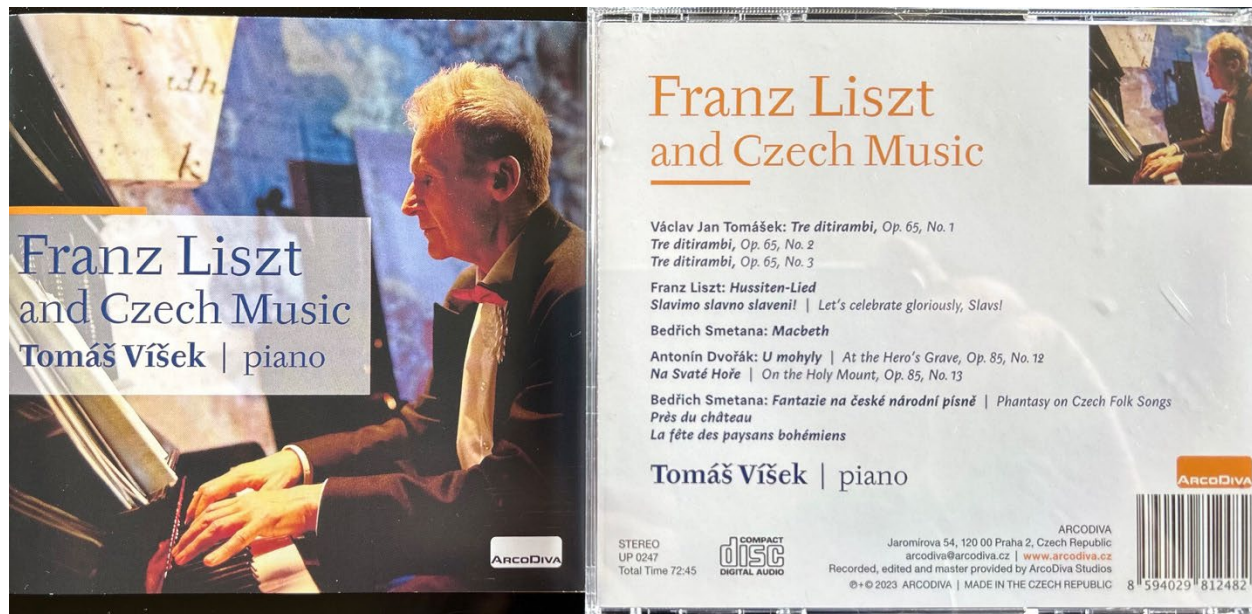


## CD Review: Franz Liszt and Czech Music Tomas Visek piano



Czech pianist Tomas Visek, born 1957, started to play the piano with 8 years under professor Pavel Svoboda. From 1972 – 1976 Visek attended the Prague Conservatory and from 1976 – 1984 the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. In addition Visek continued postgraduate studies from 1990 – 1993. In 2017, he obtained the Ph.D. title at the Pedagogical Faculty of the reknown Charles University in Prague with his dissertation “Attraction and Problems of the A. Dvorak’s Piano Works. Mr.Visek received many awards at national and international piano competitions like in 1975 at the Chopin competition in Warsaw and in 1978 the Smetana competition in Hradec. In 1992 followed Second Prize at the Vienna International Competition and in 2013 First Prize at the Concours Musical de France in Paris besides many others in Europe and the USA.

The musical education of this Czech pianist is based exclusively on the traditions of his homeland. Tomas Visek knows the entire piano works of the great Czech composers, knows the cultural environment of his homeland, the localities; in a word: thanks to his talent and diligence, Tomas Visek is the expert on the piano works recorded here.

The pianist chose relatively unknown works by Tomasek, Smetana and Dvorak, all of which have a special reference to Liszt. The two Liszt works recorded here, however, are Liszt's artistic homage to the Czechoslovakian music. One is the "Hussite Song", a concert paraphrase. Liszt assumed that this was a song from the 15th century. Tomas Visek explains to us that it is actually a patriotic text by the Czech mystic and poet Václav Hanka (1791-1861), whose text was set to music as a song in 1825 by Theodor Krov (1797-1859). The other recording is Liszt's short piano piece „SLAVIMO SLAVNO SLAVENI!“. This is a title in old Slavic language, meaning “Let’s celebrate gloriously, Slavs!” , which Liszt wrote on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of the arrival of the Slavic apostles Cyril and Methodius in Moravia. It is a small religious composition which Liszt also wrote for male choir with organ and for organ solo.

The orchestral pompous arrangement of the Hussite Song is ideally introduced with the "Tre Ditirambi" op.65 by the Czech early romantic composer Václav Jan Tomasek (1774-1850).

A breath of the theater wafts through these exuberant pieces. You hear the fanfares and orchestral introductions, then you are reminded of a lamento aria from operas from Rossini to Auber. Hummel's brilliant piano style and Chopin's early style of his rondeaux and concert pieces are also striking. In any case, it is a truly refreshing pleasure to listen to the three Ditirambi.

The close relationship between Smetana and Liszt is confirmed by the dedication of Smetana's Opus 1 to Liszt. Smetana's artistic credo also reinforces this relationship with his comment that he strives to emulate Liszt in piano technique and Mozart in composition. The two works recorded here from the piano cycle "Dreams" composed in 1875 are particularly interesting. In the "Près du Château", the harsh, archaic march rhythm is reminiscent of Liszt's late style. At the same time, the middle section of this composition, the "dolce amoroso" with its repeated notes, almost conjures up Liebestraum No. 3. Another number from Smetana's piano cycle "Dreams", the polka "La fête des paysans bohémiens", takes up in the „Più lento“ the typical Thalberg-Liszt technique of melody lines with two alternating hands. As in "The Fantasy on Czech Folk Songs", a potpourri that imitates the Liszt model of opera paraphrases and finally the unique piano piece "Macbeth and the Witches" who is a veritable symphonic poem.

From Dvorak's piano works, the pianist chose two numbers from the late piano cycle "Poetic Tone Pictures" op.85, composed in the year of 1889. In the 12th number "At a Hero's Grave" we feel a close connection to Liszt's piano piece "La Notte" as well to Liszt's 5th Hungarian Rhapsody "Héroïde-Élégiaque". Again in the 13th number, "On the Holy Mountain", a monastery near Pribram in the Central Bohemian Region, the choral, accompanied by harplike arpeggios, is in spiritual connection to Liszt's late works for the so called "Salon religieux".

Tomas Visek plays with astonishing power and virtuosity. At the same time his absolute control over any pianissimo cadences, even played prestissimo, are executed with such clearness of touch. This recording with rather unknown piano music gives a comprehensive overview of Liszt's traces to Czech music. Any music lover of Czech music will enjoy this excellent CD programming.

It can be acquired at ARCODIVA as UP 0247 : [arcodivac.cz](http://arcodivac.cz) [www.arcodiva.cz](http://www.arcodiva.cz)

Richard Frank, Liszt Society Switzerland Japan, Nov. 2024