

SOMM
RECORDINGS



CRISTIAN SANDRIN

PIANO

PURCELL

**THE COMPLETE SUITES
AND OTHER MUSIC
FOR KEYBOARD**

First complete recording of the Eight Suites on piano

Suite No. 1 in G major Z.660

[3:26]

- | | | |
|---|--------------|------|
| 1 | I. Prelude | 0:32 |
| 2 | II. Almand | 1:01 |
| 3 | III. Corant | 0:58 |
| 4 | IV. [Minuet] | 0:54 |

Suite No. 2 in G minor Z.661

[9:46]

- | | | |
|---|--------------|------|
| 5 | I. Prelude | 1:18 |
| 6 | II. [Almand] | 4:29 |
| 7 | III. Corant | 1:41 |
| 8 | IV. Saraband | 2:17 |

Suite No. 3 in G major Z.662

[7:50]

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|------|
| 9 | I. Prelude | 1:10 |
| 10 | II. Almand | 3:18 |
| 11 | A New Irish Tune Z.646* | 0:50 |
| 12 | III. Corante | 1:31 |
| 13 | A New Scotch Tune Z.655* | 1:00 |

Suite No. 4 in A minor Z.663

[9:59]

- | | | |
|----|---------------|------|
| 14 | I. Prelude | 1:29 |
| 15 | II. Almand | 3:16 |
| 16 | III. Corante | 1:14 |
| 17 | Minuet Z.649* | 0:47 |
| 18 | IV. Saraband | 2:12 |
| 19 | Minuet Z.650* | 1:00 |

Interpolations:

- * from *The Second Part of Musick's Hand-Maid*
- o from *The Indian Queen* Z.630

Suite No. 5 in C major Z.666

[8:34]

20	I. Prelude	1:13
21	II. Almand	2:53
22	III. Corant	1:04
23	Riggadoon Z.653*	0:46
24	IV. Saraband	1:15
25	Jigg Z.665/5*	1:21

Suite No. 6 in D major Z.667

[5:01]

26	I. Prelude	0:44
27	II. Almand	3:00
28	III. [Hornpipe]	1:17

Suite No. 7 in D minor Z.668

[8:35]

29	I. Almand "Bell-barr"	4:01
30	II. Corant	1:24
31	Minuet Z.T688*	0:56
32	III. Hornpipe	0:50
33	Aire Z.T675°	1:22

Suite No. 8 in F major Z.669

[6:00]

34	I. Prelude	0:49
35	II. Almand	2:25
36	III. Courante	1:53
37	IV. Minuet	0:52

38	Sefauchí's Farewell Z.656*	1:54
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Total duration:

61:09

It was a bright morning when I first met Siva Oke in the Royal Festival Hall's café overlooking the Thames. Amid the murmurs of a loitering crowd and the dazzled whistles of the espresso machine, we began discussing ideas for a future recording. I have long wished to explore overlooked Baroque music for the keyboard and record it on a modern-day piano. A few months later, I stumbled upon Myra Hess's ravishing recording of the Saraband from Purcell's Keyboard Suite No.2 in G minor, and that chance hearing proved fateful. I immediately got hold of copies of all of Purcell's Keyboard Suites.

A few months later I visited my friends' newly built music studio and concert hall in Paris. In fact I was preparing a concert with an altogether different repertoire to be given at their studio later that weekend, but in my spare time there I would toy around with the Suites. This was the ideal opportunity to explore the potential of a recording of Purcell, and it was in this space, in the acoustics of a recording studio, that the lavish dissonances and meandering harmonies of Purcell's music first began to reverberate in and bewitch me.

Adapting this music to a modern-day piano poses several challenges. Though there is clearly an anachronism between the instruments of Purcell's time and contemporary pianos, we can allow ourselves to view this discrepancy in a different light. It can be an opportunity to review the culture and mores of a bygone era within a more familiar language, one we can relate to more readily: the sounds of a modern piano recording.

We can think of the piano as similar to a contemporary laboratory instrument such as a modern microscope, in that it allows us to magnify the details of an early music to a much greater extent than instruments of the period can. In contrast to that of a spinet, harpsichord or the virginals, a piano's sound is naturally louder, with a vast spectrum of

harmonics. The piano can therefore sustain sounds for longer and create the impression of singing and legato in slower tempos than its predecessors could, while we can nevertheless replicate the transparent tone of the older instruments through the use of pedalling and articulation. There are yet more aspects of this musical culture of the past that we don't fully understand, but this lack of knowledge should not hinder our enjoyment of these works.

