

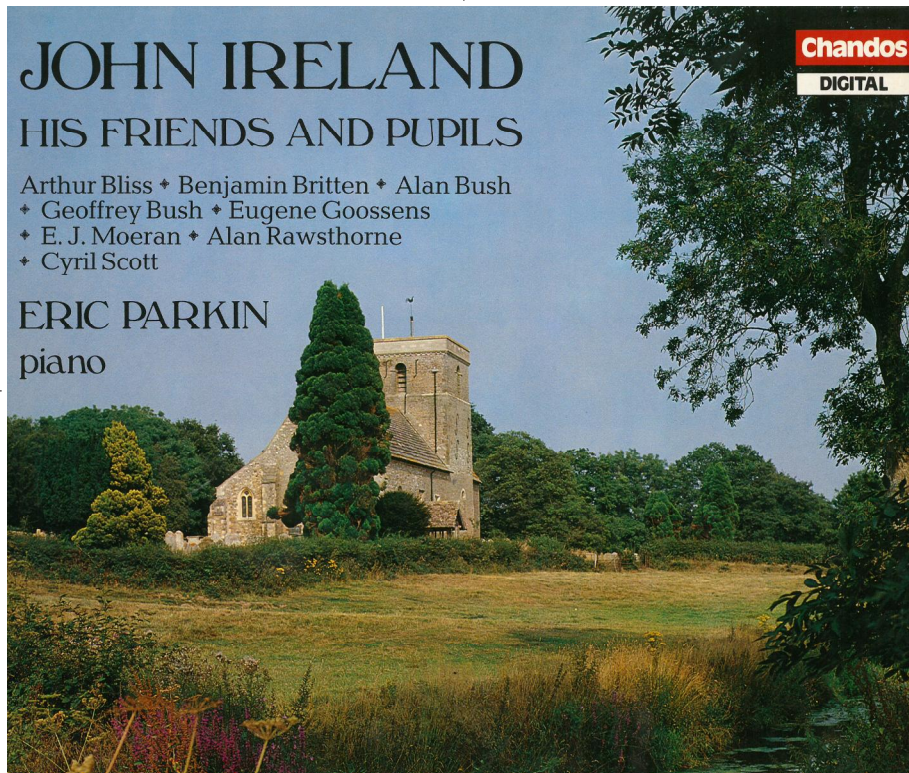
JOHN IRELAND

HIS FRIENDS AND PUPILS

Arthur Bliss ♦ Benjamin Britten ♦ Alan Bush
♦ Geoffrey Bush ♦ Eugene Goossens
♦ E. J. Moeran ♦ Alan Rawsthorne
♦ Cyril Scott

ERIC PARKIN
piano

Chandos
DIGITAL



JOHN IRELAND

HIS FRIENDS AND PUPILS

John Ireland had a wide circle of friends, many of whom – for he was the foremost composition teacher of his day – had also been his pupils. When, therefore, it was decided to sponsor a recording of a group of Ireland's piano pieces hitherto unavailable on stereo, the John Ireland Trust welcomed Eric Parkin's suggestion that they should be set within a wider context. Accordingly, Ireland's pieces are framed by those of eight composers chosen from the many who were closely associated with him in either or both of these capacities.

Alan Bush (b. 1900) who was introduced to Ireland by his piano teacher after giving a performance of the piano sonata at the Royal Academy of Music, has given this account of his studies with the composer during the years 1922-27: 'I worked at 16th century counterpoint and 18th century fugue for a whole year. I then produced on his advice chamber-music works, songs, piano pieces and an orchestral work which was played at a Promenade Concert in 1930. His help was of inestimable value, not only in his suggestions as to what a student should attempt next, but also in his comments on these attempts. He did not lay down hard and fast rules as to what the idiom of the music should be, unless, as was the case with me, it took the form of a watered-down or peppered-up Wagnerism. He had a most discerning ear, which could detect even minor deviations of style, whatever happened to be the basic idiom of the piece. In vocal writing he insisted upon the appropriate rise and fall in pitch and the rhythmical accentuation which the words required; in his own works each syllable was set to a separate note except where the words suggested movement (for example 'flow' or 'wander'). I will never forget either his penetrating remarks or his unfailing encouragement to any young musicians who were fortunate enough to have found their way to his studio in Gunter Grove.'

