

FRANZ LISZT

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2011 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of the composer Franz Liszt and this article is written to commemorate that. I will not say anything new, but I do acknowledge my teacher Humphrey Searle, who is the world expert on Liszt, and I have used the notes I made from his lectures.

It is sad that some people decry Liszt. One editor of a music journal wrote that Liszt was not a good composer and could not write for the piano whereas this editor cannot read music or play an instrument.

Liszt wrote so much music that it is impossible to write about it and so I have confined myself to what may be best works. If all his piano solo works were recorded it would take about 100 CDs. Some of his works are sensationally good, others are not.

Adam Liszt was born on 16 December 1776 in Nemesvolgy, Hungary and married Maria Anna Lager, who was born on 9 May 1788 in Krems. Her father, Matthias, was a successful baker with a lovely house and his wife was Franziska Romana Schumann (1757-1797) the daughter of a clock maker. Both of them originated from humble Austrian stock. Adam and Maria married in Unterfrauenhaid on 11 January 1811 and their only child, Ferenc, was born on 22 October 1811 at Raiding in Hungary when his father was an inspector of sheep on the Esterhazy estate in Eisenstadt in the employ of Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy. Previously, Adam was in great favour with the royal household playing the cello in the Court Orchestra and having Haydn and Hummel as occasional conductors. Adam also played the violin, piano and the guitar and was close to the Prince being a regular guest at important social events such as sea trials and parties. But in 1809, Adam took the job of looking after the sheep on the estate. It has been suggested that this was a demotion but the facts now seem to be that the health inspector of sheep paid better and that is why Adam applied for the job.

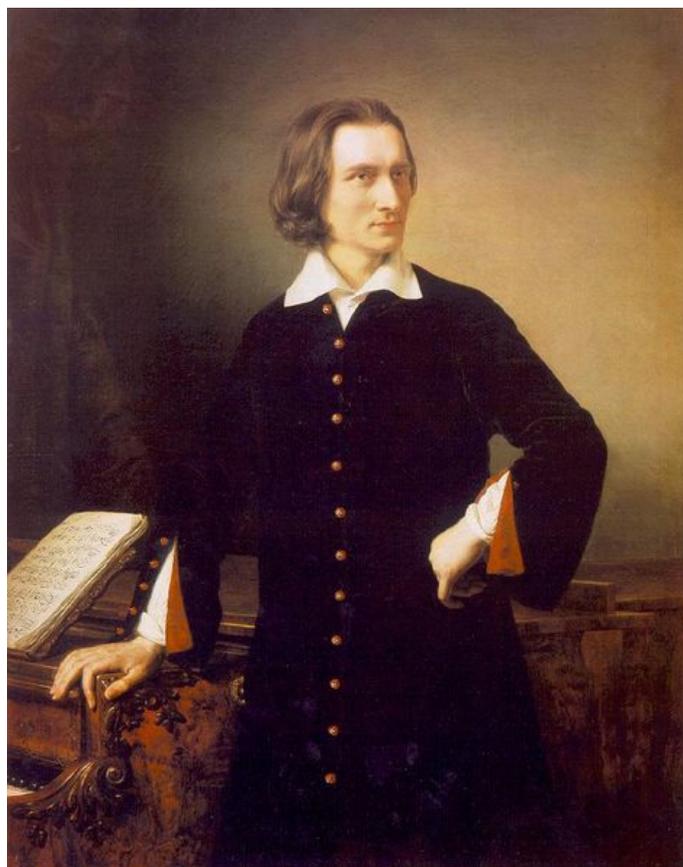
In 1795, Adam was a novice in the Franciscan Order. He was 19. But after two years this came to an end and the reason given was that he was of variable character.

By the age of six, young Liszt was fascinated by the piano playing of his father which influenced him throughout his life. The boy also enjoyed gypsy music and dance and was profoundly moved by Christian music which also was a great influence in his life, encouraged by his father's piety, which eventually established him in the Christian faith.

It has been said that Liszt's greatest works come from the time that he was a Christian, that is to say from about 1861 onwards. Such works include the Requiem of 1867, the Te Deum of 1867, the third set of Annees de pelerinage of 1867, the Missa Choralis of 1869 and many of his exquisite songs.

But, before this and, indeed, before his 50th birthday, Liszt had written some amazing works. The Piano Sonata (1852-3) is undoubtedly the finest work in this genre, the Piano Concerto no. 1, sketched in 1832 was revised in 1849 and 1853 and premiered at Weimar on 17 February 1855. It is a thrilling work. The final version of the Transcendental Studies of 1851 is another fine work written before he was 50.

Liszt invented the symphonic poem and wrote thirteen, of which Les Preludes, written between 1848-1854,



Franz Liszt, portrait by Miklós Barabás, (1847)

is deservedly popular. His oratorio, *The Legend of St Elisabeth* of 1857-1862 is a masterpiece and contains some of the most beautiful music ever written. Mention must be made of his *Harmonies poetiques et religieuses* for piano which contain some pieces of a quality beyond words such as *Funerailles* and *Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude*.

