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Midland, Michigan

THE AMERICAN LISZT SOCIETY

Scholars and artists survey the man and the music

THE American Liszt Society is not one of the country's most influential or affluent organizations. Founded in 1964, it has sought to stimulate studies, publications, and performances of music bearing a relationship (however remote) to Franz Liszt. Few knew or cared about it until recent years, when under the dynamic leadership of its president, Fernando Lares of the Peabody Conservatory, it suddenly came to life. Last October 5 through 8, it held its most ambitious annual meeting yet, drawing well over a hundred prominent scholars and performing artists to the handsome, new multi-million dollar Midland Center for the Arts [see November 1978 issue, page MA-29] in central Michigan.

Soviets fail to show

Liszt fanciers arrived in droves even though the biggest attraction, Tikhon Khrennikov, long-time boss of the Union of Soviet Composers, was forced at short notice to cancel his appearance as soloist with the Midland Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Don Th. Jaeger, in a performance of his own Piano Concerto No. 2. His place was taken by the veteran pianist, Edward Kilenyi, who was the featured pianist in the Beethoven *Emperor* Concerto. Khrennikov was not really missed, although his absence was a disappointment to some. Not to the Midland audience, however, since nobody would claim that the Khrennikov

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was a more interesting piece than the Beethoven.

There were a few other defections. Mark Podberezsky, also of the Soviet Union, who was scheduled to lecture on Soviet music, was also a no-show, as was Professor Robert Stevenson of the University of California in Los Angeles, but there were still more than enough performances and lectures to keep everybody busy from 9 a.m. in the morning through 10:30 p.m. at night with very little time for rest.

Pianists abound

Kilenyi was by no means the only artist to perform--there were also full-length recitals by Eugene List, Bela Boszormenyi-Nagy, Carroll Glenn (assisted by Robert Werner), and Beveridge Webster. For one reason or another, none of these performers seemed to be in top form (List and Webster in particular had their troubles), but there was more than ample compensation for the listeners in the recitals of younger, lesser-known pianists, some of whom were downright sensational.

Andrzej Dutkiewicz, duo-pianists Ralph Markham and Kenneth Broadway, Raymond Herbert, Michael Habermann, soprano Ruth Drucker (assisted at the keyboard by Arno Drucker), Robin Harrison, and Robert Silverman were the younger artists. Of them, Habermann, a French-born American citizen now studying at the C. W. Post College of Long Island University, made the deepest impression with a recital featuring the rarely-heard music of the English-Parsee eccentric, Kaikhosru

Shapurji Sorabji, which sounded for all the world like Lisztian improvisations on Ravel. Perhaps the most brilliant single performance of the four days was a magnificent reading of the Liszt B minor Sonata by Robert Silverman of the University of British Columbia. The Polish pianist-composer Dutkiewicz added a contemporary touch to the proceedings, and the Markham-Broadway duo offered the first American performance of Carl Czerny's not particularly inspired *Grandes Variations Brillantes sur 'La Campanella' de Paganini*, Op. 170.

Topics explored

In addition to the music-making, there were lectures by Harold Boxer, music director of the Voice of America ("Music, an International Communication"), Gregor Benko, curator of the International Piano Archives at the University of Maryland ("The Tradition Passes On: Liszt's Pupils"), Konrad Wolff of Montclair State College ("Liszt's Interest in Piano Technique"), Eugene Helm of the University of Maryland ("The Ill-Tempered Clavier: The Lisztian Piano as a Symbol of Distortion"), the writer of this report ("Liszt in America"), Robert Joseph Silverman, editor-publisher of *The Piano Quarterly* ("Music Publishing in Liszt's Day"), Julio Esteban of the Peabody Conservatory of Music ("The Influence of Literature in the Compositions of Liszt"), Charles Timbrell of Howard and American Universities ("Liszt and French Music"), David Kushner of the University of Florida ("The American Liszt Society"), and Alan Walker of McMaster University ("Liszt and Schubert: The Story of a Neglected Relationship"). It would have been difficult to assemble a more varied and provocative program around any other nineteenth-century musical figure, and the entire festival served to underline the crucial role played by Franz Liszt in the development of Romantic music.

This year, the American Liszt Society will hold its annual meeting in the Library of Congress, and an even more ambitious program of performances and lectures is promised. All of which can be taken as a sign of the burgeoning neo-Romanticism which seems to be sweeping the country nowadays. \triangle