

THE
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KEYBOARD FESTIVAL

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MAXIM LANDO,
2020 Gilmore Young Artist

Sunday, April 25, 2020 · 4:00 PM

- F. LISZT Transcendental Études, S. 139
1. Preludio
 2. Molto vivace
 3. *Paysage*
 4. *Mazeppa*
 5. *Feux follets*
 6. *Vision*
 7. *Eroica*
 8. *Wilde Jagd*
 9. *Ricordanza*
 10. Allegro agitato molto
 11. *Harmonies du soir*
 12. *Chasse-neige*

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MAXIM LANDO
2020 Gilmore Young Artist

Maxim Lando began playing the piano at age three and soon began to appear in concert, including at Carnegie Hall, where he first performed at the age of six. At age 11, he entered Juilliard Pre-College, where he continues to study with Hung-Kuan Chen and Tema Blackstone, and became a scholar—now alumnus—of the Lang Lang International Music Foundation.

Since his orchestral debut at age 14, Mr. Lando has appeared as a soloist with the Israel and Moscow Philharmonics and the Russian National Orchestra, as well as with orchestras across the U.S. and Europe. Previous solo and chamber engagements include performances at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, Ravinia Festival in Chicago, and Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris.

Winner of first prize at the 2018 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, Mr. Lando recently joined the roster of Young Concert Artists. Additional competition prizes include a Gold Medal at the 2017 Berliner International Music Competition and the Audience Award at the 2016 Musical Olympus Foundation Festival at Carnegie's Zankel Hall. Mr. Lando has been featured on CNN's *Best of Quest*, NPR's *From the Top*, BBC Radio 4, and WQXR.

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

TRANSCENDENTAL ETUDES, S. 139
Composed 1838; revised 1852

In 1852, when Liszt published his revised set of 12 Transcendental Etudes, he was under the patronage of the Duke of Weimar, who had named him *Außerordentlicher Kapellmeister* (“Extraordinary Music Director”) six years earlier. Happy with his appointment, the Duke observed that Liszt was “what a prince should be.” Liszt was happy too. He now had the leisure to conduct the orchestra and opera, to teach, and to write and revise some of his most profound music. Having secured his reputation as the greatest pianist of the 19th century, he had retired from his career as a traveling virtuoso. Between 1839 and 1847 he had given at least 1,000 public performances, traveling from Moscow to Madrid, Glasgow to Granada, Constantinople to Cadiz, creating what Heinrich Heine dubbed “Lisztomania.”

It was Liszt who invented the modern solo piano recital, abandoning the traditional practice of pianists appearing on mixed programs of instrumental and vocal works, turning the piano so that the keyboard was at right angles to the audience, and demanding that instead of chatting, his listeners remain silent as he played. It worked. When Danish fabulist Hans Christian Andersen attended one of what Liszt called his *monologues pianistiques* he reported that when Liszt entered the room, “it was as if an electric shock passed through it.” British pianist Charles Hallé sat speechless in what he called “a stupor of amazement,” bowled over by Liszt’s “crystal-like clearness which never failed him for a moment, even in the most complicated and, for anybody else, impossible passages.” Next to Liszt, Hallé believed, “all other pianists were like children.” After hearing Liszt play, Clara Schumann, not his biggest fan, wrote, “I sobbed aloud, it overcame me so.”

When Liszt’s Transcendental Etudes were first published in 1838, Robert Schumann reviewed them in his journal, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, aptly describing them as “studies in storm and dread for, at the most, 10 or 12 players in the world.” Because the set was too demanding to be played by almost anyone other than Liszt, he revised it for publication in 1852, the version we hear today. Although their name was taken from the French *etudier* (“to study”), his etudes go far beyond exercises in particular technical challenges (rapid octaves, repeated notes, etc.). They might better be called “Study-Pictures” or even *Etude-Tableaux*, a title later used by Rachmaninoff. Each one conjures up a mood or an image, all the while making extraordinary demands on the pianist, virtuosic hurdles Liszt could jump with the greatest of ease. He gave 10 of the 12 distinctive titles, some after they were finished; composer and pianist Ferruccio Busoni supplied the missing two in his 1910-1911 edition of Liszt’s etudes.