There are so many parameters one can experiment with on the piano: articulation, dynamics, pedalling. We can equally frolic on the keyboard by alternating different metres and rhythmic patterns, creating the impression of improvisation and spontaneity. Most of the music of the Suites is leisurely, save for the agonising Almand in G minor and the melancholic Suites in A minor and D minor. Although published posthumously, they were presumably composed so that Purcell's students from among the nobility could enjoy themselves and relish in an intensely private musical experience. This music is highly contrapuntal, and given Purcell's vast oeuvre of vocal music for choirs and the theatrical and operatic stage, I tried at all times to emulate the singing and rhetorical inflection of the human voice in my playing.

Purcell lived in a very cosmopolitan environment, at a time when the English court welcomed composers and musicians from all corners of Europe. The English court of the Reformation period was keen to emulate the new style of music being performed at the court of Louis XIV, and Purcell's teachers belonged to that generation of musicians educated in France. The Eight Suites are the legacy of the arrival of that new musical style on the shores of England. Its flair and elegance were closer to French norms and a break from the virtuosic tradition of the English virgalists, such as Byrd or Gibbons.

Cristian Sandrin © 2025

Visitors to London (as well as Londoners themselves) often overlook the statue of King Charles I situated near Trafalgar Square. At the other end of Whitehall, facing Westminster Abbey, stands a statue of Oliver Cromwell, the man who led the public beheading of the King in 1649, leaving Britain bereft of a monarch and ushering in the period of eleven years known as the Commonwealth. Those eleven years were dominated by the rule of Puritanism, which, whilst not forbidding public musical performances, nonetheless created a climate in which entertainment was severely curtailed.

The making of music was therefore virtually confined to the church (unaccompanied singing only) and the home (where personal musical instruments such as keyboards were played for entertainment). When the monarchy was restored in 1660, through King Charles II, the relative freedom of theatrical performances in London and entertainment music in the home returned. In that year, Henry Purcell was one year old, having been born in Old Pye Street, just over half a mile from where the King's father had been beheaded. Purcell's father would die when the boy was five, after which Henry was placed in the care of his uncle Thomas. (Later research has suggested he may have been the boy's natural father.) Thomas, a noted musician, nurtured the inclinations of Henry and his younger brother, keeping the boys safe from the capital's frightening Great Plague of 1665–66 and the Great Fire of London in 1666, and ensuring they each received a thorough musical training – Henry as a Chapel Royal chorister (as were his titular father and uncle) and budding organist. It is sometimes claimed that Henry, the most gifted of the Purcell family, was already composing at the age of nine, although the first extant piece definitively attributable to him is an Ode for Charles II's birthday, written in 1670.

A trained singer and keyboard player from childhood, in daily contact with vocal and instrumental music, Purcell's gifts were such that – when his voice matured, obliging him to leave the Chapel choir – a musical career was a natural choice, reinforced with studies under John Blow. Although Purcell composed instrumental music alongside keyboard works and

music for strings, his output during his tragically brief life (he died aged 36 – a year older than Mozart) was concentrated more upon music for the church and stage. It was only to be expected that he was attracted more by the growing fashion for theatrical drama, with its significant musical content of arias, choruses and dances. Opera had not become as thriving a genre in England in the closing decades of the 17th century as it had in Italy, but if drama with music was to be heard anywhere in England, it was in the capital. There, as a Londoner born and bred, Purcell's reputation grew considerably, especially following what is known as the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which saw King William III (William of Orange) and his wife Queen Mary II crowned as joint monarchs of England, Scotland and Ireland.

Purcell was by that time at the height of his powers, and following the example set by his former teacher John Blow's opera *Venus and Adonis* (the earliest known English opera) in c.1683, it was only a matter of time before Purcell completed his first great operatic work, *Dido and Aeneas*, five years later. In Restoration theatrical productions, dance was a regular and expected part of the evening's drama, the ability to dance an admired social accomplishment.

We should not therefore be surprised by the 17 original dances in *Dido and Aeneas* (including those in the Prologue, for which music has not survived). Dance forms feature in much of Purcell's secular output, a genre adopted by all contemporaneous English composers of the time because of Queen Mary's love for music and dance. Her example became the height of London fashion, and when she died in 1694 (Purcell's *Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary* is one of his undoubted masterpieces), the popularity of dance music lived on.

