Faculty Recital

Bruce Vogt, piano

Exuberance of Heart and Bitterness of Heart

The second of three solo recitals commemorating the bicentenary of the birth of Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Pre-concert talk at 7:30 pm

Friday September 23, 2011 at 8:00 pm
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall
MacLaurin Building
Adults: $17.50 / Students & seniors: $13.50
www.finearts.uvic.ca/music/events

Program

Années de Pèlerinage, Deuxième Année: Italie (1858)
   i. Sposalizio
   ii. Il Penseroso
   iii. Canzonetta del Salvator Rosa
   iv. Sonetto 47 del Petrarca
   v. Sonetto 104 del Petrarca
   vi. Sonetto 125 del Petrarca
   vii. Après une Lecture de Dante - Fantasia quasi Sonata

Intermission

DANCES

Paraphrase of Waltz from Gounod's Faust (1861)

Dances Continued: "Hurling a Lance into the Future"

Two Czárdás: Czárdás & Czárdás obstinée (1884)

Three Valses oubliées (1881-5)

Mephisto Waltz No. 4: Bagatelle sans tonalité (1883-85)

POSTLUDE

Elegie: Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth (1880)

“A blown husk that is finished
but the light sings eternal
a pale flare over marshes
where the salt hay whispers to tide’s change.”
(from Canto 115 - Ezra Pound)
**Program Notes**

**Années de pèlerinage**

Liszt's three collections of piano pieces titled *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage) constitute an almost autobiographical evocation of three important periods in the composer's life. The first book, *Italie*, is largely a reflection of nature scenes; most of the pieces were first written in the mid-1830s during Liszt's sojourns in the Swiss countryside, though they were later considerably revised. Here, the natural world becomes his inspiration – lakesides, streams, valleys, mountains. In nature, Liszt finds metaphors for the soul's state. Most of these works are prefaced with literary quotations – from Byron, Schiller, Sénèque. Perhaps the quote from Byron which he used in the original version of *Les Cloches de Genève* best expresses the role of the artist envisaged by Liszt during his early years: “I live not in myself, but I become – portion of that around me…”

**Deuxième année: Italie**

The second (or "Italian") book, which originated in the late 1830s, is the best known of the three collections. Revised for final publication during the 1850s, these pieces represent some of the greatest masterpieces of Liszt's mature style. Strangely, they have rarely been presented as a complete cycle, yet their cyclical nature is apparent both to the ear and the eye.

In 1839, when Liszt was living in Italy with Marie d'Agoult, he wrote about the "hidden relationship that unites works of genius." Michelangelo and Raphael helped me to understand Mozart and Beethoven... perhaps one day Dante will find his musical expression in the Beethoven of the future.” This concern with the relationship among the arts is explored in fascinating ways in this second collection.

Along with Liszt's virtuosic approach to composition, the most common ammunition for his detractors has been his interest in program music. Liszt was certainly aware of the dangers inherent in the use of a program as the inspiration for a composition; he never intended the program to rectify or excuse a loose structure. Instead, his frequent use of a program was a reflection of his intense idealism, his belief in the social responsibility of the artist.

For Liszt, the program was a means of linking the music more strongly to the imagination of the listener, “the medium by which music is made accessible and understandable to the public.” *Spowalizio*, inspired by Raphael's famous depiction of the marriage of the Virgin, is one of Liszt's great programmatic compositions. With its chaste yet passionate impressionistic sonorities, it magically evokes the world of Raphael's canvas.

Il penseroso is sombre and austere, yet in spite of its brevity, it is not a miniature. It suggests a kind of stone fragment from a large imposing sculpture. Liszt headed the score with a quotation from a poem by Michelangelo: "I am thankful to sleep, and more thankful to be made of stone. So long as injustice and shame remain on earth, I count it a blessing not to see or feel; so do not wake me – speak softly!"

When Liszt wrote the *Canzonetta del Salvator Rosa* in 1849, he assumed he was arranging a song by the 17th-century painter of the title. We now know the song is a work by Giovanni Battista Bononcini. But it is the legend of Salvator Rosa – who was also an actor, poet and musician, and perhaps a bandit! – that appealed to Liszt: the artist as vagabond and adventurer whose vicissitudes are translated directly into his art. The song can be translated as follows: "Often I change my place of being, but I shall never change my feelings; the fire of my love will remain the same, and so too will I myself.”

