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# Liszt

## TWELVE SYMPHONIC POEMS

Leslie Howard  
Mattia Ometto  
*2 pianos*



## Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

### Twelve Symphonic Poems

In Liszt's Own Versions for two Pianofortes

CD1	72'36	CD3	77'25
1 Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.1</i> ), S635	29'46	1 Hungaria ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.9</i> ), S643	21'21
2 Tasso – Lamento e Trionfo ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.2</i> ), S636	17'39	2 Hamlet ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.10</i> ), S644	13'34
3 Les préludes ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.3</i> ), S637	14'39	3 Hunnenschlacht ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.11</i> ), S645	15'04
4 Orpheus ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.4</i> ), S638	10'13	4 Die Ideale ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.12</i> ), S646	27'09
CD2	72'09		
1 Prometheus ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.5</i> ), S639	12'27		
2 Mazeppa ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.6</i> ), S640	16'26		
3 Festklänge ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.7</i> ), S641	18'56		
4 Héroïde-funèbre ( <i>Symphonic Poem No.8</i> ), S642	24'03	Leslie Howard and Mattia Ometto 2 pianos	

Liszt's pioneering series of twelve symphonic poems came to fruition during his time as Kapellmeister at the court of the Duke of Weimar in the 1850s, although the gestation of many of the pieces begins somewhat earlier. Liszt did not conceive the final order of the works until all the pieces were ready for publication, but it is clear that he thought of all twelve works as a gigantic cycle. He issued them in versions for orchestra, for two pianos, and for piano duet. [A later version for solo piano was prepared by a number of Liszt's students, under varying degrees of scrutiny, revision and alteration by the composer.] Of course, Liszt was not the first composer to write programme-music, but his decision to produce this set of symphonic works, generally related to established forms, and usually under the inspiration of extra-musical works of art, spawned a vast literature by many imitators and successors well into the twentieth century. Their influence upon composers as diverse as Wagner and Tchaikovsky is plain to see and hear.

The two-piano versions of these pieces are no mere transcriptions: Liszt allows quite considerable variance from the orchestral scores in order to make real duos, occasionally even adding some bars (as in Hungaria), omitting bars – especially of untuned percussion (as in Ce qu'on entend), or transforming the material with new harmonies instead of untuned percussion (as in Heroïde funèbre). As with his monumental *partitions de piano* of the Beethoven Symphonies, he often makes an informed trade of the letter of the score for the spirit of it, and happily gets all the closer to the musical substance.

**Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne** (What is heard on the mountain) takes its title from the eponymous poem by Victor Hugo. Although the piece echoes the poem in a general sense, the musical narrative is much freer, and also incorporates new elements such as the beautiful religious processional choral. This theme, which occurs in the middle of the work and reappears at the end, takes little part in the rest of the musical

argument, where Liszt introduces a great many motifs which are combined in ever-changing patterns and with elaborate care. So symphonic is the thought behind this grand music that Liszt often referred to the piece as his **Berg-Symphonie** (Mountain Symphony). Along with **Die Ideale**, it is the largest of the symphonic poems.

Like many of these pieces, the first draft of **Tasso** was originally intended as an orchestral overture to a play, in this case Goethe's **Torquato Tasso**. The principal theme derives from a gondolier's song that Liszt heard in Italy (sung to words by Tasso), and that he incorporated into a noble piano piece (in the first version of **Venezia e Napoli**). By the time that the piece had been much rewritten and extended – when Liszt himself noted that he had been thinking more of Byron's account of Tasso's 'lamento e trionfo' – the piece had become a truly splendid journey from darkness into light, a marvel of transformations of the theme.

**Les préludes** has long been the public's favourite piece of the set. The work was originally sketched as an introduction to a large-scale choral-orchestral work: *Les quatre Éléments*, to a poem by Autran. When the music was reconstructed for the symphonic poem, Liszt allied it to Lamartine's poem *Les Préludes*, and it is clear that the programmatic function of the title – along with the proem: "What is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown song of which the first note is sounded by death?... " – is an afterthought to encourage the listener to attach extra-musical philosophy to abstract musical ideas, but yet ties in well with the spirit of Autran's poems. Despite the comparative post-war decline in the work's fortunes – aggravated by Hitler's enthusiasm for it – *Les Préludes* remains a good introduction to the world of Liszt's orchestral music, with its neatly defined structure and attractive melodic ideas, most of which derive from the opening phrase.

**Orpheus** is a real connoisseur's piece, and shows Liszt at his most delicate, as well as at his most harmonically inventive. Once again, it is a piece first conceived as an overture to Gluck's **Orfeo** (Liszt also wrote a short valedictory piece on the same theme to be played after the opera – extraordinary notion to put an 18th century work into a Romantic frame!), and it remains one of Liszt's finest creations. It was a great favourite of Sir Thomas Beecham, who recorded it twice.