Of his own contribution to this recording, the *Esquise* 'Le Quatorze Juillet' op. 38, Alan Bush has written: 'In 1943 the men and women of the French Resistance were developing their heroic underground fight against Hitler's occupation troops. My piece was a modest expression of support for this struggle, and a reminder of previous heroic struggles by the French people. Its thematic material is based upon the tunes of the Carmagnole and the Ça Ira.'

John Ireland's most famous pupil at the Royal College of Music was **Benjamin Britten** (1913-76). He studied with Ireland at the insistence of Frank Bridge, who had guided the boy's early endeavours during the school holidays. At the College entrance examination Britten's virtuosity greatly alarmed those cautious members of staff who instinctively equated brilliance with superficiality; the award of a scholarship was secured only by Ireland's threat of instant resignation. Britten's first opus numbers, and also the early quartet for strings in D which the composer released towards the end of his life, were written during his student years with Ireland; the *Holiday Diary* appeared shortly afterwards, in 1934. It is one of the tantalizing few pieces written for the composer's own instrument. *Early Morning Bath* is exhilarating, *Funfair* deliberately brutal, both make equally severe technical demands on the performer. *Sailing* is calmer in mood (despite an effective central outburst) and simpler in harmonic structure, while *Night* foreshadows the nocturnal evocations which are such a masterly feature of Britten's later music.

The most senior of Ireland's pupils represented on this recording is **E. J. Moeran** (1894-1950), the most junior the writer of these notes (b. 1920). Moeran's sensitive, individual voice is heard perhaps at its best in miniatures such as the *Three Fancies* of 1922. A leaning towards folksong is evident, particularly in the quieter middle episode of *Burlesque*. *Windmills*, the opening movement, is the most celebrated of the set, but the central *Elegy* probes rather more deeply and builds to a climax of considerable power and tension. My own **Sonatina no. 1** (1965) probably owes its existence to a subconscious desire to emulate the energy and economy of Ireland's masterpiece. The first movement is in extremely concise sonata form. (In the recapitulation the first subject is heard only as a two-bar bridge linking the development to the second subject.) The slow movement offers a Bach-like texture stripped to its bare bones; as it proceeds the right hand (playing an elaborately decorative melodic line) and the left hand (playing repeated crotchets) move further and further apart. A two-part invention on a theme in fourths follows immediately. Contrapuntal development and a contrasting rhythmic episode lead to a strenuous climax, after a glissando from top to bottom of the keyboard a quiet epilogue reveals E major to be the tonal centre of the piece. The first public performance was given by the composer in a B.B.C. broadcast in 1967.

Music by four of Ireland's pupils is balanced by that of four of his contemporaries. **Arthur Bliss** (1891-1975) wrote his only piano sonata as a thank-you present for Noel Mewton-Wood, whose 'many splendid performances' of the composer's piano concerto had given him much pleasure. In a programme note the mood of the first movement is described as one of 'somewhat steely brilliance, set off by a flowing lyrical section' which does duty for the second subject group of a classical sonata. The slow and serene second movement, in variation form, is followed by a gay and lively finale which closes 'in a fiery burst of sound'. Mewton-Wood gave the first performance in a B.B.C. broadcast in 1953, a year after the sonata's completion. Some time later Eric Parkin had the opportunity to play the work through to the composer, and his interpretation received Sir Arthur's warmest approval.

Cyril Scott (1879-1970) was one of a group of four Englishmen and one Australian (Percy Grainger) who studied together at Frankfurt under Ivan Knorr, and who were united in agreeing with Balfour Gardiner that Beethoven was 'a boring old monkey'. It is therefore futile, as W. R. Pasfield has pointed out, to 'look for thematic contrast and development stemming from Beethoven when examining a sonata by Cyril Scott'. Scott wrote three piano sonatas, publishing the first at the age of nineteen, the last at the age of seventy-seven. Unity and diversity are achieved in no. 3 by the use of what Pasfield calls 'underlying motivic references', the most important of these is the interval of a falling semitone with which the first two movements begin and with which the first and last – somewhat after the manner of Schubert's string quintet – finish. There is much tonal ambiguity; the work closes with an emphatic assertion of the key of A major, although the first movement ends in C and the second (a Scherzo Patetico which is based mainly on a 'metamorphosis of first movement material') in F. In youth Scott's innovative talent earned him the nickname of 'the English Debussy'. This work of his old age should go a long way to restore a reputation obscured by the widespread popular success of a handful of light-music miniatures.

