

Erik Chisholm



Music for piano

- Piobaireachd
- Piobaireachd Laments
- Sonatinas nos 1 & 2
- Cornish Dance Sonata

Volume 3

Murray McLachlan

ERIK CHISHOLM - Music for piano, volume 3

Piobaireachd for solo piano

[14.17]

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------|--------|
| 1. | The Salute for Clan Ranald | [7.13] |
| 2. | The Duntroon Pibroch | [3.13] |
| 3. | The Desperate Battle | [1.38] |
| 4. | The Chisholm Salute | [2.15] |

Sonatina no. 1

[7.20]

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|--------|
| 5. | <i>Grave</i> | [1.01] |
| 6. | <i>Allegro moderato</i> | [1.29] |
| 7. | <i>Lento</i> | [1.30] |
| 8. | <i>Moderato e poco maestoso</i> | [3.21] |

Sonatina no. 2

[7.03]

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|--------|
| 9. | <i>Allegro</i> | [2.30] |
| 10. | <i>Andante</i> | [1.25] |
| 11. | <i>Moderato – variation 1</i> | [0.30] |
| 12. | <i>Variation 2</i> | [0.28] |
| 13. | <i>Variation 3</i> | [0.22] |
| 14. | <i>Variation 4</i> | [0.24] |
| 15. | <i>Variation 5</i> | [0.24] |
| 16. | <i>Variation 6</i> | [0.24] |
| 17. | <i>Variation 7</i> | [0.40] |

Two Piobaireachd Laments

[13.44]

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------|
| 18. | Piobaireachd Lament no. 1 | [5.36] |
| Piobaireachd Lament no. 2 | | |
| 19. | <i>Theme</i> [1.01] | |
| 20. | <i>Variation 1</i> [1.10] | |
| 21. | <i>Variation 2</i> [1.03] | |
| 22. | <i>Variation 3</i> [1.20] | |
| 23. | <i>Variation 4</i> [3.36] | |

Cornish Dance Sonata

[33.58]

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|---------|
| 24. | <i>The Wet Scythes</i> | [8.42] |
| 25. | <i>Blown Spume</i> | [6.26] |
| 26. | <i>Chin and Tongue Waggle</i> | [8.45] |
| 27. | <i>With Clogs On</i> | [10.06] |

Total playing time:

[76.37]

MURRAY McLACHLAN piano

Erik Chisholm (1904-1965)

This is the third CD in a series of the complete piano works of Erik Chisholm. It starts in the north-west of Scotland and ends in the south-west of England. In between, as evidence of his remarkable stylistic versatility, are two of the Sonatinas based upon works by European composers of the late Renaissance.

Chisholm was a Glaswegian, born and bred; but his interest in and attachment to the traditions and, especially the music, of the Highlands was to influence him throughout his life. Not least among those musical influences was that of the Highland bagpipes and, specifically, the genre of their music known commonly as piobaireachd but, more properly, as *ceòl mòr* – the big music. *Ceòl mòr* takes the form of variations on a theme known as the *ùrlar*, or ground. These themes are of considerable structural interest and the variations on them develop with increasingly virtuosic demands upon the fingerwork of the solo piper – for *ceòl mòr* is always played as a solo. Chisholm was fascinated by the form, and six of the tracks on this CD are of pieces based upon traditional *ceòl mòr*.

The MacCrimmons were one of the leading dynasties of pipers and composers of *ceòl mòr*, and in Chisholm's day their historical pre-eminence was undisputed. They were hereditary pipers to the MacLeods of Dunvegan on the Island of Skye, and there on occasion you may still hear a MacCrimmon playing *ceòl mòr* to the chieftain, Euan MacCrimmon having won the famous Silver Chanter in 2006. Chisholm seems to have thought of himself as a direct musical descendant of the MacCrimmons, citing his own McLeod ancestry as a kind of justification:

"I now find myself speaking, musically, in the characteristic idiom of the MacCrimmons (a great family of Piobaireachd composers), through a twentieth century technique, and writing for the modern orchestra instead of for the Highland bagpipe. Virtually a descent of the MacCrimmon line, and I am occupied with the same emotions to which to give expression. My mother is a McLeod, thus giving me descent from two Highland clans."

Added to this family connection is Chisholm's clear interest in the cultural history of the Celts and, specifically, the Gaels, manifest in the Preface to his book of Celtic Folk Songs, in which the tunes are derived from the Patrick MacDonald collection (see the first two CDs in this series, DRD0222 & DRD0223), and in the Celtic mythological basis of several of his ballets and operas.

