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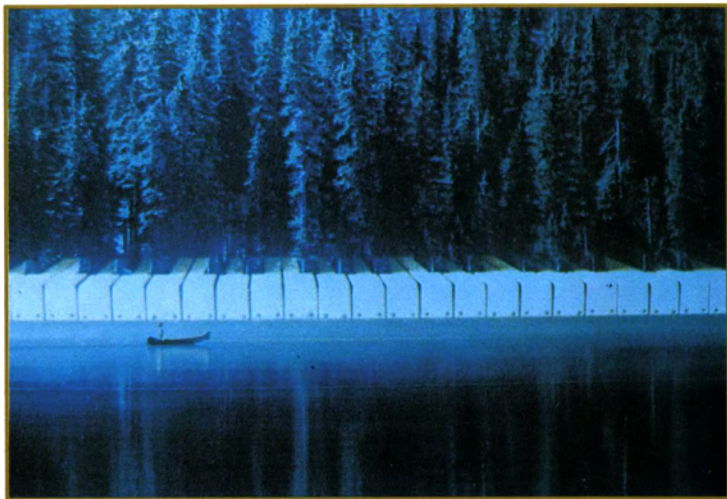
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# Romantic Piano Favourites

Romantische Klavierstuecke  
Succès romantiques pour piano

Vol. 3

Balázs Szokolay



## Romantic Piano Favourites-Volumes 3

The third collection of Romantic Piano Favourites contains a popular mixture of well known pieces, starting with an Air and Variations from a harpsichord suite by Handel that enjoyed particular favour in a more romantic guise, under the title The Harmonious Blacksmith. In fact the strokes of the blacksmith's hammer were not its inspiration, the legend of the work's inception being entirely posthumous.

Beethoven's piano sonatas offer a formidable anthology of the composer's own developing style in writing for the piano, once described by a critic as the New Testament to the Old Testament of Johann Sebastian Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues. The Andante in F, known as the Andante favori, was originally intended as the slow movement of the famous sonata dedicated to Count Waldstein, an early patron, through whose agency Beethoven had been introduced to the attention of polite society in Vienna, on his arrival there in 1792. The movement was written in 1803 and published in Vienna two years later.

Dvorák, the son of a village inn-keeper and butcher in Bohemia, forsook the family business to become a major figure in European music in the later 19th century. As a composer he was never far away from the national source of his inspiration, and it was the success of his Moravian Dances, published by Simrock at the request of Brahms, that led to a commission for a set of Slavonic Dances for piano duet, of which Opus 46 No. 1 was the first.

An important figure in the life of Dvorák was Johannes Brahms, who had left his native Hamburg to settle in Vienna in 1863, establishing himself, in the eyes of many, as the successor of Beethoven, much to the annoyance of Richard Wagner and his followers, who saw the music of the future in very different terms. Brahms himself was a pianist of some ability, although critics were later to praise rather the musical thought than the technique of his performance. The sixteen Waltzes that make up his Opus 39 were written in 1863, with a version for piano duet and an arrangement for solo piano. The work was dedicated to the critic Eduard Hanslick, a strong supporter of Brahms, portrayed by Wagner in *Die Meistersinger* as Beckmesser.

Schumann paid due respect to Vienna, where he had once briefly hoped to make a name of himself, as his future wife Clara had done with her remarkable piano playing. The story of Schumann's marriage, against the opposition of Clara's father, has appealed to the romantic imagination, although subsequent events and the composer's insanity and early death may suggest that Friedrich Wieck was exercising mere common prudence in prohibiting his daughter's marriage. The Album for the Young was written in 1848, eight years after Schumann's marriage,

at a time of political disturbance in Dresden, where the couple had made their home. In the space of a fortnight he wrote some 43 little pieces, to supply a general need for music of good quality for young players, and more specifically for the two eldest of his four children.

The Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg, descendant of a Scottish lobster-importer, who had taken refuge in Norway after the Battle of Culloden and the defeat of the Stuart cause, was to prove the most important figure in the creation of a national school of music in his native country, in spite of his training in Leipzig and the then predominance of Danish culture in that part of Scandinavia. A pianist himself, he published during his life ten volumes of Lyric Pieces, vignettes of colour and variety. The March of the Trolls offers a picture of those often hostile personifications of the forces of nature, the Trolls, creatures that make their appearance in Ibsen's play Peer Gynt, for which Grieg provided incidental music. To Spring, also included in the present anthology, formed part of a collection of Lyric Pieces published in Leipzig in 1886.

The Song without Words was a favourite form of nineteenth century composers, a suitable title for a short piano piece of obvious melodic appeal. Tchaikovsky, who used the title more than once, if not with the prolific enthusiasm of Mendelssohn, included his Chant sans paroles in F in a collection of three pieces written in the summer of 1867 and collected under the title Souvenir de Hapsal. Now employed at the Conservatory in Moscow, he had intended to spend the holiday with his brother Anatoly in Finland, but money ran out, and returning to St. Petersburg the brothers found the family house closed, in the absence of their father. In desperation they travelled as deck-passengers to Hapsal, a resort on the Estonian coast, where their brother Modest was staying with Tchaikovsky's married sister Sasha Davidov. The three pieces represent a change of attitude to Hapsal, a place he had hoped to avoid, but which he came to like, in spite of shortage of money.

Moritz Moszkowski, a German musician of Polish origin, enjoyed a reputation as a performer and as a composer of lighter music, particularly of a Spanish flavour, an association he was unable completely to discard. His piano music, and in particular the famous Etincelles, was enormously popular with his contemporaries, a fine example of salon music.

The needs of performers in the days before recording included arrangements and transcriptions. Some of these might simply make orchestral music available in the home, while others might provide an imaginative re-creation of the original music in terms of the piano. Franz Liszt, one of the greatest virtuosos of his time, transcribed a great deal of music for his own use as a concert pianist, particularly during the first part of his career, before settling in Weimar to pursue interests in orchestral music.

His version of a song from Schubert's song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin* was given its final form in 1846, following earlier transcriptions of Schubert's *Schwanengesang* and *Die Winterreise*.

Music and politics seem a world apart. The great pianist Paderewski, however, was to become Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in newly independent Poland in 1919, positions from which he retired in the following year, later resuming his international career as a performer. Although he did not write exclusively for the piano, Paderewski's works include a number of smaller scale piano pieces, among which the *Menuet célèbre* enjoys particular favour.

Sergey Rakhmaninov's version of his compatriot Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee*, is a further example of inspired transcription by a great virtuoso. The bee in question has made its appearance in arrangement after arrangement, but had its origin in the opera *Tsar Saltan*, where it is, in fact, the metamorphosed Prince Guidon, who takes revenge on his wicked aunts by stinging them.

The Swan of the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns was the only part of the *Carnival of the Animals* that he allowed to be published. The whole work, intended as a private *jeu d'esprit*, is nowadays a part, at least, of the juvenile orchestral concert repertoire, although its original form was for a very small group of players.

Saint-Saëns was known as the French Mendelssohn, with the earlier composer's command of classical form and clarity of texture. Mendelssohn himself, belonging to the generation of the first romantics, wrote throughout his life a number of short pieces for piano, grouped together in eight volumes of *Songs without Words*. The fifth album, in which the well known *Spring Song* appears, was published in 1844, three years before the composer's death.

There is a clear line of development from Chopin to Claude Debussy, whose piano music seemed to explore still further the poetic resonances of the instrument and, in its simpler forms, pleased the domestic performer in search of repertoire. The waltz *La plus que lente* was written in 1910 and found the same market as the *Préludes* of the same year.

Fritz Kreisler's reputation rested on his distinction as a violinist, an activity to which composition was ancillary. For his own use and, in particular, for the short-playing records of his earlier career, he wrote a large number of small pieces, some of them avowedly original, like the *Caprice viennois*, and others attributed, falsely, to earlier composers. Under whatever title, they served their purpose well enough whether as pieces for recording or as suitable encores in public recital.

