

# Franz LISZT

**THE COMPLETE SYMPHONIC POEMS**  
TRANSCRIBED FOR SOLO PIANO BY AUGUST STRADAL

**VOLUME THREE**  
HUNNENSCHLACHT  
PROMETHEUS  
FESTKLÄNGE  
MAZEPPA

**Risto-Matti Marin**

# LISZT SYMPHONIC POEMS, TRANSCRIBED BY AUGUST STRADAL, VOLUME THREE

## Part 1: An Overview

by Malcolm MacDonald

The pianist, composer and writer August Stradal was born on 17 May 1860 in Teplice, Bohemia. His father was a lawyer and a member of the town council. Stradal attended the grammar school in Litoměřice and then studied at the Vienna Conservatory, where his teachers were Anton Door, Theodor Leschetizky, Gustav Nottebohm and Anton Bruckner. In September 1884 he went to Weimar to become a disciple of Franz Liszt, whom he also accompanied to Budapest and Bayreuth in 1885 and 1886. After Liszt's death Stradal returned to Teplice, where he was active as a music teacher until 1893, when he joined the staff of the Horak School of Piano Studies (later the Horak Konservatorium) in Vienna. He also toured extensively.

In later life he wrote copiously about both Bruckner and Liszt, for whom he is an important biographical source, and published a memoir of the latter (*Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt*, 1920) as well as an autobiography. He received the Czechoslovak State Music Award in 1928. Stradal died on 13 March 1930 at Krasna Lipa, north of Prague.

Stradal was considered a leading interpreter of Liszt's music and made many transcriptions – some sources reckon over 250 – of orchestral and chamber works for the piano, in repertoire stretching from the Baroque era to the late nineteenth century. Notable among these are his transcriptions of Bruckner's First, Second, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Symphonies and his String Quintet (he also made a two-piano version of Mahler's Fifth Symphony). Stradal also arranged a huge number



*The older Stradal*

of Bach's works, many excerpts from Wagner's operas<sup>1</sup> and most of Liszt's orchestral works, including the *Faust* and *Dante Symphonies* and the thirteen symphonic poems, his versions of which were published about the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

<sup>1</sup> The first and second of a scheduled three volumes of Stradal's Wagner transcriptions have been recorded by Juan Guillermo Vizcarra on Toccata Classics rocc 0151 and rocc 0192.

It is a feature of Liszt's essential genius that he inhabits in his music a multitude of *personae* which range from Mephistopheles to St Francis of Assisi, as in his life he ranged from Byronic wanderer to the apparently pious and orthodox man of the cloth who wrote the late choral works. The forms cultivated by the great Classical composers gave Liszt scant precedent for this free play of imaginative affinity. His new forms – notably the thirteen symphonic poems – sprang from his desire for a more immediately dramatic conflict and interconnection of ideas, at the surface, than allowed by the fundamentally architectural, tonal contrasts of Classical sonata-structures. He found instead in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* the principle of the *idée fixe*, the symbolic idea recurring in different guises in different movements, which led him (and Wagner after him) to develop leitmotivic technique. In Schubert's 'Wanderer' Fantasy (which he orchestrated) he discovered the concept of transformation applied to the rhythmic and expressive characters of entire sections. From these hints he evolved his own structural principles of thematic metamorphosis, usually combined with a programmatic element derived from literature or painting.

Liszt's musical forms did not ape those of his extra-musical models: rather, the model provided him with what he called psychological motifs which he then worked out in his own terms. These motifs are seen at work in the symphonic poems, and especially in his supreme achievements in orchestral music, the *Faust* and *Dante* Symphonies.

Twelve of the symphonic poems were completed in the decade 1848–58, when Liszt was living in Weimar with the honorary position of court Kapellmeister,<sup>2</sup> and some of them have remained among his most famous and most characteristic works. All twelve were dedicated to the Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein. Taken together they give a graphic impression of the sheer versatility and many-sidedness of Liszt's personality, as well as his astonishing creative range.

Liszt himself routinely made four-hand transcriptions of his symphonic poems, either for two pianos or piano duet, but he tended not to make solo-piano versions, adding to the interest and value of Stradal's efforts. Even so, Stradal's solo-piano versions

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<sup>2</sup> The thirteenth and last, *Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*, is a much later work, dating from 1881–82.

of the Liszt symphonic poems were not the first of their kind, for eleven of the Weimar twelve had previously been arranged by Carl Tausig (1841–71), sometimes referred to as the greatest of Liszt’s pupils. A child prodigy, Tausig was born in Bohemia and in his short life he showed a remarkable talent for transcription. His versions of the Liszt symphonic poems were made by 1858, when he was seventeen years old. These remained unpolished drafts, unpublished in his lifetime, and some of them have been lost, though others have been performed and recorded with success in recent years. Stradal’s versions were, by contrast, both polished and published. They have not enjoyed wide currency due to their truly transcendental difficulty, but they are fascinating ‘readings for the keyboard’ of some of Liszt’s boldest orchestral inventions.

