

SOMM
RECORDINGS



Mirage

Piano
Music By
Stephen
Dodgson



Osman
Tack
Piano



First
Recordings

Mirage

STEPHEN DODGSON – PIANO MUSIC

In today's teeming aesthetic world so often characterised by factors once considered irrelevant, the urbane and civilised music of Stephen Dodgson remains as a welcome reminder of the eternal verities of the genuine composer's art.

Stephen Dodgson was born in London in 1924 and was therefore of the generation called upon to fight in the Second World War. He served in the Navy, and on demobilisation entered the Royal College of Music, initially studying the horn but also composition, at which discipline he excelled. Following his graduation, a scholarship to Italy broadened his outlook and on his return home he embarked upon a multi-faceted career as a composer, reviewer, lecturer, broadcaster and teacher – returning to the Royal College in the last capacity.

Dodgson therefore played a significant role across many aspects of music in Britain during the latter half of the 20th century, a role that some, he himself included, may feel took him away from his original creative work at times. But equally one that invariably impressed upon him a belief in the importance for composers to ensure that their work was practical, inherently communicative and relevant to the occasions for which it was created.

Dodgson's output was both extensive and varied – from significant solo guitar works (an instrument he did not play himself, but knew intimately), two concertos, several operas, orchestral and chamber music – in short, a wide-ranging output that reflected both the extent of his interests and the demand those interests engendered.

Dodgson was equally a more than competent pianist, and it is a broad selection of his solo piano music that occupies us on this disc – the third album devoted entirely to Dodgson's music issued on the SOMM label in recent years, following the song recitals *The Peasant Poet* (SOMMCD 0659) and *The Distances Between* (SOMMCD 0673).

The **Eight Fanciful Pieces**, which open this collection, come from a relatively early period in Dodgson's career. They are the earliest work in pianist Osman Tack's programme, being composed in 1956, and form a judiciously varied suite of pieces whose titles suggest a collection of complementary moods, perhaps written over several years (although we have no such definite knowledge) but a set bound by the directness of utterance that so distinguished Dodgson's music throughout his life and by the naturally organic nature of his work. No matter how this set was compiled, or over how long a period these pieces were individually created, it is the inherent organic concentration of the individual material that defines Dodgson as a natural composer: each piece is concerned with the contemplation and development of the initial material, the individual titles of each Piece offering an element of characterisation that is not wholly late-Impressionistic in nature, but one of putting the listener in a correctly receptive frame of mind. Simple, effective, apposite, we are subtly invited into a genuine composer's set of characteristic pieces.

The title of the first Piece, 'A Leaf in the River', at once conjures up an image that is beautifully expressed in a moderately-moving musical flow of linear subtleties, marked *Andante espressivo e rubato*, subtly growing from a descending B, A-sharp, C-sharp motif, from which Dodgson weaves a tapestry of intriguing design. The second Piece, 'Shrovetide Procession', is no simple revisiting of Stravinsky's 1830 St Petersburg – but it does, subtly, pay homage to the Russian genius's masterwork in tonality (a "side-swiping" C major) and affection: marked *sonore al affetuoso*, whilst retaining much of the mercurial aspects of Dodgson's own character in its ultimate acceptance of the nature of Easter.

The third Piece is 'Il Zoppo'. In Italian, the title translates as 'The Cripple', a term often applied to the early-17th-century Sicilian painter Giuseppe Salerno: the tempo is *Allegro ma non tanto* (not too fast) and *Marcato* (marked) – the occasional subtle emphasis making a sonic picture of the artist's irregular gait. 'The Storm Comes and Passes' is a wholly Impressionistic piece, beginning *Poco Lento – cantabile* in a broad 2/2 pulse, followed by another character piece, the quirky, ebullient 'Krazy Kate' – music whose initial 2/4 beat is soon subjected to the wiles and unforeseen outbursts of the uncontrollable individual. In the sixth Piece, 'Mirage', Dodgson pays a passing acknowledgement (rather than mere 'influence') to Gallic Impressionism, the interplay – interwoven, eventually – of lines, flowing from the *Allegro teneramente's* opening third in the right hand, not so much echoed but subtly refracted, as it were, in the left; both combining in a mood of rare contemplation.

