



EDWARD MACDOWELL

Piano Music Vol. 4

Second Modern Suite • Étude de Concert
Twelve Études • Two Fantasy Pieces

James Barbagallo, Piano



Edward MacDowell (1860-1908)

Piano Music Volume 4



When Edward MacDowell died on 23rd January 1908, James Huneker wrote: "At his cradle, poetry and music presided. He was a born tone-poet. He had also the painter's eye and the interior vision of the seer. A mystic and a realist. The practical side of his nature was shown by his easy grasp of the technics of pianoforte-playing. He had a large, muscular hand, with a formidable grip on the keyboard. Much has been said of the idealist MacDowell, but this young man, who had in his veins Scotch, Irish, and English blood, loved athletic sports; loved, like Hazlitt, a fast and furious boxing-match. The call of his soul won him for music

and poetry. Otherwise he could have been a sea-captain, a soldier, or an explorer in far-away countries. He had the physique; he had the big, manly spirit. We are grateful, selfishly grateful, considering his life's tragedy, that he became a composer."

Edward MacDowell was born on 18th December 1860 in New York City, in a Quaker home, of Scottish-Irish ancestry. He began piano lessons at the age of eight with Juan Buitrago, a Colombian violinist living with his family. He also took lessons from Pablo Desvernine and Teresa Carreño. In

April 1876 he moved with his mother to Paris where he began taking lessons from Marmontel and Savard and in 1877 he was formally admitted to the Paris Conservatoire. By 1878 he had moved to Germany to continue his studies with Siegmund Lebert, Louis Ehlert, Carl Heymann, Franz Böhme and, eventually, Joachim Raff, director of the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt am Main. MacDowell's first concert appearance at the conservatory on 9th June 1879 was on the occasion of a visit by Franz Liszt, who also heard him play at two concerts in May 1880. He dedicated his first piano concerto to Liszt.

In 1880, MacDowell began teaching privately. One of his first students, Marian Griswold Nevins, also an American, eventually became his wife. From 1881 to 1882 he taught piano at the Darmstadt Conservatory. In 1882 he visited Liszt in Weimar and played his *First Piano Concerto* (with Eugen d'Albert playing the orchestral accompaniment on the second piano) for the master. Liszt strongly urged him to devote himself to composition. The tremendous success of his Zurich concerts a month later made MacDowell realise for the first time that composition was his true calling. On Liszt's recommendation, Breitkopf & Härtel published MacDowell's *First* and *Second Modern Suites*. By 1884, Breitkopf & Härtel and three other German firms had published ten of his works, including his *First Piano Concerto*.

In 1884 he married Marian Nevins. The first years of their life together were spent in Frankfurt and Wiesbaden. At Wiesbaden, MacDowell completed eleven songs, eight solo piano works, his *Romanze* for cello and orchestra, and the *Second Piano Concerto*. Wiesbaden also became a

meeting-place for American composers, including George Templeton Strong, George Chadwick, Arthur Foote and Benjamin Johnson Lang. It was Lang who persuaded MacDowell to return to the United States in the autumn of 1888. MacDowell settled in Boston. Lang also recommended that Wilhelm Gericke invite MacDowell to perform his *Second Piano Concerto* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Many of his other orchestral works were heard in Boston Symphony Orchestra concerts, conducted by Nikisch, Listemann and Zerrahn. His successes continued with performances by the New York Philharmonic and with the newly formed Chicago Symphony Orchestra (under the direction of Theodore Thomas). The Boston years were very productive and financially rewarding for MacDowell. Among his students were Henry F. Gilbert and Ethelbert Nevin; he wrote some of his most popular compositions, the *Woodland Sketches, Op.51*, the *Sonata Tragica, Op.45*, the *Sonata Eroica, Op.50*, two orchestral suites and the songs, *Opp. 40* and *47*.

In May 1896 MacDowell accepted an appointment as Columbia University's first professor of music. Although he began his teaching assignments with enthusiasm, devoting much time to the difficult task of establishing a new department, the heavy burdens of an already over-loaded schedule took their toll. He continued to compose, conducted the Mendelssohn Glee Club, and served as president of the newly formed Society of American Musicians and Composers. He took a sabbatical year off to tour, performing his works in the United States, Canada and London, but upon his return in 1903, he found that Columbia University was moving

in a different direction than he had hoped. MacDowell had bitter clashes with the university's new president, Nicholas Murray Butler. Their disagreements over, among other things, a newly established division of fine arts, were making press headlines. The public wrangling was a source of much embarrassment to both the university administration and MacDowell and in 1904 he resigned from his post. During the following winter, MacDowell was run over and injured by a hansom cab in New York City. That injury, coupled with definite signs of mental illness, caused him to retire to his estate at Peterborough, New Hampshire. In his last three years, he conceived the idea of transforming his summer home into an artists' colony, a dream his widow, Marian MacDowell, saw to fruition. He died from paresis (general paralytica) on 23rd January 1908.

