



## Franz Liszt: A Faust Symphony, S. 108 – Mephisto Waltz No. 3, S. 216

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**BBC Music Magazine October 2023 (- 2023.10.01)**



‘What would the history of music look like if Goethe had not written his Faust dramas?’ It’s a good question, posed at the beginning of the liner notes to this new release, but the writer could equally have been asked where music would be without the phenomenon of Liszt. Wagner (and all the long shadows he cast) would have been impossible without the music of his father-in-law Liszt, and what might be called ‘Wagnerian’ harmonies (and Leitmotifs) make their presence strongly felt in the Faust Symphony, premiered under the composer’s own baton in Weimar in 1857.

Liszt’s connections with the city ran deep, so it is hardly surprising to hear how even today the Staatskapelle Weimar sounds steeped in his music. The orchestra’s former music director Kirill Karabits has immersed himself in Liszt too, also completing Alfred Reisenauer’s orchestration of the Mephisto Waltz No. 3 and recording it for the first time. In the Faust Symphony, he handles the sprawling and discursive first movement impressively, moving between rumination and headlong energy in this character sketch of Faust. Portraits of Gretchen (full of delicacy) and Mephistopheles follow, and the added apotheosis with male chorus and tenor soloist (Airam Hernández singing with heft) makes for a grandly affirmative ending.

**Classica – le meilleur de la musique classique & de la hi-fi N° 257 -  
Novembre 2023 (- 2023.11.01)**



Kirill Karabits s’inscrit dans cette seconde lignée, avec un troisième mouvement particulièrement réussi où une mise en place au cordeau s’acoquine avec l’esprit méphistophélique. Sa direction à la pointe sèche épure le romantisme de l’œuvre qui regarde moins vers le fondu wagnérien qu’elle ne perpétue, dans la netteté du dessin, un certain classicisme hérité de Berlioz

*Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.*

**Classical Music Magazine** September 5, 2023 ( - 2023.09.05)

source: <https://www.classical-music.com/reviews/...>

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The voice of the classical music industry

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**concerti - Das Konzert- und Opernmagazin 15. August 2023 ( - 2023.08.15)**

source: <https://www.concerti.de/rezensionen/kiri...>

**concerti**  
DAS KONZERT- UND OPERNMAGAZIN

### Grübeln und Glanz

*Die Staatskapelle Weimar und Kirill Karabits kosten mit Brillanz die Oberflächenreize in Liszts Faust-Sinfonie aus*

Das Orchester hat neben der Suche nach Tiefe auch Freude an den Oberflächenreizen Liszts, kostet diese mit heutigem Instrumentarium und entsprechender Brillanz gern aus.

*Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.*

**Crescendo Magazine 9 juillet 2023 ( - 2023.07.09)**

source: <https://www.crescendo-magazine.be/liszt-...>

**CRESCENDO**  
www.crescendo-magazine.be

### Liszt à Weimar, chef d'oeuvre et découverte

L’interprétation figolée et brillante du chef et de son orchestre sont un incontestable apport à notre connaissance de l’art du compositeur.

Très bien enregistré, ce disque est à connaître tant pour la belle découverte de la Mephisto Waltz n°3 que pour la réussite artistique de haut vol.

*Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.*

**Der neue Merker** 27.06.2023 ( - 2023.06.27)  
 source: <https://onlinemerker.com/neue-cd-franz-l...>



### Poetisierung der Form

*Neue CD: Franz Liszt „Eine Faust-Symphonie“ mit der Staatskapelle Weimar bei audite*

[...] beweist die Staatskapelle Weimar nochmals ihren Klangfarbenreichtum.

