de Troidhaugen, 2000), 141-144.

⁴ Mervyn Cooke, "Jazz among the classics, and the case of Duke Ellington," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 153-173, 350-351.

⁵ Ibid, 164-167.

⁶ "Norsk fordømmelse av Ellingtons Peer Gynt," *Aftenposten* (11 January 1964): 1. A synopsis of the dispute was given by the Norwegian music critic Reidar Storaas in an article titled "Duke Ellington's Forbidden Grieg Arrangements," posted on the

recording did not incur legal problems, but music critics generally ignored, or voiced regret over, Ellington's decision to rework, yet again, the music of a European composer (earlier in the year Ellington had released a recording of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*).⁷ In general, reviewers could not comprehend why Ellington and Strayhorn chose to rework music from the "Classical" canon. John McClellan asked of the *Boston Traveler*: "What esthetic pleasure does Duke find in caricaturing these relative lightweights? For that is what these amount to, really—amusing caricatures of some not very important music."⁸ John S. Wilson, writing for the *New York Times*, expressed similar confusion. Although he praised the originality of *Suite Thursday*, he was disenchanted by the other half of the album:

The disk also includes the Ellington treatment of five selections from the *Peer Gynt Suites Nos. 1* and 2, which, like his recent run-through of "The Nutcracker" Suite, prove to be uninspiring source material for his unique orchestrating techniques.⁹

Such negative assessments of the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites* have continued in jazz scholarship. For example, Max Harrison described Ellington's "contemptible Tchaikovsky and Grieg manipulations" as "grotesque assaults on major and minor European masters."¹⁰ More recently, Walter van de Leur described the *Peer Gynt* music as "less convincing" than the "impressive arrangement" of the *Nutcracker Suite*, even though "Strayhorn dealt most seriously with his adaptations of both Grieg and Tchaikovsky."¹¹

International Grieg Society (IGS) website, <http://griegforum.no/griegsociety/default.asp?kat=365&id=1385&sp=1> (Accessed 2007. Unfortunately, the IGS website was hacked, and when it launched its new website a few years ago, this article was no longer available). When the Grieg Foundation in Norway learned of Ellington's recording, they contacted TONO, a Norwegian corporation founded in 1928 under the name *Norsk Komponistforenings Internasjonale Musikkbyrå* that oversees copyright agreements for music in Norway, and requested that all sales and distribution of the *Swingin' Suites* album be banned in Norway and other Scandinavian countries (Sweden and Denmark also participated in the ban). But in 1966, Prof. Karl-Birger Blomdahl, the Director of Swedish Radio, declared during a live television broadcast that the ban was ridiculous and that he would be broadcasting the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites* on national radio. Blomdahl even went so far as to claim that sections of the Ellington/Strayhorn version were truer to the aesthetic of Ibsen's play than the original music by Grieg. In reaction, Norwegian Television (NRK) aired a debate on the issue with Blomdahl and Egil Monn-Iversen arguing for distribution of the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites* and the composers Klaus Egge and Harald Sæverud from the Grieg Foundation arguing for a continuation of the ban. According to press reports, Blomdahl and Monn-Iversen won the debate. Shortly thereafter, the ban was lifted in Sweden. Norway continued to enforce the ban, but only for two additional years. On 1 January 1969 the copyright on Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suites* expired in Norway. A series of articles published in Norway during the years in question traces the details of the Grieg Foundation's ban. The most interesting discussions are found in: "'Aases død' og 'Jeg elsker dig' – som jazz," *Oslo Aftenposten* (24 April 1962): 3; "Norsk fordømmelse av Ellingtons *Peer Gynt*," *Aftenposten* (11 January 1964): 1 & 16. "Grieg-fondet vil drøfte 'Ellington' versjonen I SR," *Oslo Aftenposten* (24 February 1966); "Duke Ellington og Grieg-fondet," *Oslo Aftenposten* (4 March 1966); "Duke Ellington spiller amerikansk musikk, ikke jazz!," *Oslo Aftenposten* (28 January 1967): 8; "Endelig revansje for Duke Ellington," *Oslo Aftenposten* (15 September 1991).

⁷ The album was released in 1960 under the Columbia Special Products label (CS 8341)

⁸ Cf. John Edward Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 343.

⁹ John S. Wilson, "Duke Ellington, Still the Pioneer" in *New York Times* (2 April 1961), p. 18.

¹⁰ Max Harrison, "Some Reflections on Ellington's Longer Works" (1964; revised 1991), in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, edited by Mark Tucker (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 393.

¹¹ Van de Leur, 139.

Figure 1. Cover of *Swinging Suites by Edward E. & Edward G.*

By describing Peer Gynt's adventures in America, I am situating the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites* in its cultural context to expand listeners' comprehension of and appreciation for the music. Unlike Harrison and Van de Leur, I consider the *Peer Gynt Suites* one of the most innovative examples of program music in the Ellington/Strayhorn repertoire. What previous scholars and critics have described as an inadvertently lethargic and out-of-tune performance, I interpret as a conscious choice by Ellington and Strayhorn to incorporate extra-musical content into their composition. Consequently, the following discussion explores the importance of *Peer Gynt* in American popular culture and describes the musical, literary and political forces that likely influenced the creation of the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites*. How did *Peer Gynt* first get on Ellington's and Strayhorn's radar? Were they drawn to Grieg's music in and of itself? Or did Ibsen's play influence the creation of the Ellington/Strayhorn suite in some way? Basically, this essay addresses one simple question: Why *Peer Gynt*? In answering this question, I will show how Ellington and Strayhorn studied Ibsen's play closely, via modern English translations/adaptations by playwrights engaged in America's Civil Rights struggles, and then composed a suite that simultaneously expressed a heightened sense of character development and presented a revisionist narrative of Ibsen's anti-hero.

For those familiar with Grieg's *Peer Gynt* music only through his famous concert suites (Opp. 45 and 55), the original music to Ibsen's play may come as something of a surprise. The concert suites include

only eight of the original twenty-six numbers composed for the play.¹² Furthermore, the order of the eight movements in the suites does not follow the chronological sequence of the play. Consequently, there is no sense of the music's original connections to the play's characters and dramatic events.¹³ This separation of Grieg's *Peer Gynt* music from its original extra-musical contexts has influenced the compositions' performance history. The pieces can be performed as complete suites. More often than not, a single movement is played in isolation. The music successfully stands on its own. Consequently, listeners rarely turn to Ibsen's play when evaluating the content and structure of Grieg's incidental music. This has also been the case with evaluations of the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites*. Until now, scholars and critics have looked no further than Grieg's music when evaluating the influences, both musical and extra musical, behind side one of the *Swingin' Suites* album.

Peer Gynt's Musical Adventures in America

The Grieg Foundation's objection to the Ellington/Strayhorn *Swingin' Suites* album in 1960 seems odd, at first glance, since musical adaptations of *Peer Gynt* were nothing new. As early as the 1890s, selections from *Peer Gynt* were created for the popular market.¹⁴ Ragged versions of *Peer Gynt* followed shortly thereafter. A noteworthy example is the "Peter Gink One-Step" composed by George L. Cobb in 1918.¹⁵ This arrangement was available in both sheet music and piano roll formats, and in 1919 an arrangement of "Peter Gink" for saxophone was recorded by the Six Brown Brothers, a sextet out of Canada who performed regularly on New York's vaudeville circuit.¹⁶ (YouTube Example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzC7CpN6mAw>) "Peter Gink" caused an uproar among classical music lovers. In the September 1920 issue of *Melody* magazine Gregor Mazer wrote:

[It is] disgraceful... the way beautiful music is being converted into vulgar, impossible jazz.... When Grieg's immortal "Peer Gynt" is printed on a program [as] "Peter Gink" it is time for all music lovers to rebel against this outrageous profanity.¹⁷

Shortly thereafter, the call for rebellion took place. As an article published in the *New York Tribune* makes clear, when the Brown Brothers' recording of "Peter Gink" was released in Norway, protests broke out on both sides of the Atlantic. The article's title and by-line clearly outline the conflict: "Peer Gynt Shimmie Makes Norway Shiver With Anger. Protest Sent to Washington Against Turning Grieg's Classic Into Jazz

¹² Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* premiered at the Christiana Theater in Norway on 24 February 1876 and lasted for 37 performances. Twelve years later, Grieg published a suite of 4 re-orchestrated works from *Peer Gynt* (op. 46). A second suite of 4 movements (op. 55) appeared three years later.

