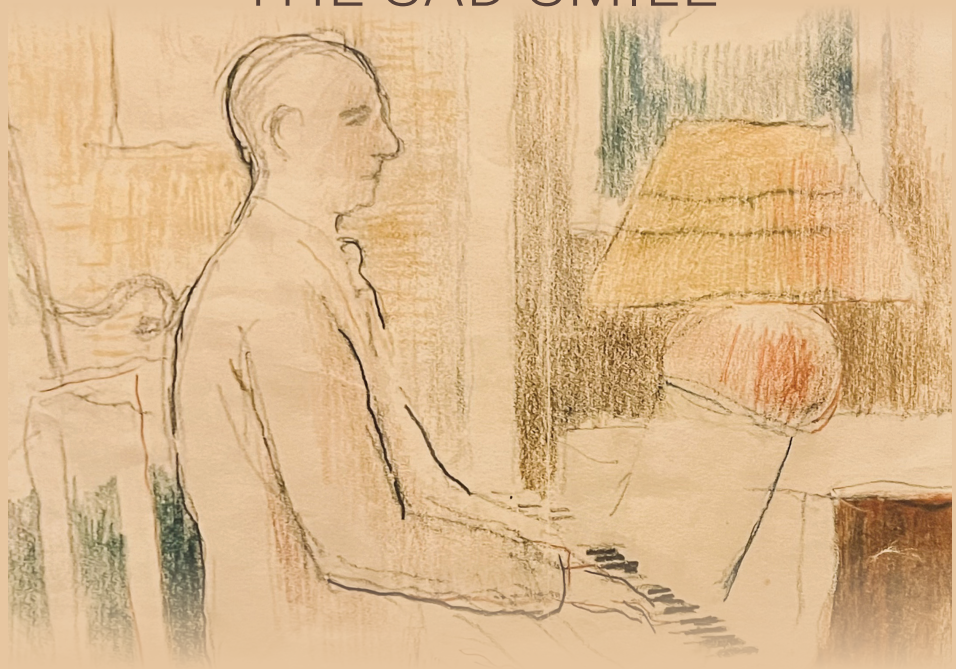


MOMPOU PIANO MUSIC

THE SAD SMILE



PAUL CROSSLEY

crd

Emma Pauncefort writes...

In the 'glory days' of the 1970s recording industry (and, incidentally, the time of CRD Records' foundation), there was a rush to record the classical canon. As the best artists of the generation established themselves, the concurrent aim was to produce the best references of music that had long been restricted to the concert hall. Thus ensued sets of a composer's complete works. Naturally, as a pioneering label, CRD was at the forefront of this trend and had the privilege to work with Paul on the complete piano works of Fauré and Ravel, amongst others.

Today, hidden corners of classical continue to be unearthed and we are encouraged to rethink genre boundaries as we elevate long-disregarded voices. Meanwhile, there is another important venture at play: the careful curation of a composer's works around an organising concept, especially when this enables the listener to better explore the relationship between one musician (as Paul underlines, Mompou protested at the idea of being a composer; his work came organically from within) and another; a cherished link, but one which can easily get lost in the noise.

This is the bent of this release. Frederic (*not* Federico, as Paul is right to insist upon) Mompou's piano works have been well-covered, not least by the maestro himself in his own performances recorded in Barcelona in 1974.

So why record this repertoire again 50 years later? From our perspective, it is a fitting choice as we celebrate 50 years as a label championing classical repertoire through the performances of world-class artists. But there has to be something more than that.

If Paul's performances in and of themselves are not evidence enough, then I invite you to listen in dialogue with Paul's essay. Such is the accessibility of music today and the desire to reach virality that we seem to have forgotten how, for its originator, it could be a definitively private and intimate exploit. Paul invites us to listen to Mompou's 'rehearsal of own'. He encourages us, as Mompou did from the outset, to listen for the silences and peer deeply into the shadows.

