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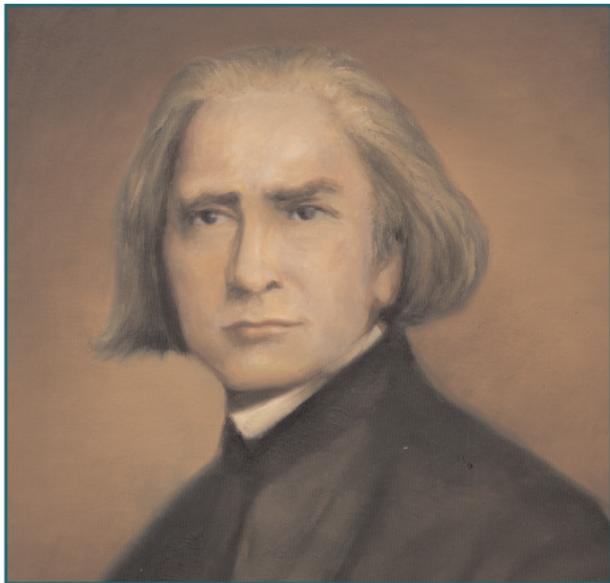
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FRANZ LISZT

Verdi Concert Paraphrases and Transcriptions

Rigoletto: Concert Paraphrase
Aida: Danza sacra e duetto final

Alexandre Dossin, Piano



COMPLETE
PIANO
MUSIC



VOLUME
25

Franz Liszt (1811-1886): Verdi Concert Paraphrases and Transcriptions

When he addressed the Chamber's Commission personally, he said that Art would speak for itself because a plagiarized work, even if it were composed by 'Liszt' ... would have little or no artistic worth. If they were allowed to plagiarize freely ... pianists and other instrumentalists would find it easier to steal others' ideas than to write material of their own.

Mary Jane Phillips-Matz: *Verdi: A Biography*, Oxford 1993, p.483

Giuseppe Verdi's oblique tribute to Liszt makes clear his view, at least in 1865, of the value of operatic transcriptions. These were the stock-in-trade of many virtuoso performers, and served to popularise operatic melodies still further, while bringing no profit to the original composer. Liszt, however, was more than a virtuoso pianist, and in the 1850s, as a conductor in Weimar, included operas by Verdi in the annual programmes he offered. During their visit to Weimar in 1854 George Eliot and George Henry Lewes were able to see Liszt conducting Verdi's *Ernani*: 'Liszt looked splendid as he conducted. The grand outline of his face and floating hair were seen to advantage as they were thrown into dark relief by the stage lamps' (quoted by Alan Walker: *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years, 1848-1861*, London, 1989, p.251). Liszt's paraphrases of Verdi are in the nature of tributes rather than plagiarism, and Verdi himself, whatever his views of travelling pianists, clearly respected Liszt.

Born at Raiding, in Hungary, in 1811, the son of a steward in the service of Haydn's former patrons, the Esterházy Princes, Franz Liszt had early encouragement from members of the Hungarian nobility, allowing him in 1822 to move to Vienna. From there he moved to Paris, where Cherubini refused him admission to the Conservatoire. Nevertheless he was able to impress audiences by his performance, now supported by the Erard family, piano manufacturers whose wares he was able to advertise in the concert tours on which he embarked. In 1827 Adam Liszt died, and Franz Liszt was now joined again by his mother in Paris, while using his time to teach, to read and benefit from the intellectual society with which he came into contact.

His interest in virtuoso performance was renewed when he heard the great violinist Paganini, whose technical accomplishments he now set out to emulate.

The years that followed brought a series of compositions, including transcriptions of songs and operatic fantasies. Liszt's relationship with a married woman, the Comtesse Marie d'Agoult, led to his departure from Paris for years of travel abroad, first to Switzerland, then back to Paris, before leaving for Italy, Vienna and Hungary. By 1844 his relationship with his mistress, the mother of his three children, was at an end, but his concert activities continued until 1847, the year in which his association began with Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, a Polish heiress, the estranged wife of a Russian prince. The following year he settled with her in Weimar, the city of Goethe, turning his attention now to the development of a newer form of orchestral music, the symphonic poem, and, as always, to the revision and publication of earlier compositions.