Piobaireachd for Solo Piano

1. We start with a Welcome – *Faillte Chlann Raonuill* – the 'Salute for Clan Ranald'. The original which has inspired Chisholm was composed in honour of the MacDonalds of Clanranald, but by whom is not known. Chisholm presents the ground at the opening, although the drones are already subjected to shifts in pitch, but his initial lyrical treatment is quite distinct from the character of the music on the bagpipes. Likewise, the manner of embellishment, at first appropriated from the bagpipes, is soon adapted to the piano and the variations pursue their own highly imaginative and ultimately demanding course. What is interesting in Chisholm's treatment is his ability to retain something of the pentatonic character of the original while allowing his harmonic language free rein. The *alla marcia* variation plays with Scotch snaps before a brief recollection of the opening *ùrlar* leads into a concluding virtuosic *presto*.

2. *Piobaireachd Dhuntrom* – The 'Duntroon Pibroch' is also known as 'The Sound of the Waves on the Castle of Duntroon'. Chisholm's reflections on the gentle rhythm of the original are matched by the ebb and flow of his harmonies: the melody is surrounded by a wash of gentle arabesques and, in omitting any variations, Chisholm chooses not to disturb its evocative pulse.

3. *A' Chomhraig Gharbh* or *An Cath Gailbeach* meaning 'The Desperate Battle' is often referred to as The Battle of the Birds, a farm-yard fight supposedly witnessed by its composer, Angus MacKay. Others connect it with a late 14th-century battle. It is the first that is undoubtedly depicted here, with its scuffling opening and its pecking accents, all of which subside until the fortissimo coup de grace.

4. *Failt' an t-Siosalaich* is, in English, 'The Chisholm Salute'. Chisholm was naturally conscious of the traditions associated with his father's clan, writing in 1945 that "'The Chisholm Salute', for example, is only to be played when the chief is in residence at Beaulieu Castle, at the birth of an heir, or on some important occasion in the life of that particular clan." There is no question that this setting is a proud one with its bold note clusters and the gathering power of its octave doublings in the second variation.

Sonatinas 1 & 2

Moving from the West of Scotland to mainland Europe, but not necessarily much further back in time, we come to *E Praeterita*. Chisholm composed six Sonatinas with this over-all title *E Praeterita*, meaning 'From the Past'.

The two Sonatinas represented here are undated.

5.-8. The three movements of *Sonatina 1* are stated by Chisholm to be *Diferencias* on *O Gloriosa Domina* by Luis de Narvaez, who flourished circa 1538. The theme is presented with contrapuntal clarity and variety of texture, appearing in the left hand in the second movement, sombre in the Lento and, in the concluding movement, given fluent fugal treatment of the highest quality. If this work might originally have been intended to demonstrate his academic skills to his teacher, Donald Francis Tovey, then it is not at all surprising that Tovey more or less waived him through his degrees at Edinburgh University.

9.-17. The opening Allegro of the *Second Sonatina* is after a Fantasia for lute by Luis de Milan (fl. 1535); but it is essentially a prelude to his second movement treatment of an *Agnus Dei* from the *Missa Sine Nomine* of Jakob Obrecht. Chisholm's ability to find the splendour in the clean, almost modest lines of his model without any sense of unwanted exaggeration, demonstrates how much he is technically and emotionally at home in this neo-classical idiom, both as a composer and a pianist. The assertive concluding movement consists of seven variations on *Guardame las Vacas* by Andriques de Valderravano, who flourished in the 1540s.

Two Piobaireachd Laments

We return to Scotland with Two Piobaireachd Laments.

18. The first of these is based upon *Cumha Dhomhnuill Bhain Mhic Cruimein*. Donald Ban was one of the famous MacCrimmon piping family and was the only person killed at the Rout of Moy in 1746. The composer of the original is not known. After two dark introductory bars, Chisholm announces the ùrlar with moving simplicity, but the darkness gradually invades the texture and the complex impressionistic treatment of the variations adds a kind of mystery to this haunting music. It was to form the basis of the second movement of Chisholm's *First Piano Concerto – Piobaireachd*.

19. The ceòl mòr piece on which the second lament is based has yet to be identified – assuming there is a model for it. There are four variations, becoming increasingly ornate and developing imaginative textures, sometimes mysterious, other times tranquil. The ùrlar returns with cold slow-flowing demisemiquavers, as though the lament were gradually turning to ice.

