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VOLUME
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FRANZ LISZT

Piano Works on Hungarian Themes

Christopher Williams, Piano



Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Piano Works on Hungarian Themes

Franz Liszt was born in Raiding (Doborján) on 22 October 1811 and died in Bayreuth on 31 July 1886.

As a child Liszt showed such immense musical talent that his family moved first to Vienna in 1822, where he studied piano with Carl Czerny and then, despite Czerny's reservations, to Paris in 1823. Mixing within artistic circles, his playing probably became more controlled as he encountered luminaries such as Lamartine, Hugo, Heine, Berlioz and Paganini. Compositions during this period included *Grande fantaisie di bravura sur La Clochette de Paganini* (1832–34).

A long-term liaison with the already married Countess Marie d'Agoult, begun in 1832, saw them relocate to Switzerland and Italy to avoid scandal. Their three children, Blandine, Cosima and Daniel were born during the next seven years. Liszt recommenced touring internationally as a virtuoso from 1839 for the next eight years. It was during this period his fame reached the epic proportions of so-called *Lisztomania*, with his deliberate cultivation of a stage presence representing the performer as hero. Works from this period include his *Rhapsodies hongroises* (1846–47).

Liszt ended his stage career in 1848, urged on by his new partner Polish Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, and took on the role of Kapellmeister in Weimar. Composition became a priority, along with championing causes such as the New German School and Richard Wagner. However, vehement criticism of his works such as the symphonic poem *Les Préludes* (1849–55) and setbacks including the deaths of Blandine and Daniel caused him to retreat to Rome and take minor religious orders from 1862 to 1867.

Thereafter, he gradually re-emerged, assuming an active role as musical elder statesman, travelling regularly between Weimar, Budapest and Rome. Finally, the reception of his compositions had become enthusiastic, and he enjoyed wide popularity. Works such as the oratorio *Christus* (1872) typify this final period.

Liszt was often regarded as an international or transnational artist in his day. He was always susceptible, however, to attractive causes, and in 1840 paid a long-awaited return to Hungary, his country of birth, attending a public recognition ceremony in Pest's National Theatre where a sword of honour was presented to him. In response, he declared himself a Hungarian and voiced his support for the country's political objectives. Indeed, for almost five decades, from the late 1830s to 1886, Liszt composed at least 80 works that incorporate Hungarian musical materials in some manner.

At the time Hungary was a very restive component of the Austrian Empire and independence was a much-debated topic. While the Hungarian revolution of 1848 failed, the debate continued and following Austria's defeat in the Austro-Prussian war, a dual monarchy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was formed in 1867, acknowledging Hungary's significance in middle Europe.

Liszt often used the *verbunkos* tradition for his musical materials. This had roots in Hungarian village folk music, usually commencing at medium tempo, but featuring a faster, sometimes highly energetic ending. From the 1780s Hungarian nobility and gentry included *verbunkos* music at social events. Furthermore, *verbunkos* music began to appear in print at that time, while Gypsy (Roma) bands, which sometimes played *verbunkos* repertoire, appeared more frequently in urban areas. In his 1859 book *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie*, Liszt credited Roma peoples alongside Magyars with the *verbunkos* style, which offended the latter causing much controversy.

Rákóczi-Marsch nach der Orchesterbearbeitung, S244a/R106/15b (1871)

Liszt's orchestral version (S117, 1863–67) is his longest and probably most sophisticated setting of this famous music. The piano arrangement, heard here, follows the orchestral score closely.

The orchestral setting is based on his earlier piano *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15 in A minor* (1851–53). A shorter and earlier version can be heard on this album [\[3\]](#), and an even earlier version dates from 1839–40. Liszt endows this later

version with full sonata form, with the main theme in A minor, and second lighter theme in F major. A short dramatic development is followed by both themes in A and a *più mosso* coda.

Magyar dallok, S242/R105a (1839–40) (Ungarische Nationalmelodien/Mélodies hongroises)

Given his unparalleled popularity, Liszt probably saw himself as an heroic musical champion of the Hungarian cause and a *verbunkos* virtuoso, an extension of the ‘artist as hero’ stage persona he had developed in earlier years.

Book 1

No. 1. Lento in C minor – This brooding melody uses a call-and-response construction that repeats with extended voicing.

No. 2. Andantino in C major – The compact, warm-hearted melody features a jaunty semiquaver-quaver motif and comprises three stanzas.

No. 3. Sehr langsam in D flat major – The music hovers between A flat major and D flat major. Intriguingly, Liszt uses a five flat key signature for the first stanza but four flats for the similar harmonies of the more florid second stanza.

No. 4. Animato in C sharp minor – This single-verse melody with its spirited syncopated motif appears later in *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6* (1847).