Purcell's public successes led to demands for music of all kinds from him, particularly dance movements, either singly or forming parts of suites for the keyboard. Purcell was only too happy to service those demands, writing music in every form, for theatre and church to concerts, balls, venues and entertainment, reinforced by a growing fashion for the French

keyboard music of Chambonnières and Louis Couperin, as well as that of his English composition master John Blow and other native contemporaries. In almost every genre it was Purcell's music that was most sought after, willingly accepting as it did structural influences from the contemporaneous French school but exuding the individual expression of an undoubtedly English composer.

Purcell's premature demise in November 1695 led to his widow, Frances Purcell, posthumously publishing *A Choice Collection of Lessons for the Harpsichord or Spinnet*, comprising eight suites for the keyboard. It was so successful that editions of his other keyboard, vocal and chamber music soon followed, reinforcing his reputation as the original master of counterpoint and expressive harmony, as well as of theatrical dramatic characterisation.

Purcell's untimely death has brought manifold problems for musicologists in terms of scholarship – only the manuscripts of twelve individual pieces and two suites survive in autograph, although Purcell himself did assist in preparing the lone publication to be issued during his lifetime, *The Second Part of Musick's Hand-Maid* (1689), which contains 18 of his works. It is from his widow's initial volume and the latter publication that Cristian Sandrin's recital is selected.

The First Suite in G major is the shortest of the set. Almost (if not quite) as a "setting out" of the expected nature and expressive character of Purcell's chosen genre, it is a set of brief miniatures seemingly spontaneously arising from the mind of the composer, the interplay between the hands reflecting the more spacious and broader expression of the music itself. The minor mode of the Second Suite is expansive in the second movement (an Almand), and altogether deeper – as befits the setting – in the concluding Saraband. This expansion is reinforced by the Third Suite, in which the opening key and movement characters are largely revisited in a more florid and positive manner, an aspect that is subtly highlighted

The SECOND PART of
Musick's Hand-maid :

CONTAINING

The Newest *Lessons, Grounds, Sarabands, Minuets, and Figgs,*
Set for the **VIRGINALS, HARPSICHOORD, and SPINET.**



Gul: Pearson Sculp.

London, Printed on Copper-Plates, for *Henry Playford*, at his Shop near the *Temple Church*, 1689.

Frontispiece of the 1689 edition

by the encapsulation of the final Corante within “New Irish” and “New Scotch” tunes. The rhetorical Prelude of the Fourth (A minor) Suite and the structural similarities with the Third demonstrate Purcell’s expressive range admirably, enhanced by the addition of the two Minuets that bookend the concluding Saraband. Purcell’s further range is shown at its brilliant best in the expansive Fifth Suite in C major – notably in the Almand and more fully so in the concluding Jigg. This last movement may possess the briefest momentum in the entire set, but it is a remarkably subtle gem – as if planned to catch the listener unawares.

The Sixth, D major, Suite concludes with a lively Hornpipe. The Seventh, in D minor, draws upon an earlier set of incidental music for its Hornpipe (from *The Married Beau*), as does the interpolated Aire (from *The Indian Queen*), each subsumed into a uniquely expressive world totally unlike any music by Purcell’s contemporaries and rich in human feeling.

The D minor Suite’s opening Almand bears the inscription “Bell-barr”, alluding to the summer residence of *The Indian Queen*’s playwright, Sir Robert Howard, with his young fourth wife, Lady Annabella (née Dives or Dyve) Howard (c.1675–1728), who was a favoured and talented student of Purcell’s and likely the intended performer of many of his compositions. Annabella’s donation of the memorial tablet to Purcell in Westminster Abbey attests to the depth of (at least, platonic) feeling between them. Purcell was buried near the Abbey’s organ, a few hundred yards from his birthplace in Old Pye Street.

The concluding F major Suite comprises precisely the same four movements as the First – perhaps the composer’s widow’s published sequence was chosen to reflect such unity as well as being tonally relative to the preceding D minor Seventh Suite.

As we have noted, in this collection Cristian Sandrin intersperses Purcell’s posthumously published eight suites with occasional additions from *The Second Part of Musick’s Hand-Maid*, and this recital concludes with that collection’s surpassingly beautiful *Sefauchi’s*

Farewell. "Sefaucchi" (Siface) was Giovanni Francesco Grossi, one of the greatest of all castrati, who appeared in London in 1687 at the invitation of Mary of Modena, the consort of King James II. Purcell was deeply impressed on hearing the Italian and wrote this superb keyboard tribute to another noble musician. It provides a fitting conclusion to Cristian Sandrin's 21st-century homage to one of England's greatest creative artists, whose music remains as relevant today as when it first appeared more than three hundred years ago.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2025



Born into a family of musicians from Bucharest, **Cristian Sandrin** has been surrounded by classical music all his life. His many visits to the historic Romanian Athenaeum concert hall and his frequent attendance at the prestigious Enescu Festival shaped his musical aspirations from early childhood. Years later, he would have his own debut at the Athenaeum, at the age of 13.

