



Liszt - The Organ Composer

aud 97.793



Choir & Organ January 2023 (- 2023.01.01)

**CHOIR &
ORGAN**

Yet another Liszt recording? Yes indeed, although this survey of the large-scale organ works has, as a bonus, the performer's own virtuosic transcription of Liszt's Totentanz which she delivers with considerable aplomb. Anna-Victoria Baltrusch holds positions at both the Hochschule für Kirchenmusik and concert hall in Halle, having previously taught at the Hochschule für Musik in Leipzig and having won many prizes at competitions as prestigious as St Albans, Magdeburg and the ARD International competition. The playing on this release is of considerable stature, and one seldom feels that Baltrusch's virtuosity is misplaced; Ad Nos clocks in at chunky 33 minutes. There is no information about the organ beyond a specification and the faintest of black and white photos. Perhaps not the most imaginative of choices (less evocative certainly than Michael Schönheit at Magdeburg or Zuzana Ferjenčíková at Fribourg, both on MDG), the high pressure Alphorns in the new Echowerk provide convincingly distant excitement, almost Strauss like (in Ad Nos's 'Tromba') fanfares, Baltrusch impresses with her muscularly vivid interpretations.

Gramophone December 2022 (- 2022.12.01)

source:

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

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A good programme, this, with all three of Liszt's major organ works and the addition of Totentanz in an arrangement by Anna-Victoria Baltrusch based on the composer's two-piano score. The latter is a close relation for, like its siblings, it too is permeated with 'incessant sighing chromaticisms', as the booklet has it. Pain, grief, anguish, high drama and violent contrasts are the order of the day.

Disc 1 (46'46") opens with the Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H, using the second of the two versions (1870 rather than 1855), following it with the mighty Fantasy and Fugue on the chorale Ad nos, ad salutarem undam. Inspired by a theme from Meyerbeer's opera Le prophète, it is the organ equivalent of Liszt's B minor Sonata, with which it has much in common: apart from their considerable demands on stamina and technique, both have a three-movements-in-one structure lasting roughly 30 minutes with reflective central sections in Liszt's favourite spiritual key of F sharp major, closely followed by a fugue and virtuoso finale. On disc 2 (37'33") we have Totentanz and Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen.

There's no doubting Baltrusch's impressive technical facility. The recording captures the full sonority of the great organ of the Court Church, Lucerne, with its powerful 32ft Principal and three 16ft pedal stops growling away beneath to thrilling effect. Her registration choices for the softer central recitativo and adagio sections of Ad nos, where many organists like to make a contrast with disquieting nasal reeds, are agreeably concomitant with the boisterous outer sections. There's one big problem. The church acoustic

has a long decay and when fingers and feet are flying, detail is at a premium. It is certainly sonically awe-inspiring, but for long stretches – and especially if you do not have scores to follow – it is hard to know what is going on amid the amorphous cathedral rumble.

Textural clarity is less of a problem in Baltrusch's own resourceful arrangement of Totentanz. Who can deny the pleasure of the 'Dies irae' theme thundered out fortissimo on the pedals? Yet the performance is too sectionalised to be completely successful. Over-long pauses between variations and an over-languid tempo for the canonic fourth variation contribute to an extra three minutes above the average performance time. Compared to the razor-sharp transcription and its malevolent, speaker-crunching performance by Thomas Mellan on the organ of the First United Methodist Church, San Diego (available to view on YouTube), Baltrusch is more *thé dansant* than *danse macabre*.

Gramophone Tuesday, January 10, 2023 (- 2023.01.10)

source:

<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/features/ar...>

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Liszt's Totentanz: a guide to the best recordings

Franz Liszt's scintillating journey to the Underworld challenges pianists and thrills audiences. Jeremy Nicholas compares a selection of recordings of this diabolic masterpiece and selects his favourite

Pisa's Piazza dei Miracoli, also known as the Piazza del Duomo, contains the Cathedral, the Baptistry, the Campanile (aka the Leaning Tower) – and the Camposanto Monumentale. Among its murals is an impressive fresco entitled *Il trionfo della Morte*: 'The Triumph of Death'. Once attributed to Orcagna, nowadays to Buonamico Buffalmacco or, by some scholars, to Francesco Traini, it was created in 1338-39. Five hundred years later, one of those who came to the Camposanto to admire the work was Franz Liszt in the company of his mistress the Countess Marie d'Agoult. It was the sight of this, it is said, that first inspired the composition of his Totentanz – *Danse macabre*, though it would not appear in its final form for nearly three decades.

