



# Ronald STEVENSON

## PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME THREE

GHANAIAN FOLK-SONG SUITE

CHINESE FOLK-SONG SUITE

THE HIGH ROAD TO LINTON

BARRA FLYTING TOCCATA

SOUNDING STRINGS

AFRICAN TWI-TUNE

BONNY AT MORN

**GRAINGER** TRANSCR. **STEVENSON**

HILL SONG NO. 1

Christopher Guild

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

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## RONALD STEVENSON Piano Music, Volume Three

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|------|---|-------|
| [1]  | <b><i>African Twi-Tune: The Bantu and Afrikaaner National Hymns Combined</i></b> (1964)*  | 1:41  |
| [2]  | <b>GRAINGER transcr. STEVENSON <i>Hill Song No. 1</i></b> (1960)  | 22:19 |
|      | <b><i>Sounding Strings</i></b> (1979)*  | 19:22 |
| [3]  | I Harp of Gold (Y Delyn Aur): Welsh Air (Broad, bardic)   | 1:14  |
| [4]  | II The Ash Grove (Llwyn On): Welsh Air ( <i>Allegretto</i> )  | 1:03  |
| [5]  | III Hal-an-tow: The Floral Dance from Helston, Cornwall ( <i>Allegro</i> )  | 1:05  |
| [6]  | IV A Fairy's Love Song: Hebridean Air ( <i>Moderato</i> )   | 1:42  |
| [7]  | V The Sheep under the Snow: Manx Air ( <i>Andante</i> )   | 1:45  |
| [8]  | VI Savourneen Deelish: Irish Gaelic Air (Fairly slowly)   | 1:25  |
| [9]  | VII The Cockle-gatherer: Hebridean Dance-song ( <i>Allegretto</i> )   | 1:03  |
| [10] | VIII Tune from County Derry: Irish Air (Slowly)   | 1:32  |
| [11] | IX Eriskay Love-Lilt: Hebridean Air<br>( <i>Andante, accarezzante</i> (caressingly))  | 2:31  |
| [12] | X Ben Dorain: Scottish Gaelic Air ( <i>Moderato maestoso</i> )  | 1:51  |
| [13] | XI La Basse-Breton: Folk Dance from Brittany ( <i>Allegro</i> )   | 1:07  |
| [14] | XII The Old Woman's Reel: Folk Dance from Barra, Outer Hebrides<br>(Not fast but fairly sprightly<br>(remember it's an <i>old</i> woman's dance)) | 0:48  |
| [15] | XIII L'Angelus Breton: Folksong from Brittany<br>( <i>Andante amabile</i> (gently))   | 1:07  |
| [16] | XIV The Christ Child's Lullaby: Hebridean Carol from South Uist<br>( <i>Andante</i> )   | 1:09  |

<b>Chinese Folk-Song Suite</b> (May 1965)*		<b>12:48</b>
17	I The Washer-woman and the Flower-girl ( <i>Con moto tranquillo</i> )	2:06
18	II A Song for New Year's Day ( <i>Andante</i> )	2:28
19	III The War-widow's Lament ( <i>Lento</i> )	4:31
20	IV Beautiful Fresh Flower ( <i>Allegretto</i> )	1:35
21	V Song of the Crab-fisher ( <i>Allegro con spirito</i> )	2:08
<b>Ghanaian Folk-Song Suite</b> (1965)*		<b>6:04</b>
22	I Song of Valour	2:03
23	II Consolation	2:21
24	III Leopard Dance	1:40
25	<b>Bonny at Morn</b> (15 November 1990)*	<b>3:47</b>
26	<b>The High Road to Linton</b> (April 1978)*	<b>2:32</b>
27	<b>Barra Flying Toccata</b> (April 1980)*	<b>1:46</b>

**Christopher Guild, piano**

**TT 70:22**

\*FIRST RECORDINGS

# A MUSICAL COALESCENCE: EMBRACING ALL HUMANITY THROUGH MUSIC

by Christopher Guild

Stevenson's output is in a curious sense the meeting place, sometimes the hostility, where the differences and diversities of much that is most treasurable in our musical traditions can be reconciled – but also celebrated: and where they may enjoy, in the old Scots phrase, 'a guid crack'.  
Malcolm MacDonald<sup>1</sup>

Ronald Stevenson (1928–2015) was among the leading composer-pianists of his generation. One of his considerable artistic achievements and innovations as a composer is the way in which he successfully assimilated many seemingly disparate elements of music from all corners of the world into his own musical language, which itself sprang from the soil of Scotland.

