

CONCERTO NO.2 IN C MINOR FOR PIANOFORTE AND ORCHESTRA, OP.126

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Allegro moderato | 15'27 |
| 2 | Adagio molto - Più mosso (Quasi andante) | 10'49 |
| 3 | Allegro molto | 9'52 |

DANTE RHAPSODIES, OP.92

- | | | |
|---|------------------|-------|
| 4 | No.1 "Francesca" | 11'57 |
| 5 | No.2 "Beatrice" | 8'32 |
| 6 | No.3 "Capaneo" | 7'21 |

FROM SIX CHARACTERISTIC PIECES, OP.132

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 7 | No.3 Study | 3'10 |
| 8 | No.4 Roundel (In Memoriam. R. Sch. June 8.1911) | 3'08 |

FROM FIVE CAPRICES, OP.136

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|------|
| 9 | No.5 Tempo di Valse | 5'18 |
|---|---------------------|------|

Total playing time: 73'35

Tracks 1-3 (Concerto) recorded May 1st, 2012
in BBC Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff, UK
Produced by Alexander Van Ingen
Engineered by Andrew Mellor
Assisted by Huw Thomas
Edited by Claire Hay

Tracks 4-9 (Solo works) recorded January 26th & 27th,
2012 in The Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK
Produced & engineered by Andrew Mellor
Edited by Claire Hay
Mixed & mastered by Andrew Mellor

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Alexander Van Ingen
Label Manager for Champs Hill Records:
Matt Buchanan

Produced in association with:



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STANFORD: PIANO CONCERTO NO.2
& works for solo piano



BENJAMIN FRITH *piano*

BBC National Orchestra of Wales
Andrew Gourlay *conductor*

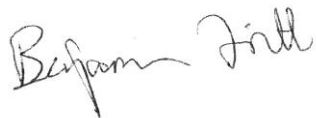


FOREWORD

Anyone who adores those Romantics, Brahms and Schumann, will surely have an open heart for the musical style of Irishman Charles Villiers Stanford. For many years his works were regarded as poor imitations of those German masters, particularly Brahms, but have since, and rightly so, been enjoyed for their own virtues. On performing the Second Piano Trio in Washington recently, some American church-goers, accustomed only to his ecclesiastical style, were shocked by the highly charged emotional effect produced by the piece. The Second Concerto, written "To two friends on either side of the Atlantic", surely demonstrates a true cosmopolitan nature; here was a composer adept in symphonic, instrumental, chamber-music and opera!

After my experience of recording his trios and piano quartets in the Gould Piano Trio, the solo piano works reveal themselves as the composer's ideal opportunity to develop his most rhapsodic musical thoughts and in so doing, prove this famous organist had a true bent for pianistic style and sonority.

I heartily wish to thank my old friend Allan Hughes, of the former "Wilson Peck" piano store in Sheffield, for providing me with a complete set of parts and score for the Second Concerto, dating from before 1920, with helpful instructions in pencil by the pianist, Julian Clifford (and probably the composer himself!) who gave a performance on December 14th, 1921 with conductor Stanley Kaye, a few years after its first outing by the legendary Harold Bauer in 1915 – Norfolk Musical Festival, Connecticut, USA. This inspired me to approach Champs Hill Records with a humble request, but David and Mary Bowerman, with their typically generous enthusiasm, soon made this wish a reality!



PROGRAMME NOTE

Stanford's influence on 20th-century British music was profound and far-reaching. The list of composers who studied with him – striking not merely in its length but also in its diversity – includes Vaughan Williams, Holst, Bridge, Coleridge-Taylor, Ireland, Arthur Benjamin, George Butterworth, Howells, Bliss, Moeran and Goossens.

Stanford's list of compositions is equally diverse but, with the exception of his outstanding church music, few of his works have secured a place in their respective repertoires. He wrote – in addition to his major contribution to the Anglican church music repertoire – ten operas, seven symphonies, concertos for violin, piano, clarinet and cello, eight string quartets and a considerable quantity of other chamber music. Many of his major works are uneven in inspiration, while their craftsmanship – as a teacher he was a stickler for technique – is sometimes rather obvious. Also his melodic ideas are not always distinctive enough to stand the weighty treatment they receive. Nevertheless there are undoubtedly fine works to be found or rediscovered, especially among the concertos and the six *Irish Rhapsodies*, two of which themselves resemble miniature concertos for cello and violin respectively.

