

# **An Irishman in an English Musical Garden: Perceptions of Stanford's Piano Music**

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## **From Fame to Neglect**

The reception of Irish born composer Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924) and his music has undergone considerable change both during his lifetime and posthumously. Despite being credited as one of the leading figures of the English Musical Renaissance on account of his extraordinary contribution to musical life in England alongside composers such as Hubert Parry, Alexander Mackenzie and Walter Macfarren, Stanford's piano music has remained hidden from serious musical scholarship and performance. Moving to England signalled a significant change in the future career of the Irish composer. The voluntary exile was immediately accepted into English musical life and like many of his contemporaries he enjoyed a successful career; illustrious appointments as Professor of Music at the University of Cambridge and the Royal College of Music signalled his strength as a composition teacher while his other professional appointments represented the diversity of his talents as performer and conductor as he held tenures with a number of choirs and orchestras. His successes were widely recognized and he forged an international reputation for himself with invitations to conduct his works in Germany and America. Despite such acclamation, the reception of Stanford's music changed throughout the course of his career, despite composing over two hundred works across all genres. Undeterred by the changes in perceptions towards his music, however, he continued to compose until shortly before his death.

An examination of his output for piano highlights the variety of genres in which he wrote which bears testimony to his wide-ranging knowledge of piano genres. Despite many of his piano works remaining unperformed and unpublished during his lifetime, he was continuously drawn to writing for the piano with his last piano work completed in 1923. Indeed, the piano played a significant role in the Stanford's musical development in Dublin and his engagement with piano compositions is therefore no surprise. All too often accounts of Stanford's music include incorrect, few or indeed no details of his piano music (Caldwell 1999, p.325; Parry 1988, pp.424–434). Considering the extensive list of compositions for the piano which has received little exposure, and an awareness that most of Stanford's output for solo piano has remained unknown, this provided the impetus to consider the reception of his piano music in an attempt to address the misconceptions about Stanford as a composer of piano music and the negative images towards piano music of the English Musical Renaissance.

While a complete examination of his output for solo piano goes beyond the scope of this article, in response to the recent resurgence in scholarship on Stanford, this article raises an awareness of Stanford as a composer of piano music in the context of reception studies, re-evaluating the contribution an Irish composer made to piano music in England and in Ireland. Recent musicological scholarship has focused on the reception history of composers as a mechanism for understanding their life and music. Perceptions of a

composer's life play an important role in the reception of their music. Despite a bright future being augured for the young musician, public perceptions towards his music changed, and unfortunately, Stanford suffered at the hands of critics who dismissed his music.

This article seeks to unveil the shifting perceptions of Stanford's piano music during his lifetime and posthumously, and considers a number of factors that have helped shape critical opinion of the composer which has affected the understanding of his piano music. Moreover, it will emphasise the value and importance of his piano compositions and reappraise Stanford as a significant composer of piano music in Irish musicological studies. While it may be argued that Stanford's contribution to piano music was not comparable in quality to that of other European composers, this is not the case. Related to this is Stanford's position as a composer of piano music in both Ireland and England. Comparative studies of Stanford's output for the piano and that of his contemporaries demonstrate that he was the most prolific, not only in terms of the size of his output for the instrument but also on account of the variety of compositions completed for the piano. Stanford's two sets of Twenty-Four Preludes in all the Keys, op.163 and op.179 represent the pinnacle of his contribution to piano music in England, being the first example of a set of twenty-four preludes by an Irish or English composer. Furthermore, they constitute the largest contribution to piano composition by an Irish composer of Stanford's generation despite Caldwell's claim that after the war Stanford 'wrote nothing of significance' (Caldwell 1999, p.253). Despite the size of his output for the piano Stanford's piano music has never been given the recognition it deserves.

The study of Stanford reception is not a new idea; the publication of two seminal biographies of Stanford in 2002, the first such biographies since Greene (Greene 1935) explored different aspects of his career and perceptions of his music.<sup>1</sup> In this climate of re-evaluation so richly reopened in 2002 (Dibble 2002; Rodmell 2002), the significance of Stanford's piano music demands reassessment. The central question to this study is why have most of his piano works remained virtually unknown? A lack of sources makes it difficult to discern whether Stanford actively tried to get each of his piano works published or performed. Considering his critical judgement of work by his students, it is possible that he was too self-critical to submit all of his compositions for publication. Despite being hailed a child prodigy, it is worth noting that Stanford did not continue to perform publicly or perform his own piano compositions.

This consideration of the reception of Stanford's piano music can serve the following functions: (i) it can contribute towards a wider understanding and appreciation of Stanford's music and (ii) it can help in the promotion of a body of music that arguably deserves greater international exposure.

### **A Musical Upbringing in Dublin: Rich Cultural Surroundings**

Amateur music-making was flourishing in Dublin in the nineteenth century with approximately sixty music societies which encouraged the progress of music in the capital

(Beausang 1996, pp.168–178). Many of Dublin’s finest musicians including Joseph Robinson and Robert Prescott Stewart actively performed with or conducted the various societies which added to the rich cultural life of the city. Indeed, Stanford’s father, John Stanford, who himself was a fine bass and cellist and had been instrumental in the founding of the Royal Irish Academy of Music in 1848, regularly performed in a range of performing groups,<sup>2</sup> while Stanford’s mother was noted as a ‘distinguished amateur pianist’ (Patterson 1900, p.3). Stanford was surrounded by a number of eminent musicians in Dublin, many of whom made a living for themselves as performers, church musicians and teachers. One of Stanford’s teachers, Robert Prescott Stewart, held prominent positions in Dublin: he was Professor Music at Trinity College Dublin and also held positions at Christ Church Cathedral and St Patrick’s Cathedral as well as conducting a number of performing groups across the city.

