

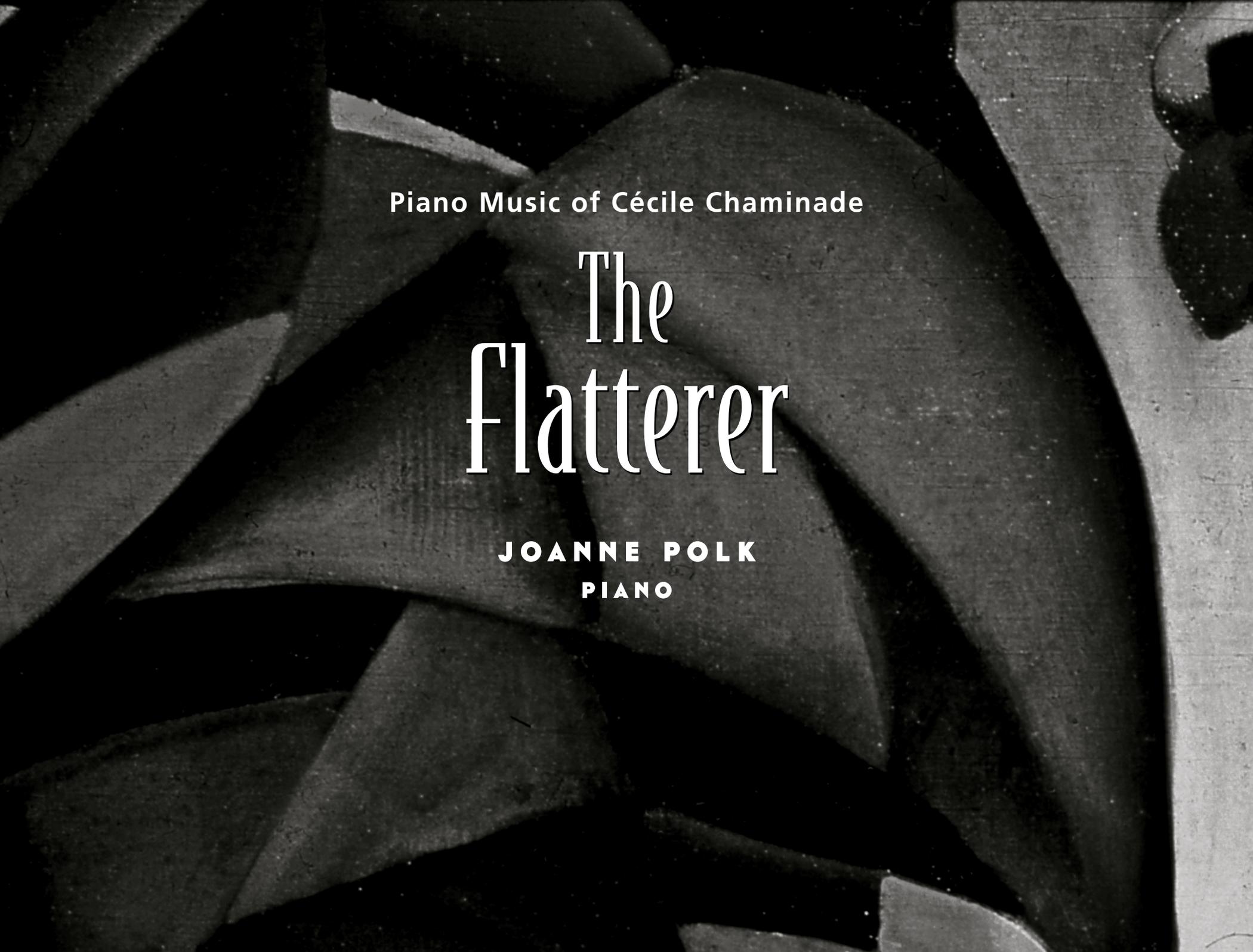
JOANNE
POLK

The flatterer

Piano Music of
Cécile Chaminade



STEINWAY & SONS



Piano Music of Cécile Chaminade

The
Flatterer

JOANNE POLK
PIANO

- 1 LA LISONJERA (THE FLATTERER), OP. 50 **4:19**
- 2 ÉTUDE MÉLODIQUE, OP. 118 **3:53**
- 3 ÉTUDE ROMANTIQUE, OP. 132 **6:07**
- PIANO SONATA IN C MINOR, OP. 21
- 4 I. ALLEGRO APPASSIONATO **6:45**
- 5 II. ANDANTE **7:04**
- 6 III. ALLEGRO **2:55**
- 7 ÉTUDE PATHÉTIQUE, OP. 124 **4:02**
- 8 ÉTUDE SYMPHONIQUE, OP. 28 **5:39**
- ÉTUDES DE CONCERT, OP. 35:
- 9 NO 1, SCHERZO **3:16**
- 10 NO 2, AUTOMNE **5:11**
- 11 NO 3, FILEUSE (SPINNER) **5:09**
- 12 NO 5, IMPROMPTU **4:00**
- 13 LES SYLVAINS (THE FAUNS), OP. 60 **3:53**
- 14 PIÈCES HUMORISTIQUES, OP. 87: NO 4, AUTREFOIS
(BYGONE DAYS) **3:15**

Playing Time: **65:32**

PUBLISHING EDITIONS

TRACKS 1, 13 Dover Publications, Inc

TRACKS 2, 3, 7, 8 Masters Music Publications, Inc.

TRACKS 4-6, 9-12 ENOCH and Company, Paris

TRACK 14 G. Schirmer

A STAND-OUT COMPOSER, RESCUED FROM OBLIVION

Born in Paris in 1857, Cécile Chaminade began her musical education in an unassuming fashion — with piano lessons from her mother. Another aspect of her musical talent began to emerge, when, at the age of ten, she began writing her own music. This led her parents to arrange private lessons with various faculty at the Paris Conservatory, not because that august institution banned female students (they did not), but because her father refused to send her to the conservatory to study among a crowd of men.

Coming of age in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century, Chaminade's major models were composers such as Hector Berlioz (then near the end of his career), Giacomo Meyerbeer, Charles Gounod, Georges Bizet, and César Franck — all renowned composers of opera, symphony and other large genres associated with serious Romantic music. When Chaminade reached her own compositional maturity in the 1880s, she made her first mark in the professional musical world with the writing of similarly large-scale works: ballets, an opera, lieder, chamber music, and a major piano sonata. Employing genres associated with recognized masters of French music was surely a deliberate decision by Chaminade to demonstrate that she had the technique and musical inspiration to compete on an equal footing with any of her contemporary male colleagues.

