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Gaetano Donizetti by Franz Liszt, the piano in the service of the opera

ABSTRACT: The aim of the paper is to analyze Franz Liszt's piano interpretations that constitute excellent operatic transcriptions and reminiscences from the operas of Gaetano Donizetti. There are seven piano works based on six of Donizetti's operas, among them bar-for-bar transcriptions of particular fragments as well as masterly syntheses of many musical themes. We try to argue that Donizetti was an inspiration for Liszt and that the Hungarian composer was not only an eminent connoisseur and admirer of *bel canto*, but also made an important contribution to the rediscovery of Italian opera. These transcriptions are an excellent example of a sincere tribute from one great composer to another; they highlight some of the treasures among Donizetti's compositions, as well as the talent of the author of the transcriptions.

KEYWORDS: Liszt, piano interpretation, transcription, reminiscence, Donizetti, *bel canto*, opera

Franz Liszt's piano interpretation is not merely a valuable virtuoso musical commentary. It is also reminiscent of unjustly neglected *bel canto* works. The creation of solo pieces based on motives from great stage and instrumental opuses can be considered on two levels: utilitarian and educational. Many miniatures and arrangements were created to popularize great vocal and instrumental works. Piano pieces also served a role in piano education: small forms were often performed in salons during social gatherings. The subjects of these works were usually inspired by melodies from popular operas. Creating these kinds of piano excerpts – taken from great stage works – was a profitable business for budding composers.¹ On the other hand, pieces on subjects taken from well-known stage works constituted an artistic challenge for the romantic generation. The practice of composing variations containing popular melodies from operas had been known earlier. Mozart's operas inspired classical composers, like Mauro Giuliani or Ludwig van Beethoven. However, in the Romantic period, spectacular virtuosity and artistic sensibility were the factors which determined a composer's standing as an artist. During the 19th century, a brilliant style connected with virtuoso concert practice

¹ Richard Wagner earned a living in this way in Paris, see also: Herbert Weinstock, *Donizetti and the World of Opera in Italy. Paris and Vienna in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Pantheon, 1963), 159; Joël-Marie Fauquet, "Lucia di Lammermoor. Commentaire musical et littéraire", *L'Avant-scène opéra, opérette, musique* [Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*] 55 (1983), 78.

became widely popular.² Masterpieces by the greatest virtuoso composers provided outstanding interpretations of original works and their mastery went beyond pure technical display. Niccolò Paganini initiated the trend of producing variations as independent works expressing a new, individual form, with his composition based on a theme from the aria *Di tanti palpiti* in Rossini's *Tancredi*. It is worth noting that the activity of the virtuosos also influenced the direction of the style of opera. Improvisations performed during concerts by virtuoso composers on a given topic – usually from a well-known opera – were another manifestation of this practice.

Transcripts and extracts from works, arrangements, and variations were prepared not only for the piano, but also for other instruments, such as the cello or violin. Pieces intended for the salon, teaching, and concerts yielded benefits not only for the arranging composer, but also for the original creator. Although they did not bring tangible income, operas by such great artists as Donizetti, Bellini, Rossini, Wagner, Verdi, Auber and Meyerbeer owed much of their wider reception to soloists. The *Hexameron* – a collective piece created by six famous virtuoso composers – Liszt, Chopin, Thalberg, Czerny, Herz and Pixis – was published and edited by Liszt in 1837, and held a very important position among 19th-century piano transcriptions. The circumstances surrounding the creation of this piece were very important for social and artistic life; the work might almost be described as a summary of a 'live' concert for a charitable cause. It also reconciled two great rivals, Liszt and Thalberg, as well as involving one of the last of Chopin's public performances and being a tribute to the prematurely deceased young Bellini. Liszt used to play this extraordinary piece during his European concerts.³

It is a truism to say that the works of Gaetano Donizetti celebrated the triumph of the most prestigious opera houses in the first half of the 19th century. The master from Bergamo became the most popular opera composer after Bellini's premature death (1835), and after the end of Rossini's operatic activity. His more than 70 works for the stage included three genres of Italian operas, *seria*, *semiseria* and *buffo*, and the French *grand opéra* and *opéra comique*. The popularity of Donizetti's works is confirmed by, beside their frequent performances, the numerous interpretations and transcriptions of themes from his operas. Among the composers performing such variations, fantasies, and extracts were such instrumental virtuosos and competitors of Liszt as Sigismond Thalberg, the German pianist Charles Voss, the Spanish clarinetist Antonio Romero, and Richard Wagner.⁴

