

ERIK SATIE (May 17, 1866 - July 1, 1925)

1. Petite ouverture à danser	1:30	15. Froide songerie *1	0:44
2. Facheux exemple *1	1:10	16. Prélude canin *4	1:03
3. Effronterie *4	1:59	17. Deux rêveries I *7	1:37
4. Airs à faire fuir I *2	4:16	18. Deux rêveries II *7	2:27
5. Airs à faire fuir II *2	1:19	19. Prélude de la porte héroïque du ciel (1894)	4:34
6. Airs à faire fuir III *2	3:35	20. Songe-creux *4	1:56
7. Son binocle *3	1:22	21. Caresse (1897)	1:48
8. Profondeur *4	1:49	22. Poésie *4	0:55
9. Idylle (à Debussy) *5	1:11	23. Désespoir agréable *4	0:53
10. Aubade (à Paul Dukas) *5	1:25	24. Nostalgie *1	1:05
11. Méditation (à Albert Roussel) *5	0:59	25. Prélude I *8	4:27
12. Nocturne I *6	3:36	26. Prélude II *8	2:49
13. Nocturne II *6	2:37	27. Prélude III *8	4:23
14. Nocturne III *6	3:21	Total: 59:45	

*1 From "Musiques intimes et secrètes" (1906-1913)

*2 From "Pieces froides" (1897)

*3 From "Les trois Valses distinguées du précieux dégouté" (1915)

*4 From "Six pieces de la période" (1906-1913)

*5 From "Avant-Dernières Pensées" (1915)

*6 From "5 Nocturnes" (1919)

*7 From "Deux rêveries nocturnes" (1910-1911)

*8 From "Préludes" (1888-1892)

SATIE

SURPRISES

CHRISTINA

BJØRKØE

PIANO

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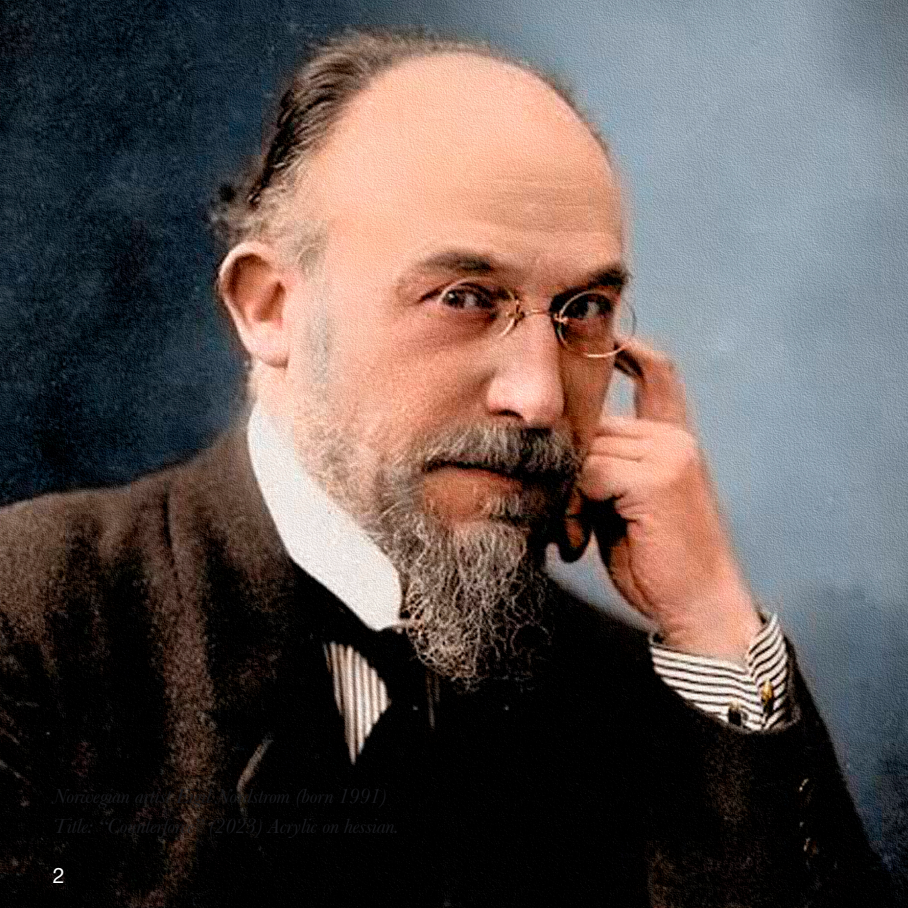
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Norwegian artist, Olav Sandström (born 1991)
Title: "Compteur" (2023) Acrylic on hessian.

