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# Liszt's Heroes: An investigation into the Artistic Interdependence of Franz Liszt and his Contemporaries

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## Introduction

Liszt's published writings are extensive, and are for the most part not readily available in print. A fully exhaustive investigation into this fascinating material would be the area of further and more extensive research. The texts chosen here include Liszt's biography of Chopin, his essay on John Field, his essay on the future of artists and their place in society, and Liszt's personal letters.

The four composers featured in this study (Chopin, Wagner, Berlioz and Schumann) were chosen because of their importance as seminal figures in the musical life of the nineteenth century, as well as their importance in Liszt's own life, both personal and artistic. He wrote extensively in letters and essays about all four of these composers. No other Romantic composer had the friendship or acquaintance of so many other great contemporaries.

Other subjects for his admiration (dealt with in less detail here) were the virtuoso violinist Niccolò Paganini, and the Irish composer-pianist John Field. Liszt helped to popularise the music of all these composers. His musical heroes were composers rather than performers.

Liszt's musical achievement seems on many levels to be predicated on the influence of other people.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## CHAPTER ONE

Franz Liszt is the ultimate musical icon of the Romantic era. His career flourished in several directions simultaneously: Pianist, composer, conductor, teacher, writer and tireless administrator. There is surely no other composer in history whose daily existence was filled with such a kaleidoscopic variety. His relationship with other composers is one that continues to fascinate, not only as a reflection of Liszt the man, but also as a valuable account of nineteenth century musical life. This association with other great composers has a wide-ranging span. He can be seen as a unifying figure of the Romantic age, living essentially from its beginnings to its closing years.

As a boy, Liszt met Beethoven: as an elderly man he was introduced to Debussy. Between times he got to know practically every musician of importance.<sup>1</sup>

Liszt can also be seen as a creator of what we know as the canon of Romantic composers, as he popularised what he thought was the best music of the day and his choices are generally carried through to the modern day as a result. One can only imagine how different the canon of Romantic composers would have been if Liszt had not existed. Liszt performed the most modern music of his time. The programs for his concert tours featured the following composers (listed in chronological order):

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<sup>1</sup> Hagebeck, *Liszt the Progressive*, preface.

Handel. Bach. Scarlatti. Mozart. Beethoven. Hummel. Rossini. Paganini.  
 Spohr. Weber. Wielhorsky. Pixis. Mayseder. Meyerbeer. Moscheles.  
 Pacini. Schubert. Donizetti. Dessauer. Czerny. Halevy. Kessler. Bellini.  
 Herz. Berlioz. Glinka. Mendelssohn. Chopin. Schumann. Liszt. Hiller. Thalberg.

A bias in favour of living composers is apparent.

### **Paganini and his Influence**

Three events are agreed to have been decisive in the years 1830 to 1833: Paganini's Paris debut; the meeting with Berlioz; and Chopin's arrival from Warsaw with his portfolio of masterpieces under his arm.<sup>2</sup>

Following Paganini's death in 1840, Liszt wrote a characteristically generous eulogy which was published in the *Gazette Musicale* on August 23, 1840. Liszt warmly praises Paganini's virtuosity (which played such an important role in Liszt's own development), in the Paganini's *Necrology* which he wrote in 1840. 'A genius that knew neither master nor equal'.<sup>3</sup> however, he goes on to criticise Paganini's excessive self-centredness.

His God was never any other than his own gloomy, sad 'I'... May the artist of the future gladly and readily decline to play the conceited and egotistical role which we hope has had in Paganini its last brilliant representative.<sup>4</sup>

Liszt demonstrates throughout his life a determination to behave differently.

'May the artist fix his goal not in himself but outside himself: let virtuosity be to him a *means*, not the *end*: let him always remember that . . . *Genius obliges*'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Perenyi. *Liszt*. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Perenyi. *Liszt*. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Walker. Vol. 1.177.

<sup>5</sup> Perenyi. *Liszt*. 54.

Liszt's inspiration for his art came from many sources, from the women in his life to musical and literary figures. In 1832 he met Countess Marie D'Agoult, his future wife and mother of his children. The same year he heard Paganini for the first time in Paris. He wrote to his Swiss pupil Pierre Wolff:

For two weeks my mind and fingers have been working like two damned souls: Homer, the Bible, Plato, Locke, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber lie around me. Ah! As long as I don't go mad- you'll find an artist in me! Yes, an artist, one such as you want, and is needed today! .... What suffering, what wretchedness, what tortures in those four strings!<sup>6</sup>

In his book *The Great Pianists* Harold Schoenberg points out that Paganini had opened the door for Liszt to transcendental bravura; while Chopin opened it to style, poetry, and finesse.<sup>7</sup> Alan Walker describes Liszt as a unique synthesis of Paganini and Chopin.

### **The Influence of Lammenais**

Abbé Felicite de Lammenais (1782-1854) was a French writer of Christian philosophy, and Liszt's spiritual mentor. Liszt spent the summer of 1834 with him at *La Chenaie* and absorbed the most crucial ideas concerned the role of the artist and his place in society. Lamennais expressed himself powerfully on such matters. Art, for him, was God made manifest, it ennobled the human race, insofar as the artist was a bearer of the beautiful, he was like a priest ministering to his congregation. The result was the composer's very first article, 'On the Future of Church Music' where called for a new kind of music, one which would 'unite on a colossal scale the theatre and the church'. A second article, 'on the position of artists and their place in society' appealed to musicians to form among

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<sup>6</sup> Hagebeck, *Liszt the Progressive*, 128.

<sup>7</sup> Perenyi, *Liszt*, 63.

themselves 'a holy bond. to stimulate the infinite spread of music'. It demanded that the status of artists be raised. 'that measures be brought about to establish their dignity'<sup>8</sup>.

Liszt then went on to unfold this manifesto:

In the name of all musicians. of art. and of social progress. we require:

- (a) The foundation of an assembly to be held every five years for religious, dramatic, and symphonic music, by which the works that are considered best in these three categories shall be ceremonially performed every day for a whole month in the Louvre, being afterwards purchased by the government, and published at their expense. In other words, we require the foundation of a musical Museum.
- (b) The introduction of musical instruction into the primary schools, its extension into other kinds of schools, and, at that point, the calling into existence of a new church music.
- (c) The reorganization of choral singing and the reformation of plainchant in all the churches of both Paris and the provinces.
- (d) General assemblies of Philharmonic Societies in the manner of the great musical festivals of England and Germany.
- (e) Opera productions, concert and chamber music performances, organized after the plan sketched in our previous article on the conservatoire.
- (f) A school of advanced musical studies established quite separately from the conservatoire by the most eminent artists- a school whose branches shall extend to all the provincial towns having a chair in the history and philosophy of music.
- (g) A cheap edition of the most important works of old and new composers from the musical Renaissance to the present time. It will embrace the development of the art in its entirety, from folk song to Beethoven's Choral symphony. This publication as a whole might be called the 'Pantheon of Music.' The biographies, treatises, commentaries, and glossaries which would have to accompany it would form a true 'Encyclopaedia of Music.'<sup>9</sup>

This manifesto is both imaginative and inspiring. It illustrates Liszt's ability to 'hurl a lance into the boundless realms of the future'<sup>10</sup> as he had intended to do. It is easy to

<sup>8</sup> Walker, Vol. 1.159.

