

**CHOPIN Nocturne in c, op. 48/1. Polonaise-Fantaisie in AI, op. 61. LISZT Sonetto 47 del Petrarca. Sonetto 104 del Petrarca. Sonetto 123 del Petrarca. Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata. Hungarian Rhapsody No. 14 in f • Sophia Agranovich (pn) • CENTAUR 3601 (65:55)**

Every new release from Sophia Agranovich is an event. She has been interviewed in the magazine more than once and has received glowing reviews for her numerous albums featuring the piano works of Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Liszt, and Scriabin. With this, her latest album, Agranovich continues her exploration of the music of Chopin and Liszt, adding to her discography of those composers' works.

The nocturne, as a type of composition intended to evoke an intimate reflective mood or atmosphere, occupied Chopin throughout his short life. As early as 1830, when he was 20, and continuing through 1846, three years before his death, Chopin wrote as many as 21 or 22 nocturnes, usually in sets of twos or threes. The Nocturne in C Minor, op. 48 no.1, dates from 1841, and has a companion in F Minor, op. 48 no.2 . Chopin dedicated the two pieces to one of his favorite piano students, a young woman by the name of Laure Duperré.

The C-Minor Nocturne is regarded by a number of commentators as the most poetic and emotionally poignant of all Chopin's Nocturnes, and forward-looking to Liszt in its technical demands and instrumental effects.

The *Polonaise-Fantaisie* in AI Major was composed in 1846. Today, it's one of Chopin's most popular bravura showpieces, but that wasn't always the case. Its harmonic complexities, unusual thematic and textural transitions, and technical difficulties made its appeal less immediate to players and audiences alike. But thanks to major Chopin interpreters of the 20th century—namely, Arthur Schnitger, Vladimir Horowitz, and Claudio Arrau—who recorded the piece and frequently programmed it in recital, the *Polonaise-Fantaisie* has become a standard repertoire item.

Liszt often worked on compositions over a number of years, and was in the habit, not just of revising them along the way, but of incorporating revised versions into other works, which sometimes leads to confusion in identifying exactly what's what. Such is the case with Liszt's second volume of his *Années de pèlerinage*, titled "Deuxième année: Italie." Liszt worked on the pieces that make up the "Italian journey" for 12 years, from 1837 to 1849; and it was another nine years before the book was published in 1858. Meanwhile, awaiting publication during those nine years, Liszt returned to his *Tre sonetti del Petrarca* (Three sonnets of Petrarch), which he'd originally composed between 1839 and 1846, revised them, and included them as Nos. 4, 5, and 6 in the "Deuxième année: Italie" book of his *Années de pèlerinage*.

Ditto, *Après une Lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* (aka the *Dante Sonata*), originally composed in 1849. It was added as the concluding piece, No. 7, in the "Deuxième année: Italie." In other words, the final four of the seven numbers that make up the second book of the *Années de pèlerinage* series were originally composed independently of the collection, but added to it in time for publication of the volume in 1858. The three "Petrarch" pieces, named for Sonnets 47, 104, and 123 by the very early (some would say "pre") Italian Renaissance poet and

scholar, Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), are often presented together as a set, outside of the “Deuxième année: Italie.” Likewise, the fairly substantial, sonata-in-one-movement *Après une Lecture du Dante* is also programmed as a standalone piece.

The life course taken by Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies is even more difficult to trace. Suffice it to say there are 19 of them, all composed for solo piano between 1846 and 1853. Based on actual Magyar themes, they are all technically challenging, virtuoso showpieces, though some are more popular than others. The means by which some of the rhapsodies were arranged for orchestra, for piano duet, and even for piano trio, and in the process had their numbering scrambled, is complicated.

The Rhapsody No. 14, the one we’re dealing with here, is one of the more popular numbers, and also one of the numbers that underwent some drastic changes. From 1849 to 1852, Liszt labored on his own, transforming the piece into the *Hungarian Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra*, S 123.

Then, 10 years after it was first composed as a solo piano work in 1846, Liszt, with the help of Franz Doppler, arranged the piece as a garish and gaudy orchestra-only work for flutes and piccolo, oboes and clarinets in pairs, three bassoons, four horns, three each of trumpets and trombones, ophicleide, triangle, cymbals, timpani, two harps, and strings. When the orchestral version was originally published, it appeared as *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 1*. It was later renumbered to correspond to the solo piano original.

With those exercises in orchestration behind him, some 20 years later, Liszt, now in his 60s in 1875, arranged the piece once more, this time for piano four hands.

The program Agranovich has put together for this album is a very satisfying one in that it nicely balances the tragic and poetic—namely, the Chopin Nocturne, against Liszt’s angst-filled three *Petrarch Sonnets* that dwell on unrequited love—against Chopin and Liszt’s virtuosic showpieces, the *Polonaise-Fantaisie*, “Dante Sonata,” and *Hungarian Rhapsody*.

As always, Agranovich displays in her approach to everything she plays a deep insight into the overall style and persona of the composer in general and into the musical content and essence of each piece in particular. You can hear it in the way she alters her tone and touch and in how she modifies her pedaling. There’s no question that Chopin and Liszt are two different composers and two individuals of different life experiences and personalities. Yet, at the same time that Agranovich is able to discern and project those differences in her playing, she is also able to convey how in many ways they were kindred spirits too.

As expected from her previous albums, Agranovich’s technique is quite dazzling, but her ability to spin the long line and summon her instrument to sing is every bit as impressive and inspiring. A piano lover’s delight, to be sure, this is also an album for all music lovers.

**Jerry Dubins**