² Danuta Jasińska, "Problem stylu *brillant* w twórczości Chopina" [Style *Brillant* in Chopin's Music], in: *Przemiany w stylu Chopina* [Transformational Changes in Chopin's Style], ed. M. Gołąb (Kraków: Musica Iagellonica, 1993), 141–142.

³ Stanisław Dybowski, *Franciszek Liszt* [Franz Liszt] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1986), 37; Jean-Alexandre Ménétrier, "Bellini et Chopin", *L'Avant-scène opéra, opérette, musique* [Bellini, *Les Puritains*], 96 (1987), 16–22.

⁴ Sigismond Thalberg produced his own interpretations of Rossini's and Bellini's operas as variations. He also composed variations on Donizetti's themes from *Lucia di Lammermoor*,

Franz Liszt – widely regarded as the greatest interpreter of works by his contemporaries, especially those for the stage – popularized Schubert's songs and Beethoven's symphonies through his recitals. The great virtuoso knew most operas not only from seeing them staged, also during his many travels. He also conducted many of them as a director in Weimar. We find in Liszt's correspondence comments indicating that operatic paraphrases and transcriptions formed a distinctive and popular part of his concerts⁵.

There are concert and salon interpretations, as well as original artistic works, among Liszt's works. The composer himself in a letter mentioned a concert in Milan in which themes from operas by Bellini and Donizetti were selected by drawing lots: 'During my last musical séance, a magnificent silver cup was placed at the entrance to the hall, made by one of the Cellini students. Inside were folded sheets with the themes. When they started to read them, I found, as I had expected, quite a number of themes by Bellini and Donizetti.'⁶ It is worth recalling another interesting event during his Italian travels, memorialized in a painting from 1838, in which Donizetti is playing the piano in the presence of Liszt. Let us add that the author of *Lucia di Lammermoor* also wrote piano music and presented the works of Rossini to the great Hungarian.⁷

There are several piano works based upon Donizetti's operatic themes among Liszt's achievements: *Valse de concert sur deux motifs de 'Lucia' et 'Parisina'* (S214/3), *Réminiscences de 'Lucia di Lammermoor'* (S397) and *Marche funèbre et Cavatine de la 'Lucia di Lammermoor'* (S398), *Spirto gentil de l'opéra 'La Favorite'* (S400a), *Marche funèbre de 'Dom Sébastien'* (S402), *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantaisie I* (S400/1) and *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' II* (S400/2) in two versions. These works come from the years 1835–1852 and are mainly related to Liszt's concert activity. Among them are both bar-for-bar transcriptions, as well as masterly syntheses. The latter tend to explore the programme, and are not only a masterful synthetic piano transcription, a virtuoso

L'elisir d'amore and *La Favorite*. He also composed fantasies on themes from *La fille du régiment*, *Don Pasquale* and *Lucrezia Borgia*, S. Thalberg, *Fantasies on Operas by Donizetti*, perf. Francesco Nicolosi, Naxos – Marco Polo 1993; Antonio Romero composed variations on themes from *Lucrezia Borgia*, see Joan Enric Luna, in: *Rossini y España*, perf. J. E. Luna, clarinet, Nigel Clayton, piano (Harmonia Mundi, 2001). Charles Voss composed his *Grande Fantaisie brillante* based on the melodies of *La Favorite*. Herbert Weinstock, Donizetti's biographer notes that a well-known transcription of this opera was performed by Richard Wagner. Weinstock, *Donizetti*, 111, 159.

⁵ Allan Walker, *Franz Liszt. The Virtuoso Years (1811–1847)* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 411.

⁶ Stanisław Szenic, *Franciszek Liszt [Franz Liszt]* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1969), 114–115.

