

CD REVIEW 100

The Definitive Eric Coates All of his commercial recordings 1923-1957

Nimbus NI 6231

CD1 - 1931-1937 78.08

- 1 The Merry-makers - Overture 4:21
- 2 From Meadow to Mayfair - Suite 11:35
- 3 Summer Afternoon - Idyll 3:28
- 4 Cinderella - Phantasy 12:46
- 5 By The Sleepy Lagoon - Valse Serenade 4:36
- 6 The Jester At The Wedding : No.1 The Princess Arrives - March 3:00
- 7 By The Tamarisk - Intermezzo 4:13
- 8 Saxo-Rhapsody 8:46
- 9 Summer Days - Suite 8:07
- 10 Springtime - Suite 12:20
- 11 For Your Delight - Serenade 4:00

CD2 - 1940-1948 77.57

- 1 Footlights - Concert Valse 4:17
- 2 Last Love - Romance 3:54
- 3 The Seven Seas - March 3:14
- 4 I Sing To You (A Souvenir) 3:17
- 5 Calling All Workers - March 2:59
- 6 Fanfare Number 1 0:18
- 7 Salute the Soldier - March 3:22
- 8 Fanfare Number 2 0:26
- 9 The Eighth Army March 2:37
- 10 The Four Centuries - Suite 17:24
- 11 The Three Elizabeths - Suite 18:06
- 12 Dancing Nights - Concert Valse 6:48
- 13 London Calling - March 2:55
- 14 London Bridge - March 4:05
- 15 London Suite - Knightsbridge March 2:56

CD3 - 1948-1955 78.33

- 1 A Song Of Loyalty 3:19
- 2 By The Sleepy Lagoon - Valse Serenade 3:15
- 3 Bird Songs At Eventide 3:08
- 4 Television March 3:19
- 5 Wood Nymphs - Valssette 3:09
- 6 London - Suite 13.27

7 London Again - Suite 12.51

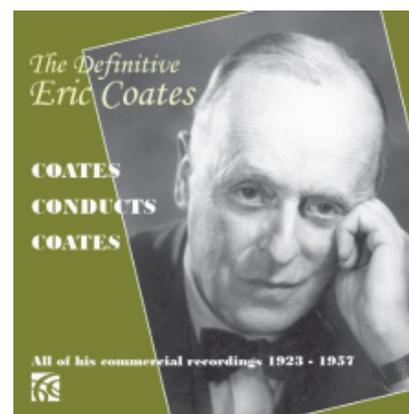
- 8 The Three Men - Suite 13.28
- 9 The Jester At The Wedding : No.4 - Dance Of The Orange Blossoms 3:45
- 10 Music Everywhere - Rediffusion March 2:57
- 11 The Dam Busters - March 2:56
- 12 Sound And Vision The A.T.V. Television March 3:00

CD4 - 1952-1957 78.29

- 1 High Flight - March 2:49
- 2 Impression of a Princess - Intermezzo 2:58
- 3 Wood Nymphs - Valssette 2:46
- 4 South Wales and West - Television March 2:47
- 5 London - Suite 13.18
- 6 London Again - Suite 12.00
- 7 The Three Elizabeths - Suite 19.09
- 8 The Four Centuries - Suite 20.25

CD5 - Early records 72.05

- 1 Summer Days - Suite 0.00
- 2 Wood Nymphs - Valssette 3:01
- 3 With A Song In My Heart - Symphonic Rhapsody after Richard Rodgers 7:47
- 4 Bird Songs at Eventide 4:01
- 5 I Pitch My Lonely Caravan At Night 4:11
- 6 I Heard You Singing & Bird Songs At Eventide - Symphonic Rhapsody 4:03
- 7 London - Suite 8.08
- 8 London Bridge - March 3:07
- 9 The Jester At The Wedding : No.1 - The Princess Arrives - March 3:21
- 10 The Jester At The Wedding : No.4 The Dance Of The Orange Blossoms 3.03
- 11 The Three Men - Suite 12.12
- 12 Wood Nymphs - Valssette 3:18
- 13 Song Of Loyalty (The Prayer Within Our Hearts) 4:16



CD6 - Early and Acoustic records 70.25

- 1 Meadow To Mayfair Suite : No.2 4:03
- 2 London Again - Suite 11.28
- 3 By The Sleepy Lagoon - Valse Serenade 3:20
- 4 The Three Bears - A Phantasy 8:52
- 5 London Suite - Knightsbridge March 4:01
- 6 Television March 3:20
- 7 Valse From The Phantasy "The Three Bears" 3:07
- 8 The Merry-makers - Overture 4:06
- 9 Moresque Dance - Interlude 3:37
- 10 Joyous Youth - Suite 11.33
- 11 Summer Days Suite : At The Dance 3:59
- 12 The Selfish Giant - A Phantasy (arr Lucas) 8:06

Bonus CD 7 - 1918-1955 74.33

Performances of works which Coates did not record himself alongside alternative and famous performances by other conductors including The Peerless Orchestra, Clarence Raybould, Charles Williams, Jack Hylton, Joseph Lewis, RAF Central Orchestra, Sidney Torch, Robert Farnon, and the Central Band of the Royal Air Force.

