



Herbert
HOWELLS

Piano Music • 1

Phantasy

Harlequin Dreaming

Summer Idyls

Siciliana

Petrus Suite

**Matthew Schellhorn,
Piano**



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(1892–1983)

1	Phantasy (1917)	4:57
2	Harlequin Dreaming (1918)	3:21
3	My Lord Harewood's Galliard (1949)	1:08
4	Finzi: His Rest (1956)	4:22
	Summer Idyls (1911)	23:36
5	I. Meadow-Rest	4:45
6	II. Summer-Song	2:08
7	III. June-Haze	4:11
8	IV. Down the Hills	2:20
9	V. Quiet Woods	2:43
10	VI. Near Midnight	4:49
11	VII. In the Morning	2:15
12	Siciliana (1958)	3:11
	Pavane and Galliard (1964)	7:23
13	Pavane	5:02
14	Galliard	2:15
	Petrus Suite (1967–73)	17:21
15	I. Finnicle's Scherzo	2:09
16	II. Gavotte	2:49
17	III. Vagrant Flute	1:58
18	IV. Minuet Sine Nomine	4:59
19	V. Bassoonic's Dance	1:55
20	VI. Odd's Minuet	1:48
21	VII. Toccatina	1:18

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Herbert Howells (1892–1983)

Piano Music • 1

Born in 1892, Herbert Howells' earliest musical education came from his sister at an old upright piano within the family home at Lydney, Gloucestershire. His school headmaster encouraged him, and a local squire funded more serious musical tuition with Herbert Brewer at Gloucester Cathedral, becoming an official apprentice at the same time as Ivor Gurney and Ivor Novello. Crucially, the link with Gloucester also drew Howells into the world of the annual Three Choirs Festival, where he experienced not only the riches of the oratorio tradition but also some of the latest contemporary music. When he won an open scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music in 1912, he changed overnight. The 'queer-looking scrubby little creature' (that Hubert Parry describes in his diary) transformed himself into a charming, dapper gentleman. With the move to London, Howells jettisoned so much of his early musical style in favour of a far more refined approach where every note mattered. The move to such a cosmopolitan city allowed Howells to soak up all the latest music. Parry mentored him and he was frequently invited to salon recitals in the homes of the rich and famous in Kensington and beyond. The Royal College of Music itself hosted many of the earliest London performances of new music and it was the French school of Debussy and Ravel that had the greatest impact on Howells. Likewise, the wartime performances of Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* were unmissable for the young composer. He joined the teaching staff of the Royal College of Music in 1920, remaining there throughout his career until ill health forced him to reduce his musical activities in the late 1970s. He died in 1983.

As for many composers, the piano was the instrument at which Howells liked to experiment and although he never composed directly at the instrument (Charles Stanford had taught him that this approach encouraged poor technique) it was nevertheless an important tool for him. It also played an important role in his creative imagination and he claimed that he could never write without a person or a place in mind. His most personal

gifts were very often piano pieces, and I am very grateful to all those who released manuscripts for this project so that they could be recorded and published for the first time.

The 1910 Three Choirs Festival had a strong impact on the young Howells, particularly the premiere of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, and it was then that he committed to following a professional career as a composer. His lessons with Herbert Brewer had provided a strong training in both piano performance and composition. His friendship with Ivor Gurney was also hugely influential. Gurney departed for the Royal College of Music that year but continued to return home to Gloucestershire regularly and the pair frequently walked for days in the surrounding countryside. The *Summer Idyls* were written between April and May 1911, and they formed part of a portfolio that he submitted to the Royal College of Music for his open scholarship. In spirit, they seem to capture the pastoral wanderings of Gurney and Howells. In style, they allude to a range of musical influences. The general theme is of the Romantic character piece or miniature (and there are moments of Schumann or Grieg, for example) but the changing musical landscape is also represented, from the jaunty Elgarian tunefulness of *Meadow-Rest* ('*Not too slowly, but very quietly*'), *Summer-Song* ('*Very lively and gay*'), and *In the Morning* ('*Cheerily*'), through to the Debussy-like dreaming sonorities of *June-Haze* ('*Very peacefully and persistent*') *Quiet Woods* ('*Tranquil, and not too slowly*'), and *Near Midnight* ('*Slowly but not in strict time*'). Elsewhere (and particularly in *Down the Hills*) Howells marks his deep love of Rachmaninov's latest piano writing.

Contemporary French music continued to be a strong influence on Howells throughout his time as a student (1912–17). In *Phantasy* (1917) we hear possibly the most successful Ravel-pastiche by an English composer, with *Jeux d'eau* echoing throughout the playful *scherzo*. Nevertheless, the level of compositional craft marked out Howells' original voice, with several commentators

pointing to him as 'the hope' for the next generation of British music. At the heart of *Harlequin Dreaming* (1918) is a fantastical waltz that develops through hypnotic repetition, only to vanish to nothing at the end. It is most likely that the puckish character that the composer had in mind was his close friend, Arthur Bliss.

The photographer Herbert Lambert had a sideline in making clavichords and in the summer of 1926 he lent one such instrument to Howells, who was fascinated by the exoticness of this relatively unknown instrument with its intimate sound, limited range and highly expressive touch. It connected him to what he saw as the golden age of English music (with composers such as Tallis and Byrd) and sparked a lifelong enthrallment with the dance forms and modal harmonic style of the period (leading to collections such as *Lambert's Clavichord*, 1927, and *Howells' Clavichord*, 1961, as well as many other miscellaneous pieces). Although inspired initially by the clavichord, the composer always chose to play the works on the piano. Falling into the category of 'clavichord style', where Howells fused Renaissance elements with a thoroughly 20th-century approach to dissonance and piano expression, *My Lord Harewood's Galliard* (1949) was a wedding present for the Earl of Harewood and his first wife, Marion Stein (later Mrs Jeremy Thorpe), who had been a pupil of Howells. It was originally preceded by a *pavane* that is now lost.