**The Three Sonnets** by Petrarch are found, temporally speaking, in the centre of this collection. Like many of Liszt's works, they exist in several versions. While we cannot be certain whether they originated as songs or as piano pieces, it is likely that the song versions came first. The final version for piano solo appeared in 1858 with the publication of this collection.

Liszt took a variety of approaches to transcription: he could be simple and discreet; or, in the other extreme found in the opera fantasies, he could recast the material with the greatest of freedom. Here, in dealing with his own songs, he felt unconstrained in his approach. The material has been elaborated considerably so that it is difficult to follow the original song, line by line.

Instead there remains what is perhaps a more vivid illustration of the varying moods of Petrarch's Sonnets.

**Sonnet 47**

*Blest be the year, the month, the hour, the day,
The season and the time, the point of space,
And blest the beauteous country and the place*

*Where first of two bright eyes I felt the sway:
Blest the sweet pain of which I was the prey,
When newly doomed love's sovereign law to embrace, And blest the bow and shaft to which I trace*

*The wound that to my inmost breast found way: Blest be the ceaseless accents of my tongue, Unwearied breathing my loved lady's name: Blest my fond wishes, sighs, and tears, and pains: That on all sides acquired to her fair fame; And blest my thoughts! for o'er them all she reigns.*

**Sonnet 104**

*No peace I find, no cause have I to war; I fear and hope, I burn and yet I freeze On earth I lie and in the heavens soar;
I grasp at nothing and the whole world seize. One who imprisons me closes no door; She neither keeps me as her slave, nor frees.
Love slays me not and chains me of yore; He neither lets me live nor grants release. Eyeless I see, tongueless my woe I voice; I long to perish and I call for aid; I fear and hope, I burn and yet I freeze; I grasp at nothing and the whole world seize. One who imprisons me closes no door; She neither keeps me as her slave, nor frees.*

*Where first of two bright eyes I felt the sway:
Blest the sweet pain of which I was the prey, When newly doomed love's sovereign law to embrace, And blest the bow and shaft to which I trace*

*The wound that to my inmost breast found way: Blest be the ceaseless accents of my tongue, Unwearied breathing my loved lady's name: Blest my fond wishes, sighs, and tears, and pains: That on all sides acquired to her fair fame; And blest my thoughts! for o'er them all she reigns.*

**Sonnet 123**

*I saw on earth the mode of angels, And heavenly beauty here beyond compare; The memory of them brings me joy and sorrow, For here I see but a dream, a vapour, a shade. I saw those lovely eyes weeping Which roused the sun's envy a thousand times, And sighing, I heard words spoken Which moved mountains and halfted streams. Love, Reason, Valour, Compassion and Pain Weeping made up the loveliest concert That one could hear on earth. The heavens lightened to the harmony; Not a leaf trembled on its bough For so much sweetness filled the air.*

**Après une lecture de Dante – Fantasia quasi Sonata** is the last and crowning work of the *Italie* collection. The main title refers to a poem of the same name by Victor Hugo. But the reference to Hugo's poem was a later addition. Liszt's composition was, in fact, inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a work he had known since the early 1830s. The first sketch of this composition, titled *Fragment danteaque*, dates from 1839.
At the beginning of Dante’s great epic, the poet finds himself at the midpoint of his life in a dark wood, having lost “the path that does not stray” while pursuing worldly success. His subsequent journeys make redemption possible. This must have had enormous resonance for Liszt, who, at the time he was composing this work, was preparing to abandon his career as a concert virtuoso – a career he had come to despise – in order to establish a new cultural centre at Weimar. The many allusions to Dante’s Inferno give this composition a unique and compelling atmosphere. It is also one of Liszt’s most original and cogent large-scale forms.