Where the previous two albums in this ongoing series for Toccata Classics focused largely on Stevenson's relationship with Scotland,<sup>2</sup> this third instalment shows Stevenson taking his inspiration from Percy Grainger and exploring the music both of his homeland and of non-western cultures. Grainger was, as can be easily heard, a central musical influence, but, to recall Malcolm MacDonald once again,

Stevenson's entire concept of 'World Music' is perhaps the artistic equivalent of a gigantic bear-hug, attempting to sweep *everything* up in a single idealistic embrace of

<sup>1</sup> *Ronald Stevenson: A Musical Biography*, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1989, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Volume One (Toccata Classics TOCC 0272) contained *A Wheen Tunes for Bairns tae Spiel: Four Scottish Pieces for Piano* (1964), *A Scottish Triptych* (1959–67), the *South Uist (Hebridean) Folk-Song Suite* (1969), *A Rosary of Variations on Seán Ó Riada's Irish Folk Mass* (1980) and ten *Scottish Folk Music Settings* (1956–80). Volume Two (Toccata Classics TOCC 0388) featured *Three Scots Fairy Tales* (1967), *A Carlyle Suite* (1995), *Rory Dall Morison's Harp Book* (1978), *Three Scottish Ballads* (1973), and two Stevenson transcriptions, of Frank Merrick's *Hebridean Seascape* (c. 1935/1986) and Savourna Stevenson's *Lament for a Blind Harper* (1986).

shared humanity. But many pieces can also be seen as fingers pointing, drawing attention to individual achievements and excellences we neglect at our peril.<sup>3</sup>

An example of this kind of individual achievement is Grainger's *Hill Song* No. 1, a piece only becoming known, and appreciated, in recent years after decades of neglect; it was far ahead of its time when first written, in 1901–2. There are links between the music of Stevenson's native Scotland and China (in the form of pentatonic modality), and there are some interesting links between Scotland and Ghana, too, which I suggest below.

The finest, and most symbolic, example of 'a single idealistic embrace of shared humanity' is where this album begins. Stevenson was Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Cape Town from 1963 to 1965, and his *African Twi-Tune* [1] was written in Cape Town in 1964. The term 'Twi-Tune' is a Graingerism, and defines a piece composed of two melodies sounding simultaneously. This one takes on an overtly political meaning: it was written during the Apartheid era, after all. The upper melody, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* ('God Bless Africa'), the hymn based on Joseph Parry's 'Aberystwyth' composed in 1897 by Enoch Sontonga, was made the official South African national anthem after the end of Apartheid. The lower part of this setting is the Afrikaans anthem, *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika* ('The Voice of South Africa'), the South African national anthem from 1954 to 1994.<sup>4</sup>

The Apartheid regime of South Africa appalled Stevenson, and he was delighted to discover that these two anthems – voicing aspirations forcibly opposed to each other – fitted together so well; it was, for him, a symbolic resolution to the tensions and strife he witnessed. Music was Stevenson's way of bringing the world together, and the tiny *African Twi-Tune* perfectly encapsulates the idealistic embrace identified by Malcolm MacDonald.

Percy Grainger maintained a major interest in Norse mythology, citing the Icelandic sagas as his favourite literature,<sup>5</sup> and he loved the outdoors. The wildness of the hills

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Stevenson's humanist impulse proved prophetic: the national anthem that replaced *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* in 1997 contains elements of both Sontonga's melody and the Afrikaans hymn.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.percygrainger.org/prognot4.htm> (accessed 11 July 2018).

and the raw ferocity of the sagas were at the front of his mind as he conceived and developed the experimental compositional techniques of *Hill Song No. 1*. Originally for a large wind ensemble with unusual scoring (piccolos, oboes, cors anglais, bassoons and contrabassoon) it was one of his earliest, and most daring, works. Stevenson's transcription [2] was intended as a tribute to Grainger on his 78th birthday. It came about during Stevenson's preparations for writing an essay on Grainger's music. But, as Stevenson wrote, 'it was also made because I wanted to hear as often as I like this music which I love and admire. As far as I know, no version for piano solo exists.<sup>6</sup> So I made one.<sup>7</sup>

