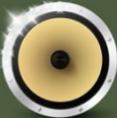


The
BitPerfect
Collection

Adagio

A small, realistic speaker icon with a black cone and a silver rim, positioned at the end of the word 'Adagio'.

Vol. 1

Adagio

Albums all have titles, don't they? *Dark Side of the Moon*, *Straight Outta Compton*, *Abbey Road*, and so forth. It is a core part of their identity. Yet classical albums typically don't. To the extent they do have titles, these are normally taken from a simple listing of the major piece(s) being played. Or maybe something to highlight the featured artist ("*Yo-yo Ma Plays Bach*", etc.). Only if the content is particularly varied will a distinct title be deemed appropriate, and even then, it will normally be a cutesy or smugly punny wordplay on the album's content – such as an album of works all associated with a specific place, which might be titled "*Ports of Call*". Have you ever seen a mainstream classical album sporting an abstract conceptual title such as, say, "*Primal Screams from the Crawlspace*"? Maybe they're out there, but if they are, they're not on Deutsche Grammophon.

Adagio is not intended to be a safely-chosen title for an album of works marked with a tempo indication of "*Adagio*". More than just being curated, Adagio represents the idea of 'composing' an album, within the constraints imposed by having to select only tracks from the Channel Classics catalogue, and having set aside not more than a day for the entire exercise.

My idea was to assemble the album in the same way that a rock or jazz musician might assemble an album of original works, with specific care being taken not only to curate the tracks which will make the final cut, but also to sequence them in such a way as to

make as much musical – or maybe just '*artistic*' – sense as possible when played through in its entirety. Only once that's done, does one sit back and contemplate the whole as a complete entity, and come up with an album name that attempts to encapsulate the overall experience – and hopefully resonates with the intended audience.

So, '*Adagio*' then. When you consider a complex piece of music, such as a symphony with its constituent movements, the tempo markings "*Allegro*", "*Sehr behaglich*", "*Molto vivace*", – and, yes, "*Adagio*" – are usually good guides to the overall character of the movement or work. But a lengthy and complex work can become rather boring without some variation in tempo, mood, or key. So a piece marked '*Adagio*' will often have passages which depart from that general indicator to provide not only colour and character, but also interest, and so help propel the piece along on its journey from opening to finale.

That's what I hope I have created here, a listening experience characterized by the mood of an Adagio, but without its constituent parts being strictly Adagios in their own right. I may have succeeded in that. Or I may not. But if you find the selection enjoyable, that's good enough for me. Either way, I'm confident that the listening experience delivered by these twelve exquisitely-recorded tracks will be a fine reward in and of itself.

– Richard Murison

1 DURUFLÉ: Requiem – In Paradisium



Channel Classics

CCS SA 22405

“All things considered, I’d rather be in Philadelphia.”

- *W. C. Fields, on what he’d like to see engraved on his tombstone*

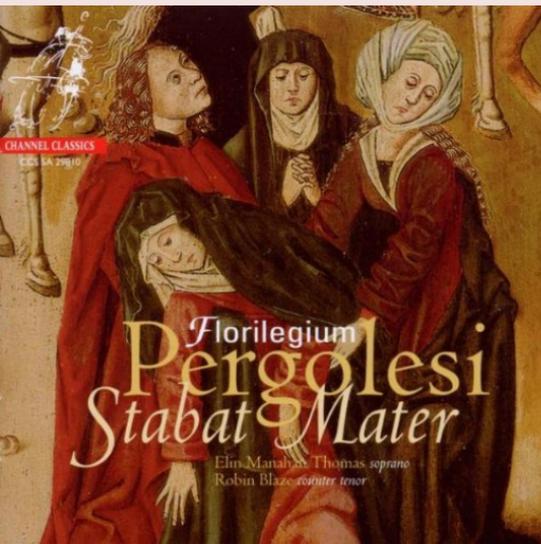
The Gents, with Erwin Wiersinga, organ
Conducted by Peter Dijkstra
Recorded at Kikrche St. Gudula, Rhede, Niedersachsen, 2004

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986) was a 20th Century French composer and organist, whose limited compositional output was constrained by an overwhelming – and probably counterproductive – perfectionism. I say counterproductive only in the sense that it surely prevented him from composing more widely, and perhaps developing a more varied style. But there can be no doubt that the finished product, after all his tinkering, is always supremely refined.

