



ORC100343



ORCHID CLASSICS

RACHEL FENLON
WINTERREISE

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Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Die Winterreise, Op.89 D.911

1	Gute Nacht	5.38	17	Im Dorfe	3.15
2	Die Wetterfahne	1.55	18	Der stürmische Morgen	0.53
3	Gefror'ne Tränen	2.32	19	Täuschung	1.24
4	Erstarrung	3.18	20	Der Wegweiser	4.35
5	Der Lindenbaum	4.44	21	Das Wirtshaus	4.01
6	Wasserflut	4.19	22	Mut	1.28
7	Auf dem Flusse	3.32	23	Die Nebensonnen	2.51
8	Rückblick	2.23	24	Der Leiermann	3.19
9	Irrlicht	2.37		<i>Text by Wilhelm Müller</i>	
10	Rast	3.55		Total time	74.03
11	Frühlingstraum	4.33		Rachel Fenlon, <i>soprano & piano</i>	
12	Einsamkeit	3.12			
13	Die Post	2.24			
14	Der greise Kopf	2.49			
15	Die Krähe	2.10			
16	Letzte Hoffnung	2.11			

This album is dedicated to my Mother, Tracy, and my Grandfather, Lionel. You have both shown me the path to love, to music, and to myself.

It is a dream come true to put my debut record out into the world, and for that record to be Schubert's *Winterreise*. Since I began singing, at 17 years old, I never quite understood why it wasn't acceptable to sit and play lieder, having studied the piano since the age of 4, and it being as equal to my musical identity as my voice. It took me a further 10 years to build the courage to sing my first recital in Toronto, titled "Liebesbotschaft", of all-Schubert lieder, accompanying myself on the piano. It was in that first public recital, both singing and playing, where I felt that indescribable spark awaken within me and I understood what I was born to do, and which path I needed to walk - sometimes forging, sometimes following, always trusting.

Over the past 10 years, I have made that little spark become my living reality, discovering repertoire of many different composers, from Schubert to contemporary, and travelling the world performing recitals, singing and accompanying myself at beautiful festivals and concert halls - something which, when I first began, many people said would be impossible. Only my closest friends knew I was crazy enough to pull it off. The thing about music is that it always gives itself to us - we only need to find our way to it. Our way to become the music.

When I began thinking about making my first record, there was no question it would be Schubert. The question was "which Schubert?" During the isolated years of the pandemic, in Winter 2020, I bought my first score to *Winterreise*, and began learning it. I was living on my own, in a house at the foot of a large forest, outside of Berlin, and would often go days and weeks without seeing anyone. I felt very alone a lot of the time. I remember the first days I opened the score, and the magic of *Winterreise* poured out - I found someone inside the music who felt deep loneliness, deep solitude, passionate love, and grief. I found a lot of myself in the work. Throughout the two years that followed, I learned the work slowly, methodically. I would often journal about the text and take walks for hours in the forest, imagining the music, allowing it to find me inside of my soul.

I have never taken so much time to learn a work before - it was that strange luxury of time we all had during those years. In the summer of 2022, I had my first ever performance of *Winterreise* in Berlin, and I subsequently took it on the road for the summer festival season. After my first few performances that summer, it became evident that this was the piece I was meant to record. I have never found, nor lost myself so much in a work as I have in *Winterreise*. In May 2023, after numerous live recitals of *Winterreise*, I recorded it at the Concert Hall at Domaine Forget, over 4 days, from morning to night, with the inimitable Carl Talbot - Canada's great sound engineer. To share my interpretation of this great work, and to add to the enormous canon of recordings, from the perspective of a singer sitting at the piano and accompanying myself, is the greatest gift I could ask for.

I wouldn't have been able to do it without my team, who have brought this vision to fruition:

Thank you to my engineer and producer, Carl Talbot, for your clarity of vision, ears, and passion. For the late night sessions in rural Quebec, where it was snowing in spring, and for making this experience so utterly full of freedom and joy.

To John Lefebvre, for your generosity and belief in me. Without your generous financial support, this album would still just be a dream.

To my incredible agent, Isabella Pitman at IMG Artists. I thank my lucky stars the day our paths crossed - you are a total visionary. To Matthew Trusler, and the team at Orchid Classics, for bringing this into the world with me.

