



SOMMCD 0125



DDD

Song of Paradise

piano music by REGINALD KING (1904-1991)

Mark Bebbington piano

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Song of Paradise | 4:03 | 13 | Spring Meadows | 4:52 |
| 2 | Melody at Dusk | 4:44 | 14 | Pierrette on the Balcony | 3:46 |
| Three Miniatures | | | | | |
| 3 | 1. Toccata | 0:48 | 15 | Beside the lake | 2:42 |
| 4 | 2. Valse Impromptu | 1:31 | 16 | Lilacs in the Rain | 5:09 |
| 5 | 3. Autumn Leaves | 1:32 | 17 | In the Shade of the Palms | 3:50 |
| 6 | June Night on Marlow Reach | 4:31 | 18 | Meditation | 4:31 |
| 7 | Money Spider | 2:37 | 19 | Summer Breezes | 5:39 |
| 8 | Humoreske | 1:57 | 20 | Dreamy Willows | 3:32 |
| 9 | Moonlight Reverie | 4:31 | 21 | Passing Clouds | 4:09 |
| Three Impressions | | | | | |
| 10 | 1. Snowflakes | 0:34 | 22 | Windflowers | 4:29 |
| 11 | 2. Reflections | 1:32 | 23 | A Prayer at Eventide | 3:02 |
| 12 | 3. Swing Song | 2:20 | Total Duration: | | 76:25 |

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Song of Paradise

piano music by REGINALD KING

Mark Bebbington
piano

including
Melody at Dusk
Money Spider
Moonlight Reverie
In the Shade of the Palms
& others

SH SYMPHONY
HALL
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REGINALD KING

(1904-1991)

As communication in the modern world has reached the stage whereby virtually all aspects of human knowledge and achievement are available at the metaphorical click of a button, it may come as something of a surprise to learn that 80 years ago, in Constant Lambert's book *Music Ho! – a study of music in decline* (published in 1934), the author complained of what he termed 'the appalling popularity of music', whereby, on strolling along a street on a summer's evening, one was often assailed from the open windows of the homes one passed with the latest popular dance tune, each paving stone seeming to represent a bar of the music as one continued on one's way.

Today, of course, the experience of listening to music can be exclusively private, with personal headphones cocooning the listener, and free from outside interference, but in recent decades the 'streaming' of separate types of music, to the exclusion of others, means that the opportunities of encountering different styles of music by accident, as often happened in broadcasting eighty or so years ago – and thereby setting one's imagination or interest off in new directions – is much reduced.

Also, of course, in the 1930s, it was the fledgling BBC that dominated national broadcasting in the United Kingdom, whereby a mixture of various programmes – speech, music, news, drama, politics, sport – would follow one another on the same station, providing a varied source of information. With the reorganisation of BBC Radio in 1967 in the wake of the impact of 'pirate' radio stations (the most famous being Radio Caroline, broadcast from a small ship outside British territorial waters – hence 'pirate' radio), the programming mixture which had evolved from the start of the BBC in the 1920s came to an end.

It may be argued that the BBC was merely giving the public what it wanted, but equally the public can hardly be expected to pass an opinion on music with which it is never given

the opportunity of coming into contact. In that regard, the reorganisation of national broadcasting had an unfortunate consequence: the demise of what, in generic terms, was called 'light' music – not pop music, not dance music, not jazz, and certainly not classical music – a type of music that was melodious, undemanding to listen to but certainly not meretricious, attractive in itself and composed with traditional musical instruments in mind. After 1967, such music, and the musicians that played it, virtually disappeared from the airwaves in Britain, with programmes such as *Friday Night is Music Night* being rare exceptions.

And whilst, as a consequence, generations of music lovers were denied frequent opportunities of hearing 'light' music on radio, or of seeing it on television, the best of this type of music has resolutely refused to die to the point where, in quite recent years, there has been a welcome and surprisingly successful revival of interest in 'British light music' of the period, the re-evaluation of this music revealing qualities which ensure something akin to musical immortality.

