

Ronald STEVENSON

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME FIVE
TRANSCRIPTIONS OF PURCELL, DELIUS AND VAN DIEREN

Christopher Guild

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

RONALD STEVENSON Piano Music, Volume Five: Transcriptions

HENRY PURCELL

- | | | |
|---|-----------------|------|
| 1 | Toccatà (1955) | 6:45 |
| 2 | Hornpipe (1995) | 2:51 |

Three Grounds by Henry Purcell (1995) 7:58

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|------|
| 3 | Ground in C minor | 2:38 |
| 4 | Ground in E flat minor | 2:51 |
| 5 | Ground in D minor | 2:29 |

FREDERICK DELIUS

The Young Pianist's Delius (1962/c. 2005)* 13:30

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 6 | No. 1 Dance | 1:00 |
| 7 | No. 2 Tune from 'Brigg Fair' | 1:01 |
| 8 | No. 3 La Calinda | 1:52 |
| 9 | No. 4 Serenade | 1:00 |
| 10 | No. 5 The Cuckoo | 2:08 |
| 11 | No. 6 Late Swallows | 1:06 |
| 12 | No. 7 Intermezzo | 1:13 |
| 13 | No. 8 Tune from String Quartet | 0:43 |
| 14 | No. 9 Tune from Violin Sonata No. 2 | 1:04 |
| 15 | No. 10 Themes from 'Song of the High Hills' | 2:23 |

RONALD STEVENSON

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|----|--|------|
| 16 | <i>Little Jazz Variations on Purcell's 'New Scotch Tune'</i> (1964, rev. 1975) | 6:03 |
|----|--|------|

BERNARD VAN DIEREN**String Quartet No. 5** (c. 1925, rev. 1931; transcr. c. 1948–1987)* **34:26**17 I *Con moto ben sostenuto* 8:1918 II *Molto tranquillo* 5:1419 III *Impetuosamente* 2:1020 IV *Con spirito* 5:4821 V *Adagio cantando* 6:2122 VI *Finale: Allegro con grazia* 6:3423 **Weep You No More, Sad Fountains** (publ. 1925; transcr. 1951) **4:20**24 **Spring Song of the Birds** (1925, transcr. 1987) **1:28****HENRY PURCELL**25 **The Queen's Dolour – A Farewell** (1959) **3:25****Christopher Guild, piano****TT 80:57**

*FIRST RECORDINGS

RONALD STEVENSON: PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME FIVE

by Christopher Guild

Like the previous instalment in this ongoing series of recordings exploring the solo-piano works of Ronald Stevenson (1928–2015),¹ this album focuses on the art of piano transcription. It includes a survey of Stevenson's complete transcriptions of Henry Purcell (1659–95), and most of his transcriptions of Frederick Delius (1862–1934), which Stevenson made with the younger pianist in mind. It is rare that one encounters the music of Bernard van Dieren (1887–1936), and all three of Stevenson's transcriptions of this composer – whose rediscovery has only recently got underway after a long period of neglect – are presented here for the first time.

Van Dieren serves as a linchpin for the programme. His music has drawn comparison with Delius' Romanticism and with contrapuntal masters of the Baroque era, such as Purcell. Another interesting point of contact is that Delius, though considered English, was in fact born in Germany to a German family; and van Dieren, likewise held to be an English composer, was Dutch, born in Rotterdam, and settled in London in 1909 (only a few miles north of Westminster Abbey, where Purcell was once organist). His musical influence, limited though it was, was more marked in the British Isles than it was in continental Europe, because of his close ties to Peter Warlock, Cecil Gray, Constant Lambert and like musicians.

Stevenson and Purcell

The piece which opens this programme, as befits the original function of a toccata,² is Purcell's Toccata in A major; Stevenson's version 1 is dated 1955.

¹ The album in question being Toccata Classics TOCC 0555.

² Toccatas were often improvised by keyboard players. When a musician arrived at a performance venue, it was common for him to sit at the instrument and try it out: *toccare* means 'to touch'. Such pieces gradually evolved to become multi-faceted works in a variety of playing styles, usually serving as vehicles for performers to display technical and musical accomplishment.

