

MOURA LYMPANY

The HMV
recordings
1947–1952

THE MATTHAY PUPILS



apr

MOURA LYMPANY

THE HMV RECORDINGS, 1947–1952

COMPACT DISC 1

(79.10)

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1. CHOPIN **Fantasy Impromptu** Op 66 HMV C4209 (2CA 17019); recorded 3 November 1952 (4.53)
SCHUMANN **Études Symphoniques** Op 13 HMV C4015/3 (2EA 13998/14002); recorded 21 March 1950 (19.47)
 2. Thema: Andante (1.29)
 3. Variation 1: Un poco più vivo (1.23)
 4. Variation 2 (1.44)
 5. Étude 3: Vivace (0.56)
 6. Variation 3 (0.41)
 7. Variation 4 (1.00)
 8. Variation 5 (0.55)
 9. Variation 6: Allegro molto (0.44)
 10. Variation 7 (1.17)
 11. Étude 9: Presto possibile (0.40)
 12. Variation 8 (0.38)
 13. Variation 9 (2.05)
 14. Finale: Allegro brillante (6.17)
 15. SCHUMANN **Vogel als Prophet** No 7 of Waldszenen, Op 82 . . . HMV C4053 (2EA 15221); recorded 28 November 1950 (3.23)
 16. BRAHMS **Variations on a theme by Paganini** Op 35, Book II HMV C3697 (2EA 12642/3) (9.37)
recorded 19 December 1947
 17. BRAHMS **Intermezzo in B flat minor** Op 117 No 2 HMV C4209 (2EA 17095); recorded 3 November 1952 (4.51)
 18. LISZT **Feux follets** No 5 of Transcendental Études, S139 HMV C4209 (2EA 17095); recorded 26 April 1949 (3.55)
 19. LISZT **Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este** No 4 of *Années de pèlerinage* III, S163 HMV C3821 (2EA 12650/1) (7.54)
recorded 22 December 1947
 20. LISZT **Polonaise No 2 in E** S223 No 2 HMV C3950 (2EA 12648/9); recorded 26 April 1949 (8.16)
 21. LISZT **Mephisto Waltz No 1** S514 HMV matrices 2EA 15623/5, unissued on 78; recorded 16 June 1952 (10.56)
 22. DEBUSSY **Clair de lune** from *Suite bergamasque* HMV C4203 (2EA 16609); recorded 3 November 1952 (4.48)

1. RAVEL **Toccata** from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* HMV C3870 (2EA 13774); recorded 26 April 1949 (3.49)
2. GRANADOS **The Maiden and the Nightingale** from *Goyescas* HMV B10531 (OEA 17052/3) (5.57)
recorded 3 November 1952
3. ALBÉNIZ-GODOWSKY **Tango in D** Op 165 No 2 HMV C4203 (2EA 16923); recorded 3 November 1952 (3.07)
4. PROKOFIEV **Toccata** Op 11 HMV C4071 (2EA 15238); recorded 12 December 1950 (4.16)
SHOSTAKOVICH **Three Fantastic Dances** Op 5 HMV C4071 (2EA 15239) (3.20)
5. No 1 March: Allegretto recorded 12 December 1950 (1.02)
6. No 2 Waltz: Andantino (1.24)
7. No 3 Polka: Allegretto (0.49)
- MENDELSSOHN **Piano Concerto No 1 in G minor** Op 25 RCA Victor LHMV-1025 (18.23)
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA/RAFAEL KUBELÍK recorded 3 October 1948
8. Molto Allegro con fuoco (6.59)
9. Andante (5.11)
10. Presto (6.13)
11. MENDELSSOHN **Rondo brillant in E flat** Op 29 RCA Victor LHMV-1025 (8.28)
LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA/HERBERT MENGES recorded 3 June 1952
12. FRANCK **Variations symphoniques** RCA Victor LHMV-1013 (15.36)
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA/WALTER SUSSKIND recorded 20 June 1949
13. TURINA **Rapsodia sinfónica** HMV C3913 (2EA 14007/8) (8.24)
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA/WALTER SUSSKIND recorded 20 June 1949
14. LITOLFF **Scherzo** from *Concerto symphonique No 4* HMV C3763 (2EA 12939/40) (6.56)
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA/WALTER SUSSKIND recorded 20 April 1948

