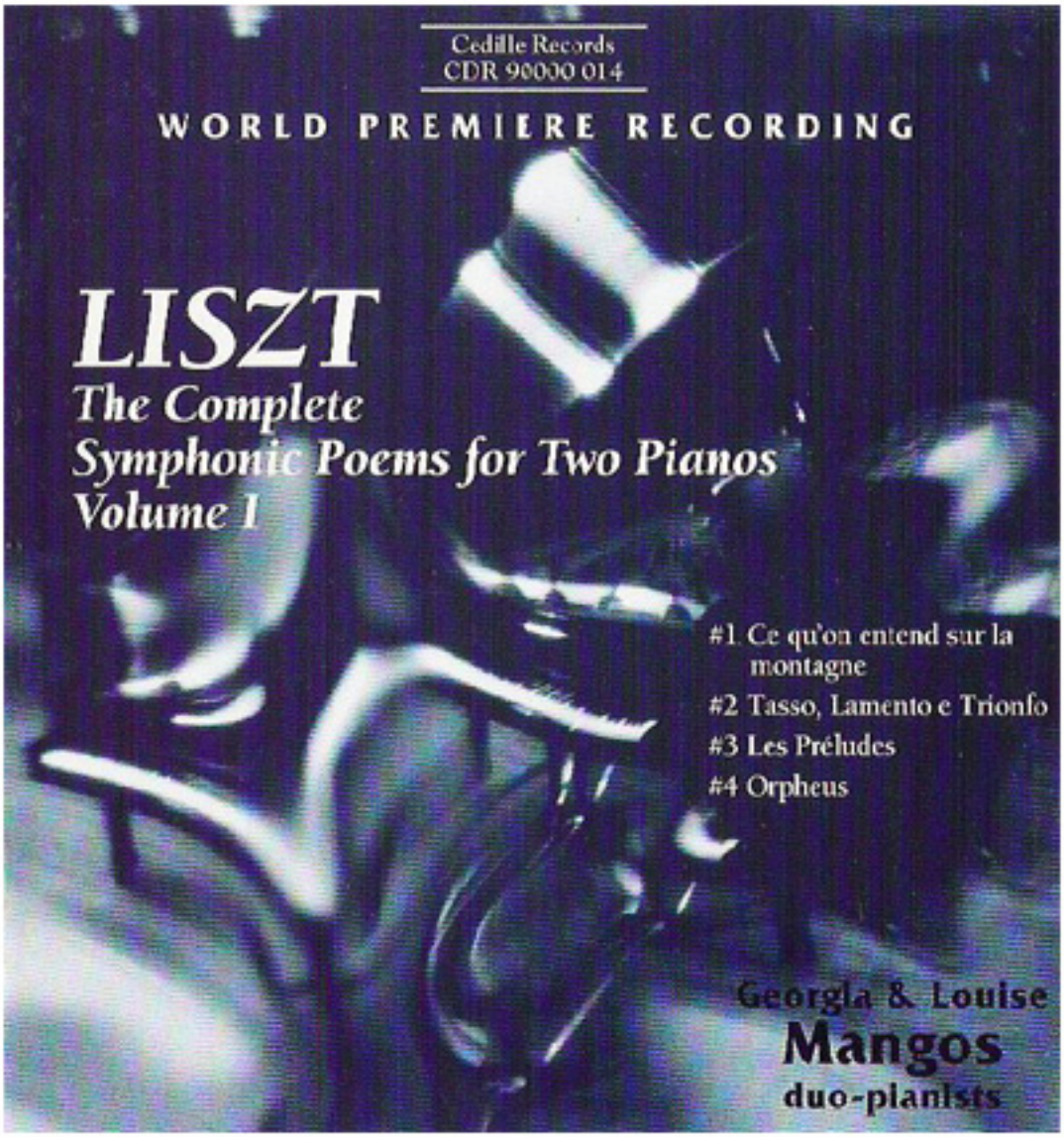
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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING
LISZT
The Complete
Symphonic Poems for Two Pianos
Volume I
#1 Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne
#2 Tasso, Lamento e Trionfo
#3 Les Préludes
#4 Orpheus
Georgia & Louise
Mangos
duo-pianists

DDD *Absolutely Digital* CDR 90000 014

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

THE SYMPHONIC POEMS FOR ORCHESTRA OF FRANZ LISZT AS TRANSCRIBED FOR TWO PIANOS BY THE COMPOSER

1 Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne (27:35)

2 Tasso, Lamento e Trionfo (15:35)

3 Les Préludes (16:00)

4 Orpheus (10:00)

Georgia & Louise Mangos, duo-pianists TT: (69:00)

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Liszt's Piano as Orchestra

Keith T. Johns

Central to an examination of Liszt's aesthetic was his ability to make the piano sound like an orchestra. One of the earliest accounts of this exceptional ability appeared in *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh) discussing a performance of Liszt's second piano concerto on January 21, 1841:

> He seems to tear the very soul out of the instrument — he calls into requisition every sound and combination of sounds of which it is capable — to work it up as it were till it produces all the effects of the orchestra.

