

A sepia-toned photograph of John Thomas, a man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit and a white cravat, seated and playing a large harp. The harp is ornate with a tall, fluted column. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape.

# John THOMAS

**COMPLETE DUOS FOR HARP AND PIANO, VOLUME TWO**  
**SOUVENIR DU BAL**  
**AND TRANSCRIPTIONS OF MUSIC BY**  
**CHOPIN, DONIZETTI AND SCHUBERT**  
**ANON. ARR. THOMAS**  
**MARCH OF THE MEN OF HARLECH**  
**RÁKÓCZI MARCH**

**Duo Praxedis**

# JOHN THOMAS: COMPLETE DUOS FOR HARP AND PIANO, VOLUME TWO

by Cornelis Witthoefft

As a harp virtuoso performing for half a century at home and abroad, as an adjudicator and formative pedagogue at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), the Royal College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music in London during the same period, as first harpist to the Royal Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre in London, as harpist-in-ordinary and musician-in-ordinary to Queen Victoria and harpist to King Edward VII, as a member of the Royal Society of Musicians and the Philharmonic Society, London, and honorary member of the musical academies in Rome and Florence, as a choral conductor, editor and music historian who championed Welsh music in the English capital and, last but not least, as a prolific composer and arranger who mainly (but not exclusively) created works for his beloved instrument, John Thomas (1826–1913) succeeded in uniting various aspects of musical, didactic and scholarly activity. This series of recordings offers the opportunity to discover and appreciate his extensive work of original compositions and arrangements for the delightful combination of harp and piano, which was blessed with a substantial repertoire in certain periods of music history but is, unfortunately, less highly esteemed today. This essay is intended to place these little-known gems in the context of his life and times on the basis of the documentation currently available, although much research has yet to be done.<sup>1</sup>

## Early Success and Years of Study

John Thomas, a son of a tailor and amateur musician, was born on 1 March 1826<sup>2</sup> in Bridgend in the county of Glamorganshire, twenty miles west of the Welsh capital,

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the staff of the National Library of Wales, Dr Maredudd ap Huw, Heini Davies and Iwan ap Dafydd, for their valuable assistance with my ongoing research on John Thomas.

<sup>2</sup> That puts him in the same generation as Bedřich Smetana and Anton Bruckner (both born in 1824) and Johann Strauss Jr (born in 1825).

Cardiff. Throughout his life, Thomas considered it significant that he was born on this very day – St David’s Day and thus the National Day of Wales, named after the sixth-century Welsh bishop St David. According to his fellow student and friend, the pianist and composer Walter Macfarren (1826–1905), Thomas once remarked: ‘I ought to have been called David, [...] for I was born in Wales and on St. David’s Day; but it was ordained otherwise, and I have had, although a Welshman, to put up with the very cosmopolitan christian [*sic*] name John.’<sup>3</sup>

Thomas was already infatuated with the harp as a boy, as Charles Wilkens poetically described in a tribute to Thomas in 1883:

At an age when most boys would have been in the fever heat for playthings – investigating drums, if of analytical turn; playing soldiers, if military – our lad, seized with a passion for the harp, studied it with avidity. Early morn found him in full practice; late in the night the faint plaintive music streamed forth to the wind.<sup>4</sup>

Thus he made his name already at the age of twelve, when in 1838, at the *eisteddfod* competition<sup>5</sup> in Abergavenny, some forty miles from his home town, he was the youngest competitor under the adjudicator, the distinguished harpist John Parry (Bardd Alaw) (1776–1851), to take the first prize and win the most valuable of four Welsh triple-harps offered as prizes. Thereafter there was no stopping the boy, but apparently his very early career start did not go to his head. A later account described him as being ‘then unpretending in his manners and appearance,’<sup>6</sup> which corresponds well with the

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Anon., ‘John Thomas’, *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 40 (1899), No. 681, 1 November 1899, pp. 725–30, here p. 729.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Wilkens, ‘Notable Men of Wales. John Thomas’, *The Red Dragon. The National Magazine of Wales*, Vol. 4 (July–December 1883), pp. 481–85, here p. 482.

<sup>5</sup> The Welsh *eisteddfodau* (plural of *eisteddfod*, translated as ‘sitting’ or ‘sitting together’, thus denoting a gathering) date back to the seventh century and were then sponsored by the aristocracy. In one of the first scholarly contributions to Welsh music, Edward Jones’ anthology *The Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards*, published in 1784, one finds the following definition: ‘The *Eisteddfod* was a triennial assembly of the *Bards*, [...] [f]or the regulation of Poetry and Music, for the purpose of conferring degrees, and of advancing to the chair of the *Eisteddfod* by the decision of a poetical and musical contest some of the rival candidates; or establishing in that honourable seat the *Chief Bard* who already occupied it’ (Edward Jones, *The Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* [...] 1st edition, London, 1784, p. 14). Parts of this tradition have been revived since the time of Jones’ *Relicks*.

<sup>6</sup> William Wahab Cazalet, *The History of the Royal Academy of Music*, Bosworth, London, 1854, p. 321.

recollections of Walter Macfarren, who towards the end of the century described him as ‘the most modest of boys, [who] is now the most modest of men.’<sup>7</sup>

He was referring to their years of joint study at the RAM, which Thomas entered in 1840 at the age of fourteen, under the tutelage of John Balsir Chatterton (1805–71), then harpist to Queen Victoria, and with the financial sponsorship of Lady Ana Lovelace, Lord Byron’s only legitimate daughter. In order to support his son’s musical advancement as best he could, his father moved to London with his large family. Subsequently, two younger brothers, Thomas and Llywelyn, also became harpists, apparently taught by their elder sibling. At this youthful age, he had two challenging tasks to master: apart from having to make English his second tongue, he had to switch from the familiar Welsh triple harp, in which the instrument rests on the left shoulder and the treble is played with the left hand and the bass with the right, to the exact opposite treatment in the pedal (or double-action) harp, as invented and patented by Sebastian Érard in 1801, which was the final refinement of the mechanism that quickly caught on worldwide and is basically still in use today. ‘I worked very hard [...] during my Academy days’, Thomas stated in an interview published in 1899, ‘much harder, I am afraid, than students do now.’<sup>8</sup> This early perseverance and determination must have been generally known in professional circles, for Wilkens had already noted in his earlier study: ‘The musician, like the poet, has heaven-born capacities; but his genius, even more than that of the former, requires long and patient effort in development and manipulation. Few worked harder than Mr. John Thomas.’<sup>9</sup>

As much as Thomas championed the music of his homeland throughout his life, it was with the deepest conviction that he defended the change of instrument from the traditional Welsh harp to the modern pedal harp, which he made at a young age. This certainty emerges, for example, from an 1892 article on ‘Music in Wales’ which states:

‘Nationality’ is a factor of distinct use in music, so far as characteristic rhythm and uncommon melodic progressions are concerned; but it would be folly to approach modern

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in anon., ‘John Thomas’, *loc. cit.*, p. 730.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 726.

<sup>9</sup> Wilkens, ‘John Thomas’, *loc. cit.*, p. 482.

music in this spirit, and attempt to resuscitate any ancient and rude instrument, or even the Welsh triple harp, the telyn. So prominent a musician as Mr. John Thomas (Pencerdd Gwalia) has lifted up his voice against this antiquity, and pointed out what a mistake it is to pit it against the modern pedal harp.<sup>10</sup>

This remark must be seen in the context of the time, as rivalry between traditional and more forward-looking views on the harp had long dominated the debate among Welsh musicians and music-lovers. Among the staunchest advocates of the Welsh harp was Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover, who bore the bardic name Gwenynen Gwent (1802–96), and who, according to a report in *The Musical World*, took a decisive step to promote and support the Welsh harp in October 1869:

On the 14th inst. [= of the current month], Lady Llanover invited real Welsh harpers to compete for a triple-stringed harp, given by her ladyship. All were to play ‘Difyrrwch Gwyr Harlech’ (The March of the Men of Harlech) without variations. No one to compete who had ever played on the pedal harp.<sup>11</sup>

Addressing the participants and the audience, Lady Llanover explained her point of view as follows:

I grieve to think that any Welsh harper should have been driven from his national instrument, so much beloved by his nation, whilst the Scotch pipers have never abandoned their bagpipes, or taken up in their place any other instrument of music; and I do not believe that one thousand English meetings, if attempted in Scotland under the feigned name of ‘Scotch gatherings’, but with the view of undermining Scotch nationality, would ever succeed in beguiling a single Scotch piper from the honourable and honoured national instrument of his country, yet the Scotch cannot boast of a national instrument which can be compared with our harp of Wales.<sup>12</sup>

In a letter to the editor, John Balsir Chatterton objected fervently to the second rule of the competition which excluded harpists trained on the pedal harp. He also pointed

<sup>10</sup> ‘T. L. S.’ (= Southgate), ‘Music in Wales’, *Musical News*, Vol. 3 (1892), No. 79, 2 September 1892, pp. 226–27, here p. 227.

