

John Knowles Paine: Selected Piano Works  
New World 80424-2

John Knowles Paine (1839-1906) was the first American composer to be fully trained to the highest international standards, which, in his day, meant German standards. He was known in his lifetime—and has increasingly become recognized in ours—as a master of the large forms, the symphony and oratorio in particular, which formed the cornerstone of an American concert-music tradition. But he also composed in smaller genres, such as the art song and the short character piece for piano that was a ubiquitous feature of the musical life of Europe and America in the mid-nineteenth century.

Like most musicians of his day, Paine began his musical education at the piano. This was both easy and natural for him, since his father was the proprietor of Paine's Music Store in Portland, Maine, where he advertised “pianos to let.” The young Paine studied with Hermann Kotzschmar, a German immigrant musician in Portland. His studies with Kotzschmar emphasized the keyboard, although there is no record of a public performance until 1857, after Paine had begun to advertise as a teacher.

He organized a series of concerts in which he appeared as a pianist with other musicians, to raise money for his further education; already at the age of nineteen his playing elicited favorable reviews although this was natural enough in a favorably disposed hometown paper. Then in 1858 he went to Berlin, where he pursued studies in organ (he became a virtuoso of the instrument) and composition. Some of his first works were elaborate sets of variations for solo organ, the instrument on which he most frequently appeared in recital.

Upon returning to the United States, Paine settled in Boston, where in 1873 he joined the faculties of Harvard and the New England Conservatory. For the rest of his life he combined composition with teaching. Immediately after his Harvard appointment, he entered a particularly prolific period, turning out in quick succession his two symphonies and other orchestral works, as well as a complete incidental score for male chorus and orchestra to *Oedipus Tyrannus* in the original Greek (1880-81), and other choral works. At the conservatory he taught piano and organ as well as harmony and counterpoint. In recitals given by members of the faculty, he appeared as piano soloist (playing Chopin and his own music) and as a partner in chamber music performances. By the 1870s his performing slacked off somewhat, no doubt from the pressure of his teaching and his active composing life, which had begun to flourish.

Although he became renowned as an organist and rarely appeared in public as a pianist, Paine's keyboard technique must have been substantial, and he certainly knew the most significant repertory for the piano, including the recent works of Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Schumann, as well as the older classics by Bach, Beethoven, and others. (His important role in promoting Bach's organ works left a perceptible mark on his own keyboard music—not simply in his own organ compositions (where it might be expected), or in a group of preludes and fugues (which do not survive complete), but even in some of his piano works in the mid-century romantic style. Because compositions for a solo instrument can be performed privately or semiprivate, unlike orchestral compositions, it is hard to track their performance history, but it is clear from some reminiscences and reviews that certain of these pieces were well known even before they were published; indeed it was sometimes the high regard in which Paine's friends held

some of these works (the Opus 45 *Nocturne* is a case in point) that may finally have led him to see them into print.

Paine spent most of his last two decades completing the opera *Azara* which, to his intense disappointment, he was never to hear. With the exception of two early piano sonatas (one of which is lost), Paine's output for the piano falls almost entirely within the realm of the romantic character piece, the keyboard miniature, frequently cast in song form (ABA). The titles emphasize Paine's relationship to the genres favored by the leading keyboard composers of his day: romance, impromptu, nocturne. Works of this type depend not on musical development of an idea, but rather on the immediate attractiveness of the melody and harmonies that make them up. Often they are songs without words, to use Mendelssohn's phrase, short pieces that capture a single mood, even as they offer the composer-pianist the opportunity to create a wide variety of keyboard textures. Paine's harmonic language reflected the developments of his own time, and he made increasingly personal use of the potential of this traditional harmony. (Many of these pieces display his desire to avoid the simple perfect cadence, which he considered to have become a cliché; he found many different ways to reach his final chord other than an unadorned progression of dominant chord to tonic.) Although he was essentially a romantic composer, his textures often show influence from the keyboard works of Bach, particularly in their motivic coherence and in his predilection for inverting melody and accompaniment.