¹³ Anna Harwell Celenza, "Review of *Edvard Grieg. Peer Gynt, op. 23: Vollständige Bühnenmusik*, edited by Finn Benested," *Notes. Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 64 (June 2002): 946-949.

¹⁴ A prime example is the publication of Grieg's "Anitra's Dance" by the National Music Company in Chicago, for high-resolution digital images of this music see: Duke University Special Collections Library, Historic American Sheet Music Collection, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/hasm_n0233/ (Accessed 10 December 2010).

¹⁵ George L. Cobb, "Peter Gink: One Step," (Boston, MA: Walter Jacobs, 1918). An excellent overview of George L. Cobb's career and repertoire compiled by Bill Edwards is available on the web: <http://www.perfessorbill.com/comps/gcobb.shtml>, accessed on August 15, 2010.

¹⁶ The recording came out on the Victor label (18652). For an excellent overview of the Six Brown Brothers' impact on American culture see: Bruce Vermazen, *That Moaning Saxophone: The Six Brown Brothers and the Dawning of a Musical Craze* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004). Vermazen gives a detailed description of the Six Brown Brothers recording of Cobb's "Peter Gink" on pp. 131-134. A recording of the Brown Brothers playing "Peter Gink" is available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzC7CpN6mAw>, accessed July 1, 2011.

¹⁷ Cf. Edwards. An equally negative editorial entitled "Resenting Grieg in Ragtime" appeared in *Literary Digest* (11 December 1920), 37.

Music on Phonograph Record—‘a Shame,’ Declares Enrico Caruso.”¹⁸ The article begins by explaining the circumstances surrounding what had quickly escalated into an international protest:

Norway in particular and Scandinavian music lovers in general, are shocked to find that Edvard Hagerup Grieg’s famous “Peer Gynt Suite” has been jazzed and is being circulated in its corrupted form on phonograph records. . . .¹⁹

Just like today, new technology led to new legal troubles. The article continues:

Norway, it seems, learned of the desecration when an assortment of American talking machine records reached that country recently. One record, entitled “Peter Gink,” composed by George L. Cobb and played by the Six Brown Brothers, was heard by Norwegian music lovers. Shocked beyond words, they began preparation of the memorial and it was forwarded with haste to Washington.²⁰

The article presents testimony from the accused, Tom Brown, who recorded the controversial transcription of Cobb’s “Peter Gink”:

Composers, singers and conductors in New York who expressed their views yesterday are inclined to think that Norway is right. Tom Brown, however, who transformed Schubert’s “Serenade” and Rachmaninoff’s “Prelude” [Cobb’s Russian Rag] into the raggiest of rags and whose company played the jazzed “Suite” for records, has a different opinion. “Sergei Rachmaninoff heard us play the adaptation of his work,” he said, “and liked it, considering this a method of popularizing real music. We play such adaptations to attract attention, and we find that the public takes to adaptations better because familiar melodies appeal. That’s reason enough.”²¹

Also included in the article is testimony from a wide range of “classical” musicians in New York who publically protested against “such a desecration of genius”:

Mme. Sundelius, soloist of the Metropolitan Opera Company, said that she had been reading of the “sacrilege” in Swedish papers. “A composer does not like people to use his melodies in that way,” she said, “and it was not a nice thing to make ragtime out of Grieg. Surely there is enough popular music to adapt without going to the classics.”

Caruso, whose voice is recorded by the company which first put out the Grieg ragtime, said: “There ought to be a law against it. It is a shame.”

“An awful shame, outrageous,” was the comment of Mischa Levitski, the pianist.

Arthur Bodanzky, conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra and also with the Metropolitan Opera Company, said he had no objection to jazz, but the jazz makers should at least be original about it and have enough invention to get along without robbing the classics.

Mr. Spalding, as an American violinist, expressed the opinion that the public, interested in good music, and also those jealous of the country’s good name as to culture, should see to it that good music is not twisted into ragtime. “There is an element of interest in ragtime,” he said, “from a rhythmic standpoint, but certainly our fine melodies should not be dished out in that form. There should be legislation to prevent it.”²²

¹⁸ *New York Tribune* (24 November 1920): 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

The “Peter Gink” incident marked the first legal challenge in the United States against jazzing the classics. But no legislation went forward, and no formal charges were filed against Cobb or the Brown Brothers. Consequently, jazz versions of the classics continued to proliferate. As Cooke has noted, stride pianists Willie “The Lion” Smith and James P. Johnson regularly performed “jazzed” excerpts from Grieg’s *Peer Gynt Suites*, and Paul Whiteman quoted Grieg’s “In the Hall of the Mountain King” in his 1926 recording of *St. Louis Blues*.²³ Less well-known, but equally important, is stride pianist Donald Lambert’s arrangement of “Anitra’s Dance,” first released in 1941.²⁴ (YouTube Example: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P_vx4xEqoQ)

“Anitra’s Dance” was the most popular *Peer Gynt* tune among jazz composers and arrangers and was especially prevalent in big band arrangements during the 1930s, 40s and 50s. John Kirby recorded a version in 1938²⁵ (Musical Example 1), followed by Carmen Cavallaro in 1948 in an arrangement titled “Anitra’s Boogie”²⁶ (Musical Example 2). Hoagy Carmichael recorded the tune in 1954 under the title “Peer’s Dance.”²⁷ (YouTube Example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP9kWnPTBDg>) Another popular version, which was featured in *Billboard* magazine, was the Maxwell Davis arrangement played by the Glenn Miller Orchestra in their *Tribute to Glenn Miller* album released by Crown in 1957²⁸ The second most popular *Peer Gynt* tune set to music by jazz arrangers was “In the Hall of the Mountain King.” A representative example is the version performed by Will Bradley and His Orchestra in 1942.²⁹ (YouTube Example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPEl96JlXTI>)

Musical Example 1: John Kirby: “Anitra’s Dance”

Listen at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205>

²³ Cooke, 163. James P. Johnson mentioned his arrangement of excerpts from Grieg’s *Peer Gynt* in 1953 in an interview with Tom Davin: Tom Davin, “Conversations with James P. Johnson,” pt. 2, *The Jazz Review* 2, no. 6 (July 1959): 13.

²⁴ Donald Lambert made only a few recordings during his lifetime, and the only commercial recordings he made under his own name were released on RCA’s Bluebird label in 1941. It is interesting to note that all four of these recordings featured Lambert’s arrangements of music themes from the classical music repertoire: “Anitra’s Dance” by Edvard Grieg, the “Pilgrim’s Chorus” from Richard Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, the “Lucia Sextet” melody from Gaetano Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and “Elegie” by Jules Massenet. The 1941 recording of Lambert’s “Anitra’s Dance” was recently made available Master Classics Records as part of an mp3 album they released on 1 April 2010 titled *Archive of American Popular Music 1934-1945*. Donald Lambert performed an updated version of “Anitra’s Dance” at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1960; a video of this performance is currently available on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P_vx4xEqoQ (Accessed 5 July 2011).

²⁵ Kirby’s version of “Anitra’s Dance” was first released by the Harmony label on an album titled *Intimate Swing* (HL 7124). Two years later, a brief article outlining Kirby’s success as a performer and arranger appeared in “Sunday Highlights,” *Radio & Television Mirror* 15, no. 2 (December 1940): 38. It is interesting to note that Russell Procope, who would later record with the Ellington Orchestra, performed with the John Kirby Sextet early in his career.

²⁶ Decca 24410. “Anitra’s Boogie,” performed by Carmen Cavallaro and His Orchestra. A review of the recording in *Billboard* 60, no. 18 (1 May 1948): 32, describes it as a “showcase for Cavallaro’s flashy fingering based on Grieg’s ‘Anitra’s Dance.’” The following year, a Swedish musician and comedian named Charlie Norman released a recording called “Anitra’s Dance Boogie” with Metronome records in Sweden. The recording caused a controversy in Scandinavia when the Grieg Foundation in Norway forced Metronome to withdraw the remaining copies. For a recording see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Xn8i98Iudc> (Accessed 29 June 2011). Recordings made and released in the United States, however, did not come under such censorship.

²⁷ Royale 1864. Also available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP9kWnPTBDg> (Accessed on 15 October 2010).

²⁸ Crown (CLP 5050)--*Tribute To Glenn Miller*. Issued in monaural only. This album features Maxwell Davis conducting and arranging for a studio group consisting of former members of Glenn Miller’s Orchestra.

