



PRESS RELEASE

Re-discovering one of the stars of British light music

In April 2012, Divine Art Records will release a new CD on its Diversions label devoted to the exquisitely crafted light orchestral music of Herman Finck. This album which was originally due for issue in 2007 is the sequel to *The Monckton Album* (Diversions ddv24110) which has been highly successful and was included in *Gramophone's* Critics Choice for 2004 having been included in the 'Christmas stocking' of two of the reviewers. As with the previous disc, the music is performed by the Bel Etage Theatre from Tallinn, Estonia, a company which specialises in Edwardian English operetta, under its conductor and lead baritone Mart Sander and featuring female vocalists Pirjo Levandi and Kelli Uustani.

Finck is one of many musicians whose style has become (according to the orthodox fashion) out of date, and whose name, once known by every household, has been almost forgotten. He was born in London on 4 November 1872; his baptismal name was in fact Hermann Van Der Finck, his parents being Dutch immigrants.

Finck began his musical training at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. In 1900 (at the still early age of 28) he joined the Palace Theatre, where he served as Musical Director until the late 1920s. The Palace was famous not only for its orchestra, but for the Palace Girls, a group of beautiful singing and dancing ladies, for whom Finck composed numerous dances, among them *Hullo, Girls!*. The most famous of these was originally a vocal number called *Tonight*, which became a top hit under the title *In the Shadows*. This remains his best known work due its being one of the last pieces played aboard the Titanic. Whilst at the Palace, Finck was also a principal conductor at the Drury Lane Theatre, and he made recordings of many of his own works and arrangements with the two theatre orchestras for the Columbia Graphophone Company.

Finck's compositions included about thirty stage shows, two of which are represented on the new CD - the ballet *My Lady Dragonfly* and the operetta *Decameron Nights*, a superbly written piece which has not been played since 1923. Revues such as *The Passing Show* and *Round the Map* were very popular with variety theatre audiences, while his songs and light orchestral pieces were among the best known tunes of their day. Examples on the new album include *Queen of the Flowers* and *Gilbert the Filbert* aka *The K-Nuts*, included in a medley specially arranged for this recording by Mart Sander. The Palace also proudly presented the ballerina Anna Pavlova in her first ever English performance - Finck dedicated his lovely orchestral piece *Pirouette* to her.

Finck was also a very talented arranger, and one of his most popular works was a medley of music-hall and light classical tunes called *Melodious Memories*; his recording of this piece sold very well and it was a staple in many of the famous London tea-rooms which boasted a resident 'palm court' orchestra.

It is easy to underestimate the position and influence which this almost-forgotten figure enjoyed in his heyday. He is described in *The Music Hall & Theatre History Website* as "One of the wittiest men in London. He was of medium height, inclined to stoutness, dark, with luxuriant dark hair parted in the middle ... he was never at a loss for a joke." He was also highly regarded among the top musicians of his day including Sir Thomas Beecham and was a special favourite of the Royal Family, especially King George V. Finck was musical director of the very first Royal Command Performance, held on 1 July 1912 at the Palace Theatre, and led a cast featuring all of the top British music-hall and variety performers of the day including Harry Lauder, Vesta Tilley and George Robey – along with the Palace Girls of course. The exception was Marie Lloyd, whose act was considered too risqué for the King and Queen! This pioneering show saw the theatre decorated with three million roses; the proceeds were donated to the Variety Artistes' Benevolent Fund.

Also in 1912, a concert was held at Drury Lane to which the King brought his cousin Kaiser Wilhelm, only two years before their respective countries went to war. *In the Shadows* was included in the programme at the specific request of the King, who had become quite a fan. It was ironic that Finck experienced a 'right royal embarrassment' in front of the King at a charity event held at Buckingham Palace Riding School. The orchestra was playing *Melodious Memories* while the audience of titled personages awaited the King's arrival; just as the Royal party entered the theatre, the orchestra reached that part of the medley called *Hush, Hush, Hush, Here Comes the Bogey Man!*

Finck continued to enjoy success throughout the 1930s, while light music as a genre was still at the height of popularity. His autobiography, also entitled *My Melodious Memories*, was published by Hutchinson in 1937 and is a witty and entertaining résumé of a different world of entertainment to that we know today. He never saw the decline and near-death of variety and light music, as he died shortly before the outbreak of World War II, on 21 April, 1939. A new generation is beginning once again to appreciate the gentle joy of British light music and to rediscover composers such as Finck, Albert Ketelbey, Hubert Bath, Lionel Monckton and others.

