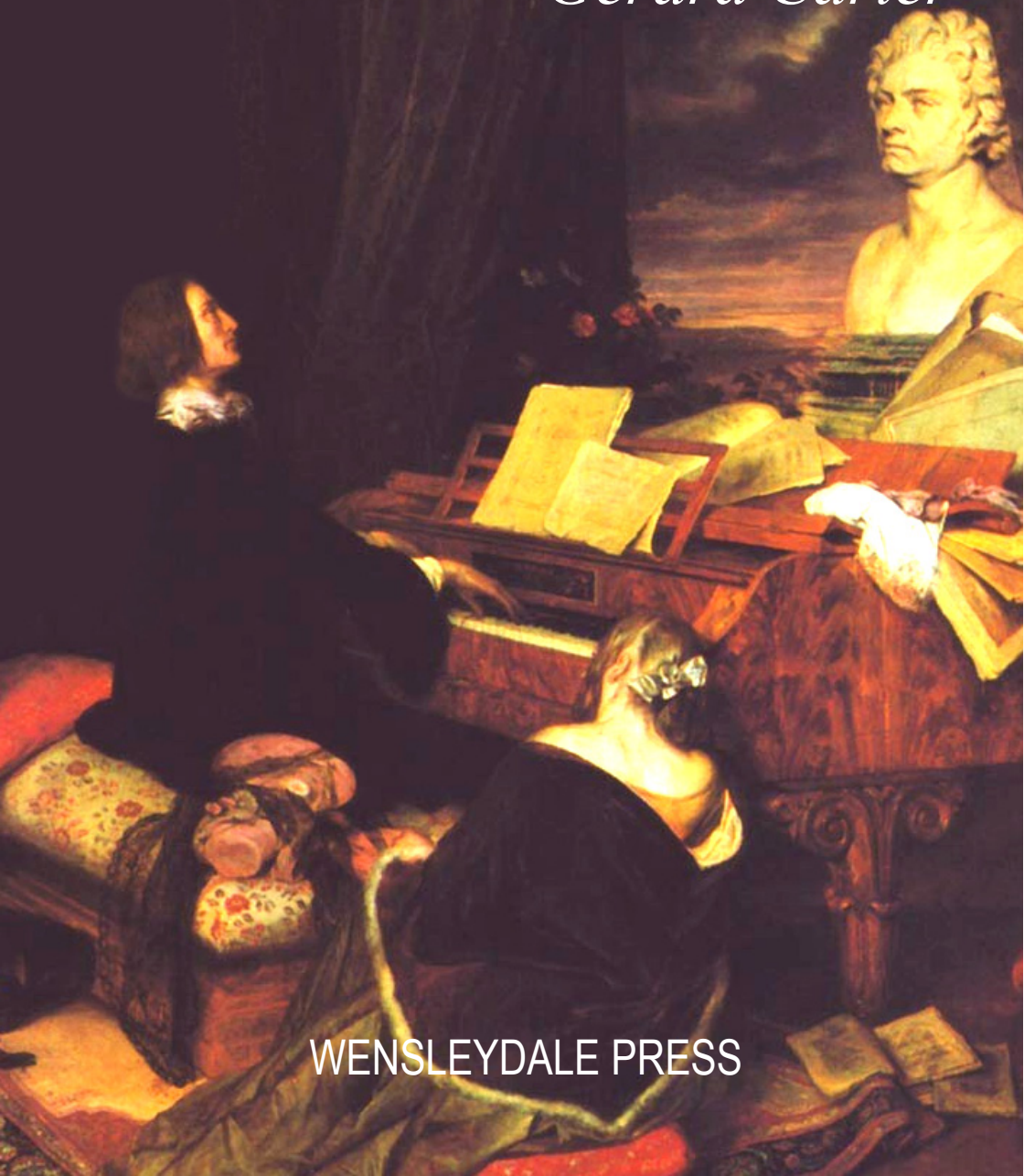


*Franz Liszt's Piano Sonata*  
*Gerard Carter*



WENSLEYDALE PRESS

**FRANZ LISZT'S PIANO SONATA**

**GERARD CARTER**

**WENSLEYDALE PRESS**

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The Altenburg, Weimar, 1900

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## 2 *Altenburg*

American pianist and Liszt pupil William Mason, writing in 1900, gives us his memoirs of musical life as a 24 year-old at the Altenburg in 1853 shortly after the composition of the Sonata and at the time of its first performances.

