### Franz Liszt Songs

**Keith Lewis & David Harper**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Three songs from <em>Wilhelm Tell</em> (Schiller)</td>
<td>13:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Der Fischerknabe</em></td>
<td>4:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Der Hirt</em></td>
<td>5:48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Der Alpenjäger</em></td>
<td>3:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Der du von dem Himmel bist</em> (Goethe)</td>
<td>5:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh</em> (Goethe)</td>
<td>4:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Im Rhein</em> (Heine)</td>
<td>2:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Vergiftet sind meine Lieder</em> (Heine)</td>
<td>1:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Ihr Auge</em> (ReIlstba)</td>
<td>0:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>Was Liebe sei?</em> (Hagn)</td>
<td>0:58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>Kling leise, mein Lied</em> (Nordmann)</td>
<td>4:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><em>Einst</em> (Bodenstedt)</td>
<td>0:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Three Sonnets of Petrach</td>
<td>19:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pace non trovo</td>
<td>7:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Benedetto sia 'l giorno</td>
<td>6:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I' vidi in terra</td>
<td>5:39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>Enfant, si j'étais roi</em> (Hugo)</td>
<td>3:03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>S'il est un charmant gazon (Hugo)</td>
<td>2:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Comment, disaient-ils (Hugo)</td>
<td>1:47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>O quand je dors (Hugo)</td>
<td>4:49</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>65:57</strong></td>
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During one of my earliest meetings with Keith Lewis, in an idyllic setting in the south of France, I extolled the songs of Franz Liszt and tried to persuade him that they would ideally suit his voice. At that time he was unaware of them, so I provided him with recordings, confident that he would agree with me. As I write these notes, the venue is the same, Keith has proved me right and, a decade later, Liszt’s songs retain all the appeal they have always had for me. Aware of the nooks and crannies which the record industry have scoured to find music to appeal to their buyers, I continue to be amazed how this wonderful music still has not found its due place in the repertoire and is ignored by so many singers.

In 1847, Liszt ended his career as a travelling virtuoso. This move, which astonished the musical world and his many followers, is generally accepted as being as a result of advice given him by the new dominant influence in his life, Princess Caroline Sayn-Wittgenstein. Liszt, then at the peak of his fame, the unchallenged king among pianists but only known as a star good looks, which were having an effect on an ever more demanding public. From this time on, settled in Weimar, which he made one of the most important musical centres in Europe, Liszt concentrated on composing, conducting and promoting the works of his contemporaries and teaching.

While this move enabled him to realise his full potential as a composer, it did little to change his reputation. To this day the worldwide public perception of Liszt is as a composer of Romantic music for the piano, the ‘greatest pianist of all time’ and, with the help of a Hollywood film, the embodiment of the Romantic artist and lover. All true, of course, but only a small part of the total picture of the life of a genius.

One of the many little-known facts of Liszt’s achievements as a composer is that he wrote more original music involving the singing voice than he did for the piano. The songs, about 75 in all, are quite a small part of that but, nevertheless, are an important part of his oeuvre. Liszt clearly had a high opinion of them himself, as he later transcribed many of them for solo piano. Among these are the three Petrarch sonnets, well known in their place in the second Année de Pèlerinage, and the three Liebesträume (not recorded here), the third of which is probably the best known of all Liszt’s works. Nine of the songs included on this CD were later transcribed for piano.

One of the reasons we still have to make a special plea for Liszt’s songs is that they have never been well-received by the ‘experts’ who have written about them. Often they have been criticised as great poetry set to virtuoso piano accompaniments that are at times wholly inappropriate. There is truth in this: it would be hard to justify the first setting of Goethe’s “Der du von dem Himmel bist” which reaches its impassioned climax on the words ‘süsser Friede’ (sweet peace) and in general gives the singer an impossible task to make sense of the poetry. Yet, if we imagine this song as a purely wordless vocalise, what glorious and inspired music this is. This is not music for dry critical assessment; to appreciate all that these songs have to offer, we must understand Liszt as the arch-Romantic who, like Byron, was an amalgam of all the passions, excesses and human frailties that are intrinsic elements of the Romantic artist. It is both the greatness and the critical failure of his music that its inspiration came from the heart before the mind, often as an almost involuntary outpouring of emotion that retains the indiscipline implicit in such acts of spontaneity.

