



THE
LISZT SOCIETY

Newsletter

www.liszt soc.org.uk

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LISZT SOCIETY ANNUAL DAY 2011

This year's Liszt Society Annual Day will take place on Friday 18th November at the **Royal Academy of Music**, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5HT

12 noon	Annual General Meeting
1.00pm	Piano recital by Jayson Gillam
2.30pm	Masterclass by Leslie Howard
5.00pm	Talk by Bryce Morrison <i>Liszt as prophet and Freethinker</i>
7.00pm	Concert by students of the Royal Academy of Music

Admission charge for the day's events from 1.00pm onwards is
members £10 / non-members £15

NEWS

Pope Benedict XVI recalls Liszt An article from the Vatican Information Service

VATICAN CITY, 28 MAY 2011 - Yesterday afternoon, in the Paul VI Hall of the Vatican, Benedict XVI attended a concert offered in his honour by the President of the Republic of Hungary, Pal Schmitt, on the occasion of the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union and the bicentenary of the birth of the Hungarian composer, Franz Liszt.

At the end of the concert the Holy Father thanked tenor Istvan Horvath, the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra and the State Choir, which performed several compositions by Liszt: Festmarsch zur Goethejubiläumsfeier, Vallée d'Obermann, Ave Maria: Die Glocken von Rom, and Psalm 13.

Benedict XVI pointed out that the first three pieces "have aroused a wide range of feelings: from the joy and festive tone of the march, to the meditation of the second piece with its insistent and aching melody, to the attitude of prayerfulness we are invited to by the Ave Maria".

Referring to the 13th Psalm, the Pope explained that this piece "has given us the idea of the quality and profundity of Liszt's faith. It is a Psalm in which the one praying encounters difficulty, the enemy

surrounds him, besieges him, and God seems absent, seems to have forgotten him. His supplication becomes anguished in light of this abandonment: 'How long, O Lord?', the psalmist repeats four times".

"It is the cry of a man and of humanity", the Pope continued, "feeling the weight of evil in the world. Liszt's music has conveyed this feeling of weight and anguish, but God does not abandon him. The Psalmist knows this, as does Liszt; as a man of faith, he knows it. Out of anguish is born an invocation full of trust that overflows into joy, 'My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me'. And here Liszt's music is transformed: tenor, choir, and orchestra raise a hymn of total entrustment to God who never betrays, never forgets, never leaves us alone".

Liszt in the Independent's Happy List 2011

Congratulations to the Society's president, Leslie Howard, for his listing in the *Independent on Sunday* Happy List for 2011. The citation reads as follows:

Leslie Howard Liszt ambassador Concert pianist and classical artiste, but also unpaid president and ambassador for the Liszt Society which celebrates the bicentenary of the composer's birth this year. Does untold hours of lecturing to increase people's enjoyment of Franz Liszt, and extend his music to wider audience.

CD REVIEW

A Book of Liszts

A 3-disc set from Chrome Audio featuring readings from the novel *A Book of Liszts - Variations on the theme of Franz Liszt*, by John Spurling (published by Seagull Books), with piano music by Liszt performed by János Balázs. www.johnspurling.com

Here we have a 3-disc set, released in May 2011, along with a book to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Liszt's birth. The first two discs consist of readings (by Jonathan Keeble and Jilly Bond) taken from the new book by John Spurling entitled *A Book of Liszts*. The readings are interspersed with various pieces by Liszt played by János Balázs (winner of the Franz Liszt Piano Competition 2005). The third disc contains full performances of the works played as interludes on the first two discs.

I'm not usually a fan of the spoken word when it is given as sections of diaries and so on as I find it almost too personal. However, in this case, I make an exception as the readings, although based on the known facts, are fictitious. The author has clearly done a considerable amount of research in order to evoke the revolutionary atmosphere of 1830s Paris with its riots and cobblestones being torn up, and thrown in protest at the way the poor were treated. Amongst all this, the performances, life and affairs of Liszt are evoked very well by the readers. The first disc is split nicely into two sections - the first is about Liszt hearing Paganini and the effect on him by this event as well as his unlucky first love affair with Caroline de Saint-Cricq. The second half of the disc is about Marie D'Agoult and her first meetings with Liszt in the 1830s, at which time she was married with a young daughter. I don't know if Marie was a singer (I have never read any of her memoirs - I don't know if you her book *Nelida* is considered to be a memoir) but her joining in to sing a piece by Weber while Liszt accompanied seems to fit well. Her prose certainly seems to be written in the overheated 19th century style which fits well with her temperament. The second, and much longer disc, concerns Liszt at a slightly later time in his life by which time he was involved with the infamous Lola Montez (whose real name was Eliza Rosanna Gilbert). There is an especially funny section which involves an early meeting

between Liszt and Wagner and Lola being very rude to him and throwing a cloak over his head and telling him that he talked too much! (I'm not sure if the "F" word was in common parlance at the time though!) Anyway, after this interlude with Lola, the action moves on to Liszt's involvement with Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein and her freezing manor house in Poland. There are lots of little details which make this very believable and the way the narrative tails off at the very end of this section (where the pair of them arrange to meet up at Prince Lichnowsky's castle for an emotional reunion) is excellently done.

