

# LISZT IRELAND SONATAS

TOM HICKS piano

and works by  
Stanford | Coleridge-Taylor | Clarke



# TOM HICKS piano

## Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)

### 24 Preludes, Op. 163

- |   |                   |      |
|---|-------------------|------|
| 1 | No. 24 in B minor | 2:01 |
| 2 | No. 5 in D major  | 1:18 |

## Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912)

- |   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| 3 | Three-Fours, Op. 71 – Waltz No. 2 <i>Andante</i> | 3:08 |
|---|--|------|

## Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

- |   |         |      |
|---|---------|------|
| 4 | Cortège | 4:17 |
|---|---------|------|

## John Ireland (1879-1962)

### Piano Sonata 24:29

- |   |                               |      |
|---|-------------------------------|------|
| 5 | I. <i>Allegro moderato</i>    | 6:45 |
| 6 | II. <i>Non troppo lento</i>   | 9:59 |
| 7 | III. <i>Con moto moderato</i> | 7:41 |

## Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

### Piano Sonata in B minor 28:36

- |    |   |       |
|----|---|-------|
| 8  | I. <i>Lento assai – Allegro energico – Grandioso – Recitativo –</i> | 11:22 |
| 9  | II. <i>Andante sostenuto – Quasi adagio –</i>                       | 6:45  |
| 10 | III. <i>Allegro energico – Più mosso – Stretta quasi presto –</i>   | 10:27 |
|    | <i>Presto – Prestissimo – Andante sostenuto –</i>                   |       |
|    | <i>Allegro moderato – Lento assai</i>                               |       |

Total playing time	64:10
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# THE MUSIC

The theme of teacher and pupil runs through much of the music on this recording. The list of pupils of Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924), the legendary, some would say infamous, composition teacher at the Royal College of Music, includes many of the British composers who came to prominence at the beginning of the twentieth century: Benjamin, Bliss, Boughton, Bridge, Butterworth, Dyson, Holst, Howells, Jacob, Vaughan Williams, as well as three of the composers represented on this album: Rebecca Clarke, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and John Ireland – a distinguished list by any standards.

Apart from his teaching and administration duties, Stanford was an accomplished organist and conductor, as well as a hugely prolific composer of operas, symphonies, concertos, songs, chamber music, and of course music for the church, for which he is still chiefly remembered. Stanford was a hugely important figure in British musical life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the First World War took a serious professional and private toll on him. His health and income declined, which together with the ascent of Elgar and Vaughan Williams in particular, meant that his concert music fell out of fashion, thus beginning a neglect that has lasted to the present day, at least as far as the concert hall is concerned. As a result, late in life, Stanford turned his attention to solo piano music – partly, it is thought, to earn money from sales of sheet music. The two sets of Preludes (Op. 163 and Op. 179) date from between 1918 and 1921, a time when the composition of major works was beginning to be a huge physical burden on the ailing and depressed composer. No. 5 in D major is one the shortest of the set, unusually in 12/16 time, beautifully laid out for the piano, a sort of study in projecting a singing melody over running semi-quavers. The final Prelude from Op. 163, no. 24 in B minor, has similarly persistent arpeggio figures supporting a folk-like melody. The serenity of the conclusion is something of a surprise; no barnstorming, virtuoso conclusion here, rather a sort of calm resignation, which is as touching as it is unexpected.

The music of Samuel Coleridge Taylor (1875-1912) has in recent years been heard more often. Not unlike his teacher Stanford, Coleridge-Taylor was enormously prolific, and achieved considerable success, on both sides of the Atlantic, especially for this choral and orchestral music. This is all the more remarkable considering his tragically short life. Coleridge-Taylor died from pneumonia when he was 37, a condition that was made undoubtedly worse by chronic over-work and a stressful lack of the financial stability needed to support his family. The Valse Suite, 'Three Fours' op. 71, dates from 1909, and is a charming suite of waltzes; the Andante second movement demonstrates Coleridge-Taylor's gift for conjuring up a charming, completely unpretentious miniature, and his Dvořák-like ability to write memorable melodies.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) was born in Harrow, in London. She originally entered the Royal College of Music as a violinist, but was abruptly withdrawn after her harmony teacher, Percy Miles, proposed marriage. After studying with Stanford from 1907-1910, and becoming his first female composition pupil, Clarke supported herself by becoming a professional viola player (a rare enough phenomenon at the time). Clarke achieved what she later described as 'my one little whiff of success' with her Viola Sonata in 1919, and thereafter, only twenty pieces were published in her lifetime. She settled in the USA after the Second World War, married the pianist James Friskin, and stopped performing. *Cortège*, one of only three solo piano works by Clarke, dates from 1932 (possibly 1930) and was revised in the 1970s, shortly before her death, when there was renewed interest in her life and work – 'My little renaissance,' as she called it. The work was dedicated to the British pianist and composer William Busch (1901-45), himself co-incidentally a pupil of John Ireland. Although a more than capable string player, Clarke's only training as pianist consisted of eight terms of study with Alfred E. Izard at the Royal Academy of Music in the early 1900s. Nonetheless, her command of the instrument can be heard in her chamber music, song accompaniments, and in this striking piano solo, which manages to pack a great deal into less than five minutes.