In a world in which our attention is constantly divided, perhaps now more than ever such albums are needed.

Emma Pauncefort
Tom Pauncefort
Directors

Paul Crossley writes...

'...hiding behind the sad smile that followed him like a shadow all through his life.'
Carlos Ruiz Zafón (1964-2020), *The Shadow of the Wind*

Shortly before making this recording, I had the great pleasure and privilege of being invited to the Fundació Frederic Mompou in Barcelona by its Directora, Sra. Berta Millà. The Foundation occupies the apartment in which Mompou and his wife, the pianist Carmen Bravo, lived and died. Immediately upon entry, one is confronted by a large bell, a reminder of Mompou's full name – Frederic Mompou i Dencausse. His father was Catalan, his mother French from a distinguished family of bell makers; indeed, the young Mompou was born and brought up next to his grandfather's bell foundry in Barcelona.

On the walls are several paintings by Mompou's elder brother Josep, himself a distinguished artist. One of them immediately struck me as the perfect cover for the music on this recording and what I wanted to say about it.

The living room, of course, included a grand piano on which I played **Pájaro triste**. At some point, Sra. Millà left the room and returned with a pile of papers, manuscripts as I soon realised. 'Are these originals?' I asked. They were! 'But I dare not touch these,' I said. The simple reply was, 'please, I invite'.

Later that evening, as I was strolling through the Gothic Quarter of Barcelona so beloved by Mompou and thinking of my earlier visit, I had a quite sudden and abrupt intimation of the child Mompou: someone so shy, so timid, so withdrawn that his mother thought he might be suitable for some holy order; the child who, as a man, would write 'Me domina la soledad' ('solitude dominates me'). And yet, the words which came to me were: 'Leave me alone. Let me be. I like to be on my own. I want to be by myself... But dare to come close to me, and I might whisper something in your ear... Can you keep a secret?'



© Courtesy of Fundació Frederic Mompou, Barcelona.

'In the artist of all kinds I think one can detect an inherent dilemma...
the urgent need to communicate and the still more urgent need
not to be found.'

Donald Woods Winnicott (1896-1971), *On Communication*

'... the forgèd feature finds me; it is the rehearsal
Of own, of abrupt self there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear.'

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), *Henry Purcell*

Here I am, at the start, like Mompou, with a 'jeu' ('game') and a 'Scène d'enfants' ('Scene of Childhood'): a great game of hide-and-seek and I am 'IT'! I like being 'it' when I am at the piano. But when writing, I am going to need the help of others who have been 'it' before, not least Mompou himself; not to prescribe, or lead, or define, but simply to conjure up an atmosphere, a patchwork of associations, of intimations, that might give me (us) some kind of handle on this most elusive of quests – to listen in on his 'rehearsal of own'.

There are two interesting hints Mompou himself gave towards the end of his creative life. The second piece of **Musica Callada** has a unique superscription: the last two lines from a poem by Paul Valéry (1871-1945), *Les Pas (The Footsteps)*, a poem which begins, 'Tes pas, enfants de mon silence' ('Your footsteps, children of my silence').

'...Car j'ai vécu de vous attendre
Et mon cœur n'était que vos pas'

('...For I have lived in wait for you
And my heart was only your footsteps')

Also (and he used them for his final recordings), he insisted that his early pieces, **Impresiones Intimas** – a collection of nine pieces of which the first four were entitled Planys – should, all of them, bear the title Planys. Planys – the 'Plaint', the 'Complaint' – is a once popular variety of poem that, above all, laments unrequited love and the exile that entails.

'Verses, ye are too fine a thing, too wise
For my rough sorrows...

...keep your measures for some lover's lute,
Whose grief allows him musick and a ryme;
For mine excludes both measure, tune, and time.'

