



THE
LISZT SOCIETY

Newsletter

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Nº 110 March 2013

2013 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for 2013 fell due on the 1st January 2013. Please will members who have not renewed do so as soon as possible as to save the society the cost of issuing individual reminders.

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The Membership Secretary
3 Offlands Court
Reading Road
Moulsford
Oxfordshire OX10 9EX
UK

If any member wishes to pay by bank transfer please contact me at memsec@lisztsoc.org.uk for details of the Society's account.

If you are not sure whether you have renewed or not, please e-mail me for confirmation at the address in the previous paragraph, or telephone me on +44 1491 651842 (overseas members) or 01491 651842 (UK members).

Please do not delay as the Society relies on your support to continue its work in generating interest in the life and music of Liszt.

Many thanks.

Jim Vincent
Membership Secretary

MEMBERS' E-MAIL ADDRESSES

The dramatic increase in UK postage charges that occurred during 2012 has greatly increased the Society's postal costs. For roughly two thirds of our members I hold e-mail addresses and to those members I am able to send out our quarterly newsletters electronically and consequently, free of charge. This is a huge benefit to the Society.

If you have an e-mail address but have not made this known to the Society, may I please urge you to inform me of it so that I may add you to my e-mail circulation list as this will represent a very valuable cost saving to the Society. Additionally, I do like to e-mail members periodically with news of events or information of general interest, and members for whom I do not hold an email address do miss out in this regard.

Of course, our primary publication, the Liszt Society Journal, is always issued in hard copy and sent out by post.

Jim Vincent

FORTHCOMING CONCERT

PIANO RECITAL for FOUR HANDS
17th April 2013 at 6.30pm

STEINWAY HALL
44, Marylebone Lane, London W1U 2DB

Hosted by the Alkan Society in association with the Liszt, Wagner and Berlioz
Societies

Leslie Howard and Mark Viner

Programme

SCHUBERT Rondo in A major for piano, four hands, D951 (1828)

LISZT Fantasie und Fuge 'Ad nos, ad salutarem undam', version for piano, four hands, S624 [Illustrations du *Prophète* IV' on a theme from Meyerbeer's opera] (1850)

ALKAN Trois Marches, for piano, four hands, opus 40 (1857)

PUBLICISING FUTURE EVENTS

As members will be aware, the Liszt Society is keen to publicise events that promote interest in Liszt's life and music. Our website has pages for both Members' Events and Non-

Members's events and I would ask all members to let me know of any forthcoming events during 2013-2014 (in any part of the world) that may be of interest to other members so that details of these can be posted on the website. The Society has many performers among its ranks and I hope that they, especially, will take advantage of this opportunity to publicise their own activities.

Please do e-mail me with details at memsec@lisztsoc.org.uk and I will ensure that the website is appropriately updated.

Jim Vincent

CONCERT REVIEW

Olivia Sham - Royal Academy of Music, London, 12th November 2012

In Newsletter no. 108 I wrote a very favourable review of a piano recital by Liszt Society member Olivia Sham, held on the 15th June 2012 at the Royal Academy of Music Museum. It was with pleasurable expectation, therefore, that my wife and I attended a second recital by Olivia Sham at the David Josefowitz Recital hall, Royal Academy of Music, on the 12th November 2012.

Apart from being an exceptional performer, Olivia is clearly a very 'thinking' musician. Her programming is always extremely imaginative and thematically well put together. On this occasion she had taken the bold step of programming all late pieces by Liszt:

'Abendglocken' from Weihnachtsbaum S.186

Variationen über das Motiv von Bach' Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen' und des Crucifixus der
H-moll Messe S.180

Unstern – Sinistre S.208

In Festo Transfigurationis Domini Nostri Jesu Christi S.188

Les Jeux d'Eau à la Villa d'Este

Sancta Dorothea S.187

La lugubre gondola I. S.200/1

La lugubre gondola II. S.200/2

Csárdás Macabre S.224

Resignazione S.187a

Nuages gris S.199

Wiegenlied S.198

I was unsure what an audience would make of these mostly stark, bleak works, offset by pieces of child-like simplicity. I need have had no worries! The audience was thoroughly absorbed and this absorption was enhanced by the dimly-lit recital room, with just the piano lit, and by Olivia's preference for playing each half of her concerts without applause between pieces. This prevented any break in the intense concentration of both audience and performer. In the second half, this intensity became almost palpable. I do not think I ever experienced such a rapt hush during any previous recital as there was during the two lugubre gondola pieces and the Resignazione and Nuages gris. The audience hardly seemed to be breathing and one could have heard a pin drop.

