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This Curious Harp

20th Century British
Music for Solo Harp

ELEANOR HUDSON | HARP

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|----|---|-------|
| 1 | York Bowen Arabesque pub. Goodwin & Tabb Ltd | 8:35 |
| 2 | Stephen Dodgson Ballade pub. OUP | 6:31 |
| 3 | Leonard Salzedo Tonada Opus 139 pub. Lopés Edition | 5:21 |
| | Ian Parrott Soliloquy & Dance pub. Griffiths Edition | |
| 4 | i Soliloquy | 2:02 |
| 5 | ii Dance | 2:04 |
| | Thomas Pitfield Sonatina for Harp pub. Broekmans & van Poppel | |
| 6 | i Allegretto grazioso | 1:36 |
| 7 | ii Variations on a Russian Vesper Hymn | 4:21 |
| | Geoffrey Burgon Three Nocturnes pub. Chester Music | |
| 8 | i Largo | 2:32 |
| 9 | ii Moderato | 2:00 |
| 10 | iii Moderato | 2:26 |
| | Sir Hamilton Harty Spring Fancies (Two Preludes) pub. Novello & Co Ltd | |
| 11 | i Vivace, molto grazioso e dolce | 6:52 |
| 12 | ii Con brio ma non presto | 4:38 |
| 13 | Stephen Dodgson Fantasy for Harp pub. Stainer & Bell Ltd | 7:31 |
| 14 | Sir Granville Bantock Sapphic Dance (Dramatic Dances no. 2) pub. Breitkopf und Härtel, New York | 11:26 |

Total Playing Time: 68:33

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"The poets did well to conjoin music and medicine, in Apollo,
because the office of medicine is but to tune the curious
harp of man's body and reduce it to harmony."

Francis Bacon / *The Advancement of Learning* 1605

This Curious Harp

The harp can trace its history back to ancient Mesopotamia, the so-called "cradle of civilisation", where the remains of three harp-like instruments dating from around 2500BC were found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur in modern-day Iraq. Hebrew scholars suggest that the instrument played by the Biblical King David was more likely to be a lyre, but mediaeval paintings frequently showed David as a harpist and the English translators who were behind the publication in 1611 of the King James Bible were certainly happy to describe his instrument as such.

Pictish carvings of celtic harps survive from 8th Century Scotland and the instrument continued to thrive both there and in Ireland, and by the start of the 18th Century it had also become popular with the Welsh. It was clearly known and understood in London by 1605 when the philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon wrote that the role of a physician is "to tune this curious harp of man's body and reduce it to harmony," but it did not gain traction as a popular instrument in England, perhaps because of the worsening political situation which culminated in the Civil War.

The development of the pedal harp in the late 18th Century resulted in the instrument becoming a regular fixture in 19th Century operatic scores. It also acquired a role in salon music in England after Sébastien Érard took out the

first British patent for the new instrument in 1792 but many of the works which were written for it were limited in scope and, typically of the genre, were sentimental or variations based on operatic themes.

While there is some truth in the assertion that 19th Century England was "the Land without Music", and the public appetite for simple, cheery or sentimental scores continued unabated into the 20th Century, composers including Elgar and Parry began a renaissance in the 1890s. Granville Bantock (1868–1946) was among the stream of intelligent young composers who followed in writing music which was interesting, original and more ambitious in scope but, like many others, he was forced to turn to more popular styles to earn a living and worked as musical director with George Edwardes' musical theatre troupe, conducting *A Gaiety Girl* in the provinces as well as in the USA and Australia. Many musicians also worked summer seasons at holiday resorts and in 1898 Bantock was appointed Musical Director at the New Brighton Tower on Merseyside, directing a military band in the open air and a ballroom orchestra indoors. Over the next three seasons he gradually introduced contemporary classical scores including Wagner before being appointed Principal of the new School of Music at the Birmingham Midland Institute in 1900. This led, eight years later, to the offer of the post of Professor of Music at Birmingham University in succession to his friend, Edward Elgar.

Bantock's *Dramatic Dance no 2*, subtitled *Sapphic Dance* was first performed by Alfred Kastner, harpist in the Queen's Hall Orchestra, on 19th August 1909 at the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts. While the *Dramatic Dances* were scored for a variety of instruments, *Sapphic Dance* was for harp alone, and was imagined as an accompaniment for a dancer, for whom Bantock wrote a detailed scenario in which Sappho improvises on her lyre, offering her genius

to Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love and summoning the Muses to her aid in exalting the power of song. Sadly, surviving reviews concentrate more on the fact that the performance had to restart after a string broke than on the colours inherent in Bantock's imaginative and beguiling score.

