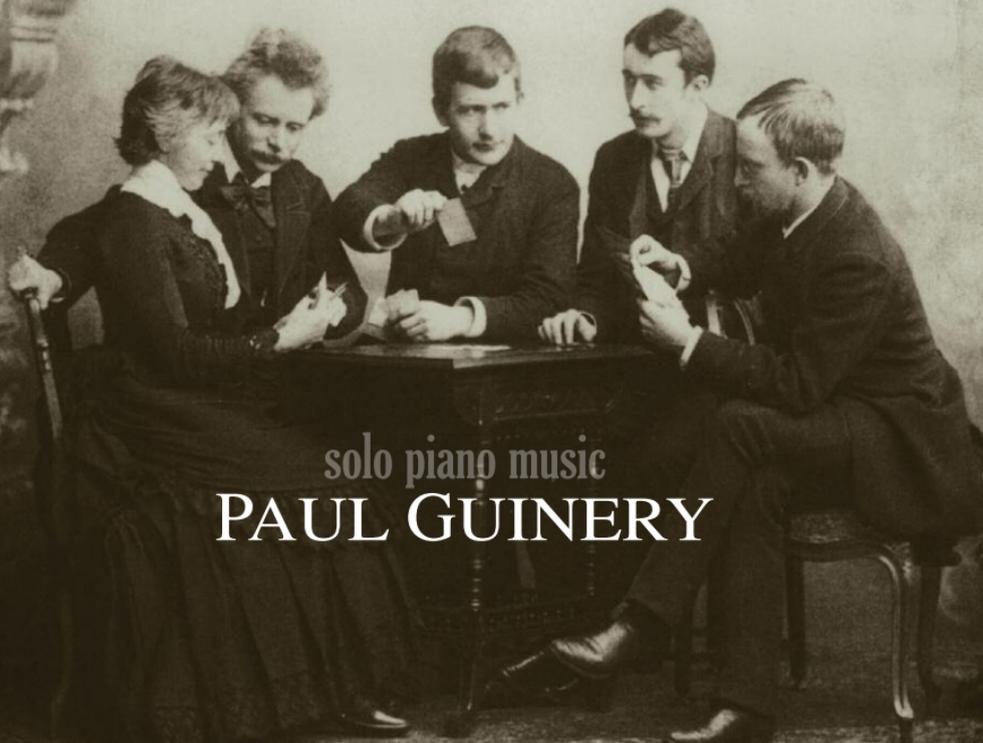


DELIUS and his CIRCLE



solo piano music
PAUL GUINERY



DELIUS and his **CIRCLE**

PAUL GUINERY

DELIUS and his CIRCLE

FREDERICK DELIUS (1862-1934)

Three preludes RT IX/8

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---------------------------------|------|
| 1 | i | Scherzando | 1'52 |
| 2 | ii | Quick | 1'09 |
| 3 | iii | With lively undulating movement | 1'23 |
| 4 | | Intermezzo from Hassan RT I/9 | 2'11 |
| 5 | | Valse RT IX/5 No.1 | 1'01 |
| 6 | | Rêverie RT IX/5 No.2 | 2'40 |
| 7 | | Dance for harpsichord RT IX/6 | 2'06 |

ROGER QUILTER (1877-1953)

- | | | | |
|----|--|----------------------------------|------|
| 8 | | Dance in the twilight Op.16 No.1 | 2'09 |
| 9 | | Shepherd song Op.27 No.1 | 2'14 |
| 10 | | Rosamund | 1'47 |
| 11 | | Pipe and tabor Op.27 No.4 | 1'30 |

CYRIL SCOTT (1879-1970)

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----------------------|------|
| 12 | | Lotus land Op.47 No.1 | 4'34 |
|----|--|-----------------------|------|

FREDERIC AUSTIN (1872-1952)

The enchanted palace

- | | | | |
|----|----|---------------------|------|
| 13 | i | The princess sings | 4'03 |
| 14 | ii | The princess dances | 3'15 |

	ARNOLD BAX (1883-1953)	
15	The maiden with the daffodil	5'14
	PERCY GRAINGER (1882-1961)	
16	The merry king	4'01
	ERNEST JOHN MOERAN (1894-1950)	
17	Irish love song	3'31
18	Summer valley	4'59
19	Bank holiday	2'23
	NORMAN O'NEILL (1875-1934)	
20	Carillon	3'02
	PETER WARLOCK (1894-1930)	
	Five folk-song preludes	
21	i Very slow	1'36
22	ii Allegretto, rubato	1'13
23	iii Maestoso; alla marcia funebre	1'26
24	iv Fairly slow but evenly flowing, in strict time	1'19
25	v Largo maestoso	3'25
	HENRY BALFOUR GARDINER (1877-1950)	
26	Mere	6'08

