

JULIUS RÖNTGEN

MARK ANDERSON

Piano Music 4



Julius Röntgen

Julius Röntgen (1855-1932)

Mark Anderson, piano

1	Impromptu	4.19
2	Ballade No. 1 in D minor Op. 6	7.08
3	Ballade No. 2 in G minor Op. 22	7.56
4	Ballade No. 3 in E minor	7.11
5	Sonata in C-sharp minor (1928)	8.55
6	Sérénade mélancolique	4.36
7	Variations and Fugue on a theme of J P E Hartmann Op. 38	17.41
Total playing time		57.38

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The present recording of piano music by Julius Röntgen (1855-1932), the fourth of an ongoing series, comprises works that span a significant portion of Röntgen's compositional lifetime. Fifty-five years separates the first Ballad, Op.6 written in 1873, when the composer was just 17 years old, from the Sonata in C-sharp minor of 1928. This far-ranging chronology gives the listener an informed overview of Röntgen's output. This is especially interesting given the fact that he lived through such musically revolutionary times.

Röntgen's writing style for the piano shows a gift for creating unique sonorities alongside ingenious harmonic invention. In particular, I am intrigued by his ability to create, on the one hand, exquisite and sublime musical moments – such as those found in the major variations of the Variations and Fugue Op.38 - and, on the other, masses of chordal harmony punctuated with rhapsodic episodes. The Ballad No. 3 best represents the latter compositional style with its highly varied textural and emotional contrasts.

When Röntgen died in 1932, Donald Francis Tovey wrote, "He was an inspiration for the future but with a link to the past. His compositions cover the whole range of music in every art form; they all show consummate mastery in every aspect of technique; even in the most facile there is beauty and wit, each series of works culminate in something that has the uniqueness of a living masterpiece." It is hoped that the present recording illuminates Röntgen's artful masterpieces in the unique light they deserve.

Ballad No.1 in D Minor, Op.6

Composed in 1873, Röntgen dedicated his first ballade to Professor H.S. Oakeley, an English composer and professor of music at Edinburgh University. Professor Oakeley met the 13-year old Julius Röntgen at a concert of the young composer's music at the Niederheinsiches Musikfest in Düsseldorf, Germany in 1869 and was astonished with the young boy's abilities as both a performer and composer. Subsequently, he wrote a letter to the Times of London exclaiming that Röntgen's work "exhibits a rare

knowledge of counterpoint and an intimate acquaintance with the best models of ancient and modern art." High praise for a composer of any age, much less one of 13. Having been raised in the musical traditions of mid-19th century Leipzig, the young Röntgen was undoubtedly familiar with Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words for piano. His awareness of that composer's uniquely idiomatic writing for the instrument is reflected in his first ballad with its arpeggiated accompaniments and vocally inspired melodic lines of the first section. A second theme, based on a lilting dotted rhythm, provides balance as well as contrasting mood and texture. The two parts alternate to create the form of the work while complimenting one another beautifully.

Röntgen premièred his Ballade No.1 on 21 February 1874 in the *Singacademie* in Leipzig.

Ballad No.2 in G Minor, Op.22

In 1883, alongside composers Frans Coenen and Daniel de Lange, Röntgen founded the Amsterdam Conservatory and in 1884 was a key advocate in the foundation of the Concertgebouw. It was during this busy time that he composed his Ballad No.2.

This is a tumultuous and unsettled work in sonata-allegro form. With a tempo indication *Allegro molto agitato*, the piece begins with large leaping *forte* octaves that are followed by a persistent rhythmic motif that unifies the structure. Based on a deeply passionate 8-bar melody, the underlying texture employs a churning eighth note motion that generates unceasing movement and relentless disquiet. A *molto animato* coda brings the piece to a climatic and dramatic close.

Ballad No.3 in E Minor "Jotunheim"

The "Jotunheim" designation in the earliest manuscript of this work indicates that the third Ballade may have been inspired by Röntgen's journey in the mountainous Jotunheim region of Norway in 1891 accompanied by his close friends Edvard Grieg and Frants Beyer, also a composer and chairman of the board of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. During this journey, Röntgen was exposed to many Norwegian folk tunes, however he used no specific folk theme in his third Ballad.

Grand, sweeping melodic lines ebb and flow to create a work rich in emotional contrast. Using the same tempo indication as for the second Ballad (*Allegro molto agitato*), Röntgen begins his third with a dark, *sotto voce* triplet figure followed by a chorale-like second theme. These two themes seem to compete for prominence and consequently unify the work. A stern episode in E minor generates a dark, serious mood that builds to a massive climax that restates the chorale theme boldly. The final bars begin with a *prestissimo* flourish and conclude with a *ff* burst from the triplet figure just before the closing chords.

Julius Röntgen's third Ballad was not published during his lifetime. However, a modern edition is available edited by Michael Krücker and was published by Friedrich Hofmeister Musikverlag, Leipzig in 2004.

Sonata in C-sharp Minor (1928)

This late sonata is composed in a single movement and is unified by the interweaving of three distinct themes, each having its own tempo designation and distinctive character.

