

Martin EASTICK

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

INTRODUCTION ET RONDO BRILLANT, OP. 3

GRANDE VALSE DE CONCERT, OP. 12

TROIS MORCEAUX, OP. 2

DEUX MORCEAUX, OP. 4

DEUX VALSES, OP. 13

Ian Hobson

ECHOES OF A GOLDEN AGE: MARTIN EASTICK'S PIANO MUSIC

by David Hackbridge Johnson

The pianist, composer and collector Martin Eastick has amassed what is surely one of the largest private libraries of sheet music in the world. He has explored ancient shops in out-of-the-way places, more recently online as well as in person, but he has also benefited from collections that come up for sale – those whose owners have run out of space, or are deceased – and library sales, where due to craven cuts to services, borough after borough has ensured that its sheet-music holdings are the first to be struck off its catalogue. Truth be told – and I speak from experience, as someone with my own collection, not a few items of which have been supplied by Martin – sheet music is nowhere until you start looking, then it's everywhere, your eye and sometimes your nose leading you to the most neglected corners of junkshops – there, under a clothes-rail of fusty, shapeless old jackets, comes a set of unknown songs by some long-forgotten composer.

Martin Eastick's taste in sheet music is reflected in his compositional style; he favours the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly those composers who have slightly fallen between the cracks, if not historically, at least in terms of modern performance and programming.¹ In a time when by and large it is the independent recording labels, not the 'majors', that are flying the flag for composers like the Scharwenka brothers, Philipp and Xaver, and Woldemar Bargiel (Robert Schumann's step-brother-in-law), Martin's collection has regularly been perused, even plundered, by performers and producers seeking the unusual with which to leaven the sometimes tired bread of the standard repertoire. The record-producer

¹ As a flavour of the ongoing collection, a recent visit to Martin revealed that he had not long taken receipt of a large bound volume of Jacques Blumenthal piano works, a first edition of Dussek's *Simphonie Concertante* (sic) for two pianos with *ad libitum* parts for two violins, viola and bass, and was actively pursuing the work of the Hungarian composer-pianist and darling of the Viennese salons, József Lamberg (1852–1940).

Mike Spring (who planned the series of ‘Romantic Piano Concertos’ on Hyperion) and the pianists Marc-André Hamelin and Ian Hobson, the performer on this recording, are among many who have beaten a path to the Easticks’ door – Martin’s wife, Sheila, is a clarinetist – where they have found a warm welcome and been faced with floor-to-ceiling shelves full to bursting with forgotten treasures. As a violinist these days more prone to sight-reading marathons than concerts, I have often been surprised by the richness of repertoire Martin has opened up for me as we read through heaps of music, before being called to the kitchen for a hearty plate of roast lamb and roast potatoes. I remember with particular delight the time he pulled off the shelves some short character pieces and sonatinas for violin and piano by Yevgeny Svetlanov, bound in attractive sky-blue card. ‘Where on earth did you get these?’, I asked. ‘Oh, I can’t remember, somewhere or other’, came the reply.² If it were at all possible to recreate the journeys taken to make a collection such as Martin’s, the resulting map would be a dense, unsolvable cat’s cradle of interlocking lines with detours, culs-de-sac, dim alleyways and roads long since buried under a new shopping mall. The map of culture is ever-changing, and its more arcane avenues are charted by people like Martin Eastick, who fear their disappearance.

Martin was born in 1957, and studied piano every Thursday after school with a local teacher and friend of his mother, Violet Gutteridge, known as Auntie Vi. Gutteridge was a former student of Tobias Matthay’s and gave lessons in Strathyre Avenue, Thornton Heath, in south London, where also lived her husband Norman, and a cat that required quantities of cooked fish, resulting in a smell that permeated the entire house. After this tuition ceased, he was essentially self-taught, developing a virtuoso technique through absorption of the nineteenth-century classics. The only exam he took was Grade 5 theory – no O-Level, no A-Level, no conservatoire lessons. He became active as an accompanist and gave recitals, primarily of compositions for piano duet, with the flautist, pianist and composer Simon Ballard before meeting Sheila, with whom he played in a number of recitals and who was to become his wife. He travelled abroad several times for performances, most notably in the Château d’Eu, on the Picardy coast

