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Consolations

Liszt *Six Consolations*
and other reflective pieces for violin & piano

Maya Magub **violin**
Hsin-I Huang **piano**

“Music is the best consolation for a despaired man” -

– Martin Luther King Jr.

The global pandemic gave the world reason to look for consolations. The true power of art has been drawn upon by so many. And what greater consolation than music, an art form which expresses that which cannot be expressed in words.

*“...Musik, die einem die Seele erfüllt mit tausend besseren Dingen
als Worten” (...music, that fills the soul with a thousand things
better than words)*

– Felix Mendelssohn on his *Songs without Words*

As a musician looking for consolation myself, I was reminded of the set of six *Consolations* for solo piano by Liszt, and the transcription of *Consolation No. 3* by the great violinist Nathan Milstein. I was curious to know how the other five *Consolations* would sound for violin and piano, and very excited by the potential I could immediately hear as I listened to them with that in mind. This was the beginning of my adventures with these fabulous pieces. After they had all come together, my greatest reward was hearing them as a complete set. The emotional impact of Milstein’s transcription, with its remote key relationship to the second *Consolation*, was suddenly even more powerful when set in relief. With extraordinary key and mood contrasts, each piece sits so perfectly as Liszt intended them in the context of the whole set.

Of course, once I had finished transcribing the set of *Consolations*, there was the small question of how to hear and perform them in the middle of a pandemic lockdown! With the cancellation of all the concerts and music festivals I had been looking forward to, and just days away from performing piano trios with the wonderful Hsin-I Huang, I was yearning for some way to continue playing chamber music without sharing a physical space.

I had begun recording in my own home for the movie studios here in Los Angeles, and realised that it could be possible to use these new skills to play ‘together’ with

Hsin-I, despite recording separately. What came intuitively when playing together in the same space would need to be made explicit – the feeling for which voice is responsible for driving the momentum at any one point within a piece would need to be discussed and set (at least temporarily), allowing that voice to record first. After initial discussions, any difference in interpretation would need to be discussed, and re-imagined or re-recorded. Most importantly, we would somehow need to hold onto that feeling of organic, spontaneous chamber music.

Somehow, to our delight, we found this to be an incredibly democratic and creative process, and one with huge and often surprising rewards. This process enabled a whole new type of creative dialogue with the benefit of experimentation over time. I could find myself playing a phrase in a way I may never had imagined, but through time I had made 'my own'. And, of course, if one of us continued to feel strongly about something, there was then the chance to re-record, perhaps with a different one of us leading an *accelerando* or *ritenuto*.

That possibility encouraged me to take musical risks that I may not have dared in a more conventional recording session. It also offered us the opportunity to experiment with microphones, and we found ourselves drawn to creating the immediacy and vibrancy of a small, intimate concert through close microphone placement.

After the Liszt *Consolations*, the rest of the programme came organically. With the benefit of more time during lockdown, I had started exploring the depths of my music shelves and had rediscovered piles of my father's old music with many hidden gems: violin and piano arrangements and compilations that he had purchased and played himself in the 1950s and 60s. A few of these I had already performed many times for the London Mozart Players' outreach concerts, and later for the wonderful UK-based charity, Everyone Matters, which funds life-enriching concerts in care homes and hospices. These places were full of people hungry for musical consolation, who above all would respond to a great tune, especially one they remembered from their distant past. In a normal year, I would have been looking forward to a trip to London and a few meaningful days performing in these spaces where, often, consolation is sorely needed. But I now found myself being drawn to these works more than ever

for my own consolation, and aware more than ever that musical communication between performer and audience works in both directions.

Many pieces in my father's old violin albums were perfect miniature musical 'consolations', with their unashamed pillaging of some of the very best tunes from operas like *Xerxes*, *Thaïs*, and *Sadko*, or gilding the lily of Bach's *Prelude* (Gounod), or the unabashed 'theft' of a work for piano by Schumann or Mendelssohn. Dushkin (in his *Sicilienne*) and Kreisler (in *Liebesleid*) did the reverse, by claiming they had 'discovered' older pieces in order to have something to play themselves in concert.

