



audite

FRANZ LISZT
FAUST SYMPHONY
MEPHISTO WALTZ

Kirill Karabits

Staatskapelle Weimar

FRANZ LISZT

**A Faust Symphony in
Three Characteristic Pictures, S. 108**

I. Faust 27:40

II. Gretchen 18:00

III. Mephistopheles 16:18

IIIa. Chorus mysticus* 5:38

Mephisto Waltz No. 3, S. 216 10:15

arr. for orchestra by

Alfred Reisenauer / Kirill Karabits

PREMIERE REDORDINGS

Airam Hernández tenor*

Staatskapelle Weimar

Kirill Karabits

Herren des Opernchores des
Deutschen Nationaltheaters Weimar*

rehearsing: Jens Petereit

Herren des Landesjugendchores Thüringen*

rehearsing: Franziska Kuba

**A Faust Symphony in three character pictures by Franz Liszt:
A monument to Goethe and Weimar – and the birth of psychology in music**

What would the history of music look like if Goethe had not written his *Faust* dramas? Goethe may not have invented the adventures of the famous Doktor Faustus, but he sublimated them. The written tradition of the popular German legend began at the end of the sixteenth century – in 1587, to be precise – with the anonymously published *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*. Seven years later, the Faust material was staged for the first time in London by the Admiral's Men in Christopher Marlowe's adaptation, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. In 1808, Goethe's *Faust. Eine Tragödie* was published (he had begun working on the posthumously published "Urfaust" around 1770; in 1790 *Faust. Ein Fragment* was published), whilst *Faust. Der Tragödie zweiter Teil* was published in 1832. Goethe's *Faust* dramas were of particular importance to posterity – first and foremost to the romantics, and especially to musicians, who were quickly and richly inspired by them.

From 1829, the year of the first performances of the first part of Goethe's *Faust* in Brunswick and later in Weimar, the tragedy was to inspire a whole host of composers across Europe to write lyrical works which would be performed in Germany, France and Italy, including Berlioz (*Huit scènes de Faust*, 1829, reused in *La damnation de Faust* in 1846), Louise Bertin (1831), Meyerbeer (*Robert le diable*, 1831), Julius Rietz (1834), Pietro Raimondi in Naples and Luigi Gordigiani in Rome in 1837, Schumann (*Szenen aus Goethes Faust*, 1849) Gounod (1859) and Arrigo Boito (*Mefistofele*, 1868). The list of nineteenth century operas referring to *Faust* and owing so much to Goethe is long. In the following centuries, the list of works becomes even longer – Mahler's Eighth Symphony (1906), Busoni's *Doktor Faust* (1925) or Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat* (1918) – and stretches to scores inspired by *Faust* which, although Goethe's shadow still hovers over them, seek to break away from him, such as *Faustus, the Last Night*, "Opera in one night and eleven numbers", by Pascal Dusapin after Marlowe (2006) and Philippe Fénelon's *Faust* after Lenau (2007).

Liszt and the Faust frenzy: the story of a life

Although Liszt's monumental *Faust Symphony* is his main work inspired by Goethe's drama, the composer also penned several smaller-scale works for different instrumentations during the course of his life: the piano transcriptions of the *Danse des Sylphes* from Berlioz' *Damnation de Faust*, the *Valse de l'opéra Faust* (i.e. the waltz from Gounod's *Faust*) and of the incidental music of Eduard Lassen (*Osterhymne*, *Hoffest. Marsch und Polonaise*) as well as the *Zwei Episoden aus Lenaus Faust* for piano or orchestra: *Der nächtliche Zug* and *Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke*, the famous *Mephisto-Walzer*; later Liszt composed three further *Mephisto-Walzer*. In terms of choral works, he wrote student, soldier and angel choruses (*Studentenlied aus Goethe's Faust*, *Soldatenlied aus Faust*, *Chor der Engel aus Goethe's Faust*) and two versions of the ballad of the King of Thule (*Es war ein König in Thule*), a song and a choral work.

