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CLASSICS

ragtime & BLUE



Elena Kats-Chernin

Sarah Nicolls *piano* ♦ Nicola Sweeney *violin*

RAGTIME & BLUE

1. Alexander Rag	[2.59]	13. Butterflying	[4.25]
2. Green Leaf Prelude	[2.22]	14. Sunday Rag	[4.53]
3. Russian Rag	[4.04]	15. Nostalgic Piece	[2.56]
4. Get Well Rag	[3.42]	16. Bucharian Melody	[2.45]
5. Blue Rose	[3.16]	17. Revolving Doors	[1.41]
6. Eliza's Aria	[3.20]	18. Suburban Rag	[3.56]
7. Backstage Rag	[3.52]	19. Sapphire Rag	[3.45]
8. Birthday Rag	[1.47]	20. Tranquil Interlude	[2.04]
9. Brothers	[1.19]	21. Mute Princess	[3.21]
10. Peggy's Minute Rag	[1.14]	22. Slicked Back Tango	[1.57]
11. Reflections	[2.22]	23. Removalist Rag	[3.08]
12. Cocktail Rag	[2.14]	24. Melancholic Piece	[2.50]
		Total Time	[70.15]

ELENA KATS-CHERNIN

Sarah Nicolls – piano
Nicola Sweeney – violin

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RAGTIME & BLUE

Elena Kats-Chernin is a composer who defies categorisation and is probably best summed up as a force of nature. Her prodigious imagination has produced a vast body of work, unparalleled in range, drawing from all the musical traditions of the past and present. A virtuosic pianist and improviser, her compositions flow from her like a fountain. This CD is drawn from the small works she often writes for her own enjoyment - a cornucopia of rags, blues and heart-melting melodies. These small vessels of fine feelings offer an intimate view into the composer's heart.

1. Alexander Rag

In 1998 Elena met her partner, the lighting designer Alexander Koppelmann, who co-incidentally shared the same name as her middle son. This work inspired by her love for both of them, is optimistic and bright, despite being in C minor.

2. Green Leaf Prelude

The opening number from her ballet Wild Swans, based on the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, this work which acted as the overture, grew out of the initial image in the ballet where Eliza imagines a fantasy world by peering through a tiny hole she has made in a green leaf.

3. Russian Rag

The very first rag that she wrote in 1996 after a long period of writing in a modernist aesthetic, this piece has become the most performed of Elena's works and has been arranged for many different instruments. This work set her on a new path of writing small miniatures as an antidote to the pressure of serious large scale composition, and is the oldest piece on this CD.

4. Get Well Rag

Elena's son became seriously ill in 1998, and this crisis inspired her to write a lullaby. Wistful, this piece became a lifeline between them as he attempted to fully recover.

5. Blue Rose

Blue Rose is based on two folk melodies which have been freely developed. It uses uneven beats and bars which create a rocking feeling that is somewhat reminiscent of Balkan music. The title refers to the way the piece starts, unfolding and blooming as it slowly becomes stronger, like the blue light of dawn.

6. Eliza's Aria

The signature tune from her 2003 ballet *Wild Swans*, it was originally for soprano and orchestra and introduces the main character Eliza as a young girl. It is very light and charming and reflects the young princess's purity and innocence.

7. Backstage Rag

One of Elena's rags which never enjoyed the popularity of Russian Rag and others, it was called Backstage Rag because it was upstaged by them. Written in 1999, this is the first recording of the work.

8. Birthday Rag

Birthday Rag was written as a birthday present for Chris Latham who has premiered many of these pieces with Elena. The piece starts in a slow jazzy manner and then suddenly wakes up and goes almost twice as fast, much in the way that Chris says he functions in the mornings.

9. Brothers

Meryl Tankard, the choreographer for *Wild Swans* asked Elena for music that sounded both Hungarian and Irish, to be danced by the eleven brothers of the story while wearing slippers and acting up. The work is both energetic and light-hearted in the nature of young boys.

