

L.P. 254

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LISZT *48 mins*

DANTE SYMPHONY

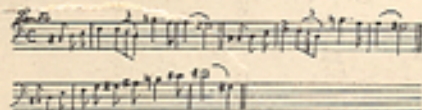
L'ORCHESTRE DE L'ASSOCIATION DES CONCERTS COLONNE

Conducted by GEORGE SEBASTIAN

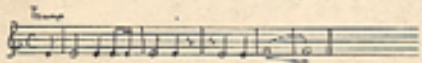
Franz Liszt's *Dante Symphony* is the companion work of his *Faust Symphony*. Completed in 1856, after many years of work, it was first heard in 1882 in England under the direction of Mr. Ganz. Richard Wagner admired it greatly. In an article, entitled "The Public in Time and Space" (sixth volume of Mr. Ashton's translation of Wagner's prose works) he calls the *Dante Symphony* "one of the most astounding deeds of music," and adds: "It was a fresh hearing of Liszt's *Dante Symphony* that revived the problem what place in our art world should be allotted to a creation as brilliant as it is masterly. Shortly before, I had been busy reading the 'Divine Comedy,' and again had revolved all the difficulties in judging his work which I have mentioned above. To me that tone poem of Liszt's now appeared the creative act of a redeeming genius, freeing Dante's unspeakably pregnant intention from the inferno of his superstitions by the purifying fire of musical idealism, and setting it in the paradise of sure and blissful feeling. Here the soul of Dante's poem is shown in purest radiance. Such redeeming service even Michelangelo could not render to his great poetic master. Only after Bach and Beethoven had taught our music to wield the brush and chisel of the mighty Florentine could Dante's true redemption be achieved."

Another contemporary music writer describes the *Dante Symphony* as follows: "The symphony commences with a description of the Inferno. Trombones, trumpets and double basses interpret the terrifying words inscribed over the gate of Hell:—

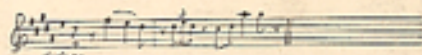
*Per me si va nella città dolente,
Per me si va nell'eterno dolore,
Per me si va tra la perduta gente.
(Through me the way leads to the city of lament,
Through me the way into eternal grief,
Through me the way among the lost souls.)*



followed by the words: *Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate.* (Abandon all hope ye who enter.)



After this the despair of the souls is characterized in the expressive music. The following 'Paolo and Francesca' episode is contrastingly gentle: Violins, accompanied by harps relieve the tension of the earlier sombre mood.



The second movement 'Purgatory' follows.



The third movement 'Magnificat,'



an old church melody, sung by a women's choir, concludes the work. Franz Liszt wrote two endings to the symphony, one soft and ethereal, the other



brilliant and triumphant."

M. D. Calvocoressi wrote in the "Musical Times": "There can be no question that the *Dante Symphony* ranks foremost with the *Faust Symphony* among Liszt's orchestral works.

The most remarkable feature of the first movement is its extraordinary vehemence. The music grips the listener at once, and holds him spellbound until the end. The form may be described roughly as that of a triptych, for there is a middle section, lyrical and tender in character—it is inspired by the episode of Paolo and Francesca—that stands in strong contrast with the seething turmoil of the first and third sections. But apart from the relief which this contrast affords, the music does not lag a single instant, nor give the listener breathing space."

FRED LOW

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