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HORENSTEIN

Liszt *Faust Symphony* - Wagner *Faust Overture*

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The *Faust Symphony* is one of Liszt's very finest works, and is only denied its rightful place in the normal concert repertoire by the dictates of musical fashion. Its neglect not only robs us of the enjoyment of a romantic masterpiece, but creates a gap in our understanding of musical history, since it was from the Liszt of the *Faust Symphony* and the symphonic poems that Wagner derived a considerable part of his later melodic, harmonic and orchestral style (from *The Valkyrie* onwards). And if we have to admit that Wagner put these techniques to much greater use, we should not deny that, in the hands of the man who originally conceived them, they produced music of extraordinary beauty and originality.

The symphony consists of three movements—three "character-portraits", Liszt called them: Faust, Gretchen and Mephistopheles. At the end of the final movement, the Prince of Darkness recedes, to give way to a religious apotheosis—a setting of the final lines of Goethe's great Faust drama, lines which sum up the striving of man's spirit for union with the divine. The work is, in fact, a portrait of Liszt himself, reflecting through a dramatic prism various aspects of his own character: there was much of Faust in his turbulent nature, more of Mephistopheles; he was a great lover, and a great seeker for religious assurance. The expression of these qualities is remarkably compelling, especially in its sense of mystery and magic; if there is an occasional vulgarity in the Faust movement and a slight sentimentality in the portrayal of Gretchen, the picture of Mephistopheles is brilliant in its wit, derision and malice (especially in the near-Stravinsky an fugue). The same themes are used throughout, superbly transformed into new shapes all the time, and there are only two real blots on the score: the would-be "noble" trumpet theme (*Faust*, letter O), which rivals its equivalent in Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration* for spiritual emptiness, and the choral apotheosis, which is religious rather than religious.

Horenstein brings a Wagnerian weight and breadth to the music, but also a tremendous drive which, in Mephistopheles, is quite awe-inspiring. In the demonic passages in the outer two movements, he is much more savage than Beecham, and realises more fully the tragic power of the score; but in Gretchen, he seems far too heavy-handed (at least, as recorded) Against this, one has to set the fact that Beecham takes Gretchen at an *adagio* (in places *molto adagio*), whereas Horenstein follows Liszt's marking—*Andante*; but I feel that the liberty is amply justified by the exquisite result. Beecham's Mephistopheles is utterly different from Horenstein's, but equally fascinating: this is not the brutal, ferocious enemy of the divine, but the cynical, quick-witted, feather-in-cap spirit, laughing sardonically at everything under the sun. Both conceptions, mutually exclusive, are brought off with absolute mastery. In the apotheosis, Horenstein is solemn and Germanic, and rightly so, I feel: he presents the music as Liszt must surely have imagined it, and if it sounds extremely portentous, that is an inherent quality of the score at this point.

Deryck Cooke, *The Gramophone*, February 1960 (*excerpt*)

This is a reading that captures all the constantly changing moods of the Faust movement with most passionate conviction and, indeed, it is his burning conviction in the music that makes the whole such an impressive performance. I thought the opening of the slow movement, Gretchen, a little perfunctory but maybe this is intentional, for the music gains in expressiveness later to greater effect. The male voice choir at the end is outstandingly good, singing with firmness and with exemplary diction.

T. H., *The Gramophone*, February 1969 (*excerpt*)

Producer's Note

Getting the best out of Jascha Horenstein's "early stereo" recordings made for Vox in 1957 can be quite tricky. The microphone placing used here means any number of potential compromises are necessary: a brighter remaster sounds more alive, with the brass positively shining, but the strings may occasionally sound a trifle raw and screechy; rein this in and the whole thing risks sounding dull and dead, not helped by an unusually close acoustic. Thus here I've had to tread a careful path to avoid tipping things too far in either direction, whilst maintaining the "Wagnerian weight and breadth" and "tremendous drive" referred to by Deryck Cooke in his review of the original UK LP issue. My thanks, again, to Misha Horenstein for his help and expertise in producing this recording. **Andrew Rose**

Horenstein

conducts FAUST

Liszt *A Faust Symphony*
Wagner *A Faust Overture*

Ferdinand Koch, tenor
Orchestra and Chorus of the Southwest German Radio

Stereo studio recordings, 1957

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LISZT EINE FAUST-SYMPHONIE - WAGNER EINE FAUST-OUVERTÛRE
HORENSTEIN, ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS OF THE SOUTHWEST GERMAN RADIO (SWDR)

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HORENSTEIN *conducts Faust*

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Jascha Horenstein

LIZST A Faust Symphony, S108

- 1. Faust (25:24)
- 2. Gretchen (18:31)
- 3. Mephistopheles (23:38)

Recorded in stereo, 24-27 October 1957
Südwest Tonstudio, Loffenau

First issued as mono LP Vox PL.10902

- WAGNER A Faust Overture (10:13)

Total duration: 77:46

Ferdinand Koch *tenor*

Orchestra and Chorus of the Southwest German Radio (SWDR)

Jascha Horenstein *conductor*

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