

TP2039091

BEN SCHOEMAN

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

- 1 **19:04** Après une Lecture du Dante:
(Années de Pèlerinage,
Second year, Italy, S.161)
- 2 **15:18** Vallée d'Obermann
(Années de Pèlerinage,
First year, Switzerland, S.160)
- 3 **9:23** Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este
(Années de Pèlerinage,
Third year, S.163)
- 4 **33:18** Sonata in B minor, S.178

Total: 77:05

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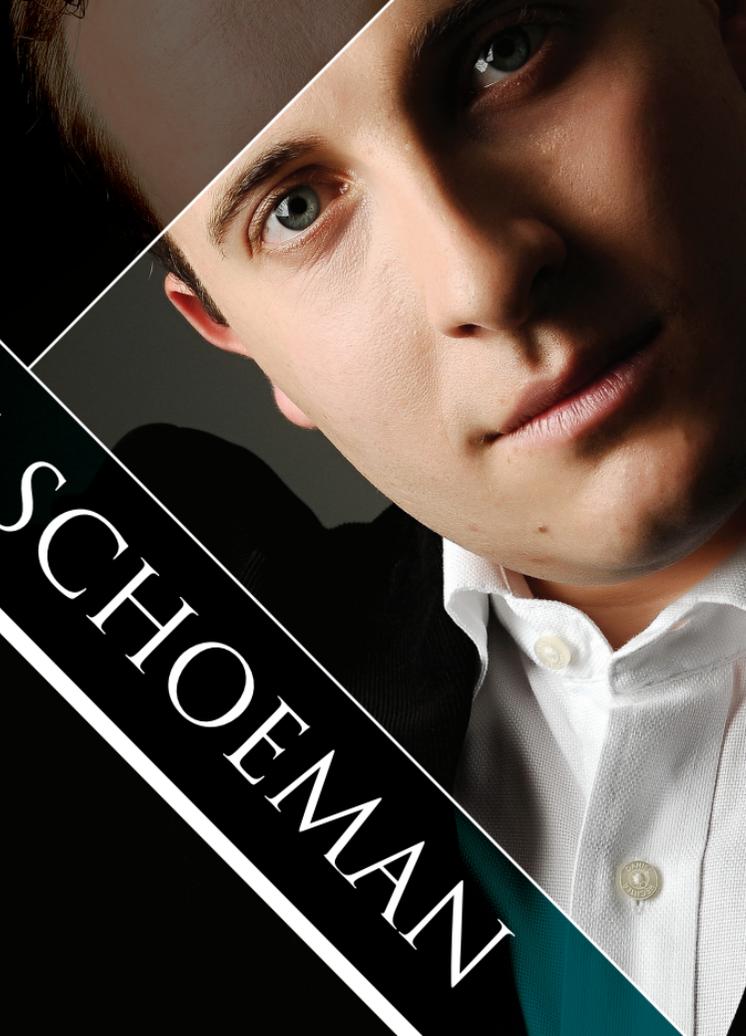


2011 Standard Bank Young Artist for Music



LISZT

BEN SCHOEMAN



LISZT

CHOEMAN

His performance of Brahms' Second Piano Concerto with the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra was described as "powerful...with enormous musical insight and pianistic command" (Die Burger).

Ben Schoeman has a lively international performing career. He has played in prestigious concert halls such as the Wigmore Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, the Konzerthaus in Berlin, the Gulbenkian Auditorium in Lisbon and the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest. He has performed in solo- and chamber music recitals at various international festivals in the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, Italy,

Switzerland, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom.

Born into a musical family, Ben Schoeman studied the piano from a young age under the guidance of Joseph Stanford in Pretoria. After winning all the national music competitions in South Africa he moved to Italy, where he studied with Michel Dalberto, Louis Lortie and Boris Petrushansky at the Accademia Pianistica 'Incontri col Maestro' in Imola. There he obtained a Master Concert Diploma together with a MMus Degree in Performing Arts (cum laude) from the University of Pretoria. He currently lives in London, where he is pursuing doctoral studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and London City University under the supervision of Ronan O'Hora and Christopher Wiley. In 2008 he received the Laureate Award from the University of Pretoria Alumni Association for his achievements as well as his contribution to music in South Africa. Salon Music and UNISA recently launched his DVD-recording of concertos by Mozart and Tchaikovsky. This debut solo album under the TwoPianists label is sponsored by Standard Bank.





