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British Light Music



Billy MAYERL

**Aquarium Suite • Four Aces Suite • Marigold
From a Spanish Lattice • Autumn Crocus
Pastoral Sketches • Bats in the Belfry**

**Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra
Gary Carpenter**



Billy Mayerl (1902 - 1959)

In the same way that it has always seemed appropriate for a composer like Benjamin Britten to have been born on St. Cecilia's Day, it is rather fitting that William Joseph (Billy) Mayerl was born within yards of London's Tin Pan Alley, in Tottenham Court Road, on 31st May 1902, the son of violinist Joseph Mayerl, and his wife Elise Umbach. Although the violin was his first instrument, the piano soon took over from the age of three. At seven years' old, he won a scholarship to Trinity College of Music, and a year later, with the help of an Italian piano teacher, gave a recital at the Queen's Hall, which included one of his own compositions. By the age of twelve he was appearing there again in the Grieg *Concerto*, while, less "publicly", accompanying silent films.

During further years of study, Billy Mayerl realised that his career lay on the lighter side of music, and by 1918, he was beginning to earn his living as a professional. His first variety show appearance came two years later, and in 1921, he joined the Savoy Havana Band at the famous London hotel, under the American saxophonist, Bert Ralton, and at a very generous salary. With this band he took part in the George Robey revue *You'd be Surprised* at the Royal Opera House in 1923, and in 1927, *Shake Your Feet*, at the Hippodrome and Lew Leslie's revue, *White Birds*, a selection from which he recorded. (His recordings for EMI companies started here, lasted some twenty years, and sold in their tens of thousands.)

In 1925, he gave the first British performance of *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Savoy Orpheans under Debroy Somers, at the Queen's Hall in the presence of Gershwin himself, who praised Mayerl's interpretation highly. The two became close friends thereafter, and if there is a source for Mayerl's favourite stylistic fingerprint of having his melodies doubled in fourths, then one need look no further than Gershwin's own *Novellette in Fourths*.

Mayerl's ability to make idiosyncratic arrangements of the popular songs of the day went hand in hand with his desire to popularise ragtime, jazz and

syncopated piano playing generally. In 1926, he opened his own School of Modern Syncopation at the Steinway Hall, and published a tutor, all in the cause of the style of piano playing he had championed. This extended to correspondence courses, and the school's setting up of branches in Germany, Holland, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA. Most famous amongst his thousands of "pupils" Mayerl could count the future King George VI. The music they were expected to play at the end of such a course fell into two categories - the up-beat pieces derived from ragtime, and those of a more lyrical nature that have their roots in the music of such contemporaries as Coates, German, Ireland, Delius, and even Frank Bridge.

Mayerl's multi-faceted career continued unabated throughout the 1930s, and by the outbreak of World War II, he found himself in charge of music at the Grosvenor House Hotel. After hostilities, and a nervous breakdown, he joined the BBC Light Music Department in an administrative, rather than creative capacity, as his music, like that of so many of his contemporaries, quietly became unfashionable. He had established, like many of them, a particular style, and rarely deviated from it throughout his career, so that whether a piece dated from the 1920s or the 1950s, the musical language was largely the same, within given parameters. However, within these self-imposed confines, he displayed a consummate artistry both in his compositions and in his performances of them. His death in 1959 closed a page in the history of music-making to which few could, or would wish to, add even the briefest of footnotes.

1 Marigold (1927)

Billy Mayerl's signature tune and best-seller (it sold over 150,000 copies of sheet music in its first twenty years of life) all but swamped his other compositions in the mind of the public, particularly in the 'wilderness years' following his death. Like so many of his pieces, the title came from a pictorial source in his everyday life - in this case, a bowl of flowers on a table in his home. After the success of the piece, it is not surprising that he named his Hampstead home, Marigold Lodge.

2 A Lily Pond (1929)

Away from the distinctive syncopated piano novelties, Mayerl had a more romantic, pastoral turn of phrase. This example shows him, perhaps, contemplating a quiet pool of water that he would later reproduce at his Hampstead home. Whereas the *Aquarium Suite* is decidedly 'indoor' music, here we are definitely outdoors, taking the air.

