

Inspiring Repertoire for Enrichment: Edvard Grieg's Lyric Pieces Opus 12 as a Pedagogical Tool

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: One of the enduring challenges for piano teachers is selecting appropriate repertoire to enrich a student's piano education, which has foundations in leveled books. A response to the challenge is to select a collection from a composer's works to immerse the student in the style and technical demands of that specific composer. In this study, Edvard Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* Opus 12 were investigated for their effectiveness as pedagogical tools for intermediate piano students. The analysis included: (1) contextualizing the collection historically through related literature; (2) identifying primary technical elements to determine an effective pedagogical approach for introducing the specific elements to students; and (3) identifying stylistic features and Norwegian cultural connections to provide meaningful insights for students' interpretation of the pieces and lead to a set of guiding questions to pose to students. Historically, Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* capture the Norwegian spirit by incorporating folkloric elements into classical compositions, and his intention in the compositions was to supply his music school with short, digestible instructional material. The *Lyric Pieces* are accessible piano pieces that allow students to discover complex technical elements such as melodic nature, varied approaches to the keys (touch), complex rhythms, and ornamentation. They also provide opportunities for students to grow their understanding of stylistic features through the titles and descriptive phrases, as well as connections to Norwegian culture, which allow them to develop their interpretation of the pieces. This study contributes to the professional learning of studio piano teachers and the application of Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* in teaching intermediate students.

Introduction

Piano teachers often incorporate Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* as inspiring repertoire for their students. The *Lyric Pieces* are appealing to students as there is "melodic charm," "uncomplicated harmony," and the music is "easily understood" (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 105). The motivation for piano teachers to pursue teaching students these pieces is to explore the historical context and composer along with the pedagogical value and approaches. This kind of immersion in a single composer's works is an opportunity that is a contrast to leveled books that contain a sampling of different composers and

eras. Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 are accessible piano pieces that are pedagogically enriching by allowing students to discover complex technical elements, such as melodic phrasing, approach to touch, rhythmic patterns, and ornamentation, concomitantly with a melodic, song-like style. To set the scene, the historical context surrounding the creation of these short piano pieces will be explored. In determining the pedagogical value of Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12, an analysis of the collection will be conducted. Areas of analysis will focus on: (1) identifying the primary technical elements to determine an effective pedagogical approach to introducing the specific elements to students; and (2) identifying stylistic features and Norwegian cultural connections to provide meaningful insights

for students' interpretation of the pieces and lead to a set of guiding questions to pose to students. This order of analysis parallels how piano teachers introduce a new piece by first addressing foundational technical elements and then moving toward understanding and interpreting the piece through stylistic and contextual considerations.

Historical Context

Edvard Grieg (1843-1908) is a well-known Romantic era composer and Norway's most popular composer ("Edvard Grieg" 89). His popularity blossomed with compositions such as *Piano Concerto in A Minor*, Op. 16 and *Peer Gynt*, Op. 23, where the development of his unique style is displayed (Halverson 18). It cannot be overlooked, however, that Grieg also became a household name because of his tremendous pedagogical pieces for piano that contained attractive melodies and Norwegian character (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 102). In particular, the first collection of Grieg's *Lyrical Pieces*, Op. 12 introduced the world to the music Grieg had to offer: the amalgamation of folk music and classical music (Foster 67).

Grieg's journey to music was not unlike those of great composers who preceded him, although he was no child prodigy. Influenced by his mother who was a gifted pianist, Grieg was fascinated with the piano and began composing at nine years old (Jarrett 1). Internationally renowned Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, a relative of Grieg, heard some of Grieg's compositions and encouraged the young composer to study at the Leipzig Conservatory in Germany (Jarrett 1). The training from Grieg's mother and at the Conservatory allowed Grieg to have a musical and compositional foundation upon which to build (Jordan 60). But Grieg desired individuality and independence after being surrounded by the music of composers like Frédéric Chopin, Robert Schumann, and Felix Mendelssohn, which led him to Copenhagen, Denmark between 1863 and 1866 ("Edvard Grieg" 89; Halverson 18). At this time, Grieg met Rikard Nordraak (1842-1866), a Norwegian composer who encouraged Grieg to not become an imitator of German romanticism but to develop a voice that contained strong Norwegian

elements (F. G. E. 642; Halverson 18).