The playing throughout gave abundant proof of both Olivia's formidable technique and sensitive musicianship. A couple of minor quibbles: firstly, there was a good deal of 'buzzing' and 'twanging' when releasing the 'soft' pedal and this slightly spoilt some of the quieter passages. Some pianos, of course, are more prone to this than others and the piano on this occasion seemed particularly so. I believe, though, that the performer can mitigate this effect considerably, as Leslie Howard has demonstrated at several masterclasses; secondly, my wife and I both were aware of a certain lack of synchronization between the hands, with sometimes the left hand leading and sometimes the right hand leading - for instance, in the timing of the chords that make up the main part of 'Resignazione'. Whether this effect was done with deliberate design, as was rather popular among some of the 'old school' players of the past, or unintentionally, we both felt that the performance would have been enhanced by tighter coordination of the hands.

But I do not want to detract from what was an absolutely marvellous recital - one of the most enjoyable and memorable recitals I have ever attended - and one which I shall always recall with pleasure. The highly imaginative programming, coupled with such splendid, musicianly playing, was an absolute treat!

Liszt would have been proud to have heard these late works, so misunderstood and ignored in his day, played with such commitment and to have witnessed an audience so transfixed by them.

Jim Vincent

EVENT REVIEW

The Liszt Society dinner and recital - 24th January 2013

This was the first event - the first of many, hopefully - to be held as a joint event with three other societies: the Wagner Society, the Alkan Society and the Berlioz Society. Each of these societies has a disparate membership and sometimes finds it difficult to obtain sufficient audience numbers to make an event viable. This present occasion was a triumphant vindication of the commitment to engage more fully with these other societies with almost sixty people attending.

The evening recital commenced with two Wagner items - 'Einsam in trüben Tagen' (Elsa's Dream) from Lohengrin and 'Mild und Leise' (Liebestod) from Tristan and Isolde - performed by soprano Cara Mchardy and pianist Ben Woodward. Both pieces were finely sung with tremendous commitment and a great dynamic range, the voice being equally steady whether at *ppp* or *fff*. The balance between piano and soprano was admirable.

This was followed by a solo piano recital by Mark Viner.

Mark opened his recital with Deux Nocturnes, opus 27 by Chopin and immediately followed these with the same composer's Fantaisie-Impromptu, opus 66. The nocturnes were played very poetically and with a beautiful touch and were never over-romanticised. The great Fantaisie-Impromptu - for me one of Chopin's most sublime achievements - was given a splendid and noble performance. A fellow member felt that the first part of the piece was played too fast and that the subsequent middle-section was taken too slowly but I cannot say that I personally felt this.

Mark then played what for many present seems to have been the highlight of the evening: 'Le Festin d'Ésope' by Alkan (Douze Études dans tous les tons mineurs, opus 39, No. 12 in E minor). This fiendishly difficult piece was played with enormous élan and virtuosity, but with so much else besides. The strange and avant-garde elements of the piece were startlingly

brought out and the overall architecture of the piece was splendidly built up leading to a thrilling ending.

We then heard a real rarity: the Grande Fantaisie sur l'opéra 'Moïse' de Rossini, opus 33 by Sigismond Thalberg. Thalberg's name lives on in musical circles as a great pianist not as a composer and few would claim that his music has any great merit when set against that of the first rank of composers. None the less his music has a great deal of charm and gives a performer the opportunity to display the qualities for which Thalberg himself was famed - i.e. the ability to play the most dreadfully demanding music with an unflustered smoothness and control that gives the impression that this is all really child's play!* Mark Viner certainly achieved this with admirable aplomb.

The final work of the evening was another rarity - Liszt's 'Hexaméron' (Morceau de concert – Grandes Variations de bravoure sur la marche des Puritans de Bellini).