<sup>9</sup> Walker, Vol. 1. 160. Taken from Liszt's essay 'On the Position of Artists' written in 1835.

<sup>10</sup> Hagebeck, *Liszt the Progressive*, preface, xiii.



extol the virtues of modern approaches. yet in Liszt's time there seems to be a far more harmonious balance between criticism and artistic production than what we have today.

### **Generosity**

It is a hallmark of Liszt's personality that he acted and spoke generously of others throughout his life. and all the evidence is that he genuinely thought very highly of others. and the faculty of admiration was a particularly highly developed one in his personality. His art may even be said to be founded upon this faculty.

From his early meeting with Berlioz until the end of his life. he helped countless composers and performers both artistically and financially. and no-one more than Wagner. He could have been one of the richest men of the century. yet never accepted fees for teaching and gave most of his concert money to charities for the poor. His main beneficiaries (his son and first daughter. and his mother) died during his lifetime. leaving only his second daughter. Cosima was financially secure in her marriages to Hans von Bulow and later Richard Wagner. and therefore there was no necessity for Liszt to support her. He was not only generous with his money. He continued to give generous praise even to former friends who had quarrelled with or drawn apart from him. including Chopin. Berlioz and. for a time. Wagner.

### **Conducting Career**

In 1847 Liszt met Princess Carolyne and their relationship developed. For a long time he hoped to be able to abandon his constant touring in order to concentrate on composition. She encouraged this idea and as a result the next twelve years were of remarkable

productivity for Liszt. He lived with the Princess at Weimar and took up conducting full time. As a conductor and teacher at Weimar, Liszt made himself the most influential figure of the New German School dedicated to progress in music. His championship of Wagner and Berlioz helped these composers achieve a wider European fame.

### **Liszt the Progressive**

In research of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Liszt's career as a pianist drew the most attention. He made many innovations- evolving a new style of piano playing in the 1830s and 1840s and introducing the solo 'recital'. However in recent years other aspects of his character have come to light, including his own talents as an original and progressive composer; his career as a conductor, and a deeper understanding of his own character. Attention has also been drawn to his teaching innovations, having invented the master-class, an idea that has meanwhile come to dominate pedagogy. More than 400 pupils are known to have passed through his hands.

Liszt believed that young masters would stimulate one another and attain higher standards by working in a competitive climate<sup>11</sup>

Liszt was a main leader in the Romantic Movement in music. He contained in his character more of the ideals and aspirations of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century than any other major musician. In his own works he developed new methods, both imaginative and technical, which left their mark upon his forward looking contemporaries and anticipated many 20<sup>th</sup> Century ideas and procedures. He evolved the method of 'transformation of themes' as part of his revolution in form, made radical experiments in harmony and invented the symphonic poem for orchestra.

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<sup>11</sup> Hagebeck, *Liszt the Progressive*, preface, ix.

In his latter years, Liszt gave first performances of works by Saint-Saëns, Anton Rubenstein, Peter Cornelius, Joachim Raff, Eduard Lassen and a host of others. French Composers such as Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Olivier Messiaen inherited many of his stylistic elements. Of these three, Liszt knew only Debussy personally. Liszt had advised him in 1885 to hear the masses of Palestrina and Lassus. He once famously remarked in old age that his one remaining ambition was to 'hurl a lance into the boundless realms of the future'<sup>12</sup>

The importance of Liszt as one of the central figures of the Romantic age in music is only beginning to be more widely recognised. In the English speaking world Liszt has traditionally been viewed with suspicion, the tendency towards the historicist, his effects in his music, his Catholicism, and his incessant womanizing being characteristics not likely to endear him to the English. The appearance of the three volume biography by Alan Walker, completed in 1996, has contributed to a reappraisal of Liszt's place in the pantheon of great composers. Even in his lifetime Liszt was viewed unfavourably in Britain, and this did not change after his death. Walker's assessment of Liszt, that Liszt was the central figure in the Romantic century (Berlioz and Wagner notwithstanding) is an exalted one indeed, and is not one that would have found many sympathizers until recently.

Outside of music his admiration was given to visual artists (Michelangelo and Raphael, and other figures of the Italian Renaissance) and writers (Dante and Goethe). His

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<sup>12</sup> Hagebeck, *Liszt the Progressive*, preface, xiii.

championing of the music of Wagner was costly to his own reputation and Wagner was an extremely graceless recipient of generosity. His actions in providing free piano tuition to countless students particularly during his Weimar years also speak of his outward looking personality.

The great musical figures of admiration of Liszt's adult years were Paganini, Chopin and Wagner. Each of these was an important figure for Liszt. It was Paganini who inspired Liszt to scale the heights of virtuosity. In Chopin Liszt found a figure that remained aloof from the pettiness of the virtuoso career which Liszt embraced to some extent with disdain. Under the influence of Princess Sayn Wittgenstein Liszt found the strength of will to remove himself from the public and apply himself more earnestly and seriously to composition. In Wagner, Liszt admired the supreme will of the creative artist in utter contempt of the world and of all else except his art. Each of these people served as a model for Liszt at different periods of his own life.

### **Liszt and Thalberg**

Liszt and Thalberg were two of the finest pianists in the Paris of the 1850s. Thalberg arrived there in 1835 and made a good impression on concert goers. Soon the Parisians became divided in their loyalty between the two pianists, with a Thalbergian camp and a Lisztian camp. The result was a duel in March 1837 to determine who the greatest pianist was. Both were declared victors in popular press of the time. However when the Princess who organised the concert was asked the verdict, she replied 'Thalberg is the first pianist in the world-Liszt is the only one' pg. 240. After this duel, six of the top

pianists of the day collaborated to write *Hexameron* for charity. Liszt and Thalberg went their separate ways. Liszt continued to play the *Hexameron* variations in his concert programmes, and years later. It was typical of Liszt's generosity that he still featured some of Thalberg's music in his concerts.

### **Liszt's Output**

Between 1834 and 1859 Liszt published widely. Among these publications were articles for the Paris *Revue et Gazette Musicale*, a book on Chopin and one on gypsy music, numerous books on Wagner, etc. and numerous polemic pieces. Even during his lifetime rumours circulated that his writings were not his own work. Modern scholarship has proved that more than half of his total literary output is his own, and some of the remaining merely edited by others. It is clear that both Marie d'Agoult and later Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein collaborated heavily with Liszt on these literary endeavours.

### **John Field**

Liszt first heard the Irish pianist John Field in Paris in 1832. (Liszt was twenty-one years of age). Field occupies an important position in the history of piano playing in the early nineteenth century. Liszt was very impressed by Field's compositions, in particular the structure and the originality of the Piano Concerto in C minor<sup>13</sup> and his Nocturnes.

Liszt's essay on John Field was written as an introduction to an edition of Field's Nocturnes, published by J. Schuberth & Co. of Leipzig, at various dates in the 1850s. The essay was also published separately in Pamphlet form.

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<sup>13</sup> Watson, *Liszt*, 259.