Liszt had intended to write 24 etudes representing all the major and minor keys, modeled on what Bach had done in his two volumes of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, each set featuring 24 preludes and fugues. Bach had used tonal parallels, setting a prelude and fugue first in major, then another in minor (C major/C minor, C-sharp major/C-sharp minor), ascending up the scale note by note. Chopin, a Bach devotee, also set his 24 Preludes of Op. 28 in a complete cycle of the major and minor keys but paired them in ascending patterns of major keys and their relative minors (C major/A minor, G major/E minor, and so on). Liszt chose a different route through the keys, descending downward through the circle of fifths (C major/A minor, F major/D minor, etc.). This mirrors the ascending pattern Chopin had chosen for his Preludes, written the same year and published less than a year later. However, the grand scope, length and impact of each of Liszt’s etudes necessitated a different approach: he wisely stopped at a magnificent set of 12, going onto other projects. Russian pianist-composer Sergey Lyapunov finished it up for him between 1897 and 1905, writing his own 12 Transcendental Etudes in the keys Liszt didn’t get to, and entitling the last *Élégie en mémoire de François Liszt*.

Liszt’s etudes are quintessentially Romantic and distinctively his own, their extra-musical ideas stimulating the imagination of composer, performer, and audience alike. In them, hallmarks of his style abound: double octaves, contrasts of texture from diaphanous to dense, thumb melodies, precipitous leaps, breathless arpeggios, thunderous chords, heart-rending melodies. Their virtuosity makes it rare to hear them played as a set—and revelatory to see how Liszt fits them together not just through their key relationships, but also in a sequence of contrasting moods, tempos, sonorities, and textures.

In the first, a *Preludio* (in C major), forceful chords, deep-throated trills, and dramatic runs racing across the keyboard give this monumental work a powerful introduction, as if warming up both the piano and the audience. Busoni dubbed the second etude A-minor “Rockets,” referring to its keyboard-scanning leaps and propulsive races to the edges of the keyboard. *It is a study of hands playing on top of each other, presenting formidable challenges indeed. At the very end, marked fortissimo, Liszt quotes the four notes that open Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, music he revered.* The third etude, *Paysage* (“Landscape,” F major), framed by two wildly virtuosic works, refreshes the ear and senses. Marked *dolcissimo, sempre legato e placido*, it provides a welcome moment of calm and serves as the perfect foil for the stunning etude to come.

The fourth etude, *Mazeppa* (in dramatic D minor) brings a legend to life, one based on a real person: Ivan Mazeppa, who was born about 1640 to noble parents in the province of Kiev and a Cossack rebel during the reign of Peter the Great. It was a story from his youth that caught Liszt’s

attention. According to this tale, while serving as a page at the court of the King of Poland, Mazeppa entered into a romantic liaison with a young Countess whose husband was more than twice her age. When the Count discovered the affair, he punished Mazeppa by lashing him naked onto the back of a wild horse and setting it loose to gallop across the steppes. Although the horse eventually died, Mazeppa survived. In one version of the story, he was found by a group of Ukrainian peasants who hailed him as their liberator. The 1828 Victor Hugo poem that inspired Liszt has an even more spectacular ending: “*Il tombe enfin! . . . et se relève Roi*” (. . .he falls and arises King!), which Liszt quotes at the end of the etude. The story is tailor-made for the romantic imagination and was taken up by Lord Byron in an 1819 narrative poem, by Delacroix who painted *Mazeppa on the Dying Horse* in 1824, as well as by many others.

Liszt's *Mazeppa* etude begins with startling dissonant chords, immediately followed by an extended cadenza marked *ad libitum*. The horse immediately begins its wild galloping, running pell-mell in music marked *sempre fortissimo e con strepito* (“always very loud and tumultuous”). Just to make things more interesting, Liszt sets the score in three staves rather than two, placing the right and left hands at the outer edges of the keyboard and requiring repeated lightning-fast jumps to the middle to supply the galloping figure. Thunderous octaves leads into soft B-flat major music providing a brief respite, then we are off again until the last bars, when, in triumphant D major, Mazeppa arises, transformed!