10. Peggy's Minute Rag

Peggy's Minute Rag was originally written in 1996 while a recipient of the Peggy Glanville-Hicks residential grant. Elena wrote this piece as a tribute to this great female Australian trailblazer, and to thank her for leaving her house to future generations of composers to live in. The original piano version was four minutes long and Elena made this one minute version for the Barossa Festival in 2004.

11. Reflections

Drawn from her music theatre work *Mr Barbecue*, this song reflects the main character's realisation, as he shaves in the mirror, that his face is becoming just like his father's and how much of his Dad he sees in his own eyes. It is about the sadness of ageing and missing one's parents.

12. Cocktail Rag

Written in 2004 for the wine making family of Peter and Margaret Lehmann, who are famous for their hospitality towards composers, this rag was intended to accompany a very civilised imaginary cocktail hour or two in their kitchen.

13. Butterflyling

Originally a song for children about flying in one's dreams, this lyrical piece tries never to touch the ground. The work has also appeared in the Rugby 2003 World Cup opening ceremony in a version for full orchestra, and was arranged for brass quintet for Lady Downer's 80th Birthday.

14. Sunday Rag

Elena wrote this work on a very hot Sunday in the summer of 1997. As often happens with her, she started and finished it on a single free day - her version of a busman's holiday.

15. Nostalgic Piece

Written as an incidental piece of music for a play by Joanna Murray-Smith in 1997, this piece has had many titles and lives - this being the latest version.

16. Bucharian Melody

This piece was a tribute to Elena's mother who worked as an eye doctor in Buchar in Uzbekistan, where, because it was so dry and sandy, many of the local inhabitants suffered from eye problems. Young ophthalmologists were sent to work there and Elena remembered her mother's descriptions and stories about the place and its people, and wrote this exotic sounding piece based on those memories.

17. Revolving Doors

The idea came in New York while Elena was visiting her publisher Boosey and Hawkes in 2000, and was struck by the enormous number of revolving doors, some of which seemed rather threatening. In the end the piece was inspired by this endlessly revolving image, and thus is built on a repeating figure.

18. Suburban Rag

Originally written as incidental music for a theatre production in Berlin of Chekhov's play *Uncle Vanya*, the rag draws on Elena's memories of Russian urban and suburban life.

19. Sapphire Rag

Written for her portrait concerts at the 2004 Barossa Festival, where Elena performed almost thirty of her recently written works, the piano writing is simpler than usual, in order to accommodate her reservations about performing in public.

20. Tranquil Interlude

Probably the calmest of all the works on this CD and originally for viola solo, Elena made this version for piano and violin for this recording.

21. Mute Princess

Another work from the ballet *Wild Swans*, here the Princess Eliza is bound by a spell not to talk, while knitting jumpers for each of her eleven brothers out of stinging nettles. This silence causes everyone to shun her, on top of the terrible physical pain of making thread out of the nettles.

22. Slicked Back Tango

Written as the title track to a film about the star theatre and festival director Barrie Kosky (the original version was even called the Kosky Tango). This piece has a Rudolf Valentino feel, hence the title which refers to his slicked back hairstyle.

23. Removalist Rag

A piece that Elena wrote while moving house, writing the first half in one and finishing it in another. It is a wry look at the absurdities of moving one's possessions and the feeling of heaviness that all those cardboard boxes create.

24. Melancholic Piece

This is a piece that seems to not be able to decide if it is in 4/4 or in a waltz rhythm. It evokes the harmonic language of the music of 1920s Russia and creates a palpable sense of nostalgia for that lost era.

Christopher Latham © 2005

BIOGRAPHIES



ELENA KATS-CHERNIN

Elena Kats-Chernin was born in 1957 in the Uzbekistan capital of Tashkent and studied composition in Moscow, piano and composition in New South Wales, and composition in West Germany with Helmut Lachenmann. While in Europe she became active in theatre and ballet, composing for state theatres in Berlin, Vienna, Hamburg and Bochum. Her music attracted the attention of the Ensemble Modern and in 1993 they premiered her extraordinary work **Clocks**. This piece has since been performed on several continents. Since her return to Australia in 1994, Elena Kats-Chernin has become one of the country's leading composers having written three operas, two piano concertos and many other works. Her brilliantly scored, energetic and often propulsive music has been choreographed by dance makers around the world including her score for the ballet *Wild Swans* choreographed by Meryl Tankard for the Australian Ballet in 2003 which won two highly acclaimed awards for best original score in 2004. Elena is published by Boosey & Hawkes and can be contacted via their offices in New York, London and Berlin.

