



*International
Presentations of
Music & Dance*

THE UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

André Watts

Pianist

FRIDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 7, 1986, AT 8:00
HILL AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

A Program of Music by Franz Liszt

Un Sospiro, from *Three Concert Etudes*

Au lac de Wallenstadt, from *Années de pèlerinage* (Vol. I)

Il penseroso, from *Années de pèlerinage* (Vol. II)

Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este, from *Années de pèlerinage* (Vol. III)

Sonata in B minor
(in one movement)

INTERMISSION

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13

Valse oubliée No. 1

Nuages gris

Bagatelle ohne Tonart

Schlaflos, Frage und Antwort

En rêve

Six Grand Etudes after Paganini

G minor

E-flat major

La Campanella

E major

La Chasse

Theme and Variations

EMI/Angel and CBS Masterworks Records

PROGRAM NOTES

by ANDRÉ WATTS

Franz Liszt — 1811-1886

Un Sospiro

In 1848 Liszt wrote “Trois études de concert” which, upon publication, appeared in at least one edition as “Trois caprices poétiques” — Il Lamento, La Leggerezza, and Un Sospiro. The third of the set seems more of a poem than a study or exercise. Its main technical requirement is the ability to cross hands in such a way that it is not apparent to the listener. This somewhat Chopinesque work consists basically of a melody surrounded by arpeggios, but the melody is one that almost never has two succeeding notes played by the same hand!

From *Années de pèlerinage*

The next three works are from the *Années de pèlerinage*. There are three volumes of these “Years of Pilgrimage.” The first volume is subtitled “Switzerland,” the second and third “Italy.” *Au lac de Wallenstadt* was written in 1835 and is the type of musical nature-picture that characterizes most of the first volume. The work reflects beautifully the quotation from Byron’s “Childe Harold” which Liszt writes on the opening page: “. . . Thy contrasted Lake . . . warns me with its stillness, to forsake Earth’s troubled waters for a purer spring.”

Michelangelo’s sculpture “The Thinker” gave the inspiration (and title) for the extract from Volume II. Again, Liszt prefaces a composition with text: “I am thankful to sleep, and more thankful to be made of stone; so long as injustice and shame remain on earth, I count it a blessing not to see or feel; so do not wake me — speak softly!” (Michelangelo). Much of the harmonic movement in this brief work anticipates Richard Wagner’s *Tristan* by approximately twenty years, and almost a quarter of a century later Liszt came back to this material in the second of his “Trois odes funèbre.” This music must have had a very special place in Liszt’s mind, because he requested (in vain, as it happens) that the first two of these Funeral Odes be played at his own funeral.

Moving from the second to the third volume takes us from the 1830s to the 1870s. Liszt had an apartment in the Villa d’Este which he referred to as his El Dorado, and where he spent many hours contemplating the garden of cypresses and fountains. From this vantage point he wrote one of the most influential works in the piano literature. Debussy, Ravel, and countless others are beholden to Liszt for this groundbreaking music which Busoni so aptly characterized as “the model for all musical fountains which have flowed since then.” Once again there is a brief quotation. Liszt inserts it in the middle of the piece, and it is from St. John: “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I give shall be a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Sonata in B minor

With the Sonata in B minor, Liszt created not only one of his own greatest works but also one of the masterpieces of all piano literature. It was completed in 1853 and given its first performance four years later in Berlin by Hans von Bülow. Volumes have been written about the special position this work inhabits in 19th-century composition: the radical departure from conventional sonata form, the peculiar metamorphosis of material, the individualistic concept of thematic transformation, etc. It is true that this one-movement work is built almost entirely of only four motifs continually altered and developed, but the real greatness of the composition stems from the fact that all this innovation is at the service of pure musical expression. The revolutionary aspects of the work were prophetically praised by Bartók: “I came to recognize that, for the continued development of musical art, Liszt’s compositions were more important than those of either Wagner or Strauss.” But it was Wagner himself who immediately grasped the end to which these compositional techniques were used when he wrote of the Sonata to Liszt: “. . . beautiful, great, lovely; deep and noble; sublime . . .” No other composition so successfully presents an amalgam of the varied aspects of Liszt as man and artist.

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13

The Hungarian Rhapsodies would more appropriately be named Gypsy Rhapsodies since they are not based on the actual folk music which was eventually researched so thoroughly by Bartók. Liszt stated that he chose the title because Hungarians had “adopted” the music of the gypsies as their own. Melancholy, capriciousness, and impetuosity are all present in the Thirteenth Rhapsody, which is reported to have been the composer’s favorite.