² I recently brought up this topic with Martin, and he was able to recall that the music actually came from a former student of Svetlanov.

in northern France, and for Italian Swiss radio. He was once invited to give a recital consisting of works by Johann Peter Pixis, Ignaz Moscheles and Daniel Steibelt – a selection of the latter's 36 *Bacchanals* and 12 *Divertissements for piano, tambourine and triangle ad libitum* being a special requirement of the occasion. In the meantime he worked for many years in banking and hated every moment of it.

Martin has composed for the piano throughout his life; the work-list is not long but reflects a fastidious attention to both the styles and textures of Romantic pianism stemming from Fryderyk Chopin, Moritz Moszkowski, Leopold Godowsky, Ossip Gabrilowitsch, Ignacy Paderewski and others in the composer-pianist tradition. His pieces might have found a place in the recitals of golden-age pianists, as did Paderewski's 'Minuet in G', the first of his *Humoresques de concert*, Op. 14, and Moszkowski's 'Étincelles' (8 *Characteristic Pieces*, Op. 36, No. 6). Martin's titles reflect the nineteenth-century fondness for genre pieces with dance-form or poetic nomenclature. In addition to piano music, Martin has also written a substantial amount of music for clarinet and piano and one piece for saxophone and piano.

Ternary and variation form are favoured over sonata structures, this despite Martin's advocacy of the neglected sonatas of Carl Czerny, several of whose grandest examples of the genre he read through for me to my astonishment – rich and powerful music far-removed from the Czerny of the exercises and studies. Martin's music is imbued with the velvet sonorities of the salon; the music is perfect in its patterning and ergonomic feel for the hands at the instrument – difficulties are overcome by the idiomatic nature of their challenges. The harmonic language is rooted in the nineteenth century; Martin does not venture into the worlds of Skryabin or Prokofiev, and yet within his chosen time-capsule he has found a rich vein of expression, original within its established boundaries and not at all fazed by the intervening decades. Some of his most beguiling pages reflect an *Alt Wien* nostalgia, a past evoked by Godowsky in his piano piece of that name and in the elegiac memoir *Die Welt von Gestern* ('The World of Yesterday') by Stefan Zweig,³ a past viewed with love yet tinged with regret. It could be argued that

³ Zweig's publisher, too, worked from a position of exile: the book was brought out by Bermann-Fischer Verlag in Stockholm in 1942.

musical innovation gallops over itself in what Richard Taruskin frequently called ‘the rush to the patent office’;⁴ as soon as one voice is heard, it is elbowed out of the way, a phenomenon particularly true of the twentieth century, where outrage upon outrage keeps ears ringing with startling newness. Martin has not closed his ears to the twentieth century – a fondness for chromatic harmony suggests a hint of jazz, as found in the highly ornate work of Art Tatum – but it is as if he has said ‘What if the vein of the nineteenth century is still capable of being mined? What happens when you extend the past like a reassuring finger into the present?’. He is not alone in his continuing of traditions long thought outmoded; he might be considered as part of a loose association of composers united by their pursuing of the music they hear, rather than what they think they ought to write. This unaffiliated group might include the composer-pianists David Earl,⁵ Michael Garrett,⁶ Neil Crossland⁷ and Geoff Cummings Knight.⁸

