

PIANO MUSIC OF JOHN KNOWLES PAINE

CHRISTOPHER ATZINGER
piano



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PIANO MUSIC OF JOHN KNOWLES PAINE

Christopher Atzinger, piano

Romance, Op. 39 • Romance, Op. 12 • Nocturne

In the Country: Ten Sketches for the Piano: Woodnotes • Wayside Flowers
• Under the Lindens • The Shepherd's Lament • Village Dance • Rainy Day
• The Mill • Gipsies • Farewell • Welcome Home

Prelude in F-sharp Minor • A Christmas Gift • A Funeral March in Memory of President Lincoln

Three Piano Pieces: A Spring Idyl • Birthday Impromptu • Fuga Giocosa

Four Characteristic Pieces: Dance • Romance • Impromptu • Rondo Giocoso

Total playing time: 65:18

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1. **Romance**, Op. 39 (3:45)
2. **Romance**, Op. 12 (7:17)
3. **Nocturne**, Op. 45 (4:32)
- In the Country: Ten Sketches for the Piano**, Op. 26 (18:37)
4. **Woodnotes** (1:36)
5. **Wayside Flowers** (2:31)
6. **Under the Lindens** (2:06)
7. **The Shepherd's Lament** (1:42)
8. **Village Dance** (1:33)
9. **Rainy Day** (1:38)
10. **The Mill** (1:56)
11. **Gipsies** (1:01)
12. **Farewell** (2:45)
13. **Welcome Home** (1:49)
14. **Prelude in F-sharp Minor**, Op. 15, No. 2 (3:03)
15. **A Christmas Gift**, Op. 7 (2:07)
16. **A Funeral March in Memory of President Lincoln**, Op. 9 (5:24)
- Three Piano Pieces**, Op. 41 (5:36)
17. **A Spring Idyl** (2:36)
18. **Birthday Impromptu** (1:13)
19. **Fuga Giocosa** (1:47)
- Four Characteristic Pieces**, Op. 25 (14:10)
20. **Dance** (2:25)
21. **Romance** (2:49)
22. **Impromptu** (5:42)
23. **Rondo Giocoso** (3:14)

Total playing time: 65:18

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Composer John Knowles Paine (1839 – 1906)—also an acclaimed organist, choirmaster, pianist and pedagogue—is primarily known as the first American to earn recognition for his larger-scale symphonic and choral-orchestral works: music that has attracted renewed interest in recent decades. Of lesser renown are his choral, chamber and keyboard compositions. Recordings devoted to his beautifully crafted piano music have been few and far between. With this album, Christopher Atzinger seeks to redress such unjustified neglect.

Paine has been called the “father of the Boston Six,” being the senior member of the famous group of accomplished composers active in and around the Boston area—then (alongside New York) the American center of classical music—during the second half of the nineteenth century and on into the early 1900s. Its other five members are Amy Beach, Edward MacDowell, Arthur Foote, George Chadwick and Horatio Parker. Among them, they created the first body of American concert music, thereby wielding significant influence

upon the generations of American composers that followed.

Of them all, Paine was surely the most important in the development of American classical music, with several significant “firsts” to his credit: He was the first American to be formally trained to the highest European standards, the first to gain widespread recognition as a composer, the first to write a symphony, the first American composer-in-residence, the first American-born professor of music and the first guest conductor of the Boston Symphony. His academic legacy is of singular importance: He created the nation’s first classically grounded music department and curriculum at Harvard, where he taught from 1873 until his death. And that pioneering model soon spread to colleges and universities across the country, becoming the foundation for most conservatories as well as college and university music departments.

Paine was born in Portland, Maine, to a well-known musical family. His musical gifts were recognized at an early age by his father, Jacob Paine, who was the proprietor of the local music store and offered lessons in the various instruments



sold there. It is not known precisely when the boy began formal training, but he was ten years old when Hermann Kotzschmar—a young German immigrant well-trained in the rich classical traditions of his native land—settled in Portland and won immediate respect as a musician and teacher. He and the elder Paine quickly became friends. Kotzschmar immediately picked up on young John's musical gifts and soon took on the lad's formal training: mostly piano- and organ-based and built upon

a thorough grounding in music theory, harmony and counterpoint.

By 1858, it had become apparent to Kotzschmar that the young man's skills warranted refinement in Germany, whereupon Paine embarked for Europe and began studies in Berlin with several of the city's finest teachers. Before long, all of them—as well as prominent critics and arts patrons—were highly impressed by his talents as well as the zeal and effort that he put into his studies. Being primarily an organ student in Germany, he was of course steeped in the music of Bach alongside advanced studies in harmony, counterpoint and composition. His immersion in Berlin's rich musical culture also exposed him to large-scale symphonic and choral-orchestral music, as well as more intimate chamber, vocal and piano compositions.

