

A close-up portrait of Llyr Williams, a man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a dark shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a light, neutral color with a diagonal, blurred golden light streak in the upper right corner.

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CLASSICS

2CD SET

Llyr Williams

**WAGNER
WITHOUT
WORDS**

WAGNER WITHOUT WORDS

CD1

1	Entry of the Guests from <i>Tannhäuser</i>	Richard Wagner/Franz Liszt	[10.39]
2	Fantasy	Richard Wagner	[26.01]
3	Spinning Chorus from <i>The Flying Dutchman</i>	Richard Wagner/Franz Liszt	[6.30]
4	“Song without Words” from <i>Albumblatt für Ernst Benedikt Kietz</i>	Richard Wagner	[1.50]
5	Elsa’s Bridal Procession from <i>Lohengrin</i>	Richard Wagner/Franz Liszt	[9.07]
6	Zürich Waltzes	Richard Wagner	[1.09]
7	Siegfried’s Rhine-Journey from <i>Götterdämmerung</i>	Richard Wagner/Glenn Gould/Llŷr Williams	[13.22]
CD 1 Total timings:			[68.38]

CD2

1	Liebestod from <i>Tristan and Isolde</i>	Richard Wagner/Franz Liszt	[7.51]
Scenes from <i>Parsifal</i>		Richard Wagner/Llŷr Williams	
2	Transformation Music		[8.35]
3	Parsifal and the Flower Maidens		[6.22]
4	Good Friday Music		[6.25]
5	In das Album der Fürstin M.	Richard Wagner	[2.55]
6	Santo spirito cavaliere from <i>Rienzi</i>	Richard Wagner/Franz Liszt	[9.35]
7	Sonata for the Book of Mrs. M. W.	Richard Wagner	[12.47]
8	Walhall from <i>the Ring of the Nibelungen (Das Rheingold)</i>	Richard Wagner/Franz Liszt	[5.47]
9	Albumblatt for Mrs. Betty Schott	Richard Wagner	[4.29]
10	Prelude to <i>The Meistersinger from Nürnberg</i>	Richard Wagner/Glenn Gould/Llŷr Williams	[9.14]
CD 2 Total timings:			[74.01]

LLŶR WILLIAMS
PIANO

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ARTIST'S NOTE

My love affair with the music of Wagner began when at age 10 I was given the Solti recording of the *Ring Cycle* as a Christmas present. Shortly afterwards I was bashing through the major music dramas at the piano, using vocal scores acquired from our local library.

By far the most frequently-played bit of Wagner in piano recitals is Liszt's transcription of "Isolde's Liebestod" from *Tristan*, a near-miraculous conjuring up of Wagner's glowing orchestration with just ten fingers. The popularity of this piece, however, should not blind us to the quality of some of his other realisations such as "Entry of the Guests" from *Tannhäuser* where Liszt gets to the heart of this particular operatic scene.

It was for a recital at London's Kings Place to celebrate the bicentenary in 2013 that the Wagner scholar Barry Millington suggested that I should combine the Liszt transcriptions with some original piano music by Wagner. I have to confess that my initial reaction was (as it is with many musicians) "Did he write piano music?" However there is more than two hours' worth of music, much of it suggestive

of the voice and the orchestra. One can hear echoes of certain phrases from the operas in the *Sonate für Mathilde Wesendonck*. Although the *Fantasy in F# minor* is a bit long-winded in places, the cyclical return of the sombre opening following the intervening movements makes for a remarkably moving, pessimistic conclusion. This is especially remarkable when one considers that it was written at the tender age of 19 and that Wagner is not usually thought of as an early starter.

The later music dramas are not well-represented in Liszt's transcriptions with their increasing density of orchestral polyphony evidently puzzling for him. Glenn Gould's solution in 1973 was to record the *Meistersinger Prelude* and "Siegfried's Rhine Journey" from *Götterdämmerung* with an overdubbed second piano part, thus giving an almost complete realisation of all the orchestral voices on the keyboard. In the *Götterdämmerung*, I have taken the liberty of re-allocating some of the material between the two pianos in order to give an even more faithful account of what is going on, as well as interpolating a section from the mountain-top duet.

