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**Tuesday, March 21, 2023
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PIANO



PROGRAM

FEDERICO MOMPOU (1893-1987)

Cants màgics (1917-19)

Energic

Obscur

Profond—lent

Misteriós

Calma

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Estampes (1903)

I. *Pagodes*

II. *La soirée dans Grenade*

III. *Jardins sous la pluie*

ALEXANDER Scriabin (1871-1915)

Sonata no. 5, op. 53 (1907)

INTERMISSION

SIR STEPHEN HOUGH

Partita (2019)

I. *Overture*

II. *Capriccio*

III. *Cancion y Danza I*

IV. *Cancion y Danza II*

V. *Toccata*

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

Selections from *Années de pèlerinage,*

Deuxième année (Italie) (1838-58)

Sonetto 47 del Petrarca

Sonetto 104 del Petrarca

Sonetto 123 del Petrarca

Après une lecture du Dante, fantasia quasi sonata



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

FEDERICO MOMPOU, *Cants màgics*

“The music of Federico Mompou is the music of evaporation.”¹

~ Stephen Hough

The piano miniatures of Catalan composer Federico Mompou are exquisite morsels, each an amuse-bouche promising an entrée that never arrives. It is not that there is no development of material, or that there is not a musical logic to what is heard; rather some of the pieces tend to be sequences of glimpses of material—a series of chords, snatches of a melody, repeated figuration—rotated and seen from a few vantages, perhaps, before vanishing. The frequent “simplicity” of the music belies its capacity for complex psychological responses. Depending on how one attends to the music as a listener, the experience can be intensely meditative, microcosmically dramatic, or simply a brief escape.

Cants màgics is not Mompou’s first work, but it is the first he published. Consisting of five movements, each “magical song” is an incantation in its own rite. In a sense, the prominent fifths and tritones of the opening chords signal the intervallic focus of the entire recital, as each work features one or both in intriguing ways, especially when heard across the landscape of the program.² After the initial vigorous chords, their energy dissipates, mimicking the sonic trajectory of a bell strike. In Philip Clark’s notes for Stephen Hough’s recent recording of Mompou’s *Música callada*, he emphasized the fact that the family of Mompou’s mother owned a bell foundry, and that “the resonances of Mompou’s so-called ‘metallic chord’ give the music an internal intelligent order.” This sound “gave his music its chromosomal identity; when the chord isn’t being explicitly referenced, the music is explaining its absence.”³

I will not give a detailed description of each movement here, as I do not want to spoil their surprises. As Hough puts it, “...the notes are too simple and the soul too complex for conventional analysis.”⁴ However, I will say a few things about how Mompou conveyed his ideas to the performer. Mompou’s written music is often distinguished by an infrequent use of barlines. While this lessens the role

1 Hough, Stephen, liner notes to *Piano music by Federico Mompou*, Stephen Hough, piano (Hyperion, 1997), 4.

2 While fifths (and their inverted friends the fourths) are a fundamental part of any tonal work, I mean here the isolated fifth, multiple stacked fifths, or other prominent melodic or otherwise unique usages of the interval beyond what is found in your average root-position piano chord bounded by an octave.

3 Clark, Philip, liner notes to *Música callada*, Stephen Hough, piano (Hyperion, 2023), 5-6. The wonderful notion of Mompou growing up with experiences in a bell factory can color the way one listens to the music—it offers one explanation for the origin of chordal complexity underlying simple melodic content in his music.

4 Hough, *Piano music by Federico Mompou*, 6.

of metrical emphases, Mompou nevertheless will often will give conventional durational relationships between events. For instance, the first chord of *Energic* is given as a quarter note, and the second as a half note. While there is wiggle room in performance, it is hard not to hear this relationship as 1 to 2, in which case one might hear the section in three, with the opening chord as either the starting point of a measure or a pickup. At times one encounters a double bar at tempo changes, or finds barlines in only one of the systems (yet at the same time the music is vertically synchronous across the staves, so a barline on one implicates the others). It may be that Mompou could have chosen to notate his music conventionally, but he attained a kind of freedom by presenting his ideas in this context, and the pianist is given license to evoke a sense of timelessness while playing. Sometimes music is repeated literally, sometimes with slight variants. Occasionally the instructions are puzzling but apt, like the section of *Misteriós* labeled *viu, sens ordre* (alive, without order (or perhaps hierarchy)).

Although there are precedents and later incarnations of music with similarities to it, there is something uniquely rewarding about Mompou's music for listener and performer alike. The Library of Congress has significant holdings of Mompou's holograph music manuscripts in its Moldenhauer archive, including a number of the *Canço i dansa* pieces, *La música callada, la soledad sonora*, some songs and other works.



CLAUDE DEBUSSY, *Estampes*

“It is unnecessary for music to make people think...
it would be enough if it made them listen.”