Liszt himself was aware of his ‘faults’. He revised nearly half his songs, sometimes more than once. “Der du von dem Himmel bist”, originally composed in 1842, was revised three times, in 1856, 1860 and near the end of his life. While most Liszt scholars agree that the later versions are better settings of the poetry, it may be argued that the only true example of unbridled Romanticism must be the work’s first incarnation.

Virgil Pomfret

Ten years ago I met Virgil Pomfret in Provence and after our initial meeting Virgil generously supplied me with the complete recordings of Liszt’s songs. When Trust Records approached David Harper and me to record a lieder CD, Liszt seemed the obvious choice. I then called on Virgil to write the accompanying notes. His knowledge and passion for Liszt’s repertoire has been a distinctive bonus. I thank him sincerely for his time and generous commitment to this project.

Keith Lewis
Three songs from *Wilhelm Tell*, S.292
(first version, 1845)
Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805)

These songs establish from the outset the importance of the piano accompaniment. It is the role of the pianist to evoke the natural settings, the lake, the sunny pastures and the mountains, and it is no coincidence that the motif common to each of the songs recalls "Au Lac de Wallenstadt" from the Swiss book of *Années de Pèlerinage*. In this first version Liszt composed the songs as a cycle with the second leading straight into the third. When he revised them in 1859, he treated each as a separate song.

1 *Der Fischerknabe (The Fisher-boy)*

Es lächelt der See, er ladet zum Bade,
Der Knabe schlief ein am grünen Gestade,
Da hört er ein Klingen,
Wie Flöten so süß,
Wie Stimmen der Engel
Im Paradies.

Und wie er erwacht in seliger Lust,
Da spüren die Wasser ihm um die Brust.

Und es ruft aus den Tiefen:
Lieb' Knabe, bist mein! Ich locke den Schläfer,
Ich zieh ihn herein.

The sleeping fisher-boy is awoken by the lake water lapping against his breast and a voice summons him, ‘Dear lad, come to me! I entice the sleeper and take him to the depths’.

2 *Der Hirt (The Shepherd)*

Ihr Matten, lebt wohl,
Ihr sonnigen Weiden!
Der Senne muss scheiden,
Der Sommer ist hin.

Wir fahren zu Berg, wir kommen wieder,
Wenn der Kukuck ruft, wenn erwachen die Lieder,
Wenn mit Blumen die Erde sich kleidet neu,
Wenn die Brünlein fliessen im lieblichen Mai.

Summer is over and the shepherd must leave to tend his herds on the mountain pastures until the spring.

3 *Der Alpenjäger (The Alpine Hunter)*

Es donnern die Höhn, es zittert der Steg,
Nicht grauet dem Schützen auf schwindlichtem Weg,
Er schreitet verwegen auf Feldern von Eis,
Da pranget kein Frühling, da grünet kein Reis;
Tief unter den Füssen ein nebliches Meer,
Erkennt er die Städte der Menschen nicht mehr;
Durch den Riss nur der Wolken erblickt er die Welt,
Tief unter den Wassern das grünende Feld.

The huntsman, fearless, strides over the glacier high above the sea of mist. Through a break in the cloud he sees below the waters and the green fields.

4 *Der du von dem Himmel bist*, S.279
(first version, 1842)
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1842)

For all the problems with this song mentioned previously, the version that is recorded here is the first one. A listener will forgive all its shortcomings to experience the passion that exists in this original realisation.

5 *Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*, S.306
(second version, 1859)
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1842)

Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln Spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde,
Warte nur, balde Ruhest du auch!

Over every mountain peak there is peace. In every tree top you can scarcely sense a breath of wind. The birds in the wood are silent. You too will soon be at rest.

6 *Im Rhein*, S.272
(first version, 1843)
Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

The first of two Rhine songs with texts by Heine, *Die Lorelei* is the other. *Im Rhein* describes the beautiful river that mirrors in its waves Cologne Cathedral, which houses a painting of the Virgin Mary whose lips and cheeks are exactly like those of the persona’s beloved.

