



Piano Phantoms

MICHAEL
LEWIN



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"Ghosts: Night on the Fleet" by Walter Neumann – Published by C. F. Peters Corporation, 70-30 80th Street, Glendale, NY 11385

"Wood Goblin" by Nikolai Medtner – Published by Boosey & Hawkes, Inc, 229 West 28th Street 11th Floor, New York, NY 10001

"The Ghosts of Restormel" by John Vallier – Published by Cramer Music, 23 Garrick Street, London WC2E 9RY

"Graceful Ghost Rag" by William Bolcom – Published by Edward B. Marks Music Co., 126 East 38th Street, New York, NY 10016

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2. Round of Phantoms - Sergei Lyapunov (1859-1924)	3:23
3. The Goblins' Wedding Procession at Vossevangen - Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)	2:26
4. The Ghost Ship, Op. 1b - Carl Tausig (1841-1871)	9:09
5. Wood Goblin - Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951)	3:38
6. Goblins' Dance - Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)	3:23
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8. Ghost Dance of the Zunis* - Carlos Troyer (1837-1920)	5:39
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11. Graceful Ghost Rag - William Bolcom (b.1938)	4:06
12. Some Goblins and Gnomes and Things* - Harry Farjeon (1878-1948)	1:47
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Ghost Variations - Robert Schumann (1810-1856)	
18. Theme	2:06
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* - World Premiere Recording

Total Time — 65:56

Amidst the endless glories and treasures of the piano repertoire, there is some music that leads a more shrouded and spectral existence—aural figments of the otherworld. This recording is a journey into the musical imagination of 18 composers featuring pieces that were all inspired by phantoms, goblins, ghosts and spirits. What could possibly capture these elusive apparitions and mythical creatures better than music, which exists only in sound?

1. Ghosts: Night on the Fleet - Walter Niemann (1876-1957)

Walter Niemann was a German music critic and writer in addition to being a prolific composer for the piano. Many of his pieces are travelogues. “Ghosts” is from the extraordinarily evocative “Hamburg Suite”, in which he paints an imaginative and wide-ranging musical portrayal of his own native city. The 13 pieces capture Hamburg’s particular beauties and physical characteristics as well as its great historic and artistic past (one of them is a portrait of Brahms). The music takes place in an old canal off the docks during high tide, with the 3 a.m. bells striking in the distance and the creaking of decaying wooden boats sloshing in the water. It is spooky and murky, a dramatic and imaginative ghost story fraught with mystery and tension.

2. Round of Phantoms - Sergei Lyapunov (1859-1924)



Sergei Lyapunov

Ronde des fantômes is the second of the “12 Transcendental Etudes, Op. 11” by the Russian composer **Sergei Lyapunov**. These 12 Etudes, completed in 1905 and dedicated to and inspired by Franz Liszt, retain a legendary status in pianistic circles, but are rarely performed, mainly due to their difficulty. Liszt’s own iconic “12 Transcendental Etudes” were originally intended to be a set of 24, with one in each of the major and minor keys, but he ended up using only 12. Lyapunov’s Etudes completed the concept of Liszt’s cycle, composed in the 12 sharp keys that Liszt had omitted. Lyapunov’s other primary influence was Mili Balakirev, the leader of the so-called “Mighty Five”, a group of deeply patriotic composers dedicated to promoting Russian Nationalism. The creativity and virtuosity of Lyapunov’s piano-writing is Lisztian indeed, but it is also saturated with references to Russian church bells, folk music, literature and folklore. I believe that they are one of the most significant sets of piano

Etudes ever written. “Round of Phantoms” is a wicked study in lightness and independence of hands, with an ending anticipating that of Ravel’s *Scarbo*, another ghastly creation of great difficulty that was to be composed a few years later in 1908.