~ Claude Debussy to Paul Dukas, 1901⁵

We have the benefit, 120 years on, of looking back at the music of Claude Debussy and situating it within a framework that takes into account “oeuvre-thing” he composed. While there were undoubtedly significant works that had been written by the time *Estampes* was published in 1903 (works like *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* come to mind), most of Debussy's celebrated piano music was either not in its final state (like the *Suite bergamasque*) or about to emerge from his pen in the years to come. For this reason it is interesting to offer a few thoughts to contextualize both Debussy's debts to other composers and cultures, and *Estampes*' extraordinary contribution to the literature.

First there is the title of the set, *Estampes*; in fin-de-siècle France the world of the “print,” and in particular the Japanese woodblock print,⁶ would have been

5 As quoted in Roberts, Paul, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Hong Kong: Amadeus Press, 1996, paperback ed. 2001), 60.

6 Paul Roberts explores the nature of the print and Debussy's relationship to it conceptually in his chapter “Three Japanese Prints: *Estampes*” (Roberts, 45-70).

an immediately comprehended reference. But the question of how Debussy considered his pieces to be “prints” becomes complicated right away, in part due to the conflation of cultural references; the first piece in the set refers to the pagoda, a structure found across East and Southeast Asia, while overtly referencing the sound of Indonesian gamelan traditions. As Stephen Walsh put it, “To compare [*Estampes*] to Japanese prints as such would clearly be hopelessly laboured... What I think Debussy was trying to do was associate himself with a tendency in the visual arts with which he sympathized and which he felt himself to be in some sense adapting to the medium of sound.”⁷ The complicated world of musical exoticism had developed, for Debussy, from the use of the “arabesque” ornamental references in his works (both in the two standalone *Arabesques* and embedded in other works) to something else entirely, with *Estampes* marking a watershed moment.

In the chapter “Exoticism in a modernist age (1890-1960)” in Ralph Locke’s book *Musical Exoticism*, the author explores three principal types of exoticism that one might find, with Debussy as a pivotal figure in all three.⁸ He describes them as overt exoticism, submerged exoticism and transcultural composing. Locke notes that Debussy “...had listened intently to, and watched, Javanese gamelan and dance performances at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris.”⁹ Eventually Debussy’s experience and remembrance of Javanese gamelan music would reach its clearest expression in *Pagodes*, the first piece of *Estampes*, which might be described seen as an example of both overt exoticism and transcultural composition.¹⁰

Over the years some commentators have dismissed or mischaracterized Debussy’s achievement as being a replication of the gamelan on the piano, but Locke points out that “to transcribe an actual gamelan performance for piano would have been impossible” for a number of reasons, including the issue of tuning systems (pentatonic or heptatonic tunings that may not equate precisely to notes on the piano, or have the same sonic quality generated by similar instruments being slightly “out of tune” with each other).¹¹ It might be said that gamelan characteristics can be spotted in *Pagodes* as significant musical forces, within the context of Debussy’s body of piano writing. In the sense that the metallophones of the gamelan constitute a body of “homogenous” sound like that of the percussive piano, Paul Roberts points to an aspect of Debussy’s translation of the gamelan world to his attention to post-attack sound: “One of the remarkable features of Javanese gamelan music is the way it shows us that percussion is a phenomenon of resonance as much as accentuation.”¹² Additionally there is the layering of registrational effects. Locke identifies “[...] astonishing passage... [that] lays three different half-measure phrases over each other (two at a time) in several different ways and in several different octaves... Often Debussy reflects the

7 Walsh, Stephen, *Debussy: A Painter in Sound* (New York: Vintage Books, 2018), 148.

8 Locke, Ralph P., *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (United States: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 214-275. Of particular relevance is the section entitled “Pagodes: Javanese pentatonicism Trans(culturally)figured.”

9 Locke, 230.

10 Ibid., 214.

11 Ibid., 230-32.

12 Roberts, 157.

standard gamelan habit of making musical lines more active the higher they are in pitch.”¹³

With respect to the title *Pagodes*, Debussy may have swirled the images of pagodas from the Exposition Universelle with gamelan, or simply used two forms of references for transcultural composing. Walsh brings us back to the visual world: “...pagodas are not characteristic of Java, so have no topographical connection with the gamelan. But Debussy may also have had a structural principle in mind, because pagodas are layered towers, and *Pagodes*, too, is composed in layers, both vertical and horizontal.”¹⁴ Debussy’s use of pentatonicism within a tonal context is not without precedent, but the approach of organizing the music in layers that could have developed successfully in a number of configurations was unique. There was another famous work that directly preceded Debussy’s that may have had an influence here—Maurice Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* from 1901. Walsh sees the notion of a rivalry with Ravel at the time of the composition of *Estampes* as “absurd” given Debussy’s status, but acknowledges relationships between Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* (1901) and Debussy’s *Pagodes* (1903), as well as Ravel’s *Habanera* (originally for two pianos from *Sites auriculaires*, 1895-7) and Debussy’s *La soirée dans Grenade* (1903).¹⁵ Walsh further states that “*Jeux d’eau* may be gamelan-like in its texture and sonority, but *Pagodes* comes as close to imitating a gamelan music as would seem possible without completely abandoning the aesthetic and intellectual world of Western music.”¹⁶

