

COCTEAU



ISABELLE O'CONNELL
PIANO



COCTEAU

- | | | |
|-----|---|------|
| | Erik Satie | |
| 1. | Rag-Time Parade | 2:22 |
| | Germaine Tailleferre | |
| 2. | Pas trop vite | 1:19 |
| 3. | Hommage à Debussy | 1:35 |
| 4. | Très vite | 2:23 |
| | Igor Stravinsky | |
| 5. | Ragtime | 5:18 |
| | Erik Satie | |
| 6. | Gnossienne No. 1 | 4:28 |
| 7. | Gnossienne No. 2 | 2:35 |
| 8. | Gnossienne No. 3 | 3:22 |
| | Igor Stravinsky: Les Cinqs Doigts | |
| 9. | I. <i>Andantino</i> | 0:43 |
| 10. | II. <i>Allegro</i> | 0:59 |
| 11. | III. <i>Allegretto</i> | 0:49 |
| 12. | IV. <i>Larghetto</i> | 1:24 |
| 13. | V. <i>Moderato</i> | 0:42 |
| 14. | VI. <i>Lento</i> | 0:54 |
| 15. | VII. <i>Vivo</i> | 0:29 |
| 16. | VIII. <i>Pesante</i> | 1:02 |
| | Darius Milhaud | |
| 17. | Le Tango des Fratellini | 1:56 |
| | Erik Satie | |
| 18. | Rêverie de l'enfance de Pantagruel | 1:34 |

ISABELLE O'CONNELL PIANO

L'Album des Six

Georges Auric

19. **Prélude** 1:25

Louis Durey

20. **Romance sans paroles** 2:46

Arthur Honegger

21. **Sarabande** 1:51

Darius Milhaud

22. **Mazurka** 1:49

Francis Poulenc

23. **Valse** 2:00

Germaine Tailleferre

24. **Pastorale** 1:32

Rhona Clarke: **Cocteau**

25. I. *Antigone* 4:53

26. II. *Portrait I* 4:19

27. III. *Blood of a poet* 4:24

28. IV. *Orpheus* 4:28

29. V. *Portrait II* 3:47

30. VI. *Oedipus* 4:11

Erik Satie: **Trois Gymnopédies***

31. Gymnopédie No. 1 3:43

32. Gymnopédie No. 2 2:52

33. Gymnopédie No. 3 2:40

Total playing time 80:51

*Digital edition bonus tracks

The initial spark for this *Cocteau* album began with a series of online conversations during the COVID pandemic between myself and composer Rhona Clarke. We had been paired through the *CMC Colleagues* initiative, a scheme run by the Contemporary Music Centre in Dublin that connected Irish composers and performers in an effort to encourage new collaborations. As a result of these conversations, Rhona decided to compose a set of pieces for me inspired by French artist Jean Cocteau's drawings. After a previous visit to the two Cocteau museums dedicated to this iconoclastic artist in the south of France, Rhona had developed a fascination with, as she put it, '*the work of this complete artist: poems, drawings, films, short novels.*'

When it came to planning the premiere, it seemed almost self-evident that given Cocteau's important musical connections, I should perform Rhona's brand-new work alongside music by the artist's contemporaries and collaborators in Paris a century ago.

Of course Erik Satie immediately came to mind, along with *Le Groupe des Six* for whom Cocteau was the figurehead, mentor and cheerleader. The young composers known as *Les Six* were Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre.

In 1918 Cocteau wrote his manifesto *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* in which he decried the German Romanticism of Wagner and the Impressionism of Debussy, in favor of Satie's simplicity and clarity. For Cocteau, simplicity did not mean poverty, but a refinement and distillation of musical material. Cocteau also proclaimed that young artists should take their inspiration from the café-concerts, Parisian cabarets, music halls, circus, ragtime, and jazz that were to be heard around Paris at that time. This manifesto defined the artistic principles of *Le Groupe des Six*.

Igor Stravinsky was another of Cocteau's collaborators and they were first introduced by Sergei Diaghilev in 1913. Following the infamous premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Cocteau was eager to collaborate and asked Stravinsky to provide music for a ballet entitled *David*. However Stravinsky eventually withdrew from this project, which ultimately evolved into the ballet *Parade* with Satie. Their strong personalities and artistic differences led to a relationship that fluctuated between creative collaboration and friction. Their major collaboration was the opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex* in 1927 for which Cocteau wrote the libretto.

I decided to include the first three of Satie's *Gnossiennes* along with the *Gymnopédies* despite their having been written well before Satie's first meeting with Cocteau in 1914. The distilled melodic lines and chordal accompaniment of these pieces epitomize the qualities that Cocteau so admired: clarity, refinement, minimal and spare textures - a reaction to the heavier chromaticism and thicker textures of 19th century German Romanticism.

