Karl

WEIGL

Isle of the Dead

Six Fantasies • Pictures and Tales
Night Fantasies • Dance of the Furies

Joseph Banowetz, Piano

Karl Weigl (1881–1949)
Piano Works

Photo courtesy of the Weigl Foundation

	Six Fantasies (1942)	**25:30**
1	I. Spring Evening (Andante)	2:23
2	II. Burlesque (Allegro)	5:43
3	III. Remembrance (Adagio mesto)	3:25
4	IV. Capriccio (Allegretto)	6:53
5	V. Longing (Adagio)	3:34
6	VI. Halloween (Allegro)	3:28
7	**Toteninsel (Isle of the Dead) (1903)**	**13:12**
	Bilder und Geschichten (Pictures and Tales), Op. 2 (1909)	**13:03**
8	No. 1 Es war einmal (Once upon a Time)	2:34
9	No. 2 Schneewittchen (Snow-white)	1:56
10	No. 3 Storch, Storch, Steiner (Stork, lanky Long-legs)	1:05
11	No. 4 Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf (Sleep, child, Sleep)	3:23
12	No. 5 Dornröschens Grab (Sleeping Beauty's Grave)	1:33
13	No. 6 Im Mondschein (By Moonlight)	2:31
14	**Tanz der Erinnyen (Dance of the Furies) (1937–38)**	**5:21**
	Nachtphantasien (Night Fantasies), Op. 13 (1911)	**21:35**
15	I. Langsam	5:19
16	II. Heftig	2:35
17	III. Langsam, innig	4:56
18	IV. Unruhig, drängend	2:37
19	V. Zart bewegt	6:08

The Austrian composer Karl Weigl grew up in the rich musical culture of turn-of-the-century Vienna and established a successful career there as a composer and teacher. His name became associated above all with chamber and symphonic music: the major string quartets of the day played his chamber works, Ignaz Friedman gave the première of his *Piano Concerto*, and Wilhelm Furtwängler, Volkmar Andreae, George Szell, Rudolf Schulz-Dornburg, Ferdinand Löwe, and others conducted his orchestral works. Weigl's world seemed secure, his future assured. But with Hitler's rise to power in Germany this world began to crumble. When the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938 forced Weigl and his family into exile he found himself, at the age of sixty, having to establish himself anew in a world where his name was virtually unknown. Although he continued during the last eleven years of his life to compose orchestral works, his new and diminished audiences in the United States became acquainted with him only as a composer of *Lieder* and chamber works. Those who first became acquainted with him at one of the private musicales where he frequently performed would have thought of him even more narrowly, as a pianist and composer for piano.

Weigl wrote four substantial solo piano works in his early years but then focused increasingly on more ambitious projects; only when circumstances changed in the late 1930s, recognizing that small works had a better chance of reaching an audience, did he again write for solo unaccompanied piano. Similarly, though in the early years he had occasionally performed publicly as accompanist for his own *Lieder* or piano works, only when faced with exile did he resume practising the instrument and performing in public.

In exile Weigl thought often of the past and what might have been.

Weigl completed his *Six Fantasies*, entitled *Spring Evening, Burlesque, Remembrance, Capriccio, Longing*, and *Halloween*, in one scant month, between 23rd January and 19th February 1942, directly after completing his *String Quartet No. 7*. He had ample time for composing just then, as his appointment at the Hartt School of Music had ended in June of the previous year and he had only a few private students. He may have planned to include this charming cycle of mood pieces on one of his private musicale or radio broadcast programmes. No record, however, has been found of any public performance during his lifetime.

The short piano fantasy *Toteninsel* (Isle of the Dead), one of the earliest completed compositions by Weigl, is the only art-inspired work in his oeuvre. Weigl was by no means alone in falling under the spell of the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin who, by the turn of the nineteenth century, was one of the best-known representatives of German symbolism and whose artistic vision was the impetus for many works of music, painting, literature, theatre, and film. Böcklin's five versions of the painting *Die Toteninsel*, which in 1903 inspired Weigl, and later Rachmaninov and Reger, to set the subject to music, depict the mythological Charon ferrying a soul across the rivers Styx and Acheron to a craggy island densely covered with gloomy Italian cypresses. On his score Weigl added yet another dimension by quoting several non-contiguous lines from Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*: "*Das ist die Gräberinsel, die schweigsame,/ dorthin will ich einen immergrünen Kranz des Lebens tragen*" ("Yonder is the cemetery island, the silent isle,/ Thither will I carry an evergreen wreath of life").

Weigl never performed this work or offered it to a publisher. The English title in different ink on the title page of his original manuscript indicates that he might have considered promoting the work once he reached the United States, but he seems eventually to have laid it aside as a negligible early work, a *Jugendwerk*. This is the first known performance.

Throughout his life Weigl wrote music with childhood themes: songs and folk-song arrangements, his children's operetta *The Pied Piper,* and *Bilder und Geschichten* (Pictures and Tales), a cycle of six piano pieces from 1909. Although generally less complex and of simpler affect than Weigl's larger works, this music was by no means intended only – or even primarily – for children. Despite their fairy-tale titles and their dedication to a four-year-old child, Mitzi, these pieces demand a high level of pianistic proficiency and, rather than simply reflecting the limpid imagination of a child, evoke an adult's shadowed memories of childhood.

