

The Life and Music of Eric Coates

By Michael Payne

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Eric Coates (1886-1957) is perhaps the most familiar name associated with British light music. Sir Charles Groves said that 'his music crackled with enthusiasm and vitality. He could write tunes and clothe them in the most attractive musical colours'. Coates won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, and from 1912 to 1919 he was principal viola of the Queen's Hall Orchestra under Sir Henry Wood. He also played under such conductors as Elgar, Delius, Richard Strauss, Debussy, and Beecham. It was, however, as a composer of orchestral music that he found his greatest success. Beginning with the Miniature Suite, written for the 1911 Promenade Concerts, he forged an enviable reputation as a composer. By the 1920s and 1930s, he was one of the most popular and highest-paid British composers, with a string of popular works flowing from his pen. Coates' music has become indelibly entwined with such popular radio programmes as the BBC's In Town Tonight, which was introduced by the 'Knightsbridge' March and Desert Island Discs whose signature tune for the past forty years has been By the Sleepy Lagoon. Perhaps his most memorable work was his march for the Dam Busters film. Michael Payne traces the changing fortunes of the career of the man who composed some of Britain's best-known music. In many ways, Coates' story is the story of British light music, and Payne's study offers a fascinating insight into the heyday and decline of the British light music tradition.

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Editorial Review

Review
'A thoroughly enjoyable, and meticulously researched, book.' Journal into Melody 'At last, here is a scholarly biography of a person widely regarded as the leading figure in British light music... There is some diligent research into Coates' dealings with the BBC. In fact, the book as a whole contains a wealth of admirably detailed and informative footnotes. Michael Payne makes a strong case for Coates' pre-eminence in the field of light music, carefully helping the reader to recognize the high standards Coates achieved in his compositions... The author has done excellent service to the cause of British light music by this research, and his book will be valued as much by those who take light music lightly as those who take it seriously.' North American British Music Studies Association Newsletter

About the Author
Michael Payne was born in Lancashire and received his first musical training as a chorister at Blackburn Cathedral. He read music at Durham University and received his Ph.D., with a dissertation on the music of Eric Coates, in 2007.

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