



The Liszt Society

Limited

Newsletter

No. 23 - DECEMBER 1984 : Edited by ADRIAN WILLIAMS

THE LISZT MEDAL.

Both the Society's Secretary, Eunice Mistarz, and the Editor of this Newsletter were delighted recently to receive news that, for "distinguished services towards fostering appreciation of Ferenc Liszt", the Liszt Ferenc Társaság (Franz Liszt Society) of Budapest had decided to honour each of them with the Liszt Medal - an award which has been presented to prominent Liszt scholars and performing artists both in Hungary and abroad.

There could hardly be a more deserving recipient of such an honour than Mrs. Mistarz, who has devoted many years of hard work to establishing friendly relations with individuals, societies and organisations in every continent; who has maintained an enormous and arduous correspondence, much of which has been concerned with the imparting of correct and helpful information about Liszt's life, works and activities; who has for the past decade shouldered virtually all the exceedingly onerous day-to-day labours of running our own Liszt Society, and launched and first edited its Journal; and who has in every way proved a zealous and selfless supporter and champion of Franz Liszt.

Heartiest congratulations to her!

DANTE PREMIERE.

An interesting Lisztian "first":

When composing the Dante Symphony, Liszt originally intended the work to be performed to the accompaniment of a diorama showing the illustrations to the Divina Commedia by the German painter Bonaventura Genelli (1798-1868), a name frequently encountered in the literature dealing with Liszt's life and activities at Weimar in the '50s. Unfortunately, for financial reasons the plan never materialised. When Genelli's drawings were recently traced at the Kupferstich-Kabinett in Dresden (where they have been since 1908), however, slides were made from them, and the first illustrated performance of Liszt's work was at last able to be given - at Brussels on 19 September.

Other performances followed shortly afterwards in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. On each occasion the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by James Conlon.

RECORDS.

Recently issued was a record of music by Liszt played by Elena Varvarova, a Russian-born pianist now living in Paris. On Stefanotis PAM 602 (1984) she plays: the Sonata in B minor and the Grandes Etudes de Paganini. The record is highly recommended by M. Roch Serra of the French Liszt Society.

The Piano Sonatas of John Field on record or cassette (hmp 0384 - chmp 0384), at £5.50 inc. p & p, played by Alan Etherden, are now available. May be obtained from H.R. Taylor, Gamut, Harmonia, Mundi, Essex.

In March a recording of Liszt's complete waltzes played by Leslie Howard will be issued in March. No further details yet available.

BOOK.

Those members who have attended the Annual General Meetings will have made the acquaintance of the Society's most welcoming and hospitable hostess, Marguerite Wolff. "Adventures of a Concert Pianist", a biography of Miss Wolff by Robert Clarson-Leach, is announced for March. See details on enclosed leaflet.

INFORMATION
WANTED.

Geraldine Keeling, an American member of the Society who is preparing a doctoral thesis on the keyboard instruments owned and played by Liszt, would be interested to learn if any other member knows of the fate or present whereabouts of his Clough & Warren reed organ. Some information about this instrument is given in several sources. In describing the Liszt Museum at Weimar in 1903, Adolf Mirus wrote:

But we must also think of the harmonium from the factory of Clough and Warren - earlier of Toronto, Canada, now of Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A. - which was found here earlier and which Liszt valued so much that he was always pleased to use it for his religious works as well as for study. Today this instrument is possessed by Herr Gottschalg, the court organist at Weimar, to whom it was given by Princess Wittgenstein in thanks for his long years of truly devoted service to Liszt.*

Gottschalg died in 1907. In 1911 Herbert Antcliffe identified the whereabouts of the organ and reported this speculation about its future:

On the death of Herr Gottschalg it passed into the hands of the present owner, Herbert A. Smith, of Leeds, who has had many tempting offers made to him by the museums of Weimar, Budapest, etc. He intends to keep it, however, pending negotiations with certain American admirers of the great pianist. He has also to settle matters with the excise authorities, who are rather fixed, owing to the instrument being partly American and partly German made (it was manufactured in America and fitted up in Germany), and by its having acquired abroad a sentimental value far exceeding its intrinsic value. It appears, therefore, that its destination will eventually be America, though it may be some little time before it is transported from England.**

Mrs. Keeling does not know if the organ did eventually go to the U.S.A. or if it stayed in Britain. She is in touch with Gottschalg's granddaughters (living in Leipzig), who would also be interested to know its later history. If anyone has any information about it, please will they write either to me (Adrian Williams, 34 Manchester Street, London W1) or direct to Mrs. Keeling (6318, N. Muscatel Avenue, San Gabriel, Ca. 91775 U.S.A.).

*Das Liszt Museum zu Weimar und seine Erinnerungen. 3rd ed. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1902, p. 30.

**"A Liszt Relic for America." The New Music Review, 10/115 (June 1911), pp. 373-74.

WHERE
LISZT
PLAYED.