George Herbert (1593-1633), *Grief*

Therefore, I would like to suggest and explore two approaches to Mompou's music: the 'rough sorrows' and the sad 'musick' of 'some lover's lute' with its ever-changing expression in 'measure, tune and time' (not forgetting that, in Herbert's time, 'measure' could mean 'dance').

Finding Time

'The music is written for the inexpressible. I wish it to seem that it comes out of the shadows to return back into them.'

Frederic Mompou

If a single abstract word would suffice, this is music of *adumbration* – everything a faint sketch, an outline, a glimpse, a whisper, nothing that leads to a 'composition'. As Mompou himself maintained, 'I've always protested when people call me a composer. I'm not a composer... I believe quite simply that I am music, music that I am convinced I don't make myself because I always have the feeling that it comes to me from elsewhere.'

In the 1980s, I made a film for television about the music of the Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu. This included a complete performance of his piece for piano and orchestra, *riverrun* (later made into a CD). Tōru was very fond of this performance, but particularly of one moment in the score: two solo piano chords (Figure 'L'). He implored me, 'Please tell me what you do, so I can write it,' to which I replied, 'but you did write it – two wonderful chords, which I love. I play what you have written.' I shall never forget his reply: 'No – beyond piece!'

'Beyond piece' is the essence of the Mompou project. But he needed to find a language and a vocabulary. First and foremost, his medium is the piano and everything proceeds from that.

'I like beautiful chords that resonate like sad bells.'

Frederic Mompou

He confines himself most of the time to the piano's middle register, to its song-like, 'hymn tune' register; to the region where chords produce their maximum resonance, where everything sings. Other than that, there are no scales, no trills, few grace-notes; octaves, yes, but only for resonance, never for bravura or rhetorical display. His early notation – and he called it *primitivista* – dispenses with bar lines, key signatures, tempi, attack, phrasing, dynamics (in **Scènes d'enfants** there is one *f* and one *p* on the first page and that is it throughout). Expressive indications are restricted to the odd 'gai' or 'triste', apart from the occasional nod in the direction of Satie which rather suited the prevailing musical currents of his early Parisian days and the welcoming acclaim he received there. The first and last pieces of **Scènes d'enfants** include – and it is his first use of such – a Catalan folk song, *La Filla del Marxant* – in the first piece, sung lustily by the boys with lots of bell resonance ('Chantez un peu grossièrement') and, in the last, more decorously by the girls ('Chantez avec la fraîcheur de l'herbe humide').

It is a music notated, as it were, in simple prose, without adjectives, adverbs, punctuation; something that is not expressed completely but with an irresistible invitation to supplement, to turn it into poetry. And that idea of 'beyond piece' comes from the performer.

'I believe that the music belongs to the true interpreter, the true artist.'

Frederic Mompou

Mompou's own recordings, particularly those of the 1950s, reveal a wonderful exponent of colour, line, balance of chords, variety of sound, texture, radiance. What most distinguishes these performances is his extraordinary use of rubato and – a rather underused word these days – his 'touch'. In his own (excellent) words:

'To interpret is to displace each sensitive note from its exact metronomic place: a floating movement against the strict beat following one's own sensibilities...

...a note does not exactly give its greatest intensity or beauty when it is first played. Moreover, it does not achieve its highest vibration at the initial hit of the hammer on the string. It happens that from this initial vibration, mixed with the resonance, it starts to walk a course that ascends, reaches a peak, and descends. These are the nuances one needs to grasp. In this small space, between two sounds lies the secret of sound.'

The 1920s, in his adopted home of Paris, were productive years, giving us, amongst many others, the **Charmes**, the first four **Cançons i danses** and the first five **Preludes**. There were great friendships – with 'Les Six' of which he became almost a co-opted member, and with Poulenc in particular (such a mutual admiration society!).

Charmes No. 3 – pour inspirer l'amour brings to my mind some words from the Catalan poet Carles Riba (1893-1959), part of his collection *Salvatge Cor (Untamed Heart)* -

'Exulten, amants!
¿Somriuréu, sants,
de l'atroç gaubança,
de tant d'indiscret
temptejar el secret,
de tanta esperança?'