Eugene Goossens (1893-1962) is chiefly remembered today as an outstanding conductor, but his compositions are far from negligible either in quantity or quality. The chamber music in particular deserves revival, as do the *Nature Poems*, piano pieces written for Benno Moiseiwitsch. By comparison the *Four Conceits* are trifles, but imaginatively conceived for keyboard none the less. The listener will notice an attractive use of bitonality in the second of the set, *Dance Memories*. The piano music of **Alan Rawsthorne** (1903-71) is more

substantial, and includes two concertos, a sonatina (1949) and a ballad (1967). The bagatelles are earlier than any of these, but already show the composer's expert craftsmanship and his individual sense of texture and sonority. The four pieces are sharply contrasted in mood but closely related in thematic material, much use is made, harmonically and melodically, of the intervals of a third and a fourth. The introspective final bagatelle (in which the composer, Eric Parkin suggests, seems at moments to be casting a backward glance in the direction of Elgar) is particularly impressive.

The Almond Tree (published as *The Almond Trees*) was arguably **John Ireland's** first mature composition for the piano; *Columbine* was certainly the last. The former was inspired by a *favourite* Japanese print which evoked, as does the music, 'a sense of oriental stillness, of a moment's fleeting vision captured'. Alan Rowlands has gone on to describe how the 'deceptively simple' pentatonic melody for the left hand with which it begins is accompanied by a 'hypnotic ripple' of delicate arpeggios for the right. For a long time these continue unchanged, until subtle shifts of tonality induce in the listener the sense of a 'new light shining on a landscape'. A faster central section provides a climax which contrasts with, but does not ultimately disturb, the prevailing tranquillity. *Columbine*, unusually for Ireland, is a waltz. Like *The Almond Tree* it is ternary in structure, but unlike *The Almond Tree* its middle section (whose harmonies play an affectionate tribute to Ravel) bears the direction 'a shade slower and more languorous'. Ireland wrote it in 1949, simplifying it (not, in Alan Bush's view, to its advantage) for publication in an album of piano pieces for students in 1951.

Between these two come the *Three Pastels* of 1941, a work which might almost be subtitled 'A pianist's guide to young persons'. Each movement is monothematic, and is headed by a quotation which makes detailed analysis superfluous.

(1) *A Grecian Lad*:

'A Grecian Lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain,
Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again.'
(A. E. Housman)

This piece (which inhabits the sound world of *The Holy Boy*) is built mainly of four bar phrases, subtly varied as to register and harmony. The composer records that it was 'rewritten from an early MS'.

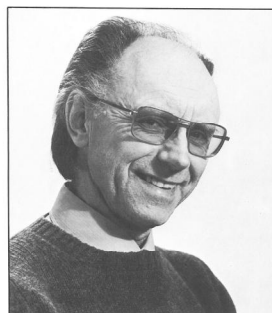
(2) *The Boy Bishop*: 'diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis' (Psalm XLV: full of grace are thy lips). Everything, even the processional middle section, derives from the unaccompanied plainsong-like 'intonation' with which the piece begins.

(3) *Puck's Birthday*: 'I am that merry wanderer of the night' (Shakespeare). This is written in a boisterous mood which was to find its fullest expression a few years later in the Overture *Satyricon*. Rhythm and tonality are handled with masterly flexibility.

The *Ballade of London Nights* is believed to have been composed in 1930. The manuscript was found among the composer's papers after his death, and edited for publication by Alan Rowlands (who gave the first performance in 1966 in a B.B.C. broadcast). It is a work on the grand scale of the *Rhapsody* and the *Ballade*, though no hint of this is given by the quiet, seemingly uneventful opening. Almost imperceptibly this first statement – in the rhythm of a barcarolle – begins to expand, until Ireland's earlier masterpiece, *Chelsea Reach*, is deliberately recalled. An elaborate rhapsodic development is launched by the downward leap in octaves of an augmented fourth (derived, it has been suggested from the perfect fourth which began the work). After the melodic line has been transferred from the left hand to the right, the music ebbs and flows until it culminates in a powerful bitonal cadenza prefaced by detached, dissonant chords. This dissolves into a transitional passage in

which the harmony and texture of the opening theme are strikingly transformed, although its melodic contours are retained. At last the reiterated semi-quavers in the bass come to rest on a dominant F sharp, and the ballade concludes with a simple restatement of its first thirty-nine bars. Musically these bars are left unaltered; but so great is the emotional distance we have travelled since we last heard them that they produce an entirely new psychological effect (proving, incidentally, that to adopt even so valuable a concept as Schoenberg's 'principle of perpetual variation' is sometimes neither necessary nor desirable).

