

CHIYAN WONG



LISZT TRANSFIGURED

OPERATIC FANTASIES FOR PIANO

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MENU

Tracklist



Credits



Programme



Biography



LISZT TRANSFIGURED

OPERATIC FANTASIES FOR PIANO

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)

1. Grande fantasia sur des thèmes de l'opéra Niobe de Pacini – Divertissement sur la cavatine I tuoi frequenti palpiti, S. 419

12:25

Edited by Chiyon Wong

2. Réminiscences de La juive – Fantaisie brillante sur des motifs de l'opéra de Halévy, S. 409a

15:21

Edited by Chiyon Wong

3. Réminiscences de 'Don Juan' de Mozart – Grande fantasia, S. 418

19:27

Edited by Chiyon Wong after the Busoni edition

4. Fantasie über Themen aus Mozarts Figaro und Don Giovanni, S. 697

22:25

Edited and completed by Chiyon Wong

Total Running Time: 70 minutes

Recorded at

Wyastone Concert Hall, Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, UK, 2–4 March 2014

Produced by

Daniel-Ben Pienaar

Engineered by

Philip Hobbs

Edited by

Daniel-Ben Pienaar and Chiyan Wong

Post-production by

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toucari.live

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Piano: Steinway Model D

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EXTRACTING FROM THE PAST: RECORDING LISZT'S OPERATIC FANTASIES

If Franz Liszt had lived into the earlier part of the twentieth century, he would inevitably have been cajoled into recording for posterity. Several of his students, such as Moriz Rosenthal, Emil von Sauer, Frederic Lamond and Arthur Friedheim belong to the first generation of pianists who left behind audio documentation of their performances. These recordings, not only of the Liszt pupils, but artists such as Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Vladimir de Pachmann and Ignaz Friedman, reveal a different prioritization in their aesthetic. There is for example, a sensitivity to nuance, an ear for effects that could be worked into an 'interpretation'. At times there is a poetic vulnerability; judicious inflections of melody and dynamics, aspects which are not conventionally captured or inherent in modern recordings or performances. For the inquisitive, listening to a variety of readings of Anatoly Liadov's *Music Box*, Op. 32 by artists of that earlier epoch – such as Josef Hofmann, Rosenthal and Leopold Godowsky – would reveal the different approaches each individual took to evoke the intimate world of a dusty little musical box found in the nether regions of a grandparent's drawer, among letters, portraits, memorabilia. The unique *stimme* (a favourite word of Liszt's student Friedheim, as well as Ferruccio Busoni, to describe inner characters and voices in music) of each artist was also intricately linked to their particular physiognomy and musical taste. This not only dictates their repertoire but this particular *stimme* is enriched by their repertoire of choice. Edwin Fischer, the Swiss pianist, sheds light on this relationship between the work and its 'player':

I once remarked that players of a particular constitution are best suited for the performance of the works of composers with a similar constitution. For example, thick-set players with thick fleshy hands are predestined for the interpretation of works by composers of similar frame, whilst tall, long-fingered, sinewy players are likewise the best interpreters of the works of similarly constituted composers.

Fischer goes on to give examples of those artists who were what he called 'thick-set' types, such as Anton Rubinstein and Eugen d'Albert, who were particularly suited to the works of Johannes Brahms and Ludwig van Beethoven. On the other side of the spectrum, artists such as Pachmann come to mind, who, as he grew into artistic maturity, became more and more focused on a selection of miniatures, a vast majority of which were by Frédéric Chopin. Today it is a cliché to lament the passing of that time, when 'every pianist had their own distinctive sound'. My own conviction is that any work is always in a state of perpetual metamorphosis, be it a sonata by Beethoven, a fugue by J.S Bach, or Christian Sinding's Rustle of Spring.

There is a multifarious quality to recordings of Liszt's students. There is no underlying trait or interpretative habit that unites them as pupils of Liszt. Naturally, most of these artists were recorded towards the end of their lives; one can only imagine what they may have sounded like in their prime. It would be dangerous to assume that Rosenthal, for example, sounded like Liszt, since he also studied with Chopin's pupil Karol Mikuli. Similarly, Friedheim

was a pupil of Rubinstein before he became a pupil of Liszt. Ideas can be revealed to us, inspiration can be extracted too, from all that is around us, not to confirm platitudes or enforce dogma, but to imbue us with a mindful state of ease, in which we drift in and out of ideas, forms and concepts. It is where the preconceived plans mingle with spontaneous revelations.

We can take Rosenthal's several recordings of Liszt's transcription of Chopin's song, 'The Maiden's Wish' as an example of a reworking that takes on a dimension of something more personal, in which variations are interpolated into the original Liszt transcription. The layers of harmonic whipped cream and pianistic sleights of hand that are recognized as 'departures' from Liszt's printed edition are unmistakably Rosenthal's, for their sense of mischief can be traced to Rosenthal's concert pieces such as the *Carnaval de Vienne* (which Rosenthal subtitled as a 'Humoresque sur des thèmes de Johann Strauss') or the *Papillons*. Liszt did write variations for individual students, as was the case for an alternative coda to his *Tarantelle di bravura d'après la tarantelle de La muette de Portici*, S. 386 for Sophie Menter (another pupil), published by the Liszt Society.