Despite the flourishing music scene in Dublin, this was not sufficient for Stanford. He was well aware of the role which musicians in his father’s musical circle played in the formation and promotion of a vibrant music scene in Dublin. Stanford would also have been tempted by the musical richness of the continent, experienced by a number of his piano teachers and who had returned to work in Dublin. Greene believed that musicians in Dublin ‘were so imbued with the stay-at-home spirit that Dublin treated them as part of the landscape’ (Greene 1935, p.20). For example, three of Stanford’s piano teachers, Elizabeth Meeke, Henrietta Flynn and Michael Quarry had all studied with Ignaz Moscheles in either London or Leipzig, and their European experiences would have added greatly to the standard of music in Dublin upon their return.

### **Stanford’s Rise to Fame: Childhood Exposure in Dublin**

From a young age, Stanford was developing a strong interest in both performance and composition and a number of his youthful compositions were performed by eminent performing groups and performers across the city; reception of his talents as both a performer and composer were widely recognised by the Dublin press.<sup>3</sup> It is no surprise that Charles’s first attempts at composition included songs, a piano work entitled *March*, and an operatic piece; all mediums which he had been exposed to as a child.<sup>4</sup> Parallels can be drawn between the young Irish pianist and other child prodigies such as Mozart, Mendelssohn, Chopin and Bizet who were all composing and performing from a young age. Irish pianist and composer, George Alexander Osborne referred to Stanford as ‘Brother Composer’, portraying how Stanford, although only thirteen years of age, was being taken seriously as a young composer.<sup>5</sup> The early recognition and performances of Stanford’s youthful compositions, and in particular his piano works, would have been significant for any young composer.

### **Initial Critical Reception**

Early in his career Stanford was applauded for his talents on the instrument. The young boy performed in at least two recitals in the family home, when he was only nine and eleven years old respectively on 13 May 1862 and 6 June 1864 (Dibble 2002, pp.32–33 ; Rodmell 2002, pp.29–30). The demanding programme for the 1864 recital, featuring Stanford in both the

roles of soloist and as part of a piano trio, was performed from memory. The range of material, including sonatas by Beethoven and Dussek, a prelude and fugue by Bach and a waltz by Heller, are evidence that the young pianist had received thorough guidance in the canonical literature from his teachers. Furthermore, works by the composers included in his programming were among some of the favoured composers at domestic recitals during the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The length of the programme also exhibits his talent at this young age and his ability to perform long works from memory. Both of these concerts were favourably reviewed by Dublin press and highlighted his maturity as a musician and his natural ability as both performer and composer (Anon. 1864b, p.590).

While Stanford was fortunate to have this opportunity to showcase his talents at such a young age, it is likely that his father's reputation in amateur music-making circles in the city ensured interest in this concert by the press.<sup>7</sup> Stanford acknowledged his influential upbringing: 'when I first had sense enough to look round, and to take note of my surroundings, I found myself in a centre of real music, where amateurs were cultivated performers who had taken their art as seriously as if it were their means of livelihood' (Stanford 1914, p.23). Additionally, opportunities for Stanford to attend concerts shaped the formative years of his social and musical upbringing. Stanford had made his mark on his native city and a solid future was predicted for him.

### **Leaving Ireland Behind: A Defining Moment in Stanford's Career**

The lack of a proper support system which would help harness the development and promotion of music in Ireland would not have encouraged the determined and talented Stanford to stay on Irish soil. Robert Prescott Stewart was clearly frustrated at the situation in Dublin: an environment lacking patronage, encouragement or a support structure for professional musicians (Stewart, 1875, p.3 cited in (Parker 2009, pp.173–174). The experiences which Stanford received in Dublin ensured that he left Ireland with a solid grounding in the canonical literature which would impact on his future musical career. Swanton posthumously concluded that had Stanford remained in Ireland he would have had a church position and may have founded an orchestra (Swanton 1937, p.6). Additionally, he may have secured a teaching position in the city. While visits from European musicians gave native musicians opportunities to assimilate the emerging trends from the continent, for Stanford 'the spirit of adventure was abroad (Greene 1935, p.38). According to Klein, Stanford was the first Irish composer to study music abroad having left Ireland in 1870 while others stayed in Ireland to develop the tradition of art music in the country (Klein 1996, p.271). Had Stanford remained in Ireland his piano works most likely would have been performed by the composer himself or by musicians such as Michael Quarry, William Conran or Michele Esposito.<sup>8</sup> However, a move to England and the opportunity to study on the continent would provide greater exposure for his music and more interesting prospects not only for his reputation as a composer but also as a teacher, musical director and conductor. Notable Irish composers of piano music in the decades preceding Stanford included John Field and George Osborne, both of whom departed for the continent where they earned significant reputations as composers and pianists. Of those composers who remained in

Ireland, few composed any significant piano works. Stewart's output includes few piano works: a march and four piano fantasias with poetic titles.<sup>9</sup> When compared to his Irish contemporaries, Stanford was certainly the most prolific and should be given the credit it deserves in Irish musicological studies.