72'38

PAUL GUINERY *piano*



CYRIL SCOTT

ROGER QUILTER

PERCY GRAINGER

NORMAN O'NEILL

HENRY BALFOUR GARDINER

FREDERICK DELIUS



DELIUS and his CIRCLE

Portraits of Delius from his last decade – mortally ill, racked with pain, cantankerous, austere and aggressively opinionated – belie the younger man, relatively rarely captured by the camera but undoubtedly charming, gregarious, sensuous and open-hearted. How otherwise could he have built up such a wide circle of acquaintances, including painters, writers and musicians, friends who stayed loyal to him throughout his difficult years. Many in this circle were fine pianists who made outstanding contributions to that underplayed and undervalued genre, English piano music.

Delius himself was not a “natural” pianist (his instrument was the violin) and though he did write chamber works involving the piano, as well as a concerto, there is only a handful of mature, solo works. These mostly date from the early 1920s when ill-health put a stop to large-scale composition and the pieces had to be dictated to Delius’s saintly wife, Jelka. The *Three preludes* (published 1923) are the best of the crop: miraculously fluid and quixotic, fleeting apparitions whose enchanting harmonies linger in the ear. Delius’s keyboard idiosyncrasies pose problems for the player: the notes do not lie well under the fingers and some re-distribution between the hands is advisable, together with careful thought about phrase lengths (barely indicated) and where to point up inner lines.

The *Intermezzo*, from the incidental music Delius wrote for James Elroy Flecker’s play *Hassan* (produced in 1923) is, on the other hand, an idiomatic transcription by Philip Heseltine whose alter ego was Peter Warlock (see below). The original version covered a brief scene change early in Act 1 and is magically scored for strings and woodwind spiced by harp; but hearing it on the piano in “black and white”, stripped of instrumental colouring, gives a valuable insight into Delius’s unique sense of harmony.

The *Valse* and *Rêverie* are rarities and remained unpublished until 1988. They were sketched whilst Delius was living at Croissy-sur-Seine (1889-90) and the lilting *Valse* was later revised as the third of *Five piano pieces* (published 1925) though the succinct original is equally persuasive. The *Rêverie* was never quite completed and peters out in a series of chords, though it is possible to give it a sense of conclusion; the piece is well worth hearing as it is a remarkably visionary work, given its date.

The *Dance for harpsichord* (1919) is a curiosity. Delius provocatively dismissed early music as “scales and arpeggios” so the harpsichord would seem not to have been his cup of tea. But he was won over by the dedicatee, Mrs Violet Gordon Woodhouse, who led an artistic salon in London where Delius was charmed by her and her playing. The *Dance* is probably the most unidiomatic, unplayable piece ever written for the harpsichord, far too complex harmonically to be effective. But it does sound well on the piano, summing up in a mere two pages the significant features of Delius’s mature style.

Delius lived in Grez-sur-Loing, near Paris, for nearly forty years and received many visitors, among them Roger Quilter who admired the “rich, lovely, melting flow of gliding harmonies” in Delius’s music. Quilter is best known for his masterly songs but there is a surprising amount of piano music by him and the best of it has a characteristic charm and wistfulness. Two of his piano suites are represented here as well as the haunting *Rosamund* from incidental music for the children’s play *Where the rainbow ends*.

Cyril Scott studied in Frankfurt as one of a group of expatriates who included Gardiner, Grainger, O’Neill and Quilter, all subsequently friends of Delius and all represented here. Scott wrote copiously (400 or so works) throughout a long life. *Lotus land* (1905) was wildly popular in its day and would have been found inside many a piano-stool. It was inspired by an episode in Homer’s *Odyssey* in which the followers of Odysseus, fleeing from Troy, discover a tropical island whose inhabitants spend their days eating the fruit of the lotus plant which drugs them into a state of utter inertia. The steady pulse of the left-hand chords is hypnotic and even when the mood is occasionally broken, it soon sinks back into languorous melancholy.

Frederic Austin was a household name in his day, a baritone equally distinguished in the opera house and the concert hall; he was the soloist in the first English performances of Delius’s *Sea drift* and later was a founder member of the Delius Trust. He was also a fine composer with a symphony to his credit. His suite *The enchanted palace* appears to be inspired by the 16th century epic poem *Orlando furioso* by Ariosto in which the sorcerer Atlas lures an assortment of chivalric knights into his enchanted palace, deceiving them with a false vision of their lady-loves; in the case of *Orlando*, this is the wicked Chinese princess Angelica. Austin gives his vividly contrasted suite a Spanish flavour and the accomplished and complex piano writing is suggestive of Albéniz and Granados.

