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SIEGFRIED
VON
RICHARD WAGNER.

Schluß des letzten Aufzuges.



Pür Klavier zu zwei Händen
bearbeitet von
August Stradal.

WAGNER

transcribed for solo piano
by August Stradal
Volume Two

Tristan und Isolde
Das Rheingold
Lohengrin
Siegfried
Parsifal

Juan Guillermo Vizcarra, piano

FIRST RECORDINGS

AUGUST STRADAL: WAGNER TRANSCRIPTIONS, VOLUME TWO by Malcolm MacDonald

The pianist, composer and writer August Stradal was born on 17 May 1860 in Teplice, north Bohemia. His father was a lawyer and a member of the town council. Stradal attended the grammar school in Leitmeritz (the modern Litoměřice) and then studied at the Vienna Conservatory, where his teachers were Anton Door, Theodor Leschetizky, Gustav Nottebohm and Anton Bruckner. In September 1884 he went to Weimar to become a disciple of Franz Liszt, whom he also accompanied to Budapest and Bayreuth in 1885 and 1886. After Liszt's death he returned to Teplice, where he was active as a music teacher until 1893, when he joined the staff of the Horak School of Piano Studies (later the Horak Konservatorium) in Vienna. He also toured extensively.

In later life Stradal wrote copiously about both Bruckner and Liszt, for whom he is an important biographical source, and published a memoir of the latter¹ as well as an autobiography. He received the Czechoslovak State Music Award in 1928. Stradal died on 13 March 1930 at Krásná Lipa (the former Austrian Schönlinde) in north Bohemia.

Stradal was considered a leading interpreter of Liszt's music and made many transcriptions – some sources reckon over 250 – of orchestral and chamber works for the piano, in repertoire stretching from the Baroque era to the late nineteenth century. Notable among these are his transcriptions of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 131, the First, Second, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Symphonies of Bruckner and the String Quintet (he also made a two-piano version of Mahler's Fifth Symphony), Reubke's *Sonata on the 94th Psalm* and most of Liszt's orchestral works, including the *Faust* and *Dante* Symphonies and twelve of the thirteen symphonic poems, his versions of which were published about the turn of the nineteenth and

the Texas Christian University, he completed his graduate studies, receiving a Masters in Piano Performance. He readily acknowledges the influence on his playing of his studies with Tomás Guillermo Vizcarra Carbajal, his father and a recognised Peruvian writer and piano pedagogue, Teresa Quesada, John Owings, Joseph Banowetz, twice nominated for Grammy awards, and with José Feghali, a gold medallist of the Van Cliburn competition.

The first volume of this series of Stradal transcriptions of Wagner was well received. The reviewer for MusicWeb International felt that 'Juan Guillermo Vizcarra makes a staggeringly powerful case for these transcriptions', and *Fanfare* commented: 'Vizcarra is a sterling pianist, clearly caught on top form here, and the recording is first-class.'

Malcolm MacDonald 1948–2014



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I am truly fortunate that Malcolm MacDonald, though seriously ill, was able to complete the essay with this recording – and only days before he died (on 27 May 2014), making this text very probably the last piece of writing from one of the best writers on music of our day. I would like to dedicate this recording to Malcolm's memory, and to express my gratitude for the booklet essays for this and the previous volume in the series. His invaluable contribution to scholarly writing on music will be remembered for many years to come and will continue to inspire generations of musicians and music-lovers.

Juan Guillermo Vizcarra

¹ *Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt*, P. Haupt, Bern and Leipzig, 1929.



Juan Guillermo Vizcarra is one of the leading Peruvian pianists of his generation, whose performances have been heard far beyond his native land: the Peruvian newspaper *El Comercio* called him a 'rare case of extraordinary talent which is called to shine in the international scene'. He has received numerous honours in international competitions, among them the gold medal of the Third

Béla Bartók International Piano Competition in 1995 in Lima, the silver medal of the Second Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart International Piano Competition in 1991, also in Lima, and the bronze medal of the Third Ludmila Knezkova International Piano Competition in Canada in 2004. Juan Vizcarra has performed as orchestral soloist and recitalist in Canada, Chile, Mexico, Russia and the United States. Back home in Peru he is a frequent guest soloist of the Peru National Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonic Orchestra of The University of Lima and other major Peruvian orchestras. In 2006 he was invited to perform with the National Symphony Orchestra in Lima for the annual anniversary concert of Filarmonia, the main Peruvian classical radio station. His most recent appearance at home was a performance of the Liszt First Piano Concerto with the Peru National Symphony Orchestra. Future performances include a solo recital at the 2015 American Liszt Society Festival, 'Franz Liszt and Damnation'.

His training was international, too. In 1988 he graduated from the National University of San Agustín, Arequipa-Peru, receiving a Bachelors of Music in Piano Performance. In 1999 he studied at the Rimsky Korsakov Conservatory in Saint Petersburg. From 1999 to 2001 he studied at the National Conservatory of Music in Lima, after which he was appointed as faculty member of the National Conservatory, remaining until 2003. In 2005 he finished the Artist Diploma Program at the Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, and in 2009, also at

twentieth centuries.² Stradal also arranged a huge number of Bach's works, and – as can be heard on the current disc – many works of Wagner, particularly excerpts from the operas. A more unusual Wagner transcription is Stradal's two-hand arrangement of the *Wesendonck Lieder* as piano pieces without voice.

