



Photo: Jana Rabova

In a career of unusual diversity, John Lenehan's performances and recordings have met with universal acclaim. As a soloist he has appeared with leading orchestras at home and abroad including the RPO, LPO and Sinfonia Varsovia. In 2010/11 he made his début with both the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra at Philharmonic Hall. His repertoire is extensive (championing such composers as Alkan, Ireland and Glass) and his innovative recital programmes often include film projection and jazz repertoire. His extensive discography, (currently more than sixty CDs), includes music from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries. This disc is the last in his complete survey of John Ireland's piano music. Other discs for Naxos include a Gramophone award-winning recording of Michael Nyman's *Piano Concerto* (8.554168) and several discs of piano trios as pianist in the Joachim Trio. John Lenehan is also active as a composer and has been published by Faber, Schotts and Novello. He has also written and arranged on CD for Nigel Kennedy, Julian Lloyd Webber, Tasmin Little and Emma Johnson, all artists he has performed together with regularly in concert halls throughout the world.

[www.johnlenehan.co.uk](http://www.johnlenehan.co.uk)



Photo: Jon Barraclough

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra is Britain's oldest surviving professional symphony orchestra, dating from 1840. Vasily Petrenko was appointed Principal Conductor of the orchestra in September 2006 and in September 2009 became Chief Conductor until 2015. The orchestra gives over sixty concerts each season in Liverpool Philharmonic Hall and in recent seasons world première performances have included major works by Sir John Tavener, Karl Jenkins, Michael Nyman and Jennifer Higdon, alongside works by Liverpool-born composers John McCabe, Emily Howard, Mark Simpson and Kenneth Hesketh. The orchestra also tours widely throughout the United Kingdom and has given concerts in the United States, the Far East and throughout Europe. Recent additions to the orchestra's extensive discography include Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* (2009 *Classic FM/Gramophone* Orchestral Recording of the Year), the world première performance of Sir John Tavener's *Requiem*, volumes 1 to 5 of an ongoing Shostakovich cycle, and Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3*, and *Nos. 1 and 4*. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and its new music group, Ensemble 10/10 were jointly awarded *Ensemble of the Year* in the 2009 Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards. Ensemble 10/10 also won the *Concert Series of the Year* category. [www.liverpoolphil.com](http://www.liverpoolphil.com).

### John Wilson

Shortlisted for the Royal Philharmonic Society's Conductor's Award, John Wilson has established an enviable reputation as a conductor, arranger and scholar, recognised internationally as an expert in light music and music for screen, and as a passionate advocate for British music. In 2009 he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the RTÉ Concert Orchestra and Principal Conductor of the Northern Sinfonia, while also working regularly with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia and the BBC orchestras. In 2007 he made his televised BBC Proms début, returning with the John Wilson Orchestra in 2009, 2010 and 2011 to celebrate Hollywood's film musicals, all televised live on BBC2. He has made numerous recordings and has recently signed a contract for his orchestra with EMI. A lifelong interest in film music led him to reconstruct the lost orchestrations of all the major MGM musicals. His parallel passion for British music has led to many outstanding recordings, including works by John Ireland with the Hallé, music by Eric Coates with the BBC Concert Orchestra and the RLPO and recordings of Vaughan Williams, Bax and Edward German. This recording marks his début for Naxos.



Photo: Chris Christodoulou



# John IRELAND

## Piano Concerto

Legend • First Rhapsody • A Sea Idyll

John Lenehan, Piano

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra • John Wilson



## John Ireland (1879-1962):

**Piano Concerto • Legend • First Rhapsody • Pastoral • Indian Summer • A Sea Idyll • Three Dances**

John Nicholson Ireland was born on 13th August 1879 in Bowdon, a prosperous south Manchester suburb. He died on 12th June 1962 in West Sussex, and was buried in the small churchyard of St Mary the Virgin, Shipley, in an idyllic setting surrounded by the downland countryside that was so important to him. Perhaps more than many other composers, John Ireland's personal world is played out in his music, with pieces closely linked to places, people and literature. The music on this recording embraces some of the locations and individuals that meant so much to him. It also reflects the very different musical sides of the composer, from poetic miniatures to large-scale orchestral works. After his studies with Stanford at the Royal College of Music (RCM) Ireland had a long and varied career as a performer, examiner and teacher, and as a composer best known for his songs, piano and chamber music. His music for keyboard reflects his own considerable abilities as a solo pianist, organist and accompanist.

