Byron Janis (born 1928) became one of the most brilliant of his generation of American pianists before his career was cut short by illness. At the age of 7 he was taken to New York, becoming a pupil of Adele Marcus, then of Joseph and Rosina Lhévinne. In 1943 he made his professional debut playing Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in New York, with Frank Black conducting. In 1944 he repeated the same concerto in Pittsburgh with 13-year-old Lorin Maazel conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Vladimir Horowitz was in the audience, and subsequently invited Janis to study with him. Then Janis embarked on a successful career as a concert pianist, including a 1948 tour to South America, and a 1952 tour of Europe.

In 1960 Janis was chosen as the first American artist to be sent to the Soviet Union, opening a newly formed Cultural Exchange between the USSR and the United States. The result was a brilliant Mercury Living Presence LP that is an all-time classic, pairing the Rachmaninov First and Prokofiev Third concertos. Aided by exemplary sound recording, the Prokofiev in particular is still regarded by many connoisseurs as the work's finest recorded interpretation. In 1995 the CD version won the Cannes Award for Best Reissue. He interrupted his career in the late '60s at the onset of an illness, and temporarily resumed it in 1972. Soon however, his concert appearances became more rare.

Meanwhile, in 1967 he had discovered the manuscripts of two previously unknown Chopin waltzes in Paris, and in 1973, two variations of them, also in Chopin's hand, at the Yale Library. This led to a 1978 French television documentary, Frédéric Chopin: A Voyage with Byron Janis, in which he detailed the difficulties in determining the authentic versions of Chopin's music.

In 1985 he was invited to perform at the White House. On that occasion he publicly disclosed the nature of the illness that had hampered him for nearly 20 years: psoriatic arthritis affecting his wrists and hands. The ailment had not prevented him from continuing to play piano well, but it often made it impossible to play to his former high standard.

In the meantime, he devoted much of his energy to teaching, composing, and humanitarian concerns. He became Ambassador of the Arts for the Arthritis Foundation, often playing in fund-raising concerts. He is Chairman of the Global Forum Arts and Culture Committee. He composed the musical theme for the Global Forum on Human Survival in Oxford, England, held April, 1988. With lyrics by Sammy Cahn, it became the song The One World. Janis's music is primarily in the Pop style, and includes a musical version of The Hunchback of Notre Dame. In 1989 he composed the score for Turner Network Television's 1989 major documentary on Gary Cooper. He is on the faculty of Manhattan School of Music, and works on the Board and Music Advisory Committee for Pro Musicus, an international organization devoted to helping young artists.

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Fritz Reiner was one of the most acclaimed conductors of the 20th century -- noted for the vast range of his repertoire, which included both symphonic and operatic pieces spanning from the traditional canon to contemporary material, he was also an influential educator who counted among his pupils Leonard Bernstein. Reiner was born in Budapest, Hungary, on December 19, 1888; despite earning a law degree from the University of Bucharest, he pursued a career in music, and at age 21 was named chorusmaster of the Budapest Opera. A stint as conductor with the Budapest Volksoper followed before Reiner was chosen in 1914 to serve as principal conductor of the Royal Opera in Dresden, where he collaborated with Richard Strauss on productions of several of the composer's early operas.

In 1922 Reiner left Europe to relocate to America, settling in Cincinnati, OH, and signing on as conductor with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; a decade later he was tapped to head the orchestral and opera departments at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, where his students included Bernstein. After next serving as the music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony between 1938 and 1948, he served five years with the Metropolitan Opera. While Reiner's frequent migration might have been attributed largely to a restless creativity, he was also a notoriously difficult personality who frequently alienated those around him -- many of the musicians under his command openly loathed him, although he inevitably inspired the best work of their careers.