The main reason for this is that the performers and composers of such music were thoroughly trained, and had frequent opportunities, through broadcasting and live appearances, of refining their art. Perhaps also, the national mood in the 1930s and 40s – the fall-out from the world-wide Depression, the rise of fascism and the looming prospect of war in Europe, the Second World War itself and the consequential post-war austerity – led to an underlying need for music which lightened the mood. Whatever the causes, the music of the enormously successful broadcaster of the period, Reginald King, is a prime and enduring example.

He was born in Hampstead in 1904 to a relatively well-off middle-class family. He was educated privately but from the start his musical gifts were recognised and encouraged. King composed his first solo piece at the age of six and his first published piece appeared two years later (*Air with Variations* for piano). At 16, following a period at the Blackheath Conservatoire (where he won both the Chappell and Broadwood gold medals and the

Principal's medal as the most distinguished student of his year), King entered the Royal Academy of Music, studying piano under Harry Farjeon. The following year, he played his Piano Concerto in F minor with Sir Alexander Mackenzie conducting. Graduating ARAM and MRST, he joined the Academy staff.

A fine pianist, King had appeared at the Queen's Hall in 1912 as a boy, and in successive seasons, 1924-26, was a soloist at the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts in Bach's Concerto for Three Pianos in D minor BWV 1063, with Clifford Curzon, Norman Franklin and Robert Edwards the other soloists (Wood conducted, each performance preceding a different Beethoven symphony). In 1927, King was asked to form an orchestra to play at the exclusive fifth-floor restaurant in Swan & Edgar's department store in Piccadilly Circus, recently acquired by the Debenhams Group, in the heart of London's Theatreland. King first broadcast for the BBC in 1929, and appeared regularly on radio for the next 35 years; with his orchestra he made many records – one of the more notable being excerpts from operas by Rimsky-Korsakov: *Chanson Hindou* (from *Sadko*) and the *Hymn to the Sun* (from *Le Coq d'or* – *The Golden Cockerel*) for HMV.

King's lighter compositions further enhanced his career, yet one should not overlook his serious compositions: an early Piano Concerto, a Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra, a Piano Sonata and Violin Sonata, alongside pieces for solo piano and for violin and piano. He also wrote much orchestral music and songs in lighter vein, worthy to stand alongside those of his contemporaries Eric Coates and Albert Ketèlby.

In this selection of King's piano music, we have items ranging from his earlier years to those composed in his 80s. Nor should one imagine that his lighter pieces are invariably formal miniatures: *Song of Paradise*, *Summer Breezes* and *Melody at Dusk* have contrasting developmental passages placing them on a higher level of interest than the 'novelty' numbers of many of King's contemporaries. The result is a body of work which is that of a finished composer, invariably well laid out for the piano: *Lilacs in the Rain*, particularly, dating from 1942, is a fine piece of English Impressionism; *June Night on Marlow Reach*

(the second movement of an orchestral suite, *In the Chilterns*, published in 1937) transfers particularly well for the keyboard. But King's melodic quality is the most immediately striking of his genuine gifts: no allowances have to be made for the work of an English composer whose training, skill and experience as a pianist, conductor and arranger brought such pleasure to millions of listeners and which have ensured the restoration of his art to newer generations of music-lovers.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2013

A Personal Appreciation of Reginald King

Reginald King's great-grandfather was Donald King, who sang opposite Jenny Lind (the 'Swedish Nightingale') at Covent Garden. His grandfather also sang principal baritone roles in grand opera. Reginald received his early training from his father Conrad King, a teacher of music and singing, who helped and fostered his son's talents in every way possible. When Reginald was seven years old he played at the Queen's Hall and at eight received offers to play at several of London's leading concert Halls, but they were rejected by his father as not being conducive to the most natural development of his art. It was also at the age of eight that he wrote his *Air with Ten Variations*, which Messrs. Boosey (later Boosey & Hawkes) published immediately, and which Sir Alexander Mackenzie pronounced as 'evinced undoubted talent'.