It was my excellent producer, Judy Sherman, who finally persuaded me to transcribe something from *Parsifal*, as this was the obvious missing link on the CD. Trying to reduce *Parsifal* to twenty minutes seems a daunting enough task, but a good way in seemed to be the Act I "Transformation Music" with its bells, as there is a whole history of the piano being made to emulate bell sounds. Part of the "Flower Maidens" scene from Act II and the "Good Friday Music" from Act III are then included before the bells return at the end, reminding us that much of Wagner's music is cyclical.

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THE RING

After graduating with a first from Oxford, Llŷr applied for the repetiteur course at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where I was then Principal. I should explain that a repetiteur is a highly specialised pianist who accompanies opera rehearsals; one must be able to play any score at sight, teach sometimes illiterate singers their parts, be able to help them with several languages and shape their interpretation of particular roles. Applicants for the Academy course are asked to prepare a scene from a standard opera and, at audition, play from the full score whilst singing the vocal parts at the same time. This can be a tricky business, and most applicants choose something fairly uncomplicated, from Mozart, for instance. (Llŷr's audition is now legendary, but I was actually there.) When we asked him what he had prepared, he said The Ring. 'Good heavens', we exclaimed, 'what passage?' 'Whatever you'd like', he replied. Accepting this brash challenge, I said, 'OK, let's hear the beginning of Act 2 of Siegfried. Llŷr proceeded to play and sing all the different voice parts, without even looking at the score – beautifully.

I doubt that even Daniel Barenboim could do that. Needless to say, Llŷr became a mainstay of the Academy Opera Department for the next two years, learning skills which have stood him good stead as, for example, one of the official accompanists of the Cardiff Singer of the World competition.

As told by **Sir Curtis Price**

WAGNER WITHOUT WORDS

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Widely associated as Richard Wagner is with the grandiose and richly-textured orchestrations of his music dramas (one can hardly listen to the radio or watch television without being assailed at some point by “Ride of the Valkyries”!), it is not often recalled that he also wrote a number of substantial works for the piano. Indeed, so little-known are these today that one might be forgiven for assuming that the piano was not his natural medium. However, when the French Symbolist poet, Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, visited Wagner and his wife Cosima at Tribschen, Switzerland where they were then living, the impression he carried away was quite different. According to Villiers, Wagner while seated at the piano became “superhuman”, and as the composer played and sang, the piano gained a soul of its own and Wagner's performance would become so overpowering that his listeners had to beg him to stop: “at the end of two hours we are really ill. It's no longer a piano, or a voice, but a vision...”

Wagner's earliest musical training was in fact as a pianist. While a schoolboy at Pastor Wetzel's school at Possendorf, near Dresden, he received piano lessons from his Latin master, Humann. Wagner was impatient with the set five-finger exercises, preferring to spend time playing the overture to Weber's *Freischütz* and other such works by ear. In his late teens, he studied composition with Christian Theodor Weinlig, the conductor of the Thomanerchor in Leipzig. Weinlig made the young Wagner study counterpoint, and almost certainly sonata form as Wagner dedicated his first opus, a four-movement Piano Sonata, to his teacher. This was published in 1831, in the same year when Wagner composed the *Fantasy* in F sharp minor recorded here.

The original piano works

In Wagner's *Fantasy* one can hear the influence of Beethoven, in particular the brooding style of such works as the *Pathétique* and other piano sonatas from the great composer's “middle period”. Wagner had a life-long admiration of Beethoven, and became particularly noted for his interpretations as a conductor of Beethoven's symphonies, most particularly the Fifth.

The *Fantasy* approximately outlines a three-movement sonata work, each movement preceded and linked by dramatic recitative passages. It opens with such a brooding, recitative-like section, which leads into an episode marked *Un poco lento*. More dramatic recitative introduces a bridge passage, with a passing resemblance to the famous Toccata attributed to Bach, which leads to an impetuous *Allegro agitato*. Another episode of recitative introduces a broad *Adagio molto e cantabile*, Beethoven-like in its noble melodiousness, with a hint of the *Tempest Sonata* in some threatening rumbles in the bass. After some dramatic recollections of earlier sections of the Fantasy, a recapitulation of the opening *Un poco lento* returns the work to the lugubrious gloom from which it started.