(Lovers, rejoice!
Would saints not smile
at the unspeakable delight
of so much indiscret
tempting of the secret,
at so much hope?)

And then with the 1930s comes complete silence – nothing at all for ten years or so. For Mompou, to use words from Michael Tippett's libretto for *A Child of our Time*, 'the world turns on its dark side'. Many things might have affected him: on an intimate level, his father died, his beloved brother Josep was confined (gravely ill) to a sanatorium in Switzerland; possible personal crises of which we know nothing. Then there were also the events in Spain: the atrocities of the Civil War, the (somewhat forgotten now) bombing of Barcelona by Mussolini's air force, and all the events elsewhere in Europe and in the rest of the world. There is a letter in which he writes: 'I am desperate. I hear too many cries from the streets and they are no longer children's scenes.'

'Whither away delight?
Thou cam'st but now; wilt thou so soon depart,
And give me up to night?

...
Me thinks delight should have
More skill in musick, and keep better time.'

George Herbert (1593-1633), *The Glimpse*

By 1941, with the Nazis occupying Paris, Mompou decided to return to Barcelona.

Keeping better time

'After many months of silence, it felt as if the city were speaking to me
again, telling me its secrets.'

Carlos Ruiz Zafón, *The Angel's Game*

'And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again...'

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), *Tintern Abbey Revisited*

This quotation must suffice. Though, I could readily recommend

Wordsworth's entire poem here – all of such relevance (whilst, at the same time, being one of the greatest poems in the English language).

1942 finds him arm in arm with a young pianist, Carmen Bravo, with whom he had begun a relationship, and who he was later to marry, walking through the Gothic Quarter of Barcelona. He sees a fountain; he hears a bell; hope returns and, with it, the reawakening of the creative genius. **La fuente y la campana** is, aptly, dedicated to Carmen Bravo. And then come two extraordinary pieces: **Cançons i danses V** and **VI**. Whilst all the others in the **Cançons i danses** collection are based on Catalan folk songs and dances, these are original, entirely his own, unborrowed. What are they? Homages to Catalonia, to Barcelona? An exorcism, a forgiveness? Was there a duty and an imperative to 'sing for the disappeared' and to 'dance for the living'? **Canço V** is marked 'Lento liturgico', which speaks for itself. The **Dansa** starts with a bell, but soon all the bells join in and, for once, they are far from sad; they tumble over themselves with joy and hope. In the middle is a short interlude marked 'semplice – cerimonioso', a 'ceremony of innocence', but here, not 'drowned'. The bells once more drive us, in their elation, to a triumphant end – one of the very few fortissimos in Mompou's music. Of **Dansa VI** the composer remarks: 'Creole with vigorous and sensual rhythm evoking the bizarre style of the Antilles' – perhaps his only acknowledgement of a sensuality which is quite pronounced in much of his music. This is very much a 'dance for the living'. Thinking of the vainglorious, stiff-legged strut of Fascist thugs still haunting the streets of Europe at that time, this is the confident jaunt and swagger of sexy young couples 'struttin' their stuff'!

The **Cançons i danses** might be regarded as the centre of gravity of Mompou's project – the first dates from 1918, the last, from 1962 – and, in many ways, are an extension of the *primitivista* idea. These are not art-songs or ballroom/courtly dances; they are those of the poor, the dispossessed. The songs, with their accumulated layers of sadness, and the dances, with their measured wildness, were a way of harnessing other lived, passionate, secret lives – able to touch something unsaid, but transfigured by experience. 'Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest' (we will come to that later). As Hans Werner Henze said of his wonderful piece *Voices*: 'I needed the voices of other hearts that ached'. And yet...