To create authentic Norwegian musical culture within his compositions, Grieg returned to Norway and settled in the capital city, Christiania, from 1866 to 1874 (Jarrett 3). The Norwegians valued folk traditions in the arts and took pride in the traditional music that demonstrated patriotism (Foster 3-5). National romanticism played a key role in the development of the public's interest in everything Norwegian as the non-German European countries were striving to develop distinct identities (Jarrett 13-14). Grieg experienced these same desires personally upon leaving the Conservatory, where he looked to Norwegian life for the development of his unique and individual style. He succeeded in refining a style that causes one to immediately identify the piece's composer to be Grieg. Grieg's use of national folk traditions influenced Béla Bartók and Igor Stravinsky in their creation of a successful twentieth-century style that included folk music from their nations, innovatively weaving it into their music (Halverson 20).

When Grieg lived in Leipzig, he became friends with Dr. Max Abraham who was the director of C. F. Peters, a publishing firm. The relationship allowed Grieg to have his compositions published under the Peters imprint as the publisher was deeply committed to the music that Grieg produced (Carley 24). Dissemination of Grieg's works was strong, enabling a wide audience to become captivated by his music. Grieg's piano works were of great interest to Peters and in particular Grieg's collections of *Lyrical Pieces*, of which he created ten between 1867 and 1901. In total, there are 66 *Lyrical Pieces* which enabled Grieg to become known as a leader in piano composition and his music to be found in homes globally. The *Lyrical Pieces* have become commonly used as instructional material for the piano from Grieg's time to the present day (Halverson 70). It has even been suggested that Grieg's motivation was partially to compose the first two collections of *Lyrical Pieces* for pedagogical use in the music academy in Christiania founded by Grieg himself (Grimley 42). As a masterful miniaturist, it is appropriate that his pedagogical intentions are contained within the short piano pieces (Dale 196).

Pedagogical Analysis

Edvard Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 were first published in Copenhagen in 1867 and were the first of the ten collections published (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 104). The collection contains 8 short piano pieces: *Arietta*, No. 1; *Waltz*, No. 2; *Watchman's Song*, No. 3; *Fairy Dance*, No. 4; *Folk-song*, No. 5; *Norwegian*, No. 6; *Album Leaf*, No. 7; and *National Song*, No. 8. These pieces were "written primarily for didactic purposes" (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 105) and demonstrate that even intermediate level pieces meant for students and amateurs can be charming and captivating while providing immense pedagogical value.

Each piece is succinct, which allows the students to learn new technical and expressive elements of higher caliber without the distractions of excessive demands of longer works (Cook 25). The more complex technique can be the main focus of the learning process and is reinforced through the repetitive nature of the *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 as certain motives and sections are frequently repeated with the pieces often structured in ABA or ABABA forms. In addition, Grieg composed these pieces with the freedom to express what he desired, which lent the *Lyric Pieces* to being created based on aesthetics (Jarrett 13). This approach provides students with pieces that draw out internal motivation and a point of connection to the beauty of playing the piano, encouraging students to be part of the music-making process.

In the collection's formation, it is evident that Grieg was not focused on creating an integrated collection by using cohesive keys or forming pieces around a central idea as Schumann did (Dale 194). Rather, it seems as though the pieces were put together out of the simple fact that their inspiration occurred close in time (Dale 194). Students then have an assortment of choices when working on the *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 as there is no specific order to learn them and the difference in level of difficulty makes it possible for students at a variety of levels to experience Grieg's compositions (Cook 25). The strength of Grieg's work, both in *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 and others, is the powerful character,

personal style, and national sense that permeates the music (Dale 194).