Ben Schoeman is regarded as one of South Africa's foremost pianists. He has won major prizes, including the coveted gold medal and first prize in the Royal Over-Seas League Music Competition in London (2009) and the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Music (2011). In 2008 he became the first South African to win the first grand prize in the 11th UNISA Vodacom International Piano Competition in Pretoria.

A regular performer on the main stages of his home country, Ben has played a wide range of concertos with the Johannesburg, KwaZulu-Natal and Cape Philharmonic Orchestras. His recent nationwide tour received rave reviews and he was praised for his "dazzling virtuosity" (Pretoria News) as well as his "magical music-making" (Classic Feel Magazine).

BEN SCHOEMAN

During the mid-nineteenth century, the development of Western art music came to be shaped by two opposing but equally influential schools of thought. On the one hand, the tradition of Beethoven was continued, with stress laid on the idea of music as an end unto itself, an art transcending the time-bound limitations of day-to-day existence. This came to be seen as the more artistically conservative viewpoint, where musical pieces were seen in abstract terms and independent of those who created them: 'form moving through time', as Eduard Hanslick so famously put it. Traditional formal genres, such as the symphony, the concerto, and the solo sonata and other chamber works, were given precedence in the repertoire. This 'art for art's sake' standpoint was perhaps embodied most aptly by the thematic cohesiveness and formal intricacies of the non-programmatic music of Johannes Brahms. On the other hand, a new and daring avant-garde movement arose around the middle of the

century. The figures behind this avant-garde envisioned a new music that was part of human experience, as an art amongst the arts. Music was seen as the unifying art par excellence, not only bringing the various art forms together, as in Wagner's music-dramas where theatre, prose, music and visual art were combined, but also in bringing into art a reflection of the sufferings and joys of the human spirit.

After a lecture by critic Karl Franz Brendel at an 1859 gathering of composers and critics in Leipzig, this avant-garde movement became known as the New German School. Despite the name, the inspirational fathers of the New German School were a cosmopolitan bunch: the French Berlioz, the German Wagner, and the Hungarian Liszt. Also, whether they really constituted a unified school of thought is a bit of a moot point. However, in the eyes of critics and historians, it is a general unifying ethos that renders this collection of composers a 'school'. This ethos manifested itself in the fundamental nature of the music that was composed. With Wagner, we saw the creation of music dramas, grand mythological narratives set to music. Berlioz,

with his *Symphonie Fantastique* and *Harold en Italie*, introduced to music the idea of the program symphony, a multi-movement musical interpretation of literature or autobiography. And with Liszt, we find a plethora of programmatic pieces, not only for piano but also for orchestra, such as the thirteen orchestral tone poems. These latter works included *Les Préludes* and *Orpheus*, with Liszt's aim being to establish a corpus of single movement orchestral pieces viewed as serious artworks in their own right.

The centrality of Franz Liszt (1811-1886) to the New German School is undeniable. Furthermore, the eminence of Liszt's pupils, such as Carl Tausig and Hans von Bülow, have served to make his role as a leading representative of the *avant-garde* all the more apparent. Yet in his output, Liszt, like so many other Romanticists, is a composer of paradoxes. On this disc, for instance, we find not only programmatic pieces we would expect from a prominent figure in New German School, such as the three featured selections from his *Années de Pèlerinage*, but also one of

the most thematically unified, formalistic works to ever have been composed by a Romantic pen: the B minor Piano Sonata.

The three suites of piano pieces rallied beneath the banner *Années de Pèlerinage*, or 'Years of Pilgrimage', were Liszt's musical homage to his wanderings across Europe between 1835 and 1839. The first of these suites, depicting aspects of his travels in Switzerland, was composed between 1848 and 1854, with publication in following in 1855. The original source of much of the material for this first set of pieces was an earlier work, *Album d'un voyageur*, written between 1835 and 1836 (published 1842). The other two volumes of *Pilgrimage* suites (published 1858 and 1883 respectively) were inspired by Liszt's visits to Italy. This period of extensive travel was not just the result of a yearning for cultural exploration. Liszt also used this time to promote his career as a pianist, which later would explode into one of the most remarkable in the history of Western music. Furthermore, eloping with his lover, the Countess Marie d'Agoult, was the initial catalyst for Liszt's departure from Paris. The Countess was unhappily married to Count Charles d'Agoult, with whom she

piece even more impressive is that the majority of the material for the entire work is derived from only five core thematic elements, which Liszt was able to masterfully transform and weave into a piece of epic proportions. If there ever was an example of Liszt's 'thematic metamorphosis' technique, this is it.