But to return to his childhood. By 1818 Liszt, only seven years old, was already a very fine pianist and an incredible sight reader. He was also encouraged to improvise on themes of other composers, often themes submitted to him, which probably set the scene for all the transcriptions he was to compose throughout his life. The next year, 1819, he began to compose.

In October 1820, he made his public debut at Oedenburg playing Ries's Piano Concerto no. 4 in E flat, Op 115. This concert was arranged by Baron Sigismund Braun a young blind flautist who was out of favour and thought that a concert with a wonder child would restore his fortunes. Liszt also gave another successful concert on 26 November 1820 dressed in braided Hungarian costume and, as a result, several wealthy Hungarians decided to sponsor him and pay for his musical education.

Vienna was the centre of the musical world and, in 1821, the Liszt family moved to the Austrian capital, although some say it was spring 1822, where Ferenc studied with Carl Czerny for piano and the great Salieri for composition. Both Czerny and Salieri never charged Liszt a fee for any lesson. The following year, Liszt wrote his first published work, the *Tantum Ergo* for choir, now sadly lost, but the 1869 setting is said to be based on the earlier setting. Also in 1822, Liszt contributed to a composite work, *Variations on a theme of Diabelli*, of which Beethoven was later to write 33 variations. Other contributors to this composite work were Schubert, Czerny, Hummel and Kalkbrenner. Liszt was only 11.

He made his debut in Vienna on 1 December 1822 and this was a great success, and at a second concert on 13 April 1823 when it is alleged that Beethoven greeted him with a kiss... but Beethoven was not there and, in any event, he was now deaf and would not have heard the music. The other fact is that Beethoven was adverse to child prodigies and he was quite unapproachable.

In the autumn of 1823, 20th September in fact, Liszt and his family moved to Paris and en route gave concerts in several German towns including Munich and Stuttgart. He was refused entry into the Paris Conservatoire by Cherubini on the grounds that he was foreigner but he continued to study theory with Reicha and composition with Ferdinando Paer on his return to Paris after his London tour. Paris grew to love this teenager.

His London debut was at the Argyll Rooms on 21 June 1824 where he played Hummel's A minor concerto, some Variations for piano and orchestra by Carl Czerny and a set of Variations for mandolin and piano by Mayseder. The mandolin was played by Signor Vimercati. In the audience were Clementi, Cramer, Kalkbrenner, Ciprani Potter, Ries and the conductor was Sir George Smart. At the end of July he played at Windsor Castle before George IV with music by Handel and Mozart and, at the King's request, improvised on a theme of Mozart.

He went to London again and played before the King again at Windsor and at the Drury Lane Theatre. He had composed an opera, *Don Sanche*, and the overture was performed in Manchester in 1825. He had now written some brilliant works for the piano the *Eight Variations* said to Opus 1, and the *Seven brilliant variations* on a theme of Rossini, known as Opus 2.

Don Sanche was scrutinised by the Academie Royale and approved by Cherubini and Boieldieu and the first performance was set for 17 October 1825 just before Liszt's fourteenth birthday. It had four performances but then the music was lost but rediscovered in 1903.

1825-1826 produced a lot of music from Liszt including several lost works including two piano concertos, three piano sonatas and chamber music.

The year 1827 saw Liszt at a potential cross roads. He took a third concert tour to England and played for the Philharmonic Society. His health began to fail and it must be remembered that he was sickly as a child. Now, at 16, he wanted solitude to ease his nervous exhaustion. He no longer enjoyed playing and the applause. He turned to books on theology such as Thomas a Kempis's masterpiece, *The Imitation of Christ*. The boy spent hours in daily prayer and considered becoming a priest. He approached his father about taking Holy Orders. His father responded, "You belong to art, not the Church."

But then his father died of typhoid fever in August 1827 in Boulogne where he was buried. Franz felt that he must honour his father's wishes and not become a priest.

The boy returned to Paris and to his mother. He had to sell his piano to afford to take a furnished apartment. Soon he had many pupils and the necessary income came in. Among his pupils was Caroline de Saint-Cricq, the daughter of a cabinet minister and an invalid mother. Caroline was sixteen, slender, blue-eyed, a brunette in the first flowering of womanhood and they fell in love and, as a consequence, the lessons got longer and longer. Passion entered Liszt's life and stayed there for the rest of his days. Caroline introduced him to the poetry of Victor Hugo, Dante and Lamartine. Her mother, who knew she was dying, encouraged the romance, but the father wanted Caroline to marry more appropriately and put an end to this romance telling Liszt that Caroline was shortly to marry the Count d'Artigaux.

The exquisite songs of Liszt often show Caroline's influence as, for example, in the masterpiece *Oh, quand je dors*. The literary influence is also shown in his symphonic poems but many expressed the view that a work of literature could not be successfully turned into a purely orchestral work particularly the works of Byron. One such objector was Berlioz who also set Byron as a purely orchestral score in *Harold in Italy*.

This introduces an important feature of Liszt's fundamentally good character based on his piety. The composers and musicians who treated him badly such as Berlioz and Chopin he never put down.

