

PIANO MUSIC by BILLY MAYERL

Volume One

PHILIP MARTIN piano

- | | | |
|---|------------------|------|
| 1 | Autumn Crocus | 3:26 |
| 2 | Wistaria | 3:20 |
| 3 | Evening Primrose | 4:28 |

Aquarium Suite

- | | | |
|---|-----------------|------|
| 4 | 1. Willow Moss | 4:58 |
| 5 | 2. Moorish Idol | 5:20 |
| 6 | 3. Fantail | 3:47 |
| 7 | 4. Whirligig | 2:56 |

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|------|
| 8 | Marigold | 3:04 |
| 9 | From a Spanish Lattice | 5:04 |

Puppets Suite

- | | | |
|----|-----------------|------|
| 10 | 1. Golliwog | 2:32 |
| 11 | 2. Judy | 2:48 |
| 12 | 3. Punch | 3:24 |
| 13 | Weeping Willow | 4:42 |
| 14 | Railroad Rhythm | 3:41 |
| 15 | Siberian Lament | 3:50 |

Three Contrasts

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|------|
| 16 | 1. Ladybird | 2:34 |
| 17 | 2. Pastoral | 2:21 |
| 18 | 3. Fiddle Dance | 3:14 |
| 19 | The Harp of the Winds | 4:31 |
| 20 | Shallow Waters | 3:31 |
| 21 | Robots | 2:47 |

Total duration: 76:22

Recorded at the Adrian Boult Hall, Birmingham Conservatoire on 3rd & 4th January 2012

Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor

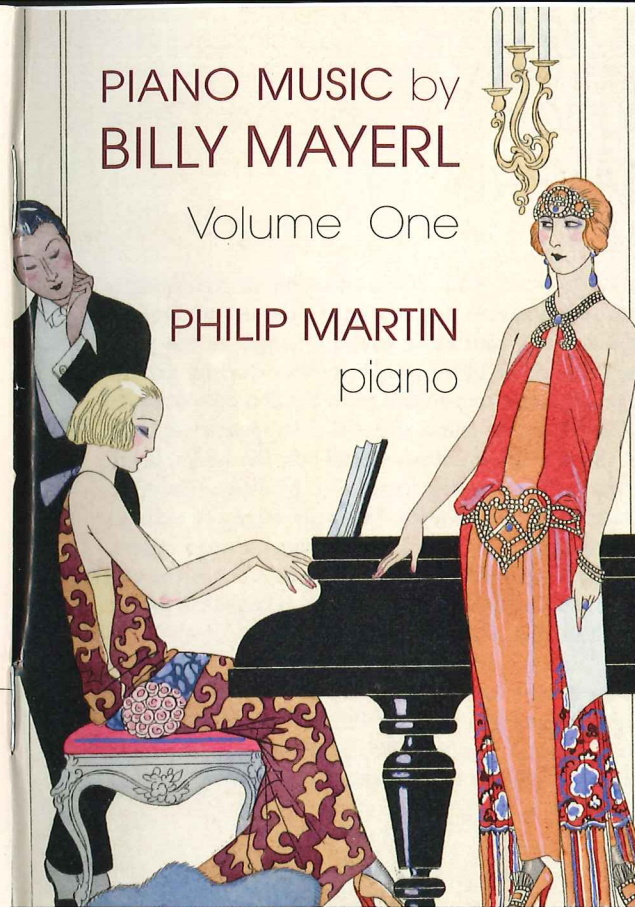
Front Cover: *Incantation*, illustration for *Gazette du Bon Ton*, 1922 (pochoir print), Georges Barbier
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Front cover design and layout: Andrew Giles