This leads me on to the final disc which contains fifteen solo piano pieces by Liszt, played by János Balázs. The pieces date from Liszt's middle and later years and include *Les cloches de Genève*, *Waldesrauchen*, the *Mephisto Waltz* No.1, and three *Transcendental Études*. The works here are all wonderfully played, the *Andante lagrimoso* (from *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*) is especially good and very tearful sounding in comparison to some other recordings that I've heard. The faster pieces are taken at fast tempi and are explosively powerful, especially sections in the etudes. János Balázs is also equally at home in the more reflective pieces, *Les cloches de Genève* is well phrased and seems very cantabile (as it should be) - I would single out Mr. Balász as being able to make the piano "sing" very well: he is excellent at holding a melodic line and making things flow together well. The latest piece recorded here is the *Valse oubliée* No.4 and, again, the pianist is quite at home with the odd harmonies and trailing off into silence that was characteristic of Liszt's latest works.

The booklet notes are short but as most of the material on the disc is readings, there is no need for a biography here! The list of music on the third disc does not include S numbers but is none the worse for that. There is also a little about the genesis of the book and its author which is most interesting, as well as a paragraph on each of the readers and the pianist. I will certainly be keeping an ear open for further recordings by this pianist as he is well worth listening to. Can I put in a plea for a disc of operatic paraphrases because, as I said earlier, he has an ability to make the piano sing?

Overall, this is an excellent set of discs with very interesting readings coupled with some excellent piano playing.

Jonathan Welsh

RECENT AND FUTURE CD RELEASES

Deutsche Grammophon has re-issued the two Liszt discs that **Krystian Zimerman** recorded for the label over twenty years ago. They are now presented as a double-disc set (but sold for the price of one disc) and contain the two piano concertos, *Totentanz*, Sonata in B minor, *Nuages gris*, *La notte*, *La lugubre gondola* II and *Funérailles*.

Hyperion Records is releasing a new recording of the two Liszt Concertos in November - with **Stephen Hough** as the soloist. He will be joined by the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Andrew Litton. The CD also contains their recording of the Grieg Concerto.

CONCERT REVIEW

Liszt 2011 – A 200th Birthday Celebration

On Friday 20th May 2011, Liszt Society member Julian Saphir gave a most memorable piano recital at the Jacqueline du Pre Music Building, St.Hilda's College, Oxford. The event was a fitting celebration of Liszt's bicentenary, encompassing almost all aspects of Liszt's remarkable imaginative range.

It was a huge and daunting programme. The first half alone would have overtaxed most pianists in terms of stamina and technique! Julian began with an impressive and stately performance of *Invocation* from the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* and followed it with three of Liszt's most lyrical and charming pieces from the first book of *Années de Pèlerinage: Au lac de Wallenstadt, Pastorale* and *Au bord d'une source*. All were most beautifully and sensitively played.

A second excerpt from the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* followed, namely *Funérailles*. For me, this was the highlight of the entire recital. It was played with tremendous commitment and virtuosity. The grief-stricken outbursts had an almost unbearable intensity (my hair really *did* stand on end at times!) and the contrasting lyrical sections were played with a delicate simplicity which was most effective (and effecting). Altogether a superb performance of the piece.

Julian then gave a splendidly evocative rendering of *Sposalizio* before closing the first half with some fireworks: Hungarian Rhapsody No.12.

After the interval we heard the Schubert/Liszt *Soirées de Vienne* No.6 but, most interestingly, *not* the usual version that is commonly played but the original version as written for Sophie Menter. I had never heard this version before and it was a fascinating experience to hear the many differences between this and the version that is customarily played. The Sophie Menter version was published in a past edition of the Liszt Society Journal. Congratulations to Julian for bringing it to light in performance!

We then entered the dark and mysterious world of Liszt's late years with a brooding and sombre (and greatly effective) performance of *La lugubre gondola* II. As always, one found oneself marveling that Liszt should have been composing such works in the early 1880s.

Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este subsequently provided a welcome lightening of mood, being played with much delicacy and sparkle, excellently capturing the effect of fountains dancing in sunlight.