There were, one could argue, the debts both composers owed to Franz Liszt, whose works like *Les jeux d’eau à la Villa d’Este* opened a universe of possibilities at the keyboard. Although unrelated to gamelan music, there is even an interesting pentatonic/tonal hybrid precedent in Liszt’s music, using the same pitches as Debussy in *Pagodes*: the opening material of *Spozalizio* from the *Années de pèlerinage: Deuxième année (Italie)*.¹⁷ It is perhaps easier to see and hear when that material transforms into a sped-up accompaniment a bit later in the piece. Both pieces use the same collection of tones (B-C#-D#-F#-G#) in these passages:

Example 1

a)

The image shows a musical score for Franz Liszt's *Spozalizio*. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The tempo is marked "Quasi allegretto mosso". The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 6/8. The first measure is marked with a fermata. The second measure is marked "dolce armonioso". Below the staves, a bracket indicates the pitch collection "B-C#-D#-F#-G#".

Franz Liszt, *Spozalizio* from *Années de pèlerinage: Deuxième année (Italie)*: mm. 75-7

13 Locke, 234.

14 Walsh, 145. This is not to say that there are not pagoda structures in Indonesia.

15 For more detailed comparisons, see Walsh, 144-6.

16 Walsh, 145.

17 We will hear four pieces from this extraordinary set at the close of this recital.

b)

B-C-D-F-G

Claude Debussy, *Pagodes* from *Estampes*: mm. 3-4

While the context is drastically different, anticipations of Debussy's sound worlds can be found in the earlier music. However, Debussy managed to create a dramatic scenario in *Pagodes* in which the bell tones, clangorous gongs and fleet washes of sound in the upper register combine in an original way.

* * *

“If this music isn't exactly what they hear in Granada, well,
so much the worse for Granada.”

~ Debussy to Pierre Louÿs¹⁸

With *La soirée dans Grenade*, the second work in *Estampes*, there is another precedent in Ravel's music—his *Habanera* from a set of pieces for two pianos. There is little argument that Debussy's piece is a more fleshed out version of the idea, but numerous elements of Debussy's music directly mimic Ravel; if the rhythm on repeated C-sharps did not give it away, the instruction “*Mouvement de Habanera*” might be a further clue. In this work one may have the impression of walking through Granada to the Andalusian accompaniment of various scenes glimpsed with each turn of the corner. Debussy achieves variety and continuity via the medium of the dotted habanera rhythm. This, combined with ideas that return periodically, yield a montage effect in the organization of the piece—our eyes (ears) flit between different panels on the Spanish quilt. Near the conclusion of the piece Debussy emphasizes this sudden shift by interpolating two passages marked *Léger et lointain* (light and distant). These interlopers suggest that the piece could go on in any of a number of directions, had one not taken the road out of town, hearing the music fade away as evening transitions to night.

The final piece in *Estampes* does not have the same relationship to exoticism as the first two, and instead draws on traditional piano figuration and the evocation of rainfall in the technique employed. *Jardins sous la pluie* (Gardens in the Rain) is an exciting *moto perpetuo* piece that features simple melodies articulated in the midst of omnipresent right hand arpeggiations. Material for this piece came from an earlier set of *Images*, sometimes referred to as the *Images oubliée*; Walsh wryly offers that the “...content, like the title, of the third of his 1894 set of *Images*, “*Some aspects of 'Nous n'irons plus au bois' because the weather is unbearable,*” had been

18 As quoted in Walsh, 145.

obviously provisional.”¹⁹ There are passages that are reminiscent of other piano music, such as the descending bassline (even though it’s in the middle register) where the key changes to F-sharp minor and we hear music that might have been at home in the *Presto* finale of Saint-Saëns’ second piano concerto. The work has wonderful moments of contrast, such as the quintuplet *mystérieux* section. The music goes from realms of vibrant quietude to an ecstatic outburst at the end of the work, reaching up into the skies as if to put the last few drops back into the dissipating clouds, so as to experience them another day.



ALEXANDER SCRIBIN, Sonata no. 5, op. 53

“I call you to life, o mysterious forces!
Drowned in the dark depths
Of the creative spirit, timid
Sketches of life, to you I bring audacity.”

~ Epigraph to Sonata no. 5, Alexander Scriabin, from *Le Poème de l’Extase*

The piano sonatas of Alexander Scriabin have earned their status as some of the most significant works in the genre of the late 19th/early 20th century. They certainly initiated and invigorated a solo piano sonata tradition in Russian music, with his example followed by composers of large sonata sets like Sergei Prokofiev and Nikolai Medtner.

By the time Debussy composed his *Estampes*, Scriabin had written his first four piano sonatas, and would write a further six before his early death in 1915. The fifth sonata is technically the first of his sonatas cast in a single movement (the short first movement of the fourth sonata serves as an introduction that moves directly into the second movement (*attacca*)); the remainder of his sonatas would be in a single movement only. The fifth sonata was composed concurrently with the *Poem of Ecstasy* (*Le Poème de l’Extase*, sometimes referred to as his fourth symphony), with sketches dating as early as 1905. The piece was composed swiftly over the course of a few months in 1907.²⁰

As Lincoln Ballard phrased it, Scriabin “...believed that the music existed outside the material world, and he saw himself as a translator who captured this divine vision into crude notated form.”²¹ Scriabin’s partner Tatyana Schloezer wrote that

19 Walsh, 146. This is an excellent point—do not judge harshly an artist who leaves something undone, as Debussy’s penchant for excellent titles would surely have intervened if he had seen the work through publication.