The following text is about Satie's life and music and therefore does not specifically refer to the selection of pieces. However, many of the musical characteristics mentioned can easily be heard.

ODD, POOR AND FAMOUS

by Torben Enghoff

On the occasion of the centenary of Erik Satie's death

Unassuming, innocuous activity can have a considerable effect on posterity. This was precisely what happened when a 22-year-old Frenchman wrote a short piece for the piano. The young man was Erik Satie and he entitled his piece *Gymnopédie no 1*, for there were two other pieces. Weird titles were frequent from the composer, who was a bit weird himself. *Gymnopédie no 1* is ear-catching and simple, bordering on the sketch-like and with a tone that is so distinctive that everyone exclaimed 'what on earth is that?'. And we must not forget that the music came at a time when many people were yearning to free themselves from the heavy influence of Wagner and Late Romanticism, so this unassuming little piece almost became a kind of catharsis.

Time was later to show that Satie had created a hit that is unceasingly made use of as background music in TV and radio, and that people who normally do not listen to classical music are enthusiastic about. It is played everywhere. The piece gently billows like a cotton curtain in a spring breeze, and it influenced the spark of life and development of French music.

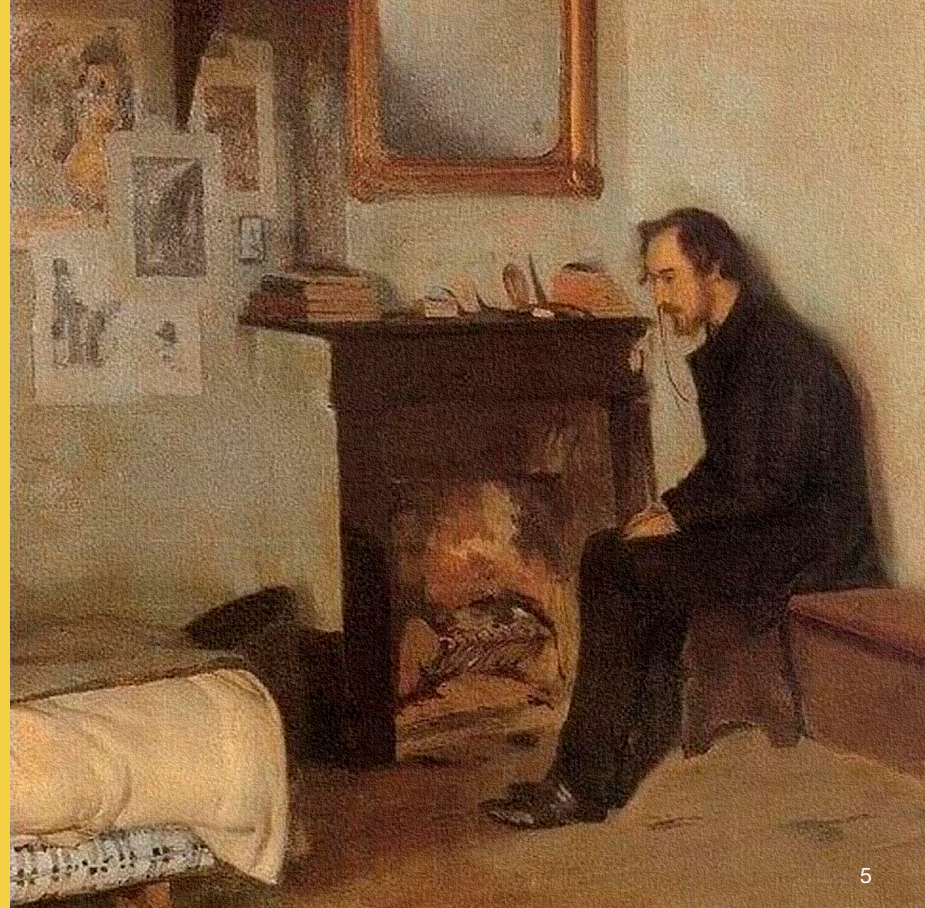
Satie was not a great composer in the traditional sense. He did not write symphonies, concertos, works of chamber music, operas, etc. His cultural fingerprint is his piano pieces, many of them extremely short but utterly themselves, charming and some of them like rapid ideas that are characterised by spontaneous flights of fancy. They are full of dreaming and poetry. Some ingenious, others meditative, simple, unforced but easy to