Light music is often given a bad name and there is some light music which is awful. Elgar said that he must be the finest composer of light music that the UK has ever produced but he said this as Coates and his music was not a threat to him and his music. Whether Coates is the best British composer of light music is a matter of opinion. It has been said that he wrote too many waltzes and marches and was only a miniaturist. However, there was a time when a certain type of Londoner clamoured for his music.

Sir Adrian Boult was kind to Coates but was in keeping with his character.

The idea that all light music is banal and not well-written, poorly constructed and badly orchestrated is denied by some of the music of Eric Coates. In this seven CD set we are rewarded with some choice music abounding in melody and purpose. Sadly, some of the music is rather ordinary and predictable and a reviewer has to be honest. If I wrote in enthusiasm about all these pieces I would not be believed.

The Merry-makers Overture of 1923 is enchanting. The recording which dates from 1931 is clean and acceptable and most of the recordings are conducted by the composer.

The Suite: From Meadow to Mayfair dates from 1931 and it does conjure up the title. The music has a pastoral flavour but it does have a few clichés and the bustling Mayfair is well-caught although it is a waltz. Waltzes are so predictable and London is not.

Summer Afternoon Idyll of 1931 is a good piece evoking the glories on the countryside on a delightful summer afternoon. The music is lush but in a gentle way not a crude way. It has a nostalgia which is inspiring and an appreciation for days like this, yet it is not sentimental or slushy. It is decidedly British without the ghastly pomp music of one particular composer. This piece is one of many that labelled Coates a miniaturist.

1929 saw the appearance of the Cinderella Phantasy recorded in 1935 and is a substantial piece of just under thirteen minutes. It is somewhat introspective and sad as depicting Cinderella initial circumstances but it highlights Coates' amazingly effective characterisation. The humour and intrigue are also well-caught. The exciting part of the story is well realised but never excessively dramatic. One has the feeling that Coates is always in control and never extreme. In the last three minutes see if you can detect Bartok.

Track seven is the famous By the Sleepy Lagoon in the extended version of 1930 made famous by the introductory music to Desert Islands Discs. The music successfully captures what is inherent in the title.

The composer was very gifted with music that portrayed the subject matter. It is a charming miniature and deservedly popular.

The Jester at the Wedding was a suite of six movements, the opening being a march, The Prince Arrives. It is full of irrepressible humour and very suitable for the subject. The muted trumpets, later imitated by the strings, is infectious and the march is not pompous, thankfully.

The use of the lower strings is very effective in By The Tamarisk, an intermezzo of 1927, another work with a pastel palette. The tranquillity is quite touching.

The Saxo-Rhapsody of 1936 is a gem with a memorable theme. The soloist is Sigurd Rascher. It takes the alto saxophone out of the usual repertoire of the night club of sophisticates to an honoured position as an instrument of expressive quality. I have loved this work for fifty years. Much as I admire Glazunov this piece is superior to Glazunov's Saxophone Concerto and other such concertos.

The countryside is at the fore in Summer Days, a suite of three pieces composed in 1919. The titles are In a country lane, On the edge of the lake and At the dance. Again they are three miniatures but they capture the England of yesteryear when we did not have motorways, flyovers, underpasses and the noisy and unacceptable bustle. This is not profound music, but it is attractive. It makes you wish for England before modern technology took it over. There are some gorgeous oboe solos. The final movement is another waltz. Move over, Johann Strauss. But it has a catchy tune and a robust ending

Springtime is a suite of three pieces, Fresh Morning, a pastorale, Noonday Song, a romance and Dance in the Twilight, another waltz. This dates from 1937 and is very similar to much of Coates music: It is light and airy. Perhaps, like most of his music, it is superficial. The middle movement has a sparkle like a small diamond and is heartfelt.

The first CD which runs for 77.57 ends with a Serenade: For your delight of 1937 which is another waltz although in a brisk tempo which is really schmaltz.

The second CD opens with Footlights, a concert waltz of 1939... yet another waltz! It is predictable and therefore not fresh. It is well-written in Coates familiar style.

The Romance: Last Love of 1939 is rather sentimental. It is pleasant enough but it reminds us that his music is much of a muchness. It lacks variety. The harp writing takes away from the sadness the music wishes to impart. It is not as obvious a tearjerker as some Hollywood film scores.

