



John THOMAS

COMPLETE DUOS FOR HARP AND PIANO, VOLUME FOUR
HARP CONCERTO NO. 1: ANDANTINO
MARCH OF THE WELSH FUSILIERS
AND TRANSCRIPTIONS OF MUSIC BY
ARDITI, BELLINI, MEYERBEER AND ROSSINI

FIRST RECORDINGS

Duo Praxedis

JOHN THOMAS: COMPLETE DUOS FOR HARP AND PIANO, VOLUME FOUR

by Cornelis Witthoefft

As a harp virtuoso performing for half a century at home and abroad, as an adjudicator and formative pedagogue at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), the Royal College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music in London during the same period, as first harpist to the Royal Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre in London, as harpist-in-ordinary and musician-in-ordinary to Queen Victoria and harpist to King Edward VII, as a member of the Royal Society of Musicians and the Philharmonic Society, London, and honorary member of the musical academies in Rome and Florence, as a choral conductor, editor and music historian who championed Welsh music in the English capital and, last but not least, as a prolific composer and arranger who mainly (but not exclusively) created works for his beloved instrument, John Thomas (1826–1913) succeeded in uniting various aspects of musical, didactic and scholarly activity. This series of recordings offers the opportunity to discover and appreciate his extensive work of original compositions and arrangements for the delightful combination of harp and piano, which was blessed with a substantial repertoire in certain periods of music history but is, unfortunately, less highly esteemed today. This essay is intended to place these little-known gems in the context of his life and times on the basis of the documentation on John Thomas currently available, although much research has yet to be done.¹

Early Success and Years of Study

John Thomas, a son of a tailor and amateur musician, was born on 1 March 1826² in Bridgend in the county of Glamorganshire, twenty miles west of the Welsh capital,

¹ I would like to thank four members of the staff of the National Library of Wales, Iwan ap Dafydd, Heini Davies, Dr Maredudd ap Huw and Hywel C. Jones, for their valuable assistance with my ongoing research into John Thomas.

² That puts him in the same generation as Bedřich Smetana and Anton Bruckner (both born in 1824) and Johann Strauss Jr (born in 1825).

Cardiff. Throughout his life, Thomas considered it significant that he was born on this very day – St David’s Day and thus the National Day of Wales, named after the sixth-century Welsh bishop St David. According to his fellow student and friend, the pianist and composer Walter Macfarren (1826–1905), Thomas once remarked: ‘I ought to have been called David, [...] for I was born in Wales and on St. David’s Day; but it was ordained otherwise, and I have had, although a Welshman, to put up with the very cosmopolitan christian [*sic*] name John.’³

Thomas was already infatuated with the harp as a boy, as Charles Wilkens poetically described in a tribute to Thomas in 1883:

At an age when most boys would have been in the fever heat for playthings – investigating drums, if of analytical turn; playing soldiers, if military – our lad, seized with a passion for the harp, studied it with avidity. Early morn found him in full practice; late in the night the faint plaintive music streamed forth to the wind.⁴

He had already made his name at the age of twelve: in 1838, at the *eisteddfod* competition⁵ in Abergavenny, some forty miles from his home town, he was the youngest competitor under the adjudicator, the distinguished harpist John Parry (Bardd Alaw) (1776–1851), to take the first prize and win the most valuable of four Welsh triple-harps offered as prizes. Thereafter there was no stopping the boy, but apparently the early start to his career did not go to his head: a later account described him as being ‘then unpretending in his manners and appearance.’⁶ That description corresponds well with the recollections of Walter Macfarren, who towards the end of the century described him as ‘the most modest of boys, [who] is now the most modest of men.’⁷

³ Quoted in anon., ‘John Thomas’, *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 40 (1899), No. 681, 1 November 1899, pp. 725–30, here p. 729.

⁴ Charles Wilkens, ‘Notable Men of Wales. John Thomas’, *The Red Dragon. The National Magazine of Wales*, Vol. 4 (July–December 1883), pp. 481–85, here p. 482.

⁵ The Welsh *eisteddfodau* (plural of *eisteddfod*, translated as ‘sitting’ or ‘sitting together’, thus denoting a gathering) date back to the seventh century and were then sponsored by the aristocracy.

⁶ William Wahab Cazalet, *The History of the Royal Academy of Music*, Bosworth, London, 1854, p. 321, quoting ‘an account of the Eisteddfod in 1853’.

⁷ Quoted in anon., ‘John Thomas’, *loc. cit.*, p. 730.

He was referring to their years of joint study at the RAM, which Thomas entered in 1840 at the age of fourteen, under the tutelage of John Balsir Chatterton (1804–71), then harpist to Queen Victoria, and with the financial sponsorship of Lady Ana Lovelace, Lord Byron's only legitimate daughter. In order to support his son's musical advancement as best he could, his father moved to London with his large family. Subsequently, two younger brothers, Thomas and Llewelyn, also became harpists, apparently taught by their elder sibling. At this youthful age, he had two challenging tasks to master: apart from having to make English his second tongue, he had to switch from the familiar Welsh triple harp, in which the instrument rests on the left shoulder, and the treble is played with the left hand and the bass with the right, to the exact opposite treatment in the pedal (or double-action) harp, as invented and patented by Sebastian Érard in 1801, which was the final refinement of the mechanism that quickly caught on worldwide and is basically still in use today.⁸ 'I worked very hard [...] during my Academy days', Thomas stated in an interview published in 1899, 'much harder, I am afraid, than students do now.'⁹ This early perseverance and determination must have been generally known in professional circles, for Wilkens had already noted in his earlier study: 'The musician, like the poet, has heaven-born capacities; but his genius, even more than that of the former, requires long and patient effort in development and manipulation. Few worked harder than Mr. John Thomas.'¹⁰

As much as Thomas championed the music of his homeland throughout his life, it was with the deepest conviction that he defended the change of instrument, which he made at a young age, from the traditional Welsh harp to the modern pedal harp. This certainty emerges, for example, from an 1892 article on 'Music in Wales' which states:

'Nationality' is a factor of distinct use in music, so far as characteristic rhythm and uncommon melodic progressions are concerned; but it would be folly to approach modern music in this spirit, and attempt to resuscitate any ancient and rude instrument, or even

⁸ A detailed history of the Érard harp and its distribution in Britain can now be found in Panagiotis Pouloupoulos, *The Erard Grecian Harp in Regency England*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2023.

⁹ Quoted in anon., 'John Thomas', *loc. cit.*, p. 726.

¹⁰ Wilkens, 'John Thomas', *loc. cit.*, p. 482.

the Welsh triple harp, the telyn. So prominent a musician as Mr. John Thomas (Pencerdd Gwalia) has lifted up his voice against this antiquity, and pointed out what a mistake it is to pit it against the modern pedal harp.¹¹

This remark must be seen in the context of the time, as rivalry between traditional and more forward-looking views on the harp had long dominated the debate among Welsh musicians and music-lovers. Among the staunchest advocates of the Welsh harp was Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover (1802–96), who bore the bardic name Gwenynen Gwent and who, according to a report in *The Musical World*, took a decisive step to promote and support the Welsh harp in October 1869:

On the 14th inst. [= of the current month], Lady Llanover invited real Welsh harpers to compete for a triple-stringed harp, given by her ladyship. All were to play ‘Difyrrwch Gwyr Harlech’ (The March of the Men of Harlech)¹² without variations. No one to compete who had ever played on the pedal harp.¹³

In a letter to the editor, John Balsir Chatterton objected fervently to the second rule of the competition which excluded harpists trained on the pedal harp. He also pointed out ‘that my friend and former pupil, Mr. John Thomas, undertook personally to secure the sum of fifty guineas towards a triple-harp scholarship, with the view of saving the instrument from oblivion.’ And he recalled an event almost thirty years previously when he concluded his letter with the remark:

It was the triple-harp upon which Thomas, as a boy, played when he came to the Royal Academy of Music to be examined for admission as a student, and I was present upon the occasion. I need not say what he has done since that time, for his reputation as a harpist and composer is well known all over Europe; and I have no hesitation in saying that if he had not forsaken the triple-harp for the pedal harp, he never could have accomplished what he has done, neither would he ever have supplied his country with a collection of Welsh

¹¹ T. L. S. [= Southgate], ‘Music in Wales’, *Musical News*, Vol. 3 (1892), No. 79, 2 September 1892, pp. 226–27, here p. 227.

¹² Thomas’ adaptation of this march for harp and piano is recorded on Volume One of this series, Tocata Classics TOCC 0561.

¹³ Anon., ‘Lady Llanover and the Welsh Harp’, *The Musical World*, Vol. 47 (1869), No. 44, 30 October 1869, p. 749.

melodies arranged in such a form as to admit of their being performed all over Europe; thereby giving the whole world an opportunity of appreciating their many beauties.¹⁴

Even in the last publication of his long career, his *History of the Harp*, Thomas considered it ‘would be superfluous to pass any encomium on this magnificent instrument; it speaks for itself, and must ever stand as an attesting proof of the genius of the man to whom the world is indebted for such a glorious invention.’¹⁵

First Engagements and Tours Abroad

Thomas’ very first engagements show how ground-breaking his teacher’s decision to change instruments was to prove. At the Academy he also studied piano and composition, the latter with Cipriani Potter (1792–1871) – the eminent symphonist, founder professor of this institution and its principal from 1832 to 1859, who, as a temporary pupil of Beethoven in Vienna, will have introduced Thomas to harmony, counterpoint and the formal concepts of Viennese Classicism – as well as with Charles Lucas (1808–69), the composer of three symphonies written as a student.¹⁶ After about eight years of study,¹⁷ Thomas rose to the rank of a sub-professor for harp and an Associate of the RAM, and on 5 February 1851 he was appointed Principal Harpist at Her Majesty’s Theatre in the Haymarket, London,¹⁸ at the age of barely 25, the principal conductor at the time being Michael William Balfe. With justifiable pride, he used the new titles less than two weeks later, in an advertisement offering classes in ‘harmony and

¹⁴ John Balsir Chatterton, ‘Lady Llanover and the Welsh Harp. To the Editor of the “Musical World.”’, *The Musical World*, Vol. 47 (1869), No. 45, 6 November 1869, p. 764.