The composer's sociable nature and generous spirit may be seen in the fact that many of the smaller works were composed for his relatives and friends, either to play themselves or in celebration of some special event. Though the keyboard miniatures cannot, by their very nature, project the weight and artistic power of the symphonies, the Mass, the larger choral works, or the violin sonata, they offer further views of the composer's melodic invention—especially in slower tempos and expressive moods—and his wit and charm, qualities that we have been slow in ascribing to our ancestors of a century ago. *Christmas Gift*, Opus 7

With the exception of a commencement hymn published semiprivatey for the Harvard community, this was Paine's first published composition. Edwards' history of Maine musicians gives the date as December 25, 1862; it was written for the composer's sister, Helen, and published in 1864. The piece skips along brightly in D major, but just as it seems about to end (having offered a simple but straightforward ABA pattern), Paine adds an extensive coda in a quick march style—possibly because military marches were very much in the air in 1862. A brief reference to the opening concludes the piece. *Four Characteristic Pieces*, Opus 25

This is one of relatively few piano works by Paine actually written for a well-known pianist, Ernst Perabo (1845-1920), who came to Boston in 1866 and remained as a favorite performer and teacher. He was a regular participant in Paine's chamber concerts in the 1870s, and he first performed the Opus 25 pieces on November 10, 1876. They were published the same year.

The *Dance* is marked by a dotted rhythm that suggests the mazurka, but the irregular phrase lengths—a characteristic element of Paine's music—makes it more of an abstract interpretation of the dance pattern than an actual piece for dancing. The *Romance* begins in gently lyrical and evocative character; a more forceful middle section unsettled in key brings back a varied repetition. The turbulent *Impromptu* draws much of its energy

from the Brahmsian opposition of two versus three notes per beat of the 3/4 meter; the middle section changes to a serene 6/8 time with a melody floating above the arpeggiated accompaniment. The cheerful *Rondo giocoso* chatters away in steady rhythm of sixteenth notes (with occasional triplets) in an ABABA pattern that moves from the tonic C to a bright E major for the first contrasting section, balanced by a move to the flat side for the second. *Romance*, Opus 12

The *Romance*, inscribed “To my friend Mr. Casimir Constable,” was published in 1869. Paine performed it on December 14, 1868, as part of the same program that included his Opus 11. The program for the concert called the work “Fantasie Stück” (fantasy piece), a designation that seems more suited to this restless music than the softer term “romance.” The main section of the piece is in a dark march style, with harmonies shifting so constantly that the home key of E-flat is firmly established only in the final four bars. The sharply contrasted Trio, in A-flat, begins with a remarkable rhythmic feature: the melody appears twice, on 2 different beats of the measure, giving the impression of a very irregular rhythm. Of the major composers of the nineteenth century, only Brahms employs rhythmic phrase structure so flexibly as Paine does here.

*Three Piano Pieces*, Opus 41

These three short, relatively light, pieces show a humorous side to Paine that is often overlooked, particularly when we rely for our impressions on the sober photographs of the muttonchopped elder musician.

*A Spring Idyl* was dedicated to Miss Sarah D. Hoppin. From the technical point of view, it is an exercise in lightness of touch, particularly in the highly decorated right-hand part; expressively, it is a charming depiction of bird calls and rapid flickerings of wings in flight.

The *Birthday Impromptu* was privately printed in 1882 as a gift to Paine's friend, the Harvard professor W.G. Farlow. The score merely hints at the dedicatee's name with a musical pun: After the words “*A mon ami*,” a hand points to a fragment of staff with a bass clef and the single note, the bottom F which Paine expects the knowing reader to identify as Farlow (“fa low”). The work itself is a tiny little *jeu d'esprit*, only 38 measures long, dying away with a gentle extended cadence.

More than any other work, the *Fuga giocosa* shows the craftsman in a sportive mood, taking as his theme the baseball refrain, “Over the fence is out, boys,” Paine creates a formal—yet surprisingly chipper!—fugue that links at once his love for Bach and his identity as an American composer. Beginning as a strict fugue in three voices, Paine enriches the texture towards the middle, then returns to the lighter texture for several episodes. *Valse Caprice*

Paine never published this composition. The manuscript, which bears no date, remained in the family without any public performances before being given to Harvard, suggesting the possibility that the work had a particularly private association for the composer's relatives. It is one of the most challenging of all Paine's piano compositions, with virtuosic devices (like the “thumb melody” under the brilliant figuration high on the keyboard) that Paine no doubt learned from the works of Liszt.