Im Rhein, im schönen Strome,
Da spiegelt sich in den Wellen
Mit seinem grossen Dome
Das grosse, heil’ge Köln.
Im Dom, da steht ein Bildnis
Auf goldenem Leder gemalt;
In meines Lebens Wildnis
Hat's freundlich hineingestrahlt.

Es schweben Blumen und Englein
Um unsre liebe Frau,
Die Augen, die Lippen, die Wäglein,
Die gleichen der Liebsten genau.

Vergiftet sind meine Lieder, S.289 (1842)
Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

Probably the bitterest text that Liszt ever set, it represents the composer in his most concise mood and, like many of his other very brief songs, he never revised it later.

Vergiftet sind meine Lieder; –
Wie könnt es anders sein?
Du hast mir ja Gift gegossen
Ins blühende Leben hinein.

Vergiftet sind meine Lieder; –
Wie könnt es anders sein?
Ich trage im Herzen viel Schlangen,
Und dich, Geliebte mein!

My songs are poisoned. How could it be otherwise?
You have poured venom into the spring of my life. In my heart there is a nest of serpents... and you, my beloved.

Ihr Auge, S.310 (c. 1855)
Ludwig Rellstab (1799-1860)

An exquisite, if brief, tribute to the eyes of the persona’s beloved.

Nimm einen Strahl der Sonne,
Vom Abendstern das Licht,
Die Feuerglut des Ätna,
Die aus der Lava bricht -
Du hast, was mich erhellt
Und mich erwärmt und mich verklärt,
Und was mein inneres Leben
Bis in den Tod verzehrt!

Take a ray of sun, the light of the evening star and the fiery glow from the lava of Etna and you will have what lightens, warms and transfigures my life; what obsesses my life until death.

Was Liebe sei?, S.288 (second version, c. 1855)
Charlotte von Hagn (1809-91)

Sophie, daughter of King William II of the Netherlands, married Carl Alexander, Grand Duke apparent of Saxe-Weimar in 1842. At the time Liszt was being wooed by Carl Alexander’s father to make Weimar his home. He composed the first version of this exquisite love song for the 19 year old Sophie in 1843.

Dichter! was Liebe sei, mir nicht verhehle!
Liebe ist das Atemholen der Seele.
Dichter! was ein Kuss sei, du mir verkünde!
Je kürzer er ist, um so grösser die Sünde!

Poet, tell me what is love?
It’s when the soul breathes in.
Poet, tell me what is a kiss?
The shorter it is, the greater the sin.

Kling leise, mein Lied, S.301
(first version, 1848)
Johannes Nordmann (1820-87)

A touching love serenade with an accompaniment that perfectly reflects the words.

Kling leise, mein Lied, durch die schweigende Nacht,
Kling leise, dass nicht die Geliebte erwacht!
Behutsam zu ihren Fenstern hinauf,
Kling leise, mein Lied und wecke sie nicht auf!

Umschlinge sie sanft, wie die Ranke den Baum
In Liebe umschlingt mit dem Blütentraum,
Und singe verzückt, wie die Nachtigall singt,
Die der Rose ein klingendes Ständchen bringt.

Erwecke sie nicht mit zu stürmischem Gruss,
Tritt behutsam nur auf, wie des Pilgers Fuss,
Der hin durch den heiligen Tempel geht,
Still klinge dein Gruss, wie ein leises Gebet!

Einst wollt ich einen Kranz dir winden
Und konnte keine Blumen finden!
Jetzt find ich Blumen fern und nah,
Ach! aber du bist nicht mehr da!

Once I wanted to find a flower to express my love, but found none. Then, from near and far, came flowers in abundance, but you were no longer there.

Three Sonnets of Petrarch, S.270
(first version, c. 1839)
Francesca Petrarca (1304-74)

A remarkable 500 years separate poet and composer, and yet it is probable that Liszt never had a greater understanding of a poet than he did of Petrarch. He was first inspired to set these three ecstatic love poems during
Tony Fomison (1939-1990), *The Fugitive*, 1981-83, oil on hessian over board, 1230 x 1830 mm. BNZ Art Collection. Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of Tony Fomison and Gow Langford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand.
his travels in Italy from 1837-9, and in all completed no fewer than four versions—the first song version in 1839, first piano version S.158 between 1839 and 1840, second piano version in the second Année de Pèlerinage in 1846 or later, and the second song version in 1861. In these songs Liszt is also inspired by Italian bel canto and, while the piano accompaniments evoke much of the passion of the poetry, the voice is required to achieve an almost operatic, aria-like intonation. This is Liszt at his most inspired.