It is a multi-sectioned work on a grand scale, which in transcription owes much of its sound-world to Stevenson's *magister in absentia*, Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924). Wherever a bigger sound and more grandeur is suggested by the original, Stevenson expands the sonority by doubling lines in different *tessitura* (pitch registers) – a liberty he justifies in the score of the *Three Grounds* (of which more below). Busoni employed similar means to achieve organ-like sonorities when transcribing Bach's organ chorale-preludes, a good example being 'Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist', BWV 667. Stevenson writes that

No organist would be criticised, but rather praised, for exercising judicious initiative in performing with a tasteful variety of registration (8 foot, 4 foot, etc); so this small freedom of choice should surely be granted to pianoforte performance in transcription.³

Following an arresting opening, a section of free polyphony leads to a central Fugato section. That in turn segues in to more improvisatory, *recitativo*-like material before more jubilant music takes over. The final section is, as earlier, more *extempore* in character, and the work ends expansively, *con gravitas*.

'Freely transcribed' in 1995, the Purcell/Stevenson Hornpipe [2] is a combination of two separate pieces into a rounded binary form. The first is the Hornpipe from Purcell's Suite No. 7 for harpsichord, itself taken from his theatre music for John Crowne's comedy *The Married Beau, or The Curious Impertinent*, of 1693,⁴ and it constitutes the outer parts of Stevenson's Hornpipe. The more relaxed middle section, in D major, is the last movement of Purcell's Suite No. 6 for harpsichord. Melodically, this piece suggested 'the melodic type of a London street song' to Stevenson, who likens it both to 'Who'll buy my sweet primroses?' and 'Who'll buy my sweet lavender?'.⁵

³ *Three Grounds* by Henry Purcell, Ronald Stevenson Society, Edinburgh, 1995, p. 1.

⁴ Ronald Stevenson, *Purcell: Hornpipe*, Ronald Stevenson Society, Edinburgh, 1995, p. 4.

⁵ Stevenson writes at the foot of the score: 'Purcell's song *Bess of Bedlam* provides evidence that he was aware of, and influenced by, popular balladry, for its music was in part inspired by the ballad *Tom of Bedlam*'.

The *Three Grounds* by Henry Purcell were originally transcribed for solo violin between 1955 and 1958;⁶ there are also versions for solo guitar.⁷ Stevenson returned to these pieces and adapted them for piano in 1995, transposing the music into different keys and adding extra contrapuntal parts. By way of a preface, he explains that he

planned a tonality-scheme of unity and variety. Number 2 was originally in E minor; number 3 originally in D minor. My revised tonality scheme is:

C minor – E flat minor – C minor.

This revised tonal scheme forms an arc of (nearly) related keys: the tonic note of E flat minor is in the tonic triad of C minor; and transposing No. 3 from D minor to C minor creates a more satisfying tonal arc, whereby the triptych ‘resolves’ to the key in which it began. Another reason for Stevenson to have made these alterations is that transposing No. 2 down a semitone from E minor makes it more pianistic: the piano keys required to play in E flat minor lie more ergonomically under the hands than they do in E minor.⁸

Stevenson believed that transcription should be, among other things, about the transcriber making his own mark on the music as an act of homage – and he does so in the *Three Grounds*. In the first and third pieces, which are predominantly in two-part polyphony, he adds a third part which often takes the role of a countermelody to the upper voice. Stevenson’s ‘voice’, therefore, becomes the middle voice in the overall texture.⁹

To the Ground in C minor [3] Stevenson has added the performance direction ‘Andante quasi Fado.’ *Fado* is a genre of music from Portugal originating in Lisbon in the

⁶ Alistair Chisholm, ‘The Chamber Music’, in Colin Scott-Sutherland (ed.), *Ronald Stevenson: The Man and his Music*, Toccata Press, London, 2005, p. 168.

⁷ Marjorie Stevenson, widow of the composer, recalled, in a letter to me dated 2 November 2020, that

R[onald] gave a copy to Menuhin. Some years later in 1992 came the premiere performance of Ronald’s Violin Concerto conducted by Menuhin. Ronald attended the rehearsals [...]. He [Menuhin] had the score of the Purcell transcriptions in his briefcase. He told Ronald that he carried them around and loved to play them in his hotel room when on his travels.

