



THE
LISZT SOCIETY

Newsletter

www.lisztsoc.org.uk

Nº 109 December 2012

THE LISZT SOCIETY DINNER AND RECITAL
Thursday 24th January 2013 at 7pm

May I remind members about the Liszt Society Dinner and Recital. There are still places available and I would urge members to apply for these as soon as possible. A copy of the original invitation (issued in October) is re-printed on page 9 - giving details of how to book.

2013 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please will members note that subscriptions for 2013 fall due on the 1st January 2013. Subscription rates remain at:

UK members - £30 GB
European members - £35 GB
Rest of the World members - £40
Students - £10 GB

Please make payment either by Paypal (destination address: treasurer@lisztsoc.org.uk) or by cheque (payable to The Liszt Society). Cheques can be sent to me at the address below:

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Moulsford
Oxfordshire OX10 9EX
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If any member wishes to pay by bank transfer please contact me at memsec@lisztsoc.org.uk for the Society's bank details.

I trust that members will continue to support the work of the Liszt Society and may I please request that members renew their subscriptions promptly as this does save the Society considerable expense as it avoids the postage costs of issuing "chasers". Many thanks indeed and may I wish all our members a very happy Christmas and New Year!

Jim Vincent

CD REVIEW

The Sound of Weimar, Volume 1 - Orchester Wiener Akademie / Martin Haselböck
New Classical Adventure 60234 59 minutes

In my review of the 200th anniversary of Liszt's birth, I mentioned that the CD label, New Classical Adventure had begun releasing a projected series of the Liszt symphonic poems on period instruments entitled "The Sound of Weimar". Thanks to the generosity and kindness of the people at New Classical Adventure, I now have copies of all of the 5 discs in the series. In all cases, the conductor is Martin Haselböck (who has also recorded Liszt's organ works for the same label) and the orchestra is the Orchester Wiener Akademie who number around 40 players and, as I said earlier, all play on period instruments. Each CD is smartly presented in a rigid plastic and cardboard arrangement with a substantial set of notes in French, English and German. These notes contain interesting details about the instruments used in the recordings, a short section about Liszt's use of the orchestra and the history of his association with the orchestra in Weimar and his work as conductor there and then details about the music. Then follows a paragraph about the orchestra, the conductor and lastly the concert hall (the Franz Liszt Concert Hall) which is located in the centre of Raiding (where Liszt was born). In the case of Volume 1, there is a section about the chorus as well. The series was started to mark Liszt's 200th anniversary and was recorded as part of the Lisztomania 2011 season in the concert hall.

The first volume of the 5 that have been recorded, contains just two works - The Dante Symphony (S109) and the orchestral version of A la Chapelle Sixtine (in this version, with the added word "Evocation" at the beginning of the title and designated S360 in Searle's catalogue). The CD begins with a performance of the Dante Symphony. There have been criticisms (especially in letters to Gramophone) about the tempi taken on these recordings - however, if you compare the timings here with (for example) those of Gianandrea Noseda on Chandos, there is little difference. Personally, and having heard many recordings of these works, I think this slightly faster approach works very well. Anyway, the other thing that comes across on this recording (and all of the others on all the discs in this set) is how amazingly well Liszt wrote for orchestra and how far he was pushing the boundaries of orchestral writing. This shows up very well in this performance of the Dante Symphony where, because of the reduced size of the orchestra, you hear a very clear and transparent texture which makes all the tiny details in the score stand out very well. Upon first hearing, I thought the woodwind section really excellent but on later listening, I extend this comment to the whole orchestra - all sections of the orchestra play incredibly well. The conductor makes a really excellent case for this work - I've not heard a better performance on disc or in broadcast.

The first movement of the symphony is a depiction of the Inferno and is very atmospheric - the bassoons' creepy trills at around 15'30" are especially evocative. There is also some very powerful playing by the percussion section! After this scary first movement, things calm down and we have a section entitled "Purgatorio" which is again excellently played. There is some lovely music interspersed with more powerful and unsettling sections before gradually metamorphosing into the 3rd and final movement, the "Magnificat". The singing here is lovely and the chorus work extremely well and ably supported by the orchestra. By the end of the movement, all the tension and power have been transmuted into peace. Overall, this is a magnificent performance which hangs together very well.