<sup>11</sup> Anon., ‘Lady Llanover and the Welsh Harp’, *The Musical World*, Vol. 47 (1869), No. 44, 30 October 1869, p. 749.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

out ‘that my friend and former pupil, Mr. John Thomas, undertook personally to secure the sum of fifty guineas towards a triple-harp scholarship, with the view of saving the instrument from oblivion.’ And he recalled an event almost thirty years previously when he concluded his letter with the remark:

It was the triple-harp upon which Thomas, as a boy, played when he came to the Royal Academy of Music to be examined for admission as a student, and I was present upon the occasion. I need not say what he has done since that time, for his reputation as a harpist and composer is well known all over Europe; and I have no hesitation in saying that if he had not forsaken the triple-harp for the pedal harp, he never could have accomplished what he has done, neither would he ever have supplied his country with a collection of Welsh melodies arranged in such a form as to admit of their being performed all over Europe; thereby giving the whole world an opportunity of appreciating their many beauties.<sup>13</sup>

Even in the last publication of his long career, his *History of the Harp*, Thomas considered it ‘would be superfluous to pass any encomium on this magnificent instrument; it speaks for itself, and must ever stand as an attesting proof of the genius of the man to whom the world is indebted for such a glorious invention.’<sup>14</sup> He added:

although works were composed by Mozart, Naderman, and others for the single-action harp,<sup>15</sup> it was not until the double-action harp was invented (when, of course, enharmonic and other effects could be produced, and it became possible to modulate into any key with facility) that operatic and other composers introduced it into their orchestral scores, whenever they wished to produce those romantic and poetical effects so peculiar to the instrument. Such composers as Spohr, Bochsá, Dizi, Labarre, Godefroid, Hasselmans, Oberthür, Parish Alvars, and the writer of this article, with others, have shared in the

<sup>13</sup> John Balsir Chatterton, ‘Lady Llanover and the Welsh Harp. To the Editor of the “Musical World.”’, *The Musical World*, Vol. 47 (1869), No. 45, 6 November 1869, p. 764.

<sup>14</sup> John Thomas, *History of the Harp. From the Earliest Period Down to the Present Day*, Hutchings & Romer, London, 1908, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> The single-action harp was essentially invented by Jacob Hochbrucker in 1720. In this type of harp, the pedal is connected to a hook that raises the string by a semitone by shortening its length.

creation of a *répertoire* for the instrument, which, but for the invention of the double-action harp, would, in all probability, never have been produced.<sup>16</sup>

### First Engagements and Tours Abroad

Thomas' very first engagements show how ground-breaking his teacher's decision to change instruments was to prove. After six years of study at the Academy, where he also studied piano and composition – the latter with Cipriani Potter (1792–1871), who was particularly prominent as a symphonist and who, as a temporary pupil of Beethoven in Vienna, will have introduced him to harmony, counterpoint and the formal concepts of Viennese Classicism – he rose to the rank of a sub-professor for harp and an Associate of the RAM and was appointed first harpist of the Royal Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket, London, in February 1851, at the age of barely 25, the principal conductor at the time being Michael William Balfe. This position gave him ample opportunity to meet in person and listen to some of the finest singers of his age, and to become acquainted both with the use of the harp as an orchestral instrument in general and with the music and the stylistic features of *bel canto* opera in particular, which, moreover, liked to use the harp as an orchestral instrument with a romantic flair, as Thomas mentioned. Among the tasks he was given there must have been the extended solo at the beginning of Lucia's scene in Act One, which includes her famous aria 'Regnava nel silenzio', when Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*, long a staple of the repertoire of the house, was performed there in his second season for the debut of the French soprano Anne de Lagrange in the title role.<sup>17</sup>

Benjamin Lumley, who had directed Her Majesty's Theatre since 1842, was able to stage the British premieres of several operas by Giuseppe Verdi there and even commissioned his *I masnadieri* in July 1847, but shortly before also experienced a 'crisis [that] was evidently formidable',<sup>18</sup> when the principal conductor, Michael Costa, left the theatre in a dispute and launched a rival company, 'Royal Italian Opera at Covent

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, *History of the Harp*, loc. cit., p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Lumley, *Reminiscences of the Opera*, Hurst and Blackett, London, 1864, p. 339.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

Garden, in April of that year. This strong competitive pressure forced Lumley to close his opera house after the 1852 season, only to reopen it after a fire destroyed the theatre in Covent Garden four years later.

Short-lived as Thomas' first engagement was, this incident enabled him to focus on his solo career; he had the winters off anyway, since the opera season ran only in spring and summer. Extensive tours on the continent as far as Russia followed; before he set out on this journey, Lady Llanover let him know that she was 'glad to hear Mr Thomas is going to Germany because the Germans [...] appreciate their own music & they neither disown nor allow it to be murdered or disguised'<sup>19</sup> – a clear allusion to the contempt for the music of his Welsh homeland of which she accused Thomas even then.

Based on Thomas' diary entries Carys Ann Roberts has reconstructed the extent of his tours abroad:

Austria: October 1851–February 1852

Germany and Russia: September 1852–April 1853

Paris: November 1853–April 1854

Italy: September–December 1854

Paris: September 1858–1859

St Petersburg: November 1873–1874.<sup>20</sup>

Fortunately, press coverage of his first two tours gives an idea of the appeal and skill of the young musician abroad. 'John Thomas from London, who is now touring Germany, is undoubtedly one of the first virtuosos on the harp, and is winning great acclaim everywhere for his eminent abilities',<sup>21</sup> a German magazine reported in 1852. The author answered the question as to why the harp enjoyed little popularity in Germany with considerations of the difficult technical mastery of the instrument and the high purchase price, but also wondered in view of an alleged German–English dichotomy 'that the harp,

<sup>19</sup> Letter of 20 June 1851, quoted in Carys Ann Roberts, 'The Cosmopolitan Aspect of John Thomas, "Pencerdd Gwalia" (1826–1913)', *Welsh Music History / Hanes Cerddoriaeth Cymru*, Vol. 4 (2000), pp. 100–10, here p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103. The diary of his second stay in Paris records numerous encounters with Gioacchino Rossini, for whom he performed on 12 February 1859 (*ibid.*, p. 104).

<sup>21</sup> *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, Vol. 52 (1852), No. 17, p. 202. All translations are by the author.



as a musical representative of Romanticism, receives far less attention in Germany, which is otherwise so romantic, than in practical-minded England, which would certainly be unjustly accused of sentimentality [‘Schwärmerei’].<sup>22</sup> The *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* also reported earlier that same year that Thomas ‘has quickly become popular in Vienna due to his excellent playing and virtuosic performance’ and pointed out that

in the runs and passages he made himself noticeable by pure and clear execution. He performs excellently in the modulations, and especially in the *piano* he achieves significant effects. [...] His beautiful technical training is significantly enhanced by an expressive and ingenious performance.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, one also learns from this review that Thomas was fortunate enough to perform there with the pianist Friederike Streicher (1816–95), who from 1839 to 1845 was one of Chopin’s most esteemed pupils, in a duo for harp and piano, albeit not yet with a piece of his own composition but with the duet on Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* by the French harpist Théodore Labarre (1805–70).<sup>24</sup> This work may have been among the models for his own numerous opera adaptations for this instrumentation; it can at least be concluded from this report that he was familiar with this genre from an early age. A eulogy of his debut in the Leipzig Gewandhaus on 3 October 1852 should conclude this small overview, which states: ‘Mr John Thomas fully justified his position as professor of the Academy in London and first harpist at Her Majesty’s Theatre. He mastered his difficult instrument with assurance and taste and his performance was noble and artistically measured.’<sup>25</sup>

Given the opportunity to perform for many royal personages on his tours of the continent, Thomas soon ‘enjoyed the distinction of being the King’s harpist’, as one obituary put it in 1913; it even called him ‘Minstrel to royalty’.<sup>26</sup> ‘I do not think there is one Court in Europe where I have not played,’ the newspaper quoted Thomas as saying.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Anon., ‘Concerte’, *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung (früher Theaterzeitung)*, Vol. 46 (1852), No. 28, 4 February 1852, p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Anon., ‘Erstes Abonnementconcert’, *Signale für die musikalische Welt*, Vol. 10 (1852), No. 41, p. 354.

<sup>26</sup> *The Porthcawl News*, 27 March 1913, p. 2.

During the ten years that I spent travelling about Europe I met nearly every reigning sovereign; indeed, I was engaged on a kind of royal tour, for I took a letter from one Court to another, and thus secured the favour of all those in high places.<sup>27</sup>

In another interview Thomas recalled the King of Hanover as commenting on his playing: 'I notice a remarkable peculiarity in your playing, which I have never found in any other performer upon the harp: it is that your execution in both hands is absolutely equal.'<sup>28</sup> It is revealing that in his answer Thomas attributed the even training of his hands to the fact that he had initially trained the left hand on the Welsh harp as the prominent one.<sup>29</sup>

The elite society in which the young musician found himself at an early age also seems to have been known to Hector Berlioz, for whom Thomas performed privately at his home during his stay in Paris on 10 January 1854 – on the recommendation of Liszt, for whom he had played on 9 October 1852.<sup>30</sup> Two months later Berlioz wrote in his columns in the *Journal des débats*: 'If I were rich, I would allow myself the luxury of having such a virtuoso to lull me in my sad hours and make me forget the real world!'<sup>31</sup> Berlioz appreciated the well-balanced intensity of his playing when he described it as 'nervous, passionate, feverish, in a manner of speaking, but without ever going to the point of outrageous nuances,'<sup>32</sup> and one could certainly not wish the aspiring young Thomas more than the effusive praise with which the famous French composer introduced him to his Parisian readership: 'This is how to play the harp.'<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Anon., 'John Thomas', *loc. cit.*, p. 727.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Roberts, *The Cosmopolitan Aspect*, *loc. cit.*, pp. 104 and 109. Both dates are according to Thomas' diary entries.

