



Aus Wien
Alasdair Beatson



AUS WIEN

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op. 26

1	I. Allegro	8. 27
2	II. Romanze	2. 31
3	III. Scherzino	2. 13
4	IV. Intermezzo	2. 10
5	V. Finale	5. 53

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

6 Kleine Klavierstücke, Op. 19

6	I. Leicht, zart	1. 19
7	II. Langsam	1. 07
8	III. Sehr langsame	1. 08
9	IV. Rasch, aber leicht	0. 29
10	V. Etwas rasch	0. 38
11	VI. Sehr langsam	1. 54

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Valses nobles et sentimentales

12	I. Modéré – très franc	1. 25
13	II. Assez lent – avec une expression intense	2. 21
14	III. Modéré	1. 25
15	IV. Assez animé	1. 06

16	V. Presque lent – dans un sentiment intime	1. 22
17	VI. Vif	0. 42
18	VII. Moins vif	2. 49
19	VIII. Épilogue: lent	4. 53

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957)

Piano Sonata No. 3 in C Major, Op. 25

20	I. Allegro molto e deciso	7. 58
21	II. Andante religioso	7. 04
22	III. Tempo di Menuetto molto comodo	6. 27
23	IV. Rondo. Allegro giocoso	5. 42

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

24	Waltz in G-flat Major, D.Anh.I/14 “Kupelwieser-Walzer” (transcr. by Richard Strauss)	1. 46
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Alasdair Beatson, piano

Total playing time: 73. 01

Dedicated to

Jolyon David Finch (1932-2021)



Aus Wien

Vienna has long captured the artistic imagination. As the city grew into a European cultural capital — ever more cosmopolitan, intellectually rich and fertile — its seductive charm drew writers, artists, and musicians to this “city of dreams”. To be Viennese, whether by birth or adoption, was to live alongside giant monuments to Art — theatres, galleries, and concert halls; to walk among the birthplaces and graves of bygone masters; and to breathe the same air as living idols. In his memoir *The World of Yesterday*, Stefan Zweig recounts the thrill of passing Gustav Mahler on the street, of being introduced as a young boy to Brahms (and receiving a friendly pat on the shoulder), and of witnessing the miraculous poetry readings of Hofmannsthal. Zweig speaks too of the confident (if naïve) optimism of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, of a creative fecundity across all art forms, and a belief, at least within cultural circles, in a

common European vision and international fraternity.

This recording was imagined in 2020 in London, under the twin shadows of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. Perhaps I was subconsciously plotting an escape, transporting myself away from the concerns of the day. I certainly benefited greatly from an immersion in this music, a music that seems to conjure a more carefree and optimistic time.

The programme I have designed is generally festive in spirit, colourful and exuberant like the city itself, and forms a playful rather than comprehensive exploration of 19th and early 20th century Vienna. Perhaps the least known of the works presented is the third piano sonata of Korngold — if in search of optimism, one need look no further than this ebullient music, and discovering its intimate and tender second movement has been for me a revelation. Schumann and Ravel offer their perspectives of

Vienna as outsiders, Schoenberg and Korngold (almost) as natives. The tension between tradition and modernism is explored throughout — a burning issue for Schoenberg of course, but one with which each composer grapples.

Just as the Viennese live alongside their musical ghosts, resonances of composers past pervade the programme: Schoenberg’s final *Klavierstück* written in response to Mahler’s death in 1911; Richard Strauss capturing the echo of a Schubert waltz more than a century old in the telling. Schubert too was the inspiration behind Ravel’s beautiful set of *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. Might Beethoven loom in the larger, architectural movements of Schumann’s *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*? And is there not a flavour of his *Waldstein* sonata, or indeed Schubert’s *Wanderer-Fantasie*, in the joyful flight and radiant C Major of the Korngold?

- Alasdair Beatson

“A Viennese masquerade and nothing more”

All cities, all cultures deal in anachronism. How much of any ancient monument is what was originally constructed? Why should we care, if indeed we do? That is all the more so in the case of a performing art such as music. What does it mean to perform a work written a hundred, or indeed several hundred, years after it was written? For all the naïve, some might say disingenuous, answers ‘authenticists’ have presented, it is the questioning, the cracks between responses, the ghosts that haunt our concert halls, recordings, sheet music, and now our electronic tablets, that convey the greater interest. Nowhere, however, is such sleight of historical hand more apparent than in Vienna, that ‘city of songs by slain artists’, as Schoenberg — he and Schubert the only composers here born Viennese — once angrily denounced it. Richard Strauss knew what he was doing in parody — perfection? — of waltzes by his nineteenth-century

namesake, Johann II, in *Der Rosenkavalier*’s fantastic portrayal of an imaginary Vienna a century earlier. In general, truth may well prove stranger than fantasy. Long before its depiction in *The Third Man*, however, the great (post-)imperial city tempted those in its thrall to believe its fantasies somehow both stranger and truer.