No. 5. Tempo giusto in D flat major – The swaggering syncopated single verse melody opens *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6*, and also appears here as *Magyar tempo* (1840) [14]. The three versions all contain detailed differences in treatment.

No. 6. Lento in G minor – The melancholic mood is arrested by a more energetic middle section *Allegretto* with two cadenzas (the first *ad libitum*, the second notated). Drama and melancholy return in the final section.

Book 2

No. 7. Andante cantabile in E flat major – This extended, sectional canvas comprises three main themes, gaining momentum as each is a little faster than its predecessor. A short coda recalls the second and third themes.

Book 3

No. 8. Lento in F minor – Sadness is etched into the direction *pesante e tristemente* at the opening. The binary form moves to an *energico* A flat major halfway through before gloom descends again, alleviated only by an F major ending.

No. 9. Lento in A minor – The hammered dulcimer tremolando effects, present in many of Liszt’s Hungarian-inspired scores, are particularly prevalent here, giving an exotic colouration especially when used with the *verbunkos* minor scale. This spacious score contains two main subjects, the first *lento* and the second a spirited *quasi presto*.

Book 4

No. 10. Adagio sostenuto a capriccio in D major – A lengthy introduction with hammered dulcimer effects is marked *Adagio sostenuto a capriccio*. The following *Allegro vivace* is infused with the tonalities of folk scales.

No. 11. Andante sostenuto in B flat major – The dark opening veers between B flat major and B flat minor. A middle section hovers around G minor before the opening section returns. The following joyful *Allegretto* in B flat major imitates the hammered dulcimer with repeated octaves. Liszt concludes his *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6* with this material, although in extended form.

Ungarische Nationalmelodie, Rákóczi-Marsch, S242/13a (Erleichtert) (c. 1846)

Originating from the 17th-century *Rákóczi Song*, the instrumental *Rákóczi March* by Nikolaus Scholl appeared in the early 19th century. Liszt’s second piano version is heard here. It uses ternary form with the first of the two main themes returning prior to a coda, the whole structure centred around A minor/major.

Magyar tempo, S241b (1840)

This version of the materials used for the opening of *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6* differs from the version on [6], and from the *Rhapsody* itself. In particular there are rhythmic differences in the treatment of the main theme.

Célèbre mélodie hongroise, S243a (after 1866) (in B flat major)

By this date the final *Allegro* of *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6* (published in 1853) was well known and popular. Doubtless, advanced-level amateur pianists would have relished the chance to perform a slightly easier version of the famous theme while maintaining brilliance and excitement. Liszt matches the *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6*'s *Allegro* bar-for-bar, except for a completely re-written ending.

Rodney Smith



Christopher Williams

Born in Wales, Christopher Williams leads a busy and varied professional life as a pianist, composer, conductor, teacher and arranger. He is currently a staff pianist at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, piano tutor at Cardiff University, and pianist for both the BBC National Chorus of Wales and BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Influenced by his teacher and mentor, Walter Ryan, Williams developed a keen interest in the performance and recording of works by undeservedly neglected composers, culminating in the release of three albums of world premiere recordings by the composer Semyon Barmotin. In addition to his work as a soloist, Williams is in great demand as an accompanist and chamber musician, and has partnered many of the prominent instrumentalists of his generation including Philippe Scharz, Tim Thorpe, David Childs, David Pyatt, Tine Thing Helseth and Anneke Scott. Williams' longest musical partnership is with his wife, oboist Catherine Tanner-Williams, and has resulted in world premiere performances and recordings. His recording of Brahms transcriptions for the Grand Piano label (GP749) was featured as album of the week on *NDR Kultur*.

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1 Rákóczi-Marsch nach der Orchesterbearbeitung, S244a/R106/15b (1871) 11:40	Book 3 9 No. 8. Lento 4:12
Magyar dallok, S242/R105a (1839–40) 46:06	10 No. 9. Lento 10:13
Book 1	Book 4
2 No. 1. Lento 3:37	11 No. 10. Adagio sostenuto a capriccio 5:41
3 No. 2. Andantino 1:11	12 No. 11. Andante sostenuto 4:11
4 No. 3. Sehr langsam 2:59	13 Ungarische Nationalmelodie, Rákóczi-Marsch, S242/13a (Erleichtert) (c. 1846) 5:58
5 No. 4. Animato 0:26	14 Magyar tempo, S241b (1840) 1:08
6 No. 5. Tempo giusto 1:07	15 Célèbre mélodie hongroise, S243a (after 1866) 2:35
7 No. 6. Lento 5:05	
Book 2	
8 No. 7. Andante cantabile 6:48	

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