The title of the fifth etude, *Feux Follets* (B-flat major), is usually translated as “Will-o'-the-wisps,” medieval Latin for “Fool's fire,” an atmospheric ghost light glimpsed by nighttime travelers. In Liszt's hands it becomes a midsummer night's dream, with sprites dancing about in the sparkling sonority of the piano's upper register. Pianist Abram Chasins called it “angelic to hear and devilish to play.” The sixth, *Vision* (G minor) begins with lugubrious plodding chords, rumbling in the piano's lowest register. Arpeggios expand into the upper register, then become cascading double octaves. No matter how decorated it becomes, the solemn march tune never ceases. It advances “with solemn and imperial pomp,” Busoni said, calling it a musical painting of Napoleon Bonaparte's funeral. Finally the music moves from the somber G minor into triumphant G major, ending with thunderous chords and leading directly into the seventh etude, *Eroica*.

In the seventh etude, *Eroica* (E-flat major), Liszt refers to a state of mind rather than to a specific person or event, as did Beethoven in his other “*Eroica*” works, chief among them the Third Symphony (in the same key). The dotted rhythm of the main theme, marked *Tempo di Marcia*, long

associated with royalty, now bestows that honor on the individual hero. It begins with plummeting runs and dramatic leaps, the middle section is filled with more Lisztian double octaves, and a moment of silence signals an abbreviated return of the solemn march. The galloping eighth, *Wilde Jagd* (“Wild Hunt,” in C minor) is one of the most difficult concert studies ever written for the piano, marked *Presto furioso, triple forte*. Speed and power are the watchwords. Midway through the romp, E-flat major breaks through, the traditional key for hunting horns, and Liszt makes the piano ring with dazzling virtuosity. The ninth, *Ricordanza* (“Remembrance,” in A-flat major) is elegiac, lyrical, and delicate. Busoni called it “a bundle of faded love letters from a somewhat old-fashioned world of sentiment.” An extended improvisatory passage introduces the *dolce, con grazia* main theme, whose extensive decoration reminds us that Liszt improvised virtually everything he laid his hands upon. A middle section in sumptuous D-flat major features a quintessentially Romantic theme over a pulsing accompaniment. The tenth, an *Allegro agitato molto* (F minor), was aptly nicknamed by Busoni *Appassionato*, a reference to Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 57, which shares the same moniker and key. Liszt's tempo markings throughout fully merit this designation: *accentato ed appassionato assai, tempestoso, disperato, and precipitato*. Full of passion, turmoil, and longing, it is the kind of music Richard Wagner (later Liszt's son-in-law) must have loved—and certainly copied. Representing the peak of romanticism, it is the impassioned fulfillment of the preceding etude.

The eleventh, *Harmonies du Soir* (“Harmonies of the Evening,” in D-flat major), meditates on twilight's peace. Chasins calls it “a mysterious dream of poetic fancy, harmonic luxuriance and impassioned flight.” The softly shimmering opening yields to an exquisite section of right-hand chords over left-hand arpeggios, moving gently from key to key, and marked *pianissimo, dolcissimo, and legatissimo* (as soft, sweet, and smooth as possible). It is followed by an expressive E-major melody, to be played *con intimo sentimento*, the left hand accompanying it *quasi Arpa* (“like a harp”). The music grows to a powerful *triumphososo* climax before returning to the opening's veiled sonorities. Busoni found the last étude—*Chasse-neige* (“Snow-storm” or “Snow-Whirls” in B-flat minor)—to be perhaps the noblest example “amongst all music of a poeticizing nature—a sublime and steady fall of snow which gradually buries landscape and people.” It is the perfect ending, with the pianist buried in notes. An apotheosis. We are at blissful Valhalla. |||||