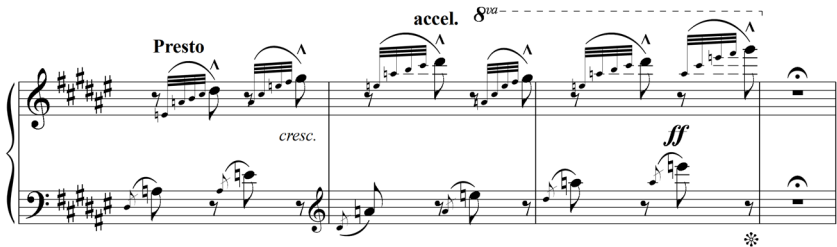
20 Ballard, Lincoln, Matthew Bengtson with John Bell Young, *The Alexander Scriabin Companion: History, Performance and Lore* (United States: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 43. It is often stated that Scriabin composed the fifth sonata in a matter of days, but it is unclear if this was true; in any case it was completed quickly on the heels of the *Poem of Ecstasy*.

21 *Ibid.*, 43.

“The Sonata flowed out of him like a river. What you have heard is nothing... the Sonata is unrecognizable, and is not to be compared with anything.”²² Faubion Bowers noted Scriabin’s struggle with bringing his conception to life: “He did not want his own shadow to dim its quartz-clear image.”²³ Theosophical undertones are present,²⁴ with concerns about Scriabin’s own self getting in the way of the music outweighing for a moment his ever-expanding ego concerning his artistic powers.

As Scriabin’s large-scale instrumental music developed, he increasingly turned to single-movement forms (including single-movements built with large subsections). Perhaps the most significant precedent for this was the music of Liszt, whose single-movement sonata forever changed the genre, and whose symphonic poems offered an alternative to the multi-movement symphonic concept. Indeed, with both the *Poem of Ecstasy* and the fifth sonata Scriabin focused the intensity of his musical thought into a single vessel, with strains that nearly burst through the confines of their written pages. The fifth sonata opens with a startling trill above a murky tremolando, as a ferocious ripping gesture threatens to tear the fabric of the sound apart. At last the gesture²⁵ escapes the confines of the low register and rockets across the keyboard to launch into the empty space of a silent bar:

Example 2



Alexander Scriabin, Sonata no. 5, op. 53: mm. 9-12

This astonishing passage and the preceding section, to my ear, is of Promethean origin and import: there is a sonic kinship here with the opening of Liszt’s symphonic poem *Prometheus*, and also with Scriabin’s op. 60, his final symphony: *Prometheus: Poem of Fire*. In that latter work we hear an expanded version of the murky depths, and ultimately the solo piano part jettisons the earthly plane with similar rising figures as those heard in Example 2.

22 As quoted in Ballard, 43.

23 Bowers, Faubion, *Scriabin: A Biography*, rev. 2nd ed. Based on 1969 ed. (United States, Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), 182.

24 Gawboy, Anna, “Scriabin’s Synaesthesia,” part of *Demystifying Scriabin*, ed. Kenneth Smith and Vasilis Kallis (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2022), 232.

25 Antonio Grande aptly calls this kind of material, which occurs frequently in late Scriabin a “gesture of flight.” Grande, Antonio, “Temporal Perspectives in Scriabin’s Late Music,” part of *Demystifying Scriabin*, 165.

For all of its startling energy at the beginning of the work, that world dissipates immediately with the arrival of the *Languido* theme and its bell-like rocking motion of the music in different registers. In sections like this Scriabin kept the concept of sonic dissipation in play, subtly achieved with diminuendo and tempo modifications. The next section of the sonata, marked *Presto con allegrezza*, includes music by Scriabin at his most joyous. Studded with tricky leaps and six in the right hand against four in the left, this material dominates much of the sonata:

Example 3

Presto con allegrezza

Alexander Scriabin, Sonata no. 5, op. 53: mm. 47-52

New ideas become integrated into this general texture via juxtaposition, including multi-register arpeggiations and an important delayed-resolution motive:

Example 4

Alexander Scriabin, Sonata no. 5, op. 53: mm. 96-99

The music moves swiftly between moods and realms, the frantic next to the sensuous and so forth; but given the increasingly ecstatic nature of the material from Example 3 and the *estatico* transformations of the *Languido* music, it is nevertheless dramatic when the expected glimpse of paradise is withheld and overtaken by almost exactly the same music as found in Example 2. If the lightning-tinged upward rush of the introduction's end served to awaken the listener from a nightmare, its return at the close of the sonata serves to awaken them from the dream, dispelling the illusion of apotheosis achieved in earlier works like the fourth sonata. The cycle is set to resume after another pause; the end of the piece is not the stratospheric G-sharp, but a measure of rest, with time suspended under another fermata.



