

Anton Edvard Pratté (1796-1875) - A Brief Biography

The recently rediscovered Swedish harpist and composer, Anton Edvard Pratté (1796-1875), once described by his contemporaries as "The Harp King of the North", wrote over two hundred pieces of music. He enjoyed a highly-praised career as a harp virtuoso, both in Scandinavia and continental Europe, alongside other illustrious figures such as Elias Parish-Alvars (1808-1849) and Nicholas - Charles Bochsa (1789 - 1856). Interestingly, a critic compared Pratté's playing with the latter, stating that he was "the teacher" and Bochsa "the student"!

He was born Georg Anton Brát in Haida, Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic), into a large German-speaking family of marionette/ puppet-masters. The Brát family puppet theater company was widely known and extremely popular, and Pratté's childhood consisted mostly of endless touring with his family all over northern Europe. Young Pratté was noticed early on by numerous newspapers as "*playing wonderfully on his David harp during the show interludes*".

It was during such a tour in Sweden while still a teenager that he decided to run away from a brutal father and harsh lifestyle. Changing his name to Anton Edvard Pratté, he embraced an international solo career, mostly playing his own compositions.

Countless enthusiastic reviews about Pratté's concerts, which always seemed to be well attended, are to be found in Swedish and international newspapers: "*...an authentic and genuine artist, who offers to his audience elegant and precious compositions in the best style.*" (Wiener Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung, 1847); "*miraculous technique*", "*deep expression*", "*extraordinary verve and virtuosity*", "*delicate and energetic touch, artistic perfection*", "*impresses in an indescribable way*", "*a true master, who reaches that point where all difficulties between the musician and the instrument ends*" (various Swedish newspapers).

From this information we can see that he was a virtuoso of high calibre, though there is still a mystery to unfold about with whom and where he learned to play the harp and to compose. Pratté himself claimed to have received personally from the Russian Tsar the Erard harp that he carried all over Europe on a specially made carriage.

Amazingly enough, despite the tremendous success he had had in most of the European music capitals and the multiple offers for permanent positions in major orchestras (including the Swedish Royal Opera), Pratté chose instead to live most of his adult life in the quiet region of eastern Sweden. From there he travelled between different aristocratic estates where he could stay in exchange for music teaching. He was very active in the region as a conductor, being, for example, the chief conductor of the ancestor of my very own orchestra, the Norrköping Symphony! In addition to his music mastery, Pratté was a talented painter and poet and despite severe sight loss and other health issues, he seemed to have performed concerts at a very high level until the end of his life in his eightieth year, in 1875.

The composing style of Pratté is a cross-over between Classical elements that remind us of Mozart, Haydn, Hummel or Boieldieu and Romanticism, including influences by Beethoven, Weber and Italian *Bel Canto*. He is unanimously praised as a composer by critics for "*his savoir-faire, his sense of instrumentation, full and harmonic, as well as his sense of form*".

He composed concertos, chamber music works with or without harp, overtures, symphonies, grand oratorios, hunting songs as well as official pieces for the Swedish Royal Court. His compositions also included numerous virtuosic works for solo harp, often Fantasies based on opera themes or folk melodies from the European regions and countries where he was performing.

The French harpist **Delphine Constantin-Reznik** has established herself worldwide as a passionate advocate of her instrument. In addition to performing a wide range of the standard repertoire, the critically-acclaimed harpist frequently moves away from the traditional route as she searches for hidden gems in the broader harp repertoire. She works closely with the leading living composers of our time, always seeking to position the harp within new constellations.

Constantin-Reznik's passion for pursuing new repertoire for the harp has resulted in the unexpected discovery of the works of Romantic harp virtuoso and prolific composer **Anton Edvard Pratté** (1796-1875), who, coincidentally, lived in the very same region and town as herself: Norrköping, Eastern Sweden.

Her ongoing research surrounding Pratté's works has recently led her to perform his harp concerto, chamber music and solo works - the first performances since the composer's death.

To celebrate the revival of his music after so many years, Constantin-Reznik founded the **International Pratté Harp Festival and Competition**, Norrköping, for which she serves as Artistic Director.

Read more about Delphine Constantin-Reznik here:

<https://www.delphineconstantinharpist.com/biography/>

Dear Harpist Friends,

I am delighted to introduce you to this fascinating collection of new repertoire for our instrument, thanks to Alaw Music Publishing. These hidden gems were created by the Swedish harp virtuoso and composer, Anton Edvard Pratté (1796-1875), in his lifetime highly-praised and successful but never published to this day!

A few years ago I had the good fortune to come across Pratté's name and to study his manuscripts. I soon realized how marvellous was his music, and that we were both based in the same city of Norrköping, Sweden!

For interpretation, most dynamics and fingerings have been added by myself and should be regarded as suggestions only.

I wish you much pleasure in discovering the music of Anton Edvard Pratté!

Yours sincerely,

Delphine Constantin-Reznik

www.delphineconstantinharpist.com

www.pratteharpfestival.se

The "*Souvenir de la Norvège: Fantasia Romantique*" also called in Norwegian "*Fra Fjelle og Dale*" (From the Mountains and the Valleys), is inspired by the numerous trips Pratté made to Norway in the 1840s.

The manuscript I have been working from is dated November 1853 in Norrköping, but it actually appears that this music had been performed by Pratté at least as early as 1849! This is not so surprising, since Pratté sometimes reviewed and improved his compositions, often giving to those new versions different titles!

This Fantasy is based on four Norwegian folk songs: *En liten Gut ifra Tistedal'n* (A Little Boy from Tistedalen); *Å kjøre vatten og kjøre ved* (O Haul the Water, O Haul the Wood); *I fjol gjett je gjeita* (Last Year, I Guess) and *Stusle Sundagskvelden* (A Gloomy Sunday Evening).

This Norwegian Fantasy was among Pratté's own favourites and he performed it frequently, always to very appreciative audiences.