3. The Goblins’ Wedding Procession at Vossevangen - Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Norway’s great composer **Edvard Grieg** had a uniquely sincere and melodic voice, coupled with a keen ear for traditional folk music matched probably only by Bartók and Kodály. “The Goblins’ Wedding Procession” is based on a folk tune describing the bridal procession of the spirits as they march above the Vossavangen lake. According to Norse mythology, it was forbidden for a human to view this sacred event, or they faced the risk of being killed by the goblins. Grieg used a charmingly dissonant style to recreate this procession, with droning parallel fifths, sharp ornaments evoking the twang of the native 9-stringed fiddle, widely-spaced dissonances, and the use of the Lydian mode. It is No.14 from the set of 17 “Norwegian Peasant Dances, Op. 72”, many of which are transcribed from old folk songs. In his preface to these Peasant Dances, Grieg praised the original folk tunes for “originality, the blending of fine, soft gracefulness with sturdy, almost uncouth power and untamed wildness as regards melody and particularly rhythm.” He stated his purpose in transcribing these pieces thusly: “To raise these works of the people to an artistic level, by giving them what I might call a style of musical concord.”



Edvard Grieg

4. The Ghost Ship, Op. 1b - Carl Tausig (1841-1871)



Carl Tausig

Carl Tausig, whom many including Brahms and Wagner considered to be Liszt’s greatest pupil and whose sovereign command supposedly rivaled that of the Master, died tragically at 29 from typhoid fever. He had a vast repertoire and was intimately acquainted with the greatest artists of the day, in addition to being a philosopher, mathematician and the chess champion of Berlin. He was very serious about composing, but only a few of his original compositions have survived, along with various transcriptions. *Das Geisterschiff: Symphonische Ballade* was written at 19, originally for orchestra (a version that is lost). It is a remarkable piece, making use of contemporary dissonances, the whole tone scale, double chromatic glissandos, and bringing its story to life with almost cinematic quality. Based on a poem by Moritz von Strachwitz, it describes an epic encounter during a huge and horrible night storm in the North Sea. A heroic Viking ship is suddenly confronted by the fearsome Ghost Ship:

“an enormous black ship, big as a mountain”. The opening captures the furious storm scene with thunder and crashing waves, followed by the noble steersman calling his men to stand fast, the chorus of the brave sailors, and the theme of the Ghost Ship. Finally the phantom vessel passes and descends back into the ocean: “Great and wild, it came right past, No sailor was within; We leaned, not moving, against the helm; It vanished from our sight.” The weary Vikings return home, shaken but victorious, singing a march of relief.

5. Wood Goblin - Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951)

Nikolai Medtner, whose music is too seldom played, is one of the most personal and meaningful Russian composers. A younger contemporary of Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, his haunting music is subtle and complex, and repeated exposure reveals a truly great composer of psychological and emotional depth and complexity with an absolutely original harmonic language, consummate craftsmanship, imagination and spiritual purity. The melodic beauty, deft counterpoint and inventive rhythms are not always immediately 'obvious' the way Rachmaninoff can be, but often offer deeper fulfillment. His 38 piano pieces called *Skazki* (translating as "tales" or "legends" but known as "Fairy Tales" in English at the suggestion of Medtner's wife) contain some of his most original and appealing music. "The Wood Goblin", *Leshyi* in Russian, is from the four "Fairy Tales, Op. 34", written in 1916. The "Fairy Tales" cover an immense emotional and expressive range and represent story-telling of the highest order. The *Leshyi* is the Lord of the Forest, a male woodland spirit from Russian folklore, with many differing versions and portrayals. Generally, he is rather mischievous and can change shape, with the capacity to cause havoc and be rather nasty. If a human encounters a *Leshyi*, he must protect himself by immediately turning his clothes inside out and backwards, and placing his shoes on the opposite feet! He has hair and a beard made from living grass and vines, blue blood, fiery green pop-out eyes, wears a red scarf and has no shadow. Medtner's perfect character sketch is mercurial, sometimes almost grotesque (the left hand melody), with original harmonies, quirky rhythms and an improvisatory feeling.