Pace non trovo (No.104)

Pace non trovo, e non ho da far guerra,
E temo, e spero, ed ardo, e son un ghiaccio:
E volo sopra 'l cielo, e giaccio in terra;
E nulla stringo, e tutto 'l mondo abbraccio.

Tal m'ha in prigion, che non m'apre, né serra,
Né per suo mi ritien, né scioglie il laccio,
E non m'uccide Amor, e non mi sferra;
Né mi vuol vivo, né mi trahe d'impaccio.

Veggio senz'occhi, e non ho lingua e grido;
E bramo di perir, e cheggio aita;
Ed ho in odio me stesso, ed amo altrui:
Pascomi di dolor; piangendo rido;
Egualmente mi spiace morte e vita,
In questo stato son, Donna, per Voi.

I find no peace. I am imprisoned by love. I long for death, but cry for help. And this all because of you, my beloved.

Benedetto sia 'l giorno (No.47)

Benedetto sia 'l giorno, e 'l mese, e l'anno,
E la stagione, e 'l tempo, e l'ora, e 'l punto,
E 'l bel paese e 'l loco, ov'io fui giunto
Da due begli occhi che legato m'annò;
E benedetto il primo dolce affanno
Ch'i' ebbi ad esser con Amor congiunto,
E l'arco e le saette ond' i fui punto,
E le piaghe, ch'infino al cor mi vanno.

Benedette le voci tante, ch'io
Chiamando il nome di Laura ho sparte,
E i sospiri e le lagrime, e 'l desio.

Si j'étais roi, je donnerais l'empire,
Et mon char, et mon sceptre et mon peuple à genoux,
Et ma couronne d'or, et mes bains de porphyre,
Et mes flottes à qui la mer ne peut suffire,
Pour un regard de vous!

Enfant, si j'étais roi, S.283
S'il est un charmant gazon, S.284
Comment, disaient-ils, S.276
O quand je dors, S.282
(second version, 1860)
Victor Hugo (1802-85)

In all Liszt set six of Hugo's poems as songs and, being entirely at home in the French language, he achieves in them great unity between words and music. Accompaniments are simpler and the vocal parts create fewer problems for the singer. Of the four recorded here “Comment, disaient-ils”, in this 1860 revision, is a miniature masterpiece, but all are delightful and, though the more typical Lisztian passion is replaced by charm, they are among his best songs.

I' vidi in terra (No.123)

I' vidi in terra angelici costumi,
E celesti bellezze al mondo sole;
Ché quant'io miro, par sogni, ombre, e fumi.
E vidi lagrimar que' duo bei lumi,
Ch'han fatto mille volte invidia al sole;
Ed udì' sospirando dir parole
Che farian gir i monti, e stare i fiumi.

Amor senno valor, pietate, e doglia
Facean piangendo un più dolce concerto,
D'ogni altro, che nel mondo udir si soglia.

Love, wisdom, devotion and sorrow create the most beautiful music that can be heard on earth and, for this, Heaven stills all, so much sweetness is there in the air and breeze.

Enfant, si j'étais roi, je donnerais l'empire,
Et mon char, et mon sceptre et mon peuple à genoux,
Et ma couronne d'or, et mes bains de porphyre,
Et mes flottes à qui la mer ne peut suffire,
Pour un regard de vous!

Si j'étais Dieu, la terre et l'air avec les ondes,
Les anges, les démons courbés devant ma loi,
Et le profond chaos aux entrailles fécondes,
L'éternité, l'espace et les cieux et les mondes
Pour un baiser de toi!

My child, if I were king I would give my empire, my chariot and sceptre, my peoples, my crown of gold, my halls of porphyry and my fleets for one look at you.

If I were God I would give the earth, the air and sea for one kiss from you.