¹⁵ John Thomas, *History of the Harp. From the Earliest Period Down to the Present Day*, Hutchings & Romer, London, 1908, p. 18.

¹⁶ Jürgen Schaarwächter, *Two Centuries of British Symphonism. From the Beginnings to 1945*, Vol. 1, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, 2015, p. 125.

¹⁷ Thomas himself claimed sixty years later a study period of six years (“Pencerdd Gwalia”, Interview with the King’s Harpist, *Evening Express and Evening Mail*, 29 June 1904, p. 3), but a period of ‘eight years’ (W. H. Grattan Flood, *The Story of the Harp*, The Walter Scott Publishing Co., London, 1905, p. 172), or ‘about eight years’ (Wenonah Milton Govea, *Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Harpists. A Bio-critical Sourcebook*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1995, p. 279) is probably more accurate.

¹⁸ Apparently, Thomas had been a member of this opera orchestra before, as he was hailed in press announcements outside London as early as 1848 as ‘the celebrated harpist, of Her Majesty’s Theatre’, whose ‘unrivalled performances [have] received the approval of all the metropolitan press’ (*The Manchester Courier*, 15 January 1848, p. 35).

composition,¹⁹ endeavouring to establish himself in musical London and earn a living. Additionally, his position in the opera orchestra gave him ample opportunity to listen to and meet some of the finest singers of his age, and to become acquainted both with the use of the harp as an orchestral instrument in general and with the music and the stylistic features of *bel canto* opera in particular, which, moreover, liked to use the harp as an orchestral instrument with a romantic flair.

Benjamin Lumley, who had directed Her Majesty's Theatre since 1842, was able to stage the British premieres of several operas by Giuseppe Verdi there and even commissioned his *I masnadieri* in July 1847, but shortly before also experienced a 'crisis [that] was evidently formidable',²⁰ when the principal conductor, Michael Costa, left the theatre in a dispute and launched a rival company, 'Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden', in April of that year. This strong competitive pressure forced Lumley to close his opera house after the 1852 season, only to reopen it after a fire destroyed the theatre in Covent Garden four years later.

Short-lived as Thomas' first engagement was, this incident enabled him to focus on his solo career as a harpist; he had the winters off anyway, since the opera season ran only in spring and summer. An important step in this direction were his appearances on the continent, for which he had clearly defined goals. Based on Thomas' diary entries, Carys Ann Roberts was the first to reconstruct the extent of his foreign tours,²¹ which I have supplemented in a few points:

Austria and Germany: October 1851–April 1852

Germany and Russia: September 1852–April 1853

Paris: November 1853–April 1854

Italy: September–December 1854

Paris: September 1858–April 1859

St Petersburg: November 1873–March 1874.

¹⁹ *The Musical World*, Vol. 26 (1851), No. 7, 15 February 1851, p. 111.

²⁰ Benjamin Lumley, *Reminiscences of the Opera*, Hurst and Blackett, London, 1864, p. 180.

²¹ Carys Ann Roberts, 'The Cosmopolitan Aspect of John Thomas, "Pencerdd Gwalia" (1826–1913)', *Welsh Music History/Hanes Cerdoriaeth Cymru*, Vol. 4 (2000), pp. 100–110, here p. 103.

Fortunately, his travel diaries and the press coverage of his tours can fill this meagre set of numbers with some life, starting with a critic in *The Musical World*, who, in a very favourable review of Thomas' farewell (and fund-raising) concert in Lady Llanover's London residence in July 1851, wished him 'a most hearty reception in Germany'.²² Obviously, the then only 25-year-old was able to fulfil the expectations placed in him and win over audiences and critics alike. A look at the press reporting and his diary on his Viennese debut proves particularly insightful. The *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* reported in February 1852 that Thomas 'has quickly become popular in Vienna due to his excellent playing and virtuosic performance' and pointed out that

in the runs and passages he made himself noticeable by pure and clear execution. He performs excellently in the modulations, and especially in the *piano* he achieves significant effects. He uses the pedal with ease and thus achieves a roundness in performance that is missed in most harp players. His beautiful technical training is significantly enhanced by an expressive and ingenious performance. Thomas received the liveliest acclamations, which were also accorded to Mrs. Streicher, whose excellent playing on the piano showed her to be a master.²³

In his own estimation, Thomas played 'better than usual'²⁴ in the concert in question, which took place on 2 February 1852 in the hall of the eminent piano-manufacturer Johann Baptist Streicher, whose hospitality he was able to enjoy extensively. However, the tension he was under at this event emerges from a diary entry from the following day, in which he admitted to himself: 'Was unwell after the excitement of my concert'.²⁵ In an undated six-page reflection, Thomas then dealt with this incisive event in detail, emphasising that it was 'the *first* concert I have ever given out of my own country', and in Vienna, of all places, which he described as 'the most musical metropolis in the world

²² *The Musical World*, Vol. 29 (1851), No. 29, 19 July 1851, p. 461.

²³ Anon., 'Concerte', *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung (früher Theaterzeitung)*, Vol. 46 (1852), No. 28, 4 February 1852, p. 116. All translations are my own.

²⁴ National Library of Wales, shelf-number NLW MS 23392iiB, fol. 4r, 2 February 1852. I would like to thank Ivan ap Dafydd of the National Library of Wales for providing me with digital copies of Thomas' travel diaries.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 February 1852.

(at least it has the reputation of being so).²⁶ Then he took stock quite soberly by recalling three objectives of his tour to Vienna, all of which he had successfully achieved, ‘in the first place that I might be able to bring a number of persons together for the purpose of hearing me, hoping that it would have added to my reputation’; second, ‘to bring back into my pocket part of the money I have expended upon my journey’; and third, ‘that in the event of my succeeding here, it might be of advantage to me when I returned to England – & in that I have also succeeded, for I have already read a most flattering & splendid critique of my concert’.²⁷ Prudently planning, he even took care of the last issue himself by inviting journalists from the local press to the concert.²⁸ He concluded his musings with the statement: ‘I have every reason to feel thankful at the result of my visit to Vienna.’²⁹

Interestingly, one also learns from the diary and the review above that Thomas was fortunate enough to perform there with the formidable pianist Friederike Streicher (1816–95), *née* Müller, the wife of the piano-manufacturer, who from 1839 to 1845 was one of Chopin’s most esteemed pupils – not yet with a piece of his own composition but with the duet on Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* by Théodore Labarre (1805–70).³⁰ This work may have been among the models for his own numerous opera adaptations for this combination of instruments; it can at least be concluded from this report that he was familiar with the genre from an early age. His other musical partner on this occasion was the well-known Austrian bassist Josef Staudigl (1807–61), who even performed a song of his own composition, ‘The Suppliant’s Prayer’, ‘which was to me one of the greatest treats I have ever had in my life’,³¹ as Thomas noted in his diary. He also found recognition on his return journey through Germany. In March 1852, a widely read magazine called

²⁶ NLW MS 23392iA, fol. 35v, undated.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 37v–38r.

²⁸ ‘Called on the *Redacteurs* of the *Zeitung*s [sic] of Vienna to invite them to my concert’ (NLW MS 23392iib, fol. 3v, 29 January 1852).

²⁹ NLW MS 23392iA, fol. 38r.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 36v, and anon., ‘Concerte’, *loc. cit.*

³¹ NLW MS 23392iA, fol. 36r.

him 'undoubtedly one of the first virtuosos on the harp, [who] is winning great acclaim everywhere for his eminent abilities'.³²

Thomas' second tour also proved successful. On 3 October 1852 he bearded the lions in their den by giving his debut in the prestigious concerts of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, choosing to perform two fantasias by Elias Parish Alvars (1808–49). The press reception was mixed. One review indicated to him that this eminent English harpist, who had died prematurely in Vienna three years previously, had not yet been forgotten after his death, at least in Germany, and that he had yet to face being measured against him: 'In Mr. Thomas, we met a very capable virtuoso from P.-A.'s school. It is now the task of the harpists to aspire to this master; we are not offered anything individual'.³³ On the other hand, he was allowed to enjoy unqualified praise:

Mr. John Thomas fully justified his position as professor of the Academy in London and first harpist at Her Majesty's Theatre. He mastered his difficult instrument with assurance and taste and his performance was noble and artistically measured. He responded to the audience's shouts of *da capo* by giving Parish-Alvars' 'Fairy Dance' ['La Danse des Fées'] as an encore.³⁴

Thomas was 'very gratified'³⁵ with his reception. Among the compliments he received after the performance, that of the piano virtuoso and composer Ignaz Moscheles was 'perhaps the most gratifying' to the young artist, as he told him that 'he had never heard harp playing like it before'.³⁶

Thomas' third objective was also evidently met, since upon his return from his travels he was able to establish himself wholly in London musical life as a performer, teacher and also increasingly as a composer. Particularly after his appointment as harpist to the Queen and full professor at the RAM following the death of his former teacher Chatterton in 1872, he was so well recognised and so well integrated into the musical

³² *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, Vol. 52 (1852), No. 17, Feuilleton, p. 202.

