

William Beaton MOONIE

INSTRUMENTAL AND CHAMBER MUSIC
VOLUME ONE: MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO

Christopher Guild

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

INTRODUCING THE PIANO MUSIC OF W. B. MOONIE

by Christopher Guild

William Beaton Moonie (1883–1961) is largely unknown among musicians and music historians. This recording is only the second ever to be devoted to his music.¹ He was a Scottish composer, based for most of his life in Edinburgh, whose output includes several operas, symphonic and choral works, songs, and chamber and instrumental music. A glance at his worklist will reveal a preoccupation with his native Scotland: tone-poems evoking the Scottish landscape or monuments, settings of work by Scottish poets such as Robert Burns and James Hogg, and homages to literary figures like Sir Walter Scott.

Moonie was born during a family holiday in Stobo, Peeblesshire. His father, James Moonie, was a well-established and respected Edinburgh musician, who wrote a significant number of choral and vocal works, mostly for ‘Mr Moonie’s Choir’, which he founded and directed. Moonie junior attended Daniel Stewart’s College before studying music at the University of Edinburgh, graduating in 1902. A Bucher scholarship enabled him to study at the Frankfurt Hochschule under Iwan Knorr from 1905 to 1908. That was at the same time as the ‘Frankfurt Group’ of composers – Percy Grainger, Roger Quilter, Henry Balfour Gardiner, Cyril Scott and Norman O’Neill – but there is no evidence of his having met or known any of them.

Upon completion of his studies and his return to Edinburgh, Moonie took various teaching positions at schools around the city, later becoming an examiner for the London College of Music. He also undertook further study privately with Donald Tovey, who encouraged him and played an important part in his early public success

¹ The other being *Perthshire Echoes*, a song and piano recital performed by Judith Buckle (mezzo-soprano) and Peter Bailey (piano), CD102, privately released in 2010.

by arranging for performances of his work. Other prominent musicians he is said to have known after his return to Scotland are Charles O'Brien, F. G. Scott and Erik Chisholm.

In addition to his various professional duties, Moonie owned a music-publishing house: Bruce, Clements & Co., latterly on Rutland Square in Edinburgh. Several works on this recording bear the 'Bruce, Clements & Co.' imprint at the bottom of the first page. The company published some 41 pieces, mainly by Moonie, although four were by his father James, one by Charles Beswick and, notably, another was Cedric Thorpe Davie's *Dirge for Cuthullin* (1935), for four-part chorus and orchestra. Moonie's older brother, James Clement Moonie, also used the modest office premises on Rutland Square in his capacity as secretary for Mr Moonie's Choir, the conductorship of which William took over after their father's death.

There is a large amount of piano music in W. B. Moonie's worklist, ranging from simple album leaves via settings of Scottish songs and pedagogical work for the beginner pianist to one large work for two pianos entitled *The Harvesters* and a piano concerto. Stylistically, most of it is strikingly conservative in the context of the early twentieth century, owing far more to Romanticism than to European modernism. In some pieces, indeed, one might draw comparisons with Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* for their lyrical melodicism and, in others, with Max Bruch. This conservatism is a keynote of Moonie's style and, one assumes, worldview. In spite of his close association with the Glaswegian composer Erik Chisholm, beginning in the 1930s,² Moonie remained perfectly impervious to the literary revolution unleashed by Hugh MacDiarmid from 1922 onwards, and to the music of MacDiarmid's friend Francis George Scott; it is striking that Edinburgh produced few of the (disparate) leading figures of the Scottish Literary Renaissance. Moonie's large output is overwhelmingly fixated on Scotland, but his Scotland is essentially that created by Sir Walter Scott, and then lovingly nurtured by the nineteenth- and twentieth-century bourgeois establishment – a Scotland safely consigned to the historical past. Two of Moonie's operas, for example, and his concert overture *1745* are set in the Jacobite era, and his last opera, *Lucy Ashton*, from the

² Cf. Jürgen Schaarwächter, *Two Centuries of British Symphonism*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, 2015, Vol. 1, pp. 411 *et seq.*

mid-1950s, is based on Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor*, a novel set at the start of the eighteenth century, and already used by Donizetti over a century earlier. In the post-modern 21st century, of course, sixty years after Moonie's death, his stylistic conservatism cannot be seen as somehow detracting from the very real qualities of his music.