In the process, he absorbed the styles and sounds of Schubert, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Chopin and (eventually) Wagner—and some of his piano works bear common European titles (nocturne, impromptu, etc.). His comprehensive training and exposure sealed Paine's destiny to become America's first significant compos-

er. Soon after his return to the United States in 1861, Paine moved to Boston, where he was immediately welcomed by the city's classical establishment.

While Paine's initial renown in Boston was as a virtuoso organist, he never lost his flair for piano playing—both as a solo performer and chamber musician. His public appearances as a pianist grew ever fewer as his academic career progressed, but he continued to compose for piano intermittently throughout his life and performed privately for his friends and colleagues, or to celebrate special occasions. It is likely that he took advantage of Boston's then-thriving in-home salon tradition, where small-scale "Hausmusik" compositions were performed for family, friends and colleagues. While few, if any, of his piano works were conceived on a grand scale, some of them employ devices found in his symphonic creations.

The Op. 39 **Romance**, composed and published in 1883, can be likened to a "song without words," though works in that genre tend to be limited in their compositional scope and level of difficulty. But this is one of Paine's more

complex works harmonically, and—in places—one of his more virtuosic. Its calm opening measures alternate between more dramatic passages and tranquil interludes until the final climax—an emphatic return to the opening motif—brings the music back into the gentle mood with which it began.

The **Romance**, Op. 12, was first performed by the composer in 1868. That concert's program likened the piece to a "Fantasie Stück," (fantasy piece) which—given its prevailing nervous mood—would perhaps have been a more apt title than "romance." Written in ABA form, its opening and predominant theme projects a somber, uneasy mood, with a few flights of skittish fantasy offering brief contrasts. The central trio has an upbeat aura, and the original theme soon returns.

The lovely **Nocturne**, published in 1889 as Op. 45, was actually a considerably earlier work which Paine had often performed even before he committed the work to manuscript. The piece is highly reminiscent of Chopin, particularly in its outer sections, with the left hand's intermittently broken chords and delicate filigree.

In the Country: Ten Sketches for the Piano, Op. 26, dates from 1876. It is probably the best-known and most frequently-performed of Paine's piano works. Each of these colorful miniatures evokes a specific musical portrait: some of them (as in many of his other piano works) reflecting classic Romantic-era themes and symbols, both literary and musical.

In the first number, ***Woodnotes***, the prevailing impression is of birdsong—with sparkling embellishments contributing to its lilting, almost elfin aura.

The pace of a leisurely stroll propels ***Wayside Flowers***, amid an atmosphere of warm, gentle wonder and delight at the beauties of nature.

Under the Lindens breathes an air of serene, romance-tinged contentment, with its sweet, Schumann-esque melody shifting between a gently undulating right hand and a less ornate left-hand part. Linden trees have been a widespread symbol of romantic love in Europe for centuries, but are perhaps best-known from their pervasive literary association with German romanticism. Furthermore, the German version of the

piece's title—"Unter den Linden"—is the name of a famous street in Berlin, where Paine studied for three years.

The Shepherd's Lament offers another strong link to the Romantic era, since shepherds were then a common symbol of a carefree pastoral existence throughout Europe. The piece's emotional feel is one of subdued, yet aching melancholy throughout.

A sprightly pentatonic figuration pervades ***Village Dance***—a delightfully celebratory piece projecting a sense of joyful abandon with mildly bumptious overtones.

Rainy Day, with its melancholic melody nestling amid a web of gentle staccato notes simulating the patter of raindrops, is one of the more impressionistic pieces of this series.

A feel of perpetual motion and echoes of Schubert pervade ***The Mill***, with its happy melody floating over an undulating left-hand foundation that suggests both the flow of water and the rotation of a water-powered mill-wheel.

Vaguely mazurka-like, ***Gipsies*** depicts yet another common Romantic theme.

While the piece can be said to reflect the rootless, ceaselessly wandering nature of its subject people, it avoids the immensely popular stylized Hungarian melodies and harmonies that are characteristic of Liszt and Brahms. (The spelling of the title of the piece is given here as it was published.)

Farewell is a beautifully crafted and reflective piece that effectively expresses the sorrow of parting from precious people and/or places, without descending into grief or despair. Despite its distinct feel of sad resignation, there are hints of happiness to come.

The preceding ***Farewell*** and ***Welcome Home*** are, in effect, companion pieces that bring this wonderful cycle to an eloquent end—pieces that could be meaningfully performed by themselves as a pair. The somber sadness of parting is instantly relieved by the brilliantly expressed joys of return and reunion.

