

THE VERY BEST OF

S A T I E



NAXOS

2 CDs

ERIK SATIE (1866–1925)

HIS LIFE

The French composer Erik Satie earned himself a contemporary reputation as an eccentric. Stravinsky later described him as the oddest person he had ever known and at the same time the most rare and constantly witty. His musical innovations proved immensely influential on his nearer contemporaries Debussy and Ravel, particularly through his tendency to extreme simplicity, as well as on the younger generation of composers and artists in the years after the war of 1914. A number of his compositions have become very familiar to many, largely through their use in other contexts.

HIS MUSIC

Stage Works

Best known among the various stage works of Satie is his collaboration with Jean Cocteau, *Parade*, described as a *ballet réaliste*, first performed in Paris in 1917. Other such works include *Mercure*, staged in Paris in 1924, a collaboration with Picasso and the choreographer Massin, described as '*Poses plastiques en trois tableaux*', presenting different aspects of the god, with music of a largely popular flavour. Satie's last stage work, *Relâche*, was a Dadaist collaboration with Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia. The ambiguous title can mean 'Closure', and the audiences attending the first night of this *ballet instantanéiste*, found closed doors and a darkened theatre. The work, which opened three days later, is interesting in the history of cinema, as it includes scenes filmed by René Clair. *Le piège de Méduse* (Medusa's Trap), a comedy with music, its words and music by Satie, was written in 1913 but not staged until 1921. It is in the avant-garde spirit of the time, designed to shock and amuse.

Piano Music

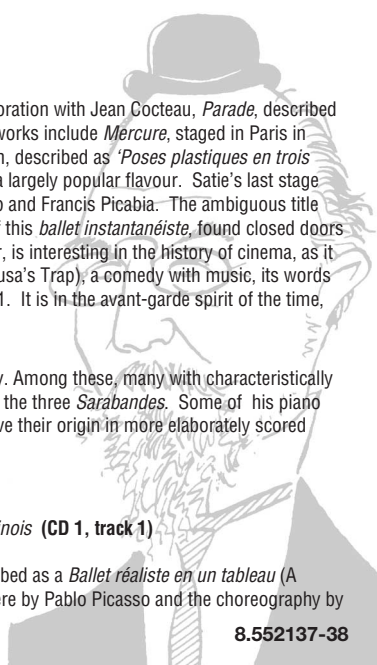
It is principally the piano pieces by Satie that have won popularity. Among these, many with characteristically eccentric titles, are the *Gymnopédies*, the three *Gnossiennes* and the three *Sarabandes*. Some of his piano compositions reflect the world of the music-hall, while others have their origin in more elaborately scored instrumental or stage works.

MUSIC NOTES

Parade: Choral – *Prélude du Rideau Rouge – Prestidigitateur Chinois* (CD 1, track 1)

Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Nancy • Jérôme Kaltenbach

Parade was the inspiration of the writer Jean Cocteau. It is described as a *Ballet réaliste en un tableau* (A Realist Ballet in One Scene). The curtain, costumes and décor were by Pablo Picasso and the choreography by



Leonid Massin and it was first performed at the Théâtre du Châtelet on 18th May 1917 by Dyagilev's *Ballets russes*. The scene is outside a fairground booth, where barkers and performers try to attract an audience. The work opens with a *Choral*, followed by a fugal exposition, *Prélude du Rideau Rouge* (Red Curtain Prelude) and the entrance of the first Manager. The *Prestidigitateur Chinois* (Chinese conjuror) does tricks with an egg and eats fire, with imminent danger to all around as sparks scatter and have to be stamped out, the whole achieved by the use of unusual percussive effects from *flaques sonores* (water noises) and lottery-wheels.

Le Piège de Méduse (CD 1, track 2)

Klára Körmendi, piano

Satie's piano arrangement of his surrealist theatre-piece *Le piège de Méduse* (Medusa's Trap) consists of seven short pieces, opening and closing with a quadrille for a stuffed monkey. The score contains the usual eccentric directions to the performer, a feature of Satie's work.

Avant-dernières pensées: I. Idylle – II. Aubade – III. Méditation (CD 1, track 3)

Klára Körmendi, piano

The *Avant-dernières pensées* (Next-to-last Thoughts) is dedicated to three of Satie's contemporaries: Claude Debussy, Paul Dukas, and Albert Roussel.

