SOMM RECORDINGS

BEETHOVEN SYMPHONIES Vol.5

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No.4

Symphony No.8

arr. Xaver Scharwenka

MOZART

The Magic Flute

Overture

arr. Ferruccio Busoni

Tessa Uys

Ben Schoeman

piano duo

BEETHOVEN – SCHARWENKA: SYMPHONIES 4 & 8; MOZART – BUSONI: MAGIC FLUTE OVERTURE

Beethoven's profound realism – that of knowing who and what he was – ran throughout his life, not least in his understanding of the changes occurring in society and how they impacted on him – his daily life – and how his art in many ways responded to, rather than reflected, those changes. We should not assume that that understanding turned him into a kind of musical commentator or made him fall into the Romantic aesthetic trap of "art reflects life", for he, of all composers, knew that there is no life in a mirror. Living in the times he did, however, he could not avoid the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that impact to varying degrees upon the lives of all artists, and certainly did upon his.

Beethoven knew, as did his contemporaries, of the impact Napoleon wrought across Europe in the quarter-century 1790–1815; it affected the daily lives even of musicians, from Haydn to Schubert. The effect such upheavals had upon Beethoven's art is shown by the greater expansion and depth of feeling expressed in his Third (*Eroica*) Symphony – originally planned as a tribute to Napoleon but re-dedicated, in the wake of the Emperor's unwarranted self-aggrandisement in 1804, to the concept of the defeat of nihilism – unadorned by fashionable pleasantries and forged by a more powerful inner compulsion of the contemporary achievements of thought and creativity in the Ascent of Man.

Beethoven knew full well what he had achieved in the *Eroica*, the first performances of which electrified Vienna and stunned his contemporaries. From that point (which historically is to say between the years 1803–05) it would have been a relatively short step to the C minor Symphony or a step sideways (perhaps) to the *Pastoral*, but Beethoven was above all a reactive human being. Following the considerable achievement of the *Eroica* in 1804/5 he began to move further toward the complete abandonment of any nihilistic concepts in the music he was writing, such as may have been expected following his profound "Heiligenstadt Testament" of October 1802: "…thus I have dragged on this miserable existence…".

Towards the end of 1805 the challenges were very great and were not resolved until several years later. By that time, Beethoven had begun what were eventually to become his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies,

each reflecting aspects of this idea. But his thoughts were interrupted in 1806 when Count von Oppersdorff – a great admirer of Beethoven, who maintained his own orchestra at his spacious country residence – proffered a generous financial commission for a new symphony.

This Fourth Symphony was written quickly, its character reflecting the civilised circumstances by which it came into being. Even so, the new B flat Symphony displayed aspects of a conundrum Beethoven had set himself, that of the complete work having a basic pulse throughout. The Symphony's first movement has one of the longest "introductions" of any Beethoven symphony – indeed, so brilliantly does it evolve into the main Allegro part of the movement that it is difficult not to hear that as a first solution to that self-imposed compositional challenge. And this is not all: the double pulse in each bar of the Allegro vivace is "held over" to the second movement to become one beat of the Adagio's 3/4. Therefore, what we have in this outward-looking masterpiece is a very subtle example (one of the first in Beethoven's music) of what might be termed a "macro-pulse": the beat of each crotchet in the long introduction – in effect almost beginning the Symphony with a slow movement, and in the amazing key (for the period) of B flat minor – becomes the temporal length of each Allegro vivace bar when that music bursts upon us as bright sunlight. The "open-air" feeling is enhanced by remarkable key-changes: a passage in the brilliant key of B major enhances the positive mood before sunny B flat major returns, driving the music to the powerful coda.

The inherent energy of the Symphony is not yet dissipated. In the slow movement which follows, Beethoven reveals a truly astonishing example of his evolving creative genius. The pulse, amounting to one bar of the Allegro vivace, now becomes one beat in the Adagio 3/4 bar – the heart of the music, almost literally, continues to beat at the same rate – now relaxed, but consistent throughout the movement. It is a rhythmic motto, brought to the forefront in an astonishingly original passage for the timpani near the end, bringing the continuous (and genuinely symphonic) variations to a close. This was the Beethoven symphony that so astonished Berlioz when he heard it: one might even claim that the work's "cross-movement creativity" played its part in the Frenchman's *Symphonie fantastique*. Beethoven having, as if fortuitously, solved the "joining together of movements" conundrum in the B flat Symphony, he could now devote his full attention to the differing emotional demands of the two symphonies he had begun earlier (the C minor and *Pastoral*). But the Fourth Symphony is not yet over with its revelations: the Scherzo, building on the achievement of that in the *Eroica,* is (for the period) exceptionally fast and

is also structurally astonishing in bringing back the Trio for an unprecedented third time. The horns (again learned from the *Eroica*) reappear, as Donald Tovey noted, to "blow the whole movement away". Beethoven was to return to several of this movement's innovations in his later symphonies.