### **A Dublin Musician About London Town: Changing Perceptions of Stanford and his Music**

The future looked bright for the young Irish musician who enrolled as a student at Cambridge University and made his debut as a pianist on 30 November 1870. Apart from brief periods of study on the continent Stanford made England his new home. In the succeeding years a number of factors contributed to changing perceptions of Stanford and his music which affected reception of his piano music. Like Sterndale Bennett Stanford was faulted for his devotion to Brahms and the Leipzig School of Composition (Bush 1965, p.85), his academicism and his traditionalistic tendencies. Furthermore, negative reaction to piano music in England from this period contributed significantly towards the difficulties in the promotion of his piano music in addition to reception of an Irishman in England. While an investigation of each of these issues goes beyond the scale of this article, it is important to note that Stanford's music suffered at the hands of critics, many of whom did not examine the music before it was written off.<sup>10</sup> The focus on Stanford's academicism from the later decades of the nineteenth century permeated critical reception of his music and unfortunately, it has proved difficult to dispel these beliefs.<sup>11</sup> Despite these claims, Stanford demonstrated excellent resource as a composer through his handling of form and harmonic language and his impeccable musicianship. Unfortunately, while Stanford's reliance on traditional forms of composition contributed to the declining interest in his work, the value of his work as a resourceful composer should be acknowledged through performances and study today.

### **Neglect of English Piano Music**

David Eden noted that 'it was generally agreed by all commentators that for much of the nineteenth century England had lost its way, musically speaking. No native composers arose to match the continental masters, whose works came to dominate English taste.' Despite not matching continental masters in some critics' opinions, this should not discount composers of this period and their music. There was a general opinion that piano music in England did not represent the strongest part of composers' output at the time. One critic in 1901 commended the English schools of composers but suggested that members of this school of composition 'from the greatest to the least, are not at their best in writing for the pianoforte', and claimed that 'the paucity of first-rate English works published for the piano is undeniable' (Anon. 1901, p.15). Statements like this in the press would not have convinced the British public of the value of British piano compositions at the time. Unfortunately such perceptions of English music affected the promotion of Stanford's piano music, a trend which continued with posthumous reception of his piano music. Fuller-Maitland made it clear that he was not interested in the piano compositions of either Parry or Stanford stating that 'the piano works of the two composers need not detain us long' (Fuller-Maitland 1934, p.24). James Gibb

(Gibb 1972, pp.259–315) later concluded that ‘the nineteenth century was a bleak one for British music.’

In order to present the impact which these factors had on the promotion of his piano music, reception of his piano music will be examined in the context of publications and performances of his piano music.

### **Stanford and his Publishers: Publications of Stanford’s Piano Music**

Stanford was fortunate that a number of his piano works were published during his lifetime with many issued shortly after composition. However, in most cases piano scores by the composer are no longer available for purchase, while others remain in manuscript; this has hindered posthumous performances of his piano music. Stanford did express concerns about the difficulties in getting works published by English publishing houses, he commended foreign publishing houses for attending concerts to hear newly composed works played from manuscripts (Stanford 1907, p.38). His piano compositions were published with a range of publishing houses with many of his choices of publishers reflecting their own interests. For example, the catalogue of the publishing house Ascherberg, Hopwood & Crew was mostly based on light music (Fuller-Maitland and Ward Jones), while Chappell also dominated in this field (Hust, Cranmer, Ward Jones and Snell). Augener was known for producing cheap editions of the classics in addition to modern works and were associated with both educational and piano music (Ward Jones). The variety of publishers used did little to ensure continued promotion of his music by the publishers and it does not appear that Stanford had an exclusive contract with any publisher. This impacted on the lack of a publication of a complete or collected posthumous edition of his piano works. Such a publication could have contributed greatly to the continued promotion of his music for this instrument. Chopin, for example, had a contract with Breitkopf & Härtel and they produced a collected edition after his death.<sup>12</sup> Such a deficiency in support from a publisher in his piano music affected the reception of his piano music.

Positive reception of Stanford’s work in Germany resulted in many publications of his chamber works by German publishing houses. Such interest shown by foreign publishers in his music was an important step for Stanford not only in establishing an international reputation for himself, but also for promoting English music abroad. These publishers include Bote & Bock, F. Ries, C.G. Röder and A.H. Payne, Simrock and Breitkopf & Härtel. In order to acquire an international reputation for his piano music, an association with a German publishing house would have been vital as many of these publishers could ensure wider dissemination. However, Stanford’s piano music did not receive the same exposure on the continent with only his Violin Concerto op.74 published in Germany in the twentieth century marking a decline in interest in Stanford’s music in Germany in the second half of his career. Not being a pianist-composer as he had retired from performing publically, this resulted in a lack of exposure for his piano music in this context.