Four Aces Suite (1933)

3 Ace of Clubs

4 Ace of Diamonds

5 Ace of Hearts

6 Ace of Spades

One of several extended works in his output, which reflect his penchant for cards. The *Four Aces Suite* was dedicated to Bill Evans, the managing director of Challen & Co. whose pianos Mayerl preferred to all others. He used the various aspects associated with the different suits to produce a set of strongly characterized pieces; music linked to games seems to have been *en vogue* at this time since four years later Bliss produced *Checkmate* and Stravinsky *Jeu de Cartes*.

7 From a Spanish Lattice (1938)

The first word of the title *From a Spanish Lattice* is particularly apposite, in the same way that it is in Delius' *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*. Here is a Spanish scene observed at a distance, by a very un-Spanish viewer. For there is frankly little Spanish about the music itself, apart from a decorative triplet in the central *habanera*. Mayerl stays very much on his own ground and in his own style, the Spanish colour coming mainly from the added ethnic percussion.

8 Minuet by Candlelight (1956)

In the outer sections of *Minuet by Candlelight*, Mayerl flirts here with the 'olden style', seeing it through twentieth century eyes (or ears), but is unable to resist bringing us totally into the present century in the central section - hence the carefully constituted title. This is candlelight, not out of mundane necessity, but for romantic effect.

Aquarium Suite (1937)

9 No. 1 Willow Moss

10 No. 2 Moorish Idol

11 No. 3 Fantail

12 No. 4 Whirligig

After his tribute to one obsession - cards - Mayerl wrote his *Aquarium Suite* most likely to celebrate the building of a fishpond in the garden at Marigold Lodge.

13 Autumn Crocus (1932)

After *Marigold*, it must have seemed natural to pick a few more flowers for titles. This *idyll*, as he called it, *Autumn Crocus*, is just one of his many botanical pieces, amongst them, *Hollyhock* (1927), *White Heather* (1932), *Mistletoe* (1935), and those within the two matching suites, *In My Garden - Wintertime* (1946) and *In My Garden - Springtime* (1947).

14 Bats in the Belfry (1935)

Along with *Green Tulips*, *Bats in the Belfry* represents a collaborative enterprise between Mayerl and Austen Croom-Johnson (affectionately known as 'Ginger') with Johnson writing the opening theme and Mayerl doing the rest. The two men recorded both pieces as duets on piano and harpsichord. Johnson left for America soon after the pieces were published, and pioneered the musical commercial, most notably for Pepsi-Cola.

Pastoral Sketches (1928)

- 15 No. 1 A Legend**
- 16 No. 2 Lovers' Lane**
- 17 No. 3 A Village Festival**

The 'outdoor' *Pastoral Sketches*, belying nothing of the style of the famous piano novelties, must have fitted well into the Boosey Light Music catalogue of the time, overseen for so many years by Frederic Curzon. The orchestration was by Arthur Wood, best known to British radio listeners through his *Barwick Green*, the theme for the highly popular series, *The Archers*, and itself a stalwart of the same Boosey catalogue.

18 Fireside Fusiliers (1943)

Despite its title, its date and its mock fanfares, there is little of the military proper in *Fireside Fusiliers* - rather of the military at a distance, or perhaps off-duty.

19 Parade of the Sandwich-Board Men (1938)

Parade of the Sandwich-Board Men, a syncopated novelty, is very much a hark back to ragtime, and might, in more 'elevated' circles, be described as a little *rondo*.

20 Waltz for a Lonely Heart (1956)

Despite its date, there is a nostalgic flavour in *Waltz for a Lonely Heart* that places it a good twenty years earlier, but its honesty is unquestionable, and it displays Mayerl as a master of melody, mood and colour.

21 Busybody (1956)

The last item in this album has a self-explanatory title, and might be a mocking portrait of a particular acquaintance. It surely cannot be the composer who is mocked gently in the introductory passage to each appearance of the theme, since Stravinsky (here in *Petrushka* guise) was one of Mayerl's favourite composers.