²⁹ Columbia 36286

Musical Example 2: Carmen Cavallaro: “Anitra’s Boogie”

Listen at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205>

As the above music examples reveal, the early jazzing of *Peer Gynt* involved the appropriation of a catchy, well-known tune from the classical repertoire. The Ellington/Strayhorn adaptation of *Peer Gynt*, however, differed markedly from these. Whereas previous jazz composers/performers engaged with *Peer Gynt* from a purely musical standpoint, often treating a single fast-paced Grieg tune in a humorous manner, Ellington and Strayhorn composed a complete suite of *Peer Gynt* tunes. (See Table 1.) They also refrained from assigning the various movements comical titles, as they had with their *Nutcracker Suite*.³⁰ Strayhorn and Ellington broke with the tradition of simply jazzing Grieg’s melodies. As I explain later in this article, their version of Grieg’s *Peer Gynt* appears to have been more directly influenced by theatrical adaptations of Ibsen’s work for the stage than by jazz renditions created for the dance hall.

Grieg	Ellington/Strayhorn
<i>Peer Gynt</i> Suite No. 1, Op. 46 1. Morning Mood 2. Åse’s Death 3. Anitra’s Dance 4. In the Hall of the Mountain King	<i>Peer Gynt</i> Suites 1 and 2 1. Morning Mood 4. Åse’s Death 5. Anitra’s Dance 2. In the Hall of the Mountain King
<i>Peer Gynt</i> Suite No. 2, Op. 55 1. The Abduction of the Bride (Ingrid’s Lament) 2. Arabian Dance 3. Peer’s Homeward Journey (Stormy Evening at Sea) 4. Solveig’s Song	* No corresponding music * No corresponding music * No corresponding music 3. Solveig’s Song

Table 1: Correspondences of Music in *Peer Gynt* Suites by Grieg & Ellington/Strayhorn

³⁰ The titles used by Ellington and Strayhorn for their *Nutcracker Suite* were mostly satirical in nature: “Overture,” “Toot Toot Tootie Toot,” “Peanut Brittle Brigade,” “Sugar Rum Cherry,” “Entr’acte,” “Volga Vouty,” “Chinoiserie,” “Dance of the Floreadores,” and “Arabesque Cookie.”

The American Peer Gynt on Stage

Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* was first published in 1867 as a dramatic poem. It was not intended for live performance, but seven years later, Ibsen decided to adapt it for stage. To facilitate the process, he wrote to Grieg, Norway's foremost composer at the time, and asked him to collaborate on the project. Grieg agreed because, as he explained in a letter to a friend, he was drawn to the play's cynical caricatures of Norwegian nationalism and its overt criticism of materialism:

The performance of *Peer Gynt* just now could do some good in Christiania [Oslo], where materialism is trying to rise up and choke everything that we regard as high and holy. There is a need for a mirror, I think, wherein all the egotism can be seen, and *Peer Gynt* is that mirror.³¹

In its final dramatic version, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* consisted of five acts, which when performed, lasted just under five hours. Peer is one of modern drama's first anti-heroes. Presented in the beginning of Act 1 as a capricious youth, he quickly degenerates into a kidnapper and rapist in Act 2, a self-seeking opportunist (which includes a stint as a slave trader in America) in Act 3, a thief and imposter in Act 4, and a murderer and remorseful old man in Act 5. This is not a feel-good play, and the underlying questions it presents to viewers are largely philosophical in nature: What is man expected to do with his life? What are the consequences of his actions? How does one define the grey area between good and evil? Grieg's music for *Peer Gynt* is in a late-romantic style; he intended much of it to be perceived as ironic. This is most clearly displayed in the prelude music to Act 4: as Grieg's familiar "Morning Mood" is played, the curtain rises to reveal Peer in the Sahara desert, surrounded by the riches he has obtained from trading slaves in America and selling false idols in China. Grieg's cheery, pastoral music clashes with the deceiving egotist displayed on stage and the play's overall modernist aesthetic. Theater critics have been noting this discrepancy ever since the play's premiere in 1876.³² Consequently, the central issue in most American productions of *Peer Gynt* has involved what use, if any, should be made of Grieg's music.

Peer Gynt's adventures on the American stage began on October 29, 1906, when the world premiere of an English language version opened at the Grand Opera House in Chicago. The script was based on a stilted verse translation by William and Charles Archer, published in 1892 that critics called "vague and puzzling."³³ Nonetheless, this first venture on stage was a success because, like most *Peer Gynt* productions performed in America during the first half of the century, this one used elaborate scenery and Grieg's evocative music to hold viewers' attention.³⁴ The goal was to present an audio/visual pageant as opposed to a text-driven, philosophical performance.³⁵ The reason behind this dependency on elaborate stagecraft and music involves the content of the play itself: the cultural and political references of Ibsen's original text do not translate easily into English. Consequently, new English translations and "modern" adaptations of the

³¹ *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Finn Benestad; trans. William H. Haverson (Columbus, OH: Peer Gynt Press, 2000), 119.

³² For an overview of critics' reactions to Ibsen's work see: Errol Durbach, "A century of Ibsen criticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. James McFarlane (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994). *Cambridge Collections Online*, Cambridge University Press DOI:10.1017/CCOL0521411661.015 (Accessed 1 June 2011).

³³ Cf. Michael Egan, *Henrik Ibsen: The Critical Heritage* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 35.

³⁴ After a four-month run in Chicago, Mansfield's production moved to New York. For reviews of these performances see: "Peer Gynt" in English put on by Mansfield: Notable First Night in Chicago of the Norwegian 'Faust,'" *New York Times* (30 October 1906); "Mansfield seen in Ibsen's Peer Gynt: An Astonishing Exhibition of Illumination and Varied Acting," *New York Times* (26 February 1907).

³⁵ The same is true for performances of *Peer Gynt* made for film. See Egil Törnqvist, "Ibsen on Film and Television," *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. James McFarlane (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994). *Cambridge Collections Online*. Cambridge University Press. DOI:10.1017/CCOL0521411661.012 (Accessed 1 June 2011).

play continue to appear regularly; most recently, Robert Bly created a new version of *Peer Gynt* for the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis in 2008.³⁶ Time does not permit for an overview of all American translations/adaptations, each of which addresses a different philosophical or cultural/political issue.³⁷ However, there are two translations/adaptations that were produced after World War II that I believe influenced the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites*: Owen Dodson's *Bayou Legend*, and Paul Green's *Peer Gynt, The American Version*. Both these adaptations replace Ibsen's original 19th-century social/political commentary with references to the struggle for Civil Rights in the United States. In addition, both were written by playwrights known to Ellington and Strayhorn.

Owen Dodson was an American poet, novelist and playwright who came to national attention in 1944 when his play *New World A-Coming* was performed at Madison Square Garden in conjunction with the Negro Freedom Rally.³⁸ Like Ellington, whose orchestral composition *New World A-Coming* appeared the following year, Dodson based his piece on Roi Ottley's book. The play, subtitled "an original pageant of hope" was attended by a large, integrated audience.³⁹ After its success, Dodson was asked to produce a weekly radio show called *New World A-Coming* in 1944 for WMCA in New York. Duke Ellington supplied the theme song for this program, which was broadcast regularly until 1957.⁴⁰ Ellington and Strayhorn clearly knew Dodson's work, and Dodson was a strong supporter of both of them. He even wrote a set of poems inspired by Duke's music titled "The Morning Duke Ellington Praised the Lord and Six Black David's Tap-danced Unto."⁴¹ Dodson's writing is rich in symbolism and imagery. He was an intellectual who did not shy away from addressing important social issues, which included his own identity as a homosexual man. This last issue, especially, would have likely been important to Strayhorn.

Dodson was appointed director of the Theater Department at Howard University in 1947. His first production in this new position was an adaptation of *Peer Gynt* titled *Bayou Legend*, which adapts *Peer Gynt* to an African-American story-telling tradition.⁴² The play is divided into two acts: Act I is set in a Louisiana bayou in 1837; Act II begins on the coast of Panama in 1850, and concludes in the bayou. All the protagonists in Act I are free blacks living in poverty. Their lives in the bayou are hard but untroubled by issues of racial prejudice. Indeed, it is only when Peer ventures outside the bayou that he comes face-to-face with the issue of race relations. In Owen Dodson's retelling of *Peer Gynt*, the disturbing insane asylum scene towards the end of the play is populated by heartless white apes dressed in white suits, a

³⁶ In January 2008 the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis premiered a new translation of *Peer Gynt* by Robert Bly. For a review of the performance see: <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117935900?refCatId=33>, accessed May 10, 2011.

³⁷ For an overview of English translations of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* see: "Peer Gynt," *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English* Vol. 1, ed. Olive Classe (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 692-694.

