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classical music reviews, news & interviews

## Classical CDs Weekly: Dubois, Sam Hayden, Liszt

A little-known French romantic, Liszt in contrasting moods and startling sounds from a contemporary British composer

by [Graham Rickson](#) | Saturday, 25 August 2012

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**Liszt: Totentanz, Malédiction, Les Préludes, Hungarian Fantasy, Mephisto Waltz no 1 etc** *Andrea Kauten (piano), Savaria Symphony Orchestra/Ádám Medveczky (Sony)*



Liszt's *Totentanz* invites the listener to grin as hard as it tries to terrify, coming from a composer whose death obsession led him to make a habit of visiting the cells of prisoners awaiting execution. These variations for piano and orchestra on the *Dies Irae* unfold with a cheeky inventiveness which is never quite squashed by the score's blacker moments; if *Totentanz* was a person it would sport a waxed moustache and wear a black cape. Within seconds you can hear how it influenced the likes of Rachmaninov and Bartók. Andrea Kauten's fearless physicality in the louder solo passages is fabulous. She's also marvellous in the *Malédiction*, an extended single movement far less sinister than the title might suggest. I've never been made so aware of the crucial orchestral percussion in Liszt's *Hungarian Fantasy* as I have in this performance; Ádám Medveczky's Savaria Symphony Orchestra offer vibrant support throughout. They also give us an imposing *Les Préludes*.

The pounding fifths at the start of the first *Mephisto Waltz* retain their shock value. Kauten's accounts of the pieces making up the Italian-themed second year of *Années de Pèlerinage* are unusually bold and commanding. The three *Petrarch Sonnets* show her dreamier, more reflective side and the set ends with an emphatic, enjoyable assault on Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody no 14*. A comprehensive Liszt greatest hits compilation, beautifully produced and well-annotated.

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