



TRANSCRIPTIONS FOR TWO GUITARS

FRANCK
RACHMANINOV
SCHUBERT
SCHUMANN

Bluvenduo

Sebastian Robles,
Zhanxiang Shi

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)	
Piano Sonata No. 13 in A major, Op. posth. 120, D. 664 (1819 or 1825)	
1 I. Allegro moderato	19:23 7:23
2 II. Andante	4:16
3 III. Allegro	7:44
César Franck (1822–1890)	
4 Six Pièces d’orgue – No. 3. Prélude, fugue et variation in B minor, Op. 18, M. 30 (1860–62)	9:15
Sergey Rachmaninov (1873–1943)	
13 Preludes, Op. 32 (1910) (excerpts)	
5 No. 12 in G sharp minor: Allegro	11:30 2:37
6 No. 10 in B minor: Lento	5:39
7 No. 5 in G major: Moderato	3:14
Robert Schumann (1810–1856)	
Kinderszenen, Op. 15 (‘Scenes of Childhood’) (1838)	
8 No. 1. Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (‘From Foreign Lands and People’)	17:40 1:42
9 No. 2. Kuriose Geschichte (‘A Curious Story’)	1:03
10 No. 3. Hasche-Mann (‘Catch Me’)	0:31
11 No. 4. Bittendes Kind (‘Pleading Child’)	0:57
12 No. 5. Glückes genug (‘Quite Happy’)	1:15
13 No. 6. Wichtige Begebenheit (‘An Important Event’)	0:46
14 No. 7. Träumerei (‘Daydreaming’)	2:38
15 No. 8. Am Kamin (‘By the Fire’)	0:43
16 No. 9. Ritter vom Steckenpferd (‘Knight of the Rocking Horse’)	0:40
17 No. 10. Fast zu Ernst (‘Almost too Serious’)	1:36
18 No. 11. Fürchtenmachen (‘Frightening’)	1:36
19 No. 12. Kind im Einschlummern (‘Child Falling Asleep’)	2:00
20 No. 13. Der Dichter Spricht (‘The Poet Speaks’)	2:13

All works arranged by Sebastian Robles (b. 2001) and Zhanxiang Shi (b. 2000) for two guitars,
2019 **5–7**, 2022 **4**, 2024 **1–3**, 2025 **8–20**

Transcriptions for Two Guitars

Franck • Rachmaninov • Schubert • Schumann

The versatility of the guitar duo as an expressive medium is well exemplified in this selection of transcriptions from piano masterpieces. The sonorities of two guitars bring new colours and intensities to familiar works. Several of these compositions have never been arranged for guitar before and provide an experience of freshness and revival which may surprise the casual listener.

Franz Schubert was born in Vienna in 1797 and died there in 1828 at the age of 31. At 27 years younger than Beethoven, Schubert embodied the great Classical tradition of Haydn and Mozart carried forward into the dawning of the Romantic period. Despite his short life he was a most prolific composer, writing symphonies, sonatas and string quartets, as well as many wonderful songs.

Schubert's *Piano Sonata No. 13 in A major, Op. posth. 120, D. 664* is an exquisitely lyrical work, ideal for transcription to guitar duo. It features traditional sonata form in an innovative manner. After the initial statement of the themes in contrasting keys, the development brings in a fascinating quasi-improvisation on a tiny phrase. The movement ultimately evolves to the recapitulation of the main theme.

The second movement evokes Schubert's mastery of song writing. The initial quietness is soon disturbed however with the interruption of a more turbulent mood. This is in strong contrast to the vivacity of a *scherzo* section and the rondo finale of the third movement, based on a theme from a much earlier work.

César Franck was born in Liège, Belgium in 1822, and died in Paris in 1890, at the age of 67. His father was a banker who encouraged his sons, Joseph and César, in their musical aspirations. César attended the Paris Conservatoire, winning various composition prizes there, while Joseph followed a career as a church organist and composer, as well as teacher. César Franck wrote a considerable amount for piano and organ, as well as a symphony and a quantity of chamber music.

