

## BOOK REVIEW

**Hyun Joo Kim** (2019). *Liszt's Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano: Colors in Black and White*. Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press. ISBN: 978-1-58046-946-3

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“My piano . . . is my true self, my native language, my life. . . . Within its seven octaves, it encompasses the full expanse of an orchestra; and the ten fingers of a single person are enough to render harmonies produced by a group of more than one hundred performers.”<sup>1</sup> Although written in 1837, during a period of intense self-reflection, this confession by the twenty-five-year-old Franz Liszt remains emblematic of his legacy. He had already revolutionized piano technique by shedding the brilliant style of Hummel and his teacher Czerny in favor of virtuosos like Paganini and Thalberg. By the early 1840s, he had harnessed the piano’s physical and expressive resources to create an entirely new concert experience in the guise of the recital. And by the time he left his post as Weimar’s Kapellmeister in the early 1860s, he had composed hundreds of enduring piano pieces that ran the gamut of style, genre, and exhibitionism. His fame as a teacher grew in his later years, where he counseled the next generation of pianists at masterclasses in Weimar, Rome, and Budapest.

While Liszt’s ubiquitous association with the piano has occasioned a rich body of scholarship, its repertorial coverage has been uneven. The Sonata in B minor, the Hungarian Rhapsodies, the Etudes, and other select virtuoso works have garnered the lion’s share of coverage, while Liszt’s four-hand and two-piano works, his pieces of a religious or commemorative nature, and those with an interior or pensive orientation generally remain overlooked. Hyun Joo Kim’s monograph, *Liszt’s Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano: Colors in Black and White*, seeks to address this discrepancy by considering “Liszt’s reworking and transferring process in detail, revealing his personalized, interpretive, and creative use of existing music and viewing his roles as composer, arranger, and pianist as a whole” (p. 8). Kim is particularly keen to highlight the timbral dimensions of Liszt’s arrangements, and thus brings analytical and hermeneutic techniques from musicology and art history to bear on his early *partitions de piano*, his symphonic poems, and his “Hungarian Gypsy-style” music. The result is a satisfying foray

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<sup>1</sup>“A M. Adolphe Pictet,” in *Franz Liszt, Frühe Schriften*, ed. by Rainer KLEINERTZ (Wiesbaden et al.: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2000), 118–120.

into an underserved, but extremely important, facet of Liszt's creative practice and artistic identity.

In the preface to his piano arrangements of Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, Liszt argued, "The worst lithograph, the most erroneous translation, still provides an image, if a vague one, of the genius of a Michelangelo or a Shakespeare" (p. 159). Chapter 1 of Kim's book explores these provocative analogies of engraving and translation by illuminating the world of artistic reproductions during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Focusing on Luigi Calamatta, Paul Mercuri, Louis Henriquel-Dupont, and Nicolas Ponce and critiques of their work by Charles Blanc and Henri Delaborde, Kim teases out ways in which translational fidelity was measured and judged. Maintaining the original work's "spirit," accounting for the various techniques that engravers used to control light and shadow in the absence of color, and allowing the engraver a certain degree of creative license were all important factors. Crucial to later considerations of Liszt's arrangements, Kim concludes,

The concept of translation underscores the properties of creative modifications, interpretive fidelity, validated inaccuracy, and conveyance of effect in the process of reproduction. Consequently, the reproduced work in the hands of professional engravers does not necessarily signify a subsequent version of lesser quality than the original, but an independent version or versions that may improve on, vary from, rival, and ever surpass the original (p. 20).

Such considerations might remain academic, were it not for the fact that Liszt held close associations with many of these artists, especially Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. As versatile on the violin as with a brush or burin, Ingres seems to have paid special attention to the ways in which spectators experienced artworks corporally. For that reason, Kim homes in on his play of shadow and perspective, particularly as practiced in his works featured in *Le Musée Français*, a multi-volume collection of engravings and commentaries designed to celebrate the grandeur of the Napoleonic Empire by bringing the Louvre's priceless sculptures, history paintings, portraits, and landscapes into wider circulation.<sup>2</sup> She connects Ingres's double mandate to render "familiar pieces in a way that would conjure their 'presence' and at the same time indelibly suggest his own experience of these objects" (p. 32) with Liszt's efforts in translating symphonic repertoire to the monochromatic keyboard. Like Ingres's play of shadow, Liszt's play of register revealed a close "familiarity" with the original that was only made possible by the "freshness" (p. 35) of its diminutive copy.

