

**Sandra Lissenden
Katharine Durran**



The Nursery METIER

'This is such music as a child of five might write, had he the technical equipment of a grown up' wrote one admirer of Mussorgsky's 'The Nursery'. It is our contention that each song on this CD, however light the tone or small the scale, is as perfectly crafted as its creator could make it and worthy of the most detailed musical attention. We have tried, above all, to preserve and promote clarity.



This disc was born of a series of recitals Katharine and I evolved a few years back under the title 'The Nursery'. My grandfather made records of some of the Fraser-Simson settings when they were newly composed and so I owned copies of the written music – most of it is now out of print. Both of us enjoyed rediscovering songs which had given us and our mothers pleasure and which our own children are now discovering for themselves. We developed a general interest in songs sung to, or about, children and in children's responses and we found a great mass of interesting material. We decided quite early in the process to perform everything in English. Although we were presented with a wide spectrum of musical sophistication and intent, we felt that in this way all the songs met on a level as

imaginative exercises of the highest quality. Mussorgsky alone of our chosen composers wrote his own texts and some of their salt and nuance is necessarily lost in translation; we hope the gain in immediacy is compensation. To be consistent, Musgrave's songs are performed in the English, rather than the Scottish version.

In English, both adults and children can appreciate the achievement of these songs in creating a balance between nonsense and inexorable logic: the magic and the claustrophobia of the nursery's enclosed world: the endless imaginary spaces and the omnipresent nanny.

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Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) regarded his *Just So Stories for Little Children*, published in 1902, as his best work. Most of the stories were written for his daughter Josephine but she died of pneumonia in 1898 and her father never really recovered from the loss. Each of the twelve tales has a poem printed after it, which is related to, but not part of, the story. (Kipling also adds his own unique and witty drawings with extensive and ridiculous explanations). **Edward German** (1862–1936) set the verses in 1903. One of five children, he showed early keyboard skills and won six medals at the Royal Academy of Music, where organ and violin were his special studies. After writing 'Merrie England' in 1902, he was considered Sullivan's musical heir. He was knighted in 1928.

Alan Alexander Milne (1882–1956) was a novelist, humorist and playwright as well as being the author of four children's classics. The songs recorded here are taken from the two verse collections, *When We Were Very Young* (1924) and *Now We Are Six* (1927). Some of the poems from *When We Were Very Young* appeared in *Punch* before publication and so E. H. Shepard, a *Punch* regular, became accepted as the illustrator of the book, which sold over half a million copies in its first ten years. Milne's later work never achieved the same success. Musical settings were made of both verse collections almost immediately by **Harold Fraser-Simson** (1872–1944), who was a shipowner. As well as the six volumes of songs to Milne's verse, Fraser Simson also wrote incidental music to his stage adaptation of *Toad of Toad Hall* in 1929 and several stage scores. (The most successful of these, *Maid of the Mountain*, ran for over 100 performances in London.)

Modeste Mussorgsky (1839–1881) wrote the music and texts to *The Nursery – Episodes from Child Life* between 1869 and 1872, during which time he was also writing *Boris Godunov*. Then and now it united critical opinion; Debussy admired it greatly and Liszt apparently contemplated a transcription for solo piano. The first song is dedicated to Dargomizhky, who was a strong influence on Mussorgsky, and Sasha Cui (son of Cesar) is also a dedicatee.

Thea Musgrave (b.1928) was born in Midlothian. She studied in Edinburgh before going to Paris in 1950 to work with Boulanger. The *Suite o' Bairnsangs* was her first commission (from the Scottish Festival at Braemar in 1953). Her early scores show a particular interest in text setting and these poems were written in Scottish dialect by **Maurice Lindsay**; he also wrote the English 'translation' used on this CD.

THE NURSERY

1. With Nanny

Come and tell me, Nanny dear, that old tale you know so well, of the wolf – that wicked, dreadful wolf! How he used to roam around the house, how he carried children to the woods and devoured them, not leaving a single bone, and the children used to weep and cry for help...

Nanny dear – was the reason he ate them, every bit, 'cause they would not do what their nanny said, disobeying both their parents too; so he ate those children, Nanny dear?

Wait a moment! I would rather hear about the King and Queen who lived by the sea in a lovely palace. He was lame and hobbled as he walked; when he stumbled, Presto! mushrooms sprang. And the Queen had such a nasty cold, when she sneezed – all the windows cracked!

Listen, Nanny dear; I don't want to hear about that wolf again. Let's forget him! Let me hear the other, yes! that funny one.

2. In the Corner

"Really, how naughty! My wool all upset, my needles astray! Dear me! All my stitches are dropped! My knitting's all covered with ink and all! Really! Shocking! In that corner! How naughty!"