As a compositional vehicle, the musical setting of the Requiem Mass has passed seamlessly into the classical music canon alongside the symphony, the concerto, the opera, and so on. Historically, commissions for a Requiem Mass originally occurred in response to the death, or expected death, of a prominent person, and the resultant work was expected to be a profound statement piece, appropriate to the life of the honoree. They are often prominent among the *Magna Opera* of their composers. Take, as examples, Mozart, Berlioz, and Verdi.

Particularly after Verdi’s monumental work, the Requiem Mass became a standard major compositional form which a composer might wish to write as a stand-alone statement, rather than as a work commissioned for a specific occasion. Maurice Duruflé’s requiem stands as probably his most important work. He produced three versions, and the present one, for soloists, choir, organ and cello, was probably closest to his heart. The present track, *In Paradisium*, closes the work.

2 PERGOLESI: Flute Concerto – Spirituoso



Channel Classics

CCS SA 29810

"I can never make up my mind if I'm happy being a flute player, or if I wish I were Eric Clapton."

- Ian Anderson (lead singer, Jethro Tull)

Florilegium, with Ashley Solomon, flute
Recorded at St. John the Evangelist, London, 2009

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736) was one of the most important early composers of the Italian opera. An outstanding young talent, he died young of tuberculosis, aged only 26.

His reputation was built on a series of extremely popular *opera buffa*, the so-called "comic operas". These operas were characterized by salacious plot lines with characters popping on and off stage like a West End farce, and prompted a famous public quarrel between the proponents of serious and comic opera.

Pergolesi also wrote some well-regarded sacred music, of which the most important is his *Stabat Mater*. He also wrote secular and instrumental works, among them the Concerto for Flute, strings, and continuo in G major.

There is a problem, though. Due to his popularity across Europe, coupled with his early demise, less talented musicians took to offering their own work for sale under the name of Pergolesi, in the hope of selling more copies. Much of these works are of poor quality, and modern scholarship has done a good job of sorting out the real Pergolesi from the dross.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Flute Concerto is among them. It is considered 'highly doubtful' that Pergolesi himself actually wrote it. However, the name of the actual composer is not known. But, of all the works mis-attributed to Pergolesi, it is by far the most polished.

3 RAVEL: Le Tombeau de Couperin – Fugue



Channel Classics

CCS SA 31612

This movement – the Fugue – was dedicated to the memory of Second Lieutenant Jean Cruppi, a friend of Ravel who died fighting in WWI.

Paolo Giacometti, piano
Recorded at Doopsgezinde kerk, Deventer, 2010

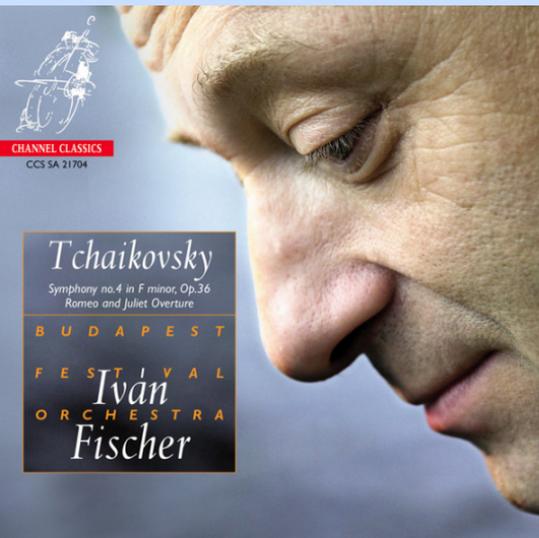
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) was a prominent French composer and pianist, known for his exception skills in orchestration. Even so, his compositions for solo piano themselves are outstanding, and many of his major orchestral works started out life as important compositions for piano. The present track is taken from one such work, a personal favourite, “*Le Tombeau de Couperin*”.

The track appears on an album such as one very rarely comes across. Pianist Paolo Giacometti plays four of Ravel’s best-known works for solo piano. He plays them twice, once on an Érard piano from the Golden Age, of a type Ravel himself used at home for composition, and then on a classic Steinway Model D, generally considered the *ne plus ultra* of modern concert pianos. “Modern” is an interesting word here, since the Steinway Concert Grand itself dates back to the 19th Century, and were used by Ravel himself in many of his recitals.

It is interesting in this album to hear the same pianist play the same pieces on two strikingly different piano designs – on both of which the composer himself is likely to have both composed and played the very same works – and to hear the distinct sonorities captured with such breathtaking clarity.

So which of these pianos is the present recording played on? I’m inclined to leave you to discover that for yourselves 😊. But no, it’s the Érard.