⁸ Ronald Stevenson, *Three Grounds*, loc. cit. p. 7.

⁹ This approach puts one in mind of the Thalbergian transcriptions which make up Stevenson’s *L’Art nouveau du chant appliqué au piano*: much of what was originally the vocal line in the original songs finds its way into the solo-piano versions in the tenor register, which, by its nature, lands in the middle of a symphonic piano texture. The tenor voice, as is now well documented in many sources, was the one to which he had a close musical and sentimental attachment.

second quarter of the nineteenth century and which grew increasingly popular in the twentieth. Assuming various forms, *fado* is generally melancholic, usually performed by a singer with guitar accompaniment.

The source of the Ground in E minor [4] is the St Cecilia Ode *Here the deities approve*, which Purcell arranged for harpsichord in *Musick's Handmaid*, Part 2 (1689).¹⁰ The transcription is Chopinesque, its melody somehow reminiscent of the nineteenth-century *bel canto* singing style emulated by Chopin in much of his piano music.

The Ground in D minor (transposed to C minor) (1958) [5] is most suggestive, in its textures, of the organ. Stevenson further illustrates his enhancements of the original by explaining that 'Doubling of registration has been added in [No.] 3, following an interpretation of harpsichord or organ registration.'¹¹ Such an example of doubling can be heard first at 0:26, when the melody, mostly harmonised in thirds, is doubled an octave below, in the tenor of the piano, which is echoed in the treble immediately afterwards.

Stevenson and Delius

The Young Pianist's Delius is a collection of ten short pieces¹² written for the intermediate student pianist. Each is based on a theme which is either well-known, or which Stevenson seems to have particularly appreciated. Comparison might be drawn with his similar anthology, *The Young Pianist's Grainger*,¹³ in which he combines his easy-to-intermediate-level transcriptions of Grainger with Grainger's own. A number of these Delius transcriptions are remarkable for how they pare down the lush orchestral textures of the original and yet retain something of its grandeur in their new intimacy.

The set begins with a sparse but beautifully poised version of the 'Dance' from *Dance Rhapsody* No. 1 [6]. Marked to be played 'Comodo (with easy dance movement)', it is an

¹⁰ Stevenson, *Three Grounds*, *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹² When the Toccata Press symposium *Ronald Stevenson: The Man and his Music* went to press in 2005, the worklist compiled by Martin Anderson listed this collection as *Eight Children's Pieces*, dating them, on Stevenson's authority, to 1962. Before its publication as *The Young Pianist's Delius* in 2006 (by Bardic Edition, Aylesbury), Stevenson added the eighth and ninth pieces, 'Tune from String Quartet' and 'Tune from Violin Sonata No. 2'.

¹³ Schott, London, 1967.

interesting blend of tonal and modal music (vacillating between F major and F Lydian). As Rosa Newmarch wrote in a programme note for a performance of this work (believed to have been in 1912), ‘the melodies used strike one as being thoroughly English in character, while their treatment is that of a musician versed in all schools and imitative of none.’¹⁴

‘Tune from “Brigg Fair” [7] is from the orchestral rhapsody of the same name. In April 1905 Percy Grainger visited Lincolnshire, where the market town of Brigg is situated, and recorded a well-known folksinger of the area, Joseph Taylor, singing 28 different folksongs.¹⁵ One of these was ‘Brigg Fair’, essentially a happy song about love. The fair in question is still held on 5 August every year, as it has been since 1205, though now for historical interest rather than as a market for trading horses. Delius heard Grainger’s recording of Taylor and was moved, in 1907, to compose *Brigg Fair*. The tune Stevenson transcribes here is exactly the song Joseph Taylor sang for Grainger.