The removal of Caroline from his life caused him to consider the priesthood again and threw him into a religious crisis. But he felt that he had to provide for and care for his mother. She had not accompanied him on his concert journeys and perhaps Franz felt that they had lost quality time together. The other problem was that despite his religious fervour, he was a worldly young man.

What made the decision for him was a virtuoso violinist that came into his life whose name was Paganini and who gave his first recital in Paris on March 9, 1831 already suffering for the tubercular disease that was to kill him. Liszt was spellbound. It was at this time that he met Berlioz and the idea of a literary work being produced on a solo piano interested him and resulted in Liszt transcribing Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* for the piano. Most scholars and pianists do not regard this transcription highly and the work itself in its original form is positively disliked by a large percentage of people. However, it may have been the catalyst for Liszt to start playing the piano again after a lapse of four years or so.

Chopin arrived in Paris in 1831. It is reported that Berlioz took Liszt to a party at Chopin's apartment in 1833. The poet Heine was there as was George Sand, Eugene Delacroix, the composer Meyerbeer, whom Chopin hated because he was a Jew and had pointed out to Chopin that he played some of his own pieces in four four and not three four as he had written them. Also there was the Countess d'Agoult.

Marie d'Agoult was born on 31 December 1805 and had a marriage of convenience to Charles d'Agoult on 16 May 1827. They had two daughters: Louise (1828 -1834) and Claire (1830-1912). The d'Agoult's divorced on 19 August 1839 the same year as Marie and Liszt split up having had three children Blandine (18.12.1835), Cosima (25. 12. 1837) and Daniel (9.5 1839). After the birth of Daniel, Marie wrote four novels and a history of the revolution of 1848 under the pen name of Daniel Stern.

But to return to Liszt's first meeting with Marie. She was slender, with long blond hair, of a noble bearing and indeed very beautiful. As for Chopin, he did not want to play Liszt's music and he was certainly not

competent to meet its technical demands. Therefore Liszt played his own pieces.

Liszt and Chopin played in a benefit concert for Harriet Smithson the actress whom Berlioz married in October 1833. Liszt was a witness at the wedding. The following year, 1834, Liszt wrote a work for piano and orchestra based on Berlioz's *Leïla* which was conducted by Berlioz. The Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* in the transcription for piano by Liszt was completed in 1835.

When Marie went to her country home in the summer of 1833 she exchanged many letters with Liszt and her letters were of hero worship as well as love. "Your every word burns like a flame within my heart", she wrote. Liszt was a desirable young dandy. An affair ensued until October 1834 when one of her children, died. Six months later the lovers came together again. But such an affair created its problems and so, in the summer of 1835 they fled together to Geneva. Marie was pregnant. He was twenty-four and she was thirty. Their daughter, Blandine, was born on 18 December 1835

It was about this time that Liszt composed his first set of *Harmonies Poétiques et religieuses* and he began work in 1835 on his first set of *Annales de Pèlerinage: Switzerland* in appreciation of the country that was now his home with Marie. This set was written between 1835 and 1854 and the final movement, the ninth, is called *Les Cloches de Genève*. The second set of *Harmonies Poétiques et religieuses* date from 1845 and 1852 and is his first masterpiece. While all ten pieces are superb, the *Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude* and *Funérailles* are amazing works. This set of ten pieces was followed by another masterpiece, the *Piano Sonata* arguably the finest piano sonata ever written.

In 1837 there began the rivalry between Thalberg and Liszt. This is one blot on Liszt's otherwise fundamentally good character. He spoke against Thalberg and severely criticised his compositions. Thalberg was to become the blue-eyed boy of Paris Society and Liszt was jealous and anxious about his reception if he returned to Paris who now knew about his adultery with Countess d'Agoult. Liszt composed his 12 *Grand Etudes*, a completely original work. Liszt's second daughter, Cosima, was born in Como on 24 December 1837.

The *Etudes* after Paganini came out in 1838. It has to be said here that the virtuosity of Paganini inspired or increased Liszt's desire to write music in that vein. When in Rome, Liszt offered to pay the outstanding balance for the monument to Beethoven in that city and the relationship between Liszt and Marie began to break down.

On 9 May 1839, Daniel was born to Liszt and Marie, but, in October of that year, Marie left Liszt and went home to France.

One of the reasons for the break-up was that Marie loathed Chopin and abhorred Liszt's involvement with him. Liszt enjoyed the company both of Chopin and George Sand and this irritated her to such an extent that she wrote many letters which were poisonous. Chopin was a predator around women and had at least one gay relationship. Many contemporaries of his reported that Chopin had a venereal disease. One can understand Marie's revulsion of him. If I was around at the time I would not let my wife or daughters near him. The other fact is that Chopin was very unkind about Liszt. Another problem was that Liszt spent hours alone with George Sand although there is no suggestion of any impropriety.

Liszt immersed himself in work. In Pest in 1840, he was awarded the *Sword of Honour* for his musical achievements and he conducted for the first time. He was back in the concert hall on a regular basis touring Europe, London and Ireland. He met Schumann in Paris and later met Wagner. This was the year of the birth of Tchaikovsky and the death of Paganini.