SIR STEPHEN HOUGH, *Partita*

Sir Stephen Hough's 2019 *Partita* was commissioned by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation and premiered that year by Albert Cano Smit. One of Hough's early successes was winning first prize in the 1983 Naumburg International Piano Competition, so the commission for the 2017 winner (Smit) was a homecoming of sorts for the composer-pianist. The *Partita* has five movements, and Hough writes that the outer movements "...suggest the world of a grand cathedral organ."²⁶ This is an apt description, as the *Maestoso energico* Overture's opening chords, articulated by rests, toss their harmonies into the vaulted space where F major alternately blends with chords based on A-flat or A. There is a joyful, grandiose quality to this music, the distinctive dotted-rhythms of which eventually give way to secondary material with running sixteenth notes. The *Tempo movendo* close foreshadows Hough's treatment of the *Partita*'s initial theme in its final movement.

The second movement, *Capriccio*, features melodic parallel fifths and broken fifths. The music moves between rhythmically active presentations of a theme that includes the dotted rhythm from the Overture and more fluid material. This movement makes me think of works by György Ligeti and Frederic Rzewski that also prominently feature the fifth—for music with such a laser focus on a single interval, it is wonderful to witness how much variety can be conjured at the keyboard from this fundamental building block.

Fifths remain the focus in the next two movements, each a *Cancion y Danza* inspired by the music of Federico Mompou.²⁷ In the first *Cancion* we hear a pulse of three rising dyads, but do not fully realize that they are cutting across two measures until measure 13, when 3/4 groupings are gently asserted for four measures. It is a subtle but effective gambit that lets the simple melody shine while keeping things interesting. The F-sharp/C-sharp dyad that started the *Cancion* swaps harmonic roles with the right hand for the bitonal *Danza*, which revels in its *giocosos* antics

²⁶ Hough, Stephen, program notes for *Partita* (London: Josef Weinberger Limited, 2019).

²⁷ Ibid. Hough recorded a number of these works as part of his 1997 recording of Mompou's music.

before the left hand finally “resolves” to an F-sharp major triad.²⁸ The second *Cancion* again features fifths (each chromatically inflected by a raised fourth-scale-degree grace note) beneath a melody. The melody of this brief section is augmented by fifths in the right hand as a more flowing bass line is introduced. In the spirited *Danza* the flowing line of fifths escapes to the right hand in *non legato* writing (also without pedal), atop a double-time version of the *Cancion*’s left hand music, with the grace notes now compacted into single *marcato* attacks. Eventually the punctuating chords of the left hand are broken in various ways as the *Cancion*’s melody returns. Nevertheless the *Danza*’s *molto ritmico* nature wins the day, leading directly into the Partita’s culminating Toccata. This brilliant showpiece still features the fifth, expanding outward so that the stepwise neighbor is no longer contained within the fifth but instead spills outside of it. The pivot is accomplished with the right hand starting the expansion against the left hand’s tritone-tinged chords in the *Danza*, followed by the major triads of the Toccata:

Example 5

a)

8va-----senza rit.

Attaca Toccata

Stephen Hough, Partita, IV. *Cancion y Danza*: mm.47-48

b)

8va-----

Stephen Hough, Partita, V. Toccata: mm. 3-4

It is not that Hough did not use fifths in this way melodically before; rather, the contrast between the crunch of the raised fourth at the close of the second *Danza* with the melodic motion in the Toccata that features notes outside of the immediate triad helps to dramatically launch the final movement. Allowing for contrasting music and recollections of the Overture, unlike in the Scriabin sonata Hough’s exuberance is allowed to take over, and there is no suppression of the joy as the bells peal in the final passages of the work. As Hough describes the movement, it is “...a sortie out of the gothic gloom into the brilliant Sunday sunshine.”²⁹

28 Like in the Scriabin sonata, we are ostensibly in F-sharp of some sort.
 29 Hough, *Partita*.



FRANZ LISZT, *Three Petrarch Sonnets & the Dante Sonata*

“My mission, as I see it, is to be the first to introduce poetry into music of the piano with some degree of style.”

~ Liszt to Marie d'Agoult³⁰

The final four selections of this evening's recital hail from Franz Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage, Deuxième année (Italie)*. In these final four pieces of the second year of his *Years of Pilgrimage*, Liszt encounters and engages with two stars in the literary firmament: Petrarch and Dante. The *Years of Pilgrimage* of Franz Liszt (and their related works and supplements) contain some of his most essential output of original music for solo piano. Some of the music is accessible to the amateur while others benefit from a masterful technique; yet all are subservient to the pursuit of the musical goals of each character piece.³¹ We start with the collection of Petrarch sonnets.