South and West of 1937 is a march originally called The Seven Seas is yet another miniature which has some good moments and a clever counterpoint and what follows are more miniatures, I sing to You, a souvenir, the famous March: Calling all workers, a fanfare of 18 seconds and another of 26 seconds, two other marches Salute the Soldier of 1944 and the Eighth Army March of 1942.

The Four Centuries Suite of 1941 fares better. The four movements are Prelude and Hornpipe representing the 17th century, a Pavane and Tambourin indicating the 18th century, another waltz representing the 19th century and Rhythm represents the 20th century. This work is more classical or serious. The opening movement has a fine flute solo and a fugue. So Coates could write music of greater purpose. He should have written more. The dark hues of the second movement also elevates the flute in a very beautiful sad pavane. The tambourin is good as well and has some very effective orchestration. The third movement is yet another waltz. Is that what the 19th century should be remembered for? The splendid classicism of the first two movements has given away to music of lesser worth. The finale represents the rhythms of the 20th century with a light jazzy flavour and so we have come from the baroque and classical to inconsequential music.

CD three opens with the haunting Song of Loyalty in the orchestral version of 1935 and the original version of By a Sleepy Lagoon the famous serenade /waltz in what can only be called a loving performance. The overuse of the harp unfortunately accents the waltz tempo.

H M Higgs made an orchestral arrangement of the song Bird Songs at Eventide. Coates wrote some beautiful songs including The Green Hills of Somerset made famous by such people as Joan Hammond. Both these songs are exquisite.

The Television March of 1946 has become popular. This is followed by Wood Nymphs a valsette that is to say a little waltz. This is an early piece dating from 1917. It is noted for its humour and playfulness.

A well-known work is the London Suite of 1932 which has Covent Garden as a tarantella, Westminster as a meditation and Knightsbridge as a march. The bustle of Covent Garden is well caught with an extensive quote from Cherry Ripe. The use of orchestration is commendable. I cannot image Westminster as a meditation particularly when I think of the Houses of Parliament. The music is too tender for such a location and its associations. It rises to a superb orchestral climax and an imitation of Big Ben. The Knightsbridge is a movement that everyone knows and it is tuneful and engaging, but how does it portray Knightsbridge?

The capital obviously fascinated him for in 1936 there appeared another suite, London Again. Oxford Street is a march, Langham Place an elegy and Mayfair is a.... yes, you've guessed it, a waltz. Oxford Street is clearly Eric Coates but the music is too attractive and, indeed, classy, to portray the noise and chaos of this busy thoroughfare but that is how the composer saw it. Why should Langham place be an elegy? The tolling bells suggest a church and, perhaps, solemn services like a funeral. The rising string melody may imply hope and resurrection and the Knightsbridge march makes an appearance before the tolling bells reappear. Mayfair is an irritating waltz. The last time I was in Mayfair it did not seem like a community of people engaged in waltzes.

The Three Men Suite of 1935 contains some energetic and appealing music. The first movement, The Man from the Country, speaks of the joy of living in the country and the enthusiasm is cleverly displayed with lively orchestration. The Man about Town is a sad fellow not content with the noise and disorienting problem of town or city life and yearning for something better. The music becomes crude with a modern style (modern in the sense of the time, the mid 1930s) but the sad music holds

sway. The Man from the Sea is another contented person with its reference to a famous sea song and Three Blind Mice, the relevance of which is lost on me. It is an exuberant piece.

Another movement from The Jester at the Wedding follows. This is the fourth movement Dance of the Orange Blossoms. It is a flippant and rather ordinary piece and another waltz!

A more substantial piece The Three Bears Fantasy of 1936 is the next offering, no doubt based on the Goldilocks story. It shows the composers ability to tell a story.

Television introductory music is next with Music Everywhere, the Redifussion March of 1948 which trips along.

The famous Dambusters March of 1954 and the composers counterpoint is admirable although that will not be everybody's first consideration. The music has pomp but, thankfully, it is not Elgarian.

The last item on this CD is another television march written for ATV called Sound and Vision which is rather trite.

CD four has repeats of other works in different performances with the exception of a march High Flight and Impressions of a Princess.

CD five has the same, repeats of works already on earlier discs but with a Rhapsody after Richard Rodgers on the evergreen song With a Song in My Heart and I heard you singing. There is the Symphonic Rhapsody; I pitch my Lonely Caravan at Night.

We have the London Bridge March and Song of Loyalty (The Prayer within our hearts) with Lance Fairfax (baritone).

The final CDs are made up of repeat performances but at different times and some acoustic recordings which may not appeal to everyone.

This set of seven CDs sells at £29.99 I believe. This is good value for money and for those who love light music and the music of Eric Coates it is a must buy.

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