The language is rather flowery and mannered:

Nobody after [Field] had the capacity to reproduce the charms of his caressing language, which affects us like a tearful and tender look, and which lulls like the soft and regular rocking of a boat on the water, or like the gentle oscillations of a hammock, swinging to and fro with a seductive languor inclining to serene meditation and poetic repose.<sup>14</sup>

Or again:

Nobody has even attempted this peculiar style, and especially none of those who heard Field play himself, or rather who heard him dream his music in moments when he entirely abandoned himself to his inspirations...adorn[ing] [melodies] anew with that shower of fragrant blossoms, and yet decking them in such a manner that their tremulousness languishment and their charming outlines were not entirely obscured, but only covered with a transparent veil.<sup>15</sup>

Liszt eschews analysis completely, as would be expected in a popular edition of the time, opting rather for a rhetorical style, in which he attempts to convey his enthusiasm as well as his assessment of their importance. He describes each nocturne in terms of its character with metaphor and simile as his usual tools. The edition contains only nine nocturnes (there are eighteen extant nocturnes by Field, so this edition was, contrary to Liszt's assertion, far from complete).

The most interesting section is his assignment of Field's place in music history:

It was formerly necessary that [compositions] should be either Sonatas or Rondos etc: Field was the first to introduce a species which belonged to none of the established classes, and in which feeling and melody reigned alone, liberated from the fetters and encumbrances of a coercive form. He opened the way for all the productions which have since appeared under the title of songs without words, impromptus, ballades etc., and to him we may trace the origin of those pieces designed to paint individual and deep-seated emotions.

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<sup>14</sup> Liszt, *John Field's Nocturnes*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Liszt, *John Field's Nocturnes*, 35.

Thus Field's significance is not merely, according to Liszt, that of the inventor of the 'Nocturne', which is how he is generally referred to nowadays, but as inventor of the character – piece, which would constitute a more important status altogether. The short biography of Field with which Liszt concludes his essay includes a factual error which is apparent to an Irish reader, namely that Liszt describes England, not Ireland, as 'the land of his [Field's] nativity'.

The other point of note in Liszt's essay is his assertion that his familiarity with Field's nocturnes 'reaches back to my earliest youth'.

Long before I thought of meeting the author, I was lapped for hours, in dreams populated with forms that rose before my imagination, while the music soothed me into a soft apathy like that caused by the fragrant fumes of rose tobacco... how often have my thoughts and my eyes rested on the name of that Mad. Rosenkampf, to whom the longest and most beautiful of these night-pieces, the fourth, is dedicated!...Beauty of style is here united to grace of feeling.<sup>16</sup>

Liszt assesses Field's character as that of a man to whom fame was a matter of no importance: 'Field sang to *himself*.' He claims that field used square pianos in his concerts in Paris, when grand pianos would have been more impressive. Liszt contrasts Field's behaviour with 'the manners of the present day'. Field is seen almost as the antithesis to Liszt himself, who pursued fame with dedication, until he had achieved it. Perhaps in the essay Liszt is looking with fleeting regard at an approach which might have held some attraction for him because it was so different from his own.

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<sup>16</sup> Liszt, *John Field's Nocturnes*, 37.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Liszt and Berlioz

Liszt first met Berlioz when he was nineteen years of age, on December 4, 1830. Excited by the rehearsals of the *Fantastique*, he rushed around to present himself to the composer. Thereafter Liszt saw Berlioz constantly until he left France in 1835. In his *Memoires* Berlioz invariably speaks of Liszt with warmth and affection. At their first meeting Berlioz introduced Liszt to Goethe's *Faust*:

On the day before the concert, Liszt called on me. It was our first meeting. I spoke of Goethe's *Faust*, which he confessed he had not read but which he soon came to love as much as I. we felt an immediate affinity, and from that moment our friendship has grown ever closer and stronger. He came to the concert and was conspicuous for the warmth of his applause and for his generally enthusiastic behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

In the years ahead Berlioz dedicated to Liszt his damnation of Faust, while Liszt dedicated to Berlioz his Faust symphony. For twenty years Liszt remained Berlioz's strongest advocate.

In 1832 Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* premiered in Paris. This unique work was very influential to Liszt. He found it a huge technical challenge to transcribe the work for piano. In 1833, at the tender age of twenty-one he completed his transcription. He played it frequently in concert from that time on and its publication was used to help Berlioz

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<sup>17</sup> Berlioz, *The Memoirs of*, 96.



financially. It may never have surfaced to our attentions if Liszt hadn't gone to such lengths to publicise it.

Although they had a strong friendship, Liszt did much more for Berlioz than he reciprocated in the thirty years they knew each other. To Liszt, that was natural enough. He felt he owed a great deal to Berlioz, and he would have been the first to admit that the premiere of the *Symphonie Fantastique* was a landmark in his life. It was the first piece of modern music he had ever heard. Berlioz, on the other hand, had turned to music journalism to make ends meet after marrying Harriet Smithson. In the thirty years of criticism (much of it for the *Gazette Musicale*) that survives Berlioz, Liszt's compositions are only explored twice. His talents as a pianist, however, are mentioned regularly. When it came to conducting new scores, only Liszt interpreted his contemporaries.

Berlioz's efforts, like Wagner's, were confined to their own music. Both were loud in Liszt's praise. Wagner heard 'my second self' when Liszt conducted *Tannhauser*. Berlioz would allow no one else to keep manuscript copies of his scores. Yet neither man ever conducted a work by Liszt.<sup>18</sup>

Berlioz and Liszt were drawn together by the uncommon breath of their artistic tastes, which did not stop at music but ranged across poetry, drama and painting. Shakespeare, Byron and Beethoven were particular heroes for them both. To have heard Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto performed by this pair (Berlioz conducted the concerto with Liszt as soloist in Paris in April 1841) must have been an unforgettable experience.

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<sup>18</sup> Perenyi, *Liszt*, 293.

After Liszt settled in Weimar, and attempted to give modern music a new direction, he did not forget his old friend. In 1852 and again in 1855, he arranged week-long Berlioz festivals in the presence of the composer at which such works as *Benvenuto Cellini*, *Lelio* and the *Fantastic* symphony were performed. Liszt also arranged Wagner festivals at Weimar. As Liszt became more friendly with Wagner, Berlioz made more of a distance between them. Liszt describes this in a letter to Dr. Franz Brendel:

Our personal relations always remained friendly, it is true, but on his side there was somewhat of a gloomy, cramped tone mixed with them...Neither Schumann nor Berlioz could rest satisfied at seeing the steady advance of Wagner's works. Both of them suffered from suppressed enthusiasm for the music of the future.<sup>19</sup>

Here Berlioz found an unexpected ally in Princess von Sayn-Wittengstein, Liszt's mistress during the Weimar years, whose dislike of Wagner surpassed his own and who took over more and more the correspondence with Berlioz. It was the princess who sustained Berlioz in his efforts to complete his magnum opus *The Trojans* (the opera dedicated to her), a work which she regarded as driving the last nail into the coffin of Wagner and music drama.<sup>20</sup>

Liszt was a pioneer of transcriptions when he met Berlioz. He didn't write his own orchestral works until twenty years later. As far as symphonic music was concerned, Liszt and Berlioz had very different styles. Liszt's interest was primarily in harmonics, Berlioz's gift for rhythm and melody, and so on.

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<sup>19</sup> La Mara, *Complete Letters*, Vol. 2, June 1868.

<sup>20</sup> Perenyi, *Liszt*, 383.

