Franz Liszt – Faust Symphony (1986)

1. Faust 2. Gretchen 3. Mefisto 4. Chorus Mysticus Siegfried Jerusalem - tenor Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus Sir Georg Solti - conductor

The Chicago Symphony first performed Liszt`s ``A Faust Symphony`` in 1899, just 13 years after the composer`s death. What an impact the score, surely the last word in musical modernism, must have had on audiences of the day! To judge from the potent effect it exerted on Orchestra Hall Thursday night, this music has lost none of its passionate, incendiary power. In fact, with Romanticism back in vogue, Liszt`s musical distillation of Goethe`s

``Faust`` poem may do wonders to redeem Liszt`s tarnished reputation in this 100th anniversary year of his demise.

Georg Solti`s splendidly heroic realization must stand as the last word on the ``Faust Symphony,`` for years to come. The maestro matched the virtuoso authority of his great orchestra against the flamboyant scoring and colorful effects, and the results were astonishingly brilliant, dramatic and exciting. His Faust was clearly a man of action, an adventurer, in addition to being a philosopher, lover and seeker of truth. So firmly organized and controlled were the various sections of the opening movement that the programmatic episodes unfolded with uncommon vividness.

Solti seemed positively diabolic himself in the ``Mephistopheles`` section --the fugue really crackled with rhythmic electricity--holding back just enough to save the rather banal pages from inflated vulgarity. In the final pages, whose text is drawn from the second part of the ``Faust`` poem, the male chorus fervently proclaimed man`s salvation through the love of the Eternal

Feminine. Siegfried Jerusalem found some difficulty projecting the tenor solo clearly and steadily, a relatively minor fault that should be corrected by the start of recording sessions on Monday.

But what lifted the performance into the realm of the extraordinary was the central movement, filled with subtle, tenderly lyrical melodic inspiration, which Solti molded in the most beautiful and flowing manner. In many performances the ``Gretchen`` movement just plods along blandly; here it rightly became the expressive heart and soul of the symphony. The recording promises to be a major addition to the Liszt discography.

From Goethe`s Faust Solti turned to the poet Lenau`s--the familiar ``Mephisto Waltz`` by Liszt--pouring on the bravura with macabre relish. He began the program with the Nimrod variation from Elgar`s ``Enigma`` Variations, an eloquent tribute to our late principal cellist, Frank Miller, whom Solti eulogized as ``a wonderful man, a devoted musician, an incredible section leader, a legend for generations to come--we will desperately miss him.`` ---John von Rhein, articles.chicagotribune.com

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