

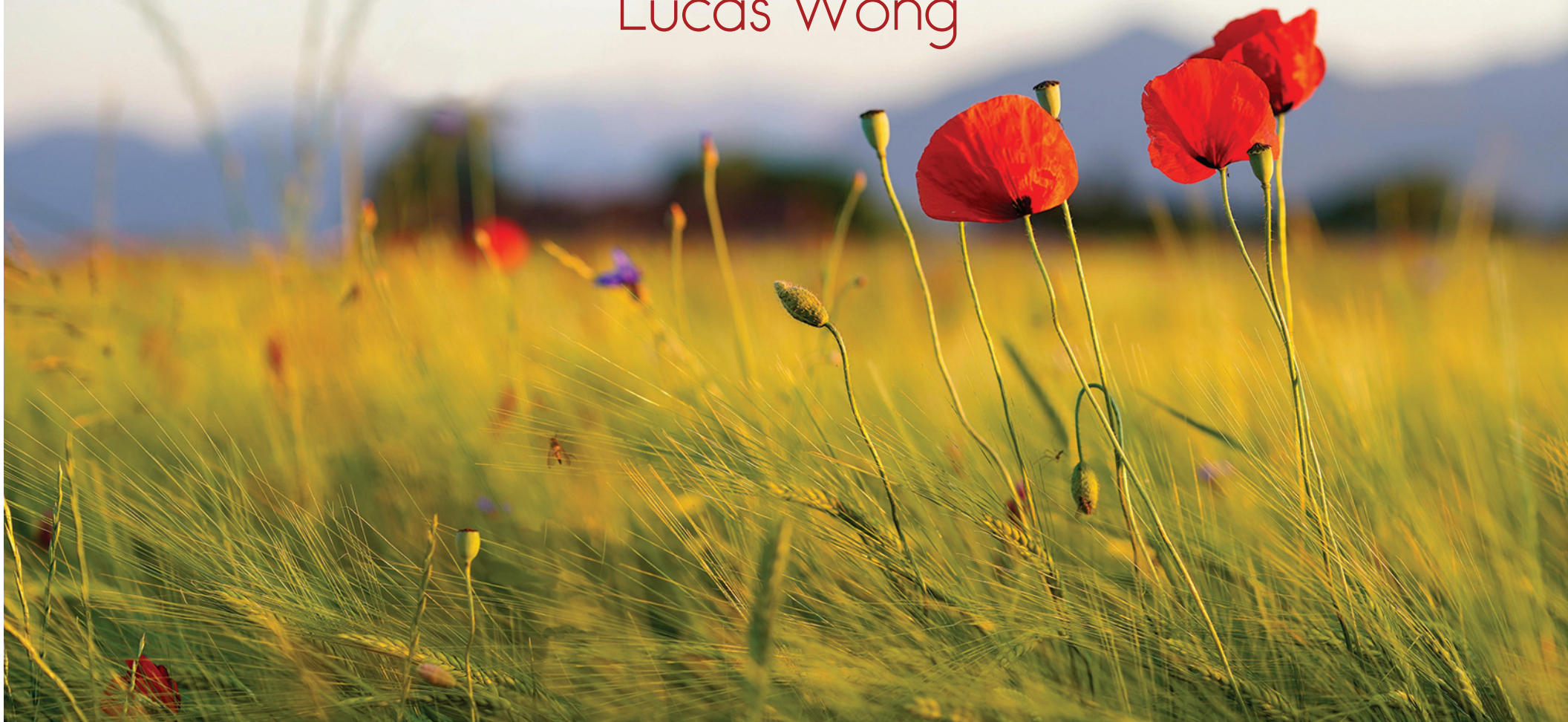


WILHELM TAUBERT

Piano Sonatas

No. 1 • No. 2 'Grande Sonate' • No. 4 • No. 6

Lucas Wong



Romantic Piano • 2

Wilhelm Taubert (1811–1891)

(Carl Gottfried) Wilhelm Taubert was born in Berlin, Prussia, on 23 March 1811 and died in Berlin, Germany, on 7 January 1891. He studied piano with Ludwig Berger and composition with Bernhard Klein and by the age of 20 was employed as assistant conductor and accompanist of the Berlin court concerts. A musical association with the Berlin Königlische Schauspiele (Royal Theatre) developed during the 1840s, and he held senior positions there from 1845 to 1848. Gaspare Spontini had been the previous Generalmusikdirektor of this significant Berlin institution, and Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer had both appeared there. From 1845 to 1869 Taubert was also Chief Kapellmeister at the Prussian court and he continued to conduct the Royal orchestra until 1883. Taubert's teaching ability was well regarded, Theodor Kullack was one of his pupils, and he taught at the Berlin Royal Academy of Arts from 1865. His son Emil was born in 1844 and became an eminent philologist, writer and librettist.