It is still true that many of Liszt's conceptions derived from Berlioz, with whom he had much more in common than, say, Wagner: and that the genesis of the symphonic poem has to be located in the *Fantastique*.<sup>21</sup>

Liszt was always enthusiastic about the operas of Berlioz. He relates his excitement on receiving one in a letter to Dr. Franz Brendel:

Berlioz was so good to send me the printed pianoforte edition for his opera "*Les Troyens*." Although for Berlioz's works pianoforte editions are plainly a deception.. yet a cursory reading through of "*Les Troyens*" has nevertheless made an uncommonly powerful impression on me. One cannot deny that there is enormous power in it, and it is not wanting in delicacy- I might say subtlety- of feeling.<sup>22</sup>

Berlioz can be seen as the greatest influence in the life of Liszt, after Paganini, until Liszt came in contact with Wagner. When Liszt was engaged with his problems of orchestra, while writing his Symphonic Poems at Weimar, the only example he had before him was that of Berlioz.<sup>23</sup>

### **Liszt and Schumann**

In 1837, long before these two composers met, Liszt had published a long and highly favourable article about Schumann's keyboard works in *La Revue et Gazette Musicale*. Schumann, who was then still struggling for recognition, was deeply appreciative (he was far better known in Germany as the editor of *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* than as a composer). He sent Liszt more of his compositions, and the pair struck up a friendly correspondence. In April 1838, Clara Wieck, Robert's future wife, visited Vienna and

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<sup>21</sup> Perenyi, *Liszt*, 70.

<sup>22</sup> La Mara, *Complete Letters*, Vol. 2, August 1862.

<sup>23</sup> Sitwell, *Liszt*, 174.

heard Liszt for the first time. When, a few weeks later, Liszt dedicated to Clara his Paganini Studies it was clear to Schumann that some kind of reciprocal gesture was called for. Schumann invited Liszt to Leipzig, but Liszt was unable at first to accept. Meanwhile, Liszt's commitment to the idea of a Beethoven memorial statue aroused Schumann's admiration still further. Schumann had in manuscript at that time a number of compositions (including *Kreisleriana*, *Kinderszenen*, and the great *Humoreske*), any of which could have been dedicated to Liszt. His choice, however, fell on the C-Sharp major Fantasy, a work which was itself intended to raise funds for the Beethoven monument and which was supposed to be 'about' Beethoven. The Fantasy was eventually printed in the spring of 1839 bearing an inscription to Liszt.<sup>24</sup> Liszt and Schumann had still not met. In their correspondence, Liszt expressed his delight about the dedication:

The '*Fantaisie*' dedicated to me is a work of the highest kind- I am really proud of the honour you have done me in dedicating to me so grand a composition... I mean, therefore, to work at it and penetrate it through and through, so as to make the utmost possible effect with it..<sup>25</sup>

Finally in 1840 they were united. Schumann travelled from Leipzig to Dresden to cover the concert for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. His pieces on Liszt's concerts in Dresden and Leipzig are among the classics of nineteenth century criticism. On Liszt's programme Schumann's *Carnival* was featured. They got on tremendously, and ended up travelling back to Leipzig together (Liszt was to play in Leipzig two days later). The first concert in Leipzig was also where Liszt gained the friendships of Schubert and Mendelssohn. Following Liszt's their warm correspondence with Schumann, and with their concern for the philosophy of music, the status of artists, a mutual passion for

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<sup>24</sup> Walker, Vol. 1, 346.

<sup>25</sup> La Mara, *The Complete Letters*, Vol. 1, no. 19.

Beethoven and for poetry in music, the two seemed set to be friends<sup>26</sup>. Schumann was spellbound by Liszt's playing and wrote flattering reviews of his Dresden and Leipzig concerts. In a letter to Clara Wieck, he wrote that to hear Liszt was the greatest artistic experience of his lifetime. :

'In the last few days Liszt has jolted me right out of all my normal habits. He really is extraordinary! I've never heard the like.'<sup>27</sup>

Over the next few years, Schumann would seize every opportunity possible to hear Liszt. Liszt remarked in his letters that Schumann would stay quietly in the room and listen to him playing for hours on end. Given such favourable beginnings, why did this promising artistic friendship deteriorate so sharply? The reason seems to be an infantile one. Friedrich Wieck opposed the marriage of Robert and Clara. Liszt sided with Schumann in the lawsuit. When he was scheduled to play at Dresden again, he chose not to send Clara's father press tickets for his concerts, even though Wieck was a prominent musical figure in Leipzig and such would have been customary. Friedrich Wieck was enraged and began to slate Liszt in articles he wrote for the Leipzig newspapers. Clara sprang to her father's defence and turned against Liszt.

There could have been an element of jealousy in Clara's attitude to Liszt. In a letter to her fiancé, Schumann, she wrote: 'My playing seems to me now so drab and I don't know what, that I've almost lost my desire to travel further. Since I heard and saw Liszt's bravura, I feel like a schoolgirl' These conflicts led to unfortunate relations. They both viewed Liszt's phenomenal virtuoso success as 'a distasteful betrayal of genius for popular glory.'

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<sup>26</sup> Watson, *Liszt*, 52.

<sup>27</sup> *Musica*, 128.

Despite the rift in their personal relations Liszt devotedly championed Schumann's music at Weimar. In addition to *Genova* he presented Part II of Schumann's *Scenes from Faust* (April 1849), gave the premiere of his *Manfred* (June 1852), introduced *Paradise and the Peri* in 1857, and included his overtures, chamber music and songs in his concerts.<sup>28</sup> Schumann's distrust of Liszt's musical aesthetics, and in Clara's case a dislike that grew into hatred, resulted in the Weimar efforts for his music being viewed with coolness and suspicion.

Liszt's dedication of his B minor Sonata (published in 1854) to Schumann was received with embarrassment, and on the reissue of Schumann's C major *Fantasy* as part of the posthumously published collected piano works, Clara struck out the original dedication to Liszt.

Surprisingly, Clara Schumann and Liszt performed together in Weimar that same year. Robert suffered a mental collapse and Clara resumed her concert career to make ends meet. Liszt conducted Robert's piano concerto with Clara as soloist. Liszt published warmly appreciative articles on Robert and Clara at this time and viewed with concern Schumann's suffering and with grief his demise.

Liszt's friendship with Robert Schumann, as well as his love of poetry, was a chief motivator in his own song writing. He also transcribed many of Schumann's songs for Piano. He played the transcription for *Liebslied* and the *Fantasy* throughout his concert

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<sup>28</sup> Watson, *Liszt*, 93.

tours. In 1834 Schumann founded the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in Leipzig. Schlesinger, a powerful Parisian publisher, with the collaboration of Berlioz and others, launched the progressive French musical periodical called the *Revue et Gazette Musicale*. This was where the shorter articles by Liszt, as well as his considerable study *On the Position of Artists* were published, and until 1840, his travel letters.<sup>29</sup>

The early acquaintances Liszt formed in Paris all either abandoned him or turned against him- Chopin, Mendelssohn, Hiller, Heine, Schlesinger and Berlioz- and this pattern was later repeated with Schumann, Joachim, von Bulow, and Wagner. In view of the many personal kindnesses extended by Liszt to all these colleagues over the years, their rejection of him is bewildering. When we read today that Liszt was 'one of the leaders of the Romantic movement', the phrase, however true, has a somewhat hollow ring to anyone familiar with the smaller details of his life: the fact is that for much of the time there was no one willing to be led by him at all, and for the last twelve years of his life he resigned himself to artistic isolation.

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<sup>29</sup> Hamburger, *Liszt*, 37.