Next follows the best recording of *Evocation à la Chapelle Sixtine* that I have heard. It is also the quickest (3 minutes faster than another one I have heard - now available on a Brilliant Classics). Here, Liszt skilfully orchestrates his earlier piano (and piano duet) piece which very effectively combines the chord structure of the beginning of Allegri's *Miserere* and Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*. There are minor differences from the original version for piano but I assume this has to do with changing Liszt's conception of the work from piano to full orchestra. This is one of my favourite works by Liszt (in any version) and I find it really hard to understand why it has not been recorded more than once or twice. Again, there is exciting playing by all members of the orchestra and fantastic conducting by Martin Haselböck. Once again full marks to everyone concerned!

After listening to this disc, I might say keep up the good work but, having heard all the other volumes in this set, I can say that they did! My review of volumes 2 and 3 (which contains the symphonic poems *Les Preludes*, *Orpheus*, *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* (Berg-Symphonie), *Hunnenschlacht*, *Hungaria* and lastly, *Mazeppa*) will follow at a later date so, in the meantime, I would urge all members of the Liszt Society to get hold of a copy of these discs. They are really superb on all levels.

Jonathan Welsh

CONCERT REVIEWS

Franz Liszt: Die Ideale - Orchesterzyklus II
Wiener Akademie / Martin Haselböck
Sunday 20th March 2011, Franz Liszt Concert Hall, Raiding

Liszt's symphonic music has always been controversial. With the possible exceptions of *Orpheus* and the *Faust-symphony* (but Charles Rosen does not even discuss the symphony in his book "The Romantic Generation", because he considered it to be poorly orchestrated), most of it is regarded as being bombastic and over-the-top. And even *Orpheus* is rarely performed. However, Martin Haselböck and the Wiener Akademie have decided to perform the majority of Liszt's secular orchestral oeuvre (the Hungarian Rhapsodies and some incidental music will be performed during 2012). Two concerts took place during 2010, another four were scheduled for 2011 (including all the symphonic poems), and further concerts took place during 2012. The concert hall is located a few meters from Liszt's birthplace in Raiding. My plan was to attend all the symphonic poems during 2011, but I missed my flight and thereby the first concert in the cycle. I managed to get tickets to the second and the fourth (and final one), but the third which took place in June was sold out.

The conductor Martin Haselböck gave an introductory lecture about Liszt and Weimar and the background of the works. He also mentioned that Liszt's Weimar orchestra was even smaller than the Wiener Akademie (I think they had five-six cellos and three to four double basses). Obviously, Liszt can be performed by a conventional symphony orchestra with good effect.

In the second cycle *Heroide Funebre*, *Tasso*, *Le triumph funebre de Tasso*, *Kunstlerfestzug* and *Die Ideale* was originally announced, but the score and parts to *Kunstlerfestzug* needed some editing, so that work was omitted. This was a pity, since it has some musical material in common with *Die Ideale*.

Nevertheless, first in the programme was *Heroide Funebre*. It was played at a somewhat brisk tempo which to my opinion did not underline the tragedy strongly enough. In the middle section, the solo horn had a slight pitch problem during one or two seconds, and there were some inconsistencies in the rhythm section, but overall it was a satisfactory performance. It

was especially revelatory to hear a balanced woodwind and brass section. On modern instruments Liszt can sound overblown in the tutti sections, but on these historic instruments all was enjoyable. However for some reason, the solo flutist played on a metal flute, and he did not blend well with the orchestra in the high register.

Tasso was an even better performance. The only criticism is that the solo oboist missed out a two-bar solo phrase in the middle section (the Menuetto).

After the interval, *Le triomph funebre de Tasso* was performed, and just as in the case of *Heroide Funebre* I felt that Haselböck and the orchestra could not release the inherent tragedy in the music. Tempi and dynamics were perfect, but still something was missing.

However, Haselböck and his orchestra saved the best part until the end of concert. *Die Ideale* was the perfect performance; I sat at the edge of my chair for nearly thirty minutes. There were some unexpected choices of tempi and rubati in the slow section, but it worked surprisingly well. *Die Ideale* and *Festklänge* are Liszt's most optimistic poems, full of energy, but on record especially *Die Ideale* can feel overlong. This was definitely not the case in this performance. The suggested cut employed by Joo on the Hungaroton recording is perhaps the best solution as, in my opinion, the music loses momentum when Liszt repeats the secondary theme in a faster version in the apotheosis. But overall, it was a revelatory concert.

Mikael Rasmusson

Beethoven, Rachmaninov and Liszt - Leslie Howard Sunday 7th October 2012, Wigmore Hall, London

Nearly 40 years ago Leslie Howard gave three debut recitals at Wigmore Hall featuring music by Beethoven, Liszt and the great Romantic Russians. Since then he has returned many times and this recital reflected his continuing passion for this music. The programme was of special interest to our members as the second half comprised four rarely performed operatic fantasies by Liszt.