MacDowell completed his *Etude de Concert, Opus 36* in May 1889. It seems that Teresa Carreño asked him to write a “brilliant” composition for her concert programmes. This was at a time when she was playing MacDowell's music on all her concert tours throughout North and South America and practically every country in Europe. Although he was never too keen on writing music to order, he obliged his great friend. The resulting *Concert Etude in F sharp major* was very pianistic in character. Resplendent with superb octave passages and well arranged effects, this is the kind of music that dazzles by its brilliancy, at the same time containing a memorable and beautiful melody, which the composer uses in various transformations throughout the piece. The *Etude de Concert, Opus 36* became one of MacDowell's most often played pieces.

The *Second Modern Suite, Opus 14* was published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1883. Dedicated to Camille Saint-Saëns, the work's serious intent is suggested by the following lines from Byron's Manfred:

By a power to thee unknown
Thou canst never be alone;
Thou art wrapt as with a shroud
Thou art gather'd in a cloud
And forever shalt thou dwell
In the spirit of this spell.

MacDowell's *Second Modern Suite* opens with a majestic *Praeludium*. As if translating a massive trumpet voluntary, MacDowell reminds us here a little of Saint-Saëns' grand opening to his *Second Piano Concerto*. The *Fugato* that follows shows us the influences of his teacher, Joachim Raff. Raff, who was a proponent of the "new German school" and often could not divorce himself from his own historical calling, feeling he needed to fuse the great achievements of the past with the present. He did so by combining contrapuntal techniques and sonata movement composition. His own suites always had a fugue movement. It was no surprise then that MacDowell would emulate his teacher. The *Fugato* is, in essence, a tribute to his teacher, and a virtuoso piece of "modern" pianistic writing. The third movement, entitled *Rhapsodie*, is Brahmsian in flavour. More ballade than rhapsody, it reminds us of Brahms's *Opus 10*, and future Celtic works of MacDowell. The

Scherzino connects with the *Marsch*. The *Scherzino* is both playful and reserved, while the *Marsch* (marked in the score *misterioso*) has a peculiarly Schumannesque quality, reminding us of some of Robert Schumann's *Novelettes*. The final piece in the suite is the *Phantasie-Tanz*, a virtuosic romp through Schumann's gardens. Raff taught MacDowell well: pay attention to the masters – Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms – but find your own voice. Although greatly influenced by the mighty German composers of his time, MacDowell was re-casting their strong voices into his own peculiarly American sound. These works by the 22-year-old show a fertile musical imagination and an extraordinary grasp of pianistic writing. The *Second Modern Suite* became so popular that Breitkopf & Härtel entered into an agreement with G. Schirmer in New York for its exclusive distribution in the United States. It was reprinted in a new edition in 1896, re-issued again in 1906 and re-copyrighted in 1911.

The *Serenata, Opus 16* was first published by E.W. Fritsch in Leipzig in 1883. MacDowell dedicated this delightful miniature to his friend and colleague, the Swiss composer, pianist and teacher Hans Huber (1852-1921). The four-page composition has three sections: the first and last are chordal (marked *Andante con moto*), the middle section provides a contrast with its *un poco animato* storm-like interlude. *Opus 17* was first published by Julius Hainauer in Breslau in 1884 as *Zwei fantasiestücke* (Two Fantasy Pieces). Like the *Serenata, Opus 16*, both of these pieces are dedicated to Hans Huber. The second composition, *Hexentanz*, became one of MacDowell's best-selling works, eventually published separately from its

accompanying work. In a sense, these two pieces were the drum-roll of future works and styles to come. In *Erzählung* (A Tale) we see a young MacDowell story-telling. We are still in Germany for this tale, but we have hints of log cabins and New England winters. The *Hexentanz* (Witches' Dance) is a demonic *scherzo* that takes us to a triumphant revel of the spirits of darkness, encompassing the whole range of the keyboard, as the witches themselves sweep through the vast spaces of the night. Marian MacDowell points out that "the German title of the piece is *Hexentanz*, and a *Hexe* may be a witch or it may be a water-nymph or tree-nymph – 'witch' in German meaning something quite other than our idea of an ugly old woman riding on a broomstick." She adds that "The piece should be played very lightly and swiftly without suggestion of the evil characteristics associated with witches as the word implies to us."

MacDowell composed his *Twelve Études, Opus 39* in 1890, dedicating the set to his first piano teacher, Juan Buitrago. MacDowell prefaced each étude with a title, creating a Romantic mood, scene or image. The opening *Hunting Song* reminds us of Mendelssohn's song without words, but we are not in a German forest, we are in America. According to Marian MacDowell, this étude is to help "the student with accentuation and graceful playing". In *Alla Tarantella* MacDowell takes us to Italy. Raff, who also composed several similar tarantellas, is clearly looming in the background. Marian MacDowell reminds us that this work needs to be played with "speed and lightness of touch." In the *Romance*, she stresses "legato and singing touch", while the *Arabesque* is to be played "with a firm, strong touch to strengthen the wrist".