Melody as a Technical Element

At the intermediate level, finger independence plays a significant role in increasing the difficulty of pieces. Often, students are expected to cover two voices in a single hand resulting in three or four voices occurring simultaneously. In Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12, emphasis is placed on the exquisite melodies nestled within the satisfying harmony that typically accompanies it. In such instances, showcasing the melody becomes a great ambition for students as the pedagogical value allows teachers to draw attention to this primary technical element. *Arietta* contains three voices in which the top voice carries the melodic line (ex 1). Control is required for the differentiation between the sixteenth notes of the inner voice and the melody. The melodic line consists of many repeated notes, requiring students to take care in shaping the line and strengthening their fourth and fifth fingers to rise to the occasion.



Ex. 1: *Arietta* excerpt with three voices.

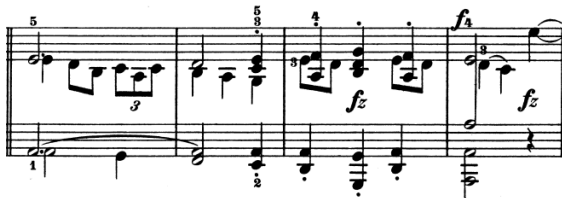
Waltz provides an opportunity for students to further develop their left hand leading with the melody (ex 2). Frequently the left hand is reserved for accompaniment, especially in elementary music where it fills out the sparse melody through chords and Alberti bass.



Ex. 2: Left hand melody in *Waltz*.

In *Norwegian*, the melodic line is found in the inner voice played by the right hand. The piece demands agility from the melodic line while the top voice anchors the hand to the keyboard through the fifth finger.

Additional challenges appear when the right hand eighth note melody is competing with quarter note dyads for attention (ex 3).



Ex. 3: Melody played by right hand in inner voice with quarter note dyads.

In *Album Leaf*, the melodic line, similarly, is found in the middle voice but this time played by the left hand (ex 4). Again, this provides the opportunity for left hand development in a slightly more demanding context of being responsible for the bottom line as well, which contains prolonged notes to supplement the harmony.



Ex. 4: Melody played by left hand in inner voice.

Teachers can approach the technical element of melody through a combination of discovery and rote learning (Jacobson et al. 18-19). For example, students may be asked to identify the melodic line, come up with lyrics to accompany the melody, sing the melody as they play, or play the melody independently to work on phrasing. Specific attention may be drawn to dynamics that are meant only for the melody, such as in *Arietta*, and discussion around melodic phrasing with the other voices playing a supporting role may be valuable. Due to the intrinsically melodic nature of Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12, these pieces can be used as a pedagogical tool to develop finger independence and melodic phrasing.

Touch as a Technical Element

The way in which one approaches the keys is vital to tone production and continues to confront students in their development of primary piano techniques. From varied articulation such as staccato, legato, and tenuto, to arm weight, the concept and production of touch is vast. For intermediate students, some types of touch like staccato and legato, in a rudimentary sense, have been mastered. Although these types of touch can be further cultivated, Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 allow for a deeper exploration of touch beyond basic articulation. One challenge that students face is hand movement, which requires preparatory gestures and advanced planning to execute. When approaching *Waltz*, students must be able to aim their left hand jumps to accurately play the correct notes (ex 5). In addition, the approach to the key must be kept in mind as the jump may cause students to accent the second beat of the measure. One way that teachers may train a student's ear to become more aware is by playing the beginning measures of the left hand in several different ways and having the student identify the correct approach. These same technical requirements are seen in both *Folk-song* and *Album Leaf*, demonstrating the value of developing this technique (ex 5).



Ex. 5: Left hand jumps in *Waltz*, *Folk-song* and *Album Leaf*, respectively.

Touch can also be discussed by taking into consideration the particular piece as a whole. In comparing *Fairy Dance* to *National Song*, the approach to producing the desired sound is quite different. *Fairy Dance* demands a quick, light touch focused on the release of the notes. Students can be directed by their teacher to find the clues that point towards the touch, emphasizing articulation, dynamic notation, and descriptions like “sempre staccato.” In contrast, *National Song* calls for a depth of sound that is achieved through arm weight and a firm but relaxed approach of the keys. Teachers can help students develop an understanding of arm weight through exercises such as dropping their arm on their lap and feeling the weight of the teacher’s arm and fingers on their forearm and recreating that feeling themselves. Through Grieg’s *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12, students are exposed to more technically advanced elements of tone that are used to cultivate the pianist’s touch, which can then be applied to a breadth of repertoire.