PIANO MUSIC by BILLY MAYERL

Volume One

PHILIP MARTIN
piano



Includes

Railroad Rhythm
Robots
Siberian Lament
Aquarium Suite

& others



PIANO MUSIC by Volume One BILLY MAYERL

From a distance of 90 years, with communication in the modern world being both instantaneous and global, to consider the impact the introduction of national broadcasting made in Britain in the years following World War I requires no little leap of imagination on our part. In the early 1920s, the programmes transmitted from London did not cover the entire country. Not everyone could afford the equipment required to receive them, but the concept of households all over the nation being united for the first time in broadcasting terms – in the dissemination of speech and music – was truly revolutionary. The medium proved to be an instantaneous success amongst those capable of receiving the programmes. Broadcasting technology improved by leaps and bounds, until by the end of the decade in the United Kingdom, the BBC had been created in a form similar (although much smaller) to today's Corporation.

The result was that music was available to every household capable of receiving it, opening up almost limitless possibilities. By 1930, the year the BBC Symphony Orchestra was founded, opera, concerts, recitals, popular dance music, jazz, folk and ethnic music were all broadcast on a

regular basis, the broadcasters becoming familiar names in many homes, their music appreciated and enjoyed on a scale previously unknown in human history.

Before the arrival of radio and the concurrent development of electrical gramophone recording, music-making in the home centred upon the piano (at least, in households that could afford one). But the new technologies meant that radio and gramophone records provided ready-made music, performed to a standard beyond that of most amateurs, many of whom sought to emulate the musicians they heard over the air by seeking to improve such technique as they possessed through enrolling in correspondence courses, supplemented by local teachers.

Within ten years of the end of the War of 1914-18, societies across the world had seen revolutionary changes – some literally so – and the popular music that encapsulated those changes more than any other was jazz, or ragtime, whose main rhythmic element – syncopation – filled radio programmes of popular music to the point where its greatest practitioners became literally world famous as broadcasting spread across the globe.

In Britain, Billy Mayerl had, by 1925, become arguably the most famous of the early 'syncopaters' (as they were sometimes called) who broadcast regularly. Mayerl had been born in central London in 1902. His musical abilities were quickly recognised, and when little more than a child, he

studied the piano at the Trinity College of Music (founded some thirty years before he was born). The College was dominated during Mayerl's time by its distinguished Principal, Sir Frederick Bridge, who must have baulked at Mayerl being attracted to early syncopated popular music, from *Whistlin' Rufus* (1898) to *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1911). The boy's progress at the College was such that he was the soloist in a performance of Grieg's Piano Concerto at London's Queen's Hall during World War I and had also composed his first solo piano piece in the syncopated style, which – although being written in 1917, was not published until 1925, under the title 'The Jazz Master'.

The attractions of popular music during the War proved too strong for young Mayerl. The possessor of a finished piano technique and a charming personality, he would often entertain troops on leave or those recovering from their wounds in convalescent homes, and was soon in demand to join established bands or orchestras in high-class venues – particularly after the War ended.

Mayerl's really big break occurred when he was engaged to join a band at London's Savoy Hotel. The band became known as the Savoy Havana Band, and in addition to the Band making records for English Columbia and later His Master's Voice, Mayerl himself soon recorded a number of solo discs, in particular Zez Confrey's *Kitten on the Keys* – a massive hit of the day. The musical connections of the Savoy Hotel, most famous for that

with Gilbert and Sullivan during the reign of its founder Richard D'Oyly Carte, continued with D'Oyly Carte's son, Rupert, who soon arranged, through his contacts, for the Band to broadcast regularly via the early 2LO studio in nearby Savoy Hill.

Within a few years, therefore, with regular broadcasts and gramophone recordings, Billy Mayerl had achieved national fame. But he was also a composer, and by 1925 the 23-year-old had additionally made almost 40 piano rolls, of his own and other composers' music, and had met with and become a friend of George Gershwin – so much so that Gershwin entrusted Mayerl with giving the British premiere of his *Rhapsody in Blue*, in London at the Queen's Hall, conducted by Debroy Somers, in October, 1925, in the composer's presence. Sadly, it appears that Mayerl never recorded the work.