4 TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphony No 4 – Andantino



Channel Classics

CCS SA 21704

"I'm not interested in having an orchestra sound like itself. I want it to sound like the composer."

- Leonard Bernstein

Budapest Festival Orchestra
Conducted by Iván Fischer
Recorded at Instituto Italiano di Cultura, Budapest, 2004

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) was a tragic Russian composer who endured a well-known sad struggle for much of his life against both personal and professional demons. Today, his music is unashamedly adored by the general public, while at the same time 'politely tolerated' by much of the musical establishment.

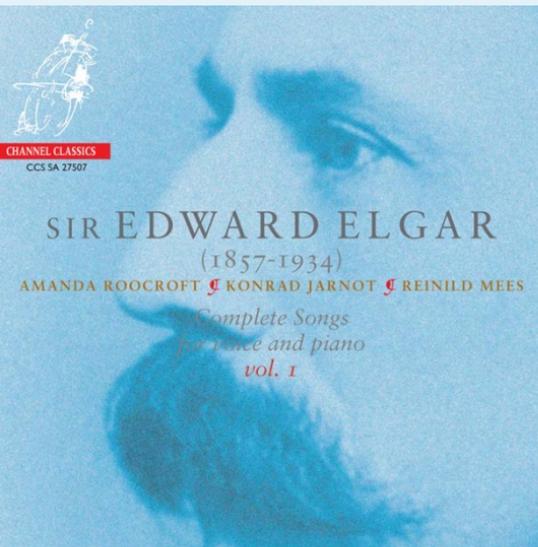
There almost seems to be a requirement in academic and professional circles that serious music should not be a cheap date, and must give up its mysteries reluctantly, and only after a period of devoted pursuit. But Tchaikovsky's greatest compositions deliver an immediately accessible, and deeply satisfying melodious payload that is hard not to love. Even to love deeply. It is wonderful, soul-restoring music.

Melody vs Structure. Can the two co-exist in a symphony? In the late 19th Century, many would have argued that it should not. For the troubled Tchaikovsky, what poured forth from his creative soul was melody, and what his music teachers hammered away at was structure, structure, and more structure. But finally, in his late 30's, he found a way with his 4th symphony to express his melodic ideas in symphonic form. And the result is the first of three powerhouse symphonies, the 4th, 5th, and 6th, which continue to pack concert houses around the world to this day.

The present track is the lighter second movement – the Andantino – which finds a comfortable place in the present collection, which the other three movements might threaten to overpower.

5

ELGAR: Sea Pictures – Where Corals Lie



Channel Classics

CCS SA 27507

*By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,
When night is deep, and moon is high,
That music seeks and finds me still,
And tells me where the corals lie.*

Konrad Jarnot, baritone. Reinild Mees, piano
Recorded at Muziekgebouw Fritz Philips, Eindhoven, 2007

Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934) was a popular English composer, best known for his patriotic Pomp and Circumstance marches and his Enigma Variations. He remains highly regarded in his native England, while being somewhat confined to the margins elsewhere. Much of his music is considered to be archetypical of the “English” style, which is odd considering that, in stark contrast to his compatriot Ralph Vaughan Williams, his musical influences were decidedly continental in nature.

Interestingly, Elgar was probably the very first composer to take seriously the value of recording music, not only for posterity, but also for reference. As early as 1914 he was recording performances of his compositions onto shellac discs using a stylus attached to a large horn, and he continued in this manner until 1925. Luckily, he kept copies of each of these recordings in his personal possessions. They were kept in good order, and digital copies are now available. Sound quality is not as dreadful as you might imagine! But for today’s 2007 recording, we are fortunate to have access to a real DSD studio master.

“*Where Corals Lie*” is the fourth of a set of six songs from 1899 called *Sea Pictures*, each set to the work of a different poet, and is probably the best-regarded of the cycle. It is normally sung by a soprano or mezzo-soprano, but in the present recording we hear baritone Konrad Jarnot in very fine form making a strong case indeed for the male voice in this cycle. Simply terrific singing.

6 BACH: The Art of Fugue – Contrapunctus 9



Channel Classics

CCS SA 20204

“Cet Art où la fugue devient poème me bouleverse.”
– Artalinna

“(This Art, where the fugue becomes a poem, overwhelms me.)”

New Century Saxophone Quartet
Recorded at Doopsgezinde kerk, Haarlem, 2003

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was by common consent the greatest composer of the Baroque period, and in some people’s minds perhaps the greatest of all time. Not only did he write great music, he also came to define and organize what it was that made music great, in a way that paved the road ahead for Haydn, Mozart, and all who followed.

