



THE
LISZT SOCIETY

Newsletter

www.lisztsoc.org.uk

Nº 113 December 2013

2014 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Please note that subscriptions for 2014 membership fall due on the **1st January 2014**. Membership rates are unchanged and are as follows:

UK membership- £30 GB

European membership - £35 GB

Rest of the World membership - £40 GB

Student membership - £10 GB

Please will you kindly make payment either on or by the 1st January, as prompt payment, avoiding the need for “chasers”, does represent a considerable cost saving to the Society.

Ideally, payment should be made via Paypal (payee address: treasurer@lisztsoc.org.uk) and making payment in £ GB.

Alternatively, please send a cheque (payable to The Liszt Society), to me at the address below:

The Membership Secretary
The Liszt Society
3, Offlands Court
Reading Road
Moulsford
Oxon OX10 9EX
UK

Many thanks and best wishes for a happy Christmas and New Year.

Jim Vincent

Dinner Recital

Thursday 23rd January 2014
6.30 for 7pm (recital), 8.30pm (dinner)

In association with the Wagner, Alkan and Berlioz Societies

at

The Forge Music and Arts Centre
3-7 Delancey Street, London NW1 7NL

Tickets £45, including dinner and wine – advance booking essential

Programme

Berlioz/Liszt: Bénédiction et Serment [Benvenuto Cellini] [piano duet]
[Christopher Smith & Leslie Howard]

Berlioz: 2 songs with tenor, cello & piano Le jeune pâtre breton; La captive
[Neil Baker, Patrick Tapio Johnson, Coady Green]

Berlioz/Thalberg: Grand Caprice sur la marche de l'Apothéose de la Grande Symphonie funèbre
et triomphale [piano solo]
[Coady Green]

Alkan: Fantaisie sur Don Juan [Mozart] pour piano à 4 mains
[Mark Viner & Coady Green]

Liszt: Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth [cello and piano]
[Patrick Tapio Johnson & Leslie Howard]

Wagner/Liszt: O du, mein holder Abendstern – for cello and piano
[Patrick Tapio Johnson & Leslie Howard]

Wagner: Weiche! Wotan! Weiche! (Das Rheingold); Der Engel; Träume (Wesendonck Lieder)
[Rhonda Browne - mezzo soprano]

Wagner/Tausig: Kaisermarsch [piano solo]
[Leslie Howard]

TICKETS

Please apply to Peter Leppard, The Wagner Society, Sickleholme Cottage,
Saltergate Lane, Barnford, Hope Valley S33 0BE events@wagnersociety.org
(cheques payable to The Wagner Society)

LISZT SOCIETY ANNUAL DAY - 9th November 2013

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Masataka Goto - piano

Recital for the Liszt Society and The Charitable Keyboard Trust

The Liszt Society has been proud over many years to present at its Annual Day, with the kind collaboration of the Keyboard Charitable Trust, a recital by a young pianist with an especial interest in Liszt. Masataka Goto, the winner of the last Utrecht International Liszt Competition continued this tradition with a truly awesome display of accomplished and deeply thoughtful playing in his recital on 7th November.

The great rarity of the day was the *March for the Sultan Abdul Medjid-Khan* – Liszt's elaborate piano transcription from an original work for band by Donizetti's brother Gaetano. Two things of importance: 1 – this may have been the first public performance of this work in Britain; 2 – Gaetano Donizetti could write a handsome piece. Mr Goto's performance made light of the mountain of technical difficulties with the same ease that Liszt himself no doubt did when he introduced his Grande Paraphrase in Istanbul in 1847!

The widely-acknowledged masterpiece from the Harmonies poétiques: *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude* was played with a controlled passion and a spiritual fervour so sincere that this emerged as the finest live performance of the work that the present writer has been fortunate enough to hear.

Mr Goto concluded a magnificent recital with a jaw-droppingly brilliant account of the fiendish but very entertaining *Hexaméron* – variations by six composers: Thalberg, Liszt, Herz, Pixis, Czerny and Chopin on *Suoni la tromba* from Bellini's *I puritani*, organised, introduced, connected and wrapped up in a wonderful finale by Liszt. It may have been a grim and wet day outdoors, but in the Deptford Town Hall, thanks to Masataka Goto, all was warmth and delight.

Leslie Howard

Liszt Society Piano Competition final

The centrepiece of this year's Annual Day was the final stage of the Liszt Society Piano Competition, the first of its kind for almost forty years. The four finalists were:

Panagiotis Trochopoulos (Greece)
Fraser Graham (UK)
Stefano Severini (Italy)
Jens-Hagen Wegner (Germany)

Before commenting on the individual players' performances I would like to make one or two general remarks on the performance of Liszt's music that I personally feel are important and relevant to what we heard.

