

# FRANZ LISZT'S BRITISH ISLES TOUR 1840-1841 COMMEMORATIVE EDITION 1990

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THOMAS WAKEFIELD plays LISZT

## SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1091

### FRANZ LISZT'S BRITISH ISLES TOUR

THOMAS WAKEFIELD, piano

In 1840 Queen Victoria had been on the throne for three years. public railways had been operating for five years, postage stamps made their appearance and Liszt started his concert tour of the British Isles. Reactions were mixed. One portion of the public was enraptured by unprecedented virtuosity and boldness, while, one suspects, others were unsettled by the flamboyant showmanship. Nineteenth century industrial Britain felt generally at ease with the comfortable domestic sentiments of Mendelssohn rather than with Liszt's potent chemical compound of seemingly incompatible elements.

Today his position as one of the major piano composers seems secure, though the continuing neglect of his songs, symphonic poems and great choral works is shameful. There is a growing interest in his piano transcriptions which formed the staple diet of the 1840-1841 concerts along with the two original works which went with him everywhere: the Marche Hongroise, which was popularly requested, and the Grand Galop Chromatique, which a critic described as 'the ugliest piece of dance piano music ever written.' (One of his colleagues described Chopin as a German composer of dissonant music.)

Liszt's British concerts included all of the pieces on this recording although not all were performed at any one recital. However they represent fairly the wonderful assortment of styles in music that Liszt's audiences experienced one and a half centuries ago.

Rossini's *William Tell* is based on Schiller's epic play. He started work on it in 1828. It is a tale of 'country men and women stirred by tyranny to acts of simple courage. Its mood at once is idyllic and heroic.' It is his last and considered by many his finest opera.

At the time that the overture was being written Liszt attended many of Rossini's musical soirées in Milan. Already by 1829, the year of the opera's first performance, Liszt had transcribed the overture for piano and played it at some of his own recitals.

Although writing an opera for the carnival at La Scala. Bellini composed *Norma* with a view to supporting the cause of the 'Young Italy' which was fighting oppressive Austrian rule.

Liszt played a two piano arrangement by Thalberg at a number of venues here but he subsequently produced his own version: *Reminiscences de Norma*. This piece has a particularly interesting and ambitious harmonic scheme based on rising major triads. A first section moving from G minor to G major gives way to a

second section moving from B minor to B major. The third section commences aggressively in Eb minor bringing the piece to a triumphant end in Eb major using a device known as 'réunion des thèmes' which contrapuntally combines the second B major theme in the third and final key.

*Lucia di Lammermoor* remains Donizetti's most successful work, and one of the most popular operas of the nineteenth century. It is a *Romeo and Juliet* type romance based on Sir Walter Scott's novel. Lucia and her lover, Edgardo, are separated by family differences and Lucia, in the famous 'Mad Scene', kills first her husband and then herself. This causes the confused Edgardo to stab himself in the moving last scene.

On his tour Liszt always chose Frank Mori, his highly talented, young coadjutor, to be the accompanist in his duet arrangement of this opera which they performed in Cheltenham, Leamington, Lincoln and elsewhere.

This *Hungarian March* was transcribed by Liszt for the piano from his own composition, *Arbeiter-Chor* written for male voice choir, bass solo and piano. Liszt wrote it to urge the Hungarian workers on towards freedom amid the war preparations being made against the Austrians. However he advised his publisher in Vienna not to publish the March because of the revolutionary events taking place in Vienna and Pest during 1848. Its themes resurface in his dashing Symphonic Poem 'Hungaria'.

It is common belief that Schubert wrote the *Serenade* on the back of a menu in a beer garden. *Serenade* is from a collection of seven songs based on poems of Rellstab and Heine. A violin obligato is often added and it is also extremely effective as a violin solo.

In 1825 Schubert wrote a set of songs based on Walter Scott's epic verse, *Lady of the Lake*. They were all composed or completed by Lake Traun itself. *Ave Maria*, perhaps the best known of the set, is a classic example of German Romanticism. It recounts Ellen's evening song and prayer for her father in the wilderness, where they live in hiding.