In his transcriptions Stradal scrupulously indicates the instruments playing in the orchestral score at any given time, and devises many ingenious solutions to representing their sound in terms of the keyboard. He also, in some passages, will give a simpler *ossia* alternative. But there is no doubt that he intended his versions only for players of transcendental technique, and some passages – for example, those displaying his liking for very rapid parallel octaves, rather than the broken octaves that less demanding transcribers might have opted for – may seem virtually unplayable. Occasionally, in a few spots in each of these transcriptions, Risto-Matti Marin has seen fit to make changes in the texts where, as he has written, ‘sometimes Stradal seems to use a little bit monotonous textures and sometimes his thinking of human physical capabilities is what I would call “optimistic” – meaning some quite impossible things.’<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Stradal’s versions do transform these revolutionary orchestral compositions into viable and effective piano works, faithfully preserving their masterly musical substance.

*Malcolm MacDonald (1948–2014) was the author of The Symphonies of Havergal Brian (three volumes, Kahn & Averill, London, 1974, 1978 and 1983) and the editor of the first two volumes of Havergal Brian on Music (Toccata Press, London, 1985 and 2009). His other writings included books on Brahms, Foulds, Schoenberg, Ronald Stevenson and Edgard Varèse. He died in May 2014.*

<sup>3</sup> E-mail to Martin Anderson, dated 2 December 2007.

## Part 2: Stradal and Liszt's Symphonic Poems— A Closer Look

by William Melton

With his profusion of devoted students, Liszt did not lack for would-be arrangers, but the intimacy that August Stradal developed with both Liszt the man and Liszt's creations made him perhaps uniquely qualified to make solo-piano transcriptions of the symphonic poems. Stradal arrived in Weimar in the autumn of 1884, and wrote of his audition in Liszt's drawing room:

Standing upon a thick carpet were a Bechstein grand covered with published music and manuscripts almost a metre high, an Ibach pianino, Liszt's desk, a bust of Beethoven, and a small table. The salon was decorated as simply as possible. Outside the three high, wide windows was a fine view of the magnificent Grand Ducal Park, with its large trees whose leaves were resplendent with autumn foliage.<sup>1</sup>

The room was occupied by Liszt as well as a group of his pupils (whom Stradal suspected of wishing him ill). 'I played with clarity and without obvious blemish, for despite understandable nervousness the fingers continued unimpeded; but my inner turmoil at the evil reception meant that power of expression was lacking.'<sup>2</sup> Stradal tearfully approached Liszt to ask for another hearing. This boon was granted and his later performance of Liszt's *Variations on a Theme of Bach* (G180) was well received: 'The ice was broken and I was accepted by the Master, who sensed that I was a promising artist who adored him and truly appreciated the greatness of his works.'<sup>3</sup> In the words of Hildegard Stradal, over the next two years her future husband

<sup>1</sup> August Stradal, *Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt*, Haupt, Bern and Leipzig, 1929, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

accompanied the Master thenceforth on all his excursions and journeys, during this time profiting from his teaching and his friendship. He became acquainted with nearly all of the leading artists and personalities who associated with Liszt or whom Liszt would visit, which had a tremendously influential influence on Stradal's receptive young spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Liszt depended on his pupil-secretary to see manuscripts through publication, and rewarded him with the dedication of the nocturne *En rêve* (G207). At Liszt's death, Stradal (whose father had drowned in a sailing accident just a few years before) wept at the casket in Bayreuth 'as if he had lost his father once again'.<sup>5</sup>

Liszt's death did not dampen Stradal's involvement with his teacher's music. Over the next decades Stradal edited Liszt's organ works and his Wagner transcriptions, and produced solo-piano arrangements of much more: an album of the songs, the *Missa solemnis*, the *Coronation Mass*, the *Faust* and *Dante Symphonies*, and the symphonic poems. He also presented Liszt to the world as an enthusiastic performer ('At the piano sat August Stradal, the well-known full-blooded Lisztian who would actually like to outdo Liszt'<sup>6</sup>). His concerts included many piano four-hands performances of the symphonic poems – on one Linz programme given in August 1887 Stradal and August Göllerich alternated on the first and second parts in no fewer than six of the works.<sup>7</sup> Such immersion in Liszt's music produced transcriptions of the highest quality:

Such labour demands a very special talent and aptitude that August Stradal seems to possess in high degree. What is essential must be distinguished from what is unimportant [...] and yet the resultant whole must be pianistic and effective. [...] Suffice it to say that Stradal has attended closely to Liszt's manner and is totally at home in his style.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Hildegard Stradal, *August Stradals Lebensbild*, Haupt, Bern and Leipzig, 1934, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Johann Georg von Woerz, 'Concerte', *Wiener Sonn- und Montags-Zeitung* 34, No. 45, 9 November 1896, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> The two performed *Die Ideale*, *Hunnenschlacht*, *Orpheus*, *Mazeppa*, *Tasso: Lamento e Trionfo* and *Festklänge* (Anon., 'Aufführungen: Linz', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 54, No. 83, 24 August 1887, p. 389).

<sup>8</sup> Vernon Spencer, 'Die Klavierbearbeitungen Liszt'scher Lieder von August Stradal', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 99, Nos. 29/30, 22 July 1903, pp. 413 and 417.

Gechter lieber Stradal!  
In etwa 14 Tagen  
erhalten Sie ein Telegramm  
welches Ihnen meine  
Einladung nach München  
und der "Frauen Insel"  
im Chiem See bringt.  
Freundschaftlich  
F. Liszt  
24ten Sept 85 - Weimar!

A letter displaying Liszt's friendly manner with Stradal:

'Honoured, dear Stradal,

In roughly 14 days you will receive a telegram which will bring you my invitation to Munich and the  
"Fraueninsel on the Chiemsee".

Cordially / F. Liszt / 24th Sept 85 - Weimar'.

(The Fraueninsel on the Chiemsee was and is home to a convent, the Abtei Frauenwörth.)

*Prometheus* (G99) [3], the fifth of Liszt's symphonic poems, was composed for the unveiling of the Johann Gottfried Herder Memorial in Weimar on 24 August 1850 as an overture to Liszt's choruses to Johann Gottfried Herder's *Prometheus Unbound*. This first version, which was orchestrated by Joachim Raff, Liszt revised five years later. The legend of Prometheus the fire-bringer led Liszt to produce a remarkable balance of formal and programmatic elements. Keith T. Johns assigned meanings (such as suffering, lamentation, striving, redemption) to musical motifs which are derived from the earlier *Prometheus* choruses as well as from *Malédiction* for piano and strings (G121).<sup>9</sup> The programme is augmented by the allegorical, as Liszt broadened his theme to include the suffering that all artists endure before achieving the transcendent. 'In fact', August Stradal wrote, 'Liszt penned the Prometheus music with his own heart's blood. He himself was the giver of light and blessings, long bound and constrained by the ignorance and malice of the masses.'<sup>10</sup>

The loose sonata-form organisation includes an introduction (*Allegro energico – Maestoso*), an exposition (*Andante*, bar 27) in A minor, a fugue – an 'academic' technique that Liszt often criticised – which functions as development (*Allegro moderato*, bar 160), and a recapitulation (*Andante* – bar 250) which ends in A major. The orchestration is often very fine, as illustrated by one section of the redemption motif (marked *ff sempre*, bar 364), where twelve different instrumental groups are assigned remarkably autonomous lines – a potential nightmare for the arranger of a solo-piano edition, but masterfully condensed by Stradal.

*Mazeppa* (Symphonic Poem No. 6, G100) [4] is an expansion of the fourth of the *Transcendental Études* of 1851 (though Liszt had composed several 'Mazeppa' treatments for piano, the first in 1826). The symphonic incarnation, originally orchestrated with Raff's help but revised by Liszt before the Weimar premiere on 16 April 1854, closely follows the Victor Hugo poem about the Cossack leader condemned to be lashed to a wild horse that is loosed on the steppes (the florid translation is by Frederick Corder):

<sup>9</sup> Keith T. Johns, *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt*, ed. Michael Saffle, Pendragon, Stuyvesant (NY), 1997, pp. 52–53.

<sup>10</sup> August Stradal, *Franz Liszt's Werke*, Kahnt, Leipzig, 1904, p. 23.

