

# WAGNER'S NIGHTMARE



## COMMEMORATIVE BOOKLET: PROGRAM NOTES AND ESSAYS

**Daniel Orsen** is a violist in the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, prior to which he freelanced in Boston where he performed with A Far Cry, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Fermata Chamber Soloists, and the Phoenix Chamber Orchestra, and was the artistic director of Jamaica Plain Chamber Music. Daniel has performed Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and appeared as soloist with the Fermata Chamber Soloists and Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble. His festival credits include Krzyzowa, Ravinia, Prussia Cove, Verbier, and the Perlman Music Program. Daniel has an interest in cultural and intellectual history, which is manifesting itself here, in *Wagner's Nightmare*. His writing has also been published in *The Anglican Way* and *The Journal of the American Viola Society*.

**Pierre-Nicolas Colombat** is a French-American pianist with regular engagements in festivals, concert series, and competitions in both Europe and the United States. He has been recognized by audiences and international juries alike for his collaborative artistry. After publishing his doctoral dissertation (*Music and Modern Power: A Performer's Tracing of Virtuosity and Systems of Musical Value*, Boston University), he moved to Basel, Switzerland to continue his studies in *Lied* with Jan Schultz. Through his work as a concert organizer, writer, critic, and performer Colombat actively seeks out creative ways to bring the living heritage of classical music into the 21st century. His main duo partners include Daniel Orsen (violinist), Kathrin Hottiger (soprano), and Vinicius Costa (bass-baritone).

**Wagner's Nightmare** is a tongue-in-cheek send-up to the most controversial and influential artist of all time, Richard Wagner. Its culmination is here, in an album of music Wagner would not like.



## ALBUM PROGRAM

1. Hermann Ritter (1849-1926) - <i>Concert-Phantasie</i> No. 1 for Viola Alta and Piano, Op. 35 (1886), arr. Orsen	-----	8:21
2. Franz Liszt (1811-1886) - <i>Romance Oubliée</i> for Viola Alta and Piano, S. 527 (1881)	-----	4:59
3. Richard Wagner - <i>Lied an den Abendstern</i> , WWV 70 (arr. Ritter, 1842)*	-----	4:52
4. Richard Wagner - <i>Preislied from Der Meistersinger</i> , WWV 96 (arr. Seybold/Orsen/Colombat)	-----	4:33
5-6. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)		
5. <i>Aus der Jugendzeit</i> (1862)	-----	2:58
6. <i>Es Winkt und Neigt Sich</i> (1864)	-----	1:49
7. Erik Satie (1866-1925) - <i>Sports et Divertissement</i> (arr. Orsen/Colombat) <i>La Balançoire - Le Water-chute - Le Bain de Mer - La Comédie Italienne</i>	-----	3:59
8-10. Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) - <i>Viola Sonata in C minor</i> , MWV Q14 (1824)		
8. <i>Allegro</i>	-----	7:38
9. <i>Scherzo</i>	-----	7:59
10. <i>Thema mit Variationen</i>	-----	15:29
11. Richard Wagner (1813-1883) - <i>Träume</i> from <i>Wesendonck Lieder</i> WWV 91, (1858), arr. Primrose	-----	4:44

### BONUS TRACKS

12. Franz Liszt (1811-1886) - <i>Romance Oubliée</i> for Viola Alta and Piano, S. 527 (1881)*	-----	5:10
13. Richard Wagner - <i>Lied an den Abendstern</i> , WWV 70 (arr. Ritter, 1876)*	-----	4:53

\* Recorded on a Viola Alta, maker unknown

Total Run Time: 77:24

Audio Engineer, Peter Atkinson  
 Branding and Graphic Design, Beck and Stone  
 Recorded at the Shalin Liu Performance Center, Rockport, MA, August 29-31, 2022

**Special thanks to Philip Rush and Carriage House Violins** for granting us use of an 18-inch German Ritter School Viola (Viola Alta), late 19th c. - the type of viola Wagner specified for the Bayreuther Festspiel Orchestra.