In his early twenties, therefore, Billy Mayerl was an established figure nationally, and in 1927 he published what became his most famous composition, *Marigold*. This appeared soon after he had left the band to pursue a solo career and to found his correspondence school for budding pianists, which lasted for 30 years and which became a world-wide phenomenon. Such was the speed and elegance of Mayerl's playing, captured on many 78rpm discs, allied to his genuine compositional gifts, that the inherent qualities of his music have endured for later generations – here is undeniably attractive and original piano music, composed

by a genuine master pianist, which in turn has surely ensured Mayerl's enduring appeal.

His own brand of syncopated playing was both immaculate and brilliant: it was captured on film, the speed at which he played being slowed down to enable the audience to see that no trickery was involved. Clearly, in technical terms his music often demands a finished and comprehensive command of the keyboard, placing his pieces beyond the skill of most amateur pianists. If not every one of Mayerl's compositions is a brilliant show-piece, his slower, more reflective items none the less require a nimble technique.

Apart from Mayerl's fame resting upon his shorter, descriptive 'characteristic' pieces (as they were often termed) his early classical training enabled him to tackle larger forms with confidence. Mayerl composed three tone poems – *A Balearic Episode*, *The Forgotten Forest* and *Sennen Cove*. *The Forgotten Forest*, around 13 minutes in duration, is certainly an assured composition, suggesting that Mayerl ought perhaps to have written more large-scale serious works.

Of his better-known solo piano pieces, Mayerl – perhaps prompted by the music of his older contemporary, Eric Coates (1886-1957) – published a number of descriptive suites for piano, of which three are featured in this collection. Amongst his stand-alone pieces, one finds many bearing the titles of flora – *Marigold*, of course, alongside *Autumn Crocus*, *Wistaria*

and *Evening Primrose*, also included here. Mayerl himself was a noted amateur horticulturist, and would often be found relaxing in his large garden in Beaconsfield – clearly a source of musical inspiration as well.

Contemporary events also inspired Mayerl. The *Coronation Scot* was the name of a record-holding express passenger train of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, inaugurated in 1937 to mark the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the success of which pushed rail travel to the forefront of the nation's news: Mayerl's response was *Railroad Rhythm*, published the following year, but the event (or impression) that inspired Mayerl's *Siberian Lament* in 1934 is uncertain. However, the appearance in 1927 of Mayerl's toccata-like piece *Robots* was surely suggested by the enormous impact Fritz Lang's German expressionist silent film *Metropolis* had made earlier that year, which conveyed the notion of robots with human characteristics on the cinema screen in no uncertain fashion. Mayerl's *Robots* may also have been influenced by Prokofiev's *Toccata Opus 11* (1912).

But it is in his 'characteristic' pieces, not all of which exhibit the syncopation often found in his more well-known work, that his immensely gifted individual compositional style can be appreciated at its best: amongst the truly masterly examples, one must cite especially *Willow Moss* from the *Aquarium Suite* of 1937, which stands out as an amalgam of Impressionism as seen through a kind of Rachmaninoff-Gershwin-esque-Debussyian