Behold this Mazeppa, oĕrpowered by minions,  
Writhe vainly beneath the implacable pinions  
His limbs that surround,  
To a fiery steed from the Asian mosses  
That, chafing and fuming, its mane wildly tosses,  
The victim is bound.<sup>11</sup>

Mazeppa's suffering is transformed into apotheosis when he is rescued and is offered a Ukrainian fiefdom.

As Stradal emphasised, 'in the symphonic poem *Mazeppa* the music is rigorously bound to the poetic original.'<sup>12</sup> Whereas the sufferings of Prometheus could be seen allegorically, those of *Mazeppa* are brutally literal, and Liszt lavishes his score with descriptive programmatic touches. The large orchestra with triple woodwinds is up to the task: from the crack of the whip that begins punishment (*ff* winds and cymbal crash in D minor) to the rhythmic pulse of hoof-beats, the cries of flying scavengers and the stumbling, exhausted collapse of the horse (bars 389–404) (Ex. 1). Mazeppa's near-death is rendered in a lament (*Andante mesto*, bar 405), but trumpet fanfares signal his revival (*Allegro*, bar 439) and a Cossack march illustrates his triumphal coronation (D major, *Allegro marziale*, bar 512). A frequent criticism of this work is that the evocative orchestration is better than the music itself, as Humphrey Searle expressed in this discouraging epitaph:

*Mazeppa* is unfortunately not one of Liszt's finest creations; though some of the music is exciting enough in a rather obvious kind of way, the march passage has a distinctly vulgar flavour – it is flat and shallow music, as Mr. Sitwell rightly says.<sup>13</sup>

*Festklänge* ('Festival Sounds', Symphonic Poem No. 7, G101) [2] first impresses by what it is not. An outlier among Liszt's symphonic poems, it is not based on a literary or

<sup>11</sup> Franz Liszt, *Musikalische Werke*, Vol. 2, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1885, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> August Stradal, 'Liszt's *Mazeppa*-Werke', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 78, No. 43, 26 October 1911, p. 600.

<sup>13</sup> Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt*, Williams & Norgate, London, 1954, p. 73.

## Ex. 1

The musical score for Ex. 1 is written for Woodwinds, Strings, Brass, and Timpani. The top staff shows the Woodwinds part with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The second staff shows the Strings and Brass parts, with a dynamic marking of *sf*. The third staff shows the Timpani part, with a dynamic marking of *fff* and a tempo marking of *poco a poco*. The score includes a section marked '2' with a *rallentando* and *dim.* instruction. The score is divided into two systems, with a measure rest in the first system and a measure rest in the second system.

historical personality, a painting or a poem, and in fact has no accompanying programme at all. In lieu of an explanatory preface by Liszt, for over a century music historians have repeated the legend promulgated by his early biographer Lina Ramann that *Festklänge* was composed for the celebration of Liszt's intended marriage to Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein.<sup>14</sup> Such a wedding would indeed be planned, but not until 1861, seven years after the premiere of *Festklänge*, on 9 November 1854 at another festival altogether. *Festklänge* was presented at the golden jubilee of the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna's first arrival in Weimar, as an interlude between Schiller's dramatic poem *The Homage of the Arts* and Anton Rubinstein's one-act opera *The Siberian Hunter*. The scholar Joanne Cormac wrote that *Festklänge* was 'a replacement for the opera [Liszt] perhaps would

<sup>14</sup> Lina Ramann, *Franz Liszt als Künstler und Mensch*, Vol. 2, Part 2, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1894, p. 309.

have preferred to unveil at the jubilee. It was not originally a symbol of Liszt's hopes of marriage to Carolyne, but rather a symbol of his hopes for Weimar.<sup>15</sup> These hopes would have included his optimism about the next Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, the cultured art lover Carl Alexander.

*Festklänge* is also unlike most of Liszt's symphonic poems as far as design is concerned, and features an improbably conventional application of sonata form. It begins with the dotted rhythms of the *Allegro mosso con brio* introduction in C major/G major, which yields to an exposition (*Andante sostenuto*, bar 48) in which the rising arpeggios of the principal theme in the strings in C major are contrasted by the stepwise declamation of the secondary theme in the woodwinds in G major (bar 158). The traditional sonata form unfolding brings a lengthy development (*Allegro con brio*, bar 232), a recapitulation (*Tempo I. Allegro mosso con brio*, bar 364) that finishes with the Polonaise rhythms that many writers have felt echo Carolyne's Polish heritage (bar 487), and a coda (*Allegro*, bar 511). Yet Liszt deftly managed a high degree of tonal ambiguity throughout, right until the key of C major is decisively affirmed at the very end of the coda. *Festklänge* reveals a side of the composer that is unexpected, and the Liszt scholar Michael Saffle has written,

the earliest proponents of the New German School ignored Liszt as sonata composer. So did Hanslick. So do we, most of the time, today. Perhaps because, in our eagerness to salute the revolutionary in Liszt, we slight Liszt the conservative.<sup>16</sup>