**Special thanks to Beck and Stone** for their generous grant, which transformed the scope and quality of *Wagner's Nightmare*. We can not thank them enough.

## WAGNER'S NIGHTMARE

Why Wagner? Why a Nightmare? Is it an album? A book? A podcast? A concert tour? An overly elaborate Instagram account? A *Gesamtmediaprojekt*? At the outset, Wagner's Nightmare was born out of two basic ideas.

First, we feel that classical music is a living history and that the current model for recording usually suffocates the richness of this cultural and historical complexity. In the worst scenarios, it reduces the music to disembodied digital tracks that we mostly listen to alone, separate from any group or audience setting. The music we play is the glistening and beautiful tip of an iceberg that goes much deeper than the isolated act of performing or recording music, and we wanted this recording to reflect that.

Second, after the release of our first recording project together we reflected on the business side of releasing a classical music recording. Newsflash - it's not good. We decided that if we were going to take a second stab at it, we would experiment with practically every parameter of making an album. To that end, we tried different models for audience/customer interaction with our work, released supporting materials like essays and a podcast, organized concerts in diverse settings, and released our recordings through many different media in an effort to explore alternatives to the bleak reality of streaming currently facing musicians. Oh, and one last idea: we want to have fun.

So with all of that in mind, we created Wagner's Nightmare: a cheeky, irreverent, tongue-in-cheek send-up to the most controversial and influential artist of all time, Richard Wagner.

Let us take a look around us, here, today in 2023. Incendiary opinions, vitriolic identity politics, and polarizing depictions of national identity are, for better or worse, some of the most prevalent themes in today's social and political discourse. Spurred on by the flashy matchstick nature of social media and a news cycle that operates at light speed, the most compelling issues of today are reduced to memes, catch phrases, and slogans that paint things in black and white, right and wrong, evidently plain or wildly deluded. The day-to-day reality of our world however is much more fluid and complex than how it is often represented. Driving this frenzy are larger than life public figures in the cultural and political forum that despite, or perhaps because of

their evidently outsized personas, have equally outsized impacts on our world. Whether we are enthralled or exasperated by these individuals and the mania that follows in their wake, we cannot escape it. In this emaciated public landscape, depleted of empathy and nuance, artists are in a unique position to comment both as insiders and observers to this arena.

As an outsized polarizing figure, Richard Wagner appears as an excellent case study to explore the multi-faceted enthralling absurdity that enrobes the individuals that are at the poles of collective consciousness. If today's issues are still burning too hot from the open flame of contemporary discourse, discussions of Wagnerian issues have cooled down just enough that, while still being molten, they can be dissected with a bit more patience and perspective, all while maintaining their evident contemporary import.

Our weapons of choice to address these issues are music and humor; as was alluded to earlier, we also want to have fun. By incessantly beating on the drums of the destiny of humanity and ethics of aesthetics, Wagnerism tends to be burdened by an unavoidable heaviness. So to counterbalance it, we choose the hat of the jester. Through approaching Wagner with equal amounts of praise and pot-shots, respect and ridicule, sincerity and satire, we want to offer a chance to reflect on how we, as a collective body of individual lovers of art, regard today's polarizing, overwrought, and absurd social climate. With that, to the music ...

-PNC



Daniel and Pierre-Nicolas on tour, Baltimore, MD, August 2022



## PROGRAM NOTES

**Hermann Ritter** was a rather remarkable violist, composer, and musicologist. Ritter started out as a violinist, switched his focus to the viola and the nascent field of musicology, and made it his mission to raise the standard of viola performance and make the instrument “tonally equal” to the violin and cello (the problem being that if the viola had the acoustically appropriate proportions for its range it would be too small to play like a cello and too big to play like a violin). Ritter’s solution was simply to make bigger violas and find bigger violists to play them.

