

S. C. Eckhardt-Gramatté

“From My Childhood”

Volume 2

14 Character Pieces

Edited by Lorne Watson

Waterloo

Editor's Introduction

In Volume I of this collection (*From My Childhood: 14 Alphabet Pieces*), the distinguished Canadian composer S. C. Eckhardt-Gramatté (1899-1974) described in music her interpretation of fourteen letters of the alphabet. Composing them between the ages of six and fourteen, the young Sophie-Carmen was at the same time writing other pieces, most of which were later destroyed.

There is evidence that she planned another collection, for under the titles of four of the early pieces which have survived is the designation, "from the 2nd Piano Book". The pieces are titled: "Trio Scherzando", "Souvenir", "Dance", and "Nocturne", and are included in *14 Character Pieces*. "Dance" and "Nocturne" appear here in revised versions made by the composer in 1936. The other ten pieces are separate works of the composer's childhood which have been brought together by the editor for this collection.

There is in the *14 Character Pieces* even greater variance in style and technical demands than in the *14 Alphabet Pieces*. The opening composition, "Theme From My Childhood", is in a simple, chordal style. "Moderato", another easier piece, takes its name from the tempo indication given to it by the composer; triplets and slurs provide a charming graciousness. The "Petite Etude" makes technical demands to control the smoothness of this quiet *moto perpetuo*. "Russian Cradle Song" has a simple, melodic beauty which contrasts with the irregular rhythmic swing of "Boîte à Surprise". For two of the pieces, "A Little Invention" and "Marching Piece", the titles have been supplied by the editor.

A rather naive virtuosity pervades the "Etude de Concert". It is amazing that a ten-year-old could have conceived these virtuoso scale, arpeggio and double-note passages. Published in Paris in 1910, this "Etude" was dedicated "à Monsieur Gabriel Fauré, mon cher Directeur

du Conservatoire". Also published in Paris (1912) was the charming little descriptive piece, "Marcelle". It was dedicated to (and named after) Marcelle Dubois, a young friend of the composer. It is reprinted here in an edited version with the permission of Editions Max Eschig, Paris.

While still in her teens the composer wrote an ambitious pantomime-ballet, *Ziganka*, of which an intriguing "Fragment" is included here. It is "Durmoll", in which modal alternation between major and minor is coupled with ambiguity of tonal centre. It provides a sophisticated example of a composer's attempt to indicate *rubato* by the alteration of time-values and time-signatures.

The editor's pedal markings are intended only as suggestions; each player should use the pedal as his ear and musical taste dictate. In some cases this will differ considerably from indications in the score. For example, in "Boîte à Surprise" the few markings appear in chordal passages in longer notes, never in the staccato sixteenths. The editor's preference is for a light touch of surface pedal in most of the sixteenth-note passages, thereby enriching the tone, which might otherwise seem too dry. The opening measures of "Dance" provide another example of a passage in staccato inviting imaginative use of the damper pedal (where none is suggested by the editor). To have indicated such pedalling in the score would probably have resulted in excessive use of the pedal.

The indication *con pedale* is used in most of the pieces in the opening measure. In some of them (e.g., "Theme From My Childhood", the "Durmoll Fragment" and "Marcelle") there can be little doubt as to its purpose: namely, to indicate legato use of the damper pedal. But there are other, more subtle "pedal effects" available to those who will search to discover them. The opening of the "Durmoll Fragment",

for example, lends itself to the use of either the *sostenuto* pedal or a special use of the damper generally described as "half-pedal". In other pieces the intention is much broader. "Petite Etude" requires almost continual use of the damper pedal, but not in its most common form, *legato* pedal. Instead, a discreet use of surface pedal is needed throughout to provide the desired connection of harmonies and to achieve a quality of tone matching the style indication, *grazioso*.

Normally, pedal markings indicated in the first statement of a theme are not repeated when that theme occurs again.

Fingering indications should be regarded only as suggestions by the editor, to be considered

according to the ability, experience and individual preference of each pianist.

Italian tempo and style indications are generally those of the composer, while English indications are those of the editor.

In the official catalogue of the works of S. C. Eckhardt-Gramatté, each item has been assigned a chronological "E" number. The appropriate number is indicated at the beginning of the editor's notes at the bottom of the first page of each piece in the collection.

It is the editor's hope that students who have enjoyed these early works will want to "discover" works of the composer's maturity, such as the caprices and piano sonatas.

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THEME FROM MY CHILDHOOD

5

S. C. Eckhardt-Gramatté

Andantino e semplice

4/4 *mf*
con pedale

5

9

13

piano e dolce
U. C.

(E. 21)* The Collection takes its name from this short piece. Its "theme" was later used as the basis of one of the composer's largest piano works: the Introduction, Theme and Variations (1936).

* "E" numbers refer to the listing in the official catalogue of Eckhardt-Gramatté's works.