comprehend and, as mentioned, they do not resemble any other music whatsoever. The two mini-collections *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes*, each comprising three pieces, are on the whole the only music of his that is played, so in connection with the centenary of Satie's death, we now have a good occasion to document both the durability and charm of some of the other, rarely heard, piano pieces.

Satie was born in Honfleur in 1866. His mother had Scottish ancestors, something the composer was highly interested in. His father was a shipbroker and also tried, unsuccessfully, to make a living as a music publisher. Erik managed to be accepted as a student at the Paris Conservatory at the age of 13, but things rapidly went wrong.

The two adjectives that recur most when his teachers express their opinion of him are: talented, but disastrously lazy. But all such statements also emphasised the fact that Satie had fine fingers for the piano and an exquisite touch. Even so, he was quite simply thrown out.

But the thirst for revenge preyed on his mind. In 1905, he was accepted at the renowned Schola Cantorum to study counterpoint under no other than Albert Roussel, and the mere fact of being accepted at the school was an accolade in itself. However, Satie's staunch friend Debussy was against the idea, for he felt that Satie should stick to his own path and not allow himself to be straitjacketed by traditional theory. Satie, though, was adamant, and Professor Roussel states that the school had never had such a disciplined and punctual pupil, one who always handed in his assignments on time – in meticulous handwriting and with extensive notes in red ink. He also left the establishment with top marks in his diploma.



Satie began his career as a cabaret and bar pianist in Montmartre. First at *Chat Noir* and then at *Auberge du Clou*. During that period, he lived in rented accommodation that gradually shrank in size as the money he had did likewise. Finally, his room was so small that his friends referred to it as 'the cupboard'. These years actually had a great influence on his music, which was tinged by the popular songs of the time that he heard at the nightclubs. Satie's few songs have precisely that feel we associate with chansons.

After his time in Montmartre, he moved – by handcart – to the working-class precinct Arceuil, 10 kilometres from the city centre. He walked every day to Montmartre and often could not take the last bus or metro in the evening, so he had to walk home as well. On his way, he would drop in at cafés, where considerable quantities of calvados were consumed.

What brought about his growing fame were the three *Gymnopédies* from 1888. They made an impression on composers who were later to become iconic French names. First and foremost, Debussy, who regarded Satie as a pioneer in French music and with whom Satie developed a close, life-long friendship. The two of them would often be together several times a week – they went to the bookshop *Librairie de l'Art Indépendant* or ate lunch together at Debussy's home, where Claude prepared divine lamb cutlets that had been simmering in white Bordeaux. On other occasions, they made do with coffee and tobacco – always at Debussy's home. Here, Debussy also helped Satie organize his musical ideas. Debussy was several times more proficient, was the richer and more famous of the two, and Satie tackled his subordinate position by clowning around. Despite their imbalance, they remained friends. Debussy quickly realised that behind Satie's bizarre behaviour there was a profound seriousness and artistic will.



Debussy later orchestrated two of the three *Gymnopédies*. There was someone else who was also highly enthusiastic. A 14-year-old youth whose first name was Maurice and second name Ravel, was rummaging around in a pile of music at a bookshop and his eyes opened wide when he caught sight of piano music composed by a certain Mr. Satie. Young Maurice went straight home and persuaded his father to arrange a meeting between him and the composer, and he was struck by the latter's intelligence, bold cast of mind and humour. After that, Ravel did not miss an opportunity to tell Satie how greatly he was indebted to him. On a number of occasions, Ravel performed Satie's piano music and orchestrated a prelude to the play *Les fils des étoiles* from 1892.