Most likely a student composition, the ***Prelude in F-sharp Minor***, Op. 15, No. 2, is perhaps the most heavily Bach-inspired piece of this program (hardly surprising, considering Paine's foundational training as an organist

during his years in Berlin.) While it may lack the cohesive structure of many of his more mature works, it's a revealing glimpse into his early development as a composer. The piece's central fugato passage shows Paine's flair for contrapuntal writing. While the later works for organ take Paine's mastery of counterpoint to more exalted levels, this piece—a student's work or not—is well worth hearing.

A Christmas Gift, Op. 7, is Paine's first published work, dating from 1862, at which time the American Civil War was raging. The piece—in straightforward ABA form—unfolds as a frisky dance, with themes displaying his lifelong predilection for pentatonic motifs. The piece ends with an extended coda in the style of a jaunty quick-step march: very likely due to the public popularity of military marches in a time of war.

A Funeral March in Memory of President Lincoln, Op. 9, reflects America's shock and profound grief following the president's assassination in 1865. Published the same year, it was probably performed several times while the nation was still in mourning. Paine evokes a gravely plodding funeral procession

emerging out of the distance, gradually growing in volume and intensity until it reaches a powerful climax as it passes by before fading away again into the distance. The writing suggests muted drums and solemn flourishes.

The composer's **Three Piano Pieces**, Op. 41, were published in 1884. Short and relatively lightweight, they remind listeners of his often-unnoticed musical wit and humor.

The abundance of highly ornamental flourishes and filigree in the right-hand part of **A Spring Idyl** suggests the warbling of varied birdsong and the fluttering of wings. The overall mood is one of quiet pleasure in the beauties of spring. (The spelling of "Idyl" here is as it was published.)

Encompassing only 38 measures, **Birthday Impromptu** is a delightfully witty and clever little jewel that Paine wrote as a gift to a fellow Harvard professor.

The opening seven-note subject of **Fuga Giocosa** is distinctly American: it's the perky little tune of the baseball refrain, "Over the fence is out, boys," that had become very popular by the late 1800s.

Yet this technically challenging work is a brief but perfectly crafted fugue that pays witty, tongue-in-cheek tribute to Bach while identifying Paine as an indisputably American composer.

The **Four Characteristic Pieces**, Op. 25, published in 1876, were written for the highly regarded pianist Ernst Perabo, a German immigrant who settled in Boston and became a prominent figure in the city's musical life, performing often in Paine's chamber music concerts.

The amiable **Dance**, like many nineteenth-century European pieces in the genre, was not intended for actual dancing. Its dotted rhythms recall those of a mazurka—but its varied phrase lengths make it more of an abstract impression of dance forms.

The **Romance** is a highly lyrical and gently reflective piece that shifts to a slightly more dynamic and nervous feel in its middle section.

Upon hearing the highly dramatic and turbulent **Impromptu**, most listeners will immediately think of Brahms as Paine's salient influence here.

The final **Rondo Giocoso** provides pleasant contrast to the preceding piece and—with its frolicsome feel and blithe good spirits—is a happy tumble throughout.

—Lindsay Koob

Lauded in *Gramophone* for his “abundant energy, powerful fingers, big sound, and natural musicality,” and praised by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for his “fervency and panache,” American pianist **Christopher Atzinger** has performed throughout North America and Europe, highlighted by concerts at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Salle Cortot, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, National Concert Hall in Dublin, Liszt Academy in Budapest, and American Academy in Rome. He has also performed at the Brevard Music Festival, Mendocino Music Festival, Banff International Keyboard Festival, and Chautauqua Institution, lectured at the Juilliard School and Berklee College of Music, and given master classes throughout the United States.

Atzinger is a medalist of the New Orleans, San Antonio, Cincinnati, Shreveport and Seattle International Piano Compe-

titions, in addition to winning the National Federation of Music Clubs Artist Competition, Simone Belsky Piano Competition and *Premio Città di Ispica* prize at the IBLA Grand Prize Competition in Ragusa-Ibla, Italy. He has also received grants and fellowships from the McKnight Foundation, Theodore Presser Foundation, American Composers Forum, Minnesota State Arts Board, Foundation La Gesse, and Joyce Dutka Arts Foundation. In addition to live appearances on WFMT, WJR, WUOL, WXEL, and WGTE radio, his artistry has been heard on American Public Media’s *Performance Today* and his recordings can be found on the Naxos, MSR Classics, and Centaur labels. This is his first recording for Delos.

A Michigan native, Atzinger earned degrees from the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Michigan, and the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University. His teachers include Julian Martin, Robert McDonald, Anton Nel, David Renner, and Carolyn Lipp. A dedicated teacher and coach himself, Atzinger has taught at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania and St. Olaf College in Minnesota.



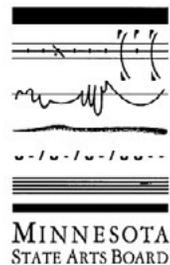
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