24.-27. Cornish Dance Sonata

The selection on this CD ends with one of Chisholm's earlier works, the *Cornish Dance Sonata* inspired by his stay in Cornwall with his piano teacher, Leff Pouishnoff. Pouishnoff had studied at St Petersburg in the early 1900s but had settled in London in the 1920s with his wife Dorothy, a former pupil and also a concert pianist. Chisholm joined them in the mid 1920s and accompanied them on holiday to an attractive cottage in north Cornwall. We have a description of him during that stay written by a fellow student, Watson Lyle:

“Through my open bedroom window the voice of the ocean would croon a berceuse, or seek with yells to overawe me to sleep, according to its mood; but the character of my aubade never varied. Promptly at 8 a.m. began the industrious application of the pianist's pupil, Erik Chisholm, to his morning's work at the keyboard. His afternoons were generally occupied at composition, though occasionally he would trudge off with me along the coast, or go swimming with his teacher while Mme. Pouishnoff and myself, from the comfort of the beach, watched them brave the breakers of the Atlantic. Well into the night, I believe, Chisholm read, or studied the planetary system through an enormous telescope. I suppose there were hours when he slept; but having just completed a commission for a book within scheduled time, his tireless energy seemed a reproach to my righteous laziness of those few weeks.”

The opportunity for Chisholm not just to study but to live with such a couple who had experienced the heyday of Russian culture, must have been an extraordinary one for a teenager, and no doubt was partly responsible for opening his ears to a wide variety of repertoire. Certainly in 1926, he gave the first complete performance in Scotland of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* in a recital for the Russo-Scottish Society, which included his own cameo *Procession of Crabs*. Pouishnoff, meanwhile, was performing Chisholm's *Cameos* on an American tour, with great success. One might expect therefore that the *Cornish Dance Sonata* would also have travelled with Pouishnoff but, alas, he hated it. He objected to the subject matter, satirising the titles of the movements, writing “clodded

hoofs to the slaughter” for With clogs on; though Chin & Tongue Waggle was indeed a correct title. “Why not be silly one day?” Pouishnoff wrote:

“Why not throw aside the desire of being “modern”, fancy for wild, queer tunes, prickly rhythms, weird discords? And to unbutton your waistcoat & flannel shirt & let the sun penetrate to your suffering heart, suffering with what? And to burst in peals of young, happy laughter? Throw yourself on the warm earth at noon and drink the nature beautiful aromas?”

How Chisholm responded to this effusion of exhortations in occasionally quaint English and frequently quainter thoughts, is not known. If he was wise, he would have let the whole business quietly drop, for behind it all there clearly lies the failure of Pouishnoff to engage with modernism and dissonance, for the tone of the letter, despite its many strictures, is affectionate and even admiring. Chisholm, at any rate, thought well enough of it to rework two of its movements for his first symphony.

The *Cornish Dance Sonata* was completed in October 1926 and dedicated to Miss Jessie Moodie. It consists of character pieces treated characterfully – the first movement, *The Wet Scythes*, [24] had already appeared as one of his Cameos, but in this form it is no cameo: nor does its title seem to have much bearing on the music, unless it is derived from a folk tune of that name. Instead the movement bursts out of the modest bounds of the initial conjunct motion of the folk-like theme into a major piece of dramatic writing in which the sea below the Pouishnoff’s cottage demonstrates that Cornwall can be as wild and romantic as a young Scots virtuoso could possibly desire. The movement is essentially a set of variations, initially meditative and coloured with some beautiful “weird discords” and minute scherzando touches that paradoxically suggest that there is danger lurking below the calm surface. When the climax comes, something of Russian passion slips into the young pianist’s idiom – Chisholm was only twenty-two when he composed this, and he was still quite possibly destined for a career as a concert pianist.

The second movement [25] is entitled *Blown Spume*. Chisholm describes the melody as “chattering along with biting accents”. A change of tempo marks the “Arrival of Rustic Band”

and, after a resumption of the spume theme, they depart with their *Allegro vivace*, as assertive as was their entry. The opening theme appears in bi-tonal dress and works itself up rhetorically to a not entirely convincing conclusion.

Chin and Tongue Waggle [26] is an *Allegretto scherzando* to be played with a dry staccato tone, but leads up to hammered chords before subsiding into a Lento. This is quite possibly a traditional tune, and Chisholm calls for it to be played with a sombre deep rich tone and, later, with nobility. This theme returns in the guise of a funeral march, to be played “passionately and “with despair”. The return of the opening “chin and tongue waggle” theme suggests some kind of underlying story – as though the surrounding gossip enshrined some genuine tragedy; but if so, Chisholm has not revealed the scenario.

The final movement [27] , *With Clogs On*, stomps about solidly and leads into a fine tune, first heard in the bass, and again probably traditional in origin. The treatment becomes increasingly rhapsodic and not without some touches of Rachmaninov in its extended rhetoric, which finally expends itself in glissandi and an exciting Presto.