⁷ Gilles de Van, *Donizetti* (Paris: Bleu nuit éditeur, 2009), 25; see also: Szenic, *Franciszek Liszt*, 115–116.

feat, but, above all, an attempt to sketch a psychological portrait of character and even an artistic synthesis of the opera.⁸

The *Valse de concert sur deux motifs de 'Lucia' et 'Parisina'* (S214/3) was composed in the mid-thirties, and the score was published as the third part of a set of three *Caprices valse*s in 1852. Liszt used as a theme a motif from the final duet from Act I of *Verranno a te sull'aure* (*Lucia di Lammermoor*, 1835), and also a theme from Act II of *Parisina d'Este* (1833). Both motifs are developed in the variation technique, overlapping and interpenetrating, they are a symbol of loving thirst. In these operas by Donizetti, love and fate are intertwined. It is worth recalling that a dreamy vision by the main character, as in *Parisina*, was also a popular subject in Romantic literature.⁹ A form of intertextuality reflects the tragic love theme of both *Parisina* and *Lucia* in a desperate waltz. The selection of motifs was not accidental – it is the only one of Liszt's composition connecting melodies from two of Donizetti's operas. In the context of the theme of fatal love, we can recall that Liszt also transcribed *The Hell Waltz* from Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*. According to Humphrey Searle, *Valse de concert sur deux motifs de Lucia et Parisina* has 'all the freshness and brilliance of Liszt at his youthful best.'¹⁰

Réminiscences de 'Lucia di Lammermoor' (S397) and *Marche funèbre et Cavatine de la 'Lucia di Lammermoor'* (S398) from 1835–36, were published in 1841 and 1844. Thus, they were created on the wave of the opera's popularity, shortly after the Neapolitan world premiere in September 1835. The first score (subtitled *Fantasia dramatique*) turned out to be so large that the original publisher insisted on it being split into two works. Liszt agreed, but in concerts it was performed as one piece, and thus the similarity of the codas did not go unnoticed. The first part – published as Opus 13 – is founded upon the closing sextet *Chi mi frena in tal momento* from Act II of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which is considered to be one of the finest operatic ensembles. Liszt – in contrast to his bar-for-bar transcriptions of overtures by Rossini – made a looser paraphrase, i.e., maintaining, major tonality, but also ignoring the original vocal-instrumental medium in favour of the solo. The composer introduced a 16-bar beginning based on a characteristic sextet rhythmic figure (semiquaver pause, three semiquavers, four, four quavers, three-quarter rhythm) highlighting the strong accent and dynamic contrast. He introduced an E-flat diminished chord at the beginning, then developed the sextet in arpeggio as the second subject.

Introduction to *Fantasia dramatique*:¹¹

⁸ Adrian Corleoni, note, *Fanfare. The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors*, May/June 2008, 5.

⁹ William Ashbrook, *Donizetti and His Operas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 77, 341–342; Alexandre Dumas, *Hrabia Monte Christo* [The Count of Monte Cristo] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo "Iskry", 1988), vol. 1, 304.

¹⁰ Humphrey Searle, *The Music of Liszt* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 98.

¹¹ Cameral Music, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://cameralmusic.pl/nuty/pdf/liszt-franz-orkestrowe-opera-i-miscellaneous-transkrypcje-i-paraphrases-s-397-reminiscences-de-lucia-de-lammermoor-cdsm--32536.html>.



Example 1. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucia di Lammermoor'*, the introduction

After a descending passage, the first main subject of the sextet section in D-flat major is presented, after a double exposition; Liszt developed the cadence based on the rapid course of thirty-second notes, and then introduced the second theme in A-flat major, in a rhythm slightly contrasted with the preceding ³/₄:



Example 2. G. Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act II, the original second theme of the sextet

Liszt introduced the extended ⁹/₈ beat, and the basis for the accompaniment are thirty-two note passages as well as trill and appoggiaturas (Example 3)¹²

The second section of the sextet was modified by changing the rhythm – without the original triplets – and it thus becomes narrower in repetition, it is played with the left hand. The piece ends against the background of a brilliant coda *tremolando*, with a change in the rhythm in a section of a phrase to ²/₄, which then returns to a ³/₄ rhythm. The presence in *Réminiscences* of arpeggios, trills and runs turns it into a brilliant virtuoso firework.