As the story goes, in February 1876, half a year before the premier of the *Ring cycle*, Ritter presented his Viola Alta to Wagner, performing “Lied an den Abendstern,” an aria (Wagner did write such things in his youth) from *Tannhäuser*. Wagner was impressed, exclaiming, “*Das richtige alt instrument!*” Ritter was immediately hired as the first Solo Violist of the Bayreuth Festspielorchester and the hands of the viola section were filled with Viola Altas. It is fitting that the premiere of the *Ring*, which benefited from a bigger opera house, a bigger orchestra, a Wagner tuba, a Wagner bell, a *Stierhorn* (an actual steer horn), anvils, a bass trumpet, a contrabass trombone, and six harps, also had bigger violas. And it is furthermore fitting that the human carnage Wagner left in his wake should include dozens of violists who had to play his five-hour long operas on eighteen-to-nineteen-inch Viola Altas.

A surprisingly large and largely unknown body of solo music was written or transcribed for the Viola Alta, with Ritter and his twenty-one original compositions and fifty-nine transcriptions for the Viola Alta (as well as thirty musicological prose publications) leading the way. Ritter’s music is schlocky, delightful, and good enough often enough to make it worth exploring. Curiously, like the music of many of Wagner’s disciples, it doesn’t sound very much like Wagner - more like the sort of 19th-century Grand opera style that Wagner vehemently reacted against.

All of these characteristics hold true for **Ritter’s Concert-Phantasie No. 1, Opus 35 (1886)**, written expressly for the Viola Alta, although recorded by us with the regular viola for health reasons. Here we present Ritter’s *Concert-Phantasie* in an abridged version. In full it is in three movements and comes close to twenty minutes, which is ponderously long for the material and its repetitive nature. In our abridged version we combined

the first movement with the coda of the 3rd movement to create a compact sonata-rondo-like structure that works well as a recital crowd-pleaser.

Something must be said here about the recording process and Take 100. We recorded two run-throughs of the Ritter at the end of the second day of recording, which was the nadir of our energy and morale. Our strategy was to get those run-throughs down, listen back for spots that weren’t sufficiently covered between those two takes, and do a sweep through the next day. Take 100 was the second of those takes. The first few minutes sounded like we were at the nadir of our energy and morale - and then I went berserk. What followed was chaotic, exciting, and rough. Listening back we were taken by the spontaneity and energy of Take 100. Although it does not have the cleanliness and accuracy one normally expects on a recording, it just sounds better and is more in the spirit of the piece. We hope you enjoy what we have dubbed “Ritter 100 PROOF,” and feel transported along with us to that dispirited, dreary late afternoon when inspiration unexpectedly struck. -DO

**Liszt’s Romance Oubliée (1881)** has a unique origin story. In 1844 Liszt composed a brief but lovely melody which he first used in the *mélodie*, “O, pourquoi donc” S. 619, and then reworked it into a solo piano piece in 1848. It is unclear if either the song or solo piano version was published during Liszt’s lifetime. Probably not, because in 1880 the music dealer Simon of Hanover sent Liszt an album leaf with the melody, written in Liszt’s own hand, with a request to publish it. Liszt was confused and pleasantly surprised, having no memory of the tune whatsoever! Hence, when he worked it into a piece for Viola Alta and piano, it was titled *Romance Oubliée*, or “Forgotten Romance.”

The *Romance Oubliée* is very different from the original “O, pourquoi donc.” The latter follows a typical ABABA structure, with the melody set against a steady accompaniment obligato. The former is esoteric and even austere, inhabiting a realm of harmonic and rhythmic flotsam and jetsam. Its form is truly unique to itself, and only fully makes sense in the context of the other progressive musical bad boys of the mid-19th century, Wagner and Berlioz.

