



The Mystic and The Muse

piano music of

**Cyril Scott
and
Roger Quilter**

**Clipper Erickson,
piano**



Roger Quilter and Cyril Scott are two outstanding members of a group of English composers that met each other while studying at the Frankfurt Conservatorium in the 1890's. Roger Quilter became best known for his meltingly beautiful songs, rightly putting him in the first class of English song composers. Cyril Scott had extremely wide ranging interests not only in music but in symbolist poets, theosophy, eastern religion and alternative medicine. He was also well known (in some ways better known) for his sometimes controversial writings.

Quilter and Scott rebelled to different degrees against the Bach-Beethoven-Brahms-Wagner Germanic line that was likely their daily diet in conservatory classes. They were attracted to the competing currents in contemporary music, including French impressionism, unusual modes and irregular and changing time signatures. Independently wealthy from his family, although battling illness for most of his life, Quilter became the quintessential miniaturist, never writing in large forms. Scott also wrote enormous quantities of short pieces of widely varying quality for which he became best known. His best work is often in his larger works, which unfortunately have been unjustly neglected. These composers were somewhat eclipsed in their later lives by the next generation of composers which became active following the First World War. Their styles bear the mark of the pre-war world in some ways and they began to be seen as dated. Now the passage of time allows for a reappraisal of their work which I believe will show that their best music has much worth and depth giving them a place as the true pioneers in British music.

Quilter's piano music is much less known than his songs, sharing their elegance and delicacy, but also showing more influence of the impressionist composers, particularly Debussy. The piano music is more demanding of the player than the song accompaniments; Quilter being very careful to not overtax the potentially limited abilities of amateur accompanists. The *Three Studies* are early works and show the influence of Brahms in their

romanticism although a bit of Faure and early Debussy enticingly creeps into the 3rd study with its parallel augmented chords.

The *Three Pieces* are more mature works showing many Debussian features. *Dance in the Twilight* recalls the feeling of *La Plus que Lent* and was dedicated to Luigino Franchetti, probably one of Quilter's beaux. *Summer Evening* was dedicated to a friend of Quilter's who had recently passed away and left a touching letter expressing peace and acceptance. Certainly Delius may also be heard in this wonderfully evocative music. *Country Fair* is the most virtuosic of Quilter's piano music, its robust dance rhythms and chaotic activity a world away from the politeness of his song accompaniments.

The *Two Impressions* were tellingly dedicated to Percy Grainger, great pianist and the most famous of the English students in Frankfurt. Quilter seems to save his best work out of respect for his friend. *In a Gondola* beautifully portrays the lazy movements of a boat and seems to have a certain wistfulness for a long vanished age of repose and elegance. *Lanterns* uses the pentatonic mode and spirited rhythms to evoke Chinese lanterns and the graceful movements of dancers.

The *Four Country Pieces* are more nostalgic in nature and look farther backward in style; they are nonetheless very charming. They sound quite a bit like Grieg; *Goblins* seems like a polite version of Grieg's ever popular *March of the Dwarves*. They were dedicated to Quilter's music teacher as a young child and owe much more to the German tradition of simple character pieces.

Scott's piano music is more eclectic than Quilter's but still shows influences of impressionism. In addition to that, a strong feature of Scott's style is irregular time signatures formed by adding on partial beats onto a regular measure. The *Second Sonata*, in addition to Scriabin, sounds like Berg in some places – expressionism and impressionism sharing space in a fascinating style. Scott has the ability to meld all this eclecticism

into a cohesive style in his best pieces.

Carillon is an inventive piece which recalls Grieg's *Bell Ringing* (one of his *Lyric Pieces*) more than the bell pieces of the French Impressionists. Parallel chords with prominent fourths and fifths coupled with a lively tempo and obstinate rhythm create a raucous and clangorous impression rather than the more dreamy treatments of Debussy and Ravel.

One of the most popular of Cyril Scott's piano works, *Rainbow Trout* is a much more interesting and forward looking piece than its parlour-music title would suggest. The opening perfectly conjures up a tranquil and watery scene but with a certain feeling of submerged activity. Scott has an uncanny feel for evoking the sudden movements of the fish and the flashing of its colors. A section marked 'wistfully' near the end could be the fisherman; frustrated in his futile efforts to catch it. The piece dies away on a completely unexpected chord as the fish finally disappears under the surface for good. The use of Scriabin's "mystic chord" (quoted almost note for note) gives the fish an almost mythical and otherworldly character.

Often the mark of a fine composer is how well their style is represented in music for children. *Zoo* is a worthy example in the great line of pedagogical pieces from Bach, Schumann and Tchaikovsky to Bartok and Stravinsky. Scott's fondness for parallel chords gives a fine effect in *The Elephant*, *The Bear* and especially in the slinky, closely voiced chords in *The Snake*. His gift for expressing the sudden and unpredictable movements of animals shines in *The Squirrel* and *The Monkey*. *The Tortoise* sings his plodding dirge followed by *The Rhinoceros* which would be a delight to a child fond of pounding on the keys!