Let us enjoy William Mason's sparkling prose, perceptive observations and dry sense of humour as he brings the 'Golden Age' alive for us:

...

'After my London visit I was obliged to return to Leipsic to transact some business, and I decided to call on Liszt in Weimar en route. My intention was to make another effort to be received by him as a pupil, my idea being, if he declined, to go to Paris and study under some French master.

I reached Weimar on the 14th of April, 1853, and put up at the Hotel zum Erbprinzen. At that time Liszt occupied a house on the Altenburg belonging to the grand duke. The old grand duke, under whose patronage Goethe had made Weimar famous, was still living. I think his idea was to make Weimar as famous musically through Liszt as it had been in literature in Goethe's time.

Having secured my room at the Erbprinzen, I set out for the Altenburg. The butler who opened the door mistook me for a wine-merchant whom he had been expecting. I explained that I was not that person. "This is my card," I said. "I have come here from London to see Liszt." He took the card, and returned almost immediately with the request for me to enter the dining-room.

I found Liszt at the table with another man. They were drinking their after-dinner coffee and cognac. The moment Liszt saw me he exclaimed, "Nun, Mason, Sie lassen lange auf sich warten!" ("Well, Mason, you let people wait for you a long time!") I suppose he saw my surprised look, for he added, "Ich habe Sie schon vor vier Jahren

Brahms said that he had never seen or heard any of Chopin's compositions. Liszt also played a part of Brahms's "C Major Sonata, Op.1."

A little later some one asked Liszt to play his own sonata, a work which was quite recent at that time, and of which he was very fond. Without hesitation, he sat down and began playing. As he progressed he came to a very expressive part of the sonata, which he always imbued with extreme pathos, and in which he looked for the especial interest and sympathy of his listeners. Casting a glance at Brahms, he found that the latter was dozing in his chair. Liszt continued playing to the end of the sonata, then rose and left the room. I was in such a position that Brahms was hidden from my view, but I was aware that something unusual had taken place, and I think it was Remenyi who afterward told me what it was. It was very strange that among the various accounts of this Liszt-Brahms first interview – and there are several – there is not one which gives an accurate description of what took place on that occasion; indeed, there are all far out of the way. The events as here related are perfectly clear in my own mind, but not wishing to trust implicitly to my memory alone, I wrote to my friend Klindworth, – the only living witness of the incident except myself, as I suppose, – and requested him to give an account of it as he remembered it. He corroborated my description in every particular, except that he made no specific reference to the drowsiness of Brahms, and except, also, that, according to my recollection, Brahms left Weimar on the afternoon of the day on which the meeting took place; Klindworth writes that it was the morning of the following day – a discrepancy of very little moment.

Brahms and Remenyi were on a concert tour at the time of which I write, and were dependent on such pianos as they could find in the different towns in which they appeared. This was unfortunate, and sometimes brought them into extreme dilemma. On one occasion the only piano at their disposal was just a half-tone at variance with the violin. There was no pianoforte-tuner at hand, and although the violin might have been adapted to the piano temporarily, Remenyi would have had serious objections to such a proceeding. Brahms therefore adapted himself to the situation, transposed the piano part to the pitch of the violin, and played the whole composition, Beethoven's "Kreutzer Sonata," from memory. Joachim, attracted by this feat, gave Brahms a

Liszt's Sonata bears no opus number as he never gave opus numbers to any of his compositions. The catalogue numbers R21, S178 and W44 denote the Liszt Sonata in the later catalogues of Liszt's works prepared by Raabe, Searle and Grove, and Walker.