## CHAPTER THREE

**Chopin**

Liszt and Chopin are perhaps forever associated in popular imagination, and their combined names are synonyms for Romantic piano playing and the ascendancy of the piano in the nineteenth century. The popular picture is not at too far a remove from the truth, since both personally, professionally and artistically there was much that bound the two men together. Born within a year of each other, they both lived in Paris in the 1830s at the opening stages of their careers. Liszt attended Chopin's debut at the Salle Pleyel on February 26, 1832, and made the personal acquaintance of Chopin around this time. He shared a platform with Chopin in some other concerts that year, and both men seem to have formed a very favourable impression of each other. Chopin dedicated his newly published set of Twelve Studies, Op. 10 to Liszt, and describes his impressions of Liszt's playing of them in a letter to Ferdinand Hiller:

I am writing without knowing what my pen is scribbling, because at this moment Liszt is playing my studies and putting honest thoughts out of my head. I should like to rob him of the way he plays my studies.<sup>30</sup>

A rift arose between the two composers in 1835. The cause was a woman, Marie Pleyel, Estranged wife of Chopin's friend Camille Pleyel, himself an important figure in Parisian musical life. Marie Pleyel and Liszt used Chopin's apartment for a tryst while

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<sup>30</sup> Walker, *Liszt- The Virtuoso Years*, 185.



he was out of Paris, and Chopin felt compromised as a result. By late spring 1835, Liszt had moved to Genova, and from then on the two men rarely met.<sup>31</sup>

However, the artistic influence of Chopin on Liszt seems to have been significant. There are many echoes of Chopin's music in Liszt's own works, and Liszt was affected severely by Chopin's death. This latter event in 1849 resulted in Liszt's biography of Chopin, as well as '*Funerailles*' which many see as a funeral tribute to Chopin.

### **Liszt's book on Chopin**

It is not very common in any era of music history for an important composer to write a whole book about another important composer. Yet given the complex combination that controlled Liszt's life, one can clearly see the reasons such a book was written. Although Liszt aimed to write a biography, as a biography the contents are incomplete, and it would be more accurate to call it Liszt's personal 'memoirs' of Chopin.

The Chopin book was first published in 1852<sup>32</sup>. A major concern associated with this curious work is its authorship. It was continuously suggested that Liszt did not write it at all but that his companion at the time, Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein, was

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<sup>31</sup> On April 26 Chopin played a rare concert at the Salle Pleyel. Liszt obtained from the usual reviewer, Legouve, to write the review. Chopin was apprehensive when he heard the news. Legouve told him not to worry, adding "he will make a fine kingdom for you." "Yes," replied Chopin. "In his empire." Chopin's fears were groundless. Liszt's long article was highly flattering and full of admiration for Chopin's playing. (Walker, *The Virtuoso Years*, 366.)

<sup>32</sup> The original was titled: F. Chopin, the author: F. Liszt. It was issued from the press of M. Escudier, and most of it had previously appeared serially in a journal owned by the same publisher (*La France Musicale*, Feb-Aug 1851)

responsible.<sup>33</sup> However, Princess Carolyne had illusions about her own literary expertise, and her contributions to the Chopin book reflect her efforts to sound learned. This makes it easy to differentiate between her contributions and Liszt's more succinct prose. Of course there is a certain element of conjecture to this, but the stylistic features do seem to be quite easy to distinguish. A typical line from the Princess' hand, describing Polish dress as a background to the polonaises, reads:

Those who have never worn the *Kontusz* of former times (a kind of Occidental Kaftan, the oriental robe modified by the demands of an active life rarely yielding to fatalistic resignation: a kind of *Férédgi*, often trimmed with fur, which required frequent gestures capable of grace and coquetry as the sleeves were tossed backward) would find it difficult to appreciate the carriage, the slow bending, the sudden straightening, the subtleties of silent pantomime which the ancients practiced as the filed past in a polonaise as in a military parade.<sup>34</sup>

Given that the Princess was of Polish origin, it would make sense for her to know intimate details about Polish dress, and extensive details about Polish dances etc. as is seen in the chapter on Chopin's Polonaises. It seems Liszt wrote very little of this chapter, his comments of which are usually showing a knowledge about the music or Chopin himself.

Liszt was concerned about the fate of Chopin's reputation and wanted to write the book to explain the man as he knew him. 'However inadequate these pages are to discuss Chopin as we should wish, we hope that the appeal his name so rightly exerts will supply all that is lacking'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In 1937, Emile Harazti published '*Le Probleme Liszt*' where he argues that all Liszt's scholarship was written by his partners: Marie D'Agout in the 1830s and Princess Carolyne in the 1850s.

<sup>34</sup> F. Liszt, *F. Chopin*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 181.

Throughout his career, Liszt had already been continually promoting Chopin's music in his concerts. 'One cannot hope that death will bring to their works that instantaneous *plus value* given to those of painters'<sup>36</sup>. Whatever the popularity of a work during a composer's lifetime, posterity will assess the works differently. Liszt hopes his biography of Chopin will help that assessment, so that Chopin will be regarded highly by those who will be concerned with the history of music.

'Today it is the custom to consider great only those composers who have left a half-dozen operas, as many oratorios, and a few symphonies- they are asked to do everything and a little more than everything. But the rightness of this idea, however generally entertained, is nonetheless highly questionable'<sup>37</sup>

Chopin called himself a 'minor talent' for this season. It appears that Liszt's comment here reflects the time quite accurately. Some music is accorded intellectual weight (symphonies etc.) and some (short piano music etc.) is not. Here Liszt is of course referring to the fact that Chopin composed almost exclusively for piano.

By way of analysis of Chopin's works, Liszt does very little. His approach is quite different to the modern methods of analysis (classification under the headings of form, style, structure, harmony etc.) These analytical approaches do not concern him. A chapter is given to the Polonaises and one to the Mazurkas, but they refer to the *social* background of these genres in Chopin's music. The analysis of the actual music is quite limited and very general:

'We owe to him the extension of chords, be they struck together, arpeggiated, or rolled: those chromatic and enharmonic twisting lines, of which his pages offer

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<sup>36</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 32.

such striking examples: those little groups of embellishing notes, over the melodic figure...He gave to this type of ornament, originating solely in the *fioritures* of the great and venerated school of Italian song, the elements of surprise and variety beyond the capacity of the human voice which, until then, had been slavishly imitated by the piano in stereotyped and monotonous decoration. He invented those admirable harmonic progressions that lent a serious stamp even to pages seeming to have no claim to such importance because of the lightness of their subject.... If we had to speak here in academic terms of the development of piano music, we would dissect those magnificent pages that offer so rich a harvest of observations. The *Nocturnes*, *Ballades*, *Impromptus* and *Scherzos*, all filled with harmonic refinements as unfamiliar as they are unexpected. We would seek them similarly in his *Polonaises*, *Mazurkas*, *Valses* and *Boleros*. But this is no time or place for such labour: it is of interest only to those skilled in counterpoint and figured bass<sup>38</sup>

Did Liszt not see himself as one of those people? It is probable that he makes this last sentence to mean that his study of Chopin is geared towards the general public, not just musicians. His commentary on Chopin's music is interesting as it is in agreement with modern commentators.