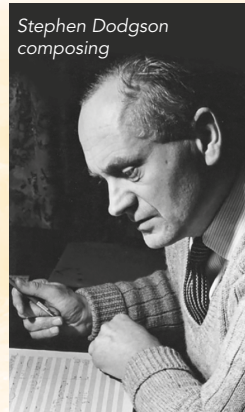
Hamilton Harty (1879–1941), the fourth of ten children from a family who lived in Hillsborough, Co. Down, moved to London in around 1900 and quickly established himself as one of the best accompanists in the city while also developing a career as a composer. The growing reputation of his tone poem, *With the wild geese* resulted in him being invited to conduct it with the London Symphony Orchestra in March 1911, and it was probably for the LSO's harpist, Miriam Timothy, that he wrote two *Preludes*, called "*Spring Fancies*" for harp. Timothy, a former member of Queen Victoria's private band, and professor of harp at the Royal College of Music, certainly played the *Spring Fancies* on a number of occasions including one in Southampton in November 1914 when the *Hampshire Advertiser* commented that "Miss Timothy flooded the hall with delightful melody, and her *Spring Fancies* were joyful and fairy-like graceful airs, played with a true sense of poetry." When the score was published in 1915 the *Western Morning News* commented that, while "the work is very beautiful, and its study and mastery will bring sincere delight" prospective players would face "severe demands on execution and understanding" in the difficult second Prelude.

Miriam Timothy's performance in Southampton in November 1914 also included the beautifully romantic *Arabesque* by York Bowen (1884–1961). Written for Timothy to play at London's Bechstein Hall on 31 March 1913, *Arabesque* was described by one reviewer as a work of "utmost loveliness" and, by 1916, it had been taken up as well by another harpist, Gwendolen

Mason. Bowen, like Bantock, had studied composition with Frederick Corder at the Royal Academy of Music, and dedicated the score to Mason when it was it was eventually published in 1932.

Although Stephen Dodgson (1924–2013) first went to the Royal College of Music in April 1947 as a horn player, it was not long before he decided to focus instead on composition. A scholarship enabled him to study in Rome and, on his return to London, his music began to be performed by many of the leading players of the day including the violinist Neville Marriner, the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble, and the oboist Evelyn Barbirolli. His first work for harp, a *Fantasy*, dates from 1952 and was written at the request of the Russian harpist Maria Korchinska, an ex-professor of harp at Moscow Conservatoire and principal harpist with the Bolshoi Orchestra who had fled Russia for the UK in 1924 shortly after playing at Lenin's funeral. Korchinska then gave the first performance on 12th February 1953 at a concert in a long-running series featuring new music which was run by the violinist, Anne Macnaghten. Dodgson's colourful *Ballade* dates from 1969 and was commissioned by the National Federation of Music Societies for the Cardiff-born harpist Susan Drake.

Thomas Pitfield (1903–1999) wrote his tiny *Sonatina* for another Welsh harpist, Mair Roberts-Jones to play on the Celtic folk harp known as the *clarsach*. Pitfield was born in Bolton and left school aged 14 when his parents enrolled him for an apprenticeship in engineering, but by the time he was 21 he had saved enough to take a 1-year course at the Royal Manchester



Stephen Dodgson
composing

College of Music, returning there in 1947 as a teacher of composition after previously spending many years teaching art and cabinet making in schools and composing only in the evenings. In contrast, Mair Roberts-Jones – who was Eleanor Hudson’s teacher – won the National Eisteddfod’s main harp class for the third time when she was 16, was harpist for the now-defunct Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra three years later, and played for many years with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Pitfield uses his favourite 7/8 time signature for the delicate and evocative first movement of the *Sonatina* and bases the second, a set of variations, on a Russian hymn which he probably learned from his wife, the daughter of Russians who had fled the Revolution.

The Welsh theme continues in the music of Ian Parrott (1916–2012) who was born in Streatham, and studied at New College Oxford but lived in the Aberystwyth area from 1951 after being appointed Gregynog Professor of Music at the University College of Wales. A great advocate for Welsh music and culture, he composed several pieces with prominent harp parts; *Soliloquy and Dance* was published in 1995. *Soliloquy* uses two different keys at once to create a feeling of mystery, while the graceful *Dance* is written in an unusual 15/8 time signature.

