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Concert: Richard Wagner & Franz Liszt: Brother Souls - Alter Egos?

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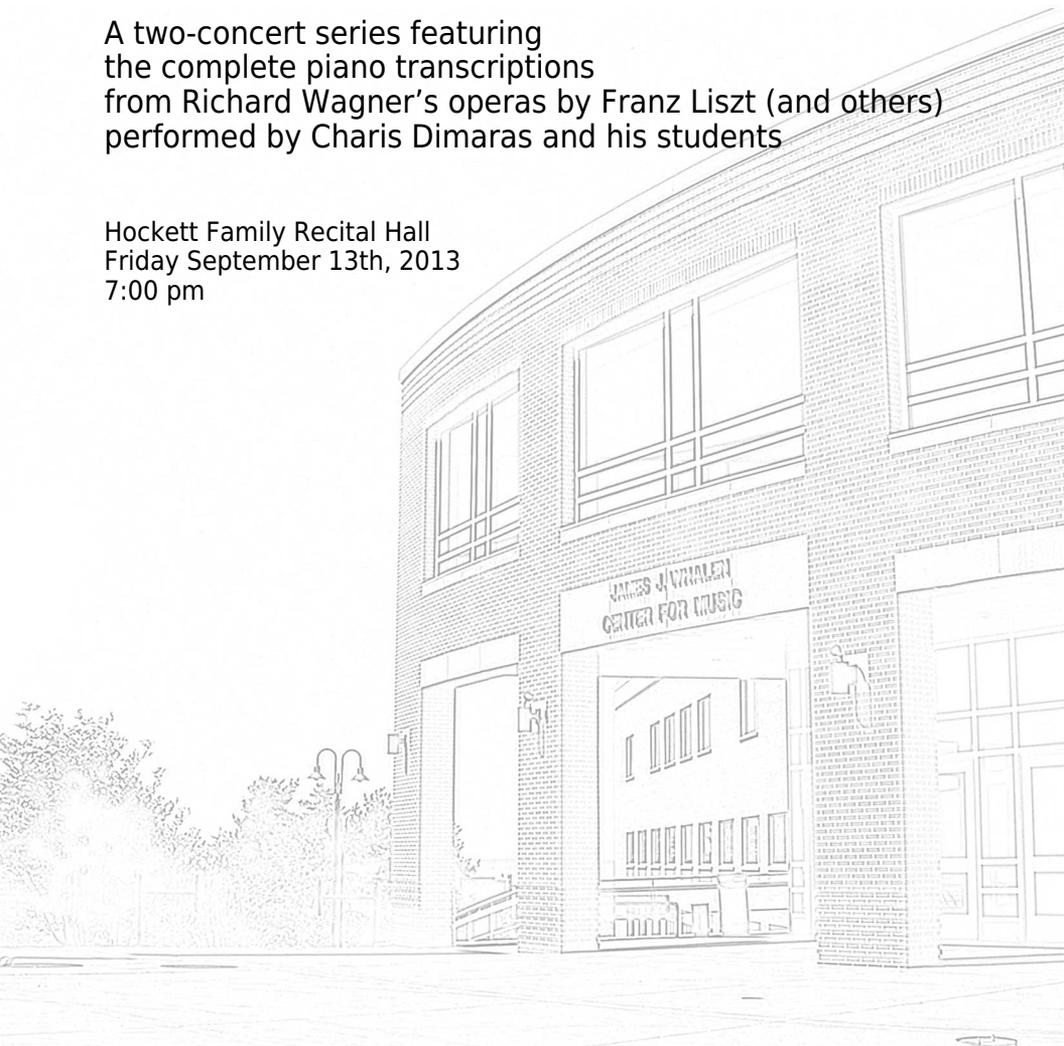
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Richard Wagner & Franz Liszt: Brother Souls – Alter Egos?

Concert II: Love, Death, Transfiguration, and various group scenes

A two-concert series featuring
the complete piano transcriptions
from Richard Wagner's operas by Franz Liszt (and others)
performed by Charis Dimaras and his students

Hockett Family Recital Hall
Friday September 13th, 2013
7:00 pm



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

Program

- Pilgrims' Chorus:
from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, S443 (1861)
Marci Rose, piano Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)
- Lohengrin's Admonition
from Wagner's *Lohengrin*, S446/3 (1854)
Alison Cherrington, piano Franz Liszt
- Festive March to the Holy Grail
from Wagner's *Parsifal*, S450 (1882)
Jiyue Ma, piano Franz Liszt
- Preludio funebre* (1885)
Richard Wagner. Venezia, S201 (1883)
Binghao Li, piano Franz Liszt
- Isoldes Liebestod*
from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, S447 (1867)
Charis Dimaras, piano Franz Liszt

Intermission

- Festival and Bridal Song
from Wagner's *Lohengrin*, S446/1 (1854)
John McQuaig, piano Franz Liszt
- Spinning Chorus
from Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, S440 (1860)
Mengfei Xu, piano Franz Liszt
- The Ride of the Valkyries
from Wagner's *Die Walküre*
Binghao Li, piano Carl Tausig
(1841-1871)

Program Notes

The Pilgrim's Chorus is originally from Wagner's opera **Tannhäuser**, which was written between 1843 and 1845. This opera focuses on the journey of the main character, Tannhäuser, from being under the power of Venus, the goddess of worldly love, to being at peace with God. During the Pilgrim's Chorus, Elisabeth, who Tannhäuser loves, is desperately searching among a group of entering pilgrims for Tannhäuser, while the pilgrims sing about finding hope and joy in God. Tannhäuser eventually returns, despondent because the pope told him that he would only be forgiven for his sins when the pope's staff sprouted leaves. Later in the opera, more pilgrims enter singing about a miracle: the pope's staff has indeed sprouted leaves, signifying forgiveness for Tannhäuser. Franz Liszt composed his transcription in 1861, basing it not so much on the Pilgrims' Chorus from Act III, but closer to a simplified version of the opening section of the Overture of Act I, which features the same melody, but differs considerably in both structure and key.