Thalberg was born in Switzerland on 8 January 1812. He composed a *Fantasy* on themes from Bellini's *Norma* in 1834 and Liszt wrote a transcription of *Norma's* themes in 1841. Why? Was he being malicious and upstaging Thalberg? On 16 April 1841 Thalberg gave a most successful recital in Paris. It was sold out and the pianist earned the highest fee and profit of any pianist before him and for over a hundred later. Liszt

published a review in a journal saying that all of Thalberg's music was worthless and, in the process, made enemies and lost friends. In the previous eight years or so, people had been comparing these two musicians.

In contrast, Thalberg said, and in public, that Liszt's playing was sensational and unequalled. He invited Liszt to dinner and this was accepted. Eventually, the rivalry subsided and ceased and, at Thalberg's recital on 3 May 1848, Liszt sat on the stage spellbound and applauded heartily. He obviously regretted and had withdrawn his previous adverse comments.

This had an effect on Liszt, although this effect had been coming for some time. When fellow musicians turned against him and abused him, he did not retaliate and ignored such rudeness. Berlioz led a campaign of sorts against Liszt protesting at his Symphonic Poems saying how can a literary work be put into a wordless orchestral work. To some extent, this is a valid point. Literary titles can deter. For example, there is in Richard Strauss's Domestic Symphony a passage where he and his wife are copulating. This encourages the public to find this point in the music and that quest become more important than the work itself and raises debate as to whether this passage does convey the activity it represents.

Chopin was very unpleasant about Liszt because Chopin was a very unpleasant and obnoxious individual. Most of us would respond by telling the truth about Chopin, but Liszt did not.

Among Liszt's friends was Charles Valetín Alkan (1813-1888) an eccentric man who wrote a work about the death of a parrot and a movement called hell. He became a recluse around 1848. He was a virtuosic pianist

Franz Liszt Fantasizing at the Piano (1840), by Danhauser, commissioned by Conrad Graf. The imagined gathering shows seated Alfred de Musset or Alexandre Dumas, père, George Sand, Franz Liszt, Marie d'Agoult; standing Hector Berlioz or Victor Hugo, Niccolò Paganini, Gioachino Rossini; a bust of Beethoven on the grand piano (a "Graf"), a portrait of Byron on the wall, a statue of Joan of Arc on the far left.



but, being anti-social, seldom played in public. For a while, he lived next to Chopin and when Chopin died, he inherited some of his pupils.

I wish to break off here to set out Liszt's works for piano and orchestra. The first is the already mentioned Grand Symphonic Fantasy on themes from Berlioz's *Leïlo* of 1834. The work in its original form is not a good work and although Raff helped Liszt with his orchestration it is very poor and, as consequence, the work does not get played much. As many musicians have said, Liszt allows his technical inventiveness get out of hand and if Liszt thought anything of it he would have revised it because it is a really poor work. Liszt's transcription for solo piano of the *Symphonie Fantastique* is also very poor as is *Harold in Italy* whereas the transcription of *Les Franc jupes* is better.

The *Malediction Concerto* for piano and strings dates from about 1840 but was begun around 1830. The title is not Liszt's. The means curse or under a curse. The work is a stylish hybrid. The writing for the strings is barely adequate but the work has some charm with its religious feelings and Byronesque romanticism. The work begins with an anticipation of *Orage* from the first book of *Annees de pelerinage*. There is a motive which also appears in the *Faust Symphony*. There follows an early example of Liszt's 'transformation of themes' which mainly occupied his years at Weimar and endless broken octaves which was a characteristic of Viennese composers such as Schubert. *Malediction* seemed to drop off the face of the earth for a very long time until the Liszt expert Humphrey Searle discovered it in the 1930s.

The *Fantasy on themes from Beethoven's Ruins of Athens* of 1852 does not work. It has the weaknesses of over elaboration with brilliance of an obvious kind which does nothing for Beethoven. It is a show piece and not a honouring of Beethoven. There are long piano solos where Beethoven can neither be seen or heard. This is not promoting Beethoven; it is promoting Liszt.

The *Hungarian Fantasy* of 1852 stems from his *Hungarian Rhapsody* no. 14 in F minor. I have yet to hear a performance which adheres to the score. The last chords of the main theme's opening bars are a held crotchet whereas in the rhapsody it is a held dotted crotchet but pianists cut these last chords which are therefore followed by a rest. Not what Liszt wrote, so why play it like this? The work contains a theme typical of Hungarian gypsy bands and the usual pyrotechnics. The work does not flow but suffers for episodicism.

One of Liszt's literary works is about gypsy music.

With the *Piano Concerto* no. 1 in E flat we come to his finest work in this genre. It was written and revised from 1830 to 1855 and, sadly, it has become hackneyed. Everyone wants to play it and few can. Unfair things have been said about it. It has a form and coherence not in the previous works for piano and orchestra; it is rich in themes and the orchestration is inventive and superb... even the triangle adds sparkle. It is both lyrical and impetuous and while the whole work is magnificent, the final pages, if played well, are the most exciting pages in piano and orchestra literature... a stunning work. It was premiered by Liszt at Weimar in 1855 with Berlioz conducting.

