

Affetto

Dawn and Twilight

The First and Last
Violin Sonatas of

Cyril Scott

(World Premiere Recordings)



Andrew Kirkman, violin
Clipper Erickson, piano

AF1504

Stemming almost from opposite ends of Scott's career, the two works on this disc, though expressions of very different aesthetics, are still audibly products of the same musical mind. Given the rising appreciation in recent years of the rare quality of that mind, evident from the growing number of recordings, they are striking also for their common neglect. While the later, 1956 revised version of Sonata No. 1 has been commercially recorded (on Naxos 8.572290), the gorgeous, rhapsodic original version – at some 40", more than a third as long again – seems, following its first performances, to have languished in silence until the present artists began performing it in 2011. A still darker horse, Sonata No. 4 (composed in the same year as the revision of the First) remained unpublished and unperformed until the composer's son Desmond suggested it as a possible CD counterpoint to No. 1. His generous provision of a photocopy of the composer's autograph facilitated a series of performances and the present recording.

The stakes of the composer when writing each of these sonatas could scarcely have been more contrasting. The outpouring of an *enfant terrible* fêted by such luminaries as Debussy, the earlier work oozes self-confidence and a bravura disregard for the kind of formal control that informed its later revision. By contrast the Fourth Sonata, the private musing of a man in his late seventies largely ignored by the musical establishment, makes a

brittle and aphoristic statement that bespeaks mature mastery and razor-sharp precision of musical thought.

The First Sonata certainly made a radical impression on its first hearers. In his 1919 biography of Scott (still the most detailed published source on the Sonata) Arthur Eaglefield-Hull noted that it was 'the most difficult and modern of all works for this combination of instruments (barring, perhaps, Ornstein's).' To get some perspective on this one has to remember that – as Peter Atkinson pointed out in a recent MA dissertation for the University of Birmingham (UK) – the piece appeared in an England still almost entirely unfamiliar with Schoenberg. Though clearly, as has been noted, showing the influence of Debussy and Strauss, Scott had already exceeded both in his harmonic and rhythmic experimentation, and he certainly paid for this via the uncomprehending and often angry responses of contemporary reviewers.

Eaglefield-Hull notes that the Sonata marks a turning point in Scott's style, one he ascribes to an influence of occultism and Eastern mysticism that led to a move away from tonality and regular rhythm. Debussy, for whom Scott was 'one of the rarest artists of the present generation,' was struck by the composer's rhythmic experiments and 'the incessantly changing aspects of the inner melody

[that] are an intoxication for the ear.' Unsettling at first, Scott's constant metrical shifts steadily absorb the performer (and, we hope, the listener), revealing moods that shift with astonishing fluidity between driving vigour and deep contemplation. While maintaining forward motion, the shifting patterns also seem paradoxically to set off melodic/harmonic units that, though lacking conventional linkage, feel tonally coherent in themselves. As Atkinson notes, 'it was not so much...the harmonic vocabulary of the violin sonata that made it unintelligible and largely atonal but the way in which the chords are ordered and connected, and, similarly, how the melodic phrases above these chords are structured.' I would suggest that the ultimate source of the coherence that nonetheless binds the piece audibly together is Scott's fluid metrical practice. Extra glue is applied by more local rhythmic cells, such as (in the first movement) the violin's frequent gestures in triplet sixteenth notes and the similar but usually more extended figures in the piano.

While, in Eaglefield-Hull's words, the opening movement 'is so closely welded that theme passes into theme, and development into development,' it is nonetheless underpinned by a basic sonata structure, albeit distinctively stretched and manipulated. The return in the first movement to the opening muscular figure certainly heralds a recapitulation, but the energy built up by this point

is so inexorable that the breaks can only be jammed on at the end of the movement by mighty chords in both instruments, followed by the final, emphatic repetitions in the piano of the opening chromatic figure.