So here we have a composer whose few and short works were of large significance for the new breakthrough in French music. And, it should be noted, this music was at the same time completely tonal and melodious. While further east in Europe musical revolutions were being devised with twelve-tone music and a rejection of the old major-minor tonality, a great part of the musical renewal in France came from easily assimilable melodies and harmonies, with such distinguished ambassadors as Darius Milhaud, Jaques Ibert and Francis Poulenc, who actually directly referred to Satie as 'my soul mate'. French music developed its own sound, characterised by lightness and elegance, the so-called *esprit*.

The rumour about Satie was already circulating around 1890, but he did not become more widely known until 1911, when Ravel performed some of his early pieces at a concert in *Salle Gaveau* arranged by *Société Musicale Indépendante*. That same year, Satie met Stravinsky at a lunch held at Debussy's. Stravinsky dedicated a work to Satie and, as late as 1944, one can hear Satie's influence in Stravinsky's sonata for two pianos. Another breakthrough took place in 1917, with Satie's music for the ballet *Parade*, which became what is known in French as a '*succès de scandale*'. Here, Satie, not for the last time, 'mixed with the big-timers'. The ballet had been written and staged by Jean Cocteau for the Ballets Russes, under the leadership of Sergei Diaghilev. The choreography was



by Léonide Massine and the costumes and decorations created by Picasso. The music, whose instruments include both a typewriter and a siren, were conducted by Ernest Ansermet. It would be hard to do one better than this! Satie was now famous.

After all the hoo-ha surrounding *Parade*, there came a commission from the mega-rich Princess Edmond de Polignac, who had also commissioned music from, among others, Stravinsky and Poulenc. This led to the stage production *Socrate*, first performed at an Erik Satie Festival. Now his recognition was total. The best of all, though, was that now he was in demand. This resulted in two ballets in 1924, *Mercury*, once again with Picasso, and *Relâche*, which was a complete flop. Both have been consigned to oblivion, but there are some fine live versions on Youtube.

A few other works should be named, because they undeservedly have been overshadowed. One of these, from 1895, is *Messe de pauvres* for choir and organ. It is 'serious', even 'elevated'. Extremely captivating, with a clear influence from Gregorian chants and musically related to Messiaen. The other is the aforementioned *Socrate*, for soprano and chamber orchestra. It is based on a text from ancient Greece and by was hailed as unique by contemporary composers. Both Stravinsky and Milhaud were quick to praise it. *Messe de pauvres* and *Socrate* can both be heard on Youtube.

It was primarily Satie's piano music that functioned as a catalyst in French music and from there travelled to composers outside France. Bach was admittedly the house god, and Satie had naturally played Schumann, Chopin and Liszt, but Satie's music was never influenced by the luminaries that had written the history of the piano. In all senses, Satie's piano music is his own. When it comes to melodies, harmonies and his free mode of composition, Satie's piano music is distinctively unique, so that if one uses an 'independence tape measure', Satie is in a sense reminiscent of Carl Nielsen.



The music historian Mogens Wenzel Andreassen has formulated it à la Kierkegaard, in a simple and precise way: 'The most important thing is the harmonics, which are revolutionary, even though at first hearing one might not realise this.' That is well put.

The piano music, like the bar soap in the bathtub, is not for those who want to hold on tight. But try exploring – it is well worth the effort. The music sticks out in every direction. One can hear what has influenced Debussy and Ravel – he can at times sound really 'jazzy' like Keith Jarrett and Chick Corea (it is of course the other way round) – and there are influences noticeable in Scott Joplin. The music also reflects Gregorian chant and has the mentioned tinge of Parisian chansons.

The kaleidoscopic pieces correspond well with all the strange titles: *Flabby Preludes to a Dog*, *The Glum Prisoner*, *Dried Embryos*, *Bureaucratic Sonatina*, *Small irritating Bits of Mischief*, *Three pear-shaped Pieces*, etc. Not only are his piano titles weird, so are the indications of how the pieces are to be played. How about this for example: 'like a nightingale with toothache'?

Admittedly things start to flicker when one tries to master Satie's piano pieces, but enter calmly the door of the crooked house, for something awaits you that is hard to brush off.