¹² Cameral Music, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://cameralmusic.pl/nutypdf/liszt-franz-orkestrowe-opera-i-miscellaneous-transkrypcje-i-paraphrases-s-397-reminiscences-de-lucia-de-lammermoor-cdsm--32536.html>. The effect was close to the original interpretation of the second section of the sextet, see Ashbrook, *Donizetti*, 265.

Example 3. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucia di Lammermoor'*, interpretation of the second theme of the sextet

The second variation – *Marche funèbre et Cavatine de la 'Lucia di Lammermoor'* – contains certain features of a programme. The main themes are founded on the final scene at the tomb – Edgar Ravenswood, awaiting the duel, learns of the death of his beloved. Desperate, he commits suicide. The reminiscence consists of a hushed introduction based on *tremolando*, and then on the march motif developed in B-flat minor, augmented with the figure of death and supplemented with a grim, drum funeral procession figure (Example 4).¹³

In the following part, the composer introduces the motif of the tenor recitative, enriched with *tremolando* and a repeated rhythm. The next section moves to F-sharp minor, combines the themes of the tenor melody and a snare drum rhythm and then is muted. After the *Cavatina* in G-flat major (after which the protagonist commits suicide),¹⁴ in a sudden surprising move, Liszt introduces two reminiscences: one is the *stretto* motif from the finale of the second act in G-flat major. *Allegro molto agitato* (Example 5).¹⁵

¹³ Cameral Music, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://cameralmusic.pl/nutypdf/liszt-franz-orkestrowe-opera-i-miscellaneous-transkrypcje-i-paraphrases-s-398-marsze-funebre-et-cavatine-donizettis-lucia-nla--32537.html>.

¹⁴ The score of the opera in D major. The phenomenon of Donizetti relied, inter alia, on the fact that the tragedy could give the major “happy” keys.

¹⁵ Cameral Music, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://cameralmusic.pl/nutypdf/liszt-franz-orkestrowe-opera-i-miscellaneous-transkrypcje-i-paraphrases-s-398-marsze-funebre-et-cavatine-donizettis-lucia-nla--32537.html>.



Example 4. Liszt, *Marche funèbre et Cavatine de la 'Lucia di Lammermoor'*, the march motif



Example 5. F. Liszt, *Marche funèbre et Cavatine de la 'Lucia di Lammermoor'*, the stretto motif from the finale of the Act II

Over the course of a very short passage, the composer – using a rich chromaticism in this section – changes the key to A major, and exposes the theme of the duet from the finale of the second act, again in G-flat major. Then, there is a spectacular coda based on the rhythm of the final sextet from Act II of the opera (*Andante maestoso*, $\frac{3}{4}$, *fff*) (Example 6).

Superimposition of themes and the introduction of the keys D-flat major, G minor, D major and G-flat major into the coda, along with the introduction of a very strong dynamic contrast (e.g., in G minor attenuation of *sotto voce*), clearly demonstrates not only the possibility of using a virtuoso display employing impressive technical solutions, but also of a programmatic interpretation. The ending of this piece can be considered to be the result of the division of the original fantasy, but, on the other hand, the cited motifs from the finale of Act II of the opera relate directly to the tragic story of Lucia – they are the last in which Edgar sees his beloved. Liszt introduced these motifs after Edgar's *Cavatina*, which precedes his death, where the protagonist recalls his beloved in his vision of the longed-for reunion with her after death. It is worth quoting here the opinion of someone who

Example 6. F. Liszt, *Marche funèbre et Cavatine de la 'Lucia di Lammermoor'*, the beginning of coda based on the rhythm of the final sextet from the Act II

performed all the works of Liszt, Leslie Howard, who said that Op. 13 represents 'the best of Liszt's early operatic fantasies.'¹⁶

Another piece that interprets a work by Donizetti – *Spirto gentil de l'opéra 'La Favorite'* (S400a) from 1840 – is the piano adaptation of an aria from Act IV of the opera. It is worth recalling that this aria – originally composed for the opera *Il Duca d'Alba* – has a short introductory recitative and simple one-part form (A: A) in C major. The romance *Ange si pur (Spirto gentil)* has a reflective character due