Liszt's discussion of the Polonaises and Mazurkas covers at great length their social background, detailing Polish customs, dress, dances and history and politics. He then compares them to polonaises by other Polish composers such as Oginski, Lipinski and Mayseder. The section on the Mazurkas gives an interesting discussion on Chopin's use of rubato:

Early in his writings he described this style, which lent such an individual stamp on his playing, by the phrase *Tempo rubato*: time stolen or broken, a flexible measure, lingering and abrupt, quivering like a breath-shaken flame. In his later publications he ceased to do this, convinced that if its meaning were understood, it would be impossible to ignore this rule of irregularity. Thus all of his pieces should be played with this measured and accented alternation, the secret of which is difficult to grasp unless he himself was frequently heard. He seemed eager to teach this style to his many pupils, especially his compatriots to whom, more than to others, he wished to impart his method of performance. It was the women among them rather than the men who grasped it with that sympathy which they

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<sup>38</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 33.

hold for all things relating to sentiment and poetry, and an instinctive understanding of his thought allowed them to follow all the shiftings of his azured yearning.<sup>39</sup>

In dealing with his concert career, Liszt describes him as effective only when playing to intimate gatherings of friends. 'Chopin knew...that he had no effect upon the multitude and could not strike the masses'.<sup>40</sup> He therefore played only very rarely in public. Not only did the public frighten him, he was unable to travel because of his continuous poor health. The void created by this lack of expression was filled by writing his own music. 'He sought compensation by writing pages that he loved to hear performed with the vigour that he lacked'.<sup>41</sup>

Although he avoided society, Chopin was very welcoming at home when guests entered his salon. The most distinguished minds of Paris met often there. While appearing to center his attention on no one, he succeeded in treating everybody most congenially. Renowned figures would assemble around his piano in the candlelight, including Heine, Meyerbeer, Adolphe Nourrit, Hiller, Eugene Delacroix, Niemcevicz, and George Sand. Liszt observed that Chopin would talk of subjects only on the surface, never agreeing or disagreeing with anyone. Liszt was fascinated by his inwardness:

He took part in no activity, no drama, no alliance and no issue. He wielded a decisive influence over no person. His will never encroached upon any desire. He neither fettered nor controlled any mind through the domination of his own. He tyrannized over no heart, he laid no conquering hand on any fate-he sought nothing, and would have scorned to ask for aught.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 81.

<sup>40</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 83.

<sup>41</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 40.

<sup>42</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 109.

He was a pious Catholic, but kept his religious beliefs silent. Music was as comforting as religion for him.

‘He unburdened his soul in composition as others do in prayer, pouring out those effusions of the heart, those unexpressed sorrows, those indescribable griefs that devout should spill in their talks with God.’<sup>43</sup>

In one area only did Chopin abandon his calculated silence and his customary neutrality—on the subject of art he declared his judgement and feelings openly.

Liszt appears to regret that he could not develop a deeper bond with him. They had several years of no communication, but this can be traced to a rift that developed between their respective partners. Chopin eluded all bonds and friendships that would lead him to stormier spheres. Ready to give all, he never gave himself. He barely mentioned love or friendship. ‘He never had an hour of expansiveness without paying for it by several hours of withdrawal...it is remarkably strange that, with such a character, he could have any friends. And yet he did have some.’<sup>44</sup>

Liszt recalls Chopin’s more light hearted side:

‘In pantomime he displayed a near-exhaustible comic verve, and he often enjoyed reproducing, in farcical improvisation, the musical mannerisms and special idiosyncrasies of certain virtuosos, repeating their gestures and motions, and mimic king their face with a talent that betrayed their complete personality in a flash.’<sup>45</sup>

Liszt gives considerable attention to Chopin’s education in his youth.

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<sup>43</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 108.

<sup>44</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 133.

<sup>45</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 111.

‘He received instruction in music at an early age, beginning to learn it when he was nine. Soon he was put in the hands of Ziwna, a devout disciple of Sebastian Bach, who guided his studies for many years in the line of strictest classicism.’<sup>46</sup>

Although his family was not wealthy, Chopin was placed in one of Warsaw’s leading schools, thanks to the generosity of Prince Antoine Radziwill, who recognised his artistic talents. Liszt refers to Radziwill as being a ‘remarkable’ composer himself. He guided Chopin until the completion of his studies and remained a lifelong friend thereafter. Chopin learned good habits early on. His thoughtful patience in fashioning and finishing his works sheltered him from the critics who seized upon easy and meaningless opportunities springing from omissions and careless negligence. Trained early by rigorous rules, even producing beautiful works in which they were adhered to, he ignored them only after proper and sound reflection.

After finishing his studies at home, Chopin’s parents wanted him to travel in order to hear fine performances of great works. He made a number of excursions to German cities before settling in Paris. He had originally only intended to pass through Paris on his way to London, but his instant success playing concerts in Paris, as well as the warm welcome he received, encouraged him to stay there. He quickly won the admiration of high society and young artists. It was here he met George Sand, who became his companion for some years. When he repeatedly became ill, she nursed him back to health. The years he spent with Mme Sand were his happiest, and very productive musically.

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<sup>46</sup> F.Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 131.

The nationalism featured in Chopin's music interested Liszt because although Chopin did not intend to write nationalist music, he felt he surpassed the Polish writers and poets who strived to captivate the most glorious and noteworthy aspects of the country's history and spirit, as well as her customs and picturesque beauty. Chopin did this without a preconceived plan, and he surpassed them in originality. Up to now, Liszt claims, there have been few whose notable compositions lie outside of the great categories of Italian music and German music. Liszt predicts that the future in the development of art in the nineteenth century would be a development in works from outside of this popular sphere. Composers will arise whose works will bear the stamp of an originality based on differences of constitution, race and climate. The influence of country upon great masters will be seen in their art, and their art will reflect the people's true spirit. Works of this kind interest Liszt the most. He describes this happening in the music of Chopin:

Chopin will be ranked in the company of the foremost musicians who thus individualized in themselves the poetic sense of a nation, but not only because he chose the rhythm of polonaises, mazurkas and cracoviennes and called many of his compositions by such names. Had he limited himself to multiplying them, he would only have constantly reproduced the same pattern and the memory of the same experience and deed, a reproduction that would soon have been tedious, serving merely to prolong a form quickly become more or less boring. If his name stands for a poet who is essentially Polish, it is because he used this form to express a manner of feeling more prevalent in his country than elsewhere and because the expression of the same emotions occurs in all the forms that he selected... His *Preludes*, *Etudes*, his *Nocturnes* above all, his *Scherzos* and *Concertos*, his shortest compositions as well as the most extended breathe the same type of sensibility expressed in varying degrees, modified and varied in a thousand ways, but always one and unchanging. An eminently subjective composer, Chopin gave to all his works the same vital spark, and he inspirited all of his creations by his own life. Thus all of his works are bound together by a unity, whence it happens that their beauties, like their defects, are always the



result of the same order of emotion and a single manner of feeling, a poet's basic requirement for his songs to stir all the hearts of his country to tremble in unison.<sup>47</sup>

A large portion of the book is given to very detailed descriptions of Chopin's illness and death in 1849. He travelled to England and Scotland the year before his death. There his works were well known and admired. In England he played in public twice and many times at private gatherings. He mingled much in society, kept late hours, and risked every fatigue. On return to Paris he planned to write a piano method in which he expected to sum up his ideas on the theory and technique of his art, but his energies no longer sufficed for his plans. The few ideas he had written down, along with sketches for new piano pieces, were destroyed. Aware of his fame, he wanted to see them burned in order to prevent their being barbled, mutilated, and changed into posthumous works unworthy of him.

