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FRANZ LISZT

Mozart and Donizetti Opera Transcriptions

Konstantin Scherbakov, Piano



Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Mozart and Donizetti Opera Transcriptions

Franz Liszt was born in Raiding (Doborján) on 22 October 1811 and died in Bayreuth on 31 July 1886.

As a child Liszt showed such immense musical talent that his family moved first to Vienna in 1822, where he studied piano with Carl Czerny, and then, despite Czerny's reservations, to Paris in 1823 where he gave concerts, taught and undertook several tours. Mixing within artistic circles, his playing probably became more controlled as he encountered luminaries such as Lamartine, Hugo, Heine, Berlioz and Paganini. Compositions during this period included *Grande fantaisie di bravura sur La clochette de Paganini* (1832–34).

A long-term liaison with the already married Countess Marie d'Agoult, begun in 1832, saw them relocate to Switzerland and Italy to avoid scandal. Their three children, Blandine, Cosima and Daniel, were born during the next seven years. Following a deterioration in their relationship Liszt recommenced touring internationally as a virtuoso from 1839 for the next eight years. It was during this period his fame reached the epic proportions of so-called *Lisztomania*, with his deliberate cultivation of a stage presence representing the performer as hero. Works from this period include his *Rhapsodies hongroises* (1846–47).

Liszt ended his stage career in 1848, urged on by his new partner Polish Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, and took on the role of Kapellmeister for Grand Duke Carl Alexander in Weimar. Composition became a priority, along with championing causes such as the New German School and Richard Wagner. However, vehement criticism of his works such as the symphonic poem *Les Préludes* (1849–55) and setbacks including the deaths of Blandine and Daniel caused him to retreat to Rome and take minor religious orders from 1862 to 1867.

Thereafter, he gradually re-emerged, assuming an active role as musical elder statesman, travelling regularly between Weimar, Budapest and Rome. Finally, the reception of his compositions had become enthusiastic, and he enjoyed wide popularity. Works such as the oratorio *Christus* (1872) typify this final period.

It is unsurprising that two of the most influential forces in music during the 1830s and 1840s – opera and pianos – should become linked through transcriptions and paraphrases of the first for the second. Affluent middle classes the world over attended opera performances when they could and wanted to recreate some of opera's mystique in their own drawing rooms. Liszt embraced the trend, leading from the front with nearly half of his solo piano works comprising transcriptions during those years. In so doing he was not only promoting the works of Bellini, Donizetti and Weber, for example, but also highlighting himself as the composer and pianist-interpreter by paraphrasing and fantasising rather than merely arranging. By the time of the works heard here, Liszt had perfected the art of selecting and presenting the material in an order that illuminates and characterises but is by no means sequential in terms of an operatic plot. In later years Liszt increasingly pursued his favoured causes using transcriptions, such as the music of Richard Wagner and also his own works. Thus his symphonic poems appeared as piano transcriptions from the 1850s. Liszt's famous complaint to Hans von Bülow in 1865 that 'I have better things to do with my time than transcribe, paraphrase, and illustrate, and from now on I will be more discriminating in this recreation' was not subsequently strongly implemented, and this lucrative activity continued to support him and his causes all his life.

Réminiscences de *Lucrezia Borgia* de Donizetti, S400/R154

(reduced version by G. Buonamici as S400bis)

Johannes Brahms, who was not a member of Liszt's circle, opined that 'Whoever really wants to know what Liszt has done for the piano should study his old operatic fantasies. They represent the classicism of piano technique'. By 1840 Liszt had resumed giving concerts following a break pursuing domesticity with Marie d'Agoult, and the first version of this work, entitled *Fantaisie sur des motifs favoris de l'opéra Lucrezia Borgia* appeared in that year,

based on the *Chanson à boire* and *Orgie* from Donizetti's opera. The opera itself (1833, revised 1839/40) was clearly very current when Liszt approached the work. In 1848 Liszt made fundamental revisions to his *Fantasie*, adding a *Part I* relating to the *Trio* from the opera's second act, and retaining and augmenting the original music as a *Part II* entitled *Chanson à boire (Orgie). Duo. Finale*. Around 1880 Italian composer, pianist and musicologist Giuseppe Buonamici obtained permission from the ageing Liszt to compact both parts into a single concert piece with reduced playing time. Buonamici achieves this by cutting a B major section from the essentially A flat major *Part I* and by omitting the final page of *Part I* and moving straight to page three of *Part II*. The music that follows is largely in C major as a substantial section in other keys relating to the opera's *Duo* is also omitted. Buonamici's reduction in key changes and in thematic content make a fine, shorter composition that is less discursive. It is the work heard here.