Wagner's music-dramas constituted one of the major artistic sensations of the nineteenth century. They were not only revolutionary in conception and highly controversial in their reception, but they attracted a huge and passionate following across Europe and the United States. Yet opportunities for Wagner's devoted audiences actually to experience his works on the stage, be it at Bayreuth or elsewhere, were few and far between, and it is certain that a large proportion of those who admired his music knew it primarily from extracts played in concert and through domestic performance of piano arrangements. In an age before radio, television or recorded music, piano transcriptions – whether aimed at virtuoso recitalists or at amateur pianists who could cope with the intricacies of the music as best they might, in private – were the chief means of disseminating operatic works to the wider public. Stradal's teacher Liszt made about a dozen transcriptions of excerpts from Wagner's operas over a thirty-year period (the most famous is probably his version of 'Isolde's Liebestod' from *Tristan und Isolde*) and it was another Liszt pupil, Karl Klindworth, who made the piano scores of the complete *Das Ring des Nibelungen*. Stradal's arrangements of excerpts from *The Ring* and Wagner's other operas are thus part of a distinguished tradition. Not a tradition, though, that has always met with approval: Sir Donald Tovey's classic essay 'Wagner in the Concert Room'³ presents a devastating criticism of the shortcomings, as orchestral concert music, of what are now colloquially referred to as 'bleeding chunks'.

² A complete cycle of recordings of Stradal's transcriptions of the Liszt symphonic poems is underway from the Finnish pianist Risto-Matti Marin on Toccata Classics: Volume One (tocc 0035) presents *Les Préludes* (Symphonic Poem No. 3; 1848), *Heroïde Funèbre* (Symphonic Poem No. 8; 1850) and *Die Ideale* (Symphonic Poem No. 12; 1857), and Volume Two (tocc 0092) *Orpheus* (Symphonic Poem No. 4; 1853–54), *Tasso, Lamento e Trionfo* (Symphonic Poem No. 2; 1854), *Hungaria* (Symphonic Poem No. 9; 1854) and *Hamlet* (Symphonic Poem No. 10; 1858).

³ *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Volume VI, Oxford University Press, London, 1939, pp. 102–14. One may not agree with Tovey's opinions, but they are far better expressed than much of the admiration that is routinely heaped on these pieces in most programme notes.

Wagner was no pianist, a fact which if anything freed his orchestral imagination to produce some of the most original effects of scoring ever conceived, but which poses a challenge to any transcriber wishing to reduce his orchestral canvases to a shape that can be grasped by a mere ten fingers. Even Stradal sometimes seems hard put to it to reduce the plethora of notes to the mere dimensions of a piano keyboard.

Four of the five items on this disc are straight transcriptions of well-known, essentially self-contained excerpts from Wagner's operas. The fifth, the *Freie Phantasie* on *Lohengrin* [1], belongs to the genre of 'operatic reminiscences' pioneered by Liszt, Thalberg, Kalkbrenner and others – as a kind of digest of the complete work, combining several 'highlights' to evoke the action of the opera in a musical narrative. Yet everywhere the items presented here manifest the care and attention to detail of the born (and highly experienced) transcriber, who is able convincingly to re-imagine a piece of music from one medium to another. Thus the *Love Duet from Act 2 of Tristan und Isolde* [2], a piece that demands a true, even and, if possible, timeless *sostenuto* that the piano is almost powerless to provide – and can only be approximated by repetition of chords while yet avoiding the effect of many attacks, however soft – Stradal is entirely successful in creating the tranced atmosphere of Wagner's original.

In the *Schluss der letzten Szene* (End of the last Scene) of *Das Rheingold* [3] the most important consideration must be the crafting of new, pianistically effective figurations that can have the force and be as convincing as the harp and string figurations in the original score. With the *Charfreitagzauber* (Good Friday Spell) from *Parsifal* [4], the challenge is to bring out the many layers and textures, with their symbolic meanings, of this climactic scene, as it is to impose some kind of symphonic structure on the *Schluss des letzten Aufzuges* from *Siegfried* [5] that will characterise all the elements yet weld them into a purposeful whole; with the *Lohengrin-Phantasie* it is to make a dramatic and convincing shape. Here all Stradal's chosen excerpts are not only displayed in their full glory but work together to produce something of the dramatic and spiritual essence of the music-drama.

The dedications of these transcriptions (none of which, incidentally, is dated) are an index of Stradal's high social standing. The *Lohengrin-Phantasie* is dedicated to Georg Boskoff, court pianist to the King of Romania. The *Charfreitagzauber* from *Parsifal* bears a dedication to Luisa, Countess Erdödy, a member of a leading family of the Hungarian nobility and a descendant of the most plausible candidate for Beethoven's 'immortal beloved'. The *Love Duet* from *Tristan und Isolde* is dedicated to the outstanding pianist (and not-negligible composer) Emil Sauer (1862–1942), and the ending of *Das Rheingold*, fittingly, is dedicated to no less a personage than Wagner's major patron, Ludwig II of Bavaria.⁴

In the present recording Juan Guillermo Vizcarra, although using Stradal's transcriptions as his basic text, has rearranged a few sections in each piece in order to restore some of Wagner's texture – especially the vocal lines – which Stradal omitted in order to make his transcriptions more pianistic. In these places he believes 'that it is possible to include most of Stradal's omissions without disturbing the architecture of his pianistic transcription – at least in these pieces – and in my opinion, I think these additions help to make these arrangements musically richer and somehow to resemble the atmosphere of Wagner's original settings.'⁵

Malcolm MacDonald was the author of the volume on Brahms in the 'Master Musicians' series (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2002). He also wrote The Symphonies of Havergal Brian (three vols., Kahn & Averill, London, 1974, 1978 and 1983) and edited the first two volumes of Havergal Brian on Music (Toccata Press, London, 1985 and 2009). His other writings include books on John Foulds, Schoenberg, Ronald Stevenson and Edgard Varèse. He died on 27 May 2014, as he was putting the finishing touches to this essay.

⁴ The *Siegfried* excerpt bears no dedication.

⁵ E-mail to Malcolm MacDonald, 8 April 2014.