These three *Sonetti del Petrarca* are actually transcriptions of songs that Liszt wrote in 1838-9. His initial transcriptions followed fast on the heels of the composition of the songs for tenor and piano. Of those first piano versions Liszt wrote to Marie d'Agoult that he had composed “...very free transcriptions of them for piano, in the style of nocturnes! I regard them as having turned out singularly well...”³² Those initial piano transcriptions would appear in print first in 1846, followed by the original songs in 1847. Liszt would heavily revise the piano versions before they made their appearance in the second volume of the *Années de pèlerinage*, published in 1858. Still not content, he made further revisions to the songs. The Library of Congress holds a portion of the holograph manuscript of the second version of “Pace non trovo” (Sonetto 104), in a version for baritone and piano. This version from 1861, published in 1883 (nearly half a century after Liszt first drafted the original versions of the Petrarch sonnets), is much more devastating in affect, pared down to its essentials and not giving in to the siren call of its original theme. It is a sober and meaningful epilogue to its famed predecessor.

The idealization of women was a common Romantic trope, and the Petrarch sonnets engage with this poetically via Petrarch's Laura-inspired sonnets.³³ The intimacy of the poetry, sung and transcribed, is different from Liszt's powerful use of Goethe's *ewig Weibliche* (the eternal feminine, from the end of *Faust* Part II) at the close of the *Faust* Symphony. The poems are human responses to love's mysteries, the good and the bad. But the piano settings in particular are not just a filtration of Petrarch into sound; they have a dramatic stance. As Anna Celenza put it, “[these] pieces are not love songs as much as they are Liszt's musical commentary on Petrarch.”³⁴

30 As quoted in Celenza, Anna Harwell, “Liszt, Italy, and the Republic of the Imagination,” in *Franz Liszt and his World*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley (United States: Princeton University Press, 2006), 27.

31 Pianists will tell you that even at its most difficult, Liszt's music fits under the hands naturally in a manner generally reserved to the output of pianist-composers.

32 As quoted in Henneman, Monika, “Liszt's Lieder,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 200.

33 The Dante/Beatrice nexus has been referenced as an artist/muse model for Liszt and Marie d'Agoult, but the rose-tinted glasses were eventually too scratched for continued use.

34 Celenza, 28.

Sonetto 47 del Petrarca

There are, in a sense, two short introductions that precede the main body of the *Sonetto 47 del Petrarca* (Benedetto sia 'l giorno/Blessed be the day), each presenting material that is developed in the piece. Programmatically the A-major segment might refer to the moment of infatuation: "Sonnet 47 begins with a description of the exact moment when "two bright eyes" enthralled the poet's soul and bound him fast."³⁵ The off-beat setting of the primary melody seems an effective way to convey the flutterings of the heart. The device, used elsewhere by Liszt and other contemporaries, has the effect of destabilizing the sense of temporal awareness, letting the listener float above the quavering music. It is worth noting the tempo and dynamic indications Liszt gives at the start of the song proper:³⁶

- 1) m.12: *Sempre mosso, con intimo sentimento*
(always moving, with intimate feeling)
- 2) m.12: *l'accompagnamento sempre dolce*
(the accompaniment should always be played sweetly)
- 3) m.13: *il canto mf espressivo e un poco marcato*
(the song melody should be played expressively at a medium strength and emphasized a bit)

While there are certainly moments of dramatic escalation, the music is more of a private affair, a recognition of love's blessings and heartaches. Musically Liszt bakes the oscillations of love's strength and fragility in his accompaniments, particularly in the powerfully tenuous segments (starting at the potentially-confusingly-labeled *in tempo, ma sempre rubato*) that precede the final coda. The memories, in the end, are worth the price.

Sonetto 104 del Petrarca

With *Sonetto 104 del Petrarca* (Pace non trovo/I find no peace), one of Liszt's most well-known pieces, we learn more about the cost of love's contradictions. In the first version of *Sonetto 104*, dating from shortly after the composition of the original songs, Liszt "...enunciated the first verse with the left hand alone, a beautiful device which is rarely found in Liszt's keyboard works."³⁷ That first verse followed the chromatic, searching introduction, a version of which was in place in the original song. The most captivating thing about the increasingly passionate setting of the text may be the built-in ambiguity of the augmented triad. The poetry lists a sequence of contradictions felt by the poet (not finding peace, no capacity for war, fear/hope, fire/ice, etc.), and in a stroke of inspiration Liszt accomplishes this duality by sandwiching the augmented sonority between two major and minor chords. It is one of the great uses of the augmented sonority in the literature, and provided the perfect coda for the piece as well, simultaneously emphasizing Liszt's use of third-relations throughout the piece in the pivot to the spelling with C natural instead of B-sharp.

The contrast between the flights of virtuosic imagination in the famous florid version of this piece and the austerity of its final incarnation as a song for baritone and piano is stunning. Liszt was a perpetual reviser of his works, and in this case as in many, he ends up with multiple "valid" readings of the material, each representing a different musical/dramatic/philosophical perspective.

Sonetto 123 del Petrarca

In the final Petrarch setting, the poet recalls the wonder of finding heaven on earth: "I vidi in terra angelici costumi" (I saw the makings of an angel on earth). As in the previous poems, there is a duality that is explored—great happiness when the beloved is there, great

35 Ibid., 27.

36 It is also worth pointing out the eyebrow-raising time signature Liszt used here: 2/3. In context he clearly meant two groups of three per measure—6/4 but metrically divided in two.