Cyril Scott's large works generally have a seriousness and depth that a cursory look at his short character pieces would not suggest. The *Second Sonata* exhibits all the hallmarks of Scott's style: irregular time signatures formed by the addition of partial beats onto a

regular measure, complex chromatic harmonies and a sense of form rhapsodic in impression, yet tightly controlled. This is the only one of Scott's sonatas in one movement, suggesting the influence of late Scriabin, particularly in its combination of lucid sonata form and mystical material. Chromatic harmonies using higher partials (ninth, eleventh and thirteenth), chord voicings emphasizing fourths and its otherworldly moods confirm the influence of Scriabin. Since Scriabin's style was somewhat out of favor (at least outside the USSR) in the 1930's the sonata was seldom performed although it was dedicated to the great pianist Walter Gieseking. Hopefully now that Scriabin's style is better appreciated this work will receive the recognition it deserves.

The sonata features two basic ideas: the first one has large downward and upward leaps giving it an arching and heroic guise. It is immediately heard again in a completely different setting marked *moderato con poesia* over a murmuring accompaniment. This thematic transformation process with its Wagnerian roots suggests that Scott did not completely reject the Germanic style that the Frankfurt group rebelled against. The second idea, stated after a tense buildup answered by a shower of fourths down the keyboard, is chromatic and snakelike; suggesting some mystical incantation surrounded by a swirling cloud of incense. This incantation rises in intensity and ends the exposition section of the sonata. The development juxtaposes these elements in an enormous variety of harmonizations and accompaniments that gradually swirl to a wild climax. After a very languorous and Scriabinesque section the recapitulation states the opening idea with its two personalities reversed. The second idea returns in an apotheosis marked *estatico* which gradually builds to close the work. Here is where Scott and Scriabin part company; while Scriabin ends his late sonatas disappearing into oblivion, Scott finishes in a more traditional heroic manner.

— Clipper Erickson

Clipper Erickson

Clipper Erickson made his orchestra debut in Los Angeles at the age of 19, under the baton of the late Calvin Simmons, and has continued to thrill audiences since, being described recently as a “true heroic pianist” by the Washington Post. He is featured in recital and with orchestras throughout the United States each year and is one of a handful of pianists chosen for the roster of Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour.

Clipper Erickson studied piano with John Ogdon at Indiana University, where the magic of Ogdon’s virtuosity and interpretations exerted a great influence. He also studied at The Juilliard School, and Yale University. He is the recipient of many honors throughout his career and a prize winner at international competitions including the Busoni Competition, and the Tchaikovsky Competition. Mr. Erickson resides with his family in historic Bucks County, outside Philadelphia, finding time in his busy performing schedule to perform for the benefit of local charities as well as his church.

His previous DTR releases include *American Journey* (DTR9807), featuring music composed entirely by American composers, *An Orchestra of One* (DTR2012), and *Woven Images* (DTR2003), including the premiere recording of *Without Borders* written by Philadelphia area composer Allen Krantz especially for him. *Woven Images* presents music inspired by the visual arts including weaving and painting. *American Record Guide* wrote of *American Journey*: “A delightful disc...Clipper Erickson’s playing has a winning vitality and exuberance...fresh and youthful”.

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Direct-to-Tape Recordings

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Cyril Scott and Roger Quilter were two of the "Frankfurt Gang" (the others being Percy Grainger, Balfour Gardiner, and Norman O'Neill) of young students studying at the Hoch Conservatorium in Frankfurt during the 1890's. Quilter's piano music is virtually unknown, and here all of it comprising numerous miniatures is recorded for the first time. Much of Cyril Scott's music reflects his mystic side, and none more than the difficult and complex one-movement *Second Sonata* which receives its recorded premiere. *Rainbow Trout* is one of Scott's best known piano works and is dedicated to Percy Grainger. *Carillon* typifies the many piano pieces by Scott with chime or bell-like effects. Children of all ages will delight in *Zoo (Animals for Piano)*, written in 1930 for Scott's children Vivien Mary and Desmond Cyril.

Roger Quilter (1877-1953)

Three Studies for Piano, Op. 4

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|----|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Molto Allegro con moto (1901) | 2:37 |
| 2. | Molto Allegro amabile (1909) | 1:07 |
| 3. | Vivace misterioso e legato (1909) | 2:26 |

Three Pieces for Piano, Op. 16

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|----|------------------------------|------|
| 4. | Dance in the Twilight (1915) | 2:21 |
| 5. | Summer Evening (1915) | 4:18 |
| 6. | At a Country Fair (1916) | 4:24 |

Two Impressions for Piano, Op. 19

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|----|---------------------|------|
| 7. | In a Gondola (1914) | 4:36 |
| 8. | Lanterns (1919) | 2:44 |

Country Pieces for Piano, Op. 27 (1923)

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|-----|----------------|------|
| 9. | Shepherd Song | 2:48 |
| 10. | Goblins | 1:45 |
| 11. | Forest Lullaby | 2:33 |
| 12. | Pipe and Tabor | 1:42 |

Cyril Scott (1879-1970)

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|-----|---------------------------------------|-------|
| 13. | Carillon (1913) | 2:03 |
| 14. | Rainbow Trout (1916) | 4:49 |
| | Zoo (Animals for Piano) (1930) | |
| 15. | The Elephant | 0:50 |
| 16. | The Squirrel | 0:46 |
| 17. | The Bear | 0:52 |
| 18. | The Monkey | 0:37 |
| 19. | The Snake | 1:10 |
| 20. | The Giraffe | 0:37 |
| 21. | The Tortoise | 1:20 |
| 22. | The Rhinoceros | 0:36 |
| 23. | Second Sonata (1935) | 17:43 |

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