After much suffering, he died in his home on October 17, 1849, his sister at his bedside. Chopin's devout admiration for the genius of Mozart led him to request the performance of his *Requiem* at his obsequies. This wish was fulfilled. Liszt expresses a huge sorrow in the closing pages for this 'irreparable loss'.

Liszt's book on Chopin has been largely ignored and since it was first issued in 1852 from the press of M. Escudier. There are sensible reasons for this: it caused little sensation at the time of its first and subsequent publications in the latter part of the century. There is a legend of misunderstandings surrounding it. The Princess made hints about her contribution when questioned about it 'When two beings have so completely

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<sup>47</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 142.

merged. can it ever be said where the work of one begins or the other ends?"<sup>48</sup> The verbosity and ramblings off the subject of Chopin altogether can be traced to her pen. "The Princess found her own literary style and thought irresistible"<sup>49</sup> But in more than half the content Liszt's personal reflections and observations are obvious, and offer us a rare insight into his own mind and character.

Liszt appears to have been profoundly affected by Chopin's death. His fascination with Chopin is obvious, and although he tried to understand him he resigned himself to the fact that even Chopin's closest friends were not exposed to his true self. There is a deep regret in the cooling of relations between them in the latter years. While Chopin had little interest in furthering the friendship with Liszt, Liszt on the other hand was constantly enquiring about Chopin's welfare to other people. The book sheds Liszt in an unusual light, instead of concentrating on the more obvious details of Chopin's life, like his teaching, composing and character. Liszt draws attention to his friendships, or lack of them, and his place in society. In contrast, Liszt was more sociable and was known and loved by all. In his last years he lamented that he spent too much of his life pleasing others instead of pleasing himself. Chopin's romantic relations with women interested Liszt greatly, possibly because he initially introduced Chopin to George Sand. Musical observations by Liszt are very general and are from a general aesthetic perspective. Although there is much praise for Chopin's extension of chords, creative use of ornaments and his wonderful melodic gifts, Liszt takes the attitude that the music speaks for itself. It is easy to extol the virtues of modern approaches, yet in Liszt's time there

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<sup>48</sup> F. Liszt: *F. Chopin*, 18.

<sup>49</sup> Waters: *F. Chopin*, Introd.

seems to be a far more harmonious balance between criticism and artistic production than what we have today.

For Liszt, Chopin is a first rate artist and a hero, someone he can aspire to. Chopin did not make claims to be a nationalist composer, but for Liszt he epitomized the height of nationalist romantic music. Liszt was inspired to write his own Hungarian nationalist works in later years. Liszt writes with honesty in this warm and generous tribute to his friend and colleague. The book is a literary monument to the relationship between two of the greatest composer-pianists in history.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**Wagner**

My admiration remains unlimited for the sublime genius of Wagner. What blissful creative power and influence has he not, ever active from *Tannhauser* to the *Ring des Nibelungen* and the marvellous *Parsifal*... The art of our century finds its foundation and glory therein<sup>50</sup>

Liszt, ever in search of musical figures worthy of his admiration, found in Wagner the apogee of this characteristic. From his earliest acquaintance with Wagner in 1841 until the end of his life, Wagner's influence was pervasive in Liszt's life. Considering Liszt's direct involvement as conductor of Wagner's works, including the first performance of *Lohengrim*, Wagner's own acknowledgement of his debt to Liszt,<sup>51</sup> Wagner's personal involvement with Liszt's daughter Cosima, one could argue that of the many composers and musicians who were involved on a personal and professional level with Liszt,

Wagner's place is at the front, ahead even of Chopin and Berlioz.

Liszt first met Wagner in Paris in 1841, and the history of their early acquaintance is related by Wagner in a famous letter.

I met Liszt for the first time during my earliest stay in Paris, and at a period when I had renounced the hope, nay, even the wish for a Parisian reputation, and, indeed, was in a state of internal revolt against the artistic life I found there. At our meeting Liszt appeared to me the most complete contrast to any own being in Situation. In the midst of this Parisian world, into which it had been my desire to flee from my sordid surroundings, Liszt had grown up, from his earliest age, the object of general love and admiration, at a time when I was being received with

<sup>50</sup> La Mara: Liszt's letter to Hans von Wolzogen, Weimar, June 18, 1884)

<sup>51</sup> 'I regard you as the creator of my present position' Wagner to Liszt

universal coldness and lack of sympathy. In consequence, I looked upon him with suspicion. I had no opportunity of disclosing my aims and ambitions to him, and therefore the reception I met with from him was altogether of a superficial kind, as was indeed quite natural in a man to whom every day the most diverse impressions claimed access. But I was not in a mood to look with unprejudiced eyes for the cause of his behaviour, which, friendly and obliging in itself, could but gall me in my then state of mind. I never repeated my call on Liszt and, without knowing or even wishing to know him, I was inclined to consider him as strange and hostile to my nature.

My repeated expression of this feeling was afterwards reported to Liszt, just at the time when the performance of my *Rienzi*, at Dresden, attracted general attention. He was surprised to find himself misunderstood with such violence by a man whom he had scarcely known, and whose acquaintance now seemed not without value to him. I am still touched at recollecting the repeated and eager attempts he made to change my opinion of him, even before he knew any of my works. He acted, not from any artistic sympathy, but led by the purely human wish of putting an end to casual disharmony between himself and a fellow-creature: perhaps he also felt an infinitely tender misgiving of having unintentionally hurt me. Those who realize the terribly callous selfishness of our social life, and especially the lack of sympathy in the mutual relations of modern artists, cannot but be struck with wonder, nay delight, at the treatment I experienced from this extraordinary man.

Liszt soon afterwards witnessed a performance of *Rienzi* at Dresden, on which he had almost to insist, and after that I heard from all the different corners of the world, where he had been on his artistic tours, how he had everywhere expressed his delight with my music, and had indeed—I would rather believe unintentionally-biased people's opinions in my favour. This happened at a time when it was becoming more and more evident that my stage works would have no outward success. But just when the case seemed desperate, Liszt succeeded by his own energy in opening a refuge to my art. He ceased his wanderings, settled down in small and modest Weimar, and there took up the conductor's baton, after having shone so long in the splendour of the greatest capitals of Europe. At Weimar I saw him for the last time, when I rested a few days in Thuringia, not yet certain whether my pending prosecution (for revolutionary activities) would compel me to continue my flight from Germany. The very day when my personal danger became a certainty, I saw Liszt conduction a rehearsal of my *Tannhauser*, and was astonished at recognizing my second self in his achievement. What I had felt in composing the music, he felt in performing it: what I wanted to express in writing it down, he proclaimed in making it sound. Strange to say, through the love of this rarest friend, I gained, at the moment of becoming homeless, a real home for my art, which I had longed and sought for always in the wrong place. <sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Sitwell, *Liszt*, 195-197.

Liszt was closely associated with all four of Wagner's mature operas of the 1840s: *Rienzi*, *Tannhauser*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Lohengrin*. Wagner sent Liszt full scores of *Rienzi* and *Tannhauser* in 1846.<sup>53</sup> Liszt produced *Tannhauser* in Weimar, and in 1850 Liszt gave the first performance of *Lohengrin* at Weimar.