37 Walker, Alan, *Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years, 1811-1847*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983/1988), 274.

anguish when not. An introduction (the material of which returns near the end) sets the stage for an appropriately Italianate aria. The pianist/singer traverses an array of emotions with music of familial relations, naturally enough, with the other two Petrarch sonnets. As the music comes to a close, Liszt's music embodies the final lines of the sonnet in one of the loveliest endings in all of his piano music:

<i>Ed era 'l cielo all'armonia s'intento</i>	<i>And all of heaven was so intent on that harmony</i>
<i>Che non si vedea in ramo mover foglia.</i>	<i>That not a leaf stirred on the branch.</i>
<i>Tanta dolcezza avea pien l'aer e 'l vento.</i>	<i>Such sweetness filled the air and wind.</i>

The music fades to nothing, the yearning stepwise motive now at peace with itself, poetically articulated by crossed hands. This is poetry in piano music, with just the right amount of style.

Après une lecture du Dante, Fantasia quasi sonata

From one perspective, Stephen Hough's recital is a celebration of fifths and tritones. The last work on the program takes the tritone (long associated with the devil) as its focus, appropriately enough for a work inspired in part by Dante's *Inferno*. The revelation of Dante and *The Divine Comedy* in particular to Liszt and the Romantics was significant, and in Liszt's case yielded two of the most unique compositions in his entire output, the Dante Sonata (we will use that as the shorthand name for reasons that will become apparent) and the Dante Symphony, both works that would take their final form in the late 1850s.

The first version of the Dante sonata was called *Fragment dantesque*, and there is evidence that Liszt performed it in 1839, perhaps without a full score.³⁸ In 1849 he composed a version of the piece entitled *Paralipomènes à la Divina Commedia: Fantasia Symphonique pour Piano*. As Anna Celenza explains, both Liszt's use here of the word "Paralipomènes" (a reference to "supplementary items... omitted from the body of a work"), and in a later version "Prolegomènes" ("preliminary discourses") show that Liszt had created a work that augmented *The Divine Comedy* instead of reproducing it.³⁹

While posterity was spared an endless purgatory of pronunciation when Liszt changed the title, the one that Liszt ultimately arrived at in 1853 has its own complexities: *Après une lecture du Dante, Fantasia quasi Sonata*. There are multiple references at play here. The first is a nod to Victor Hugo's "Après une lecture de Dante."⁴⁰ The second is the subtitle "Fantasia quasi sonata"—a clear inversion of Beethoven's famous "Sonata quasi una fantasia" description of his two op. 27 piano sonatas. The appended title amounts to a self-signed permission slip for experimentation as Liszt explored what a sonata could be in works like this and the only work he labeled solely with the term, the Sonata in B minor.

A heavily romanticized and inaccurate account of the circumstances of the composition of the Dante sonata persisted in the literature until Sharon Winkhofer shined the bright light of documentary evidence on the situation in 1977.⁴¹ Other interpretations offer a different way to visualize the compositional process than what had been on offer as an idyllic reading of the poet on the lakeshore beneath the tree of inspiration. David Trippett ties the conception of the Dante sonata, for instance, to the act of tactile experience. Given the three manuscript versions and several fragments, Trippett imagines that the sonata "interweaves hours and hours of improvisation with a gradual process of revision on a more abstracted,

38 Trippett, David, "Après une Lecture de Liszt: Virtuosity and Werktreue in the "Dante" Sonata," *19th-Century Music*, 2008, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer 2008), 55.

39 Celenza, 28.

40 The "du" was either a typo, or as Celenza puts it a more direct reference to "the" work of Dante—presumably *The Divine Comedy*—a reasonable conclusion given the nature of the musical content. Celenza, 30.

41 See Winkhofer, Sharon, "Liszt, Marie d'Agoult, and the "Dante" Sonata," *19th-Century Music*, 1977, Vol. 1, No. 1 (University of California Press, Jul., 1977), 15-32.

conceptual level.”⁴² In a sense, one who has ventured the path may have easier access to the memory of its vistas.

Alan Walker looked to the annotated copy of the sonata owned by Walter Bache, a student of Liszt in the 1880s, as a possible guide to direct correlations with the *Inferno*. If the opening tritones—the *diabolus in musica*—depict the gates of hell,⁴³ then the extraordinary first theme may derive from Canto 3, with its depiction of the cries of the damned.⁴⁴ The opening tritones are astonishing in their own way, but the *Presto agitato assai* of the primary theme after the introduction is even more so if played as Liszt originally wrote it, with the pedal held down amid the chromatic stuttering of the theme and its accompaniment. After a flurry of ideas, the dotted-rhythm tritones expand to become fifths, heralding the onset of the chorale theme.