Perthshire Echoes is a suite of six pieces published in 1924.³ Each piece is a rhapsody on a popular Scottish song from the eighteenth century onwards, and all are based on or around a famous place in Perthshire.

'Hunting Tower' [1] is based on the song of the same name (the original title being written as one word, 'Huntingtower'). It is about two lovers, Jamie and Jeanie. Jamie is a wealthy landowner, already married with children, and one of his chattels is the fifteenth-century Huntingtower Castle, once home of the Ruthven family, just to the west of Perth. After a brief introduction, Moonie follows the music of the song for the equivalent of the first verse, sung by Jeanie. He then begins to modulate to and explore a variety of different keys (from 00:28), and the melody, though clearly based on the original song, becomes freer and gives way to original invention. After a broad cadence at 01:28, the theme in its original key returns with more gusto and splendour before fading away at the end.

'Aberfeldy' [2] takes its point of departure from the Burns song of 1787, 'The Birks o' Aberfeldy'.⁴ It is an eclogue in homage of both Aberfeldy itself (with plentiful images of the river, the flora and the fauna) and the 'bonnie lassie' whom Burns implores to accompany him on his jaunt to Aberfeldy. Moonie begins his piano version of the song with a suitably upbeat introduction, skipping along to the main part of the piece. As with 'Hunting Tower', he follows the tune of the song until 00:14 before taking the music into different tonal areas. A light-hearted, elfin-like dialogue between upper and lower parts ensues briefly (at 00:41).

'Balquhider'⁵ [3] is taken from Robert Tannahill's song 'Braes of Balquhider', the place in question being a village near Loch Voil in Stirlingshire.⁶ The village is known

³ He also wrote a version of this work for wind septet.

⁴ 'Birk': Scots word for birch tree.

⁵ Pronounced 'Balwhither' or '-whether', the phoneme 'quh' in Scots being the equivalent of 'wh' in English.

⁶ Balquhider now falls under the administrative ambit of Stirlingshire, but historically it was located in Perthshire.

for being the resting place of Rob Roy MacGregor (1671–1734), the infamous Scottish outlaw. In ‘Braes of Balquhiddie’ the narrator of the poem implores a young lady to spend a long summer’s day with him. She isn’t sure, being ‘too young to be your lover / For my age is scarce sixteen’. The poet persuades her, saying he’ll go without her, and with another lover, and she then gives in:

Oh come back, oh come back
For I think you’re no deceiver
Oh come back, oh come back
I will never love none other
I will leave all my friends
Father, Mother, Sister, Brother
And I will go along with you
To the braes of Balquhiddie.

Oh now they have gone
To that bonnie highland mountain
For to view the green fields
Likewise its silvery fountain
It’s there they are united
And joined in love together
Spend a long summer day
By the braes of Balquhiddie.

Moonie follows the original melody up to 00:27, before departing on his own path, as with the other songs in the set. Texturally and sonically, ‘Balquhiddie’ suggests the adaptation of a chorus with piano accompaniment:⁷ it is largely homogeneous, with octaves in the lower bass register and broken chordal writing typical of piano music. A short interlude at 01:11 aside, it is also largely within the respective vocal ranges of choral singers.

⁷ There is a setting of this text for mixed chorus by Moonie.

‘The Lass o’ Gowrie’ [4] is an upbeat *scherzando* based on a cheerful song by Lady Oliphant, Carolina Nairne (1766–1845), about a laird who successfully woos the lass of the title; it is implied that they marry and live happily ever after. It is the most light-hearted of the set, and has the strongest sense of narrative.

Lady Oliphant also wrote the words for the next song in Moonie’s suite, ‘House o’ Gask’ [5]. This one is more nostalgic, being a fond recollection of ‘the Auld Hoose’ which has, with the exception of a period in the eighteenth century, been the seat of the Oliphant clan since the seventeenth.⁸ Lady Oliphant herself was born in this house. It is the simplest of Moonie’s pieces in *Perthshire Echoes*, similar in its lyricism and choral-like textures to ‘Balquhider’.