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### Diapason N° 727 NOVEMBRE 2023 ( - 2023.11.01)



Kirill Karabits poursuit son périple en terres lisziennes . Après l'exhumation de l'opéra inachevé Sardanapalo (Diapason découverte, cf. n° 683) puis la Dante-Symphonie (Diapason d'or, cf. n° 689), voici la Faust-Symphonie. La première de ces « trois études de caractères d'après Goethe », Faust, inspire d'emblée le respect, par la cohérence du propos et la maîtrise de la forme, avec des transitions très réussies. On déplore cependant un éventail assez limité de couleurs, et un certain manque de flamme et de tension pour l'Allegro agitato ed appassionato – le personnage est ici plus nostalgique qu'héroïque. Le début de Marguerite pourrait être plus éthéré, mais la partie centrale, où les thèmes des amants s'unissent en une étreinte passionnée, séduit par le lyrisme de la direction et les nuances. Tout va décidément crescendo, avec un Mephistophélès au rictus diabolique et fort bien tenu. A-t-on gagné le Ciel quand arrive le Chorus mysticus ? Aïram Hernandez, impeccablement stylé, à la ligne fuselée, n'a pas tout à fait le rayonnement extasié de celui que l'Eternel féminin conduit au paradis. Que donnerait le chef ukrainien à la tête d'une autre phalange ? Enregistrer Liszt à Weimar constitue évidemment un retour aux sources, mais s'il tire le meilleur de la Staatskapelle, Karabits se heurte à rude concurrence, celle de chefs plus visionnaires et d'orchestres plus prestigieux. On retiendra surtout de cet album un peu sage une intéressante curiosité, la Méphisto Valse n° 3 orchestrée par Alfred Reisenauer – un des disciples préférés de Liszt – et Kirill Karabits. Même si le maître aurait sans doute été moins massif, plus anguleux, plus diabolique. Pour la Faust-Symphonie, on retournera à Beecham, Bernstein, Dorati, Sinopoli ou Nosedà (sans le chœur final).

**Gramophone Monday, September 11, 2023 ( - 2023.09.11)**

source:

<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/lisz...>

**GRAMOPHONE**  
 THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

**Editor's Choice: October 2023 | The best new classical recordings**

Following his earlier recordings of Liszt's Sardanapalo (2/19) and A Dante Symphony (4/20) for Audite, Kirill Karabits now turns his attention to the composer's A Faust Symphony. In his review of the recording of Sardanapalo, Tim Ashley wrote that 'Karabits conducts with extraordinary passion', and the same is true of this latest entry in the series. With a running time of 68 minutes, Karabits's account is one of the swiftest performances on record, alongside those of Chailly, Muti and Sinopoli. By contrast, Bernstein takes 77

minutes.

Nevertheless, it's Bernstein's vividly characterised and impassioned interpretation that I'm most reminded of when listening to this new recording. The performance of the work's opening has a compelling sense of mystery and anticipation, and the movement's subsequent episodes are stirring and dramatic. In the movement's gentler passages, as in the subsequent 'Gretchen' movement, the playing of the viola, oboe and other solo instruments is marvellously poetic, and textures are beautifully balanced and marvellously luminous. Both Bernstein and Karabits offer enormously exciting accounts of the work's final movement but ultimately Karabits has the edge with his thrilling interpretation of the concluding 'Chorus mysticus', which combines an ardent contribution by tenor Airam Hernández with choral singing of extraordinary heft and incandescence.

It's a pity that the booklet doesn't include the text of the choral section given that it would take so little space. The booklet essay similarly makes no mention of the rarely heard orchestration of the Mephisto Waltz No 3 included on the album other than giving joint credit for the arrangement to Liszt pupil Alfred Reisenauer and Kirill Karabits. As with the symphony, however, the performance has tremendous panache, and the recording is well balanced and transparent even in the loudest tuttis. Very highly recommended.

**Kulturabdruck** 03.08.2023 ( - 2023.08.03)

source: <https://www.kulturabdruck.de/zerbroeseln...>

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ABDRUCK**

### Zerbröselnder Faust, träumendes Gretchen und ein lachender Mephisto

Die Staatskapelle Weimar formt die drei Charakterbilder unter ihrem früheren Chefdirigenten Kirill Karabits zu einem gewaltigen Klangporträt, das die flüchtigen lyrischen Momente ebenso präzise nachzeichnet wie die rauschhaften, sich mitunter selbst überschlagenden Aufschwünge. Den Herren des Opernchores des Deutschen Nationaltheaters Weimar und des Landesjugendchores Thüringen gelingt mit dem Tenor Airam Hernandez ebenfalls eine überzeugende Darbietung [...]