The *Piano Concerto* no. 2 in A was written between 1839 and 1861, revised many times as Liszt was not satisfied with it. It has some splendid moments but the introduction of the jarring march is ill-advised. It reduces the work to banality and a march is an unlikely ingredient for a piano concerto. The glissandi can be exciting. As with Brahms, the two Liszt concertos are so diverse. The first is a masterpiece as it is with Brahms, but Brahms' *Second Concerto* is a let down. I do not want any misunderstanding here. Liszt's A major concerto is tremendous in many parts and the conclusion, like its predecessor, is exciting and a tremendous experience particularly in the hands of Marc Andre Hamelin.

The other feature of these concertos is the often chamber music feel particularly with woodwind solos and the cello solo in the second concerto.

The *Piano Concerto* no. 3 is a curious work. Did Liszt write it? The piano writing is clumsy and not usual

Liszt and one section of the work sounds like a fairground.

The Totentanz, a paraphrase on the Dies Irae of 1859 is a marvellous achievement. It was premiered at the Hague in 1865 with Hans von Bulow at the piano. The Dies Irae here is an ancient plainchant and inspired by the Orcagna fresco The Triumph of Death of souls resurrected from the dead and transported to eternal life in Heaven never to return to this evil world. The work begins in the depths while the orchestra gives out the Dies Irae theme. There are hints at Verdi's Miserere from Il Travotore of 1851 and variation five may suggest Paganini. Nonetheless it is an amazing work vastly superior to the piano solo version because of the richness of colour and contrast that the orchestra supplies.

Someone has written. "It's a good job Chopin was not around when the Liszt concertos and Totentanz were performed. Liszt was a far better composer than Chopin. Just listen to the Chopin concertos... there is virtually no colour. They are piano solos with an occasional dollop of colour from the orchestra whereas Liszt's works are better written for the piano and the orchestra."

Carolyn Iwanowski was born in the Ukraine in 1819, the only child of a wealthy Polish couple. She developed into an eccentric, a keen horsewoman, had a Catholic faith which some have said bordered on mania and, like George Sand, has an addiction to cigars. In 1836 she married Prince Nicholas von Sayn-Wittgenstein (1812-1864) an army officer of modest means. They had a daughter Marie Pauline Antoinette (1837-1920) but their marriage did not last.

Carolyn met Liszt when she was twenty eight. She was not the type of person that Liszt would be attracted to. She was not pretty but small and loquacious. She had this weakness for cigars, had a vast amount of Catholic paraphernalia and, eventually, wrote 24 volumes about the weaknesses of the Catholic Church. All of her strange behaviour made her the subject of mockery and ridicule. Nonetheless she and Liszt embarked upon an affair.

The years 1839-1847 were described by Heine as Lisztomania. Liszt travelled extensively giving concerts in England, Scotland, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Russia and other countries, twenty one in all. He received acclaim in Pest in 1840 where he was presented with the Sword of Honour and conducted for the first time. In England he played before Queen Victoria. In the years 1841-1843 he met up with Marie and the children at Nonnewerth on the Rhine for holidays. He made transcriptions of Mozart's Don Giovanni, Bellini's Norma and other operatic works and composed some of his lovely songs. In 1842 he performed at twenty one public concerts in Berlin with tremendous success and gave private concerts in that city as well, and this was also the year of his visit to Russia. He met Cesar Franck and was appointed Kapellmeister at Weimar. 1843 saw him in Russia again where he met Glinka and Dargomizhsky. The following year he attended the premiere of Wagner's Rienzi but, sadly, made the final break with Marie although they did continue to correspond. Liszt had attended a recital by Chopin and this dismayed Marie who had every reason to hate Chopin. In 1845, Liszt spent time in Portugal and Spain and, in 1846, he turned again to gypsy music.

He conducted Beethoven's Pastoral symphony and Spontini's Olympia overture. He also conducted opera but that was not a great success at first. His successes, which were phenomenal was in his playing. He played to full houses everywhere gaining financially not only for himself but for the halls and organisers. No other pianist had or as ever had such acclaim.

In Berlin, he met Spohr and was friendly with Spontini and Meyerbeer but he was not always admired by Mendelssohn who said that Liszt was a wild player who did not stick to the score but included idiotic pranks into his playing and that he was a mere showman serving himself which to him was more important than what the composer wrote. Others said that his transcriptions of opera excerpts was not to promote those operas or their composers but Liszt himself. However, his arrangements of orchestral works for piano, where he kept to the text, are remarkable such as, for example, the Tannhauser Overture of Wagner.

There is truth in these criticisms although such transcriptions were fashionable in those days and many composers made them. Some still do like Horowitz's version of the Hungarian Rhapsody no 2. It make be exciting but it is not all Liszt and was a vehicle for Horowitz to show off. Marc-Andre Hamelin wrote a substantial cadenza for this work but it is not Liszt. He would have done better to make his contribution a separate work. The idea that such transcriptions were made by Liszt and for him to perform to make opera better known or to promote them to the masses is not true. Only the well off could go to the opera in those days. The ordinary working man and his family would not be able to afford such a luxury and the necessary clothes to attend such an event.