An examination of the publishers of Stanford's piano works reveals a varied list with Stainer & Bell publishing the largest number of his piano works.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, although Stainer & Bell Ltd. no longer hold Stanford's piano music in their current sales catalogue, those works which had been originally published by the publishing house are available as authorised photocopies through special order.<sup>14</sup> Stanford's connection with this publishing house from its earliest beginnings through his public support of the venture may attribute to the company's continued interest in the Irish composer's music.<sup>15</sup> Stainer & Bell Ltd. had formed in December 1907 and Stanford's friend and biographer, Harry Plunkett Greene, was a member of the music selection committee whose responsibility was to establish the initial range of the catalogue for the company. Many of Stanford's works were published with the company following his support of the enterprise including his treatise on musical composition as part of a joint venture with Macmillan (Stanford 1911).

### **The Examination System in England: A Demand for Pedagogical Music**

Stanford was on the board of examiners of the newly founded Associated Board of the Royal Academy of Music and Royal College of Music.<sup>16</sup> The placing of a range of Stanford's compositions as test pieces on the graded examinations of various examination boards ensured exposure for some of his piano music.<sup>17</sup> It was a challenge for English piano music to gain a place on the examination syllabi with much interest in European music. This was linked to the general perception of English piano music of the English Musical Renaissance and added to the problematic reception of Stanford's piano music. Writing in 1918 Ernest Austin applauded the Associated Board for including the works of English composers on the syllabi and noted that twenty-one pieces by English composers were to be included in the 1919 syllabus along with fifty-one pieces by other composers. This was in comparison with the forty-nine items in the 1909 syllabus which were all by foreign composers (Austin 1918, p.546).<sup>18</sup> Despite initial interest in putting Stanford's piano works on the examination syllabi demonstrating that his music was deemed suitable for such audiences, this trend did not continue.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Stanford reception suffered on account of perceptions of him as a pedagogue which was linked to his work at the Royal College of Music. Guy Stanford believed that 'too much emphasis [...] [was] given to his teaching and far too little on his composition'.<sup>20</sup> While early posthumous reception of Stanford focused on his pedagogical talents and his work as an educationalist why then do examining boards in England and Ireland no longer identify the pedagogical value of his piano literature and include his music on examination syllabi? A wide-spread recognition of Stanford's talent as a writer of pedagogical music is long overdue. The last appearance of a work by Stanford on the syllabus for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music was in 1991. Although they have not enjoyed the status they deserve, Stanford's contributions to pedagogical music should be given the opportunity to contribute to the culture of piano playing among the youth by being included on exam syllabi in the future in both Ireland and England.

### **Changing Perceptions**

Changing perceptions of the composer and his music had a negative impact on the spread and popularity of Stanford's music; the situation with posthumous publications of his piano music did not improve. The lack of availability of piano works for purchase greatly affected the reception of his piano music and has undoubtedly led to the decline in interest in this aspect of the composer's output. Today only a small number of his piano works are available for purchase which serves to highlight the lack of awareness in the composer's music for the instrument. These works include *Three Dante Rhapsodies* op.92 (Stainer & Bell and Cathedral Music), *Six Characteristic Pieces*, op.132 (Stainer & Bell and Cathedral Music), *Five Caprices* op.136, (Stainer & Bell) *Night Thoughts* op. 148 (Stainer & Bell), *Twenty-Four Preludes* op.163 and op.179 (Cathedral Music), *Six Sketches in Two Sets for Children* (Stainer & Bell and ABRSM Publishing) and *Ballade in G minor* (Banks Music Publications and Fitzjohn Music Publications). This small list of published works is disappointing when one considers Stanford's reputation as a composer in England. Prelude nos 4 and 10 have been published in collections of piano music (Salter 1990; Jones 1996). The inclusion of two preludes in collections of Romantic music demonstrates that the editors of these collections placed these works on a par with the other pieces in the set and also believed these works to be marketable. To ensure exposure of Stanford's piano music future collections should strive to include much more of Stanford's piano music and recognize the value of his piano music in addition to promoting British piano music of the English Musical Renaissance. Irish and English pianists have had few opportunities to experience music from this period and many would not normally associate Stanford with the instrument as his music has not been readily available. The repertoire of amateur pianists should not be limited to the music of European composers, and publishers, like performers, are responsible for the coverage a composer's works receive. While some of his piano music was re-issued in 1992, namely his *Twenty-Four Preludes* op.163 and op.179, these publications did not correct the numerous errors in the original editions of 1919 and 1921 respectively. In an attempt to create an authentic edition of the preludes I have recently prepared an edition of the works. Dissemination of this edition along with performances by established pianists will aid the future reception of these works which represent Stanford's largest contribution to solo piano music. Furthermore, editions of his unpublished works need to be created and published in order to raise awareness of the richness of Stanford's contribution to piano literature:

### **Performance Reception of Stanford's Piano Works**

Stanford's piano music has long been underestimated by performers but recently his music has begun to assume a place in the repertoire. The lack of available scores contributed to the neglect of Stanford's piano music. There appears to have been less interest by performers in his piano music than in other genres of his output and as a result performances of Stanford's piano works are difficult to trace. Stanford's association with notable performers in England, however, did ensure that some works received at least one performance during their lifetime with many of his piano compositions dedicated to distinguished performers.<sup>21</sup> The promotion and support of his music by talented musicians could only serve to help in the dissemination of his music. Exponents of his piano music included Fuller-Maitland, Agnes Zimmerman,<sup>22</sup> Percy Grainger, Fanny Davies,<sup>23</sup> Dora Bright<sup>24</sup> and Leonard Borwick.<sup>25</sup> With the exception of