Korngold had ghosts aplenty to combat, those of his father Julius, a notoriously reactionary Viennese music critic, and his earlier self included. His first Piano Sonata (1908) was the work of an eleven-year-old Wunderkind, its successor written two years later. It would be more than two decades before he returned to the genre in 1931, four out of five operas under his Vienna State Academy professorial belt. Korngold’s style had changed since 1908, if less radically than Schoenberg’s. There are traces of Twenties’ *Neue Sachlichkeit*, perhaps especially in the rondo finale whose Romanticism seems more consciously mediated than elsewhere. Like the sonata as a whole, it nonetheless



Wilhelm Gause, *Prater* (1895)



Wilhelm Gause, *In a reading hall* (1906)

remains in both senses rooted in tonal, symphonic tradition.

Does the first movement's opening material echo, consciously or otherwise, its counterpart in Schumann's *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*? Perhaps, at least here in context. There is certainly a strong sense of German Romantic tradition, such as Julius would have approved of; the cantabile A major second subject offers a case in point. Form, moreover, seems traditional rather than knowingly neoclassical. That said, the first three movements, each rising a semitone in tonality — C Major, D-flat Major, D Major, only to return 'home' to C Major for the finale — have a listless quality to their tonal progress, as if to recognise the validity, if not the necessity, of Schoenberg's 'air of another planet'. Enharmonic modulation, nodding to Schubert, characterises the 'Andante religioso' second movement, its title and character in Lisztian vein. The third movement may be marked *Tempo di minuetto*, but it is not a minuet and is

certainly not to be danced to. Its soft-spoken G Major trio relaxes at a more 'flowing' tempo, given drastic reduction in melodic and harmonic motion. If *Rosenkavalier's* action is, to quote the Marschallin, 'a Viennese masquerade and nothing more,' this is more, whilst retaining Viennese disjuncture between appearance and reality.

Korngold and Schoenberg would eventually become friendly, but that was no thanks to Korngold Senior's attacks. Even today, Schoenberg retains a popular if bizarre reputation as fearsome avant-gardist: if not quite Korngold's — or Strauss's — antipode, not so far off either. For there was always a strong strain of conservatism not only to Schoenberg's outlook, whether politically, as unrepentant monarchist — not unusual for Austro-Hungarian Jews, for whom the Habsburgs offered greater security than the Dual Monarchy's panoply of popular nationalisms — or aesthetically. Schoenberg's innovation was always rooted in and determined to save Austro-German

(as opposed to Korngold's more Austrian) tradition.

This we can see and hear in the undeniable radicalism of the Six Piano Pieces, op.19, enigmatic distillations not unlike Beethoven's late *Bagatelles*. Take the first. Its melodic lines, ever so slightly twisted, might come from a late Brahms intermezzo. In that 'slight twisting' there yet remains a world of art; likewise in the harmonic foundations, if we may use so static a word for something ever shifting. Preoccupation with intervallic relationship characterises many of these utterances, as rich in serial anticipation as in Brahmsian homage. The obstinacy of the second piece's repeated major third (G-B) is typically dialectical: generating conflict such as will erupt with violence in the fourth, and which yet remains serenely unchallenged by it. Wagner's art of transition haunts and tells these aphorisms that contain, so it seems, all that need be said. In the final piece, inspired by the bells of Mahler's funeral, we feel the chill breath — 'wie ein Hauch' — of the

graveyard. There is for Schoenberg an unusual degree of final, albeit momentary, peace.

Ravel was better able to view — to hear — Vienna and its musical traditions from a distance. It would be foolish, however, to identify that with lack of emotion, depth, radicalism, or anything else. In *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, written in 1911, the same year as Schoenberg's pieces, the old Viennese dance that haunts so much of Schoenberg's œuvre is recreated with elegance and affection, yet with a hint of recognition of the vortex into which the post-war *La Valse* would eventually hurl itself. Although Ravel denied intention of social commentary, it is difficult not to feel, whether nobly, sentimentally, or both, some sense of dancing on a volcano as well as delight both in the composer's avowed, if nominal, Schubertian model and in nonchalant escape therefrom.

Lightly-tossed paradoxes — they seem to be that, rather than Schoenbergian dialectics — abound. Just as in an earlier still

Viennese opera, *Così fan tutte*, expressivity is attained through, not despite, artificiality. The seventh waltz's bitonality does not strive to shock; however, if one listens, perhaps it does—and should. Ultimately, the epilogue seduces us with various tricks of memory in its thematic recollections; it wishes to return to, yet cannot. To quote Ravel's pupil Manuel Rosenthal, themes must 'return one above the other and vanish'. Another Viennese masquerade, both harmonising and clashing with a Gallic hall of mirrors? Doubtless, though it is also a strategy one may find in the Romanticism, ebullient and melancholy, of Schumann.