Taubert wrote six operas, five symphonies, concertos for piano and cello, four string quartets, other orchestral, choral, and piano works, and more than 300 songs. His musical style was therefore a significant factor in determining his musical standing – then and now.

His composition teacher Bernhard Klein was a pupil of Cherubini from 1812 in Paris and he was also influenced by the precepts of Anton Thibaut, a jurist and musician. Klein received from Cherubini an operatic sense of melodic flow and elegant line, and from Thibaut a love of Palestrina and early composers in Italy. These compositional precepts contrast in many ways with those of Beethoven and his adherents, where Romantic energy and rhythmic drive are prime. Such attitudes appear to have filtered through Klein's teaching and may have found a ready reception in Taubert's own musical predispositions.

Among Taubert's first compositions were songs which received favourable commentary from Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn clearly admired some of Taubert's works and in 1844 dedicated his anthem *Hear my prayer* to him. Taubert and Mendelssohn belonged to a circle in Berlin that included the baritone and writer Eduard Devrient, librettist of Taubert's operas *Die Kirmes* (1832) and *Der Zigeuner* (1832). Mendelssohn and Taubert both studied piano with Ludwig Berger, and correspondence between Mendelssohn and Taubert exists. In this correspondence Mendelssohn identifies the lack of impetus and spirit which, for all Taubert's musicianship, refined taste and great industry, nevertheless hindered him from achieving complete success as a composer.

Many of Taubert's compositions were reviewed in Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, showing the esteem in which Taubert's compositions were held. His *Piano Duo*, *Op. 11* is reviewed in the April 1834 issue, and later there are discussions about his piano sonatas, and the *Piano Concerto No. 1*, *Op. 18*. Indeed, Schumann asked Taubert to contribute to the journal.

Throughout his composing career Taubert stood firmly with the more conservative approaches of Mendelssohn, Carl Maria von Weber, and others, using a style that was very cadential and diatonic and reserving chromaticism mainly for association with modulatory passages. There is grace and light lyrical charm aplenty, and listeners are taken on a captivating tour of musical scenery. But listeners are not put into that setting and made to live in it as Beethoven would have done. Taubert's style is therefore very well adapted to smaller, more intimate musical forms, and it is unsurprising that songs formed such an important part of his output.

Given his busy professional life in Berlin, Taubert displayed exceptional industry in composition and more than 300 songs span his lifetime. Those that remain in today's repertoire are the *Kinderlieder*, *Opp. 145* and *160*, which include the best known of Taubert's songs. *Wiegenlied (Schlaf in guter Ruh')*, the fifth of his twelve *Gesänge*, published by Schlesinger in 1837–38, is also in the current repertoire – written with completely disarming innocence and warmth, it displays Taubert's strong affinity with words and music.

Taubert's five symphonies show him wrestling with the challenges of extended musical form and lengthy discourse. They comprise *No. 1 in C*, *Op. 31* (Schlesinger); *No. 2 in A*, (without opus) 1840; *No. 3 in F*, *Op. 69*, (Guttentag) 1847; *No. 4 in B minor*, *Op. 80*, (Bote & Bock) 1851; and *No. 5 in C minor*, *Op. 113*, (Kistner) 1857.

Taubert's six operas also represent him in the world of large-scale canvasses. All were performed at the Königlches Theater in Berlin. *Die Kirmes*, *Op. 7*, a comic opera, was presented in 1832, and *Der Zigeuner* in 1834. *Marquis und Dieb*, another comic opera appeared in 1842, *Joggeli*, *Op. 100* was staged in 1854, and *Macbeth*, *Op. 133*, was produced in 1857. *Cesario, oder Was ihr wollt*, *Op. 188*, Taubert's final comic opera, was presented in 1875. Although these works seem not have stood the test of time, they were well received and often highly admired when written. Taubert's talent for lighter themes is plain from the subject matter chosen.

