

**Two Fragments after  
the Song of Roland, Op. 30 (10:20)**

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The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra  
Karl Krueger, conductor



*Edward MacDowell*

**EDWARD MACDOWELL**  
**THE SYMPHONIC POEMS**

Edward MacDowell (1861-1908) is most commonly known as a composer of evocative piano miniatures such as *To a Wild Rose*, *With Sweet Lavender*, and *Nautilus*. For a period of seven years he was also occupied with large-scale orchestral works: his four symphonic poems span the years 1884—two years before Liszt's death—to 1890—the year of the first performance of *Death and Transfiguration*. MacDowell's tone poems were all begun while he was living in Germany, but the last two were completed only after his return to America in 1888.

These works reveal not only the composer's skill as an orchestrator, but also his ability to create drama in sound. While *Lancelot und Elaine* fits what is traditionally called 'descriptive' action music, *Hamlet*, *Lamia*, and *Aldâ* communicate to us a sort of psychodrama that had been achieved by only Liszt before. Although all four tone poems precede his most famous works (*Woodland Sketches* was published in 1896), they are mature compositions in their own right.

Two Fragments after the Song of Roland, Op. 30

**The Saracens; The Lovely Aldâ**

MacDowell turns to the literature of an earlier time--the eleventh-century Song of Roland--in composing his fourth symphonic poem. The two pieces that come down to us were at first intended as the middle movements of a symphony based on the epic poem. Eventually MacDowell discarded the outer movements and published only the inner pair as Opus 30. In his original conception, the two movements of Op. 30 were to portray, respectively, Ganelon, the traitor, and Aldâ, Roland's beloved. The final movement of the symphony was to be a depiction of Roland's death and apotheosis, while its first movement may have been conceived as a portrayal of Roland's protector, Charlemagne.

Here is what MacDowell included in the score of the two published movements:

**"The Saracens"**

*Thro' the dark night  
The pagan fires flare,  
The Saracen's trumpets  
Wail thro' the air;  
For, 'mid the feasting  
Ganelon sware  
To betray the good knight  
Roland, the fair.  
So the Saracen trumpets  
Base treason blare  
And sinister music  
Rends the night air.*

### "Aldâ"

Then all the hall was still  
And hushed the knightly talk  
As lovely Aldâ knelt  
Before great Charlemagne—  
"Ah, Charles, thou mighty king  
Where hast thou left Roland?  
Bring me back the hero  
To whom I gave my love,  
My soul has but one longing  
To see Roland again."

"The Saracens" poem does not focus on Ganelon, but rather tells of the treason he ignited. In *The Saracens*, MacDowell accordingly creates a mood picture that realizes the final lines, "And sinister music rends the night air." Both melodic ideas in this movement convey a threatening tone, the second made all the more eerie by the shrilling piccolos that present it. The mood is broken momentarily, about halfway through the piece, when a major-key, waltzlike fragment appears twice. Perhaps MacDowell intended this gesture as a reminder of the unsuspecting Roland.

In contrast to the near-constant mood of *The Saracens*, *The Lovely Aldâ*, involves a play of emotions, in much the same manner as in MacDowell's first symphonic poem, *Hamlet*. In the poetic excerpt presenting Aldâ's eloquent, impassioned plea to Charlemagne, two emotional states co-exist: the beauty and strength of her love for Roland, and her anxiety and despair over his fate. MacDowell separates these emotions, using their conflict as the basis of his

musical drama. As in *Hamlet*, he alternates diatonic and chromatic materials to reflect the conflicting emotions, but in *Aldâ*, the music unfolds in its own way. The primary material, a diatonic lyrical love theme, returns three times, unvaried except in orchestration. Each statement seems more resolute both in its fuller orchestration and by contrast with the increasingly unsettled nature of the intervening passages. Thus, without making any fundamental change in the theme itself, MacDowell conveys to us that what it represents in Aldâ's character is ascendant. In spite of its quiet tone throughout, the inherent drama of Aldâ is transmitted through these textural changes.

The harmonic language of sections of *The Lovely Aldâ* is that of the Wagnerian music drama—the language spoken at that time by most young, "progressive" composers. MacDowell tempers these harmonies with his most delicate orchestral colors to create his final full-length orchestral portrait.

### *Hamlet/Ophelia, Op. 22*

MacDowell's earliest tone poem is actually a set of two works. The impetus for writing these came in July, 1884, when MacDowell and his wife visited London as newlyweds and attended at least three Shakespeare plays: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Much Ado about Nothing*. It was the first of these that suggested he try his hand at a Shakespearean tone poem.