Chapter 2 unpacks this paradox by focusing on the corpus of "piano scores" (*partitions de piano*) that Liszt began to produce in the mid-1830s. The snazzy term, Kim explains, is misleading for the way in which it ostensibly prioritizes note-for-note fidelity over Ingres-like translational creativity. Indeed, Liszt's *partitions* of Beethoven's symphonies and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* "[reveal] his concealed creativity through his unceasing and painstaking compositional process in order to offer a convincing outcome in pianistic terms" (p. 42). Take the instrumental cues peppered throughout Liszt's piano scores. Kim understands them to be essential for the pianist, since they encode specific performance directions. A melody marked "Cl," for instance, might be played with more warmth and connectedness than one marked "Tr,"

<sup>2</sup>Susanne ANDERSON-RIEDEL discusses the socio-political dimensions of this ambitious collection in "A French Raphael: Alexandre Tardieu's Engraving After Raphael's *St. Michael Vanquishing Satan* (1806)," *Art in Print* 6/1 (May–June, 2016), 27–30, esp. 29–30.



which might be foregrounded with a slightly percussive attack. A double-bass melody might be heavily slurred to create a growling, muddy effect, while its appearance as a flute line might be made to sound clean and crisp.

Liszt's "attempt to transfer as much of his performance style to the score as possible" (p. 48) by way of instrumental cues and detailed performance directions also extended to the physical look of the notes on the page. Perhaps also the result of his associations with reproductive artists like Ingres, Liszt's notation is deliberate and precise. Ossia passages aid a pianist's interpretation of the main text by showing what has been omitted, while three-stave layouts help offset orchestral timbres and differentiate melodies, accompaniments, and other discreet musical materials. Kim's excellent coverage of this latter device on pp. 51–55 reinforces the ingenuity with which Liszt was able to make the "sacred texts" of Beethoven and Berlioz his own.

Such tactics also spilled over into Liszt's *partition* of Gioachino Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* Overture, the subject of Chapter 3. Kim draws on Carl Dahlhaus's separation of music as score-based "text" or performance-based "event" in order to ground her investigation of this pianistic warhorse. Unlike the Beethoven and Berlioz *partitions*, Liszt performed his rendition of Rossini's Overture frequently, perhaps because it exhibited his more advanced reworking techniques to date. For Kim, the textural enrichment that Liszt gives to the Overture's "Ranz des vaches" recalls Liszt's contemporary solo piano arrangement of Schubert's "Ave Maria." Cadenzas, embellishments, and other "fantasy-like passages" (p. 73) abound. Characteristic moments of Rossinian instrumental color become opportunities for new pianistic figurations, such as the timpani's "chromatic, dramatic, and rumbling bass line" (p. 72). Taken together, such glosses challenge the text-event dichotomy of nineteenth-century historiography. Liszt's "designation of *partition*," concludes Kim, "makes the piece worthy of serious attention in itself, while simultaneously epitomizing a virtuoso-centered and ephemeral event" (p. 58).

Liszt's *partitions* from the 1830s are among his most awe-inspiring arrangements, but Kim reminds us in Chapter 4 that Liszt continued to reduce and transform orchestral music after retiring from the public concert stage in the late 1840s. His two-piano arrangements of his own symphonic poems are almost completely unknown to scholars and performers, yet, as Kim sees it, they mark an important phase in the ontology of this niche ensemble. In particular, Liszt hoped to better approximate the "sonic structure" (*Tongebilde*) of his complex symphonic poems, especially in moments where orchestration and program collided. For instance, Liszt's careful distribution of arpeggios, tremolos, and other bravura figurations, coupled with performance directions like "leggiero volante" or "espressivo dolente," make the open plains of *Mazeppa* come alive with "Mazeppa's disturbing ride and his resulting disorientation" (p. 89). Programmatic details of *Hunnenschlacht*, inspired by Wilhelm von Kaulbach's immense fresco of Huns and Christians battling across time, space, and existence, "become more heightened, poignant, and even revitalized by Liszt's highly characteristic use of the pianos in their layout and division, once again conflating a visual, aural, and tactile effect and thus imparting to the audience a new type of hearing experience in the new medium" (p. 100).