So what are the consolations offered by all these works? They are many and varied: some are put into words through their song lyrics or the composer's own description; others are more elusive. They contain many forms of nostalgia: nostalgia for love (*Liebesleid*, *Sicilienne*); nostalgia for nature (*Xerxes*, *On Wings of Song*); nostalgia for one's homeland (*Chant Hindou*); nostalgia at the end of the day (*Träumerei*). Then there is religion (*Ave Maria*, Liszt's *Consolations*), friendship (Liszt's *Consolations*), meditation on life's meaning and purpose (*Thaïs*)... And of course... music itself.

Maya Magub, 2022

Programme notes

Schumann's **Abendlied** ('*Evening song*') is one of the pieces in his four-hand piano album, Op. 85, written for children. Strictly speaking, it is a piece for three hands since the higher pianist only uses one hand, offering a single line which naturally translates into a transcription for a single-line instrument. This violin and piano transcription, made famous by Nathan Milstein, transposes the original from D flat up to D major, and down an octave to exploit the more mellow sonority of the lower two strings. The violin melody is now in the same register as the piano, which would not have been possible in the original, with both players on one piano, but works beautifully with the colour of a new instrument. To me, the melody is almost heart-breaking... And yet it is never depressing, but instead more like a musical 'sigh'.

Massenet's **Meditation** from the opera *Thaïs* is one of the violin repertoire's most recognized and beloved melodies, with a life outside the much less familiar opera in which it originated for violin and orchestra. In the opera it appears as an *Intermezzo* during a change of scene. Instead of serving as a diversion, the music represents the inner emotions of the characters, and it is as if they, and the plot, are still evolving. I may have performed *Thaïs* more than any other piece of music, and it is always a privilege to witness the joy, and sometimes tears, it brings to audiences.

Rachmaninov's much-loved **Vocalise** is the last of his *14 Songs or Romances*, Op.34, published in 1915. Though written for voice (either soprano or tenor) with piano accompaniment, it contains no words, but is sung to any vowel. In that sense, it can be thought of as a literal '*Song Without Words*', the concept that Mendelssohn had taken even further in his works for solo piano. The *Vocalise* has been arranged for many different combinations of instruments and is often played on violin or cello. To me, though incredibly beautiful, it is the saddest piece in this album, and the only one that approaches real melancholy. It has moments of the characteristic passion we associate with Rachmaninov, though, they are closer to despair... Perhaps hearing this expressed in music is consolation in itself, and by the end it offers a feeling of acceptance.

Lizst's **Consolations** are a group of six short pieces in the seemingly unrelated keys of E major and D flat major, written originally for solo piano and revised between 1844-1850. Sainte-Beuve's collection of poetry, published just a few years earlier with the same title, may have been Lizst's inspiration. In these poems, friendship is celebrated as the consolation for loss of religious faith. And, in fact, E major is a key often used by Lizst for religious themes.

There are two published versions of the *Consolations*. The revised version of 1849-50 (S.172) was the only one published in his lifetime and is best known for its entirely new *Consolation No. 3*, marked 'Lento placido'. This is the only *Consolation* that the great violinist Nathan Milstein transcribed for violin and piano, and it is his version that we play on this recording. He made several harmonic changes to the original, and it has become an established piece in the violin repertoire.

When I listened to the remaining five *Consolations*, however, I was struck by how easily I could also imagine them for violin, and how fabulous it would be to have the whole set to play in this configuration...

Perhaps the least obvious to 'unlock' as a transcription was the deceptively simple **No. 1**. It stands almost as an introduction to No. 2 (also in E major) and is very chordal, without the obvious flowing melodies of the other pieces. I experimented with which line to give to the violin, sometimes finding that it was a middle or held voice that was actually the most natural violin line. There are wonderful moments in which the violin and piano can answer one another in musical conversation, and these became perfect moments to experiment with the different instrument colours and which voice could best lead to a new harmony. There was a 'Eureka!' moment for me as I was working this out on the piano. My husband, a composer, came into the room at exactly the right moment and said, "You know, you could have both instruments playing those two notes...". He doesn't even recall this now, but adding just those notes to the outgoing voice meant that the same two notes ended a phrase for one line and began a new one for the other – and it suddenly sounded 'right'.

No. 2 was more straightforward to transcribe in many ways, with obvious melody lines perfectly suited to the violin, much like Nos. 5 and 6, and many musical echoes that were perfect for a piano 'answering phrase'. The key of E major is also particularly bright on the violin with the natural resonance of the E string, and this melody lay well on the instrument. It gave me the opportunity to use two different registers of the violin for the same melody or, at times, to play in octaves. The clue to this one was working out the moments when the violin should rest and which voice of the musical conversation it should take. After that, it was a question of making the new piano part flow logically in its own right, without the notes the violin had 'stolen'.