Firstly, I have been to many recitals of Liszt's piano music where I have wanted to cry out "Too loud, too fast, too much pedal! – more delicacy, please, more clarity!" I believe it is often forgotten that the pianos that Liszt would have played during his performing career, and indeed for much of his life thereafter, would have been much smaller, both in physical terms and in terms of their tone and power, than the modern day "concert grand". This can be easily verified by listening to demonstrations of pianos dating from Liszt's day at such institutions as the Royal Academy of Music Museum in London. I can vouch for the fact that to hear Liszt played on an 1840 Erard is a revelation!

I believe too many performances of Liszt's piano music ignore the above fact and perpetuate the "thunderous" approach which has given Liszt such a bad name. It should be remembered that the markings *f*, *ff* and *fff* did not have the same effect in Liszt's time – or at least prior to the 1860s - as they do now on the modern piano.

Secondly, I believe the player should always take account of the size of the venue and its acoustic. This seems an obvious observation but I feel that far too often pianists will play a piece in the same way whether they are performing it at the Royal Albert Hall or the Wigmore Hall. I have been to one or two Liszt recitals at the latter venue where I have felt that I was sitting in the middle of a bombardment rather than a piano recital. Surely, one needs to play more intimately in a more intimate venue?

The Town Hall at Deptford – the venue for this year's competition – is a relatively small hall with a very reverberant acoustic. The excellent piano is a large concert grand with a huge sound. That said, it is vitally important that a pianist should take account of all these factors and tailor his or her performance accordingly, producing the necessary delicacy of touch and, even in the "big" pieces, a limited volume.

Now to the performances:

Panagiotis Trochopoulos opened the proceedings with the following programme:

Douze Etudes d'exécution transcendante, S139

No.12 Chasse-neige

Années de pèlerinage – Deuxième Année – Italie

No. 7 Après une lecture de Dante – Fantasia quasi sonata

Rapsodie hongroise XII, S244/12

As I was listening to Panagiotis Trochopoulos the thoughts with which I prefaced this article were going through my mind. I am afraid that everything was just too loud and overblown. The softness of the eddying snow in Chasse-neige was absent and the piece, to my mind, did not have the requisite steadiness and quiet relentlessness that it requires, and the Dante Sonata and the Rhapsody came over largely as a blur of noise. The Dante Sonata is, I feel, an extremely difficult piece to bring off in any event. There is a good deal of "infernal" music and it takes a really great pianist to present this as music rather than as noise and bluster. So much so that over the years I have almost come to dislike this piece having heard so many deafening performances of it (I have only heard one live performance that I enjoyed).

There were, of course, some nice things in Panagiotis's performance but the overall impression was one of unrelenting noise which did not allow the music to appear. This overall impression was not helped, I feel, by the choice of programme which would have benefited from more light and shade and the inclusion of some of the more lyrical pieces.

I felt that Fraser Graham's programme was much better chosen:

Trois Etudes de concert, S144
No. 3 Un sospiro
Zwei Konzertetüden, S145
No.2 Gnomenreigen
Isoldens Liebestod – Schlußszene aus Richard Wagners *Tristan und Isolde*, S447
Années de pèlerinage – Deuxième Année – Italie
No. 7 Après une lecture de Dante – Fantasia quasi sonata

I enjoyed Fraser's playing. It had a lightness of touch and a "neatness", if I may use the term, that was very appealing. In the first three pieces he maintained a nice tone and clarity throughout. He did not over-romanticise "Un sospiro" (as is often done) and did not play Gnomenreigen too fast (as is also often done). His playing of the Dante Sonata demonstrated the benefits of not playing this piece too loudly and he made much of the lovely lyrical passages that can often sound swamped by the outer movements. There was a memory lapse towards the end of the sonata but he recovered well and went on to confidently conclude what had been a well-prepared and well-played recital.

If Fraser Graham's programme had been well-chosen, then Stefano Severini's was inspired!

Années de pèlerinage – Première Année – Suisse, S160
No.2 Au lac de Wallenstadt
No.3 Pastorale
No.4 Au bord d'une source
No.5 Orage
No.6 Vallée d'Obermann
No.7 Eglogue

This was a hugely enjoyable recital. The first three lyrical pieces were played beautifully, with a full singing tone and some lovely occasional glimpses of inner harmonies that one doesn't always hear. "Orage" was played dramatically and with technical assurance but *not too loudly* and was well-controlled and clear. As was also "Vallée d'Obermann" where he captured the romantic essence of that piece and its literary qualities, presenting it as a journey or story. It had a remarkably nostalgic feel to it! Stefano delivered the final stages of the work, as he had done with "Orage", with some well-controlled and clear virtuosity.