Die Kunst Der Fugue (*The Art Of Fugue*) is one of Bach’s late, unfinished, works. It comprises a collection of phenomenally complex studies in extreme counterpoint, and exhibits an almost hypnotically mathematical precision. It is not scored for any specific instruments, which has led more than one expert to conclude that it was never intended as a performance piece, but rather as a theoretical study. Even so, it seems odd, at first, to be playing it on saxophones, an instrument not invented until 100 years after his death, and associated more with modern than classical music forms.

But the saxophone family has some intriguing properties that render it most suitable. All saxophones, from subcontrabass to soprano, have a common and virtually seamlessly continuous tonality. Only a piano among comparable instruments and instrument families can make that claim. Furthermore, the saxophone has an alluring combination of a warmth and depth of tone. The present track – a rendition of *Contrapunctus 9* – makes for compelling and immersive listening.

7

RACHMANINOFF: Var. 18 on a Theme of Paganini



Channel Classics

CCS SA 42620

"Music is enough for a lifetime, but a lifetime is not enough for music."

- *Sergei Rachmaninoff*

Sinfonieorchester St. Gallen, Anna Fedorova, piano
conducted by Modestas Pitrenas
Recorded at Tonhalle St. Gallen, Sankt Gallen, 2019

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was a Russian pianist and composer very much in the vein of Tchaikovsky, with a supreme talent for beauty in melody and orchestral colour. Oddly enough, his career arc followed the opposite trajectory from your typical composer/performer. Rather than taking up composition later in life, most of his better-known works were written in his younger days. He moved to the USA in 1918 to pursue a career as a pianist and conductor, and due to his busy schedule completed only six more major compositions thereafter.

As a pianist, Rachmaninoff was a real prodigy. He was particularly known for the size of his hands, with either hand capable of spanning a full thirteenth – from C to G' – which is approximately 12 inches (Franz Liszt was also said to be able to achieve this feat). And as befits a pianist of his stature, his compositions for piano are among the most challenging in the repertoire.

One of his later works was his *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, a set of 24 variations for piano and orchestra. Is it a piano concerto, or, as formally stated, a concertante? It comprises one single movement, although it can easily be broken into three separate sections, each of which functions perfectly as movements of a concerto.

The present track, *Variation 18*, closes out the 2nd section. It is by far the best-known passage of the entire work, and its epically gorgeous melody has been heard in countless romantic movies. Just try to play this without smiling

8

PERGOLESÌ: Mentre l'Erbetta Pasce l'Agnella



Channel Classics

CCS SA 38717

"I wish I could score everything for horns"

- Richard Wagner

Brass United

Recorded at Muziekcentrum van de Omroep, Hilversum, 2016

When I was a teenager I really wanted to be a composer. I studied music, and found I was pretty good at the theory part. But I couldn't play an instrument to save my life. I tried several piano, double bass, trombone, percussion, and so on. I would get only so good at each of them but couldn't seem to progress any further.

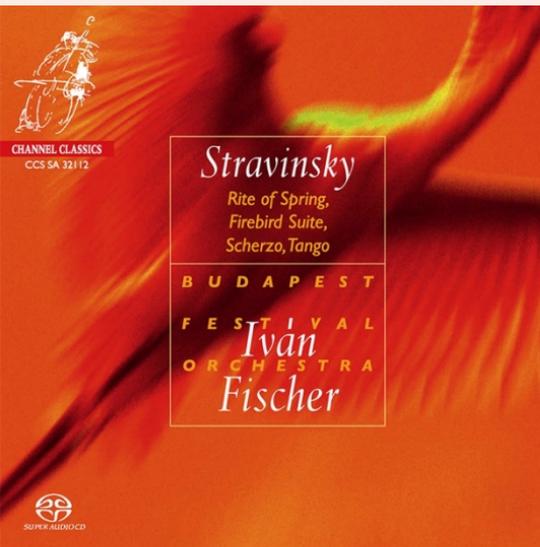
Oddly enough, the only one I ever managed to reach some level of competence on was an ancient and thoroughly beaten-up baritone horn. I rather enjoyed playing that. But the problem was, if you played the baritone horn there was not a great deal you could do with it, other than join a Brass Band.