Born in Dublin, Stanford studied the piano and the organ locally. His organ scholarship to Trinity Hall (1870) marked the beginning of a life-long association with Cambridge, where he was Professor of Music at Trinity College from 1887 until his death. Stanford was also one of the founding professors of the Royal College of Music, where he taught for over forty years.

The second of Stanford's three piano concertos dates from 1911, the same year as the 7th Symphony, and is a grandly romantic work of ambitious scale. Harold Bauer gave the premiere in June 1915 as part of the American Music Festival in Norfolk, Connecticut. The first British performance was given in Bournemouth on 7th December 1916, Stanford himself conducting. The soloist on that occasion, Benno Moiseiwitsch, also gave the first London performance in 1919, having played it in Oxford the previous year. Stanford seems to have been fortunate in attracting

famous soloists – Joachim played his Suite in D, and Kreisler played the 1st Violin Concerto. The 2nd Piano Concerto is dedicated to “Two friends on either side of the Atlantic: Carl Stoeckel of Norfolk, Conn, USA [president of the Norfolk Festival] and Robert Finnie McEwen of Bardrochat” [Scottish landowner, amateur musician and patron of the arts].

This large-scale, muscular work surely would attract more devotees if only it were better known. The very opening – the soloist’s turbulent figuration punctuated by short orchestral chords – is immediately arresting. In 1910 in Leeds Stanford had conducted the British premiere of Rachmaninov’s 2nd Concerto with the composer as soloist, and his own concerto clearly begins with a tribute to this masterly predecessor. We should not be too dismissive of such a reference. Do we despise Dvořák for his touching tributes to Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner, or Wagner himself for his obvious borrowings from Berlioz? Two horns now introduce a well defined theme based on a rising fourth and a rising fifth. This serves as a kind of motto, although it is soon modified to rising third – rising sixth and later appears in other variants, always recognisable because of the strong rhythmic profile. However, Stanford does not attempt to use it as a unifying element throughout the entire work, in the manner of Schumann’s 4th Symphony or Saint-Saëns’ 3rd. The lyrical second subject (*cantabile*) is introduced by the soloist with elegant triplets in the left hand. In the development section a relaxing of the tempo (*Molto tranquillo*) brings a delightful passage scored almost entirely for piano, solo cello and two clarinets, reminding us of Stanford the pianist’s special love of playing chamber music. In this epic opening movement Stanford not only presents a wealth of material, but also shows great resourcefulness in the way he extracts different elements of his themes for motivic use.

The slow movement begins with a touching melody (*molto teneramente*) for the soloist, played *arpeggiando* throughout. In the middle section - marked *Più mosso*

(*Quasi Andante*) – the oboe introduces a new melody, which the soloist then injects with more urgency (marked *appassionato*).

A short cadenza-like passage culminates in a chain of trills, before the trumpet quietly refers to the motto theme. The opening theme returns, now completely re-scored and with elaborate figuration in the piano, and the coda is based on material from both opening and middle sections. In the final bars Stanford’s touching reluctance to leave this deeply lyrical, heartfelt movement is reminiscent of Dvořák’s similar tendency, exemplified in the slow movement from his 6th Symphony.

The finale opens with a preamble of vigorous gestures exchanged between orchestra and soloist, before the sturdy main theme is announced. Its earthy, rhythmically insistent character calls for some contrast of mood, which duly arrives with the first episode (*Poco tranquillo*) – a *cantabile* violin melody in 3-bar phrases. In a passage of development including some sparkling piano figuration the motto theme is heard on trombones. The second contrasting episode springs a surprise, as Stanford recalls both themes from the slow movement, newly scored and with some felicitous touches. The first episode returns in C major, the motto theme again adds to the momentum, and the concerto ends amid splendid octave-writing for the soloist. Regarding this finale Herbert Howells commented that Stanford “turns his face to the west ... fills his mind with the thematic cut-and-thrust of melody and rhythm innately Irish”.