Nathan Milstein's wonderful transcription of **Consolation No. 3** is a piece he performed and recorded many times, often changing his transcription slightly. It is the piece at the very core of this album, and the starting point from which the whole project evolved, so we saved it until the end to record last. Coming after the previous *Consolation* in the bright key of E major, the harmonic shift to D flat at the opening of this piece is completely extraordinary on every hearing, and, to me, really validates placing it in the set as a whole. Hsin-I and I began the process of recording it through discussion. But then, unlike the other *Consolations* in which I had mostly asked her to dictate the tempo, I sent her a few bars of the violin part recorded on my phone so that she could hear my vision for it. After that, she sent me back her track exactly as we hear it in the album. It was played to perfection, and I knew I would never want to change anything about it! However, it presented one problem that I needed to solve: in the lead up to the climax of the piece, Milstein clearly wanted to build excitement through virtuosity, so the violin goes into faster note-values. Musically, however, the violin at this point is secondary to the piano which carries the melody. Hsin-I recorded her line as it would be without an overbearing violinist such as myself there to impose an *accelerando*! It was exactly as the piano line should be. Yet, when I played my line with it, it felt slow and not virtuosic enough... That was until I thought about adding more notes myself and doubling the speed at the end of the passage. This felt perfectly within the spirit of what Milstein may have done in that situation, and it worked!

No. 4 remains in the key of D flat major after the sublime No.3. Known also as the *Star Consolation* because of the six-pointed white star that appears on the printed score, it was inspired by a song written by the Grand Duchess (and gifted pianist) Maria Pavlovna. This *Consolation* is slower, more chordal and prayer-like. It was important to me that it didn't feel like an anti-climax after No. 3 but communicated something new from the very beginning. I suddenly realised that by adding a mute ("con sordino") to the violin line, we could enter a subtly new sound world and all this could be possible. The mute could then be taken off for the more passionate middle section and come back for the stillness of the final few phrases. The piece ends with the extraordinarily colour of the piano melody in octaves in the lowest possible register. I felt it important not to interfere with that, so the piano begins that journey on its own and the violin then joins it in octaves on the lowest string until the end. This was one piece that Hsin-I and I recorded in several turns. She recorded first; I then wanted to push the tempo further in the freer middle section, so I took control of that first; then I handed the 'reins' back to her. This felt so much like a more explicit manifestation of what we would instinctively do together in a live performance – it just took a little more time!

No. 5 naturally translated into an encore-style piece for violin as much of it works so well in thirds and sixths, both of which are very well suited to the instrument. It often then felt right to continue in octaves. Once I had worked out the best and most violinistic voicing for the thirds and sixths, it began to feel very much like playing a piece by Kreisler!

No. 6 in its original form is a real showpiece for the piano, and the most characteristic of Liszt's style. Hugely technically demanding, it was hardly any different after I had extracted a violin line!

Carl Lachmund, an American student of Liszt's who documented his teaching and musical style, described in his diaries the way in which Liszt played this *Consolation*:

'He played each note of the melody as if it were a significant poetic word, which effect was heightened in that he used the thumb for each one of these notes, and dropping his hand in a languid manner as he did this. He would dwell slightly here or there on a note as if entranced and then resume the motion without leaving a feeling that the time had been disturbed. I do not recall the particular measures in which he did this; but even then I felt that he might do it in a different place each time he played the piece.'

The difficulty here was ensuring the violin could make a meaningful contribution. But there were a few ways to achieve this. For the opening, I realised that simply giving the violin the sustained melody line – the notes that Liszt had used his thumb for! – put the piano into perfect relief. On a later iteration, where the harmony is less settled and Liszt writes *'appassionato e molto accentato'*, I found that using a thrown *ricochet* bow stroke to outline the chords made for a virtuosic accompaniment that didn't interfere with the piano line and made a fitting textural contrast. This piece also gave great scope for using almost the entire pitch range of the violin and, as the musical drama increases and the pitch rises in the middle section, I was able to add octaves to the violin. Then follows a short violin cadenza, the perfect vehicle for the music's turbulence, which balances out the focus on, and virtuosity of, the piano part. I followed the contours of the original piano cadenza moment but adjusted the note patterns to be more violinistic. After the cadenza, there is a more impassioned version of the opening theme, under which Liszt writes *'vibrato'* – a reference to letting the piano ring, but which could hardly be more appropriate for the violin! In the calm after the storm, we return to the lowest register of both instruments and the more prayer-like stillness that has been a constant throughout the *Consolations*, with the feeling of having been on a journey and being somehow wiser because of it. That's certainly how I felt, both after having transcribed these pieces and after playing them.