© 1982 Geoffrey Bush



Eric Parkin is perhaps best known for his playing of John Ireland, of whom he says: 'Ireland had decided views about the interpretation of his music and I was privileged to spend many hours playing to him (and hearing him play). He encouraged me enormously during the early years of my career and it was his influence undoubtedly which helped to put me on the musical map. He also fostered my great interest in the music of his contemporaries and, of course, that of his many distinguished pupils. I am very delighted that my first recordings for Chandos have allowed me to dip into this fascinating and frequently neglected repertoire.'

This recording is available on cassette DBTD 2006

CHANDOS DIGITAL RECORDING

This recording was mastered and edited on Chandos Complete PCM Digital System. This system is superior to conventional analog tape recording in recording in dynamic range, signal to noise and distortion.

- Equipment used:**
- Schober & Neumann microphones
 - New classical mixing console - State of the Art specification designed and built by Chandos
 - Sony PCM 1610 Digital processor
 - DAD 1100 Digital electronic mixer
 - Digital automation stored on BVU 200A recorders

Extra care is taken in cutting and processing. Manufacturing on high grade 140 gram weight vinyl.

Although analog systems have been remarkably improved today, they are still limited by a number of drawbacks resulting in distortion and dynamic range limitations. These limits are inherent in the tape, heads, and other mechanical parts, and are virtually impossible to eliminate through companding.

Digital recording, including PCM (Pulse Code Modulation) is a revolutionary technique to leave these limitations of present analog recorders behind. With digital systems, the sound signal is recorded and transmitted in the form of digital codes and this provides a whole host of features.

- Outstanding among them are:
- Wide dynamic range • Flat frequency response regardless of input level • Extremely low distortion
 - Superior transient characteristics • No distortion when repeatedly duplicated

Chandos

DBRD 2006
2-record set.

Record I

Side 1
JOHN IRELAND
(1876–1962)
Columbine

Three Pastels
A Grecian Lad
The Boy Bishop
Puck's Birthday

GEOFFREY BUSH
(born 1920)
Sonatina No. 1
Comodo
Molto moderato
Allegro

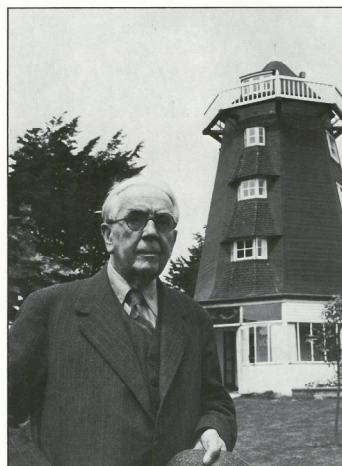
EUGENE GOOSSENS
(1893–1962)
Four Conceits, Op. 20
The Gargoyle
Dance Memories
A Walking Tune
The Marionette Show

Side 2
JOHN IRELAND
The Almond Tree

E. J. MOERAN
(1894–1950)
Three Fancies
Windmills
Elegy
Burlesque

CYRIL SCOTT
(1879–1970)
Sonata No. 3
Molto tranquillo
Scherzo patetico: Allegretto
Finale: Grave – con moto

JOHN IRELAND
HIS FRIENDS AND PUPILS



Recorded in association with the John Ireland Trust.

Record II

Side 3
JOHN IRELAND
Ballade of London Nights

ALAN BUSH
(born 1900)
Esquisse:
Le Quatorze Juillet, Op. 38

BENJAMIN BRITTEN
(1913–1976)
Holiday Diary Op.5
Early Morning Bathe
Sailing
Fun-Fair
Night

Side 4
ALAN RAWSTHORNE
(1905–1971)
Bagatelles

Allegro
Allegretto
Presto non assai
Lento

ARTHUR BLISS
(1891–1975)
Sonata
Moderato marcato
Adagio sereno
Allegro

Recording Producer: Brian Couzens. Sound Engineer: Ralph Couzens. Recorded in the Church of St. George the Martyr, Bloomsbury, London on June 26, 27 & 28, 1982.
Front Cover Photo of Shipley Church, John Ireland's resting place, containing a memorial plaque, by Derek Foss, PRPS.
Sleeve Design: Mantle Studio/London. Printed in West Germany.
© 1983 Chandos Records Ltd. © 1983 Chandos Records Ltd.

CHANDOS RECORDS LTD., 41 CHARING CROSS ROAD, LONDON WC2H 0AR.