This was the period in which Liszt was writing the first three of his symphonic poems, the two piano concertos and the *Totentanz*. He was in the process of developing a new symphonic style of his own.

In 1853 Wagner paid a visit to Liszt in Zurich, and it seems that the real closeness of their artistic relationship dates from this time. Wagner relates that he really got to know Liszt for the first time during this visit, and that Liszt had played some of the symphonic poems, some piano music, and the *Faust Symphony*.<sup>54</sup> It was in the years following this visit that Wagner began the Ring:

*Rheingold*: November 1853 - January 1854

*Die Walküre*: January - December 1854

*Siegfried*: Begun in September 1856, but then put aside in 1857, for the composition of *Tristan und Isolde*. *Tristan* was completed in 1859, and in this year Wagner wrote in a letter to von Bülow:

There are many matters on which we are quite frank among ourselves, (for instance, that since my acquaintance with Liszt's compositions my treatment of harmony has become very different from what it was formerly), but it is

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<sup>53</sup> Searle, *The Music of Liszt*, 63.

<sup>54</sup> Searle, *The Music of Liszt*, 64.

indiscreet to say the least. of friend Pohl to babble this secret to the whole world.<sup>55</sup>

During this period there was then a relationship of artistic interdependence between Wagner and Liszt which both of them acknowledged themselves. There are many parallels between Liszt and Wagner's music. Famously, the opening of *Tristan* and the so-called 'Tristan-chord' is anticipated by Liszt in the song *Ich Möchte Hingehen*.

There are parallels between *Walküre* and the *Faust* Symphony, both of which were composed in 1854. The opening three notes of the *Tristan* prelude are like a figure in the *Faust* Symphony.<sup>56</sup> Wagner and Liszt themselves both commented on the resemblance between themes in Liszt's *Excelsior!* (1874) and Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882). There are many other resemblances. An anecdote survives of a conversation they had concerning these parallels:

One day when Wagner said to Liszt, with affectionate tactlessness,  
 'You know, I stole one of your themes for my *Walküre*...'  
 'So much the better!' Liszt replied. 'At least some of my music will be played!'<sup>57</sup>

But more important than such superficial similarities are the kinship between the two men in matters of harmony, melody and form. Liszt's use of chromatic harmony was pioneering, and Wagner as we have seen acknowledged his debt to Liszt in this regard. Both Liszt and Wagner make extensive use of the whole tone scale and the augmented triad, and an ever-increasing freedom in the use of dissonance.

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<sup>55</sup> Sitwell, *Liszt*, 199.

<sup>56</sup> Searle, *The Music of Liszt*, 65-66.

<sup>57</sup> *Musica*, 117.

As regards melody, Liszt's techniques of thematic transformation were certainly assimilated by Wagner, and Wagner's development of leitmotif in the *Ring* may be traced to these developments.

What Liszt learnt from Wagner was a greater mastery of form. His ability to control form in large-scale works like *Christus* and *St. Elizabeth* came from his familiarity with Wagner's Operas.<sup>58</sup> (Searle). Sitwell claims however that Wagner's influence on Liszt was in fact negligible, and that the influence was entirely the other way around.<sup>59</sup>

The correspondence between Liszt and Wagner is very large, running into two volumes. It speaks of a one-sided relationship, Wagner's characteristic lack of concern for his friend being evident throughout, as well as his desire to make use of him artistically and financially. Sitwell says that Wagner's letters to Liszt betray 'his selfishness and the weaker sides of his nature,' although this of course makes 'no difference to ... (the quality of) ... the music.'

Liszt on the other hand can scarcely be found to utter any words against Wagner.

Richard Wagner, a Dresden conductor, has been here since yesterday. That is a man of wonderful genius, such a brain-splitting genius indeed as befits this country. -a new brilliant appearance in Art.<sup>60</sup>

He proclaimed Wagner's greatness at every opportunity until the end of his life, as witnessed in the letter quoted at the start of this chapter.

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<sup>58</sup> Searle. *Liszt*, 69.

<sup>59</sup> Sitwell. *Liszt*, 201.

<sup>60</sup> La Mara. *The Complete Letters*, vol. 1.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Liszt's Derivative Works**

There are two sides of Liszt's compositional output: Original compositions of his own on the one hand, and arrangements, fantasies and transcriptions of the music of other composers on the other. The *New Grove* catalogue of 2001 numbers approximately 900 works by Liszt (including transcriptions etc.) which is an increase on the 1980 edition which listed about 770 works. Many new compositions have come to light in the interim period. This is by any standards a large number of works, and Liszt surpasses in quantity of music all other composers of his time.

In the light of our investigations into Liszt's participation in a sort of milieu with other artists of his time, the unoriginal works of Liszt may take on an importance frequently denied to them by scholars and academics. It has always been fashionable to deride these works among certain scholars and musicians who question the sincerity and musical worth of Liszt's transcriptions. But for Liszt, the music of others was the path by which, to rob Chopin's phrase, he ascended Mount Parnassus: whether by playing or arranging other men's music. Liszt was participating in his conception of the noble occupation of art, and following his genius.

Out of the 900 works mentioned above, approximately 320 are original. Of these, a small number are orchestral, but by far the majority are for piano, including a number of four-hand piano transcriptions. Musically, the transcriptions of Liszt are of two types. Firstly, there are the show-piece style arrangements of French and Italian operatic items, which tend to be of the virtuoso type, with scales, passagework and trills, light encore-style pieces albeit frequently of enormous technical difficulty. Secondly, there are the arrangements of weightier music, in a manner intended to reveal the true characteristic of the original without changing it. Among the latter type one could mention the extraordinary transcriptions of the symphonies of Beethoven, those of passages from Wagner's operas, Bach's organ music, Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and the *Harold en Italie*.

It must be said that in the nineteenth century piano arrangements and transcriptions represented a normal means of dissemination of music, an equivalent to the recording of our time. If Liszt published arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies, so did a large number of lesser mortals throughout the century, and the musical world at large may have known such works as much from two and four-hand piano arrangements to be played at home, as from the orchestral variations in concert halls. But Liszt took his work as a transcriber seriously, and his Beethoven transcriptions are on a level far above the mundane efforts of some of his peers. Likewise, his transcriptions and arrangements of the first 'less serious' type- Donizetti, Gounod, Rossini, Bellini etc.- are typical if exceptionally well crafted examples of piano music of this era, when Liszt, Thalberg and others competed for the affection of the public in such showpieces. Chopin himself,

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## **Abstract**

'Liszt's Heroes' looks primarily at Liszt's own published writings. There is an extensive body of literature written by Liszt, both in essay and letter form, which deals with the other important figures of the musical age and other issues relating to music and art. This thesis attempts to establish Liszt's relationship specifically through treatment of this source material, and to examine what light it can shed on the composer's life and work. Texts examined include Liszt's biography of Chopin, his essay on John Field, his essay on the future of artists and their place in society, the extensive volumes of his personal letters.

Contemporary scholarship has redeemed Liszt's literary output, defending it at least in part from accusations that it was in fact written by others. So one can turn afresh to these fascinating essays and read the words of the composer himself on such seminal figures as Wagner, Chopin, Field, Schumann and Berlioz.

This thesis conforms to the house style of the Department of Music, National University of Ireland, Maynooth.