In England (and elsewhere, I imagine), Brass Bands were geared towards competition, and it was all deadly serious. Like football. If you joined a Brass Band it often had a top band, a second band, a third band, and so forth. Everything was geared towards funneling the best players up to the top band so it could go out and win competitions. A consequence of all this was that music they played was ... well, shall we say playing it didn't much appeal to me. So I gave up on that baritone horn too, much to my present day regret.

But Brass Band music at its finest can be exhilarating. Even when, such with the present track, they are just trying to make music, and not win a competition. It is a delightful arrangement of an 18th Century aria from one the operas of our old friend Giovanni Battista Pergolesi.

9

STRAVINSKY: The Firebird Suite – Berceuse



Channel Classics

CCS SA 32112

*"Bring me the Firebird, or I swear by my sword,
your head will no longer sit upon your shoulders!"*

- Demi

Budapest Festival Orchestra
Conducted by Iván Fischer
Recorded at the Palace of Arts, Budapest, 2010

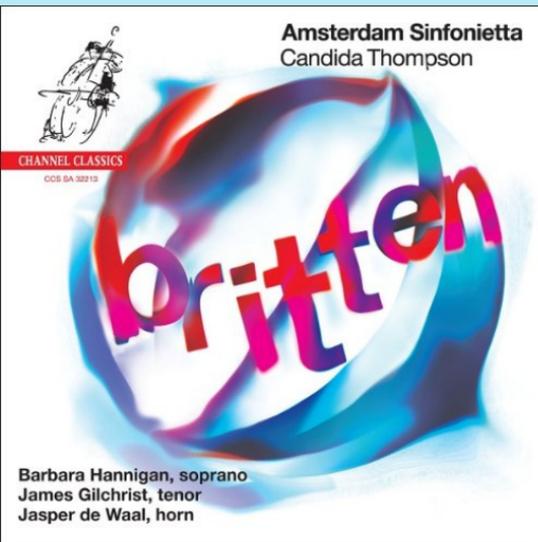
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) was a Russian composer who had probably the single most profound influence on the direction of 20th Century classical music. He sprang right to the forefront of the musical stratosphere with three extraordinary ballets, commissioned by, and written for Serge Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes. These were *The Firebird* in 1910, *Petrouchka* in 1911, and *The Rite of Spring* in 1913. Although they are seen together as the "the three ballets", it was the third, the 'Rite', that set off the powder keg all by itself.

The extraordinary 'Rite', with the notably famous – or infamous – riot that its Parisian première sparked, almost single-handedly set the course for classical music for nearly 100 years. But this is not about the 'Rite', which can wait for another day.

The first of these ballets, *The Firebird*, is not as remotely provocative musically as its youngest sibling. It is, in its rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic development, far more in keeping with what would have been the conventional expectations of audiences and critics at the time it was launched. The present track, the 'Berceuse', is a slow, tremulous and suspenseful intermezzo, whose purpose is to lull the unsuspecting listener into a false sense of peace and tranquility, prior to what will be an explosive launch of the full-on fireworks of its famous finale. You can view it as encapsulating the dying breath of a Romantic era, unknowing of what a young Russian composer is about to launch upon it.

10 BRITTEN: Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge

– Fugue & Finale



Channel Classics

CCS SA 32213

"It is cruel, you know, that music should be so beautiful. It has the beauty of loneliness; of pain; of strength and freedom; of disappointment and never-satisfied love; of nature; and of monotony."

- Benjamin Britten

Florilegium

Leader, Candida Thompson

Recorded at De Stadsgehoorzaal, Leiden, 2012

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) was the English composer who has probably enjoys the greatest international reputation of all. Much of that reputation was founded on his remarkable operas, which were heralded as refreshing and original. But, for a listener new to the music of Britten, it surely comes as somewhat of a shock to compare the style of his operatic music with that of much of the remainder of his output.

Britten's operas are highly modernistic, verging on the avant-garde, whereas much of his other music tacks more towards the mainstream. Compare any excerpt from the opera '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*' to any excerpt from his hugely popular '*A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*'. It may be hard to believe the same composer wrote them. Even his monumental *War Requiem*, which one might expect to veer more toward the operatic style, firmly avoids the avant-garde temptation.

One of the most profound influences on Britten's musical development was his teacher, Frank Bridge. Bridge was quite a prolific composer, spanning the Late Romantic and Early Modern eras. The present track comes from a work which Britten based on a theme Bridge composed in 1906, and pays its stylistic dues to that period. It is a sparse composition for string orchestra, and amply rewards fine technique in recording and playback ... and the Amsterdam Sinfonietta's rendition on this track does not disappoint at all!

