

Liszt rediscovered

Martin Haselböck

What was the source of your interest in Liszt?

Haselböck: My interest in Liszt as a conductor and organist goes back as far as my student days. Back in 1983 I was able to edit the composer's complete organ works for the first time for UE and I also made two recordings of them. We recently embarked upon an ambitious project together with the Liszt Festival Raiding called "The Sound of Weimar". This is a series in which all of Liszt's orchestral works will be recorded in their original sound for the first time. We are pleased that this project has been received so well and that it will be realised with my orchestra, the Wiener Akademie.

It is thanks to your initiative that UE is now publishing two orchestral works by Liszt. How did you come across the works?

Haselböck: The two works are definitely different in both their design and structure. *Vexilla regis prodeunt* is an orchestral work with dazzling orchestral colours. It is one of the works that Liszt composed using sacred themes after he left Weimar for Rome. I first examined the score in the Goethe-Schiller Archive in Weimar just one year ago and realised that this was an entirely unknown work that had never been played before. *Ad nos*, on the other hand, is an arrangement for organ and orchestra of one of Liszt's most well-known works for solo organ. The arranger is the French organist and composer Marcel Dupré, who used techniques identical to those employed by Liszt himself in his arrangement of Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy*. My colleagues Olivier Latry and Denny Wilke discovered the autograph score of the arrangement in the cellar of Dupré's villa in Meudon. The work has now been performed successfully on several occasions and I have recorded it myself with the soloist Christian Schmitt and the German Radio Philharmonic Orchestra in the Philharmonie Luxembourg for CD (cpo) and TV (arte).

Is "Ad nos" a sacred work?

Haselböck: No, it is a secular piece of music. Although Liszt was commissioned to write a fantasia on the B-A-C-H motif (= B flat, A, C, B natural) for the inauguration of the new organ in Merseburg Cathedral, he was unable to complete the work on time and instead contributed his *Fantasia*

and Fugue on the chorale “Ad nos, ad salutarem undam” from the opera The Prophet by Giacomo Meyerbeer. The organ composition lasts 30 minutes and is sometimes also called the Prophet Fugue.

What is the significance of “Ad nos” in this version for the repertoire of the organist?

Haselböck: The solo version of Ad nos is one of the most important works in the Romantic solo repertoire. The work is the first “organ symphony”, i.e. the predecessor of all works of the same name by Charles-Marie Widor, Louis Vierne, and many more. In the orchestral version, which Dupré expertly set in dazzling, French colours, Ad nos has become one of the few post-Romantic concertos for organ and orchestra. We organists don’t have any concertos by Tchaikovsky or Chopin. The Organ Symphony by Saint-Saëns has the same name as the genre, but fails to offer the organist any opportunity to display their virtuosity as a soloist.

Dupré didn’t have access to any instrumental scoring that he could have used as the basis for his orchestration. So what are the orchestral parts based on?

Haselböck: Actually, Dupré leaves the score of the solo version largely unchanged. In other words, the organ remains a solo part throughout the entire piece. The orchestra adds another dimension to the work. On the one hand, it doubles the sound of the organ and on the other, it offers interesting counterparts often with contrapuntal elements that were written by the arranger.

The second new work for which UE has you to thank is “Vexilla regis prodeunt”. In which creative period was this work composed?

Haselböck: After he abandoned his work in Weimar, Liszt moved to Rome, where he lived in almost monastic seclusion but maintained contact with the high clergy, the cardinals and even the Pope.

He therefore composed a number of works with a sacred theme, including Evocation à la Chapelle Sixtine and the St. Francis Legends, which were immediately arranged, as if on a production line, into different versions for piano, organ and even for orchestra. These works are far removed from the established concert repertoire as Liszt was unable to make use of an orchestra in Rome, so the pieces were composed and then put to one side. They were premiered posthumously – in the case of Vexilla regis prodeunt 127 years after the composer’s death, on 20 October 2013 at the Liszt Festival in Raiding, which was Liszt’s birthplace.

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What is the subject of the work?

Haselböck: Vexilla regis prodeunt is a Latin hymn to the cross of Jesus Christ which was used in liturgy from the 9th century onwards, although it is likely that it also played a major role at the time of the crusades. Liszt therefore gives the chant an almost martial interpretation that is faintly reminiscent of his march of the crusades in the Legend of St. Elizabeth. On the whole, however, the work is one of Liszt's short but important compositions whose colours reflect his Weimar period, but whose techniques prepare us for his later works.

How could such a major composition by Liszt remain ignored and unperformed for such a long time?

Haselböck: The autograph of the work is in the Goethe-Schiller Archive in Weimar, the main archive for Liszt's manuscripts, but it was labelled a "Fragment". The composition is also included in the usual lists of works, but nobody seems to have taken a closer look at the score until now. When looking at the manuscript, you can see that the composition is complete and that the details of the instrumentation are precise; only the three last bars are missing, but these can be easily reconstructed on the basis of the version for piano. It is therefore a large-scale composition with rich instrumentation by a mature Liszt, and it is now being presented to the public for the first time.

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)

Vexilla regis prodeunt
for orchestra | 7'

3 2 2 2 - 4 2 3 1 - timp, org, cym, str
prem. 20.10.2013 Raiding, Wiener Akademie/cond. Martin Haselböck

Ad nos, ad salutarem undam (1850)

Fantasia and Fugue on the Anabaptist Chorale from
Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera Le Prophète | 30'
for organ and orchestra, arranged by Marcel Dupré
3 3 3 3 - 4 3 3 1 - timp, perc(2), hp, str