The next original piano work represented on this album is an attractive “*Song without Words*”, dated 1840. This short album leaf, dedicated to the painter and portraitist Ernst Benedikt Kietz, was Wagner’s last piano work until 1853, the year he composed *Eine Sonate für das Album von Frau M.W.* – that is, for his muse Mathilde Wesendonk.

Wesendonk famously inspired Wagner to break off his work on the epic *Ring* cycle to create his opera *Tristan und Isolde*. Before composing that seminal masterpiece, Wagner wrote several song settings of Wesendonk’s poetry, two of which he explicitly identified as “studies” for *Tristan*. A year after they first met in 1852, Wagner composed a one-movement Sonata in her honour; this was his first completed work since composing *Lohengrin* some six years earlier, and was written some months before he embarked on the first opera of the *Ring* cycle, *Das Rheingold*. In the manuscript copy of the Sonata he gave Mathilde, he wrote the words “Wisst ihr wie das wird?” (“Do you know what will become of this?”), the question posed by the Norns in the *Ring* cycle’s final opera, *Götterdämmerung*.

The remaining three original Wagner pieces on this album are effectively little gifts he composed in a spirit similar to that represented by the “Lied ohne Worte” he gave to Kietz in 1840. One such gift was for Mathilde’s sister, Marie Luckenmeyer, who frequently visited Wagner in Zürich where he was living in exile during the 1850s to avoid imprisonment for his revolutionary activities. Wagner’s inscription on *Zürcher*

Vielliebchen-Walzer reads: “Dedicated to Marie of Dusseldorf by the best dancer in Saxony, called Richard the Waltzmaker.”

A little less frivolous is *In das Album der Fürstin Metternich*, written in 1861 for the wife of the Austrian ambassador in Paris as a thank you for her intervention that allowed the performance of *Tannhäuser* at the Opéra to go ahead on 13 March of that year.

Wagner’s last piano work, *Albumblatt für Frau Betty Schott* dated 1875, was written for the widow of the publisher Franz Schott. One may hear several echoes in this of *Die Meistersinger*, and in the present recital by Llŷr Williams it makes an effective appetiser for the *Prelude to Die Meistersinger*.

The Transcriptions

During much of the nineteenth century, it was a special event to hear substantial orchestral excerpts from Wagner’s works, let alone to hear any one of his operas entire. In the years before commercial recordings became widely available, let alone begin to do justice to Wagner’s colourful scores, much of his music was propagated through piano transcriptions,

of which pride of place goes to those by Wagner’s staunch champion, the virtuoso pianist-composer Franz Liszt. Llŷr Williams has programmed several of the most attractive of these, which will be described here in order of their appearance.

“Entry of the Guests” (Einzug der Gäste auf der Wartburg) was originally the opening piece of Liszt’s *Zwei Stücke aus ‘Tannhäuser’ und ‘Lohengrin’*, first published in 1853. To make this piece an effective concert work, Liszt converted Wagner’s original music from Act II scene 4 of *Tannhäuser* into a ternary structure, opening with fanfares and the noble march theme to which the guests enter; the subsequent entry of the minstrels becomes a trio section, Liszt then concluding the work with a reprise of the march to which the guests had entered.

One of the most charming of Liszt’s transcriptions and elaborations on Wagner’s music is the “Spinning Chorus” (Spinnerlied) from *The Flying Dutchman*, first published in 1862. Its particularly lovely ending is entirely of Liszt’s invention.

Liszt had a particularly close association with Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*, conducting its very successful first production in Weimar in 1850 while Wagner was in exile in Switzerland. Liszt subsequently made his own piano arrangement of "Elsa's Bridal Procession", which was originally published as a companion to "Entry of the Guests" from *Tannhäuser* (featured earlier in Llŷr Williams's programme). Here, though, is a very different procession: instead of fanfares, the simplest chords set the scene for a sweet, virginal theme (whose debt to Mendelssohn's Nocturne from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is more evident in the piano arrangement than in Wagner's original windband-style scoring). In the original opera, the procession, before it can reach its full climax, is interrupted by the intervention of Elsa's would-be nemesis, Ortrud; Liszt, however, rounds it off with a decrescendo and a lingering coda.