The *Trois Morceaux*, Op. 2, consist of a ‘Valse Sentimentale’ (dating from 1989, with a revision ‘completed 10th May 2013’), ‘Consolation’ (1987, revised in 2011), and a mazurka (written in 1984 and revised twice, in 2005 and 2011). The pieces refer, in their titles at least, to Tchaikovsky (his ‘Valse Sentimentale’, Op. 51, No. 6), Liszt (who wrote a set of six pieces called *Consolations*, s172) and Chopin (who wrote as many as 59 mazurkas, with others now thought lost). Although Tchaikovsky’s ‘Valse Sentimentale’ is in F minor as opposed to Eastick’s A minor [□], there are similarities in mood and in the way the music creates tension out of the ascending and descending forms of the harmonic minor scale – the melody often uses G and F in falling phrases whereas the harmony requires G sharp to create the dominant chord; there is thus a feeling of false relations throughout. As in Tchaikovsky’s piece, there is a middle section in the tonic

⁴ An example of the phrase ‘rush to the patent office modernism’ in relation to Prokofiev’s Second Symphony can be found in Taruskin’s *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, pp. 193–96.

⁵ David Earl (born 1951), of South African origin but long resident in England.

⁶ Michael Garrett (1944–2023), born in Leicestershire, died in Edinburgh. Composer of hundreds of piano works in addition to symphonies, concertos and one unfinished opera.

⁷ Neil Crossland, born in Yorkshire. Composer of many works in a rich Romantic vein.

⁸ Geoff Cummings Knight (1947–2025). Composer of cycles of piano music, two symphonies, chamber music. Particularly successful with operas for children.

major. The ‘Consolation’ [2] is in D flat major and has a distinctly English feel to it, with harmonic colourings that may remind some listeners of Frank Bridge or John Ireland – the latter’s ‘In a May Morning’ from *Sarnia*, for example. The chording is rich and often driven by contrapuntal devices such as imitation between the hands – a characteristic of Eastick’s music is dialogue between soprano and tenor voices, as typified in the *ne plus ultra* of such writing, Chopin’s *Nocturne* in E flat, Op. 55, No. 2. There is an ornamental delicacy to the opening section of the *Mazurka* [3], and yet it is a piece also tinged with melancholy. Again, there is dialogue in the right hand with competing voices, this time soprano and alto, as in a duet. The key is F sharp minor, with a more lively middle section beginning in F sharp major, and containing within it a ‘jump’ (i.e., unprepared) modulation to A major, and a lengthy detour to D flat major and B flat minor, where the music becomes intense and passionate in a manner that recalls the style of Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. Eventually the music returns to the fragile, wistful mood of the opening, ending this most substantial piece of the set with a *tierce de picardie* – a cadence in the major key rather than the expected minor.

The *Introduction et Rondo Brillant*, Op. 3, dedicated to Simon Ballard, inhabits the world of early nineteenth-century virtuoso pianism, where pianists of the day might engage in jousting competitions to decide who had supremacy – the best-known such match, between Franz Liszt and Sigismond Thalberg, taking place in March 1837 and ending in a draw. Martin Eastick’s style is pushed back some years from those of Liszt and Thalberg; the music is an unashamed exercise in *stile antico* since he positions the work in the language of composer-pianists such as Hummel, Czerny and Friedrich Kalkbrenner. The opening [4] is arresting; rolled chords in E flat major, the key of Haydn’s grandest sonata and sharing some of that composer’s noble exposition. There follows a *cantabile* melody in the *bel canto* style beloved of those pianists captivated by opera; it is Italianate, with a rocking left-hand accompaniment and full of the ornamentation expected of the best *divas*. There is a suggestion that a work such as Kalkbrenner’s *Grand Sonata* in A flat, Op. 177, might lie behind the chosen aesthetic; there are similarities in the way the piano texture is laid out that chime with the first movement of the

Kalkbrenner sonata. The music remains in E flat apart from brief forays into G flat major and G sharp minor, leading to a passage in B flat major. The rondo theme [5] begins just after the four-minute mark; it presents a disarmingly simple tune in $\frac{6}{8}$ compound time, a gigue rhythm such as Hummel used for his Rondo in C major, Op. 52, No. 6 – ideal material for all manner of extrapolations, which indeed Eastick delivers. Simplicity gives way to increasingly virtuoso passages: rapid semiquavers, dialogues between the hands, flying arpeggios. Six minutes into the rondo there is a *minore* section, the theme now transformed into something of a lament in E flat minor. A dreamy passage in B major follows before E flat major establishes its primacy once more. As is to be expected, the piece ends in a blaze of octaves and grand chords.