The melody from Gounod's **Ave Maria** (1853) is so familiar to us now that it is easy to overlook how extraordinary it is. The piano plays almost exactly (with only one bar's difference) the first Prelude from Book 1 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (1722) by J.S. Bach. Over the top of this, Gounod created a romantic melody, originally with no text, then as a song with French words which he published in 1853 as *Méditation sur le Premier Prélude de Piano de J.S. Bach*. A few years later it became the Latin *Ave Maria*, with which we are so familiar that it is almost impossible to hear the Bach without thinking of the Gounod. That Gounod originally conceived the melody without text meant, in a sense, that I was transcribing back to an earlier stage, with an awareness of the more famous, later words. I feel this piece best showcases the sonority of the violin when both the low and high registers are used for the two 'verses', rather than the standard realisation with just the top octave, so I used both. This 'one tune over another' was a perfect gift for our album, and it seemed absolutely right for Hsin-I to record first without any of the usual discussion of tempos or rhythmic freedoms that I may have wanted for my less restrained, more romantic melody. Her voice clearly came first, and mine needed to fit around that! It was heartening to imagine that our version, created through the necessity of recording separately, could actually result in something closer to Gounod's original concept which had seen him improvise his tune over the Bach *Prelude*. In any case, the result feels more optimistic than it may have been had we recorded together and taken a more indulgent 'string-player tempo'! It was a perfect way to record just this one track, and it highlights for me how different our approach was in every other track. We felt that we had magically evoked real communication and the spirit of chamber music across the physical distance.

Kreisler was one of the great violinists of the early 20th century, and of all time, with a truly unique sound and much-admired, almost vocal way of connecting notes. He composed and arranged for the violin in a bid to enlarge his performing repertoire. Frequently, with his more pastiche-style compositions, he would publish under the names of other composers, pretending to have discovered new musical gems. This is the case with **Liebesleid** ('Love's Sorrow'), which he attributed to

Joseph Lanner, a contemporary of the earlier Johann Strauss. He only admitted to having written it himself when a critic praised the piece and berated Kreisler for performing his own compositions alongside such superior works by Lanner! Despite the title, *Liebesleid* is more nostalgic than sorrowful. It is written in the style of a 'ländler' dance and, having started in the minor key, breaks out into the major key twice with great charm after keeping us waiting on a held note. It's hard not to smile each time, as it is again at the very end of the piece when the music suddenly disappears up to a harmonic.

Kreisler's **Chant Hindou** is an arrangement of the *Song of the Indian Guest* from the opera *Sadko* by Rimsky-Korsakov. It is easy to see why Kreisler was drawn to it, so perfectly suited as it was to his highly expressive way of playing. The text is explicitly nostalgic and evocative, with its reminiscences "of distant India so full of wonders..." .

Samuel Dushkin was another world-class violinist who in fact studied with Kreisler (and several of the other foremost pedagogues of his day). He performed and collaborated with Stravinsky and premiered several major compositions including Stravinsky's *Violin Concerto*. Like Kreisler, he made numerous violin arrangements and composed for the instrument, at least twice claiming to have made musical 'discoveries' that were actually his own work. He attributed the famous **Sicilienne** to Maria Theresia von Paradis, herself a highly regarded performer and composer (for whom Mozart may have written a piano concerto), but, as it has since been proven, had nothing to do with this piece! It is a heart-breakingly beautiful melody written in a major key, but sometimes flattening the 6th or 7th steps to devastating effect, and a lilting 6/8 rhythm that often keeps the listener suspended just for a fraction of a second in the middle of a bar like a missed heartbeat. Returning to this piece for this recording, almost exactly 40 years after I had first played it, and finding my name and the date written in my father's handwriting, was truly extraordinary for me.

The **Largo from Xerxes** is a transcription of Handel's much-loved aria *Ombra mai fu*, written in 1738. It is sung by the main character Xerxes I of Persia and reads very much like a love song to a tree!

