

*A Programme Commemorating the
Centenary of the death of Franz Liszt, 1811-1886*

NEIL VAN ALLEN, PIANO

Chanson d'Arcadelt (Ave Maria)

Jacob Arcadelt
(c1514-c1570)
trans. by Liszt

Années de Pèlerinage (Suisse)

Franz Liszt

*Au lac de Wallenstadt
Pastorale
Au bord d'une source
Eglogue*

Spinning Song from *The Flying Dutchman*

Richard Wagner
(1813-1883)
trans. by Liszt

Danse Macabre

Camille Saint-Seans
(1835-1921)
trans. by Liszt

INTERMISSION

Années de Pèlerinage (Italie)

Franz Liszt

Sonetti del Petrarca, nos. 47, 103

Totentanz

Franz Liszt

Variations on Dies Irae

PROGRAMME NOTES

No single adjective can be used to define Liszt the Composer or the man or his compositions. The works in this programme include the saintly, the diabolical, the heroic, the sentimental, the religious, the bucolic, the sophisticated to mention but a few. Perhaps one adjective which does not spring readily to mind concerning Liszt is innocent.

As well as in his own compositions, Liszt put his vast musical resources to the service of other composers of all periods in his capacity as a transcriber and arranger of their works.

The first piece - Arcadelt's *Ave Maria* - is a simple and direct arrangement of a three part chanson from the 15th century. Here there are no fireworks or grand gestures.

In the pieces selected from the *Swiss Years of Pilgrimage* one is constantly aware of the pastoral nature of this suite. The ideas in these pieces are essentially visual and representative of scenic, even folk-like impressions. In fact, the term "impressionistic" seems appropriate if somewhat ahead of its time.

The Spinning Song from the *Flying Dutchman* is a faithful transcription in both style and effect from this early opera by Wagner.

Danse Macabre speaks for itself from the opening bell striking midnight, the off-key tuning up of the satanic fiddle, the opening graves and dancing skeletons, the angelic voice of benediction and the return of the dead to their graves through to the echoing cock-crow at the end. In this music Liszt surpassed himself in a faithful transcription of the spirit of the music with a few discreet canonic and contrapuntal comments in the course of it and some unusual pianistic percussive effects.

The Italian book of the *Years of Pilgrimage* differs considerably from the Swiss book in that its source of inspiration was predominantly literary.

These two (of three) *Petrarch Sonnets* fall nicely into two categories - Liszt composed them as songs and then arranged them (with considerable textual freedom!) as piano pieces.

As for the *Totentanz*, it stands as one of the great daemonic compositions of any period. The theme for these variations is the well-known 13th-century plainsong melody *Dies Irae*, a theme which has since served many composers. The text of the Requiem sequence is by the 13th-century monk Thomas of Celano and the music as well has been attributed to him (but without much good reason).

Again, in *Totentanz* Liszt appears in the dual roles of composer and arranger. The piece is best known in its version for piano and orchestra. There is, however, more to it than that. First written for piano solo, it was then arranged for two pianos, then orchestrated and then again transcribed for solo piano. The first solo version exists in manuscript only. The second solo version (the one played here) was published for the only time in the 1860s. There is some reason to believe that Liszt had forgotten about the first solo version but this is hard to credit. There are certainly vast differences between the two but, of course, the orchestral version opened up a whole new area of sounds and textures.

Neil van Allen's studies took him from Dalhousie University to Toronto where he studied with the great piano teacher Alberto Guerrero, thence to England and France to work with Sydney Harrison, Yvonne Lefebure, and Nadia Boulanger.

In 1961 he was awarded the Commonwealth medal for performance, an award inaugurated by the late Sir Arnold Bax when he was "Master of the Queen's Music", and the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians in London. In 1963 he was appointed Professor at the Guildhall School of Music (London) where he stayed until 1977. In 1971 that institution recognized his services and talent by making him a Fellow of the Guildhall School of Music -- a high honour limited to 100 lifetime members. In September 1977 he was appointed Associate Professor in the Music Department of Memorial University of Newfoundland.

He has performed extensively as recitalist and as soloist with orchestra in both Europe and North America, and has given many broadcasts for both C.B.C. and B.B.C. First performances include works by Poulenc, Weinzwieg, Whittenberg, Skalkottas, Dello-Joio, Hovhaness, Malcolm Arnold, Josephs, Stanford, the last two composers having dedicated piano sonatas to Mr. van Allen.