S'il est un charmant gazon,
Que le ciel arrose,
Où brille en toute saison
Que quelque fleur éclose,
Où l'on cueille à pleine main
Lys, chèvrefeuille et jasmin,
J'en veux faire le chemin
Où ton pied se pose,
S'il est un rêve d'amour
Parfumé de rose,
Où l'on trouve chaque jour
Que quelque douce chose,
Un rêve que Dieu bénit
Où l'âme à l'âme s'unit,
Oh! j'en veux faire le nid
Où ton coeur se pose!

If there be a charming pasture watered by heaven where in every season the lily, honeysuckle and jasmine bloom, there I would make a path on which to walk.

If there be a dream of love with the scent of roses where each day a fresh delight, a dream blessed by heaven is found, there I would make a nest in which to rest my heart.

Comment, disaient-ils,
Avec nos nacelles
Fuir les aguazils?
Ramez! disaient-elles.

Comment, disaient-ils,
Oublier querelles,
Miseré et périls?
Dormez! disaient-elles.

How, they said, in our small skiffs can we escape?
Row, the girls replied.
How, they said, can we forget arguments, grief and perils?
Sleep, the girls replied.

Comment, disaient-ils,
Enchanter les belles
Sans philtres subtils?
Aimez, disaient-elles.

How, they said, can we entrance beautiful girls without a love potion?
Love, the girls replied.

Oh! quand je dors, viens auprès de ma couche,
Comme à Pétrarque apparaisait Laura,
Et qu'en passant ton haleine me touché...
Soudain ma bouche
S'entr’ouverra!

Sur mon front morné où peut-être s'achève
Un songe noir qui trop longtemps dura,
Que ton regard comme un astre se lève...
Soudain mon rêve
Raymonera!

Puis sur ma lèvre où voltige une flamme,
Éclair d'amour que Dieu même épura,
Pose un baiser et d’ange deviens femme...
Soudain mon âme
S’éveillera.

When I sleep, come to my bed as Laura came to Petrarch and by my side let your breath touch me and my lips will part.

Let your gaze rest like a star on my sad brow and my dream will take wing.

Place a kiss on my lips and my soul will awaken.

Tony Fomison (1939-1990), Sina Me Tuna, 1986-87, oil on board, 445 x 295 mm. Private Collection.
Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of Tony Fomison and Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand.
KEITH LEWIS was born in Methven, New Zealand. He arrived in London in 1974 to study at the London Opera Centre and subsequently won the Kathleen Ferrier Prize, the Royal Overseas League Prize and the John Christie Award. He quickly made his mark in the Mozart operatic roles of Ferrando (Così fan tutte) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni), and Tamino (Die Zauberflöte). Over the course of his career he has sung these roles at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Glyndebourne, Opera de Paris, Zurich Opera, Deutsche Oper, Chicago Lyric Opera, San Francisco Opera and many others.

His early career was influenced greatly by Sir George Solti and Carlo Maria Giulini. Solti suggested the role of Faust in Berlioz’ Damnation of Faust and since that time Lewis has been regarded as among the greatest interpreters of that role. With Giulini he spent many years collaborating on works by Bach, Mozart, Mahler, Britten and Verdi, many of which were recorded. He later added the roles of Titus (La Clemenza di Tito) and the title role from Idomeneo to his repertoire, which he continues to sing today.

Lewis has a large and varied concert and lieder repertoire ranging from the Baroque period to contemporary music. Over the next few seasons he will introduce the roles of Max (Der Freischütz), and Herod (Salome), as well as further performances of Nerone (L’incoronazione di Poppea), Idomeneo, the title roles in Faust and Lohengrin, and Captain Vere (Billy Budd). He has been involved in several highly successful productions in Stuttgart with the director Jossi Wieler (La Clemenza di Tito and L’incoronazione di Poppea), and most recently with the director/designer Nigel Lowery in Basel (Idomeneo).

Highlights of Lewis’ many recordings include Don Giovanni (Haitink), Damnation of Faust (Chung), Messiah (Solti), Berioz’ Requiem (Bertini), and Haydn’s Masses (Marriner). Keith Lewis was created a Companion of the Order of Merit in the Queen’s New Years Honours in 2000.

DAVID HARPER was born in New Zealand and early success there as an aspiring concert pianist led him to London in 1967 to further his studies at the Royal College of Music. However, an overwhelming passion for the vocal repertoire and the voice soon eclipsed any ambitions to pursue a solo career and within a few years of leaving college he had achieved his dream to work exclusively with singers.