Among the many Lisztian topics to which Mrs. Keeling (v. supra) has given attention is that of the concerts given by Liszt during his years as a travelling virtuoso. In his very readable volume Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, Alan Walker offers a fine map (with just a few small errors) showing some 170 towns and cities in which Liszt played during that period, in virtually every part of Europe. But Mrs. Keeling has unearthed many more, and already, I believe, has a total not far short of 300. The definitive Lisztian Map revealed by her researches promises to be at once fascinating and awesome.

Besides being the greatest pianist of his century (probably, as far as one can judge, the greatest in history), one of the greatest, most original and most prolific of composers, one of the most prolific writers and correspondents, one of the greatest of teachers (he has been compared with Socrates in this respect) and perhaps the most generous great artist in history in his attitude to gifted contemporaries, Liszt was also, to quote Alan Walker, "one of the greatest travellers of his time".

Since a certain well-known contemporary - and acquaintance - of his devoted much thought, and many words, to the concept of "the Superman", it is difficult, bearing in mind the totality of the afore-mentioned achievements, to resist the feeling that he need have looked no further than Franz Liszt.

NEWS FROM AMERICA.

In June, Volume XV of the Journal of the American Liszt Society came out — a bumper number of 244 pages. Its most important item is an invaluable contribution by Ben Arnold and Allan Ho: "Liszt Research and Recordings 1982-1984", a bibliography/discography described as "the first of a semi-annual survey of material dealing with the music of Franz Liszt". Included under author are 119 Liszt-related articles which have appeared (or been re-published) in that relatively short period, and 67 books, all given with full publication and (where appropriate) review details. These are followed by catalogues of scores, papers, and recordings (220), likewise restricted to those 2-3 years. For their bi-annual updatings and supplements, the authors will be pleased to hear from other Liszt enthusiasts who may wish to contribute material. Address: c/o School of Music, University of Kentucky, 40506-0022, U.S.A.

The remaining articles include: "Liszt's Symbols for the Divine and Diabolical"; "De Profundis"; "Josef Hofmann's Approach to Musical Dynamics"; "Sorabji and Alkan: Two Important Recordings"; and "Against Analysis".

One which seems not to reach the Journal's usual high standards is "My Memories of Franz Liszt" by Alexander Siloti — a new translation of the well-known reminiscences by the prominent Liszt pupil. Although a very well-intentioned contribution — the memoirs make agreeable and interesting reading — the English into which they have here been rendered is so unspeakably inferior (both in an absolute sense and to that of the standard translation published by Methuen) that it must be rated a failure.

The letter of Liszt's presented and translated in the series by Charles Suttoni (author of "Liszt's Published Correspondence", an essential vade-mecum for anyone trying to find their way through that particular maze) is one of 1 March 1839 (from Rome) to Robert Schumann, unpublished until 1968. As always, Suttoni's comments are very much to the point, in addition to being based on a foundation of admirable scholarship.

This latest fine contribution to Liszt studies from one of the sororal societies is rounded off with a wealth of record, score and book reviews; and the music supplement is Liszt's Faribolo Pasteur of 1844, six pages plus titlepage.

SUBS.

CERTAIN MEMBERS HAVE FAILED TO FORWARD THEIR ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS, DUE ON 1 JULY LAST. WILL THOSE MEMBERS NOW PLEASE NOTE THAT SHOULD THEIR REMITTANCES CONTINUE NOT TO APPEAR, THIS IS THE LAST COMMUNICATION THEY WILL BE RECEIVING FROM THE LISZT SOCIETY.

THE MONSTER.

Chopin was "an enthusiastic schoolboy, a morbidly sentimental flea", Schubert "unpractised and overrated", Berlioz a "vulgarian" and "lunatic", Verdi "a maker of wretched music for mobs", Wagner "patchy, puerile and poisonous", Schumann "concocted chamber music that was bad, symphonies that were worse", Liszt's music was "hateful fungi", Tchaikovsky's was "rubbish", his Romeo and Juliet overture "hideous".

Rather severe judgments? They, and many more, can be found in Charles Reid's The Music Monster (Quartet Books) — a biography, with excerpts from his critical writings, of the appalling J.W. Davison (1813-85), long-time music critic of The Musical World and The Times. His great causes or obsessive fallacies were the supremacy of most contemporary British composers and the mediocrity of most foreign ones, Chopin especially. (The supreme exception being, of course, the idol of his life: Felix Mendelssohn.) Such, unhappily, was Davison's enormous prestige, that most of his readers, and all too many of his colleagues and successors, held virtually no musical opinions of their own, being quite content to swallow wholesale these utterances of an infallible oracle, as they thought.

Here are a few more to leave you gasping: "The entire works of Chopin present a motley surface of ranting hyperbole and excruciating cacophony." "Lohengrin . . . is poison, rank poison. This man, this Wagner . . . was born to feed spiders with flies." "Schumann . . . in an evil hour fancied he could compose . . . the asylum can tell the sequel." "Men like Liszt — madmen, enemies of music to the knife . . ."