The Finck Album

Diversions DDV 62402

Kelli Uustani and Pirjo Levandi (sopranos) & Mart Sander (baritone)

The Bel Etage Theatre Orchestra conducted by Mart Sander

Upper-mid price; CD duration 67.54

UK release April 16, 2012

TRACK LIST:

1. Cheerio! *Orchestra* (1.58)
2. In the Shadows *Kelli Uustani* (4.06)
3. Hullo, Girls! *Orchestra* (2.43)
4. My Waltz Queen *Mart Sander* (3.22) *
5. Jocosó *Orchestra* (2.48)
6. Dear Old Fighting Boys *Kelli Uustani & Mart Sander* (3.11)
7. Pirouette (dedicated to Anna Pavlova) *Orchestra* (2.54)
8. Venetia (from *Decameron Nights*) *Pirjo Levandi* (4.51)

- 9.-14. My Lady Dragonfly – Ballet Suite *Orchestra* (15.44)
15. The K-Nuts Medley (arr. Mart Sander) including “Gilbert the Filbert” and “I’ll Make a Man of You Yet” *Kelli Uustani & Mart Sander* (3.16)
16. Queen of the Flowers *Pirjo Levandi & Mart Sander* (5.04) *
17. Moonlight Dance *Orchestra* (3.50)
18. Decameron Nights – Orchestral Suite *Orchestra* (13.46)

Pirjo Levandi became an overnight sensation after graduating from the Tallinn Music Academy and making her debut at the Estonian National Opera. The tall and slender soprano with more than apt acting abilities was one of the leading members of the ENO ensemble for 8 seasons, making welcome guest appearances at other opera houses and music festivals, including the Gilbert and Sullivan festival in the UK. Since then, she has dedicated herself to the lighter repertoire, often with the Bel-Etage troupe or the Swing Swindlers ballroom orchestra, as well as being a mother. She has also discovered her skills as a comedienne and in 2010 won the Estonian Drama Award as the best actress in the supporting cast. Miss Levandi can also be heard on the first album of the series dedicated to neglected British composers of light music – The Monckton Album (Diversions Records)

Kelly Uustani graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in London and has since then proved herself to be an extremely versatile singer, whose repertoire ranks from light opera and musical comedy to jazz and funk. She is the leading female vocalist of the Swing Swindlers, a dance orchestra led by Mart Sander, specializing on the repertoire of the 1930s, and can be heard on all of the band’s many albums. Miss Uustani is also a sought after vocal coach and arranger for several vocal groups and is often employed by the song writing team, responsible for the (so far only) Estonian winning Eurovision entry. Even when mothering her baby daughter, she still has time for studio work and a tight schedule of gigs.

Mart Sander, the leader and vocalist of both the Bel-Etage and the Swing Swindlers, began his professional musical career at the age of 17 and has since then stayed in the spotlight. He has released dozens of albums, sang and directed at the Estonian National Opera, composed both light and serious music, as well as acted both on stage and screen and hosted several popular TV programs (such as the Estonian version of Dancing With The Stars). He is a well known champion of Gilbert and Sullivan, and was commended for promoting British music by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, on her state visit to Estonia. Mr. Sander is also an exhibited painter and has written three best selling novels.

The **Bel-Etage** company took over an old music hall at the heart of Tallinn, Estonia, in 2000; since then it has produced and recorded many Victorian and Edwardian shows, musical revues and comic operas. The company is well known for championing British music, especially Gilbert and Sullivan, whose work was previously not well known to Estonian audiences. Bel-Etage also supports a ballet troupe and two successful orchestras and is in constant demand at home and abroad.