In 1861 Liszt moved to Rome, following Princess Carolyne, who had settled there a year earlier. Divorce and annulment seemed to have opened the way to their marriage, but they now continued to live in separate apartments in the city. Liszt eventually took minor orders, going on to divide his time between Weimar, where he imparted advice to a younger generation, Rome, where he was able to pursue his religious interests, and Pest, where he returned now as a national hero. He died in 1886 in Bayreuth, where his daughter Cosima, former wife of Hans von Bülow and widow of Richard Wagner, lived, more concerned with the continued propagation of her husband's music than with her father.

Liszt's concert paraphrases, are more than mere transcriptions, offering a re-interpretation based on thematic material drawn from their source. Among the best known of his Verdi arrangements is his *Rigoletto Paraphrase de concert*, written in 1859. Verdi's opera had had its first performance in Venice in 1851. The plot centres on the court jester of the title, a servant and accomplice of the Duke of Mantua in his amorous adventures. Cursed by a courtier whose daughter the Duke has dishonoured, Rigoletto suffers the loss of his own daughter, Gilda, seduced by the Duke and then abducted, for the Duke's pleasure, by the courtiers. In the last act of the opera Rigoletto has hired an assassin, Sparafucile to murder the Duke as he dallies with Sparafucile's sister, Maddalena. They are observed from the darkness outside by Rigoletto and his daughter, who is to die at the assassin's hands. It is this final scene that Liszt takes as the basis of his paraphrase. The theme that dominates is the Duke's *Bella figlia d'amore* (Fair daughter of love), interspersed with the light-hearted replies of Maddalena, and the exclamations of Gilda, as she sees her lover's infidelity exposed.

Verdi wrote his Egyptian opera *Aida* for the opening of the Cairo Opera House in 1871. *Aida*, daughter of the King of Ethiopia but enslaved by the Egyptians, is in love with Radames, appointed captain of the Egyptian armies in their fight against the Ethiopians. Victorious in battle, Radames is promised the hand of *Aida's* mistress, Amneris, daughter of the King of Egypt, as a reward for his triumph. In an assignation with *Aida*, whom he loves, he divulges military secrets to her, overheard by her father, a prisoner of the Egyptians. Accused of treachery, Radames is condemned to death, to the dismay of Amneris, and, immured in a tomb, he is joined by *Aida*, allowing the two to die together, while Amneris mourns the fate of her beloved Radames. Liszt offers a paraphrase of the *Danza sacra e duetto final*, published in 1879. The sacred dance, from the end of the first act, accompanies the reception by Radames of the sacred sword, the symbol of his army command. Priestesses in

the temple chant their prayer to the god Phtha, *Possente, possente Phtha!*, followed by their dance. In the fourth act the chant of the priestesses in the temple is heard, as Radames and *Aida*, entombed below, bid farewell to life in *O terra addio, o valle di pianti* (O earth, farewell, O vale of tears, farewell), and Amneris, distraught, offers her own prayer.

First staged in Rome in 1853, *Il trovatore* has a plot of some complexity. The troubadour of the title, Manrico, is the supposed son of the gypsy Azucena, but actually the stolen child of the old Count di Luna, a rebel and declared enemy of the young Count di Luna. Both are in love with Leonora, and Manrico, in his stronghold, is preparing to marry her, when news comes of the imminent death of his supposed mother, taken by the Count and condemned to death by burning. In his attempt to save her, Manrico is taken prisoner by the Count. In the fourth act Leonora, brought to a place outside Manrico's prison, thinks to bring him new hope. From the tower the *Miserere* is heard, *Miserere d'un'alma già vicina / Alla partenza che non ha ritorno!* (Have mercy on a soul already near / To the parting from which there is no return). Leonora's horrified exclamation, *Quel suon, quelle preci solenni, funeste* (What sound, what solemn, mournful prayers) leads to Manrico's *Ah che la morte ognora / E tarda nel venir* (Ah how slow the coming of death), from the tower, his farewell to his beloved. Once again Liszt has chosen the point of highest tragedy for his 1859 paraphrase. It is followed by Leonora's offer of herself to the Count, in return for her lover's release, having secretly taken poison, her death, and that of Manrico, executed, but now finally revealed by Azucena to the Count as his own brother.

Verdi's opera of 1842, *I Lombardi* was recast in 1847 for Paris as *Jérusalem*. The Paris version transposes the action from Lombardy to France. The prayer, sung by Hélène, daughter of the Count of Toulouse, who has killed her lover's father, again comes in the first act. Liszt's version, more transcription than paraphrase, made originally in 1848, is dedicated to Madame Marie Kalergis, née Comtesse

Nesselrode. The tremolo effect, originally for violins, is preserved in Liszt's version, more particularly, perhaps, in the alternative transcription for the newly invented *armonipiano*, with its tremolo pedal.