<sup>31</sup> *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 2 March 1854, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* It is indeed possible that Berlioz was inspired by Thomas' playing to write the charming Trio for two flutes and harp, which he included as No. 14 in the third part of his oratorio *L'Enfance du Christ*. Clues to this connection can be found in his letter to Liszt of 15 January 1854, in which he reported that he was currently working on this new composition and thanked him for introducing Thomas, 'who has charmed me with his talent as a harp player' (La Mara (Marie Lipsius) (ed.), *Briefe hervorragender Zeitgenossen an Franz Liszt*, Vol. 1, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1895, p. 311).

## Socialising with Exalted Circles and Championing Welsh Music

Although Thomas was appointed harpist to the Queen only in 1872, after the death of his former teacher Chatterton (on this occasion he also succeeded him as professor at the RAM), he had already established extensive contacts with the British upper class, in whose houses he was a welcome guest and who willingly patronised him. A vivid example of these contacts, which proved to be so important to him, can be found in the memoirs of the Welsh-born Mary Lucy (1803–89), mistress of Charlecote Park, Warwickshire, and amateur harpist, to whom he would eventually dedicate his *Souvenir du Nord* and his *Grand Duo*, both for two harps or, alternatively, harp and piano.<sup>34</sup> In 1851 Thomas acted as adjudicator at the *eisteddfod* in Abergavenny, South Wales, sponsored by the aforementioned Lady Llanover. Mary Lucy became aware of him when one day her son ‘rushed into the room saying, “Make haste, Mamma, put on your bonnet and come with me to a house in the park and hear a young man play the harp who will drive you wild”’.<sup>35</sup> Mrs Lucy followed this call and Thomas politely complied with her request to play for her, choosing *La Danse des Fées* (‘The Fairies’ Dance’) by Elias Parish Alvars (1808–49), apparently one of his favourite recital pieces at the time, which he also performed as an encore at the Leipzig concert mentioned above.<sup>36</sup> ‘I was enchanted and fancied the king of the fairies himself swept the cords, never did I hear such feeling, tone, richness and power combined’,<sup>37</sup> Mary Lucy recalled. At home at Charlecote Park, she soon hosted an evening of music presenting Thomas, where ‘[e]veryone was in raptures with his playing’,<sup>38</sup> and he immediately accepted her into his circle of pupils.

For his tireless dedication to Welsh music and his high degree of competence in this activity, his compatriots honoured him at the 1861 *eisteddfod* in Aberdare with the bardic title ‘Pencerdd Gwalia’, meaning ‘Chief of Welsh Musicians’, ‘one of the highest honours within the musical circles of nineteenth-century Wales.’<sup>39</sup> In addition to his

<sup>34</sup> Both pieces are recorded on Vol. 1 of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0561.

<sup>35</sup> Alice Fairfax-Lucy (ed.), *Mistress of Charlecote. The Memoirs of Mary Elizabeth Lucy*, Gollancz, London, 1984, p. 96.

<sup>36</sup> Anon., ‘Erstes Abonnementconcert’, *loc. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> Fairfax-Lucy (ed.), *Mistress of Charlecote*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>39</sup> Roberts, *The Cosmopolitan Aspect*, *loc. cit.*, p. 108.

role as an adjudicator, he continued to render considerable service to the music of his principality by conducting the Welsh Choral Union from 1872 onwards, but, above all, by incorporating his native music in his own arrangements in the annual Concerts of Welsh Music or Grand Harp Concerts he organised at St James's Hall (which was then London's largest concert-hall, situated between Piccadilly and Regent Street, seating over 2,000). The first such concert was held on 4 July 1862, with a programme consisting chiefly of arrangements of Welsh airs and featuring the debut of the young Welsh soprano Edith Wynne. The enthusiastic reviewer of *The Morning Post* called Thomas 'the justly celebrated harpist, [...] who is at the same time one of the very best musicians in this country', and reported: 'The hall was densely crowded, and the entire performance, which went off with the greatest possible *éclat*, was every way honourable to Mr. John Thomas's "Pencerdd Gwalia"'.<sup>40</sup> And a notice in *The Athenæum* said:

The applause of the audience was uproarious throughout: in fact, the concert was virtually sung twice over, since to keep count of the encores is beyond our power. A part of this may be ascribed to the nationality to which the Welsh cling with such pertinacity; but clanship did not do everything. The intrinsic grandeur and regularity of the old airs had also their part in a very great and interesting success.<sup>41</sup>

Before this event, which established for more than four decades an influential concert tradition in London, Thomas had begun to publish multi-volume collections of *Welsh Melodies* both arranged for the harp (1861) and for one and four voices with harp or pianoforte (1862). Chatterton was right when he described the former as 'arranged in such a form as to admit of their being performed all over Europe';<sup>42</sup> which is obviously what Thomas meant to say in his preface to the 1862 collection when he called them 'arranged in a popular form': 'It is a remarkable fact, that Wales, possessing music of so

<sup>40</sup> *The Morning Post*, 7 July 1862, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in *The Liverpool Daily Post*, 14 July 1862, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Chatterton, 'Lady Llanover and the Welsh Harp', *loc. cit.*

much originality and beauty, should have remained up to the present period without any important collection of national melodies, arranged in a popular form.’<sup>43</sup>

Popularity in the best sense was indeed what Thomas aspired to as a composer and arranger – and yet one should be careful not to make sweeping judgements. Although he must be described as a child of his time, although he was to some extent subject to the prevailing tastes of his patrons, and although his work has a certain proximity to the parlour music of his age, one need not go as far as the major twentieth-century Welsh harpist, Osian Ellis (1928–2021), who enjoyed a long and fruitful collaboration with Benjamin Britten<sup>44</sup> and who observed that Thomas ‘suffered from a want of self-criticism which was typical of the nineteenth century, when mawkish and pompous poems and sentimental melodies poured forth from the pens of poets and composers alike to satisfy the feeble taste of the Victorians’<sup>45</sup> and that ‘his constant dedication of his own music to ladies of nobility suggest[s] that he enjoyed the flaccid company of high society rather than the severe workshops of serious composers’.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Thomas’ music proves that there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his unselfish commitment, which he articulated in the preface to his *Welsh Melodies* and which can be considered representative of his artistic approach in general: ‘should the Editor be the means of calling attention to the exquisite beauty of his native melodies (which are here presented in their original simplicity), he will be more than compensated for what has been to him truly “a labour of love”’.<sup>47</sup>

This outlook is confirmed by a look at other published writings by Thomas, which do not exist in abundance, but which can give an idea of his mindset. Two interesting perspectives of his may be referred to here. Having already reached the zenith of his

<sup>43</sup> John Thomas, *Welsh Melodies, With Welsh and English Poetry, by Talhaiarn and Thomas Oliphant. Arranged for One Voice, and also Harmonised for Four Voices. With Accompaniment for Harp or Pianoforte*, Vol. 1, Lamborn Cock, London, 1862, preface (no pagination).

<sup>44</sup> Britten’s Suite for Harp, Op. 83 (1969), was written for Ellis, who also premiered Britten’s *Canticle V*, Op. 89 (1974), and *A Birthday Hansel*, Op. 92 (1975); he further performed Britten’s folksong arrangements.

<sup>45</sup> Osian Ellis, *The Story of the Harp in Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1991, p. 73.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, *Welsh Melodies*, *op. cit.*

career, Thomas gave a lecture to the Honourable Society of 'Cymmrodorion' in London in 1878, in which he succinctly explained his value-based understanding of his profession and the impetus for his lifelong and successful efforts to secure, on the one hand, for his instrument a proper place in the domestic public and non-public musical life of his day and in education, and, on the other hand, for his continuing commitment to the preservation of his native Welsh musical culture at a time when the Welsh in the United Kingdom were facing increasing pressure to assimilate from the dominant English. He emphasised that he saw his profession as a harpist as inheriting a great tradition, and at one point dealt with the genealogy of the harp in Britain, attempting to trace it back to ancient, even mythical origins. After mentioning the biblical Jubal, among others, who is referred to in Genesis 4:21 as 'the father of all such as handle the harp and organ',<sup>48</sup> he remarked in a more general way: 'The harp, of all instruments, is the one which has been held in the most general esteem, and has for ages been the inseparable companion of prophet, king, bard, and minstrel'.<sup>49</sup> He also drew attention to what is in fact a striking etymological connection:

With regard to the source whence Britain derived her music and musical instruments, there appears very little doubt but that they were brought from the East, either by the inhabitants, in their original migration, or by the Phœnicians, who, as is well known, had commercial intercourse with Britain from the earliest times.<sup>50</sup>

[...]

Consequently, [...] if we did not bring our music and musical instruments with us, in our original migration from the East, in all probability, we are indebted for them to the

<sup>48</sup> John Thomas, 'The National Music of Wales', *Y Cymmrodor*, Vol. 2 (1878), January 1878, pp. 1–19, here p. 3 – the paper read on 13 March 1878 in the RAM. Thomas quoted the King James Version; the Hebrew word employed here, *kinnôr*, actually denotes a type of lyre, as correctly referred to in Thomas Morell's text for Handel's celebrated soprano aria, 'Oh, had I Jubal's lyre' from *Joshua*, premiered in London in 1748. *Y Cymmrodor* ('The Welshman') was the annual journal of the London-based Honourable Society of 'Cymmrodorion', dedicated to the promotion of Welsh culture and literature. It was published between 1821 and 1843 and, in a new series, between 1877 and 1951.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Thomas also placed this statement, slightly altered, at the beginning of his *History of the Harp*: 'Of all the musical instruments ever invented the harp has always been held in highest esteem. For ages it was the inseparable companion of prophet, king, bard, and minstrel' (p. 3).