Liszt transcribed **Lohengrin's Admonition** from Lohengrin's aria "Athmest du nicht mit mir die süßen Dufte". Lohengrin sings these few sentences to Elsa in the bridal chamber on their wedding night, in response to Elsa's wish to know his identity. At this point in the opera, this has not yet been revealed. Lohengrin tries to reassure Elsa, comparing his passion to the fragrance of flowers drifting through the air from a mysterious source. He recalls how, from the moment he first saw Elsa, even though he knew nothing about her and she was an accused murderer, he felt drawn to her. These sweet words are not enough to reassure Elsa, however, and later in the scene she breaks her oath and demands to know his secret. It is then that Lohengrin's boat reappears and he is forced to return to the land of the Holy Grail.

Festive March to the Holy Grail, written in 1882, is Franz Liszt's transcription of a section from the 3-act opera *Parsifal*. Though **Parsifal** (WWV 111) was initially conceived by Richard Wagner as early as 1857, it was not produced till much later, at the second Bayreuth Festival in 1882. It is loosely based on *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach, a 13th-century epic poem of the Arthurian knight Parzival (Percival) and his quest for the Holy Grail, and on *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*, by Chrétien de Troyes' (12 c.).

Wagner died of a heart attack at the age of 69 on February 13, 1883 at Ca' Vendramin Calergi, a 16th-century palazzo on the Grand Canal of Venice/Italy. In his 1883 piece **Richard Wagner. Venezia** for piano solo, Franz Liszt evokes the passing of a black-shrouded, funerary gondola bearing Richard Wagner's remains over the Grand Canal. Another dark, nebulous piece from Liszt's late, experimental period is the one-page **Preludio funebre**, which stems from 1885 and bears no catalogue number. Indeed, due to the fact that it shares the identical augmented, chordal basis with the previous selection, it may well be related to it, perhaps an unfinished sketch or an incomplete version thereof.

Shortly after his hasty and unceremonious departure from Dresden (and his position as conductor of its Opera), due to an actual arrest warrant that was issued in his name for his alleged participation in the 1849 May Revolution, Richard Wagner arrived in Zürich/Switzerland, where he took refuge in the home of the wealthy Wesendonck family. There, through a combination of personal unrest and the study of Schopenhauer's philosophy, he increasingly became so obsessed with the legend of **Tristan und Isolde** that he abandoned his ongoing work on the Ring to devote himself completely to a new opera based on that subject. Its composition took 5 years (1854-1859) and its premiere took place at the Munich Opera on June 10, 1865. In 1867 Franz Liszt transcribed Isolde's Liebestod for the piano: The piece consists of Isolde's closing excerpt from the final Act III (her famous aria "Mild und leise" - actually called *transfiguration* by Wagner) and a short (4-bar) preface from her Act II Love Duet with Tristan.

Lohengrin is a three-act opera, which was first performed in 1850 and conducted at the premiere by Wagner's father-in-law, Franz Liszt. The opera, which is based on the medieval German poem *Wartburktrief* takes place in 10th century Antwerp, Germany. Elsa, the duke's sister is accused of murder. She requests that her innocence be judged in battle, so she prays for a champion. Her knight appears for the battle on one condition: that Elsa never asks his name. The mysterious knight wins the battle and asks her hand in marriage. She joyfully agrees, but the story continues. Elsa's opposition seeks revenge and seeks to make Elsa break her promise to her knight. The bridal chorus in this excerpt is one of the most recognizable musical themes in all of opera.

Der fliegende Holländer (1842) is a 3-act romantic opera of Wagner based of Heinrich Heine's work *Aus den Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski*: The insolent Vanderdecken, the Flying Dutchman, is condemned by the powers of darkness to strive the seas forever, unless he meets a woman willing to die to save him. Senta, the young daughter of Daland, promises to be faithful to him unto death and, upon casting herself into the sea, releases him from his curse. Liszt's arrangement of the spinning song from Act II stems from 1860. In this excerpt, the women are singing and frolicking, while spinning at their wheels. As regards the character of the arrangement, this is neither a strict transcription nor a completely free arrangement.

The Ride of the Valkyries is the popular name for the beginning of Act III of **Die Walküre**, the second of Richard Wagner's four operas that constitute *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The main theme (leitmotiv) of the Ride, was first written down by the composer on July 23, 1851. The preliminary draft for the Ride was finished in 1854 as part of the composition of the entire opera, which was fully orchestrated by the end of the first quarter of 1856. Together with the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin*, the Ride of the Valkyries is one of Wagner's best-known pieces. As the curtain rises for Act III, we are confronted by an arid mountain peak, upon which Brünnhilde and her eight Valkyrie sisters progressively gather (in preparation for the transportation of fallen heroes to Valhalla) to the accompaniment of ever-increasing layers of orchestral sonority and counterpointal complexity, eventually leading to an emotional and dynamic climax of high-unimaginable power and energy. This pianistic transcription was composed by Carl (or Karl) Tausig (1841 – 1871), a Polish virtuoso pianist, arranger and composer and one of Liszt's favorite students. Tausig met Wagner at age 16 and immediately became a devoted follower, making several piano arrangements of many of his operas. Wagner also enjoyed patronizing him despite Tausig's Jewish background.