*Tender and beautiful fronds
Of my beloved plane tree,
For you let Fate shine.
Thunder, lightning, and storms
Never outrage your dear peace,*

*Nor come, rapacious, to defile you
There was never a shade
Of any flora
More dear and more lovable,
Or more sweet.*

A phonograph recording of *Ombra mai fu* was probably the first piece of music ever broadcast on radio. It was chosen by Reginald Fessenden, a Canadian American inventor and radio pioneer, who broadcast the first AM radio program in 1906.

Mendelssohn's **On Wings of Song** (*Auf Flügeln des Gesanges*) is the second of his *Six Songs for Voice and Piano*, Op. 34 No. 2, published in 1834. It is a setting of the poem by the Romantic poet Heinrich Heine, in which he talks of escaping with his love 'on wings of song' into nature and finding peace. The song exists in many arrangements and throughout the world – from Yasha Heifetz's personal virtuosic transcription to amassed school performances all over Asia. Our version saw yet another evolution of the piece, actually brought about after Hsin-I had recorded her part! I began by changing some notes but then completely rewrote the violin part to fit better with her melody and to be more virtuosic. Finding myself unsatisfied with the arrangement I had, it was a great opportunity to take advantage of our unusual remote recording structure.

Although Mendelssohn created the title **Songs Without Words** some time after composing them, it perfectly describes these pieces for solo piano. Without the voice, it seems that he was able to create even longer lyrical lines, unrestricted by text or the need for physical breath. Mendelssohn published 8 volumes of *Songs Without Words* throughout his life, of which this one, **Op. 19 No. 1**, is the first. He meant for them not to be tied to a text, and when a friend wished to make them into actual songs, he objected in a letter:

“What the music I love expresses to me, is a thought not too *indefinite* to put into words, but on the contrary, too *definite*.”
(Mendelssohn’s own italics) (translated from the German)

Schumann’s **Träumerei** (*‘Dreaming’*) is one of his best-known character pieces from *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes from Childhood*), written for piano. A beautifully touching and nostalgic remembrance of childhood, it is a favourite encore for many concert pianists and also exists in several transcriptions. Deceptive in its simplicity, the opening phrase repeats many times but with multiple new turns of direction, making the listener feel differently each time and giving the performer a chance to explore many different sound colours. The selective use of expressive *portamento*, making audible the connection between notes, is one gift the violin has in its colour palette that was particularly irresistible here.

It was a very spontaneous decision to record part of Chopin’s **Raindrop Prelude**, and one that came about entirely because of an uncharacteristically heavy LA rainstorm! I had been excited about recording that day, and was furious with the elements and the persistent, loud drumming on my windows... But if the events of the last few months had taught me anything, it was to think outside the box! I took the piano part, recorded the melody and asked Hsin-I to fill in the gaps; and it became our virtual ‘encore’, complete with rain, and the consolation that the music could continue.

Maya Magub, 2022

Maya Magub is a British violinist living and working in Los Angeles. She has led a varied career performing in the world's greatest concert halls as well as playing on numerous movies and records.

As a solo artist Maya has performed concertos by Vivaldi, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Bruch and Tchaikovsky, the complete Bach and Brandenburg concertos in London's St-Martin-in-the-Fields, and Dvořák's *Romance* in the Royal Albert Hall. She has given solo performances for the Prince of Wales and for Professor Stephen Hawking, and was invited to Buckingham Palace where she met the Queen. She has also enjoyed playing with numerous pop icons including Adele, Bono, Paul McCartney and Sting.

Maya was awarded scholarships at the Purcell School and the Royal Academy of Music in London, graduating with a 1st class degree in music from Cambridge University. She continued her studies at the Vienna Hochschule, as an ESU scholar at Aspen and participated in many master-classes, including two with Lord Yehudi Menuhin broadcast on British television. Following her passion for chamber music, she was a founder member of the Mainardi Trio, performing and broadcasting internationally for over ten years. She has played in chamber music festivals across the UK, USA, France, Belgium, Norway, Iceland and India, collaborating as a guest artist with the Calder Quartet, the Emperor Quartet, the London Mozart Players Chamber Ensemble and the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields.



Quickly becoming recognized and sought after, pianist **Hsin-I Huang** has worked with many artists including Chee-Yun Kim, William Hagen, Simone Porter, Blake Pouliot, Steve Erdody, The Calidore String Quartet, and members of the LA Philharmonic. She has also enjoyed performing on film scores for composers Marco Beltrami and Ramin Djawadi.

