

VIRTUOSO PIANO TRANSCRIPTIONS

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Franz Liszt (1811-86),
Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Johann Strauss II (1825-99),
George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Alessandro Taverna *piano*

JS Bach Partita for Violin No.3 in E major, BWV 1006 (arr. Sergei Rachmaninov)		
1	Prelude	5:48
2	Gavotte	2:39
3	Fugue	2:04
4	Liszt-Mozart Réminiscences de Don Juan	18:56
5	Schubert Gretchen am Spinnrade (arr. Liszt)	4:20
6	Schubert Die Forelle (arr. Liszt)	3:45
7	Schubert Erlkönig (arr. Liszt)	5:01
8	Liszt-Verdi Rigoletto Concert Paraphrase	7:33
9	J Strauss II Schatz-Walzer (arr. Ernst von Dohnányi)	8:02
10	Gershwin Rhapsody in Blue <i>includes 20 seconds of faded applause</i>	17:32
Total duration:		75:45

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LIVE RECITAL

Including

Suite from
JS BACH
Violin Partita in E
arr. Rachmaninov

LISZT
Concert
Paraphrase:
Rigoletto

GERSHWIN
Rhapsody in Blue



ALESSANDRO TAVERNA piano

Before the developments in the reproduction of music during the last 100 years and more, getting to know music for most people meant owning a piano and learning to play the instrument. With orchestral music and opera, the printed music they played from was in the form of transcriptions or arrangements. But today, as the demand for home music-making has virtually disappeared, the result has been that the vast repertoire of music published in this form is almost unknown.

In the era before mechanical or electronic reproduction the art of transcribing music from one medium to another had to be undertaken by a musician thoroughly familiar with the original work. If such transcriptions were made by great musicians, or occasionally by the composer, then a further vein of artistry was involved. Today, we may be able to summon up a symphony or opera at will, but in so doing we deny ourselves an earlier, great musician's take on such music as we wish to hear.

This vast body of published music, which reached its zenith from *circa* 1820-1920, nonetheless continues to exist, affording insights into the original music and in the re-creativity of other practical musicians.

Such re-creativity, when made by a great musician who was not the composer, adds a vastly more significant strand to the original music than that of the publisher's in-house arranger, and in this collection, Alessandro Taverna plays a wide selection of music, from JS Bach to Gershwin, each arranged either by the composer himself or by other composers who were also masters of the keyboard.

Of all the great pianist-composers of the 19th century, Franz Liszt continues to reign supreme. During his lifetime, many highly gifted pianists sought to study with him; through later generations, a connection with Liszt or his pupils –

directly, or by way of influence – has carried the torch for those pianists possessing a transcendental technique.

Ferruccio Busoni was just 11-years-old when he was introduced to Liszt in 1877. Busoni never became a pupil of Liszt, unlike Alexander Siloti, who studied with Liszt in the early 1880s. Siloti was Serge Rachmaninov's first cousin (their mothers were sisters); he encouraged his young relative to pursue his love of the piano seriously.

Rachmaninov never met Liszt, although – through Siloti – the influence of the older man on him was palpable, in technique and in creativity. Rachmaninov made as many transcriptions or arrangements as did Liszt, but the concept was still relevant during the post-First World War years when Rachmaninov became (for purely financial considerations, following his flight from Russia in 1917) more of a touring virtuoso, initially in the United States.

Of Rachmaninov's piano transcriptions, the Suite from JS Bach's **Partita for Violin in E major** BWV 1006 is the largest, although it plays for under 10 minutes (unlike Busoni's 14-minute piano version of the Chaconne from Bach's D minor Partita). In the early 1930s, following his friendship with the great violinist Fritz Kreisler, Rachmaninov became attracted to the violin repertoire, composing his Variations on a Theme of Corelli (his Op.42) for solo piano, and this Suite, transcribing three movements from the E major Partita: the Prelude, Gavotte and Rondeau, and concluding Gigue.

As with Busoni's great transcription of the D minor Chaconne, Rachmaninov does not merely transfer the violinist's notes to the keyboard: there is an element of re-composition, founded upon a complete understanding of the nature of the original, making the result music which is eminently pianistic.

Any collection of virtuoso piano transcriptions cannot omit the name of Franz Liszt, for it was he, above all other composers, who raised the genre to an altogether higher level than anything achieved by any other composer.

In terms of musical understanding of the original source material, of the art of instrumental transcription, of dramatic cohesion in the finished work and of understanding and broadening keyboard literature, no other composer approaches Liszt – quite apart from the technical demands he makes on the pianist.

We see these aspects at their height in Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan* (S418), which he composed in 1841. It is, in many ways, the finest of many such works by Liszt, and is not only remarkable for that claim but also because Mozart's *Don Giovanni* was by no means frequently encountered on the stage at that time.

Far from being what a later generation might term 'Don Giovanni's Greatest Hits' in solo piano form, in this work – as in several of his other operatic fantasias – Liszt proffers a new piece, a re-composition of Mozart's original material from 54 years earlier alongside a psychological commentary on the characters and plot of the opera.

These facets of Liszt's score have been identified by the greatest musical intellectuals of the late 19th century, including Busoni, and – nearer to our own day – Charles Rosen and Alfred Brendel, pointing out that Liszt's juxtaposition of themes and dramatic passages from the opera, not invariably in the sequence they originally appear, adds degrees of psychological insight to the drama itself.