As Lisztians will know, this is a collaborative piece with contributions from Thalberg, Herz, Pixis, Czerny, Chopin and, of course, Liszt himself. As a collaborative piece it still holds up remarkably well although I have to say, from a personal point of view, I always wish that a better theme had been chosen for the variations! Nonetheless, this was, quite literally, a once in a lifetime opportunity to hear this extremely rarely performed piece played live. The piece is surprisingly well represented in the recording field with recordings available by, among others, Marc André Hamelin, Vladimir Horowitz, Leslie Howard, Raymond Lewenthal and William Wolfram (in the Naxos Complete Piano Music of Liszt series) but I cannot remember a live performance of this piece for solo piano (I do have a hazy recollection of a televised performance given on six grand pianos at the Royal Albert Hall, London, about forty years ago!).

Mark Viner gave a superbly virtuosic performance of this piece whilst bringing out the lyrical passages (including, of course, the beautiful Chopin variation) with great charm and poetry. Despite the plethora of notes in this, and in much of what had gone before, his playing never seemed rushed and was consistently clear and finely articulated. How refreshing this was! So often one hears "virtuosic" playing where any musical content is swamped by a welter of notes, noise and thunderous bluster. There was none of that in evidence here and I would say, without hesitation, that this was one of the finest recitals we, as a society, have been privileged to hear.

The recital was followed by a dinner where the members of all four societies had ample opportunity to meet and chat and to discuss future events. There was even some preparatory planning for another dinner and recital, such had been the success of this present event!

The venue was the Forge Music and Arts Venue in Camden Town, London. This proved to be a very attractive venue with a good recital room equipped with a fine Steinway piano and a large, adjacent bar and dining area that was almost perfectly suited to an event of this nature. I feel sure that now we have started the ball rolling, further joint events of this nature will soon follow.

Jim Vincent

* as an addendum, for those who might be interested in hearing more music by Thalberg, I have a wonderful recording of Thalberg's Fantasy on Donizetti's 'Don Pasquale' played by Earl Wild which, for me, is one of the most supremely beautiful examples of piano playing I have ever encountered. The version I have is part of a 5CD set entitled "Great Pianists of the Century", issued by Brilliant Classics, and the reference number is 99228.

CD REVIEW

The Sound of Weimar, Volumes 2 and 3 (New Classical Adventure)

As I mentioned in my previous review of volume 1 of this series, the conductor in this series "The Sound of Weimar" 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 play on period instruments.

The second volume of the 5 contains the most famous of the symphonic poems - *Les Préludes* as well as *Orpheus* and the first of Liszt's efforts in this genre, *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* (Berg-Symphonie).

Many years ago on a "Building a library" feature on BBC Radio 3 about *Les Preludes*, the presenter stated that the best recording of the work had yet to be made. I agreed with this statement until I heard this recording as the playing is incredible and, bearing in mind how often this work has been recorded, it is like listening afresh to it. It is also one of the fastest recordings I have heard. Often, modern instrument recordings can sound a little muddy, especially in the 'Allegro non troppo' section (bar 110 in my Eulenburg score) but that is not the case here. I think that, in this case, the period instrumentation really helps to clarify the textures. This also applies in the 'tempo di marcia' section towards the end. The work ends joyfully in the home key of C major.

Next follows *Orpheus* - probably my favourite of these works. There is some lovely phrasing here and the overall mood is restrained and peaceful. The 'cellos deserve special mention here - especially at bar 16 (again, in the Eulenburg edition) where they really sing out the main theme. The short, more agitated section (bar 155) is suitably sinister sounding and overall, the work holds together very well and ends by evaporating into the ether. Again here there is some marvellous ensemble playing and special mention goes to the strings. Liszt's use of so called chamber scoring is particularly evident here.

Liszt's first symphonic poem often comes in for criticism as being too long and rambling but here the whole thing holds together very well. The themes which occur in the piece are played in such a connected fluid way that you forget that the work is half an hour long. It is also here that my comment in the first part of my review seems to be most apt: "...how amazingly well Liszt wrote for orchestra and how far he was pushing the boundaries of orchestral writing". The writing here was, at the time extremely revolutionary as no-one was writing music like this in this way in the 1850s.