Walker continues to identify the chorale theme in F-sharp major (a key with religious associations for Liszt) as “a musical depiction of Lucifer,” an interesting proposition given the way that Liszt sets this theme in different guises throughout the piece, from boastful to beautiful. “Hell and Heaven, it tells us, are but different sides of the same coin: Lucifer himself once sat at the right hand of God, and his power and ostentation are here revealed to have their origins in a divine source.”⁴⁵ What one starts to realize, as one gets to know the piece, is that almost all of the themes are related to the very same source, the chromatic line articulated in the *Presto agitato assai* referenced above (actually, it is there stealthily a few measures before). The themes are either thematic transformations or variants that develop as the piece progresses. In a sense, this unites all the kingdoms under one motivic banner—yet the transformed episodes have a unique character despite their similar origin. I think that David Trippett was onto something with his comments about the role of improvisation, as Liszt’s great facility as an improviser may have led him to quickly assess the possibilities of a given musical idea, play them, and then retain the ones that worked best musically when finalizing the score. His capacity for thematic transformation was remarkable. Unfortunately we do not have enough space here to show you these thematic transformations or other examples, but it is well worth exploring.

Liszt utilized the dotted-rhythm tritones/fifths as stitching or glue throughout the work, depending on what was needed, along with plaintive recitative passages and daring mobilizations of the body pianistic to take us on a soul-stirring journey. We might consider this performance of the Dante Sonata to be a belated recognition of the 700th anniversary of Dante’s death in 2021. Although the piece is filled with a torrent of technical hurdles, once the dam breaks and one overcomes them, it is gloriously fun to play. And it is even better to hear with a great pianist as our Virgil guiding us through the infernal depths, showing us the pitfalls that beset the path to paradise.

David Plylar
Senior Music Specialist
Library of Congress, Music Division



42 Trippett, 54.

43 Abandon all hope, especially any underprepared pianists who may enter here.

44 Walker, 275-8.

45 *Ibid.*, 278-9.

About the Artist

One of the most distinctive artists of his generation, Sir Stephen Hough combines a distinguished career as a pianist with those of a composer and writer.

Named by *The Economist* as one of “Twenty Living Polymaths,” Hough was the first classical performer to be awarded a MacArthur Fellowship (2001). He was awarded Northwestern University’s 2008 Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano, won the Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist Award in 2010, and in 2016 was made an Honorary Member of RPS. In 2014 he was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) and was knighted in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2022.

Since taking first prize at the 1983 Naumburg Competition in New York, Hough has appeared with most of the major European, Asian and American orchestras and plays recitals regularly in major halls and concert series around the world, from London’s Royal Festival Hall to New York’s Carnegie Hall. He has been a regular guest at festivals such as Aldeburgh, Aspen, Blossom, Edinburgh, La Roque d’Anthéron, Hollywood Bowl, Mostly Mozart, Salzburg, Tanglewood, Verbier, Blossom, and the BBC Proms, where he has made 29 concerto appearances, including playing all of the works of Tchaikovsky for piano and orchestra, a series he later repeated with the Chicago Symphony.

Many of his catalog of over 60 albums have garnered international prizes, including the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis, Diapason d’Or, Monde de la Musique, several Grammy nominations, eight *Gramophone Magazine* Awards, including ‘Record of the Year’ in 1996 and 2003, and the *Gramophone* ‘Gold Disc’ Award in 2008, which named his complete Saint-Saens piano concertos as the best recording of the past 30 years. His 2012 recording of the complete Chopin waltzes received the Diapason d’Or de l’Année, France’s most prestigious recording award. His 2005 live recording of the Rachmaninoff piano concertos was the fastest-selling recording in Hyperion’s history, while his 1987 recording of the Hummel concertos remains Chandos’ best-selling disc to date.

Published by Josef Weinberger, Hough has composed works for orchestra, choir, chamber ensemble, organ, harpsichord, and solo piano. He has been commissioned by the Takacs Quartet, the Cliburn, the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet, the Gilmore Foundation, The Genesis Foundation, the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, London’s National Gallery, Wigmore Hall, Le Musée de Louvre, and Musica Viva Australia among others.

A noted writer, Hough has contributed articles for *The New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *The Times*, *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*, and he wrote a blog for *The Telegraph* for seven years that became one of the most popular and influential forums for cultural discussion and for which he wrote over six hundred articles. He has published three books: *The Bible as Prayer* (Bloomsbury and Paulist Press, 2007); a novel: *The Final Retreat* (Sylph Editions, 2018); and a book of essays: *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More* (Faber & Faber and Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2019).

Hough resides in London, where he is a visiting professor at the Royal Academy of Music and holds the International Chair of Piano Studies at his alma mater, the Royal Northern College in Manchester. He is also a member of the faculty at The Juilliard School.



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Kreeger Theater at Arena Stage

Immanuel Wilkins Quartet

There will be no preconcert conversation for this event.

Friday, April 14, 2023 at 8:00 pm

Kogod Cradle at Arena Stage

Mingus Dynasty Quintet

There will be no preconcert conversation for this event.

Friday, April 21, 2023 at 8:00 pm

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

(301 A Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003)

Harlem Quartet with Michael Brown

Music by Beach, López-Gavilán, Strayhorn, von Schauroth,
Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann

There will be no preconcert conversation for this event.

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