³³ F. G., 'Kleine Zeitung', in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. 37 (1852), No. 15, 8 October 1852, p. 159.

³⁴ Anon., 'Erstes Abonnementconcert', *Signale für die musikalische Welt*, Vol. 10 (1852), No. 41, p. 354.

³⁵ NLW MS 23393A, fol. 11v, 3 October 1852.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 12r, 3 October 1852.

life of the capital that his performances abroad were even closely followed by the local press. When on 23 January 1874, on his last tour, he performed in St Petersburg at the festivities on the occasion of the wedding of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, Queen Victoria's second son, and Duchess Maria Alexandrovna, daughter of Russian Emperor Alexander, a 'special correspondent' of *The Standard* reported about 'one of our own distinguished musical professors':

Whilst writing of musical celebrities who deservedly rank high in the estimation of the British public I am reminded, by rich tones which now reach my ears, of another favourite, whose harp under the inspiration of his mind and the touch of his masterly hands has so often given pleasure in his own country. Mr. John Thomas (Harpist to the Queen) is here, and to-day he had the honour to be received at the Winter Palace by the Duke of Edinburgh. He has already played twice to the Grand Duke Constantine (brother of the Emperor).³⁷

London readers were also informed of a concert in St Petersburg on the eve of the wedding, where Thomas performed alongside the famous soprano Adelina Patti,³⁸ as well as of his stay in Berlin on the return journey, where he 'had the honour of playing at a *soirée* given by the Crown Prince and Princess of Prussia, to which the *élite* of Berlin were invited'.³⁹ Obviously Thomas also had his share of keeping the public informed, for his diary entry of 10 March similarly qualifies the audience ('Played at a *Soirée* given by the Crown Prince & Princess. 150 of the *Élite* of the Diplomatic, Artistic & Literary World present'⁴⁰), suggesting that he himself launched this press release.

Given the opportunity to perform for many royal personages on his tours of the continent, Thomas soon 'enjoyed the distinction of being the King's harpist', as one

³⁷ *The Musical World*, Vol. 52 (1874), No. 4, 24 January 1874, p. 51. The letter is dated 12 January 1874. Thomas took this opportunity to present the Russian princess with a 'volume of my compositions' (letter from John Thomas, dated January 1874, quoted in Roberts, 'The Cosmopolitan Aspect', *loc. cit.*, p. 108; Roberts mistakenly names Queen Victoria as the recipient of Thomas' present). The concert appearances mentioned are confirmed by Thomas' diary entry for 22 January 1874 (NLW MS 23397a, fol. 9r).

³⁸ *The Musical World*, Vol. 52 (1874), No. 5, 31 January 1874, p. 70.

³⁹ *The Musical World*, Vol. 52 (1874), No. 12, 21 March 1874, p. 184.

⁴⁰ NLW MS 23397a, fol. 15v, 10 March 1874.

obituary put it in 1913; it even called him ‘Minstrel to royalty.’⁴¹ ‘I do not think there is one Court in Europe where I have not played,’ Thomas stated in an interview from 1897.

During the ten years that I spent travelling about Europe I met nearly every reigning sovereign; indeed, I was engaged in a kind of Royal tour, for I took a letter from one Court to another and thus secured the favour of all those in high places.⁴²

Thomas especially remembered George V, the blind King of Hanover, who was also active as a pianist, composer and writer on music, and who in 1852 commented on his playing: ‘Mr. Thomas, I find there is a peculiarity in your playing which I have never found in anybody else, and that is that your hands are perfectly equal.’⁴³ It is revealing that in his answer Thomas attributed the even training of his hands to the fact that he had initially trained the left hand on the Welsh harp as the prominent one.⁴⁴

The elite society in which the young musician found himself at an early age also seems to have been known to Hector Berlioz, for whom Thomas performed privately during his stay in Paris on 11 January 1854⁴⁵ – on the recommendation of Liszt, for whom he had played on 8 and 9 October 1852.⁴⁶ Two months later Berlioz wrote in his columns in the *Journal des débats*: ‘If I were rich, I would allow myself the luxury of having such a virtuoso to lull me in my sad hours and make me forget the real world!’⁴⁷ Berlioz appreciated the well-balanced intensity of his playing when he described it as ‘nervous, passionate, feverish, in a manner of speaking, but without ever going to the point of outrageous nuances,’⁴⁸ and one could certainly not wish the aspiring

⁴¹ *The Porthcawl News*, 27 March 1913, p. 2.

⁴² ‘A Chat with Mr. John Thomas, the Welsh Harpist,’ *The Llangollen Advertiser and North Wales Journal*, 9 April 1897, p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Thomas played for the king on his return journey from Vienna on 28 March 1852 and received the considerable amount of 50 Talers as remuneration (cf. his diary entries of 28 and 29 March 1852, NLW MS 23392iiB, fol. 11r).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Thomas’ diary entries relating to this encounter read: ‘Made the acquaintance of Mr. Hector Berlioz through Liszt’ (10 January 1854) and ‘Berlioz called upon me & heard me play & paid me the most flattering compliments. Had a large party at my apartments to hear me perform’ (11 January 1854: NLW MS 23394A, fol. 9v).

⁴⁶ NLW MS 23393A, fol. 17v–18r.

⁴⁷ *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 2 March 1854, p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

young Thomas more than the effusive praise with which the famous French composer introduced him to his Parisian readership: ‘This is how to play the harp’.⁴⁹

Socialising with Exalted Circles and Championing Welsh Music

Although Thomas was appointed harpist to the Queen only in 1872, he had already established extensive contacts with the British upper class, in whose houses he was a welcome guest and who willingly patronised him. A vivid example of these contacts, which proved to be so important to him, can be found in the memoirs of the Welsh-born Mary Lucy (1803–89), mistress of Charlecote Park, Warwickshire, and amateur harpist, to whom he would eventually dedicate his *Souvenir du Nord* and his *Grand Duo*, both for two harps or, alternatively, harp and piano.⁵⁰ In 1851 Thomas acted as adjudicator at the *eisteddfod* in Abergavenny, South Wales, sponsored by the aforementioned Lady Llanover. Mary Lucy became aware of him when one day her son ‘rushed into the room saying, “Make haste, Mamma, put on your bonnet and come with me to a house in the park and hear a young man play the harp who will drive you wild”’.⁵¹ Mrs Lucy followed this call and Thomas politely complied with her request to play for her, choosing Parish Alvars’ *La Danse des Fées*. ‘I was enchanted and fancied the king of the fairies himself swept the cords, never did I hear such feeling, tone, richness and power combined’;⁵² Mary Lucy recalled. At home at Charlecote Park, she soon hosted an evening of music presenting Thomas, where ‘[e]veryone was in raptures with his playing’;⁵³ and he immediately accepted her into his circle of pupils.

For his tireless dedication to Welsh music and his high degree of competence in this activity, his compatriots honoured him at the 1861 *eisteddfod* in Aberdare with the bardic title ‘Pencerdd Gwalia’, meaning ‘Chief of Welsh Musicians’, ‘one of the highest honours within the musical circles of nineteenth-century Wales’.⁵⁴ In addition to his

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Both pieces are recorded on Volume One of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0561.

⁵¹ Alice Fairfax-Lucy (ed.), *Mistress of Charlecote. The Memoirs of Mary Elizabeth Lucy*, Gollancz, London, 1984, p. 96.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵⁴ Roberts, ‘The Cosmopolitan Aspect’, *loc. cit.*, p. 108.

role as an adjudicator, he continued to render considerable service to the music of his principality by conducting the Welsh Choral Union from 1871 onwards, but, above all, by incorporating his native music in his own arrangements in the annual Concerts of Welsh Music or Grand Harp Concerts he organised at St James's Hall (which was then London's largest concert hall, situated between Piccadilly and Regent Street, seating over 2,000). The first such concert was held on 4 July 1862, with a programme consisting chiefly of his arrangements of Welsh airs and featuring the debut of the young Welsh soprano Edith Wynne. 'The orchestra presented a peculiarly striking and David-like appearance', the reviewer of *The Morning Post* noted, 'with its 20 harpists and a large bardic bust which occupied the centre'. He called Thomas 'the justly celebrated harpist, [...] who is at the same time one of the very best musicians in this country' and added: 'The hall was densely crowded, and the entire performance, which went off with the greatest possible éclat, was every way honourable to Mr. John Thomas's "Pencerdd Gwalia"'⁵⁵ A review in *The Athenæum* specified: 'The applause of the audience was uproarious throughout: in fact, the Concert was virtually sung twice over, since to keep count of the encores is beyond our power.'⁵⁶ Because of its success, the concert was repeated on 26 July at the Crystal Palace and established an influential concert tradition in London that lasted for more than four decades.⁵⁷ Thomas' innovative performance style was so successful that he soon found imitators. As early as the beginning of 1863, Henry F. Chorley, the influential critic of *The Athenæum*, bitingly remarked: 'The number of foolish concerts, without pretext or motive, which have sprung up in imitation of these Welsh entertainments, is on the increase. We shall next be hearing of "The Messiah" accompanied by a band of harps.'⁵⁸

The picture that emerges from the extant documents of John Thomas is one of an artist who, as a performer, composer, teacher and preserver and promoter of his native

⁵⁵ *The Morning Post*, 7 July 1862, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *The Athenæum*, No. 1811, 12 July 1862, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Before this event, Thomas had begun to publish multi-volume collections of Welsh melodies, which he arranged, in addition to those for solo harp (Vol. 1, 1855) mentioned above, also for one and four voices with harp or piano (Vol. 1, 1862).