³⁸ Bernard L. Peterson, Jr., "The Legendary Owen Dodson of Howard University: His Contributions to the American Theatre," *The Crisis* 86, no. 9 (November 1979): 376. A portrait of Owen Dodson in 1942, by photographer Carl Van Vechten is currently held in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, JWJ Van Vechten, Negro Collection II, "Owen Dodson. 1198,"

http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/dl_crosscollex/brbldl/oneITEM.asp?pid=2023459&iid=1091951&srctype= (Accessed 5 July 2011).

³⁹ James V. Hatch, *Sorrow Is the Only Faithful One: The Life of Owen Dodson* (Champagne-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 115. As Peterson notes, 376.

⁴⁰ Peterson, 376. As Stephen Hatch explained in the episode "New World a Coming, 1944-1957," of the radio documentary *Radio Fights Jim Crow*, produced by American RadioWorks for American Public Media in February 2001. To download the podcast and transcript for this program see: http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/jim_crow/newworld.html (Accessed 10 April 2011).

⁴¹ Hatch, 269-271.

⁴² In an interview published in 1975 Dodson explained that despite the similarity in titles, his adaptation of *Peer Gynt* was in no way related to William Grant Still's opera *Bayou Legend* (1941). Sarah Webster Fabio, "A Tribute to Owen's Song, Concert Chorus of Black Artistry in Collage," *Black World* 24, no. 9 (July 1975): 85-86.

blatant reversing of the “monkey” stereotype so often applied to African Americans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴³ Dodson did not use Grieg’s music for *Bayou Legend*. Instead, he hired Frank Fields to compose a score for the play that tapped into the African-American music traditions of early New Orleans.⁴⁴ Fields responded by creating an improvised piano accompaniment laden with folk tunes and spirituals.⁴⁵ Dodson’s *Bayou Legend* received favorable reviews during its run in Washington, DC. In 1950, it opened in New York, where it ran for six performances at Hunter College.⁴⁶

One of the few white men in the audience of *Bayou Legend* in 1948 was the playwright Paul Green, whose play *In Abraham’s Bosom* won a Pulitzer in 1926. A native of Hillsborough, North Carolina—and a neighbor of Strayhorn’s family there—Green was one of the South’s great Civil Rights crusaders. He had a strong interest in black folk culture and improving race relations, and he worked closely with a wide variety of Africa-American artists, including Richard Wright. Wright and Green collaborated, in 1941, on the adaption of Wright’s novel *Native Son* for the stage.⁴⁷ Several years later, Green was asked to create a translation/adaptation of *Peer Gynt* for Broadway. When Green learned of Dodson’s production, he traveled to Howard University in Washington, DC. After seeing the performance, Green noted in his diary that he was moved by the scene in the Asylum: “Apes dressed in ‘white suits’—white apes! The symbolism was obvious . . . Well, turn about is fair play!”⁴⁸ Ten days later, on 14 May, Green wrote a letter of thanks to Dodson, noting again the high quality of Dodson’s adaptation:

Dear Mr. Dodson,

I had to leave the other night without seeing you. But I wish to thank you for your kindness in providing me with three tickets to your *Bayou Legend* show. I found the whole production very interesting, especially the script. I think you improved dramatically in many ways on Ibsen. Your poetry was good too, and your folk images I found delightful. For several months some New York actors and theatre people have been thinking about doing *Peer Gynt* on Broadway. I was especially interested in seeing your show from the point of view of such an eventuality. Of course the New York production would be Ibsen’s play and not an American version of it, but I am sure that I as adapter of the Ibsen drama will have to work mighty hard to equal what you did in your interpretation. More power to you.

I tried to pay the young man at the desk for my tickets, but he wouldn’t allow it. Again, my cordial thanks.

Sincerely yours,

Paul Green⁴⁹

⁴³ For information on the history of depictions of African Americans as Apes in American popular culture see: Wayne Martin Mellinger, “Postcards from the Edge of the Color Line: Images of African Americans in Popular Culture, 1893–1917,” *Symbolic Interaction*, 15/4 (Winter 1992): 413–433; J. Stanley Lemons, “Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880–1920,” *American Quarterly* 29 (1977): 102–116.

⁴⁴ Ellington appears to have been an admirer of Fields’s music; a copy of Fields’s Symphony No. 1 is currently held at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection, Box 30, 11–12. 301.497–.498.

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, I have not yet found a surviving score.

⁴⁶ This performance received attention in the press: “Colleges to give ‘Bayou Legend’ 6 Days, Beginning Saturday,” *New York Times* (10 May 1950), 49.

⁴⁷ For a brief overview of Green’s and Wright’s collaboration see *The Carolina Story: A Virtual Museum of University History* posted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: <http://museum.unc.edu/exhibits/segregation/richard-wright-and-paul-green-bynum-hall-1941/> (Accessed October 13, 2010).

⁴⁸ Paul Green Diary entry dated 4 May 1948. Cf. *A Southern Life: Letters of Paul Green, 1916–1981*, ed. Laurence G. Avery (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 479. For the complete diary entry see Paul Green Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁴⁹ *A Southern Life: Letters of Paul Green, 1916–1981*, 479.

Green completed his adaptation of *Peer Gynt* in 1950, and despite his claim to Dodson in the letter cited above, he did eventually categorize his play as an “American Version” when he published it the following year. Green’s *Peer Gynt* premiered on 28 January 1951.⁵⁰ One week earlier, on 21 January, Green discussed his approach to adapting Ibsen’s play in a *New York Times* article titled “Modernization of *Peer Gynt*”:

I first read all the English translations of the play I could get: Archer, Roberts, Sharp, Ginsbury and others. Then I read the critics—Clark, Gassner, Henderson, Brandes, Gosse, Downs and Bradbrook. They all agreed that “Peer Gynt” was a long narrative poem. It was not a play. My problem was how to make it into a play—one that a modern American audience could understand, would be interested in, and willing to sit through. . . . Peer Gynt, the wastrel, the selfish egocentric seeking to find his life in outside things, might he not well be a symbol of modern man? Does he not illustrate our own tragedy—the tragedy of blindness and self waste?⁵¹

Once Green had determined the conceptual objective of his adaptation, he set to work. He rewrote the text “in somewhat colloquial speech” and compressed the five acts into “two parts with a single intermission.” Some scenes were cut and/or condensed; others were radically revised. For example, “the troll and asylum scenes—both mad” were “touched with enough . . . modern meaning, even political significance, for the audience to receive them from a point of view of their own.”⁵² With regards to the music, Green revised that element of the play as well:

I wrote the script through, then I plundered the archives at the Library of Congress for folk dances, tunes and hymns that would fit. We had long ago decided not to use the beautiful Grieg music. It wouldn’t go with the American kind of play we wanted. . . . It was decided to have incidental music written . . . a gifted composer, Lan Adomian, was brought in.⁵³

Like Dodson, Green addressed the Civil Rights movement in the Asylum scene. Here a down-trodden “negro workman” in laborer’s clothes approaches Peer. The worker “carries a mummy on his back, a short squatty effigy with the dry dead face of an aristocrat. The effigy wears a peaked headdress, with a gleaming cross standing up behind.” As Green explains in his stage directions, the effigy is “a creature of nationalism and prejudice and pride,” who “resembles a member of the Ku-Klux-Klan.” When the workman is asked what he is doing he responds:

I carry a blue-blood on my back. His ancestors go back to Pharaoh. He has fought wars . . . left and right . . . The people have praised him as a God and built temples to him. [*Furiously.*] Temples to him! To him! [*He strikes his breast.*] I want them to build temples to me—a working man. My folks are as old as Adam. [*Holding out his hands.*] Toil and sweat and calloused hands. The question is how to become a king like this fellow.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Reviews and editorial comments concerning the performance appeared in the *New York Times*. Most notable with regards to the current project is the debate the ensued over Green’s decision not to use Grieg’s music. Brooks Atkinson, “John Garfield Acts in Paul green’s Version of Ibsen’s ‘Peer Gynt’ for the Anta Series,” *New York Times* (29 January 1951), p. 15. Robert Hammerschlag, “Comments About Critic’s Appraisal of Current ‘Peer Gynt,’” *New York Times* (11 February 1951), p. 95.