Nikolai Medtner

6. Goblins' Dance - Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)



Antonín Dvořák

"The Goblins' Dance" by **Antonín Dvořák**, from the 13 "Poetic Tone-Pictures, Op. 85", is an ebullient, energetic and popular piece. It is in ABA form, with a bittersweet and touching middle section melody that always reminds me of the "Dumky" Trio. The music encapsulates the two sides of Dvořák - on one hand joyful and extroverted and on the other displaying a unique and nationalistic melancholy; working within established classical structures, he has an instantly identifiable musical voice. The music is often inspired by his cultural roots, embodying the folk traditions of his native Czechoslovakia. Dvořák seemed rather stimulated by goblins - he also wrote a large-scale symphonic poem, "The Water Goblins", which paints a far more malevolent picture of these creatures. That music is based on a macabre Scottish poem about an evil water goblin who abducts a young maiden, drags her to his underwater castle, and treats her with shocking cruelty.

7. A Ghost Story - Eugène Goossens (1897-1962)

Sir Eugène Goossens was a leading British conductor. He guest conducted many of the world's great orchestras, was the Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony and then simultaneously led the Sydney Symphony and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He was knighted in 1955, after having previously been made a Chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur. His compositions are sophisticated yet accessible, melding romantic and 20th century styles, with a dollop of impressionism, jazz and exoticism. The lugubrious and evocative "A Ghost Story" comes from "Kaleidoscope," a suite of 12 piano pieces composed in 1918. It makes effective use of the lowest registers of the piano to offset the moody melody, builds to an intense climax, and then recedes to the netherworld.

Tragically, Goossens is most remembered for a great scandal, only a year after being knighted, which cost him his brilliant career and destroyed his reputation. The story centered around his relationship with Rosaleen Norton, the notorious so-called "Witch of Kings Cross". She was known as an "artist of the grotesque" and for her interest in the occult and erotica, interests Goossens secretly shared. They conducted an intense affair, and he participated in bizarre ritualistic sexual and bondage rites with her and her pagan "coven". A sensationalistic journalist discovered all, secured letters and photographs, and tipped off the police. When Goossens returned to Australia, his baggage was searched and pornographic material was found, forcing him to plead guilty to sensationalistic charges of "scandalous conduct." He returned to England disgraced and died four years later. The scandal was the basis of a novel, *Pagan* (1990), a play, *The Devil is a Woman*, an opera, *Eugene & Roie* and a film, *The Fall of the House*. However, we should not allow any of this to sway our appreciation of his great musical accomplishments, but prefer to be guided by the words of Noel Coward: "My heart just loosens, When I listen to Goossens."

8. Ghost Dance of the Zunis - Carlos Troyer (1837-1920)

World Premiere Recording

Carlos Troyer was one of a group of composers known as "American Indianists", whose music was based on traditional Native American melodies and chants. In 1893 he published *Two Zuni Songs*, and most of his subsequent pieces were preoccupied with the Zuni tribe. The Zunis, who still exist in New Mexico, are peaceful farmers. They speak the Zuni language, a unique language unrelated to any other, whose integrity has been maintained for 7,000 years. Although some of the Indianist composers were not actually familiar with indigenous songs and tended to romanticize or stereotype them, Troyer documented his sources and strove for authenticity. The composer wrote an essay about the Ghost Dance, detailing its rituals, appearance and traditions. The dance's purpose was to call to the spirits of the departed, entreating them to return for this highly stylized celebration. It begins with a slow introduction leading to an energetic and merry twirling fire-dance, followed by imitations of animals, then a sequence of

Appeals and Responses, building to a wild anticipation of joyful reunion. At the climax, marked *furioso*, the composer asks that the pianist—who is at that moment extremely busy at the top of the keyboard—be joined by someone to play the gongs! However he writes that if a gong-player is not available, the pianist may use an assistant player striking the lowest note on the piano in prescribed rhythms and dynamics. As the climactic moment recedes, the music is repeated and then tapers to a finale in which the energy calms, the spectral forms pass away and the fires gradually die out. I would like to thank my son Jeremy for his excellent contributions as the gong-player.