Stanford’s solo piano music, which is among the most neglected areas of his output, includes only one sonata, of which the manuscript is lost. Among the other pieces or groups of pieces (about twenty-five in total) are two sets of preludes in all the keys. The *Dante Rhapsodies* of 1904 were inspired by the playing of Percy Grainger (whom Stanford nicknamed “Polar Bear”) and represent his grandest work for solo piano. Grainger had performed Stanford’s *Concert Variations upon an English Theme* for piano and orchestra and also made virtuoso

transcriptions of his *Irish Dances* Op.89. The Steinway of the early 20th century was the prototype of the modern grand piano. Described by Stanford as “battleship grands”, these revolutionary instruments inevitably changed composers’ and performers’ approach to the piano, and this exciting new potential is certainly reflected in the *Dante Rhapsodies*. However, a complementary view of Stanford’s relationship with the piano – as a performer – is provided by biographer Plunket Green: “Stanford’s touch was the most delicious thing imaginable, impossible to define. It had a sweetness which gave one a lump in one’s throat; a beauty which pervaded every note of the whole and a sparkle which made one chuckle. It never varied in this respect and seemed inviolate in crabbed passages, fifth-rate pianofortes, or moods of irritation.” In 1914 Stanford himself wrote “I shall always prefer beauty of tone to strength of muscle.”

Percy Grainger, the *Dante Rhapsodies’* dedicatee, premiered the second and third pieces in London on 13th February 1905 and introduced the complete set a few weeks later. *Francesca* is inspired by Canto V of Dante’s *Inferno* and is inscribed with the famous quotation: “*Nessun maggior dolore, Che ricordarsi del tempo felice Nella miseria*” (“There is no greater sorrow than to recall a time of happiness in misery”). These are the first words which Francesca speaks to the Pilgrim (symbolising the emotional and intellectual aspects of Dante’s psyche), before she recounts her tragic story. Paolo and Francesca, the young wife of his elder brother, had a 10-year love affair. When the brother discovered their adultery he killed them both and the lovers were condemned to the Second Circle of Hell. With grandeur and tenderness Stanford evokes the tragedy in this impressive tone-poem of Lisztian eloquence. (Liszt himself had been inspired by Dante to compose a symphony and a piano sonata.) The main *Andante con moto agitato* is preceded by a brief *Adagio* which returns at the close in modified form, before the final *fortissimo* chords. The second rhapsody, *Beatrice* is inspired by the part of *Canto II* in which Beatrice, Dante’s idealised beloved, asks Virgil to guide the Pilgrim to

safety until she herself is able to be his guide in Paradise. Marked *Lento moderato e cantabile*, this tenderly poetic piece in B major has a central section in A flat major which rises to an impassioned climax. *Capaneo* is headed by a quotation from *Canto XIV* – “*Se Giove stanchi il suo fabbro ... e me saetti di tutta forza, Non ne potrebbe aver vendetta allegra*” (“Let Jove wear out his smith ... Yea, though he hurl his bolts at me with all his force, no satisfaction of revenge shall be his.”) Capaneo was one of the seven kings who besieged Thebes only to die while cursing Jove. He defied Jove’s thunderbolts even in Hell, determined that his spirit should never be broken. Like much of Stanford’s music, this heroic C major *Allegro* in 2/2 reveals the influence of Brahms, especially the Rhapsodies Op.79 and the last piece of the Op.119 group. In the brilliant C minor middle section in 3/4 – *Più mosso and leggierissimo* – Stanford incorporates references to some of his opening material.

The Five Caprices Op.136 date from 1913. The concluding piece begins as a charming waltz in A flat major, but this elegance is combined with more robust elements and further contrast is provided by the hemiola rhythms of the E major middle section.

The Six Characteristic Pieces, Op.132 date from the same period as the 2nd Piano Concerto.

They are dedicated to Moritz Rosenthal, whom Stanford had originally hoped would give the first performance of that concerto. These pieces, together with the Five Caprices, mark Stanford’s return to solo piano music after an interval of about ten years. Both groups are generally less technically demanding than the *Dante Rhapsodies*. The fourth piece from Op.132 – *Roundel*, marked *Andante espressivo* – is inscribed “In Memoriam. R. Sch. June 8. 1911”. This wistful, undemonstrative miniature is a tribute to Schumann, a composer for whom Stanford had a deep affection. No.3 of this Op.132 set, entitled *Study*, is marked *Allegretto tranquillo*. Gentle triplet movement, predominantly in 5/4, is maintained until the peaceful concluding bars.