One such work was Chaminade's Piano Sonata, Op. 21 — the only one she ever wrote — dedicated to her brother-in-law, the popular composer/pianist Moritz Moszkowski. It is worth noting that by the time Beethoven completed his 32 piano sonatas around 1820, there were few composers willing to challenge the old master in this genre. Unable to find a way to further revolutionize a form that had already been completely remade by Beethoven, and unwilling to simply copy the master's innovations, composers such as Chopin, Brahms, Schumann and Liszt

turned their attention instead to the short character piece — as Chaminade herself would later do. Nevertheless, the sonata was in many ways still considered an entrée into the world of professional piano composition — a genre that anyone who wanted to be taken seriously had to essay at least once.

Chaminade's Op. 21 established her reputation as a young composer with whom to be reckoned. The sonata is cast in the usual three-movement form — fast, slow, fast — with the opening *Allegro appassionato* keeping with conventional sonata form, featuring two contrasting themes. The *Andante* has a simple A–B–A form, with a soaring, lyrical theme in its middle section. The final *Allegro* is a virtuoso exercise bristling with driving rhythms and high energy from beginning to end.

When measured against other turn-of-the-century French composers (Debussy, Ravel, Fauré), Chaminade managed to carve out a remarkably successful niche for herself, writing and publishing over four hundred works. For any composer this would constitute a noteworthy achievement, but when compared to the work of her most famous nineteenth-century female predecessors — Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn — Cécile Chaminade stands out. Yet the composer's true voice emerged later in her career, when, circa 1890, she began to devote herself to writing smaller character pieces for piano.