**Prometheus** is simply a marvel of symphonic construction: a sonata movement full of rigour, and commendably concise in its utterance. It began life as an overture to Herder's play **Der entfesselte Prometheus** (Prometheus in chains), and subsequently was used as an introduction to Liszt's **Prometheus Choruses** (also written to be given with Herder's play, but later presented as an independent work with spoken links). The astounding opening theme of this work, with its trenchant rhythm, introduces a recitative-like theme which is transformed into the first subject proper. The second, winsome theme, marked by harmonies that shift by thirds, takes us to the development, and one of Liszt's most skilful pieces of fugal writing – his contrapuntal expertise having been part of his technical armoury since his studies as a lad with Antoine Reicha.

**Mazeppa**, known to Liszt through both Hugo and Byron, led him to a musical homage, first in an extended version of one of his *Grandes Études*, and later reworked in the fourth of the *Études d'exécution transcendante*. For the symphonic poem, he decided that the rather abrupt coda of the piano piece would not sufficiently convey the fate of Mazeppa who, having been tied to a wild stallion, finally falls as if dead, but rises to become a great leader of men. Turning to music from his previously-composed **Marche héroïque** – itself a reworking of his **Arbeiterchor** (Workers' chorus), Liszt fashioned a new and thoroughly uplifting conclusion to the musical story, including a last reminiscence of Mazeppa's principal theme.

Although the first draft of **Festklänge** (Festival sounds) was presented as an overture to Schiller's **Huldigung der Künste** (The homage of the arts), it is really a very elaborate wedding celebratory piece, and its autobiographical nature is undisputed: whilst the marriage of Liszt to the Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein was fated never to take place, her influence on his creative life during his years at Weimar was decisive, and all twelve of these symphonic poems are dedicated to her. There are many references to themes of both Polish and Hungarian character in homage to the ethnic origins of the couple. It remains surprising that this grand and grandiose work should not appear more often as a curtain raiser at orchestral concerts. (A later revision of the orchestral piece with a great deal more Polish rhythm and atmosphere is still awaiting its orchestral première at the time of writing; a piano solo arrangement of this version was made by Ludwig Stark in collaboration with Liszt and recorded by the present writer in 1998. The two-piano score follows the original orchestral version.)

**Heroïde funèbre** is a mighty funeral ode and, although it was planned as the first movement of a five-part symphony, and harks back to the sketches from 1830 of an unfulfilled **Symphonie révolutionnaire**, it is strongly connected to the events of October 1849 – similarly enshrined in music by Liszt in the same year, and in the same key – F minor – in his mighty piano piece *Funérailles*. Both works are *déplorations* of the execution of the Hungarian leaders of the failed uprising against the Hapsburgs. The piece is an extended funeral march, twice punctuated by solemn references to the chorus of **La marseillaise**, and the intense level of grief cannot be dispelled, not even by the breathtaking beauty of the lyrical second theme, whose arrival on the scene is much delayed. There is sheer despair in the crumbling harmonies of the coda. For its antithesis we must look to the following work:

**Hungaria** is a very broad canvas of Hungarian life and music, and represents Liszt's largest single movement in homage to his national roots. The principal thematic material all springs from an earlier piano piece (later orchestrated): **Heroischer Marsch im ungarischen Styl**. That piece is in a simple sonata form; the later work is a vast rhapsody, still with elements of the sonata, but with much added fantasy and collateral thinking, culminating in a fine frenzy on a Hungarian melody also familiar from Brahms and Glazunov. Liszt has made a concerted effort here to produce a real virtuoso piece for two pianos.

**Hamlet** is the most noble of the symphonic poems. It is also the most forward-looking, musically. At some pains to delineate the character of the Danish prince, including the depiction of Ophelia as if through Hamlet's eyes, Liszt condenses much into little, and gives us some idea of the direction his later music would take. It was the last of the series to be completed, and the only one that was not performed in Weimar in the 1850s. The piece deserves comparison with Liszt's orchestral masterpiece, the **Faust Symphony**. It had a broader lease of life for a time as a very successful ballet created by Frederick Ashton for Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev. (For a time Liszt thought of the work as a possible overture to a production of Shakespeare's play, but it was never so utilised.)