MacDowell chose not to depict the dramatic events of the play in sound, but to give a character sketch of Hamlet himself. The later nineteenth century tended to view Hamlet as a striving, driven character doomed to failure rather than as a mere dreamer. In his musical setting, MacDowell suggests the disparate forces working within and upon Hamlet: unsettling chromatic passages surround the strident diatonic main theme.

Midway through the *Hamlet* movement, a new element confronts us—an expansive, lyrical theme, representing Ophelia, played by the violins. Thus, in MacDowell's interpretation, an essential element of Hamlet's makeup, and ultimately of his undoing, is his love for Ophelia. MacDowell confirms the fated nature of this love by a clever musical allusion soon before the Ophelia theme enters: the French horns present in slightly disguised form the motive commonly known as "Longing for Tristan" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

After the Ophelia theme has received extensive treatment, a shortened recapitulation of the earlier chromatic and diatonic materials occurs, until finally chromatic fragments resolve to major-key string utterances in an ironically hopeful ending.

Whereas MacDowell chose to portray Hamlet as a psychologically complex character, he gives us a simpler view of Ophelia. Her movement, based on the "Ophelia" theme from *Hamlet*, is an impressionistic portrait suggesting the MacDowell of the *Woodland Sketches*. With the exception of a contrasting middle section (where again there are echoes of the "Tristan" motive and some reminiscences of *Hamlet*), the movement consists of restatements of the Ophelia theme, varied in orchestration. Two of the restatements are given to strings while the flutes weave a delicate filigree above—one of MacDowell's most characteristic and effective orchestral colors.



### *Lancelot und Elaine, Op. 25*

For his second symphonic poem, written in 1886, MacDowell turned to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. MacDowell's fascination with this Arthurian legend was reflected not only in his tone poem, but also later in his "*Eroica*" Sonata for piano. In *Lancelot und Elaine*, MacDowell took one portion of the *Idylls* and gave it a thoroughgoing musical realization—it is, in fact, the most "descriptive" program music he wrote. Practically every major event in the story is given a musical equivalent.

The story involves the unrequited love of the maiden Elaine for Lancelot, and Lancelot's guilty love for Queen Guinevere. The opening musical materials represent a scene between Lancelot and the Queen in which she prevails upon him to go in disguise to a tournament to joust for the prize of diamonds. Lancelot's departure and journey to the tournament are signaled by new material: a horn motive accompanied by cello and bass rumblings, followed by a fanfare-like orchestral tutti.

This music dies away, and we hear a new theme, that of the maiden Elaine, whom Lancelot meets on his wanderings. Elaine's poignant theme is introduced by oboe solo. The platonic love scene that occurs between the two characters is suggested by the waltz like theme that follows immediately.

The middle section of the tone poem (in effect, the "development") represents the tournament. It is introduced by a brass fanfare. Soon both of Lancelot's earlier motives are heard, one figuring particularly at the climac-

tic moment of Lancelot's victory. Shortly before the victory MacDowell depicts Lancelot's fall through cascading lines in the flutes and violins. Once the momentum of the tournament has subsided, Elaine's theme returns: in the story she comes to nurse the wounded Lancelot.

Lancelot, unaware of Elaine's love, returns to Camelot. A musical recapitulation occurs representing the second meeting of Lancelot with the Queen: both the material from their first meeting and one of Lancelot's motives recurs. But into this familiar sequence of themes intrudes that of Elaine (in the trumpets) as the Queen taunts Lancelot about his rumored tryst with a maiden. The passage culminates with a raucous shrieking by the upper strings as Guinevere throws Lancelot's diamonds into the stream.

The coda begins with ominous string tremolos and drum articulations. A bass drum roll, MacDowell tells us, represents the "start" felt by Lancelot when he sees Elaine's bier floating down the stream—she has died for love of Lancelot. Elaine's themes are heard, the oboe sounding its plaintive note, followed by a reminiscence in the horn, of Lancelot's chief motive, and finally, undulating figures in the strings. The quiet ending is appropriate to what unfolds in Tennyson's poem: upon reading the letter found in Elaine's hands, which tells of her love, Lancelot sits by the river reflecting upon Elaine and his unworthiness, "not knowing he should die a holy man."

In 1899, some thirteen years after Lancelot's conception, MacDowell asserted, "I would never have insisted that this symphonic poem need mean 'Lancelot und Elaine' to everyone." This statement notwithstanding, many critics agree that *Lancelot und Elaine* is best appreciated as a sonic interpretation of the Tennyson story.

### Lamia, Op. 29

MacDowell's third symphonic poem, *Lamia*, was written in 1887-88. MacDowell acknowledged its literary associations by including the following synopsis of Keats's poem:

Lamia, an enchantress in the form of a serpent, loves Lycius, a young Corinthian. In order to win him she prays to Hermes, who answers her appeal by transforming her into a lovely maiden. Lycius meets her in the woods, is smitten with love for her and goes with her to her enchanted palace, where the wedding is celebrated with great splendour. But suddenly Apollonius the magician appears; he reveals the magic. Lamia again assumes the form of a serpent, the enchanted palace vanishes, and Lycius is found lifeless.