On disc 3, we have *Hunnenschlacht*, *Hungaria* and lastly, *Mazeppa*, again with the same forces. *Hunnenschlacht* starts quietly before building to a huge bombastic climax several minutes in. Thereafter, there are periods of extreme quiet (played on the organ) and loud sections for full orchestra. The organ part in the piece is often played quite loudly so that the work sounds more like an organ concerto than a piece for orchestra with organ accompaniment. Not so here - the organ is extremely quiet (perhaps a little too quiet) but when it joins in with the orchestra about 10 minutes in, the playing is lovely and the forces all work together to produce music that sounds like it was written for a much smaller ensemble than full orchestra. The piece does end noisily but here it is very well shaped and is a thoroughly enjoyable listen.

Next is *Hungaria*, itself an expansion of Liszt's earlier *Heroic March in the Hungarian Style* (S224). This is basically a large orchestral march with several longer, more peaceful sections some of which are in the style of a funeral march, based upon earlier material. The orchestra really go for it in this piece and the pace is incredible however, despite changes in tempo (as directed in the score - especially in the funereal section in the middle of the work) the whole

piece is a coherent whole. Again the clarity in the playing really shows through and all the tiny orchestral details which are often lost in larger, modern instrument ensembles are here to be heard. This really shows up well in the huge orchestral glissandi towards the end of the work which is also very exciting to hear. Great stuff all round!

Lastly, there is the crack of the whip at the beginning of *Mazeppa* which gallops off at a blistering pace but then seems to lose speed during the first section of the piece. Of the pieces from the set I have reviewed so far, this somehow strikes me as the least successful. This is a shame as all the detail in Liszt's complex writing can be heard but this performance just doesn't have the drive in this first part that others do (e.g. *Noseada* on Chandos). However, once into the march things pick up again and the piece ends heroically and powerfully. Special mention should go to the trumpets and the incredible repeated notes which occur just before the initial main theme occurs in the closing pages of the work (page 109 in my Eulenburg score).

As I said in the first of my reviews of these discs, the playing is exemplary throughout and the conductor does a splendid job.

My review of volumes 4 and 5 will follow at a later date.

Jonathan Welsh

LISZT SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

As many members will know, the Liszt Society has had a long and fruitful association with The Hardie Press which has resulted in the publication of many fine - and often rare - scores. Although details of these can be found on the Society's website I felt it would be useful to also detail these in the newsletter. Volumes 4, 5 and 8 are currently unavailable.

Volume 1: Late Piano Works Csárdás Macabre S224; En rêve - Nocturne S207; Nuages gris S199; Die Trauer-Gondel I - La lugubre gondola I S200i; Die Trauer-Gondel II - La lugubre gondola II S200ii; Richard Wagner - Venezia S201; Vier kleine Klavierstücke - I, II, III, IV S192/1-4; Trauer-Vorspiel und Marsch S206; Unstern! S208; Dritter Mephisto-Walzer S216

Volume 2: Early and Late Piano Works Harmonies poétiques et religieuses S154; Apparitions Nos 1 & 2 S155/1&2; Lyon S156/1; Reminiscences de Boccanegra S438; Am Grabe Richard Wagners (1) S135 for string quartet and harp (ad lib.), (2) for piano solo S202 (first publication); Vierter Mephisto Walzer S696

Volume 3: Two Marches in the Hungarian Style & other late works for piano revised edition by Leslie Howard [in preparation]: Deux Marches dans le genre hongrois, S693; Mosonyi gyászmenete - Mosonyis Grabgeleit, S194; Petőfi szellemének - Dem Andenken Petőfis, S195; Öt magyar népdal - Fünf ungarische Volkslieder [transcribed from settings by Kornél Ábrányi, snr.], S245; Csárdás obstinée, S225/2; Première Élégie, S196; Zweite Elegie, S197; Schlaflos! - Insomnie! S203