Grainger began *Hill Song No. 1* in 1901, while he was still a student at the Hoch Conservatoire in Frankfurt. It was a distillation of ideas he had toyed with as a teenager, in the 1890s. The source of inspiration for the piece was 'feelings aroused by the soul-shaking hill-scapes'<sup>8</sup> seen during a three-day hike in Argyll, in the west of Scotland. At that time, in his twentieth year, he said 'wildness and fierceness were the qualities in life and nature that I prized the most and wished to express in music.'<sup>9</sup> His explanation for the unusual woodwind orchestration of the piece was that his predilection for double-reed instruments represented the harsh, nasal tones of the piffero (similar to the oboe and mostly used in traditional music in the Italian Apennines), the Scottish Great Highland Bagpipe and 'some extremely nasal Egyptian double-reeds at the Paris Exhibition.' To him, these instruments represented the music of the hills, being of the 'wildest and fiercest tone type'.<sup>10</sup> Having encountered these timbres only separately, he sought to bring them all together in spirit by creating a rich polyphony as represented

<sup>6</sup> Grainger had in fact made a piano *reduction* of the wind scoring. It is found at the bottom of the wind score and is held by the British Library, London, as Barry Ould, President of the Percy Grainger Society, informed me in an e-mail conversation on 11 July 2018. Stevenson's transcription, naturally, makes the work more pianistic than what a straightforward reduction is intended to facilitate.

<sup>7</sup> Teresa Balough, *Comrades in Art: The Correspondence of Ronald Stevenson and Percy Grainger, 1957–61*, Toccata Press, London, 2010, p. 112.

<sup>8</sup> Reprinted in Thomas Lewis (ed.), *Source Guide to the Music of Percy Grainger*, as found at <http://www.percygrainger.org/prognost4.htm> (accessed 11 July 2018).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

by the western classical woodwind instruments for which the piece is scored – and so it serves as that meeting-place Malcolm MacDonald finds in Stevenson's music.

This polyphony leads to a central idea in Grainger's thought: 'musical democracy'. It was his belief that all instruments, parts or voices should have an equal share of the thematic material,<sup>11</sup> and is an approach that Stevenson takes up very strongly in some of the other transcriptions on this album.<sup>12</sup> Polyphony, by its nature, is conducive to 'musical democracy'.

In keeping with these wild, unrestrained feelings is what Grainger called 'non-architectural form-procedures'.<sup>13</sup> He wrote:

as music does not stand complete at any one moment (as architecture does), but unfolds itself in time – like a ribbon rolled out on the floor – I consider a flowing unfoldment of musical form to be part of the very nature of music itself. Therefore, in such a work as Hill-Song No. 1, I eschew all architectural up-buildment & try to avoid arbitrary treatments of musical ideas & the stressing of sectional divisions. My aim is to let each phrase grow naturally out of what foreran it & to keep the music continually at a white heat of melodic & harmonic inventiveness – never slowed up by cerebral afterthoughts or formulas. In other words I want the music, from first to last, to be *all theme* and never thematic treatment.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, repetition is intentionally absent for much of the piece, and the effect is that the music, like nature, grows and evolves of its own accord, playing by its own rules. Breaking free of the 'shackles' of a regular, predictable pulse heightens the wild feelings Grainger sought to express.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Translatable to the piano in terms of varying *tessitura*.

<sup>12</sup> In, for example, the *Chinese Folk-Song Suite*, *Ghanaian Folk-Song Suite* and *The High Road to Linton*.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> The experimental technique of irregular rhythms derives from a study Grainger undertook in 1899 of prose speech, and was first featured in his *Love Verses from 'The Song of Solomon'*. Grainger's aside is worth noting:

The 'innoculation' of the European continent with my irregular rhythms is easily traceable. Cyril Scott, with my enthusiastic permission, adopted my irregular rhythms in his Piano Sonata, op. 66, written in 1908. This finest of all modern piano sonatas was widely played in Central Europe by Alfred Hoehn soon after its appearance. By 1913 these irregular rhythms appear in Stravinsky's 'Rite of Spring' & other modernistic music of that period.