Before long Chaminade had established herself as one of the foremost composers and performers of character pieces, giving recitals both in France and the United States. A tour of the United States in 1907 brought Chaminade to a watershed in her career. While this tour was met with considerable popular acclaim, it also brought a less than enthusiastic response from

nearly all of whom fell back on sexist stereotyping in reviews of her recitals. Caught in a musical Catch-22, Chaminade found her delicate lyrical works accused of being too feminine, while her bolder and more substantial pieces were attacked as too masculine (not delicate enough?). Chaminade's reputation as a composer began to wither as a result, and her music gradually fell into oblivion. Shortly after her death in 1944, two rather damaging generalizations about her music surfaced: the first was that she was primarily a composer of salon ephemera; the second, that these pieces were designed for technically limited amateur players and were inappropriate for professional concert artists. As the collection presented here demonstrates, neither is true. Chaminade's so-called "salon" pieces are the same kind of short character pieces that Brahms and Chopin made popular, and many of them are true virtuoso works, equal in technical difficulty to any of the concert études of Chopin or Liszt.

The concept of the concert étude as an exercise focusing on specific aspects of keyboard technique is a largely 19th-century phenomenon that developed in an age when virtuosity in musical performance became of paramount importance. Johann Cramer, Johann Hummel and Carl Czerny all wrote important sets of instructional études. But the concert étude was more than an exercise. In the hands of composers such as Chopin, Liszt and the lesser known piano virtuoso Ignaz Moscheles, the étude became a virtuoso work that went beyond the mere exercise of specific aspects of finger technique and moved into the world of real music that was of sufficient interest to be played in recitals.

Much of Chaminade's best work falls into this category of the concert étude; five are presented here (with No. 4 not included as it duplicates the final movement of the Op. 21 Sonata). The first étude is an exercise in a *leggero* perpetual motion, familiar from Mendelssohn's piano music. No. 2 features a melody embedded in the tenor voice, surrounded by delicate pianistic filigree. Étude No. 3 is subtitled "fileuse" ("spinner") and captures in its delicate threads

of right-hand melody the sense of a spinning wheel. The last étude of the set is subtitled “impromptu,” and recalls similar works by Chopin falling under that title.

Also included here are four more études to which Chaminade attached adjectival descriptors: *mélodique*, *romantique*, *symphonique*, and *pathétique*. This kind of concert étude may have derived from the *Charakteristische Studien*, Op. 95 (1836–37), of Ignaz Moscheles, who was one of the first to assign emotional affects or moods to specific études in a collection. Among Chaminade’s “characteristic” études recorded here, the *Étude mélodique* is noteworthy (and difficult) for its use of a technique that pairs melody and accompaniment simultaneously in one hand. The *Étude romantique* is concerned with right-hand dexterity, and involves a significant use of hand crossing, while *Étude symphonique*, dedicated to the famous Polish pianist Ignacy Paderewski, consists of complex cross rhythms that contrast patterns of two against three, or three against four. Lastly, Chaminade’s *Étude pathétique* puts the melody in the thumbs of both hands while the remaining fingers provide the accompaniment.

The last three pieces here fall into the category of salon music. *La lisonjera* (“The Flatterer”), *Les Sylvains* (“The Fauns”), and *Autrefois* (“Bygone Days”) are all short, lyrical, picturesque pieces that recall the *Songs Without Words* of Mendelssohn, or, in the case of *Autrefois*, the transparent textures and delicate ornamentation of the music of Ravel or Satie. These three character pieces capture a refreshingly Classical elegance and Gallic charm that distinguishes so much French music of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Based on this small collection of Chaminade’s music, we can only wonder why she has had to wait so long to be admitted to the pantheon of great French Romantic composers.