Moonie’s reworking of the final piece, ‘Blair-Athol’ [6] by James Hogg (1770–1835), ‘the Ettrick shepherd’,⁹ rounds off the set in grand style. The song on which it is based, ‘Cam’ ye by Athol?’, is a gathering song. Blair Atholl (in the modern spelling) is a village above Pitlochry, in North Perthshire; Blair Castle belonged to the Murrays, a clan which supported the Jacobite House of Stuart. It was at Blair Atholl that forces were recruited and gathered under Lord George Murray in 1745 before marching north to Culloden, near Inverness, to stand against the Hanoverians. Hogg’s song celebrates Prince Charles Edward Stuart (‘Bonnie Prince Charlie’) and his cause. His original melody is heard (with Moonie’s usual free-composed departures) after an introduction redolent of an orchestral *tutti*.

A Scottish Chap-book, Bk.1 is a collection of six character pieces.¹⁰ They remain in manuscript, despite being some of Moonie’s strongest pieces for solo piano. Each piece

⁸ Gask lies in the Perthshire countryside, a few miles south of the A85, the road that runs between Crieff and Perth.

⁹ Hogg is best remembered today as the author of the radically adventurous novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, which was published anonymously in London in 1824. He also collected (and may have written some of) the 167 songs in *The Jacobite Relics of Scotland; Being the Songs, Airs, and Legends, of the Adherents to the House of Stuart*, published in two volumes in 1819 and 1821 by Blackwood in Edinburgh – although, surprisingly, ‘Blair Athol’ is not one of them.

¹⁰ Although this is the very title written on the manuscript in Moonie’s hand, there do not appear to have been any further *Scottish Chap-books*. A chapbook was a short publication, intended for a popular market, of up to 40 pages, saddle-stitched, and an important medium for popular culture. The tradition of chapbooks arose in the sixteenth century and flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth; although the term ‘chapbook’ seems to have been coined only in 1824, its use by Moonie implies a degree of archaism.

creates a picture of something particularly Scottish, whether a specific place, part of the countryside, a piece of history or a character from Scottish poetry.

‘In a Quiet Strath’ [7] begins the set, and the pastoral nature of the music is immediately apparent in its calm, pleasant and largely untroubled character. ‘Strath’ is the Scots word for a wide glen, or valley, among the mountains.

‘The “Kind” Gallows of Crieff’ [8] shows Moonie at his most dissonant and, perhaps, disturbing. Crieff is an old market town in Perthshire, sitting between the southernmost Scottish Highlands and the northernmost Lowlands. In the days when cattle-drovers brought their livestock across the country, Crieff naturally became a meeting town for a large number, and variety, of characters.¹¹ Crime and killings also burgeoned, and criminals were executed at the gallows, apparently large enough to hang six people at once.

‘Rowing Song (an Iorram)’ [9] is, as Moonie’s subtitle has it, ‘based on a Western Highland Air’, although he provides no further details as to which it might be. One could assume he took the outline of the first part of the Air, and melodically extended and changed it, as he did throughout *Perthshire Echoes*, but it feels more likely that this is an original melody of Moonie’s. Certainly, the modulation (to the flattened submediant, a very remote key to the tonic G major) at 00:31 is uncharacteristic of Hebridean folk-melody. But a characteristic of West Highland music is the use of grace notes, which Moonie includes in his composition.

‘The Goblin Ha’ [10] is, according to Moonie’s instructions in the score, ‘to be played in an eerie, “creepy”, supernatural manner’. There is certainly something of Mussorgsky’s ‘Gnomus’ from *Pictures at an Exhibition* in its unnerving, strange opening.¹² The piece is meant to portray the Hobgoblin Hall of Yester Castle, near Gifford, East Lothian (a little outside Edinburgh).¹³ The castle, now ruined, dates from the thirteenth century,

¹¹ As it happens, Martin Anderson, the founder of Toccata Classics, was brought up in Crieff, and went to school there at Morrison’s Academy, which was founded in 1860 on the site of the former cattle market, which had moved south, to Falkirk.

¹² On another copy of the manuscript Moonie notes that this piece was based on a motif by Prokofiev, but he doesn’t state which one.

¹³ Not to be confused with nearby Yester House, famously the home of the Italian-American composer Giancarlo Menotti (1911–2007) from 1972 until his death.

having been granted by William the Lion (king of Scotland between 1165 and 1214) to Hugh de Giffard, head of a Norman family which had served King David I (r. 1124–53). Hugh was known as ‘The Wizard of Yester’, having an interest in necromancy and so considered a powerful warlock. It was said that he practised sorcery in the undercroft of the castle, where he made pacts with the Devil and raised armies of hobgoblins to carry out his will – which is why the undercroft came to be known as the ‘Goblin Hall’.¹⁴ Moonie has created a fantastical, slightly grotesque piece to tell this story vividly. The goblin army is first summoned at 00:47; Moonie may have found some inspiration for its march in the music Grieg wrote for the trolls in his score for Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*.