Benjamin Frith was encouraged by his piano teacher, Dame Fanny Waterman, to pursue a musical career after he won the Dudley National Concerto Competition aged fourteen. Since then, he has been a first prize winner in the Rubinstein Piano Masters Competition where he was also awarded the special prize for chamber music, and was awarded the top prize in the Busoni International Piano Competition.

Having achieved rave reviews from his American and Edinburgh Festival debuts, Frith established himself as an international concert artist. He has given recitals and concerto performances throughout Europe, Northern America, India, Kazakhstan and the Far East. He has appeared with many of the world's finest orchestras including the Berlin Symphony, Israel Philharmonic, Warsaw Philharmonic, Hallé, the BBC orchestras, CBSO, Northern Sinfonia, Royal Philharmonic and with such conductors as Zubin Mehta, Antoni Wit, Tamás Vásáry, Stanisław Skrowaczewski, Matthias Bamert, Moshe Atzmon, Gianandrea Noseda and Sir Mark Elder.

His exciting and diverse repertoire ranges from Scarlatti to James Macmillan and includes over 50 concertos. Much praise has been bestowed on Frith's recordings. Piano Concertos numbers five and six by John Field reached the top of the classical charts and his five-disc cycle of Mendelssohn piano works received the Penguin CD Guide Rosette Award. His disc of Schumann's Davidsbundlertanze was chosen as the top recommendation on the BBC Radio 3 programme "Building a Library" and his acclaimed recording of Beethoven's Diabelli Variations has been reissued on the Resonance label.

Frith's enjoyment of chamber music has been fulfilled through his performances and recordings as the pianist of the Gould Piano Trio plus the formation of his own Piano Quartet. His interest in the romantic English repertoire has produced fine accounts of Stanford's trios and a reconstructed piano quartet in C minor together with works by Ireland, Bridge, Scott and Bax – nominated for a Gramophone award.



BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW) is one of the UK's most versatile orchestras, with a varied range of work as both a broadcast orchestra and national symphony orchestra of Wales. The Orchestra's adventurous programming is driven by Principal Conductor Thomas Søndergård and Conductor Laureate Tadaaki Otaka. Welsh composer Huw Watkins becomes Composer-in-Association in October.

Generously supported by the Arts Council of Wales, and part of BBC Wales, BBC NOW is Orchestra-in-Residence at Cardiff's St David's Hall, and performs a busy series of live concerts, touring through Wales and the UK. Almost all of its performances can be heard on BBC radio. Regularly invited to take part in festivals throughout the UK, BBC NOW appears biennially at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World and annually at the BBC Proms. Learning is at the heart of the organisation; this has included the development of an innovative concert format designed for Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing audiences. The Orchestra's home is BBC Hoddinott Hall, a world-class concert hall and recording studio based in the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff Bay.

A trombonist and pianist by training, **Andrew Gourlay** won a Postgraduate Scholarship to study conducting at the Royal College of Music where he prepared symphonies for Haitink and Norrington.

Andrew Gourlay has been appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León from 2014/15. In 2010, he won First Prize at the Cadaques International Conducting Competition and was appointed as Assistant Conductor to Sir Mark Elder and the Hallé and Music Director of the Hallé Youth Orchestra. He has replaced Sir Colin Davis at the Barbican twice and worked as Cover Conductor for Gergiev and Masur. Recent and future guest engagements include performances with the Philharmonia, BBC orchestras, RLPO, Hallé, CBSO, Sinfonia Viva, Britten Sinfonia, Opera North, Brighton Philharmonic, RTÉ Symphony, Ulster Orchestra, and the London Sinfonietta at the BBC Proms. Operatic engagements include the UK premiere of Luca Francesoni's *Quartett* for the ROH, *Rusalka* and *La Tragédie de Carmen* for English Touring Opera and *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Benjamin Britten International Opera School.

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Andrew Gourlay

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