The couple had eloped in 1835, leaving Paris for Geneva and thence, for the next few years, travelling through Switzerland and Italy absorbing scenery, places, literature and painting, while producing three illegitimate children. The first of these was their daughter Cosima, later to become the wife of Hans von Bülow and latterly of Richard Wagner. From this period of Liszt's prolific output came early versions of the 12 Transcendental Études, the Six Études de Paganini and the first two volumes of *Années de pèlerinage*, and much else besides. Totentanz, a series of variations on the Latin plainsong chant of the 'Dies irae', can be considered 'the spiritual sister' of these 'Years of Travel' (indeed, Variation 5 puts one in mind of the central section of the Dante Sonata).

The gestation of Totentanz was protracted and complex. Without going into great detail, basically there exist two versions: the first, dated October 21, 1849, with the title *Fantasie für Pianoforte und Orchester* was not published until 1919 (in an edition by Busoni); it is generally known as the 'De profundis' version because it incorporates the plainsong setting of Psalm 130 ('Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord').

Liszt continued tinkering with the score between 1853 and 1859, when a second version appeared. This dispenses with all of the 'De profundis' material and other sections never sanctioned for publication by the composer. It was issued with the title *Todtentanz* [sic] (*Danse macabre*) – *Paraphrase über 'Dies irae'*, and published in 1865, the same year in which Liszt's versions for solo piano and two pianos were published. It

was dedicated to his son-in-law Hans von Bülow and it was he who gave the first performance of this version on April 15, 1865, in The Hague with an orchestra conducted by the Dutch composer Johannes Verhulst. Though there are several other editions, notably by Liszt pupils Alexander Siloti, Bernhard Stavenhagen and Eugen d'Albert, it is Liszt's second version that is most frequently heard today,

Liszt was not the first – and by no means the last – to use the 'Dies irae' ('Day of Wrath', used for centuries in the Roman Catholic rite of the Mass for the Dead). Berlioz quotes it in his *Symphonie fantastique* (1830), the premiere of which was attended by Liszt. The music is a sequence of variations on the theme, interspersed with three cadenzas, a development section and a coda. Only the first five variations are so numbered in the score but it is possible to identify over 30 different treatments of the theme (or part of the theme) by the piano or other instruments in the course of the work, often variants within the variations.

This survey is concerned principally with the second version. Why? Despite the two versions having many sections in common, they are two distinct and different works. Version 2 represents Liszt's final, definitive thoughts (ie he decided his intentions were better realised by cutting the 'De profundis' material) to form, in this writer's opinion, a tone poem that expresses itself more powerfully with greater economical means. [...]

The version for solo piano is also the basis for its adaptation as a work for organ, an instrument to which Totentanz is particularly well suited. There's a new recording of it, this one based on the two-piano arrangement, made and played by Anna-Victoria Baltrusch (reviewed on page 71). It's impressive enough but not the equal of the quite stunning performance by Thomas Mellan on the organ of the First United Methodist Church, San Diego (available to view on YouTube), one of several filmed accounts on the organ. This one, while properly thrilling, highlights the 'Dies irae' quotations more clearly than many accounts of the second piano-and-orchestra version, recordings to which it is now high time we turn.