'Tanzende Herzen die ich bewundere und suche
Die ihr mich rühret ihr leichten – und ganz erfüllet
Die ihr mich schlinget in euren geselligen Reigen
Nimmer es wisst wie nur meine Verkleidung euch ähnelt
Spielende Herzen die ihr als Freund mich umfanget:
Wie seid ihr ferne von meinem pochenden Herzen!'

('Dancing hearts whom I admire and seek out...
You who move me, you light ones, you who fulfil me...
You who sweep me up along your friendly crowd,
You must never know, it is only my disguise that resembles you.
Playful hearts who treat me as a friend
How far you are from my throbbing heart!')
Stefan George (1868-1933), *Laughing Hearts* from *The Tapestry of Life*

Losing Time

'When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought.'
William Shakespeare (1564-1616), *Sonnet XXX*

'...those early days! when I
Shined in my angel infancy.
Before I understood this place...
When on some gilded cloud or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity...'
Henry Vaughan (1621/2-1695), *The Retreat*

'Elected Silence, sing to me
And beat upon my whorled ear,
Pipe me to pastures still and be
The music that I care to hear'
Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Habit of Perfection*

Musica Callada I: Angelico I have placed at the start as it serves as an ideal invocation. The significance of **II**, I have already noted. I have chosen **XV** and **XXII** because, for me, they are the ‘throbbing heart’ of the entire collection, his alone, somehow no longer a ‘cri’, no longer a ‘planys’ – simply ‘my own’. **XV** in its final edition carries the designation Chopiniana – surely approved by Mompou himself. Chopin and Mompou: one, half French, half Polish; the other, half Catalan, half French, both exiled (if that is the right word) in Paris for much of their creative lives. The affinity between them is well described by some words of Edward Saïd (1935-2003):

‘Exile... is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home; its essential sadness can never be surmounted.’

Reflections on Exile

XXII is the first piece in Book 4 of the collection dedicated to Alicia de Larrocha. It was she who introduced me to this music in the early 1960s, and who later – in person – taught me much about it (thank you!). We have four phrases of infinite longing and tenderness: the first two, sung by the left hand with question marks at the end; the final two by the right hand, but, this time, settling on a deep-seated chord of D major (not one of his usual ones). At which point, I always have a distinct sense of him turning back towards me with a smile – no longer sad – as he closes a door quietly behind himself.

‘Now cease, my lute, this is the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste,
And ended is that we begun.
Now is this song both sung and past;
My lute, be still, for I have done.’

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542), *Songs and Lyrics I*

Time and again

‘I desire that in my silent music... we should be brought closer to the warmth of human life and to the expression of the human heart, that is always the same and yet always being renewed.’

Frederic Mompou

Beautiful words that, whilst specifically written about **Musica Callada**, seem to me to encompass the entire Mompou trajectory, as do the following:

‘Immer wieder, ob wir der Liebe Landschaft auch kennen...
...immer wieder gehn wir zu zweien hinaus’

(‘Time and again, however well we know the landscape of love...
...time and again, the two of us venture forth together.’)

Rainer Maria Rilke (1793-1864), *Gedichte*

'I loved thee, though I told thee not,
Right earlily and long,
Thou wert my joy in every spot,
My theme in every song.
And when I saw a stranger face
Where beauty held the claim,
I gave it like a secret grace
The being of thy name.
And all the charms of face or voice
Which I in others see
Are but the recollected choice
Of what I felt for thee.'

John Clare (1793-1864), *The Secret*

Time after time

Finally, I am not interested in whether Mompou is a major or minor figure. I have no categories or league tables in which I wish to place him; I think he is a 'one off'. However, I can say why I esteem him so highly, or, rather, as has become quite normal in this essay, someone else can. Back to Tōru Takemitsu –

During the making of the film, Tōru told me that, though he himself had no specific form of religion, he considered all music 'a form of prayer'. So, my last reference to George Herbert is to his wonderful poem *Prayer* – a series of glimpses of what prayer might be. Many seem very pertinent to Mompou, but none more than the final one:

'Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age...
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage...
A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;
Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest, ...
Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls blood,
The land of spices; something understood.