If one wants to gain an impression of Satie as an individual, there are quite a few comments by colleagues and people familiar to the Parisian art environment to explore. The composer Darius Milhaud and his wife, Madeleine, looked after him a lot, and Madeleine relates that Satie was always profusely cordial and affectionate in letters to her, and that she had the feeling that he lacked closeness and tenderness. She states directly: 'I do not think that he was happy.' Satie loved to go out walking and preferred to be outdoors. He also loved children and arranged school excursions in the poor working-class precinct where he lived. He could be almost shy but was also outgoing and amusing. He could be brusque, unpleasantly ironic and one you never really got to know closely. He was a heavy drinker and preferred to speak about anything but music. He was also a keen reader,

especially of Hans Christian Andersen. Furthermore, he was a gourmet and, like Ravel, a bit of a dandy. In appearance he was neat and nattily dressed but changed styles. There were periods when he was the man in a suit and hat of corduroy, and periods when he presented himself as a somewhat more laid-back bohemian. At other times, he was dressed like the perfect office worker – some friends have actually described him as an undertaker or a schoolteacher. Always nice and clean, due to the pumice stone he always rubbed his skin with, since he hated water and soap. And always equipped with a bowler hat, cotton gloves, stiff white detached collar, small handkerchief in his breast pocket and an umbrella. For he loved rain and hated sunshine.

Satie with his lorgnette had a distinctly childlike, shy nature, but even so he liked to discuss, so this often took place with a hand in front of his mouth. On the one hand, he was cordial, but on the other hand sarcastic and irascible, so it was easy to regard him as a moody person.

On one occasion, his temperament got the better of him. This the composer Honegger wrote about in a letter to his parents in 1917. When the critic Poueigh had mocked Satie's music for the ballet *Parade*, this gave rise to a number of postcards from Satie to the reviewer. The third of these postcards is quoted by Honegger:

'Mr. Jean-Fucker Poueigh, king of the idiots, chief of the nitwits, emperor of the stokers. Asshole. I'm here in Fontainebleau, from where I shit on you with all my might. E.S.' Satie was taken to court and sentenced for defamation of character.

Nobody escaped having a row with him, not even Debussy, who even so was his warmest, devoted friend. Only one person was he never at odds with, namely the composer Darius Milhaud, who, along with his wife, visited Satie in hospital every day during the last six months of his life in 1925.

If one collects utterances from friends and social circles, Satie was cordiality in person, but at the same time also childlike, shy and a wildly uninhibited person.

Satie came from a wealthy family, but was poor throughout his life, earned practically nothing from his own music. And it did not help things that he was lacking plain common sense. He always borrowed money from people, but spent it on fine stationery, handkerchiefs and umbrellas. In 1895, he inherited 7000 francs, a really grand sum which, if well managed, could have supported him for some time. But what did Satie do? He went to the expensive shop *La Belle Jardinière* and bought seven suits and seven hats of corduroy, paid meals for friends at the best restaurants, gave generous tips and played the role of the rich man. Sympathetic, but completely senseless. The rights to *Gymnopédie no 1* must have brought in vast sums of money, but he never got a penny of them. At that time, there was no control of rights as we know it today.

Satie was religious and attracted by mysticism, so for a time he was connected as a composer for The Rosicrucian Order. He also personally established a sect which he called the Metropolitan Church of Art, and which he in childlike fashion designed stationery for. He was head of the sect – and its only member.

Satie died, not surprisingly, from cirrhosis of the liver at the Sisters of St. Joseph Hospital in Paris. After the funeral, Milhaud, Satie's brother Conrad and two friends gained access to his room in Arceuil. They got quite a shock. They found a piano that had apparently not been played on in years. The dust was several centimetres deep, there were unopened letters everywhere and a collection of more than a hundred umbrellas, but apart from that only a thick layer of rubbish and dirt.

Satie, thank heavens, has left behind these small gems of piano music. They give one tranquillity of mind and are a constant source of surprise. His story is, on the surface, entertaining, but if one delves deeper, rather sad. He was odd, cordial, irascible, poor – and famous.



Photo: Thorbjørn Fessel

CHRISTINA BJØRKØE PIANO

“Christina Bjørkøe lets loose with her most incisive, dynamically charged playing”.

