



Edward
GREGSON

**Complete Music
for Solo Piano**

An Album for my Friends

Piano Sonata

Six Little Pieces

Murray McLachlan

Edward Gregson

Rose McLachlan



Edward
GREGSON

(b. 1945)

Complete Music for Solo Piano

An Album for my Friends (2011)	17:08	Four Pictures for piano duet (1982)	5:45
1 Paul's Prelude	1:48	17 Quite fast, but majestic	1:03
2 Adam's Allemande	1:10	18 Quite slow and thoughtful	1:12
3 Clare's Courante	1:57	19 Lively	1:11
4 Stefan's Sarabande	2:00	20 Quite slow and sad	2:14
5 Gaynor's Gavotte	1:27		
6 Brian's Bourrée	0:38	Six Little Pieces (1982, rev. 1993)	9:17
7 Bethan's Bourrée	0:55	21 Quite slow and precisely (♩ = 88)	1:26
8 Brian's Bourrée (repeat)	0:43	22 Fast and playful (♩ = 88)	0:46
9 Maggie's Minuet	2:42	23 Flowing (♩ = 100)	1:24
10 Gavin's Gigue	1:35	24 Not too fast (♩ = 100)	1:23
11 Phil's Postlude	2:01	25 Gently and with expression (♩ = 112)	2:04
		26 With energy (♩ = 112)	2:08
Three Études (2020)	7:09	27 Friday a.m. (1981)	6:23
12 Fast and rhythmic	2:00		
13 Not too slow, gently	3:08	Piano Sonata in one movement (1983)	19:00
14 Fast, with energy	1:59	28 Tempi 1–4: Very slow and thoughtful/strident/dance-like, with excitement/slow and sombre	4:45
15 Lullaby (1965)	2:58	29 Tempi 1–3, plus Tempi 5–6: Slow and stately/lively and energetically	7:54
16 A Song for Sue (1966)	3:57	30 Tempi 1–5	6:18

Edward Gregson (b. 1945)

Complete Music for Solo Piano

Edward Gregson's piano music makes a striking impression. Here is a composer who totally understands the instrument, its possibilities and its nature. Throughout the impressive range of moods and forms employed, Gregson's consummate professionalism shines through. He knows the importance of restraint and control; nothing is overly stated, repeated or extended. The concentration and craftsmanship permeate every bar that the composer has penned.

We should not allow the dazzling glamour of Gregson's orchestral *oeuvre* to overshadow his equally impressive works for soloists and chamber ensembles. Study with Alan Bush at the Royal Academy of Music was of seminal influence in forging Gregson's highly impressive compositional technique. It is illuminating to turn to his piano *oeuvre* as an example of a composer who has so obviously worked hard at the contrapuntal aspect of composition, nurturing his own style via rigorous technical discipline in his student years.

An Album for my Friends (2011)

This charmingly persuasive collection of ten intermediate-level miniatures dedicated to friends of the composer consists of eight dances with titles derived from the Bach *English* and *French Suites*, framed by a *Prelude* and *Postlude*. Gregson has written 'The idea for this set of pieces initially came from writing one as a 60th birthday present ... the challenge was to write a set of pieces which would be technically suitable for both young and mature pianists, whilst still responding to the compositional demands of creating interesting material.'

The motifs are striking and developed with contrapuntal as well as harmonic skill. As with all of the music on this album there is an impressive pianistic awareness, a sense that the notes were written with the player's perspective as a firm priority. Certainly, Gregson's geometric pianistic elegance leads to much tactile pleasure for the performer. There are wistful reminiscences of other styles and works scattered

throughout the album, but Gregson states that these are illusory rather than literal. Nevertheless, figurations, harmonies and textures at times evoke memories of older composers: Bach (of course), Haydn, Ravel, Stravinsky, even Finzi. Ultimately, however, the craftsmanship, charm and accessible nature of the music makes the work unquestionably Gregsonian in flavour – it is hard to imagine another living composer who would have written a similar album with such conviction, combining sophistication with immediacy. Lucky indeed are his friends to be associated with a work as persuasive as this.

Three Études (2020)

The first of these *Études* was written as a tribute to Mark Ray, former Head of Keyboard Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music, who died in tragic circumstances in 2006. It is a motoric, linear bravura piece that makes effective use of syncopated rhythms and percussive articulation. A passing reference to Ravel's G major *Concerto* is remembered through the central left-hand triadic quotation, and the *Étude* finishes with harrowing angst in an extended pause after an explosive climax with each hand at the extremes of the keyboard.