It was in Paris, and thanks to Berlioz, that Liszt became acquainted – certainly as early as 1829 or 1830 – with the first part of Goethe's *Faust* in the translation by Gérard de Nerval. The book was a significant influence on him as well as on his contemporaries. The young and spirited composer, barely twenty years of age, immediately planned to compose a work inspired by *Faust*. Only a few of Liszt's comments on *Faust* survive, but in a letter to Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, written towards the end of his life in 1876, he illustrated the importance of Goethe's *Faust* character for his own development – in a constellation of heroes forming his personal pantheon:

“Though before and after that July (1830) I myself have drunk from the bitter sources of *Childe Harold*, *René*, *Obermann*, *Lélia*, *Hamlet*, and a good quarter of Goethe’s *Faust* – they all go back to our great forefather Job – I have not come to a halt at their doubts and despair, but maintain a trusting thirst for the sources that well up ‘into eternal life’. They are revealed to us through Christ.”

When he mentions only “a good quarter” of Goethe’s *Faust*, he is perhaps alluding to the first part with its dramatic, psychological and spiritual plot, while he considers the second part somewhat more difficult to understand. This is also indicated in his comments to the Princess of Sayn-Wittgenstein at the time when interest in Goethe’s work was revived after the first performance of the entire drama in Weimar in Otto Devrient’s production featuring Eduard Lassen’s incidental music: “The interpretations of the apocalypse seem to me to be even clearer than those of Faust... Goethe himself requested ‘more light’ in his last hour!” (1876)

In 1844, Liszt accompanied Professor Oskar Ludwig Bernhard Wolff’s recitation of *Faust* on the piano – a performance hosted by Carl Alexander, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach – and wrote to Marie d’Agoult that he had had “some moments of quite clear inspiration”. At the same time, he planned a *Faust* opera, initially to a libretto by Alexandre Dumas and then to one by Gérard de Nerval. A score was never realised, nor were half a dozen other opera projects Liszt was contemplating at the time. It was the form of the symphony into which he was to pour his version of Goethe’s tragedy: it is usually assumed that Liszt, who admired dramatic geniuses like Berlioz and Wagner, preferred to remain with piano, symphonic and religious music.

The *Faust* Symphony: a monument to Goethe and Weimar

In 1848 Liszt settled in Weimar as Court Kapellmeister in the extraordinary service of Grand Duke Carl Friedrich. He directed the court orchestra in the court theatre, conducted, premiered works by Berlioz, Wagner and many others, took the time to work on his own compositions and to form the new genre of his invention that combined poetry and music: the symphonic poem in the service of programme music. Weimar still venerated the memory of Goethe, who had directed the same theatre, making Liszt his direct heir – albeit as a musician. Imbued with Goethe’s legacy and spirit in Weimar, and employing programme music, Liszt erected a monument to Faust and his poet with the *Faust Symphony*. It is possible that elements of improvisations and earlier projects were reused in this score. Together with his *Symphonie zu Dantes Divina Commedia*, which was composed almost contemporaneously, it forms a diptych in honour of the two great figures of world literature whom Liszt admired.

In 1854 he completed a first version of his *Faust Symphony* consisting of three instrumental movements. In 1857 he added the concluding *Chorus mysticus* for solo tenor and male choir and conducted the premiere on 5 September in Weimar on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Grand Duke Carl August. Also on this day, in front of the theatre, the Goethe and Schiller monument by Ernst Rietschel was inaugurated. The concert programme – an expression of Weimar’s cultural heritage and its two eminent poets – also included two of Liszt’s compositions inspired by Schiller, the cantata *An die Künstler* and the symphonic poem *Die Ideale*.

Liszt revised the *Faust* score until it was published by Schuberth in Leipzig in 1861, dedicated to Berlioz. Its full title was *Eine Faust-Symphonie in drei Charakterbildern* [A Faust Symphony in three character pictures]. The first three movements bear the names of the three main characters as titles: *Faust*, *Gretchen* and *Mephistopheles*, with whom the first version of the work ended.

Three musical portraits and one redemption

Faust's personality, as Liszt describes it, resembles what today would be called an "anti-hero"; the composer undeniably identifies with him – and compares him to another romantic hero, Byron's Manfred:

"Faust's personality fragments and crumbles; he does not act, he lets (himself) happen, he hesitates, experiments, is confused, reflects, bargains, and is only interested in his little happiness. Manfred is completely different, incomparably prouder and more constant. By an absolute act of his will, he rejects with immense contempt the whole of nature and life – with one single exception. Manfred would certainly not think of engaging with the evil Mephistopheles, and if he had loved Margarete he might have killed her, but never shamefully abandoned her like Faust."

