

The Liszt Society Journal

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Contents

1	Editorial <i>Tamami Honma</i>	1
2	A Playbill from the virtuoso years <i>Pauline Pocknell</i>	3
3	The cycle <i>Harmonies poétiques et religieuses</i> : early versions (1834-1846) <i>Albert Brussee</i>	13
4	Could Liszt have made a recording? <i>Robert Matthew Walker</i>	48
5	A musician's reminiscences <i>Felix Weingartner</i> translated by Margaret Wolff	52
6	Mario Angiolelli at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama <i>Leslie Howard</i>	86
7	Acknowledgements	88

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MARIO ANGIOLELLI

at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama

by

Leslie Howard

The Liszt Society held its Annual Day at the Guildhall School in London on 18 October 2002. As has now become the customary format of these occasions, we began with a lunchtime piano recital, sponsored by the Society in collaboration with the Keyboard Charitable Trust. The day continued with a masterclass for singers and instrumentalists given by the present writer, followed by the Annual General Meeting, and concluding with an evening concert of Liszt's music by solo pianists, singers and chamber musicians from amongst the students of the Guildhall.

The 2002 Annual Day Recital was given by the Italian pianist Mario Angiolelli, who is also a member of the Liszt Society, and who has already distinguished himself in matters Lisztian with his excellent critical first edition of the Venice manuscripts of *La lugubre gondola* made for the Milan publisher Rugginenti. Naturally, Mr Angiolelli included the original draft of this work in his programme, which consisted of four Liszt works each receiving its first public performance in Britain. This *Gondola*, unlike the later revisions, contains the lilting triplets characteristic of the barcarolle—indeed, the removal of them from the known version, published in 1885, has led virtually every commentator to assume that this 4/4 conception of the piece postdates the very dark 6/8 version. We can now see that the 6/8 version is a skeletal account of the material made some time after the first thoughts had taken form. This earliest version, written whilst Liszt was staying with Wagner in Venice, is quite remarkable in the myriad differences from its revised better-known self, and Mr Angiolelli's account was riveting in its simple beauty and sadness, prompting many listeners to express their preference for it over all the later revisions.

Mr Angiolelli's programme began with the first version of *Litanies de Marie*, a piece which may have been intended for the earliest cycle of pieces designated as *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*—its revised version is the fourth in the 1847 set of that title. Sadly, the only edition presently available of this piece [Schott edition] is riddled with errors, commencing with the very title! The Liszt Society hopes to remedy this deficiency before long. There were no misreadings of the manuscript in Mario Angiolelli's moving account of the work.

The earlier fantasy on themes from Verdi's *Ernani* is finally about to be published in Italy. Liszt got as far as having the piece copied and making minor revisions on the copy to make it ready for engraving somewhere towards the end of 1847. His life changed irrevocably in 1848 when he took up his post at Weimar, and when he came to revise the fantasy for publication he discarded half of it, and transposed and simplified the rest. But the original version, despite its horrendous catalogue of difficulties, is a splendid piece and well worth a permanent place in the repertoire. Mario Angiolelli took the piece by the proverbial horns and dealt with it commandingly, showing a rich understanding of both composers in his intelligent balancing of the operatic nature of Verdi's original material against the innate dignity of the form in which Liszt cast the piece.

In an unguarded moment back in 1976 [but reprinted in 2001 in *Alfred Brendel on Music* (Robson Books)], the great Brendel once opined that the *Dante Sonata* is "among the pieces where Liszt has indulged his whim of saying everything in triplicate". If by that he meant that the appearances of thematic material in an exposition, development and a recapitulation are somehow excessive, rather than a proper continuation and yet revolutionising of the standard classical sonata form, then one wonders what he might make of the original form of Liszt's work: the *Paralipomènes à la Divina Commedia*. This, the first of four distinct stages of composition, is probably what Liszt first played in the late 1830s, and the most obvious differences from the final version are the division into two parts [Prima parte and Seconda parte rather than two movements in the conventional sense], and the presence of a further theme, first heard at the end of the introduction [functioning later as a codetta to the first part and a mainstay of the development with which the second part begins]. Mario Angiolelli's account of this demanding colossus was compelling, and his technique so astonishing that it seemed merely a superfluous adjunct to a profound musicality. *Chapeau!*