

# SATIE

## Piano Works Vol. 1

Trois Nocturnes • Sonneries de la rose + croix  
Deux rêveries nocturnes • Ogives • Sarabandes

Klára Koermendi, Piano



## Erik Satie (1866 - 1925)

### Piano Works Vol. 1

The French composer Erik Satie earned himself a contemporary reputation as an eccentric. Stravinsky later described him as the oddest person he had ever known and at the same time the most rare and constantly witty. His musical innovations proved immensely influential on his nearer contemporaries Debussy and Ravel and on a younger generation of composers and artists in the years after the war of 1914.

Satie was born in 1866 at Honfleur, on the coast of Normandy. His father was at the time a ship's broker, while his mother was of Scottish origin. Something of his later eccentricity seems to have been acquired from his paternal uncle, Adrien Satie, known in Honfleur as a character. The family moved to Paris, but on the death of Satie's mother in 1872 he was sent back to Honfleur to the house of his grandparents. Six years later he returned to Paris, where in 1879 he entered the Conservatoire. There he proved an undistinguished and unsatisfactory pupil, lingering on, according to one friend, in order to avoid the obligatory five years of military service. His status as a student allowed him a period of one year in the 33rd Infantry, cut short by a severe attack of bronchitis that he had deliberately courted.

Satie's few months of soldiering were followed by the first publications of his music, two piano pieces, and then a set of five songs, settings of poems by his friend Contamine de Latour, published by his father, who now had a stationer's shop and small publishing business. Inspired by his reading, in the early 1890s Satie came for a time under the influence of the extraordinary Joséphin Péladan, self-styled Sâr Merodack of the Rose + Croix, an eccentric exponent of Rosicrucianism with whom he had broken by 1892. Eclectic medieval preoccupations led him to establish his own mock religion, the Metropolitan Church of the Art of Jesus the Conductor. Of this he described himself fancifully as *Parcier et Maître de Chapelle*, the first title sheer invention, issuing his publication *Le cartulaire*, in which critical enemies were attacked in appropriate style. At the same time, paradoxically, he was involved with Rudolf Salis and

his bohemian cabaret, the Chat Noir. The same years brought contact with Debussy, with whom he remained on good terms in the years that followed, in spite of the latter's tendency to patronise him.

In 1905, after a period in which he had been compelled to earn his living as a café pianist and a composer of appropriate music, Satie enrolled as a student at the Schola cantorum, where his teachers included Vincent d'Indy and Roussel. Here he attempted to make up for his technical deficiencies as a composer by a concentration on traditional counterpoint. He completed his studies in 1908, but only began to win some success through the agency of Ravel, who in 1911 performed the three Sarabandes that Satie had written in 1887, establishing the originality of Satie's early work. The following years brought his compositions before a wider public, but it was through the advocacy of Jean Cocteau that Satie's fame was more firmly established, particularly with collaboration in the Dyagilev ballet Parade, with choreography by Massin and décor by Picasso. The scandal of the first performance, in May 1917, made Satie a hero to a younger group of composers, to be known as Les Six. In 1923, under the inspiration of Darius Milhaud, his collaborator in musique d'ameublement, furniture music, that was not supposed to be listened to, he became the centre of another group of younger composers, the Ecole d'Arceuil, its name derived from the poor and relatively remote district of Paris where Satie lived a life of the utmost simplicity, his room furnished with a chair, a table and a hammock, the last heated in winter by bottles filled with hot water placed below and looking, according to Stravinsky, like some strange kind of marimba. He died on 1st July 1925, after an illness of some six months.

Satie planned in 1919 a set of six Nocturnes, of which only five were completed and a group of three published. These, the last of Satie's compositions for the piano, rely in harmony on fourths and fifths and show a characteristic simplicity of texture, if little of the mood of Chopin or Field suggested by the title. The *Première pensée* Rose + Croix and three *Sonneries de la Rose + Croix*, *Air de l'Ordre*, *Air du Grand Maître* and *Air du Grand Prieur*, were written in the early 1890s, during the period of Satie's association with Péladan, music to be used in the ceremonies of the order, until Satie publicly

declared his independence in a letter to the paper *Gil Blas* couched in archaic French. The music, written without bar-lines, reflects something of the alternative mystical influence of the painter Puvis de Chavannes, a reproduction of one of whose works was used on the cover of the published *Sonneries*.