With *Siegfried's Rhine Journey* from *Götterdämmerung*, we reach the first of two transcriptions based on those originally made by the great Canadian pianist, Glenn Gould. A great admirer of Wagner, Gould could not resist transcribing some of the German master's grandest episodes to piano,

using some recording studio trickery – or, as he called it, "constructive cheating" – to enable him to encompass some of the rich textures beyond the reach of a mere two hands at the keyboard, over-dubbing himself to create in effect a four-hand transcription. (Llŷr Williams, as he explains in the introduction to this booklet, has reassigned some of the material between the two pianos "in order to give an even more faithful account of what is going on".) The baleful opening expresses the evil properties of the cursed ring; then, as dawn rises, we hear some of Wagner's most ecstatic music to be found outside *Tristan*, expressing the love between Siegfried and Brünnhilde at the opera's start (Williams here includes part of their love duet omitted by Gould in his transcription), made all the more poignant by Siegfried's disastrous and unwitting betrayal of Brünnhilde before the opera's end. The piece ends with the triumphant sound of Siegfried's horn call as he rides off to the Rhine accompanied by some joyous musical gamboling, with just a hint of sombre apprehension before the excerpt's triumphal final cadence.

It was Liszt who first coined the term "Liebestod" by which Isolde's final aria in *Tristan und Isolde* is now widely known. Wagner himself wrote a piano version of the ending of the opera's prelude, a relatively restrained (one may say "private") version which he sent to Mathilde Wesendonck with a letter in 1859. Here, though, is Liszt's unrestrained and justly celebrated version.

Llŷr Williams has made his own transcription of various scenes from Wagner's last opera, *Parsifal*. In the opening "Transformation music", transcribing music which covers the scene change in Act I of the opera, its bell-like effects are particularly well suited to the piano's sonorities; the more agonized and richly harmonized music heard at the heart of this section represents the agonies of the wounded knight, Amfortas. The movement ends with a passacaglia-like procession based on the tolling of bass bells. The heroic fanfares with which the following section starts represent our title hero; the Flower Maidens, sent to tempt him, are closely related to the oriental seductresses painted by such members of Russia's Mighty Five as Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov. In the Good Friday Music, originally heard in the opening scene

of Act III, we hear the emotional anguish of Kundry, the cursed woman, transformed and exalted by this holy day, the music finally fading out to the tolling of the bass bells first heard in the "Transformation Music".

Liszt's *Santo spirit cavaliere* from *Rienzi* is one of his most free treatments of Wagner, possibly presenting a musical portrait of the opera's hero. Its title is after the theme heard in the finale of Act III, followed by the theme from the opera's best known aria, Rienzi's Prayer from Act V (a theme which also features in the opera's overture). Dramatic contrast is then offered by the "call to arms" theme taken from the opening of Act I.

When it came to Wagner's *Ring* cycle, Liszt was rather more restrained, possibly because so much of the opera was effectively transcribed for piano by his student, the Polish virtuoso Carl Tausig. Liszt's sole contribution to the repertoire of piano works based on the *Ring* tetralogy is his portrait of the castle of the gods, *Valhalla*, based primarily on the transition between the first two scenes of *Rheingold* and Wotan's hymn to their newly built abode.

Finally, rounding off Llŷr Williams's recital, is another Glenn Gould transcription, this time of Wagner's contrapuntal *tour de force*>, the *Prelude to Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Wagner himself presented this Prelude as a self-standing work some six years before the first production of the complete opera, and it has been a popular part of the orchestral repertory ever since: but such is the richness of its contrapuntal detail – as lightly carried as is the contrapuntal feat of the finale of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony – that it is an understandably rare treat to hear it performed as here in a piano arrangement, with a little help from what Gould calls “constructive cheating”!

