

The background of the cover is a classic landscape painting. It depicts a valley with several tall, slender evergreen trees in the foreground. In the middle ground, a calm lake reflects the surrounding scenery. The background is dominated by rugged, snow-capped mountains under a sky with soft, hazy clouds. The overall color palette is muted, with greens, browns, and greys, accented by the white of the snow and the pale yellow of the sky.

AMERICAN CHARACTER

PIANO MUSIC OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD CHADWICK

PETER KAIROFF, PIANIST

REDISCOVERING AN AMERICAN MASTER

THE MUSIC OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD CHADWICK (1854-1931) is not nearly as well known as it ought to be. Although widely respected and admired in his lifetime, his music fell into relative obscurity after his death, and is only recently being performed once more with any frequency. His piano music, in particular, has suffered from neglect: very few of the pieces on this disc have ever been recorded before. Why this should be so remains something of a mystery, for many of Chadwick's piano works display the same inventiveness, charm and craftsmanship found in his orchestral and chamber works.



The title of this disc—*American Character*—reflects the fact that all of Chadwick's piano music is written in the style of the "Character Piece": brief, memorable evocations of one particular mood or image. Chadwick was certainly able to craft large-scale forms when he wanted to, as he did in his symphonies and chamber works to great effect. But his piano works are all on a smaller scale, like Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, and so many other piano pieces of the nineteenth century. And, like those models, Chadwick's piano music often evokes the world of Art Song, that wonderful and evocative fusion of poetry and music which was so pop-

niment. The canoe encounters some rather dramatic rapids in the “B” section, but soon returns to still waters in the return of the “A” section, although the left hand continues its sixteenth-note shudder until the very end.

Le Ruisseau (“The Rill”) is the most Impressionistic of Chadwick’s piano pieces, with extensive blending of different harmonies and subtle rhythmic syncopations and juxtapositions. Chadwick would have been aware of the very recent musical innovations of Debussy and Ravel, of course, but he was also keenly aware of Impressionistic trends among American painters of the day. Chadwick was deeply interested in painting, and *The Rill* is one of his most “painterly” of compositions, a memorable depiction of a shimmering stream rushing through a landscape. The rippling sixteenth-notes over tied triplets create an effect that corresponds to the loose, rapid brushstrokes of his painter friend Childe Hassam and other American Impressionists.

Le Crepuscule (“In the Gloaming”) is a tender and sensitive Romance. The twilight of the title is evoked through the continuous gentle pulsing of the off-beat accompaniment. The *Prelude Joyeux*, a very joyous prelude indeed, is dedicated to Arthur Foote, another of the several excellent composers active in New England in the late nineteenth century.

The *Three Waltzes*, from 1890, are appealing and well-crafted examples of *Salon* music from the Gilded Age. Each has its own distinctive character; the first a nostalgic “valse triste,” the second sprightly and playful, and the

The *Chanson Orientale* is a typical example of the taste for the “exotic” in the nineteenth century, recalling similar pieces by Saint-Saens, Tchaikovsky, and many others. This piece, and the lovely *Nocturne in D-flat* which follows, were published in 1895 in a volume of miscellaneous piano works by various composers. The *Nocturne* sings expressively over a tentative habanera-like rhythm in the left hand, and builds to an expressive climax before the peaceful coda.

The Aspen was published in 1925 and its rapidly shifting harmonies have a touch of Rachmaninov or Scriabin in them. It was published in a pedagogical edition replete with fingerings, interpretive suggestions, and a biographical sketch of the composer, which states that Chadwick “stands today as one of the foremost American composers.” Indeed, at his death a few years later in 1931, Chadwick was hailed by the influential critic Olin Downes in the New York Times as the composer who “represents most completely the body of serious American music.”

Taste shifted, of course, and all too soon Chadwick’s music was forgotten, or dismissed as old fashioned. But now taste seems to be shifting back, and we are better able to appreciate the creativity, craftsmanship, and charm of a composer who himself was something of an American Character.

Notes by Peter Kairoff

GEORGE WHITEFIELD CHADWICK

(1854-1931)

Music for Piano

Peter Kairoff, Pianist



FIVE PIECES FOR PIANO (1905)

- | | |
|--------------------|------|
| 1. The Frogs | 5:49 |
| 2. In the Canoe | 3:31 |
| 3. The Rill | 2:58 |
| 4. In the Gloaming | 3:14 |
| 5. Prelude Joyeux | 3:13 |

THREE WALTZES (1890)

- | | |
|--------------------------|------|
| 6. Waltz in F minor | 3:48 |
| 7. Waltz in E-flat major | 2:19 |
| 8. Waltz in A-flat major | 1:51 |

SIX CHARACTERISTIC PIECES, OP. 7

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| 9. Congratulation | 1:50 |
| 10. Please Do | 1:33 |
| 11. Scherzino | 3:50 |
| 12. Reminiscence of Chopin | 3:43 |
| 13. Irish Melody | 1:19 |
| 14. Etude | 2:05 |

TWO CAPRICES (1888)

- | | |
|------------------------|------|
| 15. Caprice in G minor | 4:19 |
| 16. Caprice in C major | 3:55 |

THREE PIECES FOR CHILDREN

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| 17. Ye Robin | 1:00 |
| 18. Evening Prayer | 1:17 |
| 19. Diddle-Diddle Dumpling | 0:49 |
| 20. Chanson Orientale (1895) | 3:04 |
| 21. Nocturne in D-flat (1895) | 3:21 |
| 22. The Aspen (1925) | 3:07 |
- 61:50

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