The *Piano Concerto in E flat* is one of Ireland's most radiant and uplifting works, written for his beautiful young protégée, Helen Perkin (1909-96). She came into his life at a period of great stress, following an intense ten-year relationship with a young man and former chorister, Arthur Miller (1905-86). Perkin was an important soloist throughout the 1930s and to a lesser extent after the Second World War. She was also a composer of songs, sonatas and string quartets, orchestral and brass band pieces, ballet and film scores. From 1927 she studied with Ireland at the RCM. In 1929 he dedicated his song *Hymn for a child* from *Songs Sacred and Profane* to her. During 1929 she worked on a one-movement *Phantasy* for string quartet, completed in December. This quartet went on to win the prestigious Cobbett Chamber Music Prize in 1930, previously won by Bridge and Ireland, and later, in 1932, by Britten. Ireland spent much of 1930 working on his new *Piano Concerto*. This work is closely associated with Helen



Helen Perkin in 1930

Photo courtesy of Ken Adie

Perkin for a number of reasons, one of which is that the principal theme of its first movement is related musically to her 1929 *Phantasy*. In addition, the whole piece resonates with the brilliance and energy of her youthful manner, and was conceived with the best aspects of her playing in mind, especially her brilliant fingerwork. The première took place on 2nd October, as part of the British Composers' Night series at the Promenade Concerts, an event which served to fill the Queen's Hall to overflowing.

The three interrelated movements are in E flat major, B major and E flat major, as with Beethoven's *Fifth Piano Concerto*, 'Emperor'. Structurally it is a conventional concerto, with a sonata-form first movement for example, but like so many of Ireland's works it also captures a moment in time, particularly in its slow movement dialogue between piano and orchestra, which is essentially a love-song. The third movement is perhaps the most enigmatic of the three as it contains a quotation from an earlier piano piece, *Spring will not wait*, which Ireland had dedicated to Miller. The concerto was one of Ireland's most successful works, swiftly taken up by many eminent performers such as Clifford Curzon and Arthur Rubinstein, its success due not only to its sympathetic piano writing, but also to its sparkling orchestration featuring percussion (silent until the transition between the slow movement and the finale) and trumpet with fibre mute suggested to Ireland by the danceband leader Jack Payne). Helen Perkin performed it twice more at the Proms, in 1931 and 1934, but in 1935 she married an affluent architect, George Adie (1901-89), and her contact with Ireland ended. She attempted to resume the friendship in 1939, but was unable to do so amicably. Ireland's letters to her in the early 1950s became increasingly vitriolic, and it was a shock to her to find that the dedication to her had been removed from the score of the *Concerto*. She, however, continued with a performing and composing career, emigrating to Sydney in 1965, where she lived until her death in 1996.

Helen Perkin was also the soloist in the first performance of *Legend*, again at Queen's Hall, in January 1934. This is a very different work, a dark, brooding evocation of an ancient landscape. West Sussex was a spiritual haven for Ireland, as for some other musicians of his generation such as Parry and Elgar. Between 1922 and 1934 Ireland visited the county on a regular basis, with all his major Sussex-inspired works dating from this time. He eventually settled in a Sussex windmill (Rock Mill) in 1953. One of the attractions of the area was its many prehistoric sites, such as Chanctonbury Ring and the Devil's Jumps