If Beethoven, Berlioz, Schubert, and Rossini forged Liszt's art music aesthetic, then it was Hungarian Gypsies that primarily shaped his understanding of folk music. How this latter influence came to bear on Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies is the subject of Chapter 5. In particular, Kim focuses on the cimbalom, the instrument that inspired much of "Liszt's imagined, Romanticized, and quixotic representation of Gypsy music" (p. 103). The first half of the chapter situates the cimbalom in Western European culture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth



centuries, bookended by the careers of Pantaleon Hebenstreit and József V. Schunda. Kim draws attention to the connections between Hebenstreit's instrument (nicknamed the pantalon) and the developing fortepiano, "both [being] hammered instruments that create percussive sounds and effects" (p. 110), can quickly switch between soloistic and accompanimental roles, and possess the capacity for extreme ornamentation, improvisation, and virtuosity. Such qualities clearly attracted Liszt, who not only wrote of the instrument reverently in his correspondence and *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* of 1859, but also adapted them for the keyboard. Indeed, tremolos, trills, flourishes, repetitions, hammering/percussive attacks, improvisation, *hallgató* style, and ensemble mimicry are just some of the features of cimbalom playing experience that make their way into Liszt's Rhapsodies, which repeatedly display "a skillful blend of sonic and performative fidelity and creative artistry" (p. 123).

While Kim rightly mentions the Second Ballade and *Funérailles* in a brief concluding chapter as further examples of Liszt's orchestral pianism, many other works also qualify in this regard. The left hand *Ossia* in Liszt's arrangement of Schubert's *Meeresstille* or the added trills in *Der Wanderer* recall tactics associated with Liszt's contemporaneous arrangement of the *Guillaume Tell* Overture. Liszt's melodramas, such as *Lenore* (pub. 1860) or *Der blinde Sänger* (pub. 1877), are replete with performance directions, evocative gestures, and characteristic themes that help the mind's ear better imagine an accompanying orchestra. The four-stave layout in mm. 52–58 of the *Sonetto 47 del Petrarca (Années de pèlerinage, Book 2; pub. 1858)* or mm. 71–77 of *Sursum corda (Années de pèlerinage, Book 3; pub. 1883)* not only belie an orchestral outlay akin to the earlier Beethoven arrangements, but also speak to the endurance of Liszt's interest in fashioning new "colors in black and white."

With a body of 157 pages and almost forty pages of notes, *Liszt's Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano* is able to raise, but not always answer, questions of intention, context, and impact. In Chapter 4, for instance, Kim argues that Liszt preferred two-piano arrangements because "he believed the faithful two-piano arrangement would help the audience become acquainted better with the details of the original" (p. 84). However, lacking comparison to the one-piano, four-hand arrangements that Liszt also condoned makes such a statement difficult for the reader to corroborate. Again, regarding audiences, she plausibly demonstrates how Liszt's two-piano arrangements surpassed the technical abilities of most domestic pianists.<sup>3</sup> What, then, was the ultimate function of these arrangements? As "individualized representations of his compositional oeuvre" (p. 101), were they more monuments to the original orchestral works, akin to the "conscientious translations" that Liszt had made of Beethoven's and Berlioz's music?<sup>4</sup> More generally, how do Liszt's experiments as arranger of orchestral and folk music refract back onto his own piano works? What insights might be gained by pianists who approach them with the eyes and ears of a conductor? Might it make more hermeneutic sense to explore

<sup>3</sup>See, for instance, her excellent reading of Liszt's two-piano version of his "Dante" Symphony on pp. 86–89 and p. 188, n37.

<sup>4</sup>This might also explain why Liszt's students, August Stradal and August Göllerich, chose this ensemble configuration when presenting his symphonic poems in a series of memorial concerts in Vienna in late 1886. Ludwig SPEIDEL's write-up of the first concert appears in *Kastners Wiener musikalische Zeitung* 3/7 (November 25, 1886), 107–108.



them along a Dahlhausian text-event spectrum rather than pigeonhole them into genres like fantasy, sonata, or cycle?

Rather than critiques of her book,<sup>5</sup> such questions are the result of Kim's convincing argument that Liszt's pianistic aesthetic was essentially translational – whether referencing the classical orchestra, bringing a program to life, or reenacting a concert of folk musicians. "His reworkings," writes Kim,

represent the blurring of boundaries between reference and digression, composition and performance, and faithful reproduction and creative artistry. His compositional focus on the texture, sound, and timbre of instruments, in particular, illustrates his combination of detailed attention to the model instruments and his imaginative reconstruction of them (p. 145).

In upending the traditional ontological boundaries of Liszt's arrangements, Kim ultimately expands Liszt's legacy, adding "translator" to his list of enviable accolades as pianist-composer.

<sup>5</sup>Unfortunately, the book could have benefitted from another round of proofreading, as typographical errors appear on pp. 49, 50, 62, 78, 82, 98, 110, 123, 144, 203, and 214.