¹⁶ Leslie Howard, "Liszt at the Opera, I", in: *Ferenc Liszt. The Complete Music for Solo Piano* – vol. 6, per. L. Howard (Hyperion Records Limited, 1990), booklet, 7.

to a subtle accompaniment. Donizetti's aim was to vary the accompaniment in the reprise of the aria from a simple melody descending along the steps of the scale, with the arpeggios becoming triplets echoed by *pizzicato* strings. A performance of this romance requires of the tenor the 'utmost vocal refinement and security of technique, the long linked phrases, and the repeated upward and downward movement through passage notes, as well as suspended and hushed dynamics.'¹⁷ Donizetti's aria *Spirto gentil* won the hearts of the public in Paris, and later throughout Europe. Liszt's interpretation has a reflective and elegiac character, and is full of Italian drama and pathos due to the use of restrained measures and accompaniment in accordance with the original musical score. In the repetition of the aria, Liszt moved the melody an octave higher and then wove notes with small values in the accompaniment around the subject. The third repetition was dynamically strengthened. Liszt's *Spirto gentil* is closer to the bar-for-bar transcription corresponding to the trends of the era. It is a most simple, noble and beautiful elaboration of a wonderful melody. The genius and originality of Liszt's style is seen primarily in the final cadence. Note that according to Michael Cookson, Liszt used Wagner's arrangement as the basis for his transcription of Fernando's beautiful *cavatina*. It is also worth noting that this transcription, which appears to date from shortly after the opera's première, has remained in manuscript and would not appear in the facsimile of the handwritten copy until in 1992.¹⁸

The funeral march from *Dom Sébastien* (S402), Donizetti's last opera, was written shortly after its premiere in 1844. Paradoxically, this very sombre march was composed in C major. Liszt begins with a short introduction and then develops the theme in C minor. During the rest of the reminiscence, the march motif is performed four times, first in the original major key, and then with several other themes from the opera. In subsequent runs, it appears in E minor; broken by a motif in F-sharp minor, expanded in B-flat minor, with F-sharp minor to G minor; and finally brought to C major. Liszt presented this piece to Queen Maria II of Portugal in 1845.¹⁹

The first presentation of the march (Example 7).²⁰

Two reminiscences from *Lucrezia Borgia – Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantaisie I* (S400/1) and *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' II* (S400/2) are from 1848, while Liszt's first fantasy (later *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' II*) was written as early as 1840, very shortly after the opera's Paris pre-

¹⁷ Ashbrook, *Donizetti*, 446.

¹⁸ Michael Cookson, *Music Web International*, March 2008, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://www.naxos.com/reviews/reviewlist.asp?catalogueid=8.570137&languageid=EN#34708>; "Liszt at the Opera, II", in: *Ferenc Liszt The Complete music for solo piano – vol. 17*, per. Leslie Howard (Hyperion Records Limited, 1990), booklet, 3.

¹⁹ Walker, *Franz Liszt*, 411.

²⁰ Cameral Music, access: <http://cameralmusic.pl/nutypdf/liszt-franz-orkestrowe-opera-i-miscellaneous-transkrypcje-i-paraphrases-s-402-marsze-funebre-de-dom-sebastien-de-donizetti-32539.html>.



Example 7. F. Liszt, *Marche funèbre de 'Dom Sébastien'*, the first presentation of the march miere. *Lucrezia Borgia* was the subject of many variations and transcriptions, but Liszt's interpretation stands out among them owing to its quality of compositional craftsmanship and rich and complex structure. *Grande fantasia I*, in a version from 1848, is based on two motifs of a trio from the second act of the opera. It is the scene in which the vengeful Duke Alfonso offers Gennaro (Lucrezia's son) a glass of wine, forces Lucrezia to pour the drink from the poisoned decanter, and orders her to remain silent.

In the opera, the scene of 'the order to be silent' is described by a descending motif in A-flat major (Example 8).²¹



Example 8. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantasia I*, the Duke's motif of 'the order to be silent'

Liszt masterfully develops this theme reduced to a single cell (seven quavers with quaver pause). This motif, which first appears in the introduction, is performed 11 times in different keys: A-flat minor, D-flat minor, B major, chord augmented C-flat, D-flat minor, E minor, A major, B-flat major, B minor, C-sharp minor, and A-flat minor.