In the *Romance Oubliée*, Liszt’s melody circa 1844 is stated fully just once. It is preceded by an introduction for solo Viola Alta that is a nod to Wagner; the crescendoing ascending half-steps make unmistakable

allusion to the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*. The introduction conjures the whole atmosphere of *Tristan*; its anxiety, languor, and timelessness. From this emerges Liszt's gently lilting but melancholy melody in E minor, with holes and gaps in the accompaniment rather than the obligato figurations of 1844. There is no contrasting B-section, only a fantastical and rhapsodic delaying of the cadence which covers a kaleidoscope of harmonies and implied harmonies before finally releasing on an E major cadence. This marks the beginning of the coda in which the viola plays *bariolage*, that is, the rapid crossing of strings, up and down, to arpeggiate a chord. Here, it is not all that rapid as this is a reference to the *bariolage* passage at the end of the second movement of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*, which depicts "The March of the Pilgrims Singing Their Evening Prayer." Liszt had arranged *Harold in Italy* for viola and piano in 1836, and it is worth noting that *Harold* was commissioned by one of Liszt's chief inspirations and heroes, Niccolò Paganini.

Given this context and with an eye for the programmatic - and one should always approach Liszt with an eye for the programmatic - we have a brief 19th-century *Divine Comedy* of sorts: beginning with the erotic, sensual, Schopenhauerian love-death of *Tristan und Isolde*, traversing through the more worldly and mundane romanticism (little "r") of Liszt's 1844 tune, before ascending to the chaste, pious ecstasy of the religious. This progression also mirrors Liszt's own life journey from licentious youth to Catholic *abbé*. This interpretation may strike some as an overeager reading of the tea leaves, but without this context and a programmatic perspective the *Romance Oubliée* is nearly indecipherable in form and opaque in meaning. -DO

We are pleased to present "**Lied an den Abendstern**" (1845), the first music **Richard Wagner** heard on the newly created Viola Alta. We would have liked to reconstruct Ritter's arrangement of this aria from *Tannhäuser*, but there is no record of it whatsoever; we do not know if he transposed it from its original key of G major, tinkered with the piano reduction, added double stops, octave transpositions, or any of the other tricks of 19th-century arrangements.

We are doubly pleased to present "Lied an den Abendstern" twice - once on my "regular" 16 3/8 inch Philip Injeian viola (Limited Digital Album release only, due to CD space limitations), and once on an actual eighteen-inch Viola Alta, hopefully recreating the sound

Wagner was so enthusiastic about. We are immensely grateful to Carriage House Violins in Newton, MA for loaning us this Viola Alta, a fine instrument built by an anonymous maker in the 19th century, which has been a part of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Thankfully, it was never cut down to a "more playable" size, a fate that has befallen many Viola Altas. Construction of Viola Altas (or Ritter Model Violas, as they have come to be called) fizzled out in the 20th century because they are simply too big for all but the lankiest of men to handle.

A final note about "Lied an den Abendstern": we wish that Johnny Cash had recorded it, and once you've heard it we are sure you will agree. -DO

**Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (1862)** is a unique work in many ways and stands as one of the great monuments in Wagner's output. Indeed, from an aesthetic, social, and political perspective, it is a work which takes the whole narrative of German-ness as its subject. It is the only one of his operas that is not based on a pre-existing story or myth and is perhaps the most explicit musical exponent of some of his polemics and still today, the question lingers as to how explicitly the character of Sixtus Beckmesser is meant to be an anti-semitic caricature.

One of the most remarkable feats of this opera is how seamlessly Wagner is able to blend the political and aesthetic messages of the work. It is up to each individual listener what the ethical and moral outcome of this equation is, but the enduringly problematic nature of this work is a testament to how inseparable these two elements are in Wagner's composition. Throughout the plot of the opera, two threads run in parallel: the composition of Walther's song along the lines of a new and previously unheard aesthetic vision and the wider societal progress and betterment of the grand tradition that preceded this aesthetic. Nationalism bleeds and drips through the fabric of this work like few others in Wagner's output.