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LLŶR WILLIAMS

Welsh pianist, Llŷr Williams, is widely admired for his profound musical intelligence, and for the expressive and communicative nature of his interpretations. He has worked with orchestras around the world, including the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra, London Mozart Players, Sinfonia Cymru, I Pomeriggi Musicali, Meininger Hofkapelle, Berner Kammerorchester, Limburgs Symphony and the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg. He also appears at the BBC Proms in London and has given many remarkable performances at the Edinburgh International Festival, including an astonishing performance of Charles Ives' *Concord Sonata* in 2010. He is a regular performer in the Wigmore Hall's main piano series.

Throughout 2010 and 2011 Llŷr Williams performed a Beethoven sonata cycle around the UK, including an epic two-week period in August 2011 at Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh during the Festival, for which he received a prestigious South Bank Show award. From

Autumn 2014 onwards, Williams will be performing further complete Beethoven Piano Sonata cycles, at London's Wigmore Hall and in Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in Cardiff.

Llŷr Williams is a regular performer at the East Neuk Festival in Scotland, Handelsbeurs Concertzaal Gent, and in the Piano aux Jacobins series in Toulouse. He is also currently artist in residence at Galeri Caernarfon in Wales. Highlights this season include recitals at the Piano aux Jacobins in Toulouse, St George's Hall in Liverpool and three solo Beethoven programmes at the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival in the USA. He will also work with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Meininger Hofkapelle. Beginning in September 2013, Williams collaborated with the Elias Quartet in a residency at Glasgow Royal Concert Halls. Over the next three seasons they will be exploring Beethoven's piano sonatas and string quartets, in a series of concerts and talks.

2010 saw the release of a solo CD featuring music by Mussorgsky, Debussy and Liszt, on the Signum Label. In 2012, a second disc was released by Signum, featuring works by Liszt. Both discs were met with critical acclaim. Also recently released is a live CD from the 2012 East Neuk Festival, containing Beethoven's Op.109 and Op.110 sonatas. Llŷr Williams is the subject of two films produced for S4C: the first of which won a Welsh BAFTA for Best Music Programme, and the second featured his debut at Carnegie Hall.

A regular collaborator with violinist Alexander Janiczek, they have performed at the Wigmore Hall together, and given a full Beethoven series in Perth. Future plans together include concerts at the Wigmore Hall and in Austria, and with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Llŷr Williams also has a great love of lieder and he is one of the official accompanists at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition

Born in 1976 in Pentrebychan, North Wales, Llŷr Williams read music at The Queen's College, Oxford and went on to take up a postgraduate scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music where he won every available prize and award. He is also an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. He was an active member of the *Live Music Now!* scheme for several years, was selected for the *Young Concert Artists* in 2002. From 2003-2005 he was a BBC New Generation Artist and in 2004 received a *Borletti-Buitoni Trust* award.

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Produced by Judith Sherman

Engineered by Andrew Mellor (Snape Maltings) and Mike Hatch (Wyastone Leys)

Editing assistant - Jeanne Velonis

Piano technicians: Graham Cooke (Snape) and Phil Kennedy (Wyastone)

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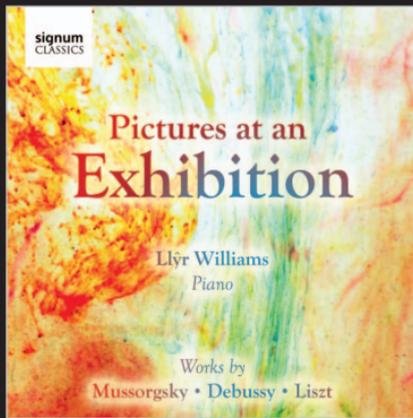
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SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middx UB6 7JD, UK.

+44 (0) 20 8997 4000 E-mail: info@signumrecords.com

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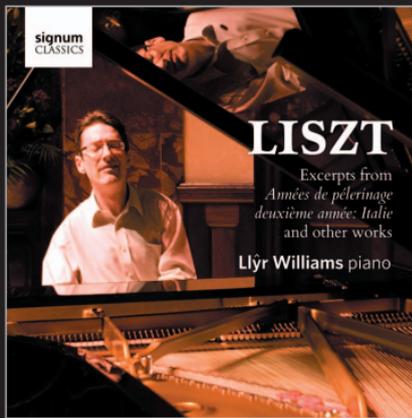


Pictures at an Exhibition
Llyr Williams

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