

Lord  
**BERNERS**  
(1883–1950)

**Songs • Piano Music**



Ian Partridge,  
Tenor  
Len Vorster,  
Piano

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<b>1</b> Polka (1941)	<b>2:32</b>	<b>Fragments psychologiques ('Psychological Fragments')</b> (c. 1916)	<b>6:50</b>
<b>Lieder Album – Three Songs in the German Manner</b> (1913–18)	<b>4:30</b>	<b>16</b> La Haine ('Hatred')	2:29
(Text: Heinrich Heine, 1797–1856)		<b>17</b> Le Rire ('Laughter')	1:13
<b>2</b> No. 1. Du bist wie eine Blume ('The White Pig')	1:32	<b>18</b> Un soupir ('A Sigh')	3:04
<b>3</b> No. 2. König Wiswamitra ('King Wiswamitra')	0:51	<b>19</b> <b>Dialogue between Tom Filuter and his Man by Ned the Dog Stealer</b> (1924)	<b>1:11</b>
<b>4</b> No. 3. Weihnachtslied ('Christmas Carol')	2:02	(Text: Anonymous)	
<b>5</b> <b>Le Poisson d'or ('The Goldfish')</b> (1915)	<b>3:11</b>	<b>20</b> <b>March</b> (1945)	<b>1:22</b>
<b>6</b> <b>Dispute entre le papillon et le crapaud ('Dispute between the Butterfly and the Toad')</b> (c. 1915)	<b>0:51</b>	<b>21</b> <b>The Expulsion from Paradise</b> (1945)	<b>1:07</b>
<b>Trois Chansons ('Three Songs')</b> (1920)	<b>4:26</b>	<b>Three Songs</b> (1921)	<b>4:49</b>
(Text: Georges Jean-Aubry, 1882–1950)		(Text: Traditional [22], John Masefield, 1878–1967 [23], Lord Berners [24])	
<b>7</b> No. 1. Romance	1:37	<b>22</b> The Rio Grande (Capstan Shanty)	2:28
<b>8</b> No. 2. L'Étoile filante (The Shooting Star)	1:25	<b>23</b> Theodore, or The Pirate King	0:53
<b>9</b> No. 3. La Fiancée du timbalier ('The Drummer Boy's Sweetheart')	1:20	<b>24</b> A Long Time Ago (Halliard's Shanty)	1:25
<b>Trois Petites Marches funèbres ('Three Little Funeral Marches')</b> (1916)	<b>6:07</b>	<b>25</b> <b>Valse</b> (1943)	<b>5:14</b>
<b>10</b> No. 1. Pour un homme d'État ('For a Statesman')	2:20	<b>26</b> <b>Red Roses and Red Noses</b> (c. 1940)	<b>2:08</b>
<b>11</b> No. 2. Pour un canari ('For a Canary')	2:02	(Text: Lord Berners)	
<b>12</b> No. 3. Pour une tante à héritage ('For a Wealthy Aunt')	1:40	<b>27</b> <b>Come on Algernon</b> (1944)	<b>3:03</b>
<b>Three English Songs</b> (1920)	<b>3:40</b>	(Text: Thomas Ernest Bennett Clarke, 1907–1989)	
(Texts: Thomas Dekker, ?1572–1632 [13], Robert Graves, 1895–1985 [14], Esther Lilian Duff, dates unknown [15])		<b>Total Time:</b>	<b>51:45</b>
<b>13</b> No. 1. Lullaby	1:26		
<b>14</b> No. 2. The Lady Visitor in the Pauper Ward	1:09		
<b>15</b> No. 3. The Green-eyed Monster	0:58		

Gerald Hugh Tyrwhitt-Wilson was born on 18 September 1883 at Apley Park, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, and succeeded to the title 14th Baron Berners in 1919. He was educated at Eton and, despite evidence of a talent for music, joined the Diplomatic Corps and served as Honorary Attaché to the British Embassy in Constantinople (1909–11) and Rome (1911–19). His musical training was therefore sporadic, but included lessons from Donald Tovey in England, Edmund Kretschmer in Germany and Alfredo Casella in Italy, where he also received advice and encouragement from Stravinsky. In all essentials, however, he was self-taught, profiting from an open-minded appreciation of the avant-garde trends he encountered during his travels in Europe. This cosmopolitan outlook set him apart from his British contemporaries: irony, satire and a degree of submerged romanticism being the hallmarks of his eclectic style. Such a talent inevitably expressed itself most happily in ballets, of which he wrote five, beginning in 1926 with *The Triumph of Neptune* for Diaghilev and including *A Wedding*

*Bouquet*, composed in 1936 (available on 8.555223), a splendid choral-ballet to words by Gertrude Stein.