⁵¹ Paul Green, “Modernization of ‘Peer Gynt,’ Dramatist Who Wrote American Version of Classic by Ibsen Describes How He Brought the Play Up to Date,” *New York Times* (21 January 1951): 83.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Peer looks at his hands and, upon seeing the worker's dark skin, responds: "Your case is hopeless." The workman is then advised to hang himself, a recommendation he accepts without pause: "Oh, oh, oh! [*With a cry.*] I'll do it! [*Calling around him.*] Who's got a rope? It will hurt a little at first, but soon I won't feel a thing."⁵⁵

With the help of a white carpenter standing nearby, the black man lynches himself as Peer looks on in horror, shocked to see "how obedient he is to orders."⁵⁶ In creating their updated versions of *Peer Gynt*, both Dodson and Green turned the Asylum scene into a commentary on race relations in America. Whereas Dodson used the irony of white apes to address the prevalence of racial stereotypes, Green confronted Civil Rights injustices with a shocking display of violence.

Green also decided that the use of music should be re-envisioned for *Peer Gynt*. At the back of his script, he indicated which scenes should receive music. Many of Green's musical numbers carry titles similar to those used in Grieg's suites; like Grieg, Green took his music cues from Ibsen's original stage directions. A comparison of Grieg and Green, however, reveals that three numbers from the Grieg suites: "Ingrid's Lament," "Arabian Dance," and "Stormy Evening at Sea" have been excluded from Green's list of musical numbers. (See Table 2.) This is because these scenes were either substantially diminished or completely eliminated from Green's version of the play. I should note that these are the same three movements that Ellington and Strayhorn omitted from their *Peer Gynt Suites* (Table 3).

This is where their adventures with *Peer Gynt* begin. In 1957, *Peer Gynt*, like Ellington and Strayhorn, found himself on stage at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival.

Grieg	Green
<i>Peer Gynt</i> Suite No. 1, Op. 46 1. Morning Mood 2. Åse's Death 3. Anitra's Dance 4. In the Hall of the Mountain King	<i>Peer Gynt</i> "American Version" 9. Song of the Drowsy Arab Warriors 7. Man that is Born of Woman (Hymn) 10. Anitra's Dance 6. Dance of the Trolls
<i>Peer Gynt</i> Suite No. 2, Op. 55 1. The Abduction of the Bride (Ingrid's Lament) 2. Arabian Dance 3. Peer's Homeward Journey (Stormy Evening at Sea) 4. Solveig's Song	*No corresponding music *No corresponding music *No corresponding music 2. Solveig's Theme

Table 2: Correspondences of Music in Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suites* & Green's *Peer Gynt* (1951)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Ellington/Strayhorn	Green
<i>Peer Gynt Suites 1 and 2</i> 1. Morning Mood 2. In the Hall of the Mountain King 3. Solveig's Song 4. Åse's Death 5. Anitra's Dance	<i>Peer Gynt</i> "American Version" 9. Song of the Drowsy Arab Warriors 6. Dance of the Trolls 2. Solveig's Theme 7. Man that is Born of Woman (Hymn) 10. Anitra's Dance

Table 3: Correspondences between Ellington/Strayhorn Suite & Green's *Peer Gynt* (1951)

Peer Gynt's Encounter with Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington

The Duke Ellington Orchestra first played the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in 1956, and the year was a high point in Ellington's career. His performance at the Newport Jazz Festival the month before had been hailed as an unprecedented comeback. He was even featured on the cover of *Time* magazine.⁵⁷ Most importantly, however, the period marked a solidification in Ellington's working relationship with his orchestra. Valued performers, like Johnny Hodges, had recently returned to the fold, and Ellington found himself fully reconciled with his close friend and collaborator, Billy Strayhorn. Strayhorn had distanced himself from the Ellington organization during the first half of the 1950s, a move that Ellington appears to have understood and respected.⁵⁸ When Strayhorn returned, Ellington offered him more artistic control of the orchestra's musical projects, among them the arrangement and recording of music from Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suites*.

As David Hajdu discovered through a series of interviews he conducted with Stratford management, Ellington's 1956 performances disappointed the festival's founder, Tom Patterson, and its music director, Louis Applebaum, who in 1955 added a Music Festival to the recently established Shakespeare Festival. Both Patterson and Applebaum had expected Ellington to compose a major work for the festival. According to Applebaum: "After he played the first year, he realized that he had missed an opportunity and offered to come back with something special."⁵⁹ Patterson agreed: "It wasn't until he came here and saw what we were about, that he got Strayhorn to start something for next year."⁶⁰ That something was *Such Sweet Thunder*.⁶¹

⁵⁷ See *Time Magazine Archives*: <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19560820,00.html>, accessed November 15, 2010.

⁵⁸ A detailed narrative of Strayhorn's distancing of himself from Ellington in the mid-1950s appears in Hajdu, 107-145. Van de Leur, 117-131, discusses this same period in Strayhorn's life and describes for the first time the various theatre projects Strayhorn worked on during the 1950s.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hajdu, 155.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ When Duke Ellington's granddaughter, Mercedes Ellington, spoke with documentary producer Richard Paul about the motivation behind *Such Sweet Thunder*, she described the work as "a thank-you note" to "the Shakespeare Festival in

Ellington caught the Stratford bug in 1956, and he campaigned hard for a chance to redeem himself. Initially, Stratford did not book the Ellington Orchestra for the following season; as of late April 1957, they still were not on the schedule. But interventions from Mary Jolliffe and Barbara Reid, publicity directors for the festival, eventually secured an invitation. Jolliffe, Reid, and the new artistic director for the Stratford Festival, Michael Langham, attended the premiere of *Such Sweet Thunder* at the Town Hall in New York on 28 April 1957 (Figures 3, 4 and 5).⁶² After hearing the high quality of the music, and Ellington's thoughtful dedication of the music to the Stratford Festival at the beginning of the concert, Jolliffe and Reid convinced Patterson and Applebaum to extend another invitation to Ellington and his orchestra. On 5 September 1957 the Ellington Orchestra closed out the Stratford Festival with a sprawling program that featured not one, but two new works: their made-for-television feature *A Drum is a Woman* (complete with narration) and *Such Sweet Thunder*.⁶³ Ellington and Strayhorn spent five days at the festival, socializing with attendees and other performers. Strayhorn, especially, was invigorated by the intellectual atmosphere. He attended several plays and a performance of Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*. Jolliffe reportedly introduced him to Peter Pears and Britten, who was especially interested in folk music at the time. According to Jolliffe, "[Strayhorn] was very bookish. He fit right in with the crowd."⁶⁴ Patterson also noted Strayhorn's willingness to engage with the Stratford participants: "I'm not saying I expected him to be unintelligent, but I frankly wasn't prepared for the depth of his knowledge. We were with literally the top Shakespeare scholars in the world, and Strayhorn didn't have a thing to apologize for. His knowledge was very deep."⁶⁵

I have revisited these encounters from 1957, because they mark the point, I believe, when Strayhorn first took an interest in *Peer Gynt*. Shakespeare and folk music were not the only topics of interest in September 1957. Under the guidance of Langham, the Stratford Festival, in collaboration with the Canadian Players, had just secured a contract with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to produce a live, televised performance of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.⁶⁶ This would be the Stratford Festival's initial foray into mass media, and because first impressions are important, the artistic leaders at Stratford—

Stratford." For an audio recording and transcript of the interview see:

<http://www.shakespeareinamericanlife.org/transcripts/ellington1.cfm> (Accessed 21 October 2010).

⁶² I would like to thank Ian Bradley for sharing with me the photo of Barbara Reid and Duke Ellington at the piano, the photo of Ellington, Reid, Langham and Jolliffe, and the undated drawing Ellington sent to Reid during negotiations with the Stratford Festival for a 1957 appearance. I also thank Mr. Bradley for giving me permission to include the images in this article. The photographs and the caricature are preserved in a scrapbook compiled by Barbara Reid during her years at Stratford. The scrapbook is now in Mr. Bradley's private collection. For a detailed description of the scrapbook and its contents see the entries in Ian Bradley's Blog, *Villes Ville*, dated 14 & 15 April, 2010:

<http://villesville.blogspot.com/2010/04/such-stuff.html> (Accessed 2 May 2010).

⁶³ On 5 November 2010, during a session titled "Duke Ellington's Late, Extended Works: Some New Critical Perspectives" at the American Musicological Society's 76th Annual Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, papers discussing the cultural contexts of *Such Sweet Thunder* and *A Drum is a Woman* were presented by David Schiff (Reed College), "Othello Revisited: *Such Sweet Thunder* and Politics," and John Wriggle (Graduate Center, CUNY), "'The Mother of All Albums': Duke Ellington's *A Drum Is a Woman*."