*Ibid.*

Rather oddly for a German-based music-student, Grainger tried to distance himself from contemporary German music. One of the hallmarks of this style as he received it was chromaticism, based upon scales composed of small intervals. He preferred 'wide-toned scales', such as the whole-tone scale of *Hill Song* No. 1, to make the music more 'island-like' (citing Britain, Iceland, Ireland and Scandinavia),<sup>16</sup> as un-central European as possible.

Grainger revised and re-orchestrated *Hill Song* No. 1 several times, and one version exists for two pianos. As already noted, Ronald Stevenson was not aware of a solo-piano transcription, but Grainger did in fact make a piano reduction of the work. The best transcribers leave their own mark on the music they touch,<sup>17</sup> and so Stevenson wrote to Grainger on 5 July 1960: 'I felt the need to make my setting a *comment* on your work, not merely a pale replica of it'.<sup>18</sup> His comment, in this case, makes the ingenious connection between *Hill Song* No.1 and Grainger's *Dedication*, the first of his 22 Rudyard Kipling settings – and so Stevenson transcribed *Dedication* and inserted it in to *Hill Song* No.1 at bar 253 (12:04), writing to Grainger:

*Dedication* and *Hill-Song I* have a common tonality (and were composed about the same time;

[...] there exist strong connections between them; the cadence in bar 1 of *Dedication* [...] is also found [throughout] *Hill-Song I* [...])

[...] the gapped [wide-intervalled] melody of *Dedication* [...] also features in *Hill-Song I* at [bar] 280 [15:34];

[...] *Dedication* itself, with its first line 'If I were hanged on the highest hill' is also a hill-song.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Ferruccio Busoni, one of the strongest influences on Stevenson's music and thought, remarked that composition and transcription are one and the same thing: both are a musical articulation of an abstract idea (Busoni, *A New Aesthetic of Music*, New York, 1907, p. 23).

<sup>18</sup> Balough, *op. cit.*, p. 112

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* *Dedication* is a poem found at the beginning of Kipling's novel 'The Light that Failed'. It is a powerful poem of a son's faith in a mother's love. (Grainger remained strongly attached to his mother throughout his life.)



He concludes, 'I think of my quotation of the Kipling song as a cairn on the hill, in honour of you.'<sup>20</sup> Grainger, impressed and delighted with Stevenson's work, replied:

it is a fine way to get to know a piece of music – to transcribe it, or orchestrate it, or otherwise creep inside its texture. [...] Your remarks about affinities between *Dedication* & *Hillsong* I are very clever & deep.<sup>21</sup>

For *Hill Song* No. 1 Grainger took inspiration from the west of Scotland. Stevenson, keenly aware of his dual Celtic heritage (Scottish on his father's side, Welsh on his mother's), took inspiration from wider Celtdom in ***Sounding Strings***, a set of pieces initially intended for the clarsach – the Gaelic harp, much smaller than the concert harp and, in Scotland, often the means by which children progress to the concert harp. Traditionally, it is an instrument that was either played by itself, or used to accompany one's own singing. *Sounding Strings*<sup>22</sup> can, however, be performed on harp, clarsach or piano, hence its presence here, and Stevenson has made the necessary accommodations for performance on the piano (omitting glissandi, and providing an *ossia* where artificial harmonics are called for on the harp). It is a compendium of Celtic tunes: all the Celtic nations are represented. Stevenson's titles and subtitles are given in inverted commas, followed by his tempo indications:

1. 'Harp of Gold (Y Delyn Aur): Welsh Air' – broad, bardic [3]
2. 'The Ash Grove (Llwyn On): Welsh Air' – *Allegretto* [4]
3. 'Hal-an-tow: The Floral Dance from Helston, Cornwall' – *Allegretto* [5]
4. 'A Fairy's Love Song: Hebridean Air', well known across Scotland – *Moderato* [6]
5. 'The Sheep under the Snow: Manx Air' – *Andante* [7]
6. 'Savourneen Deelish ('Samúirnín dílis'): Irish Gaelic Air' – Fairly slowly [8]
7. 'The Cockle-gatherer: Hebridean Dance-Song' – *Allegretto* [9]
8. 'Tune from County Derry: Irish Air' (otherwise known as the 'Londonderry Air' or 'Danny Boy') – Slowly [10]

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> Published by United Music Publishers in 1979, it features a beautiful front cover designed by Ronald Stevenson's daughter Gerda, an actress, poet and playwright.