Starting with Beethoven's *Eroica* Variations and Fugue opus 35, he quickly established the mood of surprise with the composer's almost angry interruptions at the outset, before proceeding to set out the variations in a lively and forthright manner. The centerpiece of the programme was Rachmaninov's lesser-known Sonata No. 1 in D minor opus 28, in three movements inspired by the characters of Faust, Gretchen and Mephistopheles. The work is of symphonic proportions and demands large resources of technique and power which Leslie amply supplied, especially in the devil's charge in the final movement where successive climaxes were built up to thrilling effect. Even if some listeners might have preferred more light and shade, there is no denying that the sonata as a whole confirmed once again Leslie's huge command of the keyboard and ability to maintain a tempo in the face of mounting technical challenges.

The second half opened with Liszt's Fantasy on themes from Wagner's *Rienzi* (S439) which Leslie says "might be seen as a character portrait of the opera's hero". The piece was splendidly played and is a good example of the three-handed effect with the big tune in the centre of the keyboard, shared between the hands amid cascades of arpeggios. A complete contrast was Liszt's lovely paraphrase of Verdi's *Sacred Dance and Duet* from *Aida* (S436), played with great delicacy. Continuing the romantic mood, next came *Les adieux*, Liszt's tribute to Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette* (S409) combining several motifs from the opera in what is almost an original work.

The grand finale was Liszt's huge Fantasy on themes from Mozart's *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* (S697). Restoring the cuts made by Busoni in his version of the Figaro Fantasy and adding material to fill two gaps in the manuscript, Leslie revealed Liszt's original conception of a

complex music-drama. The piece is also brimming with novel (at that time) keyboard effects which must have stunned audiences in Berlin in 1843. Brilliantly executed at Wigmore Hall, this performance brought forth thunderous applause and a surprise encore of Jerome Kern's "All The Things You Are", improvised for the occasion in honour of Leslie's parents who had travelled from Australia to be in the audience.

Alan Paul

Lang Lang and Liszt

On the 2nd November 2012 BBC4 television broadcast a recording of pianist Lang Lang giving a Liszt recital at London's Roundhouse. The Roundhouse is much more usually devoted to rock and folk concerts and, indeed, this recital had many hallmarks of the traditional rock concert: dry ice, flashing coloured lighting, projected film and graphics, a very vocal audience, and a world-famous 'star' wearing black leather and sequins and displaying gelled, spiky hair. All in all an interesting comparison to the usual piano recital!

I know a good number of serious music lovers who utterly disparage Lang Lang but I wonder whether this disparagement is born partly from that innate mistrust of popularity and success that is so often a feature of the classical music world. Indeed, Liszt himself still suffers from it. The extraordinary fame and adulation that he garnered during his performing career still affects his reputation today. How often has one heard people accuse Liszt of being a shallow, meretricious showman, not on the basis of his music, which they have rarely considered, but purely on the basis that he was hugely successful in this early career and had women fainting in the aisles!

So, what of Lang Lang? I have heard him play twice live. Once at the Wigmore Hall when he was all but unknown in the West. It was shortly after that concert that he burst like a meteor upon the world stage. It was a magnificent recital - full of remarkable things and the vibrancy of youth. I then heard him several years later at the Festival Hall. I came away in a very ambivalent mood. Certainly, there had been some wonderful playing - especially in Mozart, rather unexpectedly - but a good many mannerisms had by then begun to creep in which ruined some pieces. I recall the concert ended with a truly frightful performance of the Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 which was a travesty of the work. So, I was determined to listen to the Roundhouse recital without prejudice and with an innocent ear.

I doubt if anyone would seriously deny that Lang Lang has quite remarkable fingers and an extraordinary virtuosity. This was fully demonstrated at this recital. The question is: does this make for music? I am bound to say that, for the most part, (no doubt contrary to the opinion of many fellow members) I would answer yes. Admittedly, there was so much to distract the attention in the bombardment of lighting and special effects that it was difficult to listen impartially to the playing. Nonetheless, by frequently shutting my eyes, it was possible to enjoy a great deal of very fine playing.

The evening began with a straightforward and very fine account of *La Campanella* and proceeded with a performance of *Un Sospiro* that had great delicacy and beauty. No doubt for some the interpretation may have seemed over-romanticised but this is, after all, one of the most romantic of all Liszt's works. This was followed by the piano transcription of the song *O, pourquoi donc* - again very beautifully played. Lang Lang has perhaps a tendency to occasionally string out the lines in these lyrical pieces - not to everyone's taste, perhaps - but I found that they always remained just within acceptable bounds.

The Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15 was, as one might imagine, a technical tour de force but not over done. The 15th Rhapsody is one of the more popular of the set and its popularity can sometimes blind one to the work's rather strange and exotic atmosphere, which Lang Lang certainly brought out most successfully. A very lovely and subtle rendition of Liszt's

transcription of Schubert's *Ständchen* followed and then the main programme concluded with the Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2. played, of course, with phenomenal virtuosity but a more balanced and restrained performance of the work than I had heard previously at the Festival Hall.

Two encores followed: Liszt's transcriptions of Schumann's *Widmung* and Schubert's *Ave Maria*, both beautifully played if slightly 'milking' the emotional qualities of the works.

The capacity audience certainly did not appear to be the traditional classical music audience (whatever that might be) and I have no doubt that for many of the audience it was their first experience of a classical piano recital and, indeed, of Liszt's music. This in itself is surely a justification for this sort of event and the enthusiasm with which the audience - primarily made up of young people as far as one could see - greeted each work was heart-warming. It was definitely not an evening for purists! In fact, even I, not being in any way a purist - might have found it slightly hard to take if I had not had the luxury of being able to watch it from the comfort of my settee with eyes closed, for the most part!

It will not have escaped the notice of readers that the vast majority of the programme was of a lyrical character. This in itself, perhaps, goes some way to explode the myth that Lang Lang is merely a player who hammers the piano into submission. So, although I am not yet an out-and-out fan I would urge those who may have previously dismissed Lang Lang to listen again with unprejudiced ears. And it is an interesting thought that Lang Lang has probably introduced more people to the music of Liszt than any other player since Liszt's own day!

Jim Vincent

LISZT AND THE BALLET

Member Geoffrey Griffiths wrote to me recently about choreographer Kenneth MacMillan's ballet *Mayerling* - which is set to music by Liszt. I have to confess that, not being a great ballet fan, I had never come across this work but having done a little research into its background and content it sounds a most intriguing piece.

Mayerling was MacMillan's fourth three-act ballet, completed after he had resigned as artistic director of the Royal Ballet, Covent Garden, London, in 1977. His interest in the Habsburg royal family and the demise of the Austro-Hungarian empire had been sparked by a 1974 book, *The Eagles Die*, by George Marek. The story of the double suicide of Rudolph, Crown Prince of Austria, and his young mistress at the Mayerling hunting lodge had been romanticised in several films; MacMillan wanted to show the social, political and personal pressures that might have driven the prince to such desperate measures.

He commissioned a scenario from Gillian Freeman, author and script-writer, who researched the period in depth, providing MacMillan with pen portraits of key figures in the Habsburg court and Viennese society. John Lanchbery, who had been the Royal Ballet's chief conductor from 1960, suggested Liszt as an appropriate choice of composer. Not only would Liszt's music provide the right atmosphere for the dramatic events (extracts from his *Faust Symphony* serving as a motif for Rudolf's obsession with guns and death) but he had actually written piano music for Empress Elisabeth to play. Lanchbery arranged and orchestrated some 30 pieces of Liszt's music as the score for *Mayerling*.

In addition to excerpts from the *Faust Symphony*, Lanchbery chose music from a vast range of Liszt's output including the symphonic poems *Heroide Funebre* and *Festklänge*, the *Soirees de Vienne*, the *Valse Melancolique*, *Seven Hungarian Portraits*, *Mephisto Waltz no. 1*, *Christmas Tree*, several of the *Transcendental Studies*, *Vallee d'Obermann*, *Funerailles*, *Fleurs Melodiques des Alpes* plus much else.

Members wishing to experience *Mayerling* for themselves may be interested to know that The Royal Ballet will be staging it between 19th April 2013 and 15th June 2013 at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London.

Jim Vincent

MEMBERS' LETTERS

Dear Sir,

I found last week, in Frankfurt, an interesting new CD of works by Liszt for violin and piano. The violinist is Thomas Irnberger and the pianist Edoardo Torbianelli. The CD (Gramola 98932) includes 'The Three Gypsies' S383 and Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12 in C sharp minor, both of which, of course, are influenced by Liszt's love of gypsy music.

It is known that Liszt was fascinated, even as a child, by the gypsy music of his homeland. When he visited the Romanian Principalities in 1847 he listened to different bands of gypsy musicians. I was recently in Iassy, the capital of Moldova, where Liszt gave four concerts. There he had the opportunity to meet the best violinist of the country, Barbu Lautaru. On the façade of the Iassy Theatre there is a plate commemorating the meeting that took place in January 1847.