As the title of the score suggests, *A Faust Symphony in three character pictures* is a triptych of psychological portraits of the characters, their personalities, but also their interactions. With his *Faust Symphony*, Liszt allows psychology to enter the music. In his own words, his "sole ambition" as a composer was the "renewal of music through its more intimate connection with poetry". His *Faust Symphony* offers a masterful example of the power of sound, of tone painting, to evoke an entire world, a fantastical, epic and psychological world.

Each movement of the *Faust Symphony* corresponds to a character whose traits and psychology it depicts. This is programme music, but it does not tell a story and is certainly not descriptive music. Liszt wanted to characterise musically the profound nature and the idiosyncrasies of each character, thus offering a subtle and analytical interpretation of the story of Faust as told by Goethe. The three character pictures are effectively psychological tableaux set to music. Liszt does not simply tell the story of the characters or describe their feelings: he evokes their psyches.

The first movement is dedicated to Faust. The opening bars, in a remarkable manner, articulate the metaphysical question of the protagonist, who at the beginning of the drama is alone in his study, reflecting on his existence and the inconsequentiality of the knowledge he has accumulated. The long opening motif – not to say the theme – is a form of magical formula. It consists of twelve notes of the chromatic scale and has often been taken for a prefiguration of dodecaphony. Floating, without a tonal orientation point, a breeding ground for future melodic and harmonic developments, soon accompanied by exploratory chromatic and non-functional harmonies, it represents a remarkable expression of the character's existential questions. According to Camille Saint-Saëns, a great admirer of the score, "Liszt, in his bold exploration of new harmonies, went far beyond anything that had been done before him; even Wagner did not match the audacity of this opening, which is written in an unfamiliar tonality (although nothing hurts the ear), and which could not even have one note altered". Faust is contemplating suicide when Mephisto appears, offering him a life of omnipotence and pleasure. The movement then becomes increasingly lively, depicting the varying psychological states of the character, who is at times impetuous, at times in love, at times hesitant and at times mysterious: his verve, his desire for power, his fantastical adventures, his arrogance, his hopes, disappointments, fears and torments, but also his amorous reveries keep leading to swings in the musical character, to which the indications in the score bear witness: *lento assai*, *allegro agitato ed appassionato assai*, *allegro impetuoso*, *appassionato*, *affettuoso*, *misterioso*, *affettuoso*, *agitato*, *con fuoco*, *grandioso*, etc.

However, rather than a pictorial narration of the adventures, it is the protagonist's feelings triggered by external factors that Liszt's music describes – as Beethoven noted for his *Pastoral Symphony*: "More expression of feeling than a painting." The movement is accentuated by the multiple returns of the opening theme, which refers to the immanence of Faust's metaphysical questioning, the origin of the entire drama, but at the same time also recalls the inexorable pact he has made with the devil.

The second movement, *andante soave* (gentle), is Gretchen's. Whilst no specific key can be defined for the first movement (carried away by the whirlwind of his adventure, Faust, according to Liszt, "fragments and crumbles", thus slipping away from any clearly defined framework), the Gretchen movement is clearly set in A flat major, Liszt's key of love (it is also the key of the famous *Rêves d'amour*). The young girl's amorous reverie is set to music in refined orchestration; at the opening, the flute and clarinets play a very soft introduction. Then the oboe unfolds its theme over an accompaniment by the solo viola, an instrument that Berlioz also associates with Margarete in *La damnation de Faust* in the ballad of the King of Thule. Liszt even succeeds in setting the words "He loves me – he loves me not. [...] Loves me – not – loves me – not – [...] He loves me!", which Margarete utters as she plucks off the petals of a flower one by one. It can be heard clearly, played by two solo violins, accompanied by the flute and clarinet, pulsating ever stronger, like the heart of a young lover – a true tone painting! The central passage, in which the motif of Faust's metaphysical questions returns, temporarily interrupts the serenity of the reverie and marks the protagonist's return to Margarete's mental or real world (a play with apparitions reminiscent of those of the *idée fixe* in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*). This reminiscence reveals the nature of the connection between the two characters – Faust brings unrest into Margarete's mind, into her psyche – and is also a hidden reminder of the diabolical origin of their love.