3 Petites pièces montées: I. De l'enfance de Pantagruel – II. Marche de Cognac – III. Jeux de Gargantua (CD 1, track 4)

Gábor Eckhardt, piano • Klára Körmendi, piano

The *Trois petites pièces montées* (Three Little Mounted Pieces), arranged for piano duet from the original instrumental version, were written about 1920 and evoke the childhood of Pantagruel, the monstrous creation of Rabelais. It is written in a popular style similar to that used by Satie's younger contemporaries in this period. The childhood of Pantagruel is followed by the Cockaigne March and a polka for Gargantua's games.

Trois morceaux en forme de poire (CD 1, track 5)

Gábor Eckhardt, piano • Klára Körmendi, piano

Satie's works familiar as piano duets include the well-known *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* (Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear). The title is a satirical allusion to Impressionist theories and to alleged advice from Debussy that he should pay more attention to form. It was a performance of this work by the composer and Ricardo Viñes that led Cocteau to conceive his ballet *Parade* (see **CD 1, track 1**).

3 Gnossiennes: No. 1. Lent; No. 3. Lent (CD 1, tracks 6–7)

Klára Körmendi, piano

The first three *Gnossiennes* were written in 1890. The title suggests the world of Minoan Knossos and the labyrinth, while the score, written without bar lines, includes bizarre performance instructions to the player – 'from the tip of the thought', 'on the tip of the tongue', 'without pride', and 'with healthy superiority'.

2 Pièces froides: No. 1. Trois Airs à faire fuir; No. 2. Danses de travers (CD 1, tracks 8–9)

Klára Körmendi, piano

Satie seems to have called these pieces “cold” because when they were finally published in 1912, they were no longer new in his repertoire, having been written in 1897. The three *Airs à faire fuir* (Airs to Make You Run Away) have a contrasting central section and the *Danses de travers* (Crossed Up Dances) is filled with imploring musical gestures that are not at all danceable.

3 Gymnopédies: No. 1. Lent et douloureux (CD 1, track 10)

Klára Körmendi, piano

The three seminal *Gymnopédies* of 1888 had their title suggested by the ritual games in ancient Greece. Their solemn simplicity prefigures remarkably well one path that French music was to take after Satie. These have also been orchestrated by Ravel and have been variously used in the theatre for ballets. (For orchestral versions of *Gymnopédies Nos. 2 and 3*, see **CD 2, tracks 8 and 11.**)

Relâche: Cinéma (CD 1, track 11)

Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Nancy • Jérôme Kaltenbach

Relâche (Theatre Closure) was a two-act ballet created in collaboration with Francis Picabia, who contributed the libretto and décor, while *Cinéma*, the cinematographic entr’acte, was the work of René Clair, among others. Satie made use of popular tunes in his score, an act of deliberate provocation, as, in its Dadaist way, was the whole ballet. The ballet was staged first by the Ballets Suédois and Jean Börlin on 29th November 1924 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. (See **CD 2, track 18** for music from Act II.)

Mercury: Marche-Ouverture; Scène 3: Polka des lettres; Nouvelle danse; Le Chaos; Final – Rapt de Proserpine (CD 2, tracks 1–5)

Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Nancy • Jérôme Kaltenbach

The ballet *Mercury* was a collaboration with Pablo Picasso and Leonid Massin, produced at La Cigale in Paris in June 1924. The choice of subject, or rather title, was aimed at Jean Cocteau. The ballet is intended to represent various aspects of Mercury, as god of fertility, messenger of the gods, a cunning thief, a magician and agent of the Underworld. The twelve scenes of the ballet are preceded by a *March-Ouverture*. The third scene centres on a festival of Bacchus. Mercury invents new dances and discovers letters. Among the guests is Proserpine, who is carried off by Pluto, God of the Underworld, with the help of Chaos, in music-hall style. In music of apparent naïveté, Satie offers a score with popular elements, avoiding obvious illustration, although the music, of course, fits the action.

Prélude de la porte héroïque du ciel (CD 2, track 6)

Klára Körmendi, piano

Prélude de la porte héroïque du ciel (Prelude of the Heroic Gate of Heaven) was written in 1894 and dedicated

by Satie to himself. The piece was intended as an introduction to a play by the editor Jules Bois. The opening of the *Prélude* is marked 'Calm and profoundly sweet' and it was to be heard before the curtain rose on the play.