In the Forest is another of MacDowell's nature pictures, this time written to help the pianist with "delicate rhythmical playing". *Dance of the Gnomes* is another impish MacDowell miniature. Marian MacDowell suggests that "between each figure the hand must be raised high above the keys and the work is to be played very *marcato*". The *Idyll* is a meditation piece to be played with "delicacy, a singing tone, and with grace". Another piece of forest nymph imagery is the *Shadow Dance*, "a work of lightness and speed – and before you know it vanishes into thin air!" The *Intermezzo* is a work of Schumannesque sensibility, but not simplicity. The purpose of this work, according to Marian MacDowell, was to "exercise the independence of the third and fourth fingers". The beautiful *Melody* is an étude for the second, third and fourth fingers, while the *Scherzino* is a study in double notes. The last étude is simply entitled *Hungarian*. According to Marian MacDowell, it is "a virtuoso piece, to be played with dash and speed". Edward MacDowell does not actually use a Hungarian folk-melody for this concluding étude, but he imbues the work with Hungarian rhythm and colour while simultaneously creating a picture of brilliant dances and the romance of Gypsy life.

Victor and Marina A. Ledin

James Barbagallo



James Barbagallo was born in Pittsburgh, California on 3rd November 1952. His maternal grandfather was a piano builder who recommended to his daughter that, when she had children of her own, she start them at the keyboard, but only after they had mastered their fractions. He was nine years old when he started formal musical instruction and began to play the piano. The most influential teachers in his life were James Beall, Julian White and Sascha Gorodnitzki and he received a Bachelor's and Master's Degree from The Juilliard School in 1974 and 1976. At Juilliard he was Sascha Gorodnitzki's assistant. It was his Bronze Medal at the Seventh International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow in 1982 that catapulted James Barbagallo into international prominence. He toured all over the world, performing in many of the best concert halls and formed the Amadeus Trio with Timothy Baker and Rafael Figueroa. In 1993 he began recording the complete piano works of Edward MacDowell for Marco Polo, but never completed the series. On 26th February 1996 he died unexpectedly of a heart attack in California, where he had come for more recording sessions. He was 43 years old. In addition to the four volumes of MacDowell's solo piano music, he recorded MacDowell's complete songs with tenor Steven Tharp, a disc of the Bach transcriptions of Russian pianist Alexander Ziloti, and Arthur Foote's piano quintet and quartet with the Da Vinci Quartet of Colorado.

Edward MacDowell on Naxos American Classics

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James Barbagallo, Piano

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Six Idylls • Sonata No. 3

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James Barbagallo, Piano

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A M E R I C A N C L A S S I C S

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Time:
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EDWARD MACDOWELL

(1860-1908)

Piano Music Vol. 4

James Barbagallo, Piano

Étude de Concert, Op. 36 (3:29)

1 Allegro con fuoco

Second Modern Suite, Op. 14 (22:27)

2 Præludeium: Andante maestoso 3:13

3 Fugato: Allegro molto 2:12

4 Rhapsodie: Andante calmato 6:18

5 Scherzino: Presto 2:22

6 Marsch: Allegretto 3:35

7 Phantasie-Tanz: Molto allegro, con fuoco 4:46

Serenata, Op. 16 (3:59)

8 Andante con moto

Two Fantasy Pieces, Op. 17 (7:31)

9 Erzählung: Andantino 4:44

10 Hexentanz: Presto 2:48

Twelve Études, Op. 39 (17:59)

11 Hunting Song: Allegretto 1:14

12 Alla Tarantella: Prestissimo 0:50

13 Romance: Andantino 2:13

14 Arabesque: Allegro scherzando 1:44

15 In the Forest: Allegretto con moto 1:24

16 Dance of the Gnomes: Prestissimo con fuoco 1:23

17 Idyll: Allegretto 2:03

18 Shadow Dance: Allegrissimo 1:23

19 Intermezzo: Allegretto 1:09

20 Melody: Andantino 1:30

21 Scherzino: Allegro 1:28

22 Hungarian: Presto con fuoco 1:29

Recorded at Fisher Hall, Santa Rosa, California, from 1st to 4th August 1994, by courtesy of
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AMERICAN CLASSICS

A contemporary of Debussy at the Paris Conservatoire and later a pupil of Raff in Frankfurt, Edward MacDowell was the first American composer to achieve international recognition, writing music in the tradition of Schumann and often reflecting the interests of Grieg.

MacDowell was truly a tone poet, whose music showed a great gift for melody. No other American composer has painted a wild rose, an iceberg, a water lily or a deserted farmhouse so eloquently. MacDowell's legacy of beautiful and enduring piano pieces is interpreted by the late award-winning pianist James Barbagallo, whose love of this music is heard in every note.

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