Liszt lost no time in giving printed copies of his Sonata to those who might promote it. He inscribed a copy to his pupil Dionys Pruckner, and sent a copy to the 24 year-old Bülow in Berlin, and one to the Schumann home in Düsseldorf which arrived on 25 May 1854.

This was eleven months after the drowsiness incident and Brahms, who was staying at the Schumann home as a house guest, played the Sonata through for Robert's wife Clara, herself a concert pianist and composer.

Clara wrote in her diary:

'I received a friendly letter from Liszt today, enclosing a sonata dedicated to Robert and a number of other things. But what dreadful things they are. Brahms played them to me, and I felt quite ill. It's much ado about nothing – not a single sound idea, but altogether confused, and not a clear harmonic expression to be found anywhere! And now I even have to thank him for it, it is truly appalling.'

To be fair to Clara, her husband had two months earlier, after an unsuccessful attempt to drown himself, been taken to a mental hospital at Eendenich near Colditz Castle leaving her with seven children to support. Bear in mind also that Brahms was, and always remained, a close friend of Clara's.



Liszt pupils Hans von Bülow,  
Carl Tausig & Karl Klindworth 1865

Liszt's first pupil to play the Sonata, Karl Klindworth, had moved to London in early 1854 to pursue a concert career and on 2 July 1854 Liszt wrote to Klindworth in London: 'Write me word how I can send them [two newly published Liszt arrangements] to you in the quickest and most economical manner – together with the Sonata.'

On the afternoon of 23 October 1854 Liszt again performed his Sonata in the library of the Altenburg on his favourite Erard grand piano. His pupils, the composer Peter Cornelius and music critic Richard Pohl, were present and were moved by the Sonata and by Liszt's performance. The Sonata was preceded by Liszt's concert study 'Un Sospiro' with an improvised bravura ending and the afternoon was completed by some improvisation by one of the guests, the Parisian organist Lefébure-Wély.

In the following year 1855 Liszt's brilliant young pupil, pianist and friend Hans von Bronsart wrote an article expressing the view that the Liszt Sonata was a true successor of Beethoven's last sonatas and the inauguration of a new era in the history of form.

The official première of Liszt's E flat major piano concerto took place at the Ducal Palace in Weimar on 17 February 1855 with Berlioz conducting and the composer as soloist. Composition of the concerto had proceeded on and off since 1830 and it was finally published in 1857. The concerto uses the principle of thematic transformation as does the Sonata but within a more clear-cut four movement structure.

On 5 April 1855 Karl Klindworth visited Liszt's friend the opera composer and conductor Richard Wagner at his rooms at 22 Portland Terrace, Regents Park, London, and Wagner wrote on the same evening to Liszt:

'Klindworth has just now played your great Sonata for me! – we spent the day alone together, and after dinner he had to play. Dearest Franz! Just now you were with me; the Sonata is inexpressibly beautiful, great, loveable, deep and noble – just as you are. I was profoundly moved by it, and all my London miseries were immediately forgotten.'

Peter Cornelius was another supporter of the Sonata. He planned to devote a lecture to it in Vienna in 1859 as part of a series of three lectures, the other two dealing with Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata and Schumann's F sharp minor Sonata. Cornelius discussed his views on the Sonata with the composer but none of the lectures in fact took place because after researching the topic Cornelius felt he could not do justice to it.

The next documented event occurred on 24 August 1864, three days after the opening concert of the Karlsruhe Festival at the Court Opera House. Bülow's pupil Alide Topp played for Liszt who wrote:

‘[She] is quite simply a marvel. Yesterday she played for me by heart my Sonata and the Mephisto Waltz in a way which enchanted me.’

English pianist and Liszt pupil Walter Bache often heard Liszt play his own works. In March 1865 the 23 year-old Liszt pupil heard the composer play his Sonata in Rome. Bache was with Liszt for seventeen summers in Rome and back home in England performed and enthusiastically promoted Liszt's works including the Sonata.