11

JACOB TV: I Was Like WOW!



Channel Classics

CCS SA 26909

"I said a lot of things that were meant to be my last words.

It turned out they weren't.

But I'm glad I said them anyway."

Jörgen van Rijen, trombone

Sam Ross & Tyson Johnson, spoken vocals

Recorded at Doopsgezinde kerk, Deventer, 2008

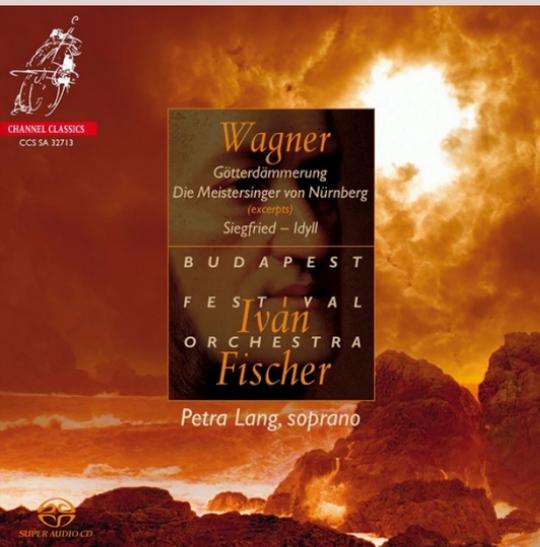
Jacob Ter Veldhuis (b.1951) who goes by the name Jacob TV, is a contemporary Dutch composer. And as a composer, it is quite difficult to categorize him with a simple descriptor, to put him in a box if you like. In his youth he was a rock musician, and much of his work has involved the integration of his many and wide-ranging musical influences. Naturally, because of this extreme eclecticism, he has remained somewhat of an outsider from the perspectives of just about all of the musical spheres his works move in. But even so, he has had, and continues to have, a rather successful career. He is probably among the most-performed contemporary composers in the world that you have never heard of!

The present track's title is "I was like WOW!" ... and that could equally stand for my reaction to it, not only when I first heard it, but also each time I come back and play it again. If JTV's work in general defies categorization, then this one captures that dilemma in its own nutshell. It is built around recorded interviews with a couple of American GIs who served in the Iraq war, accompanied, most improbably, by a trombone and some shouted vocalizations. No description I might proffer here could possibly be adequate.

When I sat down to curate this album of selections from the Channel Classics catalog, this was my starting point. Was it possible to build a selection of tracks around it that would meaningfully frame it in a musical context context? Well, was it?

12

WAGNER: Siegfried's Funeral March



Channel Classics

CCS SA 32713

"I can see Richard Wagner standing at the gates of Heaven.

"You have to let me in," he says, "I wrote Parsifal!"

- Philip K. Dick

Budapest Festival Orchestra

Conducted by Iván Fischer

Recorded at the Palace of Arts, Budapest, 2012

Richard Wagner (1818-1883) was known primarily for his large-scale operas, most notably among them his famous Ring Cycle. He was the foremost composer of his day, and his musical talents were matched only by his arrogance, his relentless self-promotion, and his dislike for any other composer who might have the temerity to attain a measure of regard in the public sphere. When Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn became popular, he adopted the anti-Semitism of the upper classes to which he aspired (and in which he successfully moved), in order to put them down. He particularly disliked Brahms, and put about an amusing rumour to the effect that Brahms liked to trap cats using a special sparrow-hunting crossbow. According to Wagner, he would shoot them with his bow, reel them in like a fisherman, and then transcribe the sounds of their dying squeals to use in his compositions. Furthermore, he suggested that the crossbow had been given to him specially for the purpose by Dvorak. Two birds with one stone!

The fact remains, though, that Wagner was a masterful composer whose influence on the musical landscape of the second half of the 19th Century cannot be overstated.

Unlike most classical opera, very few passages from Wagner's operas are routinely performed as concert pieces in their own right. But this splendid track, Siegfried's Funeral March, from Act III of *Götterdämmerung*, is definitely one of them.

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Florilegium. Flute: Ashley Solomon
- 3 RAVEL:** Le Tombeau de Couperin – Fugue
Érard piano: Paolo Giacometti
- 4 TCHAIKOVSKY:** Symphony No 4 – Andantino
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- 5 ELGAR:** Sea Pictures – Where Corals Lie
Baritone: Konrad Jarnot, Piano: Reinild Mees
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- 7 RACHMANINOFF:** Var. 18 on a Theme of Paganini
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