The *Scherzando* seventh Piece, 'Dances', combines a variety of triply rhythmic pulses within a basic 12/8 metre – this is genuine dance-music, the music's *Molto vivace* marking impelling the dances forward throughout. Finally, 'When all is Quiet'; the title, once more, tells the listener all they need to know, as a broad 6/4 tracery gently winds the music – and this set of Pieces – to its beatific conclusion.

In Dodgson's Suite for Piano, ***Four Moods of the Wind***, his fulsome embrace of the essence of Impressionism in music is wonderfully displayed. The work was composed in 1968 at a time when British music of the youngest generation was also embracing post-war European standards, but Dodgson acknowledges an earlier northern Gallic influence, as refracted through a lens of almost Albion moonlight rather than the mercurial Mediterranean wisps of the suddenly arriving Mistral.

Throughout this Suite, the attentive listener can readily absorb the nature of Dodgson's inspiration, a subject which has attracted more than one British or Continental composer –

a transient expression, no doubt, and not one merely applicable to a certain generation, but in these four movements, one can almost imagine the work being initially thought of as a solo sonata – organically adept, in nature varied, the overall tonality hovering between B major/minor and E – yet the inherent nature of the music itself betrays its transient inspiration and communicative power.

In the opening movement, *Molto moderato* in 3/4 pulse, melodic wafts sway this way and that. It is as an idle early-Summer afternoon, the distant gathering strength only appearing overhead in the *Agitato* second movement in a constant fast 6/4. The storm placates somewhat in the third flighty movement, *Flessibile e drammatico*, as if going elsewhere, until the fourth Mood, unified by a four-note cell of D-C-sharp-G-E virtually recalls the music to order, inherent constant life on its way before wafting us goodbye.

Dodgson's **Three Impromptus** together constitute a significant concert work. They were originally composed in 1962 but were fully revised in 1985. In this impressive set, all three unified in virtual symphonic fashion through inter-weaving of short phrases, or cells, throughout, we hear Dodgson at his most meaningful, one of his most public (as it were) utterances. The dramatic intensity of the first Impromptu – the constant time-changes signifying an unsettled nature, and the characteristically fine keyboard writing betoken a composer at full stretch; here is British piano music of a quality seldom matched by the composer's contemporaries.

The second Impromptu initially appears to disabuse the composer of mercurial thought, but here, despite the marking *Andante semplice* in 6/8 metre, the subtlety of its nature is always underpinned by a genuine forward momentum, fully realised in this performance. In the final Impromptu, Dodgson reverts to a playful, volatile nature in music changing between 2/4 and 3/4 in subtly intriguing fashion – a staccato-like dance of immediate lightness of character and inner grace yet never superficial.

Stephen Dodgson's **Piano Sonata No.7** was his last, composed in 2003 as he approached his 80th birthday. His work was by no means over, for he had another 10 years of creativity to give us. In this vastly impressive work, Dodgson remains in full possession of his considerable expressive powers, a lifetime in music now fully absorbed in a statement of compelling interest. The work itself falls into three movements, each supra-contained with an overall and characteristic pulse that organically moves to its brilliant conclusion.

It is this pulse which binds the music together as the living heart of the work's inner life. The Sonata begins with a somewhat peremptory brief gesture at once countered by a flowing *Allegro moderato* in C major in 6/4. But ere long has elapsed before distant clouds become more imminent in their power and expression – although the inner life of the work is not deterred, albeit momentarily affected – the varied musical argument of this first movement is compelling as the underlying tonal base remains strong. In the central *Poco Adagio*, the contemplative nature fully exemplifies the use of an over-riding 6/8 pulse, a stretch of calm before the arrival of tingling life in the *Allegro vivace* finale. Marked additionally *Molto ritmico*, here the music at times seems to veer between vitality and a sudden catching-of-breath before this unique masterwork is over.