On Monday 3 May 1869 the seventeen year old Liszt pupil Georg Leitert (1852-1902), later to study at Weimar with Liszt, played Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata and the Liszt Sonata in the small auditorium of the Concert Hall in Budapest, winning applause for himself and the composer. Liszt pupil Sophie Menter was present as were the composer and his close musical acquaintances.

On Sunday 8 January 1871 at one of Liszt's musical mornings in the hall of the Presbytery of the Inner City Parish Church, Budapest, the eighteen year old Liszt pupil Róbert Freund (1852-1936) played the Liszt Sonata and Liszt played some of his own arrangements. (Dezső Legány 'Liszt and his Country 1860-1873', Corvina Kiadó, 1983)

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## 4 Interpretation

### **Liszt-Pädagogium**

The 'Liszt-Pädagogium' was published in 1908 and reprinted in 1986 with a preface by Alfred Brendel.

It consists of a series of notes made by Liszt's official biographer Lina Ramann on Liszt's teaching of his own works and was based on notes taken by pianists present at Liszt's masterclasses and the diaries of August Göllerich and Karl Lachmund.

The Pädagogium has this to say about the Sonata:

1. Lento assai bars 1-7 [motif A]:  
Muffled timpani of the opening.
2. Allegro energico bar 8 and following:  
Suggested metronome marking crotchet = 72.  
[Hamilton considers this is a misprint for minim = 72.]
3. Allegro energico bars 8-13 rising octaves and diminished sevenths motif [motif B]:  
Liszt associated this with Coriolan's defiance.
4. Allegro energico bars 30-31:  
Reinforce the bass with octaves.
5. Grandioso theme bar 105 and following:  
Suggested metronome marking minim = 66.
6. Cantando espressivo bars 162 and 164:  
Use una corda (soft pedal) and play ppp.
7. Andante sostenuto bar 331 and following:  
Suggested metronome marking crotchet = 96.  
[Hamilton considers the figures have been transposed and the metronome marking should read crotchet = 69.]

often in his 1913 piano roll recording of the Sonata but this has no effect on the tone quality when the roll is reproduced on an upright piano. Soft pedal usage is, however, apparent from observing the piano's hammers during reproduction of the roll.

The use of the sostenuto pedal is not indicated by Liszt as that pedal was not invented by Steinway until some years after 1853. It could be used effectively in bars 309-310 and 312-313 although the surge of sound caused by the sustaining pedal obviously intended by Liszt is also exciting. It could also be used in bars 315-318. Liszt later approved of the use of the sostenuto pedal in his third Consolation.

The crisp, dry, Bartók and Prokofieff approach to pedalling favoured by some pianists in their playing of the Liszt Sonata seems historically and musically untenable. The pedalling of Liszt's works on the modern grand piano is a contentious area linked with the issue of sonority.

### **Sonority**

The Erard grand piano of the 1850's was not overstrung, nor was it fully metal framed, and it lacked the sonority of the modern grand piano. It was overdamped, that is the dampers were underneath the strings and damped by springs not gravity. The dampers did not damp as clearly as those on the modern grand piano and there was not such a difference between damped and undamped sonority. The bass was not as thunderous and the treble not as bell-like as on the modern grand piano.

### **Tempo**

Liszt marked the tempo and character of the different sections of the Sonata using the customary Italian terms but did not provide any metronome markings for the Sonata nor for any other of his works.