Piano Sonata No. 1 in A major, Op. 4 (pub. 1830)

I. Allegro vivace.

This fast 3/4-time sonata form movement takes the early Beethoven piano sonatas from 1795–99, *Op. 1* to *Op. 10*, and also perhaps the three violin and piano sonatas *Op. 12* as its models. Taubert was 19 when writing this work and would still have been searching for his compositional voice. Interestingly the Beethoven sonatas cited were themselves almost student pieces from his time studying with Haydn. Taubert adopts Beethoven's early explosive traits of syncopated accents, sudden *forte–piano* dynamics and repeated right hand octaves, traits Taubert subsequently discarded. The arpeggiated first subject in A and staccato second subject in E major lead to a development with some adroit key shifts before the conventional recapitulation and coda clearly establish A major again.

II. Andante con moto, più tosto allegretto. D major.

The gentle and direct lyricism of this 4/4-time D major almost operatic movement reflects the style of Weber, Rossini, Cherubini and others. This is the language Taubert was to find so appealing as he developed his composing further. The three-part form with coda provides opportunities for very defined mood contrast.

III. Rondo: Vivace. A major.

Taubert continues with a mixture of Beethoven's early final Rondo style found in his sonatas already mentioned and the light lyrical style found in the second movement, employing a melodiousness that Beethoven never pursued. The musical form follows Beethoven's sonata-rondo form with a light-footed first subject and more solid second subject but deviates in omitting a central totally contrasted episode. The main two subjects return with a coda based on the first subject. Consequently, the form resembles ABABA.

Piano Sonata No. 2 in C minor, Op. 20 'Grande Sonate' (pub. 1834)

I. Allegro appassionato.

It would be difficult to reconcile this tempestuous outburst with Mendelssohn's criticism citing lack of impetus and spirit. It shows Taubert at his best, with music of power and persuasion that is cohesive and full of rhythmic drive. True, the figuration is more limited in scope than employed by Mendelssohn or Chopin, but the melodies soar, and the harmonic language is fully current with the early 1830s. Related in language and aesthetic, Weber's *Konzertstück in F minor* with its second movement *Allegro passionato* had premiered in Berlin in 1821 along with his opera *Der Freischütz*. The repeated exposition contains a 3/4-time dramatically coruscated and bustling first subject and a brilliantly embellished second subject in B flat major. Rhythmic emphasis permeates both subjects and the ensuing development. The recapitulation sees the return of the first subject in C minor and the second subject in A flat major before the C minor close.

II. Scherzo: Allegro non troppo. A flat major.

This lightly lyrical movement employs a favourite mood of Taubert – one of light-hearted skittishness embroidered with periods of cantabile melodic work and staccato figuration. The form comprises two main motifs – the first lyrical and related to the first subject of the first movement, the second more chordal but still dance-like alternating in the manner ABABAB.

III. Allegro agitato. C minor.

A bridge passage leads to this Tarantella-mood movement in 3/8 time that includes two main motifs, the first more sweepingly melodic, the second, which tends to dominate, with fast semiquavers and a repeated note figuration that makes a strong impact. The key scheme resembles the first movement and follows traditional sonata form with the exposition comprising C minor and E flat major keys, a development section and a recapitulation in C minor and A flat major before the C minor close.

Piano Sonata No. 4 in C sharp minor, Op. 21, No. 2 (pub. 1836)

I. Allegro vivace.

The second of a pair of sonatas published by Hofmeister in 1836, the entire canvas is comparatively restrained in its technical demands and general emotional content and it presents a perfect vehicle for salon performance by high-grade amateur pianists of the day. The style of the first movement uses Taubert's light lyrically inclined preferred language with a good deal of academic play between voice parts. While the exposition moves from C sharp minor to the relative major in traditional fashion, the six-note first subject staccato motif permeates the whole exposition in different forms. The ensuing development and recapitulation continue to feature this dominant motif to the extent the whole movement almost sounds monothematic.

II. Romance: Andante con moto. E major.

This exquisitely lyrical movement could easily pass for one of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* and shows Taubert's melodic gifts at their very best. The form is a simple three-verse structure, with the middle verse in E minor.

III. Allegro poco agitato. C sharp minor.

The shadow of Mendelssohn is also felt in this song-like statement. The form is similar to the first movement with a predominant theme moving through exposition, development and recapitulation followed by a less prominent second theme, often heralded by a drum-like pattern.