I've never done a single thing at all, never once did I touch your knitting there. The kitten played around and spoiled your wool and the needles all came out because of that – but Mishenka behaved himself; Mishenka was good as gold.

But Nanny is a cross old thing and never even blows her nose at all! Misha's hair is smooth and nicely brushed; naughty Nanny's cap is never straight! For no earthly reason Nanny's cross, and I am sent in the corner here. Little Misha won't like you or love you, not anymore, so there!

3. The Beetle

Nanny, dear Nanny! Think how awful, let me tell you!

On the grass I sat while playing, by the arbour near the birches, busy building such a pretty house of maple, with the pieces Mummy dear herself had cut me. Finished was my little cottage, with a roof on, like a proper cottage.... Then! There came a beetle and sat on my roof, big black one, thick and fat (oh so fat) – his beard started wagging up and down, his wicked eyes were fixed upon me. I was so afraid! And then he buzzed loudly...spread his wings wide open and flew towards me quickly! And with a bound he hit me upon my temple.

So I bent down then, Nanny dear, sat still and hardly dared to breathe! One little look I gave out of my eyes – and listen, what do you think, Nanny? On his back there lay the beetle, held both feet together folded, no longer angry, and his beard had stopped its wagging, no buzz left in him, just his wings could move a bit. Was he dead then? Or just pretending? What was he up to? Oh, tell me, Nanny! What do you think about it? That blow he gave me – perhaps his last one! What was he up to, that beetle?



4. With the Doll

Dolly, hushabye, Dolly, go to sleep! Close your little eyes and sleep!
Dolly, sleep, won't you! Dolly, go to sleep, for if you're not good, great
big wolf will come, carry you from home!

Dolly, go to sleep! In the morning tell me all the dreams you'll dream
now – of fairy islands where in magic gardens bloom the lovely
flowers, grow sweet pears and apples, where the golden birds night
and day are singing!

Hush now, Dolly.

5. Bedtime Prayer

Gentle God, watch over father and mother, bless and keep them safe
from harm! Gentle God, watch over brother Vasenka and brother
Mishenka. Gentle God, watch over grandma, who is so kind, give unto
her years of health and happiness! She is so very good, she is so very
old, gentle God!

Gentle God, don't forget: auntie Katie, auntie Natasha, auntie Masha,
auntie Parasha, aunties Liuba and Varia and Sasha and Olga and
Tania and Nadia – uncles Peter and Kolja, uncle Volodia and Grisha
and Sasha, watch over all of them, protect and defend them with Filia and Vania and Mitia and Petia and
Dasha, Pasha, Sonia, Douniushka...

Nanny, do tell me – what comes next?

"Well really, what a dreadful memory! How often must I tell you? Gentle God, watch over and protect me
myself!"

Gentle God, watch over and protect me myself. Now, is it right?

6. Sailor the Cat

Mummy, mummy listen, listen to my story! I was going just to look for my sunshade (oh, it's so hot now) –
up and down the house I hunted, every corner, no, I can't find it! Not on the table, not on the sideboard –
could I have left it there by the window? Then suddenly I saw him, our little cat – he crept up and
scratched at the cage. The bird sat trembling, far in the corner – and chirped. Wasn't I angry! So cat,
you'd kill the canary, would you? All right, I'll catch you, just you wait! And as though I saw nothing at all –
I stood quite still; cast a glance now and then at Master Kitty – just imagine! Full of deceit he calmly stared
in my face and stretched his paw to the birdcage; when he was ready to seize the canary I gave him one,
wop!

Mummy, is every cage as hard as ours is? Mummy, I have hurt my fingers badly! Right at the very end, oh
Mummy, they burn and tingle so....

Oh! What a naughty cat, Mummy, eh?

7. Riding the Hobbyhorse

Trot! Giddy up! Gee up! Hi quickly – trot, trot! Prrr! Woa! Vasja, hey, Vasja! Listen, will you come and play
this evening? Come very early! Gee up, trot!

Goodbye, Vasja! I've a way to go but I'll be home again long before it's nighttime; for you know I'm put to
bed so dreadful early. Promise don't be late! Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta! Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-Hi! Gee up! Hi!

Out my way! Oh!

Oh mummy! my foot hurts.

"Dearest one, what's the matter? You mustn't cry now. Enough, my dear: now listen. It will soon be better,



Come on my love. Over there: look now – it's lovely. See it?
Among the bushes? Oh what a lovely little bird. Pretty feathers
too! See it? Come on now! All right?"
All right! I have been riding, Mummy, and so I must quickly travel
home now. Trot, trot! Vasja's coming – trot! We must hurry home
now.