As a result of this incredible feat of musical planning, the Piano Sonata has easily become one of the most analysed of Liszt's works, if not one of the most analysed works in the entire Romantic canon. The result of this frenzied analysis has at times been quizzical. Today, we understand more than ever about the way human brains pick apart complex auditory patterns such as music. It is certain that very few details of the architectural master-plan of such a large-scale work can be discerned by the listener without prior theoretical analysis. Nonetheless, critics continue to pick apart the Sonata's constituent parts, explaining obscure and questionable relationships in ways that are largely irrelevant to the listener's experience. In addition, in this, the least programmatic of Liszt's works, there has been a desperate search for an explanation of the 'story behind

the piece'. After being subjected to the scrutiny of Peter Raabe, better known for his role at the head of the National Socialist Reichsmusikkammer than his musicological acumen, the unsubstantiated idea that the Sonata portrays the Faust legend was born. Speculation in program notes and in popular biographical sketches have also resulted in the ever-predictable autobiographical program being thrust on the Sonata, as well as a plethora of religious interpretations. But no comment on the program speaks more loudly than Liszt's silence on the matter. Perhaps it is best then that we simply accept the mighty B minor Sonata not as something to be explained against the backdrop of Liszt's life, but rather as another part of the paradoxical puzzle that is musical Romanticism. And, regardless of our attempts to categorise the Sonata, to frame it in terms of the New German School or formalism or speculative narratives, it will remain a unique masterwork of the nineteenth century in its own right.

Barry Ross

LISZT

was employed by a German nobleman, and was once again in love with a wealthy member of the aristocracy. The legal wrangling involved in Princess Carolyne's attempt to annul her marriage into the Wittgenstein family caught the attention of Tsar Nicholas I himself. At one stage, her vast wealth was actually forfeited along with her rights as a subject of the Tsar. While the legalities continued, Liszt proceeded to have an affair with Agnes Street-Klindworth, a spy for the retired Napoleonic Congress of Vienna diplomat Klemens Wenzel von Metternich. Despite this affair, Liszt left Weimar and followed Princess Carolyne to Rome around 1860, where she successfully petitioned the Pope for annulment of her marriage after a year and a half. The couple's plan to marry was, however, again thwarted by legal problems; once again, potential ownership of the Princess Carolyne's vast fortune was at issue. In the end, the couple gave up hope and never married.

With hindsight, arguably the crowning achievement and success of the Weimar years was the mighty Piano Sonata in B minor, S. 178, which was composed between 1852 and 1853 (published 1854). Despite the esteem

in which this work is held today, it was at first not very warmly received. Brahms, Anton Rubinstein, and Eduard Hanslick were not enamoured by the Sonata when they first heard it. In fact, it proved so difficult and unappealing to performers that it had to wait three years for a première. The Sonata was dedicated to Robert Schumann, in recognition of Schumann's dedication to Liszt of the Fantasy in C major, op. 17. The Sonata is a tour de force of musical architecture. Essentially a four-movement work, it is played through without pause between the movements, giving the superficial listener a sense of a single long piece. Closer inspection, however, reveals a telescopic formal plan – the four individual movements, when considered together, actually comprise one large overarching sonata form. In this respect, it is sometimes said that Schubert's Wanderer Fantasy may have provided the precedent for this formal arrangement. If it did, it was certainly a precedent and not an exemplar: such a monumental architecture had never been so seamlessly achieved in the history of Western music, and was not successfully achieved again until Schönberg's First Chamber Symphony. What makes the

had a child. Liszt began his affair with her in 1832 when he was 22 years old; she was six years his senior. In 1834, the death of Marie's daughter brought her closer to Liszt. She fell pregnant with their first child in Paris the following year, and the certainty of an ensuing scandal proved a major factor in the couple's decision to move to Geneva. Their affair would ultimately result in two more children (one of whom was Cosima, first wife to Hans von Bülow and later Richard Wagner).

