

### **Moeran: Complete Solo Folksong Arrangements**

Adrian Thompson (tenor), Marcus Farnsworth (baritone), John Talbot (piano), with members of the Weybridge Male Voice Choir. **BMS 438CD**

Those readers who share my love of English and Irish folksongs will enjoy many of these arrangements by E.J. Moeran. Some share the robust style of Warlock's *Yarmouth Fair* yet Moeran's own characteristic and cunning piano style informs them throughout. The artists perform these songs with affection and great distinction. The disc is a welcome companion to the 2CD set of the **Complete Solo Songs** of Moeran, released earlier this year on the Chandos label with most of the same artists. It's heart-warming to hear the BMS publicising this unique area of British music. The involvement of John Talbot, whose championship of Moeran is well-established, adds authority to this issue. I shall not attempt a description of every one of the songs but select particular ones that especially appealed to me or have interesting connections.

Marcus Farnsworth and Adrian Thompson share the singing, with the former, a multi-prize-winning young artist, bearing the larger burden (seventeen of the twenty-six songs). He begins the recital with **Six Folksongs from Norfolk. Down by the Riverside** tranquilly opens the group, its fluid line reflected in the warm tone of the singer and John Talbot's limpid piano inflections. **Lonely Waters** is sketchily accompanied, allowing the melody to make its full, poignant, lovelorn effect. **The Pressgang** creates contrast with its brisk marching rhythm and boisterous masculine tale. It may not be too fanciful to suggest that in **The Shooting of his Dear**, we experience a visit to what I would call Van Dieren's Land. The arrangement takes on that richly bitter-sweet chromatic flavour that Moeran perhaps derived from the Dutch composer.

After this first group Moeran travels north, for – to my delighted surprise – he includes a song relating to my own county of Lincolnshire, **The North Sea Ground**, with references to Grimsby on whose docks many of my cousins worked in the heyday of the port. How they would have enjoyed the bright forthright tones with which Marcus Farnsworth lavishes praise on their town and its people, in this première recording of the composer's earliest-known song setting. **High Germany** uses the same melody that Vaughan Williams includes in his *Suite for Military Band* and exemplifies the way in which folksong singers commented on the significant historical events of the day. What a valuable opportunity for history and music teachers to inter-relate their subjects and widen students' interest and knowledge.

**The Jolly Carter** is one of the songs music teachers may recall from music festivals as it was often set for school choirs. To establish these choral credentials indeed, this is one of the three songs in which men from the Weybridge Male Voice Choir join the solo baritone.

We now move to Suffolk for six songs from that area. This county of broad farmlands and coastal areas affords examples of land songs such as ***Nutting Time*** and ***Cupid's Garden*** and sea songs - the final two, ***The Isle of Cloy*** and ***A Seaman's Life***. Marcus Farnsworth illuminates his four of these six charming songs with considerable variety of tone and sensitivity. Adrian Thompson sings the remaining two, ***Fathers and Daughters*** and the ***Isle of Cloy***, with delicacy and tenderness.

The final group, ***Songs from County Kerry***, offers a distinct change of mood from the earlier songs. I make no secret of my belief that of all British folksongs, those from Ireland are the richest and most interesting. Moeran – this also is no secret - loved the country and spent many of his happiest times here. The melodies generally have a more sinuous line, immediately apparent in the first song, ***The Dawning of the Day***. Adrian Thompson's flexible tenor is well-suited to these songs and he sings the entire group with apt and engagingly varied colours. ***The Murder of Father Hanratty*** brings us a more sinister aspect of folk music which Moeran matches with darker harmonies and quasi-hysterical high melodic comments. ***The Lost Lover*** again is lightly arranged and the melody has immediate appeal. The final two songs, ***The Tinker's Daughter*** and ***Kitty, I am in Love With You***, have our toes tapping to those infectious Irish jigs and almost laughing aloud at the end of this enjoyable recital.

In other reviews of song recitals where no words were included I have been critical. In this case, two factors make my strictures unnecessary: neither singer loses a word – all come through as clear as bells; and for those who wish to see them, the words are available on the BMS website: [www.britishmusicsociety.co.uk](http://www.britishmusicsociety.co.uk) .

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