⁶⁴ Cf. Hajdu, 163.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ I would like to thank Jenna Leifso, a research assistant at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, for her assistance in gathering press clippings related to Duke Ellington's visits to Stratford and the television premiere of the Stratford Festival's *Peer Gynt*. The first public announcement I have found concerning the Stratford/Canadian Players joint venture to televise *Peer Gynt* appeared in July 1957: Gordon Sinclair, "Langham to Produce 'Peer Gynt'," *Toronto Daily Star* (15 July 1957), Press clipping (without page number) found in: University of Guelph Library: Canadian Players Collection XZ1 MS A120 Programs and reviews, 1955-65. I would like to thank Bev Buckie in the Archives and Special Collections at the University of Guelph Library for her assistance in gaining access to programs and press clippings in the "Canadian Players Collection." It should be noted that a televised version of *Peer Gynt* had been attempted previously, but with little success by NBC in 1952. For a review, see: Jack Gould, "Peer Gynt on TV Called Good Try," *New York Times* (5 March 1952), 39.

Patterson, Langham, Applebaum, and the director of the Canadian Players, Douglas Campbell—got into a series of debates about which Ibsen translation was best and the pros and cons of using Grieg’s music. One option was to use Paul Green’s “American Version.” It was the right length, 90 minutes, and had recently been staged successfully at Victoria College with a mix of Grieg tunes “used but sparsely” and some “less familiar tunes when necessary.”⁶⁷ But Campbell preferred Norman Ginsbury’s rhyming verse translation (shorn of all music), which was divided into three acts, a metaphor for the three ages of man.⁶⁸ Campbell’s troupe, the Canadian Players, had just completed a successful North American tour using Ginsbury’s *Peer Gynt*, and in an effort to show how effective the rhyming translation could be, he had his troupe present a private performance for the Stratford management shortly before Ellington and Strayhorn arrived.⁶⁹ Ginsbury’s translation, however, presented two major problems: First, it was 3½ hours in length, far too long for the contracted televised performance. Second, in creating his translation, Ginsbury had adhered closely to Ibsen’s original text and had made no effort to reconcile the social/cultural gap between Ibsen’s 19th-century Norway and modern-day North America. This last point, especially, would have troubled Langham, who since taking over as Artistic Director of the Stratford Festival in 1956 had worked hard to develop a forceful, non-traditionalist approach to performing works by great playwrights like Shakespeare and Ibsen.⁷⁰ As theatre scholars Danielle Van Wagner and Daniel Fischlin have noted, “[Langham’s] interpretive style often put him at odds with traditionalist attitudes. . . , which had been entrenched in the early years of the Stratford Festival.” His ambition was to update canonical plays and “to have the audience relate to the human experience and truth” portrayed on stage.⁷¹ Langham was a fan of Ellington’s work, and he might have approached him about composing music for *Peer Gynt*. If such an invitation was extended, no evidence of it currently exists, although a telegram to Reid from Jolliffe dated 12 May 1959 reveals that Langham was eager to have Ellington continue as a participant in the Stratford Festival (Figure 6).⁷² In the end, Stratford’s music director, Louis Applebaum composed the music for Stratford’s *Peer*

⁶⁷ A description of the music appeared was given by Herbert Whittaker, “Ibsen, Freed of Shackles, Comes in Three Plays,” *The Globe and Mail* (3 December 1955). Other descriptions of this production are found in: Herbert Whittaker, “Ibsen Revival,” *The Globe and Mail* (2 December 1955) and E.G. Wanger, “Peer Gynt Entertaining Spectacle,” *The Globe and Mail* (8 December 1955). Each of these articles are preserved as press clippings (without page numbers) in: University of Guelph Library, Canadian Players Collection XZ1 MS A120 Programs and reviews, 1955-65.

⁶⁸ Ginsbury published his translation in 1945, with a forward by Tyrone Guthrie, Michale Langham’s predecessor at the Stratford Festival. For a description of Campbell’s approach to *Peer Gynt* see Herbert Whittaker, “Peer Gynt—A Plank and a Passion,” *The Globe and Mail* (20 October 1956). Press clipping (without page number) found in: University of Guelph Library, Canadian Players Collection XZ1 MS A120 Programs and reviews, 1955-65.

⁶⁹ In an anonymous article titled “Stratford Affairs,” *The Globe and Mail* (12 August 1957), Press clipping (without page number) found in: University of Guelph Library, Canadian Players Collection XZ1 MS A120 Programs and reviews, 1955-65, information concerning various “crises” and “debates” among Stratford staff are hinted at, including the impromptu performance of *Peer Gynt* by the Canadian Players: “Part and parcel with this is the unofficial performance here tonight of *Peer Gynt* done with most of the people who played it for the Canadian Players’ tour. It was staged for Mr. Langham and Tyrone Guthrie, being the Festival’s choice as its first TV spectacular to be done for International Nickel this fall.”

⁷⁰ For an overview of Michael Langham’s career and approach to theater see: Bruce Webber, “Michael Langham, Classical Theater Director, Dies at 91,” *New York Times* (20 January 2011), and R.H. Thomson’s video-taped interview with Langham posted as part of “The Legend Library” on the Theatre Museum Canada’s website: <http://www.theatremuseumcanada.ca/legendlibrary.html> (Accessed 1 July 2011).

⁷¹ Danielle Van Wagner (with Daniel Fischlin), “Michael Langham’s *Timon of Athens* (1963),” http://www.uoguelph.ca/shakespeare/a_michael_langham.cfm (Accessed 26 June 2011).

⁷² I would like to thank Ian Bradley for sharing a photo of this telegram with me and giving me permission to reproduce it. This telegram is preserved in a scrapbook compiled by Barbara Reid during her years at Stratford. The scrapbook is now in Mr. Bradley’s private collection. For a detailed description of the scrapbook and its contents see the entry in Ian Bradley’s Blog, *Villes Ville*, dated 15 April, 2010: <http://villesville.blogspot.com/2010/04/such-stuff.html> accessed 2 May 2010.

Gynt. Indeed, four years passed before Langham and Ellington finally collaborated on a theatrical project at Stratford: the 1963 production of *Timon of Athens*.⁷³

Regarding the 1957 production of *Peer Gynt*, I cannot document the participation of Ellington or Strayhorn in the conversations at Stratford. However, since these discussions were addressed regularly in the daily press during the Ellington Orchestra's visit, I think it is fair to assume that the two composers might have been aware of them. Their music, in any case, reveals that they had acquired a keen understanding of the way *Peer Gynt* could be presented to contemporary American audiences. Strayhorn was the driving force behind Ellington's *Peer Gynt* project, and as I hope to demonstrate below, he appears to have consulted Paul Green's adaptation of *Peer Gynt* when creating his own adaptation of Grieg's *Peer Gynt* music.

As Walter van de Leur has demonstrated, early drafts of the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites*, currently in the Smithsonian's Ellington Collection in Washington, DC and the Billy Strayhorn Collection in Pittsburgh, PA reveal that four of the five movements originated with Strayhorn: "Morning Mood," "Åse's Death," "Anitra's Dance" and "Solvejg's Song."⁷⁴ The earliest known draft of "In the Hall of the Mountain King" is in Ellington's hand.⁷⁵

Duke Ellington and his Orchestra recorded *The Peer Gynt Suites* in 1960 over a three-day period: June 28, 29 and 30. On these days they also recorded several selections for a second album titled *Piano in the Background*. As Walter van de Leur has noted, these recording dates were unexpectedly added to the band's schedule when an engagement at Gene Norman's Crescendo Club in Los Angeles was cut short. Van de Leur hypothesizes that the *Peer Gynt Suites* was composed in haste during this period.⁷⁶ But it is not improbable to imagine that Strayhorn began composing his sketches a year or two earlier, and then brought them out when the extra recording days became available. It would not have been the first time that Ellington turned to his colleague and said: "Well Strays, what have you got?" This hypothesis is supported, I believe, by the recording sessions themselves (Table 4).

⁷³ For an overview of Ellington's music to *Timon of Athens* see Mat Buntin and Daniel Fischlin, "Shakespeare, Jazz, and Canada: The Ellington Connection," http://www.uoguelph.ca/shakespeare/multimedia/audio/m_a_jazz.cfm#Timon (Accessed 26 June 2011). As Buntin explains, Ellington's music "blends Afro-American jazz stylistics and social consciousness with the themes of Shakespeare's play: greed, generosity, betrayal, revolution, reconciliation, and resurrection." A similar description could be given for the Strayhorn/Ellington music devised with Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* in mind.

