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Via Lucis through Music

A Cheshire based lecturer who works at the University of Manchester, is set to bring an extraordinary piece of work of 19th century Hungarian composer and virtuoso pianist, Franz Liszt, to Catholic cathedrals and other prestigious venues throughout Britain.

Alessandra Pompili is a classical pianist who focuses on the presentation of original and creative programmes to audiences, ranging from monographic to historical recitals and, most recently, to the combination between live music and visual support. She has performed as a soloist to critical public acclaim with complimentary critiques in important venues and festivals both in Italy and Britain.

Born in Rome, Alessandra gained diplomas in Italy and France before arriving in Britain some nine years ago. As well as pursuing her musical ambitions,

she also studied the History of Art and Archaeology, obtaining a degree, a postgraduate degree, an MA and a PhD at the University of Manchester. She has since been lecturing on the subject at the university.

As far back as 2006, Alessandra started recording recitals as a solo pianist for Vatican Radio and in 2008, was asked to produce a series of programmes. She was given carte blanche on the content for the series and, because she had admiration for the work of Franz Liszt and the 200th anniversary of his birth was on the horizon, decided to embark on a project focusing on his work.

Many months were spent in research for the series of programmes and during this time] she began uncovering many little known facts about the celebrated pianist who composed a lot of music that was inspired by his religious feelings.

She says: "I discovered that Liszt spent time in Rome and met German painter Friederich Overbeck. He was a member of a group of artists known as 'The Nazarenes' and had produced a series of 14 paintings illustrating the Stations of the Cross."

Liszt was so inspired by Overbeck's paintings that he became determined to compose a piece for piano on the same theme. He had received minor orders in 1865 and had become progressively absorbed by the composition of sacred works and by a quest for daring experimentations in music writing.



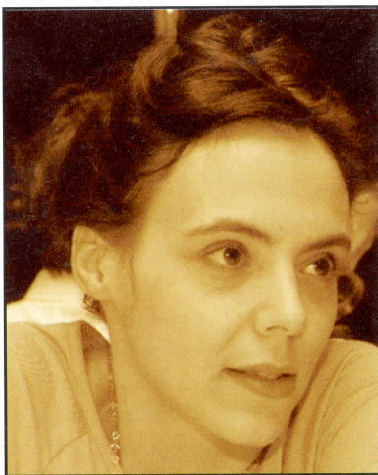
And so it was, that between 1876 and 1879, Liszt wrote his *Via Crucis*, described by Alessandra as: “a varied and striking composition that strives to be a vivid and deep reflection of the last hours of Jesus’ life.”

Finding herself inspired by *Via Crucis* Alessandra continued her research and discovered that Liszt had intended to perform some of his works with the accompaniment of images projected to his audience.

Although no record exists to suggest Liszt did so with *Via Crucis*, Alessandra became determined to create a performance whereby Liszt’s original concept could be realised.

She says: “I considered, we have the music, we have the paintings, why not try to combine them both. Liszt was an advocate of the unity of the arts, so I thought, ‘why not?’”

Working alongside the Vatican Radio production, *A Life in Seven Hours: A Journey Through the Life and the Works of Franz Liszt*, which was broadcast via seven programmes from December last year until January this year, Alessandra embarked on a project where Overbeck’s paintings, which are not on public display, but have been released with special permission of the Vatican, could accompany her performance of Liszt’s masterpiece.



Alessandra explains: “My project combines the live performance of *Via Crucis* with a video in which each of Overbeck’s paintings is not merely displayed as a still image but is fragmented, re-assembled, cut-through and combined with the words that would have been sung by the choir or the soloists if these were present.

“All videos have been produced so as to be synchronised with the music and in such a way to aid the audience at a visual understanding of the structure of the work.”

Alessandra is clear why she hopes the project, which is very much dear to her heart, will be well received. She says: “I would like to perform this version of the *Via Crucis* as widely as possible, not just because the music or the paintings are worthy, but it’s the whole theme which

connects with my beliefs and is something perhaps we should all remember more and make a bigger part of our lives.”

Described as: “an exquisite and sensitive pianist”, Alessandra has taken her ‘labour of love’ project out on the road and has combined free of charge performances at Catholic venues like Birkenhead Catholic College and Sheffield Cathedral with commercial dates at prestigious festivals and arenas. ■

For other dates, visit:
www.alessandrapompili.com