The years 1848-1861 are called the Weimar Years. In 1848, Liszt was a guest at Prince Lichnowsky at his castle waiting the arrival of Carolyne from Russia. The Prince was later assassinated outside the Frankfurt parliament in September. He was only 34. Liszt, having befriended Smetana succeeded in getting his Opus 1 published. This was also the year that Liszt took Princess Carolyne to his home town of Raiding. He visited Wagner in Leipzig and established his home in Weimar He composed his six Consolations for piano, a Mass for male chorus and the symphonic poems Les Preludes and Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne. The latter is not a good piece and somewhat dependant on Berlioz.

It was the year of political uprisings in Vienna, Prague, Poland, parts of Italy and the Danube areas. A republican government was established in Paris. And Marx and Engels produced the Communist manifesto.

In 1849, Liszt conducted Wagner's Tannhauser. Wagner had had to flee from Dresden during the unsuccessful Dresden revolt. Liszt completed his own symphonic poem Tasso and his second book of the Annes de pelerinage: Italy. And, all the time, political upheavals were still continuing as politicians fought for power.

The following year saw Liszt give the first performance of Wagner's Lohengrin. The nineteen year old Joachim became the leader of the Weimar orchestra. Liszt completed two more symphonic poems Prometheus and Heroide Funebre and his monumental organ masterpiece, the Fantasia and Fugue on Ad nos, ad salutarem undam based on an idea from Meyerbeer's Le Prophete. It is a pity that Busoni arranged this for solo piano since in this version the grandeur and splendour is lost. As Liszt wrote it, it is a compelling and amazing work and should not be altered.

Liszt was constantly drawn to other composers and, in 1851, he composed the Wanderer Fantasy for piano and orchestra based on a Schubert solo piano work in four movements with the same theme for each movement. Schubert's piano writing is very poor, full of repetition, scales and broken chords. (See my article on [Schubert](#)). It is said that Raff helped Liszt with the Wanderer Fantasy, particularly the orchestration as he had with some of the symphonic poems and Carolyne told Liszt not to depend on Raff any more.

Liszt's transcriptions of Schubert songs were several and composed for him to play to audiences that admired Schubert and not for any other reason. It must be remembered that Vienna in particular, the people worshipped Schubert and composers of bon bons and other trivial music with an immaturity akin to those today who idolise some trashy pop groups.

Franz Liszt spent time on more worthy projects such as his symphonic poem Mazeppa and the final version of his Etudes d'execution transcendendante and his Grand Studies after Paganini, magnificent virtuoso works.

I must point out that the Transcendental Studies are now so called but that can be a misleading title. It is not the studies that are transcendental but that they call for a transcendental pianist to be able to play them. As well as Liszt, I wonder who else could have played them at that time.

It was Carolyne who was behind the book that Liszt wrote about Chopin. In it, Liszt refers to Chopin's religious faith which may have been the bond between them as Liszt often considered taking holy orders. Liszt refers to Chopin's daring harmonies and poetic music but does not go overboard about it. He calls Chopin a reserved man and deals with his poor health although he does not mention Chopin's venereal

disease. Nor does Liszt make any reference to the admirable Jane Stirling but elevates Georges Sand.

Venereal disease can damage the heart, the aorta, the eyes, the bones and the brain causing madness, and contemporary eye witnesses confirm that Chopin had this disease as did Schubert and Hugo Wolf which may explain why some of their works are very poor.

Despite Berlioz's severe criticism of Liszt's symphonic poems, Liszt conducted the premiere of Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini* and arranged a Berlioz week in Weimar in the presence of the composer. Liszt also premiered Schumann's *Manfred*.

This is an aspect of Liszt that is seldom considered. He must have been a fine conductor managing such huge forces and complex scores and it also must be realised that composers were more than happy to entrust their new works to him.

It is very easy to say that Liszt was the greatest pianist of his day but he was also a splendid composer and a fine conductor.

Joachim left the orchestra after four years... one reason being to concentrate on a solo career and, about this time, Liszt composed his *Fantasy on Hungarian themes* for piano and orchestra.

The years 1852 and 1853 saw the completion of two of his greatest achievements for solo piano the *Harmonie poetiques e religieuses* and the *Sonata in B minor*. There also appeared the *Ballade no 2 in B minor*, another tremendous piece and the symphonic poem *Festklänge*. Incidentally, 1853 was the year of the appearance of Brahms' *Opus 1*, a *Piano Sonata in C* and, in the political world, Russia invaded the provinces of the Danube thus beginning the *Crimea War*.

Janacek was born in 1854, the year that Liszt premiered Schubert's opera *Alfonso and Estrella*. All of Schubert's stage works were flops and dreadful. Liszt conducted performances of several of his symphonic poems *Orpheus*, *Festklänge*, *Les Preludes*, in the revised version, *Tasso* and *Hungaria* and, apart from the final chorus, the *Faust Symphony* was completed.