Complex Rhythms and Ornamentation as Technical Elements

To equip students to tackle more advanced pieces, it is important to introduce a variety of complex rhythms and ornamentations. In the studio setting, teachers can provide strategies for students in their approach to problem-solving and conquering challenging timing. Grieg’s *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 provides opportunities for students to encounter technically complex rhythms and ornamentation that are musically rewarding. *Watchman’s Song* displays complex rhythms in the intermezzo in the form of thirty-second note septuplets as well as eighth note triplets preceding a dotted quarter note and eighth note (ex 6). In this case, subdivision is key as there are long periods of held notes followed by complex rhythms. Teachers can encourage students to subdivide through a variety of counting methods including descriptive, syllabic, and metric counting (Johnson et al. 38).



Ex. 6: Complex rhythms in the “Intermezzo” of *Watchman’s Song*.

In *Folk-song*, complex rhythms are explored in the context of the proximity of triplets, dotted eighth-note and sixteenth-note rhythms, and syncopation (ex 7). Near the end of the piece, these three elements are contained in a single measure. A variety of pedagogical approaches aid in strengthening students’ understanding of these rhythms. Through discovery learning, students can be guided to identify the main beats and subdivisions as well as where the rhythmic emphasis should be placed. Rote learning can be used for students to hear and feel the rhythm of that section played by the teacher and then attempt to mimic what they heard.



Ex. 7: Complex rhythms in *Folk-song*.

Folk-song also incorporates ornamentation into rhythmically interesting sections, like at the beginning of the piece where a triplet precedes two ornamentation notes and four eighth notes (ex 8). These ornaments embellish the music in an improvisatory manner and enable students to experiment with time. Ornamentation is found throughout *Album Leaf* as grace notes (ex 8) and in addition to contributing to the complexity of timing, it helps build the character and touch required for the piece. *Waltz* and *Fairy Dance* contain embellishments which are most notably at the end of each piece (ex 8). Experiencing complex rhythms and ornamentation in Grieg’s *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 is valuable in expanding students’ abilities to meet the demands of the technical rhythmic elements of advanced pieces.



Ex. 8: Ornamentation in *Folk-song*, *Album Leaf*, *Waltz* and *Fairy Dances*, respectively.

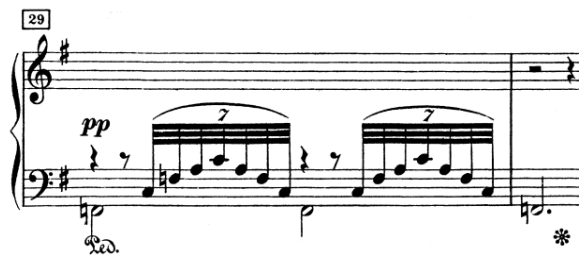
Stylistic Features

Beyond the technical elements required to fluently play a piece, stylistic features embedded in the piece are key to the interpretation of the piece as a whole. One of the first clues of the style of a piece is the title as in many instances it communicates through words the composer's intention. Before 1867, Grieg did not include descriptive titles with his compositions and the first time descriptive titles were used was for the *Lyric Pieces*, Op.12. From that time onwards, Grieg used descriptive titles that accurately convey the music contained in the piece such that they can be used as a guide to a musician as to what category the piece may belong to (Dale 197). For example, the title *Fairy Dance* may cause the musician to think about how a fairy flies around, buzzing with energy and lightness. By incorporating these ideas into the music, the staccato chords develop their character and contrast the restless eighth notes. The title *Waltz* informs the musician of the style in which the music comes from. This German dance is characterized by the 3/4 meter, with the left hand emphasizing beat one before leaping higher for beats two and three.

When introducing students to these pieces, teachers can draw attention to the title and ask the students to point out aspects of the piece that represent the title. Students can be guided to ponder the title and meaning by inquiring about what they think of when they hear the name of the piece, what

they imagine in their mind, and what emotions or feelings the piece stirs up. More specific questions can also help the students connect the piece to their own personal experiences. For example, a teacher could ask if a student has ever heard a waltz before and what similarities they notice between their experience and the second *Lyric Piece*, *Waltz*. Guiding questions are vital for discovery learning because they help students develop problem-solving and critical thinking, which can be carried over to learning new pieces.