Though wealth and social status conspired with a certain emotional diffidence to allow Berners to pose as a dilettante, there can be no doubt that his musical achievements were those of a true professional. His ability as a painter (he exhibited at London's Lefevre Gallery in 1931 and 1936) was more that of a gifted amateur, as were his literary gifts which found their most satisfactory expression in two volumes of autobiography, *First Childhood* (1934) and *A Distant Prospect* (1945). The determined flippancy of his five novellas (beginning in 1937 with the provocatively titled *The Girls of Radcliff Hall*) and the calculated eccentricity of his public persona, cocooned as it was in a vacuous social round, concealed a rather melancholy, emotionally starved personality which is reflected in some of his music. From 1931 he lived in modest splendour at Faringdon House in Berkshire where he died on 19 April 1950.

The *Three Songs in the German Manner* which make up Berners' *Lieder Album* were composed between 1913 and 1918 and appeared in 1920 as his first published composition. Although he assured Stravinsky that they were 'not at all German' they might, were it not for his irrepressible sense of fun, pass for Hugo Wolf, so masterly is his approach to Heinrich Heine's words. As it is, humour sets the tone from the piano grunts that open the almost atonal setting of *Du bist wie eine Blume*, thus illustrating the composer's unsubstantiated claim that the poet was really addressing a white pig and not a fair maiden, to the final glissando which mocks the king's bovine obsessions in *König Wiswamitra*. Even the *Weihnachtslied*, the most straightforward and genuinely 'felt' of the three settings, has its moments of gentle comedy in the 'oriental' parallel fifths which speed the three kings on their quest for the Holy Child.

Homage to France came perhaps more naturally to Berners, for it was a French text that he chose for his only opera, *Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement* (1923) (Naxos 8.660510), and it was French that he spoke most fluently. The *Trois Chansons* of 1920 are settings of poems by Georges Jean-Aubry. The subtle *parlando* of *Romance* and *L'Étoile filante*, the delicate pictorial accompaniment and shifting tonalities of *La Fiancée du timbalier*, all point to his deep understanding of the style and substance of the art he chose to emulate.

Equally appropriately, his three settings of English texts (the Elizabethan Thomas Dekker's *Lullaby*, Robert Graves's anguished attack on *The Lady Visitor in the Pauper Ward*, and Esther Lillian Duff's petulant *Green-eyed Monster*) have a directness of utterance that ranges from sweet simplicity, through furious rage, to arch frivolity. They were published in 1920. In the following year three more English songs appeared: this time, bold but slightly wayward versions of traditional sea shanties (*The Rio Grande* and *A Long Time Ago*) and, in a setting of John Masefield's *Theodore, or The Pirate King*, a brilliant parody of the bluff approach to nautical matters that seems so frequently to overwhelm the average British composer.

Most delightful of all, however, are his mock parlour-song settings of *Red Roses and Red Noses* (the words are his own), and *Come on Algernon*, the infectious music-hall contribution he made to the 1944 feature film *Champagne Charlie*. In both he captures to perfection the spirit of what he was parodying.

Dedicated to Igor Stravinsky, Berners' interpretation of his own poem *Le Poisson d'or* was composed in 1915 and tells, in appropriately nervous piano figuration, of a dejected goldfish whose dream of a companion is rudely shattered by an ill-timed crumb of bread. To much the same period belongs the *Dispute entre le papillon et le crapaud*, whose altercations are deftly illustrated by means of vividly contrasted piano ranges.