Satie's *Rêverie de l'enfance de Pantagruel*, a whimsical reference to Rabelais, was written at about the time of the *Nocturnes*, a relatively late work, while the *Rêverie du pauvre*, a title not of the composer's making, reflects a period at the turn of the century that found him in some hardship. In 1898 he had moved out to Arceuil, and here "Monsieur le Pauvre" expressed his awareness of "le séjour mystérieux de Notre-Dame Bassesse" (the mysterious presence of Our Lady Humility), perhaps in the solemn simplicity of this *Rêverie*. The two *Rêveries Nocturnes*, written in 1910 and 1911, the first of the pair without bar-lines, are of subtle lucidity, with their gentle evocation of mysterious night.

*Prélude de la porte héroïque du ciel*, written in 1894 and dedicated by Satie to himself, belongs to the early period of eccentric mysticism that followed his involvement with Rosicrucianism. The piece was intended as an introduction to a play by Jules Bois, founder and editor of a publication *Le Coeur*. In the play Christ appears urging a poet to dethrone the Virgin and put Isis in her place. This mingling of the ancient Egyptian with the medieval is characteristic of the kind of esoteric mysticism in which Satie was involved. The opening of the *Prélude* is marked "Calme et profondément doux" (Calm and profoundly sweet) and typical directions to the performer continue. The second line is to be played superstitiously and later passages are marked "Avec déférence" and "Très sincèrement silencieux" (Very sincerely silent), "En une timide piété" (With timid piety), "Sans orgueil" (Without pride), before the curtain rises.

The four *Ogives*, published in 1886, echo Satie's fascination with the Gothic and medieval, and in particular with the architecture of Notre Dame. The three *Sarabandes*, later revealed to a wider public by Ravel, were products of 1887, but anticipate in their adventurous and novel harmonies music that Debussy was to write at the dawn of the next century.

## **Klára Körmendi**

The Hungarian pianist Klára Körmendi was born in Budapest and studied under Kornél Zempléni at the Bartók Conservatory, later becoming a student of Péter Solymos at the Liszt Academy, where she received her diploma with distinction in 1967. She enjoyed early success in a number of international competitions, before embarking on a career that has taken her to the major musical centres of Europe, with broadcasts in Vienna, Paris and London, as well as Basle, Cologne, Lausanne and Ljubljana. Klára Körmendi has a wide repertoire, and has always shown particular interest in contemporary repertoire, both Hungarian and foreign. Her recordings for Hungaroton include music by Pierre Boulez, Olivier Messiaen, Luciano Berio and Heinz Holliger. For Naxos she has recorded works by Debussy and Ravel and will also record the complete piano music of Satie.

## **Erik Satie**

### **Klavierwerke Vol. 1**

Erik Satie war einer der seltsamsten Vögel der gesamten Musikgeschichte. Ein Selfmade-Man mit einem Sinn für ätzenden Humor, der seine Kollegen und Zuhörer nicht nur einmal an den Rand der Verzweiflung brachte: Claude Debussy erteilte ihm einst den freundschaftlichen Rat, er - Satie - solle bei seinen Kompositionen doch ein wenig auf die Form achtgeben. Worauf dieser sich mit drei Stücken in Birnenform für Klavier zu vier Händen revanchierte; einen Kritiker verglich er brieflich mit jenem Körperteil, auf dem Bettler und Gelehrte gleichermaßen zu sitzen pflegen, und der Ärger war da. Doch selbst Ablehnung und Unverständnis brachten ihn nicht von seinem eigenartigen Weg ab, der nach und nach den Gang der Musikgeschichte beeinflussen sollte

...

Geboren wurde Erik Satie am 17. Mai 1866 im französischen Honfleur. Von 1878 bis 1887 studierte er am renommierten Pariser Konservatorium. Als zweiter Klavierspieler fand er eine Anstellung am Kabarett "Chat Noir" am Montmartre. Als er auf die 40 zuzug, empfand er seine bisherigen

künstlerischen Leistungen als unzureichend; er setzte sich wieder auf die Schulbank, um neben jüngeren Studenten zu lernen, wie man richtig komponiert.

Eins konnten ihm seine Lehrer freilich nicht austreiben - den zum Teil recht drastischen Humor und seinen Sinn für realistische Klangeffekte. Als er 1916 sein Ballett "Parade" uraufführen läßt (dessen Bühnenbild von keinem geringeren als Pablo Picasso stammt), da kommt es zum denkwürdigen Skandal. In Paris aber bedeutet das: Satie hat den Durchbruch geschafft. Er ist berühmt.

