



Bisel Classics

Franz
LISZT
HUSSITENLIED

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Preface

Liszt brought the *'Hussitenlied'* as a tribute to Prague in 1840 where it received a rapturous welcome. A frenzied following of celebrity had rapidly grown up around Liszt so that at this time, with the composer still a young man of twenty nine years old, he commanded the kind of public adoration and mass hysteria which today would normally be reserved for rock stars. This "*Lisztomania*" was characterised by some of Liszt's finest performances beginning with a series of six Beethoven Memorial Concerts in Vienna in the presence of the Dowager Empress in 1839. Thus was the *Glanzzeit* period of the composer's travels initiated. A whirlwind, high energy, prodigious period of performing and touring that was to last for eight years and take in most of Europe. Hans Christian Andersen had the opportunity of hearing Liszt play in Hamburg in 1842 and he described him as a "modern Orpheus": *'The Orpheus of mythology could set stones and trees in motion with his music. The modern Orpheus, Liszt, had electrified them already before he began to play. Fame with her mighty aura, had opened the eyes and ears of the multitude so that everyone seemed to recognize what was about to follow.'*⁴ Today we are familiar with scenes such as these and reactions to celebrity such as this in particular. In 1840, the world had little experience of this kind of celebrity worship and the frisson of excitement that was generated, was in part generated all before a single note was struck. Excitement generated by the novelty Liszt introduced not just in his manner of performing, but in the reports of his technical prowess and the reputation of his compositional output.

Liszt exploited the contemporary technical advances of the day with a greater range to his keyboard and his playing. Thus in this edition we find *ossia* tailored to the smaller 6 octave piano but the real revolution is to be found as one might expect in the writing itself. In the pioneering technical advances as well as the breadth of his musical palette Liszt brought the concept of the modern concert artist to the world in a manner which is familiar to us today but which was practically unheard of back then.

In this day and age, the reputation of Liszt is well documented and he is rightly accounted as one of the first modern masters of the piano. Alas, this rigorous technical discipline did not always transmit to his research methodology when working up new pieces and so when he set the tune of the '*Hussitenlied*' he believed he was working on a much older work.

PJSEN HUSITSKÁ
(z patnáctého stoletj)
pro hlas basový se sborem a průvodem fortepiana.

In fact, the original tune had been composed by Josef Theodor Krov (1797-1859) with lyrics by Václav Hanka around 1823 - 1825. '*Těšme se blahou nadějí*' ('Blissfully hoping we will enjoy') had been conceived as a drinking song but quickly took on patriotic connotations ⁱⁱ and it was in the latter context that Liszt believed it to be derived from a fifteenth century choral. Liszt may be forgiven for this misunderstanding of his source material, when the result clearly elevated the status of an already popular work which had transcended its roots as so few tunes have done, before or since.

The fantasy is prefaced by a '*Version littérale*' a straightforward piano transcription of the original which is