

Franz Liszt
The 2 Piano Concertos
Nareh Arghamanyan
piano

Totentanz - Fantasy on Hungarian Folk Tunes

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Allegro maestoso, tempo giusto | 5. 24 |
| 2 | Quasi adagio – Allegretto vivace | 9. 10 |
| 3 | Allegro marciale animato | 4. 14 |

Piano Concerto No. 2 in A

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| 4 | Adagio sostenuto assai | 5. 10 |
| 5 | Allegro agitato assai | 7. 38 |
| 6 | Allegro deciso | 2. 56 |
| 7 | Marziale, un poco meno allegro | 6. 07 |

Totentanz

(Dance of Death, paraphrase on "Dies irae")

For Piano and Orchestra

- | | | |
|----|---|-------|
| 8 | Andante – allegro | 2. 00 |
| 9 | Variation 1& 2, allegro moderato | 1. 33 |
| 10 | Variation 3, molto vivace | 0. 33 |
| 11 | Variation 4 (canonique), lento | 3. 22 |
| 12 | Variation 5, vivace.fugato-presto | 3. 59 |
| 13 | Variation 6, sempre allegro,
ma non troppo | 4. 11 |

Fantasy on Hungarian Folk Tunes

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|--------|
| 14 | For Piano and Orchestra | 15. 33 |
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Nareh Arghamanyan, Piano

Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin

Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin

Concertmaster: Erez Ofer

conducted by **Alain Altinoglu**

Total playing time: 72. 24

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(PentaTone Music)

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"Das versteht ihr alle nicht, haha!"

("None of you understand this, ha ha!")

New ideas for an ancient genre

During his stay in the French capital, the German poet Heinrich Heine wrote a series of articles for the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, entitled "Musikalische Saison in Paris" (= musical season in Paris). These articles still make for fascinating reading, with Heine providing a highly ironic and personal account of musical life in Paris. And, of course, he repeatedly dealt with composer Franz Liszt. This was again the case in the article devoted to the year 1841. That year, Liszt had given two piano recitals based on the music of Beethoven. Heine writes the following: "Despite his genius, Liszt meets with opposition here in Paris, which usually consists of serious musicians and crowns his rival, the imperial Thalberg, with laurels. – Liszt has already given two concerts in which he has played all by himself, against all tradition, without involving other artists. He is now preparing a third concert in honour of Beethoven. This composer must indeed appeal most to the taste of someone like Liszt."

This passage is interesting for several reasons. Not only does Heine inform us that the piano recital was at that time something completely new, but as least as important is his remark concerning Liszt's affinity to Beethoven, which apparently is contrary to that of other great piano virtuosos, such as his "competitor" Sigismond Thalberg.

In the nineteenth century, namely, the great piano virtuosos – such as Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Henri Herz, and the above-mentioned Thalberg – preferred to play their own piano concertos in concerts with orchestra. Even Chopin performed his two piano concertos during his rare appearances in public. By contrast, Franz Liszt preferred to perform works such as Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, Weber's *Konzertstück*, or the virtuoso work *Hexameron*, which was written collectively by a group of composers, consisting of Chopin, Czerny, Pixis, Herz, Thalberg, and himself.

The two piano concertos

The question, of course, is why Liszt did not himself leave a musical calling card in the form of a piano concerto. The answer to that question is not so easy. If we are to believe the German composer/pianist Ignaz Moscheles, Liszt had composed and performed at least one and probably even two piano concertos in his younger years. Indeed, Moscheles even describes a piano concerto that he heard Liszt play in London in 1827. Unfortunately, these early works have been lost.

In a sketchbook from 1830, a first version can be found of what was later to become Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E flat – the key of

Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, which he so greatly admired. Liszt was forced to put this work to one side, partly due to his turbulent private life, and he did not pick it up again until 1839. That same year, he also started on a second piano concerto in A major, as well as a third, which would also have been in E flat, had it not been rejected by the composer. However, it would be several years before Liszt completed his two piano concertos. The most plausible explanation is that he did not want to write a traditional virtuoso showpiece, but wished to further develop the genre, keeping in mind the examples of Beethoven and Weber.

Only after the years he spent performing as a virtuoso pianist, when he took a permanent position in Weimar as Kapellmeister in 1848, did he put the finishing touches to the two concertos. The Piano Concerto in E flat received its première in Weimar on February 17, 1855 with none other than Hector Berlioz conducting, who described the work as "amazing as far as verve and intensity are concerned, as always". The Piano Concerto in A was first performed on January 7, 1857. This time Liszt was the conductor, and his pupil Hans von Bronsart played the solo part.