**Hunnenschlacht** is the only one of the twelve symphonic poems inspired by a painting or, to be precise, a fresco by Wilhelm von Kaulbach. The gruesome battle this depicts is treated by Liszt in the stormiest way as far as the pagan warriors are concerned, whereas the Christians who ultimately triumphed are essentially airbrushed into chaste purity, represented by the plainchant **Pange lingua gloriosi**. Their victory is underlined by Liszt's inclusion of the organ in the orchestral score – the only time this instrument appears in the symphonic poems. (The very much later independent symphonic poem **Von die Wiege bis zum Grabe** (From the cradle to the

grave) of 1883 is also inspired by a painting, in this case by Mihály Zichy. Liszt did not arrange this piece for two pianos).

**Die Ideale** is cast as a sort of character-portrait of the composer: Schiller's eponymous poem is frequently cited in short quotations throughout the score, in an order that differs from Schiller, but which underlines Liszt musical structure, representing the development both of idea and ideal, and the young artist's aspirations turning to a reflection of life's experience and understanding. The familiar refrain of art conquering all comes to its apotheosis in the final moments, but it is the haunting joy of discovery shown when that theme first appears that is the most memorable passage in the work, and one which Liszt happily used again in his excellent **Künstlerfestzug**.

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*Mattia Ometto and Leslie Howard*

### **Mattia Ometto**

"Mattia Ometto is a pianist with a marvelous sensitivity, one of those artists whose responsibility is to make audiences perceive what real talent is" (Aldo Ciccolini, pianist – Paris)

The winner of a vast array of national and international prize both in Europe and United States, Mattia Ometto is quickly establishing himself as an artist whose gifts hark back to the Golden Age of classical piano performance, gift that reflect

an artistry that is formed in equal parts by the inspiration derived by his Venetian background, and the influence of his studies in Paris with the legendary Aldo Ciccolini, and in Palm Springs with the American virtuoso Earl Wild.

Mr. Ometto performs regularly in Europe and United States. Following his recital debut in Paris at the Théâtre du Rond Point des Champs Elysées and in New York City at Carnegie Hall, he appeared both in recital and as soloist with orchestra in New York (Carnegie Hall, Bargemusic), New Jersey, Des Moines (Sheslow Auditorium), Boston (Rivera Hall), Venice (Gran Teatro la Fenice), Berlin, and also in Los Angeles with the Lyric Symphony orchestra, in Ankara (Turkey) with Academic Baskent Orchestra, in Vidin (Bulgaria) with the Vidin State Philharmonic Orchestra, just to name a few.

Broadcast of Mr Ometto's performances and interviews have been heard on numerous radio stations, such as BBC London, Kulturradio Berlin, Rai International, Radiotre, Raitrade, Radio della Svizzera Italiana, Radioclassica, Radio Romania, Iowa State Radio, Kanal B Ankara, WGBH Boston.

His discography comprises the critically acclaimed recordings of the complete set of Melodies by César Franck and Henri Duparc (Brilliant Classics) and the World Premiere Recording of the complete music for two pianos and piano four-hands by Reynaldo Hahn recorded with the legendary pianist and Liszt scholar Leslie Howard (Melba Recordings). Mattia Ometto and Leslie Howard are currently working on the recording of the Complete Music for two pianos by Franz Liszt (9CDs)

Born in Padua in 1982, Mattia Ometto graduated summa cum laude from the Venice Conservatory of music where he studied with Anna Barutti. Very active also as a teacher he gives master classes as a visiting artist at Drake University in Des Moines (Iowa), Redlands University, International Institute for Conductors in Vidin (Bulgaria) and Accademia della Musica in Padua.

Mattia Ometto is professor at the “J. Tomadini” Conservatory in Udine and at the “C. Pollini” Conservatory in Padua.

### **Leslie Howard**

Annual re-engagements on 5 continents and a 130-CD discography attest to the burgeoning popularity of Leslie Howard, established worldwide as a concert pianist, composer, conductor, chamber musician and scholar. A citizen both of Britain and Australia - born in Melbourne but resident in London since 1972 - Dr. Howard has earned an extraordinary claim to immortality, having accomplished a feat unequalled by any solo artist in recording history - his 97-CD survey (for Hyperion) of the complete piano music of Franz Liszt. Accomplished within 14 years, it encompasses 300+ world premieres, including works prepared by Dr. Howard from Liszt's still unpublished manuscripts, and works unheard since Liszt's lifetime. This monumental project merited Dr. Howard's entry into the Guinness Book of World Records, 6 Grands Prix du Disque and - all presented to him by the President of Hungary - the Medal of St. Stephen, the Pro Cultura Hungarica award, and a mounted bronze cast of Liszt's hand. At an internationally telecast ceremony from Buckingham Palace, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II bestowed on Dr. Howard “Member in the Order of Australia” for his “service to the arts as piano soloist, composer, musicologist and mentor to young musicians.” Highlights of Dr. Howard's 2004-2005 concert season included an extensive Asian tour, with recitals and master classes throughout China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. His triumphant return to America included his highly anticipated recital at the 2005 International Keyboard Institute & Festival in Manhattan, for which he received accolades from the New York Times. Dr. Howard also realised his dream to conduct Liszt's monumental Oratorio Christus in a rare and much-praised revival in Leicester.