David then spent four years at the English National Opera, which provided the invaluable experience of working with all voice types in a broad range of operatic styles. In 1976 he launched his freelance career, and invitations to perform concerts with a wide variety of singers followed in quick succession. Studio broadcasts with the BBC, recitals at the Wigmore Hall (London) and numerous other engagements throughout the British Isles and Europe gained him a glowing reputation as a vocal accompanist of rare sensitivity.

In addition to his increasingly prolific performing activities there grew a fascination for the more technical, scientific and physical aspects of singing. This, together with an awareness of the importance of language articulation, stylistic integrity and interpretation led to the development of a concurrent career in the teaching/coaching studio. It is this aspect of his involvement in the world of the lyric arts that has become increasingly predominant in recent years.

His wide-ranging reputation in this field encompasses a thriving London studio where his list of clients includes numerous international artists, many of whom have invited him to join them in recitals at major concert venues in Edinburgh, Wexford, Toronto, Brussels, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Spain, Australia and New Zealand. Another recent recording project includes the two volumes of Mercadante songs with Nelly Miricioiu, Yvonne Kenny and other soloists for Opera Rara.

Masterclasses and vocal workshops dealing with style, interpretation and vocal technique, as well as guest professorships and teaching residencies throughout Europe, Japan, USA and Australasia feature largely in his current professional activities.

Lied von der Erde. He has also worked with, among others, the conductors Claudio Abbado, Pierre Boulez, Colin Davis, Andrew Davis, Nicholas Harnoncourt, Zubin Mehta, Riccardo Muti, Sir Charles Mackerras, Sir Neville Marriner and Seiji Ozawa.

Keith Lewis was a Companion of the Order of Merit in the Queen’s New Years Honours in 2000.
TONY FOMISON (1939-1990)

Born in Christchurch, New Zealand, Fomison graduated from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in 1960 and was appointed assistant ethnologist at the Canterbury Museum in 1962. Awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council travel grant in 1964, he travelled to Europe and England, returning to New Zealand in 1967.

Drawing on Maori, Pacific Island and European sources, Tony Fomison invented his own multi-layered mythology. His paintings are characterised by their almost monochromatic approach to colour and their awkward approach to drawing that often seems closer to ‘outsider’ art than the mainstream. Fomison is well-represented in all the major galleries in New Zealand.

The Fugitive—one of his greatest works—alludes to the Maori legend of Maui, who challenged the goddess Hine-nui-te-po and was crushed between her thighs. Accordingly, the lone figure represents the individual contemplating his or her own death. This gothic scene also has sources in Northern European art, the fantastical album designs of Roger Dean and the dreamlike rock formations Fomison observed in the Canterbury province.

FRANZ LISZT SONGS
Keith Lewis & David Harper

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Recording Engineer Simon Eadon
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Executive Producer Ross Hendy
Design Mallabar Music
Music Notes Virgil Pomfret

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Other recordings featuring Keith Lewis
MMT2006 MMT2022

Other recordings featuring David Harper
MMT2023 MMT2038
### Three songs from *Wilhelm Tell* (Schiller) 13:22
1. Der Fischerknabe 4:11
2. Der Hirt 5:48
3. Der Alpenjäger 3:28

4. *Der du von dem Himmel bist* (Goethe) 5:14
5. *Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh* (Goethe) 4:50

6. *Im Rhein* (Heine) 2:22

7. *Vergiftet sind meine Lieder* (Heine) 1:31

8. *Ihr Auge* (Rellstab) 0:51

9. *Was Liebe sei?* (Hagn) 0:58

10. *Kling leise, mein Lied* (Nordmann) 4:29

11. *Einst* (Bodenstedt) 0:43

### Three Sonnets of Petrarch 19:29
12. Pace non trovo 7:21
13. Benedetto sia ’l giorno 6:29
14. I’ vidi in terra 5:39

15. *Enfant, si j’étais roi* (Hugo) 3:03

16. *S’il est un charmant gazon* (Hugo) 2:19

17. *Comment, disaient-ils* (Hugo) 1:47

18. *O quand je dors* (Hugo) 4:49

Total 65:57