Awareness of both personal experiences and the world of literature are well-known hallmarks of musical Romanticism. The pieces comprising the three suites *Années de Pèlerinage* are typical in this respect. From a literary angle, it is largely to Goethe that Liszt looked for inspiration, in particular Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* ('*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*'). Goethe's novel is one of self-realisation: a Romantic Bildungsroman. Further literary inspiration is in evidence with *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia Quasi Sonata*, or 'After a Reading of Dante: Fantasy quasi Sonata', perhaps better known simply as the 'Dante Sonata.' This work, one of the most technically challenging

that Liszt ever wrote, was completed in 1849, seeing publication in 1856 as part of the second of the *Pilgrimage* suites. It takes little imagination to realise that the work by Dante referred to in the title is none other than the famous *Divine Comedy*, with the pit of Hell terrifyingly captured in the chromaticism of the first theme. The second chorale-like theme plainly represents the ecstasy of eternal heavenly bliss. A formally adventurous two-movement version of the work had previously been première'd in Vienna as early as 1839, but it is the later *Années de Pèlerinage* version presented here that has found a place in the repertoire. The title 'After a Reading of Dante' is actually an allusion to yet another literary influence: it is also the title of a poem by Victor Hugo.

More literary references can be found with Liszt's *Vallée d'Obermann*, published in 1855 as part the first of the *Pilgrimage* suites.

'Obermann's Valley' was the title of a popular French novel by Étienne Pivert de Senancour. This odd novel featured a collection of letters by a fictional character who, in spite of his comfortable retirement in a valley in the Jura Alps, is reduced to a melancholic state by pangs of loneliness.

Liszt's reference to Senancour is cemented with the inclusion of two quotations from the book on the title page of the score. He also added the following lines of verse, from Lord Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:

Could I embody and unbosom now That which is
most within me, - could I wreak My thoughts
upon expression, and thus throw Soul, heart,
mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak, All that
I would have sought, and all I seek, Bear, know,
feel - and yet breathe - into one word, And
that one word were Lightning, I would speak;
But as it is, I live and die unheard, With a most
voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.

The
third
selection
from the
Années de
Pèlerinage suites
to be featured on
this disc turns away from
literature, and looks toward the
beauty of Renaissance architecture
for inspiration. Les jeux d'eaux à

la Villa d'Este
(‘The Fountains of
the Villa d'Este’) was
composed in 1877, and was
published as part of the third
and final Pilgrimage suite, three
years before Liszt's death. UNESCO
World Heritage Site, the Villa d'Este is a
postcard example of the architectural genius
of the Italian Renaissance. Liszt was lucky
enough to be hosted at the Villa by Cardinal
Gustav von Hohenlohe, who was himself a
keen appreciator of European art and cultural
history. Under the Cardinal's ownership, the
gardens, fountains, and buildings of the Villa
d'Este were restored after years of neglect by
Maria Beatrice, wife of Grand Duke Ferdinand
of Habsburg. The Villa is today a place of
great cultural history, and one of the jewels
of Europe. We can only imagine what it would
have been like to witness the cultured Cardinal
playing host to Franz Liszt in the gardens of
this resplendent palace!

Liszt's affair with Marie d'Agoult had run its
course by the end of the Years of Pilgrimage

in 1839. It is to a different Liszt we turn
now, upon his decision to move to Weimar,
some nine years later. In the interim, Liszt
had embarked on a series of highly successful
concert tours. These piano 'recitals' (it was Liszt
who brought the term 'recital' into currency)
cemented his reputation as one of the great
pianists of the nineteenth century. Over
this period, the Grand Duke of Weimar, Carl
Alexander, extended to Liszt several invitations
to join the Weimar Court. The Duke, who
shared Liszt's artistic aspirations, offered him
the position of Kapellmeister, and eventually,
in 1848, Liszt accepted. Weimar attracted Liszt
due to its reputation as a seat of the arts,
and the general quality of its musicianship. It
was in Weimar that Liszt the performer began
to take a back seat to Liszt the composer.
Ultimately, his time in Weimar would be of
mixed success; he eventually left in 1859 for
Rome. Liszt was followed to Weimar by the
second great love of his life, the Princess
Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. Princess
Carolyne had, by inheritance, control over vast
tracts of land in the Ukraine and a reported
30,000 serfs. Another paradoxical moment
for egalitarian Romanticism: Liszt, with an
increasing awareness of Hungarian nationalism,