

**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY  
A JACOBS MASTERWORKS CONCERT**

November 4, 5, and 6, 2011

**LISZT**      *Orpheus, S.98*

**LISZT**      **Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major, S.124**  
Allegro maestoso  
Quasi adagio; Allegretto vivace; Allegro animato  
Allegro marziale animato

INTERMISSION

**LISZT**      **Piano Concerto No. 2 in A Major, S.125**  
Adagio sostenuto assai  
Allegro agitato assai  
Allegro moderato  
Allegro deciso  
Marziale un poco meno allegro  
Allegro animato

**LISZT**      *Two Legends, S.354*  
St. Francis of Assisi: Sermon to the Birds  
St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves

## ***Orpheus, S.98***

FRANZ LISZT

Born October 22, 1811, Raiding, Hungary

Died July 31, 1886, Bayreuth

It was Liszt who invented the “sinfonische Dichtung,” or symphonic poem: music that was shaped not by abstract forms but instead by the desire to paint a picture, to portray a character or action, or to depict some other extra-musical event. Liszt’s twelve symphonic poems, composed between 1848 and 1858, helped break music free from classical forms, and they profoundly influenced many later composers. In his great tone poems, the young Richard Strauss set out to achieve a virtually exact depiction of things in music (Strauss once bragged that he could set a glass of beer to music), but Liszt’s tone poems remain more general in their pictorial qualities.

Liszt composed *Orpheus* in 1853-54, intending to use it as the overture to a production of Gluck’s opera *Orphée et Euridice* in Weimar, but he quickly saw a wider use for this music. For Liszt, Orpheus—the great musician of Greek mythology—was a symbol of the power of music (and perhaps of all art) to bring order to a violent world, and Liszt was thinking specifically of an image of Orpheus playing his lyre to calm savage beasts. When he published the score to *Orpheus*, Liszt included a forward that explained the attraction of this figure for him:

I once had to conduct a performance of Gluck’s *Orpheus*. During the rehearsals, I could not prevent my mind wandering . . . to that other Orpheus whose name hovers so majestically and harmoniously over one of the most poetic myths of Greece. I recalled an Etruscan vase in the Louvre collection, which represents the first poet-musician, clothed in a starry robe, his forehead bound with the mystically royal fillet, his lips open for the utterance of divine words and songs, and his lyre resounding under the touch of his long and graceful fingers.

Liszt’s music, though, should not be understood as the effort to transform the portrait on the vase into sound. Rather, he is interested in suggesting a general impression of Orpheus, bringer of beauty, order, and harmony. His symphonic poem is neither violent nor conflicted, but is instead ordered and harmonious, as befits its subject. Liszt writes a prominent part for two harps, and doubtless these are meant to suggest the sound of Orpheus’ lyre. This is music of sweetness and calm, and in addition to spotlighting the harps, it offers extended solos for violin and cello. The music rises to a noble climax, then falls away to a striking conclusion: a series of

quiet string chords, marked *dolcissimo*, slowly rise higher and higher, each of them answered by a soft woodwind chord. This passage, described by Liszt himself as “as gradually rising like the vapour of incense,” brings *Orpheus* to its conclusion on a quiet C-major chord.

### **Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major, S.124**

During Liszt’s youth, which was spent as a traveling virtuoso, he performed piano concertos by a number of composers, including Bach, Beethoven (his performances of the *Emperor* Concerto were particularly acclaimed), Chopin, Mendelssohn and others. So it is surprising that it took him so long to write one of his own, and in fact it took him a very long time indeed. In 1830, while still a teenager, Liszt made the first sketches for what would eventually become his First Piano Concerto, but he had doubts about his ability with the form (and about his ability to write for orchestra), and he set the sketches aside. He began to rework them nearly twenty years later, in 1849, after he had given up the life of a touring virtuoso and become music director at Weimar. He revised the concerto once again in 1853 and finally had it ready to perform two years after that. Liszt himself was soloist at the premiere in Weimar on February 17, 1855, twenty-five years after he had had his earliest ideas for the piece. The conductor at the premiere was Hector Berlioz, who was in Weimar for a series of concerts of his own music and who had only a week to learn the concerto from Liszt’s manuscript. The premiere was apparently a great success, but Liszt was still not satisfied with the concerto and revised it one final time after the premiere.

The most striking feature of Liszt’s First Piano Concerto—which is in the compact span of only eighteen minutes—is that its movements are joined and are unified around the same thematic material: themes presented in the opening movements return in quite different forms as the concerto proceeds. The model usually cited for this is Schubert’s *Wanderer Fantasy*, a work Liszt loved and performed frequently, though the technique of transforming the same thematic material across a multi-movement work was fundamental to many of Liszt’s own works.

Liszt did in fact find writing for orchestra a challenge, and he had substantial help with scoring the First Piano Concerto from the composer Joachim Raff; Liszt himself, however, was responsible for the final version. The orchestration of this concerto is varied and imaginative. There are of course dramatic moments for full orchestra, but more often Liszt creates a leaner sonority, often with just a few instruments playing—there are important solo passages in this

concerto for viola, cello, two violins, and various woodwinds. And, as we shall see, Liszt used one instrument that got him into a lot of trouble.

