

Child prodigy, Leventritt Competition winner, student of Vladimir Horowitz and Rudolf Serkin, pianist Gary Graffman had all the talent and credentials for lasting success on the concert stage. His meteoric rise in the 1950s carried him through more than two decades of fame and critical acclaim, but an injury in 1979 limited his career to teaching and performance of left-hand repertory. Graffman was best known for his performances of concertos by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, and Prokofiev, and for solo works by the latter pair as well as Chopin, Liszt, and others. In the 1970s Graffman delved heavily into chamber music, notably in performances of sonatas for violin and piano by Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Schumann, with violinist Henryk Szeryng. After his injury, Graffman played not only the well-known concertos for left hand by Ravel and Prokofiev, but many contemporary works written specifically for him. Graffman's numerous recordings are available from Sony, RCA, Decca, and other major labels.

Gary Graffman was born in New York City on October 14, 1928. He played the piano from age three, and at seven began studies with Isabelle Vengerova at the Curtis Institute. Graffman gave his recital debut three years later at New York's Town Hall.

In 1946 Graffman graduated from Curtis, where he was awarded the Rachmaninov Prize. He gave his official debut as soloist the following year with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Graffman's Leventritt victory in 1949 led to further success, but he continued studies with Rudolf Serkin at the Marlboro Music Festival and, in the early '50s, with Vladimir Horowitz privately.

Graffman's earliest recordings soon appeared, but it was his recordings from the 1960s that are perhaps the most memorable. His 1964 Rachmaninov Second and Paganini Rhapsody, with Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, and 1966 Prokofiev Third Concerto, with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, are still regarded as classics.

Though his career cooled somewhat in the 1970s, Graffman remained very active, including in the chamber music realm. The injury to the ring finger of his right hand in 1979 eventually caused him to abandon two-hand repertory. From 1980, he taught at the Curtis Institute.

Graffman began commissioning music for left hand and premiered several notable works: the 1993 Ned Rorem Piano Concerto No. 4 and the 2001 Daron Hagen concerto Seven Last Words. Graffman still teaches piano at Curtis Institute, having also served as director (1986-2006) and president (1995-2006).

## PIANO MUSIC OF FRANZ LISZT



**GARY GRAFFMAN, PIANO**

Liszt was the only contemporary whose music Richard Wagner gratefully acknowledged as an influence upon his own. His lasting fame was an alchemy of extraordinary digital ability -- the greatest in the history of keyboard playing -- an unmatched instinct for showmanship, and one of the most progressive musical imaginations of his time. Hailed by some as a visionary, reviled by others as a symbol of empty Romantic excess, Franz Liszt wrote his name across music history in a truly inimitable manner.

From his youth, Liszt demonstrated a natural facility at the keyboard that placed him among the top performing prodigies of his day. Though contemporary accounts describe his improvisational skill as dazzling, his talent as a composer emerged only in his adulthood. Still, he was at the age of eleven the youngest contributor to publisher Anton Diabelli's famous variation commissioning project, best remembered as the inspiration for Beethoven's final piano masterpiece. An oft-repeated anecdote -- first recounted by Liszt himself decades later, and possibly fanciful -- has Beethoven attending a recital given by the youngster and bestowing a kiss of benediction upon him.

Though already a veteran of the stage by his teens, Liszt recognized the necessity of further musical tuition. He studied for a time with Czerny and Salieri in Vienna, and later sought acceptance to the Paris Conservatory. When he was turned down there -- foreigners were not then admitted -- he instead studied privately with Anton Reicha. Ultimately, his Hungarian origins proved a great asset to his career, enhancing his aura of mystery and exoticism and inspiring an extensive body of works, none more famous than the Hungarian Rhapsodies (1846-1885).

Liszt soon became a prominent figure in Parisian society, his romantic entanglements providing much material for gossip. Still, not even the juiciest accounts of his amorous

exploits could compete with the stories about his wizardry at the keyboard. Inspired by the superhuman technique -- and, indeed, diabolical stage presence -- of the violinist Paganini, Liszt set out to translate these qualities to the piano. As his career as a touring performer, conductor, and teacher burgeoned, he began to devote an increasing amount of time to composition. He wrote most of his hundreds of original piano works for his own use; accordingly, they are frequently characterized by technical demands that push performers -- and in Liszt's own day, the instrument itself -- to their limits. The "transcendence" of his Transcendental Etudes (1851), for example, is not a reference to the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, but an indication of the works' level of difficulty. Liszt was well into his thirties before he mastered the rudiments of orchestration -- works like the Piano Concerto No. 1 (1849) were orchestrated by talented students -- but made up for lost time in the production of two "literary" symphonies (Faust, 1854-1857, and Dante, 1855-1856) and a series of orchestral essays (including *Les préludes*, 1848-1854) that marks the genesis of the tone poem as a distinct genre.

After a lifetime of near-constant sensation, Liszt settled down somewhat in his later years. In his final decade he joined the Catholic Church and devoted much of his creative effort to the production of sacred works. The complexion of his music darkened; the flash that had characterized his previous efforts gave way to a peculiar introspection, manifested in strikingly original, forward-looking efforts like *Nuages gris* (1881). Liszt died in Bayreuth, Germany, on July 31, 1886, having outlived Wagner, his son-in-law and greatest creative beneficiary.

# PIANO MUSIC OF FRANZ LISZT GARY GRAFFMAN, PIANO

- 1 Liebestraume, S541/R211: No. 3. Nocturne in A-Flat Major 4:36
- 2 3 Etudes de concert, S144/R5: No. 3 in D-Flat Major, "Un Sospiro" 5:00
- 3 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies, S244/R106: No. 11 in A Minor 5:43
- 4 Annees de pelerinage, 2nd year, Italy, S161/R10b: No. 2. Il penseroso (The Thinker) 4:04
- 5 Consolations, S172/R12: No. 3 in D-Flat Major: Lento placido 4:11
- Grandes Etudes de Paganini, S141/R3b
- 6 No. 1 in G Minor 4:54
- 7 No. 2 in E-Flat Major 4:32
- 8 No. 3 in G-Sharp Minor, "La campanella" 4:15
- 9 No. 4 in E Major 1:53
- 10 No. 5 in E Major 3:08
- 11 No. 6 in A Minor 4:57
- Total Time: 47:13

Released by RCA July 1960  
Producer – Peter Dellheim

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