⁷⁴ Van de Leur, 139, 238 and 277. Walter van de Leur was especially helpful to me as I researched this topic. I was not given access to the original manuscripts currently held in the Billy Strayhorn Collection in Pittsburgh, PA. Consequently, Van de Leur kindly answered questions I had concerning the content of these sketches via email correspondence in September 2010, and he sent me a description of the ways in which Strayhorn's original drafts differed from the final 1960 recordings. Van de Leur's edition of the final score and parts of the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites 1 and 2* is currently in the repository of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, Billy Strayhorn, Master Editions Collection, [Box 5, Folder 8].

⁷⁵ Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection, Box 268, 4. 301. Min 5136. I would like to thank and Deborra Richardson, Wendy Shay and Kay Peterson at the Archives Center of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History for their invaluable assistance during my research visits to their facility.

⁷⁶ Van de Leur, 139.

28 June 1960:	“Morning Mood” (SS) “Anitra’s Dance” (SS) “Midriff” (PiB) “Take the ‘A’ Train” (PiB)
29 June 1960:	“Solvejg’s Song” (SS) “Åse’s Death” (SS) “What am I here for?” (PiB)
30 June 1960:	“The Wailer” (PiB) “In the Hall of the Mountain King” (SS) “Happy Go Lucky Local” (PiB)
SS = Recording issued as part of <i>Peer Gynt Suites</i> on <i>Swingin’ Suites</i> album (CL 1597) PiB= Recording issued on the <i>Piano in the Background</i> album (CL 1546)	

Table 4: *Peer Gynt Suites Nos. 1 & 2* Recording Sessions at Radio Recorders, Los Angeles

On the first day, June 28, the band recorded only Strayhorn tunes, and Strayhorn himself was at the piano. The following day they recorded “Solvejg’s Song” and “Åse’s Death” plus an Ellington tune, “What am I here for?” The third day, June 30, was all Ellington. As the chronology in table 4 reveals, the order in which the movements were recorded is not reflected in the layout of the *Peer Gynt Suites Nos. 1 & 2* on the *Swingin’ Suites* album. During the editing process, the various numbers on the album were arranged schematically, alternating movements in slow tempo with those in a more lively, swing style. But if one looks closely at the division of the music over the three recording sessions, one can see that each session focused on a separate scene in the play.

On June 28 the band recorded the music associated with Peer’s adventures in Africa: “Morning Mood” and “Anitra’s Dance.” In Green’s version, these two musical numbers come one right after the other; they represent Peer’s ill-gained prosperity and subsequent fall. In Green’s version of the play, the music that correlates with Grieg’s “Morning Mood” is titled “Song of the Drowsy Arab Warriors.” Strayhorn clearly kept this reference in mind when composing his adaptation of Grieg’s music; the twelve opening chords played by the full orchestra do not exist in Grieg’s original.⁷⁷ Whereas Grieg intended the primary melody of “Morning Mood” to evoke a pastoral sunrise, in Strayhorn’s version, the opening chords appear to take on the duty of serving as a sonic visualization of a hot, Moroccan sunrise. I propose Strayhorn added the new chordal sunrise depiction in an effort to separate the sunrise imagery from Grieg’s original tune. Creating a sunrise *before* the presentation of Grieg’s famous melody enabled Strayhorn to transform the tune into a characterization of the warriors, which on the *Swingin’ Suites* album are evoked by the woodwinds in a lethargic, and at times consciously out-of-tune, performance—a clear

⁷⁷ Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection, Box 268/4 0301.Min 5137.

reference to the drowsy Arab warriors awakening on stage.⁷⁸ (See Musical Example 3.) Underlying all of this is the steady pulse of a warrior beat played on two pitched drums. As Van de Leur has explained, the drum part was not included in Strayhorn's original sketch.⁷⁹ It was probably added during the recording process in June 1960.

Musical Example 3: Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: "Morning Mood"

Listen at: [Listen at: http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205](http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205)

"Anitra's Dance" also serves as a means of characterization in Strayhorn's music. In both Ibsen and Green, Anitra seduces Peer and then steals all his money and jewels.⁸⁰ (YouTube Example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYpX9GAsx6k>) In many ways "Anitra's Dance" follows a narrative similar to Ellington's "Pretty and the Wolf," a composition that he performed during his first appearances at the Stratford Festival in 1956. As Van de Leur has noted, Strayhorn's original sketches for this tune did not include the parts for piano, bass and drum.⁸¹ It is interesting to note that the Ellington Collection at the Smithsonian Museum for American History contains two versions of "Anitra's Dance." The first, in F minor, matches the recording on the *Swingin' Suites* album and the earliest sketches by Billy Strayhorn.⁸² The other version, in A minor, differs substantially and does not appear to have been created for the Ellington Orchestra, since the instrumentation is different, and I can find no reference to the ensemble playing this version during Ellington's lifetime.⁸³ According to the catalogue notes accompanying this score, the music was originally part of the Duke Ellington Library, and judging from the paper, which was produced by the Waterloo Music Company in Ontario, it appears that either Ellington or Strayhorn picked up this arrangement of "Anitra's Dance" during a visit to Canada.

June 29th was dedicated to Peer's relationships to the only two women who ever offered him unrequited love: Solveig and Peer's mother, Åse. In "Solveig's Song," especially, Strayhorn's familiarity with Green's "American Version" of *Peer Gynt* is clearly demonstrated. In both Ibsen's original version and Green's adaptation, Peer is drunk when he first meets Solveig at the beginning of the play. However, the placement of music titled "Solveig's Song" is different in the two versions. In Ibsen, the song appears at the end of Act 4: Peer has been gone for years, and the ever-faithful Solveig, still awaiting his return, sings her radiant song of devotion. In Green's version, Solveig's song is performed right at the moment when Peer abandons her. In his stage directions for the scene, Green describes how Solveig's song should be used as a means of contrasting Solveig's purity with Peer's sinful nature:

⁷⁸ Duke Ellington, *Three Suites*, (CBS 1990, CK 46825), track 10.

⁷⁹ Van de Leur related this information to me in an email dated 10 September 2010. This information is also included in the editorial notes to Van de Leur's edition Strayhorn's and Ellington's *Peer Gynt Suites Nos. 1 & 2*: University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, Billy Strayhorn, Master Editions Collection, [Box 5, Folder 8].

⁸⁰ Duke Ellington, *Three Suites*, (CBS 1990, CK 46825), track 14. A full recording is also available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYpX9GAsx6k> (Accessed June 26, 2011).

⁸¹ Van de Leur related this information to me in an email dated 10 September 2010. This information is also included in the editorial notes to Van de Leur's edition Strayhorn's and Ellington's *Peer Gynt Suites Nos. 1 & 2* currently held in the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center, Billy Strayhorn, Master Editions Collection, [Box 5, Folder 8].

⁸² Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection, Box 268/1 0301.Min 5134, Folder A.

⁸³ Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection, Box 268/2 0301.Min 5134, Folder B. Whereas some of the parts in Folder A are labeled with the performers' names, the parts in Folder B are identified by instrument type only. As to orchestration, in addition to the usual (for the Ellington Orchestra) parts for 5 reeds, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones and bass, Folder B contains parts for guitar (a transcription of the piano part), and drums.

[Peer] starts into the hut, foul as he is, and then out of his soul comes the hateful thought and image...Peer is struck back by his sins surging in him. The melody of SOLVEIG's song rises in the hut, weak and pleading and begging withal. The song is answered once more in PEER's soul. . . . Purity calls to PEER. Impurity ferments within him. . . . He moves away from the hut.⁸⁴

Strayhorn replicates this alternation between Peer's characterization as drunk and sinful, performed by "Booty" Wood on muted trombone, and Solveig's characterization as good and pure, performed by Jimmy Hamilton on what Irving Townsend described as his "very 'legitimate'" clarinet.⁸⁵ (YouTube Example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9r2ogrIOMQ&NR=1>)

In Green's *Peer Gynt*, the death of Peer's mother occurs directly after his abandonment of Solveig. Green requested music that would duly encapsulate the melancholy mood of this scene. Strayhorn responded by transforming Grieg's music into a New Orleans style funeral march.⁸⁶ (YouTube Example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9r2ogrIOMQ>)

It is interesting to note that after recording the two *Peer Gynt* tunes, Ellington decided to end the session by recording a new rendition of "What am I Here for?"—a tune he composed in 1942 with Frankie Laine. Although Ellington recorded an instrumental version of the tune on the day in question, the lyrics to the song are nonetheless important:

What am I here for,
Living in mis'ry,
Now that you've gone from my heart?
That was my fear for
You were my future
There was no reason to part.