Gerald Finzi and Herbert Howells had a very complex and, at times, close relationship. On hearing of Finzi's death, Howells wrote a piece in his clavichord style called *Finzi's Rest: for Gerald on the morrow of 27th September 1956*, which was later published as part of *Howells'*

Clavichord. However, this was not the only piece penned that day. Whereas the published tribute emulated Finzi's own style, the other piece that Howells wrote that day, *Finzi: His Rest*, was much darker, more personal, and far more emotionally troubled. It presents in music a completely different picture of the Howells/Finzi relationship and, for those who understand something of the biography, it is a truly astonishing memorial.

The *Siciliana*, *Pavane and Galliard*, and *Petrus Suite* were all written for pianists at the Royal College of Music. The rich and lilting *Siciliana* (1958), with its characteristic dotted rhythm, was completed in an afternoon and gently builds to an impassioned climax, after which the tension is gently dispersed. By contrast, the *Pavane and Galliard* is a much darker response to the Renaissance idiom: written in 1964 at a point when he was also working on his *Stabat Mater*, it is characterised by the torturous harmonic language of the *Pavane* (intensified by the dance form) and nervous anxiety of the *Galliard*. The *Petrus Suite* was written between 1967 and 1973 for Hilary Macnamara, the title referring to her son, Peter. The *Suite* underwent a number of revisions and although seven movements exist, it was performed in a number of different orders. In common with other works in his late style, the suite shows a further paring back of his writing, to the absolute essentials of Howells' counterpoint. Material from the playful *Toccatina* was also used by Howells in his *Sonatina for Piano* (1971), but the piece originates from a sketch he made on Easter Sunday 1921.

Jonathan Clinch

For a pianist involved in interpreting works by one's contemporaries, the prospect of performing unknown piano music by an established composer is a very exciting one. I first met the music of Herbert Howells, like many do, as a chorister, but it was in a roundabout way that the gift of bringing his hidden piano output to a wider audience fell into my lap. At the suggestion of Stephen Cleobury, President of The Herbert Howells Society, I was asked to give a private recital in Cambridge of recently discovered piano works to their members. This opportunity ultimately led to a recording one: while I am greatly saddened that Stephen, who had become a friend after attending my student performance of Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*, did not live to hear the result, I am intensely grateful for this gesture of trust.

I saw my role in the project as one of mediation in all its senses. The crucial inability to communicate with the composer had to be overcome by considering the transcriptions by Jonathan Clinch, editor, in line with pianistic experience and with the sources, which are sometimes (as in the *Petrus Suite*) in multiple formats. There were challenges with the text in terms of notation as one repeatedly came up against Howells' spidery and

often ambiguous handwriting (particularly in the *Phantasy* and *Down the Hills*): I myself went to the manuscripts on numerous occasions and it was often through experience with French repertoire that some unclear and sometimes resolutely unfathomable moments were 'solved' for practical purposes. Howells's fairly idiosyncratic way of indicating expressive details, including dynamics, were another issue: in the event, I came to believe there is a certain significance to the composer's choices and tried to be fastidious in reflecting them. Finally, while the corpus of music was growing – word on the project spread and numerous manuscripts in private hands were made available – I felt it was possible, for want of a 'tradition', to encounter and begin to establish a Howellsian pianism that augmented that of the repertoire I already knew.

In the event, there is more unpublished and unrecorded repertoire than can be accommodated on one album. One looks forward to interpreting and communicating the remainder, and to continuing to unveil a side of Howells hitherto largely hidden.

Matthew Schellhorn

Matthew Schellhorn



Photo: Laura Pannack

Pianist Matthew Schellhorn has a distinctive profile displaying consistent artistic integrity and a commitment to bringing new music to a wider audience. A leading performer for over 20 years, he regularly appears at major venues and festivals throughout the UK and has recorded numerous critically acclaimed albums. Following study in Manchester and Cambridge, Schellhorn's first commercial release received positive reviews on both sides of the Atlantic and was awarded an AllMusic Classical Editors' Favourite. A prominent performer of new music, Schellhorn has given over a hundred premieres, with numerous composers having written works for him. His performance of Ian Wilson's piano concerto *Flags and Emblems* with the Ulster Orchestra was broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. In addition to his work on the concert platform, Schellhorn is a passionate educator and communicator, giving regular master-classes and workshops in the UK and abroad. In 2016, he was elected to membership of the Faculty of Music at the University of Cambridge. He is Patron of The Sand House Charity and a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Musicians.

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In addition the Society produces a Journal, *British Music*, packed full of scholarly articles and reviews, as well as a regular e-newsletter for members. Our website lists forthcoming BMS events as well as performances of British music, and also provides a forum for discussion and debate.

www.britishmusicsociety.com

With this album, Matthew Schellhorn sheds new light on Herbert Howells as a truly significant 20th-century composer for the piano. From the charming *Summer Idyls*, written before the composer began studies at the Royal College of Music, to the mature and subtle movements of the *Petrus Suite*, we encounter an extraordinary range of pianistic expression. Spanning over 60 years of Howells' compositional style, every track on this release is a world premiere recording.

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13–14 Pavane and Galliard (1964)	7:23
15–21 Petrus Suite (1967–73)	17:21

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Matthew Schellhorn, Piano



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A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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