There are reasons for this. Composers' metronome markings, such as those by Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin and Brahms, are sometimes too fast as they represent the tempo in the composer's head. Composers also perhaps play their works too fast, musicians do not play metronomically, and different pianists are technically and musically



Quasi-Faust movement from the Alkan Sonata

First subject including hammerblow motif:

This musical score shows the first subject of the Quasi-Faust movement from the Alkan Sonata. It is written for piano in G major (three sharps) and 3/4 time. The score consists of two systems of grand staff notation. The first system begins with measures 99 and 100, marked with a dynamic of *mf*. The hammerblow motif is introduced in measure 100, characterized by a sharp attack on a chord. The second system continues the piece, featuring dynamic markings of *f*, *rf*, and *mf*. The music includes various rhythmic patterns, such as triplets and sixteenth-note runs, and complex chordal textures.

Second subject including lyrical transformation of hammerblow motif:

This musical score shows the second subject of the Quasi-Faust movement from the Alkan Sonata. It is written for piano in G major (three sharps) and 3/4 time. The score consists of three systems of grand staff notation. The first system begins with a dynamic of *p* and features a lyrical transformation of the hammerblow motif, where the sharp attack is softened. The second system continues the piece, featuring dynamic markings of *p* and *tr* (trills). The third system shows the continuation of the piece, featuring dynamic markings of *p* and *tr*. The music includes various rhythmic patterns, such as eighth-note runs and sixteenth-note runs, and complex chordal textures.

Many of Liszt's important pupils have been included in the above chart. The last column indicates some specific known documented connections with the Sonata. All the pupils shown, and many others, would have had close connections with the Sonata, not necessarily documented.

1. Studied the Sonata with Liszt
2. Heard Liszt play his Sonata
3. Performed the Sonata for or in the presence of Liszt
4. Edited the Sonata in a published edition
5. Recorded the Sonata on piano roll

No Liszt pupil ever recorded the Sonata on disc.

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## 9 Recordings

Piano roll recordings were made from 1905 to 1930 when the Depression largely put an end to further production. All the well-known concert pianists recorded for one or more of the various piano roll firms. Piano rolls, when reproduced on the appropriate, properly adjusted, reproducing piano, were able to reproduce, in many cases with a high degree of fidelity, a pianist's performance. They pre-dated gramophone discs for the recording of lengthy piano works such as the Liszt Sonata. No Liszt pupil ever recorded the Sonata on disc.

Professor Larry Sitsky's two volume index of catalogued piano roll recordings, 'The Classical Reproducing Piano Roll' (Greenwood Press, 1990), shows that seven pianists in all issued piano roll recordings of the Liszt Sonata:

D'ALBERT	Eugen	Welte	2987-2988
FRIEDHEIM	Arthur	Triphonola	51890-51891
GAYRAUD	Paul	Pleyela	5433-5435
KEITEL	Friedrich	Duca	1214-1215
SCHELLING	Ernest	Duo-Art	57700, 57860, 57990
SCHNITZER	Germaine	Welte	896-897
WEISS	Josef	Duca	436-437

D'Albert and Friedheim were pupils of Liszt.

Denis Condon's Sydney collection has over 8,000 piano rolls and although not the largest collection in the world it is the most important because of the historical significance of so many of the rolls. It contains 'Duo-Art Piano Music', a classified catalogue of music recorded for the Duo-Art Reproducing Piano, 587 pages, (The Aeolian Company, New York, 1927) and other rare books and indexes relating to reproducing pianos and rolls.

The collection contains the 1913 d'Albert and 1916 Schelling rolls.



Liszt pupil Eugen d'Albert

## **D'Albert**

Liszt pupil Eugen d'Albert (1864-1932) never actually studied the Sonata with Liszt but took it up some ten years after Liszt's death. Liszt wrote that he knew of 'no more gifted as well as dazzling talent than d'Albert'.

D'Albert issued a highly 'edited' edition of the Sonata, and an edition of the E flat major piano concerto with some annotations providing Liszt's comments ascertained in discussions with him at Weimar in 1885. In later years d'Albert concentrated on composition rather than on his career as a concert pianist.

D'Albert's 1913 roll was recorded on a Feurich grand piano and has been reproduced by Denis Condon using his original Welte piano rolls on his 1922 Steinway-Welte Mignon upright piano.

