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**FRANZ LISZT**  
**Wagner and Weber**  
**Transcriptions**  
**Steven Mayer, Piano**



**COMPLETE  
PIANO  
MUSIC**



**VOLUME  
33**

## Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

### Transcriptions of Wagner and Weber

*Wagner by himself through his books ... and his three dramas – The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin – has brought about the need for a whole regiment of engineers and sappers. It needs at least a dozen years for his ideas to be digested and for the seeds that he has sown to grow and produce their harvest.*

– Liszt to his cousin Eduard Liszt, Gotha, 29th March 1854

Born at Raiding, in Hungary, in 1811, the son of Adam Liszt, a steward in the service of Haydn's former patrons, the Esterházy Princes, Franz Liszt had early encouragement from members of the Hungarian nobility, allowing him in 1822 to go to Vienna, for lessons with Czerny and a famous meeting with Beethoven. From there he moved to Paris, where Cherubini refused him admission to the Conservatoire, as a foreigner. Nevertheless he was able to impress audiences by his performance, now supported by the Erard family, piano manufacturers whose wares he was able to advertise in the concert tours on which he embarked. In 1827 Adam Liszt died, and Franz Liszt was now joined again by his mother in Paris, while using his time to teach, to read and benefit from the intellectual society with which he came into contact. His interest in virtuoso performance was renewed when he heard the great violinist Paganini, whose technical accomplishments he now set out to emulate.

The years that followed brought a series of compositions, including transcriptions of songs and operatic fantasies, part of the stock-in-trade of a virtuoso. Liszt's relationship with a married woman, the Comtesse Marie d'Agoult, led to his departure from Paris for years of travel abroad, first to Switzerland, then back to Paris, before leaving for Italy, Vienna and Hungary. By 1844 his relationship with his mistress, the mother of his three children, was at an end, but his concert activities continued until 1847, the year in which his association began with Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, a Polish heiress, the estranged wife of a Russian prince. The following year he settled with her in Weimar, the city of Goethe, turning his attention now to the development of a newer form of orchestral music, the symphonic poem, and, as always, to

the revision and publication of earlier compositions.

It was in 1861, at the age of fifty, that Liszt moved to Rome, following Princess Carolyne, who had settled there a year earlier. Divorce and annulment seemed to have opened the way to their marriage, but they now continued to live in separate apartments in the city. Liszt eventually took minor orders and developed a pattern of life that divided his time between Weimar, where he imparted advice to a younger generation, Rome, where he was able to pursue his religious interests, and Pest, where he returned now as a national hero. He died in 1886 in Bayreuth, where his daughter Cosima, widow of Richard Wagner, lived, more concerned with the continued propagation of her husband's music.

Operatic transcriptions, arrangements, paraphrases and fantasies were a necessary part of the repertoire of any virtuoso performer. Liszt excelled in these evocations of the opera house, often treating the borrowed thematic material in novel ways that revealed new features. These works number some forty, including compositions based on Meyerbeer, Bellini and Donizetti, and then on Verdi and Wagner.

Liszt's first meeting with Wagner had been in Paris in 1840, when the latter, struggling as a composer in Paris, came to call on him, apparently leaving no impression on Liszt. Four years later Liszt was present in Dresden when Wagner's opera *Rienzi* was staged there. In the intervening years Wagner had won a measure of security, established as Kapellmeister in Dresden. Liszt, with his international fame as a performer, settled from 1848 in Weimar as Court Kapellmeister and from here was able to continue his altruistic mission to support the genius he perceived in others. In support of Wagner he staged *Tannhäuser* in

Weimar in February 1849, and at the same time played an essential part in facilitating Wagner's escape from Dresden, where Wagner had rashly supported the republican rising against the King, allowing him eventual refuge in Switzerland. In 1850 Liszt arranged the first performance of *Lohengrin* in Weimar and in the following years did as much as he could to bring about performances of Wagner's operas elsewhere in Germany, while responding, as far as he could, to Wagner's repeated requests for money and for help in securing an amnesty to allow his return to Germany. Liszt and Wagner became associated with what was described as 'the music of the future', represented by Wagner's grandiose dramatic conceptions of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and by Liszt's virtual creation of the symphonic poem. While Liszt's attitude to Wagner's work was positive, Wagner was at the least ambivalent towards Liszt's compositions, however favourable the opinions of it he expressed to the composer.

Wagner's *Tannhäuser* was first staged in Dresden in October 1845, with a more elaborate version unsuccessfully mounted in Paris in 1861. In November 1848 Liszt conducted a performance of the *Overture* in Weimar and the following February mounted the opera there. His transcriptions of the *Overture* and of *O du mein holder Abendstern* (O Star of Eve) date from this period, both works published in 1848, the first in Dresden and the second in Leipzig. Both may be seen as part of Liszt's campaign to bring Wagner's work to the notice of a wider audience. The opera deals with the conflict of the Minnesinger Tannhäuser, seen first enjoying the sensual delights of the Venusberg and then in penitence. At the singing contest on the Wartburg he meets and falls in love with Elisabeth, niece of the Landgrave, his sensuous view of love arousing the hostility of the knights gathered together for the contest. Joining pilgrims, in Rome he seeks forgiveness, denied him until the papal crozier should burst into flower. Elisabeth and the Minnesinger Wolfram await Tannhäuser's return, but it is only through Elisabeth's intercession, after her death, that Tannhäuser finds final redemption. The opera opens with a prelude that makes use of motifs associated with the pilgrims and with repentance,

leading to the Venusberg music and, in the Dresden version transcribed by Liszt, the return of the motif associated with the returning pilgrims. The Recitative and Romance *O du holder Abendstern* is sung by the Minnesinger Wolfram, as Elisabeth lies dying, the transcription ending with Liszt's added coda. Liszt's transcription of *The Entry of the Guests on the Wartburg* is the first of two Wagner transcriptions published in 1852. The music marks the entry of the guests to the singing contest and the Landgrave's welcome. A trumpet announces a festal march, and three following motifs accompany the solemn entry of nobles, followed by the singers. Liszt's version ends with his own development of the material.