His *Prélude, fugue et variation* was written in the 1860s for the composer's students, Louise and Geneviève Deslignières, as a duet for piano and harmonium. However it was later modified as an organ composition, dedicated to Camille Saint-Saëns, and published in 1868 as *No. 3* of his *Six Pièces d'orgue*. In 1910 it was arranged as a piano solo by the great pianist Harold Bauer (1873–1951), a pupil of Ignacy Jan Paderewski.

Prélude, fugue et variation is a poetic work, full of variety and elegance. The variation follows the lyricism of the prelude, and the fugue, delightfully Bach-like in mood, also expresses Franck's unique musical individuality. The light texture of the composition is ideal for transcription to the medium of the guitar duo.

Sergey Rachmaninov was born in Novgorod, Russia in 1873 and died in California in 1943, aged 69. He studied at the St Petersburg and Moscow conservatoires and left Russia in 1917. One of the world's finest piano virtuosos, he toured the world extensively. Nowadays he is of course remembered as a great composer who wrote four piano concertos, three symphonies and a number of songs, as well as solo piano music and operas.

Rachmaninov, following the earlier examples of both J.S. Bach and Chopin, composed twenty four preludes. These included the well-known *Prelude in C sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2* and twenty three more in two sets under the title of *Preludes* in *Opus 23* (ten preludes), composed and published in 1903, and *Opus 32* (thirteen preludes), composed in 1910 and published 1911. The three preludes selected here make up a sensitive triptych depicting beautiful melodic lines, elegant textures, and a variety of subtle moods.

Robert Schumann was born in Zwickau, Saxony, in 1810 and died near Bonn in 1856, aged 46. His father was a bookseller and publisher, devoted to British Romantic writers such as Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron. Robert studied law in the first instance but eventually the pursuit of music triumphed as he attended lessons with the eminent piano pedagogue, Friedrich Wieck. Years later, after much opposition from her father, he married Wieck's daughter, Clara, a virtuoso pianist and worthy composer in her own right. Despite many setbacks, including mental breakdown and chronic disease, Schumann wrote a quantity of piano music, chamber music, and choral music, as well as four symphonies and a piano concerto.

As John Worthen relates in his book *Robert Schumann – Life and Death of a Musician* (Yale University Press, 2007), Schumann commented in March 1838 to his future wife, Clara that he had been recently composing 'just as if I were wearing a little girl's dress with great winged sleeves, and I wrote about 30 sweet little pieces, from which I've selected 12 and called them *Kinderszenen*. You will enjoy them, but you will naturally have to forget that you are a virtuoso'. The suite was published in 1839, and Clara wrote to Schumann that she was 'utterly enraptured' by the pieces that were 'so simple, so heart-warming, so very *you!*' On 5 June 1839, Franz Liszt, one of the greatest performers of the piano's history, having received a copy of the first edition, wrote to the composer that the *Kinderszenen* had proved to be 'one of the invigorating joys of my life' and that 'in the evening, two or three times a week', he played some of the pieces to his three-year-old daughter, who was 'utterly delighted – and myself even more so, as you can imagine'.

The first piece, *From Foreign Lands and People*, presents a beautiful melody evoking nostalgia and romantic longing. Its texture of a sweet theme over arpeggios is totally idiomatic to the guitar. *A Curious Story* is a lively dance, recalling a tale told at bedtime to a child, brief, to the point, and poetically memorable. *Catch Me* offers recollections of Blind Man's Bluff, a robust children's game. For those who have forgotten, the rules of the game are straightforward. One player is blindfolded and is 'it'. The other players spin the blindfolded individual round a few times then move around the room avoiding being touched or grabbed by the blind folded one. If anybody is caught they become 'it'. In the Middle Ages the blindfolded player was expected to become over enthusiastic with the 'buffeting', lashing out with a suitable implement such as a club or (in modern times) a rolled up newspaper.

Pleading Child is a poignant theme full of a childish anguish and a sense of misery. An ingenious use of chord progressions keeps this short work full of surprise with a moving harmonic element. In *Quite Happy* the mood is communicated not only through the effervescent melodic line but also by means of a lively inventive accompaniment in the bass. After the joy comes a statelier occasion, *An Important Event*, expressed through dignified chords and measured pace.