Liszt's transcendence from piano virtuoso to composer of "serious" orchestral music sparked controversy among nineteenth century critics debating *Zukunftsmusik* (the music of the future). Such writers questioned how Liszt could synthesize what they considered two distinct compositional directions: that for orchestra, and that for piano. According to these critics, the most suspect element transplanted by Liszt was virtuosity. In a review of an all-Liszt program given in Berlin's Singakademie in December 1855, the *National-Zeitung* printed:

> Liszt's symphonies and cantatas are displays of virtuosity that have only changed their setting: the keys of the piano have been exchanged for the choir and the orchestra.

That same concert touched off a long debate about the place of piano transcription. Otto Lindner, critic for *Vossische Zeitung*, maintained that the real test of an orchestral work was how well it sounded in piano reduction. Such a reduction, Lindner argued, would reveal the weaknesses in Liszt's symphonic works. Hans von Bronsart, a tireless fighter for the Liszt cause, attacked Lindner's assertions in a long article in the Berlin music journal *Echo* early in 1856. Bronsart illustrated his discussion with an anecdote about a two-piano performance of *Les Préludes* in Weimar where a critic exclaimed: "If one thinks that Liszt can compose only for the piano, he should hear the piece for orchestra — then much becomes realized."

The brilliant musicologist, Franz Brendel, also expounded upon this confusion of piano and orchestra as part of a long review of Liszt's February 26, 1857 Gewandhaus concert:

> It is said that Liszt plays the orchestra as earlier he played the piano. This proposition is at the same time both very correct and very false. When this is said it means that Liszt uses or misuses the orchestra with the aim of virtuosity. Rightly against that is the view that the orchestra and the forms of orchestral composition are no longer an objective power against which the artist stands in opposition but, on the contrary, both [the composition and the orchestra] fit all the impulses of the personality closely like a tight garment. That is the key to these compositions and, at the same time, to the orchestral statement and Liszt's conducting. The tone poem is now the mirror and truest expression of individuality which is no more confined by the earlier boundaries. Individuality now roams free and unhindered.

From very early in his career, Liszt displayed an uncanny ability, as composer and performer, to extend the orchestral possibilities of the piano. For the piano always was Liszt's "orchestra." As recorded by Sir Charles Hallé, Liszt's celebrated performance of Berlioz's "March to the Scaffold" vividly demonstrates Liszt's synthesis of piano, orchestra, composition, and performance:

> At an orchestral concert given by Liszt and conducted by Berlioz, the "March to the Scaffold" from *Symphonie fantastique*, that most gorgeously instrumented piece, was performed, at the conclusion of which Liszt sat down and played his own arrangement for the piano alone, of the same movement, with an effect even surpassing that of the full orchestra, and creating an indescribable furore.

Liszt's piano transcriptions of overtures by Berlioz and the Beethoven symphonies are testimony to his genius for transcribing orchestral music for the piano.

Liszt's finest original keyboard works also present the piano-as-orchestra. Such works are by no means second-rate versions of what Liszt could or should have fully realized through the symphony orchestra. They instead represent Liszt's unprecedented conception of the orchestra through the piano. Although the two-piano versions of Liszt's Symphonic Poems appear to be transcriptions, they too should not be heard as secondary versions of that which Liszt in this case did write for full orchestra. These two-piano scores are unique creations: superlative examples of Liszt's pianistic conception of the orchestra.

Pianist and writer, the late Keith T. Johns is author of the forthcoming book *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt* (Pendragon Press).

Discovering Liszt's Symphonic Poems

Georgia & Louise Mangos

After playing so much of the "standard literature" for two pianos, we found ourselves thirsting for something fresh to learn and perform. We therefore became musical sleuths seeking out-of-print scores. Although our calculated guesses as to where to find such scores were not always successful, we eventually became quite adept at our scholarly endeavors. It was always our dream to find a major work by a major composer that had, for whatever

reason, been left to obscurity. Our travels in search of such a unique find took us to libraries, museums, universities, and even antique music stores throughout Europe and the United States.