After A Reading of Dante (Victor Hugo)

When the poet paints hell, he paints his own life.
His life, a fleeing shadow pursued by spectres;
A mysterious forest where his terrified feet
Wander, stumbling astray from the well-worn paths;
A dark journey, obstructed by strange encounters;
A spiral with vague boundaries and enormous depths,
Whose hideous circles go forever onward
Into a gloom where there moves the vague and living hell!
This stair is lost in the obscure mist;
At the base of each step a wretched figure sits,
And one sees pass by with a slight sound
White teeth grinding in the dark night.
One sees visions, dreams, illusions there;
The eyes that sorrow turns to bitter tears;
Love, as a couple embracing, sad and still ardent,
Who pass in a whirlwind with a wound in their sides;
In one corner, the impious sisters, Vengeance and Hunger,
Crouch side by side over a skull they have gnawed;
Then pale Want, with her impoverished smile;
Ambition, Pride nourished upon itself,
And shameless Lust, and infamous Avarice,
All the leaden cloaks with which the soul can be weighed down,
Farror on, Cowardice, Fear, and Treason
Offering keys for sale and tasting poison;
And then, lower still in the very depths of the gulf,
The grimacing mask of suffering Hatred!
Yes, that is Life, O inspired poet!
And its murky way beset with barriers.
And, so that nothing may be lacking in this narrow path,
You show us forever standing to your right
The genius with the calm brow and radiant eyes,
Virgil unperturbed saying: “Let us go on.”

It is easy to underestimate the expressiveness of even the most frankly virtuosic works of Liszt. The opera fantasies contain some of his most remarkable pianistic innovations; they constantly demonstrate why every subsequent composer for the piano has been greatly indebted to Liszt. The opera fantasy is a genre that was extremely popular with the numerous piano virtuosi and their audiences towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Most of these fantasies were simply pot-pourris of melodies crudely strung together and decorated with impressive but too often empty embellishments. Liszt alone recognized the expressive possibilities of the form: the re-creation, indeed intensified recollection – of the stage work that inspired it. The Waltz from Gounod’s Faust is, on the surface, a lighter and less ambitious work than some of his other fantasies. And yet the glee with which the composer transforms the waltz into something truly Mephistophelian is quintessentially Lisztian. The rapture of the middle section – an arrangement of the duet “O nuit d’amour” – is soon obliterated with a cynically hard-edged return of the waltz theme: one can hear the mocking laughter of the Devil as the lovers gradually awaken to their daytime reality.

Liszt’s last years were spent teaching and composing. He did nothing to make his compositions known and even discouraged his students from playing them.

“Yet there still remain several things for me to say, irrespective as to whether they may be quickly understood or recognized. Sometime when I am no longer of this earth, the rest will find itself. I can calmly await the event while I go on working, and meanwhile compositely expiate my virtuoso reputation with the disapproval my compositions have excited.”

But it was not until the enthusiastic endorsement of Bartók and Busoni that these late works were recognized for what they are – a most astounding anticipation of major new paths which music was to follow. In their radical simplicity, obsessive rhythms and strange harmonies, they take the listener to the very brink of tonality.

The Two Czárdás were written in 1884 and published two years later. The Czárdás is a traditional Hungarian folk dance, popular with the Roma, which originated as an 18th-century recruiting dance. Liszt ignored the traditional slow/fast structure and instead focused on the dance’s whirling, repetitive rhythm patterns to create something primitive, and disturbingly obsessive.

Liszt wrote three Valses oublieés, or “forgotten waltzes,” between 1881 and 1885; a fourth was left almost completed. They are very different in character, but share a kind of other-worldly strangeness. The first was made familiar by Horowitz, and later Richter, and is a staple of the repertoire. The second – with its alternation of ironic seductive and giddy chromatic episodes – is less known. The most “forgotten” of all is the third, but it is also the most visionary, another of Liszt’s explorations of the mysteries of eternity.

The publishing history of the Fourth Mephisto Waltz: Bagatelle sans tonalité demonstrates both the incomprehension with which these works were received and the composer’s listless indifference to their fate. The work was written sometime between 1885 and 1885 but remained unknown until 1956 when it was finally published in Budapest.

Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth originated as a song composed in 1845. Nonnenwerth is an island on the Rhine which had a ruined monastery and a chapel which Liszt used as a retreat during the summers of the early 1840s. The poem refers to love abandoned, with the monastery (Die Zelle) a symbol of loss and death. Liszt subsequently wrote four versions for piano, and the metamorphosis over the years is extreme. In this last version, written in 1880, little is left of love abandoned; instead, there remains a sense of profound resignation with echoes of ghostly chanting and distant bells from the long-deserted monastery.

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