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IRELAND
Piano Works Vol. 2
Decorations • Sonatina
Leaves from a Child's Sketchbook
John Lenehan, Piano



John Ireland (1879-1962)

Piano Music Volume 2

The English composer John Ireland often complained of what he perceived as a lack of attention to his work. Nevertheless, during his lifetime, he had his fair share of exposure, although this has certainly been followed by subsequent neglect. He was born in 1879, the son of Alexander Ireland, a native of Edinburgh and business manager and publisher of the *Manchester Examiner*. His mother, also from Scotland, was his father's second wife and thirty years her husband's junior. Ireland had some of his early education at Leeds Grammar School, but at the age of thirteen, without his parents' knowledge, presented himself for audition at the Royal College of Music, where one of his sisters was already studying. He was accepted by the College, intending to become a concert pianist and also taking organ lessons with Sir Walter Parratt, organist of St George's Chapel, Windsor. Two years later he persuaded Stanford to accept him as a composition pupil. In the following years, while he attempted to establish himself as a composer, Ireland, supported by the money he had by then inherited from his parents, earned an additional living for himself as an organist and choirmaster, establishing lasting friendships with some of the boys in his charge. He settled in Chelsea, dividing his time between London, a retreat in Deal and regular visits to the Channel Islands. After the war he joined the teaching staff of the Royal College. There he continued to exercise influence on generations of students. In 1927 he made a brief attempt at marriage. His wife, a student some thirty years his junior, proved as unsuitable a partner as

Tchaikovsky's had fifty years earlier, and the marriage was quickly annulled.

In common with other musicians, Ireland suffered disruption to his life in 1939. He had at first thought to find peace in the Channel Islands, to be evacuated to safety when the surrender of France became imminent. He spent much of the war lodging with a clergyman he had first known as a young choirmaster and once the war was over returned to Chelsea, until London became impossible for him. He spent his final years in Sussex, where he died in 1962.

With his long connection with the Church of England and its liturgy, Ireland wrote music for services, hymns and carols. He also added to English vocal repertoire in a valuable series of solo songs and choral works. Works for chorus and orchestra include *These Things Shall Be* and *Greater Love Hath No Man*, both of which won success. Orchestral compositions include a *Piano Concerto*, *Concertino pastorale* for string orchestra and the symphonic rhapsody *Mai-Dun*, inspired by the British defence of Maiden Castle against the invading Romans in A.D. 43. With some labour he completed a score for the film *The Overlanders*, one of his last major achievements, and added to chamber music repertoire, with a *Viola Sonata* for Lionel Tertis, two *Violin Sonatas*, the second for Albert Sammons, a *Cello Sonata* that Casals planned to take into his repertoire and a *Fantasy Sonata* for the clarinetist Frederick Thurston. For the piano, essentially his own instrument, Ireland wrote a quantity of music, one sonata and some forty short lyrical pieces. His

most popular composition, *The Holy Boy*, inspired by one of his choristers, was originally a piano piece but underwent various transformations. His thought was much influenced by the Celtic mysticism of the novels of Arthur Machen, haunted by the ghosts of Roman Britain, and he also found affinity with the poems of A.E. Housman and the novels and poems of Thomas Hardy.

Merry Andrew, written in 1918, is dedicated to the pianist William Murdoch, who had taken part in the first performance of Ireland's *Second Violin Sonata* a year before. The caprice suggested by the title is borne out in the music, which offers a contrast of mood and key in a central section. *The Towing Path*, written in the same year, was suggested by the Thames Valley and the riverside village of Pangbourne. The piece offers an idyllic picture, in its prevailing lilting rhythm. The *Rhapsody* of 1915 lacks any overt extra-musical connection, with its strongly rhythmic opening, gently lilting chords and final tranquillity.

April and *Bergomask* were published in 1925. The second of these pieces was to mark the birthday of the choirboy Arthur Miller, son of a Chelsea antique-dealer, on 22nd February, 1925. The first is gently evocative and the second suggests, at least in part, the rhythms of the dance.

The three pieces that constitute *Decorations* were published in 1915 and reflect earlier visits to the Channel Islands. The first of the set, *The Island Spell*, was started during a holiday in Jersey in August, 1912, inspired by Le Fauvic beach. After work on the piece at home in Chelsea, he completed it in Jersey the following year. It has a quotation from Arthur Symons at its head:

"I would wash the dust of the world in a
soft green flood:
Here, between sea and sea, in the fairy wood,
I have found a delicate, wave-green solitude . . ."

The chiming of a bell is heard over the gentle sound of the water, leading to a dramatic climax, before the sound dies away once more.

The second piece, *Moon-Glade*, is again headed by verses of Arthur Symons:

"Why are you so sorrowful in dreams?
I am sad in the night;
The hours till the morning are white,
I hear the hours' flight
All night in dreams . . ."

Completed in Chelsea in 1913, the piece offers distantly evocative fragments of melody over a repeated accompaniment pattern.