9. 'Eriskay Love-Lilt: Hebridean Air', from the tiny island of Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides – *Andante, accarezzante* (caressingly) [11]
10. 'Ben Dorain: Scottish Gaelic Air' – *Moderato maestoso*<sup>23</sup> [12]
11. 'La Basse-Breton: Folk Dance from Brittany' – Allegro. The player is required to 'knock on the piano lid' (as the clarsair or harpist would knock on the sound board) [13].
12. 'The Old Woman's Reel [*Ruidhleadh Cailleach*]: Folk Dance from Barra, Outer Hebrides' – Not fast but fairly sprightly (remember it's an *old* woman's dance) [14]
13. 'L'Angelus Breton: Folk Song from Brittany' – *Andante amabile* (gently) [15]
14. 'The Christ Child's Lullaby: Hebridean Carol from South Uist' – *Andante* [16]. This piece is an extended version of the slightly simpler piano version which appears in the *Hebridean (South-Uist) Folk Song Suite*.<sup>24</sup> It uses a larger pitch-compass and sounds much fuller and more resonant than the understated, *semplice* version of the *Hebridean Suite*.

Ronald Stevenson habitually made such penetrating observations as to the way different musics of the world are linked. Very often, these observations are surprising, but the connections he made are ingenious. One striking example is the musical common ground identified by Stevenson between Scotland and the Far East. The main uniting factor is the use of the pentatonic scale. The ***Chinese Folk-Song Suite*** is a set of five pieces built upon pentatonic and hexatonic scales. There are two sources for the melodies Stevenson uses here, and he acknowledges them in the score: the Archive of Shanghai Conservatoire of Music, and the publication *Die Musikkultur Chinas* by Grigorij Schneerson.<sup>25</sup> The Suite is dedicated to the pianist Chiu Shou-Ping.

'The Washer-woman and the Flower-girl' [17] is built on the contrast between suitably florid counterpoint and detached chordal writing, which may evoke impressions of the

<sup>23</sup> The tune provides the basis for Stevenson's epic choral symphony, *In Praise of Ben Dorain*, premiered by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Scottish Opera Chorus, Glasgow University Chapel Choir and the Edinburgh Singers under James Grossmith at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on 19 January 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Recorded on Volume One of this series, Volume One (Toccata Classics TOCC 0272).

<sup>25</sup> VEB, Leipzig, 1955.

guzheng (a zither with movable bridges) or the keening sounds of the erhu (a bowed string instrument, arguably the sound most evocative of China). Grainger's influence isn't far away. When the contrapuntally treated melody returns after the detached section, the texture is inverted, and the melody is in the baritone register. Such a distribution of the thematic material is a logical application of Grainger's idea of 'musical democracy'. Also arranged for piano duet, 'A Song for New Year's Day' [18], is a spacious setting of the original melody; Stevenson marks the first chord 'gong-like (quasi tam-tam)', aiding that sense of space. 'The War-widow's Lament' [19] is the most desolate sounding piece in the set, again orchestrated so that the melody appears in various registers. Beginning with an iteration of the melody in the bass, each reiteration is lifted in pitch in tandem with a gradual filling-out of texture, in a sort of inexorable crescendo, leading to its anguished, declamatory climax. The music retreats in grief towards the end, ending *quasi recitativo*, with a sense of emptiness. 'Beautiful Fresh Flower' [20] is based on an arrangement of the same well-known song that Grainger, too, arranged, for piano and for orchestra. Stevenson's piano version is almost identical with Grainger's piano version. Indeed, 'Beautiful Fresh Flower' was the genesis for the rest of the suite: Grainger's arrangement so captured Stevenson's imagination that he wanted to verify whether the melody was original Grainger or a pre-existing melody. An opportunity to check its origin came upon Stevenson's appointment as visiting professor of piano at the Shanghai Conservatoire, a post he held for two months in 1985. He found the original melody in the archives of the Conservatoire. He was then stimulated to contribute his own settings of Chinese folk-music to the piano repertoire, and so *A Chinese Folk-song Suite* emerged. Like 'A Song for New Year's Day', 'Song of the Crab-fisher' [21] was arranged for piano duet. It brings more 'musical democracy', with the appearances of the tune in different registers adding to the joviality of the piece.