Piano Sonata No. 6 in D minor, Op. 114 (pub. 1857)

I. Allegro impetuoso, ma non troppo.

With the exception of the second movement, the language is still strictly diatonic and cadential despite the prominence of Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner at the time. The repeated exposition contains a strongly rhythmical first subject group contrasted with a Taubertian lyrical second subject in F major. The development is both extensive and thorough, replete with ingenious devices and sudden twists and turns in kaleidoscopic fashion. The recapitulation uses the opening octave scale to herald the coda at the end.

II. Larghetto con moto. F major.

Within this spacious almost operatic cantilena, Taubert occasionally introduces some very conservative but well-handled chromaticism. For example, immediately following the very simple theme's announcement, a fuller statement of it using thematic octaves and accompanimental chords employs semitonal shifts in both hands. The overall form comprises two parts, the second commencing with the main theme in F minor and moving through various keys to a final return in F major.

III. Scherzo: Allegretto con moto. A minor.

This gently playful movement is in Scherzo and Trio form with the Trio middle section emphasising legato playing in C major, contrasting with the outer scherzo sections.

IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco, ma espressivo. D minor.

This Tarantella-infused sonata movement maintains a furious pace in 4/4 time using triplets through much of the writing. The exposition moves from D minor through F major and G minor with three main motifs. The development and recapitulation serve their traditional roles and a cadenza heralds the coda.

Rodney Smith

Lucas Wong



Critically acclaimed pianist Lucas Wong has built a dynamic career spanning music, business and technology. His performances have captivated audiences across four continents, with collaborations alongside renowned artists such as Joseph Alessi, Soovin Kim, Susanne Mentzer, Frank Morelli, David Shifrin, Lee-Chin Siow and Guang Yang. His solo recitals have taken him to prestigious venues worldwide, including the Grand Hall at the University of Hong Kong and The Cobbe Collection at Hatchlands Park, England. He has premiered works by William Bolcom, Jake Heggie, Libby Larsen and Kelly-Marie Murphy. Wong has been invited to guest lecture and give masterclasses at Seoul National University, the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and The Juilliard School. He has worked on business cases for The Royal Conservatory of Music (Canada) while also developing apps for 4D Creatives. Lucas Wong is currently on the music faculty at The University of British Columbia, where he earned his Bachelor of Music, followed by both his Master's and Doctorate degrees at Yale University.

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Wilhelm Taubert was a significant composer and teacher in Berlin during a period when the city began to rival Vienna and Paris as a European musical powerhouse. Though it was also a time when the piano had reached its zenith in size and tonal depth, Taubert's graceful, conservative style was perfectly suited to the instrument. His sonatas fuse Beethovenian elements with those of Weber, and feature slow movements that draw on rich operatic lyricism reminiscent of Rossini or Cherubini.

FAZIOLI

Wilhelm
TAUBERT
(1811–1891)

Piano Sonata No. 1 in A major, Op. 4 (pub. 1830) 16:22

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|---|--|------|
| 1 | I. Allegro vivace | 6:14 |
| 2 | II. Andante con moto, più tosto allegretto | 4:19 |
| 3 | III. Rondo: Vivace | 5:49 |

Piano Sonata No. 2 in C minor, Op. 20 'Grande Sonate' (pub. 1834) 17:03

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|---|-----------------------------------|------|
| 4 | I. Allegro appassionato | 8:37 |
| 5 | II. Scherzo: Allegro non troppo – | 4:35 |
| 6 | III. Allegro agitato | 3:51 |

Piano Sonata No. 4 in C sharp minor, Op. 21, No. 2 (pub. 1836) 14:16

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|---|-------------------------------|------|
| 7 | I. Allegro vivace | 5:55 |
| 8 | II. Romance: Andante con moto | 3:57 |
| 9 | III. Allegro poco agitato | 4:24 |

Piano Sonata No. 6 in D minor, Op. 114 (pub. 1857) 26:29

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|----|--|------|
| 10 | I. Allegro impetuoso, ma non troppo | 9:00 |
| 11 | II. Larghetto con moto | 8:08 |
| 12 | III. Scherzo: Allegretto con moto | 3:25 |
| 13 | IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco, ma espressivo | 5:56 |

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Lucas Wong, Piano

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