Most players would have ended their recital with the grand ending of "Vallée d'Obermann" but it proved to be a masterstroke to finish the programme with the quiet elegy "Eglogue". This was most effectively played with a tender gentleness and gave a most touching feeling of farewell to the end of the recital.

There were one or two minor memory lapses in the course of the recital but these were of no consequence. Altogether, this was a splendid performance and earned some justifiable "bravos" from the audience.

Finally we heard Jens-Hagen Wegner from Germany. He played

Liebesträume – Drei Nottornos, S541
No.2 Seliger Tod
No.3 O lieb, so lang du lieben kannst
Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, S172
No.1 Invocation
Trois Etudes de concert, S144
No.3 Un sospiro
Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, S172
No.10 Cantique d'amour

It did not take long to realize that we were in the hands of a very accomplished player. Jens-Hagen has a very sound technique and is clearly a very serious and sensitive musician, as was demonstrated by his choice of programme. His own technical assurance and poise makes the audience feel relaxed which is a very important factor.

I personally would have liked the two “Liebesträume” to have been played a little more quietly – after all they are supposed to be *dreams* and they would have benefited from a more dream-like quality – but none the less there was much to enjoy here. The performance of “Invocation” was superb. This piece is not often programmed in recitals and, to be frank, has not in the past been an especial favourite of mine, but on this occasion Jens-Hagen made me hear it with new ears and made me realize what a splendid piece this is. His performance of this piece had everything: nobility, lyricism, delicacy and a tremendous sense of grandeur when required.

One does not need to say more about the remainder of his recital other than that it was all equally assured, finely-played and highly enjoyable. An excellent recital from a fine musician.

Whilst the jury were deliberating their decision, there was a certain amount of discussion among the audience and second-guessing of the jury's verdict. The general feeling was, I think, that the award of first prize would be a close run thing between Severini and Wegner but that Severini would just win by a close head. This was certainly my own view. And so it was. On their return, Leslie Howard, as chairman of the jury, announced that the first prize went to **Stefano Severini** and second prize to **Jens-Hagen Wegner**.

As first prize-winner, Stefano Severini is awarded the lunchtime recital at the 2014 Liszt Society Annual day and a recital tour in the North of England and as second prize-winner Jens-Hagen Wegner is also awarded a recital tour in the North of England.

Jim Vincent

THE LEGACY OF VLADIMIR HOROWITZ

My general impression over the past ten or twenty years has been that some who might lay claim to being “arbiters of musical taste” in the UK have tended to disparage the memory and recordings of Vladimir Horowitz rather than praise them. It almost seems to be the case that if one wishes to be taken seriously as a critic or commentator in the field of classical music then one should be careful not to be seen to praise Horowitz! I cannot see that this has proved to be the case elsewhere in the world (since writing the above I have been delighted to hear

BBC Radio 3's Rob Cowen regularly broadcasting and praising some of the classic Horowitz recordings).

I was never fortunate enough to hear Horowitz play live (although I did have the privilege of hearing Artur Schnabel at the end of his career – the most unforgettable recital I have ever attended). One can experience, though, a good deal of the Horowitz magic and magnetism – and also some of his occasionally exasperating qualities – through his many recordings and via a number of filmed recitals.

Let me say from the outset that I am not a fanatical “Horowitzian”. I fully accept that his playing, on occasion, could be somewhat exaggerated, taking liberties with the rhythm and dynamics of pieces. I have come across recordings of the Liszt Mephisto Waltz no. 1 and a number of Chopin works that I have found rather ugly (on the subject of Chopin I am not sure that Horowitz was always temperamentally suited to Chopin's music, with the exception perhaps of the Mazurkas and Nocturnes which he could, on occasion, play sublimely.)

More often than not, though, I have found Horowitz's recordings to be fascinating, enthralling, thought-provoking, inspiring, unique and deeply-moving, especially in relation to those composers for whom he had a special affinity: e.g. Clementi, Scarlatti, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, Scriabin, Rachmaninov and, to some extent, Liszt. I say “to some extent” as I don't find his Liszt always successful but in works such as Consolations no. 3, the Petrarch sonnet no.104, and the Soirées de Vienne Valse-Caprice no.6 for example, he achieves something very special indeed. And, of course, then there is the famous 1932 recording of the Liszt Sonata. Purists no longer seem to rate this recording but to my ears it remains mercurial, fascinating, thrilling, elegiac and moving by turns – and utterly unlike anybody else's recording of the work! The same could be said for his recording for CBS of the Vallée d'Oberman which I heard disparaged some years ago on BBC Radio 3 but which I still, unashamedly, find electrifying.