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**Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik** Bestenliste 4/2023 ( - 2023.11.15)

source: <https://www.schallplattenkritik.de/beste...>



### Bestenliste 4/2023 Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik

Liszts Tondichtung »Eine Faust-Sinfonie« gehört wie auch viele andere seiner Partituren zu den ungehobenen Schätzen des 19. Jahrhunderts. Nur selten ist das 1854 entstandene und später durch einen »Chorus mysticus« im Finale erweiterte Werk live zu erleben. Die Einspielung mit der Staatskapelle Weimar unter Kirill Karabits rückt die Komposition ins rechte Licht: symphonisch in Anspruch und Ton, dramatisch im Ausdruck, mit hohem Puls bei der Darstellung der zentralen Charaktere Faust, Gretchen und Mephistopheles. Klanglich durchsichtig, partiell fast kammermusikalisch, räumt die Produktion mit vielen Vorbehalten auf.

**[Prestomusic](#) 18th August 2023 ( - 2023.08.18)**  
**source: <https://www.prestomusic.com/classical/ar...>**

PRESTO  
CLASSICAL

### New Release Round-Up

Following their recordings of Tasso, the Dante Symphony and the abandoned opera Sardanapalo, Karabits and the Weimar orchestra turn to a work which is closely associated with the city: the Faust Symphony was premiered in Weimar in September 1857, for the inauguration of the Goethe–Schiller Monument which stands in front of the Court Theater. It's followed here by another Goethe-inspired work, the Mephisto Waltz No. 3 (orchestrated by Liszt's disciple Alfred Reisenauer and Karabits himself).

**[Prestomusic](#) 31st August 2023 ( - 2023.08.31)**  
**source: <https://www.prestomusic.com/classical/ar...>**

PRESTO  
CLASSICAL

### Editor's Choices

Liszt's orchestral portraits of Faust, Marguerite and Mephistopheles positively leap off the page in this vital, richly characterised account of the Goethe-inspired symphony: the Weimar brass glow and growl in the opening movement depicting Faust's torment, principal oboe and viola are on eloquent form when portraying Marguerite's innocence, and the devilish scherzo is given with dazzling clarity. Boris Lyatoshinsky's 1955 symphonic poem Grazhyna (which Karabits has previously recorded in Bournemouth) looks like a non sequitur on paper, but the kinship with Liszt's soundworld is striking.

**WDR 3 10.08.2023 "Hörstoff – neue Klassik-Alben" ( - 2023.08.10)**  
**source: <https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/wdr-...>**



### BROADCAST

*Packende Charakterzeichnung: Liszts Faust-Symphonie*

### BROADCAST

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I've long been a fan of Liszt's Faust Symphony and up until recently it was my favourite of his two symphonies. In fact, it was Kirill Karabits's recording of the Dante that made me appreciate that work more than the Faust. Anyway, here the Staatskapelle Weimar turn their attentions to the Faust and, as a bonus, another first recording of a late work by Liszt in an orchestrated version by his pupil Alfred Reisenauer and revised by Kirill Karabits. I'd read about this orchestration of the 3rd Mephisto Waltz somewhere but, up until now, it had remained unrecorded and unheard.

As I had expected from the recording of the Dante, the performance of the Faust Symphony is muscular and powerful – but there is also a delicacy when that is required. The first movement, subtitled "Faust", starts with a twelve-tone row, played fairly slowly and mysteriously, leaving you wondering where the music will go next. However, once the initial tune gets going, the tempo picks up rapidly. The orchestra positively explodes from the speakers with the following "Allegro impetuoso", which sets off at a tremendous pace with the first of several themes that permeate and create the movement. The details captured by the excellent recording here make Liszt's clever writing for orchestra stand out very clearly and also highlight the difficulties in the orchestral parts for the performers. However, this clearly doesn't faze the orchestra as they cope marvellously with all the complications that Liszt throws at them. The music slowly evolves into muted runs in the strings which abruptly stop with a lovely "Affettuoso poco andante" section. This slowly morphs into a section that generates what has been termed the "Pride" motif, which shows Liszt as his most bombastic. This doesn't last long and is transmuted and mixed with themes from earlier in the movement to create something entirely different. Somehow, Liszt (and Karabits) manage to contain all this tension and we get a repeat of the "Allegro impetuoso", then the twelve-tone rows return, about fourteen minutes in. This section serves as a bridge to the remainder of this long and complicated movement that is broadly in sonata form – all of which means that the themes which have already been heard are varied and changed and wound up neatly in an effective and unexpected quiet conclusion.

