

**LISZT Five Piano Pieces, S 192. Resignazione, S 187a. La lugubre gondola II, S 200/2. Sancta Dorothea, S 187. Via Crucis, S 504a** ● Lars David Kellner (pn) ● RECORDJET 37011 (62:30)

My reaction to Lars David Kellner's Prokofiev disc in *Fanfare* 36:2 was rather mixed; this fascinating disc of late Liszt is another story. Kellner understands the enigmatic, barren world of the music of the latter stages of Liszt's life. Liszt took his orders in 1865, becoming the Abbé Liszt; the five piano works collected under the Searle number of 192, date from between that year and 1879. The tempo indications for this group are predominantly slow, and indeed Liszt allows himself to stretch his melodies in the first three (*Sehr langsam*; *Lento assai*; *Sehr langsam*); only at the fourth, an *Andantino*, does some sense of movement, and with it, consolation, arrive, an approach to consonance that makes arrival points glow in an almost Wagnerian way. From the very first note of the first piece, Kellner is absolutely inside this music, while the enigmatic close of the final of the five pieces, "Sospiri," is expertly managed.

The piece entitled *Resignazione* was written on the last page of the manuscript of Liszt's *Salve Regina*, a work for organ/harmonium, and so is often listed as for those instruments. This was unpublished in Liszt's life time (the MS is in Washington, DC). More famous is the pair of works *La lugubre gondola*, allegedly written in premonition of death of Wagner; we are offered the second here. Kellner has a *cantabile* that allows the long single lines to speak mournfully; a true, and extended, funeral song. There is a more transcendent belief system at work in *Sancta Dorothea*, its redemptive heart beautifully brought forth by Kellner before the rather more ascetic sounds of the "Vexilla Regis" first movement of *Via Crucis* intones forth. I choose the word "intones" deliberately; there is a feeling of chant here, of deep religiosity. This piece, written 1878/79, is subtitled "Les 14 Stations de la Croix"; this subject seems to bring out the most austere, hardcore one might say, aspects of composers (one also thinks of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' *Vesalii Icones*). Significant interpreters of *Via Crucis* tends to be those who specialize in the harder-hitting music, or at least specialist pockets of the repertoire: Reinbert de Leeuw or Aribert Reimann, for example. Kellner understands the heart and structure of the work, finding maximal harmonic pain in "Simon le Cyrénéen aide Jésus à porter sa Croix" and balancing that with the soul-placating calm of the chorale "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" in the "Sancta Veronica" movement. Liszt's use of tremolo in his late music is pronounced, and it takes a certain technique and grasp of gesture to allow them to sound with full effect; Kellner achieves this, just as he realizes that the key to *Via Crucis* is a complete absence of rushing. Melodies must unfold, sometimes uncurl themselves, with a sense of transcendent timelessness.

A brief word on versions of *Via Crucis* is in order, perhaps, to avoid confusion. The original version is S 53 and was composed 1878/9 for solo voices, mixed chorus and organ; there is an organ version (S 669*b*) and a version for piano four hands (S 583) as well as the present S 504*a* solo piano version.

The recording of the piano (a Steinway Model D) in Kleines Theater, Haar, Germany, and produced in HiRes audio, is excellent. Kellner's performance is issued via recordJET; a search for the website reveals a fascinating enterprise that seeks to improve and expand on the work of such services as *CDBaby*, *ReverbNation* and so on. This review comes from a physical product, one of their many services. Those under the spell of the late works of Liszt should note that Kellner's disc only overlaps by one piece with Cédric Tiberghien's excellent recent Hyperion recording, which features the whole of the third and final book of *Années de pèlerinage* plus six other late pieces. The overlapping piece is *La lugubre gondola II*; Tiberghien finds an equivalent desolation, his staccatissimo spread left-hand chords in measures 6-8 astonishingly dry and impactful. It is a close run race, though, and anyone under the spell of the works of the Abbé Liszt should surely aim to hear both. **Colin Clarke**