MOURA LYMPANY's single-mindedness, courage and determination and, above all, her artistry led some years ago to an LP album suitably entitled *The Lympany Legend*. Born Mary Johnstone in 1916, she later, on the advice of the conductor Basil Cameron, changed her name to Moura Lympany, an inge-

nious alteration reflecting her ever-resourceful mother's love of all things Russian (Moura is a Russian diminutive of Mary, Lympany a re-setting of Limpenny, her mother's Cornish maiden name). Sent to a Belgian convent school at the age of six, Lympany countered feelings of alienation with a growing aware-



ness of her talent. Cherished, if occasionally chided, by the nuns (her exuberance occasionally seen as 'the sin of pride'), she read through every piece of music she could find and astonished her early listeners with a performance of Liszt's ultra-virtuoso E major *Polonaise*. Her return to England was marked by her debut when, aged twelve, she played the Mendelssohn G minor Concerto, music for which she retained a life-long affection. Her studies at London's Royal Academy of Music continued in Vienna with Paul Weingarten, later Mathilde Verne and, most importantly, Tobias Matthay whose influence was at the very heart of her fluency and musicianship. Maxims such as 'never play faster than you can think', a quiet but firm insistence on an alternating tension and relaxation and, above all, on a naturalness of line, impetus and phrasing, became central to her outlook. As she herself put it, 'I never went in for chi-chi phrasing or powdered rubato', and long after Matthay's death and in the later part of her career she would pause to wonder what her beloved 'Uncle Tobs' would have thought.

A triumphant Wigmore Hall recital was followed by international acclaim when she won second prize to Emil Gilels in Belgium's 1938 Queen Elisabeth Competition, a time when competitions were few and far between and mattered supremely. Her Proms debut quickly followed in 1940, and she commenced her long association with the Khachaturian Concerto, an exotic showpiece she later recorded with Anatole Fistoulari. The first of three recordings of the complete Rachmaninov *Preludes* was begun (for Decca) in 1941 and this also marked her debut in the recording

studio. That composer's first three Concertos and his 'Paganini Rhapsody' and Second Sonata also became part of her Russian stock-in-trade. But so, too, were her performances of English music with premieres and appearances in works by Benjamin Dale, Richard Arnell, Benjamin Britten, Frederick Delius, John Ireland and Cyril Scott.

Armed with a colossal repertoire at her fingertips, Lympny enjoyed triumph after triumph in her post-war career. Clarifying and refining her art, she had little time for what she saw as distortion and would have been as non-plussed by, say, Martha Argerich's turns of speed as by Richter's slow tempi in Schubert. For her it was never a question of what to 'do' with music, but rather a desire to present the composer's vision and wishes with all possible truth and clarity. Again, resilience was central to her success. Beset with illness and personal unhappiness she turned her back on misfortune. Returning to the Wigmore Hall in 1970, she regaled her audience with a story of how she invited her music-loving surgeon to her Royal Festival Hall performance of Ravel's Left-Hand Concerto only to receive an anxious letter asking her to confirm which part of her he had removed.

Lympny's autobiography published in 1991 may be more fluffy than substantial but the list of her honours, culminating in her DBE in 1992, is formidable. She continued playing into her eighties and after a performance in Boston of Chopin's *24 Preludes*, showing an increasing warmth and inwardness, she was declared 'a virtuoso of dreaming'. Her death in 2005 was marked by a service of thanksgiving in London.



APR's two-CD celebration of Lympany's artistry contains one gem after another. Her Chopin *Fantasy Impromptu* is pure Lympany and could be by no other pianist, graceful and fleet with a rubato at once supple and natural. She captures all of Schumann's whimsical charm in his 'Prophet Bird' from *Waldszenen*, one of those works that must surely have baffled Clara, his often musically cautious wife, who feared accusations of oddity and obscurity. Liszt's 'Feux follets' from the *Transcendental Études*, taken at a true Allegretto as marked, is enviably poised rather than fraught. Once