Best thought of as a youthful show-piece rather than a major work, the Cornish Dance Sonata displays the young Chisholm seeking out a language derived from local, intimate and unprepossessing impressions, heading for splendours they are not always capable of bearing. The influence of the Lechetitsky school of piano playing (which Chisholm followed) is evident in the writing. Straight wrists and powerful fingers characterised the approach. The work is of interest as a kind of compositional groundwork for later developments of Scottish traditional material – notably in the tremendous *Sonata in A Minor, An Rioban Dearg* (on Diversions DDV24131) In its own right, however, it has moments of beauty and mystery at the same time as being full of energy and virtuosity.

Notes © John Purser 2004

The Pianist

“Murray McLachlan is a pianist with a virtuoso technique and a sure sense of line. His timing and phrasing are impeccable, and his tone - full but unforced in the powerful passages, gentle and restrained in the more lyrical - is a perpetual delight” (BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE)

As a concert artist Murray McLachlan has received outstanding critical acclaim for intelligent and sensitive interpretations and superb technical ability. His prolific discography, much of it for Divine Art and Dunelm, has received long-standing international recognition and includes over thirty commercial recordings, including the complete sonatas of Beethoven and Prokofiev and many rarities.

McLachlan's repertoire includes over 40 concertos and he has appeared as soloist with most of the leading UK orchestras. His recognition has been far-reaching, bringing many invitations to perform abroad. In recent seasons his engagements have included performances in the USA, Scandinavia, South Africa, Poland, Byelorussia and Norway. In 1997 he was awarded a knighthood by the Order of St John of Jerusalem in recognition of his services to music in Malta. In 2003 he performed the complete cycle of 32 Beethoven Sonatas to critical acclaim in Manchester, and in 2004 his Wigmore Hall Erik Chisholm Centenary Recital and subsequent national tour attracted superlatives in the national press. His intense schedule continued this year with a 'Shostakovich Centenary Recital tour',



sponsored by the UK Shostakovich Society and including 15 concerts all over the UK. This included a return to the Wigmore Hall in September.

Murray McLachlan has given first performances of works by many composers, including Martin Butler, Ronald Stevenson, Charles Camilleri, Michael Parkin and even Beethoven! Recordings of contemporary music have won numerous accolades, including full star ratings, as well as 'rosette' and 'key recording' status in the latest Penguin Guide to CDs, and 'Disc of the month' and 'Record of the month' *MusicWeb* and *The Glasgow Herald*. He is Head of keyboard at Chetham's school of Music and tutor at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, as well as Artistic Director both of the Chetham's International Summer school and festival for Pianists, an event which attracts outstanding musicians annually from all over the world, and the Manchester International Concerto Competition for Young Pianists, which began in 2007.

His website can be found at www.murraymclachlan.co.uk

The Erik Chisholm Trust

The Erik Chisholm Trust, a registered charity, was established in 2001 to promote Chisholm's music and to achieve recognition of his contribution to the musical culture of Great Britain. It has supported the making of this recording – and others – as well as other "live" events in 2004, the Centenary Year.

For more information and continuing news, visit www.erikchisholm.com

Recordings by Murray McLachlan from the Divine Art group

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Murray McLachlan gives a masterclass with Solborg Valdimarsdottir at the fourth Chetham's International Summer School in 2004

The music on this CD was recorded on 18-22 December, 2006 in the Whiteley Hall, Chetham's School of Music, Manchester, by kind permission of the Director of Music.

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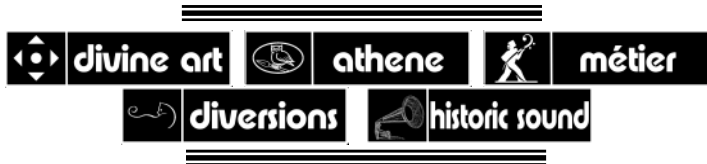
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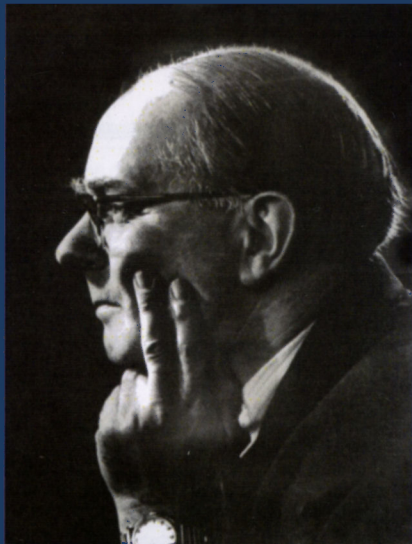


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