Thank you to my dear friend Alexander Neef, for honouring me with your programme notes. To Domaine Forget for the Concert Hall, impeccable Steinway D, and for spontaneously getting an audience together on the final day of recording with one day's notice. To Karsten Witt for lending me your Steinway the past years, which has been the instrument I learned *Winterreise*

on. Thank you to Clara Evans for the gorgeous album photos, and Mireille Lebel for styling me at blue hour. Thank you to those many wonderful people who contributed to my crowdfunding campaign.

Thank you to my friends, my siblings, and my family. You are my everything. To K - I miss you every single day, and losing you one month before I made this record was one of the hardest things I've ever done. You're here with me in it.

And last but not least, to my love, Franz Schubert. For carrying us through the grief with joy, and the joy with depth.

Rachel Fenlon

Schubert's Winterreise - a theatre of words and sound

For some time, Schubert appeared very upset and melancholy. When I asked him what was troubling him, he would only say, "Soon you will hear and understand." One day he said to me, "Come over to Schober's today, and I will sing you a cycle of ghastly songs. I am curious to hear what you think of them. They've taken more out of me than any other songs I've written." So he sang the entire Winterreise through to us in a voice full of emotion. We were utterly dumbfounded by the mournful, gloomy tone of these songs, and Schober said there was only one he cared for, Der Lindenbaum. Schubert replied, "I like them all more than any of my other songs, and the day will come when you will like them, too."

This account of what must be considered the first performance of *Winterreise* in the spring of 1827 was recorded by Joseph von Spaun, one of Schubert's closest friends, thirty years later. Almost two hundred years after Schubert's untimely death in 1828 Schober has certainly been proven wrong: Schubert's cycle of 24 poems by Wilhelm Müller, set for voice and piano, is beloved by performers and

audiences alike. The whole history of art song in the 19th and 20th century would be unthinkable without it.

The reaction of Schubert's friends, their shock at discovering music of utter hopelessness and desolation, but also incandescent beauty, still resonates with us today. Schubert draws us into the intimacy of his human and artistic soul, as already recognized by the earliest reviews of the cycle, like the one that appeared in the Viennese *Theaterzeitung* on March 28, 1828:

Schubert's mind shows a bold sweep everywhere, whereby he carries everyone away with him who approaches, and he takes them through the immeasurable depth of the human heart into the far distance, where premonitions of the infinite dawn upon them longingly in a rosy radiance, but where at the same time the shuddering bliss of an inexpressible presentiment is accompanied by gentle pain of the constraining present which hems in the boundaries of human existence.

It would without any doubt be wrong to reduce the impact and importance of the cycle to reasons related to Schubert's biography, his health, or even the social and geopolitical context of its composition. Schubert's generation lived through the hopes of personal freedom and civic liberties born by the ideas of the French Revolution, but crushed by the repressive politics of the Restoration in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. Also, Schubert suffered from syphilis from a young age. His death at age 31 places him amongst the illustrious group of 18th and 19th century composers who didn't reach the age of forty (Pergolesi, Mozart, Bellini, Chopin), but seemed to have pushed the boundaries of what can be expressed in music like few others. All of these elements might have had their share of influence on Schubert's writing, but they are largely and finally surpassed by the universal, timeless depth of his work.

Schubert's musical writing introduces an economy of means in the vocal line that corresponds to the bleakness of Müller's poems, but that is in itself of a quiet radicality without precedent. At the same time "his interpretation of the poems extended to the piano part a novel and comprehensive way of revealing atmosphere, psychology and the word's poetic layers." (Alfred Brendel). With just voice and piano Schubert creates a whole theatrical universe, there is no artifice, only great emotional depth, directness of expression, utmost concentration of means, reduction to the essential. Indeed, the power of Schubert's sounds to Müller's words seems so self-sufficient that visual realizations, or stagings of the cycle never quite seem to do it justice. Just the same way, no attempt to orchestrate the cycle has succeeded in amplifying its dramatic and emotional impact. In his introduction to Max Friedlaender's Peters edition of *Winterreise* Max Müller, son of the poet Wilhelm Müller, already remarked that Schubert's cycle can have the dramatic impact of a full-scale opera. While his operas never encountered great success, neither in his lifetime nor in posterity, Schubert seems to have realized with *Winterreise* "Havant l'heure" the most radical of theatrical concepts, Wagner's dream of the invisible theatre, with the most limited of means, voice and piano only.