Both concertos are completely unique in design, and differ significantly from the virtuoso concertos written by Liszt's fellow composers. Whereas in many piano concertos the solo instrument dominated the musical discourse, with the orchestra relegated to a supporting role, the two piano concertos written by Liszt are symphonic in scope. In the manuscript of the Piano Concerto No. 2, one even comes across the title "Concerto Symphonique", borrowed from his colleague, Henry Litolff, who was of English origin. And Liszt based the concerto on Litolff's concept of a constant thematic metamorphosis, in which he developed a stream of musical ideas from a basic theme – not only in these piano concertos, but also in his piano sonata, and in the symphonic poems he composed during the same period. Further important works that served as an example for the composer must have been Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy, of which Liszt made an arrangement for piano and orchestra in 1851, and Weber's *Konzertstück*.

The Piano Concerto No. 1 is the most traditional of the two and consists of four movements. The first movement opens with a heroic main theme, about which led Liszt's pupil and son-in-law Hans von Bülow later remarked that the composer was thumbing his nose at his critics, basing the theme on the words "Das versteht ihr alle nicht, haha!" (= none of you understand this, ha ha!). After this – analogue to Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 – the soloist makes his entrance with virtuoso passage work. The next three sections run into each other seamlessly. After the

lyrical Quasi adagio, which begins like a nocturne by Chopin and in which later an anthem-like melody is served up, a scherzo follows on, in which the triangle has an important role to play. This effect, considered by some as “banal and theatrical”, led to a great deal of criticism of the composer. The critic Eduard Hanslick even coined the phrase *Triangle Concerto*. The Finale collates the key themes from the previous movements, and culminates in a triumphant march, which is a “transformation” of the lyrical melody used to open the slow movement. The Hungarian composer Béla Bartók greatly admired the architecture of the Piano Concerto No. 1, describing it as “the first perfect realization of a cyclical sonata form, in which common themes are dealt with based on the variation principle”.

The Piano Concerto No. 2 is more rhapsodic in nature and, in this respect, somewhat similar to Weber's *Konzertstück*. Indeed, both works commence with a slow episode, and both also contain a march-like section – in Liszt's case, even a number of these sections, of which the march-like section in the Finale is based on the opening theme. Nevertheless, in this work Liszt also deals with the musical material in a highly economical manner. All themes are introduced in the first sections, and further developed from there.

Totentanz

Besides the two piano concertos, Liszt also wrote a number of shorter works for piano and orchestra. Since 1838, the composer had been mulling over the idea of writing a *Danse macabre*. The inspiration for this work was the fresco “Il trionfo della morte” in the Campo Santo in Pisa, which was at that time attributed to the fourteenth-century Italian painter Andrea Orcagna. But the engravings by Hans Holbein and Goethe's poem *Totentanz* may well also have influenced the composer.

The work is a series of variations on the “Dies irae” theme (derived from a Gregorian chant) also used by Berlioz in his *Symphonie fantastique* to portray the witches' sabbath. In the first variations, the theme is deployed as in a passacaglia. A solo passage in the piano is followed by a group of variations in which the theme is developed more freely. A major piano cadenza leads into a third episode based on a chorale melody derived from the main theme. The coda begins after a new cadenza, in which the *Dies irae* theme returns.

The *Totentanz* was first performed in the Hague on April 15, 1865. The soloist was Hans von Bülow, and the conductor, Johannes Verhulst. The latter was not exactly a lover of Liszt's music and, according to Bülow, the conducting was “pitifully bad”. Again it was Béla Bartók who proved to be a great admirer of the *Totentanz*. In particular, the power of Liszt's sinister, often percussive music appealed to him, and was reflected in his music.

Hungarian fantasy

Hans von Bülow was again the soloist on June 1, 1853 during the first performance of Liszt's *Hungarian Fantasy* or *Fantasia on Hungarian folk melodies*, as the work is officially known. It is one of two arrangements made by Liszt of his *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 14 for piano. The other is an orchestration he arranged, together with Franz Doppler, and published as his *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 1 (which can be highly confusing). Liszt wrote as follows about the character of his *Hungarian Rhapsodies*: “By using the word ‘rhapsody’, I wanted to describe the fantastical-epical nature I believed I had found therein. Each of these works seems to me to form part of a series of poems, in which the unity of national enthusiasm is most striking; it is a kind of enthusiasm, which can only belong to a single people, whose soul and innermost feelings it represents.”