Finally, given these musical links spanning a century and centered around Cocteau, it felt most appropriate to give the world premiere performance in Paris, at the Centre Culturel Irlandais. The program has grown since that first performance to include the works on this recording.

Erik Satie – *Ragtime-Parade*

The original four-handed piano score *Ragtime-Parade* by Erik Satie is from the surrealist ballet *Parade* conceived by Jean Cocteau. This *Ragtime* is a classical paraphrase of Irving Berlin's *That Mysterious Rag* (1911). This 1919 solo arrangement by Hans Ourdine (pseudonym of Stéphane Chapellier, a composer of music for silent films) was made directly from Satie's own piano duet version of 1917. The ballet conceived by Jean Cocteau brought together choreography by Leonide Massine, music by Erik Satie, a libretto by Cocteau with Cubist costumes and sets by Pablo Picasso. *The Ballet Russes* premiered the work at the Théâtre du Châtelet Paris in 1917 and it enraged and baffled the audience at the first performance in May 1917. A scandal ensued with Satie being sued for insulting a critic and Cocteau landing in jail for yelling in the courtroom during the trial.

Germaine Tailleferre - *Pas Trop Vite*

- *Hommage à Debussy*

- *Très vite*

Germaine Tailleferre was the only female member of *Les Six*, a prolific composer who composed until the final weeks before her death in 1983. Yet until recently much of her music was not regularly performed. An excellent pianist herself, she performed piano duets with both Satie and Stravinsky.

The first piece featured here is an earlier work from 1914 - *Pas trop vite* - in which one hears the influence of Fauré. *Hommage à Debussy* was written for a project conceived by Cocteau in October 1920, where *Les Six* were each to compose a tribute to Debussy following the composer's death (Cocteau had softened his stance by this point, recognizing Debussy's

musical legacy). This was to be published by *La Sirène*, but Cocteau's idea was abandoned and Tailleferre's work is the only surviving piece from this project. *Très vite* was composed not long afterwards in 1921 and features a cheerful bitonality and rhythmic exuberance.

Igor Stravinsky – Ragtime

A year after Satie's *Ragtime-Parade*, Stravinsky wrote several 'rags' of his own. After the First World War a wave of African-American musicians had brought jazz and ragtime to the music halls and clubs of Paris. Stravinsky was enchanted by this fresh music with its novel rhythms and popular appeal. He studied a pile of ragtime scores given to him by the conductor Ernest Ansermet. His first 'ragtime' piece was a dance movement in *L'Histoire du soldat* in 1918, followed by *Ragtime* and finally *Piano-Rag-Music* in 1919. Originally composed for 11 instruments, *Ragtime* was first performed by Stravinsky as a piano reduction. Rather than trying to directly imitate the style, he instead interprets it through a Cubist lens, with a highly individual use of ragtime's syncopated rhythms and harmonic fragments. In 1963 he described his rags as '*a concert portrait or snapshot of the genre*'.

Erik Satie – Gnossiennes Nos.1-3

The first three *Gnossiennes* were composed well before Satie's association with Cocteau in 1893, but they epitomize the qualities that Cocteau came to admire: clarity, austerity and simplicity of texture. The title may refer either to an ancient Greek dance, or perhaps relate to the composer's involvement with the Gnostic movement. Notated without bar lines or key signatures, these pieces are a radical departure from the traditional notation of the time and evoke an introspective melancholy through their free-flowing phrases.

Igor Stravinsky: Les Cinq Doigts

Les Cinq Doigts is a set of eight short pieces written in 1921 and subtitled '*8 mélodies très faciles sur 5 notes*' or '*eight very easy melodies on five notes*'. Written in Stravinsky's Neoclassical style, the influence of Satie is obvious here. These miniatures have a clarity and simplicity, along with hints of bitonality. Each right-hand melody is intentionally limited to a five-finger position at the keyboard in the style of a finger exercise while the left hand plays simple repetitive patterns. The melodic contours are also reminiscent of Russian folk tunes. Within these constraints Stravinsky masterfully gave each one a contrasting character through differences in tempo and rhythm. The set concludes with a parody of a tango.

Darius Milhaud – *Tango des Fratellini from Le Boeuf sur le Toit*

(piano transcription by Henri Mouton 1920)

Milhaud was greatly influenced by the music of Brazil while stationed in Rio de Janeiro as secretary to the French ambassador, poet and playwright Paul Claudel, from 1917 to 1919. He composed *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* in 1919 as background music for a Charlie Chaplin film, but it became the music for Cocteau's ballet instead. The Fratellini brothers were clowns who had been recruited by Jean Cocteau for the pantomime scenario of the ballet, set in a fictional American bar during Prohibition. *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* became so popular, that the cabaret where Milhaud, Auric and Arthur Rubinstein regularly performed a six-handed version of the score, was named after it in Paris in 1921. It became a legendary gathering place for the avant-garde arts scene.