Our diligence has been greatly rewarded, for Liszt's own two-piano transcriptions of his Twelve Symphonic Poems represents a huge historic and artistic find. This collection, although well known in its orchestral versions, has drifted into obscurity even among Liszt scholars. The discovery of the scores was thrilling enough, but the process of learning and sharing with the listening public works of such artistic stature has been miraculous.

As the only modern performers (so far) of these pieces, we have come to know and live with them in a most unique and personal way. We hope the rest of our observations will aid the listener in his or her own discovery of these fascinating works.

The most significant problem Liszt's Symphonic Poems have presented for listeners and critics is their highly segmented structure. Although many will at first find this a weakness, it in fact becomes a strength. Liszt's method of presenting new themes and developmental ideas is rhapsodic: separating passages from one another with numerous tempo, mood, and key changes. These disparate segments eventually begin to feel like the chapters of a book. While there is the feeling of concluding a thought at the end of each chapter, the reader (or listener) knows the story is not yet finished. Just as a good author compels the reader to turn the page and discover what happens next, Liszt propels the listener into the next facet of his journey.

This complete freedom of form is startling. Our Germanic classical ears feel most comfortable with traditional structures like sonata form. That Liszt takes the listener on a dramatic journey that does not depend on themes reoccurring in familiar keys is quite alarming at first. In fact, it can feel totally unruly. As one comes to appreciate the temperament of the writing, however, one realizes that the intellectual aspects of structure are not Liszt's dominant concern. Instead, Liszt lets the emotional and dramatic story line dictate the form. Each note is written with an expressive purpose in mind, and each Symphonic Poem has a unique design.

The concept of the "Symphonic Poem" (a term Liszt coined) carries no set rules. It is the trip into Liszt's imagination and soul that makes these pieces so convincing. The pianist does not even have to take the literary influences too literally: the texts on which the Symphonic Poems are based did not entirely dictate Liszt's writing, so why should we let them inhibit what we come to believe as the pieces' true meanings? As pianists, we must feel free to interpret and apply our own musical imaginations to Liszt's scores, just as he applied his genius to the texts before him.

Liszt is a master story teller, and it is up to us to travel this journey with him. On a very simplistic level, Liszt's Symphonic Poem cycle is similar to Schubert's song cycle *Die schöne Mullerin*. In both, the listener is taken through the emotional, spiritual, and physical life of a male protagonist as both composers reflect on the insecurities of human nature. However, Schubert presents his miller as a mere mortal resigned to accept his fears and limitations. Liszt, on the other hand, makes us feel that man's divine energy allows him to conquer his fears, reach great heights, and at times even rival the gods of mythology that appear throughout these works.

The recurring themes in these pieces are Man against the mythological gods, Man against nature, and Man against Man as in war. All are beautifully portrayed in the music. However, it is Liszt's exploration of the emotional conflicts within man that makes these works so provocative. Man's need to rely on God for spiritual enlightenment is continually felt in these pieces, expressed through poignant hymns of truly divine simplicity. Man's fear of being alone and losing a loved one is depicted in *Orpheus*, while our fear of death is probed in *Tasso*. Man's mortality was one idea with which Liszt did not cope well, preferring to ignore human mortality by allowing a man's work to elevate him to the immortal. Following are brief commentaries on the first four Symphonic Poems, which appear on this recording.

Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne (What One Hears on the Mountain Top) takes its name from a poem by Victor Hugo. Liszt, however, adds his own interpretation by way of program. The aesthetic dynamic of the work rests on a

central dichotomy where the voice of nature is juxtaposed with that of humanity. A chorale, marked Andante religioso, appears in the middle and again at the end of the symphonic poem. Expressing "consecrated contemplation" according to Liszt, this chorale appears to show Man resolving his conflict with nature through the strength and wisdom that he receives from God.

Tasso, Lamento e Trionfo was originally composed as an overture to the Goethe play *Torquato Tasso*. Liszt describes Tasso as "The genius who is misunderstood by his contemporaries and surrounded with a radiant halo of posterity" (much the way Liszt saw himself). The thematic economy and motivic transformations in *Tasso* serve to support the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis pattern common to many of Liszt's large-scale works. The music presents three distinct ideas: Tasso in death, his great spirit hovering around the lagoons of Venice; Tasso at the court of Ferrara (the minuet middle section); and Tasso in culture: an apotheosis celebrating Tasso as martyr and poet as the suffering artist transcends the constraints of the physical dimension to achieve immortality.