In contrast to Rebecca Clarke, John Ireland (1879-1962) was a considerable pianist. The recordings he made of his own solo works, as well as his accompanying of artists of the calibre of Antonio Sala, Anthony Pini, Frederic Thurston, Albert Sammons, and Peter Pears in his chamber music and songs are ample illustration of this. Ireland entered the Royal College of Music in 1893, studying piano with Frederic Cliffe, organ with Walter Parratt, and later composition with Stanford. Although Ireland's later relationship with his teacher became warm, it was less than convivial to begin with. Ireland recalled late in life that Stanford's first reaction after looking through an early work of his was - 'All Brahms and water my boy, and more water than Brahms,' adding for good measure, 'go away and study some Dvorak for a bit.' Ireland always maintained that Stanford's own view, that nothing but the best would do, had a profound effect on him, and made him consider every note he put on paper. Large scale works are few and far between in Ireland's catalogue, as he preferred to keep to genres that he felt were best for him: songs, chamber, and piano music. In these forms are to be found some of the most remarkable works by a British composer, music that the Ireland scholar Bruce Phillips has described as being full of '.... fervour, nostalgia, longing, bitterness, frustrated and frequently unrequited love, earthy good humour and love of ancient landscapes.'

The manuscript of Ireland's *Piano Sonata* in E minor is dated Chelsea, October 1918-January 1920. It was written in turbulent times, not unlike another great British Piano Sonata of the period, that by Frank Bridge. Ireland's Sonata covers a huge range of emotion, showing not only the composer's command of writing for the piano but also his not so often mentioned interest in what was then relatively new piano music, the Preludes of Debussy and the Sonatas of Prokofiev for example. There are three movements. The first, *Allegro moderato*, echoes the Liszt Sonata in that it subjects small motives and contrasting themes to continual and subtle transformation. The second movement, *Non troppo lento*, by far the longest of the three, is in ternary form and is deeply felt, hinting at the modal exercises that Stanford had imposed on the younger composer some

twenty years before. The finale, *Con moto moderato*, is inspired by a visit to Chanctonbury Ring in the Sussex Downs, a mysterious hilltop crowned by a ring of trees. This was an area of the country that particularly fascinated Ireland. Indeed, he spent the last years of his life living in a converted windmill close by.

There is a further teacher-pupil connection between the two Sonatas on this recording. The Scottish pianist and composer Frederic Lamond (1868-1948), who gave the premiere of Ireland's Sonata at the Wigmore Hall in June 1920, was himself a pupil of Liszt, as well as Clara Schumann and Hans von Bulow. We can be left in no doubt when it comes to Lamond's enthusiasm for Ireland's music, writing as he did, 'I have no hesitation in proclaiming this opus as one of the finest of its kind that the last years have produced. Underneath the plain exterior of its diction there is warm, pulsating life, a plaintive tenderness and depth of feeling...' The first performance was a huge success for both performer and composer, prompting the music critic Ralph Hill to write that he considered Ireland's Piano Sonata to be 'one of the finest and most important since Liszt,' a comparison that is not without justification, and making its continued relative neglect to be inexplicable.

Liszt's Piano Sonata in B minor (the only such extensive mature work by this titan of the keyboard) had a long gestation. It seems that the first sketches date from the late 1840s but the work was not completed until 1853, a time when Liszt was beginning to concentrate more on his life as a composer than as a travelling virtuoso. Although dedicated to Robert Schumann, it is not known if Schumann even saw a copy of the score, as his mental health had by this time completely broken down and he had entered the sanatorium where he died in 1856. His widow, Clara Schumann, never performed Liszt's Sonata, being less than impressed, and referring to it in her diary as 'a blind noise ... it really is too awful.'

The Sonata is on a large scale, an unbroken span of music, the whole work being developed from three distinct ideas that are heard on the very first page. The

first theme is an unsettling downward scale marked *sotto voce* (under the breath), the second a much more forceful octave motif, and the third a 'marcato' motif in the left hand. Few works by Liszt or indeed any other composer have been the subject of such heated musicological debate – some insist the work is a sort of tone-poem based on the Faust legend (a subject matter that the composer was certainly obsessed with); others have described the work as a sort of spiritual autobiography, or about the conflict between Lucifer and God, whilst many subscribe to the opinion that the Sonata has no meaning beyond itself. Whatever one's view, the work is a tour de force of thematic economy that unfolds within the traditional sonata scheme – exposition, development, and recapitulation.

Alan Walker has written that the quiet ending of the Sonata was a late revision and that originally the work ended more dramatically – in this case there can't be any doubt that second thoughts were for the best. The magical epilogue begins with the ghostly descending scale that opened the Sonata making one last appearance, before five quiet chords and a final, rather resigned, B at the bottom of the keyboard.