Fuller-Maitland, who worked primarily as a music critic and writer on music, each of these performers had earned a solid reputation for themselves as pianists in England. Borwick was a loyal supporter of Stanford and his music and it was he who premiered Stanford's Piano Concerto no.1 in 1895 and Concert Variations Upon an English Theme in 1899 conducted by the composer on both occasions. Grainger also regularly performed Stanford's piano music and made arrangements of Stanford's *Four Irish Dances*. However, despite being the dedicatee of Stanford's most virtuosic piano composition, Grainger provided a damning account of his opinions of Stanford's piano music in his anecdotes written in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>26</sup> After initial performances of the *Three Dante Rhapsodies*, Grainger discontinued from including them in his recitals despite pleas from Stanford to perform them.<sup>27</sup> Grainger declared, 'who else would have bothered with his dry 'Four Irish Dances' & miserably dull Dante Rhapsodies?'<sup>28</sup> He also noted his lack of interest in the rhapsodies: 'what rack-pains I tholed with that hated Beatrice Rhapsody! How hard it was to keep in mind, in practising, on its dull, dry phrases and what a fool I felt, playing it in concerts.'<sup>29</sup> While these anecdotes are unpublished, they represent Grainger's opinions which he may have voiced publically. It was plausible that Grainger did not publically promote Stanford's piano compositions.

Dedicatees of Stanford's piano music include Raoul de Versan (Suite op.2), Marie Krebs (Toccata in C) Fuller-Maitland (Six Waltzes), Fanny Davies (Six Concert Pieces), Percy Grainger (*Three Dante Rhapsodies*), Moritz Rosenthal (Six Characteristic Pieces) and Harold Samuel (Twenty-Four Preludes in all the Keys Set II).<sup>30</sup> While the dedicatees of his piano music gave initial performances of the works, their interest in the works does not appear to have sustained as there are few records which suggest that his dedicatees continued to programme his piano music in their concerts. Although the lack of performances of works dedicated to them may suggest a lack of interest in his music, in her account of the piano sonata in England, Lisa Hardy suggests that many of these pianists 'became inundated with compositions, all competing for an airing' (Hardy 2001, p.4). Undoubtedly this made it difficult for English works to gain a permanent place in the repertoire of notable performers. Although these pianists may have attempted to champion Stanford's music in England, this was not sufficient to raise the awareness of his solo piano music abroad, resulting in a lack of international publications. There do not appear to be any records of performances of Stanford's piano music abroad during his lifetime. In England it was not until the twentieth century that performers began to perform British piano music abroad, thus building a reputation for British composers as composers for the instrument. However, by that point in Stanford's career his music had ceased being published by German publishing houses.

Attempts were made by pianists in England to proclaim the greatness of piano composition from this period in England and concerts were arranged which consisted wholly of pieces by English composers. Two such concerts were given in 1892 and 1902 by performers Dora Bright and Fanny Davies. On both occasions piano music by Stanford was included as representative of English piano music of the period. As was the case, however, with much of the piano music being composed in England at the time it was difficult to secure continued performances of the music. To some Stanford's music would seem old-

fashioned with too strong an allegiance to traditional forms and ideas.(Plantinga 2003, p.13) claimed that:

there is no denying that a great deal more piano music of real consequence was written in the first half of the nineteenth century than in the second. The decline of the piano as a vehicle for the musical thoughts of the leading composers seems to have paralleled the general fall from grace of sonata-type pieces' [...] 'a general feeling in this arena, after that shorter keyboard works of Schumann, Liszt, and many others, such associations were already an old story.

This trajectory did not hold well for the promotion of Stanford's piano music in the twentieth century and may well explain the lack of interest in English piano music of the period.

### **Critical Reception of Stanford's Piano Music**

Reviews of Stanford's piano music were positive. One reviewer noted his 'brilliant scherzo in B minor as a piece of the most effective kind' (Anon. 1901, p.15), while the overtones of Schumann and Brahms were detected in his piano sonata, (Anon. 1884b, p.6) despite another critic deeming it as one of the most important compositions for piano solo within the past generation' (Anon. 1884a, p.147). Two performances of a number of his preludes were reported on favourably in *The Times*. The pieces were noted as 'a collection worth exploring' (Anon. 1920, p.8) and 'graceful and homely' (Anon. 1922, p.10) with much focus on their suitability for the amateur performer. Such continued reference to the amateur market, while positive in terms of generating sales, would not have initiated interest from professional performers in the work. Notwithstanding the value of a number of these works for amateur performers, they still hold value as pieces suitable for concert performance. Such repeated references to their suitability for amateur performers and to their simplicity, while positive, ironically prevented them from being taken seriously as collections of preludes which add to the strong tradition of such a body of work in musical history. While some may be simple on their own, a performance of a complete set in concert would make for a demanding programme for the performer, but also highly interesting and entertaining for the audience due to the variety and contrast of musical material. It was also interesting to note that the performer programmed Stanford's preludes alongside works by Bach, Schubert, Debussy, Mozart and James Friskin.

Despite his position as Professor of Composition at the Royal College of Music, it is difficult to assert why no students performed Stanford's music, which would have guaranteed further exposure for his piano music. It is clear that he did not engage in the self-promotion of his piano works and as new composers occupied the centre of the stage Stanford was largely forgotten. Stanford was well aware of the situation and confided in Richter: 'The younger generation is excellent, [...] but it should not in justice cut out entirely the men who prepared the way for them.'<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in his role as pedagogue he was committed to the promotion of his students; he often encouraged them to present their works to performers and conductors in the hope of achieving a performance of their compositions.