All his life, Liszt was fascinated by death and the work of the personal Devil as, for example, seen in the *Mephisto Waltz no. 1*, *Dante Sonata* (which begins with a portrait of Purgatory) *Totentanz* and the *Faust Symphony*. "Of course, " there is a personal devil," he wrote, " and a heaven and hell, perhaps a second chance when you are dead to be released from Purgatory."

Another major work about life and death is the *Symphonic Poem: From the Cradle to the Grave* of 1882. It is in three parts representing birth, life and death. The section representing life is subtitled the struggle for existence and the final section is entitled to the grave. Liszt was four years away from his final resting place. Incidentally, the orchestration is absolutely stunning particularly in the second section.

It has been suggested that while writing the *Faust Symphony*, and with these thoughts about death, his mind was reconsidering taking Holy Orders. But he was in a turmoil. He was conducting operas and concerts and *Carolyne* was encouraging him to produce more literary works.

But Liszt was also under attack. His popularity was waning. Everyone who has fame has it but for a while. He began an affair with *Agnes Street*, whose maiden name was *Klindworth*, a cousin of *Karl Klindworth* (1830-1916) who, with *Hans Von Bulow* (1830-1894) and others, were among Liszt's students at Weimar. There was correspondence between *Agnes* and Liszt from 1854 until his death in 1886 and these letters were explicit.

Agnes arrived in Weimar in 1853 thrilled at the prospect of piano lessons with Liszt, as was *Karl Klindworth*. She was very beautiful and was about 28 years old. It is assumed that she was a widow and she had two small boys. One child was fathered by *Ferdinand Lassalle*, a left wing revolutionary and friend of *Karl Marx*.

As to her father this was Georg Klindworth, Metternich's master spy, and this lead Agnes to be a political agent, a spy in fact.

She had piano lessons with Liszt and composition lessons with Peter Cornelius. Her affair with Liszt was a well-kept secret. He last visited her at her home in Brussels in the autumn of 1861 but they continued to correspond.

Von Bulow studied with Clara Wieck's father before he went to Liszt. Von Bulow was to conduct the premieres of two Wagner operas *Tristan* (27.1.1857) and *The Mastersingers* (25.10.1875). He married Liszt's daughter, Cosima, in 1857 who was to have an affair with Wagner.

This young virtuoso was a tactless man with some injudicious comments such as "A tenor is not a man but a disease" and "the three greatest composers are Bach, Beethoven and Brahms: all the others are cretins."

Liszt was the soloist in his Piano Concerto no. 1, with Berlioz conducting in 1855 during a second Berlioz Festival at Weimar. Liszt published his first volume of *Années de pèlerinage: Switzerland* and put his mind to writing songs. The ill-fated Carl Tausig began lessons with Liszt in this year.

The Weimar years came to an end with the failure of Liszt's performance of Peter Cornelius's opera *The Barber of Bagdad* at the end of 1858. He had become the subject of gossip and rumour. He had given up being a concert pianist and some of his compositions were criticised as modern.

In 1859, his son Daniel died.

He arrived in Rome in 1861 hoping to marry Princess Carolyne on his fiftieth birthday. The Church of San Carlo in Corso had been booked and prepared, but Pope Pius did not allow the marriage and that news was received on the eve of the intended wedding.

This fine musician was moving towards his Catholic faith again. He composed two sacred masterpieces, *The Legend of St Elisabeth* and *Christus*, magnificent works overshadowed unfairly by his piano works. Perhaps Liszt thought that these works might give him a musical post in the Vatican.

In 1862, his daughter Blandine died aged twenty seven. This drew Liszt into semi-retirement and he was visited by Pope Pius IX and on 2 April 1865 took minor orders in the Catholic church and became an Abbe.

Another anxiety befell him. In 1846 Countess Marie d'Agoult wrote a biographical novel *Nelida* under the name of Daniel Stern. Its main character, Guermann, was a disguised portrait of Liszt and there were some intimate disclosures. In 1866 Liszt heard that Marie was going to publish her memoirs and this really troubled him. The meeting was most unpleasant and the work remained in manuscript. Marie died in 1876 and the memoirs remained in manuscript. But her grandson Daniel Olivier had the memoirs published in 1927 and they are used by Ernest Newman in his book *The Man Liszt* of 1934. This may explain why Liszt was neglected for many years and it was not until Humphrey Searle resurrected Liszt about that time and helped such pianists as Louis Kentner and Ronald Smith to take up his work.

But to return to the time of Liszt. The third death in seven years was when his mother died in Paris on 6 February 1866 and the following year was difficult because Wagner had eloped with his daughter Cosima. In 1868 he began detailed theology studies but he could not shake off his musical life. In 1869, and for a part of each year, he returned to Weimar living at the Hofgartnerei giving piano lessons to eager students. This was a good move for he could escape Rome and the scandal over Olga Janina.

Liszt had many pupils and many of his female students fell in love with him. One was the volatile Olga Janina who had lessons with Liszt in Rome around 1870. They had a short affair until the Spring of 1871 (Liszt was 60 then) when Olga went to America. She returned in 1873 and shared an apartment with Liszt in

Budapest for three days. She was to write scandalous things about Liszt and even threatened to kill him with a revolver in his Budapest apartment.