Études two and three complete the set and were composed especially for this recording. The second is dedicated to Murray McLachlan, and has a quiet wistfulness, floating with reflection calmly over gentle quaver figurations. It is a study in textural control. The third *Étude* is dedicated to Jonathan Scott and shows the composer's admiration for Bartók. The latter's *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm*, as well as the finale of Gregson's own *Piano Concerto*, seem close bedfellows in an extremely energised essay that encourages virtuosic bravura and élan.

Lullaby (1965)

A charming miniature from the composer's student years, written for the birth of his niece, Jane Ann. Structured in simple ternary form, it seems to take the nursery rhyme

See *Saw Margery Daw* as a starting point for both its melodic material as well as its characterisation. The gentle lilting rhythm is immediately beguiling, as well as persuasively atmospheric. There are some delightful cross-over hand surprises and colouristic changes on repetitions of the opening melody, though 'cleverness' never disturbs the piece's innocent, attractive naivety.

A Song for Sue (1966)

Gregson's first attempt at concerto writing was a *Concertante for Piano and Brass Band*, also dating from his student days. It was an engagement present for his wife-to-be, Sue. The composer has taken the main theme from the slow second movement and woven it into a simple but expressive piece for solo piano, played here by the composer himself.

Four Pictures (1982)

Written and dedicated to the composer's sons, Mark and Justin, they remain untitled so that the performers (children) can imagine their own 'pictures' and so form interpretations independently. But the four miniatures have strong personalities: The first sounds regal and majestic and is in the idiom of a march. The second is a wistful slow waltz that may bring Erik Satie's *Je te veux* to mind. In contrast, the world of Bartók seems to appear in the third. The final piece in this most persuasive set (they can and indeed should be performed by 'children' of all ages) is the most substantial in terms of length, but extends from the simplest of means: a recurring ostinato on the note 'D', over which changing harmonies provide a kaleidoscopic range of colours. Murray McLachlan is joined by his daughter Rose in the recording of these charming duets.

Six Little Pieces (1982, rev. 1993)

This set fuses control with emotional expression. In a sense the pieces are 'laboratory studies' as they clearly strengthened Gregson's technical facility as a composer, moving his style forward in a new direction. The title immediately evokes a connection with Schoenberg and his own *Six Little Piano Pieces* but also show the

influence of Brahms in its concentrated use of motivic cells and the use of symmetrical chords. It also embraces the use of elements of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique.

The pieces are divided into pairs (slow/fast music), and share some of the same musical material, whilst the writing is often quasi orchestral – indeed the first movement implies a chamber ensemble in its texture, while the second is an angularly humorous two-part invention. The third is a Stravinskian neo-Classical chorale, contrasting well with the fourth, an exciting étude. The neo-Brahmsian twelve-tone waltz that is the fifth movement is cleverly constructed in two symmetrical halves (the second half an inversion of the first), while the sixth is nourished on jazzy chords, changing rhythmic metres, and rapid semiquaver atonal flourishes.

Friday a.m. (1981)

This deliciously expansive miniature, with the inscription on the title page of: 'with apologies to Gustav', obviously derives from memories of the celebrated *Adagio* in Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*. The nostalgia and quasi-symphonic beauty of the opening Mahlerian theme gradually metamorphosises into a lighter style reminiscent of a jazz improvisation. It is as though we move from the philharmonic hall in Central Europe to the night club in New York, or as the composer has written: 'a Manhattan jazz club around 2am when everything is subdued and transient'. It is consummate piano writing, full of nostalgia and unfulfilled dreams that is, possibly paradoxically, highly orchestral and evocative of film music.

Piano Sonata in one movement (1983)

The *Sonata* is 'dedicated to Michael Tippett, with admiration'. Indeed, he makes no secret of the fact that the work was inspired in particular by Tippett's *Piano Sonata No. 2*, and a comparison of both works makes for fascinating illumination.

The mosaic structure with different tempos in 'block form' that is so successfully used by Tippett in his *Sonata No. 2 in one movement* proves to be equally convincing as a compositional technique in the Gregson *Sonata*. Both works too are dramatic, full of energy and extreme contrasts, and

so very much in the tradition of piano sonatas stretching back through the Romantic era to the celebrated works of Beethoven. At the same time, there is an endearing directness of expression, a fine craftsmanship and lucidity of compositional technique that arguably makes the Gregson even more direct and accessible than the Tippett *Sonata* for both listeners and performers.