The 'Impromptu' [6], the first of the *Deux Morceaux de Concert*, Op. 4, like the Mazurka from Op. 2, was written in 1984 but later much revised; the score says: 'completely rewritten April/May 2011'. The layout of the piece recalls that of *Rosemary* by Frank Bridge, although Eastick's piece is fuller in texture, particularly as it develops into richer byways from the main theme. For comparison, Ex. 1 shows how Bridge starts *Rosemary* and Ex. 2 presents the start of Eastick's 'Impromptu'. The kinship here reveals once more an English pastoral flavour that, when added to Eastick's penchant for the virtuosic, makes a telling synthesis. The middle section, beginning at 1:30, is in C sharp minor and is quite extensive, with the passionate theme treated, after its first iteration, in the tenor with right-hand elaborations. The opening theme returns at 4:30 but is extended by means of passages in double thirds that have drifted in from Chopin's Étude in G sharp minor, Op. 25, No. 6. In spite of the warm Romanticism of the music, it is achieved by an extraordinary degree of counterpoint of a textural rather than an academic kind; this Impromptu is the closest Eastick gets to Godowsky. For the second piece of the set, 'Gavotte-Caprice' [7], Eastick essays the neo-Baroque, something Godowsky was also fond of doing. In spite of its Baroque-dance title, the music is combined with Romantic caprice; the rhythmic tropes of the gavotte are set to the full panoply of late-nineteenth-century pianistic expression, with the part-writing reaching Rachmaninov-like complexity on occasion.

Ex. 1

Andante espressivo e molto rubato



scope of the piece allows for some remarkable modulations that are an indication that Eastick knows well the Strauss transcriptions of Moriz Rosenthal.

Nothing encapsulates the intoxicating lure of a lost past more than the two exquisite waltzes with which Ian Hobson's recital concludes. These waltzes capture hints of Mischa Levitski's Waltz in A, Op. 2, and more especially Alfred Grünfeld's 'Valse mélancolique', Op. 53, No. 3, suggesting that Martin Eastick fully inhabits the rarefied world of the salons when at their peak, when the half-expected turmoil of war could be set aside for the hopes of the continuation of gilded, poetic values. The 'Valse Intime', Op. 13, No. 1 [9], positively drips appoggiaturas, chromatic embellishments and harmonic side-steps – music worthy of any *fin-de-siècle* gathering. The title of the 'Petite Valse Viennoise', Op. 13, No. 2 [10], confirms the geographical location, with an appropriately insinuating melodic line, falling and now rising.

David Hackbridge Johnson is a composer, poet and writer on music and literature. He has written eighteen symphonies, four operas and dozens of chamber pieces and songs. Albums of his music have been issued by Métier, Steinway and Toccata Classics. His poems and essays have been published by The Guardian, The Fortnightly Review, PN Review, The Salzburg Review and Shearsman Press.

Ian Hobson, pianist and conductor, enjoys an international reputation, both for his performances of the Romantic repertoire and of neglected piano music old and new, and for his assured conducting from both the piano and the podium, renewing interest in the music of such lesser-known masters as Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Hummel. He is also an effective advocate of works written expressly for him by contemporary composers, among them John Gardner, Benjamin Lees, David Liptak, Alan Ridout and Roberto Sierra.

As guest soloist, Ian Hobson has appeared with the world's major orchestras; those in the United States include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra, the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Florida, Houston, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh and St Louis, the American Symphony



Orchestra and the Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico. Elsewhere, he has been heard with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Hallé Orchestra in the UK, and the RSO Wien, Orchester der Beethovenhalle, Moscow Chopin Orchestra, Israeli Sinfonietta and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Born in Wolverhampton in 1952 and one of the youngest-ever graduates of the Royal Academy of Music, Ian Hobson subsequently pursued advanced studies at both Cambridge University and Yale University. He began his international career in 1981 when he won First Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, having previously earned silver medals at both the Arthur Rubinstein and Vienna Beethoven competitions. A professor in the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), he received the endowed chair of Swanlund Professor of Music in 2000 and is now the Swanlund Emeritus Professor.