Classics Today

The pianist Christina Bjørkøe is one of Denmark’s leading musicians and is in demand as a recitalist, chamber musician and as a soloist with symphony orchestras. Born in 1970, Christina Bjørkøe started playing the piano at the age of 5. At the age of 7 she became a student of Therese Koppel, who taught her until 1990, after which she was admitted to *The Juilliard School of Music* in New York as a student at Seymour Lipkin. Later, she completed her studies at Anne Øland at *The Royal Danish Academy of Music*.

Bjørkøe made her debut as a soloist with orchestra at the age of 16 and has since given concerts as a soloist and chamber musician in Denmark, across Europe, as well as in the USA, South America and Asia. She has been a soloist with most Danish symphony orchestras, including the *Danish National Symphony Orchestra*, and the *Czech Chamber Orchestra*, the *Recife Festival Orchestra* in Brazil, the *Malmö Symphony Orchestra*, *Symphony Orchestra of India* in Mumbai and the *Iceland Symphony Orchestra*, and is highly in demand as a recitalist.

Christina Bjørkøe has an extensive discography, both solo and as a chamber musician, and has in addition to her critically acclaimed recordings of Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations*, Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, works by Fanny Mendelssohn and the Schumanns (Robert AND Clara) as well as Chopin, but she has particularly distinguished herself in her advocacy of Danish music. Her recordings of the music of Carl Nielsen, Niels W. Gade, Hakon Børresen, Louis Glass, Niels Viggo Bentzon, Herman D. Koppel, Vagn Holmboe, Poul Rovsing Olsen, Axel Borup Jørgensen and others have received numerous accolades, and many are considered benchmark performances.

Bjørkøe’s awards and accolades including the *Danish music award P2 Prisen for Best Classical Solo Release* for her recordings of Knudåge Riisager’s piano works (2005), and Carl Nielsen’s collected piano works (2009). She twice won First Prize in the *Steinway Competition* and has been awarded several other prizes and grants including the prestigious *Victor Borge Award*, and most recently, the *Wilhelm Hansen Foundation’s Honorary Grant 2021*.

Bjørkøe is currently an associate professor at the *Danish National Academy of Music*, Odense.

Special thanks from Christina Bjørkøe to Torben Enghoff, Lars Hannibal, Viggo Mangor, Charlotte Elisabet Zeuthen Bruun, Danish National Academy of Music, Augustinus Fonden, Beckett Fonden, Niels Hav and Felicia Bjørkøe Hav.

“Keep it short.” The poet Jean Cocteau’s description of the composer: *“The smallest work by Satie is small in the way a keyhole is small. Everything changes when you put your eye to it.”*

Recorded January 2025 at Danish National Academy of Music. Odense, Denmark.
Piano Steinway D.

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releases:

OS Orchestra & soloist

OE Orchestra/Ensemble

PH Petri/Hannibal Duo

LP Vinyl

VG Violin/Guitar

EP Digital only

CR Choir & Recorder

OM Organ music

VE Danish National Vocal Ensemble

RH Recorder & Harpsichord

SW Spoken words

CH Chinese

RC Recorder Concertos

BJ Borup-Jørgensen

IS Instrumental solo

ID Instrumental duo



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IS 8.226921-22



OS 8.226926



IS 6.220677-78



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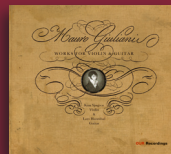
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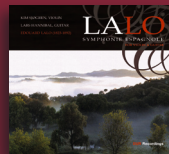
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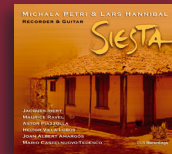
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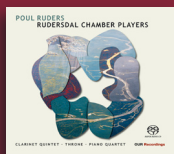
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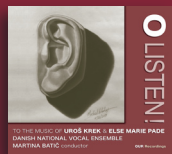
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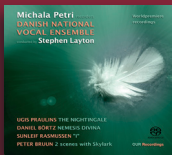
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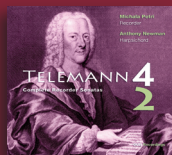
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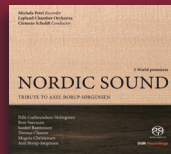
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