[Orgelportal](#) 28. OKTOBER 2022 (- 2022.10.28)

source: <https://orgelportal.ch/blogartikel/liszt...>



Review der neuen Doppel-CD | CD des Monats Oktober 2022

*Anna-Victoria Baltrusch an der Grossen Kuhn-Orgel der Hofkirche St. Leodegar
Luzern*

Anna-Victoria Baltrusch bietet mit dem vorliegenden Doppel-CD-Album die höchst willkommene Ergänzung ihres Liszt-Kompendiums, das sie mit der Edition „Liszt – The Friend and Paragon“ (Audite CD 97.792) begonnen hat. An der grossen Hoforgel von Kuhn in Sankt Leodegar, mit ihrem unvergleichlichen Raum-Effekt von viermanualiger Emporenorgel, dem grossen Fernwerk unter dem Dach – samt den drei durchschlagenden Zungenstimmen – und dem neuen üppigen Echowerk im Altarbereich, stehen ihr auf fünf Rosenholz-Manualen und Pedal nicht weniger als sieben Manual-Abteilungen und drei Pedal-Abteilungen zur Verfügung. Das Klangspektrum reicht von den historischen barocken Geissler Registern, über die romantische „Herrlichkeit“ von Haas und Goll, zu den modernen Zutaten von Kuhn, samt der glücklichen Ergänzung – ebenfalls durch Kuhn – um das Echowerk. All das grundiert von nicht weniger als drei (bzw. vier) 32'-Registern.

Baltrusch nutzt diesen einzigartigen Klang-Kosmos mit feinsinnigem Gespür für Farben, Dramatik und Virtuosität kongenial aus. Als Repertoire dieser Doppel-CD hat sie sich nicht weniger als Liszts drei Grosswerke – „Präludium und Fuge über B-A-C-H“, die epochale „Fantasie und Fuge über „Ad nos ad salutarem undam“ und das Spätwerk „Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen“ – vorgenommen. Mit stupender Virtuosität und einer grossartigen Klangregie vermag die Interpretin all diesen drei orgelmusikalischen „Achttausendern“ gerecht zu werden, von denen jedes einzelne Werk schon eine tüchtige Herausforderung an Spieler, Hörer und Instrument darstellt.

Besonders hervorzuheben sind die grossen Spannungsbögen, die die Interpretin sowohl im „Ad nos“ wie auch im „B-A-C-H“ zu zeichnen vermag, damit der Gesamtzusammenhang des, sich in zahlreiche Unter-Ideen verästelnden Flusses nicht verloren geht. Interessanterweise nimmt sie beim Ersteren einige Stellen der Klavierfassungen Liszts mit hinein, was dem Ganzen sehr zugute kommt. Berührend etwa der mystische Mittelteil in der Prophetenfantasie; unmittelbar klanglich physisch „angreifend“ dagegen beispielsweise der Dialog der Fanfaren (Tuba mirabilis im Altarwerk gegen die grosse Orgel).

Für mich als „Höhepunkt“ der CD – wenn man dann eine grandiose Leistung überhaupt noch zu steigern vermag, ist ihre eigene Orgelfassung von Liszts „Totentanz“, einer zwölfteiligen Paraphrase über das „Dies irae“, die in ihrer Perfektion nur darauf hoffen lässt, dass die Interpretin ihre Transkription auch als Notenausgabe veröffentlichen wird – eine willkommene Bereicherung des Liszt-Repertoires und in der Wirkung quasi ein vollkommen genuines „Orgelstück“ – als sei es der Hoforgel und der Organistin auf den Leib geschrieben.

Fazit: eine der besten CD-Neuerscheinungen des Jahres 2022!

www.orgelnieuws.nl 31. oktober 2022 (- 2022.10.31)
source: <https://www.orgelnieuws.nl/recensie-fran...>

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Niederländische Rezension siehe PDF!

www.ResMusica.com Le 3 janvier 2023 (- 2023.01.03)
source: <https://www.resmusica.com/2023/01/03/fra...>



Franz Liszt et l'orgue avec Anna-Victoria Baltrusch à Lucerne

C'est dans cette œuvre que l'interprète Anna-Victoria Baltrusch montre le plus ses qualités de grande virtuose et de musicienne très subtile dans le choix des jeux, des équilibres et du côté orchestral donné à ces pages. Par une grande musicalité, elle nous fait aimer Liszt organiste, alors que lui-même le fut assez peu, bien que grandement inspiré dans ces compositions. Voici une version qui fait partie désormais des références, sur un orgue exceptionnel de plus de 100 jeux et dans une prise de son très soignée.

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