9. Night Music of the Mountain Goblin - Heino Kaski (1885-1957)  World Premiere Recording

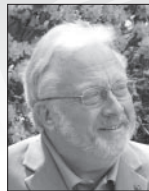
Heino Kaski was a Finnish composer and pianist. He received early support and instruction from the iconic Jean Sibelius, whose death at 91 on the very same day as Kaski's at 72 ironically overshadowed that of his student. He spent time studying in Germany, Italy and France, but lived most of his life in his native Finland, where he was honored with the Pro Finlandia Medal. Kaski was best known for his piano miniatures, in which he displays a natural gift for melody, and for his songs, although he also authored numerous chamber works, four orchestral suites, and a Symphony in B minor that the composer thought his best work. Many of the piano works are very fine, romantic and evocative, often inspired by Nature. The "Night Music of the Mountain Goblin" is filled with exuberant energy, perfectly capturing the scampering goblins as they merrily skip over the moonlit mountains.

10. The Ghosts of Restormel - John Vallier (1920-1991)

Restormel Castle is one of the oldest and best-preserved castles located in Cornwall, England, built in the 1100's after the Norman conquest of England. A majestic and inspiring edifice built on the summit of a high hill, its history is rich and full of strife and turmoil. **John Vallier's** imaginative music, which has a particularly English feel, mixes horn calls of war and visions of ghosts fallen in battle along with a traditional Royalist tune "Charlie is my darling", dating from the Civil War. It comes from a suite of five pieces inspired by Cornwall entitled "Cornish Sketches." Vallier was a well-known British pianist who toured extensively and as an encore would request the name of a composer and a popular tune from audience members and improvise works in the style of the composer suggested. His best-known composition is the "Toccatina." His "The Royal Suite" was written for and dedicated to H.R.H. Prince Andrew & Miss Sarah Ferguson; he gave its first performance in July 1986 on the eve of their royal wedding in the Royal Festival Hall, London in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother.

11. Graceful Ghost Rag - William Bolcom (b. 1938)

The eminent American composer **William Bolcom** is one of the most lauded, prolific and eclectic composers of our time. He is also a formidable pianist and performer, often collaborating with his wife, singer Joan Morris. He has received the Pulitzer Prize, the National Medal of Arts, two GRAMMY® Awards, and was named 2007 Composer of the Year by Musical America. His



William Bolcom

style effortlessly ranges from thorny serial compositions to cabaret music, with an output including symphonies, operas, instrumental and vocal music. A few years ago I had the pleasure and privilege of recording his four formidable Violin Sonatas, and then playing the cycle in New York with the composer speaking about them. Bolcom has written a number of popular Rags for solo piano, following in the footsteps of Scott Joplin and others. The most famous of them is the "Graceful Ghost Rag" (1970), written in memory of his father. It displays an idiomatic and nonchalant mastery of the Rag style; a gently swinging jazzy bonbon, bittersweet and charming. Its opening melody is unforgettable, and when it returns at the end, marked "a little slower", it has the feeling of a tender and poignant parental memory.


12. Some Goblins and Gnomes and Things - Harry Farjeon (1878-1948)  World Premiere Recording

When this piece was referred to me for consideration for this album, I was informed that the composer, unknown to me, was Henri Farjeon, from France. The musical score names him only as H. Farjeon. I was astonished to learn that in fact it was written by **Harry Farjeon**, a *British* composer! My confusion attests to the fact that the music of **Harry Farjeon** has thoroughly disappeared from view, especially considering its wide range and one-time popularity. The youngest-ever Professor at the Royal Academy of Music at age 25, after having graduated only a year before, Farjeon scored early success the following year with his Piano Concerto. His compositions are mostly for piano, but he also wrote songs, sonatas, concertos and a Mass.



Harry Farjeon

In addition to musical compositions, he wrote books on phrasing and pedaling. "The Three Cornered Kingdom" is a suite of five imaginative piano pieces, displaying quirky, inventive and humorous takes on some of the nonhuman residents of this make-believe environment. "Some Goblins and Gnomes and Things" is the first of the set.