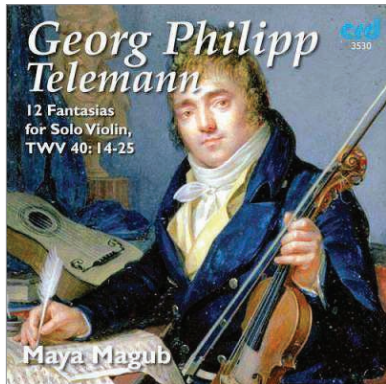


Hsin-I's album with violinist Blake Pouliot (for the Canadian label Analekta Records) was nominated for "Classical Album Of The Year" at the JUNO awards in 2019 and received 5 stars from BBC Music Magazine. Recently, Hsin-I toured North America with the "Game of Thrones Live Concert Experience" serving as Assistant Conductor in addition to Solo Keyboardist.

Hsin-I has made guest appearances at the Hollywood Bowl, LA Philharmonic Chamber Music Series, Aspen Music Festival, Ravinia BGH Classics Series, Grand Teton Winter Music Festival, La Virée Classique OSM, Fête de la Musique Mont Tremblant, NPR's Performance Today, Sundays Live at LACMA, South Bay Chamber Music Society, and the Innsbrook Institute.



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International Record Review, June 2013

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Gramophone, July 2013



CRD 35278



The Six Duos for Violin and Viola by Michael Haydn and Mozart brought about a rare but touching story of one composer helping out another. Michael Haydn, younger brother of Joseph, was commissioned to write the six duos on his own, but fell ill. His good friend Mozart swooped in to complete the final two duos. Mozart's attempts to make his own contributions sound like Haydn are obvious, yet the refined hand of the master is unmistakable.

"The Michael Haydn duos will probably be unfamiliar to most collectors, but it would hard to imagine them much better played than they are here."

International Record Review, May 2011

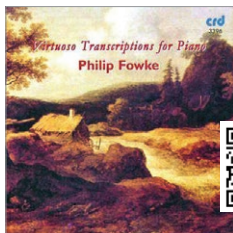
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Classical Music Magazine

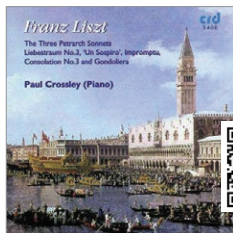
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The Strad Magazine

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Credits

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and for selflessly donating many hours to make this adventure possible.

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Maya Magub **violin** Hsin-I Huang **piano**

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|--|------|---|------|
| 1 Robert Schumann Abendlied (Op.85 No.12) | 2:56 | 10 Bach/Gounod Ave Maria †† | 4:01 |
| 2 Jules Massenet Meditation from <i>Thaïs</i> | 5:33 | 11 Fritz Kreisler Liebesleid | 4:03 |
| 3 Sergei Rachmaninov Vocalise (Op.34 No.14) | 6:06 | 12 Kreisler/Rimsky-Korsakov Chant Hindou from <i>Sadko</i> | 3:43 |
| Franz Liszt <i>Consolations S.172/R12</i> | | 13 Dushkin/Paradis Sicilienne | 3:49 |
| 4 No. 1 Andante con moto † | 1:56 | 14 George Frideric Handel Largo from <i>Xerxes</i> †† | 3:41 |
| 5 No. 2 Un poco più mosso † | 3:34 | 15 Felix Mendelssohn On wings of Song (Op. 34 No. 2) †† | 2:42 |
| 6 No. 3 Lento placido * | 4:11 | 16 Felix Mendelssohn Song without Words (Op. 19 No. 1) | 3:54 |
| 7 No. 4 Quasi Adagio † | 3:41 | 17 Robert Schumann Träumerei (Op. 15 No.7) | 3:22 |
| 8 No. 5 Andantino † | 2:09 | 18 Frédéric Chopin 'Raindrop' Prelude | 3:08 |
| 9 No. 6 Allegro sempre cantabile † | 2:46 | | |

TT: 65:12

*transcription, Nathan Milstein

†transcription, Maya Magub

†† revised transcription, Maya Magub

Executive Producers: Emma Pauncefort, Tom Pauncefort
Produced by Maya Magub & Alex Heffes

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