

DIE WALKÜRE

VON

RICHARD WAGNER.

Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond.



Für Klavier zu zwei Händen
bearbeitet von
August Stradal.

WAGNER

PIANO.

transcribed for solo piano
by August Stradal
Volume One

Die Walküre
Siegfried
Götterdämmerung
Wesendonck Lieder

Juan Guillermo Vizcarra, piano

FIRST RECORDINGS

AUGUST STRADAL: WAGNER TRANSCRIPTIONS, VOLUME ONE

by Malcolm MacDonald

The pianist, composer and writer August Stradal was born on 17 May 1860 in Teplice, north Bohemia. His father was a lawyer and a member of the town council. Stradal attended the grammar school in Leitmeritz (the modern Litoměřice) and then studied at the Vienna Conservatory, where his teachers were Anton Door, Theodor Leschetizky, Gustav Nottebohm and Anton Bruckner. In September 1884 he went to Weimar to become a disciple of Franz Liszt, whom he also accompanied to Budapest and Bayreuth in 1885 and 1886. After Liszt's death he returned to Teplice, where he was active as a music teacher until 1893, when he joined the staff of the Horak School of Piano Studies (later the Horak Konservatorium) in Vienna. He also toured extensively.

In later life Stradal wrote copiously about both Bruckner and Liszt, for whom he is an important biographical source, and published a memoir of the latter¹ as well as an autobiography. He received the Czechoslovak State Music Award in 1928. Stradal died on 13 March 1930 at Krásná Lipa (the former Austrian Schönlinde) in north Bohemia.

Stradal was considered a leading interpreter of Liszt's music and made many transcriptions – some sources reckon over 250 – of orchestral and chamber works for the piano, in repertoire stretching from the Baroque era to the late nineteenth century. Notable among these are his transcriptions of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 131, the First, Second, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Symphonies of Bruckner and the String Quintet (he also made a two-piano version of Mahler's Fifth Symphony), Reubke's *Sonata on the 94th Psalm* and most of Liszt's orchestral works, including the *Faust* and *Dante* Symphonies and twelve of the thirteen symphonic poems, his versions of which were published about the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.² Stradal also arranged a huge number of Bach's works and – as can be heard on the current disc – many works of Wagner, particularly excerpts from the operas. A more unusual Wagner transcription is Stradal's two-hand arrangement of the *Wesendonck Lieder* as piano pieces without voice.

Wagner wrote comparatively few songs, and his only mature set consists of these five settings

¹ *Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt*, P. Haupt, Bern and Leipzig, 1929.

² A complete cycle of recordings of Stradal's transcriptions of the Liszt symphonic poems is underway from the Finnish pianist Risto-Matti Marin on Toccata Classics: Volume One (TOCC 0035) presents *Les Préludes* (Symphonic Poem No. 3; 1848), *Héroïde Funèbre* (Symphonic Poem No. 8; 1850) and *Die Ideale* (Symphonic Poem No. 12; 1857), and Volume Two (TOCC 0092) *Orpheus* (Symphonic Poem No. 4; 1853–54), *Tasso, Lamento e Trionfo* (Symphonic Poem No. 2; 1854), *Hungaria* (Symphonic Poem No. 9; 1854) and *Hamlet* (Symphonic Poem No. 10; 1858).

of poems by Mathilde Wesendonck (1828–1902). He had known Mathilde and her husband – a wealthy Zürich silk merchant who had been one of his benefactors – for about five years, and while staying at their sumptuous villa his feelings for her had ripened into illicit passion. Their love-affair provided the emotional spur to compose *Tristan und Isolde*, perhaps the most revolutionary of all Wagner's works in terms of its influence on the future art of music; and Mathilde's poems in their turn were influenced by the text Wagner had written for his opera. He began setting them as a preliminary run for the musical idiom he envisaged for *Tristan*. 'Der Engel', 'Träume' and 'Schmerzen' were composed towards the end of 1857; Wagner then resumed work on his composition-sketch for *Tristan*, writing the setting of 'Stehe Still!' in parallel in February 1858. It was at this point that Wagner's wife Minna discovered the nature of his relationship with Mathilde, and it was only in May, after the ensuing domestic fracas and the departure of both Minna and Mathilde, that 'Im Treibhaus' was composed.³

The result is one of the most impressive song-sets of the nineteenth century. Though not formally a cycle, the five *Lieder* are bound together by a common language – the highly chromatic harmonic language of *Tristan*, here emerging for the first time and creating, in the central three songs, an atmosphere of extreme tension and spiritual suffering. These are framed by the warm, remembered innocence of 'Der Engel' [7] and the more peaceful, mature reflection of 'Träume' [11], an utterly characteristic evocation of a rapt, otherworldly state. 'Im Treibhaus' [9] and 'Träume' are indeed specifically marked by Wagner as 'Studies for *Tristan*', and their music bears an especially close relationship to sections of the opera: the former adumbrates the material of the Prelude to Act III, and 'Träume' is related, though more distantly, to the *Liebstd*. The long and finely arched vocal lines are indeed almost operatic in their conception.