He composed a Romanian Rhapsody half a century before our national composer George Enescu! Even in the Hungarian Rhapsodies he used a lot of Romanian tunes - being unable to detect a difference between Hungarian and Romanian gypsy songs. Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 contains more Romanian themes than Hungarian ones! This was demonstrated a century later by Bela Bartok, Zoltan Kodaly and other lesser composers.

This is one of the reasons why Liszt has always remained popular in Romania (my own country).

With best wishes from Bucharest!

Constantin Erbiceanu

Dear Sir,

I wonder whether many other members have come across Liszt's marvellous Requiem?

It was written in the late 1860s and early 1870s and has something in common with the more well-known *Via Crucis*, albeit a rather more consoling work than that harrowing piece. It is roughly fifty minutes long and is very rarely performed. I, personally, have no knowledge of any performance having been given in England - at least in my lifetime.

This is a great pity as it is a quite remarkable piece in my opinion, the level of inspiration kept high almost throughout. For me, the Dies Irae section is one of the most moving passages - a long, deeply-felt movement (around sixteen minutes) which, with its tender, restrained and profound character, will come as a huge surprise to those who are familiar only with such massive outpourings as the Verdi and Berlioz versions (fine as they are). And I also find the ending of the whole work deeply touching, fading away very quietly as it does after some quite savage harmonies and rhythms in Liszt's evocation of the Last Judgement in the Libera Me.

I have a Hungaraton recording (HCD 11267) with the Hungarian Army Male Voice Choir and soloists conducted by Janos Ferencsik (accompanied by organ and, in parts, brass). Although the singing is not quite out of the top drawer, I find this an enormously satisfying and moving experience and the performers definitely give the impression that this is music for the church and not for the concert hall. Possibly, this would not have been the case were the soloists and choir to have been of absolutely top-notch quality.

Having said that, does any member have any other recordings of this splendid work? If so, I would be interested to read about them within the letters page of the next newsletter.

M.C.Smee

Dear Sir,

I was interested to read the brief piece in the last newsletter about pianist Benjamin Grosvenor and to hear that his grandfather is a member of the Liszt Society.

I have recently heard Benjamin ('Ben') Grosvenor and feel I must tell people about him. I had heard that he is very good, but I had not expected him to be phenomenal. He is amazing and combines the fire of youth and great athleticism (with economy of movement) with fine tone (strong but not banging) and great delicacy. His Bach Partita was very clear and lively. His unusual programme had as its middle a selection of Scriabin mazurkas and Granados's Valses Poeticos which demonstrated his mercurial quick changes of mood combined again with fire and delicacy. Then came the Schulz-Evler version of *The Blue Danube* which I followed in the score. How he manages to throw off all the chords and octaves with such speed and refinement and great clarity, I just don't know. For encores we had the *Tango* by Albeniz and then a truly amazing Liszt *Gnomenreigen* and finally Morton Gould's Boogie Woogie Etude.

He had a spontaneous standing ovation after *The Blue Danube* and even more so after the Liszt.

What a recital!

Alan Paul

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The Liszt Society Dinner and Recital
24th January 2013 at 7pm

in conjunction with the Alkan, Wagner and Berlioz Societies



**The Forge Music and Arts Venue,
3-7 Delancey Street, Camden Town, London NW1 7NL**

The cost is £40 per head to include a two-course meal (meat, fish and vegetarian options), wine, and the recital.

Recital programme:

'Elsa's Dream' from Lohengrin	Wagner
'Liebestod' from Tristan and Isolde	Wagner
Cara Mchardy - soprano Ben Woodward - piano	
Deux Nocturnes op. 27; Fantaisie-Impromptu op.66 (posth)	Chopin
Douze études dans les tons mineurs op. 39 - No.12 'Le Festin d'Esope'	Alkan
Grande Fantaisie sur l'opéra 'Moïse' de Rossini op. 33	Thalberg
Hexaméron	Liszt et al

Mark Viner - piano

REPLY SLIP -----

Liszt Society Dinner and Recital - Thursday 24th January 2013 at 7pm

Name:

I shall /shall not be attending

I shall/shall not be bringing a guest(s) Please state number of guests if applicable _____

I have paid by Paypal quoting payee destination address as treasurer@lisztsoc.org.uk
(please delete as applicable)

I enclose a cheque for £ payable to The Liszt Society
(please delete as applicable)

Please return by e-mail or post to:

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