The second movement, "Gretchen", opens with the violas and oboes sinuously playing her theme with beautiful accompaniment by the remainder of the orchestra. Much of this movement is gentle with some lovely writing and playing; however, there is a more strident section in the middle which is again very well judged. Unlike the first movement, the timing here is slightly slower than other performances I am familiar with but the music does not drag at all. Towards the end of the movement, just before the violas reappear with the "Gretchen" theme, there is a beautifully recorded moment where the orchestra falls silent aside from a harp. It is magnificently captured here. This is the sort of performance in which you can completely lose yourself and be swept away by the music; I defy any Liszt haters not to be enthralled by it. The movement ends peacefully as the music evaporates into the ether.

In complete contrast to the ending of "Gretchen" the third movement, "Mephistopheles", is a portrayal of the devil, starting with a jolt. It is very cleverly constructed, made up mostly of thematic transformations of the music heard elsewhere within the symphony, but with the addition of a self-quotation from Liszt's early work for piano and orchestra, Malediction. In fact, the only theme not mutated during the progress of the movement is "Gretchen" (at 8'41") – showing that Mephistopheles has no power over her. This respite does not last long and the sardonic themes return quickly and continue their development. There is some tremendously exciting playing here – the tension inherent in the music is racked up as the piece progresses with scurrying playing in the strings, clever fugal modifications and changes in tempo and orchestration. The work doesn't really stop here, but slowly crystallises down to a very foreboding couple of bars in which the organ, violins, cellos and double basses hold a note while the chorus and, slightly later, the tenor soloist emerges from the gloom. Both chorus and soloist do a brilliant job here and are marvellously integrated into the orchestra as they sing various passages from the "Chorus mysticus" in which Faust is redeemed. The tenor Airam Hernández is especially good; his voice suits this piece extremely well.

The performance of this symphony is brilliant in every way. I am also very familiar with Liszt's own two

piano version (S647 in Searle's catalogue) and listening to this recording makes me appreciate the way that Liszt handled that arrangement. The clarity of this performance enables me to mentally connect the music in that two piano version with the orchestral version better than any other I have heard.

There is almost no information in the notes about the orchestration of the Third Mephisto Waltz which is a shame, as I would have liked to have known more about it. However, in comparison to Liszt's own orchestration of the Second Mephisto waltz, I would say that Reisenauer / Karabits's arrangement works extremely well indeed – it's also got some details in the scoring which stand out better than they do in the piano version. It's a dark, ironic, sarcastic piece – made even darker by the very interesting novel orchestration which is very much in Liszt's later style. As an aside, it's a pity Liszt never finished the fourth of this series of works although Dr Leslie Howard's completion in the Hyperion set gives an excellent idea of what he might have intended. It is conceivable to orchestrate that, too, which would be a most interesting work to hear.

There is some wonderful playing here, the orchestra works well as an integrated whole and you can really hear all the details. The recording is extremely clear and sounds especially good over headphones. Overall timings for the symphony are about average but especially in the first movement, the rhythmic drive propels the music forward in a way that makes time pass more quickly. The cover notes are fascinating and give lots of details about the symphony (although as I said earlier, there is almost nothing about the waltz, sadly). I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know this recording and hope that these forces will record more of Liszt's orchestral works as there is still quite a lot that has yet to be recorded.