**Fantasie über zwei Motive aus W.A. Mozarts
Die Hochzeit des Figaro, S697/R660**

(completed by F. Busoni)

Liszt's *Fantasie über Themen aus Mozarts Figaro und Don Giovanni*, S697, which he probably first played in 1842, remained as an incomplete manuscript at his death. The manuscript comprised mostly a paraphrase of Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* involving two principal themes: Figaro's *Non più andrai* (Act I) and Cherubino's *Voi che sapete* (Act II). A final section devoted to the dance scene from the Act I finale of another Mozart opera, *Don Giovanni*, has no written music to connect it with the previous *Figaro* section and there are also gaps in the *Figaro* section itself. The composer-pianist Ferruccio Busoni, a great admirer of Liszt, made a performing edition from the manuscript's *Figaro* section only, omitting the *Don Giovanni* music entirely. This is the composition heard here (sometimes called the *Figaro Fantasy*), the manuscript of which is dated 1912. A further version by Liszt scholar Leslie Howard was published in 1997.

**Valse à capriccio sur deux motifs de Lucia et
Parisina (Donizetti), S401/R155**

That Liszt uses themes from not one but two different Donizetti operas in a single work – the widely successful *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) and less well known *Parisina* (1833) – is unusual. The first version is heard here, written in 1842. Liszt included a revised version as the third of three *Caprices-Valses* (1850–52). This is slightly abridged, and in Leslie Howard's opinion rather more refined than the first version. However, Howard suggests that the extra material makes the first version very worthwhile. Formally, Liszt initially reserves A major for the *Lucia* main waltz theme and F sharp major and D flat/C sharp major for the *Parisina* waltz. Both return later in A major with the *Lucia* theme announced in a lively 2/4 time prior to the *Parisina* theme joining it in a cleverly combined duo. The energetic coda contains some original Liszt thematic material that blends seamlessly with Donizetti's style.

Réminiscences de Don Juan (Mozart), S418/R228

Liszt's performances during the 1840s resulted in *Lisztomania*, and this work from 1841 stands at the very peak of Liszt's technical demands and innovations that so stunned audiences. It is also an excellent example of Liszt's ability to recast his chosen thematic material into a manageable timeframe while still reflecting the essential inner tensions of the opera. The work commences with menace and threat using music sung by the Commendatore from the graveyard scene and from the finale. There follows the love duet of Don Giovanni and Zerlina along with two extensive variations on this theme. Hints of the sweeping, threatening Commendatore's music then lead to the *Champagne Aria*, and the work concludes with that material laced with further disquieting threats. In all sections Liszt employs cascades of octaves, tenths, thirds and extended leaps that accentuate the drama and present Liszt the pianist and composer in heroic guise.

Rodney Smith



Konstantin Scherbakov

Swiss-Russian pianist Konstantin Scherbakov is one of today's most versatile and accomplished artists. Renowned for his profound artistry and technical brilliance, he has recorded an extraordinary 50 albums, including the complete solo piano works of Godowsky, Shostakovich and Respighi, as well as the piano/orchestral works of Arensky, Medtner, Tchaikovsky, Scriabin and Respighi. His critically acclaimed recordings include Liszt's transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies for Naxos, with the *Ninth Symphony* earning the prestigious Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik in 2005. Scherbakov has captivated audiences in 35 countries across Europe, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas, South Africa and New Zealand. He has been a guest at leading international festivals, including Salzburg, Lucerne, Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Schubertiade Feldkirch and Kissinger Sommer. With an extraordinary repertoire exceeding 50 concertos, he has collaborated with over 70 orchestras under the direction of luminary conductors such as Rudolf Barshai, Kirill Petrenko, Nello Santi, Christian Thielemann and Yuri Simonov. A highly sought-after educator, Scherbakov is a professor at the Zurich University of the Arts and conducts masterclasses worldwide. He is a distinguished juror at major international competitions, including the Busoni in Bolzano, Liszt in Weimar, and ARD in Munich. Scherbakov's legacy continues to inspire as he bridges tradition and innovation, cementing his place among the most significant pianists of our time.

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**Mozart and Donizetti
Opera Transcriptions**

- ❶ **Réminiscences de *Lucrezia Borgia* de Donizetti, S400/R154**
(c. 1840–42) (reduced version by Giuseppe Buonamici
[1846–1914] as S400bis, c. 1880) **11:33**
- ❷ **Fantasie über zwei Motive aus W.A. Mozarts *Die Hochzeit
des Figaro*, S697/R660 (1842) (completed by Ferruccio Busoni
[1866–1924], 1912)** **15:01**
- ❸ **Valse à capriccio sur deux motifs de Lucia et Parisina
(Donizetti), S401/R155 (1842)** **10:49**
- ❹ **Réminiscences de *Don Juan* (Mozart), S418/R228 (1841)** **18:18**

Konstantin Scherbakov, Piano

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