Geoffrey Burgon (1941–2010) studied at the Guildhall School of Music and began his career as a jazz trumpeter although he soon found a greater interest in composition. After struggling financially for several years he began to write music for film and television, winning his first major success with the setting of the *Nunc Dimittis* which he wrote in 1979 for the BBC’s dramatization of John le Carré’s *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. This was followed shortly afterwards by the scores for Monty Python’s *Life of Brian* and for *Brideshead Revisited*, but he also fulfilled many commissions for music for the concert hall. These include

three dignified and rather pensive *Nocturnes* which he composed in 1974 and originally called *Romances*. They were written for the harpist David Watkins who studied briefly with Gwendolen Mason before further study in Paris and a long career with many of Britain’s major orchestras.

The remaining work on this recording is by Leonard Salzedo (1921–2000) who, like Geoffrey Burgon, wrote both for the concert hall and for commercial purposes. He is probably best known for the little fanfare for brass which opened Open University programmes for many years, but he also wrote film scores for Hammer Horror productions and worked extensively as both a conductor and composer for a number of ballet companies. For many years he was a violinist in both the London and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestras. Although he was born in London, he was descended from Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492 and calls on his heritage in *Tonada*, a word which literally means “Tune” but which, in Spanish folk music, particularly refers to a song of meditative character from the provinces of Asturias or Cantabria. One of his last works, it was completed on 10 November 1997 and, while it catches the mood of its Spanish models, its sinuous melodic material suggests traditional Jewish motifs as it floats above a gentle, repetitive rhythmic figure.

John Humphries

Leonard Salzedo

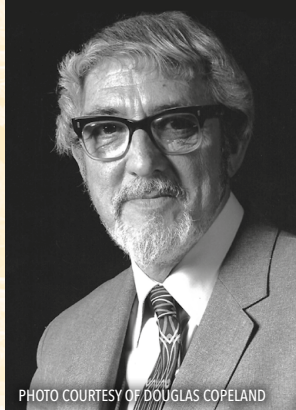


PHOTO COURTESY OF DOUGLAS COPELAND



Eleanor Hudson

Eleanor Hudson (En) began to study the Harp with Mair Jones, Principal Harpist with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, going on to study at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester and then at the Royal Northern College of Music. Having won the Guinness Prize for Harp (which partly funded the gold Lyon and Healy harp that she plays on today, En went on to gain a Distinction in Harp Performance at the Royal College of Music in London. After graduating, En worked regularly with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, performing Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp with flautist David Nicholson.

After a period guesting with orchestras such as the BBC Philharmonic and Symphony Orchestras, the Hallé, Opera North and the Philharmonia, where she played under the baton of conductors such as Sir Andrew Davis, Gustavo Dudamel, Libor Pešek, Sir Simon Rattle, Giuseppe Sinopoli and Vasilij Petrenko,

but managing also to fit in a season with the Malaga Symphony Orchestra, En was appointed Principal Harp with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. She had also been fortunate to have worked with such Showbiz celebrities as Bill Bailey, Tony Bennett, Elvis Costello and jazz musician Wayne Shorter.

During her fifteen years with 'The Phil', En additionally performed regularly in numerous concertos, solo recitals and chamber music concerts. She was also part of the original 10/10 contemporary music series and played a key role in the RLPO's Education Series. This led En to retrain in Music and Mental Health Education and then to leave 'The Phil' to develop a more diverse career visiting high security settings such as Ashworth Psychiatric Hospital on a regular basis to play her harp.

As well as performing regularly with the SCO and the BBC Phil, En regularly tutors the harpists at the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland and of Great Britain, together with the latter's NYO Inspire course. She is also Harp Tutor at Chetham's Music School where she had herself been a pupil, near the start of her musical journey.

For some years, En has lived with her husband in a house in Macclesfield Forest, Cheshire, and was married in St. Saviour's Church at nearby Wildboarclough where this recording was made and which region has inspired the artwork for this CD.

Eleanor Hudson <http://eleanorhudson-harpist.com/>

www.mikepurtonrecording.com

MPR wishes to thank the following organisations for supporting this recording:

The Ida Carroll Trust

The Leonard Salzedo Society, which promotes the life and work of Leonard Salzedo. Contact them on leonardsalzedo@yahoo.com or via Leonard's website <https://www.impulse-music.co.uk/leonardsalzedo/>

The Stephen Dodgson Charitable Trust

Stephen Dodgson Charitable Trust

MPR110 'This Curious Harp'

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