Such interest in the work of his students could have attributed to a lack of interest in trying to secure performances of his works.

As the preludes were not promoted by their publishers in the years after their initial publication, this contributed to the pieces remaining hidden from serious musical scholarship and performance. Despite some broadcast recordings of a number of preludes from both op.163 and op.179 and some performances from *Six Characteristic Pieces* and *Three Dante Rhapsodies* on 26 May 1938 by Angus Morrison,<sup>32</sup> the first complete recording of all of these works did not appear until 1992.<sup>33</sup>

### **A Reawakening of Interest in Stanford's Piano Music**

It is only in recent times that performers have begun to place any importance on Stanford's piano works. Undoubtedly the preludes represent some of his strongest compositions for piano. Peter Jacobs, who has an interest in resurrecting and promoting neglected piano music by British composers (Anderson 2001, p.59), completed recordings of both sets of Stanford's preludes for piano.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, neither CD is available for purchase, with op.163 featuring as a 'Deleted Title' and only available as a special order. Such lack of availability of a complete recording of the preludes attributes to an ignorance of the works today. On her album *Fallen Leaves from an Irish Album* Una Hunt included three works by Stanford<sup>35</sup> while Christopher Howell's recent release entitled *Land of Sunset Glories: Piano Music by Charles Villiers Stanford* includes a wide and varied selection of Stanford's piano music.<sup>36</sup> This recording by the Italian company is an important step in securing future interest in the rest of Stanford's piano compositions.<sup>37</sup> Despite an interest taken by Hyperion Records in other aspects of Stanford's output they have yet to record any of his piano music. A complete recording of all of Stanford's piano music which is readily available to a wide audience is a vital strand in the future promotion of Stanford's facility as a composer of piano music. Indeed, it would be fitting for an Irish pianist to act as a champion of Stanford's solo piano.

Not until the 1990s did Stanford enjoy critical support and interest in his piano music with the Chiltern Music publication of Stanford's two sets of *Twenty-Four Preludes*. Most importantly, the first and only article to critically engage with any aspect of Stanford's piano music was penned by Michael Allis (Allis 1994, pp.119–137). In this climate of rediscovery and re-appraisal of English art music, continued study of Stanford's piano music is needed. Indeed, Vaughan Williams, writing in 1952, professed that Stanford would come into his own again with the next generation (Vaughan Williams 1996, pp.195–196), while Waddington wondered if the future would 'give him the place in history that we all expected for him' (Waddington 1933, p.17). The recent reawakening of musicological interest in Stanford's music has ensured that his music is being recovered: many publishing houses have made it available for purchase and hire, sales of his published works have increased markedly in the past twenty years, a number of record companies have been responsible for issuing a wide range of his music, performing groups are programming much of his music which had remained unperformed<sup>38</sup> or ceased to be performed, and Stanford's music has recently been the subject of a number of articles and dissertations each focusing on different aspects of his

compositional output.<sup>39</sup> However, most of his piano works are not represented in recorded music catalogues, an area which needs to be addressed in order to continue the promotion of his piano compositions. Despite the renewed interest in his music, a detailed and comprehensive account of his piano works has not yet appeared in print. Part of this problem lies with the reception history of Stanford's piano music and his reputation as a composer for the piano.

## **Conclusion**

The turn of the twentieth century was a defining moment in the reception of Stanford's music which undoubtedly affected perceptions of his piano music. By this time his music was termed old-fashioned and critics focused on his use of traditional forms with many critics following Bernard Shaw who was outspoken in his outrageous criticism of Stanford's music.<sup>40</sup> Continued support for Stanford's music will be important in further promoting Stanford scholarship and establishing Stanford as a leading Irish-born composer who fostered the development of art music during the English Musical Renaissance. All too often Stanford, the English composer, is credited with this achievement. Literature on Stanford's piano music is exiguous, and many accounts represent a narrow and often misunderstood perception of his piano music echoing previous unjustified criticism. Linked to this is that little research has been completed on English and indeed, Irish piano music of the period; there is a need for significant research to be completed in this area in order to place Stanford in the context of piano composition in Ireland and England at this time.<sup>41</sup> Harold Rutland's claim that Stanford did not show any true feeling for the piano does not hold up in any serious examination of Stanford's writing for the piano (Rutland 1957, p.74). Perceptions such as this should not continue to affect any future attempts to promote Stanford's piano music. Despite a recognition by Bainton that Stanford 'was a master of means and everything he turned his hand to always 'comes off' (Bainton 1924, p.201), this viewpoint is often omitted from a critic's negative criticism of his music. Instead, critics chose to focus on his reliance on academic and traditional tendencies in his writing. Dunhill correctly noted that 'the great masters of the past were again his guides, philosophers, and friends (Dunhill 1926, p.51). These claims made against his music deeply affected the future promotion of his music. Furthermore, negative reaction to piano music in England from this period contributed significantly towards the difficulties in the promotion of his piano music in addition to reception of an Irishman in England. He was not alone in his deep reverence for the classics and a writer in *The Musical Times* acknowledged that the style of many young English composers had 'been too exclusively formed on the model of living German composers' (Anon. 1896, p.89). Stanford's focus on academicism in his writing should no longer be conceived as a negative attribute in his writing. Instead, the size, richness and variety of his output for piano should be re-evaluated in order to dispel myths which have lingered in relation to his piano music. While a larger study of Stanford's problematic reception charts the changing interpretations and evaluations of his artistic stature, the examination presented here demonstrates that in this climate of re-evaluation, there is a need to reconsider and appraise Stanford, the Irish composer's vast and varied contribution to the English Musical Garden.

