

DLA Doctoral Thesis  
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Interpretational freedom in Vladimir Horowitz's  
Franz Liszt Sonata in B minor recordings

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## I. The background of the study

Since childhood, I have been passionate about Vladimir Horowitz's playing and have sought to uncover the secret of his magic. Horowitz's personality and piano artistry had a profound impact on my musical development. The works of Franz Liszt became part of my repertoire during my conservatory years, and in 2006, I graduated from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest with a performance of the B minor Sonata. Later, the Sonata accompanied me to the stage of Carnegie Hall, where I had multiple opportunities to perform it. Horowitz spent most of his life in New York. After moving to New York myself, the study of Horowitz's legacy became more accessible. Examining the archives of the Steinway piano factory, exploring Horowitz's files at Yale University, and engaging in personal encounters with individuals who had known him firsthand all directed my focus toward Horowitz research. In the initial phase of my research, I placed great emphasis on Horowitz's life journey. Among the most important English-language sources were *Horowitz: His Life and Music* by Harold C. Schonberg and *A Biography of Vladimir Horowitz* by Glenn Plaskin, both of which provided in-depth analyses of his life. However, despite

extensive literary study, I did not come closer to understanding the essence of Horowitz's magic. The existing literature lacked a comprehensive work that deeply analyzed Horowitz's performance practices and could offer insight into his artistic thinking. A pivotal moment in my research was my encounter with Anton Kasanov. Kasanov served as the cultural attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow during Horowitz's emotionally charged return to Russia. Our personal conversations, recorded on video, moved and inspired me to continue my work. Although my in-depth research on Horowitz's Moscow return did not ultimately become part of my dissertation, studying this historic concert led me to focus more on Horowitz's performance style. Eventually, I turned my attention to the two commercially released recordings of Liszt's B minor Sonata, a piece I had performed many times by then. The analysis of these recordings later became to be the foundation of my dissertation. The study of these recordings gave me renewed energy to get closer to the essence of Horowitz's magic and to publish my observations in the form of my dissertation.

## II. Sources

The backbone of my dissertation is the analysis of two recordings of Liszt's *B minor Sonata*: the 1932 recording from London's Abbey Road Studios and the 1977 release, recorded in 1976 in St. Louis. My biographical research work on Horowitz and understanding the Sonata heavily relied on analyzing Harold C. Schonberg's *Horowitz: His Life and Music*, Alan Walker's *Liszt Reflections*, David Dubal's *Evenings with Horowitz*, and *The Art of the Piano* by David Dubal.

Additionally, I drew upon various publications analyzing Liszt's *B minor Sonata*. Notably, I would highlight Kenneth Hamilton's *Liszt Sonata in B Minor* and Arthur Friedheim's monograph, *The Liszt Sonata Monographs*. Friedheim was one of Liszt's last students and a close confidant. His monograph, published in 2011, gains particular significance given Liszt's reluctance to speak extensively about his *Sonata*. Friedheim's annotations can be interpreted as authentic Lisztian instructions, many of which Horowitz incorporated into both of his recordings.

### III. Methodology

My dissertation first contextualizes the two historically significant recordings by providing a brief overview of Horowitz's life and career. After an extensive and detailed study of his biography, I narrowed the contextual framework to focus specifically on the elements that influenced Horowitz's musical taste. I explored his teachers and the musical environment surrounding him, both of which played a crucial role in shaping his interpretative style.

Following an examination of the historical significance of Franz Liszt's *B minor Sonata*, I conducted a detailed performance-based analysis of the two recordings. By categorizing the tools of interpretative freedom, I developed a framework through which Horowitz's musical evolution became perceptible.

#### IV. Results

The analysis of available literature, the understanding of historical context, and the comparative study of recordings provided a new interpretation of Horowitz's approach to artistic freedom. By categorizing Horowitz's interpretative tools and examining the evolution of his recordings made forty-five years apart, I was able to illustrate how his artistry continuously reinvented itself while remaining true to his unique identity, maintaining its relevance throughout the 20th century. Through repeated performances of the *Sonata*, my research led me to rediscover the hidden possibilities within the work. As a performing artist, I hope that my dissertation not only honors textual fidelity but also encourages future performers to reimagine interpretative freedom, leading to bolder, more diverse performances that will ultimately enrich audiences' experiences.

## V. Compilation of activities related to the dissertation topic

I have performed Franz Liszt's *B minor Sonata* as one of the most important pieces in my repertoire at renowned concert halls worldwide, including the Esplanade Concert Hall in Singapore (April 19, 2016), Bunkamura Orchard Hall in Tokyo (October 15, 2018), Aula Simfonia Jakarta (April 23, 2017), Preston Bradley Hall in Chicago (March 30, 2018), Faneuil Hall in Boston (October 15, 2016), and Carnegie Hall in New York.

My most significant CD recording of the *Sonata* is the live concert performance from Carnegie Hall in 2012, which was released in the United States by AGP Records in 2016.