The finale shows Beethoven almost at play: here, the unprecedented 2/4 pulse seems unstoppable, joyous. Beethoven musically portrays his final thought in the Heiligenstadt Testament as he devotes himself emphatically, despite his affliction, to his life's work: "I have often thought of you and tried to make you happy – be happy". By slowing the main theme to half-speed, with the same underlying pulse that has run throughout, we are reminded of this great artist's ultimate humanity.

As the unique qualities of Beethoven's Fourth Symphony have tended to be overshadowed by the more often heard *Eroica* and C minor Symphonies, so those of the Eighth Symphony, lying between the A major Seventh and the great *Choral,* also go unremarked upon. Indeed, the "Little" F major Symphony (compared with the bigger, five-movement *Pastoral*, also in F) has tended to suffer from under-appreciation, almost since it was first heard.

This was Sunday, February 27th, 1814, at the Vienna Redoutensaal. It was a remarkable concert, for no fewer than three symphonies by Beethoven were heard on that occasion: the Seventh Symphony was receiving its second performance (it had been premiered two months earlier) as was Beethoven's *Wellington's Victory* (*Wellingtons Sieg oder die Schlacht bei Vittoria*), also known as the *Battle Symphony*. We may appreciate therefore that the "Little" (as Beethoven termed it) Eighth Symphony was completely overshadowed at its premiere by those two mighty (one in range and depth, the other in crowd-pleasing noise) scores.

In the "Little" Eighth Symphony, Beethoven dispenses with a slow introduction (such as distinguish the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies) and immediately begins, in 3/4 time, with a theme that uniquely broadens more and more (Robert Simpson described the effect as akin to seeing a cigar end-on, only becoming aware of its length as it was gradually revealed). The theme expands, the development proceeding without drama until the recapitulation is reached. Then a further original feature is displayed: marked *fff,* the inherent power of the entire first theme wholly surprises the attentive follower in this most subtle of arguments. The dynamic reappears in the coda, but – another surprise! – the movement suddenly ends calmly, a gesture of farewell.

More surprises are found in the second movement, which early listeners would have expected to be the "slow movement". Here, the music is not slow but has a regular tread, thought at the time by some listeners to parody Maelzel's recently developed metronome, although Beethoven never admitted that. More likely, Beethoven was using a Haydnesque "slow movement" device – such as is heard in several of the latter's "London" Symphonies – fully in keeping with the completely original features of the opening movement. Beethoven glances again at his predecessor in titling the third movement Minuet (Tempo di menuetto) – *not* the Scherzo that Beethoven had regularly used for third movements since his D major Symphony (No.2). This Minuet holds the forward momentum of the overall work brilliantly; clever also is that the wind instruments have the prime melodic interest. The whole Symphony's organic impulse is sustained until the finale, where Beethoven's metronome mark trumps the second movement's ace at a barely achievable tempo. A rogue C-sharp seems to disrupt proceedings, but in falling to the dominant of the home key Beethoven wins again, surprising us with the warmth of his final "be happy" Heiligenstadt plea.

The performances of the Symphonies on this recording are of the edition by the great Polish-German composer and pianist Xaver Scharwenka (1850–1924) for piano four-hands, a series of transcriptions published in the closing decade of the 19th century. As Beethoven's orchestral music came to be regarded as the backbone of the concert repertoire – during his lifetime and throughout the 19th century – demand increased for arrangements of his orchestral works (some made by Beethoven himself) for smaller ensembles or for piano solo or duo. And of all Beethoven's large output, it was his symphonies that headed that demand.