Mephistopheles, the third movement, originally formed the conclusion of the symphony before Liszt decided to add the *Chorus mysticus* (i.e. the final verses of *Faust II*), devoted to Faust's redemption – an ending contrary to that chosen by Berlioz in *La damnation de Faust*, but faithful to Goethe's tragedy. While Faust and Margarete have characteristic themes, Mephistopheles has none. A character of non-being, evil, heinous, supernatural and wielding magical powers, he has no manifestation of his own. His only way of existing, of taking shape in the world of humans, is to play with them and their fate. A stroke of genius by Liszt, composing a movement based entirely on this idea, characterising Mephistopheles with no motif of his own, but by repeating and transforming Faust's and Margarete's themes. (Thematic transformation was a technique favoured by Liszt.) Just as Mephistopheles takes possession of their souls, which he manipulates, he takes possession of their musical themes. The movement begins with a sarcastic, malicious laugh which will keep returning until the end. We hear some fragments from the movement dedicated to Faust, others from Gretchen's. Mephistopheles is the mirror of the emotions and sentiments of the two characters whom he connects with one another and who are at the centre of the drama. The piece, "allegro vivace ironico" at the opening, a set of veritable orchestral fireworks, is like a great diabolic scherzo – a genre in which Liszt excelled and which recalls the Berlioz' phantasmagoria in *Songe d'une nuit du Sabbat*. In the rhythm of trills, tremolos, outbursts, chromaticisms, torn notes, lyrical surges and abrupt character changes, there are several motifs reminiscent of the first *Mephisto Waltz* which was composed around the same time and based on another version of the Faust myth: that of Nikolaus Lenau. The sardonic shrillness of the devil's laughter echoes as if in a psychic, ultimately very romantic world in which a sense of fascination with the supernatural and demonic was prevalent.

The *Chorus mysticus* represented a logical conclusion for Liszt who was deeply religious and turned towards salvation and transcendence. Without this ending, his *Faust Symphony* would not provide redemption. The tenor and the chorus sing the last verses of the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, praising the "eternal feminine", a source of redemption – this is reminiscent of Wagner. Without these verses, the *Faust Symphony* would only be a triptych ending with Faust's undoing and Mephisto's victory, the victory of evil over good. But it is the longing for light, for redemption, that is characteristic of Liszt. "Look up to the saviour's gaze", Doctor Marianus prompted us – Mahler was to remember this. It is the Virgin – as in the *Dante Symphony* – and the "eternal feminine" that Liszt calls upon so that we, with Goethe, may hear the chant of the universe.

Nicolas Dufetel

Translations (French to German): Ariane Ludwig / (German to English): Viola Scheffel

AIRAM HERNÁNDEZ

Hailed by critics for his unique timbre and exquisite musicality, Airam Hernández has become one of the most relevant singers of his generation. His versatility has allowed him to stand out in many fields from baroque to contemporary, in opera, oratorio, symphonic and lied.

Appearances took him to Théâtre du Capitole of Toulouse, Opernhaus Zürich, Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg, Teatro Real of Madrid, Gran Teatre del Liceu, De Nationale Opera of Amsterdam, The Dallas Opera, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Philharmonie de Paris, Konzerthaus Dortmund, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Musikverein Vienna, Teatro Regio di Parma, Teatro La Fenice, Teatro Filarmonico di Verona, Opéra de Lausanne, Semperoper Dresden and Perm Opera. His opera repertoire includes the leading tenor parts of *La traviata*, *La Bohème*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Norma*, *Faust*, *Falstaff*, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, *Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Florencia en el Amazonas*. Hernández also performed the title roles in the world premieres of the operas *Sardanapalo*, *Caruso a Cuba*, for which he received the 2019 Schaubert Award, and *El abrecartas*.

On the symphonic field his repertoire includes among many others *Das Lied von der Erde*, Verdi's *Requiem*, *Davide penitente*, *Christus am Ölberge*, Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* and *Symphony No. 9*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* and *Elijah*.

Born in Tenerife / Spain, Airam Hernández is a former French horn player; he graduated with honours in vocal studies, and subsequently from two master degrees, in contemporary & classical music and in chamber music, at Conservatori del Liceu of Barcelona.