“‘La Calinda’ – Negro Dance’ (from the opera *Koanga*) [8] is one of the longer pieces here. *Koanga* was Delius’ third opera, and at the time he considered it to be his best. Written to a libretto by Delius himself and Charles F. Keary, it was inspired by George Washington Cable’s 1880 novel *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life*. Throughout the work, Delius used ‘traditional black tunes’¹⁶ and music from his own *Florida Suite*. Some of the latter became part of ‘La Calinda’ which, as Robert Anderson notes, is ‘a very Delian distillation from an originally obscene and violent dance.’¹⁷

‘Serenade’ [9] has become a highlight from Delius’ incidental music to James Elroy Flecker’s verse-drama, *Hassan*.¹⁸ It was the last music Delius completed in his own hand before his final illness took hold.

‘The Cuckoo’ (from *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*, written 1912) [10] is, like ‘La Calinda’, one of the longer pieces of the set. It is perhaps also one of the more

¹⁴ Located at <http://landofflostcontent.blogspot.com/2012/04/frederick-delius-dance-rhapsody.html>, accessed 14 December 2020.

¹⁵ These recordings are now digitised and held in the British Library. Copies are commercially available.

¹⁶ R. Anderson, *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000009703?rsk=xaPKq8&result=1> (accessed 14 December 2020).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ ‘Hassan: the story of Hassan of Bagdad, and how he came to make the golden journey to Samarkand: a play in five acts’, to give it its full title.

technically challenging: the ‘cuckoo’ section about a third of the way through (0:34) requires some canny exchanging of the principal melodic line between the hands while clearly articulating the bird’s call.

‘Late Swallows’ [11] is an arrangement of the opening of the third movement of Delius’ only string quartet. The following ‘Intermezzo’ [12] is also an excerpt from *Brigg Fair*. ‘Tune from String Quartet’ [13] is taken from the second movement of the String Quartet, and has the breezy, whimsical air of a waltz.

Delius’ Second Violin Sonata is written in one continuous movement. Stevenson’s ‘Tune from Violin Sonata No. 2’ [14] is a transcription of the music first heard in the piano, then passed to the violin, which comes after the energetic opening section has subsided.

Finally, ‘Themes from “Song of the High Hills”’ [15] is a medley from Delius’ tone poem of 1911, in which he wrote he had ‘tried to express the joy and exhilaration one feels in the mountains, and also the loneliness and melancholy of the high solitudes, and the grandeur of the wide, far distances.’¹⁹ It is interesting to compare the feeling of elevation, space and distance in this piece to the closing few minutes of Stevenson’s transcription of Grainger’s *Hill Song* No. 1.²⁰

Stevenson wrote a long foreword to the score of *The Young Pianist’s Delius*. It is in two parts, the first a brief biographical sketch of Delius and the second a discussion of an important ingredient of Delius’ sound – the ‘added sixth chord’. Stevenson suggests this chord could symbolise Delius’ life as divided between ‘the cold north’ (Yorkshire and Norway), as represented by a root-position minor chord:



¹⁹ David Hall, notes for Delius, *A Song of the High Hills*; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Luton Choir, conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham, RCA Victor LVT-1045, no date (accessed via http://www.philipnauman.com/diss/by_comp-b.php?piece_id=36#fn_id=149 on 7 March 2021).

²⁰ Recorded on Ronald Stevenson: Piano Music, Volume Three, Toccata Classics TOCC 0403.

and ‘the warm south’ (Florida), as shown through a root-position major chord:



Blended together, they form the ‘added sixth’. One can hear this harmony most clearly in the slower pieces presented here, particularly throughout the second half of the ‘Serenade’ (the last chord is exactly as above) and throughout the ‘Intermezzo’.

Purcell and Jazz

The added-sixth harmony is also extensively used in Stevenson’s *Little Jazz Variations* [16]. Purcell’s *New Scotch Tune* (z665), a miniature for harpsichord from 1687, provides the theme of Stevenson’s set of five short variations. They were first written in 1964 as *Simple Variations on Purcell’s New Scotch Tune*, but that version consisted only of the theme (labelled ‘Tune’ in the score) and two variations: *Andante langoroso* and *Allegro, nello stile jazz*. Louis Kentner later encouraged Stevenson to extend the piece; as a result, in 1975, a further three variations were added:²¹ Variation 3, ‘Blues’ (2:41); Variation 4, *Andante cantabile* (3:16); and Variation 5, *Poco lento* (4:29). Each pays homage to a different jazz-piano style, and as Murray McLachlan writes, ‘the ghost of Gershwin never seems far away.’²² McLachlan further observes that ‘Variation 3, “Blues” [...] recalls music from the “America” section of Stevenson’s second concerto, “The Continents”’.²³ These *Variations* further demonstrate Stevenson’s eclecticism. In whichever idiom he turns to, the solid grounding of counterpoint, an art he practised