Five Brief Compositions

Liszt once said, "My sole ambition as a composer is to hurl my javelin into the infinite space of the future." These next brief compositions, written in the last six years of his life, certainly bear witness to that statement. The first of four *Valses oubliées* points in the direction of Scriabin, while *Nuages gris* startles with its somber impressionism and dissonant clashes against whole-tone harmonies. The *Bagatelle without Tonality* is the most wonderfully bizarre and revolutionary composition written by Liszt. Arnold Schoenberg moved to atonality in the finale of his Second String Quartet when a soprano quotes, "I feel the air of another planet." Twenty-five years earlier Liszt felt the stirrings of that same atmosphere in his *Bagatelle*. The poem which was the basis for *Sleepless, Question and Answer* (Schlaflos, Frage und Antwort) is captured perfectly by the movement of dissonance into uncertainty and then to wistful tonality. *En rêve* is a nocturne that dissolves into that rarefied atmosphere so characteristic of Liszt's thoughts at the end of his life when he was writing "Sketches for a Harmony of the Future."

Six Grand Etudes after Paganini

Paganini, with his phenomenal pyrotechnics on the violin, was the spur for Liszt's exploration of the limits of piano-playing technique. The etudes based on Paganini's Caprices represented a completely new, freely virtuosic approach to the keyboard when they were first published in 1840. They were so demanding physically that Liszt revised them in 1852 to what has become the standard performing version of today. These works were meant to astonish and entertain, not by the spectacle of a hard-working, sweating individual overcoming obstacles, but by the endless possibilities of a virtuoso enjoying control of an instrument. Liszt's own words in this regard are worth bearing in mind when playing and listening to these etudes: ". . . for the artist of the future . . . may virtuosity be a means, never an end . . ."

The first etude is a study in tremolos that is actually based on two different Caprices. The opening and closing flourishes are from Paganini's Fifth Caprice; the tremolos from the Sixth.

The second study is often called the *Octave Etude*, although only the central section exploits this aspect of the technique. The main body of the work deals with all manner of rapid scale passages.

La Campanella is the only one of the set that is not inspired by the Caprices. This music is from the finale of Paganini's Second Violin Concerto, wherein he created a sensation by imitating the sound of a small high-pitched bell through the use of open string harmonics. Liszt begins in this manner but soon embarks on a virtuosic survey of trills, runs, repeated notes, and octaves, culminating in one of his more brilliant codas.

The fourth study is an extraordinarily faithful reproduction of Paganini's spiccato arpeggios. Liszt even went so far as to write on only one stave, in imitation of the original score.

The fifth etude was given the title *La Chasse* by Paganini. It evokes images of the hunt through imitations of fifes, horns, and some not-too-serious scampering hide-and-seek.

The final etude is the famous *Theme and Variations* which has seduced so many musicians, including Brahms, Rachmaninoff, and Lutoslawski. Here Liszt, through Paganini, runs the gamut of pianistic technique in a fitting conclusion to a set of etudes that reaches the pinnacle of joy in virtuosity.

About the Artist

André Watts burst upon the music world on January 31, 1963, at the age of 16, when, at the last moment, Leonard Bernstein asked him to substitute for the ailing Glenn Gould and play Liszt's E-flat Concerto with the New York Philharmonic. The debut made headlines across the United States, and the superb reviews followed. Only 16 days before, Watts had been chosen from an auditioning group of young pianists by Bernstein to play with the Young People's Concerts of the New York Philharmonic in a debut televised nationwide. Mr. Watts is now in such demand that he has played as many as 150 concerts in a single season. His schedule includes annual re-engagements with the major orchestras of the United States, Europe, the Far East, and South America. He regularly graces the prestigious recital series and plays for vast outdoor audiences at the Hollywood Bowl, Tanglewood, Chicago's Ravinia Park, and Philadelphia's Robin Hood Dell/Mann Music Center. In 1973 he made a triumphant debut in the Soviet Union with the San Francisco Symphony and Seiji Ozawa on a U.S. State Department-sponsored tour. During the 1978-79 season he commemorated the 150th anniversary of Franz Schubert's death with an extraordinary series of Schubert chamber music concerts and solo recitals.

Mr. Watts has played for coronations, inaugurals, and command performances for royalty, for foreign heads of state, and for presidents at The White House. At age 26 he was the youngest person ever to receive an honorary doctorate from Yale University. He also holds honorary degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, Miami University of Ohio, and Albright College, and in 1984 the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University honored him with its Distinguished Alumni Award.

Television has played a large part in André Watts's career ever since his 1963 appearance on the Young People's Concert with Leonard Bernstein. His PBS telecast in 1976 was the first solo recital in the Live from Lincoln Center Series and the first full-length piano recital in the history of television. Succeeding television performances have included a United Nations Day performance of Beethoven's Concerto No. 2 with Eugene Ormandy and The Philadelphia Orchestra, BBC presentations with the London Symphony Orchestra, a performance documentary of a Mozart Concerto with Zubin Mehta and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the gala opening of the San Francisco Symphony's 1983 season, and a CBS "Camera Three" program in which Mr. Watts played some of the rarely-heard music of Franz Liszt and discussed the composer and his music. Just a year ago, Mr. Watts made his third appearance on a PBS Live from Lincoln Center telecast with a full-length prime-time solo piano recital. In the recording field, he has just completed an important project — an all-Liszt album on the EMI label.

In Ann Arbor, concertgoers have heard André Watts in the May Festivals of 1971 and 1976, two solo recitals in 1969 and 1974, and in partnership with violinist Charles Treger in 1982.

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