*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (The Mastersingers of Nuremberg) was first staged in Munich in 1868. Liszt had played through the score the previous year, with Wagner, during a visit to Munich and at a time when Liszt's daughter Cosima seemed on the verge of leaving her husband, Liszt's friend Hans von Bülow, for Wagner, whom she was later to marry. The mastersingers embody the ideals of German art, expressed through the words of the cobbler-poet Hans Sachs. The young knight Walther von Stolzing falls in love with Eva, daughter of the goldsmith Pogner, and strives to gain admission to the guild by winning the hand of Eva through victory in the song contest. This he achieves through the kindness and guidance of Hans Sachs. Walther, who lacks formal training and is not bound by the traditional rules of the mastersingers, offers his first song, *Am stillen Herd in Winterszeit* (By the quiet hearth in winter time), inspired by love and telling of the example he had found in Walther von der Vogelweide. Liszt's version of the song, published in 1871, is more improvisation than transcription.

Much the same can be said of Liszt's version of the *Valhalla* music from *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, written in 1875 and published in 1876, the year of the first performance of *The Ring* at Bayreuth. This so-called transcription is based on various themes and motifs from the cycle, opening with the Leitmotif associated with the Ring itself, initially in the first of the four operas, *Das Rheingold*, leading to the motif of Valhalla, the new fortress of the

gods, first greeted by Wotan, and the motif of the sword, promised Siegmund by his father Wotan.

As a child prodigy Liszt had included works by Weber in his repertoire and during his years in Weimar he conducted performances of *Der Freischütz*. In 1840 he wrote a *Freischütz-Fantasie* and in 1846 made generally faithful transcriptions of the overtures to both *Oberon* and *Der Freischütz*. The last of these introduces a seminal work in German romantic opera, with its forest, huntsman,

the Devil and magic. The *Overture* suggests the German forest, the world of forester and huntsman, in its opening, while the main part of the sonata-form work introduces themes associated with the young hero, the forester Max, and his beloved Agathe, whom he attempts to win through the diabolical help of the ghostly Samiel, the Black Huntsman.

**Keith Anderson**



### **Steven Mayer**

Steven Mayer has performed the fiendishly difficult solos of Art Tatum, as well as music by Jelly Roll Morton, James P. Johnson and Fats Waller alongside Mozart, Schumann and Ives for classical audiences worldwide. Winner of the Grand Prix du Disque Liszt for his ASV recording of Liszt concertos with the London Symphony Orchestra, Mayer has appeared as soloist with the Leipzig Gewandhaus under Emmanuel Krivine, the Prague Symphony under Jiří Bělohlávek, the San Francisco Symphony under Herbert Blomstedt and Edo De Waart, the Rotterdam Philharmonic under James Conlon, the Boston Pops under Keith Lockhart and the Minnesota Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin. Mayer's recording of Art Tatum solos for Naxos (8.559130) won wide praise. Other recordings by Steven Mayer include Ives's '*Concord*' *Sonata* and *Celestial Railroad* (Naxos 8.559127), *The Liszt-Thalberg Duel* (ASV) and a CD of Gottschalk (Naxos 8.559130 / for future release). Steven Mayer has been Professor of Piano at the Manhattan School of Music and is Professor of Piano at the International Keyboard Institute and Festival at Mannes as well as at the University of Denver Lamont School of Music.

*Photo: Christian Steiner*

Franz  
**LISZT**  
(1811–1886)

Complete Piano Music • 33

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF WAGNER:

- |                         |   |       |
|-------------------------|---|-------|
| 1                       | Overture to <i>Tannhäuser</i> , S442/R275   | 17:28 |
| 2                       | O du mein holder Abendstern (O Star of Eve)<br>Recitative and Romance from <i>Tannhäuser</i> ,<br>S442/R275   | 8:44  |
| 3                       | Two pieces from <i>Tannhäuser</i> and <i>Lohengrin</i> ,<br>S445/R278: No. 1 Einzug der Gäste auf der<br>Wartburg (Entry of the Guests on the Wartburg) | 11:50 |
| 4                       | Am stillen Herd in Winterszeit from<br><i>Die Meistersinger</i> , S448/R281   | 10:44 |
| 5                       | Walhall (Valhalla) from <i>Der Ring des Nibelungen</i> ,<br>S449/R282   | 7:12  |
| TRANSCRIPTION OF WEBER: |   |       |
| 6                       | Overture to Weber's <i>Der Freischütz</i> , S575/R289   | 11:04 |



Steven Mayer, Piano

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Producers: Bonnie Silver & Norbert Kraft • Engineer: Norbert Kraft • Editor: Bonnie Silver  
Booklet notes: Keith Anderson • Cover painting of Franz Liszt: Chai Ben-Shan

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