²¹ Ronald Stevenson Society website, <https://www.ronaldstevensonsociety.org.uk/product/little-jazz-variations-on-purcells-new-scotch-tune/>, accessed 14 December 2020.

²² ‘The Composer and his Music’, *Ronald Stevenson: Piano Music*, Divine Art DDA 21372, p. 18.

²³ This concerto is among Stevenson’s most ambitious works. It aims to bring several national styles of music from around the world together in a single piece.

since childhood, permeates his compositional craft, something which can be heard especially clearly in Variations 1 and 5.

Ronald Stevenson and Bernard van Dieren

Stevenson was to become one of the world's foremost authorities on the life and music of Ferruccio Busoni, and he discovered Bernard van Dieren's work during the course of his extensive study of Busoni. Van Dieren himself developed into one of the more unusual progressive voices in western classical music.

Something van Dieren and Stevenson shared was a considerable interest in Busoni, to whom van Dieren was linked through his wife, the pianist Frida Kindler: she had been part of Busoni's master-class at the turn of the twentieth century. Busoni and van Dieren thought highly of each other and maintained a sporadic correspondence over several years. Van Dieren subscribed to much of Busoni's vision of a *Junge Klassizität* ('Young Classicism'), the latter's new approach to music, which, among many things, proposed

the definite departure from what is thematic and *the return to melody again as the ruler of all voices and all emotions* [...] and as the bearer of the idea and the begetter of harmony, in short the most highly developed (not the most complicated) polyphony.²⁴

Van Dieren became an established master of polyphony. In an article in the periodical *Scrutiny* from the year of van Dieren's death (1936), Wilfrid Mellers wrote that

If one had to describe, in a phrase, what constituted van Dieren's chief virtue one would say [...] that he was a great melodist [...]. That exquisite beauty of melodic line [...] has made it possible for van Dieren to write some of the finest vocal music of our time – a time when most composers show a pathetic inability to realise the nature and capabilities of the human voice.²⁵

²⁴ H. Davis, 'Bernard van Dieren (1887–1936)', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 128, No. 1738 (December 1987), pp. 675–78.

²⁵ W. H. Mellers, 'Bernard van Dieren: Musical Intelligence and "The New Language"', *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review*, Cambridge, 1936, p. 273.

One can imagine Stevenson nodding in agreement. I wrote about Stevenson's approach to transcribing song for the piano in the booklet essay for the previous instalment in this series,²⁶ but this quotation shares one of his core musical values, one which permeates not only his vocal music, and his piano transcriptions thereof, but everything he wrote – the importance of a singing line.

String Quartet No. 5 (transcribed as a Piano Sonata)

Along with his songs, van Dieren's string quartets are the works most representative of his development as a composer. Robert Williams considers them to be as significant to the quartet repertoire as those of Bartók, Hindemith and Honegger, and writes that they often share a 'rhythmic vitality' with Bartók's. He observes that 'the technique of string writing suited van Dieren and the Quartet provided a medium in which he could give full rein to the two main characteristics of his style – melody and contrapuntal skill'.²⁷

The Fifth String Quartet was first written for violin, viola, cello and double bass; the exact year of composition is not known, but is believed to be around 1925.²⁸ Considered too difficult when it went into rehearsal, it was revised for a conventional string quartet early in 1931. In this version, it was premiered on 6 March of that year by the International String Quartet, in BBC Studio No. 10, and was repeated in St John's Institute four days later.²⁹ It is this version which Stevenson transcribed.³⁰

Stevenson first set out on the project around 1948, while a student at the Royal Manchester College of Music, and the front page of the score is dated 'c. 1948' (although, of course, there's no telling when Stevenson supplied that date). He returned to the transcription several times over the next few decades, mostly in the 1980s, around the time of van Dieren's centenary. This 'String Quartet No. 5 (transcribed as a Piano

²⁶ Ronald Stevenson: Piano Music, Volume Four, Toccata Classics TOCC 0555.