<sup>50</sup> Thomas, 'The National Music of Wales', *loc. cit.*, p. 2.

Phœnicians, who were of Hebrew origin – and were supposed to be none others than the Canaanites.

It is a remarkable circumstance, in support of this supposition, that the Welsh word *Telynu*, ‘to play upon the harp’, is said to signify precisely the same in the Phœnician language. This might go far to account for the harp of David being our national instrument.<sup>51</sup>

Even more revealing with regard to the many harp arrangements of vocal music he made is ‘a word used [...] in the original Welsh, which he specifically pointed out ‘as having a signification peculiar to the Welsh language’:

In ancient Welsh works, ‘to *play* upon the harp’ is expressed ‘to *sing* upon the harp’ – *Canu ar y Delyn*. [...] This form of expression we appear to have derived from the Israelites; for we find in Habakkuk, iii, 19, that the Prophet dedicates his last prayer – ‘To the chief *singer* on my stringed Instruments.’<sup>52</sup>

Although Thomas was obviously misled in the last derivation by the King James version he quoted (the original passage obviously refers to a singer accompanied by a player of a stringed instrument), this passage proves how keen he was on a singing style of playing on an instrument not usually first associated with it. The latter also applies to the piano, of course.

## Harp and Piano

If one considers for a moment the precursor of the piano, the harpsichord, it is striking that Thomas, in an 1870 article ‘The Musical Notation of the Ancient Britons’, quoted an illuminating passage from the treatise *Dialogo della musica antica e della moderna*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3. This etymological detail seems to have been common knowledge within the Thomas family, as John Thomas’ younger brother, Thomas Thomas, called Aptommas (1829–1913), already referred to it in his 1859 *History of the Harp*, which is generally considered the first comprehensive study of this subject. In the chapter on the ‘Antediluvian Harp’, quoting the historian William Camden (1551–1623), he states: ‘Camden says, if you ask a Welshman what they call a Harp, they will presently answer you, “Telynu”; and if you could raise an ancient Phœnician, and ask him: “What are songs played on the Harp?” he would answer: “Telynu”’ (*Aptommas’ History of the Harp. In which is given a comprehensive view of its origin and progress from the Creation to the present time* [...], New York, 1859, p. 7).

<sup>52</sup> Thomas, ‘The National Music of Wales’, *loc. cit.*, p. 9.

(‘Dialogue between Ancient and Modern Music’) by the music theorist and composer Vincenzo Galilei (c. 1520–91) which states:

I say that *from the harp*, considering its resemblance in name, in form, and in numbers, disposition, and materials of its strings (though the professors of that instrument in Italy say that *they* have invented it), the *harpsichord* probably had its rise, an instrument from which were formed almost all the other keyed instruments.<sup>53</sup>

The close relatedness between these two stringed instruments certainly contributed to the first flowering of works for their combination at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was reflected by a number of Italian composers and especially by two Czech and Austrian masters of the Classical style respectively, Jan Ladislav Dussek (Dusík) (1760–1812) and Joseph Woelfl (1773–1812). Both lived for a time in London and quickly made a name for themselves in the capital, so that their works for harp and piano were probably not forgotten there even later in the nineteenth century and may still have been known to Thomas. However, it should be recalled that although the development of the harp was basically completed around 1800, the nineteenth century was the time of the most important developments in piano-making. Thus, at the time of the fortepiano, there was still a genuinely close tonal similarity between these two instruments, whereas later the appeal of their combination increasingly developed to the point where their sounds contrasted more and more, and their distinctiveness could now help to enhance the clarity of the texture. For Thomas’ works in this genre, moreover, the use of a piano, which he often specified as an alternative to the second harp – with the exception of the arrangements written exclusively for these two instruments such as the Schubert transcriptions and *Souvenir du bal* in this album – may also have had practical reasons, since the availability of a grand piano could be counted on in every salon and concert-hall in which he performed.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in John Thomas, ‘The Musical Notation of the Ancient Britons’, *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales: Collected out of Ancient Manuscripts*, Thomas Gee, Denbigh, 1870, pp. 1207–47, here p. 1242. Edward Jones cited this passage as early as 1794 in his ‘Dissertation on the Musical Instruments of the Welsh’; interestingly, the translation there contains the additional statement that the harpsichord is ‘nothing but a horizontal Harp’ (Edward Jones, *The Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* [...], New Edition, London, 1794, p. 97). Vincenzo Galilei was the father of the celebrated polymath Galileo.



Walter Macfarren's memoirs, already quoted above, written down when Thomas was 73 years old, contain the following revealing statement: 'I marvel at the slight change which is apparent between the John Thomas of to-day and in the days when we were "school and form-fellows"'.<sup>54</sup>

My friend presents the same erect and dignified form and lithe figure, the same unclouded brow, and speaks in the same voice with which he conversed with me upwards of fifty years ago. His character has been equally consistent with his personal appearance. An admirable student, he developed into an equally admirable professor [...].<sup>55</sup>

Accordingly, Thomas remained true to his artistic principles throughout his life, and he never took up permanent residence in Wales again after his student days, remaining connected with London throughout his life, a 'cosmopolitan Victorian Welshman, faithful in turn both to his homeland and to the crown',<sup>56</sup> as Carys Ann Roberts aptly characterised him. Besides his works for the harp, his compositional output comprises two early operas, songs, chamber and orchestral music and the cantatas *Llywelyn* (1863) and *The Bride of Neath Valley* (1866); as editor and interpreter, he is credited with the rediscovery of Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp, K299 (1778), for which he also wrote a piano reduction and cadenzas. He gave his last concert on 17 June 1905 and died in New Barnet, Hertfordshire, shortly after his 87th birthday on 19 March 1913.<sup>57</sup>

### **'March of the Men of Harlech'**

As already mentioned, Lady Llanover chose the 'March of the Men of Harlech' as the test piece of the competition she launched in 1869, no doubt because she considered it the most characteristic specimen of Welsh song available. Of course, in Thomas' first London concert of Welsh Music in 1862 there was no getting around it either, when this 'heroic, spirit-stirring' song created 'the greatest sensation of all', performed in his arrangement 'by the united choirs of the "Vocal Association", the West London Madrigal Society, and

<sup>54</sup> Anon., 'John Thomas', *loc. cit.*, p. 730.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Roberts, 'The Cosmopolitan Aspect', *loc. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>57</sup> Ann Griffiths, 'Thomas, John', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, Vol. 54, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 350–51.

the Royal Academy of Music,' as one reads in *The Morning Post* review already referred to. 'The orchestra presented a peculiarly striking and David-like appearance,' the report continues, 'with its 20 harpists and a large bardic bust which occupied the centre.'<sup>58</sup> For his London readership, the reviewer praised this song in superlative tones:

This, a great big 'Volklied,' as the Germans would call it, may be compared with 'Rule Britannia' or the 'Marseillaise,' or Haydn's 'God save the Emperor'. We know of nothing else so thoroughly national and at the same time so noble.<sup>59</sup>

The newly composed English text of this marching song by Thomas Oliphant (1799–1873), quoted in full in the press report and also used in Thomas' edition for voice and piano or harp,<sup>60</sup> is reproduced here from the programme note of the 'Grand Orchestral Concert' given by Thomas on 19 June 1867, again at St James's Hall, at which his even larger arrangement of the song for four-part chorus, orchestra and band of harps was performed.

Hark! I hear the foe advancing,  
Barbed steeds are proudly prancing,  
Helmets, in the sunbeam glancing,  
Glitter through the trees.  
[Men of Harlech, lie ye dreaming?  
See ye not their falchions gleaming,  
While their pennons, gaily streaming,  
Flutter in the breeze?]<sup>61</sup>  
From the rocks rebounding,

Let the war-cry sounding,  
Summon all  
At Cambria's call,  
The haughty foe surrounding.  
Men of Harlech, on to glory!  
See, your banner, fam'd in story,  
Waves these burning words before ye,  
'Britain scorns to yield!'

<sup>58</sup> *The Morning Post*, 7 July 1862, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* Thomas' innovative performance style was so successful that he soon found imitators in London. A newspaper report from 1864 states that in one of 'Mr Mellon's Promenade Concerts' a 'performance of the *March of the Men of Harlech*, accompanied by a band of harps in the "Pencerdd Gwalia" style, created the greatest enthusiasm' (Anon., 'Opera and Concerts', *The Musical Standard*, Vol. 3 (1864), No. 55, 8 October 1864, pp. 112–13).

<sup>60</sup> In Thomas' collection *Welsh Melodies, With Welsh and English Poetry* [...], Vol. 2, Lamborn Cock, London, 1862.

<sup>61</sup> The texts in square brackets refer to the repetition of the first part suppressed in Thomas' instrumental arrangement.

'Mid the fray, see dead and dying,  
Friend and foe together lying,  
All around, the arrows flying  
Scatter sudden death!  
[Frighten'd steeds are wildly  
neighing,  
Brazen trumpets hoarsely braying,  
Wounded men for mercy praying  
With their parting breath!]