By this stage most pianists would have been physically and mentally exhausted but Julian then went on to finish with Liszt's titanic transcription of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* Overture. I have never heard a performance of this piece, either live or on record, that has not sounded rather awkward and clumsy in parts – in particular the descending passages for right hand (for strings, in the original) that accompany the "big tune" in the left hand (and which are subsequently repeated in octaves at the conclusion). Not being a pianist, I do not know whether the fingering of these

passages is particularly tricky or not but they rarely sound elegant or give a convincing impression of the original orchestral version. I was interested, accordingly, to see how Julian played this piece. The answer was “extremely well”. I don’t think I have heard a better attempt to make these passages sound convincing and “easy” (in the sense of ‘relaxed’) although I begin to wonder whether it is actually possible to play them as Liszt intended. Never, to my ears at least, is the wonderful effect of Wagner’s original quite captured here.

Julian ended with a wonderfully exciting (and remarkably accurate!) welter of octaves to bring this recital to a thrilling conclusion to the delight of a very appreciative audience.

Consolation No.1 was given as a perfect encore - a lovely restoration of calm after the immense journey that we had all been taken on over the past hour and a half.

All in all this was a most impressive and enjoyable recital, full of excellent things: delicacy of touch, virtuosity, subtlety, colour and an overwhelming sense of commitment to the music.

Jim Vincent

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 8th October 2011, from 10.00am - Wigmore Hall, London

An all-Liszt day - with three lectures and three concerts

Lectures by Leslie Howard (10.00am), Meirion Hughes (1.00pm) and Michael Short (6.00pm)
Concerts of music for piano trio (11.30am), choir (2.30pm), and piano duet (7.30pm)
performers include Tristan Lee, the BBC Singers, Coady Green, Bobby Chen and Leslie Howard

Wednesday 12th October 2011, from 7.30pm - Wigmore Hall, London

Rebecca Evans - soprano, Andrew Kennedy - tenor, Matthew Rose - bass baritone, Iain Burnside - piano
A performance of many of the songs featured on their acclaimed CD *Liszt Abroad*

Saturday 15th October 2011, 10.00am - Purcell Room, South Bank Centre, London

Liszt Forum participants include Kenneth Hamilton, Peter Donohoe, and Ronan O’Hora

Friday 21st October 2011, 7.30pm - Barbican Hall, Barbican, London

Dmitri Hvorostovsky - baritone Ivari Ilja - piano
programme to include songs by Fauré, Taneyev, Liszt and Tchaikovsky

Saturday 22nd / Sunday 23rd October 2011, 2.00pm until 10.00pm

- St. Barnabas Church, Pitshanger Lane, North Ealing, London W5 1QG

Liszt Festival featuring over 20 pianists

Sunday 23rd October 2011, 4.00pm - St. George’s Church, Headstone, Harrow

Christopher Matthews - organ programme to include Prelude and Crusaders March
(St Elisabeth), Evocation à la Chapelle Sistine, Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H

Friday 18th November 2011, 12 noon until evening - Royal Academy of Music, London

Liszt Society Annual Day (see page 1 for details)

Wednesday 30th November 2011, 12.30pm - West Road Concert Hall, Faculty of Music, Cambridge

Leslie Howard gives a lecture-recital on *Harmonies poétique et religieuses*

Sunday 4th December 2011, from 7.30pm - Wigmore Hall, London

Louis Lortie - piano programme to include *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage - Italie*, RW - Venezia, *La lugubre gondola*, Venezia e Napoli

Saturday 28th January 2012, 7.30pm - The Heritage Centre, Macclesfield

Martin Roscoe - piano programme to include music by Beethoven, Schubert and Liszt

Wednesday 8th February 2012, 7.30pm - Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, London

Stephen Hough - piano Marin Alsop - conductor London Philharmonic Orchestra
programme to include Piano Concerto No. 1 in E flat major and Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major

Wednesday 22nd February 2012, 1.10pm - Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

Martin Sturfält - piano programme to include Nuages gris, and Fantasy and Fugue on BACH

Tuesday 28th February 2012, 7.30pm - Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank Centre, London

Peter Donohoe - piano programme to include *Première Année de Pèlerinage - Suisse*

Tuesday 6th March 2012, 7.30pm - Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, London

Maurizio Pollini - piano programme to include *Nuages gris, Unstern! - Sinistre, La lugubre gondola I*, RW - Venezia, and Sonata in B minor

Thursday 3rd May 2012, 7.30pm - Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, London

Simon Trpceski - piano Philippe Jordan - conductor Philharmonia Orchestra
programme to include Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major

Tuesday 22nd May 2012, 7.30pm - Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, London

Arcadi Volodos - piano programme to include Sonata in B minor

We would be very happy for Liszt Society members to inform us of any events which might be of interest to fellow members. Please e-mail details of such events to memsec@lisztsoc.org.uk so that they can be listed in future newsletters.

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