'Till I hope you change your mind
And that somehow you will find
You are meant to be my own.
I'll be lost if I'm alone.

I know that you remember
All that you told me,
Times when you hold me so tight.
How could you grieve me?
How could you leave me,
Knowing your love is my light?

In your ear that should be
Thoughts of your return to me.
I will be happy,
Patiently waiting.
Knowing then, that's why I'm here.

⁸⁴ Green, 69.

⁸⁵ Irving Townshend, Booklet to the CD: Duke Ellington, *Three Suites*, (CBS 1990, CK 46825), 7; Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection, Box 268/6 0301.Min 5138. "Solveig's song is found on track 12 of the CD. A full recording is also available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9r2ogrIOMQ&NR=1> (Accessed 26 June 2011).

⁸⁶ Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection, Box 268/3 0301.Min 5135. Duke Ellington, *Three Suites*, (CBS 1990, CK 46825), track 13. A full recording is also available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9r2ogrIOMQ&feature=related> (Accessed 26 June 2011).

Upon listening to Ellington's rendition of "What am I Here For?" released on the *Piano in the Background* album in 1960, I cannot help but wonder if working on the two *Peer Gynt* tunes reminded Ellington of the song he had composed nearly 20 years earlier. The first-person narrative presented in the lyrics clearly evokes the state of mind shared by Solveig and Åse, women who are abandoned by Peer early in the play and spend most of their lives in an emotional limbo, awaiting his return.

On the third day of recording, June 30th, it was Ellington's turn to present his contribution to the suite. "In the Hall of the Mountain King" serves as a musical metaphor for Peer's adventure in the realm of the trolls. After seducing the Troll King's daughter, Peer claims his right to the throne. He drinks the troll ale and fastens a troll tail to his bottom. In Green's version, the Troll King then calls for his musicians, and the party begins. Green describes the music in his stage directions:

The music [the trolls] make is dissonant and staccato, . . . It serves as both an accompaniment to the dancers' feet and to the husky unison chant of vocables that sounds from the troll crew. The Troll King reaches out and gestures Peer close by him to the throne. Peer obeys and stands there holding his tail in his hand and beating time with it to the music.⁸⁷

Ellington clearly took up the party theme in his rendition, which devolves into chaos as the music progresses.⁸⁸ (See Musical Example 4.) In his liner notes for *Swingin' Suites* Irving Townsend noted that "Duke concocted his arrangement of 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' while strolling around the halls of the Chateau Marmont Hotel on Hollywood's Sunset Strip."⁸⁹ Indeed, it appears that Ellington had been pondering his contribution to the suite for at least ten days. During a taping of "Lullaby of Birdland" on June 20th, a quotation from "In the Hall of the Mountain King" found its way into an Ellington solo.⁹⁰ (See Musical Example 5.) Ellington probably composed his contribution to the suite in the days leading up to the final day of the recording session. A piano score of Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suites* currently held in the Duke Ellington Collection reveals that Ellington turned to Grieg's original score when mapping out the structure for his own piece.⁹¹

Musical Example 4: Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: "In the Hall of the Mountain King"

Listen at: Listen at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205>

Musical Example 5: Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: "Lullaby of Birdland"

Listen at: Listen at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205>

⁸⁷ Green, 53.

⁸⁸ Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Duke Ellington Collection, Box 268/4 0301.Min 5136. Duke Ellington, *Three Suites*, (CBS 1990, CK 46825), track 11.

⁸⁹ Townshend, 7. This is the only movement of the suite for which Townsend gives information regarding its initial inspiration; for the other movements, originally composed by Strayhorn, the only information given concerns the order of the soloists and vague description of the music.

⁹⁰ This rendition of "Lullaby in Birdland" was released on *Piano in the Background*. On the CD re-issue of the album (Columbia CK 87107) the recording in question is track 10, not "bonus track" under the title "Lullaby of Birdland [alternate take]." The quotation of Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King" begins at the 0:55 mark.

⁹¹ Van de Leur, 139, notes that a copy of the "widely available *Edition Peters* piano transcription of [Grieg's] *Peer Gynt*" is present in the Smithsonian's Duke Ellington Collection, and he surmises that Strayhorn used the edition when preparing his drafts of "Åse's Death" and "Solveig's Song." The only piano transcription currently held in the Ellington collection, however, is the G. Schirmer edition, and the only movements with markings are "Morning Mood" (where certain themes are labeled for clarinet) and "In the Hall of the Mountain King," which is heavily annotated in Ellington's hand. Indeed, it appears that Ellington, more than Strayhorn, relied on the Grieg score when preparing his adaptation. It should also be noted that only the Ellington movement uses the same key as the Grieg original. The Strayhorn movements are in different keys from Grieg's original.

The *Peer Gynt Suites* was a project designed for the recording studio. Consequently, the Duke Ellington Orchestra rarely performed the music live. In fact, I have not yet found documentation of a concert performance of the entire suite. Norway's reaction did not help matters. When the work was banned, Ellington and Strayhorn defended their efforts several times in the press; after that, they rarely talked about it. But in 1967, Ellington was caught off guard at a dinner party in Oslo by a fan with a microphone. Various journalists had asked Ellington and Strayhorn about Grieg, but this was the first time Ellington was asked about Ibsen's play (Interview Excerpt 1):

Interviewer: You've been asked about Grieg, the Grieg suite and all that, I know. If you should have written the music for the play, for *Peer Gynt*, would you have written it romantic or anti-romantic—if you should have written it yourself?

Ellington: [stammering] Well, I don't follow too readily with the "category" idea, you know? I mean, I don't think it could have been done any better than it was done. I'm sure it couldn't have been. You can only write fittingly. And I think when Edvard Grieg wrote it, he did it as it was. And that's the only thing. You can only do it fittingly, and when I say fittingly, I mean that you do it so that it fits the story, the characters that are created in the fiction, and the people who are going to play the characters—it has to be done to fit them. Then the matter of orchestration comes in.⁹²

Interview Excerpt 1: Duke Ellington Interviewed by Gunnar Bull Gundersen

Listen at: [Listen at: http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205](http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0005.205)

Note that Ellington never specifically states who wrote the *Peer Gynt Suites*—himself, Strayhorn, or both of them together. Instead, he focuses on the issue that like Grieg's music, the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites* was composed with the story, the characters, and the actors in mind. The goal was to present the music "fittingly," through new orchestrations. In 1969, two years after the tragic death of Billy Strayhorn, Ellington returned to Norway for a series of concerts. The ban prohibiting the performance and distribution of the Ellington/Strayhorn *Peer Gynt Suites Nos. 1 & 2* had recently been lifted, and a reporter asked Ellington why he still refused to play the suite. This time, Ellington gave Strayhorn full credit for the music, and his response marked the end of *Peer Gynt*'s adventures with the band:

We shall never play it again. Billy Strayhorn made it with so much love that there is no fun in playing it now that it has been vetoed. Can you think of any bigger fools than us—to put in so much work only to have it refused?⁹³

⁹² I would like to thank Arne Neegaard for sending me a copy of this interview conducted by the Norwegian author Gunnar Bull Gundersen during Ellington's visit to Oslo in 1967. I would also like to thank him for giving me permission to include an excerpt of the interview in this article.

⁹³ Cf Cooke. *Oslo Aftenposten*, 4 November 1969.

Conclusion

To conclude, I will answer the question I posed at the beginning of this article: Why *Peer Gynt*? Because *Peer Gynt* mattered in 1960. Because it was an artistic platform for commentary about the modern age. The *Peer Gynt Suites* probably originated in the mind of Billy Strayhorn in 1957, but only came to fruition, in its final form, through Strayhorn's collaboration with Ellington over the period of several days in 1960. Like Grieg, Strayhorn was drawn to the way the *Peer Gynt* story could be used to reflect the ills of modern society. I think Strayhorn and Ellington encountered Paul Green's American Version of *Peer Gynt* during their week at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in 1957. Strayhorn's sketches for four movements of the *Peer Gynt Suites Nos. 1 & 2* reveal that he studied Green's script closely, and with Ellington, composed music that presented a revisionist narrative of Ibsen's anti-hero. To quote Ellington himself: "I don't think it could have been done any better."⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Gunnar Bull Gundersen interview. In his autobiography, Edward Kennedy Ellington, *Music is My Mistress* (Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday, 1973) 466, Ellington reminisced fondly about the creation of the *Peer Gynt* Suite: "We liked what we did, and we had fun doing it, but we did not try to do better than the symphony people. There was a certain amount of humor in it, and unfortunately the Grieg Society in Norway barred it. I don't think Grieg would have barred it."