Next comes *Daydreaming* (sometimes entitled *Reverie*), one of Schumann's most well-known pieces often deployed as an encore in piano recitals. Its sublime beauty imposes a singular responsibility on the performer to shade and shape each phrase into a meaningful unit. Though as a work it is essentially pianistic, it is also eminently suitable for the guitar. *By the Fire* is an elegantly animated work creating an image of fervent conversation in front of the hearth rather than somnolent inactivity.

Knight of the Rocking Horse communicates the wild ride on the horse through dramatic rhythms and sudden elements of surprise. For the guitar the introduction of a *pizzicato* bass line contrasted against the accompanying chords in the treble in the second section is a very expressive tonal colouring. *Almost too Serious* conjures up images of a conversation between child and adult, at the same time both frank and yet restrained, never verging into solemnity.

Frightening creates a sense of creeping shadows and mysterious sounds in the night. Just as things seem to settle down a more sinister interruption breaks in with passages marked 'quicker' contrasting vividly with the calmer opening theme. With the ending however, and the third repetition of the melody, a kind of less frightening normality is restored. The gently undulating rhythms of *Child Falling Asleep* bring to mind a cradle song or lullaby.

John Worthen points out that in *The Poet Speaks*, 'with its simple, hymn-like beginning and gentle questioning throughout', the poet speaks 'with the voice of the child grown-up'. The great pianist Alfred Cortot, giving a masterclass on this piece, commented that it should be 'conceived as a kind of intimate reverie, not just making a beautiful sound and expressive phrasing, you need also to create a sense of dreaming – the truth is you need to dream the piece rather than play it'.

The Poet Speaks stands apart to some extent from the other movements of the suite, providing a resounding final statement relating not only to one's memory of childhood, but also to the mature reflective sensibilities of the adult looking back on the busy and varied infant years.

Graham Wade

In this recording Shi is in the left channel and Robles on the right.

Bluenduo

Photo: Francesco Rocco



The musical collaboration between Zhanxiang (Joshua) Shi (China) and Sebastian Robles (Canada) began in San Francisco in 2018 during their first year of study under the guidance of Judicaël Perroy. Bluenduo has since performed in San Francisco, Paris and Geneva, and throughout North America, and was awarded First Prize at the prestigious Guitar Foundation of America International Ensemble competition in 2025. Since its inception, the duo has continued to diversify its repertoire with pieces that are enhanced by the simultaneously expressive and percussive sound of the guitar, including many of its own arrangements, which are taken from the 'grand répertoire', and aspire to present masterworks by Rachmaninov, Schubert and Schumann on two guitars while keeping the musical integrity of the original compositions. Shi and Robles work collaboratively in order to produce pieces that make the most of the possibilities of a guitar duo, resulting in arrangements that are naturally idiomatic, but when musically necessary, push the boundaries of what is achievable on the instrument. Bluenduo's arrangements are published by Kalia Editions, an imprint of MusiCurate, as well as Éditions Fougeray. www.kaliaguitar.com/bluenduo

The prizewinning guitar duo Bluvenduo present a versatile selection of transcriptions for two guitars, several of which have never previously been arranged for this format. The freshness and sense of discovery in Schubert's *Sonata in A major* is a product of the music's inherent songful lyricism, perfect material for a guitar duo. So, too, is Franck's *Prélude, fugue et variation*, a work of variety, elegance and light textures. The three Rachmaninov *Preludes* provide subtly contrasting moods, while Schumann's *Kinderszenen* offers a wealth of intimacy, excitement and expressive refinement.

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Op. 18, M. 30 (1860–62)* 9:15

Sergey Rachmaninov (1873–1943)

- 5–7 13 Preludes, Op. 32 (1910) (excerpts)* 11:30**

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

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***FIRST COMMERCIAL RECORDING **WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Bluvenduo

Sebastian Robles, Zhanxiang Shi, Guitar

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

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