While he was living in South Africa, Stevenson discovered J. H. Kwabena Nketia's *Folksongs of Ghana*.<sup>26</sup> It was this collection which inspired and informed the *Ghanaian Folk-Song Suite*, which, like the *Chinese Folk-Song Suite*, was written in 1965. 'Song of

<sup>26</sup> University of Ghana, Legon, Accra/Oxford University Press, London, 1963.

Valour' [22] loosely takes the form of verse-chorus. In keeping with much music of the African continent, Stevenson highlights instances of cross-rhythm: most of the music is settled in  $\frac{6}{8}$ , but it slips very easily into  $\frac{3}{4}$ . 'Consolation' [23] is a lullaby in character, mostly chorale-like. Stevenson undertakes a probing exploration of the harmonic potential of an otherwise simple melody. The playful and energetic 'Leopard Dance' [24] closes the set. It is made up of four-bar phrases. Each four-bar phrase is followed by a phrase of the same length – often nearly an echo, though not literally. Its call-and-response format – in the context of rhythmically vibrant, physical music – is not unlike the waulking songs<sup>27</sup> of the Outer Hebrides. (That is entirely my own conjecture but, Stevenson being Stevenson, he may well have seen this similarity as a point of coalescence.)

In 1965 Stevenson relinquished his post at Cape Town, and returned to Scotland with his family for good. He lived in the village of West Linton, in the Scottish Borders south of Edinburgh, for the rest of his life. Less than an hour's drive to the south one crosses the border with England and enters Northumberland. This region of north-east England has had a chequered history over the past millennium, with the border often moving between Scotland and England as territory changed from one country to the other. One of the better-known folksongs from the area is *Bonny at Morn* [25], which Stevenson transcribed for solo piano on 15 November 1990. Unpublished, it was 'composed after reading W. Gillies Whittaker's superb essay, *The Folk-music of North-east England* in his *Collected Essays* (O.U.P., 1940);<sup>28</sup> The earliest instance of this folk-tune being recorded in print is in *Northumbrian Minstrelsy*, a collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century folksongs and pipe-tunes collected by John Collingwood Bruce and John Stokoe, published in 1882;<sup>29</sup> Whittaker affirmed the book as 'our chief treasure-store' of such melodies. Many of the tunes found therein were long thought to be Scottish: long after Northumberland had become part of England, Scottish folksong

<sup>27</sup> Waulking songs are traditionally sung by women as they waulk (cleanse and soften) woollen cloth; usually one woman sings the verse and the others the chorus. The fourth movement of Stevenson's *South Uist (Hebridean) Folk-Song Suite* is a 'Waulking Song'.

<sup>28</sup> Footnote appended to the manuscript in Stevenson's own hand.

<sup>29</sup> By the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne; reprinted by Folklore Associates, Hatboro, Pennsylvania, 1965.

collectors published collections containing Northumbrian airs, assuming that, because they were found in Scotland, they must have originated there: either because of the proximity of Northumberland or because the songs were sung north of the border for so long, they became adopted as Scottish. This particular song assumes the nature of a lullaby, although it bemoans the idleness of the young lad and lass of the house not rising for work in the morning, while the baby awakes that bit too early. *Bonny at Morn*, although audibly different from many Scottish folk-tunes, does share the Scottish predilection for wide melodic leaps. Stevenson casts the song as two verses instead of the version of three handed down by history. His setting is bathed in a serene, fresh brightness of sound achieved by using harmonies of stacked thirds, fourths and fifths.

Townfoot House, the Stevenson family home in West Linton, was once the home of the fiddler-composer Archibald Bain, one of two fiddlers thought to have written the well-known reel *The High Road to Linton*, although Malcolm MacDonald notes it might in fact be of Gaelic origin.<sup>30</sup> Stevenson's virtuosic setting [26], using the canon form as he so often favoured when setting folk-tunes, dates from April 1978. The piece features a Chopinesque coda by the Swedish musician John Fritzell, written while staying with the Stevensons in March 2005.<sup>31</sup> Fritzell visited the Stevenson home several times between 2000 and 2005. It was he who suggested *The High Road to Linton* be published but, feeling the original ending too abrupt, added the coda heard here. Stevenson approved. Here is a younger composer honouring the spirit of Stevenson in paying tribute to the master by making a musical comment, just as Stevenson did with Grainger in *Hill Song* No. 1.