The *Grand Galop Chromatique* underwent several changes in Liszt's lifetime including text elaboration and the addition of ossia's. Later on Liszt rewrote the piece for piano duet as well as a facilitated version, performing the former frequently at his own recitals.

One of the most colourful behind-the-scenes figures in the history of piano music commissioned the Hexameron Variations. She was the Princess Cristina Belgioso (actually Maria Cristina Beatrice Teresa Matilda Camilla Julia Margherita Laura Barbiano Principessa de Belgioso d'Este &c.) and her salon was one of the most brilliant in Paris.

To raise money for Italian refugees she invited six of Europe's leading

pianists to compose a variation apiece on a rousing Bellini aria. These they would then perform on six pianos, one by one. Each virtuoso wrote a clever set-piece parading his own personal speciality. As well as his own magnificent variation Liszt also arranged the theme and composed an introduction, interludes and finale.

Thomas Wakefield, son of a professional musician, is a graduate of the Royal Manchester College of Music, where he studied under the late Gordon Green, who saw in him 'a student of exceptional attainments'. At the end of his course, he won all the awards open to him, including the coveted Performers Diploma with Distinction, and has since received professional guidance from Derrick Wyndham and Peter Katin.

In France a recital at the Tourcoing Conservatoire, which was later broadcast on the French radio, brought a prompt invitation for a return visit.

In 1981 Thomas Wakefield was chosen to take part, as winning solo pianist, in the I.S.M.Nat-West days by a panel of distinguished musicians including Pamela Bowden, Lady Barbirolli and Marcus Dodds who described his performance of Moskowski's Capriccio Espagnol as 'perfection'.

Following the publicity emanating from this event, the next few years saw him playing in numerous towns and cities. His recitals opened with a pair of classical masterworks followed by a glittering array of exciting novelties by such romantic virtuoso composers as Godowsky, Henselt, Gottschalk, Alkan, Thalberg and Tausig. The acclaim was such that return engagements became usual.

In 1990 he gave six recitals in Hungary. The Director of the Franz Liszt Conservatoire at Debrecen, where he performed twice in the course of the tour, described his performances as 'distinguished by a rich and colourful variety of tone' and said his playing of Liszt was 'a rich artistic experience'. As a token of appreciation he was presented with a commemorative Liszt medal.

Thomas Wakefield is currently giving a series of recitals which commemorate Liszt's concert tour of the British Isles one hundred and fifty years ago this year. The programmes are based on the actual repertoire Liszt performed.

The first concert of Liszt's tour was on August 17th 1840; the last on January 29th 1841. The places in which he played are shown in order below:

Portsmouth Chichester Ryde Southampton Winchester Blandford Forum  
Salisbury Lyme Regis Teignmouth Plymouth Exeter Taunton Bath Bristol  
Cheltenham Coventry Market Harborough Derby Nottingham Mansfield  
Lincoln Boston Stamford Huntingdon Cambridge Bury-St. Edmunds Norwich  
Chelmsford Northampton Oxford Newcastle-under-Lyme Birmingham  
Wolverhampton Liverpool Preston Manchester Doncaster Sheffield York  
Dublin Cork Belfast Edinburgh Glasgow Newcastle-on-Tyne Durham  
Darlington Richmond Boroughbridge Halifax

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## 1840-1841 COMMEMORATIVE EDITION 1990

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Overture to "William Tell"                                    | Rossini - Liszt                                     |
| 2. Serenade  | Schubert - Liszt                                    |
| 3. Lucia di Lammermoor<br>(Duet with Penny Losemore)             | Donizetti - Liszt                                   |
| 4. Reminiscences de Norma  | Bellini - Liszt                                     |
| 5. Marche Héroïque dans le genre Hongroise                       | Liszt   |
| 6. Ave Maria   | Schubert - Liszt                                    |
| 7. Grand Galop Chromatique                                       | Liszt   |
| 8. Hexameron Variations on the March from Bellini's "I Puritani" |   |
|  | Thalberg - Liszt - Pixis - Herz - Czerny - Chopin   |
|  | (With introduction, interludes and finale by Liszt) |

THOMAS WAKEFIELD

LISZT

Total time: 72 minutes

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