characterized as 'delightful' by the authors of that august publication *The Record Guide*, this is hardly a word used by those of us who have struggled with an étude of fearsome double-note intricacy. You may miss the *diablerie* of György Cziffra in the *Mephisto Waltz No 1* (however note that this recording was not originally passed for publication) and Lympany's way with the same composer's 'Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este' prompted a lukewarm reaction from, again, *The Record Guide* ('Lympany's rendering has been much praised; but it could be thought rather provincial in style ... as a whole the performance is but feebly evocative'), but hear her in the Toccatas of both Ravel and Prokofiev and you will note a fluency and ease in music which can cause even the most seasoned virtuoso to falter; high-calibre performances as immaculate as they are brilliant. What a marvel of colour and nuance she achieves in the Albéniz-Godowsky *Tango*, a born feel for such confectionary. Her finish and lucidity are unflinching in the Mendelssohn G minor Concerto where she allows the composer's voice to shine through in all its first freshness, unimpeded by extraneous gestures and mannerisms. Most of all, and arguably the highlight of the entire programme, her performance of the same composer's *Rondo brillant* (once described as 'a relentless trifle') is of such lightness, vivacity and elegance that the music seems to bounce off the page and take wing. Here in particular it is difficult to imagine a more life-affirming musicianship or scintillation.

Given such quality, you may wonder why Lympny hardly achieved the star status of, for example, Myra Hess, Clara Haskil or Annie Fisher, pianists who excelled in an exalted repertoire where their distinctive qualities shone supremely. For the most part Lympny avoided late Beethoven (though I once heard her play the opus 109 Sonata), or late Schubert, yet her very recognizable character made her exceptional within her wide if carefully chosen repertoire. True, there were moments when her playing stayed within safe and predictable parameters, and her way with the major works on these discs, Schumann's *Études symphoniques* and the Brahms 'Paganini Variations', Book 2, could be thought able rather than memorable; performances where you will look in vain for, say, Geza Anda's pianistic magic and piquancy in both works. Such limitation surely derived from a deference or insecurity, which I noted in my many conversations with her. Tobias Matthay may have laid the ground for her success, but her seeking of his posthumous approval could be thought to have blocked the way for a further daring and individuality, resulting in a form of musical laissez-faire. Refusing a request to record the complete Debussy *Préludes*, she claimed she could not see the point after Gieseking's legendary offering. On the other hand, I once received a telephone call asking for ideas for her forthcoming choice of Desert Island Discs. I mentioned, in passing, Rachmaninov in Rachmaninov, Rubinstein in Chopin, Gieseking in Debussy etc, but in the event, she chose only her own recordings (prompting a plea in a newspaper for greater modesty). Such things suggest a fundamental insecurity that can



haunt any artist, but Lympny's success in her finest performances is surely indisputable.

Finally, she found a ready answer to admirers and critics alike. Joining Mendelssohn's opinion she happily quoted:

In whatever way he writes,
He can't please every man.
Therefore let an artist write
However he likes and can.

Replace 'write' with 'play' and this is most apposite.

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MOURA LYMPANY
with Aram Khachaturian

Audio restoration:
Seth B Winner Sound Studios, Inc.

Executive Producer:
Michael Spring

Special thanks to Donald Manildi
for his discographic assistance

Front cover photograph:
Moura Lympany in 1938
(Courtesy of Christopher Johnstone)

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Duration 2 hours 38 minutes

APR 6011

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21. LISZT **Mephisto Waltz No 1** S514 (10.56)
22. DEBUSSY **Clair de lune** (4.48)

 COMPACT DISC 2 (79.05)

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3. ALBÉNIZ-GODOWSKY **Tango in D** Op 165 No 2 (3.07)
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TOBIAS MATTHAY (1858–1945) is the greatest piano teacher Britain has produced. From the 1890s to the 1930s, first at the RAM and then also at his own school, he almost single-handedly produced a generation of concert pianists who launched an English piano tradition. York Bowen was an early pupil, but those best remembered are a group of female pianists; Harriet Cohen, Myra Hess, Irene Scharrer and Moura Lympany, all of whom will feature in this APR series.



MOURA LYMPANY (1916–2005) was the last of the major Matthay pupils and she started working with him in 1937 when he was already 79. In 1938 she shot to international fame when she came second to Emil Gilels in the Queen Elisabeth competition. A brilliant technician, she followed in the footsteps of Scharrer and Joyce, though perhaps was temperamentally cooler than either.

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