[www.pizzicato.lu](http://www.pizzicato.lu) 03/08/2023 ( - 2023.08.03)

source: <https://www.pizzicato.lu/liszt-faust-wei...>

**pizzicato**  
Benny Franck's Blog about Classical Music

## Liszt, Faust, Weimar

Als Liszt die Leitung der Weimarer Hofoper antrat, setzte er sich intensiv mit Goethes Werk auseinander. Besonders das Faust-Thema fesselte ihn. Die Faust-Symphonie ist eigentlich nichts anderes als eine Folge von drei Tondichtungen zu den Themen Faust, Gretchen und Mephisto mit, als Zugabe, dem Chorus mysticus. Kirill Karabits hat die gleichen Rezepte für die drei Tondichtungen: resolutes Suchen nach dramatischen Abläufen, nach Programmpunkten, die an eine Handlung erinnern sollen, mit sämtlichen damit zusammenhängenden Motiven und Gefühlsmomenten.

Er wendet sich freilich nicht, wie es andere Dirigenten getan haben, vom Gedanklichen ab, um das Werk in einem opulenten, brillanten Klanggewand zu dramatisieren. Orchesterliche Virtuosität ist zwar reichlich vorhanden und auch bewundernswert, aber sie wird nie zum Selbstzweck.

Sehr tief empfunden ist der Gretchen-Satz, und in der Mephisto-Tondichtung ist die Rhythmik regelrecht faszinierend. Sie ist die Grundlage, auf welcher der Dirigent seine Interpretation aufbaut, die ihm hilft, dämonische Kräfte zu entfesseln, den Geist, der stets verneint, hörbar werden zu lassen.

Das hervorragende Weimarer Orchester unterstützt Karabits dabei sehr gut. Der Tenor Peter Seiffert und die Herren des Senff-Chors leisten eine ebenfalls gute Arbeit.

Zwanzig Jahre trennen den berühmten Mephisto-Walzer Nr. 1 von drei weiteren Walzern aus den 1880er Jahren, den Mephisto-Walzern Nr. 2 (1881), Nr. 3 (1883), Nr. 4 (1885, unvollendet).

Den Mephisto-Walzer Nr. 3 widmete er der französischen Komponistin und Pianistin Marie Jaëll, die nach dem Tod ihres Mannes Alfred im Jahr 1882 Liszts Sekretärin wurde. Dieser dritte Mephisto-Walzer ist etwas weniger virtuos und gleichzeitig moderner, harmonisch kühner als die beiden ersten Walzer. Das wird in dieser Orchesterfassung sehr deutlich, die der Liszt-Schüler Alfred Reisenauer anfertigte, aber

unvollendet ließ; sie wurde von Kirill Karabits vervollständigt und am 12. Juni 2022 von der Staatskapelle Weimar uraufgeführt.

#### ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

When Liszt took over as director of the Weimar Court Opera, he intensively studied Goethe's work. He was particularly captivated by the Faust theme. The Faust Symphony is actually nothing more than a sequence of three tone poems on the themes of Faust, Gretchen and Mephisto with, as an encore, the Chorus mysticus. Kirill Karabits has the same recipes for the three tone poems: resolute search for dramatic sequences, for program points that should remind of a plot, with all motives and emotional moments connected with it.

He does not, of course, turn away from the thoughtful, as other conductors have done, in order to dramatize the work in an opulent, brilliant sound garb. Orchestral virtuosity abounds and is also admirable, but it never becomes an end in itself.

Very deeply felt is the Gretchen movement, and in the Mephisto tone poem the rhythm is downright fascinating. It is the foundation on which the conductor builds his interpretation, helping him to unleash demonic forces, to make audible the spirit that always denies.

The excellent Weimar orchestra supports Karabits very well. Tenor Peter Seiffert and the gentlemen of the Senff Choir also do a fine job.

Twenty years separate the famous Mephisto Waltz No. 1 from three other waltzes from the 1880s, Mephisto Waltzes No. 2 (1881), No. 3 (1883), No. 4 (1885, unfinished).

He dedicated the Mephisto Waltz No. 3 to the French composer and pianist Marie Jaëll, who became Liszt's secretary after the death of her husband Alfred in 1882. This third Mephisto waltz is less virtuosic and at the same time more modern and harmonically bold than the first two waltzes. This is very evident in this orchestral version, which Liszt's student Alfred Reisenauer made but left unfinished; it was completed by Kirill Karabits and premiered by the Staatskapelle Weimar on June 12, 2022.



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