Cristian is especially devoted to the Classical and Romantic repertoire. His passion for Mozart's piano concertos led him to direct from the keyboard several concertos during summer festivals at the Royal Academy of Music, as well as for the official opening of the Academy's Angela

Burgess Recital Hall. From 2018–2020 he was privileged to tour the UK as an artist of the Countess of Munster Recital Scheme. Additionally, he holds a scholarship from the Imogen Cooper Music Trust, which has allowed him to benefit from the British pianist's unique one-to-one guidance and mentorship since 2017. He graduated in 2019 from the Royal Academy of Music, receiving a DipRAM, MMus whilst being part of the Advanced Diploma programme.

In 2023 he was invited to become the co-Artistic Director of the much-admired Kettner Concerts held in the David Lloyd George Room of the National Liberal Club, Rachmaninoff's favourite London recital room and the venue where he performed his European farewell concert.

In 2021 Cristian travelled to Romania for his debut with the acclaimed George Enescu Philharmonic, performing Mozart's Piano Concerto in C major K.503 at the country's foremost music venue, the Romanian Athenaeum. Since 2020, Cristian has performed challenging solo programmes, including Beethoven's last three sonatas and Bach's Goldberg Variations, in famous venues across Europe, from Berlin's Konzerthaus and the Radio Hall in Bucharest to London's LSO St Luke's. February 2025 saw Cristian debut at Sinfonia Smith Square in London and at Sala Puccini in Milan.

His debut CD, *Correspondances* (Antarctica Records, 2023) featuring music by Ravel, Enescu and Cyril Scott, was highly acclaimed in Europe and across the Atlantic: the German Magazine *Piano News* named it a CD of the Month, whilst the *American Record Guide* called it "the highlight of this month's listening". Cristian's performances have been broadcast on major radio and TV stations in Europe and Canada, from Bayerischer Rundfunk to Rai Tre, Radio France Musique, Radio România Muzical and Stingray Classica.

cristiansandrin.com

Special thanks go to Kirckman Concerts for their generous financial contribution to this CD and for having supported my debut Wigmore Hall recital back in 2017.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Daniel-Ben Pienaar, whose guidance as a tutor at the Royal Academy of Music has been invaluable. His innovative recordings of early English music and his unique creative approach to the recording process have been a constant source of inspiration. He also agreed to listen to me in preparation for this recording, and his direct feedback has been wonderful.

I am profoundly grateful to my family and friends for their unwavering support throughout this journey. I extend special thanks to Dana and Christophe Giovaninetti for their wonderful hospitality in Paris during the summer of 2023. Practising Purcell in their music studio provided a vital foundation during the early planning stages of this recording.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Siva Oke and Ben Connellan, whose exceptional teamwork made this project possible.



Portrait of Henry Purcell (c.1695),
by – or after the studio of – John Closterman (1660–1711)

SOMMCD 0702



HENRY PURCELL 1659-1695

THE COMPLETE SUITES AND OTHER MUSIC FOR KEYBOARD

CRISTIAN SANDRIN PIANO

1-4	Suite No. 1 in G major Z.660	3:26
5-8	Suite No. 2 in G minor Z.661	9:46
9-13	Suite No. 3 in G major Z.662 with A New Irish Tune Z.646* and A New Scotch Tune Z.655*	7:50
14-19	Suite No. 4 in A minor Z.663 with Minuets Z.649* & Z.650*	9:59
20-26	Suite No. 5 in C major Z.666 with Riggadoon Z.653* and Jigg Z.665/5*	8:34
26-28	Suite No. 6 in D major Z.667	5:01
29-33	Suite No. 7 in D minor Z.668 with Minuet Z.T688* and Aire Z.T675 ^o	8:35
34-37	Suite No. 8 in F major Z.669	6:00
38	Sefauchy's Farewell Z.656*	1:54

* from *The Second Part of Musick's Hand-Maid* · ^o from *The Indian Queen* Z.630

Total duration:

61:09

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