On the whole, the *Hungarian fantasy* follows the structure of a slow “lassan”, followed by the more rapid “czifra” and a whirling “friska”. But these parts are not strictly separated from one another, and several times Liszt recalls previously-deployed themes. The main themes in the work consist of a Hungarian folk song entitled “The battle of Mohács”, a theme described as “à la zingarese”, and a melody similar to those that Liszt must have often heard played by itinerant Gypsy ensembles. At the end – as in the piano concertos – the opening theme returns to conclude the work. Liszt wrote as follows, not without a touch of pride: “This way of summarizing and rounding off an entire piece at its conclusion is really quite characteristic of me.”

Ronald Vermeulen

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

"Elegance, humour, deliciously burbling trills and fiery imagination -this introduced me to a major, major, major talent. Pianists dont come any better. Another potential superstar has arrived!"

American Record Guide

Born in 1989 in Armenia, **Nareh Arghamanyan** began her piano studies at the age of five. Three years later, she entered the Tchaikovsky Music School for Talented Children in Yerevan, where she studied with Alexander Gurgenov. In 2004 she was the young-



est student to be admitted to the University for Music and Performing Arts Vienna, where she studied with Heinz Medjimorec. Since October 2010 she continues her studies with Arie Vardi in Hannover.

She won an impressive number of awards with as highlight the first prize at the 2008 Montreal International Music Competition.

Nareh Arghamanyan was invited by orchestras like the Wiener Symphoniker, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg and the radio-orchestras of Hamburg and Frankfurt and plays recitals at prestigious venues such as Tonhalle Zurich, The Berliner Philharmonie and in Vienna at the Konzerthaus and the Musikverein.

In the US she already performed in New York, San Francisco, Boston and Philadelphia.

At the invitation of Mitsuko Uchida, Nareh Arghamanyan returned to the prestigious Marlboro Festival in summer 2011. She was also invited at Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival and has played at many festivals internationally including the Tanglewood Festival, Festival de Lanaudière, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the Colmar Festival.

In her early twenties Nareh Arghamanyan belongs to the promising generation of today's finest pianists. Nareh Arghamanyan signed an exclusive recording contract with the Dutch label Pentatone.

Alain Altinoglu

Still only in his thirties, Paris-born Alain Altinoglu has already enjoyed an impressive and successful career as an opera conductor. He is a regular guest at the major opera-houses world-wide, including: the Metropolitan Opera New York, the Wiener Staatsoper, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Teatro Colon Buenos Aires, the Deutsche Oper Berlin, the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, the Bayerische Staatsoper München, and all four opera houses in Paris – the Opéra National, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Opéra-Comique, and the Théâtre du Châtelet. He has also appeared at the festivals in Salzburg, Orange and Aix-en-Provence. Alain Altinoglu has conducted many renowned orchestras, including: the Staatskapelle Berlin, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Orchestra della Fenice (Venice), Orchestre National de France, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Ensemble InterContemporain, and the Gulbenkian Orchestra Lisbon.

Alain Altinoglu is also particularly interested in the Lied repertoire, and regularly accompanies the mezzo-soprano Nora Gubisch on the piano. A recording of songs by Henri Duparc was released with the Cascavelle label. He has also recorded operas and symphonic music for the Naïve, Universal, and Deutsche Grammophon labels.

Born in 1975, Alain Altinoglu studied at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, where he also taught as professor of the vocal ensemble class for ten years.

Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin (Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin)

Since 2002, the beginning of the era of Marek Janowski as artistic leader and chief conductor, the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin has earned itself a prominent position among the top Berlin orchestras as well as among the German radio orchestras. The remarkable level achieved under Marek Janowski has made the RSB highly attractive to top international conductors. The orchestra also has a stable relationship with prominent conductors of the younger generation, such as Andris Nelsons, Kristjan Järvi, Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Marc Albrecht.

The RSB is the oldest radio symphony orchestra in Germany, and was founded in the early days of radio in October 1923. Under its various chief conductors – including Sergiu Celibidache, Eugen Jochum, Hermann Abendroth, Rolf Kleinert, Heinz Rögner, and Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos – the RSB has become a flexible symphonic orchestra, where great composers of the 20th century have also been happy to conduct their own works. These have included Paul Hindemith, Richard Strauss and Arnold Schönberg, to mention a few. Together with Deutschlandradio, the RSB is available for radio and CD recordings, alongside its public concerts. Numerous recordings made by the orchestra have received renowned international prizes. The recording of Hans Werner Henze's Symphony No. 9 – which forms part of the recordings of Henze's entire works for Wergo – was awarded an "Echo Klassik" in 2010.

The RSB receives regular invitations to perform at the major European festivals and music centres, as well as in Asia