²⁷ R. Williams, 'Bernard Van Dieren', *British Music*, Vol. 1 (1979), p. 59.

²⁸ F. Tomlinson, 'A van Dieren Catalogue', *Warlock and van Dieren*, Thames Publishing, London, 1978, p. 50.

²⁹ L. Henderson Williams, 'Philandering Round Mr van Dieren's Quartets', *The Sackbut*, Vol. 9 (1931), p. 327.

³⁰ Stevenson loved serendipity. How fitting, therefore, to discover that this quartet, to the transcription of which he devoted forty years of his life, was given its premiere on his third birthday. One wonders whether he was aware of this coincidence.

Sonata)' – Stevenson's full title for his version – is 'dedicated to the van Dieren scholar Alastair Chisholm by the transcriber, his friend'.

In the first movement, *Con moto ben sostenuto* [17], one can hear the general outline of traditional first-movement sonata form. The 'first subject', in C minor, is certainly *sostenuto* and gloriously *cantabile*, perhaps in the manner of those two composers of opera whom van Dieren so admired and advocated in his writings, Bellini and Meyerbeer. The more energetic second subject, in A flat major, enters at 1:21 with much more activity, in terms of melodic and harmonic rhythm. A long development section follows (2:06), and although there is no clear point at which the recapitulation occurs, the first subject is stated clearly in the low tenor register at 4:06. There follows a long build-up to the restatement of the second subject (at 6:35) before winding down to the calm conclusion.

Transcribed around 1948, the second movement, *Molto tranquillo* [18], is notable not only for its gorgeous melodic lines but also for the movement of the texture predominantly in steady, almost intractable crotchets, save for occasional contrapuntal flourishes. The melody is carried nearly always by the first violin, a feature Stevenson retains.³¹ Occasionally, and especially towards the end, the lower parts play a more significant melodic role, but only briefly at each instance. Two themes give structure to the movement. The first, which occurs at the beginning, is a chord progression, used throughout the movement to signal the beginning of a new musical 'paragraph', and in a different key each time. With each statement of this theme, the 'first violin' joins in with a descant, varied with each appearance. The second theme is heard for the first time at 1:15; the music here has less urgency than at the beginning and assumes the role of a short *interludium*. The theme from the opening returns at 2:48.

The tempo direction Stevenson gives is $\text{♩} = c. 56$, which, in view of the dense writing in this movement, is extraordinarily quick. The broadcast of this work given by the Allegrì Quartet in the 1980s is given at a tempo approaching this marking, but it is here played at a tempo which, it is hoped, captures something of the urgency of

³¹ Noteworthy because Stevenson tended to distribute the *Hauptstimme*, or most important part, throughout his textures *à la* Grainger. It was in the name of his philosophy of 'musical democracy', where all parts have a share in the main material.

the music while allowing space for the textural complexity to breathe and the intricate counterpoint to be appreciated.

At the head of the score of the third movement, *Impetuosamente* [19], transcribed in November 1983, Stevenson draws comparison to Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy*.³² It is a dazzling *moto perpetuo*: lots of long, sweeping *cantando* phrases are accompanied by unceasing demisemiquavers ducking and diving around the principal line.

The most 'scherzando' movement of the Quartet is arguably the playful fourth, *Con spirito* [20], the transcription of which was completed in June 1985. Perhaps nowhere else in the work is the sheer intensity of the writing so obvious: there is a lot of music being heard within very short time-frames. It is an example of van Dieren's use of cellular development, as Hywel Davies has observed:³³ one will hear the opening theme, slightly martial in character, recur constantly. Van Dieren also employs cellular development in the sixth movement, which, in such a highly complex and often dense musical language, can be a helpful point of orientation for the listener.