SARAH NICOLLS - PIANO

'... one of the younger generation's most exciting pianists....Sarah Nicolls brings a rare and radiant commitment to her focus on the contemporary repertoire' The Guardian

'a wonderful inspiration for and champion of new music' The Times

Since winning the British Contemporary Piano Competition 2000, Sarah Nicolls has become an established pianist at the forefront of the new music scene and one of the leading performers of her generation. She gave her debut recital at the South Bank Centre, London in 2001, as part of the Park Lane Group Young Artists Series and has performed as a soloist there every year since, often invited by the London Sinfonietta to be a featured artist. In one concert, Sarah developed the multimedia event Cinesthesia, for which she commissioned pieces written for various combinations of film, piano and electronics.

She has also appeared at the Wigmore Hall several times and abroad - in Rome's newest concert venue the Parco Della Musica with the London Sinfonietta and Warp Records and in Austria, Portugal, Spain, Holland and Belgium. In one of her most important concerts to date, Sarah gave the UK premiere of Luciano Berio's Piano Sonata in 2003 and she has given recitals at the Bath, Cheltenham, Aldeburgh and Edinburgh Festivals, and the



Ravello and Reggello festivals in Italy. Sarah has made several broadcasts on Radio 3 including a concerto with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. 2005 sees the release of two very different recordings; this collection by Elena Kats-Chernin and the piano music of Niccolò Castiglioni, the latter recorded for the first time.

Sarah was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne and read music at King's College, London whilst studying with Piers Lane at the Royal Academy of Music. She went on to study with Paul Roberts and Andrew Ball at the Guildhall School of Music.

NICOLA SWEENEY - VIOLIN

Nicola Sweeney, born in Dublin, moved to London to study with David Takeno at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. During her studies she won all seven violin competitions, including the concerto prize for her performance of the Brahms Violin Concerto at the Chelmsford festival. She graduated from the performance course with a first class honours degree.

Nicola has appeared as a soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, the RTE Concert Orchestra, the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the Orchestra of St Cecilia, as well as the European Union Chamber Orchestra and St George Strings (Belgrade). She has performed as soloist in South America, North Africa, throughout Europe and has also broadcast for BBC, German and RTE radio.

Nicola has recently led the Irish Chamber Orchestra on a major European tour and currently holds the assistant leader position. She has been guest leader with the RTE Concert Orchestra and guest principal 2nd violin with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. She is also guest leader and director of the European Union Chamber Orchestra and a recording, directing Mozart Symphony no 29, has recently been released.



Nicola also gives frequent string quartet recitals and has performed in the Purcell Room, Blackheath Concert Halls, Bishopsgate Hall, as well as in the City of London, Cheltenham and Windsor festivals.



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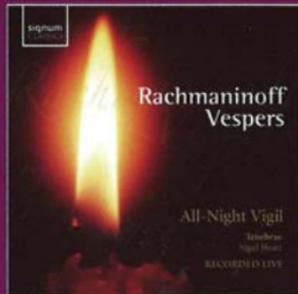
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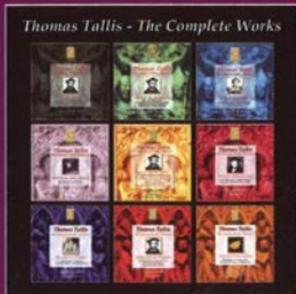
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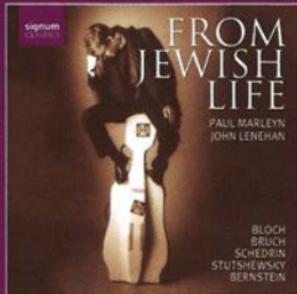
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