13. The Goblin and the Mosquito - Florence Price (1887-1953)  World Premiere Recording

Florence Price is considered the first African-American woman to be recognized as a serious composer, writing over 300 works including music for solo piano, voice, symphonic and chamber ensembles. Her symphonies and chamber works were famous for incorporating the melodies from Negro spirituals, and her songs were performed by some of the most admired voices of the day including Marian Anderson. Born in Arkansas, she attended the New England Conservatory, graduating in 1907 as a pianist and organist, and soon began to compose seriously. Her Second Symphony—the first symphony by an African-American woman to be performed by a major orchestra—won wide acclaim, and was performed by the Chicago Symphony under Frederick Stock and later by John Barbirolli. Deeply religious, Price frequently used the music of the black church as material for her popular spiritual

arrangements. “The Goblin and the Mosquito”, from 1951, is short and witty, clearly portraying the interplay of the two titled protagonists. It makes a wonderful encore, with audiences chuckling out loud at the glissandos and the ending.

14. Goblin Dance - Edgar Bainton (1880-1956)

World Premiere Recording

The classic English church anthem “And I Saw a New Heaven” is all that is known today by the British composer, pianist, conductor and teacher, **Edgar Bainton**. However he had a large output, including symphonic works, chamber music, church music and choral music and in his day he was well known and respected. Among many other distinctions he was the first Englishman to conduct Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw Orchestra. His most important and substantial work for piano is the *Concerto Fantasia* for piano and orchestra. Considering that the composer was a virtuoso pianist himself, it is surprising that virtually all of his solo piano works are miniatures. “Goblin Dance” comes from a suite of four pieces entitled “From Faery” (1912). Bainton’s goblin is of the active and mischievous variety; cute, fast and charming. It has a contrasting melody in the middle and a will-o’-the-wisp ending.

15. The Dance of the Phantoms - Ferdinand Hiller (1811-1885)

World Premiere Recording

Ferdinand Hiller was one of the most important musical figures of the 19th century. A child prodigy, he became a celebrated piano virtuoso, successful composer, conductor, writer on music and impresario. Many of his more than 200 works are very fine, and it is surprising that he is now largely forgotten. A student of Hummel, as a young man he became part of the legendary Parisian cultural scene where he met Meyerbeer, Rossini and Berlioz and enjoyed a close friendship with Liszt and Chopin. He then became one of the most important figures in Germany, conducting, performing, composing and serving as the Kappelmeister in both Düsseldorf and Cologne. The Schumann Piano Concerto is dedicated to him, and his students included Max Bruch and Engelbert Humperdinck. *La Danse des Fantômes* was clearly written by a virtuoso pianist, requiring stamina, repeated octaves and a sure sense of melodic shaping. It is melodically attractive and pianistically effective.



Ferdinand Hiller

16. March of the Goblins - Julie Rivé-King (1855-1937)

World Premiere Recording

Of all the women pianists of the 19th century, **Julie Rivé-King** was one of the most prominent, performing over 4,000 concerts. Born in Cincinnati, she began concertizing at the age of 8, enjoyed early success, then travelled to Europe to study and perform, which was *de rigueur* at the time for an American pianist hoping for a career. She worked and performed with Carl Reinecke, and became known as a student of Liszt, with whom she studied briefly in Weimar. Returning to the U.S., she performed with orchestras including the New York Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony and toured widely, playing a large repertoire. She also

published her own compositions, editions and arrangements, being the only female composer whose works were issued by the publisher Kunkel. Rivé-King continued teaching and performing until shortly before her death at the age of 82. *The March of the Goblins*, composed in 1879, is prefaced by a jolly poem exhorting the goblins to come out from their secret homes and march at midnight. Harmonically conservative and requiring good chord technique, it is jaunty, extroverted and good-humored.