The gorgeous second movement forms the profoundly contemplative core of the piece, a lyrical outpouring marked, in Eaglefield-Hull's words, by a 'still melancholy.' Its dreamy mood is set by muted violin, falling chromatic passages (most characteristically in dotted rhythms) and lilting, rising arpeggios in the piano. These patterns, informing the outer sections of the movement, encase a still centre formed by descending bell-like patterns in the piano that for Desmond Scott evoke the 'rippling water so characteristic of Scott in solo piano pieces like 'Bells', 'Rainbow Trout' or 'Water Wagtail'.

Whereas whole-tone passages and other idioms here and there evoke Debussy, the third movement leaves an abiding sense that Strauss's Till Eulenspiegel has been let loose on the Sonata. Here Scott's shifting time signatures lend a dazzlingly mercurial quality. A moment of stasis in the middle of the movement is marked by a piano ostinato repeated for several (unequal) bars, interspersed with parallel descending chords moving by whole tone, harking back to the bell-like descending patterns from the previous movement. This is soon swept away

though by a repeat of the opening material that drives to an even more flighty conclusion.

The long-limbed grandeur of the finale's opening theme sets a scene of expansiveness, aided by metrical flexibility, which plays out over a canvas exceeding that of any of the other movements. As in most of Scott's large-scale works this culminates in a structural arrival marked by thematic reminiscences from the three prior movements. Far from leading to some kind of apotheosis, however, this gathering point serves to unleash pent-up violence in a vast piano cadenza. Not to be outdone, the violin joins the fray for a driving coda punctuated by repeated returns to the piano's chromatic figure from the very opening of the Sonata, which finally wins the day in an emphatic F-major conclusion.

Following this grandiose ending the aphoristic opening of Sonata No. 4 could hardly stand in greater contrast. If the overriding qualities of the First Sonata are its 'closely welded' continuity and bold statements, those of the Fourth are quiet contemplation and anecdote. Similarly the heroic piano engagement of the earlier work is pared down here into subtle dialogue and, quite often, support to a violin that paints a studied, chromatic canvas of predominantly short phrases. An enduring hallmark of Scott's mature style, here metrical changeability serves fragmentation rather

than continuity, revealing as it does its striking versatility as an expressive tool.

The thematic content of the first movement is characterized overall by rising chromaticism, but deployed in such a way as to strike a quizzical rather than aspirational stance. While there are individual gestures of remarkable beauty, the whole is held together by a tight discipline that fights shy of indulgence. No sooner has a gesture revealed itself than it tails off into seeming indecision rather than developing into a larger argument. As in the case of Sonata No. 1, there is a residual sonata structure, with a 'recapitulation' in the first movement allowing a short foray into greater expansiveness before tailing off, once again, into the more characteristic aphorism.

With its consistent muted piano dynamics and tremolando in the violin part the second movement strikes the pose of a secretive *Elfentanz*. The prevailing 10/8 time signature lends the outer sections a jazzy lilt that gives way in the middle to a 3/4 in which the piano takes over with spiky chromatic interjections before joining the violin in chromatic parallel motion.

The *Energico* finale begins with an assertive piano statement answered by a bravura flourish in the violin. Any expectations of something more expansive here, though, are quickly disappointed:

moods (and time signatures) shift rapidly with, as in the first movement, elegantly sculpted gestures coming and going until – the one move to be expected – a return to the Sonata's opening motif begins an extended coda into the series of jubilant ninth chords that bring this elegant work to a close.

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Desmond Scott adds:

These two Sonatas were composed fifty years apart. It is impossible to compare the two because there is a world of stylistic and other differences between them. In the decade before he died in 1970 and when he had been almost completely passed over as a composer, my father sometimes complained to me that people still thought of him solely as the author of 'Lotus Land', written in 1905. If that is all they know they are in for a shock! One wonders if it was the writing of this 1956 Sonata that made him think of the earlier work, for in 1956 he also revised and shortened the 1908 one. On this CD you will be hearing the original and the first recording of it. With the Fourth Sonata it is not only the first recording of it, but (except for a few concert performances by the present artists) also the first performance ever. For anyone interested in the music of Cyril Scott and in the chamber music of the Twentieth Century, this CD is one to be treasured,

particularly when the performances are given by two such experienced and talented musicians as Clipper Erickson and Andrew Kirkman.

