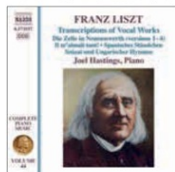


Liszt

'Complete Piano Music, Vol 44 - Transcriptions of Vocal Works'
Autrefois (first version), S577 (Vielgorsky).
Die Gräberinsel der Fürsten zu Gotha, S485b (Ernst). Ich liebe dich, S542a. Il m'aimait tant!, S533. Mes joies, S480 (Chopin).
Romances oubliées - S527; S527bis.
Slyepoi, 'Der blinde Sänger', S546.
Spanisches Ständchen, S487 (Festetics).
Szózat und Ungarischer Hymnus, S486 (Egressy/Erkel). Ungarisches Königslied, S544.
Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth - four versions: S534i; S534ii; S167; S534.

Joel Hastings *pf*
Naxos 8 573557 (76' • DDD)



Even today Liszt remains seriously underestimated as a song composer.

Like his adored Schubert, simple lyrics of scant significance could evoke from Liszt inspired settings. A case in point is the poem 'Nonnenwerth' by Prince Felix von Lichnowsky, which occasioned an achingly poignant song that Liszt returned to over the course of four decades in no fewer than four settings for solo piano. These provide the framework of this 44th instalment of Naxos's series of the complete piano works, devoted to a lovingly selected group of transcriptions beautifully played by the Canadian-born pianist Joel Hastings.

Standouts among these fine performances are Festetics's 'Spanish Serenade', reminiscent of Liszt's more extended setting of Hugo's 'Gastibelza', a dreamy account of Chopin's 'Mes joies' and 'The Blind Singer', a vividly persuasive reading of Liszt's melodrama to a text of Alexey Tolstoy. Two versions of the *Romance oubliée* hint at the evolving refinement and delicacy clearly discernible in the 'Nonnenwerth' settings. In all the performances Hastings employs great variety of touch without over-playing, a sure sense of pacing and, most critically for this repertory, acute sensitivity to the original texts.

These performances were expertly recorded at St Peter's Church in Tallahassee, Florida, in January 2016 and, from a technical standpoint, are among the best in the Naxos series. The following May, Hastings, who served on the faculty of Florida State University, was felled by a fatal heart attack at the age of 46.

Patrick Rucker

Liszt • Saint-Saëns



Liszt Piano Sonata, S178 (arr Saint-Saëns). Après une lecture du Dante, S161 No 7 (arr Ancelle)
Saint-Saëns Danse macabre, Op 40 (original version for two pianos). Danse macabre, Op 40 (arr Liszt/Horowitz/Ancelle)
Ludmila Berlinskaya, Arthur Ancelle *pf/s*
Melodiya MELCD100 2463 (62' • DDD)



This is one of the finest two-piano recitals to come my way for quite some

time – though I may be slightly biased as it has the world premiere of a work I have been waiting to hear ever since I first learnt of its existence over 30 years ago. The friendship and mutual respect of Liszt and Saint-Saëns has been well documented. Not so the existence of the latter's arrangement for two pianos of Liszt's B minor Sonata, one of the towering masterpieces of the solo repertoire.

Liszt himself always intended to make a two-piano version but never got around to it. Saint-Saëns undertook this labour of love between August and November 1914. It is an entirely faithful transcription – no hitherto unheard contrapuntal lines or remodelled harmonies – that relies entirely on the clever redistribution of material. But while freeing a single pianist from many of the immense technical difficulties of the original, the need for absolute ensemble precision and agreement on every aspect of agogics, pedalling and phrasing while retaining performance spontaneity in a work lasting almost half an hour make it in some ways even more difficult to execute for two pianists.

I can only say I was bowled over by the playing of this Franco-Russian husband-and-wife duo, astonished to the extent that any initial scepticism, any notion of this being a mere curiosity, is utterly confounded. Their performance of this music is everything and more that I had hoped for after such a long wait. Moreover, the satisfying programme opens with Saint-Saëns's two-piano version of his *Danse macabre* and closes with Liszt's (more interesting) transcription of the same with additions from Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Ancelle, whose own transcription of the *Dante* Sonata is a further major addition to the two-piano literature. For the repertoire, performances and recording (a pair of richly voiced instruments in the Grand Hall, Moscow Conservatory), this will be among my discs of the year. I only wish Melodiya had proof-read the English translation of the interesting booklet.

Jeremy Nicholas

Mendelssohn

'Mendelssohn and the Organ Sonata'
Six Organ Sonatas, Op 65.
Nine Pieces Without Opus Numbers

Anders Eidsten Dahl *org*
LAWO Classics ② LWC1108 (106' • DDD)
Played on the Hermann Eule organ of Sofienburg Church, Oslo



Mendelssohn's Organ Sonatas, Op 65, date from the last part of his truncated career

(1844) and were commissioned by the London publisher Charles Coventry. Drawing on some earlier material originating as far back as 1829, as well as newly minted music, Mendelssohn created a durable, melodically memorable, harmonically satisfying and richly varied set of six stalwarts which, since their first appearance in print in 1845, have maintained a central place in many organists' repertory, usefully providing both recital pieces and liturgical voluntaries. Although they require a fully developed manual technique (several movements are, frankly, idiomatically better suited to the piano) and demand varying degrees of pedal agility, they fully explore the organ's possibilities as an expressive instrument.

They also comfortably fit on a single disc. As a bonus Anders Eidsten Dahl has added a 36-minute CD of the nine organ pieces without opus numbers. These include what might best be termed prototypes of movements which went into the Op 65 set, and it is fascinating to compare first and second drafts. Dahl plays on a medium-size, 44-stop, three-manual organ in Oslo's Sofienberg Church. The warm acoustic's lack of reverberation suits this music, allowing Mendelssohn's contrapuntal mastery to be admired. The organ's 'Ekkoverk' department is also ideal, being especially effective in the First Sonata.

Dahl's playing is robust in the strong, energetic music and delicately lyrical and expressive in the *Lieder ohne Worte*-like *andantes*. There are very few mistakes (just one misreading in the pedals in the first movement of Sonata No 3 and a misbalancing of the left-hand dynamic in the Cantilena of Sonata No 4).

All in all this is a forthright, warm and polished account, enhanced by the bonus disc and excellent notes and packaging. A strong contender against other first-rate recordings.

Malcolm Riley