(a series of five Bronze Age bell barrows near Treyford). In *Legend* (1933), for piano and orchestra, Ireland tells a story of a strange encounter he had while walking in a remote spot on the Downs, close to Harrow Hill. This is an inaccessible spot, the site of neolithic flint mines, an Iron Age enclosure and a medieval lepers' colony. For a fleeting moment Ireland believed he saw a group of children dancing, dressed in archaic white clothing. One of the early ideas for a title for the work, derived from associations with Bronze Age barrows, was *Queen Fridias*. *Legend* opens with a solo intoning French horn and subterranean clarinets, primeval bassoon and distant timpani rumblings. On to this primitive landscape Ireland projects a piano soloist: the solitary person entering the uncanny landscape. He uses deliberately archaic modal harmonic language and a version of the *Dies irae* to evoke the ancient lepers' path. The very different central section introduces his dancing children into the landscape. The final section of the work uses the original horn invocation to lead the protagonist away from Harrow Hill. Ireland described the experience in a letter to the writer Arthur Machen, who replied on a cryptic postcard: "So you've seen them too".

In addition to these two big works for piano and orchestra Ireland left a large corpus of pieces for solo piano. After leaving the RCM he worked mainly as an organist and pianist, experimenting with different musical genres. Pieces from this period include an *Orchestral Poem* (1904) and the brilliant and virtuosic *First Rhapsody in F sharp minor*, completed in January 1906 in Chelsea. While he dismissed a number of these early works as studies on the way towards his 1906 *Phantasie-Trio in A minor*, nevertheless, he preserved the manuscripts, and this rhapsody contains the germs of his later works, such as *Sarnia* (1940), with its contrasting lyrical, wistful and virtuosic sections. It also exploits the full range of the piano in the tradition of nineteenth-century piano music of Brahms and Liszt.

Ireland also wrote many programmatic miniatures for piano, and in 1999 a previously unknown work was discovered at the RCM. This was a short piano piece,

completed on 20th August 1896 while the composer was staying in Pontwgan, in the countryside of North Wales. It is simply entitled *Pastoral*. Though this is an early student work, written before he became one of Stanford's composition students, aspects of the piece show that he was already attempting to symbolize the pastoral in music, and it contains the germs of musical motifs associated with the English countryside. *Indian Summer* belongs in this category of landscape pieces. First published in 1932, it was then revised, given the new title *The Cherry Tree*, prefaced with a quotation from A.E. Housman and published as part of a set of three short piano pieces under the title *Green Ways*. The original version is more languid, a rhapsodic miniature with a single main theme, and an example of one of a number of fluid, rippling piano pieces that Ireland wrote that rely on figuration as a means of encapsulating rural idyll.

While there are some piano works from the early period of Ireland's career, including *A Sea Idyll* in 1900, piano music does not feature prominently in his output at this stage. There are, however, several pieces in which the sea plays a rôle: the 1899 symphonic prelude, *Tritons*, and ballads and songs such as his popular *Sea Fever* (1913). Ireland's sea was a real location, a backdrop for personal experiences, and especially the sea of the Channel Islands, which he visited a number of times before the First World War. Within these seascapes he often uses repeating

figurations as a representation of water, as in the first movement of *A Sea Idyll*. This piece also shares its opening A flat major tonality with a very early work, the recitation for voice and piano, *Annabel Lee*. The version recorded here is Ireland's full three-movement work: *Poco andante*, *Allegro appassionato* and *Andante (Mesto)*.

*The Three Dances*, *Gypsy Dance*, *Country Dance* and *Reapers' Dance*, were published in 1913, when Ireland's most assured and individual compositional voice was emerging. In this year there were works for voice and piano, significantly the cycle *Marigold and Sea Fever*. There were also piano pieces, including *Decorations* and *Preludes*, a *Trio* for clarinet, cello and piano, and *The Forgotten Rite* for orchestra. The three dances perhaps had a pedagogic purpose as short, technically simple rustic works.

**Fiona Richards**

The solo piano works on this recording are published by Stainer & Bell Ltd. in *The Collected Works of John Ireland Volume 1 (Three Dances)* and in *Volume 6 (First Rhapsody, Pastoral, Indian Summer, A Sea Idyll)*. *Indian Summer, A Sea Idyll and Three Dances* are copyright EMI Music, Music Sales and J. Curwen & Co. Ltd respectively. The *Piano Concerto* is published by Music Sales and *Legend* by Schott.