

## Moeran

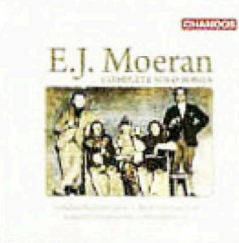
Complete Solo Songs

Geraldine McGreevy *sop* Adrian Thompson *ten*

Roderick Williams *bar* John Talbot *pf*

Chandos © 2 CHAN10596 (119' • DDD)

**Moeran's songs receive long-overdue attention in this comprehensive twofer**



Odd that we've had to wait so long for such a thorough exploration of Moeran's songs.

Fortunately this handsome set (which represents something

of a triumph for John Talbot in the triple role of pianist, annotator and co-producer) amply demonstrates the composer's fecund lyricism, fastidious craftsmanship and natural gift for word-setting.

Like so many of his contemporaries, Moeran was especially taken with the poetry of AE Housman (1859-1936): the radiant 1920 cycle *Ludlow Town* was one of his first successes, while "When I came last to Ludlow" (1916), "'Tis time, I think, by Wenlock town" (1925), "Far in a western brookland" (1925) and "Loveliest of Trees" (1931) all have a touch of magic about them. As well as Housman, there are particularly memorable settings of Robert Bridges ("Spring goeth all in white" and "When June is come"), Robert Nichols (the exuberant "Blue-eyed Spring") and the 16th-century poet Robert Wever (the vernally fresh "In Youth is Pleasure" from 1925). Both the *Four English Lyrics* of 1934 (to words by Campion, Fletcher, Browne and Marlowe) and equally beguiling *Four Shakespeare Songs* (1940) deserve to be far better known; and the neglected gem that is "The Day of Palms" comprises one of no fewer than 17 premiere recordings across the two CDs.

However, given the composer's Anglo-Irish heritage, it should perhaps come as no surprise that the meatiest inspiration here can be found in the haunting *Seven Poems by James Joyce* (1930), to say nothing of the heart-wrenching and harmonically probing treatment of Joyce's "Rahoon" (written for Kathleen Ferrier in 1946), "A Dream of Death" (Moeran's only Yeats setting, dating from 1925) and *Six Poems of Seumas O'Sullivan* (1946). On an altogether



lighter note, we also get four bar-room ballads, each rendered with ale-soaked relish; the splendidly lusty "Maltworms" was a joint effort with Peter Warlock (Moeran's housemate in Eynsford, Kent, for four years – and fellow denizen of The Five Bells pub over the road!).

Baritone Roderick Williams has the biggest share of duties and is in imperious form throughout, the voice gloriously rich and secure. Soprano Geraldine McGreevy, too, brings heaps of personable charm, unflustered agility and selfless understanding to the task in hand, and if tenor Adrian Thompson doesn't always avoid an element of strain in the upper reaches (his vibrato, too, is wider than ideal), there's absolutely no missing his infectious fervour. John Talbot's accompaniments are undistractingly sympathetic – as, for that matter, is the Chandos recording.

In sum, a set that no lover of British song will want to pass over. The two discs retail for the price of one. **Andrew Achenbach**



## MOERAN

### Complete Solo Songs

Geraldine McGreevy (soprano), Adrian Thompson (tenor), Roderick Williams (baritone), John Talbot (piano)  
Chandos CHAN 10596(2)  
118:41 mins (2 discs)  
BBC Music Direct £12.99

Moeran, aka Jack, is a fairly dim figure now, but this half-Irish, unsettled character was one of the outstanding inter-war 'pastoral' composers who rejected serialism in favour of folk and early music, and suffered undue neglect for it later. Symphonic and orchestral pieces such as *Wythorne's Shadow* recall Vaughan Williams, but his songs are more reminiscent of smaller-scale contemporaries like John Ireland and Moeran's friend Peter Warlock. Some 50 are collected here for the first time, and while soloists Roderick Williams, Geraldine McGreevy, Adrian Thompson and pianist John Talbot uncover no startling masterpieces, they undoubtedly reveal Moeran's achievement.

The songs comprise an impressive body, light-hued but intense, tinged with a distinctly Celtic melancholy. Two large AE Housman sequences often do bear comparison with Butterworth in their illumination of the verse, especially 'The Lads in their Hundreds' and 'Loveliest of Trees' – high praise. But other settings range surprisingly widely, from Jacobean like Dekker, Shakespeare and Chettle to Yeats, Joyce – some limpidly wistful settings – and, remarkably, Dorothy L Sayers; and they're all well worth hearing.

In raucous contrast, Moeran's drinking habits inspired some pub ballads such as 'Mrs Dyer, the Baby Farmer'. The male voice ensemble cheerfully hams up versions of 'Maltworms (Back and side go bare)' and 'Can't You Dance the Polka?'.

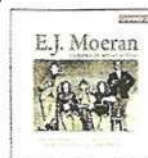
*Michael Scott Rohan*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

BBC Music Magazine June 2010

### Moeran: Complete Solo Songs

McGreevy/Thompson/  
Williams/Talbot  
★★★★★



(Chandos, two CDs)

Even the persistent enthusiasm for British music from the first half of the 20th century hasn't quite embraced EJ Moeran (1894-1950) as enthusiastically as it might. His *Symphony in G minor*, indebted to both Sibelius and Vaughan Williams, gets occasional outings, his *Violin Concerto* and *Sinfonietta* fewer performances still, while the rest of his output is hardly ever heard. Here, though, is a complete collection of Moeran's songs, and they reveal the half-Irish, half-English composer to have had a refined literary palate and a sensitive ear for setting his chosen texts. The poets represented range from Shakespeare and Marlowe to Yeats and Massfield, and if some of the songs are routine and sometimes rather twee examples of early 20th-century English word-setting, others are far more distinctive. AE Housman seems to have brought something special out of Moeran just as his poetry did in so many composers of the same generation, and the highlights of these discs are the two groups of Housman songs that baritone Roderick Williams sings with his usual burnished fluency. The miniature cycle *Ludlow Town* from 1920 and a more diverse sequence, including a ravishing *O Loveliest of Trees*, both reveal that Moeran's version of the pastoral was distinctly different from those better known ones from Butterworth and Vaughan Williams.

The Guardian, 28th May 2010

## EJ Moeran: Complete Solo Songs

(Chandos)



Fiona Maddocks  
The Observer, Sunday 23 May 2010  
[Article history](#)

Long underrated together with those other composers of the "English cowpat" tendency, Ernest John Moeran (1894-1950) is at last being rehabilitated. His love of folk song and his natural lyricism produced song settings of wistful poignancy, especially the *Ludlow Town* poems of AE Housman. This welcome, complete Chandos collection conjures a pastoral, mystical England (and Ireland, too; Moeran was famous for propping up the bars in Kenmare), beautifully expressed by the three soloists and pianist John Talbot. The imminent [English Music Festival](#) (Oxfordshire, 28-31 May) and the [English Song Weekend](#) (Ludlow 3-6 June) are ideal chances to hear more of this neglected repertoire.