²¹ Van, *Donizetti*, 76; Petrucci Library, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://japanese.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/5/55/IMSLP67868-PMLP137025-S400.PDF>.

The second motif developed from *Grande fantasia I* is Gennaro's invitation:²²



Example 9. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantasia I*, the second motif, Gennaro's invitation

The motif of the 'order to be silent' is diminished in the developments which follow, and superimposed on Gennaro's motif:²³



Example 10. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantasia I*, the overlapping of motifs

In further transformations, the motif of Gennaro is developed in E major, distant from A flat major – the tonality of the Duke. Altogether, Liszt presented seven variations with different rhythmic structures and many ornaments (four times the key of A-flat major, two times E major), and ending in a coda.

Grande fantasia II contains three main themes: the page's drinking-song (*Chanson à boire*), the finale of the Prologue and *Duo finale*, as well as the characteristic theme of the sextet. The material which opens the fantasy is not connected with Donizetti's opera, and is followed by the famous finale of the *Prologue – Mafio Orsini signora son io* in the highly chromaticised key of B major (Example 11).²⁴

The piece then moves into the drinking song in C major (*tempo giusto, non troppo allegro*) (Example 12).

The sextet theme quoted from the *Prologue* and the drinking song are extended with another fragment of the *Prologue* (the theme of the stretto from the *Prologue* in the opera begins with the words of the *Senti*) (Example 13).

²² Petrucci Library, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://japanese.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/5/55/IMSLP67868-PMLP137025-S400.PDF>

²³ Petrucci Library, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://japanese.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/5/55/IMSLP67868-PMLP137025-S400.PDF>

²⁴ Petrucci Library, accessed 5 November 2013: <http://japanese.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/5/55/IMSLP67868-PMLP137025-S400.PDF>

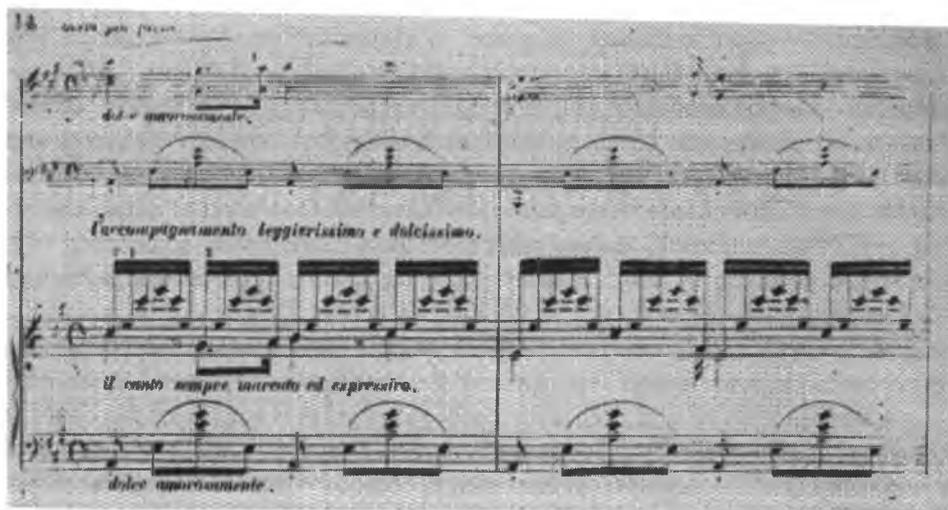


Example 11. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantasia II*, the theme of the finale of the *Prologue*, *Mafio Orsini signora son io*

Example 12. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantasia II*, the theme of drinking-song

Example 13. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantasia II*, the theme of the *stretto* from the *Prologue* (in the opera begins with the words of the *Senti*)

After three variations of these themes, there appears the melody of the duet of Lucrezia and Gennaro *Ama tua madre* in A major – the central part of this fantasy. This theme introduces a gentle mood after the harmonic tensions and dynamic contrasts:



Example 14. F. Liszt, *Réminiscences de 'Lucrezia Borgia' – Grande fantaisie II*, the melody of the Lucrezia–Gennaro duet *Ama tua madre*