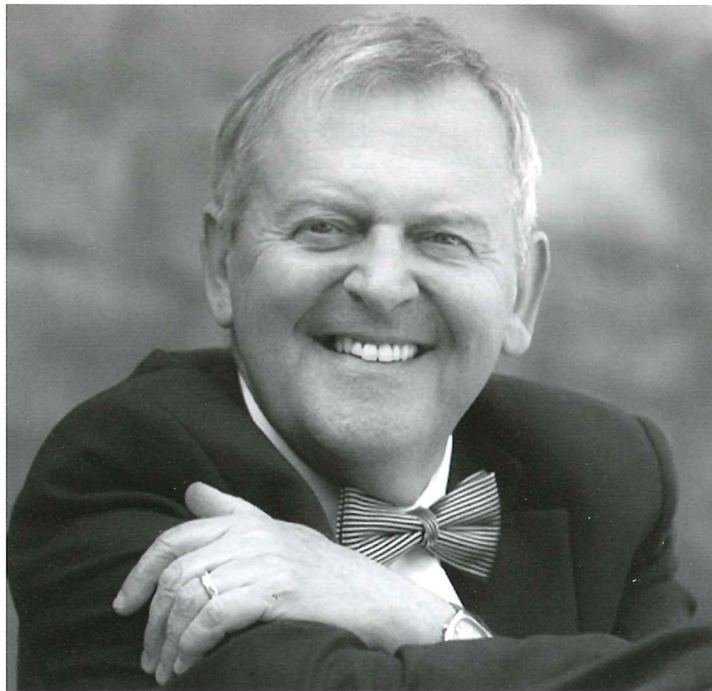
refraction, but a genuine example of British piano music of the time, and always, none the less, identifiable as a work by a truly original voice.

Although Mayer's live and broadcast appearances in Britain continued during World War II and after (with a successful tour of Australia and New Zealand in the later 1940s), by the early 1950s, with the rise of oop-shoop and other progenitors of early rock-and-roll, Mayer's sophisticated music was beginning to lose its appeal to younger generations; his radio appearances and his output as a composer also became less frequent. He was a lifelong heavy smoker and early in 1959 he suffered a stroke and a subsequent heart attack, and he died, aged 56, in March 1959.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2013

The distinguished Irish pianist and composer **Philip Martin** combines a busy solo performing career with that of a composer and teacher. It is these three elements of his musical personality that make him such a force in musical life today.

Born in Dublin, he studied with Mabel Swainson before winning an Associated Board scholarship to the Royal Academy of music in London.



He made his London recital debut in the Wigmore Hall and this led to frequent appearances on the South Bank and throughout Britain with all the BBC orchestras, the London Symphony, London Sinfonietta, the Royal Philharmonic, the Halle, the Bournemouth Symphony, the City of Birmingham and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

Philip Martin's BBC, RTE and foreign broadcasts are many and he has also been a frequent visitor to the BBC Promenade concerts, where he toured with the National Youth orchestra of Great Britain playing in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and Tivoli Gardens in Denmark before his appearance in the Royal Albert hall. He followed this two years later with a televised performance of Rachmaninoff's *Paganini Rhapsody* which was televised on 'Omnibus at the Proms'.

His concert tours have taken him to countries as varied as Japan, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Mexico, France, Germany and Canada, and he has toured extensively in the United States where, besides holding a UK-US Bi-centennial Arts Fellowship, he has held residencies in various American Universities, as well as being a guest of Tanglewood and Aspen Music Festivals.

Philip has recorded an eight-volume set of CDs for Hyperion records of the music of the colourful 19th century American composer, Louis Moreau Gottschalk. Other recordings for Hyperion have included the

critically acclaimed *Maiden's Prayer* which is heard repeatedly on Classic FM, RTE and BBC Radio 3. As well as Gottschalk he has recorded the solo piano music of the Austrian composer, Henri Herz. He has also recorded on the Nimbus, RCA Red Seal, Continuum, Marco Polo, BBC and Chandos labels as well as Somm recordings. His Somm recordings include a disc of two piano works by Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky and the solo piano music of Billy Mayerl.

As a composer, Philip Martin is prolific and he has fulfilled many major commissions including a Harp concerto (RTE) and several large choral works. His output includes a symphony (RTE) three piano concertos, over 300 songs and many instrumental and chamber works including seven piano trios. Many of these works have been commercially recorded and in the last year some eight separate CDs have been released featuring some of his chamber music.

He always proudly retains his relationship with Ireland where he returns each season.

He holds a BA degree in Art History and was recently awarded a Professorship by the City University of Birmingham for his outstanding contribution to the arts.