With respect to these arrangements, such is the inherent quality of Beethoven's thought that it was only those made by the greatest keyboard masters of later generations – pianists capable of transferring to their instrument the essence of his genius – that fully reflect the nature of the works in question. And such is the occasional complexity of Beethoven's thought that two hands alone cannot encompass everything at the keyboard: technically, and also interpretatively, the medium of four hands is to be preferred. There is no doubt, as the development of the concert grand piano evolved alongside the continuing demand for Beethoven's music, that Scharwenka's transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies for four hands must be counted as the finest ever produced. They continue an unbroken link back to the composer himself, for Scharwenka was a pupil of Franz Kullak, who studied under Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny. Here is something utterly unique and musically invaluable.

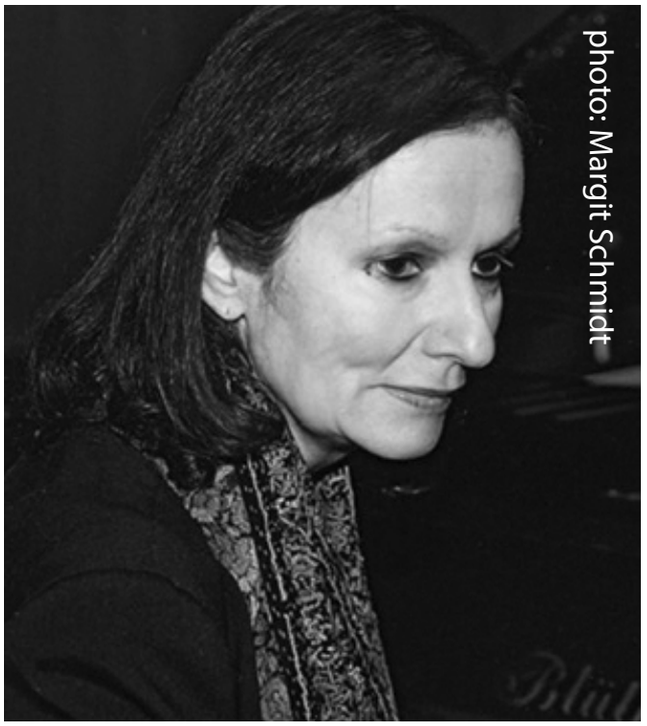
As we pointed out in earlier notes in this series of recordings, a major contemporary of Scharwenka was the younger Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), whose musical interests ranged wider than those of the older man. Busoni was equally a Mozart champion – at a time when Mozart's music was not as frequently performed as it is today. Nonetheless, Mozart's operas still held the stage by the dawn of the 20th century, and his last great operatic masterpiece, *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*), retained its admiration from opera lovers. *The Magic Flute* is the largest tribute to Freemasonry by Mozart, who was initiated into the order in 1784 and thereafter wrote much Masonic music. The opera's overture contains several Masonic references, as does Busoni's transcription, which dates from 1908. In sketches for the Lento occulto section of his own Sonatina seconda, Busoni marked a mysterious passage featuring E flat major chords "3-mal. Akkord". Mozart had used the same marking, indicating the threefold knock at the door of the Lodge, for his Masonic music in *Die Zauberflöte*, an opera that begins and ends in the "Masonic", three-flatted key of E flat major.

Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of ***Graham*** *and* ***Ruth Fennell*** *as well as* ***Graham Allum*** *and* ***Sarah Walker CBE.***

Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman

piano duo

In 2010, Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman established a duo partnership after being invited to give a two-piano recital at the Royal Over-Seas League in London. Ever since, they have performed regularly at music societies, festivals and at the BBC. In 2015, they embarked on their journey with the nine Beethoven Symphonies transcribed for piano four-hands by Xaver Scharwenka. They are currently recording the complete Beethoven/Scharwenka Symphonies for SOMM Recordings.



