

## LISZT Harmonies poétiques et religieuses (Saskia Giorgini)

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Although Liszt thought highly of his *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* and often performed them for friends long after he retreated from regular concert-giving, only the 'Funérailles' and 'Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude' have survived in the 'standard' recital repertoire. Still, numerous pianists have advocated the entire cycle on disc. Aldo Ciccolini's 1968 recording was a longtime version of reference, along with more recent offerings from Roberto Plano (Decca), Roger Muraro (Accord, 1/05) and Steven Osborne (Hyperion, 4/04). For the most part, Saskia Giorgini holds her own in such distinctive company.

Giorgini's Bösendorfer 280VC model concert grand may not match the cutting-edge treble and booming bass characterising many Steinways, yet its distinctive registral timbres blend mellifluously. This especially tells in loud passages involving repeated chords, tremolos and torrential octaves, all of which Giorgini dispatches with the utmost fluency, and without a trace of harshness or banging. Her masterful authority immediately captures your attention in the carefully sculpted climaxes of the opening 'Invocation'. So does the pianist's subtle textural differentiation in the sparer, more introspective 'Ave Maria'. She displays obvious sensitivity throughout the 'Bénédiction', albeit without the warmth and continuity one hears from Alfred Brendel (Decca) or Stephen Hough (Virgin/Erato, 6/88) in this potentially rambling piece. She also holds back slightly in 'Pensée des morts', compared to Ciccolini's unmatched ferocity in the central climax.

Giorgini treats 'Funérailles' as the brooding tone poem that it is; even the famous octave sequence emerges a tad careful and studio-bound next to Krystian Zimerman's sleek greyhound of a left hand (DG, 10/91). Conversely, she keeps 'La lampe du temple' (*Andante lagrimoso*) beautifully afloat, and colourfully navigates the rhetorical peaks and valleys of the concluding 'Cantique d'amour'. Pentatone generously accommodates this excellently engineered and annotated release on a single disc with a playing time totalling 84'49". Well worth hearing.

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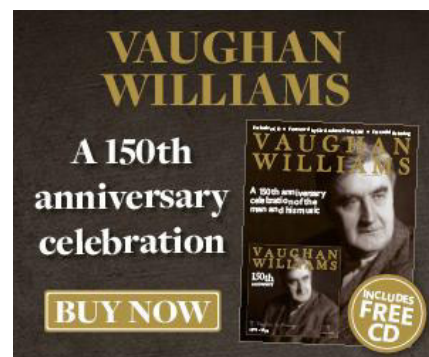


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