

Next on

Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, September 1st, 2012, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828). *Wanderer Fantasy* (1822), orch. Franz Liszt. Philip Thomson, piano, Hungarian State Orchestra, Kerry Stratton. Hungaroton 31525, Tr 2, 22:28

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897). *Liebeslieder Waltzes* (1868-9). Ensemble Vocal Michel Piquemal, Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, Armin Jordan. Erato 45457, Tr 1-9, 14:32

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). Prelude and Fugue in E-flat, “St. Anne” (1739?), orch. Arnold Schoenberg. Los Angeles Philharmonic, Esa-Pekka Salonen. Sony/CBS 89012, Tr 6–7, 15:24

Music will always challenge our assumptions, if we let it.

For a couple of generations now, those who unearthed music from earlier times have wanted to play it the way it sounded in those earlier times. These “authentic” or “historically informed” performances opened our ears to new delights hidden in Medieval and Renaissance music. As playing techniques and instruments improved, the movement grew to encompass Baroque and Classical music. Even Romantic and later music have been influenced by the growing research. We can now listen to Brahms symphonies on “original” instruments.

The quote marks around “authentic,” “historically informed,” and “original” are deliberate because the early-music experts know better than anyone that exactly recreating a centuries-old listening experience is impossible. For starters, conflicting manuscripts often make divining the composer’s original intent very difficult. Add in often-unknown tunings, playing abilities, halls, and audience expectations, and we begin to see the scope of the problem.

But when we hear ancient reeds skirling, or notice the ever-warm Brahms even warmer with gut strings and natural horns, we feel that we can better approach a closer understanding of the music.

And just when we’re patting ourselves on the back for being so open-minded, someone comes along and slaps us on the side of the head.

Franz Liszt alters a perfectly fine Schubert solo piano piece, the *Wanderer Fantasy*, into piano-with-orchestra. More than just perfectly fine, the *Wanderer* is a summation of Schubert’s piano writing. It’s very difficult as a piano work, but Liszt, the leading virtuoso of his day, could certainly play it as it was. So why did he mess with it? Because he loved Schubert. He wanted to hear all the possibilities of this music transformed into a modern orchestra. Liszt searched deeper than composer’s intent (and being himself a great composer, Liszt knew all about the slipperiness of intent). He searched deeper than notes on a page for what every composer wants: music that lives on, no matter what.

Brahms wrote his adorable *Liebeslieder Waltzes* for singers with two pianos. The Fleisher Collection has an arrangement for string orchestra, and then there’s this recording of singers with full orchestra, blooming the sounds outward until they change the entire character of the piece. Does it succeed? Hard to say; it may depend on asking ourselves the question, Do we love Brahms because of it?

The J.S. Bach “St. Anne” Prelude and Fugue for organ is the most stark example challenging us on this program. Schoenberg rips the titanic work apart, then rebuilds it into a modern monument. Far from an attempt to get close to Bach (let alone the sound of an organ), Schoenberg’s orchestration spirits Bach to now, imagining what the old master might say now, with the resources available now.

Audacious, isn’t it, but is it so silly? Listening to this stunningly brilliant orchestration, we think, Maybe not. Maybe less so, when we remember that Bach himself wrote the Prelude and Fugue as a re-imagining of the chorale of two centuries before *his* time. He was re-living and re-working the music *he* loved. He searched deeper than notes, and passed it onto us.

Maybe what Bach was saying was this: Challenge your assumptions.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), former Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).