The success of *Les Préludes*, Liszt's best known symphonic poem, is due in large part to its economical use of motivic material, the beauty of its cantilena melodies, and the brilliance of its storm and stress writing. Once again the musical program is one of juxtaposition and apotheosis, revealing a three-part archetypal pattern reflecting the human condition: from birth, consciousness, and innocent love; to hardship and disillusionment; to consolation, decision, and transcendence.

Orpheus is the most pictorial of the Symphonic Poems. The two-piano version opens with the pianos imitating the sounds of Orpheus's lyre (sounds created by two harps in the orchestral score). The chorale section that follows depicts the spiritual beauty of art. The strumming sounds of the harp return with a beautiful single vocal line floating above the accompaniment. Liszt transforms this serenade into an impassioned love theme by doubling the melody in octaves as it soars over the sounds of the harp and full chordal orchestral accompaniment. The descending octave passages that follow can be heard as Orpheus's laments over his beloved Eurydice's death, while rumbling octaves in the bass bring forth the images of the Underworld. The

work closes with a spectacular use of the echo effect: as each chord is repeated at a lesser volume one feels the spirit of Eurydice slipping inexorably away from her lover.

Liszt is such a great story teller because of the strength of his characters and the vibrancy of the conflicts he creates within them. The vivid images he creates through sound become like the characters of a brilliant novel. The pianists are therefore not merely musical performers in these tales. We become actors playing each and every character from the brave warrior, to the pious supplicant, to Mother Nature. We can possess the strength of a Greek God in one instant, and be dancing a waltz in the next. What a wonderful role we get to play!

In comparing the two-piano versions of the Symphonic Poems to the orchestral scores, one finds many similarities in Liszt's approaches to the two mediums. Liszt strove to expand the repertoire of sounds for all the instruments of the orchestra as well as for the piano, creating new sound textures for both by broadening their dynamic range and exploiting extreme registers of pitch to an unprecedented degree. The feature that most unifies the two mediums is the force and brilliance of Liszt's virtuosic writing, which makes the two pianos sound truly orchestral in timbre.

Ultimately, however, we feel that the flexibility of two players, as opposed to a full orchestra of about seventy musicians, adds an extra dimension to the two-piano transcriptions that makes them a superior listening experience. They sound more vital because they can be played with abandon. The nuance of tempo, volume, and texture is so agile between two players that it begins to take on the quality of spontaneous virtuoso improvisation. (One must remember that Liszt saw virtuosity as a means of heightening dramatic content, not as mere technical exploitation.)

Finally, we hope this recording awakens the grand Lisztian spirit within all of us.

About the Music

This is first-ever recording of Franz Liszt's own two-piano transcriptions of his Twelve Symphonic Poems for orchestra. Until recently, even most Liszt

scholars were not aware that the composer had written such transcriptions. The repertoire on this disc constitutes a major historic find, as well as a spectacular addition to the literature for two pianos. Two more CDs, devoted to the Symphonic Poems Nos. 5-8 and 9-12, respectively, are planned to complete the cycle.

About the Performers

Georgia and Louise Mangos have concertized throughout Europe and the United States, including recitals for the International Chopin Society and performances with the International Chamber Music Festival in Germany and Austria. In 1987, the Mangos sisters had the honor of being selected as one of twelve out of 129 contestant teams to compete in the first Murray Dranoff International Duo-Piano Competition in Miami. The Mangos's many broadcast performances on radio and television have included live performances for Chicago radio station WFMT and an appearance as the selected artists for a television special on duo-pianism for Continental Cablevision.

Chicago area natives, the Mangos are on the piano faculty at Elmhurst College. They have appeared on numerous Chicago area recital series including the Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert Series, the Chopin Foundation Concert Series, and the concert series for Chicago's Art Institute. Georgia and Louise have won grants from the Illinois Arts Council, and were chosen to participate in the Illinois Artstour program, a select group of artists that tour the state.

Georgia and Louise Mangos have earned degrees from the New England Conservatory, Boston University, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison. As a two-piano team they continued their studies with Paul Badura-Skoda and Joerg Demus at the Hochschule for Musik in Munich and have coached with Adele Marcus of the Julliard School, Dr. Bela Nagy of Catholic University, and Earl Wild at the University of Ohio, Columbus.

This is the Mangos sisters' debut recording.