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LISZT
PIANO WORKS

ANGELA BROWNRIDGE

LISZT

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1	Mephisto Waltz	10'14
2	Liebestraum No.1 in A flat	5'07
3	Liebestraum No.2 in E flat	3'41
4	Liebestraum No.3 in A flat	3'58
5	Hungarian Rhapsody No.2 in C sharp minor	10'19
6	Consolation No.3 in B minor	3'25
7	Consolation No.4 in D flat	2'19
8	Consolation No.5 in E	2'38
9	La Campanella	4'52
10	Concert Study No.1 (Il lament)	9'34
11	Concert Study No.2 (La leggierezza)	4'45
12	Concert Study No.3 (Un sospiro)	5'37
13	Hungarian Rhapsody No.13 in A minor	8'16

Total time: 74'52

Recording venue: St. Barnabas Church, Holden Road, Finchley N12
Producer: Arthur Johnson
Engineer: Anthony Howell
Recording dates: 20th & 21st July, 2006

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)

No truly great composer lived a more colourful life than Franz Liszt, and of no other great composer can it be said – as it can in his case – that almost one hundred and forty years after their death the music of such an incredibly complex and influential artist should be unknown in its entirety.

The rehabilitation of Liszt has been a gradual process, and is certainly not yet fully achieved. Such considerations may still fall within the realm of the specialist, for his most popular solo piano works have always been found in the repertoire of every virtuoso, although it is only in the last few decades that pianists have felt able to programme publicly his lesser-known pieces, Angela Brownridge's selection on this disc is concentrated upon widely-varied music which has long been established as part of the solo piano repertoire – music which has taken its rightful place alongside masterpieces for the instrument by Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Schumann or Brahms.

Not that every item here can be said to be fully familiar, even to the regular concert-goer, but taken as a whole this programme affords a conspectus of Liszt in various guises: the master of original large-scale form alongside smaller, transcribed gems; the arch-Romantic who understood the music of his great predecessors better than any of his contemporaries, one whose own original music – for all its powerful *empfindsamkeit* – was initially firmly rooted in the precepts of the classical masters.

We begin with the *Mephisto Waltz No.1*, the initial composition of (eventually) four works with that title. It dates originally from 1859, and was conceived as

the second of *Two Episodes from Lenau's Faust* for orchestra. Although planned as an orchestral work, the material no doubt came to Liszt through daily piano practice, as we may readily perceive through the (for the time) startling opening, in which tiers of open fifths create a frightening image of a mysteriously-frightening *Dance in the Village Inn*. Despite the initial music of the piano version emanating from his orchestral work, this independent solo piano piece contains much new material and stands as one the composer's most original shorter masterpieces for the instrument which he understood so much more fully than any of his contemporaries – the music's inherent startling originality reaching far into the future. Liszt dedicated the work to the contemporary piano virtuoso Karl Tausig.

If the first *Mephisto Waltz* surprised recital audiences by its daringly original use of harmony and rhythmic insistence, the three *Liesbesträume* have – since they first appeared – been taken to the hearts of all genuine music-lovers, especially the third, which contains one of the finest melodies in Western art music. Curiously, the three are also transcriptions by Liszt of his own music – in this case, song settings by two German poets – but it is the sheer beauty of the music itself in these immortal solo piano versions, most especially that of the third – that has ensured the immediacy of their lasting appeal and permanence in the memories of all genuine music-lovers.

Over a period of almost forty years, that is to say from 1846–1885, Liszt composed no fewer than nineteen works known as the Hungarian Rhapsodies,

all based – so he believed – on folk music of his native Hungary. During that period, the collecting of folk music from indigenous European populations (which became a powerful movement during the twenty years 1890–1910) was very sporadic, and Liszt unknowingly incorporated into several of his Hungarian Rhapsodies tunes which had actually been composed by minor (although popular) composers, played by travelling gypsy bands, but there is equally no doubt that a number of the melodies Liszt used were his own compositions in the ethnic folk style. The fact remains that Liszt's series of Hungarian Rhapsodies stand as the first significant attempt by a great composer to portray in music the soul of his homeland – more so, perhaps, than did Chopin in his *Polonaises*, and certainly on a far bigger scale.

Throughout his life Liszt would often revise and publish new editions of existing works. The Hungarian Rhapsodies were no exception – indeed, their very popularity appears to have demanded such revisions – yet it is no exaggeration to say that the Hungarian Rhapsodies, from the start, made Liszt's name more well-known, the music epitomising for music lovers across the centuries the soul of Hungary. The first group was initially published in 1853, although it is very probable that they were largely composed several years earlier.

Each of the Hungarian Rhapsodies broadly falls into two main sections, known as *lassú* and *friss* – slow and fast. The opening music appears as a ruminative improvisation, occasionally quiet, setting the scene, or occasionally dramatic, demanding attention; after much quasi-improvisatory musing over these initial

statements, the succeeding fast dance – the *friss* – enters, often with new material and occasionally varying that which has been already heard. The increase in passion, the virtuoso at the keyboard, the inherent joy in life, which infuses each one of these undoubtedly original masterpieces, runs through the entire series of the Hungarian Rhapsodies, of which Angela Brownridge plays No.2 in C sharp minor (perhaps the most well-known of all) and ends her recital with the contrasting No.3, in A minor.