Carnival seems made for Vienna: a world of disguise, make-believe, semi-licit joys, exuberance, and a farcical jesting (*Schwank*) that looks forward — back? — to that Straussian world of *Rosenkavalier*. Such fantasies may have offered Schumann relief from and/or intensification of his somewhat 'operatic' travails with Friedrich Wieck, determined to thwart his daughter Clara's

marriage to her fellow pianist-composer. Schumann might have become another adoptive Viennese, yet did not. He visited in winter 1838-9, unsuccessfully seeking to transfer publication of his *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* from Leipzig's Breitkopf & Härtel to Vienna's Haslinger. The greater part of *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* was composed in Vienna, the fifth and final of these *Phantasiebilder* (fantasy images) following homecoming to Leipzig.

The world conjured in the mind and under the fingers is so vivid on account of their interaction: inspired by poetic impulse rather than concrete depiction of the celebrations Schumann undoubtedly took in. The first movement's sublimated and submerged *commedia dell'arte* hustle and bustle is punctuated by repeated allusion to the *Marseillaise*, whose prohibition, like much Biedermeier censorship, was readily evaded in art and satire. The parade of images and sentiments is repeated and varied in the four subsequent movements, more



Wilhelm Gause, *Evening at the Ringstraße in Vienna* (1900)

focused in their particular fantasies than that seemingly all-encompassing yet elusive exposition. Once more, all is not quite as it seems. A brief, lovelorn Romance acts more as an Intermezzo than the passionate exploration of that name in darkest E-flat minor. The Scherzino's syncopations and Finale's exhilarating tumult pay homage to Vienna's esteemed Beethoven, albeit in the bitter-sweet knowledge that recreation of the past, however desirable, is impossible. Schumann achieves imaginative recreation of Beethoven's sonata principles by evading the strictures of their or any other letter.

A dozen or so years earlier, in 1826, Schubert had composed a waltz to celebrate the marriage of his friend, the painter Leopold Kupelweiser, to Johanna Lutz, a cousin of Franz Grillparzer. The piece was never notated; instead, it was passed down by family tradition, eventually reaching Maria Mautner Markhof, née Kupelwieser. Her husband Manfred recalled in his memoirs, with a spoonful of reminiscence-sugar: 'It is a

characteristic of this incredibly talented and music-loving era that Schubert played it a few times and everyone could replay it by heart.' At any rate, 'before an agreed game of skat in Simmering,' in January 1943, as war tore Europe to pieces, 'Strauss suggested putting the waltz on paper. My wife played for him, he took some notes and a few days later he gave us a razor-fine copy.' Strauss could no more resist adding a little of himself than in his edition of Mozart's *Idomeneo*. The waltz later made its way to the 1960 Vienna Philharmonic Ball in an orchestration by Gottfried von Einem — taken from the *echt*-Schubert key of G-flat Major to an orchestra-friendly C Major— and eventually received its first public piano performance from Jörg Demus, at the Theater an der Wien, in 1962, published only in 1970. The song of this Viennese bagatelle song, shared between hands, is best served with lilt and speciality coffee and without added sentimentality. Viennese family tradition and narrative will afford that.

Mark Berry

Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive producers **Alasdair Beatson & Kate Rockett** (PENTATONE)
Recording producer & engineer **Philip Hobbs** | Editing **Matthew Bennett**
Piano technician **David Peake**

Liner notes **Mark Berry**

Cover photography and portrait of Alasdair Beatson **Aga Tomaszek**
Design **Marjolein Coenrad** | Product management **Kasper van Kooten**
Product coordination **Veronika Muravskaia**

This album was recorded in September 2020 at The Sage One, Gateshead.

PENTATONE TEAM

Vice President A&R **Renaud Loranger** | Managing Director **Simon M. Eder**
A&R Manager **Kate Rockett** | Product Manager **Kasper van Kooten**
Head of Marketing, PR & Sales **Silvia Pietrosanti**

Aus Wien has been made possible by the invaluable help and support of:

Jenny and Ross Allen
Paul Crowe
Sherry Ferdman and Alasdair Smith
Fiona and David Finch
Christine and Jean Fraysse
Maguy and Jean-Michel Fraysse Perez
Anna Hill, chairman Chichester Chamber
Concerts
Pamela Kemp
Rosemary and Crawford Lindsay
Ineke and Lex van Lynden
Sally and Iain Macpherson
Catherine Maddocks

Marion and Fergus Malcolm
Lady Marriner
Janet Marson
Sue Norrington
Gilette and Jean-Marc Pallot
Andrew Robinson
Leticia and Alan Rodgers
Maria Grazia Tanese
Sally and Guy Turner
Brenda and Andrew Wallis
David Waterman
Musique à Marsac
Sage Gateshead



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