I began this note with a personal reminiscence, and I should like to end with one. Some years ago, I was enjoying an Aegean cruise. The ship had a very good Yamaha piano in its lounge and, one day, in port, thinking the ship more or less empty, I played **Pájaro triste**. But I was not alone. A lady from Texas had heard me and, wishing to compliment me, used – in her own very idiomatic way – words which I have never forgotten and which I cannot better to express my gratitude to Mompou for his poetry, his 'invitation', his 'sad smile':

'Whatever that was, wherever that came from, it is as sad a thing as I ever did hear. But, you do it so lyric it hurts real good.'

Paul Crossley, London, 2024



© Paul Crossley

Paul Crossley was born on 17th May, 1944. He studied with the legendary Dame Fanny Waterman before going to Paris at the express invitation of Olivier Messiaen and his wife Yvonne Loriod to study with them.

In 1973, at the Bath Festival, Crossley gave the world premiere of Tippett's *Piano Sonata No. 3*, which was commissioned by him, and overnight achieved international recognition as one of the major pianists of our time. For more than 50 years his brilliant technical and

artistic command has been heard in music from all periods, but particularly in the French repertoire, and in the remarkable range of new music from many countries which he has championed. Composers who have written music especially for him include: Tippett (*Piano Sonatas No. 3 and No. 4*), Henze, Berio, Takemitsu, Gorecki, Adams, Lindberg (*Piano Concerto No. 1 and Etude II*), Salonen, Knussen and Benjamin. As a recording artist, Paul Crossley has appeared on more than 50 releases, including the complete solo piano music of Franck, Fauré, Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc, Janáček, Tippett and Takemitsu. He has won major recording awards: Diapason d'Or for the complete solo piano works of Fauré, Ravel and Tippett; the Prix Caecilia for Berg's Chamber Concerto with the London Sinfonietta and David Atherton; the Grand Prix du Disque de l'Académie Française for the Fauré Violin and Piano Sonatas with Arthur Grumiaux; the Deutsche Schallplatten Preis, and a Grammy Nomination for the Lutosławski Piano Concerto with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and Esa-Pekka Salonen; and no fewer than

four awards for the complete works for piano and orchestra by Stravinsky with the London Sinfonietta and Esa-Pekka Salonen – a Grand Prix du Disque, the Edison Prize, Diapason d'Or and a Grammy Nomination. The recording of Takemitsu's *Quotation of Dream* (1991) for two pianos and orchestra, dedicated 'to two pianists, Peter Serkin and Paul Crossley, whom I have respected in long friendship', won the 1999 Gramophone Award for best Contemporary Music recording.

As a broadcaster, Paul Crossley has had a remarkable career as writer and presenter of a series of ambitious landmark television documentaries about leading 20th-century composers (*Sinfonietta* and *Sinfonietta II*) featuring the London Sinfonietta whose Artistic Director he was from 1988 to 1994, as well as programmes about Liszt and Ravel. In addition, he appeared in many other programmes, notably a celebrated film about Poulenc directed by Barrie Gavin.

In 1991, Paul Crossley was made an Honorary Fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford, and in 1993 received a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

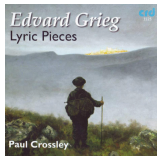
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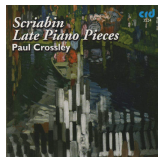
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To the beloved memory
of my father,
Lt. Frank Crossley, RN
(1914 - 1948)

Sadly, there is a second dedication –

With gratitude and in loving memory
of one of my oldest friends and professional colleagues,

Rosemary Gent

who was instrumental in putting together this recording and
who died suddenly and unexpectedly
just before its completion.

Frederic Mompou (1893-1987)

Musica Callada

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Musica Callada

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(Chopiniana) (1962) 2:07

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Total 71:47

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