Quite apart from these factors, Liszt's technical demands are breathtaking: it is as though he reserves his most profound statements only to those capable of grasping, literally, his insights and commentaries. The result is a masterstroke of artistic and

intellectual understanding, an example of musical re-creativity of the highest aesthetic order.

That Liszt was capable of the widest ranges of expression within his copious output of transcriptions, fantasias and what he termed paraphrases, is demonstrated in the following items in Alessandro Taverna's programme. The great *Don Juan* fantasy is followed by three Schubert songs, in treatment and length at the opposite end of Liszt's re-compositional spectrum. Indeed, the songs – *Gretchen am Spinnrade* ('Gretchen at the Spinning-wheel'), *Die Forelle* ('The Trout') and *Erkönig* ('The Earl-King') – are arguably the three most famous Schubert songs. Liszt subtly threads the original melodic line within the idiomatic accompaniment, but does so in such a way that he preserves both the identity and character of Schubert's word-setting.

Alessandro Taverna concludes the Lisztian part of this recital with another of the composer's operatic-based pieces. One should note that the work is not termed 'fantasia' but 'paraphrase'. In other words, Liszt does not assume to dig deeper into the drama of the original opera – in this case Verdi's *Rigoletto* – an opera which was most successfully premiered in 1851, but presents an adaptation for solo piano of the ensemble highlight of the score, the great quartet from Act III, wherein the four main characters each muse over their dramatic situation through the musical intertwining of their individual personalities. Liszt does not attempt a psychological commentary, but presents Verdi's masterly quartet in pure keyboard terms – doing so in a way that the result becomes a work for solo piano within the capabilities of a wider range of pianists than the *Don Juan* fantasy.

Johann Strauss II's operetta *Die Zigeunerbaron* ('The Gipsy Baron') was premiered in 1885. It was set in contemporaneous Hungary, and like Verdi's *Rigoletto* of 34 years

earlier it proved an enormous success. If the acclaim accorded Strauss's work reached Liszt's ears (he died a year later), it was Strauss himself who first extracted music from the score in his orchestral **Schatz Walzer** ('Treasure Waltz'). But it was left to the great Hungarian composer and pianist Ernest von Dohnányi to present his Lisztian paraphrase of the operetta's endearing waltz sequences almost 40 years later.

As a young man, Dohnányi had studied with István Thomán, a pupil of Liszt, and we may find the influence of the great Hungarian master in Dohnányi's paraphrase, the first of two such pieces he transcribed from Strauss operettas, published in Budapest in 1928.

This was four years after George Gershwin's **Rhapsody in Blue** received its first performance in New York in February 1924 by the composer and Paul Whiteman's band, near the end of a long programme in which Whiteman (a classically-trained violinist) presented aspects of the fusion between serious music and jazz before an eclectic and distinguished audience, which included Rachmaninov.

Gershwin, then 25-years-old, was better known as a composer of popular music but had already produced a study for string quartet, *Lullaby*, and a one-act opera *Blue Monday* – proof of his serious ambitions. *Rhapsody in Blue* proved the sensation of the evening. Six weeks later, Gershwin and the Whiteman Band recorded the *Rhapsody* for the Victor Company: thereafter, the music travelled the world.

Gershwin himself made the version for solo piano recorded here; as one contemporary critic wrote, "Gershwin's *Rhapsody* is in the form of a Lisztian Rhapsody" – though whether Gershwin had that in mind is a moot point compared with the truly immortal nature of the *Rhapsody*'s thematic riches, as impressive today as it undoubtedly struck its first listeners almost 100 years ago.

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Alessandro Taverna

Hailed by British music critics as the "natural successor to his great compatriot Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli", Alessandro Taverna's "music making stimulates the senses as does a visit to his native Venice", and gives "rise to a feeling of wonderment". When he reached the final and performed Chopin's First Piano Concerto at the 2009 Leeds International Piano Competition, "the world was suddenly suffused with grave beauty: flawless minutes of poetry", said *The Independent* newspaper.

Alessandro Taverna established his international career by winning top prizes at the Minnesota Piano-e-Competition, London International Piano Competition, Leeds International Piano Competition and Busoni Piano Competition in Bolzano, Italy. Since then he has gone on to perform in many of the world's most important concert halls including Teatro alla Scala Milan, Teatro di San Carlo Naples, Teatro La Fenice Venice, Musikverein Vienna, Konzerthaus Berlin, Gasteig Munich, Wigmore Hall and Royal Festival Hall in London, Bridgewater Hall Manchester, Salle Cortot in Paris, Philharmonic Hall Liverpool, Musashino Hall in Tokyo, DR Koncerthuset Copenhagen, Auditorium Parco della Musica Rome, Wits Linder Auditorium Johannesburg and Lincoln Center, New York.

His success has led to many engagements with the most prestigious orchestras including Filarmonica della Scala, Münchner Philharmoniker, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Danish National Symphony Orchestra and others, working with conductors including Lorin Maazel, Riccardo Chailly, Fabio Luisi, Daniel Harding, Michele Mariotti, Daniele Rustioni.

For his artistic achievements and his international career, in 2012 he was awarded the National Prize of the President of the Republic by Italian State President, Giorgio Napolitano.

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