She was born about 1850, married at fifteen, horsewhipped her husband on their wedding night and later tried to kill herself and her baby from another relationship. She would also talk and debate with Catholic clergy about sexual indecency in the Old Testament.

I wonder what fascinated Liszt about weird women!

In 1871, Bulow divorced Cosima who married Wagner and, within a year, the quarrels between Liszt and Wagner were resolved and they met in Weimar. To Liszt's pleasure he was elected a Royal Hungarian Councillor.

He visited Bayreuth in 1875 to attend a complete performance of *The Ring*. The following year saw the deaths of Countess d'Agoult and George Sand but this sadness was mitigated by his work with his pupils including Eugene d'Albert, Siloti, Lamond, Moritz Rosenthal and Emil Sauer. Liszt was very busy and extremely active and travelling to help out wherever he could.

He was made Canon of Albano in 1879 and, therefore, wore the cassock and regalia.

His final works show an advanced harmony and style. There is *Czardas Macabre*, *Nuages Gris* and *At the Grave of Richard Wagner*.

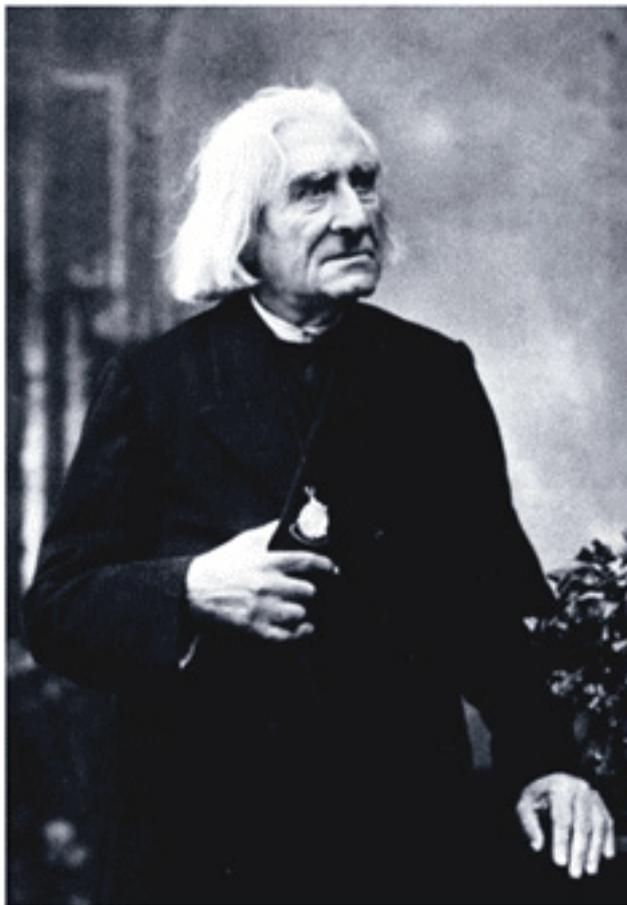
There is the *Bagatelle without tonality* of 1885 which may have influenced Schoenberg to invent twelve note music which is also called serial music or decaphony. It is a system that demands extraordinary skill and discipline and, sadly, there are people who decry it.

As his 75th year began, he visited Paris and London where in April 1886 some of his orchestral works were conducted by Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Liszt played the piano on a few occasions. He played for Queen Victoria and attended a performance of his *Faust Symphony*.

He spent Easter in Antwerp and returned to Paris where *St Elisabeth* was performed. He attended the wedding of his granddaughter, Daniela, in Weimar and revelled in a performance of Wagner's masterpiece, *Tristan and Isolde*. But he was weak and developed pneumonia from which he died on 31 July 1886 at Bayreuth.

Now what are we to make of Liszt? He was a contradiction being a spiritual man (in the correct sense of the word which means to be seeking after God and Christ) and a worldly man and he was promiscuous. Yes, he was a show off as the transcriptions do testify and this raises the problem that surely music should remain in the form in which the composer wrote it. What right has anyone to alter or modify another's work? For further discussion on this please consult my article on [Patric Standford](#). What is the real point of Busoni's arranging Liszt's organ masterpiece for the piano when it works so well in its original form?

When one listens to Liszt's orchestral scores they have a nobility that is nothing like the pompous arrogance



of Elgar. Liszt's choral works are amazing and vastly better than British choral music save for Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, Fricker's *Vision of Judgment* and Searle's *Kubla Khan*. At its best, Liszt's orchestration is as good as anyone's. His piano music is the best of its time and, of that, there is no doubt. He was a legend, a star, a celebrity who inspired others and who has left a priceless legacy.

It was Humphrey Searle who revived Liszt's work and that of Alkan and encouraged pianists like Louis Kentner and Ronald Smith to take it up when there was still some hostility against Liszt.

Searle catalogued Liszt's works and after his excellent book on the subject, others jumped on the band wagon and wrote about Liszt using Humphrey's material. To all of you who love Liszt, you owe a debt to Searle.

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