17. Spirit Dance - Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Arr. Stephen Heller (1817-1888)

World Premiere Recording

Poor **Stephen Heller**. He was born Jewish, but converted to Christianity to seek social acceptance. He was accepted to study with Czerny, but couldn’t afford the lesson fee. He had a fine concert career, but the exertion of travel was too much for him and he became ill. He composed hundreds of once-popular piano works, but like Czerny is remembered today only for his technical studies, earning enmity in perpetuity from young pianists. Fortunately for the purposes of this disc, he also made fine arrangements of 30 songs by **Franz Schubert**! One of them is *Der Geistertanz*, translated as “Spirit Dance” by Heller. The teen-aged Schubert actually made four different settings of Friederich von Matthison’s creepy text, one of them for a *capella* male chorus. The impressionable Schubert seems to have been quite smitten by images such as “rotting bones” and “hovering spirit creatures doing sprightly dances over graves as the hammer strikes midnight.” The text reads like a cross between Edgar Allan Poe (“the wooden chamber of the dead quakes”, “ravens flying out of the deserted abbey”) and a modern-day horror movie. The music is actually more dramatic than terrifying, with abrupt almost Beethovenian changes of character. It is fun to take over both the vocal and the pianistic roles and to reenact this juvenile danse macabre.



Franz Schubert

18-23. Ghost Variations - Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

This haunting and almost unknown work was to be **Robert Schumann**’s last piano piece, and the story of its existence is tragic and unforgettable. In February 1854 the increasingly schizophrenic Schumann had a series of dreams in which ghosts and angels dictated a theme to him. He woke up and wrote down the chorale-like melody, and a few days later, composed some variations on it. Suicidal and hallucinatory, he then went out and threw himself off a bridge into the icy Rhine River. Rescued by fishermen, he was brought back home. A day later, he felt compelled to complete the piece, which he dedicated to his wife Clara. The following day he was committed to the mental institution where he died two years later, seeing Clara only once again, two days before his death. The hymn-like theme is in two halves, with the second half repeated. It is followed by five variations, which adhere to the theme’s structure and remain melodically close to it. The music is fragile, gentle and intimate, painfully private. Clara was disturbed by the score’s “other-worldly origins” and withheld it, and it was not published until 1939.

Michael Lewin

Michael Lewin enjoys a distinguished international reputation as one of America's most abundantly gifted and charismatic concert pianists, performing to acclamation in 30 countries.

Piano Phantoms is Mr. Lewin's second recording for Sono Luminus, following his popular *If I Were a Bird: A Piano Aviary* (DSL-92103). Forthcoming will be a release of piano music by composer Claude Debussy.

Commanding a repertoire of 40 piano concertos, Michael Lewin has appeared as soloist with the Netherlands Philharmonic, Cairo Symphony, Bucharest 'Enescu' Philharmonic, Filharmónica Jalisco de Guadalajara, State Symphony of Greece, the Boston Pops, Moscow Chamber Orchestra, the Symphonies of Phoenix, Indianapolis, Miami, Colorado, Nevada, West Virginia, Puerto Rico, Illinois, North Carolina, Sinfonia da Camera, and the Youth Orchestra of the Americas. He has premiered two Concertos by David Kocsis and performed Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* over 50 times.

Lewin's career was launched with top prizes in the Franz Liszt International Piano Competition in the Netherlands, the American Pianists Association Award and the William Kapell International Competition. Following his notable New York recital debut in Lincoln Center the *New York Times* wrote that "his immense technique and ability qualify him eminently for success." Since then he has concertized widely in solo recital, with orchestras and as a chamber musician.

His wide-ranging discography has received extraordinary critical praise. He followed his best-selling collection of Sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti with the first-ever complete piano music of American composer Charles Tomlinson Griffes (two volumes). Earlier he recorded Gottschalk ("Bamboula"), Liszt ("Michael Lewin plays Liszt"), Scriabin, Glazunov and Balakirev ("A Russian Piano Recital"), as well as the 4 Violin and Piano Sonatas of William Bolcom with violinist Irina Muresanu.

A native New Yorker, Michael Lewin studied with Leon Fleisher. He is a graduate of the Juilliard School and a Steinway Artist.

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