Volume 6: Twenty-One Songs revised edition by Leslie Howard: Angiolin dal biondo crin, S269iii; Tre Sonetti di Petrarca, S270ii; Und wir dachten der Toten, S338; Des Tages laute Stimmen schweigen, S337; Vergiftet sind meine Lieder, S289iii; Morgens steh' ich auf und frage, S290iii; Ich möchte hingehn, S296iii; Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam, S309iii; Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam, S309a; J'ai perdu ma force et ma vie, S327; Ihr Glocken von Marling, S328; Go not, happy day, S335; Enfant, si j'étais roi, S283iii; Ich scheid, S319ii; Einst, S332; Gebet, S331; Sei still, S330; Die tote Nachtigall, S291ii; Isten veled!, S299ii

Volume 7: La romanesca & other rare works for piano revised edition by Leslie Howard: Magyar Dalok, S242 nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9 & 10; Sancta Dorothea, S187; In festo transfigurationis Domini nostri Jesu Christi, S188; Klavierstück in fis-dur, S193; Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth (final version) S534iii ; Romance, S169; Romance oubliée [Vergessener Romanze], S527; Vive Henri IV, S239 (first publication); La romanesca, (first and second versions) S247i & S247ii

Volume 9: Großes Konzertstück & Concerto pathétique for two pianos edited by Leslie Howard: Großes Konzertstück über Themen aus Mendelssohns "Lieder ohne Worte", S257 [1834] (first publication) Concerto pathétique, S258 [1855] [including the original ending of the 1866 edition and the ending revised by Hans von Bülow and approved by Liszt for the 1884 reissue] (first publication of the two editions in tandem).

Volume 10: The Complete Music for Violoncello and Pianoforte revised edition by Leslie Howard with Steven Isserlis: Élégie, S130 [Première Élégie] - with optional parts for harp and harmonium/organ; Zweite Elegie, S131; Romance oubliée, S132; La lugubre gondola, S134; Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth, S382 (first publication); Consolations - Six Pensées poétiques pour piano, S172 transcrites par Jules de Swert: no. 1 - enchainement de F. Liszt, S382a (first publication) - no. 4; Appendix: Consolations [transcrites par Jules de Swert] nos. 2, 3, 5 & 6; *O du mein holder Abendstern* - Rezitativ und Romanze aus der Oper *Tannhäuser* von Richard Wagner, S380 reconstruction by Leslie Howard (first publication)

Volume 11: The Complete Music for Pianoforte, Violin and Violoncello, edited Leslie Howard: Rapsodie hongroise no. 9 - Le carnaval de Pest, S379; Tristia - La vallée d'Obermann, S723a,b,c in three versions (first complete publication); Orphée - Poème symphonique S98, transcribed in 1885 with Liszt's *imprimatur* by Saint-Saëns

Volume 12: The Complete Music for Violin and Pianoforte (including the two pieces for violin and organ and the song with violin obbligato) edited by Leslie Howard: Zwei Walzer, S126b; Duo [sur des thèmes polonais], S127; Grand Duo concertant sur la romance de M. [Charles-Philippe] Lafont "Le départ du jeune marin," S128 (first complete publication); Rapsodie hongroise [XII], S379a; Die drei Zigeuner - Paraphrase, S383; La notte, S377a; Benedictus und Offertorium aus der ungarischer Krönungsmesse, S381 for violin and pianoforte; Offertorium und Benedictus, S678 for violin and organ/harmonium; Epithalam zu E[duard]. Reményis Vermählungsfeier, S129; Walther von der Vogelweide [Wartburg-Lieder, no. 3: "Der Mönch und die Nonne"], S345/3a for tenor and piano with violin obbligato (first publication); [Première] Élégie, S130ter for violin and pianoforte with harmonium/organ ad lib; Zweite Elegie, S131bis for violin and pianoforte with organ/harmonium ad lib, (first complete publication); Romance oubliée, S132ter; Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth, S382bis (first publication); La lugubre gondola, S134bis

Liszt Society members can buy available editions at a 15% discount direct from Hardie Press. The contact details for Hardie Press are as follows:

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The Liszt Society has been responsible for a wide range of other publications, details of which can be found on the Society's website at www.liszt soc.org.uk

MEMBERS' LETTERS

Dear Sir,

I found Jim Vincent's article in Newsletter 109 about Lang Lang and his televised Liszt recital from London's "Roundhouse" very interesting and fine! I have heard Lang Lang play several times. He played Schubert's great A-major sonata D. 959 exquisitely, with so much tenderness in the *pp* passages, and with a great sense of poetry and a dreamy atmosphere. At the same concert he played the Bartok sonata with extreme power and merciless audacity - just as it should be played. But, in my opinion, his Chopin Polonaise op. 53 was just vulgar - notwithstanding being quite fun! Lang Lang is indeed a star, and perhaps has a many sided personality, different aspects of which appeal to different sorts of personality in the audience - and, especially perhaps, the type of audience and venue described in the article.