It is true to say that Liszt's six Consolations have remained very popular among his many solo piano works, doubtless because their technical demands are by no means as demanding as – say – those of the Hungarian Rhapsodies. It is the Third of these works that stands as one of the most well-known of all Liszt's solo piano pieces, a genuine short masterpiece, and although their popularity is assured, they are not often heard as a complete set – indeed, it is uncertain that Liszt so intended them to be heard. Each stands alone as a wonderful example of the master's genius in restrained mood; we hear the Third and Fourth (both in the relatively rare key of D flat major), and the Fifth, in E major.

It is no exaggeration to say that when Liszt, then aged 19, first heard Paganini play he was at once inspired to emulate the Italian's genius at utilising a transcendental technique to convey purely expressive, wholly musical, aims. And although Paganini's worth as an original composer has too often been submerged beneath the technical advances in playing which he wrought, his

artistic originality as a genuine creative figure was recognised by many musicians who heard him play – including Schumann. This, therefore, was the background for Liszt's set of piano studies on themes by Paganini, the third of which is best-known by the later title *La Campanella* (which appears in the *rondo* of Paganini's Second Violin Concerto). For all the technical virtuosity required to play this piece, there remains a virtually unstated mystical aspect to this music, for all its energy and onward momentum – ghostly, perhaps, until the *fortissimo* closing bars.

Liszt's *Three Concert Studies* (*Trois études de concert*) were composed in 1848 and published in Germany and France the following year, since when the titles (in Italian!) of the French edition have made the pieces individually known – *Il lamento* (The Lament), *La leggerezza* (Lightness) and *Un sospiro* (A sigh) – the last-named in D flat major. Despite the serious demands of a finished performing technique, it is the expressive poetic aspects of these works that have endeared them to pianists and audiences alike ever since, especially those which run throughout the *Third Study*. They are dedicated to Liszt's uncle Eduard, who at this period in Liszt's life took over the handling of the composer's business affairs, doing so for more than thirty years until he died in 1879, seven years before Liszt's own passing.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2024

Angela Brownridge

“One of the world’s finest pianists”

New York Times

At the age of six Angela was hailed as a genius by Max Pirani who adjudicated a Beethoven piano competition which she won in the City Hall Hull. Constantly improvising and composing a year later several of her compositions were published. By the age of ten she had performed her first concerto, at the same year won the Lorna Tetley Prize for young pianists and shortly after was asked to broadcast a recital. At twelve she made her debut in London’s Wigmore Hall and throughout her teens appeared as concerto soloist in many parts of the UK, on tour in Germany, and in Norway where she broadcast the Grieg concerto live in Stavanger aged thirteen. She later won a piano scholarship to Edinburgh University and after graduating B.Mus. was awarded a further scholarship for a two year period of study with Guido Agosti in Rome. She continued her studies in London with Maria Curcio, winning the Arts Council International Piano Competition. Since then she has appeared in major venues worldwide, and with many major conductors and orchestras, recording twenty five CDs for EMI, BMG, ASV, Hyperion, United, Classic FM and Cameo Classics. Several of these have been selected as ‘Critics’ Choice’ in the UK, & as ‘Record of the Year’ in the Absolute Sound magazine of America. Her recordings include the first collections of works by Gershwin, Samuel Barber and Kenneth Leighton. In 2017 Angela was invited to make

three CDs of Beethoven, Chopin and Debussy for Challenge Classics in the Netherlands, which have received rave reviews. International festival engagements include Bath, Buxton, Edinburgh, Warwick, Grizedale, Newport Rhode Island, Bratislava, Brno, Hong Kong and Maastricht.

Critics have compared her with such legendary pianists as Solomon, Rachmaninov, Cherkasky and Bolet. She began her life in an atmosphere of freedom and individualism almost impossible to find today, under the guidance of Maria Curcio, herself a pupil of Schnabel for many years, she learned to deal with the differing requirements of a varied range of composers which recalls Cortot in his prime. In an age that has become obsessed with mere technique and seeks a degree of perfection offered by over-edited CDs. Angela’s playing restores spontaneity, character and beauty of sound to the platform. Although regarded as ‘a major star in classical music’, Angela’s musical world includes works with a jazz element. She has recorded an album with some of the jazz greats such as Ike Isaacs guitar, Jeff Kline bass, and Phil Seaman drums, and has appeared live with Jules Holland. She is much in demand as a lecture recitalist, in masterclasses, and as a mentor for Talent Unlimited which supports students from the Royal College & Academy in London.



Some comments by the audience following a recent Cadogan Hall recital:

'I felt honoured to hear such wonderful playing... Sheer joy'.

'An evening of piano perfection. Her performance was world class, thrilling, and a priveledge to listen to.'

'The concert was the best I have heard. It ended with two encores – lovely improvisations.'

'Great concert in a beautiful venue. Angela Brownridge is a top class pianist and we enjoyed a varied programme. We also enjoyed stunning encores highlighting the artist's versatility.'

'This was just sublime. Angela Brownridge is a top class artist and then some. A programme of Chopin and Debussy was played with beautiful precision, surpassing technique, making the music her own – brio & elan. She then improvised two encores of pieces by Gershwin and Nat King Cole. Amazing!'

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