The d'Albert recording is included in the compact disc that comes with this book.

Welte made and supplied a vorsetzer (robot pianist) as an option for those who wanted to reproduce Welte rolls on their own piano. No reproducing roll manufacturer other than Welte and Hupfeld provided the option of a vorsetzer for its own rolls. The development of the licensee Welte Mignon reproducing piano in the USA is another story which has no bearing on the present subject.

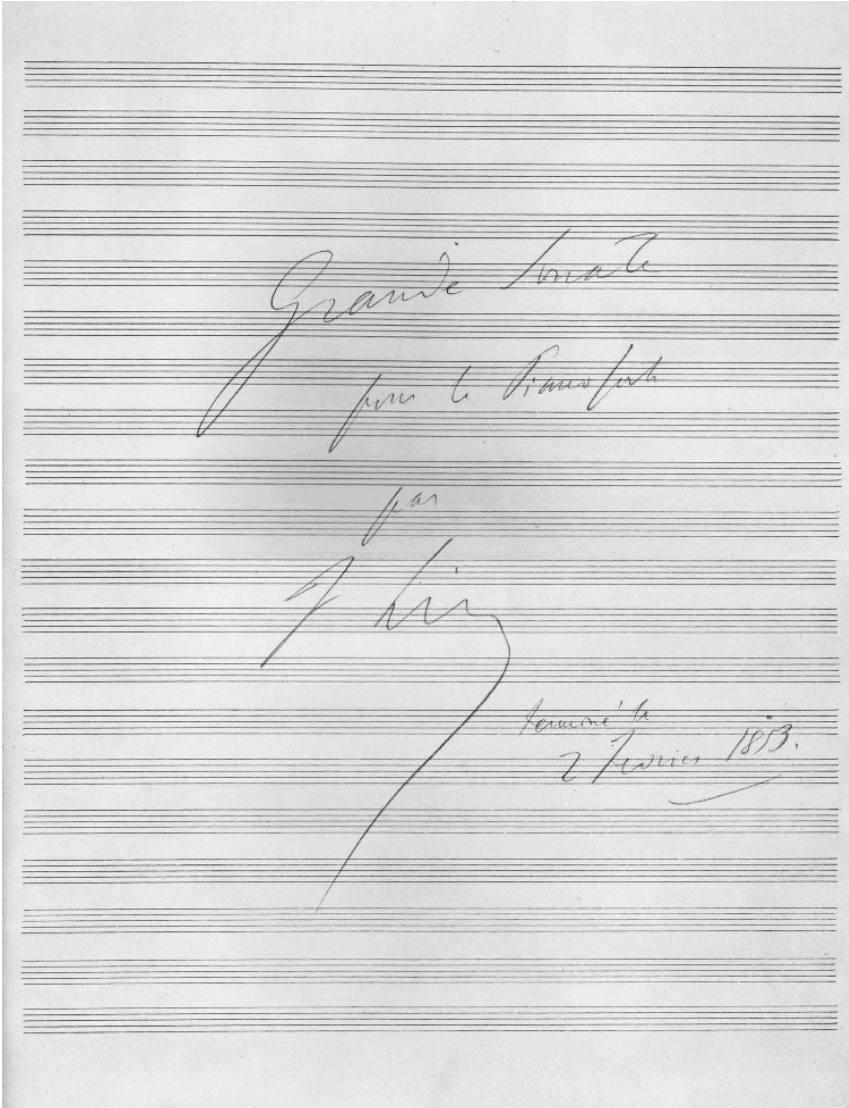
Denis Condon has a Welte green roll vorsetzer in working order but could not use it on this occasion as the d'Albert roll in his collection is a red Welte roll. Red rolls are 328mm (12 ¾") and green rolls are 286mm (11 ¼") in width. He has, in addition, custom-made his own Duo Art and Ampico vorsetzers so that those rolls can be reproduced on his Yamaha grand piano fitted with the Disklavier-Pro.

