



Franz Liszt: Sardanapalo - Mazeppa

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BBC Music Magazine (John Allison - 01.04.2019)

Specialist record labels may face a challenging time, but they do at least benefit from one growth industry: ongoing Franz Liszt discoveries and reconstructions. Yet nobody was expecting to hear anything of the composer's opera *Sardanapalo*, begun and abandoned in the early 1850s. For all Liszt's tireless role in championing operas by his peers, he wrote his only complete opera (*Don Sanche*) aged 13. Now it turns out that Act I of *Sardanapalo* had been sketched fully enough to allow musicologist David Trippett to produce a realisation of the score.

What emerges sounds like a catalogue of styles from Bellini and Verdi to Mendelssohn and Wagner, an unsatisfying mix that lacks its own distinctive voice. Still, it's good to be able to hear it and fitting that Liszt's old Weimar orchestra (now under Kirill Karabits) has recorded it. In the title role, the plangent tenor Airam Hernandez confirms his status as a rising star; but it is Mirra, the king's lover, who carries the burden and Joyce El-Khoury is on exciting, mettlesome form. As the soothsayer Beleso, Oleksandr Pushniak projects a darkly imposing voice.

Though Liszt's operatic ambitions were never fulfilled, he found his metier in the symphonic poem – with contrasting fortunes that are underlined by the inclusion here of the contemporaneous *Mazeppa*, also based on Byron. Quintessential Liszt, this masterpiece telling the story of a Ukrainian hero is brought to vivid life under the baton of today's leading Ukrainian conductor.



Liszt

Sardanapalo, Mazeppa
Joyce El-Khoury, Airam Hernandez,
Oleksandr Pushniak, Sardanapalo.
Weimar Kirill Karabits

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John Allison

RECORDING *****



Liszt for life:
conductor
Kirill Karabits

Liszt

Sardanapalo; Mazeppa

Joyce El-Khoury, Airam Hernández,
Oleksandr Pushniak; Staatskapelle
Weimar/Kirill Karabits

Audite 97.764 67:01 mins



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PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★