‘Gaberlunzie’ [11] is a character piece. It is one of two versions of the piece: the other is found as part of the manuscript of *Five Pieces for Piano*, but in a slightly higher key. A gaberlunzie is a pedlar, or someone licensed to beg by the monarch; the word itself comes from mediaeval Scots, and is used in several of Sir Walter Scott’s works. The piece is upbeat, sprightly and cheerful.

‘Caberfeidh’ [12] takes its title from the Scots Gaelic word for a stag’s antlers, *caber feidh*. The full title of the piece was ‘The Country of the Caber Feidh (i.e. Mackenzie or Seaforth Country with a deer-horn emblem)’, which Moonie shortened to a single word at a later date.¹⁵ The ‘caber feidh’ part of Scotland is Ross-shire, north-west of Inverness, the land from whence the Mackenzie clan came. The Seaforth Highlanders had their garrison at Fort George, east of Inverness, but in 1961 they were amalgamated with other Scottish army regiments. The recruits came from all over the far north of Scotland, including Ross-shire.

The piece opens with a figuration reminiscent of the skirl of the bagpipes, creating an air of keening, nobleness and mystery. There is no dynamic marked at the beginning, but when played quietly (as it is here) *lontano* (‘distantly’), it could suggest the vast expanses of wild land in Ross-shire. The far north is among the least populated areas of the United Kingdom, and whatever the argument for putting such land to better practical use, it is something extraordinary to behold, and gloriously unique to that part

¹⁴ The word ‘Ha’ of the piece’s title is pronounced with a long ‘aa’ sound: it is the Scots word for ‘hall’.

¹⁵ There are no dates on the score, but it is safe to assume these changes came at a later stage.

of the world. Following the introduction, the piece is much more march-like, proud and ebullient, with suggestions of Scottish melody.

Moonie's set of *Five Pieces for Piano*, like the *Scottish Chap-book*, is unpublished and undated. The first piece, 'Autumn', is also part of the *Five Romantic Pieces* featured on this recording. Both 'Autumns' are identical, and so, given that it wouldn't make sense to feature it twice on the same album, I chose to exclude it from the *Five Pieces*. There were two factors in making this particular choice: Moonie's handwriting, and my own musical judgement. Moonie's writing is generally fairly neat – but it is much less consistently so in the *Five Pieces*. 'i. Autumn' and 'ii. Pensée Fugitive' both seem to be rough copies, whereas the remaining three pieces, 'iii. L'Épinette', 'iv. Elegy' and 'v. Ariette', are immaculately written out as if for public distribution (for example, the stems of the notes look as if they have been drawn in with a ruler). A few thoughts naturally occur. 'Autumn' might have been written earlier and included here as an afterthought. The *Five Pieces* may, in the end, have been rejected by Moonie for public exposure, which is why 'Autumn' found its way, in fairer copy, into the *Five Romantic Pieces*. Moreover, *Five Romantic Pieces* is even more successful as a set than the *Five Pieces*. Each movement stands up well on its own, but the *Five Pieces* are presented here as an edited set of four nonetheless, in which form they still hold their own.

The *Four Pieces*, as I should perhaps now call them, are Moonie's most melancholic piano works. The set opens with 'Pensée Fugitive' ('Restless Thought') [13], brooding and unsettled, which obsesses on its opening motif: its rhythm occurs in nearly every bar of melodic writing throughout. 'L'Épinette' [14] refers to the Spinet ('épinette' being the French name for said instrument). The piece is in three sections, fast–slow–fast. The fast outer sections could certainly suggest rapid passagework played on a seventeenth-century keyboard instrument. The central slow section is typical, lyrical Moonie, its long, *cantabile* phrases being occasionally interjected with low, *staccato* octaves. The most emotionally substantial piece in this set is probably the yearning 'Elegy' [15]. It also has the most densely chromatic harmonic language, with allusions to the whole-tone scale in its main theme stated at the beginning. An 'Ariette' [16] concludes the *Four Pieces*. Its first section is *arioso*, songlike, the second section being the most varied, traversing

a number of tumultuous emotions (including something approaching exhilaration). It then winds down to the opening music, gently subsiding to its conclusion.

