

MUSIC FOR PIANO

BY LEO SOWERBY

SUITES: FLORIDA AND
FROM THE NORTHLAND

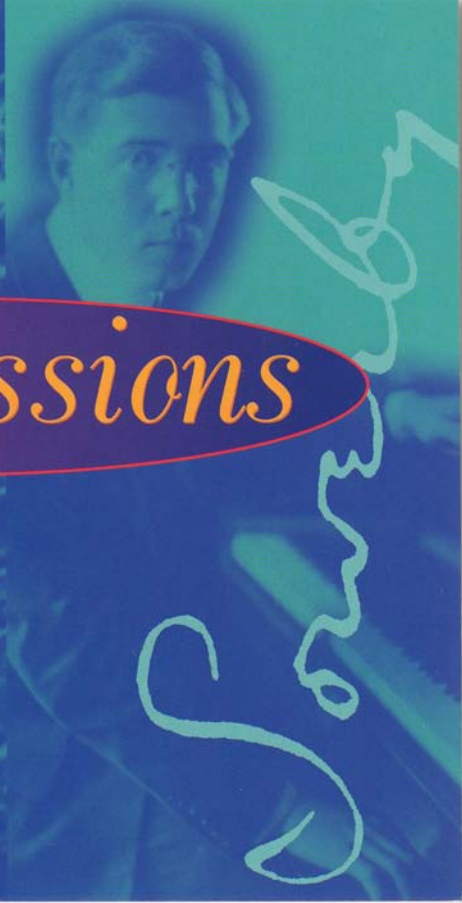
Impressions

FOLK SONGS

COUNTRY DANCE TUNES

MALCOLM HALLIDAY,
PIANIST

Albany
CLASSICAL RECORDS



very first composition, written in 1905 at the early age of ten, was a piece now lost entitled *The Dawn of Day*. Sowerby's last important piece with piano is the *Dialog for Organ and Piano*, written within a year of the composer's death in 1968. Sowerby was a born pianist and in his early years he frequently performed his own music and the works of other composers as well. As Sowerby grew older, he appeared less frequently in public as a pianist and finally gave it up all together. The organ became Sowerby's primary instrument and he divided his time between composing, teaching and his work as a church musician. Dating from 1916 to 1929, the selections on this compact disc are products of the composer's youthful maturity. All these works were composed when Sowerby was in his twenties, except for the Florida Suite, which he wrote when he was thirty-four.

In 1916, Sowerby was still the busy performing pianist, appearing often in public to perform his own music. His *Piano Concerto No. 1 in F* was an important vehicle for the young pianist. He performed the work on numerous occasions with different orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra with which he premiered both the original and revised versions of the concerto. Sowerby was a serious enough pianist to have advertised in the January 1921 issue of *Musical America* that he was booking a concert tour and invited inquiries to his agent. However, the plan for a concert tour was cut short when Sowerby was offered the opportunity to work in Rome for three years as the recipient of the first American Prix de Rome. Upon his return to America in 1924, Sowerby continued to perform as a pianist, though less and less frequently. In 1927, Sowerby made his last professional appearance as a pianist, performing his first piano concerto in Blue Island, Illinois. Thereafter, Sowerby's piano compositions were left to others to perform.

Almost all the works represented here were given first performances by the composer, and surviving accounts and programs suggest he played some of these works quite frequently. In order of composition, they include the Three Folk-Tunes

Both *Florida* and *From the Northland* were inspired by vacation trips. The composer wrote the descriptions for the movement of each suite, based on impressions of his travels. *Florida* contains some of Sowerby's most impressionistic and sensual sonorities. The suite was dedicated to George Edwin Henry, editor at Oxford University Press, which published the work in 1939. The American pianist Frank Mannheimer gave the first performance at the American Music Festival in Bad Homburg, Germany.

Florida Suite

River Night: The throb of the wavelets on St. John's River on a dark summer night. The perfumed air, the pulsing of the water narcissus urged onward by the warm wind. From over the far hills floats up the orange moon to glorify this night of quiet mystery.

St. Augustine: We invoke images of the pomp and splendour of Spain's military might; her dark dungeons seem to whisper to us cruel secrets. Ghosts of long-forgotten memories beckon to us and bid us pass by in silence.

Cypress Swamp: Here is all dank blackness; here is ooze and slime; here have horrible giants been changed into sprawling trees, whose arms, like tentacles, seem to draw me into the dark stillness where I hear only the cry of age-old Indian gods whose souls are chained in this abode of evil.

Sun-drenched Palms: The royal trees raise their plumed heads high over the glittering sands which border the great Atlantic. The sun beats down mercilessly, and huge black birds fly through the air. The sea thunders while the kingly palm stands sentinel in haughty grandeur.

Pines at Sunset: The pines stand mute against the horizon; all around is flat, waste, forgotten. The sun slips wearily to rest, and in the pale twilight the stark pines dream of a peace that is akin to death.

mood, pensive or fearful, you, of all nature, tell me most of joy, of youth, of power, of infinity!

Sowerby gave the first performance of the suite upon his return to America in 1924 at the Chickering Hall in New York. Sowerby orchestrated all movements except *The Lonely Fiddle-Maker* in 1924. The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra directed by Fritz Reiner gave the first performance of the orchestrated suite in 1925. Both the piano and orchestral versions of *Northland* are dedicated to Walter Douglas Main, a friend and supporter of Sowerby's in Chicago. Main was a wealthy Chicago munitions manufacturer who organized an entire concert of Sowerby's music given by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1917. Sowerby dedicated the organ and orchestral versions of his popular *Comes Autumn Time* to Main's wife Alice. (Later, Alice Main divorced Walter Douglas Main to marry Eric DeLamar, the assistant conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and also a close friend of Sowerby's.)

Money Musk is an old American fiddler's tune that Sowerby set for piano in 1919. Sowerby arranged the folk-tune for orchestra in 1924, and for string quartet in 1929. The jaunty, humorous variations preserve the character of an old time barn dance.

Fisherman's Tune was composed in 1921 and also based on an original tune written by Sowerby in the summer of 1920. This work is dedicated to Walter Douglas Main. Sowerby also arranged the work in 1931 for two pianos. This arrangement was premiered the following year at Town Hall by the duo-pianists Stell Anderson and Silvio Scionti. The work has the flavor of the folk-tune settings, though Sowerby uses more outlandish dissonances.

The Irish Washerwoman is the name of a jig originally composed by Walter ("Piper") Jackson, the most celebrated Irish piper of the eighteenth century. The tune also goes by the name of "Jackson's delight" or "The Irishwoman." Sowerby wrote

pianist for the American Schubert Institute in Boston, he frequently performs with nineteenth century pianos from museum and private collections. He has degrees in piano from the Oberlin Conservatory and Boston University. His teachers include Paul Badura-Skoda, Henrica Bordwin, Miles Mauney and Bela Nagy. Malcolm Halliday appears with bass-baritone Robert Osborne on the Albany Records compact disc *My Love Unspoken*, performing songs by Leo Sowerby (TROY196).

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