See! they're in disorder!  
Comrades, keep close order!  
Ever they  
Shall rue the day  
They ventur'd o'er the border.  
Now the Saxon flies before us!  
Vict'ry's banner floateth o'er us.  
Raise the loud exulting chorus,  
'Britain wins the field.'<sup>62</sup>

This song is commonly thought 'to commemorate and extol the defending garrison who took part in what has been declared as the longest siege in British history',<sup>63</sup> that of Harlech Castle. This edifice, built between 1282 and 1289 and located in North Wales close to the Irish Sea, is today a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has been described as one of 'the finest examples of late 13th century and early 14th century military architecture in Europe'.<sup>64</sup> In the War of the Roses it was held for seven years between 1461 and 1468 by the (Welsh) Lancastrians under Constable Dafydd ab Ieuan against the Yorkists.

For all the scholarship deployed on the examination of Welsh and British history, a composer and even the approximate time of the composition of the 'March of the Men of Harlech' are unknown, although stylistic features make it seem no older than the eighteenth century. It was first published under the title 'Gorhoffedd Gwyr Harlech', with the tempo marking 'Majestic', and without text in the collection *The Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* in 1800, edited, thoroughly introduced

<sup>62</sup> *Mr. John Thomas's Grand Orchestral Concert, Wednesday Evening, June 19, 1867*, London, 1867, p. 7. A later programme shows that in Thomas' estimation this piece was perfectly suitable as a finale (*Grand Harp Concert given by Mr. John Thomas [...], Saturday Afternoon, June 30, 1888, [...]. Book of Words*, London, 1888, p. 4).

<sup>63</sup> Gareth Williams, 'Men of Harlech', *Medieval Warfare*, Vol. 2 (2012), No. 6, pp. 38–42, here p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/374> (accessed 25 March 2023).

and quite undemandingly harmonised by its editor, the Welsh harpist Edward Jones (1752–1824),<sup>65</sup> who categorised it as ‘strikingly *martial* and *magnificent*’.<sup>66</sup> The textless print in Jones as well as the exclusively diatonic form of the melody suggest that this composition was originally a purely instrumental piece for the Welsh harp, to which a text could then be extemporised. The version which the Scottish folksong-collector George Thomson made available to Joseph Haydn and which appeared in 1809 in the latter’s more sophisticated arrangement for voice and piano trio under the same title and with a text by Alexander Boswell within Thomson’s *A Select Collection of Original Welsh Airs* (Hob. XXXIb:2) offers a somewhat different version. Haydn’s folksong arrangements, however, beautiful and well-crafted as they are, suffer from the fact that, through no fault of his own, the great Austrian composer could be familiar neither with authentic performance traditions nor with the text, which was not underlaid until later.

Thomas’ captivating arrangement of this Welsh march [1], marked *Moderato maestoso*, comes much closer to its true spirit. The progress compared to Jones’ version can be observed not only in the more differentiated harmonisation in general but also in the use of chromatic steps, which are typically devised for the pedal harp. Both the Jones and Haydn versions, as well as a version published by Crotch, referred to below, lack a second contrasting part in the minor key, *Sostenuto energico* (at 0:44), to be found only in Thomas’ version, that develops motifs of the song and which appears to be his own conception. The recapitulation for the second stanza (at 1:57) is marked *Spiritoso* and employs a brilliant variation for the harp while the piano plays the march tune, before a short coda, *più mosso*, concludes the composition. The very existence of a variation in this piece places Thomas’ arrangement in deliberate opposition to the performance practice advocated by Lady Llanover, who prescribed in her aforementioned competition rules that this March was to be played ‘without variations’.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Edward Jones, *The Musical Relicks of the Welsh Bards [...], Part the Second, Containing the Music of the First Volume*, 2nd edition, London, 1800, p. 124.

<sup>66</sup> Jones, *The Musical and Poetical Relicks*, New Edition, *loc. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>67</sup> Anon., ‘Lady Llanover’, *loc. cit.*

The present arrangement corresponds in musical substance to Thomas' version for solo harp (which is set in a different key) and also appeared as No. 3 of his *Scenes of Childhood*,<sup>68</sup> the first group of his *Welsh Duets*. However, due to its enormous popularity during his lifetime, Thomas also published this march – the secret national anthem of Wales, as it were – as a single print, which justifies a separate release in this volume. As in all his arrangements for harp and piano (or two harps), a formal device is at work in this arrangement as well which Thomas mastered exquisitely, namely the treatment of the two musical partners as complementary parts of equal importance, so that he offers the performers as well as the listener the pleasure of a genuine chamber-musical dialogue.

Oliphant's text, which was widely spread through Thomas' arrangement and was, as mentioned, added only later, does not explicitly refer to the siege of Harlech Castle and avoids a prominent opposition between the Welsh and the English, which must have been considered a political imperative at the time; also, with 'Cambria', the Latin word for Wales, it names the country of origin only once. By contrast, it seems to refer, with the refrains, 'Britain scorns to yield!' and 'Britain wins the field', and the exclamation, 'Now the Saxon flies before us!', to a much earlier historical epoch of British history, namely the seizure of the country by Angles, Saxons and Jutes, to provide the possibility of identification for all Britons. This approach is also in line with a statement by the composer and historian William Crotch (1775–1847) from 1808, which Thomas cited in 1870 and apparently made his own: 'British and Welsh national music may be considered as one, since the original British music was, with the inhabitants, driven into Wales.'<sup>69</sup> Thomas also quoted Crotch as writing that '[t]he military music of the Welsh seems superior to that of any other nation.'<sup>70</sup> After dismissing German marches as 'noisy' and 'vulgar', French marches as too chromatic and Scottish Highland marches as 'wild warbles', Crotch stated:

<sup>68</sup> Recorded on Volume One of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0561.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas, 'The Musical Notation', *loc. cit.*, p. 1213. Cf. William Crotch, *Specimens of Various Styles of Music referred to in a Course of Lectures read at Oxford & London, and adapted to Keyed Instruments*, Vol. 1, London, 1808, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1214.

But in the Welsh marches, ‘The March of the Men of Harlech’, ‘The March of the Men of Glamorgan’,<sup>71</sup> and also a tune called ‘Come to Battle’,<sup>72</sup> there is not too much noise, nor is there vulgarity or misplaced science. They have a sufficiency of rhythm without its injuring the dignified character of the whole [...].<sup>73</sup>

### *Souvenir du bal*

As for John Thomas as a dancer, the following amusing account is found in the memoirs of Mrs Lucy of Charlecote Park, with Lady Llanover referred to as ‘Lady Hall’ here:

Mrs Herbert, Sir Benjamin and Lady Hall’s only daughter, gave a ball to which all the Llanover party were invited, and she specially named Mr Thomas. [...] Soon after we entered the ball room Miss Bickersteth who, notwithstanding her designs on Count Esterhazy, had really lost her heart to Mr Thomas, asked him to dance which he modestly declined, saying that perhaps it might annoy Lady Hall. But Miss Bickersteth would take no denial, and Lady Shelley said, ‘Nonsense, Mr Thomas, you cannot refuse a lady when she asks you to be her partner’, so he stood up and they danced together. Lady Hall, seeing them, flew at him like a tigress and insisted on his retiring. Then we all attacked her and defended Mr Thomas, Mrs Herbert too came to the rescue and remonstrated with her mother and there was quite a scene. But Mr Thomas was triumphant and danced and enjoyed himself for the rest of the evening, the young ladies vying with each other who should secure him for her partner.<sup>74</sup>

Although Thomas’ charming *Souvenir du bal* (‘Memories of the Ball’) [2] does not refer to this incident, since it is ‘dedicated to Mrs. Edmund Tattersall’, whose husband was the director of Tattersall’s horse auction house in London, one can infer that Thomas himself was a capable and enthusiastic dancer, and assume that such evening parties were more or less similar in those circles.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas’ harp-and-piano version of this piece will be released in a later volume of this series.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas’ harp-and-piano version of this piece is recorded on Volume One of this series, Toccata Classics rocc 0561.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas, ‘The Musical Notation’, *loc. cit.*, p. 1214. Cf. William Crotch, *Specimens of Various Styles of Music, op. cit.*, p. 8. In Crotch’s collection, the ‘March of the Men of Harlech’ is shown as musical example 157 on p. 82, with the tempo indication *Moderato e maestoso*, which Thomas apparently took from there.

<sup>74</sup> Fairfax-Lucy (ed.), *Mistress of Charlecote, op. cit.*, pp. 98–99.

The formal design of this piece from the late 1870s is quite remarkable, since, surprisingly, it is written in textbook sonata form on the one hand and displays elements of the French *quadrille* on the other. Typical of the *quadrille* of the time is a rather quick  $\frac{2}{4}$  metre (Thomas' tempo indication is *Allegro moderato*), its organisation in strict, even predictable eight-bar phrases to correspond to the respective dance figures, and the occasional insertion of four-beat groups or short fanfares, during which the dancing couples swap or change positions. After a four-bar introduction, the first theme in B flat major is twice presented in both instruments, followed by twice the second theme in the dominant (at 0:33). The development section begins with a more virtuosic elaboration of the first theme, again in the home key (at 1:05), leads to this theme being played in the parallel minor key (at 1:53), and finally uses fragments of it in a transitional passage giving way to the recapitulation (at 2:37), which presents both themes in the original key, as the rules prescribe, but expands them before a brilliant coda, using passages from the development section, concludes the work.