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Charles Villiers Stanford, Piano Music of Sir Charles Villiers Stanford: *Twenty-Four Preludes* Set 1, op.163 and *Six Characteristic Pieces*, op.132, Peter Jacobs (Priory Records, 449, 1996)

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See Charles Villiers Stanford and others, *Fallen Leaves From an Irish Album*, Una Hunt (RTELYRICFM, CD109, 2006).

Charles Villiers Stanford, Piano Music: Land of Sunset Glories, Christopher Howell (Sheva Collection SHEVA 019, 2008).



Charles Villiers Stanford, *Songs of Old Ireland*, Gilberto Fornito and Christopher Howells, (Sheva Collection, SHEVA031, 2010).

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1 I have previously examined reception of Stanford and his music both during his lifetime and  
posthumously. See (Commins 2008)

2 John Stanford's success as a musician in Dublin was well-documented by the press during his lifetime  
and he had taken main parts in many productions in Dublin. See for example (Anon. 1847; Anon.  
1848a; Anon. 1848b; Anon. 1863a; Anon. 1880)

3 Such performers and groups who performed his music include the baritone Richard Smith with the  
Dublin Philharmonic Society (1863), the Dublin Exhibition Choir (1864) and the University of Dublin  
Choral Society (1867). See (Anon. 1863b; Anon. 1864a) See also (Anon. 1898a, p.788)

4 This is the earliest composition for which the music survives. The score is reproduced in (Anon.  
1898a).

5 See letter from G.A. Osborne to Stanford, 7 March 1866, in Anon. 1898, p.787. For a more detailed  
account of Osborne's opinions of Stanford's early childhood compositions see (Dibble 2002, p.34).  
For an account of some of the favoured repertory in these settings see (de Val & Ehrlich 1998)

6 Stanford had other performance opportunities as a young musician including performing Sterndale  
Bennett's *Preludes and Lessons* from memory for the composer. See (Stanford 1922, p.162).

7 Quarry had included Stanford's Toccata in C op.3 in a concert in the Antient Concert Rooms in 1877.  
8 Stewart also made a four-hand arrangement of his cantata 'A Winter's Night'. The title of the march  
9 which was composed in 1852 was 'The [Dublin] Exhibition Grand March' and was later published by  
Addison in 1854 while the titles of Stewart's fantasias which were all composed c.1862 were 'When  
the Rosy Morn', 'Thou Art Coming With the Sunshine', 'Dormi Pur' and 'My Thoughts Will Wander  
Far Away'. All four were subsequently published by H. Bussell in 1862. I am grateful to Lisa Parker  
for sharing this information with me.

10 See for example (Davey 1895, p.449) He noted 'as none of them [Stanford, Parry and Mackenzie] has  
invented an original style it is not necessary to examine their works'.

11 Shaw frequently referred to Stanford as 'Professor' Stanford in his reviews of Stanford's music. See  
(G. B. Shaw 1932, pp.203–204; George Bernard Shaw 1949a, pp.303–308)

12 Indeed, Breitkopf & Härtel published a number of such collections in the nineteenth century of a  
number of prominent European composers including Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and  
Mendelssohn.

13 Stanford's piano works were published with the following publishers: Chappell, M. Gunn & Sons,  
Edward Ashdown, Boosey & Co., Houghton, Stainer & Bell, Evans Bros, Joseph Williams, Augener,  
Swan & Co., Ascherberg and Edward Arnold while Chiltern Music published works posthumously.

14 These works include Five Caprices op.136, Six Characteristic Pieces op.132, *Night Thoughts* op.148,  
*Three Rhapsodies* op.92, Six Sketches for Piano: Elementary Grade & Six Sketches for Piano: Primary  
Grade.

15 Stanford encouraged his friend Robert McEwen to invest in the firm.

16 For a list of eminent professors associated with the initiative of which Stanford was one see for  
example (Anon. 1898b, p.785)

17 Examination of syllabi of Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, Trinity College London,  
Leinster School of Music and the Royal Irish Academy of Music have demonstrated the inclusion of  
various works by the composer on the graded exams. Despite exhaustive searches it has not been  
possible to do a complete analysis of all examination syllabi of the various examination bodies in  
Ireland and England. In most cases, there was no complete record of all the syllabi. From the scant and  
extant records available (excluding the Associated Board of the Schools of Music) it is clear that  
Stanford's piano music seldom featured on examination syllabi. One work by Stanford which was  
included on the syllabi at the Royal Irish Academy of Music as *The Leprechaun's Dance* for Grade 7  
pianoforte exam.