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Note: on this recording the Liszt Sonata is indexed as three tracks in accordance with usual practice, playing continuously. If playing this album from digital audio, ensure that your player is set for 'no gap between tracks'

# THE PIANIST

Hailed as an artist of 'magnificent pianism' with an 'engaging personality', Guernsey-born pianist Tom Hicks has been praised for his 'brilliantly evocative' (*International Piano*) and 'gorgeously creative playing' (*Fanfare*).

Hicks is a gold medallist in competitions including the CGWM Piano Competition, EPTA UK Piano Competition, Croydon Piano Concerto Competition, Evanston & North Shore Scholarship Competition, and the Connecticut Young Artist Piano Competition. In addition, he is a recipient of the Gold Medal Award and Peter Frankl Piano Prize from the Royal Northern College of Music; the Faculty of Humanities Outstanding Academic Achievement Award, the Keith Elcombe Prize for Best Overall Performance, and three Proctor-Gregg Performance Prizes from The University of Manchester; and the Richards' Prize for Piano and Musicianship in addition to the Dennis Midwood Keyboard Prize from Chetham's School of Music.

After lessons in Guernsey with Mervyn Grand, Hicks studied with Murray McLachlan at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester and continued with him on the prestigious Joint Course at The Royal Northern College of Music and The University of Manchester. Since 2015 he has been based in the USA, studying with Boris Berman at Yale University's School of Music, and with James Giles at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music, graduating with a Doctorate in Musical Arts in December 2021. He has performed in masterclasses with musicians including Emanuel Ax, Joseph Banowetz, Michel Beroff, Andrea Bonatta, Philippe Cassard, Peter Donohoe, Christopher Elton, Peter Frankl, Stephen Hough, Leslie Howard, Eugen Indjic, Yoheved Kaplinsky, John Lill, Jon Nakamatsu, Steven Osborne, Pascal Rogé, Martin Roscoe, Boris Slutsky, Kathryn Stott, Vladimir Trops, and Simon Trpčeski.



Hicks has an expansive repertoire and has appeared as recitalist in venues such as The Wigmore Hall in London, The Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, and in many other venues throughout Europe and the USA. He has appeared as concerto soloist on more than 50 occasions. This includes two complete cycles of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerti.

In 2019, Hicks released a recording of John Ireland and Tchaikovsky, supported by the John Ireland Charitable Trust. The CD has been celebrated by critics writing for magazines including *International Piano*, *Fanfare*, *Piano Journal*, and *Classical Music Daily*. Hicks releases two recordings in 2022: this present album for Divine Art, and for sister label Métier, *Blue Sounds* which follows premières of Camden Reeves' *Tangle-Beat Blues* in 2014, *Nine Preludes* in 2016, and *Blue Sounds for Piano* in 2019.

In 2019, Hicks gave the launch recital as Artistic Director of the Fanny Davies International Piano Series, an ambitious project bringing inspiring masterclasses and recitals to students and audiences in Guernsey.

Hicks is a skilled accompanist and chamber musician and has enjoyed coaching from Boris Berman, Hung-Kuan Chen, Leonard Elschenbroich, Mark Steinberg, and Ralph Kirshbaum. Performance highlights include piano quintets by Schumann and Dvořák with the Coull Quartet in 2017 and 2018 and a performance on two pianos of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* with Eylam Keshet in 2016.

As a teacher, Hicks has taught piano performance to fellow graduate students at Yale University and currently lectures at Northwestern University while teaching a private studio in Evanston, USA.

This album was recorded at St. James Concert Hall, Guernsey  
Liszt recorded on April 12 and 14, 2021; all other works on March 8 and 11, 2021  
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Piano tuner: Richard Torode  
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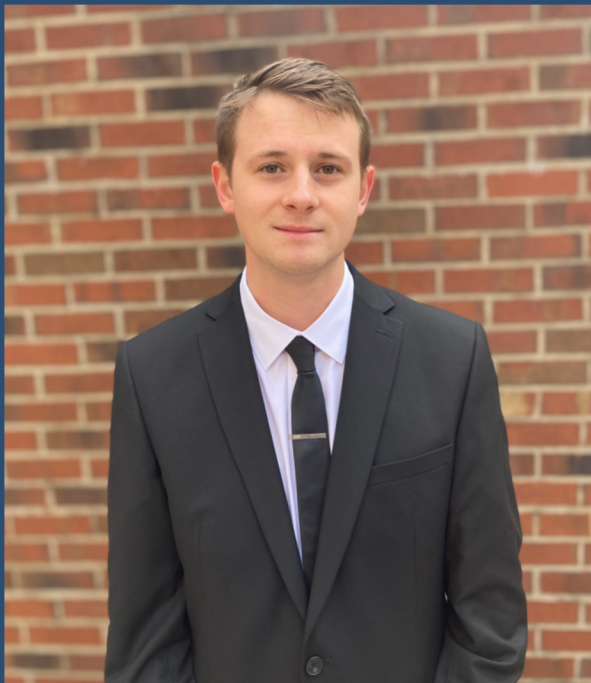
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