The duet *Polka italienne* of the Russian pianist, composer and conductor Sergey

Rakhmaninov was probably written in 1906, at a time when he was busy with plans for another opera, this time based on Flaubert's novel Salammbô. For two seasons he had been employed as conductor at the Bolshoy Theatre in Moscow, but partly as a result of the prevailing political unrest he had resigned early in 1906 and left for Italy, where he spent the earlier part of the year. It is possible that the Italian Polka has some connection with his stay abroad.

František Drdla, born in Moravia in 1869, won a contemporary reputation not only as a violinist but also as a composer of Czech flavoured salon pieces. The Souvenir in D Major was written in 1904, originally for violin and piano.

The Hungarian composer Ernő Dohnányi, also known under the German form of his name as Ernst von Dohnányi, was born and educated in the city now known as Bratislava. He chose to pursue his higher studies in Budapest where the young Bartók was to follow him, and exercised an important influence over the development of music in Hungary until his departure for the United States in 1948. A distinguished pianist, he wrote a number of works for his own instrument, including the six Concert Etudes of 1916, the sixth of which, Capriccio, concludes the present collection.

## **Balázs Szokolay**

The Hungarian pianist Balázs Szokolay was born in Budapest in 1961, the son of a mother who is a pianist and a father who is a composer and professor at the Ferenc Liszt Academy. He started learning the piano when he was five and in 1970 entered the preparatory class of the Budapest Music Academy, where he completed his studies with Pal Kadosa and Zoltán Kocsis in 1983. He later spent two years at the Academy of Music in Munich, with a West German government scholarship.

Balázs Szokolay made an early international appearance with Péter Nagy at the Salzburg Interforum in 1979, and in 1983 substituted for Nikita Magaloff in Belgrade in a performance of the Piano Concerto No. 1 of Brahms. He is now a soloist with the Hungarian State Orchestra and has given concerts in a number of countries abroad, including Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Poland, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. In September, 1987, he made his recital début at the Royal Festival Hall in London. He has won a number of important prizes at home and abroad, including, most recently, success in the 1987 Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians Competition. He took fourth place in the Leeds International Piano Competition in 1990, when his playing was particularly commended in the British press for its energy and imagination.



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 Playing  
 Time :  
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- |   |  |        |    |   |        |
|---|--|--------|----|---|--------|
| 1 | HANDEL: Air with Variations<br>"Harmonious Blacksmith" | (4:02) | 10 | PADEREWSKI: Menuet  | (3:35) |
| 2 | BEETHOVEN: Andante in F                                | (7:30) | 11 | RIMSKY-KORSAKOV<br>(RACHMANINOV):<br>Flight of the Bumble Bee | (1:10) |
| 3 | DVORAK: Slavonic Dance No.1*                           | (3:45) | 12 | SAINT-SAËNS: The Swan   | (2:40) |
| 4 | BRAHMS: Waltz in A Flat                                | (1:17) | 13 | MENDELSSOHN: Spring Song                                      | (2:14) |
|   | SCHUMANN: Album for the Young                          |        | 14 | GRIEG: To Spring  | (2:08) |
| 5 | No. 19 Little Romance                                  | (0:53) | 15 | DEBUSSY: La plus que lente                                    | (3:20) |
|   | No. 10 Merry Peasant                                   | (0:37) | 16 | KREISLER: Caprice Viennois                                    | (3:40) |
| 6 | GRIEG: March of the Trolls                             | (2:55) | 17 | RACHMANINOV:<br>Polka italienne*                              | (1:34) |
| 7 | TCHAIKOVSKY: Song without<br>words in F                | (2:21) | 18 | DRDLA: Souvenir in D  | (2:37) |
| 8 | MOSZKOWSKI: Sparks                                     | (2:40) | 19 | DOHNANYI: Concert Etude in<br>F Minor 'Capriccio'             | (2:25) |
| 9 | SCHUBERT (LISZT):<br>The Miller & the Stream           | (4:45) |    |   |        |

\*Balázs Szokolay and Peter Nagy.  
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