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CHAN 8548

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

❶ PIANO SONATA IN B MINOR, S178 (30:06)

THREE CONCERT STUDIES, S144

❷ No. 1 in A flat — Il Lamento (10:53)

❸ No. 2 in F minor — La Leggerezza (5:02)

❹ No. 3 in D flat — Un Sospiro (6:06)

TT = 52:19

DDD

LOUIS LORTIE *Piano*

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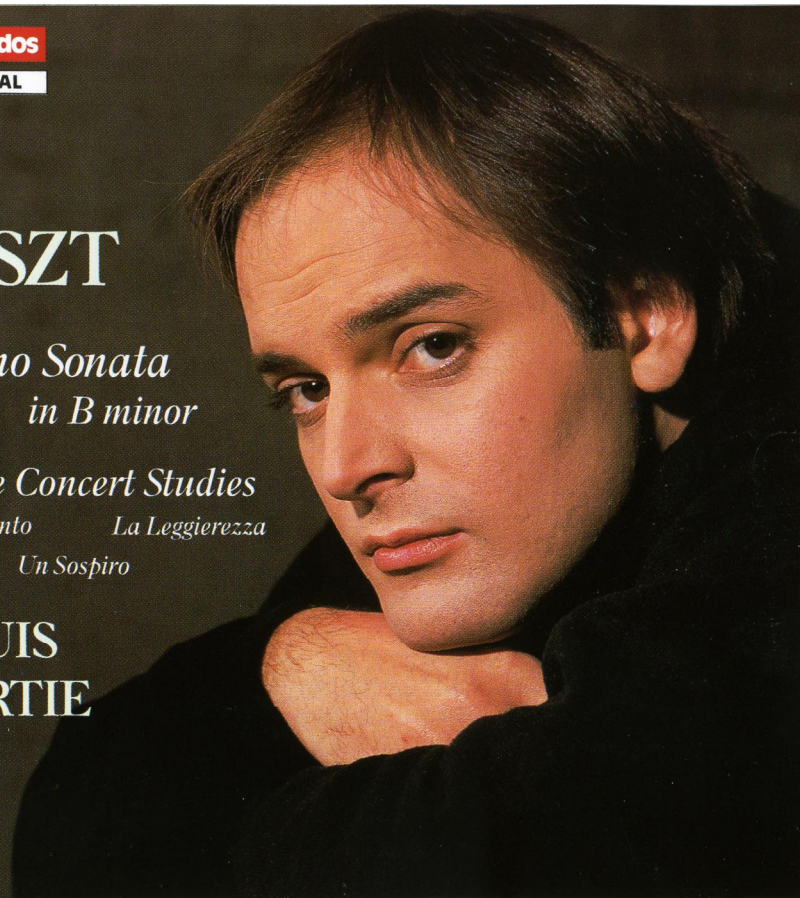
DIGITAL

LISZT

*Piano Sonata
in B minor*

Three Concert Studies
Il Lamento La Leggerezza
Un Sospiro

LOUIS
LORTIE



Liszt's B minor Sonata (1853) is his crowning masterpiece, and its fearless originality has been repeatedly and variously celebrated. Once considered both incomprehensible and unplayable, the Sonata achieved notable prominence during the 1930s when it was closely associated with Vladimir Horowitz. Since that time an increase in mechanical proficiency (rather than technique in the widest sense) has led to the Sonata becoming the darling of the concert and, more ominously, competition circuit, the property of novice and expert alike.

Yet only a truly transcendental technique can free the pianist from Liszt's alpine difficulties, allowing him to focus on the music's dark and mysterious centre, a poetic and spiritual heart or nucleus that has proved as elusive as ever. Only then can he fully respond to repeated requests for delicacy as well as strength, for intimacy as well as heroic grandeur. Directions such as *dolce con grazia* are a true foil for *sempre forte e agitato*, and a mystical serenity has the last word. After one of music's most dramatic pauses the tumult of Liszt's fiercely concentrated argument (for many, Faust's battle with Mephistopheles) is stilled in a retrospective and visionary epilogue. Here, Liszt's chorale-like transformation of one of his principal themes and the sinister rattle of Mephistopheles' reply gradually fade into oblivion; a distant chime of bells and a final *staccato* affirmation of the home key, and an epic creation has vanished for ever.