The second presentation is followed by development of the theme in F-sharp major.²⁵ Then, themes from the *Prologue* (in F-sharp major) and from the finale of the *Prologue* return leading into the key of B major. Liszt preceded the motif with a final insertion of the trio from *Grande fantaisie I*. In the complex sequences which follow, the cited themes overlap and run in parallel with highly exposed *stretti*. *Grande fantaisie II* is a highly advanced piece of virtuoso technique, and at the same time is a kind of summary of the opera, exposing themes relating to the key moments of the action.²⁶

In the opinion of Leslie Howard, Liszt's works on themes from Donizetti's operas have been judged very unevenly: the sextet from *Lucia* achieved greatest popularity, while the second variation on the themes from the same opera, and *Valse de concert sur deux motifs de Lucia et Parisina*, have received much less recognition. The exceedingly difficult pieces based on *Lucrezia Borgia* proved too

²⁵ A second quieter section of melody of the duet was eliminated in the second version of *Grande fantaisie II*.

²⁶ Howard, "Liszt at the Opera, I", 7; Howard, "Liszt at the Opera, II", booklet, 3–4; Howard, "Liszt at the Opera, IV", in: *Ferenc Liszt The Complete Music for Solo Piano – vol. 42* (Hyperion Records Limited, 1996), booklet, 4–5; Howard, "Liszt at the Opera, V", in: *Ferenc Liszt The Complete Music for Solo Piano – vol. 50* (Hyperion Records Limited, 1998), booklet, 5; Szenic, *Franciszek Liszt*, 94.

much of a challenge for performers, while the Funeral March from *Dom Sébastien* is a rarity, although it was a great success in Vienna in the mid-19th century. The enormous popularity of the German version of the opera contributed to the recognition of Liszt's version as the official state funeral music in the Austro-Hungarian capital. The ailing Donizetti, whom Liszt succeeded to the position of *Hofkapellmeister* in Vienna, suggested in a letter to Totto Vaselli that he 'Buy Liszt's arrangement of the March; it will make your hair stand on end.'²⁷ Elio Boncompagni – the first conductor who recorded *Dom Sébastien* on CD in 1998 claimed that Gustav Mahler was struck by this march when he heard it in the street, and used it in his *Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor* and in the fourth song: *Die zwei blauen Augen* from *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. On the other hand, according to William Ashbrook, Mahler must have been more closely acquainted with the march, probably in Liszt's transcription, and used it in the middle section of the last song from the said cycle in the key of C major. Despite doubts about the inspiration for Mahler's interpretations, there is no question as to the reference to Donizetti's opera, a musical illustration of the atmosphere of impending death.²⁸

Johannes Brahms said: 'Whoever really wants to know what Liszt has done for the piano should study his old operatic fantasies. They represent the classicism of piano technique.'²⁹ An analysis of Liszt's interpretation of Donizetti's operas shows that the Hungarian composer was not only an eminent connoisseur and admirer of works for the stage, but also contributed to the rediscovery of many operas. It is difficult to disagree with the opinion that his compositions helped to rescue many masterpieces from undeserved oblivion, in particular those by Donizetti, Meyerbeer, Auber and Bellini. We can thus concur with Allan Walker's claim that Liszt's transcriptions were a sincere tribute from one great composer to another.³⁰

²⁷ Walker, *Franz Liszt*, 411; Another phrase is: "Buy the march arranged by Liszt; it's frightening" (The letter of March 15, 1845) after Weinstock, *Donizetti*, 366.

²⁸ Ashbrook, *Donizetti*, 695; Elio Boncompagni, "G. Donizetti, »Don Sebastiano«", in: *Don Sebastiano re di Portogallo*: Monica Minarelli, Robert Woroniecki, Randall Jacobsh, Ettore Kim, Opernchor und Extrachor des Theaters Aachen, Sinfonie Orchester Aachen, Elio Boncompagni (conductor); Kikko Classic 2000.

²⁹ Follow Charles Suttoni, "Introduction to the Dover Edition", in: Franz Liszt, *Complete Piano Transcriptions from Wagner's Operas* (New York: Dover Publications 1991), I.

³⁰ Walker, *Franz Liszt*, 411.