

WAGNER'S PIANO MUSIC

Richard Wagner composed 13 surviving works for solo piano. Two lengthy Sonatas and a Fantasy were composed before he was 19, and can be considered student works. The most substantial of the solo piano works is the one movement *Sonata for the Album of Mathilde Wesendonck*. The remaining nine works average only two minutes each in length, were generally of the Albumleaf genre, and were composed mostly for female friends.

The *Theme in A-flat Major* first appeared as eight bars in the 1858 sketches of Act 2, Scene 2 of *Tristan*. In early 1882, while completing *Parsifal* in Palermo, Wagner returned to the idea, extended it by five bars, and presented it to Cosima. On the evening preceding the day of his fatal heart attack, he is said to have gone to the piano and played it. It has subsequently been referred to as the "*Porazzi Theme*" and "*Elegie*." The *Zuericher Vielliebchen -Walzer* was written for Mathilde's sister, Marie Luckenmeyer, who frequently visited Zurich. Wagner's inscription read "Dedicated to Marie of Dusseldorf by the best dancer in Saxony, called Richard the Waltzmaker." It has also been called the *Philippina Waltz*, alluding to a dinner party game, in which the phrase "Guten Morgen, Vielliebchen" is recited. The significance of Mathilde Wesendonck (1828-1902) in Wagner's life cannot be overestimated. Beginning in 1852, and continuing for more than 10 years, she was his muse, confidant, and object of intense love. Most sources concur that the relationship was not consummated, as she was married and the mother of four children. The Sonata written for her was Wagner's his first composition in the six years after completing *Lohengrin*, and was composed just a few months before he commenced the musical composition of *Das Rheingold*. Being early in their relationship, the manuscript of the *Sonata* contains the words "Wisst ihr wie das wird?" ("Do you know what will become of it?"), the question of the Norns from *Goetterdaemmerung*.

George Fee

Program Notes for performance on April 27, 2013