Transcribed 'past midnight 12–13 November 1983', the *Adagio cantando* fifth movement [21] may be the most accessible movement in this quartet. Its melodic line is particularly lyrical and song-like; harmonically, too, it is arguably the least complex. There are quintessentially Stevensonian pianistic effects here, too: for example, at 3:09 the enormous, gloriously luxuriant 'harped' chords with the melody singing forth, initially from within the chords, then in octaves soaring above them.

Stevenson likens the sixth movement, *Allegro con grazia* [22], to a hunting jig (commenting that it has 'shades of Dr John Bull'³⁴). The jig element of the piece is certainly present, though for a performance which, as with the fourth movement, allows all the intricate part-writing to shine, the piece probably ought to be performed more steadily than the tempo implied by Stevenson's comparison. The result is still vibrant,

³² 'Ricordando la *Fantasia cromatica* del Bach nell'edizione di Busoni'. The Busonian aspect here concerns the division of the figuration between the hands (which differs from Bach's original).

³³ *Loc. cit.*

³⁴ John Bull (c. 1562–1628), British composer of (it is now believed) Welsh birth. Stevenson transcribed three of Bull's keyboard works, grouping them as *Three Elizabethan Pieces after John Bull*.

but also graceful, as per the performance direction. Van Dieren's technique of cellular development is even more abundant here, Hywel Davies observing how 'we find a peculiar mixture of complex polyphonic structures [...], the whole form often being governed by small cells that are repeated in multiple juxtapositions.'³⁵

At the foot of the sixth and final movement of his transcription, Stevenson writes that 'the transcription of this great quartet was completed after 40 years of devotion' – on 5 October 1987. At around 35 minutes in length, it is one of Stevenson's longest completed piano works, rivalling only his transcription of the first movement of Mahler's Symphony No. 10 (and not counting, of course, the 80-minute *Passacaglia on DSCH*). His undertaking to transcribe such a large-scale work, which remains largely unknown even a century after its composition, says volumes about both what Stevenson believed its artistic worth to be, and his admiration of yet another composer he was convinced was unjustly overlooked in spite of the sheer originality of his art.

Stevenson also transcribed two very different van Dieren songs. The first is *Weep You No More, Sad Fountains* [23], a setting of an anonymous Elizabethan ballad:

Weep you no more, sad fountains;
What need you flow so fast?
Look how the snowy mountains
Heaven's sun doth gently waste.
But my sun's heavenly eyes
View not your weeping,
That now lie sleeping
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.

Van Dieren composed his setting in 1925. It was dedicated to Helen Rootham, Governess to Edith Sitwell. Van Dieren was a personal friend of Sitwell's brother, Sacheverell; Edith lived with Rootham for most of her life.

³⁵ Davies, *loc. cit.*, p. 678.

A pervasive element in van Dieren's life is that he, from 1912, suffered excruciating pain from kidney stones. It was a debilitating condition that surgery could not cure (he underwent nine operations in total). It affected not only the quality of his productivity but also the consistency of his output. He was prescribed morphine as pain relief, and took it for the rest of his life. Although he was able to work intermittently, the van Dieren family income was mainly earned through Frida's activity as a pianist and teacher. In these circumstances, 'that Van Dieren should have written so much music is remarkable', wrote Denis ApIvor.

Composing is an exhausting form of activity even when one is in good health. But more remarkable still is the fact that his music is so frequently distinguished by a beauty of sound and a serenity which is quite rare in the works of contemporary composers.³⁶

Sacheverell Sitwell went further, suggesting that van Dieren's malady actually informed his musical style.

The music of this extraordinary being must have been largely conditioned by his perpetual ill-health. [...] he was nearly continually in agonising pain. In the result, his music [...] has a lassitude and a wavering or weary line [...].³⁷

In a commentary on van Dieren's piano piece *Piccolo Nudettino Fridato*, Stevenson wrote that 'the theme of the majority of van Dieren's many songs is: sleep as anodyne to pain',³⁸ and he held that 'there is no more significant master of serenity in the music of our age: an attribute rare in 20th-century art and at its most refined in van Dieren'.³⁹ This song exemplifies these qualities. Marjorie, Stevenson's widow, recalled how 'Ronald loved its somnambulant character', and that he 'wondered if it might be an expression connected to v[an] Dieren's addiction in search of pain relief and sleep. A subjective point of view but maybe the idea helped R[onald]'s interpretation'.⁴⁰

³⁶ Denis ApIvor, 'Bernard Van Dieren (1887–1936)', *Music Survey*, Vol. III, No. 4 (June 1951), p. 271.

