

Peter Katin
in recital

Liszt
and Brahms

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Liszt:

Sonata in B minor 31'21"

Brahms:

**Variations & Fugue on a theme
by Händel, Op.24** 26'57"

Liszt:

Sonetto 123 del Petrarca 9'16"
(Années de Pèlérinage, 2me Année)

From a recital at the University of Western Ontario,
London, Ontario, Canada in April 1983.

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Introduction

The two main works in this recital have been among the most successful in Peter Katin's career. His performance of the Liszt Sonata at his second Wigmore Hall recital in March 1949 drew great critical acclaim and has done so ever since, whether from the Royal Festival Hall in London or from Moscow's Tchaikovsky Hall. Between 1982 and 1983 he played both the Liszt and the Brahms-Händel Variations in a programme which also included Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue and Chopin's Polonaise-Fantaisie, in various major cities including London, Hamburg, Barcelona, Düsseldorf and Toronto, but the only recital to be recorded was his performance at the University of Western Ontario in April 1983, a year before the end of his six-year residence in Canada. The Brahms-Händel Variations have appeared in a highly successful studio recording of various Brahms works (Olympia OCD 263, May 1990), but Peter Katin feels that the Liszt Sonata is more in danger than many works of losing its sustained intensity in a studio atmosphere. He has always been highly critical of his own performances and only on one previous occasion has he agreed to the issuing of a public recital; this was a 1977 Chopin programme at The Maltings, Snape. It was originally available in a limited edition, and was more recently transferred to CD by Pickwick International - now repackaged by Carlton (Hallmark Classics 350142). About a year ago the tapes of the University recital were discovered in his own collection, and after listening to them and comparing them with tapes of three other performances that he had given, he agreed that these three works should be made available.

Notes by Peter Katin (Author's Copyright 1996)

LISZT: Sonata in B minor

Occupying one of the loftiest positions in the piano repertoire, the B minor Sonata was written after Liszt had retired from his sensational virtuoso career on the concert platform and had found the right conditions for the fulfilment of his creative talents. It was completed between 1852 and 1853, and it received its first performance from Hans von Bülow four years later. It is in one continuous movement although this can be seen as being divided into three sections, and its main themes are all introduced in the first few minutes. These consist of (a) a sombre descending scale, (b) a frenzied motif making dramatic use of repeated notes, and (c) a *grandioso* passage which is accompanied by heavy chordal writing. The three elements are developed as the work progresses, their character changed to reflect the mood of the various sections - for instance, the phrase containing the repeated notes becomes, a little later, part of a melting *cantabile* idea which is to return yet again, ever more reflectively, while the opening descending scale reappears several times in differing guises, notably introducing the ghostly start of the fugue (a *sotto voce* version of the first outburst), and it also heralds the final overwhelming *prestissimo*. The work ends with an unhurried recollection of the various motifs, the five final chords suggesting an atmosphere of cloudless resignation and serenity. Despite the numerous corrections, deletions and "second thoughts" that spring at one from the manuscript, the work emerges with such

completeness that one might almost think that Liszt mentally heard the whole structure before setting it down. It grows with an inevitability that perhaps he did not at first feel, but which in the course of what must have been much agonising questioning, became unarguably and magnificently clear.

BRAHMS:

Variations & Fugue on a theme by Händel, Op.24

Brahms wrote this monumental work in 1861, a year in which he was working on (or had completed) two piano quartets, a piano quintet (this was not finished until 1864) and the Variations on a theme by Schumann, for two pianos. He was fascinated by the variation form and wrote several sets - not only that, but he incorporated the form in some of his other works, notably in the first two of his piano sonatas, and I feel that perhaps the most highly developed example is to be heard in the superb finale of the fourth symphony, although this is basically in pasacaglia form.

The Aria that forms the basis of the work came from Händel's second book of *Suites de pièces pour le clavecin*. He dedicated it to "a dear lady friend" who was of course Clara Schumann, who gave its first performance. From the simplicity of the Aria, Brahms produced twenty-five variations of incredibly rich variety, all the more remarkable when one considers that only one variation (21) departs from the basic key of B flat, and then only in G minor, its relative minor key. Some are linked together without a pause, for instance numbers

1 to 5, 6 to 8 etc. This produces a tremendous tension and excitement in the final four variations, the last of which resembles a sort of fanfare which most effectively fills the two rôles of bringing the variations to a triumphant conclusion, and also setting the scene for the massive fugue, building up steadily to an overwhelming final page.

LISZT: Sonetto 123 del Petrarca (Années de Pélérinage, 2me Année)

Some of the most evocative of Liszt's writing is to be found in the *Années de Pélérinage*. Three books were written, inspired by his travels in Switzerland and Italy. The first book started as a series of pieces called "Album d'un Voyageur", published in 1835 and extensively revised before re-emerging in their definitive form in 1852. The second year pieces were written mostly between 1838 and 1839, and the whole series was published nearly twenty years later by Schott (a further four pieces were written in 1840 but revised in 1859 as the suite of three pieces known as "Venezia e Napoli"). The three Sonnets were originally songs, and although No.104 is probably best known in its piano version, I find that the transcription of No.123 is more effective in capturing its nostalgic atmosphere than the original song, which can sound somewhat angular. Liszt writes a coda here that by sheer repetition draws the music further and further away:

*"And heaven unto the music so inclined,
That not a leaf was seen to stir the shade,
Such melody had fraught the winds, the atmosphere".*



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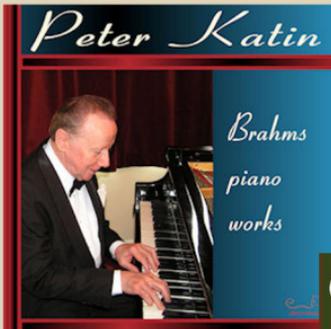
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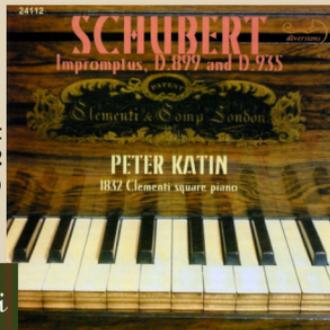
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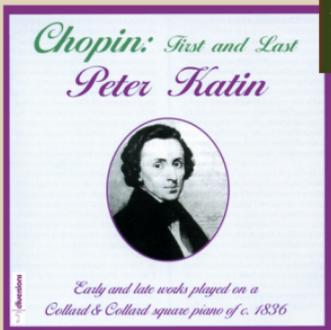
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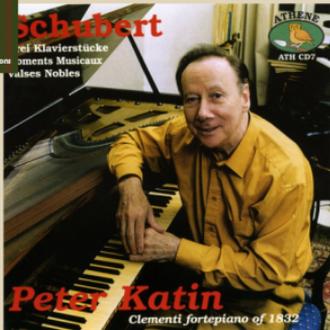
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