### **Chopin: 'Marche funèbre'**

Chopin's 'Marche funèbre' [3], for many music-lovers *the* iconic funeral march, has led an existence outside the Second Piano Sonata, as the third movement of which it was published in 1839, at the latest since the memorable moment when it was performed outdoors in an arrangement for woodwind, brass and a few strings by Henri Reber (1807–80) at the funeral service of its composer in the church of La Madeleine in Paris on 30 October 1849, after he had died at the age of only 39. According to reports, several thousand people attended the service, and the music echoed through the streets of Paris. Since then, 'Chopin's Funeral March' has gone around the world, has been played by virtually every professional and amateur pianist, has been performed in countless arrangements and has become one of the most famous pieces in all of classical music. Thomas' arrangement for harp and piano stands out against this background as a particularly well-sounding and noble version, which is perhaps even superior to the original, because it enhances its intimacy and because the timbre of the harp is ideally suited to reproduce both the sound of the death bells heard in the A part and the

cantilena of the B part, which promises transcendental consolation. Chopin composed his Funeral March as a single piece two years before the other movements of his sonata anyway, and a critic as alert as Robert Schumann noted the lack of unity in the work when he remarked that the composer had ‘coupled together four of his most extravagant offsprings’.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to the present arrangement, Thomas not only created a version of this piece for solo harp but also one for a full harp orchestra, which apparently remained unpublished. A review indicates that it was performed in London in July 1892:

The annual Harp Concert of Mr. John Thomas, at St. James’s Hall, on the 5th ult. [= of last month], attracted a surprisingly large audience, considering that the season was moribund. The orchestra presented an attractive appearance with twenty-two young lady harpists, who were heard in some selections suitable enough for such an unusual combination. [...] A curious piece in the programme was Chopin’s Marche Funèbre, arranged for the band of harps.<sup>76</sup>

### **Schubert: Complete Song Transcriptions**

Thomas apparently wrote his transcriptions of songs by Franz Schubert (1797–1828) for harp and piano, set originally for voice and piano, in the course of time and published them in 1900 in their entirety with Hutchings & Romer in a definitive ‘New Edition with two additional numbers’ (namely the last two), which is recorded here.<sup>77</sup> Through a number of pianist-composers, especially Franz Liszt, Schubert’s Lieder had become the subject of instrumental transcriptions as early as the 1830s, partly intended to popularise them in an age that knew no technical reproduction, partly designed for domestic music-making. In his transcriptions, Thomas was absolutely faithful to Schubert’s score, apart from sometimes necessary transpositions into keys more comfortable for the harp, and often took pleasure in reversing the roles of both instruments as a basic formal

<sup>75</sup> Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, ed. Martin Kreisig, Vol. 2, 5th edition, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1914, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> Anon., ‘Miscellaneous Concerts, Intelligence, &c.’, *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 33 (1892), No. 594, 1 August 1892, pp. 491–493, here p. 492.

<sup>77</sup> There is also a set of ten Schubert songs transcribed by Thomas for solo harp, eight of which are included in both collections.



principle, so that sometimes the harp and sometimes the piano takes over the vocal line and the other partner in each case plays the accompanying figures so typical of Schubert's inventiveness. They usually follow the same pattern for a longer section or even the whole song, but are designed from the outset to be so versatile that they can adapt to the necessary textual changes in expression and encompass several layers of meaning. Thomas assigned the vocal line to the piano especially in the final sections to open up the possibility for the harpist to present that instrument by filling the underlying harmonies with virtuosic arpeggios.

The genre of the Lied was familiar to Thomas, since he himself also composed songs with harp accompaniment, thus continuing a tradition that had already begun (at least in classical music) around 1800, in which French and German composers took part, among the latter Johann Friedrich Reichardt with his early Romantic *Lieder der Liebe und der Einsamkeit* and his *Douze Élégies et Romances*, in which the harp is given as an alternative to the piano as an accompanying instrument. The same applies to the above-mentioned Welsh-folksong arrangements published in 1809 by George Thomson; in the mid-century Robert Schumann's *Drei Gesänge aus Lord Byron's Hebräischen Gesängen*, Op. 95, from 1849, also with harp or piano, stand out in this genre.

The fact that Thomas begins his collection with 'Ave Maria' 4 seems intentional. Not only has this song always been one of Schubert's most famous works; it is also connected with British literature, since it is based on a work by Sir Walter Scott. But above all it was ideally suited as an opening, since Schubert himself unmistakably imitated the harp in the piano part.<sup>78</sup> The song is the sixth number of Schubert's *Sieben Gesänge aus Walter Scott's Fräulein vom See*, Op. 52, D839, composed in 1825, based on Adam Storck's German translation of the 'Hymn to the Virgin' in Scott's narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake* from 1810. The songs were first printed in both languages, since Schubert hoped to make himself better known in England by adding the English text.

In the poem, Ellen Douglas, the Lady of the Lake, hides in a cave to escape the King's revenge on the clan chief Roderick Dhu, who had previously given her shelter and has

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas performed this song, like the Welsh march discussed above, also in his own arrangement for a 'band of harps' (*Grand Harp Concert, June 30, 1888, loc. cit.*, p. 4).

now been banished. Roderick overhears her singing and playing; his words make clear that she is singing to the accompaniment of a harp:

But hark! what mingles in the strain?  
It is the harp of Allan-Bane,  
That wakes its measure slow and high,  
Attuned to sacred minstrelsy.  
What melting voice attends the strings?  
'Tis Ellen, or an angel, sings.

Ellen's subsequent prayer opens with the words:

*Ave Maria!* maiden mild!  
Listen to a maiden's prayer!  
Thou canst hear though from the wild,  
Thou canst save amid despair.

In striking contrast is 'The Erl King' [5], Schubert's no less famous *Erlkönig*, Op. 1, D328, from 1815, based on Goethe's 1782 ballad, which was inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder's German translation of a Danish folk ballad. Unfortunately, Goethe adopted Herder's mistake of rendering the Danish word 'Ellerkonge' as 'Erlkönig' instead of the correct 'Elfenkönig' ('Fairy King'), so that the meaning of the text is somewhat obscured. Divided among four narrators, the ballad recounts a father's hurried ride through the night, who ends up holding his hallucinating son dead in his arms. Thomas' clever and effective arrangement retains Schubert's highly demanding piano part and assigns the harp mainly the role of the singer, only to reverse the roles when the seductive Fairy King makes himself heard twice, marked *piano dolce* (at 1:21 and 2:05).

'Dein ist mein Herz' ('Your Heart is Mine') [6] changes the scenery again. The title is the refrain of Schubert's song 'Ungeduld' ('Impatience'), the seventh number of his song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin* ('The Fair Maid of the Mill'), Op. 25, D795, from 1823. Wilhelm Müller's cycle of poems, published in 1821, takes a miller's apprentice to his new master's house, where he is to complete the last stage of his apprenticeship, but he

falls madly in love with the miller's daughter. In this fervent song he expresses all his enthusiasm for love, but in the end his love remains unrequited, which leads the lad to end his life.

'Sérénade' [7] is Schubert's 'Ständchen' ('Leise flehen meine Lieder' ('Softly my songs plead')), D957, No. 4, composed in 1828, which is still one of his most widely performed songs today. The French titles in Thomas' compilation indicate his use of one of the many French Schubert editions in circulation at the time. Ludwig Rellstab's poem, published a year before the composition, depicts a serenading singer pleading to be heard by his beloved. This situation is ingeniously mirrored in the music by one of Schubert's most haunting melodies and the peculiar wavering between major and minor keys in the accompaniment, expressing the nocturnal atmosphere illuminated by moonlight and the lover's being torn between hope and loneliness. The vocal lines of the verses are again alternately assigned to both instruments; the echo effects already present in the composition are also adequately distributed between both partners. This song is naturally ideally suited to adaptation for the harp because Schubert imitates the related guitar in the piano part.

It proved to be a wise decision on Schubert's part to publish 'Erlkönig' and 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' ('Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel'), here again listed by its French title, 'Marguerite' [8], as his Opp. 1 and 2 respectively, since they soon made his reputation. Schubert's Gretchen song, D118, from 1814, opening with the famous lines, 'Meine Ruh ist hin' ('My peace is gone'), is considered by many scholars to be the first genuinely Romantic art-song because of the innovation of an utterly independent, highly expressive piano part, which is at the same time closely interwoven with the vocal part. The song portrays the young Gretchen who, alone in her parlour at the spinning wheel, has to cope with her unexpectedly awakened desire for Faust, whom she has met shortly before in Goethe's eponymous drama and who embodies everything that her petit-bourgeois world does not have to offer. Schubert's contemporaries soon insisted on seeing in the circling figures in the piano part mainly an illustration of the movement of the spinning wheel; to the Schubert scholar Maurice J. E. Brown, however, one owes the discovery that Schubert used a very similar accompaniment figure at the end of his first Mass in

F major, D105, which he conducted at its premiere a few days before the composition of the song. Consequently, Brown concluded:

‘Meine Ruh’ ist hin’ cries Gretchen; ‘Dona nobis pacem’ pleads the Mass. In Schubert’s mind the cry for peace manifests itself in a like music, wonderfully transmuted and matured in the song by the humanity of Goethe’s poem.<sup>79</sup>

‘The Wanderer’ [9] – ‘Der Wanderer’, Op. 4, No. 1, D489, from 1816 – is one of the songs that Schubert re-used in instrumental works, in this case in his Fantasy in C major for piano, Op. 15, D760, the so-called ‘Wanderer Fantasy’. This work, however, processes only the second part of the song, to the words ‘Die Sonne dünkt mich hier so kalt’ (‘The sun seems so cold to me here’) (at 01:38), whereas Schubert’s through-composed song begins with a recitative introduced by a hauntingly repetitive figure and concludes with a cadenza the piety of which can only be meant ironically, to the words of a ghostly voice: ‘There, where you are not, that is where happiness is!’ In his poem ‘Des Fremdlings Abendlied’ (‘The Stranger’s Evensong’) from 1813, Georg Philipp Schmidt von Lübeck enacted a character that can be described as a forerunner of Wagner’s Flying Dutchman or even Britten’s Peter Grimes, a lonely individual who yearns to belong to society and in the end breaks down as he realised that his wish cannot be fulfilled.