'C' is the lowest note possible on red Welte piano rolls, which accounts for the fact that the final 'B' is missing from the roll. Why d'Albert did not play the higher 'B' is unknown. If he forgot that 'C' was the lowest note possible on red Welte piano rolls this is evidence that he did not double the 'B' at the octave.

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# *11 Manuscript*

Franz Liszt, Sonata in B minor



This image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on ten staves. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key annotations include:

- Staff 1: *(colla ped.)*
- Staff 2: *lento con grazia*
- Staff 4: *meno rallentando* and *molto ritardando*
- Staff 5: *a tempo*
- Staff 6: *sempre più vivo*
- Staff 7: *cantabile quasi*

The score concludes with a double bar line and a final chord marked with *rit.* and *f*.

Handwritten musical score on a page with a large bracket on the left side. The score consists of several staves of music. At the top left, there is a handwritten note: "now rall - - 1923". The first staff has a large section of music that is heavily crossed out with diagonal lines. The second staff has the word "Cello" written above it and "Solo" written below it. The third staff has the number "234" written above it. The fourth staff has the word "Tempo" written to its left. The fifth and sixth staves contain musical notation with various notes and rests. The seventh staff has the word "Solo" written above it. At the bottom right of the page, there is a handwritten signature and the numbers "106", "24", and "170" stacked vertically.

This image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on aged paper. The score is organized into several systems of staves. The first system features a treble clef staff with the word "apilato" written below it. The second system includes a bass clef staff with "crescendo" written below, and a treble clef staff with "poco" written below. The third system has a treble clef staff with "solissimo" written below. The fourth system features a treble clef staff with "allargando" and "crescendo molto" written below. The fifth system consists of a treble clef staff with various musical notations. The sixth system is a single treble clef staff with a melodic line. In the bottom right corner, there are handwritten numbers: 190, 11, and 205.

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## *13 Compact Disc*

### **Piano Sonata in B minor**

**Franz Liszt**

1. **Eugen d'Albert**      1913 Welte      21'00"

D'Albert's 1913 piano roll recording on a Feurich grand piano was reproduced by Denis Condon using his original Welte piano rolls on his 1922 Steinway-Welte Mignon upright piano.

2. **Ernest Schelling**      1916 Duo-Art      25'00"

Schelling's 1916 piano roll recording was reproduced by Denis Condon on his Yamaha grand piano (fitted with the Disklavier-Pro) from his Disklavier floppy disc taken from his original Duo-Art piano rolls as reproduced on that piano with his custom-made Duo-Art vorsetzer.

**FRANZ LISZT'S PIANO SONATA  
GERARD CARTER  
WENSLEYDALE PRESS**



Franz Liszt completed his monumental Piano Sonata in B minor at Weimar in 1853 and it was published the following year. It met with a mixed reception from the musical establishment of the day but is now a part of the repertoire of every leading pianist and may even be the most frequently performed piano piece in the concert hall.

It is the outstanding example of the compositional process of thematic transformation, and the grandeur and lyrical power of its themes, based on three motifs so clearly stated at the outset, place it at the pinnacle of piano literature.

Performances by the composer and his pupils are chronicled in 'Franz Liszt's Piano Sonata', and the Sonata's editions and interpretative traditions are discussed by the author who also offers his own analysis of the Sonata's enigmatic and chameleon-like structure which has fascinated musicologists for 150 years.

This book comes with a compact disc containing the historic 1913 piano roll recording of the Sonata by celebrated Liszt pupil Eugen d'Albert and the 1916 piano roll recording by another celebrated pianist of the time, Ernest Schelling.

**Gerard Carter B Ec, LL B, A Mus A** studied the Liszt Sonata during his student days at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and in the intervening years has performed, read about, listened to and above all enjoyed it. He brings his experience as the published author of many books on legal subjects, and his extensive musical knowledge, to present this book which also marks the sesquicentenary of the publication of the original edition of Liszt's masterpiece.