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Arrangements / Orchestrations: Billy Mayerl (Tracks 1, 8 - 12, 20, 21)
Fred Adlington (Track 2)
Ray Noble (Tracks 3 - 6)
Hubert Bath (Track 7)
Herman Finck (Track 13)
George Windeatt (Tracks 14, 19)
Arthur Wood (Tracks 15 - 17)
Alan Nichols (Track 18)

Andrew Ball

Andrew Ball studied piano with Kendall Taylor at the Royal College of Music, and took a first class degree in Music at Queen's College, Oxford. He has established a reputation as an enterprising and distinctive pianist, with a huge repertoire, and a particular commitment to twentieth century music. He has given first performances of solo works by such contrasting composers as Martin Butler, Chris Dench, Sofia Gubaidulina, Benedict Mason, Frederic Rzewaki, Toru Takemitsu, John Woolrich and Alfred Schnittke. He recently made his Polish concerto début, with the Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra and is one of the most frequently broadcasting pianists for the BBC, both as a soloist, and in duos and chamber music.

Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava)

The Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava), the oldest symphonic ensemble in Slovakia, was founded in 1929 at the instance of Milos Ruppeldt and Oskar Nedbal, prominent personalities in the sphere of music. Ondrej Lenárd was appointed its conductor in 1970 and in 1977 its conductor-in-chief, succeeded recently by Robert Stankovsky. The orchestra has given successful concerts both at home and abroad, in Germany, Russia, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Spain, Italy, Great Britain, Hong Kong and Japan. For Marco Polo the orchestra has recorded works by Glazunov, Glière, Miaskovsky and other late romantic composers and film music of Honegger, Bliss, Ibert and Khachaturian as well as several volumes of the label's Johann Strauss Edition. Naxos recordings include symphonies and ballets by Tchaikovsky, and symphonies by Berlioz and Saint-Saëns.

Gary Carpenter

Gary Carpenter was born in London and studied at the Royal College of Music. Active as a conductor and composer, his ballet-scores, in particular *De Kinderspelen* for the Nederlands Dans Theater, have been performed throughout Europe and America, including performances at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. He has written two musicals. The first of these, *The Streets of London*, enjoyed a run in London's West End in 1980-81, and the second, *Goodnight Mister Tom*, won a prestigious British award in 1992. Other work has included collaboration with Iris Murdoch for the BBC radio drama *The One Alone* and further extensive work as conductor and music director in films and stage productions, with ballet and operetta performances in Germany and Holland and broadcasts in England with the BBC Concert Orchestra. He has arranged music for the London Symphony Orchestra and other orchestras in England and abroad and has received prizes and awards in Vienna, Monaco and Manchester for his work.

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Billy
MAYERL
 (1902 - 1959)

Andrew Ball, Piano
 Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra
 (Bratislava)
 Gary Carpenter

Playing
 Time:
 73'52"

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|-----------|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------|---|---------------|
| 1 | Marigold | (3:31) | 11 | No. 3 Fantail | (3:18) |
| 2 | A Lily Pond | (4:42) | 12 | No. 4 Whirligig | (4:09) |
| | Four Aces Suite | | 13 | Autumn Crocus | (3:31) |
| 3 | Ace of Clubs | (3:10) | 14 | Bats in the Belfry | (2:47) |
| 4 | Ace of Diamonds | (2:50) | | Pastoral Sketches | |
| 5 | Ace of Hearts | (3:29) | 15 | No. 1 A Legend | (2:39) |
| 6 | Ace of Spades | (3:59) | 16 | No. 2 Lovers' Lane | (2:37) |
| 7 | From a Spanish Lattice | (4:45) | 17 | No. 3 A Village Festival | (4:00) |
| 8 | Minuet by Candlelight | (3:51) | 18 | Fireside Fusiliers | (3:31) |
| | Aquarium Suite | | 19 | Parade of the
Sandwich-Board Men | (2:42) |
| 9 | No. 1 Willow Moss | (3:46) | 20 | Waltz for a Lonely Heart | (3:55) |
| 10 | No. 2 Moorish Idol | (3:53) | 21 | Busybody | (2:47) |

Recorded at the Concert Hall of the Slovak Radio in Bratislava, in October, 1992.

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