Walther's "**Preislied**" is at once a supreme example of Wagner's melodic and compositional gifts. We both adore this from an expressive and musical perspective, but also feel disenchanted or even repulsed by some of the directions that other listeners have taken the messages inherent in this work. For that reason, it is the perfect example of what is involved in dealing with Wagner reception. -PNC

**Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)** was, in his own words, “one of the most corrupt Wagnerians.” He was one of Wagner’s most adoring worshippers and his supreme propagandist. His first publication, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), was an uninhibited panegyric anointing Wagner as the savior of tragedy, art, and civilization. Then everything changed: by the mid-1870’s, as the Bayreuth Festival and the premier of the *Ring* cycle were coming together, Nietzsche vehemently turned against Wagner. His later prose work is full of veiled attacks culminating in *The Case of Wagner* (1888), an absolutely unhinged polemic full of barbed aphorism after aphorism; it is Nietzsche at his best and an absolute gas to read. There should be no mistake about it, Wagner was the single most influential person on Nietzsche and the development of his philosophy. Philosopher Bryan Macgee observed that “it is perfectly possible to write about Wagner without mentioning Nietzsche, but impossible to write about Nietzsche without mentioning Wagner.”

Nietzsche not only wrote about aesthetics, he was also a good pianist and amateur composer, writing mostly short piano pieces, choral works, and songs. Nietzsche’s compositions are typical German Romantic fare, fairly conservative and closer to Schumann than to Wagner. They are more representative of the prevailing style than a distinct and arresting compositional voice. That being said, Nietzsche composed with sufficient technique and heartfelt sincerity, and these two qualities are all one really needs to hit on a few modest pieces.

We chose two such pieces for our album: “Aus der Jugendzeit” and “Es winkt und neigt sich.” Nietzsche set “Aus der Jungenzeit,” a poem by Friedrich Rückert, in 1862 when he was 18 years old. The second *Lied*, “Es winkt und neigt sich,” is from 1864 and the author of the text is unknown. It is possible that Nietzsche wrote the text himself, although it has also been suggested that it is a translation of a Hungarian poem. -DO

If our objective is to provoke the ghost of Richard Wagner with music that he wouldn’t like, there are few 19th-century composers whose music is better

#### *La Balançoire*

*C'est mon cœur qui se balance ainsi. Il n'a pas le vertige. Comme il a de petits pieds. Voudra-t-il revenir dans ma poitrine?*

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#### *Le Water-chute*

*Si vous avez le cœur solide, vous ne serez pas trop malade. Il vous semblera que vous tombez d'un échafaudage. Vous verrez comme c'est curieux. Attention ! ne changez pas de couleur. Je me sens mal à l'aise. Cela prouve que vous auriez besoin de vous amuser.*

suitable to this end than that of **Eric Alfred Leslie Satie (1866-1925)**, or, since quirky down-sizing was one of his hallmarks: Erik Satie. Satie was a teenager by the time *Das Ring des Nibelungen* premiered in Bayreuth, and Paris was already in the throes of Wagner-hysteria with composers like Henri DuParc and Vincent d'Indy imitating the grandiose aesthetic of the German. D'Indy incidentally went on to found the Schola Cantorum, which he differentiated from the Paris Conservatory by putting greater emphasis on Baroque and Renaissance traditions. Satie enrolled at the Schola Cantorum in 1905 at the prodigious age of 39, but was more dedicated to rebelling against d'Indy’s traditionalist agenda and the Wagnerian aesthetic than to getting good grades. The chorale prelude to *Sports et Divertissements (1914)* shows that even in the later stages of his career, Satie had not yet exhausted the catharsis of breaking from the strictures of his alma mater (“I have put into [this chorale] everything I know about Boredom. I dedicate this Chorale to those who do not like me”).

Given their length, their flavor, and their sometimes gentle, sometimes flagrant irreverence, little time needs to be spent elaborating on the anti-Wagnerian aesthetic that drips off of *Sports et Divertissements*. The one whiff of 19th-century heritage present in this collection is that, along with the accompanying texts and the beautiful illustrations of Charles Martin, Satie intended the work to be equally appreciable from literary, visual, and auditory perspectives - dare we say it, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*? Nonetheless, the work has a debonaire attitude: the quirky music is accompanied by illustrations which depict the Parisian upper class sporting the latest fashion and enjoying recreational activities. The fact that the impetus for *Sports et Divertissements* came from the editor of a fashion magazine gives it an explicitly commercial bent that shows a distinctly non-Wagnerian version of what “modernism” can mean. Though it might be against the wishes of some Satie purists, we included recitations of his in-score texts before each miniature. Below are their translations (trans. Pierre-Nicolas Colombat). -PNC

#### The Swing

It is my heart that is swinging this way. It is not dizzy. My, what small feet it has. Would it like, one day to return into my breast?