All the works on this recording contain numerous derivations from the 'original text'; they are at once inauthentic to the musical text, but are sympathetic to the nature in which Liszt composed. What is an 'original text' of a written-down, nuanced performance? Busoni, the great Liszt advocate, pianist, composer and all-round thinker at the turn of the

nineteenth century, had to defend his 'alterations' to the texts of Liszt amongst other composers to scores of critics, and what he called 'law-givers'. Busoni's 'final opinion' was that notation is itself the transcription of an abstract idea'.

Set against the backdrop of a rapt audience participating in this pregnant silence, we experience, in each of these four works, something akin to Prometheus breathing life into clay, and giving it feathered wings, empowering it with the ability to soar. Liszt, like so many virtuoso pianist-composers of the nineteenth century (Sigismund Thalberg, Adolf von Henselt and Liszt's own teacher, Carl Czerny), followed a special template for his operatic paraphrases: they started with a searching introduction which led to the emergence of the melodies, followed by a play on the melodies and finally a rousing finale. Each of the four paraphrases set on this album is an individual attempt to inject spontaneity into this hackneyed convention. Paradoxically Liszt also sets out to exhaust all pianistic possibilities available to him. It is particularly in these works (a word which, as one understands it in our times, might have been anathema to Liszt, the roaming nomad in a world of boundaries and conventions) that the *oneness* that has been split into two by the words 'illusion' and 'reality' is restored; music has always been *one*. These works are not just crowd-pandering, ovation-mongering show-stoppers. They speculate and ask important questions about the process of creation in music.

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CHIYAN WONG

‘Chiyon Wong is an exciting, original and thoughtful pianist. Nothing sounds “bought in”; everything sounds freshly but not self-consciously conceived.’ **Stephen Hough**

Chiyon Wong has been astonishing audiences with the sincerity and sheer authority of his playing. He is a broad and thoughtful musician with a special interest in the music of Franz Liszt and Ferruccio Busoni. He has studied improvisation with the French-Lebanese organist, Naji Hakim in Paris and is an honours graduate of the Royal Academy of Music where he studied with Christopher Elton. In April 2016, Wong made his debut with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra playing Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto, No. 2.

In 2010 Wong made his Asian debut at the Hong Kong Arts Festival and at the International Music Festival in Dinard, France at the invitation of Kun-Woo Paik. In 2011, Wong was invited to return to Hong Kong for a Liszt live broadcast recital (part of the city’s celebration of the composer’s bicentenary) which was sponsored by the Radio Television Hong Kong Corporation. Debuts in 2012 included the Wigmore Hall, where he performed an all-Liszt recital, the 19th Singapore International Piano Festival, and Sacile, Italy.

Wong has enjoyed working with conductors such as Edward Gardner and Okko Kamu. Other European performances have included concerts for the Liszt Society, an extensive recital tour in Germany, and the Bad Bocklet Spring Music Festival. 2016–17 includes recitals in the United Kingdom, Germany, a debut with Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, and a return invite to the Singapore International Piano Festival.

Wong was the sole recipient of the Bernard van Zuiden Music Fund of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra in 2007 and won First Prize at the Jaques Samuel Pianos Intercollegiate Piano Competition in 2011. In addition, he has been awarded prizes by the Hattori Foundation in London, the International Piano Competition in Memory of Vladimir Horowitz in Ukraine and the Premio Liszt in Parma. He is a recipient of the Postgraduate Performance Award by the Musicians Benevolent Fund and the ABRSM Macklin Bursary.

Wong was born in Hong Kong where he began his piano studies at the age of six with Grace Man. He moved to England at the age of twelve to pursue his studies at Chetham's School of Music and Royal Northern College of Music under Norma Fisher. Wong is currently pursuing further music studies as a Lee Hysan Foundation Scholar. Wong is grateful to the support of Lady Valerie Solti, Lionel Choi and John Burgess. Wong is represented worldwide by Percius.

'Chiyan Wong has a sincerity as a person which he applies to his music-making, and that is very rare these days.' **Kun-Woo Paik**

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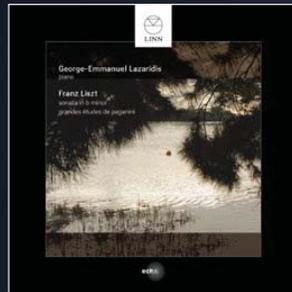
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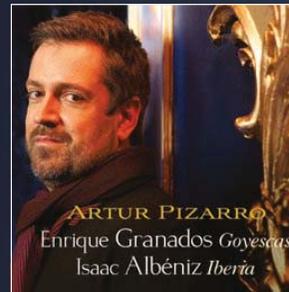
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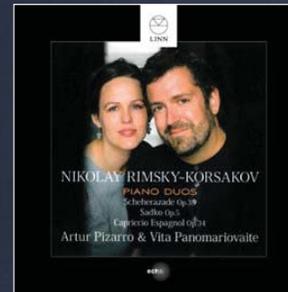
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