‘The Fisher-maiden’ [10] again is lighter in character. Like ‘Ständchen’, ‘Das Fischermädchen’, D957, No. 10, stems from the posthumous group *Schwanengesang* (‘Swan Song’) from 1828. In Heinrich Heine’s extensive cycle of poems *Die Heimkehr* (‘The Homecoming’) from 1824, from which the text is taken, a young man embarks on a search for a new love after experiencing a broken relationship, but without finding it. Even his attempt to flirt with a fisher-maiden he meets on the way ultimately comes to nothing.

‘Barcarole’ [11] has a more profound text than the title and also the music may suggest. ‘Auf dem Wasser zu singen’ (‘To be sung upon the water’), Op. 72, D774, from 1823, sets a text by Count Friedrich Leopold zu Stolberg, first published in 1783, which is based on the poet’s memory of a boat trip on Lake Zurich with his friend Goethe. The

<sup>79</sup> Maurice J. E. Brown, ‘Schubert: Instrumental Derivatives in the Songs’, *Music & Letters*, Vol. 28 (1947), No. 3, pp. 207–13, here p. 208.

weightlessness of the floating boat is captured here, as are thoughts of man's mortality and his transfiguration in the afterlife, evoked by the glowing evening sun.

Oddly enough, the song 'L'Adieu' [12] was not written by Schubert, but by the Estonian-German composer August Heinrich von Weyrauch (1788–1865), who published it in 1824 in Dorpat (the old name for Tartu, the second-largest city in Estonia). According to a pseudonymous author writing in 1889, a Parisian publisher, apparently Charles-Simon Richault, was able to take a look at a handwritten song-compilation in the possession of the Russian baron and diplomat Grigory Petrovich Volkonsky (1808–82), who was also active as a singer with a sonorous bass voice and through whom Schubert's songs 'had been made known to the Parisian distinguished world'.<sup>80</sup> It was in this collection that Richault became aware of the song in question, which was written down without any reference to a composer, whereupon he carelessly attributed it to Schubert<sup>81</sup> and published it around 1840 under this name with a new text by Pierre-Jean de Béranger. Apart from an individually published piano transcription by Theodor Döhler, the song achieved particular fame through the fact that it opened Franz Liszt's 1844 collection *6 Mélodies célèbres de François Schubert*. Thereupon Weyrauch felt compelled to reissue his original in 1846 as a single print with a Berlin publisher, not without attaching a resolute declaration to it. Although he considered it 'honourable [...] for me if my simple song, which for every connoisseur corresponds little to Schubert's character, and much more to the German original than to the French text, could be regarded as one of this now transfigured master and accepted as such,' he rightly rebuked the publisher for his 'mischievous procedure, all too common in France and England today' of attributing it to 'a name [...] of already established fame'.<sup>82</sup>

The poem by Friedrich Gottlob Wetzel, 'Nach Osten!' ('Eastwards!'), from 1819, originally set to music by Weyrauch, is about the commemoration of the deceased lover; Béranger's new verses, on the other hand, obviously modelled on Metastasio's oft-

<sup>80</sup> –a–, 'Ein vergessener livländischer Dichter', *Baltische Monatsschrift*, Vol. 36 (1889), pp. 406–12, here p. 408, footnote 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> August Heinrich von Weyrauch, *Nach Osten!, Lied von K. F. G. Wetzel*, Challier, Berlin, 1846, p. 3.

composed 'Ecco il fiero istante' ('This is the fierce moment') stage a husband's farewell to his dying wife, as it is also depicted on the title lithograph of the first printing.

Voici l'instant suprême,  
L'instant de nos adieux!  
Ô toi! seul bien que j'aime...  
Sans moi retourne aux cieux!

*This is the ultimate moment,  
The moment of our farewell!  
O you! the only one I love...  
Without me you return to heaven!*

In his 1903 essay, 'Les faux chefs-d'œuvres de la musique' ('The False Masterpieces of Music'), Camille Saint-Saëns considered the success of this hoax (of which Thomas was unaware), so indicative of the general public taste that he published the following interesting explanation:

It is well known that instead of a simple accompaniment intended to support the voice, [Schubert's songs] combined for the first time – to our knowledge at least – the melodic charm of the vocal part with the interest of a very pronounced piano part. As these lively accompaniments are inaccessible to botchers ['mazzettes'], one publisher solved this problem by publishing a *lied* by an amateur, M. de Wehrauch, under the name of Schubert. The piece is well written, and does not disgrace Schubert's name; but, on close inspection, the banal simplicity of the accompaniment, the lack of melodic richness in the song, which repeats the same note twelve or fifteen times, all this puts these two authors at a great distance from each other. From afar it is deceptive. The success of *L'Adieu* was enormous, due in large part to an extreme ease of execution that the authentic works did not have [...].<sup>83</sup>

'L'Éloge des Larmes' [13] is the French translation of the title of the song 'Lob der Tränen' ('Praise of Tears'), Op. 13, No. 2, D711, which was probably composed in 1818 and is less popular today than it was around 1900, as Thomas' selection proves. In contrast to Schubert's four stanzas, Thomas employs only three. It is one of those Schubert songs that can be used as evidence for the thesis that there are fewer stylistic differences

<sup>83</sup> Camille Saint-Saëns, *Au courant de la vie*, Dorbon-Ainé, Paris, 1916, pp. 61–68, here pp. 65–66.

between a supposedly typical German song-style and contemporary Italian *bel canto* writing than is commonly claimed. August Wilhelm Schlegel's underlying poem from 1816 once again summarises the literary epoch of *Empfindsamkeit* ('Sentimentality'), which peaked in the last third of the eighteenth century, in which tears were considered symbols of a sentient heart and tender love, but also of heartfelt music-making.

The song 'To Sylvia' [14], Schubert's 'An Silvia', Op. 106, No. 4, D891, from 1826, is further evidence of the influence that British literature had on the Viennese composer. For this good-humoured, march-like setting, he chose, in Eduard von Bauernfeld's translation, a song found in the then brand-new Viennese Shakespeare translation, namely from Act IV, Scene 2 of the comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, sometimes considered Shakespeare's first play ever. The 'Host, where Julia lodges' praises Silvia, the daughter of the Duke of Milan, asking first,

Who is Silvia? what is she,  
That all our swains commend her?  
Holy, fair and wise is she;  
The heaven such grace did lend her,  
That she might admired be.

Finally, he pays homage to her:

Then to Silvia let us sing,  
That Silvia is excelling;  
She excels each mortal thing  
Upon the dull earth dwelling:  
To her let us garlands bring.

Thomas' use of the harp's harmonics (at 0:52) is particularly charming when he assigns the melody to this instrument in the second stanza.

Hidden behind the title 'Sois toujours mes seuls amours' [15] is Schubert's song 'Sei mir gegrüsst', Op. 20, No. 1, D741, presumably from 1821. Friedrich Rückert, the author of the poem, shows himself influenced by oriental poetry here, which is also indicated

by the title of his collection of poems, *Östliche Rosen* ('Roses from the East'), from the same year, from which the composer took the poem. Schubert handled the unusual form of the poem, inspired by Arabic poetry, with remarkable skill, using elements of both the refrain on the text of the extended title ('Sei mir gegrüsst, / Sei mir geküsst' ('Be greeted, / Be kissed by me')) and the rondo for an exalted yet sensitive love-hymn born from the pain of separation. Schubert seemed to have cherished this song, since he re-used it as theme for variations in his Fantasy in C major for violin and piano, D934.

The same is true for 'The Trout' [16] – 'Die Forelle', Op. 32, D550, presumably from 1817, immortalised in his Piano Quintet in A major, D667, the 'Trout Quintet'. The distinct cheerfulness of this folksong-like setting, which made it one of Schubert's most popular songs, quickly eclipsed the fact that this outward appearance was probably meant ironically. Schubert will have been familiar with the fate of the poet of the song, Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, who worked as organist and music director for the Duke of Württemberg and made his name as one of the first music-journalists, but was openly critical of the authorities. Sentenced in an arbitrary act to ten years' imprisonment in 1777, he wrote 'The Trout' during this time as a barely veiled account of his capture: a fisherman manages to catch the fish only because he clouds the water so that the fish cannot see his rod.