*Ten Sketches: In the Country*, Opus 26

Also dating from 1876, *In the Country* was dedicated to Mme. Madeline Schiller. Amy Fay, a student of Franz Liszt's, later to become well known for her delightful book *Music Study in Germany*, gave the first performance in Cambridge on May 8, 1877. The

set, or selected portions of it, was probably the most popular and frequently performed of all of Paine's piano works. Each of its ten numbers offers a single musical image, evocative and colorful. *Woodnotes*, like the later *Spring Idyl* of Opus 41, suggests the call of birds in its lavish melodic ornaments. *Wayside Flowers* begins with a light-textured leisurely saunter, but the varied repetition of the opening is much enriched both harmonically and textually. *Under the Lindens* is Schumannesque in its presentation of a sustained melody picked out from the notes of the background arpeggiation. *The Shepherd's Lament* tinges its melancholy with chromaticism. The *Village Dance* is a light-hearted movement; the beginning of the second strain deliciously varies the constant downbeat accent with accents on the last beat of the measure. *Rainy Day* grows out of staccato descending figures (scale segments and arpeggios) over which a sweet melody grows out of the opening notes. *The Mill* suggests the running water in its left-hand sixteenth-note figure that runs virtually throughout, evoking the world of a Schubert song cycle. *Gipsies* wanders harmonically with a constant rhythmic and accompaniment figure. *Farewell* is one of those expressive lyric inventions of which Paine was a master. The poignancy of departure is followed by the joy of return in *Welcome Home*, the most brilliant and most extended number in the set. *Four Character Pieces*, Opus 11

Paine performed this work on December 14, 1868, at which time the program listed the movements with different headings than those that appear in the published score of 1872, yet they clearly represent the same four short pieces. At the time of publication, William F. Apthorp wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* for October 1872 that they were "most free in form and full of genuine, unforced, at times almost startling originality."

The opening number, *Frisch* ("Fresh, lively") features an extrovert melody over a busy sixteenth-note accompaniment, with momentary dark turns of the harmony. *Feirlich* ("Solemn") projects its mood of subdued gravity by restricting the sonorities to the middle and lower range of the piano. *Etwas bewegt* ("Con moto"), is a 6/8 march, understated at first with staccato attacks, but growing in energy. The final movement, *Willkommen* ("Welcome") had a personal meaning to the composer, its mood, described by Apthorp as "bubbling-over animal spirits and genial joyousness." In fact, Paine had written this piece to welcome his bride-to-be home from a journey; the original manuscript bears the heading "Welcome Home to my Darling Lizzie, from John, March 31, 1868." *Funeral March in Memory of President Lincoln*, Opus 9

Like many of his musical colleagues, Paine expressed in music his shock at the murder of President Lincoln, whom he greatly admired. (He left undeveloped a sketch for an orchestral tone poem on the subject of Lincoln). This march is cast in a long crescendo-decrescendo, as if a funeral procession were first heard in the distance, passed by in front of the listener, and then died away again in the distance. The march begins "con tenerezza" and pianissimo. The varied colors in the pianist's attack (sforzandi, staccati) suggest muffled drums. Hints of somber fanfares mark the fuller middle section, then the procession marches away into silence.

#### *Romance*, Opus 39

This *Romance* was dedicated to James Bradstreet Greenough. It was composed and published in 1883, the year of Greenough's election to the rank of Professor of Latin at Harvard. Possibly the work was written in celebration of the event. Beginning in a gentle songful mood in D-flat, the piece builds gradually, by way of a diversion in F, to a

climactic restatement of the opening material reaching *fortissimo*, then receding to a quiet close. *Sonata in A minor*, Opus 1

Paine was not one to shrink from a challenge. From the very beginning of his career he sought to write in the large forms, often explicitly in a genre that had been dominated by Beethoven, whose music had by mid-century become universally recognized as the touchstone of genius and inspiration. American Transcendentalists had found in Beethoven's work an ethical and moral quality elevating it above that of any other composer. Small wonder, then, that a talented and idealistic American composer should pay explicit homage to the master from Bonn in such large-scale works as the Mass in D and the First Symphony.

