

JOHN SYKES

SEVEN DIVERSIONS

on a

LANCASHIRE SEA-CHANTY

(Donkey Riding)

for

TWO PIANOS

The JOHN SYKES PROJECT

MMXIV

John Austin Sykes (1909 – 1962)



John Sykes was born in India in 1909 - in India because his father was in the Indian civil service. Back in England he won a music scholarship to Clifton College, Bristol, and whilst still a schoolboy gained his A.R.C.O. and F.R.C.O. In 1928 he went up to Oxford as organ scholar at Balliol. In those days, undergraduates were not able to read Music as a first degree, so Sykes read Modern History, and followed it up with a B.Mus. One contemporary source considered him to have been the most distinguished musical undergraduate of his time. He was president of the famous Oxford University Opera Club and active in the Music Club and Union. He was sufficiently important to be given a full-page spread in the undergraduate newspaper 'Isis' – which referred to his ability to 'make a piano do anything but swim'. He was a friend of the left-wing poet Randall Swingler, and also a contemporary of W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis, whom he knew, so it is perhaps not surprising that he was a fluent, though not distinguished, poet. After Oxford, he went to London, to the Royal College of Music, where he studied composition under Ralph Vaughan Williams, R. O. Morris and Gordon Jacob. In 1936 he was appointed to the staff of Kingswood School, and there he stayed, except for war service, until he died of cancer in the school Sanatorium in the summer term of 1962.

The John Sykes Project is an informal group of former pupils who are transcribing and publishing his music on the internet, and encouraging its performance.

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SEVEN DIVERSIONS for two pianos
on a
LANCASHIRE SEA-CHANTY

John Sykes was an outstanding pianist and wrote a lot of music for the instrument. His style was eclectic – he had a gift for pastiche – and invariably pianistic. He enjoyed writing for two pianos and produced half a dozen pieces in this medium, ranging from an early transcription of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* to the Percy-Grainger-like style of this piece – a fine encore item for any duo.

It is possible that Sykes' friendship with Randall Swingler (who married Geraldine Peppin – one of the Peppin twins who were concert pianists and often performed together) ignited his interest in two-piano music, since the twins provided a ready market for such music. In his later years at Kingswood, the school hall boasted two pianos, so Sykes sometimes wrote incidental music to school plays for the two instruments. Perhaps the best of these is the *Polonaise (Assyrian Festive Dance)*, originally part of the incidental music for a production of James Bridie's play *Jonah and the Whale* in 1952.

The *Seven Diversions* were written in 1938, the same year as *The Keel Row* – another 'Diversion', this time for piano solo, and a piece which again is reminiscent of Percy Grainger. Sykes noted 'The tune is called "Donkey Riding" and is in the Oxford Song Book, Volume two.'

P.J.C.

January 2014

Seven Diversions on a Lancashire Sea-Chanty

John Sykes

Allegro ma non troppo (with an easy swinging movement)

Musical notation for the first system, measures 1-8. The piece is in 2/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo is marked 'Allegro ma non troppo'. The first system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a dynamic marking of *mp* (mezzo-piano) in the first measure.

Empty musical staves for the second system, measures 9-16. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef, but it contains no musical notation.

Musical notation for the third system, measures 9-16. The piece continues with the same rhythmic pattern and key signature. The first measure of this system is marked with a measure rest '9'. The dynamic remains *mp*.

Empty musical staves for the fourth system, measures 17-24. The system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef, but it contains no musical notation.

Musical notation for the fifth system, measures 17-24. The piece continues with the same rhythmic pattern and key signature. The first measure of this system is marked with a measure rest '17'. The dynamic is marked *p* (piano).

Musical notation for the sixth system, measures 25-32. The piece continues with the same rhythmic pattern and key signature. The first measure of this system is marked with a measure rest 'I'. The dynamic is marked *mp*.

23

mf

30

II

p

II

mp

36

mp

mp

mp

43

p *mp* *p*

48

III

f *f* *mf* *f* *f*

54

f *f* *f*

60

IV

p *leggiero*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 60 through 66. The music is in a key with two flats and a 3/4 time signature. It features a complex texture with multiple voices in both hands. A section starting at measure 64 is marked with a Roman numeral 'IV' and the dynamic *p* *leggiero*.

IV

pp *leggiero*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 67 through 71. It continues the musical texture from the previous system. A section starting at measure 69 is marked with a Roman numeral 'IV' and the dynamic *pp* *leggiero*.

67

pp *leggiero*

p *leggiero*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 72 through 76. The music continues with various dynamics. A section starting at measure 74 is marked with the dynamic *p* *leggiero*.

72

mp

p

mp

Detailed description: This system contains measures 77 through 81. The music features dynamic markings including *mp* and *p*, along with hairpins indicating crescendos and decrescendos.

77

mf *mf* *f* *mf*

V

83

mf *mp*

V

90

mf *mp*

V

96

VI

mf

101

mf

mf

mp

106

f

mf

f

110

Musical score for measures 110-114, first system. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 3/4 time signature. It features a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a fermata. The lower staff begins with a bass clef and contains a few notes in the first measure. The system includes dynamic markings *mf*, *mp*, and *f*, and performance instructions *marcato e non legato*. A Roman numeral *VII* is placed above the staff in the third measure.

mf *mp* *f* *marcato e non legato* *VII*

Musical score for measures 110-114, second system. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff continues from the first system, featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure and a fermata. The lower staff continues with notes in the second measure. The system includes dynamic markings *mf*, *mp*, and *f*, and a performance instruction *f*. A Roman numeral *VII* is placed above the staff in the third measure, and *8va---* is written above the staff in the fifth measure.

mf *mp* *f* *f* *VII* *8va---*

115

Musical score for measures 115-119, first system. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 3/4 time signature. It features a series of chords and a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The lower staff begins with a bass clef and contains a few notes in the first measure. The system includes a performance instruction *brillante*.

brillante

Musical score for measures 115-119, second system. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 3/4 time signature. It features a series of chords and a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The lower staff begins with a bass clef and contains a few notes in the first measure. The system includes a performance instruction *marcato*.

marcato

120

ff pesante

ff pesante e non legato

Allarg. - - - - -

125

fff

fff

Allarg. - - - - -

fff

fff