Conversation can be led to the descriptive text that often denotes tempo as well as stylistic features. In *Watchman's Song*, there is text describing how it was written after Grieg saw a performance of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and echoes the "eerie spirits of the night" in the *intermezzo* section (Dale 198). In particular, the arpeggios cultivate the spirits (ex 9) and are one of the most noticeable features of Grieg's works (Cook 25). The description at the beginning of the piece, *molto andante e semplice*, points towards the interpretation of the chorale-like piece being played with beautiful simplicity.



Ex. 9: Arpeggios in *Watchman's Song*.

Arietta includes the description *poco andante e sostenuto*, which is demonstrated in multiple ways through the notation of the piece. There are sustained left hand notes throughout the piece (ex 1), slurs that connect groupings of sixteenth notes and occasionally the melody, and fermatas on the last notes, all pointing towards the *sostenuto* aspect of the piece (ex 10). Discussions of these terms and how the information impacts the interpretation of the piece are vital for students to understand.



Ex. 10: Slurred sixteenth notes and fermatas in *Arietta*.
Connections to Norwegian Culture

Many of the *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 also contain connections to Norwegian culture that are unique to Grieg's style, providing students with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of other cultural music, specifically Norwegian culture and folk music style. Pieces like *Norwegian*, *Folk-song*, and *National Song*, demonstrate strong connections to Norwegian music throughout the pieces and in their titles. Grieg is celebrated for having Norway speak through his music by using the music to stir up national pride in those who are graced with the sound (Wergeland 377). In fact, the nationalist Bjornson was inspired to set text to *National Song*, enabling Grieg to further develop the song's Norwegian identity when arranging the song for a male chorus (Benestad and Halverson 2001). The connection between Norway's past and future is captured in the music produced by Grieg. He was anchored to the people of Norway and tastefully melded together his experiences in Norway, abroad, and as an individual (Monrad-Johansen 6).

A counterclaim to this is that Grieg is not an example of a nationalistic composer because as much as his music can be thought of as Norwegian, it could be even more so described as completely "Griegian" (Gilman 225). Grieg's individuality is demonstrated through his particular mannerisms and idioms that pervade his compositions, which are then categorized as Norwegian (Gilman 229). However, many agree that these mannerisms and idioms originate from sounds found within Norwegian folk music and traditions. The term "Grieg motif" has been attributed to a three-note motive involving a minor second and then a major third (major version) or a major second and then a minor third (minor version) which is found throughout Norwegian folk music (Jarrett 15; Jordan 60). The motif is found in *Folk-song* (major version) and *Norwegian* (minor

version) and is part of the melodic line within these pieces (ex 11). Another key feature is the pedal points indicative of the open strings of folk instruments such as the Hardanger fiddle (Jordan 48). These pedal points can be found in *Folk-song* and *Norwegian* where the duration is quite short in the former, while long and persistent in the latter.



Ex. 11: Motif (major version) in *Folk-song* and motif (minor version) in *Norwegian*.

Piano pieces emulating Norwegian folk music and dance often also incorporate rapid, complex rhythms combined with sustained notes all in one hand, touching on the spirit of Norwegian dances such as springers, halling, and gangar (Cook 25). This is observed continually throughout the A section in the right hand of *Norwegian* (ex 12).



Ex. 12: Emulating the spirit of Norwegian dances.

In exposing students to these cultural connections, teachers can explain the background of Norwegian folk songs and Grieg's incorporation of these ideas into his own music. To guide students to recognize these important aspects, teachers can ask students to identify where these key features are found in the music and how they can sound like the instruments they are imitating. By understanding the connection of the *Lyric Pieces*, Op. 12 to Norwegian culture, students can interpret the pieces in a way that reflects the underpinnings of the composition.

