

## CONTEMPORARY



### ROGER DOYLE

*Baby Grand*, BVHaast 1505

Search for listings of Roger Doyle's *Baby Grand* on internet retail sites and you'll find it variously filed under 'jazz', 'modern classical', 'new age', 'pop/rock', 'musique electroacoustique' and 'alternative'. All of which should tell you two things: that it doesn't neatly fit into any of those categories, and, more usefully, that it is a disc likely to be well worth the trouble of tracking down.

Contrarily, anyone who comes to this 11-track compendium spanning 30 years of Doyle's solo piano music expecting it to resemble any of those labels will find something here to validate the descriptions, but also, and crucially, much more besides. If nothing else, *Baby Grand* eloquently demonstrates that Doyle, once annointed 'the Godfather of Irish electronic music', has an enviable ability to make his listeners an offer they can't – and certainly shouldn't – refuse.

Not so much finely sculpted as obsessively whittled away at over time, these works are magnificent multi-layered miniatures infused with the stylistic pluralism that sets Doyle out from the crowd and makes his cult status seem an absurdity in the absence of the wider critical and commercial success enjoyed by such as Gavin Bryars and Michael Nyman.

The centrepiece is a five-part suite from Doyle's 1988 theatre score for the Gate Theatre's Stephen Berkoff-directed *Salome*, music initially improvised each night and distilled in the intervening years into a heady, incense-laden experience that intoxicates as it envelops. As throughout, Doyle's own playing here is impeccably realised, admirably poised and exquisitely nimble. Characteristically, he marries performances from a previous recording (issued by the Gate in 2000) with a newer version of one episode, the lightly trembling *Salome's Dance*, taken from a concert in the Mermaid Theatre, Bray in 2003, and which blends classical and pop sensibilities in effortless equilibrium.

A beguiling sense of time and place informs the two bittersweet *Budawanny* pieces. Though more than a decade separates them (1990; 2003), they share the same concern for richly-woven texture and telling detail, and allude to the defining otherworldly stillness at the centre of all of Doyle's best work. Epic in conception, intimate in execution, they coolly anticipate the stark, tentative

simplicity of closing track, *Ten Themes (all is bright)*.

For necessary context, the evocative, guilelessly drunken *Mansard* from Doyle's magnum opus, *Babel* – 'A celebration', the composer writes in the booklet note, 'of the multiplicity of musical language' – supplies tantalising clues to how to listen to music as multi-accented and multi-faceted as that on display throughout this recording.

However you describe it, this is delightfully approachable music of an often all too rare beauty. That it pertinently reminds the listener of Doyle's own admiration for Debussy – whose music, he tellingly says, 'goes so deep while resting on the surface' – is its own recommendation.

*Michael Quinn*