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The Music of Franz Liszt

Recent Recordings of the Piano Music of Franz Liszt

By John Button

As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Franz Liszt, it is worth remembering that his first love was the piano – both as a pianist and as a composer. Although he left significant compositions in a variety of musical forms, he was a compulsive, and hugely prolific, composer for the piano. A measure of the Olympian scale of his piano output is the extraordinary achievement of pianist Leslie Howard in an attempt to record all his piano works – he has, thus far, reached 99 compact discs!

Still, there are never many discs of his music released that really stand out – here are a handful that have something of real distinction to offer:

The Complete *Années de Pèlerinage*

Louis Lortie. Chandos CHAN 10662(2)



This is the finest current recording of some of Liszt's finest piano music. As a result of playing all two-and-a-half hours of this music in concerts around the world before making this recording, Lortie is completely at one with Liszt's travels to Switzerland and Italy, and the sound on a Fazioli piano is superb.

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Recital – Lise de la Salle. Naive V 5267



This young French pianist belies her age with playing of tremendous panache and authority. In a programme that includes transcriptions of Mozart, Schumann, and Schubert, some late works and the spectacular Ballade No.2, de la Salle rivals the best in the business.

Nelson Freire – *Harmonies du Soir*.

Decca 478 2728



On this disc, the great Brazilian pianist includes not only an unforgettable *Harmonies du Soir*, but all six of the *Consolations* as part of a carefully chosen recital that is quite marvellously played. One is reminded of his 1994 recording of the two Piano Concertos and the *Totentanz*, now available on Berlin Classics 183772.

Volodos plays Liszt.

Arcadi Volodos. Sony 88697065002

This has been out for a couple of years, and it might be hard to find – try Marbecks or Parsons Books and Music – it will be worth the effort. This phenomenal Russian pianist, with an interesting and varied programme, turns the piano into an orchestra! His forte playing has enormous weight without clatter, and his quiet playing is absolutely exquisite.

Other discs that might be of interest are another Brazilian pianist, Arnaldo Cohen, with the Sao Paulo Symphony in the two Piano Concertos and the *Totentanz* on BIS -SACD-1530, and New Zealander Jeffrey Grice with a programme that, like Freire, includes the Six *Consolations*, on Integral Classic INT 221.116. This, too, might be hard to find.