⁵⁸ *The Athenæum*, No. 1843, 21 February 1863, p. 269.

musical culture, had a well-defined concept of his own life from the outset and strove to shape his artistic life accordingly. Walter Macfarren's memoirs, written down when Thomas was 73 years old and already quoted above, contain the following revealing statement: 'I marvel at the slight change which is apparent between the John Thomas of to-day and in the days when we were "school and form-fellows"'⁵⁹

My friend presents the same erect and dignified form and lithe figure, the same unclouded brow, and speaks in the same voice with which he conversed with me upwards of fifty years ago. His character has been equally consistent with his personal appearance. An admirable student, he developed into an equally admirable professor [...].⁶⁰

Accordingly, Thomas remained true to his artistic principles throughout his life. After his student days, he never settled permanently in Wales again, but remained connected to London throughout his life, a 'cosmopolitan Victorian Welshman, faithful in turn both to his homeland and to the crown',⁶¹ as Carys Ann Roberts aptly characterised him. Besides his works for the harp, his two-harp and harp/piano duos and his numerous arrangements, his compositional output (youthful works apart) comprises songs, chamber music and the cantatas *Llewelyn* (1863) and *The Bride of Neath Valley* (1866); as editor and interpreter, he is credited with the rediscovery of Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp, K299 (1777), for which he also wrote a piano reduction and cadenzas. He gave his last concert on 17 June 1905 and died in New Barnet, Hertfordshire, on 19 March 1913, at the age of 87.⁶² Shortly thereafter, the harpist Kathleen Purcell (1886–1927) sought to preserve his memory, describing him, probably without exaggeration, as someone 'who for over half a century did more for the instrument [the harp] than anyone in this country'.⁶³

⁵⁹ Anon., 'John Thomas', *loc. cit.*, p. 730.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Roberts, 'The Cosmopolitan Aspect', *loc. cit.*, p. 108.

⁶² Ann Griffiths, 'Thomas, John', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, Vol. 54, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 350–51.

⁶³ Kathleen Purcell, 'Women Harpists. A New Profession', *The Sun* (Sydney), 22 June 1913, p. 20. For further aspects of the life and work of John Thomas, the reader is referred to the booklet texts of the other volumes of this series.

Arditi: *Il Bacio*

Thomas' arrangement of the waltz *Il Bacio* ('The Kiss') by Luigi Arditi (1822–1903) [1] from 1861 should be seen in the context of his other waltz adaptations of that period. These include harp-and-piano versions of *La Gassier Valse* by Luigi Venzano⁶⁴ (1858), two more Arditi waltzes (1866 and 1867), which are recorded on this album, and the *canzone Ben è ridicolo* by Alberto Randegger⁶⁵ (1868). Together they form a delightful group in his *œuvre*, skilfully and effectively transforming the genre of Italian 'Valzer cantabile', as Arditi called it,⁶⁶ into good-humoured chamber music. Although *Il Bacio* still enjoys enduring popularity with coloratura sopranos, the purely Italian origin of this type of vocal waltz has largely been forgotten; after all, it pre-dates the equally famous waltz *Frühlingsstimmen* ('Voices of Spring'), Op. 410, by Johann Strauss Jr, commonly first associated with the genre today, by two decades.

Arditi, from Piedmont in northern Italy, was trained as a violinist and studied composition with Nicola Vaccai, who is still remembered today for his 'Practical Vocal Method'. He made an early conducting career in Italy and the USA and settled permanently in London in 1858, where, at the invitation of the director, Benjamin Lumley, he first conducted for about a decade at His Majesty's Theatre and thus laid the foundations of his reputation as one of the most important opera conductors in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The three waltzes that Thomas arranged fall into his first London period and thus also represent a part of British musical life at the time. According to his autobiography, he composed *Il Bacio* improvising at the piano in the autumn of 1859 in a Manchester hotel during a visit of his opera company to Ireland. The Italian soprano Marietta Piccolomini (1834–99), who had first triumphed as Violetta in Verdi's *La Traviata* at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1856 and sang the role again that year, happened to be listening and was very taken with the music. In the following year 'Piccolomini had gone to America', Arditi recalled, 'and it had been a promise on my part that I would compose

⁶⁴ Recorded on Volume Three of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0578.

⁶⁵ To be released on Volume Five of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0711.

⁶⁶ In the first print by Ricordi, *Il Bacio* is called 'valse brillante', but in greeting cards Arditi liked to use the term 'Valzer cantabile'.

a song for her to sing at the first concert in England on her return from the States.⁶⁷ When she came back, however, Arditi had not yet written anything for her, whereupon he hurriedly resorted to the improvised waltz of the previous year. As for the missing text, the Italian baritone Gottardo Aldighieri, with whom Arditi was rehearsing at this moment, helped him out of his embarrassment with the text beginning with 'Sulle labbra se potessi / Dolce un bacio ti darei. / Tutte ti direi / Le dolcezze dell'amor' ('If only I could, / I would tenderly give you a kiss on your lips. / They would all tell you / The sweetness of love'). Arditi swiftly put the finishing touches to the piece, rehearsing it with Piccolomini, who learned it just as quickly for the concert already scheduled for the very next day, so that the premiere could take place as planned on 16 February 1860 in Brighton. 'Never had a song been written under so many difficulties, or in so short a space of time; never was a song learned so rapidly or delivered more admirably than "II Bacio"⁶⁸, Arditi remembered. Two weeks later it was premiered in London, again with Arditi at the piano, when it received an encore.⁶⁹ It was subsequently published by Cramer in London in July 1860 and from there began its triumphal tour around the world. The fame of this waltz is due in no small part to the fact that opera stars of the time, such as the soprano Adelina Patti, liked to use it, as others did before Venzano's 'Ah! che assorta', as a so-called 'aria di baule' (literally 'suitcase aria', that is, an insertion aria brought along by the singer) in the lesson scene in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.

Meyerbeer's favorite Opera 'Dinorah'

Even more than Donizetti's *La Favorite*,⁷⁰ *Dinorah* by Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864) is today the least known and least performed of the operas chosen by Thomas for arrangement for harp and piano, even more so the revised version of this opera in question here. It is striking, then, that of his sixteen opera arrangements for this duo,

⁶⁷ Luigi Arditi, *My Reminiscences*, ed. Baroness von Zedlitz, Dood, Mead and Company, New York, 1896, p. 59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ *The Daily Times*, 27 February 1860, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Thomas' *Duet on Melodies from 'La Favorite'* will appear on Volume Five of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0711.

Thomas described only *Dinorah* as a ‘favorite opera.’⁷¹ That is certainly due to the significance it had for London musical life at the time. After it had been premiered (shortly after Gounod’s *Faust*), with decided success, at the Opéra-Comique in Paris on 4 April 1859 under the title of *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*, the much-anticipated first London performance took place at the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden as early as 26 July of the same year. In his contract with Frederick Gye, who then ran this opera house, Meyerbeer, already in his late sixties, guaranteed a monopoly of performance in England there until October 1860;⁷² in return, he undertook to compose recitatives instead of the dialogues of the original French *opéra-comique* version, as well as an additional aria with chorus for the part of one of the goatherds,⁷³ which was cast with the French mezzo-soprano Constance Nantier-Didiée (1831–67). For Meyerbeer, the fact that he already knew her voice, having heard her two years previously as Azucena in Verdi’s *Il trovatore*,⁷⁴ surely had a favourable effect on his composition.

Meyerbeer’s operas had long been a staple of the repertoire at Covent Garden, where the first of his late comic operas, *L’Étoile du Nord* (1854), had been staged in July 1855, and which reopened after the disastrous fire in March 1856 with his *Les Huguenots* in May 1858. Thus *Dinorah*, performed there in Achille de Lauzière’s Italian translation, was yet another major attraction by this composer that Gye could offer his audience in 1859. Meyerbeer had completed what he called the ‘Italian transformations’⁷⁵ of this opera by the end of May of that year, and ensured the quality of its second production by rehearsing personally with the cast for a good month⁷⁶ – which the management

⁷¹ This spelling, contrary to that of contemporary British English, is the wording on the cover of the score published by Boosey & Sons.

⁷² Cf. Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. Sabine Henze-Döhring and Panja Mücke, Vol. 7: 1856–1859, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2004, p. 422 (entry dated 8 June 1859).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

⁷⁴ ‘She sang with intelligence and fire, but her vocal material is small,’ he confided to his diary (*ibid.*, p. 237 (entry dated 1 October 1857)).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

⁷⁶ Meyerbeer documented the rehearsals from 23 June onwards in his diary (*ibid.*, pp. 448–57).

of the opera did not fail to announce explicitly in a press release.⁷⁷ The statistics prove how much Gye had backed the right horse, for in the following ten years *Dinorah* was performed 121 times at Covent Garden.⁷⁸ Three examples can be cited from the consistently enthusiastic, even exuberant, press coverage of the premiere. '[W]e say without hesitation, that we never have met with a single instance, in which a greater or more brilliant success than that of Tuesday last [the opening night] was achieved!';⁷⁹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger* stated. *The Examiner* reported that *Dinorah* 'was performed before an English audience proud to listen to a contemporary work that will be known in the next century among the most worthy achievements of our day.'⁸⁰ And Henry F. Chorley (who was soon to provide an English translation of the opera for the production at the Royal English Opera, Covent Garden, which opened in October of the same year) expressed the opinion in a review of the opera season that 'every night seems to have made the performance riper, the music more popular, and the audience [...] more enthusiastic. "Dinorah" is a success: and let it be recollected that the opera was only conditionally promised by Mr. Gye.'⁸¹

Thomas was fortunate to have met Meyerbeer in person a few years earlier, since the composer, who at the time resided partly in Berlin and partly in Paris, was present at his Berlin concert of 23 March 1852 and presented him with his portrait with a dedication.⁸² Although the year of composition or publication of Thomas' *Dinorah* arrangement cannot at present be accurately determined, there is no reason not to follow the British

⁷⁷ 'The opera of *Dinorah* has been arranged for the Italian stage, including the composition of additional music, as well as the recitatives, by M. Meyerbeer himself, expressly for the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden. The whole of the rehearsals, and the general production of the work, have also been conducted under the personal superintendence of M. Meyerbeer' (reprinted in *The Entr'acte*, 25 July 1859, p. 3).