Le Piccadilly (CD 2, track 7)

Klára Körmendi, piano

Satie's *Le Piccadilly*, described as a march, belongs to a group of works intended for the music-hall.

3 Gymnopédies: No. 2 Lent et triste (CD 2, track 8)

Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Nancy • Jérôme Kaltenbach

See **CD 1, track 10**

(Valses distinguées du précieux dégoûté: No. 1. Sa taille – No. 2. Son binocle – No. 3. Ses jambes (CD 2, track 9)

Klára Körmendi, piano

The three *Valses distinguées du précieux dégoûté* (Three Distinguished Waltzes of a Jaded Dandy), were written in 1914. The first of the waltzes, *Sa taille* (His Figure), is dedicated to Roland Manuel, a young musician whom Satie had met in 1911. The music, spare as ever, in texture, is accompanied by descriptions of the actions of the dandy. The second waltz is for Mademoiselle Linette Chalupt and has the title *Son binocle*, (His Pince-nez). The performer is told to play very slowly, and to bend gently. The third waltz is for the poet René Chalupt and has the title *Ses jambes* (His Legs).

Sports et divertissements (CD 2, track 10)

Klára Körmendi, piano

Sports et divertissements (Sports and Diversion), written in 1914, is made up of 21 short pieces that served as musical visions of illustrations by Charles Martin. The pictures and the music were published together and provide us with both the sound and image of play.

- I. Choral inappétissant (An Unappetising Choral)
- II. La Balançoire (The Swing)
- III. La Chasse (Hunting)
- IV. La Comédie italienne (The Italian Comedy)
- V. Le Réveil de la Mariée (Awakening the Bride)
- VI. Colin Maillard (Blind Man's Buff)
- VII. La Pêche (Fishing)
- VIII. Le Yachting
- IX. Le Bain de mer (Sea Bathing)
- X. Le Carnaval (Carnival)

- XI. Le Golf
- XII. La Pieuvre (The Octopus)
- XIII. Les Courses (The Races)
- XIV. Les Quatre Coins (The Four Corners – The Cat in the Corner)
- XV. Le Pique-nique (Picnic)
- XVI. Le Water-Chute (The Water Chute – The Water Slide)
- XVII. Le Tango perpétuel (The Perpetual Tango)
- XVIII. Le Traîneau (The Sledge)
- XIX. Le Flirt (Flirtation)
- XX. Le Feu d'Artifice (Fireworks)
- XXI. Le Tennis

3 Gymnopédies: No. 3. *Lent et grave* (CD 2, track 11)

Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Nancy • Jérôme Kaltenbach

See **CD 1, track 10**.

En habit de cheval (CD 2, track 12)

Gábor Eckhardt, piano • Klára Körmendi, piano

En habit de cheval was written in 1911 and its title refers, as Satie pointed out, to the dress of the horse, not that of the rider. This may be taken as a reference to the impediment of academic rules, here exemplified in two fugues and two chorales.

Valse-ballet (CD 2, track 13)

Klára Körmendi, piano

The *Valse-ballet* was written in 1887 and dedicated to Madame Clement Le Breton. The piece was published in a French music journal, and described there as part of Satie's Opus 62, with a nineteen-year-old's pardonable exaggeration. The work was described as elegantly done and in it we hear a waltz, but in a French rather than a Viennese style.

Je te veux (CD 2, track 14)

Klára Körmendi, piano

Je te veux, a waltz, was in origin a music-hall song written for and dedicated to the Montmartre café singer Paulette Darly.

3 Sarabandes (CD 2, track 15-17)

Klára Körmendi, piano

The three *Sarabandes* written in 1887 but not published until 1911, were championed by Ravel, and anticipate in their adventurous and novel harmonies the music of Debussy.

Relâche - Ballet instantanéiste en deux actes: Act II: Petite danse finale (chanson mimée): La queue de chien (CD 2, track 18)

Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Nancy • Jérôme Kaltenbach

Relâche (Theatre Closure) (see **CD 1, track 11** for details) closes with a lop-sided wheelbarrow dance for a Woman and a Dancer. The Woman alone performs the Crown dance, and places the crown on the head of a spectator. The finale is a mimed song, the *Dog's Tail*, suggesting the world of the café or the music-hall in a score that in so many ways foreshadows the minimalism of the later twentieth century.

