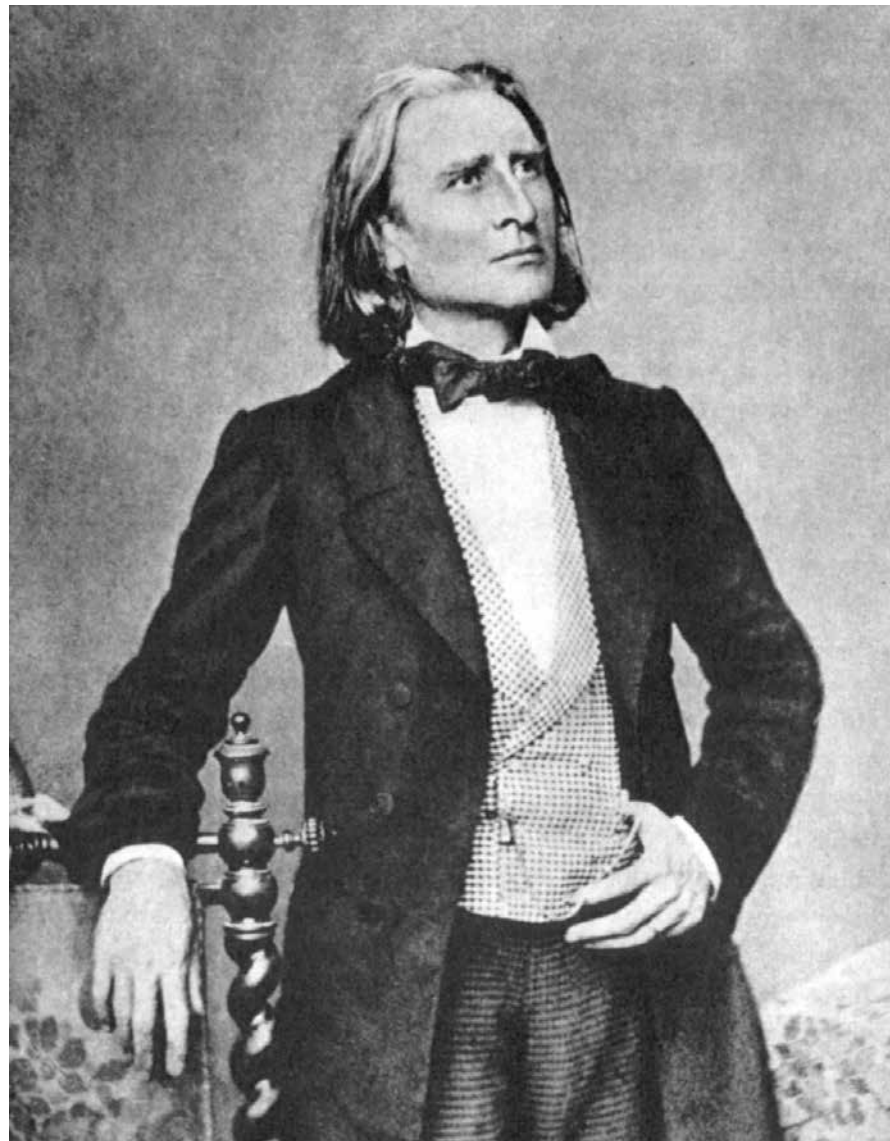


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A Liszt Recital



Ian Holttham
piano

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Liszt's *Sonata in B minor* stands alone and gigantic in the piano repertoire. The grandeur and the lyrical power of its themes and its infallible architecture make it the supreme titan of sonatas.

- Recorded at Melba Hall in the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne

- **Recording:** Martin Wright

- **Technical production:** Vaughan McAlley

- **Programme notes:** Alan Davison

- Photograph of Liszt taken in Munich 1858 by Franz Hanfstaengl

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Three Petrarch Sonnets

- 1** *Canzoniere: Benedetto sia 'l giorno* (No. 47) 4'31"
- 2** *Pace non trovo* (No. 104) 5'41"
- 3** *Io vidi in terra angelica costumi* (No. 123) 5'52"

4 *Funérailles* 10'51"

5 *Mephisto Waltz No. 1 in A major* 10'13"

