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Photo of Billy Mayerl courtesy of Chappell Music Photo Library

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MARIGOLD

ERIC PARKIN plays the Piano Impressions of BILLY MAYERL

From 'The Legends of King Arthur':

- [1] Prelude (2:53)
- [2] Merlin the Wizard (1:37)
- [3] Lady of the Lake (1:33)
- [4] The Passing of Arthur (3:34)
- [5] Almond Blossom (2:05)
- [6] April's Fool (2:41)
- [7] The Harp of the Winds (3:00)
- [8] Marigold (2:39)
- [9] Railroad Rhythm (3:02)
- [10] Shallow Waters (2:58)
- [11] From a Spanish Lattice (3:50)
- [12] Song of the Fir Tree (2:20)
- [13] Nimble Fingered Gentleman (3:18)
- [14] Evening Primrose (3:13)

From the 'Four Aces' suite:

- [15] Ace of Diamonds (0:59)
- [16] Ace of Hearts (2:41)
- [17] The Joker (2:22)
- a further contribution
to the 'Four Aces' suite

DDD

TT = 45:51

How well I remember going into the old Keith Prowse shop in Poland Street and asking for Billy Mayerl's *The Harp of the Winds*. The rather grim-looking assistant - or so he seemed to a shy schoolboy - disdainfully eyed me up and down before reluctantly sliding a copy over the counter. Then I asked if he had *Railroad Rhythm*. "These are not simplified arrangements, you know!" he snapped. Having already struggled with *Marigold* and *Aquarium Suite*, I certainly did know, but at that moment all I wanted was to get out as fast as I could. Happily I handed over my four shillings (twenty pence). Incidentally, in those days you could buy a complete set of Billy Mayerl compositions for little more than five pounds, and that included a library case!

Though I now seem to have few of those original copies, with their eye-catching covers, many of his 'syncopated impressions' as he called them, have retained their freshness for me. They are a challenge, but equally a joy to play. Many were in a style deriving from ragtime, often loosely referred to as jazz, which became so popular in the twenties. Sometimes he wrote in a freer way, not always so strictly in tempo, which gave him even greater opportunity to display his inimitable playing technique. I've included several of these in this collection, the earliest being *Lady of the Lake* (1929) and the most recent *April's Fool* (1945).

Joseph William Mayerl was born in London's Tottenham Court Road in 1902. After a brief skirmish with the violin, he seems to have taken to the piano at a very early age, giving a recital at Queens Hall when he was seven. He studied at Trinity College of Music and then, when only about sixteen, began to earn his living as a professional musician. From then on there was no stopping him, and even a brief summary of his career reads impressively. The first notable job was with the Savoy Havana Band (LP transfers are well worth searching for). Then came recognition as a soloist and extensive worldwide tours, the founding of the Billy Mayerl School of Music, composing and conducting a score of West End musicals, and a

great deal of work on radio. After the Second World War he settled as musical director at Grosvenor House in Park Lane, and at about this time he also became a member of the BBC Light Music Unit.

In addition to all of this he made history by giving the first performance in this country of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (Gershwin was there in Queens Hall, full of praise, and the two became firm friends). He made many gramophone records, which sold in their tens of thousands. Some of these featured his memorable partnership with the temperamental but immensely gifted cellist, Gwen Farrar, who died prematurely in 1945.

Somehow he also found time and energy to produce a steady stream of piano solos for Keith Prowse over a period of twenty years or more. Recently I had the good fortune to play on one of his pianos, now owned by an ex-pupil. I couldn't help wondering what he had composed at it — for I felt sure that he must have worked this way, as so many of his most engaging tunes are pianistic (*Evening Primrose* and *At a Spanish Lattice*, for instance). Had those very keys inspired the lilting *Ace of Hearts* or even *Marigold* itself? Even allowing for age and the hard work done on it by those nimble fingers, I found it quite hard to play. Consequently my admiration for Billy Mayerl the pianist increased considerably.

As for the music, it speaks so directly and persuasively that it really doesn't need a programme note. His is a unique contribution to the pianist's repertoire. It is the work of a born pianist, who has had no equal. He died in 1959.

I am grateful to John Whitehorn, EMI Music Publishing, for letting me browse through the Mayerl catalogue and then so enthusiastically making copies available of the rarer items — none, I may say, being simplified arrangements!

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Eric Parkin has had a lifelong enthusiasm for British composers of the early 20th century. He is best known for his playing of John Ireland but he also performs much of the standard repertory, including the works of Bax, Britten, Bliss and Moeran, and around seventy concertos. His many broadcasts have reflected too his love of French music, which goes back to his studies with Frank Laffitte, the distinguished Anglo-French pianist.

For Chandos Eric Parkin has recently recorded a first volume of the Piano Music of Arnold Bax (CHAN 8496 CD, ABRD/ABTD 1206 LP & MC) — Volume 2 is to be released early 1988. Other previous recordings are John Ireland's Piano Concerto, with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Bryden Thomson (CHAN 8461 CD, ABRD/ABTD 1174 LP & MC) and a double album of solo piano works, **JOHN IRELAND, HIS FRIENDS AND PUPILS** — music by Ireland, Bliss, Britten, Alan Bush, Geoffrey Bush, Goossens, Moeran, Rawsthorne and Scott (DBRD & DBTD 2006 LP & MC).

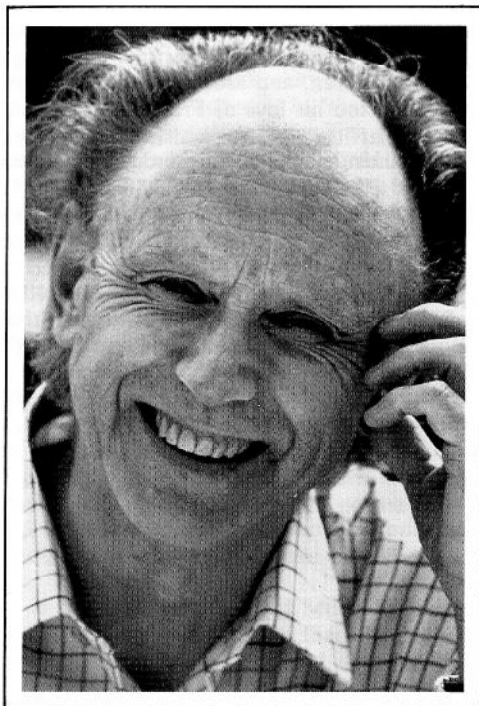


Photo: Judy Bud

Eric Parkin

- **A Chandos Digital Recording**
- Recording Producer: Christopher Palmer
- Sound Engineer: Ralph Couzens • Assistant Engineer: Philip Couzens
- Recorded in Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead, London on 4-7 June 1987
- Front Cover Illustration based on original sheet music cover of *Marigold*, courtesy of EMI Publishing Ltd., adapted by Douglas Hurst
- Sleeve Design: Jane Embley / Nick Theato
- Art Direction: Vicky Langdale

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