The *Wesendonck Lieder* (as they have come to be called: Wagner's original, rather dismissive title was *Fünf Dilettanten-Gedichte*, though he dropped 'Dilettanten' on publication) are most often heard, and reveal their true proto-operatic nature, in the versions for voice and orchestra, though they were originally composed for voice and piano. (The familiar version with large orchestra was in fact made for Wagner by Felix Mottl, though Wagner made his own chamber-orchestral version of 'Träume'.) The original settings with piano accompaniment are highly

³ Although Mathilde Wesendonck's relationship with Wagner is famous, it is less well known that she subsequently became a good friend and admirer of Johannes Brahms, and even proposed to write song-texts for him – an offer which Brahms politely declined. Wagner's knowledge of their friendship may well have been an element in his notorious resentment of his younger colleague.

effective, concentrating the mind on the sheer harmonic sensation rather than its colouring, and Stradal picks up on them in his versions. He also re-orders the songs.

A close comparison with Wagner's original shows that in turning the songs into piano pieces Stradal remained generally faithful to Wagner's own piano-writing; but to incorporate the vocal line into the piano texture he often makes it an inner voice, often an octave below its notation in the original song. By contrast, he transposes parts of the right-hand piano accompaniment an octave higher, to achieve a more brilliant effect, and he fills in some of the left-hand harmonies and spreads the chords in a harp-like manner. His treatment of the opening song, 'Der Engel', shows all these features, as does his version of 'Im Treibhaus', which Stradal places second in the cycle. In 'Schmerzen' [10] he puts the vocal line into heroic right-hand octaves, and at one point breaks the left-hand chords into bravura octave leaps.

Wagner's music-dramas constituted one of the greatest artistic sensations of the nineteenth century. They were not only revolutionary in conception and highly controversial in their reception, but they attracted a huge and passionate following across Europe and the United States. Yet opportunities for Wagner's devoted audiences actually to experience his works on the stage, be it at Bayreuth or elsewhere, were few and far between, and it is certain that a large proportion of those who admired his music knew it primarily from extracts played in concert and through domestic performance of piano arrangements. In an age before radio, television or recorded music, piano transcriptions – whether aimed at virtuoso recitalists or at amateur pianists who could cope with the intricacies of the music as best they might, in private – were the chief means of disseminating operatic works to the wider public. Stradal's teacher Liszt made about a dozen transcriptions of excerpts from Wagner's operas over a thirty-year period (the most famous is probably his version of 'Isolde's Liebestod' from *Tristan und Isolde*) and it was another Liszt pupil, Karl Klindworth, who made the piano scores of the complete *Das Ring des Nibelungen*. Stradal's arrangements of excerpts from *The Ring* are thus part of a distinguished tradition. Not a tradition, though, that has always met with approval: Sir Donald Tovey's classic essay 'Wagner in the Concert Room'⁴ presents a devastating criticism of the shortcomings, as orchestral concert music, of what are now colloquially referred to as 'bleeding chunks'.

Wagner was no pianist, a fact which if anything freed his orchestral imagination to produce

⁴ *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Volume VI, Oxford University Press, London, 1939, pp. 102–14. One may not agree with Tovey's opinions, but they are far better expressed than much of the admiration that is routinely heaped on these pieces in most programme-notes.

some of the most original effects of scoring ever conceived, but which poses a challenge to any transcriber wishing to reduce his orchestral canvases to a shape that can be grasped in a mere ten fingers. The first of his extracts from *Die Walküre* is Siegmund's Act I love-song, 'Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond' ('Wintry storms have vanished before the moon of May') [1], a piece for which, out of its operatic context, Tovey's description serves as well as any:

Siegmund's love-song [...] comes at one of the supremely poetic moments in the first act of *Walküre*. Wagner's bitterest enemies have confessed themselves overwhelmed by the poetic beauty of the moment when the doors of Hunding's house fly open and reveal the moonlight that has followed upon the departure of the storm. The accepted concert extract misses this moment and confines itself to Siegmund's tune, which begins well, but taken by itself reveals certain weaknesses from which Wagner's more sustained melodies are seldom free; it then carries the tune as far as Siegmund can carry it, and adds an orchestral cadence which finishes the business with a bump.⁵

Stradal seems to have been of Tovey's mind, for in his transcription (dedicated to Georg Boskoff, court pianist to the King of Romania) he prefaces Siegmund's tune with two pages that transfer to the keyboard, with utmost delicacy, Wagner's evocation of the streaming moonlight. He does not transpose Siegmund's song,⁶ keeping it in the tenor register where it is lapped around with rich keyboard colour, but altogether the arrangement has something of the character of a paraphrase on Wagner's materials rather than a slavish reproduction of the concert extract.