The sense of a titanic struggle between opposing forces has seldom been so potently expressed and can awe even those hostile to Liszt's supposed theatricality or insincerity and surplus bravura. Such people, together with pianists who see the Sonata primarily as a fast and

furious assault course, should ponder Hanslick's description of Liszt's playing, which was apparently 'free, poetic, replete with imaginative shadings, and, at the same time, characterised by noble artistic repose'. Composers ranging from Wagner to Copland have praised Liszt to the heavens, and today it is difficult not to see the Sonata as his supreme resolution of a life-long vacillation between temporal and spiritual emotion, a world where 'glassy sighs and menacing threats' are resolved into a state of religious grace. Small wonder, then, that this landmark in the history of Western music should continue to challenge the giant and murder the mediocrity.

Liszt's 3 *Études de Concert* (1848) are a far cry from pedagogical exercises. And, as their subtitle (*Trois caprices poétiques*) declares, they turn complex technical problems into liberated poetry.

The first, *Il Lamento*, is sadly neglected. Like *Ricordanza* (from the 12 *Études d'exécution transcendante*), *Il Lamento* replaces classical argument with a tirelessly evolving elaboration, an obsessive wheeling round a single idea that in this instance rises to a heated, near operatic declamation before sinking to a profoundly conciliatory close. *La Leggerezza* provokes a rising figure into incessant activity marked *delicatamente* and *dolcissimo*, a gentle chromatic whirlwind glimpsed, as it were, at a distance. A rhetorical climax is reached, the principle idea spins away into the stratosphere and finally the music's dizzying F minor animation is charmed into an F major close. Leschetizky, in his edition, could not resist adding a final cascade of stardust, a decadent or extraneous touch generally omitted. Liszt's poetic bias is evident in the close relation of *La Leggerezza* to Chopin's *Étude* Op. 10 No. 9 (the Op. 10 *Études* were dedicated to

Liszt) and the first of the *Trois Nouvelles Études*, both in *La Leggerezza*'s key of F minor, a leaning reaffirmed, though in a more general way, in the final *Étude*, *Un Sospiro*. Here the basic problem of crossing hands is, again, transformed into glamorously elevated poetry as one of Liszt's most celebrated melodies rises from a ground swell of arpeggios, its progress periodically interrupted by shimmering cadenzas.

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Louis Lortie was born in Montréal in 1959 and achieved early success with the Montréal Symphony Orchestra prize in 1972 and the CBC Radio Talent Competition Prize in 1975.

After his remarkable début in Toronto early in 1978, he was the guest soloist on the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's tour of Japan and China. He made his American début in 1980 with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra and in 1983 was invited back to China.

In September 1984 he won first grand prize at the Busoni International Competition in Italy by a unanimous verdict of the jury, and two weeks later he made a great impression at the Leeds International Competition, where he took fourth prize in a strongly contested final.

His recital débuts in Washington DC and London have won him considerable critical acclaim. In addition to his Canadian appearances, he travels regularly to Europe and has performed at several venues in the UK including the Aldeburgh Festival.

Louis Lortie is recording a series of Mozart piano concertos for Chandos with I Musici de Montréal. The first of these recordings, No. 12 in A major K414 and No. 14 in E flat major K449, is already available (ABRD 1166 LP; ABTD 1166 Cassette; CHAN 8355 Compact Disc). He has also recorded Chopin's complete *Études* on ABRD 1194 LP, ABTD 1194 Cassette, and CHAN 8482 Compact Disc.

A Chandos Digital Recording

Recording Producer: Brian Couzens

Sound Engineer: Ralph Couzens; Assistant Engineer: Philip Couzens

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Sleeve Design: Christopher Sims; Art Direction: Janet Osborn

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LISZT: PIANO SONATA & 3 CONCERT STUDIES — Lortie

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