#### The Waterslide

If you have a strong heart, you won't get too queasy. You will see how curious it is. It will merely seem like you are falling from a scaffolding. Look out! Don't change color. - I feel unwell ... - This only shows that you need to have more fun.

Scaramouche explique les beautés de l'état militaire. On y est fortement malin, dit-il. On fait peur aux civils. Et les galantes aventures ! Et le reste ! Quel beau métier!

Le Bain de mer

"La mer est large, Madame." "En tous cas, elle est assez profonde." Ne vous asseyez pas dans le fond. C'est très humide." "Voici de bonnes vagues." "Elles sont pleines d'eau." "Vous êtes toute mouillée !" "Oui, Monsieur."

Without **Felix Mendelssohn** (1809-1847), there would be no Richard Wagner. By this I mean two things.

First, Wagner was a man who always needed to be in conflict with something. That "something" was often Jews, usually Mendelssohn in particular. Why Mendelssohn? As an exceptional musician and thoroughly cultured German, Mendelssohn was the glaring, unavoidable exception to all of Wagner's misbegotten theories about Jewish people, particularly 1) that they could only learn to imitate German art and culture, and 2) these imitations would infect and dilute German culture. This conflict, as manufactured and hateful as it was, constituted an important part of Wagner's artistic process. Mendelssohn was not his muse, but something like it - an artistic and intellectual adversary (perhaps imagined) to wrestle with.

Second, Wagner could not have become Wagner without Mendelssohn's contributions to Leipzig and German musical life. Mendelssohn became the music director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1835, and in 1841 he founded the Leipzig Conservatory. In his role as music director at the Gewandhaus he was an early champion of "historical music," most famously the Bach revival. Mendelssohn's efforts to build institutions and start the process of canonization were a prerequisite for Richard Wagner's work.

Wagner was born and raised in Leipzig. He almost certainly saw Mendelssohn conduct the Gewandhaus Orchestra in such seminal works as Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and the Beethoven Symphonies, which had an indelible impact on Wagner ("Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 became the mystical goal of all my strange thoughts and desires about music"). Even if Mendelssohn was not conducting, Wagner certainly heard these pieces *because* of Mendelssohn. Performing such "historical" music was not the norm at the time; Mendelssohn changed that. Mendelssohn also engaged Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann as soloists and performed the

Scaramouche explains the beauties of the military state. "We are wondrously clever," says he. "We frighten civilians. And the galant adventures! And the rest! What a wonderful profession!"

The Sea Bath

The sea is wide, madame. In any case, it is rather deep. Do not sit in its depths. It is very humid. Here are some nice old waves. They are full of water. You are all wet! - Yes, monsieur

music of Robert Schumann and Carl Maria von Weber, each of whom had a significant impact on or relationship with Wagner.

For all of this, Wagner could have loved and admired Mendelssohn, but admiration can easily be perverted into envy and resentment. Mendelssohn had the sort of education that Wagner no doubt wished he had. Mendelssohn grew up in a wealthy, influential, and cultured household in Berlin, which became the pre-eminent salon in the city for artists and intellectuals. Mendelssohn was befriended and mentored by Goethe himself, heard first hand accounts about South America from Alexander von Humbolt, and attended Hegel's lectures at the University of Berlin. While Mendelssohn was no practitioner of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he not only composed but was also a talented painter and published a translation of Terence's *Andria*. And he is perhaps the only composer who could have exceeded Wagner in his knowledge of history and philosophy. It is easy to imagine Wagner, who came from a family of modest means, resenting Mendelssohn not only for being Jewish, but for his exceptional education, comprehensive artistic talents, and magnificent contributions to German culture.