³⁷ Sacheverell Sitwell, *The Hunters and the Hunted*, MacMillan, London, 1947 – quoted in the foreword to Bernard van Dieren, *Piccolo Pralinudettino Fridato*, Bardic Edition, Aylesbury, 1988, p. 3.

³⁸ Editorial note in *ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Letter to the author, dated 2 November 2020.

Spring Song of the Birds [24] is van Dieren's 1925 setting of a poem by King James I of Scotland (1394–1437):

Worschippe ye that loveris bene this May,
For of your blisse the Kalendis are begonne,
And sing with us, Away, Winter, away!
Cum, Somer, cum, the suete sesoun and sonne!
Awake for schame! that have your hevynnis wonne,
And amorously lift up your hedis all,
Thank Lufe that list you to his merci call!

Its sprightly mood conveys something of the freshness of springtime. The piano enters with a bright, descending figuration reminiscent of Busoni's *Toccata* for solo piano (Stevenson acknowledges this connection in an annotation). The vocal line enters after two bars. Occasionally Stevenson makes his own contributions to the piece, such as in the two bars leading up to the reprise of the opening material (at 0:40), where he writes an ascending *arpeggiando* passage, repeated with harmonic augmentation.

Encore Purcell

The Queen's Dolour – A Farewell [25] for harpsichord or piano (1958) is Stevenson's harmonic realisation of Purcell's original (from his opera *Dido and Aeneas*), which was written with treble and bass lines only. Stevenson also composes his own embellishments, and turns this simple, plaintive piece into something even more poignant, exquisite and deeply moving. Like the *Three Grounds*, it was also later arranged for solo guitar.

It ends this exploration of a selection of music written by composers of English origin, birth or association, which Stevenson transcribed over the course of half a century. There is still a considerable body of transcriptions left to be brought before the listening public, including music by Alan Bush, Edmund Rubbra, Bernard Stevens – and a good deal more.

Christopher Guild is becoming increasingly well known for his work on the piano music of Scotland and the rest of the British Isles. Hailing from the Speyside region of Moray, he has performed as soloist and chamber musician at some of the most prestigious concert venues in the UK, including the Wigmore Hall, St John's, Smith Square, the Purcell Room and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse.

Following studies at St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh, and with Andrew Ball at the Royal College of Music, London, his career was launched with invitations to tour the UK under the auspices of the Countess of Munster Musical Trust Recital Scheme; and to perform on the South Bank in London as a Park Lane Group Young Artist. While still a student, he performed as an orchestral keyboardist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and City of London Sinfonia.

He has worked with numerous composers, among them Judith Weir, and co-founded the Edison Ensemble, a contemporary-music group based in London. After a year's tenure as the Richard Carne Junior Fellow in Performance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, he went on to become Head of Instrumental Music at the Godolphin School in Wiltshire. Now based in the south of England, he is a visiting teacher at several schools, including Salisbury Cathedral School, Reigate Grammar and Graveney School, and is on the permanent staff at Junior Trinity (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance) in London, teaching Musicianship, Advanced Theory and Piano. He lectured on Francis George Scott and Ronald Stevenson at the Musica Scotica Annual Conference in 2019, and has written articles on Scottish classical music for *iScot* magazine.

This is his eighth album for Toccata Classics; he has recorded also for Champs Hill Records. Writing in *International Record Review* the late Calum MacDonald was unstinting in his praise of *Ronald Center: Instrumental and Chamber Music*, Volume One (Toccata Classics TOCC 0179): 'The rhythmic vivacity and crispness of his delivery, the subtlety of his pedalling, the incisiveness of attack with never a hint of heaviness, and his range of keyboard colour are such that I'm sure the composer himself would have applauded.'

www.christopherguild.co.uk





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