The eccentric and idiosyncratic world of Satie can be explored further on these recordings:

Complete piano works

Volume 1	8.550696
Volume 2	8.550697
Volume 3	8.550698
Volume 4	8.550699
Orchestral selections	8.554279

THE VERY BEST OF SATIE

CD1

- | | | |
|-----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | Parade – Ballet réaliste en un tableau Choral—
Prélude du Rideau Rouge—Prestidigitateur Chinois
..... | 5:41 |
| 2 | Le Piège de Méduse | 4:04 |
| 3 | Avant-dernières pensées | 3:27 |
| 4 | 3 Petites pièces montées | 3:33 |
| 5 | Morceaux en forme de poire | 12:10 |
| 6 | 3 Gnossiennes I. Lent | 3:11 |
| 7 | 3 Gnossiennes III. Lent | 2:26 |
| 8 | 2 Pièces froides No. 1 Trois Airs à faire fuir ... | 6:34 |
| 9 | 2 Pièces froides No. 2 Danses de travers | 4:34 |
| 10 | 3 Gymnopédies I. Lent et douloureux | 4:03 |
| 11 | Relâche – Ballet instantanéiste en deux actes
Cinéma | 11:07 |
| | Total Timing | 61:19 |

CD2

- | | | |
|-----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | Les Aventures de Mercure – ballet
Marche-Ouverture | 1:13 |
| 2 | Les Aventures de Mercure Scene 3: Polka des
lettres | 0:38 |
| 3 | Les Aventures de Mercure Scene 3: Nouvelle
danse | 1:45 |
| 4 | Les Aventures de Mercure Scene 3: Le Chaos . | 0:37 |
| 5 | Les Aventures de Mercure Scene 3: Final – Rapt
de Proserpine | 1:08 |
| 6 | Prélude de la porte héroïque du ciel | 3:28 |
| 7 | Le Piccadilly | 1:43 |
| 8 | 3 Gymnopédies II. Lent et triste | 2:42 |
| 9 | Valses distinguées du précieux dégoûté | 3:50 |
| 10 | Sports et divertissements | 14:46 |
| 11 | 3 Gymnopédies III. Lent et grave | 2:14 |
| 12 | En habit de cheval | 6:17 |
| 13 | Valse-ballet | 4:43 |
| 14 | Je te veux | 4:23 |
| 15 | 3 Sarabandes I. | 4:25 |
| 16 | 3 Sarabandes II. | 4:24 |
| 17 | 3 Sarabandes III. | 3:47 |
| 18 | Relâche – Ballet instantanéiste en deux actes
Act II. Petit danse finale (chanson mimée):
La queue de chien | 0:37 |
| | Total Timing | 63:10 |



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THE VERY BEST OF SATIE

*"One may reproach my brevity,
but I don't care."*

(Satie on Satie)

Eccentric and quintessentially French, Erik Satie crossed from the 19th to the 20th century with a vision of the future that was filled with both wit and sarcasm. In this 2-CD set, we follow Satie through his world with his well-known *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes*, as well as in his collaborative work in *Parade*.

Compact Disc 1

- 1** *Parade* – Ballet réaliste en un tableau Choral – Prélude du Rideau Rouge – Prestidigitateur Chinois
2 *Le Piège de Méduse* **3** *Avant-dernières pensées* **4** *3 Petites pièces montées* **5** *Morceaux en forme de poire*
6-7 *3 Gnossiennes* I. Lent • III. Lent **8-9** *2 Pièces froides* No. 1 Trois Airs à faire fuir • No. 2 Danses de travers
10 *3 Gymnopédies* I. Lent et douloureux **11** *Relâche* – Ballet instantanéiste en deux actes Cinéma

Compact Disc 2

- 1-5** *Les Aventures de Mercure* – ballet Marche-Ouverture • Scene 3: Polka des lettres; Nouvelle danse; Le Chaos; Final – Rapt de Proserpine **6** *Prélude de la porte héroïque du ciel* **7** *Le Piccadilly*
8 *3 Gymnopédies* II. Lent et triste **9** *Valses distinguées du précieux dégoûté*
10 *Sports et divertissements* **11** *3 Gymnopédies* III. Lent et grave **12** *En habit de cheval*
13 *Valse-ballet* **14** *Je te veux* **15-17** *3 Sarabandes* **18** *Relâche* – Ballet instantanéiste en deux actes Act II. Petit danse finale (chanson mimée): La queue de chien



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