Satie – *Rêverie de l'enfance de Pantagruel*

This is a solo piano transcription Satie made of the first movement from his orchestrated work *Trois petites pièces montées*. The orchestral work was originally composed for a concert organized by Cocteau at la Comédie des Champs Élysées in February 1920 and takes its inspiration from the stories of Rabelais with the giant Gargantua and his son Pantagruel.

L'Album des Six

Georges Auric: *Prélude*

Louis Durey: *Romance*

Arthur Honegger: *Sarabande*

Darius Milhaud: *Mazurka*

Francis Poulenc: *Valse*

Germaine Tailleferre: *Pastorale*

The young composers known as *Le Groupe des Six* were Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre. They met as students at the Paris Conservatoire and were grouped together and named '*Les Six*' by the critic Henri Colet following a joint concert by the six composers. Cocteau became their mentor, ringleader and advocate. The composers did not necessarily agree on a single musical vision as each had their own distinct style and musical aesthetic. Despite several other collaborations in various subgroups, *L'Album des Six* is the only work on which all six composers collaborated together. This set of piano pieces was published in 1920.

Rhona Clarke – Cocteau (2022)

1. *Antigone*
2. *Portrait I*
3. *Blood of a poet*
4. *Orpheus*
5. *Portrait II*
6. *Oedipus*

These six short pieces are inspired by the work of the French artist, film maker, novelist and poet, Jean Cocteau (1908-1963). Certain drawings by Cocteau influenced initial ideas for the pieces, for instance, a sketch of costume studies for *Antigone*, with its blue biro sketchy lines, suggested light dance movement involving a pirouette. However, as the music began to evolve it was Cocteau's overall aesthetic and personality, his quirkiness, modernism, sense of freedom, his mix of the sublime and the ridiculous, that helped govern the musical direction. Two of the pieces are loosely based on his self-portrait (1962). This drawing shows the sensitive and serious, now older artist whose face is somewhat ravaged by his opium drug addiction. The music started by using his name to form the pitch material which centres around A and E; *Portrait I* dwells in the higher register while *Portrait II* shows a darker side. The two fast pieces *Blood of a Poet* and *Oedipus* are rigidly pulse-based with swirling arpeggios in the first and fast scale passages in the latter. Contrasting with these *Orpheus* gives the performer some freedom regarding duration and numbers of repeated notes and is deliberately written to avoid noticeable pulse.

Cocteau was commissioned by Isabelle O'Connell and funded by Fingal Artists' Support Scheme. It was first performed by Isabelle at the Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris on 17 October 2023. – **Rhona Clarke**

Erik Satie – Trois Gymnopédies

Like the Gnossiennes, Satie's Gymnopédies predate his association with Jean Cocteau. Written in 1888, the unusual title comes from gymnopaedia - the ancient Greek word for an annual festival where young men danced naked and unarmed. While today they are regarded as his most popular and well-known works, they were originally quite subversive, defying traditional forms and structures. Using this unconventional title was a way for this eccentric composer to free himself from traditional expectations.

ISABELLE O'CONNELL

Described by the New York Times as '*one of the finest, busiest pianists active in New York's contemporary-classical scene*' Franco-Irish pianist Isabelle O'Connell's international career as soloist and chamber musician has taken her around the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Europe, to venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Chicago Cultural Center, Cleveland Museum of Art, Detroit Art Institute, the Gilmore Keyboard Festival, Die Stadthalle Wuppertal, St David's Hall, Cardiff and the National Concert Hall, Ireland.

Isabelle has a reputation for being a dynamic interpreter and energetic advocate of 20th and 21st century composers, regularly commissioning and premiering new works. She has worked with some of the leading composers of our time including John Adams, Meredith Monk, John Luther Adams, Eve Beglarian, Donnacha Dennehy, Michael Gordon, Georg Friedrich Haas, Missy Mazzoli, Joan Tower, Kevin Volans and Julia Wolfe. Her debut solo album *RESERVOIR* featured solo piano music by nine contemporary Irish composers and was released to critical acclaim in 2010 with the New Yorker calling her '*the young Irish piano phenom*'.

As concerto soloist Isabelle has performed with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland under conductors William Eddins, Gerhard Markson and Gavin Maloney. Her recording of Kevin Volans' Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Winds with the NSO was released on the Lyric fm label in 2014. She has also performed as soloist with the RTE Concert Orchestra, and in 2025 gave the New York premiere of Viet Cuong's piano concerto *Stargazer* with the Queer Urban Orchestra conducted by David Bloom.