STAATSKAPELLE WEIMAR

Founded in 1491, the Staatskapelle Weimar is one of the oldest orchestras in Germany and among the most illustrious in the world. Its history is closely associated with some of the world's best-known musicians, including Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Franz Liszt, and Richard Strauss. Established as the premier musical institution of classical Weimar and part of the Hoftheater Weimar, the orchestra continued to attract attention through the achievements of Liszt and Strauss during the 19th century. These two celebrated figures not only improved its quality and reputation, but also led the Hofkapelle in world premieres of numerous contemporary orchestral works and operas. These positive developments were brought to an abrupt end when the National Socialists seized power. After the calamitous events of World War II, conductor Hermann Abendroth re-established the Staatskapelle Weimar, restoring it to its former grandeur and quality.

Since the 1980s, conductors Peter Gülke, Oleg Caetani, and Hans-Peter Frank as well as the current honorary conductor George Alexander Albrecht, who led the orchestra from 1996 to 2002, have left a lasting mark. Kirill Karabits had taken the reins of Thuringia's only A-level orchestra from 2016-2019.

The ensemble has made guest appearances in Japan, Israel, Spain, Italy, Great Britain, Austria, Switzerland, and the US as well as in the major concert halls throughout Germany and at renowned festivals. Numerous recordings document the orchestra's diverse repertoire.



KIRILL KARABITS

Kirill Karabits has been Chief Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra for 15 years. Together they have made many critically acclaimed recordings, performed regularly at the BBC Proms and appeared together at London's Barbican Centre as part of the Beethoven celebrations in the 2019-20 season.

Recent highlights include Karabits' debuts with the Dallas, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and the Prague Radio Symphony. He has also recently enjoyed conducting at the Edinburgh Festival and joining Mikhail Pletnev on extensive European and North American tours which included his New York debut at the Lincoln Center.

A prolific opera conductor, Karabits has worked with the Deutsche Oper, Opernhaus Zürich and Staatsoper Stuttgart, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Staatsoper Hamburg, English National Opera, Bolshoi Theatre and he conducted a performance of *Der fliegende Holländer* at the Wagner Geneva Festival in celebration of the composer's anniversary. From 2016-19 he was Music Director of the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar.

Working with the next generation of bright musicians is of great importance to Karabits and as Artistic Director of I, CULTURE Orchestra he conducted them on their European tour in August 2015 with Lisa Batiashvili as soloist and a summer festivals tour in 2018, including concerts at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and the Montpellier Festival. In 2012 and 2014 Karabits conducted the televised finals of the BBC Young Musician of the Year Award and was named Conductor of the Year at the 2013 Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards.

HERREN DES OPERNCHORES DES DEUTSCHEN NATIONALTHEATERS WEIMAR

The Opera Chorus of the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar is a permanent part of the company's music theatre arm and the venerable house's second-largest ensemble after the Staatskapelle Weimar. It is currently made up of forty-four male and female singers from nine different countries. Their varied duties also include concerts and productions of spoken plays. Some of its members additionally sing small and medium-sized solo parts.

The ladies and gentlemen of the Opera Chorus perform a wide-ranging repertory extending from Classicism and German and Italian Romanticism to works by twentieth- and twenty-first-century composers. From 1968 to 1997 the Opera Chorus of the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar was run by Eduard Lehmstedt. Since 1997 his successors as chorus master have been Andreas Korn, Markus Oppeneiger (from 2005) and Jens Petereit (from 2018).

HERREN DES LANDESJUGENDCHORES THÜRINGEN

Rediscovering well-known choral music and promoting largely undiscovered works is a central objective of the Landesjugendchor Thüringen, which was re-founded in 2013 under the artistic direction of Franziska Kuba. Each year the young singers take part in five rehearsal periods at different locations in Thuringia in order to focus on demanding pieces together. The musical work is reinforced by experienced voice coaches including Kathleen Ziegner, Claudia Zohm, Mirjam Widmann, Hanna Hagel, Hagen-Goar Bornmann and Marius Schnelle. Nikolaas Schmeer was appointed musical assistant in 2022.

With a focus on a cappella music, the choir's repertoire ranges from sixteenth century settings to contemporary music, including four works dedicated to, and premiered by, the choir, composed by Christoph Göbel, Clytus Gottwald, Manfred Schlenker and Reiko Fütting.



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