One has to remember that Lang Lang is still a young man, full of life and impatience, a child of his time. He does not have the dignity and the sense of old-fashioned drama that one experienced when Rubinstein played, for instance. But Lang Lang can be thrilling and one of the very good things about Lang Lang, I think, is his ability to reach new - and young - listeners. I do like very much his approach to the audience, to children, to people who perhaps live without hope and without music. I remember a film when he played (on a miserable old upright piano) and met very young pupils in a run-down New York school. He really reached them in a very sympathetic way, I thought. And when he plays Schubert's Military March on YouTube together with a 5-year old little boy who brought his Teddy Bear with him on stage, he reached the hearts of thousands: Lang Lang, the Joy Bringer.

Anders Söndström, Sweden

Dear Sir,

I have recently bought a CD of Liszt songs performed by that great soprano of yesteryear, Margaret Price, accompanied by Cyprien Katsaris and thought that other members might also be interested in it. It contains a splendid selection of 17 songs including the well-known Petrarch Sonnets and, illuminatingly, three quite different versions of *Freudvoll und Leidvoll*. Altogether, this disc could hardly be bettered as an illustration of the quality of Liszt's song output.

As for the singing, this is very largely top-notch throughout (and often exquisite), with only a very few (to my ears, at least) less happy sounds during *Hohe Liebe*. But this is a very minor quibble. The piano accompaniment is first rate.

I can thoroughly recommend this disc to other members. It was recorded in 1986 and the edition I have bought is, presumably, a re-issue. It is produced under the Apex label, which appears to be a part of Teldec, and the CD number is 2564 66585-7.

Do go out a buy it!

Chip Messer MBE

Dear Sir,

I have recently joined the Liszt Society, motivated in part by the wish to learn more if possible about our piano which is reputed to have been played by Liszt shortly before his death.

The piano is a Steinway D Concert grand manufactured, according to the serial number, in 1875. It is built in magnificent walnut and still tunes to concert pitch. Inside, it bears a discreet brass plaque featuring the name Larkworthy.

It was purchased new from Steinway by Mr Alfred Bell, a wealthy Victorian industrialist well known in ecclesiastical circles for his work with stained glass. I am grateful to his great grandson, Mr Peter Larkworthy, for sharing the history of the piano with me up until the time I bought it some years ago. Mr Bell bought the piano to grace his Music Room which, together with the adjacent medieval style Banqueting Hall, were principal features of his rather grand mansion home, Bayford House, in Hampstead, London. That house still exists, though long since modified into apartments. Alfred Bell was a keen follower of classical music, and held soirées every Saturday night at his home for much of the latter part of the 19th Century. Many luminaries of that era spent time in that Music Room, including Sir John Barnby (*O Perfect Love all human thought transcending*), Sir Arthur Sullivan (who would have undoubtedly performed extracts from his operettas) and on one occasion the Abbé Liszt. Others attending included Sir Gilbert Scott (architect of the Albert Memorial), George Grossmith of the D'Oyly Carte company, and the singer Antoinette Stirling. The piano itself remained in London within the Larkworthy family until just before World War 2 when it was donated to Marlborough School, Wiltshire. There it remained under the guardianship of the Head of Music until the year 2000 when after 125 years of valiant service it was sold off, reportedly to make way for a new computer facility. Thus it came into our hands, still in fine working order but sadly scuffed after so many years of use in a public school. We had it restored, since when it has served us well and been played by members of the current generation of up and coming musicians in the company of our daughter, Mia, who is a professional violinist.

I would be very grateful to any member of the Society who may be able to provide corroborative evidence or anecdotes linking Liszt with the Bayford House soirées. A signed photograph of him actually playing our piano would be nice, but may be asking too much!

Yours sincerely

David Cooper, Winsford, Somerset

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