The publication of the three *Fragments psychologiques: La Haine, Le Rire* and *Un soupir* immediately placed Berners on the map as a composer of consequence and, in British eyes at least, of disconcerting modernity. Each finds an apt means of expressing the emotion involved, while at the same time exploring virtuoso piano techniques. The *Trois Petites Marches funèbres* explored similar territories while subtly expressing his own ironic slant on life: the crocodile tears that accompany a statesman to the grave, the genuine emotion felt at the death of a pet canary, and the anticipatory high spirits attendant on the funeral of a wealthy aunt. The three pieces were first performed in Rome on 30 March 1917, by Alfredo Casella.

England became obsessed with nationalism in music, greatly enhanced by the over-zealous efforts of Cecil Sharp.

*Dialogue between Tom Filuter and his man by Ned the Dog Stealer* is a brief, but effective piece. Berners takes the words from a broadsheet, issued in 1902, and writes what must be the apotheosis of the English rural folk song, re-discovered. The triviality of the text is greatly enhanced by Berners's brief but sardonic setting.

Four occasional pieces complete his piano output: the *Polka*, written in 1941 for an amateur pantomime, the *Valse*, which was intended as a set-piece in his score for the 1944 feature film *The Halfway House*, a *March*, whose origins and purpose are unknown, and *The Expulsion from Paradise*, written for a local Nativity play. The last two of these were both composed in 1945.

**Michael Hurd**



### **Ian Partridge**

Ian Partridge has an international reputation as a concert singer and recitalist. His tenor voice, with its most distinctive timbre, and his unfailing sensitivity to words earned him a devoted following through his hundreds of broadcasts and recordings. His wide repertoire encompassed the music of Monteverdi, Bach and Handel, Elizabethan lute songs, German, French and English songs and first performances of new works. Partridge's phenomenal list of recordings includes Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*, which was first choice for the work in BBC Radio 3's *Building a Library*, Schumann's *Dichterliebe* and *Liederkreis, Op. 39*, Britten's *Serenade*, Vaughan Williams' *On Wenlock Edge* and Warlock's *The Curlew*. With The Sixteen, conducted by Harry Christophers, Partridge sang the Evangelist in Bach's *St John Passion* and was the tenor soloist in the complete set of Handel's *Chandos Anthems*. Partridge has also enjoyed taking masterclasses on Lieder, English Song and Early Music at venues as diverse as Aldeburgh, Dartington, Trondheim, Versailles and Helsinki. He retired from public performance in 2008 but remained a professor at the Royal Academy of Music until 2018. He was awarded the CBE in 1992 for services to music. [www.ianpartridge.co.uk](http://www.ianpartridge.co.uk)

*Photo: © Fritz Curzon*

### **Len Vorster**

Len Vorster left South Africa for Australia in 1983 after completing postgraduate piano studies at the University of Cape Town. In 1997 he recorded Michael Easton's *Concerto on Australian Themes* with the State Orchestra of Victoria for Naxos (8.554368), and gave the premieres of the work in Italy, Hungary, Germany and London. His Naxos recording of the two-piano version of Holst's *The Planets* (with Robert Chamberlain, 8.554369) received a *Gramophone* Award. Vorster has performed in the UK, South Africa, Hong Kong and Taiwan and at numerous international festivals. He is frequently heard on ABC FM in both studio and live concert broadcasts. In 2001 he formed the Berlin Vorster Duo with David Berlin, principal cellist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. For many years he was accompanist to the Australian Boys Choir, and he regularly performs with La Prima Opera and Promac Productions. Vorster is founding artistic director of the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival, and co-founder of the Mietta Song Competition. He has served on the piano staff at the University of Melbourne, Monash University and the Victorian College of the Arts. At present he is concentrating on private piano teaching, performing and recording.

Lord Berners was essentially self-taught as a composer, profiting from experiences gained while travelling in Europe, and receiving advice and encouragement from Stravinsky. A tone of wit and humour is established in his masterful settings of Heine in the *Lieder Album*, and his subtle touch with the French language is well represented in the *Trois Chansons*. The *Fragments psychologiques* is a piano cycle that is both virtuosic and expressive. From mock parlour-song parodies to a poem about a dejected goldfish, Lord Berners' keen sense of observation and ironic view on life is here in abundance.

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A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

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Notes in French, German and Spanish can be accessed at [www.naxos.com/notes/554475.htm](http://www.naxos.com/notes/554475.htm)

Sung texts can be accessed at [www.naxos.com/libretti/554475.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/554475.htm)

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