The sonata opens with a sorrowful *Andante sostenuto* motive using successive major thirds. The slowly churning chromatic melody creates a lugubrious scene. After the entrance of a sweeping melodic line, these two ideas alternate with one another and eventually dissolve unexpectedly into B-flat major.

After a pause, a sunny *Allegretto piacevole* in E-flat major follows in a lilting triple meter. Triplet filigree in the treble register ornaments an innocent, diatonic melody, pay homage to Grieg. Following unexpected harmonic twists and turns, notably into B Major, the motion comes to a sudden halt when the opening thirds motif re-appears as a transition into the boisterous *Allegro passionato*. This third section erupts suddenly with *forte* chords punctuated with another version, albeit more fleeting, of the opening thirds motif.

The work continues to entwine these three motivic characters in a variety of guises – at times heroic, passionate or sorrowful. In the end, a *tranquillo* section transitions back to a direct restatement of the opening theme. The sonata closes with three very soft dark pulses of the lowest three c-sharps of the keyboard – *estinto*.

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by J.P.E. Hartmann in F Minor, Op.38

The Variations and Fugue in F minor were composed in 1895. The sub-heading on the first page quotes, in German, from the Agnes Dei of the Catholic Mass:

**Lamb of God
you take away the sins of the world
Have mercy on us**

The dark and solemn *Lento espressivo* theme crests gently at two points, the first in A-flat major and the second in C major, and submerges again. The variations evolve from the light and harmonious trickle of *pp* triplets (variation I and III) or quietly harmonious 16th-note patterns (Variation II) into a heroic *Energico* in Variation IV. The energy is sustained through a forward-driving Brahmsian variation (Variation V), dissolving through Variation VI and settling into a songful *Andante tranquillo* (Variation VII). Variations VIII and IX bask in ethereal beauty in the parallel major. Variation X, marked *sostenuto*, returns to F minor but in a most deeply expressive way complete with gasps and unexpected starts. An exquisite interlude *Intermezzo quasi fantasia* marked *p e misterioso* follows and acts as a close of the quiet inner chapter of the work. Variations XI through XIV act as a brilliant and tumultuous unified section, the fiery scale figures of Variation XIV creating an epic transition to the fugue.

The fugue emerges from the dying harmony of the final variation. The first four bars, taken directly from the theme, begins simply but is interrupted by a four-bar tail of unbroken eighth-note melody. This 8-bar subject builds into a masterful 4-voice fugue of epic proportions, complete with a *piu stretto* coda followed by a final stark and dramatic restatement of the theme.

Impromptu in E-flat Major (1910)

There is evidence that Röntgen composed three Impromptus for the piano. However, only the Impromptu in E-flat major is extant while two others, in D Major from 1869 and in A Major from 1870, appear to be lost.

This charming Impromptu begins with an opening motif that embodies an infectious rhythmic lilt. A chromatically inflected chordal melody defines the first section of the work. A contrasting section, based on a 4-bar *animato* theme, rises and falls in a busy alternating hand texture. The piece builds towards a *ff* climax followed by a long transition that evaporates into a return of the opening section, this time lightly decorated with a chromatic tenor melody. A coda of rolled chords signals the close, accompanied by motivic rumblings in the deep bass until a final slow E-flat major arpeggio ends the work in tranquility.

Sérénade mélancholique

Much like the Impromptu above, not much is known about Röntgen's Sérénade mélancholique, also published in 1910. This exotic work explores bi-tonality and ever-shifting modality and features a melodic triplet figure echoing middle eastern melodic inflections. A slow, swinging dotted rhythm in the left hand creates the backdrop for the hypnotic melody as it twists and turns in ambiguity. The phrases sequence through related keys but the mysterious atmosphere lingers throughout.

Special Thanks

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The Sonata in C-sharp minor was never published. As a companion to his recording project Mark Anderson has created a modern edition of the Sonata, which is available from Nimbus Music Publishing.

MARK ANDERSON

Mark Anderson is a native of the San Francisco Bay Area. His formative teachers were Trula Whelan and Aiko Onishi in the USA, and Ryszard Bakst and Benjamin Kaplan in the UK.

He has performed world-wide as a chamber musician and soloist, appearing with Sir Simon Rattle, Nicholas McCegan, William Boughton, George Cleve, Adam Fischer, and many others. Mark has given recitals in New York's Alice Tully Hall and Weill Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Phillips Gallery in Washington D.C., London's Wigmore Hall, and Zurich's Tonhalle. His performances have been featured on BBC Radio 3, the CBC in Canada, and on radio and television in Spain, Italy, Ireland, Japan and the United States.

Mark is the founder and executive director of New World Music Academy in California. The academy continues to teach and inspire students of all ages and is a leader in innovative teaching techniques. He is currently Assistant Professor in Piano and Chamber Music at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

He records exclusively with Nimbus Records and has released recordings of works by Liszt, Schumann, Brahms and Dohnanyi, Copland and Gershwin. His most recent project for Nimbus was a 2 CD exploration of the piano music of Hans von Bulow. In 2004, he released, with his former two-piano partner Tamriko Siprashvili, a world premiere of Tim Seddon's two-piano arrangement of Mussorgky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.



Mark Anderson is a Steinway Artist.