Tessa Uys

Born in Cape Town, Tessa Uys was first taught by her mother, Helga Bassel, herself a noted concert pianist. At 16, she won a Royal Schools Associated Board Scholarship and continued her studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London where she studied with Gordon Green. In her final year she was awarded the MacFarren Medal. Further studies in London with Maria Curcio, and in Siena with Guido Agosti followed. Shortly after this Tessa Uys won the Royal Over-Seas League Competition and was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music. During the past decades, Tessa Uys has established for herself an impressive reputation, both as concert performer, and as a broadcasting artiste, performing at many concert venues throughout the world. She has performed at London's Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, Barbican and St John's Smith Square, and has played under such distinguished conductors as Sir Neville Marriner, Walter Susskind, Louis Frémaux and Nicholas Kraemer.

impulse-music.co.uk/tessauys/

photo: Zach Gerard

Ben Schoeman

Steinway Artist Ben Schoeman was the first prize laureate in the 11th UNISA International Piano Competition in Pretoria, winner of the gold medal in the Royal Over-Seas League Competition in London and was also awarded the contemporary music prize at the Cleveland International Piano Competition. He has performed in prestigious halls on several continents, including the Wigmore, Barbican and Queen Elizabeth Halls in London, Carnegie Hall in New York, the Konzerthaus in Berlin, the Gulbenkian Auditorium in Lisbon, Cape Town City Hall and the Enescu Festival in Bucharest. As a concerto soloist he has collaborated with conductors including Diego Masson, James Judd, Gérard Korsten, Yasuo Shinozaki, Bernhard Gueller and Wolfram Christ. Ben Schoeman studied piano in London, Imola, Fiesole and South Africa with Joseph Stanford, Boris Petrushansky, Louis Lortie, Michel Dalberto, Ronan O'Hora and Eliso Virsaladze. He obtained a doctorate on the piano music of Stefans Grové from City, University of London and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He is a senior lecturer in piano and musicology at the University of Pretoria.

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Beethoven Symphonies arr. Scharwenka

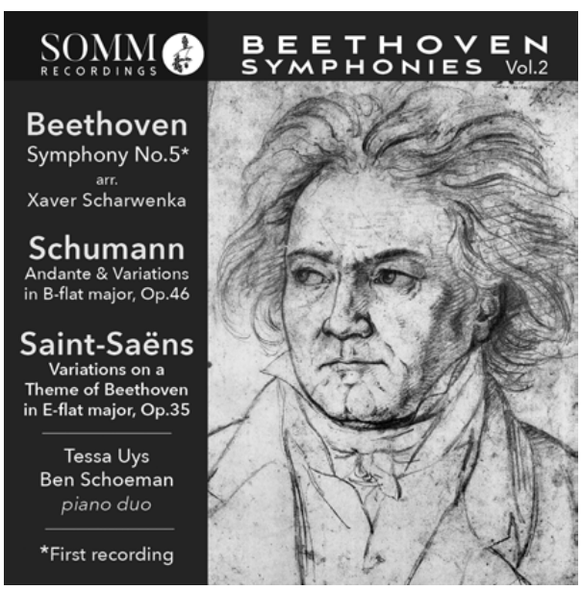
Tessa Uys, Ben Schoeman *piano duo*

Volume 1

(Symphony No.3 · Schumann/Debussy *Canonic Études)*

SOMMCD 0637

"This magnificent recording … the sound is fabulous … the playing exemplary" *MusicWeb International*



Volume 2

(Symphony No.5 · Schumann *Andante & Variations*
Saint-Saëns *Variations on a Theme of Beethoven)*

SOMMCD 0650

"The performances are state-of-the-art"
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FIRST RECORDINGS

BEETHOVEN SYMPHONIES Vol.5

Tessa Uys, Ben Schoeman *piano duo*

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
Arr. Xaver Scharwenka for piano four-hands

Symphony No.4 in B flat Op.60 [a]* [33:02]

1	I.	Adagio – Allegro vivace	11:08
2	II.	Adagio	9:40
3	III.	Scherzo – Trio: Allegro vivace	5:14
4	IV.	Allegro ma non troppo	6:59

Symphony No.8 in F Op.93 [b]* [26:28]

5	I.	Allegro vivace e con brio	9:25
6	II.	Allegretto scherzando	4:37
7	III.	Tempo di menuetto	4:04
8	IV.	Allegro vivace	8:21

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756–1791)
Transcr. Ferruccio Busoni for 2 pianos

9	**Overture BV B 93** [a] to the opera *The Magic Flute K.620*	6:53

Total duration: **66:40**

* First Recordings
[a] Ben Schoeman *primo / piano I*
Tessa Uys *secondo / piano II*
[b] Tessa Uys *primo* · Ben Schoeman *secondo*

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Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor
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Design: WLP London Ltd · **Editorial**: Ray Granlund

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