

SibaRecords will release an album of the complete songs of Richard Wagner

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Cover of the recording being discussed
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This Friday SibaRecords, the record label of the Finnish Sibelius Academy, will release a recording of the complete songs by Richard Wagner. As usual, this album is currently available for pre-order from [Amazon.com](#). According to Schott's *Sämtliche Lieder* volume (which is based on the *Wagner-Gesamtausgabe* published by Egon Voss), the only items missing from the recording are early versions of the five songs best known as the *Wesendonck Lieder*. Even the two

selections listed as fragments, “Extase” and “La tomb edit à la rose ...,” are included on the recording.

Yes, that last sentence is accurate. The composer who saw himself as defender of the faith in German values composed eight songs on French texts. They are part of Wagner’s early campaign to draw attention to his talents. They were composed between 1839 and 1842 when Wagner was living in Paris. He knew that the genre was popular and saw the songs as a means of establishing his reputation.

The songs did not have the desired effect. On the other hand those who know their Wagner will probably recognize in “Soupir” (sigh) a few seeds that would eventually take root and flower in the better-known soil of *Tannhäuser*. Thus, it may be fair to say that, while they are not likely to find their way into many art song recitals, Wagner’s French songs may be taken as “apprentice work” when he was initially finding his way as a composer. On the other hand there are also seeds of *Tannhäuser* in the thoroughly German “Gruß seiner Treuen an Friedrich August den Geliebten bei seiner Zurückkunft aus England den 9. August 1844” (greeting with his fidelity to his beloved Friedrich August upon his return from England on August 9, 1844). (Wagner completed the full score of *Tannhäuser* on April 13, 1845.)

Most of the selections are sung by the Finnish soprano Jenni Lähtilä, acclaimed as a Wagnerian soprano, at least on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. She has a solid sense of pitch that serves her well in singing “La tombe dit à la rose ...,” which has an entire vocal line but only three notes on the piano staves. Lähtilä sings the whole thing a cappella, and it makes perfect sense that way.

The other fragment consists of two versions of “Extase.” Lättilä sings both of them; and her accompanist, Kiril Kozlovsky, brings things to closure with a coda that may well have been of his own invention. Other vocal resources contribute to the seven songs Wagner wrote for a production of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*: baritone Tommi Hakala (in the role of Mephistopheles), heldentenor Mikko Satella, and the Suomen Laulu choir.

While all of these selections have a fair share of novelty value, the only Wagner songs that are performed regularly are those in the *Wesendonck Lieder*, composed while he was working on *Tristan und Isolde* (and engaging in an illicit relationship of his own). While Lättilä may overdo the dramatics of Gretchen behind her spinning wheel more than a little, she knows exactly how to home in on the expressive core of the *Wesendonck Lieder*. These are the final tracks on the album, and they provide more than adequate compensation to anyone who has listened to all of the preceding tracks!



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