Leslie Howard has appeared internationally with many of the world's finest orchestras, including the London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, English Northern Philharmonia, RTE National Symphony of Dublin, Hanover Band, Utah Symphony, Utah Philharmonic, Maryland Symphony, Mexico Philharmonic, Orchestra della Scala,

RAI Toscana, San Remo Symphony, Orchestre de Cannes, Budapest Piharmonic, Budapest Symphony, the orchestras of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Queensland and Tasmania in Australia, and the orchestras of Pretoria, Cape Town and Zimbabwe in Africa. He has been soloist with such renowned conductors as Claudio Abbado, Adam Fischer, Roy Goodman, James Judd, Joseph Silverstein, Barry Tuckwell, Sir Charles Groves, Vernon Handley, Jerzy Maksymiuk, Elyakum Shapirra, Jansug Kakhidze, Arthur Fiedler, Fritz Rieger, Alexander Lazarev, Hiroyuki Iwaki, and Sir Charles Mackerras

Dr. Howard's performances of chamber music and lieder include collaborations with some of the greatest artists of our time, including the Amadeus, Britten and Endellion String Quartets, Salvatore Accardo, Augustin Dumay, Erick Friedman, Ani Kavafian, Benny Goodman, Charles Neidich, Steven Isserlis, Nathaniel Rosen, Torlief Thedeen, Geoffrey Parsons, Sir Thomas Allen, Yvonne Kenny and Dame Felicity Lott. He has been a featured artist at many international music festivals, including the American festivals of Santa Fe, Newport, La Jolla, Palm Beach and Seattle, and at such European festivals as Brescia-Bergamo, Como, Edinburgh, Schleswig-Holstein, Bath, Camden, Cheltenham, Warwick and Wexford.

Dr. Howard's discography includes many important world premiere recordings, such as the four piano sonatas of Anton Rubinstein, the 2nd and 3rd piano sonatas of Tchaikovsky, a 2-disc survey of Glazunov's piano music, a 3-disc collection of Percy Grainger's piano works and a 2-disc box with Reynaldo Hahn's complete works for two pianos and piano duet (with Mattia Ometto). Also notable is the highly acclaimed disc entitled "Rare Piano Encores", a Stravinsky disc with Abbado and the London Symphony, a disc of Scandinavian piano sonatas (Sibelius, Gade, Palmgren & Grieg), and the Granados Goyescas. Most prominent amongst his 97-CD Liszt survey is the first complete recording of all 17 works for piano and orchestra, including Dr. Howard's reconstructions of the 3rd Piano Concerto, De Profundis, and Concerto pathétique. Dr. Howard's recordings appear on the Hyperion, Deutsche

Grammophon, EMI Classics, Nimbus, Cala, Pearl, ABC Eloquence, Musical Heritage Society and Merlin labels

As a composer, Dr. Howard's works include an opera Hreidar the Fool, a ballet Fruits of the Earth, and numerous orchestral, choral and solo compositions. As an arranger, he has written completions for unfinished or unrealised works of Bach, Mozart, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Scriabin and Shostakovich. In 2003, Boosey & Hawkes published Dr. Howard's "New Corrected Edition" for the 2-piano score of Rachmaninoff's 4th Piano Concerto (in collaboration with Robert Threlfall). He has also edited several volumes of Liszt Society Publications for Hardie Press and Editio Musica Budapest. With Michael Short, he has published Ferenc Liszt-a List of his Musical Works (Rugginenti, 2004) and he has two books in progress: Ferenc Liszt – A Thematic Catalogue and The Music of Liszt.



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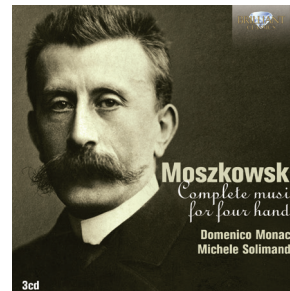
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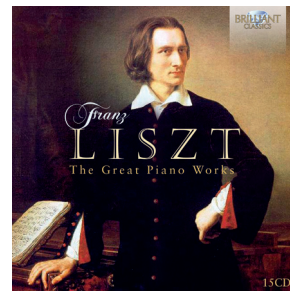
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