Tatsächlich ist die Wirkung der "Parade" enorm. Der Schriftsteller Jean Cocteau faßt Saties merkwürdige Vorstellungen in Worte, und bald hat der Komponist eine Reihe geistiger Kinder, die später weltberühmt werden sollten: Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Germaine Tailleferre gehören zu der Gruppe der "Sechs", die auf der Grundlage des neuen Schönheitsideals eine Musik schreiben, die weder der späten Romantik noch dem Impressionismus verpflichtet ist.

Saties eigenes Werk gliedert sich grob gesprochen in drei Phasen. Am Anfang entsteht unter anderem eine Reihe von rätselhaften Klavierstücken: beispielsweise um 1888 die "Ogives" (Spitzbögen), deren Klänge imaginäre Rituale zu beschwören scheinen - besonders das Schlußstück mit seinen verfremdeten Choralakkorden wirkt wie der Gesang aus einer fernen Zeit.

Damals schreibt Satie auch die drei vollgriffigen Sarabanden, die als erste seiner Kreationen auf ein gewisses Interesse stießen: Wie es heißt, soll Claude Debussy von den ungewöhnlichen Harmonien dieser drei Stücke aus dem Jahre 1887 beeinflusst worden sein.

1891 komponiert Satie verschiedene Werke für den Bund der Rosenkreuzer. Vor allem die drei "Sonneries de la Rose+Croix" (Sonnerie = Trompetenstücke, Läuten) überraschen mit seltenen Klangeffekten, wenn die einfachen Melodien von trockenen, abgerissenen Begleitakkorden gestützt werden, als zöge eine zeremonielle Prozession vorüber.

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Erik  
**SATIE**  
(1866-1925)

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Playing  
Time :  
57'34"

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- |           |                                       |        |                          |   |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|--------|--------------------------|---|
|           | <b>Trois Nocturnes</b>                |        | <b>Rêverie du Pauvre</b> | <b>(4:06)</b>                           |
| <b>1</b>  | Le Premier                            | (2:25) |                          |   |
| <b>2</b>  | Le Deuxième                           | (1:49) |                          |   |
| <b>3</b>  | Le Troisième                          | (2:24) |                          |   |
| <b>4</b>  | IV. Nocturne                          | (2:22) |                          |   |
| <b>5</b>  | V. Nocturne                           | (2:00) |                          |   |
| <b>6</b>  | Première pensée<br>rose + croix       | (1:21) |                          |   |
|           | <b>Sonneries de la rose + croix</b>   |        |                          |   |
| <b>7</b>  | Air de l'ordre                        | (4:15) |                          |   |
| <b>8</b>  | Air du grand maître                   | (5:06) |                          |   |
| <b>9</b>  | Air du grand prieur                   | (3:03) |                          |   |
| <b>10</b> | Rêverie de l'enfance de<br>Pantagruel | (1:16) |                          |   |
|           |                                       |        | <b>11</b>                |   |
|           |                                       |        |                          | <b>Deux rêveries nocturnes</b>          |
|           |                                       |        | <b>12</b>                | I.                                      |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (1:27)                                  |
|           |                                       |        | <b>13</b>                | II.                                     |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (1:56)                                  |
|           |                                       |        | <b>14</b>                | Prélude de la porte<br>héroïque du ciel |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (3:28)                                  |
|           |                                       |        |                          | <b>Ogives</b>                           |
|           |                                       |        | <b>15</b>                | I.                                      |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (1:48)                                  |
|           |                                       |        | <b>16</b>                | II.                                     |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (1:45)                                  |
|           |                                       |        | <b>17</b>                | III.                                    |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (1:32)                                  |
|           |                                       |        | <b>18</b>                | IV.                                     |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (1:51)                                  |
|           |                                       |        |                          | <b>Sarabandes</b>                       |
|           |                                       |        | <b>19</b>                | I.                                      |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (4:24)                                  |
|           |                                       |        | <b>20</b>                | II.                                     |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (4:24)                                  |
|           |                                       |        | <b>21</b>                | III.                                    |
|           |                                       |        |                          | (3:47)                                  |

Recorded at the Unitarian Church, Budapest,  
from 1st to 3rd June, 1992.

Producer: Ibolya Tóth

Engineer: János Bohus

Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Cover Painting: Summer, the Meadow by Monet



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