Dodgson composed two sets of **Six Bagatelles** written in 1998 and 2005 – the first set is to be found on the second SOMM disc in this series (SOMMCD 0673) – and this final set reveals the composer's inspiration burning as brightly in his eighties as it was in any other decade of his creative maturity. The First Bagatelle from Set II is a gently expressive piece in 3/8 time, with aspects of technically demanding writing for the right hand – a genuinely melodic modern 'stream of consciousness' that welcomes us into the mature world of this master-composer. In much contrast, the Second Bagatelle appears as a summer afternoon pastel – lazily paced, undulating and songful. In the Third Bagatelle, Dodgson is in cryptic and playful

mood: he hasn't forgotten the impetus of the rhythmic off-beat, carried further – and with quite different expressive purpose – in the somewhat expressively erratic motion the music is quite melodramatic, almost *quasi senza misura* (though not so marked) – the pianist seemingly spontaneous.

The Fourth Bagatelle, in contrast, is deliberately erratic in motion; melodramatic and suggestive, as a piece in *senza misura*, the emotion is fully on display. The Fifth takes us further, inhabiting a quasi-other-world of seemingly hollow and stealthy character – relatively 'advanced' in expression (but not technique), until the mercurial, ebullient *Moto perpetuo* finale – airy and sparking, in 9/16 time, its scalic impetuosity bidding us farewell with impish glee.

There remains one further solo piano piece by Stephen Dodgson played by Osman Tack, the length of which has made it impossible to accommodate on this disc. It is the earliest of the composer's piano works, the Rondo in A flat, dating from 1953, a work that immediately declared the creative independence of the composer. Marked *Allegro spiritoso*, and lasting around five minutes, it is a challenging piece for the interpreter, being ostensibly in 4/4 but intermittently interrupted by single 5/4 and 2/4 bars; its character is mercurial and ebullient, quasi-Stravinskian to some ears, but a genuine challenge thrown down by this admirable composer at the earlier height of his powers. It is available on all digital and streaming services, and available for free download to CD purchasers at: somm-recordings.com/somm0684thankyou.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2024

Osman Tack

Born in Oxfordshire, Osman Tack is recognised for his versatility as a pianist, excelling as a solo performer and collaborative artist. At a young age he secured first place in both the Chandos Young Musician of the Year and Pro-Corda national chamber music competition. Since then he has performed Schumann's Piano Concerto with the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra, accompanied Ian Bostridge in Schubert's *Winterreise*, and worked as a rehearsal pianist with the Royal Ballet in Covent Garden.

Osman has a PhD from the University of Oxford and a Master of Music in Performance from the Royal College of Music specialising in contemporary piano. Whilst in Oxford and London he collaborated with many instrumentalists, singers, composers, orchestras and dancers. His training includes mentorship from many renowned concert pianists such as Sofya Gulyak, Danny Driver, Ian Jones, Bernard d'Ascoli, Peter Donohoe and Imogen Cooper.

Osman's exploration of Stephen Dodgson's music originated from collaborations with the closely related composer Michael Maxwell-Steer. Building connections with Stephen's wife Jane and the Stephen Dodgson Charitable Trust has led Osman to unveil this new album of his solo piano works. This is a collection of works previously unrecorded and follows a series of premiere concerts in venues across England, including the Barnes Music Festival in 2022. With this CD, Osman aims to contribute to the wider appreciation of Dodgson's exceptional compositions amongst musicians and audiences alike.



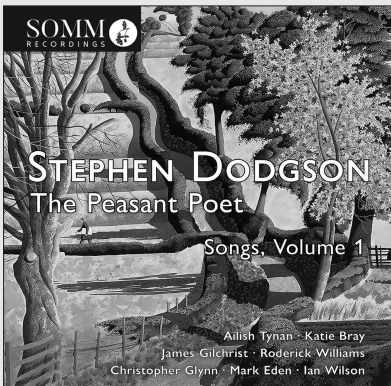
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Dodgson Songs, Volume 1

The Peasant Poet

SOMMCD 0659

Ailish Tynan *soprano*,
Katie Bray *mezzo-soprano*,
James Gilchrist *tenor*,
Roderick Williams *baritone*,
Christopher Glynn *piano*,
Mark Eden *guitar*,
Ian Wilson *recorder*



"The quality and poise of the singing, and the accompaniment from Christopher Glynn, certainly make this a pleasure... The sound is crystal clear as ever from this source, with voice and piano in perfect harmony. This is a triumph for SOMM and, for all those who wish to seek out of the way English song, this is for you." *Fanfare*

"Christopher Glynn adroitly elicits the diverse character of each song... these approachable, sometimes quirky vignettes could hardly have better advocates."