Sonata in B minor

- 6** *Lento assai, Allegro energico* 3'13"
- 7** *Grandioso* 3'34"
- 8** *Allegro energico, Recitativo* 3'52"
- 9** *Andante sostenuto, Quasi Adagio* 7'43"
- 10** *Allegro energico (fugato)* 1'40"
- 11** *[Allegro energico]* 1'35"
- 12** *[Grandioso], Presto, Andante sostenuto, Allegro moderato, Lento assai* 6'56"

Ian Holtham performed on Steinway piano model D 507410

Three Petrarch Sonnets

The three Petrarch Sonnets number amongst the seven works forming the second volume of the *Années de Pèlerinage*, published as a collection in 1858 and subtitled *Italie*. Early versions of all but one of the pieces that form the volume were in fact composed during the winter and spring of 1838, a period of outstanding compositional output in Liszt's life. As the title indicates, Liszt was inspired by the themes, sights and art he encountered during his stay in Italy.

As with many of his works from this time, Liszt later made significant revisions, tending as a rule to eschew unnecessary virtuosity by simplifying or rationalising figurations and clarifying textures. The three Petrarch Sonnets began life as songs, and were immediately transcribed for solo piano, but not published until 1847 and 1846. Liszt chose to set three of the most popular sonnets from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*: *Benedetto sia 'l giorno* (No. 47); *Pace non trovo* (No. 104); and *Io vidi in terra angelica costumi* (No. 123). The 1858 solo piano versions known today are themselves arrangements or revisions of these earlier pieces.

All three works, in keeping with their origins, begin with clearly structured introductions that set the mood for the solo melodic line that follows. Each piece aims to

project the emotional theme of the sonnet it is based upon: the first, *No. 47*, recalls the mixed emotions surrounding first love, with syncopation prominent throughout suggesting unsettled emotions; the second and most popular of the set, *No. 104*, evokes the restlessness and despair that comes with love, in part through the dramatic climax and arresting chromatic opening; the last, *No. 123*, provides a fitting contrast with an underlying peacefulness, reflecting the calm expressed in the original, and made explicit by the gently undulating figurations that run throughout the work. The Petrarch Sonnets stand as some of Liszt's most expressive and effective early piano compositions, and attest to his passionate command of lyricism.

Funérailles

Composed in 1849, *Funérailles* is one of Liszt's most dramatic works, its manifestly heartfelt passion no doubt explained by the fact that it was written to honour the victims of the failed 1849 Hungarian revolution. The ensuing retribution against the leaders of the uprising shocked many throughout Europe at the time, and Liszt left for posterity this musical elegy. *Funérailles* was for many years linked with Chopin because the great Polish composer died at around the same time it was composed, and also because the work contains some isolated parallels to Chopin's style, although the work is unmistakably Lisztian. The austere opening, making effective use of the low sonorities of the piano, evokes the ominous tolling of bells, and builds up to a dramatic

trumpet call which heralds the coming sombre funeral march. The middle section creates a climatic sense of rebellion through the rapid low double octaves in the left hand and triumphant march-like figures in the right hand. The work clearly had great emotional significance for Liszt, for many years later in early 1886, just months before his death, he invited his student August Stradal to perform it in Budapest. When the time came for Stradal to play, Liszt accompanied him onto the stage and solemnly faced the audience. Stradal realised that it was Liszt's own final farewell to Hungary: *Funérailles* had come full circle.

Mephisto Waltz No. 1

Liszt's first Mephisto Waltz, or *The Dance in the Village Inn*, was composed ca. 1860 in two versions; one for piano and one version for orchestra. He was to write three more Mephisto Waltzes towards the end of his life, but the first remains by far the most enduring. It is a programmatic work, based upon the poem by the Austro-Hungarian Lenau (1802-1850), an eccentric post-romantic writer who ended his colourful life in an asylum. In the poem Faust and Mephistopheles happen upon wedding

celebrations at a village inn. Mephistopheles, having grabbed a violin, incites the villagers into frenzied and lustful dancing, while Faust finds himself a beautiful maiden which he leads dancing into the woods. With only a nightingale's song to be heard, the lovers sink in the ocean of their own lust.

The very opening of the work brilliantly alludes to Mephistopheles tuning his violin in readiness for the frenzy; Liszt piles up a series of perfect 5ths resulting in a truly devilish effect. After the appearance of the main Mephistophelian theme which follows the introduction, Faust's evocative theme is heard. This theme is transformed through the course of the piece, becoming ever more demoniacal, until the birdlike sounds introduce a moment of calm before the final climax.