⁷⁸ Robert Ignatius Letellier, 'Introduction', *The Meyerbeer Libretti. Opéra Comique 2, 'Le Pardon de Plöërmel'*, ed. Richard Arsenly and Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Giacomo Meyerbeer, The Complete Libretti*, Vol. 10, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2008, pp. xi–xviii, here p. xvii.

⁷⁹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 30 July 1859, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *The Examiner*, 30 July 1859, p. 485.

⁸¹ *The Athenæum*, 6 August 1859, p. 183.

⁸² NLW MS 23392iiB, fol. 10v.

Library dating, which places it around 1860;⁸³ and indeed it is easy to assume that Thomas readily jumped on the bandwagon of the triumph of *Dinorah* in the second London season in which it was given. By doing so, he followed up his *Six Gems from Verdi's Operas*⁸⁴ from 1857 with another extensive sequence of arrangements structured along similar lines. As in the earlier collection, the grouping of numbers is somewhat misleading in the succeeding work. Whereas eleven pieces from three operas are grouped together into six numbers in the previous collection, eleven pieces from a single opera appear here in four numbers, the first three comprising two pieces each and the last five. None of the numbers begins with the piece mentioned in its title.

The libretto, by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré (who were responsible also for Gounod's *Faust*), designates the village of Ploërmel in Brittany as the setting of the opera, and oscillates between the depiction of Catholic religiosity on the one hand and pre-missionary customs on the other. Since the Christian theme in Meyerbeer's operas was already familiar to the English audience from *Les Huguenots* and *Le prophète*, only the pre-Christian element aroused astonishment. London's leading music-critic of the day, James William Davison, who in his long, appreciative review in *The Times* praised the librettists for 'supplying the musician [Meyerbeer] with a canvass precisely fitted to the object he had in contemplation', however, reconciled himself to this choice of subject by calling '[t]he legend on which the plot is founded [...] primitive to a degree that warrants our accepting it, unquestioned, as a natural incident in the credulous superstitions of peasant life'.⁸⁵

The other antagonism depicted in *Dinorah* is that between madness and sanity. Apart from the comic role of the bagpiper Corentin (tenor), who is driven mad by the fear of superstition but whose music Thomas chose to ignore, two particular stages of madness concern the protagonists Dinorah (coloratura soprano), a goatherd, and Hoël

⁸³ *The Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library to 1980*, Vol. 56: Teas–Toast, ed. Robert Balchin, K. G. Saur, London, 1986, p. 201.

⁸⁴ Recorded on Volume Three of this series, Toccata Classics TOCC 0578.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 28 July 1859, p. 9.

(baritone), a shepherd. The two were to marry on the day of the annual pilgrimage to the chapel of the Virgin Mary, but a sudden thunderstorm destroys Dinorah's parents' dairy, depriving her of her dowry. Hoël, who has succumbed to the promises of a sorcerer, flees in search of a legendary treasure that could form the material basis for his marriage to Dinorah, and subsequently becomes obsessed with the idea of finding it; Dinorah, however, believing that she has been suddenly abandoned in poverty by her bridegroom, falls into madness and henceforth wanders about with her goats. Only when Hoël, after many perils, bitterly regrets what he has done to her does she awake from her insanity so that their wedding can finally take place, to the sounds of the Marian procession.

In his arrangement, typically, Thomas did not follow the plot line of the opera but structured the sequence of chosen excerpts in terms of strictly musical considerations. Thus, No. 1, the 'Shadow Air' [2], opens with what Davison considered 'likely to become a favourite';⁸⁶ and another reviewer of the premiere called it 'the most beautiful solo in the opera'.⁸⁷ Hoël's aria from Act 3, 'Sei vendicata assai / del mio folle abbandon' // 'Ah! Now I feel the burden / She has borne all alone',⁸⁸ in which he expresses his remorse at having abandoned his beloved. A transitional piano cadenza (at 01:37) gives way to the most famous number of the opera and in fact the only one still performed today, Dinorah's 'Shadow Air' (at 01:51), 'Ombra leggiera, non te n'andar / Non t'involiar, no, no, no' // 'O tender shadow that hovers near me / Thou shalt not fear me, no, no, no'.⁸⁹ As the ultimate sign of her madness, the girl is shown talking to her shadow as if it were a real person, demanding all manner of breakneck coloratura passages from the soprano (at 4:23), including multiple echo effects in the portrayal of her shadow (at 3:00 and 4:23).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *John Bull and Britannia*, 30 July 1859, p. 492.

⁸⁸ The libretto texts are quoted bilingually according to the edition of the piano reduction: Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Dinorah*, with English and Italian words, Boosey & Sons, London, n. d., which contains Henry F. Chorley's translation and which Thomas probably used. In addition, I shall give the original French version, the only one still performed today, in the footnotes – at this point: 'Ah! Mon remords te venge / De mon fol abandon.'

⁸⁹ 'Ombre légère qui suis mes pas / Ne t'en va pas! Non, non, non!'

No. 2, the ‘Cradle Song’ [3], is again introduced by a contrasting number; this time the mental sanity of the village girls of the opening chorus of Act 1, ‘Lazzuro del ciel / Si copre d’un vel’ // ‘The bright Autumn day / Is fading away’,⁹⁰ is juxtaposed with the confusion of the eponymous heroine. The chorus is cast in ABA form, with the first part, a polonaise, followed by a trio in $\frac{2}{4}$ time, ‘Tra, la, la, / Andiam giù pel cammin’ // ‘Guy, lon, la / Our long day’s work is done’⁹¹ (at 0:50). After the return of the first section (at 1:30), the fanfare associated with the trio is heard again (at 2:13), but misleads the listener by transitioning to Dinorah’s lullaby in Act 1 (at 2:33), which she sings to her goat in the absence of her lover: ‘Si, carina, caprettina / Dormi in pace, la’ // ‘Sleep, my darling, nought shall harm thee, / I am watching nigh.’⁹² This number is also in three parts, in that the second part, in the parallel minor key, ‘Ahimè sei di lontan restò / Ne tornò, errando va’ // ‘Alas how many a weary day / Far away lone and afraid’⁹³ (at 4:27), is devoted to thoughts of the distant beloved before the main part is repeated (at 4:45).

At the beginning of No. 3, ‘Fanciulle che il core’ [4], Thomas placed the cheerful, rustic music of the *Entr’acte* between Act 2 and Act 3, giving the piano opportunity for virtuosic development before presenting the aforementioned aria of the goatherd in Act 3 composed especially for the London performance, ‘Fanciulle che il core / Schiudete all’amore’ // ‘Ye maidens, in Springtime / When Love goes amaying’ (at 1:13). The juxtaposition of mental sanity and disorder is resumed here, as the goatherd, a trouser role, warns the surrounding girls in this merry aria against naively engaging in love, as it is easy to lose one’s mind. Dinorah’s fate is used as a cautionary tale in the middle section (‘Povera Dinorah, / Di senno priva’ // ‘Ah the poor Dinorah! / In wayward madness’; at 2:32) before the first part is resumed (at 3:08). In his review, Davison noted a

very tolerable excuse [...] for the interpolation. Every one of the inhabitants of Ploërmel being interested in the fate of Dinorah, what more natural than that it should form a theme for remark? Thus, Goat-herd Nantier Didiée descants upon it at considerable

⁹⁰ ‘Le jour radieux / Se voile à nos yeux.’

⁹¹ ‘Guy lon la / Suivons le vert sentier.’

⁹² ‘Dors, petite, dors tranquille / Dors, ma mignonne, dors.’

⁹³ ‘Hélas! Voici tantôt huit jours / Que tu cours.’

length, and so much to the satisfaction of the audience that the new air is one of the great successes of the opera [...].⁹⁴

The popularity of this number at the premiere appears to have been unanimous, for another critic observed that the 'little song composed expressly for her [Nantier-Didiée] is one of the most successful things in the opera',⁹⁵ and a third called it 'one of the especial beauties of the opera.'⁹⁶

No. 4, 'Santa Maria' [5], consists of five excerpts. After the opening with the Intermezzo at the beginning of Act 2 – the second orchestral number within this medley, a graceful waltz – a harp cadenza leads to the titular 'Santa Maria' (at 2:20) ('Santa Maria, Santa Maria, / Nostra Donna pel perdono, / Serbaci il tuo favor' // 'Sancta Maria, Sancta Maria, / Holy Queen of moor and mountain, / Grant us thy gentle care'⁹⁷), which is heard in the opera as a chorus as part of the overture and in the finale as an expression of the villagers' piety and, at the same time, of the happy wedding of the two protagonists that finally takes place. After this prayer, a 'Religious March' (at 3:15) depicts the procession of the villagers to the Marian chapel. Rather abruptly, the compilation returns to the main protagonists, Dinorah and Hoël, for a kind of scherzo with a trio that includes Dinorah's twittering aria 'Gorgheggiar in mezzo al prato / S'ode intanto il caro augele' // 'While the bird in his lovetale telling / To his maid upon the spray'⁹⁸ (at 3:47 and 05:06), from the Finale of Act 2 and Hoël's 'Quei tesor, o mia fidanzata / Il cor per te sol pien d'amore' // 'O mine own love, so young and lonely / For thee this treasure I covet, only',⁹⁹ (at 4:18) from Act 1, before the 'Santa Maria' is grandiosely resumed (at 5:39).

