



MARIA
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LISZT

Sonata in B minor · Petrarch Sonnets
Variations on Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen

Malachite

FERENC LISZT

(1811–1886)

1. **Variations on a Theme by Bach 'Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen'** S.180 (17.09)
dedicated to Anton Rubinstein

Variationen über ein Motiv aus der Kantate 'Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen', und dem 'Crucifixus', der h-Moll Messe von J. S. Bach (Anton Rubinstein in verehrungsvoller Freundschaft gewidmet)

Three Petrarch Sonnets from The Years of Pilgrimage, second year: Italy, S.161

Tre sonetti del Petrarca from *Années de pèlerinage, deuxième année: Italie*

2. **Sonetto 47 del Petrarca 'Benedetto sia il giorno'** (7.14)
3. **Sonetto 104 del Petrarca 'Pace non trovo'** (7.24)
4. **Sonetto 123 del Petrarca 'I' vidi in terra angelici costumi'** (8.43)
5. **Sonata in B minor** S.178 (34.06)

Klaviersonate h-moll

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RARELY HAS A MUSICIAN presented quite so many paradoxes to the audience and performer as Ferenc Liszt (1811–1886). As a pianist, Liszt pushed the boundaries of his instrument further than anyone else had ever dared. Although he gave the piano a voice to rival that of the symphonic orchestra, Liszt's works remain unimaginable on anything but the piano. In seeking to define the enigmatic spiritual existence of art, which requires our awareness of all practical considerations to fall by the wayside, his writing nevertheless challenges our understanding of what is humanly possible on a very physical level.

Fast, agile fingers and sharp reflexes have never been enough to unlock the Romantic vision of Liszt's works. In fact a staunch opponent of empty technical displays, with his retirement from the concert platform in 1847 at the age of just thirty-six, Liszt went about creating a music for a new kind of virtuoso—music that was so entirely derived from the 'soul' of the piano, yet had no capacity to 'play itself' in any way. Virtuosity, he claimed, was but a way of expanding the language of musical expression to enable the interpreter '... to create as the composer himself created [and] breathe life into the lethargic body [...] He changes the earthly form into a living being, penetrating it with the spark which Prometheus snatched from Jupiter's flesh.'

Liszt was a genius of interpretation. The complexities of his own nature allowed him to weave the most extravagant and profound emotional narratives into his compositions for his instrument: 'My piano [...] is my reflection, my language, my life! It treasures the memories of what inspired my soul in

the days of my passionate youth; I entrust it with my plans, my dreams, my grief and joy.'

How we use, or misuse, his virtuosic language as interpreters ultimately presents a faithful and unforgiving reflection of ourselves. Liszt forewarned that his biography, inscribed through his hundreds of works for the piano, was 'more to be invented than to be written after the fact'—yet this act of trust demands the utmost sympathy and seriousness from the interpreter. As already indicated by Alfred Brendel in 1961, in performing Liszt's music it is a fine line between 'the ridiculous and the sublime'—the balance shared by both pianist and '(unprejudiced) listener'.

More openly than any other composer, Liszt empowers the interpreter by requesting the full flight of his imagination. With this however, he also exposes him. In the quest entrusted to us to navigate Liszt's complex nature in order to awaken his works from within, Liszt exists only through what we are willing, or able, to make him.

A DEVOUT CATHOLIC, Liszt turned to the Lutheran tradition through J. S. Bach to give voice to his grief over his twenty-year-old son's untimely death in 1859 with a short Prelude based on the bass line from the cantata *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen sind der Christen Tränenbrot* (*Weeping, Lamentation, Worry and Despair are the Christian's Bread of Tears*, BWV 12)—the same bass line as the Crucifixus of the B minor Mass. The death of his daughter Blandine in 1862, aged twenty-six, moved him to rework the Prelude into an expansive set of original variations. These Variations are one of his most poignant and austere reflections on human suffering. Yet, always

looking to art for spiritual salvation, Liszt concludes the work, like Bach, with the serene and radiant chorale *Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan* (*What God does is done well*).

In *Années de pèlerinage*, Liszt chose to share some of the most defining ideas and impressions from his travels between 1835 to 1883. Far from these works resembling the picture-postcards of a tourist, the concept of Liszt's pilgrimages is borrowed from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's profound novel of self-realization, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. The allure of the psychological realism of Francesco Petrarca's poetry, dedicated to the mysterious Laura (the laurel, which for the poet symbolized the Christian victory of faith) prompted Liszt to engage with the ideas of one of the earliest humanists through his own *Tre sonetti del Petrarca*.

Of all Liszt's works, however, the most monumental artistic autobiography is surely his Sonata in B minor. Work on the Sonata started as early as 1849 but, as revealed in the fastidiously corrected manuscript, it was an arduous journey which according to the inscription, ended on 2 February 1853. Following such an endeavour, the publication of the work was delayed until 1854 and the Sonata's first public performance took place only on 27 January 1857, performed by Hans von Bülow. Lacking any programmatic clues, for generations the Sonata has defied any attempt to convey its philosophical enigma in words. We are left by Liszt to accept the supreme power of music: 'Every artist of genius breathes into his work an unexpressed idea which speaks to our feelings even before it can be defined.'

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MARIA RAZUMOVSKAYA received her pianistic training in the class of Rustem Hayroudinoff at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Subsequently, she undertook further studies with Professor Dmitri Alexeev as an AHRC and RCM scholar at the Royal College of Music. Razumovskaya combines her international performance activities with writing; her doctorate (London: RCM, 2014) exploring the artistry of the pianist-pedagogue Heinrich Neuhaus.