The *Allegro maestoso* bursts to life with a fierce gesture for strings, punctuated by responses from the winds. This will become one of the concerto's fundamental theme-shapes, but Liszt departs from tradition by having the soloist immediately launch into a cadenza, and the character of this cadenza is made clear by Liszt's marking for the pianist: *grandioso, marcatisimo, a capriccio, strepitoso* ("noisy"). The opening gesture returns in many forms, but there are also graceful solos from the clarinet and other instruments, and the movement comes to a surprisingly restrained close.

The *Quasi Adagio* opens with another seminal theme, here first presented by cellos and basses. When the piano takes this up, in a passage marked *con espressione*, the spirit of Liszt's friend Chopin seems to hover over the music. Things grow more impassioned, the music proceeds directly into the *Allegretto vivace* (which functions as the concerto's scherzo), and at this point comes a surprise: Liszt creates an important part here for the triangle. Today this silvery sound seems imaginative, but in his own time Liszt was shredded for it by conservative critics, chief among them Eduard Hanslick of Vienna, who sneered at this music as a "Concerto for Triangle."

The finale, marked *Allegro marziale animato*, opens with a powerful idea from the winds, and only gradually do we realize that this is a complete transformation of the luminous main theme of the second movement—what had been *espressivo* on its first appearance has magically become *marziale*: "martial." This final movement reprises a number of ideas heard earlier, including the opening gesture and the part for triangle, before rushing to an exciting close, full of the sound of hammered octaves in the piano. These must have been thrilling when Liszt played them, and they still sound impressive, nearly two centuries after he wrote them.

### **Piano Concerto No. 2 in A Major, S.125**

Both of Liszt's piano concertos took a very long time to complete. He first sketched the music that would become his Piano Concerto No. 2 in September 1839, just as he turned 28. But he then shelved these sketches as he resumed the life of a traveling virtuoso and did not return to them until 1849, when he was music director in Weimar. Even then, when he was devoting much of his time to composition, this concerto took shape slowly—he revised it several times over

the next twelve years, finally completing it in 1861, twenty-two years after he had made his first sketches. The concerto was first performed on January 7, 1857, on a pension fund concert to benefit the members of the Weimar Orchestra. Curiously, Liszt—the greatest pianist on the planet—was not the soloist. That part was taken by one of his students, Hans von Bronsart, and Liszt, seriously ill at that time with a leg infection, almost had to drag himself into the hall to conduct the performance.

Like the First Concerto, the Second is in only one movement. Gone completely is the three-movement sonata-form structure of the concerto as it had been refined by Mozart and Beethoven. Liszt respected those concertos and performed them, but he also believed that a composer should not repeat the past (as he felt Brahms was trying to do). Instead, Liszt evolved a new form—though one that had its roots in the music of Schubert—in which one fundamental theme becomes the basis for an entire work. That theme is transformed across the span of the work, reappearing in completely different guises and for different expressive purposes. Some have suggested that this music is not really a piano concerto at all but instead a symphonic poem in which the piano has a prominent part, and Liszt himself referred to it as a Concerto symphonique at the 1857 premiere, only settling on the more traditional title when the music was published in 1863. One early critic, William Apthorp of the *Boston Evening Transcript*, was so struck by Liszt's method and sense of form in this concerto that he described it glibly (but accurately!) as “The life and adventures of a melody.”

To serve as the basis for such an extended musical adventure, a melody must be remarkable, and the impressive thing about Liszt's basic theme is that it at first seems so unremarkable. This subdued little tune is sung at the very beginning by a handful of woodwinds, and Liszt specifies that it should be *dolce, soave* (the Italian *soave* does not translate as our “suave” but “gentle, sweet”). The piano does not make a grand entrance but slips in almost unnoticed, touching on that opening melody only as part of a series of arpeggios. But from this unassuming opening, Liszt builds a remarkable and varied structure, and one of the pleasures of this music lies in following the ingenious ways this simple opening is transformed across the concerto's twenty-minute span. It can be stamped out by full orchestra one moment, but seconds later it has become a lyric cello solo, and presently it becomes something else. Liszt does employ some secondary material, and this also goes through similar transformation, all woven into the evolution of the opening idea.

The concerto drives to a stirring climax when Liszt transforms his theme into a powerful military march that blazes tautly to life. But this is not the final destination. Instead, the theme continues to evolve, and Liszt spins a magical, lyric transformation he marks *appassionato* before this imaginative, exciting music rushes to its resounding close.

***Two Legends, S.354***

FRANZ LISZT

Born October 22, 1811, Raiding

Died July 31, 1886, Bayreuth

The *Two Legends* are among Liszt's least familiar works for orchestra, and a certain amount of mystery continues to surround this music. Those who know Liszt's piano music will recognize these pieces as orchestral versions of Liszt's *Two Legends* for piano, but the details of Liszt's composition of this music remain uncertain.