In this arrangement, Thomas has succeeded in treating the two instruments in a particularly idiomatic way, giving the piano a more prominent role than usual and making virtuosic demands on both performers, which speaks less for domestic use than

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 28 July 1859, p. 9.

⁹⁵ *The Illustrated London News*, 30 July 1859, p. 105.

⁹⁶ *The Examiner*, 30 July 1859, p. 485.

⁹⁷ 'Sainte Marie, / Notre Dame des bruyères / Daigne exaucer nos vœux!'

⁹⁸ 'De l'oiseau dans le bocage / Retentit le chant joyeux.'

⁹⁹ 'Ces trésors, o ma fiancée / Mon cœur où vivait ta pensée.'

for a concert performance that can bring music back to life that was a 'favorite' in its time but is unfortunately largely forgotten today.

Duet on Themes from 'Norma' (Bellini)

Thomas' four arrangements of operatic excerpts by Bellini and Donizetti stand out for subverting listening expectations by suppressing the arias of the female protagonists who made them famous and which were and are sung by prima donnas then as now. In his 1884 arrangement of Bellini's *Norma* [6], Thomas also forgoes the presentation of the aria 'Casta diva' in order to combine six other, lesser-known but impactful excerpts.

Bellini's *Norma* was written and premiered (at La Scala, Milan) in 1831. It is rightly considered one of the purest embodiments of *bel canto* opera, in this case tragic opera, and has deservedly endured through the ages. Felice Romani's libretto situates the action in Gaul in the first century BC and focuses on the opposition of the local population to the Roman occupiers. Orovesco (bass), the head of the Druids, Norma (soprano), his daughter and high-priestess of the druids, and Adalgisa (soprano or mezzo-soprano), a priestess subordinate to her, represent the Gallic side, whereas the proconsul Pollione (tenor) stands for the Romans. The typical triangular situation that is indispensable for many operatic libretti arises from the fact that Pollione initially loved his enemy Norma and even fathered two children with her, but then turned to Adalgisa. When Norma gives the signal to fight the Romans, Pollione remains faithful to his new love. Deeply impressed by his steadfastness, Norma accuses herself of betraying her people and sacrifices herself to be burned at the stake. In the face of this magnitude of soul, Pollione's love for her flares up again and they willingly go together to their deaths in the flames.

The duet begins with large parts of the overture showing the readiness for battle of both sides of the warring parties, but also briefly Norma's abandonment (at 0:31) before its second theme anticipates the main melody of the final duet of Norma and Pollione ('Già mi pasco ne' tuoi sguardi' ('I already feast my eyes on your looks')) (at 1:20). The ensuing number, Adalgisa's heartfelt solo in the duet with Norma in Act 1 ('Sola, furtiva, io l'aspettai al tempio sovente' ('Alone, stealthy, I often waited for him at

the temple')) (at 2:43), in which she reveals her love for a man to Norma without naming Pollione, is seamlessly followed by one of those beautiful drawn-out melodic arcs (at 4:01) that the late Verdi praised in Bellini,¹⁰⁰ and which sustains and transcends the final section of the opera as the catharsis theme. The following turn-back to the introduction of Act 1 (at 6:18), located in the sacred forest of the Druids (in which Thomas beautifully demonstrates the capacity of the harp to create magical sounds by playing with harmonics), leads to a musical phrase of which Verdi stated: 'no one has ever made it more beautiful and heavenly'¹⁰¹ (at 7:10). The final part of Thomas' compilation is dedicated to the subsequent opening chorus of the Gauls, led by Orovesco and ready to attack, who await a heavenly sign (at 8:22) ('Dell'aura tua profetica / Terribil Dio, l'informa! / Sensi, o Irminsul, le inspira / D'odio ai Romani e d'ira' ('With Thy prophetic spirit / O terrible God, instruct her, / Inspire her, O Irminsul, / With hate and anger against the Romans')).

Rossini: *La Carità*

As with Meyerbeer, Moscheles, Liszt and Berlioz, Thomas was also fortunate enough to get to know Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868). The travel diary of his second stay in Paris (January to April 1859) records no fewer than nine visits to the home of the composer,¹⁰² who had moved from Italy to Paris in 1855. Two of his entries stand out, although in them Thomas fulfils only his chronicler's duty. On 12 February 1859 he recorded: 'Played at Rossini's'¹⁰³ and on 1 April: 'Soirée at Rossini's / Alboni sang Giovanna d'Arco, / accompanied by Rossini himself'.¹⁰⁴ The first entry refers to the composer's legendary Saturday soirées, which had just been launched at the end of 1858, and at which numerous established and aspiring musicians presented themselves over the next ten

¹⁰⁰ 'Bellini is [...] rich in sentiment and of his own, individual melancholy! Even in his lesser-known works, [...] there are long, long melodies, such as no one has done before him' (*I Copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Gaetano Cesari and Allesandro Luzio, Commissione esecutiva per le onoranze a Giuseppe Verdi, Milan, 1913, p. 416: letter dated 2 May 1898 to Camille Bellaigue).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² There may have been even more encounters, but that cannot be ascertained, since Thomas' diary for September–December 1858 is missing.

¹⁰³ NLW MS 23396A fol. 7r.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 14r.

years. The second entry proves that he not only witnessed a performance by the famous Italian contralto Marietta Alboni (1826–94), who was held in high esteem by Rossini, but was also able to experience the composer at the piano performing his 1832 cantata.

The common belief that Rossini retreated from composing in 1829 more or less after his opera *Guillaume Tell* because he was, in today's parlance, burnt out, has recently been convincingly challenged by Reto Müller,¹⁰⁵ who showed rather that contractual conditions between him and the Paris opera house must be held responsible for his mysterious silencing. Whatever may have caused Rossini's reorientation, from the 1830s onwards a concentration on composing sacred music is clearly discernible. Alongside the two major works of this genre, the *Stabat mater* of 1833/42 and the *Petite messe solennelle* of 1863, the *Trois Chœurs religieux* for three-part women's chorus and piano of 1844 occupy a more modest place, but they are replete with musical treasures. Like the other two works, Rossini composed this triptych on commission, this time from the Parisian publisher Eugene Troupenas, in whose salon it was first performed on 20 November 1844, with the renowned pianist Henri Herz accompanying. For the first two numbers, 'La foi' ('Faith') and 'L'espérance' ('Hope'), Rossini drew on older compositions of his, whereas the third number, 'La charité' ('Charity'), in the Italian version 'La Carità' [7], is a new composition from 1844 – subjected by Liszt to a monumental arrangement (s553/2) only three years later, which suggests its degree of popularity at the time. Taken as a whole, these three choruses aim to represent musically, with newly created texts, the famous biblical passage of 1 Corinthians 13:13, 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity'.¹⁰⁶ It is this culmination of the small cycle that Thomas chose for his arrangement, undertaken at a time that cannot yet be determined, but which may have been created after his personal encounter with Rossini. Since performances can be traced only from 1890 onwards (for the first time in his annual concert at St James's Hall on 2 July), it may have been composed shortly before then.

¹⁰⁵ Reto Müller, '(Neue) Hintergründe zu Rossinis Rückzug von der Opernbühne', *Die Tonkunst*, Vol. 12, 2018, No. 4, pp. 339–47.

¹⁰⁶ King James version.

For 'La charité', Rossini used a text by Louise Colet, which already evokes the world-changing power of love in the opening lines:

Force de l'âme, ô charité!	<i>Strength of soul, o charity!</i>
Ta voix enflamme l'humanité.	<i>Your voice sets humanity alight.</i>
Tu nous rends frères,	<i>You make us brothers</i>
et dans nos misères	<i>and in our misery</i>
toujours ton bras soutient nos pas.	<i>your arm always supports our steps.</i>

For this number he chose to add a soprano solo to the women's chorus to let them conduct a dialogue. As in all his faithful arrangements, Thomas retained the original simple and effective form, a rondo, which gives the following sequence: Introduction: piano solo – A: chorus – B: solo – A: chorus – C: solo – A: solo and chorus – Coda: solo and chorus. Thomas modified this presentation so that the dialogue is divided differently in terms of the instrumentation of the leading melodic voices, namely: Introduction: harp and piano – A: harp – B: piano – A: piano – C: harp – A: piano – Coda: harp and piano. This structure of timbres opens up the possibility for him to assign the two solo parts, B and C, which contrast with the refrain, to both instruments alternately (at 1:42 and 3:29).

No one could give a better introduction to this little masterpiece than the critic of the premiere, the distinguished Parisian composer Adolphe Adam (1803–56), who described Rossini with admiration as 'the man who has the best command of voices and understands the mechanism of singing better than the singers themselves':

No. 3, La Charité, [...] consists of an andante in E flat major in twelve-eight time, interspersed with solos, each re-entrance of which brings back the motif in the simplest and most piquant way: it is reserved only for great geniuses to create such ravishing effects with nothing, with a single note that transports you, and when you listen to it, it makes you dream of a modulation or a transition of extreme novelty: you take a closer look at the piece and you are quite surprised to see only a group of the simplest, least ambitious notes in the world.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Adolphe Adam, 'La Foi, L'Espérance et La Charité, compositions nouvelles de G. Rossini', *La France musicale*, Vol. 7, No. 47, 24 November 1844, pp. 337–38, here p. 338.