Horowitz was also, in my opinion, a quite brilliant performer of music by composers who may not be considered of the first rank – e.g. Moszkowski – and of his own “creations”, such as the famous Variations on a Theme of Carmen.

Horowitz is never a “safe” player. One never knows what is coming in the next bar. One never knows whether one is to be exasperated or taken to heights of pianism and feeling that one has rarely experienced before. And that is the joy of it. I have been to many recitals and heard excellent pianists give fine, well-rehearsed, well-programmed performances but one knows from the start that that is exactly what one will get. A safe bet! That makes for an enjoyable evening but not one that one will remember for the rest of one's life. There is no element of surprise or of having one's breath taken away, as Horowitz can do – or of being melted by a passage of ravishing tenderness and beauty.

Horowitz made many famous and often remarkable recordings for CBS in the 1960s and early 1970s, including a simply stunning (in my opinion) recording of the Rachmaninov Sonata no. 2. (or, at least, Horowitz's own performing version of that piece, which appears to have had Rachmaninov's blessing). But for me, it is the performances that Horowitz gave at the end of his life that are the most unforgettable, in particular the famous Moscow recital given after his return to Russia after nearly sixty years' absence in 1986 and, even more splendid perhaps, the recital given in Vienna in 1987 – both the Moscow and Vienna concerts are available on DVD. There are too many wonderful moments within these recitals to list in detail but to mention a few: two sublime performances of Mozart piano sonatas – those in C

major K330 and B flat major K333, in the slow movements of which time simply seems to stand still; a deeply touching recital of Schumann's Kinderszenen, the ending of which (The Poet Speaks) brings tears to the eyes; a wonderful Schubert Impromptu (in G flat major D899 no. 3) that has a charm and delicacy coupled with a sense of drama (almost like a Schubert song) that I have never encountered elsewhere; Liszt's third Consolation played with an extraordinary legato beauty; and an encore of Moszkowski's Etincelles that sparkles with a brilliance, playfulness and humour that is astonishing in a player in his mid eighties. Just watch the last few bars of the Moszkowski to appreciate the uniqueness of Horowitz's touch and technique. And there is so much more beside. One could live on a desert island with these two DVDs!

In these late performances Horowitz's playing, his position at the keyboard and his rapport with the audience, all display a wonderful relaxed quality – unique in Horowitz's career. His battle with concert nerves and depression throughout most of his career and his several "retirements" from public performance are very well documented and known to all. How moving then to see him here, perfectly relaxed and at ease with his audience, free of stress and the pressure that had dogged his earlier career.

His hands, to my mind, are the most beautiful hands on the keyboard that I have ever encountered (the low wrists and flat fingers would, I suspect, be condemned by most piano teachers!). The little finger of the right hand is invariably curled inwards when not needed, "like a cobra waiting to strike", as Harold C. Schonberg aptly described it. And the little finger of the left hand trembles with an incredible sensitivity like a leaf slightly blown by a breeze. All in all, a unique personality, a unique pianist and a musician who will forever exercise a unique fascination among his audience.

As long as piano playing is still admired the name of Vladimir Horowitz will be remembered – long after the names of his detractors have been forgotten.

Jim Vincent

MEMBERS' LETTERS

Dear Sir,

I am looking for an English translation of Haraszi's article 'Le probleme Liszt' from Acta Musicologica, December 1937. Does any fellow- member know if such a translation exists? If it does it might save me the effort of translating all 6000 words myself!
If anyone can help, please do e-mail me at doshea3@gmail.com

Many thanks,

David O'Shea

Dear Sir,

I enclose a photograph (rather poor quality, I am afraid) of a drawing said to be of Liszt. The drawing is owned by my mother and was originally bought from a colleague by my late father, Hermann Baron, who was a music antiquarian. The dimensions are approximately 18 inches

by 12 inches and it is framed. Unfortunately there is no other information I can provide about the work. My mother now wishes to dispose of the drawing "to a good home". If anyone in the Liszt Society is interested in purchasing it, please contact me by phone: 0208 888 6536 , or via email at baronshouse2000@yahoo.com. As regards price, I think we are open to offers.

Yours,

Stephen Baron



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