Arabesque [17] was published by Bruce, Clements & Co. in 1923. It is a pleasant, untroubled piece, owing much to Chopin, particularly through the figuration of its treble-register passagework. The central section, in the subdominant key, alludes to the mazurka through its sprightly triple-metre character emphasising the second beat of the bar.

Moonie's *Five Romantic Pieces* are the latest-known pieces on this recording, dating from 1955. The score is handwritten on what looks like shop-bought manuscript paper, but was evidently prepared for sale to the general public in facsimile. It comes with a handwritten front cover declaring copyright to be assigned to Bruce, Clements & Co., and the price of 12/-.¹⁶ It is curious that it is not typeset, as the earlier published works are.¹⁷

'Linn' is an old Scots word for waterfall. It is easy to have such an image in mind when one listens to the first piece, 'The Linn' [18], with its constant semiquaver burbling and occasional cascading passagework.¹⁸ 'Idylle' [19] uses similar figuration, but is further extended and more complex harmonically. 'Gaberlunzie' [20] returns, but this time in A major and with the addition of a four-bar introduction; it is otherwise the same piece as in *A Scottish Chap-book*. 'Autumn' [21] is brooding and lyrical, searching in its character and never settling harmonically. The 'Rondino in G' [22] is by far the most substantial piece in the set. Puppet-like and jaunty, it is mostly bright-eyed and untroubled despite the occasional foray into more chromatic passages.

Reverie [23], published by Bruce, Clements & Co. in 1922, is a song without words, the melody initially being sounded in the upper tenor register, as with many of the vocal transcriptions for piano that form Thalberg's *L'Art du chant appliqué au piano*.¹⁹ *Reverie*

¹⁶ That is, twelve shillings, the equivalent of 60p in decimal coinage.

¹⁷ It is also curious that Bruce, Clements & Co. is thought to have ceased trading in the 1940s: <https://claimedfromstationershall.wordpress.com/2020/08/05/bruce-clements-and-co/>.

¹⁸ It is just possible that Moonie was aware of another Perthshire connection here, since The Linn is a natural pool formed by a bend in a river called Water of Ruchill, just before it joins the River Earn outside Comrie, a village to the west of Crieff – but the pictorialism of the music makes that unlikely.

¹⁹ Moonie also wrote a version of *Reverie* for solo voice.

might be put to good use as an etude in *cantabile* playing for students. It is a piece which basks in its own warm glow, rounding off this first-ever recording devoted to W. B. Moonie's piano music.

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 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 School 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 ninth 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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Producer-engineer: Adaq Khan (www.adaqkhan.com)

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W. B. MOONIE Instrumental and Chamber Music, Vol. 1: Piano Music

<i>Perthshire Echoes</i> (publ. 1924)*	19:09
① I Hunting Tower	2:51
② II Aberfeldy	2:16
③ III Balquhiddel	3:56
④ IV The Lass o' Gowrie	3:24
⑤ V House o' Gask	2:12
⑥ VI Blair-Athol	4:30
<i>A Scottish Chap-book, Book 1</i> (undated)	23:00
⑦ I In a Quiet Strath	4:11
⑧ II The 'Kind' Gallows of Crieff	3:48
⑨ III Rowing Song (an Iorram)	5:01
⑩ IV The Goblin Ha'	4:18
⑪ V Gaberlunzie	1:33
⑫ VI The Country of the Caberfeidh	4:09
Five Pieces for Piano (undated)	
⑬ No. 2 Pensée Fugitive	2:31
⑭ No. 4 L'Épinette	6:09
⑮ No. 3 Elegy	5:24
⑯ No. 5 Ariette	3:06
⑰ <i>Arabesque</i> (publ. 1923)	3:49
<i>Five Romantic Pieces</i> (1955)	15:35
⑱ No. 1 The Linn	1:53
⑲ No. 2 Idylle	3:15
⑳ No. 3 Gaberlunzie	1:52
㉑ No. 4 Autumn	3:03
㉒ No. 5 Rondino in G	5:32
㉓ Reverie (publ. 1922)	4:16

Christopher Guild, piano

TT 83:00

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