'The Fountain' [17] finally serves as a joyous and elegant sweep of Thomas' compilation. The song 'Wohin?' ('Whither?'), Op. 25, No. 2, D795, comes again from 'The Fair Maid of the Mill' and depicts how the apprentice first walks along a brook the course of which shows him the way to his master. The light-heartedness of Schubert's setting is again deceptive; in his good humour the lad does not grapple with the question, 'Is this really my way?'; which he asks the brooklet. A sincere answer might still have held him back. And so, naively, he wanders to his doom.

### 'Rákóczi-induló'

The 'Rákóczi-induló' [18], described on the cover of Thomas' arrangement as 'the celebrated Hungarian march', could be called the Hungarian counterpart to the Welsh 'March of the Men of Harlech', insofar as it too functioned as a secret national anthem. During the nineteenth century it became widely known through Liszt's Fifteenth



*Hungarian Rhapsody* for piano from 1853, although there are no fewer than seven arrangements by him, which he always performed to considerable public acclaim, but even more so through Berlioz's orchestral adaptation from 1846, which he incorporated in his *La Damnation de Faust* and which is dedicated to Liszt.

Possibly the most accurate and comprehensible account of the history of this march and its significance was given in the 1942 essay 'Race Purity in Music' by Béla Bartók, certainly a proven expert in the field of Hungarian folk-music:

There was an instrumental piece in *parlando-rubato*<sup>84</sup> rhythm, well known by tradition among the Hungarians and generally played on a woodwind instrument of the clarinet type. According to this tradition, the piece had been played in the armies of Prince Rákóczi, during the national struggle against Austria at the beginning of the eighteenth century;<sup>85</sup> it therefore was called *Rákóczi Nóta* (Rákóczi Song). [...]

Someone, perhaps the conductor of a military band [...] made a very free transcription of this *rubato* melody, converting it into music of very decided, martial rhythm and adding to it many phrases of the instrumental ornamentation typical of the art music vocabulary of eighteenth-century Central Europe. The so far unidentified transcriber probably borrowed these ornamental motives not from their original source but from the so-called '*verbunkos*' music (a kind of heroic dance music) which was already so fashionable in Hungary and where many of these elements had penetrated.<sup>86</sup>

Accordingly, this piece must be described as a stylistically assimilated form of Hungarian folk-music. The 'conductor of a military band' has since been identified as Miklós (Nikolaus) Scholl (1745 or 1749–1822), although he should not also be referred to as the composer of this march.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> This term refers to a metrically unbound, often improvised performance style in Hungarian folk-music.

<sup>85</sup> The War of Independence of Hungarian rebels against Habsburg domination, led by Prince Francis II Rákóczi, took place from 1703 to 1711, and ended with the peace treaty of Szatmár in April 1711. Although his rebellion proved ultimately unsuccessful, Prince Rákóczi continued to be revered as a national hero in Hungary.

<sup>86</sup> Béla Bartók, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff, Faber & Faber, London, 1976, pp. 29–32, here pp. 31–32.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Lujza Tari, 'Revolution, War of Independence in 1848/49 and its Remembering in the Traditional Music,' *Musik und Revolution. Die Produktion von Identität und Raum durch Musik in Zentraleuropa 1848/49*, ed. Barbara Boisits, Hollitzer, Vienna, 2013, pp. 189–208, here p. 190.

## Duet on Themes from *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Donizetti)

The last piece on this album is again associated with Sir Walter Scott, whose 1819 novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848) and his librettist Salvatore Cammarano used for their ‘dramma tragico’ *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Set in seventeenth-century Scotland, the opera was premiered in Naples in 1835 and quickly conquered opera houses around the world; its first London performance, at Her Majesty’s Theatre, took place in 1838. The enmity between the Ashton and Ravenscroft families is fundamental to the plot and leads to the tragic failure of the love between Lucia (soprano) and Edgardo (tenor), who come from the opposing houses.

Perhaps surprisingly, Thomas’ medley [19], one of four he wrote on *bel canto* operas, does not use either of the two widely known arias of the eponymous heroine, although since the opera is filled to the brim with memorable tunes, other choices were easily possible. The start is made by the opening of the finale of the second act, ‘Per te d’immenso giubilo tutto s’avvia intorno’ (‘For you we join in rejoicing all around’), the chorus of guests welcoming Arturo, whom Lucia is forced to marry against her will, followed by the famous sextet, ‘Chi mi frena in tal momento’ (‘Who is holding me back at this moment’) (at 2:09), from the same finale, a ‘tableau vivant’ (‘living picture’) typical of Italian opera, in which everyone freezes when Lucia’s secret lover Edgardo suddenly appears shortly after she has signed the marriage contract with Arturo. The *stretta* of this finale, ‘Esci, fuggi’ (‘Get out, flee’) (at 5:58), serves as a transition. Thomas’ compilation concludes with the finale of the opera, Edgardo’s mournful aria, ‘Tu che a Dio spiegasti l’ali’ (‘You who spread your wings to God’) (at 7:36), which gives space to his pain facing the dead Lucia as he kills himself in despair (at 8:57). This aria must be considered one of the strongest testimonies to Donizetti’s ability to express pain in a major key.

The time of composition of Thomas’ duet can be established thanks to a review which states that ‘a new duet, entitled “Lucia”, composed and played by Mr John Thomas, assisted by Mr T. H. Wright’ was premiered at Thomas’ annual Harp Concert at St James’s Hall on 26 June 1879.<sup>88</sup> On the title page the duet is dedicated to ‘Miss Foster

<sup>88</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 28 June 1879, p. 2.

(of Apley Park), one of the four daughters of the wealthy industrial baron William Orme Foster, who bought the Apley estate in Shropshire in 1867 – very probably Julia Mary Foster (1860–1931), who became the mother of the composer Gerald Hugh Tyrwhitt-Wilson, Lord Berners (1882–1950), who, as he wrote in his autobiography, discovered ‘an old volume of “Pieces for the Harp” one day as a child in Apley Park library and recalled that ‘[m]y imagination was strangely moved by the sight of these black waves of notes undulating across the pages.’<sup>89</sup>

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Since 2010 the **Duo Praxedis**, comprising the harpist Praxedis Hug-Rütli and the pianist Praxedis Geneviève Hug, has been reanimating the unjustly forgotten tradition of works for harp and piano. These two musicians – mother and daughter – have been working on a unique long-term project designed to create an extensive catalogue of works that is still expanding. To date they have released fifteen recordings, including three double albums, and given numerous world premieres, of works by composers who include Xavier Dayer, Richard Dubugnon, Hans-Eugen Frischknecht, Daniel Fueter, Rudolf Lutz and Rolf Urs Ringer. Other composers whose works they have recorded include Bach, Beethoven, Dvořák, Elgar, Handel, Offenbach, Anton Rubinstein, Saint-Saëns and Johann Strauss II, as well as some less familiar figures, among them the Romantic German harpist-composer Charles Oberthür, the twentieth-century French harpist-composer Henriette Renié and the contemporary Swiss Gotthard Odermatt. From 2020 an exclusive streaming service has made their recordings available through Idagio.

Duo Praxedis has been extending its repertoire by means not only of arrangements for harp and piano but also commissions from contemporary composers. With the support of the UBS Culture Foundation, among others, they have given the world premieres of double concertos for harp and piano by the Swiss composers Carl Rütli and Oliver Waespi. Their unique repertoire ranges widely from Bach, Vivaldi and Mozart via Bernstein and Piazzolla to the present day. The two musicians have also conducted a good deal of scholarly research in various archives and in

<sup>89</sup> Lord Berners (Gerald Hugh Tyrwhitt-Wilson), *First Childhood and Far from the Madding War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983, p. 28.

that way unearthed a number of veritable treasures, including pieces by Debussy and Ravel, all from the golden age of the medium.

Duets for harp and piano were particularly popular not only in the aristocratic and bourgeois salons of the nineteenth century but also in public concert-halls, where leading virtuosos appeared together to introduce new works. Among those involved were the pianist Carl Czerny (1791–1857), the harpist François-Joseph Dizi (1780–1847), the pianist Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760–1812), the pianist Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1785–1849), the harpist Jean-Baptiste Krumpholtz (1742–90) and the harpist Elias Parish Alvars (1808–49), whom Berlioz described as the ‘Liszt of the harp’.

Duo Praxedis has given a new lease of life to this genre, which for a century fell into neglect as a result of developments in instrument-building. Through their performances they have shown that the modern concert harp is once again in a position to maintain its own in conjunction with a grand piano. Even more importantly, this combination of instruments reveals markedly subtle sonorities and has brought an added richness to the concert life of Europe, notably at the Menuhin Festival in Gstaad, the Engadin Festival, the Esterházy Festival in Eisenstadt and the Janáček Festival in Brno as well as to the Berlin Philharmonie, the Golden Hall of the Vienna Musikverein, the Laeiszhalle in Hamburg and the Tonhalle in Zurich.

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# JOHN THOMAS Complete Duos for Harp and Piano, Volume Two

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ANONYMOUS/THOMAS

1 *March of the Men of Harlech* 3:01

JOHN THOMAS

2 *Souvenir du bal* 4:47

FRYDERYK CHOPIN

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18 *'Rákóczi-induló'* 3:08

JOHN THOMAS

19 *Duet on Themes from Lucia di Lammermoor* (Donizetti) 10:55

**Duo Praxedis**

Praxedis Hug-Rütli, harp

Praxedis Geneviève Hug, piano

TT 76:21

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