Dating from 1867-68, Liszt's treatment of the *Coro di festa e marcia funebre* from *Don Carlos* is based on the opera of that name, first seen in its original version in Paris in 1867. Drawn from Schiller's dramatic poem, the plot centres on the Spanish Infante, son of Philip II, and his love for Elisabeth de Valois, originally his betrothed but then the wife of the King. The involvement of Don Carlos with rebels in Flanders and the interventions of Princess Eboli, who is also in love with Don Carlos, bring further complications, ending in his condemnation and final mysterious rescue into the monastery founded by his grandfather, from behind whose tomb a voice calls him. The Church has an important part to play and the Grand Finale of the third act brings a popular celebration, in front of the Cathedral of Valladolid, honouring the King. This spectacular scene is followed by a funeral march, as monks escort heretics to their deaths at the stake.

Liszt's *Réminiscences de Boccanegra* was written in 1882, a year after Verdi's revision of his 1857 opera. It deals with events in medieval Genoa, plots against the Doge, Simone Boccanegra, and the machinations of the goldsmith Paolo Albiani. The opera ends with the death of Boccanegra, poisoned by Paolo, but the happy joining together of his daughter Amelia with Gabriele Adorno, who succeeds Boccanegra as Doge. Liszt's

reminiscences start with a reference to the 1881 *Prologue*, in which the election of Boccanegra as Doge is proposed. This leads to the final chorus of the second act, *All' armi, o Liguri* (To arms, O Ligurians), a popular rebellion against the Doge, that is to be defeated. A further reference is to the final ensemble of the third act, bringing the death of Boccanegra, but otherwise general reconciliation. Liszt ends the work with a return to the theme of the *Prologue*.

Liszt made a concert paraphrase of *Ernani* in 1847, but this remained unpublished. A second *Paraphrase de concert* was made in the following years and revised in 1859. The opera itself was first staged in Venice in 1844 and deals with the rivalry for the love of Elvira of the bandit Ernani and Don Carlo, King of Spain, complicated by the implacable hostility of Elvira's uncle, Don Ruy Gomez, who conspires with Ernani against the King. When matters seem resolved, Don Ruy gives a signal, agreed with Ernani, that the latter should die, if Don Ruy demands it. The signal is given, and Ernani stabs himself. The third act is set in a cathedral vault at Aix-la-Chapelle, before the tomb of Charlemagne. Don Carlo, who is to be elected Holy Roman Emperor, overhears the conspirators, turns and addresses his illustrious predecessor in *O sommo Carlo* (O supreme Carlo), and extends clemency to Ernani and Elvira. It is this melody that provides the basis of Liszt's paraphrase.

Keith Anderson

Alexandre Dossin

Acclaimed by international critics, the Brazilian-born Alexandre Dossin has already firmly established himself as a pianist of the first rank. He was awarded both the First Prize and the Special Prize at the Martha Argerich International Piano Competition in 2003 (Buenos Aires, Argentina). Other awards include the Silver Medal and Second Honorable Mention in the Maria Callas Grand Prix (Athens, Greece, 1996) and both the Third Prize and Special Prize at the Mozart International Piano Competition (Salzburg, Austria, 1995), to mention just a few of the international and national accolades received throughout his career. Alexandre Dossin is a graduate of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, where he studied with Sergei Dorensky. In 2001 he received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Texas at Austin, where his teachers were William Race and Gregory Allen. Currently on the faculty at the University of Oregon School of Music, he maintains an active performing, teaching, and recording career.

**Franz
LISZT**
(1811-1886)

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**Verdi Concert Paraphrases
and Transcriptions**

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|---|--|--------------|
| 1 | Rigoletto: Paraphrase de concert, S434/R267 | 7:38 |
| 2 | Aida: Danza sacra e duetto final, S436/R269 | 11:38 |
| 3 | Miserere du Trovatore, S433/R266 | 8:39 |
| 4 | Salve Maria de 'Jérusalem' (I Lombardi), S431/R264 | 6:48 |
| 5 | Don Carlos: Coro di festa e marcia funebre, S435/R268 | 7:07 |
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| 7 | Ernani: Paraphrase de concert, S432/R265 | 8:49 |

Alexandre Dossin, Piano

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