Reiner's own best work was undoubtedly his tenure with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which he elevated into one of the most celebrated ensembles in the world. Moving over to the CSO in 1953, he not only established the orchestra as a top-flight live attraction but also as a popular recording entity -- the countless albums they made for RCA's Living Stereo series during Reiner's decade-long tenure were much acclaimed by collectors for both the power of the performances and the unusually high fidelity of the recordings themselves. Releases like Fritz Reiner Conducts Richard Strauss and Fritz Reiner Conducts Bartók in particular remain definitive interpretations of the composers in question. Health problems forced Reiner to resign his position in 1962, and he died in New York City on November 15 of the following year.

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# *Liszt Totentanz*
# *Schumann Piano Concerto*

*Byron Janis, piano*
*Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony Orchestra*

Liszt's mid-century inspiration, Totentanz (Paraphrase on "Dies Irae" for pianoforte and orchestra), would prove to be one of the most enduring, inspiring, and disturbing works of the 19th century. It was inspired partly by Traini's fresco, "Triumph of Death," but also from the entire medieval tradition of Death depicted as a wild sort of Peter Pan, leading the folk to their demise in dances of ecstatic frenzy. It has often been noted how these medieval depictions were psychological aids to those surrounded by inexplicable deaths (that we now know were from plague and pestilence), but they also probably served as strict warnings against excess.

A notable achievement in this genre is Hans Holbein's series of wood-cuttings also entitled Totentanz, depicting everyone from the Pope to a peddler being approached by Death, who carries an expired hourglass and tugs them away by their garments. One particularly gruesome cutting envisions Death liberally imbibing drunkards with ale, inducing what is surely the most graphic vomiting ever depicted in 16th century art.

Liszt was perfectly suited to take up this old tradition and make it his own: he had his own macabre obsessions that led him to visit, observe and play for patients in asylums, hospitals, prisons and hospices throughout Europe. He has a whole genre of macabre themed works, including four Mephisto Waltzes, the b-minor sonata, and the Dante sonata. He also had the perfect musical starting point, the ancient requiem sequence Dies irae, which he had heard to great effect in Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique:

Dies Irae.png

The vivid apocalyptic poetry was inspired by imagery mostly from the New Testament, but also this passage in Zephaniah 1:15-16: "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fencéd cities, and against the high bulwarks."

The music matches effortlessly the picturesque poetry. Right from the unprecedented opening, with the piano in its lowest range, doubled by timpani, accompanying the theme in the low strings and winds - most notably trombones (traditionally symbolic of Hades) - a powerful image is suggested: the chasm of Hell relentlessly cracking open in a mighty earthquake. The instrumentation, perhaps ugly by conservative standards, even seems to give off an offensive stench of sulfur. It is surely one of Liszt's most demonic strokes, and will continue to intrigue composers almost a hundred years later. The piano follows with three wild cadenzas traversing the keyboard all the way to the top, then all the way to the bottom: a terrifying image of the minions of Satan bursting forth from the opened chasm and gaining ground on Earth.

Following that, there comes a tableau of variations based on the theme proper. A contemporary biographer of Liszt's, Richard Pohl, astutely commented: "Every variation discloses some new character—the earnest man, the flighty youth, the scornful doubter, the prayerful monk, the daring soldier, the tender maiden, the playful child." Indeed, the Holbein series of wood-cuttings depicts all these characters and more visited by Death.

A second tableau of variations gives a nobler, less devilish version of the theme, harmonized with a modal flair. In these variations, the texture becomes noticeably lighter and more brilliant, giving an effective contrast to the dark and foreboding music of the previous variations. The main theme does return, however, and in a devilish turn of events the piece closes with a chromatic scale cascading downwards, signaling the return of Satan and his minions to Gehenna, mortal souls in tow.

Throughout the whole piece, Liszt creates a practical catalog of haute-virtuose: rapidly alternating chords, tempestuous octaves, Liszt-octaves (fast octaves alternated between hands), brilliant and ornamented runs, glissandi, lightning-fast repeated notes and chords, treacherous leaps, contrapuntal playing, polyrhythmic passages, and massive scales. One of his ultimate trademarks, lyrical bel canto passages, are conspicuously missing, and that proved to be the biggest boon for composers of the future. In this unique, radically austere approach to piano technique, Liszt was the first to understand the inherently percussive nature of the piano. Everyone strove to make it sing like an opera star, or articulate like winds, or make legato like strings - including Liszt - but he was the first to take it a step further. Composers that were drawn to this piece included Busoni, Bartók, Prokofiev, and Rachmaninoff, innovators in the realm of piano, who definitely exploited the percussive nature of the piano as handed down by Liszt.

