

Transcript from a BBC World Service program, "Recording of the Week"



"Images of Childhood"

Announcer: BBC World Service. "Images of Childhood" are the subject of today's "Recording of the Week". That's the title of a recently released disc of piano works, performed by Lyn Garland. It's been chosen by the conductor Hilary Davan Wetton.

Hilary Davan Wetton: Choosing records is always a difficult business and I have to say that generally speaking I choose records which have got music of real substance on them and I certainly don't select records with 37 independent tracks, partly because my compact disc player is only numbered up to 20 anyway. However, today's record is an exception. 'Images' of Childhood' is a series of short contrasted pieces which explore aspects of childhood or the kind of experiences which a child might most easily enjoy. I should say straight away that the record is not for children but much more about childhood, though there are plenty of tracks on it which would make excellent music to play to a child hearing the piano for the first time. For, it is indeed a piano record. The pianist - Lyn Garland – is not a virtuoso and it is not for virtuosity that you would buy the record. But she is a sensitive and imaginative performer and this enables her to interest the listener in what she is doing and communicate an infectious enthusiasm for each piece. This clearly transmits itself in the recorded performances.

The disc is divided into four sections: Sights, Sounds and Imagination is the title of the first one. From this section you can hear a charming piece by Poulenc, the 'Petite Marche Militaire' from Suite Française, which conjures up magically a world of toy soldiers, essentially made of chocolate and far removed from any of the horrors of war.

Music: *'Petite Marche Militaire' from 'Suite Française' DUR: 1'01"*

Hilary Davan Wetton: The second section of the record is entitled 'Countryside, Work and Play!' this has some of the most attractive pieces on the disc, all of which are full of colour and charm. The choices are again imaginative. For example, there are many pieces about birds available to the pianist looking for miniatures to put on to a collection of this kind, but not many pianists would choose the marvelous little vignette by Messiaen 'Alouette des Champs' (The Skylark) from the Catalogue d'Oiseaux. This lasts only 23 seconds yet beautifully encapsulates Messiaen's feeling that all birds are God's flying creatures.

Music: *'Alouette des Champs (The Sky Lark)', from 'Catalogue d'Oiseaux' DUR: 0'21"*

Hilary Davan Wetton: Scarcely the kind of piece you find in the average collection of this kind but nonetheless an entirely apt choice for this record. Indeed, one of the most attractive things about the disc is the way that it combines some of everybody's favourite childhood pieces: Schumann's 'Merry Peasant', Debussy's 'Dr. Gradus ad Parnassum', which wonderfully evokes the labour of practicing scales, and CPE Bach's 'Solfegietto in C Minor' which does just the same for arpeggios, with an equally substantial number of entirely unexpected, indeed sometimes unknown pieces and composers. Next to the 'Merry Peasant' and in the same category of countryside, work and play is a most enchanting piece by Bartok. Bartok was, of course, a composer who specialized in writing for children and who would, in my view, have made a perfect godfather, for he powerfully understood the things that interest and enchant young people. This piece is the 'Flute of the Slovak Shepherd', which is No. 15 from the 'For Children Suite'. It's another example of Lyn Garland's thoughtful playing of slender but evocative material.

Music: 'The Flute of the Slovak Shepherd No.15' DU: 1'20"

Hilary Davan Wetton: Section 3 offers us the widest musical contrast with Medtner and Mussorgsky rubbing shoulders with Balfour Gardiner and Bizet. I must mention at this point the splendid set of notes accompanying the disc by John Amis; his relaxed conversational style attempts no pretentious musical analysis but is rich in anecdotal delights. He tells us about Balfour Gardiner that when the composer's piano fell through the first floor of his house he took it as a sign and gave up composing in favour of planting trees. I have always felt that Balfour Gardiner was an underestimated composer. Like so many British composers of his generation we tend to ignore him because he was not Elgar but this charming gavotte which begins the third section has a robust rhythmic quality very much like that of Percy Grainger.

Music: 'Gavotte in D' from 'Five Pieces (1923)' DUR: 1'30"

Hilary Davan Wetton: This third section is entitled 'Home and School' and included in it are five more pieces from Bartok's 'For Children', a Purcell Air and the ever popular 'Für Elise' by Beethoven.

Section 4 is entitled 'Holidays'. This contains again a number of most unusual pieces: Liadoff, Ibert, more Poulenc, but for me also the most delicious rarity in the whole collection, Britten's 'Early Morning Bath' from the Holiday Diary Op.5. This is an early work and one of his few solo pieces for the piano. I think it is odd and rather sad that Britten, who was such a fine pianist himself, wrote so few pieces for the solo instrument. Moreover he would have been a very fine composer of piano music for children because he understood so well what amateurs could and could not do. This little piece is a real find. It is a brisk and vivid portrayal of what must have been a chilly ocean.

Music: 'Early Morning Bath', from 'Holiday Diary, Op.5' DUR: 2'29"

Hilary Davan Wetton: Taken as a whole, 'Images of Childhood' is a pungently scented pot pourri which cleverly mixes the well known with the more obscure and in 68 minutes offers no less than 37 separate pieces drawn from every pianistic tradition. The disc is the musical equivalent of an attractive coffee-table book. It supplies a splendid introduction both to the joys of piano playing and to the music of a whole range of composers. Everybody will have different favourites in a disc such as this and I would like to end with one of mine. I have always loved the stories of Babar the Elephant ever since I was given a collection of them when I was five years old. Here is Babar taking his young cousins to a cake shop for a feast of delicious patisserie; a charming fragment which neatly sums up the virtues of this enjoyable disc.

*Music: Three Pieces from the Melodrama 'L'histoire de Babar'
Third Piece 'Très gai et animé' DUR: 00'56"*

Announcer: That piano piece by Poulenc ends "Recording of the Week".

Hilary Davan Wetton presented the programme and it was produced by Molly Price-Owen.