Transcription, for Stevenson, wasn't always based on the written note. *Barra Flyting Toccata* [27] was written in April 1980, and is based on a tune Stevenson heard being sung by the Barra folksinger Flora McNeil in Edinburgh around 1970. Flyting is a bantering match between two people, or an exchange of insults, and always conducted in verse. It was an Anglo-Saxon creation,<sup>32</sup> and spread to Scotland in the fifteenth and sixteenth

<sup>30</sup> Ronald Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> E-mail conversation between John Fritzell and myself, dated 21 March 2018.

<sup>32</sup> The root of the word is in the Old English *flitan*, meaning 'quarrel'.

centuries, becoming a form of public entertainment. Stevenson recasts Flora McNeil's tune *Allegro con spirito* for solo piano, writing in the foreword to the score:

As their scolding grows livelier, it is set in canon and in increasing diminution (i.e., the voices coming closer together as if colliding). The final *stretto* (a quicker tempo) is a spirited song of the Barra woman's victory. She began by calling her rival a 'black besom'. She ends by revelling in her victory in argument.

The melody of the *Toccata* is set entirely within the pitch spectrum of the great highland bagpipe (a major ninth). It is in the pentatonic mode, in F sharp major (with one diversion to E flat major), making it Stevenson's own 'black-key etude' (cf. Chopin's *Étude* in G flat major, Op. 10, No. 5).<sup>33</sup> This short work of bravura, which, like the opening *Twì-Tune*, is in two voices, brings this album to a celebratory close.

**Christopher Guild** is becoming increasingly 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 UK's most prestigious concert venues, 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, Chris's 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 London's South Bank 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



<sup>33</sup> That said, Stevenson often used notes outside the pentatonic scale in harmonising folk tunes. Interested readers may wish to see Stevenson's foreword to his *Scottish Folk Music Settings for Piano*, published by the Ronald Stevenson Society (and recorded in its entirety on *Toccata Classics* TOCC 0272). It presents his thoughts on the harmonisation of folksongs, which are of considerable interest.

Sinfonia. He has worked with numerous composers, including Judith Weir, and co-founded the Edison Ensemble, a contemporary-music group based in London. Following a year's tenure as the Richard Carne Junior Fellow in Performance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Chris went on to become a teacher of Musicianship and Piano at Junior Trinity, and Head of Instrumental Music at the Godolphin School in Wiltshire. This is Chris' fourth album for Toccata Classics, and he has also recorded for Champs Hill Records. Writing in *International Record Review* 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](http://www.christopherguild.co.uk)

/christopherguildpianist



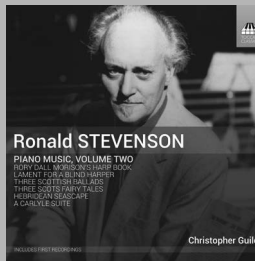
/christopher-guild-piano



@cguildpianist



## Already released





Recorded on 5 and 12 June 2016 (*Chinese Folk-Song Suite*, *Ghanaian Folk-Song Suite* and *Barra Flying Toccata*) and on 15 April 2018 (*African Twi-Tune*, *Hill Song No. 1*, *Sounding Strings*, *Bonny at Morn* and *The High Road to Linton*) at Turner Sims Concert Hall, Southampton

Piano: Steinway D

Recording engineer and producer: Adaq Khan ([www.adaqkhan.com](http://www.adaqkhan.com))

This recording was made possible through funding from the Ronald Stevenson Society ([www.ronaldstevensonsociety.org.uk](http://www.ronaldstevensonsociety.org.uk)) and Dr James Reid Baxter.

Booklet essay: Christopher Guild

Front cover: Ronald Stevenson at the fifteenth-century Cille Choirill church, Roybridge, Glen Spean, Lochaber, in the Scottish Highlands, photographed by Gerda Stevenson

Cover design: David M. Baker ([david@notneverknow.com](mailto:david@notneverknow.com))

Typesetting and lay-out: Kerrypress, St Albans

Executive Producer: Martin Anderson

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