Arditi: *The Ilma Valse* and *L'Estasi*

As immediate sequels to *Il Bacio*, his first major success, Arditì composed four more vocal waltzes in the 1860s, *La stella* (1861), *L'Ardita* (1862), *Ilma* (1865) and *L'Estasi* (1866), although only the third of these pieces was advertised by his publisher Cramer as 'a second "Bacio"'.¹⁰⁸ As Venzano had written for Josefa Gassier in 1850 and Arditì had done in the case of Marietta Piccolomini, all these vocal waltzes were composed for individual prima donnas of the time; in the case of *Ilma* [8], Arditì even adopted the name of the dedicatee in the title. The Croatian soprano Ilma de Murska (1834–89), whose real name was Ema Pukšec, made her London debut on 11 May 1865 at Her Majesty's Theatre in the role of Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor, conducted by Arditì, and impressed critics and audiences in particular with the mad scene. 'Her power of vocalisation – the variety of her tones – the beauty of her *mezza-voce* – the force of her delivery, and the splendour of her execution were here exhibited in their fullest degree', the critic of the newspaper *John Bull* wrote, 'and the enthusiasm created has not for some seasons been equalled.'¹⁰⁹ Her operatic debut was followed by her first appearance in a New Philharmonic Concert on 24 May, where, alongside Dinorah's 'Shadow Air', she repeated the mad scene of *Lucia*, again creating 'quite a *furor*',¹¹⁰ as *The Morning Post* reported, adding, 'We never before witnessed such effect in a concert-room made with an essentially dramatic piece.'¹¹¹ In the aftermath of these triumphs, Ilma de Murska premiered the waltz that bears her name – opening boisterously with 'Ballar, cantar, sorridere, / Goder vogl'io, son giovine' ('I want to dance, sing, smile, / Enjoy, I am young') – at Arditì's 'Grand Morning Concert' on 9 June 1865. According to the *Evening Standard*, her mad scene of *Lucia* at this concert once more 'created an extraordinary sensation by the unparalleled brilliancy of her singing and the impassioned earnestness of her acting', and she was 'rapturously encored' for the performance of the new waltz

¹⁰⁸ *The Illustrated London News*, 25 November 1865, p. 516. Arditì later added nine more waltzes to this series.

¹⁰⁹ *John Bull*, 13 May 1865, p. 300.

¹¹⁰ *The Morning Post*, 26 May 1865, p. 6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

‘written expressly for her’, and even ‘had a laurel crown thrown at her feet’.¹¹² For the rest of the month, she remained the outstanding event of the London opera scene, appearing at Her Majesty’s in roles as different as Marguerite de Valois in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*, Amina in Bellini’s *La sonnambula* and as Donizetti’s Linda di Chamounix.

On 15 June 1866, at Arditi’s concert the following year, de Murska repeated her *Valse*, this time joined, among others, by the young Italian soprano Clarice Sinico (1838–1909), who had made an efficacious debut at Her Majesty’s in 1864, also under Arditi, as Violetta in Verdi’s *La traviata*. On this occasion, the *Evening Standard* had quoted ‘local journals’ from the Continent ‘proclaiming that a new Piccolomini had been discovered’.¹¹³ Naturally, expectations were high, but Sinico seemed to have won over the audience on both occasions, for as Violetta she ‘was received with enthusiasm after her summons on the fall of the curtain’¹¹⁴ and at the premiere of *L’Estasi* 9] (‘The Ecstasy’), written for and dedicated to her, was met with an encore,¹¹⁵ even if its effect may have been diluted in the long ‘monster’¹¹⁶ concert. The text of the waltz offers an invitation to a nocturnal rendezvous, with the opening lines ‘La notte già stende / Un manto stellato’ (‘The night already / Spreads a starry mantle’) and, in the third part (at 2:27), with the titular word ‘L’estasi già m’inebbria’ (‘The ecstasy already inebriates me’). When Sinico, as the *Morning Post* wrote, again ‘delighted every one’ with the waltz in a concert given a year later, the newspaper felt compelled to assure readers that the ‘ecstasy in question is that of love, no doubt’ after that term – uncharacteristic of the puritan Victorian age – had aroused some prurient minds, calming them with the reminder that love is ‘the subject of nine hundred and ninety-nine songs out of every thousand[.] To compose songs without any mention of love would be, not like making bricks without straw, but like making bricks without clay.’¹¹⁷

¹¹² *London Evening Standard*, 12 June 1865, p. 3.

¹¹³ *London Evening Standard*, 19 May 1864, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *London Evening Standard*, 18 June 1866, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *The Morning Post*, 5 June 1867, p. 6.

Thomas' very effective arrangements, which skilfully exploit the possibility of dialogue between the two instruments, were each written about half a year after the first performances of the waltzes, the scores being dated on 2 January 1866 for *The Ilma Valse* and on 19 February 1867 for *L'Estasi*, which enabled him to ride the waves of acclaim for the two singers and the brand-new compositions.

Harp Concerto No. 1: *Andantino*

John Thomas wrote two harp concertos, in B flat major and E flat major.¹¹⁸ He conceived both works in his early twenties for his own use, and both were premiered, with him as soloist, at the Hanover Square Rooms in London. The first, in B flat major, dedicated to his composition teacher Cipriani Potter, is a work from his student days at the Royal Academy of Music and was accordingly first performed in one of their student concerts, on 10 July 1847. Its second performance the following year was already in a more notable setting, when it was heard, on 25 May 1848, as part of the annual concert of the Society of British Musicians, conducted by none other than William Sterndale Bennett. Thomas' Harp Concerto No. 2, referred to as a 'Concertino' in the programme of the premiere,¹¹⁹ had a still more elevated status from the outset: it was commissioned by the prestigious Philharmonic Society of London, and given on 3 May 1852 with the orchestra under the baton of Michael Costa, shortly after Thomas' return from his first continental tour. As Carys Ann Roberts pointed out, it was 'the first work by a Welsh composer to be performed in the society's history.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Thomas gave a valuable explanation for his choice of keys much later in a treatise of 1894 written for the instruction of composers and orchestrators, when he described it as 'advisable to write for it [the harp] in flat keys, as far as practicable, as the resonance is almost twice as great as it is in sharp keys' (John Thomas, 'The Harp in the Orchestra', *The New Quarterly Musical Review*, No. 5, May 1894, p. 9). He followed his own rule in his arrangements, too, by transposing the works he used, if necessary, into keys favourable to the harp.

¹¹⁹ Reprinted in *History of the Philharmonic Society of London: 1813–1912. A Record of a Hundred Year's Work in the Cause of Music*, ed. Myles Birket Foster, John Lane, London, 1912, p. 226.

¹²⁰ Roberts, 'The Cosmopolitan Aspect', *loc. cit.*, p. 106. In 1852 Thomas was already a corresponding member of the Society; relations with it became closer after his first appearance there, so that in December 1857 he was appointed a full member, and later a director. The rediscovered Mozart Concerto for Harp and Flute, K299, was presented in a Society concert on 14 May 1877, with Thomas and the flautist Oluf Svendsen (*History of the Philharmonic Society of London, loc. cit.*, p. 362).

Apparently, the second performance of Thomas' first concerto in 1848 was considered its actual premiere, for a newspaper review spoke of 'a performance of "new works" by members and associates of this society',¹²¹ which suggests that the performance in the previous year had had a rather internal character. Nevertheless, the Academy concert, where the programme included a symphony by William Bayley (1810–58), later choirmaster at St Paul's Cathedral, followed by Thomas' Concerto, was also acknowledged by the press. A critic from *The Morning Post* described both novelties as 'works of the highest pretensions', but considered Thomas' concerto, 'written on the long approved classical model', as he correctly recognised, to be 'of much more maturity than the preceding, and one that would do credit to a writer past the days of studentship'. 'We sincerely hope', he concluded, 'that their [the students'] success may [...] induce the directors [of the Academy] [...] to do every thing possible to encourage such efforts, which it is essentially the province of a national seminary to promote.'¹²²

At the second performance in 1848, Thomas was drawn by the choice of venue into what was then a heated debate about the nature and identity of British music and an institution dedicated to the subject. The Society of British Musicians was founded in 1834, aiming, according to its prospectus, 'to rescue merit from obscurity by affording to all British musicians the means of improvement and publicity'.¹²³ The founders complained that music in Britain was then neglected in comparison to the promotion of other arts and thus that 'the British musician has been left to his unaided endeavours to combat the unjust prejudices of the unthinking, and to compete with the composers of continental Europe'.¹²⁴

The overwhelming preponderance of foreign compositions, in all public performances, while it can scarcely fail to impress the public with the idea that musical genius is an alien

¹²¹ *The Era*, 28 May 1848, p. 12.

¹²² *The Morning Post*, 12 July 1847, p. 3. The performance was obviously marred by the deficiencies of the student orchestra, as the reviewer noted 'their manifest inefficiency' and 'a great unsteadiness [in] the whole performance'. He regretted 'that there was not a band competent to do justice to these new works, [...] as the effect they produced cannot but have a great influence upon the future reputation of the promising young composers'.