With Peter Atkinson in Rockport, MA during a break from recording the album.



**Mendelssohn's Viola Sonata in C Minor, MWV Q 14**, was completed on February 14, 1824, eleven days after his fifteenth birthday. The Viola Sonata is one of the last pieces we can call a "student composition" of Mendelssohn; he certainly hadn't found his compositional voice, which burst forth in the String Octet (1825). There are many who consider that mature compositional voice generic, formulaic, uninspired, and easy-listening. I absolutely disagree with them, except on the charge of easy listening, which I intend as a compliment. The Viola Sonata, however, subverts expectations. It is not typical Mendelssohn.

Here is a young composer rapidly approaching his mature style, but still experimenting with form in a way which he rarely did again. As for content, this sonata has a turgid anxiety contrasted with a disturbing hollowness that one doesn't find again in Mendelssohn's instrumental music until the String Quartet in F minor, Op. 80, written at the end of his short life.

Violists rarely perform Mendelssohn's Viola Sonata. Perhaps this is because the Viola Sonata was not published until 1966, and it takes time for works to catch on and establish themselves in the repertoire. But 1966 was 58 years ago. It does not take 58 years. Or perhaps it is because the viola is not given a preeminent role and the most beautiful music in the sonata, the slow variation of the third movement, is three minutes of magical solo piano. Regardless of the reason, it is consternating. Here, finally is a piece actually written *for* the viola by an A-list composer - and yet violists still don't play it! Well, this violist does, and hopes to make a compelling case for it with this recording. On to the music.

The first movement is a roiling sonata form in the roiling key of C minor, with a slow introduction that has all the pent up tension of the rubber band just before Felix launched it into Fanny's head.

The second movement is a scherzo in ABA form. Imagine Cerberus first as a puppy, and then as a fully grown, ferocious beast - this is the A section. The B section is Orpheus soothing the Hound of Hades to sleep. It is otherworldly. Four austere, sinewy, chromatic notes in the piano lead us into a Chorale which is a balm for weary souls.

The third movement is a Theme and Variation, but the theme is actually the theme of the A section of the 2nd movement! Here it is slower, in a different meter, creatively harmonized, and expanded, but the

resemblance is unmistakable. The ensuing variations put the theme through all sorts of...variations: pointillistic Tom-and-Jerry games, ghostly arabesques, a military march, and finally the aforementioned slow variation, Variation 8, with its extended piano solos presaging Chopin. One can hear the moonlight streaming down to earth. There is a crack in the harmony, pulling us back from C major to C minor, out of which the viola cadenza emerges and launches headlong into a coda which could be the soundtrack to a mad dash Buster Keaton scene. -DO

As with any other 19th-century composer, **Richard Wagner** was indebted (in his case quite literally) to his sponsors and patrons. Otto Wesendonck, a wealthy merchant, was one of Wagner's most long suffering supporters. Although it may have been Herr Wesendonck's generosity which sustained Wagner the man, it was Frau Mathilde Wesendonck who sustained Wagner, the man. When the Wesendoncks met Wagner in 1852, Wagner had been married to his first wife Minna for sixteen years. In 1857, Minna discovered a romantic letter her husband had written to Mathilde, and the Wagners subsequently spent the final years of their marriage living apart. It was during the heat of his troubles with Minna that Wagner composed his *Wesendonck Lieder* or *Fünf Gedichte für eine Frauenstimme*.

We excerpted the popular fifth song, **Träume** (1858), for one of our more sincerely fond portraits of Wagner. There is a note in the score saying this song is a "*Studie zu Tristan und Isolde*," and indeed, it can be found almost note for note in the Second Act of *Tristan*. This is music which serenely represents (or perhaps wills?) *Sehnsucht*, that most meaning laden word in the German lexicon, which when pitifully translated into English as "longing" is stripped bare of all its literary and musical allusions. With ever-blooming harmonies spreading under recurring motifs, creating suspensions and releases, moments of passion and stillness which never quite resolve, we find many of the typical hallmarks of what makes Wagner's music so special in this song. -PNC