He is also in much demand as a conductor, particularly for performances in which he doubles as a pianist. He made his debut in this capacity in 1996 with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, and has since appeared with the English Chamber Orchestra, the Fort Worth Chamber Orchestra, the Sinfonia Varsovia (at Carnegie Hall), the Pomeranian Philharmonic and the Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra of Israel, among others. He also performs extensively as pianist-conductor with Sinfonia da Camera, a group he formed in 1984 and which quickly gained international recognition through its recordings.

To date he has amassed a discography of some sixty releases, mostly on the Zephyr label, including the complete piano sonatas of Beethoven and Schumann, a complete edition of Brahms' piano variations and the complete piano works by Chopin. With the violinist Sherban Lupu he recorded, as pianist and conductor, the complete works of Ernst for Toccata Classics, a project that had almost been completed when Lupu died in 2023. Again for Toccata Classics he has recorded piano music by Edward and Kate Loder (TOCC 0322 and 0321) and Harold Truscott (TOCC 0252). He has released three albums in a pioneering series of recordings of the early orchestral works by Martinů, also for Toccata Classics (TOCC 0156, 0249 and 0414). Four albums in a series of the orchestral music of Moritz Moszkowski began with Ian Hobson conducting the Sinfonia Varsovia in Moszkowski's monumental symphonic poem *Johanna d'Arc* (TOCC 0523), its first-ever recording, received with astonished superlatives around the world. The second volume (TOCC 0557), which presented the Second and Third Orchestral Suites, Opp. 47 and 79, again with the Sinfonia Varsovia, was equally well received, likewise Volume Three, with the Overture in D major, First Orchestral Suite, Op. 39, and Prelude and Fugue for

strings, Op. 85 (TOCC 0598). Volume Four (TOCC 0615) featured Moszkowski's Symphony in D minor of 1873 and *Laurin: Six Episodes from the Ballet*. Four Toccata Classics albums (TOCC 0468, 0472, 0743 and 0766) of the orchestral music of the Austrian Richard Stöhr (1874–1967) have helped revive interest in this once-prominent composer, another refugee from Nazism who found exile in the United States, with the music and Ian Hobson's performances alike attracting warm praise from the reviewers.

www.ianhobson.net



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Recording engineer: Richard Scholwin

Producer: Ian Hobson

Mastering: Adaq Khan

Booklet essay: David Hackbridge Johnson

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Toccata Classics, 16 Dalkeith Court, Vincent Street, London SW1P 4HH, UK

Tel: +44/0 207 821 5020 E-mail: info@toccataclassics.com

MARTIN EASTICK Piano Music, Volume One

<i>Trois Morceaux, Op. 2</i>	19:26
① No. 1 Valse Sentimentale (1989, rev. 2013)	6:40
② No. 2 Consolation (1987, rev. 2011)	4:03
③ No. 3 Mazurka (1984, rev. 2011)	8:43
 <i>Introduction et Rondo Brilliant, Op. 3</i> (1985, rev. 2011)	 14:45
④ Introduction	3:57
⑤ Rondo brillant	10:48
 <i>Deux Morceaux de Concert, Op. 4</i>	 13:14
⑥ No. 1 Impromptu (1984, rev. 2011)	6:44
⑦ No. 2 Gavotte-Caprice (2010)	6:30
 ⑧ <i>Grande Valse de Concert, Op. 12</i> (2014)	 17:13
 <i>Deux Valses, Op. 13</i> (2014)	 8:55
⑨ No. 1 Valse Intime	5:47
⑩ No. 2 Petite Valse Viennoise	3:08
 Ian Hobson, piano	 TT 73:35
	FIRST RECORDINGS;