On leaving the Academy, King's distinguished career began and in 1936 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music. By that time he had made his first broadcasts and formed a Celebrity Trio with Alfredo Campoli (violin) and Douglas Cameron ('cello'). The trio expanded into Reginald King's Salon Orchestra when he composed his famous signature tune *Song of Paradise*, published in 1934 and dedicated to Campoli.

Light music flowed from his pen and he became well-known as the composer of such contrasting and charming works as *In The Chilterns* and *Youthful Days* (two of his orchestral suites), *Summer Breezes*, *Beside the Lake*, *Lilacs in the Rain*, *Humoresque*, *Twilight on the Waters*, *Julia*, *In the Shade of the Palms*, *Polka-Piquant*, *Moonlight Reverie*, *Where Water Lilies Dream*, *Legend of the Pine Trees*, and above all, *Song of Paradise*. The *Radio Times* said: "Reginald King has that flair for a very rare thing – the composing of melodious music and the putting over to the best advantage of the melodious music composed by others. He has been broadcasting for many years and is among the few whose compositions are regularly broadcast by other orchestras".

His summer seasons at the Spa Pavilion Whitby, and the Floral Pavilion Bridlington, between 1951 and 1964, made him a popular figure in the East Riding of Yorkshire. King brought pleasure to millions in his hundreds of broadcasts, including many *Grand Hotel* programmes. Of the man himself, one saw a serious student devoting his energies to the furtherance of British music, both serious and light – whose hobby was his work, whether as a composer, solo pianist, or conductor of his own orchestra.

After retiring from the BBC in 1964 during his later years he returned to composition including a revision of his Piano Sonata, *Reverie* (dedicated to his wife Rebé), *Elegy* and *Meditation* for solo piano. Amongst King's treasured possessions were letters from Edward German, complimenting him on a performance of his own *Welsh Rhapsody*. In another, Elgar commented "You have something no-one else possesses!", the great man also congratulating Reginald on the orchestration of his overture *The Immortals*. A letter from Eric Coates commented "I was absolutely thrilled with your performance over the air the other day – the broadcast was perfect! I shall never have my music played more beautifully!"

King was a natural musician to whom music was an art. He appeared in public for the last time on October 5th 1990, in an outstanding piano recital marking his 86th birthday.

Allan W. Hughes © 2013

In August 1986 Allan Hughes, proprietor of a leading piano showroom in Sheffield, had a visit from a gentleman who wished to have his piano tuned. He sat at one of the pianos and on hearing him play, Allan, who had known and loved Reginald King's music since listening to the regular BBC broadcasts of the 1930s featuring RK and his Orchestra, realised that this was the man himself! He asked: "would you, by any chance, be Reginald King?". The answer was affirmative and a friendship was struck which lasted to the end of King's life. Hughes promoted RK's music as part of a series of concerts of which he was Artistic Director and to this day Hughes remains the flame that keeps alive this wonderful music.

Mark Bebbington is fast gaining a reputation as one of today's most strikingly individual British pianists. His discs of British music for SOMM have met with unanimous critical acclaim and notably, his cycles of Frank Bridge and John Ireland, have attracted seven consecutive sets of 5**** in BBC Music Magazine.

Over recent seasons Mark has toured extensively throughout Central and Northern Europe, the Far East and North Africa and has performed at major UK venues with the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic and London Mozart Players. As a recitalist, he makes regular appearances at major UK and International Festivals.

SOMM Recordings and Mark Bebbington wish to express their thanks and sincere gratitude to Allan Hughes, Stuart Kendell, Ann Jackson and Rebé King for their generosity and valuable support in making this recording possible. Allan Hughes has been particularly helpful in providing information about every aspect of Reginald King's life and career and for this we are truly thankful.