This ever popular virtuoso work is a superb example of Liszt's mastery of piano writing, as well as demonstrating with the utmost clarity the effectiveness of his technique of thematic transformationa technique which served him well in other, larger-scale compositions.

Sonata in B minor

Liszt's undisputed masterpiece for the piano, the B minor sonata of 1853, was composed during his fruitful years in Weimar. It was dedicated to Robert Schumann, but by the time a copy arrived at his residence he was already in an asylum. Clara Schumann considered the piece merely a blind noise, a response not untypical for the time as it turned out.

Structurally, the B minor sonata is a sonata within a sonata; that is, it is made up of three or four movements depending on how they are classified allegro, andante, scherzo and finale within an overall sonata form movement of exposition, development and recapitulation. Most of the music is based upon three rather disparate themes presented in the short introduction that forms the first subject 'group'. Liszt transforms and combines these themes throughout the course of the sonata to create a continuous and yet ever changing musical form.

The first of these, an ominous bell-like motive, is an important structural device, for it separates the main sections of the work and returns for the close. The following two themes, the first strikingly angular, the second based upon a repeated note figure, combine throughout the work most effectively in their transformed guises. This is true both for the lyrical sections and the arresting three-part fugato that follows the slow movement.

The magnificent *Grandioso* second subject shows some of Liszt's richest piano textures, and it provides a dramatic contrast to the more song-like passages, such as late in

the development section where it is presented interspersed with *Recitativo* writing.

Following the contemplative slow movement, which opens with its own simple theme, the fugato heralds the recapitulation of the main themes that eventually leads to a technically daunting coda with *prestissimo* double octaves. But rather than finish with bang, as he originally had in an early score, Liszt ends in a sombre fashion he presents the slow movement theme, and then the three figures that began the work.

As one final stroke of genius, he reverses the order of presentation of the three themes, ending the work quietly and yet with a fittingly mysterious aura.

The sonata is widely held to be of a programatic nature, based on the Faust story, although Liszt is recorded as only referring to it as a sonata. Whatever the exact inspiration, the work certainly contains musical elements that can be readily associated with the Faustian legend.

Alan Davison

Liszt's *Sonata in B minor* stands alone and gigantic in the piano repertoire. The grandeur and the lyrical power of its themes and its infallible architecture make it the supreme titan of sonatas. Dedicated to Robert Schumann, who had dedicated his great Fantasy to Liszt, the work is conceived as one large scale movement in various sections. The thematic material is tightly unified, being based on the motifs so clearly enunciated in the works opening. Just as all the sections are in reality one tremendous sweep of a work, so all the themes derive from the opening motifs. This unity of conception within an enormous variety of execution is dazzling. The one essential impetus lies behind the puissant first subject, the lyrical second theme, the incomparably beautiful slow movement theme, the agile fugue subject and the stunning bravura near the work's close. The many moments of formidable virtuosity notwithstanding, this work is perhaps the closest a composer could come to the creation of a pianistic and musical universe, for the Liszt Sonata is certainly its own world. **Ian Holtham**

IAN HOLTHAM

Ian Holtham had specialist musical training from an early age and travelled to Europe on scholarship in his teens where he was based for over a decade. He is a student of Géza Anda, Geoffrey Parsons, Enrique Barenboim and Peter Feuchtwanger whose assistant he was for nearly five years in London. He also studied composition and conducting at the Guildhall School of Music. He made his South Bank and Wigmore Hall débuts before he was twenty and has performed throughout Australia, England, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy, France, Austria, Hungary, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and Korea.

Ian Holtham has broadcast regularly with the ABC since the late seventies, and is a constant performer here and overseas, returning frequently to Europe and Asia for concert and masterclass tours. He has a vast and varied repertoire which, excluding works for solo piano, contains well over forty piano concertos. He holds honours degrees in Music from Durham University, and in Arts from Melbourne University where he also gained his PhD, and has an extensive array of international performance qualifications.

As well as his busy schedule of performing and teaching, he is on the Council of Directors of the Australian Music Examinations Board in Victoria, and has adjudicated innumerable awards in Australia and abroad. Ian Holtham has published a book on piano technique and has released five solo CDs, including the complete Chopin Etudes, to considerable critical acclaim.

Ian Holtham is currently Senior Lecturer in Music at the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne where he heads the Keyboard and Practical Music areas. During 1999 he was also invited to be the inaugural Head of Studies at the Australian National Academy of Music.