The earliest of Paine's works in the Beethovenian mold is the piano sonata completed in Berlin in December 1859, when Paine was just twenty. He performed the work in public, but never published it. While Beethoven was very much part of his background, an equally potent figure was Bach, whose organ works Paine was practicing constantly. This may explain the somewhat "Bachian" quality of the opening theme in his sonata, which, although it is cast in the sonata form of the mid-nineteenth century, nonetheless generates the kind of rhythmic drive and motivic development that Paine would have learned from the music of the Leipzig Thomaskantor. The slow movement, in F, projects an exquisite melody over pedal-sustained chords; the contrasting middle section in F minor is more agitated, building to a high point that gradually descends to a varied restatement of the opening with recollections of the more agitated material at the end. In this sonata, as in both of his symphonies, Paine's Scherzo demonstrates an affinity with the work of Beethoven—in its energy and drive and single-minded commitment to a particular musical gesture in the main section, as well as in its relaxation into a *cantabile* passage in the Trio. The key relations of the two sections (A minor for the Scherzo and F major for the Trio) echo the principal keys of the sonata as a whole: A (minor and major) for the first and last movements, F for the slow movement. The finale's rondo theme again recalls the motivic energy of Bach, although the structure of the movement as a whole, the rather folksong-like character of the second theme, and the pianistic decorations of some passages are very much of the romantic era.

*Nocturne*, Opus 45

Though this piece was not published until 1889, Paine had evidently composed it long before. He had played it "for years," according to the writer W.S.B. Matthews, even before writing it down, and once he had put it to paper he was in no hurry to issue it. The rocking barcarole of the opening—with the melody in thirds over triplet arpeggios—is very Chopinesque. A fiery middle section, with references to the climax of the opening material, finally yields to the richly decorated restatement. —STEVEN LEDBETTER

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#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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*Fantasia uber "Ein feste Burg,"* Op. 13. Richard Morris, organ. New World Records 80280-2.  
*Fuga giocosa*, Op. 41, No. 3; *Romance*, Op. 12. Malcolm Frager, piano. New World Records, 80206-2.  
"Moorish Dance" from *Azara*. Royal Philharmonic, Karl Krueger conducting. Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage MIA-132.  
*Mass in D*. Carmen Balthrop, soprano; Joy Blackett, contralto; Vinson Cole, tenor; John Cheek, bass; Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Gunther Schuller conductor. New World 80262-2.  
*Oedipus Tyrannus*, prelude from incidental music, Op. 35. Eastman-Rochester Symphony, Howard Hanson conducting. RCA Victor VM-608. (78 rpm)  
*St Peter*, oratorio. Jeanne Ommerle, soprano; D'Anna Fortunato, mezzo-soprano; Paul Austin Kelly, tenor; David Evitts, baritone; Back Bay Chorale, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Boston, Gunther Schuller conductor. GM Recordings GM2027CD.  
Sonata for violin and piano, Op. 24; Romanza and Humoreske for cello and piano, Op. 30; Larghetto and Humoreske for piano, violin, and cello, Op. 32. Joseph Silverstein, violin; Jules Eskin, cello; Virginia Eskin, piano. Northeastern Records NR 219-CD.  
Symphony No. 1 in C minor; *As You Like It*, Overture, Op. 28. New York Philharmonic, Zubin Mehta conductor. New World 80374-2.  
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*The Tempest*, Symphonic Poem, Op. 31. Royal Philharmonic, Karl Krueger conducting. Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage MIA-130.

Producer: Kathryn King  
Recorded and edited by Larry Rock  
Recorded June 29, 30, July 1, 2, and September 12-14, 1992, at the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Auditorium, New York City.  
Cover art: Pot of Flowers hooked rug, Plate 78 in *American Hooked and Sewn Rugs*.  
Photograph courtesy of American Hurrah, NYC.  
Cover design: Bob Defrin

THIS RECORDING WAS MADE POSSIBLE WITH A GRANT FROM FRANCIS GOELET

DISC 1

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*Four Characteristic Pieces*, Op. 25
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4. *Impromptu* (5:14)
5. *Rondo Giocoso* (3:35)
6. *Romance*, Op. 12 (6:46)  
*Three Piano Pieces*, Op. 41
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8. *Birthday Impromptu* (1:02)
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10. *Valse Caprice* (4:52)  
*Ten Sketches: in the Country* Op. 26.
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13. *Under The Lindens* (2:09)
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DISC 2

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Sonata In A Minor, Op. I  
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8. Adagio (7:15)  
9. Scherzo (4:21)  
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