As he turned fifty, Liszt's life underwent a profound and painful evolution. Two of his children died suddenly: his son Daniel at 20 and his daughter Blandine at 27. The composer himself abruptly resigned his position as music director in Weimar when he felt that public opinion in the ducal court had turned against him. Wounded and adrift, Liszt found consolation in the Catholic Church. In 1861, he moved to Rome, and two years later he entered the Oratory of the Madonna del Rosario at Monte Mario; shortly thereafter he took four minor orders in the church. Not surprisingly, an increasing number of Liszt's works from these years were on religious themes. For the most part unknown to modern audiences, these works include oratorios and settings of the mass, requiem, psalms, and many other religious texts. In 1863, the year he entered the Oratory, Liszt composed two pieces inspired by events from the life of St. Francis of Assisi, both published under the title "legend": *St. Francis of Assisi: Sermon to the Birds* and *St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves*. This music exists in versions for orchestra and for piano, but it is unclear which came first. Liszt published the piano version in 1866, and the music has long been familiar in this form, but his orchestration is dated October 23-29, 1863, and may well have come first. The orchestral version was not published until 1984.

Liszt said that the first *Legend* was inspired by a passage from the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*: "He lifted up his eyes and saw the trees which stood by the wayside filled with a countless multitude of birds; at which he marveled, and said to his companions: 'Wait a little for me in the road, and I will go and preach to my little brothers the birds.' And he went into the

field, and began to preach to the birds that were on the ground; and forthwith those which were in the trees came around him, and not one moved during the whole sermon; nor would they fly away until the Saint had given them his blessing.”

The first *Legend* is a work inspired by this incident rather than Liszt’s attempt to picture it literally in sound, and he uses a relatively modest orchestra: strings, woodwinds, and harp. He sets much of the opening in the orchestra’s high register: the long first section—full of trills, runs, and gracenotes—may suggest the trilling and fluttering of the birds. The “sermon” moves into the deeper register of the orchestra, and Liszt marks its chordal statement *solennemente*: “solemnly.” This rises to an impassioned climax, but tensions gradually subside, and the music resumes the delicate manner of the beginning (Liszt’s marking here is *dolcissimo*). The *Sermon* fades into silence on three shimmering chords.

The second *Legend* was inspired by the account of St. Francis’s walking on the waves to cross the Strait of Messina. According to legend, the ferry-man refused to take St. Francis in his boat, declaring, “If he is a saint, let him walk on the water.” And so St. Francis did just that, spreading his cape on the waves and—with his staff—holding up part of that cape to function as a sail. Liszt was very fond of this story: he hung a drawing of St. Francis’ crossing by E. J. Von Steinle on the wall of his study in Weimar.

The second *Legend* is a brief tone-poem that tells this tale. This is a more dramatic story than the first *Legend*, and Liszt adds a large brass section to the orchestra for this movement. The quiet beginning, marked *Andante maestoso*, introduces the saint with a noble theme in octaves. Gradually the music turns brilliant, as swirling runs depict the motion of the waves. This builds to a huge chordal climax (*Allegro maestoso ed animato*) that thunders out the opening theme, now triumphant. The music suddenly breaks off, and the *Lento* closing section incorporates a theme from Liszt’s own *An den heiligen Franziskus von Paula*, a work for male chorus, organ, brass, and timpani. Within this, the opening theme reappears, quietly at first, and then builds to a resounding close.

**-Program Notes by Eric Bromberger**

### **WHY THIS PROGRAM?**

“This is still the bicentennial observance of the birth of Franz Liszt,” as our music director Jahja Ling reminds us. He continued: “Stephen Hough is a marvelous pianist, and to have him

available to play both Liszt concertos on one program is almost unheard of. Anyway, I've never heard of a single program featuring both of these pieces..." Speaking further about our soloist, Jahja noted, "I've conducted so many concerts with Stephen at the piano, with so many different pieces. Everything he plays, he plays for the musical content and the style of the composer, and he has the technique to do it all."

About the two tone poems, our conductor told me that he had tried hard to find some of the rarer Liszt pieces to program here. "*Orpheus* is very beautiful. *Two Legends* is a more exuberant piece, a little more influenced by Wagner. The two composers were, of course, very close. But both works demonstrate incredible craftsmanship. Liszt's famous piano virtuosity has unfortunately tended to overshadow how great a composer he was."

Each of Liszt's piano concertos has been played with some frequency on San Diego Symphony programs. The first concerto was introduced here as long ago as 1915, when Anton Kreuz was the soloist under Buren Schryock's direction. Most recently, Lang Lang played it as part of a concerto series during the 2010-11 season, under Jahja Ling. The second concerto was first played in San Diego Symphony programs by Claudio Arrau, when Earl Bernard Murray led it during the 1961-62 season. Most recently, Jung-Ho Pak conducted it with Mykola Suk as the soloist during the 2000-01 season. *Orpheus* and the *Two Legends* are each San Diego premieres, played here for the first time at these concerts.

**-Dr. Melvin G. Goldzband, Symphony Archivist**