Arnold Bax was a frequent visitor to Grez and Delius much admired him: “by far the greatest [of the young British composers] both poetically and imaginatively.” However, Bax’s volatile mistress, the pianist Harriet Cohen, was less welcome. Not long after their relationship was established, she attended a tea-party in 1915 wearing a single daffodil as a corsage and Bax was so bowled over that he rapidly composed *To a maiden with a daffodil* (the original title) dedicating it to Tania, as he called her. It’s an exquisite sound-portrait of her wilful capriciousness as well as Bax’s own obsession.

Another close friend was Percy Grainger, Australian by birth but whose career took flight in England and the USA. Delius was astonished by the prodigious talents of this energetic musician, whose setting of the folk-song *Brigg fair* inspired Delius to make fruitful use of the melody himself. Much has been written about Grainger’s eccentricities – perhaps too much – giving the impression that he was overly frivolous. But in fact he was deeply earnest about his compositions, which are constructed with great craftsmanship. *The merry king* is no.38 of his British folk-music settings and is rarely heard:

a pity, as it is one of his finest inspirations. The supremely Graingeresque harmonies bristle with counter-melodies and Grainger draws an almost orchestral sonority from the piano in rich chords demanding a large hand-stretch. Grainger noted down this Sussex folk-song in 1905 from the singing of Alfred Hunt (the words refer to “a merry king of Old England that stole my love away...”); the piano transcription was made in 1939.

The three pieces by E.J. Moeran, all dating from 1925-6, are some of the finest examples of English piano-music on this disc. *Irish love song* is dedicated to Peter Warlock with whom Moeran shared a cottage at Eynsford in Kent in the 'twenties; unfortunately, Warlock's wild and drunken behaviour had a pernicious effect on his companion. The folk-tune is associated with words by Michael Hogan beginning: “I grieve when I think on the dear, happy days of youth, when all the bright dreams of this faithless world seemed truth...”. *Summer valley* dates from the same period and is dedicated to Delius whose own style is suggested in the lilting opening, though Moeran soon treads his own harmonic path. *Bank holiday* is an exuberant romp and might well have been penned by Grainger.

Delius was very fond indeed of the charming and debonair Norman O'Neill who was musical director of the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, writing incidental music for over fifty plays. *Carillon* dates from 1919 and skilfully evokes a peal of distant bells interrupted by a stormier interlude.

In 1911 Delius received a fan letter from a schoolboy at Eton called Philip Heseltine and this led to a meeting and a firm friendship. Both the Deliuses grew enormously fond of “Phil”, who transcribed many of the composer's works for piano and published an early biography; his death in 1930, probably suicide, was a terrible blow. As a composer, Heseltine used the pseudonym Peter Warlock, reflecting a much darker side of his personality. He needed words to inspire him and so, despite the beautiful piano parts for his songs, the *Five folk-song preludes* are, alas, his only substantial solo composition. They are experimental transcriptions of Celtic folk-songs and, with the exception of the richly lyrical second prelude, are much “grittier” and more dissonant than one expects from Warlock. There are powerful sonorities, especially in the final prelude, an arrangement of *The seagull of the land-under-waves*, which ends in a mood of utter desolation.

Delius claimed that his greatest friend was Henry Balfour Gardiner who, according to Eric Fenby, was “one of the very few people Delius admired and trusted implicitly”. He was a great practical support in later years, buying the house at Grez and giving Delius free tenancy for life. Gardiner himself gave up composing in the 1920s, aware that his style was out of fashion. *Mere* dates from 1905 and is named after the Wiltshire village on the edge of Salisbury Plain, which Gardiner would often visit by bicycle. It is dedicated to Grainger who must have heartily approved of its extrovert exuberance and pianistic fireworks.



FREDERIC AUSTIN

ARNOLD BAX

ERNEST JOHN MOERAN

PETER WARLOCK

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Page 6: photograph of Cyril Scott, Roger Quilter, Percy Grainger and Norman O'Neill in 1929, from the John Bird collection; photograph of Henry Balfour Gardiner and Frederick Delius in 1922, courtesy of the Delius Trust.

Page 10: photograph of Frederic Austin in 1922; photograph of Arnold Bax and Ernest John Moeran c.1945; photograph of Peter Warlock in 1926.

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