Who is Schubert's protagonist? Müller published his cycle as *Gedichte aus den hinterlassenen Papieren eines reisenden Hornisten* (Poems from the posthumous papers of a traveling horn player). Unlike Schubert's other wanderer (in *Die schöne Müllerin*, also set to poems by Wilhelm Müller), where the protagonist is a craftsman, a miller, we come to the core of Schubert's own profession with *Winterreise*. Schubert's winter wanderer is a musician, but further biographical or geographical details are difficult to gather. Only the season is specified: winter. The poems suggest that the protagonist is a male lover rejected by his beloved. While the cycle was most likely written for tenor, but is commonly more closely associated with the baritone, it has also become the domaine of female singers. As early as 1928 the German mezzo-soprano Elena Gerhardt recorded





a selection of songs for HMV. If we follow our previous argument of Schubert's cycle as a theatrical device it could be said that the female voice adds an element of abstraction that enhances its purpose even further, turning the rather anecdotic narrative of the rejected male lover into a much deeper expression of universal grief and desolation.

If, as Alfred Brendel points out, "since Schubert, it has become impossible to separate the singing line from the accompaniment" and "the accompanist has mutated into a partner" it only seems right to question the traditional format singer-accompanist of the art song recital for the cycle. It is therefore hard to believe that we had to wait until 2024 for a performer from Vancouver Island to give us the first ever self-accompanied recording of *Winterreise*. Rachel Fenlon's performance echoes the Vienna of 1827 when Schubert first performed the cycle for his friends, accompanying himself on the piano, while laying out her own interpretation of Schubert's inexhaustibly rich theatre of words and sound in front of our imagination.

Alexander Neef, June 2024

Rachel Fenlon

Rachel Fenlon is a soprano and pianist who is establishing a unique voice on the classical music stages of the world. Praised for her "unusually shaped recitals in keeping with her extraordinary talent" (Places des Arts/Festival de Lanaudière), Rachel performs song recitals as both singer and pianist accompanying herself.

Rachel has performed recitals at festivals such as the Martha Argerich Festival, Oxford Lieder Festival, Festival de Lanaudière, Fundacion Juan March Madrid, Ottawa Chamberfest, National Arts Centre Canada, Settimane Musicali di Ascona, Vancouver Opera Festival, Scotiast, Festival International Povoa de Varzim, Toronto Summer Music Festival, Oper Leipzig, PODIUM Festival Matadepera, Toronto Summer Music Festival, Big Lake Festival, Barokki Kuopo, Kammermusik Festival Ahrenshoop, Bristol Song Recitals, St. James Picadilly

London, and Kühlhaus Berlin. Future engagements include self-accompanied recital debuts at Konzerthaus Berlin, Vancouver Recital Society, Salle Bourgie in Montreal, and Bechstein Hall in London.

Performing and creating new music is a core part of Rachel's artistic practice. Rachel has collaborated with composers such as Samy Moussa, Sarah Sleane, Nicole Lizée, Chaya Czernowin, Matthias McIntire, Susanne Stelzenbach, Helmut Zapf, Stewart Goodyear, and Danika Loren. As a composer herself, Rachel's recent compositions have been premiered in recital, and her newest composition is the creation of a new work for dance and opera, titled *Pierrot Deconstructed*, in which Rachel is composing for singers, electronics, and the *Pierrot Lunaire* instrumental ensemble, to premiere in 2025 with Vancouver Opera, Opera de Quebec, and Opera de Metz. Rachel is the co-founder of the Berlin artist collective CROWN THE MUSE – a production and commissioning body for musical projects. Rachel is a founding member of the Canadian Artist Collective New ART New MEDIA. Rachel has attended artist residencies at Avaloch Farms Music Institute in New Hampshire, has been a returning artist in residence at the Lunenburg Academy. On the opera and concert stage, Rachel has been a soloist with Deutsche Oper Berlin, Oper Leipzig, Vancouver Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, the Vancouver and Victoria Symphonies, Teatro Dello Scompiglio, and with baroque Ensemble Nylandia in Helsinki.

Rachel was born in the UK, raised on the west coast of Canada, and is now based in Berlin.



Recorded at Le Domaine Forget de Charlevoix on 14-17 May 2023

Producer & Engineer: Carl Talbot

With special thanks to John Lefebvre and Orchid Classics.

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