Lasting around 18 minutes, Gregson's single movement structure utilises six different musical units, labelled 'tempos'. Each 'tempo' has its own character and emphasis: *Tempo 1* is lyrical (dreamy arpeggios), *Tempo 2* angry (octaves, brass-like triplets), *Tempo 3* energised, but with a dancing quality that yields to wistful elegance (and reminiscences of the 'fairy harp' textures prevalent in the mystical scenes of Tippett's opera *The Midsummer*

Marriage). *Tempo 4* has an ominous, dark feel to it, while *Tempo 5* is even more austere, ceremonial and distant. Finally, *Tempo 6* is a thrilling, if dark and rather dangerous, *scherza*.

However, despite the mosaic-like structure of the work, a clear tonal and thematic outline of a traditional sonata form can be heard, with an exposition, a development section (which introduces new material: *Tempos 5* and *6*), and a recapitulation, which takes the music of *Tempo 1* and develops it into an extended lyrical utterance. The *Sonata* concludes as it began, with the three statements of the opening arpeggios, this time gradually disappearing into the ether.

Murray McLachlan

Edward Gregson



Photo: Simon McComb

Edward Gregson is a composer whose music has been performed, broadcast, and recorded worldwide (four volumes of his orchestral music and concertos have been recorded on the Chandos label). He studied composition and piano with Alan Bush at the Royal Academy of Music, where he won five prizes for composition. His commissions have included works for the English Chamber, Bournemouth Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, and Hallé Orchestras, with performances by many other orchestras and ensembles around the world. He has written orchestral, chamber, instrumental, and choral music. Among his major orchestral works are a dozen concertos for various instruments, mostly written for eminent soloists. His contribution to the wind and brass repertoire has also been of particular significance and in 2016 he was composer-in-association with the famous Black Dyke Band. In the following year he was composer-in-residence at the Presteigne Festival, where his *String Quartet No. 2* received its premiere. His academic career has included appointments at Goldsmiths College, University of London (1976–1996), where he was head of composition and was awarded a personal chair, and then as principal of the Royal Northern College of Music (1996–2008). He is a writer-director of PRS for Music, and until recently a trustee of the PRS for Music Foundation. He has also been the recipient of a dozen honorary doctorates and fellowships from various English universities and conservatoires. www.edwardgregson.com www.wisemusicclassical.com

Murray McLachlan

Photo: Helen Tabor Photography



Since making his professional debut in 1986 at the age of 21 under the baton of Sir Alexander Gibson, Murray McLachlan has consistently received outstanding critical acclaim. Educated at Chetham's School of Music and the University of Cambridge, his mentors included Ronald Stevenson, David Hartigan, Ryszard Bakst, Peter Katin and Norma Fisher. McLachlan's recording career began in 1988 and immediately attracted international attention. Recordings of contemporary music have won numerous accolades, including full star ratings, as well as rosette and key recording status in *The Penguin Guide* to classical recordings, and Disc of the Month and Record of the Month in *MusicWeb International* and *The Herald*. In 2019 he recorded Ruth Gipps' *Piano Concerto* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Charles Peebles for SOMM Recordings. McLachlan's repertoire includes over 40 concertos and 25 recital programmes. He has given first performances of works by many composers and has appeared as soloist with most of the leading UK orchestras. His recognition has been far-reaching, bringing invitations to perform on all five continents. McLachlan teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music and Chetham's School of Music, where he has been head of keyboard since 1997. As well as performing and teaching, McLachlan is well known internationally for his numerous articles on piano technique and repertoire. His books *The Foundations of Technique*, *Piano Technique in Practice* and *The Psychology of Piano Technique* (published by Faber) have been reprinted several times and received wide international acclaim. www.murraymclachlan.co.uk

Murray McLachlan says of Edward Gregson's piano music that 'he knows the importance of restraint and control; nothing is overly stated, repeated or extended. Concentration and craftsmanship permeate every bar that the composer has penned.' Renowned for his orchestral *oeuvre*, Gregson shows us a more intimate but no less impressive side in his piano music. From the *Lullaby* composed while a student, to the Tippett-inspired *Piano Sonata*, we are charmed, moved and thrilled in equal measure by this programme of his complete music for solo piano.

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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Murray McLachlan **1–15** **17–30**

Edward Gregson **16**, **Rose McLachlan** **17–20**

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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Producer: Edward Gregson • Engineer: Ben Sharpe

Piano technician: Paul Pickering • Booklet notes: Murray McLachlan

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