Liszt was motivated to compose *Hunnenschlacht* ('Battle of the Huns', No. 11, G105)<sup>17</sup>, first performed in Weimar in 1857, by the painter Wilhelm von Kaulbach's epic mural of the same name. In two introductions to the piece (one each in German and French that differed considerably) Liszt related a conversation with Kaulbach about the historical battle of the Catalaunian Fields in 451AD, when the invasion of Gaul by Attila and the Huns was halted by the Roman general Flavius Aetius and the Visigothic King

<sup>15</sup> Joanne Cormac, *Liszt as Kapellmeister: The Development of the Symphonic Poems on the Weimar Stage*, PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2012, p. 335.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Saffle, 'Liszt's Use of Sonata Form: The Case of *Festklänge*', *The Liszt Society Journal*, Vol. 24, 1999, p. 27.

Theodoric I. Kaulbach filled his work with what he saw as the opposing dichotomy of the armies, that of barbarism and civilisation, dark and light. In Liszt's imagination, the battle became a soundscape:

The musician thought that he heard in the midst of a sanguinary fight the cries of the wounded, the imprecations of the conquered, the groans of the dying, mingling in a terrible chorus, while at the same time as if coming from a distance he recognised the accents of a prayer, the sacred hymn, mounting to heaven from the depths of the cloister, whose silence it alone breaks. The more deafening the tumult of the battle became, the more this hymn increased in force and power.<sup>17</sup>

Martial motifs represent the fighting itself, the Huns (a violent sprawl of triads across two octaves) and the Romans (a starkly disciplined brass fanfare), while the organ-intoned Gregorian hymn *Crux fidelis* is ultimately triumphant. The ebb and flow of motifs obviates the use of those conventional forms that Liszt had sometimes employed in earlier symphonic poems, though a certain confusion prevails. Michael Saffle noted that

there is no real need for detailed structural analysis where the 'Battle of the Huns' is concerned. In this work we encounter 'real' program music: here is a frank portrayal in sound of pitched battle and, more specifically, of barbarians being beaten back and Christians winning the day (the barbarians get much of the liveliest music, though. They often do).<sup>18</sup>

*William Melton is the author of The Wagner Tuba: A History (edition ebenos, Aachen, 2008) and Engelbert Humperdinck: Hänsel und Gretel in Context (Toccata Press, London, in preparation). His other writings include articles on Felix Draeseke, Henri Kling, Friedrich Klose and additional lesser-known Romantics. A career orchestral horn-player, he has researched and edited the scores of the 'Forgotten Romantics' series for the publisher edition ebenos.*

<sup>17</sup> Franz Liszt, *Musikalische Werke*, Vol. 3, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1885, p. 188.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Saffle, 'Orchestral Works', *The Liszt Companion*, ed. Ben Arnold, Greenwood, Westport (Conn.), 2002, p. 259.

**Risto-Matti Marin** (b. 1976) has recorded many internationally acclaimed solo piano albums, and several others of chamber music. He has also made a number of recordings for the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE). His recorded catalogue varies from the cornerstones of Classical/Romantic piano repertoire to rare original works, transcriptions and contemporary music. Risto-Matti Marin earned his doctoral degree in 2010 from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, and the following year he was awarded a three-year grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation. In 2015 he received a five-year grant from the Arts Promotion Centre Finland. In addition to his work as a recitalist and chamber musician, he lectures on piano music and teaches at master-classes in Finland and abroad. His early teachers in the Kuopio Conservatoire were Jouni Rätty and Jaakko Untamala. Later he studied at the Sibelius Academy, where his teachers were Erik T. Tawaststjerna and Teppo Koivisto. As a soloist, as well as a chamber musician together with classical saxophonist Olli-Pekka Tuomisalo, he has premiered many Finnish contemporary works, by Sebastian Fagerlund, Eero Hämeenniemi and Matthew Whittall, among others. Recently, he was the co-dedicatée, along with Angela Hewitt, of Whittall's piano concerto *Nameless Seas*, of which he gave the European premiere in November 2017 as soloist with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Olari Elts.



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