¹²³ Quoted in J. C., 'British Musicians', *The London and Westminster Review*, Nos. 9 and 52, April 1837, p. 19.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

to this country, tends also to repress those energies, and to extinguish that emulation in the breast of the youthful aspirant, which alone lead to pre-eminence.¹²⁵

By 1848, however, the Society had lost much of its reputation, since its original aims of not presenting foreign music and only accepting Britons as members had become increasingly diluted, and disappointment with the quality of its programmes spread, a trend reflected in the press coverage of Thomas' Concerto. One reviewer stated rather gravely at the end of a lengthy introduction on the essence of British music: 'We are not forgetful of Arne and Purcell. Their spirit breathes upon us, and we owe it to the Society of British Musicians to say that it breathes not in vain'. On the young Thomas he mixed praise and blame by calling him 'a very creditable performer upon the harp, and also to some extent a creditable composer', but his concerto was only 'with some qualification, praiseworthy', because 'in an exhibition of British art, we hoped to hear something a little more original in a permanent performance, than Mr. Thomas's concerto'. Nonetheless, he finished by stating that

the exhibition was, upon the whole, highly meritorious. It proved this fact, that English musicians are preparing to elaborate with success in the spirit of their old simple melody, and that we shall not have it said any longer that Italy or Germany alone can furnish us with legitimate composers or performers.¹²⁶

Another critic, though clearly noting that 'in the *andante* movement a nice effect is produced by taking up the subject by the orchestra *tutti*, with a simple accompaniment of *arpeggios* for the leading instrument' (at 3:52), considered Thomas' Concerto to be 'one of the best things in the performance', adding that 'It was interesting throughout, and played to perfection by the composer himself'. But he qualified his praise by concluding: 'Certain it is that the Society has not, since its formation in 1834, produced anything in the department of musical composition that has either raised its own importance, or tended to promote the interests of the art'.¹²⁷ Moreover, the third reviewer of a dissenting

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Morning Advertiser*, 26 May 1848, p. 3.

¹²⁷ *The Era*, 28 May 1848, p. 12. The misprint '1844' has been corrected.

journal, *The Musical World*, two months later merely remarked disparagingly that the whole concert ‘escaped our memory as soon as we left the room, finding it unworthy of a review, though he recalled that he was ‘inwardly ejaculating with a sigh, “After thirteen years – this only!”’¹²⁸

After his first appearance as a composer outside the protected sphere of the Academy, Thomas showed little congruence with the aims of that Society and will have had equally small concern for the Britishness of his music, just as, as his numerous arrangements show, he was particularly fond of music from the continent, whither he was also drawn as a performer. He also successfully countered the justified accusation of an initial lack of originality in his later works. However, he seems to have retained an affection for his youthful First Concerto, since he arranged the middle movement of it, an *Andantino* [10], for harp and piano in 1854,¹²⁹ leaving the solo part untouched and assigning the orchestra reduction to the piano. He also kept performing the Concerto with full orchestral accompaniment – for example, with the conductor Henry Leslie at his ‘Grand Orchestral Concert’ at St James’s Hall on 19 June 1867. On this occasion, *The Globe* called it a ‘masterly work most admirably executed by the composer, and warmly applauded, especially the “Andantino”, a movement full of beautiful melody.’¹³⁰ In the estimation of the reviewer of *The Era*, Thomas had ‘apparently taken Haydn as his model’¹³¹ for this movement, and he noted in summary:

It [the concerto] was played by the composer as perfectly as anything could be played. If any one can persuade the public to believe in the harp as an instrument adapted for the

¹²⁸ *The Musical World*, Vol. 23 (1848), No. 30, 22 July 1848, p. 470. This is also the source reference for the quotation in the third paragraph on p. 8 of the booklet of Vol. 3 of this series, which is regrettably missing.

¹²⁹ The first print of the *Andantino* was published by Boosey & Sons in July 1854 (cf. *The Musical World*, Vol. 32, No. 26, 1 July 1854, p. 448); a surviving autograph, presumably made for the ‘New Version’ (Hutchings & Romer) and recorded here, is dated 4 December 1868. It seems fair to assume that Thomas revised the Concerto for the 1867 performance and had a ‘New Version’ of the Concerto and of the *Andantino* for harp and piano published afterwards, but since no copy of the original version has been located as yet, it is impossible to say how extensive his revisions might have been.

¹³⁰ *The Globe*, 20 June 1867, p. 3. It should be remembered that twenty years previously the first reviewer had also appreciated this movement, describing it as ‘very musicianly and highly effective’ (*The Morning Post*, 12 July 1847, p. 3).

¹³¹ *The Era*, 23 June 1867, p. 10.

Concerto form of composition, Mr. John Thomas is the man to do it, for he is decidedly in advance of the generality of harpists.¹³²

March of the Welsh Fusiliers

This penultimate album of Thomas' duos for harp and piano closes with a rather lightweight work [11] which Thomas wrote shortly after his 70th birthday. The reason for the composition would seem to be simply that he wanted to add to his series of marches, already consisting of *March of the Men of Harlech* (1862), *Bridal March from 'Llewelyn'* (1866), *March of the Men of Glamorgan* (1879) and the arrangement of the 'Rákóczi March' (1878), so as to expand the repertoire of his annual London concerts. The autograph is dated 14 May 1896, and barely two months later the march was publicly presented (and encoed) at the well-attended 'Grand Morning Concert' on 4 July, though not in the more intimate instrumentation for harp and piano, but – as a 'pleasing feature'¹³³ of the programme, as one critic noted and 'Thomas preferred – in a spectacle with, as another reviewer put it, 'two dozen lady harpists in white robes [...] with their golden Erard instruments' under his direction. One has to agree with this writer's assessment of it as 'a simply constructed piece', since it is laid out, with repetitions, in the straightforward form of A–B–C–A–B–C and coda; but when he described it as 'based mainly on tonic and dominant harmonics',¹³⁴ it would seem that he did not listen closely enough, since it is harmonised in a much more refined way.

This concert was again widely covered by the press, where a third critic took it as an opportunity for a broader reflection on Thomas' artistic life's work to date.

Mr. John Thomas knows the harp as Liszt knew the piano, the genius of the instrument belonging to him both as executant and as composer. [...] If the harp, which some years ago seemed to be passing out of fashion, and indeed out of date, is now recovering its lost prestige, that result is chiefly due to Mr. John Thomas, who has maintained harp-playing and harp music persistently at a high standard. Rather than hang up his harp the famous

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 5 July 1896, p. 11.

¹³⁴ *The Standard*, 6 July 1896, p. 5.

Welsh professor has played it in a strange land; which he is gradually reconverting to a taste for the national instrument of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.¹³⁵

Cornelis Witthoefft, born in Hamburg, is a pianist, conductor and organist. Since 2004 he has been a professor for Lied and score-reading at the Stuttgart University of Music and Performing Arts and writes regularly on various musical and literary subjects.

Since 2010 the **Duo Praxedis**, comprising the harpist Praxedis Hug-Rütli and the pianist Praxedis Geneviève Hug, has been reanimating the unjustly forgotten tradition of works for harp and piano. These two musicians – mother and daughter – have been working on a unique long-term project designed to create an extensive catalogue of works that is still expanding. To date they have released seventeen recordings, including two double albums, and given numerous world premieres, of works by composers who include Xavier Dayer, Richard Dubugnon, Hans-Eugen Frischknecht, Daniel Fueter, Rudolf Lutz and Rolf Urs Ringger. Other composers whose works they have recorded include Bach, Beethoven, Dvořák, Elgar, Handel, Offenbach, Anton Rubinstein, Saint-Saëns and Johann Strauss II, as well as some less familiar figures, among them the Romantic German harpist-composer Charles Oberthür, the twentieth-century French harpist-composer Henriette Renié and the contemporary Swiss Gotthard Odermatt. Since 2020 an exclusive streaming service has made their recordings available through Idagio.

The Duo Praxedis has been extending its repertory by means not only of arrangements for harp and piano but also commissions from contemporary composers. With the support of the UBS Culture Foundation, among others, they have given the world premieres of double concertos for harp and piano by the Swiss composers Carl Rütli and Oliver Waespi. Their unique repertoire ranges widely from Bach, Vivaldi and Mozart via Bernstein and Piazzolla to the present day. The two musicians have also conducted a good deal of scholarly research in various archives and in that way unearthed a number of veritable treasures, including pieces by Debussy and Ravel, all from the golden age of the medium.

Duets for harp and piano were particularly popular not only in the aristocratic and bourgeois salons of the nineteenth century but also in public concert-halls, where leading virtuosos appeared together to introduce new works. Among those involved were the pianist Carl Czerny (1791–1857), the harpist François-Joseph Dizi (1780–1847), the pianist Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760–1812), the pianist Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1785–1849), the harpist

¹³⁵ *St. James's Gazette*, 6 July 1896, p. 12.

Jean-Baptiste Krumpholz (1742–90) and the harpist Elias Parish Alvars (1808–49), whom Berlioz described as the ‘Liszt of the harp’.

The Duo Praxedis has given a new lease of life to this genre, which for a century fell into neglect as a result of developments in instrument-building. Through their performances they have shown that the modern concert harp is once again in a position to maintain its own in conjunction with a grand piano. Even more importantly, this combination of instruments reveals subtle sonorities and has brought an added richness to the concert life of Europe, notably at the Menuhin Festival in Gstaad, the Engadin Festival, the Esterházy Festival in Eisenstadt and the Janáček Festival in Brno, as well as to the Berlin Philharmonie, the Golden Hall of the Vienna Musikverein, the Laeiszhalle in Hamburg and the Tonhalle in Zurich.

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