The major dramatic events of this Romantic tale are not actions, but rather the physical changes undergone by Lamia. A similar psychodramatic feature had already attracted MacDowell to Hamlet. In *Lamia* he chooses a distinctive technique to depict his character's emotional changes: thematic transformation or the modification of a musical subject with a view to "changing its personality." Liszt, MacDowell's mentor in Germany for a time, had given this technique a significant role in his symphonic poems.

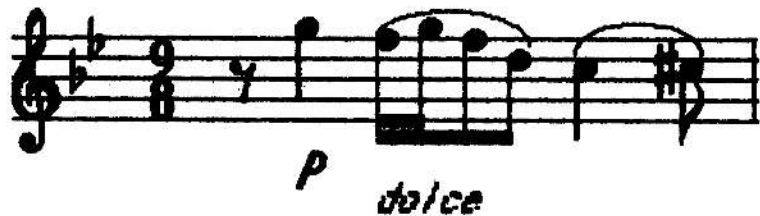
MacDowell takes Lamia's primary musical subject:



and presents it in different guises associated with specific images of Lamia. In

its initial form, it is a serpentine motive unfolded by cellos and bassoons—Lamia as serpent. Next it appears as the mystical pulsations of flutes accompanied by clarinets—Lamia as a beautiful maiden, followed by a lyrical string line—Lamia in love with Lycius. Its appearance as a majestic tutti suggests Lamia in wedding celebration, while the reappearance of the serpentine motive signals Lamia's return to serpent form.

Although the transformations of Lamia's theme provide the primary musical substance of this work, it does contain other elements. After the first two appearances of Lamia's theme, the image of Lycius is evoked with a muted horn theme of martial and noble character. Once we have heard Lamia's theme in its "love" guise, the idea of their union is strengthened when Lycius's theme is combined with an oboe motive derived rhythmically and intervally from Lamia's theme.



Apollonius, the catalyst of the story, receives no musical portrayal. His magic is made known to us only through the return of Lamia's serpent music—tentatively before the wedding celebration and decisively after it. The final image of the poem, Lycius dead, their love unconsummated, is conveyed

in the coda, which begins with a pianissimo gong stroke followed by funereal rhythms in the winds. MacDowell ends the work by recalling a love theme, Lamia's secondary motive, transformed into a poignant, plaintive melody for clarinet solo.

Unlike his previous two symphonic poems, *Lamia* did not appear in print or receive a public hearing until after MacDowell's death. Various circumstances accounted for this, including the composer's move from Germany to Boston during its composition. Yet listeners today may well concur with an opinion that MacDowell expressed in later years: *Lamia* is as good a piece as its predecessors.

—Dolores Pesce

With this release, Bridge Records in cooperation with the Music Division of the Library of Congress, begins a major project devoted to the re-mastering and re-issuing of recordings made by the Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage. These recordings were made between 1958 and 1970, and were initially released on 55 long-playing recordings. The Society's recordings contain music in genres including folk music, sacred music, chamber, piano, choral, and orchestral music. The heart of the series is the set of recordings of nineteenth and early twentieth century American orchestral works, made by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under the Society's Founder and Director, Karl Krueger. Bridge Records is pleased to present these seminal recordings to the public as part of its long term association with Music Division of the Library of Congress.

Karl Krueger (1894-1979) was born in Atchison Kansas. As a youngster, Krueger studied cello and organ, and later went on to study at Midland College (Kansas); The New England Conservatory (with Chadwick) and the University of Kansas. In 1920, after touring Brazil as an organist, Krueger went to Vienna to continue his studies with Robert Fuchs and Franz Schalk. Krueger's conducting career included positions as assistant conductor at the Vienna Staatsoper (1920-22) as well as Music Director of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra (1925-1932); the Kansas City Philharmonic Orchestra (1933-1943); and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (1943-1949). In 1958, he founded the Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage.

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was founded in 1946 by Thomas Beecham. Beecham directly controlled the affairs and policy of the orchestra until his death in 1961. From 1948 until 1963 the orchestra was the resident orchestra for Glyndebourne company performances, at both the Glyndebourne Festival and the Edinburgh Festival. In 1950 Beecham took the orchestra on a US tour, becoming the first English orchestra to tour the USA since 1912. The grueling schedule included 51 concerts in 45 cities in 64 days, performing a repertory of 50 works! Beecham's hand-picked successor as conductor of the Royal Philharmonic was the late Rudolf Kempe.

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