

Ref: 0224 rev Calum MacDonald.

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Incorporated in the text was an 88mm x 74mm coloured photograph of Murray McLachlan.

Chisholm

Piano Music, Volume 3.

Four Piobaireachds. Sonatinas Nos. 1 and 2. Two Piobaireachd Laments. Cornish Dance Sonata.

Murray McLachlan (piano).

Dunelm Records DRD0224 (medium price, 1 hour 17 minutes)

Website www.dunelm-records.co.uk

Producer/Engineer: Jim Pattison

Engineer: Joyce Pattison

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Murray McLachlan's exploration of the piano music of Erik Chisholm for Dunelm Records continues to turn up gems or, at the very least, characterful and interesting works that deserve far better than the total obscurity in which they have been buried for so long. The picture continues to emerge of a composer who wrote in a highly individual style for the instrument and who essayed the tricky task of bringing Scottish piano music into the twentieth century by crafting an idiom that on the one hand thoroughly assimilated Impressionism and on the other used the folk music of the Gaelic western highlands and islands as the material for a revitalization similar – indeed, very similar – to Bartók's endeavours with eastern-European folk sources.

This latter aspect is much to the fore in the suite *Piobaireachd*, boldly percussive settings of four traditional Pibroch melodies. A more developed conception is present in *Two Piobaireachd Laments*, plangent works in which the *urlar* (ground) is treated to increasingly ornate variations. The opening 'Lament for Donald Ban MacCrimmon' became the basis for the slow movement of Chisholm's First Piano Concerto, recorded by McLachlan on Dunelm DRD0174. The other, more extended one is on an unknown ground, which John Purser in his authoritative booklet notes hints may be by Chisholm himself. McLachlan's pedalling is excellently judged to allow the resulting penumbra of harmonics from the combination of drone and ornaments to sound with maximum effect.

The brief *Sonatinas* Nos. 1 and 2 belong to a series that Chisholm called *E Praeterita* (*From the past*) and are based on Renaissance pieces by Narváez, Milan, Obrecht and their ilk. (Compare Bartók's series of editions of Italian Renaissance keyboard music, published in 1929.) They are comparatively slight but they require sensitive playing, which they certainly receive here.

It is evidence of the rapid advances being made in the understanding of Chisholm's unpublished manuscripts that five years ago McLachlan recorded a large piece called 'With clogs on' (DRD0174), commenting that it appeared to belong to a 'Cornish Suite' but 'there are no traces to date of any other movements'. Here it appears again in its rightful place as the finale of the rediscovered *Cornish Dance Sonata*, at 34 minutes duration clearly one of the most ambitious conceptions among Chisholm's early piano works. He was only 22 when he composed it in 1926 after a stay in Cornwall at the cottage of his piano teacher – Lev Pouishnoff, no less. (Chisholm was a first-rate pianist in his own right: in the same year he gave the first complete performance in Scotland of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.)

Though Pouishnoff was already performing Chisholm's *Cameos* with success (McLachlan recorded that suite on an Olympia disc in 1907), he hated the modernism of the *Cornish Dance Sonata*, which subsequently languished. In fact the opening movement 'The Wet Scythes' is more like Rachmaninov than anything else I've heard in Chisholm's output, the more original voice coming to the fore in the Impressionism of the two subsequent movements, after which 'With clogs on' forms the tumultuous percussive culmination. It emerges as a kind of Celtic *Allegro Barbaro*, albeit one that perhaps outstays its initial welcome – Chisholm sometimes has a tendency to labour his points. McLachlan's performance is more fluid, less hard-edged than his previous one and recorded in a less close acoustic. The *Sonata* was certainly worth rescuing, as can be said of everything on this enjoyable disc.

Calum MacDonald