18 Austin lists Stanford as a native composer.

19 Works by Stanford which featured on examination syllabi of the Associated Board of the Royal  
Schools of Music included pieces from Six Characteristic Pieces, *Night Thoughts*, *Scènes de Ballet*, Six  
Sketches and Twenty-Four Preludes in all the Keys Set I. The first work by Stanford appeared in 1915.  
I am grateful to Vicky Chapman of the Syllabus Office at the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of  
Music who furnished me with this information.

20 Letter from Guy Stanford to Susan Stanford, 7 November 1952, quoted in Hudson, 'Stanford',  
*NG1980*, p.72.

21 A number of his works in other genres were dedicated to distinguished conductors and performers. For  
example, the dedication of Irish Rhapsody no.1, no.2 and no.6 to conductors Hans Richter and Willelm  
Mengelberg and soloist Sybil Eaton respectively ensured interest by these musicians in the work.  
Stanford's solo instrumental music for violin, clarinet and organ was dedicated to a range of eminent

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exponents of these instruments including Robert Hausmann, Ludwig Straus, Alfredo Piatti, Lady William Hallé, Oscar Street, Charles Draper, Walter Parratt, Alan Grey, Charles Marie Widor and Harold Darke.

22 Born in Germany Zimmermann was a student of piano and composition at the Royal Academy of Music and performed regularly across England and Germany.

23 Fanny Davies (1861–1934) was an English-born pianist who was noted for her performances of Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms across Europe and England.

24 Dora Bright (1863–1951) was an English pianist and composer who studied at the Royal Academy in London. She was the first woman composer to have a work played by the Royal Philharmonic Society.

25 Leonard Borwick (1868–1925) was an English pianist who studied with Clara Schumann at the Hoch Conservatory at Frankfurt. He performed regularly across America, Australia and Europe.

26 Percy Grainger Anecdotes, in Parkville, Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (PVgm). These were compiled in 1952. Each anecdote is titled individually and in most cases dated. I am grateful to the staff at the Grainger Museum for furnishing me with copies of Grainger's anecdotes.

27 Percy Grainger Anecdote 423–17, 'Stanford Deemed my "Irish Tune" Un-Irish & My "Brigg Fair" Un-English. His Disapproval of Vaughan Williams's Norfolk Rhapsodies', 1949, PVgm.

28 Percy Grainger Anecdote 423–17, PVgm. Grainger gives further insight into his opinion of Stanford: 'Both [Stanford and America] were nice enough as long as I played second fiddle, played other men's works and played into the hands of other men's vanities. Both gave me the cold shoulder the moment I made any sign of being a great man in my own right'. See Percy Grainger Anecdote 423–20, 'Stanford Wanted to Take me to Norfolk, Conn. Festival to Play His "Down Among the Dead Men" Variations', 1949, PVgm.

29 Percy Grainger Anecdote 423–19, 'Stanford's Dante Rhapsody (Beatrice)', 1949, PVgm. Grainger also noted that the *Three Dante Rhapsodies* were awful. See Percy Grainger Anecdote 423–17, PVgm.

30 I have not included the dedication of Ten Dances for Young Players to his son and daughter, Guy and Geraldine Stanford.

31 Letter from Stanford to Richter, 12 November 1901, in (Dibble 2002, p.326).

32 Angus Morrison was taught by Harold Samuel at the Royal College of Music before being appointed as a teacher there himself.

33 For this broadcast Morrison recorded Prelude nos 13, 21, 25, 26 and 28. Interestingly, Morrison had also recorded the Romance from *Six Characteristic Pieces* op.132 for the same broadcast. 'Capaneo' from *Three Dante Rhapsodies* was later broadcast on 6 September 1977 by Colin Kingsley. See (British Library 2010).

34 Jacobs also recorded *Six Characteristic Pieces* op.132 and *Three Dante Rhapsodies* op.92. See (Jacobs 1996; Jacobs 1997).

35 These works included Stanford's 'Toccata' from *Six Characteristic Pieces* op.132, Prelude in D flat major from op.179 and the first waltz from *Three Waltzes* op.178. See (Hunt 2006).

36 Those works by Stanford performed on the CD include: Nocturne in G minor op.148 no.1, Tempo di Valse op.163 no.10, Basso Ostinato op.179 no.14, Caprice in C minor op.136 no.1, Rondel op.132 no.4, Ballade in G minor op.170, Waltz in D minor op.178 no.2, Ballade in F major op.148 no.2, Scherzo Marziale op.148 no.3, Caprice in D minor op.136 no.2, Toccata in C minor op.132 no.6, Sarabande op.2 no.2, Gigue op.2 no.3 and "Addio" op.179 no.24. See (Howells 2008).

37 This company have recorded some other works by Stanford including a collection of *Songs of Old Ireland*. See (Fornito & Howells 2010).

38 See for example Chester Novello Hire Library 2011. Published works are available from publishing houses such as Stainer & Bell, Cathedral Music and Boosey and Hawkes. Examples of record companies include Hyperion Records, Chandos Recordings, Sheva and Naxos while performing groups committed to the promotion of Stanford's works include RTE Vanburgh Quartet, Ulster Orchestra, Bournemouth Orchestra and performers such as Desmond Hunter and Christopher Howell.

39 Such publications include (Tovey 1936; Dibble 1993; Rodmell 1997)

40 See for example (George Bernard Shaw 1949b, pp.303–308).

41 The author's present study on Stanford's solo piano works will add to this important field of scholarly research on the music of Stanford.