The third of the set, *The Scarlet Ceremonies*, bears the date June, 1913. It is prefaced by lines from Arthur Machen's *The House of Souls*:

". . . Then there are the Ceremonies,
which are all of them
important, but some are more
delightful than others –
there are the White Ceremonies,
and the Green Ceremonies,
and the Scarlet Ceremonies.
The Scarlet Ceremonies are the best . . ."

The occult ceremonies of the title are translated into musical terms, with insistently repeated figures and a final *glissando* leading to forceful closing bars.

Leaves from a Child's Sketchbook, published in 1918, offers music of great simplicity. *On the Mere* is an *Allegretto* in a straightforward triple metre, with the dotted notes of its melody above. *In the Meadow*, again in simple two-part writing, is a graceful *Moderato* and the set ends with a graphic and descriptive *The Hunt's Up*.

A poignant mood, lightened by a central passage in the major, generally pervades *The Darkened Valley* of 1921, with its superscription from William Blake:

"Walking along the darkened valley
With silent Melancholy."

Ireland's *Sonatina* was written between June, 1926, and October, 1927, and dedicated to Edward Clark, the husband of the composer Elisabeth Lutyens. The first movement includes an attack on Arnold Bax for his allegedly cruel treatment of the pianist Gweneth Hutcheson. The notes C A D provide an emphatic secondary subject in the first movement. The evocative slow movement leads without a break to the final energetic *rondo*.

The *Three Pastels* were published in 1941, at a time when Ireland had taken refuge in Banbury. The first, from an earlier manuscript, follows lines from A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*:

"A Grecian lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain,
Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again."

Ireland, in correspondence with a friend, wondered whether this referred to Narcissus or Hyacinthus, the latter in fact killed, in legend, by a misdirected discus. The second piece, *The Boy Bishop*, refers, in assumed solemnity, to the customary promotion of a boy to this office for a day. It carries the superscription from Psalm XLV 'diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis' (full of grace are thy lips), while the third piece, *Puck's Birthday*, with the words *I am that merry wanderer of the night*, from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, reflects that character's impetuosity.

February's Child was written in 1929 to mark the birthday of the choirboy Arthur Miller. Ireland had provided a first dedication in 1922 with *On a Birthday Morning* and continued the custom during the 1920s. Published in 1931, it is dominated by the opening melody, marked *Allegretto amabile*, an echo of the dedicatory *Pro amicitia* that had prefaced the first dedication in 1922. The piece was published together with *Aubade*, a salute to the new day.

Summer Evening, written in 1919, evokes an image of tranquillity.

Keith Anderson

John Lenehan

John Lenehan is one of Britain's most experienced and sought after chamber musicians. He regularly partners Julian Lloyd Webber and Nigel Kennedy and has worked with many other leading instrumentalists including James Galway, John Harle, Steven Isserlis and Tasmin Little.

During the last few seasons he has appeared in major concert-halls in London, Amsterdam, Vienna, Salzburg, New York, Washington and Tokyo and has made a number of recordings for major record companies.



John Ireland (1879-1962)

Piano Works Vol. 2

John Lenehan, Piano

1	Merry Andrew	2:49	Sonatina	10:46
2	The Towing-Path	3:40	13 Moderato	4:47
3	Rhapsody	7:31	14 Quasi lento –	3:31
	Two Pieces	7:05	15 Rondo: Ritmico, non troppo allegro	2:22
4	April	3:56	Three Pastels	9:03
5	Bergomask	3:04	16 A Grecian Lad	3:06
	Decorations	10:01	17 The Boy Bishop	4:03
6	The Island Spell	3:44	18 Puck's Birthday	1:45
7	Moon-Glade	3:20	Two Pieces	7:15
8	The Scarlet Ceremonies	2:50	19 February's Child	4:17
	Leaves from a Child's Sketchbook	7:47	20 Aubade	2:54
9	By the Mere	1:34	21 Summer Evening	3:50
10	In the Meadows	1:28		
11	The Hunt's Up	0:57		
12	The Darkened Valley	3:36		

Playing
Time
70:43

John
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(1879-1962)

John Lenehan, Piano

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STEREO

DDD

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John Ireland

The English composer John Ireland lived most of his life in London and was a frequent visitor to the Channel Islands and the Sussex Downs. These were a principal source of inspiration for his music but it would be a mistake to associate him with the so-called "English Pastoral School". Influenced by Ravel, Stravinsky and Gerswin, his music demonstrates a great deal of originality and is deserving of greater international recognition.

The Piano Music

Ireland's piano music, some of the most appealing British piano music written this century, reflects the composer's many interests: his love of literature, his interest in fatalism and Celtic mysticism as well as the bitter-sweet regret of the passing of love.

Recorded at St George's Church, Brandon Hill, Bristol, on
8th and 9th September, 1996.

Producer and Engineer: Chris Craker

www:

hnh.com



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