With *Der Ritt der Walküren* (Ride of the Valkyries) that opens Act III of *Die Walküre* – depicting eight of the nine warrior-maidens gathering in ones and twos among the storm clouds on a mountain height, each with a dead hero in her saddlebag to be delivered to Valhalla; to their astonishment the ninth, Brünnhilde, arrives with Sieglinde, a living woman – the orchestral extract⁷ was far too well-established for Stradal to take many liberties in producing his piano version [2], which faithfully follows the score but, in reconceiving the music for the pianist's two hands, produces a stunning recital item.⁸ The *Schluss des letztes Aufzug* (End of the Last Act),

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁶ Compare this arrangement with one by the other indisputably great transcriber to have busied himself with this piece – Carl Tausig: every bar of which differs from Stradal's. Tausig's has a different (and less effective) introduction and, without transposing Siegmund's tune, so disposes things that the first appearance of the melody is at the top of a much simpler texture.

⁷ Described by Tovey, who admitted its effectiveness, as 'a cheap and nasty orchestral firework [...] which is neither more nor less than vulgar; but the vulgarity is not Wagner's. One of the main types of vulgarity consists in effects without causes. Here you have a set of effects which originally had perfect causes' (*ibid.*, p. 107).

⁸ Tausig's transcription, a Lisztian barnstormer if ever there was one, again provides a point of comparison. Tausig (who admittedly describes his version as 'frei übertragen' (roughly, 'transferred with liberty')) dissolves much of the orchestral writing into bravura figuration; Stradal,

which encompasses both Wotan's Farewell to Brünnhilde as she is placed in her magic sleep on the mountaintop to await her awakening by the world's greatest hero, and Loge's 'Magic Fire' music as her resting-place is surrounded by a curtain of flame, is not often met with as an extract in the concert hall. Its wide range of orchestral textures sets a severe challenge for any arranger, yet Stradal's version [3] is cogent, poetic, and a bravura piano piece in its own right.

The *Waldweben* (Forest Murmurs) from *Siegfried* is a nature-evocation that shows Wagner's delicacy as a tone-poet [4]. On his way to confront and kill the dragon Fafner, Siegfried pauses in the woods, listening to the song of a bird. After he has slain Fafner and tasted his blood, he finds that he can understand what the bird is saying – a warning that Mime intends to kill him, and a prophecy that he is destined to find Brünnhilde and arouse her from her magic sleep. The familiar concert extract omits the music connected with Mime and Fafner, leaving the listener essentially with repetitions of the birdsong. As Tovey has commented,⁹ the challenge for any arranger is how to represent the difference to the birdsong after Siegfried drinks the dragon's blood (in the opera, of course, a singer takes over the song at this point). In Stradal's case it is partly a matter of using a higher register, but also of intensifying and harmonically enriching the delicate and intricate background figuration, whose complexity (Stradal provides a simplified ossia) makes this particular transcription a real pianistic challenge.

In the first of the two extracts from *Götterdämmerung*, Siegfried's Rhine Journey [5], the hero leaves Brünnhilde on her rock and sets out down the Rhine seeking new chances for noble deeds and glory. The exuberant *Rheinfahrt* is really a tone-poem describing his journey, made up of many themes previously heard in the tetralogy, notably those associated with Siegfried himself, the Magic Fire music and the motif of the mighty river itself. Stradal's arrangement, which he dedicated to the Court Jeweller in Vienna, Theodor Köchert, omits the 'Dawn' music which is often used as a prelude to the piece and instead begins as Siegfried sets out joyfully on his travels. In using the entire range of the keyboard and the widest range of piano textures to convey the surge and sweep of the orchestra, this is perhaps the summit of Stradal's achievement as a Wagner-transcriber.