We are indeed fortunate now to be able to compare the First Sonata in its full length original form of 1908 as given here, with the revised, shortened version of 1956, that Clare Howick and Sophia Rahman recorded for Naxos in 2010. It is up to you to decide which you prefer and I will only add that I know Scott himself would be delighted with both versions and amazed at the extraordinary revival of interest in his music that has taken place since the beginning of this century.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our thanks to the University of Birmingham (UK) for financial assistance towards editing costs, and especially to Desmond Scott for his unfailingly generous support of this project. We can only hope that the results are worthy of his father's wonderfully inspired music.

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Engineers: John C. Baker, Sam Ward, Loren Stata



Andrew Kirkman, violin, is an English music scholar, conductor and violinist, and founder of the Renaissance vocal group The Binchois Consort. As a student at the University of Durham, King's College, London, and Princeton University in the United States,

he developed an interest in sacred music of the Renaissance, on which he has published widely. He has been on the staffs of the University of Manchester, the University of Wales (Bangor), and Oxford University in Britain, and of Rutgers University in New Jersey, U.S., and is currently Peyton and Barber Professor of Music at the University of Birmingham (UK). His main area of research has been sacred music of the fifteenth century, especially that of the Franco-Flemish school, including such composers as Ockgehem, Dufay, Walter Frye, Antoine Busnois, and John Bedyngham. With the Binchois Consort he has performed throughout Europe and the United States, and has made nine award-winning discs on the Hyperion label. As a violinist he maintains a busy career as a freelancer and recitalist, performing works from Mozart to the present day, often in partnership with Clipper Erickson.



Clipper Erickson made his debut as a soloist with the Young Musicians Foundation Orchestra at age nineteen in Los Angeles. After studies at The Juilliard School, Yale University, and Indiana University with the renowned British pianist John Ogdon, his interpretations began earning prizes at international competitions including the Busoni, William Kapell, and the American Pianists Association. He has performed as a soloist with orchestras and in recitals in some of the most famous concert venues in the world, including the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Most recently he completed his DMA degree, at Temple University, researching the piano music of African descent composer Nathaniel Dett.

In addition to his powerful renditions of the great classical repertoire, Clipper's interpretations of American music from past and present have launched a series of CD releases that have received considerable critical acclaim and have often been featured on radio stations throughout the United States. Critics describe his playing as "colorful," "powerful" and "exciting" to describe his performances. Typical is the *Washington Post*: "Like a true heroic pianist, Erickson approached Liszt with power, precision and Romantic abandon ... A take-no-prisoners rendition." In November 2015, Navona Records released Clipper's recording of the complete piano music of Nathaniel Dett, the first time these works have been available together.

Through his work as a roster member of Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour and earlier in the Xerox Pianist Program of Affiliate Artists, he has performed for all types of community groups, always engaging audiences with illuminating commentary on his program selections. An important part of his mission is encouraging the love of music through commitment to education, performances in schools, master classes, and the inspiration of future generations of musicians. He currently teaches at Westminster Conservatory in Princeton, and Temple University in Philadelphia.



Violin Sonata No. 1, original version (1910)

1. First movement: *Allegro moderato* (11:52)
2. Second movement: *Andante* (10:56)
3. Third movement: *Allegro molto scherzando* (4:15)
4. Fourth movement: *Allegro maestoso* (12:47)

Violin Sonata No. 4 (1956)

5. First movement: *Andante tranquillo* (7:46)
6. Second movement: *Allegretto moderato e amabile* (2:42)
7. Third movement: *Energico* (5:47)

Producer: Andrew Kirkman

Recording Engineers: John C. Baker; Sam Ward; Loren Stata

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