In this work Weigl pays open obeisance to Schumann's *Kinderszenen*. He himself gave the first performance in Vienna in December 1910, shortly after the published score appeared, and in his last eleven years he performed it often in an arrangement for piano four hands. In an earlier arrangement for chamber orchestra (1922) it became one of his most popular works; when Rudolf Fellner conducted it in Vienna on 10th March 1938 it also became the last Weigl work to be heard publicly in pre-Anschluss Austria.

In June 1937, having just completed the *Three Songs* for mezzo-soprano and string quartet, Weigl simultaneously began sketching *Tanz der Erinnyen* (Dance of the Furies) and a large orchestral work initially entitled *Viennese Festival Overture* (later just *Festival Overture*). Over the next few months he worked primarily on that larger work and thus did not complete the scarcely five-minute-long piano piece until 24th January 1938. Given the momentous events that followed shortly after, it is perhaps not surprising that he would for a time have forgotten about the small piano piece. What is surprising is that he never went back to it and did not himself play it, have it professionally copied, or try to promote it for performance by others. It was first publicly performed in 1970 by Zita Carno.

The musical depiction of various aspects of night, more specifically the concept of night music as explored by Béla Bartók, has a long history. Weigl, in titling his 1911 solo piano cycle *Nachtphantasien* (Night Fantasies), would not yet have known of Bartók's genre-defining contributions. And although he may well have been tipping his hat to the early nineteenth-century nocturnes of Field and Chopin, works without a formal scheme or programme, it is more likely that he would have expected listeners to make the connection to the two *Nachtmusik* movements of Mahler's *Symphony No. 7*. Weigl knew that work well: he was probably among the many Mahler friends who attended the première in Prague on 19th September 1908, and a year later he contributed a 73-page essay on *Symphonies Nos. 4, 5, 6*, and *7* to a collected volume on Mahler.

From the start Weigl conceived the *Night Fantasies* as a cycle. The five movements chart a trajectory hinted at in the succession of tempo indications from *Langsam* (slow) through *Heftig* (fierce), *Langsam, innig* (slow, heartfelt), and *Unruhig, heftig drängend* (restless, fiercely urgent) to *Zart bewegt* (tenderly agitated). When Gertrud Bodenwieser choreographed the work in the 1920s she thought to capture the moods of the roundelay in her titles *Sonnenuntergang*, *Nacht des Fiebers*, *Nacht des Trostes*, *Nacht der Angst*, and *Aufblick* (Sunset, Feverish night, Consolatory night, Fearful night, and Raise up your eyes).

Following the enthusiastic audience and critical response to the October 1921 première by Richard Byk, to whom the work is dedicated, *Night Fantasies* was taken up by several pianists, including Louise Wandel, Renée Gärtner, and Richard Woitach. Weigl himself, however, only performed this demanding work in a simpler arrangement for two pianos of the first, second, and fifth movements, which he prepared in 1939 for inclusion in the private musicales that provided his first opportunities to make his composer's bow in the new world of exile.

It is tempting to think that in giving his last piano piece, the *Six Fantasies* of 1942, the alternative title *Day Phantasies* he was, at least privately, drawing a thirty-year connecting arc to his well-received *Night Fantasies* of 1911 — and to a time when his composer's voice was heard.

Juliane Brand

Joseph Banowetz

Grammy® nominated American pianist Joseph Banowetz has been heard as recitalist and orchestral soloist on five continents, with performances with such orchestras as the St Petersburg Philharmonic, the Moscow State Symphony, the Prague and Bratislava Radio Orchestras, the Budapest Symphony, the Barcelona Concert Society Orchestra, the New Zealand Symphony, the Beijing National Philharmonic, the Shanghai Symphony, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, and the Seoul Philharmonic. In December 2007 Banowetz's recording of Balakirev's works received two official Grammy® nominations and his over thirty recordings contain a significant number of world-première discs, including first recordings of Anton Rubinstein solo piano works, all eight of Rubinstein's piano and orchestra works, music of Sergey Taneyev (with Vladimir Ashkenazy as narrator), and compositions of Mily Balakirev, Leopold Godowsky and Paul Kletzki. Banowetz is also well known as an author. His book *The Pianist's Guide to Pedalling* (Indiana University Press) has to date been printed in seven languages. He is a graduate with a First Prize from the Vienna Akademie für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, and his teachers have included Carl Friedberg (a pupil of Clara Schumann) and György Sandor (a pupil of Bartók).

Photo: Edward Thompson

Karl Weigl was part of the rich cultural life of Vienna at the turn of the last century. One of his earliest works, *Isle of the Dead* was inspired by Böcklin's famous symbolic painting and here receives its first known performance. *Nachtphantasien* (Night Fantasies) relates to the two Nachtmusik movements of Mahler's *Symphony No. 7*. Folk-like but deceptively demanding, the *Pictures and Tales* were popular in their day, while *Dance of the Furies* was overlooked by the composer and not publicly performed until 1970. Weigl's career was cut short by Hitler's rise to power. Written in exile in the United States, the reflective *Six Fantasies* was his last piano cycle.

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Full track details will be found in the booklet

* WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

Joseph Banowetz, Piano

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Balance Engineer: Ed Thompson • Booklet notes: Juliane Brand
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