Conclusion

Through synthesis of historical context, primary technical elements, and stylistic and Norwegian influence, Edvard Grieg's melodic and expressive *Lyrical Pieces*, Op. 12 can be used as a valuable pedagogical tool for teachers to expand the breadth of students' musical experiences with the piano. The study's analysis of the pedagogical potential of Grieg's *Lyrical Pieces*, Op. 12 contributes to the field of research on Grieg's compositions as there is a lack of research on this first collection of *Lyrical Pieces*. Future research on the use of Grieg's *Lyrical Pieces* could explore empirical approaches to incorporating these pieces into studio teaching and investigating what students learn as well as their attitudes towards the pieces. Two options of application could be: 1) having students choose one piece from the collection to learn; or 2) having students learn the whole collection. Then, comparisons between the two groups could inform teachers of the benefits and drawbacks of each method. This study also encourages piano teachers and piano pedagogy researchers to explore other composers who put together pedagogically enriching collections similar to that of Grieg. Examples of such collections include *Eleven Short Pieces for Piano* by Violet Archer, *A Zoo for You* by Lidia Niamath, *Thirty Pieces for Children* Op. 27 by Dmitry Kabalevsky, and *Album for the Young* Op. 68 by Robert Schumann. By thorough examination of Edvard Grieg's *Lyrical Pieces*, Op. 12, many pedagogical possibilities have been uncovered to enrich a piano student's musical learning and inspire future exploration of the pedagogical potential of Grieg's other collections of *Lyrical Pieces*.

Glossary

Accompaniment: the parts of music, other than the melody, which support the melody.

Alberti bass: broken chords played in a repeated pattern for left hand accompaniment.


Arpeggios: notes from a chord played consecutively, ascending or descending, instead of simultaneously.

Articulation: how the note is played, whether the notes are connected or separated.

Beats: the steady pulse of the music (like a heartbeat).

Chorale: a hymn. Typically, the music moves with the progression of blocked chords.


Chords: three or more notes sounding at the same time.

Dotted Quarter-Note: a note with a duration of one and a half beats. 

Dyads: two notes sounding at the same time, played by the same hand.

Dynamics: the volume of sound in music.

Dynamic notation: symbols that indicate the volume of sound such as *p* (*piano*), *pp* (*pianissimo*), *f* (*forte*), *fz* (*fortzando*).

Eighth-Note: a note with a duration of half a beat. 

Embellishments/Ornamentation: adding notes that are not directly part of the melody to decorate the melody.

Grace Notes: a quick note that precedes a main note for embellishment, notated as a smaller note with a slash.

Harmony: when two or more notes are played at once, it is the notes that are not part of the melody.

Intermezzo: theatrical work between acts of a Renaissance play (Campbell).

Legato: joined notes, playing consecutive notes smoothly.

Major: sounding happy.

Melodic Phrasing: musical sentence, sometimes denoted with a long slur.

Melody: the main musical idea. Typically a single line.


Minor: sounding sad.

Molto andante e semplice: slightly faster than a walking pace and simply.

Motive: the short musical idea that is found throughout a composition.

Pedal Points: a sustained note that is held for many measures while the other parts continue moving.


Poco andante e sostenuto: a little slower than a walking pace and sustained.

Quarter-Note: a note with a duration of one beat. 

Rhythm: a pattern of sound in time.

Sempre: always, reminds a musician of directions that have already been stated.

Septuplets: seven notes fit into the same amount of time as four normal notes, designated by a bracket with the number 3.

Sixteenth-Notes: a note with a duration of a quarter of a beat. 


Slurs: a curved line that connects two or more notes, indicating that the notes are played smoothly and connected.

Sostenuto: sustained.

Staccato: detached notes, playing notes separately.

Subdivision: dividing beats into smaller sections.

Tempo: the speed at which the music is played.

Thirty-Second-Notes: a note with a duration of an eighth of a beat. 

Tone: the quality of sound.

Touch: the way in which the fingers approach the piano keys.

Triplets: three notes fit into the same amount of time as two normal notes, designated by a bracket with the number 3.

Voicing: the arrangement of notes, vertically, in which different lines of music are played concurrently, often with multiple voices in one hand.

Waltz: music written for a type of dance, in 3/4 meter.

3/4 Meter: three beats per measure and a quarter note equals one beat.

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