Isabelle is a member and co-founder of Grand Band, New York's new music piano sextet dubbed '*the Traveling Wilburys of the city's new-music piano scene*' by the New York Times. They debuted at the Bang on a Can Marathon in New York in 2012 and have since performed around the United States and U.K., at the Gilmore Piano Festival, Detroit Institute of the Arts, Peak Performances Series Montclair, the Rite of Summer Music Festival, Liquid Music Festival, Vale of Glamorgan Festival, Sheffield University and Cornerstone Festival, Liverpool. In 2018 Grand Band was the recipient of a Chamber Music America grant and commissioned a new work by Missy Mazzoli. Their concerts on the PEAK series were recorded and broadcast on WNET ALL ARTS TV.

As chamber musician, Isabelle has performed with John Adams at Carnegie's Zankel Hall, with Meredith Monk at the Bang on a Can Summer Festival and with the New Zealand String Quartet at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada. She is currently pianist with Irish

ensemble Evlana, and has played with Alarm Will Sound, Contemporaneous, the Da Capo Chamber Players, the New Zealand and ConTempo String Quartets. She also joined the Crash ensemble on tours of Australia and the United States, performing at the Canberra International Chamber Music Festival, Sydney Conservatoire, Kennedy Center, Princeton University, Peak Performances Montclair, Virginia Tech, Le Poisson Rouge New York, as well as at the Galway International Arts Festival, Reich Effect Festival and Sounds of a Safe Harbor Festival in Cork, and the NCH and IMMA in Dublin, Ireland.

Isabelle enjoys cross-collaborations across a variety musical genres and art forms, playing with Grammy award-winning vocalist Susan McKeown on her 2010 album *Singing in the Dark* and with sean-nós singer Iarla Ó Lionáird. She has also worked with dancer/choreographers Maureen Fleming, Jody Oberfelder and Megan Williams Dance Projects.

Isabelle has recorded for the Diatribe, Innova, Métier, NMC, Pyroclastic and Lyric fm labels. She has appeared on television and radio around the world, with performances and interviews broadcast on WNYC, WQXR, WFMT Chicago, CNN, WNET ALL ARTS TV, BBC3, RTE, TV3 and Lyric FM radio. She was Artist-in-Residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada and at the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris.

Isabelle has been the recipient of numerous awards including a 2025 Fulbright Alumni Projects Award, Clifford-Levy grant, John F. Kennedy scholarship, and various awards from Culture Ireland and the Arts Council of Ireland. She currently serves on the piano faculty as Artist-in-Residence at Bard College and Conservatory of Music, New York.

Rhona Clarke was born in Dublin where her early musical experiences were in piano and choral music. She studied music at University College, Dublin, and completed a PhD at Queen's University, Belfast and is a former associate professor at Dublin City University. Her output includes choral, chamber, orchestral and electronic works. Influenced by a wide variety of composers, the style is a synthesis of contemporary and traditional classical music. Ongoing collaborations with visual artist Marie Hanlon concern film and sound installation work, further expanding her artistic reach. With regular commissions both nationally and internationally, her work has been performed and broadcast throughout Ireland and worldwide and has represented Ireland at the International Rostrum of Composers and the ISCM World Music Days. The many recordings of her works include two portrait albums on the Métier label: *A Different Game* (Fidelio Trio, 2017), *Sempiternam*, a CD of Clarke's choral music performed by the State Choir Latvia (2021). Rhona Clarke is a member of Aosdána, Ireland's affiliation of creative artists.

Acknowledgements:

This recording has been made possible thanks to funding from the Arts Council of Ireland's Project Grant. Many thanks to Fingal County Council for funding the commission of Rhona Clarke's work; the Contemporary Music Centre for connecting us through their CMC Colleagues scheme; Nora and the whole team at le Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris who hosted the premiere of this Cocteau programme; Mary Barneclutt and the Hugh Lane Gallery for hosting the Irish premiere on the Sundays @ Noon series; Mark Gilchrist who tuned and so beautifully maintains the piano at St. Peter's Church in Drogheda; Jen Boyd for her art work and friendship; David, James and Margaret at Divine Art Records for bringing this recording into existence and Lina for her endless support and encouragement.

Recorded at St. Peter's Church, Drogheda, Ireland
October 14-16, 2024

Producer: Isabelle O'Connell

Engineering and Mastering: Ben Rawlins

Cover art by Jen Boyd

All text, images and devices are copyright, all rights reserved.

© 2026 Isabelle O'Connell © 2025 Divine Art Ltd.



Over 700 titles, with full track details, reviews, artist profiles and audio samples, can be browsed on our website. Available at any good dealer or direct from our online store in CD, 24-bit HD, FLAC and MP3 digital download formats.

email: info@first-inversion.com

divineartrecords.com

find us on [facebook](#), [youtube](#), [bluesky](#) & [instagram](#)

WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1, Upper James Street, London, W1R 3HG.



LC 12671

Isabelle O'Connell © Stefan Seyfert
© Divine Art Ltd • 809730114120