—Dr. Jeffrey Langford

JOANNE POLK

Pianist **Joanne Polk** was catapulted into the public eye with her recordings of the complete piano works of American composer Amy Beach (1867–1944) on the Arabesque Recordings label. Ms. Polk celebrated the centennial of Beach’s Piano Concerto by giving the work its London premiere with the English Chamber Orchestra at the Barbican Center under the baton of Paul Goodwin. A few days later, Ms. Polk performed the Piano Concerto with the Women’s Philharmonic in San Francisco with conductor Apo Hsu in a performance described as “brilliant” by critic Joshua Kosman of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He went on to describe Ms. Polk’s performance as, “an enormously vital, imaginative reading. Her playing was expansive in the opening movement, brittle and keen in the delightful scherzo. She brought a light touch to the foreshortened slow movement and fearless technical panache to the showy conclusion.”

The first recording in the Beach series, ***By the Still Waters***, received the 1998 INDIE award for best solo recording. ***Empress of Night***, the fifth volume of Ms. Polk’s survey of Beach’s piano works, includes the Piano Concerto with the English Chamber Orchestra, Paul Goodwin conducting. The sixth volume of the series, ***Morning Glories***, joins Ms. Polk with the Lark Quartet in three outstanding chamber music works by Amy Beach. Two all-Beach performances at Merkin Concert Hall, which featured Joanne Polk and the Lark Quartet, were applauded by the *New York Times*, as they deemed Polk’s performances “polished and assured.” The *American Record Guide* reported, “Polk and the Larks played their hearts out. We in the audience shouted ourselves hoarse with gratitude.”

Prior to recording the complete piano music of Amy Beach, Ms. Polk recorded ***Completely Clara: Lieder by Clara Wieck Schumann***, her debut CD for Arabesque Recording, featuring Metropolitan Opera soprano Korliss Uecker. This CD was selected as a “Best of the Year” recording by *The*

Seattle Times and was featured on *Performance Today* on New York Public Radio. Ms. Polk's CD for Albany Records, **Callisto**, features the solo piano music of Judith Lang Zaimont. Her 2007 CD titled **Songs of Amy Beach**, recorded with baritone Patrick Mason for Bridge Records, was nominated for a **2007 Grammy Award**. In 2010, Ms. Polk's two-CD set of solo piano music by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, **Songs for Pianoforte**, was released on the Newport Classic label. Ms. Polk's solo piano CD, titled **Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn**, was released in June, 2012 on the Bridge Records label.

Ms. Polk has performed in solo recitals, with chamber ensembles, and as a soloist with orchestras in Europe, the United States and Australia. With composer Judith Lang Zaimont, she co-founded *American Accent*, a contemporary music group specializing in coveted, repeat performances of new works.

Ms. Polk received her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music Degrees from The Juilliard School, and her Doctor of Musical Arts Degree from Manhattan School of Music. She has given master classes at many summer festivals and universities across the country, including Summit Music Festival, New York Summer Music Festival, Montclair State University, Kutztown University, and at the University of Minnesota. In August 2012, Ms. Polk was one of four directors launching *Manhattan in the Mountains*, a three-week summer music festival in the Catskill Mountains, devoted to chamber music, solo performing, and community engagement.

Ms. Polk is a member of the piano faculty of Manhattan School of Music, and is an exclusive Steinway Artist.

THE EXQUISITE JOY OF DISCOVERING AND RECORDING CÉCILE CHAMINADE'S
MUSIC WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE UNWAVERING SUPPORT
AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF MY HUSBAND AND SON, DR. JEFFREY LANGFORD
AND JULIAN LANGFORD; BRILLIANT PRODUCER STEVEN EPSTEIN; LIFE-LONG
FRIEND JUDITH LANG ZAIMONT, WHO IN 1986 INTRODUCED ME TO WOMEN
COMPOSING MUSIC; PIANO TECHNICIAN EXTRAORDINAIRE ED COURT; AND NEW
FRIEND JON FEIDNER FROM THE STEINWAY AND SONS RECORD LABEL.
TO ALL, MY HEARTFELT GRATITUDE.

—JOANNE POLK