If not, then surely his version of Siegfried's Funeral March [6] must take the palm. In the opera this piece occurs after the hero has been murdered by a spear-thrust in the back from Hagen, and it must be some of the most grandiose funeral music ever written. Within the overall

by contrast, here as throughout his arrangements, is much more at pains to preserve the substance and solid outlines of Wagner's orchestral thought – though producing a piece no less challenging for the pianist.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108. Tovey also felt that the omission of the Mime and Fafner episodes reduced the piece to 'grovelling imbecility' (*ibid.*, p. 107).

march-rhythm it recapitulates many previously heard themes, building to a climactic statement of Siegfried's heroic horn-call. Stradal's representation of the drum-beats, the slithering triplet figure in the strings, the angrily ricocheting brass chords, are all achieved simply and yet with marvellous vividness; and in the overwhelming central climax he seems able to make the piano encompass the full tragic impact and massive sonority of Wagner's vision, before the march subsides and dies away in impressive gloom.

Malcolm MacDonald © 2013

Malcolm MacDonald is the author of the volume on Brahms in the 'Master Musicians' series (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2002). He has also written The Symphonies of Havergal Brian (three vols., Kahn & Averill, London, 1974, 1978 and 1983) and edited the first two volumes of Havergal Brian on Music (Toccata Press, London, 1985 and 2009); further volumes are in preparation. His other writings include books on John Foulds, Schoenberg, Ronald Stevenson and Edgard Varèse.

Juan Guillermo Vizcarra is one of the leading Peruvian pianists of his generation, whose performances have been heard far beyond his native land: the Peruvian newspaper *El Comercio* called him a 'rare case of extraordinary talent which is called to shine in the international scene'. He has received numerous honours in international competitions, among them the gold medal of the Third Béla Bartók International Piano Competition in 1995 in Lima, the silver medal of the Second Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart International Piano Competition in 1991, also in Lima, and the bronze medal of the Third Ludmila Knezkova International Piano Competition in 2004, in Canada. Juan Vizcarra has performed as orchestral soloist and recitalist in Canada, Chile, Mexico, Russia and the United States. At home in Peru he is a frequent guest soloist of the Peru National Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonic Orchestra of The University of Lima and other major Peruvian orchestras. In 2006 he was invited to perform with the National Symphony Orchestra in Lima for the annual anniversary concert of Filarmonia, the main Peruvian classical radio station. His most recent appearance at home was a performance of the Liszt First Piano Concerto with the Peru National Symphony Orchestra.

His training was international, too. In 1988 he graduated from the National University of San Agustín, Arequipa-Peru, in 1988, receiving a Bachelors of Music in Piano Performance. In 1999 he studied at the Rimsky Korsakov Conservatory in Saint Petersburg. From 1999 to 2001 he studied at the National Conservatory of Music in Lima, after which he was appointed as faculty member of the National Conservatory, remaining until 2003. In 2005 he finished the Artist Diploma Program at the Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, and in 2009, also at the Texas Christian University, he completed his graduate studies, receiving a Masters in Piano Performance. He readily acknowledges the influence on his playing of his studies with, Joseph Banowetz and with José Feghali, a gold medallist of the Van Cliburn competition.



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The Czech-born pianist and writer August Stradal (1860–1930) – a student of Bruckner and disciple of Liszt – was one of the more prolific transcribers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, producing a vast quantity of piano transcriptions, which include Liszt's orchestral works, most of the Bruckner symphonies, a good deal of the Baroque (not least a huge amount of Bach) and much more, most of it phenomenally difficult to play. This series of recordings presents his Wagner transcriptions, cast in the best barnstorming virtuoso tradition.

TOCC 0151

WAGNER transcribed for solo piano by August Stradal, Volume One

Die Walküre

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | 'Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond' (Siegmond's Love-Song) | 4:12 |
| 2 | Der Ritt der Walküren (The Ride of the Valkyries) | 4:21 |
| 3 | Schluss des letzten Aufzuges (End of the last Act) | 17:34 |

Siegfried

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|------|
| 4 | Waldweben (Forest Murmurs) | 6:17 |
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Götterdämmerung

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 5 | Rheinfahrt aus dem Vorspiel (Rhine Journey) | 7:53 |
| 6 | Trauermusik aus dem letzten Aufzug (Siegfried's Funeral March) | 9:17 |

Wesendonck Lieder

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|------|
| 7 | No. 1 'Der Engel' | 9:12 |
| 8 | No. 2 'Stehe still!' | 3:32 |
| 9 | No. 3 'Im Treibhaus' | 3:28 |
| 10 | No. 4 'Schmerzen' | 7:54 |
| 11 | No. 5 'Träume' | 2:39 |

TT 71:56



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FIRST RECORDINGS

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