While certainly not a neglected work, Totentanz is not as familiar as the other Liszt concerti. Its aesthetic is perhaps slightly more foreign to us today, as threats of eternal damnation tend to hold little water with the regular concert-going public. Still, the sheer innovatory quality sustained through the whole concerto is enough to give us a thrill, even if unaccompanied by visions of wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Robert Schumann followed up his remarkable "year of song" (1840) with another compositional annus mirabilis. 1841 saw the creation of the composer's first works for orchestra, including the Symphony No. 1, Op. 38, the Symphony No. 4, Op. 120 (substantially revised and published a decade later), and the Overture, Scherzo and Finale, Op. 52. In each of these works, thematic unity among movements is of central importance, an idea widely explored in the Romantic period in guises ranging from the idée fixe of Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique (1830) to the leitmotives of Wagner's music dramas.

Schumann's other major work from 1841 is the Fantaisie in A minor for piano and orchestra. Though the Fantaisie as such has ultimately disappeared from the repertoire, it is only because it evolved into the first movement of the composer's Piano Concerto in A minor, completed in 1845. In this year Schumann appended two movements to the revised Fantasie; the composer's wife, the remarkable pianist Clara Wieck Schumann, premiered the result, a complete concerto, in Leipzig on New Year's Day, 1846.

The shifting moods that characterize so much of Schumann's music are clearly evident in the Piano Concerto. Still, as in the composer's contemporaneous works noted above, and despite the interval between the composition of the Concerto's first movement and the remaining two, inter-movement unity is one of the work's primary concerns. There is a quasi-symphonic character to the Concerto, in distinct contrast to the then-prevailing view of the concerto as primarily a vehicle for virtuosic display, exemplified by the concertante works of Franz Liszt and Nicolò Paganini. Indeed, Liszt showed little enthusiasm for Schumann's Concerto and tweaked the composer (who had earlier written a "Concerto Without Orchestra") by referring to it as a "concerto without piano."

Though the work's technical demands are not inconsiderable, they are almost wholly subservient to thematic interest and structural clarity. The Concerto opens with a downward-surging, darkly martial introductory gesture. The first theme, marked by a high-minded dignity, becomes the prime source of melodic material, spawning closely related themes that alternately brood and, in the major mode, provide respite from the sober atmosphere. The development caroms from one mood to the next in almost dizzying fashion, all the while exploring the ambiguities of the themes' various components. Schumann cannily uses the lengthy cadenza as a battleground for further emotional conflict before ending the movement with a decisive return of the lofty first subject.

The second movement, Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso, amply displays Schumann's immanent melodic sense within a spectrum ranging from genial to poetic to lushly yearning. The Allegro vivace finale commences without pause via an affirmative major-key return of the first movement's main theme. In various episodes, Schumann makes striking use of the finale's joyful, upward-leaping theme, as when it becomes the subject of a fugato. Metric and rhythmic ambiguities abound, coloring the dance-like spirit, and the prevailing mood is one of unfettered optimism that ultimately swells to exuberant triumph.

# *Liszt Totentanz*

## *Schumann Piano Concerto*

### *Byron Janis, piano*

### *Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony Orchestra*

1. Liszt Totentanz, S. 126 15:29

Schumann Piano Concerto

2. Allegro Affettuoso 14:57
3. Intermezzo – Andantino Grazioso 4:46
4. Allegro Vivace 10:51

Total Time 46:03

*Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape Engineer – Lewis Layton Producer – Richard Mohr*
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Liszt Totentanz and Schumann Piano Concerto - Byron Janis, piano Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony Orchestra