A SUITE O' BAIRNSANGS

1. The Man in the Moon (The Man-in-the-Mune)

The man in the moon's got a crick in his back
So he will not come out to play.
He sits by himself on a shimmer* of heaven
And hears what the stars say,
But his cheeks go black, he furls his brow
And his old head shakes with rage
Through the bustling clouds that jostle the earth
When God's on the rampage.
The man in the moon's got a crick in his back
And he will not come out to play
(* crossbar)

2. Daffodils (Daffins)

The wind that blew last night
Made trees rear up their heads
And wrestle as it tried to steal
The clothes from off their beds.
It must have shaken the sun
Birling around the world
For off his flaming fiery ball
A few bright sparks it hurled
And dropped them round the roots
Of every breathless tree.
Cool laughing pools of yellow light
Daffins most fair to see.

3. Willie Webster (Willie Wabster)

Have you seen Willie Webster?
He's well known from Scrabster
South to the silver Tweed.
He runs his fingers through the sky
To keep the stars a-moving:
When thunderclouds go slowly by
He gives them each a shoving.
And when the moon offends his sight
He casts it o'er his shoulder;
And so's to snuff the sun's bright light



His winds go swaggering bolder.
Have you seen Willie Webster?
He's well known from Scrabster
South to the silver Tweed.
He makes the raindrops out of heav'n
Come driving on the town;
In ribbons all the colours seven
He drops and dangles down.
Small wonder that I'm often scared,
For I'm not certain whether
He's God, the landlord of the world
Or just his clerk of weather.

4. A Child's Prayer at Night (A Bairn's Prayer at Nicht)

The stars crack the sky to let light in
So please may the holes let out my sin.

5. The Cherry Tree (The Gean)

All the trees are dancing with the winds of Spring
Ev'ry green leaf dancing in a highland fling.
Except for yonder cherry tree so ladylike and proud
Dressed up for all the rest to see with tassels of a cloud.
All the trees are dancing with the winds of Spring
Ev'ry green leaf glancing in a highland fling.



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Sandra Lissenden



Katharine Durran

Sandra Lissenden was born in Malta and grew up in Jersey but now lives unromantically just outside the Dartford Tunnel. She specialises as a recitalist although she is also an experienced oratorio and session singer. She likes exploring odd musical corners and constructing programmes.

Katharine Durran lives on a Pennine hillside. She gave her first concerto performance in Edinburgh at the age of 11. Her CDs range from the complete Toccatas of J. S. Bach (MSV CD2001) through Spanish and English Song to a newly released disc of British works for voice and piano since 1970 with Alison Smart (MSV CD92025).

Sandra and Katharine studied together at Cambridge and the RCM and have been performing and touring regularly together for over 15 years. This is their second collaboration on disc; with Andrew Sparling (clarinets) they recorded the highly acclaimed 'Songs from the Exotic', a collection of newly commissioned chamber music written for 'Tapestry' (BML 012).

The NURSERY

Sandra Lissenden (soprano) and Katharine Durran (piano)

Prologue

Fraser-Simson / A.A. Milne

1. Halfway Down 1:44

Just So

German / R. Kipling: from 'The Just So Song Book'

2. When the Cabin Portholes 1:30
3. The First Friend 2:11
4. The Camel's Hump 2:53
5. I Keep Six Honest Serving Men 2:06
6. There was never a Queen like Balkis 1:47
7. Rolling down to Rio 2:01

Animals

Fraser-Simson / A.A. Milne

8. At the Zoo 1:41
9. The Christening 2:02
10. The Four Friends 1:23
11. Missing 1:50
12. Twice Times 2:23

The Nursery

Mussorgsky: 'The Nursery'

13. With Nanny 2:08
14. In the Corner 1:55
15. The Beetle 2:44
16. With the Doll 2:05
17. Bedtime Prayer 2:15
18. Sailor the Cat 2:01
19. Riding the Hobbyhorse 3:35

VIPs

Fraser-Simson / A.A. Milne

20. Disobedience 2:46
21. The King's Breakfast 3:29
22. Sneezes 1:49
23. Bad Sir Brian 3:54
24. The Emperor's Rhyme 2:43

Children's Songs

Musgrave / M. Lindsay: 'A Suite o' Bairnsangs'

25. The Man in the Moon 1:02
26. Daffodils 2:10
27. Willie Webster 1:23
28. A Child's Prayer at Night 1:07
29. The Cherry Tree 1:20

Child's Eye

Fraser-Simson / A.A. Milne

30. Wind on the Hill 1:47
31. Buckingham Palace 2:32
32. If I were King 1:42
33. Lines and Squares 1:43
34. Market Square 3:09

Total time 73:03

The texts to **The Nursery** and **A Suite o' Bairnsangs** are reproduced in the booklet.



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