BBC Music Magazine

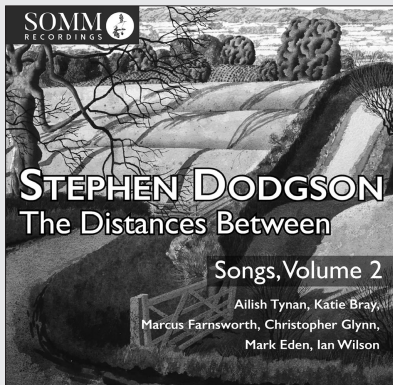
"An incredibly interesting and engaging disc. Dodgson... is done excellent service by all the performers." *Opera Today*

Dodgson Songs, Volume 2

The Distances Between

SOMMCD 0673

Ailish Tynan *soprano*,
Katie Bray *mezzo-soprano*,
Marcus Farnsworth *baritone*,
Christopher Glynn *piano*,
Mark Eden *guitar*,
Ian Wilson *recorder*



"As ever with SOMM, both the performances (by some prestigious names) and the warm lifelike recording are impeccable. No indication anywhere of an imminent Volume Three, but such is definitely to be hoped for!" *British Music Society*

Classical Connections CD of the Week, BBC Radio Ulster



Stanford *Children's Songs*

SOMMCD 0655

Kitty Whately *mezzo-soprano*
Gareth Brynmor John *baritone*
Susie Allan *piano*

"This charming and generously filled disc... should help to rectify the neglect of these attractive vignettes since the composer's death."
BBC Music Magazine

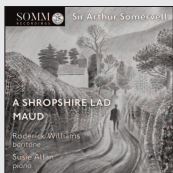


Celebrating English Song

SOMMCD 0177

Roderick Williams *baritone*, Susie Allan *piano*

"Quite simply, an exemplary recital ... a deeply satisfying and very engaging listening experience."
MusicWeb International



Somervell *A Shropshire Lad and Maud*

SOMMCD 0615

Roderick Williams *baritone*, Susie Allan *piano*

"Performances of much beauty, empathy and sensitivity."
British Music Society

Mirage

Piano Music by
Stephen Dodgson
(1924–2013)

Osman Tack *Piano*

Eight Fanciful Pieces	[22:16]	Piano Sonata No.7	[20:29]
[1] A Leaf in the River	2:21	[16] Allegro moderato	5:35
[2] Shrovetide Procession	2:28	[17] Poco adagio	5:59
[3] Il Zoppo	2:03	[18] Allegro vivace-Allegretto-	
[4] The Storm Comes and Passes	3:47	Allegro vivace	8:55
[5] Krazy Kate	3:16	Six Bagatelles	[13:18]
[6] Mirage	2:05	[19] Highly Expressive but Gentle	2:42
[7] Dancers	2:56	[20] Lazy Pace; Undulating and Songful	1:34
[8] When all is Quiet	3:20	[21] Cryptic and Playful	1:24
Four Moods of the Wind	[10:41]	[22] Erratic in Motion; Melodramatic	2:22
[9] Molto moderato	2:46	[23] Hollow and Stealthy	2:34
[10] Agitato	1:45	[24] Molto Perpetuo; Airy and Sparkling	2:42
[11] Flessibile e drammatico	3:19		
[12] Poco allegro	2:51		
Three Impromptus	[12:17]	Total duration:	79:05
[13] Allegro	5:48		
[14] Andante semplice	3:48		
[15] Allegretto	2:41	First Recordings	

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